

The Diary of Sgt. Bernard Clark RAFVR Nov 30th-Dec 20th 1943



Sgt. Bernard (Bunny) Clark 1943. He was 35 when he volunteered for the RAF and was nicknamed 'Granddad' by his fellow crewmembers. He was lost in action in January 1944 whilst returning from a bombing mission over Berlin in Lancaster Bomber DV400 QR-Y.

CREW LIST: Sgt Bernard (Bunny) Clark. Flt/ Sgt Phil Brander. P/O Frank Langley. F/O Alan Beetch. P/O LLOYD Cumming. Sgt Bill Warburton. F/O Bob West.

Orders to pack and be ready to move by 1600hrs. Everybody binds away at moving in the evening, especially as we know the conditions that exist where any NCO has to report after ordinary duty hours, nobody wants you, nobody cares, it's each man for him self. At 1630 hrs after a very hurried tea we climb aboard an ordinary RAF truck bound for Skellingthorpe, No. 61 Squadron.

The WAAF MT driver informed us that she did not want the job as she has a date in Lincoln so we had better hold on, and away we go. By Jove we did go! Slung from one side of the lorry to the other, Bob shot a bit of a line and sat up front with the WAAF.

We reported to the guardroom about 5pm. Just as we surmised nobody expected us or had any idea we were on the way. Bob and Allan went to the officer's mess to try their luck and find out if the orderly officer was available, but instead they found Squadron Leader Moss, actually our CO. He was very decent and having a few minutes to spare (ops had been scrubbed) he fixed us up with billets. Back to the old nissen!

The boys Phil, LLOYD and Bill went to the ENSA show, Alan and I made the 2 mile journey to the nearest telephone box to make our whereabouts known to our respective Ball and Chains! Of course Audry was pleased to hear me once again or at least she seemed to be. So, back to the Sgt's mess for me, and the officer's mess for Alan. After a reasonable supper we made our way back across site 3, through the woods and across a field to our site 4. I had an interesting chat with one or two of the inmates, all members of 61 Squadron and so to bed.

Dec 1st

We had breakfast and met Bob, Alan and Frank, all walked up to the 61 Sqdn flights and checked in OK. I reported to the signals and met all the boys and signals officer F/Lt Newbound, quite an enthusiastic Australian, unfortunately he is posted to go away Friday. After lunch we all had an interview with the squadron leader Moss (our wing commander is away on leave) he gave us quite a pep and gen talk and quite an interesting description for what to expect whilst on ops.

Frank and I went into Lincoln and saw the pictures "5 Graves to Cairo", and of course, we had to call in one of the locals for an odd one, night cap!!

Dec 2nd Reported to signals at 0930 we went out to one of the planes and did a DI; had quite a lot of interesting new gen. After lunch we all (the crew) caught the camp bus to Waddington (main station) to visit pay accounts etc arriving back at Skelly for tea.

We played cards in the billet, LLoyd, Bill, Phil and I and by heck did I catch a cold!! I couldn't do anything right, anyway I managed to hang out till suppertime without being too much in debt. Had a very primitive bath after supper in fact I was almost as dirty by the time I managed to get dressed owing to the layers of mud on the bathroom floor! We finished the evening up with a game of table tennis and snooker. All the boys were away- Berlin! There was hardly anyone in the mess at all.

Dec 3rd

Reported at 0930 again, did a DI on M for Mike. M had been to Berlin but was in good shape (no faults). Changed my flying boots for new type, very good idea (new boots I mean). Reported to section after lunch and had a nice job of reading all the standing orders. I see they have copped me for group exercise tomorrow nice and early, Phil was down on the list for operations with another crew but the aeroplane was u/s. Bill has been detailed as F/E stand by, Bob fixed up with his 2nd dicky trip and Alan has had to practice the flight plan just as if he was going on the trip. Frank and LLoyd have disappeared into town, so I have spent most of the evening trying to get our stove alight with wet wood: what a job!! Had supper and so to bed.

Dec 4th

Boys all still landing at 8am from Leipzig Bob got back ok and had quite a good trip. My watch let me down. Instead of 7.15 getting up I didn't get going until 8am, had to report to signals by 8.20 for group W/T exercise. Hell of a cold morning lots of frost. Fortunately, I managed to get a lift up to Flts.

Didn't do too well on exercise, too cold and too many people talking and interfering. Did the usual DI afterwards on E for Easy, had lunch and collected my laundry, back up to the flights by 2pm. We all got ready for our cross-country take off 8.45 put forward to 6.45, we managed to wangle sandwiches from the mess and all filled our flasks.

After waiting all evening and eventually getting out to the aircraft, the exercise was scrubbed. Aircraft u/s and the weather closing in too quickly. We all sat in the crew room and ate up the food, finished up the tea and enjoyed Bobs talk on his experience over Leipzig. We managed to get to bed about 1030.

Dec 5th

Another white frosty morning and some fog. Took boots in for repair and did a DI on E for easy again. We got down for lunch early, as we were going to fly first after lunch.

Fog clamped down again so flying scrubbed. We spent a good 2 hours getting lots of new gen. All had tea, then Bill and I walked to the phone at Swanpool, got through to Audrey ok, and had quite a chat for 4-5 minutes, then back to our billet-chorus when we walked in -where the heck have you been? Bob Alan LLOYD and Phil playing bridge and waiting for Bill and me to play Poker! There goes my last financial means; I nearly always loose. We didn't play after all; the bridge game was too exciting for them to leave, anchored down about 10.30.

Dec 6th

Real bull inspection Adj and Squadron Leader Moss came round at 9am everything ok. Too foggy (to) fly again so the usual DI and the dinghy drill complete with Mae West and Harness in W for William. We walked down to the mess for lunch. A very stormy mess meeting at 13.15 due to bad food and general conditions in the mess and the dining hall. Back to the flight for general discussion group for the topic- Will bombing win the war? Some bright ideas put forward and quite a good show. Walked back to the mess had my haircut at the camp barbers- quite a good job for a change. Had tea with Bill all the others changed quickly and went into Lincoln (still very foggy). Bill and I spend the evening in the billet, good fire and a good book.

Dec 7th

Up at the usual time 7.30, breakfast improved (after the mess meeting) did the usual DI and then lecture for all of us. After lunch too foggy for flying again and had short lecture on RDF, then met Alan, Frank and Bob, caught the camp bus into town. Did a bit of shopping, not much in the shops although thousands of people about. We went into Boots for tea, in came LLOYD and then Bill so we all had rissoles and chips and welsh rabbit, bread and butter, tea and mince pies. We all went to see the good old film 'The Four Feathers' still very enjoyable, we all had a drink or two afterwards before catching the bus at 10pm. What a struggle, lots of fellows left behind to walk 5.5 miles; And so to bed ; at 11pm.

Dec 8th

Still too thick to fly did the usual DI, nothing doing, so a spot of dinghy drill with our complete clothing on. After lunch another lecture and down for tea at 4.30. Bob and Alan came along and we played poker and for once I won 5/8pence to be exact. Bed about 10.30. Phil made a few snares and set them in the wood behind the hut.

Dec 9th

Phil and I up a bit earlier to have a look at the snares, but no luck. Fog not so bad, prospects of flying! Did the usual DI, and then did a spot of painting in the helmet room. Had lunch and got back to the section ready to fly, all dressed up in Mae West, harness, boots etc. Gunners in their electrical suits and in the bus ready to go out to the aircraft. Met sent an urgent message cancelling the trip, as the fog was closing in too fast, so back we go cursing the weather etc. Took a photo of the whole crew, but the camera stuck, hope I can have it done ok. Tea about 5pm, then Bob and Alan came along for poker and chess I actually won 3/8 pence-wonders will never cease.

Went along to supper about 9pm dogs and bread! And back to bed 10.30.

Dec 10th

Up at usual time DI. on M with Phil and Frank. Lectures after lunch, changed and went to Lincoln with Frank. After tea we went to the pictures 'China' (not too bad). Popped in for one or two and caught the bus back to camp 10pm. Phil, Bob and LLOYD played cards all evening and so to bed.

Dec 11th

Up in the morning at the usual time. Up to the flights, find we are down for our cross country take off 3pm. Did the usual DI. Collected food after lunch for the boys and got out 'R' Rodger. It seemed to have quite a lot of hold ups and there were lots of ground staff fellows working on it.

Airborne at last 3.30 climbed up to 22,000 only 37 deg. below but lovely and warm in our cabin. Stood and looked out of the astrodome. The sunset was really marvellous, all the colours of the rainbow, and layers of snowy clouds far below us looked like deep snow everywhere. Our route was from base, Upper Hanford, Wales, up the Irish Sea in between the Isle of Man and across Scotland down to Doncaster then out to Winglet. We could not do our bombing as the R T packed up on us.

I sat down on a box; the plane was bouncing all over the place due to our flight just under the clouds. I couldn't fix the TX so we packed up and went back to base, soon got down and then we dived into the sandwiches and tea.

After taking off flying clothes we all went down to the mess for supper, jumped into bed about 10.30 pm.

5.

Dec 12th

After breakfast we went up to the flights and did the usual DI. Took my boots in for repair, cleaned up the helmets and Mic's after yesterday's trip as oxygen always makes them wet with condensation etc.

After lunch finished of the helmets and cycled down to the billet; did a spot of mending socks etc. Afternoon lecture over, back to tea at 4pm, and down to billet, played cards and so to bed.

Dec 13th

Met Bob and the others after breakfast, then up to flights. We were down for fighter AF but after hanging about all morning vis too bad.

After lunch Bill, Frank, Phil and I went out to 'Y' our new plane, just gave her the once over, seems ok. After tea Bob rang up we go out to fly at 5.30pm practice bombing trip take off at 6.30 for about 2 hours Wainfleet range.

We used Vis Rdf for the first time; it seems wizard, Frank and Phil ok at Gunnery. Had supper and went to bed at 10pm.

Dec 14th

Awful morning, fog and frost walked out to 'Y' did the DI, all the others did their stuff too. After lunch went back to the billet and mad up ye old stove and cleared up a bit. Phil caught his victim in a snare. Problem now is how to cook the same. Lectures in the afternoon and back to the billet. After tea wrote a couple of letters, in the mean time Phil cleaned the rabbit and skinned it all ready for the pot, so on it goes. In bed about 10.30.

Dec 15th

Not too good again, so up to the flights, did runners job to ops room and orderly room. Went out to 'Y' did a spot of cleaning up, as W/Commander had an inspection of all aircraft in the afternoon we buzzed around until 4.15. After tea Bob and Allan joined us in a game of poker until 8pm. All went across to supper and back to bed at 10.30

Dec 16th

Better morning as regards weather, did the usual DI. Bob and Allan came up to 'Y' Good news, ops on.

Checked everything up ok, back to the flights for briefing, low and behold, Berlin for our first op!! Transport to the mess for the ops meal egg and bacon, bread and butter and coffee.

Bill, LLoyd, and I dashed off to change into long underwear. Phil collected coffee and orange, we were transported all of us back to the crew room and final briefing then out to the aircraft with half an hour to go to zero.

All excited , engines revved up and down the taxi path with a full load of cookie and incendiaries nickels etc. Quite a crowd to cheer us off, then off we go 6.40pm, climbing up and up then the first snag, Monica packs in on one side.

6.

I go back to check up and find the fuselage door open, the wind pressure was terrific I can only just close the door but cannot fasten it, so back comes Bill with a piece of rope and ties up the door. I manage to get M on the go and everything seems grand with first contact with base. Next thing we are over the enemy coast near Amsterdam tons of cloud and some flak bursting, on to Berlin at about 21,000 ft.

Not very cold we appear to be well on time and in the stream ok, in between Bremen and Hanover right on the markers and bang on track. Lots of flares but cloud too thick for SL, Up comes target right on time. Frank calls back on the intercom to say he is in trouble with the oxygen and feeling awful. Bob asks him to hang on till off the target if possible and on we go. Lloyd spies the target markers and we fly level on to them and zump! Bombs gone!! Ok from Lloyd. My thoughts as I felt the floor of the aircraft jerk when the cookie went were: take that one and those and share between you!

Faint call for help from Frank and lots of gurgles over the intercom, so Bob asked me to see what I could do for him. Armed with a potable bottle (oxy) I went down the back with the aid of my torch. The back door was open about two inches and by Jove the wind came through like a knife. I managed to open Frank's doors in his turret putting my hand and arm under his arm, I stretched up and tried to break ice from his oxygen mask, I could see lots of flares and lights outside; talk about November 5th!! Just then some tracer shot by us, below and behind (luckily) Frank, although almost out, turned his turret in the direction of the tracer on the port beam, so I was trapped by my arm in between the turret and the rear of the fuselage. I felt scared because I only had 2mins left in my oxygen bottle, I struggled out after what seemed to be ages and then I dropped my torch and lost it make matters worse.

7.

After what seemed an age I plugged my oxygen tube into the elsan spare and recovered my breath a bit, it was hellish cold although it was only 25 degrees below on the gauge. I struggled back to my place forward and told Bob how hopeless things were with Frank (we were still well in the flack and flares area in fact a flare just whizzed by our tail, a near thing for us)

Bob gave me a long oxygen tube (spare) and taking two or three portable bottles and another torch I went down to see Frank, he was just all out. I got his doors open again and pulled him flat on his back on the wooden plank (from his turret to the tail cross-member) then I pulled his oxygen mask off, plugged the spare one onto the elsan oxygen and popped the new mask on his face. After a bout 5 or 6 minutes he began to flicker his eyes about and try to sit up but I made him lay still and told him to take his time and then get back into his turret leaving the door open, still using the spare mask.

I then went up to the front and started work again. All this time we were getting away from Berlin and just missed Rostock and on to Denmark, across Denmark and out over the North sea. Lots of flack on the Danish coast, but although Bob had come down several thousand feet to help Frank, we dived through the barrage ok.

Frank gradually got back to normal except his electrical suit did not work and he was very cold, we carried on until we got just off the coast nr Cromer. Cloud only 700 ft high so we kept it there until we got back to base.

Base Gave us no 7 position and in we came to make a wizard landing about 12.39 midnight. The ground crew cheered us in and we soon got down to breakfast after interrogation, we eventually got into bed at 2.45 am.

So ended our first operational trip, Bob had already had his baptism of fire before at Leipzig. Glad to say Frank soon felt better; but was quite sick due to rushing about, I think without oxygen etc.

Dec 17th

Foggy again, we got out of bed, 12-15, lunchtime and LLoyd was actually awake first! Wonders will never cease! After lunch went out "Y" and cleaned her up inside and then Alan and I went into Lincoln to do some shopping; unfortunately by the time the bus came and we got to town the shops were already closing, we were unlucky.

We had some tea in Boots' cafe; it was quite nice, Welsh Rabbit and chips. Phil came in and we all went to the Ritz to see "Batann", which was quite a blood thirsty picture.

Afterwards we just popped in for a quick drink and then met Frank before catching the bus. We all managed to climb on the bus at 10-15, it was always crowded and everyone trying to get on, it was terrible. We finally arrived back at camp around 11pm and fell into our beds.

Dec 18th

Thick fog again, no flying. Did the usual D I on "Y", checked all the helmets and had a look at the results of the raid. Quite a good concentration on the target, although we lost 30 bombers in the process. Our photograph was quite good, another Lanc was flying quite a long way below us and it came out pretty good in the photo.

It rained like blazers in the afternoon, came down from the flights at about 3pm. We all played cards for the rest of the afternoon and then about 5pm, Phil, Bill and I scrounged off to the mess. We managed to get a good supply of bread and butter and piping hot tea for our flasks. Back at the billet Lloyd supplied us a spread from out of his Canadian parcels, smashing, we had toast and sardines and there was spam aplenty. We finished it all off with a wizard fruit cake, stiff with fruit and nuts.

We continued to play cards until 10 o'clock and I had amassed the princely sum of six shillings before we had finished. The weather has been awful this evening, wet and windy. I wonder whether it will be ops tomorrow. Our passes have all gone in to the orderly room, ready for our leave. And so, off to bed.

Dec 19th

Fine morning but very cold. Went up to the flights and did the usual DI. Fixed up to go to Waddington. Stopped for an early snack before boarding the 12-30 bus to Waddington. I had a very nice lunch in the Sergeants' mess and then on to pay parade at 2pm.

(Lord Nuffield 5/- per day whilst on leave) just what the doctor ordered! And two weeks pay! Caught the bus back to camp, had tea, met Bob, Alan and Frank and off we went to Southwold, roughly a two hour trip and we arrived at approximately 7-30. We got back in the mess for supper and then on to the billets for bed.

PPS...Did manage to ring Audrey from Waddington and when I got back a letter from her was waiting for me in the mess with the news about Brown being killed.

Dec 20th

Up to the flights, very cold strong wind, did the usual DI in "Y". Rumour circulating that ops were on. Complete panic, ops are on, rush to check everything and then down for lunch. Briefing at 12-45 and then we had bacon and eggs before we went back down to site for change underwear. Back for business, Frankfurt the target! Early take-off, all out to "Y" in good time. We have 13000lbs of destruction on board, 1 cookie, 4x 1000lbs and the rest incendiaries. Take-off okay, what a relief to get off the deck, gained height and set off. Had some bad luck, three or four minutes had passed when the inner engine started bumping, M and G very jumpy so Bob decided couldn't go any further.

Out to sea, jettisoned the bombs and bought back the incendiaries. Turned round, heading back towards port all the time losing height rapidly. Landed early, we then had supper and got ready for leave. We heard that Frank was grounded by the MO, so we had young Chapman in the rear turret (his 19th op). We were very disappointed, although it was better than pranging over there. Leave tomorrow, we hope. 12-30, bed.

DECEMBER 20TH WAS THE LAST DATE RECORDED IN DAD'S DIARY.

He then went on leave for Christmas. After his leave he completed 7 more operations. The first two were taken from his log book; the remaining five were taken from squadron records:

1-1-44 OPS Berlin
2-1-44 OPS Berlin
5-1-44 OPS Stettin
14-1-44 OPS Brunswick
20-1-44 OPS Berlin
21-1-44 OPS Magderburg
27-1-44 OPS Berlin..... FAILED TO RETURN *

Crew list of Lancaster Bomber DV400 QR-Y

F/O R.A. West (Bob) Pilot
F/Sgt A.P. Brander (Phil) AUS Air Gunner
P/O F. Langley (Frank) Air Gunner
F/O A.V. Beetch (Alan) Navigator
P/O L.W. Cuming (Lloyd) CAN Bomb Aimer
Sgt B. Clark (Bernard) Wireless Operator
Sgt W. Warburton (Bill) Flight Engineer