

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

INTRODUCTION

This document is a pastiche of copied information; it does not purport to be original in any way. It is therefore without copyright. It simply chronicles certain events from the Squadron's formation in 1939 onward.

The basic concept began with extracts from official documents titled AIR/ 485, 486 & 487, the Squadron Operational Record Books (Form 540 and Appendices Form 541) held by the National Archives at Kew, London which were originally available only for personal viewing at the Archives but which are now available on-line (for a fee). These records very briefly summarise each 'operational' mission.

Overlaid on this was information on the human losses suffered by 50 Squadron taken from the painstakingly researched and meticulously produced document by Flt. Lt. P.C. Jacobs, RAF and the No. 50 and No. 61 Squadron Association, the "Roll Of Honour 1939 – 1945".

Finally, further information garnered from Internet and journal sources has been over-laid to expand on some of the incidents recorded briefly, by necessity, in these Operational Record Books. Wherever possible, first hand accounts have been referenced.

Such is the nature of a document such as this, written some 70 years after the event, that accounts published by some authoritative, and some not so authoritative, sources have had to be taken at face value. Responsibility for any inaccuracies is accepted by the 'author' but I have tried to cross reference as much information as possible within the constraints of budget (i.e. zero) and time (i.e. not much).

The bottom line is that no account such as this can be taken as 100% accurate.

It is hoped this document may help anyone curious in the events that followed the declaration of war in Europe in 1939 with particular relevance to No. 50 Squadron, Bomber Command, Royal Air Force.

Plain text is the 'authors' interpretation. Text in *Italics* is a quotation taken verbatim from the original source or record. Sources are listed at the end of this document.

These were very brave men indeed.

"We will remember them".

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PART 5- THE LONG SLOG BEGINS

1943

January 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Overview.

The Bombing Offensive continues apace against European Industrial targets with mining of sea-ways also a frequent tasking.

This month the 'Casablanca Directive' is issued setting out the future strategy for the Allied Bombing offensive; the directive does not come into force until February however.

Bomber Command is to continue mainly night operations; the USAAF is to perform High altitude daylight precision strikes.

The first use of Bomber Command's specialist Pathfinder Force (PFF) 'Target Indicators' or T.I.'s (Coloured flares to mark targets for the main force) by the Squadron occurs on the Duisburg raid this month.

In addition, the PFF use the new airborne ground mapping radar, H2S, for the first time.

Also, the arrival of improved B. Mk. III Lancaster aircraft to replace battle-weary B. Mk. Is' is noted.

The Squadron is still commanded by W/ C W. M. Russell, DFC.

Movements in and out of the Squadron consists mainly of comings and goings to the H.C.U.'s with one Navigator posted to 109 Squadron and one Officer posted to No. 25 O.T.U.

Lincolnshire weather is very poor this month with rain making grass fields slippery and snowstorms with poor visibility common. Gales are also a feature later in the month; all this makes for many flying accidents this month across the Counties' airfields.

2/3 January 1943- Gardening in the DEODARS and FURZE areas.

This evening, 7 Lancaster's took off to drop sea-mines; 6 in the Bordeaux area, one in the St. Jean de Luz area. Five aircraft successfully completed their mission, one returned early due to a sick crew-member with a second suffering an engine failure. All returned safely to base.

8 January 1943- Night Bombing ESSEN

Early this morning Three aircraft successfully bombed ESSEN, using PFF T.I.'s as the cloud was so thick ground features could not be recognised. One aircraft was holed by fierce accurate FLAK over the target but all returned safely to Base around 8am.

8 January 1943- Night Gardening in NECTARINE area.

This evening, three aircraft took off to mine in the Frisian Islands area. One aircraft returned early due to an engine CSU failure. No losses with all returning before 10pm.

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8 January 1943- Night bombing DUISBERG

Five further aircraft departed Skellingthorpe tonight for a bombing mission to DUISBERG; only Four were to return. The mission was fraught, with one crew reporting being attacked by a night fighter and, having evaded it pressed on to bomb the target. In 10/ 10 cloud, four aircraft bombed the area using PFF Flares once more although results could not be confirmed, and returned to base safely. Two aircraft reported seeing an aircraft being shot down over the target at roughly the same altitude; as coloured flares could be seen exploding it was assumed that this was the sad demise of a PFF aircraft. FLAK defences around DUISBERG were ferocious but not yet 'predicted' in type.

Lancaster B. Mk. 1 coded VN-T, W4800 Failed To Return. Very few details of the aircraft's fate are known however it is believed the aircraft crashed near Düsseldorf. All aboard were killed.

Crew details:

Pilot 1293092 F/Sgt. Joseph KIERNAN (promoted posthumously), RAFVR	GRAVE 14.C.10
AG R102350 F/Sgt. Harold George DYER, RCAF aged 20	GRAVE 14.C. 9
F/Eng. 644404 Sgt. Phillip Stanley FISHER, RAF aged 23	GRAVE 14.C.11
Navigator 103831P/O Oswald Theodore Percy KING, RAFVR)	
WOP/ AG Sgt. Eric Charles MANTELL RAFVR aged 20)	JOINT GRAVE 14.C.12
AG 1538483 Sgt. Kenneth HALL RAFVR aged 20	GRAVE 14.C.14
Observer 404574 Sgt. Ernest Arthur SISSON, RNZAF aged 28.	GRAVE 14.C.13

All are interred in Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany. They would have been brought into this cemetery from their original resting places, as Reichswald is a post-war cemetery.

9 January 1943

During a night cross-country exercise, Lancaster B. Mk. III ED394 VN-R crashed while attempting to land at RAF Crosby-On-Eden airfield (now Carlisle Lake District Airport), Brampton, Cumbria killing four of the crew. Three others were thrown clear but one, Sgt. L.A. Smith, subsequently died while in Carlisle Hospital on the 13 January. It is believed that the aircraft had been diverted to Crosby due to fog in Lincolnshire; there was no operational flying on this night. After attempting a landing, the aircraft crashed in a field, sliding for some half a mile disintegrating as it did so; at this point the survivors were thrown clear. It then crossed a country lane (Old Church Lane) and finally hit a solid stone-built barn, part of Kirby Moor Farm. The aircraft then exploded on impact, catching fire and peppering the area with ammunition.

The farm later became a Hotel and is now (2016) Kirby Moor School.

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9 January 1943 Ctd.

Those "killed in a flying accident" aboard ED394, VN-R were:

F/E 617248 Sgt. Thomas (Tommy) HARROWER RAF, age 26, buried in Kirkintilloch Auld Isle cemetery, Dunbartonshire, Sec. E Plot C Grave 22 and
AG 1585578 Sgt. Herbert John HUXHAM RAFVR, age 20, buried Chulmleigh St. Mary Magdalene Churchyard, Chulmleigh, Devon and
Bom./Nav 759008 W.O. Guy SUNLEY RAFVR, Age 26, buried Carlisle Dalston Road Cemetery, Cumberland Ward 11 Sec. P Grave 47 and
Navigator 1314232 Sgt. Struan Anthony LANGLEY-ELLIS RAFVR, buried in Sherbourne Cemetery, Dorset Sec. A.2 Grave 19, and
Pilot 1312940 Sgt. Leslie Alfred SMITH RAFVR, age 29, buried Great Crosby, St. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Churchyard, Lancashire Sec. D Grave 132. Leslie died in Carlisle Hospital from injuries sustained in this crash, on 13th January 1943.

AG 1193203 Sgt. Thomas Arthur Williams was seriously injured and hospitalised but survived; AG 1054801 Sgt. George Alfred Hodgson was amazingly only slightly injured and received treatment at the local Brampton Memorial Hospital.

11 January 1943- Night Bombing ESSEN

In an early evening raid, Five aircraft took off to attack ESSEN; In poor weather, Four aircraft bombed the target area while one returned early due to guns failing to operate. Once again, PFF T.I.'s were used and indeed needed due to cloud and ground haze. FLAK was put up in 'Barrage' fashion and, once again it was reported by crews that yet another PFF aircraft was believed to have been witnessed being shot down in flames over the target. All Squadron aircraft returned safely.

13 January 1943- Night bombing ESSEN

Four aircraft this morning left in the early hours to attack ESSEN once more, with three aircraft bombing the target, again in poor weather and visibility with 10/10 cloud cover. One aircraft was forced to return early due to equipment failures. All returned to Base safely.

13 January 1943- Night Bombing ESSEN

Once again, the Squadron is detailed to attack targets in ESSEN. Departing early evening, Four aircraft set off with One returning early after the guns were found to have frozen up. The remaining Three pressed home their attack in relatively good weather with a bright moon. One crew made mention of the soon to be dreaded 'predictive Flak', a new German ground based radar based system where groups of flak guns are homed and ranged on their targets with deadly accuracy. Two aircraft reported FLAK damage in the bomb doors. All aircraft returned safely to Base.

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14/ 15 January 1943- Night Gardening DEODARS area.

Tonight, three aircraft successfully dropped sea-mines in the Bordeaux area and returned safely. No difficulties were reported, however sortie lengths were in excess of SEVEN Hours and pin-point accuracy is required delivering these munitions.

16/ 17 January 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Eight aircraft tonight took off on a long-range mission to attack targets in BERLIN this evening led by the Wing Commander. Crews reported varying degrees of success, with the Pathfinder Force marking used once more. Visibility over BERLIN was said to have been excellent however with a half- moon and some crews reported positive bombing results. One aircraft returned to base early but bombed the Island of SYLT, identified on the return leg while another, unable to maintain altitude also returned early to Base.

One crew reports seeing two aircraft being shot at; one over LUBECK and the other in the KIEL area. Sgt. Schofield and his crew in R5631 had a very trying time indeed. While over the target, the aircraft was hit in the bomb bay by flak; on leaving the target they were further attacked by a night fighter later identified as a JU88. The elevator and rudder trim systems were shot away leaving the aircraft very difficult to control in pitch, and the rear gunner Sgt. J. F. BELL was wounded.

The crew used a trailing aerial cable, lashed around a strong-point at the front of the aircraft and then wrapped around the control column, to assist the pilot to keep the nose lowered and after the crew had temporarily repaired the Trim controls managed to successfully land in England with no hydraulics and using emergency air to lower the undercarriage; a remarkable feat of crew co-ordination, skill and bravery. It is thought R5631 had been 'Borrowed' from 1660 H.C.U. for this mission as this aircraft does not appear in the Squadron Operational Record Book prior or after this eventful flight but is recorded as flying with a Lancaster Finishing School in 1944.

ED361 and crew had an eventful night as well, with the Captain Sgt. Kitching laconically noting that the FLAK was so intense that a near miss "put the aircraft over on its back"; an understatement of peril if ever there was one! All returned safely to Base with the last landing shortly after midnight.

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17/ 18 January 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Eight aircraft took off early evening for BERLIN again. It was to prove a fateful mission. Six crews found Berlin and bombed with mixed, generally positive, results. Cloud was low 10/10ths but clear underneath. One aircraft returned early due to sickness of the gunner, landing at RAF Elsham Wolds. W4280 with the Birch crew reported heavy night fighter activity on the route in to Berlin, being attacked twice but following violent 'corkscrew' manoeuvres the fighters were evaded, the aircraft returning across Europe flat- out at tree-top height to avoid the fighters. W4117 with the Davies crew were hit by FLAK and the Bomb Aimer Sgt. C. D. Terry seriously injured. ED472 suffered an engine fire and once extinguished landed safely at Base. One further aircraft had engine failure and returned early; thus, Five aircraft aborted their mission and only Three bombed the target area. Seven aircraft returned this night:

Almost new Lancaster B. Mk. III **ED471 'Failed To Return'**, assumed due to enemy action. Post war investigation revealed no claims for shooting down this aircraft. The location of the crash site is not known, however the crew are all buried in the **Kiel War Cemetery, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany** which is a Post War Cemetery; they would therefore have been buried originally in the North-west of Germany, Frisian Islands or Schleswig-Holstein, indicating the general area of the crash.

The following crew are all buried together at Kiel:

Pilot 403586 P/O Edmond Peter HEINRICH, age 20	Grave 4.J.8.
Navigator 1114338 Sgt. Jack EASTWOOD, RAFVR, age 31	(Joint Grave 4.H.16/17.
WOP/ AG 648382 F/Sgt. Arthur Gwilyn THOMAS RAF, age 23.	(Joint Grave 4.H.16/17.
FE 1198997 Sgt. Leslie James BOND RAFVR.	Grave 4.J.5.
AG R/4236A F/Sgt. Ian FRASER RCAF age 22	Grave 4.J.7.
R74326A WO 2 nd Class John Alwin MOORE RCAF, age 24.	Grave 4.J.6.
J/8127F/O Robert HARVIE RCAF.	Grave 4.J.4.

This crew illustrates well the multi-national make up of Bomber crews; a Scot, a Welshman, an Englishman, an Australian and three Canadians.

21 January 1943- Night Bombing ESSEN.

Six aircraft tonight set out in the early evening to attack ESSEN. No less than Four aircraft returned without bombing due to equipment failures; one with an engine and intercom. failure, one with intercom. and gun failures and one with turret hydraulic failure and a fourth with multiple equipment failures. WD468 reported they were carrying 'MANDREL', the RAF's first Radar jamming device; it was designed to counter the long- range ground radar used by the Germans to detect Allied aircraft.

Ground haze made target identification difficult and PFF illumination was not seen. Flak was reported as heavy and one aircraft sustained light damage. All returned safely to Base. 6X 4000Lb Bombs and 4390x 4Lb Incendiaries were expended tonight.

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23/ 24 January 1943- Night bombing DUSSELDORF

This evening Six Squadron aircraft took off for DUSSELDORF.

One aircraft returned early due to gun failure, another found that upon reaching the target two of the crew were violently sick from lack of Oxygen (Fatal if left to prolong) and subsequently jettisoned the load and returned to Base. Two crews bombed ROERMOND, the 'last resort' alternative whilst subjected to intense FLAK, due to guns freezing up. Only Two crews bombed the target area and even then accuracy was doubted by the crews themselves. In all cases crews reported having great difficulty in bombing due to intense flak while the Schofield crew aboard ED486 reported being attacked and damaged by an Me110 night fighter. All returned to base safely.

27/ 28 January 1943- Night bombing DUSSELDORF

From around 6pm this evening ten aircraft took off to attack targets in DUSSELDORF once more. Two aircraft returned to base early due to Technical difficulties, ED470 suffering oxygen failure. Seven aircraft found the target area but found target identification difficult due to low cloud and confusing target marking Indicators. Flak defences also made target aiming difficult. 'MANDREL' was reported as carried and used aboard ED484. Nine aircraft returned safely to base at around 11pm.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED486 crashed just after take-off with the loss of all crew members at around 7.30pm; all the crew were posted as 'Killed in a flying Accident'.

The aircraft is reported to have taken off normally into a cloud base of around 2000 feet; some 30 minutes later it was seen diving vertically out of cloud into the ground somewhere between RAF Waddington and Coleby. At this point the aircraft would likely have been climbing to join the 'Bomber Stream' orbiting above Lincolnshire prior to setting course for Europe. Why it crashed has not been fully established.

The Fatalities were:

Pilot 1384066 Sgt. Alfred Lawrance KITCHING RAFVR age 22, buried West Norwood Cemetery and Crematorium, London, Sec. 35, Grave 39501.

F/E 549996 Sgt. Adrian Laurence William CALE RAF, buried in Bassingbourne Cum Kneesworth Cemetery, Warwickshire, Row FF Grave 7.

Navigator 1387240 Sgt. Ronald Patrick EDWARDS RAFVR, age 27, buried Hastings Cemetery, Sussex, Div. H Sec. A Row B Grave 25.

Navigator R/102722 F/Sgt. John Wallace WILSON RCAF, age 27 buried at Lincoln Newport Cemetery, Lincolnshire, Sec. G Grave 340 South.

WOP/ AG R/110597 Sgt. Maurice Jean BARBE, RCAF, buried in Lincoln Newport Cemetery, Sec. G Grave 339 North

AG R130188 F/Sgt. John CURRIE RCAF, age 25, buried in Lincoln Newport Cemetery, Lincolnshire, Sec. G Grave 340 North.

AG 991230 Sgt. John Edward WHITE RAFVR, buried in Sheffield City Road Cemetery, Yorkshire, Sec. F Grave 2947.

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January 1943, RAF Skellingthorpe

30/ 31 January 1943- Night Bombing HAMBURG

Eight aircraft departed Skellingthorpe tonight to attack HAMBURG. Three aircraft returned early; two with airspeed indicator problems (thought to be due to icing) and one with rear turret guns frozen. The rest bombed with 9/10 cloud cover but with good visibility below it on the PFF Markers. All returned safely to Skellingthorpe.

SUMMARY

Representative aircraft:

B. Mk. III: ; ED361, ED386, ED387, ED388, ED423, ED409, ED415, ED449; ED468; ED469, ED470; **ED471**, ED472; ED473; ED475; ED478; ED483; ED484; **ED486**, ED488, ED491, ED499, ED527.

B. Mk. I: W4117; W4112; W4380, W4161; W4267, W4367, W4380; R5631, R5687, ED309, ED358, **ED394**, **W4800**.

Representative Crews:

Birch, Calvert, Davies, Dennis, Evans, Gilmour, **Heinrich**, Huntley, Johanson, **Kiernan**, **Kitching**, Knight, Maudsley, Murray C, Power, Richardson, Russell, Schofield, **Smith L.A.** Townsend, Yates.

Twenty Six men lost their lives this month on Operations or in Flying Accidents, with Four aircraft destroyed.

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The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

This month the 'Casablanca Directive' is issued replacing the previous General Directive No.5 ("Area Bombing Directive") and sets out the future strategy for the Allied Bombing offensive. Amended twice the directive stated:

4th February 1943 Air Ministry Ref. C.S. 16536 S.46368 A.C.A.S. Ops

Primary Subject to exigencies of weather and of tactical feasibility (see object);-

- (a) Submarine construction yards.
- (b) German aircraft industry.
- (c) Transportation.
- (d) Oil plants.
- (e) Other targets in the enemy war industry.

This order of priority may be varied with the Strategic situation and the U-Boat bases in France.

On Demand

- (i) U-Boat bases on the Biscay Coast
- (ii) When Allied Armies re-enter the continent, to afford all possible support in a manner most effective.

Periodic: Berlin when conditions suitable for attainment of specially valuable results unfavourable to German morale or favourable to Russian morale.

Object:

Primarily the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, Industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened. Every opportunity is to be taken to attack Germany by day to destroy objectives that are unsuitable for night attack, to sustain continuous pressure on German morale, to impose heavy losses on German day fighter force and to conserve German fighter force away from the Russian and Mediterranean theatres of war."

Arthur Harris explains in his later Biography that he drew the conclusion that ".....the **Ruhr** remained the principle target for the RAF."

No. 50 Squadron crew and aircraft losses mount this month as the air war in Europe progresses. New targets such as Cologne are attacked, and the new Lancaster B. Mk. III becomes the standard aircraft for the Squadron with older Mk.1's being released to the H.C.U.'s.

Flying accidents continue to exact a heavy toll and the weather continues its trend of ice, gales and mist/ fog in Lincolnshire. Weather is very unkind to fatigued flyers returning to base in badly damaged aircraft.

Postings in and out this month follow the familiar pattern of Heavy Conversion Unit and Operational Training Units, mainly to fill attrition losses. Ominously these numbers are rising.

A.V.M. R. H. Cochrane takes over as Air Officer Commanding 5 Group, Bomber Command from A.V.M. W. A. Coryton at the end of this month.

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February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

2/ 3 February 1943- Night bombing COLOGNE/ KOLN

Eight aircraft set off this evening for a mission to bomb targets in Cologne. 6 aircraft found the target easily and the city was already ablaze to the extent that aircraft could easily pin-point specific buildings. Searchlights and intense flak were encountered. One aircraft returned early due to turret failure; seven aircraft safely landed back at Base. **One aircraft failed to return: Lancaster III, ED488 VN-M with F/O Alan Power and crew. Post war research revealed that the aircraft was shot down on the way into the target at 21.27hrs by a Luftwaffe night fighter of NJG1 based at Venlo and flown by Hauptmann Werner Streib and Helmut Fischer. The aircraft exploded during the attack and crashed in flames into a swamp 1Km North-West of the North-Belgian Hamlet of HAMONT, the crash site known as 'Hep Papebos'. Four of the crew managed to bale out and landed safely, being taken POW immediately afterwards but two more crew remained aboard (both believed to be fatally injured during the fighter attack). The aircraft was completely submerged in the swamp and German records show that it was considered totally impossible to access the wreck which to this day contains the bodies of three crew. The pilot wrestled with the controls to allow his crew to bale out and finally jumped clear himself; tragically he left it too late as his body was found with a partially opened parachute not far from the crash site. Today, a memorial to the crew stands a few hundred metres from the crash site at the Chapel of B.V.M of de Poor, De Haart of Hamont. A part of one of the tail fins was removed by the Germans as a trophy for their mess at Venlo, which was subsequently 'rescued' by researchers in 1988 when the ex-mess building at the Royal Netherlands Air Force airfield was being demolished and is held by the GREVENBROEKMUSEUM, Hamont, Belgium along with a copy of the Report into the crash written in 1943.**

Casualties as follows:

Pilot J/9418 F/O David Allan POWER RCAF, age 28 (believed the same officer that survived the crash landing of R5702 back in November 1942). David is buried in Heverlee War Cemetery, Leuven, Belgium in Grave 7.J.2.

AG 79226 Fl/Lt. Jack Matthew BOUSFIELD, RAFVR DFC, and

AG 647383 Sgt. Stanley David BEADON, RAF were never recovered and are commemorated at Runnymede, Surrey.

Navigator F/O T.H. Church RCAF, F/E Sgt. D. Clarke RAF, WOP/AG Sgt. V. Mitchell RAF and Bomb Aimer Sgt. D. Holland were captured and made POW for the remainder of the war. In 1983 the four colleagues re-united and visited the crash site and grave of Al Power.

3/ 4 February 1943- Night Bombing Hamburg

Five aircraft departed Skellingthorpe tonight for Hamburg. Only two aircraft reached the target, bombing satisfactorily despite poor visibility on the PFF Target Illuminators. Three aircraft turned back early due to severe icing. All aircraft returned safely to Base. The Squadron C/O took part in this raid.

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February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

4/ 5 February 1943- Night bombing TURIN and LORIENT.

Two separate attacks were launched from Skellingthorpe tonight. Five aircraft were detailed to attack TURIN with four aircraft bombing successfully and returning to Base.

Lancaster III ED527 Failed To Return. After leaving base at 18.10hrs, information was received that the aircraft had made a forced landing at Gibraltar at around 10.30hrs; this however proved incorrect and after some position fixes were given to the aircraft by Gibraltar at 04.00hrs a rough position was calculated as North Africa or Western Mediterranean (some 10hrs flying time at that point and close to the endurance). Nothing further was heard from the aircraft and later Base received a Signal stating the aircraft had crashed in SOUTHERN MOROCCO with the loss of all aboard.

Fatalities were:

Pilot 414634 F/O Keith Campbell JOHANSON RNZAF, age 22;

AG 989538 Sgt. George ROBINSON RAFVR;

AG R/114490 F/Sgt. Mathew SIMPSON Napier RCAF age 20;

WOP/ AG R/104814 F/Sgt. Nelson Earl HOLNESS RCAF age 39;

FE 339844 Sgt. Gerald Macness BOWN RAFVR age 28;

Nav. 1346263 Sgt. David LIVINGSTON RAFVR age 21;

R106631 W.O. Class II Leonard Allan CUMMING RCAF, age 20.

All are buried in LE PETIT LAC CEMETERY, Oran, Algeria in the following respective graves: Plot E, Row C, Grave 13; E.C.8, E.C.9, E.C.7, E.C.19, E.C.12 and E.C.18.

4/ 5 February 1943- Night bombing LORIENT

Two further aircraft departed Skellingthorpe for an attack on LORIENT, France, the home of the Kriegsmarine's largest U-Boat Pen complex. The records do not show if this was indeed the target for tonight, however seven aircraft bombed the area with massive fires seen to take hold. One aircraft turned back early with both safely returning to base by around midnight.

7/ 8 February 1943- Night Bombing LORIENT

During a daylight fighter affiliation training sortie, Lancaster ED473 suffered an undercarriage collapse while landing heavily on Skellingthorpes runway.

Six aircraft took off for Lorient tonight; five bombed successfully in good visibility and with little opposition and returned to Skellingthorpe without incident. One aircraft returned early due to an intermittent engine problem.

11/ 12 February 1943- Night bombing WILHELMSHAFEN

Ten aircraft joined a large formation attack on Wilhelmshaven. Four aircraft returned early due to severe icing and engine problems, the remainder found the target but with virtually nil visibility. Bombs were dropped on the PFF Target Indicators and large Orange glows could be seen through the cloud layer. All returned safely to Base.

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February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

13/ 14 February 1943- Night bombing LORIENT

Eight aircraft took off tonight to attack LORIENT again. Seven aircraft bombed the docks in good visibility, returning safely to Base.

Lancaster ED484 VN-Q Failed To Return, with nothing heard from its (eight man) crew after departing base at around 7pm. Believed crashed into the sea off Lorient. No further details as of 2014.

Crew Details:

746977 WO John Howard BAILEY RAFVR, age 31;

574641 Sgt. Donald Robert BISHOP, RAFVR, age 20;

Pilot 101537 F/Lt. Evan Arthur DAVIES RAFVR age 32;

R/108386 F/Sgt. Keith Jonathan HODGSON RCAF, age 21;

Bomb Aimer R/ 97033 F/Sgt. William James HOGG

401388 F/Sgt. John Herbert McCARTHY RAAF, age 24;

AG R/114943 F/Sgt. Lloyd Harvey PETERSON RCAF, age 22

120646 F/O Maurice James STEWARD RAFVR, age 34.

Lloyd Peterson is buried in Concarneau Communal Cemetery, near Quimper, at Grave 1.

Evan Davies and William Hogg are buried in Gavres Communal Cemetery, near Hennebont, near Lorient, S.W. Plot, Row 3 Graves 4 & 5 respectively. It is probable that their bodies were washed up on French beaches later.

The bodies of John Bailey, Donald Bishop, Keith Hodgson, John McCarthy and Maurice Steward were never found and these men are commemorated at Runnymede.

14/ 15 February 1943- Night Bombing MILAN

Nine aircraft successfully attacked Milan tonight, the weather being excellent and PFF flares very useful, making visual identification of the aiming points easy. Defences were assessed as weak. All aircraft returned to base safely. The Squadron C/O took part in this raid.

16/ 17 February 1943- Night bombing- LORIENT

Eight aircraft successfully bombed the target which was well marked by the PFF and with excellent visibility. Defences were weak tonight and bombing recorded as very concentrated. ED429 returned early due to engine failure, jettisoning all bombs en-route. All aircraft returned to Base safely.

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February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

18/ 19 February 1943- Night bombing WILHELMSHAVEN

Ten aircraft were detailed to attack Wilhelmshaven Docks and nine successfully bombed the target aided by the PFF, although ED491 returned early without attacking due to crew Oxygen failure. ED449 reported a hydraulic pipe bursting during the mission rendering the upper gun turret inoperable but completed the mission. Good visibility and target clearly seen. All returned safely to Base.

21/ 22 February 1943- Night bombing BREMEN

Eight aircraft left Skellingthorpe for an attack at Bremen tonight. Weather was terrible with 10/ 10 cloud and poor visibility. PFF marking was thought to have been inaccurate tonight but aircraft had no choice but to bomb on the Indicators; no results could be seen. Two aircraft returned early due to multiple engine problems and carburettor icing.

25 February 1943

After landing heavily at Skellingthorpe after a training flight, Lancaster ED475 was damaged during taxi back to dispersal due to the tail undercarriage collapsing.

25/ 26 February 1943- Night bombing- NUREMBERG

Seven aircraft tonight attack Nuremberg successfully despite bad visibility, aided by the PFF Markers. One crew returned after bombing when the Air bomber was badly injured by flak and a direct 'speedy' return to base was made. One aircraft, ED387 failed to Return. Due to the survival of four crew members, some details are known of this crew's fate, and a search on the internet will provide many details. See <http://personal.nbnet.nb.ca/garlandb/bomber.html>. A summary is given below with grateful thanks to the above source.

Immediately after bombing Nuremberg, ED387 VN-K turned for home and was 'coned' by searchlights. The pilot took evasive action but they were soon hit by flak and the Port Outer engine caught fire. With time now critical, all seven crew bailed out but only four survived the descent; two of the crew (Ambury and McBay) died when the parachutes failed to open fully and a third (Yates) died from bullet/ shrapnel wounds received by the attack. The remainder evaded capture for a few days but eventually were made POW for the rest of the war; W.O. Peel died in captivity during the infamous 'death marches' of 1945, three others survived the war. ED387 eventually crashed near Roth, Bavaria some 25Km South of Nuremberg.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

25/ 26 February 1943- Night bombing- NUREMBERG Ctd.

ED387 VN-K Loss Ctd.

The Crew consisted of:

Killed in Action:

Pilot 1132141 Sgt. Eric Ashley YATES RAFVR, age 22, buried in Durnbach War Cemetery, Bad Tolz, Bayern Grave 5.C.1.

Nav. 1127353 W.O. Harry Siddell PEEL RAFVR, age 28, POW but died in captivity in 1945 during forced marches Eastward due to Russian advances. Buried in the Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery, Grave 1.Z.14.

WOP/ AG 1108568 Sgt. Arthur Cave McBAY RAFVR age 26, buried in Durnbach War Cemetery, Bad Tolz, Bayern Grave 5.C.2.

AG J/10365 F/O Ambury Newton JARVIS RCAF, buried in Durnbach War Cemetery, Bad Tolz, Bayern Grave 5.C.3.

Survivors:

FE Sgt. Henry Charles May injured and taken POW.

BA 1066635 Sgt. Frank Robert Anton RAFVR, evaded and taken POW #27543 at Stalag Luft VIIIIB/ 344, Lamsdorf.

AG 1558916 Sgt. David Allan, evaded and taken POW.

26/ 27 February 1943- Night bombing COLOGNE

Six aircraft tonight successfully attacked Cologne where visibility was excellent. Searchlights were very active but little flak was reported and no damage was reported. All aircraft returned safely to Base. The squadron C/O took part in this raid.

28 February- Night bombing St. Nazaire

Nine aircraft set out to bomb St. Nazaire, France. One returned early due engine failure, the rest bombed in good visibility with positive results seen. Flak and searchlights were moderate in intensity over the target. All aircraft returned safely to Base.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

SUMMARY

Representative Aircraft: (Lancaster B. Mk. III)

W4112 (Mk.1), ED382, **ED387 'K'**, ED415, ED423, ED442, ED429, ED449, ED468, ED470, ED472, ED473, ED475, ED478, ED482, ED483, **ED484 'Q'**, **ED488**, ED491, ED493, **ED527 'M'**, ED592.

Representative Crews:

Birch, **DAVIES**, Dennis, Evans, Gilmour, Huntley, **JOHANSON**, Knight, McGrath, Maudsley, Murray, **POWER**, Richardson, Russell (C.O.) Schofield, Stitt, Taylor, Thomas, Townsend, Ward, **YATES**.

Twenty-two aircrew were killed in action this month and four aircraft destroyed. Seven aircrew were taken POW.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

March 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

This month the twice amended 'Casablanca Directive' is put into practice after a slow build-up in February. The Battle of the Atlantic reaches its zenith as U-Boats sink 27 merchant Ships in one four-day operation.

A new officer takes over compiling the Operational Record Book Summary, as the narrative style has completely changed.

Thirteen No. 50 Squadron aircrew are posted to No. 617 Squadron, no doubt at very short notice!

This month's weather is pretty poor, with the typical pattern of fog or ground haze disrupting operations. This was particularly hard on all concerned, as many ops were cancelled at the last minute with a mixture of frustration and/ or relief tinged with the knowledge that the next day will bring another dangerous mission. Ground crews also had a hard time arming aircraft for nothing and disarming aircraft when the target is changed after loading, the latter being a particularly hazardous task especially where incendiary bombs are concerned.

The 'Battle of the Ruhr' begins; a campaign to disrupt German engineering output in the Ruhr Valley.

1/ 2 March 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Eight aircraft set off to attack BERLIN. ED472 was hit by flak prior to reaching the target and returned to base damaged. Flak and night fighter defences were heavy and accurate with searchlights also proving a hazard. Two aircraft Failed To Return from this mission; Lancaster ED423 and ED592. Post war, investigations has revealed the following:

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED423 VN-N was attacked by night fighters after bombing and on the return leg. As it did not appear to have been set on fire, the fighter attacked again (Standard practice) and the Lancaster was seen to dive steeply into the ground with none of the crew baling out. The aircraft crashed at Ridderkerk, South Holland at 00.44hrs on the 2nd March 1943. In his book "Countdown to freedom", Willem Ridder tells that the crews remains were buried in **Crooswijk Cemetery, Rotterdam**, near the entrance. Thousands of Dutch citizens came to pay their respects for these airmen which bothered the occupying Germans immensely; they promptly exhumed the remains and had them re-interred in a dark corner of the Cemetery. Apparently this somewhat callous act attracted even more sympathetic visitors. The author's sister 'adopted' the grave of Edward Gray and tended for it until the CWGC took over maintenance, a touching and probably typical gesture.

Full casualty list was as follows:

Pilot 655982 Sgt. David THOMAS RAFVR age 25, buried in Plot L.L., Row 1, Grave 27

FE 575832 Sgt. Clifford Howard LEWIS RAF age only 19, at L.L. Row 1, Joint Grave 28

Nav/BA 1391377 Sgt. Edward James GRAY RAFVR, Joint Grave 28

AG 131427 Sgt. Leonard Arthur KETLEY RAFVR age 20, Plot L.L. Row 2, Grave 29

AG 404108 Sgt. Rupert Sutton WHITCOMBE RNZAF, age 23, Plot L.L. Row 2 Grave 31

AG 1175887 Sgt. John HUGHES RAFVR age 20, Row 2 Grave 30

AG 1140185 Sgt. Robert Emmerson STOCKBURN RAFVR, age 32, Plot L.L. Row 1 Grave 26.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

February 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

1/ 2 March 1943- Night bombing BERLIN (Ctd.)

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED592 VN-B suffered the same fate, shot down by a night fighter and crashing around 23.47hrs 1st March 1943 near Wadenoijen (Gelderland) 5Km SW of Tiel, Holland with all on board lost. The crew are buried in Wadenoijen Protestant Churchyard, in Collective Grave 1, Plot 1 Row A. Full Casualty list as follows:

Pilot F/O 121412 Francis Eric	TOWNSEND RAFVR,
FE 1455048 Sgt. Alfred	SANDOW age 21
Nav/ BA 1322153 Sgt. William Charles	YETTON RAFVR,
WOP/ AG 648328 Sgt. David George	HOBBS RAF,
AG 1541546 Sgt. Peter John	ROSE RAFVR age 21,
AG 1389130 Sgt. Wallace Arthur	DAWE RAFVR age 22.
AG 1338068 Sgt. Harold	WOOD RAFVR.

As if to compound the tragedy, examination of the bombing results by photo-reconnaissance next day revealed that the PFF H2S radar screens could not distinguish individual features of the vast area covered by Berlin with a result that target marking was inaccurate and the bombs from 302 attacking aircraft fell in an area spread over 100 square miles.

3/4 March 1943- Night bombing HAMBURG

Eight aircraft set off to bomb Hamburg tonight. ED483 returned early, the rest bombed in poor visibility and ground haze; some crews expressed doubts as to aiming accuracy and after investigation it was thought that most bombs were dropped South of the Target area as per the previous night raid on Berlin. All aircraft returned to Base safely tonight.

4/ 5 March 1943- No Operations, Night training carried out.

5/ 6 March 1943- Night bombing ESSEN

Seven aircraft left Skellingthorpe tonight to attack Essen Krupps Works; the first of many. All aircraft returned safely after a largely successful mission.

6 and 7 March 1943- Operations were detailed but subsequently cancelled

8/ 9 March 1943- Night bombing NUREMBURG

Ten aircraft were detailed to attack this target. Eight successfully bombed however PFF markers were scattered and, despite good visibility allowing visual identification of the target by the crews, the results were not deemed to be as concentrated as they could have been. Two aircraft returned to base early after jettisoning weapons; all aircraft returned to Base safely.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

March 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

9/10 March 1943- Night bombing MUNICH

Ten aircraft tonight departed to attack Munich. Two aircraft returned early, Eight bombed the target with varying degrees of success due mainly to the fires and smoke that was already present on arrival. In general, results could not be seen. All aircraft returned to Base safely.

10/ 11 March 1943- No operations, Crew rest ordered.

11/ 12 March 1943- Night bombing STUTTGART

Nine aircraft set out to attack Stuttgart tonight. One returned early, the remainder bombed on PFF Markers and Illuminators with many bombs seen to detonate. All returned to Base safely.

12/ 13 March 1943- Night bombing ESSEN

Ten aircraft from the Squadron joined nine from 61 Squadron in an attack on Essen again tonight, joining a force of a total of 450 bombers on this raid. Nine aircraft successfully reached the target and bombed on the PFF markers, with damage to the Krupps Works thought to be severe. 23 aircraft failed to return from this raid, a 5% loss rate. Nine Squadron aircraft returned to base safely, however one aircraft Failed To Return.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED449 VN-T and crew were never heard from again after leaving Skellingthorpe. Believed to have been shot down by a night fighter (probably en-route to the target and thus fully laden) and crashed at 21.25hrs 12 March at Well (Limburg), on the East bank of the River Maas, 8 Km ENE of Venray, Holland. The crew all perished and were initially buried in Venlo; however post war they were moved to the 1945 Jonkerbos War Cemetery, Nijmegen, in the care of the CWGC.

Crew Fatalities were as follows, (with the Jonkerbos Grave locations):

Pilot R/105321 F/Sgt. Frederick	WARD RCAF, age 22 (24.c.2)
F/Eng 1104498 Sgt. Robert	WILSON RAFVR age 21. (24.c.6)
Nav 1318904 Sgt. Frederick	STEPHENS RAFVR, age 21. (24.C.1)
A/B 1501112 Sgt. Ronald	HESLOP RAFVR age 20. (24.C.4)
WOP/ AG 523635 F/Sgt. Andrew	ALLAN (24.c.7)
WOP/AG 1314184 Sgt. Richard John	JENKINS RAFVR, age 21. (24.c.5)
AG R/106357 Victor Robert David	KISSICK RCAF age 21, 24.c.3

Note the ages of these young men.

13/ 14 March 1943- Night Gardening Operation 'SILVERTHORNE' AREA

A lone aircraft tonight successfully mined in the Kattegat tonight, and returned safely to Base at 02.33hrs.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

March 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

15- 22 March 1943- Crews were briefed on six consecutive days but operations were cancelled last-minute, due to fog and early morning mists.

15 March 1943

Three aircraft were destroyed by fire on the ground at RAF Scampton in the morning fog after a parked 57 Squadron machine exploded, possibly due to a 4000lb 'cookie' being released during de-bombing and exploding, wrecking W4112 VN-L, W4196 and W4823 of 50 Squadron along with itself, Two further 57 Squadron machines and damaging Five further 57 Sq. Lancaster's. These three aircraft, old well worn Mk. I's may have been flown to Scampton as part of the creation of 617 Squadron, which officially formed at Scampton on the 21 March 1943 (and 13 aircrew were posted to 617 Squadron this month) and these aircraft do not appear to have flown on operations with the Squadron since February. The 57 Squadron machines were thought to have been parked the evening before nose to tail around the airfield perimeter track after fog had come down and made taxi-ing the aircraft back to their dispersals too hazardous. If nothing else this event proved the wisdom of the 'frying pan' dispersals!

22/ 23 March 1943- Night bombing St. Nazaire

Tonight, the Squadron provided Ten aircraft to join a large force attacking St. Nazaire, home of the Kriegsmarine U-boat pens. One aircraft returned to Base early due to unserviceability while two further aircraft reached the target but found the bombs had 'hung-up' (failed to release); these were jettisoned later. The remainder attacked the target but results were unclear. Ten aircraft returned safely to Base while one diverted to North Luffenham and another to Woodhall Spa, returning to base later on the 23 March.

23- 25 March 1943- Operations all cancelled due to weather.

26/ 27 March 1943- Night bombing DUISBERG

Ten aircraft set out tonight to bomb DUISBERG. One aircraft returned early due to Oxygen System failure and another due to engine problems while the remaining Eight bombed on accurate PFF Target Indicators, although one aircraft reported the Incendiaries 'hung-up' and were brought back to Base- a nightmare for the Squadron and Base armourers. Flak over the target was noted but not too accurate however two aircraft suffered damage.

27/ 28 March 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Twelve aircraft left tonight to join a large force attacking Berlin. One aircraft returned early due to Intercom failure while the remainder attacked the target with PFF It's in use. Results were thought to be 'scattered'. Despite a Flak barrage as well as the use of 'Predicted' Flak all aircraft returned to Base unscathed.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

March 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

28/ 29 March 1943- Night bombing St. Nazaire

Six aircraft departed base tonight to attack St. Nazaire. One aircraft turned back due to severe icing problems, the remainder reached the target, bombed and returned without incident.

29/ 30 March 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Eight aircraft set out from Base tonight to attack Berlin, the most heavily defended city in the Reich. Reports did not mention defences other than one aircraft being attacked without damage by a night fighter over the target. Icing conditions were again a serious problem with one aircraft finding it difficult to maintain height and another unable to bomb accurately due to the bomb-aimers Direct Vision panel being iced over. Another aircraft returned early due to an over-heating engine while another returned without bombing for unspecified reasons. ED712 bombed but while over Hanover an engine failed, returning to Base safely on three engines.

30/ 31 March- no operations due to weather.

Representative Aircraft: (All Lancaster B. Mk. III)

W4161, ED415, ED423, ED429, ED449, ED468, ED470, ED472, ED473, ED475, ED478, ED482, ED483, ED491, ED691, ED693, ED712, ED753, ED755

Representative Crews:

Birch, Burnett, Day, Duncan, Elderfield, Evans, Gilmour, Hollis, Huntley, Knight G, Maudeslay, Murray, Nichols, Pickens, Richardson, Russell (C.O.) Schofield, Stevens, Taylor, Thomas, Townsend, Ward.

Losses

Twenty-one aircrew were killed in action this month with three Lancaster B. Mk. III aircraft destroyed on ops and three more (Mk. I's) destroyed on the ground at Scampton on the 15th.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

The 'Battle of the Ruhr' intensifies; losses continue apace with the increasingly deeper penetration of Germany, and the policy of returning to previously attacked targets to complete the mission. German Defences soon learned that aircraft would return and accordingly prepared to repulse allied attacks.

In addition, bombing attacks on and mining of the sea approaches to La Spezia continue, Spezia being the major Italian Navy Port. Also this month, the disastrous mission to Pilsen Skoda Works with three out of the ten aircraft sent failing to return, 15 dead and six made POW, only to find that the wrong target had been bombed.

Postings in continue at much the same level as March due to attrition, as do movements of crew to and from the heavy Conversion Units and Operational Training Units. Moves to other Squadrons include one to No. 106 Sq. one complete crew to 619 Sq., 5 airmen to 83 Sq. and another two to No. 617 Sq.

Gales are a feature in this months weather pattern causing many a flying accident around Lincolnshire.

1 April 1943- No Operations planned

2/ 3 April 1943- Gardening in Deodars area

Nine aircraft left tonight to mine in the Bordeaux area. Lancaster **ED482** Failed to Return from this mission with nothing further heard from the crew after departing Skellingthorpe at 20.28hrs. The crew of ED693 reported two small 'Flak Ships' were encountered which fired at them. This may have been the cause of the loss of ED482; post war no further details have been unearthed and the aircraft and crew's final resting place has not been found.

Crew Details as Follows:

Pilot, 101051 F/Lt Alan Hone

951417 Sgt. John William

126678 F/O John Campbell

124756 F/O John

1330745 Sgt. Albert Ernest

1503603 Sgt. Cecil Mark

614099 F/Sgt. Austin Gabriel

NICHOLS RAFVR, age 27,

MOON RAFVR age 25

DAVIS RAFVR, age 22,

PARSONS RAFVR age 27,

ROBERTS RAFVR, age 21

SKELTON RAFVR age 20

MAGUIRE DFM, RAF, age 25.

All are remembered at the Runnymede memorial, Surrey.

The remaining Eight aircraft returned safely to base with little comment in the ORB on conditions or defences encountered other than the aforementioned Flak Ship.

3/4 April 1943- Night bombing ESSEN (Krupps Works).

Twelve aircraft joined an attack on Essen tonight, with one aircraft returning to base early without reaching the target. The mission was thought to be a great success with a high concentration of bombs, however flak was fierce and searchlights constant in the target area. One aircraft was holed by Flak. All aircraft returned safely to Base.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

4/5 April 1943- Night bombing KIEL

13 aircraft took off tonight to join a force attacking Kiel. One aircraft was reported damaged by another Lancaster exploding nearby (not 50 Sq.), circumstances unknown. Flak was reported as Heavy, Barrage type. Visibility was reported as very poor and 10/ 10 cloud. Results of this attack were largely unseen due to visibility. The first mention in the 50 Sq. ORB of the PFF using 'Sky' marking technique was seen.

5 April 1943- Daytime training detailed but cancelled due to poor weather in the UK.

6/ 7 April- Night Gardening in the FURZE AREA.

Two aircraft were despatched to mine the sea at St. Jean de Luz, in the mouth of the River La Nivelle/ Bay of Biscay. The mission was abortive, with one aircraft unable to find the target due to bad weather after three attempts and the other also unable to find the area due to low cloud; both jettisoned weapons 'SAFE'.

7/ 8 April 1943- No Operations planned.

8/ 9 April 1943- Night bombing DUISBERG

Nine aircraft departed Skellingthorpe tonight, but the meteorological reports were said to be incorrect and the weather at the target was very bad and made accurate bombing, and observing results, impossible, however one pilot, having left base 30 minutes after the main force reported visibility as average and that bombing appeared very 'scattered'. Nonetheless, Seven aircraft bombed the target using PFF Markers. One aircraft suffered navigational instrument failures ('GEE') and another suffered freezing of the elevator trim tabs, intercom failure and pilot's Oxygen supply failure. Both returned early without bombing. All aircraft returned to Base safely.

9/ 10 April 1943- Night bombing DUISBERG

Tonight another Nine aircraft returned to Duisburg to attack the target. Results were much improved due to good visibility with much improved bomb concentration. Night fighters were seen by two crews but no attack was pressed home after evasive action was taken. Accurate heavy Flak was also encountered. All aircraft returned safely to Base.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

10/ 11 April 1943- Night bombing FRANKFURT

Six aircraft tonight attacked Frankfurt am Maine. The PFF markers were not present as expected and crews reverted to visual identification and bombed accordingly, results were thought to be average. Two aircraft reported their gunners engaged enemy fighters and claims for 'damaged' were submitted. Five aircraft returned to Base Safely.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED478 VN-G sent a message to Waddington stating it was returning to Base. Around 02.00hrs the pilot requested permission to jettison weapons, and permission was soon granted with an acknowledgement received from ED478 again by RAF Waddington. The Royal Observer Corps then reported an aircraft crossing the coast inbound soon after (around 03.10) but at 0445hrs faint W/T signals were picked up which allowed a very rough positional fix as some 60 miles off Skegness. Any crew ditching into the inhospitable North Sea at night had slim chances for survival. A search was made the next day (11th) off the coast of Skegness and a few metal fragments were found but no positive identification could be made. Nothing further was heard from this crew and neither the wreck or the crews remains has been found to this day.

Pilot R/108260 W.O. Class II Francis Gerard
620764 Sgt. Robert Francis
1212998 Sgt. Ronald
925924 F/Sgt. Peter Lawford
134030 F/O Alfred
955619 Sgt. Cyril
1338726 Sgt. Alfred Henry

McGRATH RCAF, age 21
WILSON RAF, age 22
COULSON RAFVR, age 35
MANSFIELD RAFVR
CHEETHAM RAFVR, age 31
BIRTLES RAFVR, age 22
JEFFREY RAFVR, age 19.

All are commemorated at the Runnymede memorial, Surrey.

11 April 1943- No Operations ordered.

12 April 1943- Eleven aircraft detailed for Ops. but due to weather all Ops. cancelled.

13/ 14 April 1943- Night bombing SPEZIA and Gardening in MULLET AREA

Nine aircraft successfully bombed Spezia docks with heavy concentration of bombs achieved in good visibility without PFF assistance. A combination of High Capacity bombs and Incendiaries were used. All aircraft returned to base safely with no incidents reported.

Five aircraft were detailed to drop sea-mines in the sea around Spezia. Three successfully placed the mines, two returned to base with weapons on-board due to multiple technical failures of engines and equipment. All returned safely.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

14/ 15 April 1943- Night bombing STUTTGART.

Six aircraft tonight attacked a target in Stuttgart, with results thought to be excellent, and again without PFF assistance. No serious opposition was noted, except one aircraft had a cannon shell penetrate the bomb aimers vision panel but none of the crew were hurt. Some flak was also encountered over the French coast. Three aircraft returned low level, shooting up trains, motor cars and also one airfield was machine gunned as lights had been left lit. Another aircraft, having been unsuccessful at dropping the bomb load over the target due to bomb release failure returned to attack again, this time dropping the entire load manually; it also reported 'accidentally' dropping a 4000lb HC Cookie on an airfield in Stuttgart, hitting the runway!

15/ 16 April 1943- No operations planned.

16 April 1943

Following a Air Test and a normal landing, on returning to dispersal the tail undercarriage of Lancaster ED429 collapsed damaging the fuselage. No injuries reported.

16/ 17 April 1943- Night bombing the SKODA WORKS, PILSEN

10 aircraft departed Skellingthorpe to attack this target (Pilsen was in Czechoslovakia, the Skoda Works being famous for producing high quality armoured vehicles and of course seized by the Germans for their war machine. Pilsen was also at extreme range with little margin for error, even for the mighty Lancaster). Weather was reasonable with good visibility (and a full moon, the worst condition for an attacking bomber). Unfortunately night fighter opposition, heavy flak and many searchlights were encountered both over the target and en-route (over Mannheim for instance). Only Four aircraft bombed the primary target. ED755 was hit by flak in an Aileron and returned to base fast and at low-level shooting up a train chanced upon while doing so. Another was chased by a JU88 night fighter but managed to evade it and bomb successfully. One aircraft returned early due to a sick pilot.

Intelligence later revealed that the PFF had wrongly identified a building used for housing German troops and most of the 300+ bombers dropped their loads here some SEVEN MILES from the Skoda factory. In addition, 37 aircraft in total were lost on this one raid.

Only SEVEN aircraft from this squadron returned safely to Base.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

16/ 17 April 1943- Night bombing the SKODA WORKS, PILSEN (Ctd.)

Lancaster ED784 VN-N (and NOT ED437 as stated in the ORB) Failed to Return from this mission. Due to later surviving crew testimony the full details of this loss are known; summary only as follows.

The aircraft was engaged by two Me110 Night Fighters near Saarbrücken on the way in to the target. One aircraft was shot down; the other was evaded by 'corkscrewing'. However while over the target ED784 was 'coned' by searchlights and then seriously damaged by flak.

At around 4am on the 17 April the pilot was forced to ditch the aircraft in the sea some 6 miles off the coast of France near Berck-sur-Mer. Six of the Eight-man crew reached the dinghy but it was damaged and could not hold them all.

The aircraft Captain, 'Henry' Elderfield selflessly decided to swim for the coast to get help but was never seen again. The survivors were rescued by a British MTB at 2am on the 18th April after some 22 hours at sea. The remaining two crew were presumed to have drowned in the wreck of ED784 and were never found.

ED784 Casualties as follows:

Killed In Action:

Pilot F/O 125506 Henry ELDERFIELD RAFVR, is commemorated on the memorial at Runnymede.

2nd. Nav. 130513 P/O Patrick Claud COTTER RAFVR (on his first operation to gain experience), commemorated at Runnymede and at Runcion Holmes.

Air Bomber 1147367 Sgt. Harold HINCHCLIFFE RAFVR, is commemorated at Runnymede.

Survivors:

FE Sgt. R. CHAMBERS

Nav. Sgt. J. M. LAING

WOP/ AG Sgt. R. S. HARMAN

AG Sgt. John "Wally" HAMMOND

AG Sgt. H. WEBSTER

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

16/ 17 April 1943- Night bombing the SKODA WORKS, PILSEN (Ctd.)

Also, Lancaster B. Mk. III ED800 VN-O failed to return, with nothing further heard from this aircraft after departure from Skellingthorpe.

Luftwaffe reports give evidence that the aircraft was shot down on its way home over Belgium, by a Night Fighter Messerschmitt Bf110 of 1/ NJG 4 aided by ground control radar. The aircraft burst into flames when the fuel tanks were hit and the aircraft dived into the ground, crashing near the village of Yves-Gomezee at Bois de la Rosette (a Forest), in Namur, Belgium around 4am. The crew did not bale out. A civilian witness to the crash scene the next day tells that not much remained of the aircraft and that it most likely dived vertically into the ground almost completely burying itself, with water having filled the four craters made by the engines. Trees around the crater remain untouched further indicating a vertical impact. Two attempts were made by the Germans to salvage any useful parts but little were found; the area in question was an old disused mine and the aircraft's impact penetrated some of the old tunnels which promptly collapsed, burying the remains. The crew were never recovered despite the efforts of an allied recovery party shortly after the war ended and still remain in the aircraft.

In 1993, the villagers of Yves-Gomezee decided to trace the crews relatives, only to find that some of these relatives had not been told of the true whereabouts of their loved-ones final resting place (some had been told the aircraft lay on the sea bed of the North Sea) and on April 17, 1993 relatives of the crew met the villagers and dignitaries at a monument erected in Yves-Gomazee to honour the crew of ED800. A flypast of Belgian F-16 Jets finished the ceremony as children from the village threw flowers into the still water filled craters as a mark of respect.

It was raining, and a film of oil and petrol was seen on the surface.

The crew who perished this night were:

Pilot 1346422 Sgt. John Gilchrist DUNCAN RAFVR

947859 Sgt. James SPEIRS RAFVR, age 27

1078000 John Alec BATES RAFVR age 22

1345207 Sgt. David Mackenzie SMELLIE RAFVR, age 27

1162200 Sgt. Albert Warren BERRY RAFVR age 22

1475694 Sgt. Cyril PAYNE RAFVR age 21

1412081 Sgt. Herbert Rhys BARNES RAFVR age 21.

All are commemorated at the Runnymede memorial, Surrey.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

16/ 17 April 1943- Night bombing the SKODA WORKS, PILSEN (Ctd.)

A Third aircraft and crew, Lancaster ED691 VN-K also failed to return from Pilsen (listed in the ORB as ED491 but in error). Shot down by Night fighter pilot Hptm Wilhelm Herget and crashed at 1.6Km from Epense on Rte Dommartin, 36Km East of Chalons-Sur-Marne, now re-named Chalons-en-Champagne, France.

A civilian witness to the crash states that the night in question had a full moon; one body was found in the scattered remains of ED691 which had obviously burned fiercely. The pilot was removed that day and given a decent burial. Touchingly, he remembers the pilot was wearing a mascot, a 'Little white hen'.

That pilot, P/O Harry Herbert DAY was most likely flying the aircraft to allow the crew to escape safely but ran out of time to escape himself. The rest of the (Eight-man) crew baled out and landed safely in France.

Crew details:

Killed In Action:

Pilot 124456 F/O Harry Herbert DAY RAFVR, age 20, buried in Epense Communal Cemetery, Grave 1, Marne, France.

Survived and believed to have evaded and returned to the UK:

2nd 'Dickey' (Pilot or Nav.), F/O Trotman

Survived and made POW:

Nav. 411090 F/O Henry Edward HOLLAND RAAF, POW# 1072, at Stalag Luft 3

B/A 1243286 W.O. G.A.E. HODGKINSON RAF, POW# 1151, at Stalag 357

WOP/ AG 1199030 W.O. ROSSBOTHAM, POW# 1091, at Stalag Luft 357

FE 578213 F/Sgt. R C SALMON, made POW# 1161, at Stalag Luft 357

AG 1334839 F/Sgt. N EVANS, made POW# 1241, at Stalag Luft 355

AG Sgt. S. R. SYMES RCAF- taken prisoner but believed to have been badly injured and held at a hospital for some time. It is thought he was one of a group of Allied POW's exchanged for German POW's and put on board the MV 'Gradisca' at Marseilles bound for Barcelona then onwards to Belfast before being transferred to the SS Borinquen reaching Liverpool on the 28 May, 1944.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

17/ 18 April 1943- No Operations planned this day (No doubt influenced by the mauling the Squadron had suffered).

18/ 19 April 1943- Night gardening MULLET area and bombing (La) SPEZIA

During taxi out for an operational sortie, ED475 was damaged when a wing tip struck a parked crane. No-one was injured.

Four aircraft gardened in the Gulf of Spezia area in good conditions but with a full moon, one returning early with weapons on board due to technical failures.

Five aircraft left Skellingthorpe around 21.00hrs to join a force attacking (La) Spezia, Italy, using PFF Marking and GEE. Negligible opposition was encountered and bombing concentration was thought to have been very high with incendiaries seen to ignite in the excellent visibility that prevailed.

All aircraft returned to base safely with no damage reported.

19 April 1943- Operations planned but cancelled due to bad weather.

20/ 21 April 1943- Night bombing STETTIN

Eight aircraft took off tonight to attack Stettin, Seven completing the attack successfully and returning to Base. Enemy aircraft were encountered by the attacking bombers tonight; ED491 was stalked by two JU-88 aircraft and were engaged by the gunners, with one enemy aircraft seen to be hit and dive to the ground in flames- 'Kill' claimed (Huntley crew). This aircraft could not continue the mission after these lengthy encounters and returned to Base. Attackers and defenders were both aided by good visibility and bright moonlight. Most crews reported that the target was ablaze with fires still seen from 80 miles away. All aircraft landed safely at Base at around 05.00hrs.

21 to 25 April 1943- No operations ordered.

26/ 27 April 1943- Night bombing DUISBURG

Nine aircraft set out tonight to join a large force attacking Duisburg. Visibility at the target was good, with no cloud. Flak and searchlight activity was reported as medium and no aircraft reported being hit or encountering Night Fighters. Propaganda leaflets were also dropped by most aircraft ('Nickels'). All aircraft returned safely to Base.

27/ 28 April 1943- Night Gardening in the NECTARINE Area.

Four aircraft successfully mined the Frisian Island area and returned to Base safely despite 10/ 10 cloud covering the 'Garden'.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

April 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

28/ 29 April; 1943- Night Gardening in the DAFFODIL & SILVERTHORNE areas.

Four aircraft tonight carried out mine-laying in the Kattegat and The Sound areas, two despatched to each. The latter target's crews successfully ran the gauntlet of heavy coastal flak, with one aircraft being hit and damaged. All returned safely to Base.

30 April/ 1 May 1943-Night bombing ESSEN

Eleven aircraft joined a large force attacking Essen tonight. Two aircraft returned early, one due severe icing and the other due to navigational Equipment failure. The remainder bombed the target but results could not be seen due to cloud. Flak was heavy and one aircraft sustained damage in the main-plane and bomb doors; all returned to Base safely.

Representative Aircraft, Lancaster B. Mk. III:

R5687, W4932, W4161, ED393, ED415, ED430, ED468, ED472, ED478, ED482, ED483, ED475, ED691, ED693, ED753, ED755, ED784, ED800, ED810, ED828.

Representative crews:

Burnett, Baxter, Chopping, Day, Dennis, Duncan, Evans, Elderfield, Gilmour, Hollis, Huntley, McCrossan, McGrath, Nichols, Pickens, Richardson, Russell (C.O.), Saxton, Schofield, Street, Taylor, Weber, Wilkie, Wilkins.

23 Aircrew were killed on Operations this month and five aircraft were lost.

May 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Over-view

This month, the Allies take Tunisia; German and Italian troops surrender in North Africa; the Warsaw uprising is viciously put down by the Waffen-SS; U-Boat operations in the North Atlantic are suspended as the tide turns and 41 U-Boats are sunk in a 3-week period by the Allies and an audacious attack on German dams by 617 Squadron takes place.

At Skellingthorpe, Operations are seriously hampered throughout the month by bad weather, with more operations cancelled than are flown; such events can adversely affect morale. However the ramping-up of Lancaster aircraft production is becoming evident with No. 50 Squadron alone providing 15 aircraft to attack Dortmund on the 23/ 24th May. A maximum effort indeed.

1/ 2/ 3 May 1943- Operations were briefed but all were cancelled prior to take-Off.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

May 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

4/ 5 May 1943- Night bombing- DORTMUND

Thirteen aircraft (possibly the first time the Squadron has mustered this many aircraft) took off for Dortmund tonight; 4 returned early due to Technical problems while 9 bombed successfully. PFF target marking was very accurate; however in good visibility ED712 (Burnett crew) was attacked by an un-seen night-fighter and damaged, but continued on its mission and dropped its bombs. Crews report that the target was well ablaze and that the fires were still visible when crossing the Dutch coast on the return (150 miles). Some searchlight activity was reported. All returned safely to base.

5 May 1943- no operations ordered

6 May 1943

Eleven aircraft were detailed for operations but these were cancelled prior to take-off. Some night training flights were undertaken.

7 May 1943

Eleven aircraft were detailed for operations but these were cancelled prior to take-off.

8 May 1943

No operations ordered.

9 May 1943

Eleven aircraft were detailed for operations but these were cancelled prior to take-off. One aircraft completed a Night 'Bulls-eye' Exercise, a hazardous training flight simulating a bombing mission but using a UK City as the 'target'. This was hazardous because if navigation was not accurate the aircraft could be fired at by 'nervous' ground defences.

10 May 1943- No operations ordered.

11 May 1943

Operations were briefed but later cancelled.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

May 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

12/ 13 May 1943- Night bombing DUISBURG

Ten aircraft took off to attack Duisburg tonight. Eight aircraft successfully attacked the target with accurate PFF marking and results were thought to be very good. However, ED475 collided head-on with another Lancaster (not 50 Squadron) which was believed to have been orbiting the area due to early arrival but may alternatively have been making a further attempt to bomb due to a 'Hang-up', a not uncommon occurrence and despite serious damage (several feet of the Starboard wing missing including an aileron) managed to return safely to Base with Eight others. Defences were notable by their absence with only one crew mentioning a few searchlights which were 'ineffective'. Sadly however one further aircraft failed to return, Lancaster B.I W4762 presumed missing due to enemy action.

Post-war research by a Dutch Association found that the aircraft was most probably one claimed to have been shot down over Holland by a Night Fighter of 12 NJG/1, flown by Lt. Robert Dentzel/ Uffz. Rudi Dunger based at Leeuwarden, Holland. The aircraft crashed at around 03.30hrs, 6Km NW of Nijkerk, in the Ijsselmeer (inland sea or lake); all on board perished. It is not known whether the aircraft broke up in the air or whether the crew were all on board when it hit this shallow sea; reports indicate that the crew were found separately and some recovered from the Ijsselmeer by boats, in some cases months apart. For example Sgt. Stott was recovered two weeks after the crash on 28th May and Sgt. Bates was found on the 8th June 1943. In addition it is noted that the pilot Francis Huntley was buried in a collective grave; it is known that subsequent draining and land reclamation of the area over the decades has exposed some aircraft and some human remains have been recovered. I can not yet establish if this aircraft is one of them. I would estimate that the crash site is now in the area called ALMERE.

The body of Harold IVATT has never been found. Geoffrey Priestley is thought to have been a 'second Dickie', a new Squadron member joining a veteran crew for experience prior to flying with his own crew.

Crew Details are as follows: Buried at Amsterdam New Eastern Cemetery are:

PILOT 143453 Francis Hindmarch HUNTLEY, DFM, RAFVR, 21, Plot 69 Row C Collective Grave 7.

AG 1317229 Sgt. Frederick Charles GREENING RAFVR, Plot 69 Row C Grave 13

AB 145180 P.O. Edward HOUGH RAFVR, Plot 69, Row C, Grave 12

The following colleagues are buried at AMERSFOORT (OUD LEUSDEN) GENERAL CEMETERY, Amersfoort, Utrecht, Holland, some 50Km SE of Amsterdam:

AG 985652 Sgt. Alan STOTT, RAFVR, 28, Plot 13 Row 7 Grave 133

Nav. 144446 P.O. Charles William CLARKE RAFVR, 32, Plot 13 Row 7 Grave 134

FE 570468 Sgt. Michael BATES RAF, Plot 13 Row 7 Grave 136

F.O. 111118 F.O. Geoffrey Douglas PRIESTLEY RAFVR, 31, Plot 13 Row 7 Grave 135

J/17654 P.O. Harold Moseley IVATT, RCAF, was never found and is commemorated at the Runnymede memorial, Sussex, England.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

May 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

13/ 14 May 1943- Night bombing SKODA WORKS, PILSEN

Twelve aircraft left tonight again for Pilsen after the previous débâcle in April. 11 aircraft successfully attacked the target at around 1am on the 14th with some reporting a smoke-screen in operation. PFF Target Indicators were used and if these were accurate then the attack was thought to have been successful as many crews saw their bombs burst where expected. Accurate predicted Flak was encountered as were searchlights during the time over the target; ED588 'VN-G' was holed multiple times by Flak. Three aircraft were also reported as being seen shot down at low-level near the Dutch coast, with one aircraft seen to crash onto an airfield. Sadly, one more 50 Squadron crew failed to return to Skellingthorpe tonight- the Pickens crew in ED693, a Lancaster B. Mk. III).

The following details are as yet un-corroborated but as some crew survived and would have made POW Reports on repatriation, the information is most probably accurate.

It is thought the aircraft was intercepted by a Night Fighter of 3NJG/1 flown by Lt. Hans Augustine and crashed around midnight at Messingen 7Km ESE of Lingen, Germany. Two crew members were killed; Air Gunners Sgt. Roberts and Sgt. Nichol, who were buried in the locality but subsequently, were re-interred at Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen near the Dutch border Post-War. The remainder of the crew were made POW.

Details as follows:

Killed In Action and Buried in Reichswald Forest War Cemetery:

AG W/O Class II R/114904 William Bruce Nichol RCAF, Grave Ref. 15.F. 12 and
AG 1323253 Sgt. William Augustus Roberts RAFVR, Grave Ref. 15.F.11.

Survivors, made POW:

P/O M. Hall was interned in Stalag Luft L3 as POW# 1326

F/O T. Royds also interned in L3 as POW# 1413.

Sgt. J. G. Hanby was interned in camps L1 and also 357 as POW# 1181

Sgt. W. G. Pickens was interned in Camp L1 as POW# 1196

Sgt. C. Taylor was interned in Camp L1, L6 and L4 as POW# 1201

14 May 1943- No operations ordered.

15 May 1943- No operations, Bulls Eye exercises flown.

16 May 1943- No operations ordered; Bulls Eye exercises planned but later cancelled.

17 May 1943- No Operations ordered.

18 May 1943- Four aircraft carried out night training exercises.

19 May 1943- No Operations ordered.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

May 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

20 May 1943- Six aircraft ordered for bombing but later cancelled.

21 May 1943- Two aircraft detailed for Night Training.

22 May 1943- No operations ordered.

23/24 May 1943- Night bombing DORTMUND

Tonight a record fifteen aircraft departed Skellingthorpe around 11pm for Dortmund. Using the PFF Target Indicators as ground haze prevented visual bombing, all 15 aircraft successfully attacked the target. Heavy flak was encountered by some but not all crews over Dortmund while ED415 was extensively damaged by night fighters while crossing the Dutch coast and another badly damaged by machine gun fire from another **Lancaster** while at 20,000 feet North of Dortmund. Despite the damage, all crews returned safely to base by around 5am.

24/ 25 May 1943- No Operations ordered.

25/ 26 May 1943- Night bombing DUSSELDORF

Another large force of 13 bombers left tonight to join others attacking Düsseldorf One aircraft returned without bombing due to technical problems while the remaining twelve bombed on PFF Target Indicators, the visibility over Düsseldorf being very poor, and results were in general not observed. Defences were slight with only one aircraft reporting predicted flak.

26/ 27 May 1943- No Operations ordered.

28 May 1943

Following a night air test, Lancaster ED468 suffered a collapsed undercarriage while turning prior to parking at the dispersal. None of the crew were injured.

27/ 28 May 1943- Night bombing- ESSEN

Fourteen aircraft tonight departed for a raid on Essen. Twelve reached the target and, again using PFF T.I.'s for aiming due to poor visibility, successfully bombed using HC bombs and Incendiaries. Two aircraft returned early due to Oxygen supply failure and rear turret failure. Ground defences were spasmodic with some aircraft reporting none whatsoever, others reporting heavy accurate predicted flak and one (ED753) being hit by Flak in the fuselage and rear turret.

28/ 29 May 1943- No Operations ordered.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

May 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

29/ 30 May 1943- Night bombing WUPPERTAL

Tonight eleven aircraft left Skellingthorpe for Wuppertal. All aircraft bombed 'blind' using the PFF T.I.'s due to poor visibility, however W5004's crew had a harrowing time when, on the run in to the target the Starboard Outer engine was hit by Flak and had to be feathered. The Port Outer engine was also hit and began to misfire; the bomb doors and hydraulics were also hit and the aircraft lost 6000ft very quickly forcing the pilot to order the bombs to be jettisoned (near Wuppertal). The bomb doors failed to close (causing drag and loss of speed) and after turning for home the aircraft lost height continuously until 1500ft was the maximum obtainable. While crossing the Dutch coast at this altitude Flak was again encountered but the crew gunners returned fire and the Flak stopped. The remainder of the flight to Skellingthorpe was made at around 1000ft. All aircraft and crews had returned safely to Base by around 4.30am.

Representative Aircraft, Lancaster B. Mk. I:

W4161, W4762, W4932, W5004, ED795

Representative Aircraft, Lancaster B. Mk. III:

ED393, ED415, ED429, ED430, ED468, ED470, ED472, ED475, ED483, ED588 'G', ED693, ED712, ED753, ED755, ED810, ED826 & ED828.

Representative Crew's:

Burnett, Baxter, Birch, Bolton, Chopping, Crawford, Dennis, D. A. Duncan, Evans, Gilmour, Hendry, Hollis, Hunt, Huntley, Mason, McCrossan, Parks, Pickens, Richardson, Russell (C.O.), Saxton, Schofield, Southgate, Street, Stone, Taylor, Thomson, Weber & Wilkie.

Losses

Two aircraft were destroyed this month, and ten crew-men were killed in action. Five crew-men were taken P.O.W.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Overview:

On the 14th of June the 'Point-blank Directive' is issued. This changes the priorities of the Casablanca Directive of February. The new strategy was to destroy German Fighter Aircraft Factories, by day (USAAF) and by night (RAF Bomber Command) so ensuring that the Normandy Landings could be achieved with Allied Fighter Superiority; without this the campaign was bound to fail. Thus new targets such as Regensburg, Schweinfurt and Weiner Neustadt would be visited over the coming months. This was to prove very costly to all parties however.

Also this month the first of the RAF's 'Shuttle Bombing' raids takes place, whereby bombers leave base, attack a target and fly on to another base to refuel and re-arm. This is reversed on the return flight to base when another target is attacked. 'Wurzberg' ground radar unit production at Friedrichshafen is the first such target on the 20th June, under the code 'Operation Bellicose' and the Lancaster's involved fly on to Blida, Algeria, the survivors returning later via an attack on Spezia, Italy on the 24th.

Also, at the end of this month, the first use of a 'Master Bomber' occurs; a PFF Mosquito acts as a co-ordinator of all the bomber forces in each target area.

Again Lincolnshire's weather causes major disruption to Operations and training.

This month, the first use in the Records of the term 'War Casualties & N/E Accts Dept., Uxbridge' is seen; missing or unaccounted for personnel are 'posted' to this department at RAF Uxbridge.

A Dismal month for No. 50 Squadron with the highest loss rate of the war thus far experienced.

1 to 10 June 1943

On two days no Operations were planned; on eight days large Operations and night training flights were detailed but all subsequently cancelled. Across Lincolnshire, a spate of accidents involving aircraft during training can be attributed to poor visibility, heavy rain and wet grass on those airfields yet to receive concrete runways.

On June 1st, Lancaster ED753 was slightly damaged after it struck trees during authorised low-level flying practice. The aircraft landed safely although one of the crew was slightly injured.

11/ 12 June 1943- Night bombing DUSSELDORF.

Fifteen aircraft tonight set off for Düsseldorf, the largest Squadron formation thus far in the war. No less than fourteen successfully bombed the target while one returned early due to technical problems. Heavy Flak and searchlight activity was reported in the target area with some aircraft receiving damage. All returned safely to base, while a German communiqué admitted major damage and heavy casualties were sustained.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

12/ 13 June 1943- Night bombing BOCHUM

No less than sixteen aircraft set out from Skellingthorpe tonight to bomb Bochum. The operation was unusual in that aircraft departures were strung out over an Hour period, not usual procedure. Crew reports on defences at the target were mixed, but only a few reported any difficulties. Twelve aircraft bombed successfully and returned safely to Base. However, **three** aircraft failed to return tonight, with the **Stone, Weber and McCrossan** crews missing presumed Killed In Action aboard **ED828, ED472 & ED429** respectively. A grievous loss rate of 20%.

ED828

Post war, access to official Luftwaffe Night Fighter reports and other German records offer the following probable detail;

ED828 VN-S, believed to have been shot down over Tubbergen, Holland and finally crashing around 2.20a.m. near Fleringen, Holland, 6 Miles ENE of Almelo, Holland by a Night Fighter and claimed by Oblt. Bergmann of Stab/ NJG1. However despite the official claims, personal research by a relative of one of the crew indicates that NJG1 pilot Herbert Lutje may have shot down the aircraft. Five of the seven crew were killed, and are buried in TUBBERGEN (Reutum) Roman Catholic Cemetery, in Reutum, 14Km East of Almelo, in the Overijssel District of Holland. Two survived and were taken POW for the remainder of the war. Details are:

Pilot 66031 Fl/Lt. Philip John	STONE, DFC, RAFVR, age 25 and buried in Row U grave 3.
A/G J/10024 F/O Murray Drysdale Stephen	HICKS RCAF, age 36, Row U grave 1
F/E/ 571223 Sgt. Aubrey	HUNTER RAF, age 22, Row U grave 4
WOP/ AG 553832 F/Sgt. Alan John	MILLS RAF, Row U grave 2
A/G J/15771 F/O Albert	SMITH DFC, RCAF, Row U grave 5

Survivors/ POW: Both evaded capture for a month but were finally caught in Paris and interned at Oflag L3.

P/O W. GLENN, DFM, POW# 3010

P/O W. T. BATSON, DFM, POW# 2255.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

12/ 13 June 1943- Night bombing BOCHUM (Ctd.)

ED472

Post war research by various groups has revealed the following probable detail. Lancaster B. Mk. III ED472, VN-? was shot down at around 1.30a.m. on the 13th June by a Night fighter of 8/ NJG1 (Oblt. Dietrich Schmidt) with the aircraft finally crashing near Ahaus, Germany. The crew were all killed and were buried three days later locally in Ahaus but after the war were subsequently moved to Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Kleve, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany.

Details as follows:

Pilot 1169330 F/Sgt. A J	WEBER, Collective grave 23.A. 10-13
F/E 146404 Sgt. Mathew Cecil	CARTER RAFVR, collective grave 23.A. 10-13
NAV J/17260 P/O Marcus Richards	FELSEN RCAF, grave 23.A.14
A/G 401823 F/O Victor William	FERGUSON RNZAF, age 25 buried in grave 23.A. 15
WOP/ AG 999350 F/Sgt. Frank	NORMAN RAFVR, buried in Collective grave 23.A.13
A/G 1333840 Sgt. Robert Charles	KERLEY RAFVR, Collective grave 23.A. 10-13
AB 921667 F/Sgt. Reginald	GOLDSTRAW RAFVR, collective grave 23.A.10-13

ED429

The third casualty of this raid was Lancaster B. Mk. III ED429. Post war research revealed the following likely details. ED429 was thought to have been hit by flak and exploded mid-air, falling to earth near the village of Bovinghausen, now in the Southern outskirts of Castrop-Rauxel, Germany. There was one survivor, who was captured and made a POW until exchanged in 1944.

The following were probably buried locally but were moved post-war to Reichswald Forest War cemetery, Kleve, Nordrhein-Westfalen Germany:

PILOT 146317 P/O John Michael	McCROSSAN RAFVR DFM, Grave 3.D.15
F/E 935356 Sgt. John Thomas	WILKINSON RAFVR DFM, Grave 3.F.4
NAV 1345035 Sgt. D. McD.	BUCHAN RAFVR Grave 3.D.14
WOP/ AG 1333266 Sgt. Joseph Keenan	MORGAN RAFVR, Collective grave 3.E. 1-6
A/G 933382 Sgt. Harold Raymond	STONE RAFVR age 22, Coll. Grave 3.E.1-6
A/G 1110660 Sgt. John	AITKEN RAFVR, Collective grave 3.E.1-6

Lone Survivor/ POW:

A/B Sgt. G. L. Stewart.

ED429 was affectionately named “Sammy The Donkey Serenade” by her crew due to her skipper’s annoying habit of continuously whistling this tune!

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

13/ 14 June 1943- No operations ordered

14/ 15 June 1943- Night bombing OBERHAUSEN

Seven aircraft set off for Oberhausen tonight from around 11p.m. Weather over the target was good as was visibility. However flak, searchlights and night fighters were reported as very active and one aircraft received damage to Perspex panels due to flak. Using the PFF Target Indicators bombing was assessed as accurate although, yet again, results were not always seen. However fires were obvious and crews reported seeing the glow from the Dutch Coast on the way home. Six aircraft, including that of the Squadron Commanding officer W/C. Russell returned to base safely. Sadly one aircraft failed to return with no messages or signals received after leaving base- **ED810** with the CRAWFORD crew.

Post war it was established that ED810 VN-Z may have been shot down by a night fighter of NJG1 or NJG3, flown by Rudolf Franks, then based at Gilze Rijen, Holland. The aircraft is believed to have come down in an orchard near 'het hof Ter Delft', (The family Van Delft being the estate owner), Ekeren, Belgium, close to the docks at ANTWERP.

A flare on a parachute was found at the scene of the crash, most likely a 'Fighter Flare' used by the Germans to illuminate bombers from above. The aircraft was said to have been relatively intact but burning. An eye witness at the time, Laurent de Brucker seemed to have been one of the first on the scene and says two bodies were lying 'side by side' near the aircraft, which seemed strange; while soon after a figure in Blue coloured 'Flying Clothing' was seen by another witness running away in the same area; later an RAF airman was known to have been captured nearby, by a Flak battery crew. Is it possible that a surviving crew member from another crashed bomber dragged the two airmen from the burning wreckage before being forced to make good his (temporary) escape? The 50 Squadron ORB only records these seven crew members aboard ED810 on this mission.

The witness also believes the bomb load was still on board as the Germans later detonated the munitions leaving a large crater.

Credit to Wim Govaerts, Belgian Aviation History Society for the above.

Those killed are buried in the Schoonselhof Cemetery, now in Antwerp, Belgium.

A/G (Rear) 1602905 Sgt. Kenneth Ivor

PILOT 127903 F/O Albert Victor

Both the above are buried in Joint Grave II.F. 26-27

F/E 525494 Sgt. Leslie

A/G 1120118 Sgt. Charles Joseph

WOP/ AG 1133853 Sgt. Joseph Brown

A/B 1388490 Sgt. William George

NAV 1389014 Sgt. Arthur Earnest

BOWERMAN, RAFVR age 20

CRAWFORD RAFVR

TOAL RAF, buried in II.F.25

BUCKLE RAFVR, buried in II.F.22

McHENDRY RAFVR, age 25, buried II.F.21

REED RAFVR age 20, buried II.F.24

DAVEY RAFVR age 26, buried II.F.23

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

16/ 17 June 1943- Night bombing COLOGNE

Seven aircraft from the depleted Squadron took off tonight for an attack on Cologne. Visibility at the target was good but thick cloud prevented the ground from being seen; PFF Target Indicators were again in use. One aircraft, ED470 returned early due to Oxygen supply failure. The remainder bombed successfully and returned safely to Base

17- 19 June 1943- No operations detailed.

June 19 1943

Lancaster W4932 crashed near Grange De Lings, adjacent RAF Dunholme Lodge at around 2am while on a Night Training Exercise ('Bulls-eye'?) killing the entire crew; all were listed "Killed In Action". The cause of the crash is not known as yet.

Pilot 1317863 Sgt. John Edwin HILL RAFVR, age 21, buried in Northam St. Margaret Churchyard, Sec A Grave 3.

F/E 1607349 Sgt. Roger Desmond LANDERS RAFVR, age 20, buried in Lincoln (Newport) cemetery, Sec G Grave 290 North

NAV R/ 120129 Sgt. Neville George SMITH RCAF, age 20, buried in Lincoln (Newport) cemetery, Sec G Grave 291 South

AB 1319393 Sgt. Douglas Hartley NICHOLLS RAFVR, age 26, buried in Southampton (St. Mary Extra) churchyard, Section H.46 Grave 171

WOP/ AG 1131694 Sgt. William Newton LANCASTER RAFVR, age 21, buried in Leck St. Peter cemetery, Lancashire, N.W. corner

AG F/Sgt. Jack Walter FEAGAN RCAF, age 22, buried Lincoln (Newport) Cemetery Sec G grave 291 North

AG R/ 85566 Sgt. (W.O. Posthumously) Thomas Joseph SHIELDS RCAF, age 23, buried in Lincoln (Newport) Cemetery Sec G grave 290 South.

Average Age= 21 years.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

20/ 21 June 1943- Night bombing FRIEDRICHSHAFEN

The first of the 'Shuttle Bombing' raids goes ahead tonight, with five aircraft attacking works at Friedrichshafen and proceeding onward to Blida, Algeria. In good visibility with no cloud all aircraft bombed successfully however searchlight activity over the target was said to be intense. All aircraft reached Blida safely.

21/ 22 June 1943- Night Bombing KREFELD

Eight aircraft successfully attacked Krefeld and returned to Base safely.

22/ 23 June 1943- Night bombing MULHEIM

Eight aircraft departed Skellingthorpe tonight for an attack on Mulheim, with six aircraft successfully bombing the target using PFF assistance. Two aircraft returned early; ED470 due to a severely overheating engine and DV167 due to engine failure.

23/ 24 June 1943- Night bombing SPEZIA

Five aircraft successfully bombed Spezia, Italy on the return flight from Blida, North Africa and returned to Base safely.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

24/ 25 June 1943- Night bombing WUPPERTAL

Nine aircraft left Base tonight (including the Squadron C.O.) to attack targets in Wuppertal. Eight aircraft bombed in no cloud with good visibility on PFF Target Indicators and returned to Base safely around 3.30p.m. on the 25th June. One aircraft "Failed To Return" with seven men missing- Lancaster B. Mk. III ED712, VN-T.

Post war it has been established that the aircraft most likely came down near Houverath, Bad Muenstereifel, at around 1.30a.m. on the 25th June. How the aircraft was lost can not be ascertained at this time.

According to a 1948 Air Ministry letter sent to Sgt. Page's sister, the remains of six of the crew were recovered from the scene and were buried the day after (June 26th) in the Staedtfriedhof at Munchen-Gladbach. After the war five identified and one un-identified sets of remains were exhumed and ALL SIX were re-interred at the specially commissioned Rheinberg War Cemetery, Rheinberg, 11 Miles NW of Duisburg, Germany in 1946. However only four of the crew are listed today in the CWGC data-base as being buried at Rheinberg, while the remaining three have 'no known grave' and are commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial, Sussex.

Clearly there is a miss match in the records here; is it possible that two of the three crew today listed at Runnymede are in fact to be found buried at Rheinberg?

Crew Details as follows:

Pilot 409287 F/Sgt. John Alexander **BROCK** RAAF age 23. Initially buried in Munchen-Gladbach City Cemetery in 'English POW grave 247' and subsequently at Rheinberg War cemetery, grave 3.C.20

F/E 26228 Sgt. Thomas William **PAGE** RAAF, age 21, buried in Munchen-Gladbach City Cemetery, ENGLISH POW Section Grave 249, and subsequently in Grave 3.C.23 at the Rheinberg War Cemetery.

NAV 658137 Sgt. Reginald Harry **COOKSON** RAF, buried initially at Munchen Gladbach and subs. At Rheinberg grave 3.C.21

A/B 658294 Sgt. Leonard Lawrence **SEAL** RAF, age 30, commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial, panel 164.*

WOP/AG 1079916 Sgt. Bernard **VEALL** RAFVR age 29, commemorated at Runnymede panel 168.*

A/G, R/123129 W.O. Class II William **PEARSON** RCAF, buried at Rheinberg Grave 3.C.24

A/G 1123748 Sgt. Thomas Gerard **WILKINSON** RAFVR age 25, commemorated at Runnymede Panel 169.*

*One of these seven airmen was never recovered from the crash, the remaining two with 'no known grave' MAY in fact be buried at Rheinberg possibly in grave 3.C.22 and another adjacent grave.

Note that from this group of burial plots 3.C.20 to 3.C.24, one grave number is 'missing' on the CWGC's records, that of 3.C.22.

Note: CWGC contacted by email 23 September 2014 re above details. 'Sorry, cannot help'.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

June 1943, Based R.A.F. Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

25/ 26 June 1943- Night bombing GELSENKIRCHEN

12 aircraft tonight set out for Gelsenkirchen on what was to prove a tumultuous night. Bombing was achieved by eleven aircraft, with thick cloud tops reaching 10/ 12,000 feet and poor visibility below it. PFF T.I.'s were used again as aiming points and results were in general not observed. One aircraft abandoned the attack due to gun turret unserviceability- a wise move as eight engagements with fighters were recorded by the gunners on the attacking aircraft, with all returning safely to Base.

26/ 27 June 1943- No Operations detailed.

28/ 29 June 1943- Night bombing COLOGNE

Eleven aircraft set off tonight to attack targets in Cologne. Weather and visibility was similar to the previous raid at Gelsenkirchen. Flak defences were however ferocious and two aircraft were damaged by flak and numerous crewmen injured by shrapnel and shattered Perspex. Two aircraft returned early due to technical trouble and crew illness. All returned safely to Base; the understated crew post-mission reports hide yet again the perilous existence that these men led and the undoubted bravery that was shown in the face of stacked odds. One aircraft had four of the seven crew injured for example, one gunner losing two fingers.

29 & 30 June 1943- No operations ordered

Representative Aircraft, Lancaster B. Mk. III:

W4932, W4101, ME124, ED393, ED429, ED468, ED470, ED475, ED472, ED588 'G', ED617, ED712, ED753, ED755, ED810, ED828, EE124, EE189, DV156, DV167, DV189.

Representative Crew's:

Burnett, Bolton, Brock, Chopping, Crawford, Clifford, Cole, Dennis, D. A. Duncan, Gilmour, Hendry, Hill, Hollis, Hunt, Lees, Mason, McCrossan, Parks, Russell (C.O.), Saxton, Southgate, Stone, Taylor, Thomson, Weber, Wilkie.

Losses

Six aircraft were lost on operations and training flights this month, with 41 air-crew killed and three made POW.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Overview

This month, the Squadron continues to support the bombing of industrial targets in the Ruhr Valley and beyond. As the Allies invade Sicily the Squadron attacks targets in Italy.

Although thin aluminium strips called 'Window' had been designed years previously, use of it had been suppressed due to political and tactical arguments. Churchill sanctioned its use this month however for the first Hamburg attack (24th) where its use slashed bomber losses by up to a half of that expected.

As predicted however, the use of the foil strips to 'jam' enemy ground radars was quickly rumbled by the Germans and the counter-measures (again as predicted) were devastating and rapid. Luftwaffe single-engined fighters were gathered from other theatres and formed 'Wilde Sau' ('Wild Boar') night-fighter units with new tactics; free ranging fighters which would go anywhere and land at any airfield to be refuelled and re-armed devastated the allied bomber streams later in this month and 50 Squadron crews undoubtedly suffered from their attentions. Locally, the weather continues to give trouble, causing many planned large-scale raids to be cancelled at the last minute- a particularly hard thing for bomber crews to take. Postings in to the Squadron from H.C.U.'s continue apace; replacement crews for those lost.

1 & 2 July 1943- No operations planned.

3 July 1943- Night bombing COLOGNE

Tonight, Ten aircraft departed Skellingthorpe for an attack on Cologne. Nine crews successfully bombed the target in good visibility but with the usual ground haze which prevented results being seen. One aircraft returned early due to technical difficulties. No casualties were sustained.

4, 5, 6 & 7 July 1943- Operations were detailed but cancelled before take-off.

Four night training flights were safely carried out on the 7th July.

8 July 1943- Night bombing COLOGNE

Nine aircraft left Skellingthorpe tonight, bound once more for Cologne. Conditions were better however flak defences were both heavy and 'predicted', using Ground Control Radar. No casualties were suffered on the Squadron's aircraft while one crew returned home early due to technical problems.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

9 July 1943- Night bombing GELSENKIRCHEN

Eleven aircraft took off tonight for Gelsenkirchen; nine successfully bombed the target with PFF marking, with ED470 returning early before bombing due to technical problems. Defences over the target were intense with flak and searchlights. Squadron gunners also engaged JU-88 Night fighters in air combat but no claims were made. Nine aircraft returned safely to Base; ED475 ditched in the English Channel and ED617 'Failed To Return'.

ED475 VN-E had completed the bombing run but was immediately hit by flak. Three engines were hit to varying degrees and petrol tanks holed. The aircraft turned for home but on crossing the French coast the Right inner engine caught fire, seriously injuring the Flight Engineer and slightly injuring the pilot Sgt. Clifford. Losing height the pilot ordered the aircraft to be abandoned. One of the gunners, Australian Mid-upper gunner Sgt. S. J. King obeyed immediately and baled out. At this point the front escape hatch jammed preventing the forward crew from jumping; at the same time the Navigator informed the pilot that they were now over the sea and the pilot countermanded the order to abandon. The propeller on the burning engine was feathered with the result that the fire went out after the extinguisher was used. The aircraft limped towards the English coast and eventually was intentionally ditched in the sea 4 Miles off Hastings, Sussex at 03.50hrs on the 10th July. Due to leaking petrol the aircraft caught fire and although the crew managed to deploy the life-raft it did not inflate. Luckily the aircraft stayed afloat and after eight minutes the life-raft automatically inflated (water-activated) and the crew climbed into the raft before the aircraft sank. The six crew, Sgt. Clifford (pilot), Sgt. T. McKenna, F/O J. A. Brett, Sgt. J. Short, Sgt. K. D. Wargent and Sgt. G. Batey were picked up safe by Rescue launch two hours later and the two burnt crew taken to Newhaven Naval Sick Quarters.

Tragically, despite investigation by the Services and the International Red Cross both during and after the war no trace was ever found of the Australian Air Gunner, 410675 F/Sgt. Sydney James KING RAAF, aged 20 and he is Remembered on the Memorial at Runnymede, Sussex.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED617 VN-T Failed to return to Skellingthorpe, with nothing heard from this crew after departure. The aircraft is thought to have crashed near Fresnoy-Andainville, near Oisemont, Somme, France. Cause of the crash is yet to be determined. All of the crew are buried in Poix-de-Picardie Churchyard, in the village of Poix, 28Km SW of Amiens, France. Crew details as follows:

Pilot 145508 P/O Ronald Lawrence HENDRY RAFVR, buried at Row D collective grave 33-36

Nav. 130269 F/O Kenneth TONER RAFVR, age 21 also in collective grave 33-36

F/E 1126993 Sgt. Douglas Dick RHYND RAFVR age 23, also “ “ “

B/A 1348093 Sgt. Andrew McDOWALL RAFVR, age 21, also in collective grave 33-36

A/G 1861645 Sgt. Philip Albert CHAPMAN RAFVR, age 19, buried at Row E Grave 3

WOP/AG 1315271 Sgt. Arthur BALDWIN RAFVR, age 21, Row D Collective grave 33-36

A/G 1050802 Sgt. Andrew Smeaton COUSINS RAFVR, age 32 buried at Row E grave 1.

Two aircraft were lost and another eight empty beds at Skellingthorpe tonight.

As an example, 11 4000lb bombs, 44x 500lb bombs, 520x 30lb Incendiaries and 7110x 4lb Incendiaries were dropped by these 11 aircraft tonight.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

10/ 11 July 1943- No Operations ordered

11/ 12 July 1943- operations prepared but cancelled prior to take-off

12/ 13 July 1943- Night Bombing TURIN

Twelve aircraft left Skellingthorpe tonight bound for Turin. This was a long arduous trip of some 10 Hours flying. The target was found to be heavily defended, but 11 aircraft bombed on the PFF Target Indicators and returned home safely to Base at around 5am. Two aircraft were damaged by flak, one significantly but no injuries were reported. One aircraft, DV156 'Failed to Return' with all 8 crew presumed Missing In Action. The gunners of ED189 'VN-S' reported engaging an enemy fighter over the target after bomb release, claiming it 'Damaged'.

Lancaster B. Mk. III DV156 VN-C is one of the fairly large number of aircraft that simply disappeared without trace in WWII. None of the other aircraft crews comment on observing any other aircraft crash or explode during the mission. As if to add poignancy to this loss, the crew were joined on this flight by Air Gunner, Sgt. George Batey believed to be a replacement Rear Gunner. Sgt. Batey had escaped from ED475 two nights ago when it ditched into the English Channel after being damaged by Flak. It is also thought that Thomas Stenhouse was 'second Dickey' on this flight, gaining experience as a Pilot before commanding his own crew on an operational mission. Most probably the aircraft fell into the sea. Post-war, detailed research by Andrew Arty on German Luftwaffe Night Fighter units reveals a quite probable cause for this aircraft loss as due to air combat with a Focke-Wulf FW190, probably of 1/SA.Gr.128 based at Brest; the German air combat reports for this evening CLAIM eight four-engine bombers shot down, including a most probable loss of W/Cdr. John Nettleton's aircraft (44 Squadron) although none of the claims can of course be substantiated. Again, looking at these Luftwaffe record/ claims, a possible area for the loss of DV156 to have occurred is the Bay of Biscay. Indeed on the same raid, LM328 of 12 Squadron was shot down into the Bay of Biscay with some crew surviving to tell the tale. Given the known allied losses for the Turin raid a claim for eight is not unreasonable.

A particularly tragic end for these young men.

(As an aside, 75 RAF aircrew were posted as missing with no known grave in the two-day period 12/ 13 July 1943 alone).

Crew Details are:

Pilot	145469 P/O Ernest John	BURNETT RAFVR, age 26
2 nd Pilot	52311 P/O Thomas	STENHOUSE RAFVR, age 30
Nav.	52767 P/O Francis	O'CARROLL, age 27
	1202331 Sgt. Sturgess Herbert	RAYNER RAFVR, age 32
	146695 P/O Arthur John	HOLLOWAY RAFVR, age 22
	1336604 Sgt. Jesse Thomas	WILSON RAFVR, age 21
A/G	650588 Sgt. George	BATEY RAFVR, age 23
	149484 P/O James Edward Albert Power	MANNING RAFVR, age 23

Are all commemorated at the RAF Memorial to those lost with no known graves, Runnymede, Sussex.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

13/ 14 July 1943- No Ops. Planned.

15/ 16 July 1943- Night bombing REGGIO EMELIA

On the evening of 15 July, three aircraft took off from Skellingthorpe to bomb electrical transformers in Reggio Nell'Emilia, Lombardy. Two aircraft bombed and returned safely, however one aircraft 'Failed To Return'.

Lancaster B. Mk. III DV167 'VN-M' with the Hunt crew were never heard from again after taking off. Although some internet sources believe this aircraft may have collided in mid-air with another Lancaster, I cannot corroborate this SO FAR due to conflicting information. The aircraft is however thought to have crashed at or near the town of TRAVERSETOLO, near Parma (very close to the target at Reggio). The remains of only three crew were recovered, being buried locally until 1945 when the War Cemetery at Milan was created and all allied casualties were then transferred into Milan War Cemetery.

DV167 Crew details are as follows:

Pilot 49307 F/Lt. Colin Herbert James HUNT RAF, remembered at the Memorial Gardens, Runnymede, Sussex.

Nav. 130194 F/O Albert Dennis Sepell SNELL RAFVR, 21, also remembered at Runnymede.

WOP/AG 1383547 Sgt. William James HOOD RAFVR, 36, also remembered at Runnymede.

B/A 149985 P/O Keith Alec BARR, RAFVR, also remembered at Runnymede.

F/E 1192341 Sgt. William George TROWBRIDGE RAFVR, 22, buried at Milan War Cemetery, Joint Grave V.A.1.

AG 145443 Sgt. Reginald George William GOFF RAFVR, age 18 buried at Milan Grave V.A.2.

AG 536891 Sgt. Roy Alfred Wilfred WILKINSON RAFVR, buried in Milan War Cemetery Joint Grave V.A.1.

(As a side note, two RAF crew from a Photographic Reconnaissance Mosquito DZ459 of No. 540 Squadron were killed a few hours later on the same day as DV167 was lost, the 16th July and are buried next to the three Lancaster crew men in Milan. This may indicate particularly strong fighter or ground defences were active in the area.- normally the 'Mossie' had a very low loss rate indeed due to speed and agility.)

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

16/ 17 July 1943

Four night-training 'Bulls Eye' sorties were safely completed today but no Operations were planned for tonight.

18 July 1943- No operations detailed

19 and 20 July 1943- Operations planned but cancelled.

21 July 1943- No operations detailed

22 July 1943- 12 aircraft detailed for operations but Subs. Cancelled.

23 July 1943- 14 aircraft detailed for operations but subs. Cancelled.

24/ 25 July 1943- Night bombing a) **Hamburg** & b) **Leghorn**

Tonight a total of 16 aircraft took off to attack two targets. Fourteen aircraft set out to bomb Hamburg; in good weather and with accurate PFF marking, 11 aircraft bombed successfully. They would not know of the carnage that was unfolding below. Three aircraft returned early due to engine and intercom failures.

A second group of two aircraft attacked Leghorn (Livorno), a coastal Italian town. No problems or opposition were noted and all aircraft returned to Base safely.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

25/ 26 July 1943- Night bombing ESSEN

A very much harder target was attacked tonight when nine aircraft departed for the Ruhr Valley again, target Essen. During take- off tonight, fully- laden ED430 swung on accelerating and the undercarriage collapsed. Miraculously the aircraft did not catch fire and all the crew escaped unharmed.

Three aircraft returned to Base early with six attacking the target. Although defences were not commented upon by other crews, one aircraft was severely damaged by flak over the target and night fighters after leaving the target; eight aircraft safely returned to Skellingthorpe. One aircraft 'Failed To Return'.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED753 'VN-M' was believed to have been shot down by a night fighter flown by Hptm Hans Dieter-Frank of 1/NJG.1 and crashed near Wijchen, Gelderland, Occupied Holland at around 1am on the 26th July. Wijchen is but a few Miles from Nijmegen.

Five of the crew perished and were probably buried locally but moved into Uden War Cemetery when it opened in late 1943. Three survived and were captured and made POW's. The aircraft was carrying a second 'Dickie', pilot P/O Every RAAF who most likely was on his first operation with a seasoned crew, for experience prior to flying with his own crew.

ED753 Crew details are as follows:

Pilot 405175 P/O Ernest Arthur DENNIS RAAF, age 31. Buried at Uden War Cemetery, near Nijmegen, Holland, Grave 5.E.11.

2nd Pilot P/O E. D. P. EVERY RAAF, survivor, POW #1302.

53158 Sgt. H. ROGERSON RAFVR, survivor, POW #222471

146159 Sgt. R. F. YOUNG RAFVR, survivor, POW 1948

WOP/ AG 755064 W.O. Leslie Thomas BECK RAFVR, buried at Uden War Cemetery, Joint grave 5.E.12-13.

A/B 1337153 Sgt. Reginald TOULSON RAFVR, 22, buried at Uden War Cemetery, Joint grave 5.E.12-13.

A/G 551240 F/Sgt. Anthony George TANNER RAFVR, age 22, buried at Uden, Grave 5.D.2.

A/G 1350603 Sgt. Gordon Leslie HILL RAFVR, age 23, buried at Uden, Grave 5.D.1.

26 July 1943- No Operations ordered, 3 night training flights performed.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

27/ 28 July 1943- Night bombing HAMBURG

This evening, eleven aircraft left Skellingthorpe for the docks and shipyards of Hamburg once more. Two aircraft returned without bombing due to technical problems. Ten aircraft successfully attacked the target assisted by PFF Marking as the town was also obscured by smoke rising to 20,000 feet. Fires could be seen from 200 miles away. Little did the crews know of the reason why; the hellish 'firestorms' of the two previous days and nights. One aircraft 'Failed To Return'.

Nothing further was heard from Lancaster B. Mk. I R5687 after departure at 11p.m.

Post war research indicates that the aircraft was shot down by Flak around 1a.m. on the 28th July over Bremerhaven. The crash site is not known but in all probability was near the docks at Bremerhaven as the crew were first buried in a churchyard at GEESTEMUNDE, now the dockyards district of Bremerhaven but in 1943 likely a village. Post-war the crew's remains were re-interred in the newly created British military war cemetery at Becklingen, near Saltau, Germany.

R5687 Crew details are as follows, (all are interred in Collective grave 2.1- 6 at Becklingen):

Pilot 1339076 F/Sgt. Nigel Paul Ivan
Nav. 1397543 Sgt. James
WOP/ AG 1575932 Sgt. Graeme James
AG 700760 Sgt. Robert Benjamin Lyon
AG R178390 Sgt. Orton
AB 1336423 Sgt. Donald Alfred
FE 537395 Sgt. Robert Malcolm

CASTELLS RAFVR
DONALDSON RAFVR, age 32
KYNERSLEY RAFVR, age 22
KENT RAF, age 28
MINOR RCAF, age 21
PAGE RAFVR, age 21
SHEPLEY RAF age 25

28 July 1943- No operations detailed

Two aircraft performed cross-country navigation exercises today- likely new crews familiarising themselves with the county.

29 July 1943- Night bombing HAMBURG

Tonight eleven crews returned to Hamburg docks and shipyards unaware of the horrors that continue to unfold within this city due to censorship and the thick pall of smoke that persisted over Hamburg. Nine aircraft attacked the city while one returned early due to engine failure, landing safely at RAF BARDNEY on three engines.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED468 'VN-A' crashed immediately after take-off at Skellingthorpe, miraculously staying intact long enough for the entire crew to escape unharmed before catching fire and the bomb load detonating completely destroying the aircraft. Someone was looking after Sergeants Clarke, Cammish, Jowett, Barough, Hobbs, Stokes and Pooley tonight.

The nine attacking aircraft all returned safely to Skellingthorpe.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

July 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

30/ 31 July 1943- Night bombing REMSCHEID

A small formation of three aircraft tonight set off to attack Remscheid this evening; small in number but not drama. Two aircraft attacked the target and returned safely to Base. However, in an epic tale of determination, the crew of Lancaster B. Mk. III DV197 'VN-T' flown by F/Sgt. M. M. Cole and crew made a landing at RAF Kings Cliffe, near Corby Northamptonshire after being hit by Flak. F/Sgt. Cole received the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) and the incident is probably best described using his citation:

"One night in July 1943, this airman piloted an aircraft engaged in an operation against Remscheid. Shortly after bombing the target, the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire whilst illuminated by the searchlights. The aircraft sustained severe damage. The undercarriage dropped to the down position and the aircraft turned on its back, while all the petrol in the Starboard tanks was lost. F/Sgt. Cole regained control of the bomber, but almost immediately one of the Starboard engines caught fire and was put out of action. The aircraft became difficult to control and petrol was running low but by superb airmanship, F/Sgt. Cole succeeded in reaching an airfield in this country. His coolness and courage in the face of a perilous situation were worthy of the highest praise." Gazetted 27 August 1943.

Morall Cole also singled out his crew in his post-flight report for praise in getting the aircraft safely down, and to the tending of the injured: Sergeants H. Rushton, F. W. Dock, R. Stanwix, R. S. Shellis, D. E. Westerman and D. T. Jee.

Rear gunner 650191 Sgt. Douglas Thomas JEE was killed when the Flak hit the aircraft, and was buried at Wittering All Saints Churchyard, Northants, grave 3 Row A.

Again, luck played a huge part in the other's survival; any aircraft in a bomber stream that is manoeuvring at all let alone turning upside down is in great danger of collision.

Squadron Losses- JULY 1943

This month the Squadron lost Eight aircraft and 45 crew were killed on operations and training.

Representative Aircraft

(Lancaster B. Mk. I) R5687, W5004; (Lancaster B. Mk. III) W4161 'J', DV156 'C', DV167 'M', DV197 'T', EE124 'B', ED189 'S', ED393, ED436, ED468 'A', ED470 'O', ED475, ED483 'R', ED588 'G', ED617 'T', ED753 'M', ED755 'Q', EE124.

Representative Crews

Abercromby, Bolton, Burnett, Castells, Chopping, Clarke, Clifford, Cole, Dennis, Duncan, Hendry, Hollis, Hunt, Lees, Mason, Ruskell, Shortt, Smith, Southgate, Street, Thomas, Thomson, Thompson.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

August 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Overview

This month, the USAAF step-up daylight operations in Europe with crippling loss rates- Schweinfurt on the 17th for example.

Bomber Command is tasked to destroy a new target, the German Rocket Development Establishment at Peenemunde on the Baltic Coast.

The Hanseatic port of Hamburg is devastated this month by day and by night with horrendous casualties to the civilian population. Albert Speer, Nazi Minister for Armaments said post-war:

“It was I who first verbally reported to the Fuhrer at that time that a continuation of these attacks might bring about a rapid end to the war”.

On the 11th, a new officer, S/Ldr. R. McFarlane (DFC) is posted in from No. 9 Squadron and is immediately promoted to Wing Commander (W/C) taking over Command of the Squadron from W/C. W. M. Russell who is posted to 1654 HCU the same date.

Five crews were posted in from No.1660 and No. 1661 H.C.U.'s this month, with a few more going to O.T.U.'s and No.619 Squadron.

In a complete reversal of fortunes, not one fatality was recorded in August, with one man injured and one aircraft badly damaged and later written-off in Algeria.

Although probably unknown to most senior Officers and certainly to all Bomber Command crews at the time, this month saw the first use of '**Schrage Musik**' night fighters, during the Peenemunde raid. 'Schrage Musik' was the German name given to aircraft specially adapted with upward firing cannons, a deadly, unseen menace as the fighters flew below the target and fired into the wing fuel tanks with devastating effect. Crews simply had no idea what had hit them.

1 August 1943- No operations ordered

2/ 3 August 1943- Night bombing HAMBURG

Eleven aircraft were detailed to attack the shattered city of Hamburg. Ten took off this evening, but only seven reached Hamburg as three had technical problems and returned early, one bombing Cuxhaven after turning back due to an engine failure and icing of the remaining three propellers. Weather over the target was very bad indeed with electrical storms and thick cloud preventing even the PFF Markers from being seen.

All ten aircraft returned to Base safely; ominously the crew of ED755 reported that night-fighters had been 'lying in wait' for them en-route as FOUR aircraft were observed by crews as being shot down during this mission.

3 August 1943

No operations ordered, 4 aircraft performed training flights safely today.

4 August 1943

6 aircraft detailed for Ops. but subsequently cancelled.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

5 August 1943- No Ops. Ordered.

August 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

6 August 1943

Eight aircraft safely performed 'Bulls Eye' Exercises with no Ops. Ordered.

7/ 8 August 1943- Night bombing MILAN

Tonight, ten aircraft set out for Milan with all aircraft successfully bombing in excellent visibility and PFF Marking. For the first time, one of the Squadron's aircraft (W5004 with the Edward crew) reports using 'MONICA' tail warning radar equipment, and 'Window' jamming strips. Nine aircraft safely returned to Skellingthorpe as planned. However, **F/O J. S. Lees RCAF** and crew in **DV223** had a traumatic sortie. While approaching Milan an engine caught fire and was quickly shut-down and the propeller feathered. The bombs were dropped early on the outskirts of Milan and due to the engine failure the pilot elected to head on for North Africa to land this being a safer option than returning on three engines across heavily defended Europe. However on reaching North Africa the crew were unable to contact the first airfield, Blida and elected to continue towards Maison Blanche (MB) airfield. Now low on fuel the crew found contact with MB was very poor and worse, visibility was poor and no runway lights appeared to be on. Despite making two attempts to land in order to indicate to MB that the runways could not be seen no lights were put on; committed to landing on a third attempt almost blind and with the rest of the crew at crash positions, the Bomb Aimer Sgt. Shearwood volunteered to remain in the forward blister to guide the pilot in. As the aircraft touched down it became apparent that the aircraft had landed at an angle to the (unlit) runway; in correcting the drift the very light aircraft 'floated' a large distance and then F/O Lees was faced with a parked Lancaster looming at him. Lee's could not avoid it and the two aircraft collided with DV223 'pancaking' and the Left undercarriage leg breaking off. Now at 90 degrees with the Starboard fuselage facing in the direction of travel the aircraft slid to a halt but no fire ensued.

All the crew escaped but Sgt. Shearwood suffered severe injuries to his left side. He recovered to fly again after Hospitalisation.

The rest of the crew returned home later by Transport. Although F/O Lees put it on record that Sgt. Shearwood should receive some recognition for his selfless bravery, sadly he did not on this occasion. F/O Lees also pointedly reported that despite circling the airfield for over an hour, none of the runway lights/ aids were on at the time of his emergency landing.

20727 F/O James Stewart Lees RCAF received no award for his leadership and flying skills and was back in action with his crew later in the month.. His crew were FE Sgt. Horsley, Nav. Sgt. Crear, WOP/ AG Sgt. Mollison, AG Sgt. C. H. Brown, and AG Sgt. E. T. McLeod and of course B/A 615617 Sgt. Benjamin Frederick Shearwood RAFVR.

James Lees received the DFC later in the year while still flying for 50 Sq. and Benjamin Shearwood also won a DFC in 1945 while with No. 97 Sq. RAF.

Maison Blanche is now Houari- Boumediene, Algiers International Airport.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

August 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

8 August 1943

No Ops. Detailed.

9/ 10 August 1943- Night bombing MANNHEIM

Twelve aircraft were detailed to attack Mannheim tonight, but one failed to take-off. A further aircraft returned early without bombing due to Oxygen System problems. The remaining ten bombed on PFF coloured Target Indicators and also for the first time 'Newhaven' white illumination flares were seen, their purpose being to illuminate ground features to aid precision. All gunners on ED415 and DV227 engaged enemy fighters tonight and one fighter was believed to have been shot down. All returned safely to Base. Ordnance expended was 11x 4000lb 'Cookies', 844x 30lb incendiaries and 12,610 4lb incendiaries.

10/ 11 August 1943- Night bombing NURNBERG

Eleven aircraft were detailed to attack Nurnberg this evening. One aircraft aborted before take-off but the remaining ten made a successful attack on the target with very little opposition. Again, Monica and 'Window' were used and PFF Marking was crucial. One aircraft (ED755 and the Adam's crew) also carried and used 'MANDREL' for the first time by 50 Squadron. (MANDREL was the first Electronic Countermeasures device designed by the British to counter the long-range ground based radar system called FREYA used by the Germans to detect incoming Allied aircraft, at distances of up to 100 miles). All the aircraft returned to Base safely.

11 August 1943

No Operations detailed. Two aircraft completed training flights.

12/ 13 August 1943- Night bombing MILAN

Twelve aircraft took-off tonight for Milan. Two aircraft returned early before bombing including ED393 with the Squadron C.O. on his first operational mission with the Squadron, both suffering technical troubles. Ten aircraft bombed in good visibility with a little ground haze and PFF marking was again used including 'Newhaven'. For the first time an 'M.C.' is mentioned- Master Controller or Master of Ceremonies using UHF/ VHF voice command to direct bombing- unfortunately for the wrong reason as his commentary was not heard by any of the crews. This was likely due to teething troubles with the new system which used a special radio set in the M.C.'s aircraft. It is noted that almost all Squadron aircraft now carry and use 'Window' and a few now use 'Monica'. All the gunners on ED470 engaged fighters tonight (Thomson crew). All aircraft returned safely to Base.

13 August 1943

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

No Ops. Detailed.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

August 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

14/ 15 August 1943- Night bombing MILAN

Tonight, five aircraft left to attack Milan once more. All aircraft used 'Monica' and 'Window' and the usual PFF Target Marking was apparent. All returned safely to Base without incident.

15/ 16 August 1943- Night bombing MILAN

Again Milan is tonight's target and eight aircraft left Skellingthorpe from around 9.30 pm. Little by way of opposition is encountered and all eight bombed the PFF markers, returning safely to Base at around 6 am. on the 16th.

16 August 1943

No Ops. Detailed.

17/ 18 August 1943 Night bombing PEENEMUNDE

Tonight, the Squadron participated in a large combined raid on the rocket research facilities at Peenemunde on the Baltic coast. The raid was notable for many firsts; this was a very large force concentrating on a very small target area. A complex order of bombing was drawn up, and for the first time the use of a M.C. to control a Main Bomber Force attack occurred. No. 5 Group was allocated the third of the three targets, that of the 'Experimental Station' and in addition 5 Group Squadrons were to use a unique 'Time and Distance' bombing method which was to complement the other attacking units different method (PFF Markers). Ruden Island was the way-point from which a timed run was made. The M.C. controlled the evolving attack. While the main force suffered relatively little from night-fighters (which had been drawn-off by a diversionary raid over Berlin) the third and last wave, of which 50 Squadron was a part was badly mauled by the fighters which had been sent to Peenemunde after the feint was rumbled. All the gunners on ED393 (Weatherstone crew) engaged fighters tonight. Despite this, all of the Squadron's aircraft made it safely back to Base although one aircraft had its Perspex nose shattered by a bomb from an aircraft above it and a second was damaged by light Flak over the target. Ordnance expended was 8x 4000lb 'Cookies', 60x 1000lb H.E., 27x 500lb H.E. and 930x 4lb incendiaries.

18 August 1943- No Ops. Ordered.

19 August 1943- 12 aircraft detailed but Ops. Cancelled last minute.

20 & 21 August 1943- No Ops detailed.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

August 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

22/ 23 August 1943- Night bombing LEVERKAUSEN

Twelve aircraft were detailed for this mission but only eleven departed Skellingthorpe around 9.15 pm. Weather conditions over the target changed as the force arrived with cloud obscuring most of the target. Either the aircraft were early, or the PFF were late as none of the attacking aircraft saw PFF Markers until they had bombed. Little in the way of opposition was met; again 'Window' was used by most and 'Monica' was used by some of the aircraft while 'Mandrel' was used by only two aircraft. As no less than 36 individual Air Combat Reports were filed for this mission, nearly every Squadron gunner would have engaged fighters tonight including multiple JU-88's, mostly to and from the target. All returned to Base safely.

23/ 24 August 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Tonight the Squadron take part in the first of many, large scale raids on the German Capital city. Thirteen aircraft are detailed but only twelve left Base tonight. Two aircraft return early due to technical faults. The remaining ten bombed without loss and return to Base safely; one aircraft reported encountering a night-fighter and another suffers light damage from Flak. F/O Lees and crew are in the thick of it again when EE189 suffered an engine fire and bombs were jettisoned to maintain height. The engine was shut down and feathered on the run-in to Berlin. F/O Lees elected to stay with the bomber stream and viewed the attack, weather reported very good and clear with PFF accurate and M.C. in control directing bombing. 21 Air Combat reports were filed; a busy flight for the gunners.

24 to 26 August 1943- No Ops. Detailed.

27/ 28 August 1943- Night bombing NURNBERG

Thirteen aircraft were detailed to join a force attacking Nurnberg. All aircraft successfully bombed the target with good PFF Marking. 'Mandrel', 'Window' and 'Monica' were again used routinely. 21 Air Combat reports were submitted on landing pretty well all the gunners had engaged fighters once again including ME109's. All aircraft safely returned to Base with no damage or injury reported.

28 to 29 August 1943- No Ops. Detailed.

30/ 31 August 1943- Night Bombing MUNCHEN-GLADBACH

Thirteen aircraft set off tonight at between Mid-night and 1 am. for Munchen; ED755 returned to Base early due to lack of oil pressure in one engine. Twelve aircraft found the target area hidden by thick cloud and therefore bombed on the PFF Markers. Four aircraft report the 'Monica' equipment to be not working. 21 Air Combat Reports (A.C.R.) were submitted, again most of the gunners engaged fighters tonight, including some ME210's. All aircraft returned to base safely from around 4 am.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

August 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

31 August/ 1 September 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

From around 10.30 pm. 11 Lancaster's left Skellingthorpe for Berlin. One navigator suffered the embarrassing mishap of losing his protractor while in the climb from Base and the aircraft returned after one hour in the air. The rest reached Berlin and bombed around Midnight. The target area was covered in cloud once again and the PFF Markers were again used for bombing. The markers were thought to be rather in-accurate; most crews rated the bombing as pretty poor, being spread over 3 or 4 miles. Many night-fighter engagements were recorded by the gunners and one aircraft, ED588 'G' reported being holed in the tail-plane, fuselage and wing by Flak. Another 21 A.C.R.'s were filed tonight, most gunners having engaged night-fighters, including ME109's. All returned safely to Base. Ordnance expended was 11x 4000lb, 760x 30lb incendiaries, 8010x 4lb incendiaries and 550x 4lb X.I.B.

Squadron Losses- August 1943

This month the Squadron lost just one aircraft (Crashed on landing, Algeria) and one crew member was injured on operations and training (in the same mission above).

Representative Aircraft

(Lancaster B. Mk. I)

W4905 'H', R5540, R5546, R5546 'T'

(Lancaster B. Mk. III)

W4161 'J', W5004, W5011, W5084, **DV223**, DV217, DV227, DV234, ED189 'S', ED393 'K', ED395, ED415, ED436, ED470 'O', ED483 'R', ED485, ED588 'G', ED755 'Q', EE124 'B', EE189, JA961, JB143.

Representative Crews

Abercromby, Adams, Banks, Bolton, Brown, Chopping, Clarke, Coates, Code, Cole, Duncan, Edward, Gregory, Heckendorf, Hollis, Lees, Litherland, Lloyd, Mason, McFarlane (C.O.), McLeod, Medley, Nelson, Parks, Pullen, Ruskell, Shortt, Smith, Southgate, Sutherland, Taylor, Thompson, Thomson, Toovey, Weatherstone, Wilkie,

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Over-view

Later this month, allied forces land on continental Europe at Salerno, Italy.

The 12000Lb 'Blockbuster' Bomb is used for the first time this month, by No. 617 Squadron.

Weather at base is abysmal this month, causing havoc with operations and training alike.

For the first time for a few years, the Squadron ORB records air-sea rescue searches made by Lancaster crews looking for missing colleagues. This may have happened, but has not been recorded, previously; however the last search recorded was by Hampden and Anson crews.

The Squadron's luck breaks, and aircrew losses mount again.

The first Squadron incident where a returning bomber is attack by a Night fighter 'Intruder' over this country occurs; this was an emerging menace, where tired crews and damaged aircraft were attacked by mostly lone JU-88's that were loitering over this country watching for them returning.

1 September 1943- No Ops. detailed.

2/3 September 1943- Night 'Gardening' in the 'Nectarines' Area.

EE124 with the Duncan crew dropped a sea-mine in the 'Nectarines' area (To be defined) successfully using 'GEE' navigation and returned safely to base. Note that, again the 'Monica' equipment on board was not working; 'Mandrell' was carried but not used..

3/ 4 September 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

10 aircraft left Skellingthorpe tonight for Berlin. Eight aircraft bombed in good visibility while one aircraft returned early without bombing. Nine returned to Base safely. Records show that the aircraft returned via Denmark or Sweden as the fires in Berlin were reported to have been still visible from this distance. Sadly one crew, in ED755 'VN-Q' 'Failed To Return'. Website www.luftkrieg-oberhavel.de contains eye-witness details of the last moments of ED755.

An aircraft on fire was seen falling between the villages of Schonberg and Vielitz, Germany around mid-night. As it descended, a main-plane separated and the main body started to turn towards the village of Vielitz, some 50Km N.W. of Berlin. However the aircraft then broke-up in the air and wreckage fell over a wide area. Bombs were heard exploding throughout the night/ morning indicating the aircraft had been shot down on the way to Berlin. The next day bodies were removed from the aircraft and others from trees nearby. One crew member was said to have been alive but more detail is not available. However, from the CWGC Data, it seems probable that this man passed away very shortly afterwards as the date of death is the same for all the crew; 4th September 1943. On the 8th September 1943 all seven crew of ED755 were laid to rest in the churchyard at the village of Neuruppin.

Later the crew were moved to the Post-War Military Cemetery at Charlottenburg, The 'Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery'.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

3/ 4 September 1943- Night bombing BERLIN- Loss of ED755 'VN-Q' Continued

Crew Details are:

Pilot J/11566 F/O Percy Hornby	COATES RCAF age 26, buried in Grave 7/J/23
Nav. J/22357 F/O Jack Morgan	LAUDER RCAF, Grave 7/J/26
F/E/ 986703 Sgt. George Banks	BUCHAN RAFVR age 29, Grave 7/J/27
A/B R/156379 Sgt. Rae Warren Buddy	COLLINS RCAF, Grave 7/J/22
WOP/AG 1394523 Sgt. Reginald Gordon	COOPER RAFVR age 19, Grave 7/J/24
AG 1522883 Sgt. Robert	McKEAG RAFVR age 21, Grave 7/J/ 21
AG 1390334 Sgt. Anthony Richard Duncan	BEDBROOK RAFVR, Grave 7/J/25

4 September 1943- No Ops. Detailed.

5/ 6 September 1943- Night bombing MANHEIM

12 aircraft tonight left Skellingthorpe from around 10.30 pm. to attack Mannheim. Weather was good initially but later aircraft reported haze and smoke from bombs obscuring the target. PFF Marking was used throughout. Searchlights and night-fighters were very active in the target area; gunners on JA961 claimed a Ju88 night-fighter 'damaged' despite the aircraft flying on three engines when one engine failed some 40 miles from the target. One aircraft returned early due to an electrical problem, all returned safely.

6/ 7 September 1943- Night bombing MUNICH

Ten aircraft bombed Munich tonight at around mid-night. The ground was obscured by cloud and PFF Marking was used again. Results of bombing could not be assessed. Enemy defences were reported on this mission and one crew reported a hit on one attacking twin-engined night fighter; DV234 suffered damage to the fuselage and the hydraulic system. Eight aircraft returned safely to Base while Two aircraft safely diverted to other airfields; one landed at Thorney Island and the second at Holmsley South, both due to petrol shortage.

7 September 1943- No Ops. Detailed.

8 September 1943- Operations detailed but subsequently cancelled.

9 September 1943- Operations detailed but subsequently cancelled.

10, 11, 12 & 13 September 1943- No Ops. detailed.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

14 September 1943- Training flights detailed but cancelled later.

15/ 16 September 1943- No Ops. Detailed.

17 September 1943- Training flights detailed but cancelled later.

18, 19 & 20 September 1943- No Ops. Detailed.

21 September 1943- Training flights detailed but cancelled later.

22/ 23 September 1943- Night bombing Hanover

16 aircraft bombed the target successfully tonight with no early returns. Conditions were good with light smoke and assisted by the PFF Markers bombing was thought to be accurate. Little by way of defences was encountered, however ED483 with the Lees crew were attacked by a night intruder over this country; no damage was reported. A 57 Sq. Lancaster crew were not so lucky when it was shot down with the loss of all crew this same early morning, crashing near Louth. Most aircraft used 'Monica' and dropped 'Window'. One aircraft used 'Mandrel' countermeasures. All returned to Skellingthorpe safely.

23/ 24 September 1943- Night bombing MANNHEIM

16 aircraft were detailed to attack MANNHEIM tonight, leaving Skellingthorpe from around 7pm. One aircraft failed to take off while 15 joined the main bomber stream and headed for the target. Fourteen aircraft found the target and successfully bombed in good visibility.

The Litherland crew in DV227 reported being hit by a "SCARECROW" **while over the target at 19,000 feet**; the aircraft was severely damaged to the extent that the Starboard (Right) vertical fin, rudder, elevator and around one quarter of the fixed tailplane were blown away completely. In addition, the trimming system to the remaining Port (Left) rudder and elevator was disabled. In a classic understatement so given of Bomber Captains, P/O Litherland reported "*Own aircraft difficult to manage after damage*". Manage they did and the crew brought the crippled aircraft safely back to Base, a remarkable feat of crew co-operation and flying skill. The phenomenon of 'Scarecrows' specifically what they actually were is to this day a subject of (sometimes) heated debate. Two crews reported that night fighters were very active in the target area. This was so very true; one aircraft, **ED415 with the Nelson crew failed to return** to Skellingthorpe. After departing at 19.07 Hours no further communication was heard from this crew.

After the war, some likely detail of the fate of ED415 and her crew was established. The aircraft was believed to have been shot down by a Me Bf110G-4 night fighter of 8/NJG1 (1st Lt. Heinz Bock who himself was killed a few weeks later) in the target area and crashed at the small village of RUCHHEIM, at around 10.45 Hours; Ruchheim is around 10Km West of LUDWIGSHAFEN which is, in turn, directly opposite Mannheim on the banks of the River Rhine.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

23/ 24 September 1943- Night bombing MANNHEIM- ED415 Ctd.

The following colleagues were originally buried at LUDWIGSHAFEN CEMETERY but are now buried in the DURNBACH WAR CEMETERY, Bayern.

Durnbach is a post- war Cemetery and those buried here came from original graves in Bavaria, Nurtemberg, Austria, Hessen and Thuringia. The crew were re-interred here on 16 October, 1947.

They are:

Pilot 415088 P/O Wallace Cyril	NELSON, RAAF, age 29.	Grave 2.C.3.
A/G 909074 Sgt. William Albert	HEAL RAFVR	Grave 2.C.2
A/B 1321126 Sgt. John Edward	SHEPHERD RAFVR	Grave 2.C.1
F/E 1052661 Sgt. John Bruce	ATKINSON RAFVR, age 21.	(
Nav. 1389500 F/Sgt. Victor Alfred	DARKIN, RAFVR, age 20.	(
WOAG 1322146 Sgt. Robert Edward	MORLEY RAFVR, age 21.	(Collective Grave 2.C.4-6
A/G 1300036 Sgt. Leon McNeill	JEFFERY, AGE 28.	(

This crew were originally laid to rest in LUDWIGSHAFEN CEMETERY, Graves U3.4889, PIID, R.1, Gr. 54, 53, 52 and collective Graves 55 and 56, respectively.

24/ 25 September 1943- Night training detailed but later cancelled.

25/ 26 September 1943- Operations detailed but later cancelled.

27/ 28 September 1943- Night bombing HANOVER.

15 departed base to attack Hanover. One aircraft returned early due instrument failure, one aircraft, **EE189 failed to return, and was presumed missing in action.** 13 aircraft successfully bombed Hanover, which was reported as being ablaze. Due to good visibility, especially in the area of a bombing way-point, some crews used the 'time and distance method of bombing in conjunction with PFF Marking. It is noticeable that of the 13 crew reports available, not one commented on opposition either on the way to, or over, the target from FLAK, searchlights or night fighters.

All 13 safely returned to England, however EE120 with the Shortt crew crash landed at RAF Lissett after overshooting the runway on landing. No injuries were reported.

Nothing further was heard from the crew of EE189, VN-S after it left Skellingthorpe that night. The International red Cross notified the Air Ministry later that six of the crew had been killed when the aircraft crashed near the village of Gross Forste, (Groß Förste) 20Km South of Hanover, around 10pm local time. However one crew member had survived and was made a POW.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

27/ 28 September 1943- Night bombing HANOVER Ctd..

Crew details are:

Fatalities

Pilot	16249 P/O Malcolm James	BANKS, RAAF, age 25
Nav.	1342504 Sgt. Ian Nicol Ferguson	CAMERON, RAFVR, age 21
F/E	1049079 Sgt. William Thomas	SMITH, RAFVR, age 20
A/B	1334284 Sgt. Harry William Frederick	COOKE, RAFVR
WOP/AG	1377409 Sgt. Leonard Cecil	JORDAN, RAFVR,
AG	848625 Sgt. Albert Henry	SIMPKIN, RAFVR

The above were initially buried in the village of Groß Förste but were later transferred to the Hanover War cemetery, Niedersachsen in respective locations of 3.H.14, 3.H.10, 3.H.13, 3.H.15 and 3.H.12.

Survivor 41743 F/Sgt. Rodney Coombs TONKIN RAAF was captured and made POW. In his post-war report he has no memory of the incident other than being told by the Germans that the crew were all dead.

678 aircraft took part in this mission; 20,000 people lost their homes and 200 people were killed. The Allies lost 49 aircraft and **246 airmen killed.** What a shocking price to pay?

The Squadron's sister unit at Skellingthorpe, No. 61 Squadron also lost a single Lancaster, ED314 tonight.

28 September 1943- Training detailed and carried out by six aircraft.

However, heavy rain, gusting winds and enemy intruder aircraft activity over the other Lincolnshire bases combined to wreak havoc as returning bombers faced black-out conditions. Yet another hazard faced by flying crews, on this morning for example RAF Wickenby saw an aircraft (101 Sq.) shot down near the airfield by a night intruder; one further Lancaster crashed while landing due to both heavy rain and the runway lights being switched off (due to intruder activity, standard practice was to switch all airfield lights off) and two further Lancaster's collided while taxi-ing back to dispersal with no edge illumination in the driving rain. Three more Lancaster's were severely damaged in ground accidents at other Lincolnshire airfields this day due to the weather conditions.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

29/ 30 September 1943- Night bombing BOCHUM

Twelve aircraft were detailed to attack Bochum this evening. All took off with eleven bombing successfully, one returning early due to A.S.I. failure and the remainder returning safely to Base before midnight. The weather was good with no cloud but, as was common, a ground haze prevented surface features from being seen; yet again the PFF T.I.'s proved their worth. No losses this raid, defences were generally rated as poor. 'Monica' serviceability seems to have greatly improved, 'Window' was dropped by all aircraft and some used 'Mandrell', again the equipment seems to be performing well.

29/ 30 September- Night 'Gardening' in the SPINACH 1 AREA

Two further aircraft were detailed tonight to position sea-mines ('Vegetables') in the 'Spinach 1 Garden' (Baltic Sea off Gdynia), a good 4 Hours flying time from base. One aircraft dropped mines with no opposition and in good weather with no Moon. The second aircraft, JB143, failed to return and the crew were posted as 'Missing' after various positional reports from RAF Heston gave a final position somewhere in the North Sea off Denmark.

It was later established via the International Red Cross that six of the crew were safe but one had not been found after the aircraft intentionally ditched in the North Sea. Post-war crew debrief reports gave detail to the story. Lancaster B. Mk. III JB143 'VN-L' was attacked by a Night Fighter (Oblt. Werner Speidel of 10/ NJG 3) and eventually ditched in the North Sea at 55.50N, 05.38E (about 100Km West of Esbjerg, Denmark) at 1.43hrs on the 30th. All the crew survived the ditching and although six made it into the aircraft's Dinghy, the Navigator, Sgt. Ridsdale was washed away by a wave and disappeared, never to be found.

The six survivors drifted for days until they were luckily picked-up by fishermen on the Danish fishing vessel 'FN416' "Niels Aaen" of Frederikshavn and dropped off at Thyborøn Harbour, on the North-Western coast of Denmark on the 3rd October 1943. All six were made POW's.

They were:

Pilot P/O R. M. CODE RCAF

Sgt. H.J. BOYTON RAFVR

Sgt. E.F. COLING RAFVR

Sgt. A.E. LANGFORD RAFVR

Sgt. C.R. MOAD RCAF

P/O A. NOBLE RCAF

Navigator 1457270 Sgt. Bernard Ridsdale RAFVR perished, his body never being recovered. He is commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial, Sussex and also by way of a plaque in front of the memorial erected by Tuborg Breweries and The Danish Resistance movement in 1948 at Tuborg Harbour, Hellerup, Copenhagen.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

September 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

30 September 1943- Air-Sea Searches

The Chopping and Mason crews took Two aircraft to carry out searches of the North Sea today, unsuccessfully, for JB143's crew leaving at around 4pm this afternoon.

Squadron Losses- September 1943

This month the Squadron **lost 6 aircraft and 21 men killed** on operations and training. Seven were taken P.O.W.

Representative Aircraft

(Lancaster B. Mk. I) W4905 'H', W4161 'J', W5004*, R5546 'T';

(Lancaster B. Mk. III) DV124*, DV217, **DV227 (badly damaged, air combat)**, DV234, **EE120 (badly damaged on landing)**, EE124 'B'*, ED189 'S', ED393 'K', **ED415**, ED470 'O', ED588 'G', **ED755 'Q'**, ED 876, **EE189**, JA899, JA961, **JB143**, JB147.

All aircraft are now 'Monica' equipped; those marked * are additionally equipped with 'Mandrell'.

Representative Crews

Adams, Brown, **Banks**, Bolton, Chopping, **Coates**, **Code**, Cole, Duncan, Edward, Heckendorf, Lees, Litherland, Lloyd, Mason, McFarlane (C.O.), McLeod, Medley, **Nelson**, Parks, Pullen, Ruskell, Shortt, Smith, Taylor, Thompson, Thomson, Toovey, Weatherstone, Wilkie,

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

October 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Over-view

This month, the Allies battle it out in Italy, and Italy declares war on Germany.

The USAAF return to Schweinfurt with B-17's in daylight but suffer such heavy losses that daylight bombing is halted (temporarily).

The German War Office approves the building of 12,000 V2 rockets.

Meanwhile the Russians make advances in the East.

At Skellingthorpe (and of course across the County) weather again causes flying accidents, disruption of operations and training. Postings in continue apace as attrition of crews continues inexorably, to No.'s 1660, 1661, 1654, 1668 (Balderton) Heavy Conversion Units and No.14 OTU with a small number of inter-Squadron postings.

Royal Air Force Skellingthorpe stands up this month as a fully fledged Bomber Command Station and is no longer classed as a satellite of RAF Waddington.

1/ 2 October 1943- Night bombing HAGEN

Eleven aircraft departed base for Hagen in the Ruhr Valley, from around 7 pm. One aircraft returned early due to a sick crew member while the remainder found the target (probably the railway marshalling yards, one of the largest in Germany) completely covered in thick cloud. Again using PFF Marking bombs were dropped and all aircraft returned to Base safely. Little in the way of opposition was reported. Around 300 bombers hit Hagen tonight and overall casualties were very low. Little night-fighter activity was noted, with seven gunners filing Air Combat Reports (i.e. summaries of engagements).

On the evening of the 2nd October, the Humber Anti-Aircraft Battery shot down a Luftwaffe Ju188 Night Intruder into the Humber estuary; this was the first Ju188 to be shot down over the United Kingdom.

2/ 3 October 1943- Night bombing MUNICH

Eleven aircraft left for Munich tonight. One returned early due to engine trouble. Ten aircraft bombed the target; aircraft first at the target reported good visibility, no cloud or haze and bombed accurately. Following aircraft reported dense smoke and haze as is inevitable and results could not be seen. All crews returned safely to Base. Night-fighters were very active and no less than 28 Air Combat Reports were filed after de-brief following this mission.

3/ 4 October 1943- Night bombing KASSEL

Ten aircraft joined a force attacking Kassel tonight, (home of the Fieseler aircraft plant and Henschel facilities making Tiger and King Tiger battle tanks as well as various Army H.Q.'s). All aircraft made the target and, thanks to a 'spoof' raid made on Hanover by Mosquito's, little fighter opposition was encountered (eight Air Combat Reports were filed) and all returned safely to Base.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

October 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

4/ 5 October 1943- Night bombing FRANKFURT

Ten aircraft left tonight for an attack on Frankfurt. Nine aircraft successfully attacked the target and fires could be seen from 250 miles away on the return leg. Another 'spoof' raid was believed to have been made by Mosquitoes, (possibly at Hanover) and fighter opposition was absent.

However one aircraft failed to return to base, W4905 ('Sugar Plum') and the Wilkie crew. It was later established that all seven crew had perished when the aircraft crashed in Frankfurt; little detail is known however. The burial locations for this crew are known, six of the crew being interred, after local burials, in the Post-War Durnbach War Cemetery, South of Munich.

Casualties from W4905

Pilot 147357 F/O Cecil James Morley	WILKIE CGM RAFVR, grave 9.G.15
F/E/ 993249 Sgt. Stanley	WILKINSON DFM RAFVR, grave 9.G.16
Nav. 130599 F/O James Albert	BRETT RAFVR, grave 9.G.12
B/A 1312779 Sgt. Howard George	PASKINS RAFVR, grave 9.G.13
WOP/AG 1127575 Sgt. Maurice	MENSFORTH, collective grave 9.G. 17-19
A/G 1063624 Sgt. Fred	TWEEDSDALE RAFVR, grave 9.G.14

A/G Sgt. J. W. BRANT, USAAF, is buried in Illinois, United States. Allegedly Sgt. Brant was buried locally, moved to a Belgian cemetery and finally taken home to Illinois, U.S.A.

5/ 6 and 6/ 7 October 1943- Operations planned but subsequently cancelled.

7/ 8 October 1943- Night bombing STUTTGART

Tonight thirteen aircraft left Skellingthorpe for Stuttgart. All reached the target and bombed through thick cloud on PFF Target Indicators the results of which could not be seen. One aircraft returned early due to engine trouble which necessitated jettisoning the bomb load. All returned to base safely. Thirteen Air Combat Reports were filed by the crews tonight.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

October 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

8/ 9 October 1943- Night bombing Hanover

Fourteen aircraft left Skellingthorpe tonight, and all reached Hanover and bombed using PFF Marking as, typically, a thick haze obscured the ground. Night-fighters were active with the crews filing eight Air Combat Report forms. Only Thirteen aircraft returned to Base in the morning however as nothing further was heard from DV324's crew after leaving and they failed to return.

Lancaster B. Mk. I DV324 'VN-N' was nearly new and was lost on its first operation. It is believed that two crew perished when the aircraft crashed and caught fire while five had parachuted to safety after DV324 was hit by Flak 21,000 feet over Hanover and with an engine on fire was abandoned by the surviving crew. It is thought that the aircraft came down outside the village of Wilkenburg, about 7Km South of Hanover.

Crew details:

Survivors:

Pilot 149547 P/O J C P TAYLOR RAFVR P.O.W.#3014

F/E 519566 F/Sgt. J HANDLEY RAFVR P.O.W.# 259877

B/A 80577 F/O S D STUBBS RAF POW# 3013

WOP/AG 1129137 Sgt. H J WHITWELL P.O.W.#259922

A/G 776389 W.O. J. S. GRAY RAFVR, POW,#259874

Killed and now buried at HANOVER WAR CEMETERY,

Nav. 1336361 Frank William

DOCK RAFVR age 20, buried at grave 2.E.16,

A/G R/77965 W.O. Class II William

BECKTHOLD RCAF, grave 2.D.1-4A

Note that these airmen were probably buried locally and moved to Hanover War Cemetery after the War.

*One German Internet blog site has a discussion thread wherein a local woman has told that her Father as a child was traumatised when a bomber crashed and caught fire near to his house and he witnessed two people trapped in the burning wreckage; she was trying to give closure to her (now) elderly father by establishing if this crash could have been DV324, in which case the crew he saw have been afforded a Christian burial. The cemetery of Hemmingen very close to Wilkenburg was quoted as a burial place for two crew during the war and the witness lived in a house in what is now Sundern Nature reserve, in the centre of the probable crash area. He may well have witnessed the end of DV324. None of this can be proven, unfortunately.

9 to 17 October 1943- No Operations or training exercises flown.

15 October 1943

Today, RAF Skellingthorpe ceases to be a satellite Base to RAF Waddington and becomes 55 Base, 5 Group Bomber Command.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

October 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

18/ 19 October 1943- Night bombing Hanover

Thirteen aircraft left Skellingthorpe for Hanover tonight and all bombed the target. Weather was good but with thick cloud. PFF Marking was used again. DV217 was holed by Flak while over Hamburg and night-fighters were active, with 18 Air Combat Report forms being filed. Bombing was not good as it was seen to be very scattered and no results were seen due to cloud. Once again, 'Window' was used by most aircraft and once again some crews reported the 'Monica' equipment as not working. All returned to Base safely.

19/ 20 October 1943- No operations detailed.

20/ 21 October 1943- Night bombing LEIPZIG

Thirteen aircraft left base at the early time of 5.30 pm to attack Leipzig. The weather was very poor however and thick cloud covered the target almost to the ground. Although all bombed, due to the bad conditions over target it was thought to be a poor mission. Flak damage was sustained by ED393 while over the target and the crew were forced to divert to RAF Foulsham, Norwich, due to fuel shortage. All aircraft landed safely. Some 27 Air Combat Report forms were filed for this mission.

21/ 22 October 1943- No operations detailed.

22/ 23 October 1943- Night bombing KASSEL

Ten aircraft left Base tonight from around 6 pm. (due no doubt to the gathering darkness as winter approaches) for Kassel, bombing at around 9 pm. in good visibility and no cloud- "almost perfect conditions" as described by one crew. Defences were said to be very inefficient. Fighter activity was reported however and one aircraft was damaged by cannon and machine gun fire, the gunners engaging the enemy but with no result (some 18 Air Combat Report [ACR] Forms being filed for this mission). One aircraft returned to base early, nine returned to base safely. Sadly, **ED483** failed to return from this mission tonight.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED483 'VN-R' failed to return with the loss of one crewman, Pilot Alec **BROADBENT**. Six of the crew escaped safely and spent the war as P.O.W.'s. Interrogation reports suggest that P/O Broadbent stayed at the controls to allow the crew to escape and possibly bailed out too late for his chute to open. Post war research has failed to link the loss of this aircraft with any night-fighter claim so it is probable ED483 was hit by flak.

It is believed to have crashed at Ovenhausen, near Hörter and 100Km North of the target Kassel. Very little information is available on this loss.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

October 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

22/ 23 October 1943- Night bombing KASSEL (Continued)

Loss of ED483 Ctd:

Killed In Action:

156321 P/O Alec Bridgewater BROADBENT RAFVR, age 20, buried at Hanover War Cemetery, Niedersachsen in grave 3. E. 1.

Survivors, taken P.O.W.:

1502225 Sgt. W.F. TUDBALL RAFVR
1558970 Sgt. M. J. GILLIES RAFVR
1385540 Sgt. J. D. PORTER RAFVR
418082 Sgt. L. R. EASDOWN RAAF
1314637 Sgt. E. BAVERSTOCK RAFVR

POW #261178, STALAG LUFT III SAGAN
POW #261221, STALAG LUFT I BARTH
POW #261192, STALAG LUFT III SAGAN
POW #261431, STALAG LUFT III SAGAN
POW #261414, STALAG LUFT III SAGAN

1522567 Sgt. W. F. NICKLIN RAF

POW # 261202, STALAG LUFT I BARTH

23 to 31 October 1943- No operations ordered.

Squadron Losses- October 1943

This month the Squadron **lost 3 aircraft and 10 men killed** on operations and training. Eleven men were taken P.O.W.

Representative Aircraft

(Lancaster B. Mk. I) **W4905 'H'**, W5541, R5546 'T',
(Lancaster B. Mk. III) W4161 'J*', W5004 'P*', DV176, DV217, DV234, DV227, **DV324 'N'**,
DV634, EE124 'B', ED393 'K', ED445, ED470 'O', **ED483 'R'**, ED588 'G', JA899, JA961.
All are 'Monica Equipped. * indicates 'Mandrell' equipped aircraft.

Representative Crews

Adams, Brown, Bolton, Burt, **Broadbent**, Chopping, Dobbyn, Edward, Heckendorf, Litherland, Lloyd, Lundy, Mason, McFarlane (C.O.), Medley, Parks, Pullen, Ruskell, Shortt, Smith, Saxton, Taylor (POW), Thompson, Toovey, Weatherstone, **Wilkie**, Wilson.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Over-view

This month sees the Russians continue to push West in Europe, causing the focus of Nazi attention to shift that direction. Concurrently, this month sees the start of the 'Battle of Berlin' which ran until March 1944. This campaign initiated the retaliatory Luftwaffe 'Baby Blitz' of Great Britain in 1944. Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill meet at Tehran later this month.

Sad to see this month the first record of a movement of an Officer to the RAF Chessington Air Crew Disposal Unit, an early Rehabilitation centre for badly wounded/ limbless forces personnel.

Three new crews arrive from the HCU's, while one crew is posted out to No. 57 Squadron and another to No. 463 Squadron. One of the new crews is led by a certain Flying Officer M. Beetham.

Bad weather causes havoc with operations in the United Kingdom, with fog being prevalent and deadly. The tragic crash at Pocklington on the 27th November of ED393 shows just how fickle and cruel fate can be, and how the civilian population also suffered across the country when military flying went wrong. Other units across Lincolnshire suffered heavy losses also due to poor visibility.

The Squadron gets up to full strength with up to Twenty-One aircraft proceeding on a single mission.

The court martial took place on the 15th November of 1293920 F/Sgt. Lloyd E.C.P. (*Edgar Charles Prytherp*) for Low flying.

No.61 (Lincoln Imp) Squadron arrives at Skellingthorpe this month from R.A.F. Syerston.

As of the 16th November, Squadron Executive Officers were follows:

50 Squadron:

Commanding officer W/Cdr. R. McFarlane DFC

O.C. 'A' Flight S/L W.F. Parks DFC

O. C. 'B' Flight S/L E. Pullen DFC

61 Squadron:

Commanding Officer W/Cdr. R.N. Stidolph

O. C. 'A' Flight S/L Benjamin

O. C. 'B' Flight S/L Moss.

1 & 2 November 1943- No Operations Ordered

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

3/ 4 November 1943- Night bombing DUSSELDORF

From around 5.30 pm. tonight, twelve aircraft departed Skellingthorpe for Düsseldorf One aircraft returned to Base early due to technical trouble. 'Window' and 'Monica' were carried and used by most aircraft. Enemy fighters (FW190's) were encountered at and near the target by some crews and were engaged by the gunners, and searchlight activity was intense. Eleven aircraft bombed the target in haze and cloud, ten returned to base safely from around 9.45 pm.

DV227 with the Litherland crew had a hair-raising escape when they were attacked near Munchen-Gladbach by Ju88 Night Fighters and seriously damaged; the bomb doors opened due to the attack and as the aircraft was put into an evasive 'corkscrew' manoeuvre all bombs were dropped on a searchlight battery below them. After evading the fighters a distress call was made while crossing the Dutch coast and it was not known if they would make land due to fuel shortage. The aircraft was further damaged during the ensuing ground loop while landing at RAF Hardwicke, Norfolk. All were safe however.

4 November 1943- Seven aircraft carried out training missions.

5/ 6 November 1943- No operations ordered

7 November 1943- Sixteen aircraft detailed for operations but orders cancelled.

8 November 1943- Seventeen aircraft detailed for operations but orders cancelled.

9 November 1943- Nineteen aircraft detailed for operations but orders cancelled.

10/ 11 November 1943- Night bombing MODANE

No less than Eighteen Lancaster's departed at around 9 pm from Skellingthorpe tonight for the railway marshalling yard at Modane, on the French/ Italian border (this was a steep-sided, Alpine valley target). Weather was clear but with slight ground haze. Aircraft bombed at around 1 am. using time-and distance method with PFF T.I. marking. Once again, the 'Monica' tail warning radar equipment was reported as 'U/S' by some crews, and 'window' was dropped. Defences en-route and over the target were negligible. However, it is noted from the crews own reports that bombing accuracy was still a major issue as crews reported observing bombs exploding "*some miles from the target area*". Eighteen aircraft returned to Base safely from around 5.45 am.

11November- 17 aircraft are detailed for operations but orders cancelled.

12 to 14 November 1943- No operations detailed

15 November 1943- 4 aircraft carried out training exercises.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

16 November 1943- eighteen aircraft detailed for operations but orders cancelled.

(No. 61 Squadron moves in to RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincs. from RAF Syerston, Notts.)

17 November 1943- No Op's ordered

18/ 19 November 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

21 of the Squadron's aircraft departed Skellingthorpe to join a large force attacking Berlin. Three aircraft returned early due to mechanical failures and a fourth due to crew illness; sixteen bombed the target although thick cloud obscured the ground completely with PFF Marking being used, while one crew bombed Texel (Holland) instead. No casualties were suffered by the Squadron tonight and all returned safely but many aircraft were found damaged by Flak. As an indication of the ferocity of this campaign, no less than Sixteen 4000 lb 'Cookie' bombs were dropped along with incendiaries. Two aircraft were 'borrowed from No. 467 Squadron, with one aircraft being flown from RAF Waddington to Berlin and landing back at RAF Wigsley. The second borrowed No. 467 machine went unserviceable shortly after take-off and returned without bombing.

19 to 21 November 1943- No operations detailed.

Three aircraft from this Squadron, (Beetham, Weatherstone and Herbert crews) and two more from No. 61 Squadron were detailed to carry out Dinghy searches over the North Sea on the 19th November; weather was perfect but nothing was seen and the aircraft called off the search only when darkness fell. The object of the search is at this time unknown.

22/ 23 November 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Nineteen aircraft took off tonight from around 5.30 pm. one aircraft returned early due to a technical failure. Seventeen aircraft are known to have bombed successfully despite heavy flak from Cologne to the target and back. Cloud made target identification difficult but PFF T.I. marking was thought to have been accurate (the first mention of 'WANGANUI' Sky marking use is reported by a 50 Sq. crew tonight). Eighteen crews returned safely to Base. One aircraft, DV368 was damaged when, while crossing the coast near Skegness on the return leg, it hit trees. The crew landed safely at Skellingthorpe. An investigation came to the conclusion that that a rapid, unnoticed drop in air pressure over Great Britain meant the aircraft's altimeters were reading 300 feet higher than the aircraft actually was; on this same day two further Lancaster's crashed in Lincolnshire with fatalities for this same reason.

DV324 was hit by heavy flak over the target with the lower surfaces being peppered by holes.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

22/ 23 November 1943- Night bombing BERLIN Ctd.

Sadly, one aircraft "failed to return" to Base tonight; DV366 with the SAXTON crew.

I can find little information of this crew's demise- one more Lancaster that simply vanished without trace. While the whereabouts of DV366 'VN-R' are unknown, the crew however were all found and are buried together in the Berlin 1939-1945 War Cemetery. From this it can be concluded that they crashed within around a 70 mile radius of Berlin; the 1939- 1945 War Cemetery is post-war and casualties were moved from outlying areas to Berlin at the cessation of hostilities. DV366 was nearly new when lost.

DV366 Loss Continued:

Crew details as follows:

Pilot 1233720 W.O. John Harold SAXTON RAFVR, buried in collective grave 1. C.10.-15

F/E 1442302 Sgt. Peter Henry FRYER RAFVR, age 22, " " " " "

WOP/AG 1112190 Sgt. Christopher WATSON, buried in collective grave 1. C.10-15

AG R107172 W.O. 2nd Class James Joseph ZUNTI RCAF, " " " "

A/B 1317602 F/Sgt. John Charles Eynon REES RAFVR, age 20, " " " "

AG 1251081 F/Sgt. William Edward COATES RAFVR, buried in collective grave 1.C.10-15

Nav. 1481271 F/Sgt. John Hall JOWETT RAFVR, age 22, buried at grave 1.D.16.

The existence of a 'Collective' grave here tells its own, grim story.

23 / 24 November- Night Bombing BERLIN

Tonight, Sixteen aircraft returned to Berlin. All aircraft succeeded in attacking the target and returned to base safely. Weather over the target was poor and results of bombing (again using PFF Marking and 'Wanganui' Flares) could not be observed.

Defences were aggressive, DV217 was hit and badly damaged by FLAK; DV375 with the Leader crew were attacked by Night Fighters over Berlin and bomb bay, port fuselage and Mid- Upper gun turret badly damaged. Another aircraft from No. 467 squadron was borrowed tonight. JA899 was forced to land at RAF Wittering. Numerous aircraft reported unusually severe icing of the airframe over the UK tonight, perhaps a portent of days to come.

Ordnance expended tonight was 15 x 4000Lb HC Bombs, 28 x 1000Lb bombs, 620x 30Lb Incendiaries and 12390 x 4Lb Incendiaries.

24 November 1943- No Op's detailed

25/ 26 November- 16 aircraft were detailed for operations but the order was cancelled.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

26/ 27 November 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Fifteen aircraft were detailed for this mission tonight, joining 428 other aircraft. Fourteen took off from around 5 pm. onwards in what was to be an eventful mission. Of these fourteen, thirteen reached the target and bombed using PFF Marking, with searchlight activity intense and fighters active as well as Flak. Of the thirteen, DV178 and the Adams crew failed to return, ED445 collided with another Lancaster after landing safely at RAF Leconfield, with Two further aircraft making a landing at this airfield. ED393 with the Thompson crew crashed while attempting to land at RAF Pocklington, Yorkshire due to fog causing havoc across Britain for returning aircraft. Three aircraft are also known to have landed at RAF Melbourne, Yorkshire due to fog at Base, however the fog appears to have been equally bad across Yorkshire this morning. 'Monica', 'Mandrel', A.P.I. and 'Window' were carried by some aircraft on the mission and used/ dropped.

ED393 'VN-K' was diverted to RAF Melbourne, Yorkshire after bombing, but as two other Lancaster's (also 50 Squadron's ED377 'VN-X' and JA961 'VN-A') had already crashed and blocked the runway they were sent to RAF Pocklington a short distance to the North. After a failed first attempt at landing (in fog) the aircraft had turned South to go-around again when it hit a tree and crashed into a Pub and private house in the tiny Hamlet of Canal Head in the early hours of the 27th November.

Five of the crew perished in the crash along with two civilians who were in the house. A most detailed and saddening account of the crash is given by an eye-witness, Evelyn Ross of 7, Ramsdale Terrace, Canal Head, Pocklington, in the BBC's 'WW2 Peoples War', Article I.D. A6040153 from which the forgoing précis was made.

Killed in Action, ED393 :

AG 710256 Sgt. Allan Douglas (Bob) SPIERS, RAFVR, age 29, buried Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery, Yorkshire, Sec. C. Row F Grave 5. (Bob was a South African).
Pilot 160916 P/O Joseph Watson THOMPSON RAFVR, age 20, buried at Greenford Park Cemetery, Middlesex, section S.26 Grave 16487.
Nav. 646335 F/Sgt. Stanley CHAPMAN RAF, age 22 is buried at Wimbledon, (Gap Road) Cemetery, Surrey, in Plot P.A. Grave 95.
A/B 1091325 F/Sgt. John Ralph CONLON RAFVR, age 21, is buried at Hepworth St. Mary Churchyard, Durham in the New Yard plot A.
F/E 1431816 Sgt. Reginald Walter LAWS RAFVR, age 20 is buried at Tottenham Cemetery, in Risley section Grave 1565, Mddx.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

26/ 27 November 1943- Night bombing BERLIN (continued)

Civilians Killed on the ground:

Mrs Gertrude Bird, age 69, is believed to have been buried at Pocklington, and also is commemorated on the Civilian War Dead Roll of Honour at Westminster Abbey.

Mr. Percy Paulucy HOPKINSON, age 41.

Crew Injured:

WOAG Sgt. C. B. CORBETT

AG Sgt. T. A. WYLIE

As a footnote, ED370 'VN-J' with the Ruskell crew had a narrow escape on Melbourne's runway having landed safely in thick fog and in the process of back-tracking down the runway in use coming 'nose to nose' with Lancaster DV377 which had just landed. Only the unfortunate DV377's swing off the runway and crash into JA961 which had just done the same and had become 'bogged-down' on the edge of the runway (!) prevented ED870 from being another casualty. Both crews scrambled to safety before JA961 and DV377 caught fire and were destroyed. (With thanks to Mr. Ken Ruskell MBE DFC and the 50 & 61 Association Newsletters.)

DV178 'VN-N'

The crew of DV178 reported by radio that they had lost both Port engines and were losing height. A second message was later sent stating they had regained one of the port engines and were maintaining height and heading for base. Post-war it could be established that DV178 'VN-N' had probably collided with another Lancaster mid-air and finally ditched into the sea off Wilhelmshaven. Two crew men were killed and the others survived to be made P.O.W.

Crew details are:

Killed In Action:

A/G 1320794 Sgt. Cyril William BILLETT RAFVR, age 21, buried at Becklingen War Cemetery, Soltau, Germany, Grave 22.A.5. As Soltau is a post-war cemetery they would have been buried locally to the crash site and moved after hostilities ceased.

A/B 158762 Sgt. William James WARD RAFVR is buried at SAGE War Cemetery, Oldenburg, Germany, Grave 13.C.12. Again, Sage is a post-war cemetery and those interred here have been moved from graves in the Frisian Islands and North-West Germany. Again, it is probable that the two deceased were found at different locations initially; hence their final resting places are some distance apart.

Survivors, made P.O.W.:

Pilot, P/O J. C. ADAMS RAAF

F/Sgt. D. R. CRAWFORD RAAF

Sgt. G. M. HASTIE RAFVR

Sgt. T. MIDGLEY RAFVR

Sgt. J. RAWCLIFFE RAFVR

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

November 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

27, 28 & 29 November 1943- No operations ordered

As another example of the fickle nature of the weather, 'FIDO' Fog dispersal equipment was in use at RAF Fiskerton this morning 27th November (FIDO requiring the burning of vast quantities of petrol along runway edges to heat and raise the fog levels) but despite this a No. 49 Sqn. Lancaster crash landed at Fiskerton while using this aid only yards from safety when in visibility less than 400 Yards it flew into the ground at the approach end of the runway killing Four crew and injuring Three more.

The Serviceable aircraft return from RAF Melbourne in this period.

29/ 30 November 1943- Ten aircraft detailed for operations but subsequently cancelled.

Squadron Losses- November 1943

This month the Squadron lost **5 aircraft, 14 men killed and 2 injured** on operations and training. 5 men were taken P.O.W.

Representative Aircraft

(Lancaster B. Mk. I) W4161, R5546 'T';

(Lancaster B. Mk. III) W5004 'P'*, **DV178 'N'**, DV217, DV234, DV227, DV325, DV363, **DV366**, DV368, DV375, DV376, **DV377 'X' (burnt out)**, ED370 'J', ED383, **ED393 'K'**, ED445, ED470 'O', ED588 'G', JA899, **JA961* 'A' (burnt out)**.

All aircraft carry 'Monica' and 'Window'. Those marked * carry 'Mandrell'. This month, nearly every aircraft carried 'portable' 'A.P.I.' Bombing Wind equipment at some point.

Representative Crews

Adams, Beetham, Brown, Bolton, Burtt, Cole, Dobbyn, Durham, Edward, Erritt, Heckendorf, Herbert, Keith, Leader, Lees, Litherland, Lloyd, Lundy, McLeod, Pullen, Ruskell, **Saxton**, **Thompson**, Toovey, Weatherstone, Wilson M.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

December 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

Over-view

The end of the year sees the Squadron continuing its contribution to the Berlin campaign which runs until March 1944, with three missions to the capital city this month. With the city's defences now expectant, casualties mount.

A further blow is dealt when the newly appointed and promoted Squadron Commanding Officer, former O.C. 'B' Flight W/Cdr. Edward Pullen DFC is killed while joining the Boyle crew on a raid to Frankfurt. W/Cdr. Pullen had just taken over command of the Squadron from W/Cdr. McFarlane weeks earlier.

Meanwhile the Russians continue their advance Westward with a push in the Ukraine region; the Berlin campaign was, at least partially, intended to weaken the German capability to resist this push.

At the end of the month, the German battleship 'Scharnhorst' is finally sunk off North Cape.

No less than Eight crews are posted in from the Conversion Units with 2 posted to them, as well as one crew moving over from No. 9 Squadron.

The weather in Lincolnshire continues to be appalling with Fog and low cloud, especially late evening and early morning, causing many crashes, injuries and fatalities.

On the evening and early morning, 16th/ 17th December 1943, no fewer than **TWELVE** Lancaster's crashed in Lincolnshire due to fog and low cloud in a Five Hour period, including two No. 100 Squadron machines which collided in mid air killing all Fourteen crew, having just survived a bombing mission.

Perhaps Skellingthorpes location gave an advantage as all these casualties occurred in the North of Lincolnshire near high ground (Caistor, Kelstern etc.).

1 December-

Ten aircraft were detailed for operations but the mission was cancelled prior to take- off.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

December 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

2/ 3 December 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

This evening, ten aircraft left Skellingthorpe to bomb Berlin targets once more. One aircraft returned early due to engine failure. Of the remaining nine, eight are known to have reached the target which was in good visibility. The crews bombed on 'Wanganui' flares dropped by the PFF. Of these eight, one had engine failure over the target but continued to bomb only to suffer intercom failure and then have all the guns freeze up due to icing. One more crew suffered an unconscious Mid-Upper Gunner due to Oxygen system failure but he recovered shortly afterwards. Sadly, one aircraft and crew failed to return to Skellingthorpe this mission. DV325 with the Bolton crew were never heard from again after leaving base and were presumed missing in action.

Lancaster B. Mk. III, DV325 'VN-B' was believed to have been shot down over and crashed in, Berlin by Flak. Two of the crew were killed, while the other five crew members and a civilian war reporter survived and were taken P.O.W. The civilian, one of four news reporters airborne with Bomber Command that evening was an American, Mr. Lowell L. Bennett of American International News Service. He described in a letter smuggled out of camp Stalag Luft 1 how the aircraft was set ablaze by flak over Berlin and the aircraft was abandoned. Bennett managed to escape from captivity while being transferred from camps but was re-captured after 3 months in hiding. He was liberated by the Russians in 1945 and tells of his shooting down and his time in captivity in his book "Parachute to Berlin", 1945 published by Vanguard Press.

The crew of DV325 consisted of:

Killed In Action:

A/B 155594 P/O Alexander McCracken WATSON RAFVR, who is buried at the Berlin 1939- 1945 War Cemetery, joint grave 4.J. 13-14

A/G 1609499 Sgt. Ronald Frank MOODY RAFVR, age 19, who is buried at the Berlin 1939- 1945 War Cemetery, in grave 4.J. 12.

The survivors:

F/ Lt. I. D. BOLTON DFC, P.O.W. #

Sgt. G. E. BROWN, P.O.W. #267149

F/Sgt. R. C. FORRESTER DFM, P.O.W. #267159

Sgt. D. M. McCALL, P.O.W. #43153

Sgt. A. A. McDOUGALL RCAF, P.O.W. #263171

And

International News Service USA reporter Lowell L. BENNETT, evaded (3 times!).

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

December 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

3/ 4 December 1943- Night bombing LEIPZIG

Nine aircraft left Skellingthorpe at the late hour of just after midnight for Leipzig. Two aircraft returned early without bombing due to technical problems. The remainder bombed on PFF dropped 'Wanganui' markers in thick cloud. Although all returned safely to base from around 7 am. onward, the defences across Europe tonight were ferocious, with two aircraft badly damaged after leaving the target area by un-identified night fighters. Icing was also prevalent tonight with some aircraft suffering frozen trimming tabs (this makes it very tiring for the pilot). 'Mandrel' and 'Monica' were again used tonight, by now standard practice.

4th to 15th December 1943- No Operations ordered.

16/ 17 December 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Thirteen aircraft left tonight for Berlin again, with all successfully bombing, once again through thick cloud and with the help of PFF Target Indicators. All crews returned safely to Base. Noted tonight, for the first time in the O.R.B. is mention of the 'Broadcast Winds' (BW) ; this was a calculated wind vector given to navigators to (in principle) give better navigational accuracy when used in conjunction with an Airborne Position Indicator (A.P.I.) which again is noted as being mentioned as carried by some aircraft on this raid. The BW was said to have been very accurate tonight by most crews. This, unfortunately, was very often not the case.

17 to 19 December No Operations ordered.

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

December 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

20/ 21 December 1943- Night bombing FRANKFURT

Fourteen aircraft departed Skellingthorpe tonight for targets in Frankfurt. Most aircraft carried 'Monica' which again proved unreliable; some carried 'Mandrel', and a few carried another new piece of electronics, 'A.P.I.'. With good visibility and broken cloud the crews bombed on PFF coloured T.I.'s and 'Wanganui' flares. A 'spoof' diversionary 'attack' on Mannheim was also carried out to coincide with this raid. Twelve aircraft reached and bombed the target, sadly two aircraft failed to return to Skellingthorpe tonight.

Lancaster B. Mk. III DV234 'VN-M' is believed to have been hit by both Flak and night fighters, finally crashing near the village of Bodenrod (now Bodenrod-Westhausen) some 8 km. West of Leinefelde (now Leinefelde-Orbis), some 200 Km North of Frankfurt.

Four of the eight crew were killed while four survived and became P.O.W. Amongst the fatalities was the Squadron Commanding Officer W/Cdr. Edward Pullen, who was probably flying as a supernumerary; this was F/O Boyle's own crew.

Crew details are:

(The following crew are buried at Durnbach War Cemetery. As Durnbach is a post-war cemetery, they would have been buried locally to the crash site and later transferred by the Army Grave Service to Durnbach after cessation of hostilities.)

2nd Pilot 44315 W/Cdr. Edward
F/E 653563 F/Sgt. George Beedham
WOP/ AG 137127 F/O James Robb
AG 1236942 F/Sgt. Kenneth Albert

PULLEN RAF, buried in grave 1.D.2
BRADLEY RAF, age 23, buried in grave 1.D.1
FERGUSON RAFVR, age 23, buried in grave 1.D.3
HUMPHRIES RAFVR, buried in grave 1.D.4

The survivors, all whom were made P.O.W.-

Pilot 141683 F/O Peter Norman BOYLE, P.O.W. #3241
Nav. F/O T.W. E. HUGHES, P.O.W. #3259
B/A 1461500 F/Sgt. W. L. FORD, P.O.W. #267448
AG 517093 F/Sgt. W. AMEY, P.O.W. #267428

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December 1943, Based At RAF Skellingthorpe, Lincoln.

20/ 21 December 1943- Night bombing FRANKFURT (Continued)

Lancaster DV217 B. Mk. III 'VN-C' is believed to have been shot down on the way in to the target by a night fighter with the aircraft catching fire at 19,000 feet. Before the crew could bale out the aircraft with full bomb-load exploded throwing two survivors clear. The wreckage along with five crew fell at/ near Kelsterbach, just south of the target Frankfurt. These five members of P/O Heckendorf's crew are also buried at Durnbach War Cemetery, South of Munich, Germany alongside their comrades from DV234 and sadly many others from this same raid tonight. The two survivors were made P.O.W., and the details known about this loss come mainly from their repatriation reports. The crew of DV217 consisted of:

Killed In Action

Pilot 412442 P/O John Llewelyn

HECKENDORF RAAF, age 25 buried in grave 7.A.9

F/E 1019301 Sgt. John

HENDERSON RAFVR, age 32 buried in grave 7.A.10

Nav 141548 F/O Kenneth Thornton

DALE RAFVR, age 21 buried in grave 7.A. 11

A/G 1483259 Sgt. Douglas Sinclair

HALL RAFVR, buried in grave 7.A.8

408379 F/Sgt. Robert Campbell

TURNER RAAF, age 26 buried in grave 7.A.12

Survivors/ P.O.W.'S:

B/A 146342 F/O R. L. RUTHERFORD, P.O.W. #3276

WOP/ AG 169139 Sgt. A. D. HOPE

21 AND 22 December 1943- No Operations ordered.

23/ 24 December 1943- night bombing BERLIN

The Squadron joined Skellingthorpe based No. 61 Squadron and a large force of Command aircraft to bomb once more a target in Berlin. Of the thirteen aircraft detailed to take part, two failed to leave while three returned early; two due to engine problems and other technical failures and the third due to the failure of the heating system to one of the gun turrets (leading to frostbite of the gunner), while one, ED445 with F/O D. W. Herbert and crew failed to return.

Those that reached the target found the usual poor weather pattern and bombed through cloud using the PFF coloured T.I.'s and 'Wanganui' flares resulting in rather poor bombing. Heavy Flak was reported in the area. Twelve crews returned safely to base.

379 aircraft bombed Berlin on this occasion, killing 178 people, destroying 287 buildings and sinking one canal boat with 3 others damaged. 19 Command aircraft were lost with 99 aircrew killed and 14 made P.O.W.

Lancaster B. Mk. III ED445 'VN-L' is believed to have been shot down by Flak as no night fighter claims can be matched to this loss. The aircraft is believed to have come down near Lauterbach/ Kolzenhain which is just 40 Km North East of Frankfurt. The crew's final resting place is at Hanover War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, Germany, where the entire crew are buried.

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23/ 24 December 1943- night bombing BERLIN (Continued)

Loss of ED445 'VN-L

Pilot 133392 F/O Derrick Wilson HERBERT RAFVR, age 21, buried in grave 5.D.12

F/E 1522694 Sgt. John RUSSELL RAFVR, buried in Collective grave 5.D.15- 18

Nav. 1515141 Sgt. Philip Rex PAE RAFVR, age 20, buried in Collective grave 5.D.15- 18

A/B 1494966 Sgt. Charles Henry KEWLEY RAFVR, age 19, buried in Collective grave 5.D.15- 18

WOP/AG 1075546 Sgt. David John POOLE RAFVR, age 23, buried in grave 5.D.13

A/G 152393 F/O Clifford HUGHES RAFVR, age 30, buried in grave 5.D.14

A/G 998917 Sgt. Thomas Leslie NORTH RAFVR, age 21, buried in Collective grave 5.D.15- 18

24 to 28 December 1943- No Operations ordered.

29/ 30 December 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Fifteen aircraft were detailed for another mission to Berlin tonight. All fifteen left Skellingthorpe from around 5 pm. Fourteen crews are known to have bombed the target, once again in poor weather and with PFF coloured T.I. marking and 'Wanganui' flares. 'Monica' and 'Mandrel' were carried by some aircraft with a few also carrying A.T.I. All these aircraft returned to Base safely. Sadly one crew on DV375 'VN-E' failed to return tonight. No trace was ever found of five of the crew, while one body was washed up on the Dutch coast some time later. Gunner F/Sgt. H. E. Groves was found alive in the North Sea by a Royal Navy destroyer at a point roughly mid-way between Lowestoft and Amsterdam (5237N, 0302E).

Lancaster B. Mk. III 'VN-E' DV375

The following airmen have never been found and are commemorated at the Air Forces Memorial for those with no known grave at Runnymede, Sussex:

Pilot 118079 F/Lt. Donald Gordon

1494130 Sgt. John

139725 F/O Henry

1264148 Sgt. Jack

1584837 Sgt. Walter

McALPINE, RAFVR, age 29

GREENWELL RAFVR

MORDUE RAFVR

BIGGS RAFVR

HOPE RAFVR

WOP/ AG 52116 F/O Charles Noel HALE RAF is buried at Sage War Cemetery, in the small village of Sage, West of Bremen, Germany, in grave 5.D.8. Most of those in the Sage Cemetery were brought in from the Frisian Islands and North Western Germany after the war so Charles most likely was originally buried locally in coastal Germany after his discovery on a Dutch beach.

F/Sgt. H E GROVES RAAF was found alive in the North Sea by a British Destroyer and was found to be suffering from relatively minor shrapnel wounds in both arms.

To date (2016) I have been unable to access F/ Sgt. Groves' official report after ditching which could presumably shed some light as to how DV375 came to ditch.

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29/ 30 December 1943- Night bombing BERLIN

Footnote to the loss of DV375: An (official RAF Photographic Reconnaissance) aerial picture on the No. 50 and 61 Squadron Association's website in the archive/ photos section, kindly provided by Mr. Des Collins shows a badly damaged but substantially intact Lancaster afloat in the sea, with the survival dinghy still stowed and the upper escape hatch missing. The tail of the aircraft has broken off just aft of the mid-upper gun turret and the Starboard main-plane appears to have damage consistent with a fire at the point of the Starboard outer engine attachments. The photograph is dated the 30 December 1943 and has the latitude and longitude of the aircraft's location printed on it. Mr. Collins believes this is of DV375.

30 December 1943- No operations ordered.

31 December 1943- Operations detailed but subsequently cancelled.

Squadron Losses- November 1943

This month the Squadron lost 5 aircraft, 24 men killed and 1 injured on operations and training. 11 men were taken P.O.W.

Representative Aircraft

(Lancaster B. Mk. I) R5546 VN-T

(Lancaster B. Mk. III) W5004*, DV217 'C', DV234 'M', DV325 'B', DV363, DV368 'S', DV375 'E', ED375, ED445 'L', ED470 'O', ED586, ED588 'G', ED870, JA899, LM394, LM428, LL741.

Representative Crews

Beetham, Bolton (POW), Burt, Cole, Dobbyn, Durham, Edward, Erritt, Heckendorf, Herbert, Keith, Leader, Lees, Litherland, Lloyd, Lundy, McAlpine, Pullen (C.O.), Robinson, Ruskell, Shortt, Smith, Taylor, Thornton, Toovey, Weatherstone.

END OF PART 5

"We will remember them"

No. 50 Squadron Royal Air Force In World War Two

The Diary of a WWII Bomber Squadron- Part 5, 1942 to 1943.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

Kew National Archive's reference AIR 27/ 485, fiche 40B, visited 13 July 2009 and 20 July 2014; AIR 27/ 486 and AIR 27/ 487 (parts thereof) from on-line copies June 2012 and after (RAF Form 540 and Form 541 Appendices).

AIR 20/ 2336, National Archives, Kew (Air Gunner's reports).

The Lincolnshire Echo, archived at Lincoln Central Library.

Mr. Alan Storr, RAF WW2 Australian Fatalities, on-line document compiled by Alan using The National Archives of Australia and The Australian War Museum Archive material; a fantastic, rich source of detail for ANY RAF Aircraft loss that included an Australian crew member, as often detail of the loss circumstances is given. The source information is about as authoritative as you could wish for.

The National Archives of Australia provides on-line access to many PERSONAL files of Australian Aircrew; once any Australian National has requested access to an Aircrew file, it is then under Australian law made available to anyone who is interested. For a small fee any researcher, if lucky, can have sight of an individual aircrew's complete military record including correspondence.

Books:

S. Finn's magnificent volumes "Lincolnshire Air War 1939- 1945", Books 1 and 2.

No. 50 Squadron and No. 61 Squadron Association "Roll of Honour" (RoH) published and edited by E.A. Davidson Esq. and Association Newsletters.

'Bomber Command'; The Air Ministry Account of Bomber Command's offensive Against the Axis, HMSO, 1941.

"Bomber Group At War" by Chaz Bowyer

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"The Other Few" by Larry Donnelly, DFM

Recommended reading:

"The Hampden Files" by Harry Moyle, published by Air-Britain.

"Hampden Squadrons in focus" by Mark Postlethwaite.

"Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War" by W.R. Chorley.

McNeill, Ross 'Air Force POW's 1939- 1945'

Lake, Jon, Lancaster squadrons 1942- 1943, Osprey Publishing.

The following Internet sites also provided most valuable assistance for which the compiler is indebted:

www.cwgc.org (The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)).

www.awm.gov.au-catalogue-research, National Archives of Australia

www.flightsafety.org (Aviation Safety Network).

www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories.

www.wallyswar.wordpress.com, by Mr. David Layne.

www.peakdistrictaircrashes.co.uk. Crash sites and wrecks of the Peak District

www.archaeologydataservice.ac.uk. (Crash sites and wrecks on the sea bed around Skegness)

www.paulbuddehistory.com. (Dutch WW2 crash information)

www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk (Crash sites and wrecks of the Yorkshire Dales and Moors)

www.aviationarchaeology.org.uk.

www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk.

North East Land, Sea and Air Museums.

www.ww2crashesiteresearch.com. (Mr. Michael Beckers).

www.ktsorens.tihlde.org. (Allied Wreck sites in Norway)

www.basher82.nl. (Allied World War II Casualties in the Netherlands Remembered).

www.merkki.com (World War II Prisoners Of war- Stalag Luft 1, by Mary Smith and Barbara Freer).

www.absa3945.com. (RAF Losses in France WW2).

www.raf.mod.uk/bombercommand.

www.unithistories.com (RAF Officers 1939- 1945)

www.csn.ul.ie (The last flight of AD730, Colin Hill- a stunning piece of research).

www.flensted.eu.com (Airwar over Denmark, a meticulously researched and presented site but not quoted as requested by the website author).

www.inmemories.com (Commonwealth Graves in Belgium and France).

www.yorkpress.co.uk (The Yorkshire Press, Crash of Hampden AE394 at York).

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www.flugzeugabstuerze-saarland.de (Account of the Frankfurt raid and losses, September 2 1941).

www.lonesentry.com/manuals/commando (Vaagso raid).

www.aircrashsites-scotland.co.uk (L4063)

www.lancaster-archive.com

www.docstoc.com

www.ritterkreuz.de

www.airmen.dk

www.luftkrieg-oberhavel.de

www.belgian-wings.be

<http://www.bcar.org.uk>- Detailed listings of all military aircraft losses in the County of Lincolnshire.

(Unfortunately, with the passage of time Web sources may come and go.)