

our wave, above below, and alongside, mostly unseen, but fleetingly visible. Unrelieved vigilance was as always the only answer.

Sam in the mid upper turret searched above the aircraft, and Jack in the rear turret searched under the aircraft.

For those of us with little to do except keep a lookout, the hours dragged on, with the clamour from four healthy Merlin engines an almost unwelcome intrusion into our silent progress. A silence eventually broken by the distinctive voice of our busiest crew member as he gave the final change of course to the target and the few remaining minutes to E.T.A.

The Pathfinder Force did its job well. The target ground markers exploded precisely on time. The Master Bomber had only to confirm their accuracy and hundreds of thumbs rested on their bomb release buttons as eyes focused on the markers. The prodigious efforts of ground crews and others who had worked hard at Squadrons' bases back home were about to be rewarded.

Now we were through the target and about to sweep round with a few short changes of course in a gradual turn for home. Finally able to relax a little we could take an unobstructed look at the scene below.

On previous operational tours our crew had all flown with different squadrons and, before this raid, had between us amassed about 300 trips. On none of these sorties had any of us ever witnessed a scene of such devastation.

Our aircraft was in the second wave, and we watched as the third, and final wave, also 250 to 300 aircraft, went through. Dresden was on fire! We had seen nothing to compare with this level of destruction on a single raid.

But one member of the crew remained unmoved. Our Australian navigator, a master of his trade, non-smoker, non-drinker, and the personification of reliability, remained behind his screen despite an invitation from his skipper "just this once" to come forward and look for himself.

The following extract which has been taken from the book "Churchill — A Life" by Martin Gilbert, gives the background of the reason for the raid on Dresden. The meeting occurred during the Yalta Conference in February 1945.

On February 5th 1945, at a meeting of the British, American and Soviet Chiefs of Staff, the Russians, having pointed out that several divisions of German troops were being brought back across Europe to the Eastern Front, asked for a substantial Allied air attack on German communications in the Berlin-Leipzig-Dresden region, and for the bombing of these three specific cities, as a matter of urgency. This was agreed and instructions given for a series of Anglo-American raids.

On the night of the 13th February, more than 800 British bombers dropped 1,471 tons of high explosive and 1,175 tons of incendiaries on the city of Dresden. A few hours later, American bombers dropped another 689 tons of bombs on the burning city. The Russian purpose, explained at Yalta eight days earlier, was achieved: refugees on the roads, fleeing westwards from the fire storm, disrupted the movement of German reinforcements seeking to pass through the burning city to the front further east. But the cost, sixty thousand civilian dead, was as high as any single raid during the bombing in Europe.



* 3 in uniform: Investiture at Buckingham Palace 27 Nov. 1945. Flight Lieutenant James Cassidy DFC and Bar on the right with Wing Commander Tony Willis DFC DFM. The name of the Officer in the middle is not known.