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Air Ministry News Service

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WOUNDED PILOT'S ORDEAL

Sitting in a cockpit which had been riddled by flak, a wounded pilot brought his Halifax bomber safely home from Germany after the crew had put out a fire on board.

"S for Sugar" was approaching the target on a recent raid when heavy flak burst just below the aircraft. The Halifax was thrown over on to its back, and the crew pitched violently in all directions.

Flight-Sergeant R.E. Crockett, who comes from Bayswater, London, wrestled with his controls, but the bomber, which was crippled, went into a spin and plunged towards the ground, falling over a mile before the pilot could right it.

When at last he did regain control, Flight-Sergeant Crockett found that both he and his flight-engineer, Sergeant J.A. Duff, of Edinburgh, had been wounded by small fragments of shell. The cockpit in which he sat had been spattered with shell splinters and was holed like a pepper pot.

Then smoke began to appear in front of his instruments: "S for Sugar" was on fire, with all the bombs still aboard. The exploding shell had caused a blaze just forward of the main spar, and all the crew who could be spared tackled it with fire extinguishers.

Meanwhile, Flight-Sergeant Crockett had found a suitable target on which to release the bombs, and it was only then that he realised the extent of the damage. There had been hits in the bomb bay, one of the doors had been wrenched off, and the bomb aimer was able to drop only a small portion of his load.

Flight-Sergeant Crockett turned for home, with the fire still burning and smoke swirling into his cockpit. It became so thick that he could not see his instrument panel, yet, despite his wounds, he stuck at the controls, encouraging the others who were still fighting the blaze.

Only after about ten minutes, when all the extinguishers had been used, was the fire put out. Then, with the smoke gradually clearing from his cockpit, the pilot was able to devote his full attention to bringing the charred and battered bomber back to base. He did the job, and "S for Sugar" settled down on the runway as smoothly as though her crew had been up on a test flight.
