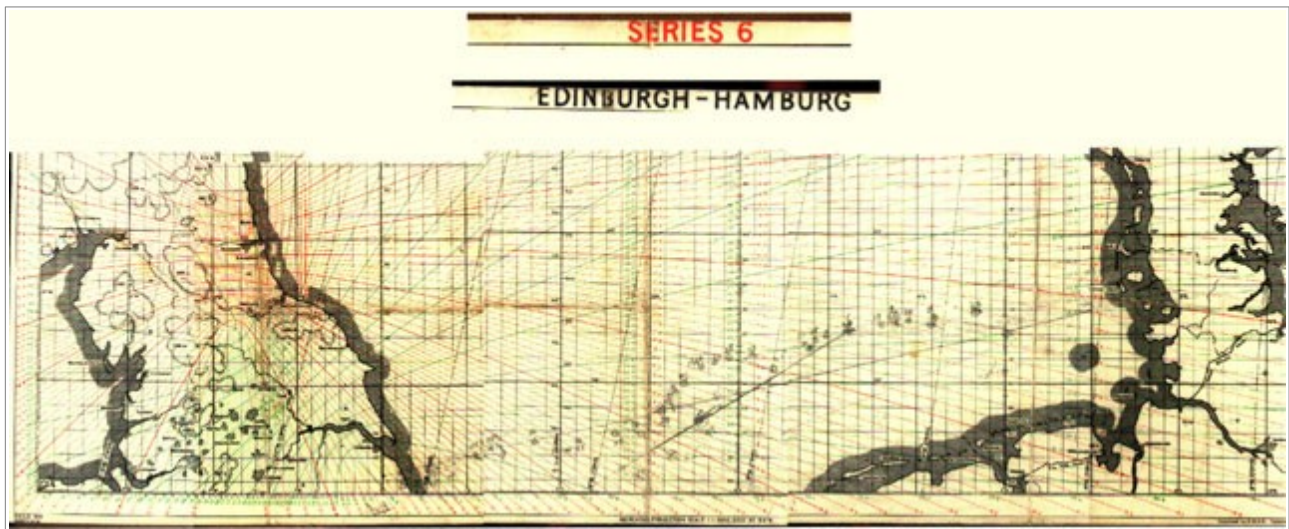


Use of Gee on the Kiel Raid

By John W. Howland



GEE chart used by Pathfinder Navigator John W. Howland on a raid To Kiel, May 22, 1944

Note: This Series 6 GEE chart actually covers an area stretching from Blackpool on the west coast of England to Denmark. Duplicate lines on the chart and smudges from erasures were due to the fact that I used this same chart on previous raids including a raid to Berlin on May 19th. Our return trip brought us home along this route.

Two teams from the 381st Bomb Group were assigned to the Pathfinder Force of the 1st Division in March 1944. Carl Clark and Jim Tyson were the Pathfinder Pilots and Clem Obler and John Howland were their respective navigators. We usually alternated flying lead and deputy lead on deep penetration missions flown by the 1st Combat Wing, made up of the 381st, 91st and 398th Bomb Groups. In May 1944 the Pathfinder Force for the 1st Division was based at Bassingbourn, home of the 91st Bomb Group.

From the wartime diary of John Howland

In the evening of May 21, 1944 we received a preliminary briefing at Bassingbourn for a raid to Kiel in Denmark. The two 381st Bomb Group pathfinder teams flew to Ridgewell, landing about 2330 hours. Sleeping quarters were provided, but we were up again at 04:30 for breakfast and briefing. Takeoff time was 0830 hours. Tyson and Howland were scheduled to fly deputy lead while Carl Clark and Clem Obler took over lead ship responsibilities. For my part, it was great to let my friend and colleague Clem Obler handle this mission. We had great confidence and trust in each other and it was a relief not to carry the responsibility of leading 54 ships and 540 men into battle.



I recently came across a picture of a functioning GEE box owned by Paul Bodifée and his father in Holland. It is the same unit that sat on the navigator's table of my B-17 almost 60 years ago. Only the scope box sat on my table, and it had a daylight vision shield. The support units were out of sight somewhere under the table. The GEE box was fast and accurate. It took about 15 to 30 seconds to obtain a fix that was accurate to approximately 25 feet at sea level. My pilot, Jim Tyson, and I developed a bad weather "homing" routine that we used at Ridgewell (only) where our main runway (280 degrees) just happened to parallel one of the GEE line on my chart.

I just followed the leader with my GEE box. We left the coast at Cromer, and took off up the North Sea. I worked hard trying to get a good wind at altitude, but had trouble since I wasn't calling the direction shots. However, I finally got a good wind using a combination of GEE fixes and bombsight drift readings. I used a Series 6 GEE chart and reception was excellent. My most distant fix was located at 54° 27' N Lat and 6° 50' E Long. The two GEE stations (Red & Green) were located in Great Britain about 39 statute miles west and a little south of Middleborough. My farthest fix was 325 statute miles east from Middleborough, about 80 miles west of the Danish coast. We were in a good position to make our final attack on the target. After passing Heligoland we swung around and started our bomb run immediately. I worked closely with our bombardier and Mickey Operator. We were ready to take over if necessary. It was clear over the target area, so the lead bombardier aimed for the center of the industrial area on the N side of the bay. He hit it with very good results. Like the other ships in the formation, our bombs were toggled when we saw the smoke bombs from the lead ship. There was very little flak over the target area, but I was extremely apprehensive. Perhaps I am still a little "flak happy" from that last raid to Berlin. However, no one got hit or hurt in our formation. We made a 180 degree turn to the right and started back toward the Danish coast. There were a few P-38 escort fighters around, but I didn't see any P-51s after the target area. I did see some fighters circling up through the clouds below, and got a good profile look at one of them. Sure enough, it was an FW-190. I dropped my pencil and grabbed a machine gun waiting for a shot. However, they must have made a pass at another Wing in back of us for that was the last I ever saw of them. A turn to the SW was made after we crossed the coast and passed N of Heligoland. I plotted DR positions every five minutes and checked them against GEE fixes. Everything checked out fine. After an hour or so I felt tired and sat back and relaxed. It was a short mission; in fact, one of the shortest I have been on. But we still logged over eight hours in the air. Following interrogation at Bassingbourn we found out we were on a 48 hour pass. But I was too tired to go anywhere. I stood up a date in the town of Royston, and went to bed. Clem is worn out from so much flying and was grounded today by the flight surgeon.

Total Eighth Air Force, May 22, 1944

Effective Bomber force 388

Bombers MIA 5

Percent loss 1.3%

My college classmate and friend Bert Stiles also flew in the same formation on this raid to Kiel. Read below his description of the raid as presented in his classic book of the air war, *Serenade to the Big Bird*.

From: "SERENADE TO THE BIG BIRD" by Bert Stiles

"On the Kiel job I got my first close-up of a Fort blowing up. The flak tightened up on a group just ahead of ours, and right out at ten o'clock, not very far away, a great red wound opened up, and then the drifting pieces, and ten men and a couple of hundred thousand dollars' worth of airplane, powdered in a hundredth of a second. And while we were watching the streamers from that one, another Fort nosed over straight down and started for the ground by the shortest route. It must have dived five thousand feet, and then, by some miracle, it pulled out level and into a straight-up climb. It stalled out somewhere below us and fell off on the right wing and spun in.

"Two chutes", Sharpe called up. "There's another.

You don't remember much when missions come so fast."

Bert Stiles