

Appendix 1

AIRCRAFT

Armstrong Whitworth Whitley

A twin-engined bomber that was already obsolete at the beginning of the Second World War. Having been designed back in the middle 30s, it first entered service in March 1937 with 10 Squadron. It performed valuable service in the first two years of the war but was already being overshadowed by more modern types. It was powered by two inline Rolls-Royce Merlin X engines giving it a top speed of 228mph. at 17,750ft. It could carry up to 7,000lbs of bombs and with a reduced load could cover 1,500 miles. There was a crew of 5 and five .303 machine guns for protection. The Whitley had the distinction of being the first British bomber to attack targets in Italy and being first to fly over Berlin.

The Whitley bravely struggled on in front-line service until replaced in late 1942 when it became a troop, paratrooper and freight transport. It was also used as a target and glider towing aircraft. A long range made it a good choice in Special Duties squadrons where the simple adaptation of a hole in the floor made it suitable for dropping agents and supplies by parachute to the Resistance forces. It was also used in training squadrons and was still being used on mining operations by O.T.U.'s as late as May 1944.

Geoff will have encountered this aircraft when he served at 297 Squadron when they were based at Thrupton. We do not know if he flew with the squadron, but the Squadron records show their uses on this squadron for parachute dropping, large movements of other squadrons and glider towing. The squadron aircraft were used to re-locate XV Squadron to Mildenhall.

Vickers Wellington

This was a twin engined mid-winged medium bomber. It had been designed by Barnes Wallace, later of bouncing bomb fame, and used the revolutionary geodetic construction method. This 'net' of duralumin construction was then covered with a doped fabric. The construction method led to a lighter, but very strong airframe that was able to absorb a tremendous amount of punishment. This in turn allowed the crews to return to England with large holes in the bodywork and some even got back with parts of their flying surfaces missing completely! It had a good reliability record and was very popular with the crews that flew it.

The crew consisted of a pilot, observer (navigator/bomb-aimer), wireless operator, and a pair of air-gunners. There were two powered turrets that housed two .303 machine guns in the front and four of the same in the rear. It

was able to carry 4,500lbs of bombs usually of mixed types and was later used in trials of the 'bouncing bomb'. Maximum speed was 235mph although this was much reduced when, at the start of a raid, the aircraft was fully loaded with fuel, ammunition and bombs. The normal bomb load could be carried over 1,200 miles and it was able to reach a maximum ceiling (height) of 20,000feet. Various engines were used, either inline or the more usual radial Pegasus power plant.

The Wellington saw service with many squadrons of the RAF including 9, 57, 101, 214 and 405 squadrons. It also served with Coastal Command carrying depth charges, aerial torpedoes and mines. Later versions were fitted with a Leigh light (a very powerful fixed searchlight in the nose) and ASV radar to aid in the search for German U-boats and surface vessels. In this format they aided the protection of the Atlantic convoys that were so vital to Britain during the war. They earned the affectionate title of 'Goofington' in this maritime patrol form.

The aircraft also proved itself an excellent aircraft with which to equip the O.T.U.'s as it had good flying and handling characteristics with few vices. It continued to give new crews the benefit of this until well after the war had finished.

It was the type in use at 11OTU at Westcott where Geoff 'crewed up' and began training for his eventual posting to a bomber squadron. It was in an aircraft such as this that he and the crew had two narrow escapes during their training due to engine failures. Thankfully none of them was seriously injured and they continued towards their final goal.

Avro Lancaster

Redesigned as a private venture by the Avro team from the ill-fated twin-engined Manchester, this bomber was to become synonymous with the RAF's bombing campaign of the Second World War. Unlike the Manchester before it and its contemporary stable mates, the Halifax and Stirling, this was a beautiful looking aircraft and it soon earned a reputation with its aircrew for strength, durability and a lack of vices. All of which enabled pilots to perform incredible evasive manoeuvres far beyond its designed parameters and if successful to bring the plane home, sometimes a little bent and with rivets missing from the skin!

Part of a pilot's notes for flying the Lancaster included: -

'... the aircraft is designed for manoeuvres appropriate to a heavy bomber and care must be taken to avoid imposing excessive loads in the recovery from dives and in turns at high speed. Spinning and aerobatics are not permitted!'

The strains imposed in the fighter and flak evasion techniques employed by pilots in wartime conditions known as the 'Corkscrew' would have appalled whoever wrote these notes.

It was an all-metal constructed airframe supporting four mighty Rolls-Royce Merlin engines on its re-designed wing. These enabled it to carry 14,000lbs of bombs over 1,000 miles or 2,350lbs over 5,500 miles. It had a maximum speed of 287mph and could reach a 22,000ft ceiling. Three power-operated turrets provided firepower. The nose and mid-upper containing two .303 machine guns and the tail position containing four. Although all this armament could not protect it during its early daylight raids, it proved very useful in the night operations that were to become its modus operandi. So great was the power of the mighty Merlin that the plane was capable of surviving on three, could bring its crews home on two and could limp along on one!

Normal crew compliment was pilot, flight engineer, navigator, bomb-aimer, wireless operator and two air-gunners. They were a highly trained group of men who flew as a team. The navigator, bomb-aimer and wireless operator were usually able to fire the guns and the flight engineer was often trained enough to fly the aircraft if required. In Geoff's' crew, the bomb-aimer had begun his training as a pilot.

There were many versions completed, some of them included Hercules radial engines or Packard (Canada) built Merlin's. The most famous variations will of course be those that were modified to carry the 'bouncing bomb'. Others carried the 10-ton Grand Slam and the 22,000lbs Tallboy, which had been developed for specific targets and raid applications.

Out of a total of 7,377 Lancaster built of all types, 3,431 were lost on operational service. Its average life expectancy was only 20 raids although many 'lucky' aircraft achieved far more even reaching the 100 and over mark! There are still a few flying examples around the world today, probably the best known being the one belonging to the RAF Historical Flight. Its reputation ranks with that of its fighter compatriot, the Spitfire, and aircrew veterans cannot speak too highly of it.

Sir George Edwards once wrote that the Lancaster was: -

"An aircraft designed by engineers and built by craftsmen and women for heroes to fly"

Today, I rate it as a truly beautiful and yet awesome flying machine whenever it appears at one of the many air-shows throughout the country. Few can fail to be stirred by the roar of its four engines as it gracefully passes over the crowds. No modern jet can instil such a feeling of pride and pleasure as the mighty Lancaster. Although he only wrote it about LM121, I'm quite sure Geoff's little bit: -

"she's fairly wizard and flies like a bird"

could be applied to all Lancasters.

Appendix 2

XV Squadron A Brief History

The squadron was formed on the **1st March 1915**, during the First World War as part of the, then, Royal Flying Corps. This later went on to be the Royal Air Force with the forced amalgamation of the Royal Naval Air Service on the **1st April 1918**. As an early bomber squadron they adopted the motto of '**AIM SURE**'. When aircraft codes (the letters that precede the RAF roundel) were introduced they were allocated: **LS**. The squadron was 'adopted' by the city of Oxford and they became known as 'Oxfords Own'

Between the wars they were operating the Fairey Battle which was little more than a slow, heavyweight fighter. It was to suffer terribly at the hands of the Luftwaffe when it finally saw combat. The squadron was posted to France as part of the BEF during the period September-December 1939.

Following their withdrawal to England they were stationed at Wyton where they were re-equipped with the far superior (compared to the Battle) Bristol Blenheim. This twin-engined aircraft could be configured as either a fighter or bomber. As such it was faster than some of the fighters at that time in service with the RAF.

The squadron stayed at Wyton until April 1940 when it was moved across to Alconbury for one month before returning once more to Wyton in the May. This remained its base until August 1942, continuing to operate the rapidly outmoded Blenheim that was beginning to take heavy losses under operational conditions. By November 1940 the Vickers Wellington was replacing them. As a medium bomber the Wellington gave the squadron a reliable, sturdy workhorse to continue their fight against the enemy.

However, the RAF was rapidly moving towards the use of the new 'heavies' that were being produced. The first to enter squadron service was the Short Brothers Stirling and XV Squadron began operations with theirs in April 1941 still from Wyton until they were moved to Bourn in August 1942. Operations with this ungainly, temperamental and under-powered aircraft continued right through the next move that found them at Mildenhall. This station was to be their home for the remainder of the war and beyond. On the **10th August** that same year 'C' Flight was reformed into a new squadron, No.622, and continued its operations beside its parent squadron at Mildenhall.

It was here at Mildenhall that, in December 1943, the squadron begun flying and operating the Avro Lancaster. This superb aircraft then continued in service with the squadron until it was eventually phased out in March 1947! One of the wartime aircraft, 'J-Jig', amassed a total of 134 sorties!

Following the war years the squadron has operated both at home and abroad using a variety of aircraft.

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