

Bombing the Gneisenau 'Some Fun' As Toronto Observer Describes It

(Editor's Note: How does it feel to be sitting in a heavy bomber, winging through dangerous skies toward an important enemy target, risking anti-aircraft fire and attack by enemy fighter aircraft? Pilot Officer Jack Calder of Toronto, whose parents live in Goderich, a former staff writer of The Canadian Press, now an observer in the Royal Canadian Air Force, answers the question in the following article, describing his first operational flight over German-occupied territory as navigator and bomb-aimer.)

(By JACK CALDER.)

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London, Aug. 12 (CP).—Slapsy Maxie looked at the oil pressure again and then he looked at me.

"I think we might just make it," he said.

Then it was time to dash out to sea, if we were to be at the target at the zero hour. The formation tightened behind us and we climbed for three minutes through broken cloud. Behind were other formations—all streaking for Brest and the Gneisenau. We levelled out and suddenly broke cloud. Below us was the sea, blue as blue could be, and far ahead was the coast of France.

I thought of the things I wanted to think about for a moment or two. Then I thought of that bad oil leak which might make our



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gun turrets unserviceable at the target area. The wireless operator was working desperately to repair it. His wedding was only a couple of weeks ahead and he wanted to come back for it.

Objects on the coast grew bigger and bigger and I went forward to the bomb-aimer's position. Max patted me on the shoulder as I passed him. Boy, he was cool.

He had refused to turn back because we were leading the formation and there was a job to do.

"Look at that ack-ack come up," someone said.

Ahead of us the sky was cluttered with little patches of anti-aircraft shell bursts. We crossed the coast and headed across the Little Peninsula toward the dry-docks of Brest.

"I'm going to try the run-up from here," Max said over the inter-communicating phone.

"But we're ten miles off the target and will be there two minutes early if we make our move now," I told him.

"That's all right," he argued. And he was captain. "They're not bothering us now and we've got a good chance of getting in."

"Okay," I said. "Steady ahead. Target."

Below I saw barrage balloons at about 6,000 feet. Something was burning on the ground—probably a fighter aircraft.

It happened like a flash.

"Rat-a-tat-tat-tat," went the guns in our rear turret.

"I just shot down an Me109," called the rear gunner. "I didn't even have time to report it."

"Heads up," cried the gunner leader. "Here come two more."

"I've got one," called the rear gunner of No. 3 aircraft.

"Let's have less people talking at one time," Maxie ordered.

BOMBING TRIP.

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BOMBING TRIP IS 'SOME FUN'

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"Give the gunnery leader a chance."

"All right, but I've got an ME-109, too," yelled No. 2 rear gunner.

Below us I saw a parachute open. One of our victims had managed to bail out. Some one reported that one fighter had crashed on the ground.

Now we were doing violent evasive action. The ack-ack was coming at us. The target was desperately near.

"Broomph! Broomph!" went a burst right beneath my face. I put on my parachute.

"You'll have to do a 90 degree turn left to make it," I told Maxie, "quickly."

He wheeled her over and the formation followed.

"Left, left!" I called. "Steady."

The target was coming down the drift wires.

"Dropping, dropping, go!" I hollered and the bombs sailed out. On the last turn No. 3 had slithered above us and his bombs nearly hit us as they fell.

"Bombs gone!" I shouted.

"Good show," said Maxie. "Now let's get out of here."

At that moment I knew that we had missed the Gneisenau because I had felt a slight skid as we came out of the last sharp turn and straightened out.

"We Had Some Fun . . ."

As we dived and turned I saw the bombs bursting slightly to the left and beyond the target. At least we had helped to mess up the docks.

The shells were breaking all around us. We got out because Slapsy Maxie was so cool.

All the way to the coast and beyond it our gunner leader reported other aircraft, but any that came near us were friendly. At the coast Maxie put the nose down and streaked for home.

He throttled back when he saw a damaged Wellington struggling home on one motor. We stuck with her until our fighters came along to protect her halfway across the Channel.

We landed at an airbase in the South of England to refuel. I cracked out, had tea in the officers' mess and lay down on the grass—to try to think about home and other far-off things.

But when I closed my eyes all I could see was a map of Brest, the drydocks and the Gneisenau.

Thank goodness a lot of people got her that day.

The next day a friend from Montreal and I were playing golf when we met Maxie and his wife.

"Did you have much trouble yesterday?" Maxie's wife asked, looking at me a little anxiously.

"Oh, we had some fun . . ." I started.

"Don't believe him," protested Maxie. "He's an awful line-shooter. It was very quiet."

He stared at me quite hard, as if to say "I wouldn't tell her. Don't you."

Our formation of three has been credited officially with three enemy aircraft. We were shot up slightly, but no one was hurt.