

Mark Azouz death events by surviving crew member Bert Turner

'In August 1942 when I was eighteen and a half and living in London, I went to Penarth for induction into the R.A.F. From Penarth I was posted to Blackpool where we did our square bashing and in December I was posted to Halton where I did a flight mechanics course.

In February 1943 I volunteered for aircrew as a flight engineer and was accepted for training. I was posted to St Athan for a flight engineers' course which I completed in September and was promoted SGT F/E I then went to 1657 Conversion Unit Stradishall and it was here that I met my new crew.

Pilot Mark Azouz, navigator Ginger Greenwell, bomber Leo Hartman, W/OP John MacGuiggan and the gunners Pete Findley and Teddy Roper.... the oldest crew member was just 22 years old.

We were posted to 90 squadron Tuddenham where we did 5 ops which included mining trips and bombing runs on the rocket installations in France. An operational day was pretty consistent, You were usually told that you were on in the morning and normally you took the aircraft for a flight test to check everything out which would take about half an hour and on landing would report any snags to the ground crew, who would prepare the aircraft for ops.

Sometime, usually in the evening we would be briefed as to the target. Met conditions, emergency drill and take off times could be any time depending on the distance but most of our ops took place at night.

The crew was then moved to Brize Norton 196 squadron and the whole squadron was moved to Keevil. This was where we lost our mid-upper gunner Teddy Roper, we were flying Stirling 1 Vs which did not have a mid-upper turret and so there was no need for a gunner. We were now in 38 group T.A.F and started to tow gliders and drop paratrooper's whilst operating at night taking arms and supplies to the resistance in Europe. It was at Keevil that I met the young lady who was to become my wife. On the 6th June we were briefed to part in the Normandy invasion and took 20 paratroopers to France on D Day minus 6 hours after the drop we were flying back across the channel when the fleet opened with the initial bombardment of the beaches, it was a marvellous sight.

About this time our rear gunner Pete Findley was taken ill and had to go into hospital we were given a spare gunner to replace him another Pete, Pete Bode. By the time Pete Findley was fit to return Pete Bode had done as many ops with us and both gunners want to stay with the crew, because we could only have one of them, mark told them both to sort it out between themselves, eventually they tossed for it, who won and who lost I never found out but Pete Bode stayed with us.

On the night of the 2nd August we were briefed for an S.O.E drop in Brittany. We arrived and identified the target but when we made our initial run in all hell broke loose, a jerry flak unit had moved into the area and they wanted to play, we completed the drop successfully and undamaged but on checking we found that we had three hang ups. On reporting this, Mark said they never touched us first time, let us go back and drop them (silly fellow) which we did. As we flew in for the

second time jerry got the range and knocked spots off of us, we completed the run but our starboard outer engine was on fire and the starboard inner was damaged and there was holes all over the aircraft. We tried to feather the starboard outer engine, but it would not feather and it ran amok. We lost the starboard propeller as we crossed the French coast and we flew back home on two and a half engines. When we got back to Keevil we could not land and we had to divert, our poor H Harry was that badly damaged she never flew again.

On 14th September 1944 I married a young lady who was a W.A.A.F who came from Fenton named Elsie Bettany and we were married in Warminster on September 17th.

We were briefed for operation Market Garden and we took a Horsa glider to Arnhem on the 17th and 18th and we took supplies on the 20th and 21st. On the 21st we told that the skipper Mark had been awarded the D.F.C and promoted to Pilot Officer. We still had to do another trip, when we got out to our Stirling and started up we could not get revs and boost, on one of the engines so the aircraft was U/S and we had to take the spare which entailed rushing across the airfield with all our kit and paraphernalia which all takes time. Consequently, we were about thirty minutes behind everyone else. We cut every corner to catch up with rest of the squadron, but it was hopeless, and we arrived just as the rest of the lads had come out. There was nothing for it but to go on our own, the natives were hostile, and they threw everything at us, but we got through badly damaged. As we flew out of the target area, Mark asked the navigator for a course to Brussels, before we could do anything else we were attacked by 5 enemy fighters, Pete shot one down but was himself killed, we were set on fire and the aircraft was going down when Mark gave the order to abandon. Seven of us abandoned by parachute, the crew except for Pete and two army dispatchers who were flying with us. When we landed, we were taken to Dutch farmhouse where we treated like royalty. There was now only six of us, we had somehow lost Mark.

We eventually got to Brussels where we were flown home in a Dakota. On arrival at Keevil I was told I was dead as no one had seen us bail out and we had been posted missing, believed killed in action, my new wife was not pleased !

After a spell in sick bay with a slight wound I was given sick leave and we came up to Stoke to meet the in-laws, after a horrific journey which is a story in itself, I had my first meal in Stoke, bacon and cheese oatcakes!

When we got back to 196 squadron it had moved to Shepherds Grove and the adjutant had got my caterpillar for me which is awarded to all fliers who save their lives by using a parachute. I stayed on with the squadron strength, but nobody wanted me, the crew has split up and we were told that Mark had been killed whist coming down on his parachute.

In January 1945 my wife was discharged from the W.A.A.F as she was having our daughter and I was on leave with her in London when I had a telegram to return to unit. When I got back I was told the Wing commander wanted me as his Flight Engineer was sick and I was to fly with him.

On the 20th February 1945 we were briefed to attack a bridge over the river Waal at a place called Reece. Once again, we were shot down and had to bail out. Wing Commander Baker and his rear gunner were killed, the rest of the crew survived and were picked up by the British Army who told that they had earlier found another aircrew on the ground who had been shot by jerry.

When I got back to Shepherds Grove, I was told my flying days were over and I was posted to RAF Roborough and finished my air force career as a clerk. I was demobbed in September 1946 and with my wife we set up home in Stoke where we brought up five children. Sadly, Elsie died in 1991.

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