

NIGHT RAID ON BERLIN

By Jack Marshall

On the evening of Thursday November 14th, 1940, we took off in our Wellington Bomber for Berlin. There were six of us in the crew, captained by Sergeant Morson, known to everyone as "Swede". Sergeant Dean, known as "Dixie" for obvious reasons, was the second pilot, George Bury the observer, "Clev" Cleverley the Wireless Operator, the Front Gunner "Gin" Iles, and myself as Rear Gunner.

The outward trip was uneventful and we bombed our target at approximately 9-15p.m. The Huns made a great effort to knock us out of the sky but failed, and, as far as we know, did not hit us. And so, still intact, we left for home.

On the way back we passed east of Hamburg, where the anti-aircraft fire was very intense. It was not long after leaving Hamburg that we crossed the coast. We flew out to sea for about three miles, and then flew level with the Dutch coast. As we did so, "Swede noticed that the oil gauge for the starboard engine was registering "Nil" and that the temperature for same was rising fast. A few minutes afterwards this engine spluttered and caught fire.

Being the Rear Gunner, sitting in splendid isolation in the tail, I decided that it was about time that I found out what was happening, so I opened my turret doors. The first thing that struck my eye was George struggling with the fire extinguisher, which he soon put into operation. The aircraft being a fabric covered fuselage had also caught fire. With the aid of the extinguisher which is mounted inside the engine cowling, the fire was very soon put out, but the engine, of course, was then useless, and we were left with the port engine as our only means of power.

Our troubles were not yet over, however, we found shortly afterwards that the oil feed to the port engine was not all it should have been, and were forced to put the hand pump into action. To add to our joys, the pump handle chose this moment to break off about three inches from it's base. The result of this, was that I found myself lying on my back next to another member of the crew, one pushing and one pulling in an endeavour to provide the engine with the necessary oil. This pumping was extremely hard work and very soon we had both broken out into quite a sweat, despite the fact that the temperature was 15 degrees below zero. Despite this and the fact that we knew the oil tank had been empty for about twenty minutes, we kept on pumping, apparently with the idea of keeping up the pressure in the pipe so as to take advantage of the very last drop of oil. Then shortly after the oil ran out, so did the petrol.

From the time the fire broke out in the starboard engine until the petrol gave out, other members of the crew had been busy jettisoning all excess weight. Ammunition,

guns, oxygen bottles, in fact everything that was not going to be of use in the immediate future, was thrown overboard. The jettisoning was possible through a large circular opening in the bottom of the aircraft.

There was nothing left to do but take up positions on the floor and brace ourselves for the moment when we hit the sea.

This we did at about 3-15 a.m., with a terrific crash! The aircraft gave the appearance and feeling that it was going to dive straight to the bottom of the sea.

There were four of us to go through the astro hatch, I being the fourth. I wondered, as I waited, whether we would all get out in time and I remember thinking, that the first two should do so. The thoughts seemed just to have entered my head, when I found it was my turn to get out. The Pilot and Co-pilot of course, went out through their own escape hatch.

I was extremely surprised, on getting out, to find that the others had already got the dinghy afloat and were all, except the second pilot, seated therein. The dinghy at this moment had been carried several yards away from the aircraft by a wave and with visions of it drifting away altogether, I plunged into the sea, which was rough - in fact, too rough - and lashed out for the dinghy when once I had reached it, I was hauled aboard. As I was regaining my breath I heard someone say "Poor old Dixie - he must be caught up in the aerial or something"!

I screwed my body around in the dinghy and looked towards the aircraft, which had settled on an even keel and could just make out a form in the moonlight, hanging on the front turret. A period of eight, nine, perhaps ten seconds and the form disappeared beneath the waves, never to be seen again.

The sea was now smashing the dinghy against the aircraft and tired as we all were, we fought like demons to keep the dinghy from being burst by this pounding. On one of the rebounds the dinghy came into contact with the sharp edge of a jutting piece of metal, which ripped the side of the dinghy like a razor. But for the fact that the dinghy had a double skin, this story would never have been written.

Eventually, partly through our own efforts, and partly I suppose through the whims of the waves, we got away from the aircraft, which we expected to dive to the bottom of the sea at any minute. We drifted around in the North Sea, waiting for daylight.

Many times during the hours before daybreak, we heard our bombers returning from raids over Germany to their respected bases. Once or twice we fired Verey Cartridges in an effort to attract attention but these were evidently not seen.

Daybreak came eventually and the sun made a very welcome appearance over the horizon, it's warm rays being much appreciated. The sea had quietened down a little and we were relieved of the necessity of "riding" the waves, which we had thought

necessary to do during the darkness. Perhaps the waves had seemed larger in the darkness than they really were, but we took no chances.

It was then about 7-15 a.m. and we were all feeling rather hungry but we had decided previously, that the emergency rations were not to be touched until it became really necessary. We did however, after a terrific struggle with many knots, managed to get the rum ration out. My first swallow of this resulted in extreme sickness, although the internal warmth it gave, even if only for a short time was very welcome. Swede, Clev and even Gin were able to keep the rum down, which rather surprised me, as they had all been quite ill previously. George Bury was very ill almost from the time we took to the dinghy. He constantly coughed blood - which worried us very much.

We drifted aimlessly around until about 10-30a.m. when someone saw what he thought was a light ship. The mere thought gave us added strength and in haste and excitement, we got the paddles to work. The fact that we could only use one arm, at a time to paddle with, made the going heavy and after what seemed hours of this, although actually at 11-30a.m., the light ship was no nearer, despite our strenuous efforts. Yet we were by this time, determined to outwit Davy Jones and paddled on.

By 11.50a.m. we had to stop paddling from utter exhaustion, such exhaustion that sleep was impossible, yet with heads on chests we tried to doze.

Suddenly we heard the most welcome sound I think I have ever heard, The drone of an aircraft which grew louder every minute and then we saw it. A Wellington! They had not forgotten us then!! We could see that it would pass us some distance to starboard and with feverish haste, we prepared a Verrey Cartridge for firing and waited until the aircraft was as near as it would likely be. The noise of the Verrey pistol, when we fired it, after many hours with only the noise of the sea to listen to, was terrific. The plane continued on it's course without deviation until it disappeared from sight.

We then decided to have another attempt at paddling and were just about to start, when once again we heard the noise of aircraft engines. "They are coming back!!!" "Yes, there they are and they are going to pass right over us." We had the Verrey pistol ready for them as they did so and fired it right at them, then reloaded and fired again. They saw us - and came down lower and circled round and round.

It is impossible to explain the feelings I had when this happened. They covered the whole gamut of emotions, laughter with tears of relief, gratitude, joy, every feeling known ran riot inside me, yet I believe that none of it showed on my face or my actions.

The plane was evidently taking stock of our situation and ensuring that we were not in immediate danger, then it continued to circle round us for the next hour or so

until another aircraft made its appearance - when the first aircraft made off with a final farewell wave to us. This was about 3-30p.m. and a fresh wind had sprung up making the sea rougher again. At about this time, another of our aircraft paid us a social call but did not stay very long.

The sun went down about 4-30p.m. and at about 5-30p.m. two more aircraft joined the party above our heads and later one of them disappeared in a westerly direction. Shortly after this we saw about three trawlers appearing over the horizon - the trawlers were being used as mine layers and were wending their way back to their base. We knew then, that we would soon be on fairly solid ground and that we should at least be more comfortable than we had been for some hours. During our spell in the dinghy we were all forced to sit in one position the whole time, each of us had severe attacks of cramp and our tentative attempts to stretch our legs at intervals, was difficult.

As the trawlers approached, we used the last of our Verey Cartridges to guide them and when we had used them all, found it necessary to use one of the two Marine Flares, which were stowed in the dinghy. We thought that the plane marking our position had lost sight of us. We determined however, to keep the last flare until the trawlers were almost alongside of us just to make doubly sure

When the trawler which eventually picked us up - and which we later found to be H.M.T. Pelton - was about 100 yards away, we lit the last flare as the trawler drew nearer. It was about 25 yards away when the flare died out and the next thing I saw was a searchlight turned on to us. Then in a matter of minutes the dinghy was bouncing against the trawler's two rope ladders.

One of the ladders was nearest to me, so taking hold I tried to climb it, but my legs were far too weak and I remember being hauled up the ladder and over the side of the ship by two of the crew. I landed on the deck like a big fish and for some time had no feeling and was unable to move. The crew then placed ropes around us and lowered us down the companion way to the engine room where they had buckets of hot water waiting for us. We then stripped off - what a wonderful feeling it was to wash down and get feeling back into our bodies. The crew then supplied us with clean clothing and our wet, salt laden uniforms were taken away. Then afterwards we were made comfortable in the crew's quarters.

The sea was very angry now and was tossing the ship in what was to us, a most alarming manner. During the night, "Actions Stations" was sounded, but it turned out to be an R.A.F. Rescue Launch that had been sent out to fetch us back. The Captain of H.M.T. Pelton however, refused to hand us over owing to the heavy swell which was running at the time. Also he felt that we had had enough excitement in the last 24 hours and on no account would he allow them to take us aboard.

Owing to the rough weather we were unable to put into Great Yarmouth until 8.30a.m. the following day. We got up at 8a.m. and hurriedly changed, as we were told that a Naval Doctor was coming aboard to have a look at us. After his examination we were surprised to learn that our Wireless Operator had somehow fractured his ankle. We were taken to the Great Yarmough Naval Hospital by ambulance and on arrival our temperatures were taken, given a hot bath and put to bed.

The following morning we were collected by a bus from our base and returned to our Squadron.

I wish now to take this opportunity to express our thanks to the Captain and crew of H.M.T.Pelton for the magnificent way in which they carried out our rescue and for their kindnesses and generosity while we were on board.

It is with sad regret that H.M.T.Pelton was torpedoed by a German E -boat and sunk with all hands.
Skipper Captain J.A.Sutherland, D.S.C. RNR.