PART 3

My Seven Year (Tw)itch in the Royal Air Force

Flt. Lt. Eric Jones DFC
1993

FOREWORD

This record is written without the aid of diaries, letters or Log Book notes. Diaries were forbidden in the Royal Air Force and in any case I had no intention of keeping one. I shared, with many others, the thought that keeping a diary would bring bad luck. My Log Books show only the bare facts of each flight so for the operational details of each of my raids over Germany I have clipped into my Log Book the official details of the raids. These I obtained from Martin Middlebrook's book 'Bomber Command Diaries'. So, I am relying on memory and also the jogging of my memory caused by conversation and the reading of Air Force related books.

I will endeavour to keep the record non-technical.

It wasn't quite seven years, it was six years and eight months but it still remains the most memorable period of my life.

I suppose I was about nine years old when my parents first suspected that I had more than my fair share of chest problems. It was to be some years before these were finally diagnosed as asthma. My Mother always said I caught it from my piano teacher who lived next door - a Mr. Ray Wilton - he taught but I never learnt. Later I was to learn that 'catching' asthma from anyone was just not on, so poor Mr. Wilton was much maligned.

For some years my complaint was treated by an 'old fashioned' doctor who lived in a large house behind a high wall a few yards from my father's shop. Dr. Johnstone was his name and his cure was to stick mustard plasters onto my chest. Whether these did my asthma any good is debatable but they had a good psychological effect. One day, when lying on my back in the 'front' bedroom and wheezing away, I remember my Mother standing at the window saying 'He's going to die, he's going to die' so I must have been putting on a pretty good show.

The doctor eventually arrived with his plasters to put her fears to rest. Incidentally, that bed in the front room had an iron frame with brass knobs screwed on at the corners. These we could unscrew and use to play bowls on the bedroom floor.

So this was the procedure for many years. Flannelette chest protectors they called Thermogene, gallons of cod liver oil and malt, no Scout camps and generally cossetted through the years. In the event and due to the ignorance about the complaint, entirely the wrong treatment.

If I had any thoughts of joining the Royal Air Force at this stage asthma would prevent it. It was high on the list of taboo illnesses.

All this until one day a certain South African, Doctor Morris arrived to take up a practice in Newent. My Father, for some reason or other, switched his allegiance to Dr. Morris and consequently I now came under his supervision.

With him came his magical little white tablet called Ephedrine Hydrochloride and a half grain or at the most a whole grain would stop the average asthma attack dead in its tracks. Sometimes he resorted to the use of adrenoline injections for the worst attacks but generally the little white pill did the trick. Unfortunately and occasionally they had one unpleasant side effect and don't laugh at this - but they made me think my heart was upside down. No laughing matter for me, it was quite frightening.

So, when the war arrived on September 3rd. 1939, I was standing outside Newent Church waiting to go in to do my stint in the choir. We all knew war was coming but it was still a shock, however, my chief interest in this new situation was to join the Royal Air Force and become a pilot. What a pipe dream, and me with asthma into the bargain.

The previous year I requested that my prize for gaining my School Certificate should be a book on the RAF. I still have it with the school crest on the front cover. But I was only 15 years and 9 months old so there had to be a period of waiting before I could try my luck. This time was filled by working for two successive employers (I had already spent a year at the Gloucester Technical College learning

typewriting and book-keeping) This year at college was not unlike my five years taking piano lessons - I didn't learn very much - the war occupied our thoughts more than anything else. Funnily enough, the strongest memory I have of that college was a fellow who got through forty Craven A cigarettes a day. I just couldn't believe anyone could have all that money.

Acquiring these somewhat dubious fresh skills enabled me to get a job as a general clerk with W.R. Field, Coal Merchants. This gentleman dealt in door-to-door coal deliveries and the obtaining of timber pit props from Shropshire for delivery to the South Wales coal mines. He ran a Christmas Book for coal. Each customer paid 3d. a week, all the year round and then at Christmas they were entitled to coal of the equivalent value. One of my duties, was to take the 'book' to these customers and collect the 3d. per week. OK in fine weather but in the wet - ugh!! Mr. Field also smoked Craven A cigarettes. He must have smoked eighty a day, the makers used to advertise and say 'these cigarettes will not give you a cough' . Mr. Field had a permanent cough, supplemented by a yellow nicotine streak that travelled up his nose and forehead and disappeared into his hair.

The offer of another job and betterment came up and I moved to Wildsmith & Hurrell Ltd. Builders whose offices were in Watery Lane. I liked Mr. Hurrell but I wasn't too keen on Mr. Wildsmith. Amongst other things I was the pay clerk and I remember paying a qualified bricklayer 1/l0d. per hour. I think my pay was about 30/- per week.

About this time evacuees were coming to Newent to escape the threat of German bombs. As I have already written elsewhere, some of them came and stayed at our own home. Sylvia Griffiths came to stay at George Lodge's black & white house opposite the church. Sylvia came with a sister eight years her junior, Muriel, and also her grandmother. One Sunday afternoon, out walking in a group, we chatted and struck up a mutual friendship. This friendship developed and we began to see a lot of each other. This included getting up at the crack of dawn and taking our dog, Jock, for a walk in the Crofts at the rear of the church and, of course, meeting Sylvia en route. Jock must have thought it a great idea, he had never had it so good and Cousin Peter, now living permanently with us must have known of these clandestine meetings but like the sport he was, kept it to himself. Perhaps Mother and Father knew as well but I very much doubt it.

Sylvia used to come to the field opposite Wildsmith & Hurrell's office and wait for me to finish work. This was a pleasant distraction from working up the wages sheets for the brickies and labourers. A mundane and ordinary job but I knew I was only marking time until I reached the magical age of eighteen when I could chance my arm with the Royal Air Force. I wasn't exactly bubbling over with self confidence, a somewhat remote hope for a village lad who could not even drive a car. But I had decided, if I failed in my quest to train as a pilot then another aircrew position would do or failing that a job on the ground staff.

But how was I able to even consider this when they demanded such a high standard of health. Dr. Norris, from the start, was on my side and said, in effect, 'Don't worry, I will get you through'.

At eighteen, or thereabouts, I volunteered. To delay would have meant being called up with the risk of being drafted into one of the other services. In due course I was instructed to attend RAF Gloucester for a preliminary aircrew medical. On the day, and by taking the magical tablets, Dr. Norris' forecast that my chest would be free of all wheezes, proved to be correct. After a full scale medical and possibly verbal interview, which I don't recall, I was through, I had passed the first hurdle. I must have stayed in Gloucester making merry because I missed the last bus to Newent. I remember walking the road from Gloucester to Newent in the dead of night arriving in Newent in the early morning hours and whistling a pre-arranged tune as I passed by Sylvia's window, indicating that I had made it.

That was the first stage - the second stage was Cardington, the old airship base with its huge hangars and here the medical was to be much more thorough and it was here that I went before a Selection Board.

The medicos did notice that my heart was beating at a rare old speed, a side effect of the little white pill, but they overlooked this, possibly thinking it was excitement or nervousness. Anyway I was able to blow the mercury up to the required level in the tube and hold it for 60 seconds and after several other stringent medical checks I then passed on to the Selection Board. I can't remember the actual questions asked but they went something like this:- 'We see that you have passed your School Certificate' - Yes sir. 'Do you play Rugby' - No sir. 'Do you play tennis' - No sir. 'Do you drive a car' - No sir. 'Do you drive a motor cycle - No sir. Although these may not be the precise questions they did follow this pattern. But I do remember being asked whether I belonged to any of the Emergency Services and here I did have another 'Yes'.

Soon after war broke out I joined the St. John's Ambulance Brigade and we met in a large corrugated iron shed just past the Saw Mills on the Oxenhall Road. I obtained my Proficiency Badge patching up imaginary injuries on fellow members and later acquired a bar to this badge as I became more proficient. Many a night we could hear the anti-aircraft guns rumbling in the distance. 'Over Bristol' we thought and we waited patiently for a call for help but they could not have known of our existence because a call never came. So I left Cardington having been accepted for the Royal Air Force. I like to think that they accepted me because I was reasonably well educated and the fact that they gave me an Al bill of health. Other eighteen year olds in the village applied and not all made it so, for the first, time I began to think that perhaps luck was on my side. Tom Hegarty and the son of the Dymock *policeman both made it to aircrew and both were to lose their lives during the war. I forget the name of the policeman's son.

I went back home to await call-up and on August 18th. 1941 I reported to ACRC London (also called 'arsy-tarsy' but in reality the Air Crew Receiving Centre). Large blocks of flats had been commandeered in Maida Vale, West London and my first RAF billet was in one of them. Here I was introduced to the 'three biscuit bed'. Three square solid mattresses made up a bed on the floor and were

* See addendum

they hard and didn't they take a long time to get used to. No sheets either, just blankets.

Maida Vale was a natural choice for the commandeering of flats because it was close by Lords Cricket Ground and this is where we used to congregate most days. Hundreds, possibly thousands of prospective aircrew amassed tier upon tier and for the life of me I can't remember what we were watching or doing. At ACRC we received our uniform and essential items of kit. All our worldly possessions stuffed into one kit bag and it was to remain that way for at least two years. No neatly-folded clothes, just push it into the old kit bag. My chief memory of 'arsy-tarsy' was marching, counter-marching and marching and marching again. So I suspect that at this early stage in one's service life the idea was to instil service discipline into one and all in the shortest possible time. This is where I was distinctly unlucky. I was six feet five inches tall and no one else on our course came anywhere this height so, when it came to parade and the order was 'tallest on the right and shortest on the left' I was always the one who was known as the 'marker'. As all eyes were focused on me there could be no 'skiving' or shirking one's duty. I learned to drill and march ,correctly, quicker than most - I had to.

Sylvia's home was in Woolwich and I discovered that the 53A London bus went from Lords Cricket Ground all the way to Woolwich. This was a great discovery - no changing - a direct route. I tried it out and the journey took nearly two hours. It was then I obtained a true idea of just how large London really was. It didn't put me off, I went quite a few times, just had to budget for more time.

Eventually, having acquired some of the disciplinary skills necessary to survive in the Royal Air Force we were posted to our next unit. 'They' still hold reunions at Lords Cricket Ground for ex ACRC types. I have never been. I didn't enjoy my stay there that much.

So we were off to No. 4 ITW (Initial Training Wing) at Paignton in Devon and here, over an eight week period, we were to learn the basics of aerial navigation, aero engines, theory of flight and meteorology. Some of the friends made at ACRC, and we were there exactly one month, travelled with me to Paignton. We were all 'rookies' together and we were to stay together for some time to come.

I hadn't been to this part of the country before and it was a delightful area to be posted to. Our billet was the 'Ramleh Hotel' and our Wing Headquarters at the Palace Hotel. All the best places had been commandeered. Everywhere we went we marched. To and from lectures, to and from the swimming pool, to and from the harbour where we embarked for navigation exercises in the bay, and all the time I was the 'marker' . Until one day a fresh course arrived and along with it a 6'6" trainee. One inch taller than me he immediately became the 'marker' and although I was still No. 2 in the line my standing had dissipated overnight and I was just one of the boys and this suited me ideally. I used to get home-sick at Paignton, not much, just a little. Opposite the Ramleh Hotel, on the sea front, was a shelter with seats looking out to sea. Sometimes I used to sit there in the late evening looking out to sea and thinking of the folks back home. It was a hectic eight weeks at ITW with

every day taken up with full lecture programmes. Certain knowledge we had gained at school stood us in good stead, but, by and large we were journeying into the unknown, dealing with entirely new subjects and at the end of eight weeks there were exams to pass, which we had to pass.

At ITW we were issued with our full flying kit. Bit of psychology here I suspect with the 'powers that be' giving us a foretaste of what was to come. If it was to keep our enthusiasm alive it wasn't necessary. Everyone on that course had volunteered for the job, there were no conscripts.

We proudly stood on the front lawn of the hotel to have our photographs taken. Fur lined suede flying boots, pure silk gloves covered by woollen gloves and then leather gloves on top, pure silk vest and 'long john' underpants (next to the skin for extra warmth), zipped outer flying overalls, flying helmet and goggles. Normal battle dress uniform wedged somewhere between. This photograph is in my RAF album and of the five I think I was the only survivor.

It was here that I met a fellow called Jim Dudman, quite a bit older than myself, we were to become good friends. His father mother and sister had all been killed in an air raid and his brother, a major, was serving in the army. Just a few months ahead whilst I was still with 'Dud' his brother was killed. Sometime later when I was on operations and had lost contact with 'Dud' there was a news item on the front page of the London Evening News with a title something like 'The last of the Dudmans'. I knew without reading on that 'Dud' had been killed. The article said that the whole family had been wiped out by the war but that the name 'Dudman' would live forever.

To teach us the rudiments of navigation we used to embark onto a kind of pinnace in Torquay harbour for a trip around the bay. This was treated by all and sundry as an afternoon's outing, a temporary escape from the pressures of the classroom. Perhaps that was the intention, I don't think much navigational knowledge was acquired, but I was very pleased I had never considered the Royal Navy.

At the Ramleh Hotel I shared a room with Peter Aspinall and a fellow called Charles. They were both ex University Air Squadron types and therefore had done some previous flying. It went without saying that I considered I was sharing a room with the élite. I don't think I showed this, we got on quite well together and I was to meet up with Peter again in the future. However they did complain about the smell of Potters Asthma cigarettes in the toilet but on reflection neither could have mentioned this outside our small circle or if they did no-one in authority could have listened to them otherwise I would have been out of the Service - pronto.

Well, I passed my final exams at ITW, not with an excellent or above average but just an average. In fact all through my service life I was to be dogged by this 'average' classification. Only on one occasion was I classified as 'above average' and this was on one of my flying training units. I was 'over the moon' with this result. Needless to say, many, many 'excellents' and 'above averages' did not come back from the war.

Early days at Initial
Training Wing
Paignton, Devon.

Issue of flying gear
on the front lawn of
the Ramleh Hotel
Paignton.

You can readily see why
I was always the 'marker'
on the daily parades.

So, once again into the unknown and onto my next unit. It was here that we first came face to face with an aircraft, the type in which we were to start our flying career. The date was early November 1941 and the station No.21 EFTS (Elementary Flying Training School) based at Booker near High Wycombe.

The aircraft was the De Havilland Tiger Moth biplane. When I passed my School Certificate Examination, in 1938 my prize was a book of Royal Air Force aircraft and it enabled me to swot up on the current RAF types. So, at the age of 15 years and 9 months I had already set myself the task of trying to become a pilot. What I didn't know was just what a task this was! The only thing I had driven or ridden mechanically was a bicycle and to be projected into this completely new element had me - to say the very least - flummoxed. My first instructor, an officer called Barlow must have given me up as a bad job and I thought, that's it, all my hopes shattered, I am finished. But someone, somewhere, thought to give me a second chance so after four hours and twenty minutes flying instruction a certain Pilot Officer Street took on the task. Maybe I was making up with enthusiasm for what was an obvious lack of flying skills. The hours ticked by. Good pupils went solo after about 8½ hours and average pupils after about 10 hours. I had completed 13 hours dual when my instructor taxied back to dispersal and as I prepared to follow him out of the plane, he told me to stay put, taxi back out onto the airfield take off and do just one circuit. I was on my own, my first solo when I least expected it and I had to get that plane airborne and back to the airfield in one piece or else. How did I do it? Well I just imagined that the instructor was still in the plane, talking to me through the speaking tube, telling me the circuit procedure. I took off, completed the circuit and did a reasonably good landing. My instructor came forward to congratulate me, he wasn't in the plane after all, and I felt on top of the world. I had done it at last and on my next solo trip I was to experience the full pleasure of flying in an open cockpit and being in sole charge. Even now on a bright sunny day with small puffs of white cumulus cloud I still imagine myself weaving in and out of them in that lovely little plane.

We pressed on with all the essentials of learning to fly. Forced landings, precautionary landings (emergency landings in small fields), aerobatics, spinning and instrument flying (a hood over the cockpit). On the ground lectures and exams as we experienced at ITW only more advanced. Also hours in the Link Trainer for ground based synthetic flying in which all ones activities were traced onto a chart. All of this was happening in the winter of 1941, and that was a pretty cold winter. My 6'5" frame did not completely fit into a Tiger Moth cockpit. The windscreen was small and part of my head was always projected into the slipstream. When we started night flying this proved to be particularly uncomfortable and on one very cold night two white blotches appeared just under my goggles, this later diagnosed as frost bite. It was not a long detail so the damage was not too bad - it could have been much worse.

The only time I ever received free booze in the Royal Air Force was after night flying at EFTS. On landing we were issued with a glass of rum.

Sometime during our stay at Booker one of the pupils managed to get his Tiger into an uncontrollable spin and hit the ground somewhere near High Wycombe. Rumour had it that he was found still sitting in the pilot's seat unharmed with the wreckage of the plane strewn all around. Another pupil pilot sent off solo by his instructor kept going round and round the circuit, each time he came into land he aborted and went round again. Eventually half the station personnel were out on the airfield to watch the fun. Eventually the pupil got down making a very ropey landing and half the station personnel gave him a rousing cheer.

At this stage I would like to mention that I was discovering something very much to my advantage. I was not getting asthma in the air and this was to prove the case right through my RAF flying career. Later when my training took me to Canada I was in the clear both in the air and on the ground. Back in England things once again returned to normal but I was still able to conceal it from the authorities until one day in 1944 when I was finally caught out - but more about that later.

I was now enjoying my flying in every sphere. I was at last confident that I could cope. Night flying, landing only by the aid of gooseneck flares, aerobatics and the occasional cross country flight at the end of the course all were milestones achieved and left behind.

There was one manoeuvre however with which I was not too happy and that was a slow roll. When inverted and for a short while only, one's shoulder straps kept the pilot in the cockpit and in order to do the roll correctly it was necessary to push upwards onto the rudder pedals when inverted to correctly fly the aircraft through the roll. I could never push my legs up far enough and this made for a very sloppy roll. Maybe my legs were just too long.

Our course was one of the last full EFTS courses to be completed in the United Kingdom. Henceforth a prospective pilot would go to a Grading School where he would only do sufficient hours to ensure that he would make the grade as a pilot then he would be shipped to Canada, South Africa or Rhodesia where he would complete his training in the Empire Training Scheme away from the enemy and in excellent weather.

Because of this change in policy my next move, to Canada, was delayed and I was posted to No. 1 EFTS at Hatfield, home of the De Havilland aircraft manufacturers.

One day when flying in the Hatfield circuit a twin-engined aircraft with one engine feathered and stationary swooped past me and did a vertical climb rolling as it did so. I just couldn't believe my eyes. I was to learn later that it was Geoffrey de Havilland testing a top secret plane which I was to recognise later as the Mosquito. A superb pilot who was later to kill himself testing the delta wing and supersonic D.H.108

All good things come to an end and so, after two months at Hatfield, where I had now amassed ninety hours on Tigers, I left the station ready and willing to meet the next flying challenge but apprehensive about the coming sea voyage to Canada.

One of my first recollections of the voyage to Canada was standing on the

DAILY TELEGRAPH.
TUESDAY AUGUST 10TH 1993 NEWS

OBITUARIES

Captain John Boutwood

CAPTAIN John Boutwood, who has died aged 94, was Captain of the anti-aircraft cruiser Curacoa, which in October 1942 was run down and sunk in the Atlantic by the liner Queen Mary.

The two giant 80,000-ton "Queens" — the Mary and the Elizabeth — were then being used as troop ships, carrying more than 15,000 servicemen across from America on each voyage.

They crossed the Atlantic alone, relying on their great speed of nearly 30 knots, constant zigzagging and evasive routing to keep them clear of U-boats. They were provided with escorts only for the last part of their voyages.

On the morning of Oct 2 Queen Mary was met off the north coast of Ireland by Curacoa (which was to provide close anti-aircraft cover) and four destroyers as anti-submarine escorts.

Boutwood had escorted Queen Mary before and knew from previous conversations with her captain what zigzag pattern he would most likely be using. But he was not informed — nor did he inquire — which leg the Queen Mary was on.

Queen Mary slowed by two or three knots to allow Curacoa, whose full speed was about 25 knots, to keep up. Curacoa's proper station was close astern of Queen Mary, and Boutwood intended to reach it by first taking station ahead and then gradually dropping astern.

Queen Mary was passing close to and fro across Curacoa's stern as she zigzagged, but Boutwood was still not sure of her exact movements. There was a dramatic near-miss just after 1.30pm, when Curacoa was so close she was almost out of sight under Queen Mary's port bow, and Queen Mary's officer of the watch ordered hard-a-starboard.

On hearing the order Queen Mary's captain went on to the bridge; told that he was too close to the cruiser, he ordered the zigzag to be carried out, saying: "You needn't worry about that fellow . . .He'll keep out of your way."

Just after 2pm Curacoa was on Queen Mary's starboard bow, and the next "zig" was to starboard. But then the officer of the watch realised that Curacoa was much too close and ordered hard-a-port.

Boutwood, who had taken over his ship from his officer of the watch, did his best to avoid collision. But it was too late.

Queen Mary's giant bow caught Curacoa about a third of her length from aft and sliced her clean in two. Queen Mary was badly damaged forward and slowed to 10 knots, but was forbidden to stop because of the risk of U-boats.

The afterpart of Curacoa sank almost at once. The forward part righted itself for a short time before sinking. Destroyers picked up 72 of Curacoa's company of 410. Boutwood was one of two ship's officers and the only officer on the bridge to survive.

The Admiralty did not officially announce the loss until May 1945, when the European war was over. But in these matters the Navy is like a whispering gallery, and Curacoa's fate was soon common knowledge.

The Admiralty enquiry exonerated Boutwood, and he was appointed in command of the Algerine class minesweeper Fantome. On commissioning in December 1942 he cleared the lower deck and told the ship's company to forget whatever they might have heard about Curacoa. If the Admiralty had no confidence in him he would not be their captain. They had a job to do.

Boutwood: collision at sea with the Queen Mary

Confirmation of the damage to the Queen Mary. The first time I have seen anything about the incident in print. August 1993

ON THE NIGHT OF SEPT 1942 TOGETHER WITH W/O CAMPBELL AND LAC FISHER YOU DID YOUR N/F X COUNTRY TEST IN

ANSON II 8631 TO ASSINIBOIA - REGINA ~ BEACH - BASE

(On reading these memoirs. Chad extracted this from his Log book. This note was dated 28/2/95 when Chad was 81 yrs old.

IN CANADA THE XIX WAS CALLED ANSON II COMPLETE WITH HYDRAULICS TO UNDERCART

deck of our ship in Gourock harbour in Scotland. It was a grey and misty day and I recall seeing a huge ocean going liner slide past. She was painted battleship grey but what really caught my attention was the huge dent in the bows above the water line. I was to learn later that an escorting destroyer misjudged a manoeuvre across the liner's bows and was cut in two. Details of this incident never reached the public as such secrecy was the order of the day in wartime. She was the Queen Mary, almost 20,000 tons larger than the present day Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen Mary and later the Queen Elizabeth repeatedly crossed the Atlantic and because of their high speed did not require an escort. Each ship could carry up to 10,000 service men at any one time.

Our transport was to be something a little smaller. She was the S.S. Batorey, a Polish ship of roughly 20,000 tons and accompanying us was the French ship Louis Pasteur. These two ships were to sail in close company for the next 10 days across the North Atlantic.

We were much slower than the 'Queens' average 30 knots so we warranted a destroyer escort. Two destroyers in fact and we all sailed from Gourock on the River Clyde in April 1942.

Rumour had it, and rumours abound in wartime, that the Louis Pasteur was loaded with German prisoners-of-war being taken to Canada. We all hoped that the German submarines had got wind of this and if so might be tempted to leave us alone.

Although not a recommended practice Jim Dudman and I camped out on the deck for the whole voyage. The alternative accommodation was below decks sleeping in a hammock in a hold jam-packed with human bodies. In spite of the fact it was only April the air down there was pretty stifling and this was a situation which did not suit my chest.

Although unaware of the route we were taking we must have journeyed well to the north. This we guessed because it became quite cold although we did not see any ice floes. Apparently this was not unusual, the intent being to avoid the U-Boat packs operating in the more southerly latitudes. The voyage was cold and uncomfortable but none-the-less it was very exciting. I had never been abroad and here I was en route to the Americas. It was also uneventful except for one night when we heard distant explosions which we all assumed were depth charges.

After 10 days at sea we docked at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. We disembarked in a city ablaze with lights, no black-out here, we were well beyond the range of Hitler's bombers. In fact, there was little indication that a war had been waged for two and a half years on the other side of the Atlantic. This fact came home even more forcibly on the train journey from Halifax to Moncton (our next stop-over from which we would eventually be dispatched to all points west). It was the fruit available on the train which I remember most of all. I had almost forgotten what a banana or an orange looked like but here on the train one could eat one's fill. The train was about one mile long and on a curve, looking out of a carriage window the huge locomotive looked more like a little Hornby engine. As we journeyed I

noticed that the last of the winter snows were melting away. The hospitality shown by the natives in Moncton was fantastic. On our first evening we walked down the Main Street. Most of the houses had open front doors with their owners standing on the threshold to welcome the new arrivals. Jim and I met a family on this very first evening and we were to meet them often during the course of the next few weeks. We played a lot of bridge in the evenings and our hostess made lovely cream cakes for each of our visits. Much to my shame I could not remember their names or address when I later thought I should write them a letter of thanks.

Eventually, we entrained at Moncton to commence our journey west. This turned out to be a three-day train journey to the small town of Weyburn in southern Saskatchewan about 60 miles north of the 49th. parallel, the border with the USA. The sleeping accommodation was similar to that provided on French railways today - the couchette - and although crowded was comfortable enough. Excellent food - by the standards to which we had become accustomed - was served in comfortable dining cars and we were beginning to think that we were going to like Canada very much. En route we passed through the northern tip of the state of Maine in the USA. The Canadian Pacific railway had, many years ago, received special dispensation to lay its railway track along this route. But all doors were kept closed and no-one was allowed to leave the train, that was for normal travellers.

The train stopped for us and we were allowed to stop at one small USA station where we bought Sweet Caporal cigarettes.

All Canadian railways were single track with loop lines to allow trains to pass. We spent many an hour waiting in the loop lines and eventually a train would pass through travelling eastwards. We liked to think they were loaded with war supplies for shipment to England so that the long waits could be justified. Some of this waiting took place in Montreal and Winnipeg and this gave us the opportunity for a quick sight-see and a few snapshots.

From Winnipeg westwards the landscape was flat, very flat as we slowly moved across Canada's prairies. This was surprising as we were always at least 2,000 ft. above sea level.

We reached our destination, No. 41 SFTS (Service Flying Training School) and our nearest 'town' was Weyburn. Weyburn was just one long street with all its shops centred on it and the most important one was the drug store. I never did find out whether they sold drugs but they did sell excellent ice creams, cakes and coffees and this luxury was enjoyed by all the trainees on the airfield. It was at Weyburn where I tried my first T Bone steak - an unprecedented luxury. Regina, capital city of Saskatchewan, was 80 miles to the north but visits to this metropolis were somewhat limited largely because of the non-availability of ready cash.

We were still only LAC's (Leading Aircraftmen) and although we collected 'danger money' for flying (2/- per day) our pay still only just topped £2.0.0 per week. Payday was once a month and somehow I always seemed to be owing all my month's pay to someone every pay day. My last month at Weyburn was a pauper's month. I had to clear all my debts before I left the station and this meant a month of

penury. On collecting pay at the monthly pay parade one had to call out the last three numbers of one's service number followed by a loud and clear 'Sir'. For me it was '252 Sir'. 252 was also the number of the Royal Air Force charge sheet and if you got one of these (known to one and all as a 'fizzer') it meant an accompanied visit to the Commanding Officer's office and a subsequent loss of pay or at the worst a spell in the 'glasshouse'. Fortunately this was an experience I managed to avoid but I always remembered the number of the charge sheet, it was the last three figures of my non-commissioned service number, 1431252. It is said that whatever else one forgets the service numbers are always remembered.

The plane in use at Weyburn which we were to fly and hopefully master was an American built aircraft which the British dubbed the Harvard. A far cry from the Tiger Moth, almost twice its size and more than twice the engine power. Tigers had a 130 hp Cirrus engine while this bird had a Pratt and Witney Wasp engine of 450 hp and it made one hell of a noise to prove it, with the propeller tips exceeding the speed of sound, at least that is what I was told.

A low wing, all metal monoplane, it looked a graceful aircraft, but I was destined to have problems with this one similar to those I had with the Tiger Moth. It was to be eight hours of dual instruction before I went solo on this type, once again considerably above the going rate. Remember, I still couldn't drive a car and although I was at home in the air the problem of mastering this much larger aircraft took me a long time to overcome.

However, once again my instructors were patient and saw me through. I think I was riding my luck once again because quite a number of my fellow students were unable to make the grade and were sent back to the dreaded base at Trenton. Here, these unfortunates were regrouped and sent to Navigation or Gunnery schools for remustering into another aircrew trade.

By coincidence, about two years ago and after knowing him for some considerable time, I discovered that my regular golfing partner, Chad Smith, was an instructor at Weyburn at the same time as I was there. Our names actually appear in each other's log books. I met him through the Aircrew Association but had been playing together for some time before we discovered this connection - small world.

And what about letters home? Well, few and far between I'm afraid but when we did write it was on a micro airgram. The amount of writing was limited to this small space and, of course, it was censored. I must have written to Sylvia far more than to my parents. I think I was still too young to really appreciate how my parents must have felt. When I used to visit home on leave, and these were more frequent during my operational tour, I used to find it easy enough to return to my Squadron but my parents used to find it a very emotional moment. It was not until I was much older with a son of my own, who was travelling the world, that I really began to appreciate how they must have felt.

Because my monthly pay seemed to evaporate so rapidly in the purchase of cigarettes (no cancer scare then) T-bone steaks at the local restaurant and luscious ice creams at that drug store I told you about, there was rarely sufficient left over to

get me away from the station at week ends. Certainly not as far as Regina so we frequently played bridge. Five of us (four others short of the 'readies') would form a bridge team and we would play right through the week-end with the odd one dropping out to get some sleep. I'm sure it could not have been quite so cut and dried as that, but this is how my fading memory recalls it.

So after eight hours of dual in the Harvard I went solo. Not quite the same exhilarating feeling as the first solo but quite an experience none the less. Flying now became a real fun thing. It was a Canadian summer, the skies were clear and the visibility unlimited. If there was a problem it was the shortage of landmarks. Everything on the ground was featureless. Miles and miles of wheat-growing prairie. Later in our training when were flying lengthy cross-country routes and we were unsure of our position we would fly in the direction of one of the two single line railway [redacted]s which crossed southern Saskatchewan and when we found it fly along it until we came to a large grain silo. These were huge buildings to house the grain collected from the prairies. On the side of the silo would be the name of the railway station. Find it on the map, set course for home, and all was OK. This procedure did, of course, involve some low flying and that's where the fun came in. We were instructed in low flying, that was part of the course, but not over Last Mountain Lake.

Last Mountain Lake lay about eighty miles north of Weyburn, fir forests lined its shores and it was absolutely devoid of habitation. It was right on track for one of our cross-country routes and the thrill of skimming over that lake at near zero feet was unsurpassable, especially as there was little chance of being spotted and reported.

Another new experience was formation flying although we had tried it unofficially on Tigers. As we improved we flew closer and closer until our wing tips were only a few feet away. Of course there were always a few nuts on the course who wanted to get even closer than that.

Aerobatics in the Harvard were not so exacting as they were in the Tiger and therefore all the more pleasurable. These we indulged in whenever instructed to do so also on numerous occasions when we weren't. I suppose the spin was the most vicious manoeuvre. In a Tiger we used to hold the plane in a spin for about three revolutions before recovering. In a Harvard it could be anything up to six rotations it span so quickly.

I did mention the clear blue skies but occasionally we did experience the dust storm phenomenon. Without warning the wind would get up to severe gale force lifting all the dusty soil off the prairie and this would swirl around reducing the visibility to zero. Nasty if this caught someone out when they were airborne. Fortunately this never happened to me but it was bad enough on the 'deck' and caused us to dive for the nearest shelter. Whilst on the subject of high winds, I remember on only one occasion seeing a twin-engined Anson held stationary over the centre of the airfield, facing into one of these gales only this time without the sand. Clever pilot - whoever he was - I hadn't seen this feat carried out before, and I

Tiger Moth

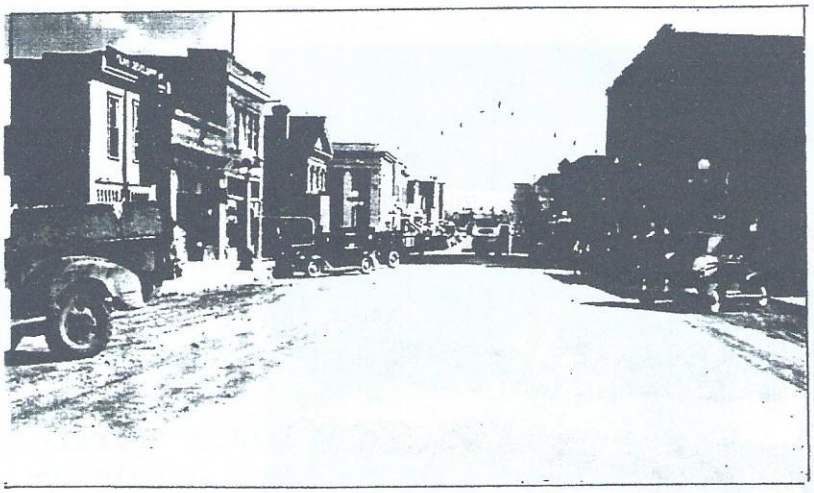
I did my first solo on this type

Harvard

I gained my wings on this type

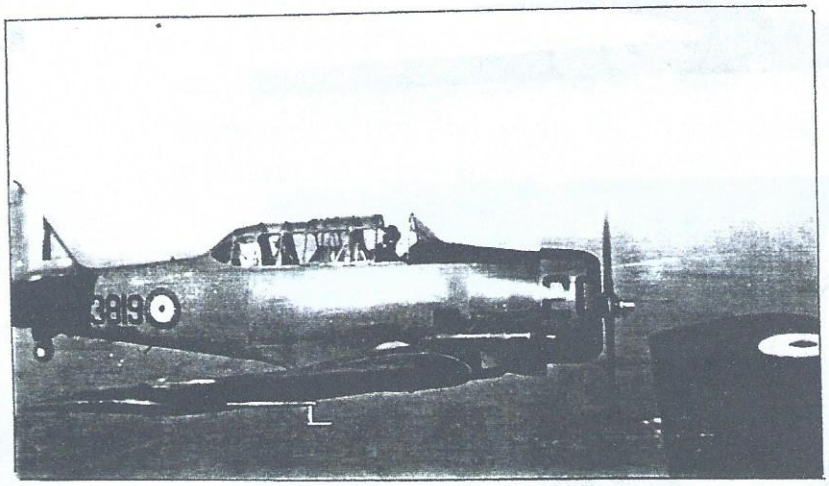
Dakota

I flew this type in Transport Command

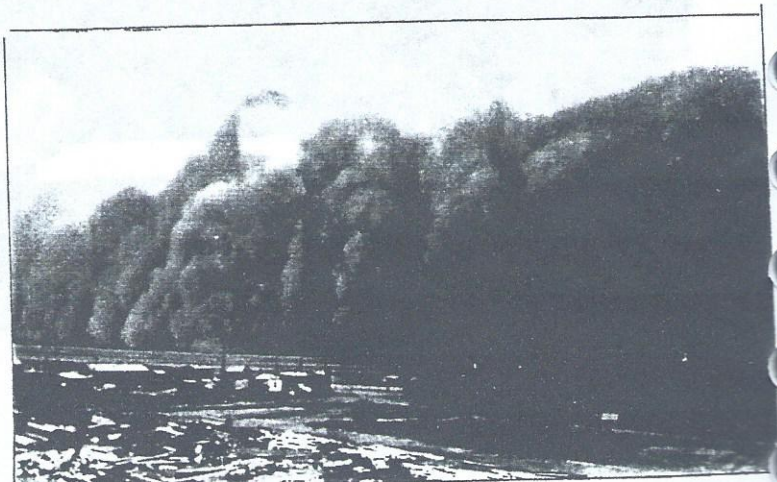


Weyburn's main street
was a dust road.

Fortunately I was not
there for a Weyburn
winter



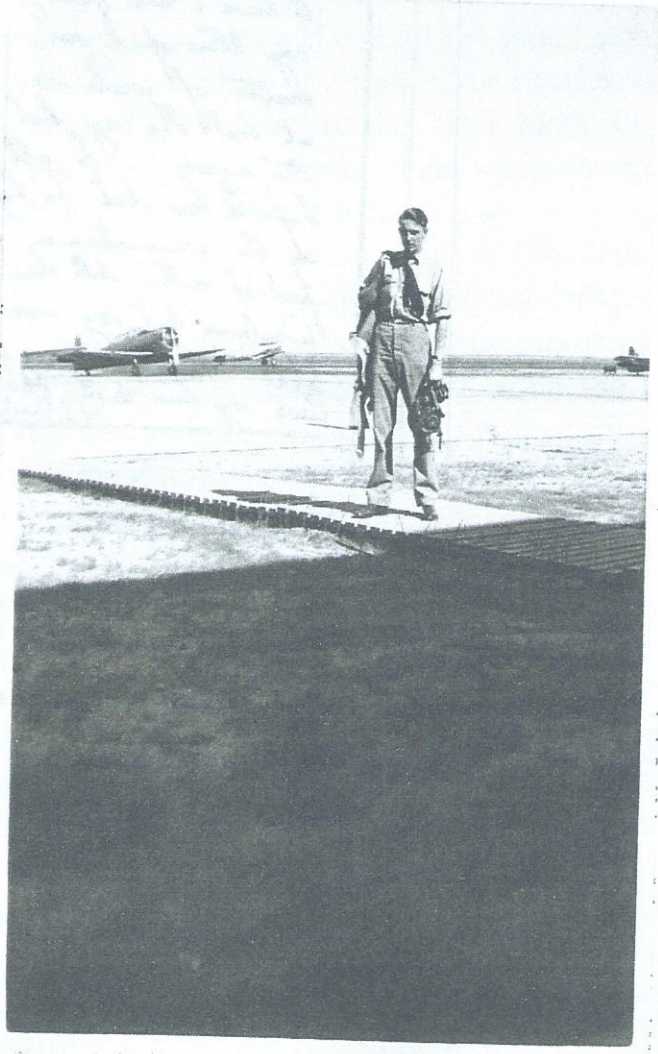
Sometimes they were
closer than this



A prairie dust storm

Initial Training Wing,
Paignton. End of course
photograph. (2nd. from left
at rear)

Wings Day at No. 41 Service
Flying Training School,
Weyburn. October 1942.



Awaiting a flight at Weyburn.
(Harvard II in background)

2

The address should be printed in large CAPITAL letters wholly within the panel alongside.

MR. & MRS J. JONES.
BROAD STREET,
NEWENT,
GLOS.
ENGLAND.

The address should be the same as for an ordinary letter.

313140

Print address in large CAPITAL letters in the panel above. Nothing else should be written above this line.

Please follow instructions on other side.
The message should be written very plainly below.

Sender's Name and Address
56/c Course.
41 SFTS.
WEYBURN.
SASK.

Date. 7/6/42.

Dear Mum & Dad,

As Peggy's Airgraph's from the East seem to get through to her alright, I thought I would send one from here and see how long it will take to get to you. Let me know when you receive it. We are now settled down on the course and the only difference I have to tell you of is that we are going on single engine planes. Tell Dad that they are Harvard's the American type which make a terrific amount of noise. I received a telegram from you yesterday saying that you had received my letter & cable, so I will be hoping to have a letter from you very shortly. I still have not received any letters from you or Sylvia, but these should be through in a matter of weeks now. Summer appears to have hit Weyburn at last. It's very hot today with the temperature somewhere in the 80° again. In all probability I will not be coming home when I finish here but I'm hoping for the best. Of course it all depends on the circumstances existing at the time of our finishing. We find it rather dull here. There are more entertainments in camp than Weyburn but very soon all our time will be occupied on the course, Well, Mum as there isn't much room for more I will close. Give my love to Peg, Pete etc. & Aunty Floss. Looking forward to seeing you both again. Your loving Son.

This space should not be used

We were allowed to write home using mini airgrams. This one has been enlarged to twice its original size. Each one received the censor's official stamp on the rear before forwarding.

haven't seen it since.

There were a few Anson aircraft on the base and these were used for navigational training both at night and during the day. As we discovered so very much later it was on an Anson flight that I first flew with Chad Smith.

Immediately after the first world war my mother's brother, Stewart, aged eighteen, emigrated to Canada and that was the last she was to see of him. Over the years letters were occasionally exchanged between Stewart and Mother's sister Alice. He married a widow who already had three daughters and he was to have a son of his own, Walter born in the same year as myself. Walter is still alive but his wife died recently. I was hoping, that whilst in Canada, I would be able to visit the family and establish personal contact. However, we were never to get more than 48 hour leave passes. Their home was in Saskatchewan but many miles to the north. In fact, 60 miles north of North Battleford at a small place called Fairholme. So small in fact that my uncle had to ride on horseback 60 miles into North Battleford every week to collect his mail. Without a fairly long leave I was never going to make it. However, I do keep in touch with one member of the family - Bob Stewart - he is the son of one of my uncle's stepdaughters and lives with his family in Ottawa.

All through this period of my training I was being told I was earmarked for fighter planes (hence my training on single-engined aircraft) and all the time I was wondering how I could possibly fit into the tight cockpit of a Spitfire or Hurricane when, if you recall, my head protruded out of the cockpit of the Tiger Moth. Of course, the pilot's head did not protrude out of a Harvard aircraft, there was a glazed sliding canopy to keep him in and the cold air out and thereby hangs a tale.

Back tracking through my Log Book it must have been the night of July 28th. '42 and I was taking my first night dual night instruction from a Flying Officer Reade. The seating in a Harvard was a tandem arrangement with the pupil up front and the instructor at the rear. We were doing the first landing of the session and I had the controls and it was, I recall, a very black night. Something went drastically wrong with that landing and we veered off the runway into the soft earth alongside. The wheels sank deeply in mud, the aircraft came to a sudden stop, the nose of the aircraft dipped and the tail came up, right up to 90° and then right over to leave the aircraft upside down with me suspended in my harness. Somewhere en route I had cracked my head quite badly but I was still conscious. Now - the drill prior to landing was to always slide the cockpit canopy into the open position. My section was firmly shut and jammed. I had failed to slide it back on the landing approach and somehow my instructor had failed to notice this. His was open and he clambered out very smartly. Suspended on my straps and unable to get out I watched the petrol dripping out of the wing tanks and I think I offered a silent prayer that the petrol fumes would not reach the heat of the engine. It probably only took a few minutes for the rescue team to get a crane to the scene of the crash but it was the longest few minutes I had ever spent. I was rushed off to the hospital where, with only a bump on the head, the Medical Officer cleared me as being OK and sent me back to my billet. I remember waking the next morning to listen to the chatter in

the hut about a broken aircraft on the centre of the airfield - 'Who was the pilot' and did he get out OK' etc. etc. They found out soon enough and for a short space of time I was some kind of hero.

This I thought was IT and surely I would be kicked off the course and sent back to the dreaded Trenton. But wonders of wonders, I don't even recall a top-level wigging although I remember F/O Reade had a few things to say about it.

The Harvard had one nasty little 'bug' which could be a problem. It had a fully castoring tailwheel and if, on landing, the wind was blowing across the runway the aircraft could veer away from its landing path as the tail of the aircraft touched the ground. If the aircraft swung through a full 360° it was called a 'ground loop'. Things happened pretty swiftly on that night but I suspect that this was the problem and as the Harvard was notorious for this bad habit it probably accounts for my getting away scot-free.

We pressed on, becoming more and more proficient in our handling of the Harvard both by day and night and in our navigation over the prairie with cross countries extending as far afield as Brandon, Assinaboine and Moose Jaw. Alongside the flying we were busy at school mastering more knowledge on engines, airframes, aircraft recognition, navigation, meteorology and other associated subjects. Exams were taken, flying tests taken with the Chief Flying Instructor and then suddenly, one day - WINGS DAY PARADE - the moment had finally arrived when I would receive those coveted wings.

I suppose one should remember one of the THE days of one's life but I'm afraid I have only vague recollections of being awarded my pilot's brevet. I suppose I was in some sort of comatosed daze. There was a large parade consisting of the bulk of the station personnel with numerous high ranking dignatories, one of whom pinned on my wings. I always liked to think it was Air Marshal Billy Bishop, Canada's First World War Victoria Cross holder but I was told much later that it could not have been he because, because - but I forget the reason.

With wings came the rank of Sergeant - Sgt. Pilot Jones - and I suspect that we couldn't get back to the billet fast enough to sew the wings and the Sergeant's stripes onto our tunics.

We were soon to start our homeward journey but first a trip to Regina to buy gifts to take or send back home. A parcel went off to Newent and I bought a quilted house coat for Sylvia with a pink rose pattern and also other gifts which I have long since forgotten.

So I was a pilot at last, an achievement beyond the wildest dreams fostered when I was a young boy in Newent. But I was to learn that there was still very much to learn and achieve before becoming, a fully fledged operational pilot. I was not even half way to this ultimate goal.

I have no recollections of the rail journey back across Canada to our port of departure. I do recall that in Halifax, either on the way out or on the way back, I went to see the 'reversing falls'. Caused by the high tides off Nova Scotia the falls in the Halifax river tumbled one way and then the other dependent on the state of

the tide. In port the transport awaited us. She was the S.S. Awatea, not a very large liner, which used to ply the ocean between Australia and New Zealand. Unlike our voyage out our voyage home was to be done in style. Our accommodation on the boat was much the same as before but there must have been a few concessions made as we were now Sergeants. But what a drastic difference in the size of the convoy. It had formed up outside Halifax harbour and as we joined it we could see boats as far as the eye could see. The USA Battleship Arkansas must have been the convoy flagship and I must say she certainly inspired confidence. Once again the voyage was uneventful but for the last few days there was a massive Atlantic swell which had the ship rolling like an old barrel. I wasn't sea-sick but I came close to it.

'The grape vine' told us many weeks later that the 'Awatea' had sunk as a result of a collision at sea. Something, similar to the 'Queen Mary's' collision but this time it was the liner which sank.

One lasting memory of this homeward voyage was of proceeding down the narrow waterway to our disembarkation port of Greenock in Scotland. Something must have attracted everyone's attention on the port side and everyone was on deck. All crowded to that side and the boat listed so much that the Captain, using the ship's tannoy, had to tell everyone to spread out and back the ship came onto an even keel. So we were back in the 'old' country proudly sporting our flying brevets wondering where our next destination might be and not knowing what our role would be in a war that was now so very much closer. Would we become fighter or bomber pilots?

The answer came when we were posted to No. 14 P.A.F.U. (Pilots Advanced Flying Unit) at Ossington, near Newark, Nottinghamshire. Twin-engined Airspeed Oxfords confronted us at this airfield and that could only mean we were destined to fly bombers. All through my RAF career I, like all servicemen, was destined to make good friends only to be parted from them at almost every posting. After crossing the Atlantic Jim Dudman was posted to a different unit and I did not hear of him again until I read that article in the London Evening News. Arriving at a new station with some of the fellow pupils from the previous course did not present much of a problem, at least there were some friendly faces around, but arriving solo at a new station was a different 'kettle of fish'. The main meeting place was in the Mess, either the Officers' or Sergeants', and that meant the bar. Initially, I always thought the best thing to do was to maintain a low profile and that meant ordering one's drinks from the end of the bar, even if a few turns were missed. As confidence grew then one moved slowly towards the centre of the bar where one felt 'one of the boys'. This process could take days or months dependent on the personality of the person concerned. Cocky ones went straight to the centre of the bar and that could make them extremely unpopular.

Flying on multi-engined aircraft meant flying with a crew and being the captain, maybe with a crew of six who would be utterly dependent on my piloting skills. In a fighter I would have been on my own with only myself to worry about. Would I be able to cope with this task to which I had given so little thought? but

crewing up did not take place at Ossington so the answer to this question was delayed for the time being.

The Oxford, built by the Airspeed Company of Christchurch, Hants (where Neville Shute the author was employed for many years), was a short dumpy little aircraft and was not one of the easiest planes to fly. Quite unstable near the stall, it needed to be flown with the pilot ever watchful all the time. However, it was reliable, and universally in use by the RAF as a twin-engined trainer. I completed 70 hours flying on this unit, arriving in October 1942 and leaving in February '43.

This was a hard winter and I recall that it was at Ossington where I had my first and worst experience of freezing rain. This unusual phenomenon is caused when rain falls through a warm layer of air and then passes through a freezing layer near the ground where it freezes instantly on contact. A very unusual occurrence considering that air usually cools as it rises.

One morning we arrived at dispersal for an early morning flight to find all the aircraft covered in a layer of ice, with icicles a yard long dangling from the propellers and wingtips. An incredible and memorable sight and of course it cancelled flying for the morning. I haven't seen anything like it since.

From Ossington we were temporarily detached to another unit to master the intricacies of 'Beam Approach'. The course only lasted a week and it took place at Holme-on-Spalding Moor, just north of the River Humber. 'Beam Approach' was the magic blind landing system of the period. Tuned into a special radio wavelength the pilot received a steady note if on course for the runway, a 'dash' signal if he strayed to one side and a 'dot' signal if he strayed to the other. At an outer marker (identified by its own special signal) the aircraft had to be at a specific height and then proceeding down the beam it would pass over the inner marker when once again it had to be at a certain height. I can't recall these precise heights but over the inner marker with everything 'bang on' the aircraft should be ideally positioned for a straight ahead landing. It worked very well and like all things practice made perfect (or almost perfect). I was destined to use the system on many occasions in poor landing conditions and was very grateful for it. I was never happy descending through the murk towards a runway one just could not see, dependent on little noises coming out of the headphones, but when there was no alternative it was a question of just getting on with it. My log book tells me that I was flying on the 24th and again on the 27th. December so there couldn't have been much time for Christmas leave.

I left Ossington in mid February '43 having, hopefully, mastered my first twin-engined aircraft. The Oxford was larger than the Harvard but a midget in comparison with my next mount. I left with an 'High Average' assessment. The only time I bettered 'Average' but I repeat, I'm still here and lots of 'Excellents' aren't.

In the Royal Air force, and I suspect in both the other services, stories used to filter back through the pipelines about the serviceability of equipment in one's next unit. In our case it was aircraft and in this instance it was Barnes Wallis' Vickers

Lancasters.

No. 49 Squadron motto.
'Beware the dog'

Wellington

Ah, the sweet nostalgia! Colour cutaway by L. Ashwell Wood of the sleek and then very new Airspeed Oxford from the cover of the fondly-remembered weekly magazine *Modern Wonder* of 8 October 1938. Painted yellow and having polished metal cowlings, L4544 was one of the first Oxboxes to be delivered to the RAF; it was a Mk I, a general-purpose, bombing and gunnery trainer, and like most early Mk Is it had an Armstrong Whitworth dorsal gun turret

Note for Oxbox buffs

Like all good trainers, the Oxford had to be treated with respect, for although it was docile in experienced hands it could spring surprises on careless pilots. There was a well-known saying in the wartime RAF that the Oxford gave you either a halo, a bowler hat or your wings.

Wellington bomber. The tips of its wings flapped like a bird, it was as heavy as lead on the controls, it was a swine to fly on one engine and, of course, all training Wellingtons were throw-outs from Bomber Command.

So it was with some trepidation that I arrived at No.29 Operational Training Unit, Bruntingthorpe near Leicester.

Wellington III's were not the ogres that the rumours had made them out to be but I suppose there was nothing unusual about that. They were heavy on the controls and full use had to be made of trimming devices. But it was a huge aircraft to my unaccustomed eye and at my first introduction it was difficult to imagine my being in control of so much aircraft.

But I am jumping ahead too quickly. In order to fly a Wellington it was necessary to have a crew and it was at Bruntingthorpe that I obtained the nucleus of my crew. They were to stay with me until the end of operational flying. Each pilot on the course had to team up with a navigator, bombaimer, wireless operator and rear gunner and the way they did it was simple. The powers that be pushed the whole course into one large room and, in effect, said 'get on with it and sort yourselves out'.

Some crew members had met on previous courses, some had met in the few days they had been on the station. I knew some of the pilots, we had trained together, but I didn't know any of the aircrew. Very cleverly the precise number of aircrew for the pilots available had been mustered into the room. As I recall it I stood back, not knowing the abilities of any of the aircrew, and also, I suspect, realising that friendship did not necessarily account for ability. So I decided to just let things happen, any positive choice I might have made might have been the wrong one.

At this time I was tall, very tall, and also quite thin, I think my weight must have been around eleven stones at this time, perhaps not looking strong enough to handle a four-engined aircraft.

On occasions like this I did not exactly ooze with confidence so I suppose I was somewhat surprised that, before the room thinned out too much, I had started to collect my crew.

Except for Steve, a bombaimer, they all looked so very old. Ken Blackham*, an ex-London policeman and my navigator-to-be was six years older, Herbert (call me Pete) Whiteley who would look after the rear turret was ten years older, Clarence (call me that and I'll punch you on the nose, you call me Pat) Peacock was a tough, square, smallish Canadian wireless operator was obviously older than myself but by what amount I can't remember. Steve Stevenson who would look after the front turret and drop the bombs was a Londoner and had been in the blitz and couldn't wait to get at the Germans. Steve was my age. As time passed I was to have no regrets about this team. They were just great and I could not have wished for a better crew. Knowing the future that lay ahead of us and the absolute necessity of pulling together we all quickly became firm friends.

Familiarisation with the Wellington for all the crew became part of the

* See addendum

everyday scene. Ground instruction and flying instruction was marred only by bad weather but it was late winter and when Spring arrived longer hours meant longer hours in the air. Long training cross countries, sometimes as far as the northern tip of Scotland were the order of the day. But here I am, jumping ahead again. Before cross countries, hours were to be spent on the airfield circuit doing 'circuits and bumps'. First of all with an instructor and then once again the thrill of flying a different aircraft solo. Around the circuit and nearer base over the local countryside we learned to manage the Wellington as a crew. No more aerobatics or precautionary landings. A Tiger Moth could be put down in a field if it's engine failed and maybe a Harvard but it would be a waste of time proceeding with this instruction for a Wellington. Instead, new items appeared on the flying menu. Practice bombing on the local bombing range with Steve at the business end of the bombsight. 201b. smoke bombs were used and it was a little akin to playing an expensive game of darts. Occasionally double-top, more frequently a 20 and more often than not a 1 or a 5. Rarely, if ever, a bullseye. The results, phoned through from the bombing range awaited the crew when they landed.

Although single-engined flying had been practised on the Oxford this could only entail the throttling back of one engine, on the Wellington an engine was stopped and feathered and this was my first experience of looking at a 'dead' engine whilst in flight.

Fighter affiliation meant getting airborne with a fighter (usually a Hurricane) accompanying, then it would break away and carry out a series of mock attacks and the rear gunner would endeavour to shoot it down with a ciné camera. It was during these fighter attacks that we carried out the 'corkscrew' defensive manoeuvre. You will have to wait for details of this until later, when it was used 'for real'.

In the event of the pilot being unable to fly the aircraft due to injury or illness it was the usual practice for the bombaimer to take over and endeavour to get the aircraft back to base. Steve would almost certainly have been able to carry out this task but we were very fortunate that Pat, our wireless operator, whilst instructing pupils in the North of England had been afforded the opportunity of flying the Anson, 'straight and level' on many occasions. Pat often took over on the 'Wimpey' (Wellington) and also later when were flying Lancasters. I don't know if he could have landed but fortunately that emergency never arose. But on long cross countries and later on operations it was often necessary for me to go to the rear of the plane and make use of the Elsan. Mind you, I was always concerned about what might be happening up front and maybe had a tendency to rush things a bit.

At this point, and before I forget it, I would like to mention how fortunate the crew were to have Ken as a navigator. As the months passed by he was to show us that he was a first-class navigator. Just in case I forget later I would like to mention that, when on operations, it was absolutely vital to stay in a band of

10 miles either side of track - to stray outside this band was asking for trouble. Almost always Ken kept us within this band.

When there was no night flying or night flying had been 'scrubbed' due to the weather there would be a mad rush to board the 'liberty' bus bound for the flesh pots of Leicester. The 'Swan with Two Necks' was one of our favourite haunts and it was on one of our evening 'bashes' to this pub that I first discovered Ken could play piano reasonably well. He took a hell of a lot of coaxing to get him to the keyboard. I think he thought he was some kind of impresario expecting to be paid for his appearances. Of course, he was paid, in the form of pints of beer which were stacked on top of the piano by grateful locals. Sometimes he got the whole pub singing which was a good thing because it obscured the mistakes which tended to creep into his playing after he had a few. Our problem was finishing off those pints when all the customers had departed and still making it to the 'liberty' bus before it departed for camp.

If it wasn't the pubs, it was the Palais ballroom where I used to try out my Newent Women's Institute dance steps with the local talent. Perhaps I didn't dance too well - but dare I say it - the wings on my tunic did help to secure some of the more acceptable local talent. On one occasion I remember going to the Palais armed with a pair of scissors. The idea was to arrive back at base with as many ends of neck ties as possible. These were black service ties and were snipped from the opposition who would have been training at some other OTU up the road. This could have been the night when I didn't run fast enough and was dunked in the fountain in the Palais foyer. At least I thought it was the foyer, I was to learn later that it must have been the fountain actually in the ballroom.

Although none of my colleagues were killed whilst training at Bruntingthorpe others were and at this stage it might be appropriate to mention that over 7,000 aircrew were missing or killed whilst training during the war. One eighth of the losses sustained by Bomber Command. Although we were unaware of this information at the time we did all realise that our life was continuously on the line and would be more so in the future so each, in his own way, was determined to live life to the full.

One night we missed the last bus from Leicester back to camp and this left us with a 13 mile walk back to base. One bright character in the crew suggested it was quicker to walk back along the railway line on the basis that a straight line between two points must be the quickest way. This logic sounded fair enough until we came to a junction in the track. Needless to say we took the wrong fork and after walking all night we arrived on the far side of the airfield still leaving us with a two mile walk to the business side of the field. We arrived just in time for the start of another working day.

Leave was fairly frequent for flying crews with a week off every six weeks. This was assessed on the basis that we worked and flew every day of the week and therefore six Sundays meant a week off. In May 1942 Bomber

Harris, Commander in Chief, Bomber Command, wishing to show the Germans and the present British Government that the RAF meant business laid on a 1000 bomber raid and the target was to be Hamburg. He just didn't have that number of front line aircraft in his Command although Lancasters and Halifaxes were beginning to appear in some strength. So to make up the numbers he requisitioned suitable aircraft from Training Command. 1047 aircraft bombed Cologne (Hamburg was cancelled because of 'duff' weather) and 40 aircraft failed to return.

A 'tough luck' story emerges from this particular raid. Stan Wright, a cousin by marriage, had nearly completed his tour on Halifaxes around this time and had been taken off his squadron and posted to a training unit because of a shortage of training instructors. Well, the Cologne raid came up and he, along with his pupil pilot were detailed to go. After having survived 26 operational flights on his squadron he was shot down over Cologne in a training aircraft. Parachuting to safety he was quickly captured by the Germans and committed to many prisoner-of-war camps including the infamous Stalag Luft III where fifty officers were shot in cold blood after an unsuccessful escape attempt. He was to stay in the 'can' for the rest of the war.

I was fairly fortunate with my leaves. On one we missed out on a 'nickel' over Paris. A 'nickel' was a code name for dropping leaflets over Europe.

On June 22nd. 1943 I had completed 88 hours on Wellingtons with a total flying time of 419 hours and I collected yet another average assessment.

Winthorpe, No. 1661 Lancaster Conversion Unit was not very far up the road from my old airfield at Ossington and only a short distance from the City of Nottingham and the town of Newark

It was here, at last, I was to meet up with the four-engined Lancaster bomber. Conversion onto the Lancaster was a comparatively short course lasting only approximately four weeks and in that time I had to learn everything about the plane because my life and the lives of my crew depended on it.

In this present day one might be forgiven for thinking the Memorial Flight Lancaster small fry against a modern 747 Jumbo jet but when I first saw a Lancaster bomber I thought it massive and wondered with trepidation how I would ever manage to fly it.

The blow was somewhat softened by first being introduced to the Manchester, a twin-engined aircraft which, with two huge and unreliable Vulture engines was not an operational success and was given a training role. Someone thought of replacing the two Vultures with four Merlins and the Lancaster was born. We have Roy Chadwick to thank for the design and A.V. Roe (Avro) for constructing it. Over 7,000 Lancasters were built and largely by women factory workers and to create the Lancaster they had to piece together 80,000 individual pieces. They did the job well - many a Lancaster still stayed in the air when all the known aeronautical laws said it should have crashed into

the ground.

We did a few hours on the Manchester and I was fascinated by the propellers on those huge Vulture engines. They seemed to rotate so slowly I could see the individual blades. Fortunately they kept turning for me until we were transferred onto the 'Lanc'.

My crew of five was now inadequate to man the Lancaster so it was here that the Engineer and the Mid Upper gunner joined the crew. Ron Harris, the engineer was even younger than I. His training lasted about twelve months *and he was just nineteen when he joined the crew. 'Jock' Brown was a wee Scot and he was to man the two Browning machine guns in the mid upper turret. If I ever knew his real Christian name I have forgotten. Jock was at least ten years older than I. He rarely joined in our social activities but he, like Ron, slotted into the crew very well and, although a bit of a loner, he was to prove an invaluable asset in the air. Ron's task was to care of and nurse the engines, monitor the petrol supply from the various petrol tanks, take stock of all the pressures etc., and would be constantly at my right hand side at all times in the air. He was the youngest member of the crew and I was second youngest and at first it sounded a little odd when they referred to me as 'Skipper'.

After completing 34 hours on the Lancaster the 'powers that be' must have considered the crew ready for operations so we were duly posted to an operational squadron.

But before we arrived at that squadron I would like to mention how readily I settled down to flying the 'Lanc'. Big she was, but she handled beautifully and although we were not flying with a full load I could sense the power of those four Merlins and felt confident that they would handle all that was demanded of them. As on the Wellington, asymmetric flying was practised again and again, feathering first one engine and then, on the Lancaster, two engines. The 'Lanc' held height quite satisfactorily on two engines when unloaded and many a pilot having lost an engine on the way into the target was able to press on and deliver his bombs before turning for home.

Either the pilot's seat or the rudder pedals adjusted to accommodate my long legs. I can't remember which but I did fit quite comfortably into the 'Lanc' which was just as well as our longest trips were to take over nine hours. Whilst on the question of comfort there was a tube suitably placed between my legs which did cater for half of nature's requirements. If a direct result of using this device was to create a block of ice which fell on some German's head - who cares.

Whilst I was at Winthorpe Sylvia presented me with a pair of rabbit fur lined gloves. Hitch hiking into Nottingham from the main entrance, I secured a lift in a Rolls Royce (there were a few around even in wartime) but on leaving the car I left my gloves behind.

I went back to the guard room for quite a few days in the hope that the Rolls owner had dropped the gloves off. Somewhere there was a Rolls driver with a pair of gloves to match his car.

* See addendum

Diversion No. 1.

At this time asthma did not cause me any undue problems although it had returned when I came back to England from Canada. I always kept a supply of tablets to hand, so they, along with Potter's Asthma cigarettes and Potter's powder, must have done the trick. All through the war (and after) I was a heavy smoker, smoking up to forty cigarettes a day and this coupled with a considerable intake of beer whenever the opportunity arose must have convinced the crew that the asthma was not a problem and could easily be contained. It could, except for one situation. Throughout our stay on an operational station we slept in Nissen huts on iron-framed beds with those three biscuit mattresses I mentioned much earlier. The huts were heated with coke fired stoves, two to each hut and they could be a problem. In a strong wind coke fumes would be blown back into the hut and in spite of all the remedies that smell could keep me wheezing all night.

Diversion No.II

I did not consider myself to be a great letter writer and indeed letters to my parents were few and far between. This lack of consideration I later regretted and as I had only a limited letter writing capability all my endeavours in this direction were centred on Sylvia.

Diversion No. III

When I got that Rolls Royce lift into Nottingham I would almost certainly have been with one or more crew members and we would almost certainly have been on our way to savour the Nottingham pubs and maybe take in a dance as well. It's funny how an Englishman always uses public houses to direct someone who is lost. Turn left at this pub and turn right at that pub. When I think of Nottingham I'm very much afraid that I always think of the Flying Horse, the Black Horse and the Hole in the Wall.

Diversion No. IV

At the time of writing this record the date is May/June/July and August 1993 and if it goes on much longer September and November as well. In May I attended the 52nd. Reunion of the 49th. Squadron Association (sometimes they hold more than one a year) at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa, Lincs. Part of the programme included a visit to the Bomber Command Memorial Flight and although I had seen their Lancaster in flight I had never seen it on the ground. Well there it was, resplendent in all its glory, sparkling in a fresh coat of paint and dominating the end of the Memorial Flight's hangar. She looked huge and it was only after we stood and chatted about past experiences did its wings shrink back to the size to which we were accustomed.

End of diversions.

The small village of Fiskerton lies in the heart of the Lincolnshire fens about four miles due east from the city of Lincoln. The countryside, as flat as a pancake right up to the suburbs of Lincoln, was ideal flying country. In fact, the only small hillock in sight was in the centre of the Royal Air Force's main

runway on the airfield constructed to accommodate a squadron of Lancasters in Bomber Command's ever enlarging force.

Arguably, Fiskerton's only claim to fame was due to the very close proximity of RAF Fiskerton and one must hesitate a moment to sympathise with the inhabitants of a quiet rural village who were suddenly in the middle of a welter of building activity followed by a mass influx of 2,000 odd young service men and women.

Fiskerton wasn't the only village to suffer in this way, airfields were springing up all over Lincolnshire to join those peace-time aerodromes already in existence. Some airfields came under the command of Five Group, one of Bomber Command's most prestigious Groups. Fiskerton was one of these.

Now all is quiet again while only a small section of the old runways and aircraft dispersals remain but the village still remember us and have commemorated our presence with a plaque in their little church and a glass case containing some of the Squadron's history. I am happy to say my crew are named on a copy of the Squadron Battle Order for the first major raid on Berlin.

There was, and still is, little traffic on the roads around Fiskerton. They connect destinations only, there are no through roads. Just as well because the multitude of right-angled bends, probably following the boundaries of ancient farming plots, makes driving hazardous. Water filled dykes exist on either side of the roads

So it was to Fiskerton, home of No. 49 Squadron with the motto 'Cave Canem' (Beware the dog) that our Course from Winthorpe journeyed

We now knew that we had finally arrived at the cutting edge of the war with Germany and that every time an operation was 'laid on' we would crew one of a maximum of eighteen participating Lancasters. We also knew that on most operations perhaps one, two or even more aircraft would fail to return. We would have to complete 30 operations before our tour was completed.

From the moment of arrival at Fiskerton and for some weeks to come we thought our chances of survival rather slim, but it was a fact that the odds against us were accepted as a matter of course and that somehow these would be overcome and our crew would always return. Living was very much on a day to day basis and our main objective was to survive each 'op' and catch that crew bus into Lincoln on the next non-operational night.

But we were not pitched into battle straight away - it was standard routine for each 'sprog' crew to do a 'Bullseye'. This exercise entailed stooging over a number of English cities at night to give their searchlight crews a bit of practice and also to get us used to being 'coned' in a pyramid of searchlights. We did not do too much evasive action so we did spend a considerable amount of time in the dazzling glare of these lights.

With that trip behind us the next step was the '2nd. Dickie' operation. This involved the sprog pilot, in this case me, and not his crew, flying with an experienced crew on a real live operation. On August 22nd. 1943 I went to

*Leverkusen in the Ruhr with F/Sgt. Kirton and very little happened. There was complete cloud cover (10/10ths) very little 'flak' (anti-aircraft fire) and no fighters. We probably bombed by the Wanganui method (named after a small town in New Zealand) which involved marker flares being dropped on parachutes and ignited above the clouds. The flares, dropped by the Pathfinder Force, indicated the point of release for the Bombaimers.

S/Ldr. Day, our Flight Commander must have considered this operation a poor example of the real thing so the next night I was detailed for another '2nd. Dickie'. In the meantime the crew were left kicking their heels on the base awaiting their first baptism of fire. Sometimes the aircraft carrying the '2nd. Dickie' would be shot down and there were such cases on No. 49. Then the waiting crew would sometimes wait around for weeks for a spare pilot or fill in their time making up other crews to full strength.

*My skipper for this second '2nd. Dickie' trip, was F/Lt. Munro a New Zealander with the Distinguished Flying Cross displayed on his chest. Although I felt a little minnow in the presence of such austere company (remember I was still only a Sgt. Pilot) I also thought, as I looked at him, 'This is experience and I am going to come back from this trip'.

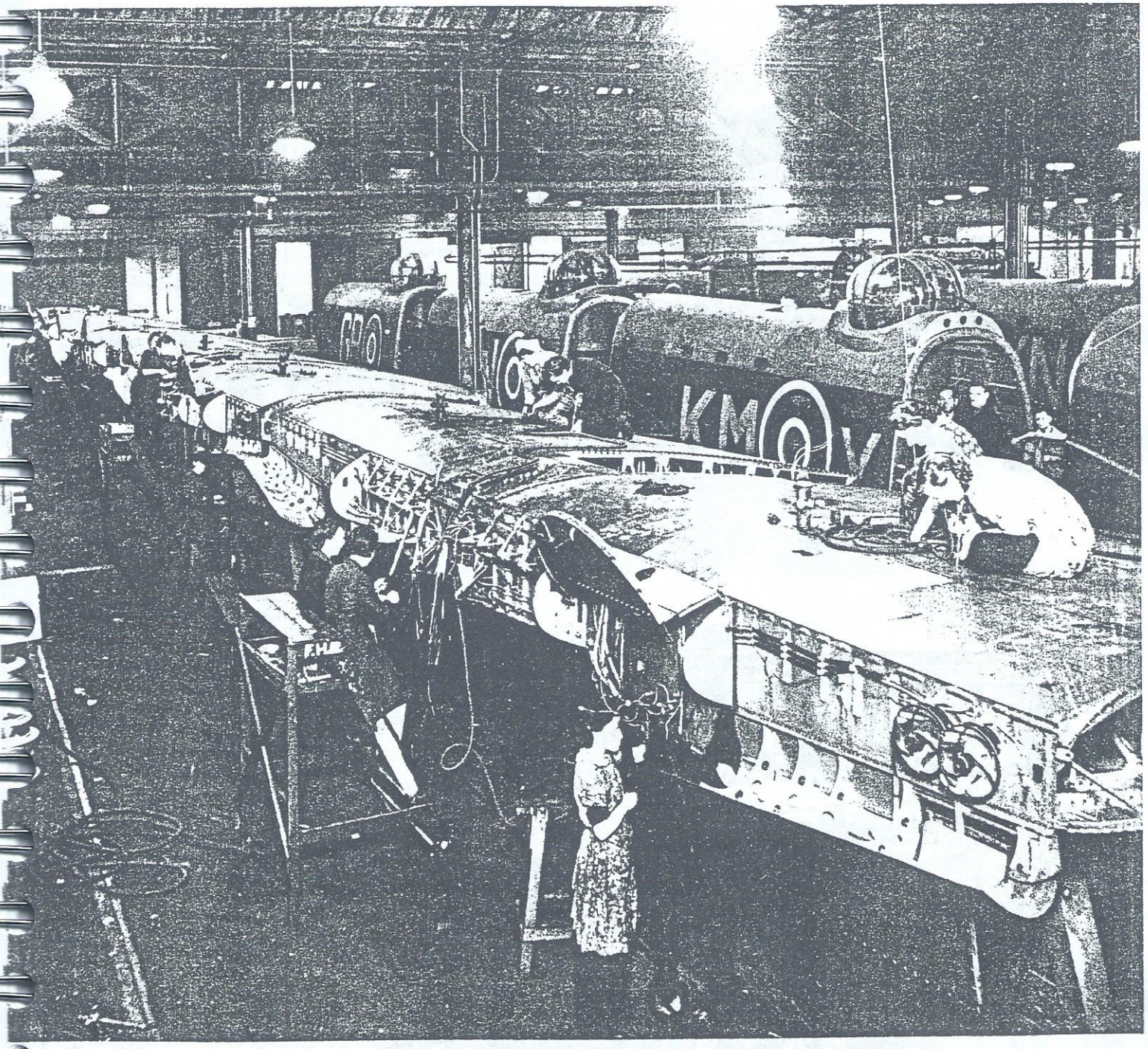
On entering the Briefing room the first thing I noticed was the large map at the far end of the room and on it the route markers pointed straight to Berlin. The weather forecast was a clear sky over the target with no cloud. 'The Big City' on a clear night on only my second op. Every time Berlin was the target (and this was not to be until a few months had elapsed) my heart used to skip a beat, such was the impact of that major target.

As a matter of interest F/Lt. Munro gets a mention for this particular operation in Martin Middlebrook's 'The Berlin Raids'. The date was August 23rd. and Middlebrook assumes that this Berlin raid was the commencement of the Battle of Berlin. On page 35 he writes that Munro's aircraft was airborne before any other Bomber Command planes on that night. Probably to do an air test before setting course. So, one of my very few doubtful claims to fame was the fact that I was in the very first Lancaster to get airborne in the Battle of Berlin.

The weather men turned out to be correct and the skies were clear over Berlin. The trip I had made the previous night bore no comparison to this one. The 'flak', the marker flares on the ground, the fires, the bombs bursting, the searchlights and the fighter flares all contributing to a scene I had never thought possible. As we left the target area I reflected with amazement on our survival and thought of the remainder of the tour which I had to complete with my crew.

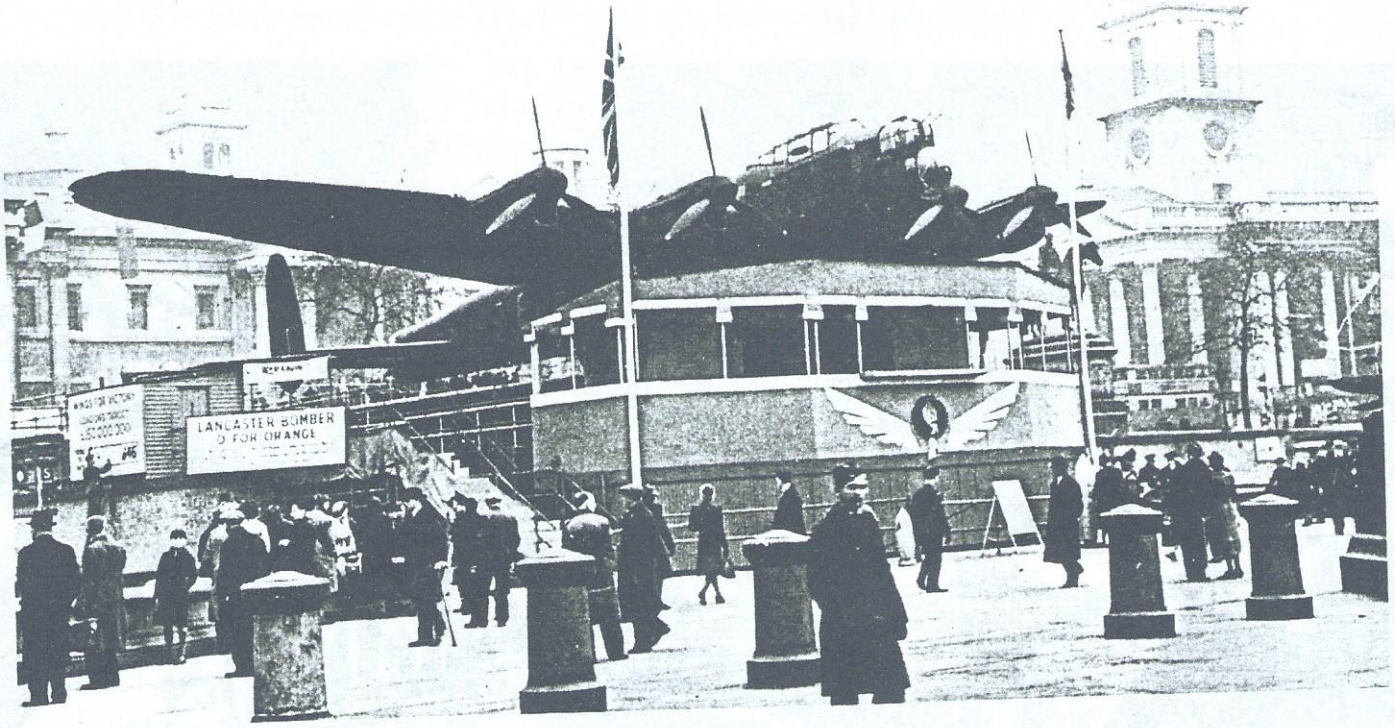
I returned to barrage of questions from the crew. 'Well, what was it like', 'was the flak heavy', 'did you see any fighters' etc., etc., How could I adequately describe the scene over the target? They would have to wait and see for themselves.

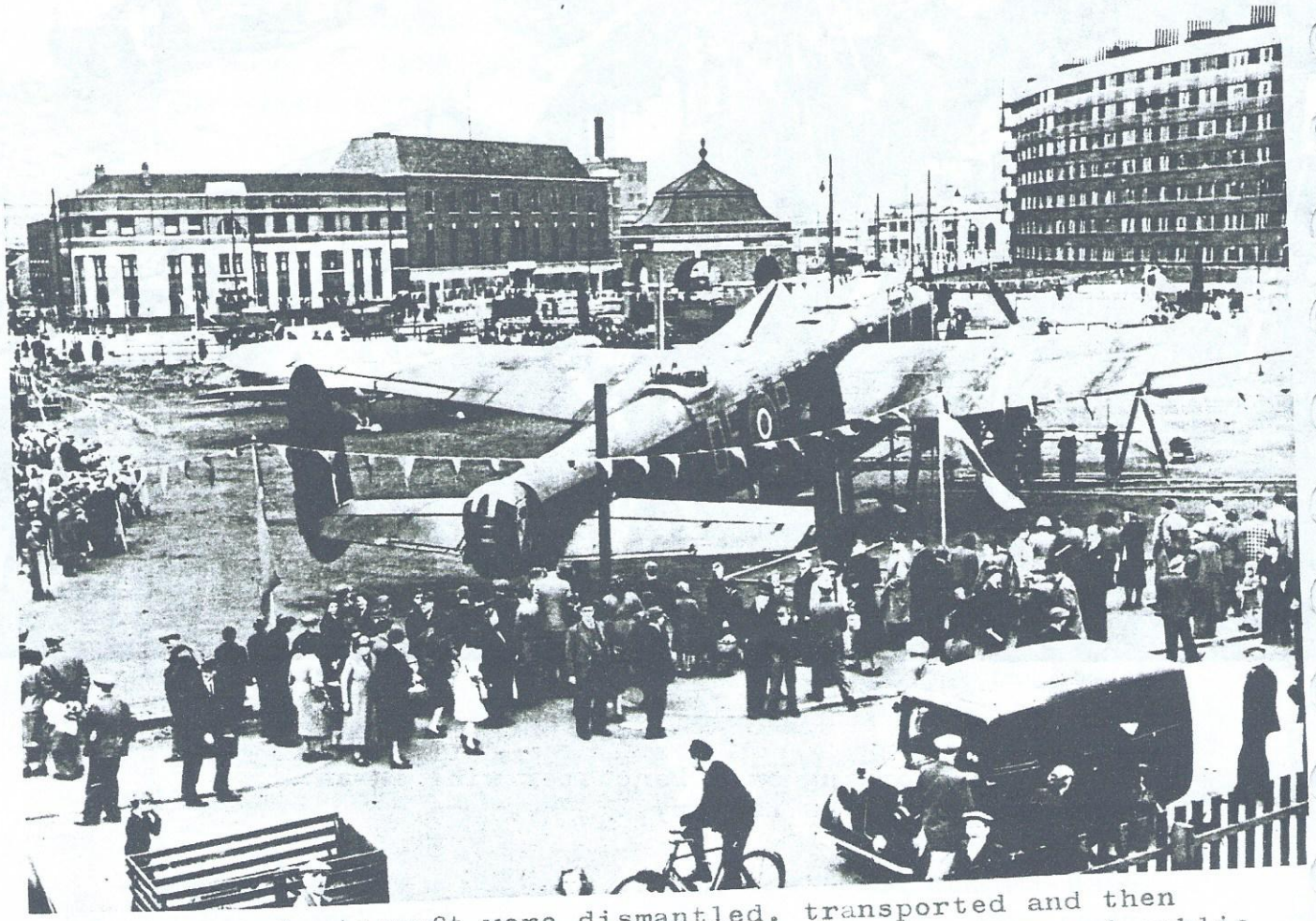
* See addendum



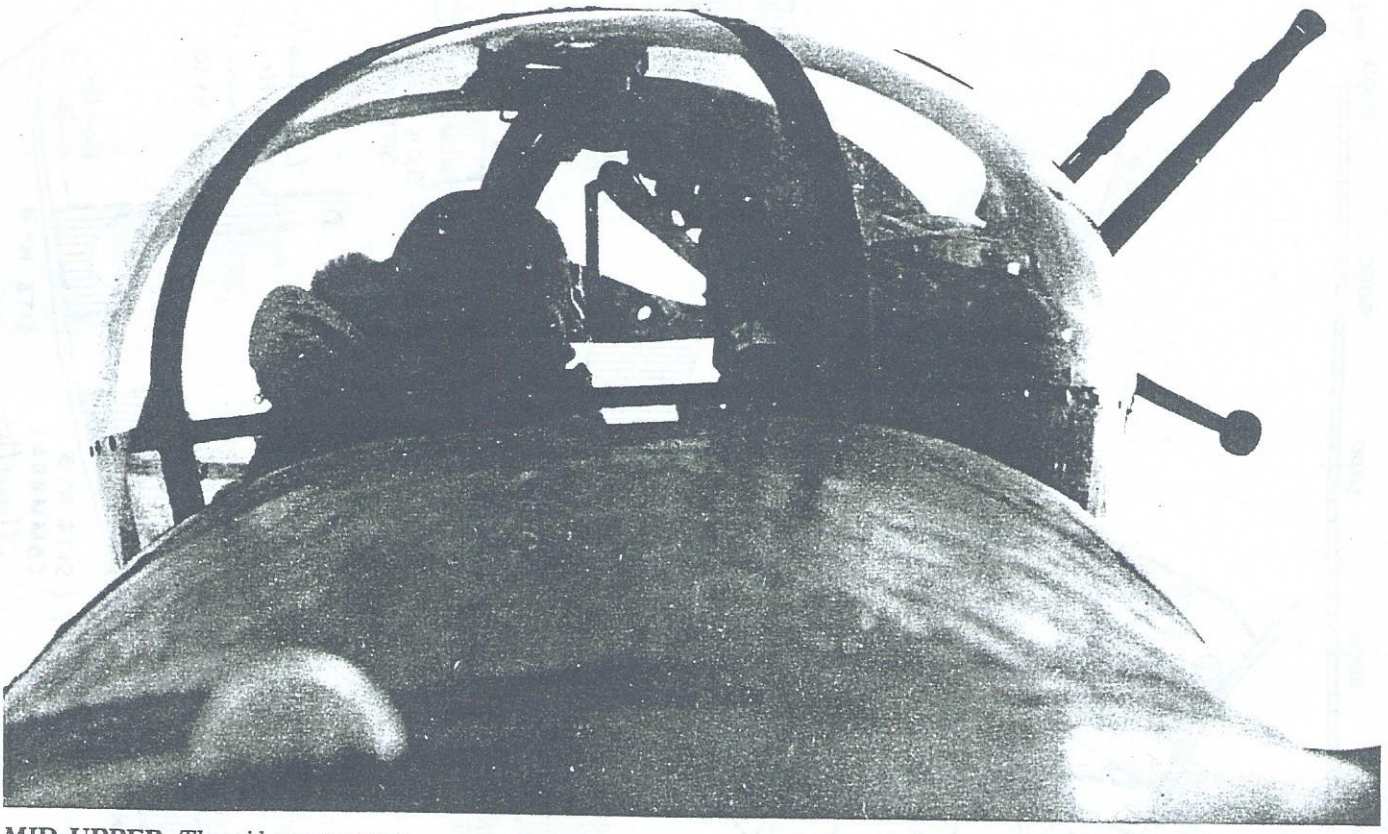
Women working on a Lancaster wing in an AVRO factory.

WINGS FOR VICTORY



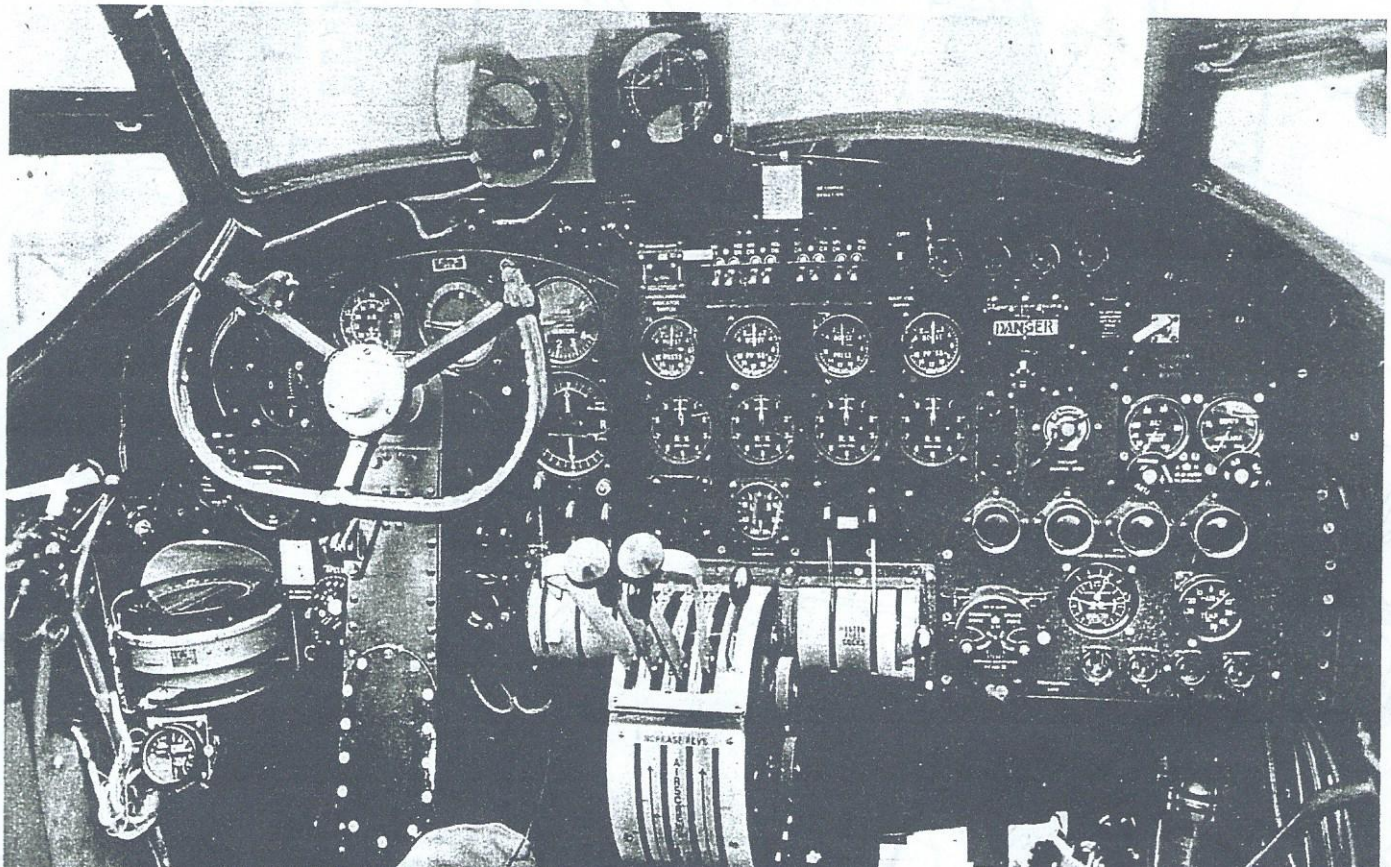


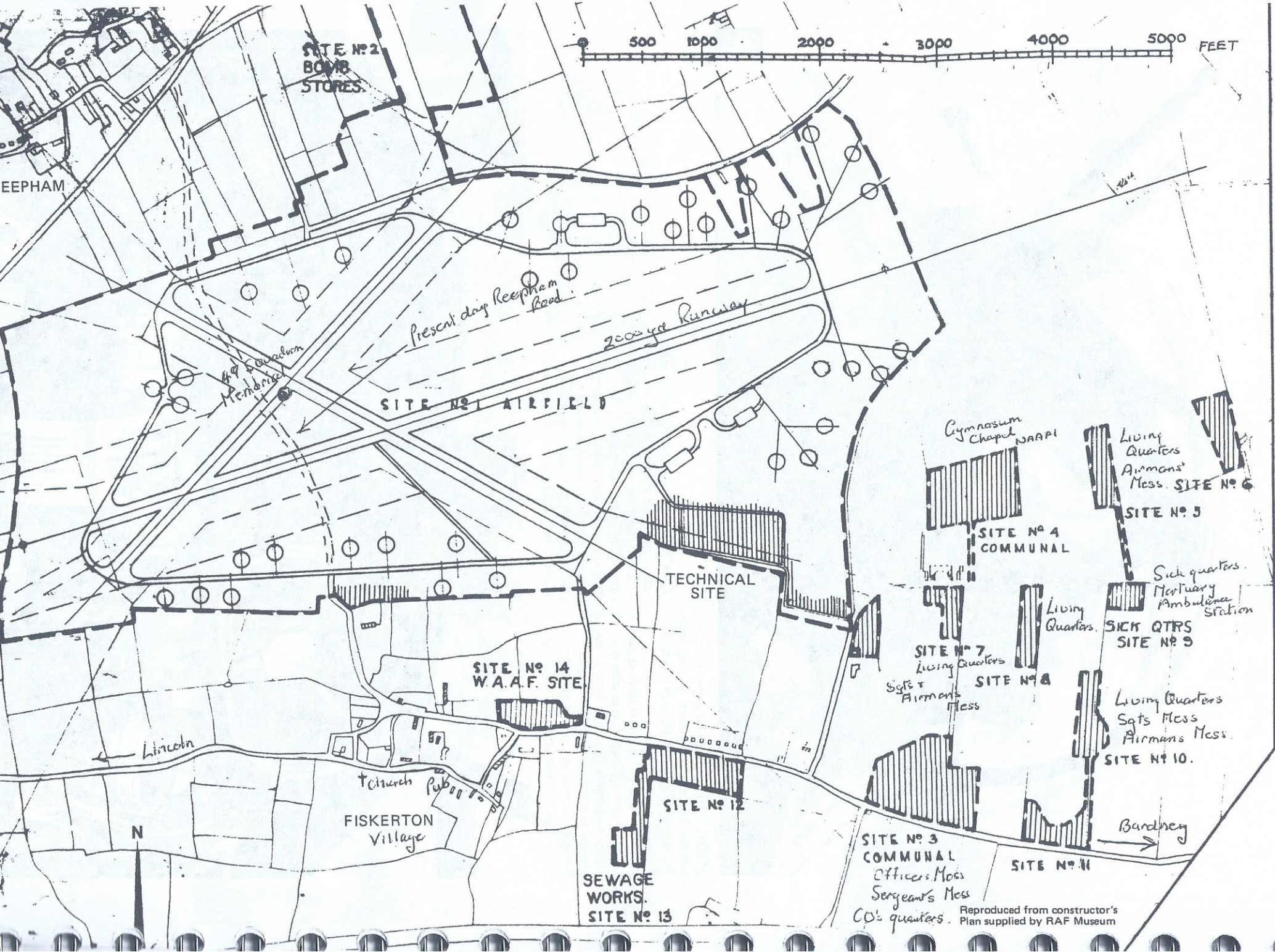
126 Operational aircraft were dismantled, transported and then reassembled in city centres. This enabled the general public to get a closer look at Royal Air Force aircraft but primarily it was to persuade them to put more and more money into the Government saving schemes. A Lancaster cost £40,000. As much as the average workman would expect to earn in 120 years.



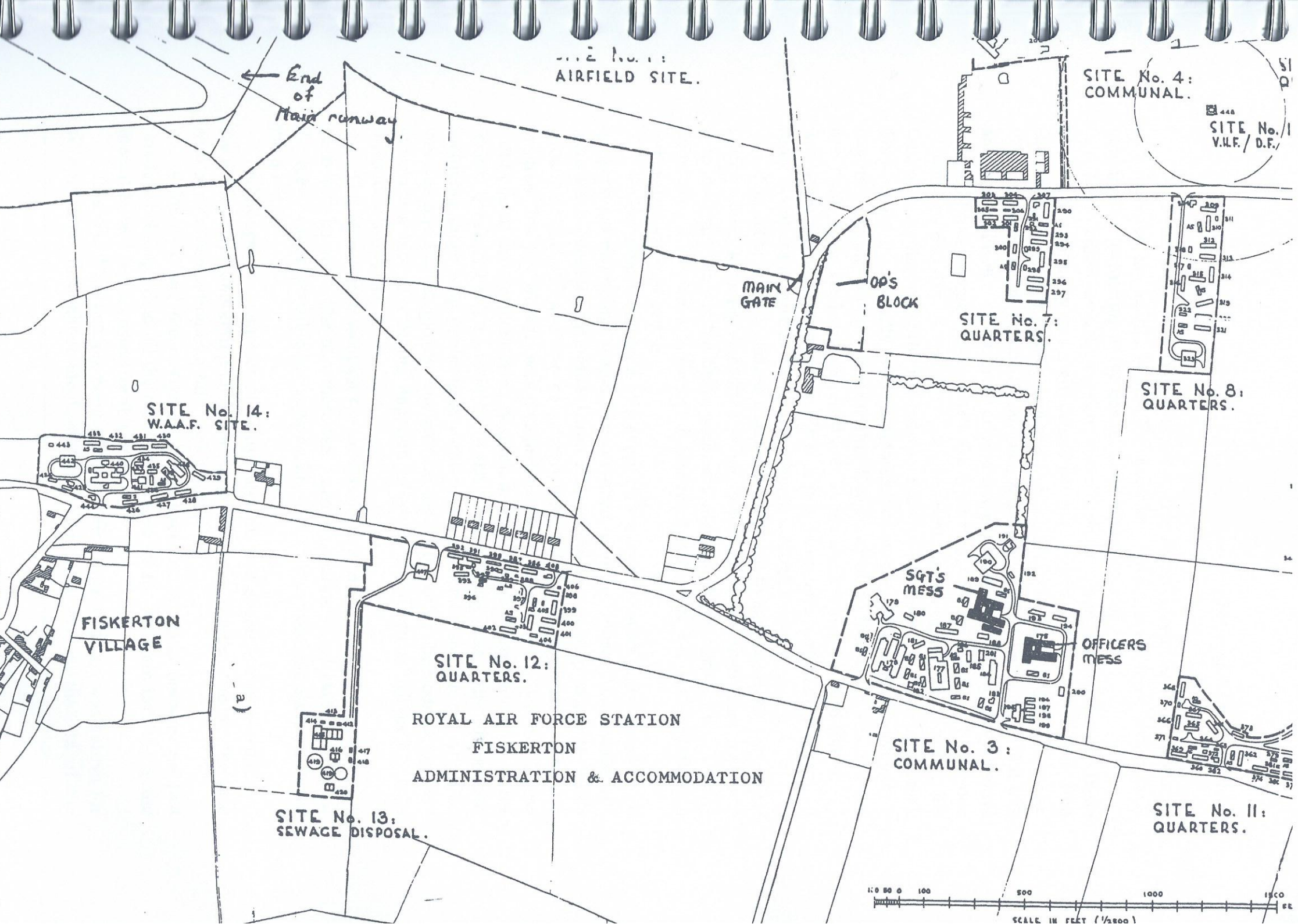
MID-UPPER *The mid-upper gunner had the best all round view. Getting into the restricted space of the turret was a difficult task; getting out in a hurry when the aircraft was in trouble could be even more difficult. It was also a highly vulnerable spot with little or no armour protection, and the roundels below were an ideal aiming point for enemy fighters from any angle.*

COCKPIT *Clean and functional – the 'office' with the pilot's position on the left and flight engineer on the right. Not an inch of space was wasted. For training, extension arms for a second control wheel and rudders could be fitted, but very few operational Lancasters were fitted for two-pilot operation.*





Reproduced from constructor's Plan supplied by RAF Museum


End of Main runway
SITE No. 1: AIRFIELD SITE.
SITE No. 4: COMMUNAL.
SITE No. V.H.F. / D.F.
MAIN GATE
OP'S BLOCK
SITE No. 7: QUARTERS.
SITE No. 8: QUARTERS.
SITE No. 14: W.A.A.F. SITE.
FISKERTON VILLAGE
SITE No. 12: QUARTERS.
ROYAL AIR FORCE STATION
FISKERTON
ADMINISTRATION & ACCOMMODATION
SGT'S MESS
OFFICERS MESS
SITE No. 3: COMMUNAL.
SITE No. 11: QUARTERS.
SITE No. 13: SEWAGE DISPOSAL.
SCALE IN FEET (1/2500)

As I stated at the commencement of this record I kept no diary of events and recorded no details in my log book so these are all memories mostly conjured up by looking at the destinations in my logbook.

Most crews usually carried some form of good luck talisman, these objects presented by one's girl friend or wife. Sylvia had been to a West End show before our tour commenced and had acquired two rag doll Lupino Lanes. One of these was to be our Good Luck talisman. I didn't know what odd bits and pieces the rest of the crew carried but after a number of ops they always ensured I had Lupino stuffed down the front of my flying gear. I still have one of these to this day. It was necessary for Ken, my navigator, to complete his tour with another crew (he had missed a few of our operations due to illness). This he did successfully with Lupino carried in his green canvas navigator's bag. But Lupino did not reappear after Ken finished, so then there was one, the one I still have. He has a scorched hole in his chest which I would like to say was a war wound but unfortunately it is just a cigarette burn caused by one of those countless cigarettes we used to plough through every day.

The other item I carried other than official flying requisites was sheaf knife pushed down my right flying boot. Some carried revolvers they had been able to obtain illicitly but these were very much in the minority. I don't really know why I carried a knife but I suspect it was more for self-preservation rather than self-protection.

Before proceeding on a raid every flying crew member had to hand in all his personal belongings which were retained until his return. Also escape kits were issued containing minimal iron rations and escape map etc, Mae Wests (floatation jackets) and also parachutes were collected and all crew members ensured that his whistle was attached to the lapel of his battledress. These would be of use for identifying position in the event of being shot down in the 'drink' (sea). All this in addition to the normal flying gear - silk underwear, including those long pants, long woollen frock 'airmen for the use of', silk, woollen and leather gloves, one pair on top of the other, battledress and any other extra bits of clothing supplied by yours truly and which in my case included a silk scarf.

The Mae Wests went on top of this lot and on top of the Mae Wests a parachute harness. The parachute was carried separately and each member of the crew was responsible for stowing his own in a convenient place on board the aircraft.

Although the memories of many incidents and events come crowding in, the difficulty is pinpointing them with a specific raid. But this was not the case with our first operation as a full 'rookie' crew.

Prior to a raid the navigator, bombaimer and wireless operator all had separate briefings then all the crew would join up for the main briefing in the special Nissen hut set aside for this purpose.

This was the procedure adopted for our first operation and was normal for all operations throughout the Command. That large map at the end of the

Briefing Room told us that our target was to be a city deep into the heart of Germany - Nuremburg. The proceedings commenced with the arrival of the Station Commander, Group Captain Windell. Wing Commander Adams, Squadron Commander, called all those present to attention and the C.O. took his seat. We had already heard rumours that the C.O. had been known to sit in his quarters and shoot out his windows with his service revolver. A story confirmed later to be absolutely true. Maybe he was one of those Commanders who felt some stress at watching us young chaps go out to do battle or maybe he was just drunk. Then we had all the specialist officers. They told us of the weather en route (to the accompaniment of low hisses), the petrol load and bomb load we were carrying, which wave of aircraft we would be in (there were usually three) and the time on Target. Also the defences we were likely to encounter and all the other information deemed to be necessary for the trip. The emergency runways available at Manston and Marham - they were 3,000 yards long instead of the usual 2,000 - and the single searchlight on the coast at Mablethorpe maintained under all conditions as a guiding beacon for those in distress.

Then a good luck message from the C.O., and a message sent in from our Commander-in-Chief, Bomber Harris 'Go out there and give those Germans hell' or something like that. There was not a single aircrew member who would not have followed Bomber Harris - into hell & back had the occasion arisen, such was his immense popularity. He seemed to make all the hazards we were facing worth all the risks and he always believed and made us believe that what we were doing could end the war without the necessity of invading Europe. That he was proved wrong in the long run was no fault of his - but there I am wandering off the beaten track. Bomber Harris is a different story and I have recorded my thoughts about this man elsewhere.

We left the Briefing Room to while away the hours until take off time. During this time no-one was allowed off the station. With everyone on the station keyed up for the off a 'scrub' or cancellation went down like a lead balloon. It meant that the whole procedure would have to be gone through the next night and maybe the next night. And for us, no trips being deducted from tour requirements. It is appropriate to mention here that operations were never laid on during the full moon period. Too much light meant too many losses. But we weren't idle during these moon lay-offs - the time was always filled in with training flights.

Little Audrey was our crew bus driver throughout our tour. Audrey would not have won any beauty contests but she had a heart of gold and we all loved her. After the ground crew that flagged us into dispersal after an op, she was the first person to greet us. As time went by she was to remain our driver and was to wait patiently for our return at all hours of the night and in all kinds of weather. We would not have swopped her for any other driver on the station. Our lucky mascot but taking second place to Lupino. Later, when Fiskerton's damaged runways were being repaired we continued to operate from

Dunholme Lodge, just a few miles away, and it was Audrey who ferried us backwards and forwards.

So it was Audrey who transported the crew out to Lancaster 'G' George for our first operation - destination Nuremburg.

I walked round the aircraft carrying out the laid down external check. Ron, our Engineer chatted to the ground crew to ensure everything was OK from his angle and then the crew prepared to board. We had heard from some of the old hands that it was good luck to pee on the tail wheel before boarding the plane. It was a good idea anyway thinking of those long hours ahead. So we all queued up to carry out this ritual having previously ensured that there was sufficient content to carry out this task. A ritual to be repeated on all our trips and I suspect, by most other crews.

Entering the aircraft, Peto turned left towards the rear gun turret (housing four Browning machine guns) and Jock, the mid upper, only had a few steps to reach his two gun turret but the rest of crew had to clamber over the notorious centre spar, something I would have great difficulty in doing today.

As take off time approached engines were started up, intercomm checked with each member of the crew and all the necessary cockpit checks made, many of these with Ron who would be at my right hand side at all times. Finally, a signal to the waiting ground crew to pull away the wheel chocks, a last thumbs up to them and we start to roll. The ground crew would remain on duty until 'their' aircraft returned, hopefully with a minimum of damage or none at all. It was always their aircraft and we were only its custodians for a few hours, but of course we thought differently.

So we took our place in the queue of eighteen or so. Lancasters making their way slowly to the take off point. Slowly, because the perimeter tracks were narrow and our undercarriage wide. One Lanc dropping a wheel into the soft earth at the side of the track could abort the trip for everyone behind. At this time, loaded with maximum petrol and bomb load the aircraft weighed over 30 tons.

Our turn for take off eventually arrives by way of a green aldis lamp flashed from the small black and white chequered hut at the end of the runway and we slowly move out onto the 2,000 yard runway lowering 20° of flap to give added lift to the wings for take off. With the pitch of the propellers in fully fine I line up the Lanc on the runway, apply the brakes, come to a stop and test all the engines at 0lb boost. I mustn't hesitate too long, the planes behind me will all be anxiously awaiting their turn so, to vigorous waves from the small knot of station personnel who always turned up for ops take-offs, I slowly ease the four throttles forward. The Lanc starts to swing, it always does, and I check it by correction on the throttles. As the tail comes off the ground and I have rudder control I move all the throttles to fully open, I then leave the throttles to Ron whose hand has been following closely behind mine and I concentrate on the take off. The throttles, fully open give 18lb boost which was in excess of the recommended setting for the Merlin engines. We

can only hold this throttle setting for three minutes. Ron shouts out the airspeed, I have no time to look at the instruments, 60, 70, 80, and at about 110 mph I feel the plane wanting to leave the 'deck'. How different this was to the lightly loaded Lanc, the end of the runway looming ever nearer until suddenly we are airborne. I reach down and select the undercarriage lever to the 'up' position and immediately I gain a few more miles per hour. Nothing like your zooming jet take-offs of modern days, we are still only a few feet into the air as we roar over the edge of the airfield and if an engine fails now we have had it. The speed is now 145 mph and if an engines fails now we might just make it. The three minutes are up and I throttle back to a powered climb at 9lbs. boost. At about 300 ft. I start to ease off that 20° of flap, if I do it too quickly I will sink back into the ground. So we slowly, very slowly, climb away until I reach a safe height where I can throttle back to a normal climb at 7lbs. boost and 2,650 revs per min.

As our tour progressed I became more and more aware that any fear or apprehension I may have had on the ground about pending operations over Germany seemed to disappear as soon as I was airborne and settled on course.

As skipper of the aircraft my concern was not to show any loss of face in front of my crew and to prove to them above all things that I was sufficiently competent to take them through a full tour of operations and I have no doubts that they were all thinking along the same lines. We had already spent many hours in the air and on the ground together, then it was training and now it was for real and each one of us were unaware how the other would react now that we were involved, irrevocably, in the real thing.

It was customary to obtain at least 10,000 ft. (oxygen height) over England before setting course for the continent and one of the more usual points from which the Group set course was Fakenham in Norfolk. It could still be half light at this time and we would be able to see Lancasters amassing all around us. Halifaxes from 4 Group and other bombers from other Groups would be carrying out a similar exercise in other parts of the country. As soon as darkness fell one felt all alone, suspended in the night sky' with only the occasional glimpse of another Lanc to reassure that there were others heading towards the enemy coast.

From the outset of the operation strict radio silence was maintained, hence the use of the Aldis Lamp for permission to take off and although Pat, our wireless operator kept a continuous watch for a possible recall etc, he was unable to send any messages. As our tour progressed Ken, our navigator might be asked to send back new wind speeds and directions he may have assessed. These were given to Pat, he would send them back to base and they would be redirected back to main force aircraft. This may have happened once or twice at the end of our tour when Ken's reliability would have been proven.

Pat also had the capability of transmitting the roar from our engines into the frequencies used between German night fighters. This was code-named 'Tinsel'.

As our Lanc was now heading out over the North Sea gradually gaining height it might be an appropriate time to briefly mention some of the radio equipment and navigational aids we had at our disposal. Pat, of course, had his high powered transmitter/receiver, also there was IFF (identification friend or foe) which, some thought, the German fighters could home onto. At my left hand side was TR 1196 with which I could communicate with the crew, with my home base from a shortish range and with other aircraft. There was another device with the code name of 'Monica'. A red light on my instrument panel meant enemy planes in the vicinity of our aircraft, but unfortunately, this device was not always serviceable. 'Gee' was a navigational system which extended as far as the Ruhr, by the use of intersecting radio beams it was possible to place ones aircraft within a few miles of its actual position. 'Oboe'* which came later had a much longer range but unfortunately, both these were susceptible to jamming by the enemy. A new device, and we were one of the first squadrons to use it, was H_2S. A large radar reflector, housed in a bulge on the underside of the Lanc projected beams to the ground and the return reflections were transmitted to a screen in the navigators department. This piece of equipment was ideal for picking up coast lines and large towns (reflection of waves from roofs etc.) and when it was working it was a great asset. Unfortunately Ken would often come up with the words the damn thing has packed up again. Also, on a clear star-lit night Ken could use Astro. This meant flying straight and level for some considerable time in order for Ken to align his sextant on a suitable star. Pilots flying over Germany just did not like to fly more than a few minutes straight and level, it could be lethal. By using Astro navigation Ken reckoned he could place us within 8-10 miles of our actual position. Useful in an emergency. 'Darky' was the emergency call to base if it could not be found in 'duff' weather conditions. They would respond with a QDM, a course to steer which should take the lost pilot over his own base.

'Rear gunner to Skipper, permission to test guns' 'OK rear gunner go ahead but take a good look round first. This goes for you mid upper and you bombaimer'. Guns were always tested at height over the North Sea and as one bullet in every five was a tracer shell it was possible to see the line of fire as the bullets streamed away from the aircraft.

I mentioned earlier that emotional moment in the Briefing Room when the target for the night is first disclosed. This is only matched when a dim coastline is sighted ahead. Enemy country and this would be my crew's first experience of crossing over a coast into hostile country. 'Skipper to crew, enemy coast ahead, keep a good look out'.

Sometimes, on future operations we would have the misfortune to be fired at by coastal batteries, or even by 'flak' trains which had been positioned across our track, but this time, on our first operation we had a clear run in over the coast.

* See addendum

Occasional coloured route markers of a predetermined colour, dropped ahead of the main force by specialised aircraft from the Pathfinder Force, marked our route across Germany. But these were infrequent, it was not advisable to show the enemy our final destination. Often when flying in poor weather they were not visible and one would fly on into the darkness assailed by doubts as to whether the aircraft had wandered off course or were still maintaining our position in the main stream? A reassuring 'OK Skipper, we are on course' from Ken would work wonders and I would settle down to flying an accurate course at a consistent speed whilst maintaining operational height. Although the Lancaster was equipped with Automatic 'pilot' (George) few pilots used it over Germany. A constant searching weave on course was favoured to enable the crew to keep a constant watch on all segments of the sky. Not an easy task, staring out into the blackness for hours on end. The imagination could play funny tricks at times and many an imaginary fighter would be sighted during the months to come.

The planning chiefs at Bomber Command devised all kinds ploys to try and deceive the enemy, some of which worked and some didn't.

Dog legged routes with considerable alterations of course coupled with diversionary raids by smaller groups of bombers in an attempt to divert fighter strength away from the main force were some of the methods used. Frequently, the route would be seen by the enemy to be going anywhere except the target then a sharp 90^{o} turn to port or starboard with a short run into the aiming point, with luck, would still have the enemy guessing. Even if this ploy was successful, they still knew we would have to return home and used to set up their ambushes accordingly.

Unlike my '2nd Dickie' to Berlin which was a successful raid with much damage being caused (but with the highest losses Bomber Command had experienced to date) the records show that the Nuremburg raid was not a success. The main target was not hit, many bombs falling in open country and on the south eastern suburbs of the city.

Apparently the Pathfinder Force marking the target had difficulty with their H_2S sets and also there was a 'creep back' by the bombing of the Main Force which was not corrected in spite of repeated radio requests from the Master Bomber. Apparently these instructions were only received by quarter of the force due to poor reception over the target. The Master Bomber was the only skipper allowed to break radio silence. They were brave men, few in number and - would fly at low level amongst the falling bombs and the lighter 'flak' with the use of their radio providing an additional hazard in the shape of enemy aircraft homing onto their radio signals.

Date	Aircraft Type & Number	Crew		Duty
27/28.8.43	LANCASTER JA.891	F/Sgt. Petty	R.W.	BOMBING NURNBERG
		Sgt. Lumsden	G.	
		Sgt. Tulloch	T.	
		Sgt. Richards	S.J.	
		Sgt. Smith	E.	
		Sgt. Walke	W.A.	
		Sgt. Roberts.	O.	
"	LANCASTER ED.702	F/Lt.Munro	R.C.	"
		Sgt. Reddish	J.	
		F/O. Harris	J.	
		F/O. Schaunberg	B.	
		Sgt. Vaughan		
		Sgt. Wilkinson	H.	
		P/O. Cook	T.S.	
		F/Lt.Pike(2nd pilot)		
"	LANCASTER DV.166	W/O. Bull	G.	"
		Sgt. Cholerton		
		Sgt. Chamberlain	C.	
		Sgt. Stewart	J.H.	
		Sgt. McWilliams	G.	
		P/O. Wright	M.	
		Sgt. Hobbs		
		F/Sgt. George(2nd pilot)		
"	LANCASTER JA.690	Sgt. Jones	E.	"
		Sgt. Harris	R.	
		Sgt. Blackham	H.	
		Sgt. Peacock	O.	
		Sgt. Brown		
		Sgt. Stevenson	S.	
		Sgt. Whiteley	H.	
"	LANCASTER ED.416	F/O. Sneaton	A.B.	"
		Sgt. Bell	A.	
		Sgt. Dick	E.A.	
		Sgt. Gillan	R.A.	
		Sgt. Hill	A.W.	
		Sgt. Cope	D.E.	
		Sgt. Walton	W.S.	
"	LANCASTER ED.448	F/Sgt. Barnes	K.	"
		Sgt. Greenwood	G.E.	
		Sgt. Atkinson	E.C.	
		Sgt. Marshall	A.	
		Sgt. McPhee	D.J.	
		Sgt. Grimley	B.	
		Sgt. Creighton	A.	

Time Up	Time Down	Details of Sortie or Flight	References.
2122	0506	NURNBERG 0100½ hrs. 20,000 ft. Clearp some smoke. Centre of clusters of greens in sights. Marker seen to cascade. Window 44 bundles. Monica u/s. Very few S/L's and not much flak at target.	
2042	0411	NURNBERG 0035 hrs. 20,000 ft. Window 108 bundles. Monica. Centre of cluster of greens in sight. More fighters about than usual for Southern Germany and defences seemed to be strengthened. M. of C. very clear. Attack going well.	
2044	0408	NURNBERG 0034½ hrs. 21,000 ft. Clear over target. Good vis. Window 120 bundles. Monica. Good routing and PFF good. About first to bomb. Too early to make any observations.	
2103	0441	NURNBERG 0052 hrs. 20,000 ft. No cloud, good vis. Green TI's in bombsight at time of release. Window 120 bundles. Monica and Mandrel. Fires well concentrated. Twon well alight. No E/A sighted. Flak very light on arrival, but searchlights numerous	
2048	0422	NURNBERG 0032 hrs. 22,000 ft. No cloud, good vis. Marker seen to cascade. 156 bundles of Window. Monica u/s. Mandrel. Appears to be a greater number of searchlights in this area. Caught by skirting S/L's at Mannheim, Target and Stuttgart.	
2108	0449	NURNBERG 0052 hrs. 20,000 ft. Centre of 3 greens in sights. Marker not seen to cascade. Many fires well spread over town. Monica very good. Quite a number of aircraft drifted into defended areas along the route	

This entry was made in the Operations Record Book after our first raid as a complete crew.
Target Nurnberg.
Copy from the Public Records Office.

Although I will relate many operational memories I find it difficult to relate them to individual raids; nevertheless I do have a lasting memory of this, our first operation, something a 'rookie' crew could have done without.

Searchlights operated in groups and they took their lead from a radar controlled searchlight. This was always an intensely blue light and if the radar beam picked up an aircraft the blue light would lock onto its prey, and immediately other searchlights would follow suit. On this occasion we were the prey over Nuremburg. It's difficult to describe the intensity of that light. All sense of direction went and it was impossible to see the instrument panel, and I knew I had to get out of that cone quickly before the guns were also targeted onto us. But the lights hung on like leeches in spite of violent twists and turns to try to escape their clutches. At one stage I remember dust and papers flying around the cockpit. At this point we must have had negative gravity. But we did escape that cone and on checking up with the crew found that they were 'shaken and stirred' but intact. I must admit I did have visions of them banging around inside the aircraft. Although we must have finally completed our bombing run I do not recall it but we might have been forgiven if our bombing effort was one of those which 'crept back'. On the return journey there was another 'incident' worthy of a mention. At least I hope it was on this trip when we were so inexperienced. I contacted Ken on the intercomm and told him we were over the North Sea and that I would start to descend. The records state that it was a very dark night and inexperienced me, after hours of flying on instruments, thought we must have reached the North Sea. Ken replied 'Hold your height Skipper we are still over enemy territory'. An argument ensued, the only one we ever had in the air, but I did hold my height and he was correct and we were still over Holland. To maintain height over enemy territory was of paramount importance, to loose height too soon brought the aircraft into the range of even more weaponry. In the future it was to be either consultation with or taking instructions from Ken when it came to the navigation of the aircraft. My job, so far as he was concerned, was to steer an accurate course no matter what (even though we weaved from side to side) and to maintain a consistent altitude. Only once did Ken come from behind his curtain and that was because he expressed a wish to look at Berlin on a clear night at the height of a raid. His words were something like 'Oh my God' and he

High jinks

MY NOTE about Billy Strachan, the Second World War bomber pilot who would dodge enemy searchlights by turning off the engines, reminded Flt Lt Tom Taylor DFC (Retd) of the manoeuvre he preferred.

"My method of escape," he writes, "was to turn downwind with maximum aileron, shunt the stick forward to lose height, assist the turn with a bootfull of rudder and throttle back the two engines inside the turn. All done very quickly. We weaved around for some time and eventually were happily in the black."

The side-effects were less technical. One: John Costello, Taylor's navigator, watched in horror as his maps, log, calculator, pencils, erasers, dividers, straight edge, parallel rulers, tobacco pouch, pipe, matches and (broken) coffee flask went flying. The Flight Engineer was sent back behind the curtain to help calm down one greatly exercised Costello.

Two: the Elsan overflowed, a point not lost on the poor wretch who had to clean out the Lancaster back at base.

Telegraph 15/11/94.

never looked out again except, that is, from the little Astro dome to take the occasional sextant reading.

Ken, like other members of the crew, was excellent at his allotted task. It was common knowledge that should you stray further than ten miles either side of the given track you could find yourself on your own with all the enemy radar equipment directed just on your one aircraft.

If this situation did arise the chances of survival might have been improved by 'Window' being pushed out of the aircraft. This was issued to every aircraft on ops and was not unlike the paper used in making Christmas paper chains, except that this had one silvery side. Each piece reflected a dot onto the enemy radar screens and, delivered in bulk, gave the illusion of many attacking aircraft. The use of this secret weapon was held back until the German raids on England diminished. It was thought that the Germans would use the same idea on us. First used on Hamburg, many months before our tour, it was a great success and caused havoc amongst the defences.

I would regularly call each member of the crew to see if they were OK and remind them to keep a keen look out for enemy fighters or our own aircraft, the risk of collision being ever present. On one occasion I only got a slurred response from Ken and when asking him for a course to steer only received a loud laugh. After a time the truth dawned on me, his oxygen tube must have become disconnected. This was the case and it was soon remedied but oxygen lack had this very inebriating effect. Good job I checked the position at that moment, we may not have had a capable navigator take us home. This incident provided yet another step up the ladder of experience and it also got me thinking about a course of action I should take should we lose Ken at any time. On a clear night I would keep the North Star in a certain position on my starboard side and by doing this I couldn't hope to get back to base but at least I would probably reach a point where Pat could get a radio bearing back home. Or at the worst I would at least arrive at the English coast. But it was a known fact that pilots with their aircraft badly shot up had done just this only to find that winds had kept blowing them to the south and off course and they had flown the full length of the English Channel and out into the Atlantic never to be heard of again.

On the Nuremburg raid, as on most other raids into Germany, three types of aircraft were used, The Stirling, Halifax I and Lancasters I, II, & III. The Wellington was last used on ops in the Autumn of '43. Of these three aircraft types the Lancaster was the most powerful, carrying the largest bomb load. It was capable of flying at least 8,000 ft. higher than the Stirling and 2/3,000 ft. above the Halifaxes. As I said before, height was imperative so we had a distinct advantage over the other two types. We always thought we were a good deal safer than those flying below. This could have been wishful thinking as the losses on the Nuremburg raid were equally distributed amongst all three types. 11 Lancasters were lost out of a total of 33 aircraft. 33 losses being 4.9% of the

total force. We were to learn later that losses over 5% were unsustainable and if losses continued at this rate the strength of Bomber Command would slowly ebb away.

During our next few operations we were to hear of a new type of Halifax becoming operational. The Halifax III had Hercules radial engines to replace the previous in line engines and what was even more disconcerting - she could operate at the same height as the Lanc, but still not with the same bomb load.

But the 'rookie crew' had survived their first sortie over Germany and confidence had probably increased by .01% and the pattern of visits into Lincoln, operating whenever the moon and weather and sleeping permitted, was beginning to take shape.

We were still all Sergeants at this stage, all sharing the same Mess and Nissen hut sleeping quarters. Remember it was the winter of 1943 and a bad winter it was. This sometimes gave rise to harrowing flying experiences. I sometimes thought the list of hazards we had to encounter were topped by the weather with fighters running a close second and 'flak' taking the third slot. Although this sequence could easily be reversed on a clear night.

At some time in the early stages of our tour I got the crew together and told them of my plan for climbing as high as possible to release our bomb load and then continuing to climb out of the target area. In reaching this decision I knew that most pilots, on releasing their bombs, dived to build up speed in order to clear the target area as quickly as possible. I thought, rightly or wrongly, that adopting this procedure carried them into the more intense 'flak' at lower levels end also deeper into the fighter belt. I assumed that the enemy would think this the natural thing to do and that the last thing a pilot would wish to do would be to prolong his stay over the target area. Well, we survived a tour of operations and who's to know, maybe this plan could have been a major contribution.

The crew agreed to this plan of action and we stuck to it except on operations of a specific nature such as mine laying (gardening) or flying under the enemy radar belt.

One cold night, and the colder the night the more powerful our engines, I reached 29,000 ft. climbing out of the target area. 49 Squadron Association pilots have since ridiculed this story, saying it was impossible for a Lanc to fly that high even without a bomb load and half empty petrol tanks. But I distinctly remember that night, particularly the manner in which the plane wallowed in the thin rarified air, way beyond the design ceiling of the Lancaster.

Air crew 'in the know' said that if a crew survived the first five operations the chances of survival considerably increased. So we went to Nuremburg, Munchen Gladbach in the Ruhr, Hanover, Mannheim and Hanover again and our first five ops were completed. On these raids 154 aircraft went missing including many of our squadron comrades. We didn't know it at the

time but by completing the five trips this could mean that we may be the one out of every three crews who would complete a tour.

It was an unwritten law on an operational squadron not to become too friendly with other crews. Yes, we knew quite a few of them because we had trained with them. Hodgkinson and Brunt both come to mind but both were to go missing before reaching the middle of their tour. Sgt. Brunt was spread across the two centre pages of the Daily Mirror, giving the thumbs up from his cockpit window as he taxied out. I thought he went missing that night but I am now told he went a few nights later.

One member of the crew always carried a pack of cards and our game, our only game was solo whist. I used to keep a running list of the debts and gains and we used to play 1d, 2d, 3d, 4d, & 6d. for solo, mazairs, bundle, mazairs ouvert and bundle declared, if ever we found ourselves at a loose end out would come the cards and solo would be played.

Not all the crew would go to Lincoln on every off duty night and therefore the nucleus of the pleasure seekers was usually Navigator Ken, Wireless Operator Pat and myself. I must admit we did get through a lot of beer and fags on those Lincoln nights. My favourite tipple was bottled brown ale but for sheer drinking ability Pat had us all licked to a frazzle. I often think back to those days and wonder how we were able to be ready to operate the next night. But we were, and able to fly on trips up to nine hours long with most of that time constantly on guard and watching the night sky for fear of attack.

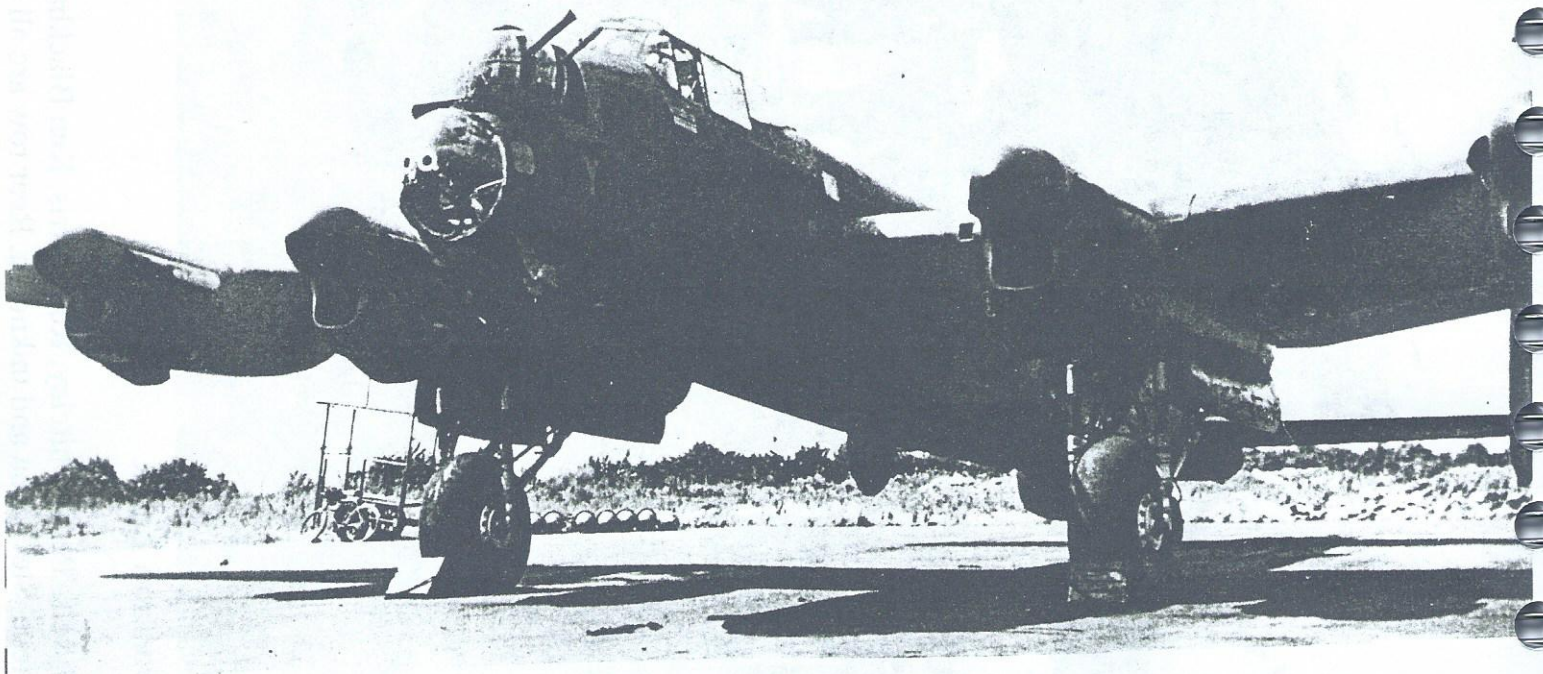
In the Sergeants' Mess there was always a bowl of Cod Liver Oil capsules and a bowl of caffeine tablets and we were expected to dip in and take a supply of each before each op. I recall taking the caffeine tablets but only in a limited way, we might have to operate the next night and sleep is only delayed by caffeine.

We were well aware that we differed from the Navy and the Army as we were able to return to normal civvy street activities wherever released from station duties. Our colleagues in the other services were on duty 24 hours of every day, but I sometimes wondered who were the better off. They were not so likely to be caught off guard but as each 24 hours of our squadron life brought such massive contrasts perhaps we could be. In a pub, drinking amongst civilians, it was difficult not to think of where one might be the next night. Almost certainly over a German city with all hell let loose and then when over that German city thinking, if one had the time, of that pint of beer in the friendly atmosphere of a British pub on the following night.

It was not 'all hell let loose' all the time. Sometimes it was possible to fly out over Germany and remain in a quiet part of the sky for most of the operation. Just a mile or so away I could sometimes see other raiding aircraft coned in searchlights with flak bursting all around and I would be grateful it wasn't us but when would our turn come? Perhaps it had over Nuremburg, but was it too much to hope that this would be the only time? It was difficult not to

Front row L to R

Myself, 'Peto' Whiteley, Ron Harris, Ken Blackham, 'Jock' Brown,
'Steve' Stevenson and unknown. Rear row are all ground crew and unknown



Top: This might well have been Fiskerton. We experienced a similar fall of snow and the whole station had to turn out to clear the runway for the night's operation.

Bottom: Engine testing prior to taxiing out.

stare transfixed at these scenes, waiting for the inevitable to happen, but a call over the intercomm 'Keep a sharp look out for enemy aircraft' would get the crew concentrating once again on searching the night sky.

Earlier, when at briefing, we had been told that, if we saw a massive explosion in the sky far greater than a flak burst, it was a 'Scarecrow', a device put up by the Germans to demoralise us. We saw many of them during our tour. After the war the Germans said there was no such animal - that what we were witnessing were other aircraft exploding in mid air.

Whatever the outward journey might have been like it was never quiet over the target area. If we were in the first wave of aircraft we would be suspended in the night sky approaching a target of which there was no sign. Ken would be reassuring me that we were on track and that time over the target would be, say, 20 minutes from now. There would be no sign of other aircraft and elements of doubt would creep into one's mind. 'Have we got it right or are we way off track' Then suddenly, ahead, the first of Pathfinders target indicators (TI) would start to go down and the flak barrage would open up. The colours of these TI's were predetermined and would not be confused with the dummy ones the Germans sometimes used. Our height would be around 22,000 ft. and as we approached the target area I would intensify my weaving of the aircraft. The first bombs would start to go down followed by high powered photo flashes which enabled photographs of the aiming point to be taken. As we approached the target the extent of the flak barrage became more evident and I wondered how we could possibly get through it in one piece. Sometimes, if the Germans had got it right and guessed our destination fighters would be amassing in the area and this would become increasingly evident as they dropped flares to further illuminate the scene and silhouette the bombers against the glare beneath. Slowly the pot would be coming to the boil, with the German fighters often operating amongst their own flak. Steve would now be at his bombsight Mark XIV having left his front gun turret would call me over intercomm 'Target sighted Skipper, keep her straight and level' and then 'Left, left a little, OK hold her there' and we were into the worst moment of the raid - straight and level over the target area - time drags for this period and then 'Bombs gone Skipper' and a few more moments for the photo flash to explode and hopefully give us a good target picture. Then left hand down to select the bomb bay lever into the closed position, then stick back, more power on and the bomb-free Lanc climbs, initially, like a lift, carrying out our prearranged plan.

So it was if one was in the first wave. In later waves, when the Germans were fully awake, the scene was even more devastating, and it was this kind of scenario that Ken looked out on when he said 'never again'. Fires would have started on the ground and smoke would have started to billow upwards, incendiaries would be carpeting the target area and twinkling amongst the bomb bursts. Also the Germans might have lit decoy fires on the outskirts of the city in an attempt to divert the bombing. Additional, different colour TI's would be going down in order to concentrate the bombing on a different part of the city.

And in the air, well, in all possibility the flak barrage would have increased as more personnel manned the guns, bombers would be twisting and turning to get out of the clutches of searchlights and if German fighters were operating in the target area individual combats would be clearly visible. For the whole period in the target area we awaited the shell burst which would blow us to pieces or the burst of machine gun which would rip right through us. Such thoughts I tried to put out of my mind and get on with the job of getting the aircraft and crew safely back to base.

Raids, such as these, on a clear night, used the Paramatta system of marking the target. Paramatta was the code name given to the method by D.C.T. Bennett the founder of the Pathfinder Force and it was the name of a small town in South West Australia.

Wanganui was the name given to bombing a cloud covered target, and was the name of a small town in New Zealand. In cloud conditions the target was located by Pathfinders using H_2S and then flares would be dropped on parachutes set to ignite above the clouds and so indicate the target to the incoming Main Force.

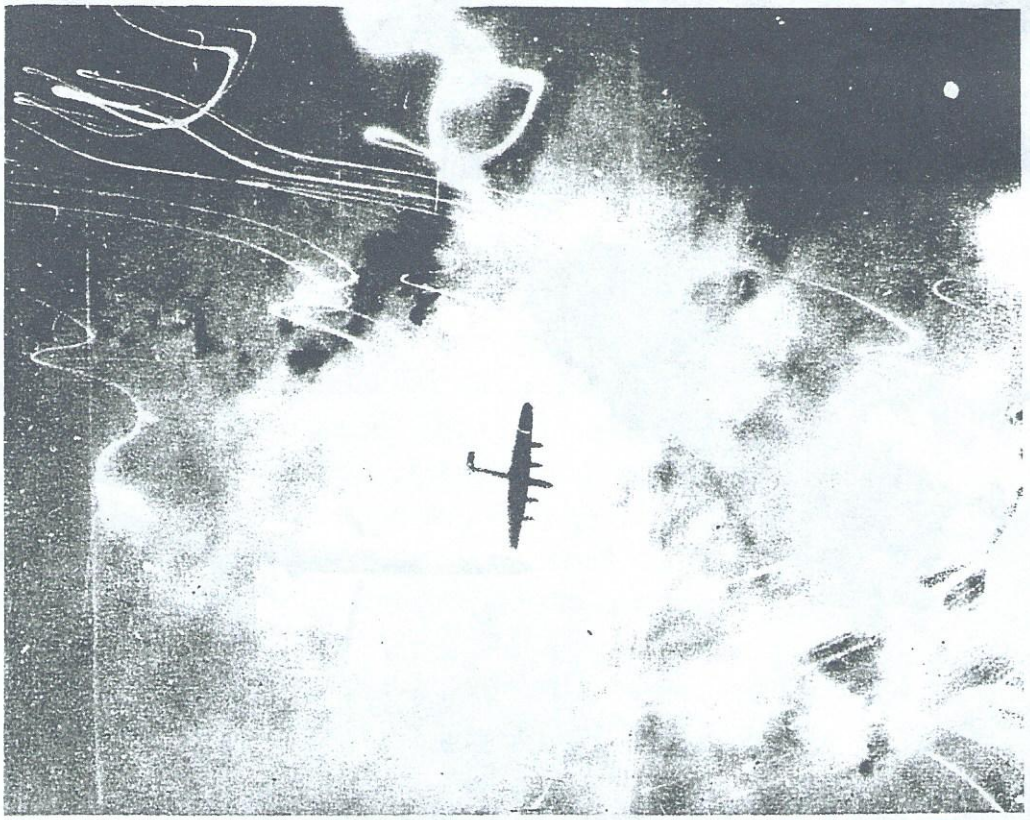
One night, when we were doing our first raid on Berlin as a crew, Steve, when approaching the city on his bombing run said 'Sorry Skipper, dummy run, go round again' and I put the Lanc into a 360^0 turn to come round onto the same heading. Well, we nearly finished our tour there and then and I might add, some other poor devil's as well. When I had gone through 180^0 and facing the oncoming stream I was left in no doubt where the rest of the stream was. Lancs were visible all round and on a reciprocal heading. How we escaped a collision I will never know. It was like driving up a motorway the wrong way. Flying to the target one rarely saw another bomber unless they were being attacked by a fighter or coned by searchlights. To find the stream, fly on a reciprocal course. I said to Steve 'Don't you ever ask me to go round again. You make sure you line up correctly and we drop 'em first time'. We did, and that was the first and last time we went round again.

We knew that to go LMF was to be secretly wafted away from the Squadron and never be seen again. LMF meant Lack of Moral Fibre which in plain language meant refusal to fly over enemy territory. It would not do for those in Command to make these events known, they wanted us to think it never happened and at the time this was so. I never did know of anyone going LMF. Since the war ended I have read that LMF aircrew were reduced in rank and given some menial task. All air crew were volunteers so no LMF's were court martialled for this offence although I stand to be corrected on this point.

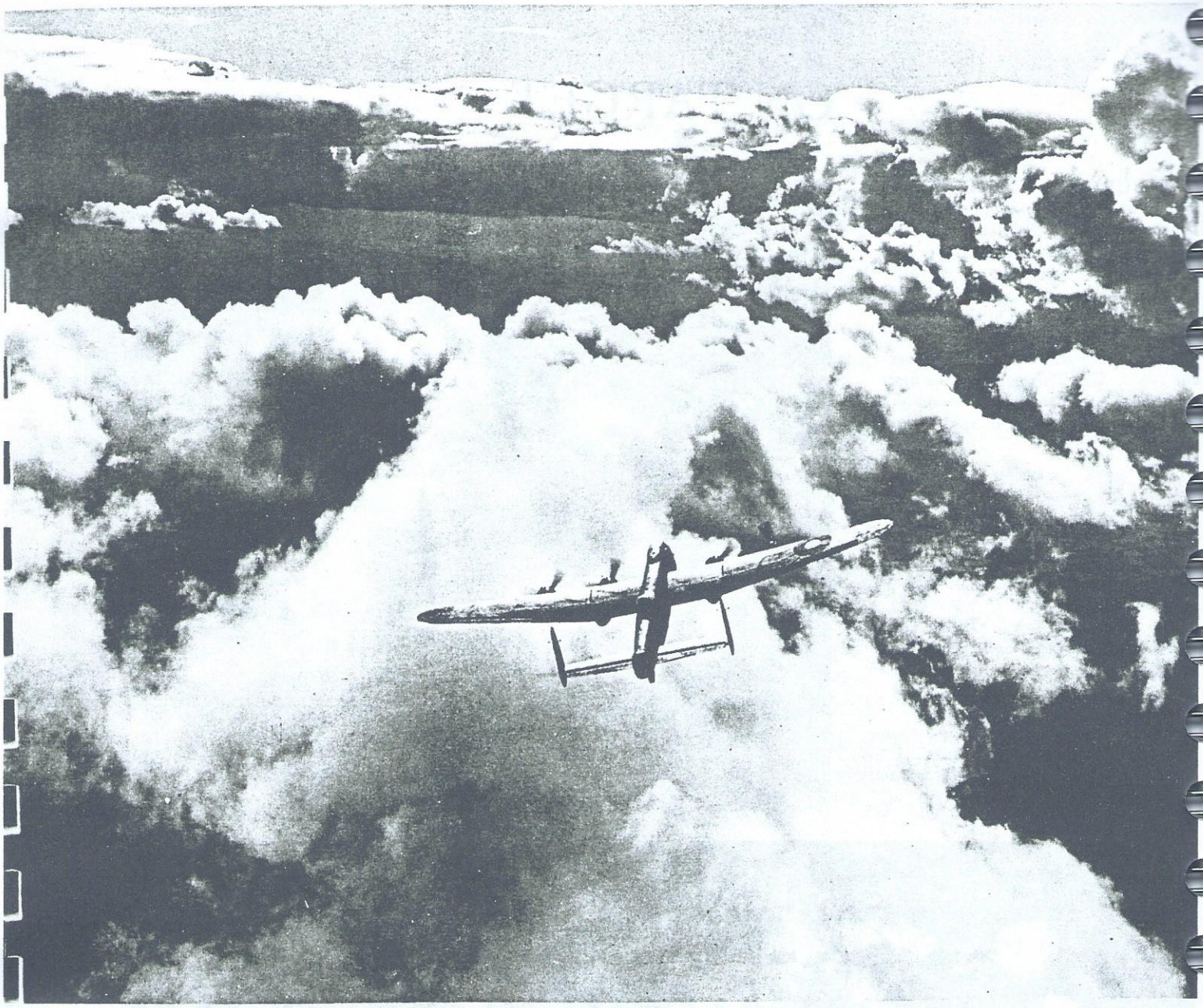
The crew's first raid on Berlin was our twelfth sortie over Germany and after Steve's call for a 'dummy run' over the target and turning to set course for home we hoped that no further problems lay ahead. Our wish was not granted. As the homeward trip progressed Ken started to calculate very high winds. At first he thought he had got it all wrong but eventually established that we were running into a 100 mph headwind and it was cutting our ground speed back to a

ON TARGET

HAMBURG BY NIGHT *Photography at night was not easy but with the introduction of the photoflash, pictures like these became possible. At 18,000 feet the camera in another kite catches a Lanc over Hamburg on January 30/31, 1943. On this night the weather took a hand, when one of the worst gales for many years raged over the North Sea. This was also the first occasion H2S was used operationally, not by Lancs but by PFF Stirlings and Halifaxes.*



PHOTOFLASH *A confusion of lights, fires, markers, bursting 'cookies', flak and smoke over Pforzheim, February 23/24, 1945. The streets and buildings are briefly revealed as a photoflash lights up the sky and ground. A Lancaster is just visible several thousand feet below.*



EN ROUTE – HIGH LEVEL *No words can adequately describe this scene as a MkII wends its way towards the North Sea. What lies in store for the crew beyond the mountainous cloudscape?*

comparative snail pace, I doubt if we were moving over the ground any quicker than 120 mph. This situation had Ron doing rapid petrol calculations and as the homeward journey progressed it was obvious we were not going to make base and we might not even make England. Our luck lasted out and we crossed the coastline but it meant getting down onto the 'deck' as quickly as possible and this turned out to be the American base at Gransden in Norfolk. That night the main Bomber Force was scattered all over Eastern England, obviously seriously disrupting any operational plans for the following night.

Our American hosts, delighted at having a Lancaster in their midst feted us with a cracking meal and excellent overnight accommodation (for what was left of-the night) .When we flew out the following morning we noticed that our night flying rations had been stolen from our Lanc. We suspected by American ground crew as some kind of souvenir. So who cared? They had looked after us so well.

We usually polished off the remains of any flying rations as we were dropping off height over the North Sea on the way back to base. Also, contrary to rules the smokers used to light up for a much needed smoke. This time, because we were watching those petrol gauges so closely, we forgot to eat the rations.

On every return there was always one hazard we had to watch out for when approaching the English coast - British convoys plying the North Sea and hugging the coast. We were usually given their position at briefing and told to keep well clear. In fact I rarely crossed the coast without a few thousand feet in hand just in case. The gunners on these convoys were trigger happy and 'pooped' off their guns at all and sundry. One night I watched wounded crewmen being off loaded from a Fiskerton Lanc. Someone said they had been hit by 'friendly' shells from a convoy.

What of the German fighters? The FW 190's and ME 110' s. In the early stages of the Bomber Command offensive these were controlled from the ground with one fighter allocated to each radar 'box' with the information on the progress being passed from one 'box' to the next. But later, when we were operating, the fighters were allowed to roam free, each fitted with their own search and find radar equipment. At the time we were unaware of the methods adopted by the Germans - all we knew was that the fighters were there and if we didn't keep a constant look out we could be shot from the sky without knowing what had hit us.

I would be gently weaving our Lanc either side of course to give the crew, particularly the gunners, a greater field of vision. It was almost an hypnotic situation, staring fixedly at the instruments with the occasional glance ahead when suddenly I would be jolted from my reverie by a cry from Peto in the rear turret or Jock in the mid upper. 'Fighter on the starboard quarter' and instantly the whole crew was 100% wide awake and a little shiver ran down my spine. We waited to see if he had spotted us and if we were his next intended victim. Sometimes it was another Lancaster - we could not be too careful - but

sometimes it was a German fighter. Peto said 'Standby by to corkscrew' and as the fighter closed in on us it would be 'Corkscrew port - go' and I would immediately jab the control column forward and the same time pulling the starboard wing up and over and in no time at all we would be entering a powered turning dive. As the speed built up I would wing over in the opposite direction expecting all the time to see the fighters tracer bullets streaking past. As the airspeed built up to around the 260 mph mark I would start to ease the 'stick' back easing the plane over into an opposite turn and up we would go turning and twisting in this fixed pattern until that blessed shout from Peto 'OK Skipper we have lost him, back onto course'. We have escaped this time, what about the next time? We have still a long way to go before the end of the tour. If we were attacked on the outward journey we would still have our full bomb load and most of our petrol. The Lanc would be heavy and it was desperately hard work and if the fighter was still there the whole procedure had to be repeated. The 'corkscrew' followed a fixed pattern-practised in training it enabled the gunners to sight their guns with reasonable accuracy. The exertion required in flying the Lancaster through this manoeuvre was intense and I always finished up bathed in sweat.

Fellow fliers used to say that once a determined fighter pilot was stuck on your tail it was usually 'curtains' for you and your crew. I didn't entirely agree with this conclusion. Maybe our attacks were not by a determined pilot or perhaps it was because I panicked after that first call of 'corkscrew go'. Some pilots may have eased their aircraft into the manoeuvre, I threw it into the corkscrew. But the panic could and did last only a few seconds and after that initial twisting plunge it became a determination to shake the bastard off at all costs. So the 'corkscrew' was a very important manoeuvre and undoubtedly saved many an airman's life.

What we did not know until after the war was the fact that as we were operating over Germany the enemy had introduced a new type of attack fighter code-named 'Schrage Musik'. Realising the most vulnerable part of the Lancaster and all the 'heavies' was their bellies (none of the British heavies had underslung belly turrets) the Germans had installed in some of their fighters a fixed upward firing machine gun. The idea was for the fighter to fly up, unnoticed, from to a position under the bomber and open fire on a completely unsuspecting crew. This method, we were told after the war, had been highly successful and had accounted for many of our bomber losses. I wonder how this knowledge would have played on our nerves had we known of these specialised fighters?

NB Schrage Musik' means Slanting Music – presumably referring to the chatter of machine guns

I believe I mentioned previously that we, in the Lanc operated in a height bracket of between 20,000 and 24,000 ft. except for that climb out of the target area. The height was always dependent on how cold the night was. The colder the night the higher we could fly, the engines developing more power from cold dense air. Sometimes the outside air temperatures could be as low as -50° Cent.

Below us until they were taken off bomber operations, were the Stirlings and these could only attain about 15,000 ft. fully loaded and at this height they often took the brunt of the German attack and they, along with the Halifax I's operating 2/3,000 ft. below us always ran the risk of being hit by our falling bombs when in the target area.

One night, homeward bound over Germany, I carried out my routine check of the crew positions. All OK except Peto in the rear turret. I called him again and still no response. I instructed Pat to go to the rear and see what the trouble was. As we were at height we were all on oxygen so this meant Pat had to take a small emergency oxygen bottle with a limited duration. I waited for a call over the intercomm but it did not come so I instructed another crew member to go and see what was going on and this may have been Steve. He also would be relying on an emergency bottle. Once again no message from either of them. I now had three crew members in the tail of the aircraft without knowing what the problem was. Being unsure of their oxygen supply and being fully aware of the outside temperature and the lack of heating in the rear of the aircraft I had no option but to take the aircraft down to a level of warmer air where oxygen would not be required. By taking the power right off we were soon down to 10,000 ft. In our view a suicidal height but once again luck was with all the crew including Peto. Apparently the electrical supply to his heated suit had failed and at the same time his intercomm plug had become disconnected. The other two had one hell of a job to get Peto out of the turret, he was no lightweight, in fact he was huge, and I often wondered how he ever fitted into the confined space of the rear turret. In the excitement the two crewmen had forgotten to plug in and tell me what was going on, but I would have had to go down anyway. I didn't see Peto until we landed but they said he had icicles dangling from his eyebrows and was quite incapable of helping himself out of the turret. After some considerable time Pat and Steve (I believe it was Steve) were able to revive him and I don't think he suffered any after effects. But if my call to him had been delayed even by minutes he probably would not have made it.

Unfortunately both Peto and Pat did not complete their tour, they were both killed whilst endeavouring to complete their tour with another crew and are buried in the RAF section of the Military Cemetery at Kleve on the Dutch/German border. By coincidence my sister Peggy's husband, Ernest, is buried in the Army section of the same cemetery. He was killed when a land mine exploded under a jeep in which he was travelling.

At some stage during our tour both Pat and Peto were taken ill and missed out on some of our ops. This meant that when we had finished they both had a few trips to complete their tour. They were making up the crew of F/Sgt. Reid when his aircraft was shot down. The records show that it was Peto's 26th trip* of his tour and it was probably Pat's as well. It was terrible for their luck to desert them at the last fence. Initially, they were both listed as missing and we were sure that they would eventually turn up. The word 'missing' always

* See addendum

seemed to soften the blow, there was a chance they would be OK and I could not believe otherwise. Some time later I received the news that they were dead and it was the end of all hope. Ken was also left with three trips to complete his tour. He did these, possibly with the help of Lupino Lane, and we were to remain good friends right up to his death some ten years ago.

I can see Peto now, red faced with a balding head, coming back off leave one night and dumping himself on his bed, which was opposite mine, and looking over the top of the tortoise slow-burning coke stove said 'I got married today'. 'You what??? you blighter, why didn't you invite the crew'. 'What and have you drunken lot messing up my wedding'. He had married a Land Army girl and she was to conceive and bear a son whom Peto was destined never to see. I did manage to contact his son John a few years ago and was able to write to him about his father and also to send him photographs taken at Fiskerton but I have since lost touch with him. Perhaps the intrusion into memories of a father he never saw caused him too much distress. Pat had no children, his English wife was called Mick but I never did succeed in contacting her.

Contact since re-establishe

I must apologise if I mentioned it before, but coke-burning stoves were the bane of my life. I think I said that if a strong wind was blowing and the fumes came back down the chimney they were always certain to set me wheezing for the night. Fortunately, a quick little tablet and a few puffs on the Potters Asthma fag and all was OK.

One night, 'stooging' out of Germany, I heard the chatter of our machine guns. I had received no call from Jock in the mid upper or Peto in the rear so it had to be Steve up front. There had been no call for a 'corkscrew'. There wouldn't be for a frontal attack. I couldn't see anything so assumed the attack was coming from below. It was all over in seconds. Looking out on my starboard quarter I saw a German fighter flying from left to right and trailing smoke. From his position in the nose of the aircraft Steve was able to follow the fighter all the way down and he claimed it as his very own. At de-briefing, on our return, I substantiated his claim. Steve was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal and although I never saw the citation I suspect that the German fighter had something to do with it.

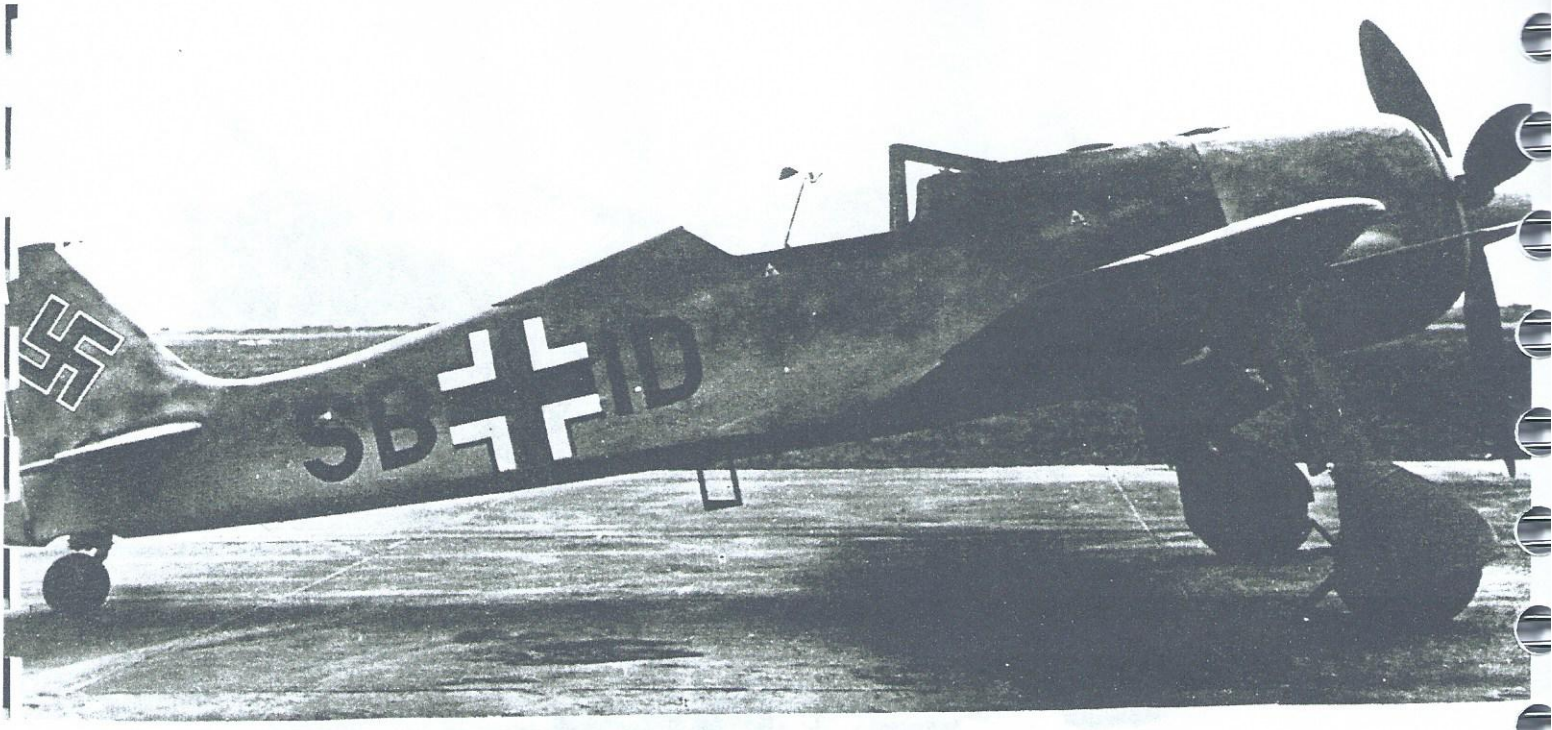
On another occasion we were briefed to go to the Modane Tunnel. This tunnel carried one of the main railway lines from France through the mountains into Italy. We were told at briefing that the idea was to endeavour to close the tunnel and so prevent the movement of German troops into Italy. We were all very pleased with this arrangement, a nice quiet 'stooge' across France, an undefended target and back home. Another operation completed - no trouble at all. We were fourth in the line to take off and the squadron's operational effort was getting under way when there was a terrific explosion heard above the noise of the idling Merlin engines and a brilliant flash lit the sky. Some poor devil had crashed on take off and surely he and his crew must have 'bought it' (died). The

Six crew members with 'K' King.
In the top picture with a ground fitter (name unknown)

Ernie Webb with members of his crew. They survived a crash on take off after being briefed for a raid on the Modane Tunnel on the French Italian border.

I still meet Ernie at Squadron reunions.

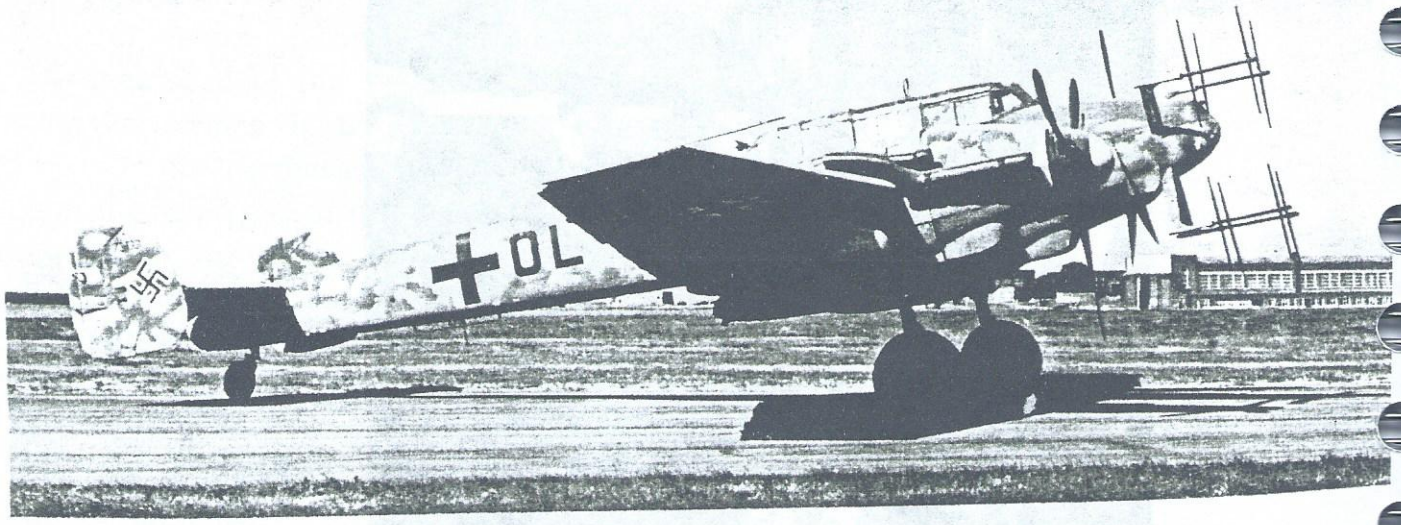
He is second from left



Our main adversaries in the skies over Germany.

Above: Focke Wulf 190 single seat fighter.

Below: M.E. 110 complete with night fighter radar aerials.



No. 49 Squadron,
Royal Air Force,
Fiskerton,
Lincoln.

21st December, 1943.

Dear S/L Hennessy

Yesterday the following message was received from the Secretary of State for Air:-

"The Prime Minister who has been receiving complete details of the recent bombing operations has asked me to convey his congratulations to the crews who have taken part in the series of great battles over Berlin and Leipzig, and the associated attacks"

The A.O.C. in C. Bomber Command has replied conveying to the Prime Minister our gratitude for his message and our heartfelt wishes for his speedy convalescence and return, and stating that his support, advice and unfailing encouragement through four dark and strenuous years have been the mainspring of our effort.

You will agree with me that it is extremely heartening to find the Prime Minister thinking of us at this time in spite of his grave illness, and I feel I must pass his message on to you in this manner for the part you played as a member of aircrew in the attacks in question.

Yours sincerely,

A E Adam.

Wing Commander, Commanding,
No. 49 Squadron.

runway must have been damaged, we could not see over that little rise in the centre of the runway. The trip was 'scrubbed' and back we went to dispersal cursing the character who had robbed us of that 'cushy' French trip. We were never again to get the chance of another French trip and it was to be Germany all the way.

I met that pilot, purely by chance, at a Bomber Command Association dinner many years ago and he was very much alive and well and for the first time I heard the full story. Even up to the time I left Fiskerton I had always assumed that the crew of that Lanc had 'bought it' and I had heard nothing to the contrary.

The pilot was building up speed and was halfway down the runway when the aircraft's undercarriage collapsed causing it to slew off the runway where it slowly slithered to a halt. The pilot shouted to his crew to get out as quickly as possible being very much aware of the 4,000 lb. 'cookie', a number of 1,000 lb. bombs and many cans of 4lb incendiaries stored in the bomb bay. A quick count told the pilot that the rear gunner was missing and back into the aircraft he went but could not find the missing man. They were all clear of the aircraft when the whole bomb load blew up. The missing rear gunner had managed to escape from his turret and had run off in the opposite direction, so the whole crew managed to walk away from the crash and counted themselves extremely fortunate to do so. Ernest Webb was the pilot. He was in 'B' Flight some distance from our own 'A' Flight and that's why the full story of that night did not emerge until that Bomber Command Dinner. We are now both good friends and regularly meet at 49 Squadron Association functions.

I am afraid I have been steering a fairly erratic course with these memories and will probably continue to do this, so, in this context, I would like to go back to the point when the crew had completed 5 operations. The date was now September 22nd and autumn and very soon winter were approaching. Long winter nights meant longer trips taking us deeper into the heart of Germany but winter also brought worsening weather.

Although I cannot recall the weather conditions on each op I do remember our tenth operation when we briefed to go to Leipzig. The official account, details of which are in my log book, records the weather as appalling and very difficult. We entered dense cloud early in the flight and continued to climb in cloud up to our operational height. When flying in cloud for a long period and relying completely on instruments most pilots start to imagine all kinds of peculiar things. At least they did fifty years ago when there was none of the sophisticated equipment of today. 'My left wing is low, the plane is flying left wing down', 'My compass is giving an incorrect reading and we are getting more and more off track', in fact, it took considerable concentration to avoid believing that all the instruments were incorrect. It needed the reassurance of the navigator to convince that everything was all right, 'Yes Skipper, Hold your course, we are on track, you are doing well'.

On this particular night our immersion pumps went unserviceable. Immersion pumps pumped petrol through to the engines when at height. We would be unable to get above 17,000 ft. and we were still in dense cloud with no sign of it breaking. This was the only time I boomeranged', Royal Air Force jargon for an abortive sortie. We turned round and went back to Fiskerton. On our way home and by using H_2S we dropped our bomb load on the Dutch island of Texel. Some time previously we had been told that the Germans had evacuated all the civilian population from the area and filled it with coastal defence weaponry. Out of a force of 358 Lancasters, 271 got to the target area but the official report added that due to the atrocious weather it was unlikely that any damage was caused to Leipzig. After the war there was no report of damage from the city. There were many stories from aircrew returning from the raid relating to the severe icing conditions causing engines to seize up and only restarting when the aircraft had been brought down to lower and warmer levels. Old Man Luck was still pointing us in the correct direction.

Raid No. 13, which we were very pleased to put behind us, was to Kassel. We went there two nights after Leipzig and it was a completely different story. The city took the full force of the attack but 43 aircraft, 7.9% of the attacking force, failed to return.

The multiple German defences may have been the main hazard but as I have written before these were closely followed by the inclement weather of the 43/44 winter and the worst threat the weather could produce was fog. To have flown for hours over Germany with all the senses keyed to fever pitch only to return to base and to find it blotted out by an impenetrable blanket of thick mist was almost the last straw. When I say 'return to base' I really mean to say 'return to the vicinity of base'. Our navigational aid 'Gee' was very efficient and undoubtedly dramatically changed bombing procedures but it wasn't accurate to that last few miles. Fortunately with fog there is no low cloud base to worry about but the rest of the Squadron's 'effort' are returning to base at around the same time. On almost every raid over Germany there were considerable losses from aircraft colliding over or near their own base and not always in foggy conditions. Also many a badly damaged aircraft struggling back from a raid on maybe two engines only, would make it to its base only to crash on landing destroying the aircraft and its crew.

When base was eventually located, maybe with aid of a QDM, which was a course given by them in order for the aerodrome to be found (a very useful service on a foggy night), I would call up on R.T. 'Bandlaw K-King to Passout, how do you hear me' and back would come the reply 'Your turn to land is No. 5'. It would be a WAAF operator on the line and they often came in for some ribald comment from a weary pilot, particularly when he was told he was told he was No. 5. So our plane would circle at its stacking height slowly dropping down as each plane landed and all the time the crew peering out into the murk to keep the 'Drem' lighting in site, or at best the beacon flashing out the

Dear Editor,

CHANCE MEETING

It was the night of 10th November 1943 and the usual long queue of Lancasters were awaiting take off. The location was 49 Squadron's base at Fiskerton. At briefing we were told we were off to the Modane Tunnel on the Italian/French border. The intent was to block the entrance and seal it off. Apparently, this tunnel was constantly in use, ferrying troops between the two countries, we could not believe our luck, this 'cushy' trip after the Hanovers, Leipzigs & Kassels of the last few weeks (the main assault on Berlin was yet to get under way).

The met. man said the weather was good, the run was over France in both directions and, what is more, it counted as an 'op'. These were our feelings as engines were nursed to avoid that 'prior to take off' overheating. I forget our exact position in that queue, but we were a few Lancasters behind the next one to line up for take off. With throttle wide open it trundled off down the runway, disappearing over the slight hill. Suddenly, there was a harsh grinding of metal, audible over our engine noise, a slight wait and then one hell of a big bang, lighting up the sky, momentarily producing broad daylight. We were ordered back to dispersal. The operation was scrubbed, something about a huge hole in the runway. We cursed our luck and the crew who had prevented us going on the 'cushy' trip. That they were anything other than very dead never even occurred to us. They were not from our flight and that seemed to be the only important thing at the time. In those days one tended to care for one's own only within the limit of the flight boundary. The only information that leaked through was that the Lancaster had been utterly destroyed and that there was a huge hole in the runway. Our time contained no more potentially 'cushy' trips.

A few years ago I applied for Bomber Command Dinner tickets, asking to sit at the 49 Squadron table. I was not expecting to meet any of my contemporaries, one seldom does at these functions. The chappie sitting opposite me looked older than myself and confirmed it by stating he flew Wapitis before the war. Not too much in common there. Someone else flew Hampdens or Whitleys or something in 1941, but the fellow on my right seemed to have been at Fiskerton about the same time as myself. My luck was in, swapping of various anecdotes established that he had been at Fiskerton over approximately the same period as myself. I told him of the Modane incident. Did he get off the deck before the 'prang' or was he robbed of this trip the same as we were or, indeed, was he on leave? (we spent a lot of time on leave in those days). No — he said quietly — he was the pilot of the offending Lancaster. Words failed me. But Jeez — how? — it's impossible — he's dead, and all his crew. Apparently he was rolling down the runway at plus 18 with everything going for him when a tyre burst and hus undercart collapsed. Slithering to a stop the crew leapt out and, to use Ernie's own words, 'ran like the clappers', threw themselves flat and 'whumpf'. They were on the ground in the nick of time.

I have now forgiven Ernie for robbing my crew and yours truly of that 'cushy' trip, and we are the best of friends. How could we be otherwise with names like Eric and Ernie!

If you are out there somewhere 'Steve', Ron and 'Jock' please give me a buzz.

Your endeavours on our behalf are always very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

ERIC JONES, (Bournemouth Branch,)
7 Tollerford Road, Poole, Dorset BH17 9AA.

Printed in 'Intercom', the Aircrew Association magazine, in Autumn 1984.

Updated account of Modane Tunnel incident.

Shortly after I left the Royal Air Force in January 1948 I joined the RAFVR club whose headquarters were in South Street, London. Every year they held an annual dinner which I used to attend with friends. Douglas Bader was always at the top table and always gave his usual rumbustuous speech.

Membership diminished and the club left South Street to share headquarters with the Royal Naval Club in Hill Street. Then, eventually, the club folded and was disbanded.

Looking around for something to replace the VR club, I heard of the Bomber Command Annual Reunion Dinner at the Grosvenor House Hotel which was always graced by the presence of Bomber Harris, our well-beloved chief.

One year I decided to attend and requested to sit at the 49 Squadron table. This was probably around 1970. I was hoping to meet at least one squadron contemporary. The fellow sitting opposite me had a white beard and flew Wapitis in some remote country. No luck there and then another fellow chipped in with his stories about Hampdens. Still no luck - before my time. However, as luck would have it, the fellow sitting next to me was indeed on the squadron at the same time as myself.

We started swapping 49 Squadron flying tales and I eventually got round to telling him of a particular incident in which I was partly involved.

It was in November 1943 when we were briefed to go to the Modane tunnel located on the frontier between France and Italy. The idea was to break it up to prevent the passage of German troops to and from the Italian front.

We were all very excited about this one. All our trips to date were against heavily defended German targets but this was a French target and, by comparison, should be a doddle - we hoped.

We were queuing up for take off. I was something like 7th or 8th in the queue when something happened out there on the runway. We couldn't see what the trouble was. Fiskerton's main runway was not level and the final few hundred yards were obscured by a slight rise in the runway. The four Merlins each idling at 1000 revs eliminated any outside noise.

We were told the raid was off and the Lancasters still awaiting take off were diverted back to their dispersals.

My crew and I, along with many others, were pretty cheesed off with this turn of events. We were robbed of what turned out to be our only French target.

We must have been fast asleep when, some hours later, there was a terrific explosion which apparently distributed parts of a Lancaster over a wide area.

We anticipated the worst and assumed that some of our squadron aircrew had bought it. Details of this incident never did filter back to our flight. It was not a crew from our own A Flight and at the time that was all that mattered. And so life on the squadron carried on, as normal as life on a squadron could be.

Continued .....

So I told this story to the pilot sitting next to me and to my utter amazement he said "Guess what - I was piloting that Lanc".

The meal must have been getting cold but the wine was disappearing fast as Ernest Webb unfolded the actual happenings of that night some twenty years previous.

It was the night of 10/11 November 1943 and the target was the Modane Tunnel as Ernest lined up his Lancaster P Peter on the main runway. Slowly advancing the four throttles until they were through 'the gate' the Lanc gradually gathered speed. Suddenly Ernest became aware of his starboard wing looming large in his cabin window and almost immediately, without warning his port undercarriage collapsed. P Peter slewed off the runway at speed narrowly missing the Watch Tower and finally finished up pointing in the direction from which it had just come. Small fires were already licking around the aircraft as Ernest dived out of his own sliding window.

The fuselage had split into two sections and the rear turret had been thrown clear with the rear gunner still trapped inside. His flying boot was caught in the wreckage but, with a quick twist and a tug, Ernest was able to free him. By now the Blood Wagon had now arrived complete with the Station Medical Officer. A head count showed that there were still two members of the crew missing. Ignoring the 303 ammo exploding all around the aircraft, Ernest and the M.O. dived back into the aircraft only to discover that the two missing men were nowhere to be seen.

Eventually they turned up. Apparently, as soon as the aircraft came to rest, they scrambled out and ran at high speed into the darkness with the live bombs very much in mind.

It was some hours later when there was a violent explosion and pieces of P Peter were deposited over a wide area. All that was left of the aircraft was a single key which is still one of the proudest possessions of the lucky pilot.

The five aircraft which managed to get airborne were, on their return, diverted to Dunholme Lodge. Bomber Command lost no aircraft in the air that night but they did lose one on the ground.

I have since forgiven Ernest for robbing us of that French trip. He survived his tour and we are the best of friends meeting annually at our 49 Squadron reunions in Lincolnshire.

* * *

identification letters for our base. FK for Fiskerton. The 'Drem' lighting was a circle of lights all round the airfield erected on poles on the local farmland. The lights roughly indicated the normal circuit and approach for landing and there were so many airfields around Fiskerton that the 'Drem' systems almost overlapped. 'Passout' was the Fiskerton call sign and 'Bandlaw' the call sign of our own 'A' Flight. Navigation lights would have already been switched on when entering Fiskerton air space but on a few occasions we were told to extinguish them and all the 'Drem' lighting would also be turned off, and we knew there was an 'intruder' in the vicinity. German long range fighters who, using bad weather as a cover were able to come in low over the Lincolnshire coast, possibly undetected by radar, hover around an airfield and then pounce on an unsuspecting aircrew who, tired and long since having forgotten the enemy, made an easy target.

So, we would continue to 'stooge' around the airfield hoping not to mislay it again. Our petrol load was always calculated to give us something in hand given reasonable weather conditions but on these occasions many a nervous glance was directed at the fuel gauges.

So the lights would go on again as soon as the 'all clear' was received and if the fog was still around we would grope our way down through the murk and land with Ron once again shouting out the airspeed so that all my attention could be directed in getting the Lanc down safely. Another operation complete, only another 'so many' to go and seven souls breathed a sigh of relief.

But very soon we were to be equipped with a new innovation – 'FIDO' (Fog Intensive Dispersal Operation) - a highly expensive way of dispersing fog, it was very simply a perforated pipe, one on each side of the main runway, for its full length. Raw fuel passing through the pipes was ignited and the resultant intense heat just burnt away the fog. Not many airfields were graced with this device so we were fortunate. When in use FIDO could be seen for miles. Not only by us, I always thought, but also by those damned intruders.

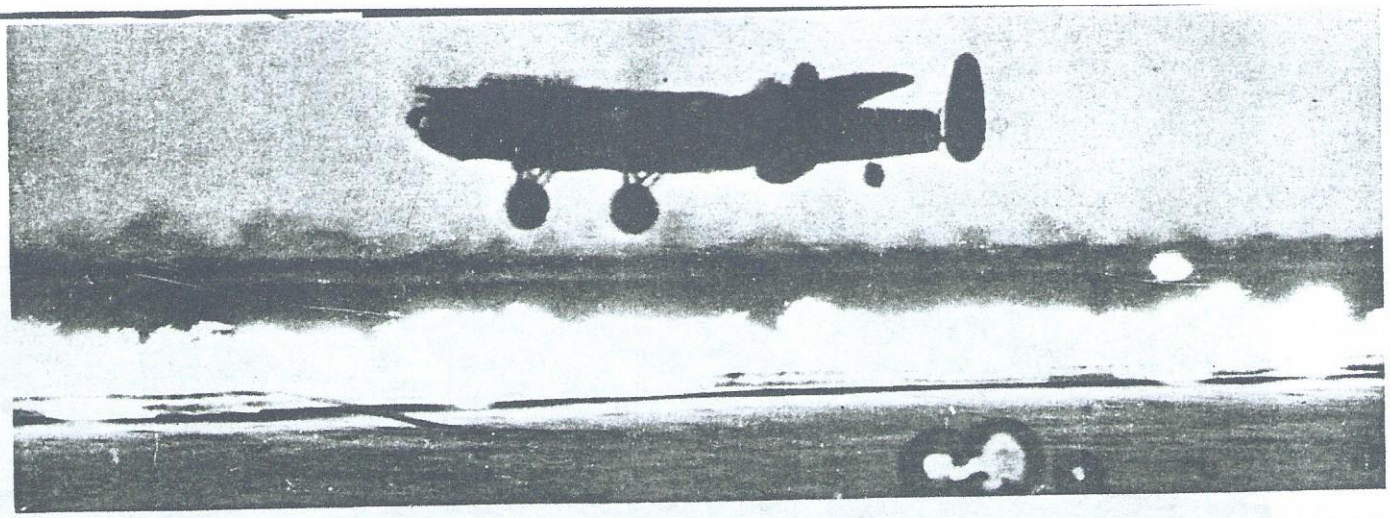
Landing a Lancaster into the FIDO system seemed like a descent might be into Hades. It was only when the plane got reasonably close to the runway that a pilot realised there was indeed a space between the two strips of flame affording sufficient space to land. The process certainly kept pilots on their toes. No swinging off the runway in a crosswind unless they wanted to straddle those flames. Nevertheless it certainly got rid of the landing in fog problem. One operational night when the fog was very dense, we were the bolt hole for dozens of Lancs. Unable to get in at their bases they were diverted to Fiskerton. Lancasters were lined up on the runways not in use and on every available perimeter track. If 'Gerry' had got wind of this he could have enjoyed a 'Hey-day' or 'Hey-night'.

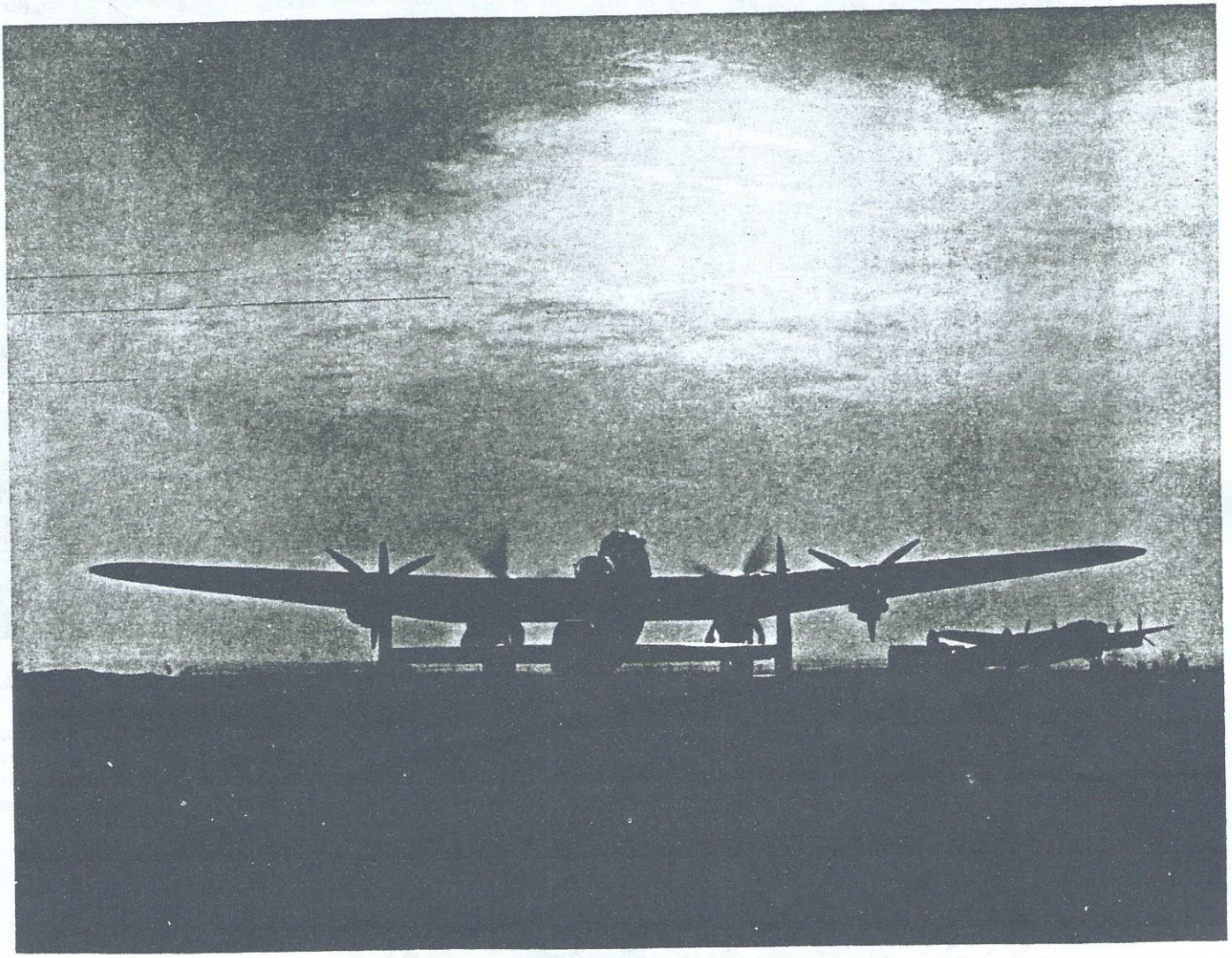
Normally, when flying on operations at around 22,000 ft. we would be above the weather but in unstable air conditions the cloud tops could go up to 30,000 ft. plus and inside these clouds flying conditions could be very

unpleasant with the aircraft being buffeted around like a cork in an angry sea. It was usually possible to miss these clouds and fly around them making the necessary calculations to get back onto course. Only on the blackest nights did they remain invisible. But sometimes there may have been no way of flying around them or even through possible valleys created by the clouds. Clouds such as these were called cumulo-nimbus and they were almost always electrical thunderstorms. In their worst form they cause the hurricanes in the Caribbean and other tropical latitudes where the atmosphere really does warm up. We had experienced brushes with this weather situation on a few occasions but, one night, well into the homeward journey we encountered weather which I remember vividly, in more ways than one.

We ran into dense cloud and I tried to get above it but with no success. Initially, it was fairly smooth going and I was, by now, quite accustomed to such flying conditions. But the going got rougher with the aircraft becoming difficult to hold on a steady course and we were flying into the heart of an electrical storm. I knew that the cloud tops would be well above the capacity of the Lanc and that the cloud base could be as low as 600 ft. We didn't know whether it thinned out to the right or to the left so the only thing to do was to keep going until we flew out of it. We then experienced St. Elmo's Fire and this occurs when the whole aircraft becomes charged with static electricity. The propellers become giant catherine wheels and every bit of perspex in the plane (all the windows) are framed in a blue flashing light. A scaring but fantastic experience. I had never seen anything like it before. In these conditions it was nothing for the plane suddenly to lose a few hundred feet and regain them just as quickly. We must have passed through a series of these storms without realising it; we were in cloud for what seemed like 'forever'. Ken eventually said that we were over the North Sea and should start dropping off height. This was a relief because I don't recall any icing up and to get to lower levels would help eliminate this further hazard. Once again there was no time for ration eating and smoking over the North Sea - it was going to take all my concentration to get us all safely back to Fiskerton. I was well aware that the safety height over Lincolnshire was 1500 ft. (the height to which one could safely descend in cloud) and to break cloud below this height without knowing one's exact position was asking for trouble. So I was back with Ken and his 'Gee' fixes and when he said we were over the coast I continued to lose height below 1500 ft. I was very conscious that Lincoln Cathedral must be at least 500 ft. above sea level so I was putting implicit faith, once again, in Ken's navigational skills. Suddenly, we were out of the cloud and very low with perfect visibility and the 'Drem' systems of Lincolnshire's airfields, for miles around, formed a very welcoming scene.

One operational night, and sometime after de-briefing, we heard of reports coming in of engines freezing up and only restarting when the aircraft reached the warmer air levels at lower altitudes. If these incidents did occur on the same





THE HOME FIRE BURNING *as a 576 Squadron Lanc comes in to land* (top) *at Fiskerton over FIDO towards the close of the war.*

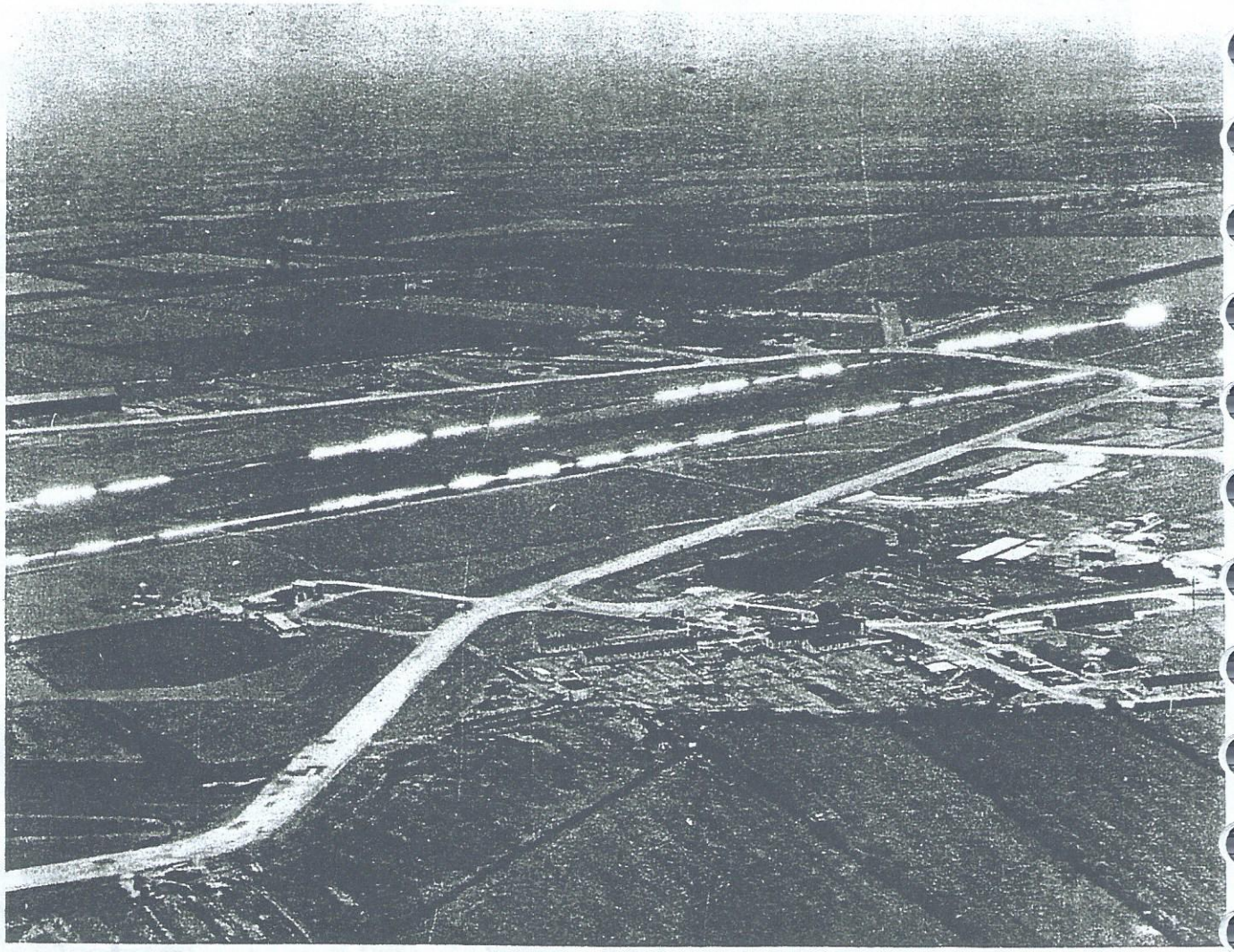
Not only did Bomber Command have to contend with enemy fighters and flak, the weather was a constant problem. Treacherous low-lying fog often greeted the tired crews on their return and, low on fuel, many kites crashed or had to be abandoned.

The answer was FIDO (Fog Investigation Dispersal Operation) albeit an expensive one. From the first operational use on the night of November 19/20, 1943, when four Halifaxes of 35 Squadron landed safely at Graveley, some 2,486 allied aircraft landed by it at the fifteen airfields thus equipped (1,200 at Woodbridge alone), at the expenditure of 100,000 tons of petrol.

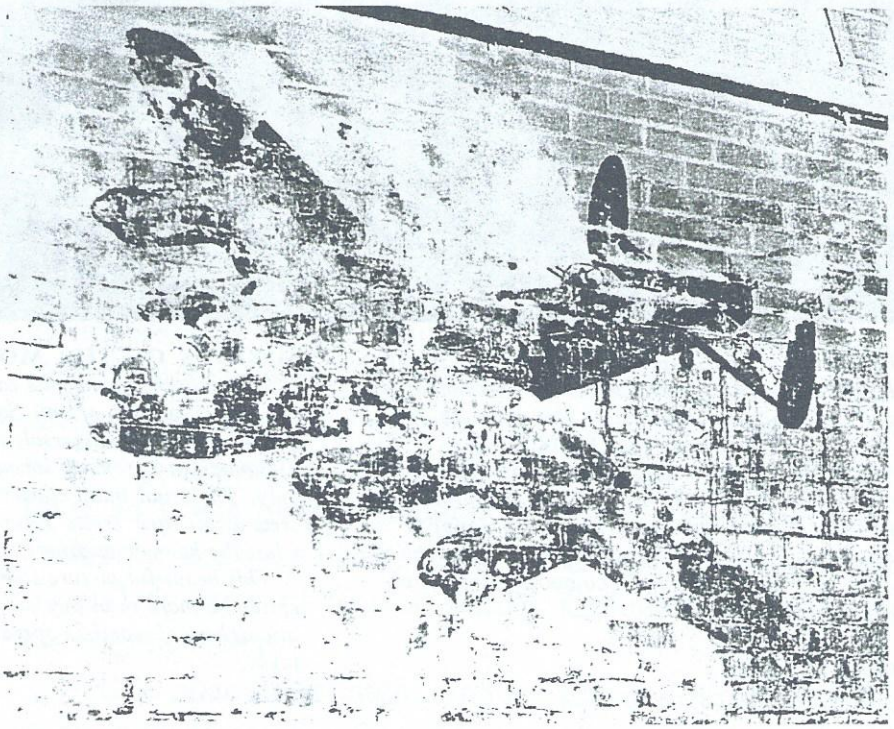
MINIONS OF THE MOON *Back from Berlin in the moonlit early hours, two Lancs* (above) *of 106 Squadron taxi back to their dispersals at Syerston in January 1943, using inboard engines only. The usual small clusters of ground crew await their crews' return no matter what the hour or weather.*

This beautiful picture seems to epitomise more than any other the atmosphere of wartime operations by night.

In October 1944 No. 49 Squadron moved from Fiskerton to Fulbeck and were replaced by 576 Squadron.



FIDO *demonstration at Fiskerton, 1944 for 49 Squadron crews. This view* (above) *illustrates to advantage the layout of an airfield built during the war, with black T2 hangars in sharp contrast to the green of the surrounding farmland.*



Painting of a Lanc on the wall of a hut before demolition at Fiskerton in 1961.

night as our experience then, once again luck had been with us.

Perhaps I should have mentioned that on October 18th we acquired a brand spanking new mount. Yes, a new Lancaster straight from the factory and she was called K King. We were to do 19 operations in this aircraft and she never let us down once. The whole crew and indeed the ground crew all became very fond of this plane. Somewhat like 'Friday afternoon' cars there were also planes of the same ilk. Although the Lancaster was a superb aircraft one could sometimes hear a pilot saying that his aircraft flew left wing low or perhaps some other similar problem and although he had told his ground crew somehow they just couldn't get right. No such trouble with K King, she flew like a bird and with such a plane the confidence of the crew must have been at a high level when we took off in her on that same day for our 11th. operation. This time to the city of Hanover. Our fourth visit to Hanover, the previous had been ten days earlier. On this fourth visit it was all Lancasters, 360 in number of which 18 were lost, 5% of the force. One of the Lancs lost was the 5,000th. Bomber Command aircraft lost on operations since the beginning of the war.

Before leaving K King it's worth mentioning that she would almost certainly have been delivered to the Squadron by an ATA pilot. Although largely comprising of men, this special organisation also had a considerable number of lady pilots on its strength and their main task was to ferry planes of all makes and sizes all over the country. Its quite possible that K King was delivered by some slip of girl and possibly without any assistance. We finished our tour at the end of February 1944 and left K King for another pilot and crew. She survived until the night of 7/8th. May 44 when she crashed at Salbris in the centre of France having flown a total of 399 hours. Our crew had accounted for about 250 of these hours. Not bad when the average life of a Lancaster was nearer 50 hours. What she was doing over Salbris I don't know, but there were a few raids in the Bordeaux area about this time and she might have been on one of these*.

After a raid de-briefing was always a tiring business. Each member of the crew had to give his own account of events to his own specialist officer and I had to give a report which was usually shortened and placed on record for perpetuity. I have some of these, photocopied from the originals at the Public Records Office at Kew, Richmond. After de-briefing they would let you get away to the traditional eggs and bacon meal and then to a much earned sleep. And if it was a cold night, and most of them were, we did not bother to take off our silk 'long johns', they were just as warm in bed as they were in the air. One night, on entering the de-briefing room there was a gentleman sitting at our table with rings all the way up his arm. It was Air Chief Marshal Sir Ludlow-Hewitt, an ex Commander in Chief of Bomber Command. Taking an extreme interest in our stories he was a very pleasant old gentleman. We didn't get round to seeing Bomber Harris until after the war but at least we met one of his predecessors.

In the winter of 43/44 Fiskerton villagers, noticing an unusual amount of

* See addendum

aerial activity disturbing their afternoon peace might well have thought 'There's something big on tonight' and they would probably have assumed correctly. It was the practice before most operations for the pilot to carry out an air test on his aircraft, certainly with his Engineer but not necessarily with his whole crew. If any minor defects were discovered these could be rectified by the ground crew before the evening's take-off time. There are many Night Flying Tests (NFT's) recorded in my Log Book, each taking approximately ten minutes.

If someone in the village had been looking skywards on Oct 20th. (the night we boomeranged from the Leipzig raid) sometime in the afternoon they might have spotted K King. Officially she was on a night flying test but also she was engaged on an unauthorised flight. On a few occasions Ron, my Flight Engineer, had expressed a wish to see his home town of Droitwich from the air. It was not all that far from Fiskerton and I thought we stood a good chance of getting back before anyone noticed anything untoward. Weather conditions were good that day and we duly arrived at Droitwich and flew around a little, perhaps a little lower than we should and I thought 'We have got this far so why not fly on to Newent and show the crew my home town'. Here, at just a small country town I felt I could really get down low, so we proceeded to give Newent the works, roaring down the High Street at roof height and just missing a large crane sited at the saw mills. We landed after being 14.5 minutes in the air ready to take any 'flak' they would sling at us but incredibly, nothing happened. The ground crew must have kept quiet about the petrol consumption and our Flight Office must have been too busy preparing the night's op.

After the Leipzig raid we went on that highly successful raid on Kassel. Then the squadron experienced a long operation free period of three weeks. This would almost certainly have been due to inclement weather coupled with a moon period. Every night from the 11th. November to the 17th. we were on night training exercises with some of the them taking 2½ hours, so there was little time to get to the Saracen's Head in Lincoln or the White Hart, both recognised as the most favoured pubs in the 5 Group area. They used to say that if you wanted to find where the target was for the night go along to the Saracen's about lunch time, ask the bar maid and she would tell you. By the way, if you went to Lincoln to find the Saracen's today you wouldn't be successful. It was demolished a few years ago. We used to force Ken to play the piano at the White Hart, at least he liked to think that we were forcing him, and the appreciative pints placed on top of the piano saved the crew many a 'bob'.

On the 18th. November the target for the night was Berlin 'The Big City' and I hadn't been there since my '2nd. dickie' in August and the crew hadn't been there at all. The very mention of the name Berlin created a certain tension and apprehension amongst all those present at briefing, but this was to be the first in the Battle of Berlin which would eventually comprise 19 major raids on that city. Martin Middlebrook in his book 'The Berlin Raids' maintains that the 'Battle' commenced with that raid back in August. K-King was to take a very

NOVEMBER 1943

As the bombers returned home, fog covered much of eastern England with many squadrons being diverted. As midnight approached, conditions at Fiskerton were quite severe. Radiation fog was 1;200ft deep and visibility down to 450yds. At 00.15hrs it was decided to light FIDO for 49 Squadron's returning crews. This was the first instance during the war, that FIDO was used operationally to bring down one complete squadron of bombers (Graveley had used its system the previous week to land four Halifaxes).

The boys arrived back over Fiskerton's 'glowing' runway just before 01.00hrs. The honour of being the first to land back from ops at Fiskerton using FIDO, fell to F/O Eric Hidderley (JB399) and crew in their faithful H-Harry; next to land was F/Sgt Edy (JB231) followed by Coxill (JB360), W/O Eric Jones (JB421), P/O George (JB469), Barnes (JB314), W/O Petty (JB371) and P/O Ewens (DV166).

SO CLOSE TO HOME

At 01.02hrs, Sgt Roy Richardson RAAF (JB235) flying 'Bandlaw C-Charlie' entered the 'funnel'. Next in the stack behind C-Charlie was 'Bandlaw A-Able' flown by fellow Australian, F/Sgt Clive Roantree (JB466). The following extract is from Clive's own book, "To Fly Lancasters", and is reproduced here with his kind permission, Clive writes:

"We positioned ourselves to land immediately after C-Charlie. He would turn into the funnel, whilst we were on the down-wind leg and should be clear of the runway as we touched down.

The two parallel bars of fire, one on either side of the runway could be clearly seen with bars of flame at each end to stop the fog rolling into the cleared area. On our practice (November 3rd), we had found that after we turned into the funnel at 600 feet and lined up with the runway, as we approached, the fire on the cross bar reflected on the perspex windshield so that it was impossible for the pilot to see out. To offset the problem my flight engineer called height and airspeed as soon as we lined up on the runway at 600ft. For the inexperienced pilot it could be a frightening experience as it is not until the aircraft crossed the bar of flame at less than 100 feet that it was possible to see clearly and then make a visual landing. Subsequently a shield was placed in front of the bar of flame to prevent windscreen reflection.

On this night, with wheels down, pitch in fully fine with 20 degrees of flap, we were at the end of the down-wind leg ready to make our turn across wind before entering the funnel, when there was a dull flash on the ground right at the beginning of the funnel. I knew that an aircraft had crashed and to my horror realised that it must be Richardson in C-Charlie. I continued the landing procedure turning across wind and there, right below us was an aircraft on fire!

Giving the crew the order that we were going to overshoot, I called flying control, 'Hello Passout, Bandlaw Able over shooting - an aircraft has crashed and is on fire in the funnel - I say again an aircraft has crashed and is on fire in the funnel'.

So I was amongst the first of Bomber Command pilots to make a FIDO landing after a completed operation. At the time I was completely unaware of Sgt. Richardson's Lancaster crashing behind me in the approach funnel.

(From 'Beware pf the Dog at War' 49 Squadron's own history)

There was a short pause before we were called again from flying control to repeat the message. Because of the flames from FIDO and the position of the control tower, they could not see the burning aircraft.

After completing our overshoot procedure we continued around the circuit and this time as we were completing the downwind leg, there was a flash of flame on the ground as C-Charlie's fuel tanks exploded. Nerves and senses were now tuned to the dangers as we carefully made our approach in copy book style. There was a slight lift as we crossed the heat rising from the bar at the beginning of the runway and A-Able set down smoothly in a three-point-landing.

It was bad enough when crews were missing over enemy territory, but there was an awful accentuation of loss when a crew had completed its mission and disaster struck so close to home and safety."

Tragically, the Lancaster burning in the funnel was that of the Richardson crew, returning from their first operation. Sgt Allan 'Spud' Mahony, the Lancaster's top turret gunner described what happened on that fateful night, during an interview with the author in 1991.

"We descended into fog as we approached the glare of Fiskerton's FIDO runway. Suddenly, without warning, I felt the Lancaster's undercarriage touch down... we were still a good way out from the runway so we must have landed on farmland. Seconds later there was an almighty impact and I banged my forehead hard... clambering down from the turret in a dazed state, I at first made for the door, then I realised the kite had broken apart so I exited through the break.

I staggered round to the rear turret and banged on the perspex, but could get no response; returning to the front section, I was confronted by flames which were everywhere."

Author's note: The Lancaster had in fact hit a drainage ditch with its main wheels and the impact had broken the fuselage just aft of the trailing edge. Spud's only thoughts were to help the rest of his crew and without hesitation, this tough Aussie gunner re-entered the fiercely burning aircraft. Allan continues with his painful memories:

"The cockpit was a sheet of flame, but I could just make out the skipper still in his seat... I went forward and could see his clothing was on fire... grabbing him by his parachute harness I pulled like hell, but the harness had been burnt part through and it gave way sending me tumbling back into the radio compartment. Regaining my feet, I went back into the heat again to try to get Roy out, but a stronger force seemed to be pulling me back; I then became aware of two figures holding me and one was shouting 'it's too late mate, it's too late... nothing can be done now'. The next thing I remember was being taken to the sick bay."

Sgt Mahony had in fact been restrained and then rescued from his heroic deeds by the station's firemen.

Wartime flight over the town

MANY former residents of Newent keep in touch with their home town through these pages. Wartime bomber pilot Eric Jones DFC, now living in Poole, Dorset, is sent the Newent edition by his sister, Mrs Peggy Adamson, of Whittington Walk.

He was born in the town and lived there until he enlisted in the RAF in 1941 when he was 18. He was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his wartime service. In this article he recalls flying a Lancaster bomber over Newent to test it before one of many bombing raids on Germany.

THE SPEED of my Lancaster bomber was building up as I slid over the top of May Hill's 99 trees, the altimeter reading almost exactly 1,000 feet.

Flying close to the curved contours of the hill a church spire suddenly loomed ahead. "There it is," I shouted to my crew. "That's my home town of Newent" and almost immediately we were roaring across the town with the High Street tucked under the starboard wing.

Before every operational trip over Germany it was routine to flight test one's own aircraft — in our case 'K' King. This usually took about 15 minutes.

Bustle

For a long time my flight engineer had been expressing a wish to see his home town of Droitwich from the air. Our only chance of doing this was during one of these air tests. It would stretch the 15 minutes a little — we were based in Lincolnshire — but perhaps it might go unnoticed in the general hustle and bustle of squadron life.

To Ron's great satisfaction we duly surveyed Droitwich from above and then, fired by the bravado of it all, I thought "Why not carry on to Newent and show my crew my home town and the inhabitants of Newent the mighty Lancaster" — might be a good advertisement for a future War Weapons Week — at least that was my excuse.

I almost forgot the Scots Derrick crane at the saw mills (it's still there). I don't think I was that low but it did cause me to pull away in a steep climbing turn. Perhaps I had been too busy looking for my old school, the Newent Grammar.

Another low run down Broad Street and the High Street, hoping I had brought my father onto the street from his shoe repair and retailing shop. I didn't see him but later he said he saw and heard us.

A steep climb away and back on a northerly heading to our base in Lincolnshire. With some apprehension I might add, not knowing what reception we would receive. After all, we had been away long over the normal flight test time. We needn't have worried; nothing was said. Perhaps they were all too busy preparing for an operation that night.

Twins

Although my log book must record the time of this trip, the date remains unknown. I could hardly enter the full details of this clandestine flight but I do recall that we went to Germany that same night and two of us in 'K' King flew with the pleasant feeling that we had been home that same day.

But, wait a minute. I seem to recollect a rumour, that a certain lady, living in the Comrades Club at the time, gave birth to twins that same night and claimed it was our fault by creating such a racket!

Gloucester 'Citizen' newspaper.
May 8th. 1991.

On display in Fiskerton's Operation Room this board shows the Battle Order for the night of 18th/19th November with the destination - Berlin. Nineteen aircrew was a good Squadron turn out. On this occasion all the crews returned safely but many would not complete their tour of operations.
I am listed five from the bottom and it was our first trip to Berlin.

FIXES 1ST CLASS 2ND CLASS 3RD

No 49 SQUADRON.
BERLIN 18/19 Nov 1943.

	A/C LETTER	CAPTAIN	BOMB LOAD	CALL SIGN	FIXES ETC	ATO	ETR	ATR
1st WAVE	Q	W/C ADAMS		NMY	LANDED WARBOYS	1657		0131
"	A	S/L DAY		"	" TANGMERE	1658		0140
"	G	F/O COTTINGHAM		"	" DUNSFOLD	1700		0115
"	N	F/SGT EDY		"		1702		0112
"	C	P/O HALES		"		1704		0135
"	T	P/O BLACKMORE		"		1705		0121
"	M	W/O JUPP		"		1706½		0116
"	H	P/O HIDDERLEY		"		1710		0147
2ND WAVE	F	F/O REYNOLDS		"		1708		0129
"	V	F/LT TANCRED		"		1707		0137
"	S	F/O PALMER		"		1706		0138
"	R	F/O FOSTER		"	LANDED CRANWELL	1711		0135
"	J	F/O BACON		"	" WOODHALL	1714		0159
"	U	W/O WEBB		"	" GRANSDEN	1715		0229
"	K	W/O JONES		"		1716		0142
"	Q	P/O BARNES		"		1719		0148
3RD WAVE	E	P/O SIMPSON		"	LANDED MANSTON	1717½		0100
"	B	P/O GEORGE		"	" W. MALLING	1720		0139
"	D	F/SGT ROANTREE		"		1713		0143

OFFICER I.C. G/C GRINDELL-MATTHEWS D.F.C. A.F.C.

CLOUD BASE

LOCAL WEATHER
TIME:-

STATION	VIS	QFE	WIND
SCAMPTON			
FISKERTON			

AERODROME STATE

FIXES		QDM'S		ETC	
A/C L[tr]		A/C L[tr]		A/C L[tr]	
FIX	TIME	FIX	TIME	FIX	TIME

A/C NO & LETTER	CAPTAIN

active role in the 'Battle' taking part in eleven of the raids. With my '2nd.' I took part in 12. Not many pilots exceeded this total. To date I have met one who did 13 and one who did 15. To do that number he must have missed out on some of his leave periods. Did I mention about aircrew leaves? Because we flew, or at least were on duty seven days a week we would get a weeks leave every six weeks (presumably for the Sundays we flew). This reminds me. Quite recently my sister Peggy told me that I was at home at Newent for my 21st birthday. So it must have been a leave period when I went to Newent instead of elsewhere. This would account for the gap in my Log Book between the end of October and the 10th. November. For the life of me I cannot remember my 21st. but we must have celebrated in some way or another. This raid on Berlin was my 14th. and the crew's 12th. so we were almost half way through our tour. It was also the raid in which we encountered those strong head winds and had to land at the American base at Gransden.

600 aircraft from Bomber Command were lost over Berlin in the 'Battle' and the controversy over whether it was a success or failure has continued ever since.

There were to be a further three raids on Berlin in that week and we participated in all of them. Then Berlin again in the following week and the next night to Leipzig again and this time we got there.

This was a hectic two weeks and I suspect that the leisure time we did have would have been spent in the Sergeants' Mess. We used to get off the airfield whenever we possibly could but the comforts of the Mess were very much appreciated and these sometimes included impromptu parties which did tend to get a little hectic. High Cockaloram was one of the favourite games or perhaps one ought to call it a sport. Two teams, each with the main contestants riding on someone else's back and the idea was to knock the rider to the floor with whatever weapon was available. The side left with the most mounted riders won the game. Also 'The Muffin Man' played to the tune of 'Do you know the Muffin Man'. It involved doing something with pints of beer balanced on one's head but for the life of me I can't remember what. The mind boggles. Whatever it was the rules usually went out of the window and a general free-for-all ensued.

You may be wondering and if you weren't I will tell you anyway, how did we cope with the calls of nature? I have already told you about the funnelled tube available to the pilot but, also, at the rear of the Lanc was an Elsan toilet. Available to all the crew I would always tell them to be quick about it and get back to their post as quickly as possible. No reading of the weekly magazine, especially over enemy territory. If my needs were very urgent then Pat would come up to cockpit and take over. Mind you, I was very reluctant to do this and usually tried to 'hang on' until we were over the North Sea and on the way home.

We also had a rest bed at the rear of the aircraft and this is where they put

Peto when they pulled him out of the rear turret.

There was one occasion when such an arrangement would just not have been used. On one operation we were routed to return just as dawn was breaking. This was achieved by a very late take off and on the return journey we were scheduled to be crossing the Dutch coast at daybreak. The whole attacking force flew back over the North Sea at sea level. I have forgotten the target for that night but I will never forget the sight of Lancasters as far as the eye could see all at wave-top height. There was precious little authorised low flying at this stage of the war so this was an occasion to be relished and I doubt if there was a pilot in that returning force who did not enjoy that helter-skelter dash for home.

Interspersed with these raids to Berlin were raids to other cities. We went to Leipzig (for the second time), Frankfurt and Brunswick. When we were expecting a lull over the Christmas period we were sent to Berlin again on the night before Christmas Eve. I can't remember where I was Christmas '43.

On the 5th. Jan we went to Stettin in Poland on the Baltic coast. It was my 23rd. op and the crew's 21st. and we were slowly approaching the end of our tour. This was to be our longest penetration into enemy territory and we were to land 9 hours and 10 minutes after take-off (with a full fuel load of 2,155 Imp gallons the Lancaster could stay airborne for just over 10 hours so this trip was pushing things to the limit). Each Merlin engine burned about 50 gallons an hour and a considerable amount could be added to this for take-off and climb.

This was a 'gardening' operation. In plain language a mine laying exercise in enemy waters and the water in question this time was the harbour approach into Stettin, one of Poland's major ports overrun by the Germans at the start of the war. Mines were dropped on parachutes to minimise the impact when they hit the water and it also meant going in quite low to drop them. We were routed in over the most northerly cape of Denmark (occupied by the Germans) right up to the Swedish coast and then we turned due south for about a 200 mile run up to the target. At some point we must have crossed over into Swedish territory because, suddenly, all hell was let loose with the Swedes shooting off with everything they had, but only up to about 10,000 ft. It was quite a sight, quite like flying over a bright red carpet with nothing coming anywhere near us. We learned later, and I don't know how true it was, that they did exactly the same for the Germans. They were a neutral country of course and they were telling us to stay up there. Come any lower at your peril.

I wonder what the crew would have thought if we had known at the time that we were one of only six Lancasters engaged on minelaying that night and that the main force of 348 Lancasters were bombing the city of Stettin. Not much 'protection in numbers' that night. 16 aircraft - 14 Lancasters and 2 Halifaxes were lost that night, 4.9% of the attacking force but we had a tiring but uneventful trip. Unless this was the night we witnessed the Aurora Borealis (The Northern Lights), way to the north shafts of light like searchlights piercing the night sky. We only saw it on one occasion and I really must find out what

causes this phenomenon, some say its the reflection of the sun's rays off the polar ice, but how can that be in winter when there is so little sun in the polar regions.

One other natural happening, and this one did give us some problems, was condensation trails. Today, they are part of everyday jet travel, and maybe the Americans in their Flying Fortresses used them to bring the German fighters into battle. But when Peto called up and said 'Skipper we are forming con trails', I always endeavoured to fly at a different level where they were not forming. Even a few hundred feet would sometimes be sufficient. There just couldn't be a worse indication of position in the night sky.

After Stettin we went to Brunswick nine nights later and then there were four more Berlin raids which took us up to the end January 1944. I had now completed 28 operations and the crew 26 (except for those members who had been sick). Almost half our tour had been taken up with raids on Berlin and it was incredible that we had survived. Going into breakfast one saw but tried not to notice that a certain table was empty, maybe sometimes two but these would soon be filled with crews straight from training. The crews of *Hodgkinson, Brunt, Cottingham, Petty and countless others had all gone missing. I knew these four pilots; they were all from 'A' Flight and as I said before I trained with Hodgkinson and Brunt. But it was never going to be us, not the crew of K King, not after we had come so far.

My turn came for taking a 2nd. Dickie and it must have been to Berlin. I can't remember who it was. Some five or six years ago a fellow called Tudor-Jones approached me and said I had taken him on his 2nd. Dickie. I couldn't remember him. But I did congratulate him on his survival and told him it must have something to do with guidance I gave him on that night. Also there's a rear gunner in Bristol, chairman of his ACA Branch, as a matter of fact, and he says he flew as my rear gunner one night. I couldn't remember him either. But with Peto, Pat and Ken all missing trips with me due to illness, someone had to fill their places.

All through my training and operational tour my promotion had progressed smoothly and rapidly. Aircraftman No. 2 when I joined up. Leading Aircraftman at EFTS and SFTS. Sergeant when I received my wings in Canada and then, whilst on the Squadron at Fiskerton I was promoted to Flight Sergeant then to Warrant Officer and then in January 1944 I received my Commission. I did not apply for a King's Commission, I was informed, possibly by my Squadron Commander, that my name had been put forward and that I was to attend an interview at our parent airfield at Scampton. Contrary to other non-commissioned pilots' efforts to gain a commission, I didn't want one. We were still a non-commissioned crew, we all slept in the same billet, shared the same mess and enjoyed our off duty time together and what was more there were only a few more ops to do to complete our tour. I just didn't want anything to disrupt our crew harmony. It was with this in mind that I

* See addendum

journeyed to Scampton and I believe it was the eminent Air Vice Marshal 'Cocky' Cochrane who interviewed me. The Air Officer Commanding Five Group, none other. Although I did express my wish, it fell on deaf ears. When I saw the rank of my interviewer I didn't expect much else. I was told it was the practice to commission all pilots approaching the end of their tour. This was Five Group policy and I must abide by it, or words to that effect. So, on the 10th. January 1944 I became Pilot Officer Jones and was given a short leave to get myself kitted out with the uniform. I was no longer paid in cash at a pay parade but became the proud possessor of a bank account in the Glyn Mills Bank. Into this account was paid the princely sum of about £50 pounds for the purchase of the uniform. Today the overcoat alone would cost at least three times as much. One of the first operations with this new gear was to make the hat look 'operational'. Take out the wire stiffener from the hat and then sit on it, throw it around and generally misuse it until slowly it began to look the part. Sylvia and all at home were particularly pleased with my change in direction and in the event things did not change very much as far as the crew were concerned. We were still united, commission or no commission, and I was still just 'Skipper'. I was now resident in the Officers' Mess and that was the only real change which took place.

Unbeknown to me, whilst I was still a Warrant Officer and had completed 19 operations (five on Berlin), Wing Commander Adams our Squadron Commanding Officer had recommended me for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross with the citation as follows:- "This Warrant Officer has completed 19 sorties of 120.05 hours operational flying as Captain of a Lancaster in 49 Squadron.

All of these sorties have been against the most heavily defended targets in Germany, five of them having been on BERLIN during the past month.

Often in difficult weather conditions and against sharp opposition from the enemy, he has always carried out his work in the air with quiet efficiency and grim determination. He has proved his intention of taking his aircraft to the correct target exactly and precisely and of bringing it back to this country without fuss or ugly incident.

I recommend that Warrant Officer Jones be awarded the D.F.C."

Signed by W/Cdr. Adams 6th. Dec 1943.

The above was countersigned Fiskerton Station Commander on 7th. Dec.

The above was countersigned Air Commodore Commanding Headquarter No. 52 Base on 12th. Dec.

Air Vice Marshal Cochrane, Air Officer Commanding No. 5 Group applied the final signature on the 1st. Jan 1944.

It was mid February and I was on leave in Newent at my parents' home when the news of my award broke. It appeared in the 'London Gazette' on the 15th. February 1944 and it must have been from this source that the local press

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

I greatly regret that I am unable to give you personally the award which you have so well earned.

I now send it to you with my congratulations and my best wishes for your future happiness.

George R.I.

Flight Lieutenant Eric L, Jones, D.F.C.

H. ALAN PEACOCK
M.Sc. Dunelm. B.Sc. (Agric.)
Headmaster

NEWENT GRAMMAR SCHOOL
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Tel. Newent 29

17th February, 1944.

Mrs. J. Jones,
Broad Street,
Newent.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones,

I am very interested to hear about the honour which has fallen to your boy and I should like you to accept my congratulations. You will indeed be proud of him, and I am sure he will richly deserve this award.

Yours sincerely,

H. Alan Peacock

Newent Parish Council.

W. H. PRICE,
Clerk.

High Street,
Newent,
Glos.

22nd February, 1944.

Mr. John Jones,
Broad Street,
NEWENT.

Dear Sir,

I am requested by the Newent Parish Council to write offering you the congratulations of the Council on the honour conferred on your son by the award of the D.F.C.

It is very gratifying to know that some of these awards come to our little Town of Newent.

Please accept these congratulations with the best wishes of the Council for your Son's future success and safety,

Yours faithfully,

W. H. Price

Clerk to Newent Parish Council.

NEWENT PILOT OFFICER AWARDED D.F.C.

High Skill and Devotion to Duty

Pilot Officer Eric Leonard Jones, R.A.F.V.R., only son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Jones, of Broad-street, Newent, has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. His name appears in a list of personnel who are decorated for having "completed, in various capacities, many successful operations against the enemy, in which they have displayed high skill and devotion to duty."

Pilot Officer Jones, who has only recently received his commission, won the award whilst serving as a Warrant Officer. He joined the R.A.F. in August, 1941, and went to Canada for training. He passed out as a sergeant pilot, and returned to this country in October, 1942.

Pilot Officer Jones was home on a two-days' leave in Newent when he was informed of the award. When interviewed, he was very reluctant to say much about his award. "I have done nothing out of the ordinary that I know of," he said, "and on no occasion has our kite been knocked about so badly that we have not been able to get back safely." He added that it was the co-operation of the whole crew that made their flights so successful.

Pilot Officer Jones, who is 21, was educated at Newent Grammar School, and later went to Gloucester Technical College. Before joining up he was a clerk at Messrs. Wildsmith and Hurrells, builders, Newent.

He has two sisters. One is serving as a Sister in a military hospital in East Africa, and the other is working in a factory.

Pilot Officer Eric Leonard Jones, who has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Jones, of Broad Street, Newent.

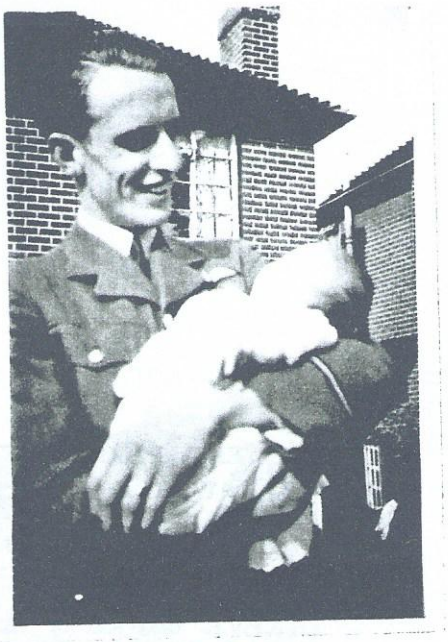
NEWENT PILOT WINS D.F.C.

The Distinguished Flying Cross has been awarded to Warrant Officer Eric Leonard Jones, R.A.F., V.R., No. 49 Squadron, whose home is at Newent.

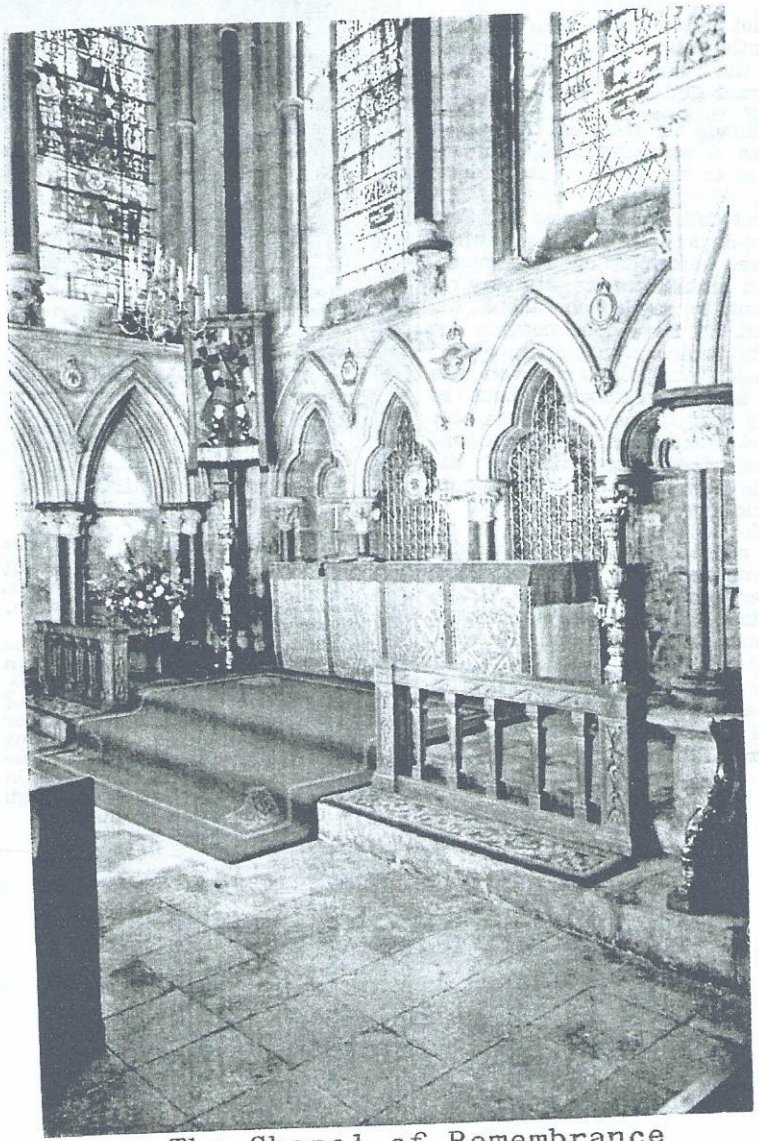
Born at Newent in 1922, he was a clerk before enlisting in 1941, and is now a pilot.

His name appears in a list of personnel who are decorated for having "completed, in various capacities, many successful operations against the enemy, in which they have displayed high skill and devotion to duty."

With newly acquired
Distinguished Flying
Cross. Feb. 1944.



With newly acquired son
Keith. July 1945.



The Chapel of Remembrance
in Lincoln Cathedral for
all those who lost their
lives in Nos 1 & 5 Groups.

got the news. The Gloucester 'Citizen' had, somehow, managed to locate me and before I knew where I was I was on the roof of the Citizen office in Gloucester being photographed and interviewed. For a very, very short time I was famous. My one regret was that I did not go to Buckingham Palace to receive the award. Up until a few months previously King George VIth had awarded all DFC's but his health was failing and at the time was only awarding the higher decorations.

But I did receive a latter of congratulations from His Majesty bearing his signature. This I still have.

One further item of interest regarding the above. Officers obtained no financial reward for this decoration but a Warrant Officer did. On the 11th. May 1945 my bank account was credited with sum of £20.00. It had taken a long time to come through and it provided the financial back-up for a great binge in the Officers' Mess for yours truly and friends.

Retracing my steps, I remember buying the blue and white striped ribbon of the DFC, taking it back to Ashridge Crescent in Woolwich and Sylvia sewing it onto my 'best blue' and also my battledress blouse.

Ken was to receive his commission a few months later and also was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Later his navigational ability took him to the rank of Squadron Leader, a thoroughly deserved reward. His private life was a different matter, but that's another story. As I have said before we were good friends right up to his death about ten years ago. Steve's Distinguished Flying Medal (a Medal not a Cross for non-Commissioned Officers) made up the number of 'gongs' received by the crew. It should have been seven, one for each member of the crew. I was grateful and always will be for such a competent crew. There was never any major dissention and they accepted me as their 'Skipper' from the start. We were good friends on the ground and a good team in the air.

Schweinfurt, the ball-bearing manufacturing centre of Germany. Knock out the ball-bearing factories and the whole German war machinery will be out of action. Everything ran on ball-bearings. This is what they told us at briefing on the 24th. February '44. This was to be my penultimate sortie and hopefully this applied to most of the crew as well. The Americans were bombing it by day and we were to bomb it by night. And here I must say how much we all admired the Yanks in their B17's (Flying Fortresses). They flew in daylight and their losses were horrendous.

When the Americans first started operating over Europe in early 1942 their losses were so great that the whole of the force was withdrawn from the air war for a considerable period of time to allow regrouping and reinforcement from across the Atlantic. It wasn't until the P51 fighter (the Mustang),with an incredibly long range, was introduced to protect the Fortress attacks that their losses were reduced to a sustainable level.

The Americans, even if they had wished to switch their bombing activities

to night time, as the Royal Air Force had been forced to do, they would have been unable to do so because their crews had never received extensive night flying training. They were wholly committed to day time bombing.

The general belief in those days was that the Yanks, as they were universally known, carried out precision bombing whereas the RAF method was pattern bombing. This belief indicates that there was a considerable difference between the two methods but this is only true up to a point. Most people are familiar with photographs of Fortresses going into the attack and these photographs show the formations of Fortresses spread over a considerable area of sky. As they approached their target they did not break away and attack the target in line astern, they maintained their heading and as they arrived at the target so they released their bombs. Inevitably they would fall over a considerable area.

Bomber Harris, more affectionately known to 'his old lags' as 'Butch', in the early days of taking over Bomber Command, wanted to achieve a force of 4,000 bombers and with a force of this strength he was utterly convinced he could defeat Germany and eliminate the necessity of invasion. He was never able to achieve this number of aircraft. There was the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne in 1942, achieved by draining the bottom of the barrel (including Training Command aircraft) and a small number of raids immediately after Cologne with a similar number of aircraft achieved in the same manner but his raiding forces never achieved that number again. Losses on every operational night of between 4% and 9% were only just sustained by an all-out production line. Yet Harris was never shaken from his belief that bombing would save the lives of thousands of invasion soldiers and sailors and this was the resolve he successfully implanted in all his aircrews.

So my 29th. operation and four members of the crew's 27th. operation took us with the main force to Schweinfurt. I had high hopes of at least Ron, Steve and Jock finishing their tour along with me but I wasn't too sure about Ken, Pat and Peto, they had missed out on quite a few trips. I suspect that we were all apprehensive about the approaching end of our tour and at even this late stage our luck could still run out so when a piece of spent shrapnel managed to find its way through the underside of our Lanc and into the cockpit between my legs it was a good indication the anti aircraft guns had got our range. We had completed our bombing run and we were on our way home so with one thought in mind 'get out of the guns' range' I stuck the nose of K-.King right down and sped post-haste towards the ground. This incident I clearly remember - the speed built up very quickly and we were well over 300 mph when I started to pull out of the dive. The controls were as heavy as lead and only lightened as the speed fell away. The maximum permissable speed for the Lanc was around 350 mph and I must have been pretty close to it. Anyway the wings didn't drop off and we were out of range of those guns and we eventually landed safely at Fiskerton.

734 bombers attacked Schweinfurt, the attack being split into two raids

Berlin Knows Might of City Squadron Blows

SHEFFIELD could not be more worthily represented in the three Fighting Services. Practically everybody knows of the city's association with the Hallamshires in the Army, H.M.S. Sheffield in the Royal Navy, but not so many have anything like the same knowledge of Sheffield's "adopted" Bomber Squadron—"The Fighting 49th," as the members like call it. A visit to the squadron at an aerodrome "somewhere in England" has convinced me that it is the duty of all Sheffielders to know more about their "own" gallant squadron and its distinguished record of service. The 49th Bomber Squadron—its official title—is undoubtedly a famous squadron. Even in the high standards of the Royal Air Force it is acknowledged to be one of the leading squadrons—and that means a lot.

Outstanding proof of its flying crews' bravery in combat is that so far during the war the squadron has been awarded over 200 decorations, including one Victoria Cross.

By ERNEST TAYLOR

The Commanding Officer, Wing Commander A. A. Adams, who has been in the R.A.F. since 1929, is extremely proud of his men, and told me that he is looking forward to the day when the squadron will parade over Sheffield in the victory flight.

City's Rose Bowl

Sheffield is never forgotten in the officers' mess, for displayed in a prominent position is a silver rose bowl, which was presented to the squadron by Mr. Ashley S. Ward, chairman of the Sheffield Savings Committee.

The squadron's history goes back to the Great War. It was formed on April 15th, 1916, at Dover. Its war service started in November of the following year, when it was posted to Bellevue, in France.

From that time onwards it became a bombing squadron and remained as such until being disbanded in July, 1919.

The squadron remained in France until May 1919, having many "homes," including aerodromes at [illegible], [illegible]hem, Petite Synthe, Conteville, Fourneuil, Beauvois, Rozoy and Villers-les-Cagnicourt.

Sixteen Decorations

In just over a year's flying under active service conditions members of the squadron won 16 decorations, including ten D.F.C.s.

With the Armistice, the squadron was transferred to Germany, being posted to Bickendorf with the Army of the Rhine in May, 1919.

The expansion of the R.A.F. saw the squadron re-formed at Bircham Newton, Norfolk, in February, 1936, and it was the first squadron to be equipped with Handley Page "Hampden" twin-engined all-metal bombers.

So much for the squadron's past. What of its present work and achievements?

To-day its young "aces" are writing new and glorious pages in its already illustrious history.

It is a friendly, happy squadron. There is plenty of hard work for all, but "The 49th" thrives on work and smiles its way through.

An interesting fact is that the squadron commander, Wing-Commander Adams, who often accompanies his men on operations over Germany in his own machine, has first-hand knowledge of most of the Nazi war lords.

Local Links

Up to the outbreak of war he served as Air Attache in Berlin, when he met Goering and Luftwaffe General Milch on several occasions. Knowing the Germans, he advocates plenty of bombing—the more the better.

A tour of the station revealed quite a number of men with local associations. One, a New Zealander, Squadron-Leader

Left: Sergt. Philip Griffiths, of Rotherham, photographed as he is about to enter his plane. Above: The Station Wing Commander waves to the crews as the bombers taxi past him to take part in the great raid on Stuttgart.

married Miss Marjorie Smith, of Morthen, near Thurcroft, just over a year ago.

His wife's father, the late Mr. J. Smith, was a former director of a Sheffield steel manufacturing firm.

Squadron-Leader Miller, a quiet-spoken young man, had just made his 44th trip over enemy country when I saw him.

Places he mentioned were Cologne, the Ruhr, Hamburg and Kiel. When I asked him about Berlin, he replied that he had taken part in five raids on the German capital.

On New Year's night he took his brother, Mr. R. T. Miller, a New Zealand war correspondent, over Berlin to have a look at the damage.

"We had a pretty rough time on account of the heavy flak put up on that trip," he said.

Sheffield and district men I met were Sergeant Douglas Rolfe, of Fitzalan Road, Handsworth, Sergt. Philip Griffiths, of James Street, Rotherham, and Sergeant Roy Machin, of the Union Inn, Doncaster Road, Mexborough.

Sergeant Rolfe, a navigator, was in the Civil Service before he joined up in 1942. At one period he worked at the Attercliffe Employment Exchange.

Eight Berlin Raids

Sergt. Griffiths' record included eight raids on Berlin. His crew claimed to have destroyed one German fighter with another "probable" in combats with the enemy.

He was employed as a clerk at Tinsley in civilian life.

Sergt. Machin, a mid-upper gunner, worked in Denaby Colliery offices up to ten months ago. His flights included Berlin, four times, Augsburg and Stettin.

It was noticeable how well the W.A.A.F. fitted into the scheme of things.

They were driving all manner of vehicles about the station, and some were engaged on important and responsible duties in the control tower and other departments.

Security reasons prevent mention of much of their work.

All-day Task

It is difficult for any ordinary person to realise the amount of preparation required for a night operation. The first steps are taken quite early in the morning and the rest of the day is spent in getting ready right up to the take-off.

PRELIMINARIES INCLUDE "BRIEFING" OF THE CREWS, BOMBING-UP, AND REFUELLING OF THE AIRCRAFT, MECHANICAL INSPECTIONS, AND A HUNDRED AND ONE OTHER VITAL JOBS.

The squadron as a whole is not too well equipped with recreational facilities, and a piano for the officers' mess would be most acceptable.

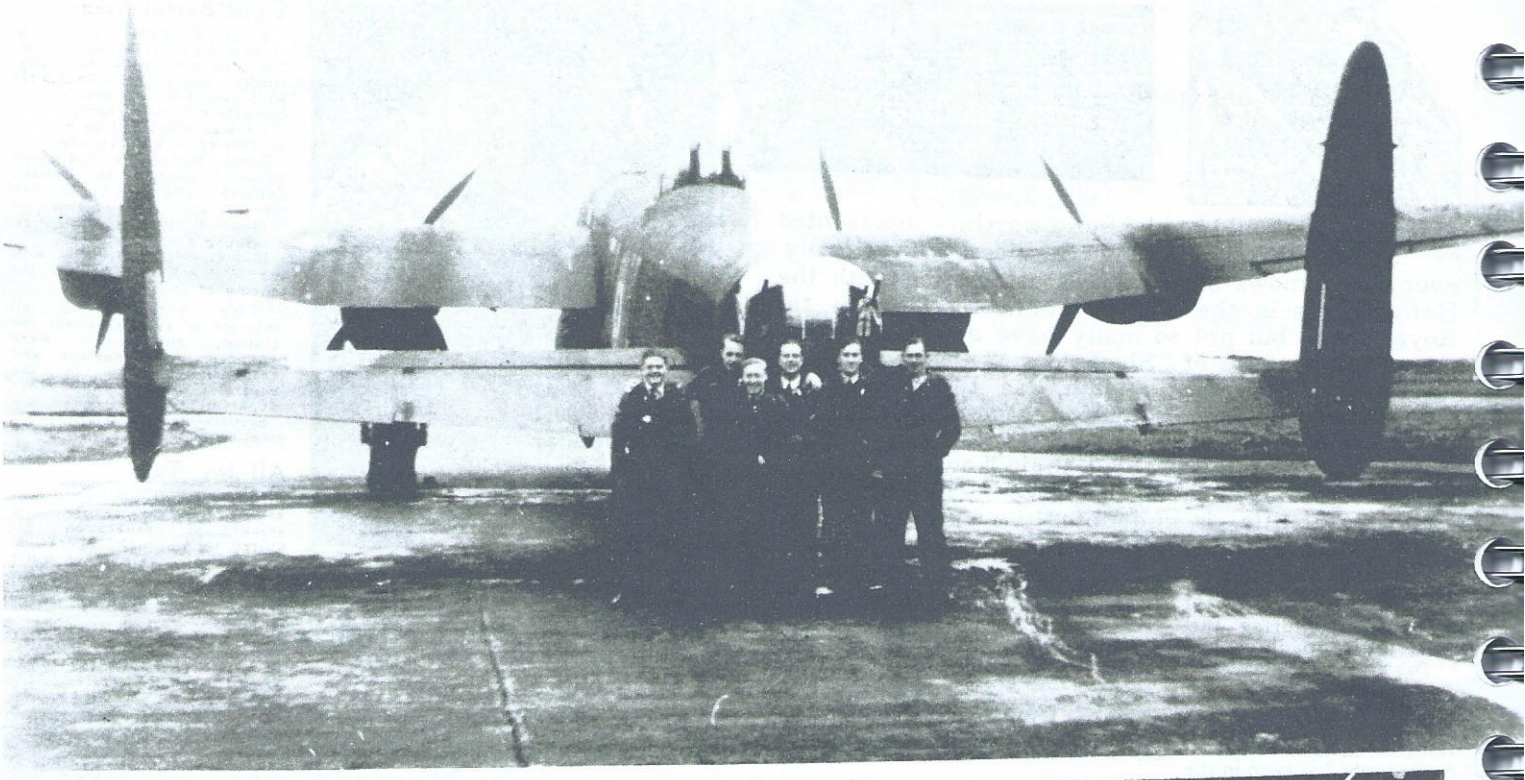
Any reader who would like to give a piano to the squadron, so that there can be accompaniment to sing-songs in the mess both before and after raids, can be put in touch with the squadron commander.

The climax to an interesting day came with the dusk, when, with Wing-Commander Adams, Mr. E. Gooseman, Editor of "The Star," and officers I stood near the airfield controller's cabin giving the victory sign to the crews as they started off on another raid.

Sheffield's "own" were on their way with more "cookies" for Hitler.

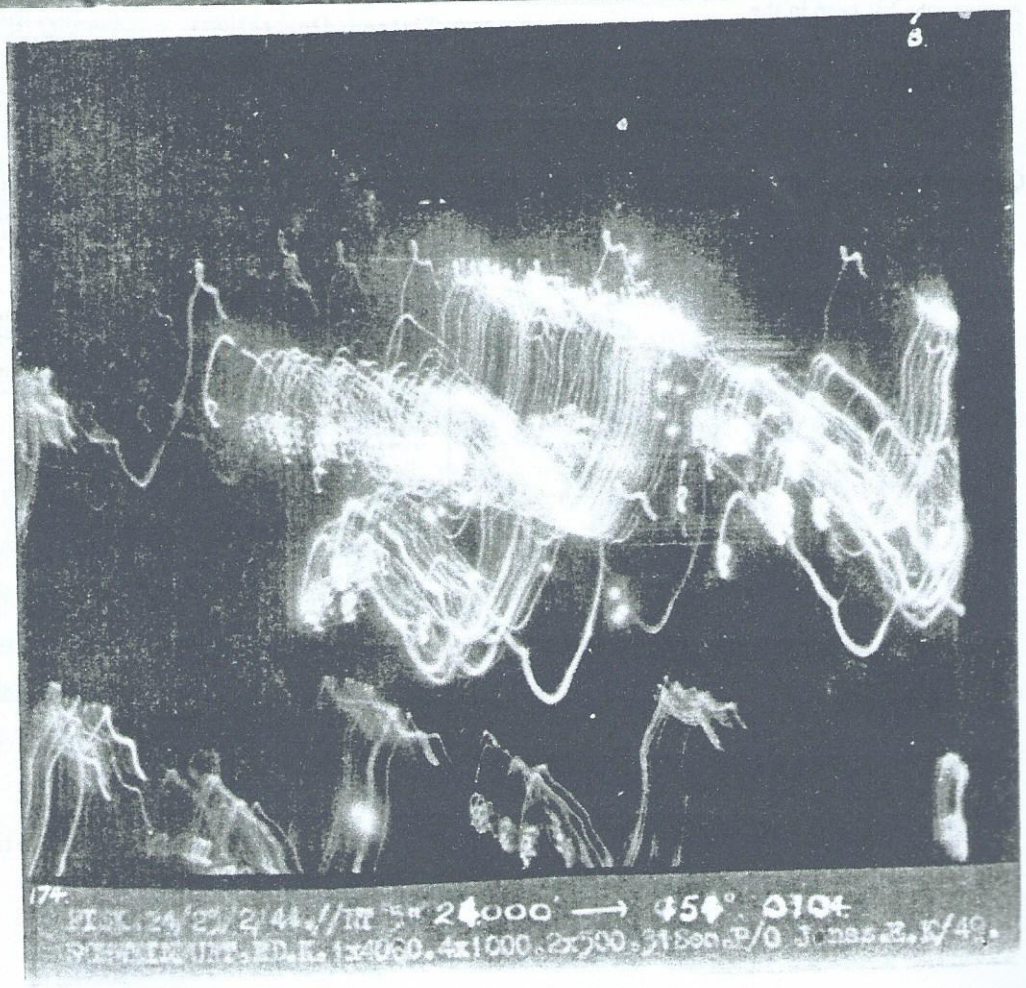
No. 49 Squadron Fiskerton was adopted by the City of Sheffield.

In keeping with W/Cdr. Adam's promise Lancasters of the Squadron flew in formation over the city after the defeat of Germany.



With 'K' King
L. To R.
Pat, myself,
Steve, Ken,
Ron & Peto.

Our last raid
Schweinfurt.
Showing bomb
bursts,
target indic-
ators, etc.



Air Vice-Marshal A A Adams

AIR VICE-MARSHAL A A ADAMS, who has died aged 81, had a distinguished service and civilian career as fighter pilot, bomber pilot, diplomat, aircraft industry and charity executive.

His operational flying service bridged the remarkable gap between Bristol Bulldog and Hawker Hart biplanes in the early 1930s, the Avro Lancaster bomber in the 1939-45 War, and the RAF's first jet fighter, the Gloster Meteor.

Alexander Annan Adams was born at Hull on Nov 14 1908 and educated at Beechmont School, Sevenoaks, Bellerive, Switzerland, and in Austria. He was commissioned in the RAF in 1930 and served initially in 54, a Bulldog fighter squadron, and 604 (County of Middlesex), an Auxiliary Air Force squadron, then exchanging its Westland Wapitis for Harts.

But Adams's linguistic skills led him towards diplomacy and he served as assistant air attaché in Berlin, Brussels, The Hague and Berne during the critical months of Munich, the run-up to the outbreak of war and the German occupation of France and the Low Countries.

While at The Hague he helped to arrange the evacuation of Queen Wilhelmina and the Netherlands government. Later in 1940 he joined the operations staff at the Air Ministry, leaving the next year for a post at the British Embassy in Washington.

In 1943 — as Bomber Command losses mounted causing an inevitable shortage of pre-war trained pilots — Adams received command of 49, a Lancaster squadron heavily engaged in main force attacks on Germany. His skills, leadership and courage were recognised in 1944 with the award of the DFC.

But soon he was in the different conditions of the Pacific war as an observer with the US 5th Fleet and was present at the recapture of Guam. Following a period at the RAF Staff College he was appointed Head of Intelligence in Germany in 1946.

In 1948 he returned to England as station commander at Binbrook before a two-year stint with the Nato Standing Group in Washington. Later in the 1950s he was Air Attaché at Bonn.

Adams retired in 1959 as Chief of Staff, Far East Air Force. Hawker Siddeley appointed him European representative in 1961; and from 1970 to 1977 he directed the Mental Health Foundation.

Adams was appointed CB in 1957. He married in 1933 Eileen O'Neill; they had two sons.

My old Squadron Commander. W/Cdr. A.A. Adams.

with a two hour gap between each raid. The first time a major attack had a two hour gap between waves. The raid was considered a success. 33 bombers were lost, 4.5% of the force.

Reporting to the Flight Office the next morning I was told that our tour was completed. I just couldn't believe our luck. I always understood that the commitment was 30 operations. For the four of us it was the end of nightly journeys over Germany. There was no explanation given but later I was to learn that a pilot, completing 200 hours of operational flying constituted a tour. Actually I had completed 190 hrs. 35 mins. including that 'boomerang' to Leipzig so, somewhere, someone, had got their sums wrong and I could have done the full 30 ops within the 200 hours. Perhaps they thought that with 12 trips to the 'Big City' included in the tour it was sufficient to call it a day.

I was not asked to volunteer for a second tour which would have meant a further 20 ops, possibly with the Pathfinder Force. I was informed, as were Ron, Steve and Jock, that we would be 'screened' which meant being posted to training unit to instruct future bomber crews.

Ken, Pat and Peto were to stay behind and complete their tours with other crews. I could have volunteered to continue with a second tour with all the crew sticking together but in spite of the additional skills we had acquired in the last six months I was firmly convinced that luck had been the biggest factor in our survival (I felt I owed it to Ron, Steve, Jock and myself to call it a day and seek fresh fields). If we could have foreseen the fate of Peto and Pat perhaps other decisions would have been made.

As you will see from this narrative we never had to return with our aircraft shot to ribbons and we never had to return on two or even three engines but every raid in which we participated was a battle. Some were more intense than others and this was dependent on the weather conditions and the state of readiness of the German defences. When we thought back about those nights over Germany we must have considered how lucky we were and how fortunate we were to have got through the tour unscathed.

During the 29 ops I completed, 798 bombers were destroyed over enemy territory. Of the 5,586 crew members in these aircraft statistics show that only one-eighth could expect to become prisoners of war. These figures did not include aircraft lost over Britain due to bad weather, enemy intruders etc.

On the night of 26/27th November after a raid on Berlin, 14 Lancasters crashed on return. On 16/17th. December, another Berlin raid, 29 Lancasters and one Stirling crashed due to very low cloud, some crews abandoning their aircraft and parachuting to safety. Although 5 Group were not greatly affected on this occasion it might well have been the night we returned in that very bad storm and experienced very low cloud conditions in the Lincoln area.

So we turned our backs on Fiskerton leaving Ken, Peto and Pat to complete their tours and it was to be some weeks before I heard that Pat and Peto had gone missing and that Ken had completed his tour.

I had been in the Royal Air Force for almost exactly 2¾ years and there was still another 3 years and 9 months to serve. I felt I had come a long way from those early days in Newent. I now had confidence, an essential ingredient as I was 'screened' to teach trainee pilots how to fly bomber aircraft.

It would be many years before I returned to Fiskerton and by then the runways had all been broken up and the resultant hardcore heaped in piles. One hangar would be standing but the place was almost unrecognisable but on an even later visit I was shown where K King used to park in dispersal and even later attend the unveiling of a commemoration plaque in Fiskerton village church. I still return with our Squadron Association every two years.

After a short leave I was told to report to No. 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston. I arrived on the 26th. February 1944 after having left Ron, Steve and Jock to journey to their own units where they also were detailed to take up instructional duties.

I was only based at Syerston for a few weeks but during that time Sylvia arrived unannounced at Newark just a few miles down the road from Syerston. She had travelled without her parents permission. Understandably, they were against us getting married, Sylvia was still only eighteen but early marriages were not uncommon in wartime. We had discussed getting married for many months and had decided that if and when I completed my operational tour we would then press for Sylvia's parents' permission. When Sylvia travelled north and stayed overnight they may have suspected the worst but the fact was that Sylvia and I spent the night sitting on a park bench discussing at great length our plans for the future. Morals in those days were a little bit tighter than they are these days. A few days after Sylvia returned home she telephoned me with the good news that her parents had consented to her marriage and that the date was fixed for 28th. April. I had already acquired a very soft spot for my future mother-in-law and I hoped that the sequence of events had not caused her too much distress. The wedding was to take place at a small church half way up Shooters Hill (Christchurch) and the reception in Welling just down the road in Kent.

The 31st. March saw me moving south to No.11 Operational Training Unit at RAF Westcott. My posting was as a Staff Pilot which indicated I was scheduled for instructional duties. Westcott was just a few miles from Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire and it was the unit through which all trainee New Zealand bomber pilots were funnelled. Although there were many British personnel amongst the ground staff and many British and Commonwealth aircrew trained on the unit the station always maintained a very definite New Zealand atmosphere. Cullinane and Kelly were two Kiwi instructors in our Flight and they used to receive delicious parcels of food from their homes. These, they always spread liberally amongst their fellow instructors and I particularly remember their Dundee cakes which used to arrive in vacuum packed tins. A luxury indeed with rationing as it was.

Once again I was to fly Wellingtons but this time in the right hand seat with a pupil pilot alongside. At Westcott I would only be concerned with flights away from the airfield:- cross-country details; bombing at the bombing range; practising fighter attacks etc. After some months I would be posted to our satellite airfield at Oakley where trainee pilots were first introduced to the Wellington. This involved teaching them the landing and take-off procedures until they were fit to fly solo, a much more demanding instructional role.

One day, my pupil at Westcott was Peter Aspinall, you may remember he was a room mate of mine at ITW in Paignton. After completing the SFTS course in Canada he was chosen to instruct on Harvards. We were delighted to meet up again, albeit in somewhat unusual circumstances.

Our trip together was a night cross-country lasting three hours. As I expected, there were no problem. Peter was an excellent pilot and he gave me an easy ride.

I am moving ahead too quickly. Operational flying was one thing and instruction another. New skills were to be acquired and these were to be obtained at a Flying Instructors' School. In my case it was to be No. 3 FIS at Lulsgate Bottom, Bristol (now Bristol's International airport). I arrived on 15th June 1944 and stayed until 7th. July and this was one of the most intensive flying periods of my RAF career, flying almost every day with night flying thrown in for good measure. My Log Book tells me that at the end of this course I was categorised as a flying instructor with a rating 'Q' (Multi-Engined). I never did find out what a 'Q' meant, or, if I did, I have forgotten. If things followed the normal pattern it would mean 'average'. So I returned to Westcott feeling a little more competent than when I left. However, this course only confirmed I was capable of continuing the duties I outlined previously. Before being posted to Oakley to supervise 'circuits and bumps' there was yet another course to be taken. This would be at the Bomber Command Instructional School at Finningly, Yorks, and unlike the FIS course at Lulsgate, which was on the small twin-engined Oxford, the BCIS course was conducted on the Wellington. An altogether different kettle of fish. However, this course was not to be taken for some months so in the meantime I settled down to my off the circuit instruction.

At Westcott I made a firm friend of Stan Brew and his wife Peggy. We are still in contact and meet occasionally at Sidmouth, a half-way point between his home in Tavistock and Poole. Stan is the only ex RAF pilot, to my knowledge, who is entitled to wear the caterpillar badge, (for baling out of an aircraft), the fish (for surviving in a dinghy at sea) and the flying boot (for walking back through the desert to his base). Stan should have picked up a 'gong' (medal) but didn't because much of his operational flying was carried out over the Middle East desert where 'gongs' were hard to come by. Stan did not drink alcohol and consequently saved a lot of money. When he came out of the service he became the proud owner of a brand new Vauxhall car. One of the first British cars to