

steadily penetrating over German waters, a Messerschmitt 110 singled us out for special attention and sat on our tail for about 20 minutes. We certainly hit him but I am not at all sure whether he was actually brought down. We last saw him flying towards the sea. Perhaps he was one of the few casualties which the Germans have admitted. They claimed, I think, that two of their fighters had landed on the water." The pilot continued: "We were busily engaged with another Messerschmitt 110 when a Messerschmitt 109 suddenly flew straight into our cross-fire, and blew up in the air. The enemy attack was sustained and most persistent throughout, and kept all our gunners fully occupied by their method of employing about five fighters to each bomber. If at any time during the battle we managed to get a 15-seconds rest we were more than grateful."

A Casualty

ONE aircraft had to leave the formation and descend into the sea some distance off the English coast, through a petrol leak. This aircraft had got severely shot at in the action, all its guns had been put out of action by shells and machine gun bullets, and the bottom of the front turret had been blown out by shells and set on fire. "My gunner," the pilot said, "was very prompt with the fire and put it out with his gloved hand. But for him the aircraft would have been well alight within a few seconds. His quick action saved our lives. When the bottom of the gun turret was blown away the gunner found that his leg was dangling in the air over the water, but his huddled position kept him from falling into the sea." This young gunner expressed the greatest admiration for his sergeant pilot. "We shall never know how the pilot managed to control his aircraft through such difficulties," said the gunner. The pilot continued: "Had it not been for a petrol leak, caused, I suppose, by a bullet, there would have been no need for us to land on the water. We glided down from a high altitude and got our dinghy out just in time before the aircraft sank within two minutes. I knew there was some hope for us because I saw a trawler and alighted as near as possible to her."

The leader of the formation summed up the great battle in these words: "This was, in fact, the biggest aerial battle ever fought. At a hazard, I should think that there were about 80 to 100 aircraft engaged. We were greatly outnumbered and out-maneuvred because of the higher speed of the fighters. The crews fired shot for shot and gave better than they got. Most of our crews were under fire for the first time and they have returned confident that on the next occasion the enemy will suffer a far heavier blow. The occasion, they hope, will not be too distant. There is no doubt whatever that we were attacked by the best fighters of the German command; ours was just a normal team. All the crews were surprised at the performance of the German aircraft and their determination to press home the attack. We felt that they were worthy opponents."

Pilots and aircraftmen helped to save the life of one of the gunners of the British bomber which alone accounted for five Messerschmitt fighters. They made a human escalator of their backs

to remove him as gently as possible from the aircraft when it returned before rushing him to hospital. He weighed 14 stone and they had no easy task. The gunner had been shot through the thigh, and although the bullet had missed both bone and artery, he had lost a great deal of blood on the long and extremely cold flight home. Now he is doing very well. It was because of his fear for the gunner's safety that the returning bomber pilot decided to land at the nearest home aerodrome, a lonely station near the East Coast. Just before dark the bomber aircraft appeared over the station. As it put down, cheered by the waiting pilots, a tyre burst and the aircraft swung round in a circle. It had been badly damaged. Both wings were largely in tatters and the fuselage was riddled with bullet holes. One wing had burst into flames, but the fire did not last long. Despite the damage the aircraft "flew as well as ever." A bullet tore the sole from the boot of a third member of the crew; but he was lucky enough to escape with a graze and a slight burn.

Unidentified aircraft appeared for a short time over the Eastern Counties in the evening of Wednesday, December 20. Searchlights were exposed and fighters were sent up to investigate, but no contact was made. No anti-aircraft guns were in action and no air raid warnings were sounded.

The German High Command stated in an official broadcast that one of their aircraft shot down a large British flying boat. The statement may have reference to an engagement which took place off the coast of Norway on Tuesday, December 19, in the morning. An R.A.F. flying boat encountered what was thought to be a Heinkel. The enemy, having received a burst of machine gun fire, was driven off. Our own aircraft completed its patrol and returned safely to its base.

Off Scotland

ENEMY aircraft were reported off the Firth of Forth on the morning of Friday, December 22. Fighter aircraft were sent up to intercept them. When the Heinkels were first sighted flying towards the Scottish Coast this morning, they were above two layers of cloud. As soon as they saw British fighters they dived to one layer. A fighter

It is believed that Heinkel He 115 twin-engined floatplanes have been used extensively for laying mines. These machines, as shown here, have two B.M.W. 132 Dc engines. The nose, with its typical German gun-mounting is an interesting feature.

