

After Action Report – D-Derby

3 Aug 1942

D-Derby of 103 Squadron, 15 Group

Veogesack, Germany

Post War Report by Flying Officer William “Wil” Eaton, Navigator, D-Derby, 103 Squadron, 15 Group
Group Mission 2/3 August 1942
Veogesack, Germany

It was a crystal-clear evening, as we ran up, in preparation for takeoff. Takeoff was smooth, and clean. We climbed to cruising altitude, adjusting to a heading of 48° True.

I was able to get a good astral fix, as we crossed the coast, out to the North Sea. Fog began to form below us, obscuring the Sea.

We were less than an hour into the mission when we were set upon by a pair of night fighters, a Do217 J-1, and an Me110 G-4. The Do217 pilot must have been a rookie, as he came upon us from 6 O'clock high. Monica gave us ample warning, coupled with Sgt Badger's excellent night vision. Badger got off a single burst, shredding the plane's port wing, destroying the 217. A parachute was observed as the aircraft plummeted back to earth.

We were not so lucky with the Me110. That pilot must have had some credentials. His first pass from 3:00 low, where he couldn't be seen. His first pass raked us from stem to stern. His run took out Badger's heat, damaged the ammo feed to the MUG, got a few superficial hits on the pilot's console, and Monica. His second pass came from 12 O'clock low. Without Sgt Huckabee's nose guns, we were defenseless. We were once again raked from stem to stern. Nose O2 was hit, causing a fire (extinguished), another hit on the nose gun, the bomb bay autopilot link was taken out, another hit to the MUG ammo supply, and the tail wheel shot away.

He had ample opportunity to have his way with us but failed to make any further runs against us.

North of The Helgoland, as we turned due East, Badger spotted an Me110 in the distance. Must have missed seeing us or had another target closer.

It got eerily quiet as we continued East, then Southeast to the IP.

Not until we were approaching the target were we spotted again. Searchlights were futilely probing the skies. We were not found, but it didn't matter. Light AAA found us but failed to hit us.

As we passed the defensive AAA belt, a lone Me110 found us, coming in from 1:30 high. We spotted him first. MUG Flt Sgt Astley got a bead on him, but his guns jammed. Leaving us totally defenseless from any aircraft not coming from behind.

This pilot must have taken lessons from the first Me110 we faced. His first pass was a knockout punch. He targeted the inboard starboard wing, hitting the inboard fuel tank. Fire suppression and self-seal

failed. The fuel caught fire, then exploded. Rob (Flying Officer Ridley, Pilot) lost control of the aircraft as the starboard wing crumbled.

I don't know how I reached the escape hatch, and opened my parachute, with us flying so low. The 'chute must have opened just early enough to keep me from getting killed as I landed. I saw no other parachutes.

Landing in Germany made escape unlikely. I tried to strike out west, but I was on the wrong side of the Wesser River. It wasn't long before I was found, hiding along the riverbank.

It wasn't long before I found myself sitting out the war in Stalag Luft 7A. I was finally moved to Stalag Luft 17B.

Killed in Action:

Flying Officer R. Ridley – Pilot

Flight Lieutenant D. Sanford – Bomb Aimer

Flight Sergeant G. Middleton – Flight Engineer

Flight Sergeant A. Huckabee – Wireless/Gunner

Flight Sergeant O. Astley – Mid-Upper Gunner

Sergeant B. Badger – Tail Gunner

Prisoner of War:

Flying Officer W. Eaton – Navigator