

No. 101 Squadron (KX) Bomber Command - "F for Freddie"

15/16 May 42

Mission 10/ TGT - Stuttgart, Zone 9.

Formation - First 1/3.

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
Thomas Stanley	Flight Sergeant	Wireless Operator
William Bedford	Sergeant	Waist Gunner
Giles Corbyn	Sergeant	Tail Gunner (1Bf-110 Kill-4th Mission)

From Oliver Davies' 5 May Diary entry:

101 Squadron was scheduled to fly a "Gardening Missions" over the next few weeks but "F for Freddie" was "stood down." Harry Ponsonby and I, along with a couple other 101 Squadron pilots and Navigators received orders to attend a briefing being held at Group HQ... some very "Hush, Hush" thing it was rumored.

"Harry" and I had both attended Oxford before the war. Different years but we both had degrees in engineering and mathematics. "F for Freddie" had done quite well in navigating and bombing our targets so far according to our Squadron Leader. He said he picked us to attend this meeting.

Rumors running through Bomber Command said that a certain Group Captain S. O. Bufton, DSO, DFC who is Deputy Director of Bomber Operations at the Air Ministry had proposed organizing a separate Pathfinder Force within Bomber Command composed of highly trained pilots and Navigators to provide accurate navigation and target marking for the rest of Bomber Command. He cited statistics that in 8 raids to Essen between March 8th and April 12th, 1942 almost 90% of the bombers dispatched had released their bomb loads from 5 to 100 miles from the intended targets! Rumor also had it that "Bomber" Harris, the Air Chief Marshal of Bomber Command was furious and totally opposed the formation of any kind of elite Pathfinder Group within Bomber Command.

At the meeting our Group Commander informed us all that "Bomber" Harris favored improving navigation and bombing accuracy by having a squadron within each bomb group trained to act as "Raid Leaders". Our Group Commander was picking 101 Squadron to be the Raid Leaders for our bomb group.

Entry for May 8th:

Ponsonby and I attended another meeting at Group HQ on our new assignment. We spent 2 days with Group staff and their senior Navigator going over target photos of Stuttgart and routes of

attack identification points for our mission to Stuttgart. We had a lot of "homework" to do before the mission.

Entry for 15/16 May, 1942:

We had "F for Freddie's" GEE system all tuned up and "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. Weather was good and there were no glitches on takeoff. We knew that Jerry's Signals Intelligence unit monitored RAF radio traffic and alerted the Night Fighter defense forces whenever we massed for a raid. This was a long process and the Germans like to let the raid develop for a bit to try to determine the route and target the bomber stream would take before committing their Night Fighters. I was thinking that since "Freddie" was lead aircraft tonight that if we made a beeline for Stuttgart that we might get in and mark the target before Jerry deployed his night fighters.

My thinking worked! Ponsonby and I decided to use our low altitude approach like always and see if we could avoid contact. With the Crescent Moon and heavy cloud cover over most of the region, no contacts were made inbound to the target.

We were lucky! Being "leader of the pack" we slipped in under the radar and was able to surprise Jerry as we climbed to bombing altitude over Stuttgart. Harry did a great job navigating! I and the rest of the crew kept a sharp look out for way point identification locations on our track to the target after we flew out of GEE range... We navigated right on to the target...

We received a desultory response from the AAA Flak guns protecting Stuttgart as "Freddie" danced around the 50% cloud cover to find the Initial Point for the start of the bomb run. One flak burst was quite close and shrapnel whizzed thru "Freddie's" fabric skin but caused only superficial damage. No one was hit. We had a few flak bursts around "Freddie" as we made that "Longest Minute" straight and level bomb run!

As always my heart was in my throat as I sat with my hands folded in my lap as "Freddie" flew on auto pilot. Sweat trickled down my forehead as Harry guided "Freddie" to the bomb release point. My stomach did its usual flip-flop as "Freddie" unloaded his bombs over the Target. As soon as I got control back I put "Freddie" into a steep dive to avoid the searchlights and the AAA guns that had now taken a very angry attitude and began to fire at us in earnest! Ponsonby was right on target with the drop!

I made a diving corkscrew turn to shake any night fighters or searchlights who may have found us and to get a look at the fires that were burning from our incendiary bombs and the flares we had dropped to guide in the rest of the bomber stream. F/SGT Stanley our wireless operator got the target photos from the bomb bay and send the "On Target" code phrase to our following brothers...

We made it out of the target zone mostly unscathed but picked up a night fighter in zone 8 on the return flight. He came in from 6 o'clock low so he must have picked us up as a dark shadow looking at the clear night sky overhead. The attacker was identified as a JU-88 C-6. He got

several cannon shells into "Freddie's" right wing and engine. The engine temperature rose but leveled off before redline.

We "danced" with the JU-88 and finally our two gunners hit him after I did some fancy aerobatics and managed to get the Jerry lined up for a good hosing. We last saw him diving away a long stream of fire trailing his port engine... There was a confirmation after we returned that witnessed the fight and confirmed the crash of the JU-88 NF. Credit was split between SGTs Bedford and Corbyn. I bought pints at the club in celebration!

We were again attacked by a night fighter in zone 3, but he only made two passes at us before turning away for home. "Freddie's" starboard engine was hit again causing a fire. I had to feather it and we managed to extinguish it ... "Freddie limped home on one engine. We made it back and landed safely without further problems.

The bombing target photos showed we got 96% on target (Rolled an 11 on Table 6-7, then 3 dice = 16 times i die -6 for 96% on target)

We had successfully marked the target for the follow on bombers and we also got credit for downing a JU-88 C-6 night fighter...

The bombs were ON TARGET, with 96% hitting near enough to count!

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

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