

Warrant Officer Robert Arthur Symmons

Bomb Aimer



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References: 97 Squadron Operational Record Books 1939-1943

Achieve Your Aim by Kevin Bending

Mark Howard

2020

*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

Symmons, R.A. (B/Aim) F/Sgt

1. 7/8 May 44 Tours Airfield (F/O J.M.Smith),
2. 10/11 May 44 Lille (F/O J.M.Smith),
3. 19/20 May 44 Amiens (F/O J.M.Smith),
4. 22/23 May 44 Brunswick (F/O J.M.Smith),
5. 24/25 May 44 Eindhoven Phillips Works (F/O J.M.Smith) attack cancelled by Controller at target,
6. 27/28 May 44 Morsalines (F/O J.M.Smith) shown as Symmonds,
7. 8/9 June 44 Rennes (F/O J.M.Smith) shown as Symmons,
8. 12/13 June 44 Caen (F/O J.M.Smith) shown as Symmons,
9. 15/16 June 44 Chateaurault (F/O J.M.Smith),
10. 23/24 June 44 Limoges (F/O J.M.Smith),
11. 24/25 June 44 Prouville (F/O J.M.Smith),
- W/O 12. 12/13 July 44 Culmont Chalindrey (F/O J.M.Smith),
13. 20/21 July 44 Courtrai (F/O J.M.Smith),
14. 25/26 July 44 Stuttgart (F/O J.M.Smith),
15. 1 Aug 44 Mont Candon (F/L J.M.Smith),
16. 3 Aug 44 Trossy St Maximim (F/L J.M.Smith),
17. 5 Aug 44 St Leu d'Esserent (F/L J.M.Smith),
18. 7 Aug 44 Secqueville La Compagne (F/L J.M.Smith),
19. 9/10 Aug 44 Chattelerault (F/L J.M.Smith),
20. 29/30 Aug 44 Konigsberg (W/C Baker),
21. 11/12 Sept 44 Darmstadt (F/L J.M.Smith),
22. 18 Sept 44 Bremerhaven (S/L J.M.Smith),
23. 19 Sept 44 Munchen Gladbach (S/L J.M.Smith),
24. 23/24 Sept 44 Munster (S/L J.M.Smith),

More.....

Cont.....

25. 26/27 Sept 44 Karlsruhe (S/L J.M.Smith),
26. 6 Oct 44 Bremen (S/L J.M.Smith),
27. 1 Nov 44 Hamburg (G/C Johnson), (B/Aim 2)
28. 4 Nov 44 Ladbergen (G/C Johnson),
29. 21 Nov 44 Gravenhorst (G/C Johnson), (Vis AB)
30. 13 Dec 44 Horten (G/C Johnson), (Vis AB)
31. 21/22 Dec 44 Politz (G/C Johnson), (Vis AB)
32. 1 Jan 45 Gravenhorst - Dortmund-Ems Canal (G/C/Johnson), (Vis AB)
33. 4/5 Jan 45 Royan (F/O Yaxley), (Vis AB)
34. 16/17 Jan 45 Brux (G/C Johnson), (B/Aim 2)
35. 2/3 Feb 45 Karlsruhe (G/C Johnson), (Vis AB)
36. 7/8 Feb 45 Dortmund Ems Canal (F/O Dow), (B/Aim 2)
37. 8/9 Feb 45 Politz (G/C Johnson), (B/Aim 2)
38. 14/15 Feb 45 Rositz (G/C Johnson), (B/Aim 2)
39. 20/21 Feb 45 Gravenhorst – Dortmund Ems Canal (G/C Johnson)

AUS408340

DETAILS FROM OPERATIONAL RECORD BOOK

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.

ND764E F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symonds, Sgts N.D.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 0044 Down 0533. Up 0042 Down 0515. 6 x 7" cluster flares, 2 x TI yellow No 4, 1 x 4000lb HC, 6 x 500lb MC, 3 x 4.5" flares. Weather clear, good visibility. Aerodrome could be seen visually and by RSF. Arrived at target before markers, first RSF went down on time. This was apparently ok. Backing up was ordered and was good. Made one run then bombed on 2nd run on cluster of RSFs which were seen to be right on aiming point. Bombing was very concentrated and attack should prove successful.

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.

JB683C F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symonds, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2200 Down 0115. 6 x 7" clusters, 1 x 4000lb HC, 8 x 500lb MC, 3 x 4.5" reco flares. Target located on RSF and visually on RSF. H2S u/s just after crossing enemy coast, impossible to drop flares on box as briefed so we circled target for bombing only, but cease bombing order was received and re-marking called for. We waited for some flares to go down and on hearing Controller's order for more flares to west of these, we dropped ours visually. Bombing was then very concentrated. Computer u/s; bombing done with emergency computer and sight gear.

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.

NE121F F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmonds, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2314 Down 0253. 11 x 7" clusters, 3 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 4.5" reco flares. Flares and RSF could be seen through cloud but unable to see if accurate. Ordered second drop flares at 0121 hours but after one drop Deputy Controller heard on VHF at 0123 hours to say attack was to stop. Confirmation by W/T at 0125 hours.

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.

JB683C F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmonds, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2245 Down 0401. 12 x 7" flares, 1 x 2000lb HC. 7/10ths cloud, vis good. Target located on H2S. First flares fell at 0106 hours approx. No RSF or TIs down on arrival but seen subsequently. Flares said to be well in centre of town. After dropping flares, awaited orders for bombing and for further flares but not received. On leaving at 0121 hours, saw red/green star over target area at approx 0123 hours. General glow below cloud, no other results.

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.

JB683C F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmonds, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2256 Down 0226. 12 x 7” clusters, 2 x 1000lb MC, 3 x 4.5” reco flares. Four miles from target at 0039 hours, heard Controller call off the raid. VHF very noisy on stud “A”. Changed to stud “C” as directed, moderate background.

27/28 May 1944 - Morsalines

JB683C F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmonds, Sgts M.N.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2304 Down 0226. 12 x 7 x 4.5” clusters, 2 x 1000lb, 3 x 4.5” reco flares. Located by H2S checked by Gee. Very good H2S run and flares released on time. Two RSFs reported on VHF 0053.5 hours. Marker asked to cancel RSF by yellow TI and re-mark. At 0057.5 hours ordered to carry on bombing; bombing stopped at 0102 approx. Markers sent in to re-mark with green TIs. Bomb bursts seen to be very concentrated on markers.

*** I include details of the squadron’s involvement in D-Day as the ORB states “Today must be recorded as one of the most eventful days in the Squadron’s history.” WO Symmons D-Day involvement to come on the night of 8/9th June ***

Further training took place today. F/O Perkins and crew paid a visit to the USAAF at Alconbury and were impressed by the high quality of the navigational radar aids. Today must be recorded as one of the most eventful days in the Squadron’s history. The target had been given us at about 1pm. It was a battery of coastal heavy guns on the French coast at a point called St Pierre du Mont, which is situated just on the south eastern base of the Chernourg Peninsula, also La Peanelle. It seemed quite a normal target until various other things came trickling in – things such as convoys to be avoided – keeping strictly on track, news of impending naval actions to the East, and many other things, until one became aware of the obvious that the invasion of Europe was about to commence. The Squadron Commander was heard to say “Thank God I’m still on ops and not at an O.T.U.” Everyone was delighted and excitement was at fever pitch; 18 of our aircraft were detailed. The attack started at 4.50am – about 30 minutes before dawn – with a red TI which was accurately dropped by an Oboe Mosquito on the target. It was instantly backed up by green TI dropped visually by Mosquito aircraft of 627 Squadron. These TI were not so accurate as those dropped on Oboe. However by the time Main Force came in to bomb, the target was well marked. The Main Force bombing was extremely accurate and the whole point was flattened. Crossing the Channel on the return journey thousands of landing craft were seen proceeding towards the French coast. Two of our crews failed to return. One was captained by the Squadron Commander, W/Cdr E.J.Carter DFC who was flying in “Z” and the other was a Norwegian crew captained by Lt. Jespersen. W/Cdr Carter had with him S/Ldr M.Bryan-Smith DFC, Gunnery Leader and F/L A.Chambers DFC, the Signals Leader. It is believed that they encountered some JU88s.

8/9 June 1944 – Rennes

(NE165Y – W/C Tait of No 54 Base with an 83 Sqn crew. Up 2307 Down 0349. This aircraft with W/C Tait as Controller operated in conjunction with 97 Sqn).

Blind bombing practice bombing this morning. 7 of our aircraft were detailed for operations tonight against a railway crossover bridge just outside Rennes. The first Oboe marker fell on time at 0127 about 100 yards north of aiming point. The Squadron dropped their flares in a stick across it – illuminating the target area. The target was identified visually and marked with a green TI by a Mosquito aircraft of 627 Squadron. There was considerable light flak but Main Force bombing was extremely good and the bridge was destroyed, there was no sign of fighters. All our aircraft returned safely.

PA973A F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2305 Down 0405. 9 x 7 x 4.5” clusters, 9 x 500lb MC/GP, 3 x 4.5” reco flares. 6/10ths cloud 3-4,000’, haze below. Target located by H2S. Called in second flares 0142 hours, after bombing had started. 0127 hours yellow TI (Oboe) went down, then at 0129 hours, first flares were dropped, followed by RSF by Mosquitos at 0132 hours. At 0134 hours Controller ordered Deputy 1 to cancel certain RSF and Deputy 2 to back up the green TI. At 0137 hours Controller told Flare Force to carry on bombing. After bombing run completed, reserve flares dropped.

12/13 June 1944 – Caen

(Controller W/C Jeudwine of 83 Sqn in Mosquito aircraft).

A large day training programme was carried out consisting of practice bombing, blind bombing and fighter affiliation. Operations tonight were against a railway junction at Poitiers. 9 aircraft were detailed. Flares were dropped to time and very accurately by blind bombing methods over the target area. At 0149 the first RSF was down. It was assessed by the Controller and backed up by a 1000lb red TI dropped by S.A.B.S. by F/L Van Raalte and crew. A concentrated and accurate attack followed. The raid was very successful. Large petrol explosions were seen. Opposition was very slight. All of our aircraft returned safely. Further operations tonight were against bridges at Caen which the Army had not been able to destroy without inflicting severe casualties on the French population. Owing to technical difficulties the first flares were dropped rather wide. However an Oboe proximity marker was dropped and further flares were dropped visually over it. By 0220 the target was marked with RSFs and Main Force went into bomb. So accurate was this attack upon a pinpoint target that the O.C. the British Field Forces who was watching the attack from nearby sent a congratulatory message of thanks. A further message of congratulations was received from AOC 5 Group. 9 aircraft took part in this raid.

PA973A F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmons, Sgts M.N.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2357 Down ? 9 x 7” clusters, 5 x 1000lb MC, 5 reco flares. Cloudy 5-6,000’. Location by H2S. First flare 0210.5 hours. Oboe down 0211 hours. Broadcast wind velocity 0413 at 0216 hours. Controller called for second Flare Force to back up existing flares. Went in to bomb 0224 hours, unable to see markers for cloud. Descended to 6000’, but still could not see them. We had overshoot. “Cease bombing and return to base” signal then received (time not logged).

15/16 June 1944 – Chateaurault

A large practice bombing programme this morning. The target for tonight's operation was an ammunition dump at Chateaurault. 9 aircraft were detailed. The flares were very accurate and punctually dropped at 0044 hrs. The RSFs were very accurately dropped and were backed up with red and green TIs. The bombing went smoothly and the target was left a sea of flames. Heavy explosions were seen. The weather was clear and no opposition was encountered. All of our aircraft returned safely, with the exception of F/L Chatten DSO who was engaged for some unknown reason by the London Defences. His aircraft was well hit.

NE124J F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2137 Down 0355. 9 x 7 x 4.5" clusters, 9 x 500lb MC, 3 reco flares. No cloud, vis good. Target Chatellerault located by markers confirmed by equipment. First flares seen at 0044 hours. Arrived target 0047 hours. At about 0047.5 hours Controller ordered Markers to back up RSF. At 0048.3, one Marker reported RSF on Marking Point. 0049 Controller asked Deputy 1 to back up. 0050 Bombing wind 350/22 mph broadcast. 0050.7 bombing order broadcast "Bomb red and green". At 0108.5 Deputy 2 reported his reds down. At 0109

23/24 June 1944 – Limoges

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(+).

JA846K F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2248 Down 0524. 9 x 7" clusters, 8 x 500lb MC, 1 x 500lb MC LD (36 hrs), 3 rec flares. No cloud. Identification by H2S. At 0153 hours first flares down. Dropped our own 0158 hours, first RSF down. Bombing wind on W/T at 0157 hours, 032/22 mph. At 0157.5 hours, Controller confirmed with Markers that RSF was okay and Deputy 1 and 2 went in to back up. At 0150.7 hours came the order to attack RSF on VHF. We bombed at 0207 hours. Controller was heard to consult with Deputies. Then at 0208.5 hours, Flare Force was told to return to base.

24/25 June 1944 – Prouville

Many training cross countries this morning. Some practice bombing at Wainfleet. The target for tonight was Prouville – a point from which the Germans had been sending their pilotless aircraft to bomb London. 12 aircraft were detailed. At 00.10 and 00.11 the first Oboe markers were seen. Flares were immediately dropped over them. It was very difficult, however, for the marker aircraft to identify the target, especially as they were hampered by searchlights, light flak and night fighters. The Deputy Controller attempted to mark blindly on his blind bombing equipment, but it is feared that as greater accuracy was needed than was possible that the raid must be considered abortive. F/Lt Walton, flying Lancaster “J”, did not return from this sortie. No message was received from him. The gunners of “Q” – F/O Jones and W/O Clark – distinguished themselves by shooting down in flames two JU88s which attacked them. A third JU88 was claimed as a probable. An exceptionally good effort.

JA846K F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, F/Sgt R.A.Symmons, Sgts M.N.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2251 Down 0205. 14 x 500lb MC, 2 x 500lb MC LD (12 hrs). Clear, no cloud, hazy, vis poor. Located by equipment to within 5 miles of target. At H-4, first Oboe seen ahead and another went down one minute later. H-2 over target; flares went down at H-hour. Bombing wind 27/12 mph received. Controller was heard asking Markers if they could identify target. At 0026 hours they replied in negative. Controller then ordered a green TI to be dropped in target area for bombing. This did not go down. At 0030 hours Controller called and said bomb RSF and PFF were to bomb on equipment if they could. RSFs were very scattered and impossible to assess the attack.

12/13 July 1944 – Culmont-Chalindrey

This morning's training programme consisted of blind bombing practice and cross countries. Tonight 13 aircraft were detailed for an attack on an important railway crossing at Culmont Chalindrey. At 0140 hours we dropped our flares on our blind bombing equipment very accurately over the target area. Mosquito aircraft instantly found the aiming point and marked it with RSFs. The Controller not having been heard from by now, the raid was taken over by the Deputy Controller who ordered the RSFs to be backed up and passed a vector wind to the main force to bomb with. At 0145 the Controller was heard from on VHF and he then assumed control of the raid. The operation is believed to have been very successful. There was no flak – only a few searchlights – and fighter opposition was negligible. All of our aircraft returned safely, but owing to cloud base being so low at base the majority were diverted to Metheringham and two to Winthorpe.

NE121E F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2155 Down 0609. 9 x 7” clusters, 4 x 1000lb MC, 1 x 1000lb MC LD (36 hours), 2 rec flares. No cloud, vis good. Target located by markers. First flares went down at H-10. At H-8 Marker 1 reported flares spot on. At H-6 marker down 50 yards 6 o'clock. Backed up 4 minutes later by Marker 2 which was followed by another RSF – immediately after this Controller ordered Markers to cancel second RSF (just released) and back up original RSF with green TI. At H-hour ordered by Controller “Do not Bomb”. At H-10 while actually dropping more flares, green TI was seen to cascade. Controller still asking Markers to back up, but no reply. Controller heard to order “Bomb red TI”, giving bombing wind of 325/15; on hearing this we went in to bomb. Bombing appeared very concentrated. Landed at Metheringham.

20/21 July 1944 – Courtrai

NFTs and blind bombing runs this morning. 15 aircraft were detailed to participate in and attack on the marshalling yards at Courtrai. The Squadron arrived punctually at 0044 hours and dropped flares by means of their blind bombing equipment across the target area. Mosquitos of 627 Sqn immediately marked the target with red TIs. These were very accurate and were soon backed up by Lancaster aircraft with green TIs. The Main Force bombing was extremely accurate and the target was obliterated. F/O Edwards and crew did not return from this mission. There was slight heavy flak and some enemy fighters were seen on the return route. There was no cloud but some haze.

PB133C F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts M.N.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2314 Down 0157. 9 x 7" clusters, 5 x 1000lb MC/GP, 3 rec flares. Clear, ground haze. Target seen by H2S and GPI, also red TI (Oboe). Attack opened up on time and was quickly marked by green TI at H-3. Bombing wind 150/8 received at H-4 and at H-1 bombing started, well concentrated around green TIs. Raid was very quickly over and bombing extremely concentrated around marker. At H+2.5, large explosion with volumes of flame and black smoke, presumably oil. VHF set very noisy and had to be switched off. One stick of flares dropped at 0050 hours approx was about 5 to 6 miles to port but ignored.

25/26 July 1944 – Stuttgart

This morning 13 of our aircraft proceeded to Wyton to participate with 8 Group in an attack on Stuttgart. The attack was on the usual area target lines – a Newhaven with emergency Wanganui. Our TIs were dropped blindly on a GPI run from Sforzheim. Cloud was 8/10ths and the attack soon developed into a Paramatta with some crews dropping Wanganui flares. The marking was continuous and generally well concentrated and crews reported markers on built up area. The defences consisted of heavy flak in barrage form with no searchlights. The raid was generally considered quite successful. All of our aircraft returned safely, the supporters at Coningsby.

PB133C F/O J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.

Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2158 Down 0532. 5 x 2000lb HC. 1/16th thin strato cumulus estimated 12,000'. Target located by H2S. Y fix at 0143 on Pforzheim followed by GPI run. Response on SOX from believed Stuttgart which would have been good enough to bomb on if we had not been briefed to bomb on GPI. Yellow TI seen ahead on run up as we crossed over. Flares just starting and a green and red TI seen to cascade – green just before bombing and red just after. Too early to assess results.

1 August 1944 – Mont Candon

The month opens with a double attack on flying bomb bases at Siracourt and Mont Candon for which we detailed 3 and 6 aircraft respectively. Unfortunately the target area was covered by very low cloud when our aircraft arrived and the controller ordered the mission to be abandoned and aircraft to return to base retaining their bombs. No fighters or flak were encountered on this mission. All of our aircraft returned safely. No night flying tonight.

PB133C F/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 1647 Down 2045.

3 August 1944 – Trossy St Maximim

Some day training on blind marking equipment this morning. This afternoon an operation was carried out against a flying bomb base at Trossy St Maximim. 16 of our aircraft participated. The formation arrived at the target at 1430 hours. The leading aircraft reported the aiming point clear and very clearly visible. Very soon afterwards the whole area was covered in smoke. The attack is believed to have been reasonably successful. The standard of formation flying was very low, and both the controller and his leader complained strongly of lack of flying discipline and disobedience to flight plan instructions. There was moderate heavy but accurate flak over the target. The weather consisted of 3/10ths cloud. All of our aircraft returned safely. No night flying tonight.

PB133C F/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M. Weather – 3/10ths cloud. Results – leading aircraft reported aiming point clear and very clearly visible. Very soon afterwards whole area covered by smoke. Opposition Encountered – moderate heavy flak, accurate.

5 August 1944 – St Leu d'Esserent

Some training this morning, but the majority of today's flying was on the daylight operation against a flying bomb base at St Leu d'Esserent, in which attack 15 of our aircraft participated. The controller led the formation and ran up approximately 5 miles to starboard of the target. He recognized the target to port and ordered a sharp turn to port. Most aircraft immediately astern of him were able to turn in time but a few to his starboard were unable to turn in time and overshot the target by nearly 2000 yards. This turn, however, did not appear to affect too seriously the rear formations, and some accurate bombing resulted. Within two minutes of bombing, however, the target area was covered in dust up to 12,000 ft and later crews had a hard job to find the target and bomb it. There was slight heavy flak, but no signs of fighters. There was three to seven tenths cumulus cloud with tops up to 12,000 feet. All of our aircraft returned safely from this raid. No night flying.

PB133C F/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 1036 Down 1516. Weather – 3/10ths to 7/10ths cloud. Cumulus tops 12,000'. Results – Controller ran up approx 5 miles to starboard. He recognised the target to port and ordered a sharp turn to port. Most aircraft immediately astern were able to make turn in time, but some further on his starboard could not make the turn in time and some overshot by 2000 yards. This turn did not appear to affect too seriously the rear formations and some accurate bombing resulted. The target area was covered with dust up to 12,000' by 1332 hours. Opposition Encountered – Slight heavy flak increasing to moderate in early stages. No signs of fighters.

7/8 August 1944 – Secqueville La Compagne

Today's flying consisted of practice bombing at Wainfleet, and blind bombing practice at Lincoln and Nottingham. Tonight's operation in which 7 of our aircraft took part, was directed against an enemy tactical military target at Secqueville La Compagne. The Oboe red TI markers were on time and very well concentrated in the area depicted by artillery star shells. The main force bombing commenced at 2319 hours and was extremely well concentrated around the markers. At 2325 hours the Master Bomber ordered cease bombing – by which time the whole target had been covered by bombs and the markers had burned out. The raid was extremely successful. The opposition was negligible and visibility was clear with slight ground haze.

PB133C F/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2133 Down 0048. 11 x 1000lb ANM 59, 4 x 500lb GP. Weather clear, slight haze, no cloud. Target located visually, checked by equipment. TIs were blown out by the time run completed. It seemed a very successful attack. Loaded at Enstone.

9/10 August 1944 - Chatterault

10 aircraft were detailed tonight, also one with 54 Base Controller crew, to take part in an attack against a German storage depot at Chatterault. The flares were dropped at 2344 hours and by 2350 hours the target was marked. The bombing seemed quite accurate and it is believed to have been a successful attack. Slight flak opposition. No fighters were seen. The weather was good, and all of our planes returned safely.

PB133C F/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgts N.M.Greenley, J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2055 Down 0300. 8 x &2 clusters, 4 x TI green (B16), 2 x TI yellow No16, 3 rec flares. Sky cloudless with thick haze. Identification by Y and flares. 2342 hours first flares on target. Reported insufficient by Markers who required more to north. At H+1 Wanganui dropped. New flares assessed as okay. H+5 markers down – 180 degrees/200 yards. H+6 remarking with green TI 150 degrees/50 yards. Bombing wind received H+11 – 293/27. H+13 “Start Bombing” signal. At H+14 told to back up left hand TI. H+15 “Ceas bombing”. TIs not seen through smoke. Made second run and dropped cluster – assessed as undershot by 200 yards. Main Force told to resume bombing with new vectored wind.

29/30 August 1944 - Konigsberg

Practice bombing at Wainfleet this morning. Tonight Koenigsberg was the target again with 13 aircraft and crews taking part. This time the target was the marshalling yards and the dock area. The attack was on similar lines to the previous raid. The flares went down at 0107 hours. The Controller, W/C Woodroffe, soon initially marked the target, but owing to VHF trouble and a backers-up bomb sight toppling, the marking became very protracted and main force were not called in until 0142 hours. W/O Moir blind marked the target with a TI green which fell 400 yards 080 degrees from the aiming point. Photographic evidence has proved the raid to have been quite successful. All of our aircraft returned safely. There was considerable light and slight heavy flak. Fighter activity was slight.

PB156R W/C R.Baker, Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, Sgts J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 2028 Down 0613. 11 x 7” clusters, 1 x red TI No 16, 1 x TI yellow No 16, 2 rec flares 1 x RSF. 10/10ths cloud 9/14,000'. Target confirmed on H2X. First flares on time – assessed as accurate. Marker III ran in immediately, did a dummy run, ran in again and dropped a RSF at 0113 hours, assessed as 300 yards NE. More flares asked for at 0116 hours. Main Force told to standby H+11/2. Marker III dropped green two TIs. H+5 Deputy I assessed green TIs as 600 yards east of RSF. Instructions given to VBU to go over greens and overshoot reds from east to west by 300 yards. Flare Force told to go home.

11/12 September 1944 - Darmstadt

6 bombing details, one fighter affiliation exercise, 22 GPI and "Y" runs, and a "Y" cross-country were together done this morning by a total of 11 aircraft. The main event of the day was however the operational mission to Darmstadt. For this, 15 aircraft and crews were detailed, all of which took-off. This operation represented a considerable success for the Flare Force (of whom this Squadron provided 6), for the illumination was on time and extremely accurate. The first red TI was, as a result, dropped as early as H-9 ("H" was 0000 hrs). This was accurately backed up and a good concentration resulted. Green TIs were also dropped accurately in the centre of the town by aircraft of this squadron, arrangement having been made that the first aircraft to make good blind runs for flare dropping should release green TIs at this point, however, a certain amount of confusion arose, owing to a misunderstood order of the Controller; both red and green TIs were backed up with further greens, and as a result the concentration became scattered. Despite this, however, early bombing was accurate, and later photographic evidence shows that much damage was done. Opposition was reported as slight; heavy flak was very slight, and light flak "meagre". A little fighter activity was experienced round the target. The weather was clear, with very slight haze on the inward journey. From this operation S/Ldr de Belleruche of "B" Flight, failed to return. No signals were received. W/Cdr Walker, a u/t controller of 54 Base, who was flying aircraft "H" of this squadron, also failed to return.

PB133C F/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 2101 Down 0217. 12 x 7" clusters, 2 x TI green No 16. Clear weather. Target located by TIs checked by H2S; first flares and green TIs on time. One green TI to starboard and one to port. Red TI dropped by Mosquito at 2353 hrs, assessed by Controller as excellent. Main Force called in at H-hour.

18 September 1944 - Bremerhaven

More training this morning and operations tonight. Seven crews did practice bombing at Epperstone, and five did GPI runs on Lincoln as well. Another seven did "Y" runs on Nottingham, Cambridge and Manchester. 9 aircraft were detailed from this Squadron to attack Bremerhaven. All aircraft detailed took off. The attack was a masterpiece of simplicity and accuracy. No snags were experienced and everything went smoothly and as planned. "H" was 2100 hours. This Squadron was to provide Primary Blind Markers, Flare Force, and a visual Backer-up. The first flare was released at 20.51 (H-9) and the first marker was seen to fall at 20.51.5. This was immediately assessed as accurate. The main force were called in to bomb at 2057. The controller was able to order "Complete bombing and return to base" by 2057 (?). Fires were visible 150 miles away; and intense orange explosions were seen at 2104. An example of the Squadron's blind bombing accuracy was provided by F/O Eaton who hit the A/P blindly. The light flak was reported as "moderate to intense", and heavy as "slight". There were about 15 searchlights in the target area and many more in the surrounding town. Weather was clear with fine visibility. All our aircraft returned to safely.

PB133C S/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1827 Down 2240. 1 x TI green B22, 1 x TI green No 16, 10 x 1000lb MC (1/2 hour delay). Weather clear. Target confirmed by H2S. Flares went down after we had dropped our load. 2052 hrs heard Controller assess red TIs as 200 yards south and they were to be backed up. Backers up backed up the reds and visual backers up backed up the greens. At 2056 hrs backing up was assessed as good, about 100 yards south of Marking Point. At 2057.5 hrs Controller sent out "Attack centre of red TIs ignoring two red TIs to north of town."

19 September 1944 – Munchen Gladbach

Flying training this morning – GPI runs, fighter affiliation and bombing. 14 aircraft were detailed to attack Munchen-Gladbach. All these took off and none returned early. The attack was only a limited success, owing to lack of cohesion and a certain amount of confusion over the target. There were two aiming points, the more northerly of which was to be marked by green TI and bombed by a Main Green Force, while the more southerly was marked by Mosquitos with red spot fires and bombed by a Main Red Force. Most of the bombs eventually fell on the north aiming point. The first flares went down at 2133.6 (H being 2145) and good illumination resulted. Marker I was about to mark the S A/P but was blinded by his own exhaust, and he was not able to mark until 2149. By this time, however, the N A/P had been adequately marked with greens, and both sections of Main Force ordered to bomb these. Although the Main Red Force were now ordered to bomb reds, few bombs fell on these, as W/T Link I had re-broadcast the Controller's original orders by W/T. Flak was reported as slight. Haze was reported over the target, and considerable icing on route. All of our aircraft returned safely to base.

PB133C S/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, Sgt N.M.Greenley, Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1920 Down 2324. 12 x 7" clusters, 2 x 1000lb MC (1/2 hour delay), 2 rec flares. Weather clear. Identified target on H2S. First flares down at 2135 hrs and at 2140 hrs heard Marker 1 saying he was going in; he made dummy run. At 2142 hrs Controller said he could see everything and that the flares were good. Controller made a run but his TIs hung up. Markers said they could not identify and suggested more flares should be dropped. It seemed that Markers were not in position as Controller said he could see the whole thing. At 2143 hrs more flares called for. At 2145 hrs Red Force told to stand by. At 2149 hrs still no red markers down, so Main Force ordered to bomb greens. At that moment Marker 1 dropped red on aiming point then Main Force ordered to bomb reds with overshoot as Flight Plan. All aircraft then told return to base after bombing. Congratulatory message sent by Controller to Flare Force.

23/24 September 1944 - Munster

11 aircraft were detailed to participate in a raid on an aqueduct at Munster. All aircraft detailed took off. In no way could the raid be described as a success. One of the controllers had navigational trouble, arrived late, and took no part in the operation. The remaining controller assessed the first flares as south of the target, and ordered the 2nd and 3rd flare waves to drop their flares 3 miles to the north. It was afterwards found however that the Mosquitos had, in the light of these flares, marked the wrong aqueduct some 6 miles to the north of the target, so the original flares could hardly have been south. The issue was further complicated by low cloud creeping across the target, and a lower cloud base generally than was expected. Many crews of this and 83 Squadron reported that they saw no markers at all. It is hoped, however, that some damage was done to the enemy. Crews detailed to drop TI and bombs on the town of Munster itself did so. The heavy flak was slight but increased as the main force aircraft came in. There was also some light flak. Fighters in some strength were encountered on the first leg of the homeward route. From this raid, two aircraft of our Squadron failed to return. They were S/L Higgs in "F" and F/O Lopez (RAAF) in "B". No signals were received.

PB133C S/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1912 Down 2343. 14 x 7" clusters, 2 rec flares. Half target covered by 10/10ths cloud, half clear. Target identified on GPI, checked by H2X. Sticks of flares seen to either side 3 miles to port and one mile to starboard of our track in. Satisfied with own check on instruments, no markers seen. Red TI assessed after difficulty approx 300 yards south east of aiming point at 2144.5 hrs. Backed up, and at 2146 hrs Controller ordered Main Force to bomb 150 yards NW of red TI. At 2149.5 hrs no bombs had been dropped. At approx 2150 hrs Controller ordered "Bomb below cloud" (base 8000'). Another Controller, callsign not heard, ordered his force home at 2150 hrs approx. Bombing wind 235/23 knots 26 mph.

26/27 September 1944 - Karlsruhe

The bodies of F/O Walker, F/Sgt Sharpe and Sgt Strowger (all of F/O Lopez's crew, missing 23/24 of this month) were today recovered from the Wash. 11 aircraft were detailed for operations, target Karlsruhe. All aircraft detailed took off, but F/O Negus (RAAF) in aircraft "C" returned early with u/s intercom in his rear turret. The attack failed, because cloud conditions and searchlights combined to make marking impossible. The target was covered with 10/10ths cloud, the base of which is believed to have been about 400'. The first blind markers (green TI) and flares (this Squadron provided the greater part of the flare force) went down to time, but it was found impossible to mark, and those aircraft able to see the green TI dropped their reds on it. Main Force were then ordered to bomb the mean point of impact of reds and greens. It is feared however that little damage was done. All our aircraft returned safely. The heavy flak, though slight, was above expectation. A few fighters were seen.

PB133C S/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, Sgts J.J.Garrod, D.J.Watts. Up 0051 Down 0657. 12 x 7" clusters, 2 x green TI No 16, 2 rec flares. 10/10ths cloud tops estimated 6-8000'. Target confirmed on H2X. After flares and green TI had gone down blind, Controller heard calling up Markers individually, asking whether they could identify mark; all replied in negative, but could see green TI through cloud. Controller ordered Mosquitos to back up green TI with red at 0354 hrs, and First Flares to back up with their greens, but we were too far away. At 0356.5 hrs Main Force ordered to bomb Marking Point I of red and green TI markers. Reported green TIs were in town.

6 October 1944 – Bremen

An H2S exercise was done this morning, with Hyde Park as the objective. It was desired to discover whether the average set-operator was capable of picking out and marking a small open area (such as Hyde Park or the Templehof Airfield) within a large built up area. Photographs taken by the crews show that the standard of set work was uniformly good, but it is still an open question whether the presence of the Serpentine in Hyde Park allows the latter to be considered a representative target. The usual training went on in the daytime, and 10 aircraft were detailed to attack Bremen. All aircraft detailed took off. Of these, 4 were detailed as Primary Blind Markers, five as Flare Force, and one as Supporter. The attack went smoothly and as arranged. H was 2025, and the first flares were dropped by F/O Woolnough of this Squadron at 2016, (H-9 as arranged). The M/P was marked, the markers backed up, and Main Force was called in at 2023. A very efficient raid, apparently, with the last of spectacular incidents emphasising the efficiency of all concerned. Flak (both heavy and light) was only slight while our aircraft were on target, though the heavy flak increased as the Main Force aircraft came in the searchlights were reported as "intense and troublesome". All our aircraft returned safely. After-note (9/10/44) Photographic evidence has since shown that this raid was highly successful. The old city is now almost completely gutted, and there are further areas of devastation in the residential area to the SE.

PB133C S/L J.M.Smith, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/O M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1742 Down 2201. 9 x 7" clusters, 2 x TI red No 16, 2 rec flares. Clear, slight haze. Located target visually by red and green TIs, checked by H2S. First flare late; red TI observed at 2010 hrs. Second and third flare force told to drop flare over red TI. At same time green TI fell. Assessed 300 yards south. Order to Main Force to bomb green TI, overshooting as planned, at 2021.5 hrs.

1 November 1944 – Hamburg

Large training schedule carried out including air to sea firing, fighter affiliation, Y runs, and Loran cross country, also 2 aircraft were on night fighter affiliation. 6 Lancasters were detailed for daylight operations, 2 of which were cancelled. 4 aircraft took off soon after 1400 hours to attack a target at Hamburg, Germany. Aircraft bombed and released their flares from approx 18,000 ft. Owing to cloud ground marking was impossible. Three blind markers released on instruments in spite of difficulties of VHF interference from Main Force. Controller reported Main Force bombing very scattered to NE and west of target, with some bombs on target. Intense box barrage encountered for first wave, diminishing later. The Squadron Commander, G/Capt P.W.Johnson DFC AFC, took part in this operation, flying in aircraft letter "C". All returned safely to base at approx 1745 hrs.

PB133C G/C P.W.Johnson, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons (A/B2), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1422 Down 1753. 1 x TI yellow No 16, 5 Wanganui red/green. 7-8/10ths cloud, tops approx 7000'. Target located on H2X, confirmed visually. Wanganui dropped on Box, checked bearing and distance GPI Wesel as briefed. VHF transmitting for Main Force aircraft seriously interfered with success of raid. No Wanganuis seen in front of us. Gaps in cloud too small for ground marking. Leading navigator overshoot position "C" and also overshoot turn after target taking us over Krefeld. H/F holes in tailplane, two engines and fuselage and wings. Hydraulics u/s.

4 November 1944 – Ladbergen (Dortmund-Ems Canal)

One cross country carried out only due to 9 aircraft being detailed for an early take off on night operations. The aircraft detailed including the Squadron Commander took off at approx 1745 hrs to mark a target at Ladbergen, the Dortmund Ems Canal. The attack was made from 15000 ft in clear weather with slight L/F & considerable fighter activity on outward route and over the target. Marking was carried out smoothly and according to plan. The 3rd flare wave was not required. First red TI was reported 1000 yards N of Eastern Channel. Backers up undershot this marker & very soon a good red splodge of reds between the two channels was seen. Target area was amply illuminated. The raid was considered successful. One aircraft F/O Royston-Piggott returned early due to mid upper turret being u/s. The remainder returned safely to base at approx 21.45 hrs.

PB450D G/C P.W.Johnson, Sgt F.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons (A/B2), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1733 Down 2128. 12 x 7" clusters, 2 rec flares. Clear sky. Target located on H2X and GPI check from Munster. Also visually – clear view of canal. Flares very well concentrated – best yet seen. First bright green TI dropped H-11 about 2 miles north of target. Second green fell fairly close to aiming point. RSF fell at 1923 hrs – assessment not heard but seemed to fall in centre of two arms of canal. Returned immediately to base. Main Force told to bomb at 1930 hrs – heard on W/T "Attack southern concentration of RSF."

21 November 1944 – Gravenhorst (Canal)

Bombing, Y runs on Boston was carried out. 17 aircraft and crews are detailed to attack Dortmund-Ems Canal. The aircraft took off just before dark in very cold weather but rain has been forecast for return at base. The target lay at Gravenhorst. The weather 8 to 10/10 in a layer, cloud tops at 5500 ft – base at 4000 ft. Defences 2 H/F guns, slight L/F, no S/Ls & no fighter activity. First flares and green TI were dropped and seen by Controller to NW of target and south. There was a good concentration of flares to NW. Marker I marked with red TI & was assessed as 100 yards south of M/P. Marker Leader was called to back up and two more red TI were dropped, one right on M/P & the other about 250 yards away on the right bank to the NE of M/P. Controller called in Main Force to bomb as planned & below 4000' cloud base aiming at the first two reds on their way in. Bombing commenced and was pretty accurate, the target becoming obscured by smoke, but the TIs were always visible. The raid is considered successful, most bombs fell very near the south easterly bank. All our aircraft returned safely to base.

PB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, F/Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons, P/O G.D.Moir (AB2), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1714 Down 2255. 14 CP No 1. 9/10ths cloud. Target located on H2S – bearing and distance from Rheine. Main Force were told to come down low to bomb, owing to cloud just before we dropped our flares. One of the red TIs was assessed 100 yards south. At approx 2055 hrs Main Force were told to come in and bomb first red TIs on run up.

13th December 1944 -“Koln” & “Emden” at HORTEN

Seven aircraft detailed for early flying, but details not carried out. Operations on, and 14 aircraft and crews detailed, take-off 1530hrs. All 14 took off, weather fair with very poor visibility. Diversion very likely. Attack carried out on “Koln” & “Emden” at HORTEN in Oslo Fjior, and aircraft returned to diversion aerodrome at Milltown, Scotland. Weather very poor and aircraft stranded at Milltown. No training carried out on morning of 14th.

PB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, F/Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons (VBA), P/O G.D.Moir (AB2), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1523 Down 2200 (Milltown).8 CP No.3 1x T.I. Green No.16 5x1000 MC. Target identified on H2S. First flares seen were quite satisfactory and flares dropped in right position, illuminating a number of ships. One Green T.I went down at about H-5 over the sea. Master bomber approved of red T.I's which were backed up. Called in Main Force to bomb as per flight plan because ship was in position as briefed. We came round on 145° and bombed ship visually – thought to be “Emden”. At this time a large square-sterned ship (?Koln) was seen inside harbour. Controller's instructions were not clear, and there was much traffic on VHF after H-hour that it interfered with bombing run.

21st /22nd December 1944 - POLITZ

Sixteen aircraft have been detailed for operations. Briefing took place after lunch & one crew was cancelled. Take-off was at 1630hrs, but 2 crews were unable to get airborne owing to technical defects. 13 aircraft and crews eventually set off to attack an oil target at Politz near Stettin, in very misty weather, visibility only half way up the runway. The crews were ordered just before taking off that they were to divert, on return, to Wick. Although all the reports are not yet to hand, the raid was not considered very successful. There were no Mosquito aircraft marking the target, and the Lancaster marking was not successful. Five aircraft landed away at Wick & the Squadron Commander landed at Metheringham. Other crews were told over R/T to land at Base, but the visibility was very poor. F/O Sinclair (Aus) & crew are missing from this operation - six aircraft from other Squadrons crashed between base and Lincoln. The attack was made by Primary Visual & Blind Markers, and three waves of flare force, the average time of mission being 10 hours.

PB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, F/Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, W/O R.A.Symmons_(VAB), P/O G.D.Moir (AB2), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1635 Down 0305 14x C.P. N0.3 Clear until smoke screen. Located target on H2X, Confirmed visually. Were first to drop flares. Yellow T.I went down just in front. The first dropped at least 2 miles N. of Politz, and the second well on the East. No "V" seen. Markers went in and were assessed as 300 yds. N. of target. Smoke screen started S. of target by 2150 hrs. No route markers seen.

1 January 1945 – Gravenhorst (Dortmund-Ems Canal)

The New Year opened with a lot of activity for the squadron. After last night's operation against the Koln at HORTEN more crews were required shortly after for a daylight raid on the Ems Canal at LADBERGEN. Only three a/c crews were required for this taking off early and returning to base about 1400 hours. The raid was highly successful & much damage has been done to the dams after they had been repaired by previous raids. All crews returned safely. Again for to-nights operations 10 more crews have been called for – mostly those who were operating last night will be required. Primary Blind Markers & three waves of Flare Force have been briefed to attack the canal once again at GRAVENHORST take off was at approx.. 1630 & flares were dropped from 15000 ft in clear weather with slight defence of flak & little fighter opposition. The first & only Blind T.I. Green fell on bank of canal & was almost immediately followed by flares which were accurate. Marker leader put down an accurate Red within 1 minute. Backing up produced a line of Reds 150 yards long & was completed within 3 mins. Flare Force told no more Reds required & Main Force were called in to bomb. Concentrated & believed accurate bombing resulted. All a/c & crews returned safely, but were diverted to various airfields.

JB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, F/Sgt F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons (Vis), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1645 Down 2103. 12 CP No 1, 2 x TI green B25. Clear. Identification of target by H2S. Not satisfied with run. Unable to pick up datum point on H2S box. The green marker was in the angle of the two canals on time. Red TIs very good. Flares not required. Flares down accurate and on time. Gee u/s. 12 CP No 1 brought back to base.

Bombing photo taken on the raid by F/L McConnell in T-Tommie



4/5 January 1945 – Royan

Some H.L.B & Y runs carried out. 10 a/c are required for operations. The 9 a/c detailed, Blind Markers & Flare Force, took off late at night to attack German Army concentration at ROYAN. Visibility was moderate & flak negligible at flare force height. Target was finally marked accurately by Red T.I.s at H -0½ & Main Force was called in to bomb at H hour. A concentrated & believed accurate attack covering the whole town resulted. All crews returned safely to base.

PB376S F/O E.Yaxley, Sgt J.A.Davies, F/O J.F.Woolcott, F/O J.Alabaster, W/O R.A.Symmons (vis AB), F/O G.H.Evans, F/O E.Armstrong, Sgt R.Wilders. Up 0058 Down 0657. 14 CP No 3. High cirrus cloud about 16/17,000', no cloud below. Visibility fair. Identified target visually on green TI and red TIs. As we turned in one green TI went down at about H-11. Flares were scattered, illumination poor. Our run was started on TI green and 4 flares were dropped. Bomb Aimer located M/P visually and dropped 10 flares visually. During this run red went down, one accurately and another right in centre of town, near the shore. Later at 0402 hrs the Controller ordered Main Force to ignore the southern red and bomb on the northern. On photographic run we arrived at MPI of 2 green TI, one about 500 yards south of H2S M/P. Large explosion in town at H+3.

16/17 January 1945 – Brux

Well, in spite of what was regarded as unfavourable weather, operations were laid on. The target, for the third time in succession, was an oil plant, but with the unusual feature of being at BRUX in (Czecho)_Slovakia. Once before, this target had been attacked, but by the Americans flying from Italy. Surprisingly enough, we were able to provide Mosquitoes with the marking force, in spite of the target range. Take off time was put back one hour, & the reason for this was soon clear. A squadron of Fortresses had been diverted to this station from the East Anglian area. It was a pretty sight for our crews to watch the silver "Forts" touching down in such rapid order. Our fifteen crews had taken to the air by 1800 hrs, and all but one, who turned back at Karlsruhe for intercom, trouble, arrived at the target on time. Unfortunately, the target was obscured by a layer of strato cu. Base of about 1500 ft. despite the high ground in the vicinity, one Mosquito went down through the cloud and marked the target. Main Force were called in to bomb the glow of these markers, & were aided in their bombing by high bursting T.I.s dropped over the target by our crews on their second run. Because of the cloud bombing results could not be observed, but several of our bombing photos showed columns of smoke rising through & above the cloud. The attack proved to be most amazing, for not one a/c in the whole of the group was missing.. Meanwhile, at base the Americans had made themselves at home, & were sleeping in the beds of the members of the squadron. Anglo-American relations were strengthened by this intimacy.

PB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, P/O F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons (Vis AB), F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1750 Down 0238. 3 x 250lb TI green, 2 x 1000lb TI green, 9 x 500lb MC (delay). 10/10ths cloud. Target identified by markers. At 2222 hrs Marker Leader reported to Controller that he was at safety height. Could not see because of fog. At 2222.5 hrs Flare Force 3 told not to drop. At 2224 hrs Main Force told to delay arrival by 2 minutes. At 2224.5 hrs Controller called "Prepare for sky marking". At 2226 hrs Marker 3 reported seeing target and went in to mark. At 2227.5 hrs, the red was assessed at 100 yards south of central chimney. At 2228 hrs Controller ordered backing up. At 2228.5 hrs he called "sky sky sky". At 2230 hrs (H-hour) he ordered Main Force to attack red TI if visible or glow through cloud. Controller asked if I could see anything and I replied "No" but immediately afterwards corrected it and said that from my altitude the red glow was quite distinct. Several times Controller ordered Main Force to attack the cascading green TIs. The sky marking was very accurate and very close to red glow. I did not see any loose sky markers. The large mushroom of oil smoke was almost ½ a mile to the east of the red glow.

Bombing photo taken on the raid by G/C Johnson in D-Dog WO Symmons was the second Bomb Aimer on this flight



2/3 February 1945 – Karlsruhe

The marshalling yards at KARLSRUHE were the target for tonight's attack. Fourteen aircraft took off ½ hour early in order to climb to 20,000' by Reading to get over a front lying in that area. Winds were very different to those forecast & timing was made very difficult. In spite of great efforts most crew were about 2 minutes late. The blind markers dropped but Group Captain Johnson, a Lancaster Deputy, reported that the glow of the T.I.'s could not be seen through the cloud. The emergency method was accordingly called for, but the T.I.'s were a bit scattered. Main Force were called in to bomb the glow but due to vector wind & height of cloud the main concentration of bombs overshot, falling about a mile north of the target. Flying Officer Hamilton returned early due to loss of power when due to adverse winds it was obvious he could not reach the target in time. No one was lost.

PB412J G/C P.W.Johnson, P/O F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1957 Down 0218. 2 x 250lb TI green, 2 x 1000lb TI green, 6 x 1000lb MC (delay). 10/10ths strata-cu. Target identified on H2S. Winds were different from those forecast, making timing very difficult. Despite cutting course and increased speed we were unable to arrive on time, being 1½ minutes late. We were the last to drop green TI, which could be seen through the cloud. Flares were fairly concentrated around the TI. No red TI seen, but Marker I heard to call Controller and say that he could identify the M/P and as far as we knew one red TI was dropped. Controller asked me if we could see the TIs and we said that we could not see any glow at all. Sky marking was then ordered but no TIs were actually seen floating above cloud, but a good glow was visible for bombing.

7/8 February 1945 – Dortmund-Ems Canal

Attention was again turned on this day to the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL at LADBERGEN. Although not yet completely repaired after previous attacks it was getting close to re-opening & was a worthy target. Thirteen a/c were detailed & took off at 2045 hours after a 2 hour postponement of H-hour, now 2359 hrs. The Mosquito markers failed to reach the target area & in the light of the flares the controller both marked & backed up the target. Bombing had to be done through cloud on the glow of the markers. Lieutenant, S.A.A.F did not return from this trip.

Extract from Bomber Command Losses – 7/8.2.45

Lancaster III ND961 OF – U. Op Ladbergen. T/O Coningsby 2105 to attack the Dortmund-Ems Kanal near Ladbergen. Believed to have collided with a 83 Squadron Lancaster that crashed at Best (Noord Brabant). All were laid to rest in Eindhoven (Woensel) General Cemetery, since when F/L Smalley has been transferred to the Canadian War Cemetery at Groesbeek. F/L Johnson was flying as the visual air bomber.

Lt C.W.McGregor SAAF(+), Sgt J.Shield(+), F/O A.J.Norton(+), F/L G.S.Johnson DFC & Bar(+), F/L R.C.Smalley RCAF(+), F/S R.H.Cheatle RAAF(+), F/S P.G.Cannon(+), Sgt D.S.Lennie(+).

PB895M F/O A.M.Dow, Sgt J.Chamberlain, F/O R.A.Muddle, F/O J.A.Orrell, W/O R.A.Symmons (Vis AB), F/O G.R.Willey, Sgt H.F.J.Brittain, F/Sgt W.E.McNeill. Up 2100 Down 0249. 14 CP No 3. 10/10ths cloud stratus, tops 10,000'. Target identified visually on existing flares. Two green TIs seen to cascade; 1st at 2351 hrs. We made our run and dropped visually on the first TI. 1st flare 4¾ miles ENE of the TI. Another green TI had cascaded about a ¼ - ½ mile to starboard of our track. 1st flares went before 1st green TI. Flare concentrations and illumination very good. No reds were seen until after our run was finished.

8/9 February 1945 – Politz

The third attack in recent months was laid on very early for the oil plant at POLITZ North of Stettin. Low cloud and rain did not bother the fourteen aircraft who took off at 1645 hrs. These conditions persisted to 7° east but weather cleared after this & the target conditions were quite good. Both P.B.M's, Group Captain Johnson and Flight Lieutenant Eaton, were very accurate. By the light of well placed flares the marking was completed successfully & Main Force called in to bomb. The raid was very successful and all crews returned safely to base.

PB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, P/O F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1644 Down 0147. 2 x 250lb TI green, 2 x 1000lb TI green, 6 x 1000lb MC (delay). Clear. Target identified on H2S. Smoke screen had started but had not got going in time to be effective early in the attack. Green TIs were in NW corner of town, two others actually landing in factory itself. Several explosions seen in target area as we were leaving.

14/15 February 1945 – Rositz

Operations were laid on for the second night in succession fourteen a/c to attack ROSITZ, a small oil target near Attenburg south of Leipzig. The route in from the French coast was almost a straight line to the target which plus a strong tail wind made flying time on the outward journey very short. A change of wind did occur though to make some crews a bit late. Owing to the wind change marking was a bit scattered, but the first flares dropped by Group Captain Johnson were very accurate & in the light of these marking was accomplished very satisfactory. Flight Lieutenant Eaton with Flight Lieutenant Dobbie as a set operator dropped their Green T.T late but exactly on the marking point for the second time in successive trips as P.B.M's. The controller called main force in to bomb the Red T.I.s marked by the green & so through a thin layer of low cloud bombing was carried out. The controller reported about three-quarters of the plant blowing up. Some incendiaries dropped by crews on another attack close at hand threatened to obscure the marker. Crews observed the city of Dresden still burning from the previous night's attack & a daylight attack by the Americans. All crews returned safely to base.

PB706D G/C P.W.Johnson, P/O F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, S/L W.G.Rogers, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 1700 Down 0151. 12 CP No 1, 2 x 250lb TI green. 10/10ths alto-stratus 13-14,000'. Target located on H2S. Dropped flares as briefed. 2 green TIs seen some distance apart (about 3 miles). No red TIs seen. We orbited awaiting sky method. Flares were fairly concentrated.

20/21 February 1945 – Gravenhorst (Dortmund-Ems Canal)

An operation was laid on for GRAVENHORST. The DORTMUND-EMS CANAL, there being almost completely repaired again. Ten crews took off at 2145 to attack the target, H-hour being 0105. T.I.'s and flares were dropped late owing to a wind change, but due to cloud conditions the mosquito markers were unable to identify the target. Main force were ordered home immediately by the controller who realized the attack was impossible. All crews landed at base.

PB473F G/C P.W.Johnson, P/O F.J.Ratcliffe, F/L M.E.Hatch, P/O G.D.Moir, W/O R.A.Symmons, F/Sgt N.M.Greenley, F/Sgt J.J.Garrod, F/Sgt D.J.Watts. Up 2142 Down 0352. 12 CP No 3, 2 x 1000lb TI green. 10/10ths cloud tops about 1,500'. Target identified on H2X. Green TI were dropped as briefed and on time. Glow was visible through cloud. Flares were quite good. Markers went down to 400' in the vicinity of the target. No marking actually carried out and raid was abandoned at H-2 approx.

