THE MYSTERY OF THE CRASH OF JUNKERS JU 88A-14: SERIAL NUMBER 141152 AT ALL CANNINGS, WILTS

14 MARCH 1944.

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MPhil MBBS FRAS FRGS
SEEND, 2022

FLIGHT PATH
OF
JUNKERS JU 88A-14: SERIAL NUMBER 141152



Introduction.

This plane was shot down and crashed near All Cannings on 15 March 1944. Four of the crew bailed out but one died after his parachute failed to open, but was there a fifth crew member?

The background.

In 1944 the allies were preparing for D-Day in June that year. The country as a whole was on full war footing and people, it is probably fair to say, were generally pretty touchy and on edge. It had been a long few years but the Nazis were beginning to realise that they were 'on the back foot'. More locally, Devizes hosted a large POW camp and during the build up to D-Day, materiel was parked along the road to Avebury, as well as there being a large number of RAF stations locally - Alton Barnes, Melksham, Compton Bassett, Yatesbury, Wroughton, Upavon and further away, Membury , Greenham Common, Andover (USAF) and so on. Nearby Aldbourne was a training centre for US paratroopers. Yatesbury and Wroughton were both hospitals, the former specially constructed alongside the existing base [Appendix 1 & 2], which was a training camp for RAF wireless operators. The hospital was built as a temporary structure and staffed by consultant general surgeons, orthopaedic surgeons and anaesthetists in the RAF, many of them RAFVR. The author's father, Squadron Leader Basil Phillips RAFVR (BMP) was a consultant anaesthetist at the hospital from late 1943 until 1945, having been transferred back from Eritrea and North Africa (22 Mobile Field Hospital RAF, 1940-1942) via RAF Hospital Kirkham to staff the hospital in preparation for D-Day. Before D-Day Yatesbury hospital was primarily a general hospital [Appendix 3]. Its medical story seems little known [Appendix 4]. Its existence is proven by:-

Air Ministry publication 'Geographical Index of R.A.F. Units - October 1944 (Amended to SEPTEMBER 23rd 1944)'

Station Hospital
R.A.F. Station Yatesbury
Mailing Address: Yatesbury, Calne, Wilts.
Telegraphic Address:Aeronautics, Yatesbury
Telephone Number: Calne 256

After D-Day it became one of the main casualty clearing hospitals, alongside RAF Wroughton and the Red Cross Hospital at Odstock, near Salisbury. During this time, BMP, his wife and his young son (*SJP - the author*) lived in Etchilhampton after spending a few weeks in Devizes itself while BMP found more permanent accommodation. They lived in Etchilhampton until the cessation of hostilities in Europe.

Unternehmen Steinbock (Operation Steinbock - trans. 'Capricorn').

Background.

By late 1943 the offensive by RAF bomber Command was gathering momentum against Germany with strategic day and night bombing of industrial cities. Hitler was incensed when bombs fell on Berlin and ordered a bombing campaign against the UK in retaliation for the RAF campaign on the city. This operation was designed as a propaganda tool for his own people and was mainly

directed at the London area and was known as the Baby Blitz since it was a much smaller operation than 'The Blitz' of 1940-1941.

The plan.

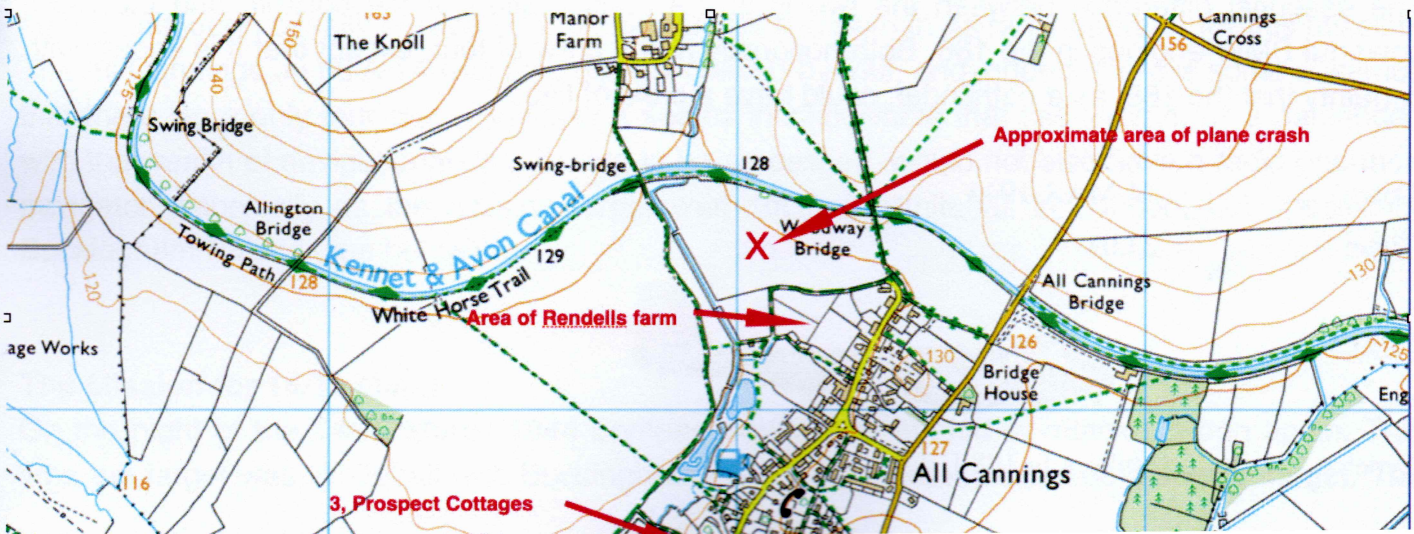
474 bombers were assembled and the operation started in January 1944 and was ended in May the same year. It was, basically, a failure. The Luftwaffe lost 329 planes in the five months of this action (an average of 77 planes per month) before it was abandoned. Ultimately the revenge attacks of Steinbock morphed into attempts to disrupt the preparations for D-Day. However, the strength and powers of Germany's air forces had been so depleted by Steinbock that the Lufwaffe was unable to mount any coherent or effective offensive action on D-Day itself. Steinbock was also the last major bombing offensive against the UK using conventional aeroplanes. Their place was taken by Hitler's *Vergeltungswaffen* ("Vengeance Weapons") - the V1 and V2 rockets.

Junkers Ju 88A-14: Serial number 141152.

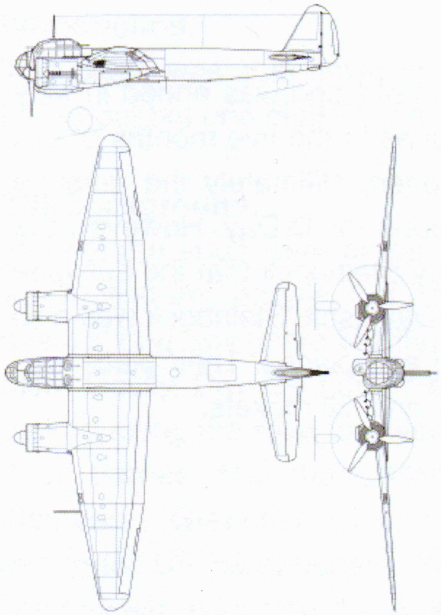
This aeroplane crashed on the night of March 14/15 1944 in a field of Rendells Farm, All Cannings in Wiltshire, between some ponds and the Kennet and Avon Canal. The plane was part of 8./KG 6 Luftwaffe (*8 Staffel/Kampfgeschwader 6: Echelon or Squadron 8 of Bomber Wing 6*) a specialised unit formed between April and September 1942.

The machine itself was a Junkers Ju 88A-14. The plane on which this was based was the Ju A-4 variant, itself an improved variant of the original production Ju 88A-1 with longer wingspan, due to redesigned wingtips; stronger defensive armament; power provided by Jumo 211 J-1 or J-2 engines producing 1,050 kW (1,410 hp), driving wooden bladed propellers; and reinforced undercarriage. There was provision for four external bomb racks. The A-14 variant (this plane) was an improvement on the A-4 with more armour for the crew; balloon cable cutters; MG FF cannon in the ventral gondola; and the bomb sight removed. The SO also had the more powerful BMW engines.

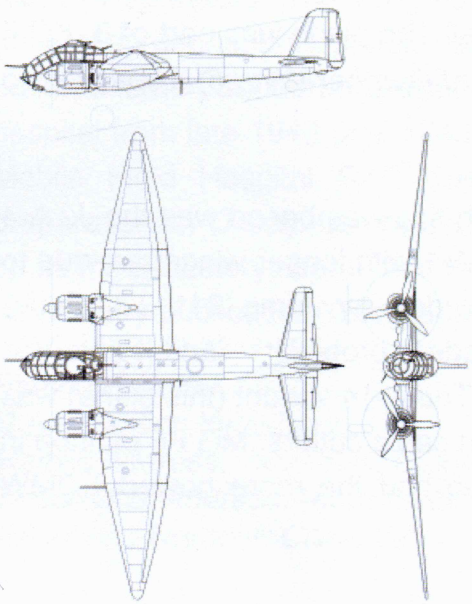
The crash site



This plane usually had a crew of four, but, as will be explained later, on this occasion it is thought that it might have had a crew of five.



Basic Ju 88A



Ju 188E-1

The essential difference between the two is in the configuration of the cockpit, and the more powerful BMW engines in the 188. Both notionally had a crew of four, except that it is known with certainty that the 188, as a pathfinder, could have a crew of five:-

Date:	14-MAR-1944
Time:	23:03
Type:	 Junkers Ju 188 E-1

Owner/operator:	4./KG 2 Luftwaffe
Registration:	260238
MSN:	U5+BM
Fatalities:	Fatalities: 5 / Occupants: 5
Aircraft damage:	Written off (damaged beyond repair)
Location:	White House Farm, Great Leighs near Chelmsford, Essex - United Kingdom
Phase:	Combat
Nature:	Military
Departure airport:	Soesterberg (NL) / Münster-Handorf (G)
Destination airport:	

The names of the crew, as well as their positions in the aircraft as also known. It is important to see that there is a separate radio operator. This will be returned to .

Pilot: Leutnant. Horst Becker. 57 357/141 – Killed. Born 24.04.1922 in Bluesenbach/Cologne.

Observer: Unteroffizier. Gerhard Bartolain. 69645/216 – Killed. Born 18.04.1922 in Walter-Kehmen, Krs. Gumbinnen.

Radio/Op: Unteroffizier. Albert Lange. 58214/192 – Killed. Born 19.01.1921 in Hamm/Westf.

Gunner 1: Unteroffizier. Guenter Goecking. 58214/267 – Killed. Born 01.09.1920 in Dortmund.

Gunner 2: Oberfeldwebel. Heinrich Litschke. 58213/190 – Killed. Born 23.10.1916 in Recklinghausen.

[https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/182397. *The picture above is of an 88, not a 188.*]

Navigation.

The essentials of navigation by these bombers is given in detail in Appendix 5. To say that the systems in use were complicated is an understatement! The Ju 188E-1 exampled above was part of the same mission as the pathfinder Ju88 A-14 in which this article is interested. The former aircraft, although usually crewed by four, had an extra crewman as radio operator for this mission. The All Cannings Ju 88 A-14 was also usually crewed by four, and indeed, there is some evidence that there were only four crew. However it seems inconceivable that this aircraft, as a pathfinder, with the wealth of navigational data having to be processed, would not also have a radio operator/ navigator, especially as the mission target was not only Whitehall in London, but specifically Buckingham Palace (see below)!

The Mission for 14/15 March

On the night of the 14/15 March 1944 bomber crews were briefed to attack London again. This time the target was Whitehall with Buckingham Palace being marked out as a special target. The

bombers were ordered to congregate over the North Sea, north west of Rotterdam at 16,400 ft. The attacking force was to cross the coast at Leiston and turn south using Cambridge as a waypoint. Once the bombs had been dropped the pilots were ordered to exit British airspace at Beachy Head. For the first time, the *Luftwaffe* attempted a diversion during *Steinbock*. Until this operation, deception was limited to the wholesale use of *Düppel (anti radar chaff)*. The Fw 190s of *SKG* 10 were ordered to fly a diversion sortie over Plymouth fifteen minutes ahead of the planned attack. Fw 190 pilots carried flares to encourage the British to think that the port town was the primary target.

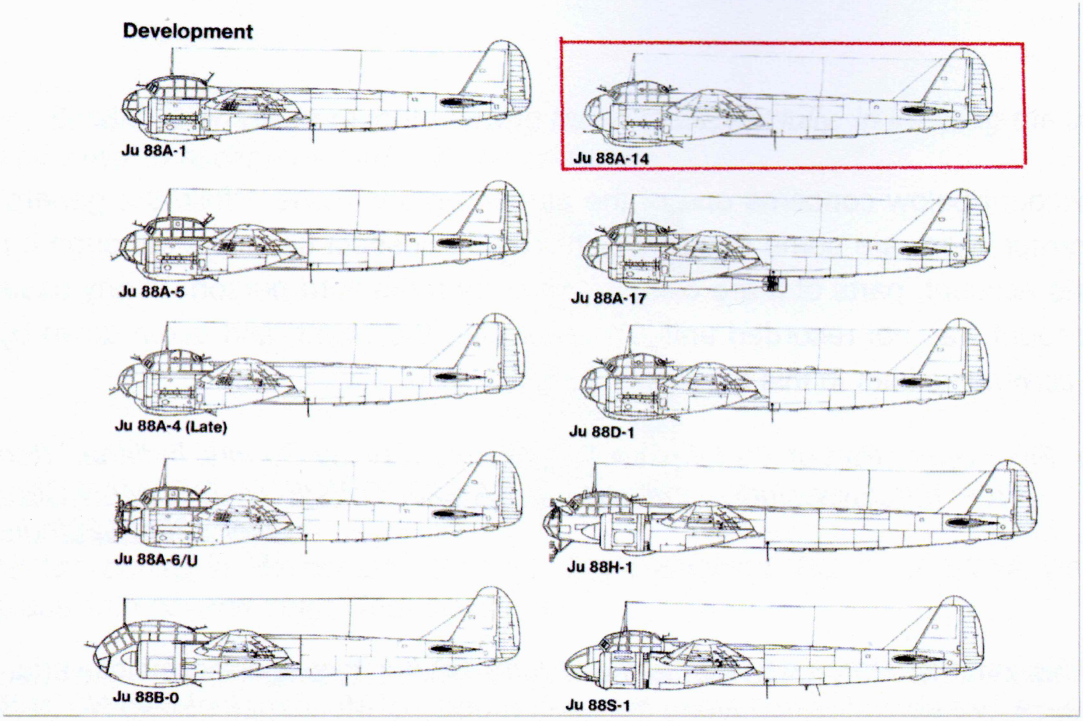
The operation was poorly executed; bomber units were prompt in getting airborne but the fighters were late. By the time the Fw 190s fighters were closing on Plymouth the vanguard, if not the bulk, of the conventional German bombers were over the English coast to the north east. The mass use of *Düppel* was rendered ineffective because of the sheer number of British radar units able to scan the skies. It was quickly determined that the main attack was occurring in the north. British radar operators were suspicious of the small number and high speed of the southern intruders, which alerted them to its diversionary function.

The bombers reached the target and dropped their bombs but little damage was done. In the Belgravia region, some damage was done by exploding high explosives. One notable casualty was Muriel Wright, the girlfriend of Ian Fleming the future novelist, who at that time was serving as a naval intelligence officer. A bomb fell through the roof of her apartment and killed her. She was the only casualty in Westminster. Around 162 tons of bombs were dropped on London. 54 boroughs reported 390 fires. Paddington, Westminster, Marylebone, St Pancras and Bloomsbury were damaged. Bombs also fell in Hyde Park. In Drayton Park, Highbury, in the borough of Islington, 26 people were killed, more than half the night's total fatalities. Two bombs damaged 100 houses in Worthing while there were reports of strafing from German aircraft with incendiary rounds which burnt out a furniture depository [*There is evidence to show that this was when and where the writer's grandparents lost all their belongings which were stored in a depository. SJP.*].

The *Luftwaffe* lost 19 aircraft in this mission alone. *KG* 2 lost three bombers, *KG* 6 lost two [*including the All Cannings Ju 88A-14. SJP.*] while *KG* 30 lost six. *KG* 54 lost one bomber while *KG* 51 lost two Me 410s. *SKG* 10 suffered the loss of three Fw 190s. Six are known to have been shot down by Mosquitos and another by ground fire. Four further claims of German aircraft destroyed, plus one probable, were made which cannot be attributed to a particular loss. 33 German airmen were posted as killed in action on the operation, 13 were listed as missing while six were captured.

[From: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Steinbock]

The flight of Junkers JU88 A-14; Number 14152.



This plate which shows the evolution of the Ju 88A clearly demonstrates that at least one variant of the Ju 88A-14 has an extra gun at the front. The plane with which this article is interested apparently only had three gunners, but the cockpit must have been more roomy (to accomodate a fourth gun) than expected from the crewman's description of it below - or possibly even fourth gunner/radio operator. The SO version was fitted with two more powerful BMW 801 G-2 engines.

Order of battle [edit]

The following is a list of the German bomber units ready to participate in *Steinbock* on 20 January 1944:[49]

Unit	Type	Strength	Serviceable	Location
Stab./*Kampfgeschwader* 2	Do 217	3	3	Zeist, Netherlands[50]
I./*Kampfgeschwader* 2	Do 217	3	3	Eindhoven, Netherlands[51]
II./*Kampfgeschwader* 2	Ju 188	35	35	Münster–Handorf, Germany[52]
III./*Kampfgeschwader* 2	Do 217 and Ju 188	38	36	Gilze en Rijen, Netherlands[53]
V./*Kampfgeschwader* 2	Me 410	27	25	Laon–Athies, Somme, France[54]
Stab./*Kampfgeschwader* 6	Ju 188	3	3	Brussels–Melsbroek, Belgium[55]
I./*Kampfgeschwader* 6	Ju 188	41	41	Chièvres, Belgium[56]
II./*Kampfgeschwader* 6	Ju 88	39	39	Le Culot, Belgium[57]
III./*Kampfgeschwader* 6	Do 217	41	37	Brussels–Melsbroek, Belgium[58]
II./*Kampfgeschwader* 30	Ju 88	36	31	Sint-Truiden, Belgium[59]
I. & II./*Kampfgeschwader* 40	He 177A-3	15	15 (1 *staffel*)	Châteaudun, France[60][61]
Stab./*Kampfgeschwader* 54	Ju 88	3	3	Marx, south-west of Wilhelmshaven, Germany[62]
I./*Kampfgeschwader* 54	Ju 88	36	25	Wittmund–Jever, Germany[63]
II./*Kampfgeschwader* 54	Ju 88	33	33	Marx, south-west of Wilhelmshaven, Germany[64]
I./*Kampfgeschwader* 66	Ju 88, Do 217 and Ju 188	45	23	Montdidier, Somme, Avord, Bourges, France[65]
Stab./*Kampfgeschwader* 76	Ju 88	5	4	Alt–Lönnewitz[66]
I./*Kampfgeschwader* 100	He 177A-3	31	27 (2 *staffeln*)	Châteaudun, France[67][61]
Schnellkampfgeschwader 10	Fw 190	25	20	

The bomber was part of *Stab* (Special Group) 8 of KG (Bomber Squadron) 6. Ju 88A-14 Number 14152, although not a Ju188 as shown above as in Jan 1944, was presumably a replacement for one of the three special group pathfinders, and on their first flight - again, see below. For details of the airfield see Appendix 6.

First account.

(Caveat: The account below concerns one of the airmen on this plane. While the general details are probably correct, there are some details which may be suspect because, although it purports to be a first hand account, parts of it are clearly written by a the third person. In any case, and in addition, the account was not recorded until 57 years after the event, and taken down by a third party. See also comments later in this article).

"How A German Flyer Spent Part of His Life in a Tent In Rural Shelby County, Indiana." (Extract)
[From http://www.indianamilitary.org/CA%20POWs/POW-GERMAN/GermanInfo/Flyer%20in%20Indiana.htm]

The Flight

At about 2145 hrs on 14th March 1944 a Junkers Ju88 S0 [for this specific minor variant of the standard Ju 88A-14 see above] *taxied along the main runway of Melsbroek airfield NE of Brussels. To those who watched it depart was visible it's* [sic] *unit designation on the side of the fuselage, 3E+LS. On board, the pilot Unteroffizier Hans Schönleitner eased open the throttles and the two supercharged engines roared into life. Schönleitner was a 23 year old Austrian, alongside him his Observer/co-pilot Unteroffizier Helmut Baumgart watched the dark airfield disappear below them as the aircraft climbed into the cold and windy night sky. He was the "baby" of the crew, just 19 years old.*

Behind these two in the wireless position of the cramped cockpit was Unteroffizier Alfons Harnisch. Further along the fuselage in the airgunners position was the tall figure of Gefreiter Gerhard Grünewald.

The mission was bomb London, specifically Whitehall. In the bomb bay sat a 1000lb bomb and 10 50kg bombs. The 3E+LS was part of the 8 Staffel of Kampfgeschwader 6, operating as pathfinders for other bombers at this time.

During the flight radio silence was kept, the weather conditions made navigation a problem. The other worry was that they had been delayed prior to take off. Schönleitner had the engines running at full boost much of the time. They were caught in searchlights, the pilot took what evasive action he could, he dived down the "beam" of the light before veering off to one side or another. The strain on the engines was telling.

As they approached their target one engine failed. Schönleitner ordered the bomb load to be jettisoned at once. Now the plane was a handful. All at once the second engine caught fire and the pilot ordered the crew to bale out.

Local people recall the German bomber flying overhead, aflame from end to end. Hans Schönleitner was the last to leave the stricken aircraft, he jumped into the night. Shortly afterwards the 3E+LS was smashed to pieces as it hit the ground near the village of All Cannings in Wiltshire.

The Capture

As daybreak broke on March 15th the villagers came to see the smouldering remains. The local Police, home guard and American service personnel had accounted for three of the four crew. Later that afternoon some schoolboys came across a prone figure lying in a field, about 2 miles from the impact area. One recounted to me, many years later how peaceful this young man looked, as though asleep. The only trace of violence being a trickle of blood from his mouth. Thus

died Hans Schönleitner, his parachute having failed to deploy fully. In keeping the Ju88 flying, and allowing his crew to escape he had paid the price.



Today he lies buried in Haycombe cemetery, Bath, England. He is not alone, as he shares his resting place with several other German airmen.

As you can see, the story does not end in England. For two of the 3E+LS their captivity takes them even farther afield, to America. This is just a brief outline of the story of one German bomber crew. This was their first, and last Feinflug!!

These are all the German planes which are known to have been shot down in this raid:

14-MAR-1944	Junkers Ju 88 A-14	1411	8./KG 6 Luftwaffe	Rendles farm, All Cannings, Devizes, Wiltshire		w/o		
14-MAR-1944	Junkers Ju 88 A-14	550[illegible]	6./KG 6 Luftwaffe	Woodford Avenue, Gants Hill, Ilford, Greater London		w/o		
14-MAR-1944	Junkers Ju 188 E-1	260[illegible]	4./KG 2 Luftwaffe	White House Farm, Great Leighs near Chelmsford, Essex		w/o		
14-MAR-1944	Junkers Ju 88 A-4	140[illegible]	6./KG 30 Luftwaffe	Blackbrook, near Dorking, Surrey, England		w/o		

[From *http://143.95.41.247/wikibase/dblist.php?Country=g&sorteer=datekey_desc&page=156*]

Second account: from Sid Jones "Evacuation to Wiltshire Wartime memories"

[http://www.memoriesofwar.org.uk/documents/Sid_Jones.pdf]

By his own admisson "*Writing about events that happened more than 70 years ago is a precarious affair. There is always the temptation to "polish" the memory of an event, but I hope that the recollections laid out here are as accurate as possible. Childhood memory can also be very fickle in times of stress, especially at a very early age.*"

He was lodged with a family whose "*names were George and Vera Gay. At that time they had no children. They lived in the village of All Cannings, near Devizes in Wiltshire, and for the rest of the*

war, this would be my home. They lived at 3, Prospect Cottages only about 100 yards from the school". . . . .

. . . . . .On one such evening, I was woken by a louder engine noise than usual, and as the heavy throb got nearer and nearer I jumped out of bed and went to the window just in time to see a large (as I found out later) German bomber pass over the rooftop in Flames. It was getting lower and lower and eventually crashed into a field close to The Kennet and Avon Canal near All Cannings. The next morning we went with other villagers to see the charred wreck. It was surrounded by Home Guard Soldiers. George Gay's Father also lived in the village. He worked as a railway porter at Patney and Churton [sic] *Station a few miles away: he would cycle to work each morning, and on this occasion came across some parachutes on the road at about half mile intervals. These covered the bodies of the dead German Pilots who had tried to bail out of the stricken bomber, but they were too low. As far as I recall, there were no survivors of the plane.. . . ."*

Other evidence confirms that this account is probably as accurate as one can get from an eye-witness of the time, even after a 70 year gap.

Third account:

[from Wartime Police Control Room Log (F5/270/2) used during 1944 and 1945, one of the documents in the Wiltshire Constabulary archives at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, entitled "*In The Line Of Fire – Wiltshire's Role During German Air Raids*"].

I have looked at two individual incidents which were logged in March and April 1944. Both incidents involved crashed German aircraft, I've added extra detail which I have found archived elsewhere. The first incident happened on March 14th 1944.

14/3/1944 2345 hours; initial reports of a plane crash about halfway between Alton Barnes and Devizes reported to Marlborough Police by an Orderly Sergeant at RAF Alton Barnes.

2355 Inspector Shears is dispatched to All Cannings as crash believed to be in vicinity.

15/03/1944 0100 confirmed that a plane, believed to be a German aircraft had crashed in a field adjacent to the canal at All Cannings. The plane had burnt out and bombs were in the field. They were unable to say if occupants were trapped. The RAF was guarding the scene and an Ambulance was en route from Devizes.

0120 Confirmation received that the aircraft was a German one with twin engines, model unknown at this stage. There was no trace of any crew 'but feared from odour and fierceness of conflagration they have been trapped inside.'

0420 aircraft was identified by flight Lieutenant Rickitto as a J.U.88. (This aircraft a Junkers 88 no. 141152 was part of the Luftwaffe which had blitzed London that night. The crew had had specific orders to bomb Buckingham Palace and Whitehall. The plane had been pursued westerly out of London and experienced engine failure as it reached Wiltshire.)

Junkers 88 (Used with kind permission of The Battle of Britain Historical Society)



0710 Major Hailey US forces at Tidworth reported that he had a German airman in custody. The prisoner had supplied descriptions of three other crewmen who had bailed out at the same time. RAF Lieutenant Ricketts (Interrogation Officer) requested that the prisoner be brought to Devizes Police Station for interrogation.

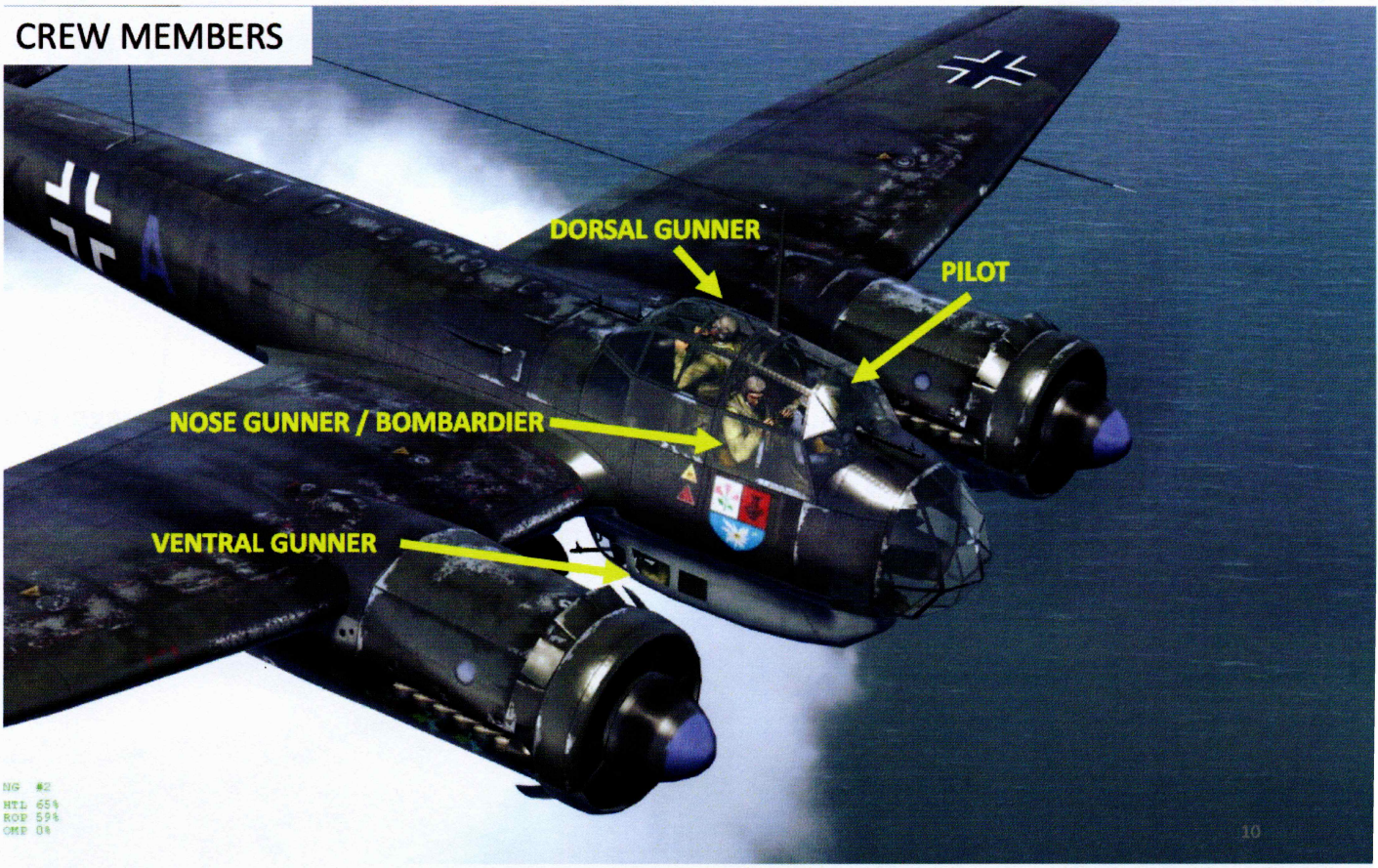
Two other German crew members were detained; one in Patney and the other in Bulford. Both were taken into custody in Devizes.

16/3/1944 1745 the body of the missing airman, the last of the crew, was found in a field in Patney, about 1 and a half miles from the crash scene. A parachute was attached to the body. (German Officer Unteroffizier Hans Schonleitner was buried at Haycombe Cemetery in Bath- local schoolchildren had found his body with a partially opened parachute).

[https://wshc.org.uk/blog/item/in-the-line-of-fire.html]

The plane itself.

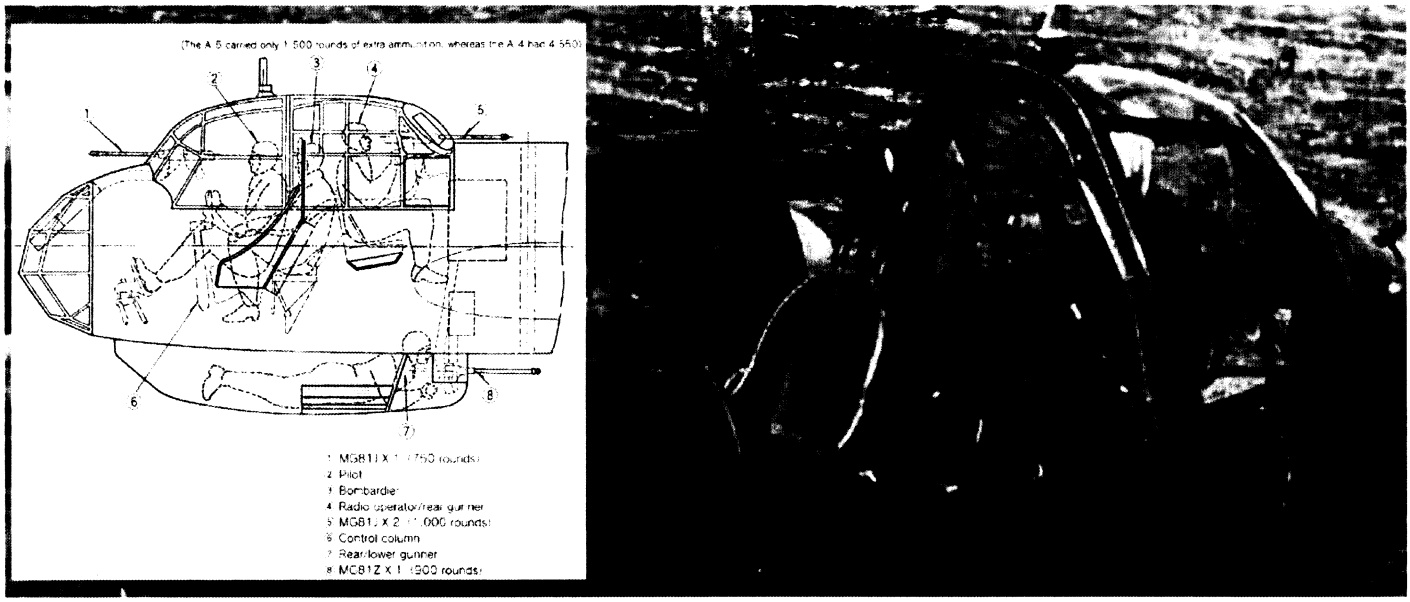
A modern day computer generated image of of such a plane:



https://www.mudspike.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Chuck-Guide-Il-2-Cliffs-of-Dover-Ju88.pdf

The configuration of a 'normal' crew is quite clear. Although the All Cannings survivor describes a 'co-pilot', there is no such crew member. There is only one set of flying controls. Therefore the so-called co-pilot is actually the nose gunner (there was no bombardier in this plane as the bomb sight had been removed, as noted earlier).

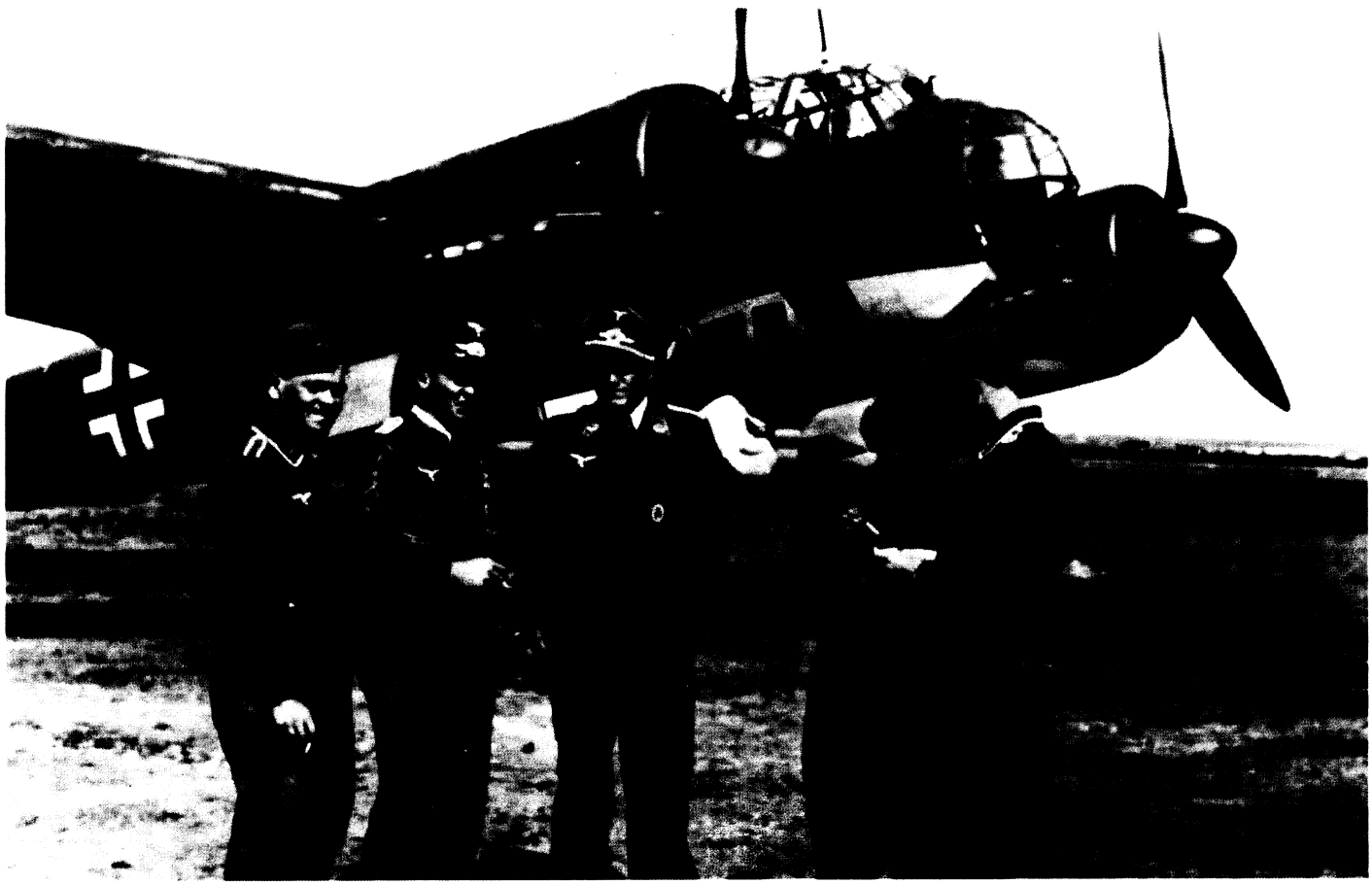
The cockpit of the Ju 88 was very cramped:



This plan shows the relative places of the crew in a side view. However, there is potential space for a further crew member beside the rear gunner, or behind the front gunner.

There is, in addition, photographic evidence for five-man crews in the Jun 88.

A five-man crew sharing a packet of cigarettes:-



A five man crew apparently being inspected by three senior officers (clearly shows the nose gun):-



Further examination of the escaped crew member's account.

We have to assume that the All Cannings survivor is Hans Gruenwald whose description of a 'co-pilot' has been discussed above. He also mentions the 'wireless position'. There is no radio operator's position in the standard cockpit layout. This has to be an addition to the standard cockpit. On the other hand he only mentions one air-gunner, when, in actual fact, the standard plane has three air-gunners (nose, and two rear - upper dorsal and lower ventral).

They were caught in searchlights, the pilot took what evasive action he could, he dived down the "beam" of the light before veering off to one side or another.

The only possible reason for this manoeuvre was to attempt to get the nose gunner to eliminate the light or to engage a fixed gun as well, if present.

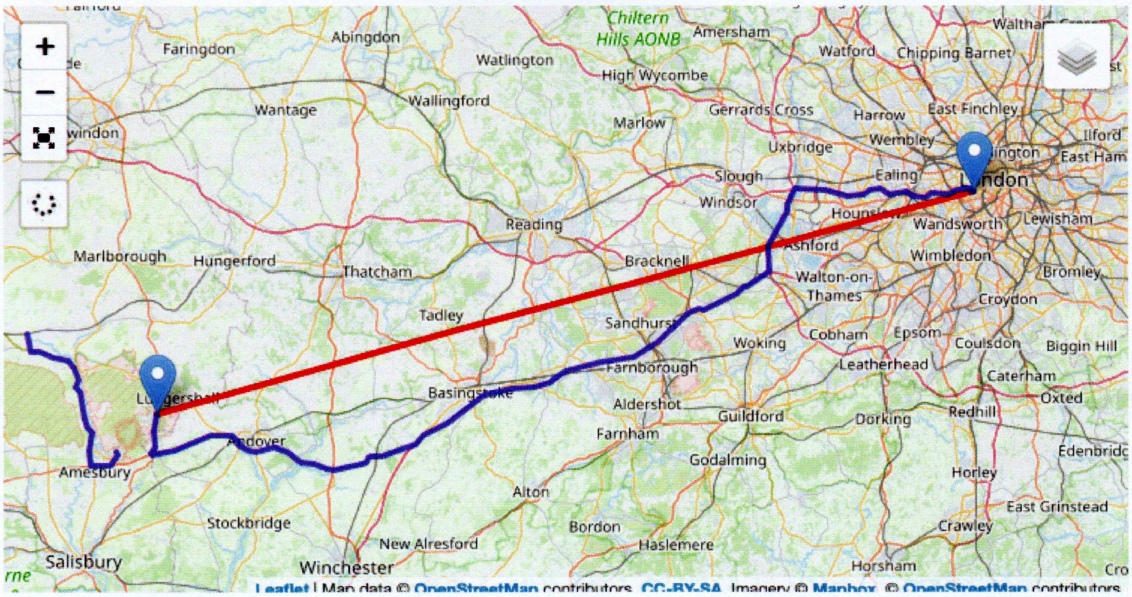
There also seems to be an inconsistency in his story of the mission:

As they approached their target one engine failed. Schönleitner ordered the bomb load to be jettisoned at once. Now the plane was a handful. All at once the second engine caught fire and the pilot ordered the crew to bale out.

There is no mention by Grunewald of any attempt by the rear gunners to take action against the aircraft which was pursuing them (account by Wiltshire Police above). Furthermore in relation to the 'wireless position', it is unlikely that the rear gunner, which is what Harnisch would appear to

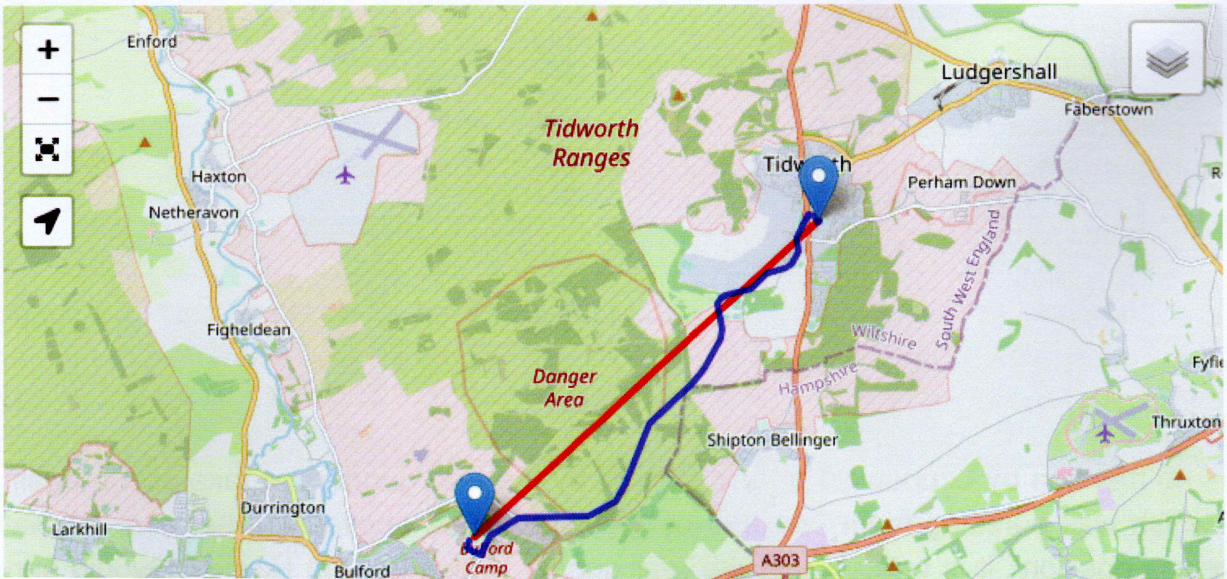
be, would also the wireless operator in a seat which would be facing backwards, in the wrong direction to which he was travelling as R/T navigator. Furthermore, it would also be difficult or even impossible, to be an active gunner at the very time that navigation was at its most crucial over the target, and be facing backwards towards pursuing potential enemy aircraft at the same time.

Map Showing the Distance Between tidworth wiltshire and london wiltshire



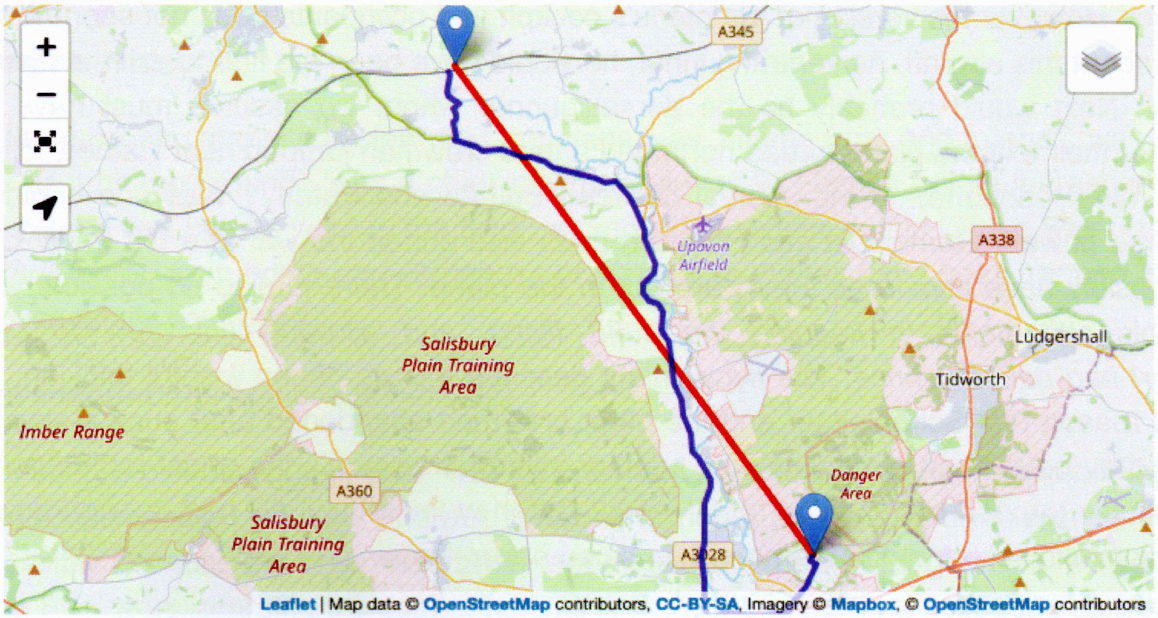
The maximum speed of a Ju 88A is around 300mph (http://www.aviation-history.com/junkers/ju88.html). The distance between London and Tidworth is around 69 miles. With one engine failed the speed would have been a lot less, and taking account of any action taken to avoid the pursuit noted in the Wiltshire Police account given above, the notional time to cover that distance (say 15 minutes) would be considerably greater, say 20 - 30+ minutes. It has to be assumed that it was at this point that the second engine caught fire and the order was given to abandon the aircraft. The course from London to Tidworth is approximately WSW, and to Bulford SW i.e. effectively the same. Around Tidworth, the first surviving crew member was picked up and the second was found near Bulford, which is just over 4 miles away. Because the bottom escape hatch is via the ventral gunner 'gondola', these two probably jumped at the same time. It is unlikely that the dorsal escape

Map Showing the Distance Between tidworth wiltshire and bulford wiltshire



hatch, via the upper rear gunners canopy, was used for fear of hitting the tail of the plane. This was mainly used after crash landings or ditching at sea.

Map Showing the Distance Between patney wiltshire and bulford wiltshire



At this point the plane turns NNE and flies, or glides possibly without power for a further 11¾ miles before another bale out - the crewman found in Patney.

Map Showing the Distance Between patney wiltshire and Allington wiltshire



The map above shows the flight path onward to Allington, (as near as this mapping app. would allow, to All Cannings), and about a half mile beyond the crash site. It does incidentally confirm the

plane's path directly over Prospect Cottages (S. Jones account above). His account also suggests that although the second engine might have been on fire, it was still running.

It is quite impossible to know why there were these course alterations. The notional account by Grunwald must be suspect. He was noted as the gunner, meaning he was almost certainly the ventral gunner. However his version of the plane's cockpit and occupants does not seem to fit the known facts about this aircraft. As ventral gunner, he would have been the first to exit the plane via his 'gondola'. Next would probably be the dorsal gunner whom we assume must have been Harnisch. After their exit the plane turned north and a third crewman jumped near Patney, followed by the pilot. What happened in the interval between Bulford and Patney? Was one engine still providing some power? Grunewald and Harnisch (who also ended the war in a US POW Camp) could not possibly have known as they were not in the plane. There is also no possible way of confirming his statement: *In keeping the Ju88 flying, and allowing his crew to escape [Schönleitner] had paid the price.* The cynic might describe this as heroic wishful thinking. What was the real reason that Schönleitner and the other crewman abandoned after such a significant time? Could they have been struggling with another injured crewman - the ghost radio-operator? Were they simply trapped by mangled metal work? Did they think they still had enough power to make a successful crash landing? We do not, and can never, know.

The evidence so far.

1. The bomber crews were young and inadequately trained. This was the first operation of this particular aircraft with a poorly prepared and inexperienced crew.

2. It was a pathfinder for a bombing group.

3. Navigation was difficult with the complicated radio communication equipment involved.

4. The navigation was further complicated by British jamming of radio equipment and the weather conditions.

5. The surviving airman does not mention a radio operator. It seems very difficult to endorse this view. As had been shown, other pathfinders could have a crew of five in a cockpit designed for four. As regards JU 141152, from the picture provided by the Wiltshire police at the time (see above), it is quite clear this plane had two rear machine guns, one behind the main cockpit above and one in the ventral position below. Therefore the plane had to have at least two other air gunners, as well as the pilot and front gunner. The contention has to be that there was a radio operator/navigator as well. The survivor seems to indicate that there was an R/T operator's seat. So who and where was he?

6. It seems unthinkable that the pathfinder aircraft for a bomber group aiming for such a specialised target as Buckingham Palace, would not have a specialist radio operator/navigator. It is also worth noting that in the event, it is possible that this raid on Buckingham Palace, presumably with the intent of killing the Royal Family, was ultimately a futile gesture (see Appendix 7).

7. The possibility is that the regular crew was the four we know about. However, in the darkness and general rush to get airborne a new crewman, hastily attached, might just not have been

noticed, certainly by the rear-facing gunners behind him - he was not 'one of the group'. Alternatively he might have been some-one the rest of the crew disliked and merely forgot about, or that he was perhaps a fervent party member who they were afraid of and preferred to ignore. It was this crew's first operational flight but we do not even know if they had ever flown together before. Again the answer will never be known.

Post crash evidence

From the evidence above it is clear that the plane was 'aflame from end to end'; 'was smashed to pieces as it hit the ground'; 'was a charred wreck'; it was 'in Flames before it crashed'; 'the plane had burnt out and bombs were in the field'; 'smouldering remains'; and '*There was no trace of any crew "but feared from odour and fierceness of conflagration they have been trapped inside*" '. The plane was totally destroyed.

Fourth account: The author's father (BMP).

As has been previously noted, BMP was a consultant anaesthetist at RAF Hospital Yatesbury and lived in Etchilhampton. In view of the restrictions of petrol rationing and the fact he lived nearby, and possibly because the crash had been reported by an Orderly Sergeant at RAF Alton Barnes, and the RAF were guarding the scene, he was tasked, with a surgical colleague called Sawyer, by the hospital, on or about March16, in his own words, "to certify the body in the crashed aeroplane". To which one comment was "if he wasn't dead when the plane crashed, he certainly would be now". These words were an eye-witness account of the aftermath of the crash and are quoted verbatim as they were made to the author over many years telling of the tale, from when the author was a little boy (and indeed verified by the author's late brother (eighteen months younger) and his sister, who being eight years younger, would not have been alive at the time, but was, again, regaled with the story when she was older). Note that there was "**the** body". Furthermore, BMP's description of the scene is the same as the other accounts, viz. that the plane had crashed "near the pond" which he had to walk past to get to it. From the map of the site, his easiest route would be along the lane past Prospect Cottages, or along the footpath by the pub, both of which pass a pond. He never divulged exact details of what he found, because the author would probably been aged seven or eight when old enough to understand, and too young to hear things which would have been pretty gruesome and unfit for a small boy's ears. The exact details were never mentioned later either, except that he found a charred mangled burnt out wreck. There was mention of a pair of binoculars found near the site and something to do with a watch, but the author cannot remember any details about this last, assuming he knew them in the first place. Whether there were actual human remains is unknown, but assuming there were, as both other accounts and the request to him would suggest, they would be unrecognisable and impossible to get out. The author's suspicion is that anything human would have been transported away by the RAF 'wrecking' crew who removed what was left of the aircraft.

Another question the author has been asked is why the body of Unteroffizier Hans Schönleitner was buried at Haycombe Cemetery in Bath. The staff at the cemetery do not know the answer, but one possibility is that this was a relatively unknown communal cemetery not closely involved with the incident. There are RAF personnel buried at Yatesbury Church. 15 RAF, airmen were killed in WWII in the region of Bishops Cannings, and recently (2021) commemorated by the unveiling of a memorial in Bishops Cannings. None of these airmen was buried locally. With the immediacy of

and the preparations for, D-Day, a German POW camp very near and anti-German feeling no doubt running very high, it was possibly felt simply inappropriate to have a local internment. There is no doubt also that some unidentified german airmen were simply buried with no date on their headstone (Appendix 8)

CONCLUSION.

The contention of this piece is that there is ample evidence to suggest that there was a fifth crewman in this plane, whose body was never found.

According to German sources,19 aircraft were lost in the March 14 operation alone. 33 German airmen were posted as killed in action on the operation, and 13 were listed as missing. Only six were captured. Assuming each lost aircraft was completely destroyed, and each had a minimum crew of four, then there is a potential for 76 crewmen. Which means that there are potentially 24 or more (76 minus 33+13+6) airmen whose fate or whereabouts are completely unknown. The remains of Junkers JU 88 A-14, serial number 141152, may have been the resting place for one of them.

Does this detail matter? In the grand overall scheme of things, probably not. However, the author's feeling, as an academic researcher, is that it does. Not only on the basis of producing accurate information and general interest, but perhaps, more importantly, that the knowledge does not get lost and perhaps, at some time in the future, some relative may be searching for an ancestor for whom this article may give more information. Bomber crews of both sides in World War II were incredibly brave men and had the highest attrition rate of any units. If one family can get some knowledge of a relative via this information, then the fate of one unknown aviator might become known.

Acknowledgement.

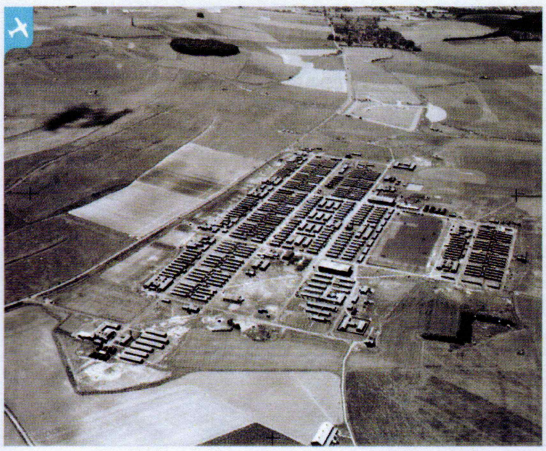
I am indebted to Lucy Collins of Haycombe Cemetery, Bath for her help with the old records held there.

© Simon Phillips
MPhil MBBS FRAS FRGS
SEEND, 2022

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

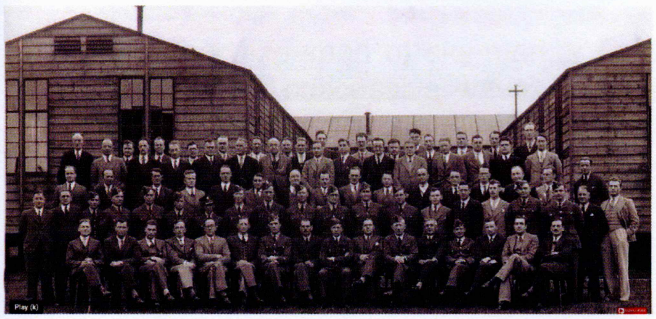
(1946). RAF Yatesbury, Yatesbury, from the north-east, 1946



(1946). RAF Yatesbury, Yatesbury, 1946

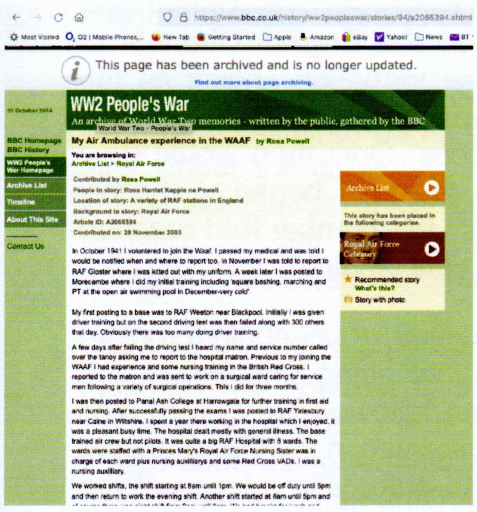


Appendix 2. Showing type of hospital hut accommodation



The group of people are unknown. The cross in the background might indicate it was the chapel or perhaps mortuary

Appendix 3. Life before D-Day



This page has been archived and is no longer updated.

WW2 People's War

An archive of World War Two memories - written by the public, gathered by the BBC

My Air Ambulance experience in the WAAF by Rosa Powell

In October 1941 I volunteered to join the Waaf. I passed my medical and was told I would be notified when and where to report too. In November I was told to report to RAF Gloster where I was kitted out with my uniform. A week later I was posted to Morecambe where I did my initial training including 'square bashing, marching and PT at the open air swimming pool in December-very cold'.

My first posting to a base was to RAF Weeton near Blackpool. Initially I was given driver training but on the second driving test was then failed along with 300 others that day. Obviously there was too many doing driver training.

A few days after failing the driving test I heard my name and service number called over the tanoy asking me to report to the hospital matron. Previous to my joining the WAAF I had experience and some nursing training in the British Red Cross. I reported to the matron and was sent to work on a surgical ward caring for service men following a variety of surgical operations. This I did for three months.

I was then posted to Panal Ash College at Harrowgate for further training in first aid and nursing. After successfully passing the exams I was posted to RAF Yatesbury near Calne in Wiltshire. I spent a year there working in the hospital which I enjoyed, it was a pleasant busy time. The hospital dealt mostly with general illness. The base trained air crew but not pilots. It was quite a big RAF Hospital with 8 wards. The wards were staffed with a Princes Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Sister was in charge of each ward plus nursing auxilliarys and some Red Cross VADs. I was a nursing auxilliary.

We worked shifts, the shift starting at 8am until 1pm. We would be off duty until 5pm and then return to work the evening shift. Another shift started at 8am until 5pm and of course there was night shift from 9pm until 8am. We had breaks for lunch and supper in the evening.

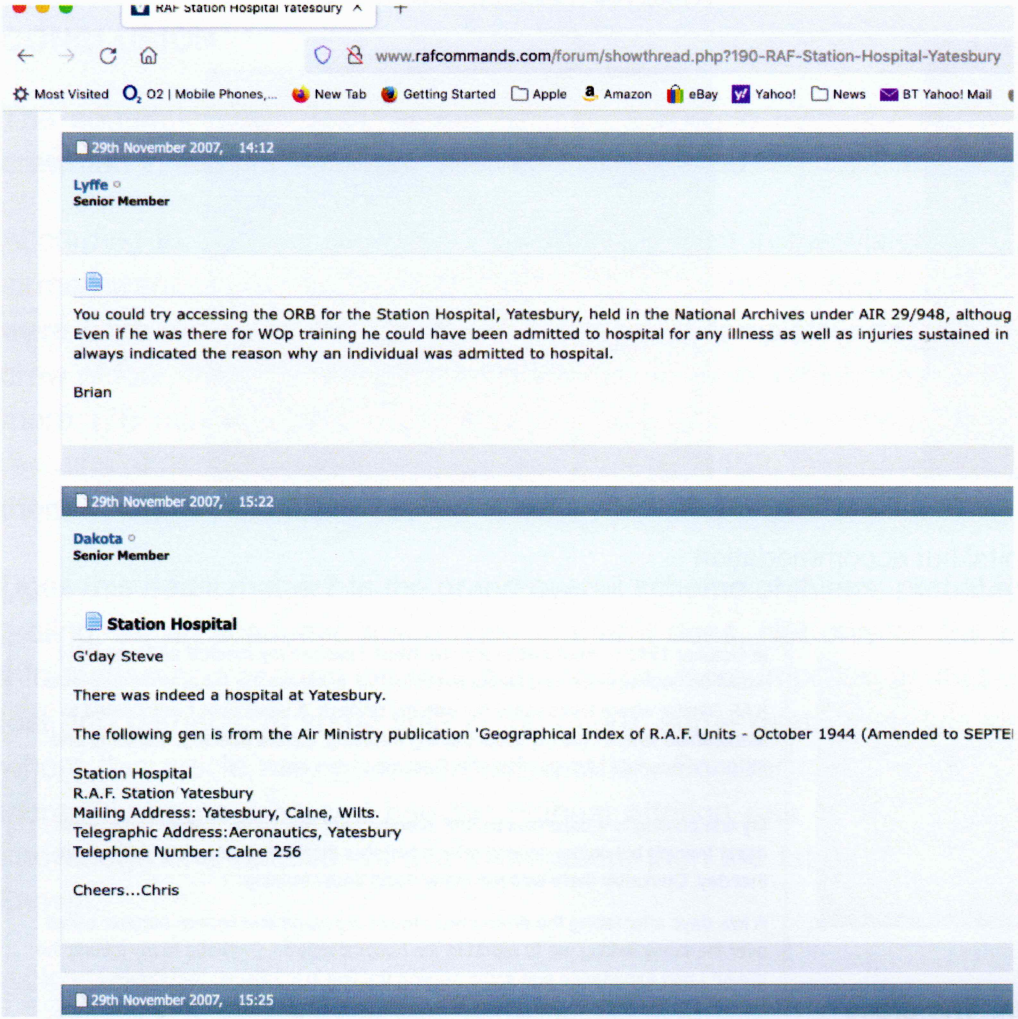
We were allocated a bed in a hut with approximately 12 sharing. We had a locker for our clothes. When we rose in the morning after washing and dressing in our uniforms we then had to make our beds according to RAF regulation. The mattress was in three 'biscuits' ie three sections, these had to be stacked at the head of the bed. The sheets and blankets were folded and placed on an open blanket which was then folded over the others. This was placed at the top of the bed on the 'biscuits'. One night a week everyone was confined to the hut and had to clean their bed space. This included polishing the floor. When finished there was an inspection by the officer and the corporal in charge of the hut. If it was not satisfactory you had to do it again.

Meals were eaten in the Mess. Food was not too bad, we had enough. Three meals a day. At Christmas we had a wonderful Christmas Dinner with Turkey and all the trimmings served by the officers. A Christmas concert which included four Dutch Airmen who sang 'I'm dreaming of a White Christmas', it was beautiful.

From Yatesbury I was sent to Collerton Cross RAF base near Plymouth.

Quite incidentally, and in addition, when SJP went to his boarding school, he found that one of the nursing sis in the Sanatorium there, turned out to have been be a member of BMP's nursing staff at Yatesbury, S Thomas, always known, somewhat unoriginally, as Tommy.

Appendix 4. Trying to find information about the hospital.



Appendix 5

In 1944, in contrast to British crews who climbed to operating altitude over Britain and maintained it until back in English skies, German crews crossed the English Channel or North Sea at low altitude to designated crossing points in loose formation known as the bomber stream. German crews, like those in RAF Bomber Command, operated the bomber stream tactic in the face of vastly improved night fighter defences. Only then would they ascend to operational altitude. Once this ceiling was reached, the pilot began a shallow diving attitude which was to be maintained beyond the target until the bomber had reached the prearranged minimum. This minimum height was maintained until landing.

Navigational aids were available to crews in 1944. The 1940 original, *Knickebein* (crooked leg) stations, produced two interlocking beams. The bomber flew along one beam and released the bomb load where the two beams joined. This was followed by *X-Verfahren* which was also a multi-beam system. *X-Verfahren* provided information to the pilot and observer as to the distance to the target which culminated in the automatic release of the bombs when overhead. *Y-Verfahren* was the final system which operated on a single-beam basis. A ground controller monitored the aircraft and transmitted navigational guidance to the crew until the point the bombs were to be released. To further aid German navigation, I./*KG* 66—a special pathfinder unit—used a number of captured British GEE sets and by 2

January 1944 five of these devices were fitted to the units aircraft. The *Luftwaffe* named the devices *Hyperbel Gerät* (hyperbola device), but marked them *Truhe Gerät* (chest device).

At the beginning of 1944 a similar navigation aid codenamed *Egon* was available to the *Luftwaffe* which was similar to Oboe. A high-powered IFF transponder in the aircraft was activated by pulses transmitted by two *Freya* radar from stations in France and the Low Countries. A coding device identified each aircraft and their progress was continuously plotted by range and bearing information supplied by the first *Freya*. Course corrections and flare release orders were usually passed on by R/T. The second *Freya* interjected to issue bombing instructions when it predicted the bomber was over the target.

Once crews had reached the target area they would find it marked. The first method of target–marking was the *Ablauflinie* (final approach) method. It was used only when the target was fully visible. The pathfinder would mark the area using incendiary bombs at right angles to the approach and six kilometres from the edge of the planned aiming point. The crews then made a timed bomb-run when level with this (visual) line. The initial waves unloaded incendiaries on the lateral fringes of the target area to supplement the pathfinder flares. If the airspace was semi-over cast or when cloud cover was no greater than 6/10ths, a different tactic was used. Seven alternating white and coloured flares would be released along the approaches. As before, the distance of the line's start point was to be six kilometres from the target area. Each pilot was to use a target marker as their aiming point. The pilot glided to approach and released the bombs via stop-watch; the time of delay was decided at the briefing. This was known as the *Leuchtpfad* (path of light) method.

The short life-span of sky-marker flares meant the initial layout over the target had to be renewed for successive waves, with a different pattern for each wave. When the bomber wave fell behind or the flare faded pathfinders were briefed to lay a line of coloured flares along a 90 degree angle to the wind direction, after which target-re-illumination would be made in the same colours. If the pattern was incorrectly marked the crew were to release a second flare directly beside it. This was not easy to achieve, prolonged the bomber's orbit over the target area, and increased the pressure on crews.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Steinbock]

EGON **navigation system** [*It is unclear whether this advanced navigation system was in Junkers Ju 88A-14: Serial number 141152. SJP.*]

The *Lorenz* blind-landing equipment had been the basis for the *Knickebein* although results were disappointing, partly because British countermeasures spearheaded by No. 80 Wing RAF under the command of Edward Addison which inhibited its use as a bombing aid. A similar adaptation of existing equipment in the form of I.F.F sets (FuG 25 and FuG 25a Erstling) brought into existence *Egonverfahren*, a ground-control procedure for crews on bomber operations. For *Steinbock* it was made available to the pathfinder unit I./*KG* 66.

The system was based upon signals radiated by the FuG 25 and picked up by two *Freya* stations. The operator of the first *Freya* plotted the course of the bomber and the second *Freya* took over for the final bomb/flare release run. Operators transmitted information by Morse code using terminology borrowed from the night fighter force. Prior to take-off, crews were given a course and height to the target. The height was rigidly adhered to since it could not be checked by ground control. After take-off the FuG 25 was switched on and the first *Freya* plotted the aircraft's course using the single letter recognition code transmitted from the bomber. The range and bearing was passed by the *Freya* operators to the plotting table. The plotting table was a transparent map of the operations area laid on a glass screen. The

pathfinder's course could be observed and corrected. Course correction instructions were picked up in the aircraft through a FuG 16 set.

The crew were equipped with a list of twelve orders which were submitted through R/T or W/T (each method having its own specific code) with each code having the same meaning. The twelve codes communicated several different orders which included: informing the crew they were being plotted; change of bearing; degree of bearings (made in multiples of five); port or starboard turns; height; straight and level course; open bombs doors; pre-release signal; bomb or flare release; acknowledgement of signal; return home. The crew responded by switching the set off for three to four seconds to acknowledge receipt of the signal or repeatedly switched off the FuG 25 to indicate they had not received it.

When the British radio counter-measures began to interfere with messages the *Luftwaffe* broadcast in both W/T and R/T format over two channels. The FuG 16 would handle incoming transmissions from the R/T frequencies and the W/T messages were received by the *Peilgerät* (PeilG) 6 (codenamed "Alex Sniatkowski") direction finding equipment and superimposed on the plotting table. Further improvements were made to combat British counter-measures with the introduction of a CRT linked to the FuG 25 set, similar in size to the Lichtenstein radar equipment used by night fighters. The CRT display consisted of a circle divided into equal segments, each marked and representing one of the twelve code words and orders. The inner circle had a surrounding frame marked clockwise from zero to nine (with zero in the 12 o'clock position). A blip appeared in the segment for the appropriate code word. Bearings were given by a second (central) blip that appeared against a succession of figures in the outer circle. Course corrections were given by a long and short blips against the appropriate segment.

[Ibid.]

Appendix 6.

The present Melsbroek Military Base is located on the northern side of the same site as Brussels Airpo

The Luftwaffe airfield is Brüssel-Melsbroek (BELG) (a.k.a. Brussels-Melsbroek) (50° 54' 15" N – 04° 30" E)
General: major airfield (Fliegerhorst) 11.5 km NE of Brussels city center. Rated for bombers.

History: built by the Belgians as a fighter airfield in the late 1930s and then extensively expanded a improved after being taken over by the Luftwaffe in May-Jun 40.

Dimensions: a triangle measuring 3,000 x 2,650 x 2,400 yards (2,744 x 2,423 x 2,195 meters) follow major expansion by the Luftwaffe.

Surface and Runways: there were 3 concrete runways built by the Luftwaffe measuring 1,820 (1,664 meters), 1,800 yds (1,646 meters) and 1,740 yds (1,591 meters) constructed on sandy clay. F equipped for night landings.

Fuel and Ammunition: Melsbroek had large buried and above ground fuel storage and a la ammunition dump was located in a woods 3.25 km NE of the airfield.

Infrastructure: there was a single large hangar along the N boundary and 3 small repair hangars. Ad buildings were at the NW corner and a large block of barracks was located not far from the ba Additional personnel were billeted in the surrounding communities. Served by a branch rail line at the corner.

Dispersal: 5 dispersal areas with a total of 54 covered aircraft shelters, 11 open shelters plus 5 parl sites (Feb 44).

Defences: 3 heavy Flak positions with up to 6 guns each, and at least 9 light Flak positions (May 43). Barbed wire fencing completely or partially surrounded the airfield and there were 3 ground strongpoints for defense purposes.

Remarks:
30 Dec 43: a second ammunition dump near the Southeast dispersal confirmed and 4 pairs of blast walls seen to have been erected on both sides of the branch railway.
24 Feb 44: additional aircraft shelters were under construction in the Southeast and Southwest dispersal areas.
23 Mar 44: low-level attack by VIII Fighter Command P-47s – claimed 1 x Me 410 destroyed and 3 others damaged.

Operational Units (Luftwaffe): 4.(F)/Aufkl.Gr. 122 (Jul 40 – May 41); I./NJG 2 (Sep 42 – Feb 43); III./KG 6 (Aug 43 – Jun 44); Stab/KG 6 (Dec 43 – Jun 44) *(Indicates the All Cannings aircraft's unit. SJP)*; II./LG 1 (Jun-Jul 44); II./KG 76 (Jun-Jul 44); I./LG 1 (Jul-Aug 44); II./JG 26 (Aug-Sep 44).

Operational Units (Regia Aeronautica): 11° Gruppo BT (Sep 40 – Jan 41); 43° Gruppo BT (Sep 40 – Jan 41).

Station Commands: Fl.H.Kdtr. E 13/IV (1940 – c.Mar 41); Fl.H.Kdtr. E 8/XI (c.Apr 41 – Mar 44); Fl.H.Kdtr. E(v) 211/XI (Apr-Aug 44).

Station Units (on various dates – not complete): Luftminen-Zug 15 (Jun 44); Feldluftzeuggruppe Belgien-Nordfrankreich (Jun 40 – Feb 44); gem.Flak-Abt. 553 (Apr-Aug 44); Ldssch.Zug d.Lw. 2/VI (May 42, Feb 43); Ldssch.Zug d.Lw. 204/VI (Sep, Nov 42).

[Sources: AFHRA A5258 pp.1629-32 (30 Jul 43 updated to 24 Feb 44); chronologies; BA-MA; NARA; PRO/NA; web site ww2.dk]

[*From Luftwaffe Airfields 1935-45 Belgium and Luxembourg By Henry L. deZeng IV.* http://www.ww2.dk/Airfields - Belgium and Luxembourg.]

Appendix 7

A massive operation of deception was embarked upon to deceive the Germans about D-Day. First conceived in July 1943, a secret group of military officers, known as the London Controlling Section, began to devise a large-scale overall deception operation, codenamed Bodyguard. The deception operation itself was called Operation Fortitude with the aim of misleading the German High Command as to the location of the invasion.

The Royal Family were heavily involved:

> On March 3 [*1944*] his [*the King's*] private secretary Sir Alan Lascelles noted in his diary: 'Two 'MI' men called on me yesterday, and explained how the king's visits in the next few months could assist the elaborate cover scheme whereby we are endeavouring to bamboozle the German intelligence over the time and place for Overlord.'
>
> George's visits to troops in southern England – previously thought to be random photo opportunities – were part of an elaborate disinformation campaign.
>
> In particular, visits to the South-East were publicised to convince the Nazis that Calais was the point of attack, rather than Normandy, and that the invasion was imminent rather than still in preparation.
>
> Princess Elizabeth was also enlisted in the deception strategy. A newspaper report on

Such publicity around a visit from the whole Royal Family was used to 'amplify' the efforts to deceive the Nazis.

[www.pressreader.com/uk/daily-mail/20190501/282183652472490 (1 May 201

More specifically:

Monday 2 March 2020
When the Queen visited the headquarters of MI5 on 25 February [2020], she was shown material about the part played by her father in misleading the Nazis over the D-Day landings in 1944. Alistair Lexden supplemented *The Daily Telegraph's* account of the King's contribution in a letter published in the paper on 2 March:-

SIR - MI5 rightly drew attention during the Queen's visit to its headquarters (report, February 26) to George VI's "central role" in misleading the Nazis over plans for D-Day.

His involvement began when two MI5 officers called on the King's private secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles, on 3 March 1944. In his diary he wrote that they "explained how the King's visits in the next few months could assist the elaborate cover scheme to bamboozle the German intelligence over the time and place for Overlord".

Much press publicity was given to visits to troops in the South East to help strengthen the Nazi suspicion that Calais, not Normandy, would be the scene of Allied invasion, and earlier than the actual date in June.

What seemed to be a huge oil-storage complex near Dover also received a royal visit, as M15 has now revealed. It was in fact a complete fake, designed by Basil Spence and built by Shepperton Studios.

An element of the elaborate deception plans to which MI5 did not refer took the King to Scapa Flow. There he inspected the fleet at length during a three-day visit in May. Prominent press reports indicated that he had "taken leave" of his fleet in "cold and lonely northern waters" as it prepared for battle. The prospect of a Scandinavian attack was created to deter Nazi troop movement to reinforce northern France.

It is right that this contribution to D-Day's success made by the Queen's father, who meant so much to her, should at last be fully acknowledged.

Lord Lexden
London SW1

[www.alistairlexden.org.uk/news/how-king-george-vi-helped-fool-nazis-d-day]

From the newspaper reports of the time, it is quite possible that the Royal Family were not actu resident in Buckingham Palace on the night of March 14/15 1944.

Appendix 8.

A Junkers Ju 88A-1 was destroyed in combat on 17/10/39 when shot down by AAA (226 HAA), Pe Burn, Isle of Hoy, Orkney.

..... Almost certainly the graves of three of the Ju88 crew in two unknown graves in Lyness Nava Cemetery, though it seems odd that although understandably they may not have been able to ID the bodies due to the explosion, but why were the headstones not dated? The graves are simply inscribed "Ein Deutscher Soldat" ("A German Solider[sic])*".*

[https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/210249]