

Graham Welsh answers to questions

1939: Joined Civil Air Guard.

1940: Enlisted in RAF as pilot/observer trainee.

EFTS Carlisle.

SFTS Brize Norton. Course disrupted by enemy bombing. Requested Air Observer course.

AONS Staverton

1941 B & G School Dumfries.

OTU Benson

40 Squadron. Posted to fill crew vacancy 9 Squadron.

9 Squadron. Joined crew on conversion to Mark 3 Wellington. Pilot Sgt Wilmot (later F/Lt DSO).
1942.

Pilot Sgt Pearson (later F/Lt DFC), then Sgt Langton.

9 Squadron was one of 6 squadrons selected to form a pathfinder group, using the new Gee system, marking targets with flares, followed by incendiaries.

May 30. My 30th operation, marking target in first thousand-bomber raid. Engine failure on return led to crash in Belgium. Thence to Stalag Luft 3.

1944 Involved in Great Escape.

1945 Refresher course in Wittering. Released on war ending.

Later - Over 30 years a director of the RCAF Benevolent Fund.

Questions

1. Which 1,000-bomber raid are you referring to?
2. Does your log identify the Wimpey you used on that raid?
3. Are you able to give any clues about what the "unbelievable" occurrence was?
4. Can you provide dates and aircraft details for the other four events you describe?
5. Can you identify everyone in your crew please?
6. When did you join 9 Squadron?
7. Which OTU did you attend before joining the Squadron?
8. Did you complete a full tour?
9. Where did you go after that?
10. When did you leave the air force?
11. What rank were you on demob?

Answers

1) First 1,000-bomber raid May 30/31 1942. As part of the "pathfinder" group, 9 Squadron and 5 others had the job of lighting up the various target areas. Half our squadron were equipped with loads of flares to light up the general areas. We, equipped with loads of incendiaries, were able to identify the target from flares that lit up as we approached. I congratulated myself on completing my 30th op according to the record board in the crew room. Naturally we did not wait around to see how the main force was doing. We followed the Rhine south-west for a time, then turned north for home. At that point an engine seized up. From then the unbelievable occurred. To protect one crew member I have never reported anything despite that misleading reports have been published.

2) My logbook disappeared while I was a POW so cannot cite aircraft registration. I do remember

seeing it in one of the books on bomber command. If it turns up I will let you know.

3) There is much more to this story so I will be as brief as possible. After leaving the target area we flew up the Rhine, then turned for home. At that time our port engine stopped with a loud bang. I was not aware of enemy action at the time. I believe lack of oil was the problem. The pilot, Langton, lost control and, trying to regain control lost most of our height. On attaining stability (under 3000 ft.) I gave Langton a course for Manston Shortly after I noticed that he had changed this by about 7 degrees to the north. His explanation was that he was allowing for distance covered while bringing the aircraft under control. These were the last words he spoke. Soon after he was huddled over the control column, airspeed just above stalling point but keeping an approximate course. I warned him he was "mushing" but he was completely unresponsive. I had already let Johnson out of the front turret and warned the gunners to jettison guns and other equipment. By now we were close to the ground and heading toward a large farmhouse. I reached over and grabbed the control column against the weight of Langton. The aircraft stalled immediately and a wing dropped.....I picked myself up, then noticed Howarth walking to me (about 40 ft from the wreckage). He was followed by Johnson. (The three of us and the wreckage were less than 20 feet from the house. A door opened and the farmer let us in and let us clean up minor abrasions. A language problem ensued. I recognized Dutch and I did the talking mostly in German and sign language. Anyhow the farmer (and neighbours who had arrived) would not allow us to go out in search of Langton and Pexman in case we might set the plane alight. It was agreed that one of the men should go out and search. He returned shortly, indicating by running his hand across his throat, that both were dead.

4) Incident 1: October 23rd 1941, returning from Kiel. Caught in searchlights north of Hamburg we were attacked by a fighter. Dazzled, the gunners could not respond. Pilot Ian Pearson stalled and dived out of danger. The resting 2nd pilot was Sgt. Silver

Incident 2: November 1st 1941, returning from Kiel. Attacked by fighter off Sylt. Gunners responded strongly. e/a last seen diving into clouds; possible victory. Our port wing was alight. Self-sealing tank sealed after a loss of about 50 gallons of fuel. Fire was extinguished.

Incident 3: March 28th 1942, heading for Lubeck. Attacked by fighter when "coned" Pilot escaped from searchlights.

Mid North Sea. Second pilot headed back to cot for rest. After quite a time I moved forward beside pilot. A little later pilot climbed down and signalled me to take over, which I did, assuming that he knew that I had flying experience. On his way back he noticed the vacant observer's position, assuming that he was taking an astro shot or resting. After a while he awakened the sleeper, saying "don't you think you should go back to your navigating?" The two gazed at each other in the half-light, then realised that the two pilots were together at the rear of the aircraft. Shortly after no. 1 appeared, waving his arms and signalling me to climb down.

Mining in Baltic. Being averse to surprises we managed to provoke a flak-ship into revealing its position by firing. This told us that it was close to our dropping point. Our gunners were briefed on action when we neared the flak-ship. The moment we dropped our mine all hell broke loose. Within seconds our pilot flew over the flak-ship at 400ft. Our gunners disorientated the flak gunners. We flew off with only minor damage and returned home. Our fellow miners did not return.

On May 27th 1942 We were about to take off on our 10th operation in 22days This was the last straw. The typical operation involved over 12 hours from briefing to reports & breakfast.; after breakfast sleep usually ended at noon. As I entered the aircraft I felt there was something very wrong Our pilot Ian Pearson (Ex Imperial Airways) was extremely exhausted. I had also notice ominous symptoms with our W/Op & rear gunner. I climbed back down again and demanded to be

taken to the CO – Wg Cdr Inness. I explained the situation and called for the MO; Inness agreed. The MO agreed with me and the three were sent on leave. I awaited arrest on a charge of mutiny. The MO had, however, brought Group into the matter. The result was that the CO was removed shortly after. (He had not flown on any operation with the squadron). I was not court-martialled but was commissioned two weeks later! Wing Commander Inness never again commanded an operational unit.

Great Escape: Provided kitbag for air pump; scanned Berlin, Frankfurt & Hamburg newspapers daily, occasionally Vienna, for data on transport & communications for intelligence committee. Awarded space as escaper. Although carrying papers as Dutch worker my number was too high (about 130).

Refresher course. None of us attended. It was about current affairs about which we felt sufficiently informed.

5) Crew: Sgt. Langton (pilot), P/O-flew as F /Sgt G.T. Welsh (observer), Jack Howarth (w/op), John Johnson (front gunner), Pexman (rear gunner).

6) Joined 9 Squadron in October 1941.

7) OTU - Benson.

8) According to 9 Squadron scoreboard this was my 30th operation. We did complete our assignment but did not return to base. I don't know whether this one counts.

9) After our crash we set off to find the "Underground". This proved difficult. We soon found we were in a Flemish area of Belgium. An RC priest warned the Germans where we were. After a few days we were captured by a German Infantry regiment while seeking medical help for Howarth. We were turned over to the Luftwaffe who sent us off to Stalag Luft 3.

2 years, 11 months later we were back home.

QED.

PS

Langton had suffered head and arm injuries and was repatriated a few months later after a long hospital stay. Pexman expected we would crash land and turned his turret for easy exit. There was no time to warn him of our action and he was thrown out, colliding with a tailplane. He survived the crash but died in hospital soon after.

PS

Later, Langton was interviewed by sundry writers and journalists. His published stories of the above events are totally false.

10 & 11. My last day of service was in January 1946. My rank was Flight Lieutenant.