

My name is Derek Gill and I was born on the 20 April 1944 (same birthday as Adolph Hitler). So I am 67 years old.

I was 11 months old when my father was killed on Wednesday 21 March 1945.

My father F/O Kenneth Gill DFC was born on the 19 November 1922, when he died he was 22yrs and 4 months old.

He joined the RAF on 18 June 1941 aged 18 as a Volunteer Reserve and after initial training was transferred by Troopship on 6 Jan 1942 arriving in Monkton USA on the 20 January 1942 for initial Flying Training and then transferred to Canada in May 1942 until he qualified as an Air Navigator on 11 Sept 1942. *EMPIRE TRAINING COURSE*

*From American
Flying
School
Pilot DM*

On his return to the UK he joined No 29 Operational Training Unit at RAF Station North Luffenham flying Wellington Mk3's during December 1942. His first Operation was on the night of 25 Feb 1943 bombing Clermont Ferrand in France this operation took 7 hrs.

In March 1943 he was transferred to 1660 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Swinderby flying Halifax Mk5's and then Lancaster's.

His second Operation was in a Lancaster Mk3 on the night of 18 April 1943 flying to La Spezia in Italy Mine Laying this flight lasted 9.5 Hrs.

On 20 April 1943 he was transferred to No 9 Squadron at RAF Bardney where he flew 26 Operational Flights with the same crew except for 3 ops Pilot F/LT Derbyshire, Flight Eng. Sgt Sullivan, Navigator Sgt Gill, Wireless Operator Sgt Overend, Bomb Aimer/Front Gunner Sgt Oakes, Mid Upper Gunner Sgt Cole and Rear Gunner Sgt Parsons. In Lancaster's. Targets were :Dortmund, Duisberg, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Essen, Wuppertal, Dusseldorf, Bochum, Oberhausen, Krefeld, Mulheim (returned early as Port outer was u/s), Gelsenkirchen, Cologne (Returned early rear turret u/s bomb load jettisoned, 21 miles from target, whilst testing rear turret a twin engine enemy aircraft made three attacks), Cologne, Essen, Milan, Nurnburg, Nurnberg (54 flak holes), Rheidt, Berlin, Munich, Kassel, Frankfurt, Leipzig, Dusseldorf, Berlin. completed on 19 November 1943 his 21st Birthday.

During these Operations was commissioned from Flt Sgt to P/O. on the 27 June 1943

On the 8 December 1943 he was awarded the DFC for his service with No 9 Squadron.

27 Dec 1943 promoted to F/O.

After completing the above missions he was transferred to No5 Lancaster Finishing School at RAF Syerston as a Navigation Instructor (Bringing new

Navigators up to speed on the different navigational aids being used on the Lancaster and also retraining older Navigators who were having difficulties with the new innovations.

Whilst at Syerston he met up with F/Lt Gumbley (pilot) and F/O Barnett (Flt Engineer) and at the end of their time at Syerston they were asked to join No 617 Squadron, so went around and completed the rest of the crew asking people who they new that had completed a Tour and were training new crews.

On the 27 September the New crew were transferred to No617 Sqd RAF Woodhall Spa (Commanded by W/Cdr J B (Willie) Tait)

Pilot: Flt/Lt B.A.Gumbley DFM RNZAF Aged 29 Hawks Bay NZ.

Flt Eng: F/O E.A.Barnett (Men in Desp) Aged 21 Thorp Bay Essex.

Navigator: F/O K.Gill DFC Aged 22 Halton Leeds.

W/Op: P/O S.V.Grimes Aged 22 Suffolk.

B/A: F/O J.C.Randon Aged 23 Chesterfield Derbyshire.

A/G Mid Upper: F/Sgt J.Penswick Aged 23 London.

A/G Rear:F/Sgt G Bell Aged 23 Hull.

After training with the other crews from 30 Sept 1944 to 26 Oct 1944 they went on their first Operation with 617 flying to Lossiemouth and on the next day took off with a Tallboy Deep penetration 12000 lb Bomb, on board to attack the Tirpitz. They flew to Tromso Fjord (Norway) and after 4 runs over the Target decided that the cloud made accurate bombing impossible. For this operation the Mid-upper turret was removed in order to install the extra fuel tanks required to achieve the range to make the return flight. Even so they landed at Skatska (Coastal Command Airfield) in the Shetlands to top up with fuel as they had not allowed for returning with the Bomb on board (C/O was not impressed as if the bomb had gone off it could have wiped out the airfield), then flew to Lossiemouth returning to Woodhall spa on the 30 Oct 1944. (Bringing the Tallboy all the way back). Top Secret and scarce) 12 hrs

Only a crew of 6 as no mid-upper turret.

On the 11 November 617 and 9 Sqd returned to Lossiemouth and on the 12 flew back to Tromso Fjord and sunk the Tirpitz,bombing at 08:43 from 15400ft a Tallboy was seen to enter the water about 20 yds off the Tirpitz which capsized. (Still a crew of 6 but on this trip the mid-upper gunner was in the rear turret) 12.15 hrs

Full Crew of 7

8 Dec Urft Dam. Not bombed as cloud cover was over target.
205 Lancs from 5 Grp carrying 1000lb bombs and 19 from 617 carrying Tallboys. 3.35 hrs

11 Dec Urft Dam Bombed from 6000 ft (Tallboy) could not see bomb burst because of cloud aircraft received minor damage to Tailplain. 5.30 hrs

15 Dec Ijmuiden E&R Boat Pens Bombed at 10000 ft hit NW corner of the Pens. 2.35 hrs

21 Dec Politz-Oil Refineries Bombed at 16900 ft (Tallboy) significant damage to target, landed at Metheringham using FIDO, transferred to Base by road and collected Aircraft on 23 Dec after fog had lifted. 9.45 hrs

24 Dec Command of 617 transferred from W/Cdr Tait to G/C Fauquier

29 Dec Rotterdam E&R Boat Pens Bombed at 16660 ft (Tallboy) Bomb unobserved owing to smoke, a good many near misses, no direct hits seen. 2.50 hrs

30 Dec Ijmuiden E&R Boat Pens Solid cloud over target did not bomb. Tallboy returned. 2.20 hrs

31 Dec Horten (Oslo Fjord) Cruisers Kolin and Emden Ships travelling at up to 30 Knots difficult to bomb accurately, later on Crews were forced to bomb by moonlight or aim at the source of Flak some crews returned with their Tallboys. Bombed at 00.15 hrs from 10200 ft (Tallboy) near miss on port side of ship, ship appeared to stop. Later identified as a 10000 ton transport ship.
7.45 hrs.

3 Feb 1945 Pootershaven E&R Boat Pens (Midget Submarines) Bombed at 1552 from 13500 ft (Tallboy), bombed into smoke over the aiming point, Aircraft hit by Flak, fuselage and rear turret damaged, not seriously, no casualties.
2.50 hrs.

6 Feb Bielefeld (Vieiesible Viaduct) Aborted Aircraft targeted by accurate Flak on return route no damage suffered
5.45 hrs

14 Feb Bielefeld (Vieiesible Viaduct) Aborted Flak encountered as the aircraft crossed the Rhine.
4.50 hrs

22 Feb Bielefeld (Vieiesible Viaduct) Target comprised two parallel twin track Railway Viaducts. Bombed at 16.10 (Second run Tallboy) 13700 ft. 3 arches at the western viaduct collapsed, but rail link remained on the other two tracks.
4.30 hrs.

24 Feb Dortmund-Ems Canal Aborted Recalled 30 miles from target because of unfavourable weather conditions.
4.40 hrs

13 Mar Bielefeld (Vieiesible Viaduct) Aborted 2 Aircraft were B1 (Specials) carrying the new 22000 lb Grand Slam Bomb (G/C Fauquier & S/L Calder). The Aircraft were modified to carry the Grand Slam, Bomb doors removed and the fairings of the bomb bay, deletion of the Mid-Upper Turret and also the Main Radio and the Wireless Operator
4.20 hrs

14 Mar Bielifeld (Vieiesible Viaduct) Bombed at 1628 hrs from 11600 ft (Tallboy) Bomb believed to be a direct hit, S/L Calder Grand Slam falling 30 yds from viaduct (G/C Fauquier aircraft went u/s at start up.
460 ft of both Viaducts Destroyed Rail link severed completely.
5.00 hrs

19 Mar Arnberg Viaduct Bombed at 10.54 hrs from 12700 ft (Grand Slam) Bomb fell 50 yds south of aiming point as Pilots Bomb Aiming Indicator was not recording the Bomb Aimers alterations. Two or Three Spans of the Viaduct were brought down.
5.20 hrs

21 Mar Arbergen Railway Bridge near Bremen. The bridge was a double track Rail link across the river Weser 200 yds long.

On this occasion Flak in the area was more intense and a number of Aircraft were damaged. A number of Me 262 Jet Fighters were also encountered after bombing. The Target was rendered unusable although the main bridge was still intact.

The aircraft was a B1 Special although it was carrying a Tallboy, on this mission there were only 5 crew members onboard.

The Aircraft was hit by Flak during its run up to the target and dropped out of formation, causing F/Lt Price to take avoiding action. British records state that the aircraft received a direct hit and dived down out of control.

Witnesses on the ground gave a different account "The aircraft went down passing over the village of Okel heading in the direction of Riede at a height of 2000ft. They do not mention that the aircraft was on fire at this stage, but state that it seemed to be flying extremely slow. As it flew over Riede the locale Flak Battery went into action, hitting one of the engines and setting the fuselage on fire. The aircraft made a 180 degree turn back towards Okel and crashed into a field. The witnesses said the aircraft did not explode immediately, but before it could be reached there was a violent explosion, reducing the aircraft to fragments and creating a crater 50ft deep by 100ft diameter.

The RAF Missing Research and Enquiry Service failed to find any German documentation regarding the incident or trace any burial for the crew. The identity of Fl/Lt Randon was established from a document found at the crash site leaving no doubt about the identity of the aircraft. Having no known grave the crew are commemorated on the RAF Memorial at Runnymede, my fathers name appears on Panel 267 and also on the 617 Sqd Memorial at Woodhall Spa Lincolnshire.

The Crew Comprised of :-

Pilot F/Lt B.A.Gumbly DFM RNZAF,

Flt Eng F/O A.E.Barnett (Men in Desp)

Navigator F/O K.Gill DFC C d G

Bomb Aimer F/Lt J.C.Randon

Rear-Gunner P/O G.Bell.

F/O K.Gill Total Flying Time Day Time 388.10hrs (74.45 Operations)

Night Time 279.15hrs (171.30 Operations)

Total Time 667.25hrs (246.15 Operations)