

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 9.00am, 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 10.00am 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.

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 commented "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 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 Navigation Flight plan. 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, plus 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.

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 that 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.

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