

## ADDENDUM NO. 1

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### A TYPICAL DAY EXPERIENCED BY OPERATIONAL AIR CREWS OF BOMBER COMMAND DURING WORLD WAR 2

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Our crew was stationed at North Killingholme near Immingham on the Humber Estuary. North Killingholme was a satellite aerodrome to the Base Station at Elsham where 103 Squadron was based.

The air crews lived in Nissan huts which were a temporary structure that could be erected quickly. The Nissan structure consisted of semi circular corrugated iron sections which were fastened to concrete floor slabs. The radius of bending was 8 feet for the crew quarters. The crew huts were enclosed at each end with timber bulkheads fitted with entry door, and two windows. Heating of the huts was by a circular cast iron stove in the centre of the hut with a flue through the roof. The stove was fuelled with coal. This certainly was not the warmest form of heating for an English winter. Fortunately all our crew, including our pilot S/Ldr. Willie Caldwell, the "A" Flight Commander, were lucky to have a hut to ourselves.

(The Nissan style structure was used extensively during the war. There were hospital wards, recreation huts. storage sheds etc. built with this construction. They were curved to a larger radius than the crew huts, and could be fitted with sections which included windows if required.)

The crews' huts were built in dispersed locations and connected by a series of walkways to ablutions, mess huts, and the miscellaneous service sections, e.g. flight office, navigation office etc. It was necessary to either walk or cycle about 1/2 to 3/4 mile for meals.

This typical day was on the 13th. February 1945. Our crew had completed 13 operations of our second tour with only 7 operations to go to complete the 20 operations nominated for second tours. The war progress at this time had the British Allied Armies poised to cross the Rhine through Holland, and the American Armies were racing across the southern approaches to the Rhine. The Americans did not cross the Rhine in strength until the 22nd. March 1945.

After breakfast, I would report in to the Navigation office at 9-00 am., before going on to the Met. office to see the chances of an operation for that day. All the Navigators made the Met. office a "must" for morning tea and a look at the weather map. I would usually tell my pilot, Willie Caldwell, what I thought of the probability of "ops". By 10-00 am. we would usually hear the news of "ops", and then Steve, our flight engineer, would confirm to us the petrol load. Today it was 2154 gallons, a full load. It was therefore going to be a long trip. None of our previous trips on this second tour had been over 9 hours. Speculation was rife whether it was to be the "Big City" Berlin.

The crews would now wait for the Battle Order to be posted, to see if they were scheduled for that night. Because our pilot was the Flight Commander, he was able to tell us whether we were on or not. We were.!!! The Battle Order was usually posted in the Mess by noon, with the crews and their aircraft listed. The briefing and meal times would be posted, and the anticipated take off time. All bomb aimers would know their bomb loads.

At this point the crew would disperse to their various sections. I would make sure I had plenty of stationery, logs, etc. the chart would depend on the target and it would be picked up at Nav. briefing.



Willie Caldwell would decide if our aircraft needed an air test or whether any of us needed to check our equipment. If we needed to visit the aircraft we did it together, after lunch, and made certain that all of our equipment was in good working order. After that it was a matter of waiting till briefing and the flying meal of eggs and chips. It was usually not wise to eat too many chips.

The briefing time arrived and all crews were checked into the Briefing Room by the S.P.s (Service Police), using the Battle Order as a check list. As we entered the room, Len the Navigation Officer laughed and said "you are bombing China tonight". When we heard the target, we saw the joke-- some joke!!!

Willie Caldwell comments "Astonishment could probably best describe the reaction of the air crews in the Briefing Room as the screen was pulled back from the route map to reveal the "Target for Tonight"----DRESDEN ".

As the Intelligence Officer rose to answer all the unspoken questions ( why Dresden?) a silence more profound than usual came over the audience. No one wanted to miss a word.

" Your aiming point tonight is in Dresden. It is being used by the Germans as a Rail Head for the transport of men, equipment, and supplies to the Eastern Front, and our aim is to give practical help to our Russian Allies by destroying the Marshalling Yards."

The rest of the briefing was routine--- first the Met. man with his weather map showing the latest position of fronts etc., as you see on your T.V. screens with the weather report. Then we were issued with the Met. 2330 forms on flimsy paper so they could be destroyed easily. We were reminded to record air temperatures at regular intervals as well as cloud cover, type of cloud, and percentage of sky covered.

Next the Navigation Officer would give us the time on target ---H--Hour for tonight was 0130 hours, and then a brief run through the route leaving the detail to the Navigation Briefing. This was followed by the Bombing Leader who would give details of the Bomb Loads, fuse settings etc. and then the Signals Leader would request all Wireless Operators to report to the Signals Section for codes and pigeons.

The Squadron Commander would give details of the raid, which wave we were in --- tonight 5 Group would attack Dresden first, then 3 hours later 1 Group would follow, ( this included our Squadron ), and almost immediately the third wave would complete the raid. The total number of aircraft on the raid would be some 850 heavy bombers split into 3 waves with roughly 250 - 300 in each wave.

The Squadron Commander would then complete with details of the Pathfinder participation, Master Bomber wavelength, and call sign, target indicators and their priorities for bombing. All these details were recorded on the Nav. flight plan ( see specimen attached ). The Flying Control Officer would tell us the runway for take off, possible diversions, and if necessary alternative airfields. The Station Commander would wish us well and look forward to our safe return.

We would then disperse to our sections for individual briefing. In the Navigation Section we would pick up our Nav. bags and instruments ( including the Dalton Computer for calculating our courses, ground speeds and E.T.A. at turning points ), our chart for the night's operation. This chart for Dresden was size Western Germany 48/1 which covered the area from 1deg.W to 14deg.E and from 48deg.N to 55deg.N.



The route in plain language was as follows:- Base( North Killingholme ) south to Reading, then south east across the Channel to a point on the Somme above Abbeville, almost due east with a touch south to pass between Frankfurt on Main and Mannheim as if heading for Nuremburg, then on north easterly course to a point due west of Chemnitz, and then the run into the target with a following wind on a course of 080 T.

Out of the target coming home the route went south east for 12 miles then a sweep to the south west for 62 miles, then almost due south to come around Nuremberg, then south west to skirt south of Stuttgart, due west to clear Strasbourg, then swing north west to Orfordness, and almost straight on to Base for 6-30am. making the whole flight 9 1/2 hours calculated.

The operating heights to be maintained were as follows:--

Climb to 8000 feet over Base, maintain 8000 feet on first leg to Reading, climb to 10000 feet crossing the French coast, and maintain 10000 feet to 6 deg. east. Climb to 14000 feet at 9 deg. east (position D), continue climb to 16000 feet at 10 deg. 30' east (position E), maintain 16000 feet through target and back to 5 deg. east (position L), descend to 11000 feet at Orfordness (position M), and continue descent to 6000 feet at Base.

Take off was set at 2100 hours, and set course over Base at 2145 hours after climbing to 8000 feet. H-Hour on target was 0130 hours, with return to Base at 0630 hours. Forecast winds were given from 2000 feet to 20000 feet. Air temperatures were given from 2000 feet to 25000 feet. Watch was synchronised at 2020 hours today 13-2-1945.

The Bombing Instructions Priorities

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|-------------------------|--|
|                         | 1. Master Bomber                         |
| At H- 6 i.e. 0124 hours | 2. Mixed Red and Green target indicators |
|                         | 3. Backed up by Red T.I.s                |
|                         | 4. Backed up by Green T.I.s              |
| Sky markers if cloudy   | 5. Red with Green on course 069 T.       |

We drew out the route on the chart ( as shown on the mini chart ), calculated the required courses from the forecast winds and desired speeds to get us to the target for H-Hour, and more importantly( for us) to bring us back home again.

After the flying meal the crew would go to the Parachute and Locker Room to dress in their flying gear, pick up their parachutes and catch the crew bus to the dispersal point for our aircraft NN715 "A" Able in which we had flown 5 trips already. Except for me, the Navigator, who would proceed to final Navigation briefing in case of any change to our Flight Plans such as wind changes or altitude alterations.

Because of the position of the heating in the Lancaster, the wireless operator and I could dress in our battle dress, but we had to keep the " frock white' or large white fisherman's guernsey (one size) handy, in case flak caused a hole in the aircraft, allowing the outside air temperature to affect us.

We took off at 2100 hours, Willie Caldwell always set himself to be first off and he usually was. The following are his comments:- The takeoff was uneventful. In flight communications, as always, among our crew, all officers on their second tour, was minimal. Exchanges between captain and navigator were brief and limited to changes of course, height, and air speed. Gunners spoke only when they observed anything that might constitute a danger. The wireless operator whose role was of



necessity, a listening one, was seldom heard. The bomb aimer reserved his main speech for the run up to the target. The flight engineer needed only to speak when engine instruments indicated a fault, requiring action from the pilot.

We settled into our silent routine. Darkness fell as we crossed the Channel and on over the French coast with only an occasional flash of gunfire to relieve the blackness below. It was a beautiful night with a clear sky and excellent visibility. The Western Front came and went, unusually quiet with enemy ground defences offering only sporadic bursts of ineffective anti-aircraft fire. The mid upper gunner Sam said, after the Front it became quiet and because it was so quiet, foreboding. During the long leg up to the target he experienced for the first and only time, static electricity bouncing off the perspex of his turret. All the time he was worried by the absence of fighters along the route, and later over the target.

Willie again continues, the one danger ever present on these occasions, with a sky full of bombers occupying an overcrowded airspace was a collision. It looked like being our only real problem. We knew that there were aircraft all around us, some 250 to 300 in our wave, above, below, and alongside, mostly unseen, but fleetingly visible. Unrelieved vigilance was as always the only answer.

Sam in the mid upper turret searched above the aircraft, and Jack in the rear turret searched under the aircraft.

Willie again, for those of us with little to do except keep a lookout, the hours dragged on, with the clamour from four healthy Merlin engines an almost unwelcome intrusion into our silent progress. A silence eventually broken by the distinctive voice of our busiest crew member as he gave the final change of course to the target and the few remaining minutes to E.T.A.

The Pathfinder Force did its job well. The target ground markers exploded precisely on time. The Master Bomber had only to confirm their accuracy and hundreds of thumbs rested on their bomb release buttons as eyes focussed on the markers. The prodigious efforts of ground crews and others who had worked hard at Squadrons' bases back home were about to be rewarded.

For our own part all the work was now concentrated on bomb aimer and pilot, the former, his eyes glued to the bomb sight, and the latter fully engaged in carrying out the bomb aimer's instructions, bringing the aircraft into the correct alignment. Enemy defensive action, if any, had to be ignored, no question of deviating unless a collision was imminent. The aircraft had to be rock steady for bombing accuracy.

Now we were through the target and about to sweep round with a few short changes of course in a gradual turn for home. Finally able to relax a little we could take an unobstructed look at the scene below.

On previous operational tours our crew had all flown with different squadrons and, before this raid, had between us amassed about 300 trips. On none of these sorties had any of us ever witnessed a scene of such devastation.

Our aircraft was in the second wave, and we watched as the third, and final wave, also 250 to 300 aircraft, went through. Dresden was on fire! We had seen nothing to compare with this level of destruction on a single raid.

But one member of the crew remained unmoved. Our Australian navigator, a master of his trade, non-smoker, non-drinker, and the personification of reliability, remained behind his screen despite an invitation from his skipper "just this once" to come forward and look for himself.



Comment from the navigator:-- I would have taken too long to adjust my eyesight to the dark. On a raid on my first tour, Jack Currie asked me if I could locate the searchlights to the south of our route. I got up to have a look, and the crew all laughed when I could not see the searchlights. It took about 4 to 5 minutes for my vision to adjust to the change. It was not on my map but turned out to be Frederickshafen, a Radio Location Development Centre.

Back to Willie again:-- So it was with mixed emotions that we watched this large city destroyed in a matter of minutes--- awe, satisfaction, sympathy, and though there was no gloating neither were there regrets.

As to Dresden, the tangible effects of its destruction, and its possible help to the Russians may have been negligible, but at least it was an operation which had the full support of the Nation at the time, and helped to keep up morale.

As Willie said the trip to the target was uneventful and as it happened the forecast winds were found to be reasonably correct and the broadcast winds matched mine so much so that we bombed on H--Hour exactly at 0130 hours, at 16000 feet on the green markers as directed by the Master Bomber. As we moved away from the target , Willie said it was the worst conflagration he had seen since Lubeck on the Baltic in 1942. (his first tour ).

Coming back to Base I was able to practice on the Radar Air to Ground, formerly called H2S, but now "Y" which was new to me on this tour.

We had been given new winds for the return route which were 20 m.p.h. lighter than the following winds at the target. I had trouble identifying some of the towns and it was not until I got within Gee range near 4deg. East that I found the wind had increased by 20 m.p.h. over their forecast and made us later at base by 30 minutes arriving at 0705.

After landing we were driven in the crew bus to Intelligence, for de-briefing on the results of the raid, weather etc. given a cup of cocoa ( with rum, if wanted, doled out by the M.O.) and then to bed to enjoy the well earned rest before the next raid.

The next day we heard that the U.S.A.A.F. were attacking Dresden ( in fact they did 3 more raids after ours ). Willie said emphatically that it was not necessary.

Our Squadron lost a Lancaster and crew on the Dresden raid as a result of a collision with another Lancaster from the 300 Polish Squadron while both were climbing over Lincolnshire, before setting course for the target.

After that trip we had six more to go which we completed, including one recall on a daylight raid, by the 17th. March 1945. We could then anticipate VE day and VJ day with a little more hope of survival than seemed possible in November 1944.

Footnote :----The statistics for the Bomber Command air crews were out of every 100 aircrew who joined an Operational Training Unit, on average 51 would be killed in operations, 9 would be killed flying in England, 3 would be seriously injured in crashes, 12 would become POW's, of whom some would be injured, one would be shot down and evade capture, and 24 would survive unharmed.



The following extract which has been taken from the book "CHURCHILL-- A LIFE" by Martin Gilbert, gives the background of the reason for the raid on Dresden. The meeting occurred during the Yalta Conference in February 1945.

On February 5th. 1945, at a meeting of the British, American and Soviet Chiefs of Staff, the Russians, having pointed out that several divisions of German troops were being brought back across Europe to the Eastern Front, asked for a substantial Allied air attack on German communications in the Berlin- Leipzig- Dresden region, and for the bombing of these three specific cities, as a matter of urgency. This was agreed and instructions given for a series of Anglo-American raids.

On the night of the 13th. February, more than 800 British bombers dropped 1,471 tons of high explosive and 1,175 tons of incendiaries on the city of Dresden. A few hours later, American bombers dropped another 689 tons of bombs on the burning city. The Russian purpose, explained at Yalta eight days earlier, was achieved: refugees on the roads, fleeing westwards from the fire storm, disrupted the movement of German reinforcements seeking to pass through the burning city to the front further east. But the cost, sixty thousand civilian dead, was as high as any single raid during the bombing in Europe.

