

## The Bruneval Raid 1942

In early 1942, a German installation at Bruneval on the French coast, not far from Le Havre, attracted the attention of RAF photographic reconnaissance aircraft.

These visits were of no surprise to the Germans as the site contained a series of early warning devices designed to detect Allied ships and aircraft approaching Western Europe.

It was suspected that these devices were at least partly responsible for the loss of many British bombers. Immediate action was necessary and a decision was made to raid the installation, carry away the most important parts of the devices for examination, and if possible capture the technicians who understood the equipment.

The site was so well guarded that a commando attack from the sea was unlikely to succeed. Therefore a company from the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division under the command of Major John Frost was chosen for the task. Transport was to be provided by Whitley bombers from 51 Squadron under the Command of Wing Commander P.C. Pickard and the evacuation of Frost's men from the beach was to be undertaken by a party of Royal Fusiliers and South Wales Borderers led by Commander F. N Cook of the Royal Australian Navy.

The weather forecast for the night of February 27/28 was good and the naval force sailed that afternoon. At night there was a bright moon, no wind and the sea was a flat calm. The Whitley bombers with airborne troops took off from Thruxton and set course for Bruneval, a flight of little more than two hours. Thirty minutes from the French coast the static lines were attached and the troops prepared to jump. Frost and his men had learned the landscape by heart from briefing models and photographs. They landed in a foot of snow but the countryside was quiet and peaceful.

The party set out quickly for the objective, which was an isolated house and the radio location pit. Within ten minutes five of the six Germans guarding the devices had been killed and a defensive screen established around the radio location pit. Lt Vernon and Sgt Cox of the Royal Engineers then worked quickly to dismantle the equipment while a fire fight ensued with German troops

alerted by the sound of earlier gunfire. Some of the radio equipment was damaged by incoming fire but leaving the comparative safety of their defensive screen the raiders made their way through the snow towards the beach.

All seemed well, but as they were beginning the steep descent to the beach Frost's men came under machine-gun fire and sustained two casualties, both of whom happily survived. Nonetheless the escape route was cleared and by 0215 hours Frost began signalling the naval force. Soon the navy picked up the signals and under heavy machine-gun fire from the clifftops the raiders embarked, leaving behind one dead parachutist. As day broke fighters from the RAF provided protective cover, ready to beat off any attempt by the Luftwaffe to destroy the captured equipment.