

shoot down an average of 40, 50, 60 and sometimes even 70 a night. That was the period, roughly from the end of 1942 until the beginning of 1943, during which the British bombers suffered such heavy losses that one could reckon on their having to give up these attacks sooner or later.

However, parallel with those British night raids came the growth of the American Air Force in England. Vast airfields were laid out and runways and underground battle HQs were built in the area of the Northeast of London, right up to the Wash. Fog dispersing plants were constructed, working as follows:

You burn petrol on the airfield; you spray it out of some sort of pipe lines and it produces great heat. The hot air disperses the fog, that is to say the air can absorb the humidity in it and thus it is possible to clear airfields of fog up to a height of 100 m.

Apart from this, there is to be observed from the middle of 1942 onwards, all the training which was taking place in England, where American crews were working up and being trained in formation flying and, as soon as they were ready, undertook their first flights over France. With what could we oppose those American four engine aircraft: What was our fighter arm like at the time? Our standard model was the Me -109, the further development of the 109 with which we had entered the war, and the recently added FW-190.

The armament of the '109' at the time consisted of two MG 17s with the normal caliber of 7.9 mm, and an MG 131, a 13 mm MG. The armament of the ME-109 was better; it consisted of two MG 131's and two MG 151/20 that is two 20 mm cannons. With that armament our fighters on the Channel coast met the first attacks made by the four engine formations. In their initial experiments the enemy flew in with a tremendous fighter cover. Forty or fifty bombers were protected by about a hundred or a hundred and fifty Spitfires. Our only chance was for our fighters to gain height in time and just dive through the enemy fighter formation, fire a short burst at the bombers and dive down further in order to avoid being involved in dog fights with the superior number of enemy fighters, as these fights always led to considerable losses on our side owing to the numerical superiority of the enemy. In order to make myself clear we had to add about a hundred fighters along the entire coast, the huge stretch from the Heligoland Bight to Biarritz. Of course, it was never possible to assemble these fighters as it would have meant their being in the air so long that they would have run out of fuel; usually about fifteen or twenty aircraft was the maximum number that operated in these invading bomber formations with fighter protection.

This disparity in number was reported to higher authority by the "Verbandsfuhrer" concerned and an increase in the number of night fighters was asked for. It had little or no effect, the reason being: that we were tied down in the East; our valiant fighter pilots

were as indispensable on those immense fronts as they were in Africa, down in the South.

After the American Air Force realized that their fighter protection was superfluous because we had too few fighters anyhow and the ones we had were badly armed and as a result very seldom shot down a four engine aircraft, they started flying without fighter protection. The raids were always on territory occupied by us. Paris was attacked, Lille, in the Northern French Industrial area, Holland, with the result that their losses were very much less than the Americans had estimated. I should like to add another example: A Fortress, a Boeing B-17 is flying home alone from a raid over Holland with one engine shot to pieces, a wave of Me 109s with the armament mentioned above, two MG 17s or a MG 131 attacks the Fortress.

Three out of the four aircraft are shot down by the Fortress and the fourth gets the wind up and makes off. That was the situation at that time. As a result it was said that Fortresses were not to be attacked, as no fighter can shoot them down. That was the first blow at morale German fighter pilots had. It was realized that their armament was inadequate and something was done about it too. The "109" was given two MG 131s instead of its two MG 17s, that is two 13 mm MGs, and instead of one of its 13 mm MGs it was given a 20 mm one; that is to say its explosive capacity was quadrupled; the FW-190 was given four cannons instead of its two and retained its two MG 131s. That made us at last capable, as far as armament is concerned, of taking up the fight against four engine bombers with success.

The following is a short description of the armament of the four engine bombers, and of the way in which, in combination with the tactics they employed, i.e. close formation it affected the attackers, our fighters. The Flying Fortress has been advertised since 1940; we knew they were coming. When attacking from the rear you are faced by six or seven MGs, firing to the rear at the fighter. Let us reckon according to the law of probabilities, six MGs against three MGs in the ME-109. This is, however, to some extent compensated in favor of the fighter by the difference of size. Now it must be realized that you're not faced by a single aircraft, but by at least fifteen in close formation. At the start, eighty to a hundred and twenty aircraft used to fly over the Reich in the very closest formation, a flying achievement of the first order. If you take the average of eighty aircraft approaching in close formation you have to reckon with 720 MGs firing out to the rear at you. You were already hit at a distance of 1000 m. The first aircraft were shot down while they had little chance of hitting a bomber

on account of their armament. The MG 12.7 has the advantage over our cannon that owing to its initial velocity it has a considerably greater range. That proved that these aircraft cannot be attacked from the rear, and attack from the front turned out to be the only possible method. From the front you are only faced with the defensive fire of two or four MGs. In addition, you have the tremendous



*Reichsmarschall Herman Goring Looks at England from across the Channel*