

Cole **Elliot Livesey**

Trade: Pilot

Rank: Flight Sergeant

Crew:

Flying Officer Frank Ridley Navigator

Flight Sergeant Llewellyn Grey Bomb Aimer

Sergeant James Arthur Gerald Browne Wireless Operator / Air Gunner

Sergeant Frederick Stanley Tristram Pittard Flight Engineer

31st January 1943

1943 had arrived and by this time in the war, technology was being developed that improved bombing accuracy. One of these was H2S radar, this was the targeting device that Bomber Command had needed so badly. The ground mapping radar could give the Navigator an image of the target city at night and even through dense cloud. The radar was so advanced that there were serious concerns as to whether it should be used over enemy territory. A shot-down aircraft equipped with H2S would hand the Germans a weapon that could be used to equally devastating effect on British cities. However, the advantages were simply too great to ignore and on the 30th of January 1943 twelve Halifax and twelve Stirling bombers of the Pathfinder force employed their new H2S radar sets to mark the city of Hamburg with Target Indicator Flares. The following force of 148 aircraft, mostly Lancasters, would attack with a combination of high explosive bombs and incendiaries.

On this first raid using H2S, the results can only be described as moderately successful, starting 119 fires in the city. As the crews became more familiar with H2S and the equipment received upgrades, bombing results became much more accurate. In fact, when the head of the Luftwaffe, Herman Goering was given a demonstration of a later captured H2S set he exclaimed "My God the British really can see in the dark".

One of the 148 Lancaster bombers on the raid was ED428 flown by Flight Sergeant Cole, a 23 year old from Caulfield, Victoria, Australia with his crew of six. His was one of five Lancasters to be lost following this raid to Hamburg. As eleven of the 49 squadron's aircraft returned to Fiskerton in the early hours of the following morning the weather that greeted them was atrocious. A 600 feet cloud base with 600 yards visibility in driving rain. The advice from the WAAF controller in the control tower was to divert to a base with better weather. This was advisory and the decision whether to divert or land was one which pilot of each aircraft would need to make for themselves.

Four of 49 squadron's aircraft took that advice, the remainder elected to land at Fiskerton. All except Flight Sergeant Cole's aircraft landed safely. There is some suggestion that his aircraft had been hit by flak and this may have influenced his decision to land as soon as possible at Fiskerton, it may also have made his aircraft more difficult to handle. After locating the flare path, Cole made an approach from the North West onto one of Fiskerton's short runways.

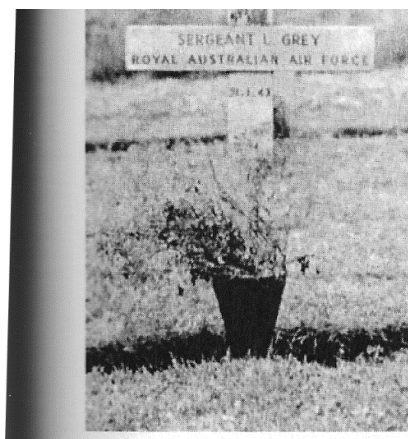


Reverend Hulbert officiates at the funeral of Flight Sergeant Cole's crew

At 7:15am, Cole lost his battle to land his stricken aircraft when it collided with trees and crashed close to the Grimsby to Lincoln railway line. Six of the crew of seven were killed. Five of them are buried at Scampton. There was only one survivor, the Mid-upper Gunner Sergeant E Phillips who escaped with unspecified injuries. The Rear Gunner, Sergeant William Wood was buried in Manor Park Cemetery, Essex. Mrs Vi Hulbert, the wife of the Padre who was later to bury the crew, recalls the Christmas she had just shared with them:

"One Christmas I played the American organ in the large hangar on the aerodrome at Fiskerton. It was Christmas morning; what a wonderful service we had and a grand turnout of airmen and WAAF. My husband conducted the service. It was a bitterly cold morning, with a strong wind blowing, but the singing of the Christmas hymns and carols by this large congregation was something to remember. We managed to have services on all the five bomber stations that morning and afterwards my husband and I were invited to lunch at one of the stations. In the evening we returned to Scampton where they were having a dance. I noticed Llewellyn, who was an Australian aircrew officer looking so sad and not joining in.

Sgt Grey's original cross



My husband and I asked if he and his friend Jerry would like to go with us to another station which we had to visit and then they could come back to our billet with us. Llewellyn was very upset because he had not heard from his people in Australia for Christmas, the mails were late. Jerry, his Australian friend, had just been married and he did not get Christmas leave.

I think we were able to help them that night, though we did not get back to our billet until very late, but they enjoyed talking to us. I told them that if they would like to come to us for Christmas Dinner my

husband and I would be delighted, as we were hoping to have Boxing Night for our Christmas. They were delighted to come. I managed to buy a chicken at the NAAFI store and a plum pudding. It was very difficult for me to get food as I only had my civilian ration book. They were so pleased as I had some tinned grapefruit, which I had brought, from our Rectory store cupboard when we left. It was Australian grapefruit, and this seemed to delight them. We had such a happy evening and it seemed to cheer them up tremendously. Donald, my husband, drove them back to Scampton.

The following week I remember so well, a cold snowy morning with a very strong wind blowing. Donald had gone to Scampton to welcome the aircrews back from operations. I was dressing and standing by my dressing table when I heard the roar of a plane, which seemed terribly low and somehow I sensed that it was in difficulty. I knew that Llewellyn and Jerry had gone on operations the night before and I felt so anxious somehow, as if I almost knew that it was going to be bad news. Donald came back to our billet and I knew directly he came into our room by the expression on his face that all was not well. I asked him if all the planes had landed safely on the aerodrome. He replied, 'I'm afraid not.' I asked, 'Was it Llewellyn and Jerry and their crew?' Donald replied, 'Yes.' It did not seem possible somehow that they had returned safely from operations only to crash and all be killed.

It was their plane that I had heard flying so low and circling round trying to land. It was another of the many funerals that were held in the village church at Scampton, followed by full RAF burial ceremony, which I had to attend. Donald conducted the service - Jerry's wife and many relatives were there. After the service I went to speak to Jerry's wife and the first thing she said was 'Thank you for having Jerry out at Christmas, he wrote and told me all about it'. What a wonderful spirit of selflessness she showed, and how brave, not thinking of her own sorrow, remembering to say thank you to me".

Extracted from 'Slightly below the Glide Path' by Gary & Brian Mennell