

PRODECURES AND LIFE OF AN AIR GUNNER WITH A LANCASTER SQUADRON

Our Crew arrived at RAAF Lancaster 463 Squadron from Swinderly Heavy Conversion Unit, on 27th December 1943, at Waddington, 3 miles south of the City of Lincoln in Lincolnshire. Waddington became an airfield before the First World War. In our time it had been updated with three concrete runways and sealed taxiing tracks and aircraft dispersal points. No 463 was a new squadron made up from RAAF 467 Squadron that had been at Bottesford, Leicestershire. This was done to create a base with RAF 50 Squadron at a satellite air field at Skellingthorpe, commanded by RAAF Wing Commander Arthur W Doubleday, from Grong Grong NSW.

Our crew was made up as follows:

Pilot	Joe Freeman	Orange NSW
Navigator	Lance Wilson	Geelong Vic
Wireless Operator	John Bulmer	Harden NSW
Bomb Aimer	George Flanagan	St Arnaud Vic
Rear Gunner	James Frith	Lismore NSW
Mid Upper Gunner	Flying Officer William Brooker	Lameroo SA
Flight Engineer	Dave Callum RAF	Newcastle UK

They were all sergeants doing their first tour. William Brooker was a Flying Officer on his second tour of 20 operations, the rest of them had to complete 30 operations. Flight Engineers were drawn from engine fitters who re-mustered to crew. Our Commanding Officer was Wing-Commander Rollo Kingsford-Smith, a nephew of Sir Charles.

The Station Commander and Base Commander was Group Captain Bonham-Carter RAF (later on an Air Commodore).

The decision as to when we operated and the targets were selected by the Commander-in-Chief, assisted by his staff at High Wycombe, the headquarters of RAF Bomber Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur T Harris.

The list of targets was composed by the War Cabinet. These would be German factories that produced U Boats, aircraft, guns, cannons, tanks, ships etc. for the German warfare. Other targets were oil, rail and road. There may be special targets such as find and sink the Bismarck, Tirpitz and other battleships.

The cities producing this were attacked (eg: Krupp in the Ruhr Valley). The main targets in Germany was attacked by up to 900 Lancaster bombers.

Mines were laid in the U Boat harbour such as Lorient and Saint Nazaare. This was done at a height of 700 feet. The mines were lowered on parachutes to break the fall and exploded as a metal ship or U Boat passed over them.

All operations were made at night. No lights on except essential illumination.

The marking on 463 Squadron were JO and on 467 was PO.

The first letters of the alphabet became 'A' Flight while the rest became 'B' flight. Our aircraft was JOT.

All aircraft would be kept in the open at dispersal around the airfield. The ground staff worked there and had small shelter huts for the gear etc.

If a pilot wanted to air-test his aircraft he would do it early, so that any faults could be rectified.

Perhaps the fitter would go up too. The fuel tanker may be waiting to top up. Some of the fuel tankers were driven by the WAAF.

A general briefing may be at 13.30pm and would be attended by all crews flying, heads of Crew members, Commanding Officers, Meteorologist Officer (quite often a civilian), Intelligence Officer to advise of the enemy defences, guns and fighter aircraft.

Aircrew on operations were sent on leave for a week, every 6 weeks, and this continued after a tour of operations. Ground staff was only granted leave every twelve weeks.

Lancaster bombers had a fuel load of 2154 Imperial Gallons of 100% Octane petrol. They had 3 tanks in each wing. Fuel consumption was up to $\frac{1}{4}$ gallon a minute.

The ground staff for a Lancaster would consist of:

2 Engine fitters, 2 Airframe fitters (for moving parts, wheels etc. Armourers for hydraulics and ammunition. Then in a group, Bomb Loaders, Navigation aids GEE H2S, Instrument Makers, Parachute packers and folders. Transport around airfield was by truck and bus and also push bike.

If there had been no night flying, the previous night all our crews assembled at the flight office at Squadron Headquarters. The Pilots would go to their Flight Commanders, the Navigators would go to their Flight Navigators, they would be given something to do or be lectured. Similarly the wireless operators and bombardiers went to their leader's office.

The message may be received, say, 9am or later, as to whether we would be operating. This would come from the Commanders of Group Headquarters using dedicated phones. Afterwards Security would disconnect the public phones, as they would monitor all outgoing phone calls made from High Wycombe Bomber Command.

The Flight Sergeant in charge of services would be asked if aircraft would be available (i.e. serviceable).

By this time the target may not be divulged but the petrol load and bomb load would be. If the fuel load was 2154 gallons of 100 octane, it meant a long flight (eg: Berlin). The aircraft would stand at $\frac{3}{4}$ full.

The fitters E (engine) would run the engines and test. Fitters A (airframe) would check all moving parts etc. The armourer would check ammunition etc, and as they were sorted and loaded on the trolley and aircraft.

By then it would be lunch time and Pilots and Navigators would assemble and be told the target. By now the Adjutant clerk to the Wing Commander would have the Battle Order printed and posted on the notice board.

After lunch final arrangements would be made, aircrew meals at the Sergeants Mess times would be set.

Bomber Command specify the bomb load eg: size of the bombs and mixture including incendiaries. These were packed in canisters and held in by a bar of iron, that were released, allowing 4 ½ pound bombs go, but the canisters came back.

Depending on the distance to be travelled for the night, it dictated the petrol load. A full load was 2154 gallons about 7 tons of 100 octane petrol.

If the aircraft sustained engine failure before the target, the operation, if over Germany, the bombs would be dropped if a target could be found and the operation would be aborted. A

Lancaster could fly unloaded on two engines but would gradually lose height.

There was a specially constructed airstrip near the coast of East Anglia, to allow damaged aircraft to get down. It was of tarmac about 3 miles long a quarter mile wide. On hearing a radio call of "Mayday" or "SOS" a row of searchlights on each side would light up a cone or tunnel for the aircraft to pass under.

Our aircraft number was ME615. The letter may have significance to the factory where it was built.

The first aircraft to come to 463 Squadron came from the Jaguar Factory at Coventry. Jaguar had their own airfield.

27/12/43, we were sent on a cross country training flight for 4 hours 10 minutes.

All new pilots had to do a "second dicky" to learn how an experienced crew went about their duties during an operation and listen to commentary. It was a quick course for a pilot to see how an operation progressed.

2/1/44 we were sent on our first operation to Berlin. However we had to abort over Holland due to glazed icing on the wings at 12,000 feet. This meant we could not climb to the desired height of 20,000 feet. This difficulty meant that we used fuel at a greater rate and may not get back from Berlin. I, as the experienced crew person, suggested we drop the bomb load, unarmed (safe) and return to base after 3 hours 55 minutes.

7/1/44 we were sent on a "bullseye", consisting of a day flight to a target in the Irish Sea. It is a small rocky outcrop. This took 8 hours 15 minutes.

13/1/44 we did a test flight with the Flight Commander, Squadron Leader W Brill for 40 minutes.

On these flights the Navigator and Bombardier did not take part.

14/1/44 we went to Brunswick our first successful operation, for 5 hours 37 minutes.

17/1/44 we did some day ground firing over The Wash for 53 minutes.

21/1/44 we went on operation to Magdeburg for 6 hours.

27/1/44 at 17.47pm we took longer on operation to Berlin for 8 hours and 55 minutes.

Joe Freeman had been commissioned as a Pilot Officer.

28/1/44 at 00.16am we took our own aircraft, T for TARE, on operation to Berlin. On approaching the target a German night fighter came close and the rear gunner shot it down. It was a Focke Wolfe 190.

30/1/44 we went to Berlin, taking off 17.19 hours and lasted 6.33 hours.

15/2/44 to Berlin, taking off 17.30 hours and arrived back at base after 6.58 hours, in our own aircraft JOT number ME615.

19/2/44 To Leipzig taking off at 23.54 hours. Landed after 7.01 hours being 6.05 hours on 20/2/44.

20/2/44 to Stuttgart, taking off 23.57 hours landed after 7.21 hours airborne 7.18 hours.

24/2/44 took off for Schweinfurt, but port inner engine was failing, returned on 3 engines after dropping bomb load. Airborne for 5 hours.

25/2/44 taking off in JOK ME614 for Augsburg, airborne from 21.30 hours for 7.25 hours.

1/3/44 in our aircraft, JOT ME 615, taking off at 23.29 hours for Stuttgart for 8.15 hours.

Then Flying Officer Brooker went on a Gunnery Leaders Course at Catfoss.

8/5/44 in JOT 615, rejoined my crew whom had a stand in during my absence. Taking off at 22.15 hours for Brest Airfield, airborne for 5.04 hours.

10/5/44 taking off at 22.16 hours for Lille Railways yards etc. For 2.39 hours. The bomb load would have been heavier and fuel load reduced. No block busters.

11/5/44 take off at 22.23 for Bourg Leopold for 3.37 hours.

Crew then went on 6 days leave.

18/5/44 taking off at 22.40 hours to St Martin's for a trip of 3.24 hours.

31/5/44 taking off at 00.23 hours to Saumur marshalling yards. Airborne for 5.10 hours. On 1/6/44, however, we received an order to return with ~~another~~ bomb load.

3/6/44 taking off at 12.55 hours for Cherbourg wireless installations for 3.34 hours duration.

6/6/44 D Day. Taking off in JO'L M130, for Pierre Du Mont, airborne for 4.29 hours. A gun emplacement near the coast.

8/6/44 to Rennes railway yards, airborne for 6.34 hours. Had to land away at Acklington and 10/6/44 returned back to Waddington base.

10/6/44 took off at 21.58 hours to attack Orleans railway yards. These were to retard Germany taking up positions in Normandy, also to prevent attack where French citizens would be in fairly large numbers. Night operational flying time was 289.20 hours.

The Australian members of the crew were decorated:

PILOT:	G FREEMAN	D.F.C.
BOMB AIRMAN:	G FLANAGAN	D.F.C.
AIR GUNNER:	W BROOKER	D.F.C. and M.I.D.
NAVIGATOR:	L WILSON	M.I.D.
WIRELESS OPERATOR:	J BULMER	M.I.D.
AIR GUNNER:	J FRITH	M.I.D.

Written by W. H. Brooker, Flight Lieutenant, De Mob
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