

Air Ministry News ServiceAir Ministry Bulletin No. 5331NAVIGATOR HID HIS WOUNDS

"Everybody O.K.?" asked the pilot of a Beaufort aircraft which had just been hit by a burst of flak off the Norwegian coast on Tuesday.

"Sure," replied the air gunner and wireless operator.

"Quite O.K.," replied the navigator, a young Canadian sergeant, as he got on with his vital job of bringing the aircraft home, through heavy weather across 300 miles of sea.

Not until an hour later did anybody else in that aircraft discover that the navigator had been severely wounded in the leg and would not admit it until his job was done.

The Beaufort from an R.A.F. Coastal Command Squadron had just hit a German supply ship with a torpedo off the south-west coast of Norway, the fourth ship to be hit by Coastal Command aircraft in that area since noon that day.

The torpedo struck the ship, a medium sized vessel, which belched a great column of smoke from amidships, but a companion vessel opened fire on the Beaufort as it turned away, hitting it with a burst of shell splinters in the nose, where the navigator sits.

The navigator, wounded though he was, assured his captain that he had not been wounded, then he set about the task of navigating the aircraft home.

A shell splinter had shot away the light above his table. Splinters of glass had tattered his log and shattered some of his instruments.

He could not see to work out a course to take the Beaufort home, so he crawled back with his charts, concealing his injury, and made some calculations by the dim light by the radio set. Then he passed the course up to the captain.

They flew for an hour on that course, through very bad weather. Without the navigators' work they could never have reached safety.

Then the pilot heard the navigator quietly cursing to himself. He asked him what was the matter.

"Oh nothing," replied the navigator, "except that that damn flak has ruined a perfectly good pair of trousers."

"Are you wounded?" asked the pilot suspiciously.

"Only just a scratch," was the answer.

They flew on through the stormy night. The pilot himself was having trouble. When the aircraft had been hit, some of his instruments had been smashed, including the airspeed indicator and the automatic pilot, and the glass from the petrol gauge had blown out and struck him so sharply on the knee that he thought at first he had been hit by a bullet. Nevertheless, he brought the aircraft safely to its base over 300 miles of sea, and landed with such skilful judgment that he did not have to use his brakes.

They helped the navigator out of the aircraft, and took him to hospital.

Only then was it discovered that there were three separate wounds in his leg, which was also lacerated by numerous cuts.

The navigator is comfortably in hospital now, very cheerful, and much readier to talk about the ship they torpedoed, and left with a 50-foot column of smoke amidships, than of his own part in bringing the damaged aircraft safely home.