

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

19/20 Apr 42

Mission 08/ TGT - Paris, Zone 6.

Formation - Last 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' 18/19 April Diary entry:**

The Squadron stood down for a much needed repair and refit after last mission. Training days were scheduled and passes and short leaves were granted. I got a few days leave to visit Downton Abbey and renew my relationship with Miss Sue Ellen Swift, the niece of the Earl of Grantham. We had previously met at the R&R Center dance at Downton Abbey several weeks ago. She is visiting the Earl from America". We got to renew of friendship!

Ops were on again for tonight! ... Maybe... It had been raining and the weather was terrible. We were scheduled to go back to Paris. We briefed at 1500 hrs. during a heavy thunder storm. "Stormy" was predicting heavy weather tonight all the way to Paris. We finished up the briefing with the Squadron Ops officer giving out the recall codes and an admonishment to monitor the radios closely... then we headed to the mess.

After finishing our supper, we walked to the crew room to kit up... then it was a cold wet ride 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 and ran for the cover of "Freddie's horizontal tail stabilizers ... After completing our "take off " ritual , we climbed on board.

"Stormy" our Meteorology Officer was predicting 100% cloud cover after reaching the French Coast all the way to Paris with bit of clearing on the return trip. We had a crescent moon so along with the cloud cover we would have a pretty dark sky ... not good for navigation but it would certainly help us hide in the clouds! With GEE blind bombing and navigation radar set installed in "Freddie" and W/O "Harry" Ponsonby doing the navigating I felt good about making the target ok.

Weather at the field was poor with heavy rain as we taxied to the takeoff point. Flight Ops gave us a GO signal... The windshield wipers were running full speed. The water spray made vision limited ... the weather was really bad. Our turn came quickly... we were the second bomber to take off... I lined "Freddie" up on the grass strip facing into the wind 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... We were in the last third of the bomber stream so I was hoping that Jerry might be tired of playing in the rain and we might be able to slip thru the cracks.

As we crossed the French Coastline a Me-110F4 night fighter found us...

"BREAK LEFT, SKIPPER!" yelled SGT Miles Corbyn, "Freddie's" tail gunner. He spotted a night fighter circling in from 6'o'clock Level... Corbyn opened fire and sent a stream of tracers into the path of the oncoming Me-110. The "110" returned fire with its own stream of 20mm cannon shells. The NF fighter pilot had the range... I saw a half dozen golf ball sized "blobs of light" pass very close over the cockpit and then the stream winked out for some reason... With my heart pounding I cranked hard on the wheel wrenching "Freddy" back into a climbing right turn into the NF... He flashed by us and made a sweeping turn... He rolled out and then disappeared from my view ... I recovered "Freddie" and then all at once the BIG Me-110 popped up alongside of us flying parallel with us just out of gun range. I could see him dimly in the soft light of his cockpit. He flashed his marker lights and when he saw he had our attention, he saluted us... the rear gunner waved and then he peeled off to the left in a diving turn...

Harry Ponsonby said "Whew! Good thing for being last in line... he must have run out of cannon shells". I let out a long breath... I didn't realize I had been holding it in... I just looked a Harry and shook my head... a bead of perspiration rolled down my forehead and dripped in my left eye...

Lady Luck had smiled upon us once again and I hoped she would not desert us...

We entered the next zone with 100% cloud cover. F/SGT Thomas Stanley our new wireless operator monitored the radio but there were no recall orders. I had climbed back up to high altitude as we passed over the French coastline. Through heavy cloud cover we could see searchlight belts lighting up the sky but none were close to us... We saw anti aircraft fire exploding in the sky in the distance and a plane was held in a twisting turning searchlight beam... all viewed thru the misty, rainy dark night sky. "Freddie" bounced and buffeted as we continued toward Paris. "Freddie" was right on course as we stayed inside the electronic beam of dots and dashes that led 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. I could see fires burning on the ground thru the wispy clouds from our bombers that came before us ... 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" got 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....

We dropped our bombs with no interference from the AAA guns or night fighters. With the rain, heavy cloud cover and a crescent moon W/O Ponsonby had a tough time getting a good target lineup. The bombs were OFF TARGET and only 5% hit near enough to count. It doesn't look like we will be in the running again for the bombing pool on this mission!

Result = 5%/OFF TARGET

I made a wide turn and laid in a course for home... Coming off the target I could see searchlights and Flak Guns firing but none came close to us... We made it back to the coast and then across the channel without any further incident. The weather had cleared some when I circled the field to land with no problems. It was a happy crew that headed back to the debriefing and then to a fantastic English Breakfast in the mess.

We had 5% bombs/OFF TARGET. No Enemy Aircraft were claimed this mission. "Freddie" had no damage and will be ready for the next mission.

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