

AIR ATTACK AND MORALE—II

More German Prisoners Confirm The Demoralization Caused by Our Planes

FURTHER research by AI2(g), Air Ministry, into the effect of air attack on the morale of enemy ground troops has provided more evidence that the German soldier is a very unhappy character, indeed, when an Allied airplane crosses his path.

Like the previous report on the same subject (SUMMARY No. 36, page 11), the current one is not based on a statistical analysis, for the average German soldier has no accurate recollection of times, dates or places at which attacks took place, nor can he identify one Allied aircraft type from another. His recollection of an air attack is usually only of having been on his stomach for a time in a cornfield or ditch.

This report, therefore, is based in the main on information from comparatively few prisoners—probably not more than 20—who were a little more intelligent and coherent than their fellows. Captured documents have helped to fill in some detail, particularly as regards material damage.

The comments of the prisoners who have been able to describe their experiences lead to the same conclusion as that expressed in the previous report—that attacks by machine-gun and cannon-fire have the most damaging effect on morale, since the ground-strafting fighter appears to be aiming directly at the individual. This is classed as the most feared form of attack, therefore, followed by RP attack, low-level bombing and high-level bombing in that order. In considering this classification, however, it must be borne in mind that none of the prisoners in question had experienced, for instance, the terrific bombing attack on targets outside Caen or St. Lô in the middle of July.

Strafing : Prisoners are unanimous in their fear of strafing. This appears to be the case irrespective of whether the troops concerned are on the open road, in partial cover or in trenches.

The terror effect seems to vary in inverse proportion to the altitude of the attack. Strafing from as low as 100 feet has sometimes been experienced by prisoners, and this is feared above all else.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the P-38 is more feared than the P-47. Prisoners allege that the latter has a noisy engine and can be heard far enough away to allow time for seeking cover. But the Lightning, they say, approaches with little engine noise, even at low level, and an element of surprise is added to the general confusion when the attack begins.

The element of surprise is often offset when strafing planes turn off to circle before coming in to

the attack. Several prisoners have mentioned instances in which this brief respite was sufficient for troops to find some sort of cover.

At 0800 hours on July 3, on a road whose location the prisoners cannot remember, the 10th Kompanie of 899 Reserve Regiment was attacked by seven single-engine aircraft. Machine-gun fire was used exclusively but the effect was considerable; nine Renault trucks containing machine-gun and rifle ammunition were blown up. A prisoner thinks that none or few of the Kompanie (who had dispersed) suffered casualties, but all the drivers of the trucks were killed. Delay and disorganization were also caused, for the Kompanie remained in cover for half an hour after the attack.

Another attack by fighters, using machine guns on a motor convoy which was leaving the cover of a wood, caused extensive loss to personnel. Of 25 men in one prisoner's truck, five were killed and ten or twelve wounded.

A soldier of the 4th Kompanie, 352nd Ersatzbataillon, was with his unit when it was attacked on July 8 at about 1000 hours at Le Mensil. Five aircraft of a formation of fifteen came down and strafed, and three trucks of rifle and artillery ammunition were destroyed.

On June 12, on the road from Lison to St. Clair, the 2nd Kompanie, 352nd Ersatzbataillon, was strafed by fighters at 1600 hours. Bombs destroyed trucks and horses but a prisoner from this unit thinks that machine-gun fire was responsible for the great number of human casualties which, in his estimate, amounted to 30 percent of the Kompanie. The Kompanie remained under cover for 30 minutes after the attack:

Rocket Fire has proved acutely demoralizing, more especially when delivered from a low altitude, and many prisoners speak of the deadly effects of the fragmentation caused when these projectiles burst. One prisoner explained that you could see a bomb falling and therefore had some small chance of avoiding it, but that RPs appear out of the blue with corresponding psychological effect.

This psychological effect, however, is balanced by the fact that there has been quite a high proportion of duds; the percentage varies, but on occasion appears to have been as much as 25 or 30 percent.

Fighter-Bomber Attack : An interesting instance of the effects of bombing in combination with strafing is provided by the attack on a German position at Plehu, in the US sector, by about two

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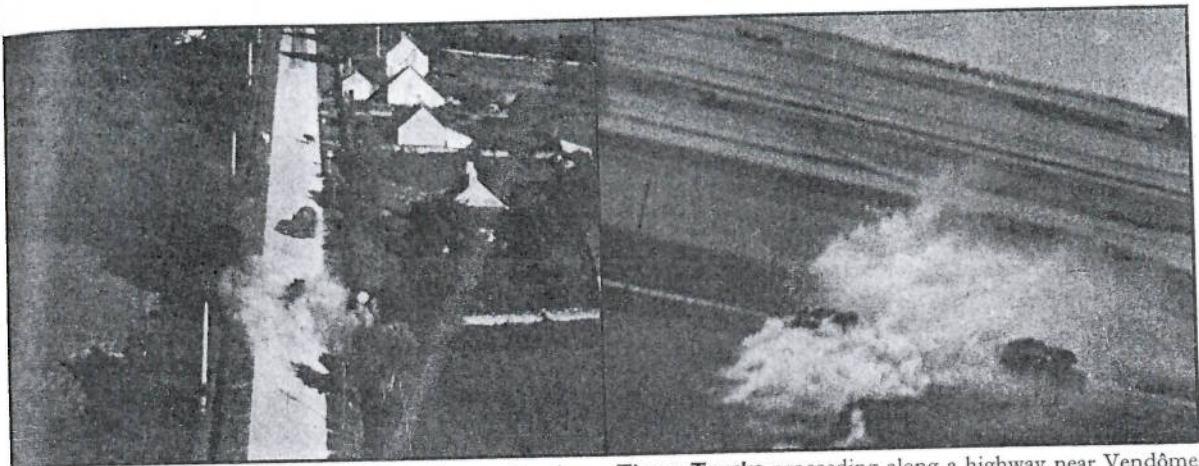
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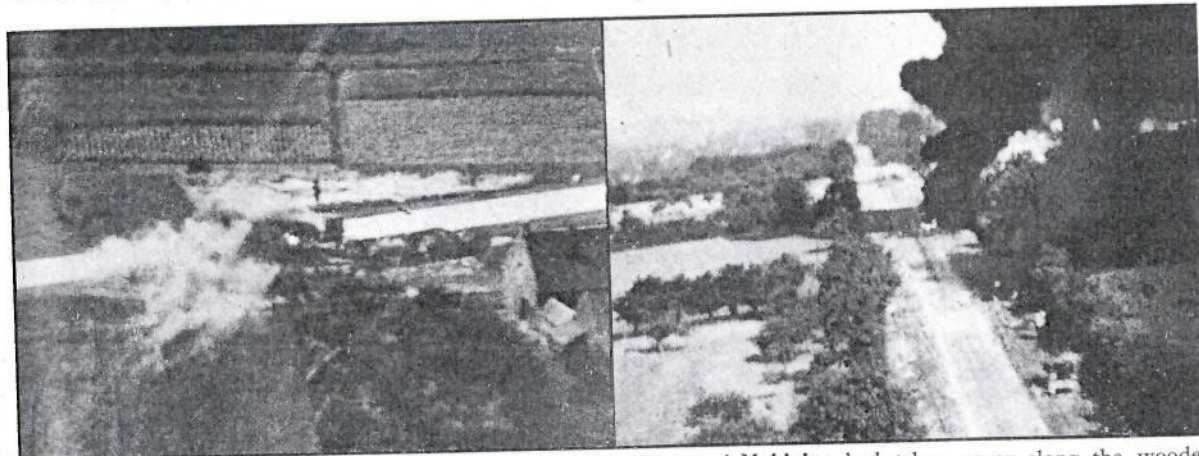
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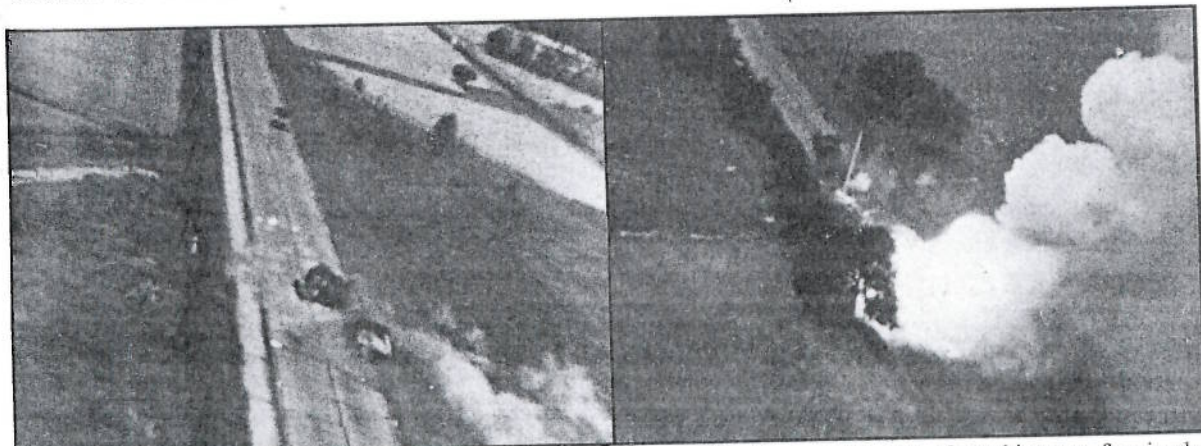
German Transport is badly disorganized by strafing (see opposite page), but no more so than the unfortunate French cow bolting across the road in this photo from a P-47 which beat up traffic in the Nevers-Bourges area.

Three Trucks proceeding along a highway near Vendôme Airfield were spotted by an Eighth Air Force-USSTAF Thunderbolt which dove on them, firing. Two of the three vehicles are seen in this photo, one surrounded by strikes.



Tracked Vehicle was target for another P-47 on a road near Ghent. The picture is not quite clear enough to identify it further, but damage appears to be severe. There are strikes all around it and smoke pouring from it.

Armored Vehicles had taken cover along the wooded side of a road near Le Mans when they were spotted by a P-47 from 8,000 feet. The Thunderbolt put his nose down, hit the deck and the column with the results shown above.



Mortality Rate among drivers of German vehicles is quite high, according to testimony of prisoners, and this combat photo from another Thunderbolt illustrates why. Both these vehicles have been hit by 50-caliber P-47 slugs.

Reason for the enemy's fear of machine-gun fire is also apparent in this photo of a tractor-mounted flak gun along the Rouen Highway, which received three passes from a P-47 and exploded in a spectacular burst of white smoke.

squadrons of P-38s and P-47s at 1530 hours on 7 July. They attacked first with bombs, and although the troops had only dugout and slit-trench cover, there were apparently only a few casualties. Immediately afterwards, however, the aircraft returned and swept the area thoroughly with machine-gun fire. Prisoners say that when this strafing started they were so "benumbed" by the effects of the bombing as to be incapable of normal reaction.

The high percentage of casualties from bullets, and the ineffective defense which the troops put up when our infantry moved in a short time later, were attributable, in the prisoners' opinion, to the dazed condition in which the German troops found themselves as a result of the bombing.

On 12 July, at 1900 hours, four P-47s attacked a convoy which was passing a troop column going in the other direction, southwest of Cérisy la Salle. It appears that the bombs caused few casualties, but motor vehicles were overturned and within three minutes 20 of them were burning furiously. The P-47s then returned and strafed the troops in the confusion with great effect.

Several captured documents give German accounts of bombing attacks and the steps recommended by German authorities as a result. One is a circular letter to units of the 21st Panzer Division, dated 13 May. "In the last few days," it says, "systematic air raids have taken place on military camps and accommodation, in some cases with severe losses resulting. Among others, the Paris-Clignancourt barracks, the Hermann Göring barracks at Reims, and the military camp at Mailly le Camp were attacked.

"The enemy employs formations (high level attack) and also single aircraft, according to the nature of the target. All ARP measures are to be rigorously enforced forthwith."

The letter goes on to list such items as blackout security, etc., and concludes: "Trenches which are not bomb-proof do not offer sufficient protection against pattern bombing, and such shelters therefore should be occupied only by single individuals. Whenever possible alternative shelters should be provided at some one and a half kilometers from the site. When flares are dropped bombs will follow almost at once and it is then too late to start thinking about alternative accommodation."

A document circulated to units of Grenadier Regiment 726 in May states that 80 percent of all casualties (from air attack) were head injuries sustained because field service caps were worn. It orders that steel helmets must be at hand at all times and must be put on immediately an air raid warning is given.

The same document contains an unconscious tribute to the accuracy of our bombing; it orders that strongpoints (*Widerstandsnest*) must be provided with a ring of reinforced dugouts at a distance of at least 150 meters from the center of the installations, and states that "... if personnel are 150-200 yards

from the installation, no losses occur; when they are concentrated in the strongpoint, casualties are very high."

Effects on Transport: Allied air superiority has reduced the rank and file of German troops, as judged by the present prisoners, to a state of acute nervous apprehension. Movements have to be carried out almost exclusively by night, tortuous side roads have to be used, troops on the march or in road convoy are subjected to almost continuous air attack and almost every town has its bomb debris blocking traffic and causing lengthy diversions.

One prisoner alleged that our air superiority over the lines of communication to the Normandy battlefield was so complete that even runners or dispatch riders could not be depended on to get through. They delivered their messages, if at all, only after detours of miles and repeated spells of crouching in ditches while the roads were swept by machine-gun fire from aircraft.

Some interesting data on the length of time taken to complete comparatively short distances has come from several recent prisoners.

Due to the bombing of a railway junction west of Rennes by 40 P-51s on June 8 and by heavies on June 9, and due to the failure of the Todt Organization, even with the help of troops, to make good the damage, one prisoner's unit was ordered to march from Rennes to the front line. The march occupied eight full days.

A 1st Lieutenant and two PFCs who had to make a duty journey by car from Troyes to Carentan were forced to take a route through Laval, Redon, Dinan and Avranches, and did not arrive at their destination, Carentan, till the evening of the sixth day.

The Lieutenant says that travel in the approaches to the battle area by a single car is almost impossible. Any vehicle attempting it must have at least three on board, one to drive and two to act as fore and aft aircraft spotters. His journey was a nightmare of ditching the car, running for cover, being machine-gunned, resuming the journey, and having these same events repeated every few miles. In many towns he found that the road was blocked by bomb rubble and he had to back the car, get out of the town and try to find a by-pass.

In the last two days of the journey military units refused his party food and they were told to get what they could from the French. All German transport, they were told, was needed for bullets and none could be spared for bread.

A similar observation on lack of food for troops on the move was made by a paratrooper who was captured near St. Lô. He had made the march from Bourges to Rennes and had been three and a half weeks on the road. He had encountered several instances of units either on the move or occupying positions, who had failed to get food supplies.

(Continued on page 17)

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Only opposition encountered by Fifteenth Air Force bombers out against oil and communications targets in Southern France and Italy was a flight of six enemy fighters ; P-51 escort claim two of these destroyed. Flak at Avignon and Genoa was moderate to intense accurate, and downed 4 B-24s.

3 August : Enemy air opposition to Eighth Air Force bombers attacking targets in Southwestern Germany was on a small scale. Only two groups attacking one of the targets, Merkwiller, reported encounters. One group was attacked by six to ten enemy aircraft ten minutes after the target. Two separate attacks were made, and two bombers were lost as a result. The other group encountered from 20-25 Me-109s near the target.

B-17s of the force dispatched against targets south-east of Paris were completely unopposed. The few enemy aircraft airborne at the time were in the assault area, and there is no evidence that any attempt was made to intercept.

Sighting of one jet-propelled Me-262 was reported in the Fressin target area, about twenty miles east-southeast of Le Touquet, but there were no attacks.

Flak was generally meager and accurate.

Slight moderate to intense flak and about 40-50 enemy fighters provided opposition to the Fifteenth Air Force attack on the aircraft manufacturing complex at Friedrichshafen. Bombers claim 7-12-0, P-51 and P-38 escort scored 11-1-1. Lost to all causes were 11 B-24s, 2 B-17s, 1 P-38.

GERMAN MORALE

(Continued from page 10)

An interesting example of the delay which can be caused simply by the appearance of aircraft comes from a prisoner of the 5th Kompanie, 899 Reserve

Regiment. His Kompanie was moving on bicycles by night when two night-fighters dropped flares on the road. The Kompanie dispersed, and although the aircraft did not return and no attack of any sort was made, the Kompanie remained under cover for 20 minutes.

Transport SOP : Some idea of the enemy's road movement procedure has been obtained from several prisoners. The chief points are :

1. In most areas side roads are used exclusively, and one prisoner says the use of main roads is expressly forbidden. A Major alleges that the use of secondary roads and country lanes has prevented the complete breakdown of supplies which would have resulted had any attempt been made to continue the use of the main roads. Side-road traffic, he believes, is satisfactory where the time factor is not critical.

2. The interval between vehicles is 100 to 200 yards, sometimes more in daytime and less at night.

3. Movements are almost exclusively carried out at night because of the comparative freedom from air attack.

4. The side roads to be used are scouted by a small party on the day before the night of the projected move and the route is laid accordingly.

5. Air look-outs are posted fore, aft, and, if possible, on the flanks of convoys and troop columns. These look-outs are equipped with portable radio.

6. When the watches report an attack as imminent an attempt is made to draw vehicles into the side, but there is seldom time for this and personnel usually scatter immediately on receipt of the warning, leaving their vehicles standing.

7. Hours of movement have recently been from 2100 till 0630 hours, and an endeavor is usually made to halt in a wood where the convoy can be camouflaged.

8. There are no fixed times of halt and rest.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS

31 July-6 August, 1944

P = Primary target. S = Secondary target. L = Last resort target. O = Target of opportunity. G = Claims against grounded aircraft.

EIGHTH AIR FORCE							
DATE	DISPATCHED	ATTACKING	TARGET	TONNAGE	SUPPORT	CLAIMS	LOSSES
31 July	705 B-17s 590 B-24s	567 B-17s	Munich (P) ...	1,499.3	{ 229 P-47s 47 P-38s 508 P-51s	0-1-0 18-0-12	21
		36 B-17s	Allach (P) ...	90.0			
		43 B-17s	Schleissheim (P) ...	77.5			
		447 B-24s	Ludwigshafen (P) ...	1,230.3			
		47 B-24s	Laon/Athies A/F (P) ...	106.5			
		36 B-24s	Creil A/F (P) ...	81.0			
		1 B-24	Poix A/F (O) ...	1.5			
		4 B-17s	T/O ...	10.3			
		36 B-17s	Chartres Bridge (P) ...	72.0			
		59 B-17s	Melun A/F (P) ...	147.5			
1 Aug.	416 B-17s	108 B-17s	Châteaudun A/F (P) ...	268.8	{ 49 P-38s 101 P-51s	Nil	6
		58 B-17s	Chartres A/F (P) ...	126.6			
		112 B-17s	Orleans/Bricy A/F (P) ...	280.0			
		12 B-17s	Etampes/Mondesir A/F (O) ...	30.0			
		15 B-17s	T/O ...	27.7			

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For Week Ending 3 September, 1944

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UNITED STATES
STRATEGIC AIR FORCES
IN EUROPE



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2009

AIR INTELLIGENCE
SUMMARY No. 39

For Week Ending 6 August, 1944

COPY NO. 144

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