



207 Squadron Royal Air Force Association
44 Squadron & The Wesseling Raid
21/22 June 1944



44 Squadron Roll of Honour for the Wesseling Raid 21/22 June 1944

Narratives

Courtesy of the late **Alan White**, Historian of 44 Squadron, which in October 1944 joined 207 at Spilsby, I reproduce below Wesseling narratives from three 44 Sqn crews - S/L Cockbain (NE138 KM-Z), P/O R Wood (LL938 KM-S) from which there were only three survivors and P/O NJW Scholtz (two killed) in LM434 KM-F, which came down near LANKLAAR in the same region as Mike Solly's 207 Sqn aircraft EM-M LL973: -

"The Main Force made only four raids that month on targets in Germany. All four were oil refineries and the German defences achieved a sizable success on the 21st when [44] Squadron despatched 16 crews to raid Wesseling near Cologne. The German electronic countermeasures service managed to interfere successfully with Oboe navigation aids of the Pathfinder Mosquitos marking at both Duisburg and Wesseling."

"The raids disintegrated completely. 37 crews were lost out of a force of 120 that set out: six of them were from No 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron. F/O Smith, P/O Richards, P/O Cauty, P/O Wood, P/O Baxter and P/O Scholtz. S/L Cockbain only narrowly missed bringing the total to seven."

S/L Cockbain: "On approach to target we were attacked by an unidentified fighter. The control column jammed in a forward position and we started to dive. I warned the crew to put on parachutes and no sooner had I said this than the aircraft dived vertically. I ordered to jump. While waiting I trimmed right back and with my foot on the instrument panel I hauled on the stick which gradually started to move back. I then told those who had not baled out to standby. We jettisoned the load and the aircraft became controllable at about 8,000ft. Three members of the crew remained. All other parachutes were seen in an open condition. I then asked the bomb aimer to come back and navigate which he did most successfully. The remaining members of my crew behaved admirably and they contributed largely to our safe return. A great number of rockets were observed some approaching less than 500 yds before bursting. We got an H2S plot of Westkappelle and then West Raynham on Darkie where I got a QDM to base."

Cockbain's Flight Engineer was **Walter Faraday**: "The trip to Wesseling was uneventful until we reached the vicinity of the target, when the night fighters moved in and gave us a beating. Very few of those crews that got away that night returned unscathed. I was dutifully feeding Window through the slot near the engineer's panel while we searched for flares. After completing one or two orbits the greens were spotted. We began the run up, bomb doors open, green flares ahead when I heard the rear gunner talking and caught the word 'fighter'."

"As I looked out the window an illuminated waterfall seemed to pour over the starboard wing tip and for a few seconds I watched quite fascinated. The aircraft began to slide nose down and Steve Cockbain told us to get out. I expected to follow the bomb aimer out the front hatch but he stayed put. Later he told me that he was pinned against the bulkhead by the 'g' forces and couldn't move. The aircraft went vertical and I found myself standing up and looking straight over the front turret but pressed hard against the packets of WINDOW and the pilot's seat."

"Steve had the stick right back with his knees hard against the instrument panel. With my left hand I was able to help him operate the elevator trimmer. We plunged downwards from 17,000 ft until, to the accompaniment of violent shuddering as the airframe objected to such treatment, the aircraft began to pull out at about 7,000 ft. The order to bale out was then cancelled."

"I took a masked torch end went aft to survey the damage, and reported. The fuselage seemed normal if somewhat eerie without the crew. John (Dixie) Dean was still in the rear turret. His guns had malfunctioned dumping several hundred or even thousands of rounds in his lap, thereby trapping him. Colin Mackenzie the navigator came back to the navigator's table and calculated a course for home. By this time we were steady at 1,500 ft. Eventually I picked up a red Darkie beacon and Steve was then able to set course for home, where we landed without further ado. Later I discovered that F/L Dobson had heard Steve calling on the RT but hadn't replied, maintaining Radio Silence as ordered."

"Once down we all had a good look at the aircraft. There were numerous holes around the rear turret although fortunately John Dean was unhurt. The bottoms of both rudders and most of the starboard elevator had been shot away. Fuel jettison tubes hung down from the wings, probably dislodged by the g forces, while embedded in the underside were brass arming spinners from our bombs. We had presumably collected them by following so close behind as the bombs had been released in the dive."

"We were naturally a bit shaken up and in the heat of the moment there was some recrimination. I was accused first of dumping the WINDOW too fast, such that the fighter, a JU 88, had been able to home in on us, then subsequently of waving the torch around too much. However since no one had been moved to mention these things at the time and we were safely down in one piece there was no need for me to reply."

"There were a lot of empty tables and surplus food in the mess that morning. Steve couldn't eat anything and settled for coffee. I tucked in to two or even three breakfasts of standard bacon and eggs. After that we slept nearly all day. That night using borrowed bikes I cycled into Lincoln with Dixie and another guy and we had a few pints at *The Bowling Green*."

"Mackenzie was awarded an 'Immediate' DFC that same day and the crew was screened from further operations. Albert, Dixie, Sid Bristow and myself all got a gong apiece later on, in my case at least 'not for anything specific'. Steve already had a DFC and didn't get a further award. He was killed on 14th January 1945 when a Stirling he was delivering to Belfast caught fire and crashed near Nottingham. I had crewed up with him at Winthorpe. Like Lucky Wright earlier he was a very alert 'straight and level' pilot, whereas Sgt Dashper RCAF, my previous pilot on No 61 Sqn, only stopped weaving to drop his bombs."

"Both Wright and Cockbain successfully guided their crews through two tours. Steve, as Flight Commander, took his time over this second tour and I flew nine trips with him in six months, missing only one through a cold or some such thing. Sid Bristow went instead and an Me 110 put a shell through the mid upper turret. Fortunately Albert Bracegirdle was unhurt."

Cockbain's Mid Upper Gunner [on Wesseling] was **Albert Bracegirdle**: "We expected a fair amount of opposition, but it was quiet until about sixty miles into Belgium. There it became evident that Jerry was waiting for us as we encountered defences on a scale far greater than I had experienced on any operation during this or my previous tour. On several occasions we corkscrewed to avoid rocket attacks by enemy night fighters, others weren't so lucky. In the light of the Fighter flares, so numerous that the sky was as bright as day, I saw several bombers go down."

"We arrived on the target at 01.30 am our ETA, but in the absence of the red spot fires, began to orbit. Presumably the marking crews either had difficulty finding the target, or more likely had already been shot down. After about ten minutes I spotted greens going down. S/L Cockbain called for a course and no sooner had we rolled out of the turn than there was a terrific thump from below. The Lanc entered a very steep dive and I heard the pilot call that he couldn't control her, followed by the order 'Bale Out'. Given our current circumstances no second bidding was necessary. With great difficulty I made my way to the rear door opened it and jumped, half expecting the aeroplane and its 14,000 lb bomb load to explode any minute."

"My next recollection was about three hours later. I came to my senses laying on my back in a forest, to see my parachute draped over a sapling, and the empty harness dangling six feet above me. Heaven knows how I freed myself. I had superficial injuries to my face: a badly cut and bruised upper lip, bruised nose, badly cut eyelid and two bumps on the side of my head. Presumably during the early part of my escape the parachute pack had struck me before deploying. I tried to take stock of my situation but my eye bled profusely, and I was sick twice, so I lay there to recover."

"It was around 8.30 am before I felt fit to move. Then after eating some of my escape rations I hid my electric and Taylor suit clothing before setting off through the forest. After about a mile I encountered deer grazing in a clearing, and from there I followed a footpath which brought me to a metalled road. A sign showed AACHEN about 10 km away, I was well inside Germany. My eye was still bleeding so heavily that it needed attention quickly. In my shocked state, my position seemed so hopeless, I decided to give myself up, and made for a nearby house."

"The Squadron [44], long since inured to a steady loss of crews, was stunned. Two other squadrons participating in the raid had also each lost six crews. One of these (No. 619 Sqn) shared Dunholme Lodge. The base had lost twelve complete crews in one night. The mess hall was strangely silent at breakfast the next day."

"The target had been marked by the now standard No 5 Group low level technique and the crews briefed not to delay their attack if the markers didn't show but to bomb on H2S. The Force had however borne the brunt of a very effective night fighter action."

P/O Cauty and crew brought down at Riethoven were buried at Eindhoven. There were no survivors from his or the crews of P/O Young, P/O Richards or F/O Smith. Three crew members survived from the Wood crew.

W/O A Sargeant RAAF, 44 Sqn: "Wesseling was our second op as a crew. After the skipper and I each took part in a familiarisation trip to AUNAY we went to BEAUVAIS for our first op and attacked a V weapon site. Our next target was the oil plant, but we were hit by a night fighter shortly after entering Germany and had to get out."

"George Phillips the M/U had opened the rear door when he spotted Tich Mackenzie, the rear gunner, struggling with an already opened parachute. While helping him to gather it up the door closed and jammed fast trapping them both. As Frank Such, the flight engineer, helped Russel Wood with his parachute he could see the skipper's face was covered in blood. Forwards in the nose Bud Leonard lay slumped over the bomb sight, and as Frank went forward and pulled the release handle it came away in his hand."

"Meanwhile the aircraft entered a steep spiral and I found myself stuck fast by the accompanying forces. My salvation came when LL938 exploded blowing Charles, Frank and I clear. Our WOP Al Martin was

an American who, having enlisted in the RCAF, had transferred to the USAAF during training. He died with the rest of the boys. We three survivors were quickly rounded up next day."

Sgt F. Preston was one of only three members of the [44 Sqn] Scholtz crew who had managed to get clear: "We were hit at 1.20 am while still over Belgium and twenty minutes from the target. The kite was soon well alight and the skipper ordered us to bale out. Putting on my parachute I saw both gunners go, followed by the navigator."

"As I tried to make my way forward to the exit the aircraft dived steeply, presumably it then exploded and I was blown clear for my next recollection was of sailing towards the earth. I noticed the D ring still attached to my parachute and pulled it. After a few seconds which seemed like hours I was floating gently down. I made a good landing and after freeing myself from the chute and harness in no time I looked to see if I was still in one piece. There were a few cuts alongside my left eye and a bad gash on my chin. To my surprise in addition to my wristwatch and a few escape aids my losses included my bottom teeth. They were not dentures. Far from worrying I thanked God for my life. I sat for about an hour, having a good but vain look for the rest of the crew, then aided by my compass and map, headed for Southern France."

Ric Green, Navigator with F/O Hart's 44 Sqn crew: "We spent the period 10th June until 7th July 1944 at 1660 HCU. On the morning of June 22 we drifted down to the Intelligence Section to see what had happened. As we read the casualty list which consisted of captain's names only our blood ran cold for it contained an incredible number of names known to us."

"Subsequently I became aware of two from No 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron who had been particularly close. Leo Tobin, a French Canadian, Al Martin an American and I had crossed the Atlantic in the hold of the Queen Elizabeth. We had had a wild on going bridge party all the way through OTU. There I had required some minor surgery but the crews couldn't wait for me and I was left behind and later crewed up with Bob Hart a Rhodesian. That delay of some six weeks dramatically increased my chances of completing a tour. At Bruntingthorpe, Al had sounded me out about the feasibility of getting a trip back home during the two-week end of course leave. His wife was expecting a baby back in the States. I wasn't too keen for I didn't fancy being classed as a deserter in wartime and being shot simply because the weather or something had delayed our return. I often wonder if he had ever made it back to see his baby."

"On 28th July we finished up at No 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston where my log book was signed by one F/L Mike Beetham who later became Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham, Chief of Air Staff. Then came the great day as we arrived at No 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron. On 1st August came an air check and the following day we were on Ops to Trossy."



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44 Sqn Lancaster I LL938 KM-S Op: Wesseling t/o 2325 Dunholme Lodge - Pilot P/O R Wood RNZAF

Of those who lost their lives, three are buried in Nederweert War Cemetery. T/S Martin USAAF is commemorated on the Walls of the Missing at the US Military Cemetery at Margraten. He had been awarded an Air Medal and a Purple Heart.

Note. It is believed this was the only Bomber Command crew lost in the war that comprised of airmen from the three Commonwealth and Dominion air forces, plus a USAAF representative. Concerning the casualties for this night, in general, it was the last occasion that Bomber Command would suffer so badly during operations to the Ruhr. Most of those shot down fell victim to night-fighters that successfully infiltrated the bomber stream.

Pilot P/O Russell Wood RNZAF age 23
F/E Sgt FJ Such pow
Nav W/O AJ Sargeant RAAF pow
B/A F/S Arthur Murray Leonard RCAF
W/Op T/S Albert E Martin USAAF see below
M/U F/S C J Phillips pow
R/G Sgt Vincent McKenzie RAFVR age 19

44 Sqn Lancaster I ME804 KM-O Op: Wesseling t/o 2326 Dunholme Lodge - P/O TB Richards
Shot down by a nightfighter and crashed in the vicinity of Lutselus (Limburg), 6 km SSW from the centre of Genk, Belgium, where all are buried in the town's communal cemetery. Sgt Wright was flying as a second navigator. P/O Richards and his tail gunner, Sgt Greenfield, came from Southern Rhodesia, the former from Salisbury and the latter from Gwelo.

Pilot P/O Thomas Bryan Richards RAFVR age 21
F/E Sgt Harold Vincent Dick Thompson RAFVR
Nav F/S Raymond Fazackerley RAFVR
Nav2 Sgt George Leonard Wright RAFVR age 21
B/A F/S John Alan Buckby RAFVR age 21
W/Op Sgt Henry Robert Pursglove RAFVR age 21
M/U F/S Willis Eugene Spinks RCAF age 19
R/G Sgt Harry Moxon Greenfield RAFVR age 19

44 Sqn Lancaster III LM434 RM-F Op: Wesseling t/o 27.55 Dunholme Lodge - P/O NJW Scholtz RCAF
Crashed between the coalmine and the As-Lanklaar road, near Lanklaar (Limburg), 10 km SSW of Masseik in Belgium. The pilot and bomb aimer rest in Lanklaar Communal Cemetery. Sgt Barnett hailed from Southern Rhodesia.

Pilot P/O Neville John Wingrove Scholtz RAFVR age 20
F/E Sgt WT Wainwright pow
Nav WO2 LP Tobin RCAF evd
B/A F/S John Campbell Willson RCAF age 20
W/Op Sgt F Preston pow
M/U WO1 R Schott RCAF pow
R/G Sgt WD Barnett pow

44 Sqn Lancaster III LM592 KM-Q Op: Wesseling t/o 2257 Dunholme Lodge - Pilot P/O EA Cauty RAAF
Intercepted over Holland, outbound, by a night-fighter and sent down to explode twixt the village of Riethoven in Noord-Brabant and the nearby town of Valkenswaard. All are buried in Eindhoven (Woensel) General Cemetery. P/O Cauty RAAF had, at the end of May, crashed during operations.

Pilot P/O Edwin Albert Cauty RAAF age 29

F/E Sgt Ronald Edgar Clay age 19
Nav F/O John Reuben Vowles RAAF
B/A Sgt Eric Norris RAFVR age 22
W/Op F/O Walter Marshall Crook RAFVR age 22
M/U Sgt Ernest George Scott RAFVR age 20
R/G F/Sgt Louis Joseph Patrick McCoy RAAF age 20

44 Sqn Lancaster III ND552 KM-X Op: Wesseling t/o 2258 Dunholme Lodge - F/O NJ Smith RAAF

Crashed into the grounds of a coalmine between the villages of Eisden (Limburg) and Lanklaar, Belgium, where all are buried in the communal cemetery, apart from F/S Fazackerley who lies in Genk Communal Cemetery.

Pilot F/O Neil Joseph Smith RAAF age 22
F/E Sgt John Douglas Barber RAFVR age 19
Nav F/O Thomas Sawers Calder RAFVR
Nav2 F/S Raymond Fazackerley RAFVR
B/A F/S Michael William Beevor Steele RAFVR
W/Op Sgt Laurence Herbert Bozier RAFVR age 29
M/U Sgt David Blackie RAFVR age 29
R/G Sgt Raymond William Brett RAFVR

44 Sqn Lancaster III ND973 KM-A Op: Wesseling t/o 2313 Dunholme Lodge - P/O G Baxter

Caught by a nightfighter over Holland and crashed at Herkenbosch (Limburg), 6 km SE from the centre of Roermond. Funeral services for the crew were conducted at Herkenbosch General Cemetery, but since 1945 their remains have been removed to Jonkerbos War Cemetery.

Pilot P/O George Baxter RAFVR age 21
F/E Sgt David Betterton RAFVR age 22
Nav WO2 Bruce Alexander Mackenzie Rutherford RCAF
B/A WO2 Samuel Young RCAF
W/Op W/O Kenneth Scholes RAF
M/U F/S Donald Allan Taylor RCAF age 22
R/G Sgt Duncan Robert Roland Lewis Whitfield RAFVR age 20

with thanks to Bill Chorley
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Albert E. Martin
Technical Sergeant, U.S. Army
Service # 10601569
12th Replacement Control Depot
Entered the Service from: Missouri
Died: 22-Jun-44
Missing in Action or Buried at Sea
Tablets of the Missing at Netherlands American Cemetery
Margraten, Netherlands
Awards: Air Medal, Purple Heart