

A QUICK AIR SEA RESCUE

Canadian members of a bomber crew turned up at their aerodrome wearing bell-bottom trousers and seamen's blue jerseys. They had been rescued from their dinghy after being afloat for only 90 minutes in the North Sea.

Their aircraft, a Wellington, had been hit by a shell during an attack on Germany, and eventually - when only a few miles from the English coast - had been forced down on the sea through lack of petrol. The shell had burst right under the port wing as the Wellington was making its bombing run, and the port petrol tank was so badly holed that all the fuel leaked out.

"I felt a terrific jolt, and the wing tilted upwards", said the Captain, an ex-schoolmaster from Saskatchewan. "but we carried on with our bombing run, dropped our load, and then headed for home at a greatly reduced speed".

The Captain thinned out the mixture to starvation point, and although the aircraft lost height all the way across the sea, it looked as if the journey would be completed. The engines began to give trouble when the Wellington was only a few miles from the English coast. First the port wing engine cut, and a few minutes later the last drop of fuel was used and the starboard engine died. The aircraft was now about 4,000 feet above the sea.

The captain brought it down through a thin layer of cloud and it struck the water. The dinghy was thrown out, and the rear gunner, whose back had been injured by the landing, was hoisted through the top escape hatch. He was carried by the wireless operator and the navigator along the wing to the dinghy: the rest of the crew had by this time paddled it round. Until the last moment, the wireless operator had remained at his set, tapping out an S.O.S. and giving the position. There was a strong wind blowing, and the sky was just beginning to lighten.

"We felt sure it would not be long before we were picked up", said the Captain, "and it was only an hour and a half before we saw a launch heading for us. It was the best sight I ever saw. Once again the air sea rescue people had done their job".

When the crew reached port, they were given beds, food and hot drinks and later naval clothes to replace their drenched flying kit.

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