

HEAVIEST ATTACK ON FRENCH RAILWAYS

The greater number of the 900 aircraft sent out by Bomber Command last night were Lancasters and Halifaxes despatched to make heavy attacks on railway yards and maintenance workshops and depots at five great traffic centres of north-west Europe, at Ghent, in Belgium, and Tours, Tergnier, Aulnoye and Laon, in France.

This was the heaviest attack so far in Bomber Command's strategic offensive against the maintenance of locomotives and rolling stock in German use.

Other Lancasters dropped many 8,000-pounders on a very important depot containing large stores of signals and radar equipment for the Luftwaffe, at St. Cyr, near Paris.

In all the night's operations, which included an attack on Hanover by squadrons of Mosquitoes, a greater weight of bombs, well over 3,600 tons, was dropped than on any previous night.

Though there was some thin cloud and haze over some of the targets visibility was excellent above and there was bright moonlight. In weather favourable to the defences, the enemy put up many night fighter squadrons. Fighter flares were laid along the route and there were many sharp encounters, particularly among the aircraft attacking the railway yards at Tergnier, when they were on the first lap of the return flight.

Sgt. I.D. Hancock, rear gunner of a Halifax, which took part in the attack on Tergnier, who comes from Cwmfelinfach, near Newport, shot down a twin-engined night fighter. "It was flying in the opposite direction to us when I first saw it", Sgt. Hancock said, "I noticed a flickering light apparently in its nose. After it had passed us it turned about and came back to attack. When it was 300 yards off it opened fire, and I replied with a long burst. When the fighter was only about 100 yards away I saw flaming debris breaking away from it: then it fell and I saw it hit the ground and flare up. I could still see the flames five minutes later".

Pathfinder tactics were used in all the attacks and crews reported that the bombing was well concentrated round the markers. First reports on the attack on the signal depots at St Cyr indicate that bombing was equally good there. Before the last Lancaster left great clouds of smoke were covering most of the target.

Squadrons of Mosquitoes attacked Hanover in clear weather, with only a little patchy cloud over the town. Fifty searchlights and a good number of heavy anti-aircraft guns came into action while the Mosquitoes dropped their load, which included almost a score of four-thousand pounders, among the well concentrated marker flares. Before the rapid attack was over crews saw that fires were getting a good hold.

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