

HARRY DURHAM RAF Volunteer Reserve.

HIS WARTIME HISTORY



Harry Durham volunteered to join the RAF in April 1941 and went to No.1 Receiving wing in Babbacombe and initial training in Torquay. On July 28th 1941 he sailed from Liverpool for South Africa aboard the Troop Transport *Reina del Pacifico*, built by Harland & Wolff in 1931. Harry did all his Observer's flying training in at Lyttelton, Port Elizabeth and Pollsmore (Cape Town) in Fairey Battles and Avro Ansons. He returned to the UK aboard the RMS *Strathmore* on April 19th 1942. Operational training then continued at RAF Millom and RAF Hinton-in-the-Hedges.

Harry then moved to Operational Training at RAF Bicester on Blenheims in August 1942 when he teamed up with Ernie Moon, then also a Flight Sergeant. Frank Kanarens joined the team as rear gunner around the same time and they were inseparable until they finished operations in May 1944. They stuck together until the end of operations as they considered themselves a "lucky Crew" - which they were. After the war Harry lost touch with Ernie Moon, who it's thought fell on hard times and had to sell his hard-earned Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). Frank Kanarens married and moved to Canada where he kept in close touch with Harry for the rest of his life. Harry worked closely with Barry and Sue Aldridge in setting up the 115 Squadron museum, donating memorabilia and helping fund one of the displays. In 1997 Frank also returned to the museum in Witchford and extracts from his flying log can be seen in the museum.

Dallas McRae probably joined the team when they started their operational career in 1942 with 180 Squadron at Foulsham flying Mitchells. They then moved on to 196 Squadron who were the first Squadron to arrive at RAF Witchford with their Stirlings. After flying only 2 Minelaying Ops with 196 the Squadron left Witchford to train for glider towing. Ernie Moon's crew stayed on with 115 Squadron at Witchford. They were incredibly lucky to survive. Five of the six Lancasters they flew whilst on 115 Sqn. were shot down and both of the Stirling IIIs they flew on 196 Squadron subsequently crashed. They were the first crew to survive a whole tour - finishing with operations against the marshalling yards at Nantes on 8th May 1944.

Harry and 115 Squadron were part of the Battle of Berlin (November 1943 to March 1944). This was a series of attacks on Berlin by RAF Bomber Command along with raids on other German cities to keep German defences dispersed. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, AOC-in-C (Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief) Bomber Command, believed that "We can wreck Berlin from end to end if the USAAF come in with us. It will cost us between 400 and 500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war".

Harris could expect about 800 serviceable heavy bombers for each raid, equipped with new and sophisticated navigational devices such as H2S radar. The USAAF, having recently lost many aircraft in attacks on Schweinfurt, did not participate. The Main Force of Bomber Command attacked Berlin sixteen times but failed in its object of inflicting a decisive defeat on Germany.



The Royal Air Force lost more than 7,000 aircrew and 1,047 bombers, 5.1 per cent of the sorties flown; 1,682 aircraft were damaged or written off.



115 Squadron suffered the most losses in the whole of Bomber Command; the only Squadron to lose more than 200 Aircraft in the war. They also flew the highest number of sorties and dropped probably the second highest tonnage of bombs, 23,000 tons in Bomber Command.

A memorial to the squadron's sacrifice was erected at the Northern Apex where two of the three main runways meet. The airfield is now a peaceful, bustling, modern industrial estate. Only the naming of the roadways and the remaining B1 Hangar, now a recycling centre give an inkling as to the turbulent times and tragic sacrifices made by all the personnel and local people to help win the war in Europe. Harry's crew attacked Berlin eight times, with seven attacks on other German cities. On only one occasion did they have to return early, with the oxygen supply unserviceable (U/S).

On 30/31st March 1944 they took part in Bomber Command's attack on Nuremberg with 795 aircraft, 94 of which were shot down and 71 were damaged. 572 Lancasters, 214 Halifaxes and nine Mosquitos (795 aircraft). Unusually clear weather and contrails lower than usual, and the bomber stream being flown in on a straight track instead of evasive routing, led the Germans quickly to decide that Nuremberg was the target. The night fighters reached the bomber stream at the Belgian border; more than 82 bombers were lost before Nuremberg and 13 bombers were shot down on the return, an 11.9 per cent loss. It was the costliest RAF Bomber Command mission of the war and ended the Battle of Berlin. The Luftwaffe's I. Jagdkorps recorded the loss of 256 night fighters from November 1943 to March 1944.

During April and May Harry and crew attacked German cities a further five times. They also took part in the allied preparations for the D-Day landings with attacks on the Railway Yards at Rouen on 18/19th and their final two operations in May against Chambly (Paris) on 1/2nd May and Nantes on 7/8th May. This completed their operational tour.

Frank Kanarens recorded two engagements with German night fighters, over Berlin on the night of 1/2nd January with a JU88 attacking at 400 yards and over Stuttgart on 21/21st February against an ME109 that passed overhead. In fact their closest encounter was on the approach to Witchford on the night of 18/19th April whilst returning from Rouen. In Harry's own words *"The trip itself was a piece of cake.....On return to home was when the trouble started.... A Gerry intruder must have followed us back and the first we knew of it was when Pilot Officer Birnie in our old E-Easy was shot down (right in front of us) making his approach. Overt the R/T came the word "Bandits" and everyone made a dash to get miles away, we went to the Wash. old Jones'y was with Birnie, worse luck. What a night was had by all, fourteen kites were missing on the night (in fact 18) ..."* Frank Kanarens as rear gunner did not see the action but heard the shock and consternation in the voices of those up front who did.

Ernie Moons was awarded the DFC on 10th October 1944 for for valour, courage or devotion to duty and as the Pilot this recognised the achievements of the whole crew.

After completing their tour with 115 Squadron Ernie Moon's crew was broken up. Harry went on to serve as a navigation trainer at 12 OTU, Chipping Warden flying in Wellingtons through to March 1945 when he went back to prepare for operations at 1660 conversion unit RAF Swinderby flying Lancaster III's. Harry joined 106 Squadron at RAF Metheringham in June 1945 where the only major event was a crash-landing on July 17th. Peace was declared across the world and Harry's final operations were some navigation tours with ground crew to places like Bari in Italy. On September 8th 1945 Harry flew to Berlin (Gatow) where they were taken to see the destruction in the city. Harry was appalled and never flew again, he also never spoke about his war. He did however bring back a small piece of Hitler's marble desk, purloined when they visited the bunker in Berlin.

In 1946 Harry demobilised and married his sweetheart, Amy. They lived in Blackburn, Lancashire and he returned to the family joinery business where he worked for the rest of his life. After his early RAF training in Torquay he and Amy retained their love of Devon and Cornwall where they returned many times on holiday.

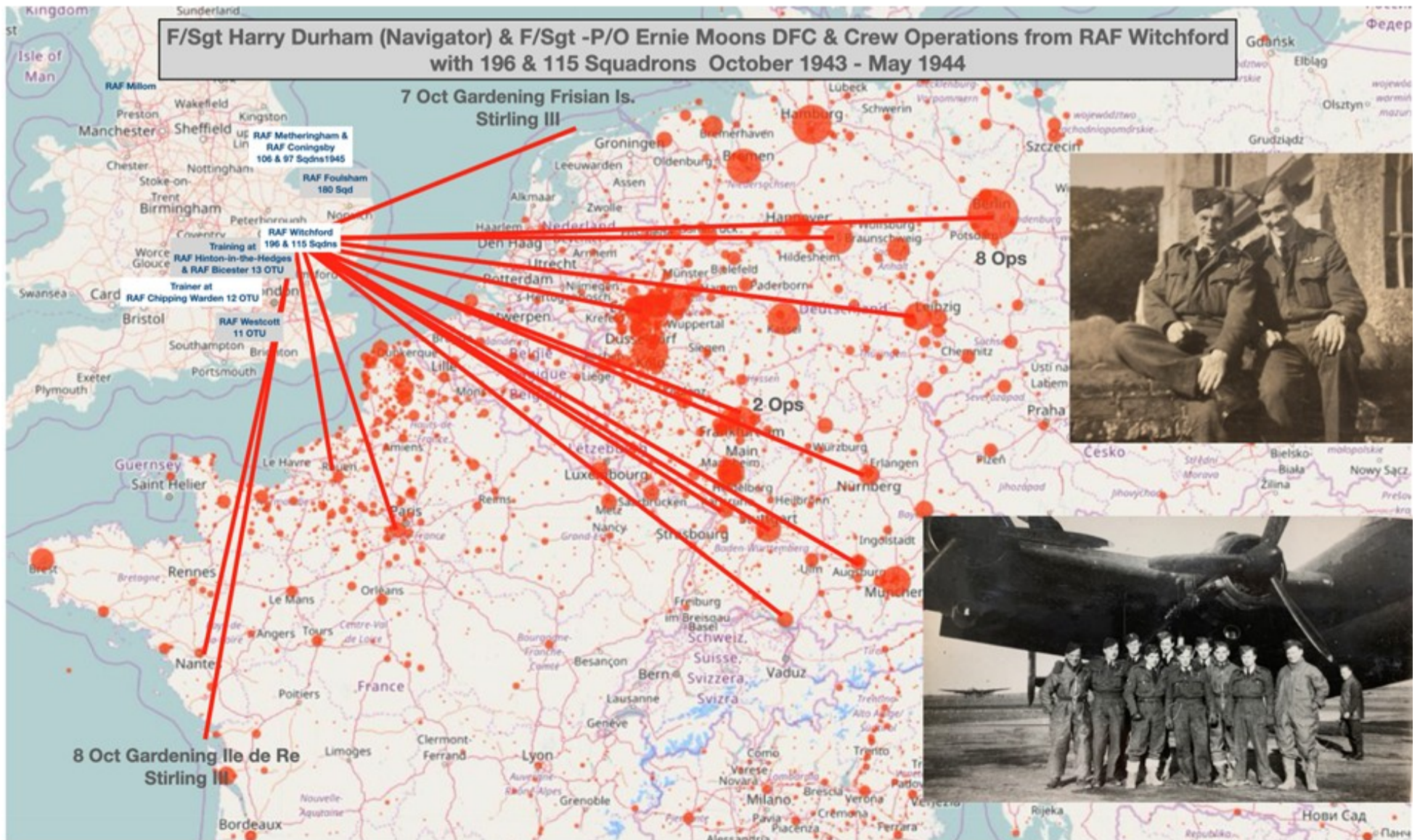
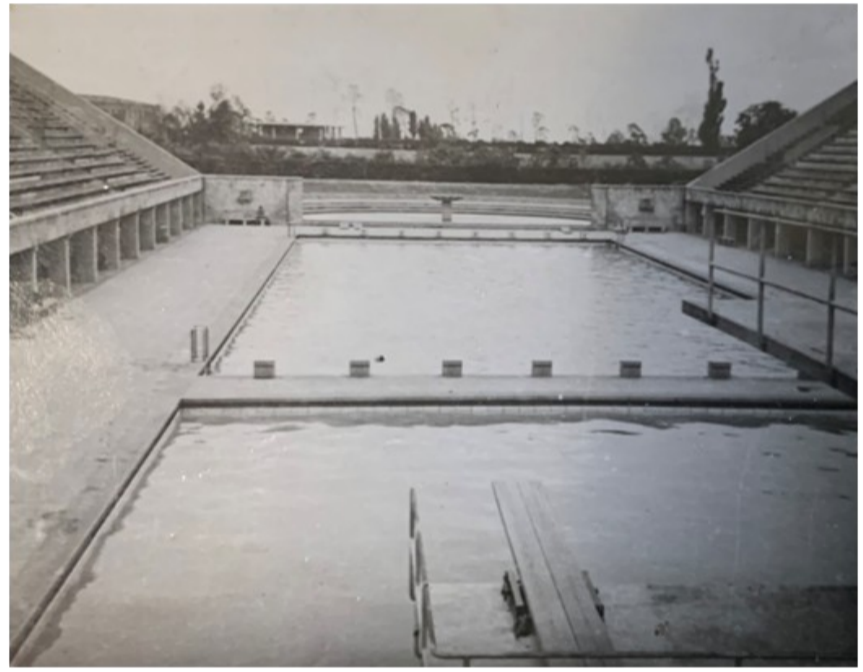
Harry in Warrant Officers Uniform 1945/46 and Harry's medals - which he never wore. He, and I think a lot of aircrew were shocked and hurt at the lack of recognition of their service and the sacrifices of so many of their friends. Harry did keep in touch with the 115 Squadron association and helped Barry and Sue Aldridge with the setting up of the museum at Witchford.



The Bomber Command Clasp was belatedly instituted on 26 February 2013, for award to air crew members on aircraft who participated in at least one operational sortie in a Royal Air Force Bomber Command operational unit between 3 September 1939 and 8 May 1945 inclusive. It came too late for Harry but his younger sister applied as Next of Kin and it is now proudly finishing the story of a peaceful but determined man.

Berlin September 8/9th 1945





Harry's Lancasters: 115 Squadron:

A.DS.682 MKII Lancaster. 29th December 1943 flown by Harry & Ernie Moon's crew on one Op to Berlin: Delivered new 10th Dec 1943. Built at Whitley by Armstrong Whitworth. 5 Ops - failed to return from Ops Berlin 27/1/44 . SOS Picked up from RAF Binbrook. ASR Search but no trace ever found.

No photo is known. This is a painting of 115 Squadron's MkII Lancasters over Ely cathedral. They are very easy to spot - with very distinctive Bristol Hercules radial engines (only 301 were built to cover any shortages feared in the supply of Rolls-Royce Merlin engines being built in the USA)



E.LL.667 : A MkII Lancaster built at Whitley by Armstrong Whitworth. Their main "Kite" January - March 1944 Berlin, Stuttgart, Augsburg, Frankfurt & Nurnburg: "One aircraft hit by flak over Hamburg port inner/ starboard outer engines U/S" After handing over the aircraft to "B" Flight LL.667 was Lost 18/18 April over Witchford. That night German ME410 night fighters flown by Hauptmann Dietrich Puffkarten & Oberlt. Claus Breissner of II/KG51 based at Soesterberg shot down two aircraft over Witchford in separate incidents, with the loss of Pilot Officer Jock Birnie and Flying Officer Charles Eddy MBE and both of their crews. This was a huge shock to the whole RAF Station as they were all so close to home and to safety after an apparent uneventful Op.



Left to Right. Standing under the starboard inner Bristol Hercules engine that is in the Witchford memorial museum to this day (inset) Ground crew. Pilot Officer Dallas McRae. Wireless Operator. Sgt. R.Sharp Flight Engineer. F/ Sgt. Frank Kanarens. Pilot Officer Ernie Moon (DFC Awarded 10/10/44). Unknown, F/Sgt W.Fraser Mid Upper Gunner. Unknown . F/Sgt Harry Durham. Navigator. Ground crew.



C.DS.728 MkII Lancaster flown by Harry & Ernie Moon's crew on 25/26th Feb Op. Augsburg. Delivered new 10th Aug 1943. Built at Whitley by Armstrong Whitworth. 23 Operations. 21/4/44 Abandoned at 21,000 feet after being hit by flak on operations to Cologne. Bodies of Mid-Upper Gunner & Rear Gunner found in wreckage. 5 Crew POW. No photo known.

Photo of 115 Squadron MkII Lancaster.

E.DS.826 MkII Lancaster that Harry & Ernie Moon's crew flew on 22/23 March to Frankfurt (Return Trip on three engines) and 24/25th March Berlin (Return Trip on three engines). Built at Whitley by Armstrong Whitworth. (Aircraft Flying with 514 Squadron by June/ July 1944) and survived the war) No photo known. This is a photo from the Australian War Memorial site of a 115 Squadron MkII and a second photo of 115 Sqdn LL689 KO-P on a mission to Berlin on 1944-02-16



E.HK.545 The MkI Lancaster Ernie Moon's crew flew in April 1944 (after "A" flight had converted from MkII's) to Cologne, Karlsruhe, Essen, Friedrichshafen and Chambly (Paris) Built at Castle Bromwich by Vickers. Lost on 13th June attacking Gelsenkirchen Captain S/L WG Shadforth DFC



F.ND. 754 MkIII Lancaster . Built at Manchester by AV Roe. Ernie Moon's crew flew on operations to Rouen 18/19th April when "A" Flight had converted from MkII to Rolls-Royce Merlin Engine powered MkI & MkII's. "B" Flight took over the MkII's (Pilot Officer Jock Birnie & Crew were shot down in LL.667 that night) .

F.ND 754 was shot down by flak and crashed at Beckerswerth 0115 hrs on 22nd May 1944 during operations to Duisburg. The Wireless Operator was the sole survivor as POW.



Left to Right F/Sgt Harry Durham. Navigator. Pilot Officer Dallas McRae Wireless Operator. Sgt. R.Sharp Flight Engineer. Pilot Officer Ernie Moon (DFC Awarded 10/10/44) F/Sgt W.Fraser Mid-Upper Gunner. Sgt. W. Swan Bomb Aimer. F/Sgt. Frank Kanarens Rear Gunner.

J.HK544 MkI Lancaster. Built at Castle Bromwich by Vickers 52 Ops. Harry & Ernie Moon's crew's Last Op. against the railway marshalling yards at Nantes on 8th May. Lost without trace during operations to Bonn 18/10/44. No image known. No photo known. This is a photo of two unidentified Lancasters in the Type T2 hangar at Witchford situated on the west side of the airfield.



106 Squadron RAF Metheringham Harry and crew. Most probably Flying Officer Johnson Pilot.



106 squadron ZN-J.ND616 Lancaster 3 crash landed at base on return from cross-country & fighter affiliation flight on July 17th 1945

HARRYS OTHER AIRCRAFT

Port Elizabeth South Africa



Fairey Battle. Feb 13th 1942. 988 Pilot Sgt Fletcher, 838 Sgt Bevingston. H.L Grouping



Avro Anson 1. Main navigation trainer in South Africa and back in the UK at Millom and 13 OTU Hinton-in-the-Hedges



Blenheim IV 13 OTU RAF Bicester. (This is where Harry met up with Flight Sgt Ernie Moon with a low level bombing flight (250') on 4th August 1942)



B-25 MITCHELL II 180 Squadron Foulsham. FL677. Harry flew March 23rd 1943. Lost 13th June 1943 attacking a Dornier aircraft factory on the Schelde Pilot Sq/Ldr. Ogilvie DFC

(They enjoyed their time in Mitchells. Dorothy remembers them talking about flying so low that they managed to knock a few people off their bicycles!)





Vickers Wellington 1C. 11 OTU RAF Westcott

196 Squadron RAF Witchford (Harry, Ernie Moons & Frank Kanarens first two operations together.

Short Stirling MkIII EE 975. Oct. 7th 1943 OPs. Gardening (Minelaying) Frisian Islands. (3% loss rate). Aircraft lost after transferring to No.1660 Heavy Conversion Unit. Crashed on Old Cote Moor on the 14th August 1944 after two engines overheated and had to be shut down.

Short Stirling MkIII EE 932. Oct. 8th 1943 OPs. Gardening (Minelaying) Ile de Re (4% loss rate).

Aircraft lost after transferring to No.1665 Heavy Conversion Unit. On 25 September 1944, EE932 crashed on the Cheviot Hills while flying in low cloud. Two of crew members were killed and one fatally injured. Pilot Flying Officer John Henry Verrall DFC (RNZAF)

196 Moved from Witchford to prepare the Stirlings for Glider Towing and Parachute Duties at D-Day. Ernie Moon's crew volunteered to convert to Lancaster's and stay at RAF Witchford to take part in the bombing campaign against Germany.



