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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

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TRANSLATION No. VII/75

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THE EFFECTS OF
ALLIED BOMBING RAIDS
ON FRENCH TARGETS.

Translated from French documents
held by the Ministère de l'Intérieur, PARIS

TRANSLATED BY:-
AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6
2nd September, 1948.

| <u>ALPHABETICAL LIST OF ATTACKS</u> | | <u>Page</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------|
| AVORD (Airfield) | 5th February, 1944 | 10 |
| BIARRITZ | 27th March, 1944 | 12 |
| BILLANCOURT | 3rd/4th March, 1942 | 3 |
| " (Renault) | 4th April, 1943. | 4 |
| CANNES LA BOCCA | 11th November, 1943 | 8 |
| CHATEAUBERNARD (Airfield) | 31st December, 1943 | 9 |
| CHATEAUDUN (Airfield) | 4th February, 1944 | 10 |
| CLERMONT-FERRAND (Michelin) | 6th/7th March, 1944 | 11 |
| GENNEVILLIERS | 6th April, 28th April and 30th May, 1942. | 3 |
| ISTRES (Airfield) | 10th March, 1944 | 11 |
| LORIENT | January-May, 1943 | 3 |
| MARIGNANE (Airfield) | 10th March, 1944 | 11 |
| MARSEILLES | 2nd December, 1943 | 8 |
| MEULAN-les-MUREAUX | 3rd March, 1944 | 10 |
| MODANE | 16th September and 11th November, 1943 | 7 |
| MONTLUCON (Dunlop) | 16th September, 1943 | 5 |
| NANTES | 16th September and 23rd September, 1943 | 6 |
| NICE | 18th December, 1943, 2nd January, 1944 and 26th May, 1944 | 8 |
| NOGENT-le-PHAYE | 15th May, 1944 | 13 |
| PARIS | 31st December, 1943 | 9 |
| PONT-LONG (Airfield), near PAU | 27th March, 1944 | 13 |
| ROMILLY-sur-SEINE | 15th September, 1943 | 5 |
| ST. PIERRE-des-CORPS | 11th April, 1944. | 13 |
| TOULON | 4th February, 1944. | 9 |

NOTE:- Some of these reports, prepared at the time of the attack by the local authorities, are very meagre, owing to the fact that the defence of the target concerned was entirely a German responsibility and French officials were not granted access. Other reports were somewhat coloured, presumably to please the Vichy Government.

Attack on BILLANCOURT on 3rd/4th March 1942

During the night of 3rd/4th March a powerful attack was made by the R.A.F. against the industrial centre of BILLANCOURT. Complete surprise appears to have been achieved as the "red" warnings were not sounded and A/A. fire was negligible. The factories of BILLANCOURT were, therefore, immediately under bombardment and the night shift of workers, together with the factory guards, had to run considerable risks in reaching the air-raid shelters. Passive defence measures, including the black-out, had been carried out everywhere with great care. These precautions, however, were shown to be completely ineffective by reason of the use by the attacking force of target illuminators which were dropped in large numbers giving a bright but not blinding light. The moonlight added to the general illumination, thus giving the bombers conditions similar to broad daylight.

The attack was carried out by approximately 150 - 200 heavy bombers escorted by fighters. They flew very low between 200 - 400 metres and were clearly visible.

Effects

The general effect was very severe, particularly from blast. Doors were torn away several hundred metres from the point of impact and walls were reduced to ruins. Only the iron walls of some work-shops were able to withstand the severe blast. A large number of private houses in the vicinity were hit, causing severe damage and considerable loss of life.

In particular the motor works of SALMSON was attacked fairly late in the evening (between 2215 hrs and 2330 hrs). This was just at the time when the night shift was taking over and about 200 workers were therefore in the factory when the attack began. The directors and engineers, both French and German, had gone home as usual without any inkling of the approaching danger.

Ten bombs were dropped on the factory during two runs, two aircraft in each run. The magneto shop was reduced to ruins and all the magnetos inside were completely destroyed by the intense heat. Electric motors suffered considerable damage and only a few of them are repairable. The total damage has been estimated at between 30 - 40 million francs.

Attacks on GENNEVILLIERS on 6th and 28th April, and 30th May, 1942

These attacks were aimed at the GNOME-RHONE factory. In the April attacks, some damage was caused by small bombs and incendiaries. Repairs to buildings were practically complete before the next attack, which was on the 30th May. On that date, about 50 bombs fell on the works but fires were limited by prompt action of the fire service. Nevertheless considerable blast effect resulted.

Attacks on Arsenal and Town of LORIENT, January - May 1943

Target

The town of LORIENT of 40,000 inhabitants owed its importance to its U-boat base, key to the navigation in the Channel, and to its arsenal, the installations of which extend on both banks of the SCORFF, but particularly on the right bank between the SCORFF and the town itself.

/ Raids

Raids

In four months, between 15th January and 17th May, 1943, LORIENT had no less than 12 major attacks, most of them by night. After the January raids the state of the arsenal was as follows:- Many administrative offices were completely destroyed. The submarine base had not been hit. The electric installations were intact and the machine tool shops still functioned.

On 7th February, H.E. bombs destroyed the A.R.P. and Fire Service establishments, the library and a number of workshops on both banks. Further damage to cranes, machine-shops and railway lines was caused on the 13th and 16th February.

Thus, after the February raids the machine shops and two dry docks were unserviceable and it was apparent that it was no longer possible to continue using the arsenal as a repair base. On the 6th March, much of the electrical installation was destroyed and canals and railways severely damaged. Finally, on the 17th May, what remained of the arsenal installations received further damage and from that date it practically ceased to function.

Destruction of the LORIENT Area

During the raids at least 500 tons of H.E. and 50,000 incendiaries must have fallen in the LORIENT area. The greatest damage was caused by the incendiaries. On the night of 14th/15th January practically the whole quarter near the gas works was swept by fires - not less than 70. The following night there were 600 fires which, in spite of all efforts, were not extinguished until the morning of the 18th. Further fires were caused by succeeding raids, particularly by that of the 7th February, in the course of which 200 fires had to be fought. By the beginning of March over 3,000 of the 4,000 houses in the town were completely destroyed and most of the remainder were more or less severely damaged. From that day indeed, LORIENT was a dead city and could be regarded as practically wiped out. Casualties were not, however, very high and the total number of dead and wounded in the LORIENT area, including the town itself, did not exceed 500. A certain amount of panic was manifest among the workers in the arsenal and after the first raid some 200 workers left the area and they only drifted back to a partial extent and very gradually. The morale of the workers was again seriously upset by the raid of the 6th March when four workers were killed and several injured in shelters.

The example of LORIENT shows that in spite of all passive defence measures a town cannot stand up to heavy and repeated incendiary attacks.

Attack on the Renault Works at BILLANCOURT on 4th April 1943

The principal objective in the area was the Renault Motor Works which was making lorries for Germany. This extensive, vital and easily identified target did not possess any exceptional A.A. defences. The raid was carried out in good weather conditions in the afternoon of the 4th April by about 60 B-24's. It was the first time that the U.S.A.A.F. had operated against France on such a large scale. Warnings were sounded only one minute before the bombs began to fall and the whole attack was over in five minutes. They flew in at about 6,000 metres and approximately 450 H.E. bombs were dropped; roughly 10% of these did not explode.

Effects

Casualties amounted to some 400 killed and 500 seriously injured. About 100 dwellings were totally destroyed and some 500 damaged. The

/following

following factories were hit: Renault, 160 bombs, great damage, 4 dead; Caudron-Renault, slight damage, 2 bombs; Daimler-Benz, 4 bombs, slight damage; Farman, 6 bombs, slight damage; Salmson, 6 bombs, slight damage.

Attack on the ROMILLY sur SEINE area on 15th September 1943

The objective was the airfield of Romilly sur Seine, which was being used by German aircraft.

The attack lasted 7 minutes, beginning at 19.48 hours and finishing at 19.55 hours. 85 bombers took part, flying in three waves at 4,500 to 5,000 metres.

Only high explosive bombs were dropped; the number which fell outside the airfield area was 356. The majority of bombs used weighed 250 or 500 kg. though there were some of 1,000 kg.

The effects of the attack

65 houses were damaged or destroyed; as most of the bombs penetrated deeply into the earth before exploding, damage from blast was not great and in many houses only the roofs were damaged.

The railway line from Paris to Belfort was hit at five points.

After the raid, Romilly sur Seine was without electricity for 3 days.

Casualties

16 killed, 7 injured.
175 people were rendered homeless.

Attack on the Dunlop Factory at MONTLUCON on 16th September, 1943

The attack began at 0025 hours in excellent weather conditions and lasted 35 minutes. It was carried out by about 50 Halifaxes. The alert was not given, as MONTLUCON is situated very close to the demarkation line and the German observation post did not pass on any message. After the first bombs had been dropped the failure of the current prevented the sirens from functioning perfectly.

Effects

About 150 H.E. bombs fell on the target area, i.e. in a rectangle about 1500 by 600 metres. At least 180 bombs, representing approximately 65 tons, were, however dropped outside the target area up to as far as 40 Km away. There appeared to be no secondary objective possible and in view of the excellent visibility it can only be presumed that the bombs outside the target area were jettisoned by aircraft which were being pursued by fighters. Although the raid was severe, only about 60 people were killed, of which 7 were killed at work (the night shift consisted of some 300 workers).

Industrial Effects

Nearly every part of the Dunlop complex was hit by H.E. but it was incendiaries which caused the greatest damage to buildings. More than half the area covered by the complex was completely destroyed by fire. These

/ exceptional

exceptional circumstances were due in the main to the construction and distribution of the buildings and to the inflammable nature of the products produced. Work at the factories came to a complete stand-still and more than six months later only the cycle shop, which had been re-built, was in any way capable of renewal of work. Rarely has there been an air attack so completely effective as this one.

Attacks on NANTES on 16th and 23rd September 1943

In the three attacks which took place on the two dates in question, 2,150 bombs were dropped. It is supposed that the objectives were harbour installations and the airfield at Bouguenais but only 880 bombs fell in the target area; 1,270 bombs fell on residential areas in the city.

The attack on September 16th, apparently made by four-engined American bombers began at 16.00 hours and went on till 16.15 hours. 160 aircraft, flying in three waves, took part. Approximately 1,000 bombs were dropped from heights between 5,000 and 8,000 metres. The areas affected were NANTES, ST.-HERBLAIN, REZE, BOUGUENAI.

The attack on September 23rd began at 09.15 hours and ended at 09.30 hours. 60 aircraft, in two waves, dropped bombs from between 1,000 and 2,000 metres. The R.A.F. was responsible for this raid. Later in the day another attack was made; the aircraft involved were presumably American four-engined bombers. The first bombs fell at 19.10 hours, and the attack went on until 19.30 hours. 150 aircraft took part, flying in 4 waves, at heights ranging between 4,000 and 5,000 metres. 650 bombs were dropped, most of them on residential areas in the city.

Bombs dropped.

In the first attack, roughly 1,000 bombs were dropped. Some 250 fell on objectives of military importance (i.e. the harbour area or Bouguenais). 650 bombs fell on residential areas.

500 bombs were dropped in the course of the second attack, and nearly all of them fell on military objectives. 20 bombs fell on residential areas.

In the third attack, 650 bombs were dropped: 50 landed on rail or harbour installations; the remainder fell on residential areas.

The estimated weight of bombs dropped in the three attacks was 1,200 tons.

The effects of the attacks

After the first and third attacks, the city was without gas, water and electricity supplies.

Details of damage to houses:-

| | <u>On 16th September.</u> | <u>On 23rd September.</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Houses destroyed | 400 | 300 |
| Houses severely damaged | 600 | 600 |
| Houses slightly damaged | 1,200 | 800 |

Most of the port area was destroyed and the vessels in the harbour were sunk.

Several factories were damaged or destroyed.

/ Casualties

Casualties

In the first attack: 812 killed, 1,785 injured.
 In the second attack: 215 killed, 110 injured.
 In the third attack: 150 killed, 200 injured.

The number of people rendered homeless was 60,000.

More than 100,000 people - out of a population of 250,000 - left the city after the attacks.

Attacks on MODANE on 16/17th September, and
 11th November, 1943

16/17th September Raid

The "purple" warning was sounded at 2350 hours but the "red" was never given. Shortly afterwards aircraft flew over the town and began the attack which lasted from 0055 hours to 0205 hours. It was carried out by about 350 U.S. four-engine bombers in successive waves at an altitude of 3,000 - 4,000 metres. Weather conditions were good with excellent visibility (full moon was on 14th September) and numerous target illuminators were also dropped. There was no A/A defence.

Effects

The main weight of bombs fell on the towns of MODANE, LOUTRAZ, BOURGET and VILLADORN-BOURGET. A large number of bombs were, however, dropped well outside the target area. The method of attack employed, using small groups of single aircraft should result in a greater concentration of bombing than that achieved by most attacks but this technique needs a very high standard of bombing accuracy which was certainly not apparent in this raid. From the 17th - 21st September traffic was suspended in the direction of ST. JULIEN and for ten days in the direction of the entrance to the tunnel. The town of MODANE itself was severely hit and its evacuation was necessary, three-quarters of the population having been rendered homeless.

Industrial Damage

The raid caused serious damage to the chemical factory of ST. GOBAIN. It is not clear whether the bombs were dropped on the factory as the result of the bomber crews mistaking it for MODANE station, or whether it was intentional. In any case, the 25 bombs dropped on the factory had important results. For $3\frac{1}{2}$ months there was a complete cessation in production and 6 months later the production of calcium products had still not been resumed. In addition the buildings were so severely damaged that with the shortage of building material 6 months were needed to re-build.

10/11th November Raid

A further raid was carried out in the night of the 10/11th November directed principally against MODANE station and FOURNAUX. This attack, also by U.S. bombers, began at about 1005 hours and lasted for 45 minutes. About 250 aircraft took part, operating in successive waves at 3,000 metres. Most of the bombs dropped were incendiaries and target markers were also used in great numbers. The concentration of bombs was much greater than during the September raid.

/ Effects

Effects

The railway lines were severely damaged again and a German goods train standing in the station was demolished. Of the station itself, only a few walls remained and the engine shed was also completely destroyed. In the town of MODANE only a few houses remained standing after the second attack and these were uninhabitable. The area of MODANE and FOURNAUX indeed had the appearance of front line villages of the First World War. The village of FOURNAUX has been wiped off the map. During the second raid no bombs were dropped on the factories in the area.

Attack on CANNES la BOCCA on 11th November, 1943.

In this attack, two factories were hit, the S.N.C.A.S.O. aircraft works and the steel works Acieries du Nord.

All windows at the S.N.C.A.S.O. works were blown out and the administrative buildings were destroyed by fire. Work could not be resumed immediately after the attack, owing to the presence of a number of delayed - action bombs; some of these exploded a week later.

The damage caused at Acieries du Nord was far more significant. 23 hits were recorded within the factory area.

Attack on MARSEILLES on 2nd December, 1943

The attack took place between 12.00 hours and 14.00 hours and was directed against the harbour area.

Roughly a hundred bombs of 200 or 300 kilos were dropped; they were well concentrated on the target area and some industrial damage resulted.

One person was killed and one injured.

Attacks on NICE and ST. LORIENT DU VAR on the 18th December, 1943 & 2nd January, 194418th December Raid

The objectives in this raid were the railway bridge and road bridge over the VAR. The attack was carried out by 6 groups of 6 aircraft each, flying at low altitude. Approximately 500 bombs, most of them H.E., were dropped.

Effects

Casualties amounted to 3 killed and 8 injured. The road bridge over the VAR was completely destroyed, necessitating a traffic diversion through GATTIERES. The railway also suffered slight damage.

2nd January Raid

The objective was again the railway bridge over the VAR and this time the attack was undertaken by 27 aircraft flying at low level. They dropped approximately 15 H.E. bombs.

Effects

There were 4 killed and 3 persons injured. The attack was carried out with great precision and direct hits were scored on the railway bridge itself and on the centre, cutting the rails and causing a large breach in the parapet. Rail communications were interrupted for an unspecified period.

Attack on the PARIS area on 31st December, 1943.

The PARIS area was attacked at approximately 1215 hours on 31st December, by waves of aircraft which concentrated on the South-east and North-east suburbs.

Effects

The SKF ball-bearing factory at IVRY was almost entirely destroyed. This was certainly the main objective of the attack as on the same day a branch of the SKF factory at BECON was also attacked and the raids on the PARIS area followed closely on the attacks made on the ball-bearing industry in Germany and Italy. A secondary objective, the Bidault factory which made aircraft parts, was bombed at the same time by one aircraft which dropped 12 bombs, 8 of which fell on the factory complex.

Attack on the CHATEAUBERNARD AIRFIELD on 31st December, 1943.

The attack, which lasted from 12.20 hours until 13.35 hours, was undertaken by a force of 260 American "Flying Fortresses"; they flew at a height of 6,200 - 7,000 metres.

Bombs dropped:

1,290 bombs were dropped; 50 of these were incendiaries. The average weight of the high explosive bombs was 250 Kg.

Damage:

On the German -- occupied airfield all the hangars except 2 or 3 were destroyed.

30 houses were destroyed.

Damage to the extent of 100,000 francs was done to the electric cables at Gente.

Casualties:

11 killed and 14 severely injured. The casualties suffered on the airfield were:

Killed: 2 French, 11 Germans and 11 Americans.

Attack on TOULON on 4th February, 1944.

The attack was made by two distinct waves of aircraft. 28 machines flying at 4,000 metres, took part in the first attack, which began at 13.53 hours and lasted for three minutes. 23 aircraft carried out the second attack between 14.01 hours and 14.04 hours.

Damage:

The "Dunkerque," which was in the harbour, received two direct hits and suffered severe damage.

/In

In all, 220 hits were registered in the port area; 145 bombs fell on the city.

107 houses were damaged or destroyed.

Casualties:

| | |
|---------|----|
| Killed | 34 |
| Injured | 44 |
| Missing | 18 |

Between three and four thousand people were rendered homeless.

A later report on this attack states that only 5 dry docks out of 13 were still capable of being used after the raid, and only one of the four docks was still in a usable condition. High tension wires were cut at several points.

Attack on CHATEAUDUN on 4th February, 1944.

Just after midday, the German - occupied airfield was attacked by a force of 200 aircraft (fighters and bombers), which flew in at 3,000 metres. All the bombs fell in the target area and many large craters were caused, especially in front of the hangars.

The runways were relatively unaffected; 18 heavy bombs fell at their point of intersection, but the craters were quickly filled. Several buildings on the airfield were destroyed.

As the bombing of the airfield was so accurate, there were few civilian casualties; one woman was killed and another injured.

Attack on AVORD AIRFIELD on 5th February, 1944.

The attack began at 11.15 hours; approximately 50 aircraft, flying at 2,000 metres, took part. All the bombs fell within the target area, i.e. within the confines of the airfield.

It was not possible to ascertain the damage caused. (Airfield not accessible to French authorities).

Casualties:

| | |
|---------|----|
| Killed | 2 |
| Injured | 36 |
| Missing | 1 |

Attack on MEULAN - LES MUREAUX on 3rd March, 1944.

The attack was delivered by several hundred aircraft which flew in three waves, each wave coming from a different direction. In perfect visibility, the aircraft flew at 500 - 800 metres. It appeared that Pathfinder tactics were being employed.

/Damage:

Damage:

The objective seemed to be the aircraft works Ste Nationale de Construction Aeronautique du Nord, and 71 hits were recorded there.

Approximately 1,100 bombs were dropped, most of them falling between the factory and the Seine.

Severe damage was caused at the aircraft works. Work was brought to a standstill for an indefinite period; the airfield was put out of action.

21 houses were destroyed and 44 severely damaged.

Casualties:

Killed 8
Injured 6

The number of people rendered homeless was 90.

Attack on the MICHELIN FACTORY at CLERMONT - FERRAND
on 6/7th March, 1944.

The attack took place shortly before 23.00 hours. In addition to 1,000 incendiaries, high explosive bombs were dropped, and there were indications that a new type of bomb was in use. At least five direct hits were scored in the factory area by very heavy bombs; the craters were 20 - 50 metres in diameter.

15 houses were completely destroyed and a further 208 were rendered uninhabitable. The management hoped to have the entire personnel of the factory back at work within a very short time.

Casualties:

There were casualties among the civilian population, and some 1,500 people were rendered homeless.

Attack on ISTRES and MARIGNANE on 10th March, 1944.

The attack was presumably directed against the airfield at Istres and the airfield and buildings of the S.N.C.A.S.E. concern at Marignane.

Istres:

Several waves of aircraft flew over the airfield: no information is available on the number of bombs dropped within the confines of the airfield, but there was no damage in the surrounding country, nor were there any casualties.

Marignane:

60 aircraft (presumably British) took part in the attack, which lasted from 01.30 hours till 02.00 hours.

/Several

Several dozen heavy high explosive bombs were dropped, in addition to a large number of incendiaries. The average weight of the H.E.s was 250 or 500 kilos.

Considerable material damage was caused to the S.N.C.A.S.E. airfield: one hangar was completely destroyed and two others damaged. Fuel tanks exploded after being set on fire by incendiaries.

Damage to the airfield was estimated at 500 million francs.

There was also material damage to the Centre for Aeronautical Research ("Centre d'etudes en vol"). Some of the administrative buildings were destroyed, but the work of the Centre could still be carried on.

At Marignane 9 people were injured and 2 reported missing.

Attack on BIARRITZ on 27th March, 1944

The attack seemed to have three objectives:

- (a) The airfield at Parme and its immediate surroundings,
- (b) The Biarritz railway station,
- (c) The area of the old port.

Five waves of aircraft took part in the attack, which began at 14.30 hours and lasted for 15 minutes; the aircraft involved were American "Flying Fortresses".

The first wave of 45 aircraft, crossed the coast at 14.30 hours and flew on in the direction of Pau without dropping any bombs.

Flying in from the west, the second wave of 22 aircraft delivered a violent attack on Parme.

The third wave of 14 bombers did not appear to locate the target, and they flew off in a north - westerly direction. A few minutes later they returned, to form the fifth wave.

The 9 aircraft which formed the fourth wave bombed the area of the old port.

The 14 bombers in the third wave then returned to make a sharp attack on the airfield at Parme.

Biarritz itself was bombed for less than a minute and a half, in which time six or seven hundred bombs were dropped.

A considerable number of fighters accompanied the 90 bombers on this attack.

Damage:

No details can be given of the damage caused on the German - occupied airfield, as French A.R.P. personnel were excluded, but the attack appeared to be partially successful.

The damage caused in the centre of the city seemed to be a result of a mistake, as only three or four aircraft dropped their bombs there.

/ The

The bombs used were American: they weighed only 9 kg., but nevertheless proved highly effective as fragmentation bombs; they did not cause craters.

Casualties:

There were fatal casualties and injured among the civil population.

Attack on the PONT - LONG AIRFIELD near PAU on 27th March, 1944.

The objective was the Pont - Long airfield, which had been in German occupation since September 1942. The attack, which began at 14.55 hours, was delivered by 71 aircraft flying in three waves.

The German authorities would not permit any examination of the airfield after the attack, so no details of the damage caused can be given.

It is believed, however, that two Germans were killed and a number injured.

Approximately 300 incendiary bombs were dropped near Oloron; they caused slight damage to property but there were no casualties.

Attack on ST-PIERRE-DES-CORPS on April 11th, 1944.

The attack took place between 01.35 hours and 03.15 hours. The number of aircraft participating is estimated at 150 - 200; they flew at 1,500 metres. Between 1,500 and 2,000 high explosive bombs were dropped in addition to several thousand incendiaries.

Damage:

Most of the damage was caused by incendiary and delayed action bombs. Approximately 400 houses were destroyed and 300 were damaged to some extent. At the railway station, the machine shop was hit and several carriages were destroyed or set on fire: the permanent way was damaged for some distance. The St - Gobain factory was damaged.

Casualties:

The combined figures for the casualties in the town area and at the station were as follows:

Killed 19
Injured 104

The number of people rendered homeless was approximately 2,000.

Attack on NOGENT - LE - PHAYE on 15th May, 1944.

4 high explosive bombs were dropped at midnight by a solitary aircraft which could not be identified. It is thought that the attack might have been the result of the fact that a light was showing from one of the houses which was destroyed.

Damage:

3 houses were destroyed and 10 damaged by blast.

Casualties:

Two people were killed when the house in which they lived received a direct hit.

/ Attack on

Attack on NICE on 26th May, 1944.

3 waves, each of 30 aircraft, attacked the city from a high level. The objectives seemed to be the St - Roch railway station and the Pont du Var. In a mass attack, some 500 high explosive bombs were dropped.

Damage:

365 houses were destroyed or badly damaged.

Industrial Damage:

Damage was caused to electrical installations, but the current was restored within 24 hours.

Gas mains were hit, but supplies were back to normal by the same evening.

One of the principal water mains was hit.

The Ste - Thecle aquaduct suffered damage.

Water supplies were cut off in the Villefranche, Beaulieu and Eze districts; at other points, the water supply was maintained at reduced pressure. In Nice itself, the water supply was interrupted in the St - Roch and Riquier areas. The damage to the water supply system for the area was considerable and might have had grave results if the problem had not been tackled urgently. However, normal supplies were restored within 48 hours.

In the St - Roch station, a machine shop was hit by 80 bombs: damage was also done to the permanent way and to the Nice - Breil line.

The Pont du Var received one direct hit.

The Michel waggon repair works was completely destroyed.

Casualties:

Killed 438

Injured 500

One of the attacking aircraft was shot down at 10.43 hours.

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