

## After Action Report – L-Lincoln

23/24 AUG 1943

L-Lincoln of 103 Squadron, 15 Group

Berlin, Germany

Rumours had been circulating for weeks. For once, they were true. We were finally bringing our personal calling cards to Berlin. Further rumours claimed this would just be the beginning. There would be more deep attacks into Germany. We were of mixed emotions. On the one hand, we couldn't wait to return the favor to Uncle Adolph, for bombing London, and other cities at home. On the other hand, these would be long, dangerous, and deadly missions. The consensus is we are all volunteers. This is what we signed up for.

I think I can speak for the crew about our mixed emotions. This will be our longest mission, to date, and we know it will be grueling, yet this is what we have been waiting for.

We will have clear skies for our take off and formation. From there it all goes to shite. We are expecting 10/10ths cloud cover almost the whole way, with few breaks along the way. We will have a waxing crescent moon tonight. Enough light to see, but low enough to help conceal us.

I had the crew load up on extra thermoses of cocoa and coffee and grab extra sandwiches. It was going to be a long night.

Everything from the briefing to take off and assembly went smoothly. The skies seemed empty of enemy aircraft as we crossed the North Sea. "Navigator to pilot." "Go ahead Nav." "Netherlands' coast ahead." "Roger." "Pilot to crew, keep your eyes open."

As if on cue, the airplane shuddered as Corporal Smathers opened up from the tail. "That'll do you, you bastard!", we heard Cpl Smathers exclaim. He had hit a Bf110 as it tried to drop in on us from high astern. He claimed it rolled over and started a headlong dive. He further claimed to see several chutes below.

Amsterdam was passing to our right when heavy flak opened up on us. "Corkscrew!", I called out to the crew, so they could brace themselves. Despite the evasive maneuvers we took a hit to the starboard wing. Later inspection showed we had lost the right-wing dinghy.

"Mid to crew, eyes open. We have a shadow. 9 o'clock high." "Pilot to crew, keep it on a swivel. Anything anywhere else?" "Just at 9, Skip." "Is it closing?" "No, sir, seems to be veering away." "Roger."

"Radio to pilot." "Pilot, here." "We've been recalled sir." "Are you sure?" "Yes, sir. Part of the transmission was garbled, but the recall is clear. Something about the weather." "Did you confirm?" "Yes, sir." "Pilot to crew, we are turning about." There was a unanimous chorus of language unfit for polite company. "Keep your guard up. We aren't home yet."

I swung the Halifax north, to avoid Amsterdam, and started to head home.

We were still in range of the flak, and took another hit, again despite evasive maneuvers, to the tail. Later Cpl Smathers reported that hit took out the tail wheel.

As soon as the flak abated Sgt Springfield, Mid Upper, sighted a 110 coming in at 6 high. He and Cpl Smathers opened up on him. Springfield claims solid hits on its left wing, getting the control surfaces. Smathers claimed hits on the 110's engine, which blew up, which could be ascertained by the bright flash from astern. Neither noted and chutes.

There were a few muffled cheers from the crew which were shortened by multiple hits on our airframe, sending shudders and ripples down her entire length. We had our first experience with the German Schrage Musik. We took hits

the full length of our aircraft. It turned out to be another Bf110, which returned at 6 level. Smathers got a bead on it and got another engine hit. The 110 went into an uncontrolled dive, with no chutes observed.

"Tail to pilot." "Pilot." "The bastard got me,...sir. Just a scratch." "Roger. Keep me posted if any change." "Yes, sir." A quick survey showed we lost our radio, MUG O2, and we took a hit to the bomb bay, which took out the bomb release mechanism. I brought us below 10,000.

We re-crossed the Netherlands' coast back into the North Sea. Once again we were wracked by an unseen enemy. Passing below us from astern, we lost our tail guns, and our mid upper guns. He did not return. When I called for a comm check, there was silence from Sgt Springfield. "Gil, go check on Rowland!" "Sir!" What seemed a lifetime,..."He bought it, sir. Shell took off his foot. He bled out." "Roger. Back to your station." Gil reported that the shells that took Rowland also knocked out his guns. We were left with only the nose gun.

The rest of the flight was quiet, both in and outside the plane. With the radio out, we fired off the emergency flare, and brought her home. I decided not to jettison our bomb load. It was worth the risk to save them for our return trip to Germany. We had a debt to pay. We were met by the blood wagon for Sgt Springfield.

Ground crew estimates three days before we are airworthy.

Well, we did shoot down three of the bastards.

P/O D. Hayden, Pilot  
L-Lincoln  
103 Squadron, 15 Group