

E-Ernest 102 Squadron Mission 6 Target DORTMUND

Pilot Jack Worthing Pilot Officer

PILOT	Jack Worthing	Pilot Officer
FLIGHT ENGINEER	Algy Moncreif	Flying Officer
NAVIGATOR	Cecil Cardew	Flight Sgt
BOMB AIMER	Gwyn Fairfax	Flying Officer
WIRELESS/GUNNER	Lance Bracknell	Flight Sgt
MID UPPER GUNNER	Henry Lane	Flight Sgt
TAIL GUNNER	Mitch Prism	Flight Sgt

1st April 1942

Good weather over base and we had an uneventful take off. E- Ernest seems to be none the worse for wear after her emergency landing on a recreation ground at the end of the previous mission.

Headed out over the North Sea before steering ESE to the target. Beautiful "Bombers Moon" hope it is a good omen. I can see bags of other aircraft in the sky ahead of us silhouetted against the sea, just hope there aren't too many German nightfighters stooging about.

As we fly over the Gunfleet Sands glad to see that we are not producing any telltale contrails. 50% cloud cover brewing up over the sea. Doubtless the Germans are busy watching us on their early warning systems wondering which way we are going to go and who is going to cop it tonight. Our tailgunner Mitch, who has the sharpest eyes of anyone in the crew, thinks he saw a nightfighter, possibly an Me110 but he clearly didn't see us. So we remain on course.

As we near the Dutch coast still no contrails and the weather remains the same so it looks like there won't be an early recall. No flak as we cross the coast North of The Hague. Cecil reckons we are dead on course.

Further inland into Holland and the cloud cover clears and we can see that the ground is covered in fog over the low flat countryside below and the air up here must be a lot colder as we start producing contrails. No flak or nightfighter activity perhaps all the Jerries have got the night off?

As we cross into Germany the weather begins to clear and so do our contrails so perhaps Spring is on the way. Still no opposition and we have a clear fix on the target.

Entering the target zone and the ground fog is back but no contrails. Suddenly we have company in the form of a Ju88 C-6 on our tail 6Lv. Mitch spots him and gets our retaliation in first and knocking great chunks out of his starboard wing. Despite this the Hun presses his attack causing some superficial damage to the tail before destroying the dinghy before breaking off thanks to Mitch's persuasion. The searchlights are everywhere as we start our run into the target but they manage to miss us. Bags of flak but again we seem to be lucky as none of it comes our way. The target is slightly obscured but with the full moon Gwyn, our bomb aimer, is able to get a good fix and we are smack on target (97%) no thermal turbulence.

Time to turn for home! On the run out the flak gets even heavier but we come through without a scratch. This time Mitch spots two nightfighters lining up to have a go at us. The first to try his luck is a Do217 J-1 attacking in a vertical dive scoring "walking hits" - causing superficial damage everywhere except for taking out the heating to the MUG. This puts off Henry as he tries to return fire but he chooses to stick to his guns as the Dornier dives away and the Ju88 C-6 attacks from 9H. Henry decides to go all out and sprays an extra long burst and the Ju88 turns into a fireball before exploding off our starboard wing.

As we leave the target zone far behind the cloud bubbles up and we are soon into ten tenths cloud cover. No searchlights and only light flak as we leave Germany. Despite suffering from frostbite Henry remains at his guns which is a good job as we are under attack from another Ju88 C-6 from 9Lv. Henry manages to tear great chunks off the Jerry's fuselage but the Ju88 gets in a lucky burst before breaking off. This causes an oxygen fire in the forward compartment. I have never seen Algy move so quickly you would have thought that the barman was about to call last order. His quick action in grabbing an extinguisher put the fire out before it could get a real hold.

Now we are without oxygen in the forward compartment so nothing for it but reduce altitude as we cross into Holland. It is only now that Flt Sgt Lane reports his frostbite - the clot! Why didn't he tell me sooner? The cloud disperses and we can see that the ground is covered in fog. Just as we are breaking out the flasks of cocoa number 2 engine suffers a fuel system failure and the petrol spilling over the wing catches fire. Flt Sgt Lance Bracknell grabs a fire extinguisher, tucks it into his flight jacket and pops open the hatch. The draft causes his parachute to open before he is fully outside the aircraft. Algy and Gwyn grab hold of the chute while Flt Sgt Bracknell crawls along the wing and tackles the fire with the extinguisher. It's at that point that the flak opens up and we take a hit to the tail's control cable. A ruddy great Me110 pops up from nowhere and Mitch manages to put some holes in his port wing. Jerry returns the favour hitting our empty bomb bay before shooting up our port and starboard wings hitting Sgt Bracknell in the process and taking out the number two engine completely but we manage to feather the prop. The hits to the starboard wing are superficial but Algy and Gwyn lose their grip on the partially opened chute and Flt Sgt Bracknell is sadly lost overboard. We don't see any more of the Me 110 which has broken off his attack.

The cloud cover persists as we reach the Dutch coast slipping south of Rotterdam and out over the North Sea. No further enemy action and we make it safely back to base and make a good landing despite the deteriorating weather over base.

The crew are shaken and silent as they descend from E - Ernest amazed by Flt Sgt Bracknell's heroic action but shocked by his loss.

Flt Sgt Bracknell was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross in recognition of his self sacrificing and heroic action.

Flt Sgt Lane recovered from his frostbite to his right ear and told not to be such a bloody fool next time and report any suit malfunction straight away but commended for remaining at his post and awarded full credit for his destruction of the Ju88 C-6.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/sergeant-norman-jackson-vc>