

## PEENEMUNDE

The morning of 17<sup>th</sup> August 1943 was bright and warm, a good English summer day. It was also in the middle of the full moon period so the likelihood of 'ops' that night was far removed from our minds. It was with considerable surprise to see a 'battle order' issued later that morning. It was not to be the only surprise that day. We were later to learn that the C-in-C was to be present at the briefing and that there was no pre Nav briefing when we did our flight plans, etc prior to the main briefing. The rest of the day was spent undertaking the normal activities prior to operations.

When we reported for briefing there was 'Bomber Harris' looking every bit the pugnacious man he was reputed to be, and to a nineteen year old, awesome. The briefing started with the C-in-C ordering everyone not connected with the operation to leave the briefing room. That done the curtains covering the large wall map were drawn apart there were puzzled looks all round as the red route marker was virtually straight across the North Sea to a small peninsula on the Northern coast of Germany. Many thoughts were why there and what was there. More surprises were to come; we were to bomb from 6000ft (very low for us at the time) and the bomb loads were not the mix we normally carried but were either primarily HE or incendiary. Furthermore there was to be a Master Bomber who would direct the operation over the Target. At no time during the briefing were we told why this target. But the briefing concluded with Sir Arthur Harris telling us the target was of national importance and had to be destroyed and that if we did not knock it out that night we would be back the next night and following nights until it was. With that he wished us good luck and left.

My crew, WO Bill Walker's, took off at 2130hrs and set course on a night that was getting brighter and brighter, a nice night for flying but not necessarily for flying due East. As we neared the target we started our descent to 6000ft and turned South to attack from the North. We were in the third wave and the Master Bomber was in full flow telling the crews which marker flares to line up on. On the bombing run it was a new experience to hear German ordnance exploding outside the aircraft but we were lucky as we did not sustain any damage. What was discouraging though to hear the Master Bomber telling crews to ignore many of the marker flares that were being dropped. It seemed that the whole raid was in a bit of a shambles. We left the target area and climbed back to 20000ft on our way home, another long straight leg in brilliant moonlight. I took some time out on this leg and stood in the astrodome and unfortunately saw a couple of aircraft shot down. We landed back at Ludford at 0455hrs and after de-briefing to bed, when I really was convinced we would be back the following night. It was with some relief to wake up later to hear that the raid had been a success and that there would be no return trip. It later transpired that whilst the main airfield area had not been knocked out bomb creep had virtually destroyed the living area with a resultant loss of vital workers on the flying bomb project. It was considered that the raid put back the flying bomb attacks on the UK by some 12 months.

As a crew we had an uneventful trip; our test was to come the following month over Hannover.