

17/6/42 - No. 35

BROADCAST BY FLIGHT LIEUT. GATWARD

Following is the text of a broadcast after the 6 p.m. news by Flight Lieutenant Gatward, who flew over Paris in a Coastal Command Beaufighter :-

I'd never been to Paris before, but it looked exactly as I imagined it would - we studied a lot of guide books and photographs before we set out.

We flew very low all the way across to avoid attack, and saw masses of horses in the fields. The Beaufighter is pretty quiet and we didn't disturb the horses and the cattle over much, but we took some photographs of them. - Some of the horses were rearing up as we came over the fields, and one of them was a white horse and you can almost see the whites of his eyes in our picture. We could see the Eiffel Tower when we were 30 or 40 miles from Paris, which helped out with the navigation because we were much too low to have a look at Paris from above. But it was a very nice day - plenty of sun and we could see quite easily where we were going. We took a bearing from the Eiffel Tower and came in smack over the Defence Monument, and then headed straight for the Arc de Triomphe. I said to Sergeant Fern, my observer, "are you ready with the first flag?" And he said, "Yes I'm ready all right but the slip-stream is nearly breaking my arm." He was pushing this furled flag down a flare shoot into the slip-stream from the propellers, and at the right moment he let her go.

We'd experimented quite a bit with the flags before we started, and they were both weighted and folded so that they'd stream as soon as they were released. However, we couldn't stop to see exactly where the first dropped, But Vichy says it fell right on the tomb of the unknown warrior, which is, of course, just where you'd want it to be.

One of the things we wanted to look at particularly was the Ministry of Marine, because it was crammed with Huns, and we had something for them. We spotted that quite easily and turned north towards the Opera House, and then out again. On this first circuit the people in the streets didn't seem to pay a great deal of attention to us. Of course there was a certain amount of traffic in the street which may have covered up the noise of our engines, but there wasn't anything like the traffic there is in London, and we saw no motor buses in the Champs Elysees.

We didn't go very far before we turned for our second circuit, and this time we came in as low as we dare in case they had any light Ack-Ack on the roof-tops. Actually I was too busy watching out for chimney pots and steeples to notice any Ack-Ack fire, but Sgt. Fern warned me that some tracer did actually pass close by us, but the aircraft was not hit.

On this second circuit we didn't make quite the same tour. We turned south a bit towards the river so we could come square up to the Ministry of Marine, and we were in line at a range of about five hundred yards before we let fly with our four cannons, and I saw the sparks flying off the building. We hadn't any time to see whether the shells burst inside, but a good deal went through the window. We sprayed the place from base to apex and we only cleared the roof by about five feet. While I was doing this Fern was shouting encouragement and pushing out the second flag which we hoped would fall slap across the front door.

There was much more interest taken in this circuit of ours, and people were running about the streets to have a good look at us, and we noticed one or two faces at the windows actually peering down at us. We saw a number of German military cars stopped in the streets with the Huns standing round them, and others of them were dodging round the trees in the Avenue, but we couldn't let fly at them because there were too many civilians about. Most of the civilians were waving to us. Fern says he saw some German soldiers trying to take cover behind a lorry. One of them was very fat, and he was shaking his fist at us.

I'm sorry I can't tell you any more about our visit to Paris, - it was very short, only five or six minutes - but I'd like to go again with all the photographs we took, and see how it looks with both feet on the ground.

+++++

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION