

'J' FOR JOHNNIE By Flt Lt John Trotman DFC & Bar Published by Woodfield Publishing (ISBN: 1-84683-106-7)

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The author, John Trotman, is a 92 year old veteran of Bomber Command who survived 70 operational sorties flying Wellington and Mosquito aircraft. To survive 70 sorties is in itself a remarkable feat given that only 41% of Bomber Command aircrew survived being killed, seriously wounded or becoming a Prisoner of War.

This book is a narrative of recollections, reminiscences and anecdotes, mixed with a little World War II history, which will provide entertaining reading for a wide audience. For those with a technical interest in aircraft and their operating bases, he provides a selection of annotated cockpit photographs, outline data sheets for the airfields where he was based as well as detailed technical points on the aircraft and equipment that he operated.

Trotman traces his flying career from his early years when he volunteered for service in the RAF thus pre-empting his call-up and avoiding the potluck selection as to which Service he would join, or press-ganged as a coal miner or a factory worker. His story of life before he joined the RAF and subsequently during his training reflects the happy-go-lucky and naïve attitude of many young people in the early days of the war. However, life changed quite quickly and radically for Trotman when he converted onto Wellington bombers. Mid-way through that training phase he found his crew was 'volunteered' to take part in Air Marshal Harris's 1000 bomber raids against Cologne and then Essen. The fact that he and his crew survived those missions made them instantly operational. In a rather bizarre way Trotman then found his way to 150 Squadron having left his Australian crew behind on an RAAF squadron, the CO of which refused to have him because he wasn't Australian!

Trotman describes the routine for a front line squadron flying operations that varied markedly in intensity, missions being largely weather dependent in the early days of the bombing campaign. He describes the highs and lows of life on a bomber station at that time in the war. In 1942 Bomber Command had only 500 aircraft, most of which were quite dated and loss rates were high. Mostly, 150 Squadron was tasked against targets well into Germany and in 1942 when the Germans had air superiority and the Wellington was a very vulnerable aircraft, as reflected in

the loss rates. It is evident that as a young married pilot he was very aware of this though he does not dwell on it and it is largely a sub-text of his story of that first tour of operations. He recounts some very dramatic moments in the air, some amusing stories of incidents on the ground as well as outings to the well-known and much frequented Betty's Bar in York. Trotman eventually completed his 30 missions and was awarded his first DFC. A summary of his logbook shows the variety of targets and the squadron losses.

Trotman's 'rest' after his first operational tour was as an instructor, first on Whitleys that had been withdrawn from the front line (and in the training role had a bad crash record) and then on Wellingtons; overall he found the routine and repetitive nature of the job quite boring. Looking for something to break the routine, he volunteered to be the unit test pilot for Wellingtons that had completed a major servicing. Then in September 1944 he volunteered for the Pathfinder Force and was posted to Mosquitos for his second operational tour, this time with 692 Squadron. By this time the Allies had achieved a degree of air superiority over Germany which was just as well as the Mosquitos of 692 Squadron had no means of defending themselves, other than their high speed. Trotman recounts many aspects of this tour in much technical detail. Amongst many incidents his most hair-raising was the result of poor servicing of his aircraft's engines that resulted in a decision to abandon the aircraft whilst home bound from the target. Immediately after his navigator had baled out, his distress call was answered and Trotman landed the aircraft at an RAF occupied airfield in Belgium. His final sortie of this tour came just before VE Day and having survived another tour of operations, he declined the opportunity to ferry Mosquitos across the North Atlantic on the basis that this was a risky business and he didn't want to push his luck! Trotman's logbook summary for 692 Squadron makes an interesting comparison with his first tour. It can be seen that raids on Berlin predominate as the war was drawing to a close, and that the intensity of operations was much greater.

For readers who were in Bomber Command during the war this book will doubtless bring back vivid memories. For those who were in the post-war RAF, much of this book will also strike a chord. It is not a diary of events; it is more a recording of a series of episodes in Trotman's life story that have made the most impression on his memory. However, his recollection of his time on the squadrons and the operational sorties does not reflect the inevitable fear and horror that must have accompanied him in the cockpit over enemy territory, and the ever-present reminder of vulnerability when squadron comrades regularly failed to return. It is the kind of courage that was evident on a daily basis but is rarely mentioned.

This book is a worthy narrative of one man's very full flying career and his service to his country.