

Recollections of the navigator of one of
the Lancasters which took part in
the attack on Dresden on 13rd/14th
February 1945.

One of the Lancasters which bombed
Dresden was "P" Peter which was one
of the fifteen aircraft from 103
Squadron which was based at
Scampton, Lincolnshire.

The crew of "P" Peter was made
up of a South African, Donald
Legg who was the pilot, a
Canadian Russell Roeslerings the
wireless operator, a Welshman
from Liverpool, Dave Jones,
who was the bomb aimer, an
Englishman Andy Anderson, the
upper gunner and Hell

Scott, Ian Nerdawer, the navigator
Jack Ross the flight engineer and
Jack Bent the rear gunner.

Donald Legg, the South African was
32 and much older than the other
members of the crew who were in
their early twenties.

The Lancaster "P" Peter was the
second one of that name which this
crew had had. Their first one
had been destroyed a few weeks
earlier when after a bombing operation
on the Urft dam the first "P" Peter
had been hit by flak which had
started a fire in the fuel engine.
The fire could not be extinguished
but the pilot had been able to
fly as far as Brussels and to
land there. Brussels was at that
time in the hands of the
allies.

5.

At the briefing before the operation the crews were advised that the target was to be Dresden and that the Russians had particularly asked that the RAF carry out the attack to help them. The Russians had believed that there was a build up of German troops and armor in Dresden preparing to make a counter attack on them.

So the crews involved it was simply another operation, the principal difference between it and the others being that it was for a longer distance than the average operation and that they would be under possible attack from enemy fighters and flak for a longer period of time.

4.

There was a strong wind from the west blowing when "P" Peter took off at 2102 hrs. After climbing to 14,000 feet it joined the main bomber force at Reading and then headed south east on a course of 145° crossing the English coast near Eastbourne and the French coast near Abbeville. It then altered course to 109° until 0053 am when at a point 30 miles from Darmstadt it altered course to 086° and flew on it for 14 minutes for about 65 miles heading in the direction of Nurnberg. It then altered course again to 081° and flew towards a point to the north of Nurnberg

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at 01.07 am it altered course to 045° and flew towards Leipzig. After about 35 miles south of Leipzig it made its first change of course to 082° direct to Dresden which it reached at 01.38.

It had now flown 843 miles in 4 hours and 16 minutes and was at a height of 18000 feet. The temperature was minimum $23^{\circ}C$ and the speed of the wind was 82 miles per hour. The bomb aimer Darr force then directed the pilot to the target which was a factory on the south bank of the Elbe and released the bomb load manually on the target at 1.40 am.

6.

Immediately after the bombs were released the navigator gave the pilot a new course to fly south east from Dresden for 140 miles. At 1.46 am the pilot was asked to change his course to 343° ie to the south west and to fly to a point 25 miles south of Schenecty (which evidently the crew referred to on another operation the following night) after flying 62 miles on this course the aircraft again changed course to 226° and flew to a point about 20 miles south east of Nürnberg "P" Peter then flew the rest 111 miles on a course of 348° to a point about 20 miles south of Stuttgart which it reached at 3.28 am.

At that point the navigator asked the pilot to change course to 268° and to fly on that course for 110 miles to a point 35 miles south of Strasbourg which was reached at 4.17 am.

"P" Peter was still flying at 16,000 feet into a steadily head wind which had increased to 90 mph. The pilot then realized that there was not enough fuel in the tanks to get home if the last dog leg on the flight plan was followed and that it was essential to fly on a straight course back to Scamplor. He therefore asked the navigator to work out a new course west to base and was given a course of 300° . He reduced height from 16,000 feet

to 10,000 feet at which height the speed of the wind fell from 90 mph to 45 mph. At the lower height the temperature rose from minus 23° to minus 8° .

There were still 460 miles to fly to base.

"P" Peter crossed the French coast near Dunkirk at 6.21 am and reached Scamplor at 7.36 am with its fuel tanks almost empty.

Due to disciplinary tactics which confused the Germans no enemy fighters were encountered on this operation but this was very exceptional and there had been no sign of the Luftwaffe being any less strong or active previously. To an after the Dresden operation.

"P" Peter had taken part in a raid of Politz near Berlin and had been damaged after being hit in the port

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engine. On the following night,
the 10th of February "P" Peter and
its crew were detailed to fly on
another long flight to Chemnitz
which was 35 miles west of Dresden
when the aircraft was hit 5
times.

Most of the Dresden crews were
given time to rest after the long
Dresden flight and the writer
cannot remember why his crew
were asked to fly on two very
long flights on two nights running.

In the following week on 21st
February when "P" Peter and its
crew took part in a raid on
Duisburg the flight engineer
Jack Ross started 5 Lancasters
going down in flames after
being hit by enemy fighters
or anti aircraft fire.

10.

The personal views of the navigator
about the attack on Dresden are
that at the time it was just one
other operation which was intended
to give assistance to the Russian
allies and be a further step in
defeating the enemy which had
still a powerful war machine in
operation and was quite capable
of carrying on the war long enough
to develop and use the more
powerful weapons which they were
working on namely guided rockets
and the atom bomb.

He firmly believes that the devastating
destruction caused to Dresden,
which was contributed to by
an exceptionally strong wind that
night, was such a psychological
blow to the Germans that it
resulted in the war ending

many months earlier than it would otherwise have done and so saved probably hundred of thousands of lives of death camp prisoners, British and American servicemen and British civilians.

At this stage of the war Germany still occupied much of Europe including Yugoslavia, Greece and the Balkan Islands. Jews were still being murdered and the gas chamber were still operating in the concentration camps.

The Germans had developed a new weapon, the V2, and were bombing London with these rockets. There was no clear indication of when the war which was in its fifth year would end.

The orders to bomb cities were to hit only military targets and this they endeavoured to do despite the heavy enemy defenses. "P." Peter Soden returned from raids over Germany with scarring

1. 26. 9.44 - calais. day.
2. 28. 9.44 - Calais. Day.
3. 6.10.44 - Dusseldorf. Near collision.
4. 7.10.44 - Dusseldorf. Day. Fullard shot down.
5. 11.10.44 - Duisburg. day.
6. 19.10.44 - Stuttgart. day. Attacked by ME 110. 7 hours.
7. 23.10.44 - Eissen. Night. Severe icing and thunder storms.
8. 25.10.44 - Eissen. Day. Hit 4 times.
9. 28.10.44 - Cologne. Night. Temp. minus 40c. Almost struck by bombs from above.
10. 30.10.44 - Cologne. Night. Landed at Dunsime Lodge by mistake.
11. 11.11.44 - Mann Rikol. night. Temp. minus 40c.
12. 16.11.44 - Durun. Day.
13. 18.11.44 - Mann Rikol. Night. Everted.
14. 29.11.44 - Dortmund. Day. X-ray missing.
15. 3.12.44 - Urft Dam. Day. Caught fire and landed at Brussels.
16. 20.12.44 - Bonn. Night.
17. 5. 1.45 - Rothen. Night.
18. 26. 1.45 - Stuttgart. Night. Jones missing (shot down).
19. 3. 2.45 - Bottrop. Night. Freehorse missing.
20. 6. 2.45 - Heligoland Night. Mine laying. Cross in S. sugar shot up body.
21. 8. 2.45 - Polit. Night. 9 hours. Hit in port engine.
22. 13. 2.45 - Dresden. Night. 10½ hours.
23. 14. 2.45 - Chemnitz. Night. Hit 5 times - once in port tailplane.
24. 21. 2.45 - Duisberg. Night. Saw 5 aircraft go down in flames.
25. 1. 3.45 - Mannheim. Day. Rhodes in U Uncle blew up over the marsh.
26. 5. 3.45 - Chemnitz. Night. Saw 4 aircraft go down in flames. Weather bad.
27. 15. 3.45 - Klaiburg (Hanover). Night. Near collision.
28. 21. 3.45 - Bremen. Day. Hit 5 times on port tailplane, fuselage and starboard wing.
29. 24. 3.45 - Langgreen. Day. Hit 4 times.
30. 27. 3.45 - Paderborn. Day. Near collision.
31. 4. 4.45 - Lutzenberff. Night. Near collision. Hit once.