



Report of Stirling Aircraft No. W7564T which crash landed 11th September 1942

Author Sergeant I J Edwards DFM

Crew

Pilot	Flying Officer JP Trench DSO
Navigator	Pilot Officer CL Selman DFC
Wireless Operator	Sergeant I J Edwards DFM
Front Gunner	Sergeant FA Thorpe
Mid Upper Gunner	Flight Sergeant R Jenner
Rear Gunner	Pilot Officer WN Glendenning
Engineer	Sergeant H Mallot

We thought that all our trips would be easy and up to the 11th we had only met one enemy fighter and he did not get anywhere, but this trip was different.

It was the first time that we had had a crew change. Up to then we were one of the few crews of the squadron that were all single. We came back from a short leave to find that the navigator had got himself married without telling anybody. However he was back for trip 18.

Our aircraft having had a big engine change, we went off to bomb a town on the Rhine called Dusseldorf. We had been there before. The Rhine trips were fairly short, usually about two hours in duration. We took off at 8.20pm in fairly good weather. The trip out was uneventful and as the visibility was good the bomb aimer was not long before he was closing up and we were headed for home. We had a few close bangs but nothing too close or so we thought. The engineer came on the intercom to tell the pilot that the port inner appeared to be losing oil pressure and that if it went much lower then it would be advisable to feather it. This was a fairly normal procedure as the engine would be un-feathered for a landing with all four engines in working order.

The pilot then went through the drill for closing down the port inner engine but was soon back on the intercom to say that the drill was not working. It was decided that the engine would have to go out and so we watched it destroy itself.

We had lost one of the engine before but never an inboard one. It was fairly easy to keep an eye on it as the reduction gear for the airscrew was just outside the wireless operators window. What happened in these cases was that the whole radial engine would overheat and finally seize up. This in turn would cause the propeller to shear off. The base of the airscrew was inside a heavy casing that also contained the reduction gear for changing the pitch of the propeller blades. This casing soon started to glow red and then to melt and drip down like





melting fat, which then disappeared in the slipstream of the aircraft. A sharp crack meant that it had come adrift and had sailed up over the fuselage and off into the 'blue'.

The relief of losing it without doing any other damage was soon changed as the whole of the port wing now commenced to shake up and down violently. In the Stirling the inboard arc of the propeller was behind the arc of the outer one and the two were overlapped. We concluded that the inner propeller had clipped the outer one as it detached itself and so unbalanced the whole of the aircraft, as now all the power was on one side of the aircraft.

I was called forward to go to the 2nd pilots seat to help the skipper hold control as the Stirling was fully dual control and could be flown from either seat. We managed to hold the direction, but the height was very poor and climbing the aircraft was impossible. Our position was to worsen as suddenly the vibration stopped and it was realised that the whole outer power plant had gone. The new danger was that we were now using fuel at an alarming rate as the two remaining engines now had to be used at full power. The makers' recommendations were that they were not to be used in this condition for more than 30 minutes. To get us home safely it would have to be a lot longer than that.

The engineer and the rest of the crew commenced to get rid of any of the excess weight. This meant off-loading all the guns and ammunition. This may sound a crazy thing to do but as the turrets were hydraulically operated and the guns were also fed and fired hydraulically and with the hydraulic pump being driven off the port inboard engine they were now useless. So it was all scattered along the route from the Rhur to the mouth of the Schledt.

We crossed the coast at zero feet and were now on the last haul back to GB without hydraulics. We would also have no brakes and the undercarriage was dead. Martlesham Heath near Ipswich had a long runway and the gear for crash landing so we set course for there.

The engineer was having trouble with the fuel as it was being burnt on the starboard side of the aircraft and most of the fuel was now in the port tanks and had now to be transferred across the wing to the starboard side. It was going to be a close run thing as to whether we would run out of fuel before even reaching land!

The navigator suggested a change of course, which would take us nearer to the coast. It worked and the low coastline came into view. We soon realised that we had more trouble as the balloon barrage at Ipswich was up and also we were too low to cross the coast without climbing. We would have to put the plane down where we could.





All the crew went to crash stations and the escape hatches were opened. The first attempt had to be changed a bit sharp as we were going straight into a village. We managed to lift over that but then lost one of the remaining two engines.

We made it to a stubble field and ran our nose into a little copse. The navigator was out and trying to get the pilot out of the escape hatch but he was unconscious and still connected by his oxygen pipe and intercom to the aircraft. We got those loose and then sat there like three stupid owls on the canopy. One shout of fire was enough to bring back to reality. We all slid off the canopy forgetting that we were some twelve feet off the ground and in this case sitting in a hawthorn that we soon found.

Having got out of that we ran into the arms of the Home Guard who we had to convince of our nationality.

The rear gunner had been blown out when the fire started and was being looked after at the local railway station. The local police had now taken over and an ambulance soon took the badly burned rear gunner to hospital. The remaining four of us were taken to the local pub where we were fed and watered before being bedded down for the rest of the night. In the morning we were given breakfast before being collected and returned to base.

