

BEFORE I WAS IN THE RAF
Wartime Memories. Reg Payne

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I didn't think of being killed whilst flying until I visited one or two crash sites in the Rothering area, none of them were German aircraft and I knew members of the crew had been killed when the A/c crashed.

I visited the crash site of a Blenheim Bomber which crashed in some sand pits, I rescued parts of flying clothing in the hedge rows, and found there were still parts of human flesh mixed with the lambs wool.

Another aircraft crashed near a pond and the crew were all killed, bits of the Blenheim Bomber were still on the ground.

A bunch of boys with catapults were shooting at something floating in the pond, as it came nearer to me I saw that it was, a human eye ball.

All this didn't stop me from joining the RAF to fly when I reached the age of eighteen yrs.

After two yrs of training as a w/o/t Airgunner for two yrs I finally arrived at RAF Skellingthorpe 50 Sqn on the outskirts of Lincoln. My brother two yrs older was also flying in the RAF, near by at RAF Tuxford, also a w/o/t. He had already flown a number of operations.

I was already a member of a Lancaster crew, and my pilot had to fly on an operation with another, before he could take his own crew on his own. After the operation was over we were glad that he had returned OK, and said that he didn't think the operation was as bad as he expected.

The next day I had a phone call from my mother to say that my brother was nursing from the same operation that my pilot was taken on. She asked me if I could come home.

I visited our Squadron C.O. and asked if I could visit my mother, he refused to let me go saying that my parents would persuade me to stop flying if I did. I told him that I promised him that

I would come back and continue flying. My mother and father both told me to be very careful when I was flying so the C.O. had nothing else to say to me. Luckily later we found that the Lancasters that my brother + was in exploded whilst flying and two of the crew, my brother one of them, were blown thru the perspex roof, although in a German hospital they were not killed.

After a few weeks my mother told me that Ron Boydon, the fellow that I had done all my training with was reported missing from operations, followed by Arthur Johnson who I trained with. She told me that Mrs Boydon has been seen looking in peoples gateways at night looking for her son Ron.

We didn't think much of our hut at Skillingshaw with no washing arrangements, to do this we had to walk to the Sgt Mess some distance away.

On our first evening there Fred our R.A.F. Gunner and myself cycled to Lincoln as we were told it was only a short bike ride.

We found a small pub called the "UNITY"; it was quiet inside not many people in the room that we were in, just two ATS girls sipping their two drinks together across the other end of the room.

It was not until they got up to go that we spoke to them, they had to be in their quarters by ten o'clock, in a large house near the cathedral. We were ready to go ourselves and asked if we could walk back with them. They invited a couple of nice girls and we arranged to meet them at an earlier time the next night.

Luckily we were not wanted for any evening duties and we were able to get away early and spend time with the two ATS girls until it was time for them to be in their billets by ten o'clock.

We spent time with the two ATS girls for a few weeks and both Fred and I found a close relationship with them, Fred along with Joan + myself with Gina, we all became very friendly, and met each other as early and many times as we could get away.

Returning to the large room of ours in our hut, we were

surprised one evening when entering our large room that there was three extra beds in there, with lots of kit bags and luggage scattered about the room. We had three Canadian air crew members added to our room who had just joined our 50 Sqn.

They seemed to get lots of parcels from Canada, and told us we could help ourselves to any chocolates or fruit that we could see in the room they could not cope with it all.

However the Station Warrant Officer came in one early evening and looked around the room. He said the place looked like a rubbish tip and he would come to look at it each evening and we were not to go out until he looked to see how tidy the room was. At times he was late coming, so it became late each evening for Fred and I to meet Joan & Ena, especially as they had to be back in their billets promptly at 10pm.

However one evening the Lancasters that the three Canadians were flying in failed to return and all their clothing and goods were taken out of the room, leaving our room neat and tidy again as it was before the Canadians moved in.

Now that our room was now so clean and tidy, the Station Warrant Officer said that he would no longer come to visit us each evening as he could see that the room would no longer be full of good parcels etc.

I never did know if the three Canadians lost their lives, but if they did all I could think was that it cost the lives of three men to allow Fred and I to go out early evening to meet our girl friends when we were not flying early evenings ourselves.

Hoping the three Canadians possibly killed made it possible for Fred and myself to go out early and meet our ATS girl friends when we were not on duty ourselves.

Many of Fred Ena's ATS friends had lost their air crew boy friends, and never knew if he had lost his life or not.

Ena's ATS friend Joan spent all her spare time with Fred Ball our Heat Gunner. Fred was killed when our own craft was in flames and he didn't bale out.

Lots of Ena's ATS friends had lost RAF boy friends flying on operations and tried not to get attached to them any more.

Ena's Mother came to Lincoln and work in the WNAF as she was called up to do war work. She chose Lincoln to be near to her daughter Ena.

She had lodgings with a nice lady Mrs Fatchett in Winn St Lincoln. Next door to her was a young lady, that had a small baby. She had it in her arms as we watched the Lancasters flying off on another operation.

She told me that the babies father was an aircrew member that had been missing from operations for some time, and no one had had any news of him. I always felt very sorry for her as she watched the Lancasters taking off from the Lincolnshire airfields.

When I knew we were on operations that night, I would ring the around lunch time, and say to her, I won't be able to meet you tonight, but all being well will see you tomorrow.

She knew that we were on operations that night.

With my brother Bert now a POW in Germany, only two of his crew surviving, my mother was worried what would happen to me. She already knew that our Lancaster was on fire over the Humber Estuary and four members of the crew didn't have time to bale out and were killed. I sort thru the clouds pulling one of the carrying handles and not the parachute release handle, luckily I pulled the correct one and my parachute opened and I made a safe landing.

We were asked to identify the four bodies in the crashed aircraft

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by one of the senior RAF officers, but not one of us wanted
to identify the crushed up bodies in the burned
We didn't want to go near the aircraft. Lancaster.

On one of our ten operations to Berlin, a German night fighter
attacked us and his bullets made a large hole in our
port wing. I thought it was smoke coming out of
the large hole in the wing, but our flight eng said it
was petrol coming from one of the large tanks in the wings.

Arriving back as far as Northamptonshire we were nearly
out of petrol and our Pilot decided to make a landing
on the emergency airfield at RAF Wittering to save the
extra miles to Lincoln. We circled the airfield, and were
waiting for the runway landing lights to come on, expecting
any time for the engines to shut down as the petrol had
all been used. At last the landing lights came on
and we were able to land with all the petrol now used up.

As we entered the Wittering office buildings, we heard
the dance band close down and found that no one had
been on duty, to turn on the aircraft landing lights when
aircraft were in trouble and needed to land.

Returning from another of our operations to Berlin we were told
to land at RAF Larkhill in Yorkshire, as there was dense
fog in the Lincoln area. We tried a few times to find the
runway at Larkhill, but then were told to proceed to
RAF Melbourn which we found was also foggy.

After flying just low for some time Michael found it
in the fog and managed to land safely.

A large van driven by a WAAF picked us safely up and
drove us to the crew room's. In the van she had a radio
that could hear all of our aircraft calling and saying
that they must land as they had little or no fuel left.

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One of our squadron aircraft ran out of fuel, and crashed into a nearby farm house, the Farmer and his wife were both killed, and only the rear gunner in the Lancaster survived. From then on all the Lancasters on the circuit trying to land were told to Head their aircraft out to sea and Bale Out, which they had to do.

The fog stayed with us for three days up in Yorkshire, and we couldn't return back to Lincoln. We had no washing or showering items for three days or money to buy anything with, not even our toothbrushes or razors to share with, we had to stay with our Lancasters until the weather improved and we could fly them back to Shellingford.

We had a rare one morning, we had just landed after completing another of our operations, and taxied the Lancasters back to our usual dispersal. Michael Butlin then said to us all, OK everybody "All Switch's off." Before I could check all my radio and intercom switch's, there was a loud scraping noise like a van dragging along the side of the aircraft, followed by a heavy thud.

We all scrambled out of the aircraft and expected to see a small lorry or van firmly stuck to the side of the aircraft, but there was nothing any where near us. The Bomb Aimer went back to the aircraft and opened the little inspection door panel that allowed him to look down into the Lancasters Bomb bay. He was shocked at what he saw.

A thousand pound bomb had been still in the bomb bay, it had not dropped with the others over the target. It's a good thing that it didn't hit its nose cap on the way down the bomb bay or we would all have been blown to pieces.

I've often wondered how the bomb disposal crews got to remove the bomb without it blowing up the Lancaster.

We landed early morning after a long trip to Berlin again and our ground crew asked Leo the aircraft had flown, we all said there were no problems with the aircraft and we all left in a hurry to get back to the Sgt Mess and get out breakfast before getting into bed and have our sleep.

After we were all awake again around tea time we were told that they wanted to show us something about our aircraft. Arriving at the dispersal point of our aircraft "B" Baker" the ground crews pointed to a large hole in the port wing when a large bomb had gone thru and left a large hole you could look thru. Not only did it go thru the wing it also went thru a large petrol tank.

Luckily the petrol tank was empty by the time we got to the target. There were three tanks in each wing and this tank was empty when the bomb went thru it. Had it been thru the one next to it which was full of petrol we would never have got home and finished as POW's etc.

On our Berlin Operation as we were getting close to Berlin, I heard the engines on the Lancaster open up and felt the aircraft starting to climb. Our Bomber Leader Leo Battell shouted to Gock Higgins our Mid Uffs Gunner and said, "Not yet Gock, wait until I say now." I moral over to our Astro. None near my compartment and looked above and in front of us, and I saw straight away a German Ju88 Night Fighter which had not seen us.

We flew closely under recall it and Leo shouted "OK Gock Now"

They both opened up to gbeer and I could see the red hot bullets crashing into the German Heinkel Night fighters. Our Post Liver bullet were being sprayed along its wing area, but I noticed that Gock's the Mid Uffs Gunner, his red hot showers of bullets were going into the cabin area when all the crew members were close together. The Ju88 continued to fly steadily on for some time whilst the bullet continued to enter the cabin area where the crew were based. After a short time after

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the German night fighter tipped over on its side, with smoke now coming from its engines and cabin area, as it fell lower and lower it was lost from my view.

The forward member of our crew said, that smoke and fire came from it as it plunged down to the burning city below it, and was certainly shot down.

What upset me though, that our front gunner was an officer, and he received a medal for his shooting, but Joach who was only a Sgt received not even a mention.

Frank Swenyard Navigator.

Frank Swenyard was a Flying Officer, we sat very close together, and we got on together very well. Frank was our Navigator.

Frank and I worked together. He would ask me what class I could see from the ASR/RDOME close by me, when I told him the ones in view, I would take his sextant and read out the degrees & minutes for him to use on his astro graph. Also I obtained quite a number of radio bearings for him from distant Radio stations, this helped him to plot his position.

When we were diverted to another Air Base on the way home he would not worry about getting the Lancaster there. He would ask me to get him a QDM to the base, QDM COURSE TO STEER after another one or two, I could take him there.

My worst flying experience was not a bombing operation, but an Air Gunnery training flight which we had over the Humber Estuary part of the North Sea of course.

We had our own crew of seven, plus another pilot and his two gunners, making ten men altogether.

From Skegness we had to fly over the Humber Estuary when a Spitfire would join us, and in radio contact would continue to attack us whilst our two gunners would train their guns on it as it dived on them. We would then call the Spitfire Pilot & tell him that the other pilot and his two gunners were changing over and we would call him to begin attacking us.

Cameras were fitted to the guns so the film could be shown after the exercise to see if the gunners were using the correct deflection in the attack etc.

We had our full crew of seven on board the aircraft, along with the other pilot and his two gunners.

On boarding the Lancaster I noticed our Flight Engineer wasn't taking his parachute with him, I remember saying to him, when your parachute don, and he said, it's only a training flight I'm not bothered about that.

The time of the year was January, but it was a sunny day although the sea looked very cold should we ever have to land up in it one day, and I wondered, should I be wearing my Mae West.

Looking down from the aircraft all I could see now was cloud, so I didn't know how far away the coast was should you have to use your parachutes etc.

The other pilot and his two gunners were moving into their positions in the aircraft, and I noticed that our two gunners had now joined us at the rear of the Lancaster where we could see the other Australian pilot and his two gunners do this part of the exercise.

At the word GO, the Lancaster was taken in a very steep dive, I've never seen one dive so steeply, but as it pulled out of its steep dive one of its engines burst into flames.

The pilot operated his extinguishers for the engine and for a little time we thought all was well, but after the extinguishers had finished their work, the whole wing seemed to be on fire, and Michael gave the order for all of us to abandon the aircraft. There were only two escape doors on the Lancaster, and ten men who needed to use them.

The Australian Pilot & his two gunners in the front of the aircraft started to take out of the nose escape exit, as our Midupper gunner Jack Higgins failed out of the rear exit, but damaged his ribs as he hit the tail plane. I tried to leave by the back exit, but the

gust of wind blew me back again. I think I was given
a push with someone's foot that got me out of the aircraft,

As I fell thru the air there was nothing but cloud
below me, and I didn't know if I was over the sea or the land.

I did a silly thing I was digging away at the carrying
Handle of the parachute pack and not the release metal Handle
so by the time I had pulled the correct parachute release
Handle I had already gone thru the cloud.

A large part of the wing had broken off and was coming
down behind me, I'm glad that it drifted away from me and
didn't cut thru my parachute.

As I got nearer the ground I could see the coast a
short distance from me, and I was drifting towards it, then
there was a large cracking noise, and smoke and flame as
the Lancaster crashed a few miles in land near East Kirkby Airfield
and I was still drifting that way myself.

I finally landed in a large field and before I could
get in a standing position I saw an RAF Van coming towards
me with two airmen in it. At the same time some one on
a parachute coming down a short distance away landed in
a dense spinney, I could hear the branches on the trees
breaking as he fell thru them, I found out later it was the
other Australian Pilot.

Our Lancaster had crashed close to East Kirkby Airfield
when I was taken to, there were four men in the aircraft when
it crashed and I was asked if I could identify the bodies.
I was told they were all crushed, and I just didn't want
to look at them.

Ted Bell our rear gunner would no longer come with us when
I would visit him in Lincoln he had every chance to bale out
the aircraft early but he didn't have the pluck to do this
Jack Higgins lost his ribs as he baled out and hit the
tail plane, he spent a short time in the base Hospital, and
made a good recovery.

Following this air crash I would go into Lincoln to see Ena on my own.

Also I was introduced to Ena's mother who was in lodgings with Mrs Fatchet in Lincoln, whilst working in one of the large NAAFI forces canteens in Lincoln.

Luckily I had plenty of time off when not flying, and during the cold winter days I could ride on my bike and visit Mrs Fatchet at her home in Winn St.

She always made me welcome and found me something to eat, she had a fast & clip shop next door to her so I could always pop in there during the day.

Before going on an operation taking five or eight hours flying time, after no sleep during the day, we were given Whkey Wakey tablets which we only swallowed just before we were airborne, there was no chance of a sleep during the day before going on operations, you didn't even know where the target was until the main briefing just you were airborne.

I was the wireless operator in the crew of Lancaster LL744 VNB 50 Sqn. Each morning after breakfast, if I had not been flying the night before, after breakfast I had to visit the Accumulator Store and collect two small but heavy accumulators, on my bike I would ride to our Lancaster, and replace them with the two in the aircraft. I then had to go to the flight office and collect the form 700 and say the batteries had been changed sign my name etc. and return the two batteries that I had replaced to the accumulator store. This had to be done by me every day unless I had been on operations the night before.

The batteries had to be changed each day, even if the aircraft had not been flown.

During one operation the two gunners said how cold they were, especially the rear gunner.

Michael Beetham our pilot told me to see what the problem was, I had to put a portable oxygen ^{BOT} round my neck before I went down, you wouldn't last long without one.

I could see straight away what the trouble was, the back door was open & a strong freezing cold wind was coming in.

The flight engineer came down to help me, but to get the we could not close the door. There must of been a wind of over one hundred miles per hour coming thru the open door and the temp would be around minus thirty degrees.

With the help of I think the Navigator we managed to tie the door up but not fully closed, and leave a sharp knife there to cut the rope should we need to bale out.

One other night the mid upper gunner said his turret had frost all over it and he couldn't see a thing, he asked me to bring him an axe, I gave him one and he smashed the perspex from the front of his turret so he could see, luckily he had electrical clothing on and could only have the turret facing backwards.

We have a long length of rope close to the back door in the Lancaster, should a crew member loose an arm or a leg and we are those or four hours from reaching home, we could tie a torch off the wounded crew member, tie a length of rope to his parachute release handle and when passing a large German town or city push the wounded airman out the back door. His parachute would open and he would be seen with the torch and parachute. Hoping he would be rushed to a German hospital to have his life saved.

We called it the dead man's rope.

As a Wireless Operator whilst I was flying on operations I was given a frequency band on my radio to search, and if I picked up a German mans voice giving out instructions

I would tune my transmitter to the frequency, and press down my Morse code key, this would transmit the sound of one of our Lancastrian engines on that frequency and blot him out. A microphone was placed against one of the engines for that reason.

To prevent too many aircraft over the target at the same time and hitting each other, we were divided into two or three waves, First, Second, or third wave, we had our own light to bomb the target and the time over the target, but after a long flight to get there we rarely arrived at our time over target, it was not unusual for an aircraft to get an incendiary bomb thro its wing which over the target, from an aircraft above.

Whilst over the target area a senior RAF officer would be circling the city area, he was the "Master Bomber" he would be shouting out details of which coloured flares to aim at, reds or greens etc. His language at times didn't meet up to an RAF officer.

On one operation we were told to land at St Eval Cornwall on our way home, but during our flight I received a message, which said cancel landing instructions "Return to Base". Unfortunately the Wing Commanders Wireless operator failed to get this message and they landed at St Eval. The only crew to land there.

All the Sqdn Officers were at the airfield when the Wing Commanders landed back at Shellingford to clear him home.

At our next briefing for an operation the Wing Commander said, Wireless Operators, make sure you get all the messages broadcast not like some lot I could name that misses them. His wireless operator stood up and said, If that's what you think of me sir, you

can get none other Wireless Operator to fly with you tonight,
and then started walking towards the door. RAF police
at the door moved to stop him leaving, but the
Wing Commander said let him go.

I'm glad I wasn't the Dirty Comm Wireless Operator.

The Wireless Operator had an unusual name which you could
remember and looking at a long list of airmen who lost
their lives on 750 Sqn I saw his name on the list.

After breakfast if I found I was on operations that night,
I knew that our Sqns mess phone was disconnected and
to tell Eric that I would not be able meet him tonight
I used to cycle to a nearby village and use the public
Phone Box (he always knew the reason why).

On one day when operations were detailed, I found our
crews were not on the list of crews taking part.

I needed a few items such as soap & toothpaste etc
and cycled into Lincoln to purchase them.

I found Lincoln rather quiet whilst in the shopping
area with no local aircraft flying at the time.

As it became dusk winter time, all the local airfields
were preparing for aircraft take off,

Suddenly I heard a heavy Lancaster taking off from
Waddington, taking off with an overload, then another one
from our Shellingdon, also from Tiverton & Barnby,
all these Lancasters were flying with an overload of bombs
and needed all the power their engines had to get them airborne.

This was the first time I had been in Lincoln city to
hear all the aircraft cycling round Lincoln with a heavy
over load of bombs, they needed all the power their engines
had, to get them airborne. The people of Lincoln didn't seem to
take notice of it I suppose they were quite used to it.

Eric + Joan had given Fred our best Gunner + I a brass Lincoln Imp which they said would bring us luck, and told us not to fly without them.

I left mine on my flying jacket so I always had it with me when I flew. Fred often removed his for his flying jacket and wore it on his tunic when he went out at evenings.

One evening we had attended briefing for an operation, and were on our way to our aircraft when Fred told us he didn't have his Lincoln Imp with him. On arriving at our aircraft we told a ground staff member and he said he would collect it from our billet, after we gave him the last number, and the position of Freds bed etc. Freds Lincoln Imp was on his tunic hanging up over his bed. First bed on the left as you go in the main door.

Off went the man in the van and he returned later with Freds Lincoln Imp which he had recovered from Freds tunic. We all felt better after this, and we hoped it would make Fred more careful to make sure he always wore his Lincoln Imp.

It was a month or two after this that we had to do an airgunnery exercise with some extra members of the crew, during the exercise the pilot put the Lancaster in a very steep dive, which caused one of the engines and the wing to burst into flames. The Lancaster was over loaded with ten crew members taking part. Four crew members were killed when the Lancaster crashed and sadly Fred was one of them.

My bed was next to Fred's and I didn't have a very good night's sleep, I lay awake for some time, looking up at Freds tunic which hung close to my bed the early sun light shone over Freds bed area, his tunic was hanging up above it, and the sun was shining on a small brass item on the eafel. I couldn't believe it, it was the Lincoln Imp and he wasn't wearing it again.

P.S. I still wear my brass Lincoln Imp.

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I think my first fear of our operational flying was
the Lancaster taking off and getting airborne.

At the briefing for the operation we were usually told
we would all be flying with a thousand pound overload.

With a normal all up weight of bombs in the Lancasters
it took a long run along the runway before the aircraft
became airborne, but when they had added another thousand
pounds of bombs on the aircraft it became that bit more
stressful.

As the Lancaster began its way along the runway,
the Navigator would read the speed it was travelling at,

it needed one hundred miles per hour before it could take off,

Some times when the pilot could see that the aircraft
was not going to reach that speed at a certain position
along the runway, and the gate was getting closer on
the throttle control, he could say to the flight engineer,
"THRO THE GATE", and the throttles were pushed that little
bit more before the aircraft started leaving the ground.

The gate had to be moved to get
the take off speed up to 100 miles per hour.

We had an Elsan toilet at the rear of the aircraft,
but it was not used very much when we were flying.

We all had our own metal cans close by us that we
could use and they were emptied into the Elsan Toilet as
we left the aircraft. The Elsan Toilet was at the rear
of the aircraft, and to get there in flight you needed a
portable oxygen bottle to breath for the journey, and for
all your layers of heavy clothing, and the temperature
around minus thirty degrees you couldn't take your gloves
off and touch anything.

Most of our flying time over Germany was around six
to eight hours. Berlin was around eight hours which our crew
flew ten times. We went there three times in five days. (Nights)

In our pockets we had a bag of sweets, and a selection of Witney according to which country we were flying over.

Also we had a map of the area that we could use should we have to take evasive and find our way to safety.

If we had flying boots with light leather padding half way up to the knee, a knife would be in one of the boots so the tops could be cut off should you be shot down in Germany, or any enemy country, to make them look just like a pair of shoes, and not flying boots.

We also had water tablets in our pockets to use when selecting water from small streams, or brooks.

As the Wireless Operator I had to know the position of some of the stars, the Navigator would ask me which ones were plainly in view. I then had to use the sextant and take a shot of the star asked for. This was taken in Degrees & Minutes and the correct time. From this the Navigator had equipment where he could plot his position.

3-12-43 around lunch time Michael Betham was instructed to take his crew to RAF Waddington to collect a Lancaster.

When we got there the Lancaster DV 376 was already loaded with bombs and before we took it to our airfield, we had to go off and bomb Leipzig first, then take it to Shellingthorpe.

During the operation we were attacked and damaged by a Ju 88, we were very short of fuel and managed to land at Wittering.

Another Lancaster from Shellingthorpe had to collect us the next day and take us back to our base Shellingthorpe whilst the Lancaster DV 376 went thru repairs.

On the 29-12-43 we had to bomb Berlin, and had a Incendiary Bomb through our Starboard Outboard Petrol tank and were lucky to get back home again.

We flew on operations to Berlin ten times, and in doing so, we lost 383 aircraft.

Our first three operations were to Berlin 22.11.43
23.11.43 26.11.43 55 MISSING.

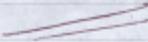
114 aircraft missing in our first three operations.

The inter comm system was powered by two smallish Lead Acid Batteries. Every morning, it didn't matter if the aircraft had flown or not, these Lead Acid Batteries had to be replaced.

Each morning after breakfast, I as the Wireless operator, I had to visit on my bike the Battery Store. I had to collect the two batteries on my bike and cycle across the airfield when the Lancaster was parked. I had to change the batteries in the Lancaster. I then had to visit the flight office and ask for the form 700 for our Lancaster.

I then had to sign it to say the batteries had been changed, then on my bike again I would return the two batteries that I had removed from the Lancaster to the battery store where they would be put on charge again.

This I had to do as the Wireless Operator every day, regardless of the day of the week or the weather. Even if the Lancaster had not left its parking site. The hardest job was finding the form 700.



If we were on our way back after an operation over Germany, and the weather was bad over Lincoln, "usually fog", we would be diverted to another airfield which could be as much as sixty miles away from Lincoln.

To help our navigator, I could contact the airfield and ask for a ADM, a course to steer to reach them. By pressing down my Morse key, the receiving station could give me a course to fly to reach that airfield, which I would then pass on to our navigator & the pilot.

My Navigator was a wind finder, this because he was an experienced Navigator of around thirty years or more of age.

The winds that he found, I would pass them on to 5 group, and then would be passed on to all 5 group aircraft in their Half hourly broadcasts.

One evening I spent some time passing wind details to the 5 group radio people not knowing if the receiver was a man or a WAAF female.

In Morse code I asked if the receiver was a male or a WAAF. I got a very short but strong answer,

In Morse code I got. (- - . * * *) which was a G and an S

The G & the S. was a short way to tell me to get stuffed.

When I attended the briefing after the operation, I asked if the 5 group radio operators to night were male or female, and I was told, they are all WAAF female operators.

All this gave us a lighter side of the serious thing we were doing in bombing cities in Germany ETC.

During our training days at RAF Bottesford, we could be riding our bikes back to Bottesford after an evening out at Stamford. Frank Swinyard our Navigator would ask me to point out certain stars in the sky, as he always asked me to do his astro shots for him with the sextant.

He had to make sure that I knew the star that he wanted. Both he and our pilot (now Sir Michael Beetham) received the DFC. after war, but for us Sgts, there was nothing.

We always relied on my radio bearings when in trouble to get us home safely.

When flying over the sea, I was taught to let my trailing aerial out, this hung down from the aircraft and touched the sea when the aircraft was flying at sixty feet.

If the pilot was flying over the sea and in the dark he could not see the water if he was going to ditch.

With my radio on, I would loose my signal as soon as the aerial touched the sea, and I would tell the pilot we were at 60 ft, and he would land the aircraft in the sea. We would call this ditching, "Losing to ditch"

When we were doing our training, flying as a crew on 14 operational unit at Bletchley, I would tune my radio into one of the regular BBC programmes and we would all listen to some nice music, I would turn it down should our pilot want to give us instructions. Our cross country flights sometimes lasted two or three hours.

It became general practice for Bomber crews to wear a white silk scarf when flying on operations, printed in black ink on the scarves were the names of the German cities that the weaver had bombed. This went on for a short time until we heard that airmen shot down over Germany wearing one of these scarves, had one wound round their necks and hung on a lampost etc. This soon stopped us wearing them any more.

By this time Ena my ATS girl friend and I had become very close to each other, She knew I was on operations, as I had contacted her & told her I would not be saying her this evening.

However in the morning on the BBC news they would mention the RAF Bawing raid, then finish by saying sixty five of our bombers failed to return, and she could't believe it when I rang her the next day and said I will meet you again tonight.

On a bombing raid to a large German city, the RAF Pathfinders would have arrived there and dropped marker flares for us to aim at, greens & reds.

Along with them would be the master Bomber, he would be in charge of the operation.

Green's Red marker flares were dropped all around the city and his voice could be heard telling us not to aim at the Reds, but let the Greens. I think what surprised me most was his bad language and his swearing.

I spoke to Michael Beetham and asked who was that man using that language over the target and he would say it was Wing Commander 80 & 88.

I never thought that an officer such as a Wing Co. would use language like that, I only heard it from cooks as we queued for our lunch.

The RAF bombers arrived over their targets in two or three different waves, each wave flew at a different height. Should you be late getting over Berlin, you could lose two hundred bombers dropping bombs from above. Our navigator 7/o Frank Swindall always urged Michael Beetham to get to the target on time.

There could be 500 ft between the height of each wave.

One night we had a bomb dropped on us from above, it punched a large hole in one of our petrol tanks, passing thro the wing.

We were lucky that the tank was empty, the petrol being used to get us to the target, should it have been the one next to it which was full, we would never have got back to Lincoln.

The windscreen wipers controlled the heat entering the Lancasters, you could never please all the ones, it entered the aircraft from the engine exhaust by the side of the Navigator, If I turned it up to please the pilot's Tkt Engineers, the navigator would tap my fire and get me to turn it down a bit.

LANDING INSTRUCTIONS

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When there were two Squadrons based at the same airfield

This could involve over thirty aircraft wanting to land at their airfield, and most of them had only twenty minutes fuel left in their tanks.

NUMBER 1 The first aircraft to arrive had to orbit at three thousand feet, and as he circled the airfield he would call out his position on the circuit such as "CROSS Roads", or "BAKERS FARM", "RAILWAY STATION", then NUMBER 2 would arrive and call up and he would follow No 1 on the circuit starting out NO 2 BAKERS FARM ETC,

After around four or five aircraft were circling at three thousand feet, number one would be told to circle at two thousand feet, but still shout his number and position on the circuit, until he was called down to one thousand feet, when he would call out, No 1 down wind, then he would call out No 1 Funnel, then No 1 "Touching" "down" then No 1 clear as he left the runway.

Our flying control would give the calling aircraft their number and instruct them when they could reduce their height as long as they all called their positions out whilst flying round the circuit.

It would possibly go on for forty aircraft to land. Our crews were trained to do this in night training exercises, to prevent aircraft running out of fuel whilst circling the airfield many times waiting to land.

My pilot Michael Beetham (now Sir Michael Beetham) was told by one of the WAAF M.T. drivers that he could use one of the Commer vans on the airfield to check on the serviceability of the aircraft. He asked me if I could drive a car, and on me telling him fair No. He then said, I have never driven a car.

This came about because the Wing Comm. spoke to Michael Beetham and said, now you have been promoted to a Flt Lt you will have the responsibility of checking the serviceability of the Lancasters in "B Flight", but you can use one of the cover vans to get round the airfield. He didn't like to tell the Wing Commander that he had never driven a car before.

As the Wireless Operator I had the major hot air supply control close to my seating. Also it was close to where the Navigator spread his maps and charts to keep us on course.

The actual heat came from the flames of the port inner "Rolls Royce" Merlin Engine, and were quite hot at times.

The Navigator often got quite hot during checking his course and direction, and signalled me to turn it down a bit, but after ten minutes or so the crew at the front of the aircraft complained at feeling the cold.

I could never please all of them.

Frank Stimpson F.R.A.T. was our navigator, also he was a wind finder, from time to time he would find a wind & I would trans mit it to our fire group base.

We went back around ten aerials on the Lancaster, most of them small whip radar aerials, these had to be looked at before each flight to check that they had not been damaged by the ground crews.

During the bombing operations that we did to Berlin, I would look out of the astro dome and see areas of Berlin covered in the small incendiary bombs, the wide roads were plain to see running thru the city with all the buildings on five each side of the roads.

At regular intervals the four thousand pound cookies would explode in the roads and that part of the wide road could not be seen any more, the whole area was covered in large circular explosion areas, and the wide roads that were clear to see at the beginning of the raid, were not there anymore, just one large area of fire.

As we had no washing facilities on the site where we slept, we had to walk some distance to the Sgt's mess, there we had washing and shower facilities. After we had been in the showers and dried ourselves we had to fold up our towels and put them back in our canvas hold all's, they never got dry, and were always damp when we used them.

Our canvas hold all's were hung on a long row of coat hooks in the shower room of the Sgt's mess.

After a number of weeks we were told to remove our canvas hold all's from the Sgt's Shower rooms for a single day. During this time all the canvas hold all's were removed on a trolley that were still hanging on the coat hooks, then hold all's were the property of the Sgt's who were missing from operations.

When our Lancaster was taking off with an overload of bombs, I would see the flames coming from the first inner engine, and spreading over the leading edge of the wing.

It was only a few hours before that I had seen the petrol bowsers pumping petrol into the wings in the same area, and petrol running down the wings.

I felt easier after ten minutes of flight, only a small flame leaving the exhaust.

During my time with 50 Sqn at RAF SKELLINGTHORPE aircrew started wearing long silk scarfs (pure white) on the scarf's were printed in black marking ink the names of the German cities that they had bombed.

We were all proud of our scarves mine had the name of Berlin on it ten times.

This all came to an end when it was found out that aircrew who were shot down and were wearing one of these scarfs angered the german public, that the scarf was hung round the airman's neck and he was hanged from the nearest lamp post or tree.

I don't think I saw anyone wearing his any longer.

I still have mine in my wardrobe.

The pilot of the Lancaster sat in the front of the Lancaster on the Port (Left) side, behind him sitting at a large table was the Navigator. He needed a large table to spread his maps open so he could read his maps.

Also on the left hand side of the aircraft, behind the Navigator was the Wireless Operator, who had his large Marconi transmitter and receiver on a smaller table, along with his worse leg for him to transmit his messages etc.

Also by the side of the Wireless operator was the Monica (aircraft Warning) receiver which he had to keep his eyes in the out the flight.

Down along the Starboard side of the aircraft were a number of boxes of "Window". Window was small lengths of stiff paper, with a stiff metal like coating on the paper strips. The Bomb aimer in the nose of the aircraft would throw out a bundle every five or six runs or so, and each time he would call out Window.

A large blip would show on my Monica screen as it passed us by, and I had no need to shout a warning. When I saw a blip on the monica screen & the

bomb aimer had said nothing, I would shout a warning, shouting "CONTACT ⁱⁿ STARBOARD QUARTER U.P.", our Lancaster would dive in a different direction and for the next few minutes everyone would search the sky until we were sure we were on our own again.

The paper bundles of window strips were along the bomb bay floor in a row along the starboard side, As our flight continued I would keep passing these bundles down to the bomb aimer in the nose of the aircraft, and as he said "WINDOW" I would see the blip appear on my Monica screen.

It's when I saw a blip appear on my screen and the bomb aimer had not spoken that I shouted contact Port, should it be that, or, Starboard if it was on our starboard side.

As a Wireless operator I had to tune my receiver to our fire group radio broadcast every half hour to see if they had any messages for us.

One part of my operational flying that I never felt easy with, was when we became airborne on an operation.

The Lancaster always had a one thousand pound over load and the engines needed every bit of power to get us airborne.

I would look out of my small side window and see the flames leaving the front engine exhaust, the flames were so long they even left large scorch marks on the wings, each side of the engine.

I knew that in those wings were over two thousand gallons of high octain petrol, the flames would burn the paint off the wings, each side of the engine. This continued until we reached the height we were detailed to fly at over Germany.

In our flying clothing pockets we had a fair amount of French or Dutch money which we could use if we had to bail out of the aircraft over such as Holland or France. We also had a supply of water purification tablets to make sure we had drinking water. This all had to be handed back in to the Squadron after landing, which we were always glad to.

A little further down the aircraft where the Navigator sat, and the Wireless operator, was the next bay, quite a large bay where a crew member could be placed if he had been wounded.

It was also handy for placing spare heavy flying clothing, especially if I myself had to move into one of the turrets to take the place of a gunner if he had been wounded. I would need to wear some heavy warm clothing.

All our Wireless operators had completed an Anti-gunner course during his training and could man one of the turrets if need be.

During our crew training period at 14070 Bottesford and Market Harborough we were debriefed to do long cross country flights taking two or three hours.

I made this period a little more enjoyable by selecting some nice music on the radio, and feeding it on to our inter com circuit in the Wellington.

Our crew always looked forward to this. But when flying on our operations over Germany we needed every bit of information on the inter com spoken, and action had to take place immediately.

Our pilot Michael Beetham was concerned that we were always in bed at nights at a reasonable time.

He had nothing to fear for Fred our seat mate and myself, as our two ATS girl friends had to be in their quarters before ten o'clock at nights failing this they were not allowed out at nights for some time.

We only had a fifteen minutes take ride back to our hut at Shellingthorpe, and were soon in bed.

Our ATS girls often gave us a sandwich or a slice of cake to eat on our way back to Shellingthorpe so we didn't go back feeling hungry.

During our operations and the long journey, our reward came when our Bomber decided which bunch of PFF marker flares he was going to aim off.

He would then say "Bomb Doors Open", and a cold draft would fill the aircraft, then he said "Steady" - "Steady", and then "Bombs Gone". You could hear and feel the "clunk" "clunk" as the bombs left the position hanging in the bomb bay. The cold air left you as he said Bomb Doors Closed.

We all felt better now we had no bombs on board, and the aircraft felt much lighter, now all we had was the long journey home, hoping that there would be no fog over our airfield and we could have a nice long sleep.