

No. 101 Squadron (KX) Bomber Command - "F for Freddie"
23/24 June 42
Mission 14/ TGT - Bremen, Germany, Zone 7.
Formation - Front 1/3 - Pathfinder Squadron.

Crew:

Name	Rank	Position	
Oliver Davies	Pilot Officer	Pilot	
Henry "Harry" Ponsonby	Warrant Officer	Nav/Bomb Aimer (Conspicuous Gallantry Cross 6th Mission)	
Richard Watkins	Flight Sergeant	Observer/Nose Gun (KIA - Mission 14)	
Thomas Stanley	Flight Sergeant	Wireless Operator	
William Bedford	Sergeant	Waist Gunner	(.5 JU-88C6 - 10th Mission)
Giles Corbyn	Sergeant	Tail Gunner	(1Bf-110 Kill-4th Mission) (.5 JU-88C6 - 10th Mission)

From Oliver Davies' 21 June 1942 Diary entry:

24 hours passes were issued for all the flying crews after returning from our Gardening Mission. I just "hung around" the station and caught up on sleep and letter writing. Harry Ponsonby and I had a few pints at the Officer's Club before "lights Out" ... The C.O. said we would be going out again on the 23rd and that 101 Squadron would be going again as the "Raid leaders" ... Harry and I are taking "Freddie" for a test flight this afternoon and we will be running a practice mission to sharpen up the crew for the Raid Leader mission...

From Oliver Davies' 24 June Diary entry:

It was still the "Dark of the Moon" ... Just a crescent showing. "Stormy" our weather briefer said we would have 50% CC over England but it would clear to just ground fog and haze over the channel and along the Netherlands coast. There was one patch of 100% CC just before we crossed into Jerry's airspace though.

We had "stood to" for the afternoon briefings and our evening meal. Then we "kitted up" for tonight's mission to Bremen. "Freddie" carried a load of incendiary bombs and flares for target marking. We were ready to go. We were the lead aircraft for this raid. Take off was smooth and we again flew our low altitude channel dash. "Harry's navigation again proved to be "Spot On"...

Like last time when we were raid leader our low channel dash seems to have taken Jerry by surprise so thought we should run it again ... it looked like we slipped thru Jerry's radar net unseen... The German Signals Intelligence unit that monitored RAF radio traffic and alerted the Night Fighter defense forces whenever we massed for a raid did not seem to see us coming in.

With the Crescent Moon and heavy cloud cover over most of the region in zone 5, we had no contacts inbound to the target. F/SGT Stanley our wireless operator reported that he received no recall orders in the zone. We passed thru zone 6, again with no visible contact from the German

defenses... I "kissed" my lucky Rabbit's foot that Sue Ellen Swift had given me... hoping our luck would continue...

"Harry" stuck his head up next to me... "Turning point 4 is coming up in "2 Minutes!" he said, "We just crossed the coast line... ", he glanced down at a stop watch he held in his right hand ... "In 1 Minute 40 seconds now!" He said.

I looked out the port window at a layer of soft white reflecting what little light there was. The ground fog covered as far as my eyes could see... "Boy! I don't know how you can tell ..." I said, "... I can't see anything down there with that ground fog." He smiles and patted me on the shoulder. "Gotcha' covered" he said as he dropped back down out of sight into his "cubby hole"...

"Turn Now!" called "Harry" from his Navigator's desk below. "Roger that!" I called back. I banked "Freddie" for a shallow turn to starboard and watched the compass heading swing around to 175 degrees. I put Freddie's nose up a bit and started a slow climb to arrive at our Initial Point to turn onto the bombing run...

We were lucky! Jerry was slow to respond to our approach ... Being "leader of the pack" we slipped in under the radar just as we had done during the Stuttgart raid. We were able to surprise Jerry as we climbed to bombing altitude. You could hear the whine of the bomb doors opening as we lined up for the run over the target.

We received a desultory response from the AAA Flak guns as they realized we were getting ready to bomb. One flak burst was quite close and shrapnel whizzed thru "Freddie's" fabric skin but caused only superficial damage. No one was hit.

I flipped on the autopilot giving control to "Harry". My heart was in my throat as we made that "Longest Minute" straight and level bomb run! I could feel the sweat trickling down my back and neck as Harry guided "Freddie" to the bomb release point. My stomach did its usual flip-flop as "Freddie" dropped his load of Flares and incendiaries over Bremen and made his rapid ascent as several tons of ordnance fell away. As soon as I got control back I put "Freddie into a steep dive to avoid the searchlights that were coming on and the AAA guns that had begun firing on us in earnest! Ponsonby was right on target with the drop! I looked back over my left shoulder as I finished making the post-target Turn. I could see a line of flares along with a string of small fires beginning to grow in intensity in the center of the city.

Suddenly, Giles Corbyn our tail gunner called out on the intercom ... "Break Right" and then I heard the hammering of his .303 machine guns in the tail... I rolled right and put the nose down as bright streaks of light flashed over top of my canopy ... They were quickly followed by a dark shadow that roared overhead and disappeared into the night... I rolled back to the left and pulled the nose up, changing course by 30 degrees... my eyes scanned the instrument panel ... all looked ok... nothing to be worried about at this point... I heard William Bedford our waist gunner call out "Night Fighter " and the rest was drowned out by the hammering of his waist gun as he begin firing... I rolled Freddie hard to the right and put the nose back down to avoid the night fighter's second pass... I failed....

This time I could identify our attacker as a Ju-88 C-6 as he corrected his aim, coming right in at us with cannon's blazing... golf ball sized white blobs streaked passed and then merged into "Freddie" as I reversed the turn and started a climb ... I could hear the bangs of shells detonating as they hit "Freddie's" internal lattice-work bracing ... most of the rounds failing to hit metal and passing thru the fabric skin without detonating...

A Bright Flash lit up the wind screen in front of me... there was a loud BANG! "Freddie" staggered heavily as the explosion ripped thru the nose section. Shrapnel ripped thru "Freddie's" fabric skin with a tearing sound like a zipper being undone. This was followed by a few loud "Bangs!" as shrapnel and small caliber machine gun rounds struck "Freddie's" inner bracings and bulkheads after tearing thru the fabric skin! I could feel a heavy flow of cold air coming up from the tunnel to the nose... "Freddie's" speed began to drop off and he became harder to control... I kicked in left rudder and pushed "Freddie's" nose further down into a dive, making for the coastline and the open ocean.

AAA continued to follow us as several very close shells peppered us with shrapnel but caused only superficial damage... I could hear "Freddie's" gunners firing as the AAA explosions subsided... Then, it was over as quickly as it started... Our gunners fired a few more bursts but they too became silent as the night fighter disappeared. (I only rolled for 2 passes!)

I leveled "Freddie" out as we made for the coast... Ponsonby's head rose up next to me... I glanced at him and then took a hard look... his face was covered with blood as were his hands and the front of his tunic... "You hurt?" I said... He looked at me and he shook his head "No"... In that very calm quiet voice of someone on the ragged edge of shock he said "Watkins is dead... He... he was in the nose turret when it was hit by cannon shells... He's... " his voice trailed off as he stared at me ... "he's really ...messed up" Harry continued. I called Stanley forward to help Ponsonby ... We got watkins wrapped in a blanket...

The nose turret was badly damaged and jammed outward causing a lot of drag... there was a gaping hole in the nose that was causing the "blast of wind" that was passing thru "Freddie" ... It was a long trip home and Stanley fired the red rockets for injured on board... We made a straight in approach and the Ambulance met us at the end of the runway... Ponsonby was taken to the hospital to be checked out and another ambulance took Watkins away...

We were a pretty somber crew at de-briefing ... "Harry" was checked out by the doc's and was released ...

The C.O. said we would get a new Observer/Nose gunner ... His name is F/SGT Quincy Jones.

The bombing target photos showed we got 40% on target (Rolled an 5 on Table 6-7)

We had successfully marked the target for the follow on bombers. There were NO night fighter shot down and our new crew member is F/SGT Quincy Jones.

Our Eerk said "Freddie's" damage will be repaired by the next mission.

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