

A Strange Tale of D-Day

by Bob Beverley, a Mosquito pilot with 264 squadron RAF at Hartford Bridge

Day by day, June was getting closer and closer, and the remainder of the Squadron left for Hartford Bridge with me left behind for a fortnight, before following them. My aircraft was flown by someone else to Deptford for finishing of the anti-jamming equipment and repaint. We had about a fortnight to finish our training and Phil (F/O Sturley Bob's navigator) had gone off somewhere, I don't know where and I arrived at Hartford full of fury and screaming - 'Where is my Aircraft'. I was told it would be 'OK' in time and I would have plenty of time before the day. When it arrived back, I was astounded - Black and White Stripes all over the wings etc., a new set of rear looking radar - all very smart! We had about 14 days to wait and to finish our anti-jamming exercises.

The start of these exercises consisted of something which to-day would be classed as 'common-place'. Our job which we had to practice consisted of what should be called 'Fox and Goose' - in other words, we had to locate a certain aircraft which could be anything up to 20-80 miles away on a black night at any height, all of which information was unknown to us and to shoot it down somehow! It didn't matter at all how we did it!

The 'Goose' or target took off 15 minutes or more before us and could go anywhere. We were told not to go too near the Channel but, if possible, to go more or less towards the centre of England, so that we should not be giving away any information to the enemy. With radar and any help which it was possible to use, it would appear nowadays to be easy, but it was quite a different proposition in those days. We could point our aircraft in 4 directions up or down, left or right when we picked up a radar signal. We would know in which quarter it was flying and we would look on to whichever direction it was - up to 40 or 50 miles from us. Had there been for instance a squadron of German aircraft, we would have knowledge of them.

264 Squadron - Hartford Bridge – the evening before D DAY, June 5th

Mosquito Night Flights

10 o'clock in our tents after a fair night's rest arrived. We had been flying most of the preceding night operating our new type of Radar with four boxes on the left side for myself - there were 7 different frequencies for transmitting and receiving messages from long distance. Phil also had new Radar equipment as well. Breakfast as usual in the large tent. We were 'A' Flight of 264 Squadron and our tent, i.e., Phils and mine were each being used by a separate crew for each tent. We then had a free morning to clear up, letters to answer etc, lunch would be approximately 1 o'clock, also in the big tent. 'A' Flight's transport would approximately 2 o'clock. We were collecting together

waiting for it at the tent at 2.00 pm. When we were ready, we all left for the Crew room and flights. We then threaded our way through Army tanks down to where the aircraft had been serviced since the night before.

Normally there had been hundreds of big tanks scattered about in the pine woods. There were several remarks about the fact that some of the tanks had gone during the last day or so. We duly arrived at 'A' Flight Crew Room, which was a small white plaster hut. First job was to take our own aircraft for a daylight test which would be about 1 hour, then the Mosquitos would come back and land one after the other. Faults would be rectified, etc and we would have orders to return and be present at the Crew Room for briefing at about 5 o'clock. These several 3 - 4 hours were all rather tiresome and various people got a bit short-tempered. I remembered that Phil and myself paid a visit into Camberley and went to a Cinema show. When we came out to return to the Crew Room, I noticed that the usual noise of aircraft about was absent and I commented on it to Phil, who said, 'Oh well, perhaps we'll have an easy night tonight.'

The weather was rough, with a 20-25 knot wind, visibility not too bad, but not bad enough to stop us flying, blowing from the west with a fair amount of cloud and there was rain about as well. We were back at the Crew Room at 6.00pm sharp, for weather and briefing for the nights flying programme. Our Flight Officer was on leave and so I had to write the programme on the black board and the times of take-off etc. I had fixed the times etc., of my own aircraft and of Mike Davison's, when there was a great stirring of the rest of the Flight. I turned around to see what the sudden silence was and through the door there came a man, with whom I was very familiar. It was Air Vice Marshal Sir Charles Steel who I had not seen since 'Salisbury, Rhodesia. He was with two Wing Commanders, and Squadron Leaders etc. I just looked at him with my mouth open!!

He said good afternoon Bob Beverley, and how are you? I have a job for you. Will you please come into a Briefing Room while I talk to you? Can we go into a separate Room? I said, 'Yes Sir, I suppose this is the Day?' He said yes, it will be for tonight you and one other aircraft and no one else. You will take off at 9.30 pm, one aircraft at 9.20 and the other at 9.27pm. We went into the little room with the other officers, and he said just sit down will you and the other aircraft captain and I will tell you all about it.

To start with, we are uncertain regarding a possible problem, which I am going to tell you about. We have knowledge of a German Aircraft which has forced landed within reach of us to the extent that the electronics on board have unfortunately proved that the enemy can upset all our arrangements for tonight and possibly tomorrow night by utilizing their equipment to such an extent that it could interfere with the accuracy of the airborne landings.

In other words, it could bend the signals which we have arranged to be dropped on all the bridges and important points in France which have been selected as initial landings for the whole airborne and parachute landings.

In other words, the landings could be scattered all over the selected spots and the bridgeheads could be anywhere in France, where we don't want them. The result will be very serious for the airborne troops and the whole landings could be useless. I have selected you and F/L Davison to fly over before the others with your new type of electronics and to demolish any other aircraft which may be airborne either ours or

theirs. By flying at all they will have to be shot down even if they are in the air - even our own. A squadron of Lancasters will be flying up the

Channel towards Dover and Calais in order to entice any German aircraft to think the landing will be taking place there and not at the Normandy landings. All British aircraft will be forbidden to be airborne before 10 o'clock and the Lancasters and the whole allies' aircraft will be out of the sky so that you need not worry who or what they maybe, just get them out of the sky. You must return by 12.30 calling me personally in the Control Tower, here, to inform me of 1. The Weather, 2. If there have been any other aircraft flying - and if it is all clear for the airborne and parachutes to carry out their orders.

You should call me before you cross the coast when you return, so that we will have as much time as possible to make our arrangements for the landings to go ahead. Is that quite clear, I am now going up to the Tower, here is where I shall remain until you call me from this side of the Channel. You will fly at not less than 15,000 feet behind the landings and call to each other to make quite sure no other aircraft are there, call each other every 3 minutes continuously during the time you are there at that height. Good luck to you both and I hope you will return without trouble. Is that quite clear? I and Mike both said, 'Yes Sir', but with shaky voices as neither Mike or myself ever thought we would get away with it. The Lancasters were to throw out as much silver paper as possible so that it would entice the enemy aircraft up Channel with radar. This trick was called Window dressing so that an aircraft throwing it out would be followed. Both navigators were with Mike and me at this briefing and after we left and went out to get a short rest our Navigators did not think we would get away with it either.

When one thinks of the whole of the American and RAF were to be grounded, it made one realise how important it was, that we should get away with it. At 9.15pm both Mike and I left the Flight Room followed by our Navigators rather like people going to be executed. Mike went first as arranged and with absolute Radio silence he went by us relentlessly silent. He, Mike turned into wind and opened up on time and I followed 2 minutes later. We both followed each other at 0 feet and crossed the coast at Southsea, throttles back to save fuel at 1900 RPM. Our time to the French coast was 18 minutes from take-off and then up to 15,000 feet where we started to call each other. Nothing there, just ABSOLUTELY NOTHING - I just could not believe it.

During the next three hours my admiration for our Intelligence people become wonder as to how they had done it. The weather was bad, the wind had gone up to 30 knots, I felt so sorry for the craft full of the army which we had passed going out. It had been daylight and we could see them rocking as they went - hundreds of them. In approximately two hours we picked up 'Window' - that the Lancasters were throwing out. I called Mike and said we would stay our allotted time and then return home.

All we knew of what was going on below I just did not know – Bofors' shells were all we saw. I started reducing height and up went the speed, Phil gave me a time for Southsea, and I called the Air Marshal 5 minutes early and got his reply - all he said

was GOOD. Another 12 minutes and we were approaching Blackbush and the red lights, hundreds of them, stacked up and up all going out! How we were going to land with them there I don't know. But we got in, underneath them and landed safely on 26 Runway.

The whole of 'A' flight was there and wanting to know what had happened 'Nothing', I said. JUST NOTHING.

'What about the Air Marshal?' - I said, gone like the wind - they said the Tower said he ran all the way to his car and his Despatch Riders had an estimated speed of over 60 mph before they even got to the road

Bob's log for the period shows

June 1st Mosquito 477 Special AI test 1hr.25 Daytime

June 1st Mosquito 477 Special AI test 1hr.50 Night Flight

June 5th Mosquito 477 NFT 0hr.50 Daytime

June 5th Mosquito 477 D Day patrol 3hr.25 Night Flight