

'How it all happened' - from 'A Wartime Log' by F/Lt D.L. Thompson, aged 23

It was a perfect summer's evening in Cambridgeshire when I took off in Mosquito B for Baker for what was to be my last operational sortie. (*The time was 11.55pm, Thursday 20th July 1944*)

Jack (my navigator/bomb aimer) and I had only arrived at Oakington a few days before, and this was our first trip together with 571 Squadron. Both of us had completed an operational tour.

On this particular night the target for three squadrons of Mosquitoes was Hamburg. We were 'spoofing' for the 'heavies' - about 800 of them attacking an oil target in 'Happy Valley'.



Having previously attacked Hamburg on two nights in 1941, and knowing something of the Hun defences there, I was well aware that this was to be no easy trip, but I had every confidence in the aircraft I was flying.

Owing to a slight mechanical defect, we were late off, and, by the time we set course for Holland, we found that we were about twenty minutes behind the 'main force'. It was not very long before we were in trouble, and I was a little concerned when I found out that the oil pressure on the port engine was reading zero, and that the oil temperature was 'off the clock'. Much to my relief, however, after a quick check-up, I found that it was only the instruments that were defective.

By the time we had reached our first turning point, on the east side of the Zuider Zee, we had managed to make up five minutes of our lost time and we were confident that we could probably make up another five minutes or more before we reached the target. On this leg, however, we ran into more trouble - a German night-fighter! - and we wasted more precious time shaking him off.

We were now flying at 30,000 feet, and we intended bombing from 28,000 feet. When we were still 90 miles from the target we could see all the bombs exploding with vivid flashes on the ground, and the colourful markers and flares were cascading down. Flak and searchlight concentrations were very heavy and I must admit I was feeling a little nervous when I realised that we would have to go in alone. Jack, who had now taken up his position at the bombsight, was as cool as a cucumber.

Then came the bombing run. Large fires were burning and we had no difficulty in finding the target. Jack gave instructions over the intercom.

"Right, right steady left, left, steady steady bomb gone!"

We were carrying a famous 4000lb 'Cookie' and I personally gave a big sigh when the aircraft lurched and I knew that the bomb was tumbling down to earth.

No sooner had the thought passed through my mind when the aircraft lurched violently again. I was thrown out of my seat and hit my head on the roof, and I had some difficulty in steadying the aircraft. We had received a direct hit from heavy flak.

Jack was lying still in the nose of the aircraft and I knew he was badly wounded - I had been fortunate and received only a slight scar from shrapnel.



It would be impossible to remember exactly what took place in the next few minutes. My first concern was to get out of the searchlights and flak - the starboard motor had stopped, and there was a large hole in the nose of the aircraft. After a few seconds the starboard engine burst into flames and I tried in vain to put the fire out. It wasn't very long before the whole of the wing was on fire and there was nothing to do but abandon aircraft. Our troubles weren't over - the escape hatch had jammed, and, as Jack was unable to release it, I had to leave the controls and kick the hatch away. As Jack was lying over the escape hatch he was able to clip his parachute on and slide out. That was the last I saw of Jack and I'm grieved to learn now that he must be presumed killed.

I followed Jack out, leaving our burning aircraft at about 20,000 feet. I delayed my drop for a few seconds because of the height and I reckon I opened my 'chute at about 12,000 feet. The drone of B for Baker grew fainter and fainter, and a little while later I saw a vivid flash on the ground - the end of a very gallant aircraft!

Below me was a thin layer of cloud and I was unable to get any idea where I was going to land. At about 1,000 feet, I floated gently through a layer of stratus cloud and got a nasty shock when I could plainly see the coastline several miles away. I was in for a good ducking!



Splash! How far I went under I don't know, but I was soon on top again, kicking my parachute clear. Once I had freed myself I wasn't long in getting my dinghy in operation and, after a lot of puffing and blowing (I was just about out of breath by now), I dragged myself into it. It was just 2a.m. (I knew that because my watch stopped as soon as I hit the water), and I was a long way from home.

In the distance the sirens were sounding the 'all clear'. A lighthouse at the entrance to the Kiel Canal commenced to blink its light again, and, one by one, the searchlights began to disappear.



I commenced to paddle! Unfortunately I was a little too far from England, so I decided to try and make for the north side of the Kiel Canal. If I could get to shore before dawn I had a chance of escape. Well, either the tide was going out, or else the wind was blowing in the wrong direction, because at dawn I was still as far from the shore as when I commenced. Shipping began to appear all around me as it became light and I knew it wouldn't be long

before I was spotted. A fisherman found me and took me aboard. He was very decent to me and took me to his house. I was offered a drink of coffee.

Soon afterwards two decrepit old men appeared with rifles at the ready - the Wehrmacht !! I was a P.O.W. They took me along to their camp, where I was under guard until the Luftwaffe Officers arrived. I was searched and then, still wet through, taken to the railway station by car at Brunsbüttel, a town in northern Germany. Whilst waiting for the train, the air raid sirens sounded, and I was taken in a shelter. The natives were somewhat hostile!! That day I was taken to Hamburg (the city I had been bombing) and, on passing through, I was the cause of much excitement and quite a few of the population tried to 'get at me'. My guard kept them at their distance at the point of a revolver.

That night I spent a rather uncomfortable night in Hamburg Prison. I was there until 5 o'clock on the next day. I was then taken overnight to Frankfurt am Main arriving there for interrogation early Sunday morning. For the next eight days I was in solitary confinement - then a quick journey to a transit camp at Wetzlar and the next day, along with some fellow countrymen and Armenians, I started on a four day journey to Barth.



(F/Lt D.L. Thompson arrived at Stalag Luft 1 on Friday 28th July 1944 and stayed there as a POW until 30th

April 1945 - his 24th birthday - when the Germans left the camp at midnight, having been defeated. The Russian forces arrived the next day, 1st May, to liberate the men. That night there was a radio newsflash announcing that Hitler was dead!)

Pictures are taken from his Wartime Log book