

Party for G for George

By STEVEN CORBY

Thousands of people have looked up and marvelled at the hulking mass of G for George — the biggest exhibit at the Australian War Memorial.

The dashing past of that particular Avon Lancaster Bomber was celebrated at a party for the big plane yesterday, complete with cake and celebrating school children. It was 50 years to the day since the aircraft landed in Australia to begin its retirement.

The curator of aircraft at the Australian War Memorial, John White, is proud of the achievements of G for George.

The lucky Lancaster completed more operations than any other aircraft in RAF bomber command. From the time it was delivered on October 27, 1942, to its final raid over Cologne on April 19, 1944, G for George spent 664 hours flying to 90 targets and was crewed by 203 men.

Perhaps the most incredible statistic is that there was not one casualty from any of those missions. "This was a lucky aeroplane and it's quite remarkable that it survived what it did," Mr White said.

"It was very badly damaged; it had engines blown up and it flew into the sea during the return part of one trip because it was so low in power, picking up a couple of tonnes of seawater in the bomb bay and then dropping it out as it flew up, bouncing off the wave-tops."

On other occasions the plane was attacked by fighters, strafed by anti-aircraft fire and even enveloped in a fierce electrical storm that sent shards of ice through the windscreen, injuring one of the crew.

Not surprisingly, the bomber became popular with crewmen because of its lucky record.

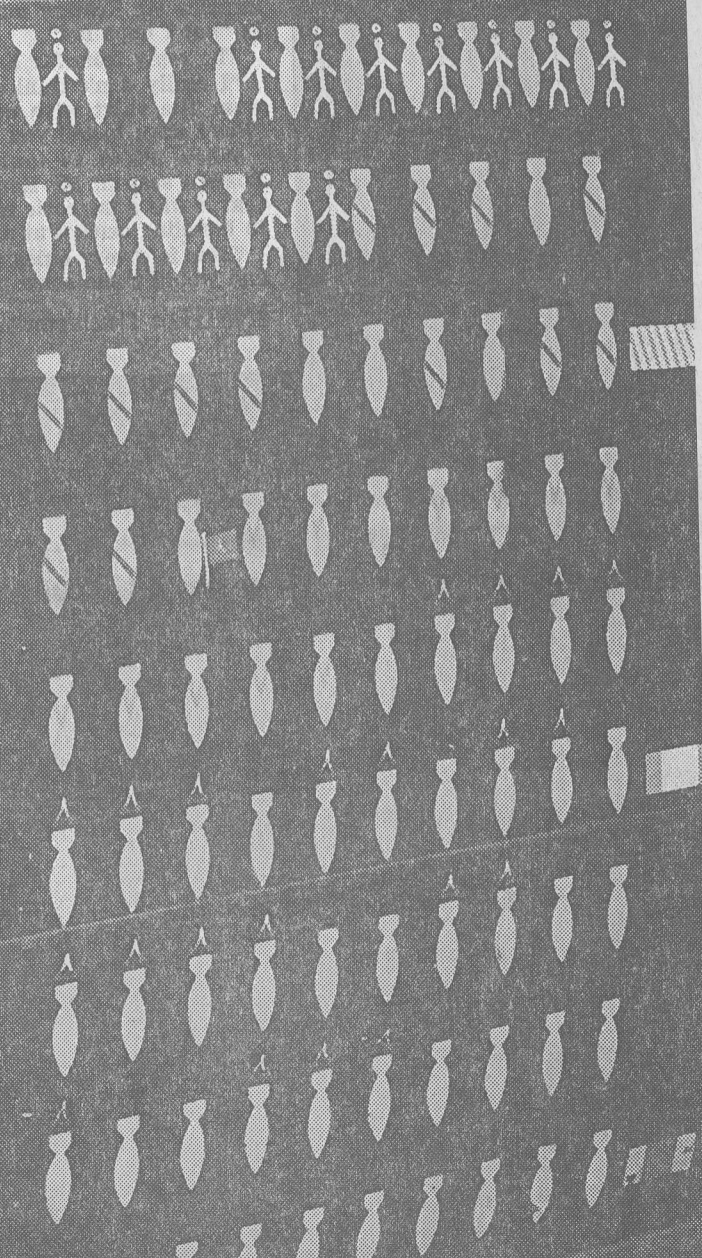
"If you were an air crewman the chances of surviving your tour, which was 30 missions, were about 50/50," Mr White said.

"So the odds were not usually good and as a result of that G for George became the object of a lot of affection. When it finished its 90 missions, or three tours, it was just about unairworthy. The navigator on the last mission commented that all his maps kept vibrating off the navigation table because the whole aircraft was just in such bad repair and had been patched up so many times."

Despite its poor condition, G for George had outlasted most bombers. By the end of its active life the other aircraft in the squadron it was attached to had been replaced almost 2½ times.

The twilight of its life was spent working for the Victory Loan war bond in Australia. It flew along the east coast raising funds for the war effort at £5 for a look inside or £20 a joy ride.

It was moved in late 1945 to Fairbairn, where it stayed for 10 years while attempts were made to move inside the



1994 TIMES 9-11-94