

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

11/12 Mar 42

Mission 02/ TGT - Paris, Zone 6.

Formation - First 1/3.

Crew:

Name	Rank	Position
Oliver Davies	Pilot Officer	Pilot
Henry "Harry" Ponsonby	Warrant Officer	Nav/Bomb Aimer
Richard Watkins	Flight Sergeant	Observer/Nose Gun
George Blackwood	Flight Sergeant	Wireless Operator
Edward Neville	Sergeant	Waist Gunner
Giles Corbyn	Sergeant	Tail Gunner

From Oliver Davies' Diary:

We stood down for a day and then we got "the word"... Ops were on again for tonight! This time we were going to Paris. We briefed and then headed to the mess. The crew of C for Charlie was finishing up and our boys razzed them a bit about their poor bombing over Essen. W/O Ponsonby, our bomb aimer asked "C for Charlie's" bomb aimer, Sgt Mann if he thought he would do better this time and said he (Ponsonby) was going to enjoy spending Sgt Mann's share of the bomb aiming pool during his next trip to London! Amid a host of cat calls and general ribbing I moved over to the big bowl on the pub bar and dropped our envelope with five quid in it in tonight's pool... The crew of "F for Freddie" was officially entered into the bomb pool now!

We finished our supper and moved to the crew room to kit up... then out to the revetments to get "F for Freddie" ready to fly. Our WAAF pulled the lorry to a stop near "Freddie" ... She wished us luck as we all jumped out... "C for Charlie's" crew was clustered around the tail wheel on their Wellington which was parked next to ours... They were completing the "take off ritual"!

After completing our own "take off ritual" , we climbed on board.

"Stormy" our Meteorology Officer was predicting 50 to 100% cloud cover on the trip to Paris with Ground fog and haze at the target. That coupled with a crescent moon meant we would have a pretty dark sky ... not good for navigation but it would certainly help us hide in the clouds! We had a GEE blind bombing and navigation radar set installed in "F for Freddie" so W/O "Harry" Ponsonby our navigator was tuning up the set and getting things ready to go.

Weather at the field was poor and we followed "C for Charlie" out on the taxiway and moved to the takeoff point. Our turn came quickly... we were the third bomber to take off... I lined "Freddie" up on the grass strip and pushed the throttles to the stops. "Freddie" rattled and shook. F/SGT Richard Watkins, our Observer, who handled the Flight Engineer duties, gave me the "Thumbs Up". I released the brakes ... "Freddie" rolled down the airstrip and became airborne behind "C for Charlie" ... we circled the field to get our bearings and I laid in the course Watkins

our Observer/Nose gunner gave me to the guiding searchlight at Flamborough Head that was our assembly point for tonight.

After Turning for the French coast at Flamborough Head I leveled "Freddie" off at 8000 feet (Low Level) for our channel dash... The coast of France was coming up...

At a "Himmelbett" Radar Control Station in the Kammhuber Line somewhere in France...

"Herr Oberst!" called the Feldwebel sitting at the communications console in the Ground Control Intercept radar station with a field telephone in his hand. "The Englanders are increasing their communications level. It appears a raid is developing".

"Very Good, Sergeant." said the Oberst "Alert the Night Fighters and Flak guns and keep me posted."

At a nearby Night Fighter base, a Bf-110 night fighter started up and taxied to the takeoff position. "Tower, Rote 3 is ready for takeoff" ... "Roger, Rote 3, you are cleared for takeoff"...

As "F for Freddy" turned at Flamborough Head and started across the channel the Bf-110 night fighter climbed into the night sky and flew toward its holding point near the French coast. A few minutes later, The Feldwebel GCI operator called Rote 3 and gave him a vector to intercept a "bogie" flying at 8000 feet over the English Channel...

"BREAK RIGHT, SKIPPER!" yelled SGT Miles Corbyn, "Freddie's" tail gunner. Corbyn had spotted a night fighter circling in from 6'o'clock high... He opened fire and sent a stream of tracers into the path of the oncoming Bf-110 even as the night fighter fired a stream of 20mm cannon shells at the Wellington.

From the Oliver Davies' Diary:

... when SGT Corbyn yelled for me to Break Right! I rolled "Freddie" to the right and pitched the nose down... I could hear the hammering of Corbyn's .303 machineguns and then I saw tracers streaking past cockpit... My heart jumped up in my throat as a roaring black form in an even darker night sky flashed by not yards away... I turned into the night fighter as he circled around... The altimeter was winding down from 8000 feet toward 7000 feet as I rolled Freddie back to the left and pulled the wheel back to start a climbing left turn... F/SGT Watkins doing Engineer duties called out "ALL SYSTEMS OK SKIPPER... Only some minor damage hits".

The Bf-110 followed us down and around ... Corbyn and Neville fired several bursts at him and finally I managed to get into some cloud cover and then we were all alone again. (New Rule) A communications check with the crew found everyone was ok with only minor damage to the fabric of "Freddie"...

We entered zone 3 with 100% cloud cover. F/SGT Blackwood monitored the wireless but there were no recall orders. I had climbed back up to high altitude as we passed over the French coastline... Through broken clouds we could see searchlight belts lighting up the sky but none were close to us... I watched an intricate dance with streams of tracer fire several miles away

winking in and out. Finally a bright fire began to burn and it arced away towards the ground. Then, it became dark again. We saw more anti aircraft fire exploding in the sky in the distance and a plane was held in a twisting turning searchlight beam ... it too fell fell silently behind as we winged our way toward Paris... "Freddie" was right on course as we stayed inside the electronic beam of dots and dashes that lead straight for our Target.

The cloud cover was 100% again and we had contrails forming behind us... I dropped the nose to see if I could get out of the contrail band. The night sky danced in weird shadows as the searchlights illuminated the cloud cover around us as we continued toward Paris. There were no recall messages.

I could see more searchlights and exploding shells as we finally turned in toward our target. The ground had picked up a blanket of fog and haze probably from the Seine River that flowed thru Paris. I was wondering how W/O Ponsonby could find his target in all that soup... He gave the call that we were lining up. I turned on the auto pilot and went "hands free" ... I heard the whine of the bomb bay doors open and then Ponsonby yelled "Bombs Gone!" I felt my stomach "fall away" as "Freddie" get lighter and rose up like an elevator as the load of bombs dropped from his belly. I closed my eyes but could still "see" the dazzling flash as our photo floodlight illuminated the night sky for the bomb damaged photos... Ponsonby yelled "YOU GOT IT SKIPPER!" as he gave back control of Freddie to me....

I made a wide turn and laid in a course home... Coming off the target I could see searchlights and Flak Guns firing but none came close to us... A night fighter did pick us up as we entered zone 5 on the trip home. He made one firing pass at us and then turned away... maybe out of ammo as he flew parallel with us for a short ways but out of range of our guns before turning away into the dark... (New Rule Addition)

He managed to hit the bomb bay on his firing pass... hitting the auto pilot bomb release mechanism but we had already used it so it would become another job for our Erk.

We dropped our bombs with no interference from the AAA guns or night fighters. With the ground fog and haze and a crescent moon W/O Ponsonby had a tough time getting a good target lineup. The bombs were OFF TARGET and only 10% hit near enough to count. It doesn't look like we will be in the running for the bombing pool on this mission!

Result = 10%/OFF TARGET

After the night fighter in zone 5 the rest of the return trip from the Continent was a milk run. We picked up a few rips and tears in "Freddie's" fabric skin and the damaged autopilot control from the night fighter attacks but else nothing major. We landed safely and went to debriefing... I was tired and really looking forward to that Big English Breakfast afterward.

We had 10% bombs/OFF TARGET. No Enemy Aircraft were claimed this mission. "Freddie" had light damage and will be ready for the next mission.

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