

Obituaries

Sergeant Ronald (Doc) Watson



Sergeant "Doc" Watson arrived on 100 Squadron on July the 20th 1944, the bomb aimer in Flying Officer Lynton Bell's crew, which included no less than four Canadians. This was just after D-Day of course, and operations by Bomber Command in support of the Allied ground forces in France were in full swing. Doc's first trip was in daylight to Villers Bocage-Caumont on the 30th July, to attack German troop positions who were holding up the Allied advance. The Pathfinders dropped yellow skymarkers using OBOE to ensure accuracy and, at 08:35, Doc released his bombload from 3,500 feet, watching them fall into the fast-developing maelstrom below. They were judged to be "bang-on target" as Lynton swung the nose of the Lancaster eastwards to set a course for home.

In a rather unusual departure from the norm, Doc Watson and his pilot and navigator hadn't flown a "second dickie" trip before their first operation, but strangely flew one on their second operation, on the night of the 31st July/1st August 1944. For that trip, to the V-2 flying bomb launch facility at Foret de Nieppe, the entire crew flew with New Zealander - Flying Officer Lee in the driving seat. It is assumed that because the crew's first operation was in daylight they wouldn't need a "second dickie" trip, this consideration being delayed instead until this, their first night operation.

Further trips to oil storage and V-2 flying bomb sites followed as the crew started to build up their operational experience. On the 11th August, in an operation reminiscent of 100's earliest operations in WW1, the crew took part in an operation to Douai railway yards,

although rather than flying in low as those early 100 Squadron crews had done in 1917, Doc released his bombs from 16,000 feet, watching them go down into the "middle of the smoke and dust". The following day the crew went to the submarine pens at Le Pallice, as part of the on-going campaign to destroy the U-Boat fleet. On this operation they were the last-but-one aircraft to bomb. Lynton pushing the nose of the Lancaster down and the throttles "through the gate" to make good their escape from enemy guns as their bombs fell earthwards.

Two days later and Doc once more found himself peering through the bombsight at German troop positions, this time at Falaise, where the Germans were threatening to break through the advancing Allied lines. Another trip down memory lane for 100 Squadron occurred on the 15th of August, when Doc and his crew, along with fifteen other crews, attacked the German airfield at Volkel, which had previously seen aircraft of 100 Squadron in WW1. This airfield was home to the latest scourge of the German night fighter force, the jet-powered ME262, and Doc made good his bomb run, helping to put the airfield out of action for a considerable time.

On the night of the 16th/17th August, Doc and his crew went to a German target for the first time, attacking Stettin. A period of leave followed, before another trip to Germany for Doc on the 25th/26th August 1944. This time though the "gremlins" conspired against them when the starboard outer motor failed a little over an hour after take-off, and the crew were forced to abandon their mission. The last day of August 1944 saw Doc attacking another V-2 launch facility at Raimbert in a precision daylight attack.

September was a mix of daylight operations to France, and night operations to Germany. On the 17th September, Doc and his crew were one of fifteen detailed for an attack on German flak positions at Flushing, on the island of Walcheren. As 100 started to make their attack, the German gunners opened fire with all their might, and at least five of 100's Lancasters received varying degrees of damage. Doc and his crew escaped unscathed, but rather shaken at what had been their first serious encounter with enemy defences.

A few days later, the crew attacked the town and docks at Neuss. By now, they were considered an experienced crew, and were trusted to take new arrivals to the squadron on their "second dickie" trips. On this night, they took two new crewmen for their first taste of operational flying over enemy territory, pilot Dave Robb and navigator Ed Mosure. These two men would later complete a tour with navigator Arthur White, who would go on of course to be our own Association

Historian for many years.

The dangers of providing close air support to Allied troops on the ground were highlighted in September when two operations to Calais to bomb German troop positions were abandoned over the target by the Master Bomber shortly after they had started when smoke and dust made it impossible to bomb without risking killing Allied troops on the ground. Doc and his crew were relieved to hear that although they had been amongst the unlucky crews who'd had to return with their bombs on both occasions, the trips would still count towards their operational total of 30.

In October, with the Allied advance in mainland Europe now well underway, Bomber Command turned its attention back to Germany and, on the 12th, Doc and his crew went to Fort Frederik Hendrik on the River Scheldt to bomb German gun batteries. This was the second trip in two days to this target, that on the 11th being called off in the target area by the Master Bomber when low cloud made target identification impossible. This was in fact Doc and his crew's 30th operation, and they would normally have been "screened" from further operational flying.

The crew stayed on, however, for a huge daylight attack on Duisburg on the 14th October. "Operation Hurricane" was planned by "Bomber" Harris himself, to show the Luftwaffe that the Allies now had mastery of the air over Germany and could attack with impunity. At dawn on the 14th, no less than 1,013 Bomber Command aircraft took off from their airfields in the UK to attack the city. Although they encountered tremendous flak, they pressed home their attack, with Doc letting go of his high explosive bombload at 08:48. An attack by the American Eighth Air Force followed the Bomber Command effort, involving 1,251 B-17s and B-24s. Doc had returned from his trip to Duisburg shortly before midday on the 14th, and was surprised to see his name on the Battle Order again for yet another operation to Duisburg that night, as part of an attacking force of 1,005 Bomber Command aircraft. He was airborne again shortly after midnight, and guided his bombs onto the target a few minutes before 3:30 in the morning. Doc noted that he could see the fires in Duisburg burning from 100 miles away on the return flight.

On the night of the 15th/16th October 1944, Doc completed his 33rd, and final operation with 100 Squadron. Taking off at 17:35 in the evening for Wilhelmshaven, he dropped his bombs from 19,000 feet at 19:48 that evening, landing back at Waltham at 21:35, his tour completed. Doc would spend nearly a month at Waltham whilst the authorities decided what to do with him, but on the 14th November,

together with his pilot Flying Officer Bell and navigator Flying Officer Shewring, he was posted to the RCAF Depot at Warrington for repatriation to Canada.

Doc was born on 4th March 1922 and grew up in Hamilton, Ontario. As a teenager and young man he became a very keen cyclist, but this activity was interrupted by World War II and his desire to follow his older brother Charlie into the air force. Charlie was a fitter at RAF Leeming on one of the two Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons which formed part of No. 6 Bomber Group. In letters home, Charlie urged his brother to do well at high school so that he could enlist as aircrew. Doc did so and, after training and conversion to the Lancaster, joined 100 Squadron.

He briefly left the RCAF after the war but soon re-enlisted and continued his military career for many years including serving at a NATO Headquarters near Paris and retired as a Chief Warrant Officer. After his military service, he worked as a microfilm archivist for Department of Public Works and the city of Ottawa. Doc retired to Victoria where he returned to his love for cycling. He was an active member of Sidney Velo and numerous other clubs that inspired him to participate in long distance tours across the continent as well as New Zealand, Cuba and Hawaii. Doc was a keen supporter of the Association coming over for a number of reunions including the 95th in 2012, when he had a chance to reminisce with Ron Clark.



over