

W&M28 Bill Eames

SPEAKERS

Bill Eames

Bill Eames 00:00

Then we had to move North to Harwell, a place called Harwell which is just west of Oxford or quite close to Oxford.

Bill Eames 00:16

because they wanted those airfields down at the South for people going on D-Day you know fighters going over on D-Day so we went up to Harwell and settled down there.

Bill Eames 00:28

Another nice prewar airfield. We stayed there... building up to D-Day and eventually we did the D-Day out of there, towing Horsa-gliders.

Bill Eames 00:44

And on the night of D-Day as you probably have read, D-Day was postponed for a day and although it had improved quite a bit before the actual operation the next night it was still not good and it took us a long time to get airborne.

Bill Eames 01:08

You see the gunner, our gunner at the back, he could tell you whether the Horsa's were airborne and he would say "Gilder airborne" you see and then because if you pulled off too soon you couldn't get, if you pulled up too soon you couldn't get your own Albemarle off the ground anyway.

Bill Eames 01:30

Well on the night of D-Day it was, the weather was not good but we had a good glider, we generally had the same glider crew, the sergeant and staff sergeant and we got to know them pretty well and they got used to flying behind us as a crew.

Bill Eames 01:53

On that night of course it was, we had to, it took us about ten miles before we could turn gently, in the dark, in miserable old night you know and our crew followed us around very well.

Bill Eames 02:09

But we were very much afraid on the night of D-Day of a towrope breaking and then they would either go into water or if they were overland, they could probably pull off a decent landing but over the water they couldn't of course.

Bill Eames 02:25

If it was rough you see and the tow rope was maybe snagging a wee bit you know, on a nice calm day it was easy enough to tow but if it was turbulent then there was always the possibility of a tow-rope breaking.

Bill Eames 02:43

What we did on that occasion we could see the flack, quite a lot of flack as we crossed the English coast, we could see the gunfire at the place that we were going to so that was a good point anyway, you could see the blooming flack although it wasn't fun for us flying into it.

Bill Eames 03:05

We eventually came up to the point and got through the anti-aircraft fire and we weren't hit on that occasion and as we got further up towards the dropping zone, there was a canal and a river there, the river Orne and the canal Orne and when we got to the right place our glider pilot said "I've got it" and he pulled off and off he went you see and down and landed pretty well on the right place actually he was very good.

Bill Eames 03:44

After D-Day when, we did some more supply dropping operations but then we had to convert to flying the Sterling because it gave us a longer range for the next part, the Albemarle was fairly limited in range so we had to convert and learn how to fly the Sterling.

Bill Eames 04:08

So we went up, might have been at that two or three days you know at a place called Tilstock and we came back and I rather liked the Sterling actually, it was a great big, good enough, it had a bad name but I quite liked it.

Bill Eames 04:25

As I say we continued doing supply drops there, until it came up to the Arnheim operation, of course that was a disaster really, you've probably read about it, so many things went wrong there you know and I flew on the Sunday which was the first day on which there was very little opposition, a bit of flack but nothing much to talk about.

Bill Eames 05:01

We got back safely from that, the second day... well I might say that on that first day, the Sunday we dropped a glider into the Northwest of Arnheim, with our two glider pilots that we never saw again.

Bill Eames 05:17

And we came back and then the following day, we took another glider but in fact on that day we were hoping that we would get off an awful lot earlier but for some reason we weren't permitted to.

Bill Eames 05:34

You know you never understand, as aircrew you're just sitting waiting to be told what to do, but the experts held us back and held us back.

Bill Eames 05:45

So that second glider we put down was a lot later than we would have liked and there was a lot of enemy action at that, a lot of flack.

Bill Eames 06:00

Then the third day, it was really a very bad day for the aircrew because the ground troops were in trouble by that point and our operation was to resupply them and a large number, we just flew in, one after the other to drop our supplies from 600ft and that is very low.

Bill Eames 06:27

But as it so happened, we were briefed exactly where to put our supplies down and we did actually the only thing was that on either side of our dropping zone there were two German Panzer divisions and they simply shot us up very badly.

Bill Eames 06:45

And many of our aircraft were just shot down, generally climbing away from the drop.

Bill Eames 06:57

I was hit, I was rather badly hit, my leg and my arm... but we were able to, we didn't, I decided I wasn't going climb up, you know I could see these others being shot down because they'd be told to.

Bill Eames 07:11

So I just turned left at low-level and got off towards home if you like.

Bill Eames 07:19

My good friend from Irvinestown, Bill Hudson, he bandaged me up and got a tourniquet on my arm and a tourniquet on my leg and that sort of thing and in the mean time I was able to fly it back.