

Lancaster DV 305 BQ10 - 550 SquadronRaid on Berlin 30/31st. January 1944

The 30th. January was a typical greyish and chilly Lincolnshire winter day. Take-off at the reasonably sociable time of around 5 p.m. was uneventful, with a sprinkling of WAAFs at the beginning of the run-way to cheer the squadron on its way.

Gee ceased to be helpful long before the enemy coast was reached, due to the usual heavy jamming by the German defenses. Thereafter, navigation was entirely by dead-reckoning supplemented by the occasional clear ground indications such as crossing coast-lines. No other aircraft were sighted throughout this phase although short, sharp turbulence at one time indicated the slip streams of others.

On the run-up toward Berlin, a marked increase in ground fire activity/ searchlights and fire glow was reported and observed and the entire crew were very sensitive and alert as we closed on the target.

Approaching the outskirts of the city, the rear gunner excitedly and urgently reported over the inter-com that a four engined bomber was close and directly behind. He was instantly questioned by both Pilot and Navigator as to its identification, it being common knowledge that the Germans were using the tactic of inserting captured heavy aircraft (or even Condors) into the main bomber stream. This questioning was immediate and very specific. The R/G's reply was equally specific - it was a Lancaster and he commenced to describe same. Before his report was ended, heavy firing commenced from dead astern. The elapsed time from the first sighting to the onset of attack was nearer 30secs. than 60 seconds.

The attack developed with a quite heart-stopping and devastating suddenness. Fiery sparks (tracers) roared down the length of the fuselage, accompanied by jolting explosions, smoke and some smell. (It was established from subsequent examination that comparatively large calibre shells or projectiles had inflicted the initial damage.

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