

AIR (CONTINUED)

followed, firing at one of the Heinkels immediately it was free of cloud. The fighter pilot's dive carried him below the Heinkel. He pulled up and went on firing from underneath the enemy. His tracer ammunition, seemed to go straight into the fuselage of the Heinkel. The German air gunner answered back. One bullet pierced the tail end of the fighter's fuselage but did no serious damage. The Heinkel, driven down, disappeared below the bottom layer of cloud. Before it went, the British pilot, and another who followed, saw a puff of black smoke coming from the raider. A third fighter pilot, returning from pursuit of a second Heinkel, saw a splash of foam on the water below the place of combat.

On the Western Front four Messerschmitt 109 fighters dived out of a cloud and attacked a British fighter patrol of three aircraft on Friday, December 22. Two of our patrol and one Messerschmitt were shot down. A second Messerschmitt was driven down but was not seen to crash.

The Kipper Kites

THROUGHOUT Christmas day the R.A.F. continued with unrelaxed vigilance their patrols covering our fishing fleets and the North Sea. Certain of our aircraft observed German patrol vessels in the eastern North Sea area. These vessels opened fire on our aircraft which took retaliatory bombing action. Hits were not observed and no damage was done to our aircraft.

An R.A.F. aircraft recently had its undercarriage and wing flaps put out of action by enemy anti-aircraft fire during a reconnaissance flight over the coast of N.W. Germany. None of the crew was wounded and the aircraft was able to return safely over the North Sea. The question of landing, however, presented great difficulty. The Pilot Officer therefore ordered the rest of the crew

men stood up and waved their arms. It was essential that the aircraft should go on to deal with an urgent military objective 200 miles away. But before it did so it flashed a reassuring message by lamp to the shipwreck sailors, and sent a radio signal in code to its base giving the position of the raft. At once the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy took action to save the Swedish seamen. Another aircraft was sent out immediately to keep watch on the raft, and the Admiralty ordered a destroyer to the scene. Unexpected difficulties arose. A fierce gale had sprung up, driving the raft fast to leeward. The rescuing coastal aircraft, therefore, could not, at first, find the raft on the course on which it had been previously drifting. So the aircraft began to carry out a wide search. Taking the originally reported position of the raft as a centre, it swept the sea for 100 miles around in the shape of a maze. Eventually, the aeroplane discovered the raft, fortunately with the six men still on it. The aircraft pilot realised that the destroyer which had been sent to help in the rescue would also be unable to locate the raft from the position given. When the destroyer had received instructions, following the first aircraft's report, she was more than 100 miles away from the position of the raft as then indicated, and had proceeded towards the spot at full speed. The coastal aircraft intercepted the warship 35 miles from the position in which the wrecked seaman had last been seen. "Have you sighted the raft?" asked the captain of the destroyer by lamp to the coastal aircraft. He immediately received a reply giving the new position, and set off towards it. As the destroyer came towards the raft the Royal Air Force pilot, because of bad visibility, fired flares into the sea to direct it to the exact position. Thus guided, the destroyer found the raft, lowered a boat and picked up all the men. The captain of the destroyer then announced by lamp to the aircraft the nationality of the men who had been saved and the name of the ship which had been sunk. The following conversation then took place by lamp signals:—

Destroyer: "Any more?"
 Aircraft: "No."
 Destroyer: "Thank you."
 Aircraft: "Welcome."
 Destroyer: "Merry Xmas! Cheerio!"
 Aircraft: "O.K. Thumbs up!"



A German fighter pilot enters his Me 109. It will be seen that this is one of the later machines with Daimler Benz engine. The splayed-out undercarriage and the slotted flaps are points worth noting.

to descend by parachute and then succeeded in landing the aircraft without any further damage.

The rescue of six survivors of the Swedish steamer *Listor*, of Solvesborg, was effected dramatically in the North Sea recently by the co-operation of British aircraft and a British destroyer. When on the way to an important distant objective, an aircraft of the R.A.F. Coastal Command sighted what seemed to be wooden planks scattered from a ship's cargo. The pilot glided towards them and saw that a red and white pennant was flying from a thin pole in the centre of what he had supposed to be moving driftwood. A few minutes later he could distinguish a rough and obviously hurriedly made raft on which six

Reports that a German aircraft made an extensive reconnaissance over the Thames estuary on the morning of Wednesday, December 27, are without foundation. Royal Air Force Fighter Command patrols were active in that area during the morning, and it is possible that ground observers mistook one of these aircraft for an enemy raider.

There were, however, minor encounters in the North Sea that day between R.A.F. Coastal Command aircraft and enemy air and surface craft. One of our aircraft encountered a Dornier aircraft and registered several hits with machine gun bullets. Another British aircraft was in a series of head-on combats with a second Dornier. In the later stage of the encounter the German machine was