WO Donald Keith Fraser

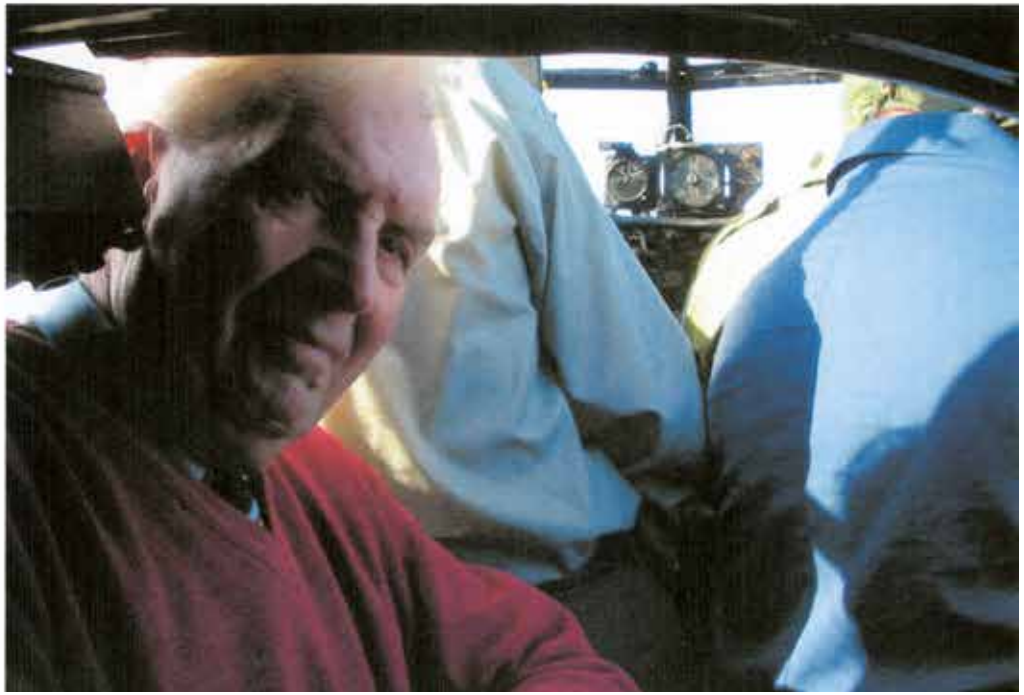
DFM 1566621

101 Squadron
July 1943 – March 1944

Crew name: WL Evans


HM QUEEN ELIZABETH
UNVEILED THIS MEMORIAL
28 JUNE
IN THE YEAR OF HER DIAMOND JUBILEE
2012

Contents



Introduction

Over the past 50 to 60 years I have enjoyed reading many books about bomber crews who flew with Bomber Command during World War II especially during the period from mid July 1943 until the end of the war. These books contained many accounts of true grit and heroism carried out by crew members. There are, however, a few experiences recalled which appear doubtful, a number of reported instances which are far-fetched or quite ridiculous to have suggested could have occurred.

Crews of the heavy bombers normally consisted of seven crew members all of whom were well trained to carry out specific tasks and as a team made up a competent crew capable of carrying out the various operations asked of them.

Operations were normally carried out over Europe (mainly to Germany) targets being the main industrial areas, factories, railway junctions and yards and eventually towns and cities, such as Berlin, Hanover, Hamburg, Leipzig, Frankfurt to name a few, all of which by 1943 the inhabitants were heavily involved in production for the German war effort.

The Bomber crews objectives were to carry out the operations they flew on to reach the target, drop their bombs and return home safely with their aircraft undamaged. Remember all these young men were volunteers, highly trained with the Pilot usually the “Skipper” and Captain, this was not to say that he gave all the orders and that no crew member acted until he gave that order. The Flight Engineer and Wireless Operator were the most mobile within the aircraft, therefore, if a situation occurred within the fuselage either or both could intervene by giving a quick call to the “Skipper”, or should a fault occur with the engine, the Flight Engineer would usually be the first to notice and carry out the essential remedy while informing the Pilot of the situation with procedure carried out. For a crew to be efficient and confident they had to be alert at all times, watching, listening and acting immediately. Survival required a highly trained crew team with loads of confidence in one’s self and in the other crew members and in the aircraft, so giving them a very strong attitude to press on.

A dedicated, loyal and skilful ground crew, a strong reliance in the Almighty (or what faith one had) and with very importantly more than normal, good luck, having lady luck on your side.

I have therefore put on paper a few experiences which happened to our crew while flying over Germany during mid 1943 to mid 1944. The following are not from diaries – they are what I recall after a long time. The experiences are genuine, the timing may be a little out, but to the reader it will still show the excitement, the pressure, sometimes fear, but above all the confidence and determination the crew had to carry out the task involved and return back to base with a full crew still intact.

A question I have been asked many times “why did you enjoy flying and with such odds against staying alive?” My answer, I loved flying, I enjoyed the excitement and I volunteered. I also liked the thought of coming back to base to a good meal and I felt safe and secure in my sometimes cold bed with its nice white sheets, compared to the Army personnel who

worked under much more difficult conditions not knowing when they would eat or sleep and under conditions just as dangerous as ours, in fact, in many, more so.

By the end of writing I hope that I provide you with some idea of what these then young crew members of Bomber Command endured when flying over Germany for 6 to 7½ hours at a time in a Lancaster bomber with around 2,000 gallons of fuel stored in tanks in the wings and with up to five tons of bombs slung under their feet along the fuselage, travelling at 250 miles an hour in the dark at 20-21,000 feet in height with temperatures of from -10 to 20^{o}C below zero and with German fighters trying to shoot them down and with anti-aircraft guns (which could be very accurate) also trying to blow them up, just to make our journey a little more scary at times to find that on returning when we reached the English coastline that it was covered in thick cloud and dense fog making it almost impossible to find somewhere to land. Some of the words most suited to express the emotions of the crew in certain situations could be excited, interesting, scary, fear, relief, apprehensive and difficult.

I think, however, that the Brylcream boys done a very good job all these years ago.

Happy days!

Chapter B
Prior to World War II

1919-1939

The First World War ended in 1919 after four years of fighting and with a very heavy loss of life on both sides. Those who were lucky enough to survive and return home found it extremely difficult to find employment.

The Government had created some opportunities by forming the Forestry Commission with the role to establish over the coming fifty years a supply of timber sufficient to make the UK self sufficient in wood requirements. This was to be created by the purchase of large areas of land, mainly in Scotland and North England (cheap less productive land) then cultivating and planting this land with conifer species. To achieve this management had to be trained and forestry workers had to be recruited.

Forestry schools were established throughout England and Scotland to educate and train management staff. One such school was opened at Dunkeld in Central Scotland where a Mr Simpson received his training and he afterwards took up the post of Nursery Manager at Tulliallan Nursery, Kincardine on the Forth.

During the war the larger estates had suffered from the lack of gamekeepers and staff to carry out the maintenance and control of vermin etc, therefore there were many vacancies for people interested to fill these posts. My father and two of his brothers did just that, they became keepers on some of the very large estates in Scotland.

My father and mother were married shortly after the war and he took up an appointment as a game keeper on a large estate near Stirling, where my sister Jean and elder brother Sandy were born. In 1923 he moved to take up Keepering on Tulliallan Estate near Kincardine. The family lived in the East Lodge which was situated adjacent to the main road from Kincardine to Dunfermline and next to the land belonging to the Forestry Commission nursery. This is where I was born on 24th August 1923. Two years later the family again moved, this time to take on the position of head keeper on Donibristle Estate and lived in the small village of Auchtertool, Fifeshire where my two younger sisters, Betty and Mary were born. These were from what little I can recall, were happy times, the family did not have much spare cash but had sufficient to satisfy the family needs.

Mr Simpson lost part of his right arm during the first War and had an artificial part fitted. In 1949 I joined the Forestry Commission Research Branch and guess where I was stationed, at Tulliallan Nursery and Mr Simpson was still there. He told me that when my father left the East Lodge in 1925 he bought his hens and chickens from him. In 1950 the Forestry Commission built around 20 houses for its staff some 400 yards west of the East Lodge and Sylvia and myself were lucky enough to have one of them. Mr Simpson played an important role in our lives over the next 30 years, however this is another story.

Moray estate during the winter months arranged a number of pheasant shoots to which a number of friends and associates of the Lairds (The Earl of Moray) were invited to attend.

The 29th January 1929 was one of those days and the shoot covered the area which my father was responsible for. The morning started with rain, however the shoot commenced and the guns and beaters started with good success. A good number of birds were raised and shot, as the day continued the weather became worse and by lunchtime, thunder and lightning had started so it was decided to call the shoot off. During the morning a few birds had been shot, but had not been collected by the dogs so my father with his two spaniels decided he would retrace the morning route and see if he could collect lost birds. The weather continued to deteriorate, while he was crossing a fence he was hit by lightning. As the day went on and he had not returned the other two keepers decided they would go and look for him. They found him where he lay by the fence with his two dogs nearby. This was a terrible and tragic day for all concerned, my mother with five children all under the age of 11, no house and little money coming in to support the family. My mother did have two sisters who stayed in Edinburgh and who visited fairly regularly and helped all they could with the family. The estate owner, the Earl of Moray and the Estate Factor were very helpful and within a week or two, arranged for the family to move to Aberdour where they gave us a house with a fairly large garden (this became quite a good asset especially when the War came).

I was told when I was much older that at the time there was much talk about what should happen to the family the suggestion being that the family should be split up with the three girls staying with mum and the two boys (Sandy and myself) being placed with other people possibly with a relative or with other people. Our mother strongly disagreed and said none of the family would leave they would stay together. I believe that my mother made the right decision, had the family been split up, our lives would have been totally different and not for the better in my opinion.

These were hard times for our mother (in those days there was not the same support or financial assistance available to call on as there is today) however somehow our mum managed to sort things out and keep all the family together. Unfortunately we as children were too young to contribute in the way of bringing in money to the home, our mum was a very likeable person and soon made friends and was extremely capable of working to earn money, she turned her hand to doing housework and helping people in their homes and for two days each week helping in Donibristle Estate house, which meant a fairly long walk to get there (one mile each way).

She and her sisters were always very happy smiling people always ready for a joke, this helped to make life much better for everyone. She still had friends on the estate and the whole family occasionally in an evening would take a walk of around three miles to visit Mr and Mrs Linton, he also was a gamekeeper on the estate.

Our mum was also a good Christian and attended church fairly regularly and also enjoyed attending some of the concerts and meetings held in the village hall, she also was a member of the WI.

The estate was very good to the family we received twice a year a load of fire wood, which myself and Sandy would chop up into suitable sizes to use on the fire. In the Spring the estate workers would come to dig over the garden and planted potatoes which helped greatly, this meant that all we (Sandy and I) had to do was keep the garden free from weeds and hill up the potatoes and plant some vegetables.

As time moved on and we the children grew older all by the age of eight or nine years managed to find jobs. Sandy and myself delivering milk before going to school and then delivering groceries after school and at weekends Jean our oldest sister assisted in the Cooperative grocery shop. This of course all helped to bring in some money.

The school leaving age at that time was 15. We all attended Aberdour school initially. At the age of 11 the choice was either moving to Burtisland school which was a technical college or go to Dunfermline high school, both schools were a distance away from Aberdour and required travelling by bus. All the girls, Jean, Betty and Mary enjoyed Dunfermline High, while Sandy and myself went to the technical school. We all got excellent grades in the exams. I left school in 1938 at a time when the job situation was very limited with little choice. I had two interests, first to be a forester, my dream being to see all the high elevation land covered with trees as it was during much earlier times and take part in that operation. Secondly to become an Engineer.

I applied for two jobs, one on the Moray Estates to become a trainee forester, the other to become an apprentice mechanic with a garage company in Kirkcaldy.

Both replied and I decided to take up the forestry appointment. This proved very enjoyable and I loved the variety of jobs and gained volumes of experience working with two brothers, Bob and Will Ewan. Will Ewan was foreman and took a liking to me and gave me all the encouragement and opportunities to carry out everything which was available. The Second World War commenced on the 3rd September 1939 and when I was 17½ years old I volunteered to join the RAF on flying duties and became a flight engineer. So in the end I got both my dreams to come true. After the war being demobbed in 1946, I took up an appointment to become a probationer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. In 1948 I joined the Forestry Commission Research Branch.

Chapter C
Joined RAF 23rd July 1942

The Second World War started on 3rd September 1939. I'm not going into details regarding the reasons why Britain thought it necessary to do so as I believe most people know the reasons.

Prior to the war during the summers of 1937 and 1938 the Territorial Army held their camps on the outskirts of Aberdour on grass fields owned by Mill Farm, which was situated adjacent to the Sheriff Road. To us as youngsters it was exciting and interesting to see double rows of horses tethered along a single rope and the troops living under canvas in large tents. To see the different tartans depending on which regiment was resident in camp at the time, such as The Black Watch, The Camerons or The Gordons.

They were the first troops to be called up for service followed by people from certain professions and the general public of different age classes, one had to be 18 years old before being recruited.

All three services required recruits and there was a certain agreement of allowing people to join the service of their choice, however, if one service was short of personnel then recruits had no choice but to go where sent.

I was sixteen years old when the war started and when my time came to be called up I wished to join the RAF and, if possible, to fly on reaching my 17th birthday. I decided I would volunteer for the RAF on flying duties. Volunteers usually were given the opportunity to serve in the service of their choice.

I recall discussing the war with a few of my colleagues and suggesting that this war would change the face of Europe, and would also change all our lives completely if we survived.

I was called up on 23rd July 1942; my orders were to report to Warrington Recruitment Centre. My stay there was for two days where I, along with many more of my own age were fitted out with uniform and all other necessities. We then travelled to Blackpool to commence our training and embark on a flight mechanics course.

Blackpool like many other seaside resorts had many private residences available (usually used as holiday accommodation or bed and breakfast), these were now being used to accommodate RAF recruits.

I with others was billeted in Montague Street, South Shore near to the South Shore beach. This turned out to be excellent, the landlady treated us extremely well, and we each had our own bedroom and facilities. She had to supply us with breakfast and evening meal, and normal washing facilities. In fact for all the time I was in Blackpool, which was just under a year I stayed there, the RAF supplied our towels etc. In fact two evenings a week we had what was called 'shower parades'. In total there was near 10,000 RAF personnel billeted in

the town, so through the town certain buildings such as baths or swimming pool areas were converted into showers, rows and rows of showers with dressing accommodation alongside.

The recruits such as ourselves were divided into groups of between 40 and 50 and each group had a corporal in charge, he was in charge of all our activities such as the shower parade. We had to assemble at a point near to our billet on certain evenings each week. The corporal would march us to the showers then afterwards march us back, he was also responsible for us on all other activities.

The course of flight mechanic was a very intensive course covering both theory and practical work. This was carried out at Squires Gate near St Anne's, three miles east of Blackpool and was originally a small airport. The hangers were converted to workshops for training purposes.

We were transported in bus convoys daily, morning and evening to and from the base with our same corporal, Lofty Clark, in charge. We also carried out the usual training and skills necessary to be a good soldier including physical training, assault course, rifle drill and route marches. Most of these were carried out on the area around the South Shore pleasure ground. The mechanics course lasted for five months. At the end of each fortnight we had verbal exams and after six weeks written exams, each exam had to be passed before one could move on. If I remember all our group passed their exams.

After the mechanics course we were given two weeks leave and on return commenced on a fitters course, which lasted a further five months, the same routine as previously. What I forgot to say, we had a break in the morning and afternoon when the NAAFI vans arrived serving a bun and a cup of tea.

By the end of the further course we were capable of dismantling an aircraft engine and reassembling it with success. We also had a basic knowledge of the aircraft workings at this stage before moving onto the next stage of our training, the flight engineer course.

We were divided into those who would be flying on Halifaxs and those who would fly on Lancasters, fortunately I was selected to fly on Lancasters.

Blackpool was a fairly good place to be stationed at, as with its many parks there was always plenty of opportunity to play sport, which was very much encouraged by the RAF. I spent most weekends playing either football or rugby; in fact for the 1942-3 season I played rugby for Blackpool's third team. There was little time in evenings for anything, as I said two nights were taken up with shower parade, then most weeks a further two nights for other activities. Every Sunday there was a church parade, one had to attend the parade but not the service if it was not your religion. Most places in Blackpool were closed, however, the lower levels of the tower were still open and I remember the organ was still being played and the ballroom was open at certain times.

For the flight engineers course those of us that were to fly on Lancasters were transferred to St Athans, South Wales. The course was originally intended to last eight weeks however, on arrival we were told that flight engineers were in such short supply that the course was being crammed into two weeks. To enable this to happen we worked a 12-hour day, seven days each week, however, the course was a success and we all knew the basics about the Lancaster workings, although we still had not flown in a Lancaster.

At the end of the course we were split up into groups of six and told to report to a certain Air Training Unit. I had to report to Lindholme near Doncaster, where other members of crew which included pilot, navigator, bomb aimer, mid upper gunner and rear gunner were already

at Lindholme operating as a crew for a period of four weeks awaiting for flight engineers to become available.

On arrival we were introduced to our crews and the following day we were flying as a complete crew, however, not on Lancasters (Lancasters were too scarce to be used on training duties). We flew on Halifax, this was a heavy bomber and gave the pilot the opportunity and experience of flying heavy aircraft. We continued training and flying at Lindholme for a further week.

As a complete crew and along with one other crew from the same course at Lindholme we were posted to 101 Squadron which was based at Ludford Magna seven miles west of Louth Lincolnshire. This was a recently built airfield; the runways and perimeter roads were complete along with the aircraft stand pods. Accommodation was nissen huts as were the messes. Roads and paths around the areas were still not laid; Wellington boots were the order of the day.

Chapter D
Ludford 101 Squadron

Ludford Magna

Ludford Magna, a small village situated on the main road between Louth and Market Rasen, was to change dramatically as the area was chosen to be the site for one of the new warfare RAF bomber airfields. Work commenced in spring 1943 and by May the airfield was ready for occupation however, as with many other war built sites, many buildings were far from being useable.

The airfield had three runways with the main runway, which was two thousand yards long from north to south. The other two runways were 14 hundred yards, one of which ran east to west. They were all connected by a narrow perimeter track of which there were 36 standing pods. All personnel accommodation was nissen hut type buildings and erected on the north side of the main road running through the village, some distance from the main airfield.

101 Squadron took over occupation of the airfield in late June but even then there were no hardcore paths leading to the billets or the ablution blocks. This meant that travelling to and from billets or airfield, the only serviceable footwear was rubber boots. We as a crew arrived in late July and I remember squelching in the mud around the base and when it rained circumstances were even worse, and it did rain quite a bit during the autumn and winter hence the airfield got the nickname of Mudford (instead of Ludford) and was well deserved.

On days when operations were planned the routine was briefing which was held at a certain time when all crew members met in the briefing room where the CO (Comanding Officer) addressed the crews stating which crews were flying and which if any were on standby in case any crew members were unable to fly.

The CO would then open the curtains on the wall covering the maps and the target, after which the various heads of section gave details of weather expected on route over target and on return, also bomb load, fuel load and any other relative information such as height levels expected to be flown at by the different aircraft. Lancasters usually flew at one or two thousand feet higher than the Halifax, which would be flying at around 19,000 feet.

It was most important for 101 Squadron to keep strictly to the timing and height levels as with ABC (Airborne Cigar equipment) on board, 101 Squadron crews task was to cover the rest of the bombers flying on the operation, along the route to the target, through the target and on the return route. Example, if the target time was 20 minutes for all aircraft to pass through the target and if 101 Squadron had 22 aircraft flying, each aircraft would be allocated a time through the target of one minute apart.

This put considerable pressure on the navigator and pilot, the route was always discussed among the crew members such as pilot, bomb aimer and engineer in order to help and assist the navigator to stay on course such as any landmarks, heavy barrage of ack ack or search

lights, as these would usually mean certain industrial areas, towns or cities. Also if weather conditions were good possibly a certain bend on a river or railway, or road crosses, these markers were always very helpful to the navigator to keep him on course and on time.

All crew members had different personalities we all, however, accepted that we were professionals and some of the best in our trades, and that belief and the fact that we worked extremely well as a crew. We trusted each other's judgement and carried out the requirements without question.

The crew (our crew) was organised similar to a football team we had a captain in our pilot Wally and with a few key team players who had the ability to carry out other members' duties. They were Navigator, Jimmy, could act as bomb aimer, Eric our bomb aimer had sufficient knowledge of navigation to bring the aircraft home, and myself as engineer could in an emergency takeover and fly and land the aircraft. The gunners were the crewmembers most out of touch with the others. In my position I could watch their turrets for movement and could keep in touch with them, and if for any reason their turrets were not moving I could give them a call. I could easily see the mid upper gunner Bill and see the rear gunner guns Len when they turned to port.

Eric our bomb aimer lounged in the front compartment of the aircraft on lookout for other aircraft and to aid the navigator, his map reading was spot on, and he liked to give a commentary of what was happening leading up to the target – such sayings as men it's bloody marvellous, we are bang on time over the target, then this was his time he was in control, he was very precise with his left slightly, right a little, hold it there, left a little. I would be watching for other aircraft and for fighters, and as he said on this occasion that it was over Berlin I said hold it Eric another Lanc is just passing immediately beneath us. He said: *"I have missed the target we will have to go round again"*. In this situation Eric was in control and Wally our pilot even with a few strong words said to Jimmy our navigator *"give us a new course to bring us round again"*. There were the occasional shouts from the gunners such as *"fighter on port, eleven o'clock"* or *"watch that search light"* or *"collision between Lanc and Halifax – no parachutes, poor bastards"*. The wireless operator Norman (Nobby) was good at his job he never panicked. Nobby could obtain bearings when others couldn't. I think he did naughty things on the frequencies to get priority. He had the warmest place on the aircraft.

Jimmy our navigator was superb, conscientious, every course had to be accurate and everything he did he gave a reason for his decision. Wally our pilot would discuss with him the situation for the change of course and automatically changed course. Wally was an excellent pilot, steady and a good captain and we worked well together, we the crew called him our taxi driver. Taking off with a full bomb load and possibly two thousand gallons of fuel was the most nervous part of the trip, after receiving the green light he would taxi onto the runway, line up, test the engines remembering we had probably some waiting for five to ten minutes, with slow engine revolutions which could overheat the engines. We together would open up the four throttles when the engines were screaming he would release the brakes and the aircraft would start rolling along the runway. When we reached the 90+ speed he would require both his hands on the controls and I would push the throttle controls fully forward, keeping the port engines throttles slightly ahead of the starboard engines throttles, as I found that the Lancaster tended to veer to the port on take off or nearing the end of the runway. If we were still on the ground I would push all four throttles through the barrier, this gave the extra power we only used this in extreme cases, as it was hard on the engines and used extra fuel. Once in the air Wally would say *"undercarriage up"* then *"flaps up"* and we would start climbing on a spiral course until we reached the height of around ten thousand

feet before setting course on our operation. I would adjust engines to obtain speed required with minimum revs.

As I previously said 101 Squadron operated ABC, which meant we carried an eighth member of crew. A specialist, his job was to jam German radio transmissions to the night fighters' ground based controllers, his operating place was just behind the main part of the port side about 6 ft square with no external vision. It was said that these members had no one crew to fly with and were allocated a crew on an operation base, this maybe true however we were a very organised crew and this arrangement did not apply. We therefore were allocated Ken as a crewmember and he flew with us during the remainder of our tour.

101 Squadron radio call was for aircraft 'Bookworm', control tower 'Bookshop'.

Returning to after briefing was completed we returned to the mess where a meal was always arranged which consisted of a main course of egg, bacon and chips. We then dressed into our flying kit, collected our parachute and made our way to the crew room where we collected our flying rations, these consisted of sandwiches, Horlicks tablets chewing gum and a flask of coffee or tea. If you wished wakey wakey pills to help keep you awake while flying (none of our crew ever indulged in these) we also collected a package containing money and maps of the countries over which we would be flying on the chance that we may be shot down.

After a few operations, the crew was allocated our own aircraft, for us X^2 the dispersal point was quite a way round the perimeter track and close to the road. The aircraft was parked facing away from the road and perimeter fence so when Mac our ground crew sergeant in charge of X^2 and his colleagues required to clean their dirty, oily boilersuits they would wash them in a can of fuel and hang them on the fence behind the aircraft, then when the engines were tested the slipstream would blow dry their clothes.

There was usually four or five technicians allocated to each aircraft with either a corporal or sergeant in charge. They were a grand bunch of lads, dedicated and had to work in the open under all various weather conditions from high summer temperatures to severe cold and winter weather conditions. They also had a remarkable collection of spare parts hidden away in their crew hut, which they built up over time from broken Lancasters. This enabled them to carry out repairs and patch up any enemy damage that had been inflicted on the aircraft. This meant that the aircraft could be kept serviceable and ready for action without delay and not having to ground the aircraft while waiting for spares from the stores.

Chapter E
Operation Dates and Targets

Operations 101 Squadron 1943-44

Operation	Date	Place
1	20th August 1943	Leverkusen.
2	30th-31st August 1943	Munchen Gladbach.
0	31st Aug-1st Sept 1943	(Abortive) Berlin. Starboard outer feathered, landed on three engines.
3	3rd-4th September 1943	Berlin. Held in searchlights for five minutes.
4	23rd-24th September 1943	Mannheim.
5	29th-30th September 1943	Bochum.
6	2nd-3rd October 1943	Munich. Shot up over Amiens landed Tangmere.
7	5th-6th October 1943	Hanover.
8	20th-21st October 1943	Leipzig. Electrical problems.
9	3rd-4th November 1943	Düsseldorf.
10	10th-11th November 1943	Modane. Fuel shortage, landed Tangmere.
11	18th-19th November 1943	Berlin.
12	22nd-23rd November 1943	Berlin. Rear turret frozen up.
13	26th-27th November 1943	Berlin.
14	16th-17th December 1943	Berlin. Heavy losses fog on return. Many fighter flares around target area.
15	20th-21st December 1943	Frankfurt.
16	24-25th December 1943	Berlin. Rear turret u/s starboard outer feathered.
17	29th-30th December 1943	Berlin.
18	1st-2nd January 1944	Berlin.
19	2nd-3rd January 1944	Berlin. Mug passed out through lack of oxygen.
20	5th-6th January 1944	Stettin. Best photo in bomber command.
21	15th-16th January 1944	Brunswick.
22	27th-28th January 1944	Berlin.
23	28th-29th January 1944	Berlin.
24	15th-16th February 1944	Berlin.
25	19th-20th February 1944	Leipzig. Heaviest losses in group.
26	20th-21st February 1944	Stuttgart.
27	24th-25th February 1944	Schweinfurt. Best photo in group.
28	25th-26th February 1944	Augsburg.
29	1st-2nd March 1944	Stuttgart.

Chapter F
101 Squadron
Notes on Various Operations

In late July 1943 after completing my flight engineer course and joining the other crew members at conversion unit Lindholme near Doncaster, with two other crews we arrived at 101 Squadron based at Ludford Magna. The crews were always known by the name of the pilot and out of the three crews that arrived, two crews had the name of Evans; W L Evans and A H Evans. I was the flight engineer assigned to W L Evans's crew and had flown with them at conversion unit, however, the records had been mixed up and showed me as flight engineer to A H Evans's crew. The simplest method of resolving the problem would have been for me to join A H Evans's crew and the other flight engineer to join W L Evans's crew. W L Evans, however, said definitely not, I was his engineer and in no way was I not flying in his crew, the records were therefore corrected.

For the next three weeks we worked as a crew getting to know each other and familiarising ourselves with the aircraft. When we were told that we were to be on operations we had flown 33 hours in total, 12 of which was night flying.

Both crews flew, our first operation was on 22nd-23rd August 1943, the target was Leverkusen. There was of course much excitement among us and especially when at briefing the curtains covering the maps on the wall were opened and we saw the target, we were the new bods not knowing what to expect. We listened carefully to what was being said by the various Heads of Section regarding the weather, hot spots to miss along the route, where fighters could be expected and where flak would be very heavy.

Leverkusen was a German town situated in the near proximity of the Ruhr Germany's main industrial centre, where a high percentage of their heavy equipment was made. The Ruhr had been visited many times and considerable damage carried out which helped delay their war equipment this was an operation to attack specific targets, which would further upset and delay their war effort.

After briefing we returned to the mess for a meal, which usually consisted of egg, bacon and chips. Takeoff was scheduled for around 21:30 hours so before that we had to collect our parachutes rations and packet containing money, maps etc to cover the countries over which we would be flying in case we had to bail out.

We then changed into flying kit before catching the crew bus out to our aircraft. The next task was to carry out the pre-flying checks on the aircraft, then start the engines.

Wally then taxied the aircraft along the perimeter track towards the takeoff runway, waiting in the queue for the aircraft in front to obtain the green light to takeoff. Then our turn, green light given, we turn onto the runway, line up at the end, carry out the formal checks between pilot and engineer. Wally our pilot and skipper then holds on the brake as I open up the four

throttles, pushing the port two slightly ahead of the starboard two, let brake off and feel the aircraft rush along the runway increasing speed rapidly (this was the most exciting part of the operation as far as I was concerned).

As the throttles are fully opened and as the end of the runway is nearing, the heavy aircraft laden with fuel and bombs leaves the tarmac behind. Relief. Pilot: "*undercarriage up*" engineer "*undercarriage up*, *brakes on off*". Pilot "*flaps up*", engineer "*flaps up*". As the undercarriage and flaps are raised you could feel the plane sink a little before starting to climb. Pilot to navigator: "*course and speed, and height*". I would then reduce throttle to minimum revs to produce power sufficient to keep climbing at the speed asked for, then as far as possible synchronise the four engines to cut out unnecessary noise. The noise from four Merlin engines was a noise that you never forget.

Taking off and managing to get this large aircraft off the ground safely while possibly carrying two thousand gallons of fuel stored in the wings and a full bomb load under your feet, as I said previous, was always the most exciting part of the operation as far as I was concerned and I always marvelled at Wally's skills in achieving this without any mishaps. I was always relieved, happy and knew that everything would be all right until we had to do it all again on the next operation.

We had no troubles with our landing at base on return from Leverkusen, taxied to our parking space, caught a crew bus which took us to the debriefing room where we received a nice hot cup of tea or coffee with a spot of rum in if wanted. The debriefing consisted of an Intelligence Officer asking a number of questions about what we saw on route, anything unusual, search light positions around built up areas, flak, fighter activity. Did we see any planes being shot down and did we see any parachutes appearing and anything else, which may be of interest.

We were then able to return to the mess for breakfast. While having breakfast, A H Evans and crew arrived, we had a few words regarding the operation and made our way back to our billet for a few hours sleep, luckily it was coming up to high moon period so for the next ten days there were no operations.

The second operation, which both crews were on, was to Munchen Gladbach on 30th and 31st August, we had another fairly quiet trip without any problems and landed safely on time at Base. We heard that two planes were late, one of which was A H Evans, we held on at breakfast hoping to hear some news. News came through that a SR Lancaster had landed further south due to fuel shortage, it turned out not to be A H Evans and crew. The following day we heard the dreaded news that A H Evans's crew was reported missing and presumably shot down. This was later confirmed.

This was a new experience for us to know that seven young men who we had been friendly with, even for a short time, were no longer around. The engineer had come through the same training as myself – mechanic course fitters course at Blackpool – followed by flight engineers course at St Athans, then crewing up at Lindholme. He was slightly older than myself therefore not in my squad although I did know him on the course to say hello, and as you know both crews joined 101 Squadron on the same day and I almost changed places with him.

The same routine was followed each time we took off and continued to be the most anxious time and possibly the most scary and nervous moments of each operation. We soon realised that each operation was different with its own hazards and that flying over Europe for however short or long a period, it was a very dangerous and frightening place to be.

The normal procedure for all aircraft after takeoff was to start to gain height, circling the area until reaching a height of around 10,000 ft before setting course for the target. Around the Lincoln area there were at least 20 airfields, each with at least 20 aircraft flying on each operation, that was why the residents living in the area knew when operations were on by the noise of 400 planes all circling to gain height. Once a course was set we tried to reach a height of at least 15,000 ft before crossing the enemy coast.

There were certain things that we had no control over such as the weather, the conditions on route could be quite different from that forecasted. Increased wind speeds, a tail wind instead of a nose wind, these affected the navigator greatly who was trying to stay on route and be at a certain point within the time space of the operation. More so with 101 Squadron, responsible to give protection by using ABC over the full length of the operation. Thunderstorms and heavy clouds could also cause icing up of the engine air intakes and front edge of the wings (remember temperatures could be as low as -20°) and if not dealt with could cause engine failure.

Fog, however, was the most serious problem, thick fog in the UK on return. Blanket fog so thick it was impossible to see anything from the air or the ground, this caused heavy losses of aircraft as returning from flying with low fuel levels, trying to find a landing ground was impossible, for many resulting in heavy losses in aircraft and crews. Conditions improved slightly when FIDO was installed on some runways.

There were hazards from conditions which crews did not expect as the Met weather forecasts had given much more favourable conditions, otherwise we should not have been flying. As soon as we flew over the Dutch coastline we expected to be greeted by flak and if ground conditions were good by enemy fighters, depending on the operations route, flak could be very heavy and accurate especially round the towns and cities. Searchlights then also came into play especially those with the strong blue coloured lights. If caught by one of these it was almost impossible to lose them they were also radar controlled by anti-aircraft guns, which were especially accurate and many aircraft became casualties.

There was also a fair risk of collision bearing in mind that on the route to the target there were possibly between 400 and 600 large aircraft (100 ft wingspan) all travelling in the same direction at the same time, making for the same point and expected to be over the target all within the space of 20 minutes or less (granted there would be a range of heights between some, possibly within a band of 2,000 ft). Think of it as 600 cars travelling along a motorway all doing 70 miles per hour, all expecting to pass point ‘A’ at between 01:00 and 01:20 hours. If congestion occurred the car driver would see and would slow down, there was no way of changing lane or slowing in an aircraft. It was therefore very clear to us as a crew early on that flying over Europe was a very dangerous and frightening place to be and if we were to succeed we had to work as a team, be alert all the time whether for two hours or eight hours. This we managed fairly well, we recognised that the safest place to be was in the middle of the concentration along the route. It was usually those who had strayed off course that were picked off by fighters or became casualties by flak.

Our navigator Jimmy was therefore a very important member of the crew (he was an exceptionally good navigator) the rest of the crew could also help him which we did if conditions were clear telling him of certain markers, such as there is heavy flak ahead to 11 o’clock, or we are just passing over a river with a railway line and road alongside or such like information.

He could then take action if necessary and give a change of course to Wally our pilot, or if we had a strong tail wind ask me to reduce speed slightly. So we had two-way conversation

between key members such as navigator, bomb aimer, pilot and engineer but only with reference to the operation in hand.

The rear and mid upper gunners role was to continually scour the sky by rotating from side to side in their turrets, with one turning to starboard the other turning to port, the bomb aimer controlled the front myself had the only view to watch the gunners and watch ahead and to the sides, while the bomb aimer carried out his other work such as dropping window or preparing for his bombing run, therefore we were fairly well covered. If another aircraft came close or overhead, or below us on our bombing run a crewmember could give the alarm. If a fighter was seen and showing interest then mostly the gunners gave the alarm *"fighter starboard, 2 o'clock, dive now!"*. Wally would dive immediately and carry out a corkscrew manoeuvre then return on to normal course, this usually worked. If for any reason I could see the gunner's turrets not moving I would give them a call, only once was it necessary to take further action (this is recorded later) usually they were just having a short rest or such like.

Fuel was also a concern, petrol was rationed throughout the UK as most of the supplies had to be imported, therefore fuel for aircraft was also closely regulated on Lancasters to 200 gallons per hour flying time. Therefore if the estimated time for an operation was seven hours, fuel allocated was 1,400 gallons plus 200 extra, a total of 1,600 gallons.

The flight engineer therefore did have some control; it was dependent on how efficient he was in regulating the engines (similar to driving, there are good drivers and not so good drivers). The Lancaster had six fuel tanks, three in each wing with the small tank on the outside of the wing which could only be pumped into the middle tank, the other two on each wing could be used in tandem or individually to feed the engines.

It was the engineer's responsibility to use the fuel distribution the most successful way so that whatever happened the maximum fuel was available to keep the engines running. To such ends I fully used the centre tanks each fuelling the two engines on port and starboard when sufficient was used pump tank fuel into tank two, then using fuel evenly from the other two tanks to supply the port and starboard engines.

If anything unforeseen happened such as a tank being damaged from enemy flak or fighter guns, the minimum fuel loss would occur and I could re-adjust my method of usage by opening and closing valves.

All engines could be run from one of the four tanks, this meant keeping a log and recording every ten or fifteen minutes. It was also necessary to record engine temperatures and oil pressure and with experience listening to the noise of the engines could give a good indication of how efficient they were running. Fuel could be saved by making sure that, when possible, the engine revs could be reduced and that other control on the aircraft such as flaps, etc were being used at optimum levels. This saving in fuel could be the difference between touching down safely or not, on the odd occasion when fuel loss occurred from a leaking tank or when on reaching the base area it was under thick fog and extra flying was necessary to find a suitable landing site.

Life on the base was very mixed, flying on operations was usually carried out during the dark nights of the moon and these two weeks could be hectic, operations could be on two consecutive nights resulting in our crew getting to bed at around 05:00 hours and then having to be ready for pre-briefing and head of section meetings, followed by main briefing at 15:00 to 16:00 hours and once again ready for takeoff by 21:30 hours. Other times operations could be scheduled and then cancelled because of possibly extreme weather

conditions over the UK or over the target area. The dark nights were therefore a continual case of being ready to fly when called upon.

The period of high moon was more relaxing. Training and practice still had to be carried out such as bombing practice for Eric; this was carried out on targets set in the North Sea a few miles off shore. Gun practice for Len and Bill carried out on a moving target towed behind a small plane off the coastline.

The station had an excellent gym where one could keep fit which was essential and a very good library of general reading material and technical information. I also spent a considerable amount of time on the simulator improving my flying skills and landing procedures, also the period when crews could have some leave. I always travelled home on these occasions.

We were on base during the autumn (harvest time) as a crew we decided to help the local farmer with stocking and collecting his grain crops as our accommodation Nissen huts were situated near to the farmstead, in return he offered us a pile of fire wood to keep our stove lit during the colder nights as the coke ration was rather limited.

Ludford Magna was a small village supporting two pubs, a post office and a small but very nice church during the 11 months, which I spent at the base. I had never been in either of the pubs. I had attended the church service on a number of occasions.

The Women's Institute also ran a small unit situated on the main street where one could obtain a nice cup of tea and a cake, also within a mile radius there were two small cafes which crew members frequently visited during the day for a tea and a bun.

During off flying periods we as a crew fairly regularly visited the Kings Head Hotel in Louth where we had a meal. Crewmembers also received generous leave, seven days approximately every 6-8 weeks depending on weather and operation timing. We had extra rations of chocolate, vitamin tablets and cigarettes. On leave from Ludford I always travelled home to Aberdour in Fife, Scotland. It was a long, slow journey, going on leave we usually managed to go by transport from the base then catch a train at Louth to Grantham where we could catch the train on the main line travelling between London and Edinburgh. This was usually an overnight train and usually very packed by other military personnel doing the same. The train usually reached Edinburgh during the night or very early morning then another wait to catch a train to Aberdour. The conditions occurred on the return journey unfortunately the train reached Louth early in the morning when no such transport was available; it was then a seven mile walk back to base.

Leave was a time to catch up with family and friends and especially to catch up with sleep and to chill out and rest. I said earlier that we did have good rations of sweets, chocolates and cigarettes which I usually was able to take some home.

During the winter 1943/44 we had several days of heavy snow and naturally this added to the mud when it melted, it also meant that to keep operational the runways and perimeter tracks had to be cleared of snow, every available person, air crews and ground crews, armed with spades and shovels turned out to clear the snow. We were treated with the odd drop of rum to keep the cold out and our spirits up, and to keep us digging.

Our billet nissen huts had snowdrifts around them, these Nissen huts were unlined and in bad weather there was considerable condensation inside and this used to run in the corrugations of the sheeting and if the temperature was cold enough, it would freeze. We did have heating in the form of a round pot stove with chimney from top of the stove up through

the roof. Coal or anthracite was the main fuel, it was of course rationed and in short supply. There were raids between huts to obtain extra supplies. The odd chair went missing along with any spare pieces of wood to help out. If you were lucky and had sufficient supply to completely fill up the stove and get it and part of the chimney extremely hot then it would keep the hut warm until the next morning.

During the summer the problems were different, it was earwigs that would climb up the inside of the huts and occasionally drop into beds. I remember one of our crew members, I can't remember who, while sleeping an earwig crawled into his ear and he had to pay a visit to the MO to have it removed. Field mice could also cause annoyance.

Notes on Various Operations

Operation 3
3rd/4th September 1943
Target: Berlin

We had a reasonably quiet trip keeping clear of the various hot spots on route and staying well on course, searchlights were many on the approach to the target with some very powerful blue lights. As we prepared for our bombing run we got caught by one of these powerful lights and no matter what we did we could not lose it, and if we did a further light caught on to us. We were flying at 22,000 ft; Wally decided the best manoeuvre was to put the aircraft into a power dive and loose height quickly.

After four minutes we were down to 18,000 ft and still dazzled by its glare just then a Halifax, which was flying at a much lower altitude, drifted across under us and the light caught on to it, then the Halifax completely exploded. It had received the full blast possibly intended for us. These blue searchlights and guns were radar controlled and worked together.

We reached the target and bombed at the lower level then set for home and had a quiet trip back to base. We were a bit shaken up by what had happened to the Halifax and in future made a mental note to keep well clear of blue searchlights. The navigator noted in his log the position of this light so if possible it could be targeted for special attention.

Operation 6 (705 hours)
2nd-3rd October 1943
Target: Munich

Takeoff time for the operation was 18:45 hours. For us as a crew this was a quiet trip, we had no problems with enemy fighters, searchlights were few and by keeping strictly on course found no problems with ack-ack. We reached the target on time, bombed and started on our way home still without any troubles, then as we thought we were doing well without warning we were shot up by anti aircraft guns near the town of Amiens which caught the underside of the body of the aircraft and along the wings. From this we developed a fuel leak. In trying to evade further damage from the anti aircraft guns Wally put the aircraft into a power dive at around 21,000 ft, trying to pull it out took Wally and myself great strength pulling on the control column, we were down to 5,000 ft when we finally levelled out.
On inspecting the aircraft at Tangmere we found that many of the rivets on the lower side of the wings had been stripped open owing to the strain on the wings caused by the speed in diving, and counted over 80 holes of various sizes along the body and wings however after refuelling the following day we decided the aircraft was airworthy and safe enough to fly back to base where we could have repairs carried out quickly. Mac was not amused when he saw the Lanc X not X² but was pleased that we had brought it back safely for his team to repair it.

Operation 8
19th/20th October
Target: Berlin

During the week previously I had been told that more new Lancasters would be arriving at base and the one with X² as its recognition number would be allocated to our crew and from then on for our use on operations. Up until that date we operated on whichever aircraft was available. Mac, a ground engineer (Sergeant) had arrived on the station in July, until now he was a spare engineer, X² became his charge for all servicing and repairs. We struck up a great relationship between us and after each operation, as soon as possible I would contact Mac and tell him of any problems which we had experienced during the flight. I was thrilled to think I would be the only person operating these engines and I could nurse then whenever possible and be reasonably sure that they had not been misused for no good reason. Mac had warned me that because of the lack of time, the aircraft had been checked and was serviceable, however, he and his team had not yet had the time to check all electrical and hydraulic circuits.

Takeoff was 17:30 hours and all went well until I retracted the undercarriage, it appeared to lift ok but the warning lights indicated that it had not fully locked. We proceeded to circle and climb and as we reached the Dutch coastline Nobby, our wireless operator, was having problems with his equipment, I then had a temperature gauge on one of the engines reading an excessively high temperature. The engine appeared to be working satisfactorily, however, we were still only a short time into our operation. I was concerned what may continue to happen and without radio contact we could have a problem.

We still had a full bomb load on board and high levels of fuel, under these conditions we could not return to base and land without losing our bombs. Wally was in agreement with Jimmy our navigator, they decided that they would set course for Texel and drop our bombs on the installation there. This we did then returned to base. As we had no contact with ground control we landed without permission.

On return before landing, however, we dropped our undercarriage and as the lights were not showing we did do a shallow dive with a quick pull up, this jerked the undercarriage down and all was well. The problems were resolved, the pressure gauge was faulty, meaning the undercarriage was not fully engaging because of limited pressure on the hydraulics.

Operation 10
11th/12th November 1943
Target: Modane

Normally as we have said previously operations were usually carried out during the nights when there was no moon. This was full moon; a beautiful bright night with clear skies which meant that aircraft flying could be seen for great distances. We had no trouble in reaching the target with little or no opposition from enemy fighters, searchlights or flak. Even on the way home it was trouble free and we could see and watch the marvellous sights of the high mountains as we passed over them and then without notice flying over Amiens a blue search light ‘coned’ us, immediately followed by heavy and accurate ack-ack fire which burst very close to us, causing some damage to the underside of the aircraft and to one of the fuel tanks, luckily no crew member was injured.

This was not a great problem it only meant isolating the tank involved, eventually causing a fuel shortage. I said we would not have sufficient fuel to reach base, so Jimmy (our navigator) gave Wally a course for Tangmere in South England where we landed. On checking we found that the aircraft was not too badly damaged around 50 holes of various sizes along the underside of the fuselage and two holes in the side and front window where a piece of shrapnel entered in and out again, as well as cutting a hole in the sleeve of my flying jacket. This I did not know until I was removing my jacket.

The following morning we refuelled and returned to base.

Operation 14 (Black Thursday)
16th-17th December 1943
Target: Berlin

This was supposed to be a very quiet trip as reported at briefing in the late afternoon. The weather was so bad over Europe that no fighters would be able to fly therefore the route would be straight to the capital Berlin, and straight back out – should be a very easy journey, unfortunately things did not turn out this way.

As we crossed over the Dutch coast the weather took a dramatic change and instead of cloud and thick fog, conditions were good for flying and the fighters which were supposed to be sitting on the ground were flying on strength and interrupting the bomber stream, and we noted a few running battles and a number of aircraft being shot down. Within a short time it was clear that this was going to be a night to remember. The attacks continued all the way to the target, fortunately we remained clear of any trouble except for seeing the odd fighter going in the opposite direction.

There was the usual heavy concentration of searchlights and heavy activity of ack ack over the target creating a heavy barrage. We bombed on target and set on our route for home, this proved uneventful for us although we did see a few fighter battles being continued.

The weather by this time was beginning to close in with much more low cloud as a result Wally decided to carry out a gentle decent, reaching the coastline at around 2,000 ft and by this time we knew that there would be trouble with low cloud and fog. We were alerted by base that Ludford was fog-bound and that we should proceed to Driffield, this was when it became very difficult. By now all the crewmembers were active in trying to find any ground markers all with little success, Eric who was still in his front position shouted "*pull up Wally – I've just seen a barrage balloon*". Jimmy quietly informed us we must be over Hull, I'll use this as a reference check.

By now we had been in the air for 7½ hours and from my calculations our fuel was becoming in short supply. Nobby (wireless operator): "*I'm picking up a signal*" RT messages from Dishforth and Catfoss but they could see no lights through the fog.

Then Catfoss offered to put a light on for us, they, however, realised that we were very low and put the beam aimed parallel to the ground.

Presumably, because of the light what Wally and I saw was a farmhouse and buildings, we both acted simultaneously, Wally pulled the control unit full back, I slammed the throttle fully open, luckily I had been flying with the engine booster pumps on so there was no delay in the engines producing full power. As the power emerged we somehow managed to lift the aircraft over the buildings we must have been only feet away from the ground because as the

aircraft pulled up the tail wheel clipped the farm entrance gate, I think that it must be true to say that the beam of light from Catfoss saved our lives.

Wally: "*How much fuel have we left?*" My reply, "*Very little, what should we do?*" Jimmy: "*Take course for base and try to land there*". We decided to return to base and as luck would have it Eric caught a brief glimpse of something he recognised followed by a few sodium lights of the outer ring lights and as we circled round Wally said "*I think I will go round again as I will then have a better chance of landing*". "*No*" I said, *"we do not have the fuel for that"*. So with some quick manoeuvring he managed to bring the aircraft back on course. Unfortunately, as I have said previously there are so many airfields in Lincolnshire that the outer perimeter lights cross over each other and this is what happened to us because we were flying so low we managed to pick up the occasional light expecting it still to be the lights for Ludford. Unfortunately we had crossed over and unbeknown to us were travelling on the lights for Wickenby. On having a glimpse of the runway lights Wally turned in and asked for permission to land thinking it was Ludford, Ludford control said yes but we can't see you. We landed safely part way down the runway the fog was still very thick. Wally to control: "*We have landed but fog too thick to see*". Control: "*You have not landed where are you?*". Wally and I looked at each other "*Wally we have haven't we?*" Then a further voice came on, this is control Wickenby we think you have landed here *"who are you?*" Wally told them and asked them to give directions. Leave the aircraft where it is, we think it is still on the runway, we will send transport to collect you when we find you. After 20 minutes a crew bus collected us and eventually dropped us off at the mess where we had a meal and it was Wickenby.

Wickenby was a wartime base similar to Ludford and with similar living accommodation. We were given a nissen hut where we had a cold bed. As we were extremely tired after our ordeal we had a good sleep.

We woke up to a much better day and there on the runway was Lancaster X² just where we abandoned it. I arranged for fuel and a starter trolley to be delivered, prior to refuelling Wally and I started the engines, carried out the pre-flying checks.

The engines fired up and ran for 2 to 3 minutes then began spluttering and then stopped. We had run out of fuel, the decision not to go round again was the correct decision.

Mac our ground engineer and his staff were there to meet us on our return and gave hand signals in order to park up on our parking point. Mac said: "*where have you been*" and gave me a big hug. "*I think I heard the old girl last night and we came running out hoping to see her, I'm sure it was her she has a noise all of her own, a sweeter, quieter noise*". However, when we checked the time we thought that we must have been mistaken because we were sure that she did not have the fuel to last that time. Then we heard that a Lancaster had crashed on the rising ground hear Louth so we then went to bed – none of our aircraft landed last night, apparently they are scattered across the east side of England as they are from all the other bases round about.

"*Is she ok*?" Mac asked. "*Yes*" I say. "*You might however check over the engine booster pumps as they were used a lot last night*". Mac: "*What's happened to the cowlings around the tail wheel?*" Me: "*Oh, give the tail wheel mounting a good inspection Mac*". Mac "*Why, what happened, surely Wally didn't do this on landing, he usually lands on the main wheel first*". Me "*No, we hit a gate*". Mac "*You what? You hit a gate, why didn't you open it first!*" Mac: "*Yes, will check her over and make her ready for tonight if required*". Fortunately the fog again returned with poor visibility, it was 4 days before we flew again and then the operation was Frankfurt.

We found out later that out of the 483 Lancasters that flew that night 25 were lost over Europe from a combination of attack from night fighters, flak and collisions. Another 29 Lancasters from crashes, which occurred due to the thick fog conditions experienced around the airfield on returning home and trying to land.

Mac also confessed that he and his engineers were completely fed up with the time they had spent working on the carburetting on the engines, ensuring that the fuel taken up by the engines was the least possible and me insisting that they check the volume over and over again until no more could be done.

He now agreed that all the effort made now paid off as if not there was no way that she could have kept flying for that period of time (8 hours 30 minutes) and he said thank you.

Each aircraft carried seven crewmembers, 101 Squadron aircraft carried eight crewmembers. On the attached page there is a paragraph which Len Brooks, our rear gunner told his recollection of the night's events due to the fog.

Considering the events of that night in a rational way it is difficult to believe what happened could have happened with a satisfactory ending.

We had travelled across Europe direct to Berlin and back escaping enemy fighters, flash lights and enemy ack ack fire without mishaps, only to arrive back in Lincolnshire to find all the eastern side of the UK that the cloud base had almost reached ground level. Base diverted us to Driffield and we found ourselves over Hull and among barrage balloons. We were flying low to try to find some marker which we could relate to such as outer ring lighting or runway lighting, as there were a number of airfields in that area.

Nobby our wireless operator said I'm picking up RT messages from Driffield, Dishforth and Catfoss but they could not see us because of the fog. Catfoss offered to put a light up for us realising we were so low, their beam was almost parallel to the ground. How was it that the beam came on at that precise moment? How was it that we acted so quickly with the control column and obtained such a quick response from the engines? The aircraft must have climbed at 40-45% because as the power took over the tail wheel caught the gate leading into the farmhouse, meaning that the aircraft was at most four feet from ground (travelling at 150 miles per hour), this meant covering the ground at 88 ft per second. The time we had to clear the farmhouse and building was less than one second, how could that happen?

We know what Len Brooks said, he felt the power from the engines and looked down and saw the chickens in the farmyard scampering away from their coupes denoting that the aircraft had climbed exceptionally quickly. How did the aircraft pull itself up and over a two storey building in such a short distance? What would the consequences of been had the aircraft not made it? How many people were in the house; farmer's wife and family? How many children? In fact what was their experience of it, did they sleep through it or were they very scared? We don't know. How many animals were in the steading, was there a milking herd of 20 to 30 cows? The destruction could have been tremendous, as it was no one was injured as far as we know.

We gained some height; Jimmy gave Wally a course back to base. Why was it just at that precise moment that the fog thinned to allow Eric to recognise an object followed by the sodium lights of the base outer circle? Wally saying that he thought he should go round again, I say no we haven't the fuel, Wally doing an unconventional manoeuvre to bring the aircraft back on course and immediately picking out further lights of the outer ring. However, by this time we had left Ludford outer ring and crossed over onto Wickenby outer ring. We kept on circling round very low to keep lights in sight and luckily spotted the runway lights

and landing part way along the runway thinking we had landed at base surprised to find it was Wickenby we had landed at, then being told to abandon the plane where it was on the runway. Had we been directed to taxi off the runway and round the perimeter track to a conventional parking area I think the engines would have cut out on the way giving all the crew a complete shock. As it was it was only myself and Wally who realised the seriousness of the situation when we started the engines the following morning.

As I said earlier this was supposed to be a very uneventful operation, in and out of Europe. The average trip to Berlin was around 7½ hours flying time, fuel 1,750 gallons, this I consider could have been estimated at around 7 hours maximum flying time, 1,700 gallons.

I realise that I was always considered better at conserving fuel than most engineers however, how did our aircraft manage to stay airborne for 8½ hours and give out as soon as we touched down. This turned out to be a very exciting but frightening night, how was it that we managed to avoid the various objects we encountered and still managed to bring X^2 back safely. This was an episode that as a crew we never talked about.

Operation 16
24th/25th December
Target: Berlin

Takeoff time if I remember correctly was early evening in order that we should reach the target before midnight. On board each aircraft was a mix of various bombs, high explosive, incendiaries and delayed timed bombs triggered to explode on Christmas Day.

It was an uneventful night for us, keeping our place on route, seeing some ack-ack activity being aimed at those aircraft, which strayed off route and seeing the occasional night fighter gun tracers streak across the dark sky.

We reached the target on time and Eric was preparing for his bombing run when I noticed that the oil temperature gauge on the outer starboard engine was reading very high. I had to decide the best action, normally on the bombing run I would be on lookout watching for other aircraft approaching us from above or below us and was all the other spare members of crew, it was critical to have maximum look out because of the concentration of aircraft all making for the same point. Many collisions occurred in these situations; damage could also take place by aircraft flying above by dropping their bombs without watching what was below.

I said *"Wally, feathering starboard outer"*. Wally to Eric: *"Cancel bombing run, engine feathered, have adjusted revs on other engine"*. Jimmy: *"Wally take course so-and-so and go round again"*. This was a very difficult and dangerous decision to take as our aircraft would be on an entirely different direction from all other aircraft and exposed to enemy fighters.

We as a crew had previously discussed what we should do in the event of something like this happening, the conclusion was that after flying all this way to the target our first priority was to put our bombs on the target, so any distraction must be remedied first before the bombing run was made. Hitting the target was the only reason for being there. Eric carried out his bombing and the result was that the bombs scored a direct hit, this was confirmed from a self-operating camera situated in the bomb bay and rolled when the bomb doors were opened.

Afterwards we set off on our return run on three engines but because of limited power instead of holding our 20,000 ft altitude Wally and I decided to make a gradual descent, passing over the enemy coast at 5,000 ft and making our way direct to base on the instruction given by Jimmy our navigator.

The engine proved to be suffering from a faulty gauge, this, however, we had no way of knowing and had it been an engine seize up and possibly resulted in an engine fire, we could have been in serious problems being an easy target for enemy fighters. Wally made a very professional landing on three engines, of course he always did make a good landing in the dark, it was during daylight that he always had a few Kangaroo jumps before rolling along the runway.

Operation 19
2nd/3rd January 1944
Target: Berlin

I would expect that everyone would experience fear on a number of times during their lifetime being frightened is nothing to be ashamed of. Fear can be brought on instantly by such things as an explosion, a fire or such like, then fear can turn to panic. Controlled fear can be felt when one expects that they are likely to die, on the motorway getting caught up in an accident when cars are travelling at speed.

Our crew experienced such emotions once when on operations over Berlin when our Lancaster was hit by ack-ack fire, which exploded very close to us and caused severe damage to the fuselage from shrapnel, also causing loss of all communication. After checking all engines and fuel supplies, and assessing for any further damage I realised that Bill's (our mid-upper gunner) turret was stationary with no signs of movement from him. I knew that something must be wrong so I touched Wally gave the thumbs up and pointed towards the rear. I collected a portable oxygen bottle and on the way through the aircraft I touched Nobby on the arm and signalled him to follow me. True enough Bill was not in his turret, with the light from my torch we found him trying to open the fuselage rear door and in his panic he had no parachute with him. He seemed very strong and determined to leave the aircraft. The only way to prevent this happening was to hit him with the oxygen bottle. We were able to man handle him back to the rest bed. When giving him the oxygen bottle he began sucking it like a baby, we made him comfortable with a blanket then returned to our positions.

This episode had taken over 30 minutes at probably the most dangerous period of any operation over the target with lights being shone from the torch and loss of lookout crewmembers (mid-gunner and myself). Luckily the aircraft was not too badly damaged between 40 to 50 holes along the fuselage.

In early January Bill reported sick, which meant that we required a mid upper gunner, Dave who had lost his crew was looking to join a new crew, so he joined our crew and flew with us until we completed our tour of operations.

Operation 28
25th-26th February 1944
Target: Augsburg

I have little recognition of what happened on this trip, it however was of great importance because this was the first time on any operation that Lancasters had been fitted with 2 x 0.5 guns in the rear turret instead of the 4 x 0.303 guns. Furthermore it was only 101 Squadron who had them.

These turrets were made by a small local company from Gainsborough and designed in conjunction with 101 Squadron's technicians; this gave the Lancaster a much greater firepower.

At briefing it was announced that six aircraft, which included our X^2, were fitted with 0.5 guns and that crews should take the initiative and attack fighters rather than take evasive action.

All I remember of what must have been relatively quiet was that the 101 Lancasters that were carrying the new turrets and firing at the fighters, it was the fighters that were taking evasive action and as the fighters were unaware that only a few aircraft were fitted with these much more effective guns. Over the next few operations there was much less fighter activity which was much less effective.

On a number of operations as well as dropping window we also dropped leaflets, the leaflets were typed in German and gave information as to how the war was progressing (propaganda information).

All operations were usually carried out at twenty thousand feet plus for Lancasters, other types of aircraft would bomb at slightly lower heights because of the thin air at above 10,000 ft. Oxygen had to be taken through masks and also because of the altitude temperatures could drop to as low as -20°, so much so if you touched any metal part of the fuselage with your bare hand it could stick to the metal and because of condensation one had to free the ice from your mask frequently.

Operation 29
1st-2nd March 1944
Target: Stuttgart (8 hours 10 minutes)

During the 1930s and 40s the winters could be very severe with long periods of frost and snow. March 1944 commenced with heavy and prolonged snowfall resulting in Ludford runway being covered in over 8 ft of snow which had to be cleared before flying could continue. At that time there was no heavy snow clearing equipment available, only the normal tractors that were on site, therefore to move the snow every person on the station not on duty was put on snow clearing. The aircraft standing points were cleared first so that ground crews could operate then the task of clearing the main runway commenced spades and shovels were the tools of the day. Generally I think everyone enjoyed it with plenty of high jinks and laughing, many snowmen being made along the runway edges.

Operations were ordered for that night 1st March therefore the runway had to be ready for takeoff by 16:00 hours. It was crucial that 101 Squadron was available because we were the only Squadron operating CIGAR a jamming device which prevented German radar from

contacting their fighters to give them instructions. Bomber Command refused to fly without 101 Squadron's aircraft.

It was determined that the runway would not be fully cleared, however, if four hundred yards were ready aircraft could take off with a light fuel load, fly to the neighbouring airfield Wickenby, fully fuel and bomb up there.

Briefing took place mid afternoon; flying was laid on for 16:00 hours. We were the first plane off without trouble, a further two followed, the fourth didn't make it on the cleared runway part, ploughed into the snow and skidded off the runway closing it. This meant that four of 101 Squadron's aircraft carrying CIGAR were available. On the operation the aircraft were spread out along the route covering the period of the raid. (ie approximately five minutes apart)

Our aircraft was fuelled and bombed-up at Wickenby and took off among the planes from Wickenby. The operation as far as we were concerned was quiet, with few fighters, no troubles. We bombed on time and returned for home crossing the Dutch coast at around 10,000 ft, then continued to base Wickenby, then de-briefed, had breakfast and then to bed. We stayed at Wickenby for two more days before we could return to Ludford.

On our return our Squadron Commander told us that we had completed our tour of operations and since the squadron moved to Ludford we were the only crew that had achieved that, so he didn't want to test our luck any further.

The following two days were spent testing the new rear turret with the 2 x .5 guns under various flying conditions, including high level flying at 25,000+ ft and it proved to be equally good under all conditions.

Five days later we all went on leave, this was the break up of the crew after which none of us met again, during the war that's how things happened.

Before going on leave I went to see Mac to tell him the situation. "*Can't you stay?*" he asked "*where are you being posted to?*". "*I think I may be posted to Lindholme as an instructor*". "*Why can't you stay here then and instruct here? I will miss you, you've taught me more about carburettors and how they work. I know I told you you were a pain in the neck to my chaps, you demanding that they check and monitor the engines performance to obtain maximum fuel savings. I will continue to carry out your instructions and to see if I can help save other crew's lives as we have just recently experienced on X²*".

"*If you do a further operation tour, come back here and I will try to look after your aircraft again for you, all the best, good flying*".

Operation Highlights

I have highlighted only a few of our more exciting operations, many of which have been written about and described by other aircrew presumably because these were the operations which for some reason caught the headlines and probably they were the crew members which survived.

It must be remembered, however, that every operation had its dangers. The fact that the aircraft flew over enemy territory was a dangerous place to be, with it being usually in darkness and with anywhere up to 600 aircraft plus on many occasions, all making for the

same target within a time limit of between 30 to 60 minutes alone had its dangers and problems.

When I say that we had a quiet trip this usually meant that our crew had no major problems and every member carried out his duties as an individual and as a team member. This did not mean that minor problems did not occur such as the rear turret freezing up causing problems for Len (rear gunner) from severe cold and lack of visibility or wireless operator loosing contact with base or even Wally and myself with ice forming on the wing edges from travelling through cloud. On one occasion the whole crew suffering because of being caught up in a thunderstorm, the aircraft being thrown about like a toy, falling immediately to 1,000 ft and back up again, something that no one had any control over.

Cold was a further concern; the temperature could fall as low as -20 to 30°C below zero. The metal of the aircraft if you touched it with your bare hand, the skin could stick to it therefore gloves had always to be worn. There was warm air circulated throughout the aircraft this was controlled from a duct situated near to the wireless operator's station and at times should he become very warm would turn it down.

Oxygen masks were also worn as above ten thousand feet oxygen was necessary and it was a continual task to have to remove the ice from your mask, as it built up due to the moisture created from breathing. As you can imagine the gunner being isolated from the main cabin area suffered even more.

The enemy could also cause a few problems on route. Fighters had an advantage over the heavier, slower bombers and the fact that bombers had four engines creating a fair amount of exhaust flame and light made it easy for the fighters to see us. Generally if a fighter was spotted by the gunners in time it was safest to take evasive action.

The action would come say from the rear gunner '*fighter 3 o'clock approaching*' following *'dive, dive to port'*. The skipper would immediately throw the aircraft into a dive and do a corkscrew manoeuvre, regaining back on his normal course. This generally worked; it was the fighter which was not spotted by the lookouts which caused the problem as they would normally attack from below the rear of the aircraft strafing the fuselage with bullets.

Search lights. The normal search light could be a problem for aircraft at lower levels and were situated around most towns, cities and industrial sites, however, there was another much more dangerous blue search light, much brighter which could penetrate to much higher altitudes and operated in conjunction with anti aircraft guns. Being caught by one of these was an unfortunate experience and usually resulted in severe damage or the loss of the aircraft. We on one occasion suffered this experience, the blue light locked on to us and no matter whatever we did it was impossible, after about three minutes Wally decided to put the aircraft into a controlled dive to loose height, as we did so a Halifax aircraft which was operating at a much lower height came across our track. The anti aircraft guns operating in conjunction with the searchlight opened up and the Halifax just blew up. We had a lucky escape.

As I said some anti aircraft guns operated in conjunction with search lights, however, the bulk of them were situated around towns and cities and created a heavy barrack in order to keep the bombers from bombing at low levels, the result could be seen and occasionally heard, and on one occasion over Amiens felt.

Returning from Modane on a bright moonlit night without warning this small unit of guns opened up and a shell exploded very close to us, fortunately not causing any injuries to the crew. Shrapnel caused damage to the fuel lines causing a leak in the pipe and holes appeared

in the fuselage, and along the wings and side windscreen of the aircraft. We made an emergency landing at Tangmere in South England and on inspection found over 100 various size holes along the length of the fuselage and wings.

The piece of shrapnel that hit the windscreen had entered through the starboard side unbeknown to me had ripped through my flying jacket sleeve and gone out through the front window, again, lady luck was with us.

Log Book and Operations Record Book (Battle Orders)

Every crew member kept a log book showing every date, time and flying details carried out.

I have copied some pages which correspond to copies of the Squadron's battle orders, referring to operations 14, 15, 16 and 17 as detailed in my log book.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Time carried forward :—	48·20	112·05
					Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times Day	Flying Times Night
		TOTAL FLYING HOURS		NOVEMBER	101 SQDN		
			HRS MINS				
		DAY	3 30				
		NIGHT	39 45				
		TOTAL	43 · 15				
					Flt Lt Robertson OC 'C' FLT		
DECEMBER.							
16		LANC III X²	WO EVANS	FE	(14) OPS - BERLIN HEAVY LOSSES. FOG ON RETURN QUIET TRIP.		8 30
20		LANC III X²	WO. EVANS	FE	(15) OPS - FRANKFURT FOG ON RETURN LANDED WICKENBY - MANY FIGHTER FLARES AROUND TARGET AREA -		6 30
24		LANC III X²	WO. EVANS	FE	(16) OPS - BERLIN REAR TURRET U/S. STBD OUTER FEATHERED.		7 10
29		LANC III X²	WO. EVANS	FE	(17) OPS - BERLIN		6 40
			TOTAL FLYING HOURS	—	DECEMBER. · 101 SQDN.		
				HRS. MINS.			
			DAY.	· ·			
			NIGHT	28 · 10.			
			TOTAL	28 · 10	Total Time ... OC 'C' FLT 48 20		140 15

Battle Orders The numbers 14, 15 & 16 - 17 refers to the operation number on the log book page

Date	Aircraft Type & Number	Crew	Duty	Time Up	Time Down	Details of Sortie or Flight	References
3.2.43.	Lancaster I DV.300 'W'	Sgt.Bell,D.J. Sgt.Sowers,L. Sgt.Bailey,W. Sgt.Harris,H.H. P/O.M.Albert. P/O.W.J.Zubbie. Sgt.Morton,J. Sgt.Browne,D.C.	Leipzig.	00.20	08.15	Load 1 x 4000lb.HC. 1230 x 4lb(90x)lb.IB. 48 x 30lb.IB. Primary attacked at 04.06 hours from 20,000', heading 182M at IAS 150. Bombed on Wanganui flares. One large explosion on target which lit up the whole area and died down slowly.	
16.12.43.	Lancaster III LM.367 'G'	S/L.J.F.Marshall. Sgt.Potts,G.E. P/O.E.J.Densley. Sgt.Maun,C.K. F/S.Gray,I.G. F/S.Bence,F.C. Sgt.Marston,J.H. P/O.R.J.Wilson.	Berlin.	16.05	23.39	Load 1 x 4000lb.HC. 1020 x 4lb(90x)lb.IB. 48 x 30lb.IB. Bombed scattered TI Reds and Greens and R/T flares from 20,000' at 20.05 hours, 184M at IAS 170. Large orange coloured explosion at approx. 20.06 hours. Bombing scattered in West; 'spoof' fighter flares to South.	
"	Lancaster I DV.307 'Z'	F/L.Robertson,I. Sgt.Calvert,T. F/O.R.L.Kennedy. F/S.Mayes,S.T. P/O.B.W.Zeal. F/L.W.J.F.Hill. T/S.Jones,E.(USAAF) F/O.F.G.H.Smith.	"	16.10	00.10	Load as above. Primary not bombed as A/C hit by heavy 'flak' 6 miles north of HANOVER; unable to open bomb doors. Bomb doors opened manually on run-up on ROSTOCK. 4,000lb jettisoned manually, no description owing ~~xx~~ to cloud conditions.	
(14) "	Lancaster III D.V.295 'N'	W/O. Evans, D.L. Sgt. Fraser, D. Sgt. Grant, J.W. Sgt. Harris, E.H. Sgt. Adamson, E. P/O. W.J. Zubbs Sgt. Brooks, V.L. Sgt. Lewis, L.H.	"	16.25	00.55	Load 1 x 4000 lb HC. 48 x 30 lb IB 930 x 4 lb IB 90 x 40 lb IB Bombed T.I. reds & greens from 20,000' at 20.08 hours on 69M at 165 m.p.h. I.A.S. Sky Markers rather scattered.	
"	Lancaster III D.V.269 'F'	P/O. G.R. Fawcett Sgt. Grieg, I.F. F/Sgt. Laurence, J.W. Sgt. Wild, F. P/O. L.W. Moore Sgt. Andrews, D. Sgt. Griffiths, I.J. Sgt. Cornwall, R.S.	"	16.10	00.15	Load as above. Bombed T.I. Reds & Greens and a few Sky Markers from 20,000' at 20.01 hours on 110M at 150m.p.h. I.A.S. Too early to achieve results.	
16.12.43.	Lancaster III D.V.264 'L'	F/Sgt. Murphy, G.A. Sgt. Gamerod, J. P/O. L.J. Toombs Sgt. Woolisbroft Sgt. Kendrick, A.C. Sgt. Hepworth, H.L. F/Sgt. Hood, R. P/O. C.F.A. Clothier	"	16.20	02.05	Load 1 x 4000 lb HC. 1020 x 4 lb IB. 48 x 30 lb IB 90x40 lb IB Bombed T.Is Green & Red flares with Green Stars from 21,000' at 20.13 hours on 69M at IAS 165. Good concentration of markers, Fires seen through clouds.	

Date	Aircraft Type & Number	Crew	Duty	Time Up	Time Down	Details of Sortie or Flight	References
15 (15) 5							
20.12.43	Lancaster. III DV. 275 'Z2'	W/O. Evans L.W. Sgt. Fraser D. Sgt. Grant J.W. P/O. D.M.McDonald. Sgt. Adamson E. Sgt. Blaney W.J. Sgt. Brooks L. Sgt. Lewis K.D.	Frankfurt.	1725	2315	Load 1 x 4000 Lb HC. 76 x 30, 1240 x 4(1no 90x) Bombed TI greens and fires from 20,000' at 1946 hrs., hdg. 066M, IAS 165 IAS 168.	
"	Lancaster III DV.245. 'S'	P/O. R.B.Leeder. Sgt. Smith G.F. P/O. Turner J.A. Sgt. Brown C. W/S. Lyall R.G. Sgt. Drought P.J. Sgt. Hickley E. W/O. Windle D.M.	"	1720	2235	Load as above. Bombed on TI greens from 20,000' at 1943 hrs., hdg 061M, 150 IAS. Numerous small fires. Attack fairly well concentrated.	
"	Lancaster III DV.264. 'A'	P/O. Adamson W. Sgt. Bowyer A. Sgt. Kippen E. Sgt. Laffman L.H. F/S. Ball A. Sgt. Collier R. Sgt. Goodall J. P/O. R.P.M.Bagg.	"	1722	2322	Load as above. Bombed on TI greens from 20,000' at 1947, hdg., 106M, IAS 174. Bombing scattered; Mainly in N.E. part of town.	
"	Lancaster III LM. 367 'K'	F/S. Rose P.F. Sgt. Hollands A. Sgt. Pearson R.A. Sgt. Prismore R.M Sgt. Carmen C.H. Sgt. Donovan T.I. Sgt. Creighton J. Sgt. Napier W.C.	"	1725	2325	Load as above. Bombed green TIs from 19700' at 1949 hrs., hdg. 034M, IAS 165. Large explosion in N.E. section of town at 1947½ hrs. Numerous other explosions and fires seen in target area.	
"	Lancaster 1. DV.908 'V'	P/O. Marsh K.P. Sgt. Detrock F.O.E. Sgt. Kaye C. Sgt. Ross D.W. P/O. Middleton K. Sgt. Glendinning D.R. P/O. Hickmin. Sgt. Lander I.L.	"	1715	2305	Bombed load as above. Bombed TI reds from 19,000' at 1943 hrs., hdg. 142M, IAS 179. Heavy explosions, and incendiary fires scattered.	

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK

Appendix

R.A.F. Form 541.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT

By No. 101 Squadron.

SECRET

Page No. 158

For the Month of December 1943

Date	Aircraft Type & Number	Crew	Duty	Time Up	Time Down	Details of Sortie or Flight	References
16) 24.12.43.	Lancaster III DV.275 'X2'	W/O.Evans,L.W. ✓ Sgt.Frazer,D. Sgt.Grant,J.W. F/O.Y.G.Yiggura. Sgt.Adamson,E. Sgt.Blayney,W.J. Sgt.Brooks,L.	Berlin.	00.25	07.35	Load 1 x 4,000lb.HC. 48 x 30lb.IB. 930 x 4lb(90x). Primary bombed from 20,500', at 04.09 hours, heading 359M, IAS 160. T.I.Greens on ground. Glow from several fires seen in target area; markers well concentrated.	
"	Lancaster III DV.304 'X'	F/S.Bruce,D.T. ✓ Sgt.Pates,C.D. Sgt.Heard,B.V. F/S.Dyer,W.T. Sgt.Spencer,A.E. Sgt.Charlton,D. Sgt.Richards,C. P/O.C.F.A.Clothier.	"	00.30	07.40	Load as above. Primary bombed from 21,000' at 04.12 hours, heading 01M, IAS 165. Glow from fires seen over large area.	
"	Lancaster III DV.264 'L'	P/O.W.L.Adamson. ✓ Sgt.Bowyer,A.H. Sgt.Kippen,E. Sgt.Huffman,L.R. F/S.Hall,A.G. Sgt.Whittle,H.R. Sgt.Goodall,J.W. Sgt.Cohen,M.	"	00.15	07.50	Load as above. Primary bombed from 20,000' at 04.10 hours, heading 01M, IAS 170. T.I.Greens in bombsight. Fires well concentrated in target area, one large explosion seen.	
"	Lancaster III DV.245 'S'	F/L.R.R.Looder. ✓ Sgt.Smith,C.F. P/O.L.A.Turner. Sgt.Brown,D. F/S.Lyall,B.C. Sgt.Drought,P.J. Sgt.Brakley,E.H. W/O.Windle,D.N.	"	00.25	07.40	Load as above. Primary bombed from 22,000' at 04.07½ hours, heading 329M, IAS 150. T.I.Greens in bombsight. Many small fires taking hold.	
	Lancaster III DV.298 'J'	F/S.Corkill,K.D. ✓ Sgt.Cole,K.A.F. F/S.Thompson,K.C. Sgt.Manser,C.I. Sgt.Gundy,R.H. Sgt.Dewsbury,T. Sgt.Mann,H.S. Sgt.Manners,E.H.	"	00.15	08.10	Load as above. Bombed flares Red with Green Stars from 20,000' at 04.16 hours, heading 00M, IAS 170.	

Date	Aircraft Type & Number	Crew	Duty	Time Up	Time Down	Details of Sortie or Flight	References
29.12.43.	Lancaster I DV.304 'X'	F/S. Bruce, B.T. Sgt. [illegible], C.D. Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. Spencer, [illegible] Sgt. [illegible], D. Sgt. Richards, [illegible] P/O. [illegible]	Berlin.	17.10	00.10	Load 1 x 4000lb.HC. 1140 x 4lb.IB(90x)48 x 30lb.IB. Bombed flares Red with Green Stars from 20,000' at 20.21 hours, heading 037M, IAS 165. HV well concentrated; glow seen 70 miles away.	
"	Lancaster III DV.369 'Y'	F/S. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible], D.H. Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible]	"	17.10	00.01	Load as above. Bombed T.I. Red with Green Stars from 20,000' at 20.14 hours, heading 035M, IAS 160. Glow seen through cloud.	
17	Lancaster III DV.275 'Z'	W/O. [illegible], L.W. Sgt. [illegible], D. Sgt. [illegible] F/S. [illegible] F/O. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible], L. Sgt. [illegible]	"	17.05	23.45	Load as above. Bombed flares Red with Green Stars from 19,500' at 20.10 hours, heading 036M, IAS 155. No bombing results seen owing to cloud.	
"	Lancaster I DV.307 'J'	F/Lt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] F/O. [illegible] F/O. [illegible] F/O. [illegible] F/O. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] F/O. [illegible]	"	17.00	23.35	Load as above. Bombed Red flares with Green Stars from 21,000'. at 20.00 hours, heading 055M, IAS 150. Large glow from fires seen through clouds.	
"	Lancaster III DV.387 'G'	F/S. [illegible], J. Sgt. [illegible] F/O. J. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible] F/S. [illegible] Sgt. [illegible], J.	"	17.00	00.25	Load as above. Bombed T.I. Greens and Reds from 21,000' at 20.24 hours, heading 095M, IAS 170. Glow of fires visible 100 miles away.	

17

Chapter G
Christmas 1943

I always thought of Christmas as a time for giving and receiving, a time of joy and happiness, a time for families to come and meet and join in the happiness of the event. It was of course a time to remember, to consider ones relationship with family, friends and others and how relationships could be improved. Christmas 1943 was different; it was a time of anxiety and many other emotions, anxiety not only for the crewmembers but more so for the folks at home.

Before joining the RAF we lived in a small village where everyone knew each other. There was three of us in the forces, my older sister Jean, my brother Sandy and myself, living at home with my mother our two younger sisters Betty and Mary. So quite often my mother would be stopped in the street and asked how one of us was getting along, furthermore she had received a telegram stating that I had not returned from an operation and that further information would be forwarded when received (one must remember that at that time (1943) telephones were a luxury so the only method of communication was by the Post Office. Christmas 1943 was also the first Christmas that we had not all been at home).

The ground crews also had similar feelings when waiting for their aircraft to return from an operation and then the relief when they saw the aircraft landing and taxiing in.

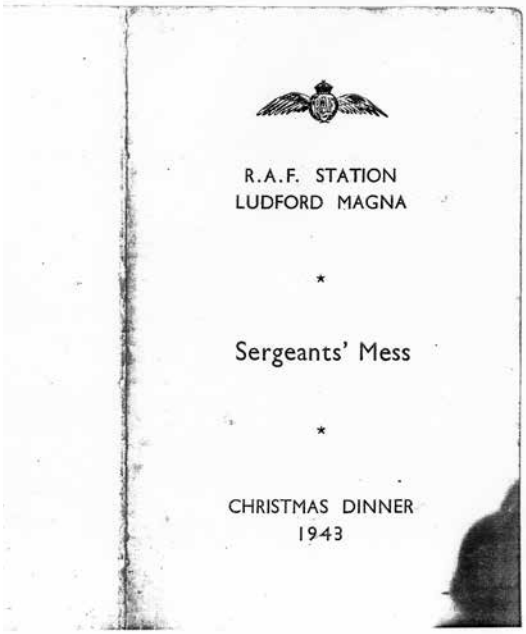
There was also a period of what today would be known as pressure, then it was just part of the job although some individuals did suffer from depression and for some this ended their flying career. All crew members had to be physically and mentally fit to survive.

It was early morning on Christmas Day 1943, we as a crew had just returned from an operation, the target Berlin. After debriefing we arrived for breakfast at around 6:30 hours, the atmosphere in the dining room was best described as noisy as you would expect from 150 young men aged between 19 and 23 years old, until you really looked around and saw one, two even three empty tables then the atmosphere changed to a more sober one.

Christmas dinner was being served at 13:00 hours, this gave us time for a few hours sleep before arriving back at the mess around 12:50 hours. The meal was good and all seemed in high spirits. We finished eating and were enjoying a cigarette when the duty officer arrived, he slowly walked up to the bar and turned the Toby Jug sitting there towards the wall, this was our first indication that operations may be on, slowly the mess began to empty as the air crew members began to leave.

It was a cold but pleasant afternoon as I hurried along the perimeter road thinking of past Christmases and remembering the simple things, the pink or white sugar mice, an apple and orange possibly a few sweets, we never had many presents, hand knitted socks or gloves, then my thoughts were interrupted by seeing coming towards me a tractor pulling a bomb trolley with a mixed load of bombs on board, and further to my left I could see a fuel bowser topping up a Lancaster. Normally the aircraft were filled with 1,200 to 1,400 gallons of fuel

sufficient for a five or six hour trip, if the trip was going to be longer then the aircraft were topped up.



R.A.F. STATION
LUDFORD MAGNA

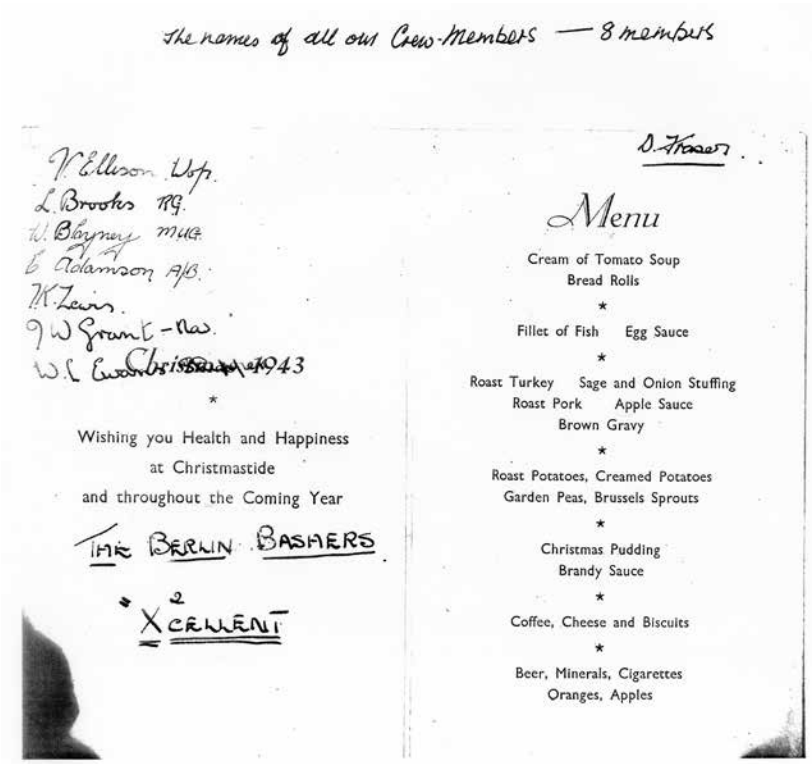
*

Sergeants' Mess

*

CHRISTMAS DINNER
1943

On arrival at our Lancaster X² Mac, our ground engineer, was there standing in front looking at the aircraft, I said "*what are you doing*?" Thinking he answered "*isn't she beautiful, I don't want her to fly tonight. I am the happiest sergeant on the Squadron. Before I arrived at Ludford I had been with 101 Squadron for 18 months and during that time I had lost seven aircraft under my control. Since being here and in charge of X² and you as the flight engineer after five months I still have the same aircraft. Do you know how many operations you have flown in X²?*" "*No I don't* ", I replied. "*Eleven and six of which was to the big city Berlin and we are still going strong*." "*Let's go and carry out our ground checks*", I said.



The names of all our Crew-Members — 8 members

W. Ellison Wop.
L. Brooks RG.
W. Blayney MUG
G. Adamson AB.
W. Lewis.
J. W. Grant - Nav.
W. L. Evans Christmas 1943

*

Wishing you Health and Happiness
at Christmastide
and throughout the Coming Year

THE BERLIN BASHERS

2
XCELLENT

D. Fraser

Menu

Cream of Tomato Soup
Bread Rolls

*

Fillet of Fish Egg Sauce

*

Roast Turkey Sage and Onion Stuffing
Roast Pork Apple Sauce
Brown Gravy

*

Roast Potatoes, Creamed Potatoes
Garden Peas, Brussels Sprouts

*

Christmas Pudding
Brandy Sauce

*

Coffee, Cheese and Biscuits

*

Beer, Minerals, Cigarettes
Oranges, Apples

We had just finished when Wally our pilot arrived. "*I thought I would find you here*" he said. "*I thought we could carry out a test flight and check out the hydraulics on the undercarriage*?" "*Yes I have fixed them*" said Mac. "*Let's go*" said Wally, "*coming*" I said to Mac. He hesitated then said "*I haven't got a parachute*". "*Neither have we*" I said.

We fired up the engines, taxied out, got the green light from control and were airborne. I then vacated my seat and let Mac have it. As I checked all the fuel and engine gauges etc we climbed to around 300 hundred feet, flew in a south west direction and as we banked to starboard there standing on the ridge was the magnificent building Lincoln Cathedral with the city spread out below it. We were privileged to see it yet also very humbled and it seemed than that what we were doing was right and that this was a 'just war' and had to be won. I touched Mac on the shoulder and pointed down. I'm sure he was brushing a tear away.

Ten minutes later we had landed with everything ok including the hydraulics as we closed the rear door of the Lancaster X² we hugged each other and I'm sure we all said a short prayer, at least I did.

Briefing was scheduled for 19:00 hours. All two hundred of us where there on time and the Group Captain arrived and slipped up onto the platform, the wing commander brought us all to attention. I noticed that the curtains covering the map on the wall stayed closed "*I'll be brief*" said the Group Captain, *"all flying has been cancelled for tonight because of severe weather conditions over Europe. I also wish to thank you all for the maximum effort and success, which has been put in during the past five months. Good show and good flying from now on. I will let you go to continue your Christmas celebrations, have a good time, good night and god bless"*. Mac got his way and X² did not fly on Christmas night.

Briefing was scheduled for 19.00 hours and as I said all flying was cancelled, this only lasted for 15 minutes, after which all the members of the 25 crews that would have flown, along with all the other necessary ground staff support teams necessary to service such an operation (all in 350-400 young people) were now free to do as they wished, however as by now it was around 19.30 the choice was limited, retire to the mess or the local pubs.

As we the crew were now making our way back from the briefing room, Norman (our wireless operator) announced that he was visiting the pub to see if they had any beer *"Are you coming?" "No"* I said *"I'll make my way back to the mess"*. Bill (our mid upper gunner) said *"I'll join you for a beer"*.

The technical section of the squadron was situated on the south side of the main road which ran from west to east through the village from Market Rasen to Louth. The living accommodation and messes were located on the north of the road.

On reaching the main road instead of crossing and carrying on up the lane to the mess for some reason I turned right and continued along the main road, as it was extremely dark walking in the centre of the road as this was the safest place. As I continued I heard music and singing coming from the pub on the right everyone seemed to be happy and enjoying themselves, further on and on the left was the other pub 'The Black Bull'. I could hear footsteps coming and going, but could not recognise the people, here also was the sounds of people enjoying themselves.

A little further along the road on the left stood the small church, as I approached I could hear the organ music and the congregation singing carols. I remember thinking if I was thinking of attending church I should have dressed. I was in battle dress and should be in uniform, however to return to the billet and change it would make me too late for the service.

I found myself at the church entrance I looked through the entrance hall, I could see a chink of light coming from under the heavy door. I pushed the door open and heard the creaking noise, on entering I stood for a few seconds to allow my eyes to become accustomed to the light, a few members of the congregation hearing the door turned to see who entered, as I moved across to take a place in the pews an elderly gentlemen from the other side came across squeezed me on the shoulder gave me his hymn book *"we are on verse three god bless"* and returned to his place. The church was fairly full mostly of elderly people man and female with a few children, all were singing and appeared to be enjoying it, the service was not a format which I knew, however I felt good to be involved and somehow very pleased to be there. All those in church appeared to believe in what they were singing and doing and further more believed that all the service people on the base were doing what was right and that they all had their full support that the war was a righteous war and a war that had to be won.

At the end of the service I quickly left the church and made my way back along the main road. I was somehow excited so much so that I remember running all the way and turning

right until I reached the mess. There were a number of people sitting around having a drink and/or reading. A colleague was reading the picture post magazine which had an article covering 101 Squadron. When I asked him if I could have a look, he said *"I'll keep it for you"*. On the centre two pages was a photo of a Lancaster with staff standing around and on the wings etc, inspecting the photo closely I noticed that it was not a 101 Squadron Lancaster as it did not show the special aerials to work ABC. (The programme had been arranged unfortunately while we (our crew) were on leave and a Lancaster from Wickenby had been used).

I checked to see if the rations had come in and found a good selection of cigarettes were available Woodbine, Captain, Players and Gold Flake and there was also some chocolate.

The dining room was closed, on a trestle table at the end was a collection of bread, cheese and butter. I took a few rounds of bread and a chunk of cheese and made my way back to the billet, on arrival I found Wally, Eric, and Jimmy were there and they had a good fire going, making the chimney almost red hot. They were sitting reading and asked *"where did you get to?" "Church"* I said *"you should have said I would have come with you"* said Eric, *"I didn't know, I brought some bread and cheese for toast if you want it". "Thank you"* said Wally *"have a mug of tea, the teapot will still be hot on the stove". "I called in at the mess they have cigarettes and chocolate in. Only a letter for Bill which I have brought back. He and Norman were going to the pub. Where is Len (our rear gunner)?" "Oh, he has gone to try to hitch a lift home to Grimsby, remember if opps are on tomorrow give him a ring to let him know so that he can return, I have his telephone number"* said Wally. *"Do you want something to read?"* asked Eric. *"No"* I said, *"I think I will turn in and catch up with some sleep"*.

This 1943 Christmas was at least different from all previous ones and part of my life which I will never forget.

The next time we flew was on 30th December and then again the following night on 31st December both operations were to Berlin. Mac continued to service X^2 and over the next 3½ months we completed a further 13 operations to complete our first tour.

We didn't always bring the aircraft home in the same condition as we started, however, we always brought it back and Mac and his crew always managed to repair it and have it serviced ready for the next trip.

We completed our tour in late April 1944 and the crew were all split up and we went our separate ways all as instructors. I joined the staff at Lindholme as a flight engineer instructor. In June D-Day arrived, we were again temporarily called up as reserved in case the invasion went wrong, fortunately all went well. I was later transferred to Bottesford then Cottesmore and ended up at North Luffenham where by now VE Day had arrived in June 1945. We were again crewed up to join the Tiger Force to operate against Japan. Luckily for us VJ Day came much sooner than expected with the use of the hydrogen bomb being used on Japan, which stopped us from being posted to the Far East.

I stayed at North Luffenham until demobbed. Lincoln Cathedral played an important role in our lives as we used to use it as a landmark when returning early in the morning from operations and provided weather conditions were good, when we saw the cathedral we knew we were safely home again. Sadly Lancaster X^2 only flew two more operations after we finished and was lost over Mailly le Camp, France on the 3rd/4th May 1944.

Chapter H
Heavy Conversion Units Instructor
Lindholme
Bottesford
Cottesmore
North Luffenham

After Operations

After completing our tour of operations with 101 Squadron in April 1944 the crew went on leave for around ten days and while on leave I received information informing me to report to Lindholme on such a date.

Lindholme was 1656HCU the conversion unit, which I had reported to prior to being crewed up and joining 101 Squadron. Ludford Magna as I had said previously was an airfield specially constructed as a utility base to carry on the war against Germany. All buildings, temporary constructions accommodation nissen huts were situated in small groups situated around the unit site.

Nissen hut accommodation for up to eight persons situated in the wilds half a mile from mess, flight units ablution block 20 yards away with washing and shower facilities, no heating (as you can imagine it was very cold in winter). The accommodation had a stove in the centre of the hut with a chimney, which went up through the roof, used coal or anthracite as fuel and required lighting daily. These huts were extremely hot in summer with regular visitors such as field mice, ants and earwigs. In winter they were extremely cold and damp with condensation running down interior sides and dripping on beds etc.

Lindholme was a peacetime permanent station which had all the niceties available, good roads comfortable, centrally heated one-person accommodation with all mod cons including dining room with waitress service. This to me was the biggest difference between Ludford and Lindholme.

Lindholme then was a conversion unit where pilots and crews had completed their initial training on smaller aircraft then upgraded to the heavy, four engine bombers such as Halifax and Lancaster. Lindholme trained Lancaster crews; it was here where additional crewmembers such as gunners and flight engineers joined in.

Having completed a successful tour of operations my role now was to introduce flight engineers who had completed their year long course, at possibly Blackpool and St Annes's as up to this time these trainees had only briefly seen the interior of a Lancaster, far less done any flying.

Unfortunately because of the shortage of Lancaster bombers arriving to the squadron, the conversion units such as Lindholme were still using Halifaxs, this did not cause too much of a problem for the other six members of the crew (except the engineers) as it was a heavy bomber and the handling regarding flying and landing was similar to the Lancaster giving the pilot the experience of flying a large, heavy plane.

The engineer's role was the same on all heavy bombers so the experience gained was still valid and it still gave him the necessary confidence. The difference being some of the instruments and dials on the Halifax were in different positions to that of a Lancaster. The crews would have a period of familiarisation on reaching the squadron before finally carrying out operations.

Life was so much more comfortable working on a base with all mod cons as expected for the 1940s.

My role along with others was to aid the trainee engineers to familiarise themselves with the aircraft inside and out, and when flying with their new crew, introduce the engineer to his role such as to the large number of switches and dials on the main panel and also the instruments on the engineer's panel.

One of the main tasks was how to change flying on the various fuel tanks safely, the other how to feather an engine if required without causing any problems, how they as a person fitted in with the other crew members. Therefore while the pilot was under instruction with a pilot instructor mainly on what we called circuits and bumps, which was taking off, flying around and landing again. I would also fly and show the engineer and make sure he was confident and safe in his execution of his duties.

The time varied depending on how quickly the pilot took to prove himself capable and the instructor pilot was satisfied that he could safely fly and land such a plane, this could take anything from a few hours to many hours.

I used the experience, which I had gained over the past year of flying many hours in different conditions to make sure that these young operators had a better chance of completing a successful tour than I had. I tried to emphasise on them the need to be fully committed to their job of making sure they knew their role and capable of carrying out all the safety checks which should be carried out by themselves even although someone has said that they have done so, that they used the engines efficiently and monitored the fuel available as economically as possible. I had prepared a schedule, which if used in conjunction with the gauges and filled in every fifteen minutes in flight or so gave instant information if any problem had or were occurring to the fuel position, when action could be taken.

Lindholme being a permanent station was well equipped and had space available for each crew members to have their own section huts which proved most usual and I spent a good part of my time being available to talk with these trainee engineers, discussing any problems or whatever.

In any month I spent on average around 50 hours in actual flying time either day or night flying. This was made up of flying with possibly 10 different pilots on 26 to 30 different flights. The flights were generally around the airfield at fairly low altitude, up to two hundred feet carrying out circuits and landings with pilot, instructor and conversion crews. We therefore did not carry parachutes; this also gave the trainee crews a little more confidence to think that we had confidence in them.

In June 1944 two days after D-Day I attended an instructors course at St Albans, South Wales lasting for four weeks, which proved most instructive, enjoyable and created confidence with ample time for self expression. After that I took the opportunity to attend any other courses, which became available such as a course on jet engines – something for the future, update course on the improved Merlin engines coming into service and a short course on Stromberg carburettors. The RAF at this time was looking to the future and on the levels and quality of staff they were likely to require once the war ended, but with the peace still to be kept for years on. At present most if not all of their engineers and a station or base engineer were all from senior ground staff, so when I was asked if I would wish to embark on such a course (the course was quite complex covering all aspects of engineering ground and in flight) I said I would.

After quite a lot of time on reading (time which I had) I eventually sat the paper and was very happy with the results 89% success, this was of course only part of the paper an oral examination was also required which up until I was released from the RAF I had not taken, however, these showed on my records.

1668 Heavy Conversion Unit, Bottesford

After leaving 101 Squadron I spent a short period at Lindholme as a Flight Engineer Instructor before moving to Bottesford. Bottesford was another war time base similar to Ludford Magna and from where Lancasters also flew, however, in early 1944 it had become surplus to requirements.

The living accommodation instead of being Nissen huts were constructed of fabricated wooden framed units. Being available it was used as a holding base for American troops waiting for D Day resulting in the accommodation being left in a dreadful state.

During August 1944 1668 Heavy Conversion Unit took the base over and myself and few others were in the advance party. On arrival we found it difficult to find accommodation suitable to live in however, after a few days of hard work managed to make progress with repairs. Among the early arrivals were two air gunners both of whom had completed their tour of operations. Jock on Wellingtons and Jack on Lancasters. The three of us became really good friends for all the time we were on the base. In fact, Jack is still a good friend, he now lives in North Cirney Nr Cirencester and we have a card from him each Christmas.

The base was situated midway between Newark and Grantham on the left, half a mile off the main A1 road, walking or cycling were the only methods of transport for getting around the base or for travelling further afield.

We had been at Bottesford for just over a week when this night the three of us decided to have a ride around, on reaching the main road instead of turning left for Long Bennington and Newark we turned right towards Grantham. After cycling along the A1 road for about three miles we came across a signpost, which read Marston and Dry Doddington so we decided to go left and see where the lane would take us. After a mile we came upon a nice looking pub on the corner of the crossroads called the Thorold Arms where we decided to call and have a beer this being Friday evening. The pub was open, furthermore this was the first time that I had entered a pub since I joined 101 Squadron, as I had promised myself that so long as I was flying on operations I would not have a drink.

Training at Bottesford got under way relatively soon and by early September crews for conversion to Lancasters were arriving in number. The routine was very similar to that at Lindholme.

Crews arrived without any experience of the Lancaster and it was our role as instructors to train the flight engineers to a standard where he was competent and safe to act on his own, and to pass on my experience which would make him feel more confident, while other staff members were doing the same for the pilots and the other members of the crew.

Bottesford as I said previously was a base built around 1942 to a standard sufficient to allow Bomber Command to carry the war to the enemy, where heavy bombers such as the Lancaster could operate from. Carrying a bomb load to most destinations necessary and to cause severe damage to their war effort.

From the staff viewpoint it was a complete change from the comfort offered by a peacetime base with all the mod cons, even including waitress service in the dining halls.

Bottesford was however a very happy unit where, so long as the training and flying was carried out on time to a very high standard, all was well.

It was becoming clear that with D Day over with the Allied Troops now moving across Europe as expected and on course, that victory in Europe was only a matter of time with the need for heavy bomber operations becoming limited. This meant that the training for crews could be relaxed and extended, therefore to ensure the trainee flight engineers interest and enthusiasm was kept alive. Two other instructors and myself introduced a short course on engine maintenance, this course lasted three weeks, the purpose of which was to strip down an engine completely, then reassemble it so that it would fire up and run. We had available to us a Lancaster, which had recently run off the runway on landing and was declared not airworthy. The four Merlin engines were still in good condition; this meant that with four engines and four trainees working on each we could entertain sixteen students.

The course proved a great success and it was felt that all those involved had afterwards a better understanding of the engines, which could possibly save their lives in the future.

As the weeks passed three of us, Jock, Jack and myself, had more free time and when on an evening we decided to leave camp we usually ended up at the Thorold Arms. By now we knew many of the locals as well as the family and were being brought into the evening events, such as playing darts. There were a number of really good dart players and eventually we, along with Sylvia, also became an excellent partnership.

Five months on. Christmas 1944 was a completely different Christmas to that of 1943, by now Sylvia and myself were seeing quite a lot of each other and I was still on duty over Christmas, I was asked to spend Christmas day with the family, we had a lovely time. A few days later I was on leave and travelled north to spend New Year with my family in Aberdour.

Our friendship blossomed and we were spending more and more time together and with Sylvia's family and friends. Sylvia had a brother and three sisters; Roy was the oldest followed by Eileen then Sylvia, with Gert and Brenda the two younger sisters. Roy was also in the RAF on air-sea rescue and spent most of his time overseas.

Eileen was on munitions working in Grantham; Sylvia also worked in Grantham in ladies hosiery. Gert worked in a bakery with Brenda still at school.

In the evenings when the pub was open Sylvia helped serve in the bar with her father and mother Gert usually at weekends. During early 1945 flying at the base continued smoothly

and generally without incident. We had one scary incident during night flying practise, an enemy light bomber managed to evade the radar controls and came in along the runway following one of the Lancasters and dropped cluster bombs along the length of the runway. This did cause some excitement as these bombs could explode from the vibration of the landing aircraft. Fortunately the runway was cleared without any injuries.

The other excitement was when one of the Lancasters, which we had just received from squadron required an air test to check its airworthiness before being put to use as a training aircraft. One of the staff pilots and myself as engineer was asked to carry out the test which we did, doing all the usual flying and checking the various instruments and controls. We decided to put it in a downward power dive, at first all was fine and the controls responded perfectly then it happened the port outer propeller began speeding up. No matter what we tried it continued to increase then it disappeared, the two on the inner engines seemed all right, the propeller in the starboard reached well above the normal speed but stayed in place. We quickly reduced our speed and dive, and made a quick return to base and landed on two engines, the aircraft did not pass its airworthy test. We found out later that it was a fault with the balance plates on the, then, new four paddle bladed propellers.

I, by now, had spent eight months as an instructor resting from the pressures of flying on operations and I knew that in the near future it may be necessary to do a further thirty operations, either across Europe or possibly against Japan. A few of us were thinking along the same lines and discussing the possibilities with others of forming crews.

There were two staff pilots on the base who were seriously thinking to the future, with whom I would have been happy to fly with and to this end we took every opportunity of carrying out test flights and then engaging in some low flying, which we expected would be necessary for the future especially if the enemy were the Japanese.

I increased my link training and spent considerable amounts of time keeping fit and up-to-date on all aspects of flying which could be beneficial to our survival. There was suggestion floating around that a new Tiger Force was being formed, which was likely to operate against Japan.

The river Trent gave an excellent corridor to practise low flying as there was at that time no obstacles such as power lines, telephone lines or high buildings to restrict flying. The river banks were relatively high with a river width in excess of 130 ft where the Lancaster wingspan was 101 ft and could easily be tucked in below the level of the banks, great flying, great excitement and very satisfying.

The war in Europe was progressing well, the need for heavy bombers was becoming less and with now limited targets. In mid April a few of us were informed that it was almost 12 months since we last flew on operations and it would now be necessary to do a further tour, more information would be available shortly.

On 8th May 1945 the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, announced the termination of the war in Europe to the whole country and his speech was broadcast over the station Tannoy system at 3pm. The afternoon was then devoted to sports activities and there were parties in all messes during the evening.

I was not on base, this was the date selected on which I was to be presented with my DFM at Buckingham Palace by King George VI. My mum and Aunty Kate travelled down from Edinburgh on the overnight train in the early hours of the morning; I joined the train at Grantham. As usual it was standing room only so I met up with my mum and Aunty on the platform at Kings Cross station. If I remember correctly the investitures commenced at

11am so we had time for breakfast then made our way to the palace. There were many RAF personnel there as well as family members to watch the ceremony and see their relatives presented with their medals. We were all greeted on arrival and then informed of the procedure.

The King seemed very thin and poorly, dressed in an Admiral's Naval uniform. After shaking hands with him and him pinning the medal on my uniform he asked me which squadron I flew with. I told him 101 Squadron, he replied "*One of the elite I believe, good flying*".

We were out of the palace by 1:30pm, by this time the news that the war in Europe was over was known and London was beginning to fill up with people. Everyone was in party mood, singing and dancing or just walking around. London had been under blackout conditions since the start of the war in September 1939. Today things were different all the dark days were over; the people of London were showing their joy. Every light possible, which could be lit, was lit and the streets looked most inviting, it was an amazing sight. My mother and Aunt Kate were booked to stay the night in London so I saw them to their hotel then I made my way back through the crowds to Kings Cross and caught the train back to Grantham. What a day to be in London, VE Day the 8th May 1945 celebrating the end of the war in Europe. There was a real sense of relief and everyone was there to have a good time and to party.

The train was again packed, mainly with service personnel making their way home on leave. I arrived at Grantham around 5pm and from the station phoned the Thorold Arms expecting to speak to Sylvia. She and Eileen had gone to the church service and not yet returned so it was Sylvia's dad that answered, he said he would tell Sylvia on their return that I had arrived in Grantham. It was agreed that Sylvia would come and meet me cycling on one bicycle and pushing the second for me to ride back to Marston, however, on her travelling along the A1 road towards Grantham she met a person she knew cycling from Grantham. She stopped and asked him if he had seen an airman walking and he said no. Previously to this an RAF vehicle had passed Sylvia with RAF personnel on board, thinking that I had thumbed a lift and that I would be dropped off at the road end leading to Marston she decided to turn back. As I was not waiting at the road end she then thought that I must have decided to go back to Bottesford, collect my own bicycle and return to Marston later.

Sometime later Gert happened to look out of the window at the Thorold Arms and shouted to Sylvia *"Jock is coming down the road"*. Sylvia, thinking she was having her on didn't believe her until she herself looked out the window. My other pals Jock and Jack had already arrived and all including the locals were having a great time. As the evening progressed and the drink continued to flow a game started where the aim was to collect as many possible pieces of other peoples ties by cutting off the ends, this was all taken in good fun until one person who had just been given a new tie for his birthday, that day, by his wife and she was not amused at seeing it being cut to pieces.

The end of the war in Europe sealed the fate of most of the war time built heavy bomber bases, they had completed their usefulness for which they were built, that in giving Bomber Command the opportunity required to take the war to the enemy, which they had accomplished very successfully.

Food on the stations was very good with a real selection most of the time. Sundays was the time when the menu suffered as most of the catering staff had time off and tea was usually laid out to help yourself, mostly cheese, bread and butter, and possibly a few cakes. This possibly was the reason why on Mondays the sweet was often bread and butter pudding, something I didn't like then and even now when on a menu I still shy away from.

This was the time that Petula Clarke was often on the radio, in fact every lunch time she recorded a song especially for RAF Conversion Unit 1668.

Bottesford was no exception for within six weeks the complete Conversion Unit was closed down and I, along with others, moved to new surroundings to the peacetime base of Cottesmore where all the staff enjoyed the luxuries of a permanent built unit. Working conditions within the base were very relaxed, with all enjoying a five day week when most weekends were free unless on duty. Flying hours, however, as far as I was concerned still reached between 33 to 44 hours each month.

During June onwards, now that the war was over in Europe, it was still most important that the peoples of Europe, friends as well as enemy, that Britain controlled the airspace and continued to show this by having continued aircraft flying in the skies around.

Certain trips were carried out in order to show ground staff, who had carried out such an excellent job in sometimes terrible conditions to keep the bases and aircraft serviceable along the last five years the opportunity to see for themselves what conditions across Europe looked like now. These trips were given various names: the Ruhr Express, Cooks Tour, Happy Valley Express, each lasted five to six hours flying time where up to 12 to 15 personnel were on board plus the crew of four.

I, as Flight Engineer, was on a good number of such trips. They were enjoyed by most and showed the devastation which had occurred to many of the towns and cities across Europe, in vast areas which had received attention from bombing by the RAF followed by the destruction caused by the Armies fighting their way to Berlin since D Day.

The destruction was terrible with many large areas just a pile of rubble or shells of buildings still standing. The thing which impressed me most was the number of churches and round towers such as commercial chimneys which still stood.

Such a trip would cover from a base to Ijmunden, Amsterdam, Arnhem, Nijmegen, Wesell Dortmund, Essen, Duisburg, Düsseldorf then back to base. Or base to Cologne, Bonn, Aachem Rotterdam then home.

Cottesmore

Cottesmore was situated between Grantham and Stamford, four miles west of the A1 road near the village of Ashwell and six miles north west of Oakham, so our move was only a few minutes flying time. There was much movement between stations, which gave the opportunity of visiting different locations which we heard about but not visited, such as Drem in East Lothian, Ternhill and Shawbury in Shropshire, and many others which helped to make life more enjoyable.

Being stationed close to Stamford and the main road north it wasn’t difficult to hitch a ride or at worst catch a bus or train to Grantham.

Our stay at Cottesmore was fairly short lived; we then moved on to North Luffenham another of the pre war built stations with all the usual mod cons. North Luffenham is situated south west of Stamford, one mile off the A6121 road. Before leaving Cottesmore I had confirmation that we were crewed up and to expect instructions shortly regarding a further tour of operations in the Far East but before that certain procedures would have to be carried out, such as doctors reports and certain jabs given. However, six weeks on and we were still waiting.

The war against Japan was expected to last for some considerable time, however, the introduction of the Atom Bomb by the Americans and the use of them by the American Air Force brought the Japanese war to a very quick end. We had at the time just received our preliminary dates and instructions for flying out to the Far East. This announcement that the Japanese had surrendered cancelled this and we missed the opportunity of joining the Tiger Force. The use of the Atomic Bomb on two Japanese cities seemed, and was, a terrible thing to do and caused terrible casualties among the Japanese citizens in these two cities.

However, if it had been necessary for US troops to land and fight their way through all the various islands the casualty list was estimated that it could have been one million plus service people.

North Luffenham

The war in both Europe and Japan was over which meant that working conditions at North Luffenham changed as from now. There was less requirement for further training of Lancaster crews. There were a large number of service men and women in all three services hoping and wanting to get back to Civvie Street as soon as possible. The government also had a problem in that across the country there were not the organisations or jobs available to employ all those excess to requirements service personnel. Therefore a delaying action was in place to slow down the release. Lancasters were of course used for various operations such as dropping food supplies to the people of Belgium and Germany and for bringing home prisoners of war from Germany and elsewhere and from bringing to the UK survivors from the torture camps.

The top chiefs of all three services were of course now considering the future of the armed forces. The Air Force was no different, we had won the war but not the peace, the peace may be a lot more difficult and to that end the Air Force was trying to assess and ensure whatever happened they had sufficient of high quality personnel to carry out this purpose. Therefore as personnel were being demobbed, if they should have certain qualities they were being given the opportunity to stay on by being offered certain incentives.

While at Luffenham I took the opportunity of attending as many courses as possible, improving my knowledge and information regarding the services and of course continuing to add to my flying hours, something I enjoyed doing.

Our job on the unit was similar to any other staff member, flying still took priority, other duties such as Duty Officer and such like was also now part of our programme.

I recall an interview which I had with the Group Captain Section Leader arrived at the flight office and said "*Jock, the Wing Commander wants to see you*". "*What have I done*?" "*Nothing, it's good news, make your way to his office for 11am.*" "*I'm flying at 10 o'clock*". "*Ok, after that will do*". I arrived at his office next day around 9.55 am, his secretary showed me into his office. I saluted, he said "*Good, come and sit down*" then the interview went something like this: "*I have been looking over your record and I see that you have carried out a lot of flying, almost 2000 hours. There are not many people who can live up to that, you must enjoy flying*?" "*Yes I do*".

"I also see that you have attained a pass, in fact an extremely high pass on the Chief Ground Engineer course, unusual for aircrew even although you are a Flight Engineer".

"Your flight commander also told me you were highly respected and thought of at Cottesmore because of your work with Engine Service course. You would seem to be going back to Civvie Street?" "*Yes sir*". "*Do you want that*?" "*Possibly*".

"*Even with all your exceptional work the war is over so I can't recommend you for a medal however, what I can offer you – you know that the Air Force is looking for people like yourself for its future success – therefore the offer I am prepared to put to you is stay on in the Air Force as a Chief Ground Engineer with Flying Officer on entry (permanent) with good promotional opportunities to at least Flight Lieutenant or even Squadron Leader. Think carefully about it, don't make your mind up now, come and see me in one week's time*."

The unit continued flying and with training. The war being over the RAF was keen to show off their aircraft such as the Spitfire and the Lancaster, which had been so brilliant during the war, to the general public so a number of open days throughout the UK were arranged whereby the public could come along and see over all these war time aircraft. These days proved very popular.

To show off the Lancaster we landed at the base involved, stayed for four to five hours opening the Lancasters up and allowing people to enter by the rear door, make their way up through the fuselage past the pilots positions and exit through the flaps in the bomb aimers compartment, at the front of the aircraft reaching the ground by ladder. Two of the open days I remember going to were Finningly and Haverford West.

During my time in the RAF I only met up with my sister Jean on one occasion and that was when I was at St Athans in South Wales, she was stationed at Bridge End and we managed to meet for an hour or two, where we met I cannot recall. My brother Sandy was stationed at Swinderby for most of his time in the RAF as a fitter servicing Lancasters, and even although we were relatively closely stationed to each other we never once met up and even when I occasionally landed at Swinderby we never managed to get together. Of course these plans were always last minute arrangements and we might only be there for an hour or so before taking off again.

After two weeks I made a further appointment to meet the Group Captain and told him that after serious consideration that I had decided to leave the RAF and return to Civvie Street. I believe that he was disappointed, he wished me success in whatever I decided to do, we shook hands and I left his office.

I was demobbed on 10th September 1946 at Uxbridge then travelled north to Stamford, Sylvia had earlier moved to Stamford to further her career as a shop buyer, by working in a much larger ladies fashion store, travelling to Stamford on a Sunday evening, returning home in the Saturday evening. This meant that we saw more of each other on my time off.

The other opportunity that was open to me on my demob, as I had over a 1000 flying hours, was to join BOAC. Unfortunately the base was Australia and the airline travelled between Australia and Ceylon. Also available because I had A-level passes on RAF teaching courses gave me the opportunity to train as a technical course teacher.

Both of which I declined and decided to return to Civvie Street and continue in forestry, which was always my first choice and as my future notes will show.

Chapter I
Advances in Technology
What if?

Advances in Technology

Most of the technology was designed to combat the increasingly efficient enemy night fighter's control system, in July 1943 window was used for the first time. Window was made up of thin strips of aluminium foil (approximately 9" long) packed in bundles of approx 100. It was the bomb aimer's responsibility to drop these down a small chute filled in the front compartment every 15 minutes along route. With all other aircraft doing the same, the concentration played havoc with the enemy's ground and air radar sets, however, it could not deter the enemy fighter threat for a long period of time, as the Germans managed to overcome this problem.

During D-Day window was used with great success in fooling the Germans that a second landing area further east along the coast was to happen. 101 Squadron completely serviced this operation by dropping window, continually moving across the channel for 48 hours, which meant that German defence forces were stretched along the French coastline rather than being able to concentrate on the D-Day landing site. By the time they realised their mistake the landing had a strong hold.

Other new aids such as RDF (Radar Direction Finding) known as Monica was trialled by 101 Squadron, but was short lived simply because the enemy night fighter crews became efficient at tuning into the signals omitted by Monica.

In July 1943 another new system known as Ground Cigar was operating twenty-four hours a day from a site on the Suffolk coast, jamming the whole of the 38-42 MHZ band known to be used by the German fighters.

It became obvious to the boffins that to be really efficient the system needed to be airborne, it was envisaged that a single Bomber Command squadron should be allocated the new RLM role and would operate within the main part of the bomber stream. This highly responsible task was given to 101 Squadron, the new system was known as ABC or Airborne Cigar.
The ABC required an additional crewmember known as a Special Duties Operator; the area behind the main spar normally occupied by the aircraft emergency couch was converted to accommodate the new equipment. Externally, 7 ft long aerials were fitted to the aircraft, two along the spine and the third under the forward fuselage. The special duty operators were German speaking and became the eighth crewmember in 101 Squadron crews.

The role was to jam the radio transmissions made by the German night fighters ground based controllers. ABC equipment consisted of a panoramic receiver and three transmitters; the receiver could pick up all 24 different frequencies being used by the crystal controlled VHF sets. Its eight crystals each covered three wavebands used by the Germans' night fighter

crews to receive the necessary information about the bomber stream location. Once the operators were able to use their German language skills to find the active controller frequency he put down a key connected to one of his transmitters, which broadcast engine noise on that frequency effectively jamming it over a range of around 50 miles. He repeated the process until he had his three transmitters effectively jamming three German frequencies.

In theory, eight of the 101 Squadron Lancasters could cover all 24 frequencies in use during the night.

This equipment was quite weighty therefore so-called unnecessary equipment such as the steel plates behind the pilot's head and the steel door behind the front compartment were removed to counter the weight increase.

ABC was very effective in jamming the German night fighter's ability to connect quickly with the main bomber stream. The other downside was when the 101 Lancasters specials were operating their equipment these aircraft could be readily picked up by German night fighters and search lights. With the squadron suffering much heavier losses than any other squadron in Bomber Command. There was a plaque in the middle of Ludford Magna remembering the 101 sacrifice, it read:

101 Squadron Lancasters based at Ludford Magna from June 1943 with highly secret ABC radio and 8 man crews flew on every major Bomber Command mission suffering the highest losses of any squadron in World War II

Ludford Magna was also selected as one of the first airfields in the group to have FIDO fitted. FIDO (Fog Investigation and Dispersal Operation) this was justified because of 101 Squadron's key role within Bomber Command.

The equipment consisted of two pipelines running along the edge of each side of the main runway with perforated holes in the pipes. In extremely foggy conditions when aircraft were due to land petrol was forced along the pipes which was then set alight, this helped clear the fog sufficiently to allow aircraft to land safely. One of the disadvantages being should an aircraft with fuel leaking or swerving off the runway an explosion could occur causing loss of aircraft.

This equipment came into us in January 1944. The standard rear turret fitted to the Lancaster was the Fraser Nash with four 0.303" (rifle calibre) machine guns, which were always thought to be of poor quality in terms of armament. A new turret was built by Rose Brothers of Gainsborough after much discussion with personnel from 101 Squadron. The new turret was easy to control, had more room for the gunner and better vision. Six aircraft from 101 Squadron were the first to receive the new turret. Our aircraft X^2 was one of the six (2 x 0.5 calibre).

On 25th/26th February 1944 when we visited Augsburg, operation 28, Len our rear gunner was excited about the possibility of using them against a German fighter and witnessing what effect it would have.

1943-44 was an excellent period to join 101 Squadron. The squadron had just moved to a new base at Ludford Magna near Louth, Lincolnshire and was well placed to carry the war to the enemy. A highly rated squadron within 1 group, a squadron which was given every opportunity to prove itself as one of the best and we were so lucky to be part of it.

The squadron was involved in all that was happening. New equipment was becoming on stream such as 'Window', ABC, upgraded Lancasters, FIDO and the introduction of the more superior rear turret. As days and weeks passed our crew was becoming the most experienced so as a crew were very much involved, we flew on the operation when Window was first used. We were also on the operation ABC was first introduced into Bomber Command and our aircraft X^2 was one of the six aircraft fitted with the new turrets.

These were exciting times, sometimes frightening, anxious and tiring, however, as a crew we worked as a team. We were loyal to each other, dedicated in what we were doing and hence very satisfied with the results we achieved. On completing our tour of operations we were the only crew that had completed a tour of operations since the squadron moved to Ludford Magna. Statistics showed that if Lancasters lasted more than five operations they were exceptional.

All who served in the forces have memories, some good, some not so good. My memories of being in the RAF are of being good and exciting times not to be missed.

My memories of being part of 101 Squadron are also of exciting times, with plenty of different experiences, most when flying. Some exciting, some frightening, one or two horrific, others best forgotten, however, a part of life which I am proud to have been part of and on the whole really enjoyed.

On 12th June 1944 I received confirmation that I had been awarded the DFM.

What if?

The situation seemed very strange, here was seven or eight young men from various backgrounds and from different areas of the United Kingdom, who had for the best part of a year lived and dined together. Worked as a close team under very difficult and dangerous conditions and after completing a tour of operations went on leave a few days later, moved from base on to other jobs and from then until the end of the war had no further contact with each other. In fact until recent years I still had no contact. It was 2001 when I met up with Norman our wireless operator and then years after that out special operator Ken.

What if when I joined 101 Squadron Wally Evans, our pilot, had not insisted that I was his engineer and I had joined A H Evans' crew as their engineer? A H Evans' crew were lost on their third operation.

What if when our Lancaster was caught by the blue searchlights over Germany, if the Halifax which drifted a few thousand feet below us into the path of the search light at that split second and received the full impact of the guns had not done so? We would be just another statistic.

What if when over Amiens we received only comparatively slight damage from exploding shrapnel which passed through the window, just caught my flying jacket sleeve and then went out through the windscreen? Had I been standing three inches to the right the result could have been very different.

What if on returning to base from operations over Berlin on 16th December 1943, when caught up in thick fog and was diverted, if the beam light put up by Catfoss had not been at that precise moment when we were flying at zero feet from the ground we would have ploughed into the farm house. Another aircraft lost on operations. Or when on reaching base Wally had not accepted my advice and decided to go round again on another circuit before landing, we would have crashed due to shortage of fuel.

What if I had decided to accept my commission and stay in the RAF as a Station Engineer probably reaching rank of Squadron Leader or had joined BOAC as a flight engineer possibly based in Sidney Australia, or had taken up the opportunity to become a teacher teaching technical subjects? Life would have been so different, however, I believe I made the correct decision, in fact I know I did. This however is for another time to discuss.

Chapter J
Aircrew Bomber Command

Wartime Bomber Squadrons

Bombing of Berlin

A Day in the Life of a Squadron

Clothing Worn on Operations by our Crew

Contact Made with Two Crew Members plus information on others

Aircrew Bomber Command

A typical description of a bomber crew at the time was provided by the ministry publication entitled Bomber Command. The men of Bomber Command are appointed to fulfil a special mission. Their life is not that of other men, not even those in the other branches of the service. It's very physical conditions are different for them now; a day is much of the night, as much of the day is a time for sleep and repose. Discipline is constant yet flexible. Triumph and disaster are met with and vanquished together.

Air Marshall Arthur Harris, Air Officer Commanding in Chief Bomber Command 20th February 1992. He was known as Butch, the opinion of him varied in accordance with our losses, if they were heavy then his popularity (if that was the right word) suffered. You must remember that most aircrews never saw him when he visited Ludford, I thought he was stone faced, severe and even cynical over our effort. I disagree with those who dubbed him arrogant – he certainly was not. Nevertheless, if his crews did not see enough of him to love him they certainly appreciated what he was doing for them, he gave his command a much-needed sense of purpose. Up to the end of 1941 many people tended to regard strategic bombing as little more than a wasteful sideshow. It was Harris who proclaimed loud and long

that Bomber Command was vital to the war effort and that his crews should be given the best of everything, because their efforts would be decisive in the final outcome.

After a successful raid the C-in-C would send a signal to the squadron saying good show keep it up this meant a great deal to men who knew that they stood a less than even chance of surviving a tour of operations.

Harris was also a great innovator, he called for better navigation and bombing aids, better lit flare paths and increased safety conditions on take offs and landings.

GEC was one of the aids which he had pressured for which enabled the navigator to plot his position relative to a ground station, this turned navigator from an art into a science.

Wartime Bomber Squadrons

People of the younger generation can get the impression that Bomber Command was one big, happy family. This was not so, squadrons were very much individual entities, we didn't mix much with other squadrons and they assumed the character and charisma of the people who were on the squadron at the time.

As a result, few outsiders will ever appreciate what it was really like to serve on a bomber squadron unit. Not wishing to dwell on the dark side of squadron life I was twenty years old at the time, life was for living, we got on with the job. The higher direction of the war was for the older types – 25 years old and above. They were enjoyable days and of course we always expected to come back, suffice to say therefore that at least 277 aircraft were lost or went missing from 101 Squadron between July 1943 and 1945 and that the squadron lost 1094 crew members killed in action and 178 taken prisoner of war.

This was the highest casualty rate of any RAF squadron in World War 2.

Bombing of Berlin

It is difficult for ordinary citizens to visualise the effect of concentrated aerial bombardment.

Un Sangro front in Italy, often spoken of as the biggest land bombardment of the war, 1400 tons of shells came down in eight hours. Remember the front was many miles in length and mostly open country yet they smashed the German defence and prisoners spoke of the astounding paralysing effect of these heavy bombardments. Now compare the figures of the air assault, take as an instance only one raid in January 1944, 7300 tons of bombs went down on Berlin in 30 minutes. Remember too that the bombs fell into built up areas on a shorter front than a land attack. Remember too that tonnage for tonnage a bomb contains a much higher explosive charge than a shell. No city, no defence system could stand up to such attack for long delivered as Bomber Command was doing.

War time Bomber Station – a normal day's work load

The total number of personnel on the stations was around 2,500 including officers, male and female personnel.

The station was equipped to perform as an individual unit like a small town with runways of sufficient length so that the aircraft could take off and land from where to attack the enemy.

It carried sufficient supplies of food, stocks of all the necessary maintenance supplies such as aircraft parts, tyres, turrets, engines and down to all the other small items like rivets screws everything necessary to keep the aircraft flying.

In every hour of the day people were working and with 2,500 staff on board the station could exist from the rest of the country for weeks. Time meant very little to staff and many would not know which day in the week it was or which date in the month it was. Sundays were just another working day.

The work was continuous, outside interests were possibly intentionally forgotten, all friends and family had to remain outside the airfield boundaries.

The best way of describing a normal working day is by eight am the bomb handling crews would already be hard at work sorting out the various bombs, such as the 4,000 lb (cookies) mounting them onto low engine driven trolleys, others would be packing the incendiaries into special cases, similarly all the other bombs likely to be used on operations. All these would be loaded onto special transports and dispatched around the airfield to the Lancasters which would be flying later that day if operations were on.

This operation would carry on well into the afternoon. Other staff would be doing the same with cartridges, feeding thousands of them into their ammunition belts and distributing them to the guns in the aircraft.

Other airfield staff would be filling the fuel bowsers which held 2,500 gallons of petrol and filling up the Lancaster fuel tanks which held 2,140 gallons. The fill up amount would depend on the time of the operation (Lancaster used an average of 200 gallons per hour). At the dispersal points ground crews would be carrying out their inspections on the aircraft under their control, engine fitters would be carrying checks on engine's plugs and instruments, turrets and undercarriages and tyres, while others would be doing other pre-checks on the airframe wings, intercom and oxygen bottles etc., should any faults be found then an air test would be necessary to be carried out by the Pilot and Flight Engineer to make sure all was well. If a fault was still found and was connected with the flying ability of the aircraft further work would have to be carried out, a further air test would be required. Occasionally a complete engine may have to be replaced putting great strain on the ground crews.

While all this was happening other special staff would be working against time.
The Intelligent Officer checking maps and up to date information regarding the target and route. The weather people checking the last minute weather conditions.

In messes the kitchen staff would have to prepare breakfast, lunch, tea and supper for around 200 people on top of that when operations were on a meal consisting of chips and egg had to be prepared and served approximately two hours before take-off time for the aircrews. In the locker rooms each flying crew had to have a parachute, flying helmet, safety aids, maps and money of the countries over which they would be flying, in case of being

shot down. Sandwiches, extra rations prepared by the WAAFS and parcelled up to include chocolate, fruit, chewing gum and other items of refreshment.

The Station Officer and Flight Commander would be selecting the crew and working out the technical data for the journey.

Up until now the aircrews who may have been flying the evening before would be, during the morning, catching up on sleep (having got to bed around 4 to 5am), and in the early afternoon catching up with information etc. from their own Flight Officer or be visiting the aircraft to discuss with the ground crew, Sergeant-in-charge, any problems from the previous operation. Then probably the Pilot and Flight Engineer would have to carry out a test flight.

Once it was announced that operations were on, the aircrews had to attend briefing, have their meal then collect all necessary equipment from the locker room ready for being transported to the aircraft, to carry out the pre-flight checks ready for take-off. Only then after this could the ground crew relax, have a meal, a wash and have some time to themselves, if there was any time left, then be ready for the aircraft returning home anytime from five to eight hours later depending on the distance of the target.

Crews on return were interviewed by the Interrogation Officer, then have their meal and then to bed for hopefully a good sleep, to be ready for what were to happen the next day.

The Clothes Normally Worn on Operations by our Crew

In Bomber Command there was no laid down dress code for air crew to wear when flying on operations, every Squadron in fact every person had his own preference, all had to wear the RAF uniform, however what they wore under or over was entirely up to individuals (the RAF uniform had to be worn for safety reasons in case they landed in enemy territory, in uniform they became prisoners of war, in 'civies' they were most likely to be called spies and possibly shot).

Most of the operations carried out on Lancasters (in fact from all heavy bombers) were from heights of 20,000 ft or over where temperatures could drop to as low as -35 or -40^{o}C below zero.

There was a certain amount of heating within the aircraft, this was heat which originated from the engines through ducts and entered the fuselage in the wireless operators compartment, therefore while the wireless operator and the navigator were roasting a little of the heat could be felt by the pilot and engineer, the bomb aimer who was in the front and the gunners in their turrets received no benefit, they had to source heat from other means.

As I indicated earlier it was an individual choice what clothing they wore, however I can tell you what our crew would normally wear, starting with the most comfortable.

Wireless operator: Normal RAF battle dress, heavy white jersey up to the neck, Mae West, parachute harness, flying boots and silk gloves.

Navigator: Normal RAF battle dress over silk underwear, heavy jersey, Mae West, parachute harness, flying boots, leather shoe foot with lamb's wool tops (easily cut off), silk gloves plus leather gloves.

Pilot and Flight engineer: There was much less heat reached the front of the aircraft therefore we wore silk underwear, long johns under RAF battle dress, heavy white woollen jersey up to neck, leather gloves over silk gloves. No Mae West, parachute harness, flying boots leather shoe base and leather flying jacket.

Bomb aimer: He usually flew in the nose of the aircraft which could be very cold, he wore silk underwear, long johns, RAF battle dress usually two heavy woollen jerseys and heavy over suit, Mae West, parachute harness, silk gloves, woollen gloves and a pair of leather gloves on top plus the normal flying boots.

The two crew members who suffered most from the cold were the gunners.

Mid upper gunner: he was still within the aircraft which gave some comfort. He wore two complete suits of silk underwear, two woollen jerseys, RAF battle dress, unheated over suit, heated over suit, Mae West, parachute harness, woollen scarf, woollen head cover under his helmet, three pairs of gloves, silk, woollen and leather, heated flying boots.

Rear gunner: This was the coldest place in the aircraft in fact he was actually outside the rear of the plane, so if it was expected that the temperatures would be around -20^{o}C he would wear that similar to the mid upper gunner however if the temperatures were expected to drop to say -40^{o}C he would add on extra layers of clothing and wear five pairs of gloves.

The gunners flying suits were electrically heated from a plug-in switch as were their helmet and gloves, their flying boots were also electrically heated, therefore if everything worked properly they were reasonably comfortable, this was however not always the case, a fault in the electrical system, possibly caused by enemy action, then they had problems and could receive severe frost bite, resulting in loss of fingers, toes or even more.

When the gunners were dressed up to ready to fly, it was difficult for them to walk and reach their position in the aircraft. The rear gunners especially looked like the advert for Dunlop tyres!

One of the main reasons for all crew members wearing silk gloves was if you caught the metal part of the aircraft with your bare hand it was so cold that the moisture from your skin would stick to the metal and leave you with severe injuries.

In the aircraft flying at over 10,000 ft oxygen had to be used which meant using masks attached to the helmets, which every few minutes you had to break the ice which had formed around the mask from just breathing.

The oxygen was also distributed through the aircraft from a single supply at each crew position there was a supply tap, there was also emergency bottles at each position, these would last for around 10 minutes.

We all also carried a whistle which was attached to the top left hand buttonhole of our tunic. The sound from a whistle carries much further than the human voice. It could be used to attract attention to one's self in a dangerous situation or for making contact with others.

Contact made with Two Crew Members after 60 Years plus information on others

Living in Scotland during the 1950's and 60's we had little choice of attending any of the activities which took place such as Airfield Open Days, Squadron reunions, or fly pasts, and it wasn't until the early 1970s when we moved down to Shropshire that we began attending the occasional 'open days' (by this time Brian was old enough to be interested), Sylvia's mum and sister's home was in North Hykeham, Lincoln, only a short drive from Waddington RAF station, so this was our first visit of many which proved interesting and a good days entertainment.

We then in 1998 decided to revisit Ludford Magna (101 Squadron airfield) and the small church in the village where a Book of Remembrance was, the Book of Remembrance was of interest to me as it contained all the names of the aircrew that had been lost during the period which 101 Squadron had been there, as I said in my earlier notes that when we arrived at Ludford in July 1943 there was four crews two of which had the name of Evans, WL Evans and AH Evans, at Lindholme Heavy Conversion Unit. I was crewed up with WL Evans' crew, and carried out my training with them, however when we arrived at Ludford somehow the paperwork was wrong and I was crewed up with AH Evans' crew. It was suggested that as neither crews had been on operations the obvious thing was just to leave the paperwork as it was and for me to change over to the AH Evans crew, and the other Flight Engineer to take my place, Wally Evans would not agree, I was his Flight Engineer and that was how it had to be. All four crews flew on the same operations, on our first two, all returned, on our third AH Evans crew did not return, and by our fifth operation only our crew WL Evans were still operating. Checking in the Remembrance book sadly, I was able to read and realise how lucky I was that Wally had faith in me all those years ago.

While in the church we met a lady who looked after the church and was in fact decorating it with flowers, as she said this weekend coming was the 101 Squadron Association Reunion, when a service was held in the church followed by the laying of wreaths at the small memorial and afterwards the Women's Institute laid on in the village hall tea and cakes for all, and if the weather was kind the Lancaster bomber would give a flying display.

In the year 2000 I joined the 101 Squadron Association and have attended the reunion every year since in early September, and in recent years Brian and Pauline have also joined us, joining the Association has proved very good as we have met many veterans who were flying during our time in the Squadron and other very interested people. It was through the Association Newsletter that I made contact with some of our crew members whom I had not heard from for nearly 70 years. They are Norman Ellison, our Wireless Operator and Len Brooks, our rear gunner.

In the summer of 2002 after writing a short article for the 101 Squadron Association Newsletter I was contacted by Chris, the son of our Wireless Operator (Norman Ellison) asking if I was the Donald Fraser who flew with his dad in 1943-44 with 101 Squadron. After the telephone call Chris arranged for Sylvia and I to go to his home to meet his wife Christine and James his son, he lives in Exeter, his dad's home was in Dawlish only a few miles apart. Chris then took us to meet his mum and dad, it was great to see him after 63 years and as such was quite emotional for both of us. It was so good to meet his wife Pauline. We stayed for around two hours before travelling on our way to Woolacombe. We met up again over the next two years, unfortunately Norman's health deteriorated and he passed away on 13th February 2005. We attended his funeral, since then we exchange Christmas cards and the odd telephone call each year with his wife and Chris and his family.

Norman also kept in touch with Wally Evans (our Pilot). After the war he emigrated to Australia where he lived for a number of years before returning to the UK in the mid eighties when he again contacted Norman, they then tried to contact all the other crew members, unfortunately the only member that made contact was Len Brooks, our rear gunner, Norman understood that Wally died in the late eighties.

Len Brooks, our rear gunner, we all knew that he lived in Grimsby for most of his life. During our time at Ludford whenever there was no flying on, he would take the opportunity to visit home which only took him over an hour to hitch a lift. If there was any change on flying one member of the crew would give him a telephone call and he would return to the Squadron very quickly.

During the 1980s and 90s there was a large number of books written covering the war and Bomber Command, I enjoyed reading many of them, even although as you know I did not believe all that was written, many of the books covered the time we were flying, as a result many of the operations we flew on were mentioned in them. There was a series of books written by Patrick M Otter on Bomber Command One Group, the group which 101 Squadron was in and operated throughout Lincolnshire. On reading one of Otter's books called "Maximum Effort" I came across a picture of a number of air gunners while they were stationed at Lindholme as Instructors during their rest period. On a closer look I recognised one as Len our rear gunner. On contacting Mr Patrick Otter in 2004, he said it was 16 years since he spoke with Len at his home in Cleethorpes. However he could find no trace of him in the local telephone directories, he said he had left a message at the RAFA club in Cleethorpes to see if anyone knew what became of him, and if he had any response he would drop me a line. We thought that he had passed away around 2001-2002.

I also made contact with Ken Lewis our Special Operator through the Newsletter, Ken also wasn't in the best of health, however he arranged for his son in law to drive him from Reading (his home) to Lincoln. We had a great time at the Reunion lunch catching up with the past in September 2006, Ken's profession was in Insurance which he spent all his working life in. Unfortunately he was unable to attend any more reunion meetings.

At the end of the war Norman had been in touch with Bill Blaynay, our Midupper gunner, who part way through our tour of operations after an unfortunate incident was released from flying. He told Norman that he had been reassessed and had his Sargents rank reinstated, other than that we have no other information about him.

There was still two more crew members still unaccounted for, Jimmy, our Navigator and Eric, our Bomb Aimer.

Shropshire during the war had a number of Heavy Bomber Airfields, Ternhill, Shawbury and Cosford which are still in service today. Prees, and Sleap, were both wartime bases flying Lancasters, at Prees the hangers are being used as storage units for commercial companies. Sleap is now the home of Shropshire Flying Club using part of the runway, a few buildings and the Control Tower. It is open to the public, where you watch the small aircraft flying and one can enjoy and a good cup of tea and a cake and have a good chat with people who are still interested in flying.

There is also a small Museum covering plane parts from World War II. In the last three years Sylvia, myself and friends occasionally drop in for a cup of tea, by now we know a few of the staff who are all Volunteers and very interested people.

Jimmy Grant, Navigator

On one of our visits in 2012 I had taken with me the 1943 Christmas Dinner menu for 101 Squadron, all the crew members had signed it in the inside, most people looking at the menu thought that we had had an excellent meal considering there was a war on.

Mike Grant one of the longer serving volunteers at Sleap Museum, who aids in researching the items that are given to the Museum before they go on display to the public.

Meantime he is also tracing the history of the oil pipeline which carried the millions of gallons of oil from the ports, across the UK down to the Channel ports and on to the D Day landing sites and beyond. This will be a very interesting book to read when it is published, soon.

On seeing the menu Mike said *"I know this signature, he is one of my family, see how he writes the 'G' and the 'r' in Grant, we all write our signature the same way, and we were all told off at school for not writing properly"*. We worked out that Jimmy our Navigator was his uncle. After the war he said the family had gone their separate ways, as many families did, so he had no idea where Jimmy would be now – it's a small world.

We still have no idea of what happened to Eric our Bomb aimer.

Chapter K
The Lancaster Story

It became clear reasonably early in the Second World War that if Britain had any chance of winning, Bomber Command had to take the war to Germany, deep into its industrial heart, which was not possible with the short range light Bombers.

It was decided by the War Council that a much larger aircraft which could travel further, with a much heavier bomb load into Germany was needed, hence the introduction of the four engined heavy bomber, the Halifax and the Lancaster.

1942 marked the turning point for Bomber Command, Marshal Travis Harris (later known as Bomber Harris) was appointed Leader of Bomber Command. He believed that Bomber Command given the necessary aircraft and equipment, could play an important role in winning the war by strategic bombing of Germany's industrial towns and cities.

Harris ordered a 1000 aircraft raid on Cologne be carried out. Fortunately the operation was credited as a success, this persuaded the Government to allocate Bomber Command high priority for aircraft and more importantly navigation aids and radar which were vital for accurate delivery of bombs on targets.

The development of the Lancaster continued with a few prototypes being produced, the production of Lancasters increased slowly at first and gradually stepped up reaching their peak by the end of 1944.

The earlier two engine bomber had a second pilot to aid the captain with a crew number of five, however on the four engined heavies where crew members could move around the fuselage, a change was necessary. The heavies had a mid upper gun fitted requiring a mid upper gunner; because of pilot shortages owing to the increase in numbers of new squadrons coming on stream and the increased complexity of the four engine bomber, this called for a specialist engineer to replace the second pilot, so the flight engineer was created, the standard crew of the Lancaster comprised of seven specialists, Pilot, Navigator, Flight Engineer, Wireless operator, Bomb Aimer, Mid Upper Gunner and Rear Gunner. Each was an expert in his own field and each a vital cog in the overall crew, rank played no part in the airborne life of the crew.

The Lancaster was involved on most of the important operations, such as the Dambuster Raid on 16/17th May 1943, The Battle of the Ruhr, Battle of Berlin, (Overlord, the name given to the Invasion of Europe 6th May 1944) and Operation Thunder Clap, mass raids against supply and communication targets such as road and railyards continued, and against German naval shipping at Le Havre.

In late July a bombing campaign against the V-weapon sites commenced as there was fear that Germany had a new secret weapon, raids were carried out on launching and storage sites, these operations took much of Bomber Commands efforts throughout the autumn of 1944 as did the attacks against the French railway in support of Overland. In September the

Navy believed that Tirpitz (the German Battleship) which was anchored in the Kaa Fjord in Norway was about to put to sea. Bomber Command was again given the task of destroying her. On the third attempt on 12th November 31 Lancasters attacked the Battleship. This time on arrival the weather was clear over the ship, no smokescreen obscured the target, during the attack several hits were seen by the Lancaster crews, followed by a heavy explosion, one of its magazines blew up, then the mighty Battleship rolled over and capsized.

By the end of 1944 the Allied Armies were approaching the Rhine, come the end of March 1945, they had crossed the river in strength and were advancing on Berlin.

Bomber Command's role assisted by the United States Eighth Airforce was to support the Allies by bombing Military targets, and in supporting the Russian Army on their advance from the east on Berlin.

The last major attack of the war took place on 25th April 1945 by the bombing of the Bergholf (Hitler's Eagles nest) and the SS barracks nearby.

The war in Europe ended on 8th May 1945 (VE Day), however just previous to that operation Manna was put into action, which was dropping vital food supplies to the starving civilian population of the Netherlands (the Germans agreed to the dropping areas) a similar operation dropped food parcels to the Dutch population. A large number of Lancasters were involved, these operations stopped on VE Day.

With the war in Europe over, plans were made for the repatriation of British and Commonwealth prisoners of war under the code name Operation Exodus, many Lancasters were converted to carry 25 passengers for this purpose. Flights continued bringing prisoners home from across France and Germany. Receiving camps were set up in the United Kingdom for the thousands of men returning home from Europe.

Although the war was over in Europe, many Lancasters were preparing for war in the Far East, known as the Tiger Force, it was agreed that 10 Squadrons of Lancasters would be used until the New Lincoln Bomber came on stream which had much longer fuel ranges. Fortunately the Japanese war ended sooner than expected (because of the use of the Atom bomb) resulting in Tiger Force not being required. Myself along with many other crew members were very relieved, because flying over Japan would have been very difficult and dangerous.

After the war the Lancaster continued flying carrying out various roles until the new aircraft came into service, of the approximately eight thousand Lancasters that were built only a few are left with only two airworthy aircraft, one in Britain and the other in Canada.

During World War II Lincolnshire was known as Lancaster County, because of the large number of squadrons scattered across the County (28 in total). Today most of the land then used is now returned to agriculture. It is still difficult to travel around without driving past the site of a famous airfield.

The airworthy Lancaster belongs to the Lincolnshire's Lancaster Association, based at RAF Coningsby and is part of the Battle of Britain memorial Flight. Each year this flight performs at many air-displays entertaining thousands of people and serves as a living memorial to those air crew who gave their lives in the defence of their Country.

There is a second Lancaster which has its home also in Lincolnshire at East Kirby and belongs to two brothers, Fred and Harold Panton, the aircraft is maintained to a very high standard,

where the public can have a taxi ride in the Lancaster, and enjoy the sound of the four Merlin engines.

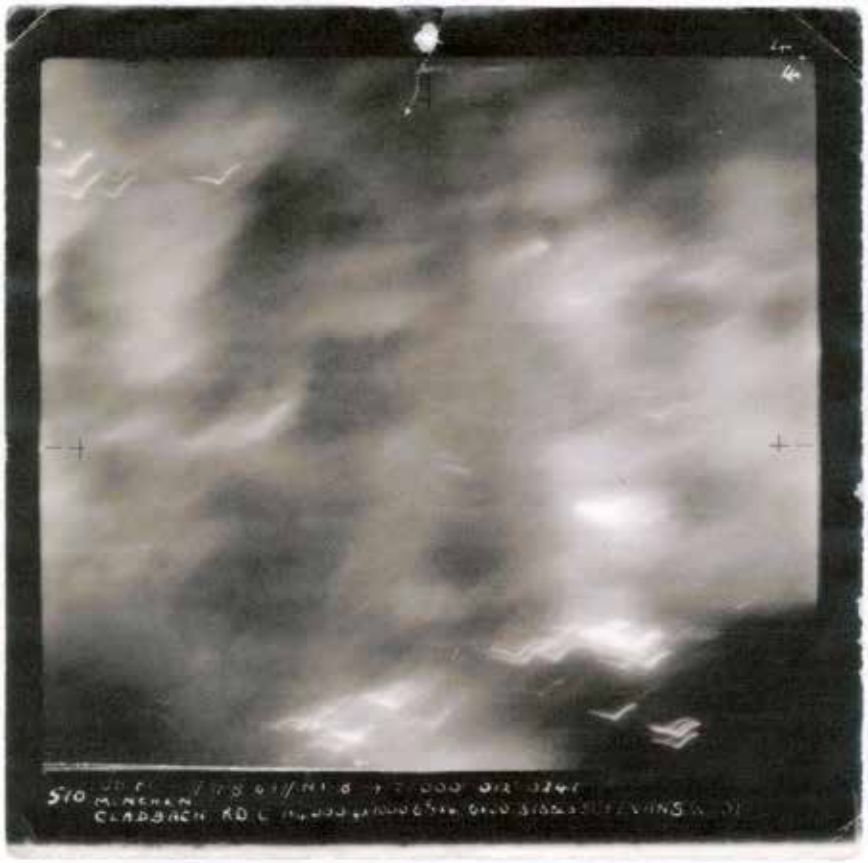
The people of Lincolnshire were the first to know when the RAF were on operations, as with 28 squadrons based throughout the county and each squadron with at least 20 aircraft serviceable, the sound made from over 2000 Merlin engines, as they circled and climbed to reach a height of 10,000 ft before setting out across Europe was tremendous. People from the Netherlands told me (after the war) that during the war they lay in bed at night hoping to hear the special sound made by the British bombers, and as they passed over, they wished them success in their operation and prayed that the young men who flew in them returned home safely.

During operations I listened to the four Merlin engines purring away for five or six hours, the sound was magic and something I will never forget.

I am one of the thousands who have been entertained over the years by attending many of the fly pasts and open days, where the Lancaster has been carrying out the flypast, firstly to hear the sound of the Merlin engines which is music to my ears, then to see this superb aircraft flying towards you at around 200 feet nearly always brings a tear to my eyes for memories past.

Date: 30 Aug 1943

This picture was taken from the camera operated in conjunction with the opening of the bomb doors and Bomb Aimer releasing his bombs on our 2nd Operation to Munchen Gladbach. The picture plotted the bombs hitting the target.



Lancaster Bomber Specification

Length:	**69ft 4ins**	**(21.08m)**
Wingspan:	**102ft 6ins**	**(31.00m)**
Height:	**20ft 6ins**	**(6.23m)**
Maximum Speed:	**300+ mph**	
Range loaded:	**2,600 miles app**	
Ceiling loaded:	**24,000 ft**	
Internal payload:	**up to 7 tons**	
Full fuel load:	**2,140 gallon**	
4 Merlin engines	**1390 hp**	

(The latest Lancasters could be better in all specifications)

The cockpit of Lancaster

16th Dec 1943 14th Op.

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Black Thursday

Further Notes on our 14th Operation on 16th Dec 1943

AT A minute before midnight on the night of December 16, 1943 Lancaster LM395 emerged briefly from low cloud just north of Caistor. There was barely time for the pilot, Sgt Stan Miller of Scarborough, to register what was happening before the Lancaster struck high ground near the town. When rescuers arrived they found no survivors among the crew of seven.

Crashes amongst Lancasters returning from ops or on night exercises had become an almost regular occurrence in Lincolnshire by the winter of 1943. But that night something awful was happening as the 1 Group aircraft returned from a round trip of eight hours to Berlin.

The raid that night had been specifically planned to catch the defenders fog bound on their night-fighter bases across Northern Europe. Instead, the mist came down and shrouded many of the airfields in Eastern England as the bombers were returning.

That night 483 Lancasters and 15 Mosquitos raided Berlin. Twenty-five aircraft were lost to a combination of night-fighters, flak and collisions over the German capital. At least another 29 Lancasters were lost in crashes when the bombers returned to airfields blanketed in fog.

1 Group suffered more than most with 13 aircraft being lost and 56 men killed in crashes on or around their bases. 100 Squadron was hit hardest of all, losing four aircraft, including two which collided right over the airfield at Waltham. 460 at Binbrook lost two as did 166 at Kirmington, and single aircraft were lost from 625 Squadron at Kelstern, 101 at Ludford and 12 and 626 lost a Lancaster each at Wickenby.

During briefings that afternoon, crews had been told that Bomber Command had been waiting to mount a raid on Berlin when the weather was so bad that the fighters would be grounded and they would have an easy trip. This was to be it.

The planned route was straight in and out again over Denmark. But the fighters, which were supposed to be sitting on fog-shrouded airfields across Holland, Belgium, Northern France and Germany, were airborne, and the first intercepted the stream of Lancasters over the Dutch coast and there were running battles until the bomber stream turned for home across Denmark. Twenty-one aircraft were shot down and four lost in collisions over Berlin itself.

The weather became progressively worse as the aircraft returned and by the time the 1 Group Lancasters began arriving, they found the cloud base had almost reached ground level.

Crashes began to be reported from almost every airfield. Tired crews were unable to pick up the circle of lights which by then had been fitted around most of the dromes. Some came down in open fields, some, like LM395, simply flew into the Wolds. At Waltham, two Lancasters from 100 Squadron, O-Oboe and F-Freddie, collided as they circled looking for the funnel of lights that could guide them to safety.

One man who remembers that night vividly is Wing Commander Jimmy Bennett, who had arrived at Waltham three weeks earlier to form the new 550 Squadron which was due to move to North Killingholme in the new year.

Bennett, with two tours behind him already, chose to fly that with "Bluey" Graham and his crew.

"Our take-off was early, about 4.30 in the afternoon, and even then visibility wasn't very good and it was plain we were not going to be in for a very pleasant journey," he said.

The bombers emerged from the cloud cover which was supposed to protect them over the North Sea. "There was no high cloud and at times we could see dozens of aircraft around us," Bennett recalled. "The clouds below cleared slightly over the city, we dropped our bombs and got away again. There was some fighter activity but we were not bothered.

"Coming back the cloud started to increase again and it was clear that by the time we reached England it would be almost right down to the deck. Bluey decided to come down through the cloud over the North Sea. In conditions like that it was always wise practice. Lincolnshire may have been fairly flat, but other places weren't and there were always a few of what we called "stuffed clouds" around, clouds which contained something hard, like a hill.

"We dropped down into the mist but Bluey picked up the outer circle of sodium lights at Waltham, stuck his port wing on them and followed them round until he found the funnel and put her down.

"We rolled along the runway to the far hedge and we were already aware that planes were coming down all around us, landing at the first opportunity, so we decided it would be a lot safer to leave the aircraft where it was and walk the rest of the way."

100 Squadron had suffered terribly that night. So had 97 Squadron at Bourn in Cambridgeshire. It lost no fewer than seven aircraft in crashes.

The 1 Group Summary, which was circulated to all squadrons at the end of December, recorded: "No opportunity for striking at our objectives must be lost. This being the case, it is obvious that, in addition to the enemy on the far side, the elements of this side still have to be mastered.

"As an illustration, after the raid on Berlin on December 16/17, a widespread and unpredicted deterioration in the weather at our home bases occurred.

"No diversion areas were available and many deplorable accidents resulted while our aircraft were endeavouring to break cloud and land."

The Summary continued: "An investigation has now been completed which shows the accidents cannot be attributed to a common factor. Some aircraft broke cloud too quickly, some broke cloud too slowly and continued to sink, whilst others "slipped in" on a turn while endeavouring to keep the airfield lights in view."

It added: "Conditions were vile and unexpected yet 136 aircraft landed safely. We must continue to strive for better airmanship and more effective ground control."

But no number of investigations and changes to procedure could erase the memory of that wooden hut near Louth for Wing Commander Bennett.

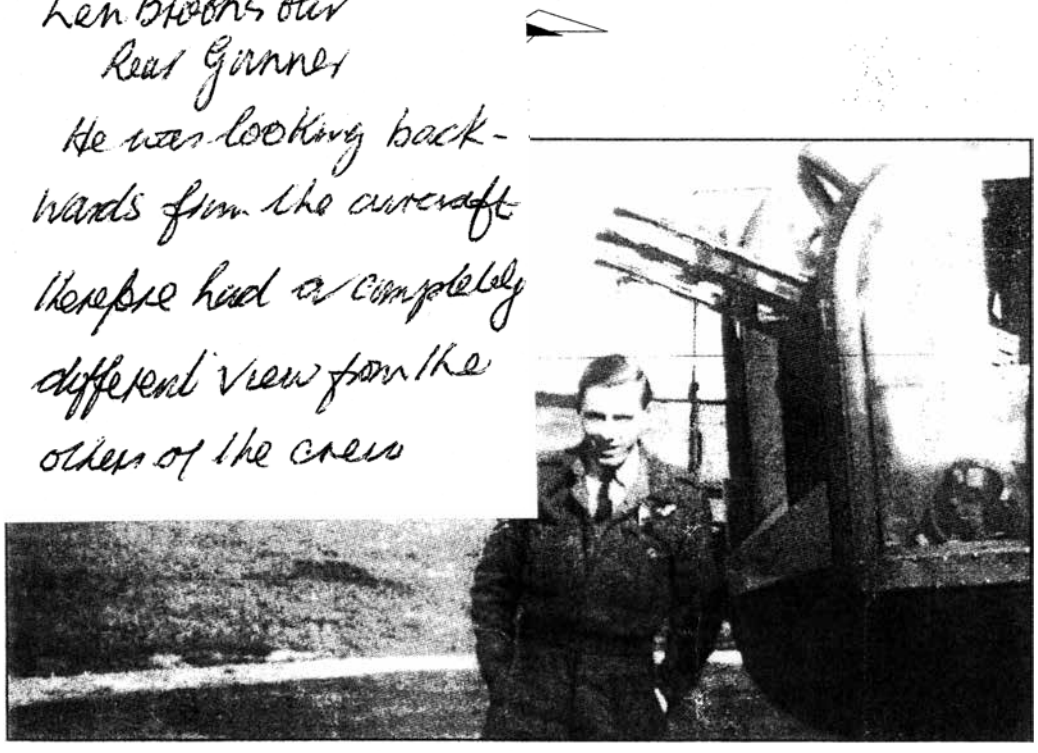
One crew which narrowly escaped joining the casualties that night was one from 101 Squadron at Ludford.

Len Brooks, who was the rear gunner in a Lancaster flown by Sgt Walter Evans, remembers that they were diverted to Driffield because of the bad weather. Over East Yorkshire they were picking up RT messages from Driffield, Dishforth and Catfoss but could see no lights through the murk.

Then Catfoss offered to put a light up for them. "They realised we were very low and put the beam almost parallel to the ground right on us. I remember feeling the power go on, the nose lift and suddenly I saw under the turret chicken huts, a garden shed and finally chimney pots flashing by. That light had saved us."

Mr Brooks also remembers the first time Ludford's new FIDO fog dispersal system came into use. This consisted of a system of petrol burners the length of the runway, the theory being that the heat generated would drive the fog away. It worked, too, the only problem being that the hot air caused a great deal of turbulence over the runway.

He recalls that two aircraft ahead of them declined to land, despite the exhortations of the station commander, Group Captain Bobby Blucke. When it came to their turn they were so low on fuel they had no option and Evans virtually forced the Lancaster down onto the runway.



102. An unknown gunner standing by his turret, 12 Squadron, Wickenby, May 1944.

Training the Crews

BEFORE BOMBER Command could launch its projected expansion in late 1943 and 1944 it had to have a ready supply of crews. And that meant an increase in training establishments.

Changes in the training system meant that each Group became responsible for turning out its own heavy bomber crews. With Lindholme in South Yorkshire as the Base station, Heavy Conversion Units were set up at Faldingworth, Blyton and Sandtoft with other training units being based at various times at Hemswell, Ingham and Sturgate.

Most of the 1 Group crews were to go through these training bases and many felt that flying with operation squadrons was considerably safer than in the HCUs.

Until more Lancasters became available, their conversion to four-engined heavies was largely on Halifaxes, and in particular on the early Mark I and IIs. They were underpowered aircraft which had already been discarded by operational squadrons in favour of either Lancasters or the much superior later marques of the Halifax. They also had some nasty habits, particularly when inexperienced crews tried one particular manoeuvre which effectively blocked the airflow over the tail and was responsible for the destruction of a number of these aircraft.

One ex-12 Squadron crew remember starting six cross-country exercises from Sandtoft and failing to complete one of them. There was little wonder that Sandtoft became known throughout 1 Group as Prangtoft.

Sandtoft itself was, like the other training airfields, originally intended as an operational station.

The site, which is alongside what is now the M180 between Scunthorpe and Thorne, was selected by Air Ministry surveyors in January 1942 as suitable for use by heavy aircraft and work started that October on the construction of the airfield. It was intended that it would come into use as a bomber airfield in January 1944 but in the meantime it was decided to earmark the new station for a Heavy Conversion Unit.

It officially opened in December 1943 (although it was by no means complete, not unusual with newly-opened airfields in 1 Group at the time). The first unit to operate from there was A Flight of 1667 HCU which moved in from Faldingworth, followed by its other two flights. Later in the year a fourth Flight was formed and this became the Flying Instructors' Flight which in turn provided the training for instructors within 11 Base, which also included Lindholme and Blyton.

Second from left is Len Brooks our Rear Gunner

133. Gunnery instructor at Lindholme in 1944. On the extreme left is Bob Dunston, an Australian who had lost a leg while serving with the 8th Army at Tobruk and later volunteered for the RAF as an air gunner. The picture comes from Len Brooks of Cleethorpes, pictured second from the left.