

Please check against broadcast

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Air Ministry Bulletin No. 6237

COLD RAID ON EMDEN

Following is script of broadcast in 6 o'clock news tonight by the rear gunner of a Hampden bomber in a recent raid on Emden:

to be
Cold may not sound to you one of the worst dangers which a bomber crew has to face; but in some ways it is. It's cold on a different scale to anything you experience on the ground: cold that bites at you: that attacks your will power: that makes you physically and mentally incapable of doing anything.

Naturally our bombers have heating systems. Hot air from the engine is blown on to you down a sort of thing that looks like a speaking tube. But the other night no sooner had we taken off than we found that our heating systems had packed up. There was nothing else wrong with the aircraft. Peter - that's our pilot - didn't say anything about going back. So we set course and carried on. But it meant six hours of cold that would take a bit of living through.

These Hampdens are grand aircraft: but they are a bit cold at times, and the coldest place in them happens to be where the rear gunner - that's me - has to sit. I'm in a sort of bulge which looks like a coal scuttle - we call it the tin - which sticks out from the bottom of the aircraft, at the back under the tail.

The flight out to Emden was quite uneventful: just cold: and then getting colder and colder as we gained height. It was a lovely clear night and we soon found our target - our navigator doesn't make mistakes. There was about the usual amount of flak, but it didn't worry us. As a matter of fact that was a bad sign.

It was the cold: there were about 65 degrees of frost up there over Emden: that amount of cold begins to make you indifferent. You feel the pain of it - but in a way you don't even mind that much. We did a nice run up, our navigator got his sights on, and down went our bombs. I had to look out for the flashes - I saw them too - and also to throw out my incendiaries. I always take a few extra incendiaries with me in my scuttle, even when we have a full load of H.E. bombs - just for luck. The back of the tin was made of this perspex stuff and it opens, rather like a sash window except that it's on the curve. You have to pull out a catch and then push the perspex window up.

/Well

Well I got it open all right. That brought a blast of air at 65 degrees of frost in at me. Then I had to fuse my incendiaries. It's rather a niggling little job - pulling out a pin and getting your fingers into a little wire loop. My big outside gloves had to come off, of course. But I pulled the thin ones off too, to try and get the job done quickly.

This was a mistake. The moment my fingers touched the metal they went dead and powerless. It's a nasty sensation. I couldn't even begin to fuse those bombs. Then I realised I couldn't possibly work my guns either. I guessed the wireless operator was in the same boat, and he was, too. So I knew that if a night fighter came for us we were helpless.

There was nothing to be done about it though. So I tried to get my gloves on again, but I found I couldn't. I must say I thought that meant that my hands would be gone. Then I realised that the perspex was still open: that was why I was freezing up so quickly. I began to fumble with the catch to get it shut.

For a long time I couldn't get any kind of grip on it. Then I knelt on my guns to get more purchase. The movement must have stirred me up enough to realise that if I didn't get the perspex shut I was done for: no one could stand for hours with it open. I got one of my bent fingers round the catch and it came out. Now the curved perspex should push down shut. I heaved at it. It stuck. I heaved again. It was frozen fast. But the exertion was waking me up. I went on fighting it.

You know how maddening it is when some gadget won't work. My life may have depended on my making this one work. I just went on heaving; then I tried to jerk it. Nothing happened. I couldn't think of anything else to do. I just went on at it. Then suddenly it shut.

I had been fighting it for 20 minutes. After that it wasn't so bad. I still couldn't get my gloves on. But I worked my hands back into my sleeves and that saved them. Then Peter brought us down lower and lower so that it got less cold. We'd found the target and bombed it and we all got back none the worse.