

FORTRESSES ATTACK ROUEN

Flying Fortresses of the U.S. Army Air Force, escorted by a strong force of R.A.F. fighters bombed the railway marshalling yards at Rouen yesterday afternoon. At the same time other U.S. bombers, similarly protected by fighter escorts, made diversionary feints north and south of the target, one towards the Dunkirk area and the other towards the Cherbourg peninsula.

The main bomber force, whose fighter escort included Spitfire squadrons of the U.S. Army Air Force, reached their objective without interference. Their bombs were seen to burst on the marshalling yards, one of the main traffic distribution centres of the Nord Railway system - while two sticks of heavy calibre bombs scored hits on engine sheds.

A British Flight Lieutenant - whose fighter squadron was in the bombers' close escort said:

"The weather was perfect, with brilliant sunshine and first class visibility.

"We had a more or less uneventful run up to the target and were able to see the Fortresses drop their bombs bang on the marshalling yards and inland docks. Dust, smoke and all sorts of debris came up into the air and it looked as though the bombing had been very good.

"On the way home, the Hun began to pay us considerable attention and at one time or another we saw about 50 F.W.190s. They came head on and from the side, but most of them were driven off.

"My No. 2 and myself saw about 12 F.Ws. coming in to make a beam attack on the bombers and we went for them head on. We went right through them and only two out of the twelve got anywhere near the Fortresses."

Squadrons of Spitfires in the rear of the bombers saw about 40 F.Ws. and one squadron had a short and indecisive dog fight with twelve of them.

"We ran into a few F.Ws. and had a few squirts at them," said the leader of one of the U.S. Army Air Corps fighter squadrons. "The bombers, meantime, were all flying in close formation. The whole operation was beautifully timed and most of the enemy fighters were drawn off."

A Canadian squadron which was also in close attendance on the Fortresses fought with about 20 F.Ws. when ten miles on the homeward journey.

A flight commander of this squadron which destroyed one of the two F.W.190s shot down, said that after the bombing they were attacked by F.W.190s which seemed to come in from all directions. There was a really exciting mix-up and fights seemed to be going on all over the sky.

He saw one or two F.W.190s spiralling down towards the bombers, but then they seemed to shoot off in almost vertical dives without doing any firing.

He added that he saw one Hun falling through the bomber formation with smoke pouring out of him.

This squadron had another fight over the Somme estuary, which was described as pretty hectic. The flight commander and another member of the squadron destroyed one Hun which, from 20,000 feet, they saw go down and eventually burst into flames.

The fighters and Fortresses - still in unbroken formation - flew home.

A Royal Observer Corps controller at a post on the South Coast who saw the bombers flying back in lines of three abreast said: "We were very impressed by their excellent flying and formation. The Fortresses were a grand sight, packed in tightly and glinting in the sunshine."

Two fighter aircraft are missing.

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