

## LONE BRITISH BOMBER BOMBS BONN

On a cold and raw December 28 1944, the Orderly Officer informed our crew, "your on tonight, briefing the usual 1600 hours", (4pm). With all crews present in the briefing room, the heavy drapes covering the large wall map were drawn, revealing our 'target'. A red ribbon marked our route, with changes in direction, to confuse the enemy as to our actual target. Reports were given by section heads as to what ground defences we may expect, flak, searchlights, or air defences. Navigation, bombing instructions were given, and last but not least the 'Met. Man, (Meteorologist), who would try to predict the weather to, and over the target. Briefing over, we head to the mess hall, and after, to the crew room, to dress in our bulky flying gear, and hear more stale jokes, from someone trying to release built up tensions. Then its a lorry ride to our Lancaster being readied on the dispersal site. The last drags on a cigarette, a 'pee' on the tail wheel for luck, then up a short ladder to our positions. Every thing now was becoming routine, our pilot going through his check list. Finally "Geoff' our flight engineer is now calling, airspeed 95..airspeed 100...105...."Skipper, we have a red light"...Instant panic...breath holding...waiting... waiting, for the inevitable to happen, 2154 gallons of high octane gas, and a full bomb load, we cannot stop, its go for take off regardless. We become airborne, and almost immediatelly lost power to our star-board motor. Geoff, our flight engineer quickly feathered the propeller, as our pilot gained control of the 'Lanc'. After gaining a safe altitude, the crew had to decide whether to jettison the bomb load in the English channel, or to continue on with the mission, we all agreed if 'Dickie' our pilot could fly on three motors. Bonn, a 'University' city, a five and a half hour round trip, but we had forgotten that we would be flying slower than the main bomber stream, and this would make us late over the target.

'Tommy', our navigator, (from St. Marys) gave 'Dickie' a course to fly, and then started our slow climb towards the target. With three motors we were unable to climb and reach our normal cruising speed. This put us well behind the main bomber stream, and apparently all alone. If there were enemy fighters they probably attacked the main stream, and hopefully would leave us alone.

Arriving at the target area considerably late, we saw no other 'Lancs', but a city burning furiously. There were many searchlights wandering aimlessly over the city searching for us with radar. A heavy concentration of flack also found our altitude. There were no colored markers to aim for, and bomb on, and it didnt seem to matter where we bombed. we apparently were the only Lancaster over the target, so our bomb aimer called for bomb bay doors open.... bombs gone,...bomb bay doors closed, get the hell out of here.

We had no sooner turned to our new course, when a radar controlled search light locked on to our 'Lanc'. Then others locked on, and soon it seemed as if every search light for miles were coned on us. Search lights easing towards us in long lazy arcs. Light so intense I felt I would suffocate. There seemed no escape, we were coned with twenty or more, it was impossible to even hesitate a guess. Being coned meant only one thing, we could expect a barrage of flak any minute. Each light was 2 million candle power, and multiply this by twenty or thirty lights. I was blind in my mid upper turret, as were the rest of the crew. We were totally exposed, totally helpless, we were a very bright and shiny star in the apex of many

*Is this accurate? Len*

search lights. Our pilot reacted instinctively by shoving the nose down hard, at the same time telling the engineer 'full throttle'. Flak had found our altitude, and was bursting all around our Lanc. The flak seemed accurate enough, but we were not hit. Although we only had three motors, we hurtled toward the ground at a steep angle, and after what had seemed like an eternity, the pilot pulled up, the 'G' forces ramming everyone into our seats, as we roared over the burning city. The dive cost us valuable altitude, but we escaped the search lights, and flak, and were safe for the moment. As we left the target area, ground defences seemed to throw every thing they had left, up at us. Perhaps our lower altitude, the flak burst well above us. Our return to base was fairly uneventful, our pilot landing the Lanc. with three motors, safely. We were then de briefed, and then to bed for some much needed sleep. The following day one of the London news papers carried a small article headed " Lone British Bomber Bombs Bonn" Few, if any details were printed, due to security, But our crew knew all the details.