

Largest Bomber Fleet Rips 4 Rail Centres

London, April 21 (CP). — An armada of more than 1,100 R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. heavy bombers, in their strongest blow of the war, poured more than 5,000 tons of bombs last night on Cologne and three other key railway centres behind the Nazis' invasion front.

The largest number of planes ever sent out at one time by Bomber Command ripped apart the enemy's four rail centres, presumably busy with last-minute preparations for strengthening the vaunted Atlantic Wall against the forthcoming Allied invasion.

These operations, including a sharp attack on Berlin by R.A.F. Mosquitos, which carry two-ton blockbusters, cost 16 aircraft, one of them Canadian.

Day Raids Followed.

In a day follow-up, American light and medium bombers hammered at Atlantic Wall targets, losing five bombers as the Nazis sent up fighters for the first time in more than a month. The Berlin radio reported American heavy bombers carried out a "major attack" on Bucharest and other targets in Southeastern Europe.

Besides Cologne, described by the Air Ministry as being by far the most important railway centre in Western Germany, the night raiders shattered and burned Lens, in the Pas-de-Calais "invasion coast" area; Ottignies, in Belgium, about 15 miles southeast of Brussels, and La Chapelle, on the outskirts of Paris.

It was the second time in three nights that giant R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. bombers had broken the record for the greatest tonnage of bombs dropped in a single operation. In a raid on four other railway centres in France Tuesday night, 4,480 tons were dumped.

Cologne Got 1,800 Tons.

Cologne, hit by 1,800 tons, still was hidden by smoke from fires on both sides of the Rhine this morning. The railway yards and junctions which ring the city were laid

out many years ago on a strategic plan for war with France and they still are essential to the German armed forces guarding the European coastal fortifications.

The city's ground defenses apparently were crushed, for only a loose anti-aircraft barrage was started.

At La Chapelle the big planes dropped on a few acres as many bombs as ordinarily are unloaded in a fairly heavy attack on a German industrial centre.

"In the past," the Air Ministry observed, "it has been proved that the railways and railway facilities can be rather quickly repaired after a number of direct hits, but it is a very different matter when the whole area of the yards is densely pitted with craters, in some instances overlapping each other."

Canadians Hit Lens, Coast.

The Canadian bomber group provided the entire force of Halifaxes and Lancasters which attacked Lens and the Pas-de-Calais areas, while other R.C.A.F. heavyweights joined the R.A.F. in pounding Cologne.

Three of the Canadian bomber

group's squadron commanders led their units. Wing Cmdr. C. S. Bartlett, D.F.C., Fort Qu-Appelle, commanded the Bluenose Squadron; Wing Cmdr. W. F. Newsom, D.F.C., Victoria, led the Iroquois Squadron, and Wing Cmdr. J. D. Blane, North Sydney, commanded the Tiger Squadron.

Canadian airmen reported seeing one tremendous explosion at Lens and speculated it might have resulted from a direct hit on an ammunition train.

The 30-second blast was so terrific that it lighted the sky so that P.O. Archie Gardner, Lansing, "could see a huge force of Canadian bombers converging on the target."

Other squadrons in the night assault included the Allouette, Snowy Owl and Thunderbird.

Was an Easy Attack.

Canadians in R.A.F. squadrons bombing Ottignies said the attack was one of the easiest they had made.

The Allied air forces now appear to have reached the height of their second large-scale campaign against key railway centres feeding war supplies to the German armed forces waiting along the invader's coast.

The first began April 8 and continued through April 13, with day and night attacks on 14 transportation cities in Germany, France and Belgium, including Lille, Hannover, Aachen, Gent and suburban Paris.

After a 4-day interlude the drive was resumed by American medium and dive-bombers against Charleroi in daylight Tuesday. That night the R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. jumped with the 4,480 ton load, and mediums came back Wednesday with a blow against Malines in Belgium.

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