

to the RAF, whose bombers visited it several hundred times in the course of the war. In addition they sapped the energies of factories and machine shops of all kinds in the cities they were methodically erasing. The 8th and 15th went after the rest. Ball bearing production at Schweinfurt was attacked. So were tank and truck plants, rubber plants, ordnance plants scarcely touched, in accordance with American strategic doctrine. It was thought to be, and it proved, unnecessary to launch continued attacks against aluminum production, electric power, chemicals, machine tools and other industrial systems. The dry rot in the bombed systems was affecting the entire tree. German production began to take sudden and terrifying downward swoops. By the fall of 1944 the economy as a whole was badly shattered. It absorbed even more grievous blows during the winter by which time the German armies were suffering from so many shortages that they were to offer up only disorganized resistance, once their final effort in the Ardennes had been defeated. The country at their backs had become an industrial graveyard. Reeling under the hammer blows of Allied ground and tactical air forces, they retreated across the Rhine, falling back through one ghost city after another. They were out of food, out of gas. Out of ammunition, out of transport. They surrendered in droves, a wrecked army in a wrecked nation.

Nobody who was not there, when the roof fell in, to see it for himself can grasp the scope of the destruction which was meted out to the Germans. Of their 50 largest cities, all were from 30 to 80 percent destroyed. Dazed citizens wandered through crooked little paths which they had cleared between the mountains of rubbish. Looting was wide spread, until the Allied military took over, emphasizing the universal shortages of food, fuel and clothing. The factories the patched and repatched factories were silent, their twisted metal guts slowly rusting in the sun. Children played on the tracks of the otherwise motionless rail yards. Sheep grazed on the airfields. Of the complex and wonderful edifice on which countless Germans had labored for generations, little remained but the bare bones.

Attack on German Fighter Production With the plain precept in mind that first things come first, the Combined Chiefs of Staff early in 1943 ordered the first intensive bombing campaign against strategic targets to be aimed at the German aircraft industry. Opposition from the Luftwaffe had grown increasingly fierce. In our earliest attacks—many of them against German sub pens—eight to ten percent of our heavy bombers were being shot down on every mission. At the rate of ten missions a month, an entire bomber force could be knocked out in 30 days. The young 8th Air Force was fighting for survival. With the limited number of planes we had on hand, something had to be done, quickly and where it would hurt most.

It was clear, too, that the success of future strategic campaigns and invasion of the continent depended on eliminating the Luftwaffe. The aircraft industry was then centered in a few big complexes. By hitting assembly plants, the number of planes the Luftwaffe could put in the air would be reduced in a matter of weeks. And time was of the essence.

At the start, numerical inferiority and the lack of long-range fighter escort put the 8th Air Force behind the eight ball. But there was no question that our planes and crews were more than equal to the task. The history of U. S. air power will always honor the bloody summer of 1943.

At Warnemunde on 29 July, for example, the fighter aircraft and assembly factory, making mostly FW-190s, was attacked by 54 B-17s. Eighteen of 27 buildings were destroyed. We lost only two B-17s. One day earlier at Oschersleben, on the deepest penetration into

Germany up to that date, 28 B-17s found an important fighter plant which turned out 50 FW-190s a month—21.7 percent of the total output. We destroyed 48 enemy fighters in combat. We lost 15 B-17s. Fifteen out of 28.

Beirne Lay Jr Speaks But the feel and flavor of those first battles are best summed up in a transcript of an extemporaneous interview given at AAFSAT by Lt. Colonel Beirne Lay, Jr., who was a copilot and special observer on the Regensburg mission of 17 August. (The Me-109 assembly shops at Regensburg accounted for 30 percent of German fighter production.) This doubleheader mission made history because it was the largest force sent out by the 8th AF to date, and because it was the first big shuttle mission. The larger part of the force hit the ball bearing plants at Schweinfurt, then returned to its base. The other task force (147 B-17s) hit Regensburg, then wound up in Algeria.

Here are some excerpts from the interview: "We were to operate with three groups in the first combat wing, two groups in the second and third combat wings. I was in the low group in the third wing. We were told we'd have P-47 escort picking us up at Eupen and carrying us through the fighter belt. The P-47s were not yet carrying 300 gallon belly tanks—they had just started using belly tanks and were carrying only 100 gallons—so that meant we wouldn't have support at the target".

"We assembled on time. As soon as we got up to base altitude (17,000 feet for the third wing), we were well within the German RDF (Radio Direction Finder) screen, which has a range of about 50 miles at that altitude. So the whole German defense machinery was beginning to warm up in front of us".

"To counteract our diversionary feints the Germans had set up a fluid defense. By the time we crossed the enemy coast, they were reporting us once every minute, and could get a pretty good idea where we were headed; furthermore, they knew we had to follow a rather direct course coming home, because of our fuel limitations. So they could pull fighters from as far north as Denmark and from down around Paris, Poix and Lille, and send them after us".

"We encountered the first fighter opposition at Eupen, just inside Germany, which was where our fighter cover was supposed to be. We didn't see any fighter cover; it must have been awfully high. Our column was about 15 miles long and the fighters may have been giving protection up around the first two combat wings. They certainly weren't helping us any in the trailing wing".

"Shortly after we were supposed to have made a rendezvous with the P-47s, the attacks started. Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts came in from every direction, making coordinated attacks. Therefore, there could be very little evasive action within the group. I believe those attacks were more intense than any we had met up to then. There were more than 200 fighter attacks from there to the target".

"They used 20-mm time-fused cannon shells. They made the first fairly large-scale use of rockets. And there was some air-to-air bombing. Flak was negligible. By the time we got close to the IP we had lost 17 planes, nine of them shot out of my group, which took more than half the loss of the whole force, giving some indication of where those fighters were making their attacks".

"Weather at the IP was perfect . . . The fighter opposition died off just before we got to the target; I don't know why, unless they just ran out of fighters. The bombing was excellent. I saw only one bomb wasted".

"The boys of the 1st Division (bombing Schweinfurt) took a terrific shellacking. They lost 35 bombers from their nine groups. The