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Berlin Is Next

Rising Fury of Air Warfare
Blasts Toward Center of Reich



The smashing force of the Allied air offensive against Germany, past and potential, was revealed last week in the colossal record of Royal Air Force and United States Eighth Air Force action over Nazi Europe in July.

Last month the RAF based in Britain dropped nearly 18,000 tons of bombs in thirteen major raids on Axis Europe, and the Eighth bettered its June record by 50 per cent in losing 3,600 tons in ten big raids—a record total of 21,520 tons. That was 6,000 tons more than fell in June, twice as many as fell in April, and nearly half as many as fell during the whole year of 1942.

The record tonnages were dropped by record bomber formations. The RAF Bomber Command, which used large numbers of medium bombers for its 1942 mass raids, was strong enough to send about 800 four-motored bombers in the raids on Hamburg, flying them with 5,600 men, supported by 100,000 in ground crews at about 50 airdromes. The Eighth had grown enough to dispatch formations of more than 300 Flying Fortresses, manned by some 3,000 fliers and supported by ground crews of close to 70,000.

The cost in planes for the July action underlined the size of the fleets. The RAF lost 186 bombers (84 less than in June), and the Eighth 108 bombers (25 more than in June). The cut in RAF losses, which now run under 3 per cent, was due to one of the month's most important bombing developments—improved saturation bombing. As the RAF formations have grown in size, so has the speed of their attacks. When British planes raided Lübeck in March 1942, they achieved a bombing rate of 2 tons a minute, surpassing any German attacks on Britain. In February of this year the rate went up to 22 tons a minute and rose to 34 tons in June. But at Hamburg last month, "thunderbolt" saturation became a reality. In the first 2,300-ton raid, 46 tons fell each minute; in the next two, 51 tons. This meant greater bombing effectiveness and greater safety for the raiders.

Air Warfare

The losses of the Eighth, although climbing, meant bigger fleets and not a higher rate of casualties. For the Eighth's losses rate, which came dangerously near the "economical maximum" of 10 per cent last spring, has now shrunk to less than 4 per cent, as the Americans fly in bigger, tighter, and therefore safer formations.

The significance of the July record lay in its promise for the future. The growing strength of the Allied fleets and the stretching radius of the American planes, coupled with the lengthening summer nights, meant that few German cities would be safe from mass raids in the months to come. The RAF said it needed only two more hours of darkness to strike 600 miles into Germany, and the Eighth said there was nothing to prevent it from flying that far by day. They both meant Berlin.

The target of 69 RAF raids so far, Berlin has been hit hard only a few times this year and underwent no raids at all in 1942. On the morale front it ranks ahead of all other German cities. When the others were raided the outcry of the Germans was bitter but local. When Berlin was hit groans rose from all over Germany. If RAF night raiders should raze the capital by fire, as they did Hamburg, the whole German nation would suffer the shock of Berliners.

German industry as well as morale would suffer. As an industrial target Berlin ranks close to the Ruhr and Hamburg. It is the home of the great Siemens and A. E. G. electrical plants, and harbors as well Focke-Wulf, Heinkel, and 23 other airplane factories, the Rheinmetall Borsig armament works, the Knorr Bremse railway brake plant, three railway repair shops, 21 power stations, gas works, and water works, and many other industries. In addition to its important railroads, it is Germany's second inland port.

For British and American airmen the trip would be the hardest yet. Berlin's defenses, while probably not so strong as those of the Ruhr, may equal Hamburg's in intensity and would undoubtedly be strengthened with mobile anti-aircraft guns and fighter squadrons. In addition the element of surprise would be gone. Hamburg is a fringe target, and planes raiding it come in over the North Sea, while Ruhr raiders cross only the Low Countries. But bombers aiming for Berlin face fighter attack almost the whole way to the target and back.

The Germans knew as well as the Allies the importance of their capital. In Berlin, the people counted four more minutes of darkness each night, added them up, and knew that in September the blow would come. That knowledge, driven home by the fate of Hamburg, started a mass stampede.

The Berlin press, stating flatly that "our city can be bombed tonight or tomorrow," called on its readers to "mobilize all spiritual strength." It also urged them to get

Air Warfare

out of town. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, who is Gauleiter of Berlin, denied that the evacuation had been ordered, then said in the same breath that the children, the aged, and unemployed women were leaving for the east. School children, hospital patients, and inmates of old people's homes got first place on the trains, already choked with Germans fleeing from the Ruhr and the northern ports. Other civilians followed close behind.

Plans for the evacuation were made two months ago, when évacué centers were set up east of Berlin. Last week stores of food, blankets, and other supplies waited for the refugees, and the people of Eastern Germany were urged to welcome them. Berliners with relatives in the country were instructed to take refuge with them. Others were issued food ration cards and told to take along cooking and eating utensils.

In the city teen-age boys and girls were forbidden to leave and were mobilized into fire-fighting patrols; Reich Ministers skipped to the country each night and advised newspapermen to do the same. Berliners who stayed were instructed in the ways of blitz warfare, while Goebbels begged them to stand up under bombs as stoutly as the British did in 1940. They dug more trenches and built bomb shelters. In their houses they filled tubs with water, extinguished fires, labeled their furniture, and waited fearfully. Refugees from Hamburg told them what to expect.

Newsweek

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