“I WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES!”

Wartime reminiscences

of

WILLIAM GUNDRY

**My thanks are due to Lorna Lincoln
who managed to tease out and type my script.**

Hers, too, are the cartoons

PART ONE

JOINING UP

to

END OF FIRST TOUR

"I WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES!"

William Gundry

PART ONE

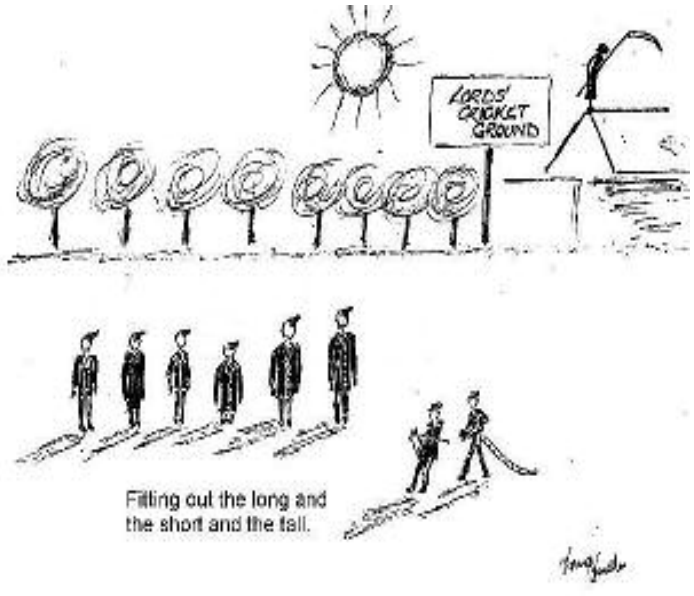
CHAPTER I

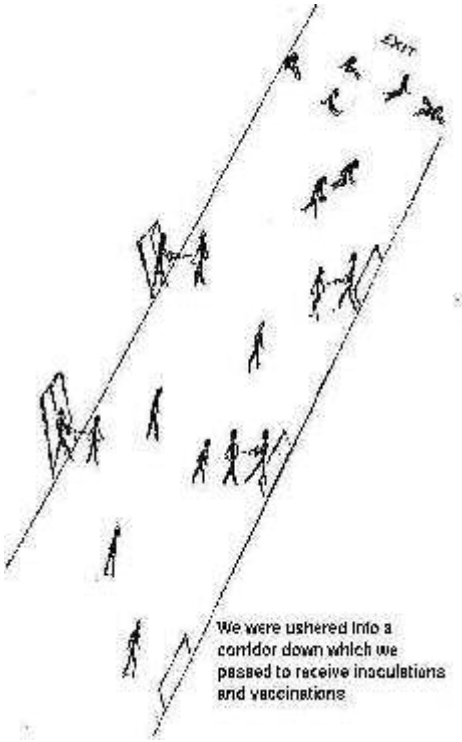
From the outbreak of War in 1939 I was engaged in a reserved occupation assembling '1407's' (radio sets destined to be fitted in aircraft) therefore it was 1941 before I became a member of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. When there were 'alerts', though, I helped man a Vickers heavy machine gun in London's Air Defence.

It was my twenty-fifth birthday when I received my notice to join a unit at St John's Wood (London) Aircrew Reception Centre. We were billeted in local hotels 'umpteen' to a room.

After a few days of giving our details a number of times and getting used to reciting our service numbers, we were sent to be kitted out. This took place in a nearby garage. We were issued with all sorts of things in addition to 'Best Blues' and battle-dress; we got underwear, a knife, fork and spoon ('irons'), a 'Housewife' (pronounced 'Hussif'). This was a little pack of needles and cottons, darning wool and a tailor's type thimble which is just a circular strip of pocked steel through which one's finger tip protrudes! We also were given a 'First Aid' pack which fitted into a small pocket in our uniforms. The forecourt of the garage provided us with a 'cat walk' down which we could emerge wearing our uniforms – most very ill-fitting – to the great amusement of passers-by!

Temperature in the eighties the following day we were marched to Lords' Cricket Ground, over our uniforms our overcoats – buttoned to the neck! There we were lined up while a diminutive junior officer with a clip-board and a sergeant armed with a stick of chalk and a rule, measured the hems of our overcoats to ensure they would all be fourteen inches from the ground after alteration in the tailors' shop.



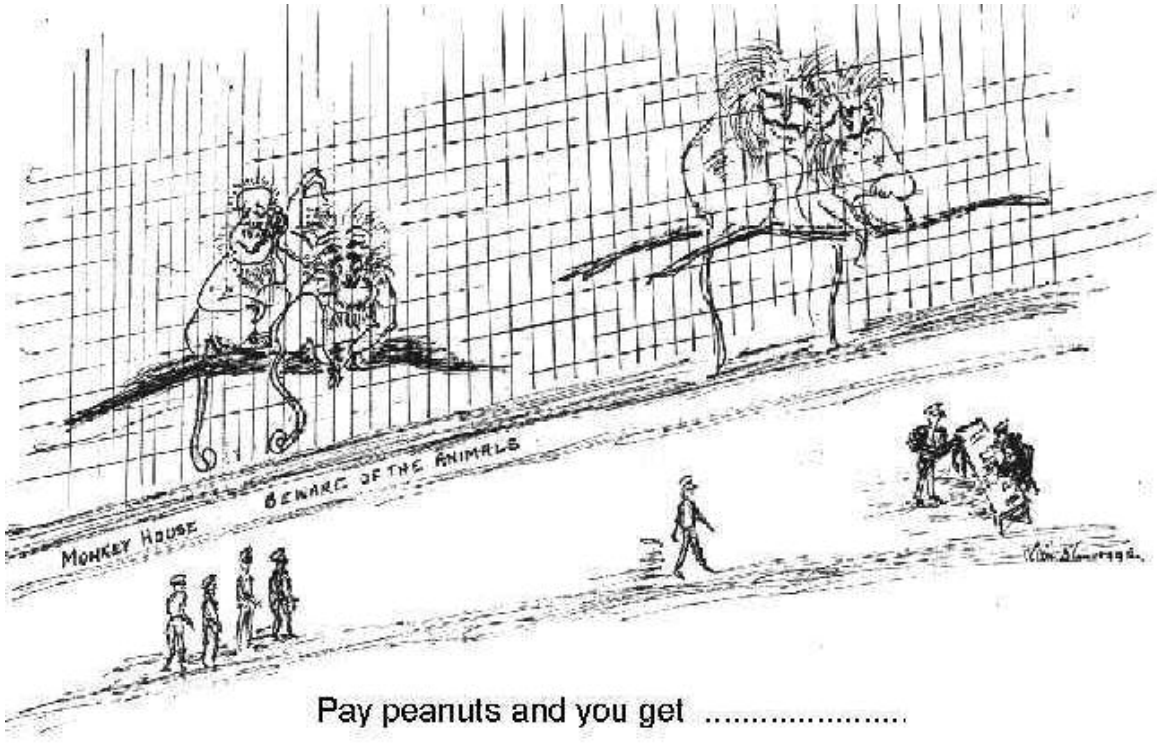


We were ushered into a corridor down which we passed to receive inoculations and vaccinations

Inoculations and vaccinations were next on the agenda. Being assembled we were then ushered through a corridor, shirt sleeves rolled to the shoulders, hands on hips. From medical orderlies who appeared like horseflies from left and right we received a series of injections from needles which in those days seemingly had the girth of the knitting variety! Trouble was, one needed to be careful to step over the propped up 'passed out' bodies at the exit!

We did all our basic training in the St John's Wood Unit, marching, rifle drill, floor sweeping, boot and button cleaning. (The liberal use of spit worked up a thirst!)

'Pay Out' took place in London Zoo – in the Monkey House! (The gibbons who had not been evacuated, found this hilarious) A sergeant, seated at a table called each 'squaddy's ' name; we had to march up, salute the officer and call out the last three digits of our service numbers. Having been in the service but a couple of weeks, quite a lot of us could not remember our 'last three'. I'll leave you to imagine the sergeant's 'few choice words'!



Like all good things this 'Intake' period had to come to an end. At this point we were informed we were being posted to Twentyone Initial Training Wing, Torquay…."and if you thought you were going to have a nice time at the seaside..!"

A lot of shops on the sea front had been commandeered for use as classrooms where we learned navigation, morse code and why aeroplanes fly.

It was an extraordinarily hot summer and our quarters were in hotels in Babbacombe. From there we were marched to the town each morning for breakfast and training. Once a week gas masks had to be worn. (The trick was to push a short length of pencil behind each ear).

On one occasion I had a poisoned toe and had to go to sick quarters each day for about a week. This entailed going to the other side of Torquay and my taking towel, shaving kit, etc, just in case it was necessary to be admitted. The 'limp' to the dressing station was over a mile…..my toe healed in no time.

Dinghy drill was a real diversion for those of us who could swim. As it was off the harbour wall those who could not soon learned.

CHAPTER II

After examinations we 'passed out' and learned we were destined for Athan in South Wales.

What a journey that was! We boarded the train at Torquay late at night. Admittedly we had been warned to fill our water bottles as the trip would probably be non-stop. It wasn't. We were shunted into a siding in Bristol. 'Black out', of course, meant a scramble down the side of the railway coach, then to pick a hazardous path to find the NAAFI canteen. A mug of tea later we traced our stumbling way back to the train.

Come daylight we were at Gilestown, St Athan's nearest station. Our kitbags were taken by lorry (thank Heaven) which left us our small kit and back packs to carry the three and a half mile march.

At St Athan I was trained as a Flight Engineer. Here there were other courses taking place, one training a contingent of the Free French components of the 'Halifax' bomber. My course comprised everything about flying and included such oddities as flying wires, landing wires, turnbuckles… in fact, a Fitter 1's course in engines and a Fitter 1's course on airframes. Later the 'powers that be' decided a Flight Engineer in a four engine bomber did not need to know all these things, so they brought in 'Direct Entry' and, apart from saving money, achieved a faster through-put.

It was here that I had my first experience of parachute drill. A tall tower in a high hangar sufficed. Fixed to the centre of the roof was a rope. Having climbed the tower you fixed the rope to your parachute harness, the tower was then moved back, pulling you off and leaving you swinging about ten to fifteen feet from the ground. The trick was to press your release button on the downward swing, then, when you hit the ground you could do a proper roll as you had been taught. If you failed to manage this manoeuvre properly, you were left dangling.

Those of us on the Flight Engineers course were divided into huts, each in the charge of a sergeant. Our sergeant was a martinet of the old school, but he noticed if you were interested in what you were doing and saw to it that you got all the help he could give.

Came the inevitable day of the examinations……!

Two days later we were all assembled in the main hangar to hear the results. Names were called…a very small number who had achieved nearly one hundred per cent marks were granted commissions.

I, along with most of the entry, became sergeants. Those who failed were still of AC2 rank, maybe with a chance to try again.

That evening was spent sewing on our stripes. Breakfast next morning was the sergeants' mess. We quickly adjusted and any strangeness soon wore off.

In all we were at St Athan about nine months. During that time we had been granted a leave break, but now we were on indefinite leave. A telegram would tell us where next to report.

CHAPTER III

I had been home about ten days when the call came – to report to Chedburgh, 1653 Heavy Conversion Unit in Suffolk.

On arrival I found about eight or nine of our unit from St Athan were already there.

It was here we joined our CREWS and took our first flights in Stirling four-engined bombers.

The Conversion Unit was so named because the crews we joined had been training on twin-engined Wellingtons and were now converting to four-engined bombers on which flight engineers were needed.

Let me introduce our Crew:

Flight Officer	BILL LESLIE	(Willie)	Pilot	Canadian
Flight Officer	ERIC McNIECE	(Mac)	Bomb-aimer	"
Flight Officer	FRANK FRUDD	(Frankie)	Navigator	"
Sergeant	DOUGLAS FENDLY	(Fenn)	Rear-gunner	"
Sergeant	JOHN ROSIER	(Rosy)	Wireless Op	British
Sergeant	EDWARD NORTH	(Red)	Mid-upper Gunner	"
Sergeant	WILLIAM GUNDRY	(Bill)	Flight Engineer	"

We got on very well with each other and, with instructors, were soon flying the Stirling.

It is a high aircraft. The pilot and I were perched twenty-two feet above the ground. The Stirling was also rather a complicated aircraft with its seven fuel tanks in each wing and everything powered by electric motors – flaps, undercarriage, the turrets and double tail wheels.

To get used to the aircraft we did lots of circuits and bumps, that, is, wheels down, come in to land, touch and take off. This was good practice for the pilot and for me controlling the flaps, wheels and fuel cocks. On each circuit the navigator brought us round to the runway, but, as most of this took place at night, the gunners got more bored than had it been daylight!

After we had become proficient at circuits and bumps and cross country, we were detailed for a 'bulls eye'.

This was a ploy used by Bomber Command to make things harder for the enemy radar, etc., by sending a decoy force out into the North Sea while the main force was going another way to the target.

This sort of thing was getting near to the real operation inasmuch as we were given a pre-flight meal of eggs and bacon, then assembled for a briefing of our task.

On return we were to tell 'Interrogation' how things had gone. All flights, with details, were entered in one's log book, red for night, blue for day, and at the end of the course total hours night and day, and our logs signed by the Station Commander.

By now we had got to know each other very well. In the air rank was dropped and it was 'Skipper' for the pilot and nicknames for the rest of the crew. There was little conversation during a flight so that when anything was said over the intercom you knew it was important. This sort of discipline stood us in good stead when we were really operational.

Chedburgh now is back under cultivation as it was built only for the war. We all lived in nissen huts so that when we left Chedburgh to go to Feltwell for our conversion to Lancasters we found ourselves on a pre-war station with brick built accommodation blocks, (only two or three to a room) bathrooms and showers!

No 5 LFS (Lancaster Finishing School) was a very comfortable station. Sadly, we were only at LFS a short time as it was an intensive course on the Lancaster. All we had learned at St Athan was beginning to pay off.

The routine now became a couple of flights followed by a couple of night flights accompanied by an instructor for the pilot and one for me, the engineer. There followed an air test of the aircraft before we were despatched on a 'bull's eye', no instructors, more or less the real thing.

We were sent to the outskirts of Emden to create a diversion from the main force whose raid was to be further along the coast.

One incident stands out about Feltwell. One Flight Engineer who had been through all the courses from ACRC in London, 21 ITW, Torquay, Chedburgh and now

Feltwell, refused to fly in Lancasters. He was put in the Guard Room and, being a Sergeant, only personnel of his rank or above could guard him. This incident caused quite a stir among the sergeants.

Later he was stripped of his rank and branded ‘LMF’ (Lacking Moral Fibre), then posted to some out of the way station.

We left Feltwell that week and joined Fifteen Squadron, Lancasters, Three Group, Bomber Command, in Mildenhall, Suffolk. This was the culmination of our training.

Mildenhall had been a peace time station. It was used in 1934 for the race to Australia won by a bright red little aircraft named ‘The Comet’ in seventy hours and forty-five minutes flying time, piloted by Black and Campbell. This craft was powered by two 230hp ‘Gypsy’ engines and is on display today at Old Warden Airfield (Museum) in Bedfordshire.

All the married quarters at Mildenhall had been vacated for the duration and each crew’s non-commissioned members had a house. ‘Red’, ‘Fen’ and I were downstairs. ‘Rosy’ and two sergeants from another crew were upstairs. The quarter had a bathroom with immersion heater, a kitchen and coal fires. There was an ‘issue’ of coal for each house. Situated at the end of the block was a coal dump with its coals sprayed with whitewash to inhibit those tempted to ‘disturb' a few.

Eventually we fitted up a small electric fire near the hot water tank so that it kept the water warm. Came the day and we all went on leave and each of us forgot to switch it off! The water was LOVELY when we returned.

Operational air crew had a week’s leave every six weeks and when we were despatched we received an extra £2 – perhaps £3 – from the Nuffield Fund. Lord Nuffield, who founded the Austin Motor Company, donated this and it was quite an acceptable sum of money in those days.

After a ‘pep’ talk from the Commanding Officer, we had to meet our Leaders, (Flight Engineers had a Flight Engineer Officer-in-charge who would inform us how much petrol we would be carrying, the types of bombs on board – in fact, all that engineers needed to know).

On our first flight we were to take up a new aircraft, LSJ LL.806, on a loaded climb. This was accomplished. On one occasion we took ‘her’ up to almost 29,000 ft.

Our crew were to fly this aircraft on a number of ‘opps’ during our tour and it was this aircraft which went on to the end of the war, amassing one-hundred-and-thirty-four opps, three ‘Exodus’ trips (to bring home British prisoners of war) and three ‘Manns’ trips which entailed dropping food to the Dutch.

CHAPTER IV

Our first Operational flight took us to Boulogne's gun emplacements. We were flying aircraft 'K ED 395' Night flight. Duration two hours, forty-five minutes.

To see one's name on the Battle Order for the first time made one think a bit……

Preliminaries had to be followed for all our tours. We would go to the Briefing Room; there there would be a large map on the wall with the route marked out in red ribbon. Also marked would be the details of the target and any defended areas. The Meteorological Officer would then tell us of the weather to be expected.

We then broke up to go to our respective leaders for details of our particular jobs. My instructions would cover petrol, bomb load, jettison etc. As a new crew we naturally had little idea of what to expect. Happily our first sortie proved uneventful. Maxie (McNiece, bomb-aimer) dropped the bombs and we heard later a photograph showed he had hit the target. We had seen searchlights but encountered no fighters – perhaps they had been over the North Sea chasing a decoy flight.

Having accomplished our first operation we felt a lot better. Back over base we took our turn in the circuit….and landed.

We then had to pass through 'Interrogation' while events were still fresh in our minds. Questions would run along the lines of: "What did you see?" "Were their guns fired at our fighters?"….Then from the Engineer Officer, "How did the engines perform? …Any snags?" There was little to recount on this operation, so we gave in our parachutes, took off our flying kit and hurried over to the Mess for eggs and bacon.

No matter what the time was those ladies of the WAAF staffing our Mess were unfailingly bright and cheerful and ever ready with our eggs and bacon.

Meal over, back to tour quarter to sleep until midday. We then made our way out to the aircraft to see if there was flak damage and have a chat to the ground crew.

All opps were not to be easy, as we were about to learn…

At this time, just before 'D Day', there was a lot of activity. Bomber Command had squadrons out every night, mostly to targets which were all to do with approaching D Day – though we could not know that at the time.

We were to have our baptism of fire on our next trip. This also was the first time we took LS JLL 806 on an operational flight.

Trappes was an important railway marshalling yard in France. It had to be put out of action to stop German troops getting to the beach head. This raid engaged over two hundred aircraft from all groups, together with Path-finder Force to mark the target.

Anti-aircraft fire was quite heavy and there were fighters in the area.

It was quite a sobering thought when we returned after just over five hours, to see holes in the craft where we had been hit by ‘flak’ and to hear later that four Lancasters had been lost.

At times, when we were not flying, we would practice getting out of the aircraft on to the wing and I would find my way down the fuselage blindfold in order to acquaint myself with where the axes, dinghy release, emergency oxygen bottles, etc were to be located in the dark. En route I collected a few bruises getting past the mid-upper turret!

In Cambridge Municipal Baths we learned how to get into a dinghy and how to right it if it flipped over. At one point in these activities we wore darkened goggles to simulate night time. Maxie, a superb swimmer, did a swallow dive wearing his goggles and I remember the Instructor remarking, “I’d like to see that in a rough sea from the wing of an aircraft!” Decidedly deflating!

A maxim regarding aircraft losses – so we were led to believe – was that the first eight probably would be due to inexperience and the last eight due to being too self-assured and the fourteen in the middle would be (relatively) safe. I don’t think it worked out like that with us…. For instance, I imagine it would be just bad luck when flying at 20,000 ft with flak bursting at 18,000 ft, a stupid twit of a German gunner set the fuse wrong on the next shell and it burst at 20,000 ft!

Our next trip was a mirror of the first, again to Boulogne. It took two-and-three-quarter hours and was in a Lancaster III F LM486.

The Lancaster was a wonderful aircraft, made with no other role in mind that that of a machine made to carry as big a bomb load as possible – and deliver it.

Bombs were carried in a huge bay. Each bomb had its detonator pin held by a wire fixed to the roof of the bomb bay. When the bombs were released the wire pulled the pins from the bombs, so arming the bombs. If the bombs had to be jettisoned, safely, the wires could be detached from the roof of the bomb bay by the bomb-aimer’s energising an electric switch. The bombs then fell with the detonator pins still in place.

As bombs were released the flight engineer could feel and count the thuds of the bombs leaving the aircraft and could then announce “Bombs Gone”.

In the event of a ‘hand-up’, it was my job to open the panel in the floor where the bombs were and prise open that bomb’s hook, so letting the bomb go. It wouldn’t hit the target, but might give the people down below a bit of a surprise.

The Lancaster was also a wonderful aircraft to fly. Very manoeuvrable and for it to do the standard manoeuvre to get away from a fighter there was nothing to touch it.

Over enemy territory everyone, except the wireless operator and the navigator, was keeping a look out. If suddenly the rear gunner yelled “Starboard (or Port) Go!”, the pilot would make no challenge, he would just put the nose down, diving to starboard from about 1,000 ft, then pulling up and climbing to port 1,000 ft. This way the

gunners got, for a second, a steady firing platform as the aircraft changed from dive to climb.

There were various ways of performing the 'corkscrew', one was diving to port and continuing to dive, but diverting to starboard, then climbing. These manoeuvres were designed to make the enemy fighter over-shoot and for you to lose him in the darkness.

Navigators did not like 'corkscrews'. Apart from the gravitational pull ('G'), all their maps and pencils levitated and went floating out of reach!

Not all aircraft could be thrown about the sky in this way. For instance, the Fortress was allowed to do a diving turn only.

CHAPTER V

JUNE 6 1944

Down to the Flight Office to check Battle Orders…..

"Flight Officer W LESLIE and CREW LANCASTER R 590"

At 'Briefing' we learned the target was to be a rail junction at LISIEAUX.

589 Lancasters, 418 Halifaxes and 58 Mosquitoes were to bomb railway and road centres behind the Normandy battle area.

3,488 tons of bombs were dropped on these various centres. Unfortunately, some were very near French towns which inevitably suffered some damage.

Ten Lancasters and one Halifax were lost on those raids.

Returning home the sea seemed filled with ships of all sorts and we could see the flashes of the ships' guns pounding the beach head.

Some of the Navy were a bit flak-happy and fired at us. One aircraft was unfortunate enough to be hit with ONE 303 bullet which killed the navigator.

From my Log I am reminded that on this trip we carried 1,400 gallons of petrol, eighteen 500lb bombs and it lasted three hours, thirty-five minutes.

The enemy was finding that our superior bombing force could go to many of the rail heads at the same time. They seemed not to have enough fighters to cover each of these targets, so concentrated fighters on one junction… If you were sent to that junction, as we were at Massey, with only sixty-two aircraft over the target, you had more than a fight on your hands! They waited until we were straight and level on the

bombing run and then attacked, sending two or three fighters to attack each Lancaster.

Twenty-eight aircraft were lost on that occasion, 8.3% of the force. Craft not sent to Massey on that assignment encountered no trouble at all.
Lancaster G LN110 we flew that night collected quite a few holes. Self-sealing petrol tanks proved their worth, though.

At times, operations had to be cancelled owing to bad weather or unexpected movement of troops in the target theatre.

If the cancellation came in the middle of a briefing, our Commanding Officer usually came into the room with a yard broom over his shoulder, signifying the opp had been 'scrubbed'. Cheers would go up followed by a rush out to the 'local'. (Our local was at that time 'The Bird in Hand' in Beck Row.)

Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC was a Master Bomber in Pathfinder Force and conducted the raid on Le Havre on 14th June 1944.

This was one of the war's spectaculars. The enemy had been using Le Havre as a base for their 'E' boats (fast craft that were attacking Allied shipping in the English Channel, only thirty miles away.)

Two hundred and twenty Lancasters and thirteen Mosquitoes were used. 217 Squadron sent twenty-two aircraft each armed with one 12,000 lb bomb. A Mosquito marked the concrete boat pens. The huge bombs devastated those pens and caused such a tidal wave that many of the E-boats were overturned and sank. The rest of the raid was on the workshops and barracks of the port.

Sir Arthur Harris regarded this as an experimental raid. Only one aircraft was lost on the whole operation.

Returning home we could see a raid, as we thought, on London and we were quite excited at seeing what appeared to be enemy fighters going down in flames.

When we reached Briefing we were asked what we saw of the pilotless aircraft (buzz-bombs/V1s). Then we realised what we had been watching. The date was 14th July 1944.

CHAPTER VI

The following opps were all bombings of rail heads and marshalling yards in France, designed to prevent enemy troops getting to the beach head. It was on one of these, to a place named Montdidier, that we had our only experience of having to bring our bombs back.

It happened on a night sortie in Lanc. N NG958, an aircraft we had not taken up before.

We arrived over the target area with no trouble as there was quite thick cloud. We could hear the Master-bomber of the Pathfinders assessing the target. Then came the dreaded words 'Monkey Nuts' (the code for 'abort the raid and return to base'). This we did, though with quickening heartbeats as we had a full bomb load on board. Landing with bombs aboard is quite a nail-biting time for everyone. It must be accomplished without bumping. The Armourers are not too pleased either as they have to take the bombs off and remove the detonators.

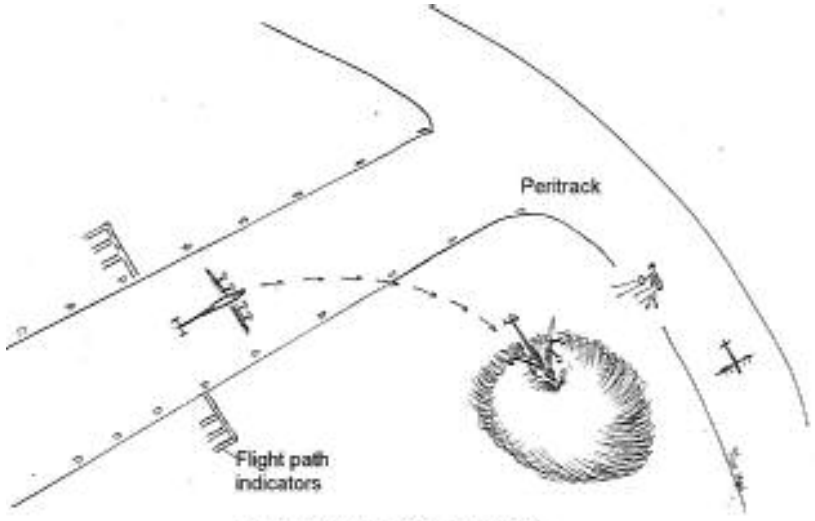
We had not been carrying any on this trip, but had there been those with delayed action fuses, they could not have been defused, but would have had to be taken off and conveyed to Thetford Forest to be exploded in a deep pit.

BIENNAIS - a name I will never forget. It had been quite an uneventful raid on some railway sidings, that is until we got back over here……

We were coming in to land as usual through the one searchlight beam, our wheels down. Suddenly all the airfield lights went out and over the intercom we heard: "Bandits! Bandits!" which meant there was an intruder in the circuit. It was a Junker JU88 waiting to shoot down one of our aircraft as it throttled back to land.

We landed using the glide path indicators, but this was when our trouble started. At the end of the runway we saw two blue torches waving us on – we duly turned, but those torches had not been meant for us….BANG! We had taxied across the grass and ended in a defence ditch. Obviously the props hit the ground and the wings folded upwards, causing £30,000-worth of damage!!

Willie, our Skipper, was charged with failing to keep a proper look out and sentenced to twenty-eight days in Sheffield Disciplinary Centre for transgressing aircrew. We, the rest of the crew, could have the choice of splitting up or going with him. To a man, we went with Willie. We languished there for twenty-five days – with three off for good conduct.



Junkers !!!!! and Jankers !

It was a stiff course, naturally, which included a great deal of parade ground drill, physical training and acquainting us with all sorts of armaments.

Naturally, too, we encountered an assortment of air crew there. For instance, a chap reputed to have chased his station warrant officer around his mess with a loaded revolver! (How many of you could have identified mentally with him? Don't answer that!)

Work commenced at 8am and went on until 9pm. Like Cinderella, we had to be in bed by ten.

We left Sheffield the fittest crew in Bomber Command.

On returning to Mildenhall we found that now the beach heads were established, the bombing was back over the German mainland. Sadly, we also found that during those twenty-five days quite a number of crews we knew had gone.

After a couple of short air tests to get us back into routine, we were back on the Battle Order.

KIEL – this time in Lanc. B PB139, an aircraft we were to fly on all opps for the rest of that month of July. This was to be the first major attack on a German town for two months. Five-hundred-and-nineteen Lancasters, one hundred Halifaxes and ten Mosquitoes were despatched and, owing to the elaborate deception and Radio Counter Measures (I'll explain RCM), this surprise return to a German target completely fooled their fighters and only four Lancasters were lost.

Radio Counter Measures were centred on aircraft fitted with devices designed to confound the German radar and radio commands. One such device was called 'Mandrel' which blotted out radar and gave a false impression of aircraft numbers. Carried in some RCM aircraft were German-speaking operators who countermanded commands to enemy fighters. In the air one has no idea who is speaking.

Kiel suffered heavily. The Bombing Force suddenly appeared from behind a Mandrel screen (the German warning system had only reported some mine-laying aircraft). Their important U-boat yards and port area were extensively damaged. Five hundred delayed action bombs were dropped, causing severe problems, culminating in their having no water for three days, no gas for three weeks and public transport non-existent for a week. Over three hundred people killed.

Attacks on German towns were in full swing; in fact, during August and September 35,000 tons of bombs were dropped in thirty raids. This was achieved by flying in bad weather as well as good.

Here I would like to divert to recount the story of Len Miller and the Billy Goat. (Billy Goat was the mascot of Len and his crew.) Len (Dusty) Miller, pilot, was flying with his crew in Lancaster LL605 on their way to Friedrichshaven.

Over the target they were hit and the aircraft was engulfed in flames. Two members of the crew were killed, the rest bailed out.

Flight Officer Miller landed safely and evaded capture.

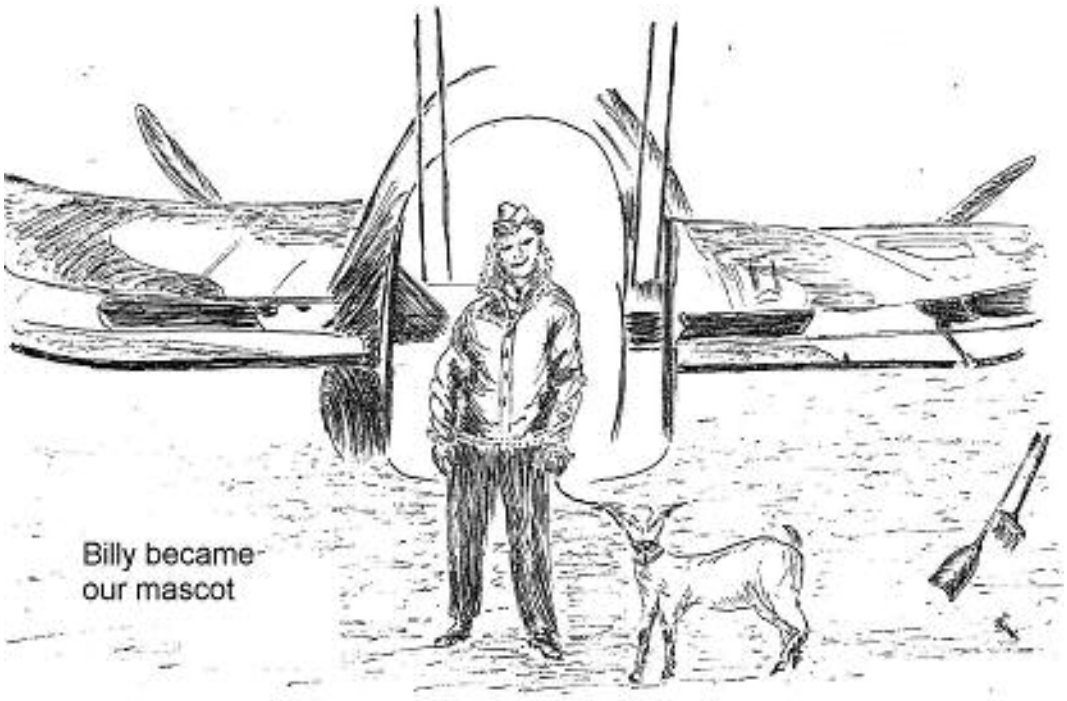
This all took place on the night of 27th April 1944.

With the help of the French resistance, Flight Officer Len Miller was sheltered, later to be secretly flown back to England in a Dakota aircraft which would be sent out from England for this purpose. By this time it was September.

Unfortunately, the promised Dakota developed a fault on landing in France. After London had been informed, a special force of RAF engineers were dropped. To Dusty's great surprise, one of these engineers was his cousin!

Repairs completed, Flt Lt Miller returned to England.

How all the foregoing affected us was that Len's and his crew's mascot, Billy Goat, had been adopted by us – much to the concern of our ground crew as Billy was addicted to a delicacy he had discovered – insulation. Added to the fact that when we took him up on air test, our ground crew had an unwelcome added chore involving a dustpan and brush!



Billy was adopted by another crew when our tour finished.

Incidentally, LL805 and LL807 (on another station) only clocked up a total of sixty flying hours between them before they were lost. Strangely, our LL806 finished the war.

But, to return to the job in hand, bombing the Third Reich.

Whoever in the Air Ministry thought up the idea of the next three raids ought to have been made to fly on them!

The target was Stuttgart. We were sent on the first wave.

Stuttgart was a rather difficult target as it is a town in a hollow. The prescribed route was to fly as if going to Mannheim, then turn as if making for Ludwigshaven, then turn towards Stuttgart.

All went quite well. There was a lot of flak and fighters, but I think only four aircraft were lost.

The next night it was Stuttgart again. We were on 'rest' so were not on that raid, but those who were, saw to their surprise and dismay the route was exactly as that of the night before. Theory: 'The enemy would never think we would go the same way two nights running.' They were SO wrong! Twenty-one aircraft went down to fighters and flak.

We were on the third raid a couple of nights later.

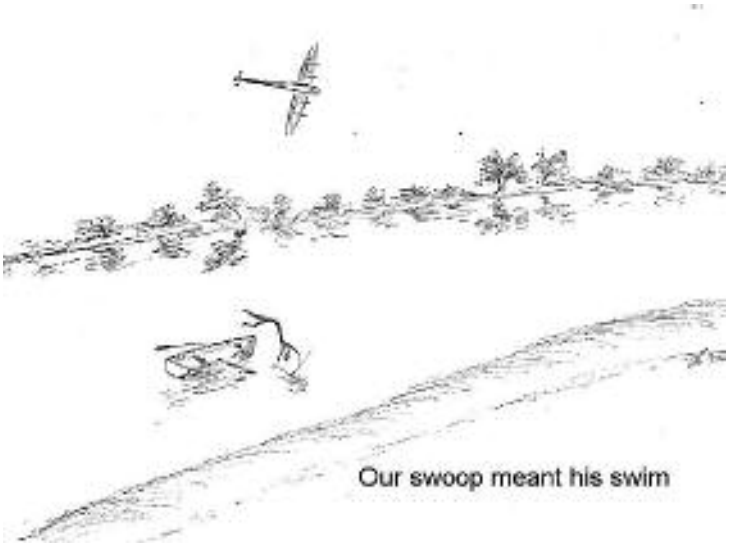
Pre-flight meal… down to 'briefing'….There it was on the map – STUTTGART – route the same as the previous raids. 'The enemy would never think we would repeat the same operation a third time'….THEY DID! And were waiting.

We got there, bombed, took a lot of flak and evasive action. Back at base we learned thirty-nine aircraft had not returned.

When one thinks each aircraft was crewed by seven young men, what a ghastly waste of lives, of trained personnel, in the short span of about half an hour.

For a few opps we were back to helping the troops at the now very extended bridge head by bombing marshalling yards and rail junctions in France. The final operation was a long daylight raid to Bordeaux on the River Gironde.

To try and stop German radar finding out about this it was flown, low level, down to Landsend and out across the Bay of Biscay, then climbing as high as we could when nearing the target.



This strategy proved a great success.

As we flew out low over England our bomb-aimer said there was a chap standing up in a small boat on the River Cam… Poor chap, his enthusiasm watching us tipped him into the water!

We reached Bordeaux without intervention. At 12,000 ft we found ourselves in smoke from damaged oil storage tanks.

Expecting to be told to return home as the damage had been done, instead we heard the Master Bomber urging, “Stoke it up, lads!” We did. Surprisingly only one aircraft was lost – and that one was trying to show off by flying too low over the sea and going in.

This raid, we heard later, had greatly reduced the supply of oil for the German U boats and the Army.

It had been quite an exciting change to do a daylight raid. After over eight hours in the air, it was getting dark by the time we got back to Mildenhall.

There is always a bit of chatter when over base, each aircraft calling in to air traffic control to be given a height to fly at and told when it would be their turn to land.

Mildenhall was rather complicated as our approach comprised a grand circuit of Mildenhall, Tuddenham and Lakenheath. This was a circuit up to 20,000 ft. Each airfield had its own circuit, but at a different height. As your turn was called you came down to a lower band until you joined your own base circuit to land.

At times those waiting their turn to land got impatient and – with a finger still on the transmit button – would say a few ‘blue’ words! A WAAF in the control tower, in a very composed voice would say: “Correct RT procedure will be used at all times” (Loud click as a finger came off transmit button!)

Recounting the low level flight to Bordeaux reminds me of a wonderful character, a Jamaican sergeant, Pilot Owen Sylvestre, one of only two black pilots to join Fifteen Squadron.

Owen loved low flying. There are quite a number of stories of his ‘down on the deck’ exploits. The one I like concerns Owen’s crew on an air test which took them down to Welwyn Garden City where their mid-upper gunner, Ernie Fitch, lived. Down went the nose and they treated Ernie’s house to a ‘fly-past’. Unfortunately, the letters on their craft were noted and subsequently Owen was up before the CO. (Owen was such a good pilot he continued to lead a charmed existence.)

The Bomber Offensive switched again to the German mainland, though there were occasions when bombing was needed in front of advancing troops. Predominantly, our sorties took us to the main German ports and industrial areas.

Stettin, up in the Baltic, was one such target; this was to help the Russians.

The first trip was uneventful. Our route took us across the North Sea, over Denmark, from there over the Baltic and on to Stettin. Eight and a quarter hour flight. Five planes lost.

Bremen was very different. A ‘terror raid’ in three waves. The first five hundred aircraft carrying 1,000 lb bombs to take the roofs off buildings. The second wave

delivering incendiary bombs to ignite fires in the damaged buildings and the third to drop large bombs to inflict massive damage so as to disrupt such services as Air Raid Precautions, Fire Service and so forth.

This concentrated action caused a fire storm which engulfed quite a large portion of the town, sadly demolishing old historic buildings.

Leaving the target zone at 17,000 ft we were ‘coned’ (caught in searchlights).

The Germans had a master beam sweeping the sky and if you were unfortunate enough to get caught in it, instantly another six or seven beams ‘homed in’ to catch you in a cone of light. The master beam then switched to sweeping another part of the sky.

The only defence against this was to dive so fast that the beams could not follow fast enough. We went nearly vertical from 17,000 to 3,000 ft. The sudden changes in air pressure made one’s ears extremely painful and the ‘G’ force gave one a feeling of extreme heaviness and immobility; the reason for this is, at 17,000 ft the air pressure is about ten pounds per square inch, while near ground level it is nearer fourteen pounds per square inch.

We were so fortunate and extricated ourselves from the searchlights. (Maxie, our bomb-aimer, swore we dived to much lower than 3,000 ft since he maintained he saw trees passing his nose window – but then, he was consistently good at ‘shooting a line’!)

Kiel was the target again later and on that raid seventeen planes failed to return – that number very nearly included ours.

At that time German fighters were attacking our bombers from underneath…. Very difficult to observe when such an attack was imminent so a number of aircraft were fitted with a ventral or under gun. For this trip we flew such a craft.

A large circular hole had been cut aft of the bomb bay with a swivel seat fitted near the edge. A .5 ‘Browning’ gun was fixed to an extension on the seat. The gunner, suitably clad in an electrically heated suit, was strapped in the seat and could manoeuvre the gun to fire downwards. He was not expected to hit anything, but as most of the ammunition was tracer it was mainly to scare off the opposition.

We had released our bombs and were leaving the target area when we were hit. The missile must have been a large piece of shrapnel as it made a sizeable hole in our port side.

The under gunner had been bending forward, mercifully, and the piece of metal passed across the back of his neck, cutting his ‘Mae West’ collar…. Kapok flying everywhere!… it also cut his oxygen tube which had been an extra long one to go over his shoulder and allow him to move more easily.

We had all felt the impact on the aircraft and we all heard the very flowery language coming from our under gunner! As we were flying quite high oxygen to him was paramount.

I changed to emergency oxygen and, taking another bottle for the gunner and my tool bag, he was soon fixed up. I then turned to look at the damage. The port side had a hole. On its way past the under gunner the invading piece of shrapnel had damaged the oxygen economizer fixed on the starboard side. This was a device which only emitted oxygen when one breathed in and it shut off when one breathed out. This I had to by-pass with a length of tubing fixed in place by insulating tape. I could then take the under gunner off the emergency bottle and by turning up the oxygen control on my panel could get him a good supply.

Flying at about 17,000 ft and in the dark, made this quite an interesting exercise which probably took but a short time; it seemed to take an age!

Next morning when I went out to the Lanc I found we had a small, plate-sized hole in our red, white and blue roundel on the port side and a similar hole in the roundel on the starboard side!

Next assignment – return trip to Stettin. This time the route was different. It actually took us over ten hours. As before, out over the North Sea, over Denmark, then, to our surprise, over neutral Sweden, down into the Baltic, over the Isle of Bornholm and so to Stettin. The rationale being ‘If you get shot down or have to land over Sweden, you have got lost during a training flight.’ In fact, I think some navigators had maps prepared showing false tracks and times.

We found that the Swedes were with us all the way. Flying very high as we were we could see guns below were firing in pairs to form ‘V’ signs in red tracer bullets.

Stettin itself was on this occasion heavily defended, in fact, twenty-three of our aircraft were lost. From my log of the trip I see we had full tanks, 2,154 gallons of fuel, one 4,000 lb bomb, plus cases of 30lb incendiaries.

The round trip took ten hours five minutes and we landed with only one hundred-and-fifty-eight gallons of fuel left – which meant we had no chance of going round again or being diverted to another aerodrome. We had already understood that if any of us had to 'ditch' near the North Sea coastline, Air Sea Rescue launches were standing by! A chilling thought.

About this time Germany commenced bombing England, particularly London, with ‘V2’ rockets. This was an indiscriminate weapon, so quite a lot of Bomber Command’s efforts were designed to trying to eliminate their launching sites on the French coast.

The bombing was done by what was code-named ‘GH’. Put simply, this was by radar. Bomber Command knew when our planes were over the launch pads, our craft were so spaced that on receiving a given signal from Bomber Command, we were to release our bombs carpet fashion.

The Allies were now well into France and Belgium, but there were, of course, pockets of resistance. Le Havre was one such. The enemy General would not surrender. He was duly warned he would be bombed until he would. Consequently, a force of Lancasters was sent out.

We dropped our bombs from a fair height as his anti-aircraft fire was quite good. Tons of bombs were dropped.

Two days later, in daylight, the onslaught was repeated, the resistance was not quite as fierce this time, but the bombing continued and a couple of days later, again in daylight, we bombed Le Havre. On this occasion there was no resistance at all. We were down to about 3,000 ft, the lowest safe height so that we did not get the blast back of our own bombs.

The next day the General surrendered. Thousands of German soldiers were unnecessarily killed. One thousand, four hundred tons of bombs were dropped. Two Lancasters were lost.

CHAPTER VII

Our tour of operations was nearing its end and when there are only three or four more opps to go you do not take chances.

A daylight raid to the Ruhr came next, to a place named Kamen. Owing to another aircraft cutting across our path when we were on our bombing run, we had to go round again. Consequently, when we had discharged our mission everyone also had gone home. We, therefore, put the nose down, opened up and got out double quick! The best part was, though, when we were picked up by a long range Spitfire.

Our wireless operator told him, by Aldiss lamp in Morse code, who we were and why we were alone, he waggled his wings and escorted us back to the British coast – we had never felt so safe as we did with him alongside.

A couple of trips to Calais to try and silence the sixteen inch guns firing on Dover – even though the Allies were only a few miles away and advancing into Belgium.

One more sortie over the Ruhr, a night trip to Neuss. There was quite a bit of flak and seven of our aircraft were lost, but we were fortunate enough to return with little damage.

TOUR FINISHED! We could not believe it! Predictably, we ‘sank a few jars’ at the ‘local’. Having got our log books signed by our flight commander, Squadron Leader Hayes, and Wing Commander ‘Loftie’ Watkins, Fifteen Squadron, and confirming we would like to go on again, we were sent home on indefinite end of tour leave.

PROPAGANDA LEAFLETS are worth a mention on their own.

These leaflets were dropped by aircraft adapted to do this. One day it was decided by Air Ministry that leaflets could be dropped by bomber aircraft on their operational trips.

The first time we had them we carried a large packet weighing one hundred and fifty pounds with orders to open it and drop the leaflets – exactly how was not explained.

Our Lanc was not adapted for leaflet dropping so we thought the best way might be to feed them into the 'window' shute, this was a small opening in the side of the bomb bay. (Window consisted of small bundles of silver foil strips, about half inch wide and six to eight inches long, which when dropped near a target showed up on the enemy radar screens in the same way as did aircraft.) These foil strips were dropped by the Flight Engineer at spaced intervals of about one-and-a-half minutes.

Leaflets were rather different and I found it impossible to put them down the window shute as the amount I could feed in each time was so small we would never get rid of them.

Method No 2 Slide the Engineer's side window open a few inches and push out packets of leaflets…
This done, came howls from the Mid Upper Gunner, instead of the bundles breaking up, the slip stream held them together and smashed them against the Mid Upper's turret!

Method No 3 A wonderful idea! Rosy, the Wireless Operator, and I could post them down the flare shute. (The flare shute was a tube about a foot across and about three feet tall in the fuselage aft of the bomb bay.)
Together we got packets of leaflets and fed them into the flare shute… No joy! The up-draught in the tube just blew them back at us. We then stuffed packets into the shute and quickly shut the lid!…. Waited a few minutes hoping they would have gone…Not a bit of it! On opening the lid the aircraft filled with leaflets! Imagine the scene, all this had to be done by the light of a small torch, with Rosy having to break off at intervals to go listen to his radio and my going to check engines, petrol etc.

Final Method Tie ourselves to the static line (used to open the parachute of a wounded man) open the door of the aircraft and, together, kick the large remaining packet of remaining leaflets out through the open side door… Perfect! Bet if that bundle hit some poor German on the head he would not be in a fit state to read 'em!

Other aircrew reported their difficulties happening in much the same sequence.

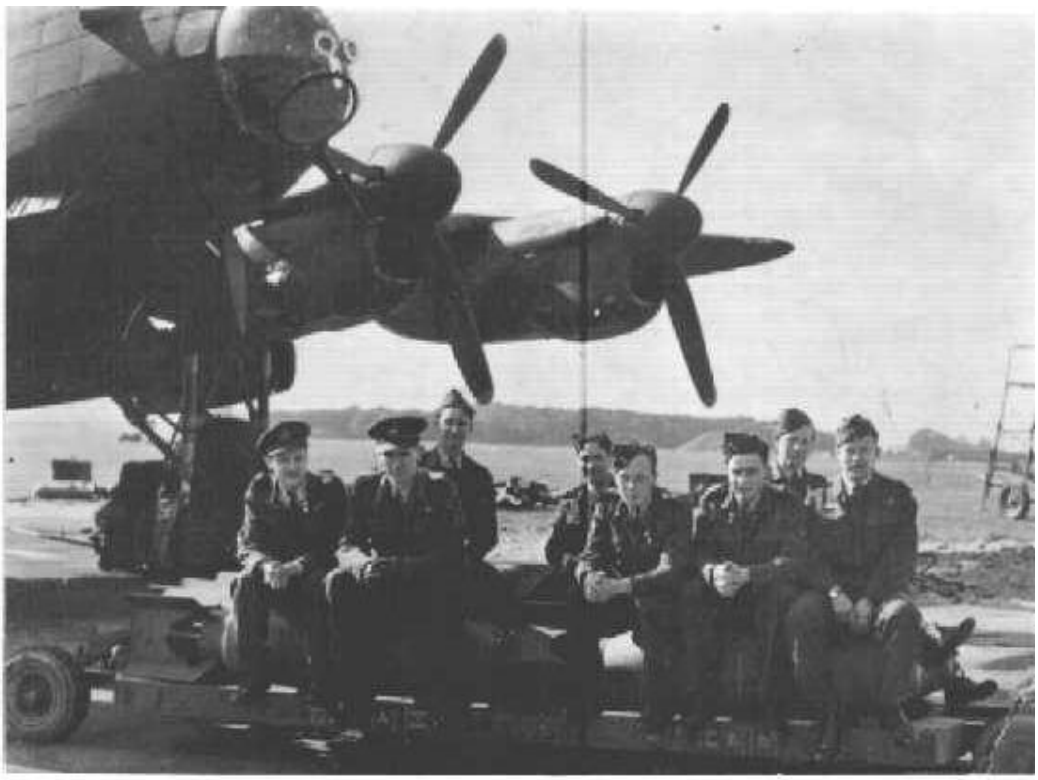
Some time later another method was devised which proved even more comical. This idea consisted of the aircraft being 'bombed up' as usual, but when the bomb doors were nearly closed by the hydraulically operated pump, packing in leaflets and shutting the doors. Theory being, leaflets and bombs would fall together.

We duly bombed the target and returned to base.

Now, the drill is, after you have landed and are returning to your dispersal point, you open the bomb doors to take the pressure off the hydraulic system.

Doors open…out fell showers of leaflets which had travelled back with us, they had stuck to the roof of the bomb bay – again due to the slip stream when the bombs were released…. Leaflets now cascaded over the airfield. All the other aircraft had been caught in the same trap….there were more leaflets over Mildenhall and Beck Row than over the Third Reich!!

Propaganda? ***'PROPAGOOSE!'***



End of tour September 1944

OPERATIONAL TOUR ON LANCASTERS AT RAF MILDENHALL

BOULOGNE
TRAPPES
BOULOGNE
LISIEUX
MASSAY
DREUX
LE HAVRE
MONTDIDIER
BIENNAIS
KIEL
STUTTGART
STUTTGART
CAEN
LE NIEPPE
BOIS DE CASSON
BASSENS
ROCQUE COURT
STETTIN
BREMEN
KIEL
STETTIN
PONT REMY
LE HAVRE
LE HAVRE
LE HAVRE
KAMEN
NEUSS
CALAIS

PART TWO

BOMBER DEVELOPMENT UNIT (BDU)

TO

DEMOBILISATION

Our first tour of operations completed and our having volunteered to do a second tour, we were sent on indefinite end of tour leave knowing we would be called back.

Actually, things did not work out quite like that as I had not been on leave more than a few days, when a telegram arrived ordering me to return to Mildenhall.

I dutifully returned to Mildenhall…sadly, there seemed no sign of the rest of those I had flown with from Mildenhall.

Finally, I found I was to go to Bomber Development Unit (BDU) at Newmarket, as they were short of a Flight Engineer who had done a flight mechanic's course on engines and a flight mechanic's course on airframes, so, with all my kit aboard the provided transport, I bade a regretful 'Goodbye' to Mildenhall – and from then on lost all touch with the other members of the first tour crew.

NEWMARKET RACECOURSE: this was so different from Mildenhall. A very small specialist unit comprising two flights, Bomber Development (which was to be the section I would be working with) and a Fighter Tactics Unit.

The whole of this specialist unit only totalled two hundred personnel. All the aircrew had at least one tour on main force behind them. Though we lived in Nissen huts, the conditions were superb. First class mess and lounge. I soon settled in and met up with a couple of other flight engineers.

We were expected to be able to fly in any type of bomber aircraft. These turned out to be Lancasters I, III and X, also the Lancaster II which was fitted with radial engines. Besides these, there were the Halifax III and VI. Naturally, I was quite at home with the Lancasters, but had to have some tuition on the Halifaxes. These I found to be quite a nice aircraft to fly in.

All these aircraft had been specially adapted. No mid-upper gun turret nor front gun, but a fuselage crammed with all sorts of strange things which were being developed. In fact, my world became one of code words – 'Rebecca', 'Oboe', Village Inn', 'Shoran', 'Loran', 'Lucero', I could go on. It is surprising how soon one gets used to a sort of secret language.

A crew consisted of four: pilot, wireless operator, rear gunner and flight engineer. As a flight engineer was needed to complete our crew members, I filled the vacancy. All the others on board would be 'boffins' (scientists). We crew servicemen, obviously, were there to fly the plane, while the passengers, often civilians, experimented with equipment.

Having been given a few flights in the Halifax III under tuition, I found I was on my own and en route for Chalon-sur-Marne and Dijon. It proved to be an uneventful trip. The boffins aboard were trying out long-range 'GEE', a navigational aid, and when they were satisfied, they just said "Let's go home".

This was, of course, not like an operational base. On landing we were fed the now 'traditional' eggs and bacon (which was Most acceptable!) but there was no de-

briefing nor interrogation, just a Form 700 to sign for the ground crew in the morning, then we would be allowed to go to bed.

Flying from Newmarket BDU was every day and over all parts of England and France.

During the whole of our tour of opps from Mildenhall we did not have an engine failure, but, flying down to Lyons on a 'Loran' experiment, we were nearing Lyons when trouble struck… the port inner engine began playing up. After endeavouring to right it, we returned to base on three engines.

The following night we were scheduled to fly the same path, but this time flying over Paris. All went well until we turned for home. Flying in a different aircraft, on this occasion we had trouble with the port outer engine. This time we did not mess about, I 'feathered' that engine and we returned to base – again on three. This time, though, the boffins had completed their experiments. You might imagine, I was the butt of 'micky-taking' the next day!

Life was very pleasant at Newmarket. Our 'local' was the 'Rising Sun' (known to us as 'The Japanese Embassy'). I could go home to Enfield easily. Added to that, my Flight Engineer Officer lived at Ponders End; he also was the owner of an old Royal Enfield 'side valve' motorbike. I went home as a pillion passenger on that motorbike many times.

Incidentally, it was very handy for him to have a passenger, especially one who had a spanner on him. The bike had two disc plugs on top of the cylinder, (they should have been steel, but owing to war-time shortage of metals, these had been fashioned in some sort of aluminium alloy). When travelling along these discs gradually worked loose so the compression diminished… I carried the suitable spanner ready for each stop…After the plugs had been tightened, on we went again. We were usually brought to at least two shuddering halts between Newmarket and Enfield.

The Halifax VI was a wonderful aircraft; with its 2,000 hp 'Centaurus' engines, it was very fast indeed, which was, of course what was needed. We had so much secret equipment aboard that orders were that at the first sign of trouble we 'beat it' – fast!

By this time we were not doing so much night flying. Day flying could consist of curious activities the Air Ministry might dress up. For instance, what happens if you have to land during a gas attack? This had to be tried out, landing while wearing special goggles and using emergency oxygen. All the results went somewhere, I suppose, but we never heard any more about them.

Our aircraft carried no distinctive markings, except the letter of that aircraft. This was rather confusing if we had to return to their own airfield folk who had come to learn the latest technology. We could only say. "Sorry, mustn't tell you that", when they asked for squadron marking etc.

Most flying was done in Halifax IIIs but some special Lancasters were fitted with rear turrets in which was a type of radar allowing the gunner to spot an enemy plane and assess how far away it was. All this in complete darkness.

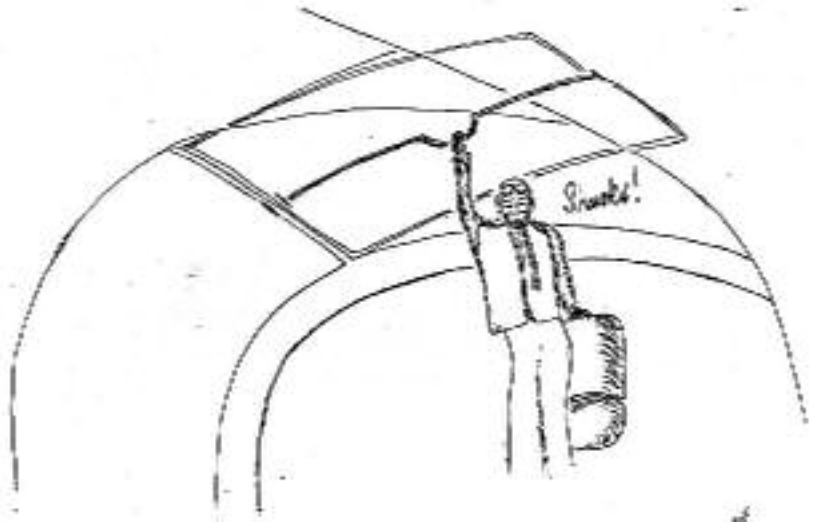
This was interesting for us as we flew in daylight with the rear turret blacked out and we could see the fighter posing as the enemy, and hear the gunner's running commentary as he tracked the fighter. (The code word for this operation was 'Village Inn'.)

One of the troubles with radial engines is the oil coolers. Flying high, where it gets very cold, the oil tends to get very thick and sluggish, causing the engine to overheat. Endeavouring to combat this, a device was fitted, consisting of a flap at the end of the cooler which could be controlled by the flight engineer from the cockpit. This flap could be closed, stopping cold air rushing through the coolers, then gradually re-opened if the oil got too hot.

We took a Halifax, fitted with such a flap, to 23,500 feet in December and it performed exactly as planned. All these innovations were designed to help with bomber development.

Latterly, we took American Officers on our flights so they could see the sort of experiments the Royal Air Force and Air Ministry were conducting.

On one such occasion we had an American Colonel on board and, on our way back from a trip over France, he appeared in the cockpit, took a look around and asked casually, "Any chance of flying this aluminum bomber?'… 'Frenchy', the pilot, said, "OK", put the plane on auto-pilot ('George'), eased himself out of his seat to let the American in. Now, above the pilot's head in a Halifax III is a large escape hatch, the release for which is a grip… our American friend naturally found that grip useful as he sat down! ONE LOUD BANG! The escape hatch's perspex cover duly disappeared into the wide blue yonder…Shouts from the rear turret as the hatch hurtled past!…



As we had not been flying above 10,000 ft we had no oxygen worries – but, by 'George'! it was cold! Not surprising, since there was now a hurricane blowing into the aircraft.

Mercifully, there was no damage – apart from the loss of the escape hatch. Commendably the Colonel took full blame for the incident.

Being at BDU was enjoyable. There was at this time a lot of flying bomb activity, with them coming in from the North Sea. At Newmarket we had watched the 'V1s' going over on their way to London – those, of course which had made it past the defences on the coast.

One day I was called into the CO's office…my house in Enfield had suffered damage; my wife, though, had escaped injury. Consequently, I was allowed a week's leave to get things sorted.

The damage turned out to be less than expected…window broken, roof tiles dislodged…dirt and dust. Salvage squads were very good. Repairs were done quite quickly.

Incidentally, we suffered damage later on – just at the end of the war when we were hit by a V2 rocket and quite a lot of damage was caused…doors blown off…windows gone…roof needing complete repair. This necessitated another spot of leave to help tidy things up. My wife, thank Heaven, was unhurt, though badly shaken.

Back to Newmarket and a new experience.

We had been on a 'Loran' trip to Le Havre, Brest and the Scilly Isles and were diverted to Tuddenham owing to very thick fog.

Tuddenham was equipped with 'FIDO' (known to us as Fog Intensive Dispersal Of – fog consists of a grain of dust surrounded by a globule of water; dry the water and the dust particle falls to the ground).

FIDO operated through perforated pipes positioned on either side of the runway. Into those pipes, under pressure, was fed waste oil, petrol was added and ignited. Flames reaching to a height of about three to four feet, warmed the air and dispersed the fog. This device, I'm told, used 60,000 gals an hour, so there was no practice.

As we arrived over Tuddenham we could see this glow below us. Our turn came to land. We made the usual approach and could see the tunnel of clear air in front, making the runway easy to pick out.

It was like going down into Hades with the flames on either side!!…Now came the peculiar bit. The warm air generated had the effect of keeping the aircraft buoyed up so that the craft had to be *flown* in. As we reached a point about ten to fifteen feet from the ground, when the weight of the aircraft overcame the 'lift', the landing became an uncomfortable imitation of the progress of a kangaroo.

On landing at an airfield not one's home base, the procedure is, you are expected to go to 'Interrogation'. There were lots of aircraft landing with us that night. We upset Tuddenham a bit as I locked our craft and explained our operation was secret, confirmation could be obtained from Newmarket. This was done, evidently, because we found we were treated with some deference, given a nice meal, and, in the early hours of the morning, transport arrived to take us back to Newmarket. The aircraft would be collected by another crew.

Incidentally, before we left, after all the odds and ends had been sorted, we stood by the control tower at Tuddenham to watch other craft come in… They did kangaroo hops just as we had, which made us feel a bit better!

A blind landing system, called 'Lucero', was being developed about this time and we had been on quite a lot of interesting flights which consisted of the navigator guiding the flight by watching his cathode ray tubes. In the middle of all this activity, word came that Newmarket was to be returned to the Racing Fraternity and we were to move back to where I did my Lancaster Finishing School training.

Organised chaos reigned for a week or two while all our equipment was transferred to Feltwell. We went by transport with our personal gear and, as Feltwell was a peace-time station, we had a barrack block with baths, showers and were just two to a room.

We settled in, then went over to Newmarket to ferry the aircraft across to Feltwell. This meant several trips for the pilots and flight engineers. A number of other crew members stayed until the last flight. It was for all of us a nostalgic farewell.

Two things come back to me of that departure:

We were under orders from the CO *not* to 'beat up' Newmarket town… He knew we might…we did! Some of the gunners and wireless operators who had stayed for the last flight had sunk a few beers and were decidedly happy. One gunner, unwisely, got into a rear turret…the pilot proceeded to climb, dive and weave back to Feltwell… Poor Chap! Feltwell was a misnomer.

Apart from one night opp down to Angers and Nantes, to check where interference to our radar was coming from, the next month was entirely daytime flying.

Taking American officers who had been observing some of our experiments, back to their bases, was a nice day out, especially as their PX Stores stocked goodies we'd never seen.

At the end of the month the Air Training Corps came on base for a week's camp. Naturally, these lads got a chance of a flight when we did air tests. They would draw lots as to where they might be in the aircraft. Mostly they were quite good in the air, though some became a trifle pale and not sorry to land.

Had they been aboard on our next little job, they might not have been too happy. We took off on a lovely April day and were to undertake a liaison trip to Lossiemouth.

The further north we flew the more snow we could see; we, of course, were only dressed for a warm Spring day.

Over Lossiemouth we prepared to land, but when I selected 'wheels down', my indicator lights showed the main wheels as being down, but the tail wheel did not appear to be down and locked.

Down the fuselage I went and took up the panel over the tail wheel. The rear wheel appeared to be down and after a lot of kicking at the wheel's undercarriage, the pilot warned the lights were still red.

Lossiemouth Control advised us to fly over the bay to Kinloss where there were better facilities. This we did and their Control said, "Fly low and slow past the Control Tower a few times so they can have a look to see if the wheel appears to be locked down…" We complied twice and were told it seemed …"OK - Land and take a chance". Without any trouble we landed. Mechanics came out to inspect…The trouble proved to be the atmosphere being so cold the micro switch which controlled the lights had frozen. I think all they did was wipe a drop of anti-freeze over it; anyway, all was well. We thanked them gratefully and fifteen minutes later, landed at Lossiemouth.

Dressed unsuitably as we were, seeing all the folk on station wearing overcoats and gloves made us envious. Snow cleared from the runway was piled two feet high. We beat a hasty path to the mess, our mission accomplished and a cup of hot beverage inside us, we jogged swiftly back to the plane.

When my next leave was due my wife was staying with relatives in South East London. Feltwell had some equipment to go down to Croydon Aerodrome and I was fortunate to be offered a ride as a passenger in a Proctor, a little single engine aircraft. What a contrast to bombers!

Funnily enough, when I returned from leave, our old Anson was going up to Waddington and I scrounged a ride in that. Just pushing a lever in this aircraft to operate wheels and flaps was not the case, in an Anson they had to be *wound* down by hand – the passenger was often 'invited' to do this.

The War in Europe was coming to an end now, but we still had experiments, demonstrations and trials of procedures which might be useful during the war with Japan. Blind landing was being developed, as were very high level navigational aids, such as 'Special H2S'.

War in Europe over, we celebrated by taking down the blackout curtains, having a few 'jars' in the mess and going into Newmarket where the celebrations seemed mainly to be by the Army letting off thunder flashes.

One of the best jobs now began. This was called 'Baedekers' and entailed taking ground crew and WAAFs on flights over Germany to show them the effects of the war efforts to which they had contributed. A typical trip might take about five hours and take us to such places as Walcheran, Brussels, Antwerp, Munchen Gladbach, Cologne, Hamm, Duisberg, Nijwegen, Arnhem… Even for us, the aircrew, it was an eye-opener to survey the devastation in daylight.

About this time, Cranwell had the idea they would like to convert a Halifax bomber into a flying classroom. Our crew got the job of assessing the runways to see if landing a large, laden aircraft was feasible.

‘Control’ knew what we were going to do, but it seemed no-one else did as there seemed to be great consternation when the biggest thing their (potential officer) cadets had ever seen flew up and down the runways at only a few feet.

We decided that landing was possible, so came in, taxied to a dispersal and got mobbed by wide-eyed cadets.

After being entertained to a very nice meal in their mess, we prepared for ‘take-off’. This entailed taking the plane to the extreme end of the runway where the ground was rough and dusty… there, an ancient civilian was watching us. As we turned round we waved him to get out of the way, but he just waved back; consequently he disappeared in a cloud of dust as I opened up the engines for take off! We said ‘Sorry’ to the poor old buffer, but otherwise there wasn’t a lot we could do.

After our assessment of Cranwell’s runways, a number of odd jobs came our way. Air experience for the Air Training Corps from all parts of England was by now well established. They came to stay on a number of airfields, living under canvas for a week and being taken aloft when we were doing air tests.

At the request, I suppose, of some government department, we undertook a photographic survey of Lincoln city. Another task was to drop lots of cases of incendiary bombs ‘surplus to requirements’ into Cardigan Bay. (How reprehensible that was!) On a number of flights cameras fitted on gyros were tested.

Heathrow, soon to become London Airport, had to have its homing devices tested and, if the proposed runways were to be lined up with the homing devices, we got that job, too. To see London Airport now is amazing.

The war with Japan was over, said to be the consequence of our dropping the first atomic bomb…We had a parade to celebrate this on our barrack square and the Feltwell Brass Band played as we formed up to march to the local church for a thanksgiving service. They played again as we marched out of the camp. Then they must have boarded a lorry and raced down the road in front of us for there they were playing as we arrived at the church. The villagers, the band and we really enjoyed ourselves.

There was very little flying, as you can imagine, just a few 25,000 ft short-range ‘Gee’ (‘Shoran’) tests…so it was no surprise when we learned Feltwell BDU was closing down and aircrew would be dispersed; this entailed our being interviewed to assess us for other jobs.

In my case this was where my twenty-five days ‘jankers’ was to pay off: I was sent to Flying Training Command Headquarters at Shinfield Park, Reading, and had been promoted to Warrant Officer to take over the Engineering Branch Office. It fell to me to take morning parades of about three to four hundred airmen and Women’s Auxiliary Airforce.

This was a very good posting and I felt I had been elevated to the peerage when I found I had my own quarters and an airman to tidy up for me!

Demobilisation finally came. It is profoundly humbling for me to remember 40,000 good men and aircrew didn't make it…….but

I WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES

In 1989, through the Mildenhall Register, I learned 'Rosy', John Rosier, the wireless operator of our Lancaster, LS J LL806 was living within forty miles of me. We spent many happy occasions together, reminiscing… it was with his cooperation and some of his material that this booklet was compiled. Sadly, Rosy died in 1991.

Through Rosy, I learned the tragic news that 'Willie', Flight Lt Bill Leslie, our pilot, had been killed in a flying accident with a Wellington only five months after we finished our tour.

Now we are three:

Bomb-aimer	'Maxie'	Eric McNiece	Now in Canada
Mid-upper Gunner	'Red'	Edward North	In England
Flight Engineer	'Bill' (me)	William Gundry	In England

Willie Frank Bill Rosie Red Fen Maxie
Lesley Frudd Gundry Rozier North Fendley McNiece

Sgt Maxie Fen Rosie Frank Bill Willie Red
Ground McNiece Fendley Rozier Frudd Gundry Lesley North
Crew

LIE IN THE DARK AND LISTEN

(Noel Coward)

Lie in the dark and listen
It's clear tonight so they're flying high
Hundreds of them, thousands perhaps
Riding the icy, moonlit sky
Men, machinery, bombs and maps
Altimeters and guns and charts
Coffee, sandwiches, fleece-lined boots
Bones and muscles and minds and hearts
English saplings with English roots
Deep in the earth they've left below
Lie in the dark and let them go
Lie in the dark and listen.

Lie in the dark and listen
They're going over in waves and waves
High above villages, hills and streams
Country churches and little graves
And little citizens' worried dreams
Very soon they'll have reached the sea
And far below them will be the bays
And cliffs and sands where they used to be
Taken for summer holidays
Lie in the dark and let them go
Theirs is a world we'll never know
Lie in the dark and listen

Lie in the dark and listen
City magnates and steel contractors
Factory workers and politicians
Soft hysterical little actors
Ballet dancers, reserved musicians
Safe in your warm civilian beds
Count your profits and count your sheep
Lie in the dark and let them go
There's one debt you'll forever owe
Lie in the dark and listen.