

Letters from Patrick Cramer to his wife, included in "Patrick's Story". From Berenice 9 June 2023.

MISSIONS OVER EUROPE

ST NAZAIRE, WESTERN FRANCE

German U-Boat Pen

28th/29th March 1943

The major operation this night was over Berlin. A selected number of Lancasters were diverted to St Nazaire. Patrick's crew of five Aussies: Ryan, Gentle, Rose and Stringer, plus two other crew – the Flight Engineer and Mid-Upper Gunner (probably RAF men) headed for St Nazaire where the Loire River empties into the Bay of Biscay.

...we were caught in spotlights at 17,000ft and Jerry gave us hell for a few minutes. Finally we fell out control for 6000ft and I gave up the job as useless. Marty got us on a level keel again just in time. The fall really saved us, for when we came out of it, we were free of the lights again.

Flattening out, I saw the next plane on the target get caught also by the same light. He was not so lucky. I watched him burst into flames and crash onto the grasslands just behind the beach. Fighters came up to us then, and I had the guns trained on a Messerschmitt but Marty put our nose down and went into a wild evasive action that did not stop until we were half way across the Channel. We had a quiet week then until April 3rd....

ESSEN: NORTH WESTERN GERMANY

Major armaments manufacture

3rd/4th April 1943

Anti-aircraft fire over Essen that night was reported as the heaviest ever seen. Searchlights tracked the bombers in "cones" of thirty lights apiece. Airmen described Essen as everyone's nightmare.

...when we went over Essen to do up Krups. What would Jack & Arthur do for a sight of a 4000lb bomb dropping on that joint? Just as we got to the target, our communication system went haywire for an awful minute. That shook us! Marty straightened up for the run in and Cliff went to his "eggs". Just as he got there we were coned in the big master searchlights and then "flak" flew past. Two bursts took away our ailerons and we promptly went into a dive straight for the ground. Marty yelled to us to jump and I swung the turret around so that I could get a hold of my "chute". The darn XZ?O thing came off its hook and fell in to the darkness of the fuselage. Wow! Panic! I'll say! However, I got to it again, tore off my helmet and turned the turret around so that I could lean outside and put the "chute" on. The slipstream of 300mph caught me and tore me out of the turret but fortunately I had both feet securely hooked inside and I hung on, trying to adjust the "chute" before letting go. The wind had other ideas and I had to stand a belting from the flapping "chute".

I gave the job up and had a lovely few minutes getting a hand on the door. One could almost hear the Nazis below, demanding their money back when I did once more regain my seat. Once again I swung the turret so that I could get into the fuselage and jump from the side door, but I thought I may be too late as I was under the impression that we were still falling fast. Now as I had no helmet I was without oxygen and that makes one feel very inebriated at a good height, which we still were, with the result that I was too stupid to remember how to open it and collapsed for what I thought was the final time.

I woke up later to find Cliff Stringer (Dalby) filling me up with oxygen and saying we were on an even keel again. I made a dive for the turret but as I they thought I was not fully recovered, the boys would not let me go so I started to argue with Marty on the intercom system.

Looking out I saw that both ailerons were gone and I did not want to take Marty's mind off the job, so I stopped arguing. Well that little champion took us away over the heavy "flak" of the Dutch coast, the North Sea, and put us down by a miracle on a grassy slope in Kent. For that job he has been recommended for a DFM and deserves a bagful of VCs.

An Aussie "winker" who saw the wreck that was once "our plane" stared in wonder at it and said "Good God man, do you mean to say you flew that thing from Essen?" I said "Don't blame me. That's your man lounging over there like a tramp with a fag dangling in his mouth". Marty saw him coming and bolted for he had lost 3 tunic buttons!!!

Well, I am still here anyway. Today the boys have gone away without me and I feel very lonely. I have just had another operation on my toe and the MO has barred me from flying for the night. I am not going to do any more anyway. My next lot will be against the Japs I hope, after I spend some leave home. Wish me luck.

And let me tell you that my horsey days are gone for good. I put five shillings on a horse last August in Bournemouth and that was my only bet. It happened to be the St Leger Stakes, a big race here.