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BEFORE 0030 B.S.T. (i.e. FOR MORNING PAPERS) ON
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A STIRLING'S LAST JOURNEY

Fighting their way home from a recent big raid on Germany against the heavy odds of only one engine working properly, a Stirling bomber crew crashed just after crossing the English coast.

The plane burst into flames, trapping the rear-gunner in his turret. The front-gunner and the flight-engineer rushed back to save him from the blazing wreckage. They fought their way into the fuselage, but the petrol tank blew up, killing them both.

It was their last act in a heroic struggle to bring the crew and craft back safely.

The Stirling ran into trouble when continuously hit by flak during the bombing run, and after bombing it received further hits. The starboard petrol tank was holed, the port oil pipes severed, and then the port inner propeller flew off, crashing into the mid-upper turret.

Three minutes later the port outer-engine fell right off. Only the two starboard engines remained to keep the Stirling flying, and one was not working to full capacity.

The pilot required help to control the craft, and it came from the wireless operator, who was in the second pilot's seat at the time. It took their combined strength, however, to handle the rudder bar and control-column and keep the big bomber on a more or less even keel. The wireless operator had no time to send out a distress signal.

Behind them, the flight-engineer was working swiftly and deftly to keep the two engines running. In record time, he turned off the cocks to the useless pipe lines.

Not for a moment did he relax his efforts to nurse them all the way home.

Near the Dutch coast, the aircraft had lost height and came down to about 150 feet. The navigator worked out a course to avoid all heavily-defended areas. The captain kept to this course, but to hold their height, the rest of the crew had to collect every movable piece of equipment - guns, parachutes, and ammunition - and jettison it.

With the aircraft so low, they had to be very careful to distribute the weight of this heavy equipment while they were collecting it, so as not to disturb the Stirling's balance. Had this been lost, even for the shortest time, all would have been lost.

At the moment that they crossed the coast of England, the starboard inner-engine began to splutter, and then it cut out.

The pilot had to crash-land at once. He and the wireless-operator were knocked unconscious, but though it was obvious that the Stirling might catch fire at any moment, the navigator went to their help and eventually pulled them clear.

All the crew were away, except the rear-gunner, when the machine burst into flames. He was trapped in his turret. The front-gunner and the flight-engineer went back and sacrificed their lives in an effort to reach him.

He was saved, however, for the mid-upper gunner managed to force his way through a break in the fuselage and drag out the rear-gunner, who was suffering from severe injuries.

The crew's squadron-commander, reporting what had happened, described it as an "outstanding example of the highest courage and determination on the part of the captain and crew, and proof of the team spirit which their captain had instilled into the crew".