

Warrant Officer Harold. V. A. Kirby L.d'H

Flight Engineer



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97 (Straits Settlements) Squadron Association by the webmaster 97 (Straits  
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References: 97 Squadron Operational Record Books 1939-1943

*Achieve Your Aim* by *Kevin Bending*

Mark Howard

2022

Approved  
George R.I.



J.W. Weston-Amstrong

College of Arms,  
January, 1939.

Chester Herald  
and Inspector of Royal  
Air Force Badges

**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

**Harold Kirby**

### **Operational record**

#### **16 Operations with 467 Squadron**

(\* Daylight Raids )

1. 12/13 July 44 Culmont (Railway)

2. 17 July 44 Caen

3. 20/21 July 44 Courtrai (Railway)

4. 22/23 July 44 Kiel

5. 24/25 July 44 Stuttgart

6. 26/27 July 44 Givors (Railway)

7. 28/29 July 44 Stuttgart

8. 30 July 44 Cahagny(?) Normandy Battle Area \*

9. 1 August 44 Siracourt Flying Bomb Storage Site\*

10. 2 August 44 Caen Flying Bomb Storage Site\*

11. 3 August 44 Troissy-St-Maxim Flying Bomb Storage Site \*

(on return belly landed at Wittering which had a grass runway at that time as a bomb through the port wing had taken away the undercarriage at that side)

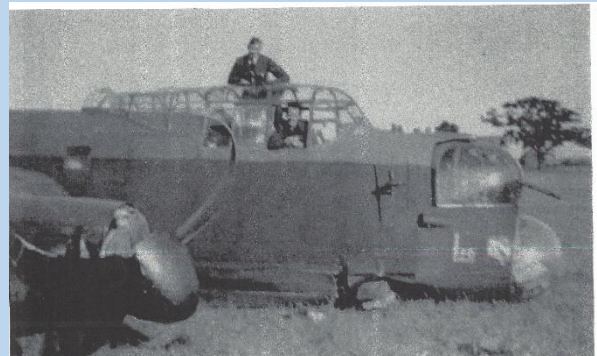
12. 19 August 44 La Pallice (Oil Storage Tanks)\*

13. 25/25 August 44 Darmstadt

14. 26/27 August 44 Konigsberg

15. 29/30 August 44 Konigsberg

16. 31 August Rollencourt\*



**Harold Kirby**  
**Operational record**  
**Operations with 97 Squadron**

- Sgt 1. 19 Sept 44 Munchen Gladbach (F/O Ryan),
2. 23/24 Sept 44 Munster (F/O Ryan),
3. 14/15 Oct 44 Brunswick (F/O Ryan),
4. 28/29 Oct 44 Bergen (F/O Ryan),
5. 6 Nov 44 Gravenhorst (F/O Ryan),
6. 21 Nov 44 Gravenhorst (F/O Ryan),
7. 22/23 Nov 44 Trondheim (F/O Ryan),
8. 26/27 Nov 44 Munich (F/O Ryan),
9. 4 Dec 44 Heilbronn (F/O Ryan),
10. 6 Dec 44 Giesson (F/O Ryan),
11. 17/18 Dec 44 Munich (F/O Ryan),
12. 18/19 Dec 44 Gdynia (F/O Ryan),
13. 7/8 Jan 45 Munich (F/O Ryan),
14. 14/15 Jan 45 Politz (F/O Ryan),
15. 7/8 Feb 45 Dortmund Ems Canal (F/O Ryan),
16. 8/9 Feb 45 Politz (F/O Ryan),
17. 13/14 Feb 45 Dresden (F/O Ryan),
18. 20/21 Feb 45 Gravenhorst – Dortmund Ems Canal (F/O Ryan),
19. 21/22 Feb 45 Gravenhorst – Dortmund Ems Canal (F/L Ryan),
20. 3/4 March 45 Ladbergen (Dortmund-Ems canal)(F/L Ryan)
21. 4/5 March 45 Bohlen (synthetic oil refineries)(F/L Ryan)
22. 6/7 March 45 Sassnitz (port and shipping)(F/L Ryan)
23. 20/21 March Bohlen (synthetic oil refineries)(F/L Ryan)
24. 27/28 March Hamburg (benzol plant)(F/L Ryan)
25. 8/9 April 45 Lutzkendorf (oil refineries)(F/L Ryan)
26. 16/17 April 45 Pilsen (railway yards)(F/L Ryan)
27. 18/19 April 45 Komatau (railway yards)(F/L Ryan)
28. 25/26 April 45 Tonsberg (oil refineries)(F/L Ryan)

## DETAILS OF OPERATIONS

(Incomplete at present)

19.4.44 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.

19 September 1944 – Munchen Gladbach PA973A F/O W.P.Ryan, Sgt H.V.A.Kirby, F/O C.W.L.Sabine, F/O J.J.G.McPhie, F/Sgt J.D.Nicholls, Sgt N.Johnston, F/Sgt H.W.Newing. Up 1917 Down 2322. 12 x 7" clusters, 2 x 1000lb MC (1/2 hour delay), 2 rec flares. Weather clear, vis good. Target identified on H2S. Flares dropped on time and were sufficient illumination but Marker unable to release TIs. First flares died out and Controller called for more flares at 2144 hrs which we dropped. Later red TIs were dropped but we were on our way home.

23.9.44 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.

23/24 September 1944 - Munster PB348U F/O W.P.Ryan, Sgt H.V.A.Kirby, F/O C.W.L.Sabine, F/O J.J.G.McPhie, F/Sgt J.D.Nicholls, Sgt N.Johnstone, F/Sgt H.W.Newing. Up 1918 Down 0008. 9 No 1 MkI 4.5" clusters, 5 x 1000lb MC (1/2 hour delay), 2 rec flares. Weather clear. Target identified visually. At H-10 heard Controller say existing flares were 2 miles too far south and he then ordered numbers 2 and 3 flare waves to drop on estimated position 2 miles north of existing flares. At 2152 hrs received over W/T orders for Main Force to attack below cloud base 8,000'. 14.10.44 Today's event was a mission to Brunswick, for which 10 aircraft of this Squadron were detailed – 2 as Primary Blind Markers and the rest as Flare

Force and Supporters. All of our aircraft reached the target, though one must technically be counted as abortive – aircraft D (F/O Ryan) – as his flares hung up. Crews enjoyed clear weather and an almost complete absence of flak. Searchlights also were negligible. A marking point in the centre of the town was to be marked with red TI, and, with the help of a system of overshooting by main force, it was hoped that the whole of the town would be severely damaged. The attack went smoothly and to plan, and its success was indubitably laid on the foundation of flares and green TI dropped by aircraft of this Squadron and 83 Squadron. Main force were called in to bomb at 0229 (H-1) and were ordered to “complete bombing and return to base” at 0238 hours. All of our aircraft returned safely to their base. Reconnaissance aircraft over the target one hour later reported that the centre of the town and large portions to the west were burning fiercely, with smoke up to 15,000’.

14/15 October 1944 - Brunswick PB450D P/O W.P.Ryan, Sgt H.V.A.Kirby, F/O C.W.L.Sabine, F/O J.S.McPhie, F/Sgt J.D.Nicholls, Sgt N.Johnston, F/Sgt H.W.Newing. Up 2309 Down 0527. 9 x 7” clusters, 2 x TI green No 16, 2 rec flares. Clear, good vis. Target identified visually – good view of town. First flares fell fairly punctually at 0219.5 hrs and green TI immediately after. Mosquito dropped red TI at 0224 hrs approx. 4 Mosquitos reported success. Controller said green TI were 300 yards E from town centre. Flares did not release – hung up. Mid upper turret Perspex holed by H/F over target 0223 hrs at 18,000’. Gunner slightly wounded in cheek.

28.10.44 Crews training on Y runs and one day cross-country. 12 aircraft have been detailed for tonight’s operations. The target was Bergen to be attacked by Primary Blind Markers, Flare Force and 5 crews Main Force. Very thick haze, mist and fog were encountered, the defences very slight. H/F and moderate flak and up to 6 searchlights seen. All main force aircraft were either unable to see Marker or unable to bomb due to icing or other causes. Very little result was seen owing to the bad weather conditions. All aircraft returned safely to base, after being diverted to Driffield and Carnaby.

**In Harold's own words.**



I started life in the RAF training as a Flight Mechanic and Fitter (Airframes) as I was originally considered as medically unfit for flying duties. During training volunteers were required to train as Flight Engineers for the four-engined aircraft. I applied and this time passed the medical and was accepted. After a few months working as a Fitter on 460 Squadron at Binbrook I was posted to RAF St Athan where I did my Flight Engineer training. I was then posted to 1661 Heavy Conversion Unit at Winthorpe where I joined my crew, ( all the rest being Australian ).

These were Bill Ryan (Pilot), Les Sabine (Navigator), Jim McPhee (Bomb Aimer), Johnny Nichols (Wireless Operator), Bert Newing (Rear Gunner), and Norm Johnston (Mid-Upper Gunner).

After a period at LFS based at RAF Syerston we were posted to 467 Squadron at Waddington where we completed sixteen operations before transferring to 97 PFF Squadron at Coningsby where we completed our first tour of operations and went on to complete fourteen further operations before the end of the war.

The duties of a Flight Engineer were quite involved including checking various features of the aircraft prior to taking off. At take-off operating engine control such as throttle levers to leave the pilot free to operate flying controls, and, during flight, operating flap and undercarriage controls and bomb doors as required. Also keeping an eye on oil temperatures and pressures and recording the same at set intervals, and operating the fuel tank controls as necessary. When not doing this keeping a look-out for enemy aircraft. The F/E also had to be ready to take over from the pilot if the latter became incapacitated. to keep the aircraft flying more or less straight and level and on courses ordered by the Navigator, and takeover from the Bomb Aimer if necessary. I never had to take over from the pilot except during training, but towards the end of the war I did act as Bomb Aimer while the usual Bomb Aimer assisted the Navigator with some radar equipment.

Shortly after leaving the target on our very first operation the Rear Gunner suddenly shouted "Cork-screw" as he spotted a two-engined aircraft approaching from behind. The pilot immediately dived at the same time as shots were exchanged, one from the other aircraft passing through the rear turret and the gunners clothing, cutting off his heating supply. The two-engined aircraft overshot us and disappeared into the darkness and fortunately we never saw it again, On a daylight operation against a V1 storage site in France the mid-upper gunner shouted there's a Lanc above us has just opened its bomb doors, but before we could take evasive action we heard two thumps as we had a bomb through both wings the one on the port side taking away the undercarriage on that side, and putting all the hydraulics out of action, We came back with three engines and the pilot decided to do a belly landing at Wittering which, at that time had a grass runway. Both these incidents occurred while we were with 467 Squadron and we had no similar serious problems when with 97 Squadron.



**LEST WE FORGET**

