

Suitcases, Vultures and Spies

The story of Wing Commander Thomas Charles Murray DSO,
DFC*



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Thomas Murray with Mark Hillier

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The medals awarded to Wing Commander Thomas Murray, DSO, DFC*

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Foreword



Wing Commander David Haines RAF

(David Haines)

I met the author nearly 2 decades ago through our joint passion of aviation and we have shared the skies on numerous occasions; he is a skilled aviator as well as writer. Throughout the time I have known Mark, his enthusiasm and love of aviation has been ever present as you will learn in the pages of this book. When aviation researchers delve into the archives in an attempt to discover the truth about the exploits of World War 2 airman, it can be a daunting task to translate the bravery, stoicism and stamina prevalent during those times into an accurate picture for today. Fortunately in this instance, the author was able to interview his 'man of interest' in the flesh and gain a wonderful insight into the exploits of Wing Commander Thomas Murray. Having been awarded a DSO, DFC & bar and his operational accomplishments in the most dangerous of circumstances, with the slimmest chances of survival, a fleeting glance at his biography is both revealing and humbling. This book is an outstanding tribute to Wing Commander Murray, his fallen comrades and those that survived the most appalling of odds whilst operating as Bomber Command aircrew, and it is most commendable that the proceeds of this book will be donated to support the RAF Benevolent Fund.

As I started to read this book, I was struck by the number of connections I shared with Wing Commander Murray. We both learnt to fly at RAF Halton and Cranwell, were both treated at Grantham hospital for broken collar bones gained in motoring accidents and we both served on operational squadrons at RAF Cottesmore. But most striking of all was his philosophy of 'leading from the front' which I believe is just as important today as it was then. This differentiates between an average military leader and a great leader. Having been a fellow RAF bomber pilot and squadron commander with nearly 200 operational sorties in my flying logbook covering Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan, I sought to identify how my operational experiences as a leader compared to those of Wing Commander Murray. It was surprising to note the many similarities between how the RAF conducts operations today, yet also the stark differences.

One of the things that has remained unchanged is the desire to conduct offensive air operations at night, and improving aircrew survival rates by avoiding detection is as valid today as it was in WW2. The skills to operate in such an environment should not be underestimated. During WW2 aircrew would be required to fly, navigate and defend the aircraft en route to a target or SOE location, with ground avoidance being conducted with the aid of rudimentary instruments and the naked eye utilising moonlight, stars and cultural lighting. Today's aircrew are able to rely on modern navigation systems that measure accuracy in metres, and other aids such as night vision goggles, infra-red cameras, radar altimeters and terrain proximity systems to achieve their mission. Regardless of the technological changes, night operations are still the primary choice for commanders in an effort to minimise aircraft detection.

The political appetite and public expectations of aircrew and aircraft losses have fundamentally changed these past 70 years. Losses are now avoided at all costs in both war and peacetime and can be measured in single figures instead of tens of thousands. Today we have the luxury of time to train aircrew to a high standard and develop safer aircraft. However there is a trade off as training for each fast jet pilot costs £3-4 million, and highly complex and expensive aircraft (£30-70 million each) mean that the RAF is equipped with a limited number of jets. Better training, more modern (and arguably easier to fly) aircraft, and the move away from low-level operations to medium level sorties have changed modern aerial warfare. It is easy to understand why training accidents and operational losses have become the exception rather than the norm.

Although risks have been minimised, as a squadron commander I remained constantly alert to the risks of losing a pilot or aircraft and the challenges of command this might bring. Losing one of my aircraft became a reality during operations in Afghanistan when one of my pilots safely ejected from his Harrier aircraft which was destroyed in the ensuing fireball. This book highlights the fortitude required of a wartime squadron commander to handle the stresses of almost daily losses whilst at the same conducting dangerous missions on a regular basis. Few of us will ever experience the loneliness of command, the daily wartime struggles and the inner strength required to survive, yet this story will give you that insight.

This book echoes the stories retold by the surviving aircrew I had the privilege of meeting in March 2013 at the Downing Street ceremony to commemorate the award of the Bomber Command medal clasp. The author has written a compelling biography which tells it 'like it was' – there are no tales of bravado or bragging. Whether you are an aviation enthusiast or not, I urge you to read this book as you cannot fail to be humbled by the exploits contained within. It will make you realise how brave those young men were in World War 2 and how much we owe to those that served a spell in wartime Bomber Command.

I salute them all.

INTRODUCTION

BY MARK HILLIER

As a boy, I was always enthralled with the stories of wartime air and ground crew. I was fortunate enough as a young lad to get to know a Lancaster rear gunner of 218 Squadron, by the name of Bert Avann who lived in our village. I spent many hours listening to his stories and in my teenage years often shared a pint with him in the local pub. It was on these occasions I learnt more about the mental stress and strains of operations. He tolerated my youthful ignorance and answered my questions with good humour and grace. Never one to boast or embellish the stories, he told it as it was. I developed the greatest of respect for his generation who went to war in defence of our freedom.

Over the years I have been lucky to make the acquaintance of many more air and ground crew who served during WW2. I could sit and listen for hours to their tales of flying or working on aircraft that would now only grace the halls of museums, the likes of which I will never get my hands on. I could only imagine what they were like to fly. Sitting with these heroes of mine, they bring it to life for me. They are sadly getting fewer each year and there are still many tales to be told, regrettably many already lost in time.



Portrait of Squadron Leader T C Murray DFC by Orde, drawn in the mess at RAF Waddington during 1942

(Cuthbert Orde, for Air Ministry, UK Government)

I was keen to meet *Tucker* as he was referred to by a friend of mine. He described him as “an interesting chap who flew in Bomber Command”. I am not one to turn down any such opportunity and little did I know how interesting and exceptional *Tucker's* career was. It was arranged to meet him at Goodwood airfield cafe one Saturday morning and boy what a morning. In walked *Tucker* looking very sprightly for a gentleman approaching his 96th year. Initially a little reserved and not one to ‘line shoot’, our conversation began, chatting about his first flight and learning to fly.

As the morning went on, he seemed surprised that I would be so interested and as he warmed, the stories flowed about his operational flying for which he was to receive the Distinguished Service Order, twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and a further Mention in Dispatches. He, like many others I had interviewed, was very modest about his career but it was clear to me that he was one of the few of the many of Bomber Command that had completed three tours of operations, a miracle in its own right! He was honest about his feelings and also about how the war affected him and his flying.

I arranged to meet *Tucker* again at his home with a view to interviewing him and making a record of his service, in one way shape or form and he kindly agreed. It soon became evident that he was an exceptional pilot and leader and that his survival during the war was partly down to his drive, motivation and leadership. His analytical approach to tactics also increased his chances of seeing the end of the conflict, and the chance of peace.

Thomas Murray joined the RAF in 1937 and saw service with the RAF through to 1959. He survived 75 operational sorties in Bomber Command. His first tour was flying the Handley Page Hampden in 1940, going on to complete his second tour on the Avro Manchester and Lancaster. He finished the war in command of 138 (Special Duties) Squadron, flying Special Operations Executive operations into Denmark and Norway. A remarkable story of luck and skill, bearing in mind that so many crews never made it through their first tour of 30 sorties. Some say this is just down to pure luck. My belief is that luck certainly plays a part, but is certainly not the only factor.

Wing Commander Percy Belgrave "Laddie" Lucas, CBE, DSO*, DFC, wrote a book called "Out Of The Blue - The Role Of Luck In Air Warfare" (Grafton 1987) in which he gives many examples of how luck seemed to play a part in the demise or success of air crew, dating back to the First World War.

Indeed many crews flew with a lucky talisman, a piece of clothing or similar trinket to help ward off the 'gremlins' and bring them back safely from operations. Sometimes the crews acted out a lucky ritual such as having a last minute pee on the tail wheel of their aircraft prior to a sortie. In some of the cases mentioned in this book, it certainly seems that some crews really did lead a charmed life especially in Bomber Command, taking into account the stark figures on losses compiled after the war and survival rates. For *Tucker* his lucky talisman was his .38 revolver, which gave him some comfort that he would not have to endure a terrible death in a flaming aircraft!

Bomber Command crews suffered an extremely high casualty rate: 55,573 killed out of a total of 125,000 aircrew (a 44.4% death rate). A further 8,403 were wounded in action and 9,838 who became prisoners of war. Of these figures 8,195 were killed in flying or ground accidents and a further 18,241 were recorded as being wounded in aircraft returning from operations. By 1943, the odds were that only 1 in 4 crews may survive the first tour of operations. It seems that the chances of surviving two tours were as low as 1 in 40. Many of the surviving crews who have been interviewed over the years since 1945 have passed comment that they didn't expect to see the end of the war.

Squadron Leader Thomas Murray DFC*, having completed two tours of operations was once faced with a question from the King, whilst being interviewed in the mess at RAF Waddington in 1942. He asked "What will you do after the War?" *Tucker* was lost for words. He also did not expect to survive and he had never afforded himself the luxury of thinking of this possibility. His focus was solely on

surviving the next sortie. How war had blunted many a young pilot's outlook on life with such poor expectations of survival, it was more a case of live for today, as tomorrow may never come.

I am a strong believer that in flying, you also create your own luck and you can reduce the odds against you, taking into account factors such as training, crew skill, leadership and determination.

Fail to plan, then plan to fail, still rings true in aviation. From accurate briefings and navigation plotting, to pre-flight inspections and crew training drills, you can certainly increase your odds of survival. Just getting airborne and climbing up to the bomber rendezvous was often a trial for these brave young crews, especially in some of the earlier cantankerous aircraft such as the Avro Manchester, notoriously underpowered and unreliable. However a well trained pilot and crew, with good morale and belief in their ability, could make the difference between life and death on operations.

You cannot take away the unpredictable elements such as weather, flak, night fighters, as well as aircraft reliability and serviceability. All that can be said is that the odds were stacked against the Bomber Command crews.

However having talked to *Tucker* and researched his wartime career it became clear that he was an exceptional pilot, highly thought of by his aircrews. He also showed great leadership to his crews when flying as a flight commander or as a squadron commander. He was not afraid to change tactics or encourage his pilots to move away from expected drills in an effort to reduce casualties.

His approach typifies an example of how you can create better odds for yourself and your crews by understanding the nature of the beast and fighting it head on. He was not afraid to lead from the front, when many squadron commanders would not fly on ops as they didn't have their own allocated crews. *Tucker* would be up taking his part in the roster for moonlight drops of agents into Denmark and Norway, often flying with new aircrew to show them the ropes. He freely admits that, at times he too suffered from anxiety and nerves, particularly when taking off in the last few months of operations, having defied the odds, wondering if this would be his last trip.

While Commanding Officer of 138 Squadron, he was instrumental in introducing new tactics in an effort to reduce casualties. He gave orders that aircraft approaching the Danish coast would do so at a height no greater than 80 feet. It would be a dog-leg approach to the coast, the first part at altitude so they could use H2S to navigate and then 80 miles from the coast they would dive down to 80 feet. This reduced the chance of detection by enemy radar, but also meant that German fighters could not get a shot at them from underneath the fuselage as they had been trained to do. If the fighters tried to engage it would often result in a crash at such a low level. The Stirlings would then 'pop up' at the coast to get a fix and then dive back down to below 400 feet. It took skill and courage to complete these ops and before *Tucker* arrived on the squadron, none of the crews had, up to that point, completed a full tour. By introducing new tactics, leading from the front and boosting morale, the odds of survival greatly improved.

This is the story of Wing Commander Thomas Murray, from his early days in flying training, through to his time as a squadron commander with 138 Squadron at RAF Tempsford. An exceptional pilot and leader who, in my view, inspired others around him and created his own brand of luck.

This book is dedicated to the memory of the Bomber Command and Special Duties Crews who never made it home.

Chapter 1

Fly like a bird

The Murray family originated in Hawick which, is a town in the Scottish Borders in the east Southern Uplands of Scotland. It is one of the farthest towns from the sea, in the heart of Teviotdale, and the biggest town in the former county of Roxburghshire.

The Murrays came from a modest background and *Tucker's* great grandfather was Thomas Murray, born on the 15th January 1811, the son of a tailor, who after learning the trade became a journeyman tailor travelling in the northern counties of England. *Tucker* recalls that he was told the story of the tailors in the family walking from Hawick to Edinburgh to observe the 'fashions of the day', before heading back home to recreate the styles they had seen on their travels.

Thomas Murray and his wife Mary had four sons and one daughter, one of whom was *Tucker's* grandfather, Charles Oliver Murray who became an artist and etcher. He mainly illustrated books and magazines and worked on the Punch and Judy magazine in London although he was to become better known as a copper plate etcher. His grandfather's brother was Sir James Murray, an extremely talented schoolmaster and lexicographer. He was subsequently to be appointed editor of the Oxford English Dictionary from 1879 until the date of his death.

Charles Geoffrey Murray, *Tucker's* father was born in Scotland in 1880, one of seven children. He started his career as a journalist on the Boy's Own paper before joining the R.N.V.R in 1903 and later was commissioned as a Sub-Lieutenant. He met and married his wife in Scotland; her name was Ramah. Her maiden name was also Murray and she and Charles were related through distant cousins way back in the 1750s.



Ramah Barbara Murray, wife of Charles Murray, (1884-1972)

(Murray)

In 1914, Charles transferred to the Royal Marines and served through the First World War achieving the rank of captain. Although the family originated in Scotland, by the time Thomas was born, the Murrays were living down in Dorset as his father's career had seen them being fairly transient due to service life demands. When a family came along, the first born was Barbara, followed by Thomas who was born a twin to his sister Elspeth and later, the last addition; a sibling was born named Janet.

I was born on the 31 May 1918 in Blandford in Dorset we were only there for 6 months as my father was constantly moving around. My father, Charles G Murray, was originally in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve in the early 1900's and transferred to the Royal Marines, at the outbreak of the First World War. When the Royal Air Force was formed in 1918, he assisted in setting up the secretarial branch, so he was in the RAF from the beginning. He rose to the rank of group captain, was appointed the OBE in 1919 and the CBE in 1937. I think he would have preferred that I went into the Navy than the RAF though.



A photo of Group Captain Charles Geoffrey Murray RAF.

(Murray)

Thomas grew up around the service but was not particularly interested in aviation at the time. Whilst he was at school, at the Imperial Service College, he was to gain the nickname *Thos*, one that was to stay with him throughout his time in the RAF. As a boy, Thomas Murray had no inkling that he wanted to be a pilot. He didn't make model aircraft or read about the heroes of the Royal Flying Corps. He never really knew that he wanted to join the RAF until the age of 11. It was whilst his father was serving at RAF Halton and he, still a schoolboy, that his passion for flying was 'sparked'.

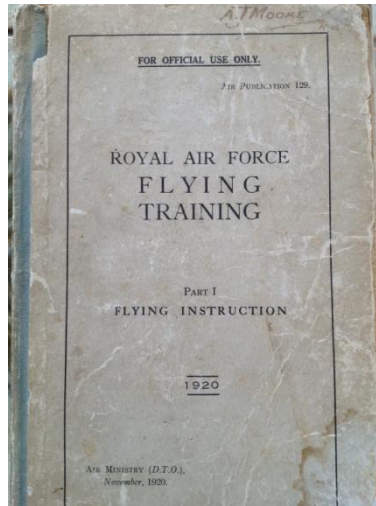


A family photo of Thomas with his three sisters, Barbara, Elspeth and Janet, with their dog Mickey, at the school house, RAF Halton village.

(Murray)

I went to Junior School at Imperial Service College at Windsor at the age of 7. This was an all boys' school which was very strict and a lot of beating went on. Eventually, I became house captain and life became much more human! I was not very good at sports and didn't make models of aircraft, but I remember the moment I knew I was going to be a pilot. I was lying in a field next to the school in the village of Halton, right next to the airfield. The sun was out and I was watching a Hawker bi-plane overhead and he went into a spin right over my head. I was totally captivated and as he spiralled down, he was pointing straight at me. I knew, at that moment, I would go into the Air Force.

My flying started at RAF Halton where my father was stationed. My first flight at the age of 11 was in an Avro 504K. The flight commander was keen on making me take up flying. He told me it was a wonderful privilege to be in the air and being at one with the birds. To show this he found a heron flying along a stream, which he formed on! He had to fly higher than the heron as we couldn't fly as slow, but eventually the heron accepted us. First I had to attend a full medical with the station medical officer before I could commence any training. My lessons started on the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas, a large bi-plane which was powered by an Armstrong Siddeley Jaguar radial engine of 450hp, on which I completed about 6 hours flying training.



A flying training manual, given to *Thos* when learning to fly at RAF Halton, dated 1920

(Hillier)

The illusions I cherished were many and varied and were soon shattered when, with the aid of an Honorary King's Cadetship, I scraped through my exams to enter the Royal Air Force College Cranwell in January 1937.

Thos entered the RAF at a time when it was expanding and changing. In the years immediately after the First World War, there was a strong belief that another major war was unlikely and the strength of the RAF was allowed to fall to an all-time low of 371 first line aircraft in 1923.

RAF strength slowly increased through the 1920s, but by 1934, it was clear that Germany had begun an extensive re-armament programme and they were becoming a threat, although Germany did not officially declare the formation of the Luftwaffe until March 1935. Winston Churchill had addressed the House of Commons in 1933 and warned of the shape of things to come, stating that Germany was well on the way to becoming the most heavily armed nation in the World.

As a result, the RAF embarked on a series of expansion plans. By 1934, 42 squadrons existed giving a first line strength of around 800 aircraft. By 1939 this had grown to 157 squadrons and 3,700 aircraft. At the same time as there had been a major increase in aircraft and aero-engine production, a rapid expansion was required of training to provide the new air and ground crews for these aircraft. (1)

Also there had been a re-organisation of the RAF into four specialised commands; Bomber, Fighter, Coastal and Training Commands. It had recently been announced by Viscount Swinton in the House of Lords, that the RAF Volunteer Reserve was to be formed with recruits being taken on for a minimum of 5 years and receive flying training at weekends. The growing darkness that was Nazi Germany was starting to cast a shadow over England. It was against this back drop that *Thos* entered the junior service, having been accepted for a regular commission, he embarked on a two year officer training course at the RAF College Cranwell. However, it was not quite as he expected!

He had set his heart on being a pilot and having been accepted to the RAF College Cranwell, no doubt had expectations of flying every day and being free like a bird! Unfortunately the reality of Cranwell was very different in those days. There was a 'hierarchical' system inbred into the training with initiation and fagging for the senior students which *Thos* had already seen plenty of at school and he was not impressed to find it again at Cranwell. Flying was not on the agenda initially, with

other lessons deemed more important to the bearing and character of an officer. Drills, service law amongst others were necessary evils. Interspersed with the flying were the ground subjects required to make a rounded aviator such as principles of flight, meteorology, engines and airframes. For a young pilot with his head in the clouds, these lectures were no doubt a drag.

I found that flying was not the free and unfettered pastime that I had expected it to be. Air Force Law, Imperial and war studies; administration and the parade square, were unexpected and unwelcome aspects of Air Force life. In retrospect, the course appears to have had certain shortcomings. The emphasis was laid, perhaps, too heavily on the production of a certain stamp of officer at the expense of his training in practical squadron duties. The cadet was being trained as a staff officer rather than an operational pilot. Either the standard of teaching was low or my intellect poor, in any case, the mysteries of mathematics and the science lab were soon laid bare.

I first flew the Avro Tutor at RAF Cranwell, then the Hawker Hart and Hawker Audax. The flying was not continuous; it was interspersed with quite a lot of ground training. I enjoyed flying the Tutor, I found it very easy and it had nice handling characteristics. I had completed just over 6 hours of flying training before I went solo. Fortunately I had the edge over some of my classmates as I had already done about the same number of hours flying at Halton before I joined the RAF. I knew I was ready to go solo. One thing of note is that we did have a high casualty rate amongst student pilots at that time.

Thos had his first flight in an Avro Tutor, serial number K3233, with Sergeant Barret as his instructor. The Tutor was introduced into the RAF in 1933 and was a radial engine, two seat trainer, simple yet rugged, ideal for ham fisted ab initio pilots. Flying was initially one flight a day, weather permitting, all of his sorties lasting no more than 20 to 40 minutes each. Exercises covering pitch, roll and yaw or the primary effects of control, followed by further effects such as adverse yaw. This would have been followed by straight and level flight. The next exercises would cover climbing and gliding, then medium turns, stalling and spinning. The circuit pattern, take off and landing would be built into each sortie so the student got the maximum benefit from each flight. Engine failures and practice force landings were an essential part of the training for the student to master before setting off on a solo adventure. Thos went solo after 6 hours 20 minutes on the 5 February 1937 for 15 glorious minutes of freedom. Aerobatics and spinning came next with some low flying thrown in for good measure.



Avro Tutor K3215, the aircraft type that *Thos* first flew at RAF Cranwell,

(Hillier)

At this stage in the development of flying training, it had been recognised that just flying the aircraft, performing aerobatics well and formation flying, were not the only skills to be mastered for the new era of RAF pilot. The importance of being able to fly on instruments was becoming a higher priority. As early as 1930, interest was being shown in 'pilotage without exterior visibility'. Flight Lieutenant W E P Johnson was sent on a course at the Farman Factory near Paris and on his return he pioneered the teaching of instrument flying in the Royal Air Force.

A further development of note in 1937 was that the RAF chose a set of six essential flight instruments which would remain the standard panel used by pilots for flying in Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC). The introduction of the link trainer saw pilots being able to practise flying on instruments in the safety of a classroom. As each new aircraft started to enter RAF service, they were now flown by a Central Flying School officer and a set of pilot notes were produced to help crews operate their new aircraft to its best effect. Navigation, however, was at this stage still very basic, using only a map, compass and stop watch.

For each flight undertaken, we were briefed for specific duties. For example aerobatics, navigation etc. The Tutor was nice for aerobatics, easy to spin and easy to get out of.

Just after I went solo, I had a chum who was at EFTS or elementary flying training school at Grantham. I was certain he had not gone solo, so on this particular flight I left the circuit, flew to Grantham to say 'Hi'. I couldn't find it as I had not had any map reading tuition by this stage in my training. I eventually found it, I landed but I couldn't find my chum. Before taking off, I asked one of the ground crew which direction RAF Cranwell was. He said it was "over there somewhere" pointing in the general direction. So I pushed on and got hopelessly lost! Eventually I got to the northern outskirts of Stamford and landed the thing in a field as I was running out of fuel. I obeyed the training

I had been given which was to go to the nearest civilian and ask for a telephone. Also to appoint him for the safety of the aircraft. I found a chap on a roof, and he totally ignored me to start with and then told me there was a phone a couple of houses down, so I phoned Cranwell and they sent my instructor, Flight Sergeant Sextone down to fly the aeroplane out of the field.

As for the standard of flying training, I found the training very thorough as pre-war it was a two year course. There was a noticeable difference between our standard of flying as pre-war regulars and those pilots who trained during the War.

As if flying and mastering the aircraft in daylight, with the ground and horizon being visible was not difficult enough, it was soon time to practice flying without reference to the ground. Thos encountered his first instrument training in March of that year after completing 17 hours of flying. His first instrument training sortie was 50 minutes in an Avro Tutor, going on to complete approximately 4 hours 30 minutes instrument instruction before he was required to undertake a flight test in the new skill with Flight Lieutenant Thompson in Tutor K2513.

Navigation was introduced at this stage of the game and several cross countries. No GPS to help or other navigational aids, just a map and compass. Never easy in an open cockpit biplane, with nowhere to store your map, the wind tugging at your goggles all the time and following line features such as roads and rail lines to make one's life simpler. Flying a bi-plane is certainly an invasion of the senses and requires considerable concentration and good airmanship. It's noisy, windy and on turbulent summers days, difficult to map read as you were being thrown around the place by air currents.

Thos was certainly to benefit from the new enhanced training and although not as thorough as today's standards, it was going to stand him in good stead. Little did he know at this stage that most of his operations were to be at night, often in poor weather conditions. He also excelled at aerobatics and was due to compete for the aerobatic prize at the end of the third term at RAF Cranwell, although initially his exuberance nearly cost him his life!

As for aerobatics, I went to the Hendon air display just after I went solo and I tried to emulate all the exciting stuff I had seen. As a result the engineers had to change three of the main bolts holding the wings on as I had over-stressed the aircraft! I was lucky to get back down on the ground in one piece.

Towards the end of June of 1937, the flying picked up apace and Thos was often flying two or three sorties a day, with nearly every trip involving spinning! Not all pilots enjoy this part of the training which for many years was poorly understood and as an exercise approached with some trepidation. Once practised, spinning an aircraft is actually easy to recover from.

Initially the trainees were expected to stall the aircraft first, instructed to bring the nose of the aircraft up above the horizon, slowly reducing speed until the point when the airflow over the wings would become turbulent and break away. The loss of lift would cause the aircraft to stall and stop flying, with a resultant nose pitch down. Not really an unpleasant experience, something akin to going over a hump back bridge in a car. Once the nose had dropped, the airspeed would recover and the airflow over the wings restored. At this point the aircraft could be recovered to straight and level flight.

To spin the aircraft the instructor would require the student to keep the control column aft at the point of stall and put in rudder, causing the aircraft to yaw in a stalled state, this resulted in the

aircraft rotating, yawing, pitching and rolling as it descended. This was much more unpleasant as the ground spun round quite quickly depending on the type of aircraft. To recover required the student to be able to ease the control column forwards, at the same time after identifying the direction of spin, putting in opposite rudder control to stop the yaw. The ailerons must be kept central at all times. Some aircraft would actually spin faster once the pilot had initially applied anti-spin controls which could be very disconcerting! Aircraft could also use up a huge amount of height during the recovery phase. Pilots learned to cope with spinning, some enjoyed it immensely, but it was a skill that needed to be mastered. Recovery would need to be instinctive if it inadvertently happened in cloud or at low level.

It was during this month that *Thos* converted to the Hawker Hart. This was quite a step-up in engine size as the Avro Tutor radial was only rated at 240hp. The Hart on the other hand, had a Rolls Royce Kestrel V12 engine rated at 510hp. A significant increase in performance, with a cracking climb rate and ability to reach 10,000 ft in 8 minutes. With a top speed of 185 mph at 13,000 feet this aircraft, *Thos* recalls, was just great for aerobatics. He also managed to get his hands on the Hawker Audax which was of a similar performance to the Hart. Things were going swimmingly until *Thos* was involved in a car accident in an MG that hospitalised him.



Thos at RAF Museum Hendon in 2013 with a Hawker Hart behind, a type he flew at RAF Cranwell.

(Hillier)

I had a car accident in September at the beginning of my third term which put me out of action and it set me back a bit. I was being groomed for the Groves Memorial Aerobatic Prize which of course I couldn't do with broken bones. The car was being driven by an ex Halton apprentice by the name of Jock Robertson. We came to this corner far too fast and there was a junction, he took the wrong fork and we crashed into a ditch.



A newspaper clipping of the car accident in which *Thos* broke his collar bone and dislocated the other shoulder.

(Murray)

I was taken to hospital at Grantham and the next day an ambulance from the Cranwell hospital was sent to collect me, it was pretty icy and it left the road and that went into a ditch! I was in considerable pain and this did not help.

Thos had October off of flying to allow his broken bones to heal, but he was back in the cockpit raring to go on 8 November, no doubt still feeling a bit stiff and sore. He missed a fair amount of the third term and spent most of his time catching up with the rest of his entry so that he could graduate on time and gain his wings.

Instrument flying and cross countries continued into 1938, qualifying for his 'B' certificate on the 14 April 1938 and his flying summary classed his proficiency as a pilot as 'average' with a comment 'he tends to glide too slowly near the ground'. By the time *Thos* had completed Cranwell, he had amassed 166 hours total flying time, of which only 3 hours 50 minutes were at night and nearly 13 hours of instrument flying. *Thos* describes the night flying training as being a tad hazardous.

I remember that for night flying we were using a goose neck flare path to identify the runway but also we flew with flares which were alight under the lower wings of the aircraft so we could see the ground! As the aircraft were made of canvas, there was a serious risk of fire!

In 1938 when *Thos* was about to pass out from Cranwell, his father, still in the RAF, was posted out to Singapore along with the rest of the family. Although he received some communication from them, it would be some time before he would see his family once again.

After passing, or rather 'scraping' out of Cranwell in December 1938, due mostly to my car accident, I was attached with the majority of my term to the School of Air Navigation, RAF Manston, to course 46 B, where a short six week navigation course had recently been started. Our recently won

commissions had, I think, gone to our heads for I remember that we considered this training was no longer really necessary. That this navigation business was 'odd stuff' and not properly the job of pilots anyway! It was high time we were off the restrictions of the classroom and we should be out enjoying ourselves!

The course at RAF Manston where the newly qualified pilots would learn the art of navigation, utilised the Avro Anson as a teaching platform. Staff pilots would fly the aircraft whilst the students got to grips with the navigation exercises. Each would take turn to be 1st or 2nd navigator with most sorties being of 2 hours 30 minutes in duration. The course gave those pilots, 38 hours 40 minutes of navigation by day and 8 hours 35 minutes by night. Experience that was to prove invaluable despite their protestations.

At the beginning of 1939, it looked like war was inevitable, Neville Chamberlain had been seen to give in to the German demands for the annexation of the Czech Sudetenland, famously stating on his return from Munich "peace in our time". The RAF had increased its strength to 135 squadrons, 74 of which were bomber squadrons. The Spitfire had entered service in the previous year and with its stablemate the Hawker Hurricane, were both re-equipping the fighter squadrons, replacing older bi-plane fighters such as the Gloster Gladiator and Hawker Fury. *Thos* was no doubt hoping for a posting to fly the new sleek monoplane fighters, but instead his hopes were dashed.

The navigation course was over by March 1939 and the team dispersed to their allotted squadrons. I had the usual ambitions to become a fighter pilot and was disgusted to find I had been posted to 106 Bomber Squadron, newly formed at RAF Thornaby, with Fairey Battles.



The 106 Squadron Crest

(Crown Copyright. Provided by the RAF Heraldry Trust.)

106 Squadron had originally formed in 1917 but was disbanded in 1919 after serving in Ireland where it carried out army co-operation and policing, prior to the formation of the Irish Free State in 1921. The squadron reformed on 1 June 1938 at RAF Abingdon from a nucleus provided by 'A' flight from 15 Squadron. Initially, it was equipped with Hawker Hinds but then began to receive Fairey Battles. These were subsequently replaced with Handley Page Hampdens, which began to arrive in May 1939, together with Avro Ansons to assist in the conversion process.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the squadron was flying Handley Page Hampdens with 5 Group in a training role which continued until the 1 March 1941, when it reverted to front-line status and began regular night bombing operations over Europe. Its first major operation was a bombing raid on Cologne, although it had also taken part in some mine laying prior to that.

I flew the Battle with 106 Squadron and didn't think much of it. It was very underpowered and built like a tank. One of the pilots on the squadron I remember crashed into a wood and despite writing the aircraft off he survived the ordeal with cuts and bruises. I didn't think it was really war-worthy. We were soon re-equipped with Handley Page Hampdens.

It was fortunate for *Thos* that the squadron did not become operational on the Battle as it was to suffer terrible losses during the Battle of France, whilst employed on daylight bombing sorties. It was slow and lacked defensive armament, falling easy prey to the Luftwaffe's Bf 109s.

It was on the 4 July 1939 that *Thos* was to come in to contact with the Hampden. He took to the skies in Hampden L4184, captained by Flight Lieutenant Oxley, with *Thos* peering over his shoulder to get the 'gen' on flying the new type. There were no dual control aircraft, so after just over an hour watching over the pilots shoulder and learning the 'knobs and tits', he was deemed fit to fly solo on the same day. The following months were filled with cross countries and exercises, when they could find aircraft to fly.

At Thornaby, I came into contact with two new factors of service life. The first was the attitude adopted by certain more experienced officers who regarded themselves as 'hardened' veterans. They implied that to enjoy flying was to stamp oneself as inexperienced; the correct thing to do was to avoid flying whenever possible. The other factor was the habit of the N.C.O's in charge of flights of tucking aircraft away in obscure corners of the hangars and keeping them out of sight and therefore out of the air for as long as possible!

Between the two, there was little enough opportunity for those brazen enough to wish to fly. All this acted as a 'cold douche' after the enthusiasm of Cranwell. The more so, as a war was imminent and a rapid working up was necessary if one hoped to survive. When it arrived, the war, of course changed everything and it was obvious that a lot of work would have to be done before anyone was fit to do battle. To everyone's relief however, the squadron was relegated to the reserve role and subsequently formed one of the first Operational Training Units (OTU).

In August of that year we flew up to a practice camp at RAF Evanton in Ross and Cromarty, Scotland, to do practice bombing. There was a bombing range just around the corner from the airfield. I had only done one practice run at this bombing range and very nearly killed myself. We did a low level run over the sand dunes, then climbed up and I remember the airspeed dropping to 80 mph which should be a safe speed. I lost some control, the ailerons wouldn't respond, whether it was this sideslip trouble with the Hampden, it could have been as I was just about to turn back. I had no roll control at all so I shoved the nose straight down and built up speed. I pulled out inches above the sand dunes. It must have been inches!

My flying career nearly ended before it had started. I must have made an error; I was very inexperienced at the time. I didn't report it but the next day I was sent out as second pilot behind an older pilot who had spent his time on the North West Frontier on bi-planes. I was terrified as I knew that if he did the same he wouldn't have a clue how to get out of it. I remember as he pulled up and

the air speed got down to about 80 mph, I put my arm over his shoulder and pointed to the air speed indicator. He put the nose forward thank goodness! We survived.



A photo of a Handley Page Hampden being bombed up, the first time *Thos* went on a practice bombing sortie on type. It was nearly his last!

(49 Squadron Collection)

The British declaration of war against Nazi Germany came at 11.15 a.m. on Sunday 3 September 1939. Neville Chamberlain spoke to the nation via the radio; stating he had given Germany an ultimatum to withdraw its troops from Poland, which it had invaded on 1 September. As no such undertaking had been received, Britain was therefore at war with Germany. This was it, all the training that *Thos* had been through was about to be put to the test. Was the training enough? Were the aircraft up to the job? The reality was that the training and inactivity were to continue for a time in a period that was to become known as the 'Phoney War'.

As soon as the war broke out, many people became paranoid that the country would be full of German spies! This belief was strengthened when the government decided to intern large numbers of Germans and Austrians as a precaution. It appeared that secret agents could be anywhere!

The government was also worried by the possible presence of a 'Fifth Column' (people working or spying for the enemy) in the country. As a result, the department responsible for propaganda, the Ministry of Information, began a campaign called 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' with a view to making the public aware of the risks associated with talking about information relating to the war effort, no matter how insignificant, with slogans like 'Walls Have Ears'.

I remember when war was declared, we all went and had a good 'crap' in the bogs. It certainly focused our attention! It was my duty at that stage, to be on aircraft guard, keeping a patrol around the aircraft. A few days prior to this, we had seen a German U-boat surfaced in Cromarty Firth and as soon as the war started it dived. During the middle of the night, on a steep wooded hill behind the airfield, I saw lights flashing. It was spies signalling the sub. The guard went off and captured these spies. My first excitement of the war! We flew down to Cottesmore on the 4 September 1939 just after war was declared.

This was not the last time that *Thos* was to come into contact with spying and espionage. Later on in 49 Squadron, he was to come across further examples of civilians and also RAF officers who were accused of acquiring information for the enemy, as he describes.

The Germans had installed quite a good spy system. Once, when we got back to Scampton after an operation, I was bicycling back from dispersal to find the local padre peering through the hedge. Being young and naive, I didn't think much of it. A few days later he had been taken in as a spy. Our squadron leader intelligence officer had been a PoW in the First World War. He was also accused of spying. His son, who was a pilot, was to later shoot himself probably due to the humiliation of it all. Often when we had night intruders over our airfields such as the Ju 88, you would see rockets fired over the station to give our position away, fired by agents of some sort.

By the end of October 1939, 106 had re-located to RAF Finningley in Yorkshire. It was from here that *Thos* managed to escape the drudgery of 106, being posted to 49 Squadron at RAF Scampton, hoping for a different attitude and operational flying.



Log book and dog tags of Wing Commander T C Murray DSO DFC*

(Hillier)



The 49 Squadron Crest

(Crown Copyright Provided by the RAF Heraldry Trust)

Chapter 2

Ops in a Suitcase

Within three weeks of the outbreak of war, I was lucky enough to be posted to 49 Squadron at RAF Scampton as a replacement pilot. The station commander of the unit having been in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War. He had wanted to get some of the old RFC spirit back into the squadron, with pilots spinning their wheels on the roof of the station buildings and that sort of thing. Unfortunately the young officer that tried to do so in an Avro Anson on the Officer's Mess roof was killed in the process, all very unfortunate. I was his replacement. The atmosphere on this squadron was a refreshing change to my last. On my flight in 49 Squadron, four of the chaps were my contemporaries from Imperial Service College. I noted that morale in the squadron of both ground crew and aircrew alike was high. The flight commanders were good pilots but the squadron commander tended to be more non-operational although they did fly the aircraft occasionally.

49 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, was formed at Dover, Kent, on 15 April 1916, and in November 1917, went to France as a day-bombing squadron equipped with DH4s. In May 1919, the squadron was posted to Germany as part of the Army of Occupation. Post-war disarmament led to its disbandment in July of that year and it was not until 1936 that it re-formed at Bircham Newton, Suffolk, as a bomber squadron with Hawker Hinds.

At the start of World War 2, 49 were flying Hampdens from RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire and in April 1940, helped inaugurate the RAF's sea-mining campaign. Soon afterwards it began to drop bombs as well as mines and in August 1940, one of the squadron's pilots whom *Thos* got to know well, Flight Lieutenant R A B Learoyd, won the first Bomber Command VC for his part in a low-level attack on the Dortmund-Ems Canal.

The standard of flying was, for those days, of a particularly high order and training was carried out as often as the peculiar conditions allowed. Conditions were peculiar, as the squadron had yet to see action. Instead, a policy of dispersal was rigorously pursued which necessitated the involvement of a greater part of the squadron.

It was not long before the squadron were tasked with patrols of the North Sea and fortunately *Thos* had already flown the Handley Page Hampden with 106 Squadron. The Hampden was quite a unique looking aircraft, starting life on the drawing board as far back as 1934 from Air Ministry Specification B.9/32, calling for a twin engine day bomber. The prototype Hampden took to the air on the 21 June 1936. Powered by two Bristol Pegasus 980 hp (730 kW) nine-cylinder radial engines. It had a highly tapered low drag wing and narrow fuselage. It also featured a tapered tail section which reduced drag and enabled the bomber to fly faster. It had a crew of four, who were all accommodated in the narrow section of fuselage, all bunched up, which prompted its nickname 'The Flying Suitcase', although it was also known by others such as 'Hambone' and 'Ferocious Frying Pan' to quote only the printable versions! It carried a bomb load almost equal to the Vickers Wellington, but at faster speed. Its top speed of 254 mph was pretty good for the time, almost as fast as the Bristol Blenheim. Pilots of the Hampden often commented on the startling performance of the aircraft at full boost on takeoff, feeling a massive punch in the back as the aircraft accelerated down the runway. With wheels and flaps up, the aircraft was fast and manoeuvrable. The pilot had an excellent field of view, with a high seating position which was to come in handy for low flying operations. However, its drawbacks were the cramped conditions for the crew, lack of decent heating and quirky handling.

Despite its speed and good manoeuvrability, it was no match for German fighters of the day. So its role as a day bomber was very short-lived and it carried on with night operations both on bombing raids and for mine-laying operations. At the outbreak of war, there were 226 Hampdens in service with ten squadrons equipped with this aircraft.



An air to air shot of a 49 Squadron Hampden, showing of its unusual shape, narrow and deep crew compartment and thin tail, very small rudders. The Hampden ended up being known by many crews as the 'Flying Suitcase'.

(49 Squadron Collection)

I found the Hampden to be reliable but unfortunately it had quite a few vices too. I remember we lost quite a number of inexperienced crews to these problems. One disconcerting issue was that if you did a flat turn, or on the approach, if you didn't do a properly balanced turn, it had a rudder that could slam hard over, causing loss of control. I think this was what I experienced early on during my first bombing practice which nearly killed me! The other problem it had was that if you let the engines idle for too long prior to take off, or lining up, they would cut on take-off as the bottom cylinders on

the radial engines would oil up. You had to be very careful that you ran the engines up prior to take off to clear them. That problem killed quite a number of crews. Otherwise it was quite pleasant to fly. The cockpit was quite cramped and only three feet wide which was rather uncomfortable on long trips.



A snapshot of 49 Squadron Hampdens over Lincoln cathedral

(Murray)

Another pilot who flew operations on the Hampden with 49 Squadron was Sergeant Fred Hill, who gives us an insight into his training and what it was like to fly the aircraft.

The Hampden was one of the three 'heavies' with which Bomber Command entered the war. Unlike the other two (Whitley and Wellington) which had a crew of five the Hampden had, because of its design, a crew of four. Since the 'heavies' had to have two pilots, the Hampden crew consisted of two gunners and two pilots; the upper gunner had also to operate the radio equipment while the second pilot was responsible for the navigation, the bomb aiming and manning the front, moveable gun.

Training for pilots was thus, flying school, navigation school and an extended OTU course. Because of this complication, training was on an individual basis – as was posting to a squadron. So for the first half of his operational tour, a pilot was an observer in effect (as the navigator/bomb aimer was then known). For the second half of his tour he became (after appropriate training) a first pilot. All very complicated and not conducive to good crew co-operation.

On the first half of my own tour, I flew eighteen sorties with nine different pilots and thirteen sorties in the second half with nine different second pilots! After my first sortie as first pilot, I was hoping to keep the same second pilot but, sadly, on the day of the 'Channel Dash' in February 1942, he was crewed with someone else on one of the four aircraft of the squadron which didn't come back.

The Hampden was a pleasant machine to fly; compared with the Wellington (which replaced the Hampden in OTU training) it was easily manoeuvrable but cramped for the crew. The Mk 1c version of the Wimpey (Wellington) had the same engines as the Hampden (Pegasus XVIII) and the two engine failures which I experienced in my wartime career were both with the Pegasus, one when it seized through lack of oil and the other a cracked cylinder.

Fred was to receive a 'Green' endorsement to his flying log book for excellent airmanship whilst flying the 'Hampden' with the endorsement reading '*On the night of 18 January 1942, when flying Hampden AT111, Sergeant Hill lost his starboard airscrew whilst descending through cloud on an operational flight. He landed his aircraft at RAF Conningsby safely, this being a most creditable performance in view of his experience on that date*'. He went on to volunteer for a further tour of duty after 49 Squadron and a period of instructing. He was posted to 692 Squadron on the Mosquito, in which he completed a further 55 operational sorties, 22 of those were to Berlin! He was awarded a DFC and two Mentions in Dispatches, ending the war with the rank of Flight Lieutenant



Sergeant Fred Hill standing centre in front of his Hampden, taken in 1941. The other two are Sergeant Ralph PoW 10/04/42 (LHS) and Sergeant McGreney KIA 10/04/42 (RHS)
(Both losses were in different aircraft with other pilots)

(49 Squadron Collection)

Despite the pilot's recollections on handling, commenting that the aircraft was quite manoeuvrable, it is also a revelation to read the pilot's notes for the Hampden. These state that the aircraft was in fact longitudinally unstable with an aft centre of gravity and barely stable when gliding, needing constant attention to keep in balanced flight, with various speeds and power settings. Also, at low and moderate speeds, any sideslip could cause the rudder to lock over, with control only being regained on increasing speed. Not a good characteristic on landing! In particular, one note grabbed my attention. "The pilot must be on his guard against the development of sideslip because it may lead to conditions in which control becomes difficult, feet must not be taken off the rudder especially while instrument flying".(2)

One can't imagine what it was like to fly on operations no autopilot, navigation by a floor mounted compass located behind the control column and a gyro direction indicator. It seems that the aircraft required constant attention from the pilot and on long trips in difficult weather conditions could become quite a handful, as *Thos* was to experience on more than one occasion. Once used to the handling no doubt the pilot was confident with the type, they then just got on with the job. There is no comparison for modern pilots as aircraft designed in the last few decades are almost vice-less, most of the problems having been designed out to reduce the pilot's workload.

Soon it would be time to test the Hampden in action and aircraft of 5 Group including 49 Squadron were tasked with looking for the German Navy in daylight.

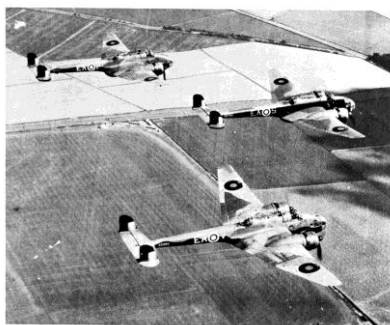
Towards the end of the year, we were almost continuously stood by, from dawn till dusk, to intercept the German Fleet. Whenever a squadron in the group was scrambled, the casualties were inevitably high. It soon became obvious that the Hampden was unable to continue in its day role.

On the 20th of the month, the squadron had received instructions to bomb the pocket battleship *Deutschland*, which had been reported in the vicinity of the Norwegian coast, but despite a lengthy search, nothing was sighted. They were fortunate not to get intercepted.

The following day, they were briefed for the same target. Twelve Hampdens took off from RAF Scampton in daylight and joined formation with a further twelve Hampdens of 44 Squadron from RAF Waddington. On reaching the Norwegian coast, they turned northwards and spread out to search, in a big V or vic formation, for the elusive *Deutschland*.

This was the first operational sortie for *Thos* on the 21 December, 1939. He was acting as second pilot\navigator in Hampden P1177 with the other crew members being Flying Officer Timmerman as captain, Sergeant Charles Fennell as observer (later to be awarded the DFM) and Aircraftsman J Openshaw as the wireless telephony operator. At that stage in the war, some of the aircrew were of aircraftman rank, only later were aircrew all promoted to the rank of sergeant. Air gunners for example were often tradesmen, paid extra for flying duties and it was not until Air Ministry Order A.416/40 of 27 June 1940, that they were given NCO status.

Thos flew a number of sorties as navigator for Timmerman. Flying Officer Nelles Timmerman, a Canadian pilot, survived the war retiring from the RCAF as an Air Commodore, he was awarded the DSO and DFC for his wartime exploits.



Three 49 Squadron Hampdens in formation heading out on a daylight sortie. These were soon stopped due to the losses experienced and they were relegated to night sorties only.

(49 Squadron Collection)

This particular operation on the 21st, I called this the 'Norwegian Fiasco'. We headed off from Scampton, in a big V formation of threes and charged off to the southern Stavanger area, looking for this battleship, armed with 500lb bombs. They would not have done much good. We never found it and as we had no R\T, we had to send each other coded letters, via a signal lamp to communicate which made things even more complicated. I remember seeing something that looked like a pocket battleship so we all turned towards it and with open bomb doors, roared in that direction. It turned out to be a lighthouse on a low lying island. It must have scared the lighthouse keeper somewhat.

The weather started getting bad and we flew hugging the coast on the left, below low cloud. I looked out and saw coast the other side as well! We were flying up a fjord at about 400-500 feet below low stratus. We reached the end of the fjord and there was no room to turn this vast unwieldy formation so we did what the massed military bands do and turned back inside each other, we managed to get away with it without colliding or any one scraping a mountain.

We didn't find out until much later that we were being followed by a number of Me 110 twin engine fighters, these had been spotted by the Norwegians on land. Fortunately they didn't follow us into the fjord as they probably thought we were pretty stupid to fly into a dead end. It was lucky we were not intercepted.

We headed back towards Scotland, but the headwind was very strong, our progress was slow and we were burning a lot of fuel. In my squadron commanders aircraft we had a Naval Lieutenant, who was the adviser on the German battleship we were looking for and he realised something was wrong. He said to the CO 'we're missing Scotland, those are Atlantic rollers, and I recognise them'. We turned south west, the other squadron went straight on, and the weather was pretty awful by then, we couldn't find the coast.

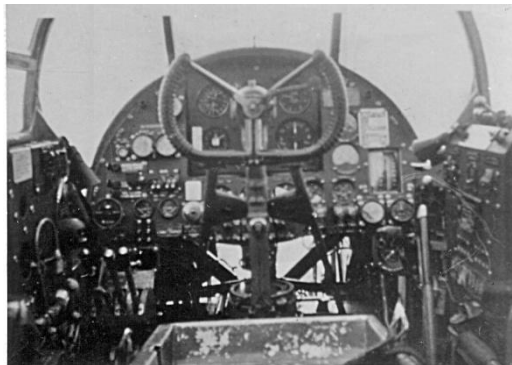
We found this trawler and the formation circled round it, getting low on fuel. The crew had all gone below as they were not too happy with all these aircraft buzzing around. The CO was planning on flying alongside and letting his rear gunner parachute out next to the Trawler. The gunner would swim to the boat to get directions. However, fortunately for the gunner, it was not necessary as the CO realised that half his squadron had disappeared. We had noticed land in the haze and turned towards it. I landed at RAF Acklington with very little fuel.

The Scampton flight made landfall in Northumberland where it was intercepted and recognised as friendly by twelve fighters of 43 Squadron. Soon, most of the formation was home and dry and landing at nearby RAF Acklington. Meanwhile, 44 Squadron had crossed the coast south of Dunbar. Hurricanes of 72 Squadron intercepted them and informed control that they were Hampdens. 602 Squadron Spitfires from Drem (the same base as the Hurricanes) were also scrambled, and without at first recognising the aircraft, proceeded to shoot down two of the Hampdens. *Thos* remembers that one of the pilots who were shot down managed to escape the sinking aircraft and swim to a nearby Scottish fishing boat. As he tried to board the boat he was told in no uncertain terms to 'bugger off' as they tried to push him away. The fishermen had thought he was a German. He set about the fishermen with a fusillade of bad language and they soon realised he was not a Luftwaffe pilot.

At Acklington, one of 49 Squadron's aircraft short of fuel was having problems. Piloted by Sergeant Marshall, it crashed into a wood at the edge of the aerodrome. As a result, the pilot was seriously injured and sadly two members of the crew were killed. *Thos* remembers going to the scene of the crash as they could not get a fire truck to the accident site. *The fire was so hot that we could not get to the crew, I remember rolling four 500lb bombs into a nearby ditch to get them away from the aircraft and they were white hot with heat.* Also injured in the crash was the 2nd pilot/navigator, Pilot Officer J.M.D. Irvine. *Thos* and his crew had been airborne for 7 hours 50 minutes and no doubt must have landed with only fumes in the tank, a lucky escape.

The squadron was fortunate to lose only one aircraft on this raid as 144 Squadron, on a similar operation a few months previously in daylight, had encountered a large number of Bf 109's over the German Bight between Heligoland and Wangerooge Island. Being lightly armed, they stood very little chance against these fighters. Five Hampdens being led by Wing Commander J.C Cunningham, the officer commanding, were never seen again. *Thos* knew one of the crew on that operation.

I knew a chap who was a navigator, a large chap who had played double bass in the Royal Philharmonic orchestra. He said the Bf 109s knew exactly the limitations of the defences of the Hampden, they would fly by, salute and then proceed to shoot down the aircraft. You had a very limited arc of fire for the guns. So he took one of the guns and opened the mid upper escape hatch behind the pilot seat, as this fighter came over, he opened up, firing from the hip. The fighter shot off, the pilot obviously taken by surprise.



The cramped cockpit of a Hampden, only three feet wide and sat on a hard seat type parachute, it was not ideal for long sorties

(49 Squadron Collection)

This led the Air Ministry to rethink its policy of unescorted bombers to accomplish daylight bombing sorties being particularly flawed. From then on the Hampdens were mostly used only on night operations.

As the pilots and crew started the transition from peacetime sorties and training flights to a war footing, one can only imagine the nervous tension at briefing as they prepared themselves mentally for the mission ahead. *Thos* describes his feelings and emotions in the build up to ops.



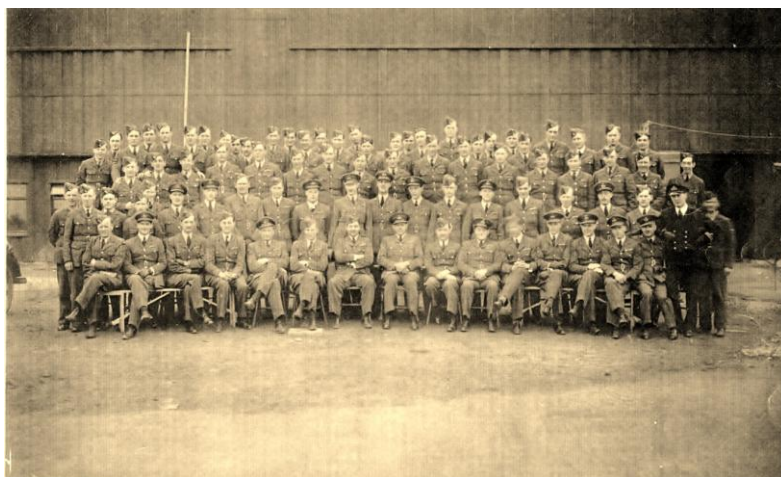
The crew of a 49 Squadron Hampden leave the aircraft post sortie for debriefing and a welcome cup of tea after a sortie cramped up in the narrow fuselage

(49 Squadron Collection)

Briefing was always nerve-wracking as there were so many cancellations. You got yourself geared up to go. We went into briefing and in front of us was a board with the target for the night, there was nothing like this curtain idea revealing the target. The navigator would note the route given by Bomber Command and each trade had their own briefers. The commanding officer would also address the crews. I would always then go out to the aircraft and do a thorough pre-flight check.

We never really took any flasks or rations in the aircraft as if you drank you would need a pee, which in the Hampden necessitated the use of a pee tube. You tried not to have too much to drink, but you had a meal after briefing. You were allowed two boiled eggs which was a luxury. My nerves were always worst at briefing. Once you got in the aircraft and you were on the job, these went away.

In early 1940, the squadron was detached along with 83 Squadron to RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth respectively for operations with 18 Group, Coastal Command, under the control of the Navy which was predominantly to engage in anti-shipping sorties and the hunt for submarines. The detachment lasted until April 1940, but few targets were seen or even attacked.



The squadron on detachment to Kinloss, April 1940. Flying Officer Murray is in the second row, seventh from the right

On the 9 April 1940, Norway was invaded by the Germans in an operation known as 'Weserbung Nord'. This operation pre-empted the British plan to invade Norway for protective purposes. Denmark surrendered immediately, and after fierce fighting, Norway also fell. Bomber Command was tasked with doing what it could to slow down the German advance in Southern Norway. The invasion triggered a number of operations that month searching for shipping and German Navy cruisers. The Wellington, Hampden and Whitleys were not ideally suited for this role. No fighter escort could be provided and these sorties were often round trips of 1000 miles, all across water. This marked a change in operations for 49 Squadron who were to initially undertake night reconnaissance and later mine laying operations.

The first for *Thos* was on the 1 April 1940. The captain for that particular sortie was Flying Officer Forsyth, who was flying Hampden P1176 with the other two crew on this particular operation being Sergeant Ellis and Leasing Aircraftman Hibbert.

Flying Officer Douglas Sinclair Forsyth was in July 1940 awarded the DFC. He subsequently was to be promoted to squadron leader and posted to 61 Squadron on Lancasters. Unfortunately he was sadly killed in action on the 3 September 1942 whilst on an operation to Karlsruhe. The crew were never found and they are remembered on the Runnymede memorial. Both Hibbert and Ellis were also later to be awarded the DFM for their continued bravery in the air.

My first operation of that month was to fly along the German coast to North Sylt, as far as Denmark dropping leaflets, and carrying out night reconnaissance. This was known as 'Nickeling'. It was quite exciting as we didn't know if we would be shot at. We thought the whole idea of dropping leaflets was ridiculous. At that time I was acting as second pilot, navigator. My position was sitting in the front, down in the nose section of the aircraft. At this stage of the war there were no specific navigation officers so if you had done a navigation course you were tasked with being navigator.

On early operations, the crews had no idea what they would face on reaching the enemy coast. Flak defence and searchlights were an unknown quantity, intelligence on the targets was sparse and night fighting was in its infancy and ineffective. The greater risks were often navigational errors, weather conditions and aircraft serviceability.

The aircraft used for this operation was Hampden P1176, taking off from Scampton at 11:15p.m, setting course for the Danish town of Esbjerg. They flew across the North Sea at 6000 feet and then at the coast, turned towards Sylt. They dropped leaflets over the mouth of the river Elbe from a height of 9000 feet, many searchlights were seen and the wireless operator spotted a single engine aircraft close by, but they were not attacked and the crew returned home, arriving back at the break of dawn for a welcome breakfast.

This operation was quickly followed on the 6 April by a security patrol with the same crew, in much the same area but this time they observed some anti aircraft fire trying to find another aircraft in the vicinity. The rest of the trip was uneventful apart from the operational record book recording the fact that the heating had failed on the aircraft. This was a common occurrence as the system relied upon hot water to heat the air. A return trip at night of just over 6 hours for the crew cooped up in a cold, draughty, noisy Hampden.

These crews were trailblazing the way for Bomber Command. Long sorties at night, no autopilot and navigation by compass and stopwatch. The lessons learned would be invaluable for later operations over France and Germany, as the bomber offensive was stepped up. For now the operations were often limited to small numbers of aircraft or individual crews briefed for specific targets.

Mine laying operations commenced the same month. The majority of these were in and around the coast of Denmark targeting German merchant and troop ships with a view to hampering the German occupation. These operations were carried out at very low altitude and needed accurate positioning. Most were carried out successfully, the crews navigating around the coastal areas and easily being able to identify land masses in the moonlight. However the weather was not kind to the crews and on two later trips, *Thos* and his aircrew encountered severe icing conditions which, was to cause considerable problems. April kicked off with mine laying sorties as *Thos* describes.

When we started dropping mines, our operations were controlled by the Navy. They would choose the target. They expected all sorts of things from us. It was very uncomfortable, every day we were on fighter style standby, sat in the cockpit for up to four or five hours at a time. I caught flu here which dogged me for the rest of my career. You dare not report sick as you would be taken off ops.

One operation that sticks in my mind was to Middlefart, Lunen Island on the 13 April 1940 in the Little Belt, Denmark. This was the first time mines were dropped in the war, and my flight commander was detailed to drop the first one. We were briefed to drop a mine under a bridge between the town of Middlefart and the mainland. He took off 10 minutes ahead of me, I was determined to beat him and I did, so I was the first person to drop a mine in the war. Sometime later when I was CO of 138 Squadron, I found an intelligence photograph of this merchant vessel which our mine had sunk, it was lying on its side under this bridge, I couldn't believe it. Mine dropping required us to fly low, speed down to 130 Kts and one third flap extended to drop it accurately. This made you very vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire.

There were three aircraft ordered to stand-by for mine laying operations that night, the sorties were all carried out successfully. Flight Lieutenant Mitchell, the skipper of Hampden L4092 recorded 'mines laid, trip took 7 hours 15 minutes and petrol consumption worked out at 70 gallons per hour'.

Further operations to drop mines in the Great Belt area of Denmark, on the night of the 14 /15 April were not so fortuitous, the crew of Hampden L4045 including *Thos* as navigator, hit low cloud and poor visibility. The operational record book for that night reads 'after crossing the coast, low cloud and fog was encountered. We descended to 400 feet and tried to approach the target but were unable to do this as low cloud appeared to be right down to the ground' As they made their way back out to sea across the Danish coast they ran into very bad weather, encountering violent electrical storms.

As a result of such severe conditions, the captain of the aircraft Flying Officer Forsyth had considerable trouble keeping the throttles open as they kept sliding back into the shut position. This required considerable pressure to keep them open and the aircraft flying. Eventually the aircraft became so unstable and difficult to control that the captain took the decision to get rid of the mine and the aircraft managed to return to RAF Scampton. Not surprising taking into account the pilots notes entry on handling.

The aircraft was quite susceptible to icing and I remember once we were bringing a mine back because of the weather not letting us get to the target and we were forced down to find warmer air. There was a front in the middle of the North Sea which we had to fly through and we had to jettison this mine just to remain in the air because of heavy ice accumulations. We were at this stage under the command of the Navy; they of course said they would prefer to lose the aircraft rather than the mine. The other spectacular thing you would see in icing conditions was that you could look back at the engines from the navigator's position and see St Elmo's fire on the prop tips which, was quite pretty.

St Elmo's fire was quite a common occurrence when flying through cumulonimbus clouds, one of the pilots of 144 Squadron, Bernard George 'Max' Meyer described it vividly:-

'I noticed a little blue ball of fire on my front gun. It got larger until it was as big as a grape fruit and my navigator looked ghastly in the blue light. The propellers from boss to tip were one mass of blue flame and the whole of the leading edge of each wing was lit up; while a vivid blue flame, three feet long streamed out in front of each wing tip'(3)

At 11.05 p.m. on the 17 April, Flying Officer Forsyth, took off with his crew, again in Hampden L4045, bound for the Little Belt area of Denmark for a further mine laying trip. They climbed to 9000 feet on their run into the Danish Coast. *Thos* was again acting as navigator and down in the nose of the aircraft. It was a bright moonlit night but patches of fog were seen below over the target area. The crew managed to accurately drop their mine and climbed to make their way back to RAF Scampton no doubt feeling slightly relieved at a successful mission. As they crossed out over Westerland, Sylt they were suddenly illuminated by batteries of searchlights. Forsyth tried to out manoeuvre the lights and break contact, but despite his best efforts he could not get away. It must have been heart stopping moment for all on board to be coned in the lights, awaiting the inevitable flak, hoping to get through with minimal damage to the aircraft. To their relief, strangely no anti-aircraft fire was encountered. They made another safe home run, in an operation lasting just over 6 hours. This was a taste of things to come as the Germans bolstered their anti-aircraft defences.

As for night fighters at this stage in the war, the Germans had not opted for aircraft fitted with radar for defence against marauding bombers, they relied on ground based systems; the targets would first be picked up by radar assigned to a *cell*, the radar would then direct a searchlight to *paint* the target, allowing the fighters to attack them. At this point the Bf 109 single engine fighter was employed in this role, this was known as *Helle Nachtjagd* - illuminated night fighting. The searchlights were later supplanted with short-range radars that tracked both the fighters and bombers, allowing ground operators to direct the fighters to their targets. By July 1940 this system was well developed and known as the *Kammhuber Line*, it proved able to deal with the small raids by isolated bombers the RAF was carrying out at the time. This line had to be crossed by all bombers heading for Germany, the line extended from the middle of France to Denmark.

Fortunately *Thos* and his crew were not rostered for operations on the night of the 25 and 26 April 1940. This would prove to be the squadron's most costly and saddest nights of the war so far. Eight Hampdens fought their way through terrible weather to the now familiar gardening (mine laying) areas in Kiel Bay. Only one aircraft dropped its mines successfully, the remainder failed due to the deteriorating weather conditions. Returning home, the squadron was diverted to RAF Montrose where four aircraft landed and a fifth at RAF Leuchars. Three aircraft and crews were missing from

this operation. The reason why two of the aircraft failed to return will never be known, but the third gained the unenviable distinction of being the first bomber to be shot down by a German night fighter.

Hampden P1319 was the victim, flown by Pilot Officer Arthur Benson, the aircraft was claimed by FW Förster, a member of IV[N]/JG.2, the very first German night fighter unit. This unit operated Messerschmitt Bf 109Ds which had the cockpit hoods removed. The Hampden came down in the North Sea off Sylt. The body of Sergeant Robert Mackenzie, one of the crew was washed ashore on 30 May near Rantum, and now rests in the Kiel War Cemetery; the rest of the crew were never recovered.

On the 4 May we were sent to drop a mine in Oslo harbour. The operation was to help make Oslo harbour as dangerous as possible for the landing of the German Army, who were disembarking from troop ships that night. Up until then the majority of troops had arrived by air. There is a long fjord going up to Oslo with the harbour on the left, our task was to fly up the fjord and drop a mine in the harbour and then go out via the fjord to the right. We had searchlights shining down on us reflecting on the water and it was very confusing. Halfway up there was a German Navy vessel and we were low of course, tracer started coming up and all hell broke loose with heavy flak. I was sitting more upright than I normally would have been as I was under tension and I was sat down in the nose section. My mouth was open, a tracer round came through the perspex, went past under my nose and out through the other side of the aircraft. I was immediately blinded and I couldn't speak as my mouth was full of dust and effluent from the tracer round.

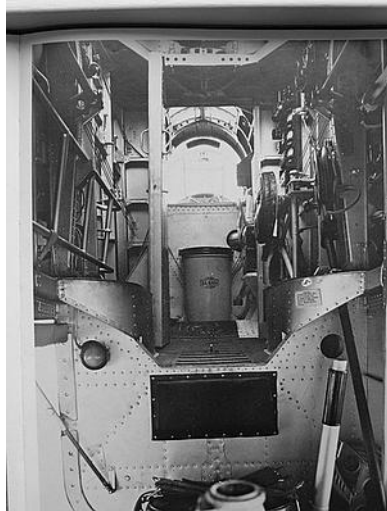


Thos was sat down in the nose compartment when the aircraft was hit by flak. As can be seen from this photo the perspex and fuselage don't offer much protection.

(49 Squadron Collection)

Incredibly, *Thos* managed to regain his composure and give instruction to the pilot and get the mine dropped in the harbour despite the noise, confusion and searchlights shining down on the water. The squadron operational record notes 'many searchlights and heavy anti-aircraft fire'. Squadron

Leader Duncan Good and four other crews of 50 Squadron, flying Hampdens were also briefed to attack Oslo that night. They too encountered fierce opposition and Good later wrote 'The ack ack was the heaviest I've ever seen. You would not think an aircraft could fly through it without being cut to pieces'. Good's aircraft was hit and he was very badly wounded, his navigator Walter Gardiner, had to take control of the aircraft as a result and successfully made it back to base, being awarded a DFC for his actions. Squadron Leader Good survived his wounds and returned to ops. (4)



The view rearwards, from the cockpit, shows how little space there was to move about in bulky flying kit.

(49 Squadron Collection)

Fortunately my eyesight and voice returned in time to guide my pilot into the harbour. As we reduced speed on entering the harbour mouth, we got down to very low level, immediately ahead, lying side on was a troop carrier. I immediately released the mine and told the pilot to climb; we just missed the funnel, going between the masts. We were attracting all manner of anti-aircraft and small arms fire. Fortunately we were not hit further but it was extremely exciting or should I say frightening. We returned back to Scotland, either RAF Lossimouth or RAF Kinloss, a round trip of 8 hours.

By the 10 May 1940, the Battle of France, also known as the Fall of France and the Low Countries had started. German troops were crossing the borders of Belgium and Holland but the squadron were not immediately to be engaged on operations in support of the ground troops.

Back at home there was a new broom sweeping the halls of Bomber Command; Air Marshall Charles Portal CB, DSO, DFC had taken over as Commander in Chief. This heralded a change in tactics and in May, a decision was made to commence the strategic bombing of Germany by night. 49 Squadron were in the thick of the new offensive. The targets were mostly important industrial installations, many of which had been identified by the RAF as far back as 1937 in Western Air Plan 5. This called for attacks on the German war industry including oil supply, with priority being targets in the Ruhr, Rhineland and Saar. (5)



Ground crew pose in front of a 49 Squadron Hampden. These stalwarts would work around the clock to ensure that the aircraft were ready for operations and serviceable. Often working long hours in rough and ready conditions they were the unsung heroes of the RAF

(49 Squadron Collection)

For most of May, *Thos* and his crew were engaged on bombing raids on these industrial targets in Germany. These were the furthest targets that the RAF had been to at that point in the war; very few crews had experience of flying such long sorties so far into Germany, relying on dead reckoning navigation at night, often in poor weather conditions. 49 Squadron was one of the first to be involved in a raid on a German town on the night of the 11 May. Along with 18 other Hampdens and 18 Whitleys, *Thos* took part in a raid against Monchengladbach. The target was road and rail communications, in an attempt to slow up the German advance into France.

That night the flak and searchlights claimed a Hampden, piloted by Wing Commander Arthur Luxmoore of 144 squadron. Despite being hit numerous times, he managed to keep his aircraft flying but eventually he knew the game was up and he ordered the crew to bail out. The skipper had held his faltering aircraft long enough to save the crew, but unfortunately he did not make it out. He paid the ultimate price. The total losses for that night were two Hampdens and a Whitley.

The Ruhr followed on the night of the 15 which signified the commencement of Bomber Command's so called 'strategic offensive' with 99 bombers attacking oil and steel plants. *Thos* and his crew flying Hampden P4321 successfully dropped their bombs on a synthetic oil installation, observing 3 bomb bursts on the target.

Bombing sorties against Germany and German occupied countries were soon to become a nightly occurrence with L4045's crew taking part in the majority. The next target for 49 Squadron was Hamburg, on the nights of the 17 and 18 May. The focus of attention being a fertilizer factory with the result that the factory was destroyed and 34 people killed and 72 injured. Fortunately all aircraft returned home safely. This was followed by further oil and fuel targets in the Rhine area on the night

of the 19 May. A railway was targeted to the north of Grevenbroich on the night of the 23/24 May with a round trip of 4 hours and 30 minutes in unfavourable weather conditions.

Thos was mostly flying in Hampden L4045. This Hampden was known as 'The Queen'. The aircraft was unfortunately later lost on return from an operation against the Battleship Tirpitz, then lying in Wilhelmshaven. The bomber was returning across the North Sea and crashed near Northorpe in Lincolnshire. There were no survivors and no cause was ever established for the crash. It had completed an amazing 786 hrs and 10 minutes of operational flying up to that point from December 1939. Of these 56 operations completed, 20 were with *Thos* at the controls.



Hampden, 'The Queen' of 49 Squadron, L4045 flown on many operations by *Thos* later lost in a crash

(49 Squadron Collection)

Matters turned from bad to worse as the German Army advanced into France, some of the squadron were engaged in operations over the occupied countries with a view to disrupting and slowing down the German advance at the end of the month. There is one telling entry in the operational record book of interest for the 27 May 1940. Flying Officer Forsyth and his crew flying Hampden L4045 attacked crossroads at Dinant. The results were not clear due to intense searchlight activity but on the return journey, they noted that 'Dunkirk was burning fiercely'. It was evident to the crews that the Battle of France was clearly being lost and these raids to attack communications behind the enemy lines were largely ineffective.

A pocket of French and British soldiers were encircled and trapped around the Dunkirk area, having retreated to the coast for evacuation. They were coming under intense aerial bombardment by the Luftwaffe as they waited on the beaches. The Dunkirk evacuation, commonly known as the Miracle of Dunkirk, code-named Operation Dynamo by the British, was the evacuation of Allied soldiers from the beaches and harbour of Dunkirk. The operation took place between 27 May and the early hours of 4 June 1940.

Squadron losses for the month of May were fairly light with only one Hampden being lost to flak. This aircraft, Hampden P1318 being flown by Flying Officer P Butler on a raid to Krefeld/Aachen with all the crew reported as killed.



On the 26 May 1940, the King came to present medals for gallantry to three crew members of 49 Squadron. Front left is Squadron Leader 'Tubby' Lowe DFC known as 'Drain' to *Thos*, next to him is Sergeant Hills DFM, rear far left is Flight Lieutenant Timmerman DFC

(Hillier)

The 4 June saw the first operation of the month for *Thos* as aircraft captain having served his time as navigator. He and his crew departed on a sortie to attack the oil refineries at Frankfurt. A round trip of just over 6 hours. Fifty seven other aircraft were dispatched that night to various targets in Germany, fortunately with the loss of only one aircraft. Hamburg was the target for *Thos* on the 6 June, this time with Pilot Officer Michie as navigator in L4045 their trusty steed.

Early June saw the RAF re-focus its attention to targets in France with over fifty bombers dispatched on a variety of sorties to the Lower Somme area again with a view to upsetting German troop and supply movements. On the 8 May, *Thos*, again as aircraft captain and pilot, was briefed to drop bombs in the Amiens area. His navigator on this occasion was Pilot Officer David McClure, a pilot by trade; he completed 40 ops on the Hampden being awarded the DFC. He was later killed in action whilst flying with 83 Squadron in 1943 and is buried in Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Kleve. This operation was followed on the 10 of June with a raid on a road and rail crossing at Liart, Pilot Officer Thomas Fox in the navigator's position, again a pilot who was gaining experience on operations with a seasoned crew. He himself completed 37 operations on Hampdens and was posted out in October 1940.

In the period between the night of the 7 June and the 11 June, Bomber Command carried out 336 bombing sorties, in the continuing Battle of France. The night of the 12/13 June saw *Thos* and his crew mine laying along with six other Hampdens without the loss of any aircraft. The 13 June saw 163 aircraft including 65 Wellingtons, 64 Hampdens and 34 Whitleys dispatched to attack military targets in France, Belgium and Holland again with a view to disrupting German supplies and communications. *Thos* acting as navigator in L4045 was briefed to attack railway lines around Fargniers, south east of Amiens. On the return from this raid the crew was to witness Paris ablaze.

I remember flying over Paris at the beginning of the German advance. I was hopelessly lost when we stumbled across the city, way off track. Although it was a terrible thing it was strangely a beautiful site, it was burning, you could see all the bridges and buildings in the fire light.

All of our operations at this stage were by moonlight and there was moderate anti-aircraft fire, but not that efficient although it was more accurate than our flak. The Navy convoys up the east coast of England used to fire at us, but most of it passed well behind us. It was quite useful navigationally as you knew that the coast was 10 miles ahead. Flak was frightening, you could sometimes smell and taste it if it was close to you. Enemy fighter opposition was almost non-existent at this stage of the war. I came back a few times with flak damage, never an engine out but mostly tail damage.

The Germans had marched into an undefended Paris on the 14 June 1940. France was all but lost and soon operations re-focused on targets in Germany. Despite the allies' best efforts, the capitulation of France was all over and on the 22 June, an armistice was signed between France and Germany. Having joined the squadron as a pilot officer, *Thos* was promoted to the rank of flying officer with effect from the 17 June 1940.

For the rest of June *Thos* was sent to attack aircraft factories at Wismar as well as targeting German aerodromes. The crew of L4045 also undertook their fair share of mine laying trips, a staggering 12 operational night sorties in one month.

One particular operation of note was carried out on the night of the 19 June 1940. The RAF sent nineteen Hampdens to attack the Dortmund-Ems Canal which was vital for moving supplies and equipment on barges. Squadron Leader Lowe was one of the pilots briefed to attack the canal that night in Hampden P4304 whilst other aircraft, including *Thos*, carried out diversionary attacks in the local area. The results were recorded as 'one bomb burst between the aqueducts, one at the northern junction causing some flooding'. (6)

This was the first of many such operations against this target, these included crews from 49 Squadron. The attack was a success as the viaduct at that stage was quite defenceless with no anti-aircraft guns. The viaduct was damaged and water poured out leaving barges in the canal stuck in the mud. Despite the RAF's best efforts, by early August the Germans had repaired the damage and massively enhanced the defences to prevent a repeat performance.

I took part in three attacks against the Dortmund- Ems canal in 1940. On the first raid, my job was to clear any balloons alongside the canal, flying at low level using the balloon cable cutter in the leading edge of the wing. On the next raid I was detailed to drop bombs on a fighter airfield quite close by. I had about four 500lb bombs and I was detailed to drop one bomb every half hour to keep the Germans heads down. The third operation was to drop a mine on the 25 July.

Eventually after about three operations we broke the bridge but the German had it repaired in about three weeks.

The squadron was to return to this target a number of times, one of the pilots, Flight Lieutenant Roderick Alistair Brook 'Babe' Learoyd had made two previous attacks on the canal. He was quite familiar with the target when he took off on a further operation on the night of the 12 and 13 August. This time to carry out a daring low level attack. The crews were flying on the night of a full moon which would help navigation but was a hindrance as they approached the target, shining into the faces of the crews. The first aircraft to make its bombing run was hit and the wireless operator injured, the second destroyed and then third hit and caught fire. The fourth was hit in three places but the crew nursed the severely damaged aircraft back to base.

The last Hampden piloted by Learoyd, approached at 200 feet into the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire. His aircraft was hit in the wing and he was blinded by searchlights. The aircraft bucked about under heavy fire at point blank range but Learoyd persisted and pushed home his attack. He subsequently brought his wrecked aircraft home. As the landing flaps were inoperative and the undercarriage indicators out of action, he waited for dawn in the vicinity of his aerodrome before landing, which he accomplished without causing injury to his crew or further damage to the aircraft.
(7)



A dramatic war time image of Learoyd's Hampden, over the Dortmund-Ems canal for which he was to receive the Victoria Cross

(Image HMP)



Another impressive period artist's impression of the Learoyd action at the Dortmund- Ems canal

(Image HMP)



A photo of Flight Lieutenant Roderick Alastair Brook Learoyd VC in flying gear

(HMP)

On the 23 June, *Thos* was flying as the captain of Hampden P4305 to attack the aircraft works at Wismar. The raid was a success and the crew observed that all of their bombs fell in hangers on the target area. This was followed by a mine laying operation in the Kiel area and to end the month, further attacks on Luftwaffe airfields and targets in Germany.

For June, the squadron losses were light with only one Hampden being lost, Flight Lieutenant Mitchell's P4305, sustained flak damage in the Kiel area when mine laying on the night of the 26 and 27 June. Two of the crew were killed and two became PoW. One of the crew, Pilot Officer Reavall-Carter was interned in Stalag Luft III and later, he was to take part in the now infamous Great Escape. Fortunately for him, he was one of the lucky ones, caught at the end of the escape tunnel and returned to the PoW camp. Fifty other internees who managed to escape were rounded up and later murdered by the Germans.



An extract from the Daily Sketch of 4 September 1940, Flying Officer Murray receives his DFC.



Thos at the Palace 2nd from the left, to get his DFC in 1940

(Murray)



Thos has kept his wartime uniforms and Irvin Jacket. This No 1 Uniform was the one he wore to Buckingham Palace to be awarded his DFC

(Hillier)

At the end of June it was announced that Flying Officer Thomas Charles Murray had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and it was posted in the London Gazette on the 30 July 1940. The recommendation for the award details the particulars of meritorious service written by his commanding officer which was then passed to the Air Officer Commanding 5 Group, who at the time was Air Vice Marshall Arthur Harris.

The recommendation reads 'Pilot Officer Murray has carried out a total of 137 hours operational flying against the enemy by night. This includes seventeen operations as second pilot and navigator and four operations as first pilot.

On the night of 4/5 May he was navigator of an aircraft carrying out operations in the Oslo area from an altitude of 500 feet. On the run up to the target, his aircraft was hit and tracer entered the navigator's cockpit. In spite of this he continued to give instructions to his captain who was able to complete the operation successfully.

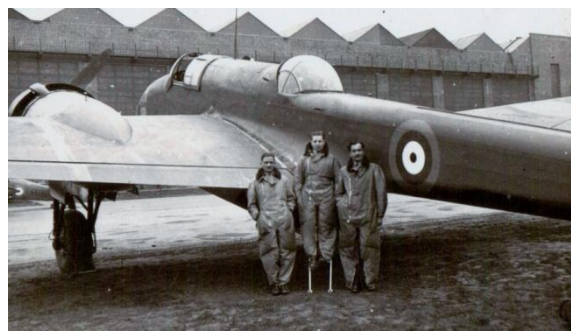
On the night of 23 /24 June Pilot Officer Murray was captain of an aircraft engaged on bombing some enemy aircraft works. In spite of violent storms and adverse weather he successfully attacked the target while nine other and more experienced captains were forced to turn back and bomb alternative targets.

On the night of 26 /27 June he was navigator of an aircraft which successfully completed operations on the Kiel Canal area in spite of severe conditions and heavy anti-aircraft fire.

The courage, coolness and determination which he has displayed at all times have been a source of inspiration to other pilots and navigators in his squadron.'

Arthur Harris noted underneath the CO's recommendation: - 'most strongly recommended, an outstanding efficient and resolute pilot.'

There was no respite from operations and in July *Thos* took part in four further sorties, three dropping bombs and one on the 25 of the month, recorded as mine laying in the Dortmund- Ems canal, however the target could not be found due to the weather and the mine was dropped safe in the sea. All of these trips were by night, some requiring flight on instruments for up to four hours at a time due to poor weather. This required concentrated mental effort to monitor all the aircraft systems and keep her flying on track, monitoring the blind flying panel, eyes flicking from the air speed indicator to the artificial horizon, to the altimeter and turn and slip.



An early photo of a Hampden crew in Sidcot flying suits, the access to the cockpit can be seen up the wing, a black walkway, in through the sliding canopy for the pilot

(Hillier)

August started as a relatively quiet month for *Thos*, but the pace soon quickened, including some of the first raids on Berlin of World War 2.

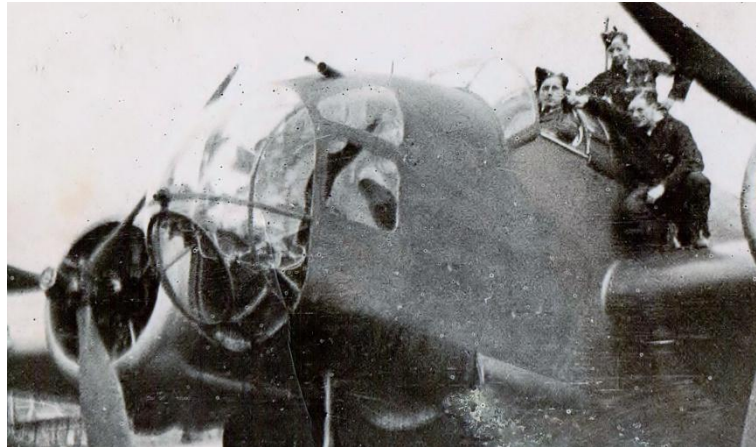
We did a trip on the 22 August where we had to drop a mine in Lorient Harbour. It had two castles either side of the harbour with round towers at the entrance. We had to drop a mine between the two. It was quite precise work. I remember feeling very sorry for the French because the Germans were firing at us on one side, we were very low. As a consequence, the anti-aircraft guns firing tracers were bursting on the roofs of the French town on the other side of the harbour. I thought this was somehow unfair.

On the night of the 24/25 of August 1940, the Luftwaffe took to bombing London. This was the first time that London had been bombed since 1918. As a result the War Cabinet sanctioned the first raids on Berlin in retaliation. 103 aircraft were despatched, half of which, including 49 Squadron were to Berlin. The Hampdens were flying at the limit of their endurance, flying time being around an 8 hour round trip.

I did two Berlin trips in the Hampden both in August 1940, which were particularly long, also one to Potsdam later on in the Manchester with 207 Squadron. Most of our operations were at about 16,000 feet which was ideal flak height; we couldn't climb any higher with a full bomb load. We didn't have very good oxygen in the aircraft either and it was also very cold. The Hampden had a heating system based on boiling water, it never worked very well. Regardless of what you wore you

were always frozen. You could get ice building up on the instruments inside the aircraft it was that bad. There was a lot of flak over the target, it was pretty heavily defended. Fortunately I was never caught by fighters, I was very lucky. I did receive peppering from flak on a number of occasions.

After one operational sortie to Berlin of eight and a quarter hours, I landed back at Horsham St Faith and as the tail wheel touched down the engines stopped out of fuel. Sitting in the cockpit for that long, on a parachute was very tiring. I managed to get out of the cockpit and roll down the wing, looking like a dead spider, my limbs wouldn't work. The ground crew caught me at the bottom giggling.



A snapshot taken of ground crew in the cockpit of a Hampden, this photo gives a clearer view of how exposed the crew in the nose were to ground fire

(Hillier)

August had been a busy month for the squadron and losses had been incurred, with five crews either being reported missing, killed in action or taken as PoW. One aircraft was lost on the Berlin trip on the night of the 25/26 August. The bad weather and thick cloud over the target that night prevented accurate bombing. The crews were aware they were at the limits of their aircrafts endurance with Berlin being a 1200 mile round trip. In still air with no head wind, the Hampden is quoted as having a range of 1990 miles with a 2000lb bomb load. This figure does not take into account the wear and tear on the engines, weather conditions and outside air temperature.

As the bombers turned for home they were then faced with a very strong head wind. The Hampdens rapidly burning fuel as they struggled back against the wind, it must have been a nerve-racking time as the skipper of each aircraft monitored the fuel gauges. It was inevitable that some would run out of fuel, *Thos* and his crew were fortunate to make it home.

Once back over the North Sea and running on fumes, the pilot could only try and lighten the load, set the engines up for the most economical boost and RPM and hope for the best. Once the fuel was exhausted, the crew would have had sufficient height to glide for a while whilst taking decisions on whether to bail out into the darkness over water, or stay together and risk a night ditching on a potentially difficult sea. Both options were not particularly attractive as the chance of surviving either and being discovered were slim. If the captain did successfully ditch, if the crew were not injured in the ensuing crash, they would have minutes to get out and into a dinghy. The temperatures likely be encountered in the North Sea also were not conducive to life safety. Sadly,

one of the ditched aircraft was P4416 L-London from 49 Squadron. It was piloted by Pilot Officer Nicoll Fawcett; he and his crew were never found and are still officially reported as missing. They are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.



A Handley Page Hampden being loaded up with mines

(Hillier)

The raid to the Siemens Electric Works at Berlin on the night of the 28 August was flown by Flying Officer Peter Ward-Hunt with *Thos* acting as navigator. A gruelling round trip of eight and a half hours in Hampden P2134. Interestingly Peter Ward-Hunt completed 32 operational sorties on Hampdens and then went on to complete a further 23 operations in 106 Squadron, being awarded a DFC and bar. He survived his time with Bomber Command, retiring as a Wing Commander.

The night of the 6 September brought a raid on the Gladbach/ Emmerich area by four aircraft of 49 Squadron. Unfortunately bad weather prevented two of the crews from making successful attacks. *Thos* flying L4045 could not locate the primary target but instead he managed to bomb a blast furnace in the vicinity of Gladbach. On return to Waddington, one of the crews in Hampden P4304, piloted by Pilot Officer Beauchamp were to fall foul of a night intruder and were machine gunned over home territory. The operational record book mentions that the attack 'was without effect', they were lucky to make it back to terra firma.

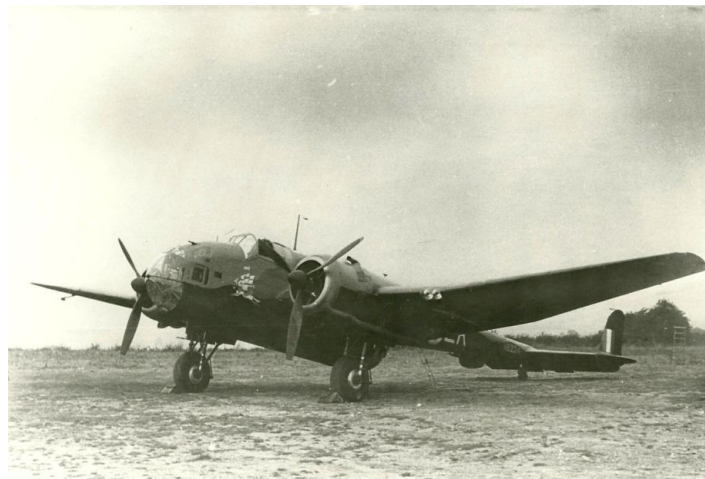
By mid August, The Battle of Britain had been raging overhead the skies of Britain for some time, the Luftwaffe aim to wipe out the RAF as a prelude to invasion. The German army were preparing for the seaborne operation to invade England code name '*Seelöwe*'. They had been amassing barges and all manner of ships along the Channel ports.

Thos and his crew were sent to bomb invasion barges in the ports along with 106 other aircraft from Bomber Command on the night of the 10 and 11 September. Two Hampdens and two Whitley bombers were lost on this operation. The 15 September saw them take part in a raid against an oil depot in Antwerp whilst other crews again sent to tackle the invasion barges in the hope of delaying an impending invasion. There was no let up, when on the night of the 19 and 20 fifty three Hampdens and Whitleys returned for another go. The last operation of the month was again to the ports on the night of the 22 September. *Thos* remembers that they could clearly see troops in the barges.

As we flew over and dropped our load we could see troops who had been in the barges running up the gang planks to get away from our bombs.

60% of the operations by Bomber Command that month were to attack the Channel ports. Although Fighter Command were taking much of the credit, it was down to the concerted efforts of Bomber Command that Germany could hardly find enough transports and even river barges to mount such an invasion, as a result Operation 'Seelöwe' was officially abandoned on 12 October 1940.

September marked the last operational flight with 49 Squadron for *Thos*. He had flown as both navigator and as pilot throughout his time with the squadron and survived against the odds. It was time for a rest, although those due a posting did not see it the same way. The squadron had been through an intense period of operations and had achieved good results. At the end of 1940, the squadron crews had received between them 1 Victoria Cross, 15 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 13 Distinguished Flying Medals. These crews were setting the scene for the forthcoming Bomber Command offensive, flying long arduous operations in adverse weather conditions to press home their attacks. It was without doubt that some of these crews needed a well earned rest.



A photo of 49 Squadron Hampden AE224 AE-Z, lost on operations on the night of the 1/2 November 1941, Squadron Leader D.B Drakes and his crew were posted missing after an anti-shipping and mine laying sortie

(RAF Scampton)



Hampden P4403, EA-M 'Pinocchio', flown by Flight. Lieutenant R A B 'Babe' Learoyd VC, 49 Squadron, 12 August 1940 on the Dortmund-Ems Canal raid

(RAF Scampton)

Overall I completed 39 operations with 49 Squadron before they tried to post me on a rest. They hadn't invented tours by then, we reckoned we could keep going until the end, it was our war, and we began it, the first operational crews. Suddenly in September four of us were posted to 14 OTU which had just been formed and we were horrified. Our very last operations had been bombing the invasion barges in the Channel ports and to be taken off ops at this stage was an insult. We were pretty tired by then. We just ignored the order and went down to flights, carrying on in the normal manner. We managed to do a few more ops, there was a long silence from Group who didn't know what to do with these mutinous crews. They eventually offered us three weeks tired crew leave. The chance of a rest was welcome news and we jumped at the chance.

Little did we know, it was their opportunity to clear all our stuff out of our rooms and equipment and send it down to 14 OTU. When we got back from leave there was a lorry there waiting to take us all down to the OTU. I left 49 Squadron on the 25 September 1940.

14 OTU

I was moved to RAF Cottesmore and here I flew the Anson and was converting crews to the Hampden. It was difficult with student pilots as you could only have one pilot flying the Hampden and the student had to sit behind you. This was until you felt he was fit and you could send him off solo.

This posting was a so called rest tour. We were the first ex-operational pilots to be posted into the OTU as instructors and we were regarded with the utmost suspicion by the CFI and junior squadron instructors alike. We were expected to protest at the training syllabus; we did. We were doubtless arrogant and unruly but I think the unit benefited nevertheless. I was not a good instructor and soon found to my disgust that each pupil invariably made the same mistake, thus making flying a monotonous affair. Instead of individuals it was not long before I came to regard them as just so many squares to be filled in with blue pencil, there were always too many squares and too little time

to fill them in. I was then selected for a squadron that was being formed entirely of second tour crews to man the new Avro Manchester; I left Cottesmore six months to the day of my arrival.



A photo of 49 Squadron ground crew in front of a Hampden
(49 Squadron Association)



'New Arrivals At Scampton'
(Copyright Nick Trudgian)

Chapter 3



207 Squadron Crest

(Crown Copyright. Provided by the RAF Heraldry Trust.)

Vulture Trouble

Flying Officer T C Murray DFC, arrived on posting from 14 OTU on the 5 April 1941. By then the squadron was based at RAF Waddington. The squadron had quite a history, forming back in 1915 as 7 (Naval) Squadron RNAS; they flew a variety of aircraft including the B.E.2, Short Bombers, Caudrons and Sopwith 11/2 Strutters. They took part in a number of operational bombing raids in France before converting to the Handley Page O/100 twin engine heavy bomber, in which they continued the bombing offensive. On the 1 April 1918 the RNAS was amalgamated with the RFC to form the Royal Air Force and with that 7 (Naval) Squadron became 207 Squadron.

It re-equipped with the Handley Page O/400 in April of that year prior to commencing operations on the new type in June 1918. In the inter war years the squadron operated a variety of aircraft including the Fairey 111F, Fairey Gordon and Vickers Vincent before converting to the Fairey Battle in 1938. At the outset of war in 1939, the unit was regarded as a non-mobilising unit tasked with the job of training aircrews and supplying them to front line squadrons. 207 Squadron disbanded on the 8 April 1940 but it was not to stay that way for long. It was reborn on the 1 November 1940 at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire as part of 5 Group, Bomber Command. It had the honour of being chosen to be equipped with the new Avro Manchester twin engine bomber, which was seen as a big leap forwards, compared to the Wellington, Whitley, Hampden and Blenheim that were the main stay of operational squadrons at that stage.

The squadron was formed under the command of Wing Commander N.C Hyde who with a number of officers and NCOs was dispatched to Boscombe Down to gain experience on the new aircraft. The Manchester was fitted with two 1800 hp Rolls Royce Vulture II engines, basically two Merlin engines fitted on top of each other! It was a large imposing aircraft sat on the ground; great things were expected of it.

It had three tails initially, a low wing, nose and tail turret with a retractable ventral turret for defence. The first crews found it was very difficult taking a new aircraft and getting it ready for operational use, as many design issues had to be ironed out and modifications made before it could take to the skies over Europe. On the 24 February 1941, the first operational sortie was carried out led by the CO. This was to be six Manchesters on a high level bombing attack on a 'Hipper' class cruiser in Brest on the north west coast of France. All of the aircraft made it back to Waddington but one pilot, Flight Officer Peter Robert Burton-Gyles crash landed due to a failure of the aircraft's hydraulic system and problems with getting the undercarriage down. Yet another fault to add to the list of rectifications and modifications that were needing to be addressed on the type.



Avro Manchester 1 prototype. L7246, pictured during 1940, note the three tail configuration

(Hillier)

It was soon acknowledged that the engines were not powerful enough and that single engine performance was poor. This caused problems with crews being able to climb the aircraft above flak height over the target. Hydraulics were proving a problem, engine reliability and turret trouble amongst others. Even with these shortcomings the squadron was launched into operations.

Inevitably the month of March saw a number of operations that were plagued with problems and incidents, the crews persevered, they had a job to do. On the night of the 13 March, 139 aircraft took off to bomb the Blohm and Voss U Boat yards. It was a bright moonlight night, Flying Officer Hugh Matthews of 207 Squadron lined up on the runway; hand on the throttles, waiting for the aircraft ahead to get airborne. He advanced the throttles and the aircraft slowly accelerated down the runway, the pilot checking the swing as the tail came up. The aircraft lumbered down the runway painfully slowly, struggling with a full bomb load. As the end of the runway approached, the Manchester eventually lifted clear of the tarmac, the pilot retracting the undercarriage to reduce drag. With take-off checks completed, the crew settled into the long climb up over the coast. Little

did they know that a German intruder was lurking close by and only minutes into the climb, the stalking Luftwaffe pilot had pulled into position to attack the vulnerable Manchester. The aircraft crashed at Wisby, its bomb load exploded, killing all but two of the crew.

On a raid to attack submarine pens at Lorient on the 21 March, one Manchester piloted by Sergeant F B Harwood suffered engine failure just 20 minutes into the flight and the engine caught fire. Harwood ordered the crew to bail out but he and the wireless operator/air gunner remained with the aircraft which he then attempted to crash land. Unfortunately he struck a tree and it caught fire, several of the bombs on board exploded and they were killed.

The 27 March saw four Manchesters take part in a raid along with 35 Hampdens and Whitleys, the target, Dusseldorf. One Manchester P-Peter was being flown by a second tour pilot by the name of Flight Lieutenant Johnnie Aloysious Siebert RAAF. After dropping his bombs on the target, he encountered heavy flak and one shell burst beneath the starboard wing, throwing it up in the air, close call. As the Manchester approached the Dutch border the flak subsided, but then the starboard engine started to smoke and the propeller had to be feathered.

The Manchester was not good on one engine and started to lose height. If that was not enough to deal with the port engine started to give up the ghost too. Siebert called to the crew that he could not hold the aircraft for much longer and the wireless operator started to transmit the aircrafts position to base. Suddenly, tracer appeared over the port wing, the Manchester had been caught in the sights of a Bf 110 night fighter of Nachtjagdgeschwader1. The crew were ordered to bail out, the Manchester crashing near Eindhoven. The pilot had done his best to maintain the aircraft on an even keel long enough to ensure his crew had time to get out. He stayed at the controls to the last minute and unfortunately bailed out to late, his parachute had not fully opened and he was killed, the rest of the crew becoming PoW. (8)

It was against this back drop of events that *Thos* arrived on the squadron. Not a happy situation and no doubt morale was affected by the recent issues with the new aircraft. This was to be compounded on the 9 April when the CO Wing Commander 'Hetty' Hyde was shot down on a raid to Kiel. The crew bailed out and were taken as PoW to Stalag Luft III where 'Hetty' was to take part in the digging of the 'Wooden Horse' escape tunnel. The squadron was taken over in the short term by Squadron Leader J F Kydd DSO, DFC.

We were very patriotic, regular officers and my view was always that as soon as I felt fit enough I must go back to operations as I was a professional and that was my job. I didn't particularly want to but I felt particularly honoured to be setting up a new squadron with mostly second tour crews or elite crews with a new aircraft. So it was a great compliment. But the driving force was that the war had to be fought and one had to do it.

It was at Waddington in April 1941, I started flying the Manchester on 207 Squadron. When one thinks of the Bomber Command war effort one tends to think of the achievements of the Lancaster. Its predecessor, the Manchester was a failure and best forgotten about.

It was soon after *Thos* arrived that all of the Manchesters were grounded due to a suspicion that the main bearings in the engines were made of an unsuitable alloy. As a result, they didn't resume operations again until the beginning of May. A taste of things to come, engine trouble plagued the Manchester for the rest of its career, the crews still battled on regardless, putting a brave face on it.

Thos first took to the air in the new type on 1 May 1941, flying Manchester L7379 for a 25 minute local familiarisation trip. This was followed by a cross country to the Isle of Man on the 6 May to really get to grips with its handling. Thos managed to get in six sorties on type before taking part in his first operation with 207 Squadron.

We converted to type on the unit. My first Impression was that it was a very big aircraft compared to the Hampden. Although it was pleasant to fly, light on the controls, it was colossally underpowered. The powers that be had great belief in the power of the engines, when they first did the run up when they were testing the aircraft they put barriers behind it to stop people getting blown over by the prop wash. In reality, nothing like that happened. Our training was on the squadron and not all that methodical, we learnt as we went along. These were desperate times so the aircraft was rushed into service long before it was operationally fit and whilst it still had many teething problems. The Manchester was light on the ailerons, lighter than the Lancaster, but unfortunately not at all reliable.

The first Manchester we had was the three tail variety; this had a problem with tail flutter. I had to return from one operation because the rear gunner got really worried that the tail was about to come off, although I didn't feel it through the controls. A number of aircraft were lost because of it. Later they extended the fins and had just the twin tail adding about 12 feet to the tail. That was not the worst of the problem, the propeller feathering system was unreliable and could fail to feather or they would suddenly lock in to fully fine pitch

Also little things like when you were taxiing out with a full bomb load the centre of gravity was slightly wrong so that the tail wheel would get a shimmy on and would get damaged. This necessitated having to change the tail wheel before you took off. That delay killed a friend of mine, he was at the end of the runway waiting to have his tail wheel changed and there was a German intruder over the airfield at the time. He took off and the intruder took him out as he climbed away.

The engines themselves were totally unreliable. There were spots where the coolant couldn't reach so the engines would overheat and start engine fires after a few hours running. The hydraulics system upon which the operation of the flaps, undercarriage, bomb doors and turrets depended was subject to leaking and consequently failure.

With so many problems it was indeed fortunate that all the first pilots and most of the aircrew were experienced and had completed a tour of operations. A rare achievement at this early stage of the war. We needed not only to be bomber pilots but test pilots as well.

I remember my first full bomb load take off. I got the thing airborne and that's all I could do. It would fly along the runway and it looked like it would hit the hedge. When the hedge was coming up, I banged it back down onto the ground and fortunately we bounced back in the air, staggering over the hedge. RAF Waddington is on a ridge and as I went over the edge I managed to get the nose down and increase the speed sufficiently to climb away. We had to fly straight ahead, carrying on for about five miles before you dared turn. If you had an engine go on takeoff you were a goner, the single engine performance with a full bomb load was nonexistent.

If you hadn't reached 10,000 feet by the Dutch coast you were allowed to drop, safe up to two, 1000lb bombs which I had to do occasionally, amounting to one third of our bomb load. You were in the climbing mode all the time through the searchlight belt over the enemy coast, limiting our ability to take evasive action and with these unreliable engines the temperatures and pressures were well in

the red, both needles off the clock. You may make 14,000 feet by the time you reached the Ruhr which was again ideal flak height for the German guns. It didn't do much for our morale.

My first operation was to Mannheim on the 9 May 1941, which was a successful operation. There were three aircraft operating from the squadron, two went to Berlin but as I was inexperienced I was sent to Mannheim on which I dropped a cookie (4000lb bomb). After the war I knew exactly what the damage I did on that target as the Germans kept very good records of raids and the damage caused.

Thos flew his first operational trip in Manchester L7381, code EM-R to attack Mannheim. He managed to climb his aircraft to 17,000 feet with a 4000lb bomb and successfully dropped it in the target area. The crew observed the bomb flash and large fires as a result. Mannheim was again the target on the night of the 12 May but due to a navigational error and ground haze the target could not be identified so Thos attacked his secondary target at Cologne.

On the 15 May, Thos picked up a Manchester from Boscombe Down but shortly after the whole fleet was grounded yet again on the 17 May, mainly due to the same old engine trouble and it was decided to carry out intensive training flights to monitor engine behaviour. Thos took off for a cross country on the 24 May on one such sortie.

By now losses were beginning to rise inexorably, so Group gave the unprecedented instruction that wireless operators, should it be possible, were to transmit in clear, FLK for flak, FIT for Fighter or ENG for engines to indicate the cause of their loss!

In that month it was decided to fly one Manchester continually on triangular cross countries around England until one engine failed with the hope that we could get one back and Rolls Royce could analyse the cause.

It was the turn of my flight commander Squadron Leader Mackintosh to have a go, he had turned north of Land's End towards the Isle of Man, when halfway to the Welsh coast the starboard engine failed, caught fire and he feathered the prop. The nearest airfield was Perrenporth, a small fighter strip about 40 miles away. He couldn't maintain height but he ordered the crew to chuck out the guns and drop the dummy bomb load to reduce weight. Fortunately they just made it back. They roared down the runway where he retracted the undercarriage in an effort to stop. He careered through a hedge, across a road, through another hedge and finally the starboard wing hit a parked lorry which finally stopped them. So Rolls Royce had their engine. I had to fly down and pick the crew up the following day.

One ex-gunner's thoughts on the Manchester at that time are quite telling and no doubt mirrored the rest of the crew's views.

'My own experience of Manchester single engine performance commenced when a starboard engine blew up on a local flying trip. The resulting descent was at a gliding angle approximating to a house brick in free flight. Other diverting incidents included a complete shearing of all the port propeller retaining bolts, we also had a constant speed unit give up the ghost over Essen. The resulting howl must have terrified the ground defences; it certainly shook us'. (9)

To top it all, as well as the aircraft issues, the Luftwaffe had started night intruder operations over the RAF home bases to look for easy prey in the circuit and to cause maximum disruption to

operations. This was also having a marked effect on crew's morale. *Thos* was to witness these on several occasions, one being whilst he was at RAF Waddington.

In 1941 we started to get a lot of night fighter intruders. As we lived in different messes from the NCO crew we never really fraternised off duty or went to the same pubs so entertainment would often be in the Mess. One night at Waddington I can remember we were playing games in the Officer's Mess with 44 Squadron against 207. This particular game was with the long sofas of which you had to get your sofa over the enemies into the goal at the other end. I was the last to leave the mess with the MO (medical officer), there was a sofa upside down and we were just surveying the damage when there was a terrific bang. One of these intruders had dropped a parachute mine which had hit the church steeple in Waddington village. We immediately dived under the sofa, and I can remember that neither of us spilt a drop of beer.

We rushed off to the village to help in any rescue, one girl was killed, it was a bit harrowing, they all thought I was a doctor so I pretended I was just to try and help boost morale.

One particular Luftwaffe unit set up for this 'Night Intruder' role was NJG 2 or Nachtjagdgeschwader 2. Their initial role was unlike the other units of the Luftwaffe night fighter arm; as a Fernnachtjagd Gruppe they were tasked with long-range intruder missions over the UK, disrupting night flying training and harassing the returning Royal Air Force bombers over their own airfields. The Luftwaffe would intercept radio transmissions of Bomber Command raids which then helped pinpoint the operational airfields in Eastern England. From this information, NJG 2 aircraft could scramble to be over the airfields at the predicted times of the bomber's return.

The technique employed was to mix with the returning bombers, orbit their bases and take a crack at any unfortunate souls about to land back at base. After a long sortie this was the bombers most vulnerable time, with wheels and flaps down and a weary crew. Their other tactic was to drop 50 kilograms (110 lb) bombs across the runways of the bomber bases. 207 had experienced this first hand already back in March with the loss of a crew already.

Based at Gilze-Rijen in Holland, operations commenced using just seven, JU 88 C-1 night fighters. Although most missions were carried out using the Junkers Ju 88C-1 and C-2 a few Dornier Do 215B-5 fighter conversions were trailed in the spring of 1941.

The offensive over the UK yielded promising results- some 143 victory claims were made, and over 90 RAF aircraft were claimed between October 1940 and the start of 1942. There was also the additional disruption to RAF operations and the psychological effects on the RAF crews.

By October 1941 however night intruder sorties were curtailed, due to the inadequate number of aircraft available (I Gruppe never had more than 20 JU 88s operational) and the High Command's perceived lack of results; it was thought shooting down RAF bombers over Germany had a far greater morale effect for the population than over the UK. (10)

Operations were back on again towards the end of June. *Thos*, now promoted to Flight Lieutenant, was briefed to drop six 1000lb bombs on Dusseldorf in company with five other Manchesters. They had all sorts of problems trying to gain height on route to the target area, engine temperatures soaring, not helped by the outside air temperature being high, which resulted in *Thos* dropping one bomb on Haamstede aerodrome in order to lighten his load. Two other aircraft decided to drop

their loads on airfield targets but the crew of EM-X soldiered on and dropped the rest of their bombs in the target area.

Thos and his crew were off to Kiel on the night of the 26 June. Weather conditions that night were appalling and prevented accurate bombing. A tail gunner on board a Wellington with 150 Squadron also on the same sortie recalled that: - 'The cloud cover was 10/10. The cumulonimbus, where winds inside the turbulence can easily exceed 200 mph towered to over 35,000 feet'. (11) This created a number of problems one of which was extreme turbulence, making it a very uncomfortable ride for the crew. It was also hard for the pilot to keep control of the aircraft as it was being hurled about like a butterfly in a strong wind as well as the risk of lightning strike and severe icing conditions. These operations were extremely tough both mentally and physically for the crews.

Two Manchesters were lost that night, one from 97 Squadron, the other from 61 Squadron. The next raid was on Hamburg on the 29 June, which included 13 Stirlings, 6 Manchesters, 2 Halifaxes and 7 Wellingtons. On this raid yet another engine fire occurred on a squadron Manchester and the aircraft piloted by Flying Officer Hills had to jettison their bomb load. The pilot managed to successfully re-start the engine and make it back to RAF Waddington. Five aircraft in total were lost on this raid, three to prowling night fighters.



Manchester L7515, EM-S, of 207 Squadron pictured during 1941 or 1942, First Operation was to Cherbourg in France on 5/6 Nov 1941, other Ops included St Nazaire 2/3 Jan 1942, Brest 5/6 Jan 1942, Brest 8-9 Jan 1942, Brest 9/10 Jan 1942, Wilhelmshaven 10/11 Jan 1942, Hamburg 14/15 Jan 1942, Munster 22/23 Jan 1942, Brest 25/26 Jan 1942, Mannheim 11/12 Feb 1942, Gardening 12/13 Feb 1942 and Essen 10/11 Mar 1942

(Hillier)

In July 1941 they grounded the Manchester yet again. This was due to the continued engine failures. Intensive flying continued with the air testing of numerous modifications which were being introduced to try sort out the plethora of problems. A number of Hampdens were allocated to us so that operations could continue, if only on a limited scale.

To keep the crews gainfully employed, the squadron received four Hampdens to be used as an interim measure pending a solution for the Manchester. Having flown the Hampden on his previous tour *Thos* felt at home in the aircraft but disappointed that they had to revert to this older type. He flew raids on Hanover, Kiel shipyards and one mine laying operation in July on the Hampden before operations were resumed on the Manchester on the 7 August 1941.

By then we were flying quite large gaggles of aircraft and no doubt many casualties were due to mid air collisions. You could see other aircraft around you as you formed up in the bomber stream but as dusk turned to nightfall you couldn't see the other aircraft. At this stage of the war, the searchlights and flak were pretty unpleasant really. You would see searchlight batteries active either side of your course so you instinctively went for the darkness between the two, only to find another gun battery in that spot. I then tried another tactic which I referred to as the 'pass the dummy' method of avoiding searchlights. The idea was that crews were to fly as close as possible to searchlight cones rather than follow their instincts to keep away as far as possible. By this means you would be flying over batteries that were already fully engaged and whose detecting devices might well become confused by our presence which could only be of benefit to the unfortunate 'moth in the candle'. We were thus able to penetrate the searchlight zone without the enemy being able to bring many of his flak batteries to bear on us. This undoubtedly reduced casualties and did much to improve morale.

As you got close to the target and the flak started you could then see how close some of the other aircraft were to you, nearly missing each other. We were seeing night fighters at this stage over Germany, more so now than when flying Hampdens. The tactic we used to break contact was to do a corkscrew manoeuvre which soon put them off. Later on in the Lancasters we had radar which enabled us to see approaching night fighters and take appropriate action.

Night fighters and flak were becoming a very real threat to Bomber Command's efforts. In July of 1941, 63 aircraft were claimed as shot down. This was only to get worse as the August totals were to reveal 67 shot down. The odds of survival were ever decreasing and would have affected the crew's morale. The German anti-aircraft defences were enjoying success with their radar controlled anti-aircraft guns used in conjunction with the Wurzburg radar, 300 of which had been delivered to the Luftwaffe by the middle of 1941.

This first operation back with the Manchester on the 7 August was not a total success as *Thos* and crew were briefed to attack the Krupp works at Essen. On route the aircraft suffered from tail flutter and it was decided to drop their bombs on their alternative target of Duisberg instead. Further crews complained of the same problem with tail flutter on a raid to Mannheim on the 25 August. Seven crews were briefed for the sortie, of these one aircraft suffered a burst tail wheel, another developed a serious oil leak. The five remaining crews complained of tail flutter and a reluctance of the aircraft to climb. One aircraft had to jettison a 1000lb bomb to climb.

It was eventually found that this tail buffet was caused by climbing too close to the stalling speed. The performance fully loaded was so poor, crews did not really have a choice. This problem had occurred on a number of the aircraft and the tail flutter and vibration was solved by dispensing with the third, central fin and adopting a larger 33 ft span tail unit with twin rudders similar to the Lancaster arrangement.

The 28 August saw *Thos* and his crew briefed to fly Manchester, L7317, EM-C to attack railway targets around Duisburg along with 117 other aircraft. The crew took off at ten minutes past midnight from RAF Waddington with five, 1000lb bombs on board but as they could not reach a reasonable height over the Dutch coast, they again dropped two bombs to lighten their load in the hope of being able to climb above the impending flak over the target.

The Manchester would have struggled, climbing hard, engine gauge needles in the red, *Thos* ever vigilant for any sign of an engine failure or fire. The crew tense as they crossed the coast, looking out for night fighters creeping up on them in the darkness. Suddenly as they approached the target, flying at a height of 12,500 feet they were coned by searchlights, forcing them to climb higher, pushing the engines to their limits.

Thos records in his log book that he successfully put his searchlight tactic to good use and they managed to escape through the master searchlight without any flak damage to the aircraft, no doubt a nail biting few minutes. Finally they made the target and dropped their bombs. Turning for home they were to witness another aircraft close by in flames, heading for the ground, thousands of feet below. It is hard to imagine the horror as the crew witnessed a fellow crew, plucked out of the night sky by flak or night fighters, helpless onlookers, no doubt wondering if it was their turn next.

On the way out from the target they had to repeat the process of flying through the flak belt near the coast. The strain on the crews nerves must have been incredible and it is no surprise that some cracked under the pressure. Out of the seven briefed to attack, three failed to reach the target and bombed alternatives.

September saw *Thos* on a seven and a half hour operation in Manchester L7317, EM-C to attack the Heinkel aircraft factory in Rostock and the harbour area. However, due to cloud cover obscuring the target, the majority of the 56 aircraft bombed the nearby town. It was on the return from this raid that the crew were to see enemy night fighters in conjunction with intensive searchlight batteries. They were fortunately not intercepted and touched down at 05:25 a.m. for a good aircrew breakfast back in the mess at RAF Waddington .

The last raid of the month *Thos* was to take part in was on the 29 September to attack the Blohm and Voss works at Hamburg along with 93 other bombers, but this time they encountered extremely heavy and accurate flak over the target which called for serious evasive action. This no doubt put them off their aim. The operational records note that the bombs were seen to fall in the dock area 1.5 miles from the target. Four aircraft were lost to flak that night.



A target photograph of Hamburg, concentrating on areas on U-boat construction. The original caption points out that (1) indicates the basin, (2) covered slips and pens for U-boat construction, (3) machine shops, (4) goods sheds, and (5) jetty with adjacent floating dock. *Thos* took part in a raid against this target on the 29 September

(Martin Mace/HMP)

A most welcome interlude occurred on the 4 October 1941 when Peter Burton-Gyles and I were able to get our hands on the prototype Lancaster which had just been loaned to 44 Squadron as they were the first to be re-armed with the aircraft.

Lancaster BT308 was basically a three tail finned Manchester with the wings extended to accommodate its four Merlin engines. The extra throttle and pitch controls were just metal tubes alongside the Manchester controls. With no turrets, radio or navigational equipment it was empty as a shell and light as a feather. It took off like a startled stallion. It flew happily on one of its four engines and in steep turns with both inside engines feathered. What a tonic after the lumbering Manchester.

Peter Burton-Giles went on to be awarded the DSO, DFC*, rising to the rank of Wing Commander. He was subsequently posted to 488 Squadron as CO and then to 23 Squadron. He became a very successful intruder pilot on the DH Mosquito. It was whilst flying a Mosquito, serial HJ 832 from Aighero, Sardinia, at 17:40 p.m. on 10 December 1943 to attack rail and road targets in the Genoa – Milan – Turin area, that nothing further was ever heard from his aircraft. He is still listed as missing in action.



Peter Burton-Gyles at the controls of a 207 Squadron Manchester, a good friend of *Thos*. Sadly he was to lose his life flying a Mosquito

(Copyright World War 2 images)

It was back to operations on the night of the 10 October with crews being briefed for Essen and the Krupps works. Krupps were an armaments manufacturer with a massive area sprawling with factories making weapons of all types as well as locomotives, tractors and mining machinery. Due to bad weather, of the ten crews who took off, only six aircraft reported back as bombing the target.

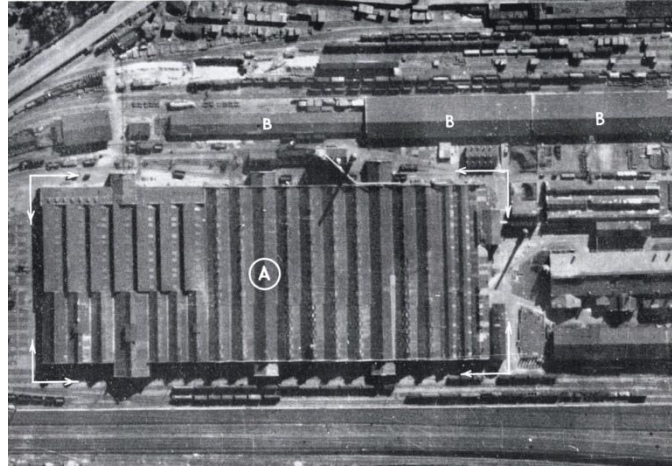


Pictured on 11 April 1945, RAF officers inspect an unfinished siege gun in a wrecked building of the Krupps armaments works at Essen, Germany, a principal target for Bomber Command throughout the war. It was completely wrecked by the end of the war. 207 Squadron were to visit the Krupps works on a number of occasions

(Martin Mace/HMP)

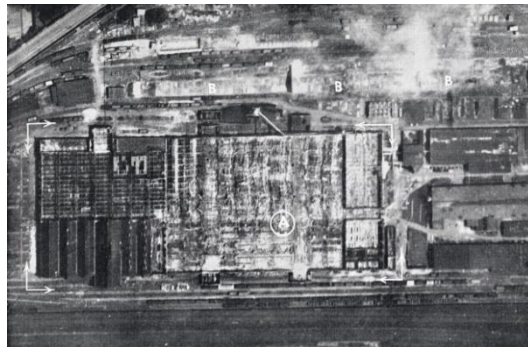
Two nights later the squadron were briefed to attack a synthetic rubber plant at Huls with eleven Manchesters. At this time this target was one of the most heavily defended targets in the Reich. One aircraft failed to return from this operation, being intercepted and shot down by a Bf 110 over Belgium; only one of the crew managed to get out and was taken prisoner.

Thos and his crew were 'chalked up' on the roster for a sortie to bomb Cologne railway station on the 13 October. Nine aircraft took off just after midnight, aircraft EM-O with *Thos* at the controls, struggled to get airborne under the weight of one, 4000lb and two, 250lb bombs. They climbed hard towards the Dutch coast with the rest of the gaggle, but two aircraft in the formation had to jettison some of their deadly load to enable them to climb up to a reasonable height over the target.



A vertical aerial reconnaissance photograph of the railway workshops at Cologne taken before an attack in 1942. The letters indicate the same buildings in the image below. *Thos* was briefed to attack the railway yards on the 13 October

(Martin Mace/HMP)



The same railway workshops after a Bomber Command attack in 1942. The original caption states that “the damage covers approx. 9 acres”. It also points out that the letter (A) indicates a “main building almost entirely devastated”, whilst (B) are “subsidiary buildings destroyed”

(Martin Mace/HMP)

On the way in over Liege, one of the aircraft piloted by Pilot Officer J Unsworth was caught in a searchlight beam, which in turn attracted a Bf 110. With devastating accuracy the pilot poured rounds into the Manchester. Only two of the crew managed to bail out of the crippled aircraft before the wreckage plummeted to earth.

The rest of the formation flew on and found the target but were met with fierce flak and intense searchlight activity making it difficult for the bomb aimers to locate the target. They eventually dropped their deadly loads, to the relief of the crews and made for home. Even though on the way back, there was no time to relax, they were not out of trouble yet. Night fighters would be lurking in the shadows waiting to catch the returning bombers and increase their score. Imagine the tired crew at the limit of nervous exhaustion, looking forwards to a cup of tea and sleep only to be mercilessly hacked out of the sky within sight of a safe runway.

Sadly another Manchester piloted by Pilot Officer L Paskell fell victim to a Bf 110 on the return leg, one minute flying on a heading back to Waddington, the pilot monitoring the instruments in the faint light, the rest of the crew alert and watching out for night fighters or other aircraft in the formation that may get too close for comfort.

As they approached the enemy coast on the way home, without warning a searchlight coned the aircraft, caught like a moth in a lamp shade; the captain tried his best to manoeuvre the aircraft to break contact. This would have been quite unpleasant for the crew as these high energy manoeuvres meant pulling against gravity, making it difficult to move your arms or limbs as they doubled in weight. It would have been quite disconcerting on its own but the crew knew that this was not the only problem, being caught in this searchlight beams would attract the fighters. Heart stopping moments would pass as the crew hoped that they would evade the probing searchlight, but suddenly cannon shells ripped through the fuselage, shards of red hot metal flying about, the aircraft bucking under the force of the attack and fire breaking out in the fuel tanks or engines as the Manchester took the full force.

One can only imagine the terror in those final moments of the aircraft as the captain gave the orders to 'bail out' trying his best to keep the protesting aircraft as level as possible to allow the crew to get away. Once the aircraft entered its final spiral dive towards the ground, it would have been almost impossible for any of the crew to get out, again pinned down by G force against the fuselage. The difference between survival and certain death being down to how long the airframe stayed together and how long the skipper could keep the aircraft on an even keel. Unfortunately only two of the crew managed to escape the wreck and the remains of the aircraft crashed near Lommel. Three aircraft lost to night fighters within a week would have seriously affected morale.

NJG 1 or Nachtjagdgeschwader 1, were the primary foe for the bomber force. Formed in June 1940, they were the unit tasked with defending the skies of the Reich, operating with Bf 110s, controlled by the Wurzburg radar, they would be allocated a 30 mile square zone with which to patrol. Although simple in operation, the crews did gain considerable successes during 1941, with two of their top pilots claiming in excess of 20 kills each by the end of the year.

Prior to the Squadrons move to Bottesford, nine experienced crews took off to have another crack at Cologne's main railway station on the 7 November 1941. This time the weather was forecast to be bad over the North Sea with thick cloud and storms; it seemed that every operation was in unfavourable conditions. *Thos* and his crew were carrying one, 4000lb bomb in Manchester EM-D, their wheels leaving the tarmac at 19:30 p.m. for a five hour round trip. Of the nine that took off, two aircraft returned with unserviceable front turrets, two aircraft reported dropping their bombs on the primary target, encountering light flak. The remainder could not locate the primary target and dropped their load on the city, but all aircraft returned safely for a change with no losses.



A view down the fuselage of a Manchester, looking towards the tail turret. The very thin aluminium skin gave very little protection to red hot pieces of flak, flying about the sky

(Copyright World War 2 images)

In November 1941 we moved to Bottesford. After the pre-war luxury of RAF Waddington this was a severe shock to the system. Damp Nissen huts in dispersals for sleeping quarters, a central Nissen hut site for messes and ablutions, all separated from each other and the operations site by a mile or so of muddy paths. Woe betide if you strayed off a perimeter track when taxiing out; the wheel would sink axle deep in mud, blocking any following aircraft. It was in short, misery.

That month, the decision was made to cancel any further development of the Vulture engine, much to the relief of Rolls Royce. Although the maximum power had been marginally increased to give a slightly better take off performance, there was no prospect for any improvement in the aircraft's abysmal overall performance.

Bottesford was not a happy place for the air and ground crews alike, wet, muddy, poor accommodation, and no pubs nearby to drown their sorrows. Operations eventually got under way on the night of the 23 November 1941 with two aircraft being briefed to attack submarine pens at Lorient. That same day, a double engine failure caused a Manchester to crash, fortunately for the nine souls on board, in the ensuing crash; the tail of the aircraft broke off as it plunged into Fiskerton Lake, enabling all of the occupants to escape with only minor injuries.

December was a slow month for 207 with work being carried out on the aircraft's manifolds that took four days to complete. Many crews took the opportunity for some leave. It wasn't until January 1942 that *Thos* was to be back on operations, but the first one of the month certainly focused his attention.



A 207 Squadron Avro Manchester which crashed into Fiskerton Lake on 4 December 1941, after double engine failure, whilst en route to RAF Waddington

(Hillier)

On January 2 1942 I was back flying Manchesters and we had been briefed to do a low level attack on the Prinz Eugen in the harbour at St Nazaire. After some difficulty in finding the target due to cloud cover we started the run in through heavy flak at about 1500 feet. I selected the bomb doors open and the hydraulics failed. They only opened a little bit so we did everything we could to get these damn doors open, but we roared over the battleship not doing any harm to it at all but getting all the attention. There was heavy flak and we were hit several times.



A vertical aerial reconnaissance photograph of St Nazaire, though on this occasion it is not *Prinz Eugen* that is passing through the lock gate but two U-boats – (A) and (B). St Nazaire was the target for 207 Squadron on the night of the 2

January
(Martin Mace/HMP)

We got quite a bit of damage and the navigator was not any use at all, I'm not sure if the lights failed in his compartment, so I worked out a route home and the wireless operator got out a distress call. As we neared the coast, our searchlight batteries came on and pointed in the direction of the nearest airfield which was Exeter. This was only a fighter station with a short grass strip. On the approach I found that, due to the hydraulic failure neither the undercarriage nor flaps would come down so I had to blow down the undercarriage using the emergency system. We still had a full bomb load, I didn't know if the bombs had fused or not. This meant a high speed flapless landing with the inability to retract the undercarriage should it be necessary to slow the aircraft down after landing.

I managed to make full use of the landing run and fortunately the brakes still worked so I was able to avoid any further damage to the aircraft. That was the smoothest landing I ever did. And the most nerve-racking.

On the night of the 9 January 1942, bad weather again hampered operations and *Thos* and his crews efforts against Brest were thwarted due to 10/10s cloud cover. The targets were the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*, targets that had been receiving attention from the RAF for some time. On this particular raid 82 aircraft of various types took part and flak was reported as heavy but inaccurate over the target.

Throughout 1941 the German battle-cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had been taking refuge in the French port of Brest. They were soon to be joined by the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* which had recently left the battle-cruiser *Bismarck* to its fate at the hands of a British Navy determined to avenge the sinking of HMS *Hood*. Responsible for heavy losses of allied shipping in the North Atlantic, they were subject to constant surveillance and regular air raids from the other side of the Channel as the British ensured they remain bottled-up on France's Atlantic coast. One of the reasons the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had been unable to assist the *Bismarck*.



The German capital ship *Scharnhorst* pictured at Brest in 1941. Note the damage to the buildings in the foreground caused by the various attacks by the crews and aircraft of Bomber Command. 207 were sent to this target on the 9 January but were thwarted by cloud cover

(Courtesy of Chris Goss)



A low-level oblique photographic-reconnaissance image of the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* in dry dock at Brest on 26 January 1941. The picture was taken during a “Dicing” sortie by Pilot Officer J.D. Chandler, of No.1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, who, having taken off from St Eval in Cornwall, was flying a Supermarine Spitfire PR Mark IG. Occasionally it was necessary for a PRU pilot to obtain photographic-reconnaissance images at a low level, as opposed to the high altitudes commonly flown at. These low-level missions, which could be as low as 100 feet, were extremely dangerous, the aircraft involved coming within range of small and high calibre anti-aircraft weapons. Consequently, such flights became known as “Dicing” sorties – short for “dicing with death”. The original wartime caption for this image states: “The hull, funnel and bridge are dazzle painted. The hatch to the aircraft hangar is open.”

(Martin Mace/HMP)

The 14 January saw the loss of two crews after a raid on the Blohm and Voss shipyards, one aircraft crashing it was surmised through technical problems and killing the crew, the other succumbing to the lethal guns of another night fighter.

The squadron was still dogged with engine trouble and the days of the Manchester were numbered as 207 Conversion Flight was formed at RAF Bottesford on the 16 January 1942. Its role was two-fold, one to train replacement crews and secondly to convert crews onto the new four engine Lancaster. No doubt a sigh of relief could be heard amongst the crews when the first Lancaster arrived later that month. Despite all the tinkering and alterations to the Manchester the engines were really never any good and caused the death of a number of crews, *Thos* reckons his chances of engine failure were reduced due to his method of handling the engines.

The technique those days was to fly with high boost and low revs which in theory gave the best range on the aircraft. It meant that the engines were trundling around in top gear at low speed, so I reversed the procedure against standing orders and used to fly my aircraft at high revs and low boost, so it whined a bit and used more fuel but it seemed to be a bit happier and that's why I reckon I survived much longer than other people.

On the night of the 25 January, piloting L7486 *Thos* took off at 6:12 p.m., heading back to Brest, The RAF still determined to sink those battle cruisers, *Scharnhorst*, and the *Gneisenau*.

At the end of the month the crew were briefed for a navigation training flight in Manchester L7486. This particular flight was eventful for reasons other than the reliability of Manchester.

Shortly after take-off from RAF Bottesford on the NFT, my aircraft was subjected to a rapid build up of glazed ice which quickly obscured all effective forward vision. I immediately broadcast an order for all aircraft airborne to land immediately at RAF Waddington, which at that time was still a grass airfield. We had to use our clear vision panel to judge the approach. I landed without incident and as we were taxiing in, I watched another Manchester L7486 on its approach. I saw it fly straight into the

ground, crumpling its undercarriage as it did so. I have never encountered such a rapid build up of glazed ice since in all my years of flying!

This episode illustrates that weather was still a major factor in the success or failure of operations and was not to be underestimated. Fortunately L7486 was subsequently repaired after it's prang and returned to service with 50 Squadron.

February saw a task of a different nature for *Thos* as he and his crew flew down to Boscombe Down in Manchester L7378 and then on to Weston Super Mare, where experimental mines were fitted for a series of trials, returning to Bottesford on the 8 February. *Thos* recalls that this was not the standard method of dropping mines.

Mines were normally dropped as I recall, at low level with partial flap down. These trials, we were told were to develop a weapon that could be dropped at cruising speed or above. Our task was to drop them at high speed and low level off the end of the pier in Sandy Bay where they were recorded. Whether they were prototype mines or other weapons, I could not be certain as security was, of course, intense.

In February 1942, Adolf Hitler, in need of his ships for the defence of German occupied Norway and for intercepting supply convoys bound for the Soviet Union, ordered the return of the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* and a plan was put forward to break the ships out and make for Germany via the English Channel, passing through the Straits of Dover. Some thirty escort ships were to accompany the cruisers, which themselves had been fitted with extra anti-aircraft defences. They were not expecting an easy time off it.

The newly appointed Commander of the Luftwaffe's Fighter Arm, Oberst Adolf Galland, was personally tasked by Hitler to provide air cover for the convoy during its dash. On 11 February 1942 under cover of darkness, the cruisers slipped undetected into the English Channel and made for the Straits at great speed.

The start of the operation was delayed by several hours due to yet another RAF raid on the harbour. Relying on the element of surprise and subject to complete secrecy during its planning, Operation Cerberus finally got underway. An operation, that was to become known as the Channel Dash.

It was a cold day with 10/10s cloud cover, the news arrived at Bomber Command HQ just after 11:00 a.m. that the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* accompanied by a strong escort of destroyers with fighter cover had sailed from Brest, which prompted a huge air effort to try and stop the ships making the home ports in Germany. If they were to succeed, they could wreak havoc in the North Sea. 207 were one of the squadrons briefed to take part in the operation to stop the convoy.

On February 12 1942 I was sitting in my office having my portrait drawn by Cuthbert Orde, my adjutant came in and said "the battleships have escaped, briefing at 02:30 p.m.". I had to sit there looking unmoved. We briefed, and on take off a fountain of hydraulic fluid came out in the cockpit, I turned and landed before I lost all hydraulics on the aircraft. The ground crew worked on the aircraft all afternoon and that night we dropped mines in front of the ships. In retrospect our earlier sorties with 500lb bombs would have done nothing against those ships, a mine would have been much more effective. In some ways I was quite relieved to have a hydraulic failure.

Operation 'Fuller' was hastily implemented by Bomber and Coastal Command and a mixed bag of 242 aircraft were launched in daylight to deal with the problem. 207 Squadron put up four aircraft

but only one found any ships and dropped their bombs with no result. This was in itself a very brave effort by the crew, who in adverse weather conditions, with heavy enemy fighter escort and a sky rammed full of aircraft under no control, managed to locate and drop their bombs. A miracle in its own right. The captain of the Manchester, Flight Sergeant J C Atkinson was awarded the DFC for his part in the operation. The RAF and Navy lost 42 aircraft in total with many more damaged, with little success to show for it.

The ground crew worked on L7485, EM-D all afternoon to make it ready for night mining operations, the target area being the River Elbe mouth. *Thos* took off at 10:58 p.m. and returned at 04:43 a.m. with his entire load of mines due to another hydraulic failure which stopped them being able to open their bomb bay doors yet again. The frustration must have been awful, flying a five hour sortie and not being able to carry out the operation successfully, with the increased risk of having to land back with a full load of mines. Manchester L7485 was later put on charge with 106 Squadron and was subsequently lost on operations on the night of the 16 April 1942.

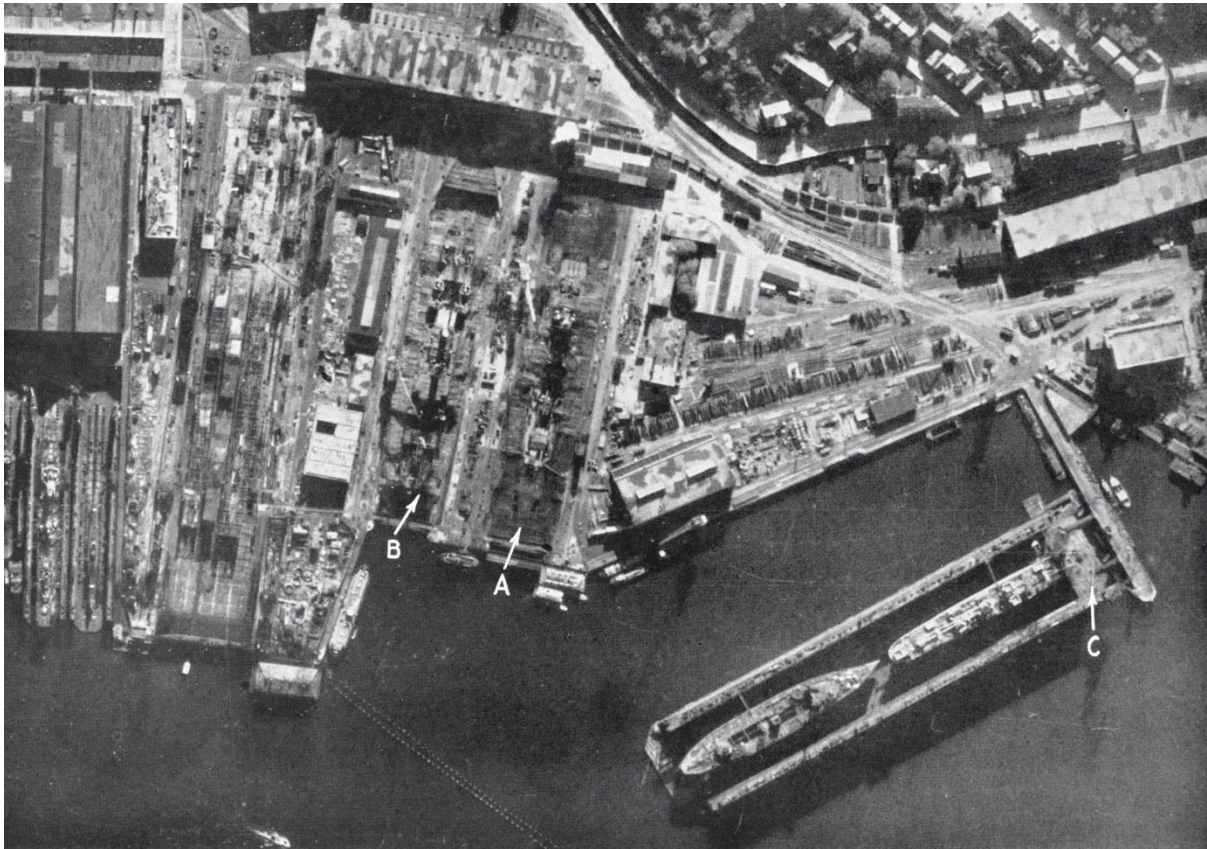
It was during February 1942 that the Japanese attacked Singapore and despite a gallant effort by the defending army, the British were to suffer a humiliating defeat and Singapore was handed over on the 15 of February. *Thos* had not seen his family since 1938 when they had all moved to Singapore. He was not to find out what happened to his family until April of that year. This must have caused a fair amount of anguish for *Thos* as he waited to find out their fate.



A paper clipping, kept by *Thos* of his elder and younger sisters in Singapore

(Murray)

There was not much time for contemplation and it was soon back into action with four Manchesters briefed for operations over Kiel on the 25 February including the crew of L7486, with *Thos* at the controls carrying one, 4000lb and four, 500lb bombs, the target being the Deutscherwerke shipyards. *Thos* returned to base due to excessive engine vibration and another aircraft returned with intercom failure, leaving only two aircraft to drop their load over the target. The same target was attacked two nights later on which *Thos* was able to drop his bombs successfully but the results could not be observed due to the cloud cover over the target, a round trip of seven hours.



Thos was briefed to attack Kiel on the night of the 25 February, only two aircraft made the target, the others suffering technical issues. Camouflage netting covers the pocket battleship *Lutzow* (A) and a liner (B) at Kiel. The original caption states: "Strips of netting are stretched from the dockside over the decks and lower parts of the superstructure. Note the netting over the end of a vessel in the floating dock (C)."

(Martin Mace/HMP)

March saw the conversion flight now turning out one trained crew per week and it wouldn't be long for *Thos* and his crew to wait to get their hands on the new Lancasters. First they had to survive two further operations on the Manchester. The first of those in March occurred on the night of the 3rd, when Bomber Command sent 235 aircraft to attack the Renault vehicle factory at Billancourt, a suburb of Paris. This was the largest formation sent to a single target so far in the war and the bombers attacked in three waves.

Seven Manchesters from 207 Squadron took part including *Thos* and his crew flying L7486. The target was well marked with flares and was well alight with incendiary devices making the target easy to identify. Over 461 tons of bombs were dropped that night on the factory which was totally devastated. Unfortunately and inevitably there was some collateral damage, 367 French citizens were killed, 341 badly injured and 9250 people lost their homes.

The crew's final operation was to Essen on the 8 March 1942, rounding off 20 operations for *Thos* on the type. This raid was the first to employ the use of Gee navigational and target identification sets installed in some of the bombers which aided in finding the targets and bombing accurately. 211 Bombers took part that night, 82 with Gee fitted. The first wave of Gee equipped aircraft dropped flares, followed by aircraft dropping incendiaries. Unfortunately a number of these were dropped after the flares had extinguished and scattered fires started in various parts of the town. This made accurate bombing impossible. *Thos* was also convinced that the Germans had employed the use of

dummy fires to distract the bomber force.

The night of the 8 March was one of the worst trips I had to the Ruhr. I had been here many times before. The target was the Krupps Factory at Essen and I could see the main force bombing a dummy target 10 miles to the north of Essen. I was watching these aircraft but I managed to drop my bombs at the Krupps factory, the actual target. My photo flash went off and I could see I was on target, but the intelligence people said the photo didn't come out clearly as they wouldn't dare admit that the main force had bombed a dummy target. At that point the whole of the Essen anti-aircraft defence opened up. Until then they had kept quite hoping I would go away I think.

Luckily for me one of the other members of the squadron was behind me so at least two aircraft got their bombs on target. I did everything I could do to get out of that flak. I really thought we had had it, I dived down from 22000 feet to 3000 feet to get out, I threw all of my experience at it, and I actually wept at that time, not for me but for betraying the crew. I was an experienced operational pilot and everything I knew didn't seem to work. Then all went quiet, they gave up or I got out of range and I flew back at low level. We got badly peppered and had quite a bit of damage but we got back. The Germans were good at setting spoof fires to distract the bombers. It was quite common.

Of those bombers who took part, 168 claimed they had bombed the target but in reality the brunt of the attack fell on the southern outskirts and neighbouring towns of Hamborn, Duisberg and Oberhausen. Not a great success despite the use of the new navigational aid.

The final operation of the Manchester occurred on the 8 March 1942. After that the squadron was stood down to convert onto the Lancaster. At least we had a reliable aircraft with an excellent bomb load, rate of climb and service ceiling. It was heavier on the ailerons than the Manchester due to the extra wing span.



Thos re-united with a Lancaster at RAF Hendon in 2013, a type that he converted to from its forerunner the Avro Manchester

(Hillier)

The Lancaster also had similar crew to the Manchester which had seven crew. The crew for the Lancaster was made up of a pilot, flight engineer, navigator, wireless operator, bomb aimer and two air gunners. The Lancaster differed in that there was no second pilot position as in the Manchester; this had been taken up by a flight engineer's panel whose job it was to monitor the engines and fuel in flight as well as hydraulics and other systems, greatly reducing the workload of a pilot. If the pilot was injured, both aircraft had room to move the pilot out and give the crew chance to make it back home, something that was very difficult in the early Hampden.

Neither aircraft had underside turrets for defence but I don't think it would have changed our loss rate as really the air gunners were not a lot of use as the Germans would attack the port outer engine, killing the hydraulics and putting the turrets out of action! Also the guns were not of sufficient calibre to cause enough damage. Some aircraft did fly with two .50 calibre machine guns in the rear turrets in place of the .303 machine guns we carried.

Since the date of commencement of operations on the type, the squadron had been sent on 370 bombing sorties, 48 mining sorties and twelve leaflet drops, a grand total of 430 operations. During this time nineteen aircraft had been lost on bombing or mining sorties and a further six on accidents. No one on the unit had managed to complete a full tour of operations on the type. Also it is worth noting that of the 202 Manchester aircraft built; nearly 40% were lost on operations and a further 25% written off in crashes of various causes. Overall the Manchesters completed 1269 sorties and dropped over 1,826 tons of bombs. It made a contribution to the war effort despite its shortcomings and no doubt aided in the development of the Lancaster. (12)

On the 18 April *Thos* received a phone call from a PA to an Air Marshall at the Air Ministry to inform him that his mother and one of his sisters had arrived home from Singapore and were waiting for him at Liverpool having arrived by ship. *Thos* took a spare aircraft and flew up to Speke airfield to see them both. He made his way to the Adelphi hotel and found his mother and sister Elspeth sat on their luggage like refugees in the hotel lobby. At first his mother did not recognise him as he had lost quite a bit of weight and hair too. His sister ran over to him, recognising him straight away. An optional reunion for some of the family.

He took them to his aunt's cottage in the Lake District and managed to get a week's leave with them to catch up on events and find out about the rest of his family after the fall of Singapore.

Fortunately my father got out to Australia on one of three boats, the ones in front and behind were both torpedoed by the Japanese. My father was lucky to survive. My sister Jan, had married Tim Vigors, a fighter pilot who had fought in the Battle of Britain. He was shot down trying to cover the battleships off Singapore. He was brought in from the jungle by natives, badly burned. He got out through Sumatra and to India. Jan used to tell me that he slept on the top bunk and he would bail out of bed at night, thinking he was still in his burning aircraft. He was plagued with nightmares. My sister Barbara married a sapper by the name of Jim Gavin. As an army officer they were only allowed to take immediate family with them, so he asked Barbara to marry him so he could evacuate her too. They both got out to Ceylon by sailing a fishing boat. My twin sister Elspeth had married a Manchester Regiment officer who was captured by the Japanese and put to work on the jungle railways. He fortunately did survive that. I had to fight a war not knowing what had happened to them for quite some time.

The squadron commenced Lancaster operations in late April 1942 and I flew my last operation of my tour on the 2 May to Danzig, at last, in a Lancaster. It had been a long and stressful tour which began only a few weeks after the first tentative operations of the squadron. I had lost many personal friends and comrades including Dave Romans DFC and Peter Burton-Gyles DFC. I confess I was relieved when it was over.

Flying Officer David Romans was a Canadian, born in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. He had joined the RAF in 1939 and had seen action with 44 Squadron on Hampdens prior to a tour on Manchesters. He was awarded the DFC in 1940, the citation for the award reads: - 'on the night of the 18 July 1940, whilst carrying out a bombing attack on Eschwege aerodrome at approximately 5000 ft in Hampden P1324, the aircraft was hit by an anti-aircraft shell rendering the pilot, Pilot Officer W Walker unconscious, he had received a shrapnel wound to the head which later proved fatal. The navigator/bomb aimer, Pilot Officer D A Romans, climbed into the cockpit and sat on the pilot's knees initially and flew the aircraft safely back to base'. The pilot was removed from under David after he had regained control of the aircraft after 20 minutes flying at low level through intense flak. An incredible feat, bearing in mind the cockpit was only three feet wide! Twice during his tours with 44 Squadron he had crashed into the English Channel and survived, as a result he gained the nickname 'duck feet'. He later went on to fly The B17C and it was whilst flying an operation near the Norwegian coast on September the 8th 1941, that he and his crew were shot down by a Bf 109. The aircraft went straight down in a mountainous area and unfortunately all on board were killed. (13)

Having completed 62 operational sorties, it was in July 1942 that Squadron Leader Thomas Murray was recognised for his leadership and experience with a Bar to his DFC, which was announced in the London Gazette on the 11 August 1942, the citation reads:-

'This officer has been one of the most successful operational pilots in the squadron. He has made a close study of enemy defences and tactics and the most advantageous methods to be employed against them.

The knowledge he has acquired from practical experience has proved to be of the greatest value in training new and inexperienced crews in operational flying and I consider is partly due to his efforts that the casualties in this squadron have been exceptionally light.

Squadron Leader Murray has shown the greatest determination in bombing his primary targets. The enthusiasm he has shown in striking at the enemy and the high standard of flying which he possesses have set a magnificent example to other personnel in the squadron'.

Due to the troubles with the aircraft and a succession of squadron commanders who neither flew nor operated, it lowered morale to a level from which the squadron never recovered until it received Lancasters in 1942. The squadron badly needed leadership which was the one thing we did not get. We had often not been able to find our targets and our loss rates had been high, we certainly were not doing much damage to Germany. Once we got target markers, radar and pathfinders we got much more accurate.

I was always nervous of flying the Manchester, a bit demoralising. Sometimes you would get an odd Bunsen burner effect on the exhaust stubs, catching fire. Not good over enemy territory as it gave your position away. One was always nervous about fire more than anything else.

One of my greatest friends I reckon was my service .38 revolver and I had it with one round in the second chamber so you had to click it twice. I kept it in my flying boot. The thing that gave me the most fear was burning to death. You saw a lot of it when you were flying over Germany on operations, you would see a plume of flames, and another aircraft had been shot down! It was pretty horrific and as captain you knew you would never leave the aircraft, well I never would. You never knew if your crew were alright. It would have to be a very controlled operation in which your crew, rear gunner etc could say 'ok skip' they had all got out. So I never held a prospect of being able to leave the aircraft if you were being shot down. So the gun was for me, you never felt you would have to face that last bit. It was good for my morale.

I started the squadron as a flying officer, then became a flight commander and at the end of my tour I was acting squadron commander, bearing in mind I was only 23 at the time it was a pretty rapid promotion.

Like all crews *Thos* was suffering from fatigue and in need of some respite. It was bad enough having to fly long trips at night with the odds of finding the target and returning in one piece being slim. Add in the weather conditions, aircraft reliability issues, flak, searchlights, risk of collision and enemy night fighters into the mix, the mental strain was exceptionally high. There is no surprise that crews had started to refuse to return to operations because they just couldn't face it, anxiety and fear getting the better of them. Post traumatic stress was not recognised at that stage and crews who refused to fly were often unceremoniously stripped of their flying brevets, demoted and branded LMF or lack of moral fibre. *Thos* experienced this phenomenon whilst on 207 Squadron.

People refer to this idea of LMF, or lack of moral fibre. I would say that when you got really tired, everyone was LMF. I should say I was jolly well LMF after taking off on my 60th trip, when the chances of survival were slim and you are getting more and more tired, when you know it's just luck really and the odds against your survival are getting slimmer and slimmer. I have no contempt for anyone who had LMF. I did have a Flight Sergeant who refused to fly; it's very difficult for a squadron commander to know what to do. I could have had him sent for court martial, but I had him off the station within 24 hours instead because of the possible effect on other personnel. I just got rid of him, he seemed very confident, he was not a nervous wreck, he just didn't want to get killed. I did not have much sympathy for him, he didn't seem a nervous wreck and he hadn't been flying long. I think I said he was unsuitable for operations rather than put him through a court martial.

My time with Manchesters was not over, however, as I remained with the squadron taking over the conversion flight from Peter Ward Hunt on the 18 May. Most of the training was on Manchesters, as few Lancasters could be spared for the purpose.

I left 207 Squadron in September 1942 to help convert 9 Squadron, known as 9 Con flight (recently arrived from 3 group) onto Lancasters at RAF Waddington. It was whilst I was at RAF Waddington that I was interviewed by the King who was visiting the stations. They chose me as I was the most experienced pilot at the time. The King was very worried about what we were all going to do after the war. At that stage we daren't think what we would do; I remember being completely nonplussed at the time as you didn't expect to survive.

They then formed 1661 OCU at RAF Winthorpe near Waddington and I took my flight and joined it within that organisation. Owing to the shortage of aircraft it was necessary again to train the crews

on Manchesters. A lengthy and I considered unnecessarily dangerous procedure as the aircraft were squadron throw outs, very unreliable and invariably unserviceable. My last Manchester flight was in late January 1943. I think I must hold the record of flying hours on that unfortunate aircraft. I think I was the third highest in the number of operations carried out in the Manchester, with 20 operations.



A hurried snapshot of Squadron Leader T C Murray DFC* in the mess at RAF Waddington with the King whilst on 9 Conversion Flight

(Murray)



The King, inspecting Lancaster crews at RAF Waddington late 1942

(Murray)

Whilst I was on 1661 OCU, we had a case of sabotage with the ground crew reporting that on one aircraft the trimmer cable to the elevators had been partially sawn through near the retaining clip, so that it could not be seen. We thought that all this sort of stuff had finished at this stage of the war.

In 1943, I went to HQ Bomber Command Training Branch and also did a factory tour giving pep talks to raise morale. Having to talk to 2000 factory workers was a chore but they thought I was obviously good at it. I went round with 'Babe' Learoyd (VC). He was big man but a very gentle soul.

Staff duties were at first a bewildering business, Files came into the office at an alarming rate. I did not know where to put them or how to get rid of them so they steadily piled themselves around the

office walls. However despite the chaos, Bomber Command still appeared to function smoothly and at last I began to settle down to interesting work.

I was responsible for accident prevention and investigation so it was not all that much of a rest as you were dealing with death all the time and losses to accidents were high. It was very interesting but often harrowing. However I was pleased to see a descending graph in the accident rates and it was satisfying to feel an achievement. I worked for Air Vice Marshall Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, indirectly. I met him occasionally and I remember he had a bit of a temper, a bit of an explosive character. We had to man the ops rooms day and night and I would often meet him in the ops room. Our meetings were not in relation to my job.

Chapter 4



138 Squadron Crest

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Spies and Supplies

Thos remained on a ground tour from March 1943 until early November 1944. It was not really a rest as he was surrounded by accident reports, death and destruction. He was managing to get in some flying on twin engine Avro Ansons and Airspeed Oxfords from RAF Halton, where he had started his flying career. Part of his duties whilst he was at Bomber Command was to liaise with Irvin parachutes to develop a back type chute for use by the bomber crews instead of the seat type chute. He utilised the Oxford to fly between bomber bases to distribute the new chutes for testing.

After nearly an 18 month secondment to Bomber Command HQ he was ready to return to operations and a chance conversation lead to his posting as boss of 138 'Special Duties' Squadron.

I was talking to an officer in the mess and telling him I felt rested and ready to return to operations to complete another tour. I ideally wanted experience in another command, either fighter or coastal, but that was apparently impossible. I didn't know that the air officer in charge of training was listening in on my conversation and fortunately for me he then gave me command of 138 Squadron at RAF Tempsford, cloak and dagger stuff. There was a catch, the air officer told me that 'Bomber' Harris wanted 138 Squadron back in Bomber Command and it was my job to get them ready for that eventuality. I knew when I was posted that I was the 'Death Knell' for the squadron and I kept that bit pretty quiet.

138 Squadron, RAF was formed on 30 September 1918. Its beginnings were as a fighter-reconnaissance squadron, it was mid way through its formation at Chingford when the war ended and the squadron disbanded in February 1919. In its next incarnation from August 1941 until May 1945, 138 was reformed at Newmarket as a "Special Duties" squadron.

The squadron's Second World War activities began in 1941 after the formation of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) - an organisation whose function was to promote sabotage against the enemy. This was to be achieved by stimulating subversive activities, spreading political discontent, disorganising and dislocating communications. The agents, ammunition, explosives and equipment to achieve this were dropped inside enemy territory, the first being flown by Lysanders of 419 Flight (later 1419 Flight) which formed at North Weald in August 1940.

Very quickly the task grew too big for a solitary flight and although Bomber Command was hard pressed at that time for aircraft and crews, it was decided that the strategic importance of sabotage operations required the formation of a full squadron. 138 Squadron was re-formed at Newmarket in August 1941 from the nucleus of 1419 Flight to do the job; it was now re-designated 138 (Special Duties) Squadron.

For more than three and a half years the squadron ranged across Europe, from Norway in the north to Yugoslavia in the south and at times far into Poland. It first flew with Whitleys and Lysanders, then with Handley Page Halifaxes and later Short Stirlings. It operated from a number of RAF stations including Newmarket, Stradishall and Tempsford with, agents, arms, explosives, radio sets and all the other equipment of the saboteur, parachuting them down at rendezvous points where reception committees of local underground members waited. These reception committees would mark the drop zones with torches arranged in an 'L' shape to give the crews an aiming point. There was a training facility for the SOE, Norwegian section at Gaynes Hill, St Neotts close by the airfield at Tempsford, used to train agents. Later in the war, prior to a sortie, the 'Joes' would be moved from Gaynes Hill to Gibraltar Farm at the airfield prior to being flown to the drop zone or DZ by 138 or 161 Squadron.

RAF Henlow dealt with the mechanics of parachute drops, the contents of the packages were handled mainly by SOE's own packing unit which was also located at station 61 (Gaynes Hill). This station packed an unbelievable amount of equipment during the years of its existence, packing over 56,464 containers in 1944 and 4,334 in 1945. Since its beginning in 1941 it packed over 76,504 containers, a staggering 10,000 tons of equipment to be delivered by 161 and 138 Squadrons. At its height of operations it employed 150 personnel augmented by 96 soldiers and 100 RAF men. (14)

Another, but far less frequent, type of 'cloak and dagger' operation undertaken by 138 - beginning in September 1941 - was the 'pick up' in which the aircraft (either a Lysander or Hudson) landed to collect an agent, or special plans and articles, always on moonlight nights into rough and ready French fields. During 1942, the squadron operated with the bomber force when not required for special duties. The pickup role was later to become the main duty of 161 Squadron. During 1943 and 1944 the squadron were operating all over Europe and into North Africa. The squadron had faced considerable losses during that time as two crew of that period explain. Sergeant Mike Gibbons was a flight engineer on 138, starting his time with the unit in 1943.



A photo of Wing Commander Murray, taken whilst CO of 138 Squadron

(Murray)

Group Captain 'Mouse' Fielden was the station commander at RAF Tempsford at the time (he had been captain of the King's Flight) I was on 138 Squadron as a flight engineer on the Handley Page Halifax. I found the Halifax sturdy, strong and very reliable. Our sorties were at that stage to Denmark, Norway, Holland and France. All our operations were flown by moonlight, dropping spies, containers, pigeons and window etc. Our spies were driven from a barn on the airfield to the waiting aircraft. Some of our trips were very long, mostly about 8 hours at low level. By the time I turned 18, I had already completed five operational sorties.

Our crew didn't get intercepted that much at that stage; we were pretty lucky, mostly light flak and searchlights. We had a rear gunner but the .303 guns we had were useless and we had no mid upper gun, which allowed us to carry more supplies. The mid upper gunner was employed instead to drop the canisters or pigeons and help the spies. One night over Amsterdam at about 250 feet we were caught in a searchlight, a lot of light flak started coming up, it was very unpleasant. I was watching in the astrodome, behind the pilot, flak bursting all around us, each explosion sending thousands of shards of hot metal, searing through the night sky. We were dead lucky not to get hit, it was very unpleasant. I think I made a mess in my pants!

On one sortie in December 1943, our objective was in Southern France as at this stage of the war prior to D-Day we were still dropping supplies into France. This time we did get intercepted by a night fighter, a Me 110. He knocked out our starboard engine, causing us to lose a lot of fuel. It was my job as the flight engineer to manage the engines, props and fuel and work out our most economical flight home. We managed to climb into clouds and lost contact with the night fighter. We were very lucky.

We got back to England but the whole of the South was covered in fog so we couldn't land back at RAF Tempsford. We flew to Woodbridge in Suffolk, all the time running out of fuel, and with fog everywhere. You really couldn't see a thing. After four attempts to find the airfield the skipper decided to give the order to bail out. I remember that night clearly because it was also my 19th Birthday.

I jumped out but unfortunately my parachute didn't open properly. I kept pulling and pulling but it wouldn't open. I dropped a few hundred feet and kept on pulling like mad at the release handle but

only the flaps opened. I thought I had had it. All of a sudden the ground came up. I was very lucky; I landed in a field and apart from bruises I was not injured. I walked for about half an hour in the cold and the wet fog and I came to a farm house. The turkeys, geese, sheep and cows all started making a racket and I knocked on the farmhouse door and waited a few minutes. The farmer opened a window and pointed a 12 bore shotgun at me and said 'be you one of them or one of ours' I shouted 'I'm one of us!' He came down stairs and let me in; his wife gave me some breakfast.

When I got back to the squadron and I went to see the Group Captain Fielden, he said 'you might as well go on leave as we have no aircraft; you were the only survivors'. We were due to get replacements by the end of December. When we got back from leave there were still no aircraft available so we had to wait until early January. We restarted our operations on the 4 January 1944. I was awarded the DFM in that year and by the time I left the squadron I had completed 40 operational sorties.

December of 1943 had been a bad month for the RAF Tempsford (Special Duties) squadrons with the loss of eight Halifaxes, a large proportion of its available aircraft. Also the sad loss of 21 aircrew killed due to a mixture of causes including bad weather or night fighters. Success was at a considerable cost and by the time Sergeant Bill Stoneman, a rear gunner arrived in March 1944, things had not improved greatly.

I went to 138 Squadron on the 16 March 1944; losses were quite high at the beginning. I was a rear gunner and eventually carried out 32 operational sorties, 13 with different crews. The reason for this is that the first pilot I was to fly with, Sid Godfrey a Canadian, went to Holland on his very first trip as second dickie, (second pilot) the aircraft got shot down, only he and the dispatcher survived, the rest of the crew were all killed. As a result I became a spare gunner, when ever required, I had a good tour. I was on the Halifax to start with my first sortie being on the 5 April 1944, with Flight Sergeant Jones as captain. On my first trip, we landed back at Exeter due to fog. All of our trips at this stage were by moonlight.

I flew in the Halifax to start and then up until the end of my tour the Stirling. The Stirling was a damn good aircraft, good for carrying supplies; they called it the 'flying solenoid'. It had a few teething troubles to start with on the cooling system but they eventually ironed that out.

Both the Halifax and Stirling were both very good for the role. The Halifax had the Boulton Paul turret with a joystick control and the Stirling had the Frazer Nash turret like the Lancaster, with a handlebar type control. Out of all the operations I did, only one was marked down as duty not carried out. We had an experienced pilot and our crew achieved most operations successfully.

That particular sortie marked in my log book as DNCO (duty not carried out) was when we had been briefed to fly to RAF Blida in North Africa on the 9 July 1944, from RAF Tempsford. A long sortie of 7 hours 30 minutes, dropping agents and supplies into the south of France and then flying down to Algeria to re-fuel and pick up more supplies. We flew back on the 11 July 1944, with an aircraft full of supplies for the Maquis. We took off at 08:50 p.m. with Flight Lieutenant Walker DFC, at the controls. He was a Canadian chap, an excellent pilot.

Just after take-off, about 40 miles from Algiers, there was an almighty bang. We were flying over a hospital ship at the time, an Italian ship commandeered by the British with a medical crew on board. We later found out that one chap had gone up on to the deck for a crafty smoke as we flew over and

as he did so he noticed a Ju 88 above the ship in the moonlight. Then seconds after he heard a bang as the night fighter attacked our aircraft. We didn't see it; we think he came in underneath us. I didn't see him. We crashed into the sea; we were in our dinghy for 50 minutes.

The dinghy didn't automatically open. It should have come out on an immersion switch in the wing. The bomb aimer held me into the fuselage so I could reach a dinghy release near the top hatch, I can even see it all now in my mind's eye, I turned it and the dinghy came out. As the aircraft went down we could see the fin and the rudder rise up in the water and heard cries for help but there was nothing we could do. The navigator, Flying Officer Farr, unfortunately went down with the aircraft and was killed. A real shame as he was the only married man in the crew. We were picked up by a boat from the hospital ship, we were very lucky. We had two big yellow overload tanks in the fuselage full of 100 octane fuel, they split but didn't explode, and the stink of the fuel mixed with salt water was terrible.

As a result of his actions on this sortie Sergeant Bill Stoneman as he was at this stage in the war was awarded a DFM, the citation for the award reads:-

'As air gunner, this airman has participated in many operational missions and has displayed commendable skill and zeal. On one occasion the aircraft in which he was a member of the crew sustained such damage that the pilot was forced to bring it down onto the sea. As the aircraft touched down there was an inrush of water in the escape hatch of the rear of the aircraft, which flooded the compartment whilst the aircraft interior became filled with petrol fumes. Several members of the crew became partially overcome and in danger of asphyxiation. The dinghy had failed to release. Sergeant Stoneman quickly appreciated the danger and climbed forward to a position from which he released the dinghy manually and afterwards assisted some of the crew members out of the aircraft. His promptitude and resource contributed in good measure to the ultimate safety of his distressed comrades.

The pilot was awarded the DSO, the aircraft was bucking and falling like a sycamore seed, we were being thrown about all over the shop and the pilot did a splendid job to get the aircraft down in one piece. The controls had been seriously damaged. We were lucky the sea was calm when we ditched as well as the aircraft may have broken up in a heavy swell.

At the end of July 1944, Flight Sergeant Fred Bowman who had joined the Royal Australian Air Force arrived at RAF Tempsford. He had trained as a wireless operator and after crewing up at the conversion unit they were asked if they would like to volunteer to serve on a special duty squadron of Bomber Command. They were told it required skill in low flying, navigation and map reading. They volunteered and he and his crew were posted to 138 Squadron. He and the crew started operations into France as he describes.

The first ones we did were to France, which was to supply the Free French not the Vichy French. We only had one pilot and the co-pilot seat was usually taken up by the bomb aimer but as we approached the enemy coast he had to go down into the nose, to do his map reading and he would map read us all the way, from the enemy coast to the drop zone. So when he went down there, I went up and sat in the co-pilot's seat. From there I had a fantastic view of all that was going on. You had to be pretty good with your navigation when you were approaching the enemy coast because you had to know exactly where you were and where you wanted to cross in. The flak positions and

fighter strips were marked on our maps and you wouldn't want to be flying up and down the coast trying to find out where you were because you could be quite easily be picked up visually. As we approached the drop zone we had the bomb doors and trapdoor open awaiting a signal from the resistance group, just a torch signal, usually a morse letter.

This was a bit dicky too, as you are making these approaches you wondered whether the Germans had got there first and taken over the drop zone, instead of getting the torch signal we would get the wrong end of a German machine gun! It was very exciting as we made these approaches because we were all looking out for the signal on the ground and when we got it the resistance guys would come out and they would be waving to us. We would make the drop and they would be running towards the parachutes as they were floating down. They would gather them up and put them in whatever transport they had and get out as quickly as they could. Right under the noses of the Germans.



The crew of Stirling 'D' dog, left to right, Bill Clarkson mid upper gunner, 'Bunny'Skinner, flight engineer, Fred Bowman, wireless\air gunner, Bill Cowlson, rear gunner, Hec Shaw, pilot, Roy Buckingham, bomb aimer. Taken at RAF Tempsford

(Bowman)

Thos arrived in November of 1944 and took command on the 20 December, replacing Wing Commander Wilfred Burnett DFC. By then, most of the operations being carried out by the unit were over Denmark and Norway flying the Short Stirling. The Stirling was the first four engined British heavy bomber of the Second World War. It was designed and built by Short Brothers to an Air Ministry specification dating back to 1936, and entered service in 1941. The Stirling had a relatively brief operational career as a bomber, being relegated to second line duties from 1943 onwards when other four-engine RAF bombers, specifically the Handley Page Halifax and Avro Lancaster, took over its role, but it fulfilled a major role as a glider tug and resupply aircraft during the allied invasion of Europe in 1944-1945 as well as the special duties role.

Thos mainly flew the Mk IV version which had no nose or dorsal turrets. It was a big aircraft, powered by four 1,635 hp Bristol Hercules VI engines; it could carry up to twenty fully armed paratroopers. Its range with a load of 3,500 lb was 2,010 miles; it was an ideal and versatile aircraft for the 138 squadron role. The squadron had received Stirlings in August of 1944 carrying out its first

operation on the type on the night of the 28 August. *Thos* arrived on the squadron at a time when the crew's morale was poor due to high losses and he soon set about redressing the situation and changing the tactics employed in an effort to increase survival rates.

RAF Tempsford was highly secret, thought itself rather glamorous and definitely a closed shop. Our masters were SOE. The other Squadron, 161 operated primarily for SIS or the Secret Intelligence Service. We took on each other's targets as and when required.

When I got to the squadron in November 1944 we were flying Stirlings, morale was not very good as no one had survived a tour of operations. I immediately expired two crews who had completed 28 sorties. That had an immediate effect on morale. Behind the facade lurked inefficiency and slothfulness. Squadron admin was virtually non-existent; no records were kept, because as my adjutant said, the operations were of such a highly secret nature that nothing was allowed to be put down on paper. The letter containing these instructions had already been destroyed. The work and type of operations were most interesting, not too dangerous and full of incident.



138 Squadron crew members relaxing in between sorties at RAF Tempsford

(Hillier)

To give an idea of losses for 138 Squadron for 1944, three did not return in August and five in September for various reasons including flak, weather and night fighters. Success on these operations was dependant on good weather, successful navigation and a reception committee at the drop zones. The month prior to Wing Commander Murray's arrival, a 161 Squadron Stirling had been intercepted by a night fighter on an operation known as *TABLEJAM* which entailed dropping supplies in Denmark. Its bomb aimer Wing Officer R F Philip was killed and the remaining crew evaded capture with two becoming PoW. Something had to be done to reduce the casualty rate and *Thos* soon set about changing some of the established tactics.

By this stage operations were mainly over Denmark and Norway as the war had progressed and ops were not required over France. I did a few operations over Holland, but by then the Germans had broken the Resistance so our role was to fly parallel to the coast to pick up radio messages from the Resistance.

For Denmark, I introduced the tactic of approaching at high altitude to use H2S for navigation then at 80 miles we would change course towards the coast and drop down to not higher than 80 feet. As we crossed the Danish coast, we climbed up to 400 feet to get a fix and then continued at no greater than that height. 400 feet was the minimum to drop canisters. We had a three light indicator in the cockpit which was green, red and amber which helped us fly at 80 feet on the run in.

Over Norway the tactic had to be different because of the height of the surrounding terrain. We would cross in over the coast at about 4000 feet, below the ridge height of the mountains which meant we could not be detected by radar. We crossed at points given to us by the Norwegian resistance with the least flak which was very useful. Then we would drop down to follow the terrain. Immediately the casualty rate went down. We only operated in moonlight; there was quite a good fighter defence by this stage. The Luftwaffe would carry out their standards procedure; the Germans were very good at procedures. They stuck with flying under the aircraft to strafe the belly. Of course at this height they would fly into the ground! In the end we felt pretty immune from them.



A 138 Squadron crew in front of a Stirling at RAF Tempsford, Squadron codes were NF

(Hillier)

Sergeant Stoneman as a rear gunner recalls having a few engagements with night fighters but often it was the low flying that saved the aircraft:

We would often get intercepted by fighters and it seems strange, we were so low, you saw them going the other way. If you saw them you would alert the pilot and he would fly lower, they couldn't get a bead on you as we flew so low, they couldn't get underneath you. We would get away with it. I fired my guns a few times, mostly at night fighters nosing around.

We were taught at gunnery school to wait until the target filled your ring and bead sight. I would just open up when I saw something. Later on after the war I was serving in Germany, I went to a party and met two men wearing bomber jackets; they turned out to be night fighter pilots, lovely chaps. They told me they were mainly pitted against Bomber Command. If they found one bomber with guns blazing and the rear gunner therefore awake, they would go off and find another whose gunners were dozing, the sky was full of aircraft; they had plenty to choose from. If anyone opened fire, why would they hang around being fired at?



Squadron Leader Bill Stoneman DFM, photo taken in 1945, a rear gunner on 138 Squadron

(Photo Squadron Leader Stoneman)

Thos had a dilemma to consider as the squadron boss, he did not have a regular crew to fly with. He was determined to lead by example and fly on operations, so he decided on a different approach, easing new crews into the special duties role.

It was difficult as a CO operating as you were not given a crew; so many CO's didn't fly. I started off by taking all my leaders, gunnery, nav etc as crew but then it occurred to me that if we got the chop the squadron would be headless. That was too much to risk so I decided to fly with new crews and to show them what was expected.

Each of the crew members would be briefed by their own trade leader, the navigator and pilot would attend the main briefings, then each crew member would be off to sort out preparations for their individual roles. Sergeant Stoneman as an air gunner remembers that they were not briefed all together.

At RAF Tempsford we were briefed by the gunnery leader, we were not briefed with the rest of the crew. We would test fire the guns in the afternoon with the armourers and make sure it was all tickety boo. We were not told the target; however I had done so many trips over France that on one occasion I told the skipper he should have turned at that last bridge. I knew where I was going. It was all very clear in the moonlight.

Thos, having flown the Lancaster, was not taken with the handling of the Stirling at the critical stages of the operation, the takeoff and landing. A number of the squadron's aircraft were written off due to its notorious swing on takeoff.

I started my operations here on Stirlings. It was a pig of an aircraft to land, and not easy to take off as the rudder was not effective until it was raised up into the slipstream. To keep it straight you had to juggle the throttles, you had to lead the starboard throttles by two inches and juggle with them if she started to swing which was always tricky. Once you were in the air she was very nice to fly with a great turning circle. You could turn inside an Fw 190. Most of our operations at this stage were done at low level. It was not good at high altitude as the engines were not supercharged.

The low level flying took its toll on the pilots and crew, a mentally and physically demanding job, hauling the aircraft around, fighting against the updraughts and downdraughts found in and around the Norwegian Fjords as Sergeant Stoneman describes.

That low flying in moonlight was quite difficult and it affected some pilots and crew. We had quite a problem with mental health on 138 Squadron; quite a few aircrews developed a twitch. My wireless operator developed quite a significant twitch. I always used to think that at least if we were fired at either by flak or fighters, at least I could do something about it, the navigator and the wireless operator had to just stay at their posts. We went at very low level on the way over and had to climb at the coast. On one flight we had entered Sweden to make our approach to the DZ. Over Norway it was quite physical work due to the terrain, you could hear the pilot's heavy breathing over the intercom as he fought the down and updraughts around the fjords.

Thos recalled that as well as taking the normal supplies they also carried some feathered friends.

We always flew with two carrier pigeons and it was hoped that if you force landed you could put messages on them to return home. It was the responsibility of the mid upper gunner to look after them and if there was chance he would let them off. I think sometimes we dropped some pigeons with the agents.

Sergeant Stoneman remembers that they used to pick them up from Gibraltar Farm.

We would go down to Gibraltar Farm to pick up pigeons. We used to drop pigeons from the aircraft in a canister. It was the dispatcher's role to drop them out. We would take about 12 at a time. They would be dropped by parachute. Inside the containers were rice paper, pencil, water and seed. There was a questionnaire for who ever found them to fill in the form with intelligence and send the pigeon back which would hopefully return to Gibraltar Farm.

The Stirling was seen by its crew as an ideal aircraft for this type of operation, it had a useful payload and great versatility as Thos recalls.

We were dropping a mixture of supplies and containers over occupied territory. The Stirling was a very good aircraft for this role. It had a big fuselage, suited to carrying about 12 agents and something like 22 dropping points for containers in the bomb bay and under the wings. We carried a vast number of containers which were about 250lbs which would break up into packs of 50lbs which they could manhandle on the ground. These were often long operations of about 7 Hours.



A 138 (Special Duties) Squadron Sergeant, a Bomb Aimer, at RAF Tempsford late 1944, early 1945. He is standing against one of the squadron's Stirlings. Note the Halifax in the background

(Hillier)

The first operation for *Thos* was on the 21 November 1944 flying as second pilot to Flight Lieutenant Sephton in Stirling IV, 'F' for Freddie carrying 24 containers to drop supplies in Northern Denmark on another *TABLEJAM* mission. That night five crews from the squadron were briefed for similar targets with four crews from 161 Squadron. Only six of the nine were successful. All of the returning aircraft had to divert to Woodbridge owing to RAF Tempsford being fog bound. On the night of the 26 November, Flight Sergeant Fred Bowman and his crew were briefed for ops to Norway and Denmark along with 13 others, a maximum effort by 138 for the night. Unfortunately aircraft icing prevented them dropping their agent but it unusually enabled them to have a one to one with one of the Joes. Fred explains the lead up to the operation.

It was the 26 November 1944; we were taking a Joe and containers to drop at the same time. (This operation was known as TABLEJAM 26/157) When you were dropping Joes, you would go out to the aircraft, we would know the take off time and we would do all our checks and tests. We would be standing outside the aircraft waiting and up draws an army staff car, two army officers get out and they are attached to SOE. Then the Joe gets out and he has all his parachute gear and other

equipment. He is quickly introduced, so the Joe gets in and SOE go back to their comfortable HQ at Gibraltar Farm and we head off for Denmark.

Everything went well, as we approached the DZ, we had the bomb doors open but we couldn't get the trapdoor open to drop the agent. What had apparently happened, we had gone through rain on the way over and that had frozen and formed ice around the edges, so the trapdoor for the agent couldn't be lifted. We had no alternative but to drop the containers and fly the Joe back to RAF Tempsford. We were halfway back across the North Sea when we got a radio signal that we were diverted to RAF Lossiemouth. We landed, had something to eat and they found us a bed for the night.

The next morning we were assembled outside the aircraft. The Joe has taken off his jumpsuit and he looked just like your local bank manager. So we had a long chat to him, a very interesting guy. We asked what would happen if he was captured by the Germans? He replied 'well first off they would interrogate me, then they would torture me to find out as much as they could about my Resistance group, then they would shoot me'. He went on to say 'as I am a civilian, I would not be treated as a military prisoner of war, I would not have the advantage of the applicable conventions. The Germans would also try and get at my family who are still living in Denmark'

On that particular night only two of the 14 aircraft did not fully complete their allotted sortie, these two aircraft had trouble with ice, freezing their bomb bay doors and trap hatches. One Stirling was shot down by night fighters and all the crew were killed on the return journey. A further aircraft was hit by flak, hitting the fuel tanks and bomb bay door control cables causing the bomb bay to open. The skipper of the aircraft managed to get back to RAF Lossiemouth as RAF Tempsford was fog bound.

This next operation for *Thos* was an agent drop and further containers to Norway on the 29 November. Fourteen aircraft took off that night but only two succeeded in finding their DZ. The problem was down to bad weather with crews reporting 10/10 cloud at 2000 feet and severe icing above it. December was not much better with a high failure rate due to weather, one Stirling crashed into the sea on a *TABLEJAM* operation, none of the crew survived. The 28 December was a better night for the squadron, the weather had improved and the aircraft despatched on operations achieved good results, ten agents, 120 containers and 74 packages were delivered. The following night 138 Squadron, despatched fourteen aircraft on a perfect moonlit night to Norway and all but four aircraft were successful in dropping agents and containers, a good night.

Thos explained that the crews did initially have some contact with the spies or 'Joes' as they were known but that practice was eventually stopped for security reasons.

There was a place called Station 61 which was an old country house with Nissen huts around it. This is where they trained the agents not far from the airfield and when I arrived it had been the tradition that crews would go there for parties but I put a stop to that as I thought it was a security risk. If I had been shot down and the Germans were twisting my goolies or whatever they wanted to do I couldn't trust myself not to spill the beans. The less you knew the greater the security. At RAF Tempsford there was a farm house (Gibraltar Farm) in the middle of the airfield where we would sometimes meet the agents. Often on the way out to the DZ I would hand over to my second pilot and go back and have a chat with the Joes. The agents and trainers were quite colourful and would often dress up, quite picturesque people. In fact one chap dressed up as a Chinese general and

started inspecting the place. The agents were not just men, there were some women too. They were mostly Norwegians; there were of course quite a lot of political factions.

On one operation to Denmark, I had two lots of agents to drop on different DZs. The agents in the aircraft were from two different political factions, during the flight the boss of each stick came up to try and bribe me to drop all my stores on their DZ rather than a load for each party.

Sergeant Stoneman had a very different view of operations from the rear turret, tucked away remotely at the rear of the fuselage, his only connection with the crew being through the intercom. He was always on the lookout for enemy night fighters but also had a unique view of Joes being dispatched from the aircraft. On several occasions he would see the faces of terrified agents as they passed the tail of the aircraft waiting for the parachute to open.

We didn't speak to the Joes, we saw them in and around the aircraft, and they were brave people. I remember on one operation to drop 'Joes', as we approached the target, it felt like 'Fred Astaire' was tap dancing on the fuselage. It was a German armoured car firing at us and hitting the aircraft as he was driving along at speed on a French road beneath us. He took the paint off. The agents still jumped out, they were very brave.

In the rear fuselage you had a 'Joe' hole for them to jump out of. For a split second the slipstream would take them past the rear turret and I would recognize the terrified face going past. I saw one chap went past and his chute hadn't fully opened and he landed in a hedge. We were dropping from 800 feet and below. The canisters we would drop from about 600 feet, that's very low in a bomber. Over the fields you saw all the hedges; you had a great view from the rear turret.

Thos recalled that although fighters were often seen, they were not often successfully intercepted due to the tactics employed, but he took to taunting the Luftwaffe instead as he crossed Denmark.

We were intercepted once or twice on these ops but the fighters gave up. The Fw 190s operated from an airfield in central Denmark called Ford, so we used to fly straight over the top to taunt them.

Sergeant Stoneman and his crew were not looking for a fight and on one occasion stumbled across a German night fighter airfield over Norway much to their consternation.

On one of the trips we were coming home and just approaching the North Sea we flew over a German airfield with Me 110's on it. None took off, they must have been snowed in, and you could see all the lights and the aircraft. We thought we had had it but surprisingly none got airborne. We were very lucky. Searchlights were not really a concern for us. If we were caught by searchlights, they could not get down low enough to catch us!



A squadron bomb aimer, poses for his picture in the cockpit of a 138 Squadron Stirling at RAF Tempsford. A rare photo as security was tight and cameras were strictly forbidden

(Hillier)

January saw *Thos* acting as second pilot to Squadron Leader Watson en route to a target called *FETLOCK 2* in Norway. This operation was flown from RAF Kinloss to drop food to an isolated group at Haushorn, 6km west of Torslake. However, they arrived at the Norwegian Coast in daylight so the mission was aborted. They tried again the following night, this time they were successful and found a good reception. They dropped their supplies on target from a height of 4600 feet. This was due to the mountainous nature of the terrain. By the time the crew had finished, the last containers swinging under the parachutes, it was nearing daylight. The skipper pushed the nose down and the Stirling descended to extremely low level for the run home, wheels touching down at RAF Tempsford after a trip of 11 hours. Squadron Leader Watson had carried out his last operation with 138 that night and he was promoted to Wing Commander to take over 161 Squadron.

Thos flew his first sorties as captain on the 21 and 23 February to Norway. The first, codename *Snaffle 5* dropping four agents with a mixture of packages and containers. This particular night, 23 Stirlings took off from RAF Tempsford bound for Denmark and Norway. 138 Squadron did all of the Norwegian sorties. Wing Commander Murray had on board four agents, Roger Backstom, Severre Arntzen, Aarge Larsen and Kjell Stordalen, along with eleven containers and nine packages. It took three runs over the DZ to drop the agents, but they returned home successful. The following night 138 despatched 15 sorties to Norway, one of the aircraft was intercepted by a Ju 88 and a Bf 110 but fortunately managed to break contact. In the resulting violent manoeuvre its master gyro compass had toppled and the crew had to return to base.

Thos undertook his second sortie as captain on the night of the 23rd on an operation codenamed *Pommel 19*, again flying Stirling 'U' Uncle with containers. In his log book this operation is annotated

as 'to be dropped on a frozen lake between two hills'. The Stirling was carrying 14 containers, 8 packages and 2 bundles of leaflets. These sorties were just over 9 hours long and must have been extremely tiring. Seven sorties were briefed that night for 138 Squadron of which three were completed successfully.

For the rear gunner these operations were cold, lonely and uncomfortable cramped up in their turrets as Sergeant Stoneman found.

Some of the trips were very long; one to Norway I did was 10 hours 15 minutes. On the 29 November 1944, I did another with Squadron Leader Watson as the captain and we landed at RAF Kinloss after 10 hours 50 minutes. We did have heated suits to combat the cold but they were very uncomfortable. The metal elements used to burn against your skin.

At least the pilot and navigator had some labour saving devices to assist them on such long sorties, with the development of Gee and H2S radar along with an autopilot to reduce hand flying. Long flights flying on instruments and fighting air currents, trying to maintain accurate headings takes considerable stamina. The navigation had to be accurate to find the drop zones as *Thos* recalls.

We would use H2S radar to get us across the North Sea; we also had 'George' an autopilot which we used until close to the coast then we would dive down. The targets were often located in the middle of nowhere and need accurate navigation. We had a single navigator but we had a chap in the nose with a sort of rostrum from which he would map read. We would come across the Danish coast low about 80 feet and then pull up to get a fix, then back down again, on track to the target.

Norway was tricky; you had to go over the coast at 4000 feet to enter the fjords. Once you got in amongst the high ground you could fly along the valleys so you would not be picked up by radar. The Resistance would tell us the ideal places to drop, mostly frozen lakes, well inland. The weather was also quite changeable and a threat to our ops, the forecasting was not that good. Several of our met officers suffered considerable stress and I think we went through six met officers while I was there!

Over Denmark the targets were never easy to find as they tended to be in the middle of a wood which for the agents was ideal but of course you could not see anything. The target was marked by ordinary hand held torches which would not arouse suspicion amongst the Germans. These were arranged in an L shape which marked the DZ, similar to the set up for Lysander pickups by 161 Squadron in France. Sometimes you would make a mistake, the Germans were getting worried about what we were up to, the blackout was very good in Denmark but as the Germans sent this order to enforce the blackout, the Danish farmers rebelled against this and put on their lights instead, which of course many of these were L shaped farms which looked like a DZ marker so it confused us. I used to get all the reports back after each operation and on this particular night I received a report saying that my stores had landed in a manure heap 12,000 yards from the actual DZ, although the stores were ok.

We were quite careful about security. I remember once we had the head of Danish security over at RAF Tempsford to give us a lecture with his wireless operator, quite a mousy woman you would not think would be doing such a job, I think she was English. They were suffering heavy casualties on the ground at that time. She said "please no circlings, no circlings" as it would give away the reception parties position if the aircraft was orbiting overhead. Of course the natural thing to do if you saw something or you were looking for the DZ was to circle overhead then come back and drop your

agents or supplies. So we adopted a practice whereby if the DZ was in the middle of a wood, if I thought I saw the lights laid out by the Resistance, I would circle remotely, get my bearings, confirm the target and get the heading correct before running into the DZ to drop the stores. I understand the casualty rate went down quite significantly.

One night I did this and saw all of the roads jammed full of German lorries, troop movements everywhere. From one of these roads, bouncing across the field with headlights full beam was this car. I thought that's bloody Germans, so I aborted the trip and returned to RAF Tempsford. After getting home, we got the message "humblest apologies but that was in fact the doctor, who was a bit late." he was the chap who was supposed to be at the pick-up. We went all that way to abort the mission. They were brave chaps picking up this gear under the noses of the Germans.

After the war at Trondheim, I was to meet the underground movement officer, who was responsible for moving all the stores; it was quite interesting chatting with him. There was a big valley north of Oslo which was easier to find DZs. The method this chap had for moving stores from this area was that they had a mole in the German Army MT section. He would fill out a pick up order to the German MT section and they would go pick up the stores and move them to where they were required. Unwittingly they were working for the Resistance. The Germans were so methodical, the right form and stamps on the paperwork and they would do anything.

The 26 February saw *Thos* take Stirling 'T' for Tommy on special ops in moonlight to Denmark known as Operation *TABLEJAM 111* with 24 containers to drop on two separate reception areas around Aalborg in Denmark. There were eleven operations mounted that night in total by the two squadrons. They found their target and successfully dropped the supplies. One of the Stirlings flown by Flight Lieutenant P B Cornwallis was hit by flak and crashed into the sea, the crew were never found and they are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial. Flight Sergeant Fred Bowman was to witness the demise of this aircraft as they were on a similar operation.

I witnessed the shooting down of that particular aircraft. It appears that Flight Lieutenant Cornwallis and his crew along with our aircraft flown by Flight Lieutenant 'Hec' Shaw Royal New Zealand Air Force, were individually briefed for drops in the same area of Norway. I was sitting in the co-pilots seat at the time. We had crossed the North Sea and turned into and up the Skagerrak towards Oslo Fjord. Well ahead I saw tracer flak coming from the coast on our port side. Then I saw the aircraft it was aimed at. The Stirling caught fire and crashed into the sea. We immediately turned sharply left, crossed the coast and flew behind the flak position and onwards to successfully drop our containers at the DZ. After the war I made contact with some of the Cornwallis crew families to pass on this story of the last moments of their heroic loved ones.

Unfortunately the squadron were to lose three aircraft that month on operations.

March saw the last two special ops that *Thos* was to take part in, both being to Denmark carrying agents and supplies. On one of these on the 2 March, his log book records that it took 6 attempts to pinpoint the target. If it was not bad enough being alone over occupied territory with the threat of night fighters and flak, having to stooge around at low level to find a drop zone marked by torchlight in a big four engine bomber was no mean feat and was an extremely brave thing to do.

As the weather had improved, 15 sorties out of the 16 briefed for both 161 and 138 that night were successful, dropping between them 6 agents, 220 containers and 58 packages.

Thos undertook his last SOE job on the night of 3 March flying Stirling 'F' for Freddie with a similar load as the previous night, again on two separate locations which was carried out successfully after a round trip of just over 7 hours. This was the penultimate special duty sortie that 138 was to undertake of the war. The final six special duties sorties flown by 138 were on the night of the 4 March 1945. Unfortunately these last operations although successful were marred by the loss of two crews.

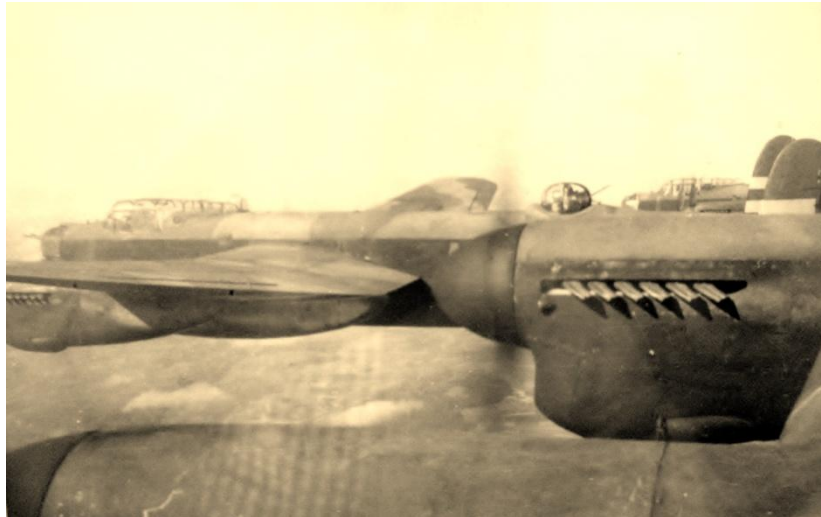
161 Squadrons Commander, Wing Commander M A Brogan DFC, came down in the sea near Livo Island, Denmark. There were no survivors and the bodies of the crew were slowly washed ashore to be buried. 138 Squadron lost one Stirling flown by Flying Officer L G Slevin who was on his way home when there was an explosion in the fuselage of the aircraft. They hit shallow water in a Fjord near Tippen Island at a speed of 240 mph. Luck was with them that night as they all escaped with cuts and bruises. They were interned as PoW for the remainder of the war; fortunately they did not have to wait long to get home as the war was drawing to a close.

The operations that 138 undertook were both difficult and hazardous. Ranging over Norway and Denmark, the risk of interception, often plagued by poor weather conditions, they suffered their fair share of losses. During the war they carried out 2569 sorties losing 70 aircraft. In the months between November 1944 and April 1945, 28 aircraft were lost on operations over Norway alone, 19 of those were Stirlings.

I found the special duties role a tonic, once I got the casualty rate down. I felt much better about this job as you were not burning cities. I never really believed in bombing but it was the only thing to do I suppose. Early in the war we were attacking specific targets in the Hampden. Later on as the defences got more effective we would try and hit a target in the centre of the town, effectively hitting civilians, I didn't like that. Bombing at that stage of the war was not that accurate. In the SOE role you felt you were doing something to help. I don't think I can ever say that it was a particularly efficiently run operation from the SOE perspective though.

I was halfway through that tour when the war finished. Prior to VE day, Bomber Harris had been keen to get us back into Bomber Command and that task fell to me. It was not very nice as the crews considered themselves a cut above the rest because of their special operations role. That happened at the beginning of 1945 and we converted back to the Lancaster in about six weeks.

138 Squadron had completed its special duties role and the crews who were nearly tour expired were moved to 161 Squadron. The remainder of crews converted to Lancasters at 1662 Heavy Conversion unit at RAF Lindholme and were subsequently posted to RAF Tuddenham. Early in March 1945, after "repeated requests from Headquarters Bomber Command", 138 Squadron was switched from special duties to the main force of 3 Group. It went to RAF Tuddenham, re-equipped with Lancasters and converted to type in six weeks. Before the European war ended the squadron flew 105 sorties on 9 bombing missions and dropped approximately 440 tons of bombs on the enemy in mainly daylight raids. 138 also carried out food-dropping operations over Holland, known as Operation Manna. They were also engaged on PoW repatriation flights know as Operation Exodus, during which it brought home nearly 2,500 men before VE Day



A formation photo taken from the cockpit of Wing Commander Murray's aircraft. The original caption states 'Serious exhibition flying'

(Murray)



A 138 Squadron crew in front of Lancaster AC-S 'S' for Sugar taken in April 1945. The pilot in the centre wearing his hat is Flying Officer Stan Sickelmore of 'B' Flight. *Thos* flew this particular aircraft on a number of occasions

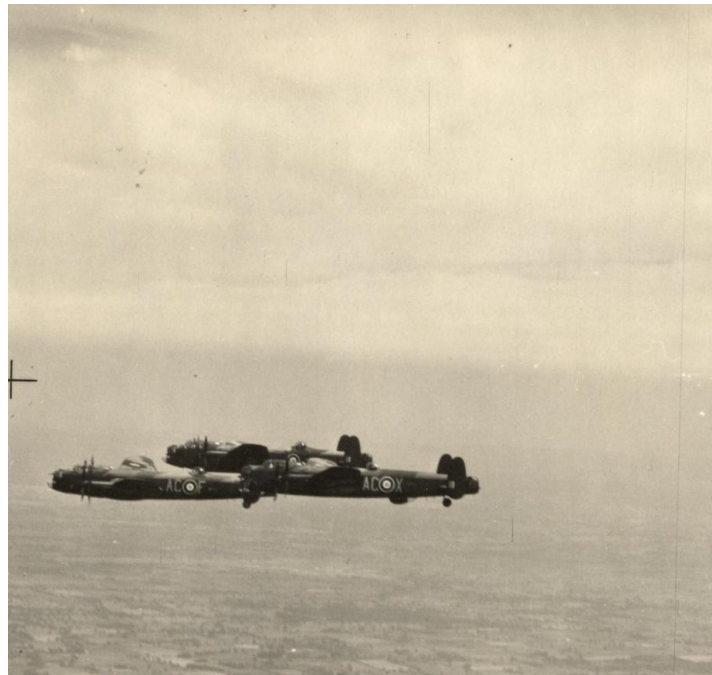
(Hillier)

Once we had converted, I then did three daylight bombing raids in the Lancaster. Our crews were anxious to show up well in the main bomber force and their standard of flying was particularly high considering their short period of training. By then the fighter opposition was not significant but the flak was still bad. My first raid was to Potsdam, and the last was over Regensburg and I remember it had a very heavy flak defence.

For the raid on Potsdam on the 14 April 1945, *Thos* was flying Lancaster 'F' for Freddie carrying one 4,000lb and seven 500lb bombs. They were part of a force of 500 Lancasters and 12 Mosquitoes that were to take part in the last major raid of the war on a German city; only one aircraft was lost despite the opposition.

A far cry from the operations that *Thos* had faced in the Manchester in 1941 and 42. The raids had increased in size significantly and aircraft were by now fitted with better navigation such as H2S. On the 30 January 1943, H2S radar was used by RAF bombers for navigation for the first time, and so became the first ground mapping radar to be used in combat. Initially it was fitted to Stirling and Halifax bombers and provided ground mapping for navigation and night bombing. Also of considerable assistance to the pilots was 'George' an autopilot that could be engaged by the pilot to maintain height and direction which took away some of the fatigue caused by hand flying the aircraft. On this raid *Thos* encountered his first rocket aircraft, an Me 163 Komet, much to his surprise.

On the raid to Potsdam, as I was approaching the target I saw a little rocket aircraft suddenly pass vertically upwards past my starboard wing just missing it, it was a Me 163 Komet. It may have been firing at me but luckily it didn't hit us.



A number of 138 Squadron Avro Lancasters en route to Juvincourt airfield in France, May 1945. Taken during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war (PoW) at the end the war in Europe. Taken between 8 May and 16 May 1945. The formation leader is Lancaster PP675, an aircraft flown by Wing Commander T.C. Murray, CO of 138 Squadron, on ops to Potsdam (14 April 1945), Heligoland (17 April 1945 – a daylight bombing raid) and Regensburg (20 April 1945, the last bombing raid of the war).



A 138 Squadron member of aircrew pictured in front of one of the Avro Lancasters, after March 1945

(Hillier)

The next raid *Thos* took part in was to Heligoland on the 18 April as part of a force of 969 aircraft which were sent to attack the naval base, town and airfield. The damage was so bad that the target area was turned into a crater pitted moonscape. Only 3 aircraft were lost on this raid.

That month, Warrant Officer Bowman and crew carried out a trip to Kiel on the Baltic coast. Little did they know this was no ordinary target and still very well defended.

We were briefed to go to Kiel and we were told we would be attacking U boat pens and dock installations. As we were doing our run up to the target the bomb aimer was in the nose doing his left, left and right, right thing. We could see the target well ahead of us as there had been a previous wave of bombers just before us. So there in front of us we could see a fire, smoke, searchlights and the coloured pathfinder flares with the smell of cordite from the flak. The master bomber was circling above giving instructions when there was a huge explosion from somewhere below us. We were blown off track temporarily and then we resumed our run up to the target. We dropped our bombs and went back to RAF Tuddenham. I went up to the mess a couple of days later and I read in the newspaper, the headlines 'Pocket Battleship Admiral Scheer had been sunk by RAF Lancasters at Kiel' It had been bombed and blew up beneath us as we approached the target.

Thos flew his last operational sortie of the war, a daylight trip to Regensburg on the 20 April 1945, a raid in which 100 Lancasters bombed a fuel storage depot with the loss of only one aircraft despite the heavy flak. This marked the end of 76 operational sorties for *Thos* since the start of the war. 138 Squadron, since its conversion to the Lancaster had completed 105 sorties in the bomber role up to the 8 May 1945, VE Day.

When the war finished morale was excellent and the squadron generally regretted that further opportunities for showing their prowess would no longer be available.

In April and May, 138 Squadron were involved in dropping supplies to the Dutch. Operations Manna and Chowhound took place from 29 April to the end of the war. These two operations, Manna by the Royal Air Force (29 April – 7 May) and Chowhound by the U.S. Air Force (1 –8 May) dropped a total of over 11,000 tons of food into the still un-liberated western part of the Netherlands, with the acquiescence of the occupying German forces, to help feed civilians who were in danger of starvation in the Dutch famine. When this proved insufficient, Operation Faust was launched on the 2 May when 200 Allied trucks began delivering food to the city of Rhenen, behind German lines.

Warrant Officer Fred Bowman, by now coming to the end of his time with the squadron recalled that he was to be involved in these mercy missions. One sortie that sticks out in his logbook occurred on the day prior to this operation when he flew as crew to Wing Commander Murray on the 29 April 1945.

Wing Commander Murray asked our skipper 'Hec' Shaw RNZAF to fly him to Cark in the Lake District. He was going off on leave. This airfield had a short runway for Lancasters so Wing Commander Murray said he would fly us in and then instruct 'Hec' how to take off on the short runway. He said to put it down in our log books as an H2S exercise. We landed ok and Thos then left the aircraft with his bicycle and waved goodbye. He was off on leave. I was a bit surprised, to see him cycling away. We thought we would continue the H2S exercise and did a low level trip around the Lake District and its beautiful scenery. It was a fantastic sunny day.

Soon it was back to business and the following day, Warrant Officer Fred Bowman was dragged out of bed at 04:30 a.m. in the morning to attend a briefing.

Parts of Holland had not as yet been liberated and this included the two major cities of Rotterdam and The Hague. The dykes around these cities had been burst with the bombing and the area was flooded. They couldn't get food into these two cities by rail or road and the only option was by air. The King of Sweden in conjunction with the International Red Cross approached the German High Command and they gave permission for the RAF to fly in the food. The food was carried in a type of sling that was stretched across the bomb bays and the food was just loaded in on top. There were no parachutes and when we got to the drop zone, one side of the sling was dropped and out would come the food onto a muddy playing field. We were a bit wary about this as we were still at war with Germany and here they were giving us permission to fly in over their most heavily defended areas, flying straight at them, low level. The German Army honoured the agreement thankfully.

After returning from leave, Thos was also to take part in operation Manna, flying Lancaster PP675, dropping supplies carried in the bomb bay on stretchers into a sports arena at The Hague on May 7 1945.

I recall approaching the sports arena in a long stream of aircraft and I could make out this chap standing outside the arena on a road with his arms up in a gesture of thanks. The preceding aircraft had a hang up with its load and the supplies were dropped late. They were dropped from the bomb

bay with no parachute at all. This bag of flour, fell out and burst over this chap making him all white head to toe, still keeping his arms up, a very funny sight.

As dawn broke on the 8 May 1945, few probably knew that a new chapter was about to start in their lives. Peace would be declared and millions of servicemen would at long last be able to think about their future and civilian life. So the end of war in Europe was declared and Winston Churchill made a speech to the nation which was heard by the crews at RAF Tuddenham. Shortly after this speech, Warrant Officer Bowman recalled a further speech by *Thos* who by that stage had taken over as station commander, which was to stick in his mind.

On the 8 May 1945 we listened to Winston Churchill's speech and when that was over the CO from the Tannoy loud speaker system said 'the station was now stood down and we could go into Mildenhall to celebrate. Before you go I am going to tell you that I am going out to each aircraft and I'm going to lock them, each of them. I am going to put the keys in the safe and the safe keys will be in my pocket so don't try and get back to Australia or anywhere else.'

Such confidence in his crews.

Thos recalled that a high percentage of his crews were from Canada, New Zealand and Australia and he was particularly concerned that some would make an effort to 'borrow' an aircraft and try to make it home.

For 138 although the war was over, they still had work to do and immediately after VE-Day the squadron was to be involved in Operation Exodus, the air effort to repatriate prisoners of war back to the UK. One sortie that *Thos* was asked to do involved scouting out suitable accommodation close to a German airfield near Kiel that had a long enough runway to operate the Lancaster from. However it was not straight forward and caused him considerable anxiety to say the least.

About 16 May I was summoned to see the AOC 3 Group who explained to me that there were all these POW were being marched across the north of German, all communications were wrecked but they wanted to get them out. As the Luftwaffe didn't have any heavy bombers in that area, there were not any suitable runways. Fortunately a Spitfire PR unit had identified one runway at a place called Hohne, south of Kiel which was ideal for the job. They took photos of the surrounding area and hatched out some buildings that may be ideal for housing a large number of POW.

They asked me to fly out to this airfield and inspect it. There were about four hatched areas to inspect so I collected together this crew of about 8 officers and my plan was to pair them up and visit each of these hatched areas. They were to wear best blue and take no side arms, just assuming victory so no need for self defence.

We got over the airfield and it was notable that some areas had already been marked out for demolition. However, I did get an amber light which, I presumed meant I could land. I did a very gentle landing and there was a perimeter track which ran parallel to the main runway so I taxied off on to it and immediately the main wheels sunk down to their axles. I think it was a jet fighter station and the taxiway was not designed to take such a heavy bomber. That's why they had a long runway for the jets. The perimeter was covered in wrecked jet aircraft.

After 10 minutes a small German car arrived with two SS officers in black uniform and gave me a Nazi salute which I ignored. I demanded to see the station commander immediately and he came

out, he was not a flying man, he was in scruff order. I told him I wanted the aircraft extracted from the hole and re-positioned at the take off end and the I explained the need to inspect these areas of accommodation around the base. He asked if he could be excused to get into his uniform and have a shave. So off he went and I was left with his second in command who tried to be pleasant and exchange conversation but we were under strict orders for no fraternisation with the enemy.

Eventually the CO arrived properly dressed and he looked at my map of the various areas I needed to inspect and he said I cannot guarantee the safety of your officers if they went off independently. Anyway he whittled it down to three places that may be suitable and off we went through this village to inspect the first place. I remember the citizens turning their backs on us when they saw we were RAF officers. We got to the first place and it turned out to be a concentration camp, even the Germans would not go in due to the diseases that were rife. No good for POW.

The next one turned out to be a Hitler Youth training camp with fanatic young lads and their rather effeminate looking cavalry officers in charge. That place would have served our needs very well. I remember going into the sick bay and there was a young lad lying very ill. When he saw us he sprang to attention laying poker straight and eyes fixed on the ceiling at attention. I thought, God you poor lads.

The third place the Luftwaffe officer told was German Army and he had no authority over them at all and it was obvious he was quite worried. I explained these were my orders and we must inspect the building. He understood that and we went inside. There was a central hall for parades with rooms off, each big enough for an army section. The troops were sleeping on straw with rifles by their side. So I decided to treat it like a CO's inspection and as I went into each place and looked around the soldiers all trooped out after me carrying their guns. Their jackboots clicking on the floor all in step. At the end was an ablution block, all spotless apart from a dead sheep, its blood trickling across the clean floor. I thought this was the perfect place for an assassination.

I looked at the poor Luftwaffe officer who was behind me quivering, all of the soldiers looking at him waiting to receive an order or just a signal. I was sorrier for him than myself. I looked around and nodded my head, I couldn't see an exit at this end but I could see where we came in and the way out was blocked by these troops. I put my head up and confidently walked back the same way I had come, quivering in my heart but looking as confident as I could. They kept looking at me, but we made it out. There were no NCOs or officers in that block. I was lucky to get out alive.

I had a look at the officers' quarters and found one Luftwaffe officer in bed with a beautiful fräulein, they were just getting up and I felt a bit of an intruder really. The CO then asked us to stay for lunch in the Officers' Mess. I said no as I was still keeping to this non-fraternization policy. I said we would eat in the control tower as we had brought some chocolate and rations with us. Eventually a large bowl of Goulash or something was brought over and I thought I'm not eating any of that; they could have piddled in it. I know I would have done.

The aircraft had been removed from the hole and was by now at the end of the runway ready for us to depart. It was all a very interesting experience and one I would not want to repeat. They never did use the airfield as the perimeter track was not man enough to carry our transport aircraft or heavy bombers.



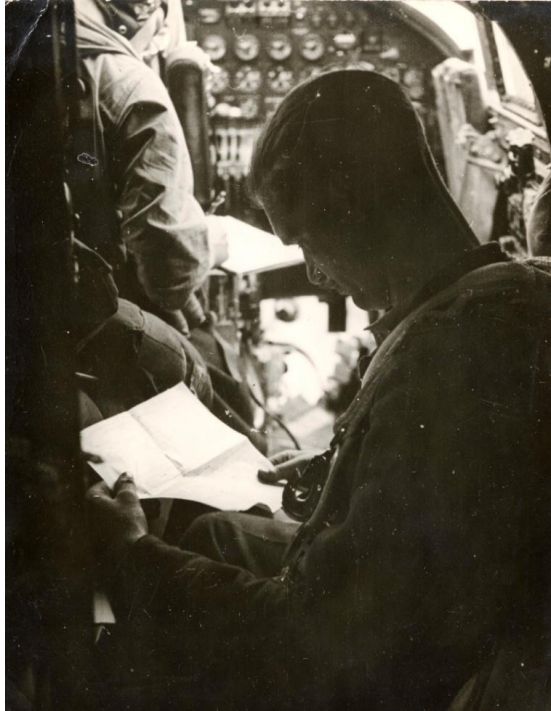
138 Squadron Lancasters in formation, en route to Jouvincourt

(Murray)



Avro Lancasters of 138 Squadron. Original caption: "The boys pulling up into formation". Taken between 8 May and 16 May 1945. Taken en route to Juvincourt by a member of 138 Squadron during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war (PoW) at the end of the war in Europe

(Hillier)



A view inside one of the 138 Squadron Lancaster's on route to pick up PoW

(Hillier)



A 138 Squadron Avro Lancaster, AC-S "S" for Sugar, at Juvincourt airfield in France, May 1945. Taken during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war (PoW) at the end the war in Europe. Taken on 10 May 1945. Note the presence of an Avro York on the left and a Halifax in the background

(Hillier)



Loading PoW in to a 138 Squadron Lancaster at Jouvincourt

(Murray)

138 were still to be employed in the airborne taxi role and Warrant Officer Bowman was amongst the crews briefed for the first sorties.

We were told that the British PoW who had been held in the German PoW camps had been released and were assembled in a place called Juvincourt in France. They couldn't get them any further because the rail and road systems had been bombed and the only way to get them back to England was by air. We were to go over and pick them up, 24 in each plane. There was no seating in the Lancaster for anybody other than the crew but these guys couldn't care less as they were on their way home. We landed the squadron in formation, there was one at the end of the runway as the next was completing its landing role with another just touching down, and it looked quite impressive.

The first lot of PoW we took back we decided to give them a treat and fly them low level across the English Channel straight towards the White Cliffs of Dover. We tried to give them all a vantage point to look out from as we approached low level looking at the White Cliffs, I looked around and you can just imagine the emotions on the faces of all those guys as they saw the White Cliffs. The RAF soon put a stop to such sightseeing.



Warrant Officer Fred Bowman, third from right and his crew after converting to Lancasters, taken at RAF Tuddenham in 1945

(Bowman)

Thos undertook four such trips, each time carrying 24 PoW back to England, an operation which he described as 'very emotional'.

After the war was over I was then involved in bringing PoW back home. It was good for morale. The POW had marched for miles to get to us and all were pretty light, we were only allowed to carry 24 passengers but we could have carried many more as they didn't weigh anything. It was difficult for them to get up into the rear door of the Lancaster. I was the last to leave on one trip and there were two South African officers left, it was a lovely summer's morning and I couldn't leave them behind. They came up and stood in the cockpit and I contravened standing orders.

The English countryside looked so lovely on that morning, very emotional. We returned some to an airfield with a large tent which had 'Heathrow' written over it and I remember some WAAF telling me that it would be the future London Airport! Just one tent in the middle of a field. We used to land every aircraft individually at the time in rotation but I told the reception that my squadron would land in formation with one aircraft rolling to the end of the runway, one touching down and another turning on to short final, it worked well and saved a lot of time.



Avro Lancasters of 138 Squadron during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war at the end the war in Europe. Taken on 11 May 1945 at RAF Oakley. Original caption: "Waiting to start up having dropped [off] the PoW."

(Hillier)

In total 469 sorties were flown by the RAF and 75,000 men were brought back to England the fastest way. The Squadron flew to Juvincourt in France to pick up and then returned back to RAF Dunsfold and other receiving centres such as Wing or Oakley. These were sometimes flown in formation and were emotional trips for both the passengers and crews. They were also not without incident as *Thos* recalls.



A 138 Squadron Avro Lancaster, HK692, at Juvincourt airfield in France, May 1945. Taken during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war (PoW) at the end the war in Europe. Taken between 8 May and 16 May 1945. Original caption: "Chalked on to the aircraft by the crew, just a joke for the PoW."

(Murray)

On one of these trips we carried Indians with Turbans. One sat on the D Spar, sitting directly below a handle in the roof marked in yellow and black, it was the ditching escape hatch. We were in the circuit and his inquisitiveness got the better of him and he had to turn the handle. As he pulled the lever, it shot off and luckily it went between the tail fins. He stood up to see where it had gone and his Turban flew off as well. I found it quite difficult to handle.



A 138 Squadron Avro Lancaster at Juvincourt airfield in France, May 1945. Taken during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war at the end the war in Europe. Taken between 8 May and 16 May 1945. Possibly loading PoW kit into the bomb bay with what appears to be improvised stretchers

(Hillier)



British PoW returning May 1945 inside a 138 Squadron Avro Lancaster. Taken during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war at the end the war in Europe. Taken between the 8 May and 16 May 1945

(Hillier)



Avro Lancasters of 138 Squadron during Operation *Exodus*, the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war at the end of the war in Europe. Taken on 9 May 1945 at RAF Dunsfold in Surrey. Original caption: "Waiting to start up after dropping [off] the PoW."



A 138 Squadron photo taken in 1945

(Bowman)

For Warrant Officer Bowman, it was time to head back home to Australia after being with his crew for 13 or so months and he now approaching his 21st Birthday.

I decided to go back and continue my studies to become a chartered accountant. It wasn't quite as exciting as what I had been doing for the last few years but the life expectancy tables were much more favourable.

Our squadron strength would have been about 20 aircraft and crews. During the 10 months that I was on the squadron, we lost 18 aircraft. Only one of the crews were taken as PoW and that when they crash landed in Denmark. The other 17 crews were killed outright.



A photo of Warrant Officer Fred Bowman, RAAF taken at the end of the war

(Bowman)

Thos flew a number of sorties in the following months around Germany and along the Russian border; some of these were on photographic survey work. There were also flights to take other personnel to look at Germany from the air, known as a 'Cook's Tour', these were not without danger. On the 20 June *Thos* and his crew were engaged in one such daylight sortie en route to Berlin. On the way out, they had to fly through a string of cold front stretching across Germany. *Thos* did not know that in the middle of these fronts was a developing tornado. The turbulence was horrendous and both ice and hailstones caused considerable damage.

We also had on board the station Padre at the time, it was very rough! During this operation, one of my aircrew decided the situation was so bad that he grabbed my parachute from behind my seat and went down in the nose to bail out. Fortunately he didn't. I found a clear hole in the weather and did a tight descending turn to come out of the worst of it. We came out of this cloud at about 500 feet and I couldn't make out why I was still losing height fast. It suddenly dawned on me that I had forgotten I had pulled the throttles back for the descent. A few seconds later we would have crashed.

The turbulence would have been horrific and the aircraft difficult to control. To add to the problems they hit hail which cracked the windscreen and damaged the engine radiators. To top it all the Lancaster was then hit by lightning. Fortunately they managed to limp back to base after a gruelling 6 hour 20 minute fight with the weather.

Once we finished getting the PoW back we were sent to Trondheim in August on aerial survey work to assist in mapping Europe for our own government before they stopped us flying over their territory. We did line overlaps with two cameras, one each end of the bomb bay, you needed calm air for that job. Morale was very low as crews were kept waiting to get de-mobbed and the phrase at the time was 'they couldn't care less'. It was hotter than Madrid at Trondheim in 1945. It never got dark at that point.



138 Squadron crews at Trondheim in August 1945, Wing Commander Murray is fourth from the right in the rear row. At the time of this photo the crews all looked a bit happier, and morale had improved as they had tasks to complete. The general attitude in the RAF was one on 'couldn't care less' at that time

(Murray)



A close up photo of the wings and medal ribbons on the Wing Commanders Battledress that he wore whilst on operations with 138 Squadron

(Hillier)

At Trondheim I managed to get my hands on a Fiesler Storch in Luftwaffe colours. I had great fun in that aeroplane. We had a German engineer officer, I was practicing short landings and I landed across the perimeter track. The tyres were not that good, I taxied it back to the engineer officer with

the tyres hissing as I had over braked the aircraft. He couldn't get any replacement tyres. It was certainly shorter field than the Lysander that we used.



A captured Fieseler Fi 156 Storch or 'Stork' in English, the type flown by Wing Commander Murray in Trondheim, An extremely versatile short take off and landing aircraft

(Hillier)

Thos managed to clock up nearly nine hours flying in the Storch before returning home in November of that year. In September 1945, Acting Wing Commander Thomas Murray was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, The citation for his award reads as follows:-

'This officer is an exceptionally keen and inspiring leader whose enthusiasm and devotion to duty in the face of the enemy have always been of the highest order. Since the award of the DFC, he has led his squadron on a number of important attacks with unflinching precision and determination. Wing Commander Murray has taken part in numerous operations of a difficult and hazardous nature, always displaying the most outstanding gallantry and tenacity'.

I was a regular RAF officer so I knew I would be staying on after the war finished and they then sent me initially to Malta, then on two staff college courses and one on directing staff in the Canadian Air Force, Toronto. I was by then not getting much flying. I did later convert to the Meteor and the English Electric Canberra. I was never really in flying practice though. I needed to get back to flying as I had developed a form of post traumatic stress. I had thoughts that when I flew with a crew that I would pass out. I called this my paper tiger. This anxiety had developed from the continuous strain of operations over a sustained period of time.

Wing Commander T Murray was posted to Malta to 8 Sector Operations room, as a rest tour at RNAS Hal Far in 1946 and he flew occasionally with 38 Squadron at Luqa, engaged in the maritime reconnaissance role with the Vickers Warwick and later the Lancaster. He was later to attend No 36 course at the RAF Staff College in July 1947, followed by a posting which was to HQ Reserve Command in January 1948, where he managed to keep some flying going on Avro Ansons and

Percival Proctors. He then attended a further staff course with the Royal Navy at Greenwich which he completed in 1950.

This then lead to a job as Senior Personnel Staff Officer at 24 Group, but again he managed to keep himself current on the Anson and Proctor. In 1953, *Thos* was sent to Canada and he became directing staff at the RCAF Staff College, from 1953 until 1954, where he managed to get his hands on a variety of exotic types such as the Beech 18 Expeditor, Canadair North Star and Fairchild C119.

I was fortunate enough to get involved with re-supply operations to islands in the far north of Canada in the Fairchild C-119 via Resolute Bay. These people up there had not seen anyone for months on end; we had three aircraft and would drop in a tractor to start to create the runways. We would then land with oil and supplies and then quickly depart. On one occasion I did get out and went to look at a huge Husky dog. He eyed me up and then jumped up, knocking me to the ground. I thought he was going to rip my throat open; it looked as if he had not had any meat for a long time. I just thought if you're going to do it, do it quick. Fortunately he let me go.

On his return to the UK *Thos* returned to flying and it was not long before he was sent to 4 FTS to learn to fly the Meteor Mk7 and Mk8. Unfortunately he was not to finish his course as he was posted to Bomber Command HQ to assist with the planning for the forthcoming Suez crisis.

I had been called back to give advice on the Suez crisis but I didn't have much current experience of flying operations on modern strike aircraft. I remember being asked at a briefing 'how many Canberras it would take to wipe out an airfield'? I didn't really have a clue, fortunately I had been given a booklet which gave me the required information, so I quickly thumbed through and gave an authoritative answer.

Thos subsequently went on to attend 231 OCU at Bassingbourne to convert onto the Canberra. He flew both the T4 and B2 versions right up to his retirement from the service in April 1959. Although he had managed to keep some flying going through to the end of his service career, he was keen to get back to regular flying practice to deal with his anxiety.

Fortunately my then brother in Law, Tim Vigors who had also been in the air force provided me with an answer. He had originally brought a Piper tri-pacer and subsequently awarded the Piper agency for Europe. One of his pilots in Ireland unfortunately killed himself leaving a door unlocked on takeoff which left a place for me. Tim knew I wanted to get back to flying practice so he asked me to set up a dealership at Kidlington which I leapt at. I sold 7 aircraft the first year, 21 the second and 62 the third.



The Wing Commander at the controls of a Piper Super Cub, demonstrating its short field ability at Oxford, Kidlington. One of his favourite aircraft

(Murray)

After his time selling aircraft, *Thos* became the personal pilot to Freddy Heineken, flying all over Europe. He later went on to fly aircraft such as the Piper Aztec for Vickers Aviation. This he did for nineteen years and he continued flying until late in life. He remembers a few incidents that took place whilst flying with Vickers that are worthy of note.

I was flying an Aztec for the company and I remember during the cold war, there was an industrial fair in East Germany just to the south west of Berlin. The control zone around the airfield just missed the air corridor into Berlin, so they would not let me fly to the airfield from the Berlin corridor as there was a gap between them, the corridor and the control zone of the airfield. You were not allowed to fly as pilot in the corridor unless you had done three trips as second pilot first.

I was of course flying single pilot in the Aztec, flying the Chairman of Vickers. We were allotted a route from Frankfurt down to the Czechoslovakian border and on to Prague, then up to the border of East Germany and Poland and then down to this airfield on the edge of Berlin. All I had was Decca navigation and line of sight. Remember this was the height of the cold war, the airways only 5km wide, narrow airways with NDBs occasionally which would often not work due to the weather. If you flew outside these zones the East Germans would have been very pleased to force down the Chairman of Vickers, but we made it in ok. The first year we did it, everyone was very anti British.

I was clearing customs on the way back and I was asked by the custom officer if I had any money, I told them only small change. They said 'you expect to leave with this money that's an imprisonable offence' so I told them they could have it. They were shocked and told me that was bribery. Fortunately one of the German citizens suggested opening a bank account, they told me 'of course I could'. As far as I know I still have an East German bank account with a few Marks in it!

The following year was completely different, same route, but approaching Prague they seemed so happy to see us. Well of course this was just after the Prague Spring in 1968, that's why they were so happy.

After Vickers, *Thos* decided it was time to retire from flying. He hung up his flying boots and retired to the South Coast, living in the house his parents had purchased, here he continued to sail and swim regularly, keeping himself fit. After a gap of nearly 30 years, he recently took to the skies once more in a Cessna 172 from Goodwood airfield in West Sussex. *Thos* was at home at the controls and landed the aircraft back on runway 24 perfectly. He commented that 'flying is like riding a bike, you don't forget it' but he was not too impressed by the modern glass screen instrument display in the aircraft



Wing Commander Thomas Murray DSO, DFC*, MID after his flight at Goodwood, age 95

(Hillier)

This was in celebration of his 95th Birthday. Thomas Murray has had a remarkable life, a life that has seen aviation develop from biplane to fast jet, experienced war at its worst and suffered the effects of mental and physical strain unique to the bomber crews.

There is no doubt in my mind that he had an exceptional career, was a remarkable pilot and leader and this was recognised with his ultimate award of the DSO. The citations for his gallantry awards say it all about this aviator. His ability to grasp the problem and lead his crews by example, set him out from the rest and no doubt, contributed to his survival on nearly three tours of operations.

Thos generated his own brand of luck and his men were happy to follow his example. In the last chapter of his paper written at Staff College in 1946, he sums up what for him were the important lessons learned from his wartime experience, and it is a fitting final comment with which to end his story, illustrating his views on the importance of good leadership.

On reflection certain lessons that I learned do stand out. The most obvious, concerns morale and leadership. In all the units in which I served where morale was low there was one common factor, indifference and bad leadership. Young and inexperienced men, new to battle were often incapable of standing on their own two feet without sympathetic guidance and example from their commanders. I found also that efficiency and keenness depend largely upon a full and adequate flying programme. Where there is little flying as we had in 106 Squadron before the war, apathy and stagnation soon set in.



The log book and medals of Wing Commander T C Murray, DSO, DFC*

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