

Lancaster 1
NG 294 F-H
625 Sq

Pilot

James Fletcher

Pilot Officer

RAF 186736

28 years old

Son of James and Christina Fletcher, married to Agnes Fletcher from Renfrew

Air Gunner

Peter Banks

Sergeant

RAF 2205640

20 years old

Son of Peter and Maria Banks, from Wigan, Lancastershire.

Air Gunner

Ian Rosse Clapton

Sergeant

RAF 2205668

Flight Engineer

Sidney Goodier

Sergeant

RAF 1673585

20 years old

Sohn v. Thomas and Elsie Goodier, from Garston, Liverpool.

Navigator

Leonard James Hart

Sergeant

RAF 1804387

22 years old

Son of J.W. F. Hart and Alice Maud Hart, from Poplar, London

Bombardier

David Rhys Jones

Sergeant

RAF 1602369

Radio Operator

John Howard Smith

Sergeant

RAF 1606296

20 years old

Son of Arthur E. Smith and Rhoda M. Smith, Blunsdon, Wiltshire

Thoughts on Take-off

by Pip Beck

They rise, dark-winged,
Mounting the coloured air,
Men and machines to the skies
And the sunset making a glory there.

What are their thoughts,
These men to fly
To the edge of the night
Down the windy sweeps of the sky?

The first faint stars
Are theirs, and below
Lies the darkening land
Where no lights glow.
Our thoughts, like a cloud
Of migrating birds
Fly with them
Never shaped into words
As they are lost from sight.

A brightness is theirs
Of courage and strength
And each his youth like a brevet wears
Valiant and laughing,
In battle array -
May they safely come back
Before break of day.

from "A WAAF in Bomber Command"

The Bomber Command War Diaries

15/16 December 1944 LUDWIGSHAFEN

327 Lancasters and 14 Mosquitos of 1, 6 and 8 groups. 1 Lancaster lost.

The target area for this raid was the northern part of Ludwigshafen and the small town of Oppen in which two important I.G. Farben chemical factories were situated. The local report shows that the raid was very successful with 450 high-explosive bombs and many incendiaries falling in the premises of I.G. Farben. Severe damage was caused and fierce fires were started. The report states that no other attack since the start of the war had caused such a setback to I.G. Farben production which included synthetic oil at this factory. The Oppau factory ceased production completely "until further notice". 5 other industrial firms were also badly hit. Some damage was also caused to housing areas around the various factories but this was not serious and the fatal casualty figure was only 57 people; 50 of these may have been foreign workers who were killed in one of the factories (the records are not clear about on this point). Damage was also caused to installations and ships at the nearby Rhine quays.

It would be difficult to find a Bomber Command night raid which caused so much industrial damage but so little in civilian housing areas.

Minor Operations: 62 Mosquitoes to Hannover, 11 to Osnabrück and 3 to Duisburg, 31 R.C.M. sorties, 38 Mosquito patrols, 15 Lancasters and 8 Halifaxes minelaying off north-eastern Denmark. 1 Lancaster minelayer lost.

Total effort for the night: 509 sorties, 2 aircraft (0.4 per cent) lost.

This was the minelayer:

12 Sqn

Lancaster I PD201 PGH-E

Pilot Officer	E T	Gillingham	KIA
Sgt	J	Nichols	KIA
Sgt	F D M	Smith	KIA
Sgt	A	Muttock	KIA
Sgt	J A	Carter	KIA
Sgt	F J	Angus	KIA
Sgt	J G	Robinson	KIA

take off 1507 from RAF-base Wickenby. While returning to base a fire broke out and before anyone could react the stricken Lancaster dived into the ground at 2100, exploding on impact, near Holbeach Drove, 8 miles SSW of Holbeach, Lincolnshire.

"Darky" Call

by Pip Beck

Through the static
Loud in my earphone
I heard your cry for aid
Your scared boy's voice conveyed
Your fear and danger;
Ether-borne, my voice
Went out to you
As lost and in the dark you flew
We tried so hard to help you,
In your crippled plane -
I called again
But you did not hear
You had crashed in flame
At the runway's end
With none to tend
You in your dying ...

from "A WAAF in Bomber Command"

The Second Plane

Development of the Lancaster

by Phil Adams, Ramstein, Germany

At the end of the thirties, the RAF was equipped with very few modern fighting aircraft. The front line fighter squadrons were still flying biplanes, and the bomber squadrons were flying basic small short range bombers such as the Hampden, Wellington and Blenheim.

After the start of hostilities the development of larger and heavier aircraft took place, in both the offensive and defensive roles. Larger bombers such as the Avro Manchester, the Short Stirling and the Handley Page Halifax were developed, but we shall be concentrating on the Avro Lancaster, which was developed from the Avro Manchester. As you may have guessed, most aircraft at that time were named after British towns and cities. The AVRO company started life at Brooklands, the first motor racing track in the world, which was built around an airfield. Alliot Verdon Roe raced cars, and then decided to learn to fly, finally building his own aeroplane and starting his own company, cryptically using his name, changing it to AVRO. Avro started building aircraft shortly after the first world war, and with the boon of aviation, the company was very successful, supplying aircraft to the RAF long before the start of WWII.

The Avro Manchester was first flown in **July 1939** as a two engined medium bomber, and despite its drawbacks, it was pressed into service due to the desperate need for aircraft, at first 200 were ordered, but that was later increased to 400, although it did not reach expectations. It was powered by two Rolls-Royce Vulture engines each with 24 cylinders and **1760** Horsepower. Despite a ban on engine deliveries from the Ministry of Supply, Avro managed to procure four of the new Rolls Royce Merlin engines, and redesigned the Manchester with four engines and a larger fuselage, calling it the Lancaster. The first Lancaster flew in 1941, and production models entered service at the end of that year. The initial order was for 1070

Lancasters were built in a number of places in the United Kingdom, mainly in the midlands of Great Britain, but they were also built by Avro Canada, using Merlin engines built under license by Packard, then flown across the Atlantic, fitted with armaments, and put into service. The Lancaster operated alongside the Halifax, but the slower and lower flying Stirling was withdrawn from front-line service, and relegated to towing gliders and dropping paratroops, because it was too slow, and could not fly at a high enough altitude.

Despite its smaller size, the Lancaster carried twice as much armament in comparison to the larger B17. The B17 had heavier armour plating and its construction was sturdier, lowering its capacity to carry bombs. New Lancasters reaching the squadrons had most of the armour plating removed, the crews sacrificing armour plate for the safety of higher altitude. The Lancaster had a total weight of 31 tonnes, and could cruise at 6500 M for 4350 KM with a cruising speed of 338 KMH

During its service life, the Lancaster underwent a number of changes and alterations. The Lanc. II had Bristol Radial engines and powered control surfaces, and a number of Lancasters were converted for specialist purposes, for example the 617 Sqn Lancaster was equipped to carry the Barnes-Wallace Bouncing Bomb, and other Lancs were equipped to carry the 12000 lb (5443 KG) Tallboy and 22000 Lb (9979 Kg) Grand Slam Bombs, which were used against specialist targets such as the heavily armoured Submarine Pens at St Nazaire, and used to attack the Tirpitz in Norway. The Grand Slam Bomb was the largest bomb ever carried in combat during World War 2.

The self-defence of the Lancaster comprised of three turrets, the front and mid-upper using 2 303 Browning Machine guns, and the rear turret using either 4 Brownings or two cannons.

A Number of Lancasters still exist today from the 7377 built, particularly in Canada. The Canadians fly a Lancaster as do the BBMF, but perhaps the most interesting case is that of NX 611 'Just Jane' which was bought by two brothers in Lincolnshire to commemorate their third brother who was killed over Munich, and who is buried in Durnbach Cemetery, near the Tegernsee. NX 611 is the only running Lancaster in private hands in the World. Lancasters are also to be found in a number of museums throughout the world, many of them in Canada, but at least Five still exist in the United Kingdom, and many lay in parts.

Retrospect

Extract from "No Moon Tonight" by Don Charlwood

The train left Aberdeen in the late afternoon and by the time we reached Stonehaven it was dusk. As I watched the North Sea beating at the Scottish cliffs and heard the shriek of the wind about the train, I realized I might never again see this bleak expanse of water; certainly never from the air, perhaps never from the shore. Often we had looked down on it as darkness fell and we sped eastward to a waiting Germany; we had only felt affection for it when I was able to say to the crew, 'We have crossed the enemy coast and are well out of the sea'. I used to feel then that everyone had sighted deeply. Down would go our nose and within forty minutes we would see the searchlights of England.

This same sea they said had claimed Tom and Max and God only knew how many others from among my friends. Now, I alone of all of them was going home.

A porter drew the blackout curtain, leaving only my mind to remind me of the scene outside ...

Sometimes in later years that last glimpse of the North Sea returned to me, but the emotions it represented, I almost forgot. I even forgot how we had felt as we had watched for the Ruhr, crouched ahead of us in the darkness. Then one day long after, without knowing why, I became afraid. The other life began crowding back, until suddenly I realized that I was listening to a song we had known ten years before. Even as I listened my surroundings dissolved and the song became a worn recording, an arrangement of "Tristesse" played on a grammophone.

I knew then that we were in the mess at Elsham Wolds on a night in January 1943. About me were many men I had known, most of them now ten years dead. There were Laing and Webber, Newitt and Berry, Maddern, our own pilot, and with him Richards, our Welsh engineer. They wore heavy white sweaters under their battle dress and each carried on his collar a silver whistle. Tonight we were to go to Dusseldorf. They were sending only thirty bombers from the whole Command, for it was to be an experiment that might easily fail.

On the faces of the men about me there was a similarity of expression, an expression I had often called "contemptuous serenity" They spoke very little and when they did their voices were subdued, as though at the same time they were listening.

I wondered why it was that this recording happened to be played so often as we waited to leave. To me it was a song without hope, full of urgent pleadings we could never heed.

I sat at a corner table finishing a letter home, as I had often done while we waited to leave. Familiar sounds registered on my mind as they had done

before: the clack of the billard balls; rain on the windows and the unrelenting song.

Soon the crews about me began leaving. In their hands they carried red packages of escape equipment - tabloid foods, maps printed on silk, a small compass - in case tonight they were shot down, but survived. It occurred to me how young they were and how foreign to their task. There was Morris, who at nineteen was so soon to die, and Syd Cook, now a sergeant, but in the year of life left to him to rise to Squadron Leader and be doubly decorated. And Ian Robb, the first among those I knew who was not to return. Other men lay dozing in the long green chairs. As members of their crew roused them I noticed how child-like they appeared in the moment they woke. I saw them leaving the mess. Outside the rain had increased and as they passed through the door they put on their coats and turned up their collars.

With a feeling of urgency I turned back to my letter.

'It is time now to go. Geoff and the rest of the crew have already left and except for a few ground staff men I am alone in the mess. Once again it scarcely seems possible that we will leave this room, with its chairs and fire, for the grey miles of the North Sea, then Germany.'

I paused, not knowing how to end. The imploring crescendo of the song filled the room. In a moment of defiance I wrote quickly, 'Whatever happens, happens. I feel that when all is known, all will be well.'

Between the inner and outer doors I paused. Outside the night was empty and very dark, the rain heavier. I shuddered and pulled on my coat. As I left the building the last words of the song followed me, as on other nights they had followed other men no longer there,

'No moon tonight,
No moon tonight'

Priesberg Hill

11 p.m. at Priesberg Hill, Bosen, Germany. It was bitter cold, ½ inch snow covering the ground. High above the village of Bosen big formations of heavy bombers flew eastward. The whole village was outside staring above. Suddenly there was another noise, nearer than the others. But you couldn't see anything. The gouching became a howling, created by overturned air craft engines. From the direction of the recent Lake Bostal a big bright burning plane approached, passed Bosen, and the sky over the Priesberg hill turned red.

Then there was a big bang followed by a strong shock wave blowing tiles from roofs. Someone cried "now we all have to die!" But nothing happened to the village.

Next morning German Army troops on trucks went to the site. The boys from the village followed them. 300 yards below the crater on of the engines was found. A bloody lower jaw with teeth hang from a tree - a terrible sight. A body was found but no limbs and no head still wearing his uniform. Three or four bodies were recovered and buried right outside the crater in a common grave.

In the afternoon more trucks came to carry away the engines and bigger parts of the wreck. They didn't care for the boys but avoided them from approaching to the crater. Therin another engine lay. The area around it was filled with parts of the wings and the fuselage, belts lay around an ammuniton. That was what the boys like best and wanted to have. But there also were shreds of parachutes and shreds of blue uniforms.

The kids went to the crash site a couple of days when suddenly snow fall and covered it all up.

The remains of the bodies were burried outside the crater wall. In 1946 or 1947 they were exhumed by British or US forces and now rest at Rheinberg War Cemetery.

Speculations

We don't know what happened between Rhine River and the Priesberg Hill high up at 8,000 meters. People say that the Trier Flak shot down the plane but this seems improbable, if not the plan was hit, turned and returned to Bosen right over the rim of the Priesberg and crashed into the slope. But in that case the crater had another shape.

More likely the bomber had been damaged by flak over the target and could make it up to here to crash. But why did the crew fail to bail out? It takes 20 minutes for this distance in a crippled and burning bomber, time enough to get out.

If it was not a sudden and unexpected attack from very near leading to a crash in seconds and giving the crew no time to react or escape from the burning trap there once so proud bomber has changed to.

We assume that Pilot Officer Fletcher's Lancaster became the victim of a German night fighter approaching unseen and shooting it down. Maybe it was equipped with the new system "Schraege Musik" (oblique music), consisting of machine guns firing diagonal upward. The night fighter approaches from down below and the rear and the rear radar system doesn't see him and also not the rear gunner and then from this position they fire.

Most probably we will never find out.

NON OP.		YEAR		MONTH		DAY		SQUADRON			TYPE OF A/C			CAUSE	
DC	DATE	TYPE	SERIAL NO.	GP.	SO.	L	TIME OFF	BASE	TARGET	E.T.A. TARGET	FUEL	A.U.W.			
	15.12.44	Lanc 1	M944	1	625	4	1042	Katzen	Reading	105800 N/0115E			BOMBS LOAD		
													144000 lb		
													4 x 1000 GP		
													3 x 900		
													5120 N0210E - ordnance		
CREW—NAME RANK NO		PILOT		NAV.		W.OP.		S.E.		P.M.		D/R		A.G.	
		Fletcher, J		Hart, L. J		Smith, J.H		Goodier, S		Banks, P.		Jones, J.R		Clapton, I.R.	
		186736 P/O		1804387 Sgt		1626296 Sgt		1673585 Sgt		2205440 Sgt		131603369 Sgt		2205668 Sgt	
SPECIAL EQUIPMENT		SOURCES OF INFORMATION		TARGET											

Although this was a British plane, the following text is from a US gunner I learned to know through an email forum called "Heavy Bombers". This is from his book to be about his experiences in World War II "Wing Ding"

The Need for Courage by Gene Carson

"The odds were stacked against survival. Records show 450 combat crews to have passed through the 388th Bomb Group during the war. Of these there were 141 crews missing in action. Not all died, some were prisoners of war and in rare cases some were evaders. Records also indicate that during the first 100 missions the 388th lost 83 crews. The next 206 missions had a loss of 58 crews. During the period October 8, 1943 through October 14, 1943 the 8th Air Force suffered a loss of approximately 140 heavy bombers. Those statistics gave one cause to contemplate the odds of survival.

Every mission is best described as intense. Visualize if you will, taxiing along a dark and narrow perimeter before taking off with a full load of bombs carefully following the aircraft to the immediate front. It is creep along time until you arrive at the runway. Then there is a brief run-up of engines. The pilot lines up on the runway. The tail wheel is locked into place and full power is gradually applied. Ever so slowly the lumbering bird gains speed; turbulence from the prop wash of a dozen or more preceding aircraft threatens stability. It is not yet daylight and a heavy mist covers the field. The pilot's eyes are focused on the instruments. The copilot devotes attention to the performance of all four engines. He is prepared to acting instantaneously in event of the slightest emergency. The flight engineer calls out the aircraft speed. Three quarters of the way down the runway he calls out 100, then 105 and 110. There is lift off. The copilot brings the wheels up to reduce drag. Air speed increases slowly, flaps are brought up. At 145 the climb is steady and straight until a minimum of five hundred feet. Off to the right a bright orange glow rises from the ground. Someone didn't make it. There is no visibility only a white impenetrable curtain. Then still on instruments, the pilot starts his turn. More often than not departures were made with that minimum visibility in the pre-dawn hours. Control tower radar was nonexistent. The blind climb up through that white curtain finds each crewmember searching the sky, probing for the telling shadow of any one of the dozens of other aircraft sharing the sky and following identical procedures. There was apprehension while waiting to break out on top of that great white curtain into a clear sky and assemble in a formation. For some, it did not always work. They became hopelessly lost and never found the formation. Others found another bomber at the total cost of twenty men, ten to a plane.

Crashes on take off were not unusual, mid air collisions came to be anticipated and as the mission progressed into enemy territory both the Luftwaffe and the anti aircraft fire found their targets resulting in aircraft going out of control, or exploding in mid-air. Those incredible fighter attacks and accurate anti aircraft fire thinned our formations before we ever reached the target. What had once been a bomber with a crew of ten men became a ball of fire with black smoke with bodies and debris being in all directions.

Skillful and courageous fighter pilots of the Luftwaffe screamed in from all angles as they demonstrated superb skill and dedication in their efforts to stop us short of our target. There was no long-range fighter escort. We were there and the Luftwaffe was there and all too often many of us remained there.

For those of us who flew against the pilots of the Luftwaffe and the superb anti aircraft gunners of the Third Reich, the clock ticks on as our final days draw ever closer. But we have memories, memories that could tell a thousand tales. Tales not unlike what you read here. There are memories of skill, courage, and daring; memories of trying to survive as well as memories of fun times between the flying and the dying. Combat aircrews lived and died in a much cleaner environment than that faced by the ground combat soldier. At night, if fortunate, we returned to clean beds and a hot meal. On the other side of the coin, we had no foxholes or bunkers in which to take shelter. We had only the thin skin of our airplane to protect us, a skin that could have been penetrated with a can opener. If our thin skinned airplane suffered battle damaged a crew might be fortunate and have sufficient time to enjoy the option of a parachute jump into enemy territory. But such a jump almost always meant prison camp and possible death. A successfully completed mission found us, like Pavlov's dog, waiting for that calming shot of whisky at the de-briefing room. Sometimes it took more than one drink and sympathetic intelligence personnel quietly violated regulations.

We named our aircraft after ladies, places, animals, people, and things. We drank a lot of warm beer, learned to drink tea, danced the hokey pokey and courted the ladies of the land. We experienced the warmth and friendship of the British people, enjoyed the wonders that the country had to offer and invented a few new wonders of our own as we took in the friendly sights and nights of Piccadilly Circus as spectators and participants. There was the Windmill Theater; it never closed, and the friendly Rainbow Corners U.S.O. near Piccadilly Circus where Fred Astaire's sister Adele worked tirelessly as a volunteer.

We lived a good life between missions but on most mission days we awoke to the predawn dampness with full knowledge that we were about to face a formidable enemy. As I reflect back I know I was scared and with good reason. We faced some of the world's finest fighter pilots and extremely accurate anti aircraft fire. Each mission was flown with the awareness that it could be a final mission. There was no certainty of a tomorrow; we lived only for today.

People speak of courage. I am not really sure about courage. Under moments of stress when it seems as if there are only minutes left to live strange things take place. Who can give you courage or train you to know exactly what to do when a 20mm shell punches a softball size hole in the windshield and sprays the cockpit area with fragments. Who can prepare you for what to do when severed oxygen and hydraulic lines ignite with unbelievable intensity next to a box of flares. And I'm still not sure it's courage when you conquer intense pain from your wounds to continue to fight for survival. Such are not moments that

call for courage; they are moments that require action, there is no time for courage.

The need for courage comes the next day. It comes the day after you have returned to your barracks to find twenty-four empty bunks and the Quartermaster personnel collecting the personal effects of your friends. The night is long and lonely; bad dreams and thoughts interrupt sleep. You know you are going again at dawn; and the need for courage comes the next morning. "

Breakfast at the mess hall usually consisted of an abomination known as powdered eggs, a type of canned meat known as Spam and a famous dish called SOS, a gravy mix on toast, commonly known to the troops by the rather vulgar title, "shit on a shingle." Fear is controllable, but there is an excessive need to use the latrine. It is also possible for your mind to cause your body to revolt and your breakfast may well exit via the same way it went down.

You struggle to make a painful knot in the area of your solar plexus go away. Ashamed of your weakness, you sneak off in the dark and stick your finger down your throat to find relief. Near by you hear a gagging sound and realize you are not the only one seeking such relief. The pain continues, but now you feel better and quickly return to the briefing room unwilling to expose your fear to others.

You are in your seat when the Briefing Officer pulls aside the curtain to show a long red line indicating the route to the target. You listened intently as you are told what to expect on the way to the target, over the target, and on the way home. This is when there is a time for a silent prayer. It is also a time to search deep to find your courage.

Crash site of a RAF Lancaster:

Dec 15, 1944

Lancaster I # NG 294 F-H
625 Sq
Basis: Kelstern
target: Ludwigshafen

Crew

Pilot Fletcher James Pilot Off. RAF 186736 28
A-Gnr Banks Peter Sgt. RAF 2205640 20
A-Gnr Clapton Ian Rosse Sgt RAF 2205668
F-Ing. Goodier Sidney Sgt RAF 1673585 20
Nav Hart Leonard James Sgt RAF 1804387 22
Bomb Jones David Rhys Sgt RAF 1602369
R/Op Smith John Howard Sgt RAF 1606296 20

digits behind serial number are age of flyer

main point of impact

location: Priesberg near Bosen, St. Wendel County, Sta



2003

Sources:

"No Moon Tonight" by Don Charlwood

"A WAAF in Bomber Command" by Pip Beck

"The Bomber Command War Diaries" by Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt

"Bandits at Twelve O'clock" by Gene Carson

"Royal Air Force Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War II", Vol. 4,
by W.R. Chorley

Loss Card of Lancaster NG 294, Air Historical Branch (RAF), Ministry of
Defence, London

Squadron Operations Records of No. 625 Squadron, Air 27/2143, Public Record
Office, Kew, GB

Station Book of Kelstern, Air 28/416, Public Record Office, Kew, GB

Eye witnesses:

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Edmund Lauer, Gonesweiler, Germany

Ewald Nachtwey, Bosen, Germany

Alwin Schmidt, Bosen, Germany

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Thank you:

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