

R E S T R I C T E D

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

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ANTON HOCH

THE AIR ATTACK ON FREIBURG ON 10TH MAY, 1940

(from "Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte", Vol. 2, April 1956)

TRANSLATED BY
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G.H13673/JHA/11/56/

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The air attack on Freiburg on 10th May, 1940 - the first of the larger scale raids in the second world war - has twice been the subject of an official German report. The first time (directly after the raid) it was referred to as being carried out by the enemy (1). It was described as a contravention of international law and reprisals were threatened. The second time, in December, 1947, the Baden Chancery of State said "in the interest of truth and of the improvement of relationships between the erstwhile hostile nations" that the air attack on Freiburg had been carried out by German aircraft and that it could be traced back to a perfidious order given by Hitler (2).

This announcement, although it was not proven and was in fact based on a "personal and subjective opinion", was officially made to the public, but only because it originated from a reliable witness who, in his official capacity, was qualified to make it. The statement at the beginning of the announcement that the archives department at Freiburg in Breisgau had "started to make the necessary enquiries so that the accuracy of this claim might be established beyond dispute" (3) was untrue.

(1) "Völkischer Beobachter", Munich edition, 11th May '40 and Supreme Command of the Armed Forces Report dated 11 May '40 (Völk. Beobachter, Munich edition 12 May '40).

(2) "Badische Zeitung", 2 Dec. '47, (complete text). An abbreviated account was given by most of the other newspapers. See "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", 4 Dec. '47; "New York Herald Tribune", 4 Dec. '47; "Neue Zeitung", 5 Dec. '47; "Time" (Chicago), 15 Dec. '47; "Süddeutsche Zeitung", 6 Dec. '47 and "Frankfurter Hefte 1948", Vol. 2, p. 102 ff.

(3) In this connection see:- (a) Badische Staatskanzlei, Generalia XIX, Militär- und Kriegssachen, Fliegerangriff auf Freiburg i. Br., jetzt im Reg.-Präs. Südbaden; (Baden Chancery of State General File XIX, Military Affairs, Air Attack on Freiburg in Breisgau, now in the district of South Baden). N.B. In future this source will be abbreviated to "Badische Staatskanzlei".

(b) Städt. Hauptverwaltung Freiburg i. Br., OO-073-2 Betr. Luftangriff am 10.5.40, Heft 2; (Freiburg Municipal Administration File OO-073-2 concerning the air attack on 10 May 1940, Vol. 2). N.B. In future this source will be abbreviated to "Städt. Hauptverwaltung".

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 2 -

The Freiburg archives department therefore rightly disassociated itself from this announcement. Generaloberst HALDER (retd.), who was the witness referred to, had in fact categorically declared in his letter of 27th December, 1947, that his statements were based on personal information which he gave to authorities which he understood were entitled to ask for them and that he did so under the expressly given promise that "no publicity would ensue and that no other unsuitable use" would be made of them (4).

On 4th October, 1954, the Baden and Württemberg State Ministry instructed the Munich Institute for Contemporary History to investigate the event.

Even a fleeting study of the files made it obvious that the circumstances as made known by the Baden Chancery of State could in no way be considered proved and that they had been definitely contested in various letters and newspaper articles. During the course of the work, an abundance of possibilities came to light which made it clear how difficult it was going to be to establish facts and to check sources of information. A direct account could not be found either in the original file at the mayor's office at Freiburg in Breisgau (5) or in the war diary of the local A.R.P. chief during the period 1939-1945 (6).

The same was true of the war diary kept by the 3rd Gruppe of Bomber Geschwader 51, which was operating in the south-west of Germany at that time. Fortunately a privately owned copy of this book has been preserved. Our efforts to trace documents in the German files in London and Washington which dealt with the air attack were also unsuccessful. Situation Report No. 248 by the C.-in-C. of the Luftwaffe, Operations Staff Intelligence, dated 10/11th May, 1940, which was procured from London, limited itself to the official version given in the German Armed Forces report.

Not until after the end of our investigations were we successful in obtaining a few important original documents from private sources which presented the hope of really clearing up points about the event. While the original documents - the historian's main sources of information - could not be traced, efforts had to be made to appeal to as wide a circle of witnesses as possible. Attempts had to be made to find people who would be both in a position to and be prepared to give evidence about the matter either as direct or indirect witnesses.

(4) Halder's information was given as the result of a request made by Dr. Zwölfer (the Freiburg Archives official) on 2 Oct. '47 and by Dr. Hefeke (the head of the department) on 24 Oct. '47 in letters on the 7th and 27th Oct. '47. See Städt. Hauptverwaltung, Vol. 2, pp. 1-4. Photostat copies of these letters may be found in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Zeugenschrifttum, 240, III, S. 6-9; (Institute for Contemporary History, Witnesses' Correspondence, 240, III, pp. 6-9). N.B. In future this source will be abbreviated to "IfZ, ZS."

(5) Städt. Hauptverwaltung, Vol. 1.

(6) Preserved in the Freiburg in Breisgau Town Archives. There are photostat copies of the relevant sections of the war diary in the archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, (appendix).

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 3 -

The following list may give some idea of the extent of the enquiries which proved necessary when we investigated this event (which took place on one day within a small area). The following witnesses from the units and organisations concerned were written to:-

Fuhrer's H.Q. :-

The Adjutants of the Army, Air Force and Navy and the Liaison Officer of the S.S.

Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, Foreign Affairs/Counter Intelligence Department:-

The Heads of Sections I and III and two other senior officers on the staff of Admiral Canaris.

Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe and Reich Air Ministry:-

The Intelligence Chief at C.-in-C, Luftwaffe H.Q. and three other officers in this department; the Chief of Staff to the Director General of Luftwaffe Equipment; the Director of the Office of Minister for Air; the Chief of Staff and Adjutant to Reichsmarschall Goering; the Director of Luftwaffe Signals and his Aircraft Reporting Chief; the Head of the Air Ministry Technical Branch; the Head of Luftwaffe Inspection Branch 13 (A.R.P.).

Army Group C:-

Chief of Staff.

Luftflotte 3:-

The Judge Advocate; the H.Q. Commandant; Senior Personnel Officer; Operations Clerk, the Adjutant to the Senior Signals Officer.

7th Army H.Q. :-

Chief Quartermaster; Senior Personnel Officer.

Luftgau VII:-

Chief of Operational Staff; Quartermaster; Situation Officer (Intelligence); Ops2(A.A.); Ops.3 (A.R.P.).

33rd Army Corps:-

Chief of Staff.

Bomber Geschwader 51:-

Geschwader Commander; O.C. III Gruppe and 20 other officers in the Geschwader.

A.A. :-

O.C. and Ops. Black Forest A.A. Group; O.C. and Medical Officer Heavy A.A. I/491 (motorised).

R E S T R I C T E D

G. H13673(a)(r)/SJW/11/56/

Aircraft Reporting and Air Raid Warning Service:-

O.C. Aircraft Reporting Service Luftgau VII and two further officers in the section; the officers i/c the Donaueschingen and Stuttgart Observer Post H.Q's.; the officer i/c the Freiburg Observer Post; the officer i/c and the observer at the Lorettoberg Observer Post near Freiburg; the officer i/c, the deputy and two plotters at the Air Raid Warning Centre at Freiburg in Breisgau.

Air Force Ammunition Depots:-

The Director of the Haid Ammunition Depot.

Various other military H.Qs. and units:-

The static artillery officer for Freiburg-North and his adjutant; the static artillery officer for Freiburg-South; the Freiburg District Commander; the Adjutant of the Fortifications Engineering H.Q.; the Censorship Officer attached to the Vth Army Corps H.Q. deputy at the Baden Propaganda Office.

Civil Authorities

The Baden Land Commissioner; the Mayor, two assistants and one Freiburg town councillor; the Chief Inspector of Police and the A.R.P. officer at Freiburg Police H. Q.

Besides this we were able to draw upon the statements of 21 persons who were either eye-witnesses of the incident or who had received information about it from a third party. Some of them were sent to us direct and some came to the Institute as a result of notices which were inserted in the newspapers "Freiburger Wochenbericht" and "Badische Zeitung".

Our next task was to find out everything that we could about the incident from all the available witnesses, no matter how closely or otherwise they might have been concerned with what took place.

No definite conclusions could be drawn until their various statements combined to produce some unconflicting evidence about what happened. One important point was that we had to accept the possibility that when the incident took place, steps may have been taken (for various reasons) to camouflage the true state of affairs. It was therefore obvious that the evidence of an impartial group of witnesses was of particular importance in a case such as that which we had under review. We are referring here to those witnesses who took no actual part in what happened and who were in no way responsible, but who were in a position to have a good idea of what occurred.

The following possibilities had to be examined:-

- (1) Did Hitler order German aircraft to make the attack so that he had an excuse for waging unrestricted air warfare?
- (2) Did German aircraft fly off course and drop their bombs on Freiburg by mistake? Or did they have to jettison their bomb load?
- (3) Did enemy aircraft carry out a planned bombing offensive against the civilian population or against military objectives? Did they attack openly or were they camouflaged as German aircraft?

(4) Were enemy air force personnel using German aircraft or were German bombs dropped from enemy aircraft?

(5) Was it not also possible that enemy aircraft dropped their bombs on Freiburg by mistake?

We now submit the results of our investigations. We are doing so in full detail because we think that this will be the best way in which to clarify conflicting public opinion about the incident. In our examination, we shall turn our attention first to the general air situation in the Freiburg area on May 10th, then we shall outline the conclusions which were reached at that time about the origin of the bombs which were dropped and in a further section we shall examine the contribution which the flying personnel involved can make towards the clarification of what actually happened. A further confirmation of the result of our investigations will be given in a final chapter, where we shall investigate how the German High Command and its propaganda machine handled the matter.

II

What original documents giving information about the air situation on 10th May, 1940, are still at our disposal to-day? On Page 4 of the Freiburg A.R.P. chief's war diary we read the following:- "The enemy aircraft approached the town from the west under cover of an extensive thunder-cloud, out of which they unexpectedly emerged at the moment that the bombs were dropped. The number and the nationality of the aircraft could not be recognised, but as far as one could tell, they were French machines".

According to K.W. Straub, to whom the Freiburg municipality entrusted the task of writing the "Daily Notes on Events during the War" (7), opinion was divided about the direction from which the attack took place and as to the number of aircraft involved.

In his letter dated 5th June, 1955, (8) he points out that nobody in Freiburg at the time had any doubts who was responsible for the raid, as everyone felt sure that it had been carried out by enemy aircraft. For this reason he saw no need to address any enquiries about the matter to the military authorities.

What value can be placed on the statements in the two diaries? Did the men who wrote them know about the reports which had been made to the military authorities and were they informed as to the result of the investigations? According to statements by the Mayor (9) and the town clerk of Freiburg (10), the town authorities took no part in the investigations, nor were they informed of the result. The A.R.P. officer at Police H.Q. had the impression that the Armed Forces showed a strong desire to handle the affair themselves. His superior, the Freiburg Chief of Police, pointed out to him emphatically that he ought not to bother about the matter and that it did not come within his province (11). Of course the Armed Forces might have good reasons for making this suggestion, perhaps because the air raid warning system had failed or because the A.A. did not go into action.

(7) Städt. Hauptverwaltung, Vol. 1, (1940/43), p. 7.

(8) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 97.

(9) " " " " " No. 43.

(10) " " " " " No. 113.

(11) " " " " " No. 112.

R E S T R I C T E D

- 6 -

When General Dollmann, the C.-in-C. of the 7th Army in the Freiburg area, appeared in the Mayor's office on the day after the attack to express the Armed Forces' sympathy, the Mayor asked him what possible reasons he could give for the attack having been made. Dollmann limited himself to drawing attention to the elaborate reporting system which came into operation when the air raid warning was given (12). The former Chief of Police stated finally that he had heard nothing which would give rise to any misgivings about the incident either from Dollmann or from General Zenetti, who was the C.O. of Luftgau VII at that time (13). It therefore seems a likely assumption that the Armed Forces were anxious to keep quiet about the affair.

It is here that we reach the limits of the reliability of both sources of information. It therefore remains for us to prove whether eye-witness accounts may tell us more. Here we are dealing for the most part with former personnel from air raid warning sections, aircraft reporting sites and A. A. units (who were stationed in or around Freiburg) and some of their accounts agree with the statement that no enemy aircraft were sighted over the area at the time of the attack. Others claim to have seen enemy aircraft, however (14). The observations of both groups with regard to the approach and departure of the aircraft, the number involved, the height at which they were flying and the height from which they dropped their bombs do not tally and are full of contradictions. Some witnesses report that a low-level attack was made (15); others that the bombs were dropped from a great height (16).

(12) See Notes (9) and (10).

(13) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 114.

(14) Some of the reports are quoted in full or in an abbreviated form in the "Freiburger Wochenbericht" dated 10/11th June '54 and 10/11th Feb. '55, also in the "Badische Zeitung" dated 8th Dec, and 22nd Dec. '54. The editors of both newspapers were kind enough to let us see the originals of these. Further statements reached us via the editors or came to us direct. Reports claiming that the attack was one launched by the enemy may be found in the Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, Nos. 1, 4, 22, 28 (see also "Nation Europa", Vol. 4), 29, 35, 42, 49, 51, 63, 76, 84, 103, 105, 106. Reports claiming that German aircraft launched the attack may be found in the Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, Nos. 3, 19, 38, 39, 56, 94, 108 and in "Witnesses' Correspondence", No. 610.

(15) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, Nos. 19, 49, 94, 105, 106.

(16) " " " Nos. 51, 63.

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 8 -

If the sky was 7/10ths to 8/10ths obscured and if the cloud-base was 1,500 to 2,000 metres above ground-level, there can be no doubt that the approaching aircraft (which, according to the majority of the witnesses, were flying at a height of 2,000 metres or more (23)) could only have been seen from time to time through gaps in the clouds. It is easy for people not to look sufficiently carefully at aircraft or to identify them falsely when they only catch unexpected glimpses of them in this way. This applies particularly to casual, civilian observers who have not received training in aircraft recognition. Nor must we forget that people's normal reaction when they hear bombs falling is to associate them with enemy aircraft. When we add to this the fact that 15 years have elapsed since the attack took place, it is understandable that we could not use all the eye-witnesses accounts indiscriminately.

We can, however, attach more importance to reports from those witnesses who had been specially trained and whose particular task it was to look out for enemy aircraft in the area and to receive or send out reports. We can do this even more because they were in a position to get to know about the reactions and measures which the incident produced at command level. The chief people to take into account are the men who were stationed at the observer post on the Lorettoberg near Freiburg and at the Air Raid Warning Centre in the town (who were in direct telephonic touch with one another) and those who were stationed at the observer post in Donaueschingen, who received reports from other posts as well (24). Because of the many links in the aircraft reporting service, we also tried to get into touch with the former personnel of neighbouring observer posts. The information we received makes it obvious that important evidence was disregarded.

The witnesses whom we questioned said unanimously that there were no enemy aircraft over Freiburg at the time of the attack. The following is an extract from the report made by the officer who was on duty at that time in the Lorettoberg observer post (25):-

"We heard the sound of aircraft for a considerable time. Thunder clouds hung over the south of Freiburg. We sent through regular reports about the noise of aircraft.

- - - Suddenly we spotted three He.111s to the west (in the direction of Thringen-Breisach) and confirmed that they had German markings on them. These aircraft were flying at 1,500 to 2,000 metres. They came towards Freiburg in wedge formation and thinned out one behind the other about half-way between Breisach and Freiburg. - - - Suddenly we saw three bombs exploding along the ground in the same direction as that in which the aircraft were flying - - - I immediately informed the officer i/c the observer post and he joined me. Then we both saw another stick of bombs exploding along the Breisach to Freiburg railway line near the artillery barracks and up to the main station. Then the aircraft flew off in the direction of Kandell, where they turned and then flew on slightly to the north of Breisach in wedge formation once more."

(23) Archives of the IFZ, ZS/A-5, Nos. 13, 22, 35, 39, 51 and 106.

(24) " " No. 26.

(25) " " No. 39. These statements have been certified correct by the former chief of the observer post.

R E S T R I C T E D

The Deputy A.R.P. chief at the Air Raid Warning Centre in Freiburg at that time confirmed (in a statement made on 11th November, 1947) that the Lorettoberg observer post reported German and not enemy aircraft, even when this was queried (26).

The A.A. furnishes us with a proof that the written reports which were on hand at that time in the aircraft reporting posts and in the Air Raid Warning Centre mentioned German and not enemy aircraft. The local population had reproached the A.A. for having failed lamentably in its duties. Although the Black Forest A.A. Group received reports directly after the attack that the bombs had been dropped by German aircraft, the O.C. (and the O.C. 491 Heavy A.A. Battery) thought it right to check up on the situation in some detail. On looking through the reports, it was seen that only German air activity had been recorded (27). The officer i/c the Air Raid Warning Centre, who, on returning from leave, looked through all the reports which had come in on the day in question, has the same story to tell us (28).

There only remains the question as to whether the reports given by the Lorettoberg observer post were incorrect and whether other information was on hand at the Donaueschingen observer post H.Q. Why did this H.Q. query the accuracy of the Lorettoberg report, saying that it "knew nothing about German aircraft" (29)? We gleaned some information about this from a Freiburg solicitor who knew the servicemen who were stationed at Donaueschingen, as he had been in charge of the aircraft reporting section in Freiburg before the war (30). When he asked what was the matter and what the observer posts had reported, he was simply given the messages from the Lorettoberg (which have already been mentioned) saying that only German aircraft - and not enemy ones - had been identified.

(26) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 38. The chief plotter who was on duty at the time of the attack even thinks he remembers the following message:- "Three He. 111s over the observer post flying towards the airfield are dropping bombs on the main station." (ZS/A-5, No. 3). The Officer i/c the local air reporting section, who, as far as he remembers, happened to be on the Lorettoberg at that time, also reports that the aircraft which were dropping bombs were identified as German. He heard "the sound of aircraft in the direction of Freiburg" (which was mentioned in the report we quoted) and saw German aircraft appear through the clouds and, after the bombs had been dropped, he saw them "disappear into the clouds again as quietly as they had come." (ZS/A-5, No. 56).

(27) Archives of the IfZ, ZS 610, p. 4, and ZS/A-5, No. 108. It should be noted that, in accordance with regulations, all the reports had been rendered in writing.

(28) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 94.

(29) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 39.

(30) Ditto. Unfortunately no report from the former officer i/c the Donaueschingen Observer Post H.Q. could be produced, although repeated efforts were made

In addition to these messages there are two more reports at our disposal which may be of especial importance. This is so partly because they come from witnesses who might be suspected of trying to justify themselves and partly because they show that there were no reports on hand about enemy aircraft at other aircraft reporting centres. The writer of one of the reports was at that time duty officer at the aircraft movement report collecting centre for Luftgau XII in Wiesbaden and was urged by his intelligence officer and his chief of staff to obtain exact details about the incident. The writer of the other one, a Freiburg architect, was an A.A. telephone operator at the Nuremberg citadel. The former received information from the observer posts in Stuttgart and Mannheim and the latter received his from Ettenheim and in both cases the same news was passed, i.e. that the aircraft concerned were German (31).

In view of all this there ought really to be no doubt about the air situation, were it not for the fact that we also received a report from the man who was the commanding officer of the 7th Aircraft Reporting Section in Luftgau VII at that time and who tells us that he undertook a detailed investigation. He summarises the result as follows (32):-

"From the observer post (Freiburg?) the aircraft (the exact number was not definite) were spotted circling in the clouds over the Tuniberg a short time before the attack.

As the aircraft kept disappearing behind the clouds, it was impossible to be certain about their nationality or their exact number and they were accordingly reported as "two to three enemy machines". (This is in accordance with regulations (33).) The bombs were dropped by one aircraft, which suddenly made its appearance out of the clouds, pressed home a sharp attack and then turned westwards, landing at the eastern foot of the Vosges. This machine was identified as a Caudron and reported as such. The height from which the bombs were dropped was 400 to 500 metres - - - No more information was forthcoming as to the whereabouts of the other aircraft over the Tuniberg - - - At the time of the attack, no German machines were airborne in the immediate vicinity of Freiburg - - -"

(31) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, Nos. 71 and 93.

(32) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 76.

(33) The accuracy of this statement has been challenged (see Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 3). The officer i/c the Air Signals Aircraft Reporting Centre does not keep to it in the following extract from his general account of the Aircraft Reporting Service:- "8.15: Unknown aircraft. 8.16: Two to four aircraft flying low." (See Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 16). Unfortunately the relevant official Luftwaffe publication was not at our disposal.

Although this report contradicts the evidence of some very important witnesses, we found it necessary to check these statements as they emanated from the officer responsible for the tactical side of the aircraft reporting units in Luftgau VII. Is it possible that he gained some information about which nobody else knew and, if so, whence did it come (34)?

When we investigated the matter, the staff of the Lorettoberg observer post in Freiburg were able to reject this theory straight away, as their own reports contradicted this claim. The Donaueschingen observer post H.Q., which also received reports from other observer posts, declared that its report that German aircraft were circling over Freiburg and that no enemy aircraft had been identified was not queried at a higher level of command (35), which would certainly have happened if its reports had proved to be incorrect. All sorts of questions were asked, numbers of people were interviewed and officers from the Freiburg Luftgau H.Q. made frequent visits to examine the written evidence, but nobody made any mention of an unsatisfactory report.

The Luftgau H.Q. Chief of Staff (36) and the Operations Officer (37), likewise the Intelligence Chief at Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe H.Q. (38), to whom we submitted the report for comment, all declared (independently of one another) that they had never heard anything about a French Caudron aircraft being the perpetrator of the attack. The duty officer at the Air Raid Warning Centre in Freiburg rightly replied that he should have had access to this report when he was interviewed so that he might have compared it with his own, which was in direct contradiction to it (39). The commanding officer of the Black Forest A.A. Group asserted that if this had really been the state of affairs, both the A.A. and the Aircraft Reporting Service would have been severely reprimanded. This had not been the case, however, and he had not even been asked to submit a report (40). The only possible remaining explanation is that some confusion may have arisen because a Potez 63 (41) made an incursion into the Kaiserstuhl region and then set off on its homeward course near Lahr. The intelligence officer remembers clearly that the presence of this French reconnaissance aircraft was not taken into account when the attack was being investigated. In the special report which Intelligence sent to the Luftwaffe Operations Staff on the afternoon of 10th May, it was stated that this aircraft could not have been in the area at the time concerned (42).

(34) No details could be ascertained about the scope of the enquiry and the particulars upon which it was based. According to the technical aide and adviser on the operational side at H.Q. (Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 46), it seems likely that it consisted of an examination at a later date of the plotting carried out by the aircraft reporting service, which was probably undertaken by the commanding officer. The technical aide was quite certain that he did not conduct the enquiry himself.

(35) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 39.

(36) " " ZS 605, p. 6.

(37) " " ZS 387, p. 3.

(38) " " ZS 140, p. 20.

(39) " " ZS/A-5, No. 3.

(40) " " ZS 610, p. 7.

(41) A modern French multi-purpose machine, which was used as a fighter, a long range reconnaissance aircraft and a light bomber. See Feuchter, Georg W.: "Geschichte des Luftkrieges", Bonn 1954, p. 83.

(42) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 117. (This special report is quoted in full later.)

We have now reached the point where we can indicate what reports were forthcoming from British and French sources. According to information supplied on 8th August, 1955, by the French Ministry of National Defence (x), French bombers did not attack German territory until the night of the 10/11th May, 1940, and naval aircraft did not do so until the 13/14th May.

Reconnaissance aircraft did in fact operate on that day, but they did not fly over the regions of the Upper Rhine. The most southerly point which they touched was Wissembourg in Northern Alsace (43). The French Air Force was very anxious not to give the numerically superior Luftwaffe any excuse for carrying out reprisals, which were much feared, and so it employed cautious tactics. This is confirmed by the German military personnel concerned at that time (44). Denis Richards, author of the official history of the R.A.F., also says that this was so (45) and his word carries considerable weight, for he had access to the secret reports issued by the French Air Force when he was making his study of the air war during May and June of 1940.

As a result of careful research, Richards establishes the fact that Britain had no plans for attacking Freiburg on 10th May, and that no R.A.F. aircraft could have bombed the town by mistake, thus disproving the theory that the raid was a ruthless British attack. Four times during that afternoon advanced formations of R.A.F. bombers, which were based in the Rheims area, attacked German road convoys which were pushing on towards Luxembourg City via Echternach. Attacks were launched from British bases on the German occupied airfields of Waalhaven and Ypenburg in Holland. It was not until the night of the 10/11th May that nine R.A.F. bombers flew from England to attack lines of communications along the German frontier in the Geldern, Cleves and Wesel areas (46).

When we consider these two reports, it becomes obvious that no part of Reich territory was attacked either by British or by French bombers during the daytime on 10th May, 1940. French bomber formations were not in operation until the night of the 10/11th May, and the R.A.F. limited itself to attacks on targets in Luxembourg and Holland. French reconnaissance flights only took place in the regions of the Rhine and the Moselle and to the west of Karlsruhe.

(43) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, appendix.

(44) " " ZS140, p. 19; ZS610, p. 6, ZS605, p. 6 and ZS612, p. 28.

(45) (In his letter dated 28th Feb., '55). See "Royal Air Force, 1939-45", (London H.M.S.O.), Vol. 1: Denis Richards: 'The Fight at Odds', (1954), Chapter XI, P. 430 and Vol. 2: Denis Richards and Hilary St. George Saunders: 'The Fight Avails', (1954), Chapter IX, p. 415.

(46) Richards' report was submitted to the former Intelligence Chief at Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe H.Q., for comment. He confirmed that Richards' description of Allied air activity on 10th May, 1940 corresponds in most respects with his own recollections of events on the Western Front on that day. See Archives of the IfZ, ZS140, p. 25.

(x) Ministère de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées 'Guerre', Etat-Major de l'Armée, 2^eème Bureau.

These statements from reputable French and British sources tally in most respects with the German report (x) concerning the air situation in the Reich (47). Even here, however, there is an entry to the effect that Freiburg was attacked by enemy aircraft and so we still have to test the validity of this statement, despite the authoritative pronouncements of the Service Historique and of Denis Richards.

Having investigated the air situation and drawn what conclusion we can from it in our attempt to discover the originators of the attack, we turn next to the question of the unexploded bombs and bomb splinters which were discovered in Freiburg and which may provide us with further information. As far back as 1940 investigations were carried out in this connection. Luftgau H.Q. instructed the officer i/c the Observer Post H.Q. in Freiburg to examine the bombs and bomb splinters with the help of the airfield staff and to find out where they had come from. He and a technical inspector from the airfield did so and it was found that they were German bombs. This information was communicated by telephone and the officer who received it gave orders that the entire staff of the Observer Post H.Q. be sworn to strict secrecy about the matter (48). Independently of this, the officers responsible for the A.A. defences in the Freiburg area also carried out investigations in order to be certain that their units were not at fault. They discovered the tail unit of a bomb which was definitely of German make (49). It is not known what other information may have been forthcoming, but it appears that the Luftgau experts had no doubts about the matter by the evening of that day. The former adjutant to the senior signals officer in Luftflotte 3 informs us that Generaloberst Kortzen (who was the Luftflotte Chief of Staff at that time and quartered in the same building as the adjutant) told him in the late evening of May 10th or 11th (50) that on examining the bomb splinters, the Munich Luftgau was certain they were of German origin (51).

(x) Situation Report No. 248, Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe, Operations Staff Intelligence, No. 8850/40 (secret), dated 10/11th May, 1940, Part A, Section I, para. (a), (Military Operations on 10th May and during the night of the 10/11th May).

(47) There is a photostat copy of Situation Report No. 248 in the appendix of the Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5.

(48) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 56. The officer i/c the Observer Post H.Q. told us that the men were informed about this at 1800 hrs. on that day (Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 39).

(49) Archives of the IfZ, ZS610, p. 5 and ZS/A-5, No. 108.

(50) According to other reports at our disposal, the date was presumably May 10th.

(51) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 111.

No sooner did the Luftgau feel that the whole affair had been settled than orders came through from Goering for the matter to be thoroughly investigated (52). The director of the Haid Luftmunition (53) informs us that he was instructed to carry out the investigations by Generalmajor Spruner von Merz, O.C. Luftwaffe Equipment Gruppe 7. The bomb fragments were collected by experts and were sent to him in a sealed goods wagon under conditions of the utmost secrecy. He estimated that these fragments were the remains of 12 to 16 bombs. He did not receive any unexploded bombs, electric fuses or remnants of fuses. He came to the conclusion that the thin-walled bomb case seemed to be of German origin. "But in spite of a number of distinguishing marks, it was impossible" - he told us - "to be sure which firm manufactured the bombs or when they were made. At all events, they could not have come from an Air Force Ammunition Depot - - -" Since the bomb cases had obviously been made a very considerable time ago, he formed the opinion that they dated from the time of the Spanish Civil War and that they had "fallen into other hands" from there (54).

This report is of interest for two reasons. The Chief of the 'Bomb' Section in the technical office of the German Air Ministry told us that it would in fact be simple to identify the bombs and fuses as being German from the serial numbers imprinted on them (55). He was shown a photograph of one of the unexploded bombs at the time. In contrast to this, the Air Force Ammunition Depot had no access to the unexploded bombs or the German type electric fuses while it was carrying out its investigations (56). We may well ask ourselves whether this could have been an oversight, since we know that there were no less than 24 unexploded bombs amongst the total of 69 bombs dropped on Freiburg (57). It is certainly surprising that those items which were obviously of importance for the investigation were the very ones which were not sent.

This is even more remarkable when we consider that the men who collected the evidence for the Haid Ammunition Depot were supposed to be experts (58). We come across the same difficulties here as we did when finding out about the air situation; at first the state of affairs seemed clear and then doubts were raised. Whereas the witnesses who told us about the events themselves nearly all referred to German aircraft and German bombs, yet in the reports about the investigations which took place at that time the question of the attack being launched by the Germans was either denied or described as impossible to prove.

(52) Archives of the IfZ, ZS605, p. 4.

(53) The Haid Air Force Ammunition Depot.

(54) Reader's letter in the Metzinger-Urbacher Volksblatt, 11 Feb., '55 and Letter to the Institute, dated 23 April, '55 (Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 107).

(55) Archives of the IfZ, ZS606, p. 3ff. Cf. Note (58).

(56) Cf. the Report from Luftwaffe Equipment Gruppe 7, dated 16 May, '40, which we reproduce later.

(57) Freiburg A.R.P. Chief's War Diary, 1939-45, p. 5, with appendix 1a (map showing bombs dropped during the first air raid on 10 May, '40) and Städt. Hauptverwaltung, Vol. 1, p. 94.

(58) Archives of the IfZ, ZS611, p.5. The Chief of Staff for the Director General of Luftwaffe Equipment mentions an expert who was sent to Freiburg who examined an unexploded bomb and some splinters and clearly identified them with 50 kilogram German bombs. It cannot, however, be assumed that this man was in charge of the collection of the bomb fragments.

According to witnesses' statements, the technical side of the investigation was handled by Udet, the Director General of Luftwaffe Equipment. It was he who conferred with Goering about the incident. We also know that when the news of the attack on Freiburg reached Goering in the late afternoon on May 10th, he became very excited. He is said to have exclaimed: "This is a fine way for our campaign to start. I and the Luftwaffe have made complete fools of ourselves. How can this business be vindicated in the eyes of the German people?" He immediately gave orders that court-martial investigation be carried out amongst the bomber units in Fliegerkorps V and that a detailed technical enquiry be made into the question of where the bombs had come from. By the evening, however, his attitude had changed completely. The Intelligence Chief was amazed when he noticed this, for he knew that Goering usually let such mishaps prey upon his mind for a long time. When it was announced in the late news bulletin on the German radio that Freiburg had been attacked by enemy aircraft, Goering rubbed his hands with delight. The former Intelligence Chief went on to tell us that he gathered from conversations at table that "in view of the lack of evidence as to who had dropped the bombs, it had been thought convenient to assume that the French had raided Freiburg" (59). How can we account for Goering's change of attitude and how was it possible to talk about a 'lack of evidence'? Might it be that Goering and Udet had conferred in the meantime and that the latter had set the machinery in motion for this announcement to be made?

The whole affair was handled with the utmost secrecy at the highest level of command. The importance of the Freiburg raid became obscured to some extent by the rapid succession of other events on the Western Front. The affair was not mentioned openly even within Goering's close circle (60). According to his Chief of Staff, Udet was very taciturn (61). In a strictly confidential conversation with Goering, he once discussed the possibility of orders having been given for a deliberate attack to be made on Freiburg, but this idea was dismissed. He showed his bomb expert a photograph of an unexploded bomb which had been found in Freiburg and asked whether it were possible that the enemy had used German bombs. The officer concerned replied that the Reich Association of Aircraft Industries had sold German bombs and aircraft to foreign countries before the war and that, conversely, because of a shortage of ammunition, a whole German Geschwader was equipped with French and Czech bombs which had been captured in Poland. In this case, however, it was easy to see where the unexploded bomb had come from by the numbers stamped on it and on the fuse (62). Naturally any other organisation which had to do with this business kept the whole affair a strict secret. The officer conducting the investigation at the Haid Air Force Ammunition Depot told us that Generalmajor Spruner von Merz repeatedly said that the investigation was proceeding in a very negative way. Finally it was assumed that the bombs dated from the time of the Spanish Civil War and that they had been dropped by enemy aircraft (63). Generalmajor Spruner von Merz was the officer to whom Halder referred as follows (in his letter to the Freiburg Archives Department dated 7th October, 1947):- "After I had retired from my post as Army Chief of General Staff, I was appealed to about the Freiburg affair by a Luftwaffe general who was well known to me personally and whose attitude to the Third Reich was that of an officer of the old school. He informed me that when he was employed in his technical capacity at that time, he received a report which stated that German bombs had been dropped on Freiburg. This he passed on to a higher authority with the request that an explanation be given" (64).

(59) Archives of the IfZ, ZS140, pp. 10-12 and p. 17 ff.

(60) See Note (59).

(61) Archives of the IfZ, ZS611, p. 5.

(62) " " ZS606, p. 3 ff.

(63) " " ZS/A-5, No. 107.

(64) " " ZS240, III, p. 7. This report is presumably the letter dated 16 May, 1940 which we quote later.

It is not known whether other departments took the same action, but it seems fairly certain that they did so since the results of the enquiry which the Director General of Luftwaffe Equipment had set afoot filled a bulky file (65). The Intelligence Chief at Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe H.Q. remembers clearly that the results did not prove conclusively that German bombers carried out the attack. He did add, however, that "it could be concluded from the files that the bombers which attacked Freiburg were probably German" (66).

We also gained the same impression as a result of investigations amongst the flying personnel. Let us now turn our attention to them and to the events which took place in connection with the Freiburg raid. At first it looked as if our enquiries would not meet with any success. All that was certain was that Freiburg lay in the sector from which attacks were carried out by Bomber Geschwader 51. The former C.O. of the Geschwader stated in a letter to the "Marburger Presse" on 6th December, 1947, that when the aircrew personnel were questioned during the court-martial investigations, they all declared that they had dropped their bombs on the targets they had been told to attack and not on Freiburg. A personal interview with the C.O. on 8th December, 1954 did not yield any more information (67). It was thus not surprising that out of 22 former members of the Geschwader, 14 were unable to give any information as to who carried out the attack. Several of them even denied that their units had had anything to do with the attack.

At the end of November, 1954, however, an account written by a former Luftwaffe officer appeared in a number of newspapers in south-west Germany (68) which stated that three aircraft from Bomber Geschwader 51 had lost their bearings and had attacked Freiburg instead of Mulhouse. An illustrated magazine seized upon this information and got into touch with the man who gave it and three witnesses whom he named. The result was a sensational illustrated article entitled: "Bombs which affected Europe. The Tragedy of Freiburg explained at last" (69).

During the course of our investigations, however, we discovered that the information given by these three witnesses was second-hand (70) and could therefore not be considered valid for an assertion of such importance. It was certainly noteworthy that the Luftwaffe officers concerned said that Mulhouse was the target for that day and not Dijon-Lonvic (which was given as the target in the war diary of III Gruppe).

(65) Attempts to discover this file amongst the captured Luftwaffe material in London were fruitless. It must be regarded as lost.

(66) See Note (59).

(67) Archives of the IfZ, ZS612, pp. 15 ff., 30 f. and 27: He thinks that it will never be possible to know definitely who dropped the bombs.

(68) Amongst others: "Schwäbisches Tagblatt" dated 26 Nov. '54 and "Badische Zeitung" dated 29 Nov. '54.

(69) "Quick", 1955, No. 6 (5 Feb.).

(70) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, Nos. 11, 27 and 34.

Information received from the department responsible for informing next of kin about German servicemen killed in battle makes it seem probable that 'S.' (who was alleged in the report to be the officer responsible for the attack) did not belong to III Gruppe on 10th May, 1940, but to I Gruppe (71). According to the Geschwader commander, however, only III Gruppe was concerned if the bombs had in fact been dropped by accident, so we deemed it wise to exercise caution when dealing with these reports (72). There was also some doubt as to whether we could wholly rely upon the memories of the witnesses concerned.

Meanwhile, several important witnesses had declared (some positively and some conditionally) that the bombs had been dropped by mistake. The Intelligence Chief at Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe H.Q. wrote the following in his daily notes: "Unfortunately there was an accident during the campaign in France when a German bomber Gruppe lost its way in bad weather, mistook Freiburg for a French town and dropped bombs on the railway station there." He also reported that Generalfeldmarschall von Greim (who was in charge of V Fliegerkorps at the beginning of the Western Campaign) said that the attack had been made by German aircraft (73). The Chief of Staff of Army Group 'C' made an entry to the same effect in his diary (74). Furthermore, Generaloberst Korten is reported to have said: "A crazy thing has happened. A certain officer was supposed to attack the French town of X, but he flew off his course and dropped his bomb load on Freiburg by mistake." (75).

While we were carrying out our investigations, we often had the impression that we were going round in circles. We kept coming back to a point which we had reached before and against which a large question mark stood. It was not until after more than six months' correspondence that we succeeded in escaping from this vicious circle and were receiving reports which, by reason of their clear-out statements, contributed very considerably to the final solution of our problem. We got into touch with the former C.O. of III Gruppe, who stated the following:-

"During the questioning of one of the junior aircrews, whose O.C. was Lieutenant S. (who was killed later in the campaign), the following information was divulged:-

Ltn. S. 'After starting off from Landsberg, I frequently had to fly blind and in so doing, I apparently got off course. When I thought I must be in the Dijon region (because of the time I had been flying), I could see the ground in places, but I was unable to get my bearings. I then changed course several times, hoping to get my bearings through gaps in the clouds. Suddenly a fair-sized town with an airfield came into view. I recognised Dijon and at X hrs. I dropped my bombs on the airfield. It was impossible to see what effect this had because of poor visibility. After dropping the bombs, I set course for Landsberg. At first I flew blind again for part of the way. Later I flew below the clouds and could see the ground.'

(71) After we had queried it, this information was confirmed by witnesses' correspondence ZS/A-5, Nos. 11, 14, 37, 89, 96 and ZS613, p. 7. His name does not appear in the III./KG51 war diary.

(72) Archives of the IfZ, ZS612, p. 33.

(73) " " ZS140, pp. 9 and 19.

(74) " " ZS585, p. 4.

(75) See Note (51).

The time interval as described by Lt. S. between the bombs being dropped and his aircraft landing was quite insufficient to cover a direct flight from Dijon to Landsberg, but it was just about right for a flight from Freiburg to Landsberg.

When aerial photographs of the airfields at Dijon and Freiburg were compared, it was seen that there was a rough similarity between them. Lt. S. admitted that the Freiburg airfield might have been the one which he attacked and he could give no definite assurance to the contrary. The time factor on the return flight led us to the devastating conclusion that Lt. S., after wandering off course and searching for the target for a considerable time, had mistaken Freiburg for Dijon. He was very disconcerted when he realised this" (76).

This Leutnant S. (77) is also referred to in the III Gruppe War Diary, which states the following:- "Three aircraft, led by Leutnant S., lost their bearings over the Black Forest because of poor visibility. They carried out an independent attack on the airfield near Dole from a height of 5,000 metres" (78). According to this account, all three aircraft were involved and not just the aircraft flown by Leutnant S. (which is implied in the report given by the C.O. of III Gruppe). This is also borne out by the following statement made by the O.C. 8 Staffel (to which the aircraft under the command of S. belonged):-

"As the sky was about seven-tenths covered with cloud on that afternoon, the Staffel was obliged to fly in loose formation so as to penetrate the clouds and reach the necessary height. The result was that when the formation came out above the clouds over the Black Forest, it had become scattered. After making several banking turns over the Black Forest, I succeeded in linking up with two Ketten (x) in my Staffel, but the third Kette (under the command of Leutnant ---) was missing. With my two Ketten, I joined up with another Staffel from our Gruppe, which was flying some way off, and set course for Dijon. After we got back from operations, Leutnant --- had already landed with his Kette. He told me that after coming out of the clouds, he had missed the Staffel and so he and his Kette had attacked one of the alternative targets laid down by the Gruppe" (79).

(76) Archives of the IfZ, ZS613, p. 4.

(77) This Leutnant S. is not the same man as the Oberleutnant S. mentioned above and in "Quick". The Institute for Contemporary History knows the names of both men.

(78) "22nd Sortie against France, 10 May 1940", p. 49.

(x) Kette = 3 a/c; Staffel = 9-12 a/c; Gruppe = 30 a/c.

(79) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 89. The 8th Gruppe of Bomber Geschwader 51, when engaged on this operation, consisted of three Ketten under the command respectively of Hauptmann Sch., Oberleutnant St. and Leutnant S. (who was killed during an attack on Portsmouth harbour on 12 August 1940). The first two officers have given us personal reports and the Gruppe C.O. and the O.C. Staffel have told us what they remember of the statement Leutnant S. made at the time. It can thus be said that first-hand reports are available about what happened.

Taking these three reports together, it becomes obvious that the Kette under the command of Leutnant S. lost touch with the rest of the formation because of bad weather conditions and carried out the attack on the afternoon of May 10th all on its own (80).

After returning to base, he told the O.C. of his Staffel that he had attacked the alternative target (the airfield of Dôle-Tavaux) instead of Dijon (81). According to official French information, however, it seems that Dole-Tavaux was not attacked on that day (82). The officer conducting the enquiry did not know that, but he did know that the Kette under the command of Leutnant S. had landed at base earlier than the other aircraft. The O.C. Staffel believes he can remember this quite clearly, although the time entered in the III Gruppe War Diary for the landing of aircraft 9K-CS (which S. flew) is given as 18.17 hrs. and that of his own machine was 18.14 hrs. This should probably read 17.17 hrs., since, according to the entries in the War Diary, aircraft 9K-CS and 9K-HS (which can both fairly safely be assumed as having belonged to the Kette under the command of S.) landed at 17.15 and 17.30 hrs. respectively (83).

So far, the only decisive results reached in our investigation have been arrived at by means of verbal interrogation, but there are two original documents which will lend additional weight and which should do much to quell the doubts so often expressed by our witnesses as to whether it will ever be possible to solve the Freiburg mystery. In view of their particular importance, we will quote them in full:-

(80) In this connection we must note the following observation by Oberleutnant St.:- "I am quite sure I did not see any bombs dropped, nor did I notice any aircraft leaving the formation" (see Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 96). Since, however, a contrary report is given both by the other two witnesses and in the War Diary, we consider that our statement above is correct (see Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 109).

(81) This reference to Dijon as the place which S. attacked can only be explained as a lapse of memory on the part of the C.O. when he was reconstructing the statement S. made. The place mentioned in the War Diary is Dole-Tavaux.

(82) See Note (43).

(83) Our assumption is confirmed by the statement made in the Intelligence Memorandum dated 17 May 1940 (which we quote later) that three He.111s landed in Landsberg at 17.20 hrs. As further evidence that Lt. S. returned early, we have a report from a former Luftwaffe officer, who was on the staff of the bomber school for officer cadets in Neuruppin in 1944. One night in the mess, two officers on a course there told him what they knew of the Freiburg incident. In what he told us, he confirmed that the time taken for the return flight indicated that the aircraft had flown back from Freiburg and not from the more distant area of Dijon or Dôle-Tavaux (see Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 30). As regards the entries in the War Diary, we must not forget that we are dealing with a carbon copy of a duplicate version which was written (on Gruppe instructions) after the campaign in France (see Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 27), because the original War Diary had been lost (!) It is certainly remarkable that the entries are incorrect at this precise point. The former O.C. 8 Staffel points out that there is another false entry in this copy of the War Diary, where it is stated that he flew his sortie with 7 aircraft, whereas in fact there were 9. His statement is verified in the Intelligence Memorandum.

R E S T R I C T E D

- 20 -

TOP SECRET

From: Luftwaffe Equipment Gruppe 7 Munich, 16th May, 1940
File Ref.: 74/b/Gr.IV/B, No. 480/40, top secret (Official Stamp:
received by
Luftgau VII H.Q.
16th May, 1940
No. 2847, top
secret)
SUBJECT: UNEXPLODED BOMBS IN FREIBURG
To: The Chief of Staff, Luftgau VII H.Q.

Major Greiner, of the Armaments Department, made a verbal report to the Intelligence Branch at Luftgau H.Q. on 11th May, 1940, a copy of which is attached (84).

The tail unit of the bomb which was dug up was sent via the Black Forest A.A. Defence H.Q. and Luftgau Intelligence to the Luftwaffe Equipment Gruppe and is now with Gruppe IV. The bomb case and the fuse are still in the ground.

It has been established that the bomb is definitely a German type SC50 (x), which was manufactured at the Schwabstadl Air Force Ammunition Depot and issued at the bases of Landsberg, Memmingen and Lechfeld.

Further details are as follows:-

1. Bomb Case:

The central section of the case is cylindrical and about 200 mm. in diameter. Some welding can be seen and felt on the front portion. The overall length is about 680 mm. The name of the firm which filled the bomb with explosive and the month and year when this was done ("Km. 10.38") is stamped on the centre line, the middle of the fuse and on the suspension loop. About 15 cm. from the base the acceptance stamp "Wa.A.636" is embossed. Between the fuse and the suspension loop, the following is stamped:- "14 = filled with explosive type O2".

The fuse is an El.A.Z.C.50(15) - electrical impact type - with the marking "Rh.S.1938.59.c.", which means that it was manufactured in 1938 by the firm of Rheinmetall in Sommerda and belonged to instalment (c) of the 59th delivery.

Drawings have been made of the bomb case and the fuse. A photograph of these is on its way to you (85).

(84) Not available.

(x) H.E. thin-cased bomb.

(85) This is with the official documents.

R E S T R I C T E D

G.H13673(a)(r)/IC/11/56/

2. Tail Unit:

This is made of ingot steel with a surface 1 mm. thick. The acceptance stamp (two eagles with the inscription "Wa.A.597" and that of the manufacturing firm "4K & Co. 376 1938") is plainly embossed on it.

The whistling device (86) was fastened on to two opposing sides of the tail surface by screws and aluminium rivets. The rivet heads and screws are still in the drill holes. As this was rather remarkable, we asked various ammunition depots which bombs had these devices fixed on to them by both screws and rivets. The Schwabstadl Air Force Ammunition Depot reported that at the bases of Landsberg, Memmingen and Lechfeld the whistling devices, all of which were originally fastened by aluminium rivets, became loose through faulty handling and that personnel on the advanced air bases subsequently secured them by screws.

3. Reasons why the bombs failed to explode:

- (a) Either the fuse switch was not turned on in the air, which meant that the fuse could not be charged, or
- (b) the voltage of the battery was too low to charge the fuse, or
- (c) when the aircraft was being loaded, the charging connecting plug was placed obliquely across the fuse, so that it did not drop down the 22 mm. when the bomb was lowered (and thus failed to charge the fuse) or the connecting plug may have been torn away before the current passed through it. If this were the case, then the trouble could be traced to a mistake made when the bombs were being stowed. If this were the reason why the bombs failed to explode, some evidence would certainly be visible on the aircraft itself in the shape of a missing connecting plug or a bent or damaged one.
- (d) Another possible alternative is that the electrical circuit may have been cut as a result of machine-gun fire or some other damage. This would have been detected by the Technical Superintendent.

It would therefore seem essential to find out which aircraft could have dropped the bombs in question.

4. Action taken by the Luftwaffe Equipment Gruppe:

At 16.00 hrs. on Saturday, 18th May, 1940, the 10 to 11 bombs which are still in Freiburg - three of which are near the radio tower - will be officially inspected, dug up and sent to the Haid Ammunition Depot for safe keeping, so that a closer examination of them can be made at any time.

1 Enclosure (x)
 (3rd Intelligence Section,
 attached to Luftwaffe
 Equipment Gruppe 7, IV/B)

Signed:

v. Spruner

(86) This secret device (the "Jericho") was designed to accentuate the scream of falling bombs.

(x) Missing.

Intelligence H.Q.Munich 17 May, 1940MEMORANDUM

According to the records of the Aircraft Movement Report Collecting Centre, the following are the machines which were airborne between 14.00 and 17.00 hrs. on 10th May, 1940 and which may have flown over Freiburg: -

1. 9 He.111s belonging to the 8th Staffel of Bomber Geschwader 51, which left Landsberg for France between 14.33 and 14.39 hrs.

Three of these aircraft landed back at Landsberg at 17.20 hrs.
Distance from Landsberg to Freiburg: 225 km.

2. 3 He.111s belonging to the 5th Staffel of Bomber Geschwader 55, which left Neu-Ulm at 14.45 hrs. and landed back there at 16.55 hrs.

Distance from Neu-Ulm to Freiburg: 170 km.

No bombers left Memmingen or Lechfeld during the time in question.

Signed:

v. Donat (87)

In the first of these documents we find all the necessary details for identifying the bombs which were not forthcoming from the officer in charge of the investigation at the Haid Ammunition Depot (88). The peculiar way in which the whistling device was attached to the tail unit provided a clue which, with the help of the Schwabstaal Ammunition Depot, led us to turn our attention to the air bases at Landsberg, Memmingen and Lechfeld.

Since we knew (from the memorandum quoted above) that no bombers left the latter two bases during the time in question, the field was narrowed down to Landsberg. It was there that the 8th Staffel of Bomber Geschwader 51 was stationed (about which we had already heard from other sources). According to the Aircraft Movement Report Collecting Centre, this Staffel may have flown over Freiburg at the time of the attack and three of its aircraft landed back in Landsberg at 17.20 hrs.

(87) Oberstleutnant von Donat was Intelligence Officer at Luftgau VII H.Q.

(88) See Note (54).

As the Chief of Staff at V. Fliegerkorps stressed (89), it was the duty of German airmen to do everything in their power to subdue the enemy air force at the beginning of the campaign in the West. A glance at the map showing where the attacks were made (90) makes it clear that the attacking aircraft intended to bomb the airfield and the adjoining buildings, which were erroneously thought to be enemy air force living quarters (91). This indicates that the attack was one carried out by the Germans. The fact that some of the bombs fell wide of the target can be accounted for by the peculiar visibility conditions on that day and the understandable state of excitement which prevailed (as this was the first important air operation to be carried out against the enemy). No doubt this meant that the bomb-release devices were not used very accurately. This would seem to be particularly true in the case of the bombs which were dropped near the radio tower in the district of Lehen. The possible reasons to account for the fact that no less than 24 bombs failed to explode are listed in detail in the secret report made by Luftwaffe Equipment Gruppe 7.

(89) Archives of the IfZ, ZS609, p.14 - See also ZS612, p.17.

(90) See Note (57). - According to the local A.R.P. chief's war diary (p. 5), the bombs fell in the following areas: -

District of Lehen (about 2.3 km. W.N.W. of the airfield):

11 bombs, all of which failed to explode.

District of Freiburg:

(a) on the airfield:

10 bombs, all of which failed to explode.

(b) on the edge of the town to the west of the airfield:

31 bombs, 4 of which failed to explode.

(c) in the Gallwitz Barracks area (situated between (b) and (d)):

6 bombs.

(d) in the area of the main-line railway station (about 1.2 km. south of the airfield):

11 bombs.

(91) Theodor Zwölfer had indicated that the attack on Freiburg was directed against military objectives in "The Chronological History of the Town of Freiburg, Local Population, 1950" on p. 37. By showing on the map the points where the bombs fell, he disproved the official announcement which was made in 1947.

Of these, the theory that the fuse switch was not turned on in the air seems the most likely one, as it is best in keeping with the aircrews' peculiar circumstances at that time. The layman may well wonder how a thing like this could happen to fully trained pilots, but it is interesting in this connection to hear what the O.C. Gruppe has to say about it:-

"The recognition of ground targets through gaps in the clouds is often very difficult, even for an experienced airman. In view of the weather conditions on the afternoon of 10th May, 1940, it is quite possible that Leutnant S. only had a few seconds at his disposal between spotting the 'big town' and dropping the bombs, during which he had to recognise his target, operate the bomb-aiming device (which in those days was a very complicated and time wasting apparatus), signal to the pilot and operate the bomb-release. Under these conditions it is understandable that the target was falsely identified and that the bombs were dropped inaccurately (92)".

As we saw at the beginning of this section, some statements were made during the investigations carried out amongst Bomber Geschwader 51 which contradict what we have just said. Both the Geschwader C.O. and the former Chief of Staff of V Fliegerkorps stated that when the aircrews were questioned, they denied having dropped bombs on Freiburg (93). According to the records of the examination, the aircrews had stated that they were unaware of having attacked Freiburg (94) and this was an essential factor for the Judge Advocate at Luftflotte 3, who was instructed by the Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe to take court-martial proceedings because of a "breach of military discipline". According to the adjutant at the Fuehrer's H.Q., Goering's report to Hitler states that "the bombing attack appears to have been carried out by three aircraft, the nationality of which remains uncertain. There would appear to be no actual proof that they were German machines (95)."

To help explain the contradictory nature of the statements given by various witnesses, it behoves us to try and imagine the situation brought about by the air attack on Freiburg. The nation's confidence in its leaders and in its armed forces would obviously have been shaken if it were proved that German aircraft had dropped the bombs by mistake and killed 57 people (96). As is well known 10th May, 1940 was the date of the commencement of the campaign in the West. The troops' morale had to be considered from the point of view both of those who might feel the threat of such mistakes to their own safety and of those who realised that they might make a fatal error like this one day themselves. All sorts of considerations of this kind probably came into the picture. We have already quoted what Goering said when he heard about the attack: "This is a fine way for our campaign to start. I and the Luftwaffe have made complete fools of ourselves. How can this business be vindicated in the eyes of the German people (97)?"

(92) Archives of the IfZ, ZS613, p.5.

(93) " " ZS609, p.1.

(94) Archives of the IfZ, ZS614, p.3. - In 1944, a former clerk in the Luftflotte saw a note at the end of the records of the investigation to the effect that it was quite possible that the bombs had been dropped by mistake because of the weather conditions at the time, but he said that the members of the Geschwader had declared elsewhere that they were unaware that they had dropped their bombs on Freiburg (IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 100).

(95) Archives of the IfZ, ZS222, p. 30.

(96) See Local A.R.P. Chief's War Diary, p.6. - 22 children, 13 women, 11 civilian men and 11 soldiers were killed and 20 children, 34 women, 24 civilian men and 23 soldiers were wounded.

(97) Archives of the IfZ, ZS140, p.10.

At Luftflotte H.Q. they were worried about the prestige of the Luftwaffe and were wondering what they could do for their 'boys'. If it were really to be a matter of court-martial proceedings, they were ready to protect them as much as possible by means of 'careful' interrogation. General von Greim, the C.O. of V Fliegerkorps, was very annoyed at the rapid way in which the report about the attack was passed on and is reputed to have said: "Even if this is really true (i.e. that the attack was carried out by German aircraft), the person concerned ought not to know about it (99)". The Geschwader commander stressed the fact that he wished to intercede in favour of his men, upon whom he relied every day (100). The O.C. Gruppe felt the same and did not tell his Staffel officers about the results of the investigation, but simply told them that the affair was settled. "It was obviously in our interest", he told us, "to prevent the spreading of information about what had happened. I told S. that he should not talk about it to anyone. All I did was to inform verbally the Geschwader commander, Oberst Kamhuber, about the results of my investigations (101)."

When we consider these statements, there can be no doubt that the bombs were accidentally dropped on Freiburg by German aircraft and that the facts were purposely concealed at the time. If any further proof is needed, we can find it in what follows. We know what agitation the incident provoked in Goering and amongst his circle. Hitler was obviously very angry when he heard about it through his personal adjutant, Gauleiter Wagner, and reproached Goering bitterly about "the negligent way in which the air raid warning system seems to have been operated (102)". It is significant that court-martial proceedings were not carried out against the Aircraft Reporting and Air Raid Warning Services, but against the Luftwaffe formations concerned. This proves that the reports which the Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe had received clearly indicated that the attack had been made by German aircraft. It is also noteworthy that the proceedings which were taking place at Luftflotte H.Q. against certain specifically named members of Bomber Geschwader 51 were suddenly dropped. At the same time that instructions were given that the strictest secrecy was to be observed about the incident, the Judge Advocate was informed that the propaganda machine was already in full operation and that, for reasons of state, Hitler could no longer deny that the attack had taken place, as the prestige of the Luftwaffe and of Germany was at stake (103).

(98) Archives of the IfZ, ZS614, p.2 f.

(99) " " ZS605, p.5.

(100) " " ZS612, p.34.

(101) " " ZS613, p.14.

(102) " " ZS222, p.30.

(103) " " ZS614, p.3.

III

In actual fact, however, the German propaganda machine made out that this unfortunate error on the part of our own airmen was a deliberate act by the enemy. German Information Service bulletins referred to "the open city of Freiburg i. Br., which is situated right outside the field of military operations and in which there are no military targets", to the civilians who had been killed and to the fact that the bombs had been dropped on the central area of the town. The following threat was added: "The Luftwaffe will take appropriate reprisals for this contravention of international law. From now on, any further systematic enemy bombing attack on the German people will be met by retaliations on an English or French town by five times as many German aircraft (104)". Soon afterwards a pamphlet appeared, entitled "The Mothers of Freiburg Accuse the Enemy", with numerous impressive photographs of the unfortunate victims and a text which ran as follows: "It began with Freiburg. Since then, night after night, Allied aircraft have been bombing German cities where there are no military targets and have been claiming more and more civilian victims. This is not war. It is murder (105)." Mr. Taylor, the main U.S. representative for the Red Cross, was quoted as the principal witness. He had just reached Freiburg by train when the aircraft were flying away he is alleged to have reported on 13th May, 1940 in the 'New York Times' that Freiburg "despite the fact that it must undoubtedly be considered an open city . . . was bombed by French aircraft". A closer examination shows, however, that this quotation is inaccurate, since the words "by French aircraft" do not appear in the 'New York Times' (106). It is also noteworthy that in this official pamphlet French aircraft were said to be responsible for the attack. Hans Fritzsche also mentioned French aircraft in his commentary over the Deutschlandsender radio at 6.45 p.m. on May 11th (107). Later on, the R.A.F. was blamed and the pattern was set for a propaganda drive against England and particularly against Churchill as the originator of the unrestricted bombing of civilians. In his Reichstag speeches on 19th July, and in a speech given at a Berlin armaments factory on 10th December, 1940, Hitler said that the Freiburg raid marked the beginning of unrestricted air warfare by the British (108).

(104) "Völkischer Beobachter", Munich edition, 11th May, '40 and "Frankfurter Zeitung", 12th May, '40. -No mention was made of the fact that the casualties included military personnel. Accounts about the points where the bombs fell are exaggerated. We have already shown that the target was undoubtedly the airfield. The threat that reprisals would be taken "from now on" was inserted some time later, however. A report issued by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces on 3rd January mentions the date of August 8th, 1940.

(105) According to a communication from the Freiburg University Library on 10th December, 1954, the leaflet was published by the Reich Propaganda Office in several languages. In the Freiburg Municipal Administration Files, Vol. 1, p.54 f., there is a note about some information given over the telephone to the German Foreign Office Information Dept. on 14th May, '40. The figures quoted for the casualties tally with those given in the pamphlet (53 'civilians'). On request, photographs of the victims and of their burial were sent to the Information Dept. on May 14th and 16th, 1940.

(106) See also Habermacher, Gerhard: "Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld", ('How Reuter twisted the Facts about who was responsible for the Bombing'), Nuremberg, 1944, p.53.

(107) Communication from the B.B.C. to the Institute, 23rd December, 1954.

(108) "Völkischer Beobachter", Munich edition, 20th July and 11th December, 1940.

Goebbels did the same in an address which he gave at the funeral service for the victims of the terror raid on Wuppertal in 1943 when he said: "A long trail of grief and of intense human suffering in all the towns which have been visited with Anglo-American bombing bears witness against England and the United States, from the murder of children in Freiburg on 10th May 1940, up to the present day (109)". In contrast to the "previous isolated attacks", the bombing of Freiburg was described as the beginning of "systematic raids on open cities and residential districts (110)". In 1943 the German Foreign Office published a White Book (No. 8) which alleged that England alone was responsible for the bombing attacks on civilians. The report issued by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces on 11th May, 1940 and relevant extracts from the war diary kept by Luftwaffe Inspection Branch 13 (A.R.P.) were quoted as conclusive documents (111). These few examples will suffice to show how the German propaganda machine dealt with the incident. Let us remember at this stage what Hitler said in "Mein Kampf" about propaganda during the First World War. When referring to British and American propaganda, which he described as being psychologically sound, he expressed the opinion that it is essential for propaganda to uphold the rightful conduct of one's own nation: "It was a fundamental error to say that Germany was not the only country which could be held responsible for the outbreak of the war. It would have been right to have placed all the blame on the enemy, even if this did not correspond to the facts . . . (112)".

It is obviously only a short step from this attitude to the way in which the Freiburg affair was handled. There is a parallel in the case of the British passenger steamship 'Athenia', which was accidentally sunk by a German submarine on 3rd September, 1939 and in which 120 people lost their lives.

(109) "Völkischer Beobachter", Munich edition, 19th June, 1943.

(110) "England entirely responsible for Terror Tactics in the Air. Facts contradict Anglo-American Lies", (Völkischer Beobachter", Munich edition, 20th April, '43).

(111) 'Documents dealing with England's sole Responsibility for the Bombing of Civilians', German Foreign Office, 1943, No. 8 pp.13, 120 and 123. -The Foreign Office official who was responsible for compiling the White Book had his attention drawn by an official in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, rumours that Freiburg was bombed by German aircraft. He consequently made enquiries at Luftwaffe Inspection Branch 13, which contested this and sent him the relevant extracts from their war diary by way of counter-evidence. The draft of the White Book was submitted to Gaus (the ambassador), to the Luftwaffe Dept. of Military Science and to the Fuehrer's military historian for examination and was released for publication (Archives of the IfZ, ZS604).

(112) "Mein Kampf", 10th edition, Munich 1942, p.193 ff. (Quotation on p.200).

R E S T R I C T E D

- 28 -

Admiral Raeder stated at the main Nuremberg trial (113) that when the British announced that the 'Athenia' had been torpedoed by the Germans, the Supreme Command of the German Navy, acting on the information available at that time, denied in all good faith that this was so. This incident was looked upon as a splendid opportunity for German propaganda to wage war against the "abominable lies" circulated by the British. This campaign was continued until the true facts became known at the latest when the German submarine U 30 reached its home port on 27th September. Hitler told Admiral Raeder: "Now that we have denied being responsible for the affair, we must observe the strictest secrecy about it, not only in dealing with the outside world, but also within official circles at home." Thus it came about that, some time later, German propaganda accused Churchill of having had an infernal machine placed on board the 'Athenia', thereby intentionally causing it to be sunk (114).

Whereas in the case of the 'Athenia' there is a witness (Admiral Raeder) who discussed the matter with Hitler, there is unfortunately no such witness available for the Freiburg affair, which puts us in a different position. Instead of a first-hand account, we have only two second-hand statements at our disposal, which may be interpreted in various ways. According to one statement, Hitler heard nothing about the incident until the appearance of the report claiming that this was an enemy attack (115). If this is true, then the Freiburg affair could be considered a counterpart to the case of the 'Athenia', at any rate as far as Hitler was concerned. The other statement claimed that Hitler was simply informed by Goering that there was no actual proof that the attack had been carried out by German aircraft (116). It might be concluded from this that Goering caused the false report about an enemy attack to be circulated (quite independently of Hitler). It is possible that in issuing this report, Goering only wanted to reassure Hitler that the methods adopted to mask the true facts would fulfil their purpose.

It seems highly improbable, however, that either Goering or Goebbels would take this step in a matter of such political importance without informing Hitler about what had really happened. What seems to matter most is for us to know when the "competent authorities" in Berlin were informed of the true facts.

(113) IMT (International Military Tribunal), Vol. 14, p. 92 ff.

(114) "Völkischer Beobachter", South German edition, 23rd October, 1939, (Nuremberg Documents, PS-3260). Further documents and statements about the case of the 'Athenia' are quoted in IMT, Vol. 23/24, p. 145. For details of the way in which the propaganda machine handled the matter, see press reports from 5th September, 1940 onwards and a publication by Adolf Halfeld entitled "The Case of the 'Athenia'," Berlin 1940, (No. 1 of the series "The True Face of England" published by the Deutsche Publikationsstelle).

(115) Archives of the IfZ, ZS614, p. 3.

(116) " " " " ZS222, p. 30.

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 29 -

It has been testified that late in the afternoon of 10th May, a very clear intelligence report was sent by the Luftgau to the Intelligence Chief at Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe H.Q. and that it was passed on to Goering, who read it in great agitation and ordered that a thorough investigation be carried out (117). Amongst the documents to which we later gained access is the handwritten draft of this special intelligence report, which - as the former situation officer in the Intelligence Section remembers - was sent through at about 17.00 hrs. It read as follows:-

Intelligence

Munich, 10 May, 1940

Special Report

To:- Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff, Intelligence, Luftflotte H.Q. 3, Intelligence.

Subject:- BOMBS ON FREIBURG

Full details about the attack are not yet known.

Damage caused:-

The Freiburg Chief of Police reports:

25 civilians killed, including 7 children; 24 persons injured.

Exact extent of material damage cannot yet be assessed.

Some M/T vehicles burnt out. Several horses injured.

Freiburg Air Raid Warning Centre reports:

Gallwitz Barracks: 4 killed, 10 seriously injured and several slightly injured. 3 buildings in the barracks damaged. 3 lorries damaged. The Bismarckstrasse bridge over the railway was hit. Several civilians were killed in the Breisacherstrasse.

Bombs were dropped along the railway line between Freiburg and Breisach.

2 bombs fell on the Mooswald housing estate.

It seems that the bombs were dropped by a Potez 63, which flew back over the Rhine near Lahr at 16.00 hrs.

(N.B. Time does not fit)

Freiburg Airfield reports:

8 to 10 small craters on the taxiing area, not serious, no damage caused.

Observer Post No. 14, Freiburg, reports:

(117) Cf. p. 17.

R E S T R I C T E D

G. H13673(a)(r)/SJW/12/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 30 -

- 15.40 hrs: Three twin-engined monoplanes, flying high, 4 to 8 o'clock, He.111s, height 3,000 to 4,000 metres, definitely identified as He.111 P aircraft. The German markings could be seen clearly through binoculars.
- 15.59 hrs: Freiburg Airfield bombed. Immediately after the smoke had billowed up from the ground, 2 aircraft with German markings were spotted flying one behind the other. The German markings were plainly visible through binoculars. Bombs exploded while the aircraft were being observed. They disappeared into the clouds, direction 11 to 1 o'clock. A German marking is said to have been found on a bomb splinter.

This information is not to be divulged (118).

Luftgau VII H.Q., Intelligence

Distribution:-

Commanding Officer
Chief of Staff
Ops.
Q.M.
Senior Signals Officer

Signed:

v. Donat
Oberstleutnant

This report did not leave much doubt and nobody who read it could refer in good faith to 'an enemy attack'. The observation at the beginning that "full details about the attack are not yet known" can only mean, in the light of what follows, that von Donat wanted to avoid making any binding statement for the time being. Against the only reference to a French aircraft stands the note: "Time does not fit". References to German aircraft, on the other hand, are qualified by such expressions as: 'definitely identified', 'seen clearly' and 'plainly visible'. We can therefore readily understand why Goering became so agitated when he received the report.

(118) Sic!

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 31 -

It is certain that the Luftgau knew all the details about the bombs which were dropped on Freiburg by the evening of the same day that the attack took place. It is true that we have no confirmation as to when this report arrived at Luftwaffe Operations Staff H.Q., but we know that all reports were usually handed on to the higher authorities immediately. In addition to this, we have another interesting statement upon which to draw. It comes from the situation officer in the Luftgau Intelligence Section, whom we have frequently mentioned before. He was present when his chief, Oberstleutnant von Donat, had a telephone conversation that night with the Reich Propaganda Ministry. The situation officer emphasised the fact that it was plain from von Donat's answers that attempts were being made from the other end of the line to "get him to agree that the truth about the bombing was still an open question and that the attack may have been carried out by French aircraft" (119). This conversation took place on the evening of May 10th and in the late evening news bulletin from the Deutschlandsender radio, the official report about the attack on Freiburg was broadcast for the first time (120). The situation officer can only rely on those parts of the conversation which he overheard (121), as he did not engage in it himself, nor did his chief supply him with any information about it. It looks as if the authorities in Berlin had been so clearly informed about the incident that they deemed it necessary to talk to the Luftgau intelligence officer in this way. When we remember how delighted Goering was when the radio announcer said that the attack had been carried out by the enemy, there can be no question that the true facts of the matter were known before this announcement was made.

(119) Archives of the IfZ, ZS/A-5, No. 117.

(120) Letter from the B.B.C. to the Institute, 23rd December, 1954.

(121) The situation officer remembers the conversation so clearly because v. Donat emphatically refused to do as he was asked and stuck firmly to what he had said in his report. When the situation officer handed the newspapers to his chief the following morning, v. Donat went as white as a sheet. During a personal conversation, he did concede that some section of the Luftwaffe Operations Staff may have wanted his report to be altered in this way.

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 32 -

The true facts of the matter have now been established: the bombs which fell on Freiburg were not dropped by the enemy, as Nazi propaganda claimed (122), but were accidentally dropped from German aircraft. The theory that the attack was one purposely carried out on Hitler's orders is false. The German report issued in 1940 is discounted too. This asserted that the Freiburg affair marked the beginning of the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and made use of the name of Mr. J. M. Spaight, Principal Assistant Secretary in the British Air Ministry, as chief witness to this, but he was deliberately misquoted and his words were falsified (123).

(122) "This was done so successfully", observes 'Nation Europa' (Vol. 7 1955) with obvious pride (to this very day), "that even J. F. C. Fuller, the well-known English military historian, accepted the idea that Britain was responsible for the attack on Freiburg." In contrast to this, an article entitled 'Who was Responsible for the Bombing?' was published in 'Nation Europa', Vol. 2, 1956, which referred to Freiburg under the headline 'The Unexplained Air Raid'. Linked with this was a reader's letter to another weekly paper describing its claim that the Luftwaffe had bombed Freiburg as "a fabrication".

(123) These assertions can really only be attributed to J. F. C. Fuller, who states in his book 'The Second World War, 1939-45', Vienna/Stuttgart 1950, p. 261, that: "Freiburg in Baden was bombed on 11th May, (sic!) Mr. J. M. Spaight writes as follows about this: 'We (the British) began to bomb targets on the German mainland'. Fuller's statements are wrongly attributed to the 'authoritative witness Spaight. In this book 'Bombing Vindicated', London, 1944, Spaight does not mention Freiburg at all.

R E S T R I C T E D