



Tales from the Boards *Author: Geoffrey Haskins (40-43)*

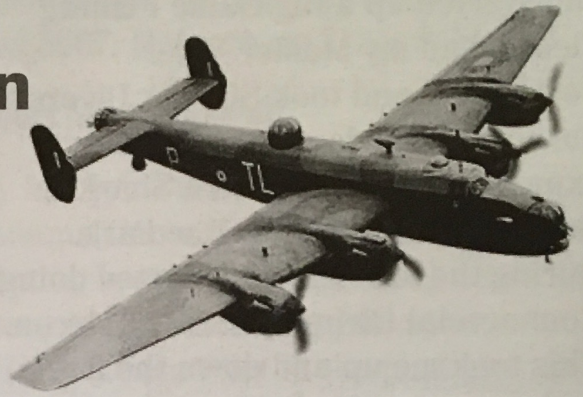
Continuing a series of tales culled from research into names inscribed on the Memorial and Honours Boards now located in the Conway Chapel at Birkenhead Priory. All the information has come from the public domain: various web-sites and publications. The main sources are the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and London Gazette together with numerous Associations and Specialised sites

What Might Have Been

B V Robinson (28-29) was 31 years old when he died after a short life, full of achievements which are nothing short of remarkable. His name appears on both World War II Honours and Memorial Boards

After leaving Conway in 1929 we must assume he went to sea but, after he completed his time, jobs were in short supply in a country wracked by economic depression. One solution, sought by a number of adventurous young men in a like position was a Short Service Commission as aircrew in the Royal Air Force. On 1st September 1933 Basil Vernon Robinson was commissioned as Acting Pilot Officer (Probationary); the following year he was confirmed in the rank of Pilot Officer.

Obviously good at his job, on 28th January 1936 he stepped up to the next rank of Flying Officer and in April 1938 to Flight Lieutenant. With war clearly looming the Air Ministry was not about to release Flt Lt Robinson and his contemporaries, so his five year "contract" was extended; indeed, on 2nd January 1940 he was promoted to Squadron Leader, RAF (RAFO) - the letters standing for Reserve of Air Force Officers. His bravery and skills as a pilot, allied to leadership qualities in Bomber Command were soon recognised with the award of a Distinguished Flying Cross in 1941, and a



Halifax

Distinguished Service Order in January 1942 (for his part in a raid on German naval units in Brest), and further promotion to Acting Wing Commander.

Then, in 1942, Wing Commander Robinson was awarded a Bar to his DFC; the citation is a story of breathtaking skill and courage:

Wing Commander Basil Vernon ROBINSON, D.S.O., D.F.C. (34089), No. 35 Squadron.

"One night in November, 1942, during an operational sortie against Turin, this officer displayed great gallantry and determination when a dangerous fire broke out in his aircraft. Owing to the intensity of the flames and smoke which filled the cockpit, Wing Commander Robinson saw no hope of bringing the fire under control, and therefore ordered his crew to abandon the aircraft. While preparing to follow them himself, the fire abated. Undeterred by the difficulty of the flight which involved crossing the Alps and flying many hundreds of miles over enemy occupied territory, Wing



Survivors of the Pathfinders, 17/9/2007

Commander Robinson continued alone, completed the return journey, and landed his large 4-engined aircraft (a Halifax bomber - Ed) successfully in this country despite very adverse weather, accomplishing a most praiseworthy and skilful feat of airmanship."

http://www.historyofwar.org/air/units/RAF/35_wwII.html is the history of 35 Squadron and shows that in August 1942, the squadron transferred to the newly formed Pathfinder Group which itself is described in

<http://www.raf.mod.uk/bombercommand/h8gp.html>.

"The Pathfinder Force began operations within a few hours of its formation and continued its work of leading the main force against the enemy until the bombers' offensive ceased, shortly before VE Day. The gallantry of the PFF is legendary, and its contribution to the war effort immense, perfecting as it did techniques for precision main force bombing. Probably the greatest of many successes was its part in the sustained Battle of the Ruhr." Basil

Robinson was promoted Group Captain.

"Future attacks on the German capital, Berlin (The Battle of Berlin), took a heavy toll on the RAF. Over a four month period over 1000 bombers and crews were lost. The RAF wrought terrible damage on the cities of Germany, it dragged the German populace into 'Total War'. The very same effect that their Nazi leaders had inflicted on other cities during the war, cities like Rotterdam, Warsaw, Coventry and London."

On 24th August 1943 Group Captain Basil Robinson's luck finally ran out and he became one of the 3,700 Pathfinder air crew who lost their lives over Germany, as detailed in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission data. Though by now in command of the RAF Station at Gravelly, he was flying a mission in one of 35 Squadron's Halifax aircraft which was lost during the raid. He is mentioned in "Halifax Squadrons of World War II" by Jon Lake.

In 2007 there was a last reunion of surviving members of the elite force: