

FLAK IN THE PAS DE CALAIS

An FLO Report on a Special Mission To Observe the Defenses in Action

On 19 March the Flak Liaison Officer of 1st Bombardment Division had the unique opportunity to stand off at a little distance and watch the enemy ground defenses in operation against an Eighth Air Force attack. Targets on this occasion were special military objectives in Northern France. Weather was fair, with some haze and scattered low cloud, but our planes were probably visual targets. The wind was 65 m.p.h. from 310°. The report follows.

General: 1st Division were assigned two targets in the Watten area, and 3rd Division had a target only just across the coast. Owing to difficulties of wind and sun, it was impossible to route formations so as to avoid heavy concentrations of flak, and therefore the two Combat Wings of 1st Division were ordered to cross the coast between Cap Gris Nez and Calais, while 3rd Division were to cross the coast 10 minutes later, just south of Cap Gris Nez. This seemed an ideal opportunity to "stand off and watch formations being engaged by flak" and with this in view, I acquired a Fortress complete with crew, with the exception of bombardier, in whose place I myself was to sit. We carried no bombs.

The plan was to fly to the left of, and level with, the lead aircraft of the 1st Division—the chances of fighter opposition were remote—and then when our bombers were about five miles from the French coast we were to turn southwest and fly parallel to the coast so that I would get a perfect view of our formations being first engaged by the concentrated defenses which are said to exist between Calais and Boulogne. We would then turn northeast and watch the aircraft of 1st Division, who would by then be on our right going away from us. After this we were to turn left-handed to meet the formations of 3rd Division and repeat the maneuver while they crossed the coast just south of Gris Nez. We ourselves, at my suggestion, were never to approach nearer than seven miles from the French coast. Our altitude was to be 22,000 feet, the same as that of the attacking bombers.

Narrative: We took off at 1600 hours, and all went according to plan. We made our right-handed turn when the Fortresses were some few miles from the French coast, and with my camera at the ready, I waited for the first bursts to appear. But nothing happened, and the entire formation crossed the coast without let or hindrance. We rounded Gris Nez (too close, I thought) and flew south, and then turned left-handed and headed northeast (the seven-mile limit had now been reduced to about two miles) and we watched our

two Combat Wings who were by now somewhere between five and ten miles inland.

And then at last the first bursts of flak appeared. They were good for altitude, which from that distance was all that could be determined as regards accuracy. I did not gather the impression that rates of fire were anything out of the ordinary—in fact, I should judge that an estimate of 10 r.p.m. would be generous, although I believe that this is a very difficult thing to assess when a large number of guns are firing. Predictor-control was probably in operation.

While observing these things I noticed (with some apprehension) that we ourselves were now flying over the tip of Gris Nez, thanks to the 65 m.p.h. wind that was blowing from 310°. We were entirely alone, and as far as I could judge there seemed to be little, if any, evasive action. I am scornful of German flak on the whole, but this was altogether too generous, and I therefore suggested to the pilot that we should turn back to meet 3rd Division.

The turn was most welcome, but no aircraft from 3rd Division were in sight, and so, looking over to my left again where 1st Division were still mixed up with flak bursts in the distance, I saw a phenomenon which had not been there before we turned. Hanging in the sky there were five huge arches of black smoke. The bottom of each was lost in some low cloud, and an accurate pinpoint of the sources of origin is therefore impossible, though it must have been somewhere near a line drawn between Ardres and Watten. The formation of the smoke suggested that five large rockets had been fired up from the ground, and had all faded out at the highest point of trajectory, which would be about 24,000 feet. There was no smoke concentration at the end of the smoke trail, suggesting that the projectile had "faded away" rather than burst. The five trails were parallel and similar, suggesting that they had been fired under one control at the same time, and I feel reasonably sure that they were rockets, though I did not see them appear. The length of each smoke trail was perhaps 15,000 feet from end to end.

By now 3rd Division were in sight, flying in small squadron formations of five or six aircraft. Most of these formations crossed the coast just south of Gris Nez, and like 1st Division, they crossed the coast unmolested by flak, but were engaged when they were a few miles inland, probably immediately before bombing. I fancy that some of these squadrons had no flak directed

at them, but the Calais flying north predictor-control.

Again, I completely alone of gun positions and assuredly turned left noticed that in the sky. at least 10 hours.

Comments: between C target which typical of the

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New types: be Messerschmitt to turn up Lechfeld. I number of

Me-262: (SUMMARY) were photographed runway—the these planes respects the confirmed by points are well

1. The tail indicating the carriages. I ground.

2. One of engine nacelle trailing edge

3. It was found to be some wing. In the trailing edge quite possible noted may have earlier photograph

Lechfeld 1: tatively assigned seen on the film Messerschmitt of 28 March. aircraft of the photograph of

at them, but I saw some of them being engaged by the Calais defenses as they crossed the coast flying north. The method of fire control was clearly predictor-control.

Again, I noticed that we ourselves were completely alone, and well within range of a number of gun positions. I therefore called up the pilot and assured him that I had seen enough. We turned left-handed and started for home, and I noticed that the "rocket trails" were still hanging in the sky. By this time, they had been there for at least 10 minutes. We landed at base at 1915 hours.

Comments: 1. The many guns along the coast between Calais and Boulogne had target after target which they refused to engage. This is not typical of the Hun and cannot readily be explained.

2. For this type of target, when no fighters are expected, it is wise, from the flak point of view, to fly by squadron rather than in larger formations.

3. Our formations did drop Chaff just before crossing the French coast, but being visual targets, I don't believe this had any effect, and it certainly could not have been the reason for the failure of the Gris Nez defenses to engage.

4. There are such things as rockets, and they were reported by many of the crews, but most of them report that the smoke trails were white. I know that the trails that I saw were black, and I'm beginning to wonder if, after all, white bursts, etc., are in fact an optical illusion depending on where they are and how the light falls on them. White bursts are always reported as being "above" observing aircraft. I have seen them myself, and have been quite certain that they were white. However this might have been an illusion.

5. On the whole, I think that by day, at any rate, watching the flak from a distance gives one a far better impression than would be the case if one was mixed up in it oneself.

More New Planes at Lechfeld

New types of aircraft, believed in most cases to be Messerschmitt experimental models, continue to turn up in photographic reconnaissance of Lechfeld. Latest cover, on 28 March, showed a number of new planes, and photo interpretation has provided the following details:

Me-262: Three of these jet-propelled aircraft (SUMMARY No. 18, page 15; No. 19, pages 10-11) were photographed together at the edge of the runway—the first time that more than one of these planes has been seen at one time. In most respects the previous description of the 262 is confirmed by the photograph, but the following points are worthy of note:

1. The tail units of two of the planes are raised, indicating that they may have tricycle undercarriages. The tail of the third, however, is on the ground.

2. One of the Me-262s is light-colored, and its engine nacelles can be seen projecting behind the trailing edge of the wing.

3. It was previously stated that there appeared to be some sweep-back in the trailing edge of the wing. In the recent photographs, however, the trailing edge appears almost straight, and it is quite possible that the appearance previously noted may have been caused by light spread in the earlier photographs.

Lechfeld 127: This designation has been tentatively assigned to a very large four-engine plane seen on the field, near what are believed to be the Messerschmitt experimental hangars, in the cover of 28 March. A year ago, on 10 March, 1943, an aircraft of the same type was seen indistinctly in a photograph of the same field, but no further

sightings have been reported here or elsewhere since.

The plane is a four-engine mid-wing (or possible shoulder-wing) monoplane, with a wing of fairly high aspect ratio. The leading edge of the wing is swept back, and the trailing edge appears to be straight. The tail unit is high off the ground, probably indicating a tricycle undercarriage. The nose is not long, and the fuselage tapers towards the tail unit, which is high-set and has twin fins and rudders. The tailplane has a swept-back leading edge and a fair amount of dihedral. The engine nacelles are staggered and appear to be centrally mounted.

Dimensions are approximately as follows:

Wing span	...	...	...	126-128 ft.
Length	...	...	...	68-69.5 ft.
Root chord	...	...	...	15.5-17.5 ft.
Tailplane span	...	...	...	25.5-27 ft.
Leading edge of wing to leading edge of tailplane	...	...	...	45-46 ft.
Distance between center lines of outboard engines	...	...	...	48.5-50 ft.
Distance between center lines of inboard nacelles	...	...	...	21-22 ft.
Length of nose	...	...	...	12.5-14 ft.

Augsburg 95: This large twin-engine aircraft, a type which has been seen a number of times in the past two years, was seen in a dispersal area to the east of the airfield on 28 March, in the same position where it was indistinctly visible in cover of 31 January.

This aircraft is a mid-wing monoplane with more taper on the trailing edge than the leading edge of the wing. The fuselage is fairly slim and the tailplane, which has a marked sweep-back on the leading edge, has twin fins and rudders on its extremities.

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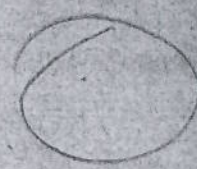
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