

## F/O John Joseph Berg DFC (129551) 550 Squadron

**John Joseph Berg** DFC (129551) navigator was posted to 550 Squadron from No1 LFS Hemswell on May 27th 1944. He was killed in action the night of 16/17th June 1944. He is buried in the Netherlands in Wisch Varssveld General Cemetery Plot A Coll Grave 12-14. His aircraft was Lancaster ME840. Code 'V'.

He was 23 when killed and was the son of Sidney & Sarah Berg and husband of Frances Berg, Grimsby, Lincolnshire. The epitaph on his headstone *"In Loving Memory. Sadly missed by his dear wife, mother, father and brother"*

John had married Frances just 6 weeks before he was killed. Frances was born Fanny R Greenberg in 1919 in Grimsby - Mother maiden name Ross. In 1949 Frances R Berg married Arthur F Francis (Prager) in Grimsby.

John Joseph Berg was born in 1921 in Mile End Old Town and his mother's maiden name was Brash - his brother Ralph was born in 1927 in Hackney London. Ralph went on to marry Deborah Marcus in Hendon in 1947 and their son Gary N Berg was born in 1953 Pancras, London and kindly gave access to precious photos and documents of his uncle John.



Courtesy of Gary Berg published on 550 Sqn Association Web Site

**John Joseph Berg** was posted to **100 Sqn** from 1662 Conversion Unit 8/5/1943 as a Navigator in the crew of **Pilot A.R. Gersekowski**. Berg flew his tour of 26 sorties plus 2 more cancelled between 13/5/43 and 23/8/43. He was then posted to 18 OTU on the 7/10/43. He was awarded a DFC along with his pilot Gersekowski and they were listed in the London Gazette on 12/11/43. Flight Lt Andrew Reginald Gersekowski AFM DFC of 100 Squadron was from Brisbane Australia, he could fly before

joining the RAF. He was married in Loughborough in 1944 to Joy M Allen who accompanied him back to Australia when demobbed 14 Jan 1947.

Below Australian newspaper reports on Gersekowski:

### AIR FORCE MEDAL

Pilot-Officer Andrew R. Gersekowski, son of Mr. and Mrs. F. Gersekowski, Haden, via Toowoomba, has been awarded the Air Force Medal for devotion to duty.

Pilot-Officer Gersekowski left Australia for England in 1939 to take up instructional work with Airwork Ltd. When war broke out he joined the R.A.F. and served as an instructor. He has since been transferred to Canada.



### Cary Grant "Hello" To Brissy Boy



Brisbane boy Flying-Officer Andy Gersekowski, whose Dad lives at Oxley road, Graceville, got a kick recently out of meeting up with movie he-man Cary Grant, who usually does a screen job that appeals to most masculine tastes.

When in America, Andy, then serving on R.A.F. Training Command, visited Hollywood and was given a grand look-round the movie lots by various companies. Back in England, Andy, who'd gathered a real inside to talkie-making while in the States, visited London studios and was able to judge for himself the difference between British and American technique.

### R.A.A.F. AWARDS

For high skill, fortitude and devotion to duty in air operations in various capacities and many successful operations against the enemy, six more Australians have been granted gallantry awards. The Minister of Air (Mr. Drakeford) said yesterday that the recipients were:—

D.F.C.—Flight-Lieut. Frank Morton Griggs, D.F.M., of Nyah (Vic.), and Flying Officer Cecil Raymond Johnson, of Kempsey (N.S.W.).

D.F.M.—Flight Sergeant William Ross Wicks, of Inverell (N.S.W.) (since killed in air operations); Flight Sergeant James Canning Ross, of Rockhampton (Qld.); Flight Sergeant Alwyn Cobden Jones, of Corrimal (N.S.W.), and Flight Sergeant Stuart MacKenzie Dunshea, of Charleville (Qld.).

An Australian serving in the R.A.F.V.R., Flight Lieut. Andrew R. Gersekowski, A.F.M., has been awarded the D.F.C., his second decoration for gallantry in air operations. The citation to the award revealed that he had shown high skill, fortitude and devotion to duty in many successful operations against the enemy.

**100 Squadron** was reformed on 15th December 1942 at RAF Grimsby near Waltham as a night time heavy bombing squadron part of No 1 Group RAF Bomber Command. In January 1943 the squadron received its new Avro Lancasters. The very first operation 4/4/1943 was against a U-Boat base at St Nazaire. Then Nuremberg followed and by the end of 1943 the squadron had completed the second largest number of successful operations of units within No1 Group and had the lowest loss rate.

**OBOE:** A British aerial blind bombing system, based on radio transponder technology. Oboe operators sent radio signals to the aircraft to bring them onto their target and time the release of their bombs.

**Skymarking:** Target Indicators TIs could be fused for both air and ground burst. The air burst markers resembled bunches of grapes or upside-down fir trees when detonated. The Germans called them 'Christmas trees'.

**H2S:** This was the first airborne ground scanning radar system, to identify targets on the ground for night and all-weather bombing.

**GEE:** A radio navigation system which measured the time delay between two radio signals to produce a fix, with accuracy of a few hundred metres, at ranges up to 350 miles. Entered service in 1942.

### The Crew members of JJ Berg in 100 Squadron

F/Lt Andrew Reginald **Gersekowski** Pilot

Sgt T. **Pearse** Flight Engineer

F/O J.J. **Berg** Navigator

Sgt V. **Peake** Bomb Aimer

F/Sgt H. **Perry** Wireless Op/ Air Gunner

Sgt O. **Steinberg** Mid Upper Gunner

Sgt F.G. **Roberts** Rear Gunner

**J.J. Berg's Operations whilst in 100 Sqn with Gersekowski as pilot:**

**20/21st May 1943:** Lancaster ED732 'W' Mine Laying. Aborted. Starboard engine failure at 4000ft. Mines brought back. Mine Laying was in the Frisians, River Gironde and La Pallice. The squadron reported that minelaying proved successful in hampering the blockade running U-Boats.

**23/24th May 1943:** Lancaster ED749 'B' DORTMUND Take Off: 22:59h Return 04:07h. Primary 01:36h 21,000ft whole area on fire and white magnesium type fire, 2 miles east. Bomber Command had dispatched 826 aircraft on the largest raid of the Ruhr so far. The Pathfinders marked the target accurately in clear weather conditions. Many industrial premises were hit, particularly the Hoesch steelworks which stopped production. It was difficult to observe the ground so P.F.F. was invaluable. The squadron believed there the enemy used target indicators as decoys.

**25/26th May 1943:** Lancaster ED732 'W' DUSSELDORF Take off 23:30h Return 04:39h 21,000ft little result observed. Bomber Command dispatched 759 aircraft. This raid was a failure. There were 2 layers of cloud over the target and the Pathfinders had great difficulty in marking it. It was thought the Germans were marking with decoy markers and fires. As a result, bombing was scattered over a large area. In spite of cloud no fewer than 8 enemy fighters were seen and F/S Baile opened fire on an unidentified aircraft seen near the target with 2 others.

**27/28th May 1943:** Lancaster ED732 'W' ESSEN Take off 22:49 1/2h Return 03:47h Primary 01:25h Glow of fires through cloud. Engine trouble observed due to flak. The weather was cloudy and sky marking had to be used. The main bombing was scattered. This was a blind bombing attack. Flak was moderately intense, but enemy fighters were very active. I

**29/30th May 1943:** Lancaster ?583 'U' WUPPERTAL Take off 23:14h Return 04:00h 20,000ft Bombed red T.I.s cascading smoke 15,000ft explosion 01:27h Bomber Command dispatched 719 aircraft. This raid was an outstanding success during the Battle of the Ruhr. Both Pathfinder marking and Main Force bombing was accurate. 5 out of the town's 6 largest factories, 211 other industrial premises and nearly 4000 houses were completely destroyed. This was an entirely new target for Bomber Command. One aircraft of 100sqn opened fire on a suspected ME210.

**11/12th June 1943:** Lancaster ED732 'W' DUSSELDORF Take Off 23:17h Return 04:35h 20,800ft Bombed red T.I.s Bomber Command dispatched 783 aircraft. The Pathfinder markings plan went well until an Oboe Mosquito accidentally released a load of target indicators (T.I.) 14 miles NE of the target area. Part of the Main Force wasted its bombs on open country. However, the main bombing caused extensive damage in the centre of Dusseldorf and thought to be the most damaging raid of the war for this city.

**12/13th June 1943:** Lancaster ED732 'W' BOCHUM Take off 23:00h Return 03:53h 22,000ft Bombed red T.I.s saw glow from Zuider Zee. Bomber Command dispatched 503 aircraft. The raid was on a densely cloud covered target but accurate Oboe Sky markings enabled the bombers to cause severe damage to the centre of Bochum/

**14/15th June 1943:** Lancaster ED732 'W' OBERHAUSEN Take Off 23:11h Return 02:?? Aborted. Port engine overheated - bombs jettisoned.

**16/17th June 1943:** Lancaster DV159 COLOGNE Take Off 22:36h Return 04:20h 21,500ft Bombed centre of cluster on green ground markings. Several fires seen and a large explosion at 01:14h Bomber Command dispatched 212 aircraft. The markings for this raid was not by Oboe but by 16 heavy bombers of the Pathfinders fitted with H2S. It was sparse and late and bombing was scattered.

**21/22nd June 1943:** Lancaster ED732 KREFELD Take Off 01:36h Return 03:22h Primary 01:36h 21,000ft Red T.I.s in bomb sight. Fires of own 4000lb burst nearby. Very large explosion 01:40h Bomber Command dispatched 705 aircraft. The raid was carried out before the moon period was over and the heavy casualties were caused by night fighters. 12 of the 44 lost were Pathfinders. The raid took place in good visibility and the Pathfinders produced an almost perfect marking effort. A large area of fire became established.

**28/29th June 1943:** Lancaster ED732 COLOGNE Take Off 23:01h Return 04:18h 20,500ft dispatched 608 aircraft. The circumstances of this raid did not seem promising as the weather forecast predicted heavy cloud cover. Marking of the target was unsatisfactory but the Main Force delivered its successful raid.

**3/4th July 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 COLOGNE Take Off 22:43h Return 03:49h Primary 01:16h 21,000ft Bombed two release point flares over-shooting to allow for southerly drift. Flash revealed that fires were in built up area. Mid Upper turret out of action after leaving the English coast. 653 bombers dispatched. The aiming point in Cologne was the east bank. This saw the first operations of a new German unit Jagdgeschwader 300 equipped with single engine fighters using the Wilde Sau (Wild Boar) technique. A German pilot used any form of illumination available over a city being bombed to pick out a bomber for attack. They claimed 12 bombers shot down over Cologne.

# AIR CAMERAS SHOW GREAT DAMAGE TO COLOGNE

## North Transept Of Cathedral Roof Hit

The Air Ministry News Service announced last night that R.A.F. photographic experts confirm that great industrial damage has been done in Cologne in R.A.F. raids on June 28 and July 3.

The statement says: It is now confirmed that the last two attacks on Cologne were successful. In the first raid, when our aircraft attacked targets on the west side of the Rhine, the great Gerson railway yard, the main railway station, and many industrial plants were severely damaged. In the second raid, when the objectives were Kalk and Deutz, two districts on the east side of the river, heavy industrial damage was done throughout the area attacked.

### Clouds Of Black Smoke

This is the conclusion of the R.A.F. staff of experts who have been studying the photographs taken by our reconnaissance aircraft after the two attacks. The story of the devastation by no means complete, and the photographic experts have not yet had time to give more than a general idea of the damage caused by the first raid. As for the second raid, the reconnaissance pilot found large industrial areas on the east side still covered by clouds of black smoke. But it is known already that the Humboldt-Deutz factories—works of the highest priority—were very seriously damaged.

Thirteen months ago Cologne was the objective of the first 1,000-bomber raid, and the damage was described afterwards, to quote the words of the official report, as "on a larger scale than anything yet seen in any German city." In one week of this year—the first attack was on the night of June 28 and the second on the night of July 3—well over twice the weight of bombs has been dropped as was dropped in the 1,000-bomber attack, and the devastation has been far greater.

### Heavy Damage In U-Boat Works

There were two huge factories belonging to Humboldt-Deutz in Cologne, and both have been damaged in the raid. The interpretation experts say that, despite the pall of smoke that still hangs over the factories on the day after the raid, the photographs show that a great

many buildings were hit in the largest of the two Humboldt-Deutz works. Over the second works there is less smoke, and heavy damage can be plainly seen.

Humboldt-Deutz has played a leading part in the U-boat construction programme, for it was from the two Cologne factories that many of the submarine Diesel engines have come. The damage makes it certain that, at the very least, production at Cologne will have been seriously affected, and this in turn must affect the whole U-boat programme.

### Railway Damage Severe

Many other factories hit have not yet been identified, but it is known that the Citron Werk, the Mannesmann Rohren and Eisenhuetten iron and steel plant, the West Deutsche Waggon-Fabrik, a plant of the Vereinigte Stahlwerke conglomerate and a large chemical factory have all been hit.

Railway damage is severe. The roof of the main railway station has been scorched and the station offices damaged. There is extremely serious damage in the huge Gerson railway yard. Two large sheds and a very large building have been destroyed. Another building of considerable size has been damaged.

### Cathedral Roof Damage

Preliminary examination of the photographs indicates that the north transept of the Cathedral has sustained some roof damage, but the rest of the structure appears to be unaffected.

As a correspondent writes:—German reports of "great devastation" to Cologne Cathedral are now officially discounted by Air Ministry experts who have examined air photographs. These reports, issued at the time, but subsequently watered down, claimed that heavy bombs exploded in the interior, destroying the Left Transept, the baptismal chapel, and the organ, and valuable sculptures. A Stockholm report also said that both towers were badly hit, but admitted that the nearby main railway station was severely damaged.

Reports from a neutral source, that the famous Hohenzollern Bridge was hit by a heavy bomb, appear to be unfounded. No damage to the bridge is apparent in the photographs.

**"WORSE THAN SMOLENSK"**

German Reporter On

**8/9th July 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 COLOGNE Take Off 22:43h Return 03:23h Primary 01:15h 22,000ft Abandoned - Rear Gunners oxygen packed up. Jettisoned 1 X 4000lb

**9/10 July 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 GELSENKIRCHEN Take Off 22:43h Return 04:48h Primary at 01:14h 21,000ft Bombed red and green flares. Explosion at 01:18h but no fires.

**24/25 July 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 HAMBURG Take Off 22:18h Return 03:08h Bombing 21,000ft Bombed red TI. Red explosion followed by smoke plumes at 01:12h

**25/26th July 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 RUHR/ESSEN - Cancelled

**27/28th July 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 HAMBURG Take off 22:10h Return 03:05h Primary 01:00h 20,000ft Bombed centre of yellow and green TIs. Fire burning up rapidly.

Primary 01:15h 20,000ft Bombed red TIs. Saw fires from the Dutch islands.

**2/3rd August 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 HAMBURG Take off 23:19h Return 04:37h 21,000ft Bombed yellow markers. Fires seen to target. This was a 4th raid on Hamburg for the squadron, but ended unfavourably as 100Sqn aircraft got into a severe electrical storm and icing on the route and in the Elbe area, several aircraft were in serious difficulties and had to abandon the mission and drop their bombs on last resort targets. Only 4 crews claimed to have bombed markers and in this they were mistaken (Berg's included) as none were dropped by pathfinders. Cloud covered the entire target. 740 aircraft took part in the raid. At least 4 were lost because of icing, turbulence or struck by lightning

**9/10th August 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 MANNHEIM Take off 22:47h Return 04:31h Primary 01:41 20,000ft Glimpsed the ? in a compact area ? over target. Unsettled weather caused a last-minute change in the technique of raid. Cloud over the target which decreased during the attack. Large explosions reported by the squadron as well as strong fires, but the target was not visibly identified. 457 aircraft in the raid. The Pathfinders marker plan did not work well because of cloud cover and the bombing was scattered.

**10/11th August 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 NUREMBERG Take off ? Return ? Bombed centre of 6 green TIs. Fires seen building up. Reported ships near Le Treport. An attack only partly successful going further into Germany. Cloud covered the target and the crews who did manage to find the markers did so through lucky gaps in the cloud. 653 aircraft were despatched. Despite cloud a good attack went in, in the central and southern parts of Nuremberg.

**12/13th August 1943:** Lancaster 'L' ED732 MILAN Take off 21:06h Return 05:05h Primary 01:16h 20,000ft Bombed green TIs near town centre. Instruments u/s so landed at Tangmere. Milan was a perfect op for the squadron - outstanding amongst attacks on Italy. Good trip across the Alps for our aircraft. 504 aircraft took part in the raid.

**15/16th August 1943:** Lancaster DV192 MILAN Take off 19:49h Return 04:19h 19000ft Bombed centre of clusters of green TIs. Phenomenal photographic success for the squadron. Perfect weather conditions. Long journey across France and the Alps, again achieved without serious difficulty. 199 aircraft took part. Seven were lost to German fighters which were waiting for the bombers return over France.

**17/18th August 1943:** Lancaster DV192 PEENEMUNDE Take off 21:07h Return 03:52h Good concentration of fires and explosions. An important target for the squadron. Brilliant moonlight lit the target area although some smokescreen obscured the target. A radio commentary was of great

assistance to our aircraft. 596 aircraft took part in the raid. This was a raid against the German research establishment on the Baltic coast, where V2 rockets were being built and tested. The raid was carried out in moonlight to increase the chances of success. The raid had a 'Master Bomber' controlling the bombing which was successful throughout the raid. A Mosquito diversion was sent to Berlin to draw off most of the German night fighters. It was believed this raid set back the programme by 2 months and reduced the scale of the actual rocket attacks in the future. Bomber Command lost 40 aircraft. Many of the losses occurred late in the raid when German fighters arrived in force. This was the first night they used their new Schrage Musik aircraft weapons - twin upward firing cannons fitted into the cockpits of ME110s.





**22/23rd August 1943:** Lancaster 'N' JA969 LEVERKUSEN Take off 21:13h Return 01:49h Primary 00:12h 20,000ft No marking seen, bombed on e.t.a. The target for the squadron was a chemical and gas warfare plant north of Cologne. 10/10 cloud cover over the target and for miles around. Bombing scattered. Cloud kept most night fighters away but 2 JU88s and ME110 were seen. 426 aircraft attacked the target. The IG Farben factory was chosen as the aiming point for this raid. It relied heavily on slave labour from concentration camps and was a major Nazi party donor. This company made Zyklon B that killed over 1 million people in gas chambers during the Holocaust. Thick cloud covered the area and there was a partial failure of the OBOE signals. Bombs fell over a wide area. I.G. Farben now trades as Agfa, BASF, Bayer and Sanofi.

#### **Other Crew Members of J.J. Berg whilst in 550 Squadron:**

S/Ldr Gavin Strang **Smith** (108543/108439) DFC Pilot 'B' Flight Commander KIA - Age 22 Son of Robert & Marion Leiper Smith of Perth. Smith is remembered on a monumental inscription at Redgorton Churchyard in Perthshire.

Before being assigned to 550 Sqn **Gavin Strang Smith** served in **142 Squadron** from 17 Aug 1942 to 30 Nov 1942, flying Wellington bombers.

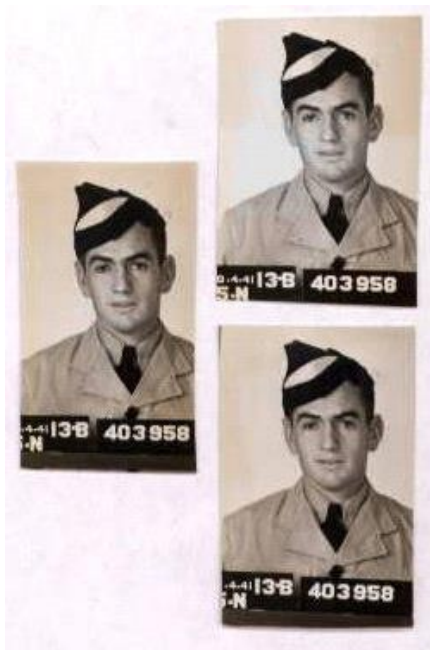
#### **GS Smith's Crew whilst in 142 Sqn:**

Sgt William Joliffe Whitewood (1266086) RAF Observer

Sgt J Edwards (1317475) RAF A/Bomber

Sgt Edward William Salmon (403958) WO/AG RAAF

Sgt Louis Peter Marneweck (778875) DFM DFC A/G RAF 166 squadron 27 Jan 1943



Sgt E.W.Salmon (403958) RAAF 142Sqn courtesy National Archives Australia

Salmon was born 3 Jan 1921 in Sydney NSW - father Edward Salmon. He was a Clerk when he enlisted living 7 Speed Avenue, Five Dock, Sydney. He survived the war.

### **Gavin Strang Smith's Operations with this crew in 142 Sqn:**

**27th Aug 1942 KASSEL** Wellington Z1219 Take Off 20:37h Return 03:22h Camera carried. 2 fires target area. Bombed from 10,000ft Flak turret. 306 aircraft on the operation with 142 squadron losing 5 of its 15 Wellingtons on the raid. Many casualties attributed to night fighters. Slight cloud over Kassel and Pathfinders were able to illuminate the area well. Widespread damage, particularly SW of the city. Several military establishments hit. All 3 of the Henschel aircraft factory severely damaged. It's factory trading under the name Fieseler produced ME 109 and FW 190 and the V1. Henschel also produced Tiger tanks.

**1st Sept 1942 SAARBRUCHEN** Wellington Z1414 Take off 23:40h Return 06:15h One photograph attempted at bombing. Bombed at 9000ft - OK. Fires well scattered over target area and palls of black smoke. Clear visibility. Loop in River Saar clearly seen and white and coloured flares in confirmation on the approach. Successful trip with extensive fires. 231 aircraft on the raid. 90% of them bombed Saarlouis a mistake of the PFF markers. It was 13 miles NW and in a similar bend of the River Saar.

**4th Sept 1942 BREMEN** Take Off 00:13h Return 05:22h Camera carried - one photograph captured OK. Bombs believed to have burst in built up area. 251 aircraft on the raid. The Weser aircraft works severely hit as was the Atlas Shipyard, 4 dockyard warehouses and three oil storage tanks

**7th Sept 1942 GARDENING** Wellington Z1414 Take Off 20:00h Return 03:24h No camera carried. Mines laid in allotted areas from 500ft. Visibility Good. Quiberon Peninsula. 2 parachutes seen to open in allotted planting area. Wizard Trip! 43 aircraft were sent mine laying that night.

**10th Sept 1942 DUSSELDORF** Wellington Z1219 Take off 20:29h Return 01:10h Bomb load 810 X 4lb incendiary. One photograph. Bombs fell on marking point. 3 good fires seen. Bombed 9500ft. No cloud. Ground haze. Rhine and Docks seen by aid of fires. Quite good trip. Damage appeared extensive. 479 aircraft on the raid. All parts of the city except the north were hit. 42 industrial firms bombed.

**18th Sept 1842 GARDENING** Wellington Z1219 Take Off 20:11h Return 02:45h Vegetable brought back owing to inability to pinpoint owing to cloud. Disappointing trip. It was a mine laying trip off Brest by 8 Wellingtons.

**2nd Oct 1942 KREFELD BK3U6** Wellington Take off 19:04h Return 23:40h Scattered fires seen - OK. Successful trip. Incendiaries believed to have fallen on target area. Raid of 188 aircraft. The Pathfinders encountered dense haze and target marking was late. Dispersed bombing.

**5th Oct 1942 AACHEN** Wellington Take off 18:40h Return 01:15h Successful trip. Good fires burning - better than Krefeld. Bombed from 7500ft River Maas at Liege clearly seen. Many fires seen in target area. One particularly large one amongst the factory chimneys. 257 aircraft on the raid. Weather continued to be bad over Germany. There were few PFF markings on Aachen. Consequently, bombs fell on Lutterade. 6 aircraft crashed in England possibly in thunderstorms.

**11th Oct 1942 GARDENING** Wellington Take off 18:46h Return 00:51h Parachutes seen to open in allotted area. Dropped at 500ft. Haderslev Fjord, Bago Island and Blaavand Point clearly seen.

**13th Oct 1942 KIEL** Wellington Take off 19:05h Return 00:58h Bomb load 1 X 4000lb No Cloud. Slight haze. PFF marking the target. Identified Kiel Hafen. Fires well concentrated. 288 aircraft on the raid. A decoy fire was operating - at least half the bombing drawn away into open country, but the rest did fall on Kiel.

**23rd Oct 1942 GARDENING** Wellington Take off 01:22 Return 09:10h Successful trip. Searched Bourgneuf St Nazaire area for 15 mins before ascertaining position. 2 parachutes seen allotted area.

**7th Nov 1942 ESSEN** Wellington BJ581 Take off 10:25h Return 13:48h 9 X 500lb bombs load. Bombed on e.t.a. Built up area seen through gap in the clouds.

**9th Nov 1942 HAMBURG** Wellington BK305 Take off 17:35h Return 00:20h No visible fixes available. Target attacked believed Bremen. Bombed from 8500ft. Ratzeburg Lake and Hamburg missed on D?? Intense flak. 213 aircraft deployed which encountered cloud, ice and winds which had not been forecast. No clear or identification or marking of Hamburg was made.

**16th Nov 1942 GARDENING** Wellington BK299 Take off 17:12h Return 23:17h Mines dropped Pleasant and successful trip. Vegetables laid from 700ft.

**18th Nov 1942 TURIN** Wellington Take off 18:19h Return 02:39h No photograph attempted. Excellent - Incendiaries dropped in vicinity of aiming point. Landed at Hunsdon (no indication as to why). There were hits on the Fiat factory which made military machinery and vehicles.

### **John Joseph Berg's Crew whilst in 550 Squadron along with Gavin Strang Smith:**

**F/O Roy Kay** Flight Engineer survived and evaded capture with the help of the Dutch. He was taken from Aalten to Lichtenvoorde and from there to Belgium and the escape line. Roy had landed in his parachute in a tree and hurt his lower back and had trouble walking. When he got back to the UK a coded message was sent to the Dutch.



Courtesy of Joe Pinguey nephew of F/O Pulfrey published on 550 Sqn Association web site

**F/O Leslie Pulfrey** (148869) Bomb Aimer KIA Aged 29 Son of John & Florrie Pulfrey of Sheffield. *"Deep in our hearts his memory is kept, we smile with the world, but never forget"* Pulfrey grew up in Sheffield and had an older brother called Jack and a younger sister Elsie. Both were in the RAF. Leslie was a policeman before the war. He was found by Gerrit Van Eerden, a Dutch farmer, wrapped in his parachute which failed to open correctly. He had two bullet wounds in his neck. Eyewitness accounts stated the parachute was torn and his head was entangled in the cords. He was identified by his wristwatch and dog tags.

**F/Sgt Ralph Townsend** DFM (1078579) Wireless Op KIA Aged 23 Son of William H. & Gladys Townsend of Emley, Yorkshire. *"In heavenly love abiding"*

**Flt/Lt St John Tizard** (112026) Mid Upper Gunner born 1921 Hendon, Middlesex, Mother's maiden name Dawe.

**F/O James Heath** (J.200002) **RCAF** Rear Air Gunner. Son of Mr & Mrs James Heath and stepson of Viola Banks, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The epitaph on his headstone *The Lord Is My Shepherd I Shall Not Want*. The National Archives of Canada has burial details within the file concerning the service of F/O James Heath. His Casualty Sheet states *"An extract from official German totenliste No.230 confirms his death on the 17th June 1944, and states that he was buried on the 19th June in the Parish Cemetery, Varsseveld, Grave No.11. It is located about 11 miles West South-West of Winterswijk, Gelderland, Holland"* Dated 6/12/1943. On another document dated 29/5/1946, to the Air Ministry on Oxford St, London the military map reference was A1272 and place of the crash was given as Wisch, Heelweg. More details on the crew was requested, presumably for identification as the aircraft had hit the ground in flames and Townsend, Tizard and John Berg were buried together with one cross initially. There is a mention of exhumation next to their names.



Memorial Plaque at crash site Oude IJsselstreek

### **Final Raid 16/17th June 1944 Sterkrade, Ruhr.**

The Operational target was a synthetic oil plant at Sterkrade situated to the NW of the Ruhr. 19 aircraft deployed with one returning with an unserviceable port engine. Conditions were cloudy en route with problems of icing. There was 10/10 cloud over the target, but the Pathfinders flares could be seen although concentration was not as good as had been the case recently. The crews thought the bombing was scattered. Flak over the target was moderate to intense and heavier than on previous sorties to the Ruhr. Night fighters were active. Three aircraft were unaccounted for S/Ldr Smith in 'V', F/O Neilsen in 'H' and P/O Packham in 'P'. They will be sadly missed, for they were all jolly good fellows. Bomber Command dispatched 321 aircraft on this raid. Weather forecast was poor. The target was covered thick cloud and the Pathfinders markers quickly disappeared. Most of the bombing was scattered. The route of the bomber stream passed near a German night fighter beacon at Bocholt, only 30 miles from Sterkrade. 21 bombers were shot down by fighters and 10 by flak.

S/Ldr Smith was late leaving the target area and fell behind the bombers and was isolated and became easy prey for night fighters. The first burst from the enemy fighter set the wing petrol tanks on fire. The pilot ordered the crew to put on their parachutes but before anyone could jump the Lancaster exploded. Kay had been standing next to Smith the pilot and was blown out of the aircraft. In total

321 bombers from Bomber Command attacked the Oil Plant that night. 31 aircraft were shot down - almost all by night fighters. When Lancaster ME840 was hit, according to eyewitnesses on the ground, it came down in Aalten and had lost a tailpiece and part of a wing. It is believed that ME840 was shot down by Oberleutenant Josef Nabrich of 3/NJG1 at 01:49h. He too was killed on 4/5th November 1944 - shot down by a Mosquito.



Grave photo courtesy of Gary Berg publ. on 550Sq Assoc. web site

#### **Other Operations of 550 Sqn carried out by Berg's crew:**

**Battery near Calais 2/3rd June 1944** - Flying in Lancaster LL838 the target was on a defended area. As a consequence, their aircraft was badly damaged by Flak but the crew managed to get to the South coast before bailing out in the vicinity of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. No injuries. This raid was part of the deception invasion plan

**Crisbecq 5/6th June 1944** Flying Lancaster LL747 the Operational Record Summary of Events: *The crews of the 18 aircraft which had been accepted for operations were briefed to attack a coastal battery commanding a strategic position on the Cherbourg peninsula at Crisbecq. All aircraft took off promptly and without incident. Although some cloud was encountered across England on the outward journey enough was seen to realise that the whole of southern England was on the move. Whilst flying across the Channel a vast Armada, of ships was seen making their way towards France. At the target 10/10 cloud was encountered but the glow from the markers was seen quite distinctly beneath. All crews agreed that the bomb flashes, as far as could be judged were well centred around the marker. The Flak around the target was negligible and very few incidents were reported by our crews who all returned safely after participating in the opening phase of the invasion of Europe.../ The Squadron striking force of eighteen aircraft who beat the spearhead by a matter of hours know now, like all the*

world that the spear was driven straight and true, leaving 550 Squadron to create more chaos behind the Hun's lines. Bomber Command dispatched 1,012 aircraft

**Flers 9/10th June 1944** Flying Lancaster LL747 dropped their load at 1500ft at 03:20 18 aircraft briefed for operations. The attack was made against the enemy airfield at Flers and all the aircraft took off without incident. Weather difficulties were less than expected and all crews claim a successful attack. Owing to low cloud over the target, bombing took place at heights from 1500ft to 6000ft and several reports of visual identification indicate that the airfield believed to be used by day fighters, was both accurately bombed, several explosions were seen. The whole force on this target returned without loss. Bomber Command had dispatched 401 aircraft to bomb airfields to prevent reinforcements being brought up by air because the railways were blocked.

**Le Havre 14/15th June 1944** Flying Lancaster ME840 Bombed at 22:33 from 18,500ft. 16 aircraft were called to attack the dock area of the French port of Le Havre one hour after sunset, which necessitated a daylight take-off, much to the delight of all the crews. Weather conditions at the target were ideal for the operation. All the aircraft and crews returned safely and are looking forward eagerly to some more daylight raids - referred to as the bomb aimers paradise. One aircraft failed to take off owing to a tyre bursting on the perimeter track and only 15 aircraft participated.



December 1942

Pilot Gavin Strang Smith whilst in 142 Squadron, was in the news in December 1942 when he was awarded the DFC. "F/O Gavin Strang Smith RAFVR whose home is at Drumearn, Kincarrathie Crescent, Perth has been awarded the DFC. In describing his exploits, the official statement says: 'As Captain of an aircraft F/O Smith is always undeterred by the strongest enemy defences or adverse weather. By his fine offensive spirit this officer has inspired a high standard of morale in the squadron'. The statement also describes how on one occasion F/O Smith was detailed to make an attack on a factory in Northern France. On his first run over the target, technical trouble developed with the bombing panel. This was repaired and although severely harassed by searchlights and anti-aircraft fire, he descended to 1500ft before releasing his bombs. 21 years of age, F/O Smith was educated at Sharpe's Institution and Perth Academy. He enlisted in the RAFVR while serving his

*apprenticeship as a solicitor with Messrs. McCash & Hunter, Perth. Having trained in Canada under the Joint Air Training Plan, he was commissioned in Sept 1941 and promoted a year later.*

Thanks goes to 550 Squadron Association web site for help in finding Gary Berg and details of the crash and preceding operations carried out by this 550 Squadron crew.

[www.550squadronassociation.org.uk](http://www.550squadronassociation.org.uk) Researched by Dorothy Ramser