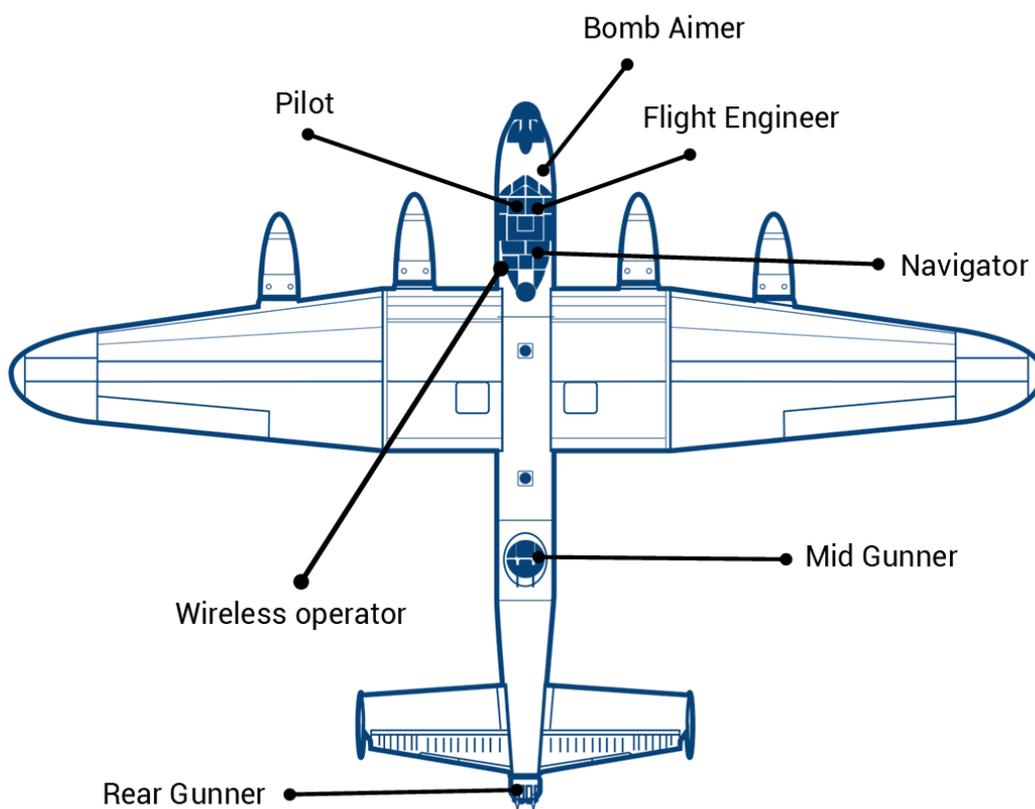


Lancaster crew

Most Lancaster crews consisted of seven men who had to work together to undertake the mission given to them and return home safely.



Pilot

The pilot of a Lancaster crew had the most responsibility. He had to show and install confidence in the six other men of his crew and fly the aircraft. He was automatically captain (regardless of the rank held by him or the other members of his crew). He had to show leadership but also take advice from those on board. Through example he led his men undertaking dangerous missions and worked on returning them and his aircraft home safely. The captain was located in the cockpit with good visibility all around him so he would know what he was flying his men and machine into. Sitting next to the pilot forward of a blackout curtain in their own cramped concentrated world was the flight engineer.

Flight engineer

Introduced in 1942, the flight engineer was expected to know his aircraft inside and out and be able to cope with any emergency through either mechanical faults or enemy action. A flight engineer was practically minded and able to make split second decisions. A delay

could result in the crash of the aircraft and injury or death for the crew. He had to monitor full-time the four-engines via some twenty gauges, propeller and throttle controls as well as the fuel and electrical systems. He also assisted the pilot when necessary which could include flying the aircraft if the pilot was killed or wounded. In front of him and the pilot crouched in his position at the very front of the Lancaster was the bomb aimer.

Bomb aimer

With the introduction of the four-engine bomber and the growing complexity of the observer role, it was decided in 1942 to separate it out between the bomb aimer and navigator.

The bomb aimer had a dual role. He did not just release bombs at the correct time and allotted target. He was also responsible for ensuring the safety of the aircraft by acting as a look-out for enemy aircraft and manning the Browning machine guns located in the front gun turret. Training consisted of high level and low-level bombing runs and gunnery skills. Night familiarisation flying over blacked out wartime Britain was also key. A bomb aimer had to have excellent map tracking and navigational skills and would work closely with the navigator pre-flight. He checked the bombs to ensure the correct type had been loaded pre-flight and signed for them. He also programmed the bombing mechanical computer to ensure the correct settings for the bomb load and weather conditions.

Navigator

Sat behind the pilot in his curtained off compartment, lit by one simple angle-poised lamp was the navigator. Next to the pilot he was the busiest man in the Lancaster. He would be constantly working, plotting the course of the aircraft, and adjusting this if poor weather or enemy action called for a change of plans. A navigator had to be adaptable and the pilot relied on them to find the target and bring the aircraft and men safely home. His radio communications to the pilot would be restricted to simple directions. His tools were not bombs or machine guns but a chart, protractor, dividers, ruler and pencil and as the war went on radar equipment and analogue computers.

Wireless operator

The wireless operator sat near the navigator and his job was also a multi-purpose one. He was responsible for monitoring the wireless and communications. Part of this role would involve him activating the Identification Friend or Foe signal and giving false signals to the enemy to help suppress searchlights and the constant terror of flak. He had to check the bomb bay to ensure it was operating correctly and act as look-out through the observation dome directing the pilot and gunners in the event of enemy aircraft attack. When a bombing run was in progress, he would spend most of his time there. He also had to have a working knowledge of the navigator's role so he could take over if necessary and was expected to give first aid to members of the crew.

Air gunner

The air gunner was located in the last third of the aircraft. His world was not the blacked-out interior of the Lancaster but the small Perspex mid-upper turret – vulnerable to night fighters and flak. This bubble contained two Browning 0.303in machine guns each with 1000 rounds of ammunition. When strapped into the hammock-type seat the air gunner could rotate this through 360 degrees to enable a wide field of fire to defend the Lancaster. Experienced air gunners would often remove a section of the Perspex for a better view and to combat the misting that could occur. The air gunner was recognised as a specialist in his field.

Air gunner: 'Tail-End Charlie'

At the rear of the Lancaster in the most exposed position of all was the rear gunner nicknamed 'Tail-End Charlie'. Like his fellow air gunner he had undergone training in areas of air gunnery, bullet trajectory, deflection and aircraft recognition. His location was in a small Perspex bubble in the rear gun turret armed with four Browning machine guns. Maintaining night vision was vital in his position. Other experienced gunners would have shared the advice not to stare at fires or bright lights; to never fire unless seen and to always look for aircraft making odd movements as these could be enemy fighters. Of all the positions on the Lancaster 'Tail-End Charlie' was the least likely to survive due in part to being physically separate from his parachute.