

1311249 Flt Sgt Williamson, Air Gunner Lancaster

Born in Manchester on 29 September 1912.

Dad joined the RAF VR on 16th September 1940.

I know very little of his first 2 years in the RAF apart from one whinge he told me about, that being a "W" he could be standing on the parade square for nearly 2 days awaiting his turn to be paid.

In December 1942 he was posted to No.4 Air Gunnery School at RAF Morpeth, where between the 20/12/42 and 20/02/43 he started his training to be an Air Gunner on the AB Initio Gunnery Course flying in the Blackburn Botha.

Botha: 14.00 Flying Hours. Air Gunner.

These initial training flights consisted of turret manipulation, air to sea ball and tracer, cine, drogue tracer.

He was then posted to C Flight 14 OTU at RAF Cottesmore where from the 9th March to the 21st he flew a total of 10 sorties in the Wellington out of Cottesmore and Saltby as both rear and mid upper gunner. Flying a further 5 sorties up to the end of March as front, mid upper and rear gunner with P/O Hoboken, who was to be his future captain. He completed his training on the OTU on 8th April 1943.

Wellington: Saltby day 10.20. Cottesmore day 14.55. Night 13.50

Total Flying hours. Day 39.15. Night 13.50

From the 5/5/43 to 7/8/43 he attended the "5 Group Corkscrew" at 1485 Flt. B & G RAF Fulbeck. This was a camera gun simulated fighter attack evasion special group training unit. It had been found that by corkscrewing, enemy fighters found it more difficult with their fixed guns to get a line on a bomber. The air gunners had 5 flights in a Wellington which whilst the aircraft was corkscrewing and subjected to simulated fighter attacks had to work out the required deflection for their guns. The films were then checked for accuracy after each flight.

Wellington: 1485 B & G Fulbeck day 7.05

From Fulbeck he moved to 1654 Conversion Unit at RAF Wigsley. Here he met up again with F/O Hoboken where the crew was formed. He flew by the end of May a total of 13 sorties as mid upper gunner, covering famil, bombing, cross country, air firing, corkscrewing, high and low level flying, fighter affil and evasion.

Lancaster Wigsley Day 17.15. Night 17.40

Total Flying hours Day 63.35 Night 31.40 Grand total of training hours 95.15

Battle of the Ruhr or, "Happy Valley"

106 [ZN] Squadron RAF Syerston

All of the following flights but one on 106 Sqn. both training and operational were in the Lancaster 3 with F/O Hoboken as Captain. On the majority of their flights he filled the mid-upper gunner position, though on occasion would exchange position with the tail gunner.

7 June "U" Flt time 1.00 (daytime) Night Flying Training. NFT

9 June "P" Flt time 2.10 (daytime) NFT & bombing

9 June "S" Flt time 1.40 NFT Cross Country, Petrol leak RTB early.

10 June ED 801 Flt time 3.15 NFT Cross Country Southwold, Frome, Northampton, Goole, Newark

12/13 June ED801 (N) – Flt time 5.50 Ops. 8,244 lbs. Bochum. Mid Upper.

503 aircraft – 323 Lancasters, 167 Halifaxes, and 11 Mosquitoes took part, 14 Lancasters and 10 Halifaxes were lost.

This raid took place over a completely cloud-covered target but accurate Oboe sky marking enabled all Lancaster/Halifax main force to cause severe damage to the centre of Bochum. After daylight photographs had been taken, 130 acres of destruction were claimed. The only report from Germany says that 449 buildings were destroyed and 916 seriously damaged and that 312 people were killed.

Note: Oboe was an aerial blind bombing targeting system based on radio transponder technology used extensively during the Battle of the Ruhr in 1943. It was accurate over short range where line of sight could be used. For the Ruhr though it required Mosquitoes as the only aircraft capable of flying high enough to obtain line of sight to direct the bombers onto their targets. It was limited though as it could only direct one aircraft at a time onto the target. In addition further east, Hamburg for example was beyond the range of Oboe.

14 June ED 801 NFT & Bombing 1.00hr.

14/15 ED 593 (Y) June 1943 – Flt time 3.30 Ops. Oberhausen. Mid Upper.

Note: Returned early freeze up.

197 Lancasters and 6 Mosquitoes took part, 17 Lancasters were lost.

This target was also cloud covered, but again Oboe was accurate. A report from Oberhausen says the Germans noted the markers right over the top of the Altstadt. 267 buildings were destroyed and 584 seriously damaged 85 people were killed and 258 were injured.

16 June (U) NFT & Bombing 1.00hr.

16/17 June (G) 1943 – Flt time 4.45 Ops. 10,550 lbs. Cologne. Mid Upper.

202 Lancasters and 10 Halifaxes took part, 14 Lancasters were lost.

The target was cloud covered and the sky marking was late and sparse, resulting in the Lancaster bombing being scattered. The local report believed that several hundred planes approached Cologne, but because of the bad weather only the first 100 bombed, the remainder turned back. Most of the damage in Cologne was to housing areas; 401 houses were destroyed and nearly 13,000 suffered varying degrees of damage. 16 industrial premises were hit including the Kalk chemical works which was burnt out. Other buildings destroyed included 9 railway stations, 2 railway stores, one telephone exchange, 2 town halls at Ehrenfeld and Spanischer, 5 churches, 3 cinemas and 2 schools. 147 people were killed and 213 injured.

Note: During this flight Dad, who was the mid-upper gunner, suffered frost bite and was unable to fly again for some 5 weeks.

Note: Sky marking is the dropping of several parachute flares simultaneously. As a rule the flares used were red ones from which at regular intervals, quick burning green flares drop out. However, when the cloud is dense and high reaching they were not very effective.

Once medically cleared he flew a total of 9.00hrs over the 12-15-16-17-18 and 22 July in the Lancaster with F/O Hoboken, carrying out NFT, air tests & bombing.

Start of Operation Gomorrah on Hamburg

24/25 July DY 195 (X) – Flt time 5.10 Ops. 10,570 lbs. Hamburg. Mid Upper.

This raid was outside the area Oboe could be used, but was the first major use of Windows which successfully confused the German radar.

791 aircraft – 347 Lancasters, 246 Halifaxes, 125 Stirlings and 73 Wellingtons took part. 4 Lancasters, 4 Halifaxes, 3 Stirlings and 1 Wellington were lost.

Conditions over the target were clear with only a gentle wind. The target markings were a little scattered but most of the target indicators fell near enough to the centre of the City for a concentrated raid to develop quickly. 728 aircraft dropped 2,284 tons of bombs in 50 minutes. The explosive power was the equivalent of the 5 most destructive raids on London. Bombing photographs showed though that less than half the force bombed within 3 miles of the centre of Hamburg. Severe damage was caused in the central and north western districts, particularly in Altona, Eimsbüttel and Hoheluft. Hagenbeck Zoo was also destroyed in the raid. Approximately 1,500 people were killed.

26/26 July DY 195 (X) – Flt time 3.00 Ops. Essen. Mid Upper.

Another attack to take advantage of Window on Hamburg for this night was cancelled due to the problems smoke would cause and the bombers raided Essen instead.

705 aircraft – 294 Lancasters, 221 Halifaxes, 104 Stirlings, 67 Wellingtons, and 19 Mosquitoes took part. 26 aircraft, 10 Halifaxes, 7 Stirlings 5 Lancasters and 4 Wellingtons were lost.

The raid was successful with particular damage being recorded in Essen industrial areas in the eastern half of the City. The Krupps munitions works suffered its most damaging raid of the war. 51 industrial buildings were destroyed and 83 seriously damaged, 2,852 houses were destroyed. 500 people were killed.

Note: On this raid Dad as the mid-upper gunner, fired and hit a JU 88 though what happened to this aircraft is unknown. His aircraft then had to return early as the guns in the rear turret became unserviceable.

Note This was the last major raid on Essen during the Battle of the Ruhr.

27 July DY 195 (X) Flt time 1.05 Night flying training and "gate exercise"

27/28 July JA 896 (R) – Flt time 3.55 Ops. Hamburg. Mid Upper

787 aircraft. 353 Lancasters, 244 Halifaxes, 116 Stirlings, 74 Wellingtons took part. 17 aircraft, 11 Lancasters, 4 Halifaxes, 1 Stirling and 1 Wellington were lost. 729 aircraft dropped 2,326 tons of bombs. It is estimated that 550 – 600 bomb loads fell onto an area measuring only 2 miles by 1 mile which caused a "firestorm" which started through an unusual chain of events, high temperature, and high humidity. The fires which had started as a result of the bombing suddenly all joined together and the whole area became one big fire with air drawn into it with the force of a storm. The firestorm raged for 3 hours in an area that was almost entirely residential. Approximately 16,000 multi-storied apartment buildings were destroyed and approximately 40,000 people died most of them by carbon monoxide poisoning when all of the air was drawn out of their basement shelters, 1,200,000 people, two thirds of Hamburg's population fled the City after this raid.

Note: H2S the first airborne ground scanning radar system was used by the Pathfinder along with "window".

Note: The GEE failed on Dads aircraft forcing them to return an hour early.

Note: GEE was a radio navigation system which measured the time delay between two radio signals to produce a fix, with accuracy on the order of a few hundred metres at ranges up to 350 miles. GEE was considered so important that a non-working set would ground an aircraft.

28 July JA 896 (R) – Flt time 1.05 Mine laying exercise

29 July DY 195 (X) – Flt time 1, 00 NFT @ bombing

29/30 July DY 195 (X) – Flt time 5.35 Ops. 11,592 lbs. Hamburg. Mid Upper.

777 aircraft. 340 Lancasters, 244 Halifaxes, 119 Stirlings, 70 Wellingtons, 4 Mosquitoes took part. 28 aircraft 11 Halifaxes, 11 Lancasters, 4 Stirlings and 2 Wellingtons were lost.

It was intended for the raid to come in from the North, but the Pathfinders came in 2 miles to the East marking an area just south of the firestorm area. Again there was widespread fire though no firestorm this time. There was also further a fall back of up to 4 miles from the markers which destroyed many more residential areas.

30/31 July ED 801 (N) – Flt time 5.05 Ops. 11,592 lbs. Remscheid. Mid Upper.

273 aircraft. 82 Lancasters, 95 Halifaxes, 87 Stirlings and 9 Mosquitoes took part. 15 aircraft, 2 Lancasters, 8 Stirlings and 5 Halifaxes were lost.

Both target marking and bombing was accurate, with 871 tons of bombs dropped resulting in 83% of the town devastated. 107 industrial buildings were destroyed. Industry lost 3 months production and never fully recovered. 3,115 houses were destroyed, 1,120 people killed and 6,700 injured.

2 August DY 195 (X) – Flt time 1.00 NFT & Bombing

2/3 August DY 195 (X) – Flt time 6.10 Ops. 11,500 lbs. Hamburg. Mid Upper.

740 aircraft. 329 Lancasters, 235 Halifaxes, 105 Stirlings, 66 Wellingtons and 5 Mosquitoes took part. 30 aircraft, 13 Lancasters, 10 Halifaxes, 4 Wellingtons and 3 Stirlings were lost.

This raid was deemed a failure due to a severe electrical storm over the target area. Many of the crews turned back early or bombed alternative targets. At least 4 of the aircraft lost were due to icing or being struck by lightning.

End of Operation Gomorrah on Hamburg.

3 August JA 876 (R) – Flt time 1.45. Bombing and mine laying exercise.

7 August DV 195 (X) – Flt time 1.20. Bombing and mine laying exercise.

15 August (E) – Flight time 1.30. Fighter Affiliation.

16 August DV 229 (Z) – Flight time 2.05. Bombing and NFT. Diverted to Dunholme. NE of Lincoln.

17 August YED 593 (ZN) – Flight time 1.20. Air sea firing.

17/18 August YED 593 (ZN) – Flight time 7.40 Ops. 11,500 lbs. Peenemunde. Mid Upper.

Operation Crossbow.

596 aircraft. 324 Lancasters, 218 Halifaxes and 54 Stirlings took part. 40 aircraft, 23 Lancasters, 15 Halifaxes and 2 Stirlings were lost.

This was a special raid which Bomber Command was ordered to carry out against the German research centre on the Baltic coast where V-2 rockets were built and tested. The raid was carried out in moonlight to increase the chances of success. It was the only time during the second half of the war where the whole of Bomber Command attempted a precision raid by night on such a small target.

Another first was the use of a Master Bomber controlling a full-scale Bomber Command raid. There were 3 aiming points – the scientists and workers living quarters, the rocket factory and the experimental station. Unfortunately, the initial Pathfinder marking and bombing fell 1.5 miles to the south onto a forced labour camp where 500-600 foreigners, mainly Polish were killed. A Mosquito diversion to Berlin drew most of the German night fighters for the first 2 of the raids 3 phases. They had though returned in force by the time 5 Group (106Sqn.) who had practised as an alternative the time –and –distance bombing method for their part of the raid began their run in. 560 aircraft dropped 1,800 tons of bombs on the target which set back the V-2 experimental programme by at least 2 months and reduced the scale of the eventual rocket attacks. Some 180 Germans workers were killed in the attack.

Note. This was also the first night the Germans used their new Schrage Musik weapons; these were twin upward-firing cannons fitted in the cockpit of Me 110s.

Note. Although there were several more raids on Peenemunde this was the only night operation.

20 August ED 593 ZN – Flight time. 1.15 NFT & Bombing.

22/23 August ED 593 ZN – Flight time 5.10 Ops. 12,000lbs Leverkusen. Mid Upper.

462 Aircraft. 257 Lancasters, 192 Halifaxes, 13 Mosquitoes took part. 3 Lancasters and 2 Halifaxes were lost.

The IG chemical factory at Leverkusen was the chosen aiming point for the attack. This was not a successful raid. There was thick cloud over the target and also a partial failure of the Oboe signals, with the bombs falling over a wide area.

27 August ED 593 – Flight time 1.15 NFT.

27/28 August ED 593 ZN – Flight time 7.45 Ops Nuremburg. Mid Upper.

674 Aircraft. 349 Lancasters, 221 Halifaxes and 104 Stirlings took part. 33 aircraft, 11 of each type were lost.

Nuremburg was found to be free of cloud, but it was very dark. The initial Pathfinder markers were accurate but creep back quickly developed. The Master Bomber could do little to persuade the main force to move their bombing forward as only a quarter of the crews could hear his broadcasts. Most of the bombs were scattered either in open country or in the suburbs to the South East and East of the City. 65 people were killed.

14 September DV 229 (Z) – Flight time 2.10 Bombing Wainfleet – air sea firing.

14 September ED 874 (O) – Flight time 1.20 Indirect bombing.

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15 September WD 809(N) – Flight time 1.00 Bombing.

15 September JA 973 (P) – Flight time 1.00 Formation Bombing.

18 September JA 973 (P) - Flight time 1.20 Bridlington - moving target bombing.

18 September ED 809 (N) - Flight time 4.00 Night cross Country landing at Swinderby.

20 September ED 593 (Y) – Flight time 1.00 NFT & Bombing.

21 September DV 229 (Z) – Flight time 1.25 Bridlington, bombing moving target.

21 September ED 593 (Y)) – Flight time 1.05 Indirect bombing.

22 September R 5609 (L) – Flight time 00.55 NFT & Bombing.

Note. Lancaster 3

22/23 September R5609 (L) – Flight time 5.45 Ops. 7,500lbs Hanover. Mid Upper.

711 aircraft. 322 Lancasters, 226 Halifaxes, 137 Stirlings, 26 Wellingtons and 5 American B17's took part. 7 Lancasters, 12 Halifaxes 5 Stirlings and 2 Wellingtons were lost.

Visibility in the target area was good but stronger winds than forecast caused the marking and bombing to be concentrated between 2 and 5 miles SE of the city centre. It is unlikely that serious damage was caused.

Note. This was the first night raid to Germany by the American B17's.

Note. This was also the first of 4 heavy raids on Hanover for 2 years.

23/24 September ED 593(Y) – Flight time 6.45 OPS. Mannheim. Mid Upper.

633 aircraft plus unknown number of Wellingtons took part. 312 Lancasters, 193 Halifaxes, 115 Stirlings, 8 Mosquitoes. Wellingtons and 5 B-17's took part. 18 Lancasters, 7Halifaxes and 7 Wellingtons were lost.

This raid was intended to destroy the northern part of Manheim, which had not been so severely hit in the successful raid earlier in the month. The Pathfinder plan worked well and concentrated bombing fell on the intended area. The following buildings were destroyed 90 houses, 20 industrial premises, 11 schools and church. A large number of other buildings were also damaged and injured. There were more than 2,000 fires. During the later stages the raid crept back across the northern part of Ludwigshafen, where the I.G Farben factory was severely damaged then on to the smaller outlying towns of Oppau and Frankenthal. Ludwigshafen suffered 47 killed and 260 injured. A further 8,000 people were bombed out, of whom 4289 were foreign workers. The centre of Frankenthal was completely burnt out and 38 people were killed there.

Note. The pilot for this Op. was P/O Hamovan and was the only operational flight that Dad flew without F/O Hoboken as pilot.

25 September ED 593 (Y) – Flight time 00.30 NFT & bombing.

27/28 September ED 593 (Y) – Flight time 5.15 Ops. Hannover. Mid Upper.

678 aircraft. 312 Lancasters, 231 Halifaxes, 111 Stirlings, 24 Wellingtons and 5 B17's took part. 10 Lancasters, 17 Halifaxes, 10 Stirlings, 1 Wellington and 1 B17 were lost.

The use by the Pathfinders of faulty forecast winds again saved the centre of Hanover. The bombing was very concentrated but fell on an area north of the city causing minimal damage.

29/30 September ED 593 (Y) – Flight time 10.40 Ops. Five 1,500 lb. mines. Rear Gunner. Gulf of Danzig. (South Baltic Sea). Or the bay of Gdansk in Polish.

Whilst the main bomber force was bombing Bochum, 14 Lancasters were mine laying in the Gulf of Danzig. I cannot find any reports on this operation.

Note. Great birthday present.

Note. The crews called these ops "gardening" as each geographical waterway area for mine laying was code named after a vegetable. This area was named Pollock.

Note. Mine laying had gone from a fairly easy Op in the early part of the war to this time in 1943 when it was one of the most dangerous. It required flying at 1,000 ft. Straight and level at 190 kts, release their load, then continue for a further 2 minutes maintaining the same height, direction and speed so that the enemy were unable to pinpoint the drop location. All this time there was the danger from, fighters, flak ships and land based anti a/c batteries. By the end of the year mines had been developed that could be dropped from a greater height.

Note. Landed at Croft, possibly due to shortage of fuel.

1 October ED 593 (Y) – Flight time 00.45 RTB.

2/3 October R5609 (L) - Flight time 7.50 Ops. Munich. Mid Upper.

296 aircraft. 294 Lancasters & 2 B-17s took part. 8 Lancasters were lost.

Visibility over the target was good but initial marking was scattered. Heavy bombing developed over the south and south-east districts of Munich but creep back up to 15 miles back along the approach route resulted in inaccurate bombing. No 5 Group crews were unable to pick out the Wurmsee Lake which was the starting point for their timed run. 339 buildings were destroyed, 191 people killed and 748 injured.

3/4 October ED 593 (Y) - Flight time 5.45 Ops. Kassel. Mid Upper.

547 aircraft. 204 Lancasters, 223 Halifaxes, 113 Stirlings and 7 Mosquitoes took part. 4 Lancasters, 14 Halifaxes and 6 Stirlings were lost.

This raid did not proceed to plan. The blind marker aircraft considerably overshot the aiming point. The visual markers were then unable to correct this due to the ground being restricted by a thick haze. The main weight of the attack thus fell on the western suburbs and outlying towns and villages. Even so, large fires were started at both the Henschel and Fiesler aircraft factories, plus a chance bomb load hit a large ammunition dump at Ihringshausen destroying 84 buildings. The eastern suburb of Wolshanger was devastated. Casualties were 118 killed and 304 injured.

22 October. ED 593 (Y) - Flight time 1.40 NFT.

22/23 October ED 593 (Y) - Flight time 6.40 Ops. Kassel. Mid Upper.

569 aircraft. 322 Lancasters and 247 Halifaxes took part. 18 Lancasters and 25 Halifaxes were lost.

The main raid was exceptionally accurate and concentrated. The result was the most devastating attack on a German city since the raid on Hamburg in July. This in part was due to a diversionary raid on Dortmund and the first time Operation Corona was used. This was a ground radio station in England broadcasting as German controllers giving out misinformation to confuse their night fighters. The fires were so concentrated that again there was a firestorm, although not as extensive as the Hamburg one. Damage to dwelling blocks were so severe that some 100,00 to 120,000 had to leave their homes. 155 industrial buildings, 78 public buildings, 38 schools, 25 churches, 16 police and military buildings and 11 hospitals were either destroyed or badly damaged. The Kassel railway system and its installations were severely hit and all three Henschel aircraft factories seriously damaged which were building the V1 flying bombs at the time. Some 5,599 people were killed in this raid, 3,587 were injured; 800 seriously, and a further 8,084 people were treated for smoke and heat injury to their eyes.

After leaving the target area ED 593 was hit by a burst of gunfire from a night fighter, sustaining substantial damage. A few moments later it was attacked again this time rendering both turrets unserviceable. The aircraft was now badly crippled with 5 of the crew seriously injured. Although both also suffering from injuries, F/O Hoboken ably assisted by his Flight Engineer, Sgt. Lucas first managed to fly the aircraft clear of the immediate danger, then nurse the stricken aircraft back to base.

Note. On the 16 November 1943 it was announced in the London Gazette issue 36254 on page 5076 that F/O Hoboken was to be awarded the DFC and Sgt. Lucas the DFM.

Dad spent several weeks in hospital as he suffered severe head injuries due to shrapnel, with one piece considered too dangerous to remove due to its close proximity to his brain.

This was one of the last operations mounted from RAF Syerston by 106 Sqn prior to their final move to RAF Metherringham, where the Squadron continued to fly from until its disbandment in February 1946.

On the 26/27 November F/O Hoboken and Sgt Lucas along with 5 replacement crew members took off from RAF Metherringham for a raid on Berlin. Sadly their aircraft was badly damaged over Berlin and crashed with no survivors.

On the 23rd March F/O Hoboken and Sgt Lucas were posthumously awarded the DFC and DFM.

On the 7th Feb 1944 Dad returned to flying.

7 February York H28 Mid Upper Gunner 3.15hrs Air sea firing Skegness

8 February Manchester H25 Mid Upper Gunner 5.45hrs. Bombing Epperstone.

Following these 2 flights he was medically downgraded and never flew operationally again.

In total he had flown 151.15 hrs on operations and 115.40 hrs on training flights.

He was awarded the 39-45 Star, Aircrew Europe and Defence Medal.

On the 1st January 1946 he attended 101 Personnel Dispersal Centre at RAF Kirkham where on the 3rd January he was discharged with a war pension.

By this time I had arrived and my Mother and I were living with her mother's sister in Cardiff.

Dad went to Loughborough Teachers Training College, where he trained to become a woodwork teacher.

On completion of his training we all then moved to Northend, a small village in mid Warwickshire. Dad took over joint responsibility with a Mrs O'Shaunecy for a Centre some 10 miles away in Southam, where 11 to 15 year old boys and girls from the village schools in the surrounding area travelled to once a fortnight for a day's woodwork or cookery lessons.

To supplement his petrol coupon allocation during the 4 months of fuel rationing throughout the winter of 56/57, he had lifts to the centre in the van that delivered meals to the schools in the area. It was during one of these lifts that the van skidded on ice and overturned. Dad received injuries to his upper back and neck. These injuries along with the shrapnel were to add to his slow decline in health.

In September 1957 Dad took over the metal and woodwork departments of the newly opened Secondary Modern school in Southam which had been built to cater for all 11 to 16 olds in the area that had not passed the 11 plus. By the early 1970's though his health had deteriorated to the point he had to take early retirement.

In May 1962 I joined the RAF and whilst stationed at RAF Wildenrath in the spring of 1975 Mum and Dad came out to visit us. I picked them up off an evening ferry in Zeebrugge and Dad set foot on German soil for the first time some 3 hours later. The following morning my Mother said Dad did not look well. A doctor from Sick Quarters came round, diagnosed a suspect stroke and sent him straight off to RAF Wegberg. Following tests the specialists told my Mother there was little they could do as though the symptoms resembled a stroke it was felt the shrapnel near his brain had in fact moved slightly resulting in symptoms similar to a stroke. 3 weeks later he was cleared to fly back to UK.

Over the next 10 years his health continued to slowly deteriorate with loss of mobility and speech problems and this once strong man finally died in February 1986.

William ex RAF
1962 - 1998