

So, after surviving a few trips we were given our own aircraft, ~~UMF2~~, already a veteran of many ops. She proved to be the most dependable aircraft. Apart from the increasing number of bombs painted on the side we also had the nude lady which I understand was repainted by the next crew after we completed our tour. The lady was no longer reclining but standing and partly clothed. At a reunion a chap said it had been ordered to be removed, which it was, but repainted standing and captioned 'Frigger of the fighting sixes' instead of 'Friga of -----'. Whoever gave the order must have got the message as it survived. It was a special aircraft in that for some reason it had a much better performance than the vast majority of Lances. She flew faster than others on the same revs and boost and it didn't make any difference when engines were changed. Fuel consumption was better. A lovely plane. We never found her ceiling and she performed well in all weather conditions. Only once when on an op to Saarbrücken on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1944 did we have real problems with icing and engine failure, with loss of all heating. We all suffered from frostbite and had to abort.

However, on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1944, target Frankfurt, when evading a fighter JU88. I smashed my lower jaw and was placed sick. The rest of the crew then had two abortives and became convinced I was their luck and pleaded with me to sign myself off which I did and flew with my jaw strapped up, hardly able to talk, and still living on liquids. Wearing an oxygen mask I was in agony but at least the pain kept me awake. Bone splinters from the jaw were still working their way out 40 years later. I was still unable to eat properly for many years and on occasions my jaw would lock solid for weeks at a time.

Once the bombs had gone we either flew high or very low on our way home, preferably very high, and, as on the outward journey, weaving about all the time to allow us the greatest chance of seeing anyone underneath us, a method that stood us in good stead twice. On a moonlit night we flew high, on dark nights low, avoiding lit up areas. We used cloud cover at times but not if our shadow was thrown.

UMF2 survived the war. I was told she completed over one hundred ops but have not confirmed it. She was one of only two aircraft to fly from beginning to end of Squadron Ops period and had been on C Flight 12 Squadron before C Flight became 626 Squadron.

Like many other crews we all learnt as much as possible about each others jobs and agreed amongst ourselves who was the best substitute for who. It was decided that Stu Tween W/OP was best gunner, Jim Jackson, N, was best B/A, Johnny Payne B/A, best F/E, Johnny Moore, MU/G best W/OP. I was best Pilot and also Nav, but every one of us practised at all other positions. I was the only one to land the aircraft which I only did 3 times with a very nervous skipper hovering and the rest on tenterhooks too. What would have happened if I had needed to do it with a dodgy aircraft I have no idea.

Landing occasions were on August 1<sup>st</sup>, V2 on return from Rufforth, August 21<sup>st</sup> F2 and 29<sup>th</sup> F2, September 9<sup>th</sup> Navigated whole trip, September 27<sup>th</sup>, Navigated whole trip.

I had been taught to fly and navigate by a First World War pilot, my father also, and tried to keep up-to-date as I grew older.

Of all my ops the ones I remember more than the others were: Kiel Canal, Aire (abortive) when we hit downdraft of a cu-nim cloud and the plane was almost torn to pieces and Frankfurt and Saarbrücken when we landed with full load of 62,000lbs with 3 engines. We also had a second dickie on board. (Aire Abortive is reported separately).

When we flew it was necessary to keep a sharp eye out for enemy aircraft, mostly at take-off and landing. Many of our aircraft were shot down for not being alert at all times. There was never a time you could relax, even in England. We were all concerned about the possibility of becoming Prisoners of War and found out as much as possible from evaders and escapees who came to give us such information as they had, e.g. no labels or names, numbers on clothing. I had a Swiss knife with a German inscription on it and some German matches and watch I believe had been taken from a Prisoner of War or perhaps a dead German. I also had a French pipe and pouch of French tobacco which I did not use as I could not replace it and which by the time I finished flying was nearly all dust.

Flying an aircraft which is open to the elements requires plenty of clothing. In most bombers the wind could get into the fuselage from several points. To try to keep warm was impossible and so we wore many layers of clothing, i.e. one pair of silk socks, 2 pairs of wool, 1 pair sea boot socks thigh length, silk Long Johns and vest, silk balaclava and a wool one, 1 wool and 1 cotton vest, 1 RAF shirt, wool Long Johns, 1 roll neck sweater, 1 8ft long silk scarf, 1 tunic, trousers, flying inner suit, electric heating suit, Irving trousers and jacket or Kapok electric buoyancy suit, silk gloves, wool mittens, electric inner gloves, leather gauntlets, leather lined flying helmet, fur lined flying boots, Mae West Parachute Harness. In our pockets we had a torch, all the personal items mentioned, the escape kit which would have maps of the area, several currencies, concentrated Horlicks tablets, water purifying tablets etc. In our clothing were hidden knives, films, maps, compasses etc. There was also a Thermos, sweets, concentrated caffeine tablets (Wakey, Wakey) which caused eyes to become dry and sore on a long Op. We also had a parachute to carry.

Despite all the clothing and heating by the time we reached our operating height the cold would be creeping in and within half-an-hour we would be freezing. When the temperature was below minus 30 degrees or more the pain began to penetrate every part of the body. It was not uncommon to suffer frostbite even with the heating still on. In F2 we also had hot air pipes from the engine exhausts which were pushed into the flies..... to give extra warmth to the legs, but still could not dispel the cold.

Before an Op. every piece of equipment was checked. Nothing was left to chance. We and our ground crew would be crawling all over the plane making sure nothing was missed. The ground crew of F2 were, I believe, the best on the station (Wickenby). Proof I believe is the fact that F2 was one of only 2 Lancaster's on the Squadron to survive the war.

To increase our chances we spent time in the sections to keep up-to-date and also in the Intelligence section, often helping there. Briefing was conducted before each Op when we were given all information known at the time about the target and defences and weather en route. Very often both would be wrong but we expected that and took things as they came. Winds, cloud cover etc were never left to chance.

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Interrogation on our return was more intense and I am afraid here we were less co-operative. After long hours frozen to the marrow all we wanted to do was get into bed to warm up after a hot meal (egg, chips and beans) and so we had nothing of note to report wherever possible, even if we had had a brush with a fighter. Any report unusual would mean an interminable questioning of every member of the crew when we were dead beat and just wanted to rest and relax. Only if something was completely new would we bother.

I flew with 3 other crews on Ops, one officially and the other 2 unofficially, due to chaps being unable to get back to the station, as previously mentioned. The official Op was with F/O Oram who was on his last Op and had lost both gunners when he had to ditch. The first was to Kiel and the others to the Ruhr.

Our ground crew were a grand bunch of chaps. The electrician, George Grant, lived not far from my parents. On every Op he would bring a ¾ inch steel plate, heavily padded, for me to sit on 'for special protection'. Whenever there was a stand down we would take the ones with nothing to do to a show, cinema, dance or just a drink. There would sometimes be a dance on the station and so we would lend or procure SNCO or Officer's uniform for them if the dance was at one of those messes. Nobody, to my knowledge, ever complained as most crews did this. We always made sure to get all drinks when on the station and gave each one a pound to spend as he wished when off the station. Also when any of them went on leave they were given a pound a day if single and if married double this with an extra pound for each child. Each of us shared the cost but the Canucks insisted on paying twice the amount of us natives. The Canadians also bought two rounds to our one, etc. Three of us gave local farmers a hand when we could and in return we were given any farm produce they had. Over our time at Wickenby we were given chickens, ducks, beef, pork, eggs, milk, cheese, butter, bread, dripping, etc., and twice when we couldn't leave the station for a while a delivery was brought in by the local policeman.

Taking off from the station on a summer or autumn evening, turning towards the continent, meant I was often presented with some of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen and climbing often prolonged them. We flew into darkness with bright skies behind, night below and daylight above and the only real danger from the dark areas, which meant there was no time to linger on the exquisite sight behind us.

On each Op I took note of the route and times etc. of different dog legs so that I would be able to estimate a course to be taken if the Navigator and navigational equipment were damaged. My hope was that I could give the Skipper a course to the centre of the British landmass from wherever we might be at that time and that one of us would be able to check drift, wind speed and direction and knowing aircraft speed, roughly work out ETA over Britain. All details had to be kept in my head. We put it into practice only once as an experiment and arrived over Cromer instead of Lincs. From Kiel. I did navigate sometimes when on cross-countries and was OK but had all the aids which I could not rely on in an emergency.

On night ops we flew on the outside of the stream until 30 or 40 miles from the target when we moved to the right track for bombing, trying to find a spot with nobody above us. There is nothing more unsettling than being on the point of dropping the bombs and seeing an aircraft immediately above you with its bomb doors open with bombs still to be dropped. This happened three times early in our tour. To see bombs falling in front and behind your wing and tail tends to make you more cautious and think of a solution. We flew on the edge and higher than the main stream which allowed us to dive into the stream if attacked, which in fact got rid of the attacker every time.

On a cross country a Flying Fortress came close to us and indicated a race. Tom opened up and we moved steadily ahead of him. After about 5 minutes Tom throttled back. It came alongside again and to our surprise the pilot gave us the 'V' sign and waved, then moved away. Two days later a jeep called at the guardroom and left a 40 oz bottle of Bourbon 'for the guys who were flying the Lancaster UMF with the naked babe on' three days before. How they found out our station I have no idea. We never found where they were based. Tom and I collected the bottle and gave each bod in the guardhouse a tot before leaving. For several days we had personnel who didn't normally travel around the station coming to look at the 'Babe' and the C.O. commented it was probably in need of modification but as nobody had complained about it there was no hurry. Later when there was a stand down, our crew and the ground crew got together to finish the bottle off with a toast to all USA Forces, especially USAAF.

On one other occasion, on our way home over the Kattegat, a twin engine aircraft flew alongside us for 20 minutes, quite close, possibly a Mosquito but no recognition was possible due to bad visibility. No attempt was made by it that could have been considered hostile and we thought it was one of ours or Swedish. One thing we did not do was fire, except in defence, which would give away our position. I am convinced that some chaps fired at imaginary aircraft and made themselves targets.

Getting caught in searchlights was always bad. If this happened the usual evasive action was taken, plus Johnny Payne and I would throw out 'window'! We had no idea if it helped but we evaded almost immediately every time. Luck or not it seemed to work.

Air pressure at height reduces the higher you go and can cause some unusual effects. Nitrogen bubbles in the blood can cause a sensation similar to intoxication. Also releasing the ground pressure in a flask, particularly hot beverages, causing the contents to expand and boil.