



All text from **One of The Many** by Russell McKay, which documents the life and action of the 420 Squadron flying out of Tholthorpe, Yorkshire, England. Rus McKay and his crew completed thirty-eight operational flights between January 26, 1944 and August 2, 1944. This was at the height of the Battle of Berlin, and through the June 6 D-Day operation. For him, being posted to 6 Group, the all-Canadian group, was the ultimate honour.

420 Squadron. Jan 30/44. Tholthorpe

TIME CARRIED FORWARD: 39:15 09:30

DATE	HOUR	AIRCRAFT TYPE AND No.	PILOT	DUTY	REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	FLYING TIMES		
						DAY	NIGHT	
2/2/44	16:30	HALIFAX B	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CHECK-DUAL	1:30		
3/2/44		T.	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CIRCUITS-LANDINGS. SOLO	3:00		
7/2/44		V.	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CROSS COUNTRY (EARLY RTN)	1:10		
7/2/44		V.	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CROSS COUNTRY (EARLY RTN)	:15		
7/2/44		T	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CROSS COUNTRY		4:20	
8/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	BULLSEYE		5:05	
11/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	BULLSEYE		5:35	
12/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CROSS COUNTRY		3:35	
15/2/44		Q	F/O CALDER	AIR-GUNNER	OPS BERLIN. (LANDED HETHEL)		7:00	
20/2/44		Q	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	HETHEL TO BASE.	1:00		
21/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CROSS COUNTRY		6:00	
24/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	OPS SCHWEINFURT (DIVERGED)		7:45	
25/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	RETURN FROM DIVERSION	1:10		
25/2/44		V	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	OPS AUGSBURG (DIVERGED)		7:20	
28/2/44		V.	F/S LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	RETURN FROM DIVERSION	1:00		
CERTIFIED CORRECT						HOURS DAY	HOURS NITE	56:20 54:10
Sgt. R. A. Anderson S/L						56:20	54:10	
O.C. "B" FLIGHT						SUMMARY FEB. 1944	DAY	NIGHT
#420 (R.C.A.F.) SQUADRON.						TRAINING MONTHLY	9:05	24:25
						OPERATIONAL "		22:05
						TOTAL "	9:05	46:30
						TOTAL TIME....	56:20	54:10

From Flying Log Book of Sgt. R. A. Anderson, Air Gunner, R.C.A.F.

February 7

Flew a night cross-country to Inverness, Scotland, to base, and Stirling to base, in all six hours and forty-five minutes. It was a beautiful moonlit night. Loch Lommond stood out very silent and picturesque. What a grand view.

February 8

Flew a Bull's Eye, simulated operation; base to Holbeach, Newcastle, Achlington, Hexam, Spalding, Southhold and Bedford to base – five hours and thirty minutes. It was practice for our fighters in interception, the searchlight crews and bomber control. We arrived home in the early dawn.

February 11

On Bull's Eye tonight another training exercise with bomber command, new crews and training command. I was only airborne three hours and thirty-five minutes. Had engine trouble. Oil line broke on starboard outer. Told bomb aimer to feather the propeller, that is press button to stop blades rotating. He feathered it and unfeathered it by holding too long. The swinging propeller gave very high excess drag. The aircraft commenced to shake and shudder. The bomb aimer went berserk in the cockpit next to me – yelling and shouting. My engineer, Barry Ashby, a powerfully-built former hard rock miner from Northern Ontario, took him out of the seat and hauled him to the rear area. My starboard inner temperatures were rising. I called for emergency landing at base – an aircraft pulled onto the runway as I made my approach. I was forced to go round again with that swinging propeller giving heavy drag. I managed to make the circuit at about two hundred feet and came in with a heavy bounce. My rear gunner, Gerry Pelletier, was first out of the aircraft and he promptly kissed the good earth. It was a close call and air force slang referred to this type of flying as dicing.

(I never saw or heard of that bomb aimer again. My engineer, Ashby, assisted me henceforth, locking controls or feathering an engine, and a new bomb aimer was added to the crew, Ray Irwin.)

February 12

Tonight we flew another long cross-country flight over 10/10 cloud. How peaceful it was, and already last evening's flying forgotten.

February 15

All day preparing for operations. Long lines of trolley trains emerged from the bomb dump. Loaded with one thousand pounds of heavy explosives and boxes of incendiary, fire bombs, pulled by a small David Brown tractor and a Waaf driver. Feverish activity by the armourers at every aircraft dispersal. Petrol trucks were fuelling each aircraft. All six tanks in each wing were loaded with 1,880 gallons. It is a long trip tonight. Spent most of the morning at the aircraft, checking and re-checking, with the ground crew thoroughly testing all equipment. Our aircraft was well hidden on a dispersal sheltered by an old hedgerow of hawthorn. We usually reached it by our trusty bicycles during the day. The aircraft dispersals were scattered and well camouflaged by the natural topography. This was a protection from enemy intruders. It meant much exercise for us to reach the aircraft. Bicycles were handy and convenient. The entire station seemed to move more on two wheels than trucks, but of course when heavily loaded with parachutes and equipment, we were delivered by the Waaf driver in tarpaulin-covered trucks.

At briefing, we learned the target to be Berlin, and our target aircraft factories were to be marked by the Pathfinders, with an MC to direct traffic. Bomber command was sending about one thousand aircraft with diversionary attacks by the Mosquitos on southern German cities and a small raid on the Ruhr. Our trip was one thousand, one hundred and fifty miles and we were routed to miss the heavily defended areas.

The met man reported the weather over England and the North Sea: Thick cloud up to ten thousand feet with some thunderheads to fifteen thousand or higher. Most likely we would be in snow, sleet and rain. We were to keep a sharp watch for a likely diversion on our return. Yorkshire weather would become worse. However, over the target we could expect about 5/10 cloud. I marshalled the aircraft well back of the take-off runway. Waited my turn for take off. This was the most nerve-wracking experience. Waiting take off. The padres, R.C., Protestant and Rabbi, made the rounds on their bicycles, speaking cheerfully to each crew member. Before take off, nerves were taut, adrenalin pouring through my blood at this stage of the operation, much like an athlete before a championship game. Time to start engines for warm-up. Once in my seat and busy with the warm-up procedure, I felt relaxed and cool once more. The deafening roar of aircraft after aircraft, sixty seconds apart as they moved down the runway and climbed into the night. The whole heavens shook to the deep-throated roar of squadron after squadron as we took off. I entered cloud at four hundred feet climbing on track. It was rough and turbulent as we climbed out over the North Sea, battling our way through sleet and snow. I started to take on a heavy load of ice. The controls became sluggish. I had to lose altitude and get below icing conditions. The ice broke off with a loud crashing. It was an eerie feeling. Again I climbed slowly and managed to get through to cloud tops. The weather over the North Sea was appalling but improved as the enemy coast appeared. The bomber force was greeted by heavy flak. How pretty it looked in the distance. How deadly. My navigator, Andy Anderson, managed a good fix and determined we were on track and ETA. Some were not so lucky. They were coned by searchlights and flak poured into the cones. We crossed a very wide band of searchlights. The Kamhuber searchlight defenses were placed near the enemy coast protecting Germany. This huge belt of searchlights must be flown through both going and coming. It was quite unnerving to fly through this and I felt very naked. I warned the crew to be doubly alert for fighters. Heavy flak was poured at us all along our track. It seemed endless. Bremen put on a terrific show as some of our bombers strayed over it. We bombed from twenty-two thousand and five hundred feet on indicator markers. We carried five thousand pounds of HE bombs with incendiary fire bombs. A tremendous barrage of flak greeted us. The smell of cordite was heavy in the air. Huge black puffs of smoke spotted the sky. A huge curtain of ack-ack fire was thrown at us. Aircraft were falling out of the sky in front, behind and at our sides. Fighters were creating havoc among the bomber stream. Bomb Aimer Ray Irwin took over and directed our attack: "Straight and level – bomb doors open. Skipper left – left – steady – steady – right – steady – steady." Bombs gone as bomb aimer pressed the tit. The aircraft leaped skyward as the bombs dropped away. I pushed the control column forward, moved throttles forward and felt our sturdy Hally increase speed rapidly. This inferno was too hot for my liking. "Nav course for home?" Huge fires were burning fiercely. Smoke and flames could be seen for miles. I cruised at the top of the cloud and through some wretched weather. Wireless Operator Bill Lynn to skipper: "Base is fogbound, ordered to land East Anglia at Hethel." "Nav give us course to Hethel." "Wilco skipper." Engineer to skipper: "Petrol running low, need to conserve every drop of petrol we can." "Engineer keep log very carefully." "Nav I'm throttling air speed back to one hundred and eighty m.p.h. and reducing altitude slowly."

Nav to skipper: "Hethel is an American army airfield near the Wash. No hills near." Landed safely at Hethel after seven hours and ten minutes struggling with grim, winter storms most of the way to Berlin and return. Forty-five of the bomber command failed to get home. We had a few cups of petrol left. Our base had us reported missing and our bags were all packed and stored. It was an error, of course, and we were enjoying American hospitality at the American air base, Hethel.

Hethel air base was the home of U.S. Army Air Corps, Fortress and Liberators. These great birds were a vivid contrast to our aircraft. They were shining white and bristled with guns. Heavy 0.5 to our light 0.3 Brownings and our drab olive and black colours. The American flyers delighted in showing their aircraft and telling of their experiences on daylight operations. How youthful they seemed, like

college kids. Enthusiastic and keen. When I saw the great strength of their air force first hand, I knew the war was won. It was the first gut feeling I had and each time I saw the mighty formations, I would get the feeling again. They were fresh and had the power. Thank goodness for the Americans, their military power and generous help to the Allies.

The contrast between Hethel and our base was like the difference between day and night. The barracks were warm and comfortable. The bed was a bed with a mattress and cover. One slept in comfort – like home. The most joyful difference was at the mess. The food was excellent and there was a choice of menu. Couldn't believe it – even had doughnuts and apple pie. My sweet tooth delighted in it and I gorged myself at each meal with steak or pork chops and all the trimmings. Imagine milk, and coffee that tasted like coffee.

We were fog bound and grounded. It was paradise to us. What better place, and I cheered for the duff weather. Spent three wonderful days enjoying life on this base. An American rear gunner insisted on giving me a silk section from his parachute. It saved his life when his bomber and another collided in the circuit on return from an operation. He was the only survivor of the two crews. It is a much-treasured souvenir of Hethel and Americans at the base.

Weather cleared a bit at Tholthorpe. I flew home above tree tops, hedge-hopping. Lucky to land before fog closed down all flying.

We had been reported missing and our meagre belongings packed. It was a scramble to reclaim our bags. So ended operation No. Two on Berlin.

The padre of our squadron was a tall, handsome, oldish flight lieutenant in his forties. He had a smiling and kindly face and always a humorous joke for the roughest occasion. I never missed Sunday church, when not flying, in the little chapel. Air crew loved this man, perhaps partly because we received no sermons on our many sins. His duty was heavy, no matter how late at night or early in the morning, he saw each aircraft airborne and awaited the return. The missing airmen's meagre belongings were gathered and sent home to loved ones, first carefully screening out any extraneous matter and disposing of it. This was a sad duty to perform. The padre's office was usually stocked with old blue kitbags gathered from the night's operations. Casualties and losses were high. The enemy took its toll as duly reported in the press each day but losses on return and take-off were heavy too.

The padre was kept busy also trying to visit the sick and maimed at the hospital. The hospitals were packed with casualties, and the convalescent homes too. Our padre was one busy man and his work was far beyond the call of duty.

F/O Damguard and crew returned to Tholthorpe having missed the diversion message and tried to land. Made several overshoots trying to land in the fog – crashed on landing killing W/O Whale (WOP), and Sgt. Downey (Ag.) – other crew members injured including pilot.

February 20

Sunday. Our crew was preparing all day for op again tonight. Briefing showed the target Stuttgart in southern Germany near the Alps, and Switzerland. The weather, as usual, was grim with snow, icing and cumulus nimbus (thunderheads) rising to twenty-five thousand feet. It was to be very rough battling the elements. We were loaded with five thousand pounds of incendiary bombs. Flew south over England, climbing on track. At twenty thousand feet at the enemy coast, I discovered troubles with our oxygen supply – breathing was more difficult. Our engineer, Barry Ashby, discovered a broken line to the oxygen regulator and our supply exhausted. I had to decide quickly either to fly to

the target at low level or return to base. There was little chance of survival by going ahead. We could easily be picked off by a fighter or shot down by light flak. Better to return with the crew and aircraft and fly another op.

I returned early after four hours, through winter storms. I was met at the dispersal by the Wingco, MacIntosh, engineering staff officer, and ground crew specialist. The Winco demanded brusquely, why the early return. They swarmed over the aircraft checking out oxygen equipment. Luckily for me, our reasons for early return were sound.

One of our squadron crews returned early without a bona fide reason. The pilot was labelled lack of moral fibre (LMF) and sent to a detention camp for disciplinary action. He told me that the bugler blasted them from bed at 6 a.m. The inmates ran to the parade square for an hour of continual physical exercise - ran to breakfast. Did drill with packs on their backs till noon hour, more drill and obstacle course routines in the afternoon. Ran to the evening meal. Two hours more pack drill in the evening before bed. This physical exercise was repeated each day for six weeks. He returned to the squadron a trim one hundred and sixty pounds with a loss of sixty pounds from his old weight. He told me that no way would he return early from any op – shortly afterwards the same skipper was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), on a flight to the Ruhr. I was disgusted to lose credit for an op but off early to bed at 2 a.m. and lucky not to be labelled LMF.

February 21

Surprise of surprises my crew was given today off. We lost no time heading for nearby York and our favourite headquarters off station, Betty's Bar. It was the favourite rendezvous of all air crew from the many squadrons in the area and 6 Bomber Group predominated. It was a chance to meet old friends from training command days. It was good food, good drink, singing and merry making. Half-and-half English beer, a mild, watery liquid, was consumed in quantity by all. It gave our kidneys a thorough cleansing but it seemed mild compared to our stronger Canadian brews. I was saddened to learn of the many pilots and crews of operational training days already missing. "Gone for a Burton" was the air crew slang, or vernacular of the day. A few more beers, our buddies were toasted and forgotten for now. We found a nearby dance hall packed to capacity by servicemen, girls and civilians. Danced till the wee hours with Yorkshire lasses, friendly, spirited, youthful girls who had the ability to make any serviceman forget war. Found our hotel room and slept between soft, clean sheets on a soft bed. A deep slumber, early rise and back to the squadron to see my name posted on the flight board for operation tonight. Prepared all day. Briefed for op to Frankfurt. Lined up for take-off. Ops scrubbed at last moment. Yellow flares from control. Weather over target terrible, reason given. Aircraft returned to dispersal.

February 24

All day preparing for ops tonight to Happy Valley, Schweinfurt in the Ruhr. Our target: ball-bearing factories. As usual, the weather over Yorkshire was miserable, low banks of fog and cloud. The met man said the weather would be clear over Germany. He was right again, it was a clear, cloudless sky. There were five hundred and sixty-two aircraft on target. Luckily I was in the second wave and bombing from twenty-three thousand feet. A good position to be in. The first wave seemed to get hit hardest by flak. I always felt when the bombs started to drop, accuracy of the anti-aircraft gunners diminished - at least that's what I told myself. The Pathfinders marked the factory with red Ti markers. The MC urged us to bomb in the centre of the cluster. Had a good run up on the target despite bursts of flak all about us. Many searchlights (it the target area. It was a spectacular scene in vivid technicolour. Dropped our three thousand, six hundred and twenty pounds of incendiary bombs. Huge fires were burning fiercely as we turned for home base. A great black column of smoke and fires could be seen for miles on our return flight. Home base was fogged under. Diverted to Wing air base north of London, landed at 2:20 a.m., hydraulics unserviceable. Debriefed and found bed in a

chair in the mess at 6 a.m. Awakened at 8 a.m. and flew to home base. Thirty-five bomber command aircraft failed to return from Schweinfurt. Missing F/O Long (Pilot), Sgt. Richardson, Sgt. Gile, W/O Knight, Sgt. Hunt, Sgt. Crowley, Sgt. Bothsill of 420 Squadron.

February 25

Awoke in our miserable steel hut, cold and sweating, my voice a mere squeak. All my crew suffering from severe head colds. Reported to hospital for treatment. Medical officer grounded me. Given pills. Put to bed in hospital and given series of medicines. Squadron on stand down, base snowbound, and later fogbound. Thankful for much needed rest and cure. Activity at hospital not to my liking.

Missing on Augsburg F/O Blakenay (Pilot), F/Sgt. Bessette (2nd Pilot), F/O Patterson, F/O Armston, W/O Bourdet, Sgt. Burgon, Sgt. Oswald, Sgt. Eden.¹

February 28

Back with squadron. Prepared all day for op to Munich. Marshalled aircraft at take-off runway. Scrubbed at dusk as yellow signal flares burst from control tower. Bomber Harris, chief of bomber command, called raid off. Weather too bad over target. Very thankful to get little more rest. Still weak and suffering chills from virus.

DATE	HOUR	AIRCRAFT TYPE AND No.	PILOT	DUTY	REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	FLYING TIMES		
						DAY	NIGHT	
7/3/44	1850	HALIFAX	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	OPS' "LE MANS"		5:15	
11/3/44	1430	"A"	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	FIGHTER AFFILIATION.	:50		
11/3/44	1835	"V"	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	CROSS COUNTRY.		4:35	
24/3/44	1850	"V"	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	OPS' "BERLIN" (D.N.C.O)			
					HYDROLOGICS U/S.		2:35	
26/3/44	2020	"R"	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	'OPS' "ESSEN."		5:00	
30/3/44	2210	"V"	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	'OPS' NURNBERG (LANDED 97 FORG) A/C		7:30	
31/3/44	1025	"V"	WO ^{II} LEONARD	AIR-GUNNER	U FORD TO BASE	1:20		
CERTIFIED CORRECT						SUMMARY MARCH 1944.		2:10 78:05
Sgt. Anderson S/L						DAY	NIGHT	58:30
OC "B" FLIGHT.						TRAINING MONTHLY	2:10 7:10	
#420 (R.C.A.F.) SQUADRON.						OPERATIONAL. "	17:45	
						TOTAL "	2:10 24:55	
						TOTAL TIME...	58:30	78:05

From Flying Log Book of Sgt. R. A. Anderson, Air Gunner, R.C.A.F.

¹ Note: Dad flew on the Augsburg Ops.

March 7

Came home to base from Thorney Island, low flying. Crew map read as P4 compass still unserviceable. Take off was out over the sea. Held my sturdy steed on airbrakes. Revved engines high, released brakes, pushed hard forward on control column, lifted tail and controlled torque by rudders. Our powerful Halifax was airborne three-quarters way down runway at one hundred miles per hour and rapidly gained speed climbing into the fog at five hundred feet. Climbed over London at safe height to miss barrage balloon cables and identify ourself to defenses. Not wise to fly low over London. I picked up the great north road, originally built when the Romans conquered England. It would take us straight to York. Dived below the cloud. Arrived at base in clear weather. Port outer engine leaking oil. Landed to find squadron preparing for ops tonight. Briefed, marshalled aircraft for trip to Le Mans, France. Op scrubbed at dusk². Dance on station tonight. Crew wasted no time doffing battledress and getting to recreation hall.

March 24, 26 & 30

Russell Mckay and crew on-leave in Edinburgh (no diary/book entries). Dad involved in Ops. Berlin, Essen and Nurnberg.

March 24 – Ops Berlin

Dad's aircraft returned early with under carriage problems

March 30 - Ops Nurnburg

“Sir Arthur Harris, Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command ... remained convinced that all-out attacks against the major cities would be the decisive factor in bringing the war to an end. He had anticipated that by 1 April 1944 his bombers would have caused in Germany ‘a state of devastation in which surrender is inevitable. On the night of March 30, on what should have been a routine ‘maximum effort’ raid to Nuremberg, Bomber Command suffered its heaviest loss of the war. Out of 779 bombers on the raid 96 were missing, while due to weather conditions over the target area Nuremberg was only lightly damaged.”²

“The only thing the Nuremberg Raid achieved was probably to raise morale in the Third Reich.” (Sergeant R. A. Anderson, *420 Squadron*)³

Note: There was a Le Mans Op in which Dad's aircraft was involved.

² “**The Nuremberg Raid**” by Martin Middlebrook

³ Dad quoted in Middlebrook's book, **The Nuremberg Raid**.

DATE	HOUR	AIRCRAFT TYPE AND NO.	PILOT	DUTY	REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	TIME CARRIED FORWARD:-	
						58:30	78:05
						FLYING TIMES	
						DAY	NIGHT
1.4.44	1425	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	ERIC	2:10	
8.4.44	1650	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	FIGHTER AFFIL. DICO	1:05	
8.4.44	2125	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	BOMBING PRACTISE.		1:00
9.4.44	2050	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	OPS. VILLENEUVE ST. GEORGE (PARIS)		5:25
10.4.44	2045	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	OPS. GHENT.		3:50
12.4.44	1455	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	FIGHTER AFFIL. DICO	1:35	
13.4.44	1505	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	A.S.F., SBA AND 'BEE' DCO	1:50	
15.4.44	1455	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	FIGHTER AFFIL. DCO	1:00	
16.4.44	1550	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	A.S.F., SBA. DCO	1:35	
18.4.44	2105	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	OPS. NOISY LE. SEC. (PARIS)		5:25
20.4.44	2200	HALIFAX III 'V'	W/O LEONARD	A.C.	OPS. KENS. - MISSING - (SHOT DOWN BY FLAK OVER DIEPPE) P.O.W. 20.4.44 TO 22.4.45		2:30
						67:45	96:15
						CERTIFIED CORRECT	
						- F/King F6 - F/0	
						O.C. 'B' FLIGHT	
						#420 (RCAF) SQUADRON.	
						SUMMARY. APRIL, 1945.	
						TRAINING } DAY. NIGHT.	
						MONTHLY } 9:15 1:00	
						OPERATIONAL } 17:10	
						TOTAL. 9:15 18:10	
						TOTAL TIME.... 67:45 96:15	

Flying Log Book of Sgt. R. A. Anderson, Air Gunner, R.C.A.F.

April 1

Back off leave from Scotland and find only one crew missing. Weather bad and squadron on stand down. Dance at station tonight. Missing F/C Rice (Pilot), F/Sgt. Fraser, F/C Altio, W/O Renwick, Lt. Thomsen (USA AF), Sgt. Bore, Sgt. Bushnell.

April 8

Weather cleared and airborne today on a fighter affiliation exercise with a Mosquito aircraft. Great work-out with the gunners of my crew and another crew taking turns in the turrets. Tonight took my crew out on the bombing range for practice night bombing. Had the results at flights on landing and find my bomb aimer, Ray Irwin, does exceptionally well.

April 9

Church in the small Nissen hut used for a chapel in the morning. Prepared for ops most of the day. Target St. Jean de Villeneuve marshalling yards south of Paris. A marshalling yard in Europe is usually very large, covering about twenty to thirty acres. It is an assembly point for many railroad lines and there can be ten, twelve, or more lines. It is a very crucial and important junction for the railroads. Jerry commenced to defend them after the first few raids with fighters and heavy flak. The weather was fine with bright moonlight. I had my favourite Hally III X Xray (nicknamed Xterminator). The ground crew painted a large ape, Alley Oop, a cartoon character of the day, on the nose panel.

He swung a big club. It was a new aircraft just arrived from the factory. In fact, my engineer, Ashby, and I ferried it from the factory to base. I was impressed with the power and pep of this aircraft. It handled very smooth on the controls. I asked to fly it on ops and tonight was my first flight with it. However, on the flight my two inner engines were giving trouble and we almost lost them at one time.

Two very large explosions were seen in the target area. Orange flames leaped skyward. The defenses were a small amount of heavy flak. Landed at 3 a.m., interrogated by intelligence and to bed at 5:30 a.m. We missed our egg for breakfast. They were out of fresh eggs and we were almost the last crew to eat.

April 10

Up early and to flights to find our crew on ops for tonight again with very little rest. A different wireless op for tonight as my regular WOP, Bill Lynn, is getting married today. He fell very hard for a lovely, blonde, English girl. We would celebrate later with him on our regular leave. I had misgivings about air crew getting married while on operational flying. It seemed that a great many went missing or were killed in flying accidents shortly after the nuptial ceremony. It was uncanny the numbers lost. I hoped that he would have a good day.

The target was the marshalling yards at Ghent in Belgium. Our bomb load was twelve thousand pounds of HE. It was a clear, moonlit night and visibility was excellent. The defenses at the target were very light. However, night fighters put up a battle and the last waves on target really caught it. There were twenty-two aircraft lost on bomber command operations tonight. Back at 2:30 a.m., interrogation breakfast and bed at 4 a.m. This was our eighth operation.

April 15

Did fighter affiliation with a Mosquito. He makes attacks on our aircraft and we try to fight it off with corkscrew manoeuvres and using cloud cover. It means diving very violently and twisting into a steep climb, then rolling into another steep dive while the gunners fire camera gun shots at the fighter. Keeping a steady patter to the location of the fighter in the sky is a life and death exercise. My gunners were extremely sharp and the camera guns showed how really skilled they had become. I was very fortunate to have such good crew members.

The Elsan, our tin-can toilet in the rear of the aircraft, spilled its contents. What a smell! On landing, the ground crew didn't find it funny. One day on a training exercise, one of the crew had the urge to use the Elsan. I gave him time to get sitting comfortably, then pushed the control column forward sharply and brought it back quickly. There was a roar from the rear as he took off, hit the ceiling and came back down with a thud. Pants half up, he came forward to crawl into the nose compartment muttering threats of what was to happen to me

April 16

Sunday church (Padre Hap Haydon) in the small chapel and in the afternoon flying on an air-to-sea firing exercise for the gunners. Found it too foggy over the North Sea and came back to base early, flying low over the Yorkshire moors. The fog was rolling in quickly. Landed just in time, but the aircraft following us had a very difficult landing coming through the fog. One of our squadron was diverted to Eastmoor to land. Two other aircraft were not so fortunate, they crashed near Topcliffe trying to land at the airport.

This evening attended a dance at the Waaf's recreation hall on the station. It was a lively affair.

April 18

Prepared for ops on Noisy - Le Sac marshalling yard near Paris. Two hundred aircraft on the mission. Weather over Yorkshire very poor. Climbed from deck to nine thousand feet through cloud. Rough and turbulent. Our all-up weight tonight was sixty-five thousand pounds. Our bomb load ten thousand and five hundred pounds of delay action HE bombs. Bombed from fifteen thousand and four hundred feet in clear visibility. Heavy flak put up a strong barrage. Two aircraft were hit and crashed in flames in front of us. Another aircraft blew up in a great shower of flame. Came home by the Thames Estuary and Jerry had a big raid on London. The London guns and searchlights put on a terrific show. Flew up the channel to avoid the heavy traffic. Crew had to be very alert for night-fighter intruders. Landed at 3 a.m. after four hours and fifteen minutes. Bed at 6 a.m. A long day and night for one-third of an op. I have been told operations over France and the Low Countries count only one-third. These trips are usually about four to five hours flying. The defenses are slight compared to heavily defended Germany. However, more and more fighter squadrons are being encountered.

Bomber command lost fourteen aircraft tonight. Jerry is no fool and putting up a stiffer fight.

April 20

On ops again tonight with twenty-seven aircraft from 420 and 425 Squadrons joining two hundred and seventy-five other heavy bombers on raid to Lens, Belgium. Target marshalling yards and engine workshops. Briefed at 6:15 pm, marshalled aircraft at 7 p.m. for take-off at 9:00 p.m. Carried twelve thousand pounds of HE bombs, delay action type. Crossed the enemy coast at eight thousand feet encountering some flak. Crossed the searchlight belt and some night fighter activity. Nay had us bang on target on ETA. Came home across channel at low level and in dark part of sky. Eight aircraft in the circuit ahead of us to land. One aircraft in trouble pranged on the runway. Landed in strong cross-wind on other runway. Bed at 6 am. tired and weary.

Missing W/O Leonard (Pilot), Wilson, F/Sgt. Warren, Sgt. Wheelhouse, Sgt. Boucier, Sgt. Anderson, Sgt. Gough.

April 21

Up and to flights. Weather very poor and squadron on stand down. One of my best friends missing from night's operation. It was his tenth op too. Came through training with him. He was a tall, quiet pilot from Toronto with a skilled crew.⁵ Let's hope that they were able to bail out, there is always a chance of escape over the Low Countries with assistance from the resistance movements if one lands safely on the ground. Night fighters are taking their toll and our aircraft seldom escape these attacks. The enemy fighters are equipped with heavy armament – canon – and can knock our aircraft out of the air from a safe distance, well out of the range of our lightly equipped gunners' 303 machine guns.⁶

⁴ Should be Bourcier (Paul)

⁵ Russll McKay later told me that it was his friend Ray Leonard, whose aircraft was the only one shot down on the 20th

⁶ Dad's Log states "Shot down by flak"