

A Lanc called Mickey

Recollections of the crew of World War II Lancaster
Bomber called Mickey the Moocher



Memoirs of Frank Mouritz, Laurie Cooper, Jim Leith,
David Blomfield, Peter Smith, Dennis Cluett and Arthur Bass.

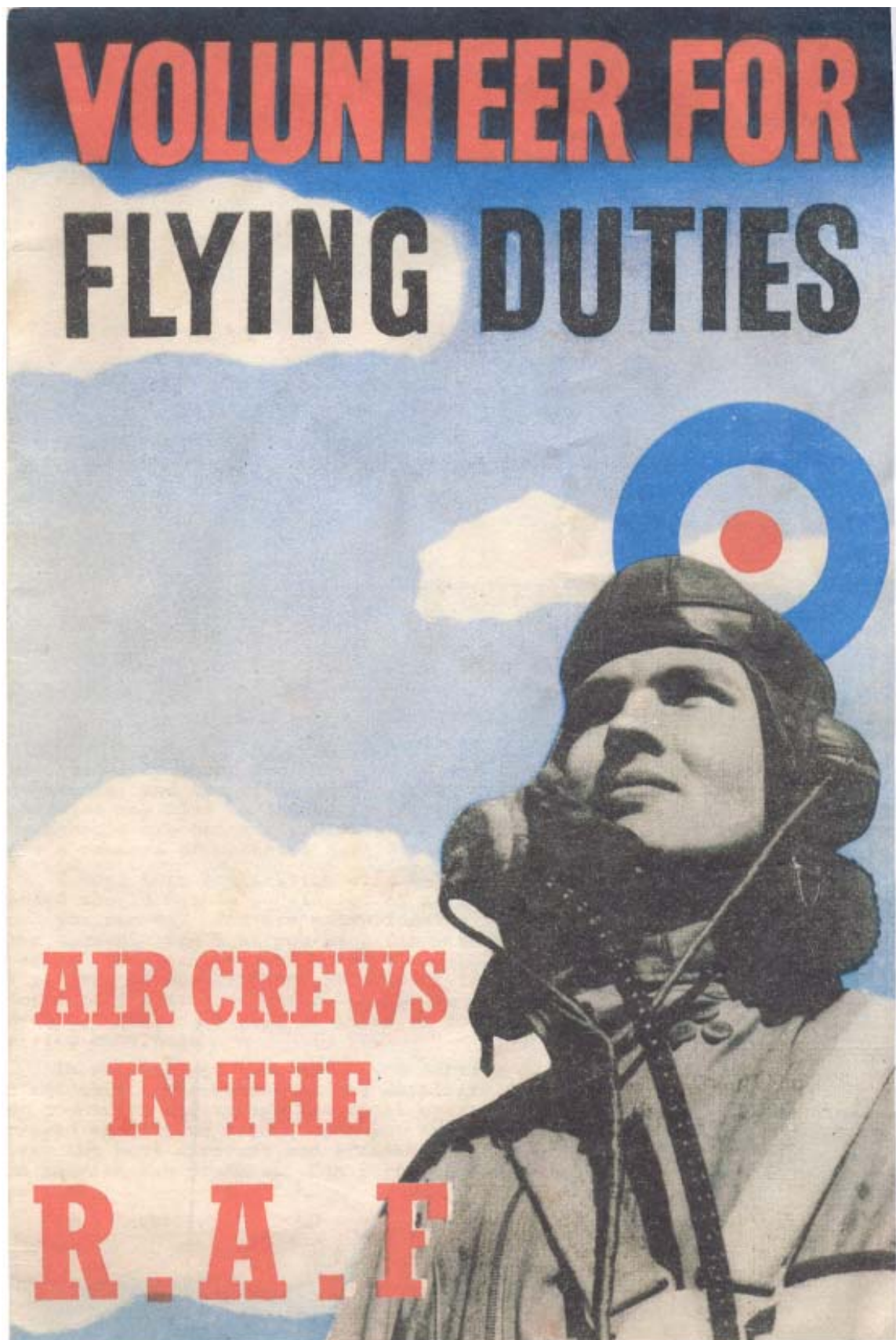
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Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher



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Introduction

This volume records some important war time memoirs of one crew who served as members of the Empire Air Crew flying Lancasters over Europe during World War II. The recollections provide an important insight into the challenges they faced as they served their countries as proud members of the Allied Forces.

This account of what was a relatively short but highly significant part of the lives of these men was collated as one volume in draft form to mark the 80th birthday of Frank Mouritz, the pilot of the crew, in October 2003. It has taken a year or so since then to get the final version complete.

Within these pages there are substantial accounts provided by Frank Mouritz, Laurie Cooper and Jim Leith, with briefer accounts provided by the other members of the crew, namely David Blomfield, Dennis Cluett and Peter Smith. Each providing their own insights and reflections on their experiences during training and active service. The stories recorded here are of ordinary men who were asked to do extraordinary things; face death and deliver as much damage and even death to an enemy, in the name of the very significant challenge faced by the Allied Nations.

Their story is made even more extraordinary by the fact that they were required to fly in a plane, referred to as Mickey the Moocher, which had already seen 119 missions. All their early missions of the 34 they flew were in this plane. The odds of returning from any mission was very low, with far higher losses occurring in less experienced crews. The overall survival rate in Bomber Command was one in five. So we have a story of significance just because of the remarkable circumstances.

As I reviewed these documents to bring collection together what amazed me was the sheer magnitude of the logistics involved in this part of the war effort. These men came from different walks of life and even different countries. They were brought together with a common purpose, through a highly organized process, with training in different parts of the world, ultimately coming together as well trained teams, committed to serve. I feel sure that the experience they gained in team work and commitment served these individuals well for the remainder of their lives.

While these are just the reflections of one crew within thousands, it provides an important record of a significant part of our history. Although just 60 years ago, it provides a stark reminder of the horror of war and the amazing risks faced by those who serve.

For the families of these men, these recollections also reveal a part of the lives these men that must have had great influence on them as individuals. In my case, my father, Frank Mouritz, never spoke of the war to us as children. The first time we spoke about it was my 21st birthday with Dad indicating he had the first of several combats with Luftwaffe night fighters on the night of his 21st. Now that was a sobering experience. I found the task of tidying up the crews' memoirs very emotional. Simply coming to terms with events described has given me a brief glimpse into experiences I hope I never have to endure.

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I encourage the readers of this document to reflect on the words and the deeper message that underlies these very personal but truly insightful reflections of this period of our history.

Mike Mouritz
January 2005

Abbreviations Used

ITW	Initial Training Wing
RAFVR	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
ACRC	Air Crew Reception Centre
PNB	Pilot Navigator Bombaimer
DF	Direction Finding
OTU	Operational Training Unit
HCU	Heavy Conversion Unit
LFS	Lancaster Finishing School
ATC	Air Training Corp
ETA	Estimate Time of Arrival
ITS	Initial Training School
WAGS	Wireless Operators/Air Gunners
(P)AFU	Pilots Advanced Flying Unit
PT	Physical Training
PFF	Path Finder Force
TI	Target Indicator
AA	Anti Aircraft
NAAFI	Navy Army Air Force Institute

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61 Sqdn Skellingthorpe, October 1944

L to R: Jim Leith (Flight Engineer), Dennis Cluett (Rear Gunner), Peter Smith (Bomb Aimer), Frank Mouritz (Pilot), Arthur Bass (Mid Upper Gunner), Laurie Cooper (Navigator) and Dave Blomfield (Wireless Operator).

Mickey the Moocher

The crew first arrived in Skellingthorpe in September 1944 and after completing two operations in Lancaster GR-B, we were allocated a permanent aircraft, GR-M whose code name was Mike and with the nose art of Mickey the Moocher (named after a popular song at the time, 'Minnie the Moocher'). This was a real veteran with 119 trips recorded as bombs on the nose. The crew recall it was quite something to have their own aircraft. Mickey was nearly worn out and statistics collected after the war noted that 6,500 Lancaster flew on operations and only 34 completed over 100 trips. Mickey's engines were due for a change, the controls were sloppy and she bore dozens of patches on her wings and fuselage. She took a lot of runway to take off with a full load of fuel and bombs and a long time to get to planned altitude.

This crew completed five trips in old Mickey then she was flown to a training unit, grounded and used for ground instructions. In 1999 the only Lancaster still flying, PA 474 of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, was given a major overhaul and a decision made to rename the aircraft after a Lancaster that had completed 100 trips or more. Mickey the Moocher was chosen as it had a good sounding name.

In July 2002 Laurie Cooper and Jim Leith attended an aerial display "Salute the Bomber Crews" and, with their wives, were invited into the control cabin of the new Mickey. We understand that there are enough spare parts to keep Mickey airborne for about a further 50 years doing trips to air shows etc



The new Mickey landing at Fairford, 2002

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'Winter Ops', GERALD COULSON, for the Lancaster Trilogy

Frank Mouritz

Nº 5 Initial Training School, Clontarf

‘Why join the Air Force and why volunteer for Air Crew!’

I was brought up to some extent in the shadow of the Great War and to some extent the Boer War, as my father and most of my uncles had seen service in the Australian Infantry Forces firstly in Gallipoli, Middle East and the trenches of France. Some had not returned.

The 1939-1945 war was declared shortly before my sixteenth birthday so I realised that provided it lasted a few years, I would be involved. As a boy, my heroes were the aviators of those days, Bert Hinkler, Kingsford Smith, Amy Johnson, etc, and I had read many stories of the RAF fighter planes of the Western Front. This coupled with the prestige and glamour that the Air Force fighter pilots had during the Battle of Britain convinced me that the only thing to do was to volunteer for Air Crew as soon as I was old enough. Most of my mates at the time had the same ideas. All that was required was to be between 18-32 years of age, reasonably educated, and to be able to pass the medical examination.

Soon after my 18th birthday I applied, and was soon accepted. Military service was compulsory and if I had not joined the RAAF I would have been conscripted for the army.

Air Crew training was on a world wide basis known as the Empire Air Training Scheme. Ground and flying training schools were established in Australia, South Africa, Rhodesia and the UK. Initial training of 2-3 months was undertaken in each state with some trainees going overseas for flying training, but the majority during my period trained in Australia. Three categories of Air Crew were being trained at the time, Pilots, Observers and Wireless Operator-Air Gunners.

All pilots did their initial training on Tiger Moths and were then separated for single engine and twin engine training. The observers were trained as navigators and bomb aimers while the third group were trained as wireless operator-air gunners. These groups were basically to crew the twin engine light and medium bombers. Eventually these duties became more specialised as the four engine heavy bombers came into service. The training overall was very standardised throughout the Empire, as trainees would eventually reach the UK and go onto further training with men from various schools and various countries, so we all had to be of the same standard.

After waiting for some months, I was notified to be at Airways House in St George's Terrace, Perth, on Monday 21st June 1942 and there I was informed that I was to have my initial training at Clontarf on the Canning River near Perth. Clontarf had been a boys' orphanage that the RAAF had taken over for use as an initial training school, known as Nº 5 ITS. This was for ground instruction and to introduce us to

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Air Force discipline only, and to sort the men into the three categories. You had no choice, the instructors making the decisions and there was no appeal. The categories were decided at the end of two months, the WAGS then went to Ballarat in Victoria while the Pilots and Observers remained at Clontarf for a further four weeks before being sent for flying training. New recruits came in every month. My course was N° 29 and my N° 427346, the 42 being the year and the 7 approximately the month of recruitment. This probably was a simple system for administration, but if in future years you were shot down over Germany the Luftwaffe intelligence, from your number, had an immediate knowledge of your recruitment date and hence, your length of service.



Sgt Frank Mouritz,
Church Lawford, 1943

The rank on recruitment was Aircraftsman Class 2 (AC2) and the rate of pay was 6s6d per day, and based on the price of a loaf of bread, this would equal \$10-\$12 per day at the time of writing (in the mid 1990s). The RAAF of course, provided all working and dress clothes, food and lodging, etc, but we had to provide our toilet items. We had one dress uniform and overcoat, shirts with detachable collars, dark blue pullover, socks, one pair of shoes, one pair of boots, sports shorts and singlets and sand shoes. The work clothes were two pairs of dark blue overalls and a blue beret. As all items were not always available in the required sizes it usually took some weeks to get fully equipped.

Our course consisted mostly of 18-19 year olds, some of whom I knew from school and other youth associations. The remainder being in their late 20s and early 30s, some having been manpowered for some years. There were also a few who had remustered from air force ground staff. Initially I slept on an iron bed in a large dormitory, but soon moved to a tent under pine trees. We slept 6 to a tent with board floors and on a straw filled hessian bag called palliasse.

Food was reasonable by the standards of the day but quite monotonous. Apple jelly was used as a

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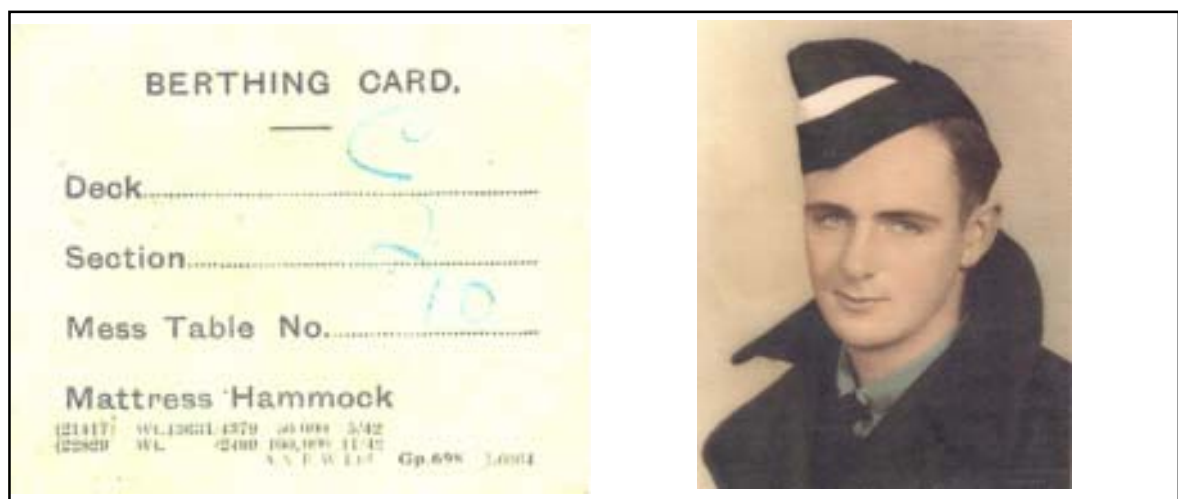
spread for bread most of the time. (Apples could not be exported so this helped to use up the country's surplus). One episode I remember well was when the Medical Officer decided that the new recruits needed "opening medicine", so the cooks laced the evening meal. At about midnight there was a queue to the outside toilets, which were a bank of thunder boxes in an iron roofed and Hessian walled shed. The medicine must have been very severe and the only way to ensure another seat was to join the end of the queue in the rain. This went on most of the night.

Training consisted of lectures, drill, PT and sport with progressive exams in various subjects. The general discipline was strict and we ran between classes. For the first two months all recruits studied the same subjects and drilled and played sport together while the instructors decided on your future role in the air force.

We had a weekend leave every 2 weeks with transport provided to Perth. How proud we felt when we were able to show our families and girl friends how smart we looked in our air force blue uniforms. This also meant that although we were under age (21 being the legal drinking age) we could drink in pubs. The general feeling being that if you were considered old enough to fight for your country, you should be allowed to drink in pubs. This being so, the barmen never queried your age.

It was during the first two months at Clontarf that I caught German measles (Rubella). As it was highly contagious, several of us with the disease were isolated in a tent wing of the hospital under some pine trees. This caused us to miss lectures and training, and we were put back a training course from 29 to 30. This probably made a difference to the various future training stations and operational theatres that I was involved in. I could have possibly served in the islands to the North of Australia instead of the United Kingdom and hence a very different life.

I found the training at Clontarf interesting and stimulating both mentally and physically. The lecture subjects were reasonably easy for me as I had passed my Leaving Certificate (university matriculation) the year before I enlisted. After 4½ months, I was posted to N° 5 Elementary Flying Training School (5



Berthing Card and Frank Mouritz, July 1942

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EFTS) at Cunderdin in the Western Australian wheat belt, 160kms east of Perth to train as a pilot. I was given a week's leave and then travelled to Cunderdin by rail on 12 November 1942.

Nº 9 Elementary Flying Training School, Cunderdin

The Air Force had been very wise in locating an elementary flying school at Cunderdin. The country was very flat and the airfield 2-3 miles across with a dry hard grassed surface. The Perth to Kalgoorlie railway, water supply pipeline and the main road ran east west close to the southern boundary and the towns of Meckering to the west and Tammin to the east, 20kms each side. The usual excellent visibility made for good flying conditions and it was almost impossible to get lost.

I was very excited at the prospect of being taught to fly as it was only a few years since my boyhood hero worship of the early aviators and fighter pilots. We had ground instructions for about a week and I then had a first flight as a passenger for 35 minutes on 20 November. For flying instruction I was paired up with Bill Nilan, whom I already knew as we had lived in the same suburb of Perth for some years. I was to remain with Bill (Paddy) Nilan for about the next 18 months, having the same instructor who was Sgt Jack Murray. It is pleasing to know that Jack Murray survived the war and flew as a commercial pilot with McRobertson Millar Airlines for many years.

Our training aircraft was the De Havilland DH82A Tiger Moth, classified as a two seater elementary trainer. It first flew in 1931 and it was a very simple bi-plane powered by a Gypsy Major 130hp (97kw) 4 cylinder in line, air cooled upside down engine. It was used throughout the Elementary Flying Training School as an elementary trainer. The controls and instruments were simple with voice tube communications between instructor and pupil, was hand started by swinging the propeller and had no brakes. The maximum allowable instruction hours for going solo were fifteen. If a pupil got this far without his instructor considering him ready for a solo flight, he was checked by the Chief Flying Instructor (CFI). If found close to solo he authorised further instruction and, if not, the pupil was scrubbed and reclassified as an observer or WAGS. I soloed in 10 hours which was about average. As landing and take off were much easier in no or little wind condition, we started training very early in the morning and had to be ready for flying soon after dawn was breaking. The afternoons were reserved for ground instruction.

Although we had been issued with full flying kit of inner suit, outer suit, helmet, flying boots and gloves, we mostly flew in our outer suits with sand shoes on our feet, as the Tiger Moth controls were very sensitive and required a fine touch. The Tigers were fully aerobatic so after about 8 weeks of instruction and approximately 25 hours of dual and 25 hours of solo flying, we were reasonably competent pilots. These hours were all flown within a 20km radius of the aerodrome. Flying accidents were rare and serious injuries or death was unknown during the time I spent at Cunderdin. Of course, the weather was extremely good and virtually no time was lost due to bad weather.

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At the end of this course, pilots were selected for future training as single or multi engine pilots. I was selected for the latter and posted to Geraldton, WA to train on Avro Ansons, arriving there on 19th January 1943. The single engine trainees were sent to one of the aerodromes in the Eastern States to fly Wirraways (an Australian made version of the American Harvard trainer).

While at Cunderdin, we were required to start a flying log book and this was used to record all future flying. Luckily I still have this record of my experience.

Nº 4 Service Flying Training School, Geraldton

After a week's leave I caught the passenger train to Geraldton to commence my course at Nº 4 Service Flying Training School. It was a slow uncomfortable 8-10 hour journey in those days. The aerodrome was a few miles out of town on the site of what is now the civil airport. It was quite a large airfield, all dry grass, very dusty when the sea breeze blew, which was most afternoons at that time of year.

We had long left off our blue uniforms and overalls with the arrival of summer, and shirt, shorts and long socks were our standard dress. We may occasionally have worn a pullover for night flying and high altitudes but that was all as the air temperature to 6,000ft being suitable for shirt and shorts.

I was again paired with Bill Nilan and in the initial training section our instructor was Flying Officer Rudenbach (after the war he owned the Ad Astra dry cleaners for many years). It took 6 hours instruction before I soloed as I found the Anson a great deal more difficult to fly than the Tiger Moth, and also hard to taxi in the often windy conditions. The weather was usually good and I flew most days.

The initial training school lasted about 6 weeks and apart from flying training we had a great deal of ground instruction, played sport and practiced flying in the Link Trainer. I also soloed at night flying which only involved circuit and landing onto a line of kerosene flares laid out on the runway, there being no electric light runways at that time. I completed 50 hours of dual and solo flying and was passed out as an average pilot. I then had 106 hours flying recorded in my log book. We then moved onto the advanced flying section at the same airfield with a different instructor, and I found this much more interesting.

We now flew mostly with one or two other pupils, doing navigation, bombing and air gunnery with cross country's lasting up to 3½ hours and 3 and 5 plane formations flying. Next followed instrument flying and cross country flights at night. The greatest thrill for me was low flying, usually carried out over the paddocks of the Greenough Flats.

During this period the first birthday of the WAAF recruitment into the air force occurred and a party was organised for the girls. Pupil pilots were not invited but a group of us went down to the Irwin river mouth and camped one night to catch crayfish – which were very plentiful – by hand on the reef, for the party. The station had a visit also for the party from a Kittyhawk Squadron from the Potshot base at Exmouth. This included their Sqd/Ldr Bluey Truscott DFC who was an ex Battle of Britain pilot and probably one of Australia's most famous pilots at the time. He and his pilots cut quite a figure in their black flying

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boots, shirts, shorts, wings and decorations. The planes all sported sharks teeth painted around the air intakes and various insignias. Most notably, Bluey's Kittyhawk had a winged dunny with the Latin motto 'Simpla in Excreta' inscribed under it.

There was little to do in Geraldton on our days off except swim and drink a few beers. At the time there was an Australian Army Division stationed in the area, as the possibility of a Japanese landing on the WA coast was imminent. All this manpower led to a considerable shortage of partners at the Saturday night dances, even though there were some local girls and quite a few WAAFs.

I passed out of the course, received my wings and was promoted to Sgt at the beginning of May 1943 with 183 flying hours recorded in my log book. I was classified as an average pilot.

Nº 5 Embarkation Depot

After sewing on our wings and sergeant stripes on our khaki and blue uniforms, we packed our flying gear, clothes and personal items and left Geraldton for Perth by the slow train.

How very proud I was to show my parents the wings and stripes and to walk around the streets of Mt Hawthorn, to visit one or two of my teen age girl friends. All of my old mates were somewhere in the services by then. I spent a week's leave at home and then reported to Nº 5 Embarkation Depot at Wembley. We had no knowledge of our next posting except that we would be sent away from Western Australia.



Frank Mouritz in his flying suit, 1942

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As multi engine pilots it was an Eastern States Operation Training unit, and onto twin engine Beaufort Bombers or twin engine Beau-fighters, then to the islands to the north or overseas to the UK or the Middle East. The Indian Ocean was held by the Japs operating out of Singapore, so all troop transport to Europe and the Middle East went from one of the Eastern states ports, to the USA, west coast, across the USA by rail, then across the Atlantic to the UK and beyond. Being posted overseas was the preferred option if we had one, as letters from other airmen telling of their adventures in the USA and about the English girls and English pubs, were circulated around. Censorship of letters prevented any reports of the high casualties that the air force was experiencing from reaching us, although lists of casualties appeared in local papers, but could not be related to percentage loss. These did not worry me as it was one great big adventure to a 19 year old. I had been trained at the government expense to fly an aeroplane, was well paid, and was now to be taken on a world cruise for nothing. Exciting times!

I spent two weeks at 5 Embarkation Depot and then after 24 hours notice boarded the SS Morella at Fremantle, bound for Melbourne. The Morella was a small passenger ship that made a regular run between the southern ports of Australia.

We travelled as normal passengers in cabins and ate at tables served by waiters which was very pleasant. To make the trip more interesting, there were plenty of girls on board, office workers on their way to work in a defence establishment in Canberra. The trip took 8 days and the Bight was rough most of the time, being mid winter. Fortunately, neither seasickness nor airsickness worried me during my sea trips or flying, except once in extreme conditions in a Lancaster.

We arrived in Port Melbourne on the 5th June 1943 and were driven to N° 1 Embarkation Depot Ascot Vale.

N° 1 Embarkation Depot, Ascot Vale

Now we were at Ascot Vale we knew that we were going overseas as soon as a troop ship was available. N° 1 Embarkation Depot was part of the Melbourne showgrounds and we slept in tin sheds without heating. Being winter in Victoria we slept in our woollen inner flying suits on straw palliasses. There were all the other categories of air crew in the depot and we experienced our first taste of life in a sergeant's mess where we got extra privileges.

The embarkation depot was crowded with air crew waiting overseas transport and we had little to do except to be in camp in the mornings for a very rough roll call. The city of Melbourne was only a short tram ride away, and though it was full of troops from various services there were plenty of girls at the dances. The most popular haunt was an all services club called 'The Dugout' in the city where cheap meals were served (I have fond memories of my first taste of peach melbas and banana splits etc). There were dances held both in the afternoons and evenings with plenty of girls. There were also Friday and Saturday night dances in most suburbs, only a short tram ride away.

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I was in this camp for a month enjoying the lifestyle, except for one week, when I went with Bill Nilan to the Point Cook aerodrome for a beam approach landing course, flying Airspeed Oxfords. The beam approach was a system to enable the pilot to land an aircraft in fog with visibility down to about 20 yards. We had Link training familiarisation then both day and night practice, always with an instructor. The system consisted of radio beams sent up from a transmitter at the end of the runway which sent morse code signals that kept you at the correct approach angle. It was possible with a great deal of training to successfully land an aircraft in heavy fog conditions but it required continual practice, so was not really suitable for operational conditions. I completed a further course in this system while in the UK. From an operational point of view it would never have worked with the large number of operational aircraft needing to land in as short a time as possible at the same aerodrome. As far as I know operational aircraft were not fitted with this equipment, and we used a system called FIDO in the UK which was successful though very dangerous.

While in Melbourne I met by arrangement a mate of mine from Leederville, Alf Ball was about 3 months behind me in pilot training and was at a flying school in Victoria. We had two days out together in Melbourne, the last one nearly getting me into trouble. I met Alf that afternoon, and amongst other things, we made arrangements to meet two girl shop assistants to go dancing that evening. In the late afternoon, it was turning cold and as I did not have my overcoat I left Alf, to go back to camp, to pick up my coat, have a meal and return to meet the girls. On my return to camp I discovered that my name was on a list of about 200 aircrew who were due to go aboard a troop ship that evening. Alf took both girls to the dance and it was some months before I was able to explain to him why I didn't make the dance. Alf was later killed on a raid while flying a Lancaster in April 1945.

At Sea

We handed in our Australian flying gear, collected a second blue uniform and other items, climbed aboard a truck and drove to Port Melbourne where we carried our gear up the gangplank and on board the USS Rochambeau. She was a US Navy troop transport; diesel engine, and had the French name because she was in the Philippines when France capitulated in 1940, was taken over by the Americans and refitted as a troop carrier. She had brought US marines and Army personnel to the South West Pacific and was returning to the USA with repatriated American troops who had been wounded and mentally deranged after fighting in the battle of Guacanaval. The ship had been re-routed to Melbourne to pick up Australian aircrew for the UK. The ship looked worn, tired and rusty. Our accommodation was below decks in converted cargo holds, large areas that stretched from each side of the ship, with 3 tiered bunks with hardly enough room to walk between. There was very little room to stow our gear and the ventilation was poor. We left during the night and were through the 'heads' by early morning. We were allowed on certain sections of the decks, but Bass Strait in July was wild and wet, so not very inviting. As there were Jap submarines operating in the Tasman Sea, we sailed south along the west coast of Tasmania down towards the Antarctic in the roaring forties, and up along the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand to Wellington.

The accommodation was bad and the food even worse. We had two meals a day, breakfast from 7-

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9.30, and afternoon meal from 3.30-6.00pm. The meals were served cafeteria style and we stood to eat at benches. The food was served on metal trays with compartments for various items. After about an hour on the mess deck of the rolling ship the floor was covered with spilt food. Although the food was plentiful it was very different to what we had been used to. The food was soft and slushy with sweet tasting bread, no potatoes (mashed potatoes had been standard food in air force messes for the last nine months) with coffee, no tea. We complained and there was some improvement after New Zealand because of extra provision, however, we were only given cold tea, the Americans not really understanding our traditions.

There was a small library on board run by a navy chaplain, Lt Cdr William T Holt. Early on in the voyage while looking for a book in the library I noticed that the chaplain was very busy. I offered to help him as I had had some library experience in civilian life. He accepted my offer which turned out to be a major move as I then became a crew member and was entitled to a meal at lunch time, this being for the crew and troops working on the ship. Not only did I eat better but for the two hours a day I worked, I could also smuggle bread, fruit and other snacks back to my mates.

Three days out of Melbourne we ran into a terrific storm that lasted a day and a night. The night was very bad and the ship rolled so much that we were continually thrown out of bed and our gear got all mixed up together. We arrived in Wellington early one morning and fortunately, due to some engine trouble we stayed there 2 days. The ship docked at a wharf, not far from the centre of the town, and we were allowed to go ashore in the day time. We did some sightseeing by riding trams to their terminus and then returning. The people were very friendly and hospitable, and we used to spend some time talking to girls in shops and public places, and we also sampled the beer. We took the opportunity to buy tea and sugar in order to have a change from the American coffee.

Soon we were heading out into the Pacific with San Diego on the west coast of the USA as our next destination.

The weather quickly warmed up, and fortunately we were moved from our cramped below deck quarters to 2 tier bunks on the open deck. Not a lot of room but the air was clean. Some of the air gunners stood a watch on the few guns we had on board, to help the navy, but luckily we did not sight any submarines. The only real inconvenience caused by the subs was the rule about wearing or carrying of life jackets at all times, and no lights or smoking on open decks after dark. We solved the tea brewing problem by collecting several food tins from the trash pile and fitting handles to make billies, to be boiled in the steam jets in the wash rooms.

We passed the time by reading, writing, playing cards and playing a portable gramophone. I still remember one or two tunes from our limited supply. An American marine from Dallas, Texas, taught me a simple two person card game that my wife and I have played together on many occasions since then.

San Diego was reached at last, where we docked and put ashore some of the marines and then headed for San Francisco, arriving there on 31st July 1943, 28 days out of Melbourne. Until this day,

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every time I smell diesel engine exhaust I can still recall the smell of the USS Rochambeau. My only other souvenir of this trip is a prayer book given to me by the chaplain.



Frank Mouritz and Peter Smith,
September 1944

Across America

We sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge and into San Francisco harbour in fairly thick fog, hence hardly saw the bridge. We disembarked near a rail terminal, dressed in our best blue uniforms and carrying all our kit. We boarded a Pullman type train which had sleeping compartments, but as the train was carrying 50% more people than it was designed for so we had to double up in the bunks. Negro attendants looked after our needs and changed the bedding every day. The locomotives burnt pulverised coal and were very dirty. The weather was fine and warm so we soon donned our shorts and shirts. The shorts amused the American public as only Boy Scouts wore shorts in the USA at that time. The scenery we passed through was good – farms, forests, deserts, canyons and big cities (lots of slums on the outskirts). It was a northern route going through Sacramento, Nevada, Salt Lake City, and, eventually, Chicago and New York. A kitchen car supplied our meals and we took turns in carrying them along the train. Packaging, unknown to us, was in full swing and cereals such as Kelloggs Cornflakes came in single serve packets lined with greaseproof paper, the milk in cartons and we ate the cereal straight from the packet with wooden spoons.

Stops along the route were only made to change engines and crews and we hardly ever left the train. We were given a pay in US dollars and promised leave in New York if we behaved ourselves and returned promptly to the train at departure times after the short stops. It was common knowledge that there was a holding camp near New York. We expected to go there for a few days prior to be given leave while we waited for a troop ship to cross the Atlantic.

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

When we disembarked at New York station carrying all our kit, there we saw a double line of armed US military police, from the station gates to waiting army trucks. We were still under the impression that we were getting leave until the trucks ended up at a wharf and we were shepherded up a gang plank and packed into cabins on the SS Aquitania. She sailed next morning past the Statue of Liberty as day was breaking. We learnt afterwards that there were several hundred Australian airmen waiting at the holding camp, and it must have been just too easy for the administration to put us straight on board instead of giving us the promised leave. All the other Australians that I met in the following years had been given 1 or 2 weeks leave in or near New York. So my experience of the USA was extremely limited.

Crossing the Atlantic

We left New York on the 5th August 1943 aboard the SS Aquitania. The accommodation was below decks in cabins with forced air ventilation. We were in six berth cabins converted to sleep twelve. The ship was very crowded with thousands of troops, mostly American, but our section was aircrew of different nationalities. This was to be the set up for our way of life for the next two years. Apart from our group of Aussies there were other Aussies who had been flying anti submarine patrols in RAF squadrons in the West Indies, Catalinas I think. Many were RAF crews, pilots, navigators who had just completed their training to Wings standard in Canada. There were also Kiwis and Aussies who had trained in Canada instead of Australia. The Empire Training Scheme was in full swing. Men were trained in their thousands and were steadily moving from all around the world to the UK. This was a highly organised scheme and it always amazed me that men from various countries and training schools could meet for further training in the UK and all had been trained to the same standard and could fit easily into future courses and roles.

We had to spend most of our time in our cabins, and were only allowed on the open decks for two one hour periods a day with life jackets to be worn or carried at all times. We were given three meals a day and these were OK.

The war against the U Boats was about at its peak and shipping was either in convoys with naval and air force escorts or the fast ex passenger liners that travelled unescorted at high speed on a zig zag course, and were relatively safe.

As sergeants we had limited use of the ship's lounge and concert hall, and there was also a canteen on board for chocolates, cigarettes, coke, etc (my first introduction to Coco Cola), but no alcoholic drinks. Even though it was midsummer the Atlantic was grey and wet, and I did not fancy spending my air force career patrolling the grey water as a member of Coastal Command.

We did not have any submarine alerts and the trip was relatively comfortable and free of any major

A Lanc called Mickey

incidents. After 6 days at sea we entered the Clyde, anchored off the coast at Greenock, and disembarked in lighters (small boats) late in the afternoon of August 11th, about 5 weeks out of Melbourne.

United Kingdom, First Stop Brighton

A troop train awaited us, we boarded it, had a meal and settled down in passenger coaches for an overnight run to London. We awoke to an early dawn and being midsummer the green English countryside was at its best with lush grass and ripening fields of wheat, and fat cattle and sheep. Any flat land beside the railway tracks had been taken over to grow rows and rows of vegetables that we later found out were called allotments, allocated to families in nearby houses, who had only small gardens, to grow their own vegetables.

London showed signs of war, with bombed houses and factories easy to see as we travelled through the suburbs. We changed trains onto the Southern Railway for Brighton. The RAAF and RNZAF had recently moved there from Bournemouth, which had then become a Canadian holding depot.

The RAAF had requisitioned two of the major hotels that lined the Brighton waterfront. They had been stripped of all comforts such as lounges, bars, etc. They had kitchen, mess hall and administration section on the two lower floors, and the rest converted to dormitories. For the first time in an air force camp I slept in a bed with a proper mattress and sheets, as a contrast from the straw palliasses and blankets back in Australian camps. The lifts were shut down and the stairs were a long climb to the 5th and 6th floor for our sleeping quarters.

The whole of the actual beach was barb wired and mined, with anti-aircraft guns set up every couple of hundred yards. We were told that the Luftwaffe across the channel in occupied France had a fighter pilot finishing school and a shoot up of the main streets on a low level trip to Brighton, was a passing out operation. The guns were manned night and day and the whole of the promenade and water front streets were out of bounds after dark.

To us boys from Western Australia, Brighton was quite a town as there were plenty of girls of our age, plenty of pubs and beer, dance halls, picture theatres, ice skating rinks, and other novelties we had not experienced.

There were several flats available (due to many of the local residents having left the town) close by the Grand Hotel, that were rented by our boys unofficially, and passed on to newcomers as the occupants were posted away for further training. This meant that parties could be held most nights and it wasn't difficult to get girls to attend.

I was given 7 days disembarkation leave and arranged to spend my leave in Devon through the Lady Ryder scheme. There were families all over the UK that took Commonwealth servicemen into their homes, for their leave, at no cost to the men. I went to a little village near the sea, called Budleigh Salterton, to a large house where there were already 4 or 5 servicemen staying there. The grounds

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and gardens were large and at meal time we were waited on by servants. The man of the house was a senior army officer was away at the time. It was very pleasant and a real touch of upper class English style of life. We went on walks and took bus trips during the day and a few beers or ciders in the local pub in the evenings.

On returning to Brighton I had another couple of weeks with little to do but enjoy the town. Then the air force picked Bill Nilan and myself to attend an experimental flying school at Hullavington in Wiltshire. Presumably they picked the two of us because we had the same background and had had the same flying instructors throughout our training and had achieved the same standard. The experimental course was related to night flying training in Airspeed Oxford aircraft.

There was a great deal of night flying training taking place in the UK as all pilots trained to 'wings' standard all over the Commonwealth had to become familiar with European conditions and operating aircraft at night. The problem was that most of the UK was in range of Luftwaffe night fighter intruders. They were roaming over the UK and picking training aircraft and shooting them down, mostly as they were coming in to land. The RAF was doing the same thing over Germany, but the German training fields were well to the East, and possibly out of range of our intruders.

One of the Oxford planes, that were part of the experiment, was fitted with a curtained hood, dark glasses and special lights so that flying the plane was as dark as night. The instructor, with dual controls was available in an emergency. After a flying test Bill Nilan was selected as the day-night pupil and I was selected for night training. My log book shows that I trained every night for a week and then had a test. Bill trained in the daytime in the simulated night conditions. It must have been considered very important as all the instructors were squadron leaders. We were never told the results of this experiment and in our future training on Oxfords, all night flying training was done at night. This had been an interesting variation to my training, and it must have helped my future training as I later soloed in Oxfords in 3 hours.



Left to right: Jim Leith, Dennis Cluett, Peter Smith, Frank Mouritz, Arthur Bass, Laurie Cooper and David Blomfield with Mickey the Moocher.

A Lanc called Mickey

Nº 18 Pilots Advanced Flying Unit, Church Lawford

A few days after returning from Hullavington to Brighton, again with Bill Nilan, we were posted to our next training station. This was an aerodrome called Church Lawford, a few miles out of the town of Rugby in the county of Warwickshire. The countryside was beautiful with lush green fields and hedges, and the trees beginning to turn yellow as it was now autumn.

The accommodation was typical of many of the RAF stations that I was to be posted to over the next 2 years. Accommodation, messes, offices, and classrooms were nissen huts of various sizes, all dispersed around the sides of the drome. As a consequence, there was a great deal of walking, so the first thing to do was to acquire a bicycle. They were on sale in Rugby the nearest town, so I bought a new one on my first day off. The only one available was a very heavy but simple machine, similar to a policeman's bike. I managed to retain it, and it gave good service through many eventful miles until I was posted back to Brighton at the end of the war in Europe. I gave it away to an airman at Skellingthorpe.

With our bikes we roamed the countryside in the evenings, stopping at the local village pubs that were in easy riding distance of Rugby, and a little further a field to Coventry. There were, of course, bus services into the towns on some evenings, but the bikes gave us much more freedom, for, as sergeants, we were not required to book out or in again at the station.

The local pub, 'Red Dragon' in Church Lawford village and the 'White Horse' at Bilton proved very popular. We mixed with the local people in the pubs and at the local dances on Saturday nights, and there was also a large ballroom at the GEC works in Coventry. Coventry had been heavily bombed early in the war and the whole centre of the town destroyed. As a consequence, it seemed the local people were always friendly to air crew. There were always plenty of girls to go round at the dances with our own station WAAFs, other service girls, land army girls and civilian girls. The WAAFs lived in a fenced and guarded compound and had to report back to camp by 10.30 or 11pm. We, as sergeants, had no restriction after flying or training was completed for the day or night. Provided we were back for the next parade, we had plenty of freedom.

My stay at Church Lawford station was a pleasant one. The company of the other pilots was an interesting experience as this was my first encounter of training with mixed air crew. The course was made up of about 50% RAF from various parts of the UK and the remainder from the Commonwealth and Empire. The Canadians made up the majority of the mixed 50% and were the highest paid. We had many interesting discussions on sundry subjects, and I believe this broadened everybody's knowledge of the world.

The weather started to get colder and fogs and ice were constantly with us. Once I was acclimatised to the conditions, I found the Oxfords good to fly, though not docile as the old Ansons in Geraldton.

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

Firstly, we flew with instructors, then we flew solo and with other pupil pilots, and my log book shows solo navigation in daylight of 2½ hours and night navigation of 1¼ hours. The log book has a note of 'lost' against one night cross country flight. The whole country was blacked out and the route was around a series of flashing beacons called Pundits, 50-60 miles apart, and in the conditions of cloud and poor visibility this took a fair amount of precision navigation, while flying solo, to arrive back at base.

This was also our first introduction to RT (radio telephone) control, where all take offs and landings instructions had to be requested over the radio at all times. There was also another Beam Approach course similar to the one I had taken at Pt Cook. Again, looking through my log book, I see that I was assessed as an average pilot with a good knowledge of beam approach procedure.

The deep European winter had now started with fogs and frosts lasting several days, and dark mornings and evenings. These dark evenings along with the blackout conditions, and shortage of torches and batteries, made the meeting of WAAFs for dates outside their compound difficult, with the problem of recognising the right girl. There would be about 20-30 girls waiting for boys around the time the bus left to go to town all dressed alike in near full dark conditions. This problem was partly solved by the boy whistling a pre-selected tune and for the girl to reply by calling her name. This was complicated and still possible to cause confusion, especially when as often happened that night flying duties or some duty for the girl caused 'stand in' people to try to get together. Not long after arriving at Church Lawford I had my 20th birthday which I celebrated with a few beers in the local pub.

In December, I had my first English and RAF Christmas. The catering staff seemed to have no difficulty in finding supplies and there was never any shortage of food and plenty of booze, despite the severe rationing. The dance, La Conga, was all the rage at that time and mixed gangs of all ranks and sexes were in long lines moving from one mess to the other, at various times of the day. As sergeants, it was our duty to serve the Christmas dinner to the airmen in their mess, and the officers served the sergeants.

So life here went on! We knew that Bomber Command was likely to be our next posting, and this winter was the time of the Battle of Berlin during which Bomber Command had very heavy casualties. A lot more than was ever reported in the newspapers. The RAF only informed the reporters of the numbers of aircraft missing from the raids. It did not take into account the casualties in planes that managed to limp back shot to pieces with wounded crew, nor did they count the number of crashes in the UK due to bad weather, pilot error, or German night fighter intruders. These planes were not classed as 'missing'. During the middle of this training I had a week's leave and went to a farm in the Scottish Lowlands, interesting and relaxing but not very exciting.

On March 18th 1944, I passed out of this training school, again with the classification of average pilot. So far, in my flying career I had not had any flying or taxiing accidents and had not damaged an aircraft as a pilot. I was to retain this record for the remainder of my flying career.

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Before leaving 18 (P) AFU in March 1944, I spent some time at our sister drome, Snitterfield, that was close to Stratford on Avon. Here I completed some further flying training, still on Oxfords. Snitterfield was also a large holding depot for pilots before being posted to operational training. Whilst at this station I got involved in a minor mutiny of pilots who revolted against being virtually dragged out of bed in the bitter cold of early morning to do PT and drill, and then spend the rest of the day doing nothing. As most of the culprits were from overseas the RAF had a serious disciplinary problem on their hands.

The outcome was that two other pilots and myself, who were all Flight Sergeants, because of our higher rank, were put on a charge and posted to Sheffield. Punishment for aircrew was a problem to the RAF as all were Sergeants and Pilot Officers. We could not be demoted and still fly, and if they stopped an airman's training it would have been an avenue for anyone wanting to go LMF (lack of moral fibre) to escape the duty he had volunteered for. So, in some ways to handle this problem, a disciplinary school, ACRC (Air Crew Refresher Course) at Norton near Sheffield, was established.

This was a permanent camp with brick barracks and messes, parade grounds, gymnasium and playing fields. The course was for three weeks and was it tough! The weather was bitterly cold and we were all up at 6.30 in the morning with PT before breakfast. We were given marching and drill instruction till we were as good as Grenadier Guards. We even had lectures on air force and general law after tea, and lights out at 10.30 pm. The instructors were real bastards! They were not game to walk around the camp singly, or go into Sheffield alone for fear of being bashed by their pupils. For the first two weeks we were allowed out on Saturday nights till 11 pm and Sunday afternoons. This was hard to take after the free life of Brighton and Church Lawford. If you passed the course in the first two weeks to the satisfaction of your instructors, you were allowed to go out any evening during the third week until 11 pm, but we were nearly always too tired. Actually, the third week was not too bad, we played hockey – I captained a team in the snow with a white ball – and cross country running. We also had some good lectures on European geography, on escaping or evading after being shot down in Europe.

The inmates – for it was rather like a reform school – were varied characters from different countries of the world, some who later made big names for themselves in civilian life. Much of the knowledge acquired by the air crew on this course could have proved to be invaluable if, as Prisoners of War, they escaped from prison camps. The escaping information included how to use a telephone without paying, hot wiring of cars, and for the pilot's full instructions on how to start up and fly a German Fockewulf 190 fighter plane.

Looking back I think I learnt a great deal, mostly about the necessity of discipline in the successful running of a bomber crew. It also kept me away from operational flying for a further three weeks and may have helped my survival.

On my return to Snitterfield after the refresher course at Sheffield and while waiting for further posting, I was sent for two weeks as an aerodrome control officer to one of the satellite dromes, near Warwick, being used for flying training. The planes were not kept there over night, but flown there every day for landing training. It was rather a unique set up there, as the total staff consisted of a Flt/Lt pilot being

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spelled off operations as Commanding Officer, a cook, an ambulance driver, fire engine driver, and two flying control pilots carrying out their two weeks duty. The food was excellent as we also had emergency rations in case planes were grounded due to bad weather. The weather was often too bad for flying and we spent many enjoyable hours in the local pub, the Wheat Sheaf.

Eventually time caught up with me and after about 9 months in the UK the time for the more serious part of my training. I was posted to a Bomber Command Operational Training Unit, therefore separated from Bill Nilan, as he was posted to Coastal Command.

14 OTU (Operational Training Unit), Market Harborough

On March 20th 1944, I was posted to the next stage of my training. It was Bomber Command for me and an OTU at Market Harborough on Wellington bombers. The Wellington had been the main plane of Bomber Command from the beginning of the war until October 1943 (they continued to fly on operations in the Mediterranean theatre till the end of the war). They were equipped for full crew training, having front, mid upper, and rear gun turrets, bomb sights and navigational equipment, etc. The Wellington crew consisted of six men, pilot, navigator, bomb aimer/front gunner, wireless operator, mid upper gunner and rear gunner. Of the six crew, all the gunners had been trained in the UK and had only a few hours actual flying experience.

The other categories were generally overseas trained and Market Harboro was a mixed crew training station with men from all over the world. Most of the gunners were British and most of the wireless operators were Australian on this course. The first two weeks were ground instruction, and during the first week crews were formed. Once the crew was made up they generally stayed together through the remainder of their training and for the first operational tour, unless sickness, wounding, LMF or the pilot getting rid of a crew member for a specific reason. It was generally the pilot, who, regardless of rank, was to be the crew captain, and he approached the various members in the first instance to form a crew. It was quite a responsibility as we were to live, eat and fly together for the next 12 months at least. It was a bit of a combination of a marriage, a sporting team, a drinking group, or maybe a family of brothers.

My first choice was a lively young, fairly short cockney gunner, as, after a few preliminary conversations we seemed to hit it off. He suggested that his course mate should join us, so that is how I got Sgt Cluett and Sgt Bass, who were both English and 19 yrs of age. I let them decide who was to be the rear and who was to be the mid-upper. The rear turret with its 4 Browning machine guns was considered to be the more dangerous of the two, but in the Lancaster the rear gunner's bailing out time was very quick compared to the mid-upper's and for that matter to most other crew members positions.

I next picked an Australian F/Sgt WAG, Dave Blomfield, as wireless operator. Mostly because he was a little older and appeared to be a solid reliable type, who proved to have a steadying influence on the crew in subsequent dangerous situations, and he was also trained as an air gunner. There were not many bomb aimers left still to be crewed and I picked Peter Smith. He was an Englishman from Cambridge, son of a senior policeman. He had been trained as a pilot in Canada and was scrubbed

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part way through his course. This was a considerable advantage as the crew had at least a partly trained 2nd pilot in an emergency. Pete was commissioned as a Pilot Officer.

At the time he outranked me, but I as a Flt Sgt, was still the skipper in the air. I expected to be commissioned shortly as all Bomber Command pilots at that time were officers. This left a navigator to be found, but as the navigators had not yet arrived, the Chief Instructor allocated us one from a group yet to arrive. This group did not eventuate and I was allocated Sgt Cooper from a later group. He was a London boy about my age and had trained in South Africa. He proved to be an accurate and dedicated navigator. The crew was not complete until we got a flight engineer who we would get at the next training station. The Wellington being twin engined and with all the flying controls convenient to the pilot, could be flown without assistance except for look outs. My familiarisation and initial flying instruction was carried out with all the crew in their positions, and I have often wondered what went through their minds when I made a mess of a landing or any other flying procedure, as the instructor could be very sarcastic at mistakes. My log book showed that I (we) soloed in 4 hours which was probably about average. Our flying training was actually conducted from a sister drome at Husbands Bosworth and we were transferred back and forth to there. It was now springtime (April) and the weather had improved and we flew most days and later at night.

High level bombing from 20,000 ft seemed to be the main exercise, firstly daytime and then at night. The log book shows an accuracy of between 80 yards and 220 yards and one trip when we bombed the wrong target. The bombs used were small practice ones that exploded in a puff of smoke, but had the same characteristics when falling, as genuine bombs.

As well as this flying training in bombers, we ate together, slept in the same hut, and went out most evenings to drink in the local pubs. We all had bikes and toured the countryside in the lengthening evenings. We had a couple of days leave and went to Nuneaton, the mid-upper gunner's home town, and spent a night in Rugby.

We settled down as a crew quite well and the Wellington (Wimpy), though heavy to fly after the nippy Oxfords, was no real problem. Some of the other crews had maintenance problems which caused forced landings and the like but we somehow managed to avoid these problems.

We had a week's leave mid course and I went to Pete Smith's home in Cambridge where I had a good look round the town and a few beers most nights. By this time I had visited three of the crew's homes and it gave me a better chance to think about their attitudes and reactions after meeting their families. I did, at this stage, develop a dread that was to remain with me until we had finished the tour of operations. If one of the crew was to become a fatal casualty either through enemy action or in a crash possibly due to pilot error, it would be my responsibility to visit the family and answer questions and make explanations. Thankfully this did not happen.

The second month (May) of the OUT was concentrated mostly on navigation exercises. The navigators were all overseas trained and had a lot to learn about European flying conditions and weather, and the

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use of the Gee box navigation equipment. The W/op was busy during all the training as he had to listen to base at fixed times and pass and receive various messages, and also had to use radio beacon homing equipment. It was very boring for the gunners, for apart from practicing the planned search procedure, and to keep a constant lookout, there was little for them to do. The bomb aimer did a lot of map reading to help the navigator and the rear gunner, because of his excellent view helped and acquired a knowledge of map reading.

Day and night cross country exercises were carried out and my log book shows trips of 5-5½ hours. I kept what I thought was reasonable discipline in the air, i.e. no smoking and all conversations over the intercom should use the member's classification and not Christian or surnames. On the ground I exercised little control apart from keeping a friendly attitude and setting a reasonable standard of behaviour both on and off the aerodrome.

As well as flying training, we had ground training in bailing out and ditching in old mock up fuselages, and some trips to an indoor swimming pool to have the experience of swimming in full flying gear. I found out, at this time, that Den Cluett, the rear gunner, was unable to swim and was terrified of the water. We actually had to throw him in the pool to get him wet. All bomber aircraft carried an inflatable dinghy in the wing between the inboard engine and the fuselage. It was flat when stowed and after ditching (landing in the sea), a lever was pulled, it inflated, pushed off the cover and floated away attached to the aircraft. As most bombers take a few minutes to sink, if landed skilfully and the sea was not too rough, there was a fair chance of the crew managing to board the dinghy. There was some equipment and rations on board and some further items had to be carried from the plane to the dinghy. A full crew survival after ditching at night into the North Sea during the winter was very rare. We, of course, always wore a life jacket known as a Mae West. This had a padded float on the front and a small gas cylinder to inflate the collar etc, and a battery light to show your position. We also had a whistle permanently attached to the collar of our battle dress tunic that was supposed to enable us to signal after ditching on a dark night.

The next major event in my career in the RAAF was in early June when I was commissioned as a pilot officer. This meant many changes including Officer's mess, accommodation and a different uniform, to name some of the so called privileges of rank. At the end of the course I was classified as an average pilot.

We were now close to being a fully trained crew and if Bomber Command in the UK had been still flying Wellingtons on operations we could have been posted to a Wimpy Squadron. As Wellingtons were still being flown on operations in the Middle East, I guess we could possibly have been posted there.

It was near enough to 2 years since I had joined the Air Force! What an enormous amount of training and expense to the country. We were posted to another holding station, ACS Scampton, just north of Lincoln, after a week's leave which commenced on June 6th (D Day).

It was on this leave that Laurie Cooper, our navigator asked me to go home to London with him. By this

A Lanc called Mickey

time Laurie and I were becoming good mates and his family made me very welcome, and I was to spend most of my remaining leaves in the UK with his people. I met his aunts and uncles and cousins, and also his young sister, Kathleen, who was aged 17 at the time. Mr Cooper was a local air raid warden and Laurie and I met several of his associates in the local pub 'the Commercial'. I eventually became very friendly with Kathleen and we became engaged soon after I returned to Western Australia and were later married in January 1948.

So the air force administration allocation of Sgt Cooper to my crew was one of those relatively small things that was to have a major influence on my future life.

Commissioned

On June 3rd 1944, I was promoted to the rank of Pilot Officer. This was a matter of routine as all pilots of heavy bombers were now commissioned and as they became operational they were promoted to the rank of Flying Officer. This we were told was a security measure, as if you were shot down, the German intelligence had no simple way of telling whether you were an experienced pilot or on your first trip.

Officers' best uniforms were tailor made and during the finish of course leave, I went up to London to the RAAF contract tailor in Regent Street to get measured. Actually, I obtained a uniform immediately as they had one in stock that was a good fit, that had been made for an officer who had been shot down before he had a chance to collect it. I couldn't have been very superstitious. My great coat had to be tailor made and I collected it during a later leave.

The crew considered that getting their pilot commissioned was an occasion for a day and night out on the booze in London. This created a precedent and after that we always met for a day in London on future leaves.



Frank Mouritz, 1944

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We had quite a celebration and my lovely new officer's cap was filled with beer and ceremonially kicked up the Strand for several hundred yards to christen it. I was staying at the Strand Palace Hotel for that night. As Den Cluett missed the last train back to his home he slept in my room under the bed, so that in the morning, when the maid came in, he wouldn't be seen.

As an officer we still wore the same battle dress on the stations, but had a narrow band sewn on the shoulders instead of the Sgt stripes on the sleeves. All other gear was new and I was issued with a large metal trunk to keep my gear in, and this I still own.

On a later leave I had a studio photo taken in my new uniform and cap to send home to my mother and father in Western Australia.

1660 Heavy Bomber Conversion Unit (HBCU), Syerston

After a few weeks in the Scampton holding camp we were posted to a further flying school. It was now time to learn to fly 4 engine aircraft and this was to be the Stirling bomber. The Stirling was the first of the 4 engine bombers to be used on operations, and it operated from February 1941 until September 1944. They were then used extensively as glider tugs in many of the European airborne landings.

We picked up the seventh member of our crew here, our Flight Engineer. Sgt Jim Leith was from London, a year or two older than me, a married man, and had a fair amount of service having been an engine fitter in Fighter Command for some time before re-mustering to air crew. Jim and I got on very well together, which was a good thing, as in 4 engined bombers the flight engineer was the pilot's assistant. By contrast, the American 4 engine bombers had two pilots.

It was virtually impossible to take off and land a large aircraft by one man, as some of the controls were located beyond the pilot's reach. The engineer operated, on the pilot's instruction, all engine and boost controls, under carriage and flaps and fuel tank changeovers. He kept a log of fuel consumption and other technical matters of engine performance. On operational flying he also kept a continual fighter search on the starboard side while the pilot searched to port. On take off, he pushed the throttles of the inboard engines to full power on the green light from the aerodrome controller, while the pilot used the outboard engines to control the aircraft swing as the plane gathered speed. He was the pilot's right hand man and successful take off, especially with a full load of bombs and petrol, required good teamwork between the two men.

Now for the flying! The Stirling was very large, heavy to fly, slow to take off, OK to land and a real sod to taxi. The grass edges of the taxi tracks were soft and if you ran off the bitumen they often bogged in the mud. The brakes used a lot of compressed air and when training, it was very easy to go beyond the capacity of the plane's compressor to keep up the pressure, and you had to radio for a portable unit

A Lanc called Mickey

to get you out of your trouble. The air brake lever was in an awkward position and you needed three hands and two feet to taxi, particularly in windy conditions. All the aircraft were old and despite the excellent RAF maintenance, mechanical problems were common. However, good fortune followed us again and we had no serious problems of a mechanical nature. I soloed in 3½ hours in daylight and a further 2 hours at night.

We did further bombing training from medium levels and a lot of fighter affiliation. In this exercise we met a fighter plane, usually a Spitfire, at a pre arranged time and place. The Spitfire was equipped with a movie camera sighted the same as his guns, and our gunners had similar cameras lined up with their guns. After the exercise the films were developed and shown to us to see our results. A considerable amount of gunnery and flying skill was required between the pilot and the gunners to enable accurate shooting at a moving target from a moving aircraft. We trained on what was called the 5 group corkscrew, in which the gunner after warning the pilot of an impending attack, gave his instructions to the pilot, who made a diving turn to the attack side at a predetermined rate, so that the gunner would know the correct deflection angle to sight his guns. Most crews considered that this manoeuvre was too routine, although it gave the gunner the chance to score hits. Survival was more important, so that under attack more unconventional manoeuvres were used, such as flat skidding turns or throttling back on the engines to make the plane skid, thus making it difficult for the enemy fighter to aim correctly.

The problem was that all our anti fighter training was carried out in the daytime and as we were trained as night bombers this was not the answer to night fighter attack. The German night fighters, mostly JU 88 and Heinkel 111 were twin engined, about 40% faster than our bombers and equipped with excellent radar sets. They were controlled from the ground to vector them into the bomber streams, and used their airborne equipment to obtain the position close to the bomber, and then made visual attacks.

The British bombers were not equipped with a belly gunner (as were the American Fortresses and Liberators) and we were very vulnerable from attack from below. Most bombers that were shot down were caught by JU 88 with twin cannons mounted to fire through their cabin top. The only real defence we had against these fighters was a banking search. In this the pilot banked the plane, for example, to the port side about 30°, turn 20-30° off track for 10-20 seconds, then reverse the procedure to get back on course. This enabled both gunners and particularly the mid upper to search below. We practiced this on the Stirlings. It became a major manoeuvre when flying in dangerous skies and I varied this from one every 5 minutes to one a minute. This became monotonous, physically demanding and made navigation difficult as the plane tended to wander off course. This could not be carried out in a fixed time pattern as a fighter following you on his radar could soon decide the most appropriate time to attack.

After 3 weeks flying training of 37½ hours, we passed out with the rating of a proficient crew.

We were given a week's leave and then reported to a holding depot again to await posting to a Lancaster finishing school.

ACS Scampton

We were again posted to Scampton and spent about 4 weeks doing very little apart from sport, PT and lectures. Our evenings were free and we toured the countryside on our bicycles or visited the city of Lincoln. We were not greatly impressed with Lincoln as it was rather drab and the people were somewhat fed up with Bomber Command airmen who had dominated the city for the last 4 years.

Lincoln was and still is a major RAF area with several permanent airfields and many more wartime ones. I had a look around the famous cathedral and did not realise then that it was to play a part in our future flying operations. Our eventual operational Squadron was N° 61 the city of Lincoln Squadron. The Lincoln Imp being the Squadron symbol and the approach to the main runway at Skellingthorpe was right over the cathedral.

N° 5 Lancaster Finishing School – Syerston

After a week's leave the crew met again on September 1st at Syerston in Nottinghamshire. This was a Lancaster School so we knew that we were destined to fly the famous Lancasters on operations. As we were now considered to be a fully trained bomber crew we left Training Command for Bomber Command and this school was part of 5 Group. 5 Group was part of the enormous Bomber Common Organisation though it mostly operated independently having its own Pathfinder Force and two special duty squadrons, 617 (the Dambusters) and 9 Squadron. All 5 Group bombers were Lancasters, though Mosquitoes and Mustangs were used by the Pathfinder Force section.

The group squadrons were located close to the city of Lincoln in the flat Lincolnshire countryside, and some stations were up graded peace time stations but most were the temporary war time ones.

Now came the greatest flying thrill! After months of heavy and under powered Wellingtons and Stirlings, the Lancaster was nothing short of fantastic. The difference between the Lancasters and the others was like comparing a 5 ton truck to a sports car. The Lancasters were easy to taxi, smooth to fly, very manoeuvrable and without a bomb load and only ½ tank of petrol, they accelerated down the runway fast enough to force you back into your seat. They were built by AV Roe & Co, the same company that designed and built the old Ansons that I had trained on way back in Geraldton, WA, and the flying characteristics were similar.

When you crossed the aerodrome fence on landing and cut the throttle to perform the conventional three point landing, it was almost the same, although somewhat faster, as the Anson. In all the hours that I flew the Lancaster, I do not think that the crew could remember a bad landing. They would fly

A Lanc called Mickey

easily on 3 engines even with a full load, and quite well on 2 engines, and fully manoeuvrable on 2 engines on one side.

This was our first use of the famous Rolls Royce Merlin engine, similar to the engine that powered Spitfires, Hurricanes, Mustangs and Mosquitoes. It was a superb liquid cooled 16 litre, V12, all aluminium, very reliable and economic on fuel and producing about 1600 HP each at maximum revs. The Lancaster had evolved from the unsuccessful twin engined Manchester. The first Lancaster to fly on operations was early in 1942 and, altogether, 7,377 of all Marks were produced, and 59 bomber Squadrons were equipped with them.

They were a Spartan machine as far as crew comfort was concerned, with no luxuries, all equipment being functional. We were told that they cost 35,000 pounds to build which in 1993 prices would be more than 3 million Aussie dollars. The armament was the same as our training aircraft, 2 Browning .303 machine guns in the front, 2 in the mid upper and 4 in the rear turret, and a maximum bombload of about 16,000 lbs and a fuel capacity of 2154 gallons, and a service ceiling of about 24,000 ft. With a cruising speed of about 210 mph and fuel consumption of about one mpg we had a range of 1,000 miles and time in the air to maximum about 12 hours. We had an automatic pilot (George) that operated reasonably well with an empty aircraft but not too good when fully loaded. I soloed in 3 hours 15 minutes day flying and a further 2 hours at night, and altogether 11 hours 24 minutes were spent in flying familiarisation.

On the ground we again had mock fuselages set up to practice bailing out and dinghy drill. I had to be able to sit in the pilot's seat blindfolded and touch each dial, switch and control, when told to by the instructor and this took hours of practice. At night we flew by the fluorescent light that was built into all dials so that our night vision would not be impaired. The navigator used a light and he sat in a screened off section, and the W/Op virtually managed to operate his equipment in the dark. It takes about 20 minutes in the dark to recover night vision after your eyes have been exposed to even a small light. The closing of one eye before turning on a light to perform a special operation can save one eye vision at least.

Our instructors in all the various crew classifications were air crew who had survived a tour of operations, and this was considered as being spelled for about 6 months before returned for another tour of operations. Mostly they would be posted to a higher rank or to Pathfinders Force, or other special duties. We received plenty of helpful hints, along with the operational instructions, from these experienced men. It was a good system and worked quite well.

By this time, my log book showed that I had 434 hours of flying training and had spent 2 years and 3 months in the RAAF before becoming operational.

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher



Frank Mouritz on the Lancaster Flight Deck, 1944

61 Squadron, Skellingthorpe

On September 27th 1944, we reported to N° 61 Sqdn at Skellingthorpe, a station on the SE outskirts of Lincoln. I was now promoted to Flying Officer and did my first operation as second pilot with an experienced crew, on my first night on the squadron. This was the usual procedure, as it enabled the pilot to gain some ops experience before taking his own crew on an operation. Sometimes it happened that a new crew lost its pilot this way because the plane was lost and they had to start training again.

But first to 61 Sqdn! 61 was originally a WW1 sqdn and had reformed in March 1937. It was the City of Lincoln Sqdn with the Lincoln Imp as the motif on the badge and also the Latin Motto 'Per purun tenantes' meaning 'Thundering through the clear air'. The Lincoln Imp is a gargoyle with a lot of tradition behind it, connected with Lincoln Cathedral. 61 Sqdn was one of 13 squadrons in 5 Group which had operated since the beginning of the war. The airfield at Skellingthorpe also housed 50 Sqdn which was also part of 5 Group.

It is hard to recall my feelings at joining the squadron. It was a personal achievement after more than two years training, but the thought of the responsibility hung rather heavily. The chance of surviving a tour of operations was about one in five and about half of the losses occurred during the first 5 or 6 trips. We did not talk about the heavy losses much as a crew, but we realised that we had volunteered for flying duty and could not let ourselves or our mates down. The great adventure had become a reality!

A Lanc called Mickey

Skellingthorpe station took its name from a small village, and the aerodrome virtually surrounded it. The station was of wartime construction, so the Nissen huts of various sizes were scattered around the aerodrome, as were the aircraft. Dispersed was the word used for this type of layout and the push bike was essential around the drome, as well as for going to town in the evenings. The railway line between Lincoln and Nottingham ran close by, with a station near the huts. Nottingham was possibly the best town in England for a night out. Plenty of entertainment, pubs and girls. The check out book kept in the Officers' mess usually had entries stating the destinations as GTN (Gone to Nottingham).

I was glad that I had my first operation quickly as the thought of it hanging over one's head for several days would have been hard to take. It was a night trip to Kaiserlauten in West Germany, a return trip of 6¼ hours. I had nothing to do except to observe, Ft/Lt King's crew doing all the work. They had completed 20 trips by this time and successfully survived a tour. The trip turned out to be uneventful as far as night fighters were concerned. The amount of flak and the bright lights over the target amazed me with so many search lights. Ft/Lt pointed out the blue tinted one that was radar controlled that could lock onto an aircraft and then 20-30 other search lights would cone you. This gave the anti aircraft gunners a visual sight and violent evasive action was necessary in an attempt to break free of the cone of lights.

If you were coned on your bombing run, you had to make the decision either to take the necessary evasive action and then go right around the target and complete another run, or carry on straight and level for the half minute or so of the final run and take the chance of the accuracy of the flak. The strips of silver paper that all aircraft dropped in a pre-determined pattern during the whole trip blanketed out the German radar, so that the flak over the target was 'barrage flak' with shells probably 88mm fitted with time and proximity fuses set to explode at a certain height.

The whole target area was spotted with exploding shells and you continually smelt the arid smell of cordite. The strips of silver paper called by their code name 'window' (the US used 'chaff') when spread in large enough quantities (it was the bomb aimer's job) could blank out the enemy radar. This actually only helped the plane behind you so that the lead aircraft was always subject to predicted flak, which was very accurate and if evasive action was not taken the third shot was usually on target.

An anti aircraft shell takes about 1 second for each 1,000 ft of travel. A bomber at 20,000 ft usually received the first shell as a near miss. The ground radar operator who plotted the aircraft and the explosion gave the anti aircraft gunner a revised position and delay time to be set on the next shell. Evasive action had to be undertaken in order to alter height and direction before the next shell. This had to be carried out in such a manner that the ground radar operator could not anticipate your position. The effect of the 'window' only helping the aircraft behind you was a problem for the Pathfinder flare force who had to illuminate the target for the visual marker plane. This was overcome by a few Lancasters of the main bomber force being instructed to fly over the target a minute or two ahead of flare force and drop the 'window' to protect them. All bombers took turns as 'window' aircraft.

Later we did it three or four times and must have become good at dodging the predicted flak, as we never got hit. After dropping the 'window' we had to circle round and join the bomber stream to bomb

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

after the target had been marked. We acted as 'window' aircraft for 617 Sqdn when they bombed a bridge in Northern Germany with 22,000 lb bombs towards the end of the war.

Now back to the first operation as an observer! The first sight of a target area at night was horrific. The waving searchlights, the coloured markers on the ground, the orange flashes of exploding flak, the flashes from the exploding bombs and photographic flares and the incendiaries made a firework display look like nothing. It would take something like 3-5 minutes to approach a target area, do a bombing run and clear the target area. The operational diary of Bomber Command that I now have stated that the Kaiserlautern raid was carried out by 217 Lancasters and 10 Mosquitoes, destroying about 36% of the town's built up area and killing 144 civilians. One Lancaster and one Mosquito were lost.

For the next week we were sent on cross country, bombing, fighter affiliation, and sea firing exercises, in order that the Sqdn Commander could assess whether we were ready to fly our first operation. They held new crews back until a supposedly easy operation was scheduled. So we waited and trained and went out in the evenings.

On the 4th October, Laurie Cooper, our navigator, and myself decided to go to Nottingham for the evening by the local train. We had not been away long on our trip to Nottingham when the loud speaker (Tannoy) in the crew hut called certain crews to a battle order for a take off in the early hours of the next morning, and my crew was on the list, but Laurie and I were missing.

The W/Op and Rear gunner decided to catch the next train to Notts to see if they could find us, having a fair idea what pubs we frequented. They eventually found me in a dance hall as I had left Laurie with some other air crew drinking in a pub. I managed to catch the next train back to camp while the other two continued to look for Laurie. They eventually missed the last train and managed to hitchhike and walk back to Skellingthorpe. I reported for briefing soon after dawn. It was to be a daylight trip to bomb the port of Wilhelmshaven with a fighter escort.

When I informed the Sqdn/Ldr that I was minus a navigator he was not very impressed. He organised a navigator for us from another new crew who were not on the battle order. Laurie arrived just as we were taxiing out and after a short conversation with me via the rear gunner, we proceeded on with the exchange navigator. This was my first take off with a fully loaded aircraft, but we did not swing at all and got off the ground OK.

The operation was for 5 hours 45 minutes and 10/10 cloud obscured the target. We were told to bomb when the H&S equipped aircraft bombed. We flew through barrage flak and did not see any German fighters or any of our own. We hoped they were above us in the sun waiting for the Me 109s and FW 190s that did not eventuate. We went on 7 daylight operations out of a total of 34, and these were mainly short ones with fighter escorts.

On day ops we flew in a loose formation known as a gaggle. The Lancaster was not suitable for flying the very tight formation that the US Air force had developed, as the Lancaster was too manoeuvrable and dangerous if not impossible to fly closer than 2-3 wing spans apart.

A Lanc called Mickey

She was a night bomber and at low speeds could turn tighter than any enemy fighter, though in daylight we would have been cut to pieces by a determined enemy. We had no training in fighting in large formations and our guns were unsuitable for this type of fighting. We completed our first operation with no knowledge of how close to the target our bombs landed, as cloud obscured the target.

Each aircraft carried a camera in the bomb aimer compartment that was set to record where the bombs fell. So, not only did we have to fly straight and level on the bombing run, but we had to hold the same direction, height and air speed for the time of the falling bombs to reach the ground, approximately up to one minute and the Lancaster bucked like hell as the bombs went. They dropped in a timed stick and when the 4,000 lb cookie left, the plane bucked and had to be trimmed again for straight and level flight.

After the bomb aimer had called 'bombs gone' as recorded on his switches, the engineer lying down on the floor of the aircraft could check through a window in the front of the bomb bay, to see if any bombs were still hanging. Sometimes he used a torch, but mostly the general target lights were bright enough for the inspection. After we cleared the target, provided weather and area was suitable, we dived from bombing height (usually 18-22,000 ft) to about 1,000 ft above ground level. The main reason for this being that the German night fighter radar equipment picked up a ground return on their screens at about 1,000 ft and below, which blanked out their screens. To be sure of the safety of this tactic you had to have complete confidence in your navigator, that he could not only know exactly where you were but also be able to read the contours on the map showing the actual ground height above sea level. Our altimeter was set at zero at Skellingthorpe.

From the beginning of the war inaccurate night target marking was the main cause of Bomber Command's poor bombing. Various marking techniques were used and improved upon. A visual marking system developed and used exclusively by 5 Group was well established in the last 12 months of the war. This was a highly organised and delicately timed operation which could best be used by a group consisting of from 250-300 aircraft.

A Master Bomber controlled the complete operation using VHF radio equipment which was quite reliable (we never had any failures). This equipment had a range of hundreds of miles and was never jammed by the enemy. The Master Bomber flew a Mosquito bomber and later a Mustang fighter. The first aircraft over the target area were the 'window' aircraft mentioned previously, followed by several aircraft of the flare force who dropped sticks of parachute flares over the target area from a maximum altitude, using the H2S radar to locate the approximate target position. The flares were dropped at, e.g. H hours minus 12 minutes, and closely following their release the Master Bomber assessed visually that the area illuminated was in the general target area. He then called the N^o 1 Marker who was flying a Mosquito at between 500-1,000 ft to mark the aiming point with a target indicator which was a coloured flare. This was usually a town feature, eg a playing field or a bend in a river. Something that could be easily identified by experienced crews under the light of the flare. The Master Bomber then assessed the position by flying over the aiming point. If it was OK he called N^o 2 Marker to back it up. If it was not, he called in N^o 1 Marker to wipe it out with a different coloured flare, and then N^o 2 Marker

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

to mark the correct aiming point. While all this was going on, the 250 Lancasters were approaching at about 200 mph in groups of 3 waves of 2 minutes apart, so that the whole group was about 35 miles long and a mile or two wide, and staggered between 18-22,000 ft.

We did not bomb the target indicator (TI) as a direct hit could extinguish it. We overshot the indicator by a variable number of seconds and on different headings in about a 30° fan. This was very accurate area bombing. After releasing our load we had to fly on straight and level for a number of seconds to enable the camera to take a photo of where the bombs landed. While this was going on, the Master Bomber or Master of Ceremonies as he was sometimes called, gave encouragement to the crews still approaching the target, or he would make changes to overshoot times and angles to spread the attack. He could also call for another PFF marker to back up the TI if it was put out by a stray bomb. He could also at times call for bombs to be directed to the upward edge of the smoke. It was a most effective system and called for accurate navigation by the bombers navigators and very accurate navigation by the PFF. They were allowed plus or minus 20 seconds either side of their briefed time and the 5 Group bomber force were allowed plus or minus 2 minutes. All navigation logs were checked by the navigation leader after a raid.

With such a precise system, if things went wrong, it could cause a real shambles. If for some reason, eg bad weather, wrong winds from forecast, or the loss of the PFF leaders or markers, the Master Bomber had various decisions to make and had to make them quickly. With a force of 250 Lancasters bearing down on a target, if they had to be dog legged or a square circuit made to lose time, many collisions could result. If the bomber force was timed to be too far behind the placing of the TI's, the Germans could ignite spoof indicators and also, once the target was known, the fighter force could be quickly called in to attack.

The night after our first daylight trip we had our first real operation as a crew. The night raid was to the Port of Bremen, 4 hours 40 minutes return from Lincolnshire. It was a clear night and the target was well marked. The crew was amazed and I guess terrified by the action over the target. Flak, flares, search lights, other Lancasters, bombs falling, and the flash of the cookies (4,000 lb) going off. Laurie Cooper, the navigator, came out of his curtained off compartment to see the fireworks but, on most operations afterwards, he remained at his desk calculating the next alteration of course after bombing. The raid was very successful but 5 Lancasters were lost (2%).

We completed 4 more ops in October, 2 being to the Dutch coast in daylight, attempting to breach the sea walls and flood German positions ahead of the advancing British Army. We lost 4 Lancasters out of 112 (3.5%). The other two raids were area bombing of the towns of Nuremburg and Brunswick. The raid on Brunswick took place on the night of my 21st birthday and we had our first encounter with a German fighter. One of the gunners saw him before he attacked and after a brief exchange of fire and some violent and probably unconventional manoeuvres we lost him. The attack on the target was successful. In May 1945 after the war, I met some New Zealand soldiers who had been in a prisoner of war camp 30 miles from Brunswick. They told me that they could have read newspapers in the open from the light of the fires in the city at the height of the raid.

A Lanc called Mickey

A Day on the Squadron, Winter 1944-45

A typical day would commence with a wash and shave, dress in battle dress uniform, a short ride on the push bike to breakfast in the Officer's mess, then report to the squadron crew room on the edge of the aerodrome, again by bike at 9am. Each of the air crew categories had their own rooms, with their section leader in charge.

If the weather was OK for flying, there could be an air test of an aircraft that had been returned after maintenance, if not we just waited around to find out if an operation was planned for that night (usually referred to as 'being a war on'). In bad weather, crews could be stood down after lunch. When an operation was on, the first details we heard were the petrol tank loads and the bomb loads. This enabled the ground staff to commence preparing the aircraft. The Wing Commander and his two Squadron Commanders would be informed if it was to be a maximum effort for all available aircraft, or a limited number. They would then make up the battle order. We always had a few more crews than planes, mostly new crews who had not yet been allocated a plane.

For the sake of recording an operation, I will assume that we were on the battle order and M Mike was our aircraft. By the time the battle order was made up, the time of take off was usually known and the briefing time would be announced. On this particular day, it was 1700 hours briefing, with takeoff at 1900 hours. As soon as this was known the crew would go to their plane and carry out an air test if required and check all equipment that could be tested. After lunch the crews would be stood down until briefing time. This usually meant reading or playing billiards in the mess or resting in the huts. Consumption of alcoholic drinks was forbidden for 8 hours before flying. A meal, usually of bacon and eggs, was served before briefing, and this was the last meal before returning from the operation though we carried thermoses of coffee, sandwiches, chocolate and barley sugar as flying rations. Once it was announced that 'there was a war on', security was tightened with no phone calls allowed and no one was allowed to leave the squadron. The target was not announced to the aircrew till briefing and the ground crew never knew until the crews returned from the operations.

The navigators had a separate briefing half an hour before the main one, as they had a great deal of map preparation to do. At the stated time we all assembled and sat together as a crew in the briefing room (about 150 men). The room had a raised platform at one end and a curtained off wall map board. We all stood up for the arrival of the Squadron Commander, in our case, a Wing Commander by rank. After a few words he unveiled the large map on which the route of the night's operation was shown. Our group's route and the routes of any other groups that were operating was shown in different colours. We never flew direct to a target but usually headed towards different locations in an attempt to confuse the Luftwaffe fighter controller and to doge heavily defended areas.

The Intelligence Officer briefed us on flak positions on the outward and homeward journey, the expected number of anti-aircraft guns and search lights in the target area. He also informed us of the location of any known beacons that German night fighters circled whilst awaiting instructions from their ground controller. The next briefing was from the Met Officer who gave a forecast of weather en route, over

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

the target, and on return, with particular reference to possible fog on return, icing altitude of cloud banks and cold fronts. The bomber leaders discussed the attack methods, the wireless leaders the radio control and signals and the times of possible diversion signals to order landing at other locations due to weather changes. All 'signals of the day' information was on rice paper that could be eaten. The CO wished us all the best of luck and we certainly needed it.

As a pilot I had to visualise the total route in my mind as in an emergency such as losing a navigator or his maps, I would have to fly home by memory. The crew now moved out to our lockers to get dressed into flying kit, to pick up our parachutes and Mae Wests (life jackets). We had to empty our pockets of all items and leave them in our lockers, and then collected sealed money wallets containing currency notes of the countries over which we were to fly. This was to help an airman shot down to possibly evade capture. We also carried an escape package of condensed food, fishing lines, maps, knife, compass and other survival equipment, but far more basic than anything that might exist today.

The pilot and the rear gunner had parachutes that also acted as a seat cushion while the rest of the crew had a chest parachute pack that clipped onto the front of their harness. When we were all ready we made our way to a bus or a covered truck that delivered us to our aircraft. The Lancaster was always ready with the ground crew to assist us in boarding, but not before we had a last cigarette and pee-ed on the tail wheel for luck. We moved into our respective positions, plugged in our intercoms, stowed our gear and did the various checks of our equipment. I would then call up each member of the crew to ascertain that all their gear was functioning correctly. With everything OK, the flight engineer and myself would commence to start up the 4 engines. Starting from the starboard outboard, with all engines running, all crew members were able to check all electrical and hydraulic equipment, such as turrets, wireless and navigator's sets. The engineer and myself then ran up each of the engines to operating revs and checked the magnetos for drops in engine revs. With all this correct and our timing right, we started to move out of our disposal bay onto the taxi track.

We had three runways, the main one 2,000 yds long, and the other two 1,650 yds long each, and we used the most suitable one depending on the wind direction and strength. The take off was controlled by the aerodrome controller based in a caravan near where the taxi track joined the runway. Both 50 and 61 squadron aircraft lined up to take their turn from either direction. All control was carried out with coloured aldis lamps as radio silence was a security must. When our turn came, we turned onto the runway and held the Lancaster on full brakes with engines at a fast idle. As soon as the aircraft ahead of you was safely airborne, the controller flashed you a green light. I held the two outboard engine throttles and the flight engineer held the two inboard ones. On the signal he pushed his two throttles forward to the entrance of the emergency gate and the two inboard engines then went to full power. I moved the other two forward, leading with the port one, to counteract the aircraft swing. By the time we were up to 50 mph I had the throttle up to the gate. The flight engineer then locked the throttles and I concentrated on the flying controls. As soon as the wheels left the ground I instructed the flight engineer to 'wheels up'. The hydraulics were very effective and the wheels were up in a few seconds.

This was the most crucial part of the take off because with a full load of bombs and fuel, an engine

A Lanc called Mickey

failure or loss of power in the period of time from reaching the speed of 50 mph to airborne at 120 mph and an altitude of 200 ft, could have been fatal. You could not belly land a Lancaster with a 4,000 lb cookie bomb underneath and get away with it. We saw it attempted once with fatal results.

The next item was flaps up and then throttle back to climbing revs and boost. Depending on the route and the number of planes involved in the operation, we either circled base to get height or climbed on track. We soon settled down to each member of the crew's allocated task with the only conversation being between the navigator and pilot, and pilot and engineer. The navigator made a position check every 6 minutes and instructed the pilot as to any changes in height or air speed to keep us in our position as briefed. The gunners kept a look out for other Lancasters at this stage. Navigation lights were kept on until we crossed the English coast.

After that, on dark nights, we saw very few other aircraft until we were in the target area. We often hit the turbulent air of a slip stream and knew we were with the mob. The Lancaster had an automatic pilot but it was rather crude and not very effective when the plane was fully loaded. It was never used over enemy territory and I rarely used it. If the weather was reasonably clear, the bomb aimer could usually obtain a pinpoint map reference as we crossed the European coast. The navigation was carried out with the Gee set over England and the Loran set over Europe.



The New Mickey the Moocher in Flight in 2002

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

As we got closer to enemy territory, the gunner and bomb aimer started a coordinated search from their turrets, while the Wireless Operator stood beside his set and searched through the astrodome. The engineer and myself searched ahead and to our respective sides, and banking searches were commenced. These measures were undertaken to try and prevent the radar equipped night fighter planes from coming up unobserved underneath us. These fighters were twin engined JU 88s and HE 111s and they carried a pair of upward firing 30mm cannons that were very deadly. I turned about 30° off course to either port or starboard and banked the aircraft sufficiently to enable the mid upper gunner to obtain a good view straight down, then banked the other way for a view down the other side.

We started a banking search at about 5 minute intervals and increased this to one a minute in really dangerous areas. It was very hard work and after several hours the desire to fly straight again was strong. It also made navigation more difficult. We kept this routine up till nearing the target and as we saw the flare and the target indicator go down we prepared for the bombing run. All targets were hell with some worse than others. The searchlights, the puffs of smoke and flashes of exploding AA shells, the searching above in case another aircraft was above you with bomb doors open, all seemed like a fireworks display except one thousand fold brighter.

The bomb aimer set his black box with the wind direction and speed supplied by the navigator, set up the bomb selector and armed the bombs. By this time the raid was under the control of the Master Bomber who could communicate with all the aircraft by radio and directed the approaching bomber stream. The bomb aimer opened the bomb doors, selected the correct target indicator burning on the ground as instructed by the Master Bomber. He then instructed me verbally to turn the aircraft to line the target up with his bomb sight. I had to hold the plane straight and level and at constant speed. He called, "left, left, right" or "steady, steady, left, left", and so on. I did my best to comply with his instructions as we approached the target at about 200 mph. He pressed the bomb release as the target indicator crossed the release line of his bomb sight and called "bombs going". The flight engineer could see into the bomb bay under the step down to the front of the aircraft. He watched the bombs going, then called, "all bombs gone". I then called, "bomb doors closed".

Following this, for a further few minutes, we maintained a straight and level course for the timed camera run. This depended on our height and the target picture was taken to show the impact point of our bombs. When the camera run was finished, I advanced the throttle to maximum, put the aircraft nose down and after clearing the target, turned onto the first leg of the course for home. Once we were out of the light from the target area, we usually dropped down to about 1,000 ft above ground level. This action was only possible with a navigator skilled enough to know our position on the map and to be able to read the ground level contours.

We remained at this height if the weather made it possible because the night fighters with their upward firing guns had a ground return on their radar sets that blotted out their screens below 1,000 ft. Or at least, so the intelligence officers told us. I still carried out banking searches but at greater intervals. At this position on the way home if the sky was clear, I would glance over the starboard wing tip to check by the position of the North Star that we were heading back to England. I could still visualise the route

A Lanc called Mickey

map from the briefing room wall in the back of my mind and this would reassure us that we were on the correct heading.

The return trip with the plane unloaded and undamaged from the target area was a relief but there still remained the worry of a fighter attack. Sometimes the route was marked with crashed and burning aircraft if the fighters had located the bomber stream.

As we neared base, the wireless operator obtained a QFE from base which enabled me to reset the altimeter to read Zero at ground level at base after landing. As soon as we sighted our base flashing beacon I broke radio silence and called, "Black Swan from Spotnose Mike" and the reply would come back, "Spotnose Mike N° pancake". I then changed frequencies and joined the circuit to be called down by our air controller on our pancake number. It was always our ambition to get N° 1 pancake but this required burning up a lot of fuel so we usually played it carefully and kept our fuel reserves fairly high.

After landing, we taxied to our disposal point, ran the engines down and left the aircraft to be welcomed home by the ground crew who were always glad to see us return. All the crew except Dave the wireless operator, lit up a cigarette which was greatly enjoyed as smoking in the aircraft was forbidden and I always enforced this regulation.

A crew bus soon turned up to take us back to the briefing room. Here we had a cup of coffee and each crew was debriefed by an intelligence officer. He asked a series of routine questions which we answered, then we reported incidents like fighter attacks and aircraft shot down, or any other relevant information we could offer to help plan other missions. This lasted 10-15 minutes and we then returned our parachutes, got out of our flying gear, boarded the crew bus and returned to the mess for a meal and then to bed.

The Night We Nearly Bought It

It was our 20th operation; we were an experienced crew but not too experienced to be over confident. On the 13-14th January 1945, our operation was to attack for the second time a synthetic oil refinery at Politz, near Stettin on the Baltic coast in Northern Germany. This was our maximum range on this route and we carried full fuel tanks of 2,154 gallons and 12,000 lbs of 500 and 1,000 lb high explosive bombs, some with delay fuses. We flew in our new M Mike – the original Mickey the Moocher having been retired after 130 trips – which was a brand new Lancaster 3.

The route out was over the North Sea to Denmark, across the Kattegat to Southern Sweden, then turning south across the Baltic to the North German coast. The return route was to be similar. Denmark being occupied was heavily defended by German armed forces, Sweden however, although neutral, shot up quite a lot of light flak, but never in our direction so it was relatively safe to fly across their territory.

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The attack, purely a 5 Group operation, was planned as a blind attack through cloud, but was changed to a visual one as the target was clear. Although we carried out our usual fighter search there was no real danger till we neared the target after crossing the Baltic. We bombed on time through very heavy flak and numerous search lights as the refinery was very heavily defended. After bombing we set course for home over the Baltic, on the briefed route over Sweden, and then over Denmark. This meant that the Luftwaffe had little trouble working out the probable times and position that the returning bombers would cross Denmark. No doubt the Nazis had agents in Sweden that radioed their passing to Germany. The skill of the navigator and bomb aimer in map reading kept us on track as there was little cloud cover and the coast lines were fairly visible.

On nearing Denmark, we went into maximum banking searches at every 1 or 2 minutes, and saw several flashes of gunfire from aerial combats. We were about 15-20 minutes on the route home after crossing the Western Danish coast, and I was easing up on the banking searches thinking that a couple more would be sufficient when the silence of the intercom was broken by the mid upper gunner. "Twin engined aircraft underneath". He did not say which side down but as he could not see straight down it must have been on the starboard side.

My reaction, which luckily must have been the correct one, was to put the Lancaster into a violent diving turn to starboard and called out, "going down starboard". The wing had just started to drop when we heard explosions and saw flashes under the starboard wing between the inboard engine and the fuselage. Possibly 5 or 6 shells probably 30mm hit us and as we dived I heard our guns firing. One of the gunners called out excitedly, "we've got him and he is heading for a cloud bank below on fire".

In retrospect, we assumed that the mid upper gunner had sighted him before he was in his best position and our violent diving turn had spoilt his aim. He had to break away to avoid a collision and as we were nearly on our side the two gunners were able to rake him with our 6 Browning machine guns across his top. As I straightened out the Lancaster, I found that our emergency signal lights at each crew station had come on and we were lit up and in full view if the fighters were hunting in pairs.

I called out to the wireless operator to get to the fuse panel and pull out the appropriate fuses. Dave's reply in his slow Queensland drawl was, "hell, I'm just taking a broadcast". The calmness in Dave's voice reduced the panic that was beginning to appear in the crew. This all took place in a few seconds. The problem of the lights was solved by the rear gunner smashing his light with his cocking toggle, short circuiting the globe, and blowing the fuse. By this time, of course, we had all lost our night vision.

I levelled the plane and returned back on course and started to take stock of our damage – from the front we could not see any fires – by calling each member of the crew in turn from back to front, asking for a report on themselves and their equipment. No one had been wounded and all their equipment was functioning, except the flight engineer's. He reported that we had lost some power on the starboard inboard engine and that he was possibly losing fuel from the starboard inboard tank. The Lancaster has 3 tanks in each wing, all interconnected, and it was the rule to draw them all down together so that no tank held maximum fuel, as this could be lost if punctured.

A Lanc called Mickey

The air space above the fuel in the tank was filled with inert nitrogen gas to help prevent fires. Jim Leith, the flight engineer, immediately started to run down the holed tank by feeding the fuel from it to all engines. We also adjusted the controls to bring the bad engine up to the others and carefully watched the gauges. The navigator had a problem with his protractor, calculator and other equipment, as they were tangled due to the violent manoeuvre we had carried out. He had them all tied to a centre point with pieces of string but they took some sorting out. We had just settled down and began to analyse the combat when the rear gunner reported an object going past his turret followed by another one. The flight engineer managed to have a look at the damaged wing with his torch and reported that the dinghy cover was missing and so was the dinghy. We assumed that was what the rear gunner had reported.

The navigator, flight engineer and myself had a discussion on the distance to base, fuel consumption and remaining fuel. Having lost our dinghy, a ditching in the North Sea was out of the question. The other alternative was to return to Denmark and bail out. However, we worked out that if we flew at our most economical airspeed and height we could make the English coast with a small margin to spare. I did think about putting out a May Day call but left it for the time being as we still had 3½ engines and probably enough fuel. We discussed the combat and concluded that the fighter plane, a Junker 88, had probably been following us on his radar for some time, waiting until we stopped the banking searches and that the decision to bank to starboard was the correct one. If we had turned to port he could have followed us down and used his front guns as well.

Many years later when reading the accounts of the Luftwaffe night fighters, I learnt that their preferred aiming point when attacking from below, was between the inboard engine and the fuselage. This was possibly to give the crew a chance and also that a loaded Lancaster has bombs stretching along underneath the centre section of the fuselage and a strike on the fuse of a bomb would blow up both aircraft. So we headed for home at the most economical speed with the rear gunner keeping a lookout for any more pieces of wing flying past the turret. Nothing further happened and I was tempted to try to lower the undercarriage, to test it, soon after we crossed the coast but decided to leave it until we entered the circuit in our normal manner.

On arriving at base, I lowered the undercarriage which made the right sort of noises and vibrations and the indicator light came on, so I completed the approach. As soon as we touched the runway, I knew that something was wrong. The aircraft tried to drop the starboard wing and I managed to hold it up with full aileron till we lost speed, then it dropped down, something dragged on that side, we left the bitumen and slewed around in an ever decreasing circle till we ended up, luckily, almost in our own disposal point. The starboard tyre had been shot to pieces.

(Jim Leith's account of the operation provides a more detailed description of this problems with the remaining fuel and damaged undercarriage).

An inspection of M Mike next morning showed that most of the underneath starboard wing plates were missing or holed, there were some holes in the lower section of the fuselage, but no major structural

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damage. The loss of power had been due to some ignition leads being cut. Repairs were carried out at our aerodrome but the Lancaster was out of action for nearly 6 weeks. The Junker 88 was later confirmed as damaged as another crew had seen the combat and the Junker 88 going down into cloud, on fire. He may have ended up in the North Sea.

When we analysed the action, we realised that the sighting by the mid upper gunner had saved us and that on future operations extra banking searches would have to be carried out on the return journey and at irregular intervals.

I was very pleased with the overall crew reaction with little or no panic. We realised that constant surveillance and not allowing ourselves to relax on the way home would be necessary for survival on the remaining operations.

This had been our longest trip, 10 hrs 30 mins airborne.

The photo reconnaissance stated that the plant was reduced to a shambles. However, we attacked it again in 3 weeks time and the production of oil ceased, proving to be a great set back to the German war effort.

How an Excellent Meteorological Forecast got us Home for Christmas

It was nearly Christmas 1944 and the airmen's, sergeants' and officers' messes at Skellingthorpe RAF station were being decorated for the occasion. Most of the decorations being made from the silver paper of various widths and lengths that we dropped over Germany to flood out their radar sets.

My crew had flown several operations this month as the weather had been reasonable. Some crews, of course, would be going on leave over Christmas as we were entitled to 9 days leave every 6 weeks, and, often sooner, as when a crew failed to return, the next crew moved up the leave roster and the new crew went to the bottom. It was quite possible that operations would be flown on Christmas Day, weather permitting, so we were hoping for bad weather to ground all planes. The Christmas menu was on the notice board and it looked good to us after the monotonous wartime rations.

On the morning of December 21st, the loudspeaker announced that there would be an operation on that night and gave briefing times. On reporting to the flight office I found out that we were on that night's battle order with a full petrol load and 16,000 lbs of high explosive bombs. The Met Officer said the weather for take off would be OK, clear over the target, but there was a probability of fog at Skellingthorpe for our return, so a diversion to another aerodrome was to be expected.

This was our 14th trip and we were becoming an experienced crew. After successfully bombing the target and having met with little opposition from enemy fighters, we headed back towards England. The route out and back took us over Denmark and neutral Sweden. Sweden was lit up and we could

A Lanc called Mickey

see coloured lights on the Christmas trees in the village squares. We had just left the Danish coast over the North Sea heading for base on the return trip, when the wireless operator received our diversion, 50 and 61 squadrons to Dallocky. It took the navigator some time to find it on the map. It turned out to be in Northern Scotland. A check of distance and fuel by the navigator and flight engineer assured me that distance was no problem, so North Scotland it was to be!

We landed in the early hours of the morning in clear COLD weather at Dallocky, a Coastal Command Beaufighter station, not very well equipped to handle about 35 Lancasters and 300 aircrew at that time of the morning. We eventually got debriefed, had a meal of sorts and then tried to sleep in makeshift beds on the floor of the mess with few blankets. After a few hours sleep, the pilots reported to the flight office to be told that Skellingthorpe was still fog bound, and we were told to report again after lunch.

With my crew we went to our plane to check for damage as the flak over Politz had been heavy. No damage or oil leaks could be seen so the flight engineer went to check the refuelling. This was going very slowly, as the Beaufighters were operating against German shipping along the Norwegian coast and Beaufighters only had small fuel tanker trucks for refuelling. We reported after lunch as instructed, only to be told that Skellingthorpe was still fog bound and to report again the next morning.

Not being permitted to carry money on operational flights we only had a few shillings between us to spend. Money was not much use to us anyway as the drinks in the various messes were restricted due to there not being enough supplies to cater for 300 extra airmen with Christmas a few days away. To fill in time, the whole crew went for a walk for an hour or two but this was not too successful as flying boots are not the best for walking in cold wet conditions.

Next morning we reported to the flight office at about 10 o'clock and the information from base was that there was an improvement in Lincolnshire and our Met officer forecast that between 2.30 and 3.30 that afternoon there would be a period of 20-30 minutes of reasonable weather between two cold fronts. Flight control considered that they could get us all down in the time.

All the Lancasters had to complete refuelling and we had to carry enough fuel to get us to Skellingthorpe for an hour's circling, if the clearance was delayed, and enough to get us back to Dallocky if the clearance did not eventuate, plus 25%, our regulation for any other emergency.

Although our flight controllers at base were used to handling two squadrons returning from an operation, these planes were usually spread out over a longer period of time. Whereas this landing would have to be carried out at about one plane a minute with only our radios and no radar to control the landing.

The navigators worked out a flight plan on a time basis for each aircraft. Taking off was a bit of a shambles as the taxi ways were somewhat cluttered with Lancasters and anyone going off the bitumen could get bogged and upset the whole timing.

Both squadrons took off in clear cold weather which soon changed to 10/10 cloud from ground level to

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high altitude. I flew on instruments for nearly two hours till close to Skellingthorpe. The controller stacked us up and called us in, in our turn and we landed in reasonable visibility in a little over 30 minutes. The date was 24th December. The weather closed in again for the best part of two weeks and we enjoyed a good Christmas day and dinner.

This was the time when the Germans launched an offensive in Europe later known as the Battle of the Bulge. This weather had grounded most of the allied air forces. We carried out one operation, bombing a concentration of German tanks, just behind the front line at Houffalize.

Had it not been for the foresight of the Met officers combined with good flight controllers, the two squadrons would not have been available to assist in army support at a crucial time. Also, the crews would have had to spend two weeks over Christmas at Dallocky in miserable conditions and rationed food and beer.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE WOULD HAVE MISSED OUT ON OUR CHRISTMAS DINNER.



L to R: David Blomfield, Dennis Cluett, Peter Smith, Arthur Bass, Jim Leith, Frank Mouritz and Laurie Cooper.

A Lanc called Mickey

Manston

On New Year's Day 1945, we were briefed to carry out our second attack on a canal at Mittelland in Germany. We had attacked this target previously on 5-6th November, but due to bad weather the bombing was abandoned. This current operation was to be about a half strength attack in clear weather with visual marking. We took off ahead of a large cold front and we had been warned to expect a diversion away from Lincolnshire and carried our usual reserve of fuel.

The route out and back was over Reading and Beachy Head. It proved to be an uneventful trip except that our starboard outboard engine was running hot and both the flight engineer and myself were watching it closely. On nearing the English coast on our return trip, we received the diversion that had been forecast. The cold front had speeded up and had closed down all of England except the SE tip and Northern Scotland. Our diversion was to be Dallocky in NW Scotland. We had previously spent two days there recently and did not think much of the idea of returning there again. It had been very cold, no facilities to handle 20-30 Lancasters, we had had to sleep on the floor, the food had been poor and the aerodrome was miles from a pub.

The South East of England was still clear and we were fast approaching Manston aerodrome. This was one of two emergency dromes in England. The other was at Woodbridge on the East coast. Manston had three parallel bitumen runways each 75 yds wide and 2 miles long, as well as 3 miles of grass overshoot. All Manston's landing lights were on and showing up brightly in the blacked out countryside. When the crew heard of the diversion to Dallocky there was a great deal of moaning, not only because of our earlier experience, but the prospect of a further 3 hours flying and maybe fuel shortage was not very popular, so Manston was very inviting. Jim and I decided that the overheating of the starboard outer engine was reaching near to the danger point, so we shut it down. I now had the right to ask Manston for an emergency landing. The wireless operator found the call sign and I switched on the R/T set and called, "Spotnose Mike, I am on 3 engines and request emergency landing". This was granted. I had not carried out a 3 engine landing since the Lancaster finishing school about 6 months before. I landed on the left runway as instructed, made a mess of it and swung over to the other side and blew the starboard tyre. This was no real problem as Manston was set up to handle damaged aircraft. They sorted us out and we were eventually debriefed, then allocated beds in good quarters. The aerodrome control contacted Skellingthorpe and advised them of our location.

Late next morning after several hours sleep, I fronted up to the Engineer's Office to see about M Mike. The tyre had been fixed but they could not find the cause of the engine overheating. This was a new M Mike and it had a modification to the engines that the Manston ground staff had not heard about. To prevent the engines being damaged by overheating when being run up on the ground, a high temperature relief valve was installed in the cooling system. This released a small amount of Glycol (engine cooling liquid) into the exhaust manifold, which created a cloud of white smoke. The Manston fitter had started and run up the engine. It had heated up quickly, the relief valve had opened, and a cloud of smoke had come out of the exhaust pipes. They, therefore, assumed that the engine had an internal coolant leak or possibly a cracked cylinder head. I had been rather concerned about shutting down the engine the

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night before, so this assumption seemed to be an easy way out of a possible dressing down by the squadron commander. So I held my tongue about the relief valve. The engineering officer decided to remove the sparking plugs and send them to a laboratory for analysis to see if they could determine which cylinder was in trouble.

I phoned the squadron commander at Skellingthorpe to tell him of the problem and left it to him to make the decision for us:

- 1 Send a Lancaster to pick us up,
- 2 Send us back by train,
- 3 wait for M Mike to be fixed.

There was an operation called for that night so there were no Lancasters available. He told us to wait for Mike and to phone him the next morning. This was the best decision for us as we did not fancy a train trip back to base involving changing stations in London while carrying flying gear and parachutes.

We decided to spend the day off in Margate, the nearest town. Although it was winter, the day was fairly mild and we enjoyed the seaside town, though the beaches were barbed wired and mined. The general atmosphere in the town was pleasant after Lincoln.

The next morning I checked with the maintenance staff but the results of the laboratory tests on the sparking plugs had not yet arrived. I rang the Squadron Commander at Skellingthorpe again who told us to stay put. We went into Margate again, returning late afternoon to be told that the tests on the plugs had shown negative. The flight engineer and I started the engine, ran it up but shut it down before it got too hot. I then told the engineering officer that we would take it as it was, as the Manston runway was long enough for a lightly loaded Lancaster to take off on 3 engines if necessary. We, of course, knew that there was no real problem. We took off next morning quite safely and returned to Skellingthorpe, about 1¼ hours flying time and the engine had behaved OK.

There were no operations that night but we flew 4 operations in the next 10 days, on the last of which we got M Mike shot up and out of action for 5 weeks. She was returned to us with a new starboard outboard engine.

Apart from the crew, no one knew of our little escapade and I have often wondered what disciplinary action could have been taken against me without involving the loss of an experienced crew.

Dresden

On the 13th February we were briefed to carry out an area bombing attack on the Eastern German city of Dresden. This city had never been bombed before and was at that time only about 100 miles from the advancing Russian army and was crowded with refugees. We carried our usual area bombing load of one 4,000 lb Cookie and 12,000 lbs of 4 lb incendiaries.

A Lanc called Mickey

The raid was to be a maximum Bomber Command effort with nearly 1,000 heavy bombers taking part. 5 Group was the first attacking force and our Lancaster was in the first wave of the group. We bombed on ground markers using the usual overshoot method. The city was well defended with many searchlights and accurate flak. The group bombing appeared to be accurate with many fires started.

After we cleared the target, we dropped down to 1,000 ft above the ground for the run home. Even at that height the city could be seen burning and when we were 100 miles away the rear gunner reported that it looked like a brilliant sunset. We didn't sight any night fighters on the route out or back, and the operation had been a routine one.

The remaining 4 groups of Bomber Command attacked Dresden 2 hrs after us and continued the devastation. The American Flying Fortresses stoked up the fires in the mid morning of the next day.

The aerial photograph of the target that we viewed a couple of days later showed that the entire city had been destroyed. The attack had been accurate and a fire storm started.

Much has been written about this raid and because of the number of refugees in the city the casualties could have been as high as 200,000 and possibly more than the casualties caused by the later atomic bomb attacks on Japan. From the Bomber Command point of view, it was a copy book attack with only 6 aircraft lost, as the spoof method and our night fighter intruders kept the German night fighters out of the bomber stream.

About 30 years after the bombing, I worked with a Dutch Engineer who, as a 16 year old boy, was in a forced labour battalion that went into Dresden the day after the raid. His description of the destruction and the loss of lives was horrific.

Various Operational Incidents

The instructors at the OTUs and other flying schools being all ex operational pilots had advised us about various strategies that the Luftwaffe tried in aerial combat. Although we had been told of this particular one, we nearly came to grief one night early in the tour. The German strategy was for a pair of night fighters having located a bomber on their radar and keeping outside of the bomber visual range, they would then arrange themselves either side of the bomber, one somewhat ahead and the other somewhat behind. The one to the front would turn on his navigation lights (the same colour lights were used on all aircraft by world standard regulations). The other would then wait a second or two, then attack the bomber with his front guns, while the bomber crew were distracted by the navigation lights.

On the occasion that it happened to us, the bomb aimer in the front gun turret reported, "Navigation lights starboard beam up". The immediate reaction from all the crew was to turn their heads and the gun turrets to see the lights. Fortunately, the burst of tracer fire from the attacking fighter on the other side passed over the top of our aircraft. I took immediate evasive action and turned towards the attacking fighter and the other fighter turned his lights out.

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On discussing this later, we remembered the warning from the OTU instructor. At that time, we were a green crew and very lucky that the attacking fighter had been a bad shot. We devised a drill to cope with a similar occurrence. On sighting the navigation lights, the bomb aimer was to report it and open fire on the lights while the rear and mid upper gunners intensified their search on the other side. While they were going this, I turned toward the side of the expected attack. About 3 or 4 nights later we had occasion to try out the drill and it worked. A sighting of navigation lights, a burst of fire from the front turret and a turn in the other direction was executed with no attack from the second fighter. We wondered afterwards whether some bomber pilot had mistakenly turned on his lights and we had opened fire on him.

On another occasion we were very lucky.

In early February 1945 the squadron was put on a maximum effort and as our plane M was unserviceable at that time, we were allocated another one, L. The take off was eventually delayed by 2 hours and M Mike was then available for our crew which pleased us as we did not enjoy flying strange aircraft. The flight commander Squadron Leader Hugh Horsley took over L.

Take off time came and we were taxiing along the taxiway in fading daylight. Aircraft L was two or three planes ahead of us. He took off and had an engine failure just as he got airborne. All further take offs were halted as he did a slow flat turn at a few hundred feet and lined up on the grass beside the runway, as his speed was too slow to lower his undercarriage. He landed on his belly, skidded about 200 yds and then hit a bitumen taxiway. The bomb load of 4,000 lb Cookie and 12,000 of 4 lb incendiaries instantly blew up. We were waiting on the other side of the aerodrome and felt a heavy blast and 4 lb incendiaries landed all around us. Six of the crew died instantly while the rear turret containing the rear gunner was blown free. He was badly injured but survived.

Squadron Leader Horsley had only recently joined us (he was a permanent air force officer) from training command but had just come back after escaping through France from an earlier operation flown from Skellingthorpe.

So again, Lady Luck smiled on us.

The End of the Tour

And so we flew on, trying not to be too over confident towards our last trip, our survival being uppermost in our minds and actions. We had become a very skilled and professional crew. April 17th 1945, was to be the last trip to Pilsen in Czechoslovakia. The target was to bomb railway yards and we were away 8 hours. Again we had a diversion on return, just a local one, not to Dallocky this time.

In the 34 trips we had dropped about 270 tons of bombs, burnt up about 50,000 gallons of high octane petrol and were responsible for the deaths of an unknown number of military and civilian people and caused considerable destruction to German industry and cities.

A Lanc called Mickey

Our operations were as follows:

Area bombing of cities 9
Marine and canals 12
Oil refineries 6
Army support 7

After the last trip we all had two weeks leave, returned to Skellingthorpe and the crew was broken up and posted to various duties. It was a very sad moment to lose the close companionship that had been welded together over the last 12 months. The wireless operator and myself being Australian were sent to our embarkation depot in Brighton for return to Australia.

Before I left the Squadron I was told that 5 Group was being reorganised under the name of Tiger Force and was being sent to the Pacific to be based on Okinawa to bomb the Japanese mainland. We would be flying the next generation of Lancasters, the Lincolns, and I gathered that I would eventually be posted to join them after leave in Australia. The atom bomb changed these plans.

I left England from the port of Liverpool on the 18th June in the Stirling Castle travelling via the Panama Canal to Sydney and then by troop train to Perth arriving 28th July. I was discharged on the 18th October 1945, three days after my 22nd birthday after being in the RAAF for 3 years 5 months, including nearly 2 years in the UK.



L to R: David Blomfield, Arthur Bass, Frank Mouritz, Peter Smith, Dennis Cluett and Laurie Cooper, 1944 at Peter Smith's Wedding.

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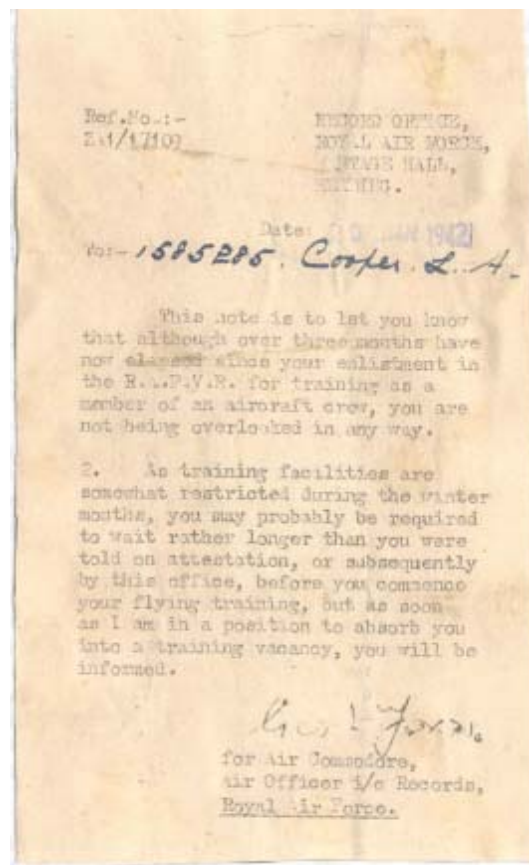
Frank Mouritz and his Mother, Mt Hawthorn, Western Australia after he returned home at the end of the War.

A Lanc called Mickey

Laurie Cooper – Navigator

Kidbrooke Park and I Join Up

When the war broke out in September 1939, I was working in the head office of The Alliance Assurance Company in Bartholomew Lane in The City of London. Owing to previous preparations, the firm was able to evacuate Head Office to Kidbrooke Park in Sussex. Kidbrooke Park was just outside the village of Forest Row, and reached by a long driveway from the main Eastbourne Road, The large mansion had several paddocks, landscaped gardens and small natural waterfalls.

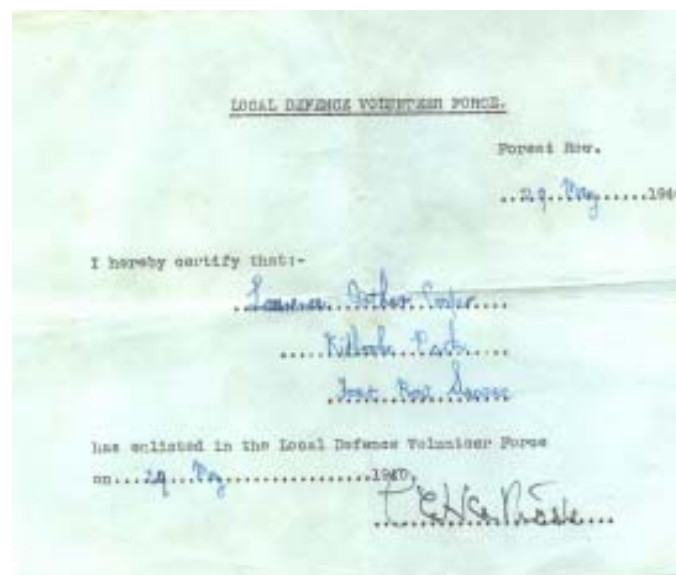


A number of huts had been constructed in the grounds. One was the dining hut, and the male staff lived in the remainder. They were not overwarm in winter, but pleasant enough. I was able to go home to Herne Hill at weekends by various buses via Croydon.

In May 1940 when an invasion seemed imminent, groups of the Local Defence Volunteers, as they were first called (Later the Home Guard) were formed hastily by Churchill. Although volunteers had to be officially between seventeen (my age,) and sixty five, some were younger, and some quite a lot

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older. Many of the Alliance staff joined the Forest Row unit. At our first parade we discovered that a long since retired Brigadier General was to be our Commanding Officer. He arrived on horse-back complete with sword. Old and frail, but keen to do his bit for his country again, he was very disappointed when ill health forced him to stand down. Headquarters were in a room at the side of the Brambletye Hotel in Forest Row.



We had no uniforms at that stage-just a white LDV arm band and of course no rifles, The only weapons were anything that came to hand. When we first went on night duty, we had to guard the main Eastbourne Road in Ashdown Forest, near the Roebuck Hotel. We were armed with two pikes from the Brigadier General's own armoury, and there was a wooden barrier to push across the road if the enemy was approaching. As in "Dad's Army" we were eventually issued with uniforms and American rifles although at first there was no ammunition for these 1914-18 weapons, they being of a different calibre to the British 303.

Another acquisition was a Northover Projector, a weapon that looked like a very wide drainpipe on legs that was alleged to fire some sort of missile, but I can't remember it ever being tried out.

Life was more peaceful at Kidbrooke Park than the air raids we experienced in London at weekends. However in 1940 one had sometimes a distant view of Battle of Britain dogfights over Kent, whilst an occasional deer wandered into the grounds from Ashdown Forest.

In 1941, having read everything about flying that I could lay my hands on, I went to the Recruiting Office in Croydon, filled in some forms, volunteered for the R.A.F., and after two days of interviews and medicals, at Weston Super Mare was passed fit for Pilot, Observer, Wireless Operator, Air Gunner or Observer/Radio. After attestation on September 18th I was issued with a metal R.A.F.V.R. lapel badge, and sent home on deferred service.

A Lanc called Mickey

Several days later came a letter of welcome from the Secretary of State for Air, reminding me that "The honour of the R.A.F." was in my hands, and I would be joining "Those whose stirring deeds and indomitable courage daily provoke the admiration of the world." I would be given, "The best aircraft and armament that the factories of England and America can produce." Meanwhile I must await my turn to be called up for training.

During my deferred service, office work carried on as usual at The Alliance. Night-time patrols continued of the pumping station, the Eastbourne Road areas of the Brambletye and Roebuck Hotels and some more isolated parts of Ashdown Forest, with occasional pauses for liquid refreshment.

I managed to become quite proficient in the Morse Code, thanks to instruction from a local retired post office telegraphist making his contribution to the war effort. The waiting seemed very long, but in January 1942 came a letter from the R.A.F.. A small scrap of paper in a tiny envelope, (war economy size,) assured me that I had not been overlooked, and would be informed as soon as a training vacancy became available.

Finally, the call came to report on March 9th 1942 to the Air Crew Reception Centre at St. John's Wood, close to Regent's Park Zoo, and Lords' Cricket Ground. Here we were kitted out and billeted in Viceroy Court -luxury flats in peacetime, but now very spartan indeed. This was where I first met Doug Coxell, a Peterborough policeman. After the war he flew as pilot with an airline in the Channel Islands, and still in 2001 was doing some flying on screening duties. We kept in touch, and met up again, several years ago in Guernsey, after an interval of fifty years.

At A.C.R.C. we received inoculations, vaccinations psychological tests, a night vision test, a mathematical grading test, and of course there was drill. When I was free, which was not often, it was a straightforward bus journey home to Herne Hill.

In early April I was posted to 12 Initial Training Wing on the windy coast of St. Andrew's, Fifeshire in Scotland, and was billeted in the Grand Hotel, overlooking the Royal and Ancient Golf Course. However, the accommodation was less luxurious than the outside of the building suggested. Stripped down to bare boards, the rooms contained no more than iron-framed beds.

Lectures took place in the rooms of the ancient University of St. Andrew's and the instructors appeared to be mainly ex-teachers or university lecturers. The course was hard work and included long sessions of lectures on Anti-Gas, Aircraft Recognition, Armament, Engines, Hygiene and Sanitation, Law and Discipline, Mathematics, Meteorology, Navigation, Principles of Flight and Signals. It was a formidable list, and for some reason what has remained in my mind is the instruction to shake one's boots every morning in case they were sheltering a scorpion. Classroom studies were punctuated by periods of physical exercise and drill.

An afternoon each week was given over to games, and within reason one could choose in which activity to indulge. As a concession to cadets, golf clubs could be borrowed, and old golf balls pur-

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chased very cheaply, so one could elect to stroll round the golf course trying to hit the balls in the general direction of the holes. This must have been quite diverting to the locals, accustomed to seeing world champions playing on their hallowed course.

With Doug Coxell and two others, another pleasant activity was rowing in the North Sea, as dinghies could be hired for a nominal fee.

Close by St. Andrews was Leuchars, an airfield of R.A.F. Coastal Command. The Lockheed Hudsons and Handley-Page Hampdens were of great interest and an inspiration to us, as they flew out or returned low over the sea from patrols.



12 Initial Training Wing at St Andrew's, Scotland

Very fit after the bracing wind and sun of St. Andrews, those cadets who had successfully completed basic training-by no means all of them- were now promoted to Leading Aircraftmen. In late July, following leave, came a posting to Elementary Flying School at Scone near Perth. After an enjoyable 12 hours or so pilot instruction on Tiger Moths, we were shunted off to the Aircrew Distribution Centre at Heaton Park, Manchester.

In the summer of 1942, with the advent of the four engined bomber, the post of the second pilot was abolished, and most of the duties normally performed by him were carried out by a flight engineer. Fewer pilots were now needed, and the P.N.B. scheme was introduced. Many of those under training as pilots were re-mustered as specialist navigators or bomb aimers. There was a further category of navigator/bomb aimer, (equivalent to the earlier observer.)

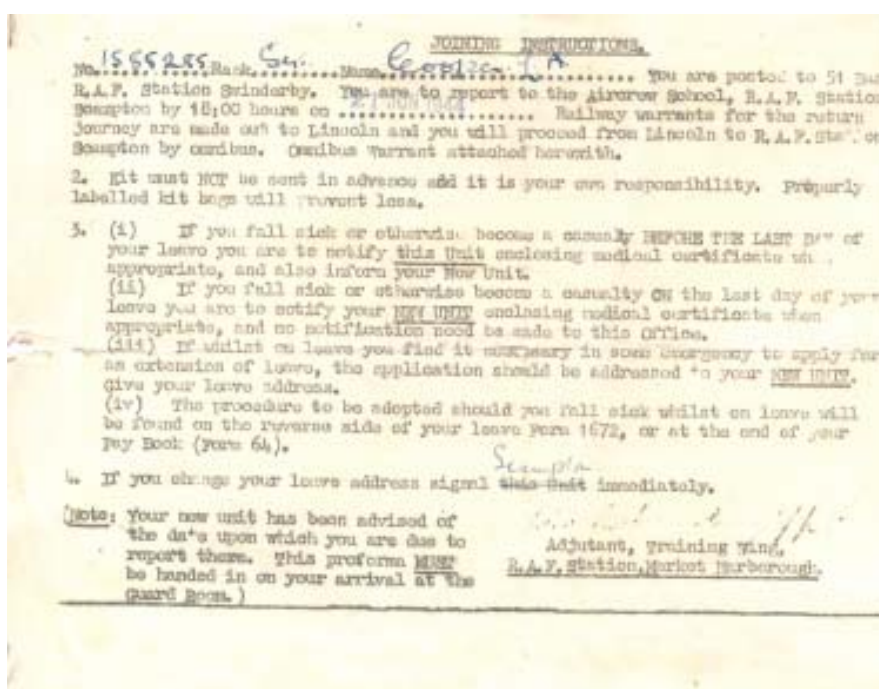
A Lanc called Mickey

On my arrival at Heaton Park I was not best pleased to learn that I had been re-mustered to navigator/bomb aimer. However, fate takes a hand, and in the future this was to greatly affect the Cooper and Mouritz families.

Heaton Park was crowded with air crew cadets awaiting posting overseas to complete their training. Most were accommodated in huts in the park, but I was fortunate to be in a 'civvie', billet., a Coronation Street type house in the Cheetham Hill district of Salford. The couple who owned the house were very kind and hospitable, although they only received a pittance in payment from the authorities. Because of the friendliness and generosity of the Manchester folk it was the best of cities in which to kill time. For example, bus conductors would not accept fares from servicemen.

We led a fairly useless existence, with the exception of some Morse practice. To pass the time, very long columns of cadets were taken out on marches, under the supervision of corporals. A great deal of initiative was shown en route. The columns became shorter and shorter as cadets took any opportunity to slope off on their own private affairs, whenever out of sight of the corporal. Chances would be taken to jump on to passing buses, dive into shop doorways etc. The bored corporals were not unduly bothered by their dwindling columns. On one march everyone stayed the course. That was to a cinema to see 'The First of the Few' on its original showing.

After a number of weeks at Heaton Park came a move to Blackpool, for no apparent reason, and a billet in a typical boarding house. Two weeks later came a journey north to the River Clyde, and a posting overseas.



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To South Africa

Our posting embarked on The S.S.Mataroa, a cargo ship which in peace-time carried fruit from New Zealand. Nobody had any idea of our route or destination, and although we had been issued with tropical kit at Heaton Park, the service cynics assured us we were bound to be heading for a cold country!

We were accommodated in the holds, and ate at long tables, sleeping over them in tightly packed hammocks at night. There were the initial difficulties of sleeping in hammocks on board an overcrowded vessel. If you tried to turn round you either fell out, or started the whole thing rocking. When you started to swing you knocked against others-who were not best pleased!

The S.S.Mataroa joined a convoy, and we found it interesting to read morse messages flashing from accompanying destroyers-about the weather, U-boat scares, etc. Cadets were paid 2/6d a day, and we were given various tasks to carry out, such as washing up, cleaning up our quarters, etc, and there were frequent boat drills. Water was scarce, and we washed in warm sea -water. In the hot weather, after the daily chores had been completed, there was little else to do other than to sit on the deck, watch the rest of the convoy and the antics of the flying fish.

When the convoy anchored off Freetown, in Sierra Leone we knew that our eventual destination would be South Africa. We were not allowed ashore, but "bum-boats" bustled around the ships selling fruit.

The monotony of the continuing journey was at times relieved by some of the crew men of the S.S.Mataroa who could spin a great yarn, although as a number of them had survived the torpedoing of their ships (more than once in some cases),their unsung heroism shone through.

After five long, uncomfortable , and fairly uneventful weeks at sea the ships steamed into Durban Harbour, where we were greeted by the "Lady In White", (the nickname given to a local singer), belting out an impressive powerful welcome from the dockside as she did for the arrival of every convoy. It was mid January in 1943, and hot but not uncomfortably so.

The R.A.F. contingent disembarked and was taken to Clarewood (Imperial Forces Transhipment Camp) near Durban to be installed in what appeared to be concrete pig sties, but well pleased to leave the ship. We found out later that Clarewood was a race-course in peace-time.

After a few brief days stay in Clarewood Camp, long enough to get some decent meals in Durban , and to ride around in a rickshaw pulled by a Zulu in full regalia ,we were entrained for a two day journey to East London, south-west of Durban. The train was spotless, the sleeping compartments self-contained, and the food excellent. This was luxury indeed compared with the weeks at sea.

East London was a very pleasant town on the coast, facing the Indian Ocean. 48 Air School. Woodbrook was on the outskirts. The camp was encircled with barbed wire and the guards were armed with rifles, but outside the demands of the course cadets enjoyed a fair amount of freedom. After years of air

A Lanc called Mickey

raids, the blackout and food rationing in England, South Africa was a paradise. There were no apparent shortages, and particularly memorable at the time were the lights at night, the mixed grills in town, and the huge tins of Koo melon and lemon jam. It was good to be able to send food parcels home to England, which the local stores were geared up to pack and dispatch.



An early priority was to visit an Indian tailor to modify the ridiculous baggy tunics and long shorts which had been issued in England, and which were objects of derision by those who had already "got their knees brown." The huge solar topees, which appeared to be of Boer War vintage were never worn, many having been lost "overboard on the sea voyage. Bush shirts were purchased, as these were comfortable articles of clothing favoured by RAF types

On the course we were taught the basic requirements of navigation, the logic of the triangle of velocities, the use of visual fixes, the D.F. loop, astro navigation, taking drift sights, the effect of magnetism in the air frame structure, the variation of the earth's magnetic fields, the art of the Dalton computer, (not today's version), how to box a compass and sundry other gems of information, all to ensure a safe passage from A to B.

There was no flying at this stage, but the course was concentrated, and we were expected to stay in camp for two nights a week for private study. Unless on guard or fire picket duty we were allowed out until midnight during the week, and were free on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. As the shops closed at 5pm and at 1pm on Saturdays for the weekend, purchases had to be made on the weekly shopping parades into town.

The Union of South Africa, in 1939 was still very much part of the British Empire, but its mixed government of British and Boer population meant that entry into the war on the side of the allies could by no means be guaranteed. Great pressure was naturally exerted by the British Government, and it was the respect

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that Winston Churchill and Field Marshall Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa had for each other-old enemies from the Boer War as they had been- that tipped the scales. The South African Government in Pretoria voted to enter the war by the narrowest of margins. Thus we were there under the Empire Air Training Scheme. At the same time there were some South Africans opposed to the entry, and who were strongly anti-British. Mostly they lay low during the war but the younger element had been known sometimes to attack lone R.A.F personnel late at night in the darkness. However, R.A.F. police, not normally regarded in the U.K. as the airman's best friend, in South Africa performed a valuable security function. At around 11pm they would drive around town, collecting stragglers and giving them a lift back to camp.

In our free time we were able to enjoy the beaches, lovely surroundings and local hospitality. We were glad not to be training in a totally isolated place, or in the depth of a Canadian winter.

On a visit to the Marine Aquarium I was very interested to see the stuffed specimen of a coelacanth, believed to be the missing link between life in the sea and on land, and thought to have been extinct for 360 million years. Known only through fossil remains, this dead fish had been dredged up by a South African Trawler in 1938. No more were seen until 1952.

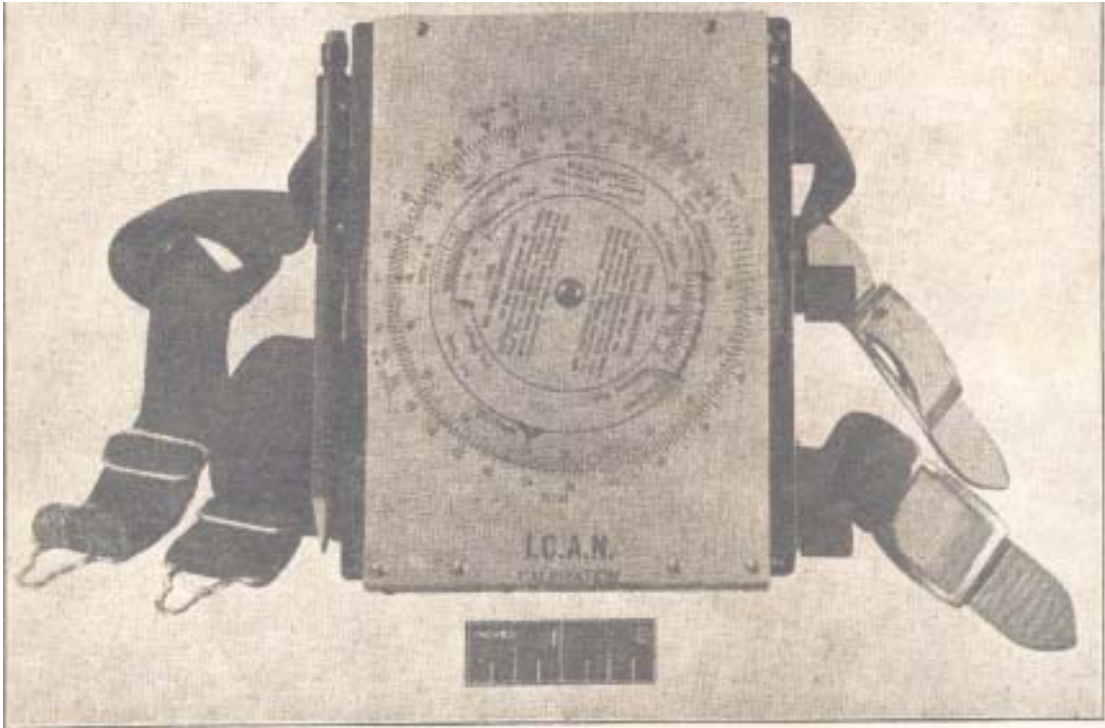
Exams completed, and after a Flight Dinner at Deal's Hotel, in mid-April 1943 we were transferred to 44 Air School in Grahamstown for the flying part of our training, and became 11 Air Observer Course. Grahamstown, still in Cape Province, but inland and further south, was a quiet university town, very English in character and the airfield was on the outskirts.

The course was intensive. When not flying or on guard duty we were attending lectures during the day, working on charts at night, or taking astro shots with a bubble sextant. Practical navigation training was carried out in Avro Ansons. The friendly "Flying Greenhouse" offered superb visibility. For bombing and gunnery Airspeed Oxfords were used.

Flying training was done in pairs; the duties alternating between 1st and 2nd navigator. The 1st navigator did the dead reckoning, and passed courses and air speeds to the staff pilot. His colleague wound the Anson's undercarriage up after take off, down for landing (about 120 turns-quite a chore), and in between times indulged in map reading.

The art of navigation consists principally in being able to calculate a compass course and airspeed, which together with the wind effect will cause the aircraft to move along an agreed track at a desired ground speed. In this respect, the Dalton Computer-a sort of circular slide-rule with a perspex centre - was invaluable. There was only one way to find the velocity of the wind. You had to know your ground position reasonably frequently. This is where the second navigator came in, as observing the terrain over which we flew, he supplied the 1st navigator with pinpoints. The well spaced out lighted towns showed up clearly at night.

A Lanc called Mickey



The Dalton Computer used to navigate

On sea patrols over the Indian Ocean drift finding, photography, reconnaissance, flame float dropping and practice square searches were carried out. On one occasion the South African Air force staff pilot reckoned that a submarine we spotted might have been an enemy. However even if it had been, there wasn't much that our Anson could do about it! Late in the course, came the astro trips using the sextant for position fixing in a moving aircraft. Trying to hold in the bubble of the moving sextant whichever star you had managed to locate was easier said than done, and Astro proved a slow and cumbersome aid to air navigation.

Aerial gunnery was practised in Oxfords fitted with turrets. One blasted away at drogues towed by Fairy Battles. Closer inspection of the patched tail of the Battle indicated that the lot of the pilot of the airborne tug was not as cushy as it might have seemed. Firing took place over the sea off Port Alfred and afforded an excellent view of a group of sharks disporting themselves in the shallower water near the beach.

Also in the Oxfords practical training included high and low level bombing by day and night, dropping eleven and a half pound practice bombs. After night bombing practice an indignant camper had been known to complain when a stick of practice bombs straddled his lonely camp fire instead of the target.

The winter weather in Grahamstown was changeable with quite heavy rain at times, although the ground soon dried up. The locals seemed as surprised as we were by quite a heavy fall of snow one

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

day which vanished quickly. However, the flying in South Africa was very pleasant, and the programme was interrupted little by adverse weather.

Flying training and exams successfully completed, our Passing Out Parade and presentation of brevets took place on August 20th 1943, an odd way to spend my twenty- first birthday.

Although we were kept very busy on the course, any free time was spent in Grahamstown itself, where we found friendliness and hospitality. Most of the European inhabitants came from British stock and were 'on our side.' Especially were cadets made welcome at the Farmers' Home Hotel, more like an English country inn in style than a typical South African Hotel. It was run by a couple who had left England after the First World War, and were all for 'Our boys.'

When the course finished we were not immediately due to move on, but had to find our own accommodation as there was no longer room for us in camp. Several of us were adopted by the owners of The Farmers' Home Hotel and stayed there for several days. We lived a very gentlemanly existence, with our own rooms, and excellent food. The couple would accept only a very nominal payment for full board and lodging.

Sorry to leave after such kindly hospitality we embarked on another long journey, back to Durban in a comfortable South African train with self contained sleeping compartments.. It was a leisurely trip, with several halts on the way, long enough to have a look at some of the towns en route, and including an afternoon and evening spent in Ladysmith.

It was early September 1943, and now, as sergeants, on the return to Clarewood Camp we were billeted in very slightly improved accommodation than on our first visit. However, the waiting period provided plenty of opportunities to explore Durban, and to seek out the relatives of several of our neighbours back in London. They were very pleased to see somebody from England, were most welcoming and were keen to hear any news from home. The trips on the quaint railway to coastal beauty spots such as Isipingo and Amanzimtoti were especially pleasant.

It was sometimes hard, whilst leading this comfortable existence to remember why we were there, and what work lay ahead. When eventually it was time for us to move on, it was to yet another transit camp, 'The Retreat' in Capetown. Once again, we were living on a train, with stops along the way, providing chances for sightseeing.

In Capetown we had no duties to speak of, and thus were able to appreciate the place virtually as tourists. However, after two or three weeks .our group was finally embarked on the S.S, Strathaird. In peace-time she was a luxury liner, but all traces of that had of course disappeared long since, and it was only marginally more comfortable than on the outward journey. At least we had bunks.

Back in the U.K. we were disembarked at Greenock. After leave, and a further period of waiting in Harrogate, (in another Grand Hotel), in early February 1944 came a posting to 4(O) Advanced Flying Unit , West Freugh, near Stranraer in Scotland.

A Lanc called Mickey

We had first to accustom ourselves to British conditions. Cloud, rain and mist, rather than the clear skies and open landscapes of South Africa, was the normal weather pattern now. There was also the blackout. The thirty flying hour course, still on Ansons, aimed to bring the difference home to us. This consisted mainly of cross country flights over Ireland, the Western Isles and the Irish Sea.

At the end of the course, in early March 1944, I was posted to 14 Operational Training Unit in Market Harborough, Leicestershire. On arrival at O.T.U. we were all of us individuals, pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators and air gunners. We left as members of a crew.

In the normal informal crewing up procedure I had already got together with a pilot. However this arrangement fell through as he was taken sick, and so I was allocated to Frank Mouritz's crew who were short of a navigator.

This twist of fate was to be of great significance to the future history of the Cooper and Mouritz Families. Frank was to spend leaves with my family, and a friendship developed with my sister Kathleen which was to result eventually in their marriage in Australia in January 1948.

At O.T.U. Wellingtons were the aircraft on which crews came together for the first time, and were given the opportunity to work as a team. At this stage our crew comprised besides myself:-

Frank Mouritz, Pilot Peter Smith, Bomb Aimer Dave Blomfield, Wireless Operator Dennis Cluett and Arthur Bass, Air Gunners. Frank and Dave were Australians.

We practised by day and night on circuits and 'bumps', fighter affiliation, bombing, navigation and wireless exercises now extended to trips of about five hours, and on the ground, crash and other emergency procedures. Meanwhile there was much to assimilate, apart from the actual flying, and individual crew members continued to polish up their own skills within their particular categories.

As navigator, the new skill for me was the use of GEE. This radar equipment was an excellent aid to pinpointing the geographical position of the aircraft as indicated by signals from three widely separated transmitters based over in the U.K. When the difference in the times taken by the signals to reach the aircraft was revealed on the GEE box, and plotted on a special lattice chart, the exact position of the aircraft could be determined.

Crew life was enjoyable, especially the nights spent in Leicestershire village pubs and visits to Rugby. Six men, from two continents and following different paths of life, became bonded together.

After 80 hours flying our O.T.U. course was completed in early June 1944, and after leave we were posted to a holding unit in Scampton for a while. From there we progressed to 1660 Heavy Conversion Unit at Swinderby, Lincolnshire, where we were introduced to our Flight Engineer, Jim Leith, who had re-mustered to air crew after service as an engine fitter with Fighter Command. Now for the first time, we were a crew of seven, and we were to stay together for the duration of our 'tour'.

H.C.U. was mostly an extension of O.T.U., but the main object of the course was to ensure a smooth

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

transition from twin to four-engined aircraft The cumbersome Stirlings flown were clapped out from heavy usage, and prone to many mechanical ills. However we fortunately had no serious problems, but were not sorry to part with them at the end of the course.

At H.C.U. navigators were initiated into the mysteries of H2S. This entirely airborne radar aid made it possible for a navigator to map-read in any weather without leaving his cabin. H2S transmitted radio waves downwards from the aircraft. These were reflected back from the ground to show features from below such as buildings, ships and water expanses, on the face of a cathode ray tube in the navigation compartment. This could be achieved by day or night, irrespective of weather conditions, giving the opportunity to pinpoint the aircraft's position at any time when over land.

This was interesting, but we were to discover later that our squadron aircraft were not fitted with H2S. German fighters could home on to aircraft using this equipment.

At the end of the course and thirty five hours of flying, following leave and further time spent in a holding unit, we were posted in early September 1944 to 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston, Nottinghamshire. The short L.F.S. course of about twelve hours flying was designed primarily to convert pilots and flight engineers to the Lanc.

From Syerston we were finally posted to 61 Squadron at Skellingthorpe, the nearest airfield to Lincoln Cathedral, and our real work began. I was now a Flight Sergeant. It had been two years and seven months since my call-up, but I had yet to see action. Considering war-time difficulties, my training had been pretty thorough, It is strange to realise now, that in so many cases, those years of training came to nothing as men were lost on their first missions.

NJ5.Q. AGR.L. LONDON
S.M. Form 395.

Has not } permission to wear plain clothes
Temporary } leave Form
Free }

If a General Mobilisation is ordered
every airman on leave or pass must
return immediately to his Unit with-
out waiting for instructions.

Office Stamp.

Unit.....RAF. HERTON PARK
Official No.....Rank.....Name.....
Has permission to be absent from his
quarters from.....has on.....
.....for the purpose of pro-
ceeding on
Leave
Free

13a).
Date.....
Strike off words on word
not applicable.

Eligible for travelling Concession

A Lanc called Mickey

Skellingthorpe

Before the main briefing navigators made their way to the navigation section which was a hut, very sparsely equipped, with a number of utilitarian benches upon which we unrolled out Mercator charts. On the far wall was a huge map of Europe and from a red pin stuck in the co-ordinates of Skellingthorpe, a red cotton thread meandered its way in straight lines with changing angles until it came to rest on the target, and then by another circuitous route, back to Skellingthorpe.

Now there was work to be done. The Navigation Leader took over and we were given the routes, turning points, anticipated winds, air speeds, times on each leg, times on target, normally a minute either side of zero hour. The time to collate all this information usually took up to about half an hour, and then on to the main briefing, which Frank has already described, to join the main crew.

At dispersal before take-off crew members made their various checks. In my case it was the Gee-box, the gyro compass, checking my navigation bag for protractor, dividers, ruler, Dalton Computer, maps and charts, and a good supply of pencils, and making sure that the tiny light over the very important chart table worked. Two aids were indispensable to independent night navigation over wartime Europe: the faithful old Gee-box, without which accurate fixing would have been impossible, and the homespun Dalton Computer, in whose absence the calculations necessary to do the job would never have been made in the time available.

Date	Time	Altitude	Time	Map
OCT 1				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
2				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
6				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
7				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
10				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
15				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
19				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
23				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR
26				LANCASTER F/O MORRIS NAVIGATOR

Time	Altitude	Time
FIGHTER OFF	1.30	
AIR/SEA Firing	1.30	
OPERATION - BREMEN	6.30	
OPERATION - FLUSHING	7.00	
OPERATION - FLUSHING	7.10	
OPERATION - BREMEN	7.30	
OPERATION - NUREMBERG	7.40	
OPERATION - FLUSHING	7.45	
H.L.O.	7.55	

Signature: Laurie Cooper
Date: 13-09-1944

Laurie Cooper's Log Book , 1944

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At the target a master bomber directed the show over the VHF system. Prior to this however, the entire force had to reach the target individually, via a carefully worked out route and to a rigid timetable. For purposes of concentration the bomber stream was required to stay within a rectangle approximately thirty miles long, by not more than ten wide from rendezvous to finish. Navigational standards were therefore stringent, one minute only being allowed either side of a fixed time at tactical turning points, including the target. Also it was a group requirement to calculate a "wind" and to check your ground speed every ten minutes while Gee lasted.

This meant continuous work, particularly at the outset, with pencil, ruler, protractor and dividers, building up the air plot on the navigation chart. Gradually with the help of Gee, and the Dalton computer, the wind pattern of the night emerged so that later, when the radar faded, you had reasonable data on which to base the dead reckoning. Wind shifts meant alterations of course, and adjustments of air-speed, for there was no such thing as a revised E.T.A. Times were fixed, and it was vital to stay in the bomber stream as a straggling aircraft was especially vulnerable to enemy fighter attack.

Consequently I was often on the intercom, informing the pilot of any necessary change. Unfortunately, Gee was only effective up to about 5 degrees E. before the German radar stations jammed the transmissions with "grass", rendering the set useless. Thus, as our Lancasters were not fitted with H2S, beyond this longitude one had to travel on dead reckoning. However, any pinpoints from other crew members were much appreciated! In spare moments I kept the navigational log of the flight.

A curtain shielded me, and my chart table light from the cockpit, so as not to upset the pilot's night vision. This helped to make my part of the aircraft very warm so I wore no flying suit. I had occasion to regret this on one trip when, after dropping our load, the bomb doors jammed open and it was so cold that I had icicles hanging from my oxygen mask.

As Frank has described our actual operations in detail there is little I can add, as on our trips I was working constantly, and rarely had the time to venture out of my curtained off compartment. However I do remember seeing the snow covered top of Mont Blanc. Occasionally someone would call me out to look down at fiery and spectacular scenes below. Thus my view of an operation would generally be restricted to the occasional comments and instructions passed between the crew on the intercom.

Once, when we were diverted to Manston because of an engine problem, we were astonished at the incredible speed of the twin engined aircraft based there- and without propellers! It was our first sight of jets. They were RAF Gloster Meteors, and with a top speed of about 600 m.p.h. were doing very useful work chasing and shooting down enemy V.1. flying bombs. Very hush hush, I believe that their pilots were segregated in their own Mess.

Tribute must be paid to the indispensable and reliable ground crew that we depended on for our safety. The servicing of the aircraft was carried out in the open, where the uncomplaining ground crew worked exposed to the elements and rigours of the winter weather.

A Lanc called Mickey



L to R: Dennis Cluett, David Blomfield, Jim Leith, Peter Smith, Arthur Bass, Frank Mouritz and Laurie Cooper.

Jim Leith – Flight Engineer

From 14th July 1941 to 6th Aug 1946

One day in Jan 1941 just after my 18th birthday, I was sitting in the account's office of the company I had been employed with since my 14th birthday. Looking around me and seeing the temporary staff, who were now employed, because of the war, (now very much in progress) I was in charge of the office, most of the senior staff had either been called to National Service, retired or died.

I decided I must join up and do my bit (as it were) and in so doing, I imagined I would escape from the dreary office routine. Spiced only by what seemed to be almost continuous air raid alerts, the aftermath of which meant a daily struggle to and from the office, which was incidentally, in the Haymarket, Central London. Where as, I lived with my parents in SE London, some 10 or more miles from the office. So off I went to the "Yorkshire Grey" public house in Eltham which had been requisitioned and was now acting as a recruiting office and I duly enlisted in the RAFVR.

I was eventually summoned to attend for a medical examination, which I passed, some weeks later, I received my "call up papers" and Ordered to report on the 14th July 1941 to RAF Station Melksham (Wiltshire), for initial training and "Kitting Out", where in spite of protesting that I wished to be sent for training as an Airgunner, I was measured and fitted with my uniforms and sent off to Fily in Yorkshire (ex Butlins holiday camp) for military training i.e.: foot drill, rifle drill and general disciplinary indoctrination, this took some 5 weeks.

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At the end of which time, a passing out parade was the order of the day, we were now of course a "Squadron" the great day came and of course started with a full inspection by the Squadron Leader, who was a regular RAF officer. I remember this very well, since he reminded us of this fact at every opportunity, and told us the difference between regular Air Force personnel and RAFVR rabble.

Finally, we lined up for the parade, we were immaculate, the order was then given that our identity discs were to be displayed. These discs which had to be hung around our necks and carried at all time's "On Pain of Death" (it seemed like that at the time), were to be shown to be in place. This was achieved by drawing the discs through one's shirtfront, so that the inspecting officer could see they were in place. At this point I remembered that I had removed my discs in the shower that morning and left them hanging from the showerhead, panic set in, there was no escape, even worse. I was at the far end of the parade line, so that some fifty or more "ERKS", which was the derogative term the staff NCQ's used to describe us, would be inspected before my turn came. Bearing in mind that this "REGULAR" RAF officer had a very low opinion of all National Service and RAFVR (volunteer) airmen, who were a cross to bear, as it were, until the war was over.

It seemed like hours before the inspection group accompanying the officer, were within a few bodies of my position, by then, I had convinced myself that this was going to be the worst moments of my life, the punishments I envisaged do not bear describing, then a miracle happened, this most dedicated officer who appeared to love nothing better than to place us ERK's on a disciplinary charge, walked straight by me and did not notice the absence of my "Dog Tags", I will never know why, but I still have the mental scars of that long wait on the parade ground.

The actual passing out parade went off very well, we showed our new found military discipline, proudly marching in all directions in perfect step on the commands of the drill Flight Sergeant. Followed by rifle drill and in fact through the whole range of the training program.

All watched of course by our friend, the regular officer with a very critical eye. However, to give him his due, at the end of the parade he thanked all the NCQ's, for the excellent way they had turned us rabble into a disciplined unit. The only comment he made regarding the rest of us was, that he hoped in some way, we would live up to the high traditions of Regular Air force personnel.

To be quite frank and honest, we really were a credit to the NCO's who had bullied and cajoled us, into a very respectable and disciplined unit, able to respond instantly to the various drill commands, which they had literally drilled into us quite painfully at times. For those unfortunates, who found marching in step and swinging arms up to shoulder height, there were difficult times ahead, in fact a few just could not master the drill. There lives during this period, to say the least, had been very uncomfortable, drill corporals and sergeants are not renowned for there patience and understanding, in the end even they had to give up on a few.

After the passing out parade, we decided we would have a celebration party in the camp NAAFI, this

A Lanc called Mickey

being the only option available to us, the nearest town from the camp was Scarborough, ERKs had to have a pass to go their, anyway, we had very little money between us, our pay at this time being two shillings per day. However, the party was great, mainly I think because of the relief at coming to the end of the constant drilling. That is what we thought at the time, how naive we were.

The very next day, we were ordered to pack our kit and be prepared to move to another station within the following 24 hours, in fact I was given orders promulgated on DRO's (Daily Routine Orders) and joined a party of about thirty, destined to travel by train to Blackpool, where we were to train as mechanics either Engine or Airframe, with no individual choice allowed. As you can imagine, I protested vigorously, since I still had the desire to be an air gunner, I could have saved my breath, all protests fell on deaf ears and I was told in no uncertain terms, that protest would not be tolerated, I decided to make the most of the situation and wait for a more suitable opportunity.

S.F. 16

(*) (11111) W.L. 20487-1344 15M 10143 T.O. 100

ACCOMMODATION RECEIPT FOR BEDDING.

Squadron.	Flight.	Billet.	Room.	Bed.
			523	

1. The following rules and regulations must be carried out. Failure to do so will result in disciplinary action.

2. Beds must be made up and kit laid out in the regulation manner by 08.30 hours daily.

3. Beds or rooms or billets must not be changed.

4. You are responsible for the BLACKOUT.

5. You have taken on your charge the following items :—

1 Bed.	4/5 Blankets.	1 Bolster.
3 Biscuits.	1 pr. of Sheets.	1 Bolster Slip.

6. Barrack damages, etc., will be charged against you.

KEEP THIS FORM ON YOUR PERSON AT ALL TIMES, it is your authority to occupy the above bed.

Group Captain, Commanding,
R.A.F. Station, Harrogate.

The journey and life at Blackpool

The train journey took much longer than the "Barrack Room" solicitors forecast, which way we travelled I do not know, however, judging by the number of stops we had, mostly out in the middle of open country, must surely be an indication of the very low priority given to our train, there was no opportunity for getting off the train, for any reason whatsoever, since we were escorted through out the whole journey.

We finally arrived at Blackpool where a meal had been organised for us, after which, we were given the news that we were to be billeted with civilians, in Boarding Houses or small Hotels and some Private Homes. After the meal we were marched off to the billeting office, where a Flight Sergeant allocated us to our various billets, myself and three other ERK's were sent to Osborne Road at South Shore to be

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billeted with a Mr and Mrs Crabtree, we did not realise until much later how very fortunate we were. We duly arrived at the Billet to be met by Mr. Crabtree a Yorkshireman, retired ex postman now running his own Boarding House, since the billets had been requisitioned by government order, the reception was a little frosty, however, we were allocated two rooms at the very top of the three story converted house, two of us to each room. The rooms were very nice, well furnished, meal times were explained to us and we were allocated places in the dining room, we soon had our kit unpacked and generally made ourselves at home, it was by now quite late but Mrs Crabtree gave us a very nice meal, just as the meal was finishing we received word that a Parade had been ordered for the next morning, eight o'clock sharp, to allocate duties, courses and procedures for the following fourteen weeks.

At the parade we were told that DRO's would be posted at the billeting office every morning, since the office was some ten minutes walk from our billet, we decided to take it in turns to read the orders and pass on to each other the relevant instructions. I was allocated for Airframe Mechanic training, reason given was that I had never worked on engines, I did point out that I had never worked on Airframes either, the answer was "don't worry both courses are of the same duration" there must have been some logic in that statement which was beyond me, what was worse the other three fellows billeted with me were allocated for Engine Mechanic training, this situation was later to cause me some embarrassment.

The Airframe course, St Annes Blackpool

Before the course started we had what one might term the obligatory session of square bashing, or if you like, foot drill. It was late August-early September and the weather was very nice indeed, so to be truthful, we quite enjoyed our few days marching up and down the promenade, to the delight of various holiday makers and in particular the old ladies and gentlemen. Comments from them of "Don't they look handsome" or "Just like the guards" was very nice to hear, if somewhat exaggerated. Other remarks from some of the local lads, like "right shower of Brylcream Boys" or "call that a straight line, need you're bleeding eyes tested", all in good humour of course, and it broke the monotony.

The course eventually started, we paraded each morning and were taken by bus to Lytham St Annes, where a number of classrooms had been prepared in a vast aircraft hanger, each class being twelve airmen. Most of the instructors were civilian technicians, the course was to last fourteen weeks, and covered a great variety of subjects. We were taught the theory and then were obliged to demonstrate in practice what we had been learnt. The subjects included, Aero-dynamics, hydraulics, electric's, the various types of aircraft construction, repairs of all descriptions, metal, fabric, wood and of course maintenance and aircraft re-fuelling.

We were then obliged to take spanners, test our skills. The course was very intense, lots of study in the evening, upon which, we were tested next morning, there was no escape, we all worked very hard since failure meant transfer to General Duties, odd jobs in other words.

Most of us enjoyed the course, I must say it was made as little as possible like a military operation, the

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instructors were of a very high class, so the mysteries of aircraft, why they were able to fly, there construction and all the equipment found in them, was slowly unravelled for us. The time for the final examination drew rapidly nearer.

While the technical indoctrination was taking place, we were still subjected to a certain amount of military training, the classroom hours were from eight AM till 5.30 PM Monday to Fridays. On Saturday mornings we were obliged to parade for some PT and some more foot drill. On Wednesdays we had a bath parade, first a complete roll call was taken, so that nobody could escape, then we march off to the bathhouse, which was close to the Blackpool Tower Ball Room. The arrangements were typically military style, we went into a room and undressed, through a door to the right, along a corridor which led into the showers, a one way system. The shower room was a long row of perforated pipes discharging hot water or cool, depending at what stage of the parade your particular unit arrived on the scene. We were obliged to pass through the shower room in order to get to the exit door, and out along another corridor back to the room containing our towels and clothes, if nothing else, it brought us all down to the same level, no secrets anymore, all was revealed.

Since most of us were making full use of the bathroom facilities at our billets, the bath parade was a waste of time, however, as you can imagine, it was a good laugh, in any case with so many bodies in close proximity, the practical benefits were obvious.

During all this time we had become more and more like a family at the Crabtree's, they were getting on in years so we took over the cleaning of our rooms, all the corridors and the hallway. We also cleaned the windows in and out and took care of tidying the small garden, making ourselves useful where we could. Our relationship with Mr and Mrs Crabtree became very close, in particular Mrs Crabtree became like a mother to us, since I was the youngest by quite a few years, I was very well looked after by Mrs Crabtree.

About halfway through the course one of the technical officers had a bright idea, this as I mentioned earlier was to cause me much embarrassment. The idea was to move all Engine trainees into one area and Airframe trainees into another, Osborne Road, including my billet was designated for Engine trainees, so I was given orders to move to another area. Mrs Crabtree was very upset indeed and I wasn't over enthusiastic either, she insisted on giving me a letter to the billeting officer, requesting that I be left where I was. I did not hand the letter in at first for obvious reasons, so I was allocated to a new address some fifteen minutes walk away, I duly arrived at a very large house, rang the bell, the door was opened by a servant in uniform, I handed my billeting slip to the servant and was asked to wait, about five minutes later the servant reappeared, gave me back the billeting slip and said, Madam will not accept forces people and that I should go away. I insisted upon seeing madam, she eventually came to the door and said "do not waste my time, I will not accept forces people". I had no alternative but to return to the billeting office and report, the billeting officer, said, wait in the canteen we will send for the police to accompany you to the billet and enforce the order, what a nice billet that would have been.

Sometime later my luck changed, a Flight Sergeant who I had spoken with earlier came to the can-

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teen, I made a point of speaking to him I explained the situation and told him what had happened, surprise surprise, he was really sympathetic, also very angry at the attitude of the people concerned and wanted to take action to enforce the order. This was of course the last thing I wanted, I carefully got around to suggesting, I would be better off if he used his influence to have me sent back to my original billet. At first he said it was out of the question, I then showed him Mrs Crabtree's letter, he suddenly changed his mind and said if no other person had taken my place at the Crabtree's and I kept quiet on the subject, he would fix it and fix it he did. I returned to Mrs Crabtree's with my fingers crossed, I was welcomed with open arms by Mrs Crabtree and in fact that night she gave a little party to celebrate her family (as she put it) being kept together.

The day for the final examination arrived, we were all swotting frantically. The actual examination was in two parts, first day was the written exam: second day oral and practical, we then had twenty four hours free from the school but not from the inevitable marching and rifle drill. Following day on parade for the results, I had a nice comfortable 70% pass, of the eighty fellows on my particular course, only 11 failed. My class decided on a celebration, we had a great time at the local pub in spite of the shortage of beer and spirits, we found a plentiful supply of cider and Australian wine. The following morning plenty of very bad headaches, on balance it was worth it, except that, Mrs Crabtree was not at all pleased and sorted me out, in particular, for a lecture on the evils of drink, followed by a grumpy evening of disapproval from Mr Crabtree. We kept on our best behaviour and Mrs Crabtree was soon back to normal, Mr Crabtree however, was not so quick to forget.

On the Monday following the exams, we were summoned via DRO's to a parade at the School Hanger, and were instructed to pack our kit and be ready to leave our billets on the following Wednesday, we were to have 10 days leave before reporting direct to our new stations. We were ask to complete a form indicating our choice of Stations, all the old hands advised us rookies, that if we wanted the south of England, ask for the North, since from experience they said the RAF preferred that we were far from home. I thought carefully about this advice and decided to ask for Biggin Hill in Kent, about twenty miles from my home, so ignoring the advice of the "old sweats".

We had to wait nearly twenty four hours for our leave, travel warrants and posting orders, by that time I had resigned myself to being posted to Newcastle or some other foreign place. Surprise surprise, I was posted to Biggin Hill against all the forecasts of the experts. I was to report to my new Station just before Xmas 1941, No.4 Squadron, flying spitfires. Although I was really looking forward to my first leave, I was excited at the prospect of working on Spitfires, which I had never seen at close quarters, I could hardly wait.

Our departure from the billet was a very sad and emotional time, Mrs Crabtree had become very attached to us and me in particular. That evening she cooked us a special dinner, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding with all the trimmings and a special fruit pudding for sweet, followed by some of her home made wine that she kept special. Where all the food came from we did not know, since food rationing had been in force for sometime, we had a bit of a singsong and off to pack our kit for the morning departure.

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Next morning Mrs Crabtree gave us, a good breakfast after which we were told to behave ourselves and take good care and keep in touch. Then came the tears as we left, Mrs Crabtree was very upset and this of course affected her husband, it was a time none of us would forget.

Biggin Hill in Kent

I arrived at Biggin Hill, the Airfield and camp were pre-war construction, very well built and equipped, comfortable brick built accommodation. I was detailed to "A Flight", next morning I was on early shift, start at 0400 hrs, this soon proved to be the normal time for work (with few exceptions) preparing aircraft for early morning sorties. I was soon into the swing of things and it became a routine, which I quite frankly enjoyed.

In the NAAFI one afternoon I first met Charlotte, She recognised me from our earlier years at Deptford, where we were both born. I had no idea at that time, that this meeting would later change my life forever, that we would be married and spend the rest of our lives together. I owe a great deal to my choice of Station when leaving Blackpool, somebody must have been looking out for me.

My time at Biggin Hill was in fact very short. While I was walking around the perimeter track one morning, on my way to the Aircraft dispersal area. I was stopped by a Flight Sergeant, he ask me where I lived, being honest, I said in London, with obvious satisfaction he said *you* are posted to Manston in Kent, get your kit packed for departure tomorrow. So my stay at Biggin Hill, although it was very short and exciting, only some six to seven weeks, was to affect my life from then onwards.

Manston in Kent

I travelled by train to Manston, sometime mid Feb 42, arrived at Margate Station with about thirty other ground crew from various parts of the country. We were met by a Sergeant, who informed us we would have to march to Manston Camp, no transport was available, since we were wearing full kit and carrying a kit bag etc, this news did not go down well. It was about four to five miles to Manston, we set off at a fair pace but soon slowed down to normal speed, urged on of course by the sergeant who had nothing to carry and was quite enjoying the walk and our discomfort.

On arrival, we were billeted in a beautiful old building, which had apparently previously been an orphanage, it was in a nice setting about a half mile from the airfield. However, we had little time to enjoy the scenery, I was soon at work on 32 Squadron Hurricanes, the maintenance was very similar to Spitfires, however, the repairs were quite different, since Hurricanes were partly fabric covered. Among the various repair jobs, I now found myself "stitching" fabric patches over various holes in the body-work etc and painting the patches with dope. A solvent which tightened the fabric and made the repair strong and durable, since these repairs were carried out in the open, in winter, they did become very tedious indeed, in time it all became just part of the job.

We settled in to the routine until sometime later, a German landing craft was washed ashore on the

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beach adjacent to the airfield, which in fact extended right to the sea shore in places at that time. This caused great excitement and activity, first about thirty ground crew, including me, were sent off to Sandwich a near by army camp for instruction on the firing of various machine guns. I drew the Vickers water-cooled heavy MG to start. An army sergeant who had survived Dunkirk was our instructor, a very intelligent and experienced soldier, he taught us all we needed to know to maintain and operate the gun, we had a great deal of practice on the firing range and became quite proficient. We then moved on to Browning twin MG's, fired from the shoulder on a fixed stand. It was an intense ten-day course, we were taught a great deal about MG's and the instructors enlightened us as to what we could expect from the other side. We were all very young and completely confident that we could handle any situation, with the MG's, now, with hindsight, I thank my lucky stars we were not put to the test.

On our return to our Squadron, things went from bad to worse, we worked on the aircraft during the day, had a meal, then reported to the various machine gun positions, that had been prepared for us overlooking the sea front. We stood on alert two hours on and two off practically all night, waiting for the expected invasion, at day break off we went to work on the aircraft, we were snatching forty winks in all manner of places, but mainly the cockpits of aircraft we had repaired. This situation went on for some time, interspersed on occasions during the day, by being drafted to areas where we had to dig trenches and make barbed wire entanglements, What a life!

During this hectic period of invasion fever, I had two accidents. The first occurred in a dugout on a hill top overlooking the sea shore, I was getting the stove going for some hot drinks. While blowing through the bottom opening, there was a sudden down draft, which blew hot sparks into my eyes, off I was sent to sick quarters, my eyes irrigated and some yellow ointment applied and my eyes bandaged. I was excused duty and given an airman to lead me around camp, after the first day I found on shifting the bandage, I could see reasonably well. I postponed telling anyone for two more days, but then my conscience pricked me, I returned to the sick bay and of course was returned to duty immediately.

The second accident that was while digging a trench with another fellow, we were rushing the job in an effort to finish early, remember that we had been working most of the day repairing aircraft. Anyway we both swung full spades full of earth up to the parapet of the trench at the same time, his spade caught the handle of mine, slid down the shaft and embedded itself into my fingers, one of which was badly torn and bleeding profusely. Off I went to the sick bay for attention, I had a few stitches in the finger, arm in a sling and excused duty for forty eight hours. I was tempted to have a good rest, however, everybody was working so hard and for such long hours at that time, so I went back to the Squadron dispersal and did whatever I could to help. This of course was mainly bringing tea and buns from the Salvation Army, since a one armed mechanic is really not much use, anyway the lads enjoyed the refreshment service and a good laugh at my expense.

Work continued at Manston for some time, long hours of duty working on the aircraft, standing guard at night, very few days off, waiting for the invasion that fortunately never came. On the plus side was the fact that the summer of 1942 was particularly good, we enjoyed lots of fruit from local farms, cherries, apples etc. On rare occasions when off duty, we visited some of the farms nearby, we were

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very well received and given a good insight into farm life and farm food, in fact our relationship with local farmers, in general, was very good indeed.

During my last week at Manston, one of the general duty airmen on site, saw a rabbit dive into a hole just outside the tin shed that served as our dope and paint store. He decides to smoke the rabbit out, so he stuffed paper and dried grass into the hole and set it alight, waiting of course, for the rabbit to appear out of some other hole. Unfortunately, the flames went into the hole that came to the surface just inside the dope store, this ignited some dope that had been spilt on the floor of the store, and it was not long before a fair sized fire was going. Pandemonium broke loose for a few minutes, while the keys to the store were found. Our Flight Sergeant, cool as a cucumber had us all organised, all the paint and materials that could be reached was carried from the store and away to safety, foam fire extinguishers were brought and the fire extinguished.

A fair amount of damage was done and our young GD Airman was in a state of shock, this was potentially a very serious matter, however, our F/Sergeant gave him a very serious shellacking and a great deal of extra duties for him to remember. We all got cracking and cleared up the dope store gave it a lick of paint so that when the Flight Lieutenant arrived, we were complimented by him for our efforts to smarten up the place. Thankfully he was unaware of the fire. Life was never dull at Manston and I could relate many happy as well as sad incidents.

Sometime in Aug 42 I was offered the chance of a Fitter 11 A course with promotion to Leading Aircraftsman (LAC), if I passed the exam: I accepted the offer and later was posted to Cosford in Salop. I left behind some very good friends at Manston, in particular, Sam a Jewish engine mechanic, no one could ask for a better friend, we did not know when we said our farewells that our paths would never cross again.

The Fitter 11 A Course, Cosford

This Fitter 11 A course was very similar to the mechanics course at Blackpool, but obviously, much more detailed and technically advanced. The course was to last sixteen weeks, the same high pressure with checks and tests at frequent intervals, we however, had quite a lot of practical experience this time, so it was not all a mystery as before. I must say I was very pleased when the course came to an end, mainly because I missed the work on the actual Aircraft under operational conditions. Once again the instructors were of a very high quality, but I could hardly wait to get back to an airfield and an operational Squadron, however, this was not to happen.

We took our examinations some time in Dec 42, I passed comfortably and after seven days leave I was posted to Henlow a Maintenance Unit and reported there later that month.

No.3 Wing, Henlow

I arrived at this very large Camp, which was more like a huge factory complex, the personnel were split into three shifts, so work continued 24 hours a day, except Sundays just like a factory except we

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marched to work and marched back again. The senior staff were mostly regular air force personnel, very well trained technically. The work was quite interesting, two other fitters and myself had the task of dismantling several Tempest fighter aircraft, which had been withdrawn from service for some reason or other. The dismantling to be done so that all the parts could be re-used. I had never unscrewed so many nuts and bolts in all my life, all the parts were laboriously collected by general duty airmen and sorted into size and type etc. Each aircraft took us several days to dismantle, since the space inside the aircraft was very limited, only one person at the time could work inside, the other two on the outside. When we finished each aircraft, all that was left was the bare airframe tubes, each of us learnt a great deal about aircraft construction, all good experience for the future.

Since Henlow was reasonably close to London, I was able to get home on quite a few weekends, although, going home was not in every respect a pleasant experience. The bombing of London was well underway, the civilian population had a lot to contend with, not only the nightly bombing but the food rationing. Some were directed to war work and sent to all manner of factories etc. For service personnel food and clothing was not something we had to worry about.

My time at Henlow was really quite uneventful, with the exception of a flu epidemic, which effected hundreds of people, including a great number of air force personnel at the station, I was one.

I reported sick and was sent immediately to Henlow General Hospital, with a coach load of other airmen, we were confined to bed, the Flu was a very unpleasant experience, the Hospital was overcrowded, staff were at full stretch constantly. Some of the patients who were able, were asked to help with serving meals, washing up, fetching bottles etc, even helping with bed making, however, the patients with Flu were strictly confined to bed by the Doctors. In any case, most of us were really very poorly, the patients helping the staff, were mainly those who already had received minor surgery, in respect of accidental injuries.

After a few days the flu subsided, I was discharged from hospital and soon back at work at the factory, fortunately, the chance for me to transfer to aircrew duty came in the form of a notice on DRO's asking for volunteers for training as Flight Engineers. I jumped at the chance and put my name forward instantly, I expected to be called in a few days but this was not to happen. In the forces progress grinds away very slowly.

Some time in Mar 43, I was posted from Henlow to Lindholme in Yorkshire. How pleased I was to get away from the factory type work and back on to an operational Squadron.

Lindholme in Yorkshire

I reported to the orderly office, they were taking my particulars when I walked another LAC, I could hardly believe my eyes, it was a very good friend of mine, who I had last seen at Biggin Hill. What a coincidence. He had also just passed a Fitter 11 A course at Cosford, we reported to the Squadron office and were attached to the same Flight, and this was a Wellington Bomber squadron, with mostly

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Canadian Crews. We soon found ourselves working together on the more badly damaged Wimpy's, that we saw could sustain an enormous amount of damage and still fly back to base.

Lindholme was a very comfortable station, not far from Doncaster, where, there were all the facilities one would need to relax after duty. A very well equipped NAAFI with all manners of indoors sports, films, meals and quiet rooms *for* writing or reading. They even supplied the paper and envelopes and the books to read. Also an excellent Salvation Army Hostel, where one could get a nice clean bed *for* the night, if you managed to miss the last bus.

My friend Wilf and I, carried out many Aircraft repairs on the airfield, just to mention a few, we had a Wimpy with the leading edge of its tail fin missing and its tail plane badly damaged. Also many minor holes over most of the rear fuselage, the Canadian aircrew pressed us constantly to get the aircraft serviceable, they certainly had enormous pride and faith in that old Wimpy, that feeling for a particular aircraft, I was later to understand more readily.

The work took us three or four days, working from dawn till dusk, when we finished the old Wimpy looked as good as new. To be frank, we were very pleased and quite proud of our efforts. Another job was to fit a new wing to an aircraft that had been badly shot up, fortunately, their landing had gone reasonably well, but the port wing was beyond repair, a few days later, with lots of help, we had the aircraft as good as new.

Another aircraft made an emergency landing at Snaith, another airfield a few miles away, Wilf and I were detailed to assist the engine fitters to fit a new propeller to that aircraft. We had a large truck detailed to us, loaded the prop: flat on the truck, the blades of the prop: overhung the side of the truck by about a foot on the off side. We set off for Snaith, while going through a village, a local bobby saw us coming and decided to give us right of way by holding up some farm vehicles which were about to cross our path. He was so engrossed in this task that he did not notice the prop: blades overhanging the side of the truck, he missed being beheaded by a whisker and was blissfully unaware of how near he came to meeting his maker.

In June 43 came the order for me to report to Cosford medical centre for an aircrew medical examination. I knew Cosford very well, so on the day I was early at the Centre with about twenty other volunteers. The medical was quite thorough, but nothing we had not already experienced, except for having to take a deep breath and hold mercury at a certain level up a glass tube. I can't remember how long but it seemed like hours, I passed all right and was sent back to my unit.

It was something of an anti-climax arriving back at Lindholme, with still no definite date for aircrew training, I really should by now have known better than to expect otherwise, so I resigned myself to a further waiting period.

We carried on repairing, what seemed like an endless number of damaged Wimpy's, with an occasional break, doing perimeter guard on the Airfield, well it was different anyway. Then, I was posted for some reason to Warmwell in Dorset, so it was cheerio once again to my friend Wilf, we never met again, I wonder how he finished his air force career, his father was a scrap metal dealer, perhaps he carried on the business eventually, who knows.

Warmwell, Dorset

I travelled by train to Dorchester, transport was waiting to take me and several other airmen to the airfield at Warmwell. This was the first time I had ever been to the West Country, Warmwell was a very unusual airfield, it was spread over a very large area. The sleeping quarters were a long way from the ablutions and the Mess Hall, I soon discovered that a bicycle was an absolute necessity to get around the place. These were in very short supply, somehow I was lucky and was issued with a "twenty eight inch wheel" upright bicycle, no lights, no mudguards and just a front wheel brake, and still it was a very good runner.

The ablutions were so far away that most of us washed, shaved and at times even bathed in a little stream just behind the sleeping quarters (Nissen Huts). It was really cold at times but we soon became hardened to the conditions, it certainly got us on the move in a morning.

The airfield only had a few Lysander aircraft on station, these were used for towing a target drogue, to enable fighter Aircraft to practice gunnery. I did get a few trips in the rear seat, letting out the target drogue, it was quite exciting at the time, I don't think I would be quite so keen now. I never ever saw any of the fighters hit the drogue, however, they never hit us so they could not have been all that bad?

Life at Warmwell was dreary in comparison with the operational Squadrons I had been on. Some time later in the year I overslept one morning, had to rush to the Mess Hall for breakfast, in doing so I overlooked reading DRO's. My luck was out, for on that very day, I was detailed for guard duty. I didn't find out until the following morning, at which time my name was being called on the Tannoy system to report to the orderly room, I reported and was given a lecture on discipline and for good measure seven days jankers in the cookhouse. I reported to the sergeant in charge and was promptly given a job in the "tin room". I soon discovered that all the greasy tins used for cooking, were passed to the tin room for washing, no Persil or washing up liquid, just a knob or two of soda, I was up to my elbows in grease most of the time. All for oversleeping a few minutes, well that's how I saw it at the time.

However, the job had its rewards, the WAAF's in the cookhouse, in the main were very sympathetic, after the first day, they said I was cleaning the tins much better than previous janker inmates had done for a some time. I could well understand why, anyway, they supplied me with endless mugs of tea, whole Swiss rolls and my meals each day had to be seen to be believed, I really began to enjoy my stay at the cookhouse.

On my fourth day of jankers, I was working away at the tins as usual, the sinks were under a large window, suddenly my friend John's face appeared at the window. He ask me had I read DRO's that morning, I had not, thinking that while I was on jankers, I would not receive other jobs. He then told me that I was ordered on DRO's to pack my kit immediately, report to the orderly room and collect my travel warrant and posting instructions. I had been posted to St.John's Wood in London, for preliminary Aircrew intake preparations.

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I was delighted, also it was with enthusiasm that I reported the fact to the cookhouse sergeant, who of course, immediately phoned the orderly room to check my story, before he released me, I was glad to leave, but as jankers go, the cookhouse wasn't so bad, in spite of all the greasy tins.

It was just after Christmas 1943, I had a weekend pass to go home, after which I was to report to St.John's Wood, on the following Monday morning.

St John's Wood, London

When I arrived at St John's Wood, I was amazed to find we were billeted in what had been a block of luxury flats, of course, everything that could be removed, had been removed, all that was left for us, were the bare walls and floors, even so, it was quite a fancy address and very warm and comfortable. We slept eight to a room, each had the usual issue locker, and of course DRO's were posted in every corridor, on every floor.

After unpacking and getting settled in, we were called on parade and spent the rest of the day with the medical staff. First a blood sample was taken and then our pay books examined, to see whether the list of inoculations and vaccinations, tallied with the records they had received from HQ. We were then told that the next day, we would receive all the jabs necessary to bring us up to standard, after which we would be allowed twenty four hours excused duty, that sounded ominous, we then had the rest of the evening to ourselves.

The following day we were on parade at eight thirty at the medical centre, which was just another small block of flats, which had been requisitioned for the purpose. The arrangement for the Jabs was typical military organisation, we entered a very long corridor, with small rooms off each side at regular intervals, at each door stood a person in a white coat, some male some female. About thirty or forty of us were fed through the corridor, sleeves rolled up, as we passed each door, we were obliged to give our name and number and produce our pay books. At some doors we received an injection at others a vaccination, I received two jabs and a vaccination, this apparently brought me up to date.

The following day was quite unpleasant, sickness, headache and general malaise, however, after a good sleep that night, most of us felt better except for sore arms, so that period passed off quite well. Later some of us were fitted with new uniforms, shirts etc, working on aircraft repair and maintenance, out in all weathers, did have a rumpled well-worn effect on our clothing. There were plenty of jokes about the new clothing, for example. If *you* are shot down, the RAF does not want the Germans to think we are a scruffy demoralised lot, or short of clothing, even worse, if *you* are killed, they prefer *you* to be laid out neatly in nice uniforms. An extremely happy lots these Aircrew volunteers. We only stayed at St.John's Wood for five days, and then we were packed off to St.Athens in Glamorgan, about twenty miles west of Cardiff, where our Flight Engineer Course would begin.

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St Athens, Glamorgan

We arrived by train at St.Athens early Jan 44, this was a nice neat camp with the usual Aircraft hangers, sectioned off into classes for the actual course, which was to last eighteen weeks. We were arranged, ten to a class. The instructors were all RAF personnel, the course began immediately, I must say it was to be the most interesting period of my service in the RAF so far.

Having been through the Airframe mechanics course and the Fitter 11 A course, the initial training came relatively easy for me, since it covered much of the ground contained in the previous courses. The only difference being, we spent much more time on how to operate the equipment, and of course, how to carry out emergency repairs in flight. We were instructed in great detail, the layout of the Hydraulic and electrical systems and in particular the Fuel system, most of these systems, I already had acquired a fair working knowledge, nevertheless, the different aspect we covered was very interesting.

We eventually came to the operating controls of the Aircraft, and also a crash course on the mysteries of the engines. We covered both Rolls Royce Merlin's and several types of Radial engines. I must say I found the engine instruction very hard going, but with some help from a couple of engine fitters on the course, I managed in the end to get by quite comfortably. I believe that even after all the years that have passed, I would be able to find my way around a Lancaster or Stirling Aircraft, that is how well the instructors managed to drill the essential procedures into our minds. In fact it never ceases to amaze me, how they contrived to turn clerks and all manner of unskilled people, into mechanics and in some cases Flight Engineers, and I must say that in the main, most were to become very efficient and effective at the work allocated to them. For myself, I will only say that of the Flight Engineers tasks and duties, I was very soon handling efficiently and with every confidence, those instructors on the various courses did an excellent job for us and the RAF.

We came to the end of the course, it had been hard work, studying in the evening, lot of tests along the way. A few did not make the grade, including one of my friends, we had all tried hard to push him along, but it was not to be. I passed the final examination together with another friend of mine, Joe Hands, we had worked hard together on the course, had a few laughs along the way. He had been a "Bevin Boy" working in the coal mines before he joined the RAF, being from such different backgrounds and having had such different jobs. We had got along marvellously and found in fact, that we had a lot in common.

In early June 44 we received our coveted Flight Engineers half wing and were of course made up to Sergeant, surely a day for celebration, we also received fourteen well earned days leave, at the end of which, I was to report to RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire.

Swinderby, Lincolnshire

I reported to Swinderby, June 44, this Airfield was an HCU (Heavy Conversion Unit) No.1660, this unit was to enable pilots in particular, and other members of the crew to familiarise themselves with four

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engine aircraft. In our case Stirling's and Lancaster's, most pilots and crews at this point had flown only twin engine Aircraft, which did not need the services of a Flight Engineer, I was to join the crew a little later.

A full crew for four engine aircraft was, Pilot, Flight Engineer, Navigator, Wireless Operator, Bomb Aimer and two Air gunners (A rear gunner and mid upper gunner). At first we were obliged to fly with various instructors so as to absorb all the pre-flight checks, control of the aircraft, and to practice all the procedures we had been taught.

My first flight in a Stirling took place all most immediately. It was a two hour familiarisation exercise. We flew a dual control Aircraft, the pilot had a instructor with him and I was being instructed by a experienced engineer, he had already completed two tours of operations, before becoming an instructor. Apart from some slight difficulty with my ears at altitude, I did not experience any trouble with the flight the instructor was excellent and soon had me licked into shape.

Over the next four days, I flew four different exercises as "engineer under instruction" with two different pilots, then on the 2nd July. I graduated to second engineer and flew a further eight exercises, with yet another two different pilots. The second engineer on Stirling's sits half way down the fuselage of the Aircraft, where a panel was situated with various dials and switches relevant to the fuel system etc. The first engineer sits next to the pilot in the dual control seat, I mention this fact since it is relevant to one of the exercises out of the eight.

Six out of the eight exercises went without incident, the fourth trip we had a tyre which caused some difficulties on take off. We landed away from base at Scrubby, a near by Airfield, where the tyre was changed and we flew back to base, not very exciting but it broke the routine.

On the third exercise, however, I was sitting peacefully at my post down the fuselage, on taking a look out of an adjacent window, I noticed some smoke drifting by, took a closer look and saw that the starboard inner engine was smoking badly. While I was watching, the smoke seemed to get far worse, I reported the matter to the Pilot and suggested the engine should be switched off and the propeller feathered. He decided to send the first engineer down to my position to take a look, he arrived and looked out where I indicated, by now the smoke was really bad. I have never seen anyone move so fast up the fuselage to the cockpit, the engine was immediately switched off and feathered, fortunately for us it did not catch fire. On landing the engine was inspected, the fault was that one of the Lower cylinders in the radial had blown the cylinder head off, I was particularly pleased to have spotted the trouble and suggested the correct action that had to be taken.

A few days later, I was sitting on my bed writing a letter home, when in walked two air gunners, they asked if my name was Leith and had I crewed up with anyone, I said no and they ask me to come and meet P/O Mouritz an Australian, who needed a Flight Engineer to complete his crew.

I went with them, met Mouritz and crew, decided on the spot that they suited me fine. I was never to regret that decision, so, the crew was, Pilot Frank Mouritz, Navigator Laurie Cooper, Bomb Aimer

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Peter Smith, Wireless Operator Dave Blomfield (another Australian), Rear Gunner Dennis Cluett, Mid-Upper Gunner Arthur Bass and of course myself Jim Leith Flight Engineer. We were an odd mixture, from completely different backgrounds, however, we all got on very well together, all that remained was to see how we blended together and reacted under the pressures of operational flying conditions.

We continued with our familiarisation flying exercises, except that we were now flying as a crew, with myself as 1st Engineer. It was a most enjoyable time, we went through all the various flying exercises, practice landings, circuit and bumps, high level bombing, corkscrews (the standard evasive manoeuvre if attacked), x-country flying with radar, etc".

This continued into early August 44, at which time I had flown just over 60 hours, 35 night flying and 25 day light flying, out of which we had now flown together as a crew between 11 and 12 hours. This was now the end of our course at Swinderby. We had all been checked out in one way or another, as a crew we, had blended well together, in particular, Frank the Pilot and I, were now working well together as a team.

We now went on leave and in early Sept 44, we moved to Syerston nr. Nottingham to continue our training.

Syerston, near Nottingham

From now on at Syerston (No.5 LFS) we would be flying Lancaster's for the first time, the course lasted only 15 days. We flew 7 different exercises, on 4 occasions with an instructor, mainly for the Pilots. We did the usual circuits, steep turns, 3 engine overshoots, more corkscrews, night circuits and 3 engine landings, in all we flew 11.45 hours, 7+ day and 4+ night flying. All went very well and we as a crew became more and more confident and capable. Frank took easily to flying Lancaster's, and apart from the odd heavy landing, appeared always to have everything under control, I felt confident and capable handling my job in Lancaster's, also I felt comfortable and at ease with the other members of the crew. We were going through our routine pre-flight checks now with ease and assurance, I had noticed that a certain calmness came over me, as soon as I buckled on my parachute harness and drew my parachute from the store. This made the training flights very enjoyable, I began to hope that the same would happen when we began operational flying.

The course came to an end on the 24th Sept.44, and we heard we were to be posted to 61 Squadron based at Skellingthorpe in Lincolnshire.

Skellingthorpe, Lincolnshire (61 Squadron)

We arrived at Skellingthorpe roughly the 26th Sept.44, I thought and I expect the other members of the crew were the same, that we would be on operations immediately, we were wrong. We continued with more training, High level bombing, x-country flying, fighter affiliation and Air Sea firing practice. This last exercise was to prove interesting, we dropped smoke floats into the sea as targets and the gunners had some real practice, Frank sent me to the front gun turret to have a go and see how it felt. After blazing away for a while, one of the crew noticed one of our warships in the vicinity, it seemed to be

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taking evasive action, was I that bad I ask myself. The ship flashed a message on an aldis lamp, but we were not quick enough to read it, Dave our wireless operator sent back a short message, I hope it was "Bon Voyage" but I am not sure.

On the 5th Oct 44 we were to prepare for our first operational mission, on that day a sort of calm excitement pervaded the crew. The operation, of all things, was to be a daylight attack on the naval base at Wilhelmshaven, we all assembled in the briefing room, this being our first operational briefing, and we were intent on absorbing every word. We received details of the target, the defences or opposition we were likely to encounter and of course the weather man's guess as to what the weather over the target should be, also that we were to be escorted to the target by fighter aircraft.

After the main briefing we reported to our respective sections, to be given the finer briefing details. In my case, by the Engineer Leader, we were told the total fuel we would be carrying and advised on what would be the most economical engine and rev settings, for the height we would be flying. We also each received a very basic tool kit, with which we were expected to cope with any emergencies.

The briefing over, we drew our parachute and harness and waited for the crew bus to take us out to the dispersal area, where the aircraft allocated to us for this operation, "B" for Baker, was waiting.

All was very quiet during the ride out to the aircraft, I was very lucky, since as I previously mentioned, as soon as I buckled on my parachute harness, I again felt completely calm and quite confident in myself and all our crew. I am glad to say that feeling was to stay with me all through our operational tour.

On arrival at the aircraft, Frank and I did the necessary checks on the outside, all being well, it was all aboard and make our way through the fuselage to our places. Checking various pieces of equipment on the way, each dealing with their own particular responsibilities. All pre-flight checks complete, we signalled to the ground crew, indicating each engine in turn, we required starting. With all engines started, they were each checked and given a good run, we were then ready to taxi round the perimeter track to await our turn for take off. All off duty personnel on the base were expected to be at take off point, to see us off, a very nice thought on somebody's part. We get the green light and we are off down the runway, our first time with a full bomb load, these were very exciting moments.

Frank and I are busy with the take-off, Frank would use the throttle controls until the aircraft was travelling straight down the runway, when satisfied, he would ask for full power. I would take over the throttle controls, open completely for full power and lock the throttles in that position, until we were safely airborne.

While all this was taking place, Laurie the Navigator's voice could be heard calling the airspeed on the intercom until we were safely airborne. I cannot fully express in words the feeling of exhilaration, relief and some satisfaction that our first operational take-off had gone so smoothly.

We arrived at the designated area, where we were to form into a loose formation, Lancaster's were not

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designed for close formation flying, from this point we set off for Wilhelmshaven. We met a fair amount of anti-aircraft fire near the target, but did not see any enemy fighters, neither did we see the escort fighters, that were supposed to be accompanying us. I suspect that they were some where around, we would have felt safer had we seen one or two or known for sure they were there.

Soon we were approaching the target, quite a lot of flak ahead of us, one wondered how they could be missing us. However, we passed through the target area with Peter the Bomb Aimer giving the Pilot some small directional corrections, to bring the target into the bombsight-aiming slide. After a minute or two, which seemed very much longer than it really was, away went the bomb load, I checked the bomb bay, to see that all bombs had gone, no "hang ups", reported to the Pilot and received the order to close bomb-doors.

I did not see where our particular bombs landed, however, I had briefly seen the target area as we approached and saw many bombs exploding in that general area. I must say that it did give me personally a great deal of satisfaction. Certainly no feeling of regret for the people below, reaping an harvest, as it were, for all the seeds of destruction that their political Masters had directed on our country and people, also all the immediate neighbours of Germany in Europe.

We returned to base without incident, the whole operation that was five and three quarter hours flying time. On this occasion, in terms of nervous tension, the briefing time and waiting for the actual take off, was more of a strain than the actual operation. During which time we had many tasks to perform to keep our minds off the obvious danger, however, as a crew we were elated at the manner in which we performed and carried out our first operation.

After the de-briefing, at which time we were obliged to report to an intelligence officer, any incidents that occurred or anything unusual we observed, after which we were off duty. It took some time before normal routine took over again and we settled down to await our next operation, probably with more confidence.

We did not have to wait long, we were summoned for duty the very next afternoon for a night operation on Bremen, from then the 6th Oct to the 11 Nov we flew a further five night and two day-light operations.

The Bremen operation, being our first Night operation, was of course the one which we will probably remember most of all. It was not the worst one we would have to endure, it was however, our introduction to the quite horrific sight of the approaching target at night. The Target Area seemingly filled with exploding shells, searchlight beams, the flashes from bombs exploding on the ground, red tracer shells coming in endless streams and the bright green target markers burning on the ground.

Other Lancaster bombers suddenly and briefly appearing in the bright flashes, how would we get through this maelstrom of fire and explosions. At first it did not seem possible, however, as we flew closer, the gaps between the exploding shells and tracer became larger, we were through, it had taken

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five or six minutes to pass through, it again seemed much longer. Fortunately, we all had various tasks to perform as well as keeping a wary eye open for night fighters, this kept our minds off the obvious, I believe we were all very relieved to see our home base that first night.

On our return from ops: we were always well received at the mess, plenty of corn flakes and tins of carnation milk, eggs and bacon etc, lots of tea and plenty to talk about, it all relieved the tension. Then off to bed, it sometimes took quite a while before the noise of the four Merlin engines on the Lancaster, finally quietened down and left your ears.

On the 16th Nov 44 we were ordered to report for another day light operation, which at the briefing we were told we would be attacking Duren a small town, just East of the Rhine, this operation had been requested by the Army who were advancing in that direction.

I mention this operation in particular, since in spite of heavy anti-aircraft fire, the attack was carried out in textbook fashion. On our approach to the target, which was clearly marked with the usual green marker flares, dropped in place by the pathfinder Aircraft. We could hear the Master Bomber, who was obviously flying very low down over the target, giving instructions as the Lancaster's were arriving at the target area. Aim to the left and then later to the right of the green target markers and continued with such instructions until virtually the whole target area had been bombed. Photos taken later were to show the horrific destruction inflicted on the whole area. What a terrible price Germany was paying for their aggressive policies. We heard later that the army even had difficulty getting through the area. I do not know whether this information was true, but I do know that the devastation was truly terrible.

We arrived back at base without mishap, nine operations now completed safely. We carried out a further two operations in Nov 44, the first to Dortmund Ems Canal, which was to be the first of three visits we were destined to make to that target. The last operation in Nov was to Munich, a round trip of 9 hours fifty five minutes, and the longest we had made so far. It is worth mentioning that we went to Munich via the Swiss Alps. It was a beautiful moonlight night while over the Alps, the ice on the mountains was glistening and sparkling, wonderful fairy tales sight. Switzerland being neutral we saw a few villages with their lights shining bright, a great sight since we had been subjected to the black-out for some years now, it reminded me of peaceful times past and possibly some to come in the future.

During Dec 44 we carried out a further three operations, the first was Politz, an oil target on the German/Polish border, the next to Gdynia well into Poland and the third to Houffalize in Belgium. The trip to Munich was a very difficult one, especially for our Navigator. Since the electronic navigation equipment failed, our Navigator was obliged to plot our course to and from the target by "Dead Reckoning" navigation. Since the round trip was just short of ten hours flying, this was a significant achievement, especially since we not only arrived at the target but we arrived at the correct time.

During the flight and being aware of the Navigator's difficulty, from time to time, I looked into his tiny curtained area to see how he was coping, not that I could have helped in any way with the Navigation. Every time, all I saw was Laurie hard at work with his slide rule etc (no calculators in those days)

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doggedly sticking to his task. It must be remembered that to get off course and be flying alone, would have greatly reduced our chances of survival, luckily for us he did an excellent job. We encountered only the usual mass of anti- aircraft fire, to which we had now become accustomed. The only other threatening enemy activity, was the blue radar controlled searchlights, if caught in a cone of these beams, it would not be long before very heavy and accurate radar controlled anti- aircraft fire would follow. Another very good reasons not to fly off course, alone, presenting an easy target.

The New Year 1945

The new year arrived, we had now completed fourteen operations, I suppose we could be excused for considering ourselves Veterans, in the light of the fact that so many crews never ever reach that number, we could at least feel thankful and very fortunate.

During Jan 45 we completed another five operations, between the first of Jan (no let up for the New Year) and the 13th Jan. We visited the Mittelland Canal, Royan in the Bay of Biscay, South of France, (unfortunately not for holiday purposes), and second trip to Houffalize in Belgium, not far from the Luxembourg Border. A Second trip to Munich, and a second trip to Politz. An Oil target near Stettin on the Polish border. This was a ten and half-hour trip and very nearly our final trip and could have been our last night on earth.

The route took us out over the North Sea (a most forbidding sight in winter) into the Baltic, touching on Sweden and into Germany and on to the Polish border. We arrived at the target on time, had a good bombing run, the usual heavy flak, searchlights etc out through the target area. On our way home we were attacked from below by a JU 88 night fighter, with an upward firing cannon, fortunately, our mid-upper gunner spotted the Aircraft flying below us and shouted for the pilot to corkscrew starboard (this is the standard evasive action we had practised during training). We had just started the corkscrew, which begins with a violent banking turn, when the JU 88 opened fire, we were hit several times with cannon shells along the starboard wing, some considerable damage was inflicted on our old "M" for Mickey.

Had the Corkscrew started a few seconds later, the pilot and myself, the navigator and bomb aimer, all being in the cockpit area of the aircraft, adjacent to the wing which received the cannon shell hits, would probably not be here today. The rest of the crew would at best, have been in serious difficulty and probably worse.

The immediate effect of the exploding shells was that some of the internal lights in the aircraft came on, we were lit up like a Xmas tree. Fortunately, our mid-upper gunner, whose turret virtually hung from the roof of the aircraft in the area of the main fuse box, took a kick at the fuse box and all the lights were extinguished. While this was happening, both gunners were firing back, the mid-upper gunner spraying tracer bullets all over the sky around us, the rear- gunner, however, was more accurate and scored hits on the JU 88. He dived away from us, fortunately we never saw him again.

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A short while after the attack, the gunners reported seeing what they thought was petrol coming from the damaged wing. I had in fact been expecting trouble from this quarter and had been watching the fuel gauges, for any sign of a drop in fuel level, also I had switched off the electric pumps in that wing in case of a leak. After a few more minutes it became clear that we had a leak from the centre of the three petrol tanks in that wing. So would we have enough fuel to get us home? The Pilot and I decided to run all four engines from the damaged wing tanks, so as to use as much fuel as possible from those tanks, before the fuel drained away. This was achieved, by closing the fuel line on the opposite undamaged wing tanks, and running the engines from the damaged tank or tanks. This meant watching the fuel situation very carefully, I could not risk stalling all four engines, but had to get as much fuel as possible from the damaged tanks. It would certainly be a disaster to run out of fuel on the way home, especially as we had to cross the North Sea on the final very long leg to base.

I obtained from the Navigator his estimated flying time to base, and calculated that, taking into account the present rate we were losing fuel, we would make it back to base with a small margin.

However, that was not our only problem, it became apparent that our hydraulic system was not operating, I checked the hydraulic header tank and found it empty, obviously the hydraulic pipes must have been severed. This meant that the undercarriage could not be lowered hydraulically and also raised the question whether the undercarriage itself had been damaged, this really was a dilemma.

We had an emergency compressed air system that would lower the landing gear, if that was not also damaged, lowering the under-carriage would have given us the opportunity to check visually, if any damage was evident. The emergency air system unfortunately, could not be used to raise the under-carriage, so if the undercarriage was damaged badly, it would be preferable, to leave it in the retracted position and make a belly landing. The Pilot and I discussed the problem and we decided to wait until we were nearer home, then take a chance and lower the undercarriage and deal with whatever problem arose at that time.

During the time that the undercarriage difficulty was being given some thought, I was still watching carefully the petrol situation and ringing the changes on the various fuel tanks to get the most from the leaking tanks. Eventually, we arrived at instrument readings, coupled with my own gut feeling, that the starboard tanks were all but empty, so I switched all engines to the port tanks, from further rough calculations I was reasonably confident, with my fingers crossed, that we would make it back to base.

As we crossed the English coast, we decided to use the emergency air system and lower the under-carriage, the undercarriage dropped down and the port wheel locked into position. The starboard wheel however, was down and appeared at first sight to seem OK, but the indicator warning light did not confirm that it was locked into position. On closer examination of as much of the wheel I could see from the cockpit and later from the astrodome, I could not make out whether the tyre was intact or not.

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Lincoln Imp Squadron Badge

I made several more attempts at examining the wheel, I used the aldis lamp to get some light on the tyre, I then came to the conclusion that the tyre and we must assume the undercarriage also had been seriously damaged in the attack. Probably it would not sustain a normal landing. After discussing the matter with the pilot, he decided we would report the matter and try for a normal landing. On our arrival at base, the pilot advised the control tower of the situation, after a few minutes we were told to land but on the grass not the runway. I suspect they thought we might make a mess on the runway, what a very kind thought and a wise one as it turned out.

We made our approach and Frank the Pilot put old "Mickey" down very gently, he held her on one wheel for a short while, then the damaged undercarriage ploughed into the grass. We went all over the place, tearing into the ground, grinding and tearing sounds that seemed to be coming from everywhere.

During this time I managed to switch off the engines, close the fuel cocks, after what seemed like a very long time, the aircraft came to a grinding halt. I waited a few seconds with my fingers on the fire extinguisher buttons for the engines, no sign of fire, so out we all jumped as fast as we could. It was pitch black outside, we had no idea where we had actually stopped on the airfield, nor could we see the actual extent of the damage to the aircraft, we just stood in a bunch waiting for somebody to come for us.

The first to arrive was the Station Commanding Officer in his car, he said, "very well done" transport is

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on its way. Transport arrived and off we went for our de-briefing and later some food and bed. In spite of everything I slept like a log that night, in the morning I thought how lucky we had been, also how good our training had proved to be, how well the crew had pulled together, relying on each other to do what ever was necessary.

This aircraft was our new M-Mike and was out of action for 6 weeks. The first aircraft that we had been allocated was M-Mike "Mickey the Moocher". We flew our first of five operations in Mickey before she was retired as being completely worn out after 130 operations.

After breakfast we all went out to see the extent of the damage to our Aircraft. It wasn't too bad, the starboard wing and under-carriage and all four propellers were a write off, plus a dozen or so other bits and pieces.

Also on Jan 1st.45 on an operation to Mittelland Canal, we had difficulty with an engine overheating, we seemed to manage quite well, nursing the engine along. Frank the Pilot decided that it was a reasonable excuse for a landing at the emergency Airfield at Manston, this airfield was equipped with gooseneck flares all the way along the very extensive runway. When these were alight they could be seen miles away, the landing was approved and we set down at Manston. I was quite pleased, since I had been stationed here during my early days as a mechanic. We stayed overnight, the next morning we saw a twin engine Aircraft take off without propellers, it turned out to be a Meteor, the first of the jets to come into service with the RAF, for us *it* was an incredible sight, very secret and hush-hush.

During February 1945 we managed another seven operations successfully, the majority of which were of long duration, these included another visit to Politz our third to this vital oil target, Rositz not far from Leipzig, well into the heart of Germany, Bohlen in approx: the same area. On the 14th Feb.45 we visited Dresden, this was a major operation, as we approached the target we could see already enormous fires burning below. The area was well protected with anti-aircraft fire and many night fighters were operating. The result of their efforts was seen by us on occasions, this was the only time I can remember that our Navigator ever came into the cockpit. The Pilot thought he should see the fires which really were massive, there was lots of flak coming up at us, the sight was truly horrendous, it really was like looking into "Hell" or as near to the impressions painted by some artists of their idea of that place.

I have been asked many times in later years, what I felt about that operation and whether it should have taken place. My reply is that at the time we went wherever we were sent, we were the operating tools not the strategic planning department. Had I personally been given a choice, I would still have said yes, if you were forced to fight a ruthless enemy, I believe you must adapt your response accordingly, no matter how strong your feelings of revulsion. I have absolutely no feeling of guilt or pity, I strongly believe that "What you sow you will eventually reap". Those who point to Dresden as a barbaric act, should take a good look at the whole picture starting at Sept 39 before seeking to pass judgement..

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

During the period of our Feb 45 operations, we had another very nasty incident, I cannot recall on which operation it occurred. After going through the target area, the bomb aimer had called "bombs away", we found that we had a four thousand pound block buster still hanging in the bomb bay, what a nasty surprise. The bomb aimer made several attempts at releasing the brute, without success. I believe we all felt a little uncomfortable, to say the least, nobody in their right mind would want to sit on a block buster for a second longer than necessary. To make matters worse we had the bomb doors open during this time, in case the bomb decided to fall off, which made the temperature in the aircraft very cold indeed. We made quite a few steep dives, pulling out abruptly, hoping the resultant "G" force would cause the bomb to release. As time went on, the prospect of having to land with the bomb still attached, with the possibility that the jolt of landing would cause it to dislodge, became a possible reality, to be avoided at practically any cost.

With the Pilots consent, I went down the fuselage and eventually located the inspection plate, covering the electrical bomb release mechanism for that bomb. I pushed and levered everything I could see and something's that I could not see, in an effort to release the brute, all was to no avail, and the possibility of landing with the bomb on board was now looming large in our minds.

The Pilot decided to have another try at using "G" force, as previously mentioned, to release the bomb, so we tried and tried again. Suddenly away it went, by this time we had lost considerable height, these block busters generate enormous blast and should not be released at less than four thousand feet. We were on the borderline and started to climb at full power, the bomb exploded and we felt the blast, luckily it was not too bad. We were over open country so probably it did no harm, not that we were particularly worried on that account, since we were still over Germany, believe me, we were very relieved to get rid of that particular bomb.

Of the seven operations flown during Feb 45, I overlooked mentioning that one was an extra for me, flying with a different crew and Pilot, whose Flight Engineer was sick, so I was the replacement. The operation was to Karlsruhe, quite a long trip of seven hours and twenty minutes, my regular crew had been stood down for this operation. The weather was appalling for practically the whole trip, we did arrive at the target and as far as I am aware, carried out a successful bombing run on the target, we set off on the return journey and ran into even worse appalling cloud conditions.

Ice was forming on the propeller nose cones and the leading edges of the wings, the Pilot tried to climb above the cloud level. The higher we went the worse the conditions became, pieces of ice were breaking off the propeller bosses and flying in all directions, some pieces hit the outside of the aircraft, it sounded as if they were ripping holes in the fuselage.

The pilot then decided to lose height, then had to level out at the height the Navigator considered safe, taking account of high ground in the vicinity, still we had not managed to get out of this intense cloud formation. However, the lower altitude had improved considerably the icing condition. I must say that I was very apprehensive during this whole period, flying with a strange crew, I did not have the same confidence that I had with my regular crew, however, we arrived back safely, lucky I think to have got through that one.

A Lanc called Mickey

By March 1st 1945, we had completed 26 operations, crews had come and gone since we started, quite a few new faces around, strangely crews never returned, others took their places and very little was said, we just got on with the job of waiting for our next target.

During March we completed another six operations, four nights and two daylight, the first was to Dortmund Ems Canal, this being our second visit, it was in the area of Essen just east of the Rhine.

In places the Canal was above the ground level with banks each side, we saw the banks broken in several places, somebody must have got a little wet, took just short of six hours flying. The next was to Sassnitz in Germany, just short of the Polish border and quite near Peenemunde, from where the first V2 rockets were fired. We actually saw a trail of light soaring up into the sky, while on our way to Sassnitz, we reported this at de-briefing, we were not aware at the time, that we had seen a V2 rocket fired, Sassnitz was nine and a quarter hours flying. The next was to Bohlen, roughly in the Rositz, Leipzig area, another eight and quarter hours flying.

Then Bremen in daylight, our second visit, target was a road bridge in the port area, when we arrived at the target, a considerable number of Lancaster's had already bombed. The smoke from those bombs obscured the actual target, the target marker flare, however, was still visible, I believe we used that as our aiming point, I doubt the bridge was much use after that lot, flying time five hours.

The next was to Wesel, on the Rhine, about twenty miles or so over the Dutch border into Germany, on the way there we had a propeller runaway. Some fault caused the revolutions to get faster and faster causing some vibration in the engine, I tried various exercises on the controls to bring it under control, but eventually had to switch off the engine and feather the propeller. We carried on towards the target for sometime, slowly we fell further behind the main stream and had to give up, and turn for home, discharged our bomb load into the Wash and returned to base. We were really aggravated, after all the tension of taking off with a full bomb load, flying over Germany, getting shot at and achieving nothing, then getting cross questioned as to why, on our return, certainly not something to be recommended, flying time three hours fifteen minutes.

The last in March was to Farge, another daylight operation. Farge was very close to Bremen, we almost knew our way to this area, this being our third visit, the usual heavy flak, otherwise, business as usual, flying time Four hours Forty minutes.

April 45, Have now completed 32 operations, at the moment only two more to do, sometimes when they are short of crews the tour as it is called is lengthened, we will have to see.

April the 4th we are on call for a daylight trip to Nordhausen seems like a railway junction, probably one to assist the army by generally wrecking the supply lines and associated facilities.

We arrived safely at the target, plenty of flak as usual, somehow it doesn't seem so forbidding as it is at night, when all the flashes of shells bursting seem endless. No searchlights in daytime that is a plus, but enemy fighters are a minus, flying time six hours thirty five minutes.

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

April 17th, it looks like the last in our tour of operational flying, we are going to Pilsen in Czechoslovakia, its about forty miles East of the German border. Although it was our last operation, none of the crew seemed effected, or that is what appeared on the surface, I expect that all the crew felt the same as I did, would our luck hold and see us over this last hurdle. Well it did, we had the usual run to the target, went through without trouble, just the normal flak and searchlights which we had now become accustomed and back home for a safe landing.

We had a bit of a celebration the next day, then the following day had to report to the Station Commander, at which time, if all the crew wanted to carry on for another tour, we had to volunteer, some were not keen so we finished. The Station Commander was obliged to write a reference as to our general performance, he wrote "A very disciplined and effective air crew a shambles on the ground" or words to that effect, we didn't grumble, we were quite happy to have made our mark.

Twenty-four hours later I was posted to Lindholme in Yorkshire, had to leave immediately, not even time for a proper farewell with the other members of the crew. The RAF did not waste any time on sentiment, we were all dispersed to various places, the two Australians were sent home and I did not find out where the others were sent until after the war was over.

Lindholm Again

I arrived at Lindholme nr. Doncaster, they seemed quite surprised that I had not been given leave at the end of our operational flying. They then gave me a very nice surprise and sent me on fourteen days leave, it was great to be able to spend time with my wife and members of both families, having completed my tour of operational duty. The time went far too quickly and the day soon arrived for me to report back to Lindholm.

On my arrival, I tried to get onto Transport Command Flying York's, before I managed the transfer, the conversion course was cancelled, so I was reallocated.

My new job was interesting, I was sent to join a small group detailed to train new Pilots and F/Engineers, how a Lancaster should be handled on the ground, engine starting procedure, safety drills, and some actual tuition dealing with some common faults that arise. For this we were given a very old Lancaster, which was parked on a dispersal area as far away from the main Airfield *amenities* as possible. There was also an even older Nissan Hut near by, for the lectures to take place. We did our best to make the time interesting, the new aircrew really only had one thought in mind, they wanted to get on an operational Squadron as soon as possible, who could blame them. They were all full of enthusiasm and expectation, having completed all the training courses, they could not wait to put into practice all the things they had been taught.

My time at Lindholme finished in April 46, I was posted to Snaith nr. Goole, also my records having shown that before joining the RAF, I had worked in an accounts office, I was given the task of preparing the Officers Mess Bar monthly accounts, on that very highest of achievement. I completed my service and was demobbed on the 6th Aug. 1946 having served for Five years and 23 Days.

A Lanc called Mickey

David Blomfield - Wireless Operator

Prior to enlisting in the RAAF in June 1942, I was a dairy farmer, two of us, batching, no electricity, just kerosene lamps, a wood stove and cold showers. We had a 3hp diesel engine with milking machines. Transport was a bicycle or horse. Wasn't a bad life.

Passed medical in Sydney and asked if we would do guard duty while waiting for our air crew training. We did guard duty at RAAF Stores depots in Sydney and then were posted to Nhill, in Victorian wheat belt country in the middle of nowhere.

Not a prime target for any enemy so were sent on guard duty with a revolver and one round. One round because previous guards had been shooting at rabbits which were fairly numerous. Eventually called up for ITS (Initial Training School) at Bradford Park, ½ mile from my parents' home in Queensland.

When we were interviewed to see what our preferences were, two of us wanted to be Air Gunners. A very unusual request as most wanted to be pilots. Then asked if we would consider the wireless course and if we failed that we could then do the gunning course. Six months later we finished our wireless course at Maryborough, Queensland, and then the gunnery course at Evans Head in Fairy Battles and received our Sergeant's stripes. Then off to England via America stopping off at Taunton, Mass, 25 miles from Boston at a US army camp.

Boarded the old Aquitania with about 10,000 Negro troops for Scotland. Then billeted at the Metropole Motel, Brighton, before going to Dumfries, Scotland, to do our course in Ansons. Course delayed by bad winter weather. Then posted to Market Harborough to form a crew and fly in Wellingtons then Lancasters. The rest of the time is well covered by Frank's account. Crew reunion 50 years later at Lincoln with 6 members of the crew was very eventful and an important event.



Peter Smith – Bomb Aimer

I volunteered on my 18th birthday to Selection Board, Cambridge. Actual birthday was Sunday so signed on on previous Saturday and gave date of birth 1/11/23 and this incorrect date was in my records throughout Service.

Volunteered, for some reason, to be Air Gunner. Selection Board said why not train to be a pilot? – go join the ATC in interim before call up. Said OK.

Joined up March 1942 to St John's Wood, London, number 1801673. Billeted in converted luxury flats – supposedly owned by AOC Training Command, Air Commodore Critchley, who was having difficulty in letting them. Drill, etc, in Regent's Park: London being blitzed, but not at its earlier peak. Around July posted to camp site at Ludlow in Shropshire. There we heard news of loss of 91 aircraft over Nuremburg and infamous remark of a group of drunken trainees "that means we shall be getting our wings quicker".

I was posted to ITW Cambridge around June 1942 (my home town). Billeted very comfortably in a number of Cambridge Colleges. Boys from many Nations and Dominions, Colonies, Poland, Czechoslovakia and also large contingent from Dutch East Indies. Many ITW officers from show business; one a concert pianist – one was Sebastian Shaw, a well known actor of the time. Did much drill and had many lectures, where I remember hearing a famous remark from the instructor that, "Compass is known as dead beat or aperiodic – easy for you to remember – first applies to you, the other to your girlfriend" (didn't know what he meant at the time).

I was posted around October 1942 to EFTS Marshall's aerodrome Cambridge (so still at home). The instructor was a charming veteran of the Battle of Britain, F/Lt Bell, who had been very badly burned. Went solo after 4½ hours (Tiger Moth) – probably longest solo in records – went round five times before landing. From Cambridge to transit camp, Heaton Park, Manchester. I remember it being mean and miserably cold weather – only relieved by seeing Casablanca for first time at local fleapit (cinema).

In January 1943, moved to Liverpool to embark for EFTS Canada under Empire Training Scheme. Ship for crossing was called Louis Pasteur – totally unsuited – apart from speed – for the Atlantic. Most of us sick by mid journey – yours truly all the way, including in Liverpool harbour. Docked Halifax, Nova Scotia – then to Monkton and from there via Canadian Pacific Railways to FTS at Virden, Manitoba.

Virden – Tiger Moths – demonic instructor Warrant Officer RCAF (no combat experience) fearful temper and tongue. Went solo after 4 hours and did twenty hours solo flying – but was finally totally unable to cope with instructor's attitude and asked for transfer to other flying duties – the irony, of course, being the fact that many budding pilots had already failed the course and desperately wanted to continue.

A Lanc called Mickey

They sent me to train as a Bomb Aimer at N° 5 Bombing and Gunnery School, Dafoe, Saskatchewan – training in bombing, gunnery and navigation on Ansons and Bolingbrokes (Beaufighters). Had a fine training officer in P/O Thwaites, a New Zealander, who unfortunately came to a tragic end later in Europe.

From Dafoe, to N° 1 CNS Rivers, Manitoba, for more specialised bombing and navigation. We received much hospitality offered to us in Canada and friendships were struck up with a number of fine Canadian families.

Awarded wings October 1943 – and offered a commission as a Pilot Officer. December 1943 – train through Canada – great lakes, Niagara, to New York for embarkation to UK on Aquitania – a four funnelled old but famous Cunarder. Ship full of newly trained aircrew and American troops. Trip was quick but comfortable dash across Atlantic to Greenock in Scotland.

Posting to Bomb Aimer course Wigtown (Scotland) – more bombing and navigation training in Oxfords – mostly over Ireland. Then to 14 OUT Market Harborough. Billeted at Husbands Bosworth for training and crew selection. Frank Mouritz “offered his hand” as Pilot and captain and we teamed up with Dennis Cluett, Arthur Bass, Dave Blomfield and Laurie Cooper. Our Engineer, Jim Leith, joined us later, at, I think, Swinderby. Course at Market Harborough, where we flew a diversion – up around north west Scotland, I think, on D Day.

After Market Harborough we dispersed, in late June 1944, along the Fosse Way, for our eventual bombing squadron (5 Group) to Scampton, then Swinderby – a session on Short Stirlings – to Syerston, first taste of Lancasters, and then finally to Skellingthorpe, to 61 Squadron. Frank Mouritz has really detailed out our tour at Skellingthorpe at some length and it would be superfluous to repeat it. I am afraid I should report something he has been too polite to mention. I missed an early operation – too, I think Kaislerlauten – because I had gone off to Nottingham one afternoon and crews had urgently summoned for this trip. Luckily, since I was not alone in being missing from the trip, no action was taken. Actually, I had to ‘make up’ this operation by flying with another crew later and it turned a bit of a nightmare.

In March 1945, I was married to Nancy – the lady I had been to see in Nottingham when I missed the operation. Most of the crew were at the wedding, though a couple, very rightly, had their own new wives to visit.

At the end of hostilities in Europe – we had in any case completed our tour – the crew broke up. I was posted with Flt Lt Hutchings and some crew from 50 Squadron (co-occupiers of Skellingthorpe) to 10 Squadron in Yorkshire, which we thought was a very lesser squadron.

We went to Melbourne (near York) to fly Dakotas and then to Broadwell in Oxfordshire to two gliders, training for eventual assault on the Japanese mainland. Luckily, in August, the atom bomb was dropped on Japan and this, I suppose suicidal mission was aborted. Instead, we were posted to India to fly Dakotas to ‘fetch’ troops who were fit enough to fly from Burma to India and then taken by ship, or other

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planes to UK. As a Bomb Aimer it was decided (but not until I had arrived in India) despite me being a second pilot, there was no point in me flying, so I was eventually transferred to Middle East HQ in Cairo for six months and then posted home (ship to Marseilles then train (English) across France to Dover) and eventually demobilization.

Dennis Cluett – Rear Gunner

Born Westclifon Sea, Essex, 21st March 1924. Working class parents – apprentice toolmaker, 1939. Volunteered for RAF Aircrew and Palestine Police Force in early 1943. As an apprentice in the engineering trade, I was manpowered but could volunteer for high risk forces.

Entered the RAF in July 1943, N^o 1895933.

Introduction station – St John's Wood, London, then to Bridlington for Initial Training and to Bridgenorth. After that to Bishops Court in Northern Ireland for first flying training. This was from 24 December 1943, to 18 February 1944. We trained in Avro Ansons and did air to air firing at decoys towed by another aircraft and air to ground firing with live ammunition.



L to R: Dennis Cluett, Peter Smith, Frank Mouritz, Arthur Bass, Laurie Cooper and David Blomfield, O.T.W.

A Lanc called Mickey

Air to air training was also carried out against fighter aircraft using Cinie Camera instead of guns. I passed above average. Excellent work throughout and received my AG half wing and promoted to the rank of Sergeant. Flying time was 25 hrs 30 min. We had leave and were posted to 14 OTU Market Harborough to be crewed up and trained on Wellington twin engined bombers.

I crewed up with Frank Mouritz, pilot, Laurie Cooper as navigator, Dave Blomfield as wireless operator, Peter Smith as bomb aimer and Arthur Bass as mid upper gunner. I selected the rear turret.

We started air training as a crew on April 11th and soloed on April 13th after 6 hours training. The rest of our training and operational flying is well described in Frank Mouritz's memoirs.

After completing a tour of 33 operational trips, the crew was disbanded for a rest and I was posted to 11 group Fighter Command in Sussex. There was no allocated job for me at first and then I was given a job in flying control as a flying control officer. This was very interesting as many captured German aircraft were being flight tested on the airfield and I had contact with a lot of the fighter aces from the War. After about 18 months, I was posted to flying control at West Raghorn in Norfolk, a satellite aerodrome at Great Massingham. An experimental station for Meteor Jet fighters.

In April 1947, I was demobbed in Blackpool and returned to my trade as an unbound apprentice toolmaker. I continued to work in various workshops at my trade. I married in 1948 and moved to South Africa in 1971. I have four daughters living in South Africa and one in Western Australia. My wife died in 1999.

Dennis Cluett died of a heart attack in June 2000 and at the time of publishing these memoirs, he has fifteen grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Arthur Bass – Mid-Upper Gunner

Arthur was born in Nuneaton, Warwickshire in 1925, and he had a job with the local council, prior to joining up in 1943. The training of a gunner was relatively short, compared to the rest of the crew, the actual gunnery course lasting for about six weeks. However, once installed in his cockpit, where he would remain for the entire mission, his lookout role was of vital importance, and his position dangerous, as well as lonely and uncomfortable. There would be no let up to the vigilance required to watch for enemy planes.

Arthur trained at the same stations as recorded in Dennis Cluett's memoirs, and arrived at 14 OTU as a sergeant, at the same time, and joined the crew. He was a good crew member, with excellent night vision and was a little bit trigger happy. On our 20th trip it was his warning shout over the intercom that probably saved us from a watery grave, when he spotted a J.U.88 fighter beneath us.

When the crew was so unceremoniously split up, Arthur was posted to India, where he remained for

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two years. According to his sister, May, who has very fond memories of her brother, he contracted a tropical disease there, and was a changed person when he returned to England.

Se we mostly lost touch with Arthur, but Laurie Cooper and wife Joy remember calling on him out of the blue, in Kenilworth in the nineteen fifties. He greeted them happily, and soon they were at their local where they met his wife, and a convivial evening was spent by all.

Arthur had three children, a daughter, Hilary, and twin Simon and Felicity. Sadly his wife died, and Arthur married a lady who had helped him to look after his children. This turned out to be a disaster for the little family, and then Arthur himself died in 1980 of a heart attack at the age of fifty five.

The Squadron Association's Tracing Secretary eventually found Arthur's daughter and through him Jim and Laurie with their wives were able to meet his sister May, and two of his children. He would have been proud to see how they had faced up to life, and in particular Simon, a dedicated Social Worker and, at that time, working part time towards a degree. So in June 1996, Simon, Felicity and Arthur's three young grandchildren were able to watch the Veteran's March Past and to take part in the service for all lost crew members of 50/61 Squadron, at the Birchwood Memorial.

After the War Postscripts of the Crew and their lives

Frank Mouritz

In February 1946 I went back to Perth Technical College where I had studied the Leaving Certificate (Matriculation) in 1941 and completed a three year course in Mechanical Engineering (at the expense of the Government). Kath Cooper (Laurie Cooper's sister) came out from the UK in December 1947 and we were married in January 1948. Our first child, Lorelie was born in February 1949 and we flew to Tasmania when she was 10 days old to take up a position as an engineer for the Hydro-Electric Commission at Butler's Gorge which was a construction village in a then very remote area. After two and a half years we travelled to the UK by ship to visit Kath's family and further my engineering experience. I worked in Scotland and London for 2 years then we returned to Tasmania with second child Barry (born in London). I worked for the H.E.C. and we lived in another construction village, Bronte Park, for a further two and a half years where our third child Carolyn was born. We moved to Mt Isa mines in Queensland where I worked as a Maintenance and Construction Engineer for a further three and a half years and had a further addition to the family, Michael.

We finally returned to Western Australia to live at North Beach, a northern suburb of Perth, in 1959 where I continued working in construction and project work associated with oil refineries and mines. My most senior position was that of Construction Engineer supervising the building of a Nickel Smelter

A Lanc called Mickey

for the Western Mining Corporation in Kalgoorlie in 1970/71, having moved there for the duration of the project. On returning to Perth we developed, as a part time family project, a strawberry farm 22 miles north of Perth while I continued to work for WMC. This was hard work for everyone but financially successful. After selling the strawberry farm and retiring in 1983 we moved to Busselton 230km south of Perth.

During our time in North Beach our family was increased by two more children: Neil and Jenny. In her spare time Kath did voluntary work using her previous library training establishing school libraries in four separate schools. For the last four years before retiring working for the Education Department as a library aide.

Our retirement years have been very busy and rewarding. We have travelled a great deal both in Australia and overseas including visiting members of my crew. We have been involved in the local community mainly with the Historical Society and Museum.

I have been greatly involved in establishing and walking bush walking trails in the south west of Australia.

Our six children are all married happily and successful in their chosen careers and between them have given us 13 grand children and four great grand children. We continue to have good health and are still enjoying our retirement years.

Laurie Cooper

The last operation of our tour was to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, on 17 April 1945. After two weeks we returned to Skellingthorpe and were posted away to various duties. This abrupt dispersal was a sad moment after the closeness of crew life since O.T.U. Some crews probably never met up again.

I was posted to Bushey Park in Teddington. This hutted camp had, prior to D-Day, been General Eisenhower's H.Q. (S.H.A.E.F.), but was now R.A.F. Transport Command H.Q. It was a fortunate posting as I could, when not on night duty, hop on a train to Herne Hill and home. My work was in the Route-Book Section of Transport Command. It was interesting and involved compiling books of route information for specific flights around the world and keeping our airfield plans up to date. Occasional flights were made to check details of airfields across the British Isles.

The most enjoyable of these was a round trip that two of us made, in an Anson, to Lossiemouth, Stornoway in the Hebrides, and Aldergrove near Belfast, Northern Ireland. In Stornoway we were invited to a crofter's wedding. This proved to be a very congenial experience.

It was just before Christmas 1945. The well stocked food shops in Belfast were a cheering sight after the austerity in the rest of the U.K., so were happy to bring back plump turkeys for relatives and friends.

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I was now a Warrant Officer and was eventually demobilised at the end of December 1946 after nearly five years in the R.A.F.

After the War

Wishing to have a more constructive career, I trained to be a primary teacher under the Emergency Scheme. In 1957 I married fellow teacher Joy and we later became Head Teachers.

Our daughter Rebecca and partner Mark, who live nearby, have given us two grandsons and we enjoy looking after them. Our son Adam, a motor racing journalist and biographer, is married to Tinneke. They often visit us from their Belgian home.

We enjoy retirements in Norbury where we have lived for over forty years, gardening and keeping our old Victorian house from falling about our ears.

Over the years we have kept in touch on and off with the crew of Mickey and in 1994 we all met up in Lincoln with our wives. Sadly the seventh crew member, Arthur Bass, had died but later we met his children.

With Jim and Charlotte, Peter and Nancy, we continue to attend the Memorial Services and Reunions in Lincoln. A photograph of our crew with Mickey hangs in the Squadron Museum, together with another of the six of us in 1994.

In 1999, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight decided to repaint their one and only Lancaster. As a tribute to 61 Squadron they chose the livery of Q.R-M. which was our Mickey the Moocher. The original centenarian Mickey has spent its last ops in our care and Jim and I were able to see the plane at Coningsby and once more climb aboard. It was an honour to see our Mickey fly down The Mall at the Funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

This was a great thrill, but more was to come. In July 2002, The Royal International Air Tattoo at R.A.F. Fairford took as its theme "Salute to the Bomber Crews Past and Present". Mickey was the centrepiece of the ground display and Jim and I, when invited as V.I.P.'s jumped at the chance to reunite with Mickey once more.

In a day that we and our wives will always remember, we were able again to climb inside Mickey as photographers surrounded us and members of the public shook our hands thanking us for our part in the air war. The day culminated with a small group of ex bomber crew on the saluting base when Mickey taxied down the runway to stop facing us. A war time siren blared out and the large crowd stood in silent homage to the fifty five thousand members of Bomber Command out of 75,000 who did not return from their operations (a survival rate of 1:5). We who had survived the conflict thought of them too.

A Lanc called Mickey

Jim Leith

The period immediately following my Honourable discharge from the R.A.F. was for me very difficult. I returned to the company that I was with before the war, only to find that the only position they could offer was as a clerk in the Account Office. That pay for which was very poor.

After some agonising after the situation, I decided to take the position and see what progress I could make. It was a very hard time indeed, especially for Charlotte, my wife, having to manage on very poor pay. Managing to keep us out of debt and happy was a juggling act that she must have been very pleased to leave behind, and for which I shall be eternally grateful.

However, I did enjoy the work for Shipping and Forwarding, Warehousing and Travel Business. I decided to work in every position that became available. It was a hard slog but it did pay very considerable dividends.

Over a period of time I went from an accounts clerk to Company Secretary at the firm I joined after demobilisation in 1946. Later, in 1970 I resigned and joined a second company immediately as their Company Secretary. I then became a Director, and finally, Group Managing Director. I retired on my birthday on 1 November 1987.

In 1946 we had a son, Alan, which was a very happy event. In time he grew to be a civil engineer and gave us the pleasure of two exceptionally good grand daughters. The elder, Clare, also gave us the enormous pleasure of a great grandson, Jacob, born on my birthday. Our son has always been a credit to us, and very supportive, especially in our later years.

Both our grand daughters did well at college and have worked in different ways with children; the elder, with children such as autistic, etc. requiring special needs. The younger, Amy, cares for families in need and child adoption.

Except for the early years after leaving the R.A.F. which were trying to say the least, I personally enjoyed my working years and found it just as difficult to settle on retirement as I did when I left the R.A.F.

Charlotte and I have had a very happy life together and will, 'God Willing', be celebrating our Diamond Wedding Anniversary on 10 June 2004.

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Dave Blomfield

I was discharged in Sydney on 13 September 1945 after serving one operational tour on Lancaster Bombers at 71 Squadron, Skellingthorpe, Lincoln, England, with a very good crew and our share of luck.

I returned to the dairy farm in Miriam Vale, Queensland, where I had been working before enlisting in the R.A.A.F. It was in the process of being converted to beef cattle by my father who, at the end of the war, was aged 77. I carried on from there with Angus Cattle and finally finished up with all Brahman Cattle before selling the property in 1988.

I married a young English girl, Doreen, whom I met in Brighton, England. We had four children and sadly she died in 1956. I later married a young woman, Dell, with a baby son and eventually had two more sons.

We now have 14 grand children and 4 great grand children. We are now retired to a small hobby farm near our small township of Miriam Vale. My wife Dell gardens and plays bowls and I have a veggie garden, woodwork and golf as hobbies. We have travelled extensively with the Aussie pilot, Frank and his wife Kath, having made contact with them after 33 years or more after discharge. Our crew and one ground crew member keep fairly good contact which is great. I am still in good health at 82 after a long and interesting life.

Peter Smith

I returned home in 1946, to live in Nottingham, where Nancy had organised to purchase a house. This was a very useful purchase. In 1947, I attended a Business Training Course for one year, finishing up at Barnett Hutton, which was a year wasted.

My dear wife came to the rescue, by telephoning a chap in the City Treasurer's Department to ask if there was anything available. As a result, I had an interview with the Deputy Treasurer, who agreed I could start work in the Wages Department, at £19.00 per month – the mortgage payment on the house was £5.12.7d per month. During my time at Nottingham, I achieved the C.I.M.T.A. qualification and got First Prize in Part 2 with the G.A. Johnson Prize in Statistics.

On the home front, we had our first daughter, Caroline, who hardly ever cried and was learning to read at six months. I moved to Newmarket at Deputy Clerk and Accountant and later became Treasurer and then Chief Executive. We had our second daughter and Nancy studied and eventually became a teacher. Our move to the village our of Newmarket followed and after Local Government reorganisation, I was asked to become Bursar at King's College, Cambridge, where I spend the remainder of my working career. This was a very important job, to bring the college up to the 20th century. I had, arguably, the nicest office in the country.

A Lanc called Mickey

My wife retired in 1985 and I followed suit in 1986. We have, since retirement, gone on many holidays and seen a vast part of the world outside our own country. Our health has been quite good, apart from one or two blips. Our eldest daughter is an Orthoptist at a hospital in Kent and the youngest is Head of Sixth year at a school in Hemel, Hempstead, Herts.

I have pursued my love of music and have a vast library of tape recordings, records and discs. I read many books and the half acre garden takes much of my time. We still enjoy our journeys to see new things and tend to shudder at what is happening in the world today. We have two grandsons, one aged nineteen and studying at Nottingham University and the other still at school at the age of fifteen.



A Squadron Reunion at the Cock Tavern about 1950

L to R: Dennis Cluett, squadron member, Laurie Cooper, Frank Mouritz and Jim Leith.

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher



More Squadron Reunions at the Cock Tavern, approx. 1950.

Above L to R: Laurie Cooper, Jim Leith, Dennis Cluett and another squadron veteran.

Below L to R: Laurie Cooper, Dennis Cluett, Jim Leith and 2 other squadron veterans.



A Lanc called Mickey



Reunion of 1994 outside the Grand Hotel, Lincoln. L to R: Dennis Cluett, Jim Leith, Frank Mouritz, Peter Smith, David Blomfield and Laurie Cooper.

Taking the salute at the RIAT Airshow, July 2002 (Jim Leith, Laurie Cooper and Charlotte Leith)



Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher



George Trillo, Fitter, who looked after Mickey and painted the artwork with one bomb for each air raid.

Laurie Cooper, George Trillo and Jim Leith with war veteran as Guests of Honour at the RIAT 2002.



A Lanc called Mickey



Joy Cooper, Laurie Cooper, Pilot, Frank Mouritz, Kath Mouritz - 2004

Frank Mouriz in Mickey 2004



Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher



Mickey the Moocher – Mystery Solved?

Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Avro Lancaster PA474 has been newly repainted to represent one of Bomber Command's "centenarians" — aircraft which took part in 100 or more operations. But just how many missions *did* it fly? **MARTIN W. BOWMAN** goes in search of an answer

IN FEBRUARY THIS YEAR BBMF Lancaster PA474 *City of Lincoln* had its markings changed, adopting the colours of B.III EE176 OR-M *Mickey the Moocher* of No 61 Squadron, No 5 Group, based at Skellingthorpe, Lincolnshire. The new scheme utilises satin-finish paint, which combines practicality with an approximation of the wartime surface appearance. In addition, the aircraft's bomb bay doors were returned to their original configuration. While these changes appear straightforward, the painting of the new nose artwork — and, more pointedly, the number of operations recorded on the bomb log on the original aircraft — was a far from simple task. *Mickey*

TOP: BBMF Lancaster PA474 leaves St Athan on March 31 at the end of its winter over-haul and repaint. **RIGHT:** PA474's nose art. The name echoes a popular wartime blues song by Cab Calloway, *Minnie the Moocher*.

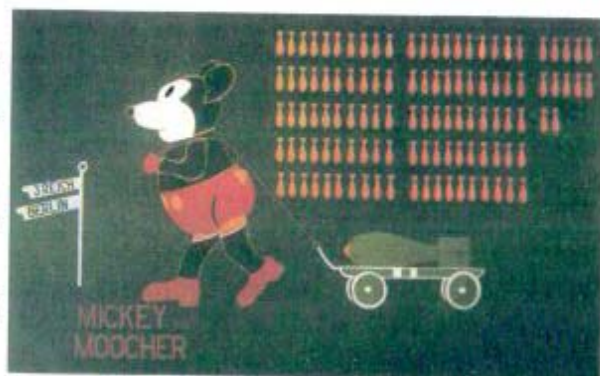


Illustration: © Peter Jackson

A Lanc called Mickey

BBMF LANCASTER

the *Moocher* reputedly finished the war with 115 bomb symbols painted on its nose, but official records apparently show *Mickey* having completed 128 operations before it was retired to No 1653 Conversion Unit. Once there, it was marked H4-X but was designated Cat AC on April 21, 1945. In May it became 5260M at BOAC Whitchurch and was relegated to an instructional airframe.

Fitted with Merlin 28 engines, EE176 was built as part of contract No B69274/40, and came off the Manchester production line in the spring of 1943. First issued to 7 Sqn at Oakington, Cambridgeshire, on June 11, the Lancaster was reassigned to No 97 (Straits Settlements) Squadron on June 21. That unit's flights were at Bourn and two other stations, and EE176 joined C Flight at Oakington. At first EE176 was coded OF-N, possibly a result of its short time with 7 Sqn, but by early August EE176 had become OF-O. Its first operational mission was to Cologne on the night of July 3-4 in the hands of Flt Lt J.H. Sauvage and crew. On July 24-25, Sauvage flew an operation to Hamburg.

When EE176 returned to the German city on July 27, it carried Flt Sgt Baker and crew. On its third trip to Hamburg, on August 2-3, EE176 was piloted by Sgt C. S. Chatten. On August 23, Chatten and his crew were attacked by a Messerschmitt Me 410 which wounded Chatten and killed his Australian mid-upper gunner.

On the night of August 10-11, for a mission to Nuremberg, EE176 was flown by Fg Off D. Moodie. He was to become a regular pilot for the aircraft, although on trips to Milan on August 12-13 it was flown by Sqn Ldr J. M. Garlick, and on August 17-18 to Peenemünde by Plt Off W. Richen. Moodie's crew then flew six ops in EE176, beginning on August 22 with a trip to bomb

RIGHT This photograph of Avro Lancaster III EE176 *Mickey the Moocher* was taken at Skellingthorpe, 61 Sqn's base, when the bomber had 83 operations to its credit. It made its maiden flight at Woodford on June 2, 1943, piloted by Bill Thorn.



the IG Farben factory at Leverkusen. On its 15th and last mission with 97 Sqn on September 15, EE176 was flown by American pilot 2/Lt J.E. Russell. The target was the Dunlop rubber factory at Montluçon in Central France.

On September 20, EE176 joined No 61 Sqn at Syerston, Notts, where it was re-coded QR-M. Aircraft lettered M were usually known as "M-Mike" or "M-Mother" but EE176's nose received a Walt Disney cartoon of Mickey Mouse, walking towards a signpost upon which was written "3 Reich" and "Berlin", pulling a bomb on a trolley. The Lanc became *Mickey The Moocher*, a name derived from Cab Calloway's popular slow blues song, *Minnie the Moocher*.

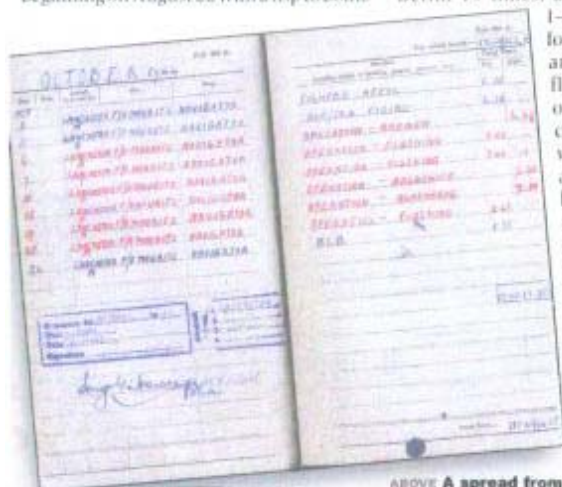
At Syerston EE176 became the regular aircraft of Flt Lt J. E. R. Williams and crew, who, during the Lancaster's first 28 operations with the squadron, flew it to targets in Germany on 13 occasions between October 4-5 and February 15-16, 1944. During this period EE176 started out for Berlin 15 times, although on January 1-2, 1944, Williams was forced to abort about 1hr and 56min into the flight when *Mickey's* outer starboard engine caught fire. Williams was posted to 617 Sqn and *Mickey* was flown by other pilots in 61 Sqn, including Sqn Ldr Sidney J. Beard DFC and Plt Off J.A. Forrest RAAF.

On the night of March 30-31 1944, *Mickey The Moocher*, flown by Plt Off Forrest RAAF, was one of the Lancasters which took part in the fateful raid on Nuremberg, when 95 RAF bombers were lost. Forrest flew EE176 well

north of the track owing to the wrong winds being broadcast and, with fuel running low, he decided to home in on the "B" Lattice Line. Reaching the North Sea, he headed for RAF Comingsby, only to encounter violent electrical storms off the Norfolk coast. *Mickey* was struck by lightning, the shock passing right through the bomber, stunning and temporarily blinding Forrest, who lost control. Believing that they had already crossed the coast, he ordered the crew to bale out and EE176 dived for the ground, the wireless operator (WOP) and the rear-gunner being the only two crew members who recovered sufficiently to do so. But then, when just 1,000ft from the ground, and still over the sea, Forrest regained control and quickly landed at the nearest airfield he could find. Although an immediate search was made, neither the WOP nor the rear-gunner were found. Forrest and the rest of his crew were to die in action on another operation shortly afterwards.

In May Plt Off Delbert E. White RCAF and Sqn Ldr Sidney Beard shared most of *Mickey's* ops. The aircraft flew throughout the summer of 1944, attacking V1 sites and enemy communications sites. Beard flew EE176 on D-Day, June 6, when the squadron attacked St Pierre. He also piloted *Mickey* on the Caen raid on July 18, during Operation Goodwood — the Allied breakout from Normandy — when 942 bombers, including 667 Lancasters, bombed the battle area. Beard made 17 trips in EE176, the last on August 3, and received a bar to his DFC.

It would appear that — if the aborted raid to Berlin on January 1-2 is discounted — EE176 flew its 100th operation on August 15. On this day, when more than a thousand bombers, including 599 Lancasters, attacked nine night-fighter airfields throughout Holland and Belgium, *Mickey*, piloted by Fg Off J. S. Cooksey, took part in the attack on Gilze-Rijen in Holland. If *Mickey's* aborted operation to Berlin is included, then EE176 completed its 100th trip on August 14, when it was flown by Plt Off Delbert White and crew, who



ABOVE A spread from Frank Mouritz's logbook, including the daylight raid to Flushing on October 11, 1944, which is unrecorded in accounts of the Lancaster's history. The letter "M" below the aircraft type identifies flights in *Mickey the Moocher*.

Laurie Coopers

Aeroplane, June 2008

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

"A German night-fighter approached to 600 yards and opened fire on the Lancaster. It then closed to 200 yards and fired again from the starboard quarter"

took part in the bombing of Brest. This was White's 28th and last operation in EE176.

Night-fighters were a constant source of danger and in September they almost shot down *Mickey The Moocher* in the skies over Germany. During the raid on the twin towns of Mönchengladbach-Rheydt on September 19–20, when EE176 was flown by Fg Off S. E. Miller, a German night-fighter approached to 600 yards and opened fire on the Lancaster. It then closed to 200 yards and fired again from the starboard quarter. The mid-upper and tail gunner both opened fire and the enemy aircraft broke off the attack.

Four nights later, on September 23–24, Fg Off Norman Hoad (later Air Vice-Marshal Norman Hoad CVO CBE AFC) flew *Mickey The Moocher* on the raid to the Dortmund-Ems Canal. He recalls:

"On September 23, 1944, on the pretext of it needing an air test, I flew *Mickey* from Skellingthorpe to Tatenhill to meet an old chum from training days who had been sidetracked into instructional duties. When we returned after lunch I was somewhat shattered to find us on the Battle Order for that night!"

Mickey was one of 130 Lancasters of No 5 Group that set out to bomb the banks of the two parallel branches of the canal at a point near Ladbagen, north of Münster, where the level of the canal water was much higher than the surrounding countryside. EE176 bombed from 7,800ft, but most damage was caused by two direct hits by 12,000lb Tallboy bombs dropped by 617 Sqn. A Ju 88 night-fighter attempted an attack on *Mickey* but, thanks to Fg Off Hoad's evasive action, he could not get into a firing position. However, Hoad and his crew subsequently ran out of luck, and failed to return from the No 5 Group raid on Brunswick on October 14–15. Hoad was subsequently captured and made a POW.

That same night *Mickey the*

Moocher was flown by Australian Fg Off Frank Mouritz. Frank recalls:

"My crew and I arrived at No 61 Squadron, Skellingthorpe, from No 5 Lancaster Finishing School (LFS) Syerston nearby, on the morning of September 27, 1944. I carried out my first operation that night, September 27–28. It was a 6½ hr trip to Kaiserslautern with Fg Lt King and crew. I was an observer and had no duties except to gain experience. The trip was uneventful and I was really amazed at the target with the sheer brilliance of searchlights and explosions of bombs, flak and photo-flashes. The biggest fireworks display I have ever seen was nothing compared to the target."

"During the next ten days or so we carried out our first two operations, one to Wilhelmshaven on October 5, and one to Bremen on October 6, both in OR-B. On the October 5 raid *Mickey The Moocher* was also abroad that night, in the hands of Fg

Off C.A. Donnelly, while on the 6th, EE176 was flown by Fg Off M. L. Hunt and crew. We were then allocated a permanent aircraft, QR-M, with the nose art of *Mickey the Moocher*, a real veteran, with 119 trips on the nose. It was quite something to have our own aeroplane, another milestone in our career. The groundcrew were very proud of their Lancaster and the number of trips completed. This showed good maintenance and a lot of luck. We hoped that the luck had not all been used up, as it was usually considered that to survive a tour required about 70 per cent luck and 30 per cent skill."

Norman Franks, in his book *Claims To Fame: The Lancaster* (Arms & Armour Press, 1994), has systematically covered the history of 34 Lancaster "centenarians", including *Mickey The Moocher*, and painstakingly listed their operational record. Using Norman's listing, and discounting the abort on January 1–2, 1944, I make the total

RIGHT Taken at Lincoln in 1994, this group photograph depicts most of the 61 Sqn crew who flew in the original *Mickey the Moocher* up to the end of its operational life. Left to right: Dennis Cluett, Jim Leith, Frank Mouritz, Peter Smith, Laurie Cooper and Dave Blomfield.



RIGHT *Mickey the Moocher* later in its operational life, with the 61 Sqn crew that became its regular occupants from October 1944. Left to right: Jimmy Leith, flight engineer; Dennis Cluett, rear gunner; Peter Smith, bomb aimer; Frank Mouritz, pilot; Arthur Bass, mid-upper gunner; Laurie Cooper, navigator; and Dave Blomfield, wireless operator.



Aeroplane, June 2000

A Lanc called Mickey

BBMF LANCASTER

number of Mickey's operations by October 7 came to 112. Frank Mouritz continues:

"By this time Mickey was nearly worn out. The four Merlins were close to their hours, the controls were sloppy, and she had dozens of patches on wings and fuselage. She took a lot of runway to get off the ground with a full load of fuel and bombs. We were the new crew given the oldest Lancaster on the squadron, but we were proud of her."

Sgt Jim Leith, flight engineer, adds: "Old Mickey was a bit slow on take off. She took a while to pick up speed. The groundcrew were excellent and had an unusually deep affection for her. We were very lucky. We started with Mickey and that groundcrew. Also our own crew, who came from very diverse backgrounds, worked together exceptionally well as a team. More than that, we completely relied upon each other. When in trouble that means more than anything." Frank Mouritz continues:

"She took us on our third trip on October 11, a daylight one to the Dutch coast,



ABOVE The BBMF crew took PA474 for a 45min air test in the morning before leaving St Athan at 1530hr. The hangar in the background belongs to 3 Sqn's Harriers.

"At this stage I could sense, through Mickey, the feelings of all the crews that had survived more than 100 trips in this special aircraft, passing on their experience and good luck for a successful tour, a sort of feeling of comradeship and well-being which is hard to describe. Mickey was something to look up to, a guiding star."

"Our next trip, on the night of October 14-15, was a 7hr night flight to Brunswick

28-29, when Fg Off T. Bain and crew flew Mickey *The Moscher* on the Group raid to the U-Boat pens at Bergen, Norway. Clear conditions were forecast for the target area but cloud cover was found to cover the target. The Master Bomber tried to bring the force of 237 Lancasters down below 5,000ft but cloud was still encountered and, after 47 Lancasters got their bombs away, the operation was aborted.

"Mickey was nearly worn out. The four Merlins were close to their hours, the controls were sloppy, and she had dozens of patches on wings and fuselage"

with a fighter escort, to bomb dykes in an attempt to flood German artillery batteries that were holding up the advance of the British ground forces. The raid was not successful, although we bombed from low level". (This operation, which is recorded in Frank Mouritz's logbook as a 2hr 40min trip to Flushing, is not recorded in EE176's tally in *Claims To Fame: The Lancaster*.)



ABOVE The author (left) with Sqn Ldr Dave Thomas, BBMF Bomber Leader. Dave was the Vulcan display pilot, and is currently a multi-engine pilot instructor on Jetstreams at Cranwell. This year marks his fourth season with the BBMF.

with 233 Lancs and seven Mosquitoes. This was an area attack with Cookies and incendiaries. A large amount of damage was inflicted. This was also a milestone as October 15 was my 21st birthday, and we had our first fighter combat. This is recorded in the debriefing combat report as follows:

"Nearing the target area the mid-upper gunner, Sgt Arthur Bass, spotted a fighter approaching from the port quarter, above which it then appeared to sideslip into position behind them. He ordered the pilot to corkscrew as he opened fire, while also giving the rear gunner, Sgt Den Cluett, the fighter's position and who, upon seeing it too, also opened fire. The fighter dived quickly away, the mid-upper gunner giving it a burst as it disappeared out of range."

"The next trip, on October 19-20, was another night one — 7hr to Nuremberg with 263 Lancs and seven Mosquitoes — again area bombing with a large amount of casualties and damage inflicted. We were beginning to get a little confident now with Flt Sgt Laurie Cooper, our navigator, keeping us on time and track and hence in the middle of the stream, and Fg Off Pete Smith, our bomb-aimer, directing the bombing run with precision. And we were obtaining good target photos."

"Our next trip, on October 23, was another daylight one to the Dutch coast to attack the same batteries as before. It was also unsuccessful."

On October 24 Frank Mouritz, with his crew, flew EE176 on a 1hr 35min High Level Bombing (HLB) practice flight from Syerston. No 5 Group then did not fly any operations until the night of October

As Frank Mouritz concludes: "Mickey took us for her last operation on November 6-7 to bomb the Mitteland Canal at Gravenhorst. The marking force had difficulty in finding the target due to cloud. We were called down to bomb at low level and I recall selecting full flap and wheels down to enable us to lose height in time. The first markers were so accurate (they were dropped by Flt Lt L.C.E. De Vigne, navigator, in a low-flying Mosquito of No 627 Sqn flown by Sqn Ldr F.W. Boyle RAAF) that they fell in the canal and were extinguished. We were one of the few 31 Lancasters that bombed before the Master Bomber abandoned the raid owing to low cloud. Ten Lancasters were lost."

"On November 9 we flew Mickey to Netheravon, a 1½hr flight from Skellingthorpe, and returned in QR-F piloted by Fg Off Burns. Mickey must have been retired from operations now, because along with a Halifax and a Stirling, she was to be loaded with Red Cross parcels to ascertain the number that could be carried during relief flights for the liberated Allied POWs on the Continent."

"Mickey remained at Netheravon until November 30, when we travelled in a Lancaster piloted by Flt Lt Greenfield to fly her back to Skellingthorpe. Some other crew must have flown her away to 1653 CU after this possibly, as we were on leave."

"We were allocated our new QR-M on December 18, for a 9hr 35min operation to Gdynia. What a difference to fly. When doing our first air test with no bombs and limited fuel, I opened the throttle on take-off and we were flung back in

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

our seats. She behaved like a sports car.

"We had now completed 12 trips and flew the new Mickey (although no art was ever painted on the nose) to the end of our tour expect for a few weeks in January and February 1945 when she was being repaired after getting shot up and having a dicey landing. I returned to Australia in July with the probability of starting a second tour as part of Tiger Force, the new name of No 5 Group, bombing Japan. The Atom Bomb prevented this."

Now, almost 45 years later, *Mickey The Moocher* is flying in Britain once again, and its operational career has come under the microscope at both Coningsby and St Athan, where PA474 has been repainted to represent the famous Lanc. The dilemma confronting the BBMF before the bomb log could be completed was this: did the original Lanc complete 115, 118, 119 (in his book *Lancaster — The Definitive Story*, Harry Holmes says that Mickey completed 122 sorties) or 128 operations?

Frank Mouritz says that when he and his crew were first allocated EE176, "it was ... a real veteran, with 119 trips on its nose". Air Vice-Marshal Norman Hoad says, "My visit to the Dortmund-Ems Canal on September 23 is clearly annotated '110th' trip in my logbook but I have no recollection at all from where or from whom I got the information. I suspect it was from the groundcrew; they kept meticulous note of everything 'their' aircraft had done."

In *Claims To Fame: The Lancaster*, Air Vice-Marshal Hoad is quoted as saying that "the September 23-24 trip being the 110th, the aircraft went on nine further sorties, although the last two were frustrated by orders not to bomb, both because of cloud covering the target". (Mickey, however, was one of the few Lancs that bombed Gravenhorst on November 6 before the Master Bomber abandoned the raid owing to low cloud). The September 23-24 trip "being the 110th" does not, however, tally with the listing in *Claims To Fame*. When counted up (and ignoring the aborted January 1-2 sortie) this makes the September 23-24 trip No 108, or, if the abort is included, No 109. As we now know, thanks to Frank Mouritz's logbook revelation, EE176 did not fly nine further sorties, but ten. The photo of Mickey taken with Frank Mouritz and his crew standing beside it quite clearly shows 119 bomb symbols, so the bomb log must include a symbol for the aborted trip!

It should be remembered that the bomb symbols on the nose of an aircraft were painted by the groundcrews. It was "their aircraft", permanently assigned. As we have seen, several aircrews flew a bomber during its squadron service, and they had other things to worry about, such as stay-



ABOVE Smiling St Athan groundcrew pose for a farewell shot with PA474.

ing alive and completing their tour. Records of course are only as good as the person who keeps them, and with the multitude of names and numbers, it was easy to slip up and transpose numbers or write in completely different ones.

Perhaps the key to a solution lies in the official records (yes, the same ones that say Mickey flew 128 ops). As far as the groundcrews were concerned, once "their" bomber had taken off and returned, this achievement would require a yellow bomb symbol to be painted its nose. The same situation would not necessarily result in an official credit if the op had been aborted, as on the January 1-2, 1944 sortie. But the raid to Bergen must surely count officially, and the one to Gravenhorst on November 6 should equally be counted as an operation. If the groundcrew had painted a bomb symbol on Mickey's nose for the aborted operation (perhaps EE176 had crossed the enemy coast), then the total number of bombs would of course

total 119. So, using the list in *Claims To Fame*, but omitting the entry for January 1-2, and including the ones to Bergen and Gravenhorst — and not forgetting the "missing" operation on October 11 — this would give Mickey *The Moocher* a grand total of 118 operational sorties. One can only assume that any official records that show EE176 as having flown 128 ops is a mistake or misprint — 2 instead of 1.

Another vexed question concerns the H.S. radome for the Lancaster, which could well be applied to PA474 in the future. Did Mickey *The Moocher* in fact have one? Peter Smith, the bomb aimer on Frank Mouritz's crew, recalls: "I think we had a pod, but not, in the first instance, anything in it," Jim Leith says "Mickey did not have the H.S. scanner".

Whatever the final outcome, EE176 is one of the war's leading Lancaster "centenarians" — of that there is no doubt. Next time you see the Lancaster, count the bomb symbols for yourself.



RIGHT Mickey the Moocher! City of Lincoln heads home to Coningsby on March 31.

Aeroplane, June 2000

21

A Lanc called Mickey

ONE OPERATIONAL TOUR BY LANCASTER BOMBERS

61 SQUADRON, SKELLINGTHORPE, LINCOLN

OCTOBER 1944 – APRIL 1945

CREW	
Pilot RAAF	Frank Mouritz
Ft/Engineer RAF	Jim Leith
Bomb Aimer RAF	Peter Smith
Navigator RAF	Laurie Cooper
Wireless Op. RAAF	David Blomfield
Mid-Upper Gunner RAF	Arthur Bass
Rear Gunner RAF	Denis Cluett

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

OPERATIONAL DIARY

27 September 1944 – 17 April 1945

1	27 September 1944	Kaiserlauten	Second pilot
2	05 October 1944	Wilhelmshaven	Pilot & Skipper
3	06 October 1944	Bremen	Pilot & Skipper
4	11 October 1944	Walchern (Flushing)	Pilot & Skipper
5	15 October 1944	Brunswick	Pilot & Skipper
6	19 October 1944	Nuremberg	Pilot & Skipper
7	23 October 1944	Walchern (Flushing)	Pilot & Skipper
8	06 November 1944	Mittelland Canal	Pilot & Skipper
9	11 November 1944	Harburg	Pilot & Skipper
10	16 November 1944	Duren (US Army support)	Pilot & Skipper
11	21 November 1944	Dortmun- Ems Canal	Pilot & Skipper
12	26 November 1944	Munich	Pilot & Skipper
13	18 December 1944	Gdynia (Poland)	Pilot & Skipper
14	21 December 1944	Politz	Pilot & Skipper
15	30 December 1944	Houffalize	Pilot & Skipper
16	01 January 1945	Mittelland Canal	Pilot & Skipper
17	04 January 1945	Royan	Pilot & Skipper
18	05 January 1945	Houffalize	Pilot & Skipper
19	13 January 1945	Politz	Pilot & Skipper
20	01 February 1945	Seigen	Pilot & Skipper
21	07 February 1945	Dortmun- Ems Canal	Pilot & Skipper
22	08 February 1945	Politz	Pilot & Skipper
23	13 February 1945	Dresden	Pilot & Skipper
24	14 February 1945	Rositz	Pilot & Skipper
25	19 February 1945	Bohlen	Pilot & Skipper
26	03 March 1945	Dortmun- Ems Canal	Pilot & Skipper
27	06 March 1945	Sassnitz	Pilot & Skipper
28	20 March 1945	Bohlen	Pilot & Skipper
29	22 March 1945	Bremen Bridge	Pilot & Skipper
30	23 March 1945	Wessel	Pilot & Skipper
31	27 March 1945	Farge	Pilot & Skipper
32	04 April 1945	Nudhausen	Pilot & Skipper
33	17 April 1945	Pilsen	Pilot & Skipper

A Lanc called Mickey

OPERATIONAL DIARY

27 September 1944 – 17 April 1945

27/28 September 1944	KAISERLAUTERN*	Second Pilot*	6.25 hours
<p>217 Lancasters & 10 Mosquitoes of 1 & 5 Group in the only major raid carried out by Bomber Command on this medium sized target.</p> <p>1 Lancaster & 1 Mosquito lost.</p> <p>909 tons of bombs were dropped in an accurate raid and widespread destruction was caused. The post war British Bombing Survey Unit estimated that 36% of the town's built-up area was destroyed.</p> <p>The local report complains that the town was not a military objective but then lists the typical catalogue of small factories, public buildings, churches, etc destroyed or seriously damaged, which larger German communities had long got used to being hit in area bombing raids. The report concludes with the statement that 144 people, predominantly women & children died-victims mostly burnt alive.</p> <p>1 Lancaster lost.</p> <p>* This raid was undertaken whilst Frank Mouritz was 2nd pilot only, & did not involve the rest of the crew until he became 1st pilot in the following raids. This raid is not shown on the map.</p>			

05 October 1944	WILHELMSHAVEN	1 st Pilot	5.45 hours
<p>227 Lancasters & 1 Mosquito of 5 Group attempted to bomb Wilhelmshaven through 10/10th cloud. Marking and bombing were all based on H2S and the raid appeared to be scattered.</p> <p>18 Lancasters did not join in the main attack but bombed a group of ships seen through a break in the cloud over the sea. Wilhelmshaven's diary only states that 12 people died.</p> <p>1 Lancaster lost.</p>			

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

06/07 October 1944	BREMEN	1 st Pilot	4.40 hours
<p>246 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 1 & 5 Group carried out the last of 32 major Bomber Command raids on this target. The raid based on the 5 Group Marking Method, was an outstanding success. 1,021 tons of bombs were dropped of which 868 were incendiaries. A detailed local report is available.</p> <p>"The local official who compiled this report after the war writes that the night was so clear with a three-quarter full moon that 'Bremen lay before the bombers like a presentation dish. The bomb aimers could not have wished for better conditions to carry out their task'.</p> <p>A huge fire area was started throughout the town centre and the surrounding areas but the effects of this were lessened by extensive property damage caused in this area by the Bomber Command raid 18/19th August.</p> <p>Classed as destroyed or severely damaged were: 4,859 houses, 5 churches, 1 hospital, 18 schools & 16 public & historic buildings. Casualties were 65 killed (a figure that suggests many evacuations), 766 injured & 37,724 bombed out.</p> <p>Severe damage was also caused to the A.G. Weser shipyard, the two Focke-Wulf factories, the Siemens Schuckert electrical works and other important war industries. The 'transport network' was described as being seriously disrupted.</p> <p>(It is interesting to note the increased efficiency and hence destructive power of Bomber Command at this time. Bremen- with it's shipyards & aircraft factories- had been the target for many carefully planned Bomber Command raids earlier in the war and was the target for one of the much publicized 1942 1,000 bomber raids. Now this raid with no more than a quarter of the total strength of Bomber Command, hardly mentioned in the history of the war books, had finished off Bremen and this city need not be attacked by Bomber Command again.)</p> <p>Two days later the Bremen Zeitung published passages in typical German propaganda style: 'But we know that we must bear all misfortunes with courage, since this is the best way we can contribute to a speedy victory, a victory which will repay us for the blows we have suffered. A victory which will also see the walls of Bremen duly rebuilt providing us with a future in freedom within a new abode.'</p> <p>5 Lancasters lost.</p>			

A Lanc called Mickey

11 October 1944	WALCHERN (Flushing)	1 st Pilot	2.40 hours
61 Lancasters & 2 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attempted to breach the sea walls at Veere on the northern coast of the island but were not successful.			
No aircraft lost.			

14/15 October 1944	BRUNSWICK	1 st Pilot	7.30 hours
233 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 5 Group carried out the worst raid of the war on Brunswick. The old centre of the town was completely destroyed.			
A local report says: 'The whole town, even the smaller districts, was particularly hard hit.' Reliable statistics on the damage are sparse: instead of quoting the normal number of buildings destroyed, the destruction was measured in hectares(150 hectares of the historic town area is mentioned) 561 people are believed to have died but there are near miraculous escapes when, 4 hours after the raid, firemen reached the first of 8 large public shelters which had been cut off in the 'sea of fire'* in the centre of the town.			
An estimated 23,000 people were in these shelters and all but 200 of them rescued. Among the relief, which arrived to help the 80,000 people bombed out, was the Hilfszug Bayer, a train from far way Bavaria equipped with technical help & kitchens for mass feeding arrangements. Brunswick was not raided again in strength by Bomber Command.			
1 Lancaster lost.			
* (In May 1945 I met some New Zealand soldiers who were POW's 30 miles from Brunswick. They could read papers by the light of the fires.)			

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19/20 October 1944	NUREMBERG	1 st Pilot	7.10 hours
<p>263 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 5 Group</p> <p>This attack was only a partial success for the 5 Group Method and the knockout blow, which had eluded Bomber Command for so long, was not achieved. The target area was found to be almost completely cloud covered. The aiming point is believed to have been the city centre but the local report says that the bombing fell almost entirely in the southern districts but this was the industrial area. 397 houses and 41 industrial buildings were destroyed. 306 people were killed- 122 civilians, 28 soldiers & air raid workers, 91 foreign workers & 65 Russian officer prisoners with 5 of their guards were killed when their earth shelter was hit.</p> <p>2 Lancasters lost.</p>			

23 October 1944	WALCHERN (Flushing)	1 st Pilot	2.45 hours
<p>112 Lancasters of 5 Group attacked the Flushing battery positions but visibility was poor and the bombing was scattered.</p> <p>4 Lancasters lost.</p>			

06/07 November 1944	MITTELLAND CANAL	1 st Pilot	5.55 hours
<p>235 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes attempted to cut the Mittelland Canal at its junction with the Dortmund -Ems Canal at Gravenhorst. The marking force experienced great difficulty in finding the target. The crew of a low flying Mosquito, pilot Flt/Lt L.C.E. De Vigne & navigator Australian Squad. Lead. F.W. Boyle 617 sqd found the canal and dropped their marker with such accuracy that it fell in the water and was extinguished. Only 31 aircraft bombed before the Master Bomber ordered the raid abandoned.</p> <p>10 Lancasters lost.</p>			

A Lanc called Mickey

11 November 1944	HARBURG	1 st Pilot	5.15 hours
<p>237 Lancasters & 8 Mosquitoes of 5 Group</p> <p>The aiming point for this raid was the Rhonania-Ossag oil refinery, which had been attacked several times by American day bombers. Brunswick's history of the Hamburg-Harburg air raids gives this raid only a brief mention, saying that considerable damage was caused in Harburg's residential and industrial areas but the oil refinery is not mentioned. 119 people killed & 5,205 people bombed out.</p> <p>7 Lancasters lost.</p>			

16 November 1944	DUREN	1 st Pilot	5.00 hours
<p>Bomber Command in max. strength and the U.S. Air Force attack various targets between Aachen & the Rhine prior to an attack by U.S. First & Ninth Army.</p> <p>485 Lancasters & 13 Mosquitoes of 1, 5 & 8 Group attacked Duren & virtually destroyed the town. 3,127 fatal casualties consisting of 2,403 local civilians, 398 civilians from other places, 326 unidentified including 217 soldiers. 9,400 tons of high explosive bombs were dropped by both air forces.</p> <p>The American advance was not a success.</p> <p>5 Group lost 3 Lancasters.</p>			

21 November 1944	DORTMUND-EMS CANAL	1 st Pilot	5.50 hours
<p>123 Lancasters & 5 Mosquitoes attacked the canal near Ladbergen. We bombed from 4,000 feet below the cloud. A breach was made in the only branch of the aqueduct, which had been repaired since the last raid. Water again drained out of the canal.</p> <p>No Lancasters lost.</p>			

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

26/27 November 1944	MUNICH	1 st Pilot	9.55 hours
<p>270 Lancasters & 8 Mosquitoes of 5 Group.</p> <p>Bomber Command claimed this as an accurate raid in good visibility, with much fresh damage done to railway targets. No local reports obtainable.</p> <p>1 Lancaster crashed in France.</p>			
18/19 November 1944	GDYNIA (Polish Corridor)	1 st Pilot	9.35 hours
<p>236 Lancasters of 5 Group attacked this distant port on the Baltic coast and caused damage to shipping, installations & housing in the port area.</p> <p>4 Lancasters lost.</p>			
21 December 1944	POLITZ	1 st Pilot	9.55 hours
<p>207 Lancasters & 1 Mosquito of 5 Group attacked the synthetic oil refinery near Stettin. Post raid reconnaissance showed that the power-station chimneys had collapsed and that other parts of the plant were damaged.</p> <p>3 Lancasters lost; 5 more crashed in England.</p>			
30 December 1944	HOUFFALIZE	1 st Pilot	5.30 hours
<p>154 Lancasters & 12 mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked a German supply bottleneck in a narrow valley at Houffalize. The results of the raid are not known. We brought our bombs back.</p> <p>1 Lancaster crashed in France.</p>			

A Lanc called Mickey

01 January 1945	MITTELLAND CANAL	1 st Pilot	4.30 hours
<p>152 Lancasters & 5 Mosquitoes of 5 Group carried out an accurate attack on the Gravenhorst section of the canal. Half a mile of banks were pitted with bomb craters and some parts were breached.</p> <p>No aircraft lost.</p>			

04 January 1945	ROYAN	1 st Pilot	6.30 hours
<p>347 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 1, 5 & 8 Group attacked Royan. A stubborn German garrison was holding out in this town preventing the Allies using the port of Bordeaux on the French coast. This was a tragic raid with a disputed background. Many French civilians were killed. 85-90% of the small town was destroyed.</p> <p>The German garrison did not surrender until April 18</p> <p>4 Lancasters lost, 2 collided & crashed in France.</p>			

05/06 January 1945	HOUFFALIZE	1 st Pilot	5.30 hours
<p>131 Lancasters & 9 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked this bottleneck in the German supply system in the Ardennes. The target was bombed with great accuracy.</p> <p>2 Lancasters lost.</p>			

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

13/14 January 1945	POLITZ	1 st Pilot	10.30 hours
<p>218 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked this oil plant near Stettin.</p> <p>This raid was planned as a blind attack but because the weather conditions were better than forecast, low level marking was carried out and very accurate bombing followed. Bomber Command, on the basis of photographic reconnaissance, states that the oil plant was 'reduced to a shambles'.</p> <p>2 Lancasters lost.</p> <p>This was by far the worst fighter attack that we had. The n/v gunner reported a twin engine fighter underneath. (We were about 30 mins on the way home over the North Sea after leaving the Danish coast). I took immediate evasive action and we received several 20mm cannon shells between the fuselage and the inboard starboard engine. The evasive action that I took enabled the rear & n/v gunner to fire on the enemy aircraft at close range. Both claimed hits. (Later confirmed by other aircraft).</p> <p>We lost petrol, some power of the hit engine, one dinghy & considerable panel damage. I suspected undercarriage damage but any check would have to wait until we were in a landing circuit. I considered a Mayday call but as the plane was maintaining height, and we still had sufficient petrol I did not think it warranted this action.</p> <p>We reached base with some petrol left. The undercarriage lowered OK but there was no way of checking damage in the dark. I landed, keeping most of the weight on the port wheel. When the starboard side touched the remainder of the wheel & leg dug into the runway & we turned slowly onto the grass in an ever-increasing circle & eventually came to rest. No-one was injured.</p> <p>M-Mike was about 5 weeks being repaired.</p>			

01/02 February 1945	SEIGEN	1 st Pilot	6.10 hours
<p>271 Lancasters & 11 Mosquitoes of 5 Group</p> <p>This raid experienced difficult marking & bombing conditions. Some damage was caused to the railway station but local report says that the markers were either carried away from Seigen by a strong wind or that dummy markers and a decoy fire attracted much bombing. Most of the raid fell in the country area outside Seigen. 128 people died.</p> <p>3 Lancasters & 1 Mosquito lost.</p>			

A Lanc called Mickey

07/08 February 1945	DORTMUND-EMS CANAL	1st Pilot	6.25 hours
<p>177 Lancasters & 11 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked the canal system near Ladbergen with delayed-action bombs. Later photographs showed that the banks had not been damaged: the bombs had fallen into nearby fields.</p> <p>3 Lancasters lost.</p>			

08/09 February 1945	POLITZ	1st Pilot	9.05 hours
<p>475 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 1, 5 & 8 Group.</p> <p>The attack took place in 2 waves, the first being marked and carried out entirely by 5 Group and the second being marked by the Pathfinders of 8 Group. The weather conditions were clear and bombing of both waves was extremely accurate. Severe damage was caused to this important synthetic-oil plant. It produced no further oil during the war. Spear mentioned this raid in his post war interrogation, as being a big setback to Germany's war effort.</p>			

13/14 February 1945	DRESDEN	1st Pilot	9.30 hours
<p>The Air Ministry had for several months been considering a series of particularly heavy raids on German cities with a view to causing such confusion and consternation that the hard stretched German war machine and civil administration would break down and the war would end. Several cities were on the list and Dresden was attacked in a very successful raid.</p> <p>5 Group attacked using low level marking with 244 Lancasters & Mosquitoes with moderate success. 3 hours later 552 Lancasters of 1, 3, 6, & 8 Group attacked using standard pathfinder marking. This was an accurate attack and a firestorm* started. Much has been written about this raid, both the reason for & the terrible result; at least 50,000 people & some say 200,000 people killed.</p> <p>6 Lancasters lost.</p> <p>311 American B-17 stoked up the fires next day.</p> <p>* On the return flight after the first raid, for at least 1 hour flying time, the target area resembled a blood red sunset between 2 layers of cloud.</p>			

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14/15 February 1945	ROSITZ	1st Pilot	8.55 hours
<p>244 Lancasters & 8 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked the oil refinery in this small town near Leipzig. Damage was caused to the southern part of the oil refinery.</p> <p>4 Lancasters lost.</p>			

19/20 February 1945	BOHLEN	1st Pilot	8.20 hours
<p>254 Lancasters & 6 Mosquitoes of 5 Group</p> <p>This raid was not successful, probably because the aircraft of the Master Bomber W/C E.A. Benjamin was shot down by flak over the target. Post raid reconnaissance showed that damage to the target was 'superficial'. There was no evidence to show where the main bombing fell (the body of W/C Benjamin D.F.C. & Bar is buried in the Berlin War Cemetery.)</p> <p>1 Mosquito lost.</p>			

03 March 1945	DORTMUND-EMS CANAL	1st Pilot	5.50 hours
<p>212 Lancasters & 10 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked the Ladbergen aqueduct, breached it in 2 places & put it completely out of action.</p> <p>7 Lancasters lost.</p>			

06/07 March 1945	SASSNITZ	1st Pilot	9.15 hours.
<p>191 Lancasters & 7 Mosquitoes of 5 Group attacked this small port on the island of Ragen in the Baltic. Considerable damage was caused to the northern part of the town & 3 ships sunk in the harbour.</p> <p>1 Lancaster lost.</p>			

A Lanc called Mickey

20 March 1945	BOHLEN	1 st Pilot	5.00 hours
<p>224 Lancasters & 11 Mosquitoes attacked the synthetic oil plant. This accurate attack put the plant out of action, and it was still inactive when captured by American troops several weeks later.</p> <p>9 Lancasters lost.</p>			
22 March 1945	RAILWAY BRIDGES	1 st Pilot	5.00 hours
<p>102 Lancasters of 5 Group attacked bridges at Bremen(82 aircraft), & Nienburg(20 aircraft of 617 sqd.) The Nienburg bridge was destroyed. (617 used Grand slam bombs.) We flew M-Mike and were window aircraft for 617 sqd.</p>			
23 March 1945	WESSEL	1 st Pilot	3.15 hours
<p>195 Lancasters & 23 Mosquitoes of 5 & 8 Group carried out the last raid on the unfortunate town. The Commandos crossed the Rhine as the bombing stopped & met little opposition.</p> <p>* We boomeranged with a u/s port inner engine. The propeller feathered itself due to a mechanical fault.</p> <p>No aircraft missing.</p>			
27 March 1945	FARGE	1 st Pilot	4.40 hours
<p>115 Lancasters of 5 Group attacked an oil storage depot (95 aircraft) and a U boat shelter at the small port of Weser north of Bremen(617 sqd.) Both attacks appeared successful. The results of the raid on the oil depot were not known because delayed action bombs were used so that smoke would not obscure the target. The U-boat shelter has a roof of 23ft of concrete. This was brought down by 2 Grand slam bombs. The shelter was rendered useless.</p> <p>No aircraft lost.</p>			

Recollections of a crew of World War II Lancaster Bomber called Mickey the Moocher

04 April 1945	NORDHAUSEN	1 st Pilot	6.35 hours
243 Lancasters & 1 Mosquito of 5 Group & 8 Pathfinder Mosquitoes attacked the barracks and the town, which was severely damaged. 1 Lancaster lost.			
17 April 1945	PILSEN*	1 st Pilot	8.00 hours
222 Lancasters & 11 Mosquitoes of 5 Group carried out an accurate attack on the railway yards. 1 Lancaster crashed in France. * The target is indicated on the map, but the flight path is not, due to the rapid series of events after their final raid			