

1/6/42 - No.27

Air Ministry Bulletin No.7148

The following will be given after the 9 o'clock news tonight by a Flying Officer who was bomb aimer in a Lancaster which was one of a thousand and more bombers which attacked Cologne on the night of May 30.

The dykes, the towns, and sometimes even the farmhouses of Holland - we could see them all clearly as we flew towards Cologne soon after midnight on Sunday morning. The moon was to our starboard bow and straight ahead there was a rose coloured glow in the sky. We thought it was something to do with the searchlight belt which runs for about 200 miles along the Dutch German frontier. But as we flew through this belt - we saw by the light of blue searchlights some friendly aircraft going the same way as ourselves and a few coming back - the glow still ahead.

It crossed my mind then that it might be Cologne. But we decided between us that it was too bright a light to be so far away. The navigator checked his course - it could only be Cologne. It looked as though we would be on our target in a minute or two and we opened our bomb doors.

We flew on. The glow was as far away as ever. We closed the bomb doors again. The glare was still there like a huge cigarette and in the German blackout.

Then we flew into the smoke. Through it the Rhine appeared a dim silver ribbon below us. The smoke was drifting in the wind. We came in over the fires.

Down in my bomb aimer's hatch I looked at the burning town below me. I remembered what had been said at the briefing. "Don't drop your bombs," we were told, "on the buildings that are burning best. Go in and find another target for yourself." Well, at last I found one right in the most industrial part of the town. I let the bombs go. We had a heavy load of big high explosive and hundreds of incendiaries. The incendiaries going off were like sudden platinum coloured flashes which slowly turned to red. We saw their many flashes going from white to red and then our great bomb burst in the centre of them.

As we crossed the town there were burning blocks to the right of us while to the left the fires were immense. There was one after the other all the way. The flames were higher than I had seen before. Buildings were skeletons in the midst of fires: sometimes you could see what appeared to be frame-works of white hot joists.

The blast of the bombs was hurling walls themselves across the flames. As we came away we saw more and more of our aircraft below us, silhouetted against the flames. I identified Wellingtons, Halifaxes, Manchesters, and other Lancasters. Above us there were still more bombers lit by the light of the moon. Then we set course for home knowing that Cologne had been well and truly bombed.