

Leonard Thomas Archard
102 (Ceylon) Squadron

This article is written in honour of an uncle, Leonard Thomas Archard, whom I never got to know.

Leonard Archard was one of nearly 58,000 crew from Bomber Command who made the ultimate sacrifice during WWII. Born in Poplar, East London on 24th December 1924, he was the third born of four siblings. My mother, Margaret, was the eldest and she served in the W.A.A.F. Next in line was brother Fred who became a Petty Officer in the Royal Navy in command of a landing craft tank around the time of D Day on 6 June 1944. He was the last of the four siblings to pass away in March 2022, aged 100, he would have been one of the last to receive birthday wishes from Her Majesty the Queen and last but not least the youngest of the four, Ronald (Ronnie) who was too young to serve at the time but would later serve in the RAF.

Lenny as he was known by his family enlisted on 23rd April 1943 and qualified as an air gunner on November 27th during that same year. This date has much relevance to myself as I was born on November 27th, 1952, during the big fog in London. This event was recently highlighted in a tv documentary.

Lenny's initial air gunner training took place on the Isle of Man at 11 Air Gunnery School, RAF Andreas, moving onto 10 O.T.U. RAF Stanton Harcourt, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, where their crew would be awarded 'Best All-Round Crew' on number 95 course in March 1944. The training aircraft were Anson's and Whitley's and they finally moved to RAF Rufforth, Yorkshire to convert to flying the Halifax in C Flight at the 1663 OCU in May 1944.

At the beginning of June 1944, he and his crew were posted as operational onto 102 Squadron. The crew only survived for some three weeks! After a familiarisation Circuit and Landings as shown in his log on 2nd June followed by a bombing practice flight on 3rd June. Their first mission in anger was an attack on the Boulogne defences with 6500lb bomb load on the 5th of June in a Halifax III G for 'George', piloted by their Captain, F/Lt. Treasure who would be promoted to acting Squadron Leader later.

The next day, D Day 6th June 1944, at 00.55 hours they were tasked with bombing Maisy Gun positions along the French coast, with an 11,000 lb bomb load. In his is log it states (Invasion Started). Then later the same day at 22.20 hours they took off for a trip to St Lo flying at 1,800 feet, his comment in his log this time showing the words (Low Enough).

The 8th of June saw the marshalling yards at Alencon attacked with 6,500lb bomb load but diverted to Lisset on return showing a night flight of just over five hours. They then returned to Pocklington on 9th June, in the log (Good Show) written.

On 22nd June, an operational flight dropping 1800lb sea mines (gardening) on the port of Brest (Not spuds) was written in the Log Book.

Not shown in his log, the Squadron records show a mission on 24th June to Noyenne-en-Chausee so we cannot be sure if he was a participant in this raid or just forgot to enter the log as this was the day before his death.

Their final mission is not entered in his Log Book, only the words 'Death Presumed 25th June 1944, but the end came on this date when attacking a V1 flying bomb site at Montorgueil, France with several other squadrons when a fatal accident happened, causing the destruction of two aircraft when the formations were on the final bomb run, Lenny and his 102 Squadron. Halifax III MZ753 DY-M. The other destroyed aircraft 77 Squadron. Halifax III LL549 KN-L.

This was a daylight attack where some 100 Halifax aircraft left on what the Americans called 'milk runs' (short duration and distance).

Approaching the target at 16,000 feet in stacked formation a 10 Squadron machine from Melbourne let go of his payload of bombs too soon, having appeared to have over flown the aircraft below, one of the 500lb bombs dropped and impacted the aircraft below and removed a wing at the root which fell and destroyed the third aircraft below it. Witness reports state that there was a very large explosion and what was left of the two aircraft, and their broken structures fell out of control to the ground near to the village of Fontaine Etalon, part of the region of The Pas de Calais, MZ753 DY-M from Pocklington falling in the wooded area whilst LL549 KN-L from Elvington fell on open ground.



Both of the crews are buried in the church grounds in Fontaine-Etalon, along the south wall and this is a Commonwealth War Graves site.

As with most incidents such as this, a policy of silence would normally have prevailed to maintain morale for the other crews during war time. A sad epitaph is that one of Lenny's crew members, Derrek Sykes was due to be married the following day also their target had been attacked and bombed and made inoperable several days beforehand by American aircraft. This information never reached the RAF Squadrons involved until after they were on their way.

As an outcome of this tragic incident, the RAF reviewed its daylight formation bombing tactics and these were changed to prevent possible further accidents.

Addendum

The first visit by the family took place in July 1993 when my late parents, my brother and I went by ferry via Folkestone to Bolougne and drove to the town of Hesdin and from there found our way to the small village of Fontaine-Etalon to pay our respects with flowers laid at the grave. Since then, several other members of the family have visited, including Lenny's brother Ron and Ron's daughter Bernice and her husband Gary. Ron, along with his wife *Marion* helped to compile an extensive portfolio of information/pictures whilst also contacting Lenny's crew members' families. They have all shared any relevant information and pictures which has been of comfort. My late mother also provided much additional information. I am now the custodian of this portfolio which is to be bequeathed to another member of the family on my own passing.



I gained an interest from an early age in World War II and military aviation/history because of my mother's service and that of her siblings. The stories I grew up with sparked that interest so when I retired from work, I sought out a local museum/aerodrome which was part of the Home Defence network during the Great War and, I volunteer there two days a week to carry out maintenance, minor building works and ongoing development (see Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome in the county of Essex). www.stowmaries.org.uk

This aerodrome still has an active grass air strip and has several events of interest taking place during the year.

I hope the above will be of interest to 102 Squadron Association members.

Albert James Cattell