

On 18 November 1943, the crew of Lancaster JB362 returned safely to RAF Fiskerton after a raid on Berlin. A reporter and photographer from the Daily Sketch were at the base reporting on the bomber offensive and took photos of the crew returning and at their debriefing.



Harold 4th from left. John Burrows standing behind the ground crewman.



Harold 2nd from right.



Pilot Ronald Brunt



Bomb Aimer John Burrows

Eight days later on 26 November 1943, the crew returned to the skies on a night operation to Berlin. The aircraft was attacked by a night fighter and crashed south of Gransee, Germany.

John Burrows was the only survivor from the crew. John's son Andrew has kindly provided information about his father and the crash of the aircraft.

John died in 2002 and only spoke a few times about his experience. Andrew recalled that there was one time when they had been enjoying a few drinks together that his father told him the full story of the raid. 'He did not talk about the war very often, but he suffered from survivor's guilt all his life and would occasionally say, 'Why did I get to live and not them?'

The crew had already dropped their bombs over Berlin and had turned for home. Shortly afterwards they were attacked by a night-fighter from below. At first it looked like they had not sustained too much damage, but then the engines started failing and there was a fire. Ron Brunt, the pilot realised that he was not going to be able to get the plane back home as they were still hundreds of miles away. So, he gave the order for the crew to bail out.

John Burrows was the bomb-aimer, stationed at the front of the aircraft, right on top of the forward escape hatch, so he would be the first to get out. As he was opening the hatch and getting ready to jump, he still had his intercom connected and he distinctly recalled hearing Harold say, 'I'm not jumping. I'm Jewish. I know what they do to Jews down there.' John's son said that his father was shocked by this. He had not known that Harold was Jewish, and he did not think any other of the crew knew this either. But he did not have much time to think about it, as he was already halfway out of the plane. Straight after hearing this, he disconnected his intercom and dropped through the hatch. As it turned out, he was one of only two of the crew who jumped. He landed heavily in a field and sprained his ankle. Unable to get far, he spent the night hiding in a hedge. He was found the next morning by a Polish farm worker (a forced labourer, wearing a P symbol to denote his nationality). They shared a cigarette but then the worker explained in sign language that he had to turn him in, or he would be punished. John was taken to the large house of the estate, which he said

was almost like a baronial castle. The estate owner's wife threatened to shoot him, but her husband calmed her down and persuaded her to give him breakfast, instead!

Later he was collected by two soldiers and taken to the nearest Luftwaffe station (which is now Tempelhof, Berlin's main airport). There he met the night-fighter pilot who had shot them down. This officer then took John to the place where the Lancaster had crashed. 'My Dad said he saw the bodies of his crew members. He said it was very upsetting but didn't give me any more details.'

John was told that the body of another crew member had been found elsewhere, 'I think it was Fred Ashman, the navigator.' Seemingly he had also jumped but had forgotten to disconnect his intercom and the cable had broken his neck as he exited the aircraft.

'After that, my Dad was shipped off to the POW camp. He said he felt very alone there, and he kept going over the whole event in his mind. Did Ron Brunt decide to try and get the plane home because of what Harold said? Did the other crew members agree with the decision and decide to stay on board? Or was the plane so badly damaged that they just didn't have time to get out? Of course, he never knew the answers to those questions, but they must have haunted him all his life.'

John was held in the camp right to the end of the war. When he finally got home, he said that he made an effort to go and visit the families of all of the crew members. 'I'm a bit hazy about the detail here so I don't know whether he managed to meet with Pearl (Harold's wife) or not. The only other family I have been in touch with is Fred Ashman's, and they remember his visit very well and were grateful to learn more about what happened.'

The crew who were killed were:

Nav, Frederick Edward Ashman, 1337269, age 19. Son of Herbert & Edith Eliza Ashman of Lenham, Kent.

F/E, Harold Bronsky.

Pilot, Ronald Brunt, 1288015, age 21. Son of William & Alice Norley of Chadderton, Lancs.

W/Op, Ronald William Norley DFM, 1386374, age 23. Son of William & Alice Norley of Dover, Kent.

A/G, Ronald Patrick O'Dea, RAAF 427017, age 21. Son of Daniel & Amy O'Dea of Geraldton, Western Australia.

A/G, Edward David Wilson, 1452163, age 23. Of Liverpool.

B/A, John Grant Burrows, 1452806, POW Stalag 4B Muhlberg.

I am extremely grateful to Andrew Grant for supplying the photographs and information about his father John Burrows.