

Edward and William Bracken

It's a terrible thing to lose a family member in war; it must be close to unbearable to lose two.

The photograph below shows the five children of Miles and Lucy Bracken: William, Edith, Jack, Edward and Robert. William and Edward both joined the RAF in 1941; they were both killed in 1943.



Sgt. E. Bracken (57 Sqn RAF)

Edward (Teddy) Bracken was born in 1921 and attended Kildwick school before going on to Ermysted's in Skipton. He joined the RAF in August 1941 and, after training in the UK and in South Africa, was assigned to Arthur Harris's Bomber Command¹.

Sgt Bracken was the tail gunner aboard the Lancaster III, ED931, DX-C of 57 Sqn, that took off from RAF Scampton at 23:26 on the night of July 29th 1943 as part of a major bombing raid against Hamburg, involving over 700 aircraft². This was one of the last of the "firestorm" raids, Operation Gomorrah, of July and August 1943, that rendered Hamburg virtually uninhabitable for the rest of the war^{3,4}.

DX-C exploded over Torstedt after being hit by a German fighter aircraft. All members of the crew, except the navigator, were killed.

He was reported missing-in-action in the Craven Herald¹:



Sgt. E. Bracken.

Mr. and Mrs. Miles Bracken, of South View, Farnhill, have received official intimation that their son, Sergeant Air-Gunner Edward Bracken, of the R.A.F., is missing following air operations. Sergeant Bracken was born on 31 July, 1921. He joined the R.A.F. in August, 1941, and did his training in England and later in South Africa. Later he was attached to Bomber Command. He was an old boy of the Skipton Ermysted Grammar School, and has been a playing member of the Kildwick Albion Cricket Club. Prior to enlistment he was on the clerical staff in the control office of the L.M.S. Railway Company at Skipton. Sergeant Bracken has two brothers in the Forces, Gunner J. Bracken, of the Royal Artillery, and Sergeant W. Bracken, of the R.A.F.

The RAF Bomber Command report on the loss of Edward Bracken and a report on the raid in which he was killed is included below. (They have his age wrong.)

ROYAL AIR FORCE

BOMBER COMMAND LOSSES of the second world war

EDWARD BRACKEN Sergeant Air Gunner 1527091 57 Squadron RAFVR age 22.

57 Squadron - Lancaster ED931 DX-C Op: Hamburg.

29-30 July 1943 T/o 2326 Scampton. Shot down by a night-fighter, exploded and crashed at Tostedt. Of those who died, three lie in Hamburg Cemetery, Ohlsdorf. **Sgt. Bracken** is buried at Becklington War Cemetery, while Sgt. Bell and Sgt. Slade are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial. Their average age was 23.

Crew: F/S E. F. Allwright
Sgt A. G. Elcox
F/O B. G. N. Kennedy pow.
Sgt. T. L. Ormerod
Sgt. E. Bell.
Sgt. E. D. Slade
Sgt. E. Bracken.

THE BOMBER COMMAND WAR DIARIES

Night of 29 / 30 July 1943

HAMBURG.

777 Aircraft - 340 Lancasters, 244 Halifaxes, 119 Stirlings, 70 Wellingtons, 4 Mosquitoes. 28 aircraft - 11 Halifaxes, 11 Lancsters, 4 Stirlings, 2 Wellingtons -lost. 3.6 per cent of the force.

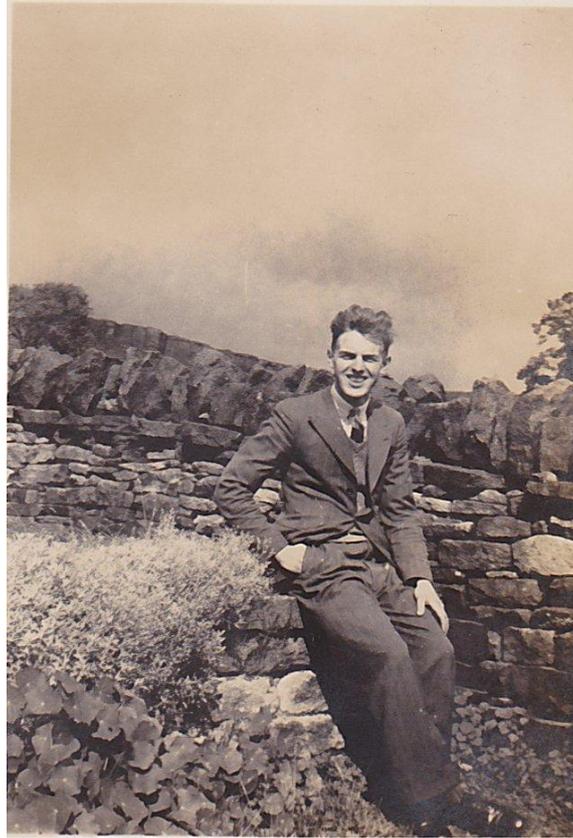
The marking for this raid was again all by H2S. The intention was to approach Hamburg from almost due north and bomb those northern and north-eastern districts which had so far not been bombed. The Pathfinders actually came in more than 2 miles too far to the east and marked an area just south of the the devastated firestorm area. The main force bombing crept back about 4 miles, through the devastated area, but then produced very heavy bombing in the Wandsbeck and Barmbek districts and parts of the Uhlenhorst and Winterhude districts. There was a widespread fire area -though no firestorm - which the exhausted Hamburg fire units could do little to check. The worst incident was in the shelter of a large department store in Wandsbek. The building collapsed and blocked the exits from the shelter which was in the basement of the store - 370 people died, poisoned by carbon monoxide fumes from a burning coke store nearby.

Edward Bracken is buried in Becklingen War Cemetery, Germany⁵. He died on the day before his twenty-second birthday.



Sgt. W. D. Bracken (428 Sqn R.C.A.F.)

Shown below relaxing in the garden of Sunny Bank, Farnhill, Billy Bracken joined the RAF in December 1941. He was just 19¹.



Sgt. Bracken was assigned to No. 428 Squadron, nicknamed "Ghost", which was formed at Dalton, Yorkshire, on 7th November 1942 and later moved to Middleton St. George near Darlington².

Between November 1943 and March 1944, 428 Squadron took part in Bomber Command's "Battle of Berlin" campaign. The second major raid of this offensive took place on the night of 22nd/23rd November 1943. This was the most effective raid on Berlin by the RAF of the entire war, causing extensive damage to areas west of the city centre³.

Sgt. Bracken was wireless operator onboard Halifax V, LK906, NA-D, which took off from Middleton St. George just after 4:30pm on November 22nd.



The aircraft crashed at Scherenbostel, just north of Hanover. All members of the aircrew, shown in the photograph above (with Billy Bracken appearing middle-top) were killed⁴.

He was reported as missing-in-action in the Keighley News¹:

ANOTHER SON MISSING
Mr. and Mrs M Bracken, of South View, Farnhill, have received official intimation that their third son, Sgt William Bracken, is missing following operational duties. He was 21 years of age last October. He joined the R.A.F. in December, 1941. In civil life he was employed at Messrs J Woodrow and Sons, Cross Hills, and was keenly interested in cricket, and was one of the opening pair of batsmen of the Kildwick Abion Cricket Club, and at the time of his enlistment was captain of the team. Mr. and Mrs. Bracken received notice that their second son, Sgt. Edward Bracken, R.A.F., was posted as missing following an operational flight last July, and they have now been notified that he is missing presumed dead. Their eldest son is serving in the Army.



Sgt. W. Bracken

The RAF Bomber Command report on the loss of William Bracken and a report on the raid in which he was killed is included below. (Once again, they have his age wrong.)

ROYAL AIR FORCE

BOMBER COMMAND LOSSES of the second world war

WILLIAM DAVID BRACKEN Sergeant Air W.Op/Air Gnr. 428 (RCAF) Sqn , RAFVR age 21.

428 Squadron Halifax V LK906 NA-D Op: Berlin.

T/o 1638 Middleton St. George. Crashed at Scherenbostel, 16 km NNW from the centre of Hanover, where all are buried in the War Cemetery.

Crew: Sgt J M Jacob RCAF
Sgt A Ackland
Sgt W B Boucher
Sgt A B Radbourne RCAF
Sgt W D Bracken
Sgt M F Donaldson RCAF
Sgt G Kemp

THE BOMBER COMMAND WAR DIARIES

Night 22 / 23 November 1943

BERLIN

764 aircraft - 469 Lancasters, 234 Halifaxes, 50 Stirlings, 11 Mosquitoes. This was the greatest force sent to Berlin so far but it was also the last raid in which Stirlings were sent to Germany. Bad weather again kept most of the German fighters on the ground and the bomber force was able to take a relatively 'straight in, straight out' route to the target without suffering undue loss. 26 aircraft - 11 Lancasters, 10 Halifaxes, 5 Stirlings - were lost, 3.4 per cent of the force.

Berlin was again completely cloud-covered and returning crews could only estimate that the marking and bombing were believed to be accurate. In fact, this was the most effective raid on Berlin of the war. A vast area of destruction stretched from the central districts westwards across the mainly residential areas of Tiergarten and Charlottenburg to the separate suburb city of Spandau. Because of the dry weather conditions, several 'firestorm' areas were reported and a German plane next day measured the height of the smoke cloud as 6,000 metres (nearly 19,000 ft.)

It is impossible to give anything like full details of the damage or to separate completely details from this raid and a smaller one on the next night. At least 3,000 houses and 23 industrial premises were completely destroyed, with several thousands of other buildings damaged. It was estimated that 175,000 people were bombed out. More than 50,000 soldiers were brought in to help from garrisons up to 100 km distant; these were equivalent to nearly 3 army divisions taken from their normal duties. Interesting entries among the lists of buildings destroyed or severely damaged are: the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedachtniskirche (the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church which is now half ruined, half restored, a major attraction in West Berlin.) the Charlottenburg Castle, the Berlin Zoo, much of the Unter den Linden, the British, French, Italian and Japanese embassies, the Ministry of Weapons and Munitions, the Waffen S. S. Administrative College, the barracks of the Imperial Guard at Spandau and among many industrial premises, 5 factories of the Siemens electrical group and the Alkett tank works which had recently moved from the Ruhr.

It is difficult to give exact casualty figures: an estimated 2,000 people were killed, including 500 in a large shelter in Wilmersdorf which received a direct hit, and 105 people were killed in another shelter which was next to the Neukoln gasworks, where there was a huge explosion.

Minor operations: 12 Mosquitoes to Leverkusen. 14 Wellingtons mine laying in the Frisians and off Texel. 12 O.T.U. sorties. No losses. *Total effort for the night:* 802 sorties, 26 aircraft (3.2%) lost.

William Bracken was buried in Hanover War Cemetery⁵.



Additional information

Considerable research on Lancaster III, [ED931 \(Edward Bracken\)](#) and Halifax V, [LK906 \(William Bracken\)](#) has been carried out by Dorothy Ramser as part of her work for the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) Digital Archive, held at Lincoln University. The Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group are happy to acknowledge her help with this article.

To view Dorothy Ramser's full reports click on the links above.

References

Edward Bracken

- 1 Craven Herald, August 1943
- 2 <http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/showthread.php?1303-Info-On-Peter-Jackson-49-Sqn-Kia-9-4-45-amp-Edward-Bracken-57-Sqn-Kia-30-7-43>
- 3 <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2007/March%202007/0307gomorrah.aspx>
- 4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Hamburg_in_World_War_II
- 5 <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2107183/BRACKEN,%20EDWARD>

William Bracken

- 1 Keighley News, December 1943
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- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Berlin_%28RAF_campaign%29
- 4 <http://www.aircrewremembered.com/raf1943/4/jacobjack.html>
- 5 <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2198236/BRACKEN,%20WILLIAM%20DAVID>

Acknowledgements

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