

# The Mildenhall Register

XV, XC, 149, 218 and 622 Bomber Squadrons' Association  
Supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron  
Chairman: Miss Dee Boneham MBE CertEd

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2020



## Changes at the Top

John receives his retirement present at the Annual Reunion dinner.

Dee proudly stands before His Royal Highness Prince Charles as she receives here award of the MBE at Buckingham Palace.



## Roll of Honour 2019

Mr	B	Bernard	<b>Adkins</b>	Solihull	XV	Navigator.
Mr	C E	Eric	<b>Barclay</b>	Oswestry	622	Air gunner
Mr	E	Ernie	<b>Barlow</b>	Mepal	75NZ	Honorary Padre
Mr	W H		<b>Baxter</b>	Alton		
Mr	G H	George (Larry)	<b>Broome</b>	Shipley	XV	Air Gunner
Mr	M	Matthew	<b>Bunten</b>	Methwold	149	Air gunner
Mr	R	Robert (Roy)	<b>Davie</b>	Williston, Vermont	622	Pilot and F/E
Mrs	H	Helen	<b>Davis</b>	Leamington Spa	XV	Widow of F/O Douglas Davis
Mrs	H	Helen	<b>de Hoop</b>	Haywards Heath	75NZ	Widow of John
Mr	P W	Phillip	<b>Elger</b>	Trundle, NSW	XV	W/Op
Mr	D	Doug	<b>Fry</b>	B/Stortford	XV	A/G
Mr	C W	Charles	<b>Gibbons</b>	Portland	XC	Rear gunner
Mr	R M	Reg	<b>Heffron</b>	Myrtle Bank	622	M.U.G.
Mrs	M	Mollie	<b>James</b>	Dudley	149	Widow of Sgt Allan James
Gr.Cpt	J	Jerry	<b>Jarvis OBE</b>	Fowey	218	
Mr	J D	John	<b>Jones</b>	Usk	XV	Bomb aimer.
Mr	L E	Lawrence	<b>Kearns</b>	Sandown	149	Ground crew
Mr	J P	John	<b>Martin</b>	HarrowWeald		
Mrs	A	Audrey	<b>Matthews- Frederick</b>	Keppera, Q/sland	XV	Sister of Flt Sgt A S Long
Mr	T J	Tom	<b>Maxwell DFC</b>	Exeter	622	Pilot
Mr	S	Sydney	<b>Merrifield MBE</b>	Littlehampton	XV	Navigator
Mr	B	Bill	<b>Morris DFC</b>	Hereford	218	
Mr	R F	Richard	<b>Murphy</b>	Edenbridge	XV	Navigator
Mr	E	Edmund	<b>Niland</b>	Hartlepool	149	Eng. Fitter
Mr	T	Tom	<b>Pooley</b>		622	Flight Engineer
Mrs	G	Gladys	<b>Richards</b>	Fakenham	75NZ	Widow of Jack
Mr	F R	Frank	<b>Sauntson</b>	Spalding	149/ 622	Driver, Methwold
Mrs	C	Celia	<b>Savage</b>	Leeds	149	Daughter of Sgt Ernest Lown
Mr	S	Sydney (Syd)	<b>Stewart</b>	Deans Marsh Australia	XV	Pilot
Mr	P	Phil	<b>Stonehouse</b>	Stockville on Tyne	218	
Mr	J	John (Swifty)	<b>Swallow</b>	Toronto	622	W/Op
Mr	J M	Jack	<b>Trend</b>	Dudley	XV	W/Op
Mr	W	Bill 'Grim'	<b>Turner</b>	Australia	XV	Bomb aimer
Mr	R	Ron	<b>Warburton</b>	Warnham	218	

## From Our Former Chairman

I first heard of the Mildenhall Register in 2005 whilst working for the supermarket Waitrose. I had recently retired from my employment with the UK Civil Aviation Authority and was delivering a weekly grocery order to a gentleman in Mildenhall named Fred Coney. Fred asked me to take his order into his kitchen where I noticed much Royal Air Force memorabilia displayed on the wall. I let on to Fred that I had served for 24 years in the RAF mainly as a navigator on Hercules aircraft and we chatted.



On a subsequent visit Fred invited me and my wife Jill to be his guests at the annual reunion of the Register. I knew nothing of the Register and little of the wartime activities of RAF Mildenhall and its surrounding airfields. Jill and I much enjoyed the evening, however, I was somewhat surprised to receive a telephone call from Fred, a few days later, inviting me to become his deputy! In typical Fred fashion I doubt whether he had consulted other committee members of his offer! He explained to me that he was getting old and that as I was local, ex-military and young (although I was 61 years old and born at the end of the war. I suppose I was young compared to the veteran members of the Register!) and an ideal man to be his deputy! I had become a victim of the saying that there is no such thing as a free lunch, or in my case a free dinner!

As you know I accepted his offer! In 2006 I was introduced at my first AGM to the Register where I met that great man Don Clarke, then the Register Secretary, and the inspiration behind its formation nearly 30 years earlier. I was impressed by the friendliness of those present and the great affection they had towards Mildenhall and its satellite airfields. At this stage the youngest of the veterans would have been 80 and what grand people they were, as are the few that are with us still today. In late 2008 Fred rang me to say that he was giving up the Chairmanship with immediate effect and I was in charge!

The 2008 Reunion saw a huge change in the Committee, understandably the veterans on the committee felt it time to hand over to a younger set. I was confirmed as Chairman to join Smiley Mildwater, already Treasurer, Andrew Bridgewater as Secretary, Geoff Reynolds and later Clare More as committee members. Later in the year Geoff was to replace Andrew as the Secretary. The “new” committee felt that some input was required from the veterans and much to my great pleasure Jim Coman joined us. Several meetings were held to determine the Register’s future. Also, the Squadron Historians were invited to join the committee and we were thus augmented by Martyn Ford Jones (XV Sqn), Alan Fraser (149 Sqn) and Howard Sandall (622 Sqn). Moves had been made at previous AGMs to close the

Register down but the new committee were determined it should continue and we set about making it more accessible to families and increasing the membership.

Saturday day time outings were made to interesting places such as the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre at East Kirkby, the Dads' Army Museum at Thetford, the American cemetery at Madingley and many others. We also set out to increase the membership by offering an association with us to all those Squadrons that had served at RAF Mildenhall and we were thus joined by with 75 and 218 Squadron Associations. Representatives of those Commonwealth Air Forces whose members served with Mildenhall Squadron became regular attendees at reunions.

One of the most pleasing events was the unveiling of a plaque in St John's Church, Beck Row remembering all who had served at RAF Mildenhall and its satellite airfields during World War 2. Another was the reformation of 622 Sqn at RAF Brize Norton and the tremendous interest and support given to the Register by its Officer Commanding and all personnel. Communications with members were improved, a Register web site was set up by Alan Fraser which now, under Debbie Reynolds' stewardship, continues to grow and flourish and the newsletter was made more attractive and a Facebook site was developed. Throughout all this we continued to have the strong and vital support of the USAF through Team Mildenhall and its leaders for which we are eternally grateful.

On a personal level, my wife Jill and I have met many fine and interesting people from far and wide. We will never forget the veterans who spoke movingly, albeit at times reluctantly, about their war time experiences. Alas their number is naturally rapidly decreasing and it is up to the next generations to ensure that their sacrifices will always be remembered and what they did for us never lost.



Although no longer Chairman, Jill and I will still be attending future reunions (*Glad to hear that. Ed*) and are sure that with the support of members, Dee Boneham, the new Chairman and her team will continue to take the Register forward. We wish the Register all good fortune for its future.

*John Gentleman*

## A Message from the New Chair

Welcome to the latest edition of the newsletter. My first doing the introduction as Chair (ouch).

My first job is to thank John & Jill Gentleman for their sterling service since they took over. I know they wanted to relax earlier but we kept persuading them to keep going. I hope they are enjoying their wine set. We look forward to seeing them at the Reunion as we love to have them around.



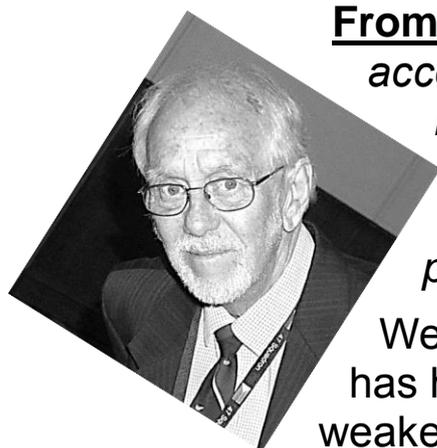
The new Station Commander has now bedded in at RAF Mildenhall ensuring it continues to operate at full efficiency along with his staff, and we look forward to meeting him soon. I am sure you will join me in welcoming Colonel and Mrs Pananon to the UK.

Geoff, Smiley and their lovely wives are the heart of the committee and thanks go to them for all they do. The Register can't do without them. Look forward to seeing you all in 2020 at the next reunion.

**From Our Treasurer** (*Or as he wrote in the e-mail which accompanied this missive, "Attached are the jottings from my tortured mind.*

*Don't expect these little treats all the time".*

*No, he hasn't had too many and neither have you, the picture is on the slant, not him! Ed.)*



Well, dear reader, here we are again and another year has hurtled past. The joints have stiffened, the bladder's weakened and the ticker's still dicky but I was still breathing when I woke up this morning and able to chase the CGS around the conjugal container so it can't be all bad.

For those avid readers of this column, you may remember that last year I told you of our dire financial state and I have to report that, thanks to the generosity of you, the Register members, we are now on a much more stable footing. The response was overwhelming and on behalf of the Chairpersons and committee members I thank you one and all. What an amazing lot you are!

Apart from the usual wreath laying here, there and everywhere, the only other major occurrence was the invitation from the Stirling Aircraft Society to give my Middleton VC presentation during their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary meeting at the Mildenhall Museum in June (for invitation read 'volunteered' by Geoff our beloved secretary). It seemed to go ok and was followed by a jolly fine luncheon at the Riverside House Hotel. (Kipper fleet aircrew will go anywhere and do anything for a free meal!).

Well, that about wraps it up for the last time as I stand down after the 2020 Reunion and hand over to the delectable Debbie. After 15 years as your treasurer I have to say it has been a pleasure, an honour even, to play my part in keeping the Register running. I wish you all the very best in whatever fate has in store for you with its slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Cordialement

*Smiley*

### **Secretary's report**

I will begin by wishing everyone a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

My thanks go to John, our former chairman, for all the hard work he has put into leading us through these past ten years and to Jill, his long suffering wife, for her support through this time too.

Congratulations to Dee for her nomination as our new chairman and agreeing to take over the 'joystick' to guide and lead us through the future years. Not forgetting, of course, her award of the MBE for services within the RAF, with whom she still continues to work on a part time basis.

In contrast to many of the past years, it's been rather quiet. There were no commemorative trips abroad this year with Howard. Following the Heligoland '39 event in Ely just before Christmas 2018 there were no others that I could attend due to other commitments. These included the erection of a memorial in France, near Petitmont, to the crew of 622 Squadron Lancaster L7576 which crashed in the woods there. This is covered later by John Myhill's article. Also, Howard and I were unable to attend the official opening of a wonderful museum in Holland, on Zeeland, where we had visited last year. Worst of all, I was unable to visit Lormaison, the site of my Uncle's crash for their 75<sup>th</sup> commemorations of the loss.

The reunion, whilst another good one from all accounts, was rather short of numbers. So we had quality, if not quantity, but it was rather disappointing, considering the work that the committee and our hosts at Mildenhall put into this throughout the year.

Finally on the down side, we had only a limited response to our mailing request for confirmation that members still wanted the newsletter sending.

So if you are reading this in paper form, it means you are one of just a quarter of the total membership who took the trouble to reply. Thank you, we will continue mailing your copy unless we hear otherwise. Do please remember to tell us if you move house, it seems that many just don't.

Thank you also, to all those people who chose to opt for the 'free to send' electronic version. This saves significantly on costs, especially to our overseas members. We almost doubled our electronic memberships!

Thank you to those who have submitted articles for the newsletter. I've tried to cram as many in as possible. My apologies if yours hasn't made it in.

There is no write up of last year's reunion to make way for all this copy, but the back cover has a selection of pictures from the event.

So, to this year. We hope we've devised an exciting and entertaining program to entice you to join us. With a base visit planned for the Friday, followed by the casual evening meal and AGM in Middleton Hall. Then we hope we have chosen an interesting venue for the Saturday trip, before the main dinner on Saturday night in the Galaxy club. Once again provided by our hosts, the USAF and Team Mildenhall. Finishing on Sunday with our Remembrance service in Beck Row church.

For full details, see the last page of the newsletter where a full plan of the weekend, with timings, is shown, along with a list of places to stay. There are also our contact details listed there too, if you need to get in touch.

We hope to see many of you there.

*Geoff Reynolds*

### **The Register's New President**

**COLONEL S. TROY PANANON** is the new Commander, 100th Air Refuelling Wing, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom, supporting four U.S. Air Force Major Command 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.



Prior to assuming his current position, Colonel Pananon served as the Vice Commander, 6th Air Mobility Wing, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., where he assisted the wing commander in leading more than 3,000 people and providing worldwide air refuelling and combatant commander airlift support in addition to the support of Headquarters U.S. Central Command, Headquarters U.S. Special Operations Command. Colonel Pananon served five years as an enlisted Marine prior to receiving his commission from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Fla., in 1996. He was initially assigned as a maintenance officer at Hurlburt Field, Fla., and then attended Undergraduate Pilot Training at Columbus Air Force Base, Miss.

Colonel Pananon has commanded an operations support squadron and is a command pilot with more than 4,000 flying hours in the T-37, T-1, C-21, KC-10, C-5, and C-37.

As has been our practice over the past few years, Col Pananon has been invited to be The President of The Mildenhall Register. We are delighted to announce he has agreed to take up the post and serve as our president during his time in post here at Mildenhall.

We welcome you sir, both to the UK and to this prestigious post.

*Below, taken during our 2018 visit, is a picture of one of the KC-135 tanker aircraft under Colonel Pananon's command.*



### **From OC 622 Royal Auxiliary Air Force**

*(Currently our only link with today's modern Air Force. Ed.)*

It's been yet another busy year for the Sqn with our strength reaching over 90 personnel. Our global influence has expanded with Sqn members located in Cyprus, Germany, Hong Kong and Tunisia. Personnel continue to contribute to Operational Theatres, and some have been fortunate to go on exercises overseas in America and Spain, and in the case of Flt Lt Alex F, a trip to Australia for the International Reserves Junior Officer Leadership program.

April marked the passing of 622 Squadron Veteran Air Gunner, Sqn Ldr Tom Maxwell LdH, DFC. An honour guard of Air Marshal Sir Timo Anderson, the OC and 4 Sqn personnel said a sad farewell to one of the Sqn's cherished veterans who died at the age of 94.

Flt Lt John Myhill and MEng Tom Lee organised a fabulous Staff Ride Ex Night Owl (derived from our squadron crest's emblem and motto *Bellamus Noctu*) to London before joining the Register at Mildenhall for their annual reunion. Staff Rides aim to foster a spirit of learning and development by studying key military events from our history. This years focussed on bombing raids on the Capital ranging from the Zeppelin and Gotha raids, key to the formation of the RAF, to the Blitz. We also used our connections to get a private tour of the Tower of London guided by ex-Brize Spike Abbott, Warder 402. (The Tower would not be the only Royal establishment graced by the OC this year).

Another nod to our wartime past came with Ex Piccadilly Commando, named after our own Jack Lunn's Lancaster's nose art. This annual visit to the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park, Piccadilly commemorates all the Bomber Command Veterans.



(Picture shows Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier chatting with Chick Chandler as former BC pilot George Dunn DFC looks on)

John also represented the Sqn at the unveiling of a memorial to a fallen 622 Sqn Lancaster crew in France. (More later. Ed) Having had Flt Lt Ben W mobilised to 32 Sqn from British Airways last year, this year saw Flt Lt 'Sticky' mobilised from Virgin

Atlantic for 9 months. Now that the pathway has been established with both airlines, we hope that this will become a regular occurrence.

The collapse of the Initial Airport Services Contract at RAF Brize Norton has left the Station short of personnel in several key areas and Reserves, including those on 622 Sqn, have played an important part in filling some of the capability gaps left. With the new DCOM Ops, Air Marshal Mayhew, being a significant advocate of Reserves the future is looking exciting with further growth on the horizon. He has installed a new Commandant General for the RAuxAF, AVM Munro who joined as a private in the TA and has worked his way up to 2-Star in the Reserves. As an avid private aviator and having his para wings, I am sure we will be able to persuade his true allegiances to light blue in no time given our aircrew and PJI capabilities. Cpl Hayley Court has finally been recognised for her work supporting the BRAVOS, Brize Norton's Station Awards, winning the Stn Cdrs Award for outstanding contribution to the Station. This was not only for the BRAVOS but for her work on the Voyager Force, volunteering for Guard and other duties, and charity events including working with the homeless at Christmas.

For the last few years the Squadron has developed an affiliation with the Worshipful Company of Arbitrators, formed from the ranks of judges, QC's and lawyers working for the City of London. They joined the Squadron at



Brize Norton for a station visit in August and swapped their skills in mediation for the challenge of not crashing our transport fleet in the simulators. The WCA provide the Squadron with an annual award, nominated by the OC, for outstanding service over the year. The award takes its name from our illustrious wartime leader. This years "Blondie

Swales" Award goes to Sqn Ldr Stu Avent for his dedication to the task of

training the RAF, Army and MOD civilian personnel across the wider defence environment on the subject of human factors.

And in what seems to be a well-kept secret, I had the honour of attending Buckingham Palace this Oct to receive an MBE for the work in building 622 Sqn into the success that it is. The Sqn is something I am very proud of and it would not happen without the contributions 622 Sqn personnel are making across the Station and wider RAF on a daily basis so my sincere thanks to you all.

On behalf of Judy, Rick, Graham and myself I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and the very best for 2020.

Rosh

### **A Chance Meeting**

During the 2018 reunion weekend, we had the wonderful trip to American War Cemetery at Cambridge. It was whilst we were there that we happened upon a very enthusiastic young photographer named Daniel Hardingham. He'd heard about the flypast that Smiley had arranged of the Spitfire and Hurricane and came along to get some shots as they flew over. Dee and I struck up a conversation with him as we awaited the planes and it soon became obvious that we had something else in common, other than to watch these magnificent WW2 aircraft.

Daniel's Great-Grandfather, Sgt R E (Robert Edward) Hardingham, an Air Gunner, was lost on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1943 when the Stirling I, BF383 of 90 (XC) Squadron was shot down into the IJsselmeer, Holland.

I'll let Daniel tell his story: -

*"It all began when my Grandad passed away, I went to my mother's as she was very upset that day and we were going through a box of stuff he had kept over the years and I came across my great grandfathers log book. My little boy who was three at the time had showed an interest in planes and I was new to photography so wanted to see the fast jets in action at Lakenheath and also take some pictures, thought I could kill two birds with one stone and I was hooked into the military aviation scene. So with finding the log book and my new hobby made me want to know more about my Great –Grandfather's history.*

*I did some research on the internet and found some information of where he was buried and how he was shot down but couldn't find much information on it and I wanted to know more.*

*I visited RAF Ridgewell museum (This was where 90 Squadron were operating from at that time. Ed) in the hope they would have more but unfortunately they only had a book of names, so when I showed them the log book they were very fascinated to see it.*

*Time had passed and I was still out taking pictures of planes and joined a few spotters groups on Facebook and came across the Coningsby page. I was wanting to visit there one day as they have the BBMF there.*

*One day one of the people who manage the page posted a picture of the flypasts the BBMF was doing on the Saturday and it said Cambridge so I asked where that might be and it was at the Cambridge American cemetery. I was very excited to be seeing the planes flying over so got there early to see if anyone else might be there for the same thing.*

*When I got there I took a walk round to find someone who might have some information so the first couple I came across unfortunately were just on holiday and just visiting the cemetery. They were pleased to know they would see the planes. I carried on with my walk and that's when I met Geoff and Dee. I remember asking Geoff if he knew anything about the flypast and he said: "Maybe", in a joking way. Turns out it had been arranged as a surprise for their visiting group. He asked what I knew and then he told me that a Spitfire and Hurricane were expected any minute.*

*Geoff and Dee were so nice to me and told me about why they were there and a little about what they do and that's when I mentioned that my Great-Grandfather flew with 90 squadron and I had his log book. They were both very excited to hear this, as was I to the fact that they were so interested. Dee sent me a load of information on how to obtain information about his history in the RAF and some of the 90 squadron history sites. Geoff also sent me information too and also contacted the 90 squadron historian to find out any information he had and Sam the historian is still sending me records to this day and it's very fascinating to read.*

*Geoff and Dee were on a reunion weekend which had taken them to the American cemetery and mentioned they were holding a service at St Johns church in Beck Row, Mildenhall the next day and invited me to join them. I appreciated their offer very much and I went along. As I'm a bit shy I only joined up with them after the service but instantly regretted it.*

*It was really nice as I got to speak to a few pilots, navigators and an engineer and heard some amazing stories about what they had done so far. I also took the log book with me and everyone that saw it was pleased I brought it along and to have seen it. The book isn't in the best of condition (Well it is over 70 years old. Ed) and when we were talking to one of the pilots my Nana mentioned about getting it rebound and she said: "No, you should keep it as it is, that's part of the history of the book".*

*When everyone started to leave we said our goodbyes. Geoff told me about the Memorial for 90 Squadron at Tuddenham so on the way home we took a trip there and it was very nice to see. I didn't know this existed."*

*The story doesn't end there though.*

*Daniel has become a member and Sam Mealing-Mills has been doing further research for him.*

*Daniel had already found out from the internet that his Great-Grandfather's aircraft had been shot down by a night-fighter piloted by Oberleutnant*

Werner Husemann of the Stab NJG 1, flying a Messerschmitt Bf110 from Deelen airfield whilst on a raid to Duisburg. The aircraft had crashed into the IJsselmeer some 3.5Km north-west of the Dutch town of Lelystad. This was very close to where Howard and I had crossed the IJsselmeer just a few months before and I was able to send Daniel some pictures from there. Sam was able to send Daniel numerous scans of the Squadron ORB's which show some of the operations his Great-Grandfather was involved in. This one shows the night the crew went missing. You can see the entry at the bottom of the ORB page.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT							
		By 90 SQUADRON		SECRET		PAGE No. 3	
		FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL, 1943		APPENDIX XII			
DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES
				UP	DOWN		
SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT AGAINST DUISBURG ON THE NIGHT OF 26/27TH APRIL 1943 (Continued)							
1943	STIRLING III	P/O WILSON, G.	PILOT	00:26	04:27	This aircraft attacked DUISBURG at 02:27 hours dropping 459 X 4lb. incendiary, 81 X 4 "X", 96 X 30lb. incendiary, 6 X 500 M.O. from 12,000ft. 240° M.L.A.S. 165. Weather was dark. 0/10 cloud. Good visibility. Green T.I.s well concentrated. Red T.I.s also seen. A glimpse of river on way out. Green T.I.s in bomb sights when bombs released. About 10 good fires well concentrated believed to be of docks. One photo attempted. Route as ordered. Aircraft landed at 04:27 hours.	
26/27th April	BF.665 (D)	F/SGT. TOWNSEND, H. SGT. THOMPSON, D. P/O JENKINS, D.D. SGT. MURKILLAND, B. W/SGT. FAGAN, S.J. SGT. HAWKINS, W. SGT. KEUDE, W.H.	NAVIGATOR AIR BOMBER W/OPERATOR MID-GUNNER REAR GUNNER P/ENGINEER 2ND PILOT				
	STIRLING III	F/S CREEK, W.H. SGT. GERRARD, V.O. P/O TREFKAY, J.R. SGT. WHITEHEAD, O. SGT. HARRIS, E.J. SGT. PRESTON, A.S. SGT. BRYANT, W.H.	PILOT NAVIGATOR AIR BOMBER W/OPERATOR MID-GUNNER REAR GUNNER P/ENGINEER	00:29	04:49	This aircraft attacked DUISBURG at 02:28 hours dropping 536 X 4lb. incendiary, 94 X 4 "X", 88 X 30lb. incendiary, 6 X 500 M.O. from 12,000ft. 195° M.L.A.S. 250. Weather was dark. 0/10 cloud. Good visibility with slight haze below. Red and Green T.I.s seen also a glimpse of river as coming out. Green T.I.s in bomb sight. Fires concentrated in an area two miles square and built up area seen by light of fires. One photo attempted. Route as ordered. Aircraft landed at 04:49.	
	STIRLING III	F/E SCOTT, A.R. DFC. P/O FOWLER, L.G. P/O MORGAN, E. SGT. HAMILTON, B. SGT. THOMPSON, W. SGT. HOLDWAY, K. SGT. MUIR, R. SGT. STEEL, J.	PILOT NAVIGATOR AIR BOMBER W/OPERATOR MID-GUNNER REAR GUNNER P/ENGINEER 2ND PILOT	00:28	04:21	This aircraft attacked DUISBURG at 02:27 hours dropping 459 X 4lb. incendiary, 81 X 4 "X", 96 X 30 lb. incendiary, 6 X 500 M.O. from 12,500ft. 195° M.L.A.S. 160. Weather was dark. 1/10 cloud. Clear. Red T.I. Markers in middle of Green Markers. Red T.I. Markers bombed. Bursts not seen. Concentrated fires burning well. Good mass of fires in vicinity of markers. One bunch of Red T.I. markers was dropped at position of yellow flares on the approach. One photo attempted. Route was ordered. Aircraft landed at 04:21 hours.	
	STIRLING I	F/O MCKENZIE, I.F. P/O WALKER, P.A. SGT. COCKING, C.V. SGT. LEAK, V.G. SGT. BOYES, J.R. SGT. HARDINGHAM, R. SGT. WILSON, J.	PILOT NAVIGATOR AIR BOMBER W/OPERATOR MID-GUNNER REAR GUNNER P/ENGINEER	00:37		Aircraft took off at 00:37 hours and failed to return.	

Sam also wrote: - *"This was a time of high casualties for the squadron. Three crews failed to return from Rostock on one night alone and even shorter mine-laying operations were very hazardous. Looking through the ORBs the names of crews appear frequently and end with the short entry, 'Failed to Return'. It gives a clear insight to the high price paid by Bomber Command for victory. We owe them a lot."*

The bodies of pilot P/O Mackenzie, W/Op Sgt Leak and the MUG Sgt Boyes were never recovered and they are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial. Those of F/E Sgt Wilson, B/A Sgt Cocking and Nav F/O Walker were recovered and buried in Amsterdam. The body of tail gunner Sgt Hardingham wasn't washed ashore until 11<sup>th</sup> May that year. It was interred at the Amersfoort (Oud Leusden) General Cemetery. Daniel plans to visit someday.

Sadly, when Daniel applied for the war medals he found out that they had been issued in 1948. Despite searching for them, they've not come to light. He was, however, able to apply for The Bomber Command clasp. I have since received an e-mail to say that he is now the proud owner of that. *(What a happy coincidence that we should all come together in that cemetery in Cambridge and Daniel now has his answers. Ed)*

### **No. XV SQUADRON ORBITUARIES 2019**

**Bernard Adkins** was a navigator who held the rank of sergeant, before being promoted to flight sergeant during October 1944. Bernard joined the crew formed by Flight Sergeant Alan Sellwood, RAAF, (later commissioned in the rank of flying officer), with whom Bernard was posted to XV Squadron between July and August 1944 and with whom he would go on to complete a total of 31 operational sorties. On 14<sup>th</sup> October 1944, the crew undertook two operational sorties against Duisburg on the same day, one in the morning and the other that night. The first attack commenced at 06.41 hours, when the first XV Squadron aircraft took-off from RAF Mildenhall. The evening attack commenced at 22.06 hours.

On completion of his operational tour of duty with No. XV Squadron, Bernard was posted to RAF Transport Command, flying as a navigator on Avro York aircraft, ferrying them out to the Middle East and India

**George H Broome.** Harry (as he preferred to be known) was a sergeant air gunner who, according to the XV Squadron Operational Book, joined the squadron in mid-1945. He is known to have flown with both P/O H. Hansen and F/O J. Dunbar, on Baedeker trips; these sorties giving squadron members employed in various ground-based duties, the opportunity to see the damage inflicted on enemy targets by RAF Bomber Command aircrews. Unfortunately, no personal details relating to George Harry Broome, who came from Shipley, are known.

**Phillip Elger** was born to Mr & Mrs Jack Elger, at Strathfield, New South Wales, Australia, on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1926. Following the declaration of war in Europe, Phillip volunteered for service with the Royal Australian Air Force, in Sydney and was accepted for training as a wireless operator. On completion of his basic and elementary flying training, he was posted to the United Kingdom, possibly via Canada, where he was attached to the RAF. Having joined the crew formed by Flight Sergeant Bill Mason, Phillip was posted to No. XV Squadron, at RAF Mildenhall during early July 1944.

Around this time he was promoted to the rank of flight sergeant.

Flight Sergeant Phillip W. Elger undertook a total of thirty-two operational sorties, one of which was abandoned due to the fact the crew were unable to identify the target.

Phillip Elger is recorded as one of seven Australians to receive a D-Day Bomber Command Award.

**Doug Fry** (Air Gunner) and his wife Margaret were ardent supporters of the Mildenhall Register from its early days; they were also part of the group which visited No. XV Squadron, at RAFG Laarbruch, West Germany, during May 1983.

When Doug Fry left school in May 1939, aged fifteen, he was an active member of the 9F/Islington Air Training Corps (known pre-war as the Air Defence Cadet Corps). Although he had taken employment in a City of London office, when he reached his eighteenth birthday Doug made application for service with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Having obtained a certificate of service from the ATC, Doug was able to make a direct entry air gunner application to the RAFVR. Having taken the usual route of training for a member of aircrew, St John's Wood Receiving Centre, Initial Training Wing at Bridlington, Air Gunnery School at Bridlington, Operational Training Unit at Chipping Sodbury (where Doug joined the crew being formed by Pilot Officer George Judd) and Heavy Conversion Unit at Woolfox Lodge, Doug and his crew reported for operational duties with No. XV Squadron at RAF Mildenhall on Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1943.

The crew's first sortie was a mine-laying operation on the 22<sup>nd</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> June. Between that date and 3<sup>rd</sup> July, Doug and his crew flew on four further operations, including two against Cologne. With five operational entries in their respective flying logbooks, the crew were given six days Leave.

Between 24<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> July, Doug and his crew participated in three attacks against Hamburg (collectively recorded as Operation Gomorrah). It was on the night of the first of these attacks that a new 'weapon' was used, known as 'window' which consisted of strips of aluminium foil, each cut to half a wavelength of the German radar. As it floated down to earth the foil acted as a resonating dipole aerial and radiated more of the radar pulse than an aircraft. The stronger echo on the radar screens gave the German controllers the idea that a huge aerial armada was heading for the city.

On the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> July, Doug saw his name and those of the rest of his crew on the battle order for another attack, on this occasion the target was to be Remscheid, on the edge of the Ruhr.

As Doug's aircraft approached the target, a blue master beam searchlight locked onto the bomber, bursting flak shells from the enemy artillery on the ground soon surrounded the aircraft fairly soon after. As the pilot held the aircraft on a straight and level flight for ten seconds to get the bombing photograph, the bomber took a direct hit. Following the explosion the Stirling went into a near vertical dive, Doug sustained a wound to the stomach from flying shrapnel, fell to the floor and realised there was fire all around him. As Doug resigned himself to his inevitable fate his parachute pack, which had fallen from its storage rack adjacent to his mid-upper turret, slid past him. In an act of self-preservation the wounded gunner made a

grab for the pack, retrieved it and managed to secure it to the harness he was wearing. With an inner strength supporting him, Doug managed to get to the open escape hatch and tumble out of the stricken aircraft. As he floated down under his parachute, Doug saw the flaming aircraft falling away beneath him; he was totally unaware at that point that four of his fellow crew members were still on board.

Doug landed dazed and disorientated in the back garden of a small house. Having, initially, been carried into the house by two men he was, a short while later, transferred to a small car and driven to a local doctor's house. Some days later, Doug awoke to find he was in a small camp approximately 3km from Dusseldorf, along with a number of other airmen who were in a similar position as himself. In due course, Doug was sent to Dulag Luft, Frankfurt, for the obligatory interviews and questioning. A few weeks later, having been finger printed and photographed with his POW number suspended around his neck, Doug was sent to a holding camp prior to being sent to Stalag Luft VI at Heydekrug on the Memel Peninsula. Just over a year later, on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1944, Doug and his fellow inmates arrived at a new camp, Stalag Luft IV, located at Gross Tychow. With the Russians advancing from the east and the Allied forces advancing from the west, the Germans decided to move the prisoners again, in what was to become known as 'The Long March'. On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> February 1945, at 6.00 a.m., the prisoners were paraded, in blizzard conditions, outside their huts; they were forced to stand in ranks until being ordered to march off two hours later. The days passed, the snow melted and gave way to seemingly incessant rain by which time they had reached a camp at Fallingbommel, where they remained for two weeks before being moved again. It was by now April 1945 and everyone knew the end of the war was near, including the German guards. On the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1945, the prisoners awoke to find all the guards had made their own escape under the cover of darkness, probably just in time as a couple of hours later the American arrived at the camp.

After all the formal checking of the former prisoners of war, and with all the proper arrangements in place, Doug Fry took his place in the queue for a flight home. He had arrived over Germany in the mid-upper turret of a Stirling bomber but, with the pilot's consent, was allowed to fly home in the mid-upper turret of a Lancaster bomber.

Doug Fry's experiences were first recorded in the book, *'Bomber Squadron – Men Who Flew with XV'*, published in 1987. They were included, in revised form, when the book was republished earlier this year.

**John D. Jones** (Bomb Aimer), who was born in Wales, joined the Royal Air Force in 1937, as a member of groundcrew, servicing single-engine Hawker Hind biplanes, at Netheravon, Wiltshire. As the Second World War

progressed John volunteered for service as a member of aircrew, he was accepted and commenced training as a bomb aimer. On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1943, he was posted to No.11 Operational Training Unit, based at RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire, where he joined the crew being formed by Flight Sergeant Norman Overend. From Westcott John was posted, along with the crew, to No.1657 Conversion Unit, at Stradishall, and then on to No.3 Lancaster Finishing School, at RAF Feltwell. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1944, the crew were posted to No. XV Squadron, at RAF Mildenhall, where they were informed they would be attached to 'B' Flight. Four days later the crew carried out a loaded climb exercise, followed by their first operational sortie the next night.

John and his crew got an early, personal, introduction to the enemy night fighters whilst undertaking their second and third missions. On the first occasion they were attacked by a German Ju.88 night fighter, which they managed to evade, and four nights later they were attacked three times by Messerschmitt Me.110s. Having survived their encounters with the Luftwaffe, John and his crew went on, on 30<sup>th</sup> June, to attack German transport and Panzer columns in Normandy. On 3<sup>rd</sup> August, John's 10<sup>th</sup> sortie, the crew participated in a daylight attack against flying bomb sites at Bois de Cassan. In post war years, especially at reunions, John and those crew members present, loved reminiscing about how, having become detached from the main force following this raid, and flying totally alone, their aircraft was spotted by two USAAF P.38 Lightning fighter aircraft which swooped down, took up station either side of the Lancaster, and escorted it all the way back to Mildenhall. Such was the impression that this episode made on Bob Kendall, the wireless operator, that he commissioned an artwork depicting the event. Unfortunately, luck was not with John and his crew on the night of 12<sup>th</sup> September 1944, their 19<sup>th</sup> operational sortie. At 22.55 hours that night, they were attacked and shot down by a ME.110 night fighter, piloted by Oberfeldwebel Heinrich Schmidt, of 2./NJG6. The pilot and the mid-upper gunner were both killed in the attack, whilst John and the four remaining members of the crew were captured and taken prisoners of war. John Jones was given the prisoner of war number 850 and incarcerated in Stalag Luft 7, Bankau, Upper Silesia.

**Sydney Stewart** (Pilot) was born to Hugh and Henrietta Stewart, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1922, at Geelong Victoria, Australia. Sydney's military service, possibly with the Australian Army, is recorded as having commenced during 1939, at Birregurra, Victoria. A year or two later he is known to have enlisted for service with the Royal Australian Air Force at the RAAF Recruitment centre in Melbourne. On completion of his basic RAAF training and having qualified as a pilot, he embarked for the United Kingdom where he undertook advanced flying training and where he ultimately commenced

operational flying with No. XV Squadron. Having been commissioned in the rank of pilot officer on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1944, Sydney Stewart flew his first trip as a second pilot, with an operationally experienced crew, twelve days later. A further eleven days later, on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, P/O Stewart flew his first combat sortie with his own crew.

During the period of his operational tour, 12<sup>th</sup> June – 4<sup>th</sup> November 1944, Sydney Stewart received two promotions, first to the rank of flying officer on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1944 and then to flight lieutenant on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1944. Sydney and his crew received attention from the enemy ground gunners on the night of 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> July, when they sustained flak damage to the Perspex glazing, enclosing the mid-upper turret of the Lancaster bomber.

Following the completion of his tour of operational flying, during which he undertook a total of 34 sorties, Flight Lieutenant Sydney Stewart was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross; the award was gazetted on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1945.

**William D. Turner**, Bill, (Bomb Aimer) was born on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1923, to Vivian and Evelyn Turner, in Ryde, New South Wales, Australia,. When he reached the appropriate age, William visited the Royal Australian Air Force Recruitment Centre in Sydney, where he enlisted for the duration. On completion of his training as a bomb aimer, he was posted to the United Kingdom, sailing via America. William is recorded as having arrived in San Francisco, aboard the “Noordam”, on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1942.

On completion of his training in England, having been posted to operational training unit, where William joined the crew headed by Sydney Stewart, heavy conversion unit and finally Lancaster finishing school, William was posted along with his crew to No. XV Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall. On 31<sup>st</sup> May 1944, prior to commencing his operational tour of duty, William was granted a commission in the rank of pilot officer. Some months later, possibly during September that same year, he was promoted in the rank of flying officer.

Flying Officer William Turner was to complete a total of thirty-four operational sorties, commencing in June and finishing in November 1944. Although a celebration of having completed his tour of duty safely was held, 1945 gave William cause for two further celebrations, the first on 27<sup>th</sup> March, when the award of a Distinguished Flying Cross was gazetted in his name, and the second celebration in June, on the occasion of his marriage to Christine Carpenter, of Wolverhampton, Staffordshire.

William Donald Turner returned to his homeland in 1945, taking his young bride, Christine Mary Carpenter with him.

**F/O Sidney R Merrifield** “Sid” (Navigator) was born on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1922 into a family who came from a very impoverished background, and lived in a

very deprived area of Cardiff, South Wales. Both of Sidney's parents were profoundly deaf, this was to have a great influence on his later life. Although Sidney came from humble begins, he was a bright lad and excelled in his education, gaining entry to Canton Grammar School near to where he lived, when only 14 years old. A couple of years later, at the age of 16, he graduated two years early, with a London Certificate to his credit. When the time came for him to 'do his bit' in the Second World War, Sidney enlisted for service with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. He was selected for aircrew training as a navigator. On completion of his training he was presented with his 'N' half-wing flying brevet, promoted to the rank of sergeant, and posted to an operational training unit, where he joined a crew being formed by Pilot Officer John Whittingham. From O.T.U. the crew moved to a heavy conversion unit, where they honed their skills flying on Avro Lancaster bombers. Being declared 'Ready for Combat', Sidney (or Sid as he was better known) and his crew were posted to XV Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall, in early/mid October 1944. Somewhere around the same date, Sidney was promoted to the rank of flight sergeant.

Sidney's tour of operational flying consisted of attacking thirty-six towns, cities and installations all in Germany; amongst those operations were three attacks on Trier, three attacks against Dortmund and two attacks against Detteln, Dortmund, Homberg and Wanne Eickel. Sidney and his crew also participated in the attack against Heinsberg, on the afternoon of 16<sup>th</sup> November 1944, when Wing Commander William Watkins, Officer Commanding No.XV Squadron, was shot down. William Watkins was blown out of the aircraft when it exploded and was the only survivor of the crew. Following his tour of operational flying, Sidney was granted a commission in the rank of flying officer and was demobbed from the RAF in 1946.

Bearing in mind his early years and the condition his parents were forced to endure, Sidney decided to become a specialist teacher, working with and helping deaf children through their school years. In 1968 Sidney joined Oak Lodge School, in Wandsworth, London, where he eventually became head teacher; he retired in 1986. In recognition of his work and for services to deaf children, Sidney Merrifield was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the New Year Honours 1986.

Sidney Merrifield, MBE, died in Worthing Hospital, on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2019, aged 96.

**SERGEANT JACK M. TREND** 1397945 (Wireless Operator/Air Gunner)  
Jack, who was known to many members of the Mildenhall Register because of his quiet, modest manner and immaculate dress sense, passed away in hospital on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

Although he lived in Dudley, near Birmingham, records indicate that Jack was born and raised in Brighton, Sussex, where he was educated, joined

the Air Training Corps and worked in a Solicitor's office. It was also possibly in Brighton that he enlisted for service with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve during October 1941.

Having been accepted for aircrew training as a wireless operator/air gunner, Jack was posted to No.10 Signals Unit at Blackpool. Successfully passing his various courses, Jack qualified as a 'WAG', was promoted to the rank of sergeant and posted to No.82 Operational Training Unit, based at RAF Ossington, Nottinghamshire. It was at O.T.U. that he joined a crew being formed by Flight Sergeant Carl Thompson, an American, born in Detroit, Michigan, who had applied for flying duties with the United States Army Air Force but failed the medical due to a leg disability. Determine to fly, Carl Thompson crossed the border into Canada, where he applied for service with the Royal Canadian Air Force, was accepted and subsequently qualified as a pilot.

Jack completed his training, along with his crew, at No.1651 Conversion Unit, where they learned how to handle four-engine bombers, and then No.3 Lancaster Finishing School where they honed their new skills on the aircraft type in which they would go to war. Being declared 'combat ready' at the end of December 1943, Jack and his crew were posted to No.XV Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall, during the first week of January 1944. Having completed five operational sorties, mainly attacking German targets, including Augsburg, Berlin, Stuttgart (twice) and Frankfurt (twice), Jack's pilot, Carl Thompson, was granted a commission in the rank of pilot officer. With preparations being made for the Allied invasion of Europe, Bomber Command began attacking targets in France. As a result of this decision, Jack and his crew attacked various targets including Boulogne, Cap Gris Nez, Chambly, Courtrai and Rouen. It was on the night of 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> June, following a return to bombing German cities and towns that Jack and his crew took off for an attack against Gelsenkirchen; it was the crew's 22<sup>nd</sup> operational sortie. At 23.08 hours that night, Pilot Officer Thompson lifted Lancaster bomber, LM465, LS-U, off the runway at RAF Mildenhall; less than two hours later, the Lancaster was attacked by an Me.110 night-fighter piloted by Hauptmann Gustav Sarzio, of 6./Jagdgeschwader 1 (6./NJG1). The bomber, which was flying at an altitude of 5000m, fell to earth and crashed in a field close to the town of Meerlo, Holland; the sole survivor of the crew was Sergeant Jack Trend.

Having landed safely by parachute, Jack evaded capture and escaped into Belgium, where he met up with another member of RAF aircrew, Flight Sergeant E. Grisdale. Together they managed to get back to England. In 2007, the residents of Meerlo decided to honour the crew of Lancaster, LM465, LS-U, by erecting a memorial close to the crash site. The memorial took the form of a rectangular display board, approximately five feet in

length, bearing an image of the Lancaster and inscribed with the relevant details including the names of all the crew members; it was constructed from metal recovered from the site. *(Howard and I managed to find this rather secluded memorial and pay our respects at this wonderful tribute to Jack and crew last year whilst driving through Holland. Ed)*

Guests attending the unveiling ceremony included Jack Trend, Wing Commander Mike Saunders, OC XV together with a detachment from No.XV (R) Squadron, Martyn Ford-Jones, XV Squadron Historian, the Town Mayor, local dignitaries and many others. Following a short service of commemoration Jack was invited to unveil the structure, which he did in his own, quiet, dignified manner, taking a few private moments to reflect on the names inscribe on the memorial. Names he would never forget and always respect. That was the mettle of this quiet unassuming gentleman.

**The Mildenhall Register** is sad in also recording the passing of the following members whom we have lost. It is with sympathy to the families, relatives and friends that we extend our thoughts.

**Mrs Hazel Davis.** Hazel was the widow of Douglas Davis, who flew as a rear gunner on Frank Dengate's crew. Hazel first met Douglas in 1942, just two months before he received his call up papers. At the time Douglas worked for the Ministry of Agriculture and, as part of his job, delivered the wages to the Women's Land Army, with whom Hazel was serving. They met, became friends, romance blossomed and eventually they got married; it was a union that was to last over 65 years. Hazel and Douglas were blessed with a daughter, Lesley, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Although Douglas rarely spoke about his wartime experiences, both he and Hazel were regular attendees at the reunions, where they would meet up with other members of his XV Squadron crew.

**Mrs Audrey Matthews-Frederick.** Audrey was the sister of F/S A. S. Long Navigator who was killed in Action on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1944. *(Audrey sadly lost two brothers during their time with Bomber Command towards the latter part of the war. Stephen, recorded here, was a great friend of my Uncle, Geoff Norris, in Peter D'Ombain's crew with XV Squadron. Just six months later on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1945, she was to lose her second, Gordon, also a navigator, flying with 115 Squadron from Witchford. He is believed to be the youngest serving commissioned navigator in the RAF at just 19 years of age. Ed)*

### **From our Friends at 75 (NZ) Squadron.**

*Whilst reading the Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron newsletter I was impressed by the story of Chester G. Guttridge, a ground crew Erk working on engines, who served with the squadron at Mepal from April '44 to March '46. Far too large to completely replicate here, I've picked out his story's very beginning and end to reproduce here. I think it is rare to hear these stories and as our*

*founder, Don Clarke was ground crew, I thought it might bring back memories to others. Ed. Chester begins: -*

I was called up in July 1943, aged 19 years and one month. I did my initial training at Skegness, spent three weeks at RAF Coastal Command Operational Training Unit at Withybush, near Haverfordwest, and eighteen weeks at RAF Cosford on the sixteen week Flight Mechanic Engines (FME) course. These are memories of events that occurred over 70 years ago, now recalled by a 94 year old man..... *Chester continues: -*

Operations permitting, all ground staff enjoyed a week's leave every three or four months and a 48 hour break in the interval, service needs permitting, for which we were issued with rail passes. We also got a 36 hour breaks from time to time, from Saturday lunch time to 23.59 hours on Sunday, but travelled at our own expense. When going on leave, Corporal Cooper allowed me to go for early tea if our daily engine checks were completed. Early tea, from 3.30, was much desired. Queues were shorter, the mess less crowded, the food freshly cooked and the tea freshly brewed. When without a travel pass, I caught a train to Cambridge, hitchhiked to Watford and bussed the final five miles to Kings Langley. Trains were often overcrowded so we stood in the corridor or sat on the floor. Fare dodgers piled into the loos and locked the door when a ticket inspector approached. Hitch hiking luck varied although I was never stranded. Once a Sunderland's lorry picked me up probably on the A1 at Baldock and took me all the way to his base near my home in Kings Langley. Another time a US Army truck took me from Cambridge to Watford, the black driver swigging whiskey from a bottle every few miles. But lifts were mostly from town to town - Royston, Baldock, Stevenage, Hatfield bypass and Watford, usually having to walk across town for the next pick-up. Sometimes I rode in comfort, other times I bumped along on the back of a lorry. In Cambridge, I liked to browse in Heffer's bookshop, then in Petty Curry. I returned by train, not wishing to risk Sunday evening lifts. I chanced it one glorious summer evening. After waiting perhaps half an hour at Waterbeach, a few miles beyond Cambridge, I was picked up by an army dispatch rider and taken pillion for the last 15 miles or so. He went out of his way to drop me, much relieved, a couple of hundred yards from my hut at Mepal as the sun set. Sometime in 1945 an urge to learn came upon me. From whence it came, I know not. Where it led is the story of my life. It was not long after I had read an abandoned coverless copy of Pickwick Papers with the last page missing. I had left school at 15 years of age without any qualifications. The education officer seemed pleased to have someone interested in his world. He gave lectures on rehabilitation into the expected post-war better world. I borrowed books from his small library and he offered me a new book he had just received - 'The Song of Bernardette' about the shrine at

Lourdes which was and is said to have miraculous healing powers. I know a disabled man for whom it failed.

I took an English correspondence course first, studying in the education hut. The Education Officer set me up in a quiet place to study. Then, getting ambitious, I started courses leading to London Matriculation, part one. I registered for the examination and later sat several three hour papers in London with hundreds of others at widely separated desks in a huge hall, writing furiously. I passed, then embarked on part two.

Meanwhile the European war ended. A few mechanics like me were being transferred to the Royal Navy to work on aircraft carriers (presumably) in the Far East. I was selected but the education officer said he would try to get me off on the grounds that I was studying for an examination. He succeeded, and a hut colleague went instead. I was unpopular and uncomfortable for a while but there was no going back. A couple of months later my substitute came to see his old mates, proud of his sailor's uniform, not unhappy. I doubt whether he saw action in the Far East as Japan surrendered three months after Germany, following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, although he may have gone there and seen more of the world.

It must have been well into the part two course when, out of the blue, the unbelievable happened. I was to be released back into civilian life at the request of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, specifically to go back into poultry keeping. Colleagues were madly envious, some of them having served up to five years. Perhaps someone in Whitehall thought that the national diet lacked sufficient animal protein and that poultry meat could be produced more quickly than any other. It was not demobilisation, only a Class B release. I was to report to Watford Employment Exchange within seven days of release. I was relegated to class GII of the reserve and required to keep my uniform and be available for recall at a week's notice. I was granted 21 days release leave before taking up employment. I received a gratuity of £15 (30 months @ 10/- a month) and a Post War Credit of £24 0s. 6d. (961 days at 6d per day). So it was that 3006180 L.A.C. Guttridge, trade F.M.E., of V.G. Character and Sat. proficiency and NIL Marks and Scars, said good bye to the RAF on Wednesday, 20 February 1946. The three week leave was counted as service so my release date was 13 March. Not until 30 June 1959 was I finally discharged from the reserve. But first were the formalities. Once again I packed all my possessions in my kit bag, left an empty hut at Mepal - colleagues were all at their duties - humped my kit bag upon my back and caught the duty lorry to Ely station, changed at Cambridge for Cardington where I surrendered part of my kit, had my genitalia examined yet again for V.D. and was issued with a civilian suit of my choice - I chose a brown one. The single breasted jacket was too

small, the trousers, with turn-ups, too baggy and the trilby hat looked silly on my head. I kept one uniform (my comfortable working battle dress), my RAF shirts, socks and underclothes. In my new suit, release papers in my pocket, train pass in hand and a lighter kitbag on my shoulder, I caught a train to Bletchley and changed to a stopping train for Kings Langley. I remember being restless, finding the journey slow and tedious in the non-corridor coach. At Kings Langley, I caught a bus to the common and walked the quarter mile home. I felt strange, empty of purpose. Mother was unimpressed with my suit.

My RAF career had been a happy time, generally speaking. I had been lucky. I had not been called upon to serve in North Africa, in France after D-day nor in Burma. I had done my job, enjoyed the camaraderie, the friendships, the responsibilities, the feeling of doing something useful. I reported to the Labour Exchange. The man shook his head, 'I've got no jobs in poultry keeping. Don't know what to do with you.' I explained that I could work on my father's poultry farm. That satisfied him.

I continued to study for matriculation, passed part two and qualified for university.

**Kevin King** (75 NZ Chairman) sent in this art work which was done by Ian Black on his van. He is a friend of Jack Richards and Sons former driver, Denny, who lives in Fakenham. *(It looks stunning in colour, with the two Lancaster's flying over a field of red poppies, but sadly we can only reproduce it in B&W. Ed)*



### **75 Squadron Obituaries**

We have lost some treasured members over the past months.

**Ernie Barlow** who was our Honorary Padre, and also our right hand man at Mepal died. Boy we will miss you Ernie for all you did for us. What a wonderful funeral, the chapel and back room were full. Ernie did his own service even to his eulogy, typical Ernie. The horse drawn hearse was just wonderful and the coffin Ernie chose was a scene of a World War 2 air base. What a lovely way to leave this world.

**Helen De Hoop** has also passed away after years battling cancer and going through new trials of treatment. Some made her feel terrible but she wanted to help those who might have cancer survive. I spoke to her a couple of weeks before she died and she said she still hoped to get to another reunion. We thought of both John and Helen in November who were great supporters of the Friends.

**Gladys Richards** the widow of the Association's former president, Jack. Gladys had always been a great supporter.

*Sam Mealing-Mills, our 90 Squadron historian has chosen the forthcoming 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Manna to write about.*

### **Succour for the Starving came from the Skies.**

The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Manna & XC Squadron's Role.

In the autumn of 1944 the gains of D-Day meant large numbers of people in occupied countries had been liberated. This was not the case in the western Netherlands, where a Reichskommissar still held power with the German military at his command. When Operation Market Garden offered the promise of further liberation for Holland, the Dutch government in exile called for a strike by railway workers to hinder the German's ability to fight at Arnhem. With the failure of that operation, the occupied Dutch suffered reprisals for their brave action. Transport services and energy supplies were restricted and food rationed by the occupying powers.

The winter of 1944-45 is known in Holland as 'The Hunger Winter' for the deprivations the people suffered. In January 1945 Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands wrote to King George VI and President Roosevelt to ask them to help. Negotiations were conducted at high political and military levels and, once approval had been received, the RAF and USAAF took action. Bomber Command's 1 and 3 Groups would conduct Operation Manna flights supported by target marking Mosquitoes.

The first mention of an aircraft dropping sandbags in 90 Squadron's operational records books (ORBs) is on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1945. A shortage of parachutes meant the supplies would have to be dropped as dead weight; dropping speed and height would be a factor in the success of the operation. Tom Saunders, bomb aimer in F/O Proome's crew, was involved in early trials, "They hung some sandbags on the aircraft and asked us to fly up and down the runway at various altitudes and speeds, dropping the sandbags. We heard no more until just before the end of the war." The problem of sacks splitting, scattering their contents was solved by double sacking, the inner sack would burst whilst the outer retained the contents. Although approval had been given by the Germans, they remained suspicious that the allies might try to drop more than food. The crews had their own suspicions. Tom Saunders recounted going in for briefing, "it was announced the Germans had promised not to fire at us! That was greeted with derision as you can imagine... There was uproar for a little while, then it sobered down." By the end of Operation Manna a few aircraft had been hit by rifle-fire, but none of 90's aircraft met any flak or fighter opposition. That was the experience of George 'Rex' Armstrong, another 3 Group airman who flew on Manna, a flight engineer on 195 Squadron, "I saw Germans, but I never saw any anti-aircraft fire at all."

90 Squadron's first Manna flights were on 30<sup>th</sup> April to Rotterdam. Lancasters carried food in packs, four packs to an aircraft. At Rotterdam 14 of the Squadron's Lancasters dropped 43 packs in 13 minutes. One of the aircraft was flown by F/Lt Jansen BEM, 90's Dutch pilot. On Manna sorties dropping zones would be marked by a white cross by the reception committees with red target indicator dropped by Mosquitoes to back these up. Visibility was generally clear for 90's drops, but haze and cloud developed on some flights.

Rex Armstrong recalled flying at the low levels required to drop the supplies as safely as possible, "It was the first time I'd ever flown so low... We were flying over some villages and the pilot said to me, "What's the time?" I went to look at my watch and he said, "No." He pointed out and I was actually looking at the face of the town clock! It was brilliant."

Tom Saunders agreed: "It was good fun, flying at 300 ft. and nobody firing at you for a change. It was just good to do it and we enjoyed it very much. We dropped some of our rations through the flare chute – sweets for the kids." Speaking of dropping extra rations, Rex Armstrong remembered an amusing sight when flying over a village, "...there was a bloke sitting on the church spire holding up a board. He'd written on it, 'Drop your cigarettes here.'!"

Despite the double sacking, some food spillage was inevitable. Sometimes packs would hang-up in the bomb-bay and have to be brought back to Tuddenham. It must have been frustrating to return with these desperately needed supplies. Crews could see the gratitude of the Dutch, one crew reporting at de-brief: A factory roof in The Hague was seen marked 'Thanks'. Tom Saunders saw signs of this too: "We dropped at The Hague, on the race course...everybody was cheering and waving flags. People were hanging out of windows waving flags. It was quite fabulous really." *(Image right, courtesy of the RBLFrance page showing a Lancaster, possibly from 195 or 514 Squadron, disgorging its payload)* Operation Manna resulted in over 6,500 tons of food being dropped to the Dutch. Three of 90's



Lancasters made the Squadron's last Manna flights on 8<sup>th</sup> May. The weather was clear, but two aircraft had a pack of food hang-up in the bomb-bay. In its summary for May 1945 90 Squadron's ORB records the total weight of bombs dropped Nil, total weight of mines laid 11 tons 860 lbs, total weight of food 130 tons. Including food drops for April, 90 Squadron dropped 153 tons of food in 141 sorties.

The crews involved enjoyed the change in duty. They knew people were starving, but Tom Saunders pointed out, "It wasn't really until we were

invited to go back to Holland that we really found out what it was about. It was really traumatic for us to hear the tales people were telling.”

Since the war, the Dutch have been grateful for the actions of Bomber Command that contributed mightily to their liberation, but perhaps no action secured their gratitude more than the mercy flights conducted during Operation Manna.

*Sam Mealing-Mills*

*And with 2019 being the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day, I thought it would be ideal to see what some of our Squadrons were doing during that period of the war as the Allies finally got their feet firmly back on enemy soil. This is a great effort from Alan Fraser. I just loved the hand drawn illustrations. Ed.*

**The D-Day period for 149 (East India) Squadron.** In the run up to D-Day the Squadron, still equipped with Stirling Bombers, were more and more concentrating on their strengths; Special Operations and Mining. The Special Ops. were very secret Operations, mainly to supply the French Resistance fighters known as the Maquis. This name covered many groups and loyalties, but all were determined to assist the Allies and resist the occupying Germans. To this end the Special Operations Executive in London supplied radio operators, trained saboteurs and SOE/SAS personnel to carry out training in their own areas.

The partisans desperately needed arms and ammunition to facilitate their efforts. This need was fed by dropping containers of those items, including silenced pistols, plastic explosives and pencil detonators, alongside wireless operators and specialist SOE/SAS personnel. By 1944 it was estimated that there were 100,000 members of the various resistance movements that existed in France. By the spring of 1944, there were 60 intelligence cells whose task was solely to collect intelligence as opposed to carrying out acts of sabotage. In the build up to D-Day they gathered vital intelligence and in May 1944 alone, they sent 3,000 written and 700 radio reports to the Allies. The resistance destroyed 1,800 railway engines from April to May, lowering the German ability to move men and machines. Special Operations in the RAF were normally carried out by 138 and 161 Squadrons operating out of RAF Tempsford, but at times they were swamped with tasks and other squadrons assisted. The Stirling aircraft was ideal for these tasks, as it was extremely manoeuvrable at low altitudes. The crews were also used to navigating to precise points after their experiences with Mining sorties. This is an extract from a local newspaper after the conflict: -

*“Special operations had no fighter escort and exploited low flying under the most difficult of conditions, contending with “flak” and fighter defence. Moonlight nights were favoured for their sorties, but it was highly exacting work, requiring pin-point navigation, and when the tiny hand torch signal*

was seen at the appointed place, the packages and containers were dropped. Once over the spot, the aircrew had to work hard in unloading their cargo quickly enough to prevent the packages being scattered. There were times when the partisans would delay flashing in order to establish the identity of the plane – a delay which caused the pilot to fly around in the vicinity and risk arousing the defences. Sometimes they had such a hot reception that they had no alternative but to leave the area with the Operation aborted.”

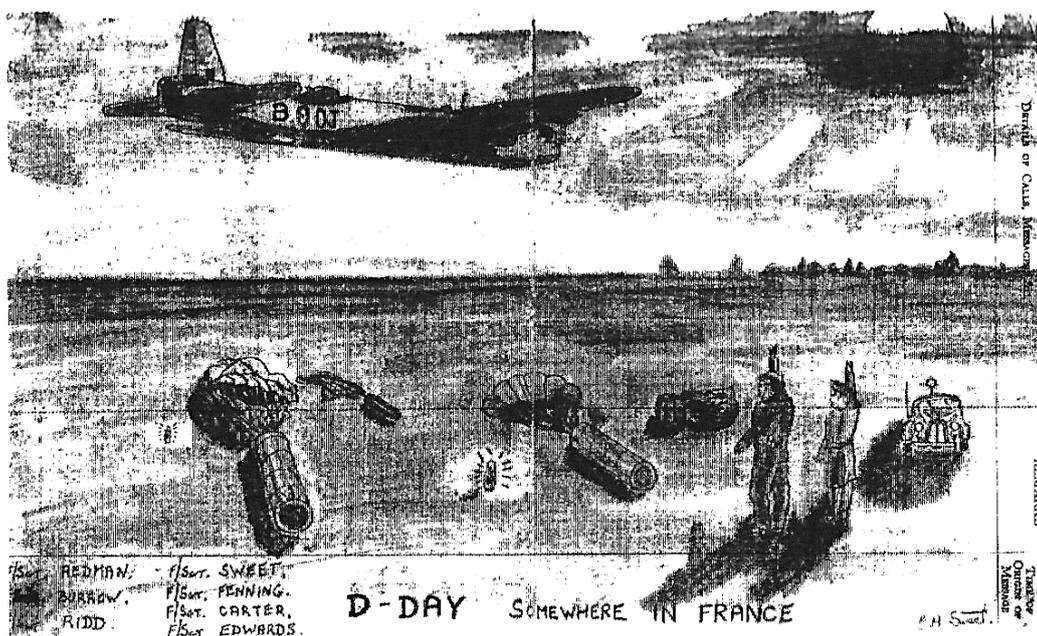
The SOE Ops were normally carried out with single aircraft allocated to specific drop zones. Only the Navigator knew the precise co-ordinates of the drop and even these were typed on a small piece of rice paper. It was rumoured that these rice paper flimsies were less than palatable.

Engineers were briefed on fuel loads and the possibility of increased fuel consumption due to the low level flying – usually between 500 – 0 ft. after passing the coast at a safer altitude! The wireless operators were also involved, being briefed on how and when to push the bulky ‘packages’ out of the open escape hatch. These were given a firm push after the bomb aimer shouted, ‘bombs gone’. The contents of the containers and packages varied but could include sten guns, ammunition, army boots, rations, currency and forged documents. Even wireless transmitters were sometimes dropped. Crews were told to do all they could to confirm they

dropped in the right place, and if in doubt, abort. The load was then dropped over water to ensure none fell into German hands.

*Right. A drawing by the late Flt Sgt Ted Sweet.*

Operations for D-Day commenced for 149 Sqn on the



1<sup>st</sup> Jun with seven Stirling aircraft, from their new base Methwold, being sent on Special Ops. 81 containers and four packages were successfully dropped that night.

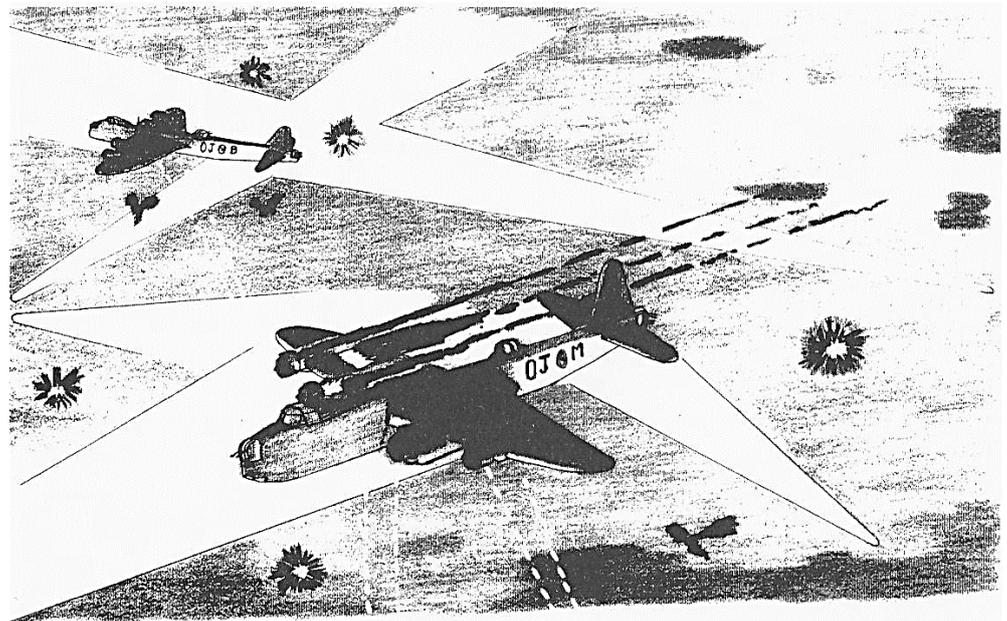
Despite these Special Operations, the main focus for the Squadron was still mining. Although not as glamorous as attacks on the big industrial cities, these operations were a vital part of the Allies efforts to disrupt shipping, E-

Boats and U-Boats. The Stirling was initially equipped to carry up to four Mk A – V sea mines, but this was later increased to six. Loads varied between three and a full complement of six depending on the area targeted. The mine laying trips carried out throughout the war were known as "Gardening," flights with the drop areas divided into zones named after vegetables or flowers. The crews sometimes referred to their mines as 'Vegetables' in the ORB reports.

149 Squadron had long been associated with mining, even developing the high altitude (Parachute) launch of mines and the use of 'GEE' to ensure the accurate placement of them. The intense Mining around the time of D-Day was designed to keep U-Boats, surface craft and even E-Boats from penetrating the landing flotillas and wreaking havoc – a task at which they had great success.

On the 3/4<sup>th</sup> June the squadron laid 27 mines in the Ostend area, with other aircraft being sent on Special Ops.

*The drawing (right) again by the late Sgt E.H. (Ted) Sweet shows just how dangerous mining operations could be.*



BREST . 23<sup>RD</sup> JUNE 1944. "JOURNEY'S END."

E.H. Sweet

He was flying in OJ-B, shown in the left hand upper corner. Of the three aircraft taking part, the notoriously coded OJ-M, M-Mother was lost and another crash landed at Canvey Island. B-Beer was unscathed.

The remembered squadron Operation for D-Day, was, of course, Operation Titanic, the squadron's main contribution being Titanic III which was the dropping of SAS troopers and 50 dummy parachutists in the Calvados region near Maltot and the woods to the north of Baron-sur-Odon to draw German reserves away to the west of Caen. Led by their new C.O. Wing Commander M.E. Pickford, seven squadron aircraft dropped one third scale dummy paratroopers with scale parachutes. When the dummies hit the ground they gave out simulated rifle, machine gun and mortar fire to persuade local troops they were in the heart of the invasion. The aircraft also dropped heavy 'Pintails' which hit the ground quickly and fired off Very flares as if to indicate drop point signals. Sadly, the squadron lost two aircraft and the majority of the SAS personnel to Titanic III. Their drop time was 5-6 hours before the actual landings and proved very successful.

I have written more detail on 149 Squadron's role in Operation Titanic in a previous Newsletter, which I am sure you have.

The post invasion activities continued apace for the squadron. After losing two aircraft on the day of the landings, the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> June saw another eight Special Operations drop 108 containers and six packages without loss. Another two aircraft dropped one container and 24 packages the following night, whilst six aircraft resumed their mining duties.

During a mining operation a squadron aircraft (B-Beer flown by Flt Sgt Redman with Ted Sweet as the Wireless Operator) witnessed and logged one of the first V-1 Flying Bombs to be launched against London. It caused a fair degree of consternation in the aircraft, but was to become even more common later. The date of this first sighting was the 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1944 – just nine days after D-Day.

So the period around D-Day was a flurry of activity with not a few losses – but the Allies were firmly embedded back in France. The redoubtable Stirling carried on in the mining and SOE roles until later in the war and then converted to Lancaster aircraft. *Alan Fraser, 149 Historian and Researcher.*

### **Obituaries – 149 (East India) Squadron.**

We record the passing of a lady who honoured her late husband – and his Squadron – with her loyalty. **Mrs Mollie James.** The widow of Sgt Allan James - A Navigator, who was Killed in Action on the 21st/22nd May 1943 when his Stirling was shot down in the Bay of Biscay on a gardening operation (Minelaying around Gironde), flying from Lakenheath. There was no further information found on the fate of the crew. Rest in Peace, Mollie.

**Mr Edmund Niland** of Hartlepool belonged to the, often forgotten, ranks of the Ground Crew. An Engine Fitter on 149 Sqn, he served at RAF Coningsby between 1952 and 1954 and was there as the Squadron traded its ageing B29 Washington aircraft for the Canberra Jet bomber. A vital part of any Squadron, the Ground Crew were the rock on which the Aircrew relied. Rest in Peace, Edmund.

**Mrs Celia Savage** of Leeds, did what many of us do – research our relatives. In Celia's case it was her father. Sgt Ernest Lown, who was the Observer on Wellington OJ-M Mother, R1474. The aircraft crashed on a bungalow at Beck Row on the 18th March 1941, killing all the crew. They had been shot down by a night fighter intruder JU88 over RAF Mildenhall. The 'Fernnachtjager' Ju.88 of 1./NJG2 was flown by Lt. Rolf Pfeiffer. The bungalow the aircraft hit was destroyed, but the occupants, Mr & Mrs Titmarsh, survived. Following the hearing of a friend's piano composition, 'Flight', Celia took her research and turned it into a book, titled simply 'Ernie'. Her book prologue follows:

Somebody said to me, "This is only one story, what about the other men in the war who lost their lives?"

I replied "I only knew of this one, he was my father."

However, when I think of my father's sacrifice, I think of the others in the crew who perished with him, and to whom I am so grateful, because he did not die alone. I also think of those like them, and the families they left behind, They, like the outgoing tide, leave behind the exposed beach – ourselves. However, the tide turns eventually and we all get caught up in the ebb and flow, which is eternity.

Celia's book is available as ISBN 0 9529609 0 7 and contains not only a cracking good story, but many pictures of Mildenhall and other scenes. Rest in Peace, Celia.

**Mr Frank R Sauntson** of Spalding, was another of the great unsung - who served as a Bomb Dump driver for 149 and 622 Squadrons at RAF Methwold in 1945. In 2006 received the Dutch 'Thank You for Freedom' medal. Received from Mr Sauntson was the following note: -

"The Dutch 'Medal for Freedom' Medal was issued for those who took part in the liberation of Holland in 1945. All forces qualified, to commemorate 60 years of freedom by the Dutch People. In April 1945, 149 & 622 took part in Operation Manna (food from heaven) it was called. As a driver involved in the loading of this food on to the aircraft I was deemed to have taken part. A form of application was sent to me from the Dutch Embassy in London which I completed and returned. The Medal and Certificate came some months later." Rest in Peace, Frank.

I have only recently heard of the passing of **Mr. Matthew Buntten**, a Rear Gunner on 149 (East India) Squadron. He was born 16th January 1925 in Crookedholm, Ayrshire to Matthew & Mary (Tait) Buntten. After school, at Crookedholm and Hurlford Academy, Matthew fulfilled an ambition and started work on the railway as a fireman. With the outbreak of War, Matthew wanted to do his bit and so, despite being in a reserved occupation, he signed up at Glasgow to join the RAF as soon as he was able. Matthew went to the Aircrew Receiving Centre in St John's Wood in London and from there to Bridgenorth ITW (Initial Training Wing). After passing exams, he went to Castle Kennedy in Stranraer where he got his AG wing and sergeant's stripes. Matthew then went to Edgehill and Chipping Campden where he met up with the crew he was to fly with, - Phil Merritt (Skipper), 'Red' Reeves, Ike (Isaac) Hill, Geoff Hanks, George Dane, and Cyril Harding who, along with Matthew, made up the crew of seven. After training on Wellingtons the crew were transferred to Longar near Nottingham and were introduced to what Matthew always called the best plane of the War, the Avro Lancaster. During the War, Matthew flew a number of missions including one to Gelsenkirchen in Germany where their plane was hit by enemy flak on the run up to drop its bombs and George Dane, the bomb aimer, was killed. After the War, Matthew signed on for another three years

...serving amongst other places in Egypt. Matthew married Doreen Chaplin just after the war and together they had 13 children, all of whom live nearby with their families. After a long and varied career, Matthew and Doreen retired to Methwold, close to where he had spent his war years with 149 Squadron. Matthew kept in touch with old comrades and was always proud of what he and his comrades had achieved during the War. I had the pleasure of meeting 'Jock' at a Reunion gathering and remember him with fondness. He died on the 9th September 2018. Rest in Peace, Matthew.

**Neil Kearns** wrote in to inform us of the sad loss of his father. I asked for some details of his career. These are his notes for **Mr L H Kearns**.

I can fill in some detail about Dad's training and career in the RAF. For a couple of years before he joined up he was in the air cadets at Ryde which involved a number of trips to RAF Gosport and what became RNAS Daedelus at Lee on Solent. One trip on a RAF rescue launch convinced him that that was one part of the RAF he didn't want to serve in - sitting in a wooden hull with a lot of petrol and two Merlin engines was noisy very, smelly and felt more dangerous than flying. I got the impression that a fair bit of the cadet training was to get teenagers into the RAF or Fleet Air Arm and prepare them for basic training. After square bashing at Skegness, he

was posted to Cosford for training as an engine fitter. He was trained on Bristol Hercules engines. *Right is a scan of their group course photo.*

No. 4 T.T. WING  
"A" SQUADRON



COSFORD  
"K" FLIGHT

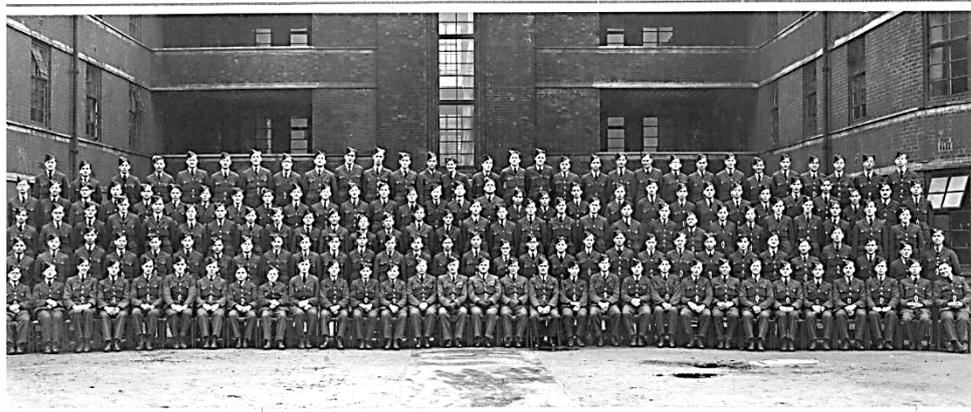


Photo by WAKEFIELDS, EALING, W.S

No. 14.  
F/Sgt. Ells.  
(Sqdn. N.C.O.)

No. 15.  
F/Lt. Eddia.  
(Sqdn. Commander)

No. 16.  
S/Ldr. H. W. Beckett.  
(Wing Commanding Officer)

No. 17.  
W.O. Dawson.  
(Wing W.O.)

No. 18.  
Sgt. Cronin.  
(Flight N.C.O.)

165 ENTRY — FLIGHT MECHANICS (E)  
JANUARY, 1944.

*With help from his step-mother they have identified Lawrence in the second row from the back, standing somewhat alone beneath the 'K' in "K" Flight.*



After training, like many men, he ended up at a loose end within the system and was posted to RAF stores depot Chilmark near Salisbury. Many years ago when he first told me about his posting to Chilmark, I didn't really understand about the bunkers in limestone mines and narrow gauge railways of Chilmark. (The story of the military railways at armament stores like Chilmark, Dean Hill and Trecwn has never really been researched. The snippets are interesting and an aspect of the armed forces history never considered.) Thirty something years later, I was one of the

railwaymen monitoring the movement of armaments in and out of Chilmark and other bases across the south of England!

After a few weeks at Chilmark, he was posted to 149 Squadron in the wilds of the fens. That must have been a shock after working under cover in workshops or mines to get off a train at Shippea Hill late at night on a winter evening. Within a year the squadron converted to Lancasters, but his training on radial engines was used to get unexpected visitors fixed and back to their own bases. I got the impression that training for Lancasters was a few days instruction and then mentoring by fitters or other technical trades seconded from other units.

Only in the last few years did he speak much of that happened to him. Although not directly in the conflict, like all the ground crew he had a traumatic time helping get injured or dead aircrew out of damaged aircraft or searching for "remains" from crashed aircraft on remote areas like Thetford Forest. Then there was the stress of repairing damaged aircraft repaired and returned to service as quickly as possible. It was custom and practice for engine fitters to fly on test trips after engine repairs and he probably amassed over a hundred hours flying, even if he was not meant to fly due to a perforated ear drum.

He also spoke of the surprise of having to start major maintenance on aircraft in early 1945 as aircraft (and crews) were surviving for much longer and aircraft were achieving flying hours based servicing intervals.

Although his memory was failing in the final few years he always remembered Methwold , Mildenhall and Feltwell with fondness, recalling memories of the locals and their tolerance to a noisy blue invasion of their quiet countryside. I suppose after some years of living on the Isle of Wight, it was a rural community which felt familiar.

Something he was very proud of was servicing aircraft used on Operation Manna dropping food and supplies to Dutch civilians just before the end of the war. Twenty years ago it was a suitable story for his young grandchildren and something unusual not mentioned in school history. In late 1945, he was posted to a high altitude photographic unit operating Spitfires from Halle in northern Germany. He had nothing but respect for the normal Germans he met in that period and their determination to rebuild their country from a shattered ruin. After health problems in early 1947, he was given an honourable discharge from RAF on health grounds in the summer of 1947. He went back to the printing industry and eventually spent 33 years with the Ordnance Survey.

### **From our 218 Squadron historian, Steve Smith**

I have recently been made aware that the wreckage of Short Stirling BK716 HA-J skippered by F/O John Harris has been located and identified in the

IJsselmeer. Pictured below is the crew photographed in February 1943 at 1657 Con Unit. They arrived on the squadron w.e.f 9th February.



(In Steve's book; "From St Vith to Victory" he had written the following: - Ten of the squadron's aircraft took off for Berlin on the 29/30th, the second trip to the Capital in three nights. 3 Group's contribution amounted to fifty-three Stirlings and eight Lancaster IIs of 115 Squadron. Weather over the North Sea

and the Continent was bad, with severe icing conditions, and this may have contributed to the high number of early returns afflicting the group. It was only during the last twenty miles to the target that the weather began to improve. Crews pinpointed Berlin's largest lake in the haze, and red TIs were initially well-placed in preparation for the arrival of the main force. Unfortunately, they did not turn up in sufficient numbers to capitalize on the opportunity, and the majority of bombs fell into open country, after flares dropped by H2S were six miles south-east of the intended aiming point attracted attention. This last operation of the month accounted for the loss of two 218 Squadron aircraft without survivors. Nothing was heard from F/O John Harris and crew in BK716 HA-J after take-off, and *it is believed they*



*were shot down over the North Sea on the way home. Harris and his crew had completed eight operations together. Tragically, of the seven men on board, five, including twenty-nine-year-old Harris, were married'. (So, with this discovery, the uncertainty of their loss has been solved at last. Ed.)* Left Johan Graas, chief historian behind the recovery, seen with one of the Stirlings prop blades. All the crew are reported to be still aboard. The recovery is being done with the full cooperation and knowledge of the Royal Netherlands Airforce

Recovery Team. The whole site is to be fully recovered next year. At the time of their loss, the crew had completed 8 operations, including trips to Berlin, Nuremberg, Hamburg, Essen, Stuttgart and Munich.

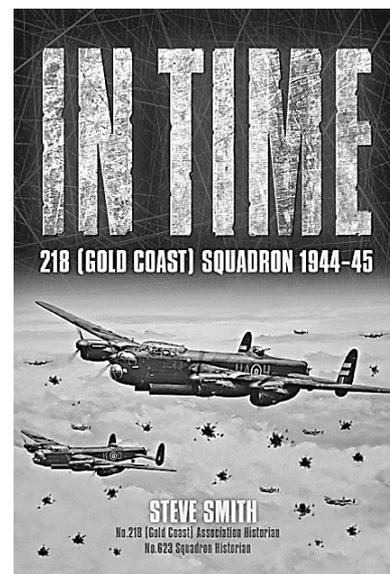
My latest book on 218 was published in August. It covers the squadrons last 16 months of the war while flying Stirlings and the Lancaster. Good coverage of the development and operational use of the navigational aid

GH. 400 odd pages, 200 odd photographs. The paperback version is available to purchase through Amazon. *Cover image.*

### **D-Day operations for the Squadron.**

Just before the D-Day invasions in Normandy, the Short Stirling bombers of 218 Squadron undertook diversionary bombing raids against Wehrmacht shore defences near the Pas de Calais. Then, on the day, 218 Squadron played a significant role in a diversion known as Operation Glimmer in which Window was dropped to simulate a naval fleet headed towards the French coast. The operation, which was intended to draw German forces away from the real landing sites over 100 miles to the southwest, was so critical

to Operation Overlord's success that the squadron was temporarily directed by the civilian physicist Sebastian Pease of RAF Bomber Command's Operational Research Section to ensure that the deception seemed as authentic as possible. It is to the credit of the pilots and navigators of the Squadron that the German shore batteries actually opened fire on the "ghost" fleet that they created. The German 2nd Panzer Division and 116th Panzer Division remained at the Pas de Calais for at least two weeks after D-Day, because they believed that Pas de Calais would be the site of a major British operation. *(Courtesy Wikipedia)*



### **218 Squadron Obituary**

**Mr W 'Bill' Morris** His daughter wrote: - Dad was a Navigator in Lancasters, flying from Chedburgh. After the war he returned to Manchester University to complete his degree and then taught English back in his old grammar school in Hereford. He'd met mother, a nurse, whilst still in the RAF. They were married for 67 years. He was a very good cricketer and played for the RAF whilst in training. He loved the wartime music.

### **No.622 Squadron's Contribution to D-Day. 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944 the Allies launched one of the most momentous military feats of all times, the seaborne and airborne assault upon the coastline of Normandy-Operation 'Overlord.' A major factor to the success of the D-Day campaign was the contribution of the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command, who waged an unrelenting campaign in the run up to D-Day. The last phase of the 'Transportation Plan' was to isolate the assault area by destroying all rail and road bridges on the routes leading into it. To keep the exact landing area disguised, strategic bombing took place along the French coastline. The build up to D-Day included 200,000 operations in various guises connected with operation 'Overlord.' Over a period of two months some 190,000 tons of bombs had fallen upon the enemy.

*“...The air offensive against the Transportation before D-Day has produced a state of virtual paralysis in the railway system of Northern France and Belgium. This was the air’s decisive contribution to that wide complex of operations by which Allied military strength was re-established in Western Europe”.*



So said Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder, Deputy Supreme

Commander, SHAEF (*The picture above clearly demonstrates the effects of aerial bombing on one railway yard. Ed*)

On the day itself, and in the subsequent months, Bomber Command aircrew were omnipotent attacking railways and communications targets to prevent the battle area from enemy reinforcement. They bombarded enemy positions, supplied the French Resistance and deceived the enemy as to the true location of the beach landings.

The cost in aircrew lives was high, sacrificing their lives attacking invasion targets in the three months prior to the beach landings. Many rest in French and Belgian cemeteries or are listed as missing.

During May/June 1944, 622 Squadron attacked the following priority targets in direct correlation to D-Day support.

1<sup>st</sup> May Chambly- Railway stores and repair depot.

7<sup>th</sup> May Nantes Airfield

8<sup>th</sup> May Cape Gris Nez- coastal batteries in the Pas de Calais area.

10<sup>th</sup> May Courtrai-Railway Yards

11<sup>th</sup> May Louvain-Railway Yards

19<sup>th</sup> May Le Mans-Railway Yards

27<sup>th</sup> May Boulogne-Coastal gun positions

28<sup>th</sup> May Angers-Railway yards and junction

30<sup>th</sup> May Boulogne-Coastal gun positions

31<sup>st</sup> May Trappes-Railway Yards- 2 Lancasters lost, 9 aircrew KIA

2<sup>nd</sup> June Wissant-Coastal gun positions

3<sup>rd</sup> June Calais-Coastal gun positions

5<sup>th</sup> June Ouisterham-Normandy Coastal Batteries

6<sup>th</sup> June Lisieux-Road & rail centres behind the Normandy battle area.

### **622 Squadron aircrew D-Day memories**

**Charles Bright** was the rear gunner in the crew of F/Lt Derisley DFC. “We awoke to find ourselves on the battle order to attack the coastal batteries at Ouistreham, our first daylight operation. On the way to the target I looked

down at the sea and I have never seen so many ships together before, it was a sight that I will always remember.

*(Right, a Google image of the massed armada of ships!)* On this trip I witnessed a Lancaster being hit by flak and begin its spiral death plunge. The guns in the rear turret seemed to be firing all the way down.



On our return to

Mildenhall the ground crews sprang into action quickly refuelling and rearming our Lancaster, it did not take a genius to guess that we would be on another mission very shortly. That mission was again in support of the Normandy battle area and we were sent to attack the railway and road centres at Lisieux, just behind the front lines. Our target now were all concentrated on the support of the invasion and on the 8<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> June we attacked the railway yards at Fougères & Dreux respectively.”

The Squadron continued to support the Normandy landings throughout June 1944 and beyond, with the communications targets at Fougères and railway targets at Dreux, Valenciennes & Montdidier (operations abandoned due to cloud) attacked. The Germans launched their V-weapon flying bomb attacks on 13<sup>th</sup> June and Bomber Command was given a new directive to destroy the launching sites on the ground in the Pas de Calais area. Subsequently the flying bomb sites at Dollenger, L-Hey & Beauvais were attacked.

**Peter Atkinson** was a navigator in the all NCO crew of F/Sgt Jock Walker. Having returned from a week's leave on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1944 and half way through a tour of operations, the crew were kept busy with operations on 24<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> June. Activity was in support of preparations for the invasion of Europe, attacking the German V bomb sites and the attack on other targets in Germany. On 5<sup>th</sup> June it was known that there was to be a maximum effort but no more. The crew were sent to collect Lancaster R5514 from RAF Tuddenham, very near Mildenhall. It was being used for circuits and bumps by 90 Squadron who were converting from Stirlings to Lancasters. After a 30 minute air test it was clear that the Lancaster had many faults. Peter's usual Lancaster was being serviced therefore they were due to fly that night in this Lancaster but luckily it was declared not fit to fly on operations. On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> June the whole station heard about the Armada of ships seen by the crews on the early morning raid to Ouistreham.

Peter picks up the story: - "We were made aware that our Lancaster ED747 'S' was ready to fly and we flew that night to Lisieux to support troops on the ground. As navigator I was too busy to view the proceedings on the ground but our crew witnessed quite a lot of activity. The following night 7th June we attacked Massy-Palaiseau, a railway junction south of Paris to help stop the advance of German troops against our troops. We lost two aircraft out of seven attacking the target. Our thoughts at the time are hard to remember as we were too busy, but we felt at last something more was being done to bring the war to an end and that our families would soon be saved from doodle bugs etc, but we realised we still had a lot to do." *H. Sandall*

## **622 Squadron Obituaries**

### **Warrant Officer Charles 'Eric' Barclay**

It's with deep sadness that I have to report the passing of Charles Eric Barclay on 6th July aged 94. Eric as he liked to be known, was an air gunner on 115 Sqdn (briefly) and then 622 Squadron.

Charles had an eventful tour of operations firstly with 115 Squadron where he joined the crew of F/Lt P.W. Norbury. Eric was sick for the crew's first operation, tragically the crew were lost and laid to rest in Les Breviaries Communal Cemetery. He completed one other operation on 115 Squadron before he was posted to 622 Squadron in late June 1944.

On arrival at RAF Mildenhall he joined the crew of P/O Jack Clarke DFC RCAF who was some way through his tour, he needed a replacement gunner and Eric fitted the bill. Nine ops were completed in Clarke's crew and another eight trips as a spare gunner in various crews. In September Eric joined the crew of F/O Frank Stephens RAAF and completed another eight ops with this crew.

His tour came to an abrupt end on 6th November 1944 when Koblenz was the target. En route their Lancaster (HK621) was hit by flak knocking out the port outer engine which could not be feathered and began to windmill uncontrollably. Smoke filled the cockpit and the Lancaster lost height until a starboard engine cut out, F/O Stephens gave the order to bail out. Luckily for the crew they were picked up by Americans and eventually returned to the UK. Eric's parents received the dreaded MIA telegram.

A few years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Eric and his W/Op in the 'Stephens' crew, W/O John Crago RAAF at an hotel in London. More recently Eric was awarded the Legion d' Honneur by the French Government.

Eric was extremely proud that his story was included in the Squadron history 'We Wage War by Night.' Very sadly missed by his wife Thelma and daughter Susan.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019 the sad news was received that **F/Sgt John 'Swifty' Swallow RCAF** had passed away in Toronto Canada. Swifty was a rear

gunner in the crew of F/O Done RAAF and served on the Squadron during the latter stages of the war in 1945, he completed several daylight operations and finished on Operation Manna & Exodus.

Swiftly gave tremendous help and support to Josselyne Lejeune-Pichon when she was researching 622 aircrew shot down in France, in particular the crew of P/O John Hall who rest in her local cemetery at Tacoignieres. Josselyne ventured to Canada to stay with Swiftly where she was allowed inside the Lancaster at the Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton Ontario. Josselyne was presented with a plaque and testimonial by Swiftly on behalf of the Mildenhall Register.

John Swallow was a regular attendee at the Mildenhall Register reunions over the years, he was great to engage in conversation with a quick wit and warm personality. His endeavours to preserve the memory of lost aircrew is worthy of recognition.

### **F/Sgt Tom Pooley**

Tom passed away on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019 in a care home in Maryport, Cumbria. Tom was a flight engineer in the crew of F/O A.L. McHugh RAAF and completed a full tour of operations with 622 Squadron from November 1944- April 1945.

The operation to Osterfeld on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1944 proved to be the most eventful when their Lancaster was hit by flak over the target damaging out the port outer engine which had to be feathered.

### **W/O Roy Davie**

Roy from Vermont, USA has passed away. He was originally trained as a pilot at No.22 EFTS at Caxton Gibbet, a satellite field near Cambridge. From here he was posted to No 32 EFTS in Bowden, Alberta Canada and finally to No.32 SFTS at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan where he gained his pilot wings. On arrival back in the UK it was apparent there was a surplus number of pilots therefore, he chose to be re-trained as a flight engineer. Roy wanted to play his part in the war and considered this his only option. Roy joined the crew of F/O J. 'Bluey' Ingram RAAF and completed operations during 1945 with No. 622 Squadron. His first operation was to Gelsenkirchen on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1945 and over the next three months the crew undertook both daylight and night operations. On an operation to attack Kiel on 9/10<sup>th</sup> April 1945, the crew were attacked by a Ju88 night fighter which aborted its attack at a crucial moment. Roy finished his operational tour with Operation Manna & Exodus.

At the end of hostilities Roy was posted to Fighter Command, 12 Group as a 'Link' training instructor at RAF Church Fenton instructing on the Mosquito. His last posting was to 1660 HCU, 5 Group Bomber Command, RAF Swinderby where he took charge of the 'Link' section.

Sad news was received that **Flying Officer Reginald Heffron RAAF** from Myrtle Bank South Australia had passed away during 2019. Reg was the mid upper gunner in the crew of F/O Max Bourne RAAF completing a full tour of operations from August to December 1944. The majority of their operations were carried out in Lancaster 'E'- Easy and they would become known as the 'Easy Boys.'

After initial training was completed in Australia Reg arrived in England in January 1944 and was sent to No. 26 OTU at Wing, Buckinghamshire where he crewed-up. Next posting was to the Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Methwold (No.1653 HCU). The last stage of training was at No.3 Lancaster Finishing School at RAF Feltwell.

The crew attacked all primary targets in France and Germany until the middle of October when Max Bourne collided with another aircraft whilst taxiing out from dispersal. A board of enquiry found him responsible despite evidence to the contrary. Subsequently the crew were posted to a disciplinary camp at Sheffield for three weeks. Operational flying resumed in November and the last operation was completed on 19<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Dee's Day at the Palace**

I always wondered how the lads of Bomber Command felt when they went to Buckingham Palace to receive an award and in March I found out! Not to say that my award was anything like their heroics but it is nerve racking going there in your best blues!

My family arrived with me and we, along with many others, went in through the south side gates. It felt really funny being there and having tourists take photos of us. I wonder who they thought we were. Through the gates and the famous inner court yard to the main entrance where we were all checked in. After a nervous visit to the toilets we all went up a stair case where we were split off. My family went to the right and I went to the left to a room where everyone getting OBE and below was being gathered. After a bit of socialising and admiring the fabulous paintings we then got a briefing about what to do at the investiture which was done with a great deal of humour. Then as we watched Twiggy being made a Dame on the live TV feed and they gathered the first group you could feel the tension ratchet up. Once the group I was in was called we moved into the corridor next to the Ballroom where they do the investitures. I could see Prince Charles doing the last of the OBEs and I looked at the families and caught the eye of my sister. With a smile and a wave she calmed my nerves a bit and then I moved into the position as next to be presented. I was the first of the MBEs and it's probably the only time a non commissioned proceeds an officer as I am female.

When your name is announced you walk forward and curtsey to Prince Charles and then move forward to within a few steps from the dais he's

standing on and he hooks the award onto a prepositioned hook before him asking a few questions.

He asked me where I was based and when I replied RAF Honington we both smiled when he said was it still open! Then he puts his hand out to shake hands and you know it's all over. You move back and curtsey and then out the other side of the room. There is a member of staff who takes your medal off and puts it in a box and hands you a copy of the programme of the day (a copy of which my family already had). Then we all went round to the back of the guests to see those who came after get their awards (apart from the great and the good who were already being interviewed and filmed by the press).



Once all the awards had been given and the National Anthem played, Prince Charles processed out with his Ghurka and Beefeater Guards and his entourage. After that we joined with our families and we were on our way out. What was really lovely was the congratulations given by all the high ranking officers there and they all used my first name and shook my hand.



*(Sadly, for printing purposes we have to have B&W pictures inside, so, for those who don't know, the ribbon that holds the silver crown and cross is vermillion (vivid pink) in colour, split by a white line. Ed.)*

After pictures in the courtyard in the sun my family and I went to lunch with some London based friends before we all went home. I tried to get photos in front of the Bomber Command Memorial but it still had the fence round it from where the idiots threw paint over it. I dedicate my award

a lot to the veterans as it was part of the reason I got the MBE.

I know the Palace staff do the same thing on a regular basis so it was very slick and practised but they made it a fabulous day for all of us.

**Memorial to L7576, St Sauveur 29 July 1945-2019.** By John Myhill *(With pictures courtesy of Anne Ackermann. A link to more can be found on the Internet at: - <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/jlnm5kyibqwo80b/AAB-qNAb1UZpTjpgwMcpmuWYa?dl=0>)*

On the 28th-29th July I took a trip to NE France to take part in an unveiling ceremony for a 622 Sqn Lancaster L7576, GI-K that was lost on operations 75 years ago to the day. The ceremony brought to an end a 75-year-old mystery as to what happened to just one aircraft and crew on that fateful night in 1944. The final mission of L7576 began at 2200 on July 28th 1944. The aircraft GI-K had flown an epic 98 missions and was one of a very

small number pushing to reach the 100-mission milestone. When you consider the odds of achieving anywhere near this number of missions you would realise how special GI-K was. (If you are interested please contact Howard Sandall who has some background information concerning this “push for 100” and how it involves his 622 Squadron relation)

L7576 was part of a 496 aircraft raid, the last of a series of heavy attacks on Stuttgart. The bomber stream crossed the French coast at 23:16 hours and were quickly identified by the German radar plotters. Around 200 night fighters were scrambled on a bright moonlit night, perfect conditions for hunting. The first aircraft were shot down in the Orleans area of France. From this point onwards the fighters were able to stay in the Bomber stream, as the fires burning on the ground from crashed aircraft acted like a beacon. In total 39 Lancasters were lost, 8% of the mission. The aircraft loss total of 39 in a single raid can be seen in a different light if you consider this is now 273 airmen either killed, captured or for a few, on the run deep in enemy territory. This is one crew's story out of the many taken from us that night and of course one tiny part of the 55,573 airmen of Bomber Command lost during the war.

What was known at the time was that three of the crew perished in the attack and were buried in the local communal cemetery at Petitmont. Two of the crew were known to have parachuted from the stricken bomber. The Flight Engineer was badly injured and subsequently captured; the Bombardier landed safely and went on the run. The Pilot and Navigator were reported missing but believed to be killed in the crash, but as no bodies were found they had no known grave, their only memorial was as a name on the Runnymede memorial. In 2015 Jon and Robert Peck, who's late Mother was the Pilot's (Harold Peabody) cousin, decided to investigate the mystery. Having reached positions of influence as a CEO of a mining company and a career diplomat, the brothers Peck financed a research project for three undergrad students from Bishop's University in Quebec. Their first act reunited two families who had not known of each other. The family of the Pilot were now in touch with the nephew of the Navigator, James Doe; Rick Doe, an American atmospheric scientist now residing in California. The research team very quickly dismissed the 1947 Missing Research and Enquiry Service (MRES) report that the missing crew were probably vaporised in an explosion of the aircraft's ordnance. They tracked down eye witness reports, sightings, physical evidence and critically, a British Army War Crime Investigations Team's (WCIT) report into Nazi activity in the Vosges Mountains. This report led the investigators to the almost certain knowledge that Peabody and Doe had indeed survived the crash but had been captured by the SS and taken to the Natzweiler-Struthof camp, the only concentration and extermination camp on French soil.

Interviews of former Allied prisoners, German prison guards and Nazi War criminals led to the belief that within a few days of the crash the captured airmen were executed, cremated with their ashes scattered in a communal pit purpose built at the death camp. The 70-year-old mystery was essentially solved.

During a village celebration in St Sauveur in 2017, Alain Founé, a former pilot of the French Air Force and member of a local aeronautical heritage society, realised that there was no memorial to the crew and many in the village were unaware of the event. "It was as if Lancaster L7576 had fallen twice – the first time in combat in the forest during the night of 28/29 July 1944. Then, over time, fallen a second time and much less gloriously – into oblivion". Aware of the research project, Alain decided to organise a ceremony to raise a memorial stone, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the loss. The Peck brothers immediately proposed the financing of the memorial.

So 75 years on, in a forest clearing of the community of St Sauveur the crew of L7576 finally received a memorial to their actions, and the crew were brought back together.

*(Right: - Jon Peck(R) and M. Alain Founé (L) stand proudly beside the information board at the memorial site)*



The event drew large crowds from the local community, representatives of the British Embassy, the RAF and FAF, RAFA and most importantly families of five of the crew from Canada, England, USA and Ireland.



*(Pictured left are from L-R: - Lieutenant-Colonel François Bourcy, Megan Withworth (Canadian student investigator), Evelyne Founé (my wife!), Colonel Pierre-Alain Antoine, Alain Founé (Project Manager, tie of No 622 Sqn RAF !), Patrick Baumann (Amateur historian), Robert Poteau (Veteran Forces Françaises Libres and Coastal Command), Robert Peck (Grand-nephew of Peabody), Philippe*

*Arnould (Mayor of Saint-Sauveur), Richard Coplen (Buckley's grand-nephew), Mrs. Poteau, Jon Peck (Grand-nephew of Peabody), Brett Fiddick (grandson of Fiddick), Larry Fiddick (Son of Fiddick), Rick Doe (Nephew of Doe), Rod Fiddick (Son of Fiddick) and Sean Summerfield (Canadian Student Investigator)*

I felt honoured to have represented 622 Squadron, another fitting piece of the puzzle had been put in place.

*(Pictured right are L-R:- Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Claude Barral (President of the Centre for Documentation and Historical Research of the Air Base 133 Nancy-Ochey), Adjudant-Chef Hervé Schuler, Major Christian Pardieu, Colonel Pierre-Alain Antoine (Historian, former leader of the Patrouille de France), Yves and John, Lieutenant-Colonel François Bourcy (Mutilated Combatants*



*Association)* The crew also received two military flypasts, the first being a patrol of Mirage fighter-bombers overflying the ceremony and its guard of honour. The second flypast of special significance occurred thousands of miles away with the Canadian Lancaster from John C. Munro, Hamilton International Airport in Hamilton, Ontario taking part in an aerial tribute to L7576; it had been painted in the livery of 622 Sqn. *(For anyone interested in this wonderful tribute you'll need access to the Internet and follow either of these links: - <https://www.dropbox.com/s/bnu4u8i7vj9aek5/CWHM-MemorialFlightL7576-4K.mp4?dl=0>*

*<https://www.facebook.com/CanadianWarplaneHeritageMuseum/videos/389096892010364/>*

*Ed)*

With such a massive loss of life experienced by the largely volunteer force of Bomber command it is often difficult to focus on the individual. So what do we know about the crew.

Wireless operator/Gunner Sgt Arthur Payton RAFVR, 30 years of age along with Mid-upper Gunner Flt Sgt Richard Proulx RCAF aged 21 and Rear gunner Sgt Percy Buckley RAF, did not survive the crash and their final resting place is at Petitmont cemetery. Percy Buckley had just turned 18 and was one of the youngest members of Bomber Command who paid the ultimate sacrifice. So little is known of these three airmen from service records simply because of their age, and their time with Bomber Command defines their short lives. The research pointed to the likelihood that all the Gunners were killed during the repeated attacks by an ME110 night fighter, leaving the Lancaster defenceless as it tried to escape using “corkscrew” manoeuvres. These three airmen were laid to rest in the local cemetery and have been cared for by a grateful community ever since.

Flight engineer acting Flt Lt George Wishart RAF, was the Squadron's Engineer leader and was a late replacement for the crew's standard Flight Engineer Sgt David Cosgrove who was unwell. He survived the crash but was captured and spent the rest of the war in a prisoner of war camp. While declared missing he was awarded a DFC backdated to the 28th July 1944,

the date the crew took off on that fateful mission. His citation reads “Flt Lt Wishart, as Flight Engineer Leader, has completed numerous operations against the enemy, in the course of which he has invariably displayed the utmost fortitude, courage and devotion to duty”. As a POW he was constantly moved from camp to camp, including the infamous Stalag Luft 111, he was forced on the “Long March” the first use of a mass human shield to cover the German retreat, and was finally liberated by allied forces in May 1945.

27-year-old F/O Ronald Lewis Fiddick RCAF from Victoria, British Columbia Canada bailed out of the stricken Lancaster and went on the run. He evaded capture with the aid of local villagers before joining members of the French underground. Three weeks after the crash he joined an SAS unit operating behind enemy lines and for three months he took part in sabotage operations against the German occupiers. He finally crossed enemy lines with an SAS Captain with sensitive information that was passed to advancing US troops. Lew was made an honorary SAS member for his wartime exploits. After the war Lew became one of Canada’s first Federal Forest Rangers and lived a long and active life before passing away in his 100th year.

Twenty-three-year-old Harold Sherman Peabody (known as Al) of Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada was notably athletic and part of Bishop’s University’s golf and hockey teams and a popular man on campus when World War II broke out. He dropped out of school to join the war effort and enrolled in the flight-training program in Quebec. After training he joined 622 Sqn at their Mildenhall home. He was the Captain of Lancaster L7576, and was on his 9th operation with his crew.

Harry Doe was born in Calgary in 1922, the son of a First World War pilot, a keen sportsman who cut short his education to enlist with the RCAF at the age of 18. He was posted to Chipping-Warden training unit in the Midlands where he met up with Peabody, Fiddick and Buckley all destined to be crewed together when they reached 622 Sqn at Mildenhall in June 1944. The charmed life of Sgt David Cosgrove, the crew’s standard Engineer unable to fly on this fateful mission owing to an illness lasted two weeks. On his next flight, guesting as Engineer on F/O Busby’s crew, he took off on a mission to bomb the Opel works in Russelheim. The crew were shot down, five lost their lives, two became POW’s and one evaded capture to return home sometime later.

The research story wouldn’t be complete without the part played by the “villain” of the piece. At 0130 hours Lt Walter Swoboda claimed his first and only victory when he shot down L7576 into woods near the village of Petitmont. Lt Swoboda, an Austrian flying with the Luftwaffe, was subsequently killed along with his crew, piloting a Me110 on 18 Dec 1944.

His aircraft was shot down by an American Field Artillery unit near Felsberg. L7576 had been his only victory.

At the ceremony I met many locals whose lives have been deeply affected by the events that happened so long ago. Pierre Vinot was 17 at the time and was one of the first people to reach the crash site. His testimony was crucial in finding out the fate of the missing crew. Madelaine Schultz, now 97, remembers the aerial battles overhead, and never forgot the sacrifices made. She has tended the grave site of the three Gunners ever since. I was introduced to a man who worked for the owner of the house where the injured George Wishart was taken. He explained that the master of the house refused to hand over the injured airmen to the Germans until he had received medical assistance and been stabilised. This delay may have ensured that George was handed over to the right authorities and thus avoided the grisly fate of his Pilot and Navigator. I met an old man who said "If anyone says they didn't know what was going on, they are lying, we all knew". This cryptic comment was explained to me: St Sauveur was in the very NE of France very close to the German border and had been under occupation for 5 years. The village was split between acceptance and simmering resistance and the presence of a death camp so close to their homes has scarred the village ever since. It is hoped that this memorial, the solving of a decade's old mystery and the inclusivity of the memorial will help in the healing.

The memorial to L7576 is composed of a Lancaster tail fin mounted on 3 distinct levels of rock. The background blocks were mined from the forest valley where the aircraft crashed. The base is formed from a granite block from Harold Peabody's home in Quebec, and the marble plaque bearing the names of all the crew came from the Austrian



home of the Luftwaffe pilot Walter Swoboda. This brave and challenging design was the idea of the Pilot's family to provide a fitting finale to the story of L7576. It is a story of individuals from many countries fighting for a cause that they believed in and as such earned their part in this story.

It is our aim to preserve the memory for future generations so that the noble sacrifice of those who lost their lives in Bomber Command will always be remembered. A total of 55,573 of the 125,000 who served in this largely volunteer service, formed from so many nations, lost their lives in the Second World War. We will remember them.

*John Myhill*

**New Memorial Planned** As I'm sure many of our longstanding members will know, the last operational loss of a XV Squadron aircraft was that of Lancaster HK773 LS-W. Following engine failure on take-off for a daylight raid on Bocholt it impacted with full bomb and fuel load into the forest just south of Mundford. The date was 22 March 1945 and all crew perished. In 1999, my first year as a member of The Mildenhall Register, I was able to assist Martyn Ford-Jones with the erection of a plaque at the crash site. Over the intervening years the site has been visited by members of the crew's families and was placed on a local walking groups list, which ensured the site and surrounding area was regularly visited. Local residents even made a small area for the numerous Lancaster pieces which are still being discovered to this day.

The plaque was originally mounted on a wooden stake which hasn't stood the test of time well. Plans are now being made to replace this with a more permanent stone plinth, possibly of granite on a concrete base. The Forestry Commission are taking on this work and it is hoped to have the new memorial stone in place to be commemorated for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this sad loss.

The event will take place on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020. If you would like to attend or know more please contact Mrs Pat Tuck, (for catering purposes) 11 West Hall Road, Mundford, IP26 5OR or telephone 01842 878483

*Readers of last year's newsletter may recall the story of **Robert Whymark's** father who was lost during Operation Dodge. Well, Robert wrote to me to say that he has now completed his research into this and the two other Lancaster's lost that day with all crew and passengers. He has converted this it into a book. Robert says: -*

*"Although the position of the crash was noted [30 odd miles WNW of Cap Corse] nothing was ever found.*

*My father Flt Lt John P Whymark DSO DFC RAF was on board & having completed THREE Tours of Operations as an Air Gunner, he succumbed to this comparative 'Milk Run' of a flight. His DSO is considered remarkable for a Flt Lt and non-captain of an aircraft.*

*One of the ATS ladies killed with him was engaged to a W/O on General Alexander of Tunis' staff - he later became my step-father.*

*I have put together an 85 page A5 book 'The Air Ministry regrets...' about this incident.*

*Although the title is about a 1945 crash and its aftermath, my dad was on 149 Sqn in 1940-41 as a Rear Gunner on his 1st Tour. He later went to N. Africa with 148 Sqn and kept a diary. These Ops are in the book and form a large part of the story of his first of three tours plus some desert pictures.*

*It is priced at £9-00 GBP. + £1-75 p&p (UK) for 1 copy. Orders via his email address: - robertwhymark326@gmail.com*

*New member Bruce Fernie, who lives in Italy wrote in to ask to join The MR and said his father, **John Fernie** had served in 75 (NZ) Squadron: - "I received some logs from the RAF but have never received his full records. He was born in Dundee but raised in Manchester, England. For some reason he faked his birth as 1920 Cheadle Hulme, reality was 1919 Dundee. We think his mother was unmarried when he was born and registered his birth when she moved to England. This created problems for me in my early teens when I wanted my UK passport.*

*The story is he wanted to only fly and the RAF squadrons were 'full' and the newly arrived New Zealanders gladly accepted him. He flew Wellingtons as a wireless operator where he was injured and then up front after a few years into Lancasters. Over his career there were a couple of crash/very hard landings when back from a run and one crash on the Euro coast and the crew survivors needed to have a fisherman get them back to the UK. He had scars up his backside that he said he received from flak coming into the Wellingtons as he was seated. After many missions*

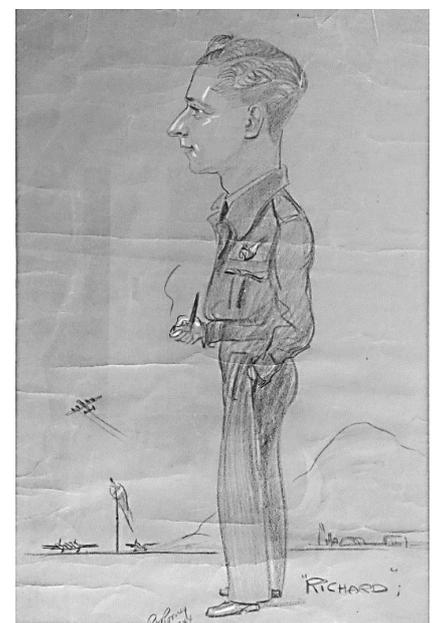


*he was then shipped to Western Canada to train the RCAF guys and then the war ended.*

*He emigrated to the USA and started his career as an artist in NYC. A few of his RAF buddies became trans-Atlantic BOAC pilots after the war and as a boy I had many a spirited Sunday meal when they all got together and told their stories; they were my boyhood heroes.*

*Mrs Ann Gilbert contacted me to tell me that her father, **Richard Murphy**, a navigator with Bill Parke's crew had sadly passed away. She also mentioned a drawn caricature which she had of him done by Pat Rooney. She'd seen a similar picture shown on 'The Antiques Roadshow' and thought it bore a certain resemblance to the one she had in a frame. On checking, there it was, Pat Rooney's signature almost hidden by the frame by 'Richard's' foot. So who was Pat Rooney?*

*The Internet, ever the researcher's friend, came to our rescue when I initially found a small article written by none other than our very own Thomas Maxwell DFC back in 2006.*



Tom had written to the Essex Gazette and Standard: - "Seeking any information about an Essex family Pat Rooney 1884-1966 and his wife who died in 1989 a year short of her century.

William Pat Rooney was a prolific artist and for 25 years visited countless RAF stations to draw portraits of servicemen and women in caricature form during WW2 and after. Both are buried at St Peters in Boxted.

I still treasure the drawing Pat Rooney did for me in 1945. I intend ultimately to write his biography." *Well, I don't know if that ever got written, but other sources on the WWW gave few further insights. Ed.*

Despite there being a large number of his cartoon like drawings out there, very little else is actually written about him. He had been actively drawing portraits before the war, not always in this 'comic' fashion. But in wartime, for just a few pennies, he'd quickly roll off one of these amazingly accurate, if comic, drawings of just about anyone. He seems to have had free range over most RAF bases and even continued post war. I've noticed that most of the figures he drew were facing to the left. Everyone comments on how well he portrays the character drawn and even Ann admits that ".although I didn't know him when it was drawn, it's a definite likeness"

*Any further information or pictures of portraits gratefully received. Ed*

### **Charles W. Gibbons RCAF, 90 Squadron Rear Gunner.**

Charles 'Red' Gibbons, who has recently died, was an RCAF air gunner who first crewed up at Chipping Warden with Peter 'Fuzzy' Fawcett, before going to Chedburgh for the crew to convert to Stirlings. The crew ended up on Stirling Mk IIIs at Tuddenham, 90 squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1944.



*Left, this is the picture referred to later in the text. It shows the six man crew as they crewed up for training. I believe that Charles is the bottom left gentleman as there appears to be a 'Canada' flash on his left shoulder. Jim Coman (W/Op) stands behind him and the gentleman in the middle front has to be 'Fuzzy' Fawcett their pilot, with their navigator behind him. Sadly I do not have his or*

*the other Air Gunner and Flight Engineers names.*

At Tuddenham the crew were soon employed in supply drops to the Maquis during the build-up to D-Day. Mine-laying as part of the transportation plan also saw them operating on a regular basis. Both types of sortie called for low-level flying, with the dangers that involved, and pin-point accuracy in navigation.

It was on a mine-laying sortie to the harbour at Kiel that Charles Gibbons' vigilance saved the aircraft from a night-fighter. On the route into Kiel Bay

the crew could see aircraft above them dropping fighter flares. As rear gunner, Charles spotted an Me110's tracer fire and ordered the pilot to make a corkscrew to port. His return fire drove the fighter off, diving away to starboard quarter down. The Me110 was claimed as damaged. The Stirling did not escape unscathed. Jim Coman, a former Mildenhall Register committee member, was the crew's wireless operator, he recalled the damage: "The shrapnel went all over the rear of the fuselage, but it didn't do any serious damage to any of the cables. The gunners hit him, so he got out of the way. We had our moments!"

On supply drops to the Maquis the aircraft flew in a loose 'V' formation to a distribution point, then each went their own way. On the night of 9<sup>th</sup> May 1944 a German flak position detected the 'V' formation that Charles' aircraft was flying in, the flak gunners picked their target and brought down one of the Stirlings. As Jim Coman said, "It could have been anyone of us. We were lucky. It happened; it could happen at any time."

On these supply drops, the resistance fighters would identify themselves by flashing Morse signals on small lamps. On one trip to supply the Maquis in the foothills of the Pyrenees, flying below 1,000 ft. across France to stay under the enemy radar, the crew were confused when the visual contact was lost, then re-established and lost again. Conditions were misty, but it wasn't until the mid-upper gunner pointed out they'd been flying first one side and then the other of a mountain as they circled the drop zone, that they realised the problem! The drop was made successfully, but it could have been a disaster.

90 Squadron converted to the Lancaster and started operations on the type on 10<sup>th</sup> June, flying a tactical operation to Dreux. Charles Gibbons was amongst the crews to fly 90's first Lancaster sorties. It was a difficult trip; two Lancasters failed to return and a third was involved in air-to-air combat. Some good results were observed and 90 were now regularly involved in tactical bombing to support the troops, such as at Villers Bocage. Flying bomb sites and German targets were also attacked. Setting out for a sortie to Gelsenkirchen 12<sup>th</sup> June, Fawcett's crew were forced to return early as Charles' rear turret was unserviceable. To continue would have left the aircraft dangerously vulnerable to enemy fighters.

It wasn't only over enemy territory crews faced danger. Returning from an operation to Biennais, Luftwaffe intruders attacked 90 Squadron aircraft over Tuddenham. One Lancaster was shot down, its crew killed, and a Canadian rear gunner was killed in his turret when another Lancaster was shot-up. Bomber crews were never far from danger in the air.

For Charles Gibbons the risky life of aircrew on operations finished 11<sup>th</sup> August 1944 with an operation to Lens.

He may have faced another kind of risk with his posting of 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944 to 24 O.T.U. where he would be training rookie crews in the art of air to air firing.

*However, he survived this new challenge and the war to live a long life as his daughter, Kerry, wrote in to say: -*

*“He was a wonderful husband to my mom for 64 years and an amazing father to my brother and me. We miss him every day. We buried him in his uniform jacket and a WWII photo of him with his crew (as seen in the text above) and another photo of the same men at the 50th anniversary which he and my mother attended in*



*London”. I’m guessing this is the second image that Kerry refers to and that Charles is seen here (front left) with (l-r) Jim Coman, Peter Fawcett and navigator at the memorial on the Green at Tuddenham, circa 1995. Ed.*

### **Heligoland '39, the final Chapter (almost).**

Readers of last year’s newsletter will remember the ongoing story of this project of Remembrance, Reconciliation and Commemoration driven by the inimitable Jack Waterfall from Ely and his dedicated team.

So it was on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2019, 80 years to the day since the fateful battle took place, Dee and I were amongst the invited guests at the Runnymede memorial. We joined with many dignitaries and family members of those lost and of those who survived, including Rachel Kellett, who is related to Wing Commander Richard Kellett. At the time of the battle, he led 149 Squadron and the whole raid. He and his crew were some of the lucky few to survive. In a moving ceremony the names of those lost, including the two German Me 109 pilots, were read out. The Act of Remembrance was led by Air Commodore Nick Hay followed by wreaths being laid for the RAF; the German Embassy, London; The People of Surrey; IX, 37 & 149 Squadrons; the RNLI, Wells Lifeboat (who were involved in heroic rescue attempts on the day); The CWGC and our own Mildenhall Register.

Another 149 Squadron survivor was Wellington 1A, N2980, OJ - R Robert, which is under reconstruction at Brooklands museum. That was our second visit of the day. Often referred to as The Loch Ness Wellington because that’s where it ditched on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1940. ‘Robert’ survived this raid and a transfer to 37 Squadron operations before joining 20 OTU at Lossiemouth.

*Sadly, lack of space limits a more in-depth coverage of this event, but as the title eludes, this isn’t the end. A book is to be written and this is planned to be launched at a ceremony in Inverness cathedral on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 which will commemorate ‘Robert’s ditching. Ed.*

## Useful details for the 2020 Reunion weekend

The Reunion will once more be based on and around RAF Mildenhall base by kind permission of the Commander of the 100<sup>th</sup> Refuelling Wing of the USAF. **PLEASE NOTE THAT PHOTOGRAPHIC I.D. WILL BE REQUIRED FOR ALL BASE VISITS.**

### Friday 15 May

TBA Coach leaves the Bird in Hand for a Base Tour, (Photo ID Required), see booking form or tickets for details.  
1600 Return to the Bird in Hand  
1730 Welcome drinks in Middleton Hall (Photo ID Required)  
1830 Buffet supper served 2000 AGM

### Saturday 16 May

1000 Coach leaves Bird in Hand  
1045 Arrival at RAF Honington (Photo ID Required)  
1100 Tour of Base and facilities, with picnic lunch served during visit.  
1430 Coach leaves for return to Bird in Hand  
1600 Arrive Bird in Hand  
1800 Pre-Dinner Drinks Galaxy Club (Photo ID Required)  
1900 Formal Dinner  
2200+ Carriages

### Sunday 17 May

1045 Wreath laying at the RAF Mildenhall Plaque, St Johns Beck Row  
1100 Register Remembrance Service St John's Beck Row  
1145 Refreshments in the Church Hall  
1230 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 -	01638 718947	5 miles
The Riverside House Hotel, Mildenhall --	01638 717274	4 miles.
The Golden Boar, Freckenham --	01638 723000	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:

Hon Chairman	Hon Secretary	Hon Treasurer
Dee Boneham MBE	Geoff Reynolds	Smiley Mildwater
13 Holloway Crescent	61 Salem St	33A Hardwicke Fields
Leaden Roden	Gosberton	Haddenham
Dunmow, Essex	Spalding, Lincs.	Ely, Cambs.
CM6 1QD	PE11 4NQ	CB6 3TW
Tel 01279 877935	Tel 01775 841585	Tel 01353 749509
dee311261@yahoo.com	mrsecretary@hotmail.co.uk	smileym@waitrose.com



A medley of photographs from the 2019 Reunion that include the base visit, AGM, Madingley US cemetery, our formal dinner and Remembrance at Beck Row.

