

From a newspaper clipping in the family scrapbook:

## **I WENT BOMBING A P-PLANE WOOD**

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A Mitchell Bomber Station, Tuesday

This afternoon I looked down on one of the lairs of Gobebels's "Hell-hound." I was flying in a Mitchell medium bomber. Our mission was to smash up another of the well concealed installations from which the pilotless planes are being launched across the channel.

A flight over a similar target yesterday afternoon had proved abortive. Cloud was piled up to a height of nearly 16,000 ft. over the target, and we had to return to base with bombs unreleased. But today we took off in brilliant weather.

As we taxied to the runway in "U" for Uncle, the navigator, Flt-Lt. H. Rees, who made one of the first attacks on a "secret installation" last November showed me our target. In the first box

On the map it looked far from sinister - a small green strip - a nameless wood. It had already received a pasting this morning and the crew of "U" for Uncle knew all about the neighbouring flak concentrations.

As we crossed the English Channel my pilot, Flying Officer Donald Stevenson, of Australia. told me over the intercom.: "We are in the first box. There is plenty of flak and we might have a rough trip." I was also told that it might be difficult to see much of the target.

Now through the heat haze I glimpsed on the horizon the dark line of the French coast. Higher on the starboard side another squadron of Mitchells was heading over a second rocket bomb "hide-out" south west of ours.

### **Over port wing**

With visibility only slightly marred by the haze we crossed over the coast-line, over fields, forests and villages, in which no movement was discernable. I was reminded of the 200-mile stretch of France I had looked down on a few weeks ago - a dead land.

The navigator rouse me from the fruitless game of "I spy."

"Target over the port wing," he said.

I saw a narrow wood about half a mile long. Afterwards I was showed an enlarged photograph of the target.

The mounting platform was located in the southern sector of the wood, and the hut from which the "Hell-hounds" are directed on their mission of destruction. Now we were going in to bomb. "Bomb doors open." I looked about the starboard side.

"Here we go," and from the two Mitchells behind us I saw two neat clusters of eight 500-pounders drop into seemingly leisurely fashion to their goal.

### **Flak too high**

In the co-pilot's seat it was impossible to see the bomb bursts, and now I was on the look-out for flak. It came but not for us. Gazing back over the starboard wing I saw the second box of six Mitchells circling beneath a cluster of black puffs.

As I watched, our air gunner, Flt. Sgt. J. Finch, began a lively commentary over the inter-com. "It's coming up now," he shouted, "there it goes, miles too high. They haven't a clue. Now their getting the range. One poor chap's flying on his own\*. Their after him all right."

I saw a lone Mitchell that had dropped from formation surrounded by the sinister black smudges. By now the sky over the target was thickly dotted with floating shell-bursts and the Mitchells, with the straggler well behind, were forging through the rain of fire for home. They got through, some of them holed, but all able to land.

In one of the six Mitchells, I later learned, another passenger-observer was flying - Ernest Hemmingway\*\*, author of "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

His plane was twice hit. But for a Spanish Civil War Veteran, the experience cannot have been alarming.

Grounded again, the navigator, who had a clear view of the target, told me that the wood showed clear signs of previous bombing. Trees were felled all around the mounting platform and huts.

Two gun sites were known to be in the wood as protection, but a deceptive course had evidently taken gunners by surprise.

Bombing results are believed to have been satisfactory. The wood was well straddled — and already today it has been battered by 64,000 lbs. of bombs.

Another "Hell-hound" lair had been smashed up.

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Jim's comment on this page in 1989 in answer to questions :

Our plane was the one mentioned as being knocked out of formation. Hot "Do."

(\*) " Yes, our plane was knocked out of formation by flak. When that happened the Germans concentrated on the lone plane & hammered the hell out of us. We lost one engine and had two hundred holes all over the kite - some big enough so you could stick your head through.

(\*\*) Yes, that was the flight where I was wounded and awarded the 'Wound Gold Stripe'. It's like a 'Purple Heart Medal' that the USA gives wounded servicemen, and yes, Ernest Hemingway was our passenger.

He was a nervous wreck but we didn't have to 'knock him out and tie him up' . . . The capt gave him a stern talking to and we told him to just sit tight and keep his mouth shut. As you can imagine we were busy as hell and his 'yapping' was a pain in the ass.