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The Return

All firing ceased. A semblance of normality returned and as a crew, we took stock. Both gunners were dead and unbelievably, the B/A was missing. So was the hatch through which he exited. The resultant unimpeded airstream scoured all loose and light objects towards the rear of the aircraft, including maps, instruments, pencils, and last but not least, loose 'window'. The F/E had sustained a blow to his shoulder and had momentarily fainted or collapsed. All compasses were U/S and the plane required heavy right-foot pressure on the rudder control to maintain reasonable directional stability. The port engine was useless and height was slowly but surely bleeding away. Having dropped several thousand feet, the view of Berlin in its fiery glory was clear and unobstructed. It also looked disconcertingly close. We turned for home.

The destination chosen was the emergency east/west airfield at Woodbridge, Suffolk. Polaris was bright and clear and from this, the pilot was directed to fly almost due west. This course was to be maintained, with a few deviations, for the remaining hours, with the Navigator carefully tracking the fast moving moon relative to unwinking Polaris.

The recovered Mercator projection chart proved a valuable aid as it showed the major cities to be encountered on flying west from Berlin. The largest and probably the most dangerous of these was Hanover. All hands therefore kept their eyes peeled for any sign of aggressive intent from the ground.

A small multi-coloured eruption began in the nose of the aircraft, from which it was deduced that some of the loose window might well be shorting across the bomb switches. With the navigator hanging on to the parachute harness of the F/E, the F/E gingerly crawled across the open hatch aperture and removed the danger.

On two occasions, white flares were fired from the ground alongside the track of the Lancaster as it slowly proceeded westwards. Otherwise, all was quiet and uneventful.

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