

THE FINE SECOND WAR GROUP TO A 20-YEAR-OLD WELLINGTON BOMBER PILOT WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION IN JUNE 1943 ON THE RETURN FROM AN SORTIE TO DÜSSELDORF. HIS AIRCRAFT BEING HIT BY FLAK OVER THE DUTCH COAST, HE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO GET HIS AIRCRAFT BACK TO ENGLAND BEFORE CRASH LANDING IN NORFOLK, KILLING BOTH PILOT AND NAVIGATOR A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF EVENTS BEING LEFT BY A SURVIVING CREWMEMBER



1939-45 STAR, 1 CLASP, BOMBER COMMAND, THE CLASP IN ITS NAMED BOX OF ISSUE; AIR CREW EUROPE STAR; DEFENCE AND WAR MEDALS 1939-45, THE MEDALS IN AIR MINISTRY CARD BOX OF ISSUE ADDRESSED TO HIS FATHER 'F. W. JACKSON, ESQ., 708 FROBISHER HOUSE, DOLPHIN SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.1.'

Frank Whitford Jackson was born at Dublin, Eire, on 1 April 1923, son of Major Frank Whitford Jackson, D.S.O. In 1938 he was Captain of Beaumont College, Old Windsor, and is shown as a student upon enlisting as an A.C.2 on 5 March 1941. He became a L.A.C. in November 1941 until September 1942 when he was appointed to a temporary commission in the General Duties branch of the R.A.F.V.R. Following flying training in the U.S.A. and with 15 (O.T.U.), he was appointed Flying Officer on 25 March 1943, and joined No. 196 Squadron on 3 May 1943. He was killed in action on the night of 11-12 June 1943 when piloting a Wellington bomber on a mission to Düsseldorf. Both Jackson and his Navigator, Flying Officer R. P. Lea, were killed after their plane had been badly damaged by flak and crashed near Docketing, Norfolk. There were three survivors, the wireless operator, the bomb aimer and the rear gunner, the latter being Ivor Prothero who gave the following account of the fate of their Wellington X MS486 ZO-R:

'R.A.F. Leconfield, East Yorkshire, 11 June 1943.

The afternoon and evening at Leconfield, base of 196 squadron, was fairly overcast with almost continuous rain and crews awaited whilst a secondary take off time was arranged, eventually set for 23.00 hrs. We had a fairly rough take off having run into what we thought to be runway water puddles causing us to skew to the runway edge before lift off. Also concern was expressed over the intercom that the under cart may have been lifted too early (Possible damage?).

This 'R' Roger Wellington X was a new replacement aircraft which we had all tested several days before and the skippers remarks were mainly that he found the controls stiff. By coincidence a week or so before whilst at flying control I saw the aircraft land, flown direct from manufactures by a ferry pilot. Of particular interest because it was noticed that it had no squadron lettering on its side when taxiing. To all of us watching, we were very surprised, to see a sole figure of a rather slight lady carrying a sizeable black bag, emerge. Very soon afterwards an Anson aircraft landed and picked her up where she presumably joined other ferry pilots. We didn't seem to stick to any particular aircraft although we had previously used 'Q' Queen for two or three Ruhr trips. This 'R' Roger was allotted to us and for its first operational trip to Dusseldorf it was to carry our first 4000lbs bomb. We all took a good look at it before boarding, agreeing that it looked large and ugly slung beneath the fuselage. Well before reaching the Dutch coast and still climbing the port motor's high temperature reading was causing concern. So eventually it was decided to reduce speed and rate of climb. This would have resulted in putting us behind the scheduled bombing time over the target. To aid the situation it was decided to cut across one of our 'Dog Legs' of the planned route. Having altered course, we were at about 12,000ft in 10/10 cloud and most probably crossing the Dutch coast (more likely a flak ship) when there were three distinct A/A bursts, firstly lighting up the cloud beneath us, the second above, the third? shook the aircraft and the starboard motor soon burst into flames. Resulting almost immediately in to a spirally dive to port which delayed some of the urgent actions called for over the intercom "starboard motor fire extinguisher" feathering its propeller; shutting off its fuel supply and urgent bomb release. The effect of 'G' force in the rear turret was so great that I couldn't even lift an arm, whilst over the intercom, I heard them struggling to regain control. Had I been able to move and put my parachute on- I'm pretty certain I would have baled out, those moments seemed so final. When the skipper managed to pull out of the dive regaining part control, as for a while the rudder had frozen up. Having lost some 6,000ft and at a higher temperature, it soon eased off.



Fortunately no one was hurt, the fire was out, and the reported damage involved many electrical and hydraulic failures, and some problems with the main compass. With this unsettled compass condition it became necessary to break radio silence and obtain an accurate fix/QDM' (Magnetic course to steer to reach you). We received three almost immediate replies from UK bases thus enabling true compass headings, checks and a return course. With increasing difficulties, all our skipper's undoubted skills and energy were now called for in keeping airborne and avoiding further temperature build of that port motor. Although in cloud and owing to cross winds, in order to get back on course the turning of reciprocals didn't help maintain height or level flight. It also became necessary to monitor and balance fuel supply from wing tanks, which became critical at one time. The

possibilities of ditching were discussed briefly but none of us suggested any positive action; for example lightening the aircraft by getting rid of heavy equipment etc.

Some way out on approaching the Norfolk coast and through radio contact with RAF 'Docking', we were informed that we were being diverted to nearby Bircham Newton airfield Norfolk. On route they had three searchlights coned at cloud base of 2000 feet, which we found without much delay. About this time the skipper told us over the intercom that he intended to land the aircraft, but added it would be a rough landing without the undercarriage (no hydraulics). He reminded us all that as we broke cloud the last chance at 2000 feet to bale out would have to be taken without delay. All replied that we would stay; with the usual comment "That you can't take it back (the Chute) to the stores and change it when it doesn't open." Soon after breaking cloud, with the port wing slightly down from my turret I had a glimpse of the well lit runway and chance lights. Whilst the skipper was in contact with flying control on R/T, I may not have heard all that was said, but there seemed to be a question about "call sign" procedure. However, he made it clear that he intended to come straight in, and not circuit.



He then told us all to get to our crash positions. In my case, turret to beam, and I had time to put my 'chute at head height, in front of the guns. I believe procedure for the rest of the crew in getting to their respective positions, includes disconnecting their intercom. As I had mine still connected, I assume was possibly the last in contact with the skipper, as he suddenly called 'Can anyone see the lights?' Looking quickly now to my somewhat limited side view and beneath us, I reported likewise- 'no sign of any lights now'. As there was no answer from anyone else assumed that now at their crash positions, they were no longer on intercom. I'm fairly certain that firstly some rapid "Call Sign" procedure was used by the skipper to flying control. His final message to them was clear, "Put your lights on, what are you trying to do, kill us all?"

I believe then, that he must have opened up the throttle of the port motor, with the possibility of doing a circuit. With his intercom still switched on I heard him say, "Sorry chaps crash". Almost immediately sparks and flames passed the turret from the port motor and wing area. Bracing myself in the turret for the inevitable- fancy the port wing hit first.

Regaining consciousness somewhere in a fire near the starboard wing, confirmed later to be in a barley crop field some 3 feet high, I found it best to roll to the right and away from the fire. Experiencing considerable breathing difficulties and right arm/ shoulder problems, but my legs seemed OK. Slight problems getting away from my Mae West which was on fire, stumbling, I managed to undo the tapes with my left hand and also pressed the harness quick release. At this stage probably gathering my senses thoughts of self preservation must have taken over - get away from the fire.

Wherever I turned there seemed to be a fairly strong cool wind blowing in my face, this later turned out to be smarting, effects of burns to hands and face. A week or so earlier we had been issued with whistles which we were advised to attach to the top part of our battle dress blouse, so that in the event of ditching in the sea at any time, they could be an aid to contacting each other. On hearing a whistle I stopped and managed a short blow before it stuck in my mouth, which just increased my breathing difficulties. Having sensed the direction and realising someone else was about, I edged my way round the head of the blazing wreck where I could clearly see someone, Syd Mortimer our wireless operator was alongside a hedgerow. After our brief words and recognition he asked me if I could do anything with his leg, he was in a half sitting position with one leg almost wrapped round the other. I was briefly explaining that my right arm seemed useless and that my hands had deep cuts but were not bleeding (as seen in the light of the fire) when we heard Jack Atherton our Bomber Aimer calling (obviously delirious) at a point nearer to the fire, but not too far away. When I got to him, a broken loop of his parachute harness enabled me to use my left hand and pull him to one side a little way. He was pretty well alight.



I must have passed out for a while, as the next thing I remember was a civilian bending over me, later confirmed to be a Mr Seaman the local ARP warden who I learned was first on the scene. I'm fairly certain that I said there were still two of our crew to find (Pilot and Navigator) and that the crackling sounds were probably small arms ammunition exploding and assured him before he left, that there no bombs on board. Soon afterwards, I got this crazy idea that by walking beyond the fire area it might be possible to get some help. In attempting to get over an iron fence, half way over, I became stuck with insufficient strength to lift a second leg over, but I was soon rescued by the now advancing RAF ambulance crew.

Mr Seaman ultimately received his commendation for organising and carrying out his excellent rescue

work. The time of the crash is recorded as being 02:20hrs on 12/06/1943 at Stanhoe Hall near Bircham Newton. We three survivors (Wireless Operator, Bomb Aimer, and myself Rear Gunner) were immediately taken to Bircham Newton RAF medical centre and then transferred to RAF Hospital Ely, where for several months we received that excellent treatment for various orthopaedic needs and first and second degree burns. In due course we were informed of the regrettable and upsetting news that both our (Skipper) Frank Jackson and (Navigator) Ron Lee, had not survived the crash. Some ten days or so later my bed was wheeled from the burns ward to the orthopaedic end, where Syd Mortimer (Wireless Operator) and Jack Atherton (Bomb Aimer) were receiving additional treatment for their serious leg injuries. I believe some of the body burns needed skin grafting also. Jack was not at all well and didn't talk then. However Syd and I had a good update on each other's condition and exchanged thoughts and memories which matched surprisingly well, in spite of some lost periods of time.



The day and night care and attention given to us in the 'Burns Ward' by the nursing staff was obviously superb, not forgetting those visiting ladies who basically wrote letters for us etc. Looking back regretfully, time and circumstances never allowed adequate thanks and appreciation to be expressed before progressing onto convalescence elsewhere. Early on surprise ward visits, including some officers from Leconfield (196 Squadron) followed during July by some of our own ground crew staff, with their remarkable news that the squadron had been posted to nearby Witchford and were to convert onto Sterling Bombers. Whilst all war time air crews were 'volunteers' for one reason or another, none of us three survivors returned to operational flying. We never got to know the true circumstances of just why the runway lights were extinguished on that final approach. Unofficially we heard that there had been 'intruder' enemy aircraft in the area a night or so before.

Our skipper, Pilot Officer Frank Jackson gave his life trying to save us and the aircraft, he never saw his 21st birthday, a courageous and brave young man which we had the honour to serve under. For example; having just regained some control of the aircraft and before ordering 'bomb jettisoning', he said that we ought to continue to target, but we jointly voiced opinions against such an idea, thus we headed back to the UK.'

Flying Officer Pilot Frank Whitford Jackson, aged 20, is buried in New Hunstanton Cemetery, Norfolk.

Condition EF. Sold with copied R.A.F. record of service and transcript of Ivor Prothero's account written in about 1975.