

THE FULBECK TRAGEDY

It happened shortly before 10.00hrs on that fateful Sunday morning of April 22nd, as 49 Squadron's Lancasters were taking off from Fulbeck for the last time, bound for their new home at RAF Syerston.

Some aircraft had already departed, but just as F/Lt Les Hammond was about to release the brakes on B-Baker he suddenly announced over the inter-com; 'so that's how a Lanc goes!' – his crew immediately looked in the direction of the main site where a pillar of fire and smoke marked the spot where a Lancaster had just plunged into the ground.

Eric Read was an eyewitness to this ghastly accident:

"I had just left Flying Control and saw the whole thing as if in slow motion - the aircraft was 'shooting up' Fulbeck and was very low; it came from my right (heading north) and as the pilot pulled up, the tail hit the MT shed, bringing the aircraft down onto a large group of ground personnel. "The clothing store was demolished along with the private car belonging to S/Ldr Brydon. The fire crew was there in seconds but to no avail; I was asked to give evidence at the court of enquiry; it was all very sad and a long time ago, but some of the shocking images still remain in my memory."

Another witness, who also had a very close call was F/O Bill Ansell DFM - Bill had previously completed a tour with 166 Squadron, 1 Group. After a spell as an instructor, he was posted to the Bomber Command Film Unit, which had been at Fulbeck and was now moving with 49 Squadron to Syerston.

Bill recalls:

"On Sunday 22 April, I missed death by inches when a Lancaster crashed almost on top of me. I was standing by a truck waiting to move off to Syerston when the Lancaster hit with a horrific rending crash, the huge ball of fire seared and almost burst my eyeballs. I broke all speed records with unbelievable heat scorching my back.

Sadly all in the aircraft were killed. The truck went up in flames, together with my log book and my glorious Crombie overcoat. I have just examined the charred remains of my log book for the first time in all these years."

The aircraft involved was piloted by F/O George Elkington (PB463), who hailed from Tonbridge in Kent. There were five other crew members onboard, and all were killed. The absent crew member was mid upper gunner, F/Sgt Logan, who must have considered himself to be the luckiest man alive that day.

The unfortunate ground staff who were killed, all belonged to 5015 Works Flight; it is believed they were on parade at the time.

FULBECK PARADE GROUND DISASTER - SUNDAY 22 APRIL 1945
ROLL OF HONOUR

AC2 G.H. Brenchley
AC1 R.J. Clewley
LAC J.H. Davies (died 23 April 1945)
LAC J. Griffin (died 28 April 1945)
Sgt L.C. Hammond
Cpl H.S. Hancox
LAC T. McKie (died 28 April 1945)
LAC L. Masterman
LAC S. Mellows (died 23 April 1945)
LAC P. Moor (died 8 May 1945)
LAC F. Plumtree
LAC J.W. Rogers
LAC E. Shaw
F/L G. Wimpenny
LAC W. Wright

Crashed PB463

(EA-Y) 'B Flt'
F/O G.F. Elkington Pilot
F/S C.I. Walker F/E
F/S L.W. Evans NAV
F/S J.W. Petch W/OP
F/O H. Macaulay A/B
F/S M.J.C. Garrett P/A/G

The injured survivors from 5015 Works Flight included the following:

LAC L.R. Hassan Injured
LAC J.E. Lambourn Seriously injured
LAC T. Sarling Dangerously injured but survived
AC1 J. Weston Dangerously injured but survived

Later in the day over at Syerston, once everyone had found a bed, a roll call was taken to see if any extra bods had been in the Lancaster that crashed. But in wartime, life has to carry on.

The immediate task was to locate all the amenities on the new base - the initial verdict was; 'grub at the Mess very good and ultra clean after Fulbeck – the Station dance was wizard and there are some wizard WAAFs here!' By 23.00hrs that night, 49 Squadron had well and truly arrived and were settled in.