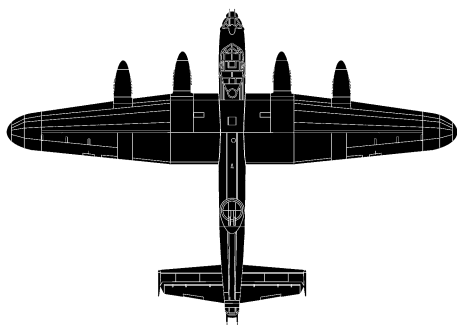


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

Lancaster



The Lancaster, unquestionably the best British bomber to see action in World War II, wreaked havoc upon the Third Reich. While US bombers flew into Germany on their day missions in massive, mutually supportive formations, the Lancasters streamed out of England at night in single file, its crews flying lonely bomber-stream missions deep into enemy territory. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, wartime leader of RAF Bomber Command, contended that the Lancaster was “the greatest single factor in winning the war.”

Yet the Lancaster was a fortuitous design, the outgrowth of efforts to salvage something from the Avro Manchester, an aircraft ruined by unreliable engines. With a redesign to allow use of four powerplants, the Lancaster was born. It was all metal except for fabric-covered ailerons, and it had

a massive, 33-foot-long bomb bay. The bomber was easy to fly and was extremely maneuverable, capable of high-speed dives and turns. Its stout build allowed pilots to pull demanding “corkscrew” maneuvers to evade German night fighters.

The Lancaster could carry enormous 22,000-lb bomb loads. The fleet dropped 608,912 tons of ordnance—more than all other RAF heavy bombers combined. The Lancaster began operations in March 1942 and dropped everything from mines and spinning “Dam-Busters” to 12,000-lb “Tall Boys” used against warships and 22,000-lb “Grand Slam” bombs dropped on submarine pens. The RAF lost 3,249 to fighters or flak and 822 to accidents in the course of just 156,000 sorties. The Lancaster flew into the toughest spots, and was the definitive British bomber of the war.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: A Lancaster B I—#KM-O R5540—as it looked in Fall 1942 when assigned to RAF Waddington in England. It was lost in a January 1943 crash.



In Brief

Designed by Avro ★ built by Avro, Armstrong Whitworth, Austin Motors, Metropolitan-Vickers, Vickers Armstrong, Victory Aircraft ★ first flight Jan. 9, 1941 ★ crew of seven ★ four Rolls Royce Merlin engines ★ number built 7,347 ★ **Specific to Lancaster B I:** max speed 287 mph ★ cruise speed 227 mph ★ max range 3,000 miles (loaded) ★ armament, eight .303-cal machine guns ★ weight (normal loaded) 65,000 lb ★ span 102 ft ★ length 69 ft 6 in ★ height 20 ft.

Famous Fliers

Victoria Cross: Ian W. Bazalgette, RAF; Geoffrey L. Cheshire, RAF; Guy Gibson, RAF; Norman C. Jackson, RAF; Andrew C. Mynarski, RCAF; John D. Nettleton, RAF (Rhodesia Sq.); Anthony M. Palmer, RAF; William Reid, RAF; Edwin Swales, SAAF; George Thompson, RAF. **Test pilot:** Alex Henshaw (performed a barrel roll in the bomber).

Interesting Facts

Featured in 1955 film “The Dam Busters” ★ suffered 108 losses in March 1944 raid on Nuremberg ★ nicknamed “The Lanc,” and “Lankie” ★ first named “Manchester III” ★ flown by nine nations ★ dropped food to starving Dutch in 1945 *Operation Manna* ★ had unheated gunner positions, requiring gunners to wear electrically heated suits ★ rarely completed 100 missions (35 aircraft) ★ sank German battleship *Tirpitz* ★ used in several *coups d’etat* in Argentina ★ appears in computer-animated form in “New Captain Scarlet.”



A Lancaster en route to Germany.