

Biggest U.S. Mission Hits 'Rocket Area'

1,500 Bombers, Fighters Raid France Without A Single Loss

Two thousand Allied warplanes seized air mastery over the invasion coast of France during the Christmas weekend and hammered targets which may have been the Nazi's secret rocket gun emplacements.

The raids, climaxing a five-day assault on installations in the German-held Pas de Calais area, were carried out Friday by some 1,500 bombers and fighters of the U.S. Air Forces, and more than 500 RAF, Dominion and Allied fighters and medium and light bombers.

Not one fighter or bomber was lost from the huge fleet which set up an air umbrella over a deep beachhead along the closest French coast. Luftwaffe fighter planes were unable to get past even the outer fringe of the cordon of Allied fighters surrounding the bombers, and crews in many instances were able to make two runs over the targets to insure accuracy.

1,300 Forts, Libs, Fighters

A force of more than 1,300 Flying Fortresses, Liberators and American fighters made up the heavy artillery of the armada. A big formation of Marauders also went out, while the RAF sent out Mitchells, Bostons and Typhoons to hit similar targets. RAF, Dominion and Allied fighters covered the medium and light bombers.

With good weather favoring the air fleet, crews reported precision bombing.

The assault on the invasion coastline targets came only a few hours after RAF heavy bombers returned from another major raid on Berlin, in which more than 1,000 tons of bombs were dropped on the Nazi capital to bring the total weight of bombs on Germany since last May 23 to 100,000 tons, a weight equal to the total of all bombs dropped on Germany from 1940 to the spring of this year.

Terror Raid, Says Berlin

Dispatches from Sweden said that the most recent Berlin raid, which once again brought from the Nazis charges of "terrorism," had struck most heavily in the industrial southeastern portion of the city. Seventeen RAF planes were reported missing.

Friday's Allied onslaught on targets in France was rumored as a "pre-invasion blitz" in neutral capitals and in unofficial circles in Washington. Authoritative observers in England discounted such stories.

Christmas Eve dusk was just falling as the last formations of bombers returned from the Continent to report the day's targets had been wiped out. Some group leaders reported the day's work was among the best jobs of bombing U.S. heavy bombers have yet done in this theater.

For the Marauders, the raids marked completion of almost 600 sorties in five days.

There were no raids on Christmas itself.



LT. MENDELSON

Good weather, good visibility and good results characterized the mission over Western France on the day before Christmas, but members of the crew of one of the Forts knew a few anxious moments when three bombs became "hung up" after 2nd Lt. Leonard J. Mendelson had pressed the release switch over the target. They might have exploded in 15 or 16 seconds' time, but Mendelson hurriedly kicked at the bombs and managed to jar them loose in the nick of time.

"We owe our lives to his heroism," said 2nd Lt. Gaston Fox, the pilot.