

THE LANCASTER BOMBER

The Lancaster Bomber is easy to see in the entrance to Bomber Command Hall. You can look at the Lancaster Bomber in a general sense and there are also some stories about the Lancaster that we have on display here and the missions it took part in.

Lancaster

- The Lancaster was the best heavy bomber the RAF had during the Second World War.
- The crew of a Lancaster were very close. They stuck together on the ground as well as in the air and they all depended on each other for survival.
- The 7 man crew was made up of:
 - Pilot
 - Navigator
 - Flight Engineer
 - Wireless (Radio) Operator
 - Bomb Aimer
 - 2 Gunners (one in the middle turret and one in the rear turret).
- The rear gunner had the worst position sitting in the Perspex gun turret at the rear of the plane. They had to sit through long flights on their own in the cold. They had to wear oxygen masks to breathe and they were linked to the rest of the crew only by earphones. The fate of the crew was very much down to how alert both gunners were.
- Being on a bomber team was a very dangerous job; a Lancaster was only expected to stay in combat for 3 weeks over Europe before being shot down. In fact half of all the Lancaster's that were delivered during the war were lost on operations. In human terms, 55,000 members of Bomber Command were lost. The average age of a bomber crew was only 22 so a lot of young men lost their lives serving their country.
- Lancaster Bombers were used for many different jobs. They made bomb raids on armament factories, chemical plants, military and industrial sites, U-boat pens and German cities. They were also used at the end of the war to collect prisoners of war.

Whilst you are in the Bomber Hall take the time to watch the film about the Dambusters.
(The entrance to the Dambusters display is located next to the Wellington Bomber).

Dambusters

The mission the Lancaster Bombers are most famous for is the Dambuster raid in 1943. Our Lancaster didn't take part in these raids but many others like it did. The task was to break 3 dams in Germany so the water in the dams would cause huge destruction down stream of the dams. Two of the dams were destroyed.

They broke the dams using a new type of weapon called the bouncing bomb. The bomb was shaped like a drum and would spin when it was dropped from the plane. It then skimmed across the water (like you skim stones at the beach) and when it hit the dam it would roll down the wall where it would explode and cause the most damage.

Activity

Find the replica bouncing bomb in the Dambuster display. How is this different to other bombs that are displayed around the museum? Think about shape, design and function.

Stories about our Lancaster

The Lancaster we have in the museum flew 137 missions, which is very impressive considering the average number of missions a Lancaster flew was only 21! If you have a look at the plane you can see lots of bombs painted on the side. There are 137 of them, each one representing 1 mission.

Only one other allied bomber flew more missions (140) than the one we have here so it is very special.

By the time it had completed its last mission our Lancaster had flown operationally for at least 795 hours and had dropped 466 tons of bombs.

Mid air collision

On its 96th mission in 1943 this Lancaster collided with another bomber whilst it was flying over the target area. Luckily both planes involved made it back home.

The Lancaster had dropped its bombs and closed the bomb doors when it was picked up by German search lights. The pilot made a lot of corkscrew turns to try and escape out of the light but it failed. There was lots of heavy anti aircraft fire and black smoke all around them. When the flak stopped the crew still weren't safe because it meant that the fighter planes would be coming in to attack. The pilot of our Lancaster went in to a steep dive and they finally lost the searchlights. It was when they were climbing out of this dive that the plane lurched; they had hit another plane in their attempts to escape the enemy. Eventually the pilot regained control of the plane and they slowly made their way back towards home. No one knew how much damage had been caused and the crew even prepared to bale out. After a difficult flight they managed to get back to England where they inspected the damage and found that 5 ft of one of the wing tips was missing!

Naming

This Lancaster has had two names during its life. Each Lancaster in a squadron is given a letter, and as this one was given the letter Q it became known as Queenie. Later in 1943 Queenie was moved to a new squadron and was given a new letter and from then on was known as S-Sugar.

Enemy attack

In 1944 piloted by M G Johnson our Lancaster was flying a mission to raid railway yards used by the enemy in Northern France. The crew spotted an enemy fighter plane that was rapidly closing in on them but the pilot managed to shake the fighter off. Johnson thought the Lancaster had been hit; he heard the bullets hitting the wing. It wasn't until they got back to base that they realised they hadn't been hit at all, the noise they had heard had actually been the rivets that were supposed to be holding the plane together popping out! Needless to say the Lancaster was taken in for repairs.

Prisoners of war

In April and May 1945 this Lancaster was given a new job, it was sent to pick up prisoners of war and fly them back home. This Lancaster was the first aircraft to undertake such a mercy mission.

Follow Up Activity

Imagine that you were one of the crew of a Lancaster Bomber taking part in an operation, e.g. the Dambuster raid.

Write a letter to your family describing your experience on that day.