

Warrant Officer C.J.Skinner

Air Gunner



This work has been produced on behalf of
97 (Straits Settlements) Squadron Association by the
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References: 97 Squadron Operational Record Books 1939-1943

Achieve Your Aim by Kevin Bending

Mark Howard

2019

Approved
George R.I.



J.D. 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

Skinner, C.J. (MG)

- F/Sgt 1. 22/23 Sept 43 Hanover (F/O Steven),
2. 23/24 Sept 43 Mannheim (F/O Steven),
3. 27/28 Sept 43 Hanover (F/O Steven),
- W/O 4. 7/8 Oct 43 Stuttgart (F/O Steven),
- 5.8/9 Oct 43 Hanover (F/O Steven),
6. 18/19 Oct 43 Hanover (F/O Steven),
7. 22/23 Oct 43 Kassel (F/O Steven),
- 3/4 Nov 43 Dusseldorf (F/O Steven) ret early,
8. 17/18 Nov 43 Mannheim (F/O Steven),
9. 22/23 Nov 43 Berlin (F/O Steven),
10. 23/24 Nov 43 Berlin (F/O Steven),
11. 25/26 Nov 43 Frankfurt (F/O Steven),
12. 26/27 Nov 43 Stuttgart (F/O Steven),
13. 2/3 Dec 43 Berlin (F/O Steven),
14. 3/4 Dec 43 Leipzig (F/O Steven),
15. 23/24 Dec 43 Berlin (F/L Steven),
16. 29/30 Dec 43 Berlin (F/L Steven),
17. 1/2 Jan 44 Berlin (F/L Steven),
18. 2/3 Jan 44 Berlin (F/L Steven),
19. 5/6 Jan 44 Stettin (F/L Steven),
- 20.14/15 Jan 44 Brunswick (F/L Steven) kia.

DETAILS FROM OPERATIONAL RECORD BOOK

22/23 September 1943 - Hanover

22.9.43 "Y" cross countries, SBA, fighter affiliation and bombing training. 20 aircraft detailed to attack a target at Hanover and three aircraft to attack Oldenburg. Three aircraft failed to attack Hanover, F/O Moodie dropping bombs on Emden, having oxygen failure. G/C Fresson jettisoned bombs owing to electrical failure, bombs were forced off by hand; and F/S Roberts jettisoned, port inner being u/s also bomb sight u/s. The attacks were made in good visibility. Very little flak reported but many enemy fighters about. Attacks reported scattered but all in built up area. Numerous fires developing. All aircraft and crews returned safely to base.

22/23 September 1943 - Hanover

JA846M F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, F/Sgt C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1915 Down 0030. 6 x 2000lb. Target hanover attacked. 18,000'. No cloud, slight haze. One green TI marker in bomb sight at time of bombing. Several large fires observed – glow seen from coast on way back.

23/24 September 1943 – Mannheim

23.9.43 F/O Wilson on NFT had trouble with undercarriage when coming in to land. Aircraft was circled round the airfield for some while trying to lock the undercarriage. Owing to operations taking place the aircraft was diverted to Newmarket where F/O Wilson carried out a successful landing without damage to aircraft. Sixteen aircraft detailed to attack Mannheim and five aircraft on Darmstadt. Both targets were successfully bombed – flak was negligible but many searchlights were operating with fighters. Visibility was good. Two crews are missing from the attack on Mannheim. F/L Fletcher and crew and W/O Stevenson and crew. S/L Foster and the Gunnery Leader S/L McKinna were with F/L Fletcher. No news has been received since leaving base. All other crews returned safely.

23/24 September 1943 – Mannheim

JB174S F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, F/Sgt C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1954 Down 0143. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 5 x 1000lb. Target Mannheim bombed. 17,500'. No moon, visibility good. Bombed on centre of cluster of green TIs – in bomb sight. Very large explosion seen at 2240 hours followed immediately by another.

27/28 September 1943 – Hanover

27.9.43 14 aircraft detailed to attack Hanover and 4 aircraft (one of which was cancelled) on Brunswick. These targets were successfully bombed. Visibility was good. Many fires were seen by crews on return over enemy coast. There was one early return – P/O Dawson reporting faulty rear turret. All aircraft and crews returned safely to base.

27/28 September 1943 – Hanover

JB174P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, F/Sgt C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1953 Down 0032. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 6 x 1000lb. Hanover attacked. 19,200'. No moon, no cloud, vis good. Bombed on centre of cluster of green TI markers. Numerous fires seen burning among TIs with considerable smoke pall.

7/8 October 1943 – Stuttgart

7.10.43 16 aircraft attacked Stuttgart and four aircraft Friedrichshaven. The target at the former had bad cloud conditions which prevented observation of TIs with any certainty. Glow of fires was seen which were probably from scattered incendiaries. Heavy flak varied from slight to moderate. No searchlights seen and fighter activity was negligible. F/O Cameron's aircraft had damage from incendiaries dropped from above. One incendiary hitting the armour plating behind the Pilot nearly causing disastrous results. At Friedrichshaven there was 10/10ths cloud and no results observed. Defences – heavy H/F, no S/Ls seen, little fighter activity.

7/8 October 1943 – Stuttgart

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 2106 Down 0404. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 3 x 1000lb. Stuttgart bombed. No moon, 10/10ths cloud. Visibility fair. Bombed on centre of cluster of green TI markers. Good fires were going. TIs scattered.

8/9 October 1943 – Hanover

8.10.43 21 Lancasters detailed for operations with one aircraft reserve. One aircraft was withdrawn, the navigator being sick, another returned early due to oxygen supply being u/s. 19 aircraft attacked the target at Hanover in clear sky and some haze. Good concentration of fires seen. Generally the raid would appear promising but later smoke and haze prevented observations. Slight to moderate H/F and fighters not so active. 17 photos attempted. P/O Nicolls and crew failed to return from this operation. No news has been received.

8/9 October 1943 – Hanover

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgts W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 2304 Down 0415. 5 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 4 x 1000lb. Primary target Hanover bombed. 18,000'. Vis hazy, clear sky. Bombed on tight cluster of green TIs. 2 or 3 small fires were soon developing. Blue explosion observed at 0141 hours.

18/19 October 1943 – Hanover

18.9.43 Training as per schedule in the morning and NFTs. 15 aircraft detailed for operations. Briefing at 1500 hours. 15 aircraft attacked Hanover. One aircraft – F/L Moodie and crew is reported missing. Weather 9/10ths cloud tops 15,000', vis good. Defences moderate, H/F predicted up to 22,000', heavy at 12,000', searchlights mainly ineffective, fighter opposition reported great. Generally, owing to cloud, success of raid cannot be assessed. Crews reported glow of fires on cloud and fires were seen as crews were leaving target under cloud.

18/19 October 1943 – Hanover

JA963Q F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1741 Down 2236. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 6 x 1000lb. Hanover bombed. 18,800'. No moon, 9/10ths cloud. Bombed between two cascading green TI markers. Own results not observed. Big dull orange explosion seen at 2019 hours. Cloud prevented further observation of results.

22/23 October 1943 – Kassel

22.10.43 16 aircraft detailed to attack Kassel and two aircraft detailed to attack Frankfurt as spoof target, one of which returned early. The raid on Kassel was highly successful, 4/10ths cloud, tops 10,000', vis good, some haze. Marshalling yards were visually identified and many fires were seen. H/F was encountered, S/L cones – some scattered. Fighter opposition did not seem so active. 16 photos attempted. Fires were seen to start at Frankfurt. All aircraft returned safely.

22/23 October 1943 – Kassel

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1836 Down 2332. 6 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 4 x 1000lb. Primary target bombed. 17,800'. 1/10th cloud. Vis good. Bombed on concentration of red and green TIs – in bomb sight. One really good fire burning with orange flame and much black smoke. Several other fires starting up.

3/4 November 1943 Dusseldorf

3.11.43 NFTs and flying training in the morning. 16 aircraft detailed for operations tonight. P/O J.K.McAvoy DFM and Act W/O R.J.Williams reported POW (were missing with W/C Burns crew 31st Aug). F/Sgt T.Lancashire and F/Sgt S.Powell reported POW (were missing with F/L Covington's crew 10th Aug). Operations : 7 aircraft to attack Dusseldorf, 9 aircraft to attack Cologne. At Dusseldorf 6 aircraft bombed the primary target, 1 aircraft returned early due to turrets being u/s. The attack was made in good weather – clear sky, vis good, ground haze with slight to moderate H/F and L/F. S/Ls ineffective. Fighters not reported over target. Fires reported but generally the attack is considered scattered. At Cologne (spoof target) the attack was made in good weather. Defences – desultory, H/F and S/Ls mainly ineffective – no fighters reported. Ground detail was not seen owing to haze or smoke. 14 photos were attempted in all. All crews returned safely.

3/4 November 1943 Dusseldorf

JA243P F/O K.M.Steven, P/O A.J.Coleman (2nd Pilot), Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgts W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgts K.D.Newman. Up 1742 Down 1943. 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 6 x 1000lb. Mission abandoned – both turrets u/s.

17/18 November 1943 – Mannheim

17.11.43 P/O Fairlie, Sgt Ball and S/L Parrott reported by IRCC as killed. W/C Alabaster DFC, S/L Rodley DFC and S/L Sauvage DFC awarded the immediate DSO. Y bombing training, SBA and fighter affiliation. 15 aircraft detailed for operations tonight, target being Mannheim. The attack was carried out in 2/10th cloud, vis good, hazy. PFF Group operated with blind bombing, no markers being used. Explosions were seen and fires started and seen on return 30 miles away.

From reports of fires and explosions generally it would appear that a fairly good margin of success had been achieved. Defences slight. H/F inaccurate and many S/Ls ineffective. Many fighter flares but no fighter activity seen otherwise. All aircraft returned safely to base. G/C Fresson DFC carried out night training.

17/18 November 1943 – Mannheim

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, F/Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1721 Down 2241. 5 x 2000lb. Mannheim. No moon, no cloud, vis hazy. 17,000'. Target located by H2S. Many HE bomb bursts seen among fires. Own bombs dropped blind.

22/23 November 1943 – Berlin

22.11.43 20 Lancasters detailed to attack targets in Berlin. Weather 9/10 – 10/10ths cloud at 7,000' – visibility good. Bombs were released from approximately 10,000'. All TIs were reported as fairly well concentrated and a good and continuous marking was kept up during the attack. Some fires were reported but bomb bursts could not generally be seen. Observation was hampered by clouds but the attack is considered scattered. Defences – heavy and light barrage over target with box barrage at 16,000'. No fighter flares. Two aircraft and crews have failed to return from this operation – they are JB227J F/L Munro DFC (Can) and crew and JB238A P/O McEgan (Aus) and crew. All remaining aircraft returned to base, a few of them with minor flak damage.

22/23 November 1943 – Berlin

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, W/O H.Bryson, W/O C.J.Skinner, F/Sgt E.Battle. (No times shown). 7 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 3 x 1000lb. Bombs released into centre of cluster of 4 TIs Green over Berlin. Vis good. Occasional bomb bursts seen. Bomb doors would not close after bombing and the hydraulic system rendered u/s by flak

23/24 November 1943 – Berlin

23.11.43 16 Lancasters detailed to again operate against Berlin. Weather was better although 10/10ths cloud, there were patches of visibility. Markers reported to be well concentrated – owing to cloud no details were possible but the attack is considered very scattered. Some incendiaries were seen through clouds. A good red glow could be seen for 20 minutes on route home. Fires were still believed to be burning from the previous raid. H/F moderate and barrage light. Many fighter flares and fighter activity. F/Sgt Penny and crew failed to return. All other aircraft returned safely to base encountering bad weather and gales. Minor damage was sustained by some aircraft – F/L Riches had two engines shot up over the target but the aircraft was brought back to base safely in the remaining two engines, the third one cutting while still on the runway.

23/24 November 1943 – Berlin

JA963Q F/O K.M.Steven, Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1730 Down 2340. 1 x 4000lb, 5 x 1000lb. Aiming point in Berlin bombed from 18,200'. Target located with aid of "Y". Routemarkers considered accurate and helpful. Fires seen starting but no spectacular results. 25.11.43 19 aircraft detailed for ops and night training cross countries which were carried out.

The following signal has been received from AOC-in-C

"I have received the following message from the Secretary of State which please convey together with my reply to all ranks"

...."My warmest congratulations to you and to all ranks serving under your command on two crushing attacks on the Nazi citadel. Berlin is not only the home of Prussian militarism and the capital of the Nazi government, but it is also the greatest single centre of war industry in Germany. Often before, your squadrons have hit it hard. The most convincing measure of this success has been the huge deployment of the enemy's resources for its defence. Nevertheless your attacks these last two nights have reached a new level of power and concentration and have proved that however much he may marshall his guns, searchlights and fighters, the enemy cannot match your skill and determination of your crews."

AOC-in-C's reply

"On behalf of all ranks of Bomber Command I thank you for your encouraging message. The Battle of Berlin progresses. It will continue as opportunity serves and circumstances dictate until the heart of Nazi Germany ceases to beat.

25/26 November 1943 – Frankfurt

Out of the 19 aircraft detailed for operations, which were to attack Frankfurt, three aircraft were withdrawn. Remainder bombed in 9/10ths cloud top about 1,800' in thin layer – vis good.

Defence – H/F moderate – barrage bursting 16-18,000'. S/Ls ineffective, some enemy aircraft fighter activity. First TIs were fairly well concentrated, later flares were seen wide of target and scattered bombing followed. Fires were scattered over an area of some 8 miles radius. Fires were seen reflected in the clouds from 40 miles away but a good concentrated attack was not achieved. F/L Brown (Can/USA) and crew failed to return. This crew was operating for the first time with this Squadron.

25/26 November 1943 – Frankfurt

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 0020 Down 0550. 4 x 2000lb. Frankfurt attacked from 18,100'. 10/10ths cloud tops at 10,000' to 18,000'. Vis fair. "Y" used to locate aiming point.

26/27 November 1943 – Stuttgart

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1735 Down 2350. 6 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 5 x 1000lb. Target attacked from 18,600'. Vis fair. 7/10ths cloud tops at 10,000'. Concentration of TIs quite good. Glow from fires reflected on clouds visible about 10 – 20 miles away.

2/3 December 1943 - Berlin

2.12.43 17 aircraft detailed for tonight's operations, the target being Berlin. One aircraft was withdrawn, another P/O Billing and crew returned early, the captain having collapsed but recovered sufficiently to land back at base. The remaining aircraft raided the target in quarter moon – 7/10ths cloud top 5,000' – vis good. Defences H/F predicted moderate, about 200 S/Ls around the city forming cones when cloud breaks permitted. Many fighter flares and activity. TIs fairly well concentrated and many incendiary bombs and bombs burst in area. Later the markers appeared to be scattered. Reports vary considerably, some saw no fires, others saw fires and much smoke in three columns to 10,000'. No good concentration was maintained and results are difficult to assess. S/L Garlick DFC B Flight Commander and his crew failed to return. No news has since been received. The remaining 14 aircraft returned safely to base in the early hours of the morning. F/L Riches' aircraft was peppered by flak, the pilot himself having a knock on the head which rendered him unconscious – on coming to, the aircraft was in a vertical dive but he managed to bring it under control.

2/3 December 1943 - Berlin

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1705 Down 2320. 4 flares, 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 3 x 1000lb, 4 x 500lb. Target bombed from 18,500'. Quarter moon, 7/10ths broken cloud at 5,000'. Vis good. Several fires and plenty of smoke observed when leaving the target area.

3/4 December 1943 - Leipzig

3.12.43 16 aircraft have been again detailed for operations tonight. The crews have been briefed to attack targets at Leipzig. The attack took place 7-9/10ths cloud tops 5,000'. Vis good. Defences – moderate predicted H/F, S/Ls about 50 mainly illuminating cloud base. Considerable fighter activity. Owing to cloud, no definite results were seen. P/O Coleman and crew failed to return, no news having been since received. One aircraft returned early due to rear gunner being sick. The remaining aircraft returned safely to base.

3/4 December 1943 - Leipzig

JB243P F/O K.M.Steven, Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1720 Down 2330. 4 flares, 4 x TI, 1 x 400lb, 3 x 1000lb. Target bombed from 17,600'. Red TIs appeared to be well placed. Black smoke rising above cloud tops seen from point 20 miles from target.

23/24 December 1943 - Berlin

23.12.43 17 aircraft detailed to attack Berlin. Two aircraft returned early due to engine trouble and 15 aircraft attacked the primary target. 7/10th – 10/10ths cloud at 8,000', vis go

23/24 December 1943 - Berlin

JB712U F/L K.M.Steven, F/Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, F/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, F/Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 0017 Down 0739. 7 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 3 x 1000lb, 1 x 500lb. Bombs released on Berlin from 18,400'. 10/10ths cloud tops at 10,000'. TI reds well concentrated. No results of bombing seen.

29/30 December 1943 – Berlin

29.12.43 "Y" training, bombing on range and air firing during day. 18 aircraft detailed to attack Berlin. Two aircraft were withdrawn, one of which had a tyre burst just before the take off which blocked the dispersal of the other. One aircraft returned early, oxygen being unserviceable for rear gunner. 15 aircraft attacked the primary target. Weather 10/10ths vis good. Defences moderate H/F barrage predicted. S/Ls nil, slight fighter activity. Crews report good concentrated attack. Two were shot up by flak, F/L Steven returning on three engines. F/L Roberts damaged his wing tip over target, another four engined aircraft hitting him. All aircraft returned safely to base.

29/30 December 1943 - Berlin

JB728P F/L K.M.Steven, F/Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, F/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 1706 Down 2349. 3LBTI Red, 3 x TI Red, 1 x 5 flares. Attacked target from 19,200'. 10/10ths cloud, vis good. Nothing seen through cloud except flares going down. Hit by heavy flak. Port outer damaged and caught fire. Airframe holed.

1/2 January 1944 - Berlin

1.1.44 20 aircraft Lancaster IIIs are detailed to attack Berlin. Two aircraft were withdrawn owing to engine troubles. The remaining 18 aircraft set out to attack the primary target. Weather was 10/10th cloud at 12,000', vis good. Defences moderate H/F to slight – S/Ls ineffective. Slight fighter activity and many scare crow flares. No results of bombing were seen and some scattered markers were reported. It appears that no good continuous concentration was achieved. One aircraft and crew – Captain F/O Mooney DFM is missing, no news being received since leaving base. Another aircraft, F/Lt Owen and crew landed at Tangmere with a burst tyre and damage by enemy action. The rear gunner has been admitted to hospital suffering from a shell wound in the lower right leg. The remainder of crews returned to base.

1/2 January 1944 - Berlin

MD351P F/L K.M.Steven, F/Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, F/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt J.Newton. Up 0020 Down 0723. 4 flares, 6 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 5 x 500lb. Primary target attacked from 19,400'. Bombs released on H2S. Rear gunner reported TIs drifting in a long line after target was left. Vis good, 10/10ths cloud over target.

2/3 January 1944 - Berlin

2.1.44 17 aircraft are detailed to again attack Berlin. Briefing was in the evening with a very late take off. One aircraft was withdrawn being too late. The remaining 16 aircraft set out to attack the primary target but one had to return after 3 hours owing to trouble. Weather and defences were much the same as the previous raid. Little was seen owing to cloud but the reports show it as a good raid and generally concentrated and successful. F/O Snell claims that his rear gunner, Sgt O.D.Wood, shot down an enemy aircraft believed to be a FW190. The attack was made from astern about 20 miles south of Berlin. All crews returned safely to base.

2/3 January 1944 - Berlin

ND351P F/L K.M.Steven, Sgts A.C.East, S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 2343 Down 0607. 4 flares, 4 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 4 x 1000lb. Berlin bombed by H2S. 10/10ths cloud tops at 9,000'. Rear gunner reported TIs drifting in a long line after target was left. No results observed.

5/6 January 1943 – Stettin

5.1.44 No flying training as detailed due to poor visibility. 20 aircraft have been detailed for tonight's operations. Two aircraft did not take off owing to a burst tyre on perimeter track and gyro instruments u/s. The remainder attacked Stettin in good visibility and clear sky. Defences were moderate H/F to L/F, S/Ls ineffective – some fighter activity. Four engined bombers seen over target laying flares. TIs were concentrated and bombing good. Ground detail could be seen. Fires started early and one crew claim to have seen direct hits on the railway station. Large areas of fire could be seen by crews leaving the target 150 miles en route home. The raid is regarded as being a great success. F/O Anstee and crew and P/O Flack and crew failed to return from this operation. Nothing heard since.

5/6 January 1943 – Stettin

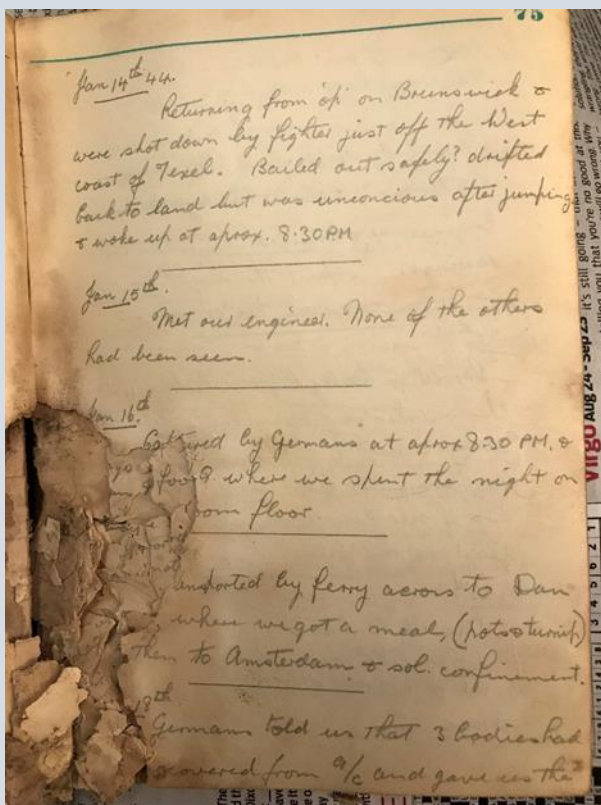
ND351P F/L K.M.Steven, Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.S.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, F/Sgt K.D.Newman. Up 2327 Down 0827. 24 flares, 3 x TI, 1 x 4000lb, 2 x 1000lb. Stettin bombed from 18,000'. A thin patch of cloud covered target although inlet to town was seen. No results observed.

14/15 January 1944 – Brunswick

14.1.44 Training programme for today has been cancelled in lieu of tonight's operations for which 21 aircraft have been detailed, the target being Brunswick. The weather was 10/10ths cloud with tops from 5,000/8,000', visibility good. Defences slight H/F inaccurate and below, S/Ls ineffective. Fighters were very active from coast to target and on the return. No bombing results were seen but some scattered fires were reported. Markers were however scattered and no continuous concentration was achieved. F/Lt Stevens and crew, P/O Hodgson and crew are missing, nothing heard since.

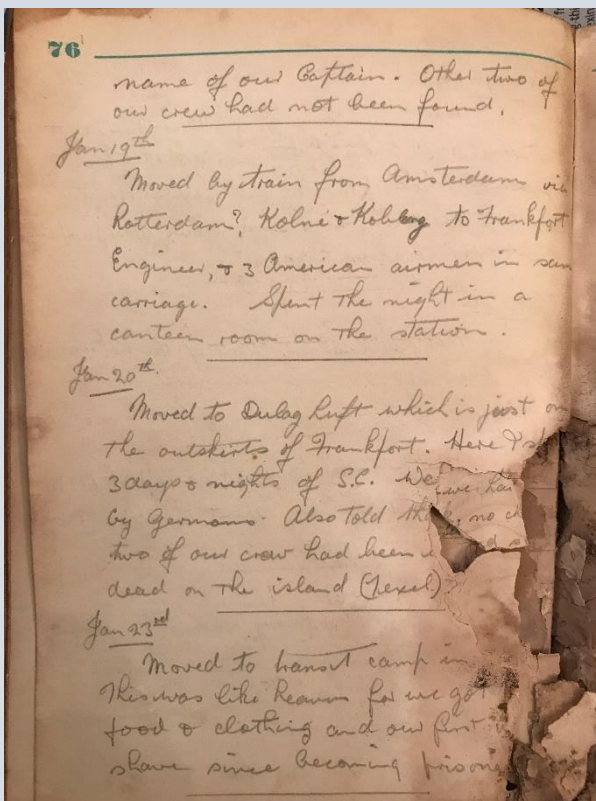
14/15 January 1944 – Brunswick

ND421S F/L K.M.Steven, F/Sgt A.C.East, F/Sgt S.B.Stevenson, P/O R.R.Brown, F/Sgt W.C.Gadsby, W/O C.J.Skinner, Sgt L.N.J.Laver. Up 1646 – missing.



Pages from the diary of Pilot Officer Ridley Brown who was the Streven's Crew Bomb Aimer. It describes what happened on the Brunswick OP 14/15 January 1944.

Age has taken its toll on the diary, but it still holds a wealth of information from what is legible.



The Story of Lancaster III ND421 OF-S for Sugar



Mission: Brunswick Date: 14th/15th January 1944

Unit: 97 Squadron

THE AIRCRAFT Type: Lancaster III Serial: ND421 Code: OF-S

Base: Bourn, Cambridgeshire

Location: Fonteinsnol, Texel Island, Netherlands

THE CREW Pilot: F/L Kenneth Munro (Steve) Steven DFC. Age 30. Killed Flt/Eng: F/Sgt Albert C (Ace) East. Survived, POW. Navigator: F/Sgt Samuel B (Paddy) Stevenson. Age 22. Killed Bomb Aimer: P/O Ridley R Brown. Survived, POW. Wireless Op: William Charles (Bill) Gadsby. Age 22. Killed. (Bill Gadsby's age is incorrectly shown as 27 in most documentation and even on his grave in the War Cemetery on Texel). Mid Upper Gunner: W/O Clifford John (Jack) Skinner. Age 22. Killed Rear Gunner: Sgt Leslie Norman John Laver. Age 20. Killed The crew, on their 28th sortie, would have been regarded as a senior and experienced crew and would normally have been allocated their "own" Lancaster. Normally this was OF-P, Peter, but this aircraft was undergoing repairs after sustaining damage on its previous sortie. The none regular crew member or "spare bod" was the rear gunner, Leslie Laver. Poor Leslie only flew in combat twice. The first on Black Thursday, 16th/17th December 1943 when 5 of his original crew were killed when attempting to land at Bourn. As recorded here his second sortie cost him his life.

THE REASON FOR THE LOSS On the return from the target S Sugar was either hit by flack or was the subject of a night fighter attack. Different versions of the incident are inconclusive. Even the two survivors were unable to confirm the real reason for the crash. A monument to S Sugar has been placed in the pine forests at Fonteinsnol where the plane came down. The pine forest is roughly 100 years old and even in 2010 it was possible to see the track the plane took as younger trees have been planted which of course are lower than those of the original forest.

NB. It is now almost certain that S-Sugar was attacked by a night fighter piloted by Lt Kurt Matzak. (Tony Walton)



The story below appears to have been translated from a Dutch original, but I cannot confirm that fact. I have left it in the same format as it appeared on the old 97 Squadron web site as I think the translation adds a little authenticity to the story. (Tony Walton)

Around the same time a Lancaster of the 97th (Pathfinder) Squadron crashed near the "Westerslag" on Texel Island (in fact on the slope of the wooded dune) Fonteinsnol). (The crashing of another Lancaster Pathfinder of Wing Commander N R Mansfield (Captain)). The crew was formed of F/L Kenneth Munro (Steve) Steven DFC (30), a former bank employee from Ilford Essex, the pilot commander; F/Sgt Samuel B Stevenson DFM, the navigator (22), a quiet and serious young man from Northern Ireland; P/O RR (Rid) Brown the bomb targetter from Hexham, North of England; F/Sgt Albert East, a former printer from London who was the mechanic; F/Sgt William (Bill) Gadsby (22) also from London serving a radio officer; F/Sgt Clifford John (Jack) Skinner (22), mid - upper gunner from Worsbrough Dale, Yorkshire and Sgt Leslie Norman John Laver (20), the tail gunner from Sydenham, London. Sgt Laver was a newcomer – he replaced the regular gunner, Ken Newman, who was kept on the ground as he was suffering from a skin disease. It was his second flight above enemy territory. Normally they were flying the "P for Peter" which however was damaged in the previous night so they were assigned to fly the "S for Sugar". A row of bombs painted on the body (27) indicated the number of missions made. There is not much to tell about the flight itself, no events worth mentioning happened. When reaching the target, they released their "fire crackers" through the clouds, turned and prepared for the trip home. They were quite a bit on their way home and the flight undoubtedly would have been ended well if not Lt Kurt Matzak, flying a ME110 would have traced them. The attack was a professional one – no one of the crew noticed the danger before it was too late. Taking all into account they could be grateful to the German who did not fire at the plane's body. F/Sgt Albert East, the mechanic didn't notice at all that the plane was attacked. As he in a Pathfinder also had the care of the machine gun in the nose of the plane, he had moved himself to the nose compartment and laying on his belly, threw a glance through the Perspex (?) window. He didn't see a thing. A short time later the skipper called him back to the cockpit by the intercom. One of the outer engines had caught fire and it was the task of the mechanic to put the propeller into idle position. Probably a night fighter has crept in their dead angle and fired a salvo at the engine, or did an AA gun hit them? Because the gunners had not reported any fighter, he supposed an AA grenade caused the fire. He put the propeller of the hit engine into idle position and had hardly finished his job when the other outer engine caught fire. East handled this engine the same way and went back to the nose compartment. In a Pathfinder it was the task of the mechanic to open the front emergency door and jump as the first man; it seemed no bad idea for him to take the necessary precautions. It is impossible to trace what damage the night fighter did to the plane but probably no part of the plane body or crew was hit. The fire in the engines spread out and Flt Lt Steven, seeing both wings afire gave the order "parachute, parachute, jump, jump, jump" an order given under critical circumstances. Albert East had taken off the tube of his oxygen supply because it was not long enough to reach his place beside the pilot. In his excitement he forgot to reconnect the tube to the oxygen supply. As it had happened often that the crew members got strangled by the intercom wires in emergency cases. East, on his way back to the bomb-target compartment and kneeling at the "door" took off his helmet and threw it away to avoid being killed in this unlucky way. By lack of oxygen and because the ice cold air was streaming inside the "door", he had a black-out and must have hit his head on the edge of the door opening. Being conscious again he was lying on the ground, what proved to be hard frozen little field with some bushes and stubby grass on the Wadden island Texel in the province of North Holland.cont.



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According to eye witnesses on Texel, the plane came flying over afire; the clouds over the plane were reddish coloured by the shine of fire. Then it crashed vertically, probably after an explosion. The pieces came down on the Fonteinsnol (Fountains dune), a high dune between De Koog and Den Hoorr. Except for two, all the crew members lost their lives. Steven as well as Gadsby and Skinner were married. Leslie Laver, as mentioned before, was not a member of the regular crew, but had taken the place of the rear gunner who fell ill. They were buried in den Burg. One of the survivors (as it became clear later on, was the mechanic Albert East) knocked at the door of Mr Piet Smit, a sheep farmer living in the hamlet of Noord Haffel, just south of den Burg. The man was bare foot, his boots had slipped off his feet when jumping. Confused of the sudden appearance of a stranger, who he couldn't understand, Smit took the Englishman to one of his sheep sheds near his house. The Englishman, nervous of the suffering he had gone through, shivering from cold, laid himself down in the layer of hay and tried to find rest and forgetfulness after the frightening adventure. There was something to think about: his mother celebrated her birthday and he imagined the whole family sitting together in her cosy room around the table. His own position was quite a contrasting one. Next morning, when Smit made his way to the shed with clean socks and hot tea for his protégée, he met a neighbour who told him that a stranger was sitting in one of his sheds. Soon it became clear that this was the second survivor. It was PO Brown the bomb targetter.

That evening both men were brought together, a doctor was warned as East had his meniscus broken (concussion) – he had hit an obstacle while coming down. The doctor (Vellinga from the Weverstaat) knew English and he spoke with the men for some time. It was mainly by persuasion of a farmer, who was living nearby, and who was quite terrified about the thought that the Germans in Den Helder had undoubtedly seen the two parachutes in the searchlights that the proposition was made to present the two to the

Germans. The doctor explained the situation in English, in particular that going underground would endanger the two wounded. The flyers agreed that the Germans would be informed. Not long afterwards they found themselves in German imprisonment. This is not the end of the story, 18 years later in 1962, one of the men, Albert East visited

Texel for the 2nd time but this time in a more comfortable way and as a civilian. He visited Mr Smit with whom he still keeps contact through his daughter. It is one of those friendships born in distress. Note: Sadly Ace has now passed away.

NB: When Ridley and Ace were transferred to the Dutch mainland, they were transported to the ferry by bus. When they boarded the bus all of the Dutch passengers stood up as a mark of respect for the fliers. There was nothing the Germans could do to stop them!

(Tony Walton)