

HEADQUARTERS 306TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)  
Office of the Commanding Officer

A.F.O. 634,  
18 March 1943.

SUBJECT: Operations Report.

TO: Commanding General, Headquarters, First Bombardment Wing, APO 634.

(In compliance with Memorandum, Headquarters, First Bombardment Wing, dated 21 February 1943, the following report is submitted.)

1. Narrative of Mission.

At 1139 hours on 18 March 1943, twenty (20) aircraft of 306th Bombardment Group (H) began taking off. The Group was airborne at 1150 hours and assembled in the usual formation of "V's" over base. The lead Squadron of seven (7) aircraft echeloned to the right at base altitude, the right Squadron of six (6) aircraft echeloned to the right and low, and the left Squadron of seven (7) aircraft echeloned to the left and high, composed the Group formation. Rendezvous of the 101st Provisional Combat Wing was accomplished at Bassingbourne at 1210 hours with the 91st Bombardment Group (H) leading. Proceeding on course the 101st Provisional Combat Wing assembled with the 102nd Provisional Combat Wing between Peterborough and Burham Market at 8,000 feet and the First Bombardment Wing crossed the English Coast out five (5) miles west of Cromer with the 102nd Provisional Combat Wing leading at 1302 hours. The formation flew out into the North Sea to a point 54-28N, 03-46E where a right turn was made at 1358 hours. At a point 54-01N, 05-00E a left turn was made at 1421 hours, the Group having climbed to 18,000 feet. Arriving at 54-32N, 06-39E at 1447 hours another right turn was made at 25,000 feet. The formation crossed the German Coast in at 1520 hours at 28,000 feet and arrived at Bederkesa, the I.P. at 1526 hours still maintaining 28,000 feet. Turning right, and dropping 100 feet the Group made the bombing run and successfully bombed the primary target at Vegesack at 1533 hours. Leaving the target, the formation made a wide right turn, passed over Lake Zwischenahner at 1541 hours, crossed the German Coast out over Juist Island at 1555 Hours at 26,000 feet. At 1610 hours a left turn was made still at 26,000 feet and descent began. The English Coast was recrossed at 1700 hours at 5,500 feet and the Group proceeded to base via King's Lynn, landing at 1725 hours.

Track Chart Enclosed.

2. Bombing.

95 one-thousand pound G.P. bombs were released over the primary target, the submarine yards and power station at Vegesack, Germany from an altitude of 27,900 feet at 1533 hours. Formation bombing technique was employed on an axis of 195° with wind of 110° at 65 miles per hour.

Weather over the target was good with a slight ground haze. Results of bombing are believed to be very good with direct hits observed in the target area and on the island itself. One aircraft brought back four (4) bombs due to malfunction of intervalometer and one aircraft brought back one (1) bomb due to a faulty release.

Bombing Plot Enclosed.

Annotated Photographs-forwarded to First Bombardment Wing.

3. Abortives.

There were no abortions by any aircraft of this Group on this mission.

4. Air Combat

a. Enemy Tactics.

Fighter opposition was first encountered near the Island of Heligoland by 20 - 25 ME 110's and 2 JU 89's. Attacks were made from all angles, nose attacks predominating. They continued inland to the target, and back to the German Coast. From there about 20 or 25 FW 190's took up the fight and continued it a considerable distance out to sea. Despite a running fight of approximately 40 minutes duration, there was only one minor wound, and one slightly damaged aircraft in the Group.

b. Our Tactics.

The gunnery on this mission was exceptionally good with many attacks repulsed. Our usual method of fire control was employed, each gunner having been assigned an area of fire to cover prior to take-off. Gunners called out the angle of attack by the clock method. Nose gun installations again proved their effectiveness. Our Group claims seven (7) enemy aircraft destroyed.

c. Armament Failures.

(1) Ball Turret Solenoids on Aircraft No.'s 42-5720 and 42-29498 failed at high altitude. Both of these turrets also leaked oil and it is evident that they need heavier gaskets.

(2) Several miscellaneous failures were reported among which were, weak firing pin, poor location of ammunition cans causing heavy feed, ruptured cartridge case in chamber, and broken cocking lever.

(3) Five (5) waist guns, two (2) radio guns, two (2) tail guns, one (1) ball turret gun, and one (1) upper turret gun were not operational due to freezing.

(4) Freezing of guns was the most common malfunction reported. This can only be accounted for by the extremely low temperature encountered, plus the interval of time between the initial test firing and the actual operation of the guns. All guns were wiped free of oil prior to take-off.

(5) Some gunners complained of inferior ammunition.

d. Suggested changes in our tactics or equipment.

The majority of turret gunners have experienced a desire to replace the Sperry Computing Sight with the British Reflector Mark III A Sight. This unit has been installed as an experiment by this Group and has proven very successful. However, orders from Headquarters, First Bombardment Wing prohibit this change.

5. Flak.

Flak was first encountered to the right of Bremerhaven but was light and inaccurate. On approach to the target area a series of heavy barrages were encountered which were fairly accurate but due to excellent evasive action, no lethal hits were scored on our formation. Heavy barrages were shot up from Emden on the way out but these did no damage.

6. Communications.

a. Procedure employed.

Correct procedure was employed throughout, command being used for passing orders with good results.

b. Navigational Aids.

Splasher Beacons No. 5 and 6 were used for homing by four (4) aircraft with good results. Four (4) aircraft used Multi-Group beacons with good results up to 350 miles. One navigator obtained a radio-fix while near Bremen, using Beacons B and C.

c. Radio Discipline.

No breaches of radio discipline were reported on this mission.

d. Equipment failures.

A few minor failures of equipment were reported, namely; two microphone switches and ball turret interphone went out, the command antenna of one ship was shot off, and the nose jack box cuts out on interphone system on another. All have been repaired except the jack box which is being checked. In general, the command equipment worked very well. VHF noise level was reported to be medium to high.

e. Remarks.

Three (3) radio operators reported jamming of wing frequency at the German Coast with severe static. Radio Operator T/Sgt. C.F. FEHR, 368th Bombardment Squadron (H), in aircraft No. 41-24507 did a fine job in using command set as interphone after the latter failed. He worked on the equipment almost continuously and through his efforts a satisfactory interphone system was devised.

7. Other equipment failures.

As on previous missions there was considerable supercharger trouble, some being erratic and some lagging. The engine used excessive oil, one oxygen system did not function properly, and one aircraft had its flaps fall down due to a faulty control gear. This last has been replaced. One bomb-sight froze, two intervalometers were slow in warming up, and one set of bomb-bay doors froze. Much of this trouble was due to excessive cold at this high altitude. All malfunctions have either been remedied or are now being checked.

#### 8. Battle Damage.

Battle damage resulting from this mission was limited to one aircraft which had a push rod cover of No. 9 cylinder on No. 4 engine damaged by flak. This was repaired within twelve hours.

#### 9. Aircraft down away from base.

All of our aircraft returned safely to home base.

#### 10. General Recommendations and Corrective Action Adopted.

a. The cause of the greatest amount of trouble on this mission was the poor type of formation flown by the two leading Groups. The 91st Group flew a good formation in and of itself but was never in position relative to the 102nd Provisional Combat Wing throughout the flight. It is believed that the reason for this is the poor formation flown by the first two Groups, necessitating the flying of the 91st Group to the left of these Groups rather than in trail and above as ordered. We believe that there is only one way to fly a Group formation, and that is with every ship tucked into a close position from the join-up after take-off throughout the mission, until the peel-off over the home field preparatory to landing. At the time of leaving the English Coast on this mission the 303rd Group resembled nothing so much as a casual gathering of aircraft, according to several observers. The 305th Group was only less casual than the 303rd Group. With ships all over the sky in front of them the 91st Group could not possibly have flown in the correct position. To add to the confusion, the 102nd Provisional Combat Wing was stacked high on the right while the 101st Provisional Combat Wing was stacked high on the left. With proper coordination between Groups this would not have happened.

It must be recognized by higher authority that the present method of flying the First Bombardment Wing formation necessitates the use of 7,000 to 10,000 feet of airspace. It is impossible to fly the formation with less depth, and from this there arises a definite problem in formation flying. On the mission in question it has been computed that with the low or lead Group indicating 160 mph, the high Group indicating 160 mph would have a true airspeed 30 miles per hour faster. Consequently the high Group has the problem of overrunning the lead Group unless the airspeed is cut considerably. The speed can be cut to 150 IAS, but to go slower than that with the bomb load aboard would be courting disaster. Therefore the high Group has to S continuously to keep from overrunning, which makes the wing position even more difficult to fly. Couple this with the added difficulties encountered in working at extreme altitudes, and it is plain that the wing men in the high squadron have quite a workout. The solution may be to step up the cruising speed of the lead Group.

How to deal with a point mentioned previously. The lead Group insisted on remaining at a high altitude for a long time after leaving the German Coast, thereby making the gunners uncomfortable, reducing the efficiency of the bomber aircraft and crew, and uselessly exposing the wing formation to repeated and continued attacks by fighters. This point was brought out strongly in an Operations report, dated 27 February 1943, this Headquarters, and it is evident that the recommendations fell on deaf ears. Knowing that the point was thoroughly discussed in a Wing conference, it is not understood why corrective action was not taken. The advantages of flying home at a lower altitude are obvious and the Wing leader should avail himself of them.

The navigators complained that the time of operation of the Splasher beacons was not changed with the zero hour, and that they were therefore left without proper homing or plotting aids. One navigator used the German radio at Amsterdam to good advantage. Recommendations are again obvious.

One airplane was seen to abort on nearing the German Coast on the way in. This pilot, even though he was in extremely serious trouble, was taking a long chance by his action due to patrols and their use in connection with the RDF grid. Such a risking of crews and equipment does not on the surface seem to have been well thought out.

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Commanding.

- 4 Incls:  
Incl 1 - Bomb Chart.  
Incl 2 - Formation Diagram.  
Incl 3 - Raid Tract Chart.  
Incl 4 - Bombing Flight Record.