

Leslie Wallace Harvey 1922-1945

By Paul Batenburg

Introduction

Leslie Wallace Harvey died in Germany in 1945. He was a crew member of a Lancaster bomber en route to a mission to Dessau.



Near Schauen, Germany, the Lancaster was attacked by a German plane. The Lancaster caught fire and crashed. Of the seven crew members, 4 men are known to have survived. The three men who fell are CJ Jones, pilot, J. Buckmaster, navigator and LW Harvey bomb aimer.

Only Leslie Harvey's body has been recovered. He is buried in the [military cemetery in Nederweert](#).



The [Nederweert War Cemetery Adoption Graves Foundation](#) has allocated Leslie's grave for adoption in November 2020 to Paul Batenburg from Nederweert. The information from the Foundation¹ has been used gratefully.

Paul adopts the grave with Mahmoud Abo Ali, a refugee from Syria.

The adoption is a tribute to Leslie who had the courage to fight for freedom and human rights.

1: Personal information has been made available confidentially of the Stichting Adoptiegraven Nederweert. The indicated entries come from this source.

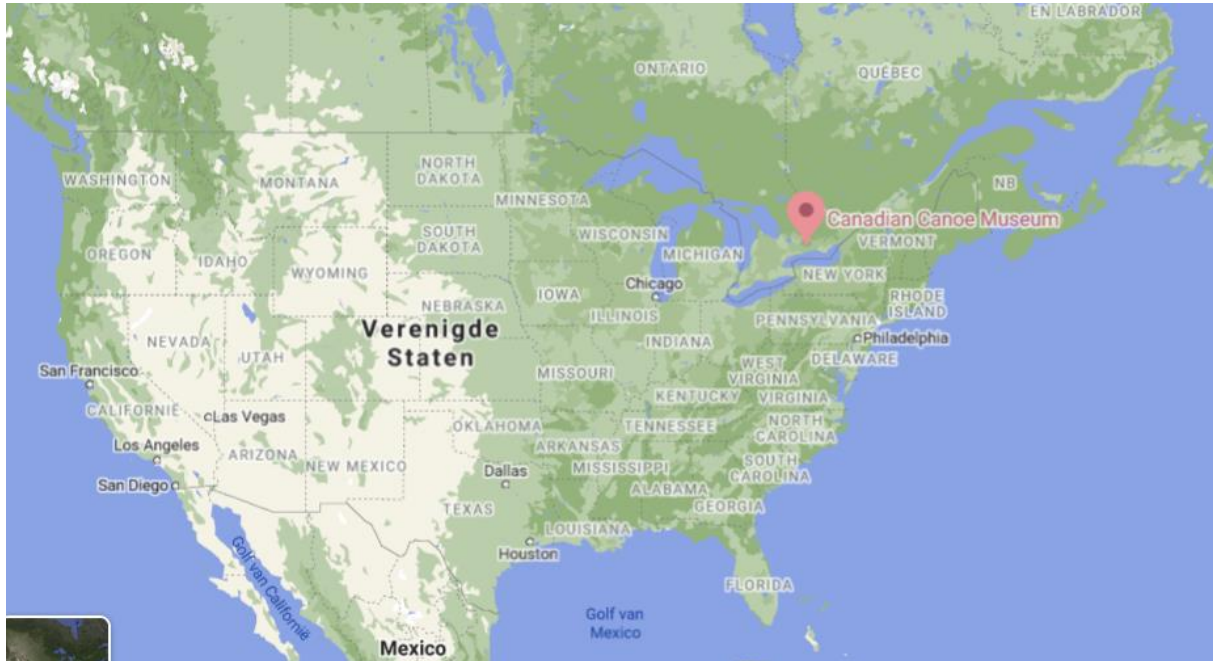
2: RAF 550 Squadron Association

3: LAC Ottawa debriefing F/O Jones crew

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Leslie Life

Leslie was born on May 31, 1922 and the youngest in a family with father, mother and three older sisters. He lived in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.



In Peterborough, he attended the secondary school which he left immediately after his exams to enlist. Even the points list was not yet known when the director wrote a nice reference¹. That reference expressed the expectation that Leslie would certainly succeed in Canada's Air Force, the RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force).

He officially entered service on 23 July 1942. His wish was to become a navigator, a pilot was an unfeasible position¹. Eventually he successfully completed the training as a gunner / bomb aimer. On September 17, 1943 he received the official designation 1: Airbomber.

Around that period, September 1943, Leslie left for England. In England he served with the RAF's 550 Squadron Lancasters [based at Killingholme-North](#). The Lancaster is a bomber with a crew of 7 people: pilot, navigator, communications man, aircraft technician, bomb aimer / gunner in the nose of the plane, gunner in the top center of the plane and a rear gunner. [Click here for a film about the inside of a Lancaster.](#)

An extensive film about the history of the Lancaster: (about 45 minutes) [Click here.](#)

That squadron flew various types of Lancaster. There is an overview of all people who served in 550 squadron. Likewise from Leslie. [Click here for his Squadron Personnel: Summary Information](#) ²

These data show that Leslie has several missions on three different bombers.

Bomber ² [NG120](#) lists 3 of his missions: 11/9/1944, 11/11/1944 and 11/16/1944.

On the [NG135](#) also three missions: 23-2-1945, 1-3-1945 and 2-3-1945.

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He may have participated in more missions, but that is not explicitly stated. It seems very likely from the reports ² that Leslie was only stationed at North-Killingholme base.

Click on the numbers of the bombers (above and below) to see in detail which missions have been completed (destinations) with the names of the crews.



On the [PA995](#) he started on his last mission to Dessau on March 7, 1945. Official sources report that Leslie was buried in Nederweert in the late 1940s.

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The mission itself.

Through the 550 Squadron and RAF North Killinghome Association it appears that the Lancaster PA955 has been a successful aircraft. On March 6, 1945, the 100th mission of “The Vulture Strikes” was celebrated. This name was mentioned on the aircraft, as often aircraft were given a specific name. See below, with the pilot who had just made his last flight leaning out of the window. A double anniversary.



Foto 550 sqdn/ pilot G.E. Blackler last mission completed



On [March 5, 1945, three of Leslie's predecessors](#) boarded the plane that would crash on March 7. From left to right: center gunner, bomb aimer, rear gunner. Leslie must have boarded through the same entrance for his 34th mission.

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The 101st mission was scheduled for the following day: March 7, 1945. The aircraft was given a new crew because the previous crew "retired" or was assigned to other team (s).

Below the team of pilot / commander CJ Jones with third from left Leslie W. Harvey.

The pilot Jones, the navigator Buckmaster and bomb aimer Leslie were Canadians of the RCAF. The other crew members were English.



The crew had the following functions in the aircraft:

Pilot (captain): Jones, Navigator: Buckmaster, Airbomber: Harvey, Flight engineer: Webb, Radio operator: Main, Gunner-center: Pelham (not shown) and Tail gunner Smith (not in the picture). Sgt Blair and Spowart, both on the right of the photo, were not on the run on 3/7/1945.

The report contains many details such as the escape route. Click here for [page 1](#) or here for [page 2](#) of that report. Hereafter the most important points.

The report was made after Sergeant Smith's debriefing on April 13, 1945. So he returned to England fairly soon after the crash on March 7, 1945. That report was made available by Niel Pelham's son.²

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Foto: part of Secret interview report Smith 13-4-1945 ²

The Lancaster PA995 was designated in group bombers with the letter "V". this designation also appears regularly in various messages. The aircraft itself took off on Wednesday 7 March 1945 from Killingholme-North base in a group of 27 bombers towards Dessau, Germany.

There is talk of variable cloud cover and "lively" resistance of flak and night fighters. Above the target, that resistance was less. Ground marker bombs were dropped with good visibility, 3/10, on Dessau and the river Elbe. The general impression was that the attack was well concentrated. 3 aircraft have been reported with "unclear battles" with night fighters. It concerned aircraft V, O and R. These aircraft did not return and were reported missing.

As can be seen in the photo above, the coordinates of the flight are listed. On the basis of those coordinates, the photo below shows which route was planned for the plane where Leslie had taken place in the nose.

For the sake of completeness, both the outward and return route can be seen. Just before the plane was about to deflect to the south, things went wrong and the plane crashed.

What happened to Leslie during that crash is evident from the following three debriefing reports.

First from Sergeant Smith, rear gunner, then that of Sergeant Webb, aircraft technician, and finally the report from Sergeant Main, radio operator.

The final piece is the report of the military investigation into possible war crimes. That report is from 9-9-1949 which appears to have ended the information about what happened to Leslie. Vervolg van

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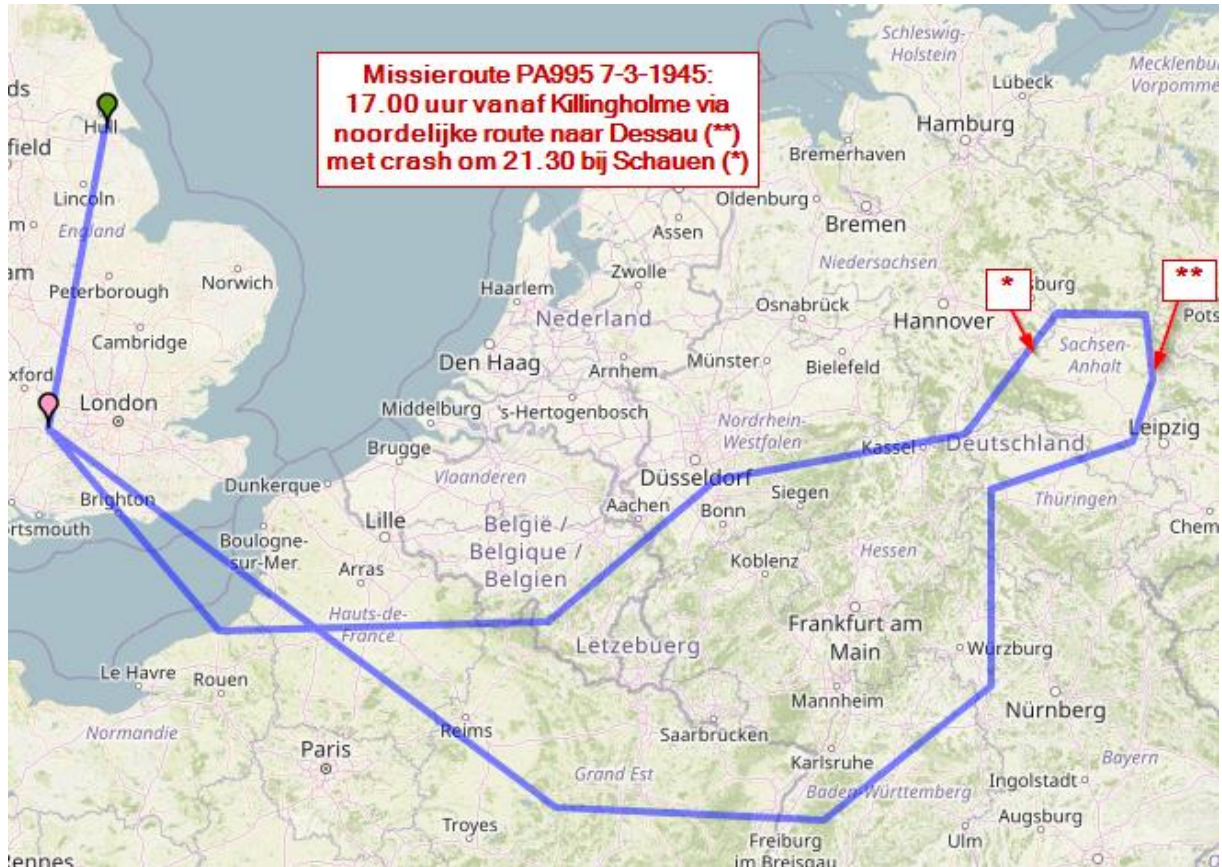


Foto: Afstandsmeter.nl

Sgt Smith's report:



Smith reports that they were attacked by a Junkers 88 around 9.30pm at coordinates 52.30-11.40 E. An attack on the rear of V. The rear gunner fired on the attacker and hit the propeller and engine of the JU-88.

Afbeelding: Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-417-1766-03A,_Flugzeug_Junkers_Ju_88

The German fired back without tracer ammunition and hit V's inner tank which immediately caught fire. Likewise, the turret at the back caught fire from the burning fuel. No evacuation signal was received by the rear gunner. He also could not warn the pilot because the button on the intercom

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was "off". That button was on the fire button of the rear gunner. No "bail out" signal received, aircraft shook violently, tail gunner jumped out with serious burns to his left eye and forehead. Landed in dense forests, he saw the burning plane crash.

The man got rid of his parachute, flight overalls and life jacket. Everything hidden in the woods. Somewhat disguised (sweater over flight jacket and pants over his flying boots, but with his Russian identification kit, first aid kit and maps) walked out of the forest. On a road he met a German citizen on a bicycle without a light. Distrust arose and the German seemed to want to arrest him so that he fled back into the woods. Finally, tired and without proper shelter and wounded, he was arrested by three German soldiers. He was interrogated and taken to a railway station afterwards where he was reunited with Pelham and Webb.

They were placed in an air force camp about 20 km away. After a couple of days, Sergeant Main was brought in. Main had a broken leg that required hospital treatment. After that treatment, the foursome were taken to the train. The train journey took two days and they passed through Halle, past Leuna Works (PB: one of the largest chemical companies in the city of Leuna south-west under Dessau), Erfurt and finally ending in Frankfurt. Subsequently, a report is made of movements through Germany in which one was attacked by Allied aircraft. At some point they managed to escape and contact was made with American troops. Initially it was suspected of being a spy. Secret services interrogated the men and then returned to England.

Special note to Sergeant Smith's report:

NOTE.

At the OBBERUSEL P.O.W. interrogation Sgt. Webb was informed by the interrogator that the remainder of their crew i.e. F/O Jones, F/Sgt. Harvey and F/O Buckmaster were all P.O.W's. Sgt. Smith had also been told of this at his first official interrogation when in the village jail.

*Agel
S/L.*

Foto: uitsnede 2^e pagina verslag Sgt Smith dd 13-4-1945

Loosely translated, it is reported here that the three missing crew members Jones, Buckmaster and Harvey have been taken prisoner of war. That has been reported to Sgt Webb and also previously to Sgt Smith.

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Statement by Sgt Webb, flight engineer from debriefing reports³

The two gunners Smith and Pelham were not part of the standard crew of Captain CJ Jones' team.

Sgt Webb states (date of report unknown) *"that the crash happened about 12 miles, about 18km, from the village of Schauen"*. See the previous map which shows that Schauen is on the outward route. However, Sgt Webb's statement gives the coordinates of a place much further away. The relationship between the two statements is unclear. The designation of Schauen seems more plausible because the place Hoppenstadt is close to Schauen. Hoppenstadt appears to be the first place where Leslie is buried.

Webb further explains, *"Jones and Buckmaster were still in the plane when I jumped out, Main jumped ahead, Pelham, Smith and Harvey jumped out."* Webb does not explicitly state that Harvey jumped out for him.

Moving on, Webb explains, *"Harvey was the first to leave the plane and appears to be safe. I clearly heard two "cracs" of parachutes during the descent.... I have not seen Harvey again... .. the residents of the town reported that two officers were taken prisoner.... The interrogation officer in Oberusal gave the impression of having spoken to them."*

Based on these facts, it appears that Leslie left the plane by parachute. There are reports of two captured officers. It's unlikely that Leslie was there.

Statement Sgt Main, from debriefing reports ³

Date of report unknown: *"Smith and the "bomb aimer" jumped out of the plane before me.... It was near Schauen, close to Stendal.... Nothing more was heard from the bomb aimer"*.

It is noteworthy that as a regular member of the crew, Sgt Webb does not mention Lelsie's name anywhere. He names him as *"B / aimer"*.

Stendal is located at the coordinates 52.60-11.90 and is much more north than planned (at 52.30 we would turn south). The plunt reported by Main is located about 100 km NE of Schauen.

The device may have gone off course, which is why several observations are reported.

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9-9-1949: investigation of missing persons and possible war crimes stopped.

It is officially reported that Leslie Harvey was buried in Hoppenstadt, mentioned on the Death Card 108560 which also states that Leslie was eventually buried in Nederweert. The researcher visited Schauen and Hoppenstadt to no avail and discontinued the investigation because the area is in the Russian zone. This means that the war crime (s) cannot be confirmed and the men Jones and Buckmaster are declared to have died somewhere in German or occupied territory. Both men are registered with an unknown grave.

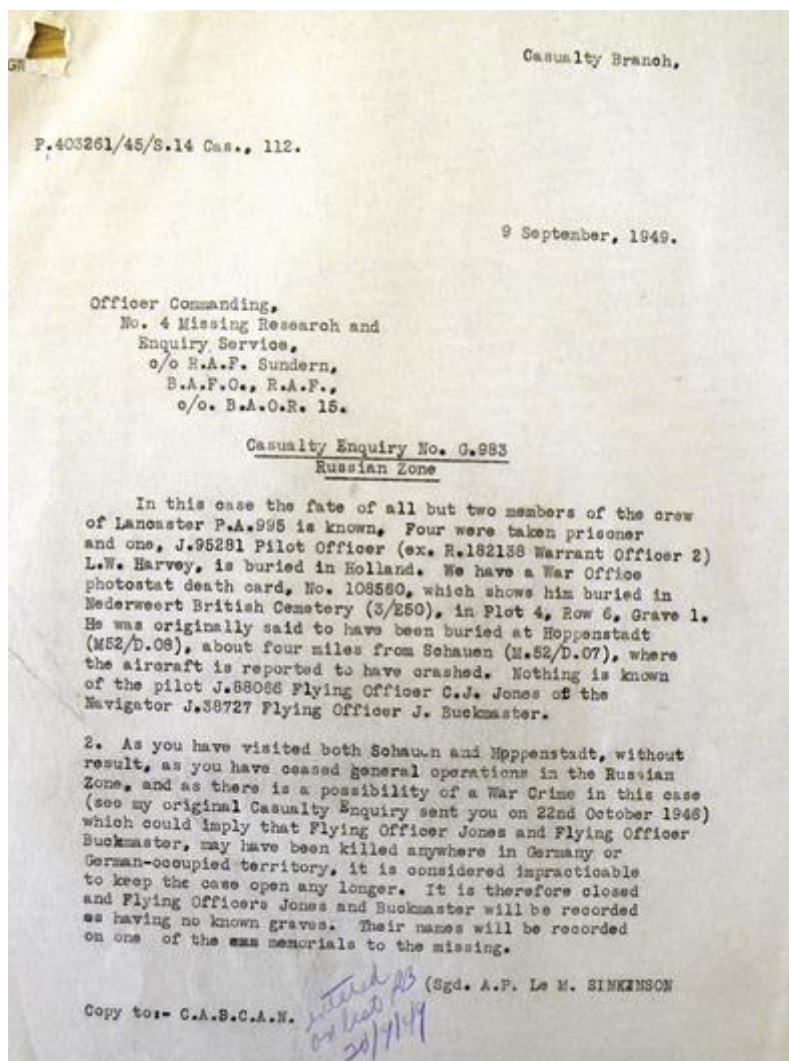


Foto: Library and Archives Canada; J. Buckmaster

Via Findagrave.com more personal information about:

[Cyril John Jones](#), date of birth 4/22/1923, [zijn RCAF information forms \(including family names\)](#).

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[John Buckmaster](#), date of birth 3/18/1921 married 7/10/1942, [are RCAF information forms](#).

[On 10-10-1945 the widow of Joh Buckmaster writes](#) that she received a letter from a survivor of the crash in which it is stated again that John almost certainly landed well and that he may have fallen into the hands of the Russians. On 12/4/1945 there is formal confirmation to the widow that John is believed to be dead. No report of the (halted) investigation into a possible war crime. The letter is signed by WA Curtis, Air Vice Marshal on behalf of the Chief Air Staff. John had a brother George and a sister Florence King-Buckmaster. [On April 26, 1951, RCAF reports to John's mother](#) that further investigation remains "missing".

Conclusion.

It is clear that Leslie was in the crashed plane. There is no source to the contrary and the witnesses always mention Leslie.

What remains unclear is what happened between the testimony of leaving the plane and the report that Lelsie was buried in Hoppenstadt.

Possibly the "death card" number 108560 provides clarity about the cause of death, something that is the subject of further investigation. The family may have more information on this point. The family tree research shows that there may still be cousins of Lelsie alive. No female offspring were found. Those cousins are sons of Leslie's elder sisters and all born during the war period. Perhaps the Library and Archives Canada can help with this. Possible contacts are also sought via the modern media.

It is not clear where the plane eventually landed. The suspicion is somewhere within a radius of 20km around Schauen. At the moment, searching with Google Maps for remarkable ground situations is our only option. The "adoption team" of Leslie in Nederweert has therefore, perhaps temporarily, been expanded with grandson Luuk van Paul. Luuk has been very proficient with the English language for 12 years and is very interested. Another option to gain more clarity is to tap into friend relationships in Germany.

It is possible that certain sensitivities can be better recognized by someone with German nationality. Initiatives in this regard are taken with caution.

And how now.

So far part 1, who was Leslie and what happened, has become a bit clearer again. Plenty of things that can be sorted out and already shared. Part 2 of the project Keeping Leslie's Sacrifice Alive will focus on Paul's experiences of his father's military struggle in Indonesia in the period 1945-1948. A great deal of first-hand information is available. Part 3 will be Mahmoud's story about his experiences in and about the recent war in Syria, the reason why he fled.

Part 4 of the project will be the dissemination of all historical facts and the translation thereof to

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young and old who want to think and talk about it.
Finally, the developments are shared with the Foundation in Nederweert.

Paul Batenburg, Nederweert, 22-12-2020

Bijschrift

Document [9783981530766_content_pdf_1.pdf](#) contains a German report of the Dessau mission. The report, page 339, mentions [the crash van de Lancaster PD278](#).

Kehlmühle aufgeschlagen. Der Heckschütze lag neben dem Flugzeugrumpf. Im Rumpf befanden sich die verbrannten Leichen seiner anderen sechs Kameraden. Die sieben Toten wurden unmittelbar an der Absturzstelle begraben. Später wurden sie exhumiert. Ihre letzte Ruhe fanden sie im „1939-1945 War Cemetery“ BERLIN.

29.3 Der nächtliche Absturz einer Lancaster bei MARISFELD am 7. März 1945

Am 7. März 1945 waren gegen 17:30 Uhr von ihren Einsatzhäfen in Südostengland 526 Lancaster und 5 Mosquitos der Royal Air Force zu einem Angriff auf DESSAU gestartet.*

Die Lancaster PD278 mit der Kennung HA-V startete um 17:23 Uhr in CHEDBURGH/Suffolk. Sie gehörte zur 218. Staffel der 3. Bomber-Gruppe und wurde von dem Neuseeländer F/L K. J. Mackenzie geflogen. Noch ahnte niemand, dass es der letzte Flug der PD 278 sein würde. Der Bomberpulk hatte nach der Erledigung seines unheilvollen Auftrages für den Heimflug eine Route gewählt, die ihn in einem weiten, südlich verlaufenden Bogen um die stark verteidig-

ten Regionen ERFURT und GOTHA herumführen sollte. Dabei wurde der Bomberstrom von deutschen Nachtjägern verfolgt. Zu ihnen gehörte die vom Fliegerhorst Altenburg gestartete und vom Feldwebel Helmut Burkhard geflogene 2-motorige Ju 88 G-6. Der Nachtjäger gehörte zum 1. NJG 5 der I. Gruppe in der 1. Jagdivision. An einem Punkt SSW von MEININGEN gelang es dem deutschen Flugzeugführer, die Lancaster PD 278 um 22:45 Uhr aus dem Verband herauszuschießen.^{352, 353}

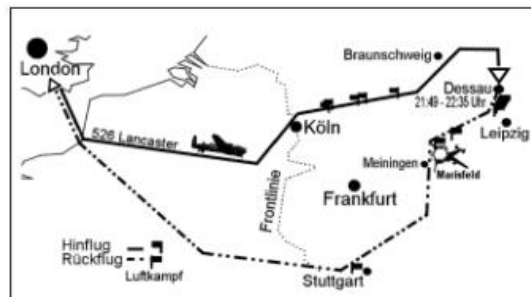
Brennend und im Tiefflug überflog die Maschine das Dorf MARISFELD bei MEININGEN und tauchte es in einen hellen Feuerschein. Der Lärm und der helle Feuerschein lockten die Bewohner aus ihren Häusern.

Bevor die Maschine etwa zwei Kilometer westlich des Ortes im Fluggebiet Vogelherd abstürzte und explodierte, hatte sie zwei immer enger werdende Kreise gedreht.³⁵⁵



Absturz der Lancaster PD278 am 07. 02 1945 bei MARISFELD

Keines der sieben Besatzungsmitglieder überlebte den Absturz. Ihr Durchschnittsalter betrug 22 Jahre. Bis auf den Piloten und den Sgt Scrowther gehörten sie zur RAFVR**.



It is noteworthy that this also shows, almost, the same routes as those of PA995. The German site that manages the archive of Group 3 (Einsatzgruppe 3, of which the JU88 may have been a part) was inquired about a possible German report by the crew of the JU88 that attacked PA995.

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