



F/Sgt Robert 'Bob' Becker

Another member of the crew, the flight engineer, Sgt Robert 'Bob' Becker had a grandstand view of Werner Hoffmann's attack; here he describes the events as they unfolded:

We started getting Monica beeping and then we heard reports from the gunners that there was a night fighter behind us. Then the chaos started. The rear guns all seized up and 'Ginger' Watson tried to clear them. The mid-upper turret manned by Basil Upton, who was our 'Spare Bod' that night, received quite a lot of bullets into the turret because I remember looking back down the fuselage and seeing the remains of his turret on the floor.

He was sitting on the rest bay seat and the internal light had come on. I then looked out and there was our friend sitting almost above the tail fin, he was angled up quite nicely and pointing towards our port wing. You could see that his forward-facing cannon were firing. I've always thought that I was in a very detached state, not really believing that I was there and that I was just an observer.

He then came across the aircraft and completely devastated the astrodome where I had been looking out. He then hit all the oxygen bottles underneath that went off like flak themselves; one little bit went through my battle dress and tweaked my arm. It was then I realised that all of our controls had been shot away. We were at 21,000ft, the highest we had ever been, when there was a general call to say we should get out. This is where things went all wrong again.

I went down the little step next to the wireless operator who was on my left, and in front of the escape hatch were the bomb-aimer and the navigator who could not get the hatch up — it was sort of partially open as it had been damaged. The wireless operator gave me a direct order to 'something OFF!' Which I thought was reasonable under the circumstances.

So, I sat forward with my legs dangling and edged my way out of the aircraft. I finally remember grabbing the floor on the way out, which wasn't a sensible thing to do because I was dragged along the bomb bay doors. As I was going along the underside of the aircraft the ripcord was pulled and the parachute opened in the slipstream. There was a tremendous

movement of the harness up to my throat and I then had the most terrible pain in my matrimonial prospects.

I found myself at 21,000ft, it was very cold and I think I was suffering from lack of oxygen. I then woke up to the fact that I was coming down in a horizontal plane with the parachute coming out of the small of my back. There was an aircraft going down on fire, which I thought was Werner's aircraft, but it transpired later that it wasn't — it must have been ours still burning brightly and going around and around.

Obeying the laws of jumping with a parachute I brought my knees up in a horizontal plane and landed straight on my kneecaps. So there I was on the ground feeling very, very lonely when I heard the sound of hunting horns and out came the Volkssturm with their dogs looking for us.

I went through the procedure of burying my parachute and was shortly surrounded by gentlemen who sort of more or less implied in German 'For you the war is over!' I spent that night on the kitchen floor of the Burgermeister of Schwerin. From there I went to Schwerin itself and was later joined by the rest of the crew except for poor old Basil who was the next man out after me. That was the luck of the draw, I came down on the side of the lake and he went down into it and was never seen again. Then of course it was off to Dulag Luft, the Frankfurt interrogation centre, and then off to a transit camp.

Although the entire crew was able to escape from the stricken aircraft they were all later interned by the Germans except for Sgt Basil Upton, the mid-upper gunner. He had followed Bob Becker out of the burning bomber but had the misfortune to land on, and plunge through, the ice-covered surface of Lake Schwerin; he subsequently drowned and his body was never recovered from its watery depths.