



W/O Plaunt & crew. (l-r) Back Joe Taylor (MG), Trevor Williams (FE), Donald Plaunt (P), Jean-Louis Viau (BA); front – “Jock” Lochrie (RG), Ralph Franks (WOP).

SGT. RALPH FRANK R.C.A.F





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 authorised 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



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)

Sgt. Ralph Frank flew his first OP with 97 (Straits Settlements) Squadron on 7th February 1943 and completed a total of 10 OP's before his death on 30th March 1943.

Frank, R. (W/Op) Sgt

1. 7/8 Feb 43 Lorient (Sgt Plaunt),
2. 13/14 Feb 43 Lorient (Sgt Plaunt),
3. 14/15 Feb 43 Milan (Sgt Plaunt),
4. 16/17 Feb 43 Lorient (Sgt Plaunt),
5. 19/20 Feb 43 Wilhelmshaven (Sgt Plaunt),
6. 3/4 Mar 43 Hamburg (Sgt Plaunt),
7. 5/6 Mar 43 Essen (Sgt Plaunt),
8. 8/9 Mar 43 Nuremburg (Sgt Plaunt),
9. 9/10 Mar 43 Munich (Sgt Plaunt),
10. 29/30 Mar 43 Berlin (F/O Norton) kia.

He is buried in the Jewish Cemetery Wilford, Nottinghamshire. Grave number 38

Ralph's pilot was W/O Donald Plaunt a fellow Canadian.

Donald was very generous and loyal with his crew. He asked his father to send him a monthly box of Laura Secords and the odd carton of cigarettes to share with them, even though he didn't smoke. Although he was in the RAF 97th RAF Squadron, four of the seven were Canadians. With Ralph Franks, a Jewish Canadian from Hamilton, Donald exchanged his identity tag whenever they flew together to protect Franks in case they were captured by the SS. (Andy Thomson)

Donald's letters home say that Ralph was a joker as seen below.

My wireless operator is a Jewish kid from Hamilton. He made his living as a horn player in an orchestra. He has us all in stitches all the time. One big laugh. His latest is that if we get shot down over Germany, we tell Jerry his name is Paddy O'Brian so they won't treat him too rough.



Donald Plaunt (left) with Ralph Franks.





AIRCRAFT ON OPERATIONS

OF- W R5559 7/8 February 1943 Lorient
OF-L W4249 13/14 February 1943 Lorient
OF-H W4825 14/15 February 1943 Milan
OF-Q R5915 16/17 February 1943 Lorient
OF- Q R5915 19/20 February 1943 Wilhelmshaven
OF-B R5490 3/4 March 1943 Hamburg
OF-D R5483 5/6 March 1943 Essen
OF-X R5607 8/9 March 1943 Nuremburg
OF-R R5612 9/10 March 1943 Munich
OF-U W4175 29/30 March 1943 Berlin

THE OPERATIONS

7.2.43 4 aircraft detailed to attack Lorient. The op reported highly successful, weather good and target bombed with good results. Many large fires observed in town and target area.

7/8 February 1943 Lorient

R5559W Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, W.Lochrie. 14 SBC. Up 1916 Down 0048. Primary target Lorient successfully bombed. Thin cloud. Identified southern point of town visually. Saw at least 15 good fires burning. Bombs released and seen to burst in midst of fired area. One very yellow fire seen.

13.2.43 Fighter affiliation. 14 Lancasters detailed for ops. 12 aircraft successfully attacked Lorient under good weather conditions. Numerous fires seen. 2 aircraft returned early owing to technical failures.

13/14 February 1943 Lorient

W4249L Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, W.Lochrie. 14 SBC. Up 1849 Down 0147. Primary Lorient target successfully bombed. Visibility good, very clear. Pin-pointed target visually – rear gunner saw bombs explode on aiming point. Many large fires observed.

14.2.43 14 Lancasters detailed for night ops. 13 aircraft successfully raided Milan in good weather. 13 photos were also taken and two plotted within 2000 yards of the target. 1 aircraft returned early owing to technical failure. Operation was highly successful.

14/15 February 1943 Milan

W4825H Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, W.Lochrie. 14 SBC. Up 1830 Down 0353. Primary Milan target successfully bombed. Visibility good except for smoke haze. Target identified visually. Bombed where red markers had been burning. Own bomb bursts seen. Lots of good fires observed.

16.2.43 8 Lancasters for ops tonight. All successfully attacked Lorient in good weather. Many fires seen. On return to base W4197A was badly damaged when the aircraft swung off the runway, trying to avoid overshooting. The undercarriage collapsed. No one was injured.

16/17 February 1943 Lorient – Bomb load 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC

R5915Q Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, W.Lochrie. Up 1855 Down 0129. Primary target successfully bombed. Bombed TI markers which were confirmed visually as being in correct position. Stick of incendiaries seen to straddle town.

19.2.43 6 Lancasters detailed to attack Wilhelmshaven. All aircraft attacked the target and fires were seen. Weather, haze and low cloud 5-10/10ths. One aircraft also on night cross country and one on night bombing.

19/20 February 1943 Wilhelmshaven

R5915Q Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, W.Lochrie. 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC. Up 1818 Down 2245. Wilhelmshaven attacked from 15,000'. Cloud over target area. Pin-pointed coast visually just north of target. Bombed on red markers, own bomb bursts seen. One large and many smaller fires seen.

3.3.42 11 aircraft detailed to bomb Hamburg. 8 aircraft attacked the town and all but one crew saw the marker bombs. Many good fires were observed and the glow was visible some distance from the target. One aircraft bombed a last resort, Friedrichskoog owing to technical failure. Two aircraft jettisoned bombs and returned due to technical failures. No cloud but considerable ground haze over the target.

3/4 March 1943 Hamburg – Bomb load 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC

R5490B Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, Whiting. Up 1917 Down 0023. Hamburg attacked 17,000'. No cloud. Green TI markers confirmed by outline of River Elbe – this we bombed and observed own burst. Number of good fires. We bombed late in attack. Ground detail obscured by smoke from fires.

5.3.43 12 Lancasters detailed to attack the Krupps Works at Essen. All aircraft reported successfully having attacked the target or target area and all crews agreed the raid was well concentrated. There were many large fires and explosions, smoke reaching a height of 6,000'. Weather was fine but hazy.

5/6 March 1943 Essen – Bomb load 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC unless stated

R5483D Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, W.Lochrie. Up 1847 Down 0001. Primary objective bombed. 18,000', thin cloud and haze. No TI markers after making run from yellow Tis. Bombed farthest edge of fires. Large number of concentrated fires observed.

8.3.43 12 Lancasters detailed to attack Nuremburg. 10 aircraft reported success. PFF markers were scattered, there being three distinct concentrations, most of the crews bombed the largest cluster. Numerous scattered fires were reported, some being particularly good. Two aircraft returned early owing to technical failures.

8/9 March 1943 Nurnburg – Bomb load 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC unless stated

R5607X Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, Baggs. 1 x 8000lb. Up 1920 Down 0303. Primary objective attacked. 13,000'. Clear – hazy. Built up area observed visually. Bombed on green TI markers. Number of good fires seen, one particularly large one.

9.3.42 9 Lancasters detailed to attack Munich. 9 aircraft successfully attacked target. Many fires reported, one particularly large in the south east of Munich. Most crews report having seen a very large explosion followed by fire and smoke. One aircraft returned early due to technical failure after jettisoning bombs. 10.3.43 Three Lancasters detailed to lay mines in Privet Area and one in Spinach Area. All report successful laying of mines. Weather was fine with good visibility.

LAST FLIGHT WITH SGT.D.C.PAUNT

9/10 March 1943 Munich

R5612R Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, R.Frank, A.W.Taylor, Dillon. 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC. Up 2045 Down 0358. Munich attacked from 17,000'. Slight ground haze. Too late for TI markers so bombed built up area where fires were burning. One very large explosion seen as we approached target. Few scattered fires.

This is the ill-fated OP of Donald Plaunt in which he and the crew were lost. It is also sad that his commission came through after his death.

R103187X Sgt D.Plaunt Pilot Missing 13.3.43

12.3.43 11 Lancasters detailed to bomb Essen. 7 aircraft report successful bombing of the target and large fires and one outstanding explosion were seen. Weather was good with ground haze. One aircraft (Sgt Plaunt) is missing. Three aircraft returned early due to technical failures.

12/13 March 1943 Essen – Bomb load 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC unless stated

R5607X Sgts D.C.Plaunt, T.L.Williams, P/O A.J.Smith, Sgts J.L.Viau, W.Burr, A.W.Taylor, Dillon. 1 x 8000lb. Up 1907 – aircraft and crew missing.

Extract from Bomber Command Losses – 12/13.3.43

Lancaster I R5607 OF – X. Op Essen. T/O Woodhall Spa 1907. Crashed near Wulfen, 7km NNE of Dorsten. All were buried on 17 March in the Gemeindefriedhof at Wulfen. Their remains have since been exhumed and laid to rest in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery.

Sgt D.C.Plaunt RCAF(+), Sgt T.L.Williams(+), P/O A.J.Smith RCAF(+), Sgt J.A.J.L.Viau RCAF(+), Sgt W.C.Burr(+), Sgt A.W.E.Taylor(+), Sgt G.W.Dillon(+).



LEST WE FORGET

RALPHS LAST OP

29.3.43 9 Lancasters detailed for ops – Berlin. 8 aircraft reached the target and bombed the PFF markers. Weather conditions good. The remaining aircraft, captained by F/O Norton, crashed near the aerodrome on return. All the crew were killed. It is presumed that this aircraft successfully bombed the target.

29/30 March 1943 Berlin – Bomb load 1 x 4000lb 12 SBC unless stated

W4175U F/O P.H.Norton, Sgt J.A.Peel, F/O G.C.Francis, Sgts W.Standring, R.Frank, F/Sgt R.Birtwistle, W.Whiting. Up 2151 Down 0445. Presumed mission completed. Aircraft crashed near aerodrome just prior to landing. Crew killed.

Extract from Bomber Command Losses – 29/30.3.43

Lancaster I W4175 OF – U. Op Berlin. T/O 2151 Woodhall Spa. Crashed 0445 in Coningsby village, Lincs, while circling the nearby airfield. F/O Norton and F/O Francis were laid to rest locally in Coningsby Cemetery; Sgt Frank RCAF was taken to Nottingham (Wilford Hill) Jewish Cemetery; the others rest in their home towns. On 18 April, the Squadron joined 8 Group.

F/O P.H.Norton(+), Sgt J.A.Peel(+), F/O G.C.W.Francis(+), Sgt W.Standring(+), Sgt R.Frank RCAF(+), F/S F.R.Birtwistle(+), Sgt W.H.Whiting(+).





ר'מק
SERGEANT
R. FRANK,
30.3.43.
ROYAL CANADIAN
AIR FORCE



This work is presented to the Family and Friends of

Sergeant Ralph Frank

R.C.A.F

This work has been produced on behalf of
97 (straits Settlements) Squadron Association by the
webmaster 97 (straits Settlements) Squadron

References: Write Soon and Often by *Andy Thomson*

Achieve Your Aim by *Kevin Bending*

Photos Mark Howard

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