Clifford B. Ackerman — Briefing Officer Details

The following are notes I took from a conversation with my Dad about Tibenham and the Kassel Run:

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Squadron Briefing Officer, 702nd Squadron

445th, 2nd combat bombardment wing

Tibenham, UK, 1944

My Dad was the Squadron Briefing Officer (SBO) for the 702. He also held the position of Assistant Operations Officer at the same time for the 702. He was grounded due to a head injury sustained during a bomb run over Germany; he was hit in the head with Flak.

Each Squadron had its own Briefing Officer and Operations Officer. There was a Group Briefing Officer that would be on the stage giving the briefing but my Dad does not remember who that was.

My Dad worked for the Operations Officer for the 702 who reported to the Squadron Commanders, who then reported to the Deputy Group Commander and Group Commander.

First I'll explain the briefing room and then the duties of the SBO on that day.

The briefing room was of Standard Air Ministry Construction, as my Dad explained, measuring 40x60 feet with one entire (60') wall containing the map of the UK/Ireland/Scotland Mainland and all of Europe as well as the aircraft formation silhouettes painted on the wall.

The building was constructed of concrete cinderblocks with metal casement windows, open wood rafter framing, and smelled like a damp warehouse and stale cigarettes.

Installed was a stage three feet high in front of the map that ran the length of the map (about 40'), large enough for the Group Commander, Deputy Group Commander, Group Briefing Officer, Lead Mission Pilot, Senior Weather Officer, Group Bombardier, Group Navigator, Anti Aircraft Officer, sometimes a Doctor; and a junior officer who had the task of using a pointing stick to locate areas of the map for those who were speaking about it, usually noting the route of the mission and positions of Anti Aircraft installations.

The Group Commander or Deputy Group Commander would lead the briefing along with the Group Briefing Officer.

After the Briefing, the Group Navigator, Group Bombardier, Lead Mission Pilot would brief the Squadron Navigators, Squadron Bombardiers, and Squadron Pilots in separate meetings.

The weather reports came from a separate building on the base and were printed on a primitive ink-jet printer onto paper that was impregnated with some type of solution so that it could be read.

The Air Crews sat on wooden benches in front of the map: more than 300 members of the Air Crews, consisting of the Pilots, Co-Pilots, and Navigators, would be in the Briefing Room.

The Flight Engineers were usually with their airships making ready for the mission, and the Gunners would be picking up their gun barrels from another building, some attending the briefing for just a few minutes.

There was an adjoining Equipment Room to the side of the map in the Briefing Room where the Air Crews picked up the following after the Briefing:

Oxygen Masks, Electric Flying Suits (Electrically heated once connected to the inside of the aircraft), Electric Gloves, Electric Boots; an Escape Kit containing a knife, sometimes a pistol, compass, a map of the area in which the bomb run was to take place, literature in German explaining you are an American and to assist the Air Crew, UK entry passes, written in German, to allow access to the UK for Germans who assist Air Crews to escape enemy occupied territories, pills to make water safer to drink, German currency, a medical kit, field rations and chocolate bars; the Escape Kit was about the size of a show box.

A series of events lead up to a Briefing and they are as follows:

A "FRAG" Order (FRAG stands for a US Army acronym and my Father does not recall what it stands for) comes through on the teletype, Underwood Teletype he thinks, usually just after midnight.

This describes the destination, the number of aircraft for the mission, the bomb load to be carried, the "nose and tail" fuse settings for the bombs, and radio information such as altitude codes and radio frequencies to be used.

Sometimes the Altitude codes would be changed with an addendum FRAG order, sometimes they would change in-flight.

Also contained in the FRAG Order are the types of bullets to be used: Tracer, Armor Piercing, or Standard.

The Squadron Commanders and Operations Officers would determine which Air Crews from each Squadron would fly each particular mission; this is usually determined by who flew last and who was next in line, and their positions in the flight formation.

In the Briefing Room there were silhouettes of plane formations painted on the wall, along with the map, where the names of each Air Crew for each mission were placed in the formation that was decided for each mission. The Group Briefing Officer placed the names on the plane silhouettes.

Some of the crews rushed to equipment room after the briefing to get the Flying Suits because they would run out (those crew members who did not get the electric suit would have to bundle up and fly without it). The Flight Crews would arrive to the briefing in all form of dress and disarray, with over 300 men, it was like filling and emptying a large movie theater, according to my Dad.

After the FRAG Order arrives and prior to the Briefing, each SBO would get the list from the Operations Officer as to who would be on the "wake-up" list, and then dispatch an airman with a jeep with the crew list and the quarters list, to inform them of the briefing time.

Each Air Crew was instructed to remove all personal items and get on their bicycles in the dark and make their way to the Mess Hall. Some would stop by the Church prior to eating breakfast. Some would stop by the Equipment Room to make sure they got their Flying Suits and Escape Kit before they ran out. Breakfast consisted of powdered eggs, bacon, toast, sausage, coffee.

The Squadron Briefing Officer also contacts the Ordinance/Armament Officer associated with each Squadron and provides the types of bombs to be loaded, fuse settings and indicates the number of tracers to be loaded with the 50 caliber gun belts. The SBO contacts the Engineering Officer and instructs how much fuel should be loaded onto the airships. The SBO also contacts the Officer-in-Charge of the Aircraft Guards to inform him of the estimated time of the Air Crews' arrival at their airships, and to withdraw the personnel on guard duty accordingly.

The SBO goes to the main Briefing but does not participate.

From the time of receiving the FRAG order to the time the aircraft start to taxi on the runway is at least six hours.

The 445th had about 50 aircraft at one time. A "maximum effort" was for each Squadron to have nine aircraft in the air. Each Squadron had between 12-14 aircraft assigned to it.

My Dad's B-24 was called "Q for Queeny" and had a lounging woman in a bathing suit.