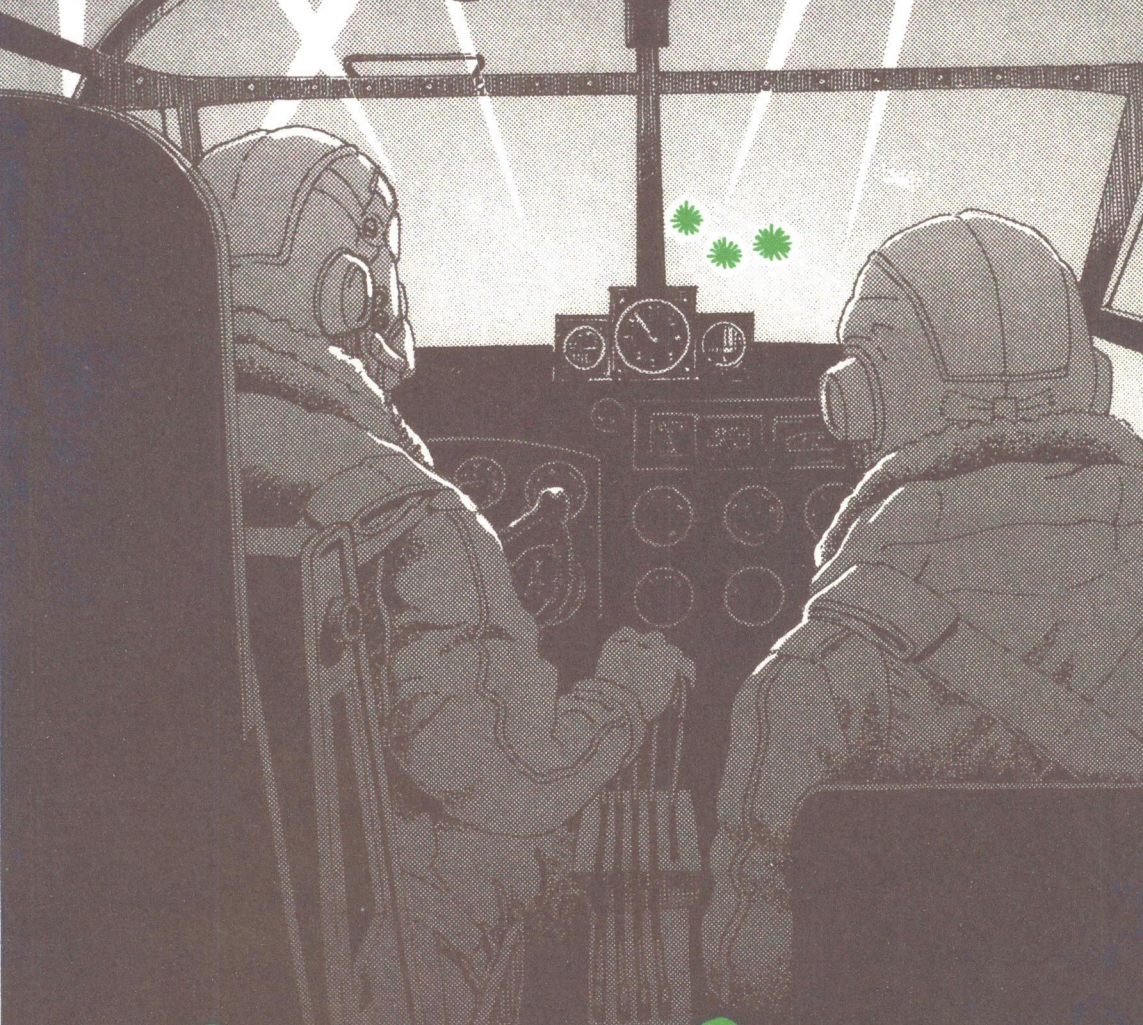


"GREEN MARKERS  
AHEAD SKIPPER!"



GILBERT GRAY



**EXAMPLE OF LEAFLET DROPPED OVER GERMANY IN 1943 BY THE RAF**

('Out of the Dream' - a reminder that the Ukraine was now back in Russian hands after Hitler and Goering had promised the German people bread from that part of Russia.)



# Aus der Traum!

„Oben Sie nur nicht, eines Herren internationalen Kräfte, oder wie ich Sie beschreiben, das wir im Osten sind von den neuesten Wissenschaften, von den neuesten Wissenschaften, oder neuesten Erfindungen oder neuesten Kohlenminen, gewonnen haben mit dem Frieden in den Hörsaalchen und das was Sie betrachten haben. In diesem Jahr ist geschickter werden, und wie! Und das beginnt sich jetzt so allgemein beginnt zu machen. Und wenn der nächste Jahr kommt, wird wieder mit recht die Freiheit einer Arbeit kommen!“

Hilfer, 8. November 1942

„Ich würde es für die Vorarbeiten haben, dass deutschen Völker heute etwas in Aussicht zu stellen, von dem ich nicht sicher weiß, dass ich es haben kann. Und deshalb kann ich sagen: Eine Schwere, auch in der Entscheidung, ist überstanden. Von heute an wird es dann immer weniger, denn die Gefahr mit Deutschland hat sich gelöst. Es ist jetzt nur eine Frage der Organisation. Und wenn Sie wissen, dass man sich immer mehr anstrengen muss, um die Freiheit zu gewinnen, dann gibt es doch einen Ausweg, wie Sie es mit einem vernünftigen können!“

Götter, 4. Oktober 1942

**Die gesamte Ukraine ist wieder in russischer Hand**

d. 14

## OPERATIONS - PHASE TWO

During our absence, 106 had been out on three nights - 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of May. Six aircraft had attacked Duisburg, sixteen had been sent to Brunswick and a further ten raided Nantes. Flight Lieutenant Holden had not returned to base from Brunswick. His crew included Flight Sergeant Scott, a Canadian pilot, who was doing his 'second dickie'.

The attack on the Nantes railway yards had been so successful that half the force was ordered not to bomb. On the trip, Pilot Officer Monaghan's aircraft was damaged by a fighter but, as the Squadron Report says, 'He effected a masterly one wheel landing at Carnaby'.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the conventional bombing attacks, twelve Lancasters had been sent to Kiel Bay and five others to the Bay of Biscay coast of France on mining operations. This, apparently, was part of the preparation for the forthcoming invasion which was now imminent and was directed at enemy coastwise shipping. It is recorded that, in the seven weeks prior to D-Day on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 7,000 mines were laid between the Baltic Sea and the Bay of Biscay, nearly half of them by Bomber Command.

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, decorations which had been awarded to the Squadron were gazetted though none of the recipients were currently on strength. Squadron Leader AH Crowe was awarded a bar to his DFC. A DFC went to Flying Officer H Johnson and DFMs to Flight Sergeants J Boaden, WP Haig and AG Mearns and to Sergeant LIB Blood.

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### OP. NUMBER FOUR - ABANDONED

When we were on leave, 'C-Charlie' had been flown twice on operations by Flight Sergeant Kitto and once by Flight Sergeant Fitcher. Fortunately, they had brought 'our' kite back safely and it was there to take us out on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

A medium gun battery at Maisy near the base of the Cherbourg peninsula was the target for the twelve of us who took off at 11pm in filthy weather to join the other fifty-six Lancasters and four Mosquitoes of 5 Group. We flew through violent thunderstorms which produced thick cloud conditions with the cloud base no

higher than 800 feet above sea level. It was no surprise, therefore, when the mission was abandoned just before 1 am when we were at position 49°30'N, 00° 50'W – less than ten miles from the target.

On our way home, 'C-Charlie's' hydraulic system failed so we had to seek a landing at another airfield which turned out to be Chipping Warden where we touched down safely. It was two days before we were able to return to base under our own steam. There, news had come through of the award of the DFC to the 'B' Flight Commander, Squadron Leader Sprawson.

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On each side of the English Channel tension was mounting.

Outside Portsmouth, on Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, in the huge Operations Centre at Allied Naval Headquarters in Southwick House, senior officers and their Chiefs of Staff were gathered in the library awaiting the arrival of the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, General Dwight D Eisenhower. These officers included Major-General Bedell Smith who was Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, and with him, Deputy Supreme Commander, Air Chief Marshal Tedder. With them were Admiral Ramsay and Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, the Allied Naval and Air Commanders, together with General Montgomery who was to be in charge of the forthcoming Allied invasion of mainland Europe.

These Commanders appraised the conditions, particularly weather prospects, before making the final decision on the date and time for any landing attempt. The date had already been postponed once. When would conditions be as advantageous as they could be: fair and reasonably calm weather, good visibility, calm seas, light onshore winds to help the craft ashore, broken cloud to allow air activity necessary to protect the landings, long daylight, low tide to expose any obstacles which the Germans might have laid to hinder a landing? To allow a build-up of forces to take place after the landing, a further three days of quiet weather would also be necessary.

The meteorological situation showed a frontal system moving up the English Channel – enough to cause the weather to clear and sky conditions to improve, enough to allow bombers to operate at night on the 5<sup>th</sup> and on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup>, enough to encourage Eisenhower 'in his isolation and loneliness' to give the order to go.

The time was now about 10pm on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Message from the Supreme Commander to the members of the Allied Forces about to embark on the battle to liberate occupied Europe.

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS  
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

## Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup> would be the day!

On the other side of the English Channel, radio receivers tuned in to BBC broadcasts from Britain in anticipation. At 6.30 on Monday morning, June 5<sup>th</sup>, the groups of underground resistance fighters in France heard two coded messages: 'It's hot in Suez', and 'The dice are on the table'. The first gave the order to engage in widespread sabotage and the second to cut telephone lines and cables.

Jean Marion was a sector chief in the area near Grandchamp on the coast of western Normandy. He was anxious to get two pieces of news to London.<sup>11</sup> He had noted a considerable strengthening of anti-aircraft defences in the area of Isigny-Grandchamp. Five batteries – 25 guns – had been put in place. He had also observed that at the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc, a place popular with holiday-makers, the great gun emplacements remained empty. The guns had not yet been installed.

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### OP. NUMBER FIVE – D-DAY – ST PIERRE DU MONT.

The entry in the 106 Squadron Operational Record Book dated June 5<sup>th</sup> is significant.

'Weather fine. Flying training – bombing exercise. Night flying tests were carried out for an operation scheduled for an early hour tomorrow morning.'

Max Hastings records the events in the chapter '97 Squadron', a near neighbour of 106, in his book 'Bomber Command'.

'On the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> June they were briefed to attack a gun battery on the French coast at St Pierre du Mont. They were told nothing of the significance of the occasion but their orders were unusual: no aircraft was to fly below 6,000 feet; no bombs were to be jettisoned in the Channel; no IFF was to be used. In the early hours of 6<sup>th</sup> June, they flew south across the Channel and broke cloud to see the great invasion armada below them.'<sup>6</sup>

On return, I sat on my bed with Charlie Tate beside me and together we made the following entry in our Flying Log Books:

Date	Hour	Aircraft	Pilot	Duty	Remarks
6.6.44	03.39	Lancaster ZN – C LL 953	F/Sgt Browne	Engineer	Operations: St Pierre du Mont Attacked by four FW 109's Invasion Starts

Later in the day, I wrote to my father ....

*'Well, what do you think of the news today? The great day has dawned and what do you think. I was in it. We hadn't been told about it but after briefing we had a pretty good idea that it was coming off. Our target was one of those gun batteries on the coast and we set off about 3 o'clock so that by the time we bombed it was daylight. It was lovely up there – the moon ahead and the sunrise behind us – as we floated along between two layers of cloud.'*

*Just after our load had gone, round came four FW 190's – the first Jerries I had actually seen and been able to recognise. Two of these attacked, but after a very violent dive into cloud during which our gunners scored hits, we got away by staying under cover for about half an hour.'*

*On the way back over the Channel, we saw huge convoys setting out but unfortunately we couldn't see the coast. Over England, we passed the Yanks going out so it was a rather impressive trip.'*

1,136 aircraft of Bomber Command dropped 5,315 tons of bombs on the coastal batteries that morning with the result that only one battery was able to offer serious opposition to the invading forces and ships offshore.

The 106 Squadron Operational Record Book has the following entry for 6<sup>th</sup> June:

*'At 03.00 hours this morning, 16 aircraft took off to make an attack on the medium Coastal Battery at St Pierre du Mont. The target was again cloud-covered but the target indicators were clearly discernible this time and our crews had no difficulty in picking them out. Bombing was carried out from between 04.50 and 05.00 (virtually daylight) at heights of 6,000 to 11,000 feet. All crews claim to have made successful attacks subsequent reconnaissance revealed that the target had been completely*

obliterated. A little light flak was encountered and all our aircraft returned safely.

'Bombs dropped: 176 x 1000lbs; 64 x 500 lbs - 92.8 tons.'

'As our crews were returning across the Channel, they saw a vast fleet of miscellaneous craft from battleships to barges, heading towards the coast of Normandy. D-Day had arrived!'<sup>9</sup>

From 5 Group, 116 Lancasters and 4 Mosquitoes were sent to this target and three were lost, two of them from our neighbours, 97 Squadron. 'Jimmy Carter, 97's Commanding Officer went down, hit by a Junkers 88, taking with him the Squadron Gunnery and Signals Leaders.'<sup>6</sup>

In the 5 Group record of the attack it is stated that ...

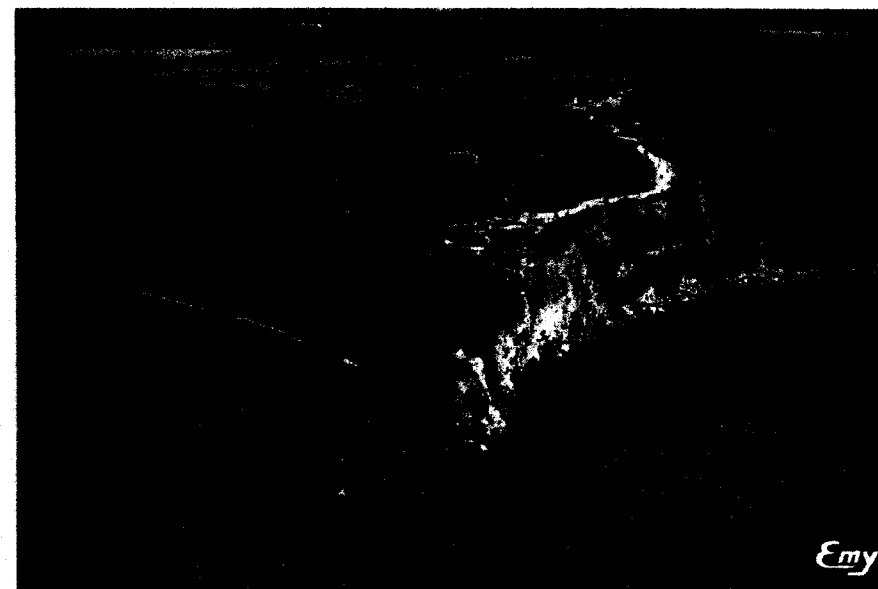
'.... There were two layers of cloud - 10/10 at 11,000 feet and 3 to 5/10 at 3,000 to 5,000 feet. The first markers appeared to be close to the aiming point and were backed up. The initial bombing seems to have been slightly to the east, but in the later stages it was reported as falling across the aiming point. Flak defences were negligible but some fighter activity in the target area was reported.'<sup>10</sup>

We, ourselves, reported cloud tops at about 15,000 feet but we located the target and saw two red target indicators cascading. On a course of 130° (approximately south-east), we dropped our bombs at 05.00 from a height of 10,500 feet and saw the bombing concentrated round the markers. Flight Lieutenant JE Taylor was able to identify Pointe du Hoc, the actual target, but cloud was such a hindrance that the Controller called some aircraft below the cloud to carry out their attacks.

Strangely, the 106 ORB does not record the combat in which we involved since it was a matter which we certainly would not have kept secret during the interrogation! After dropping our load, we found ourselves alone above cloud which was almost 10/10 over the coast. The four FW 190's came in from astern, two of them attacking. By this time, urged on by Wally in the rear turret, Peter was taking the standard 'corkscrew' evasive action and the enemy tracer ammunition passed, lazily it seemed, over the port wing and was well off target. Our own gunners, Wally and Eric in the mid-upper turret, were

firing bursts from their six flimsy .303's to some effect but Wally's increasingly urgent instructions came over the intercom.... 'Get into the cloud; get into the cloud!!!' Peter got the nose down and eventually the cloud offered us a safe haven. It was really quite remarkable that these fighters had made such a mess of dealing with a lone Lancaster which should have been a 'sitting duck', especially in broad daylight!

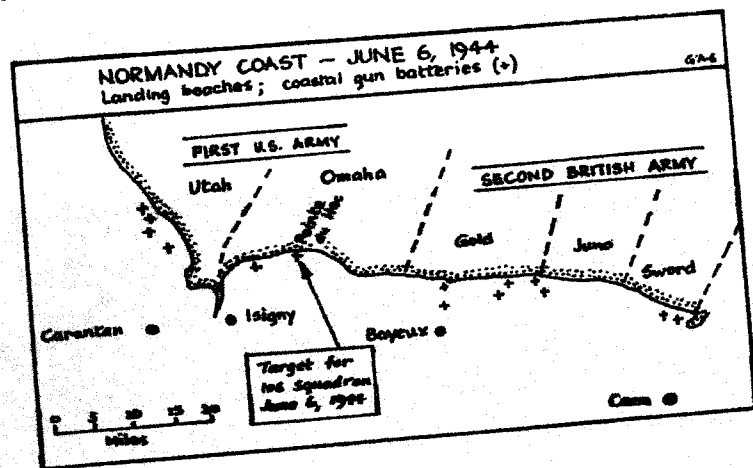
John Keegan in 'Six Armies in Normandy' is not quite correct when he writes '.... The Luftwaffe flew only 319 sorties on June 6<sup>th</sup> and lost many aircraft; the Allies flew 12,105, of which not one was interrupted by enemy air action.'<sup>12</sup>



D-Day target for 106 Squadron at 5 am on June 6, 1944. Pointe-du-Hoc as it is today with the cape spattered with bomb craters from the air and shell holes from bombardment by naval vessels.

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As we flew north over friendly territory, not only did we pass the air armada going in the opposite direction, but on the ground aircraft had been painted with broad black and white stripes across their wings and round their fuselages to identify them as belonging to the Allied forces. This applied particularly to gliders and their 'tugs' - the Stirlings, Dakotas, Albemarle - and to close support aircraft of the Tactical Air Forces.



Our aiming point on the day had been Pointe du Hoc at St Pierre du Mont. Before the war, its cliffs had been a beauty spot but the German occupiers ...

... by 1944, had converted the area into what was reported to be the most dangerous battery overlooking the American beach. The six 155 millimetre guns were able to cover both Omaha and Utah beaches and it was necessary to plan to destroy them. One gun was demolished in a massive air attack on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944. Unknown to the Allies, the Germans removed the guns after this raid and installed them in a camouflaged site covering the mouth of the Vire River. This was unknown at the time and further attacks were carried out on May 22<sup>nd</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>.

'At dawn on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the battleship USS 'Texas' shelled the cliffs.'<sup>13</sup>

Together with the USS 'Arkansas', it landed some 600 shells on the battery position from six miles out in the Channel. At the same time, smaller naval vessels added to the onslaught.

'Now a sound throbbed over the fleet .... Nine thousand planes ..... It seemed as though the sky could not possibly hold them all'<sup>11</sup>

Above the fighter aircraft - Spitfires, Thunderbolts, Mustangs - and the B-26 medium bombers of the USAAF and, above the heavy clouds which masked the beaches, came the Lancasters, Fortresses and Liberators.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> US seaborne attack began at about 7 am. Three Ranger companies led by Lieutenant Colonel James E Rudder stormed the beach and the cliffs with the help of ropes, grapnels and London Fire Brigade ladders in one of the great heroic enterprises of the war. By the end of their assault, their original two hundred and twenty-five men had been reduced to ninety such was the ferocity of the German counter fire. The story is told graphically by Cornelius Ryan in 'The Longest Day'.

Today, above the daunting cliffs of Pointe du Hoc, the craters remain and the shattered concrete remnants of the gun emplacements and living quarters lie askew to be seen by visitors who come to view the site and pay homage at the memorial to those gallant US soldiers.

Well to the east of the actual assault area, 617 Squadron was carrying out a influential navigational exercise. Using a high degree of skill, they flew a series of overlapping orbits releasing 'window' (strips of aluminium foil designed to interfere with enemy radar wavelengths), to simulate two convoys approaching the French coast between Cap Gris Nez and Le Havre. Alongside them, but generally unsung, in the same operation flew six Stirlings of 218 Squadron. This, and other feints in the Pas de Calais area, did much to divert German attention and battle resources from the Normandy landing zones.

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The invasion saw an intensification of the use of heavy bombers in a tactical capacity. New developments in navigation and in target marking which had been tested during the implementation of the 'Transportation' Plan were now

used in a number of close support attacks as the Allied armies sought to establish and consolidate the Normandy bridgehead.

Meantime, Dwight D Eisenhower, from Supreme Headquarters, addressed himself in a personal message (see p.79) to 'soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force' and wished them 'Good Luck' as they embarked upon the 'Great Crusade'. 'I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!'

'For a whole fortnight after D-Day, the weather was most unfavourable for bombing, with continuous low cloud, more often than not completely unbroken.'<sup>16</sup>

So writes Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris.

'In the circumstances, it was far more difficult for the American heavy bombers to operate than it was for my Command; the Americans were compelled to cancel many operations and in those which they were able to carry out many sorties were abortive. On the other hand, Bomber Command was able to attack from below cloud, even when the cloud base was at 2,000 feet, in operations within the invasion area. On every one of the seven nights after D-Day, Bomber Command was able to operate, mostly against the roads and railways of immediate tactical importance, and with the American heavy bombers largely inactive, this was of critical importance for the success of the invasion.....We were now able to keep the German reserves out of the battlefield during a most critical period by a whole series of heavy and extremely accurate attacks.'<sup>16</sup>

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#### *OP. NUMBER SIX - BRIDGES IN CAEN*

We were in action again on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

'Allied forces which had landed on the French coast less than 24 hours ago had already established a bridgehead and the Squadron took off early this morning (*twenty-five minutes past midnight in fact!*) on a mission intended to be of immediate support. The object of the attack was the destruction of two bridges at Caen; enemy reinforcements would thus be delayed in reaching the

battle area. There was full moon above 10/10 cloud at 5,000 feet. The target was located early and the markers clearly seen.'<sup>9</sup>

'The aiming point was marked by Mosquitoes at low level and the bombing appeared to be accurate though smoke from large fires on the other side of the river made observation difficult.'<sup>10</sup>

We ourselves saw red spot fires and green target indicators and at 02.43 dropped our eighteen 500-pounders from 5,200 feet, aiming at three spot fires. Although the bombing was well concentrated, we could not see definite results. Mind you, we were rather busy with other affairs! A Ju 88 attacked us and caused some minor damage to the Perspex panel in the rear turret. A piece of shrapnel came through the open front and passed out by the roof within inches of Wally's head. Fortunately, he didn't notice the damage until daylight came!

106 Squadron sent 16 aircraft and 14 of them came below cloud to bomb from between 3,000 and 5,000 feet for accuracy so bearing out the views expressed by Sir Arthur Harris earlier on the versatility of the 'heavies' of Bomber Command. Unfortunately, two of our crews did not come back. Although the 5 Group Operational Record reports that crews met only a small amount of anti-aircraft fire, we met quite a lot of light flak and this might have accounted for the loss of the aircraft flown by Squadron Leader Sprawson and Pilot Officer Warren. About twelve light guns were operating from an aerodrome west of Caen. Of the fourteen crew-men, seven were killed, one died of wounds, three evaded capture and one became a prisoner of war. Altogether, six Lancasters were lost from the 5 Group force of 121 which was accompanied by four Mosquitoes.

'Reconnaissance showed that both bridges had been put out of action as a result of the attack and a message of congratulations and appreciation was subsequently received from the C-in-C Army Group.'<sup>9</sup>

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#### *OP. NUMBER SEVEN - RAILWAYS AT RENNES*

The following night, June 8<sup>th</sup>, the Squadron rejoined the assault against railway marshalling yards. Rennes was the target this time and twelve of us