

B Bobby Mission12 Osnabruck 13/14 June 1942

This would be the crew's first flight together although they had all served as crew on other bombers with the exception of Flt Sgt Japp who had transferred from Bolton Paul Defiants and had been shot up over France and was only now returning to active duty.

As we boarded B Bobby through the side hatch something brushed against my face – it was “Fat Hermann” a rag doll hanging by a noose around his neck. We each gave him a tug for good luck and then went to take up our positions.

“OK John start them up.” “This is lousy weather – I can only just about make out the runway.” “OK for take-off.” As the crate rumbles down the runway the gathering speed clears the windscreen, and we are almost immediately into the low cloud. The crate starts bucking and with a stomach-churning lurch we drop several feet in the turbulent air. St Elmo's fire crackles around the wings and guns giving a ghostly light.

“Strewth look at that!”

Two of the Stirlings that took off mediatey in front of us have collided and flames penetrate the murk. Too low to bail out the crews will be lucky to survive a prang at this height. That bumps us up to the number 3 position.

After a jittery start the crew have settled down and routine has taken over . The weather has cleared as we fly out over the North Sea and all systems seem to be on the top line. “OK chaps test your guns and warm up Monica.” With very little moon light the canopy of stars is laid out above us in all their brilliance and if only there wasn't a war on it would be an inspiring sight. No contrails to give us away but doubtless the Huns are aware of our presence as we are in the last third of the bomber stream.

“Skipper we have an Me110 on on tail 6 High and Monica is definitely working!” Flt Sgt Henry Crabbe our tail gunner manages to get off the first rounds and tears great chunks out of the Me's starboard wing and our rather dour mid upper gunner, Flt Sgt Japp adds to the damage on the same wing but the Hun keeps coming but having been put thoroughly off his stroke completely misses and breaks off.

“Skipper – we have a sneaky blighter trying to catch us out from 9 level. Looks like a Ju88 C6.” well, at least Japp has got his wits about him. “No problem skipper. He's just found out that you can't fly those planes with one wing.” Japp's lugubrious voice is a break in the tension that we are all feeling at this point.

As we get nearer to the Dutch coast some more cloud bubbles up and contrails start to stream up behind us in the damper air. “Skipper change course to 96 magnetic. That should help us avoid the flak concentration around Texel Island.” That's our resident Geordie, Flt Sgt Lewis. Thankfully no night fighter activity in this area.

“Enemy coast ahead chaps. Keep a sharp look out.” Cloud is even worse now 10/10ths coverage. Looks like the Met Officer got it wrong again. Let's hope that the mission isn't scrubbed if this keeps up. The cloud is lit up by searchlights and after the pitch darkness of the mission so far it feels like daylight and we feel very exposed. Although there is bags of flak it all seems to be off to port and we get through unscathed. Again, no night fighters approach us although we get the distinct feeling that there is something out there.

“OK skipper that looks like Emmen to starboard, steer 110 magnetic to bring us round to our run in to the target. “ “Thanks Robbie. Keep an eye out for drift as I can feel a bit of side wind on this heading.” “Aye that’s canny now skip.”

“Skipper, bad news we have had an electrical short that has taken out the flap motors. I’m afraid that we can’t do any corkscrew manoeuvres and you’ll need to watch the landing.” PO Barnaby’s voice sounds matter of fact and unflustered, but it was not what I wanted to hear going in to the bomb run.

“Steer 185 magnetic. Target now 11 miles dead ahead.” “OK George time for you to do your stuff.” “OK chaps the Luftwaffe seems to be busy elsewhere tonight but keep your eyes peeled. Over to you George.” The flak is concentrating its hate on the Halifaxes who have already dropped their bomb load and at least one receives a direct hit and pieces of aircraft rain down on us from above. “BOMBS GONE! Despite the cloud cover and smoke from the squadrons in front of us that looked like a decent result skipper.”

“Steer 260 degrees and haraway home.” “Thank you Robbie. Tell me do you speak like that just to confuse the Germans or is it for our benefit?”

Just then a blinding flash as a searchlight latches onto us and crump, crump, CRUMP as flak bursts all around us. “Anyone hurt? Check in.” but no one is hurt and there is no significant damage as far as we can tell. “Sorry skipper. I am afraid that got Fat Hermann. He’s had the stuffing knocked right out of him and that’s no error.”

“Skipper we have a Dornier with evil intent 6 high (thank you Monica).” The combination of our mid upper and tail guns reduce the Flying Pencil to a fireball. “Well done Henry. Your bird I think,” says Japp rather generously.

Back over Holland and it looks like we are going to be stuck with this cloud cover all the way home but at least we aren’t troubled by flak or night fighters. “Perhaps everyone has gone home?” pipes up Flt Sgt Dixon our wireless operator. “Shall I break out the cocoa skipper?” “Yes go ahead George and bring us a sandwich while you are at it.”

“Utrecht off to port skipper. Should cross the coast just north of The Hague on this heading.”

“Searchlights ahead.” A bit of light flak but nothing close enough to worry us.

However, a Ju88C6 has been stalking us and as soon as the flak clears he bounces us unseen from 1.30 level but nothing important is hit.

“He’s coming around again and trying a vertical dive. Have you got him James?”

Japp totally shreds his canopy and the Ju plummets down and disappears into the cloud.

“We should be out over the North Sea now skipper but it’s hard to tell with all this cloud.”

Number 2 engine malfunctions and catches fire. PO Barnaby as flight engineer activates the fire extinguisher but it has no effect. “Try it again John” “Yes, that’s got it skipper. Fire out. Prop feathered.”

The rest of the flight home is uneventful so now here comes the landing with no flaps and one engine out. The weather over base has not improved either. “Show me the way to go home. I’m tired and I want to go to bed...” “Put a sock in it, Robbie.”

We get down and make a decent enough landing and our first mission together is a success. We found the target despite everything (40% accuracy) shot down three Huns and made it home pretty much intact and with only one casualty – Fat Hermann.