



The Mildenhall Register

15, 90, 149 and 622

**Bomber Squadrons' Association
supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Sqn
and 218 (Gold Coast) Sqn**



Newsletter

January 2018

Roll of Honour 2017

Mr	F C	Chuck	Antell	Beverley	149
Mr	P	Phil	Brentnall DFC	Amersham	218
Mrs	D	Daphne	Brown	Sheffield Aus	622
Mr	M R	Mike	Coles	Paignton	622
Mr	T J	Taff	Crowley	Thetford	XC
Mr	E L	Edwin	Davey	Lowestoft	XV
Mrs	R K	Rosemary	de Raeve	Oxford	WAAF
Mr	A W	Arthur	Edgley	Spalding	XV
Mr	H L	Hugh	Fraser	Dundee	149
Mr	B	Bernie	Harris	Ilford	622
Mrs	J E	Joan	Henry	Boreham Wood	
Mr	G	Graeme	House	Hobart Aus	XV
Mr	B	Brian	Jones	Horsham	XC
Mrs	O	Olive	Linsell	Birchington	XV
Mr	J E	Jim	Lubran DFC	Llandrindd Wells	XC
Mr	C	Charles	Mears DFC		218
Mr	J E	Jim	Morris		218
Mr	N S	Nicholas	Papp	Canada	622
Mr	K W		Prestidge	Daventry	149
G Capt	A J		Read RAAF	Canberra Aus	149
Mr	G	Geoff	Rothwell DFC*	North Shore NZ	75(NZ), 99 & 138
Mr	T	Tom	Saunders	Coventry	XC
Mr	K B		Smith	Port Naarlunga Aus	622
Mr	H R	Harold	Stannus	Vancouver Canada	149
Mrs	J	Joan	Studley	Sheringham	149/WAAF
Mr	E R	Eric	Taylor	Kings Lynn	622
Mr	M	Mark	Tindall	Sheerness	149
Mr	P	Peter	Webber	Gillingham	218
Mr	C	Charlie	Woolford	Brentwood	149

**Front Cover Picture: Taken on Howard Sandal's and Geoff Reynold's visit
to 622 Sqn War Graves in France;**

The Cross of Sacrifice in the cemetery at Lille where Sgt Edward Baxter rests. Edward lost his life when he parachuted out of a burning Lancaster on 1st February 1945. An eye witness saw Edward descending with his parachute on fire. The tragedy was that the fire was caused by a mechanical fault that spread oil along the main fuselage. It was the crew's first trip, Edward was classed as a 'spare' gunner at this stage and he was on his last trip.

Chairman Remarks

I begin by wishing you all a very Happy New Year and welcome you to the 2018 newsletter and magazine. I say magazine for many of the articles deal with the past and cannot be said to be news but are nevertheless important, relevant and interesting! May I thank all who have contributed copy for this publication and say sorry if your article does not appear this time which is due to a lack of space, however, I will endeavour to include it in the next edition. Also, please continue to send to the Secretary your stories and photographs which could be published in the next newsletter.

The past year has been another gratifying year for your committee. The newsletter was very well received and the reunion enjoyed by all who attended. One element of the year which pleased me greatly was the efforts made by 622 Sqn to include their vets in events organised throughout the year - the RAF 99th Anniversary and 622 Sqn Slate Dedication Services in the RAF Church, St Clement Danes, the RAF reception in the Law Courts and the Bomber Command 5th anniversary Service in Hyde Park which was followed by lunch in the RAF Club. On a sad note was the disbanding of XV Sqn with as yet no news of its reformation.

In July, we welcomed the new Commander, 100th Air Refuelling Wing, RAF Mildenhall Colonel Christopher R Amrhein to the UK and he has graciously agreed to be our new President. I learnt recently that the RAF Base Commander, Squadron Leader Rick Fryer is to leave the RAF in September 2018. He has been a staunch supporter of the Register during his tour at Mildenhall, providing me with lots of support and guidance on arranging reunions. He will be missed and on behalf of the Register we wish Rick and his wife Penny all the best for their coming retirement in France. It has also been reported that the USAF will not leave the base at Mildenhall until 2024 which is good news.

Finally, I wish to thank my fellow committee members, Cherry and Smiley Mildwater, Debbie and Geoff Reynolds, my wife Jill and the Squadron Historians, Martyn Ford Jones, Sam Mealing Mills, Alan Fraser, Steve Smith and Howard Sandall, the Team Mildenhall and Congregation at St Johns Church Beck Row for all their support given in their various ways to me and the Register.

Hopefully I will see many of you at the Reunion which will mark the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Royal Air Force on 1st April 1918 and the 75th Anniversary of the formation of 622 Squadron

John Gentleman

Secretary's Report

As I sit here writing this and reflecting on another year in the life of The Mildenhall Register, the weak sun streams in through the office window and I notice it is just 12 days to Christmas.

It is a year in which our membership has remained pretty constant, with just over 500 members on 'the books'. A steady stream of new members has kept pace with the sad news of departed members. It was a very sad loss that began the year when I was notified of the passing of one of our greatest and long-term supporters, Arthur Edgley. There is a lovely

tribute to this fine gentleman within these pages and I'm sure many who knew him will have their own personal memories of him.

We then moved on to the annual reunion, which this year was celebrated with members of the 100th Bomber Group, the forerunners of today's 100th Air Refuelling Wing, our wonderful hosts, who were celebrating the 25th Anniversary of being based at Mildenhall. It was a great gathering, with two veterans and a widow of the 'Bloody Hundredth' joining our members and guests at the formal dinner on Saturday night. Our guests included a number from The Manna Association and an article by Marliese Jeremias, with family memories of those times and her life is also included inside.

The year moved on with many enquiries for our historians to deal with and more new members who often come from those enquiries. Your committee also began planning for the 2018 reunion to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the RAF and the 75th Anniversary of 622 Squadron's formation.

In June John, Howard and I were invited to go to look round the International Bomber Command Centre which is being set up just outside Lincoln. Now I have to admit to being a bit of a sceptic because of their beginnings as The Lincolnshire Bomber Command Centre, which seemed to be ignoring the other 50 odd percent of Bomber Command, especially 3 Group and our squadrons. However, I and the others came away realising that, in the IBCC's own words, "they had had to work hard to overcome that early stigma". We could see what a great job they are now doing to honour all Groups and record the losses of the whole of Bomber Command. They will also record and honour those lost in Command aircraft (like those in both Alan's and my stories) who were lost after hostilities ceased. The number eventually recorded and remembered at Lincoln will far exceed the 55,573 loss figures that are usually quoted. I will be helping update their records whenever I can in the future.

Following this, I began planning, with Howard, for the trip around France which he wanted to make later in the year to the numerous 622 Squadron graves. It was a task I relished as I enjoy driving on the continent and it was a good opportunity to brush up on my French once more.

Then disaster (as far as I'm concerned) struck when my computer decided to chew up its hard drive (or memory), taking with it all the records of The Register and many personal memories, photographs and files with it. It wasn't a virus, as first feared, but an internal fault which, despite employing two 'computer doctors' was never again going to give up its secrets. Luckily, a back-up existed, and a good deal of reconstruction from paper records, e-mails and details from John and Smiley's computers has resulted in a current, up to date mailing list. Apologies to anyone I've missed off or not changed their address or details. Should you hear of anyone who doesn't get their newsletter/reunion invite, please get them to contact me and I'll rectify the matter.

Early October and Howard and I set off for France. A thorough write-up of the trip is included for your perusal. Despite the gravity of visiting the graves of so many young men, we had a great time, the weather was wonderful for the time of year and so was the hospitality of the many French people whom we met. (I even managed to photograph other

Squadron's graves wherever we visited and some historians have kindly done write-ups about those losses too).

So, we come almost full circle except that early December, on a really cold day, saw me representing The Register at the 100th Anniversary of the formation of 115 Squadron. It just remains for me to thank the other two committee members and our dear wives for their continued support, the squadron historians for their tremendous work and all our members for continuing the remembrance of those who served alive for future generations.

Geoff Reynolds

Notes from the Treasurer

Dear Members, due to your continuing generosity 2017 was, again, a good year financially for the Register. Donations came from around the globe and I hope I have replied to, and thanked, all donors. If I did miss anyone then I do apologise and will take this opportunity to thank all of you for your kind thoughts and donations. It is this income that allows us to keep the newsletter in print and to cover the various donations that the Register makes over the year.

With regard to this year's reunion, as we are back to normal there will be a raffle (do I hear a collective groan?) so any donated prizes will be gratefully received.

Well, dear reader, that's enough from me so I will wish you all a Happy, Healthy and Riotous New Year and hope to see you all in May.

Smiley Mildwater

Update on The Register's web site - themildenhallregister.co.uk

The new website has been up and running since March 2017 and has been viewed over 2000 times. I hope you have found it easy to use and navigate. There are a few stories that feature on the website, but I would love to publish more. If you have a story about your relative who served at Mildenhall or in any of our squadrons that you would like published, please send it to me, along with photos if you have some.

There is also plenty of room to add further pages and information. Let me know if you would like to see any other features on the site.

Debbie Reynolds Website Administrator

Obituaries

Mr P Brentnall DFC (218). Phil flew a tour with No.218 Squadron flying both Short Stirling's and Lancaster's most of which were in the role of 'B' Flight Commander. Phil Brentnall was an experience pilot, prior to joining the squadron he had served as a pilot instructor at Moody Air Force base, Georgia where he had accumulated over 1500 flying hours. Wanting to do his bit, he pulled a number of strings to get himself back to Britain to fly operationally. Squadron Leader Phil Brentnall's 32nd and last operation was on August 12th 1944. Phil Brentnall arrived on the squadron via No.1651 in October 1943, by a strange twist of fate he would return to No.1651 Conversion Unit as an instructor. Within a matter

of months, he was posted to No.3 Lancaster Finishing School where he would see the war out. Wing Commander Fenwick Wilson AFC (C/O of 218 squadron) described Brentnall's assessment as a heavy bomber pilot as 'exceptional'.

Mr Hugh Fraser (149), B/A with both Dennis Johns and Keith Sutton, March '45 - Feb '47. Split with 1st crew in summer '45, became Orderly F/S, dishing out leave passes, soap coupons and marching the 'charged ones' in. Was asked by new skipper Keith Sutton to join and wouldn't have given up cushy number for anyone else!

Mr Michael Coles (622) tail-gunner in Flt/Lt (later Group Captain) A Brignall's crew managed to complete a very quick tour from May '44 to March '45 which started with a low level, 20 aircraft operation on Calais on a Sunday teatime. His last being leader of a single file of aircraft attacking Wesel in the hope of keeping the enemy's heads down whilst the allied troops were crossing the Rhine in their boats and barges.

He said in a 2011 letter: "We were Master Bomber/Group Leader on some of the daylight missions where G H techniques were used. Much to the chagrin of the bomb aimer who became just a front gunner because the navigator dropped the bombs."

He spent the end of his RAF service in Flying Control at Turnhouse with a Polish fighter outfit. This he enjoyed as, being a senior NCO, he had a room in the Sgt's mess and shared a batman.

He finally received a 'B' release as his pre-service skills of making up passenger trains meant he was more useful to the railways than flying control once the war in Europe was over.

W/O Graeme House (XV) was posted to XV Squadron during October/November 1944. He flew all his 'ops' with F/L J. Dollisson, DFC, on Lancasters. He was posted out during March/April 1945.

Mr C F Mears (218) Born December 9th 1923, Moss Side, Manchester. Charles joined RAFVR at 17, trained in Canada and gained his wings in Florida where he was bitten by a horse which prevented his graduation dinner. He was returned to the UK and joined the squadron via No. 3 LFS in October 1944 at Methwold. He finished a tour with Bomber Command by May 1945 at Chedburgh, which included a number of extra operations. He continued to fly with Transport Command between Cornwall & India. Returning to the UK a second time, he flew 120 sorties during the Berlin Airlift.

Mr J.H (Jim) Morris (218) Flight Engineer, arrived on 218 squadron September 1st 1942 from 218 Conversion flight. Flying with 'A' Flight deputy flight commander F/Lt Edward (Bicky) Bickenson DFC. He did his first operation on October 5th 1942 to Aachen. He finished a complete tour on March 1st 1943 with, above all, an operation to Berlin.



Jim, 1st left with his Nav James Trainer later KIA

Gp Capt A J Read RAAF Retd (149) in 2011 he wrote in: - I was a Wireless Operator in 149 Squadron during World War 2 and a member of the regular RAAF until my retirement in 1980. I also served in the Vietnam War in 1968-9.

Mr Geoff Rothwell DFC* (75 & 218) Born in England on 3 April 1920, he joined the RAF just prior to the war. He flew three operational tours with 99, 75(NZ), 138 and 218 squadrons in Wellingtons, Halifax's and Stirling's. He received the DFC and Bar, Croix de Guerre and Palme (Bel), Order of Leopold II with Palme (Bel), and Legion of Honour (Fra). His aircraft collided with a barrage balloon at 300ft near Texel in Holland during his 71st mission over enemy territory in September 1944 and he was captured. He spent the rest of the war as a PoW in Stalag Luft Barth Vogelsang. Geoff Rothwell was the subject of the book "The Man with Nine Lives" which is currently being updated and is due for re-release soon.

Fg Off Harold R Stannus (149) F/E on Stirling LJ477. OJ-M. Pilot - P/O Holmes DFC. The last remaining Australian member of the exclusive "Guinea Pig Club" Harold Stannus, has passed away in Vancouver, Canada. Harold - or "Harry" to his mates in the club - was one of the 649 burns victims who went on to be treated in Britain by the maverick New Zealand plastic surgeon, Sir Archibald McIndoe. In 1942 Harry enlisted with the RAAF, and later that year departed to participate in the Empire Air Training Scheme. He trained at Ontario before joining an RAF crew in the UK to train on Wellingtons and then Stirlings. In 1943, their training completed, they were posted to 149 (East India) Squadron RAF at Lakenheath, Suffolk.

On the night of July 5, 1944, returning from an aborted SOE drop (coincidentally codenamed 'Harry'), an enemy anti-aircraft gun hit the starboard inner engine, damaged the port inner engine and ripped a hole in the fuselage, flooding the interior of the Stirling with fuel. The pilot managed to make it to the RAF base on Thorney Island, completing an emergency wheels-up landing on turf. The aircraft then careened onto the tarmac, creating sparks that ignited the fuel.

Flt Sgt White, the Navigator, lost his life. Harry and the pilot were splashed with the igniting fuel and before crawling out of the wreck, his left side, lower face and neck suffered third-degree burns. Along with two surviving crew who escaped with minor burns, he was taken to the East Grinstead Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital and Archibald McIndoe.

After a long period of reconstructive surgery, Harry was discharged from hospital in February 1946 and boarded His Majesty's Transport Arawa for



The crew with Harry front left



The Guinea Pig Club Badge

repatriation to Sydney Australia. Before departing Sydney, he had met his future wife, Fay (nee Daniel). They were married on May 17, 1948 and went on to have 12 children. Harold rose from junior office clerk to deputy head of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, British Columbia and then became chief manager of the main CIBC British Columbia branch in Vancouver. He is survived by Harold rose from junior office clerk to deputy head of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, British Columbia and then became chief manager of the main CIBC British Columbia branch in Vancouver. He is survived by his brother Ron Stannus of Melbourne, and his children Susanne, Bernard, Mary Jane, Martin, Stephen, Rachel, Maureen, Sarah, Andrew, Gabrielle and Genevieve, 21 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. A brave man.

Mr.D. Leahy 'Sydney Morning Herald' & Alan Fraser. 149 (East India) Sqn Historian

Mrs Joan Studley (WAAF) Widow of Jim, 149 Sqn Electrician. was a WAAF W/Op at Chicksands Priory. The site operated as a SIGINT collection site throughout World War II, intercepting German traffic and passing the resulting material to the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park.

Arthur Edgeley 1927 - 2016 No one amongst the long-term membership of the Mildenhall Register needs an introduction to Arthur Edgley, but for the newer membership, he was short in stature, but a giant of a man in many ways. He was easily identified at reunions making his way across the room, supported on his arm crutches, with a big smile on his face.

Arthur William Edgley was a country boy born and bred. He entered this world on Easter Sunday, 27 March 1927, in the small Lincolnshire village of Gedney Dawsmere, near Long Sutton and Holbeach. Arthur's parents, Charles and Fan Edgley, had lost their first baby, a daughter, when the child was only six months old, so it was a blessing for them when Arthur was born a year later.

Although an only child, Arthur was not a lonely lad, he had many friends at the local school where, being a quick and intelligent boy, he excelled at all of the lessons.

With the Holbeach Marsh bombing range located about one mile from Dawsmere and the many and varied RAF planes flying over it, plus having got to know many of the airmen based in the locality, it was almost inevitable that when the time came for Arthur to sign up for military service, he chose to enlist with the Royal Air Force. However, being in a reserved occupation (agriculture), Arthur had to make many visits to the recruiting office; he was finally successful on his fifth attempt!

During July 1940, Arthur received instructions to report to Blackpool for kitting out and basic training. Three weeks later he was posted to No. 4 Balloon Centre, at Chigwell, Essex,



Arthur with his daughter Diane right and Niece at the 2013 reunion

on the outskirts of East London, under the flight path of the incoming German bombers which were intent on attacking the London docks.

Feeling he could better serve his Country in other ways, Arthur applied for aircrew training as an air gunner, but although the interviewing officer confirmed he would recommend Arthur for training in this capacity the Education Officer talked Arthur into re-mustering again for pilot training. Arthur took the latter's advice. The postings then began to come thick and fast, first he was sent to the Isle of Man for a ground gunners' course, then back to Chigwell, where he was promoted to the rank of Leading Aircraftman, before going to Aircrew Receiving Centre (ACRC) at St John's Wood, London. From ACRC, Arthur was posted to No. 12 Initial Training Wing at RAF Leuchars, near St Andrews, Fife. On 4 April 1942 the young LAC arrived at No.15 Elementary Flying Training School, at Kingstown, Carlisle, where he received instruction in how to fly a Miles Magister two-seater aeroplane; by the end of that same month Arthur was permitted to fly solo.

With all this moving around, it seems incredible that Arthur was able to court a young lady named Joan Lawson, to whom he became betrothed. Joan was a local lass from the village of Long Sutton, not that far from Arthur's birthplace.

Arthur was posted to Canada for flying training but, for a number of reasons the flying programme did not go according to plan, and then, on 22 June 1942, Arthur and a number of his contemporaries were removed from flying training; they were however given the opportunity to remuster as air gunners. Three months later, on 25 September, Arthur qualified as an air gunner, was awarded his 'AG' flying brevet, promoted to the rank of sergeant, and posted home to the United Kingdom.

Having crewed up with Sergeant Jack Wilson, an Australian pilot, Arthur progressed through Operational Training Unit and Conversion unit before being posted to No.XV Squadron, based at Bourn, Cambridgeshire, but on arrival at the local railway station pilot phoned Bourn for transport and was told that XV had left some time before and that the squadron had moved to RAF Mildenhall.

Arthur commenced operational flying during the early hours of the morning of 14 May, 1943, when his crew undertook their first operational sortie, a mine-laying trip, off the coast of Terschelling, in the West Frisian Islands. Two weeks later, on the night of 23/24 May, Arthur was to fly his third and last operational sortie, an attack against Dortmund.

Unfortunately, things did not go according to plan and, on the last leg of the flight to the target, flying at 12,300 feet, Arthur became aware that the number of large black objects close to and level with the Stirling, were bursting flak shells, but before he could utter a warning the starboard engines took hits, which exploded on impact, putting both of them out of action.

Realising the situation was grave, together with the fact he was experiencing difficulty holding the aircraft in level flight, Jack Wilson gave the order for the crew to abandon the aircraft. As Arthur began to lower himself through the escape hatch the slipstream caught his legs and thrashed the lower half of his body from side to side with terrific force. Feeling uneasy about the situation, he clung on for dear life and gradually fought his way back into the fuselage. Given the aircraft was, unbelievably, still flying on a somewhat level attitude,

he reasoned that the pilot might be able to ditch the aircraft. However, with the aircraft losing height, it was only a matter of time before it struck the ground on the south side of the Horst Venlo/Sevenum - Grubbenvorst crossroads, approximately 8 km north-west of Venlo, Holland.

Accompanied by Sidney Maxted, the wireless operator, who had also survived the crash, Arthur made good their escape. After a while the duo chanced knocking on the door of a farmhouse, where the farmer and his wife took them in and gave them food and shelter. This was the first in a chain of 'good luck' that would see the two airmen making their way into Belgium, where they were accommodated in a house in Brussels, along with a group of other evaders. Their next move was to a small hotel in Paris, from where they were told they would catch a train to Bordeaux.

Whilst walking to the railway station on the morning of 9 July, the group was apprehended by eight armed men in civilian clothes - the Gestapo - they had been betrayed. They were taken to Fresnes - the most notorious prison in France, before being moved on to Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe (more commonly known amongst British aircrew as a Dulag Luft), a Luftwaffe interrogation facility at Oberursel, north-west of Frankfurt. On 1 September Arthur arrived at Stalag IV B., a prisoner of war camp situated to the north-east of Mühlberg; the town being located on the right bank of the river Elbe, approx. 80 km north-west of Dresden; he was incarcerated here until the end of the war. After the war, Arthur Edgley learned that the whole escape line was a set-up, with all its 'helpers' receiving payment for each fugitive caught.

A number of World War Two servicemen who had similar experiences to Arthur, never spoke about what they had endured, but thanks to those like Arthur the stories of these courageous men has been recorded

Arthur William Edgley died on 24 December 2016. Arthur's story is to be related, as a chapter in its own right, in a new, up-dated reprint of the book, '*Bomber Squadron - Men Who Flew With XV*', due for republication towards the end of 2018. Hopefully it will be a fitting tribute to a man who was, both a true gentleman and a beloved friend to many.

Martyn Ford Jones XV Sqn Historian

Thomas William Henry Saunders, Air Bomber - XC Sqn. Tom Saunders, who passed away 3rd December 2016 aged 95 years, had a life-long interest in aircraft and things mechanical. As a child he lived in Surrey close to airports at Croydon and Hanworth, also Brooklands and Hawker's at Kingston. Holidays were taken at Ramsgate. The family would stop on the way near RAF Manston and Tom remembered "sitting on the road verge alongside the airfield, watching the old Virginias take-off and land. I guess that awakened my interest in flying". Tom's next-door neighbour was press secretary at Brooklands and this contact meant Tom attended many flying displays and his enthusiasm saw him involved with aircraft as well as cars at this famous site: "Racing cars and test aircraft often had a spare seat, and even a new Hawker Hart needed 'ballast' in the rear seat."

In 1940 Tom was employed training men and women in manufacturing skills at the local Technical College, then transferred to a Ministry of Supply factory equipping all three

services. Called up that year, Tom joined the R.A.F.V.R. However, he had quickly become a Chief Inspector at his factory: a reserved occupation. This made it very difficult to depart civilian life and he entered active service mid-1942.

A spell at Aircrew Recruiting Centre, Lords Cricket Ground, St Johns Wood was followed by a period at Ludlow under canvas then Initial Training Wing (ITW) at Newquay. Here were daily reminders of the war as Whitley aircraft returned to their base at St Eval, often showing battle damage. On one occasion Tom was amongst the airmen called to help launch the lifeboat when the tide was a long way out. This earned them the thanks of the crew of a Hudson which had made an emergency ditching.

November 1942 saw Tom depart Newquay for Desford, for his first taste of flying. Despite bad weather delaying the course, Tom took it in his stride. The course delay did create some difficulties as Tom's wedding had been on hold since September, when he and fiancée Joan had anticipated leave after I.T.W. Instead Joan had three days' notice to arrange everything and they were duly married on January 3rd 1943.

After ten days leave Tom was off again, this time to a holding unit in Manchester and thence to Canada. For the duration of the voyage on the 'Empress of Scotland,' Tom was detailed as part of the ship's air defence; four hours on, eight hours off.

In Canada, Tom was sent to the Personnel Dispatch Unit at Moncton. They travelled to the holding unit by rail: "As we passed through little towns people waved and cheered on the platforms, passing sweets and cigarettes through the open windows as the train passed slowly through. The initial hospitality continued all the time we were in Canada and made us feel really welcome." In deed Tom struck up lifelong friendships with two families whilst at Moncton.

Tom was at Picton from September until December, then transferred to Rivers, Manitoba flying Bolingbrokes. He thought, "The beauty of the air bomber's course was you did a bit of everything. You didn't have to be totally expert at anything except bombing, but we had a lot of time doing other things."

Tom sailed back to Liverpool on the Andes expecting to join an Operational Training Unit (OTU), but periods at Harrogate, Whitley Bay and Halfpenny Green followed. Flying Wellingtons at OTU, Tom was based at Silverstone, a cold and wet station; the only time Tom felt really uncomfortable during his service.

For Heavy Conversion Unit, Tom and his crew went to Swinderby, on Stirlings. The final stage of training was a Lancaster Finishing School, at Syerston. Tom found the Stirling, "was a fine aircraft to fly. The Lancaster was much more manoeuvrable and we all took a turn at trying our hand at flying. It was only intended to get us back if we got shot around and the pilot was injured. It handled very well indeed, a beautiful aircraft to fly, though it wasn't very comfortable to fly in."

An operational posting followed to 614 Squadron at Scampton, but the squadron had moved and Tom's crew were posted to Tuddenham. He found it a "nice station, out in the country and very comfortable". The first trip of his tour was abortive, which was a bit of a let-down. They went on the second the next day, a straight forward operation, but the crew found it exciting; this was what all their training had been for.

By this time XC was a G. H. squadron, flying daylight raids. Tom recalled, "We did 27 operations, we were fairly lucky really. We had one trip where we never actually got out of cloud from the time we took-off to the time we landed back. One or two trips were pretty grim. On a bit of a shaky trip my oxygen mask came adrift from its connection point. I was without oxygen for a little while which left me disorientated for a few minutes. We managed to connect it up again and I was alright."

From February to April 1945, Tom's crew had a temporary attachment to 7 squadron where they completed four operations. They were involved in Operation Manna flights on their return to XC, "everybody was cheering and waving flags. It was quite fabulous really. It was good fun, flying at 300 ft and nobody firing at you for a change. We dropped some of our rations through the flare chute - sweets for the kids."

After VE-Day, Tom went on flights to repatriate p.o.w.s from Juvincourt. At the end of May, Tom contracted tonsillitis. By the time he returned to Tuddenham his crew had been posted away from the Squadron, so he joined another crew flying various exercises in the expectation of operating in the Far East. After VJ-Day, XC was involved in flying photo mapping sorties over Europe. These required an early start to avoid the sun casting shadows over the landscape and very accurate dead reckoning navigation.

Tom was demobbed in August 1946. and after the war, work was difficult to obtain, so Tom went back to college and qualified for AmIMechE status. He was subsequently selected from the Technical and Scientific Register for an interview with Sir W.G. Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft Ltd. (AWA) at Baginton, Coventry. The job was in the Aerodynamic Research Laboratory Flight Test section. While waiting for the departmental head to conduct the interview, Tom enquired after an R.A.F. comrade who had worked for AWA. The interview was going quite well when the phone rang. The departmental head excused himself and answered. Then he proffered the phone to Tom and said with surprise in his voice, "It's for you!"

Despite the interruption Tom was given the job. Tom's baptism of Flight Testing was two 2-hour test flights in the Apollo and three 1-hour flights in a prototype N.F.11. Tom would go on to work on all marks of the Meteor night fighter, the Prone Pilot Meteor and Hawker Sea Hawks (being responsible for the tropical trials in Khartoum and Aden).

The Argosy was the last aircraft to be built at Baginton and Tom was involved with the tropical trials at Khartoum and Nairobi, route proving throughout Europe and the Near East and carrying out tests on demonstration flights. After 3 years on the Argosy, Tom started with the AW 681. That project was the end of Tom's work at AWA.

Tom moved to Hawker Siddley Dynamics in a senior position there, testing and developing the Sea Dart and Sea Slug. When the work transferred to Hatfield, Tom joined Automotive products at Leamington Spa (previously called Lockheed) as Quality Control Instructor. That extra education after the war was not wasted, after AWA Tom returned to a spot of teaching at the local Technical College, but only in the evenings.

Thinking of operational flying Tom reflected, "The bomb run was nerve wracking for the crew, but not for the bomb aimer who was much too well occupied. You never had much time to think about things other than what you were doing. Our main targets were oil refineries.

It was nearly all precision work. There were only three or four occasions when we were involved in a big raid on a town. We all felt we were doing a job on worthwhile targets - not mass bombing."

Tom took some pride in the Manna flights. He returned several times to the Dutch reunions. At his funeral, a wreath was presented on behalf of the Dutch nation and a handwritten card from the attaché was included. Tom explained, "It wasn't until we were invited to go back to Holland that we really found out what it was about. It was traumatic for us to hear the tales people were telling. Dropping food to the Dutch always gave you a good feeling, though I must say you don't have the feeling you're killing people when you drop bombs. You're doing your job, the same as they did when they came over here. You didn't feel it that way - probably do now, but not then." **Sam Mealing-Mills XC Squadron Historian.**

Bernie Harris passed away on 16th December 2017 after a short illness in hospital. Bernie was a former member on No. 622 Squadron within the crew of Plt Off P.B.J. Ryan RAAF acting as the mid upper gunner. Arriving at RAF Mildenhall towards the end of the war, Bernie and his crew took part in Operation MANNA, dropping food supplies to the starving Dutch populations. Operation Exodus followed with Bomber Command crews repatriating prisoners of war from airfields in France.

Bernie was a staunch supporter of The Mildenhall Register and attended several events over the years. His name and photograph features in this current newsletter and he was an attendee at the 2017 reunion. His smiling face and humour will be missed.

The 2017 Reunion

Over 100 people attended some aspect of this year's reunion which was very gratifying to the committee who had arranged another interesting programme.

The weekend started with what has become a regular feature of the reunion, the Base Tour. This year we were again hosted on the coach by Dr Bob MacKay, the 100th Air Refueling Wing (ARW) Historian. As we toured the base Bob pointed out features both old and new and referred to various aspects of historical events relating both to the RAF and USAF use of the airfield.

The first stop was to view the base's aircraft, a C130 (Hercules), V22 (Osprey) and the KC135 Stratotanker. We were permitted to board the KC135 and whilst some sat in the pilots' seats, others laid in the position used for refuelling aircraft. At this stage of the tour we experienced rain and it was indeed fortunate to be inside, although some sheltered under the aircraft's wings! Next came a police dog display with the dogs being admired by all, although no one volunteered to be the victim who the dog chased and caught!

Back on the coach, we continued to see various buildings on the base, the war time hangars, communications centre, the domestic accommodations block and the astro trainer used by WW2 navigators. Next the party split into two groups, one to visit the Control Tower building and the other the Fire Section. Whilst in the Fire section the party heard the alarm going off. This was caused by a stuck lift in the Control Tower in which were members of our party. However, the occupants were soon rescued and those that wished to see the main visual Control Tower area had to make the long climb up the stairs whilst others visited the

Photographs from 2017



Briefing in Ops Room at the RAF Air Defence Museum Neatishead



Assembling in the Galaxy Club for the formal Dinner



The Last Post at Beck Row Church

Photographs from 2017



On the Base Tour watching Dog display by a KC135 Tanker



OC 622 with vets Ken Thomas and the late Bernie Harris



Coffee and Reminiscences after the Sunday Service at St Johns

ATC simulator and briefing sections on the ground floor. During the tower visit we had fine views of the huge USAF transport aircraft, the C5 Galaxy. In the fire section we observed all the facilities available in order for the fireman to sustain a 24-hour operation - the galley, fitness centre, recreational room, bunk house and the laundry. Finally, we were given a demonstration of one of the fire vehicles capabilities

The two parties re-joined the coach to visit the fine stained-glass windows in the Base Chapel. The six windows portray all aspects of the base's activities from its opening until the arrival of the current KC135 aircraft. It tells in a visual manner the history of RAF Mildenhall. There was a poignant moment whilst inspecting the window which depicted Operation Manna as one of our guests turned out to be from a Dutch family that had benefitted from the food dropped. Also, several of the vets had flown sorties in support of the Operation. Although inevitable that the tour covers many areas seen before, it is an enjoyable event and will hopefully be a feature of future tours.

In the evening we meet in Middleton Hall which was once the RAF's Officers Mess. It is a rather grand setting with its oak panelled walls and glittery chandeliers. Here, after pre-dinner drinks we had soup and a cold buffet before assembling in the Stirling Room for our AGM. This was followed by a talk given by Geoff Reynolds entitled "Caught Napping". It told the story of one of our members, George Thompson and his attempt to evade capture and reach the UK. His Lancaster was en route to Frankfurt and had to be evacuated after being shot down.

Early next morning a party left for the hour and a half journey to visit the RAF Air Radar Defence Museum at Neatishead. It is a fascinating place and is located on the site of the world's longest continuously operating radar site, providing a unique window into the history of radar. The museum has twenty exhibition rooms and talks about the early development of Radar and the Cold War are included. All agreed that the visit was very worthwhile.

This year the dinner on Saturday evening was a joint function with members of the 100th Bomb Group USAAF, who were visiting the UK to mark the 75th anniversary of their arrival in the UK and participation in WW2 and the 100th ARW who were celebrating 25 years of being at RAF Mildenhall. At the dinner we were joined by our military guests for the weekend, OC 622 Sqn and her deputy plus representatives of the RAAF, RNZAF and the Newmarket Branch of RAFA. We enjoyed an excellent meal served by the Galaxy staff and afterwards listened with interest to a talk by Jonna Doolittle Hoppes, Granddaughter of the legendary James Doolittle of the USAAF. We were entertained throughout the evening by the Skyliners, a WW2 swing band who were very much appreciated. The evening was also enhanced by a model aircraft display of both RAF and USAF aircraft that had seen service at RAF Mildenhall. The event which was thoroughly enjoyed by all proved to be a late night with the last guests leaving well after 11!

Sunday saw a new event, the formal laying of wreaths by the Register's plaque at St John's Church Beck Row where the minister, David Ball said prayers, and the last Post was played. It was a moving ceremony which we intend making a regular feature of the Sunday Remembrance Service. We then re assembled in the Church for the service, again attended by members of the Commonwealth air forces, the USAF and the RAF. A RAFA standard was

paraded and we listened to a thought provoking sermon by the Minister, David. Afterwards the ladies of St John's entertained us to a fine spread in the Church Hall. Finally, we said our goodbyes but not before many, if not everybody, commented that it had been another good reunion and they looked forward to next years which will be held, hopefully over the weekend 11-13th May 2018. Book the date in your diary now!

The Register's New President

In July we welcomed our new President to Mildenhall. Col. Christopher R. Amrhein is the commander of the 100th Air Refuelling Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, supporting four USAF MAJCOM flying programs and more than 16,800 military, civilian, dependent, and retiree personnel. With 15 KC-135 aircraft, the wing is the only permanently assigned air refuelling operation in the European theatre.

Colonel Amrhein entered the Air Force in 1996 after earning his commission as a distinguished graduate from the ROTC program at The University of Texas at Austin. He has served in operational and training assignments logging more than 3100 hours in a variety of aircraft.

Operationally, while assigned to Air Mobility Command, he served as a KC-135 aircraft commander, instructor and weapons officer. Colonel Amrhein was assigned to U.S. Air Forces Central Command in 2010-2011, where he commanded the 340th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron, the USAF's largest Air Refueling Squadron. In these operational capacities, he has supported contingency operations Allied Force, Joint Guardian, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and New Dawn.

Colonel Amrhein has served in multiple staff assignments at the joint, Headquarters Air Force, and major command levels. Prior to this assignment Colonel Amrhein was the Vice Commander, 18th Wing, Kadena AB, Japan. The 18th Wing is the largest combat wing in the U.S. Air Force and serves as a key strategic forward base for USPACOM and Pacific Air Forces.

Reunion 2018 - 11 to 13 May

This year the reunion will mark not only the 100th Anniversary of the RAF's formation but the 75th Anniversary of 622 squadron being formed! Planning is well advanced for the 2018 Reunion, much of which will follow that of previous years. We will begin with the tour of the base at RAF Mildenhall which will include a short brief on the role of the unit within the USAF together with visiting various sections of the base. **In the event of the tour being overbooked priority will be given to those attending the whole weekend.** For the formal dinner on the Saturday evening the Sky Liners band have been booked to provide WW 2 music and song. The full itinerary for the weekend is given elsewhere in the newsletter, however, note that this year the Register goes Maritime for the Saturday day trip. Well,



perhaps not proper job maritime in the 'Kipper Fleet' tradition but the next best thing.... the Norfolk Broads. This year we thought we'd have a change from the usual aviation themed day trips and have a boat trip instead. To this end we have hired 'Cordon Rouge', one of the Broad's fine passenger vessels.

As you can see she is a trim and nicely proportioned craft (not unlike your own dear hon. Treasurer) and, although not nuclear powered or approaching the size of the USS Nimitz I do like the cut of her jib. She can accommodate up to 60 passengers, either in the open air or safe and dry inside in the event of inclement weather. There is disabled access, a bar and the usual facilities. We have booked her for a three-hour round trip and, as usual, we will be providing a buffet luncheon. We are aiming for a 0900 departure from the 'Bird' with a 1030 arrival at Wroxham and an 1100 'cast off'. We will disembark at 1400 with a 1600 arrival back at the 'Bird' giving us plenty of time to get ready for the evening's jollities, bun fighting and pea throwing. The booking form for the weekend's event is included with the newsletter, we would appreciate your returning as soon as possible even if you are not attending thereby enabling us to maintain an accurate record of our members

So, me hearties, don your peg-legs, hooks and eye-patches and we look forward to welcoming you aboard for what promises to be a pleasant and relaxing voyage into the wilds of Norfolk. The booking form for the weekend's event is included with the newsletter and the full weekend's programme is on the inner back cover.

Smiley Mildwater



News from 622 Sqn

OC 622 Sqn writes:

The year 2017 has been fabulous for 622 Sqn. We have seen the Sqn continue to grow both in numbers and activity. Sqn personnel have been operating in the Middle East in the fight against DAESH and by stark contrast, also in the Caribbean with hurricane relief. We now have 3 Air Traffic Controllers on Sqn strength, which is great following on from Chick Chandler and Tom Maxwell who were Air Traffic after they finished flying. There are 2 articles on the Sqn events we have held this year with Veterans and it was lovely for so many to join us at St Clement Danes and at the Bomber Command Memorial (see separate articles).

Another major event for 622 Sqn was a trip to Berlin. This involved a visit to the Commonwealth 1939-45 Cemetery. Led by the Sqn WO a short service of commemoration to the 29 comrades of 622 Sqn who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the air Battle for Berlin. The



cemetery, part of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, came complete with imported British Grass to bring a little bit of "Blighty" to a corner of some foreign field. Our fallen were all individually remembered and Martyn Ford-Jones read out details of their short lives and final missions. We allowed ourselves a period of quiet reflection amongst just a few of the many of the 55 thousand Bomber Command aircrew lost on operations before departing in a thoughtful mood to visit a concentration camp. A poignant trip reminding us of the horrors of dictatorship and war and why we do the job we do.

Next year we will be involved in the many RAF 100 celebrations and also the 75th anniversary of the formation of 622 Sqn. Some will be attending the Veteran Preview of the IBCC in Lincoln on the 19 January and then we hope to get a good group of the Sqn to attend the Mildenhall Register Reunion in May. Although the Sqn was formed in Aug 43, we will celebrate its 75th year at the reunion and look forward to seeing many of you there.

Wishing all 622 Sqn and Mildenhall Register veterans, family and friends the very best for 2018.

622 Sqn Replacement Slate at St Clement Danes

A sincere thank you to all who kindly donated to cover the cost of the 622 Sqn slate replacement; without you the Sqn would be unrecognisable on the floor. 622 Sqn now stands out brilliantly in a beautiful position in the Church and I would encourage those that can to visit such a lovely place.

On the 2 Apr 17 622 Sqn held a veterans' day out to celebrate the RAFs 99th birthday at the Central Church of the RAF, St Clement Danes. Our Vets were the well-deserved centre of attention as they held court in the post-service reception held in the Central Law Courts.

An hour of wine, canapés and a game of put the name to the Air Marshal (large numbers of the Air Force Board were dusted off for the occasion) and it was back to the Church for the last part of the day's activities. We had commissioned the replacement squadron slate and held a re-



dedication service for its installation in the central aisle. A bit of divine intervention kept us stunned as a ray of sunlight illuminated our crest throughout the service.

Many thanks to our veterans, the Mildenhall Register association (our wartime home), the Stn Cdr and Air Marshal Sir "Timo" Anderson, the Sqn's honorary Air Commodore for their support for the Sqn service.

"The Many" have become the few.

"The fighters are our salvation but the bombers alone provide the means of victory" Winston Churchill September 1940.

That victory came with the fearsome cost of 55 573 young men lost, out of 125,000 airmen of Bomber Command, a number close to twice the manning of the modern-day strength of the Royal Air Force. They came from around the world; they were all volunteers, and throughout the war nearly half their number died on operations. Flying day and night over occupied Europe, running the gauntlet of night fighters, anti-aircraft fire and mid-air collisions, the nerves of these young men were stretched to breaking point. They faced dangers we can barely imagine, all in defence of our freedom, but their sacrifice has too often gone unrecognised.

The Few of Fighter Command have had a recognised day of commemoration since 1943, and the Many of Bomber Command had to wait until 2012 to get their memorial. The Royal Air Force Benevolent fund have become guardians of the Memorial, their motto "The Debt We Owe" and there is no greater debt of gratitude we have as a nation than to those who served in the RAF during the Second World War.

In the 5th anniversary of the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial members old and new, or old and older, of 622 Sqn gathered in Piccadilly to remember the young men who flew with the Command during the Second World War. Today it is as well that we remember those lost in the air and on the ground, the families they left behind, and take time to reflect on the scars of conflict. We were also there to pay tribute to the surviving veterans who were able to be with us. All in their mid-nineties, they have waited a long time for this moment of recognition, as they bring with them a living memory of their fallen friends and comrades. The wonderful Bill Gould stepped in at short notice to do a reading, beautifully delivered without microphone to a large gathering! Our veterans all had an opportunity to give the Chief of The Air Staff a good talking at with their favourite true-life war story. These stories, often untold for decades, continued to be relayed as the Vets where given their own VIP treatment with lunch at the RAF Club.

It is hoped that Bomber Command will get an official annual day of remembrance to recognise their extreme sacrifice, but until then we will continue to support our veterans through occasions such as this. Sunday 24th June 2018 will be the 6th anniversary service. 55, 573 reasons.....We will remember them



Bill Gould reading the lesson



Chick Chandler with CAS

Flt Lt John Myhill 622 Sqn

Paying Respects in France

I am delighted to have fulfilled two long held ambitions in 2017. In September whilst on a family trip to Munich I visited Durnbach War Cemetery and paid my respects to the 17 aircrew laid to rest from No.622 Squadron.

In October I visited France with Geoff Reynolds; Mildenhall Register Secretary, to visit a number of war graves. The trip was meticulously planned to include 16 cemeteries and to pay our respects to 77 airmen from No.622 Squadron. My wingman Geoff planned the trip ensuring we had a place to rest our heads whilst enjoying some local wine tasting; a tough task to be sure!

Trip summary

Day 1 Saturday 7th October (5 hours driving covering 280 miles)

We travelled on the overnight ferry from Dover to Dunkirk arriving in France at 07:00 local time. Less than an hour from departing the ferry, at first light we arrived at the small village of Socx, 15 miles south east of Dunkirk. Two airmen, W/O W.H. Cooke RNZAF & Sgt F. Oliver rest in the churchyard, shot down by a night fighter (Uffz Konrad Beyer 1./NJG4) in the early hours on 24th June 1944. It was the crew's first operation. The target was the flying bomb site in the Pas de Calais at L' Hey. I was privileged to have written and contributed the full account of the crash in one of the 'Fighting High- Failed to Return' series of books.

From here it was 40 miles to the cemetery at Lille where Sgt Edward Baxter rests. Edward lost his life when he parachuted out of a burning Lancaster on 1st February 1945. An eye witness saw Edward descending with his parachute on fire. The tragedy was that the fire was caused by a mechanical fault that spread oil along the main fuselage. It was the crew's first trip, Edward was classed as a 'spare' gunner at this stage and he was on his last trip. From here we drove to spend the night at Thionville.



Day 2 Sunday 8th October (3.5 hours driving covering 155 miles)

From Thionville it was a short distance to Volmerange- les- Mines cemetery to pay our

respects to F/O D.H. Holdsworth and his crew on 26th August 1944 the crew were shot down by Lt. Josef Forster (8./NJG2) on a hill above the village behind a wooded area (1st Operation). Whilst we were in the cemetery we were approached by a Frenchman who informed us his mother had witnessed the Lancaster crash. He directed us to the



crash site and we just had to take a look. We negotiated quite a steep hill by car and then continued on foot. From beyond the wooded area lay a flat plateau where the crash occurred. Next, we headed for Sessenheim, department of Bas Rhin. F/O G.W Owen and his crew rest there. They were returning from an operation on Frankfurt when they collided with a Lancaster from 582 Squadron. Fifteen airmen lay side by side in the Churchyard, with one crew member resting in Hotton War Cemetery in Belgium. After a rewarding day we travelled to our hotel at Hageneau.

Day 3 Monday 9th October (5.5 hours driving covering 225 miles)

The day started with an hour's drive to Petitmont cemetery, 50 miles south east of Nancy. Here we met up with Jean-Pierre, Cathi & Alban. I had corresponded with Alban for some time and it was nice to finally meet him. I laid a wreath to honour the three members of the crew who rest there. We were invited back to their home for coffee and were made very welcome. We were interested to see their photographs of the original wreckage and crash parts from 1944.

F/O H.S Peabody & crew crashed just north of Petitmont in the early hours of 29th July 1944; shot down by Ogrf Walter Swoboda (2.NJG6). Three of the crew were killed, one was taken POW and one evaded. F/O Peabody RCAF & his navigator F/O J.H. Doe RCAF were captured by the Germans. No official records exist to confirm their cause of death however local knowledge suggests they were murdered whilst in Buckenwald Concentration Camp. Their bodies were never found.

After further hours travelling and we arrived at Essey-les-Nancy cemetery to pay respects to Flt/Sgt Vercoe RNZAF and five of his crew. Their aircraft crashed onto houses in Nancy after being shot down by Obit Breitfeldt (stab 1./NJG5) at 02:31 hours on 25th July 1944. We continued to Choloy War Cemetery near Toul which holds 446 graves including a large Canadian section. Here we were interested in F/Lt J.A Watson RCAF, killed whilst attempting to safely land his Lancaster fearing his rear gunner was trapped in the turret. Watson lost his life in the crash and the rear gunner managed to bail out. F/Lt Watson was awarded a posthumous Mention in Dispatches.



F/O M.T. Thomas RAAF & his crew also rest at Choloy and they crashed at Arranville Mill on 25th July 1944. No recorded night fighter claims relate to the demise of NE146 so it is thought that anti-aircraft fire accounted for the crash. All the crew

were buried in a communal grave near the village as the cemetery was too small to accommodate seven airmen. In 1950 the bodies were exhumed and taken to Choloy War Cemetery where they rest today.

Our final destination on this day was Lachalade cemetery where P/O W.J. Morcombe RAAF and seven of his crew are buried. Shot down by Hptm Helmut Bergmann on 18th November 1943 they crashed in woods close to the village. The cemetery at Lachalade is located



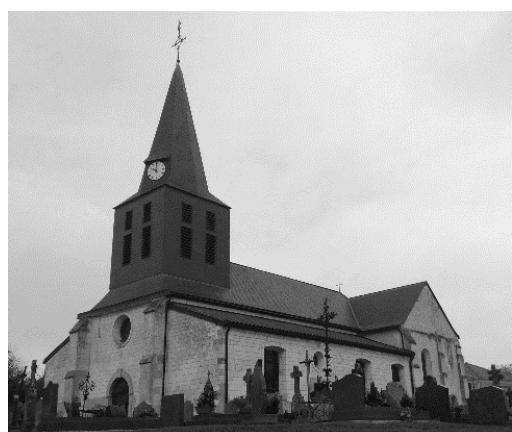
behind a charming little church and monastery, both beautifully maintained in this quiet region of France.

Bergmann filed a combat report which stated that he made contact with the bomber via his radio operator using Lichtenstein radar. Short Stirling EF128 was flying at 4200 metres and Bergmann drew closer. P/O Morcombe threw the aircraft into a steep dive to port obviously, aware of the enemy presence. Bergmann approached again and at a distance of 100 metres he positioned himself under the aircraft, firing from 80 metres between the starboard engines. A small fire started which soon extinguished. Bergmann lost sight of the aircraft but noticed a small ball of fire descending towards the ground. At 19.49 hours Bergmann observed the aircraft crash.

225 miles covered, ending at Bussy-le-Château.



Day 4 Tuesday 10th October (3.75 hours covering 175 miles)



Our accommodation was located directly opposite the church at Bussy-le-Château and we appreciated our first sight of the building. After a hearty breakfast we walked across the road to the eight graves of F/O S. Owen's crew. They carried a 2nd pilot on this trip and the crew took off from RAF Mildenhall at 17:15 hours on 18th November 1943. They formed part of 395 aircraft including 114 Stirling's, 23 Stirlings were lost; a high attrition rate. Official records show that the Bomber force were infiltrated by the German night fighter force

(Tame Boar crews) shortly after crossing the French coast near Abbeville. The weather was ideal for night fighters with partial cloud and a half moon. At 21:40 hours, north east of Chalons-sur- Marne at 3,500 metres, Stanley and his crew were shot down by Ofw Reinhard Kollack of 8/NJG4. Kollack claimed the Stirling as his 31st victory.

Hit repeatedly, EJ113 came down near the village of Bussy-le-Château. The main fuselage crashed within 300 yards of houses. The bodies of the crew members were scattered among the debris and found by local residents.

Progressing onwards to Villeneuve-St- George's cemetery on the outskirts of Paris, we visited just one grave; that of Sgt C.A. Connor, flight engineer of 1st Lt Braithwaite RCAF. His aircraft was shot down in the early hours of 1st June 1944 whilst on an operation to attack Trappes in France by Hptm Hubert Raüh (stab.II/NJG4). Two other crew members were killed, two evaded and two were taken POW's.

Bomb aimer Sgt T.P Sterling RCAF later described what happened, a synopsis follows: 'Just after dropping the bombs they were attacked by a night fighter who raked the underside



of the aircraft with cannon shells setting the aircraft on fire. The rear gunner also recorded a Ju88 night fighter on their tail. The aircraft was burning intensely and the pilot ordered the crew to bail out. Sgt Sterling suffered burns to his hands and face before he opened the front escape hatch and parachuted out. In an official POW debriefing record, Sgt T.H. Cloran (W/op) described the aircraft on fire and the frantic search by the flight engineer to find his parachute. Unable to find his parachute, Sgt A.C. Connor jumped out of the burning aircraft clinging to Sgt Cloran.' Unfortunately, Sgt Connor fell to his death and is buried in the cemetery at Villeneuve-St- Georges.



We continued onto Viroflay cemetery situated 4 kilometres east of Versailles. We were met by Claudine and his husband Francois and they took us to the graves of F/Lt R.G. Godfrey RAAF and his crew. I laid a wreath after which Claudine kindly took us to the crash site which is now a roundabout surrounded by a housing estate. In 2015 a memorial plaque was unveiled and is mounted on a wall adjacent to the large farm house estate where wreckage fell. The roundabout also has a plaque with the words 'ROND-POINT DES AVIATEURS' written upon it. A short synopsis of the crew's demise follows.

Two days after D-Day on 7/8 June 1944 the Godfrey crew left Mildenhall flying Lancaster ND765 on an operation targeting the marshalling yards at Massy Palaiseau, near Paris. The aircraft was hit with the bomb on board and exploded mid-air. It crashed at Montigny, approximately five minutes from their target. The Lancaster ND765 and crew crashed in a large meadow near Montigny, three kilometres east of Trappes, leaving a huge crater. The Germans had installed search lights and machine guns in Trappes to protect the strategic railway yards. It is not possible to know whether Lancaster ND765 was shot down by a night fighter or hit by anti-aircraft fire from the ground, or both. The bodies of F/Lt R.G. Godfrey and his crew were buried in the cemetery at Montigny-Le-Bretonneux. Later in 1951 their remains were reinterred in the Viroflay New Communal Cemetery near Paris. After enjoying a coffee break at the home of Claudine and Francois we headed for the hotel at Rambouillet.

Day 5 Wednesday 11th October (2.5 hours covering 88 miles)

We enjoyed quite a leisurely day in comparison to previous days with only 88 miles covered. Firstly, we drove a short way to Poigny la Foret cemetery where two members of 1st Lt Braithwaite's crew rest. F/Sgt D.P Bernhardt RCAF & W/O S. Norris are buried there in a wonderfully maintained cemetery with an impressive headstone. Please refer back to day 4 for further details of the crew's loss. From Poigny la Foret we travelled a short distance to Tacoignières cemetery where P/O J.E. Hall and his



Key to Photographs of Howard and Geoff tour displayed in the Centre and Back Pages

Page 1 - Centre Spread

Top left - Sgt Frederick Oliver & W/O Wilfred Harold Cooke RNZAF rest in Socx churchyard

Top right - Lille - The grave of Sgt Edward Baxter tragically killed on his last operation.

Left, second row - F/O D.H. Holdsworth & his crew are the only war graves to rest in Volmerange-les-Mines Cemetery. Shot down on their first operation.

Right, second row - F/O G.W. Owen & crew rest alongside the crew of a No.582 Squadron Lancaster. Both crews collided in mid-air.

Left, third row - Petitmont - The graves of Sgt A. Payton & Sgt P.W. Buckley, wireless operator and rear gunner respectively in the crew of F/O H.S. Peabody RCAF.

Right bottom - Petitmont-The grave of F/Sgt Proulx RCAF, the mid upper gunner in the 'Peabody' crew

Left bottom - F/Sgt P.N. Vercoe RNZAF and five of his crew lay side by side.

Centre- Cross of Sacrifice in Lille cemetery.

Page 2 - Centre Spread

Top Left - Choloy-F/Lt J.A Watson RCAF rests in Choloy War cemetery. He stayed at the controls of his Lancaster thinking his rear gunner was alive and trapped in his turret. For his bravery he was awarded a Mention in Dispatches

Top right - Choloy - F/O M.T. Thomas RAAF & crew, Choloy War Cemetery, the first seven graves in line 1-A-C

Left centre - Lachlade churchyard-P/O W.J. Morcombe RAAF and his crew rest in Lachlade churchyard.

Right, second row - F/O S. Owen's crew are buried directly behind the church at Bussy le Château.

Left bottom - Sgt A.C. Connor, the flight engineer in the crew of 1st Lt Braithwaite rests in Villeneuve St George cemetery on the outskirts of Paris.

Right, rows three and four (x2) - Viroflay - F/Lt R.G. Godfrey RAAF and his crew; Close up of F/Lt Godfrey's grave and the wreath laid by the author.; Claudine & Francois pose for a photo, they have a personal interest in the crew, Claudine's mother witnessed the crash in early June 1944.

Centre - Crucifix in Sessenheim churchyard.

Page 3 - Rear Cover

Top left - Poigny la Foret-The joint grave of F/Sgt D.P. Bernhardt RCAF & W/O S. Norris, both members of 1st Lt Braithwaite's crew

Top right & centre - Close to Tacoignières church lay the joint grave of six members of P/O J.E. Hall's crew. & P/O John Ernest Hall's grave, the author laid a wreath in remembrance.

Left, second row - The crew of F/Lt F.R. Randall rest in Marissel/Beauvais cemetery alongside the XV Squadron crew piloted by P/O Dombrain RAAF. Both crew were shot down by the same German night fighter pilot within minutes of each other.

Left, third row-St. Sever, Rouen-The graves of Sgt J.M. Allan & Sgt H. McGiffen, both air gunners in the crew of P/O Burrows RAAF

Left bottom - The remembrance wall at Ste Sever Cemetery

Right bottom - P/O F.R. Burrows RAAF & three of his crew rest in Ste Marie Cemetery, Le Havre.

Centre (x2) - Choloy cemetery Cross of Sacrifice from both sides.





crew rest. On the night of 7/8th June 1944, Lancaster LM491 GI-E crashed on a raid to Massy-Palaiseau. LM491 was shot down by an enemy fighter and crashed into woodland near Orgerus in Northern France. There were no survivors. The bodies of the crew were recovered from the wreckage by local residents and buried by the Germans in the churchyard at nearby Tacoignières, Seine-et-Oise.

We had intended to meet Josselyne Lejeune-Pichon at Tacoignières but unfortunately this could not be arranged. Josselyne has tended the graves for many years and her father Monsieur Roland Lejeune M.M. was one of the local residents who helped to recover the bodies from the wreckage. Sadly, the 20 strong local French Resistance group who had assisted in removing the bodies were betrayed to the Germans and arrested on 5th August 1944. All of the group members were transported to Buchenwald and all but one of them perished. Monsieur Roland Lejeune M.M., a former Officer in the French Air Force, was one of the Resistance men who died in Buchenwald, leaving behind a wife and infant daughter named Josselyne.

We spent the night in Beauvais in readiness for a busy day ahead.

Day 6 Thursday 12th October (2.5 hours and 113 miles)

After a hearty breakfast we drove a short distance from the hotel to Beauvais via Lormaison. Geoff's uncle Sgt R.G. Norris lost his life in a XV Squadron Lancaster on 31st May-1st June 1944 on an operation to Trappes. In 2003 Geoff attended a ceremony to unveil a monument in Lormaison adjacent to the crash site. Sgt Norris is buried with his crew alongside F/Lt F.R. Randall (622 Sqn) and his crew in Beauvais cemetery.

F/Lt Randall & crew took off at 23:43 hours to attack Trappes also and was attacked by Hptm Fritz Sothe of 4/NJG4, who claimed his seventh victory. The replacement rear gunner for this operation was Flt Lt L.F. Berry DFC who was the Squadron's Gunnery Leader. Shortly before reaching the target area, Berry spotted a Me110 approaching and gave the instruction to Flt Lt Randall to take evasive action. Randall threw the Lancaster into a 'corkscrew' manoeuvre whilst Berry opened fire at the attacker. Five further attacks were witnessed with Berry in the rear turret unable to bear guns on the Me110. The mid upper turret remained silent leading to speculation that the mid upper gunner (Flt Sgt E.G. Small) had been killed on an earlier attack. The final attack set the starboard inner engine ablaze, Flt Lt Randall gave the order to bail out. Berry bailed out through the rear door knocking himself out temporarily when his parachute opened in his face. Berry was assisted to evade back to England with the aid of the French Resistance and was advised he was the only survivor.

We moved on to the cemetery at St Sever in Rouen which has 8673 graves.

Air gunners Sgt J.M. Allan & Sgt H. McGiffen both rest at St Sever in Rouen. They were part of the crew of P/O F.R. Burrows RAAF and took off to attack Laon on 10/11th April 1944. Burrows and his



crew were the only aircraft shot down on the Laon operation by an unidentified night fighter pilot. ED808 crashed near Cuiry-les- Chautardes, South West of Soissons with all the crew losing their lives. The wreckage of the Lancaster was identified by the German authorities. The visits complete we checked into our hotel at Harfleur, Le Harve.



Day 7 Friday 13th October

The day started according to plan with a short journey to Ste Marie cemetery (Le Havre) where five other members of the crew of P/O Burrows rest, including Burrows himself. Ste Marie Cemetery contains 1999 graves.



With time to spare prior to catching the ferry home from Caen (Ouistreham) we decided to take a look at the Normandy D-Day beaches. We visited Gold and Juno beaches and spent some considerable time at Arromanches, walking the coastline. We also took a quick look inside the museum and around the town.

We visited Sainte-Mère-Eglise, liberated by American Army. Unfortunately, the museum was about to close so we strolled around the town. The church has the dummy parachutist dangling from the bell tower depicting a real event.

Homeward bound

We caught the ferry out of Caen at 23:00 hours making the most of the overnight cabin catching some well-earned sleep before our journey ahead to England and home. We arrived in Portsmouth at 06:45 hours.

We travelled 1728 miles in total. Geoff drove and I assisted with the trusty sat nav. The weather was perfect and we were in our short sleeve attire most days. Our route took us across some of the most beautiful rural parts of the French countryside with cattle and sheep grazing in the meadows. It was hard to imagine that over seventy years prior, young men were being killed on the ground and falling from the sky.

Lasting memories of the trip for me is the respect shown for the fallen and the recognition by way of memorials to all the men of the armed forces buried in France. This was made even more special through meeting our French contacts who shared with us their first-hand knowledge of the crash sites and the circumstances of the tragic events.

Travelling with a likeminded friend was enjoyable. We laughed and joked our way across France especially when my mobile phone burnt itself out becoming so hot we had to cool it down. It proved to be an expensive laugh! For Geoff it was poignant because he was able to visit the crash site and resting place of his Uncle. A wonderful trip completed, now for Holland and Belgium in 2018!

Howard Sandall No.622 (WWII) Historian

Recuperative breaks for ex RAF service members and their families

Are you aware that the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund offers recuperative breaks to serving or ex Service members of the RAF family, their partners and adult dependents?



Princess Marina House & Grounds

Princess Marina House is the centre in Rustington, West Sussex for respite and care breaks. The home has a tranquil yet stimulating atmosphere, and there are a variety of social activities available.

The house is set in spacious grounds on the seafront and has recently been refurbished to provide comfortable and well-appointed accommodation, taking advantage of a superb coastal location.

Princess Marina House was originally the Newton Driver Services Club. In 1969 the house was bequeathed to the RAF Benevolent Fund by Mrs Newton Driver whose generous gift enables the fund to provide short-term residential care facilities.

The site is staffed with expert carers 24 hours a day and is fully wheelchair accessible throughout the home and gardens, including two lifts serving the first floor. Recently the house has opened Beachside, a new wing for these members of the RAF family with mild cognitive impairments and early dementia.

Fully details are available at www.rafbf.org/princess-marina-house. The contact details are:

Address: Princess Marina House, Seafield House, Rustington, Littlehampton, BH16 2JG

Telephone 01903 788 900

Email: shirley.steeple@rafbf.org.uk

If you are interested for yourself, a relative or friend please either contact the house or if unsure contact one of the Mildenhall Register officials who will endeavour to help. Their contact details are inside the back cover of this newsletter.

Witchford and 115 Squadron's 100th Anniversary.

Accompanied by a widow of a former Flight Engineer, Mrs Joan Eldrett, who happens to belong to the same walking group as me, we set off for Witchford on the 1st December, through snow which had accumulated over night. There, Bram Dermout (an MR member) and his Belgian friends had organised an informative display in the building occupied by the wonderful small Squadron museum run by Sue Aldridge and her band of volunteers. A hot drink and some biscuits were welcome as guests met others with stories to tell and memorabilia to share.

There then followed a small, but moving ceremony at the memorial stone that stands on the site of the old airfield (now an industrial estate).

Bram, dressed in authentic RAF uniform of the time, read out the incredible facts that the Squadron had: Flown in 3 Group from the outbreak, until the end of the war, from Marham, Mildenhall, East Wretham, Little Snoring and Witchford, apart from a short detachment with Coastal Command.

Carried out the first GEE trials in August 1941.

Carried out the third highest number of raids in Bomber Command and the most in 3 Group.

Flew the second highest number of sorties of Bomber Command, possibly dropping the second highest tonnage of bombs in the Command, more than any other 3 Group Squadron. They suffered the highest losses in all of Bomber Command, being the only squadron to lose more than 200 aircraft. Whilst suffering the highest percentage loss rate of all Lancasters in 3 Group.

(RAIDS are defined as squadron operations against a target, whereas SORTIES, are the number of individual aircraft taking part in those raids.)

Then some wreaths and flowers were laid, whilst the Last Post and Reveille were played over a mini sound system they had brought for the occasion.

About 20 people attended, including a current serving officer with 115 (R) Squadron Central Flying School at Wittering.

Apart from them being a Mildenhall Squadron, if only for a very short time, I feel a special connection with the squadron following my research into my Uncle's crew. It turned out that the brother of my Uncle's crews navigator was a navigator with 115 Squadron. He (Gordon Long) was killed in a 'friendly fire' incident over Belgium six months to the day after his elder brother (Stephen Long) was shot down over France. At the time Gordon was believed to be the youngest commissioned navigator serving with the RAF.

Apparently, their Association closed a few years ago and Sue now has problems contacting those past members, with whom she has since lost touch. I still remain hopeful that closer ties will be formed between us and new membership will come from the relatives who attended the event.

Geoff Reynolds

The Register has neither joining nor annual membership fees. We rely on those, in a position to do so, to send donations to the Treasurer in order that we may continue to produce the newsletter, maintain the web site and respond to requests for information. The newsletter costs around £2 per copy to distribute in the UK and more for overseas.

If you are able to donate then please contact the Treasurer, details inside the back page. We are very grateful for all donations however, big or small. Whilst funds allow we will continue to send the letter to all members regardless of whether or not they have contributed.



Bram Dermout is on the left

XV (RESERVE) SQUADRON DISBANDMENT - 31st March 2017

At 10.54 a.m. on the morning of Friday, 31 March 2017, XV (R) Squadron paraded its Standard in front of approximately 700 invited guests, including many veterans of different aircraft eras, at RAF Lossiemouth. At the end of the Reviewing Ceremony the Standard was marched out of the hanger accompanied by its armed escort, and followed by a lone piper who played *Sands of Kuwait*, the tune having been written to commemorate XV (R) Squadron's last battle honour. As the Squadron Piper, Chief Technician Al Sharp, disappeared from view, and the sound of the pipes dissipated on the wind, a total of one hundred and two years service was brought to a close.

As the parade, led by Wing Commander Paul Froome, entered the hanger, the guests, some of whom had travelled from the United States of America, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and various part of the United Kingdom, all rose from their seats. The parade, assisted by the Band of the Royal Air Force College, consisted of two flights; No. 1 Flight being commanded by Squadron Leader Mark Swinton, whilst No. 2 Flight was commanded by Squadron Leader Matt Smith, the latter being the squadron Senior Engineering Officer (SENGO). Marching proudly between the two flights was Flight Lieutenant Sam Williams, the Standard Bearer, who was escorted by Warrant Officer Tam McEwan. An armed escort, one either side of the Standard, was provided by Chief Technician Si Guillou and Chief Technician Grant Hilton.

The Reviewing Officer was Chief of Defence Intelligence Air Marshal Philip Osborn, CBE, who earlier in his career had served with a number of Tornado squadrons as a navigator, before being granted command of No. 13 Squadron, itself a Tornado squadron. Unfortunately, the acoustics in the hanger were not conducive with the sound system in use, thus rendering parts of Air Marshal Osborn's speech inaudible. Many hours of practice, week after week during the lead up to the disbandment ceremony, were given to the parade, the marching and the execution of the orders given, all of which paid off. During the course of the parade, Wing Commander Froome and his two Flight Commanders issued a total of 131 orders, which were carried out with precision and added much to the ceremony.

After the parade, Wing Commander Froome paid his own personal tribute to the men and women of his Squadron, all of whom had worked tirelessly in their respective jobs in general, and in ensuring that XV (R) Squadron's final military ceremony in particular, was carried out with dignity and precision.

Although dark clouds rolled in over RAF Lossiemouth during the afternoon, Tornados from RAF Marham paid a final salute to XV (R) Squadron with a number of low passes over the



Highland airfield, thus bringing to an end RAF Lossiemouth's twenty-three year association with the Tornado aircraft.

Whilst the day had been a somewhat sombre affair, punctuated with feelings of immense pride, the evening was one of much merriment and laughter when the guests all filed into the hanger for an enormous party. XV (R) Squadron did not go quietly.

At the time of the disbandment ceremony it was unsure what the future was for XV Squadron's number plate. With that thought in mind, it was decided that the Standard would be laid up in the rotunda at RAF College Cranwell. **Martyn R. Ford-Jones** XV Sqn Historian

XV SQUADRON ASSOCIATION - THE FUTURE a letter to members

As you will know, No XV Squadron disbanded at RAF Lossiemouth on 31 March 2017. You will be pleased to hear that the organisation of the ceremony and the standard of the parade reflected the outstanding professionalism which XV Squadron has shown throughout the whole of its service career and was a proud, if sad, moment in its history. The disbandment of XV Squadron has also had a major impact on the viability of the Association's future. For some considerable time, the Squadron has provided the Association with a serving officer to act as Secretary. This has not only provided a vital link to an active front line unit but has also provided us with many resources, both in manpower and materials. The opportunity to meet and talk to Sqn personnel, even if only at Reunion Dinners, has enhanced the vibrancy of the Association. The Squadron Standard has been laid up at RAF Cranwell but this is no indication of an imminent reformation and, with the shrinking of the UK's front line, it could be some time, if ever, before the number plate is resurrected.



The Association Committee met on 12 May, before the Reunion Dinner, to decide on a way ahead for the future. The options available realistically came down to three:

1. **Close the Association permanently.** Although it was unlikely that the Sqn would reform as an active unit in the foreseeable future, it was felt that to close the Association at this stage would be premature.

2. **Continue in the current format.** It was not feasible to maintain the status quo because of the resources we had lost with the Sqn closure and the load it would place on the Committee to overcome those losses.

3. **Move the Association into 'hibernation'.** It was felt that to maintain the current functions of the Association but reduce the tasks would offer a viable solution which would provide the means of communication between members if needed. It was decided that, for the meantime then, we would continue as follows:

- a. The President and all members of the Committee would maintain their current roles for the immediate future but discussions and decisions would be made by email.
- b. The Chairman, now also the Secretary, would maintain the Association email address active in order to answer any queries or pass them on to the appropriate part of the Committee.

c. Website. The webmaster would maintain the site, updating as necessary. The Membership Secretary would maintain an active database for use as required. New members would be accepted but there would no longer be a membership joining fee.

d. Membership. The Membership Secretary would send out an email twice per year which would remind members that the website was still active, prompt them to update any membership detail changes and continue to seek contact details for those 'lost' members.

e. Finances. The Treasurer would maintain the bank account active to pay for minor charges such as the website fee (currently £20 per year). The Treasurer would not maintain account records for longer than 7 years.

f. We would no longer publish Newsletters or hold official annual reunions. The current trend is for reunions to become more type orientated (Buccaneer Blitz, Finfest, Jaguar Reunions etc) or geographically based. The website or the membership details could provide members with the means of staying in touch and organising more appropriate size and venue meetings. The Victor representative, for example, commented that they were still likely to continue with self-organised small reunions.

g. These arrangements would be reviewed in one year.

The President suggested that it might be appropriate to meet informally once a year in the RAF Club for a casual lunch on 1 March as this was the anniversary of the formation of XV Squadron. It would be up to individual members to decide whether to participate.

Finally, to reduce the large number of spam emails which are sent to the Committee, all contact details will be removed from the website. As stated above, the Secretary's email address, without the personal details, will still feature on the website for members to send any queries - Membership, Website, History etc. The Secretary will forward them to the appropriate Committee member.

I hope you will understand that the President and Committee have given this decision considerable thought and hope that it will provide a viable way forward for our membership to remain in touch. I

Ivor Evans Chairman/Secretary

(We have included the letter above for Register Members have asked about the future of the XV Sqn Association and indeed several have suggested membership of the Mildenhall Register should be offered to any XV Sqn Association members. With this suggestion your committee is in agreement and would warmly welcome any XV members of whatever vintage joining us (there is no membership fee) whether they wish to come to the reunion or just receive the newsletter. If you know of anybody interested then please contact our Secretary.)

Membership of the Mildenhall Register is free and open to all have served at RAF Mildenhall plus their relatives and friends whether in war or peace time. including all members of the USAAF both passed and present. If interested, contact our secretary, details inside the back cover.

AIR CRAFT RECOVERY IN THE NETHERLANDS

by Harry Bouwman from the Netherlands

A tribute to ex-recovery officer of the RNAF, Gerrit (Gerrie) J. Zwanenburg, MBE, 1928-2016

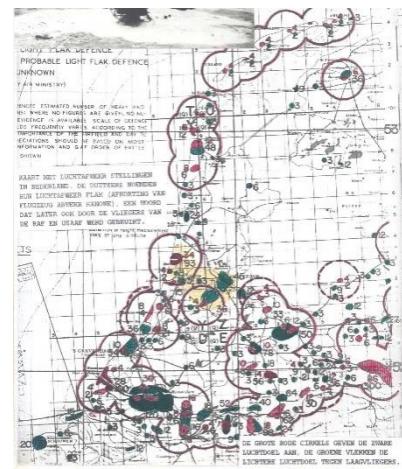
During World War II a large number of aircraft came down in the Netherlands, as the territory was in the flightpath of the main targets in Germany, with many flak concentrations and a number of bases for German night fighters. Apart from briefed routes, aircraft often took the shortest way home over Holland, either because of damage or for other reasons. It was fairly easy to pin-point position due to the many waterways, islands, lakes and in particular the IJsselmeer (the former Zuider Zee which has been changed into the polders of Flevoland after the war). The large expanses of water were, to a large extent, free from anti-aircraft fire.

The Germans had the whole of the Netherlands under FLAK but strangely at Egmond on the coast, they had nothing. If Allied air crew were in trouble or wounded, they always took the shortest route over the IJsselmeer and then at Egmond; the pilots knew that by taking this route they had a reasonable chance of getting home.

Unfortunately, many aircraft did not make it and, consequently, quite a number crashed in Holland. In fact, more aircraft came down in the Netherlands than in any other country in Europe, apart from Germany. Research has shown that from 1940 to 1945 about 4.150 aircraft came down in Dutch territory, including the many Dutch inland waterways, lakes and the Wadden Sea, as well as the North Sea territorial waters. Of this number roughly 1.500 were RAF (and Allied units), around 650 of the USAAF and of the German Luftwaffe roughly 2.000. The aircraft of the RAF and USAAF were mainly bombers with larger crews than those of the Luftwaffe which were mainly fighters. No less than 160 aircraft crashed in the area of the IJsselmeer.

Years after the war, when the polders in the IJsselmeer were drained and became the polders of Flevoland, a large number of aircraft wreckages were found in the mud. These were recovered by the Recovery Team of the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNAF) under the supervision of Gerrit (Gerrie) J. Zwanenburg.

Gerrie, born in 1928 and grown-up during WW2, was very interested in WW2 aircraft and gathered a lot of information. After the war he used to be a wireless operator with the Navy Intelligence and was working in Amsterdam. In 1962, an aircraft was recovered in Amsterdam and Gerrie went there to have a look. The recovery services appeared to be working there together with the Air Force. Gerrie had already checked his files to find out what plane had crashed. While knowing this inside information in advance, he saw certain pieces that he recognized for this type of aircraft. As his knowledge was pretty accurate, it



A map showing the air defences in the Netherlands. The 'gap' at Egmond is clear to see.

was easy to connect the dots. The Air Force asked him if he wanted to help them. Gerrie already had files of many aircraft that had crashed in the Netherlands. In 1967 he transferred to the Air Force as a recovery officer. Some of his many recoveries are worth it to report in this article.

It was not until the new polder was drained and the former IJsselmeer bed was revealed that a lot of wreckages were discovered. They had to be entirely removed in order to make the land safe for farming and residents. At first, removals were handled rather haphazardly. The main priority was to remove any explosives and the aircraft wreckage. However, people were so concentrated on removing the dangerous material, they had little regard for anything else.

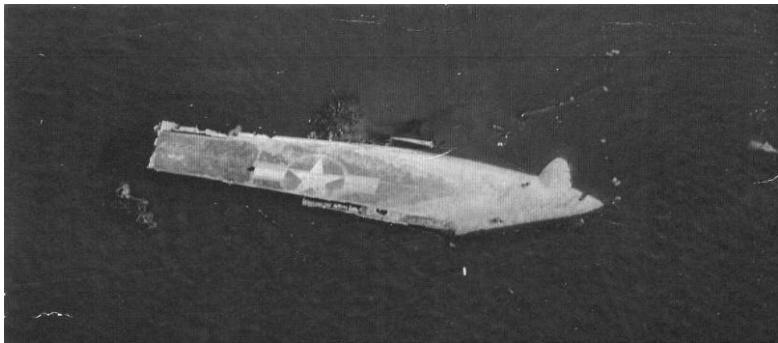
One Lancaster, recovered in 1960, was identified as DS794 of No. 427 Sqn (RCAF) which crashed on February 15th/16th 1944. In addition to finding the aircraft and bombs, human remains of some of the crew members were also found. Following this incident it was realized that recoveries had to be handled with great care. During the sixties and seventies many crew members were identified and were put to rest in a recognized grave.

In the years 1962-1963 the remains of another Lancaster were recovered. With the Merlin engine of which Gerrie found the number plate and so discovered the identity of ED357.

Also, the propeller was found. The new inhabitants living and working in the new polder East Flevoland asked the RNAF if it would be possible to make a lasting monument in Dronten for the Allied airmen who made the ultimate sacrifice. To explain as well, all over the Netherlands in almost every village and town there were wartime victims, and many (small) monuments erected to remember them, every year on the eve of the 4th of May.

A miraculous coincidence happened in 1967 during a recovery of a Wellington. Gerrie was told that in the polder some parts of an aircraft had been found. They were pieces of an apparently not fully disintegrated Wellington. Clues were found in the ammunition, which dated 1938, 1939 and 1940, thereby suggesting that the Wellington must have been crashed late 1940 or early 1941. Both live and spent rounds were found, indicating there had been a running fight. There were also indications that at least one of the crewmembers was killed in the aircraft and there were signs of a fire before or during the crash. Although no engines were located, an engine number plate was found lying in the mud among the wreckage. One of the men working in the polder had found an almost complete accumulator, which showed that it could not have been a heavy impact crash, because it would have been disintegrated otherwise. So, it looked like a 'ditched' aircraft, although not much was there. On the accumulator were two rough hand-painted letters 'LS'. Assuming this to be a squadron code, the Wellington would have been from No. 15 Sqn. With this information on hand, research was done and Gerrie found that the only Wellington could have been was a No.15 Sqn aircraft failing to return on February 10/11 1941, of which one crew member was killed, and buried after the war. At this point he phoned the Public Relation Office of the Air Force to inform them of his findings. Gerrie stated that the engine number had yet to be checked with the records in England. Already at that time there was, and always has been a splendid co-operation with the Air Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence in London, who have provided many conclusive answers over the years.

About an hour later, the phone in Gerrie's office rang. It was the PR Office telling him they just had received a letter from a former Sergeant pilot of the RAF living in Ireland, who asked if they knew anything about his Wellington in which he crash-landed on the ice of the IJsselmeer after a battle with a Luftwaffe night fighter! The Wellington had been set on fire and one of the crewmembers was killed. He gave the number of his Wellington as T2702 serving with No. 15 Squadron until its last flight on the night of February 10/11 1941.



One of the most interesting projects was the recovery of an American bomber. In 1968 a wing was reported sticking out of the water in the western part of the polder. A flight by helicopter over revealed the port wing of a B-24 with a clearly visible USAAF

insignia, outlined in red as was the practice in late 1943.

This aircraft had to wait for recovery till 1975, due to several other priorities. In the meantime, the policy for this area had changed; it would now become a permanent bird sanctuary and shallow water would remain. Everyone agreed that recovery was best done as soon as possible. This would not be easy; not only was the B-24 lying up to her 'shoulders' in the mud with water all around, the nearest road was 1,200 yards away. The bed between the road and the B-24 was very sloppy: in 1968 not far from that spot an entire dragline had disappeared into that soft mud. Successful recovery was, therefore, a real challenge, for Gerrie reckoned that if they managed to recover this aircraft, there would be few places left in Holland that would be more difficult.

In 1968 Gerrie thought the last digit of the serial number had been a '3' and research was done accordingly. This indicated that a 392nd Bomb Group B-24 had probably crashed in the IJsselmeer on November 13 1943, from which all crewmembers survived. As the dry summer of 1974 led to much less water than normal, Gerrie had been there again and made a more thorough search. On his first visit in 1968 Gerrie noticed that one of the dinghy hatches on top of the fuselage was still closed, although one of the main dinghies had been used. This would indicate that one dinghy might still be there. He hacked it open and pulled out the dinghy. Inside were the paddles and to his surprise the serial number 42-7638 was painted on the dinghy and on the paddles. A check revealed that indeed B-24 42-7638 of the 44th Bomb Group; 68th Bomb Squadron had come down in the IJsselmeer on December 22 1943, with four of the crewmembers known to have been killed and five still listed as missing.

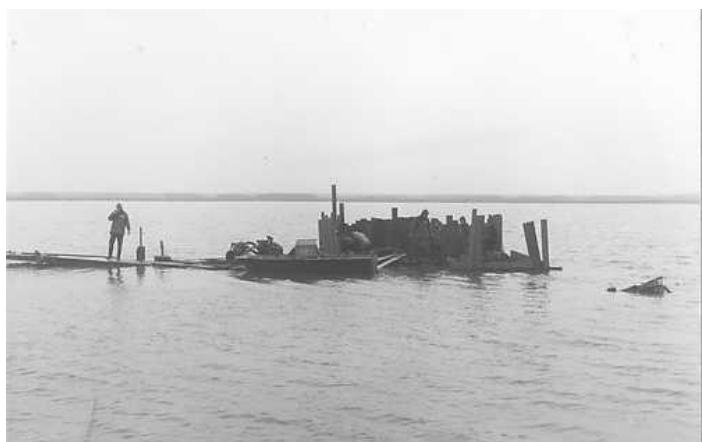
This information changed the story entirely; his mistake in reading the last digit of the serial as '3' was understandable, as only part of the '8' was visible. It turned out that the other B-24 had in fact come down on the IJsselmeer coast, the crew baling out over land.

The idea was to build a road to the aircraft, which had to be strong enough to hold the heavy



equipment that was needed. When the road reached the aircraft, the idea was to build a sheath pile around the aircraft and dig it free with the help of cranes and pumps. Gerrie's check revealed that, although the left wing was sticking out, the right one was lying horizontal just two to three feet below the surface. By working this way, they would also be able to recover the remains of the crew, that should be still inside the aircraft. They were ready to start in April or May in 1975, with the driest part of the year to come. However, because the area was a bird sanctuary and a spoonbill pair was possibly going to breed some 650 yards away, they were not allowed to start until after the breeding season in August. Thanks to various sources in America the sole survivor of this B-24's crew, co-pilot Lieutenant Charlie Taylor, had been located, and through correspondence Gerrie came to know the story of the crash. Over Germany they had received FLAK hits in an engine, so they had to feather this propeller. On a second engine the propeller governor did not work properly and the supercharger of a third engine failed. Lacking the power to keep formation over Holland, they realised that they would not make it, so the pilot gave the order to bale out, which was obeyed by three of the gunners. When the flight engineer cranked open the bomb bay doors for the rest of the crew to jump through, he saw that they were over water. Since it was winter they decided that a ditching and a chance of getting in the main dinghy, was better this was done with seven crewmembers aboard. But the B-24, which is not an easy aircraft to ditch, hit the water earlier than the pilots expected at a speed of 120 mph. The results were disastrous; the crewmembers were all killed except for Charlie Taylor. During the impact the forward part of the fuselage, just at the bulkhead behind the cockpit, broke off. This enabled Charley to get out through the break, with, miraculously, only one bump on his head. Struggling in the cold water he was able to release one of the dinghies, but he was unable to climb into it. Twenty minutes after, still hanging on to the dinghy barely conscious, he was picked up by a German vessel.

Charlie was able to assure Gerrie that no bombs were aboard. At long last, on August 15, the Army Engineers started to build a Bailey Bridge down the embankment to allow the trucks with sand to proceed down and dump their load to build the sand road to the wreckage. However, the work did not go as quickly as planned. At the end of September, only some 400 yards of road had been finished, instead of the required 1,000 yards. As time went on the situation got worse, not only due to deteriorating weather, but also due to a rise in water level. As one of the main goals was the recovery of the missing airmen, Gerrie wanted the Army Grave Service in as soon as possible. The original idea of waiting for the road to be finished was abandoned and a new plan was formulated. A sheath pile was still going to be made, but only around the forward part of the aircraft where the remains of the crew were to be located. Once the crew remains were recovered and identified, there was no further need to proceed so carefully. This looked feasible, but the



main problem was the transportation of material needed for the barrier wall: the heavy wooden planks, sandbags to put on the wing to make the barrier wall circle complete and to keep the water out, pumps and equipment, and the transportation for those who had to work on the wreck. The solution was eventually found in a small raft-like ferryboat, made from two F-84F Thunder streak wing pylon tanks with a wooden deck, since the water was too shallow for a normal type. The ferry was pulled to and from the wreck with the help of a recovery truck, which was a modified half-track vehicle. This operation was not easy as the material was heavy, and the barrier wall had to be pushed in by hand! Eventually, at the end of October, the pumps installed on the port wing were started. Although it was leaking a bit, the wall held. For the first time the cockpit section, at least the top, could be seen.

At that moment the sole survivor, Lieutenant Charlie Taylor, came to visit the recovery. After 32 years he was confronted again with the B-24 he had left there on that fateful day in 1943. He came at the invitation of NCRV, a Dutch television company, who made a documentary film of the entire recovery. After three weeks, in wind, rain and cold, the remains of all missing crewmembers were identified. It became clear that the aircraft had been damaged more severely on landing than first thought. Practically everything beneath the flight deck had been ripped off. In fact, the only thing that looked more or less complete was the wing. Of the material recovered there were thousands of rounds of ammunition, guns, fire extinguishers (still working) and oxygen bottles (still pressurised). On the instrument panel, which was recovered almost completely, the aircraft serial number 7638 was found as final proof.

Work progressed steadily and the road was finished as well as a floating 'pontoon bridge' for the last 200 yards. Early on a morning in December two Leopard armoured recovery vehicles of the cavalry pulled out the port wing and No 1 engine. Some 70 feet of wing, with three engines, and a large part of the fuselage followed. It was found that the fuel tanks still held a considerable amount of 100 octane fuel. Therefore, smoking was not allowed...

After that the wing was cut into sections for transport and on December 22 1975 the recovery of the B-24 was finally completed. Only a few bits and pieces of the B-24 were sent to the RAAF Museum, as well as some to the USAAF Museum in Wright-Patterson. Most of the aircraft ended up at the scrapheap like many others.

All in all, there is a long list of recoveries, representing a lot of effort from everyone concerned. The spoils of war over the Netherlands were many! Still the RAAF and all those regularly involved look upon this work as an honour, due to all those gallant airmen, who made the supreme sacrifice for our freedom too. For every salvage is not just the recovery of aircraft parts. Behind it is the human tragedy of the crews concerned, many of whom are still 'Missing believed killed in action'. And missing is worse than dead. Gerrie's motto was always: "Therefore we are grateful, that though little, we can at least do something in return for all they did for us."



Charlie Taylor (left) and
Gerrie Zwanenburg middle)

After his retirement in 1987, Gerrie was asked very frequently by individuals as well as companies or government for details about crashed aircraft and locations of bombs. His knowledge and his enormous collection of files were fabulous.

In 1991/1993 he published the magnificent chronicle 'En nooit was het stil...' (And it was never soundless...) By using the Air Ministry War Room Daily Operational Summaries Gerrie describes (in two parts, 1450 pages!) all raids of the RAF and USAAF on Dutch territory during WW2.

Gerrie Zwanenburg passed away very unexpectedly on April 22nd 2016. With him we lost a man who knew so much about crashed aircraft of WW2.



The sources of this article are <http://www.flevolandsgeheugen.nl/> and several articles written by Gerrie Zwanenburg. Photos of this article: collection G.J. Zwanenburg. More about Gerrie's work ("Air war over Flevoland") can be read on the website of the Mildenhall Register.

On YouTube.com you can watch some wonderful documentaries about Gerrie's work:
The documentary about the recovery of the B24: 'Some of our airmen are no longer missing'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTpAXE4WIJM> and another wonderful documentary
'And failed to return', about the recovery of Stirling BF523 No. 90 Sqn RAF:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXyfuY1lhZI>

Recently another aircraft was recovered by making a sheath pile around the wreckage. In August 2016 Wellington R1322 305 Sqn RAF has been salvaged in the IJsselmeer, 12 Kilometres from Lemmer. Human remains, bombs and ammunition were found and recovered.
<http://www.zzairwar.nl/dossiers/549.html>

Operation Manna

During last year's reunion, we were honoured to have a number of new people join us. One of these was a guest of our veteran member, and former 622 Squadron air gunner, Bernard (Bernie) Harris. He had asked if we minded if some friends of his, from the now disbanded Manna Association could join us. We were only too pleased to invite them to come along. One of Bernie's guests was the delightful Marlies Jeremiasse from The Netherlands who told us some wonderful first-hand stories that had been passed to her as a child. What follows is Marlies' story and that of the Manna operations and the Dutch courage in those terrible final winter days of the war.

Marlies story:

As a child I was told many wartime stories, among which the one about the food drops. My mother, 16 when the war ended, lived in The Hague with her parents. Mum's older sister married in '44.

Mum was given a poetry album on her 12th birthday, in October 1940. Family and friends write short poems of love and friendship in such an album.

Towards the end of '42 one of her little friends wrote:

*I wish you coffee and chocolate, for when you have none.
I wish you a warm hearth, for when you are cold.*

For decoration the friend used food coupons, valid ones, and says not to let them expire. They've been torn out so I guess Mum used them. There's another entry around that time which reads: 'in loving memory of Peter'. Peter was the much-loved family cat. He failed to come home one day and Mum always believed he was caught and eaten by a hungry neighbour.

The long and very cold winter of '44/'45 is, till today,

known as 'the hunger winter'. The situation was desperate in the cities in the still occupied northwest of the Netherlands. There was hardly any food or fuel. The exact number of deaths of starvation and/or exposure is not known, but estimated between 16.000 and 22.000.

Grandma told me how, towards the end of the war, she cooked on a 'mayo'. A sort of small tin can with a hole in the side in which you could build a small fire. It didn't need much fuel, you could cook on it and it gave some warmth. Sugar beets and tulip bulbs were eaten for lack of something better.

In front of the house there was a railway which was used for freight trains. The Germans used to transport coal along that line. After dark, people would go and look for coal that had fallen off. It was of course forbidden to get anywhere near the railway.

Mum and her sister went on a 'hunger trip'. People from the cities walked miles and miles to try and barter whatever they had of value for food with farmers in the country. I think Mum and her sister walked (and hopefully were given rides) to Kampen, some 100m northeast of The Hague, near Zwolle. They had a small cart with them, made from the wheels of an old pram. Their shoes had seen better days. Sister had so many blisters on her feet that after a while she couldn't walk any further.

Finally, they managed to obtain a bag of potatoes. The cart collapsed under the weight of the potatoes and of course it was also too heavy to carry. They left the potatoes with the master of a market-ship who agreed to transport them to The Hague. A few weeks later they had a message that the potatoes could be collected at a certain address in The Hague. When they went there, the weight of the total of the goods delivered there had caused the floor to collapse. No doubt the beams had been sawed away from underneath for fuel. But they had their potatoes!

At long last the German oppressors agreed to an allied plan to get some food to the suffering inhabitants of the cities. Somehow everybody 'knew' that food was on the way. So,



**Marlies at the 2017 reunion with
Manna Vet Bernie Harris and a
USAF Chaplain in the Base Chapel**

when the drops finally started, people were ecstatic. Mum and Grandma could see the planes on their way to Ypenburg some 4m away, from the balcony of their first floor apartment.

Orange is the name and colour of the Dutch royal family and was therefore forbidden by the Germans. Grandma had an orange dressing gown. She stood on the balcony and waved it at the planes. Everywhere people were flying flags and waving bedsheets from windows, balconies and rooftops.

Operation Manna/Chowhound was a lifesaving one for the Netherlands.

Between 29 April and 8 May 1945, the British, with their Lancasters, carried out Operation Manna.



Left: A Lancaster drops its full load of food and supplies from low level over a designated drop zone.

Right. An American B17 takes part in Chowhound.



The Americans did Operation Chowhound between 1 and 8 May. Food was dropped at mutually agreed places among which

Terbregge, north of Rotterdam, the former airfield Ypenburg near The Hague, the Wassenaar racecourse Duindigt, former airfield Valkenburg near Leiden, Vogelenzang south of Haarlem, former airfield Bergen near Alkmaar, former airfield Hilversum, at Lage Weide, west of Utrecht, at Zuidplaspolder west of Gouda and at Schiphol Airport. During 5.500 sorties no less than 12.000 tons of food and emergency rations were dropped and distributed among the people in the cities.

No matter whom you speak to, people who witnessed the food drops all say the same: 'The sight of those low flying airplanes, their crew waving at us, and the roar of the engines, which vibrated through your body, is something you never forget'. A few days later the war was over.

My Dad was 17 at the end of the war, but he lived in the south of the Netherlands, which was already liberated at the end of 1944. The story is that he came north with the Canadian liberators, probably in the spring of 1945, acting as an interpreter. He had an older brother who was already living in The Hague, and eventually he went to live and work in The Hague. There he met my Mother, but that was several years after the war.

It was 1979 when one morning, one of the national newspapers printed: 'THE NAVY IS GOING TO SEA WITH WOMEN', big and bold on the front page. I decided that I was going to be one of them! I joined up and started training as a signalman in February 1980. In December 1980 the first women went to the ship, and I joined them in January, after I had finished my training. Just in time for the first mixed crew trip to Rosyth. Despite the criticism, the opposition and the wild stories in the newspapers I had a great time. (*Anyone wishing to read more about this might like to look up the very funny article on the net about Marlies' first trip on Hr.Ms. Zuiderkruis as reported at the time in de Volkskrant newspaper online at www.volkskrant.nl/archief/krijgsmacht~a610641/.*)

Below: *Hr.Ms. Zuiderkruis*



After my time on board I was stationed at the Naval Air Station Valkenburg (yes, a former drop zone). For about a year. I left in 1984 and went to work for the Ministry of Defence as a civilian.

My next project was the Territorials. I wanted to join them, but there was this one colonel who was opposed to women in 'his outfit', despite the fact that in other parts of the country there were a half a dozen women territorials already. He did everything he could to dissuade me. To no avail. After about a year he gave up and I joined up, the first woman in the province of South Holland.

One of the very first things that happened was that they asked us for volunteers to help out at a big 'Manna / Chowhound' reunion planned for April/May 1985. Needless to say, I was interested and volunteered. I was assigned a Tuesday evening shift, so I was there when the whole group came home from their activity that day. A fellow Territorial by the name of Hans Onderwater, clapped eyes on me (the only woman in uniform) and said: 'Come with me, there is someone I want to introduce you to'. He introduced me to Air Commodore Andrew Geddes.

'My dear', said Andrew, a twinkle in his eyes, 'Would you like to be my ADC?' So instead of one evening I ended up staying the rest of the week as Andrew's ADC (alias pill sergeant, blanket carrier, guide and companion). It was a great week. Went shopping with some of the Polish veterans, was hugged by a Russian general and fetched and carried for Andrew. Andrew and I became good friends. He was such a gentleman. I spent many holidays in England and always tried to visit Andrew in Seaforth, at his museum like home.

Unfortunately, not long after, first his wife passed away, and then he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Andrew sadly passed away in 1988. The Manna Association were appreciative of my attempts to look after Andrew and they made me an honorary member. I went to many of the Manna Association reunions until the Association was disbanded around 2000.

In 2009 I had a phone call from David Fellowes, one of the Manna veterans, asking me if anyone in Holland might be interested in a small group of them visiting once again in 2010, for 65 years of liberation. I set to work and sure enough I found interested parties. After a

little while we were joined by some Bomber Command veterans who wanted to raise funds for the Bomber Command Memorial in London. This complicated things a bit, but I do like a challenge! It turned out to be a great week. In 2015, 70 years of liberation, I co-organized another visit. A weekend this time.

My history with the Manna/Chowhound veterans is long and I've loved every minute of it. I still get to go to new places, meeting new, interesting people. I had a wonderful time at the Mildenhall Register reunion, with old and new friends, and I do hope to see all of you again some time.

I am sure my late Dad, Mum and Grandma, join me in saying: 'Thank you liberators'.

Marlies Jeremiasse - The Manna Association

The Loss of X- X-Ray

Missing, the single word chalked on the operations board against the crew of Flying Officer David Howlett on the morning of April 17th 1943.

David Frederick Howlett, a 20-year-old lad from Sevenoaks, Kent, arrived on No.218 (Gold Coast) Squadron on Saturday March 13th on completion of his conversion to the four engine Short Stirling at No.1657 Con Unit based at RAF Stradishall. He arrived on a rather subdued squadron, March had so far proved costly for the squadron, two crews had been reporting missing, both senior crews, both nearing completion of their tour.

David was posted onto 'B' Flight where he had to kick his heels and wait until March 22nd before he undertook his first operation. The squadron and the better part of Bomber command had been stood down on return from Essen on March 12th.

David attended his first operational briefing on the late afternoon of March 22nd, the target for that night was the port of St. Nazaire He would be flying in the right hand seat with the experienced New Zealander, Flight Lieutenant James Neilson.

Flight Lieutenant Neilson lifted Stirling BK700 HA-W away from RAF Downham Market at 19:00 hours, BK700 was a new aircraft and one of the improved Mk.III versions which had recently arrived on the squadron. Unfortunately for David twenty miles from the enemy coast the recall broadcast was received, the bomb load was jettisoned and the crew were back at dispersal at 23:15 hours.

David and his crew had to wait until March 28th before they would have a chance to operate together, the target was once again the port of St. Nazaire. The squadron dispatch six crews, one of which was that of Pilot Officer Howlett at the helm of Stirling Mk. I BF413 HA-T. The crew aboard T - Tommy were a mixed bunch, fellow officer, Pilot Officer Kenneth Bird was the crew's navigator, the flight engineer was twenty-seven year-old Bristolian, Sergeant Leonard Canning. Sergeant William Hamilton operated the wireless set, another older than usual member was twenty-seven year old Sergeant Frederick Knight a married man from Middlesex who occupied the mid upper turret. The twenty-three-year old bomb aimer from Ontario Canada was Sergeant David Roberts RCAF. The rear gunner was one of the small group of Americans who served on the squadron, Sergeant Emmett Jay Longstaff RCAF. Twenty-six-year old 'Jay' had joined the RCAF in 1941, originally from

Denver Colorado he was an accomplished boxer and trainer having won the Golden Gloves Award in both the US and Canada. At the time Jay was applying to join the US airforce. The crew identified the port visually, dropping their all incendiary load from 11,500 feet on a number of red target indicators. Upon their return they reported a number of good fires over the target, but also witnessed the demise of two bombers going down over the target area. The crew's next trip was on April 4th with the northern coastal port of Kiel the intended target. Aloft again in BF413 HA-T the crew were part of a force of over five hundred bombers dispatched, the largest 'non-thousand' bomber raid thus far in the war. Experiencing a spirited flak barrage the crew dropped their all incendiary load on a number of isolated red markers from 13,000 feet. The crew turned for home landing back at Downham Market after being aloft for six hours fifteen minutes. The raid was a failure, marking by the PFF was inaccurate due to stronger than expected winds and thick cloud, bombing was scattered and no serious damage was achieved.

The crew did not operate again until the 14th when the target was Stuttgart. A new tactic was used on this operation to confuse the German defences. The crews of No.3 Group were detailed to fly at tree-top height across occupied territory until quickly climbing to bombing height when nearing the target.

The crew were allocated an almost brand new aircraft, Stirling BF505 HA-Z for this raid. Pilot Officer Howlett reached the target just after 00:52 hours dropping 450 x 4lb + 32 x 30lb incendiaries on a cluster of 24 green T.I Marker from 14,200 feet. On the return flight the Stirling was hit by flak near Baden Baden, thankfully no injuries to the crew were reported. They landed at Downham Market after being airborne for 6 hours 47 minutes.

April 16th, seventeen crews of No.218 Squadron were detailed and briefed for a diversionary raid against Mannheim while a larger force attacked the Skoda Works at Pilsen. Pilot Officer David Howlett lifted off the runway of Downham Market for the last time at 22:00 hours at the controls of Short Stirling Mk.III BF514 HA-X a brand new machine on its first operation. The crews of 3 Group were once again given a new tactic, instructed to gain altitude to 13-15,000 feet before reaching Dungeness they were then instructed to lose height rapidly gaining speed as they crossed the enemy coast between 1,500 - 2,000 feet. The Stirling X-X Ray was loaded with 1 x 2000lb + 3 x 1000lb + 2 x 500lb HE bombs.

The crew were intercepted at 00:14 hours (German time) by Major Kurt Holler of Stab III./NJG4 crashing near Raucourt, ten miles south of Sedan. Only two of the crew managed to parachute to safety, Sergeant Leonard Canning landed in a tree while Sergeant William Hamilton landed in a corn field. Unable to disentangle his harness Canning dropped to the ground leaving the parachute entangled in the branches. Knowing that at first light this would be spotted he quickly set off in an easterly direction. Within an hour and by sheer good fortune he met up with Hamilton.

Both agreed that the best chance of escape was to head south towards the Spanish border. For the next six days these two dishevelled hungry and desperate men managed to elude the efforts of the Germans. The pair crossed the River Meuse and were fortunate in that while hiding in a farm near Lerouville the farm owner showing great courage let the two bedraggled airman stay on his farm where they were fed and clothed. On April 24th, a friend of the

farmer took the two via train to Dole, from where they passed Nancy, Besancon and finally Belfort, where they stayed in a hotel overnight. The next day the two, with their French guide, arrived at Frasne, it was here the brave Frenchman bade the two fugitive's farewell and good luck.

After walking for a number of hours they approached a farmer asking for directions, however the farmer was too drunk to help them. For the next two days the pair tried to get help from local farms and isolated houses. Finally, on the 28th they had the good fortune to meet another courageous young farmer who took them both to his farm near some woods close to Sarrageois and hid them in his barn. Both were fed and given directions on how to cross the frontier without detection, they were to cross between Mouthe and Gellin early morning. Rested and with the information in hand, the two crossed the frontier at 05:30 hours on April 29th crossing near the Swiss village of Le Pont. While walking to the Swiss town of Lausanne on Lake Geneva the pair were arrested by Swiss Police and taken under guard to Berne. They eventually reach home in September 1944.

The Howlett crew had lasted a mere 35 days before being reported missing, it was tragically short. Regardless of the all too brief time their courage and commitment is undeniable. They had fought and died living up to the high traditions of No.218 (Gold Coast) Squadron, and No.3 Group, RAF Bomber Command.

Steve Smith 218 (Gold Coast) Squadron Historian.

Photographs of the graves in Choloy cemetery.



Plt Off D F Howlett
Pilot



Fg Off K S Bird
Navigator1



FS D E Roberts
RCAF Bomb Aimer



Sgt F J Knight
Mid Upper Gunner



FS E J Langstaff
RCAF Tail Gunner

Their Third Operation - Crew of R9161 Coded OJ - T

A new crew arrived at 149 (East India) Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, from 1651 Conversion Unit at RAF Waterbeach. Their time on the Squadron would be only too short. Arriving on the 7th July, 1942, the crew were quickly into the operations of the Squadron, only to be claimed by the first Nachtjager 'Ace' on their third full Operation, 30th July 1942.

The crew were:

Flt Lt F.G. Neate, a married 24 year old Pilot from Essex.

P/O R.R. Graham, (RCAF) a 21 year old Observer from Saskatchewan, Canada.

Sgt J.T. Avedisian, (RCAF) a 25 year old Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (serving as the Wireless Operator) from Ontario, Canada.

Sgt H W Sampson, (RNZAF) a 34 year old Air Gunner (serving as the Mid-Upper Gunner) from Hawkes Bay, New Zealand.

Sgt K.J. Leblanc, (RCAF) a 24 year old Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (serving as the Front Gunner) from Inverness, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Sgt A. Allsopp, a 21 year old Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (serving as the Rear Gunner) from Blackpool.

Sgt Hazell, Flight Engineer. Captured and interred as a POW.

I have been unable to source pictures of this crew or aircraft, probably due to the short time scale involved - 23 days.

Short Stirling Mk I

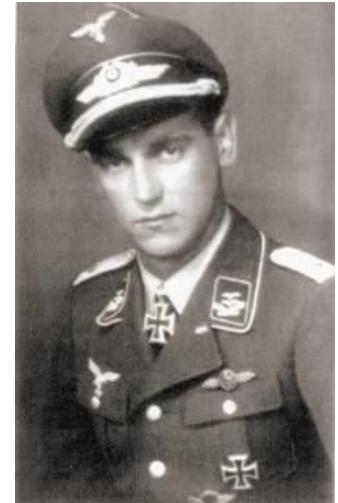


At this time 149 Squadron were flying Short Stirling aircraft from RAF Lakenheath. Their aircraft that night had not been on the squadron for a long time, arriving on the 22nd June 1942 and being pressed straight into service. It was coded as OJ-T (for Tommy) and bore the serial number 'R9161'. It would have been similar to this one, in 149 insignia, courtesy of Pinterest.

After a brief period to settle in the crew went on their first operation - to Hamburg - quite a start. Duisberg followed and both operations were considered a success by the 'rookie' crew. On the night of the 29th/30th July the crew took off at one minute past midnight and a course was set for Saarbrucken. They had been briefed that the target defences were not expected to be strong and low altitude bombing was encouraged. In fact, around 191 of the 200 aircraft employed claimed to have bombed from below 10,000ft.

One of the aircraft sent to intercept the Bomber stream was the Messerschmitt Bf 110E-2 flown by 24 year old Oblt. Reinhold Eckhardt, with his Bordfunker Fw. Frank. This experienced team had worked together well and Eckhardt had already claimed 19 victories - he was also the Staffel Kapitain of 7 Staffel NJG3. At 01.20 they came up on the Stirling 'T' - Tommy - the duel was short and vicious. The stricken Stirling fell away over the village of Regniowez, in the French Ardennes. There was only one survivor - the Flight Engineer, Sgt Hazell. The aircraft was claimed as a Stirling at 01.15, West of L'Escaillere, falling West North West of Rocroi. The victors flew on and added two more aircraft to their tally for the night - a Lancaster of 50 Sqn and a Halifax of 102 Sqn.

But all things come to an end. Another attack that night was met with withering return fire and the pair were forced to abandon their Me 110. Fw Frank got out safely, but Reinhardt's parachute got entangled in the tail of his aircraft, 'D5 + AR', and he was dragged to his death near Kampenhout, Brussels. His badly fragmented body was recovered the following day.



Obit Reinhold Eckhardt

In late August 1997 the remains of Eckhardt's aircraft were exhumed and they now lie in the Museum for Freedom at Ramskapelle / Knokke.

The Stirling crew members who were killed now rest at Choloy War Cemetery, 28Km west of Nancy. Sgt Hazell was taken as a Prisoner of War and spent the remainder of his time as prisoner number 25135 at Camp 344, Lamsdorf - now called **Tambinowice** - in Silesia, Poland. Information as to his presence on the 'Long March' is not currently available.

Pictures of the crew graves are courtesy of Geoff Reynolds.

They are, from left to right, as in the crew list in the story.



Many Bomber crews were initially interred close to where they had been recovered and basic details alone were used in identification. During and after the war the Missing Research and Enquiry service (MRES) and others spent many months identifying and re-locating the dead to a designated Commonwealth War Grave Commission site. This was purely to simplify maintenance and centralize the deceased - it was called 'Concentration'. Concentration Cemetery Documents can be downloaded from the CWGC site along with other documents covering deceased personnel. This inevitably led to crews being interred far from the place where their aircraft fell. The CWGC website and a very good book, *Missing, believed Killed*, credited in the source material will enlighten those who wish to know more.

Alan Fraser 149 (East India) Sqn Historian.

A Chance Find

The vicar of the three parishes where I live (Gosberton, Quadring and Gosberton Clough) asked me to look into a name on the war memorial within Quadring church.

The name appeared as Sqn Ldr E C Lane-Sansom, but this was suspected as an incorrect spelling and should be Sansam. A few searches on the internet (that wonderful research tool we have at our disposal these days) soon found references to the man but only up to Flt Lt rank whilst serving with 272 Beaufighter Squadron in Egypt, where he was killed and buried on 26th June 1942 as on the CWGC site.



Right: A Bristol Beaufighter Mk IC T3314 'O' of No 272 Squadron RAF running up its engines at Idku, Egypt

A further search unearthed the fact that, in 1939, according to the RAF Gazette, he had received a short service commission. He was posted to XV Squadron and it was this breakthrough which help immensely in furthering the information. I contacted Martyn Ford-Jones, the XV Squadron historian.

Martyn writes:

Based on the service number (42236) I have reason to believe the names (in their many spelling forms) all appertain to the same man.

42236 Pilot Officer Lane-Sansam (Sansom), both being recorded in the XV Squadron Operational Record Book, flew his first 'op' with XV on 29th May 1940. I have him recorded as undertaking 16 operational sorties from 29th May - 2nd August 1940. He was lucky (apparently) to survive combat with enemy fighters on 4th July that year.

He had been commissioned on 9th December 1939 and, according to the service number, was awarded a DFC, which was gazetted on 22nd August 1941, for duties with No.203 Squadron. The man you have named, with the same service number is named on the Alamein Memorial, Column 247, which implies he has no known grave. He was the 22-year-old son of John & Nellie Lane-Sansam, of Quadring, Lincolnshire. **Martyn Ford-Jones XV Sqn Historian**

This has been a voyage of discovery for us all. Despite, possibly, being wrongly credited with Squadron Leader rank, there can be no doubting this young man's courage and ultimate sacrifice. Something I'm sure his family will be very proud of. **Geoff Reynolds**

French villagers to build memorial to British airmen who died in 1941 crash.

A French village which has flown the Union flag since an RAF bomber crashed into it during the Second World War is to build a lasting memorial to the doomed crew.

The Wellington, T2897 of 149 Squadron, which was on its way home from bombing a German airfield near Bordeaux on April 13, 1941 developed engine trouble after being hit by anti-aircraft fire. It crashed into the centre of St-Sever-Calvados, Normandy, population 1,400, killing five of its six crew members and nine villagers.

Since then the Union flag has been proudly flown by the villagers. Andre Laroze, the French village's historian, said the memorial in the cemetery should be completed by 2018.

Mr. Laroze said: "The work on getting permission for the 1.5 metre memorial has been undertaken by local people in their own time and at their own expense and underlines the deep debt of gratitude that still exists among those liberated by the Allies, even though French families suffered casualties in the process."

He added that they had made contact with the relations of the pilot, Ronald Morison, but "We have no idea about the rest" and hoped to "track them down before the unveiling."

Can readers help with more information? If so please contact the Register asap

From the Post Bag

There were numerous very kind comments on last year's newsletter. Thank you all! The following come from the post bag Please keep the letters coming:

Peter Hall (Son of Sgt H Hall, Blenheim pilot KIA 12/5/40) wrote: "Many thanks for the January newsletter, it's always a great read! Well almost, as it's indeed sad to note disbanding of the XV Squadron with or without the "R". Some of us thought the Squadron might convert to Typhoons. What a history over its century of service and loss of so many with all the triumphs and struggles. Please give my best wishes to The Register".

John Johnson (from Chesham) wrote in to explain his association with The Mildenhall Register. He says: "Firstly, my cousin, F/O Dick Johnson; W/Op, flew with XV squadron at Mildenhall.

Dick died some years ago I served in the RAF as National Service, 1959 - 61 stationed at RAF Honington. In 1960 I was detached to be with 199, 55 & 57 Squadron's Valiant and Victors to Mildenhall because of an alert during the Cold War period. I then spent two to three months with the Americans at Mildenhall during this time to look after our 'V' bombers and I must say, I made some very good American friends during that time".

Reg Heffron (M.U.G. in F/O Max Bournes crew) sent in his thanks for the newsletter, which took until 7 February to reach him in Australia! He wrote "I happily stayed up until 1a.m. to read every word! It is amazing how it reaches so many people and helps to put them in touch with long lost friends, companions, relatives and even unknowns who have information to help solve families' queries. I received a phone call this morning (17th February) from the French Consul's Office in Adelaide stating that my application had been approved and the medal was being forwarded by post".

Roy Davie (W/O pilot in 622 Squadron, lives in Canada) sent in to say: "Regret I will not attend the 2017 Reunion - whilst in reasonable health, I'm 93 years old and a trifle slow and not very mobile. Also, commercial air travel is a 'BORE!' Please pass on my regards to the dwindling number of 622 and other WW2 veterans. By the way, regarding the Newsletter article on Elsans - please tell the guy that we, in our crew, ignored it in favour of a jelly can obtained from the mess. We in the front, used the can and emptied it by pouring it down the flare chute. Much handier than the Elsan at the back of the fuselage! We never had 'bowel movements' fortunately".

Sarah Farrow (daughter of 622 Squadron F/E Sgt Jack Gregson, who flew as part of P/O Alec Taylor's crew) wrote in to say how much she and her husband Bob were looking forward to their visit to Mildenhall. She pointed out that the 12th May would have been her father's birthday had he not died in 1992.

She enclosed this picture of her father's crew, but sadly doesn't identify any of them. Can you name any?



Useful details for the 2018 Reunion weekend

The Reunion will once more be based on RAF Mildenhall by kind permission of the Commander of the 100th Refuelling Wing of the USAF.

Friday 11 May:

- 1300 Coach leaves the Bird in Hand for Base Tour
1600 Return to the Bird in Hand
1730 Welcome drinks in Middleton Hall
1830 Buffet supper served
2000 AGM
2045 Short talk by Howard Sandall about his visit to War Graves in France

Saturday 12 May

- 0900 Coach leaves Bird in Hand
1045 Embark on MV Cordon Rouge at Wroxham for Cruise on Norfolk Broads
1100 to 1400 Cruise and Sandwich lunch. Buy own drinks at Bar
1400 Disembark for Beck Row
1600 Arrive Bird in Hand
1800 Pre-Dinner Drinks Galaxy Club
1900 Formal Dinner
2200+ Carriages

Sunday 13 May

- 1045 Wreath laying ceremony at the RAF Mildenhall Plaque, St Johns Beck Row
1100 Register Remembrance Service St John's Beck Row
1145 Refreshments in the Church Hall
1130 Farewells

Hotels and Guest Houses in the Mildenhall area	Dist from Base approx
The Bird in Hand, Beck Row 01638 713247	1/2 mile
The Bell Hotel, Mildenhall - 01638 583511.	4 miles
The Lord Mayor's Cottage, Barton Mills - 01638718947	5 miles
The Riverside House Hotel, Mildenhall - 01638717274	4 miles.
The Golden Boar, Freckenham - 0163872300	6 miles
The Walnut Tree Worlington - 01638 713345	5 miles
Worlington Hall - 01638 712237	5 miles
Travel Lodge Barton Mills - 0871 984 6006	5 miles

The Mildenhall Register Officers with Contact Details:

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