

WAR IN THE AIR (CONTINUED)

of another squadron ahead, flying west. Endeavoured to join up with them for mutual protection, but before this could be done enemy aircraft in large numbers were attacking, about 30 in number, mostly Messerschmitt 109s, joined later by three or more Messerschmitt 110s. The flight ahead took such violent avoiding action that my flight could not keep with them. While repelling formation attacks of enemy aircraft, the rear gunner of the port aircraft was killed, and the aircraft was subsequently shot down in flames. The aircraft on the starboard side was shot down in flames soon after the signal 'engines on fire.' My aircraft again tried to join up with the flight ahead, but the starboard engine and oil tank were hit by cannon fire, the engine seized and died, and the airscrew and reduction gear dropped off. The attack by enemy aircraft lasted for over 30 minutes after leaving the target, including two attacks by two Messerschmitt 110s while in the clouds well out over the sea and after the starboard engine seized up. I continued on the course for home, and, owing to lack of petrol, was considering landing beside some mine-sweepers when the coast line became visible. Made forced landing at coastal aerodrome, when the undercarriage jammed in the 'up' position. All the hydraulic system had been put out of action during the fight with the enemy. The air observer, during the action with enemy fighters, shot down one Messerschmitt 109, and possibly damaged several others. The rear gunner damaged one Messerschmitt 109. His gun was put out of action by explosive bullet from which he received slight damage to one eye."

Mr. Churchill's Broadcast

THE Prime Minister delivered a stirring broadcast to the nation on Sunday evening, July 14, in the course of which he said: "This has been a great week for the Royal Air Force and the Fighter Command. They have shot down more than five to one of the German aircraft which have tried to molest our convoys in the Channel or ventured to cross the British coastline. These are, of course, only the preliminary encounters to the great air battles which lie ahead; but I know of no reason why we should be discontented with the results so far achieved, although we hope to improve upon them as the fighting becomes more widespread and comes more inland."

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. Alexander, broadcasting the day before, was rather more detailed. He said that in the previous eight days 90 enemy aircraft had been shot down for certain by the Air Force and A.A. guns, and, in addition, 50 more had probably been destroyed. It is also gratifying to note that since Italy entered the war 94 of her aircraft have certainly been destroyed, 28 most probably lost, and a further 31 damaged.

Over the week-end the R.A.F. was particularly busy in both attack and defence. The number of raids which the Bomber and Coastal Commands can now manage in a single night is most impressive. On Saturday, 13th, and Sunday, 14th, no fewer than 14 enemy aerodromes were attacked, in addition to numerous raids on barges, communications, and munition works.

The Fighter Command had good days also. On Friday, 12th, the defences shot down 11 German machines. The first victory of the day was won by six Hurricanes patrolling off the East Anglian coast. They saved merchant ships from an attack by 10 Heinkels, four of the enemy falling into the sea. A little later two Dornier 17s tried to attack the convoy, and a single Hurricane shot down one and damaged the other. Three Dornier 17s which attacked shipping farther south were also unlucky; a Wing Commander in a Hurricane sent one down in flames. His own aircraft was hit in several places, but he landed safely. About mid-day Heinkels were being attacked both in the North of Scotland and over the South Coast of England. Spitfires shot down a Heinkel 111 over Aberdeenshire, and anti-aircraft gunners on the South Coast got another, which crashed on land. Another Heinkel when attacked jettisoned its bombs over the sea, but a Hurricane pilot

got in a long burst of machine-gun fire. Then there was an explosion in the Heinkel. "It literally smothered me in oil," he said, but the Heinkel pilot handled his controls well. Bits and pieces were flying off it all over the place. He landed in a grass field with only one wheel of his undercarriage down, and that was the end of that. The last German, a Junkers 88, also a shipping raider, was claimed by Hurricanes off the Hampshire coast later in the afternoon. It was intercepted under a bank of low cloud and crashed into the sea. Two of our fighters were lost during the day.

On Sunday, 14th, the A.A. guns secured the first success within a few minutes, getting a direct hit on a Junkers flying level far above them. They did not see it crash, but a neighbouring gun crew let them know. One patrol of Spitfires shot down four of the six enemy aircraft known to have been destroyed by fighters. These four were Ju 87 dive bombers. Two Me 109 fighters were destroyed by a patrol of Hurricanes. The first Me 109 was shot down by the Squadron Leader. After a long burst it flicked over on to its back. The Squadron Leader continued to fire. Still upside down, the Messerschmitt dived steeply and crashed.

Meanwhile another enemy fighter was doing its best to get on the tail of the Squadron Leader's Hurricane. But it, in turn, was being attacked by another British pilot. After one long burst from the latter's machine gun there was an explosion in the Messerschmitt. This, too, dived steeply to its end.

A pilot from another formation of Spitfires went after a third Me 109, got in two bursts, and saw it go down enveloped in smoke. It may have been destroyed, but the Spitfire pilot was too busy attacking another enemy fighter to watch it further. This aircraft is therefore not claimed officially.

Five bombs were dropped in the south-east on Sunday night by a lone raider flying at a great height. Buildings were shaken, but apparently no damage was done.

A Legless Pilot

AN extraordinary fact about the week-end fighting was that one Dornier 17 was shot down into the sea by a fighter pilot with two false legs. His name has not been officially mentioned, but there is no doubt that he is F/O. D. R. S. Bader, who some years ago was a first-class fly-half at Rugby football. He used to play for the Harlequins and for the R.A.F. XV. The story of this pilot's return to flying when war broke out is unique in the records of the Royal Air Force. Originally he passed through Cranwell, where he was known as a fine games player. He was captain of cricket and might have played for his county. Soon after he had been commissioned in the R.A.F. he lost control when flying over his aerodrome and crashed heavily. It was thought by all who saw the crash that the pilot could not possibly be saved. But he was got out at last, and, in the words of a friend, "refused to die." He woke up from a long period of unconsciousness to find that both legs had been amputated, one completely and the other at the knee. After being invalidated out of the Service he became more and more skilful in the use of his metal legs. When war broke out he argued his way to an R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve Medical Board and insisted that he was fit for flying. The President of the Board was so impressed by his enthusiasm and determination that he persuaded the doctor to send him to a Central Flying School for a test. He passed the test with flying colours and was passed for active service with a Fighter Squadron. At first he was flying Spitfires, and has always said that he can get in and out of his machine quicker with his artificial legs than other pilots with their real ones. A few months ago he was taking off when his engine failed and he had a mild crash. Both his metal legs were badly bent, but an artificer straightened them and half an hour later he was up in the air again. Now he is leading a squadron of Canadians.