

Down Memory Lane

By

Squadron Leader William George Watt, R.A.F.

*On reading the newly
Published book in
1985 by
Martin Middlebrook
And Chris Everitt*

*“The Bomber Command
War Diaries 1939 – 1945”*

*Completed my Flight Engineer Course at No4 S of T.T., R.A.F., St Athan .
Result, Category A and top cadet of my entry. 12.10.42*

*Posted to No1657 Con Unit, Waterbeach on 1/12/42. eventually crewed
up with my Aircrew Crew as per photograph.*

*After 27hrs 45mins. flying training we were posted to our Operational
Squadron, after 7 days leave. Arrived at Chedburgh 2/1/43. 214*

*Squadron (F.M.S) now equipped with 12 Stirlings. Only runways newly
made, no roads, only paths, no hot water, had to wash and shave at
outside taps, accommodated 4 crews to a hut of 28 beds. On completion
of our tour of operations on 20/6/43 we were the only crew who survived
from the original 12 crews who were posted there on 2/1/43.*

*But over the period 2/1/43 to 20/6/43 R.A.F. Chedburgh had expanded to
operate 2 full Squadrons of Stirlings. New Stirlings were flown in from
the factories each week to replace the heavy losses in aircraft and at the
same time expand the number of flights in the two Squadrons 214 F.M.S
and the newly formed 616 Squadron.*

*Similarly new crews were arriving continually. On all the operations
over Europe I took part in we never had a 100% return of aircraft. The
heaviest loss was 7 (seven) aircraft from 214 Squadron, on the bombing
of the Rhur (Essen) on 5/6 March 1943.*

*In February 1943, in preparation for the "Battle of the Rhur" the
following appointments were made.*

Commander in Chief Bomber Command

Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Harris

Deputy Commander in Chief Bomber Command

Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Sandby

Commander in Chief 1 Group. Bomber Command

AIR VICE MARSHALL E.A.B Rice

Commander in Chief 3 Group Bomber Command (my group)

*AIR VICE MARSHALL R.Harrison. (3 group had the highest
percentage of*

losses in Bomber Command)

Commander in Chief 4 Group Bomber Command

AIR VICE MARSHALL C.R Carr

Commander in Chief 5 Group Bomber Command

AIR VICE MARSHALL The Hon. R. Cochrane

Commander in Chief 6 (Canadian Group) Bomber Command

AIR VICE MARSHALL G.E Brookes

Commander in Chief 8 (Pathfinder Group) Bomber Command

AIR VICE MARSHALL D. C.T Bennett

Commander in Chief 2 Group Bomber Command

(left May 1942 and joined Fighter Command)

AIR VICE MARSHALL Basil Embry

I flew with the rank of Sergeant on all my 28 operations with 214 Squadron.

My captain and pilot Vernon Miller commenced flying with us at 214 Squadron as Sergeant, promoted Flight Sergeant 14/3/43 was commissioned Pilot Officer 4/4/43 was promoted to Flight Lieutenant 6/6/43 and became a Flight Commander. Awarded D.F.C 14/6/43. His recommendation for this award was made on our eventual return from our Raid on Stuttgart 11/12 March 1943 when we had to return all the way from Stuttgart on the 2 inner engines only, crash landing at West Malling, Kent. Lack of fuel.

I was recommended to be commissioned for my part in the engine handling. After being interviewed at 3 Group H.Q. by the Commander in Chief AIR VICE MARSHALL R. Harrison my commission came through on 30/6/43, thus I returned to my squadron from leave on completion of my tour of operations as a Pilot Officer, but my stay in the Officers Mess at 214 Squadron only lasted a few days as I was immediately posted as a Flight Engineer flying instructor to 1651 Conversion Unit at the end of July 1943, there my duties were lecturing on Engine handling to the pilots converting on to Stirling Bombers from Wellingtons and in checking F/E's in flight, in night exercises and authorizing their suitability to join operational squadrons. I was promoted F/O in September '43 and promoted to F/Lt. in November '43 and posted to No4 S of T.T., R.A.F. St Athan as an instructor on the Flight Engineer Leaders Course later to be promoted Squadron Leader and Chief Instructor on 1/8/44.

I was delighted to hear that Flight Lieutenant Miller D.F.C my pilot in 214 Squadron was awarded a bar to his D.F.C and promoted Squadron Leader, also that Stu. our navigator along with Harry our bomb carrier both of whom had been awarded D.F.C's and promoted Squadron Leaders they both held important posts in the Navigators and Bomb Aimers Training Courses.

During my duties as Chief Instructor at 4 School of Technical Training, R.A.F. St Athan I flew on three operations with 422 R.C.A.F. Squadron, Coastal Command on Short Flying Boats. Also with 431 R.C.A.F. Squadron Bomber Command on Halifaxes (1 op), and with 511 Squadron Transport Command on Yorks.

My total operations over Europe and the Atlantic 32.

My appointment as Chief Instructor was an Air Ministry one as I was responsible for the training of Flight Engineers with operational experience in Bomber Command, Coastal Command and in Transport Command.

The course was really a Staff Officers Course and if successfully completed the Flight Engineers were now considered for promotion to Flight Lieutenant and became the Flight Lieutenant Engineer Leader on an operational Squadron.

On the victory over the Nazi's the pressure was on for the training of all surplus pilots and lights Engineers for the Japanese offensive which would have involved long distance flying over the Pacific Ocean hence the importance of Engine handling.

***Memories of my operation with
214 (F.M.S.) Squadron
3Group Bomber Command, R.A.F.***

***Records from:
“The Bomber Command War Diaries 1939 – 1945”
And
My own Aircrew Flight Log Book***

<u>Op.No.</u>	1.	<i>18/19 Jan. 1943 Mine Laying to Friesian Islands.</i>
<u>29 Aircraft.</u>		<i>22 Stirlings and 7 Wellingtons. No aircraft Lost.</i>
<u>Flying time.</u>		<i>3hrs. 30mins.</i>
<u>Aircraft used.</u>		<i>Stirling D W9610</i>
<u>Result.</u>		<i>Successful, all mines planted.</i>
<u>Opposition.</u>		<i>Flak from flak ships in the area. No damage was sustained.</i>
<u>Object.</u>		<i>To create mining hazard for Nazi Navy also troop and supply ships from Hamburg port to Nazi army in Norway.</i>

<u>Op.No.</u>	2.	21/22 Jan. 1943 <i>Mine Laying to Friesian Islands.</i>
<u>70 Aircraft.</u>		54 Stirlings, 4 Wellingtons, 12 Halifaxes. 6 aircraft shot down. 4 Wellingtons, 2 Halifaxes.
<u>Flying time.</u>		3hrs. 55mins.
<u>Aircraft used.</u>		Stirling F R9186
<u>Result.</u>		Most mines planted.
<u>Opposition.</u>		Enemy better prepared this time, far more flak ships and naval ships with larger guns..
<u>Object.</u>		To create mining hazard for Nazi Navy also troop and supply ships from Hamburg port to Nazi army in Norway.

Op.No. 3. 3 / 4 Feb. 1943
Naval port of Hamburg.

263 Aircraft. 66 *Stirlings*, 51 *Wellingtons*, 62 *Lancasters*, 84 *Halifaxes*.
Losses. 16 aircraft shot down. 8 Stirlings, 3 Wellingtons, 1 Lancaster, 4 Halifaxes.

Flying time. 5.40hrs

Aircraft used. *Stirling O R9191*

Result. *Damage to port installations and ships.*
 55 Germans killed and 40 seriously injured.

Opposition. *Night fighters very active over the target area. Flak from anti aircraft guns and naval ships in docks severe. We were hit on the starboard outer engine which went on fire. Fortunately I eventually managed to extinguish the fire. Then we were hit around the bomb doors. Electric motors u/s.. I had to hand operate bomb doors for the release of our bombs, this meant we were over the target area running on three engines only for approximately 15 minutes. Hit again by flak and radio u/s. also navigation equipment. Had to return by the use of the stars only. This was my first taste of operations over enemy territory and to make matters worse as my crew were not on operations that night I volunteered to go as Flight Engineer with a New Zealand crew whose Flight Engineer went sick that night. It was a hell of a baptism and the crew as a whole panicked. It was no surprise to me that they were shot down over the Rhur a week later. The pilot was Flying Officer Hewitt. On this trip to Hamburg after landing I was shattered. The Medical Officer gave me a mug full of Navy Rum*

Object. *Naval port facilities of Hamburg and naval ships docked there.*

Op.No. 4. 5 / 6 Feb. 1943
Mine laying in Baltic Sea flying low level over
Denmark.

19 Aircraft. All Stirlings
Losses. 2 Stirlings shot down.

Flying time. 4hrs. 25mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling H BF445

Result. Many mines planted in the Baltic Sea..

Opposition. Night fighters active on North Sea coast off Denmark
also in Baltic Sea, plus numerous flak ships.

Object. To mine the route to Norway for Naval and Troop
Ships leaving Kiel harbour.

Op.No. 5. 7 / 8 Feb. 1943
 Lorient submarine base.

323 Aircraft. 100 Wellingtons, 81 Halifaxes, 80 Lancasters, and 62
 Stirlings
 Losses. 7 aircraft. 3 Lancasters, 2 Halifaxes and 2
 Wellingtons shot down.

Flying time. 4hrs. 35mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling F R9186

Result. Most successful attack with large fires around
 harbour area. No official record of deaths. This was
 our first experience of being coned for several minutes
 in searchlight cones. To escape we had to dive down
 to ground level amongst the barrage balloon cables.

Object. To assist the Royal Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic
 on our convoys.

Op.No. 6. *13 /14 Feb. 1943*
 Lorient submarine base

486 Aircraft. *140 Wellingtons, 96 Halifaxes, 164 Lancasters, and 63 Stirlings.*
 Losses. 7 aircraft. 2 Lancasters, 1 Halifax, 1 Stirling and 3 Wellingtons shot down.

Flying time. *5.35hrs*

Aircraft used. *Stirling A R9358*

Result. *The first time more than 1000 tons of bombs had been dropped on a single target. Considerable damage to the town where the base workers and Nazis were billeted. Large fires. Port area severely damaged.*

Opposition. *Far more ack-ack guns around outskirts of the town and the harbour. Also far more search lights had been rushed in with larger area in the cones lit up. Search lights and ack-ack guns co-ordinated electronically so that when an aircraft was coned there was an immediate ack-ack barrage of fire into the cone. More fighters were hovering around and they in turn worked in conjunction with the searchlights and ack-ack guns so that if an aircraft was hit ack-ack ceased but searchlight cone remained leaving several fighters to close in and finish off the aircraft. This procedure was now used on all Rhur targets. When caught in a cone of light aircrews were completely blinded and the only hope of escape was to dive straight down and pray hard!*

Object. *To assist the Royal Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic on our convoys.*

Op.No. 7.

14 /15 Feb. 1943
Cologne.

243 Aircraft.

85 Wellingtons, 90 Halifaxes, and 68 Stirlings.
Losses. 9 aircraft. 3 Halifaxes, 3 Stirlings and 3
Wellingtons shot down.

Flying time.

3hrs. 10mins.

Aircraft used.

Stirling A R9358

Result.

Pathfinder aircraft were now being used to mark targets with red flares. Using H₂S experimentally but not very successful in this raid they dropped their flares in the wrong area hence main bomber force bombed wrong area. With the result that only two large industrial premises and two large agricultural premises were flattened. 51 Germans killed and 135 seriously injured. Unfortunately 25 French forced workers in their barracks in the outskirts of the city were killed

Opposition.

As this was our first operation into the heartland of Germany we experienced the difficulties now to be faced in all future raids on Germany. On crossing the Channel or over the North Sea we had to face heavy ack-ack and searchlights for a depth of 15 to 20 miles on all the coast from Norway right round to the Atlantic tip of France. Then if still lucky we were then faced with hundreds of night fighters right up to the Rhur area and beyond into S.W. Germany. Many of our aircraft were shot down in passing through these blast areas en route to target and then on the return route. If one or two of the engines were hit over the target and you managed to get clear you were a sitting duck in this fighter belt on the return journey and in the 15 mile ack-ack coastal belt as due to engine failure you may well be flying below 6000ft unable to climb or take effective evasive action. On this particular raid we were attacked by three fighters as we approached the target. One fighter managed to hit us on the port mainplane, starting a fire. Severe

evasive action had been taken by “Stinkie” during this attack and thereby we had lost considerable height. We were down to approximately 3000ft. In fact this loss of height saved us as the fighters did not like continuing their attack in the dark at such a low level and as they saw fire on the ;port mainplane they broke away thinking we had had it. However the Good Lord must have intervened because the fire miraculously went out – it must have been extinguished by the airspeed of our dive. Upon our return home on examination it was a petrol pipe that had been fractured by the fighters bullet and a spark had set alight the fuel but as this petrol pipe was connected to the small wing tip petrol tank there was no fuel left in it. Ad we always used up the wing tip tanks first to give us more ability to take effective evasive action over Germany. However we were at 3000ft only and over the outskirts of Cologne, bombs still in the bomb bay and we had no idea what damage had been done nor what petrol was lost etc.. “Stinkie” then first asked my opinion re the fuel condition and the possibility of the fire starting up again. I could only say that we must get rid of our bombs quickly. He agreed and ordered Harry our Bomb Aimer to try and discern some target on the outskirts. Bombs were then dropped, Harry having seen what he thought was wooden barracks blocks in what appeared in the dark to be a wooded area. We were lucky once more and got safely home. On reading the official records in this 1985 Diary I wonder if it was our bombs that hit the French forced workers huts? I sincerely hope not. God forgive us.

Op.No. 8. *16 /17 Feb. 1943*
 Lorient submarine base

377 Aircraft. *99 Wellingtons, 103 Halifaxes, 131 Lancasters, and 44 Stirlings.*
 Losses. 1 Lancasters shot down by a fighter near the target area. We saw it going down in a huge ball of flame. A horrible sight.

Flying time. *5hrs. 25mins.*

Aircraft used. *Stirling K R9145*
 As we had survived our baptism of fire on 7 Operations we were rewarded by getting this lovely new Stirling newly flown in from the factory

Result. *This was to be the last large raid on the Lorient submarine base for some time as intelligence reports had confirmed that it was largely destroyed hence we all carried loads of incendiary bombs to complete the destruction of town and harbour by fire. The town and harbour area was completely destroyed and deserted. No official record of deaths is recorded.*

Opposition. *Our heaviest opposition on this raid was by searchlights and night fighters over the target area.*

Object. *To assist the Royal Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic on our convoys.*

Op.No. 9. *19 / 20 Feb. 1943*
Wilhelmshaven Naval port and submarine base.

338 Aircraft. *120 Wellingtons, 110 Halifaxes, 52 Lancasters, and 56 Stirlings.*
Losses. 12 aircraft. 5 Stirlings, 4 Lancasters and 3 Wellingtons.

Flying time. *3hrs. 40mins.*

Aircraft used. *Stirling K R9145*
2nd operation on our new Stirling.

Result. *Poor bombing results due to the inaccuracy of Pathfinder Force. It was later discovered that the inaccuracies of the Pathfinders to mark target areas properly was not their fault as the maps they were given to plan the raids from were now outdated and did not contain the new development areas passed on through the Secret Service Intelligence Corps. All maps were immediately brought up to date upon the discovery and were continually amended from now on.*

Opposition. *Flak encountered was very heavy not only from ack-ack guns but from battleship guns as well. We were hit on the starboard outer engine losing the propeller completely shot off. Once again a shaky return on only three engines.*

Object. *To continue raids on other naval ports and submarine bases.*

On return from this operation we were immediately sent off on seven days leave. We were ready for it!

Op.No. 10.

28 / 29 Feb. 1943

St Naizaire submarine base.

Our seven days leave included the traveling time from Bury St Edmunds to Aberdeen and return. Result really only four days in Aberdeen. We arrived back on the Squadron around 9am and immediately detailed for operations that same night! (C'est la guerre!)

437 Aircraft.

119 Wellingtons, 100 Halifaxes, 152 Lancasters, 62 Stirlings and 4 Mosquitos.

It is worth noting here the apparent increase in numbers of aircraft operating, in spite of heavy losses of bombers and aircrew. The factories and aircrew training establishments were working flat out and aircrew volunteers kept coming forward, not only from civvy street and R.A.F. ground crews but also from transfer of volunteers from the army to the R.A.F..

Losses. 5 aircraft. 1 Stirlings, 2 Lancasters and 2 Wellingtons.

Further to my comments, from now on large numbers of aircraft were dispatched to other target areas in other towns. Also with the map problem resolved and the Pathfinder Force strengthened by the addition of Mosquito Squadrons, the marking of targets became very very accurate indeed. Also the Nazi night fighter squadrons had the added problem of attacking many different streams of our bombers and by day the ever increasing raids by American Fortress bombers, far more heavily armed than ours by many air gunners in each aircraft and flying at greater altitudes than we could. Though they did not carry the same load of bombs per aircraft as we did, they, by flying in formation in daylight put up a flying fortress of fire all around the formation and accounted for the destruction of many Nazi day fighter aircraft.

Op.No. 10.(cont.)....

Flying time. 5hrs. 45mins.

Aircraft used. *Stirling K R9145*
2nd operation on our new Stirling.

Our lovely new Stirling K R9145 on which we had flown on 2 operations before going on leave had been used by another crew whilst we were on leave to bomb Nuremburg but unfortunately was shot down. Thus, as the Squadron C.O. was not flying this night we got his aircraft.

Result. *Having destroyed Lorient, St Nazaire had to be bombed from now on. Result of this raid was that 60% of the town was destroyed and a large part of the port area. Fortunately the civilian population knew by common sense and underground information That St Nazaire was next on our list they scattered out to the countryside. Nazi losses unknown but 29 civilians were killed and 12 severely injured.*

Opposition. *The opposition was heavy indeed, from the usual ack-ack, searchlights and fighters. We were hit on the port inner engine, part of it being blown away. Once again a return on only three engines.*

When an engine was lost it put tremendous strain on all crew members.

- 1. The pilot had not the same ability to take evasive action.*
- 2. The Flight Engineer, me, had to be very careful selecting fuel from the fourteen petrol tanks as the other engines had to give more power and used more fuel. Required to carry maximum tonnage of bombs, we were never given adequate fuel to cover emergencies.*
- 3. Strain on the air gunners in their lookout for fighter attacks in the dark*

*By the end of February 1943 Bomber Command had done tremendous damage to ports and submarine bases thus higher concentrations of bombers could be dispatched to get to the factories in the Rhur area. And so began on the 5 / 6 March 1943 **The Battle Of The Rhur** which lasted to the 24 / 25 July 1943. Although the Rhur area continued to be bombed thereafter the above period was the period in which it was really destroyed. All aircrew now knew the fierce opposition which now had to be faced. The Rhur was the heaviest defended area in Germany as it was the centre of its war production requirements.*

*And so having played our part in the **Battle of the Atlantic** I was, along with my crew, now entering a battle that was to cause the heaviest casualties of the war on Bomber Crews. (However from July 1943 the losses of aircrew and aircraft were not so severe. (...see note later...)*

*We referred to the Rhur as “**Happy Valley**”. Happy was the word used to camouflage the nervous tension within us. We lived a day at a time those of us who survived.*

It was HELL!

It was, as far as I know, from this Battle of The Rhur that our Commander in Chief, Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Harris became known to us all in the R.A.F. Bomber Squadrons as BUTCH HARRIS (The Butcher)

Bombers shot down from 5 / 6 March 1943 to 24 July 1943 was 1,058.

The Aircrew Europe Star medal was well and truly earned by all Bomber Crews.

Never the less in spite of the vast numbers of aircrew killed in this battle, it was in my opinion, through their sacrifice that the Nazi's were beaten and the "D" Day Landings could then be planned for. If The Battle of the Rhur had not been won, no "D" Day invasion could have succeeded or even been contemplated.

Op.No. 11. *5 / 6 March 1943*
Essen (In the heart of the Rhur).

442 Aircraft. *131 Wellingtons, 94 Halifaxes, 157 Lancasters, and 52 Stirlings and 8 Mosquitos.*
Losses. 28 aircraft. 12 Stirlings, 4 Lancasters, 4 Wellingtons and 8 Halifaxes.

Flying time. *4hrs. 20mins.*

Aircraft used. *Stirling H EF331*
Once again another new aircraft. Flown in during the afternoon we were given it but had no time to air test it, it had to be fuelled up and bombs loaded.

Result. *160 acres of destruction mainly on the Krupps Works in addition 3,018 houses completely destroyed, 2116 seriously damaged. Germans killed, 482, the heaviest casualty list of the enemy so far in bomber raids.*

Opposition. *Over the target just as our bombs were released we were caught in a huge searchlight cone. Our only escape from the ack-ack barrage was to dive immediately from 13000ft to 5,000/6,000ft to find ourselves amongst the balloon cables. Luckily we got out but had both our wings damaged by flak. However our ground crew repaired the port main plane and fitted a new starboard wing when we returned in readiness for our next raid on 8/9 March to Nurenburg*

Object. *The first raid of the 'Battle of the Ruhr'. It was on this night that Bomber Command's 100,000th sortie of the war was flown.*

It is worth recording at this point the opposition faced by Our Bomber Crews when bombing the Rhur. It was terrifying and devastating. From 5th/6th March 1943 to 24th July 1943, 1,058 bombers were shot down which meant that approximately 7,406 aircrew were killed within Bomber Command alone in a space of four and a half months.

What then was the opposition?

Well, to get to the Rhur the bombers had to first evade the night Fighters operating from the European coastal squadrons over the English Channel, we had no fighter escorts. We then had to face the 15 mile deep coastal defences of light and heavy ack-ack fire working in conjunction with the searchlights and night fighters. The next problem was to evade the hundreds of night fighters whose squadrons were based inland, right up to the Rhur area. Then the awful test began on touching the Rhur area which was the heaviest defended part of Germany with thousands of heavy anti aircraft guns which could fire accurately up to over 20,000 feet along with the lighter antiaircraft guns of smaller caliber which could reach 17,000 feet.

The Lancasters and the Halifaxes usually bombed from 17,000 feet. The Mosquitoes could fly much higher. The Stirlings when loaded with bombs were hopeless to handle over 12,500 feet thus the Stirling crews had the added danger of being struck by falling bombs from the Lancaster's and Halifaxes. When we bombed Bochum in the Rhur on 13th/14th May 1943 we had a 500lb bomb dropped from above go right through our starboard mainplane. Luckily it went clean through the upper and lower mainplane skins without touching any petrol tanks or solid internal spars. If it had there would have been nothing, absolutely nothing left of us or the aircraft only fragments to fall to the ground. Another added problem in the Rhur area there were thousands of balloons from which dangled sharp edged steel cables capable of shearing off a mainplane if hit at 200mph normal airspeed.

Op.No. 12. 8 / 9 March 1943
Essen (*In the heart of the Rhur*).

335 Aircraft. 103 Halifaxes, 170 Lancasters, and
62 Stirlings..
Losses. 8 aircraft. 4 Stirlings, 2 Lancasters, 2
Halifaxes.

Flying time. 7 hrs. 25mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling H EF331

Result. 600 buildings completely destroyed and 1400
buildings severely damaged. M.A.N. AND Siemens
factories severely damaged, also railway installations
severely damaged. 600+ Germans killed. No record of
injured.

Opposition. Very heavy flak encountered as we passed through the
coastal belt. Had two attacks by night fighters but with
extreme evasive action they lost us in the dark. Over
the target heavy flak and searchlights, we were hit on
the fuselage sides by exploding ach-ack shells around
us. Once again we survived. On our return the ground
crew began the fuselage repairs immediately and had
our air craft ready by 10am for testing then refueling
and bombing up as we were on ops that night, the 10th
of March.

Op.No. 13. 10 /49 March 1943
Mine laying in the Gironde Estuary

35 Aircraft. 20 Lancasters, and 15 Stirlings..
Losses. 2 aircraft. 2 Lancasters.

Flying time. 6 hrs. 00mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling H EF331

Result. Most mines planted OK. With the submarine bases at Lorient, St Nazaire and Brest so severely damaged the Nazi submarines were forced to work from this estuary and out into the Atlantic along with Nazi naval ships. Hence the importance of mining the estuary. This raid also added another one to the others going into Germany the same night.

Opposition. Heavy flak encountered from both banks of the estuary and enemy fighters very active. Our port mainplane badly damaged. Once again a new mainplane had to be fitted on our return. We were extremely lucky with so much flak damage on the wing that the petrol tanks in it escaped.
Three operations now completed in our new H for Harry but the fuselage showed many patches and we now had both mainplanes renewed.

Op.No. 14. *11 / 12 March 1943
Stuttgart.*

314 Aircraft. *109 Halifaxes, 152 Lancasters, and
53 Stirlings.
Losses. 11 aircraft. 34 Stirlings, 2 Lancasters, 6
Halifaxes.*

Flying time. *6 hrs. 35mins.*

Aircraft used. *Stirling F R9186. Our H Harry was not ready as
ground crew had trouble fitting the new mainplane.
Once again we got the C.O.'s F Freddie.*

Result. *118 buildings completely destroyed. 112 Germans
killed and 386 severely injured. This was the first time
the Germans used dummy cities and setting them
alight. This caused errors by the Path Finders flares
and most of the early bomb loads were released over
dummy targets but as the remaining bombers came in
they began to see where the real city was from the
light of the large fires from the dummy target.*

Opposition. *The heavy flak was devastating as the city was well
defended. As we were in the tail end of the bomber
waves we managed to bomb the real city but by this
time the flak was really heavy and accurate. As we
dropped our bombs we were hit in the starboard outer
engine and part of it fell away but no fire. Now on
three engines and still over the target our evasive
action for flak and searchlights was badly upset and
we were hit again, this time on the port outer engine
which went on fire but I managed to extinguish the fire
with our fire extinguishers around the engine
bulkhead which I could operate. This meant we left the
target on the two inner engines at maximum revs. And
overheating badly and at least a 3 hour flight to get
home. We were losing height rapidly and of course the
speed was reduced so we were away behind the
returning stream of bombers and at the mercy of all
the night fighters. Our only hope of reaching the C
English Channel to ditch was to throw overboard*

everything we could spare to reduce our weight and to rely on the skill of our skipper "Stinkie" to fly over Germany to the coast at ground level and I had to handle the engines the best I could to save enough petrol as on 2 engines we were using up far more petrol than 4 engines would normally have done. Once again the Good Lord took care of us. We were not attacked by fighters so no evasive action was needed and miraculously as we were now almost 1 hour behind the main stream on reaching the French coast we got through the defensive coastal belt ack-ack safely as most likely the gunners had thought all the returning bombers had gone through an hour ago and as we were at ground level we were on top of them before they realized who we were. However to reach our Squadron at Chedburgh we needed another half hours flying time to cross the channel and get home. By my calculations on fuel used and the tremendous strain on the 2 inner engines running at max revs. for 2 hours I knew we could not make it... a. not enough fuel and b. the engines could blow up at any minute. So on informing "Stinkie" of the situation he ordered us to be ready for ditching in the Channel. In due course I could see the white cliffs of Dover appearing and finally after some anxious minutes we crossed over the at roof top height, the engines began to splutter – no more fuel. We could not bail out as we were at only 100ft. Luckily "Stinkie" what appeared to be a fighter squadron landing strip in a field, he tried to glide on to it but instead he could not make it and managed to take us down on a clump of trees which broke our speed as we glided across their tops. We finally came to rest on top of a few. On getting out we had to climb down the trees. Dazed, shaken and utterly exhausted, fortunately for us fighter boys had seen us and arrived very quickly with a truck, taking us back to their Mess. After a mug of Navy Rum we slept on the Mess anteroom floor still in our flying kit. They took on hand to notify our Squadron. Next day our Squadron flew an aircraft down to us and flew us home. Needless to say the C.O. was glad to see us and told us that "Stinkie" was to be recommended for the D.F.C. for his leadership and extremely skillful

piloting and as so much rested on the engine handling I in turn was recommended to be commissioned for my part. As well as the D.F.C. "Stinkie" was also recommended for a commission. Meantime "Stinkie" was promoted to Flight Sergeant rank. Very soon on the 3rd April his commission came through then on the 13th June his D.F.C. came through. My commission came through on the 30th June.

When we got back to the Squadron after the forced landing we were sent on leave for seven days.

Op.No. 15. 28 / 29 March 1943
St.Nazaire (The raid was necessary as the base was being used again).

357 Aircraft. 99 Halifaxes, 189 Lancasters, and
63 Stirlings and 6 Mosquitoes.
Losses. 1 aircraft a Lancaster.

Flying time. 5 hrs. 40mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling H EF331 once again.

Result. Severe damage to the port area. On our way to the raid for some strange reason "Lankie" our wirless operator reported picking up a message recalling the Stirlings. "Stinkie" decided to ignore the message and as we discovered later 7 other Stirling crews has done the same. However as we were to be "On the carpet" the following morning, Photographic Mosquitoes had brought back pictures of the damage done to the port area and so we were let off with a reprimand only.

Opposition. Once again we were hit by flak on the port wing but it was repairable with patches. OUR NUMBER WAS STILL NOT UP ! Amazingly, by now we were hardened to it all and kept on a day at a time. The loss of comrades taken in our stride. We had changed inside and had become hardened attackers showing no mercy.

Op.No. 16. 29 / 30 March 1943
Berlin.

357 Aircraft. 103 Halifaxes, 162 Lancasters, and
64 Stirlings.
Losses. 21 aircraft. 11 Lancasters, 7 Halifaxes and 3
Stirlings.

Flying time. 6 hrs. 30mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling H EF331 our fifth operation in her!

Result. 148 buildings completely destroyed and 148 Germans
killed. Not a very satisfactory raid due to severe icing
conditions as we crossed the North Sea. This was a
frightening experience as the ice built up on the
leading edges of the mainplanes it affected our lift and
hence we were continually losing height. As the ice
broke off the four propeller blades it battered
continuously against the fuselage. It was frightening
and in addition to the severe icing we experienced
electrical storms, rings of fire surrounded the 4
propellers and fire streamed off the rear of the
mainplanes and from the guns in the mid upper turret
and the rear turret. Then again as the ice built up in
the air intakes to each engine we lost power. 21
aircraft were shot down over Berlin. Many did not
reach the centre of the city and there must have been
many more aircraft lost over the North Sea through
icing up and also some who would have exploded in
the electrical storms. I seem to remember that the true
number of aircraft lost was in fact 72 bombers; but of
course were never admitted to in the press.
A terrifying experience On return we were completely
shattered. After debriefing it was then 4a.m. we
wandered as a crew in a daze eventually finding
ourselves in a darkened church and each of us on our
knees silently praying. Not a word passed between us
as we eventually wandered to our billets.

Op.No. 17. 4 / 5 April 1943
Kiel harbour. We were told that a large build up of Nazi Naval destroyers were squeezed into the harbour and that they were to be our target. There was 577 bombers on that raid. This was the largest raid on Kiel harbour so far. "Stinkies" commission had come through so he was now pilot Officer and we were very proud of him.

577 Aircraft. 116 Halifaxes, 203 Lancasters, 90 Stirlings and 168 Wellingtons..
Losses. 12 aircraft. 5 Lancasters, 4 Hallifaxes, 2 Stirlings and 1 Wellington.

Flying time. 6 hrs. 20mins.

Aircraft used. *Stirling H EF331 our sixth operation in her!*

Result. *Many destroyers and battleships severely damaged – unknown if any were sunk. In addition 11 warehouses at the quay side were completely flattened.*

Opposition. *The opposition was severe. Not only had we face the heavy barrage of anti aircraft fir we were also under fire from the guns on the vessels in the harbour. On leaving the target we were attacked by 3 fighters but got away by diving to sea level. H Harry suffered no flak damage this time. We now had 6 little Red Bombs painted on the nose of our aircraft.*

Op.No. 18. *10 / 11 April 1943
Frankfurt.*

502 Aircraft. *124 Halifaxes, 136 Lancasters, 144 Wellingtons and
98 Stirlings.
Losses 21 aircraft. 8 wellingtons, 5 Lancasters, 5
Stirlings and 3 Halifaxes.*

Flying time. *5 hrs. 45mins.*

Aircraft used. *Stirling F BK763 The photograph of this aircraft is
below along with our Ground Crew.*

*This was the third new aircraft we had been given and
on this one we did the next 10 raids and returned
successfully. Thanks be to God.*

*On our return from the Kiel harbour raid (Op. No. 17)
in our H Harry we were told by the C.O. of the
Squadron that he had been notified by Bomber
command H.Q. that he had to start training his most
experienced crews on low flying exercises for special
raids to be undertaken on the next full moon period
which was 14th to 17th April, and until then the crews
chosen had not to go on operations until the night of
the 14th April. With the large number of our Squadron
bombers having been shot down since we arrived at
Chedburgh we were then equipped with only 12 new 4
engined bombers. Our crew along with two others
were the only survivors, the other 9 crews had been
shot down and so out of the many new crews which
had been posted in since January 1943 (many of them
had also been shot down) and replaced our crew
along with the two others had completed 17 raids.
Thus 214 Squadron could put 3 crews. The result of
the C.O. 's decision was accepted and three new
Stirlings, all fitted with the new equipment were flown
in from the factory the following day and we got F for
Freddie BK763 on the 10th of April. However during
the period 4th to 10th April we had begun our special
low flying training first in daylight and then at night*

and during that time our H Harry had been taken over by another crew which were operating and on their first operation in H Harry she was shot down on the night of the 9th April over the Rhur.

This disturbed us greatly when we knew this as it was the second aircraft we had been given as new but on another crew taking over they had perished. However the excitement of this low flying and the wondering what this special operations to come on the full moon were, put that worry and disturbance completely out of our minds.

Well to get back to the beginning of my writing re this raid on Frankfurt on which we used our 3rd new aircraft F BK763, officially we should not have been sent out on it because we were not supposed to operate again until the full moon period. But on our low flying training we could not try out the new navigation equipment over Germany and this we felt we should have the chance to try before going on the special operations and along with our C.O./ who knew the time of departure for Frankfurt was to be after midnight it was going to be nearer 6am the following morning before we could return to base and there would be the opportunity to have some moonlight experience and so we were ON op's.. Thankfully we returned safely the only damage done to us was that we were hit by flak on the starboard outer engine but I managed managed to keep her going reasonably well. On return we found that the shrapnel had damaged the mixture control only and hence I was able to keep her going on the richer mixture Our losses overall were quite high, 21 aircraft shot down so we were lucky in the gamble we took and on our return over Germany we managed to get some low flying done and try out our new equipment. Our confidence grew!

Op.No. 19.

*14 / 15 April 1943 and the full moon.
Our target was to be Stuttgart and to beat the night fighters and the German radar warning systems which could only function if the approaching aircraft were flying at least at a height of 4 to 5 thousand feet. So the experiment was to be taken with around twenty experienced crews flying at sea level across the Channel and across Germany until reaching the target when we were to climb to 3000ft before bombing so that the blasts from our bombs would not damage any of our twenty aircraft. All the other 480 bombers were to be flying at the usual height of 13 to 17 thousand feet but they were to be so timed that they did not bomb until zero + one minute of the dropping time. We were timed that we would drop green flares only, we carried no bombs, and we would drop these at zero – two minutes hoping that by flying low the defenses would be taken by surprise as their radar warning would have been warning the ack-ack at a later time of arrival than our actual attack, so*

462 Aircraft.

*135 Halifaxes, 98 Lancasters, 83 Stirlings and 146 Wellingtons..
Losses. 23 aircraft. 3 Lancasters, 4 Hallifaxes, 8 Stirlings and 8 Wellingtons.
6 of the Stirlings shot down were in fact really crashes into pylons or electrical cables because it was only 14 low flying Stirlings that returned.*

Flying time.

7 hrs. 05mins.

Aircraft used.

Stirling F BK763

Result.

The experiment worked as flying at sea level no fighters had been warned of our crossing and the same for the coastal defences. They were taken by surprise, we were skimming over their heads and gone before they could take action. You see the radar had noted the main stream coming and so the night fighters were up flying at 20000ft waiting for them and the ack-ack had also been prepared for that timing. The Stirling was a lovely aircraft for low flying but in the moonlight and traveling at over 200mph the

pylons and cables were a menace. We passed over many night fighter squadron airfields on our way out and on our return journey their defences were again taken by surprise. On our return flight over Germany we were so elated we shot up two trains straffing the from the engine to the rear carriage from our 4 gun mid turret and our 4 gun rear turret. In spite of the heavy casualty of 6 out of twenty aircraft H.Q. decided we do the same the following night and attack Mannheim.

Op.No. 20. 16 / 17 April 1943
Mannheim

271 Aircraft. 17 Halifaxes, 95 Stirlings and 159 Wellingtons.
Losses. 18 aircraft. 2 Hallifaxes, 7 Stirlings and 9 Wellingtons.
Again twenty Stirlings were detailed for the low flying technique, but with an almost 50% casualty list 7 of the 20 failed to return, Bomber Command decided no more Stirling bombers to be used for this technique. Only other 4 engined bombers would repeat this. But the method was in fact taken over by some Mosquito crews of the Pathfinder Force. They were so much faster than the 4 engined bombers. Group Captain Cheshire in his Mosquito did many operations thereafter at low level and very accurately marked by flares the targets.

Flying time. 6 hrs. 15mins.

Aircraft used. Stirling F BK763

Result. We shot up two trains on our return journey. The raid was very successful as production was stopped at 41 industrial premises and 4300 buildings destroyed. 230 Germans were killed and 6954 rendered homeless.

Op.No. 21. 20 April 1943
Heinjel Factory near Rostok

86 Aircraft. 86 Stirlings.
Losses.8 aircraft. 8 Stirlings.

More special equipment had been fitted for jamming the German radar, but to our horror we found that by using this jamming equipment the searchlight radar could pick us up spot on!

Flying time. 8 hrs.

Aircraft used. Stirling F BK763 (3rd Op in her)

Result. The Heinkel factory was almost completely destroyed. No record of deaths.

Opposition. Over the factory, which was heavily defended, we were coned for 12 long minutes. From 13000ft we were forced down to 1000ft and for that 12 minutes we were continually fired at . Luckily no engines hit nor any fuel tanks.

Op.No. 22. 12/13 May 1943
Duisberg in The Rhur

572 Aircraft. 142 Halifaxes, 70 Stirlings 112 Wellingtons, 238
Lancasters and 10 Mosquitoes .
Losses. 34 aircraft. 9 Hallifaxes, 5 Stirlings, 10
Wellingtons, and 10 Lancasters.

Flying time. 4 hrs.

Aircraft used. Stirling F BK763 (4th Op in her)

Result. Very successful raid, no need to bomb
Duisberg again. 280 killed in factories and the total
tonnage of 73 ships sunk was 18,921 tons plus 21
barges sunk. 1,596 factory blocks raised to the
ground. Our losses were heavy with 34 aircraft shot
down.

Opposition. Defenses were powerful. We were twice
coned in searchlights and forced to 7000 ft on edge of
target. Port inner engine hit by ack-ack shell.
Returned on three engines. Attacked by a fighter after
leaving target but as we were now flying very low we
managed to evade him. Wally the rear gunner hit him
and he broke away damaged.

Our low flying training and low flying experience on
the two experimental raids, Stuttgart and Manheim
gave us great confidence when coned in searchlights
and forced to dive low to escape. Stinkie our skipper
and pilot was first class and a young man of great
courage. His gallantry was recognized and he
deservedly was awarded the D.F.C. and Bar.

Op.No. 23. *13/14 May 1943
Bochum in the Rhur*

442 Aircraft. *135 Halifaxes, 98 Lancasters, 95 Stirlings, 104 Wellingtons and 10 Mosquitoes..
Losses. 24 aircraft. 1 Lancasters, 13 Hallifaxes, 4 Stirlings and 6 Wellington.*

Flying time. *5 hrs.*

Aircraft used. *Stirling F BK763 our 5th operation in her!*

Result. *394 industrial buildings completely destroyed and 716 severely damaged. 302 Germans.*

Opposition. *The Mosquitoes now using the low flying marking method was a great success. Again we were coned twice. 50 searchlights in each cone. All hell was let loose around you. Once again the starboard inner engine hit by a shell. Return at low level on three engines.*

The amazing and courageous raid by 617 Squadron on the Rhur Dams really added to all the previous bombing raids and produced the final knock out blow to the Nazi industrial effort. 16/17 May 1943.

But Air Chief Marshall Butch Harris did not hold his hand. My crew took part in a further 4 raids on the Rhur, as follows:

Op.No. 24. 23/24 May 1943
Dortmund in the Ruhr

826 Aircraft. 199 Halifaxes, 343 Lancasters, 120 Stirlings, 151 Wellingtons and 13 Mosquitoes.
Losses. 38 Aircraft. 8 Lancasters, 18 Halifaxes, 6 Stirlings and 6 Wellington.

Flying time. 4 hrs. 5min

Aircraft used. *Stirling F BK763 our 6th operation in her!*

Result. *Large areas of this industrial area completely devastated including the Hoesch Steel Works. 2000 Industrial buildings completely destroyed. 1275 Germans killed and 624 seriously injured. Very successful raid but at a high price in lives of our aircrew.*

Opposition. *The ack ack and searchlights were still very formidable as one can see by the number of our aircraft shot down. This time we returned miraculously unscathed.*

Op.No. 25. 25/26 May 1943
Dusseldorf in the Rhur

759 Aircraft. 169 Halifaxes, 323 Lancasters, 113 Stirlings, 142 Wellingtons and 12 Mosquitoes.
Losses. 27 Aircraft. 9 Lancasters, 4 Halifaxes, 8 Stirlings and 6 Wellington.

Flying time. 3 hrs. 45min

Aircraft used. *Stirling F BK763 our 7th operation in her!*

Result. *Disappointing 10/10 cloud over the target. Pathfinder flares could not be seen clearly thus the early waves of bombers had started fires outwith the heart of the target thereby the remaining waves bombed over the less important areas. 100 buildings completely destroyed unfortunately they were not the principal ones we were after. 40 firemen killed.*

Opposition. Yet again we returned unscathed.

Op.No. 26

29/30 May 1943
Wuppertal and Barmen in the Rhur

719 Aircraft.

185 Halifaxes, 292 Lancasters, 118 Stirlings, 113 Wellingtons and 11 Mosquitoes.
Losses. 35 Aircraft. 7 Lancasters, 10 Halifaxes, 10 Stirlings and 8 Wellington.

Flying time.

4 hrs. 25min

Aircraft used.

Stirling F BK763 our 8th operation in her!

Result.

*Very very successful raid but as we circled the target before breaking away for home, I cannot forget the horror we saw. The two towns were a blazing inferno. If Hell is like that, may I be spared ever seeing it on my Judgement Day. **Words cannot describe it!** 1000 acres were completely flattened and burnt out. 3500 Germans were killed. No record of the seriously injured. 90% of the factories were erased to the ground and 6082 buildings were erased to the ground.*

Opposition.

On our return flight we were attacked by a fighter but our gunners set him alight, unfortunately we could not see if he crashed as the smoke from the fires was very dense. Small damage to our fuselage from his attack. Safe return once again.

*Stinkie promoted to F/Lt and recommended for a bar to his DFC. Harry our bomb aimer and Stu our navigator recommended for their DFC's
Sad to say as Curly, Lanky and Wally were the only Sgt's in the crew and Stinkie, Harry Stu and I were commissioned their recommendations went through. But as our Flight Commander and CO were shot down the following night, whether Curly and Wally our gunners were recommended for their skill and courage of warding off the several fighter attacks we experienced will never be known as Sgt's recommended were usually, I believe, filled in officially after the officers awards went through.*

Op.No. 27. *11/12 June 1943*
Dusseldorf in the Rhur

783 Aircraft. *202 Halifaxes, 326 Lancasters, 99 Stirlings, 143*
Wellingtons and 13 Mosquitoes.
Losses. 38 Aircraft. 14 Lancasters, 12 Halifaxes, 2
Stirlings and 10 Wellington.

Flying time. *3hrs.45min*

Aircraft used. *Stirling F BK763 our 9th operation in her!*

Result. *130 acres flattened. 1292 Germans killed. 140,000*
bombed out.

Opposition. *No record in log book.*

*As we had had a really strenuous time we did not fly
on ops after Wuppertal 29/30 May until this one.*

Op.No. 28. *19/20 June 1943*
Schneider Works Le Creusot near Paris.

290 Aircraft. *181 Halifaxes, 2 Pathfinder Lancasters, 107 Stirlings,*
Losses. 2 Aircraft

Flying time. *? hrs.?min*

Aircraft used. *Stirling*
Once again we had to take a new aircraft, for the third
time now, Our last one Stirling F BK763 was shot
down flown by another crew during our lay off period.

Result. *All the above crews were experienced having*
completed over 25 operations each. This was a special
target of the Schneider Works only. With the loss of
only 2 aircraft we completely flattened it and returned
safely.

We were now being taken off ops for a rest period, but
as a crew we had been recommended, if we so wished,
and if W/Cdr Guy Gibson was satisfied after
interviewing us we could join 617 Squadron (The Dam
Busters). We flew down to Scampton to be interviewed
by W/Cdr Guy Gibson but as Harry and I were over
30 years old we were not accepted.