

Flight Sergeant 1582270 Horace Laking

Age 24

RAF Bomber Command

(24/11/1922 to 17/12/2012)



Flight Sergeant 1582270 Horace Laking, trained as a Flight Engineer and served in Bomber Command flying in Halifax Bombers.



Hadley Page Halifax Heavy Bomber

Horace Laking (24/11/1922 to 17/12/2012) was the son of Thomas, a Coal Hearer, and Kathleen Lois Laking of Winney Lane, Harthill. and was the second oldest of the four brothers, Ernest, John and Cyril.

Horace Laking served in RAF Bomber Command from 23 July 1942 to 26th of July 1946.

23/8/43-30/9/43: 1663 Heavy Conversion Unit (HCU) at Rufforth

Horace commenced his service at Rufforth, training as a Flight Engineer, on the Hadley Page, Halifax Heavy Bomber.

The Halifax Heavy Bomber required a Crew of 7. The Pilot, the Navigator, the Flight Engineer, the Wireless Operator, the Bomb Aimer/Nose Gunner, the Mid-Upper gunner, and the Rear Gunner.

The Navigator & the Flight Engineer positioned in the front Fuselage, between the front Turret and the Cockpit. The interior of a Halifax was not roomy, but it was provided with 2 Rest Bunks and an Elsan Toilet.

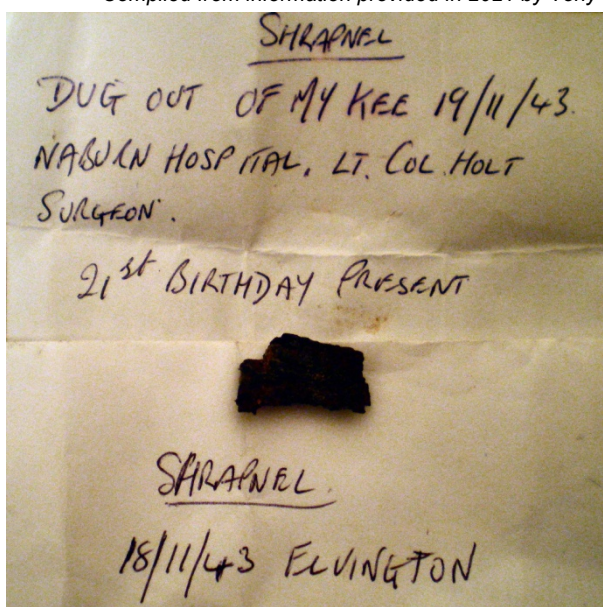
Neither the Avro Lancaster, nor the Hadley Page Halifax had a co-pilot. The Flight Engineer sat below, and to the right of the Pilot. His task was to look after the Engines, Throttle settings & Propeller Pitch settings, Fuel Flow and act as the Pilot's Assistant, and take over control of the aircraft if necessary. He had two Panels to Monitor. The 1st panel on the Starboard side, that contained Oil & Fuel Gauges, Booster Pump switches, Fuel Pressure warning lights, Fuel Tank selector cocks, and many other things. The 2nd panel was part of the Main Dash, which could also be seen by the Pilot. This contained Rev Counters, Boost Gauges, Ignition Switches, Engine Fire Extinguisher Buttons & Propeller Feathering Buttons, etc.

31/9/43-24/8/44, he was posted to **77 Squadron Bomber Command, Elvington** (now the Yorkshire Air Museum)

During his time with 77 Squadron, Horace was hit in the knee by a piece of Shrapnel on a raid over Ludwigshafen on the night of the 18th of November 1943.

NOVEMBER 1943					Time carried forward :-		
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
10-11-43	1505	U.LW290	F/O GARLETTE	FLIGHT-ENG.	AIR TO AIR FIRING. V.G.O and TURRETS.	0.35	
11-11-43	1535	U.LW290	"	"	BOMBING EXERCISE. 4 BOMBS DROPPED.	1.20	
13-11-43	11.30	U.LW290	"	"	FIGHTER CO-OPERATION.	1.15	
14-11-43	1530	Z.LW233	"	"	SEA-SEARCH. FORT CREW DINGHY SIGHTED.	2.20	
18-11-43	1703	U.LW290	F/O GARLETTE	"	OPS - LUDWIGSHAFEN (MANNHEIM) M.V.G. and SELF INJURED WITH METAL SPLINTERS 8 1/2 WEEKS IN DOCK. CREW MISSING ON MAGDEBURG JAN 22 WHILST ON SICK LEAVE	7.12	
TOTAL TIME ...						33.10	40.02

The logbook entry above details this event and shows spent eight and a half weeks recuperating. It also shows that whilst he was recuperating his crew went missing over Magdeburg; this must have hit Horace very hard. As all crews were close knit teams, fought together, and ate and slept in the same billets.



Once recovered, he returned to 77 Squadron to complete his *tour of operations, which he did on 24th of August 1944 having flown for 56 hours and 50 minutes in daylight and for 150 hours and 2 minutes in darkness.

*‘Tours of Operations’ in Bomber Command -First tour, 30 bombing raids, and Second tour, not more than 20 bombing raids

After his tour of operations, he was then posted to **21 Operational Training Unit (OTU) Moreton-in-Marsh**, as an Instructor. Many young RAF personnel from as far away as Canada and New Zealand passed through (OTU 21) before being stationed in far off places such as North Africa and Burma.

17/1/45 to 10/2/45, he was posted to **Heavy Conversion Unit 1659 Topcliffe**, where he served as an instructor. However, after short a stay of only 24-days, he requested to be returned to operational duties.

27/2/45 to 4/7/45, he was posted to **171 (Special Duties) Squadron, North Creake (Norfolk)** Part of Bomber Command’s RAF 100 Group, their role was to carry out secret radio counter measures.

On the 3rd of March 1945, his Halifax Bomber, while returning from a Special Duties operation, was shot down over Norfolk by an enemy aircraft. He and the rest of the crew bailed out, and Horace landed in a graveyard. He thus became a member of the Irvin Parachute Company’s Caterpillar Club because he had used one of their parachutes to save his life.



The Caterpillar Member Pin

After leaving 171 (Special Duties) Squadron, he flew to India on the 16th of November 1945 where he served until his discharge on the 26th of July 1946. His total flying Hours were: - 124 hours 16 minutes daylight flying, and 209 hours 37 minutes night flying.

His total operational hours flying = 182.

Of the 125,000 aircrew served Bomber Command, 55,573 were killed, and another 8,400 were wounded. 10,000 survived being shot down and became prisoners of war. To summarise, if you served in Bomber Command, you had only a 40% chance of surviving without physical harm.

Additional information researched by E. J. Mullins
Harthill Memories and History Society
22 March 2021