ALLIES HAVE BIG BOMBER EDGE IN WAR AGAINST AXIS

The big bomber, picked by Douhet and scores of later military prognosticators as the weapon most likely to succeed in this war, is only now beginning to fulfill its promise. Strangely, it is the United States and Great Britain who, though late in realizing its potentialities, are making best use of this instrument of total destruction. Germany’s preoccupation with fighter planes and lighter blitz bombers is attributable, perhaps, to their failure to subjugate Britain from the air and Herman Goering’s nostalgia for dogfight tactics of the last war.

But the big bomber still has far to go. Round-the-clock raiding by thousands of British and American bombers is a more easily accomplished fact on strategists’ lapboards than on the real battle front. First, an average of a thousand bombers a day would frequently require armadas of several thousand planes to offset times when weather keeps them grounded.

Second, operational facilities in Great Britain must be greatly increased before mass flights of hundred-foot bombers can be conveniently accommodated. The magnitude of this task is evident when one considers that only sixteen small ships can be handled simultaneously at America’s largest air training center. Most important, such operations would require the services of almost 400,000 trained aircraftsmen. Flight crews can and do fly the Atlantic in planes which they will use in combat, but service and supply staffs must travel by slow, vulnerable surface craft. If American bombers were at all ineffective during the early days of lend-lease service with the British, it was primarily because RAF maintenance crews, unfamiliar with American structural characteristics, were unable to maintain them at top efficiency. Wide variances between American and British design principles have, at the same time, dictated the operational use of our planes over France and Germany — Fortresses and Liberators being used exclusively on day-raiding while Stirlings and Wellingtons operated at night. American planes of the types mentioned are said to bomb more accurately at high altitudes than British counterparts, and thus daylight target bombing is limited by the number of planes that we can spare for the European front — although the Lancaster is reportedly taking over much of this work.

Because there are so many types in use, identification of twin-engine bombers presents many problems. Some spotters have learned to divide them instantly into two groups — those with simple tail assemblies and those with twin rudders and fins. But even these distinguished characteristics are subject to sudden change. For instance, pictures continue to arrive in this country showing both two and three fins on the Avro Manchester, an inconsistency which is rendered all the more confusing as the Manchester no longer appears on official lists of front line planes. First introduced at Augsburg, announced in this country only seven months ago, the Manchester has already joined the Whitley and Hampden on the
Below: The first shipment of Boeing B-17C Flying Fortresses to reach England two years ago. Note external variance from current B-17E in tail and turrets.

Easiest to identify of all twin-engine bombers, the old Junkers Ju-88 above is in service with Sweden’s growing air force. Germans use Jumo engines on Ju-88K.

Mainstay of the British bomber forces in Norway in 1939, the Bristol Blenheim (above) is now serving in its fourth version. Wing, smooth lines are easily spotted.
war's has been list. The Bristol Blenheim, which performed nobly in Norway, then virtually disappeared from action, has now returned to favor. So it seems that military considerations, not age, determine an airplane's life span in this war. While some planes fail to match expectations because of basic design, others like the Wellington, now serving in a Mark VI version, seem adaptable to any operational purposes. Basically however, spotters' texts of six months ago are still fairly complete in scope, inasmuch as the British have introduced no new bomber design since the Lancaster, even though several types have dropped from first-line duty.

Only one important change seems imminent in American bomber strategy. Impressed by the brilliant performance of the Douglas A-20A as an emergency night fighter in the desert and on regular night duty in Great Britain — as the Havoc — Army officials are reportedly considering reassignment of the Douglas as a fighter. What with the Martin Baltimore (A-30) and the Maryland (A-22) doing yeoman work as regular attack bombers, the A-20 or its modifications might effectively be released for night interception duties. On the Axis side, only the Heinkel 177, the Dornier 217Z, and the Piaggio 138 can be considered as new bombers. The first offers a peculiar spotting problem, with four liquid-cooled engines encased in two nacelles of radial form. The Piaggio 138 is a four-engine bomber on which all performance and dimension figures are restricted. Germany's principal bomber innovation of the year now seems to be the Dornier 217K. Generally akin to the flying pencils — the Do-17 and Do-215 — it is used for both dive and level bombing, using easily spotted tail drogue or diving brake on the former operations and looking very much like its progenitors when used as a standard bomber. After three years of air warfare, the clean-lined, well-armed, fast American bombers continue to excel, as a group, the best that the Axis can muster.

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