

## “Lest we forget”



Today **76 years ago**, the 1944 strategic night bombing offensive started off with yet another raid on **Berlin** in the night of **1 January 1944**. 28 out of the 421 Lancasters dispatched were lost. The spearhead of the bomber stream, was first detected by the German radar at **01.10 hrs.** about 130 km west of the **Dutch** coast, and accurately plotted from that point onwards.

The take-off was planned for mid-evening but it was delayed due to doubts about the weather and it only began around midnight. This delay also caused a change in the outbound route, planned as a wide northerly approach over **Denmark** and the **Baltic**. The bombers were now ordered to fly the much used direct route across **Holland**.

The Lancaster **JB280 LQ-K** of the RCAF 405 squadron took off after this long delay as part of the second group of *Pathfinders* on **2 January 1944 at 00.23 Hrs.** from **Gransden Lodge**, west of **Cambridge** England. The German controller was not deceived by a Mosquito ‘spoof’ raid on **Hamburg**, and German fighters were directed on to the bomber stream at an early stage and were particularly active en-route to **Berlin**.

From the night's operation a total of 31 aircraft (3.16%); 31 Lancasters were struck off charge, including 8 of the 81 despatched Pathfinders, few losses were suffered over **Berlin**, only 2 bombers being shot down by fighters there, and the local Flak was probably restricted to the height at which it could fire and only shot down 2 bombers over **Berlin**. From these 31 aircraft there were a total of 217 casualties; 183 airmen died, 33 became Prisoners of War and 1 evaded.

On its route to their target **Berlin** the Canadian pilot Flying Officer **Thomas Henry Donnelly** and his crew, flying the Lancaster **JB280 LQ-K** were attacked by the German night fighter pilot Leutnant **Friedrich Potthast** flying a Bf 110 of the IV./NJG1 while the Lancaster **JB280 LQ-K** was bombed up with one 4000 lb. HC Cookie and four 1000 lb. MC bombs and with high octane fuel on board left for 7 hours of flying.

The Lancaster **JB280 LQ-K** and its crew crashed at *02.10 Hrs.* close to **Schoonebeek** in the **Netherlands** after a violent midair explosion caused by the attack of the German night fighter killing the entire crew of 7 instantly and shredded the Lancaster.

**Berlin** was almost completely cloud-covered, and the *Pathfinders* experienced much difficulty in marking the target properly, both marking and bombing were carried out almost blindly. Bomber Command could make no assessment of the results; bombing was scattered and relatively ineffective mostly in the southern districts of **Berlin**.

The German **Berlin** damage report says that there was scattered bombing, mainly in the southern parts of the city. A large number of bombs fell in the **Grunewald**, an extensive wooded area in the south-west of **Berlin**. Only 21 houses and 1 industrial building were destroyed, with 79 people being killed, including 25 in a panic rush at the entrance of a public air shelter in the **Neukölln** district. A high-explosive bomb hit a lock on an important canal and stopped shipping at that area for several days.



T.H. Donnelly  
Pilot  
Canada  
KIA

L.G.R. Miller  
Flight Engineer  
England  
KIA

A.J. Salaba  
Navigator  
Canada  
KIA

B.S.J. West  
Wireless Operator  
England  
KIA

W.L.J. Clark  
Air Bomber  
Canada  
KIA

R.E. Watts  
Air Gunner  
England  
KIA

R. Zimmer  
Air Gunner  
Canada  
KIA

Let's keep the remembrance alive of what Flying Officer **Thomas Henry Donnelly**, Sergeant **Leslie George Robert Miller**, Flying Officer **Alexander Jerry Salaba**, Sergeant **Brian Sidney James West**, Flight Sergeant **William Leonard John Clark**, Sergeant **Ronald Everest Watts** and Sergeant **Ronald Zimmer** did for our freedom.

All the crew members of the Lancaster **JB280 LQ-K** are buried in the Commonwealth War Graves section of the Municipal Cemetery at **Schoonebeek** in the **Netherlands**.

**Rest in Peace.**