

Target for Tonight Mission 16 Bergerac 27/28 December 1943

21st January 1944 Stalag Luft III

Debrief by S.B.O. Group Captain E.F. Benson of Bomb aimer - Fl Lt Ross White 102 Squadron aircraft Bouncing Betty.

“Come in a sit down White. I gather you have had quite a time of it.”

“Thank you sir. We had only just crossed the French coast just north of Rouen when the rear gunner spotted a nightfighter and shouted, “Dive port” but as he did the mid-upper spotted another and called “Dive starboard” and this one was already attacking. Keith, our pilot, went into a starboard corkscrew and I could see tracer going over the top of the canopy. We came out of the corkscrew and we thought that we had shaken him off.” Ross’ hands were shaking as he recalled the events of the bomber’s last flight.

He could smell the cordite mixed with the heady odour of aviation fuel and the dope of the Lancaster’s fuselage.

Gently the SBO prompted him to go with his story.

“Well after that we checked for damage but it appears that we had got off lightly. Nothing much happened again until we were passing over Tours where we were coned by searchlights for about 20 minutes and all the time flak was bursting all around us. The skipper did everything he could to shake off the blighters and we were giving up hope of ever getting clear when the lights just slipped away. Whether we got out or they just got fed up I don’t know, but it seemed like a lifetime. Then we were attacked by a Ju88 which caused a fire in the starboard inner and a glycol leak that caught fire in the starboard outer. We dived in an effort to put out the fires but were attacked again, I don’t know if it was the same Jerry. He got the rear gunner and mid upper, there was a fair amount of chaos. Then we took hits to the nose, where I was and I got bits of shrapnel in my arms and legs and splinters all over my face. My parachute and all the navigational equipment had gone out of the nose. Fortunately I didn’t fall out with it. It was bitterly cold and one of the port engines was giving trouble so that was when Keith decided to try and put her down before she fell out of the sky. We hit a hillside and then skidded down the far side. Ronnie, our Flight Engineer tried to destroy the H2S with a flare. None of the others got out. Then I passed out.”

“We were picked up by the local Police and handed over to the Gestapo who put us in a cell which was either boiling hot or freezing cold to try and get us to talk. Eventually I was patched up and then sent here.”