

STORY OF A LANC'



Lancaster B Mk. VII NX 611

R.A.F. Scampton

STORY OF A LANC'


(NX 611)

Compiled and written by Brian Goulding, Mike Garbett and Squadron Leader
John Partridge, RAF

Foreword by The Rt. Hon. Lord Lilford :

NX 611 was doomed to the scrapyard when we found her in Blackpool. She was offered in a very poor state to RAF Scampton and the renovation to her present mint condition is a tribute to the ability and enterprise of all who were concerned.

The Lancaster and the men who flew and serviced them played a major role in winning the Second World War, and I wish the loan of NX 611 to be my tribute to the Royal Air Force.



LILFORD

Acknowledgements for assistance in the preparation of this story are gratefully
extended to :

Dick Taylor whose first hand knowledge and collection of photographs has
proved invaluable

Bill Fisher

Capitaine de Corvette Henri Aragnol French Navy (Ret'd)

Jean Pierre Dubois

J Chillon

Bunny D'Arby

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Cover picture : Brian Goulding
FIRST IMPRESSION

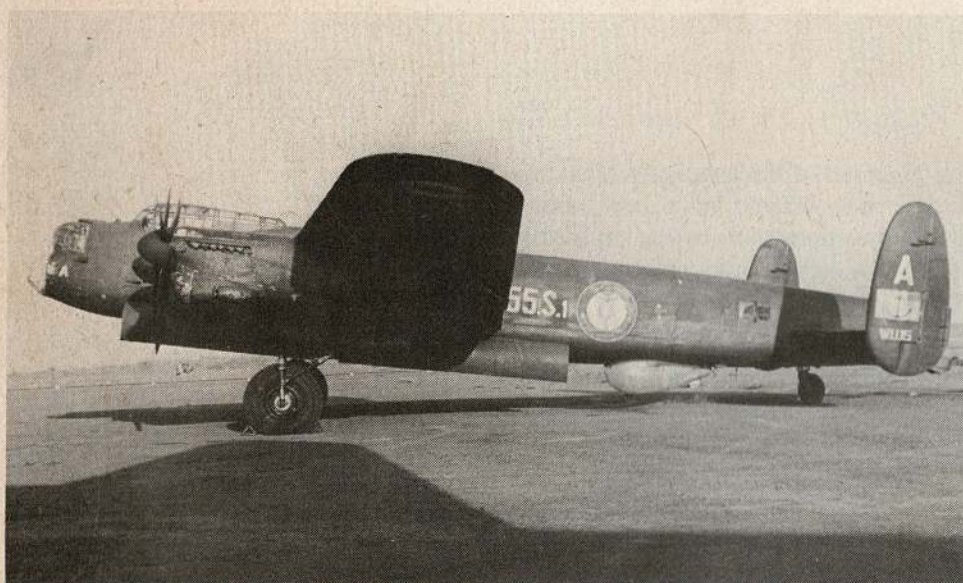
The story starts...

NX611 was built by Austin Motors at Longbridge near Birmingham, and was completed in April 1945, too late to take any part in World War II in Europe. It was the first of 150 production B Mk VIIIs, finished to Far East standards for Tiger Force, and fitted with Martin dorsal turret, Frazer Nash FN 82 rear turret, both with 2 x 0.5 inch guns, and Merlin 24 engines suitable for operations in the tropics.

FRENCH SERVICE

Delivered new to 38 MU Llandow, there she was destined to remain as surplus to requirements because of Japan's early surrender, until 1952. Then, as one of 54 Lancasters, NX611 was sold to the French Naval Air Arm, L'Aeronavale, under a Western Union agreement whereby the French were to supplement the Royal Air Force in the patrol of Atlantic and Mediterranean shipping lanes. Coded WU15 and finished in midnight blue, she was collected from Avro's at Woodford (Cheshire) on 30th May 1952 by a French Navy ferry crew, having been converted to Maritime Reconnaissance standard. Modifications included removal of the mid-upper turret, fitting of airborne lifeboat attachment, provision for ASV radar, etc.

For the next ten years WU15 served on patrol and air sea rescue duties with a number of 'Flottilles', based at Lann-Bihoué (Brittany) and at Port-Lyautey and Agadir (both Morocco). In November 1962, following a major overhaul by Union des Transports Aériens at Le Bourget, and repainted white overall, WU15 was ferried to Noumea, New Caledonia, a French island 1000 miles east of Australia. With two other Lancasters, it performed regular patrol, ASR, communications and liaison duties throughout a wide area of the Pacific, operated by Escadrille de Servitude 9 S (for Surveillance); but by mid 1964, due to shortage of spares, and the expense of maintaining ageing machines, a decision was taken to withdraw the world's last three operational Lancasters.



NAVY BLUE. In the dark blue of L'Aeronavale (French equivalent of the Fleet Air Arm) WU15 stands in the hot sun of Agadir, Morocco, during service there in 1959/60 with Escadrille de Servitude 55S. The WU stood for 'Western Union', the agreement under which the Lancasters were sold to the French for a reported price of £50,000 each. The roundel is blue/white/red and, like the fin-flash is superimposed with a black anchor. Protruding from the tail can be seen the rear-facing camera mounting. Unlike the RAF's Maritime Reconnaissance Lancasters, which were fitted with Lincoln-type rudders, WU15 retained the standard style, though the stronger 'Mk IV' (Lincoln) undercarriage and wheels can be seen. (R. Caratini/J. M. G. Gradidge)

PACIFIC WHITE. Before delivery to the French base at Noumea-Tontouta, New Caledonia, in late 1962, the blue was replaced by a much harder-wearing all-white finish. The serial numbers of the three Lancasters used latterly by E. de S. 9S also became their unit codes, and the WU was discontinued. WU15 was ferried from Le Bourget (Paris) to Noumea by Capitaine de Corvette Angelini and his crew of five via Malta, Turkey, Persia, Pakistan, India, Cambodia (Phnom-Penh — the first and only time the machine was in that part of the world), the Philippines, Dutch New Guinea and Australia. Flying time was 60 hours. On their withdrawal in 1964 the three Lancs were replaced by DC4's, and WU15 had by then completed 2220 flying hours in L'Aeronavale service. (R. Caratini/J. M. G. Gradidge)



TIMELY APPROACH

13,000 miles away in England, a group of enthusiasts, the Historic Aircraft Preservation Society (HAPS) had anticipated the French decision, and on the initiative of their energetic chairman, M. D. N. (Bill) Fisher, had made enquiries about the chances of preserving one of the machines nearly twelve months previously. The original approach had evoked no response and it came as a complete surprise when the French authorities in Paris wrote to the Society offering not only to donate a Lancaster, but also to deliver it as far as either Australia or New Zealand. Hurried arrangements were made for Hawker de Havilland Australia Pty Ltd to accept WU15, which duly arrived at Bankstown, near Sydney, in August 1964.

Months of negotiations, organisation and fund-raising followed, during which Bill Fisher worked almost full time in co-operation with an Australian solicitor, Bruce Miles. The minimum sum needed to finance an overhaul and the ferry flight to the UK was put at £10,000, and with generous help from the Royal Australian Air Force, Shell Petroleum, the Royal Air Force, Quantas (who lent radio equipment for the flight), the Hawker Siddeley Group, with the aid of money raised from holidaymakers on Sydney's beaches, and subscriptions from enthusiasts all over the world, delivery to the UK at last became a reality. By the beginning of April 1965, sufficient had been raised to enable WU 15 to be overhauled and test flown. On 23rd April she was positioned to Mascot near Sydney.



FINAL CHECK. On test from Bankstown, near Sydney before positioning to nearby Mascot for final departure for the U.K. Though still retaining the L'Aeronavale roundels and badges of E de S.9S below the cockpit, the British civil registration G-ASXX has now been applied.

(Hawker Siddeley News)

HOMeward BOUND

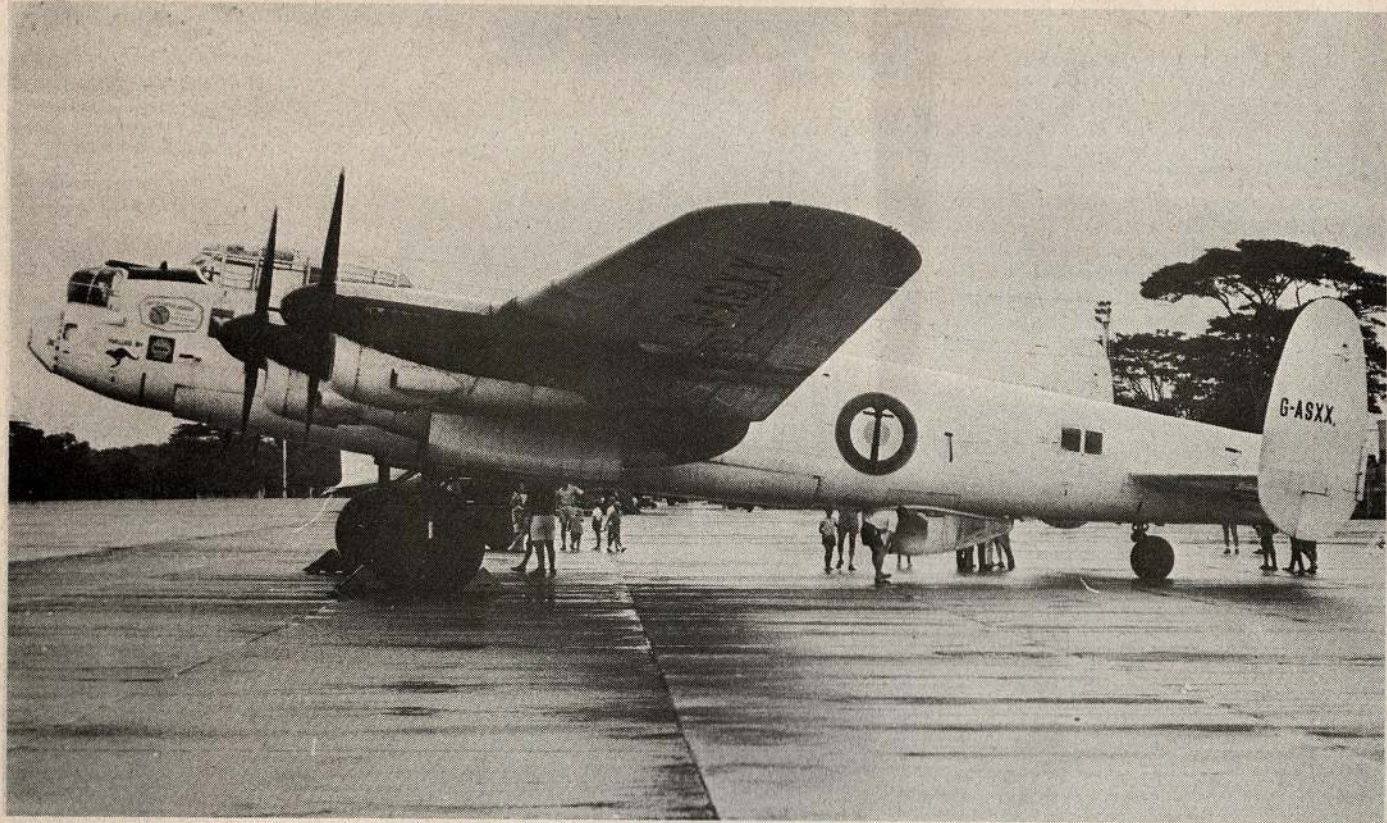
A volunteer crew had been assembled, comprising mainly current or recently retired RAAF and airline personnel. Most had served on Lancasters operationally during the war:

Captain	John Hampshire DFC
1st Officer	Douglas H. Smedley
2nd Officer	John B. Nicholls
Radio Operator	Arthur Johnston
Navigator	Keith McCarthy
Flight Engineer	Don Delaney
Flight Stewards	George Parlbay
	Jack Birney
PRO	Pat Kilvington
Press Officer	Derrill Farrer

At noon on Anzac Day, 25th April 1965, the white Lanc, still in L'Aeronavale markings, but now bearing the British civil registration G-ASXX, lifted off the Mascot runway on the first leg of its 12,000 mile journey to Biggin Hill, Kent, England. The short first stage of only 2 hrs 55 mins to Coolangatta acted as a preliminary shake-down for the crew. The rest of the ferry flight was a long, hard haul, not without incident, particularly over some Middle Eastern countries which were crossed without the requisite clearances. The route was Sydney (Mascot), Coolangatta, Amberley, Darwin, Changi, Butterworth, Calcutta (Dum-Dum), Karachi, Bahrein (Muharrag), Akrotiri, Istres (Marseilles), Biggin Hill.

The aircraft and its engines were carefully nursed all along the route, the experience of Don Delaney, the Flight Engineer, proving invaluable. Appropriately, having completed a tour of ops on Lancs, Don had been the Flight Engineer on the first Lancaster ferried from Britain to Australia in June 1943.

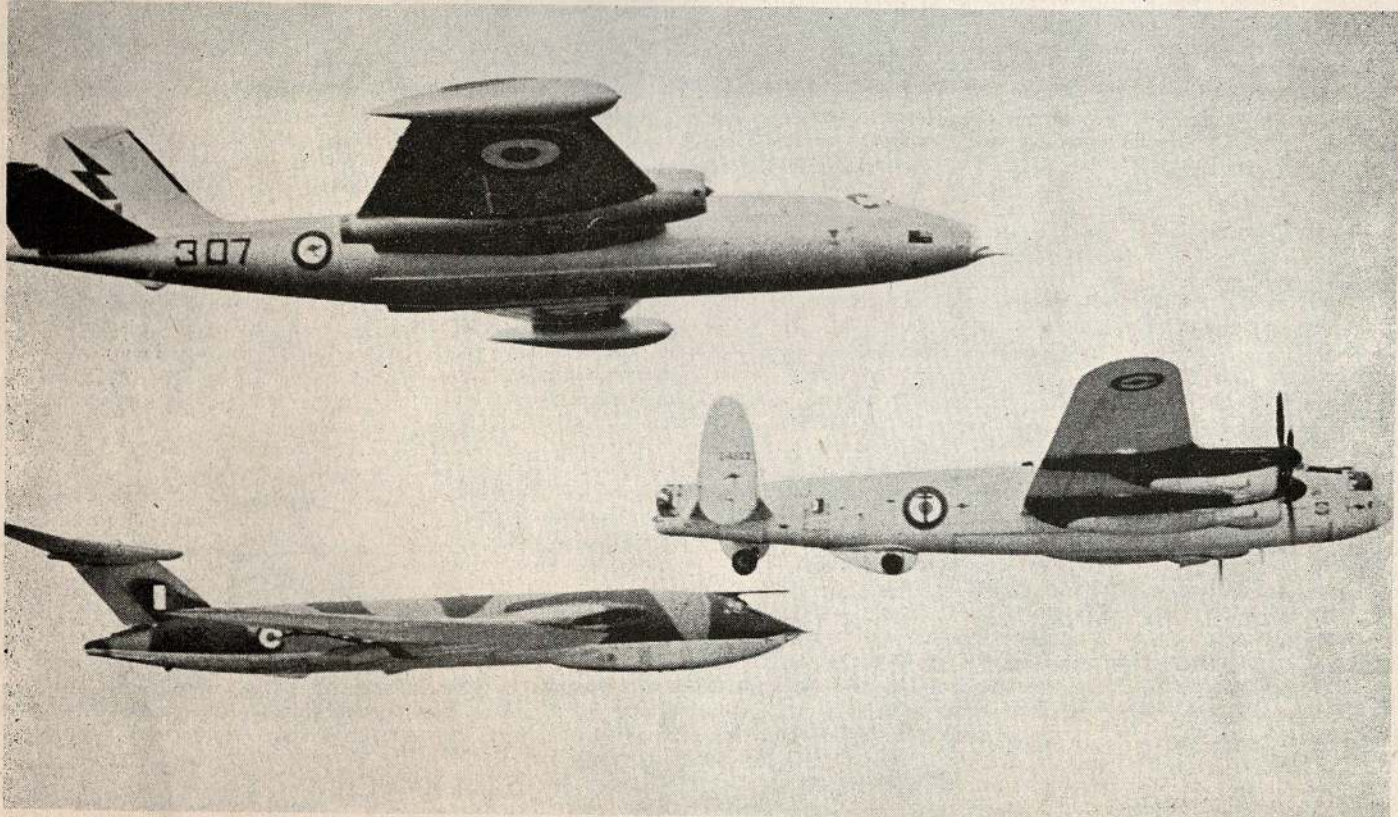
After 19 days and a flying time of nearly 70 hrs the target was safely and successfully achieved—arrival at Biggin Hill at 1615 hrs on 13th May 1965 to coincide with the opening of the Annual Air Fair. Its total logged air time from new was then 2411 hours.



OVERNIGHT STOP following the long 10 hour haul from Darwin (North Australia) was made at RAF Changi (Singapore). For the ferry flight a 400-gallon fuel tank was fitted in the bomb bay to supplement the normal 2154-gallon capacity of the wing tanks. At every port of call, the aircraft was surrounded by an admiring crowd of well-wishers, and proved a nostalgic sight and sound to many an ex-Lanc man still serving in the RAF abroad. (Via Sqn. Ldr. R. C. B. Ashworth)

FRIENDLY ESCORT out of Butterworth (Malaya) provided by a Victor and Canberra of the Royal Air Force. Other escorting aircraft included Sabres of the Royal Australian Air Force.

(Photo: FEAF)



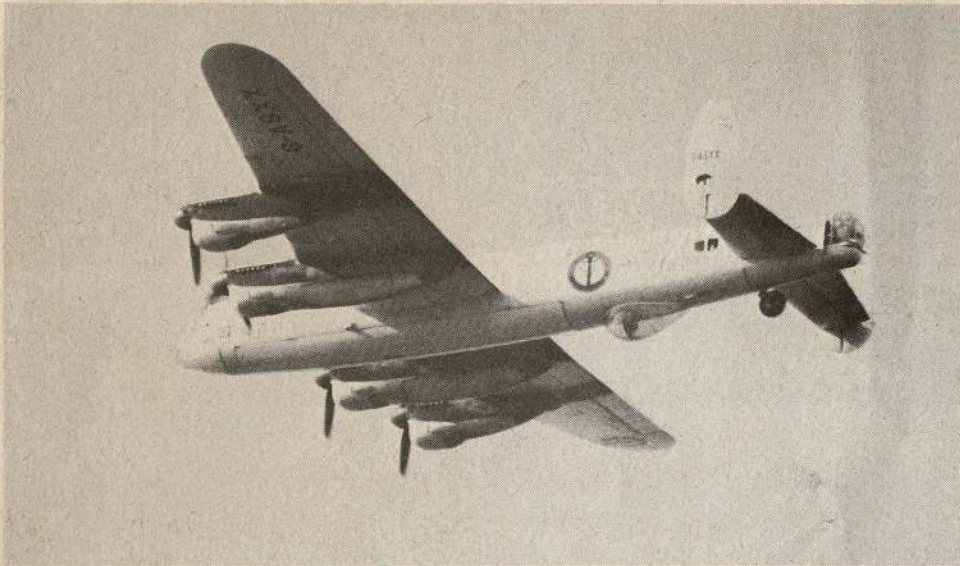
WELL ON THE WAY. On final approach to RAF Akrotiri (Cyprus) after a nervous 7-hour dash across the Middle East from Bahrein on rather doubtful diplomatic and route clearances. Over one country, the crew only just misinterpreted an order to land due to "slight radio difficulty".

(RAF Akrotiri)

BASE LEG. About to join the circuit at Biggin Hill, photographed from an accompanying Shackleton Mk. 3, near the end of an epic 12000 mile flight.

(The Times)





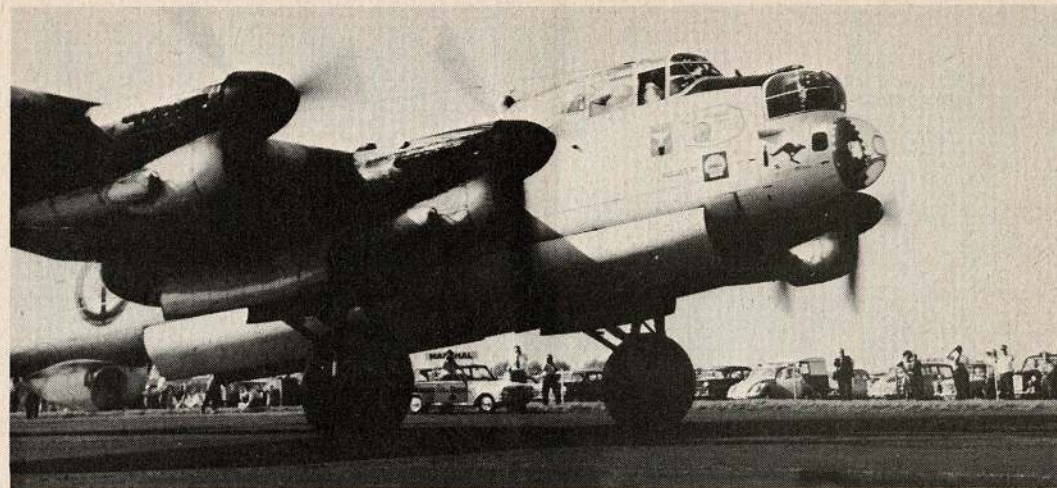
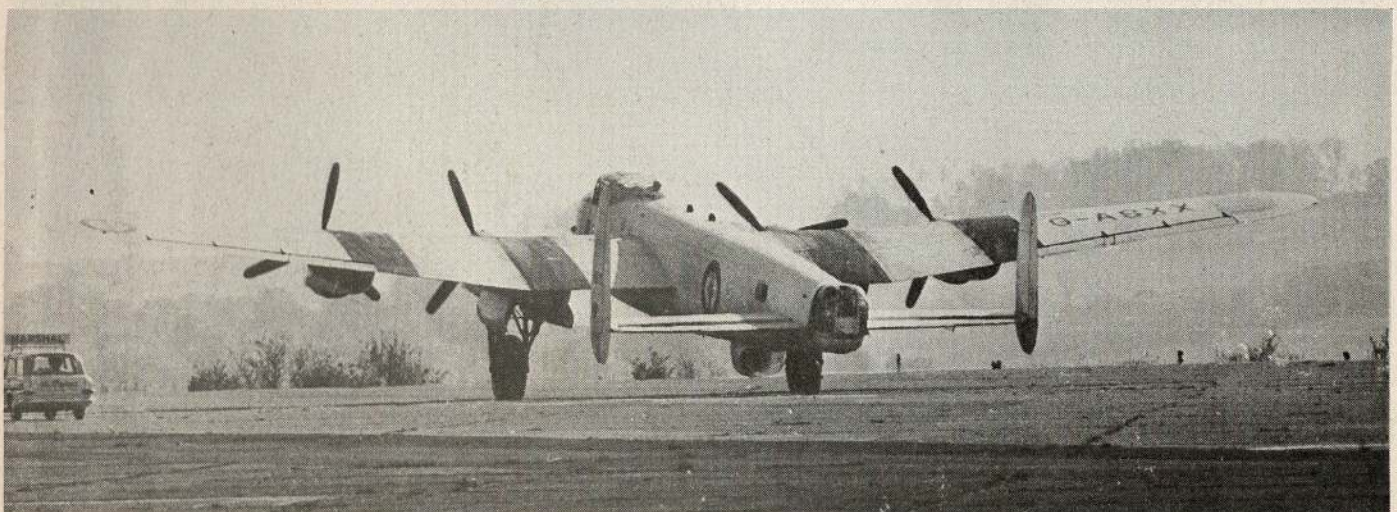
FLYPAST. Before landing the Lanc made several runs over the huge crowd awaiting its arrival. The two observation windows in the rear fuselage, port side, are a standard ASR/MR modification.

(R. W. Cranham)

*TOUCHDOWN at Biggin Hill.
(Neville Franklin collection)*



(Both Daily Express)



TAXYING-IN past the hordes of welcoming enthusiasts and photographers gathered for the opening day of the 'London Evening News' International Air Fair.

(R. W. Cranham)



SAFELY BACK. The crew, all of whom had served with the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II, leave the aircraft at the end of a hard, taxing journey, which spanned 19 days and involved 70 hours' flying. The tail-plane is streaked with oil blown back from the engines.

(R. W. Cranham)



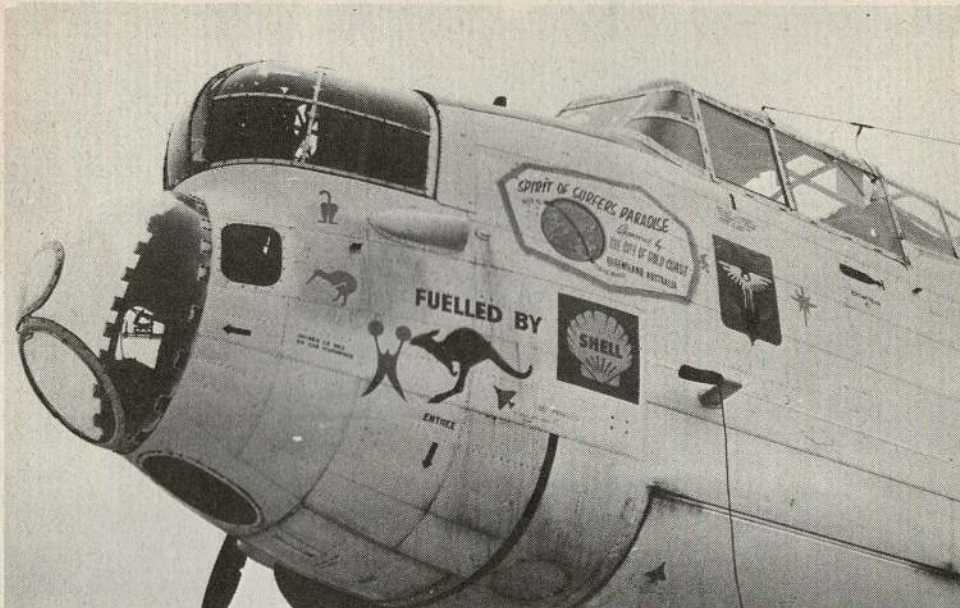
KEY MEN. The captain, John Hampshire, second from left, and in the dark overall Flight Engineer Don Delaney — 'the first and the last' (see text).

(R. W. Cranham)



RUN-UPS were carried out on occasions at Biggin Hill by engineers of Field Aircraft, supervised by Arthur Heath. Although the Lanc was officially grounded because some of the engines and propellers were time-expired, engines and systems were kept well-exercised ready for the day when she could fly again.

(Dick Taylor)



TRIBUTES on the nose to some of the contributors to the successful home-coming. The winged motif below the pilot's window is the badge of Escadrille de Servitude 9S.

(John Walls)

GROUNDED

Due to expiry of permitted hours on an engine and propeller, G-ASXX was grounded by the Air Registration Board. Restoration work soon got under way. A large team of volunteers, not only HAPS members, but people from all walks of life stripped the aircraft down to bare metal before it was resprayed in standard night bomber black and camouflage. The original RAF serial, NX611, was re-applied, with the code letters HA-P — not only the initials of the Historic Aircraft Preservation Society, but also a genuine wartime Lancaster unit code, No. 218 (Gold Coast) Squadron. The aircraft was later named 'Guy Gibson' at a ceremony performed by Mr. Gibson senior. The work took nearly two years and included limited overhaul and re-certification of engines, propellers and systems by engineers of Field Aircraft Services (Hunting Group).

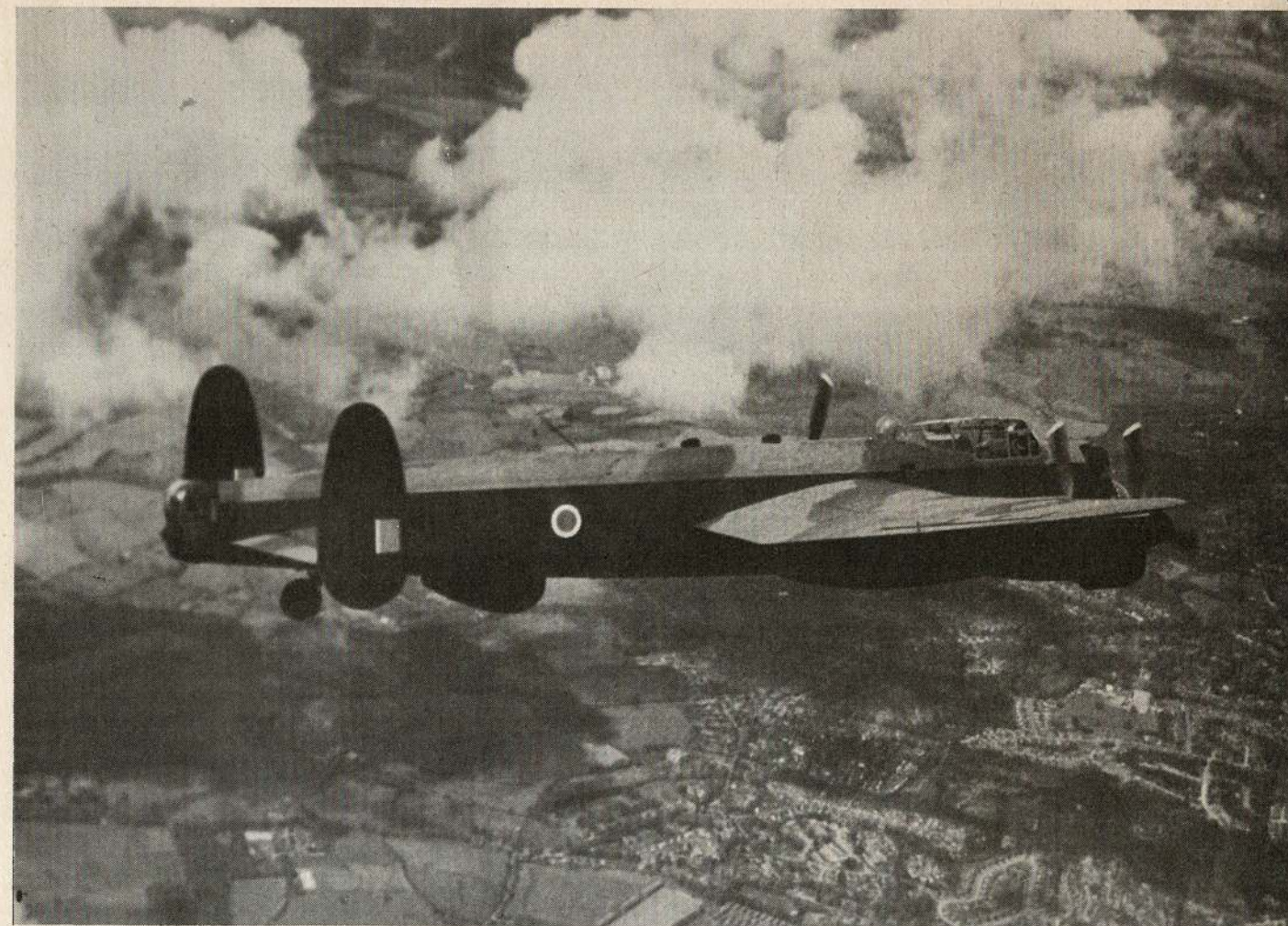
AIRBORNE AGAIN

It was not until May 1967 that test flights could be undertaken on a special certificate. The first, on 6th May, was relatively uneventful, but the second, on the following day, was somewhat hair-raising for the crew. The No. 2 engine failed to feather and, overspeeding at 3200 rpm, with fire warning light on, the extinguisher had to be operated before the engine was cut. As if this was not enough, the No. 3 generator went U/S, the intercom was dead and the port wing flaps developed a two inch droop in flight. A safe three engine landing was made back at Biggin Hill after 40 very eventful minutes. It is fortunate the aircraft was in the extremely capable hands of Flt Lt Neil Williams, an RAF test pilot well known as an international aerobatic champion, who was to captain NX611 on all 14 of its flights following return to the UK.

On 9th May the third air test — this time a complete hydraulic failure after take-off, resulting in wheels and flaps having to be blown down by the emergency air supply. A thorough check by Field's and Hawker Siddeley engineers followed, and on 17th May a 30 minute test flight was successfully completed without incident.

She was now ready for her first real outing — a visit to RAF Scampton on the weekend of 19/20th May for the 24th anniversary celebrations of the 'Dams' raid. Aboard for this flight were several ex 617 Squadron wartime aircrew. One of the welcoming personalities at Scampton was Sir Barnes Wallis himself, whose legendary "Bouncing Bombs", "Tallboys" and "Grand Slams" were carried exclusively by Lancasters. On this occasion NX611 performed perfectly, as she did on her next sortie, to Blackbushe on 2/3rd September 1967 for a display sponsored by the St. John Ambulance Brigade. On both days Neil Williams ably demonstrated the Lancaster's fighter-like handling qualities.

It was hoped to fly NX611 regularly at displays, but the cost, estimated at £2/300 per hour, was prohibitive and only one booking was forthcoming, a display at Filton on 15th June 1968. By then PA 474, the RAF's own Lancaster, was flying again and HAPS lacked the sponsors it so badly needed if NX611 was to be kept flying.



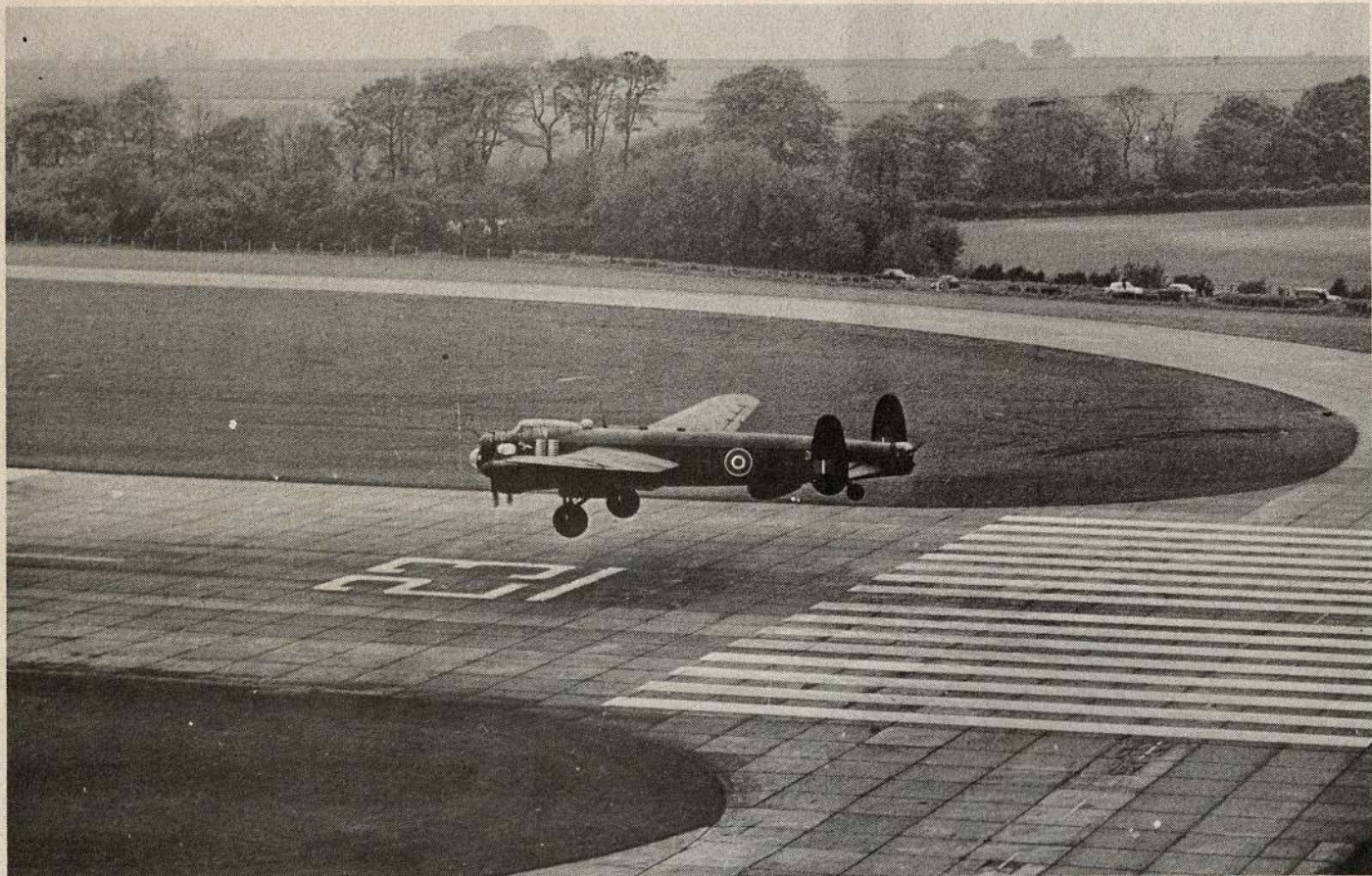
AIRBORNE AGAIN after a grounding of nearly two years, during which she was overhauled and repainted in standard bomber colours. Seen here over southern England on one of three eventful test flights. Codes, serial and yellow outline of fuselage roundel have still to be applied.

(John Blake — Royal Aero Club)



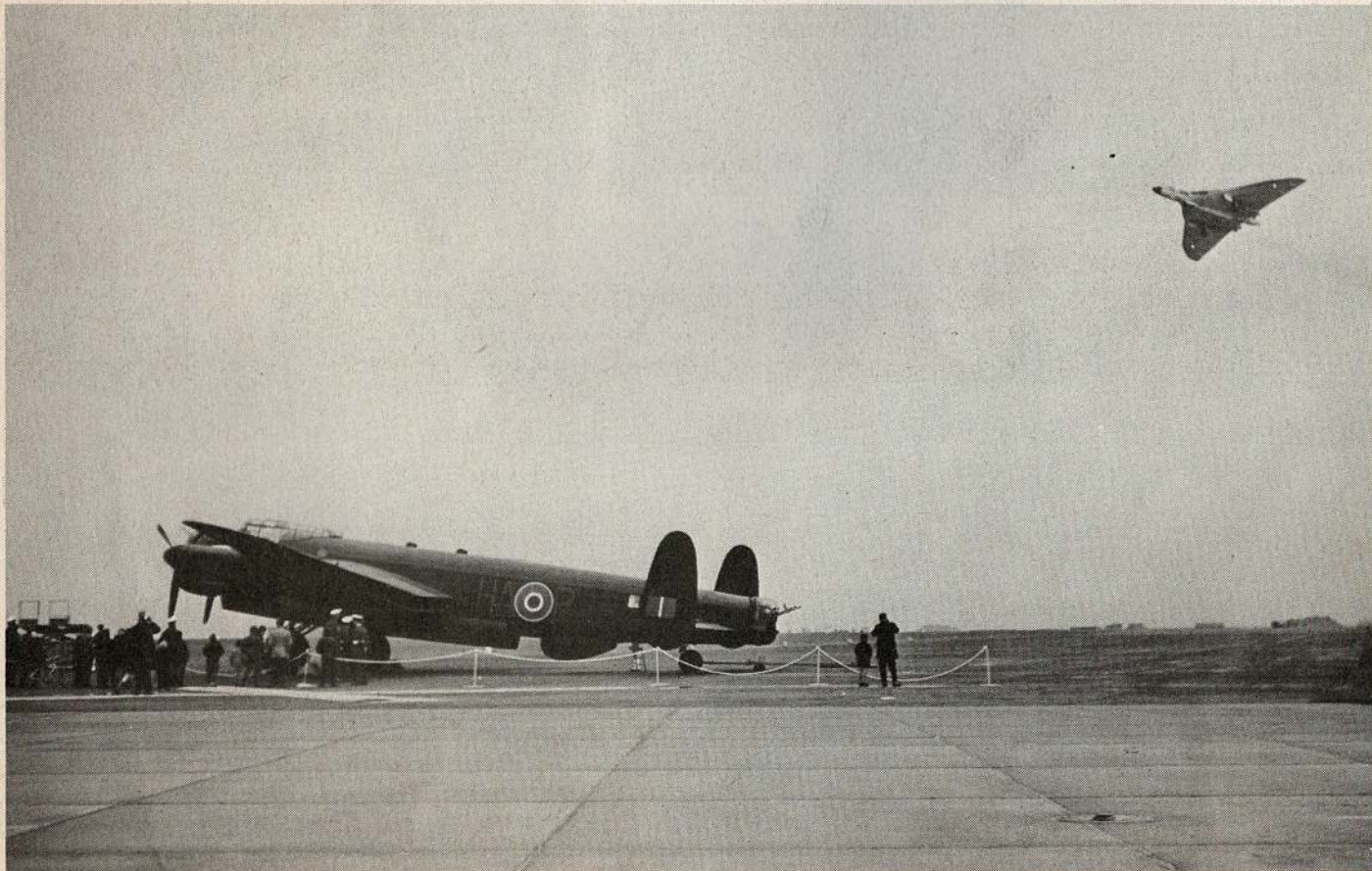
FINAL TEST FLIGHT prior to the weekend visit to Scampton in May 1967. The markings are now complete, with the letters HA-P representing the Lanc's owners the Historic Aircraft Preservation Society. The red code letters were slightly thinner than wartime standard, but in general the finish was commendably authentic.

(The Times)



SCAMPTON SCENE. NX 611 arrives over the threshold of runway '23' on 19/5/67 for the 24th anniversary celebrations of the 'Dams' raid. Photographed from an RAF Whirlwind helicopter. (RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

FAMILY TRIBUTE. A Vulcan from the same AVRO 'stable' flies low over the Lanc at Scampton on the same weekend, making an interesting comparison in size and shape with its worthy predecessor. (M. Parkinson)

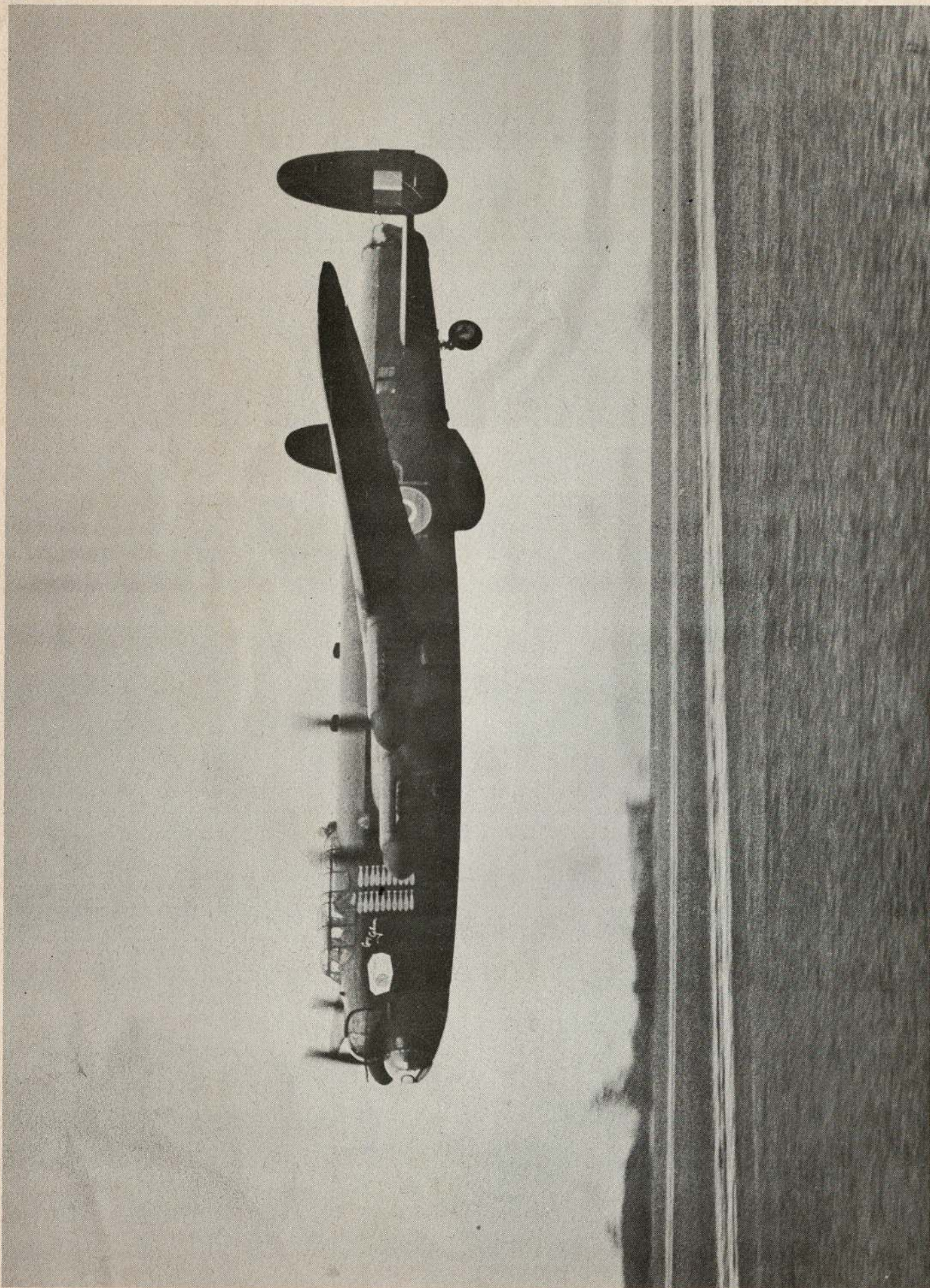


LIFT OFF. On a perfect summer morning, NX 611 is a magnificent sight as she roars away from Biggin Hill on the way to Filton (Bristol) to take part in what was to be her last sponsored display, 15th June, 1968. (Brian Goulding)



LOW LEVEL over the crowd at Filton, showing upper-surface markings, including 'walk lines' on the wings. The two protrusions on the fuselage behind the astro-dome are housings for French radar aerials, and have now been replaced with the more standard 'whip' aerials. (E. Ashman)





NEW HOME SOUGHT

Soon HAPS was to be wound up and its assets taken over by Reflectaire Ltd. The new company was given notice to leave Biggin Hill and on 30th March 1969, the Lanc was flown out to a new home at Lavenham, Suffolk, a former wartime USAAF base. It was here the codes HA-P were replaced with the letters GL-C, the initials of Gp Capt Leonard Cheshire VC DSO DFC following his visit to the airfield during which he had the pleasure of taxiing NX611. It was obvious that the temptation to open-up and take off was only just resisted.

Negotiations to lease the airfield at Lavenham were not successful, and until another more permanent home could be found, permission was given for NX611 to be moved to RAF Hullavington, Wilts. The flight took place on 7th February 1970, and on board was actor Richard Todd, recording a commentary for TV, and renewing his acquaintance with Lancasters dating back to his starring role as Guy Gibson in "The Dam Busters" film of 1953.

During her stay at Hullavington the Lanc was completely repainted by the two full-time employees of Reflectaire Ltd, and was inspected by Rolls Royce and Hawker Siddeley (Woodford). A serious defect was discovered in the starboard inner engine, necessitating its removal and transport by road to a specialist engine company on the south coast. The engine had to be stripped down, a new cylinder head had to be acquired and fitted, then subjected to a four hour pressure test. The airframe was X-rayed and found to be quite sound, apart from a small crack in an engine bearer which was not considered critical. After retraction tests and engine runs, the aircraft was cleared on a special certificate of airworthiness for "one flight of three hours".

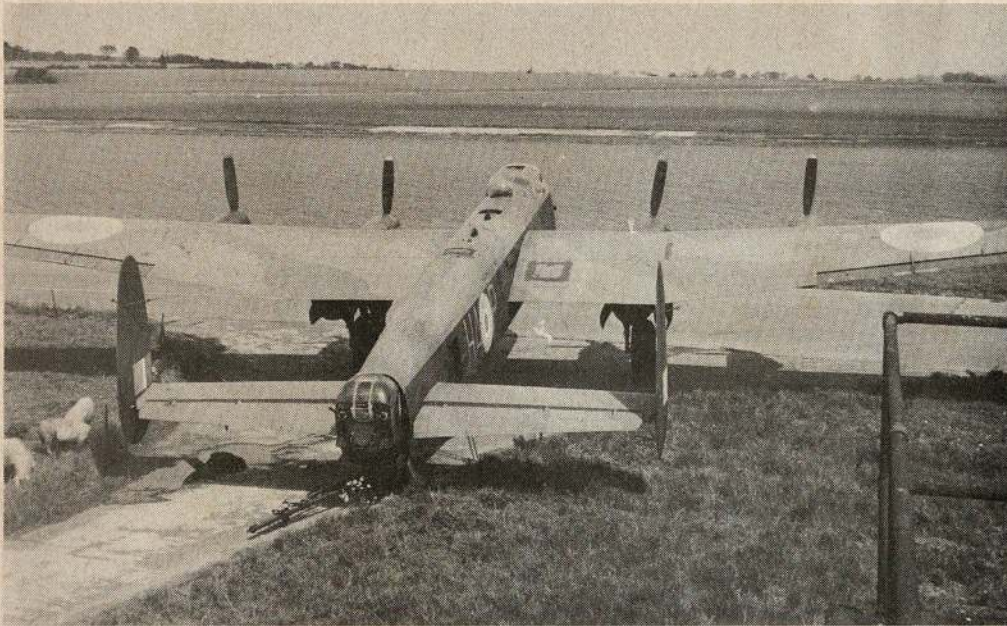
On 26th June 1970 at 1500 hrs, NX 611 lifted away from Hullavington on what was to prove her last flight, bound this time for Blackpool (Squires Gate), which was safely reached after 1 hr 20 min, an uneventful trip apart from the loss of two exhaust stubs in flight over North Wales.



*Above and opposite: BEAT-UP of Lavenham on arrival at its new base from Biggin Hill, 30/3/69.
(Both East Anglian Daily Times Co Ltd)*



*WET WEATHER WELCOME as she taxis gently along a rain-swept perimeter track in front of the old control tower, from which the B17's and B24's of the 487th Bombardment Group, USAAF had once been the more usual sight
(East Anglian Daily Times)*



AT DISPERSAL, Lavenham, May 1969, showing clearly the two fuselage escape hatches, and dinghy stowage in the starboard wing root. The roundels have become bleached by exposure in just the same way as on wartime operational aircraft, which seldom saw the inside of a hangar.

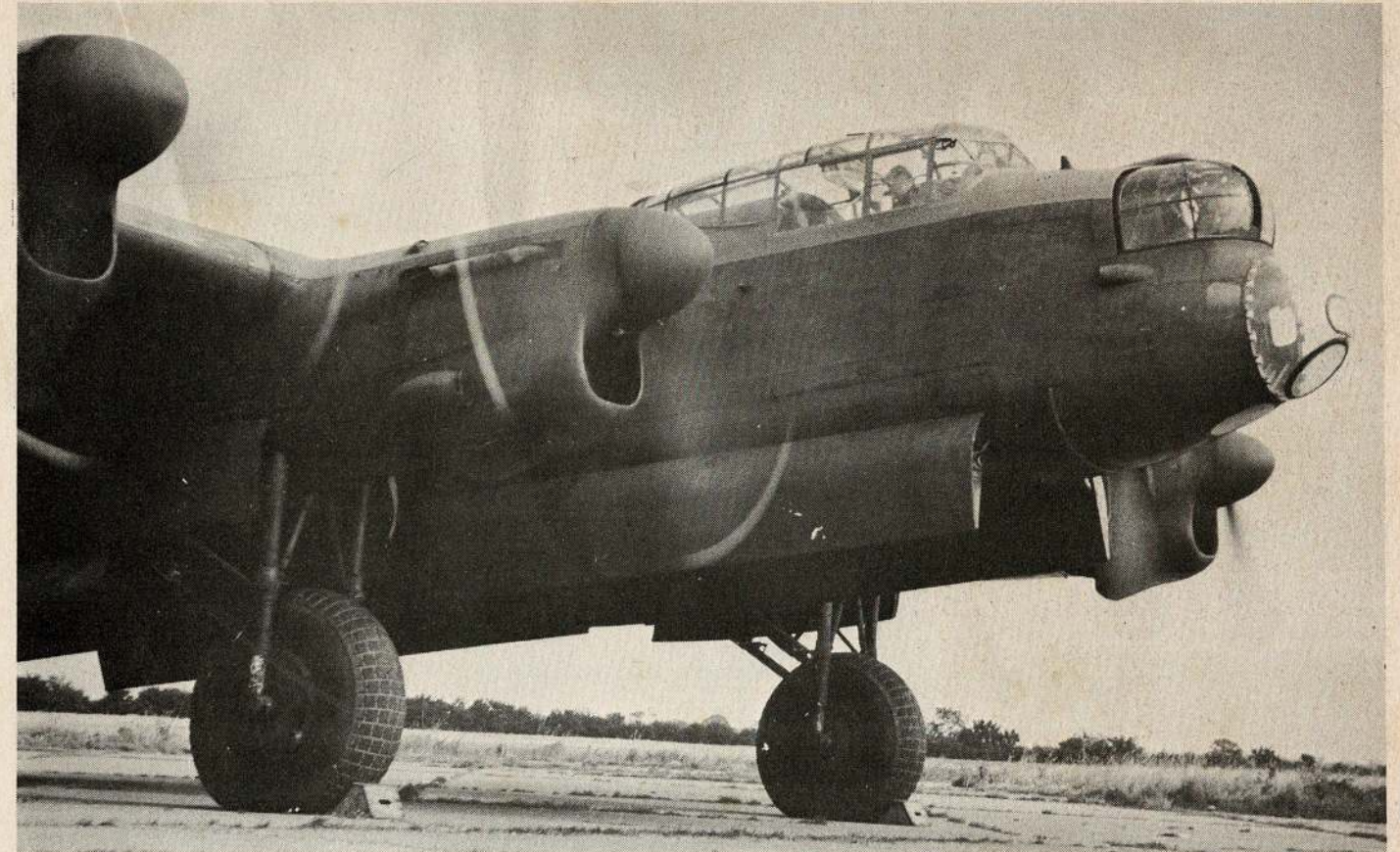
(Dick Taylor)



NEW HOME, OLD MARKINGS (above) at Lavenham 17/5/69; (Dick Taylor)

and . . .

NEW HOME, NEW MARKINGS (below), August 1969. The codes GL-C were applied following a visit by Gp Capt G. Leonard Cheshire, VC DSO DFC. Shortly before leaving Biggin Hill the ailerons had been removed and sent to Hawker Siddeley's Woodford factory for refurbishing, and the new fabric stands out clearly on both photo's. (Lewis G. Pain)

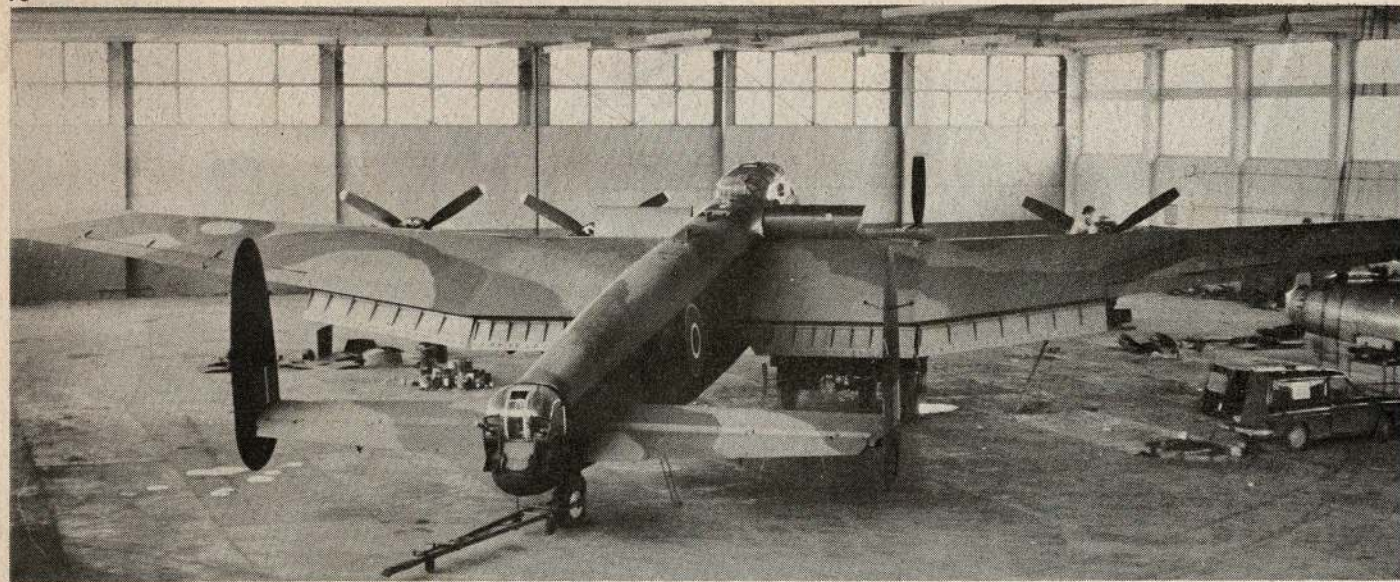


ENGINE TEST at Lavenham 27/8/69. Although no interim flights were made during the stay at Lavenham, she was maintained at the ready. There were few facilities at this disused airfield, and refuelling had to be carried out by hand.

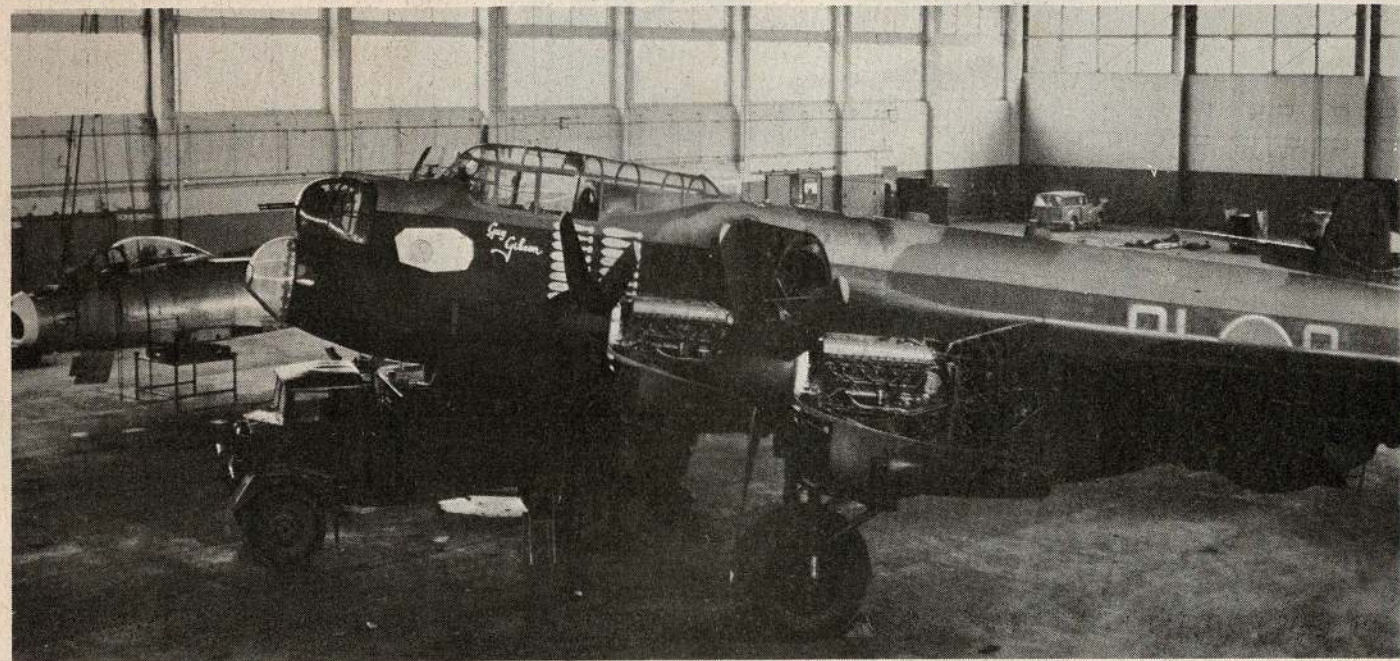
(Both Dick Taylor)

DAY OF DEPARTURE. NX 611 lifts away from Lavenham on a cold, wet February day in 1970, bound this time for RAF Hullavington (Wilts.), and leaving her usual trail of exhaust smoke.

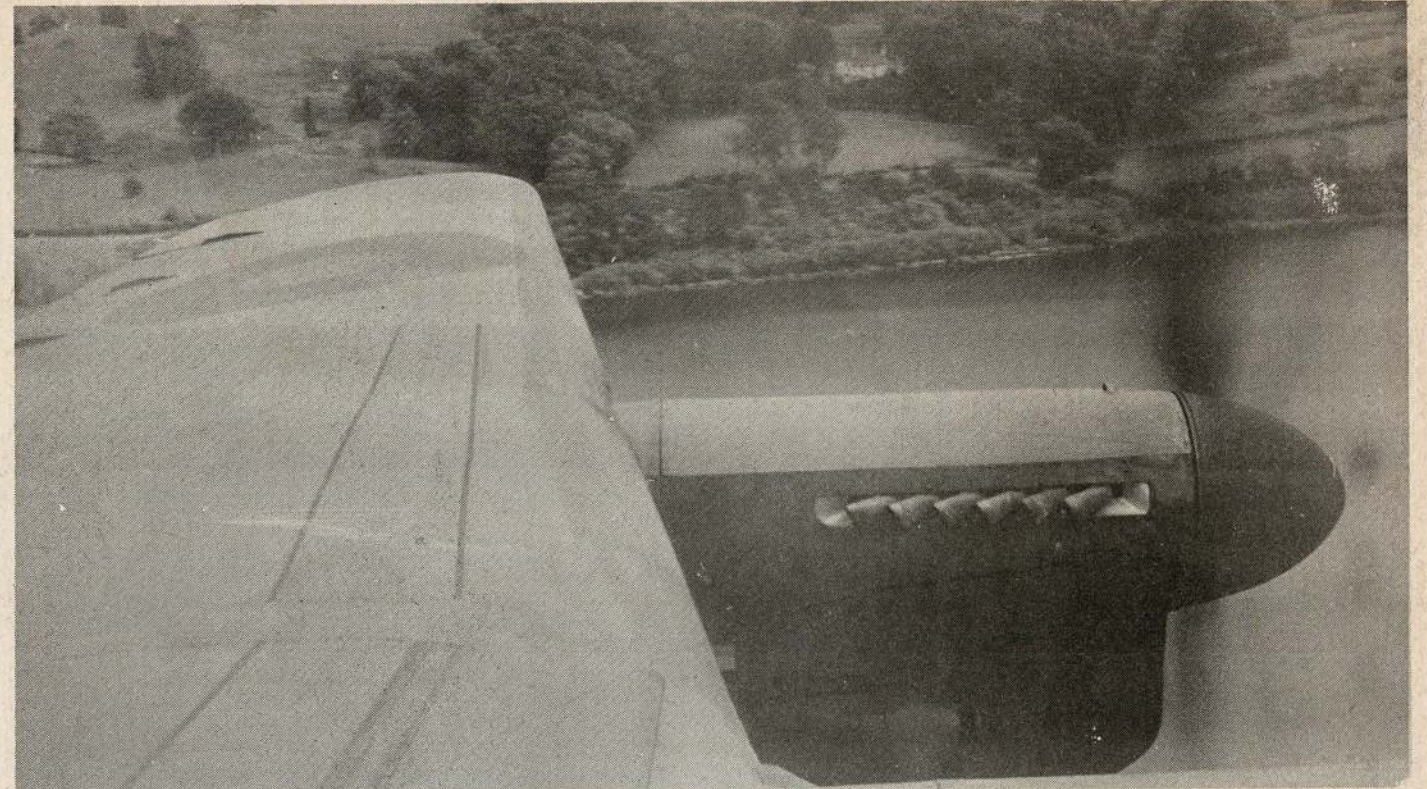




HANGAR SCENES at Hullavington in May 1970, during overhaul, which involved a complete repaint, considerable attention to the engines, and a detailed survey of the airframe. (Both Dick Taylor)



READY TO LEAVE Hullavington on 26/6/70, and looking in fine fettle. The silver "25 years" motif behind the bomb-aimer's blister was applied on the aircraft's own 25th birthday. (Dick Taylor)



Above: SWAN SONG. What proved to be the final flight was from RAF Hullavington (Wilts) to Blackpool's Squires Gate Airport on 26/6/70, during which a very low-level, high-speed run was made over Lake Bala in North Wales for the benefit of a former 617 Squadron bomb-aimer (Ron Valentine) who was occupying his old position in the nose. Shortly after this picture was taken one of the exhaust stubs worked loose and was lost. (Brian Goulding)

BATMAN. Bill Sangster marshals the Lanc in at Squires Gate at the end of her last flight. (West Lancs Evening Gazette)

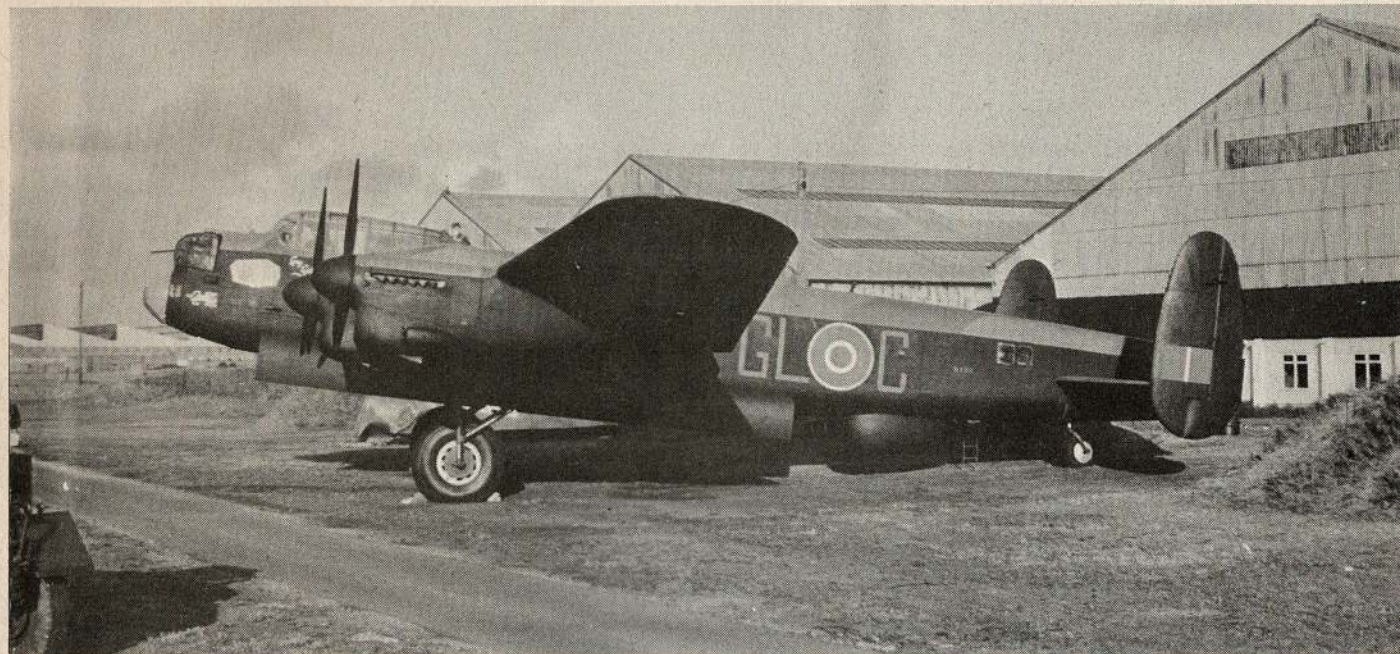


THE CREW shortly after the safe arrival at Blackpool, together with some of the welcoming party. The captain, Neil Williams, is second from right. Far right is Flt Lt Eric Hughes, Navigator, who, like Neil Williams, was an ever-present on all the 14 flights undertaken following the Lanc's return to the UK. Norman Potter, Flight Engineer on its latter flights is third from right, and centre (dark sweater) is John Roast, Chairman of Reflectaire Ltd. The efforts of he and his staff to establish a military museum and to keep NX 611 airworthy unfortunately failed. (West Lancs' Evening Gazette)

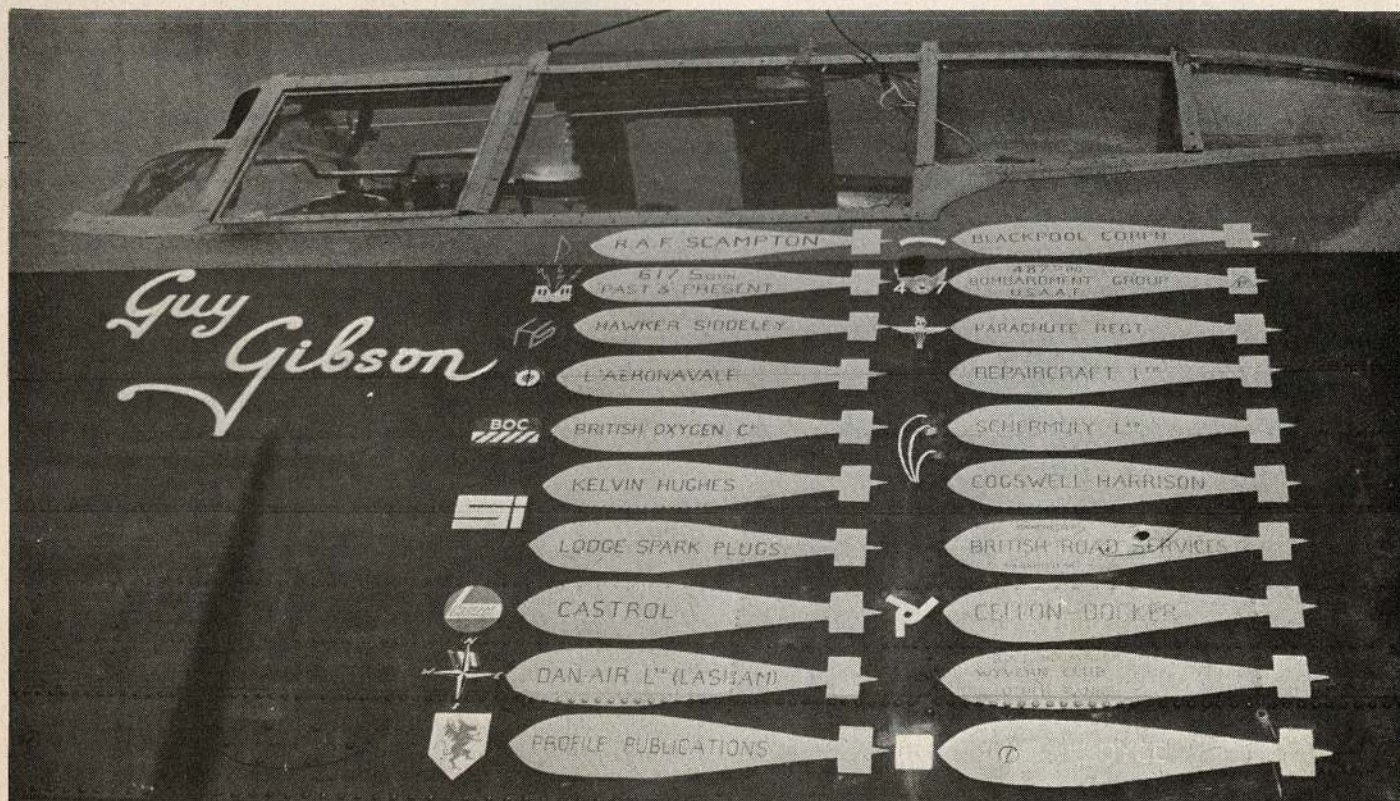
BLACKPOOL MUSEUM

Using NX611 as a centrepiece, its owners intended to set up an aeronautical museum at Blackpool. It was also hoped to maintain her in flying condition, but the nearest she came to flying again was when taxiing and engine run ups were carried out for ITV's "Family at War". The operating company got into financial difficulty and a receiver was appointed.

On 29th April 1972 the museum's exhibits, including Lot 63 — the Lancaster — were auctioned by Mr. Rupert Spencer, appropriately from Retford in "bomber country". It was confidently expected that the Confederate Air Force of Texas would buy the Lancaster, but there was a notable absence of bidders and it was withdrawn after failing to reach the reserve price. Two days later a private sale was concluded, the purchaser being The Rt Hon Lord Lilford of Nateby whose desire was to see the aircraft remain in Britain. The Lanc's engines had been run for the auction and there were hopes that it might still fly again. It gradually became obvious, however, that nearly two years in Blackpool's salt air, and a general lack of expert attention had already begun to take effect, and throughout the following winter there was a rapid deterioration. With rent alone costing £5 a day, a solution had to be found if NX611 was to be saved from scrap.



MUSEUM SITE at Squires Gate was to have been extensively developed, using the Lanc as a centrepiece. Other exhibits included a Sabre jet fighter, Seafire, Mew Gull, and a number of wartime military vehicles, etc. During the first summer season thousands of Blackpool holidaymakers visited the Lanc., and were allowed to pass through it for a small fee. (Dick Taylor)

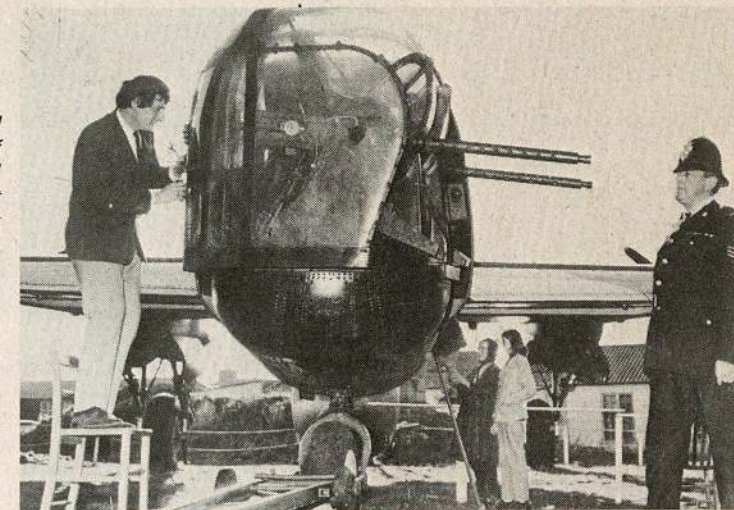


CREDIT-BOMBS displaying names of benefactors were brought up to date at Hullavington. (Dick Taylor)



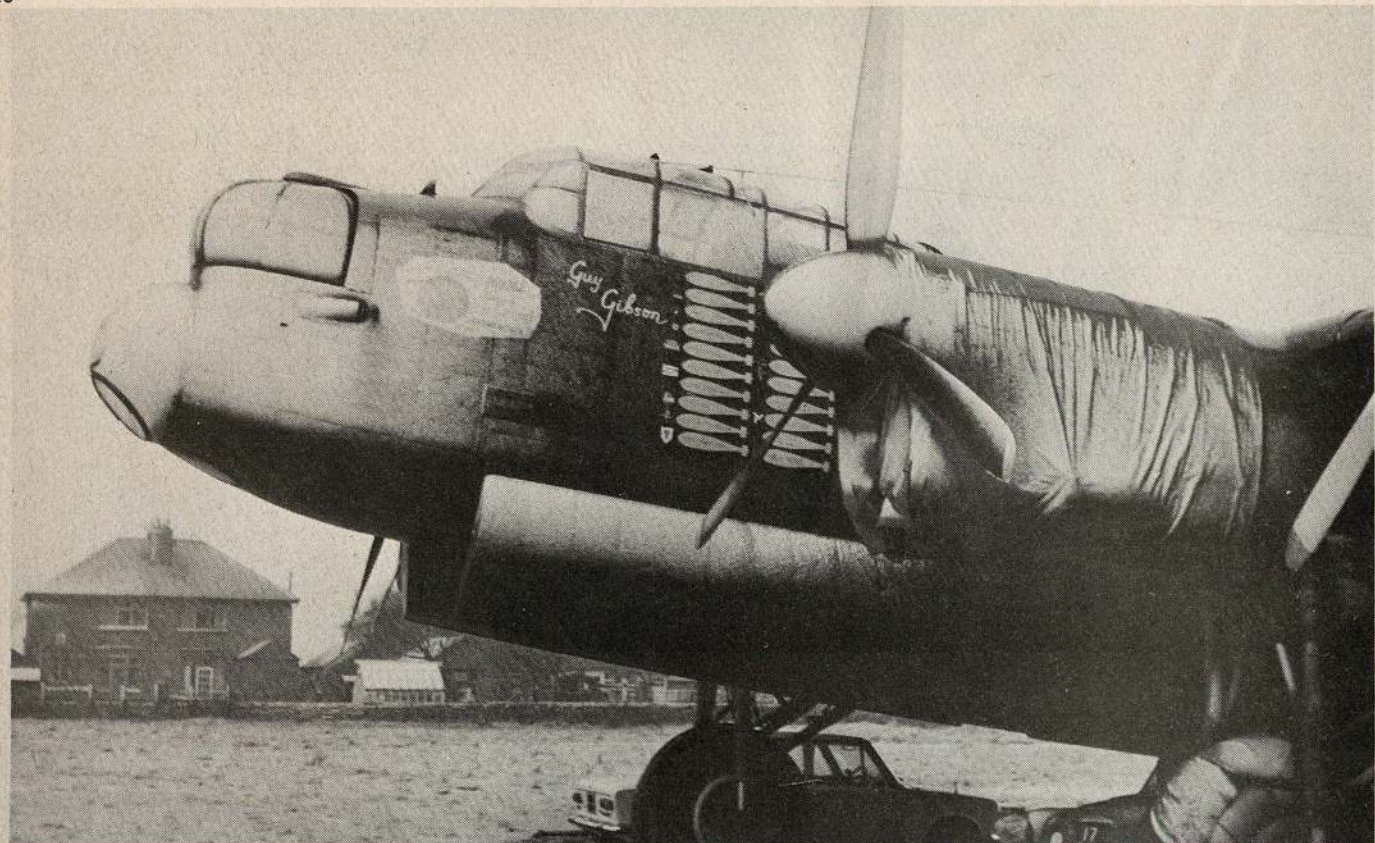
Left: FILM STAR. In February 1971 NX 611 was taxied and used for interior scenes for ITV's "Family at War" series. (West Lancs Evening Gazette)

Right: HANDS UP. In October 1971 the Lanc's guns were considered a security risk and were ordered to be removed. Sgt Riley of Blackpool's South Shore police watches the work being carried out by Ken Hillman, an armament specialist from British Aircraft Corporation's nearby Warton factory. The guns in the rear turret are of 0.5 inch calibre, while those in the front turret were .303's. (West Lancs Evening Gazette)



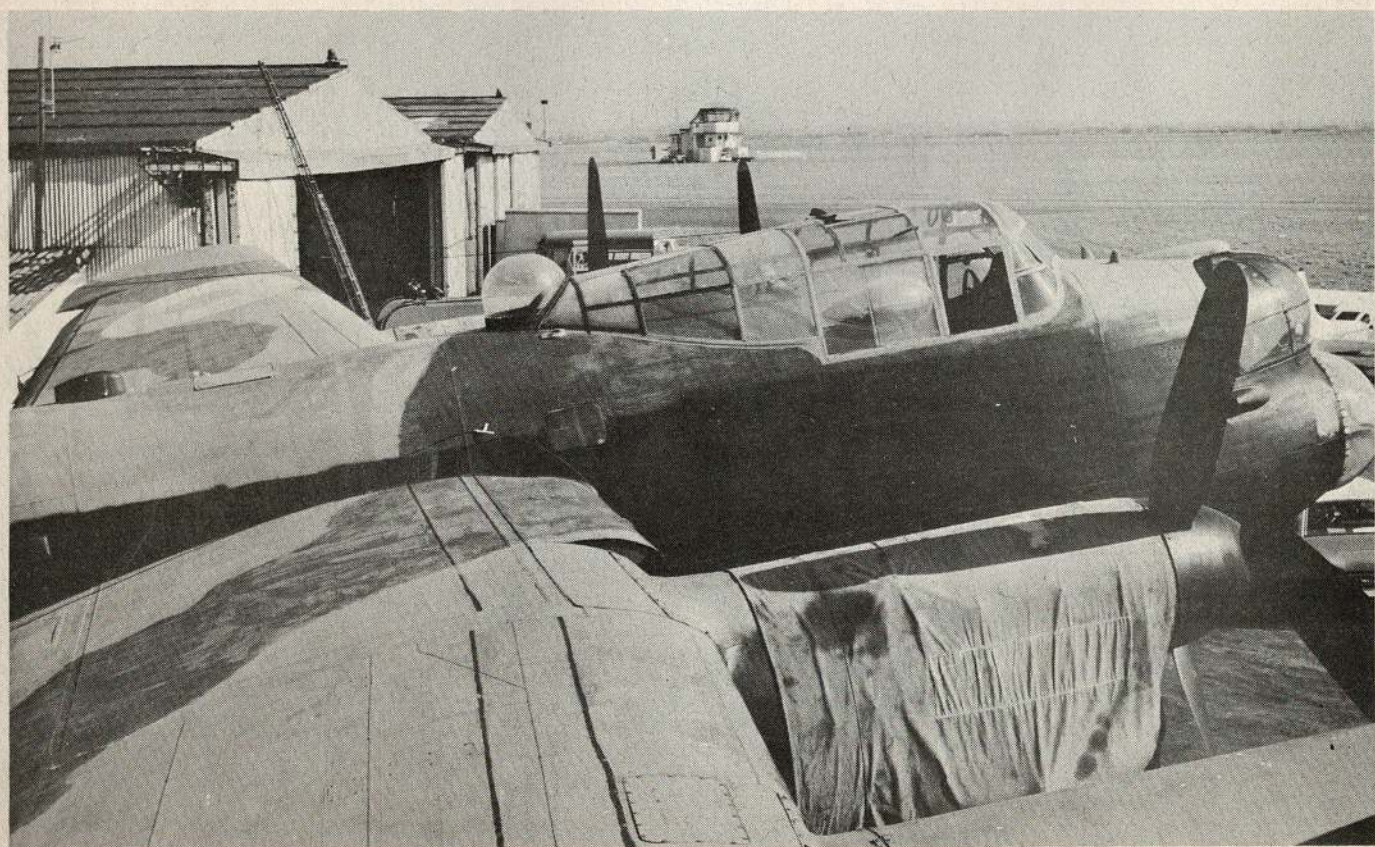
Below: UNDER THE HAMMER. On 29/4/72 lot no. 63 is auctioned by Mr Rupert Spencer, of Henry Spencer and Sons following the appointment of a liquidator. Engines were run to impress potential buyers, but few bidders came forward. (Brian Goulding)





SORRY SIGHT. A snowstorm in February 1973 adds to the Lanc's increasingly sad appearance. Following the auction, she was moved to stand alongside the Airport Fire Section whose personnel kept a watchful eye on it, and found the 102 ft. wingspan a useful car-port. John Kilburn, Senior Air Traffic Controller at Squires Gate, and himself an ex-Lanc. W/Op, could also keep the aircraft well in view from his house in the background, and from his control tower (lower picture). In the lower photo can also be seen the damaged wing leading edge which was blown back and badly strained in a gale; broken aerials; damage to cockpit top escape hatch; window left open to the elements. Some attempt had been made at repainting the aircraft but had only got as far as the black on the fuselage.

(Both Brian Goulding)



SAVED

Various schemes were advanced and in the end it was a Lincolnshire farmer and Lancaster enthusiast, Mr. Fred Panton who, having hoped at one stage to purchase the aircraft himself, persuaded the RAF to consider taking the Lancaster over for preservation. In January 1973 Sqn Ldr John Partridge, an engineering officer at RAF Scampton, inspected the aircraft at Squires Gate and decided the dismantling, transportation and restoration to static exhibit standard was within the scope of the Scampton enthusiasts. A happy solution was eventually reached when, on a visit to Scampton in April 1973, Lord Lilford generously offered NX611 on long loan.

A great deal of research and planning was carried out by Scampton's Mechanical Engineering (Air) Squadron, as the work had to be undertaken within the limits of a strict budget allocated by the Ministry of Defence. Very little Lancaster ground support equipment remained available within the RAF but some, suitable for adaption, was borrowed from 71 MU Bicester, and RAF Waddington lent a number of special tools used for the RAF's flying Lanc, PA 474. Many adaptations and improvisations had to be made on site during the dismantling work.

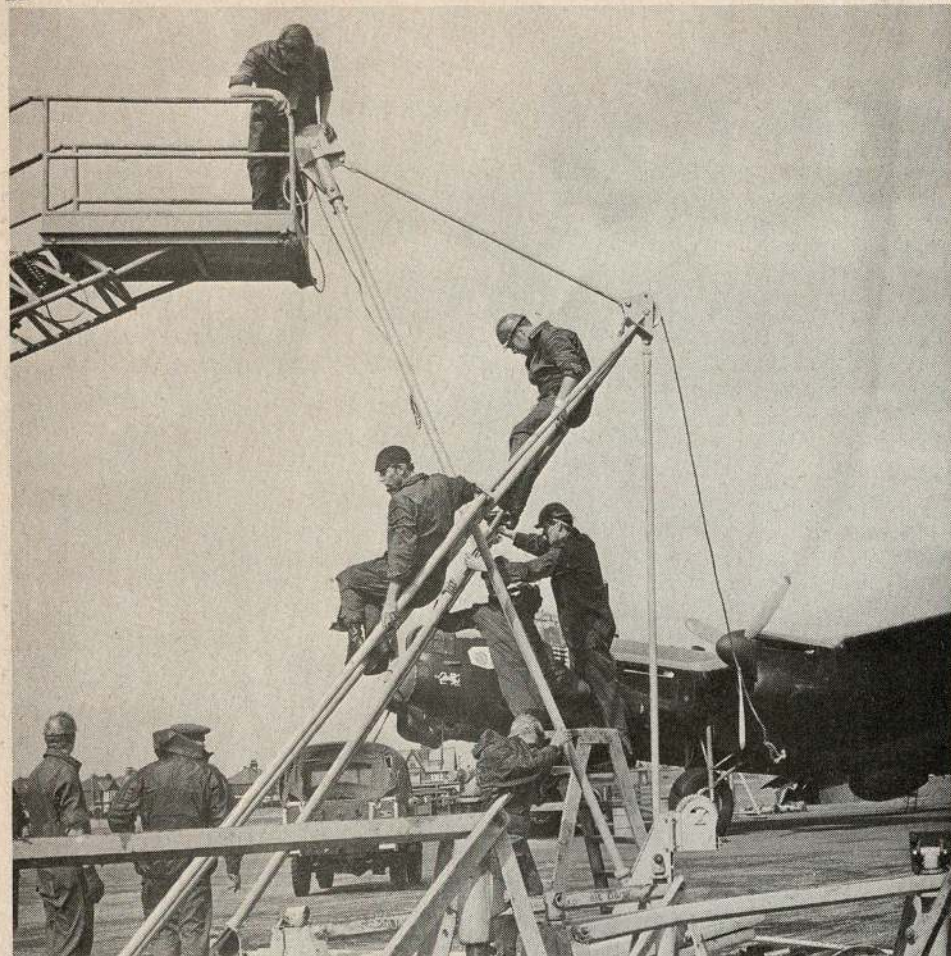


INFORMAL HANDOVER. On August 2nd, 1973, the Lanc was accepted from Lord Lilford by Gp Capt R. B. Lockyer (left), CO of RAF Scampton at the time, who had played an important part in the early negotiations. On the right is Wg Cdr Maurice Gee, OC of Scampton's Engineering Wing, who, in 1965, had helped to stage NX 611 through Muharraq on the homeward flight. (Guy Goulding)



THE TEAM of volunteers ready to start the dismantling operation, Saturday, August 4th, 1973. As No. 617 Squadron was already well represented on the port side of the aircraft, the team felt obliged to acknowledge Scampton's other flying unit — No. 230 Operational Conversion Unit — by placing its badge on the nose. Left to right: Jnr Tech Dave Roffey, Sgt 'Geordie' Nicholson, Jnr Tech 'Frisby' Fraser, WO Peter Higgins, MBE, the late Cpl Dave Haynes, FS Bill Brown, Jnr Tech 'Jock' Anderson, Jnr Tech Tony Hogan, Chf Tech Pete Cooke, Sgt Jess Harker, SAC Les Obard (photographer).

(Brian Goulding)



INITIATIVE TEST. Preparing some of the equipment, much of it improvised on site.

(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

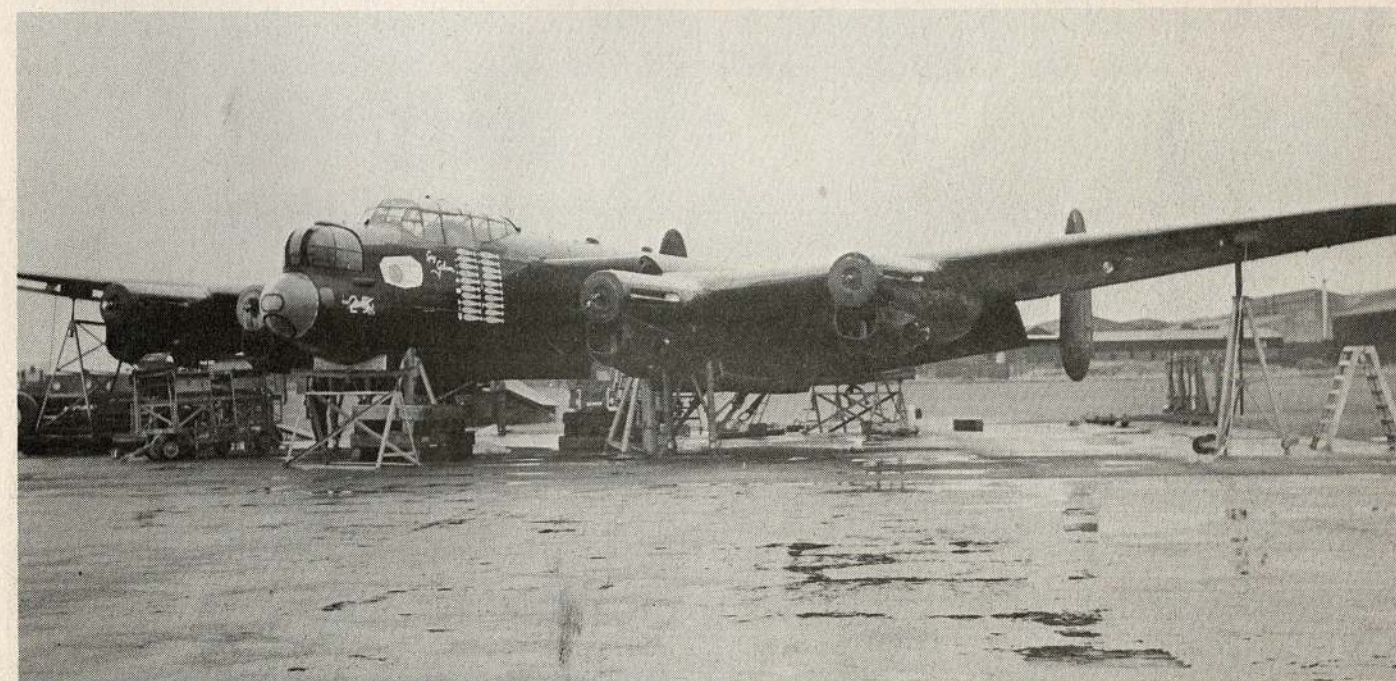
THE FIRST LIFT by British Island Airways' "Iron Fairy" which was to come in very useful, aided by the broad backs of the team. The rear end is being lifted to be placed on a cradle prior to removal of the tailwheel. Throughout the operation, considerable assistance was rendered by British Island Airways, and by Mr. Bob Bagshaw, Airport Manager and his staff.

(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



CLOSE OF FIRST DAY'S PLAY, with tailwheel, mainwheels, props, port bomb door and radome already removed, and the aircraft lowered to working height. For the first week, the work was carried out in the most dismal conditions, with persistent cold winds and driving rain.

(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

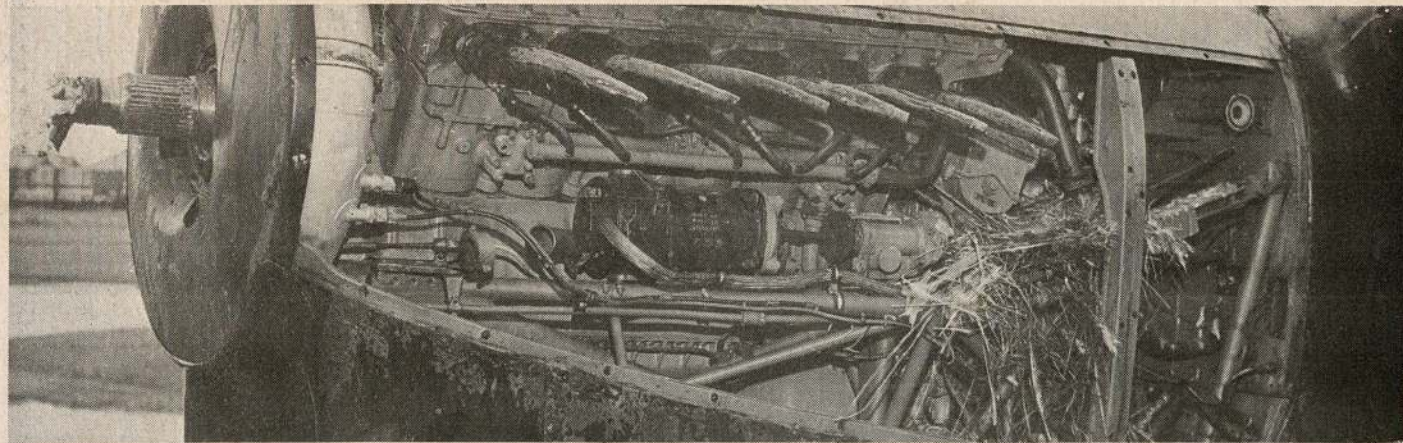


THE RESCUE OPERATION

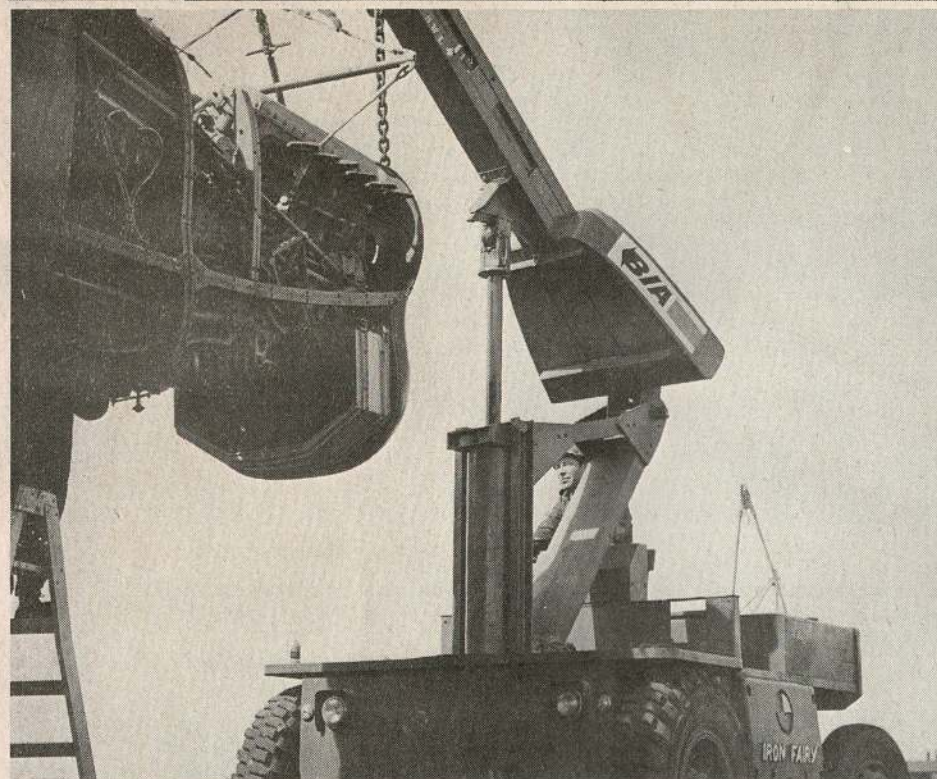
In August 1973 a party of eleven airmen from RAF Scampton, led by Warrant Officer Peter Higgins MBE, successfully completed the dismantling operation in the planned time of nine days. To keep within the budget, the crew, all volunteers, worked in leave time and were hosted by the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment at Weeton Camp. The task was carried out in all weathers — rain, gales and sunshine and the help provided by British Island Airways, and the warmth and shelter of that company's crew room were much appreciated by the men.

The sections of NX611 comprised six Queen Mary loads and, once back at Scampton, preservation, restoration and re-assembly had to be carefully planned and executed — again in spare time. Target date for completion was set at mid-April 1974. Before re-assembly all joints were cleaned and a preserving compound was applied to all accessible parts of the airframe. One of the worst jobs was the complete stripping down of the outer surfaces to bare metal, undertaken by the Mechanical Engineering (Ground) Squadron. The areas under the French white Pacific finish were in good condition but where the white had been removed, corrosion was extensive. The engines and propellers had suffered particularly badly through exposure to Blackpool's salt air and general neglect. Corrosion of the propellers was so advanced, they would have been a danger to run.

Slowly but surely the work progressed, and much detective work and "negotiation" was necessary during the internal refurbishing in order to obtain suitable replacement instruments, gauges and various missing items. There were many whose enthusiasm, devotion, help and support made the whole project possible but special mention should be made of the following stalwarts working under the supervision of WO Higgins: Chf Tech Brian Stark, Sgt Rodge Collins, Cpl Colin Oliver and the members of the Mech Eng (Air) Sqn Avionics Section who painstakingly restored all the flight instruments, bombsight and the front and rear turrets. Cpl Steve Payne, Jnr Tech Emo Emerson and SAC Ray Davies of the Hydraulic and Tyre Bays who refurbished the undercarriages and wheels. Sgt Jim O'Sullivan and his men who stripped the entire paintwork and refinished the Lanc to a very high standard. Chf Tech Pete Cooke and Sgt Jess Harker who were in from the beginning and with the Visiting Aircraft Section carried out the final assembly at the Main Gate. Cpl Gordon Clayforth and SAC Chris Moss who cleaned, inhibited and preserved the engines. Chf Tech Tom Turner who did the carpentry work including the dummy guns, and, lastly, Jnr Tech Jock Anderson who worked many long hours both as a member of the dismantling party and subsequently on the rebuilding and refurbishing of the airframe inside and out.



Above:
BIRDS' NEST. The engine cowlings proved a secure refuge for several families of sparrows. The deterioration in the paintwork is obvious.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



Left:
ENGINE LIFT. The starboard outer is gently eased away by Chf Tech Pete Cooke.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

Below:
KNOWHOW. WO Peter Higgins and FS Bill Brown (now Mr!) discuss removal of the starboard inner, both well clad for the summer weather. Their prior experience on Manchesters, Lancasters and Lincolns was to prove invaluable.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

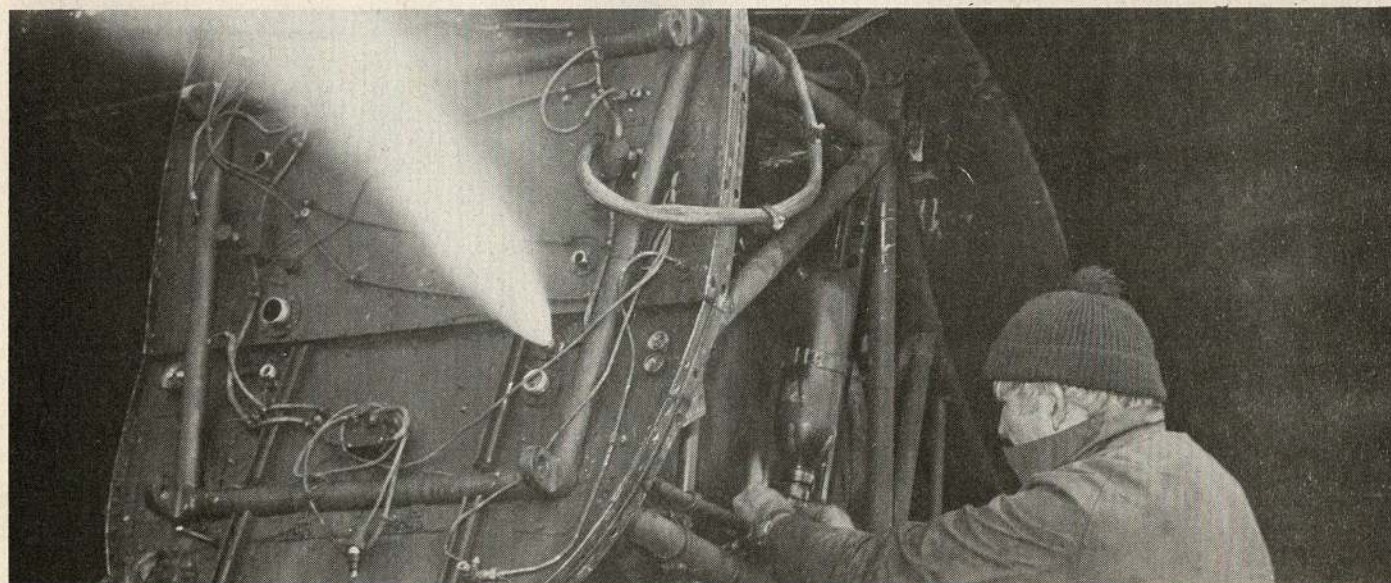


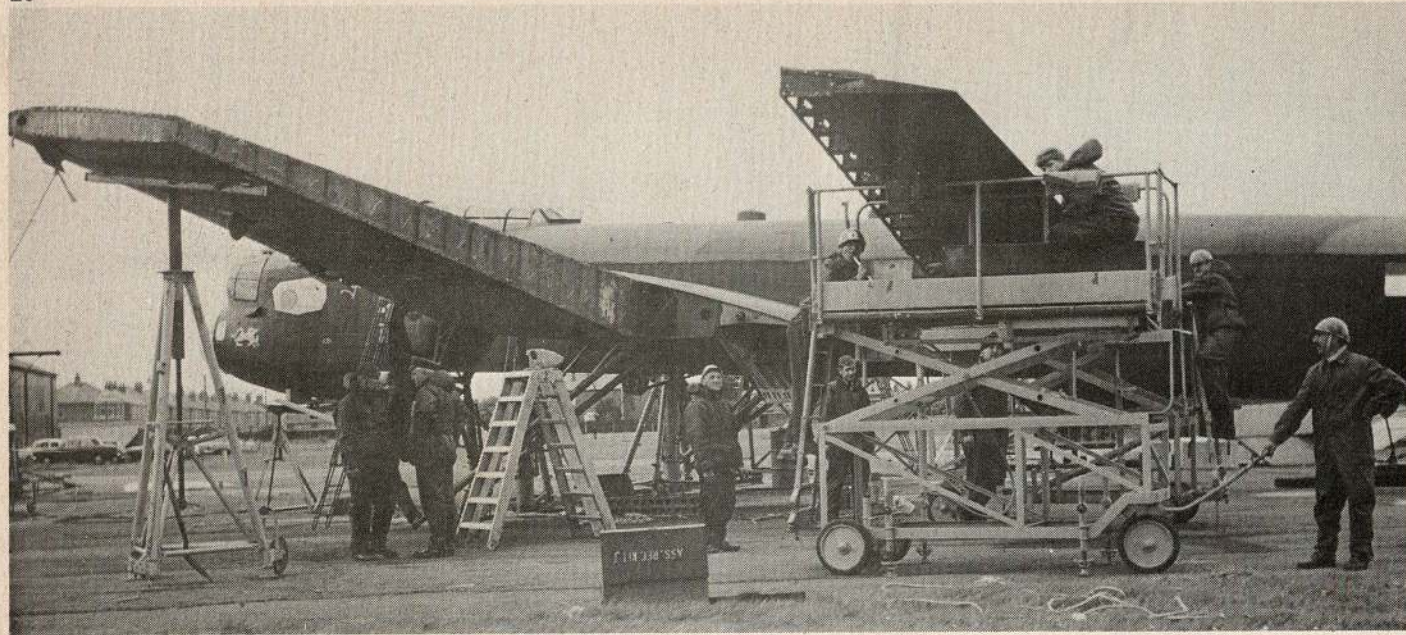
Above:
TIGHT FIT. With only an inch clearance each side, an engine is edged aboard a "Queen Mary" trailer, beside which stand the Lanc's mainwheels.
(Brian Goulding)



EXPOSED. The starboard inner engine mounting and fire-proof bulkhead, behind which is the oil tank, capacity 37.5 gallons. Jnr Tech Jock Anderson prepares for removal of engine and undercarriage attachments.
(Brian Goulding)

Below:
BLOW OUT as the powerful Graviner fire extinguisher is discharged by Chf Tech Mick Reed. The spray is methyl bromide (not to be confused with that in NAAFI tea!).
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



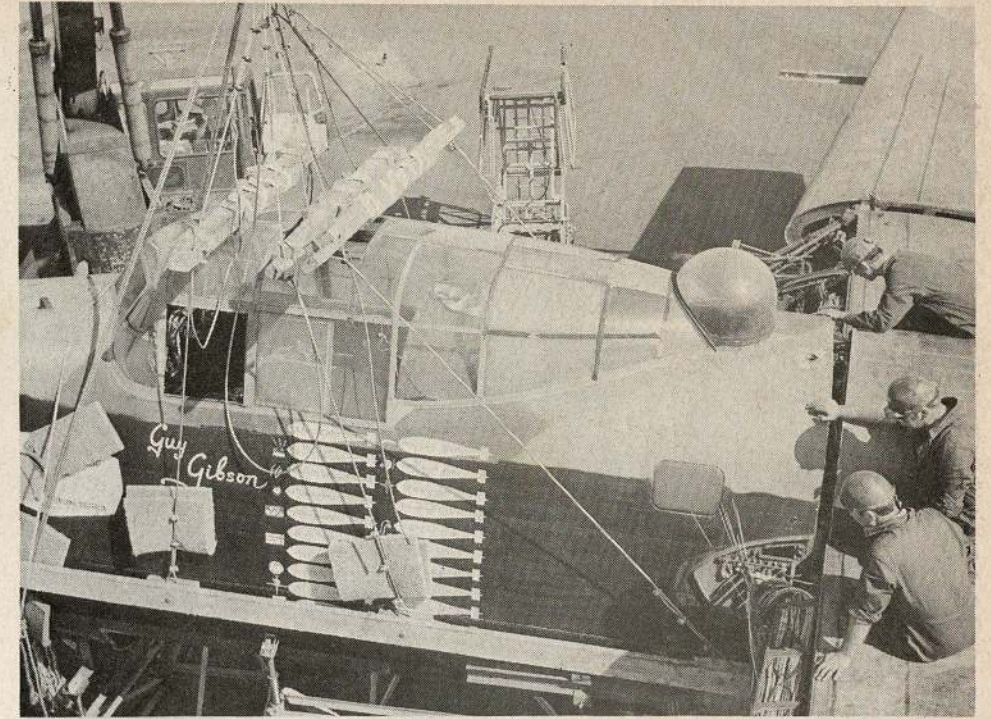


Above :
SEPARATION of port wing spars. Removal of one wing tip alone involved the unscrewing of 96 nuts. Some corrosion is evident at the facing joints.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

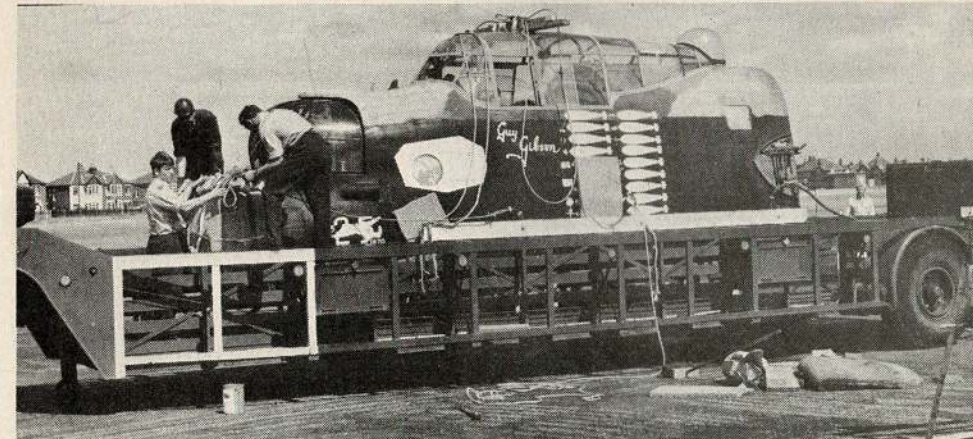


Left :
PREPARING FOR THE BIG LIFT. Removal of nose and cockpit section was a particularly difficult task, and special lifting rigs were improvised. This picture gives some idea of the amount of equipment which had to be assembled.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)

Below :
TRIMMED DOWN, minus many parts now, and looking at first glance remarkably like its predecessor, the Manchester.
(Brian Goulding)



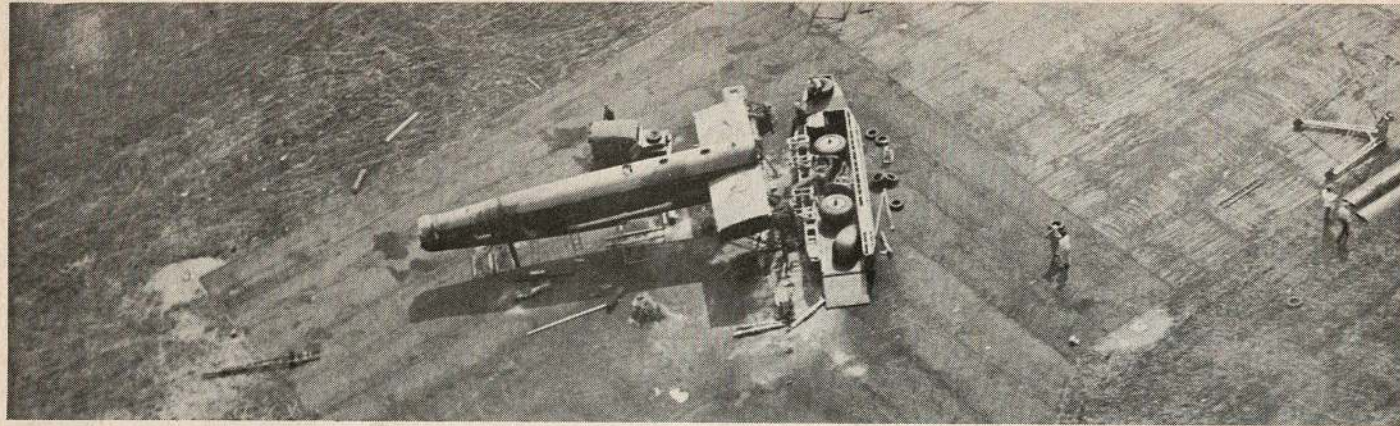
CLEAN BREAK, as the cockpit section is lifted away from the centre section. Before removal, dozens of pipes, wires and control rods had taken hours to uncouple.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



SAFELY ABOARD the Queen Mary, with the crew at last enjoying more seasonal weather.
(Brian Goulding)



IN KIT FORM, looking almost like a modeller's dream.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



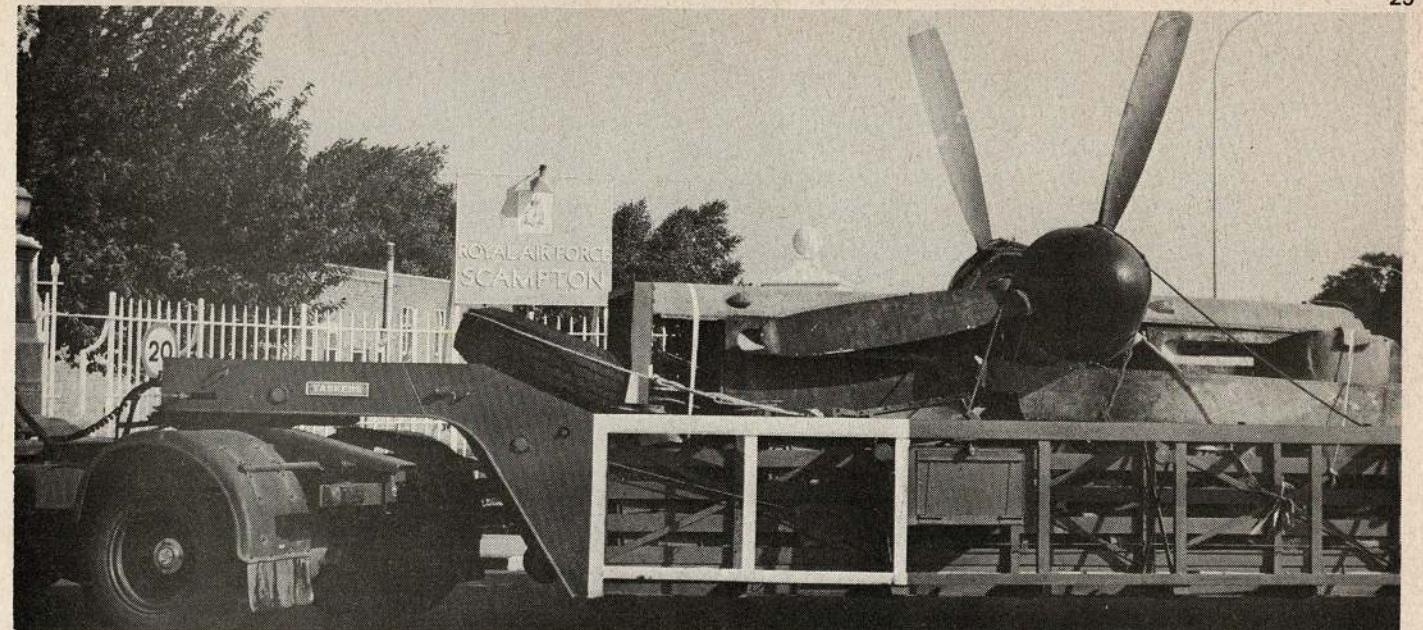
BIRDS EYE VIEW. Little remains of the Lanc as mainwheels, bomb doors and radome are loaded. Final tidying up of the site has already begun. (RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



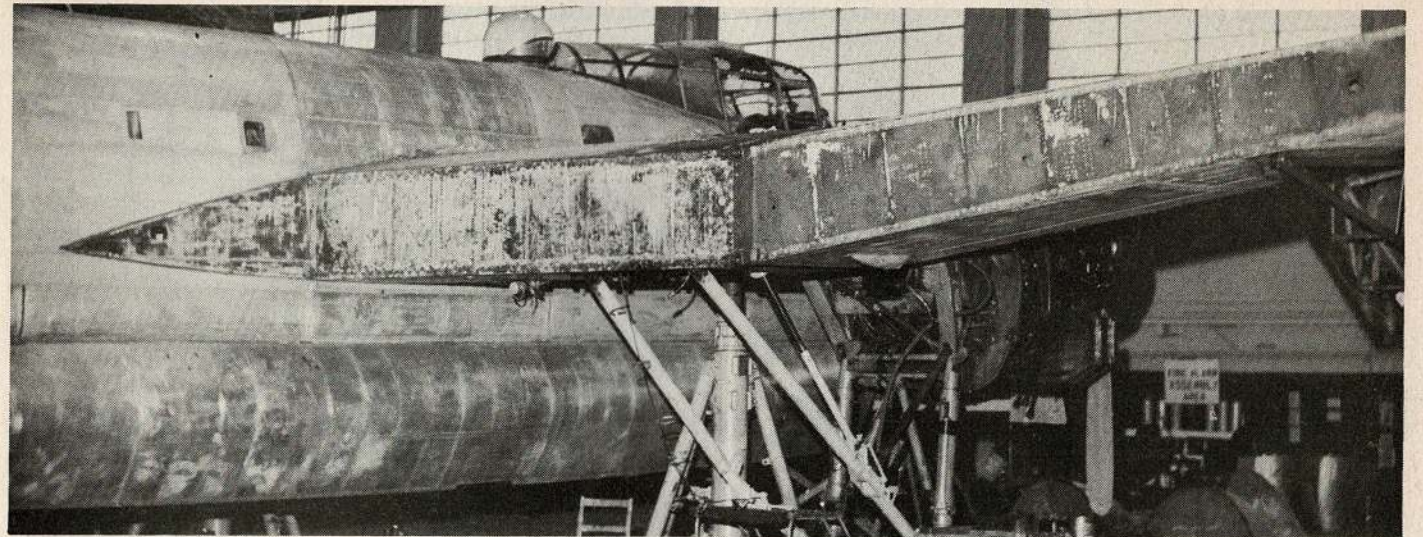
FINAL PARTING as centre section and rear fuselage are separated. The centre section itself constituted one complete trailer load, the biggest and most awkward one of all, requiring police escort through built-up areas (RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



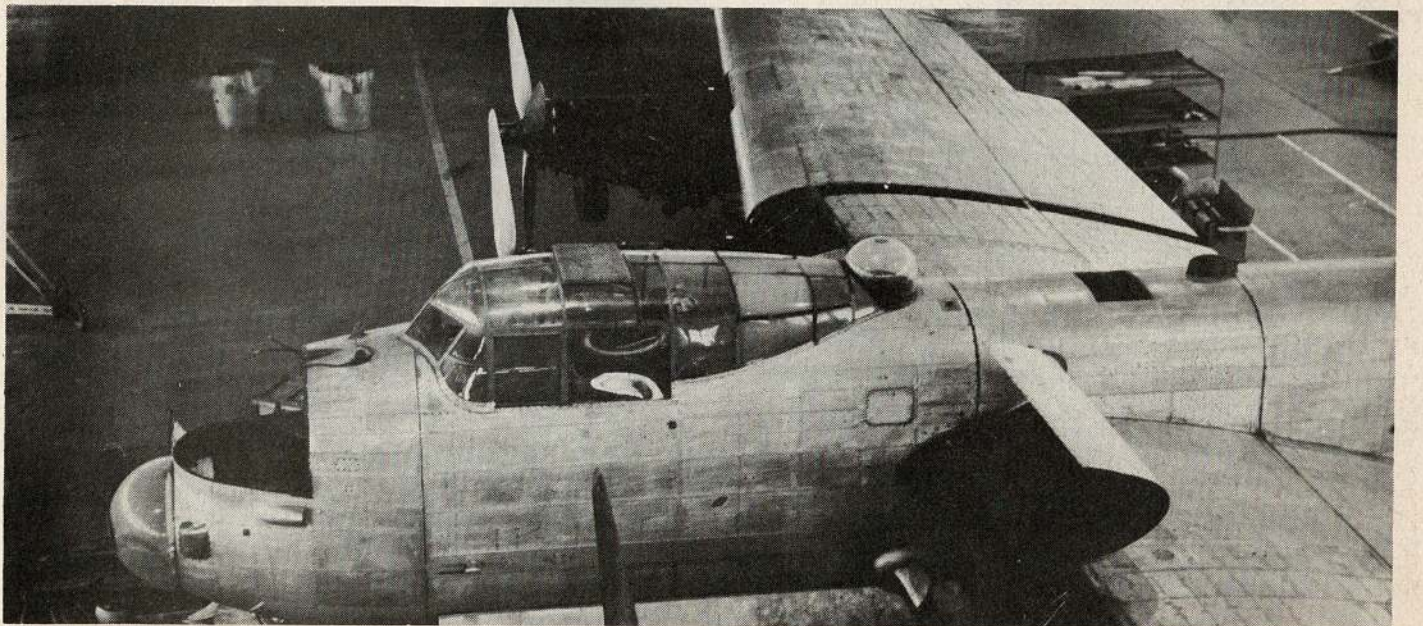
JOB WELL DONE. With the final load safely secured, the crew take a well-earned breather before breaking camp. (Brian Goulding)



FIRST ARRIVAL back at Scampton are the propellers. (RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



STRIPPED of paint and partly re-assembled. The main spar surface corrosion is particularly evident. (RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



TAKING SHAPE again. (Brian Goulding)

FINAL CHAPTER

By mid-March 1974 restoration was sufficiently complete to enable NX611 to be picketed in the open for weathering trials, which lasted a fortnight. Some slight leaks in the cockpit canopy were easily rectified and then began the task of partial dismantling for the move to the Main Gate of the Station.

As there was no question of using the narrow roads through the camp itself, the only route lay via the main A15 Lincoln-Scunthorpe road. The propellers and outboard engines were removed for lightness and the mainplanes and tailplane for clearance. Special supports had to be made for the tailwheel which is normally attached to the tailplane spar in the rear fuselage; without the tailwheel the aircraft could not be towed or steered. The large Main Gates of the Station had to be removed, together with the metal pillars to which they were attached. Careful calculations were necessary to determine the final resting place where once R5868 had stood for some years.

During the afternoon of 10th April, the aircraft, minus wings and tail, was towed via the perimeter track to a gate leading to the now disused section of Ermine Street, and on to its junction with the new A15 Lincoln-Scunthorpe road. Promptly at 6.30 pm the Lincolnshire police were on hand to halt the traffic for the final move down the A15, which took only ten minutes in spite of the intricate manoeuvring required to negotiate the main entrance. Two tractors were necessary, one to tow and steer by the tailwheel, the other following behind under the nose attached by cables to the main undercarriages to act as a brake.

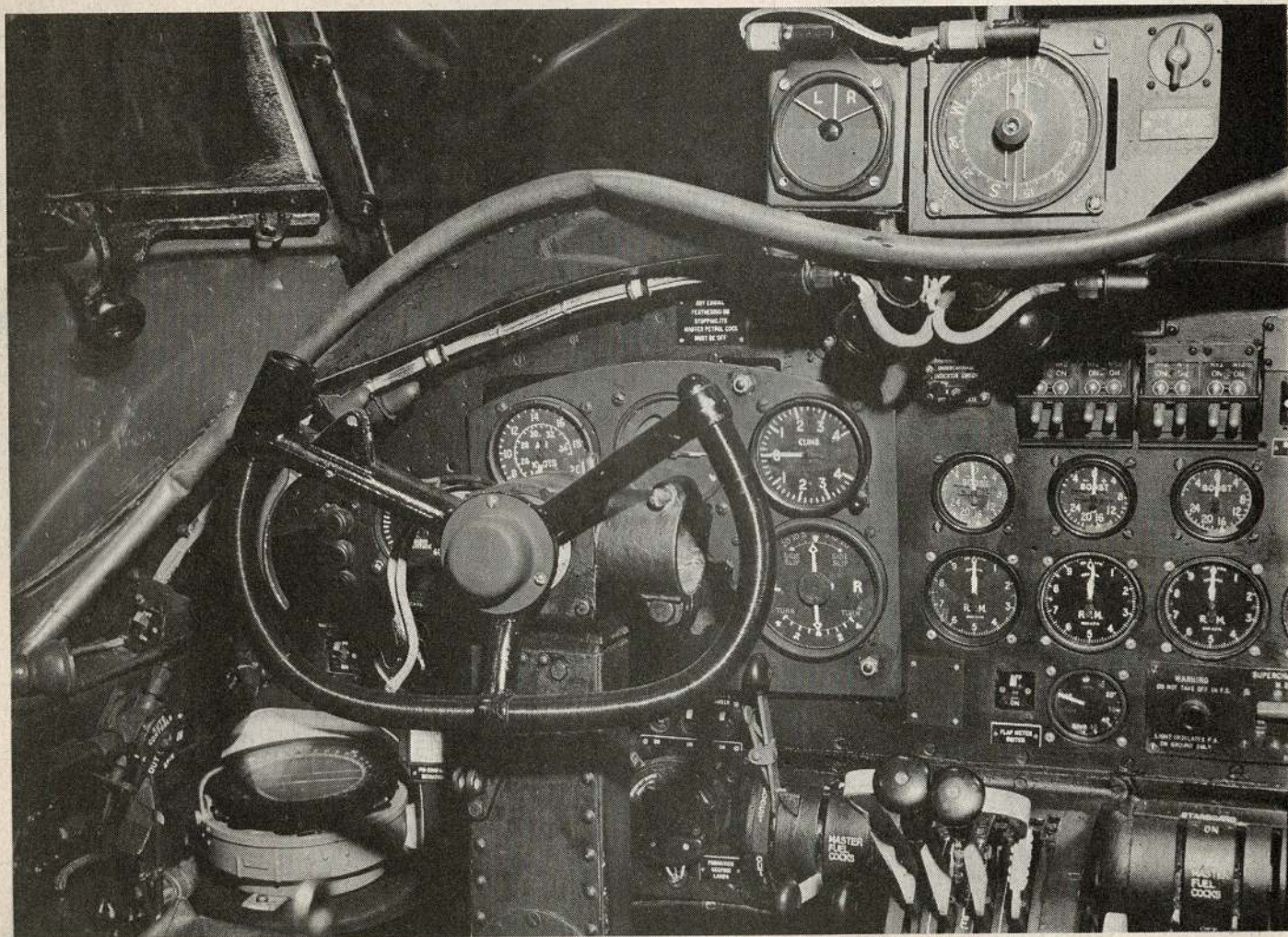
The next day final re-assembly began and continued without hitch until Sunday, when the Lanc came to be moved through 180 degrees in the confined space between the Guardroom, trees and road signs. The crew had confidently turned up at 9 am for the final move, little knowing there would be no church for them that Easter Sunday! Despite being pushed and pulled in all directions, the port wingtip of the Lanc became frustratingly, but seemingly irrevocably baulked by a mere few inches behind a corner of the Guardroom. The only solutions appeared to be either removal of the wingtip or the corner bricks of the Guardroom parapet. Eventually, however, the problem was solved by building a ramp for the port wheel, just sufficient to lift the wingtip over the Guardroom.

By this time numerous onlookers had gathered, including the padre and his congregation, whose appearance may have had some influence, as NX611 soon succumbed and rolled easily onto the grass, allowing the crew to take lunch and to fortify themselves for the final positioning in the afternoon.

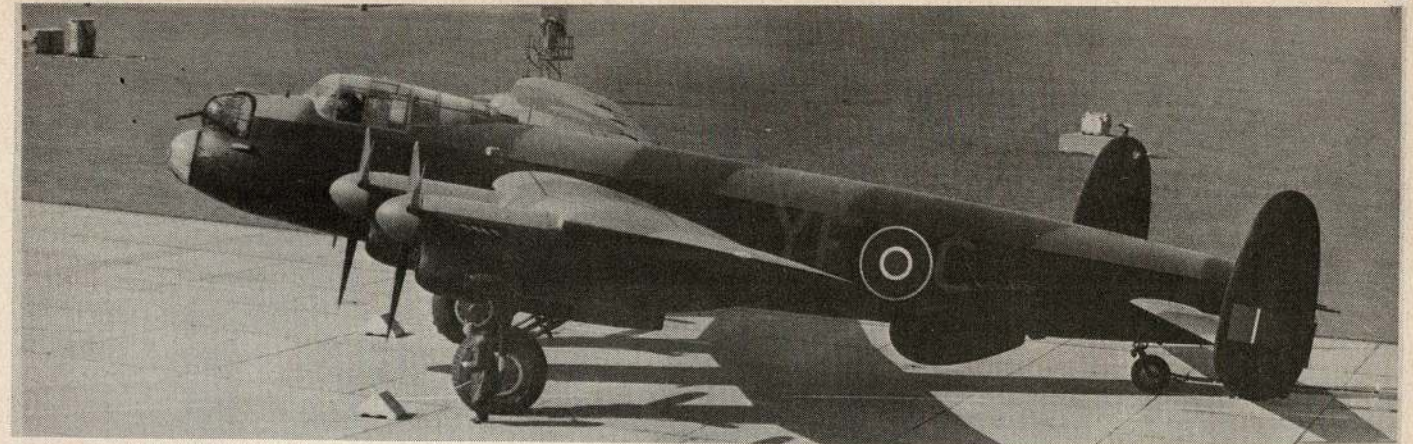
The last major task was the construction of the concrete and steel supports for the three axles, and it was 25th April before NX611 was lowered on to these from her temporary wooden ramps to become finally secured as the Gate Guardian of Royal Air Force Scampton.

The code letters YF were those used by Scampton's Station Flight when operating Lancasters and the letter C was that used on ED 932 the late Wg Cdr Guy Gibson's aircraft when operated by Station Flight after the 'Dams' raid. The bombs displayed in front of NX611 are the 12,000 lb Tallboy and 22,000 lb Grand Slam. On 17th May 1974 Lancaster NX611 was officially handed into the safekeeping of RAF Scampton by the Rt Hon Lord Lilford who unveiled a commemorative plaque and handed to the Station Commander, Group Captain J. B. Fitzpatrick, the Form 700, the present servicing record of NX611.

The aircraft now stands as a memorial to all Lancaster aircraft, the Aircrews who flew them and the Groundcrews who serviced them.



THE COCKPIT. Factory fresh, beautifully restored with painstaking attention to every detail to ensure authenticity. (RAF Scampton Photographic Section)



FIRST AIRING following completion, and ready for weathering trials, March 19th, 1974. The acquisition of a mid-upper turret had been considered but the structural alterations necessary were not thought worthwhile. (Brian Goulding)



HOLD UP on the A15 as NX611 is towed towards the main gate ready for final positioning, wings and tail removed for transit. (Lincolnshire Echo)



RIGHT HAND DOWN A BIT, as Chf Tech Pete Cooke turns the Lanc through the main gate. (Lincs Chronicle)



SNOOKERED by a mere few inches, despite the efforts of Sqn Ldr John Partridge directing operations at altitude on the guardroom roof. (John Walls)



*OFFICIAL HANDOVER, 17th May, 1974 by the Rt. Hon. Lord Lilford to Gp Capt J. B. Fitzpatrick, Station Commander.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)*



*TWO OUT OF THREE of the last Lancasters to remain in the care of the Royal Force are seen in this picture as PA474 flies in salute over NX611, a fitting finale to the ceremony.
(RAF Scampton Photographic Section)*

LEADING PARTICULARS OF THE LANCASTER B MK VII

* * * * *

ENGINES	Four Rolls Royce Merlin 24 engines, each of 1640 horse power and driving three bladed Hamilton constant speed hydromatic propellers.
NUMBER IN CREW	Seven.
ARMAMENT	Two Browning .303 machine guns in the front turret and two .500 in the rear turret. (Martin dorsal turret two .500's)
DIMENSIONS	Span 102 ft. Length 69 ft 11 in. Height 20 ft 6 in. Wing area 1300 sq ft.
WEIGHTS	Tare weight 37,330 lbs with dorsal turret removed. Maximum all up weight 72,000 lbs. Maximum landing weight 60,000 lbs. Maximum bomb load 18,000 lbs.
PERFORMANCE	Maximum speed 275 mph at 15,000 ft. Cruising speed 200 mph at 15,000 ft. Service ceiling 25,000 ft. Take off run with full load approximately 4,000 ft. Range 2,350 miles with a 7,000 lb bomb load. Rate of climb 250 ft per minute. Stalling speed 92 mph with flaps and undercarriage down at 50,000 lbs weight.

THE LANCASTER IN SERVICE

A total of 7,377 Lancasters were built including 430 built in Canada. Famous wartime exploits included :

Low level daylight attack on the MAN Diesel factory at Augsburg on 17th April 1942.

Attacks on the Möhne and Eder dams on 16/17th May 1943.

Destruction of the German battleship 'Tirpitz' on 12th November 1944.

Attack with the Grand Slam bomb on the Bielefeld Viaduct on 14th March 1945.

Lancaster aircrew gained 10 Victoria Crosses.