



NIGHT FIGHTER ATTACK

MY EXPERIENCE

LEN JACKSON

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|---------------------|-------------------------|
| DATE: | FEBRUARY 21 1945 |
| AIRCRAFT: | LANCASTER PH-H |
| PILOT: | F.O. BIRD |
| DUTY: | REAR GUNNER |
| OPERATION: | DUISBERG |
| FLYING TIME: | 6:30 NIGHT |

Bomb aimer Sam called out "bombs away", immediately "Dickey" Bird (pilot) called back over the inter-com "full throttle", turning to a course for home.

Doing my bit as tail-gunner, moving my turret from left to right, (officially) port to starboard one hundred eighty degrees, my eyes glued to the skies for the possible attack from the ever-present German night fighter. This particular sky was; as I recall about 8/10 cloud, which was lit up at times like day. The targeted area especially spurted – searchlights – exploding bomb flashes – flac – fire – smoke etc. I always thought the scene to be in the middle of a super grand fireworks display.

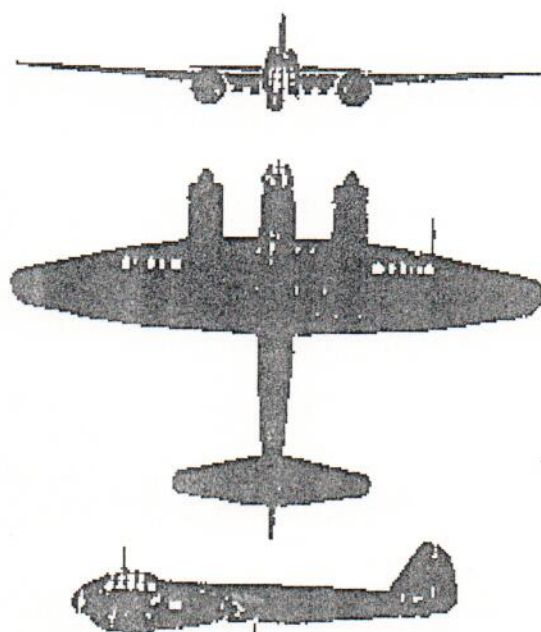
Seemed about five minutes after dropping our bomb load. I spotted a fighter, about 500 yards to my left, slightly above level on a parallel course. I moved my turret and four guns to line up the enemy, and began to pray "please God don't let him come after us". Just then he banked his Ju 88 night fighter loaded with 8 cannons and 12 guns, following a curve towards us. All my training for that moment was lost to me as I froze.

Following is what action plan we took and what resulted all in less than 2 minutes. Seconds seemed like hours. "Oh God he's coming for us" (to myself). Holding fire, leading him as he closes to a range of 300 yards. I opened fire – tracers were too far in front – I adjusted – he was now dead astern and closing. I opened my inter-com, "enemy-corkscrew port-go!". I opened fire again point blank, enemy closing 400, 300, 200 feet. I was terrified, again I screamed, "enemy-corkscrew port-go!". My pilot, "Dickey Bird" got the message – (the terror in my voice – the noise and smell and vibration from my guns blazing). Dickey dropped our plane like a bullet in a violent manoeuvre to port. The Ju 88 now opened fire. The evasive move by Dickey threw me to the top of my turret, my knees hit the servo feed levers causing 4 guns to jam. 88 cannon fire – great balls of fire – and gun shells – tracers all accurately heading my way – shells hit – bullets hit. We were sprayed from port underside (6 feet back of my turret) on through to starboard knocking out outer and inner engines. I could hear our pilot instructing Jeff (our engineer) to shutdown starboard outer, which was by now on fire. Pilot was fighting to corkscrew while 2 engines were down on one side, the tail plain had been damaged, steering and control became almost impossible. Jeff and Dickey somehow got fires under control and began to limp our way to base.

Meanwhile back in my turret, not knowing my oxygen had been shot out, I became oxygen starved. What happened to me then can not be verified, but I remember it this way. First, as we came to the top of the corkscrew the 88 was waiting. With my guns jammed, I broke off strips of ammo, flinging them out of the opening at the 88. Next I remember leaving my turret to sit on the Elson (chemical toilet) staring at the large hole from the cannon shell on port side under tail plane and all the holes sprayed on starboard side of the aircraft which was where the engines were knocked out. As I sat there, who should appear, armed with emergency oxygen bottle? Yes, it was Engineer, Jeff. He and Dickey Bird had been calling crew. I was the only one not answering. They feared that I had been a casualty. Jeff hooked me up and I returned to my turret where I continued my search, giving thanks to God for pulling us through.

The landing at base was scary, petrol fumes, only 2 engines. Fire trucks and an ambulance were waiting. However Dickey and Jeff did all the right things and we landed safely. We all cleared the wounded bird with much haste, in case of fire, explosion etc. All was quiet as we boarded the crew lorry heading to the de-briefing and breakfast.

Next day we went out to see the damage. The aircraft looked to be a write-off. Two days later we were back in the air, off to "Phorlime" – Lancaster PH-N.



Ju 88 – bomber, dive bomber, night fighter