



St George's College

PERTH · WESTERN AUSTRALIA

WILLIAM ROBERT CUTHBERTSON

29 APRIL 1914 TO 1 JULY 1944



Bill Cuthbertson lived in West Perth and attended Hale School with his two brothers from 1922 to 1931. He had the unique distinction of being dux of the school in both 1930 and 1931.

He was at St George's from 1934 to 1937, and was Senior Student in his final year. As one of the founders of the University Camp for Boys (later Camp for Kids) which was wholly manned and run before the war by St George's students, Bill became memorable as the first camp cook.

After gaining his Bachelor of Science in 1936, and then Master of Science degree from UWA, he sailed for England and there completed

his PhD before embarking on a career as a research scientist. He worked briefly for the Wool Industries Research Association in Leeds where he co-authored a paper on *The Action of Alkalis on Wool* (Biochemical Journal, 1945). The paper was not received until 28 July 1944, by which time Bill had been killed.

Bill married Joyce, a cousin of his fellow Georgian “Tom” Darling (1935) who also died as a result of the war (c.f.).

It looked as though he had a distinguished career before him, as he had just completed his PhD at Leeds; but no-one who knew him was surprised to hear that Bill had gone from chemical research to Bomber Command, said the 1945 Dragon.

Bill joined the RAF and trained as a navigator, being posted eventually to 101 Squadron for operations on Lancaster aircraft. Pilots and navigators both took about two years to train before joining operations, while an ‘air bomber’ (the correct term for bomb-aimer) took about 18 months. Wireless operators and air gunners took 9 months to a year, and an engineer usually took 6 to 9 months. It was common for bomber crews to self-select, with the pilot asking others to join his crew until he had a full complement. This probably explains the eclectic nature of Bill’s crew. The pilot was RAF Pilot Officer James N. Brown; the two air gunners were both RCAF Flight Sergeants, Albert T. Couch and David Urquhart; the wireless operator/air gunner was RAF Sergeant Thomas Lyth; the Flight Engineer was RAF Sergeant William Offord; and the two other crew were both RAAF Flight Sergeants, Carl V. Krieg and John Pritchard.

On 15 June 1943, 101 Squadron moved to its final wartime base, RAF Ludford Magna in Lincolnshire. From here its Lancaster crews participated in the battle of Hamburg and the raid on the secret German rocket site at Peenemunde. In September 1943, 101 Squadron crews began to fly specially modified Lancasters fitted with top secret “air-borne cigar” (ABC) radio jamming equipment, becoming Bomber Command’s first electronic counter-measures group. An additional German-speaking operator joined each crew to scan the German wireless frequencies and use transmitters on the aircraft to jam those supporting Luftwaffe night fighters. This explains why Bill’s crew totaled eight instead of the usual seven, and it would seem one of the RAAF Flight Sergeants (his name suggests it was Kreig) was the ABC operator. However, the signals emitted by this equipment also made the

aircraft easy to home onto and 101 Squadron suffered heavy losses as a result.

During the winter of 1943-44 squadron crews fought in the Battle of Berlin but suffered high casualties. On 31 March 1944, during the Nuremberg Raid, 101 Squadron lost 7 Lancasters and crews out of 26 dispatched. In the spring and summer of 1944, 101 Squadron attacked targets in France in preparation for and support of the allied invasion of Normandy. After the initial success of the D-day landings, it was imperative to stop the Germans bringing forward men and equipment from regional France to the front line. On the evening of 30 June the target was a set of railway yards at Vierzon, south of Orleans. This was an important junction for through traffic to Normandy, and Bomber Command sent 118 Lancasters from No. 1 Group for the five-hour mission. After marking the target with its own marking flight, the RAF bombed the yards with great accuracy and success.

This success was won at great cost. The German ground and air defences together created a maelstrom of death, and almost 12 percent of the force was lost. Crew members from a 626 Squadron Lancaster who took part in the raid recalled: *There was massive fighter opposition all the way from our coast landfall at Dieppe...to the target and back to the coast. This was a very frightening op. I was logging aircraft going down all the time..... This was our worst trip so far. Fighter opposition was terrific. Noted 15 of our aircraft go down in flames. Lucky to get back alive.*

Bill Cuthbertson and the crew of his Lancaster are buried at Langon Village, 50km south-east of Blois. During the bomber campaign against Germany, 101 Squadron flew on more raids than any other bomber squadron and suffered the highest casualties of any RAF unit in the war, losing 1176 aircrew killed in action.

Bill's mother, Isabel Cuthbertson, wrote to Josh Reynolds that Bill had planned to come back to Australia with his wife Joyce when the war was over. Though she couldn't attend the opening of the War Memorial Squash Court, Joyce Cuthbertson wrote from her home in London in January 1959:

It was good to feel that I could be with you all in spirit on the day of the ceremony. Your description of the building and its setting brought back very fond memories of my brief but happy visit to St George's in 1948 when my mother-in-law and aunt and I came to have tea with you, and

you showed me the college in its beautiful grounds. It was a happy visit, rather than a sad one, because Bill had told me so much about it and had a tremendous affection for it, and particularly for you and all the help and encouragement you gave him.

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“Above all he stood out among his fellows as a quiet but convinced Christian. His life, so tragically cut short, was a fine, constant and inspiringly successful attempt to put his Christianity into practice.”

The Dragon, 1945 (attributed to Josh Reynolds)