

Thousands of Planes Hammering at Ruhr Before Monty's Armies

London, March 23 (Friday) (CP).—More than 8,000 British and American planes gave Germany its greatest dawn to dusk lashing today, concentrating particularly on enemy defenses east of the Rhine, and tonight RAF Mosquitos maintained the terrific pressure by bombing Berlin for the 31st consecutive time.

The German radio claimed that at least four other formations of night raiders were on the prowl over Western Germany, the Hannover-Hildesheim area, Munster and the Province of Bavaria.

These were the major blows delivered during one of the finest flying days of the year:

1. Approximately 4,000 planes, including 2,000 British, American and Canadian heavy bombers from Britain, tore up enemy concentrations and reinforcements within the Ruhr industrial basin and surrounding areas. This attack, one of the most violent delivered by air power during the war, was directed at targets across the Rhine from Field Marshal Montgomery's impending "jump-off" positions.

2. A force of more than 500 Italy-based United States heavy bombers

blasted the big Ruhland oil refinery 70 miles southeast of Berlin. This blow was believed to have virtually halted the production of gasoline within the United States 15th Air Force's range in Southern Germany, Austria and Hungary.

3. Using the new 11-ton volcano bombs, British heavy bombers collapsed the main span and the approaches to the important Nienburg railway bridge between Hannover and Bremen.

4. British and American tactical air forces flew nearly 4,000 sorties from bases on the Continent, losing five planes while destroying 63 German aircraft on the ground and damaging 46 others, and picking off eight in the air. The United States 9th Air Force alone destroyed or damaged 3,143 railway cars, 135 locomotives, 92 tanks and armored vehicles, and 780 trucks. It rained 1,600 tons of bombs on 16 key communications centres, all in a 25-mile triangle between Munster and the Rhine.

So widespread were the daylight operations that armadas from Britain and Italy criss-crossed each other, and part of the fighter escort for the United States 8th Air Force bombers made a rendezvous with the 15th Air Force's heavy bombers flying up from the south. Italy-based aircraft also smashed at targets in Austria and Czechoslovakia, and early reports indicated that 24 American heavy bombers were missing.

The RAF unleashed three British-based fleets totalling upward of 1,000 heavy bombers and fighters against German bases and supply links on the front facing the British 2nd and 1st Canadian armies.

Halifaxes and Lancasters carpeted explosives on Bocholt, Dorsten and Dulmen, north and east of the pivot point of Wesel. The three towns serve as advanced centres for the German defense of the lower Rhine.

A second British bomber team smashed the railway and industrial city of Hildesheim, an important supply hub 20 miles southeast of Hanover. RCAF bombers joined in the Dorsten, Duermen and Hildesheim attacks and two are missing.

The third RAF fleet, consisting of modified Lancasters screened by American fighters, attacked two railway bridges on the Ruhr traffic system with 11-ton volcano bombs.

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