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Battle of Berlin

Opening Raids Show Capital
Destined for Hamburg's Fate



Fiery Foliage: *Not trees but actual bomb bursts dot this Nazi air base located in occupied France. The photograph shows the remarkable degree of concentration which is possible in Allied raids.*

The long-awaited climax of the great Allied air offensive against Germany came like a thunderclap last week. It was the opening of the Battle of Berlin. Now that the nights were long enough, and dark under the waning moon of late August, Allied bombers could fly deep into Germany to attack its capital with the same power they had used against Hamburg.

Some 700 four-motored bombers made up the attacking force—Stirlings, Halifaxes, and Lancasters of the RAF and RCAF. For most of the 600-mile trip, clouds covered the raiders, but when they reached Berlin a few minutes before midnight, the skies were cloudless and the flare-lit target showed up clearly below. Berlin took it for 42 minutes, during which 1,800 tons of high explosives and 1,000,000 incendiaries fell on the city.

While explosions rocked Berlin's heart and flames spread over a 4-square-mile area, the Germans fought bitterly to save their capital. On the ground, anti-air-raid squads met the attack with a stolidity that matched that of the defenders of London three years ago. In the air, swarms of Luftwaffe fighters drove into the bomber formations, with close cooperation from twenty belts of searchlights, and their toll was 58 bombers—a record RAF loss.

But though the defenders fought calmly, a new wave of tremors, bordering occasionally on panic, hit the populace and was heightened on subsequent days as Mosquito bombers roared over on nuisance raids. And all Germany trembled when four nights later the RAF plastered Nuremberg with 1,500 tons of bombs.

From RAF reconnaissance after the foray and from Stockholm and Bern came the first details of Berlin's wounds. The day after the raid fires were still burning fiercely and a pall of smoke 4 miles high shrouded the city. Beneath it, two great electrical plants lay badly damaged—the Siemens and the A.E.G. works. Two power stations and two gas works were reported hit; stations and lines of Berlin's intricate subway system were blasted, as well as the Tempelhof air-drome.

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Most of the damage was done in the western and southwestern sections of the city—in Charlottenburg, Spandau, and Wilmersdorf—where factories and their workers are concentrated. But the center of town (see map), where government buildings and Berlin's monuments cluster, got it too. Among the areas hit were Unter den Linden and the Kurfuerstendamm.

A Stockholm report said the Berlin police had accounted for 5,680 dead, and the Nazi welfare organization said it had fed 73,000 citizens the day after the raid. But there was no sign of wholesale evacuation of the 3,500,000 people left in the capital. That was underlined in London by the British Ministry of Economic Warfare.

According to the Ministry, the Germans had evacuated nonessential civilians (children, invalids, and the aged) just as the British had from London three years before. But all evidence indicated that government officials and essential workers still remained in the German capital.

