

The Loss of Lancaster ED838 and Crew, 1st May 1943

Compiled
by
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Summary:

9 Squadron Avro Lancaster ED838 "R" took-off from Bardney, for a night raid on Essen, shortly after midnight, on 1st May 1943, with a seven man crew. Sadly, it never returned and was one of 12 aircraft lost that night, namely 6 Lancasters and 6 Halifaxes. No trace of aircraft or the crew has been found to date.

The writer has a personal interest in this particular loss, in that the aircraft's Bomb Aimer that night, Sergeant Edward Francis Doolittle, was his mother's brother, ie his Uncle. Motivated by a desire to find out more about the fate of the aircraft, a programme of research was embarked on, from the early 1990s onward.

More recently, a visit on the part of the writer to the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln, June 2018, together with his establishing contact with the Grandson of the aircraft's pilot, Pilot Officer George Nunez, has provided the impetus to set down in writing the results of this research.

Such findings are therefore collated in the present document, which describes the background and build-up to the raid and the various correspondence entered into. With the assistance of various interested parties in the Netherlands, a possible fate for the aircraft has been identified, although this can not be confirmed. In conclusion, some avenues for further research are proposed.

This documentation into the loss of No.9 Squadron Lancaster ED838 and crew, on the night of 1st May 1943, is dedicated to the aircraft's crew, who gave their lives in order that we may enjoy our today.

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1. The Build-up to the Raid and the Coming Together of the Crew

The 9 Squadron Operational Record Book (ORB)¹ provides a continuous record of the Squadron's operations and associated activities, throughout the war.

Excerpts from this, from April 1943, are provided in the tabulated summary, Table 1. These indicate the preparations for the Squadron's move from Waddington to Bardney starting to take place from 7th April on and with the Squadron becoming operational from RAF Bardney, on 14th April 1943.

The first entry in relation to Sergeant George Nunez, who, as Pilot Officer Nunuz, would be in command of Lancaster ED838 on its final mission, 30th April/1st May 1943, is on 14th April 1943, with him flying as an 8th crew member, with P.O.Boczar and crew in ED487, in a raid on Stuttgart. For interest, it is noted that P.O.Boczar was a Canadian and that he survived the war; further details on his life and times may be obtained via the links provided in Table 1.

The ORB shows that Sergeant Nunez flew for the second time as an 8th crew member, on 16th April, this time with F/L G.F.Robertson and crew, on a raid to the Skoda Works in Pilzen, in what is now the Czech Republic.

The Squadron's first loss after the move to Bardney is shown to be on the night of 22nd April, with aircraft "G" failing to return from a night mining operation, albeit with the aircraft having taken off from Waddington, after having previously positioned there, to load up with mines.

The first entry of Pilot Officer Nunez coming together with a crew of his own, including the writer's Uncle, Sergeant Edward Francis Doolittle, is shown for the night of 28th April 1943, in the mine laying operation "Silverthorn", in Lancaster ED838.

Two nights later, on the night of 30th April/1st May 1943, the ORB shows Lancaster ED838, under the command of Pilot Officer Nunez, being detailed as one of eleven aircraft, for a night raid on Essen. Sadly, this is the last known record for the aircraft and crew. ED838 also holds the unwanted distinction of being the first aircraft to be lost on a raid, after taking off from Bardney itself.

Table 1:- Excerpts from 9 Squadron Operational Record Book

Date	Entry	
7.4.43	Advance party moved to Bardney, preparatory to the Squadron moving	
13.4.43	Start of move to Bardney, with intent that Bardney should become operational on 14.4.43	
14.4.43	Completion of move to Bardney and with 5 x a/c despatched for raid on Stuttgart	
14.4.43	First entry for Sgt.Nunez, flying as 8 th crew member in ED487, under P/O Boczar, in night raid on Stuttgart	See: http://www.thememoryproject.com/stories/397:stephen-steve-boczar/ ; and also https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205218714
16.4.43	8 x a/c despatched to bomb the Skoda works at Pilzen, with Sgt.Nunez flying in "X" with F/L G.F.Robertson	
22.4.43	2 x a/c flew to Waddington, to load up with mines for Gardening sortie, and taking off from Waddington. "G" failed to return.	
28.4.43	5 x a/c despatched for night mining operation, including "R" (P/O (sic Sgt) Nunez)	
28.4.43	First entry of P/O Nunez flying with ED838 and crew of his own, including Sgt.E.F.Doolittle, in mine laying in Silverthorn	
30.4.43	11 x a/c detailed for night raid on Essen, from which "R" failed to return (P/O (sic Sgt) Nunez)	

Some further background information on Bardney airfield is provided by Halpenny² and with a memorial to the Squadron's time at Bardney being located in the village, Figure 1.



Photograph: J.N.Baker

Figure 1:- No.9 Squadron Memorial, Bardney

2. Lancaster ED838's Crew

All seven crew members were lost on that night, with no trace ever being found of the aircraft or crew. The crew members are remembered at the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede, in the No.5 Group Memorial Book, in Lincoln Cathedral, and at the International Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln. Further information in relation to the crew is provided in Table 2, below.

Table 2:- The Crew of 9 Squadron Lancaster ED838

(Sources: International Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln, ED838 Bomber Loss Card and as stated)

Name	Service No.	Role	Comments
P/O G.A.Nunez, RAFVR*	146436	Pilot	From Trinidad, in the West Indies. Further information available from https://www.caribbeanaircrew-ww2.com/?p=98
Sgt.D.R.Barber, RAFVR	1354869	Air Gunner	From Dorking, Surrey.
Sgt.J.Bayliss, RAFVR	1300620	Air Gunner	From Brockmore, Staffs.
Sgt.A.Beard, RAFVR	1535181	Navigator	From Thorpe Hesley, Yorks; remembered on War Memorial there.
Sgt.C.H.Collins, RAFVR	1200432	Flight Engineer	From Friern Barnet, Middlesex.
Sgt.E.F.Doolittle, RAFVR	1505512	Bomb Aimer	The writer's Uncle, from Liverpool, Lancashire. Please see Appendix 1 for further information.
Sgt.R.A.Knapman, RAFVR	1312487	Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner	From Guildford, Surrey.

* Promoted to Pilot Officer wef 2nd April 1943

3. Bomber Command Operations, April 1943

Some background on the raid on Essen and the build up to this may be obtained from references^{3,4,5,6}.

Chorley, in his compilation of RAF Bomber Command Losses³, notes that April 1943 saw a total of five raids on the Ruhr, namely two on Essen and three on Duisburg.

The further effort in relation to raids on Kiel, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Mannheim, in Germany, and to Pilzen, Czechoslovakia, and La Spezia, Italy, is also noted.

The raid on the Skoda Works, in Pilzen, on the 16th April, which was P.O Nunez's second sortie as an 8th crew member, is recorded as being far from a success, with the main force aircraft mistakenly bombing an asylum building, some 11 kilometres from the target. Furthermore, the raid suffered very heavy losses, predominantly from Luftwaffe night fighters, which accounted for the majority of the 36 crews lost that night.

Two mine laying (gardening) operations are also noted, with these being reported as concentrating on shipping lanes in the Bay of Biscay and northwards to the approaches to the Baltic.

The Bomber Command War Diaries⁴ provide further insight into individual raids, including both the mine-laying operations of 28th April and the crew's ill-fated final sortie of 30th April.

The mine-laying operation of 28th/29th April was particularly significant, in that it both represented the most mines laid in any single night of the war, but also at the cost of the heaviest loss of aircraft in mine-laying, throughout the war. A total of 167 aircraft laid 593 mines off Heligoland, in the River Elbe and in the Great and Little Belts, with 22 aircraft failing to return.

For the raid on Essen, on the night of 30th April/1st May 1943, the War Diaries record that 305 aircraft were despatched on the raid, including 190 Lancaster bombers. Losses on the night comprised 6 Lancaster and 6 Halifaxes, with the attack succeeding in producing modest damage throughout the city, including on the Krupps factories, albeit with no major concentration.

Further and more detailed information on the raid on Essen, on the night of 30th April/1st May 1943 is provided by Cooper, in *The Air Battle of the Ruhr*⁵. This notes that a night fighter was patrolling the inbound route of the British aircraft, in the Egmond/Amsterdam area, with a claim being made for an aircraft descending in flames, at 02-18 hours.

In total, 34 sorties are stated to have been flown by ground controlled night fighters and with 12 interceptions being made. Another specific night fighter claim described by Cooper, relates to that at 03-23 hours, South East of Deelen, to the North of Arnhem. Total British losses on the night were 12 aircraft (6 x Lancasters and 6 x Halifaxes), of which 7 are attributed to flak and 5 to night fighter activity.

Webster and Frankland, in their History of the Second World War:- The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany⁶, provide a complementary insight into the raid on Essen, of 30th April/1st May 1943. Three hundred and five aircraft are reported to have been despatched, supported by 8 Mosquito aircraft, for the purposes of sky-marking the target, throughout the raid. Two hundred and thirty nine crews are reported to have bombed the target, 3 bombing alternatives, 51 making abortive sorties and with 12 aircraft failing to return.

Subsequent daylight photographic reconnaissance is reported to have established that whilst some bombs had fallen on the Krupps works, these had resulted in no new substantial damage.

4. Specific Research into the Loss of Lancaster ED838 and its Crew

The writer's Uncle, Sergeant Edward Francis Doolittle, was the middle of three children, with his elder sister, Gertrude, being the writer's mother. Further background information on him is provided in Appendix 1.

The Air Ministry's 247th and 248th Casualty lists, published on 18th and 21st June 1943, included the names of all seven of ED838's crew under the "missing" category. These lists were included in the long established magazine "The Aeroplane" at the time⁷.

4.1 Correspondence with the Air Historical Branch, of the Ministry of Defence

An early enquiry was made in February 1992, to the Air Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence, to see if this could elicit any new and supplementary information in relation to the fate of the aircraft and its crew. Their reply of 13th April 1992⁸ confirmed what was already known in relation to the loss of the aircraft and crew, but nothing more in relation to this.

4.2 Documentary Evidence from ED838's Bomber Loss Card

In the early 1990s, motivated by a strong interest to find out any further information on the fate of the aircraft and its crew, the writer and his parents travelled down to the then Public Records Office at Kew (now The National Archives), outside of London, to access the Squadron's Operational Record Book and associated records, including ED838's Bomber Loss Card⁹ (and as shown in Appendix 2). The Bomber Loss Card provides information on the crew, the bomb load and of their route to target.

4.3 Correspondence with 9 Squadron, Royal Air Force

The writer's Aunt Doreen, Edward's younger sister, also made some enquiries into her brother's fate and, in particular, wrote to 9 Squadron, in December 1992. Whilst their reply of 1st March 1993¹⁰ provided some supplementary information on the raid itself, it was unable to offer any insight into the fate of the aircraft and crew.

An indicative plot was also provided of the route to the target, Figure 2, together with the comment that the sortie would have taken some 8 hours[†]. It is also interesting to note the comment in relation to the inexperienced nature of the crew, reflecting the disproportionately high loss rates of such crews, early in their operational tours.

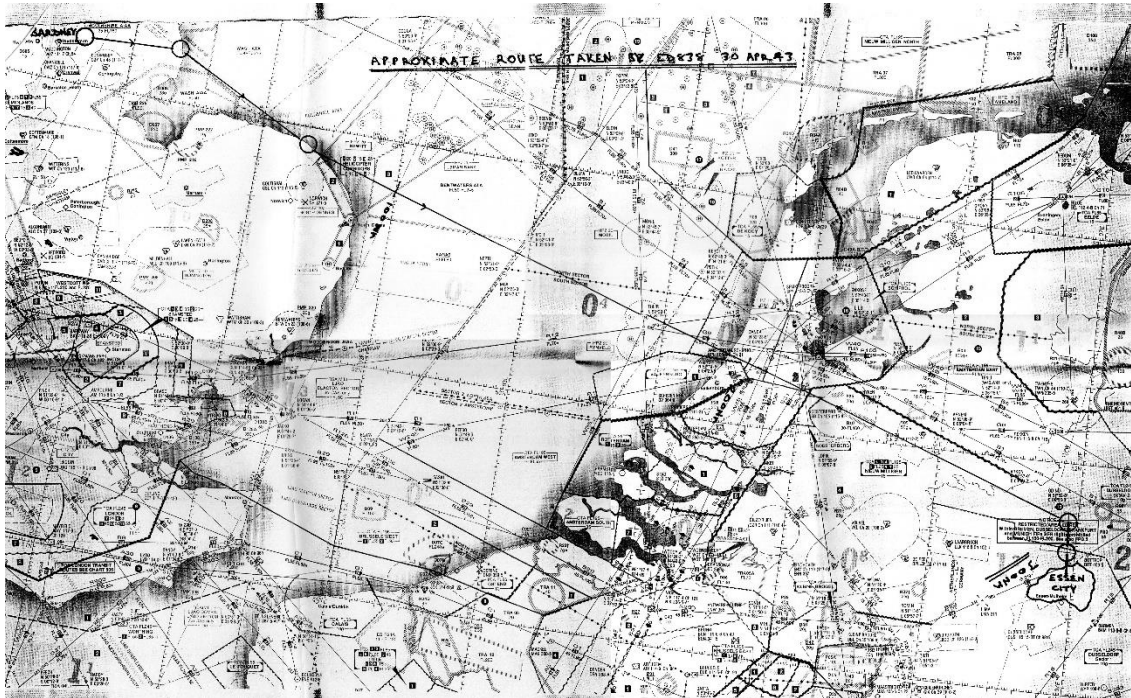


Figure 2:- Indicative Route to Target
(Source: Fl.Lt.M.H.Lloyd, 9 Squadron,
Royal Air Force, 1st March 1993.)

4.4 FlyPast Related Research

FlyPast magazine¹¹ is a long established UK monthly publication, focussing on historical aspects of aviation, including matters in relation to the two World Wars. At the time, and in the pre-Internet era, the magazine included a regular “Help” column, for interested parties to write in, seeking information on particular events, aircraft or individuals, including many in relation to missing crew members and aircraft in World War 2.

A request was therefore placed in the Help column of FlyPast’s August 1992 edition¹². This led to a small number of replies, as summarised below.

[†] The Squadron ORB shows typical round trip durations of circa 5 hours for this raid on Essen

4.4.1 Correspondence with Frank Hop, in the Netherlands

An early reply was from a Frank Hop, a KLM airline pilot, living in the Netherlands. There continues a strong interest in the Netherlands in relation to Bomber Command and its losses over the Netherlands in the war, with wrecks still being recovered, to this day.

Frank's initial reply to the writer's mother of 24th August 1992¹³ indicated that the aircraft had crashed at 02-35 hours, local time, into the North Sea. Correspondence then developed, with Frank providing some further insight via his letter of 19th September 1992¹⁴, where he cited a German "Lagebericht" (situation report), recording an aircraft being shot down in flames by a flak battery, at 02-36 hours, local time. He stated the aircraft was believed to be ED838, with it crashing into the North Sea, to the North West of Bergen. However, there was nothing to substantiate the link between the German Lagebericht and any specific aircraft.

His further letter of 30th November 1992¹⁵ aimed to provide some further corroboration, in particular citing the linkage of this claim to ED838 via a process of deduction, in relation to other known losses on the night and further citing a Ger Boogmans, an aviation historian in the Netherlands, of the same belief.

Also enclosed with this latter communication was a copy of the wording from the German Lagebericht and excerpts from a Royal Netherlands Airforce (RNAF) collation of aircraft crashes relative to crash sites; for convenience, this wording from the Lagebericht and a copy of the RNAF document are reproduced in Appendix 3.

4.4.2 Correspondence with Aircraft Recovery Group 1940-1945, The Netherlands

A further issue of FlyPast, February 1996¹⁶, contained a short feature on an aircraft recovery group active in the Netherlands, namely Aircraft Recovery Group 1940-1945; please see <http://www.arg1940-1945.nl/en.htm>

In this pre-Internet age, an enquiry to the Editor of FlyPast was required to put the writer in touch with this Group and various associated correspondence ensued.

Initially, this was with a Cees Broere, with the writer's records showing that he must have written to him, prior to engaging via two telephone conversations, on 17th and 18th March 1997¹⁷. The feedback from these calls was that (at the time) some one or two aircraft per annum were being recovered in the Netherlands, supported by an active network of enthusiasts, who believed that they owed it the British, to continue with such activities. Mr. Broere also indicated that a number of such enthusiasts had developed their own records on allied losses over the country, in the war. On the first call, Mr. Broere indicated that he had initiated enquiries via this network and would be back in touch.

It was therefore Mr. Broere's return call, on 18th March, that provided some further information, namely that ED838 "R" had crashed into the sea, to the North West of Bergen, at 02-36 hours, having been claimed by two flak batteries, one at 02-35

hours and the other at 02-36 hours. Mr. Broere also commented that he was aware of the writer's previous contact with Frank Hop, via FlyPast.

Mr. Broere confirmed the basis of this telephone conversation via his letter of 3rd July 1997¹⁸, which cited the specific Lagebericht previously referenced by Frank Hop and, furthermore, providing the references to the two claims in the Bundesarchiv. These are stated to be available in the Bundesarchiv, at Freiburg, under reference 2031-N-T2. The specific details provided were:-

Abteilung 428, based at Schellingwoude, near Amsterdam. Claim at 02-35 hours;

Lagebericht 2043-43, unknown Flak-abteilung claiming to have shot down aircraft at 02-36 hours.

Mr. Broere also extended an invitation to visit the group's museum, situated 20 km to the North of Amsterdam. The writer was therefore pleased to accept this invitation, via a visit in September 1997, tagged on at the end of a business trip to the Netherlands. Whilst the Group has an interesting array of artefacts, recovered from various crash sites, there was no specific information in relation to ED838 and its loss.

The Group did however express an interest in the loss and asked for some supplementary information and for a photograph of the writer's Uncle, which was gladly provided. Some limited ad-hoc dialogue continued thereafter, with a further communication, from a Christel Strebus¹⁹, re-affirming the belief that the aircraft had met its fate in the vicinity of Bergen, in the early hours of 1st May 1943 and again citing the Lagebericht.

4.5 Timings

In any effort to determine the fate of ED838 and the crew, timings are likely to be of prime importance. The take-off time was advised as 00-17 hours GMT, via correspondence from the Air Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence²⁰. In addition to this, an enquiry to the Netherlands Embassy in London elicited the response that, in May 1943, the time was the same in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom²¹.

It also appears to be the case that local times in both the UK and the Netherlands were each 2 hours ahead of GMT (ie GMT + 2), with the UK being on British Double Summer Time (BDST) and the Netherlands on Central European Summer Time (CEST)²².

It is also perhaps worth noting that the timings recorded in the Squadron's Operational Record Book¹ do not specifically designate the reference time zone employed (ie GMT or the prevalent BDST). It is further worth noting the overall timings for the other aircraft on the Squadron, which successfully completed the raid and returned safely to Bardney, viz:-

**Table 3:- Indicative Overall Timings for the Raid on Essen,
30th April/1st May 1943¹**

Take-off from Bardney	Circa 00-15 hours
Bombing run over Essen	Circa 03-00 hours
Landing back at Bardney	Circa 05-00 hours

It is in this context that further research is likely to be required to reconcile the records in relation to aircraft coming down over the Netherlands or Germany, with the recorded timings of the mission itself.

For reference, the April/May 2020 sunrise/sunset times for Lincoln and Essen are provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4:- Sunset/Sun Rise Times for Lincoln and Essen, 30th April/1st May 2020²²

	Lincoln	Essen
Sunset (GMT)	19-30	18-54
Sunrise (GMT)	04-27	04-03

5. Conclusions

The research into the loss of Lancaster ED838 and its crew has succeeded in pulling together various background information on the lead up to the fateful raid, including that in relation to the 9 Squadron's move to Bardney, the coming together of the crew, the operational activity in days leading up to the loss and of the raid itself.

It has also identified significant and ongoing interest within the Netherlands, in relation to the many RAF aircraft and crew, lost over that country in the war.

Through various dialogue with such interested parties in the Netherlands, an indication has been provided that ED838 may have been claimed by a flak battery, in the Bergen/Egmond area, on the Dutch coast. However, this could not be corroborated.

6. Further Work

In the absence of any recovery and identification of wreckage, the fate of ED838 and its crew remains an open question. Whilst it is always possible that a wreck may yet

be unearthed and/or the remains of the crew identified, this is unlikely, although not impossible, now more than three quarters of a century after the event.

It is perhaps however worth expending some further effort in seeking to reconcile the various timings identified, specifically in relation to the projected outward and return track of the aircraft, to and from the target, relative to claim(s) by the flak battery/ies.

Similarly, it could be worthwhile collating information on the other identified losses on the night, relative to claims, to see if this may reveal any further insight.

7. Acknowledgement

The contribution of all those respondents identified is gratefully acknowledged including, in particular, the network of enthusiasts and researchers in the Netherlands, who keep the memories of the wartime sacrifices alive.

8. References

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2. Action Stations: Military Airfields of Lincolnshire and East Anglia. Halpenny, Bruce Barrymore, Patrick Stevens Ltd., 1981
3. RAF Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War. Volume 4:- Aircraft and Crew Losses, 1943. Chorley, W.R. Midland Counties Publications, 1996.
4. The Bomber Command War Diaries, page 382.
5. The Air Battle of the Ruhr. Cooper, A. Airlife, 1992.
6. History of the Second World War:- The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany. Webster, C. and Frankland, N.
7. The Aeroplane, Volume LXV, No.1675, 2nd July 1943 (accessible via:- http://cybra.lodz.pl/Content/7475/Aero_v65_no1675_opt.pdf).
8. Private Communication, Mr.G.Day, Air Historical Branch, Ministry of Defence, to Mrs.G.Baker, 13th April 1992.
9. Bomber Loss Card, ED838
10. Private Communication, Fl.Lt.M.H.Lloyd, 9 Squadron, Royal Air Force, to Mrs.D.Hedley, 1st March 1993.
11. FlyPast Magazine. Key Aero Publications:- <https://www.key.aero/flypast>
12. FlyPast Magazine, August 1992
13. Private Communication, Mr.Frank Hop to Mrs. G. Baker, dated 24th August 1992
14. Private Communication, Mr.Frank Hop to Mr.J.N.Baker, dated 19th September 1992
15. Private Communication, Mr.Frank Hop to Mr.J.N.Baker, dated 30th November 1992
16. FlyPast Magazine, February 1996
17. Transcripts of telephone conversations with Cees Broere, Aircraft Recovery Group 1939-45. J.N.Baker, 17th & 18th March 1997
18. Private communication, Mr.Cees Broere to Mr.J.N.Baker, 3rd July 1997

19. Private Communication, Mr.Christel Strebus to Mr.J.N.Baker, 26th December 2000
20. Private Communication, Mr.N.E.Hunter, Air Historical Branch, Ministry of Defence, to Mr.J.N.Baker, 8th September 1992
21. Private Communication, Commander O.G.W.Tieleman, Commander RNLN, Assistant Naval and Assistant Air Attaché, Royal Netherlands Embassy, London, to Mr.J.N.Baker, 2nd March 1993
22. Time and Date; <https://www.timeanddate.com>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Edward Francis Doolittle

Edward was the middle of three children, born in Liverpool, October 1921. His elder sister, Gertrude, was the writer's mother, and with Doreen being the third and youngest child of the family.



Figure A1.1: Edward Francis Doolittle

It is understood that, upon leaving school, Edward embarked upon a career in the Civil Service, working at the outset of the war in the Ministry of Works and Buildings, in London.

He then volunteered for the Royal Air Force and trained as a Bomb Aimer.

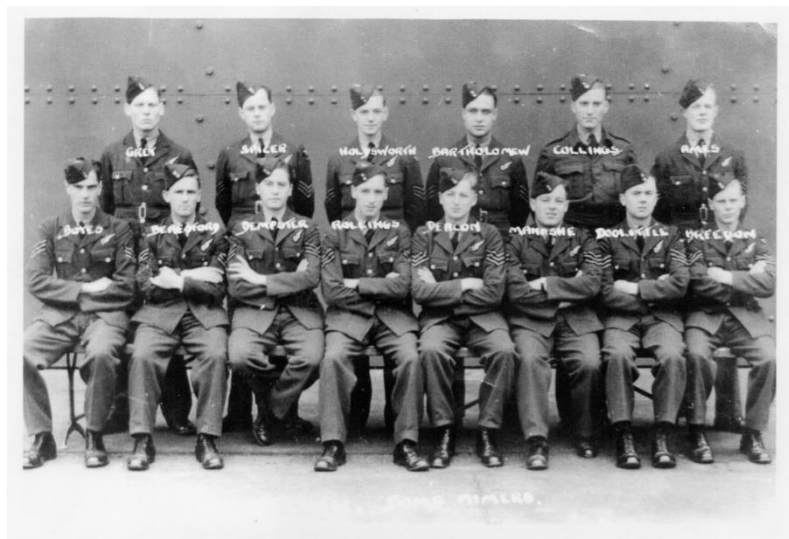


Figure A1.2: 45 Course, Bomb Aimers (Front row, second from right; believed to be at West Freugh, Scotland)

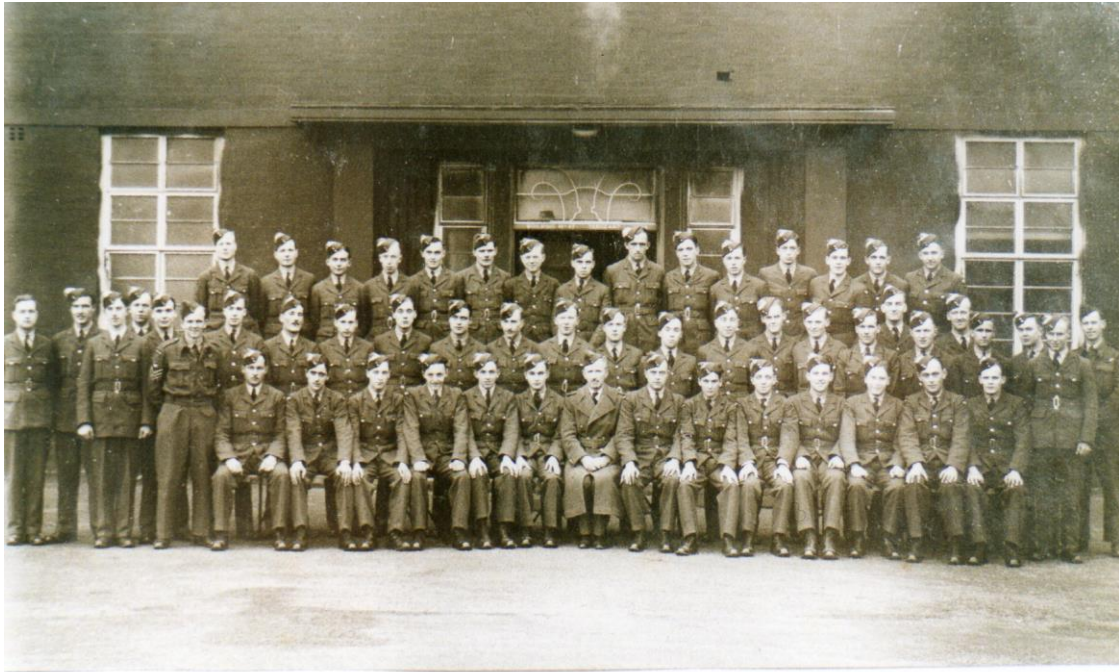


Figure A1.3: As Part of a Larger Group (Third from right. Location unknown)

Upon completion of his training, he joined 9 Squadron in April 1943, and disappeared without trace, along with the rest of his crew, on 1st May 1943.

With the commissioning of the Bomber Command Clasp in 2013, this was applied for and awarded on his behalf, Figure A1.4.



Figure A1.4: Bomber Command Clasp

Appendix 2:- Bomber Loss Card for ED838

304 43 hmc III ED 838 S 9 R		Waddington	Coast
<p>NO. 2 299</p>		<p>SHERINGHAM - EGMOND 1 X 4000 lbs H.C. -SUSNOBSE - 90X 4 1/2" typ inc S17N 0667E - 990X 4 1/2" inc. ESEM - SSON 0715E - EGMOND - SHERINGHAM.</p>	
P.	Mung G.A. Sft. 139184T NUNEZ 146346	1/0 not 4/4/43	dead
N.	Beard A.S. Sft. 1535181		dead
B/A.	Doollittle E.F. Sft. 1505512		dead
W/O.	Knapman R.A. Sft. 1312487		dead
F/ENA.	Collins C.H. Sft. 1300430		dead
A/G	Bayliss J. Sft. 1300620		dead
A/G	Barber D.R. Sft. 1351869		dead

Appendix 3:- The German Lagebericht and Excerpts from RAAF Crash Records

3.1 Lagebericht (Referenced by Frank Hop, 30th November 1992 and further cited by Cees Broere, 3rd July 1997)

Lagebericht. Am 1.5.43 02:36 uhr. Abschuss eines Feindflugzeuges unbekanntem Musters westlich Bergen durch flak: Schicksal der Besatzung unbekannt;

translated as:-

Situation Report. 02:36 hours, 1.5.43. Flak firing on an enemy aircraft of unknown type, west of Bergen; fate of the crew unknown.

