

At our Squadron (467) we continued "in-service" training, mainly fighter-affiliation, often with cine-camera "gams" against Hurricanes mainly, sometimes a Spitfire ... with analysis following. We did 7 of these, plus further bombing practice. Loran was introduced in November ('44), so after simulator training we did 2 training flights using it. We also had (earlier) some simulator training with H₂S which was fitted ^{as used} as early as Jan '43, but we weren't allowed to use it on operations because of the danger of German fighters "homing-in" on it! An exception was a daylight raid on Wilhelmshaven (on 5.10.44) when we dropped our load of incendiaries through 10/10 cloud using H₂S.

After we finished our "tour" I was posted to Training Command ... one of several Heavy Conversion Units where we helped to prepare crews for operations against Japan... the "Tiger Force" of 400 Lancasters & Lincolns. The Americans were reluctant to let the RAF use any of their air bases until eventually, they agreed to share Okinawa. The first lot of Tiger Force, led by the "special" Lancasters of 617 & 9 Squadrons arrived in July '45... they didn't get anywhere near their planned 400 planes out there before the Atom Bombs stopped the war.

We flew about 84 hours (20 flights) mainly where I was the only staff member... is instructor for the crew's navigator. The bulk of our navigation instruction was in the classroom or on simulators. It was all rather dull routine, with 2 exceptions.

One night, when I was in the Control Tower as Duty Navigator, several German planes (likely Me 110's) came across the English Coast with returning bombers & were undetected ... until they began shooting down training

planes.. I think 2 at Wigsley, where we were, and several more at adjoining training bases, plus one of them attacked Waddington, machine-gunning the Officers Mess & having a go at the bomb-dump (without success). Caused a big panic; but I think it happened on a couple of other occasions. Brave Germans.

A fellow instructor, "Twitcher" Kennedy (F/Sgt) who had a medal from some S. American country for surviving ("I think) 19 raids on Berlin in his tour, was flying as navigation instructor with a crew who'd done a "cross-country", then went to do air-to-sea gunnery practice over the ocean, firing at a patch of aluminium powder they'd dropped. The pilot, silly boy, came well below the safety height to give his gunners easy shots, dipped his wing in the ocean, & killed most of the crew, including "Twitcher", aged 21.

A bit about "Fire Storms". There was a big, and continuing, "hoo-ha" about the bombing of Dresden so late in the war... mid Feb. '45... mainly because of the fact that a fire-storm occurred, killing a lot of people & doing a lot of damage. However, there is no way that the RAF could deliberately cause a fire-storm... it was just luck. The first, of just a hand-ful of such storms was at Hamburg, way back in July '43. It may well have been partly due to the fact that WINDOW was first used, "blotting-out" the German radar, leaving their heavy concentration of AA & searchlights unguided... & so the bombers may have been a lot more accurate than usual ("usual" was not good in those days). Plus, it was hot.

Yet this was the first fire-storm in thousands of raids. The only other ones mentioned in the many books I've read were: Damstadt 11.9.44 (5000 killed); Magdeburg 16-17 Jan '45 (460 killed); Pforzheim 23-4 Feb '45 (17,000 killed); and Wurzburg 16-17 Mar '45 (5000 killed). Besides those, we took part, just with 5 Group, on 3 raids which caused firestorms... on 12.9.44 Bremen (1171 killed); 18.9.44 Bremerhaven (30,000 homeless in the open for a few days); and Bremen on 6.10.44... "much destruction... finished Bremen"... none of these got a mention... so only 9 firestorms in all the years of bombing... they were just 'flukes'... but bad luck for those towns.

A bit about Weaving, Corkscrewing & Banking Seaches. Prior to the use of WINDOW, the German A.A. & searchlights were guided by Radar; so the technique used by bombers was to WEAVE... perhaps 20°-30° either side of the desired course when the pilot saw AA or searchlights ahead. There was not much else they could do... perhaps try lower altitude. But weaving was popular.

Once WINDOW became established, the German resorted to Barrage Flak along the path to the target. It looked bad to fly through, but going straight & level through it was the safest... if you ~~got~~ got out of the "stream" the night-fighters could pick you up by radar. So we did not ever do weaving.

In August '43, during an attack on Peenemunde, the research station for the development of V-1 & V-2's, that the Germans first used "Schrage Musik" where fighters were equipped with upward-firing guns... often getting below a bomber undetected... often close enough to deliberately aim at main petrol tanks... a sure kill.

I think that the RAF deliberately kept quiet about this ... it would be bad for morale. But pilots were told to do "banking searches" over enemy territory to allow gunners to pick-up approaching fighters before they could attack. Our pilot was conspicuous about this ... we would hear "down front, reply all-clear port, down starboard, all clear starboard" for hour after hour. We only saw enemy fighters well-astern 2 or 3 times, & each time began the corkscrew manoeuvre at once. It seemed to be well known that German night-fighters would abandon those bombers & look for "easy-pickings" from below someone who hadn't seen them. And although the concentration of flak & searchlights continued to grow as the war wore on, I think the losses to night-fighters increased. Some figures suggest that our loss rate eased off in latter part of the war, but it was mainly that Bomber Command gave up on the Battle of Berlin about March '44 as the losses then (about 5%) were not sustainable. During our tour the loss rate was closer to 2% than 3%, yet many crews were lost before ending a tour ... 5 of the 8 crews who began with us were shot down.

I've read that some of the Schräge Musik pilots claimed over a hundred Lancasters downed in 1944-5. Our base lost 2 Wing Commanders & 2 Flight Commanders in Feb-April 1945.

I think we were lucky to have served in 5 Group. Bomber Command had 6 Groups, but to a large extent 5 Group operated alone on most of our targets, often when the rest of Bomber Command continued with the area-bombing of cities, which, in retrospect, seems to have been a faulty obsession of "Bomber" Harris.

Bomber Command, 1944.

Up to March '44, Bomber Command mainly attacked large targets at night... big manufacturing places, especially the Ruhr. American bombers mostly bombed in daylight, escorted by long-range fighters. These bombers (Fortresses & Liberators) carried a lot of ammunition, some armour-plating, and a much smaller bomb-load than the British Lancasters & Halifaxes. They often endured running battles with German fighters for hours on long trips like Berlin.

After March '44, Bomber Command abandoned night attacks on Berlin due to unsustainable losses. The German night-fighters had developed tactics to down our heavies by shooting from below where we only had partial coverage from the rear turret. Instead, Mosquito bombers began almost nightly raids on Berlin. These planes carried nearly as much bomb-load as a Fortress & just a crew of 2, taking 4 hours instead of 8. But the number of planes used was not great, more of a nuisance perhaps... & their loss-rate was very low.

In preparation for D-Day, Bomber Command began using heavies on short daylight raids 'softening-up' the eastern side of the Channel for the invasion, and trying to stop the V1 bombs at their source. The number of 'ops' to a 'tour' was ~~reduced~~ increased from 30 to 36, as most of these 'trips' took only about 3 hours.

Just prior to D-Day the heavies concentrated on railway bridges, locomotive workshops,