

Midnight Adventure

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We had drawn a secret mission. This was to be our trial by a jury of German night-fighters, searchlights, and flak-guns.

The briefing room was empty at 7:00, much to our surprise, we were to be the only crew sent out that night. The briefing officer gave us all the information necessary for the flight. Take-off time, time in flight, target, target time, and compass heading to and from, bombing elevation, all of this was written down in our pilot's notebook.

At last we went to the ship. I checked the bombload and ran through my bomb-sight. The pilot was working his pedals and instruments. All the crew were checking and double checking their guns and equipment around their positions, for a B-17 is one ship that should be put through its paces before the engines start. Everything completed, we were ready to go on this secret mission.

At 9:05 we were in the air with our nose east and the dark English countryside moving west. The Kiel Canal in the northern heart of Germany was our heavily defended target. All the way over the North Sea I visualized night-fighters and search-lights coming up to pick us out of the sky like an egg from its nest. Nothing happened.

At 10:30 John, our navigator, called corrections over the inter-phones. At 10:50 Charlie, our radio-operator called to tell me that he had picked up German radar signals and was drowning them out as fast as he could. Our lower turret-operator kept his eye opened as he swung his turret slowly around and around.

At 11:00, the navigator told us to put

on our flak-suits. We were now over Germany and in enemy territory. No oxygen needed this time, for we were flying low for protection against all those things that we knew the Germans were going to use.

We heard John's voice over the inter-phone telling that the Kiel Canal was fifteen minutes away. Suddenly one light came up, then another, then two more, all trying to track us down. So far, these light were behind us. No fighters yet.

At 11:50 I began working my bomb-sight to see that every thing was all right. All the data on elevation of the target, airspeed of the ship, bombing altitude, and type of bombs to be used, was set in the sight.

John told us five minutes to go and still the search-lights and no fighters.

Flak bursts started when I saw my target, the western locks of the Kiel Canal. The ship rocked from the bursts, but Bill kept it on its course. Sighting, checking my angles, watching the drift of the ship and correcting for it, trying to keep the ship level, and listening to the awful sounds of the shells bursting around us, had me worked up to a near frenzy. I threw the lever that opened the bomb-bay doors and checked my sight once again.

After what seemed hours, the two four thousand pound bombs fell, and I watched them fall through the turmoil of smoke and light.

At four minutes after midnight a large jagged hole took the place of the Kiel Canal, and our midnight mission was over in a fiery climax.