

J/28851 Flying Officer Harry Reid



Harry Reid was born in Toronto, Canada on 24th April 1921, the elder son of Rousay born Alex Reid. Harry's father served in 14th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery during the Great War, returned to Orkney after it to marry Jeannie Windwick in Kirkwall on 30th December 1919. Harry was named after Alex's younger brother, who died in Longhope in May 1917 from measles and pneumonia whilst recovering from wounds he suffered serving in the Seaforth Highlanders in the Battle of the Somme.

Harry worked for the Eagle Star Shipping Line as a clerk, before started reading maths and physics at the University of Toronto. During 1941 Harry served as an air cadet, before he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force on 19th June 1942. Harry started in the ranks as an airman 2nd class in 6 Initial Training School, but in March 1943 he began navigation training as a cadet at 4 Air Observer School in London, Toronto.

After flying 100 hours in Avro Ansons, 60% at night, Harry successfully completed the course. He passed out as a sergeant and received his Navigator's Wing on 6th August, then received a commission to become Pilot Officer Reid next day. Three weeks later Harry sailed from Halifax, to arrive in England on 1st September. Harry joined 1,500 airmen awaiting postings to advanced flying units or operational training units in 3 Personnel Recruitment Centre, Bournemouth, but spent two weeks as a liaison officer at Bomber Command HQ at High Wycombe. In November he was posted to 2 Advanced Flying Unit at Millom, Cumbria for about 25 hours flight training. On 29th December Harry began nearly two weeks leave and was able to visit his family in Orkney.

On return Harry began the final stage of his training, in Vickers Wellington twin-engine bombers of 16 Operational Training Unit at Upper Heyford, near Oxford. Bomber Command had been for several years very much a British Commonwealth force, with every airman a volunteer. Harry was the navigator among six airmen of the aircraft crew in "B" Flight, Course 73 of experienced pilot and former flying instructor Flight Lieutenant Peter Lines from Surrey. The other four were bomb aimer John Steel from Bradford, wireless operator Arthur Young from Cardiff, air gunners John Davenport from Shropshire and Robert Saul from the Midlands. The main role of bomber OTUs from mid-war was to build up team work, needed to fly an RAF main force four-engine bomber.

In OTU training bomber pilots learned to fly by instruments (for night operations), in simulators and training flights, also in occasional diversionary missions such as mine-laying on the French coast. Lines' crew made visits to gain technical knowledge, to the Vickers Factory at Weybridge and Airscrews Ltd. They also went into a decompression chamber, to experience the atmospheric conditions found at an altitude of 20,000 feet. On 11th April Lines' crew was posted to join 1661 Heavy Conversion Unit at Winthorpe, near Newark, to learn to fly four-engine Stirling bombers. They first trained in survival and evasion tactics at 52 Base Aircrew Combat School at Scampton.

At Winthorpe Lines' crew was joined by a flight engineer, Raymond Barnes from Pendlebury, north Manchester, who had completed engineer technical training at St. Athan, near Cardiff. Lines' crew carried out flight training at Winthorpe's 51 Base, which had a safety problem with USAAF Dakotas and bombers flying low in its airspace. Lines' crew completed training there with a 4–5 hours flight close to the French coast, then enjoyed six days leave at the end of June.

Lines' crew returned from leave to be posted to 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston, SW of Newark. Flight Lieutenant Peter Perry, DFC, who had completed a bombing tour with 106 Squadron RAF in February, looked after Lines' crew and two others. Perry was impressed with Peter Lines' flying skills and considered him one of the finest students he ever taught.



On arrival at Syerston Lines' crew got instruction on the Avro Lancaster's airframe, followed by fifteen hours of flying experience, half solo. Peter Lines' good control of the Lancaster allowed his crew to fast-track through the (usually fortnight) course, with their first flight on 28th June and the last on 1st July. Dinghy drill was practised dry on an old Lancaster fuselage and wet in Nottingham Baths. On 6th July Peter Lines and his crew were posted to join 106 Squadron, RAF at Metheringham, Lincolnshire.

106 Squadron started the war at Thornaby flying Handley Page Hampdens, as a training unit until moved to Coningsby in February 1941. A year later 106 Squadron received Avro Manchester bombers, but in May 1942 converted to four-engined Lancasters. Wing Commander Guy Gibson was then its CO, but left to form the Dambuster Squadron in March 1943. Air gunner Sergeant Robert Mathieson of South Ronaldsay died on 21st July 1942, when 106 Squadron Lancaster R5576 crashed after an engine failure on a bombing practice flight. After a year based at Syerston, 106 Squadron moved to Metheringham in November 1943. It was equipped with Fog Intensive Dispersal Operations (FIDO), pipes containing petrol that was burned to clear away fog and mist. 106 was the only Bomber Command Squadron using the airfield, but Americans wounded in the Normandy fighting, after treatment in a nearby hospital, took off in USAAF planes to fly home.

When Lines' crew joined 106 Squadron, it had lost two aircraft two nights earlier, bombing the V1 Flying Bomb dump at St Leu d'Esserent, 25 miles north of Paris. Peter Lines flew as second pilot in Lancaster PB248, when 106 Squadron lost five more planes attacking that target again on the night 7th-8th July. Lines' crew flew their first mission together in Lancaster PB298 on the night 14th-15th July, dropping 18 x 500 lb bombs on railway marshalling yards at Villeneuve, near Paris. All ten squadron aircraft returned safely, as had all six that bombed railway yards two nights earlier, also all nine that bombed yards at Nevers on the night 15th-16th (when Lines' crew rested).

Lines' crew took on a brand new Lancaster, PB304 built at Woodford, Manchester and given the ID letter S for Sugar, for their second operation on 18th July. It was a daylight attack on German troop positions east of the River Orne in Normandy, by a force totalling 1,056 bombers. 667 of these were Lancasters: the 19 dispatched by 106 Squadron had as target Mondville steelworks in the city of Caen, turned into a German fortress. All 106 Squadron aircraft bombed and returned safely, only a total of six bombers were lost, but the British tank attack, Operation "Goodwood", had limited success that day and lost nearly 200 tanks.

Lines' crew was one of seventeen of 106 Squadron that attacked another V1 flying bomb site at Thiverny (27 miles north of Paris) on the night 19th-20th July. PB304 bombed visually with good concentration of 11 x 1000 lb and 4 x 500 lb bombs, all 17 bombers returning safely although two were hit by flak. On the next night Lines' PB304 was one of twenty Lancasters 106 Squadron sent to bomb marshalling yards at Courtrai, Belgium. PB304 had a bomb "hang up", but jettisoned it safely into the North Sea.

The next two missions that were flown by Lines and PB304 were again to France. The first on the night 24th-25th July was to bomb fuel tanks at Donges, near Saint-Nazaire, the second on the following night to bomb Saint Cyr airfield and signal centre near Paris. 106 Squadron contributed twenty Lancasters to the bombing force of 104 aircraft, including six Mosquitos, on the St Cyr mission. It encountered fighter opposition and quite heavy flak, which shot down one Lancaster. PB304 was also hit by flak, as it crossed the French coast heading home. The rear gunner, Sergeant Robert Saul, was wounded in his right leg and left shoulder, but not seriously enough to require Peter Lines to divert PB304 to another airfield. On landing at Metheringham, Robert Saul was taken to hospital, where he spent the next ten days.



Mohand Singh

Robert Saul was replaced as rear gunner in Lines' crew by Sergeant Mohand Singh. Mohand was born in the Punjab, India, but was studying medicine in London when he joined the RAF in September 1941. Mohand trained at 11 Air Gunnery School at Andreas on the Isle of Man and then was posted in December 1943 to 106 Squadron. Mohand's first operation was to Berlin and he flew on most of the twenty operations that 106 Squadron contributed to the difficult Battle of Berlin, losing eight aircraft shot down and 56 men killed. Mohand did not have a regular crew, so he acted as a spare gunner and in that capacity joined the crew of PB304 as the rear gunner.

Lines' crew seventh operation to bomb railway yards at Givors, near Lyons, on the night 26th-27th July was in bad weather and lasted nearly nine hours. The next, two nights later, was Lines' crew's only mission to bomb Germany. The crew flew Lancaster JB593 to bomb Stuttgart, dropping one 2000 lb bomb and twelve J type incendiary clusters. 106 Squadron's Lancaster PB145, with Australian pilot Lloyd Pemberton, was shot down by a night fighter near Durmersheim and all seven of the crew were killed.

Lines' crew was back in Lancaster PB304 for another daylight mission on 30th July to Normandy, in support of Allied troops fighting there. PB304 took off carrying 18 500 lb bombs that Sunday at 0555 hours to fly to Cahagnes, half way between Caen and St Lo. 106 Squadron provided 21 of the 462 Lancasters in the bomber force, which also included 200 Halifaxes and 30 Mosquitos.

Bad weather over the south of England that morning had threatened cancellation of the mission, when Normandy was reached it was shrouded in clouds. Although some aircraft did descend to bomb from low level, 106 Squadron was not called down by the Master Bomber so circled the battlefield for some time. The Germans were firing both heavy and light flak, which may have hit PB304. About 0830 hrs 106 Squadron turned for home, with planes still carrying bombs because ordered in the briefing not to jettison bombs into the English Channel that was full of Allied ships.

Lancaster PB304 was in difficulty and on fire when it appeared flying low over the Manchester suburbs of Salford and Pendleton just after 10 am. Raymond Barnes lived locally, so he probably guided Peter Lines towards relatively open playing fields on Littleton Road to make an emergency landing. The bomber overshot in its first attempt, then skimmed over rooftops to approach again.

Peter Lines managed to land the stricken PB304 on the playing fields, but its bombs exploded in the heavy landing and killed all seven airmen on board. The explosion caused significant damage to nearby buildings and seriously injured 70 local people. Two of them later died from injuries sustained that morning. 45 year-old Air Raid Warden George Morris, who had been working in his Pendleton allotment, died of shrapnel injuries, including a fractured femur, on 1st August in hospital. 72 year-old Lucy Bamford was badly injured by glass and died on 14th August.

The bodies of only three of PB304's aircrew were identified in the wreckage. Harry Reid's body was found on 5th August and at his family's request it was taken to Orkney and buried in a family grave in Kirkwall's St. Olaf's Cemetery. John Davenport is buried in All Saints Churchyard, Sedgely. Mohand Singh was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. Peter Lines, Raymond Barnes, Arthur Young and John Steel are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey.

Lucy Bamford's grandson, Joe, wrote a book about Lancaster PB304, "The Salford Lancaster", published in paperback by Pen & Sword Books in 1996. By then a local memorial to honour the crew had been erected in Agecroft Cemetery, close to the crash site. When it was unveiled on the 50th anniversary of the crash, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster PA474 flew past.

