

Welcome Guests, Parents, Cadets & Staff

Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few. All hearts go out to the Fighter pilots, whose brilliant actions we see with our own eyes day after day, but we must never forget that all the time, night after night, month after month, our bomber squadrons travel far into Germany, find their targets in the darkness...aim their attacks, often under the heaviest fire, often with serious loss...and inflict shattering blows upon the whole of the technical and war-making structure of the Nazi power.

These famous words were delivered by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in his wartime speech to Parliament on the 20th of August, 1940. And was said during the Battle of Britain, which was taking place at that time. And although widely accepted that the comments related mainly to those who fought against the Luftwaffe as part of Fighter Command, most historians now take the view that Churchill was also referring to the aircrew of Bomber Command. And considering the losses and casualties being experience amongst Bomber Command during this time, this opinion rings true.

The speech came at a time when Britain had suffered a series of monumental defeats. The Luftwaffe in particular appeared unstoppable and the fear of land invasion by Germany was probable.

Months after Churchill made this speech the tide however began to turn in Britain's favour. His words proved to be a great inspiration to an embattled United

Kingdom during its most dangerous phase of World War II.

In World War II 125,000 airmen served in the strategic bomber force. Approximately 10,000 were Australian. In fact, RAF Bomber Command was predominantly made up of British, Australian and Canadian airmen who were assisted later in the war by the US Air Force following America's entry into the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in December 1941.

55,573 (or 40%) of those in Bomber Command were killed and another 18,170 became casualties. It was this branch of the Air Force that incurred the highest casualty rate of any Allied force in WWII.

Of those killed in action 4130 were Australians. This accounted for 10% of Australia's total number of combat deaths in World War II – an even more disproportionate number of losses considering just 2% of Australia's forces were part of Bomber Command.

But it wasn't only air crew who died in Bomber Command. The ground crew who worked tirelessly to maintain the aircraft and airfield, were targeted by the Luftwaffe, and were also killed.

The Australians in RAF Bomber Command units were recruited through three main avenues.

Those who joined the RAAF and accepted service duties in the RAF via the Empire Air Training Scheme.

Others joined the RAF direct in response to recruiting notices published in Australia.

While the final group, living in Britain, joined the RAF direct.

Some Australian pilots transferred to RAAF Squadrons when they were raised, but most chose to remain with the RAF for the duration of the war. (As was the case with most of our 622 SQN Australians).

The men of Bomber Command were younger on average than other men who served in World War II. Most were between 19 and 25 years of age. THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE AUSTRALIANS KILLED WITH 622 SQN WAS 23. Invariably, they were some of the fittest and brightest of their generation.

As mentioned, most Australians joined up under the Empire Air Training Scheme. The Empire Air Training Scheme was established to supply trained Commonwealth aircrew to the RAF. Under the scheme Britain had committed to providing the industrial capacity to build and supply aircraft while Australia, New Zealand and Canada, amongst other Commonwealth nations, would supply a proportion of the pilots and ground crews needed to fly them.

The first Australian Training Schools were established in 1940. **They were set up In South Australia at Victor Harbour, Mallala, Mount Gambier and Port Pirie.**

Our own Australian Air Force Cadets traces its history to The Empire Training Scheme.

Once trained the men of the RAAF embarked for Britain on a transport or Merchant Navy ships on a voyage that took approximately 2 months to complete.

Final training was completed within RAF squadrons with many of the Australian's dispersed rather than retained in the groups in which they had arrived. Some Australian air crew completed their final training in Canada. (As my

own Uncle did this – becoming a fighter pilot in his case).

For the men of Bomber Command each mission was kept top secret until the day of the raid. Each day air crew would check the battle order to see which men were required to run missions (sorties) that day. If their name appeared on the list, they were restricted to base – unable to leave for any reason. This was because earlier in the war, it was thought German spies had intercepted information at the pubs that pilots were known to frequent (a lot!).

Raids often contained between 200 – 1,000 planes, so having precise information was very important. The bombing window usually lasted 20 mins. This meant all Bomber Command planes flew in close proximity to each other. The window was measured from the first bomber that dropped its payload to the last bomber passing over the target.

Despite being in different formations, at different altitudes, when a plane went down either due to mechanical failure or enemy intervention, it was a very real risk to other planes in the formation. Many accidents occurred. It only took one pilot to make a slight deviation a second too early or too late, to cause catastrophic collisions.

Early in the war, due to heavy losses on daytime raids, Bomber Command started flying most missions at night under the cover of darkness. Once they left England, crews were instructed to turn off all lights both inside and outside their aircraft. Pilots had to know instinctively where their instruments were, and to find throttles, steering, and other levers and buttons by feel. The only

exception was the navigator, who could use a small pin light to work by, while surrounded by curtains on all sides.

A Tour of Duty usually consisted of 30 sorties (raids). Except in exceptional circumstances, once an Aircrew had completed a tour, it was required to rest for a minimum six months. During this time the crew would undertake other tasks such as transport, instructing or further training. The chance of completing a tour is reported at being 1 in 3. The chance of surviving a second tour of 20 sorties, just 1 in 2.

The men of Bomber Command were a special breed. They needed nerves of steel and a remarkable courage to continue night after night week after week, month after month.

Tonight we honour the 37 Australians Killed in Action with 622 SQN RAF. Three of those 37 I want to mention.

622 Squadron was formed at Mildenhall from 15 Squadron, on 10 August 1943 – about half way through the war. Originally equipped with Stirling Bombers, the first 4 engine bomber, they were soon provided with the now iconic Avro Lancaster. It was operational the same night it was formed, part of the main force of 3 Group Bomber Command. It conducted attacks on German industrial and military targets for nearly 2 years until April 1945. Its duties switched to dropping food to the starving Dutch population, repatriated POWs and troops back to Britain from Europe until the end of the war in Europe in may 1945.

It would be just 6 weeks after operations began for 622 before the first Australian was killed. PLTOFF James Hunt who had enlisted from Randwick Sydney. He was just 20 when the Stirling Bomber he was piloting simply went missing during a raid to Hanover Germany on 28th Sept 1943. Neither he, his crew nor the plane were ever seen again. No wreckage was recovered and they have no known grave. They simply disappeared most probably over the North Sea. He left in Australia a grieving mother who never found out his true fate.

Several months later in November 1943, PLTOFF James Morecombe a 20 year old farmer of Ceduna South Australia plane was shot down just west of Verdun in France. They had been intercepted by a German night fighter after a bombing raid in Germany. All 7 aircrew were killed as the plane crashed. The local French population were eventually allowed to bury the crew not far from the crash site after 6 days of being prevented by the German Army, and it was those civilians who later advised allied authorities as to the identity and burial location of the crew so the families could be informed.

But it was the lead up and the weeks following the D-Day Invasion in June 1944 when over half the Australian casualties of 622 SQN were sustained as the now Lancaster's Bombers flew low level sorties over Normandy and France in support of the allied ground forces – many of their missions to destroy German Armour and troop convoys being sent by Hitler to repel the invasion forces.

The last Australian FSGT Graham Conley was killed just two months before the cessation of hostilities in Europe in March 1945 when his Lancaster was hit by flak and shot down over Cologne - he was 21. FSGT Conley was from Sydney and was the wireless operator. Witnesses advised that the plane went down without parachutes being seen.

Tonight we honour those Australians killed flying in this RAF Heavy Bomber Squadron, some with no known graves.

Lest we forget

I thank you all for attending tonight and ask you be upstanding for the unveiling of the Honour Board and the dedication by our Warrant Officer with the Airmen's Prayer.

We will end this ceremony with the playing of the Last Post, a Minutes Silence, Rouse and the Australian National Anthem.