

Newsweek

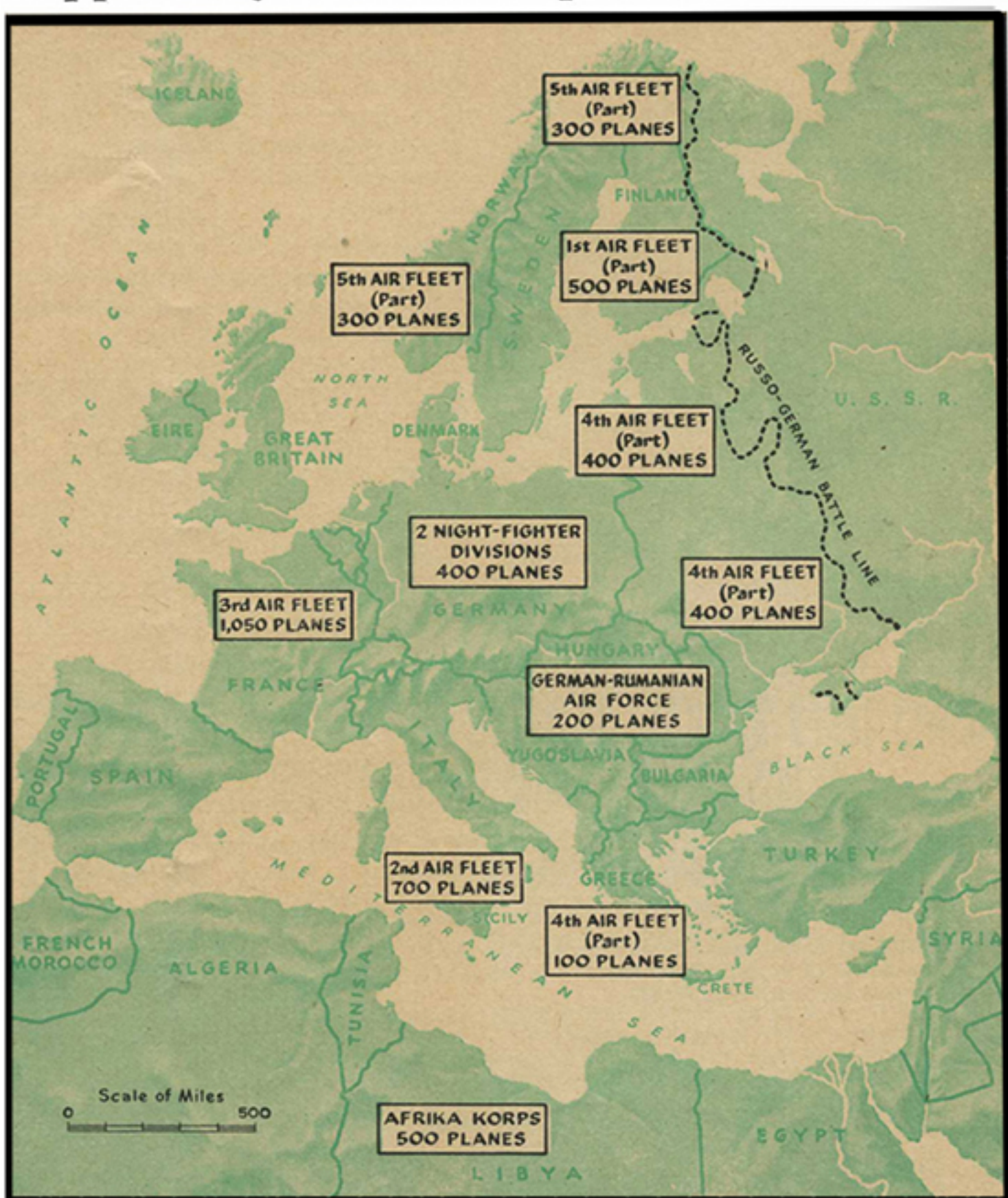
May 18, 1942: p. 24

Battered Luftwaffe

If I could send 20,000 bombers to Germany tonight, Germany would not be in the war tomorrow. If I could send 1,000 bombers to Germany every night, we could end the war by autumn.

Air Marshal Arthur Travers (Ginger) Harris, chief of the British Bomber Command, offered this short cut to victory. Although the figures he quoted are very high, Harris' statement indicated what the RAF had in store for the Germans. And last week the big planes of the Bomber Command continued to crack hard at the Reich.

They flew again to Rostock, where the death toll after the previous RAF hammering had risen to 7,000. On the wreckage of the Baltic city, the RAF dumped mostly incendiaries just to make sure that the Germans would be unable to do any rapid repair work. These British incendiaries were a new type. Instead of depending on thermite, the standard incendiary filling, they contained oil and phosphorus, which produced a more persistent fire than thermite and more than double the amount of heat given off by a thermite bomb. The drawback of such bombs previously had been the difficulty of putting enough oil in them to be effective, but the British had apparently solved this problem.



Where is the Luftwaffe?

This map shows how Hitler has had to scatter his air fleets across Europe and Africa

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The RAF saved its high explosives for Warnemünde, an important ferry terminal on the Baltic a few miles north of Rostock. Some 250 tons of bombs were dumped on the little city, which has a U-boat training base and a plane factory employing 10,000. The Germans kept quiet about the exact casualties and damage but described the attack as a "terror raid."

Warnemünde had a unique system of protection. Though the anti-aircraft barrage was very heavy at first, no searchlights were used. Then hundreds of beams flashed on, not only stabbing the sky with huge cones but also shielding Warnemünde beneath an almost horizontal sheet of light. The raiders had to dive beneath the blinding light screen to see their targets. Nineteen RAF bombers were lost.

The Germans struck back in reprisal raids on British towns. These attacks were weak and at no time did the Nazis display their old power. The reason was simple. Hitler, who took such trouble to avoid a two-front war, has now been forced to scatter the Luftwaffe over most of Europe and part of Africa. The extent to which this has divided German air-striking power was revealed in a breakdown made for the North American Newspaper Alliance by Peter Masefield, air correspondent of The London Sunday Times and one of Britain's best informed commentators on aviation (see map, page 24).

Masefield estimated that the Germans had 5,000 planes in operational squadrons—first-line formations in actual service—out of a total of 30,000, including reserves and trainers. This compared with 6,000 operational craft and a total of 40,000 planes possessed by the Nazis in the spring of 1940. The heaviest German concentration now faces the British, and the next heaviest is under Field Marshal Albert Kesselring in Sicily.

The dilemma before Hitler, Masefield believes, is that he must marshall all his air strength to crush Russia. He cannot do so without weakening his air units in France or the Mediterranean. Such a move would threaten him either with an Allied invasion of the Continent or the disruption of the Axis supply lines to Africa. An equally optimistic view came last week from Maj. Gen. Dmitri D. Grendal, the Soviet aircraft expert. The Luftwaffe, he declared, had lost 15,000 planes in Russia—and with them the hope of regaining air superiority in Russian skies.

Meanwhile, the worried Nazi command

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was reported to have ordered its war industry to concentrate all energies on production of planes—even to the detriment of tanks. Figures from neutral sources indicated that Germany's plane output had dropped from its peak of 3,300 in June 1941 to between 2,700 and 2,800. Italy was believed to be turning out no more than 700 machines a month. The Nazis estimate their opponents' production as follows: United States, 3,300 planes a month; Britain, 2,400; Russia, 2,600 to 2,900.