

**ROYAL AIR FORCE – BOMBER COMMAND
RAF STATION WICKENBY, LINCOLNSHIRE**

**GEOFFREY W ROBINSON MBE
FLIGHT ENGINEER, 12 SQUADRON**

THE CREW:

F/O PCL BIRD DFM – PILOT
F/O T THOMPSON – NAVIGATOR
W/O S PECHET – BOMB AIMER
W/O F BRATBY – WIRELESS OPERATOR
F/S GW ROBINSON – FLIGHT ENGINEER
P/O LW LANG – MID TURRET GUNNER
W/O LA JACKSON – REAR GUNNER
R.

THE FACTS:

**RAID ON DUISBERG 21/22 FEBRUARY 1945.
362 LANCASTERS AND 11 MOSQUITOES TOOK PART.
7 LANCASTERS LOST. 3 CRASHED BEHIND ALLIED LINES.
FUEL CARRIED 1850 GALLONS.
BOMB LOAD 10,000 POUNDS (4.464 TONS).
18TH OPERATION.
FLYING TIME 6 HOURS 30 MINUTES.
AIRCRAFT PH-H.**

REMINISCENCE OF A FLIGHT ENGINEER'S NIGHT TO REMEMBER 55 YEARS AGO

Operation number 18 of a ^{TOUR} tower of 30 meant that the half way mark had safely passed and every operation was ^{ONE} ~~me~~ nearer the magic moment which heralded the ~~REST PERIOD~~ ^{REST PERIOD} 'riot record'. It also meant that the crew was experienced and battle tried. In this respect the crew was very fortunate to have Peter Charles Lewis Bird DFM (Dicky) as pilot. Dicky was on his second tour. The first tour being on Wellingtons (Wimpeys) and he was awarded the DFM. In addition to being a first class pilot he could almost map read his way over France and Germany by the position of the enemy anti-aircraft batteries.

After the Bomb Aimer announced "Bombs gone" the skipper asked for full throttle and confirmed with the navigator the course out of the target area. All spare eyes were searching the sky for night fighters. Lancasters were well illuminated or silhouetted against the clouds turned red by the fires of Duisberg below, the sky was well marked by the smoke generated by the flack (anti aircraft ^{SHELLS} skills). At this stage every one was tense. Suddenly the urgent voice of the Tail Gunner, ^{BUNK} ~~Buck~~ Jackson, screamed at the pilot "enemy fighter, corkscrew port, go, go" Standing in my position by the pilot, I instinctively grabbed something for support, as Dicky Bird started the violent evasive manoeuvre. Then all hell broke loose. The ^{NOISE} ~~voice~~ of our ^{BOOMING} ~~beaming~~ machine guns could be heard and then the aircraft shook and shuddered as cannon shells hit it.

My first reaction was that the starboard outer-engine was on fire with flames streaming from the engine nacelle and over the wing. I instinctively shouted to the skipper that I was feathering the propeller, closing the throttle to close down the engine and pressing the fire extinguisher, at the same time closing the fuel cock. All this time the pilot was frantically corkscrewing the aircraft with the added problem of being short of one engine.

How long did all this last? Minutes, seconds? I for one was thankful that all the hours of training had proved worthwhile.

Eventually, we were aware that the firing had stopped and we seemed to be clear of the target area. The skipper asked the navigator for a course for home, fortunately he had it in mind, because his instruments and charts were scattered over the floor and desk. The skipper then called each crew member to check if they were OK. All responded OK except the rear gunner who was quite incoherent and obviously in trouble. We had been flying at about 28,000 feet (5.3 miles) altitude and oxygen deterioration was a likely problem. The outcome of which could be fatal if not dealt with quickly. So with the agreement of the skipper who had by now got the aircraft flying on an even keel and was trained for flying with one engine short, I set off with my tool kit picking up an oxygen bottle on the way to find out the problem with ^{BUNK} Buck Jackson and check out the damage. I discovered that the oxygen pipe to the rear turret was severed and so filled up ^{FIXED BUNK} Buck with the portable oxygen cylinder. He soon recovered to his normal level of sanity, so I closed off the oxygen pipe to stop wastage and then had a close look at the damage, which was severe. There was a gaping hole in the fuselage in the port side and smaller holes in the starboard side where the shells had nipped through and out, but with no apparent damage to control surfaces or mechanisms.

Having returned to my post by the pilot, we (Dicky and I) concluded that the starboard inner engine was not giving out full power. We were unable to climb, so had to limp home at a slow speed and at a fairly low altitude.

We arrived back at Wickenby to find that the airfield lights had been switched off and the 'welcoming party' was getting ready for bed. We were well overdue and I think had been given up as lost.

The next morning the crew inspected the aircraft and I think most of us collected one of the many sharp pieces of shrapnel riddled aluminium which had been lifted from the fuselage by the cannon shells. I still have mine, a reminder of what might have been and the fact that lady luck was riding with us that night or it might have been Len in the rear turret.