

F/Sgt John Fairbairn

Bomb Aimer



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References: 97 Squadron Operational Record Books 1939-1943

Achieve Your Aim by *Kevin Bending*

Mark Howard

2026

Approved
George R.I.



J.W. Helm-Armstrong
Chester Herald
and Inspector of Royal
Air Force Badges

College of Arms,
January, 1939.

Commanding Officers:

Wg Cdr D.F.Balsdon

Wg Cdr J.H.Kynoch

Wg Cdr J.H.H.Collier DSO DFC

Wg Cdr G.D.Jones DSO DFC

Gp Capt N.H.Fresson DFC

Wg Cdr E.J.Carter DFC*

Wg Cdr A.W.Heward DFC* AFC

Gp Capt P.W.Johnson DSO DFC AFC

(* denotes Bar)

Early in 1941, a large donation was made to the British Government by the Malay Straits Settlements for the purchase of some Avro Manchester bomber aircraft. In appreciation of this, 97 Squadron was authorized to assume the title of "97 (Straits Settlements) Squadron", and it was reformed in February 1941, at Waddington.

25th February 1941 97 Squadron was scheduled to operate from RAF Coningsby as part of 5 Group. The Squadron began to convert to using Lancasters in January 1942 and, in March of that year, 97 Squadron re-located to Woodhall Spa.

re-formed 25.2.41 as No.97 (B) Sqdn from nucleus provided by No.207 (B) Sqdn at: Waddington Feb 1941-Mar 1941

Coningsby : Mar 1941-Mar 1942

Woodhall Spa : Mar 1942-Apr 1943

Bourn : Apr 1943-Apr 1944

"A", "B" & "C" Flts detached to Gransden Lodge, Graveley & Oakington, respectively during Aug/Sep 1943.

Coningsby : Apr 1944 onwards

Aircraft flown by 97 Squadron

Avro Manchester : Feb 1941-Feb 1942

Avro Lancaster B.I and B.III : Jan 1942 onwards



List of Operations

Fairbairn, J. (B/Aim)

- Sgt 1. 15/16 Feb 44 Berlin (P/O Perkins),
2. 20/21 Feb 44 Stuttgart (P/O Perkins),
3. 24/25 Feb 44 Schweinfurt (P/O Perkins),
- 25/26 Feb 44 Augsburg (P/O Perkins) ret early,
4. 1/2 Mar 44 Stuttgart (P/O Perkins),
- 15/16 Mar 44 Stuttgart (P/O Perkins) ret early,
- F/Sgt 5. 22/23 Mar 44 Frankfurt (P/O Perkins),
6. 30/31 Mar 44 Nuremburg (P/O Perkins),
7. 11/12 April 44 Aachen (P/O Perkins),
8. 28/29 April 44 Kjeller (P/O Perkins),
9. 29/30 April 44 Clermont-Ferrand (P/O Perkins),
10. 1/2 May 44 Toulouse (P/O Perkins),
11. 3/4 May 44 Mailly-le-Camp (P/O Perkins),
12. 7/8 May 44 Tours Airfield (P/O Perkins),
13. 10/11 May 44 Lille (P/O Perkins),
14. 19/20 May 44 Amiens (P/O Perkins),
15. 22/23 May 44 Brunswick (F/O Perkins),
16. 24/25 May 44 Eindhoven Phillips Works (F/O Perkins) attack cancelled by Controller at target,
17. 27/28 May 44 St Valery-en-Caux (P/O Perkins),
18. 21/22 June 44 Gelsenkirchen (F/O H.W.J.Edwards).
Killed in flying accident 23.6.44.

From Operational Record Books

15/16 February 1944 – Berlin

Flying and ground training as detailed. 24 aircraft detailed for operations. 17 aircraft took off to attack targets in Berlin in 10/10ths cloud tops 5/6000 feet and visibility good over target. Defences predicted H/F and L/F. Searchlights ineffective owing to cloud. The marking was kept constant and well concentrated, in most cases TIs were lost in cloud. No results were seen but a good glow reflected on clouds indicated a fairly good concentration and the glow was seen from 30 miles on route home. P/O McLean and crew failed to return from this operation. 16 photos attempted. The remaining 7 aircraft attacked Frankfurt-on-Oder about 50 miles away from Berlin. Weather was 10/10ths cloud tops 5/8000 feet, visibility good. Negligible H/F and L/F. Searchlights ineffective, no fighter activity. The target was well marked by TI green and a concentration of reds was maintained. A good glow was seen when on route home, otherwise no results were seen owing to cloud. 7 photos attempted. The raid on Berlin was considered very successful – over 1000 aircraft were employed on the night operations.

ND355T P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt Rosenberg, P/O W.H.Hunt, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Coman, J.K.Russell, M.H.McBride. Up 1710 Down 0030. 5 x 2000lb. Weather over Berlin 10/10ths cloud tops 8-10,000'. Vis good. Bombed at 20,000'. General opinion is that good results were obtained.

20/21 February 1944 – Stuttgart

Crews resting today. 21 aircraft have again been detailed for operations with briefing for aircrews at 1700 hours. 21 aircraft took off to attack Stuttgart. 2 aircraft returned early due to technical failures. The remaining 19 aircraft carried on to raid the target in 4-6/10ths cloud tops thin layer 15,000 feet, visibility good. Defences moderate H/F barrage. No searchlights. Fighter activity seemed reduced. 18 photos attempted. The attack opened early and all supporters were on time. Red TIs were seen at 0356 hours with Wanganui flares and the first green at 0358 hours. Marking from that time was fairly regular and the target was kept marked throughout the attack, a good concentration was maintained. Bomb bursts were seen in town but some incendiaries were wide and overshot. An explosion, orange in colour, was seen in NW part of town at 0404 hours. And large fires were seen embracing whole streets in NW part of town. Smoke rose to over 15,000' and fires were seen by some crews of returning aircraft from 130 miles on route home. Generally marking was good and the attack is considered to have been successful. F/Lt R.S.Emerson and crew crashed on approaching to land on the runway – there were no survivors. The aircraft had circled and been in touch with Control by R/T. The captain stated that they were in difficulty, having collided over the target with another aircraft. The aircraft was considerably damaged which no doubt was the cause of the aircraft diving into the ground some 300 yards short of the runway. The aircraft was burnt and wreckage strewn about – seven bodies taken to SSQ Bourn.

JB728S P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, F/O W.H.Hunt, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Coman, J.K.Russell, M.H.McBride. Up 0035 Down 0650. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 5 x 1000lb. Bombed target from 19,000'. Smoke was observed. Fires could be seen from about 45 miles away. Weather - light good, no cloud, visibility good.

24/25 February 1944 – Schweinfurt

Flying training etc carried out as per schedule. In the morning the funeral took place at Cambridge Cemetery at 1100 hours, of those killed in the crash. The following were buried :- F/L R.S.Enerson, P/O I.Worth (Aus) Nav, P/O J.A.Bartholomew A/B, W/O R.Dickie W/Op (Can), F/Sgt G.W.Wood A/G, F/Sgt J.Newell F/E. Relatives of those living in this country attended. The Flight Commander, Adjutant and 20 officers and NCO aircrew were also in attendance. F/Sgt W.Duncan A/G was conveyed to be buried at his home town in Ireland.

21 Lancasters have been detailed to attack Schweinfurt in two waves, take off being approx 1900 hours and 2100 hours. 10 aircraft attacked in the first wave in clear sky, visibility good. Defences moderate H/F barrage bursting 22,000'. Searchlights numerous. Fighters very active from French coast to Stuttgart where many flares were seen. 9 photos attempted. At 2258 hours red TIs and green TIs were seen during the first few minutes the target was well covered with markers, flares being kept constantly marked throughout the attack. The town and river were identified by most crews. Incendiaries were well scattered over the town and fires commenced in the NE and appeared to draw back until most of the town was covered. Smoke was in two columns and obliterated the fires when crews were 80 miles away on route home. F/O D.R.Smith and crew failed to return. In the 2nd wave, 9 aircraft attacked Schweinfurt. 1 aircraft was withdrawn and one aircraft returned early, W/T and R/T u/s. The attack was made in clear sky and good visibility. Defences moderate H/F barrage – fighter activity considerably reduced and negligible. Fires were seen on approach to target from 150 miles away. Green TIs were seen first at 0103 hours and red TIs at 0115 hours. Many incendiaries carpeted the area and the glow made it difficult to see individual TIs go down. An orange explosion was reported at 0108 hours and another at 0109.30 NE of the town. Generally concentration was good and fires could be seen by returning aircraft from 120-150 miles on route home. All these aircraft returned safely to base. 9 photos attempted.

ND501U P/O N.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, P/O W.H.Hurst, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Comans, J.K.Russell, M.H.McBride. Up 1850 Down 0155. 10 x 1000lb. Bombs dropped in centre of 4 red TIs over Schweinfurt. Red TIs fairly well concentrated but greens rather scattered. Large whitish-orange explosion seen in centre of town.

25/26 February 1944 – Augsburg

21 aircraft have again been detailed for operations, crews have been briefed to attack in two waves. 1st wave – 1 aircraft returned early S/I u/s. The remaining 12 aircraft attacked Augsburg in clear sky and good visibility from 10,500 – 19,000 feet. Defences slight to moderate H/F. Many searchlights ineffective around target. Fighters negligible although flares were plentiful directly after attack. The first green TI was seen at 22.38 hours and immediately afterwards others followed there being a good concentration of TI greens and TI reds in the first two minutes. Marking was good and maintained throughout the attack and bomb bursts and incendiaries were seen in the area of markers. Some bombing was seen in the north corner of the town and most was generally to be seen in the built up area. The attack was generally considered to be good.

2nd wave – 1 aircraft was withdrawn – technical failures – 1 aircraft returned early due to electrical failure, the remaining 6 aircraft attacked Augsburg from 14,500/19,500' in clear sky and good visibility. Defences were mod/slight H/F bursting high. Searchlights ineffective but numerous. Fighter activity negligible. 6 photos attempted. Fires resulting from the earlier attack were seen to be burning when first aircraft arrived. TI greens were seen and quickly backed up by the VBUs and the target was kept well marked. Main force aircraft arrived early and bombed before time. The main force of the attack appeared to be a little to NE. A good fire appeared to be burning covering a large area in center of town and some scattered to north from earlier attack. 18 Lancasters attacked and returned safely to base.

This attack on Augsburg is the first by night since the famous daylight attack on the factory on the 17th April 1942 by 97 Squadron led by S/L Sherwood DFC who is now a prisoner of war. The American Air Force attacked the same targets in daylight yesterday in large force.

ND501U P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, P/O W.H.Hunt, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Comans, J.K.Russell, M.H.McBride. Up 1846 Down 2224. Sortie abandoned and returned early owing to engine trouble.

1/2 March 1944 Stuttgart

21 aircraft detailed for operations against target at Stuttgart. The attack was made in good vis. 8/10ths cloud tops 6/80000', from 16/20000'. Defences slight to moderate H/F. Most crews reported seeing neither flak, searchlights, or night fighters. 21 photos were attempted. The attack opened at 02.56 when Wanganui flares were first seen, and after the first two or three minutes when Wanganuis were in fairly good concentration, marking became rather scattered and was not continuous. Fires were reported and smoke was seen coming through clouds which reflected a good glow from fires. Owing to the inconsistency of marking, no clear picture of the trends of the attack is possible. All aircraft and crews returned safely to base.

ND501A P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt A.Coxhead, P/O W.H.Hurst, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Comans, J.K.Russell, M.E.McBride. Up 2335 Down 0635. 5 x 2000lb. Stuttgart bombed from 16,000' on H2S and Wanganuis. On account of 10/10ths cloud only some flares seen and glow on clouds from incendiary bombs. When aircraft left target a good glow from fires was observed.

15/16 March 1944 Stuttgart

24 Lancasters detailed for operations. Briefing took place, with Stuttgart for the target. The attack was made in good visibility with 10/10ths cloud, tops 8000'. Wanganui flares were seen at 23.09 and at the commencement the target appeared to have been well marked, but a second concentration soon built up wide of the original one. Gaps appeared in the marking, supporters were late with scattered bombing. From all reports it would appear to be a disappointing attack.

ND501U P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, P/O W.A.Hunt, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.McBride. Up 1930 Down 2210. Sortie abandoned owing to starboard engine losing power resulting in inability to gain height above 8,000'

22/23 March 1944 – Frankfurt

Some training was carried out in the morning and 14 Lancasters were detailed for operations tonight. Frankfurt was the target and the attack opened on time at 21.45. A fair concentration was achieved, timing was good, and marking was well maintained. Large fires were seen around aiming point and fires quickly extended with smoke rising to 10,000' and fires were visible 200 miles away. There was slight H/F, searchlights numerous but ineffective. Enemy fighter activity below normal. P/O Cooper and crew failed to return, no news having since been received. F/O Moroney and crew also failed to return, the last message heard was at 20.38 hours, position given as 53.21N 03.45E baling out.

ND501M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, F/O W.H.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, Sgts J.V.Coman, J.K.Russell, M.H.McBride. Up 1855 Down 0015. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 2 x 1000lb, 600 x 4lb incs, 40 x 4lb incs. Vis good over target. 2/10ths cloud. Bombed from 17,000' in centre of 6 red TIs. One minute before bombing three red TIs cascaded and aircraft bombed these as they fell towards centre of another three red TIs seen through cloud on ground. Markers and fires spread slightly west of built up area.

30/31 March 1944 Nuremburg

Some training was carried out prior to briefing. 14 crews were detailed to attack Nuremburg. Weather was 7 to 10/10ths cloud with tops varying from 10,000' to 20,000' with thick haze. 2 red TIs were seen to disappear under the cloud at 0103 hours. A cluster of skymarkers were observed at 0110, in a concentration east of Nuremburg with two others south of the city. The attack tended to become scattered towards the end, however, a large explosion was noted at 0113 hours. The flak was moderate to heavy, no searchlights. Fighters were up in great strength. Command experienced their heaviest night's loss in 96 aircraft. F/Lt Rowlands and crew and F/Lt Hyde and crew failed to return. P/O Edwards was badly shot up, returned safely.

ND501B P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, F/O W.H.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2215 Down 0515. 5 x 2000lb. Vis good over Nuremburg. 8-10/10ths cloud. Two red TIs observed at 0103 hours and one Wanganui seen a few seconds later. After bombing 4 Wanganuis seen in line. Faint glow seen from Nuremburg area after leaving.

11/12 April 1944 - Aachen

Fighter affiliation, "Y" runs and air-to-air firing carried out. 10 aircraft detailed to attack Aachen for tonight's operation. Weather was 10/10ths cloud with tops 6,000/8,000 feet, good visibility. First red TI was seen at 22.40 and marking from then was constant and in a very good concentration. Several areas of fires were seen and generally the attack was well concentrated. Fires over the target could be seen by a Mosquito crew taking off from base at 22.50. There was slight H/F, S/Ls were negligible, also fighter activity.

ND501M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.E.Coxhead, F/O W.H.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, Sgts J.P.Coman, J.K.Russell, M.H.McBride. Up 2045 Down 0010. 13 x 1000lb MC. Aachen attacked from 15,800' on one long stick of red TIs. Bomb bursts were seen, all in centre of TIs which were well concentrated. Red TIs were seen cascading in a circle around main concentration. Fires seen burning on ground.

28/29 April 1944 – Kjeller (Oslo)

15 Lancasters have been detailed to attack a Maintenance Depot at Kjeller just outside Oslo. The attack was made in clear weather from 6-10,000 feet. Opposition nil. Datum point markers accurate. Flares provided perfect illumination on time. The raid was highly effective – hangars and buildings were seen to blow up. Excellent photos of aiming points obtained. All crews returned safely.

ND495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2110 Down 0430. 6 clusters 7" flares, 6 x 1000lb MC. Aero engine works at Kjeller seen by illuminating flares. Backed existing flares which went down a few seconds before and dropped from west to east. Instructed to bomb 2000 yards west of existing RSF, which was done. All flares appeared to have gone out when bombing started. More flares would fall and then ground marking was out.

29/30 April 1944 – Clermont-Ferrand

15 Lancasters detailed to attack a factory at Clermont-Ferrant near Paris. The attack was made in good visibility from about 7,500 to 9,000 feet. First red spot fire seen in light of flares to be very accurate. Marking carried out promptly. Raid went according to plan and was well backed by Main Force, both 4000s and incendiaries. Operation was successful and good photos obtained. All returned safely to base.

ND452S P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2204 Down 0430. 6 clusters 7" flares, 6 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 4.5" flares. Located by datum point and flares. Datum point markers in correct position at 0113 hours, well backed up. First flares a bit too west but second were over target. Bombing very good indeed.

1/2 May 1944 – Toulouse

Some training was carried out in the morning. That night 15 Lancaster aircraft were detailed for an attack on an explosives works at Toulouse. Our aircraft opened the raid by illuminating the target with 7" flares. Mosquito aircraft then located the actual aiming point, and marked it with Red Spot Fires, which were backed up by 97 Squadron aircraft. The Red Spot Fires were, unfortunately, at times obscured by smoke, but the great majority of aircraft managed to bomb the markers, and the raid was subsequently proved by PRU photographs to have been satisfactory. Three very violent explosions were observed during the raid. The weather was very good and opposition negligible. All our aircraft returned safely.

ND495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, P/O W.Hunt, Sgts J.Fairbairn, J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2139 Down 0506. 6 clusters 7" flares, 3 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 1000lb MC (LD), 3 x 4.5" reco flares. Located target, seen by flares and visually. RSF obliterated by bombing. Main Force seemed to be late; Controller called them in to bomb but they didn't come and we were called in instead.

3/4 May 1944 – Mailly-Le-Camp

A considerable amount of training was carried out in the morning. Operations that night were directed against a German military camp and supply depot at Mailly-Le-Camp. Our aircraft kept the target illuminated from 00.14 to 00.29 hours whilst the Mosquito aircraft marked the actual aiming point for the Main Force to bomb. The raid was extremely successful and the target was completely destroyed. Fighter opposition was exceptionally intense during a period from the end of the attack until crossing the French coast home. The whole operation was carried out in brilliant moonlight and on the return journey many of our aircraft flew at heights between 50/200' above the ground, often flying down German occupied aerodromes, strafing searchlights and flak towers! One of our aircraft – "A" captained by F/O Ross Ellesmere RCAF, did not return from this mission. The weather was very good.

N495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.J.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2158 Down 0320. 6 clusters 7" flares, 8 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 4.5" flares. Weather cleared over Maily. Target located by RSFs, clearly visible. Though target obscured by smoke, flares not needed. Bombed the second Main Force group. Bombing concentrated. Hits seen on barrack blocks. Numerous combats seen on homeward route.

7/8 May 1944 – Tours Airfield

Slight training this morning. The target for tonight was the aerodrome at Tours. Here again the objective was identified visually by Mosquito aircraft which marked the aiming point with extraordinary accuracy with Red Spot Fires. These were backed up with Red Spot Fires dropped by this squadron. The bombing on the markers was accurate, and many hits were observed. This raid was afterwards proved by photographic reconnaissance to have been quite successful. The fighter opposition was negligible and the flak defences consisted of approx six light guns. All of the seven aircraft detailed from this Squadron returned successfully.

ND495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 0041 Down 0530. 6 x 7" cluster flares, 2 x TI yellow No 4, 1 x 4000lb HC, 6 x 500lb MC, 3 x 4.5" flares. Target (Tours Airfield) identified by RSF in good visibility. First RSF down at 0250 hours, assessed and backed up at 0251.5 hours. Seen to be all over buildings. Flare Force bombed, followed by Proximity Marker aircraft. Attack very successful and bombing well concentrated.

10/11 May 1944 – Lille

A training programme was carried out this morning. The target for the night's operation was Lille marshalling yard and locomotive factory. Of the 8 aircraft detailed by this Squadron, 6 were detailed to illuminate the target with flares and two to direct the attack. The attack opened to plan, the flares were dropped accurately, and the aiming point was marked visually with Red Spot Fires dropped by Mosquito aircraft. The attack was so accurate that the Red Spot Fires were extinguished by our own bombs and the target had to be re-illuminated and re-marked. Subsequent aiming point photographs proved the accuracy of the attack. Two of our aircraft, captained by F/Lt Smith RNZAF and F/O Edwards, failed to return from this mission. Another aircraft captained by F/Lt Walton received a direct hit by a flak burst resulting in the death of F/O Ward RAAF, the mid upper gunner. The weather was good during the whole attack, and the defences which consisted of light flak were moderate.

ND495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2158 Down 0129. 6 x 7" clusters, 1 x 4000lb HC, 8 x 500lb MC, 3 x 4.5" reco flares. Weather clear at first; slight drifting cloud later at 3-4,000'. Visibility moderate. First RSF was blown out, further one down about 10 minutes later which was bombed. On leaving, a large triangle of small fires was seen. A first wind for RSF was heard 337/26 at 2335 hours approx. No other received.

19/20 May 1944 – Amiens

A small training programme this morning. The target for the night's operation was the marshalling yard at Amiens. When our aircraft arrived at Amiens, they found the target covered by 10/10ths cloud. Flares were dropped by means of special equipment and a yellow TI was dropped on the aiming point by an Oboe Mosquito, but bombing was made impossible by cloud conditions, and our aircraft brought their bomb load back to base. All of our aircraft returned safely to base.

ND495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2319 Down 0344. 11 x 7" clusters, 3 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 4.5" reco flares. 10/10ths cloud at 6-10,000'. Target located by yellow TI. Flares were released on time. Orbited, and two lots of RSF were seen; one was assessed as wrong. Were going in to release more flares when attack was called off. W/T u/s after leaving target.

22/23 May 1944 - Brunswick

A large training programme was carried out this morning. Operations tonight were detailed against Brunswick. Although assured by Met. of clear skies, when our crews arrived at the target, seven to nine tenths cloud were found. Illuminating flares were dropped by this Squadron but were not very effective. An emergency Wanganui had been planned, but the Controller – W/C Jeudwin – was unable to contact the markers, and passed the control to his deputy. The deputy was also unable to contact the markers, and passed control over to the Second Deputy – W/C Northrop of 83 Squadron. The Second Deputy also had difficulty in contacting the markers but eventually managed to call for the Wanganui flares and a blind bombing attack ensued. It is not thought that this attack was very successful. F/Lt Chatten of this Squadron who was flying “H” on this attack, was engaged by a Ju88 just North of Hanover. He sustained many hits by cannon fire, the Perspex nose was shot completely away and the bombing compartment wrecked. Despite the intense cold and damage to the aircraft he decided to “press on” and maintained course to the target. On arrival at Brunswick, he was hit several times by flak. By now every one of his instruments was destroyed or unserviceable. However, he dropped his bombs on the Wanganui flares and set course by the stars for base. On the return journey he was again attacked by fighters. He followed the fighter around and the mid gunner returned fire by shooting over his own plane’s wing. Several hits were observed on the fighter in this action. On arrival at this country he was unable to identify himself as a friendly aircraft and our coastal batteries promptly opened up hitting him with first two shots. Eventually he reached base where he made a good landing. F/Lt Chatten received an immediate award of the DSO. The navigator F/L Campbell displayed a high standard of Pathfinder navigation, in guiding the aircraft part of the way to the target and all the way home without the use of instruments of any kind and also without a map or chart. Lancaster “Y” captained by F/L Reynolds returned early to base. The bomb aimer went unconscious near Hanover. An extremely unfortunate incident occurred when F/O Jardine flying Lancaster “B” collided with another aircraft over a nearby airfield. The tail was torn off and the plane crashed to earth killing the whole crew.

ND495M F/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, W/O J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2240 Down 0353. 12 x 7” flares, 1 x 2000lb HC. 9/10ths cloud. Vis good. Identified on H2S. Dropped 8 flares on H2S at 0108 hours. Various sticks already dropped by first force. Awaited orders while 3rd wave dropped theirs. No RSF and no green TIs seen. Marker III said all flares were off target to east. Controller asked Marker Leader if he could mark just after 0115 hours but bombing had already started. Aircraft left target 0118 hours; cloud obscured results. No further instructions received; no Wanganuis seen.

24/25 May 1944 – Eindhoven (Phillips Works)

No flying in the day. The night operation was against the Phillips works at Eindhoven. The crews were briefed with strict instructions not to drop bombs anywhere except on the target. Unfortunately, on arrival at the target the crews found 10/10ths cloud. The controller gave the order to “Abandon Exercise” and the whole force set course for base. All bombs were jettisoned in the North Sea.

ND495M F/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, W/O J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2258 Down 0207. 12 x 7” clusters, 2 x 1000lb MC. Target located on H2S but not visually. About 3 sticks of flares went down at approx 0036 and 0037 hours. Controller ordered no-one to drop more flares and at 0039 hours he ordered Flare Force to return to base.

27/28 May 1944 – St Valery-en-Caux

Some training this morning. The coffins of F/O Paige and F/Sgt Dunae were conveyed to Dogdyke station for funeral at Brookwood Cemetery. The target for the night's operation was a gun position at St Valery-en-Caux. Our aircraft illuminated the target with reco flares but the Mosquitos were unable to identify the target at first. The Controller gave orders for more flares to be dropped and in a short while the target was marked with a RSF. At about this time the marker aircraft was heard to report that he was hit. He afterwards ditched in the Channel. The Main Force then went in and bombed. The raid was very successful.

ND495M P/O E.L.Perkins, Sgt F.Coxhead, F/O W.Hunt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/Sgt J.P.Coman, F/Sgt J.K.Russell, F/Sgt M.H.McBride. Up 2358 Down 0258. 12 x 7 x 4.5" clusters, 2 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 4.5 reco flares. Gee identification. Markers called for more illumination, then one Wanganui went down but in wrong place; second one was "ON"; then marking was done. We got vector 053/10. Nice run in, but bombs seemed to undershoot RSF by about 200 yards.

21/22 June 1944 - Gelsenkirchen

A large formation flying programme this morning and afternoon. Tonight 9 of our aircraft were detailed to attack oil refinery plant at Gelsenkirchen. Intense fighter activity was encountered from the enemy coast to the target. The Oboe markers were not accurate – falling a mile apart. The Controller's aircraft had developed engine trouble and the Deputy Controller taking over ordered that no flares should be dropped, but that the Flare Force were to back up the Oboe instead. Two concentrations of fire followed which were quickly assessed, and when Main Force arrived, they were ordered to bomb the southern TIs. The attack, however, was scattered and definitely not one of our best. There was a terrific flak barrage and a thin layer of cloud at 4/5,000 ft. S/Ldr McLeod RAAF and crew did not return. No message was received from him. He was flying Lancaster "L". Two other aircraft "C" and "G" piloted by F/L Benton and F/L Baker were badly shot up but with no casualties.

ND867R F/O H.W.J.Edwards, F/O W.Hannah, F/L E.C.Burt, F/Sgt J.Fairbairn, F/O K.S.Barker (Vis A/B), F/O W.E.Clayfield, F/O R.Underhill, Sgt J.Rumney. Up 2313 Down 0332. 4 x TI red, 1 x TI yellow No 16, 9 x 7" cluster, 3 reco flares. 10/10ths cloud tops 9-10000'. Vis above good. Target identified by yellow Oboe, red and green TIs. Orbited until told not to drop flares. At 0135 hours told to back up with reds which we did. Intense heavy flak was accurate. As we ran in we were told to bomb the southerly concentration. Some fighter activity over the target.

23rd June 1044 – Air Accident

More formation flying this afternoon with calamitous results. Two of our aircraft piloted by F/Lt Perkins and F/Lt Van Raalte RAAF were flying in formation. Whilst attempting a gentle turn F/Lt Van Raalte's aircraft sideslipped over F/Lt Perkins' aircraft and dropped suddenly, removing the entire tail from F/Lt Perkins' aircraft and smashing the nose of his own. Both planes immediately spun to earth out of control. All of the occupants in both aircraft were killed with the exception of Sgt Coman, who managed to bale out when his aircraft broke in two at 1000 ft. Operations tonight were against the railway yards at Limoges for which 10 of our aircraft were detailed. The flares were dropped accurately over the target area and on time. Mosquito marker aircraft dropped a Red Spot Fire which the Controller assessed as being exactly on the Aiming Point. It was quickly backed up with red and green TIs and RSFs. At 0159 the marking was completed and the Main Force were ordered to commence bombing. Bombing was extremely concentrated and sticks were seen to fall in the "yards". At 0202 hours an ammunition train exploded with an enormous explosion. Intermittent explosions continued throughout the attack. A very successful raid. There was no fighter opposition, and no flak. All of our planes returned safely.

Extract from Bomber Command Losses – 23.6.44

Lancaster III ME625 OF - . Training. Collided with another Squadron Lancaster while engaged in formation flying practice and spun out of control to crash at Cloor House Farm on Deeping Fen. Five rest in Cambridge City Cemetery, the others being taken back to their homes. F/O Arnold RAAF was flying as visual air bomber.

F/L H.S. van Rhalte RAAF(+), F/S M.Durn(+), P/O D.G.Williams(+), W/O A.L.Lambert RAAF(+), F/O A.Arnold RAAF(+), F/S E.H.Peace(+), F/S R.G.Davies(+), F/L J.D.Fletcher(+).

Lancaster III ND981 OF - . Training. Lost in the circumstances previously described. Sgt Cowan had a miraculous escape and parachuted safely as the Lancaster broke up. Four days later the London Gazette carried details of the DFM awarded to W/O Partos. Those who died rest in various cemeteries.

F/L E.L.J.Perkins(+), Sgt F.E.Coxhead(+), F/L W.J.Hunt(+), F/S J.Fairbairn(+), Sgt Cowan, W/O D.G.Partos DFM(+).



In Memory Of
Flight Sergeant

JOHN FAIRBAIRN

Service Number: 1456224

97 Sqn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who died on 23 June 1944 Age 30

Son of Frank and Ada Fairbairn, of Knottingley; husband of Ivy Fairbairn, of Ferrybridge, Knottingley.

Remembered with Honour
KNOTTINGLEY CEMETERY

Grave 5224.

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