

297. *The Retreat across Northern France and Belgium.*—Once the enemy had begun his retreat to the Seine, the fighter and fighter bomber forces of A.E.A.F. were presented with some first-class targets. Low flying attacks inflicted enormous personnel casualties, while skeletons of burnt-out transport littered every road and track and were ample evidence of the effectiveness of these attacks.

298. During this retreat it was reported more and more frequently that very large columns of ambulances were moving to the German rear. I was almost certain that these ambulances were faked and did, in fact, contain fighting soldiers and equipment. It was a critical decision to take as to whether or not these ambulances should be attacked. You finally decided against attacking them. Although we were thereby likely to miss some targets, it was preferable to win the battle without laying ourselves open to criticism, however unjustified. In a number of cases, however, it was found that ordinary vehicles were intermingled with the ambulances and these were attacked. It was significant that whenever this happened, the doors of the ambulances opened and German soldiers poured out in every direction and made for cover with a speed and agility quite remarkable for wounded men. Occasionally too, fire was opened on our aircraft from these ambulances.

299. At this time, reconnaissances began to show what was in the circumstances, a relatively considerable enemy movement on the railways north-east of the Seine, particularly through Rheims. This rail movement was apparently to carry up reserves to stabilise a line, probably on the Seine or the Marne. I therefore directed a proportion of the fighter bomber effort against these movements. The United States Ninth Air Force fighters, and further east, the United States Eighth Air Force fighters, did extremely well against these targets, and this effort, I believe, virtually broke up the enemy's last chance of bringing up sufficient forces to re-form a line in France.

300. Once the remnants of the enemy divisions had crossed the Seine (and in the crossing they had to run the gauntlet of continuous air attacks on their ferries) they dispersed rapidly into a widening area. In consequence there were fewer and fewer large targets offering themselves for attack. In the main, therefore, fighters and fighter bombers reverted to direct support of the Allied columns and attacked the enemy rearguards just ahead of them.

301. In general, I would like to emphasise again the terrific havoc that was created by the air forces during the enemy's withdrawal to and across the Seine. Thousands of vehicles were destroyed and from this onslaught the enemy succeeded in getting away only small sections of his previously very powerful army.

302. The two outstanding days for the tactical air forces in this period were 18th and 25th August. The R.P. fighters and the fighter bombers of R.A.F. Second Tactical Air Force particularly claimed many victims, and the fighter bombers of the United States Ninth Air Force added their quota. The densest congestion of these enemy concentrations was in the

Trun-Vimoutieres area, and the wreckage later found in this area is ample testimony to the effectiveness of these air attacks.

303. On 25th August, the G.A.F. attempted in force to protect the efforts of the German Seventh Army to use the river crossing in the Rouen area. They were met by the fighters of the United States Ninth Air Force. 77 enemy aircraft were destroyed in combat and a further 49 were destroyed on the ground. On this and the subsequent three days, approximately 3,000 vehicles were destroyed and several thousand dead German soldiers were found among the wreckage in the area of the Seine crossings.

Attacks on Coastal Garrisons.

304. During the last week in August and through September, strong bombing forces were used to reduce the enemy garrisons holding on to the Atlantic and Channel ports. The attacks on Brest between 24th August and 6th September were shared by the United States Eighth and Ninth Air Forces and R.A.F. Bomber Command. More than 6,000 tons of bombs were dropped on the garrisons of this city. The attacks on Le Havre, Boulogne and Calais were R.A.F. Bomber Command operations, and provided excellent examples of reduction of a town by air bombing. This was especially so in the case of Le Havre. The Allied casualties in the subsequent assault against a strongly fortified garrison of 11,000 defenders totalled only 400. Between 1st and 12th September, 2,042 sorties were flown against Le Havre alone and 11,000 tons of bombs were dropped, 5,000 tons of this total being aimed in one massive daylight attack on an extremely small area.

305. This bombing was undertaken at the express wish of the Army Commanders and undoubtedly it succeeded in paving the way for and in saving the lives of thousands of our soldiers in the final assault. It must be recorded however, that casualties to French civilians shut up with the German garrisons in these ports were inevitably high, particularly so at Le Havre. I feel, that in the broad view, this bombing effort would have been more profitably directed against targets inside Germany, particularly as the disorganisation of her retreating army was most acute at this time. I should have been happier to see it used against focal points in the communications system behind the enemy frontier, in an effort to delay the movement of reinforcements with which the enemy succeeded, in mid-September, in stabilising a line along the Rhine and the Moselle.

306. It must also be remembered that the bombing had to be laid on to suit the Army plan, and in consequence it was sometimes delayed or postponed because the Army could not always be ready to attack at the agreed time or because of unfavourable weather conditions over the target. Bad weather over the target areas coincided sometimes with good weather over Germany. Because the heavy bombers had been committed to, and were standing by for, attacks on the garrison towns, opportunities for using them in good conditions against vital industrial targets in Germany were lost.

307. The following statistics give the weight of effort against coastal defences and gun positions during the month of September. This