

E. Goss

Dear Mr. Goss,

My English was not bad, but your German is better than my English today. Because of that, let me answer in German.

I was very pleased with your letter, also with the things you and your society do. Of course I will report what happened on the 7/8th of March 1943, although it is difficult to give an actual objective report after 35 years. Even shortly after the event, everybody will see it differently, especially when the whole event is crammed into a few moments, and the consequences very incisive. Pilot seriously wounded, navigator wounded, Radio Operator dead, Flight Engineer dead (missing). In 1948, I asked for a report when I had the opportunity to get in touch with my Navigator. I have studied this information again to refresh my memory, in order to give you a precise report.

My crew and myself belonged to 1 Staffel I Gruppe Kampfgeschwader 2. We were stationed at Gilze-Rijen, between Breda and Tilburg in Holland. We were the only Geschwader (81 aircraft Dc217) that flew attacks against England. We were reinforced by a Gruppe of Kampfgeschwader 6 (27 aircraft Ju88). The English defence (nightfighter and AA) was built because of the strong German attacks in the years before. Through war in Russia and North Africa, the German Luftwaffe was widely spread, and the attacks against England were flown by the above mentioned 108 aircraft. Because of heavy losses through the superb English defence, especially the technically very well equipped nightfighters, in general our attacks were flown with not more than 30-60 aircraft.

We were equipped with the Dornier Do 217 E, a very good plane. Its flying quality was first-class. Without bomb-load, one could almost fly a full aerobatic programme with it (Loops upwards, rolls to the right and left, upward circle, downward circle). One could put on. It only fell about 200m. before one again had full control of the steering, there was no falling or stumbling. The plane nose dived very well (without brakes). Our Geschwader code was U5-. My plane was U5-EH.

At 22:58 hrs. on the 7th of March 1943, the aircraft took off in two minute intervals for an attack on Southampton Docks. The attack height was 4000m. It was assumed that the large ships of the English Fleet were docked there. In this case it meant a nose dive attack. We reached the starting position on the French coast 10 minutes early at 1500m. I therefore went on a easterly course and back again on an easterly course, and then from the starting point, I rose up to 4000m, flying on a northerly course. We flew over the English coast and further inland. We wanted to reach Southampton on a southerly course. Suddenly there were sparks in the cockpit and I heard glass breaking. The radio fell out. Between the starboard engine and the fuselage, we could see flames. Now we could see flames coming from the starboard engine. I turned the plane on its head and nose dived to extinguish the flames. The flames got smaller. When I pulled the plane back again, the flames were bigger than before. I couldn't see the plane level, and we flew in a downward curve to the left. The possibility of reaching the French coast was nil, and the danger of an explosion was too great. I gave the order "bale out". My Navigator cut the radio cable on my helmet, otherwise I would have strangled myself.

We assume that we were hit by two shots from nightfighters. That explains the loss of life, the sparks and shattered glass in the cockpit, and on the other hand, the burning wing. What happened afterwards cannot be reported objectively. The fact is my Radio Operator is buried at Chichester, Flight Engineer has never been found (████████████████████). My Navigator was wounded by shrapnel in nose and chin, left hand and left knee. I was seriously wounded with a fractured skull, broken ribs, and a shot through my shin-bone.

When I was hanging on my parachute (how it opened, I do not know), I felt that I was gliding high above the well lit Olympic stadium of Berlin. I was there in 1936, that surely could not be possible. Again I noticed the singing of the parachute before it touched the ground. I had landed in a clearing in the woods. Everytime I regained consciousness, I shouted for help. How long it lasted I don't know.

Suddenly there were soldiers. One of them took off his jacket vest. They poured tea from a flask onto the clothing and cleaned my

"NO READ GLIDE AREA"

"READ "RADIOS & FD TO WORK"

so stained face. I became conscious again in a farm. There I was lying on a retcher and an old man with a lamp and with hair down to his shoulders (that's unusual in those days) rubbed me gently and said, "My dear son, my dear son". I gained consciousness on an operating table in a hospital. I remember saying, does the leg stay on?". The leg stayed on. I got a replacement silver shin.

The hospital was in Bramshot. There were Canadian Troops stationed there, waiting for the invasion of France. I was for them the first war see. That was my luck. The next step for me was Lingfield, near London. It was an interrogation hospital. From there I went to Chepstow at the Bristol Channel. In this POW hospital, I stayed over a year until all my wounds were healed. I found here, not under exactly favourable conditions (medical), many friends among actors and Nurses. Our united Christmas party 1943/44 was an unforgettable event.

I would like very much to take part in the excavation of my lane, but I am not self-employed and cannot take the time off as I wish. My standing vacation of two weeks, I have already booked at the end of August, beginning of September. We go with two other families and my eldest son in the Austrian Alps. We will make some tours equipped with ropes and climbing gear.

My eldest son Klaus-Dieter studies English and sport. He was for a few terms at Leeds University. We have sent him a copy of your letter. I do not think that he can get in touch with you because at the moment he is hiking through Scotland just before returning to Germany for his studies.

I thank you very much for your invitation. My wife and I will visit you for a few days next year, if possible, but we would like to return your invitation. We expect you or your parents at our home when you come to Germany.

With kind regards,

Gunter Vestewig.

1964
JULY 31