

Another Plea for Help

Member Liz Waller saw this online and posted it on Facebook. I, in turn referred it to Alan Fraser, the 149 Squadron historian in the hopes we can help.

From an entry in the Jersey Evening Post 3rd December 2018: -

"The discovery of debris from a Second World War bomber has started a search for the family of a Jersey-born airman who was killed when the aircraft was shot down 77 years ago.

Sergeant Air Gunner William George Marett (seen right) was 23 years old, and serving with 149 Squadron, when the Wellington was brought down close to Sevenum, a small village in south-east Holland.

He is buried in Jonkerbos War Cemetery in Nijmegen.

The crash impact left a crater, which has recently been investigated by aviation archaeologists Piet Snellen and Gérard Huijs, who have examined nine Second World War allied aircraft that crashed in the area on their way to bombing Germany's industrial heartland in the Ruhr Valley. They were brought down by night fighter aircraft based at Fliegerhorst Venlo - the largest German military airfield outside Germany.

'This spring Gérard and I started an investigation into plane crashes in nearby very inaccessible high moorland where five British planes crashed in the Second World War,' Mr Snellen said.

'When we visited a crater in March, it was filled to the top with water. When we went back in July, taking our metal detectors with us, the extremely dry summer had made the wet moorland around the crater easily accessible, and we found several parts of an aircraft in and near the crater.'

By searching on the internet, and publishing their finds on Facebook, they established that the remains were from a Wellington bomber, which they subsequently identified as belonging to 149 Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk.

From that they were able to identify the seven crew members, including William Marett, who all died in the crash.

His service record shows he lived in St Helier before the outbreak of war and was born in 1917, the son of Mr and Mrs W G Marett.

He died on 14 March 1941 when the Wellington was shot down with a full load of bombs by a Messerschmitt after it was caught in searchlights.

By contacting local newspapers in the UK to help his research into the Wellington's crew, Mr Snellen is in touch with the families of three of the members.

'I hope that this article will make it four,' he said. 'All these families knew hardly anything about what had happened to their beloved, and we were able to give them detailed information for which they all were very grateful.'

Sadly, this came too late for Howard and I to pay our respects to William and his crew when we visited Jonkerbos back in October.

Post Script However, having contacted Piet as soon as I'd seen this post, I was very pleased to know that his search had already been successful.



Piet posted "The day after the publishing of the article, family of William George Marett contacted me. We have now found the families of all six crew members of the Wellington L7858 OJ-A of 149 Squadron from RAF Mildenhall.

A very special and warm thank you is for Mary Ghrist and Dave Moss of The Stirling Aircraft Society, who have helped us tracing the families. Without them we would not have been able to trace all six families. We owe them our respect and sympathy for their work.

Next spring a large information board will be placed near the crash location so that passers-by can read what happened there on the evening of 14 March 1941. Gérard Huijs and I are also very grateful for the help we experienced from Joop Hendrix and Sjaak de Veth of "Planehunters Recovery Team Belgium" for their help in finding and analyzing the parts of the aircraft.

Our next aim will be a memorial for the crews of five British bombers, which crashed in the same nature reserve called Mariaveen in Sevenum in the south east of The Netherlands. Gerard and I visited the graves of the crew at Jonkerbos War Cemetery Nijmegen to bring flowers and to pay our respect."



Further research on the web found this entry on 'aviation-safety net' describing the loss: - "On March 14th 1941 Vickers Wellington L7858 with call code OJ-A left RAF Mildenhall at 7.50pm on a bombing mission to the Gelsenkirchen Oil Refineries.

The Gelsenkirchen authorities reported serious damage to the oil refinery after a raid by under 100 aircraft on this 14/15 March 1941. One of the 149 Squadron participating crews was not able to attend debriefing. The Wellington MK 1c L7858 (Call code OJ-A) was tracked by the ground radar and caught in a searchlight cone. Once coned, it was intercepted by an early 'Expert' of the Nachtjagd; Hpt. Werner Streib of 1/NJG1 Venlo (Nachtjagdgeschwader) and became his 11th confirmed kill. The aircraft (which, according to the Middlebrook/Everitt Bomber Command War Diaries, was the only aircraft lost on this raid) crashed in Sevenum near the border with Helenaveen in a swamp area at 10.32pm. There were no survivors from the crew of Sgt Hawley. In the exchange of fire Streib's Bf 110 was badly damaged by a burst from the rear gunner of the Wellington, Sgt Ward. Streib's 'funcker', Oblt. Josef Schnauster was seriously injured in the leg.

Crew of Vickers 416 Wellington 1c, L7858, code OJ-A

Sergeant/Pilot Leslie Richard Hawley
Sergeant/Pilot Charles Barrie Rogers
Sergeant Air Observer Edward Guy Prettyman
Sergeant. Wireless Operator Ernest White
Sergeant Air Gunner William George Marett
Sergeant Air Gunner Clifford Godfrey Harry Ward

Sources:

3 Group Bomber Command, Chris Ward.
ORB 149 Sqn RAF
Boiten's Nachtjagd War Diaries Vol 1
Alan Fraser 149 Squadron historian.