

# WAR in the AIR

*R.A.F. Bag Five Messerschmitts in One Day*



A squadron of Gloster Gladiator biplane fighters (Bristol Mercury IX) on the Western Front. Although not so fast as the Hurricanes, these outstandingly manoeuvrable machines will be excellent for tackling such types as the Henschel Hs 126 army co-operation machine and the Henschel Hs 123 and Junkers Ju 87 dive-bombers.

**S**PRING is here and on fine days a certain air liveliness is to be expected on the Western Front. For their neutral merchant ship bombing the Germans prefer bad weather as it makes the task of finding them more difficult for our fighters.

Wednesday last, March 28, marked a day of considerable air activity over the Maginot Line and Western Germany. British fighters accounted for no fewer than five Messerschmitt Me 109s, and it is thought that a Dornier and another Messerschmitt were also shot down, but these were not actually seen to crash and so, of course, are not claimed. One Hurricane was shot down but the pilot escaped by parachute.

These results were from six separate encounters of which three had decisive results. A flight lieutenant, on patrol at about 15,000 feet, saw four Dorniers in Vic formation, with three Messerschmitt Me 110s looking after them about 2,000 feet higher. The Hurricane immediately attacked one of the Dorniers, giving it severe punishment. When last seen oil was streaming from the Dornier, and it is doubtful whether it reached its own aerodrome.

Another air battle near the frontier of Luxemburg, between a patrol of the R.A.F. and nine Messerschmitt Me 109s. Battle was joined at 25,000 feet. The patrol leader took on a pair of Germans and made a bold attack; one Me 109 falling to his first burst. Turning his attention to the enemy's companion, the eight Brownings rattled again and in a cloud of smoke the second German went down out of control. The British pilot did not, however, have it all his own way, for a third Messerschmitt attacked him in turn and, having shot his cockpit cover away with a shell gun, finally set the Hurricane afire. Slightly wounded and somewhat shell-shocked he went down in a spin for some while before he was able to get the nose up and escape by parachute. He landed in No Man's Land, about half a mile from the German lines, and was rescued by the

French Army. A second member of this patrol also got a Messerschmitt, and a third is possible.

Three more Hurricanes on patrol the same day were bold enough to take on no fewer than twelve Me 109s which were in close formation. Two of the British machines were too low to join in, but the higher one immediately pressed home the attack. Separating two machines from the remainder of the formation, a scrap ensued for a while until one of the Germans went down in a spin. Although he had been shot about somewhat, the British pilot nevertheless turned to the other enemy machine and proceeded to chase it back to his (the enemy's) aerodrome, where a dog-fight took place. Finally the German made the mistake of diving and zooming up in front of the Hurricane, making almost a perfect target; a burst of fire and the Messerschmitt went down in flames.

## Coastal Command Success

**D**URING the period under review extensive reconnaissance flights have been carried out over enemy territory and, altogether, three of our machines have failed to return. An enemy aircraft was shot down off the N.E. coast of Scotland on March 27, and another on Sunday last.

Coastal Command bagged a German patrol ship in the North Sea, also on March 27.

The attack was carried out in face of intense anti-aircraft fire. The British pilots took advantage of cloud cover to stalk their quarry, and then circled round to choose the best position from which to strike.

Four ships were seen close together. Selecting one as a target, the British pilots made a dive bombing attack with accurate results. The rear gunner of one of the aircraft saw a salvo of bombs burst directly on the deck of one of the ships. There was a big explosion, but before the smoke had died down, the British aircraft flew into