

## Action Stations...

Whenever we went on an op we were provided with flying rations of chewing gum, two bars of chocolate, barley sugars, a tin of orange juice and a thermos flask of coffee. On one occasion the latter proved a painful wake-up call for Taffy, who was quietly going about his business. He had poured himself a cup of coffee to fend off the chilling air and lodged the flask to one side in his turret. With a shout from Ken at mid upper over the intercom,

“Fighter ...”

Taffy swung the turret and, elevating the guns searching for the gun flare of the fighter, heard a graunch as the breach end of the Browning crushed the thermos which he had stowed clearly in the wrong place!

“Bloody Hell,” was cursed over the intercom, as piping hot coffee soaked his suit and legs.

A 109 was very close, climbing away to our port and before Ronnie had a chance to say anything, Ken screamed,

“Coming down from 5 o’clock.” Its guns now blazing Taffy was on it, trying to make each round count as he delivered them into the dark abyss, towards the 109’s fire. Taffy hollered,

“Corkscrew ... to port, Go!”

Ronnie responded immediately flinging the aircraft downward with the engines screaming at maximum torque, but perhaps due to the severity of the banking, soon lost control and the Halifax started to spin. Most of us were able to brace ourselves against nearby struts or spars, but Harry was not so lucky: he took a bit of a tumble but fortunately suffered no ill effects. For several minutes Ronnie struggled to regain control as we twisted and spun erratically through the sky. Reg, bracing his feet against the instrument panel, helped Ronnie heave back the control column. Our altitude saved us and we eventually levelled out and resumed flight; we had all been badly shaken including our attacker, who I imagine, thought we were lost to the sea and had made off.

Heading directly for Tempsford, our thoughts firmly focussed on the odd pint or two at the Wheatsheaf, we landed only to discover we had sustained serious damage to our tail plane, now partly fractured from the fuselage. We were to learn that this outcome following a corkscrew was not unusual, and in one recent incident that exposed this alarming vice of the Halifax, the crew had not regained control and ended up in the drink.<sup>34</sup>