

Cheltenham
26 Nov. 2001

My dear Gaye and family,

What a thrill to watch the programme. He has grown and performed very confidently. All our family watched, in Newcastle, York and Reading - I believe they recorded it on video as a keepsake. Catherine (Heather's daughter in Reading) rang ~~to~~ me immediately afterwards to discuss the photo and the various people. Where was my log book? - Well, it vanished from my office when I was the CO at the RAF Chaplains school at Dowdeswell Court. I kept it on my office shelf together with my copy of the Manual of Air Force Law and the Kings Regulations. I was deeply distressed but nothing ever transpired.

The photo in Bob's log book is rather special (to us anyway) and I thought that you might be interested to keep a record of the background of this particular photo. The photo was taken on 14th August 1943 by a press photographer who was at Elsham that day taking photos of life on a bomber station (the date I obtained from the Book "Black Swan" by Sidd Finn. We had just completed our Night Flying Test.

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to check that all items of equipment were serviceable and fit for operational flying. The bomb train containing 1 x 4000 bomb and 16 x 1000 lb bombs had just departed. The 1000 lb bombs were being winched into the bomb bay leaving the 4000 bomb in front of the aircraft. The press photographer jumped out of his van and took a photo of both air and ground crews all over the plane (you might have that photo also) he then asked Bob if he could take a photo of the air crew sitting on the bomb. Bob agreed and we all sat rather (self consciously) on the bomb. He thanked us and left in his van. - this took place about midday -

At the briefing that afternoon we found that we were to bomb Turin - not only Turin but the Breda and Pirelli Factory on the North of the town from 8,000 ft. (not the usual 20,000 - 22,000) Seven of us were to bomb from this height (only 7!!!) the rest were to bomb from 20,000 only 5 mins after we were to bomb. Since we were to pass over Turin from South to North the prospect left us all rather subdued. We had also learned that the Italian Ack Ack defences had been reinforced by German 'Flak' units - and they were a different set of conditions altogether.

We flew down to Lac Bourget in S. France without undue trouble and at Lac Bourget

We were to "wait" for green "sky-makers" to fix our position and time. As we approached the lake a Lancaster passed from right to left about 50 ft in front of us and immediately a bright green flare burst just below us. It was all very very close - Bob and I looked at each other and shook our heads in relief. We then changed course directly to Turin - on course and spot on time. Having crossed the Alps we all took a deep breath and began to lose height to 8,000 ft. The ground looked very very close!!

We lined up at South of Turin and opened the bomb doors. Denys and Bob were working together and I looked up to see another Lancaster about 50 ft above us, bomb doors open - I could see all of the bombs hanging there!! As Denys let our bombs drop so did the other aircraft and the bombs fell just off our port wingtip. We moved apart and disappeared into the night at full power climbing to clear the Alps. This aeroplane was a Zivko piloted by "granfer" Lee. They were killed about one month after we were shot down. Their aircraft was always parked in the next dispersal to us in U'ncle.

We were a very subdued crew as we ~~fly~~ flew alongside Mont Blanc. Then Bill Milburn the mid upper gunner asked if he could shoot a few rounds into the mountain "so that he could leave his mark on the mountain"

So if you ever climb Mont Blanc and see
a row of bullet holes on the peak you will
know that they are the work of Sgt W. Wilburn
of No 103 sqdn !! such was Bills claim
to fame !!!

Well my dears - that is the story behind the
photo in Bobs log book. Perhaps of no
historical worth but real history nevertheless

- try looking at the entry in Bobs
log book for 14th August 1943.

I do hope that this scratching of memory
is not too incoherent to follow.

A big hug to you all - and many
many thanks for writing to let us know
about the programme

Always yours

Jean and Eric Dickson who was
also there.