

THE LUFTWAFFE vs BOMBER COMMAND

-Although batteries of radar controlled anti-aircraft guns could fill the sky with flak, the Nazi's air force (The Luftwaffe) accounted for the majority of the 12,330 aircraft lost by Bomber Command.

-The deployment of large numbers of Luftwaffe fighters to defend against Bomber Command meant there were few available to support the German army.

LUFTWAFFE FIGHTERS vs BOMBER COMMAND'S AIR GUNNERS

Bomber Command flew almost exclusively under the cover of darkness. The aircraft sacrificed guns, firepower, and armour for the ability to carry a maximum bomb load. The standard machine gun was the Browning .303 which, although it dispensed significant volumes of lead, lacked range and destructive power. The Luftwaffe fighters were armed with 20 and 30 mm cannons. Bomber Command air gunners shot down thousands of enemy fighters but their primary role was that of a lookout so that they could hopefully have their pilot begin the "Corkscrew" evasive action prior to a fighter opening fire.



Cannon Shells and a .303 Cartridge

LUFTWAFFE STRATEGIES

-THE KAMMHUBER LINE

During the early years of Bomber Command's offensive when the bombers flew separate routes to their targets, the Luftwaffe established a series of radar stations and fighter bases across eastern France. Overlapping zones called "boxes" were created, each covered about twenty miles of the line. Within each "box," an operator controlled a single nightfighter. When a bomber approached the box, the fighter took off and was guided to the bomber by the ground-based controller.



-ZAHME SAU (TAME BOAR)

When Bomber Command began sending large numbers of bombers in tightly-packed "streams," the Kamhuber system was no longer effective. "Tame Boar" was utilized to attack the bomber stream en-route to the target. Guided by ground-based radar system operators, two-seater, twin-engined fighters closed in on the bombers utilizing on-board radar systems. Crews often shot down more than one bomber in a single sortie –the record was eight.



Tame Boar radar on an Me 110

-WILDE SAU (WILD BOAR)

This technique took advantage of illumination over the targets provided by searchlights, ground fires, target markers, and flares dropped by Luftwaffe aircraft. When viewed by the fighter pilots from above, the bombers were silhouetted and extremely vulnerable. Single engine, single-seat aircraft could be used and Bomber Command's radar-jamming tools such as "Window" were ineffective.



A bomber silhouetted over an enemy target

-SCHRAGE MUSIK (JAZZ MUSIC)

Few Bomber Command aircraft had ventral turrets. The Luftwaffe took advantage of this by approaching from behind and below until directly beneath the bomber. Schrage Musik was two or more 20 or 30 mm cannons mounted on the fighter's fuselage and positioned to fire upward and slightly ahead, the target generally being the bomber's fuel tanks in the wings between the engines. Tracers were not used so the crews being attacked and those in other aircraft nearby had no idea where the fire was coming from.



Schrage Musik on a Ju 88

-INTRUDERS

In addition to attacking the bombers over Europe, Luftwaffe fighters engaged in offensive "intruder" operations against Bomber Command. Many bombers were shot down over their own airfields.



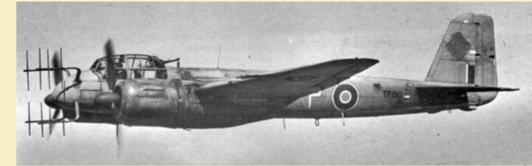
This Halifax was shot down close to its base at Elvington, near York.

"We did not hate the men who flew in these bombers, these men who we characterized as 'comrades from the other side,' in whom we saw airmen, who just like ourselves loved to fly, and who in those dark nights with their manifold dangers had to endure the same fears as we had to." –Lt. Otto Fries

THE FIGHTERS THAT CHALLENGED BOMBER COMMAND



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 -Some models carried armour protection for the pilot and were fitted with two 30 mm cannons.



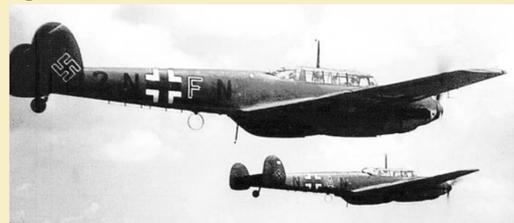
Junkers Ju 88 -The aircraft in this photo "accidentally" landed in England in 1944. The RAF used specifications based on its radar to develop countermeasures.



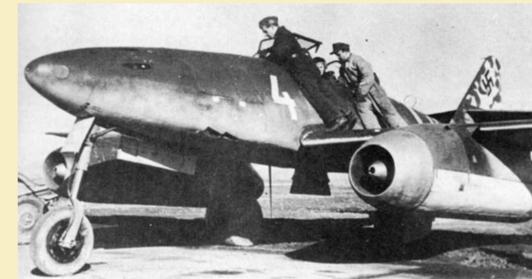
Messerschmitt Bf 109 -The backbone of the Luftwaffe, the Me 109 was the most produced fighter of all time.



Heinkel He 219 -Known as the "Eagle-Owl", the He 219 was a sophisticated design that was introduced in the latter stages of the war.



Messerschmitt Bf 110 -The Luftwaffe's top night fighter ace, Major Heinz-Wolfgang Schnauffer, flew the Me 110 exclusively, shooting down 121 aircraft.



Messerschmitt Me 262 -Operational in mid-1944, the Me 262 was the world's first jet-powered fighter aircraft.

MAJOR WITTGENSTEIN'S LAST FLIGHT

Sgt. Ostheimer was the "Tame Boar" radar operator in a Ju 88 piloted by Heinrich Wittgenstein, one of the Luftwaffe's leading aces. The aircraft was equipped with Schrage Musik and he had 79 kills to his credit when he entered an 88-mile long stream of 648 Lancaster and Halifax bombers on 21 January 1944.

Sgt. Ostheimer recalled:

"At 22:00 I picked up the first contact. It was a Lancaster. We moved into position and opened fire and the aircraft immediately caught fire in the left wing. It went down at a steep angle and began to spin.

"Again we searched. At times I could see as many as six aircraft on my radar. The next target was sighted; again a Lancaster. Following the first burst from us there was a small fire, and the machine dropped back its left wing and went down in a vertical dive.

"After a short interval we again sighted a Lancaster. There was a long burst of fire and the bomber ignited and went down.

"Immediately afterward we saw yet another four motored bomber. After one firing pass this bomber went down in flames at about 22:40. I saw the crash."

Four bombers within forty minutes –an impressive feat. But the flight was not over . . .

"We again sighted a Lancaster and after one attack it caught fire in the fuselage. The fire then died down and we moved into position for a new attack"

At that moment an air-gunner aboard the bomber spotted the Ju 88 and opened fire.

"Major Wittgenstein was ready to shoot when, in our own machine, there were terrible explosions and sparks. It immediately caught fire in the left wing and began to go down. The canopy above my head flew away and I heard on the intercom a shout of, 'Get out!'"

Ostheimer parachuted safely to the ground but Major Wittgenstein, now with 83 victories, did not survive. It is thought that he struck his head on the vertical stabilizer as he exited the aircraft. At the time of his death he was the most successful night fighter pilot in the Luftwaffe. 55 Bomber Command aircraft were lost that night.



These period Luftwaffe maps showing the layout of the Kamhuber line and other defence positions indicate the scale of defenses Bomber Command was faced with each night that they launched a raid. The map at right is dated August 1943. Both maps include both operational and planned positions.

