

Soon it was time to take off, and we rumbled out on to the flare path in one great formation, and soon all nineteen of us were *en route* to Germany at zero altitude.

It was a wonderful sight. There was a full moon, and on either side of me stretched the two long arms of Lancasters forming a V, flying in perfect formation, each man knowing the plan, each one knowing his job.

We fought our way past Hamm, the well-known Hamm which used to be bombed so many times, and then as we came over the hill we saw the Möhne Lake. And then we saw the dam itself, and in the early light of the morning it looked squat and heavy and unconquerable. A structure like a battleship was shooting up flak all along its length. It was light flak mostly, green, yellow, and red, and the colours of the tracer reflected upon the face of the water in the lake; it reflected upon the dead calm of black water, so that it seemed to us that there was twice as much as there really was.

I spoke to my squadron: "O.K., chaps. Come in to attack when I tell you. I'll attack first."

The gunners saw us coming. It was not exactly an inferno. I have been through far worse flak fire than that; but we were very low. There was something sinister and slightly unnerving about the whole operation.

We skimmed along the surface of the lake, and as we went my gunner was firing into the defences, and the defences saw us coming and fired back. Their shells whistled past us, but for some reason we were not being hit. Spam said, "Left . . . little more left . . . steady . . . steady . . . steady . . . bombs gone!"

Then it was all over.

Trevor, the rear gunner, said, "I'll get those devils." And he began to spray the dam with bullets until at last we were out of range.

As we circled round I saw that we had not broken the dam, and so far as I could see there was not much damage, but the explosion of my mines had caused a great disturbance upon the surface of the lake and the water had become broken and furious, as though it were being lashed by a gale. I had to wait for this to calm down and it took quite a long time.

"Hello, M Mother. Hello, M Mother. You may attack now. Good luck."

Hoppy began his attack. Hoppy the Englishman, casual, keen now only on one thing, which was war. I saw him approach. I saw him drop his mines. I saw him shot down.

Many minutes later I told No. 3 to attack. He was all right; he got through. It was then that I saw that the dam wall had moved. It had moved back on its axis and I knew then that if we could only go on pushing, in the end it must collapse. Then one after the other, No. 4, No. 5, and No. 6 went in to attack.

Now we had been over the dam for more than an hour, and all the while I was in contact with my aerodrome at home. I was in contact with my Commander in Chief and with the scientist, the man who was witnessing the last great experiment in the science of damology. I am told that he sat in the Operations Room with his head in his hands, listening to my report as one by one I announced that aircraft had attacked, but that the wall had not broken.

But I knew that the structure was shifting and then suddenly, as the last aircraft attacked and as I watched the mines drop in exactly the right place, a great column of whiteness rose up a thousand feet into the air and the dam wall collapsed. I saw it go, but I could not believe that it had happened. I heard some one shout, "I think she's gone! I think she's gone!" And other voices picked up the call and quickly I said, "Stand by until I make a recco."

Now there was no doubt about it. There was a breach 100 yards across, and the water was gushing out and rolling down into the Ruhr Valley towards the industrial centres of Germany's Third Reich.

I passed the message home to my station, and I am told that when the news came through there was great excitement in the Operations Room. I am told that the scientist leaped up and danced around the room and shouted the news.

Then I looked again at the dam and at the water. It was a sight such as no man will ever see again. Down in the valley we saw cars speeding along the roads in front of this great wave of water which was chasing them and going faster than they could ever hope to go.