

The Mildenhall Register

XV, XC, 149, 218 and 622 Bomber Squadrons' Association

Supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron

NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2020/1



VE DAY

75TH ANNIVERSARY

A SHARED MOMENT OF CELEBRATION



Roll of Honour 2020

| | | | | | |
|-------|-----|---------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Mr | C | Cyril | Badol | Ground crew | 149 |
| Mr | C H | Cecil 'Chick' | Chandler | F/Eng. | XV/622 |
| Mr | K | Ken | Fisher | Pilot | XV |
| Mr | R | Raymond (Vic) | Francis | F/Eng. | 622 |
| Mrs | K | Kathleen | Garrard | Sister of Nav. | XV |
| Mrs | J | Jeanne | Gearing | S-i-L of F/E | XV |
| Mr | J A | John | Gerard | F/Eng. | XC |
| Mr | W L | Les | Harlow DFC | Pilot | 218 |
| Mr | J B | John | Higham DFC | Pilot | 419 |
| Mr | I | Isaac 'Ike' | Hill | W/Op | 149 |
| Mr | R H | Ron 'Rockie' | Knight | Nav. | XV |
| Mr | T | Tommy | Knox | F/E | 149 & 199 |
| S/Ldr | N W | Norman | Walter | A/G | 622 |



Words from The Chair

Welcome to the latest newsletter. I hope you are all safe and staying well especially our lovely veterans.

Well I thought that when we had the quieter but very happy reunion in 2019 that we had a lot to look forward to in 2020. I was right but for all the wrong reasons. Then Covid19 hit us early this year and wiped out all but virtual or minimum attendance reunions and memorials and all of the air shows! I know we are all missing our families and it will be even more difficult if we go into yet another complete lockdown again which is currently looking likely (I hope by the time you get this newsletter that has been and gone.) We will have to cross our fingers for the next few years as I hope this does not go on and on.

Geoff, Smiley and their lovely ladies have been keeping the Register ticking over and I would like to give them my thanks for keeping me and you updated. I know that Smiley is suggesting that we buy a stone for the Ribbon of Remembrance for the Register Squadrons which will be placed at the Bomber Command Memorial in Lincoln. Having been to the Memorial and Heritage Centre I think it's a great idea. I was glad to see they got some funding from the National lottery to help keep it open at least for now. I shall definitely donate towards a ribbon and

hope you will decide to do so too when you have read about it further in the newsletter. Keep coming up with good ideas Smiley!

I would also like to thank the staff both RAF and USAF at RAF Mildenhall plus the padre and folk from St Johns Church at Beck Row for their assistance with organising last year's reunion and starting to organise this years. I know you, like we all, were looking forward to 2021! Sadly, we'll have to wait until 2022 before we'll feel safe to organise our next one.

As one last thing I thought you might like to see my individually designed bench I have had made for my garden by Roll and Scroll based in Grantham. (See back cover. Ed.) I saw, on Facebook, the one they gave to Captain Sir Tom Moore (isn't he just a star!) for his birthday plus other ones they have done for WW1 and others, so decided, since I had a bit of money spare, I would have one made. You can imagine where I will be sitting if it's sunny next year.

Anyway, stay safe all and I hope to see at least some of you next year.

Best wishes Dee

From The Treasury

Who could have imagined, dear reader, that when I closed last year's missive with the words: 'I wish you all the very best in whatever fate has in store for you with its slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' what did lay in store for us all. Enough said on the subject except to say that I hope you are all safe and well.

Although all booking fees were refunded when we cancelled the Reunion the Register finances are still in a pretty good shape with some £8600 in our accounts.



In October the AOC in C Domestics and I visited the International Bomber Command Centre where our guide was a chap I flew with on 42 (TB) Sqn. Steve has organised a stone on the Ribbon of Remembrance for those Nimrod crews who died flying the Mighty Hunter. This set me thinking and I suggested to Dee and Geoff that we organise one for the Register along the following lines.... from our current funds the Register donate £1000 and, as we won't be having a Reunion in 2021, all received donations are added to the £1000 with the size of stone depending on the amount raised. (See the accompanying letter for further description and how to donate. Ed) If you are as generous as you usually are, I estimate we could raise somewhere between £2750 and £3000 in total. That would give us a 'Stirling' stone of 200mm x 350mm (8in x 14in) for £2500. Next up is a 'Wellington' stone at 300mm x 300mm (12in x 12in) for £5000 which I feel is asking too much. My thoughts, for what they're worth, is our logo at the top with the same inscription that is on the St John's plaque underneath.

On Wednesday 4th November, to beat lockdown II, we bimbled over to Beck Row and laid a Mildenhall Register wreath underneath the Register plaque at St John's Church. (Thanks for that Smiley, see pictures on back cover. Ed)

Finally, some of you may wonder why I am penning this missive having said I was stepping down but, in view of chaos that has ensued this year, we felt it would be easier all round if I continued until the situation is resolved.

On that note I will finish and wish you all the very best in the hope you all stay safe and well.

Smiley

Scribblings from your Secretary



Well, where to start? Seasonal greetings and the hope that you'll all have a happier New Year than the washout that 2020 turned out to be, might be a good way.

Following the cancellation of last year's reunion, I'm sure everyone wondered what the future might hold for us all. As I found out during the extra spare time I had for reading, 2020 should have been our 40th ever event.

With total lockdown, so many events that should have commemorated and celebrated their 75th anniversaries were scaled back. These included both VE and VJ commemorations, Manna operations events in Holland and, on a smaller scale, the installation of a new memorial stone to the last operational loss of the XV Squadron Lancaster in Mundford forest.

Despite all this we did get on with our lives as best we could and there were a number of events which did go ahead, if scaled back to comply with the health rules in place. Alain Founé in France managed to gather people together at the 622 Squadron memorial that was erected last year. There was an event at the Bomber Command memorial. This was shared live on the internet. For those of you who have access to a computer but didn't get to see the event, it is now available on YouTube by following this link: -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUKeZp-kjh8>

Thanks to the efforts of the Tuck family and villagers in Mundford, the new memorial stone was placed in situ. I've yet to go and see it, but I know quite a number of relatives of the crew have been to the site and the pictures I've been sent back are magnificent. When the Covid dust settles, there **will be** the planned, but delayed, service of dedication in the forest.

As I write this, we've just seen the scaled down, subdued, but none the less poignant, Royal British Legion Service of Remembrance in the Albert Hall. One re-enacted in countless towns and villages across the country.

In most cases, we, in true British style, with a stoic wartime spirit, have just got on with things. Yes, we moaned a little, we blamed this one and that one, but on the whole, we just knuckled down and did our best.

One annoying thing happened in lockdown, but I'm sure is totally unrelated; I became aware that I was no longer able to operate the MR Facebook page as an administrator. After numerous contacts with their very unhelpful customer assistance service, the matter hasn't been resolved. I don't know what's gone

wrong, they don't know what's gone wrong and we're going round in circles. So, I'm leaving the administration and running of it to the two other administrators and I hope everyone will continue to post on there.

The website, with its enquiry page, continues to work well, with thanks to Debbie for administering this. Along with e-mails and the post I still receive interesting enquiries that keep myself and our historians busy.

On which note, I have the sad task of announcing that Martyn Ford-Jones has decided to retire as the official XV Squadron historian after more years than he cares to remember. This means that all those wonderfully researched and completed dossiers that many of us have about our relative's service with the squadron will be no more. He has assured me that he will continue to answer questions and enquiries that come through me to assist researchers, but that's about the limit of it. My thanks go to Martyn for his help over many years and with my Uncle's service research and introducing me to The Mildenhall Register. You will be missed.

So, to the future of The Mildenhall Register. We've had to make the difficult decision to not even plan for next year's reunion. The uncertainty of the health situation, not to mention the extra work that is caused if we should have to cancel at a later date for a second year just doesn't make it a feasible option.

The good news is, that with the base being given a further reprieve from closure (BBC News 9th July 2020) which was due in 2027. Although we don't know what Joe Biden might do, we still have many more years ahead of us in our partnership with the base. So we'll have to look forward to finally celebrating our 40th Anniversary in 2022.

A year in the life of 622 Squadron RAuxAF

I am grateful, once again, for this contribution from OC 622, in what has obviously been a very testing and difficult time.

As far as this year has been concerned it has been unrelenting for 622 Sqn.

When COVID hit the airline market, it was to the RAF's benefit, with pilots no longer taking their option point to leave and fly outside, and a stream of pilots looking to re-join the RAF got together with BA and came up with a sabbatical arrangement to help fill some gaps caused by the backlog in our training system. Over 1500 of BA's 4000 pilots expressed an interest in joining the RAF! In total the RAF had expressions of interest from almost 2500 pilots (not bad for sorting a shortfall of 300!)

With Flybe, Virgin and other airlines also making staff redundant, as the aircrew Reserve Sqn, 622 Sqn swelled and recruited 30 pilots to help alleviate the drop in numbers through quarantine requirements and periods of isolation. In total, 50 pilots were brought back in at Brize Norton bringing all Sqn's up to full Manning status.

Flying did not stop for the RAF, indeed on occasion they had the skies to

themselves. It was a beautiful time during lockdown where the fabulously clear air quality provided some of the most beautiful far-reaching views across the country – a really clear picture of how much pollution is normally in the atmosphere from industry and traffic. Parachuting exercises continued, both overseas and in the UK, and the aircraft did numerous medical moves around the country as well as transporting some of the urgent PPE from overseas.

The military response is called Operation Rescript – we had 1 x 622 Sqn member working in NHS Gold command, 1 running mobile testing, 1 testing in Yorkshire, 1 in the Air Covid cell and 1 in the mortuary handling cell. Closer to home, at Brize, a team of 4 x 622 Sqn Cabin Crew swapped their trolleys in the air for food delivery to those isolating on Station. They formed the Station support cell to ensure those livers-in who had to isolate for 2 weeks had everything they needed.

With the lockdown and numerous restrictions, many of the events marking key anniversaries for our Veterans have unfortunately had to be cancelled. We continue to remember their bravery and sacrifices made - more on this in John Myhill's article.

As many of you know, the Squadron is affiliated with the Worshipful Company of Arbitrators, formed from the ranks of judges, QC's and lawyers in the City of London. The Worshipful Company provides the Squadron with an annual award - the Blondie Swales Award, named after the Sqn's illustrious wartime OC, with the winner being nominated by the current OC for outstanding service over the year. This year's Blondie Swales award goes to WO Rick Burke-Smith, the Sqn WO, for his role in setting up the affiliation, his role in engineering recruitment and for the standards and welfare work he has undertaken for 622 Sqn this year.

As furlough ends for many in the travel industry this month, enquiries about jobs are still coming in. Public service is more attractive to all ages, and recruitment at all levels is surging. Plans are in place with many people on standby for the winter for COVID, BREXIT and a possible vaccination programme.

Finally, on behalf of Judy, Rick and myself, I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and very best wishes for a safe and happy 2021.

Rosh

40th Anniversary I hear you say. Yes, indeed dear reader. When spending all that extra time reading during lockdown, and looking for something to write up for the newsletter, I found this article, penned by our founder, Don Clarke, in the November 1988 newsletter. I think it explains why we should have been celebrating in 2020.

“Members have asked me how it all began and how I got involved in it to become the Hon.Sec/ Treasurer. Going back to the 70s there were four persons who influenced and pushed me to take on the job and alas all four have now passed on. Jack Cregson a Flight Engineer on 622 Squadron in Alec Taylor's crew. Jim Fletcher a Rear Gunner on XV Squadron in F/ Lt. Clayton's crew. Harry Bysouth,

Rear Gunner on XV Squadron who flew in F/Lt Johnny French's crew and Harry Pitcher, Chairman and founder of The Bomber Command Association who was a Rear Gunner on 44 Squadron at Bardney, Lincolnshire.

Jack tried to form the association in 1972 when a small article answered by me and a few others saw it in AIRMAIL but alas it never took off but we continued to phone and write to each other until he died in 1977.

In March 1975 XV Squadron arranged a reunion in the RAF Club London to celebrate their 60th Anniversary and not knowing London at all Fletch and Harry Bysouth met me at St. Pancras and took me to the reunion. We had a wonderful time together and in his speech Wing Commander Mick Simmonds asked if anyone present would like to form an association and become the Hon.Sec. Fletch and Harry knew that I would love to have a go but we didn't think anything more of it during the rest of the evening. I wrote to XV in Laarbruch shortly afterwards and was told no-one had taken on the daunting task, but after a lot of persuasion from Harry Pitcher and the others, in 1976 it began to take shape. At the Mildenhall air show in 76 I managed to get a few bods from 15/622 to come along and Eddie Mann from 622 booked a room in the 'O' club with some light refreshments and some 50 members and wives turned up; this was the start I wanted.

In the meantime I became the Hon.Treasurer of 75 Sqdn and also the same for 90 Sqdn and planned many reunions with them. In September 1980 at the 90 Sqdn reunion I met Ken Botfield and he told me he was ex XV, we struck up a good friendship and decided to join forces to have a reunion of 15/622 and the 1st one was in April 1981 in the Bob Hope Centre on the base."

(Courtesy 100th ARW archives)



(So there you have it, 2020 should have been our 40th Anniversary. Covid, you horrible bug... you have a lot to answer for!) Anyway, Don continues:

"Before that I wrote to about 80 newspapers all over and others in the Commonwealth for at the time I only had some 40 names or so to work on and with no funds to start it off. The donations began to flow in and by the time of the reunion I had some 400 members. G/Capt. Ken Batchelor became President, Frank Cork as Chairman and with a small committee we were well and truly 'off the ground' and the evening was a great success.

In 1983 it was decided to ask ex members of 149 Squadron to join us on The

Register as they had no association of their own. Altogether, we have 1300+ names on the list.” (In 2020 we currently have 268! Ed)

And finally, Don concludes:

“I have a very understanding wife who always supports me and I have enjoyed doing this job, year after year. I only hope it continues for many long years to come”.

Well, as we now know, Don continued in the post of Hon. Sec. until ill health in 2008 sadly persuaded him to relinquish his duties. I can only echo the sentiments of his last sentence, reiterating that I too have a very understanding wife, I enjoy the job and I hope we can keep it going for many more years. Ed.

Some obituaries 2020 It will always be sad to hear of members passing, so it was particularly pleasing that, even with Covid, we have suffered very few membership losses this year. Amongst them are two, with whom I have special personal links.

Mrs KATHLEEN GARRARD was the sister of Flight Sergeant Laurence Seymour Jamieson, the bomb-aimer on my uncle’s aircraft. The crew were all lost on the Trappes raid 31st May/1st June 1944 when shot down by a night-fighter. Although we’ve never met, I have kept in contact with her and the Jamieson family over the years since finding them whilst doing the research on my uncle. The Jamieson’s originated in the Shetland Islands, where young Laurence was born. He emigrated with his mother and father to China where his father set up a Pilotage Association called the Woosung-Hankow Pilot Association in Shanghai. That’s where Kathleen was born, later moving to New Zealand with Laurence, and their other brother, John. Their father followed in 1937 when the Japanese bombed China. John remained in New Zealand, whilst Kathleen later moved to Australia.

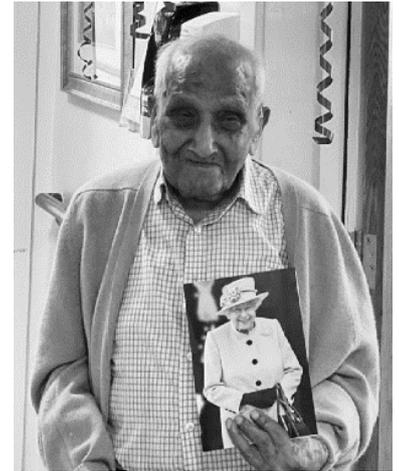
Secondly, **Mrs JEANNE GEARING**, was sister-in-law to the Flight Engineer, Sergeant Len Gearing, on the same aircraft. Jeanne, her husband Don and other brother Bert, along with his wife, Rita, have been personal friends and great supporters of The Mildenhall Register ever since I made contact with them in 2003. Len Gearing was a talented football player and worked at the Ford factory in Dagenham before enlisting. He played with none other than Alf Ramsey at one time and would surely have made the England squad if it hadn’t been for the intervention of the war. Both brothers and their wives came out to Lormaison in France when the villagers erected a memorial to the crew.

I was very sorry when I received the e-mail from Monica Walsh, concerning one of The Register’s greatest enigmas, Mr. **CYRIL BADOL**.

Monica, one of his two daughters wrote: *“It is with great sadness that I send this email to you to inform you that our dad Cyril Badol passed away on 1 Apr 20. He reached 100 on 21st Mar and although we had to cancel all celebrations planned due to the current situation he was well and happy on the day. He even had his birthday card from the Queen”.* For years, we’ve been trying to unravel his history

and service. Hindered as he was with profound deafness, even the family (who have been great supporters of him and The Register over the years) had been unable to decipher what he had done in the war.

We were pretty sure he'd served with either 90 Squadron or 149 and eventually, with the help of his RAF records, Alan Fraser was able to give his family the definitive story behind this charming old gentleman. This story is rather full of RAF service jargon, letters and numbers, so for clarity I've summarised it here, using Alan's excellent research as the basis.



Cyril Solomon Badol had been born 21st March 1920 in Spanish Town, St. Catherines, Jamaica where he grew up. By the start of the war, he was working as a clerk there and the war rolled on around him, but was far away.

He eventually volunteered and his attestation took place in Jamaica where he was taken on as an ACH/Clerk/GD recruit on 22nd November 1944. His first posting, after this initial recruitment stage, still in Jamaica, appears to have been to Base 32, which was at Mildenhall.

His Record of Service notes that he may only serve south of the Midlands for the first 6 months and anywhere in England or Wales thereafter. Presumably this was due to acclimatization issues, although there was a Malaria 'probationary' period of 6 months for all those from West Africa or the Caribbean.

Three months later he was posted to Tuddenham, in support of the squadron's based there. He remained here until after the end of hostilities when, in November 1946, he was again posted to 149 Squadron, now based at Stradishall. They were operating Lancaster IIIs and had detachments to Shallufah, Egypt.

He was re-engaged for a further 4 years in December 1946. It is unsure how his hearing was actually damaged, but this seems to have blighted the remainder of his service until his final discharge, on health grounds, in December 1951.

He did manage to tell me once, confirmed by his daughters, that he had worked at the RAF museum at Hendon in later life. He lived just across the road from this wonderful place, so it was an easy commute to work. We know he very much enjoyed his time there.

So, finally, after many years of trying, we'd found the truth about this wonderful old gentleman who, with his family, had graced the reunions for so many years.

CECIL "CHICK" H. CHANDLER trained, as a flight engineer, at No.4 (Air) Engineering School, at St. Athan, South Wales. On qualifying, he was promoted to the rank of sergeant, awarded an "E" flying brevet and posted to No.1651 Heavy Conversion Unit, at RAF Waterbeach, where he joined the crew headed by Sergeant Oliver Brooks (later squadron leader, DFC). The crew, as with all bomber crews, had been formed at Operational Training Unit, but official policy

dictated that flight engineers took a separate course and joined a crew at H.C.U. Having completed their training at H.C.U. “Chick” Chandler and his crew were posted, on 1st October 1943, to No.XV Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall, where they operated on Short Stirling four-engine bombers.

On the night of 22nd November 1943, “Chick” and his crew were detailed for an attack against Berlin. Although Bomber Command detailed a total of 764 aircraft, including 50 Stirling bombers, “Chick”, along with his six fellow crew members and was the only crew/aircraft representing No.XV Squadron on this raid. It was also the last raid in which No.XV Squadron flew Short Stirling bombers against the German Fatherland.

On 1st January 1944, “Chick” and his crew flew their first training flight on an Avro Lancaster bomber, to which No.XV Squadron was converting. Sixteen days later, on the night of 20th January, “Chick” and the crew flew their first operational sortie on the aircraft, an attack against Berlin.

The night of 24th/25th March 1944, was to become known in the annals of Bomber Command as *‘The night of the strong winds’*, due to the fact the crews experienced wind forces far greater than those forecast, and many aircraft were blown off track. However, “Chick” had reason to remember that night for another reason. As his aircraft was flying over Denmark, on the return leg of their attack against Berlin, without warning the cockpit canopy imploded with a deafening roar. As the canopy erupted, shards of metal and glass flew into the cockpit area, followed by the twisted, bloody, lifeless form of a large bird. It was a bit ironic that a crew member, known to everyone as “Chick”, had the unenviable task of clearing up the resulting mess. *(Although by some accounts, this is disputed. At the time, no one knew that migrating birds flew at these operational heights, nor that they flew by night. I have no doubt that Chick’s account is accurate. Ed.)*

A month later, on the night of 22nd/23rd April 1944, “Chick” and the crew participated in an attack against Dusseldorf. Having dropped its bomb load, the aircraft was attacked by a night-fighter which set the port inner engine ablaze. Seconds later, a predicated heavy flak shell (88mmm) exploded immediately beneath the still open bomb doors. The resulting vortex of the explosion reverberated in both directions along the length of the fuselage, killing the bomb aimer, mortally wounding the wireless operator and causing other non-life threatening injuries to some other members of the crew.

“Chick” had a lucky escape when he leant forward in his seat, seconds before another flak shell exploded outside the cockpit, sending a lump of shrapnel into the aircraft, which sliced through the back strap of his parachute harness.

Although the aircraft should have fallen out of the sky, with “Chick’s” help, the pilot nursed the aircraft back to the English coast and crash-landed at RAF Woodbridge.

The following month, during May 1944, “Chick” was posted to No.622 Squadron, where he joined the crew headed by Flying Officer “Tommy” Hargreaves, who

was later to be promoted in the rank of flight lieutenant and be awarded a DFC. On the night of 5th/6th July, “Chick” was participating in an attack against Wizernes, a V-weapon site. During the flight he became aware of another Lancaster flying parallel with his own aircraft and just off to the starboard side. As he looked at the other aircraft, it suddenly disintegrated into a ball of fire, before his eyes, having been attacked from below by an enemy night-fighter, equipped with “*Schrage Musik*”, the upward firing cannon.

Although the enemy night-fighter turned his attention to “Chick’s” aircraft, the German pilot broke off the engagement after the third unsuccessful attempt. Unfortunately for the German pilot, as he broke away from the fight, the rear gunner on “Chick’s” crew managed to take aim on the enemy aircraft and shot it down; for this action, the rear gunner was granted the award of an Immediate Distinguished Flying Medal.

“Chick” Chandler is known to have flown seventeen operational sorties whilst serving with No.XV Squadron, including four to Berlin, three to Stuttgart, one to Nuremburg and one to Schweinfurt.

Following his posting to No.622 Squadron, “Chick” added a further nine operational sorties to his log book, all of which, with the exception of an attack against Gelsenkirchen, were against German forces in France; the latter being part of the on-going assault following the D-Day landings. During August 1944, “Chick” Chandler was posted away from No.622 Squadron.

Away from the wartime period, “Chick” enjoyed being a highly valued and popular member of a local golf club near his home in Alton, Hampshire, where he was affectionately known to all as “Pops”. Over the years, some of those members took it upon themselves to act as driver to “Chick” and conveyed him comfortably and safely to squadron reunions and/or other related events.

Martyn Ford-Jones

(Not just at our Reunions, but at many Bomber Command and 622 Squadron events, Chick will be sorely missed by all who knew him. Ed.)

I was also advised that Flight Lieutenant **KENNETH 'Ken' FISHER**, Pilot, No.XV Squadron, who undertook his pilot training at Clewiston, Florida, in the United States has died.

On completion of his training in America, Ken was posted back to England and following the usual service procedures reported to No.26 Operational Training Unit, based at RAF Wing, Buckinghamshire, on 27th June 1944; it was at Wing that Ken formed his crew. Having mastered the technicalities of flying twin-engine Vickers Wellington bombers, Ken and his crew were posted to No.1651 Conversion Unit based at Woolfox Lodge, Rutland, where they converted to four-engine bombers.

As 1944 gave way to 1945, Ken and his crew began to prepare for a posting which would introduce them to flying on operational sorties. This posting came

on 10th January 1945, when Ken and his crew reported for duty with No.XV Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall. Eleven days after their arrival at the Suffolk airfield Ken and his crew flew their first operational sortie, accompanied by the officer commanding No.XV squadron, Wing Commander Nigel Macfarlane. Nigel Macfarlane was a very popular squadron commander who made it his policy to try and fly with every new crew on their first operational sortie after reporting to No.XV Squadron.

Sometime between leaving No.1651 Conversion Unit and arriving on XV Squadron, on an unspecified date, Ken Fisher was promoted to the rank of Flight Sergeant but was, a few weeks later, on 27th January 1945, commissioned in the rank of Pilot Officer.

For Ken and his crew, flying operationally against enemy targets began in earnest on the night of 28th January when they attacked the railway marshalling yards six miles south-east of Cologne. Although one aircraft was lost to enemy action, the remaining ten aircraft, including Ken Fisher's, returned safely to Mildenhall. The next night Ken and his crew were detailed to join ten other aircraft and crews for a daylight attack against the marshalling yards at Krefeld. On this occasion all the participating aircraft and crews returned safely to base.

On 7th February, Ken and his crew were amongst a total of thirteen crews detail to bomb the Benzoyl oil plant at Wanne Eickel in the Ruhr. Three aircraft returned early, but the remaining bombers endured the icing and thick cloud, and planted their respective bomb loads as instructed. The following day, Ken and his crew commenced a period of fourteen days leave; their first period of free time since joining the squadron.

On returning to duty, Ken and his crew resumed operational flying on 22nd February, with an attack against the coking plant at Buer, Germany. Although a number of aircraft received damage due to accurate and intense flak, Ken, his crew and aircraft returned to base unscathed.

Around the end of February Ken Fisher was promoted in the rank of Flying Officer, he 'celebrated' by undertaking operational sorties against targets in Kamen, Cologne, Dessau, Datteln, Buer and Dortmund; following which a further period of fourteen days leave was granted, commencing on 13th March. Further operational sorties were carried out through the rest of March and into April, with no untoward issues or problems relating to either the aircraft or crew being reported.

With the Allied Forces advancing eastward, and British Ground Forces being on German soil, some RAF bomber squadrons carried different consignments in the bomb bays of their aircraft; instead of bombs they carried food panniers, the contents of which were dropped at pre-designated 'drop zones' in order to feed the starving Dutch people. These food drops were given the designation of 'Manna' operations, and Ken and his crew undertook two of these sorties, on 2nd and 7th May 1945 respectively. It was during this same period of time that Ken Fisher was promoted in the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Following the surrender of the German Forces on 8th May, Ken and his crew participated in two 'Exodus' operations (the repatriation to England of British prisoners of war held in European camps), three 'Dodge' trips (repatriation of former prisoners of war held in Italian camps), and four 'Baedeker' trips (carrying ground staff from RAF Mildenhall on flights over bombed German cities and towns). Each Lancaster aircraft carried five passengers, giving those members of ground staff the opportunity of seeing for themselves how their work had contributed to the war effort.

Having completed a total of twenty-two operational sorties, four 'Exodus' trips, three 'Dodge' trips, two 'Manna' trips and two 'Post Mortem' exercises (pseudo bombing trips), Flight Lieutenant Ken Fisher was posted from No.XV Squadron.

Ken Fisher was a keen and ardent member of the Mildenhall Register, this is a fitting tribute to his memory. Martyn R. Ford-Jones

W/O RAY (Vic) FRANCIS – 622 Squadron - Ray was born on the 16th September 1923 in Birmingham and had one brother and sister.

When his Mother died when he was seven, the children along with his Father went to live with their Grandmother.

He attended Gower Street Senior Boys School where he passed the exam for Birmingham School of Art. Ray excelled at drawing and retained that passion well into his late eighties. Unfortunately due to family finances he had to refuse his place.

So at the age of 14 he took a position in an office in Birmingham. Two years later he saw from the window a certain young lady going to the post, her name was Brenda. That was the start of Ray's love affair that lasted 74 years. They married at Sheldon Church on the 30th June 1945 and were blessed with two daughters.

In 1943 Ray joined the RAF and was selected for flight engineer training. After his period of training he joined the crew of an Australian, F/Lt Ray Trenough DFC. Below, right, Ray Francis, is sat front left on the bomb.

As a crew they completed a 'tour' of operations from January- August 1944. Perhaps the most memorable of his operations was the infamous Nuremburg operation on 30/31st March 1944. 95 aircraft were lost on a disastrous night for Bomber Command.

The 'Trenouth' crew were flying their usual Lancaster GI-B 'Beer' with a foaming pint of beer proudly



painted on the nose section along with the numerous bomb tally markings. Whilst still climbing over the English Channel the bomb aimer reported the first combat.

B 'Beer' was on course flying at 19,000 feet over France when the flak opened up whilst weaving skilfully through the flak barrage. Streams of red tracer became frequent, seeming to hang in the air until arching over and down like water from a hose. Alarminglly the Lancasters started to go down with regularity, starting with a flash of fire, growing in intensity until the stricken aircraft exploded into a mass of blazing clumps. With the danger increasing, the pilot called upon all his experience and decided that the safest place would be to be above all other aircraft. The whole crew was now living on their nerves and they realised that to survive this mission they would have to conjure up every ounce of their training and comradeship as a crew.

Both gunners rotated their turrets ceaselessly in an attempt to spot the enemy fighters first. Ray stood beside the pilot and searched the night sky in readiness to warn his skipper of impending danger. The MUG spotted the first of the enemy fighter encounters in the mid upper turret and he ordered an immediate corkscrew starboard. The rear turret fired off a burst of tracer that mingled with that of the enemy fighter as it dived away into the night sky. The rear gunner who gave the pilot the instruction to corkscrew starboard announced the second encounter.

F/Lt Trenouth threw the Lancaster into a violent corkscrew manoeuvre, the 'G' forces pinned the rear gunner down in his turret and subsequently he was unable to fire. The evasive manoeuvre had forced the belted ammunition in four tanks halfway down the fuselage into the chutes and jammed the servo feed at the bottom of the turret, blocking the guns from firing. The skipper sent the wireless operator back into the fuselage with a portable bottle of oxygen to pull the belts of ammunition back into their tanks. Some time passed and Ray Trenouth decided to check on the wireless operator's progress via the intercom. On receiving no response he sent Ray back to investigate where he found the wireless operator unconscious from lack of oxygen. He dragged him back to the rest bed and plugged him in to the main oxygen supply. The crew eventually reached the run in for the target with a height of 25,000 feet showing on the altimeter. The bomb aimer identified three blazing areas and he skilfully guided the pilot to the bomb release point.

The rear gunner reported the sensation of the aircraft diving down however; the cockpit instruments suggested that they were not. The sudden realisation that the Lancaster had 'iced up' brought another danger to the already stressed crew and Trenouth called for Ray to help. Ray did not respond, the now recovered wireless operator went to investigate. In a reversal of the earlier incident, Ray was found unconscious on the floor and he was dragged to the rest bed and plugged into the main oxygen supply.

Lancaster 'B' Beer touched down on the runway at Mildenhall after seven hours and twenty-five minutes of intense combat action. As the crew dropped out of the

Lancaster they took off their parachutes and lit up their cigarettes. Ray and the wireless operator were taken away to be treated for oxygen starvation, the rest of the crew would attend a de-briefing. That night the crew could not sleep as they recalled their lucky escape and contemplated images of the operation.

Post war Ray took over the family business named J.K. Francis and Son Export Packers and Case makers and sold it when he retired. He had made it successful and became well known in that business world and other societies connected.

In 1954 they bought their first house and moved to Solihull with their two girls and made it their home for many years. They moved to Barford and later Warwick where Ray became part of Rotary which he loved. In later years he moved back To Solihull to an apartment where they were very happy.

Ray was blessed with four grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Ray's daughter Dee wrote: *"He was a wonderful Father and I loved him very much. I am so glad that he will be honoured on the Roll of Honour. One of the finest things in his life was the RAF"*

Howard Sandall. 622 Squadron historian.

Richard Gerard wrote in with the sad news that his father, **TONY GERARD** passed away December 2019. For many years he was a subscriber to both The Mildenhall Register and 7 Squadron newsletters, plus, until about 5 years ago, he used to attend the annual functions.

John Anthony ("Tony") Gerard, who died on the 19th December 2019, was a Flight Engineer with 90 and 7 squadrons flying operations in 1944-45.

Tony was brought up and lived in West Kirby, Wirral where he grew his love of sailing with his Father, racing boats on the River Mersey.

At school he joined the Air Training Corps, before signing up for the Royal Air Force. His assessment and medical took place at Liverpool.

Tony was called up in November 1943. He went to initial training wing at RAF Bridlington for six weeks, before going to RAF Locking/Weston-Super-Mare for further training. A course at RAF St Athan followed.

At No. 1660 Heavy Conversion Unit, Swinderby, Tony joined Kip Proome's crew. As a new member of the crew, navigator Tom Saunders was detailed to help him settle in. Subsequently they would pass many of their off duty hours together, sometimes walking to Barton Mills from their operational station at Tuddenham to cadge a lift to Newmarket or Cambridge. In Cambridge they'd take a canoe out on the Cam, have tea in a little café in Market Square or go to the cinema.

At Swinderby, the crew were flying Stirlings to become used to handling a heavy bomber. They then progressed to No. 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston to convert their operational type.

A posting to No. 614 Squadron at Scampton followed, but the Squadron had

already moved and, in November 1944, Tony's crew went to No. 90 Squadron at Tuddenham instead. They weren't on the station long before enjoying two weeks leave.

Their tour began 15th December 1944 with an operation against Siegen, but the force was recalled because bad weather prevented their fighter escorts from taking-off. 90's Lancasters jettisoned their unfused bombs into the sea to bring down their all up weight for a safe landing at base.



Tony Gerard, far left, above, with crew and groundcrew.

Due to its railway yards, Siegen was the target again the following day and on this occasion the operation went ahead. This was part of the transportation plan and railway yards would feature frequently on the list of targets Tony would attack. Even with aircraft fitted with the G.H. navigation/bombing aid it was difficult to hit such targets effectively, particularly in the poor winter weather conditions, so some targets were revisited more than once. It didn't help that the Germans were efficient at repairing the damage.

It wasn't just enemy action that posed a danger to aircrews, Tony's aircraft was forced to take evasive action over Vohwinkel on New Year's Eve 1944 to avoid a collision with another Lancaster.

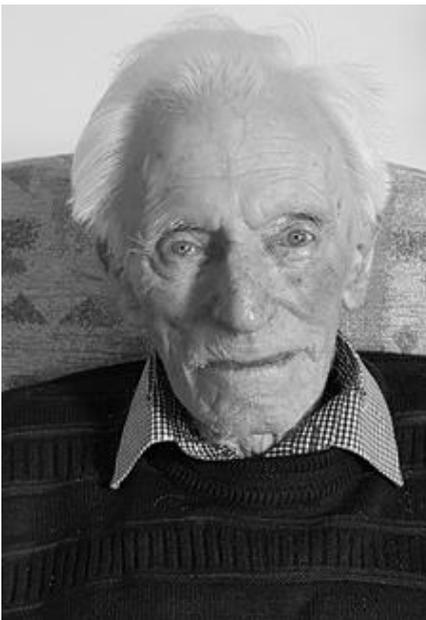
Five days later the Luftwaffe dispatched fighters which attacked 90 squadron Lancasters on a trip to Ludwigshafen. Some aircraft were damaged in action. Tony's crew came under attack from an Me 109 at 15.10 hrs whilst following their G.H. lead aircraft on the bomb run; a time when they could not take evasive action. The fighter fired on the Lancaster from dead astern and broke away. Despite some hydraulics to the turrets being unserviceable, the air gunners (Sgt. Davies & Sgt. Gillies) returned fire. Some 500 rounds were expended, but no

definite damage could be claimed. Flak also menaced the Squadron that day, bringing down one Lancaster and damaging others including Tony's.

In February 1945 the crew were posted to No. 7 Squadron part of the Pathfinder Force dropping target markers. They flew four operations before returning to 90 Squadron. During this time, he remembered an incident involving his motorbike which he lent to a colleague who had an accident with a police car. The bike had to be written off; Tony had only ridden it once.

The crew finished their tour of operations with a sortie to bomb the naval base, airfield and the town on Heligoland. There followed trips to drop supplies to Dutch civilians at the Hague on Operation Manna, and flights to bring home prisoners of war from Europe as part of Operation Exodus.

From 90 Squadron at Tuddenham, Tony was posted to RAF Valley. He was posted overseas, to drive lorries in Iraq. Tony made the return voyage to the Britain, landing in Liverpool and a posting to RAF Burtonwood followed. In all, Tony's logbook reveals 23 Operational missions, plus his 33 (prior) training flights and also 38 other flights! – So, 94 flights in all covering 163 hours of daytime flying and 93 night hours.



After being demobbed Tony went into banking in Liverpool until he retired, along the way he married Mavis and had a son Richard.

However, his main enjoyment in life was to race sailing boats on the River Dee at West Kirby Sailing Club and his beloved Fife yacht 'Fleur' on the Menai Straits at the Royal Anglesey Yacht Club in Beaumaris. He also kept in very close touch with his Lancaster crew and looked forward very much to the annual veterans reunions.

I'm most grateful to the IBCC Lincoln for allowing me to use parts of a taped interview with Tony, which they had recorded in 2018. With further contributions from

Sam Mealing-Mills, the 90 Squadron historian and Richard. (Ed.)

Flt Lt LES HARLOW 'C' Flight No.218 (Gold Coast) Squadron. 1944-1945

Les was already an accomplished and skilled pilot when he joined No.218 (Gold Coast) Squadron in November 1944 having served as a flying instructor for much of the early war. Not wishing to 'miss-out' he applied for front line service in mid-1944. Having instructed on twin-engined trainers the move to four-engine heavies would have been something Les would have relished.

After a spell at 1653 Conversion Unit and 3 Lancaster Finishing School, he and his crew arrived at a time when No.3 Group was establishing itself as an independent bomber Group thanks to the introduction of the blind bombing aid G-H. Les and his crew, who became known as the 'Harlow Mob' began their tour on November 23rd 1944 against Gelsenkirchen. Their next operation they were

given the GH Leader role on account of Les's previous flying experience! From that day on every operation flown by the 'Harlow Mob' was in the GH Leader role. On three occasions they flew as Group and Deputy Group GH Leader and No.31 Base Leader. Les was awarded a DFC in November 1945 for the operation against the Steel Works at Witten on December 12th 1944 when the 'Harlow Mob' led No.3 Group. The crews 32nd and last operation was on April 20th 1945 when they successfully bombed Regensburg.

In June 1945 Les was posted to No.108 Transport Squadron flying Dakotas, there then followed an oversea posting to Australia with No.243 Squadron. Here he served until February 1946 when he returned to the UK.



On leaving the RAF he became a civilian pilot, he eventually joined British Airways and became the companies, Chief Pilot, for many years. Les was an unassuming, modest man who I had the pleasure of meeting at the association reunions. Softly spoken, this hid a steely determination that made him one of the squadron's prominent skippers, and his crew one of the most successful.

Steve Smith 218 and 3 Group historian.

Les' daughter sent me this tribute which appeared in the local press, with the lovely picture of her father in later life.

Loving husband of Mary, the love of his life for 77 years, and beloved Father of Cathy and Pam. Passed away peacefully at Malden House, aged 99. Also treasured Grandie to Claire, Nicky, Alex and Maddy and proud Great Grandfather of eight.

Incredible life: decorated WW2 RAF

Lancaster pilot, Chief Pilot with British Airways until retirement in Sidmouth 39 years ago. Ex-Captain of Veterans at Sidmouth Golf Club, member of All Saints' congregation. Keen sportsman and all-round gentleman. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Steve Smith 218 Squadron and 3 Group historian & Cathy.

We have had a few former 419 (Moose) Squadron veterans over the many years of The Register and **P/O JOHN B HIGHAM DFC** was, sadly, the last.

Details of his early service and the commendation which follows were found on the Squadron website and are reproduced with their full agreement.

P/O John Brock Higham, (J7080) – was born in Boharm, Saskatchewan in 1920. His family made their home in Assiniboia. He enlisted in Calgary on the 2nd July 1940. Trained at No.1 ITS, No.12 EFTS, and No.5 SFTS. Was then posted to No.419 (Moose) Squadron. He was commissioned in September 1941. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross effective 6 August 1942 as per London Gazette dated 21 August 1942 and AFRO 1413/42 dated 4 September 1942. The citation reads: -

One night in July 1942, this officer was captain of an aircraft which attacked Dusseldorf. When approaching the target area one engine of his aircraft failed and caught fire. Despite this, Pilot Officer Higham resolutely flew on and successfully bombed the target in the face of considerable opposition from the ground defences. On the return flight the aircraft began to lose height until Pilot Officer Higham ordered certain equipment to be jettisoned. He was thus able to maintain height at some 2,000 feet and eventually succeeded in flying the damaged aircraft back to a base in this country where he made a skilful landing. Throughout, this officer displayed great determination and devotion to duty.

This is a sketch drawing of him reproduced courtesy of the Canadian War Museum's records. The sketch was made by Mr D K Anderson allegedly in 1939. However, according to the 419 'Moose' Squadron website, he wasn't awarded the DFC until 1942. So this is obviously drawn sometime after that.



Dan Logan, who runs the 419 Squadron commemorative website also pointed me in the direction of this tribute to John Higham, which gives a further insight into his life:-

'Passed away around 1am on June 18 at home, in his own bed, just the way he wanted to. He was three weeks shy of 100. He wanted no funeral or

memorial service but that doesn't mean we won't have a party in memory of him once Covid has been beaten. He didn't ban family reunions!

He was once asked to send an author bio for a poem he wrote, and this is what he wrote for himself: "*John Higham is a retired pilot who currently spends his time whittling, woodworking and picking up new hobbies, from surfing the web to ramping up his cooking skills.*" That describes him well; short and sweet. He excelled at any hobby he put his mind to.



He also excelled at caring for and taking an interest in the people in his life - whether family, friends, or

colleagues.

John flew 20 different aircraft in his aviation career starting out with flying lessons in a Fleet Finch with the RCAF. He flew 30 combat missions in the Second World War and joined TCA/Air Canada on loan from the air force in 1944. He flew there for 33 years and retired on the B747 Classic.

John will be missed by all who knew him'.

His family tribute courtesy of the Wall-Custance Funeral Home Ltd. website.

ISAAC (Ike) HILL was the Navigator on the same crew as the late 'Jock' Buntin. Captained by Flight Sergeant C F Merrit, the full crew for their first Operation was

Flt Sgt Merrit C F Pilot; Sgt Hill I Navigator; Sgt Dane G A Air Bomber;

Sgt Reeves J T Flight Engineer; Sgt Hanks G C Wireless Operator;

Sgt Harding P J Mid Upper Gunner; Sgt Buntin M Rear Gunner.

The squadron ORB records: - Operation. 19/3/45 OJ-J Lancaster I serial NG224

Target – Gelsenkirchen. Take off from RAF Methwold at 12.38, landed at 18.23.

Bomb load 1 x 400lb Tritonel (Cookie), 14 x ANM 64 TD 0.025. Weather - No cloud. The Engineer released the bombs over the target as the Air Bomber (Sgt Dane) was killed when the aircraft was damaged by flak.

| DATE | AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER | CREW | DUTY | TIME | | DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT | REFERENCES |
|------------------|------------------------|--|--|-------|-------|---|------------|
| | | | | Up | Down | | |
| 19th March cont. | LADO I. No. 224 | F/S Merritt, C.F. Sgt Hill, J. Sgt Dane, G.A. Sgt Reeves, J.T. Sgt G.C. Hanks Sgt Harding, P.J. Sgt Buntin, M. | pilot navigator air bomber F/engineer W/operator M/upper/gunner R/gunner | 12.38 | 18.23 | Target - GELSENKIRCHEN - Bomb load 1 x 4000 HC TRITONEL 1 x 500 ANM 64 TD .025. weather - no cloud. The engineer released bombs over the target as the air bomber was killed when aircraft was damaged by flak. | |
| | LADO I. NF. 973 | F/O J.A. White NZ F/S Boyle, J.M. F/S Wright, E.J. Sgt Aspinall, H. Sgt Baillie, W.H. Sgt Houlden, R. Sgt Grieve, W.J. | Navigator Air bomber F/engineer W/operator M/upper/gunner R/gunner Pilot | 12.34 | 18.26 | Target - GELSENKIRCHEN - Bomb load 1 x 4000 HC MINOL 2, 1 x 500 ANM 64 TD .025. weather - clear. Lots of smoke and flame seen. | |
| | LADO I. PA. 166 | F/L E.C. Rogers Sgt Cole, J.O. | Pilot Navigator | 12.27 | 18.30 | Target - GELSENKIRCHEN - Bomb load 1 x 4000 HC MINOL 2, 1 x 500 ANM 64 TD .025. weather - clear. Lots of smoke seen. | |

This part page from 149 Sqn ORB gives Sgt Dane's loss due to Flak.

The Bomber Command Diaries record the raid as: 79 Lancasters of 3 Group attacked the Consolidation benzoyl plant. Smoke and dust from the bombing prevented observation of the results. No aircraft lost.

A few years ago, in the company of John Johnston, author of 'Strong by Night' - the 149 Squadron history, I visited the Methwold site. John pointed out to me the spot where Sgt Dane's body was removed from the aircraft and the Bomb Aimer's cushions were removed and buried at the side of the perimeter track.

The crew 2nd Operation was on 22/3/45 OJ-D Lancaster I serial NF927

Target – Bocholt. Take off from RAF Methwold at 10.39, landed at 15.59. Bomb load 1 x 4000lb Tritonel (Cookie), 12 x 150 x 4lb Incendiaries. Weather - No cloud. Bombs landed in the middle of the town and whole of the town was covered in smoke.

The Bomber Command Diaries record the raid as:

100 Lancasters of 3 Group carried out a G-H attack on the town area with the intention of cutting communications. The town was seen to be on fire. No aircraft lost.

The crew's next five ORB mentions were in connection with Operation Manna and Operation Exodus.



Jock, Ike and Geoff (Hanks – the crew Wireless Operator) remained in touch for many years until the passing of first Geoff, then Jock and following them, Ike. The friends are shown with the rest of the crew. At the front (L to R) Jock, Ike and Geoff. Their friendships, forged in battle, never waned. Now the last of the three friends has passed.

Rest in Peace, Ike.

(An extra little snippet came in about Ike from his friend John Watts of Methwold Hythe, which I've included here. Ed.)

Ike died on 18th May 2020, peacefully in his sleep. May he rest in Peace. He had visited Methwold in later years and signed the book at St Georges Church, Methwold. The families of Ike Hill and Jock Bunten are still in close contact. In the enclosed photograph, if you look carefully, Jock is wearing a scarf. Ike's wife made all the crew a scarf but Jock never flew without wearing his scarf.

WARRANT OFFICER RON H. 'ROCKIE' KNIGHT; Wireless Operator/Air Gunner; XV Squadron, RAF Station Mildenhall.

It was with great sadness that the passing of Ronald H. Knight was announced on Monday, 13th April 2020.

I first met Ronald Knight, known more familiarly as Ron or 'Rockie' to his many friends, at a Mildenhall reunion back in the early 1980s. Tall, bearded and walking with a stick, it was impossible not to find 'Rockie' in a crowd.

Ron was born in Epsom, Surrey, on 8th November 1922. In 1938, at the age of sixteen, he was employed as a Carriage and Wagon Examiner on the railways. Three years later, in November 1941, he volunteered for service with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Ron was initially posted to RAF Padgate for 'kitting out' and basic training, before making his way to No.2 Wireless Training School based at Yatesbury, Wiltshire. In its day, Yatesbury was the largest and probably busiest RAF Camp, with a vast complex of wooden hatted accommodation.

Thousands of young men passed through the camp gates, and it was at Yatesbury that 'Rockie' qualified as a wireless operator, was awarded his flying brevet, and promoted to the rank of sergeant.

From Yatesbury, the newly promoted Sergeant Knight was posted to No.10 Air Gunners School based at Barrow-in-Furness, where he qualified as an air gunner before being posted to RAF Little Rissington, in Gloucestershire. From Little Rissington 'Rockie' was posted to No.9 (Observer) Advanced Flying Unit, at RAF Llandwrog, North Wales, before being posted to an operational training unit where he joined a crew being formed by Flying Officer Laurence Marshall. Laurie Marshall had been commissioned in the rank of Acting Flying Officer on 25th June 1944, presumably whilst still under training. From O.T.U. Flying Officer Marshall and his new crew were posted to No.1657 Conversion Unit, based at RAF Stradishall, Cambridgeshire, where they learned to fly the first of the four-engine heavy bombers, the Short Stirling. Mastering the technique of hauling this monster of an aircraft around the sky, the crew was then posted to No.3 Lancaster Finishing School, based at RAF Feltwell, Norfolk. It was at Feltwell that the crew learned how to operate the Lancaster under 'battle' conditions, by flying loaded climbs and 'Bullseye' exercises (simulated bombing raids on a specified target in England).

On 17th July 1944, Flying Officer Laurence Marshall and his crew were deemed 'combat ready' and posted to No.XV Squadron, based at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk. Apart from 'Laurie' Marshall as pilot and 'Rockie' Knight as wireless operator/air gunner, the rest of the crew consisted of Sergeants Tim Bates (navigator); Jack Kay (mid-upper gunner); Harry Jackson (rear gunner); Daniel "Ken" Kenny (flight engineer); the only officer on the crew was Flying Officer Les Ford, the bomb aimer.

During the first nine days of their time on the squadron the crew flew a number of exercises including familiarisation flights, 'Bullseye' exercises, loaded climb exercises and air to air firing exercises. They undertook their first operational sortie on the night of 28th July, when they, along with seventeen other crews, attacked Stuttgart. On return from this sortie, Sgt Harry Jackson recorded in his log book that their aircraft had been attacked by a Messerschmitt Me.110 night fighter, although no record of the attack was recorded in the Squadron Operational Record Book.

On the night of 25th/26th August 1944, 'Rockie' and his crew participated in an attack against the Opel motor factory in Russelheim, which was, according to Sgt Harry Jackson's log book, building V1 flying bombs. The bombing was reported as being well concentrated and accurate. During the twenty-four hour period of 14th October, No.15 Squadron attacked Duisburg twice, with F/O Marshall and his crew, including 'Rockie', participating in both attacks. The operation commenced when the first aircraft took-off at 06.41 hours, with 'Rockie' and his crew departing RAF Mildenhall ten minutes later, at 06.51 hours. Six hours and fifty minutes after taking off, 'Rockie' and his crew landed back at Mildenhall. Following the post-operational debriefing, a well-earned breakfast and equally

well earned sleep, the crews did it all again. At 22.08 hours that same night the crew took off for a second attack against Duisburg. 'Rockie' and the crew saw the target clearly and unleashed their bomb load in the vicinity of the docks reporting later, at their debriefing, that the fires and smoke could be seen at a distance of sixty miles on their return home. A total of 7,614 tons of high explosive bombs and a total of 1,320 tons of incendiary bombs were dropped during the course of the two attacks.

Between the dates of 27th July and 2nd December 1944, Ron 'Rockie' Knight completed a total of thirty-one operational sorties. Records show that he participated in a number of attacks against targets in France and Germany including Brunswick, Duisburg, Kamen, Le Havre, Neuss, Calais, Russelsheim, Stettin, St. Trond and Stuttgart on numerous others. During that same time period, in November, 'Rockie' was promoted to the rank of flight sergeant.

On completion of their tour of operational duty, 'Rockie' and his crew were granted a period leave, it was not until their return to Mildenhall that the crew were officially declared 'Toured Expired'.

Although the specific date is not known, 'Rockie' was promoted to the rank of warrant officer in November 1945 and subsequently posted to Egypt. Possibly in late 1946, having been posted back to England, he was sent to Oswestry, Shropshire for demobilisation (demob) from the RAF. Between 1947 and 1950 'Rockie' is recorded as having been re-employed in his former position as a Carriage & Wagon Examiner on the railways.

Ex-Warrant Officer Ron Knight did not walk away from the RAF and forget all about his service with XV Squadron. He joined the Mildenhall Register and was a regular attendee at the annual reunions held at the Suffolk base; he also attended many of the events held by the Squadron at RAF Laarbruch, when No.XV was based in West Germany and at RAF Lossiemouth after they had relocated to the Scottish airbase, near Elgin, Scotland. It was at Lossiemouth, in June 1995, on the occasion of XV Squadron's 80th anniversary, that 'Rockie' met two veterans of a later war, Flight Lieutenant John Peters and Flight Lieutenant John Nichol, pilot and navigator respectively, who survived being shot down and interrogated by Iraqi soldiers during the first Gulf War in 1991. A reminder of that occasion can be seen in a photograph in the book, Oxford's Own, Men and Machines of No.15/XV Squadron, Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force. Ronald (Ron) 'Rockie' Knight may have gone, but he will not be forgotten.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones

The Golaten Lancaster the Loss of W4355 LS – A of XV Squadron.

Early in 2020, I was contacted by Daniela Baumann, a young lady who lives in the small Swiss village of Golaten, Canton of Bern. She told me that her father, Fritz, had always wondered what had happened to the crew of the Lancaster which crashed into the fields of his father's farm in March 1944. Now retired, he wished to find out more about the crew, who, he now knew from internet

searches, all miraculously survived. Some evading internment, some injured others to be eventually repatriated.

The Lancaster had been tasked with bombing Stuttgart on the night of 15/16th March 1944. The raid planners had routed the attack far to the south over France, turning near Vesoul to cross the Rhine between Basle and Strasbourg to avoid flying over neutral Switzerland. It was here that numerous Luftwaffe attacks took place on the bomber stream. W4355 was attacked by a German fighter and severely damaged. The pilot, Flt Lt Blott, was injured and the cockpit was rendered virtually useless. It looked like they were doomed.

Remembering the story that Malcolm Gill wrote for the newsletter two years ago, I contacted him. Our records revealed that member Sophie Kaminarides was the daughter of the pilot, Flt Lt Walter Blott. I immediately contacted Daniela with the first two bits of good news and put Sophie and Malcolm in touch with her.

Since then a large amount of research has been done by all involved. Some by both the known family members in the past, with more by the Baumann family and myself as new facts and information came to light. I am most grateful to the Baumann family and Malcolm and Sophie for allowing me to use the material that they have discovered. Sophie in particular, had been through the debriefing records of the crew on their return to England. These were most enlightening.

'At Vesoul, route markings had been dropped by the Pathfinders. So the following bombers could see that they should now turn north-east, overfly the Rhine between Basel and Strasbourg and thus avoid neutral Switzerland. Navigator Nabarro reported that they had just passed the three markings on the ground. Blott turned north-east towards Stuttgart.

When they were 25 kilometers east of Vesoul, near the village of Athesans, Mattock, who was on watch in the Astrodome, saw the German night fighter very late. The enemy aircraft attacked them from below with their on-board cannon.

It hit the left wing tank and put the Rolls Royce Merlin inboard engine out of service. The cockpit also suffered, with instruments and fittings being unusable.

Pilot Walter Blott felt a sharp blow on his left elbow; a metal fragment had hit him on the arm. The bomber gunner John Millard and the rear machine gunner Denis Murphy were also injured.

Smoke was spreading in the cockpit. The bomber began to vibrate and Walter Blott could barely hold it. There were exploding anti-aircraft shells everywhere. They saw burning bombers falling from the sky like meteorites. It was the hell between heaven and earth.

Walter Blott now knew that he was going to lose the Lancaster bomber. He turned south and hoped that he and his crew could escape to neutral Switzerland in order to avoid captivity in Germany. During the war, neutral Switzerland often became a place of refuge for British and American flight crews who landed their wrecked planes in Switzerland. The crew had probably got rid of the bomb load via France.

Walter Blott ordered his crew to prepare for a parachute jump. The bomber then flew west of Saignelégier towards Lake Biel. It was a clear and cold night. They could see the hilly landscape, which was covered with snow well.

Now they flew over the Chasseral in the direction of Lamboing. There the injured Millard and Mattock parachuted out. They landed on a snow-covered meadow. The local guard saw this and rushed to the two parachutists. They took Millard immediately to the hospital in Neuchâtel. His lung was badly perforated. Until his recovery, shortly before Christmas, he stayed in the hospital (according to the hospital files).

After his release, he was officially reported as “fled”. This is how Switzerland protected its claims to neutrality.

Mattock stayed in Lamboing. The next morning he was taken to Nidau. Next out was William Forster, who jumped over Prêles. Forster was also brought to Nidau the next day. The Lancaster, partially under control flew on over Lake Biel.

Gill went next and landed on the south bank of the lake in the Lüscherz area. He buried his parachute and life jacket and headed south. In the morning, around 7 a.m., he arrived in Siselen. Without knowing that he was on Swiss soil. He was brought to the restaurant Sonne in Kallnach.

Walter Blott then flew in the direction of Golaten, turned right and flew over the “Grosses Moos” again. Before Kallnach, Nabarro and Murphy jumped into the cold starry night.

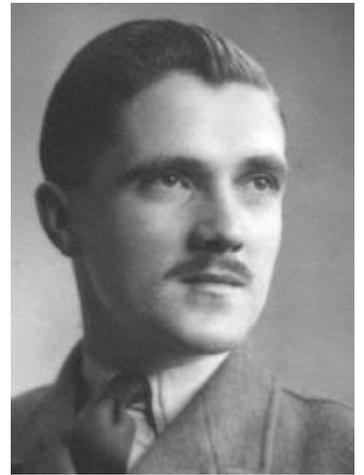
In the early morning Nabarro was found completely exhausted and frozen in the “Riedschritten”. People gave him warm tea and explained with words and hands that he was in Switzerland. He injured his leg because his parachute did not open properly.

Denis Muprhy was found at the edge of the forest north of the Kallnachwald. Impact with the frozen ground had injured his back. He was brought to Aarberg Hospital.

Fritz Köhli from Kallnach set off with his “Bockwägeli”(horse drawn carriage), taking blankets and a bed bottle with him to pick up Nabarro and take him to the hospital in Aarberg.

Blott was now the last on the plane, he had to get out. At this point in time, the pilotless bomber was on its way towards the Niederried reservoir (artificial lake).

It is presumed that Blott engaged the auto pilot and then jumped into the night. The pilotless Lancaster flew on over the Niederried reservoir. It brushed the treetops in the forest “Gummliwald”, turned in the direction of Hinterdorf Golaten, hit the meadow in the “Gummlli” and slid into the “Hoschtet” orchard, where it was torn to pieces and burned out. The crackle of ammunition could be heard clearly in nearby villages. However, it was not a battle with the crew, but machine gun cartridges exploding in the fire. It is also presumed that the bomb load was jettisoned somewhere over France after the fighter attack.



1st Row, L – R: - Pilot Walter Blott; Crash site from air 1944; M.U.G. Gordon Gill.
2nd Row, L – R: - Remains of tail turret; Crash site today; Nabarro or Murphy.
3rd Row, L – R: - Wrecked Merlin engine; Main U/c wheel; villagers & soldier.
4th Row, L – R: - Wreckage strewn through the orchard (2); View today.

Walter Blott, then aged 91, wrote this account to his daughter in 2012.

"I got out, my parachute opened, it was a clear night, the stars were shining in the sky. I sailed towards the ground, sad and afraid. I saw that the ground was covered with snow. My fear was, am I in Germany or in Switzerland?"

He must have landed in a wooded area as he continues: - *"It crackled from breaking branches. I hit my back on the ground in the snow. Except for the cut on my arm, I was unharmed. I lay or sat there for a few minutes, collecting my parachute, hiding it under a bush, and marching on a snow-covered path. Soon I came across a house with an overhanging roof. It was dark, no lights were on. I was desperate and wanted to find out where I was".*

(The house of the Mori-Hurni family on the Buttenrain as it is today).

"I knocked loudly on the door. Shortly thereafter, a woman with a little child opened the door. I asked "Here German?" She replied "No Switzerland". I was so relieved that I sat in front of the door and tried to explain to her that I was an English pilot and had just landed with a parachute. To prove to her that I was English, I showed her coins that I had in my pocket. Then her husband came home.



She called something to him and indicated that I should go with him. He took my hand and said something like "quick, quick". Immediately we were in the middle of the village. I saw a big house with lighted windows. It was the guesthouse 'Häberlis', which today is the restaurant Sonne. (Below) Inside the guesthouse



everything was full of smoke; many men were there.

The local shooting society had a general meeting. I was now the center of interest. The guesthouse keepers proudly showed me a bottle of Booths London gin they had. They gave me a couple of cognacs and bandaged my arm. I also got something to eat. At some point I went to bed on the upper floor. I could hardly sleep; I didn't know where my plane had crashed. Were there civilians there who were killed? I had only seen the blush from the fire in the sky.

In the morning a Swiss officer came in a car, asked for names, etc. Then he took Gill and me to the "rural" hospital in Aarberg in a car. There were already two more of my crew, Cedric Nabarro and Denis Murphy. There was a friendly head nurse who spoke English because she had worked as a nurse in England.

The local people brought us razors, toothbrushes, cakes and flowers. My stay in Aarberg lasted about ten days. The Swiss officer drove on with Gill to Nidau and picked up Forster and Mattock there. The three were taken to Bern".

The crew, minus Millard, who remained in hospital in Neuchatel, were reunited shortly afterwards at Hotel Gurten-Kulm, Bern (below, left). Here they were

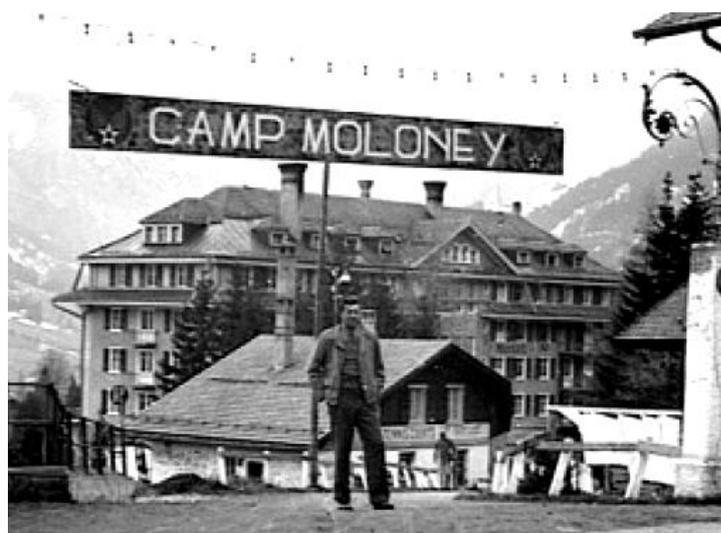


looked after with many other, mainly American crews. Walter thought they were a rude bunch! They were allowed to wander freely in the town.

From here they were transferred, in mid-April, to the large internment camp in Adelboden (below, right), named 'Camp Moloney'. There were a lot of American airmen in this hotel too.

Memories of Walter Blott continued: - *"We could move freely in Adelboden. There was also a local café where we could buy delicious cakes with coupons. I went to the embassy in Bern two or three times to do personal shopping.*

During this time other aircraft crashed in Switzerland and about six of us went to Vevey on Lake Geneva to act as pall bearers at a funeral of three or four of them. An emotional experience, all the local UK residents were there, they were enemy surrounded and marooned in Switzerland. After the ceremony we were entertained to tea and spent the night at a hotel before returning to Adelboden".



It was from here, on 12th May 1944, that Blott and Gill were chosen, as part of a repatriation exchange, to be returned to the UK. Six or eight internees were disguised as civilians, given passports and sent on their way as Swiss Diplomatic baggage!

They travelled to Basle, the crossing point into Germany, with a Swiss diplomat and a German officer. From there, via Baden-Baden, to Paris where they were met by an English speaking German. They travelled on by bus and crowded trains to the Spanish border town of Irún via Bordeaux. They were afraid to speak or move from their carriages, which were specifically for 'diplomatic baggage' because everyone was German. They even had to pee through the train windows!

Arriving in Spain, which wasn't at war, they stayed in San Sebastian before moving on to Madrid where they were joined by some British diplomats returning to the UK. They slowly crossed Spain by lorry with two overnight stops. One was awful, the second was at the bodega of Williams & Humbert (winery) which still exists to this day.

Blott finishes with the following: - *"We crossed the nearby frontier and were back*

to the war. Ugh! A few days in Gibraltar and then by air in a slow Dakota, going well west of France to Bristol (Lulsgate).

Home to Bedford for some leave, then reported back to the Air Ministry in London. They said we are sure you do not want to go back to bombing, and would you like to go to Montreal ferrying Lancasters built in Canada to the UK (Prestwick) and it transpired later a couple of B 25s - light bombers built in the USA. What an offer. What a contrast between war torn Europe and Canada”.

To complete the story, we find that Gordon Gill returned to the RAF training air gunners. We know that Cedric Nabarro and Denis Murphy returned to England in early October 1944. Mattock left Switzerland in November 1944. William Forster returned during Christmas week 1944 and lastly, John Millard went back home in the last week of 1944.

Sadly, despite pleas on the internet, we have been unable to find relatives of the other five members of the crew from that night. We don't know their stories or what became of them. So, if anyone knows of relatives or what happened to the rest of the crew, F/O Cedric Nabarro, Sgt. G. R. Mattock, W/O John Millard, Sgt. William Forster, and Sgt. Denis Murphy, please do get in touch.

Further obituaries to those who have passed away this year.

TOMMY KNOX, a Flight Engineer with 149 and 199 Squadrons passed away in Sydney on the 15th October. A Glaswegian by birth, Tommy moved to Australia in 1950, but retained his accent to the end.

He completed 40 operations, 22 with 149 Sqn, mostly low-level supply drops to the Maquis in France, and the rest on RCM duties with 199 Sqn. He was 95.

I'm most grateful to the pittwateronlinenews.com where I was able to gather a few more facts about Tommy. Ed.

Tommy was in a Reserved Occupation, apprenticed to the railways, but wanted to volunteer for Air Crew. The opportunity came when he was almost 18 years old and he went to the recruiting office in Edinburgh. Having passed all the tests he was placed on a waiting list. His call-up came when he was 18 and he was sent for training at No 4 School of Technical Training at St. Athan, South Wales.

Following his training and having passed out, he was posted to a 'Heavy Conversion Unit' (1657 HCU) at Stradishall, Suffolk. Here he converted from the twin engine Wellington onto the four engine bomber Stirling. And that's where the Engineer joined the crew. The crew consisted of two Australians, two Canadians, two English and me.

From Stradishall they moved to 149 Squadron at Lakenheath, Suffolk on March 15th 1944 and stayed there until the squadron converted onto Lancasters and they were transferred onto 199 Squadron, which was still flying Stirlings.

Tommy recalled in the interview: - *"I only flew in Stirlings. The engineer's job was very different in Stirlings to that of those flying in Lancasters and Halifaxes, and you had to specialise in one or the other and I specialised in Stirlings.*

This turned out to be very fortunate for me as we were taken off main targets while we were in the squadron; they were losing too many Stirlings, Stirlings couldn't get the high altitude and the Lancasters would unintentionally drop bombs on top of us. So they put us on Special Duties, which was great.

Our first operation was on 31 March 1944, mining Frisian Islands, subsequent ops included bombing, more mining and low level moonlit trips to supply the French Resistance fighters.

We used to drop canisters with ammunition and arms – anything that they needed we were dropping. It was very exciting. You used to go out by yourself, on moonlit nights, doing low flying, we would run in at about 200 feet and drop these supplies away in the middle of France somewhere. The navigators did a great job finding the fields where the resistance



fighters were. We were sent over on the 6th of June. We came in over France at low level to find the drop zone, I recall flying low over the paddock, and we were instructed to avoid any airfields because they were all occupied by the Germans. We had to look for three lights in a row and another light flashing a Morse letter – and that was the beginning of the “bombing” (supply canisters) run – that’s why we flew very low because they were actually map reading to find the paddock where we would drop the supplies.”

Tommy was awarded the Legion d'Honneur in September 2015 for the work they did supplying the Maquis during these operations, especially on June 6th 1944.



When the crew transferred to 199 Squadron, they were carrying out Electronic Counter Measures. “We would take on a Wireless Operator with a huge wireless setup with which to jam the Germans’ radar. We’d fly to the target and he’d use his wireless setup so the Germans

couldn't pinpoint the bombers. So we didn't drop any bombs we just orbited sending out these signals the whole time, and then would head back to base camp”

Having completed 40 operations Tommy was posted to No 30 M.U. at Sealand,

Cheshire as a draughtsman, to 'keep him occupied'. The war finished while he was there. He kept going up to look at the noticeboard and one day saw that they were looking for people to be parachute jumping instructors. He thought that would be good and would get him back to flying again.

He put his name down for a PTIS course and finished up as a jumping Instructor. He did his first jump from a balloon in February 1946 at Manchester and finished up training paratroopers in Palestine.

Demobilised in February 1947, he sailed home to Glasgow, where the only job he could find was shovelling snow on the streets. Having served with Australians he'd heard how good their homeland was. The attraction was enough for him to take the £10 Pom route out to Brisbane. Eventually moving to Sydney where he married and worked for a number of different companies in engineering roles.

He leaves behind three daughters, a son, thirteen grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. As he quipped at the end *"I tried to re populate the area!"*

When **Squadron Leader NORMAN WALTER's** son wrote in with the sad news of his father's passing he said; *"Like many veterans dad did not talk much about his bombing missions etc but was proud of the 622 Squadron role in operation Manna. He also talked about how moving it was repatriating POW's as part of operation Exodus."*

F/Lt Norman Walter- 622 Squadron - was born in July 1925 in Plymouth, the youngest of 5 children. His family lived near Plymouth Hoe and Norman spoke often, not only of a happy childhood, but of his enduring love for the city of his birth. This even stretched to a lifetime of loyalty to Plymouth Argyle FC!

His lifelong interest in planes and in the Airforce first began when, as a boy, he would watch seaplanes landing on Plymouth Sound. He spoke fondly of his trips to Plymouth Pier where his brothers taught him to fish. In common with all those of his generation, Norman's life was changed forever in 1939 by the outbreak of the Second World War.

His family suffered the great sadness of losing his older brother Arthur when his ship was sunk in 1942. As soon as he was old enough, Norman signed up to do what he considered his duty and found himself in the northeast of England being trained as an air gunner. He was soon to join the crew of a Lancaster bomber as part of 622 Squadron at RAF Mildenhall. So began a lifelong friendship with other members of his Lancaster crew.

Norman often spoke of how lucky he and his friends had been to join up in the latter stages of the war and to survive the heavy losses of Bomber Command. In late 1945 Norman was in one of the many allied aircraft dropping emergency food parcels over Holland in Operation Manna and he was subsequently posted to the Far East where one of the RAF's roles was to fly the surviving prisoners of war back to Europe - an experience he never forgot.

On returning to Devon, Norman chose to join the police force in Exeter. Fate was to intervene when Norman was one of many former airmen who received letters

from the Ministry of Defence offering the opportunity to re-join the Royal Air Force as a junior officer. He jumped at the chance and was posted to Singapore, writing amusing letters home and sending many postcards. So began what Norman often described as some of the happiest years of his life. He and Margaret began married life in Cornwall at RAF St Mawgan where their son Christopher was born and often enjoyed picnics on the lovely Cornish beaches.

Three years later they were posted to Cosford in Shropshire but with their daughter Penny only 9 months old, they were off again, this time to Gibraltar. Postings in warmer climates brought particular pleasure as Norman's great interest in sport included one of his favourite pastimes - playing tennis. He was still playing tennis many years later at the age of 65. Norman was rather sad when, in the late 1970s, it was time for his RAF career to draw to a close, but soon found himself packing once more - this time contracted to work in Saudi Arabia and then Oman.

When it was time to retire Norman was delighted to find himself living in his beloved Plymouth and the whole family were to spend very happy holidays in Devon. He loved nothing more than showing his grandchildren Oliver and Natalie the places near Plymouth Hoe and the beaches he had played on as a boy. Whilst he was fortunate enough to enjoy a long and healthy retirement, Norman and all his family were greatly saddened by the loss of his dear wife Margaret who passed away in early 2019 after a brief illness. After 63 years of marriage it was a heavy blow indeed and Norman struggled to regain his usual zest for life. His own health declined gradually and, after a very brief stay in hospital, he died peacefully in his sleep on 22 December at the ripe old age of 94. In his own words, he had been fortunate to live a long and happy life with a family he loved very much and a career he had greatly enjoyed.

There is no doubting that Norman was greatly loved by all who came to know him, always bringing humour and the warmth of his personality wherever he went. As mentioned by his closest family, to lose someone with such a loving and gentle soul is hard indeed, to have known them, a blessing.

Christopher Walter (Norman's son)

Memories of those Early Years

With Martyn announcing his retirement, I asked if he would pen something on The Register of the past. Ed.

"Way back in the mid-to-late 1970s, following a private visit to RAF Mildenhall, I wrote an article for my then in-house office newspaper. In an effort to gather some historical background material for the article, I put a few adverts in various newspapers and magazines, requesting help from anyone who served on the base during the Second War World. One of the earliest replies I received came from a gentleman in New Zealand named Graham 'Mick' Cullen. Not only had Mick served with XV Squadron at Mildenhall during 1943, on completion of his 'tour of ops' he married Brenda Jaggard, a local girl who was a barmaid at the

Bird in Hand Hotel and who lived in Beck Row. Mick advised me that a chap named Don Clarke, living in Bedford, England, was setting up a reunion, to be held at RAF Mildenhall, during the forthcoming month of May. I contacted Mr Clarke and, as they say, "The rest is history".

The idea to hold a XV Squadron Reunion at RAF Mildenhall seems to have first been mooted during the summer of 1980. Although it is believed the reunion was to comprise of former XV Squadron veterans and their wives and families (XV had occupied RAF Mildenhall between April 1943 to August 1946), members of other squadrons who had been resident at the Suffolk airfield during the war asked to be included in the event; thus the basis for the Mildenhall Register was formed.

The first reunion was held in a building named 'The Bob Hope Centre'. The venue was packed, and there I was standing alone, not knowing a soul, thinking, "*What have I let myself in for?*" A voice behind me saying, "*It's a good turnout, isn't it*", woke me from my musing. The voice belonged to a smartly-dressed gentleman, wearing slacks and a sports jacket; attached to the collar of the latter was a badge bearing the name Diamond. I immediately asked if his name was Frank Diamond, a navigator who flew with a New Zealand pilot named Hugh Wilkie. It was purely by co-incidence that prior to leaving home that day I had grabbed a few copies of extracts from the XV Squadron Operational Record Books, otherwise known as RAF Form 540s. These documents, recorded all the operational sorties undertaken by the squadron, together with posting movements to and from the squadron, of all the officers. The 540s in the folder under my arm were those relating to Frank Diamond and his crew; that revelation led to Frank and I becoming friends for many years, in fact up until he passed away. The incident also led to me getting to know many more of the wartime airmen in the room, all of whom wanting to know if I also had the records relating to them, individually, and their respective crews. During the course of the evening I managed to meet up with Mick Cullen, his wife Brenda and their family. I also gathered a respectable number of names and addresses of those I had met, would correspond with, meet at future reunions and ultimately become good friends with.

At the end of a tremendous evening, having had the honour and privilege of being in the company of these august and distinguished men, Don Clarke asked if I would like to attend the reunion the following year; I did not hesitate with an affirmative reply.

Such was the success of that first reunion, when between three and four hundred people attended, that future reunions were held in the original Galaxy Club, a single-storey structure not to be confused with the one in present use.

To somebody who had not experienced the wartime camaraderie, or the ever-changing emotional feelings that the Mildenhall Register veterans endured during their respective operational tours of duty, I personally found that the reunions at Mildenhall was not only a place to meet the veterans, but was also a

venue of living history.

During July 1982, over in West Germany, Wing Commander Edward 'Eddie' Cox took command of No.XV Squadron, at RAF Laarbruch; the following April the new boss, along with approximately 30 members of both air crew and ground crew attended the Mildenhall Register reunion. The proverbial 'icing on the cake' for the register members was that four squadron aircraft, three Buccaneers and one Hawker Hunter training aircraft, flew over from Germany for the occasion.

During WWII, the squadron flew a Short Stirling bomber, which had been named, 'MacRobert's Reply'. The name was requested by the benefactor, Lady Rachel MacRobert, who had privately purchased the four-engine bomber. The aircraft was Lady MacRobert's personal reply to the Germans over the loss of her three sons, one in a flying accident and the other two during operations against the Axis forces. The bomber carried the squadron code and identification letter, LS-F. The Stirling was to survive a very short operational period of service, from Oct 1941 to Jan 1942, before being written-off in a landing accident. Although a second Stirling bomber was hurriedly adorned with the same legend and code, this second aircraft was lost to enemy action, over Denmark, on the night of 17th/18th May 1942.

On the Saturday morning of the 1983 reunion weekend, Buccaneer aircraft, XT287, which Wing Commander Cox had piloted into RAF Mildenhall, was officially dedicated as 'MacRobert's Reply', and was adorned with the tailfin code letter 'F'. Just over forty-two years after the naming ceremony at RAF Wyton, in November 1941, Squadron Leader Peter Boggis, the original captain and pilot, officiated; 'MacRobert's Reply' was back in the skies. Thereafter, it became a custom that every aircraft on XV's inventory coded 'F', carried the legend; it was a tradition that was to last until XV Squadron was disbanded in 2017.

Later, during the formal part of the evening, Wing Commander Cox issued an invitation for members of the Mildenhall Register to visit XV Squadron at RAF Laarbruch during May the following year.

With all the necessary formalities approved and in place, a group of approximately 35-40 members boarded a coach at Victoria Coach Station, London, and headed for Dover for a ferry to Calais. Having travelled all day and crossed and re-crossed the Dutch/Germany border at least twice, we arrived at Laarbruch where a very enjoyable weekend awaited us.

Amongst our group there were veterans from XV Squadron, 622 Squadron and 149 Squadron; some with remarkable wartime stories. They included Flight Lieutenant Len Miller, DFC, pilot, who had been blown out of his aircraft, landed safely by parachute and evaded capture by walking to the French/Swiss border where he gained access into Switzerland by literally 'jumping' over the wire. Len later escaped internment in Switzerland, ventured back into France and with the help of Resistance units eventually got back to England. There was also Squadron Leader Oliver Brooks, a Lancaster pilot, whose aircraft suffered the effects of being attacked by a night-fighter and having an anti-aircraft shell

explode immediately under his open bomb bay doors. By sheer determination, Oliver flew the badly damaged bomber home with two dead and two wounded crew members on board. With thoughts of his two dead crew members, Oliver made the most dignified crash landing he possibly could. Squadron Leader Brooks was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions.

Another member of our group was Sergeant 'Steve' Stevens, an air gunner who was the sole survivor of his crew. Apart from knowing his crew mates had perished, Steve had no idea where they were laid to rest. On the Sunday morning of our trip, a Service of Remembrance was held in Reichswald Forest War Cemetery. On completion of the formalities, the members of the group were given twenty minutes to browse around the cemetery and left to their own thoughts. I noticed Steve Stevens amble off on his own, walking slowly and glancing at every headstone as he passed. Suddenly I saw him stop, lurch slightly forward and freeze on the spot. I went to ask if he was o.k. but as I came up behind him I could see over his shoulder that he was looking at the headstones of his former pilot and crew.

Needless to say, I backed away quietly, but kept within a suitable distance to render assistance should the need arise. It was an amazing co-incidence that Steve chose that row, between the headstones, to walk along, one row either side and he would not have seen those six headstones.

Some of the names of those characters I had read about in various books when I was young became reality when they started attending the Mildenhall Register Reunions. One of these characters was a man I had heard and read about, but never thought I would get to meet. Flight Lieutenant Douglas Cameron, DFM, was very quiet, mild-manner man and quite unique in his own way. Douglas, or 'Duggie', as he was known to his friends, was the only known man in the history of the RAF to have flown with four pilots, all of whom were awarded a Victoria Cross, and to have been flying with two of them operationally, on the nights which led to the awards being made. Duggie's first pilot was an Australian by the name of Rawdon 'Ron' Hume Middleton.

On the night of 27th/28th November 1942, Middleton and his crew participated in an attack against the Fiat Works in Turin, Italy. The crew consisted of Middleton as pilot, F/S Leslie Hyder, 2nd pilot, P/O George Royde, navigator, P/O Norman Skinner, wireless operator, Sgt James Jeffery, flight engineer, Sgt John Mackie, front gunner, Sgt Pete Gough, rear gunner and F/S Douglas Cameron mid-upper gunner. Having battled with the unreliability of the Stirling all the way to Turin, as Middleton lined the aircraft up on its bombing run, an anti-aircraft shell burst in the cockpit, blowing out his right eye and a portion of his face; the co-pilot also received severe injuries. Shortly after clearing the target area, Middleton regained consciousness and, even in his perilous state, took back command of his aircraft. The crew, working with the two pilots, assisted in getting the aircraft back to the English coast, where Ron Middleton ordered the crew to bale out. However, both Mackie and Jeffrey elected to stay on board in order to help their pilot after the aircraft had ditched into the sea; unfortunately, all three of them

perished. Flight Sergeant Middleton, RAAF, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Apart from Duggie Cameron, four other members of aircrew who had previously formed part of Middleton's crew, Pete Gough, A/G, Huia Russell, observer, James 'Jim' Coman and Norman Vickers attended the reunions. There was also a very pleasant surprise at one of the reunions when Mary Giddings, Ron Middleton's fiancée, also attended.

My wife, Valerie, and I often used to visit Duggie at his stone built cottage home at Braco in Perthshire, on our way north to visit No.XV Squadron in Lossiemouth. One on visit I was looking out of Duggie's front window, when he said to me, "*Apart from the colour of the paintwork, neither this room nor the view out of that window has changed since Ron Middleton stood where you are now*". It was a surreal moment and a shiver ran down my spine.

Coming to the end of a posting as a gunnery instructor at RAF Lossiemouth, Douglas Cameron was invited to join the crew being formed by a Canadian pilot named Ian Bazelgette, whom Duggie had flown with during his time at 'Lossie'.

In a bizarre twist of fate, circumstances led Duggie to being in similar circumstances to those on the night of 27th/28th November 1942. On the 4th August 1944, whilst undertaking a daylight attack on a V1 storage site at Trossy St Maximin, France, the Lancaster bomber in which Duggie was flying as rear gunner, came under enemy fire. Both starboard engines were put out of action and a fire started in the starboard wing and fuselage. With history repeating itself, Douglas Cameron found himself being one of four survivors, whilst his pilot and two other crew members perished. Just over a year later, on 17th August 1945, the award of a Victoria Cross to Squadron Leader Ian Bazelgette was gazetted. Such was the respect that Douglas had for both Middleton and Bazelgette that after the war, when his only child, a daughter, was born, he named her Margaret Middleton Bazelgette Cameron.

Although not on operational sorties, Douglas Cameron is also believed to have flown with Squadron Leader Roderick Learoyd and Flight Lieutenant Robert Palmer, both of whom were to be awarded a Victoria Cross.

At a later stage of our friendship Douglas gifted his 'best blue' uniform tunic, to me. Adorned with his air gunners' brevet, his five medal ribbons and the Pathfinder (eagle) badge attached to the top left hand breast pocket flap, it is permanently on display in my study, where I see it every day.

Another veteran who attended the Mildenhall Register reunions was Gordon Woolatt. Gordon was known to a few as a pilot on No.149 Squadron, but he was known to thousands of movie buffs as the co-pilot who sat next to Squadron Leader (later Group Captain) Charles Pickard in the 1941 film, '*Target for Tonight*'. The film was voted 'Best Documentary' film in 1941 and received an honorary Academy Award in 1942. After the war Gordon became an architect; as with the majority of his contemporaries, it was an honour to meet him at Mildenhall and later, visit his home, chat with him over lunch and listen to his

memories of the early years of World War Two.

So many other names come to mind from those early years of the Mildenhall Register, with so many other stories. Some have been recorded and published in a variety of RAF/Squadron related books. I feel both honoured and humble to have met and become friends with many of those veterans. Unfortunately time has taken its toll on their number, but time will not erase their memory or what they endured.

Don Clarke's hard work and enthusiasm over many years, reuniting the veterans who served at RAF Mildenhall, many of whom had not seen each other since being posted away from the Suffolk airfield, was recognised with the award of an MBE in 1991.

Although Don passed away on 22nd August 2011, I would like to record here that I will never forget his kindness in allowing me, an 'outsider', to attend that first reunion.

Thank you, Don, and thank you Mildenhall Register.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones, XV Squadron Historian (Retd)

More Musings

Have you ever wondered where the RAF got its blue uniform from? Or how the RAF ensign came about? Well, quite frankly, neither had I. So, the answer came out of the blue, so to speak. Using the extra spare time of lockdown, I began reading a book called 'Air Force Blue. The RAF in World War Two' by renowned author Patrick Bishop. There, in Chapter 2 were some probable answers to the first question and a definitive one for the second from non-other than Lord Trenchard himself.

Wishing to share this information with you all, I contacted Patrick Bishop, asking for permission to use the story as he tells it in the book. There was little hesitation, just so long as I credited him with the story. So here it is, complete as written, with thanks to Patrick Bishop and his publishers, Harper Collins for allowing its use.

"One afternoon in the middle of the war Group Captain Arnold Wall sat down to tea and biscuits with Lord Trenchard who was revered as the 'Father of the Royal Air Force'. Wall taught at the RAF Staff College and was preparing a lecture on the early history of the service. Among the questions he had for the great man were two that were 'pretty trivial', but which he 'felt personal curiosity about. The first was how it was that the RAF got its famous blue uniform.

There were 'two legends about this, both picturesque' in circulation, and he hoped Trenchard might be able to settle the matter once and for all. One claimed that in 1917 the textile mills of Bradford had received an order to weave a million yards or so of light blue cloth for the Tsar of Russia's cavalry. After the October Revolution, this was left on their hands. Thus, when the RAF officially came into being on 1 April 1918 there was a vast stock of surplus material going cheap that

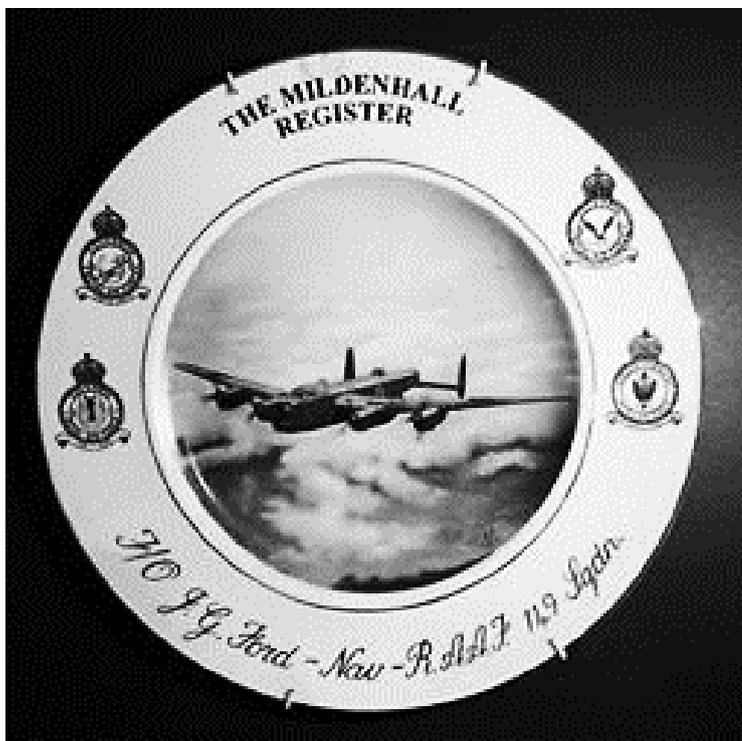
suited their requirements.

In the other version, the staff officer charged with choosing the colour was the beau of a musical comedy star named Lily Elsie, famous for starring in the London version of *The Merry Widow*. When samples were brought to him for a decision he decided to consult his girlfriend. *'This is it,'* she is alleged to have replied, picking out the shade that the RAF has worn ever since, *'because it matches the colour of my eyes.'* Trenchard was 'most apologetic' but could throw no light on the matter.

On the second subject — the origin of the RAF ensign — he was more helpful, saying *'Yes, yes. I can tell you something about that.'* Trenchard recalled his staff coming to him with a sketch of the design. It featured the RAF red, white and blue roundel, originally devised to deter trigger-happy Tommies from blasting at aircraft from their trenches, set on a sky-blue background. They warned him, however, that the Royal College of Heraldry had ruled the roundels unacceptable as they were 'not heraldry'. Trenchard resolved to take the matter up with the King. On his next meeting with him he brought the design along and explained the difficulty. *'Well, Trenchard,'* said George V, *'If it wasn't heraldry before it will be from now on! And he signed the drawing there and then.'*

I leave you to make your own minds up about the uniform, but, with Royal assent, I think we have to believe the second!

The Mildenhall Plate



Just after the newsletter went out last year, a post on our Facebook page from Anita J Penfold brought to light a long lost treasure. A commemorative plate which was manufactured by W Bates & Co of Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

Anita said "Hello, I'm researching a plate that was given to a John Giles Ford of 149 squadron. The plate also has the Badges of 15 and 622 squadrons on it. Can you please tell me how it came about that they are on the plate together? I've sent a photo of it. I'm from Australia and I'm a Lancaster lover. I look forward to

your reply. Anita."

Howard Sandall quickly told me that "These were presentation plates that you could order via the MR. I remember my uncle had one (622 Sqdn) hanging on his wall. Long lost now unfortunately. I remember the plate was mentioned in an early MR newsletter."

Howard and I both found the relevant newsletter, November 1993. It turns out that the plate was produced, amongst many, following an approach by the company, to our founding member, Mr Don Clarke, back in 1993.

Alan Fraser, the squadron historian then supplied the following information; 'As you can see, it was made for a F/O J G Ford, a Navigator with the RAAF serving with 149 Squadron during the war. His pilot was P.O. Witen. At that time they were flying in Lancaster OJ-B serial HK598. *(Sadly, because of printing constraints, I can only produce it in black and white, but I can assure you, in colour and full size, it is quite splendid!)*

A little bit of detective work resulted in finding the original manufacturer, who is still in operation! There followed a long chat with Bill, the designer of the plate and owner of the factory which produced them. I don't think he'll mind me mentioning that he is 80 plus years old these days and still not fully retired!

Bill remembers these well amongst the many commemorative items the factory has produced over their long years in production. He was very interested to hear about the Mildenhall Register and the fact we now include other squadrons associated with the base and its satellite fields.

The company can no longer produce these plates, but Bill did say that it might be possible to turn out something like a trinket box, with all the Squadron Crests on as a memento if there was enough interest shown.

I'd like to hear from anyone who might possess one of the originals, with a photograph too, please. You can send these to me electronically or through normal post to my addresses contained in the contacts list inside the back cover of the newsletter. I'd like to do a further item for the newsletter if possible.

A French Connection with thanks to Alan French.

"I am writing in response to the latest Newsletter and the item on 149 Squadron's role in Special Operations. The article has a drawing showing an operation on 23 June 1944 and as my father (Sgt Ronald V French) was flying on that operation I thought you might like the following which has been gathered from my own research and extracts from Sgt Ted Sweet's excellent book (Enemy Below) as he described the raid. As a matter of interest the aircraft originally reported to have crashed on Canvey Island was my father's which, as you can read, crash landed at Hartford Ridge (now Blackbushe)

On the night of 23 June 1944, four Short Stirling Mark 3 aircraft of 149 Squadron took off from RAF Methwold in Norfolk on what was called a "Gardening Operation", to plant mines in the sea off Brest in France. They were OJ-C, OJ-B, OJ-M and OJ-O, my father's aircraft.

Stirling serial no.EF188 – Squadron Code Letters OJ-M was recorded as being airborne at 2315 but was shot down by flak and crashed in the vicinity of Plougonvelin (Finistere), 18 km WSW of Brest killing all the crew.

I cannot recall whether this aircraft was the one that his friend, also a flight

engineer, was operating on but said he watched after being shot down and scattered itself as it exploded.

The next aircraft; containing my father's crew - Serial No LK386 – Squadron Code Letters OJ-O was recorded as being airborne at 23.17 and together with the other two aircraft made their way towards Brest in France leaving the English coast near Exeter. To reach the target area, referred to as the “Jellyfish Region”, they initially made their way over the town of Brest towards the harbour.

The first aircraft flown by F/Sgt Bemrose (OJ-C) flew through only light flak and dropped their mines from 3000'. Operational height for dropping mines was 1500ft. The next aircraft in was OJ-B, during their approach the area was illuminated with searchlights and flak. The intensity of the flak was very heavy and whilst they struggled through the area they observed a bright flash on the port side and saw a Stirling with an engine on fire and spiralling down to crash with a large explosion as the mines detonated. That was Stirling EF188 OJ-M.

With radar controlled searchlights coning the aircraft and hit by flak my father's Stirling OJ-O, dropped their mines and I recall him telling me, “the Germans didn't like it very much and put up a lot of flak”. As they were trying to escape, a flak shell burst close to the aircraft and he was severely injured by it. They apparently weaved their way out of danger at low level and flew back towards England. The only thing he ever said about that was that “he tried to keep the engines running” which was his job as the Flight Engineer. According to a report I have seen he had asked to return to his engineer's panel to carry out his duties. After regaining the south coast near Exeter the crew headed for Hartfordbridge Airfield (now Blackbushe) in Hampshire. On touchdown at 0357 the hydraulic brake pressure was insufficient to prevent the Stirling from running off the end of the runway, whereupon the undercarriage collapsed and the wreckage caught fire and burned out.

As a matter of interest my father was badly injured, in fact, I have a piece of the shrapnel that they took out of my father that he passed on to me, he could not get out of the burning aircraft but the Wireless Operator, Flight Sergeant Donald Houssemayne Duboulay dragged him through the aircraft and passed him down to the pilot and other members of the crew which is how he survived.

The following has been taken from the Operational Log

Mines laid as ordered. Cloud base 4000ft, good visibility. Flak damage from a number of guns. On approaching Garden area flak was seen ahead so course was altered slightly to port. Aircraft was hit by flak very shortly afterwards and mines dropped in position 48.20N 04.37W. Two members of crew injured (Engineer and Bomb Aimer) and aircraft was landed at Hartford Bridge so that the former could receive medical attention. Aircraft overshot end of runway owing to brake pressure failing. The undercarriage gave way and the aircraft caught fire and burnt out. All members of crew got out safely.

The aircraft was a Short Stirling Mk3 LK386 with the squadron letters OJ – O had completed 42 operational sorties before being destroyed, all with 149 Squadron

My father flew 6 of his missions on this same aircraft.

As a result of the action that night Pilot Officer Sidney Edward Lucas R.A.F.V.R., received the Distinguished Flying Cross. (During the Battle of Britain Sidney Lucas was a Sergeant pilot flying Hurricanes)

Wireless Operator Flight Sergeant Donald Duboulay of the Royal Australian Air Force received the British Empire Medal (Military Division)



My father, Flight Engineer Sergeant Ronald Vivian French, R.A.F.V.R. received the Distinguished Flying Medal.

Right, he is seen at Buckingham Palace to receive his medal from the King.

As well as family members in the photograph there are members of the hospital team from RAF Halton.

Connected to the above story came this from **Tony Adams** aged 96, from Sydney, Australia. He was the Wireless Operator in Cryer's Crew, 149 Squadron May to December 1944.

For about seven years or more Chris Stone, a Historian at Methwold and I have been exchanging emails in regard to my time when based there. In April 2018 I was one of 15 Australian Veterans of Bomber Command that our Government funded on a trip to Lincoln for the Opening of the International Bomber Command Conference Centre. With my son and his daughter as Carers we visited Methwold and met Chris. When the bells were rung as we approached the Church of St George and Chris told me it was in my honour, it was just so emotional.

Chris has just sent me an extract from your latest Newsletter headed 'The D - Day period for 149 (East India) Squadron' being an article by Alan Fraser.

What a great article! I am amazed how Alan could so accurately describe our operations at that time without being there.

Our crew of 4 Australians and 3 RAF completed a tour of 36 operations on Stirlings and Lancasters .Supply drops to the Maquis, Sowing Mines and Bombing German Industrial targets by day and night.

I do recall knowing fellow W/Op Ted Sweet, the artist of the illustrations used in the article.

Operation Manna

April 29 marked the 75th anniversary of Operation Manna, the humanitarian food drop into occupied Netherlands at the end of World War II. Much of the Netherlands was suffering from a terrible famine known as “Hongerwinter” or Hunger Winter with many thousands facing starvation.

The British launched Operation Manna to drop food packages from Avro Lancaster bombers from as low as 50 feet. The Lancasters were crewed by British, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and Polish squadron members. The US then joined the food drops under Operation Chowhound and Canada led Operation Faust with food-laden land convoys into western Netherlands.

A short video has been produced by the RAF, <https://raf.imagencloud.com/record/~0735be6540> available to those with computer access. It features member Bill Gould about 50 seconds in, talking about his memories of the drops. It also gives an insight into the relief operations by the RAF then and its current roles in humanitarian relief. This remarkable and rarely seen wartime footage shows some of those Lancasters operating and dropping at ultra-low level.

We remember all those involved and honour the courage of the Dutch people.

Despite Covid.....

Alain Founé was determined that the memory of the crew of Lancaster L7576 GI-K of No. 622 Sqn RAF should not be forgotten.

The names of the crew have now been etched on the memorial stone and an informative panel has been installed at the memorial site near Petitmont, France.

Flying Officer H.S. PEABODY, Pilot. (Royal Canadian Air Force).

Flying Officer J.H. DOE, Navigator. (Royal Canadian Air Force).

Sergeant A. PAYTON, Radio Operator. (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve).

Flight Sergeant R.G. PROULX, Air gunner. (Royal Canadian Air Force).

Sergeant P.W. BUCKLEY, Air gunner. (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve).

Flying Officer G.J. WISHART, Flight Engineer (Royal Air Force).

Flying Officer R.L. FIDDICK, Bombardier. (Royal Canadian Air Force).

Following two days of tributes to their memory, it was during a very moving ceremony that the “Lancaster Memorial”, funded by the Peck family (Canada),



was unveiled on July 29, 2019, exactly 75 years to the day after the crash, by family members of the downed crew.

This ceremony, which emotionally joined the families, elected officials, French and foreign soldiers, patriotic delegation and a large audience, marked the end of a long period of 75 years when the crew were virtually forgotten.

A year later, for the commemoration of the 76th anniversary on July 26, 2020, the emotions were very much the same. No, they are no longer forgotten!

Proposed very late because of the health problems related to Covid-19, by Alain Founé, Delegate to the “Lancaster Memorial”, the organization of this ceremony immediately received the consent of Philippe Arnould, Mayor of Saint-Sauveur and President of the Community of Communes of Vezouze en Piémont.

Alain was able to quickly put together an event to match the successful organization of the previous year, finding a master of ceremonies, sound system manager, protocol manager, flag bearer, etc.

Families, friends, and soldiers residing outside of France were unfortunately prevented from attending to honor the missing crew, condemned by the Covid-19 to have to stay at home in Quebec, British Columbia, California and Great Britain.

Presided over by Lieutenant-Colonel (French Air Force) Jean-Claude Barral, President of the Center for Historical Research and Documentation (CDRH) of the Air Base 133 of Nancy-Ochey, this second commemoration was led by the experienced Lieutenant-Colonel François BOURCY, in his capacity as Master of Ceremonies, the ceremony began with the National Anthems of the three countries being played. As the three flags were fluttering under a bright sun above the poles of the Lancaster Memorial, “O Canada”, “God Save the Queen” and “La Marseillaise” sounded in the clearing of La Fourchue-Eau. The emotions of those present somewhat masked by the regulatory masks.

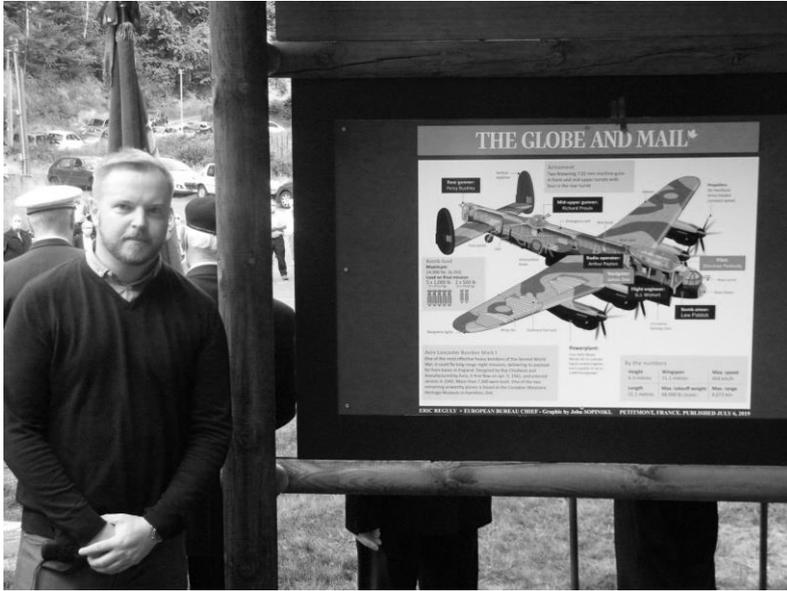
Then Lieutenant-Colonel Bourcy recalled the tragic last flight of L7576 on the night of July 28 to 29, 1944 and the fate of each of the 7 members of the crew (killed, missing, prisoner, and escapee). As a reminder, this story in English and French written by Jon and Robert Peck appears on the information panel which was inaugurated in July 2019.

There followed a four minute sound recording of a Lancaster under fire from a Me110, the sounds of aircrew conversation and ending with a dull explosion sound. All listened in silence, including representatives from the 3/3 Ardennes Squadron, French Air Force. There followed one minutes silence.

Then Richard Copen, great-nephew of Sergeant P.W. Buckley, rear gunner, stepped forward to unveil the new information plaque which has been installed on site. Richard was the only family present because he was exempt from the travel restrictions by coming from Ireland.

The new plaque shows an exploded view of the Lancaster L7576 with the

position of the seven crew members and the configuration of its load of bombs on July 29, 1944. It is a reproduction of a drawing by John Sopinski, graphic designer at Globe & Mail newspaper (Toronto). It illustrates an investigation by Eric Reguly, the newspaper's European correspondent in Rome, published on July 6, 2019 after his visit to the crash site: "A Second World War mystery solved: 75 years later, a transatlantic team retraces two lost Canadians 'final days'".



This reproduction has been made with their kind permission and that of the Publisher of the largest circulation national newspaper in Canada.

Wreathes were then laid on the memorial by military officials and dignitaries. The Last Post rang out and the Standard Bearers solemnly dipped their colours. Following a further minutes silence, Reveille sounded and the strains of the three National

Anthems brought the proceedings to a close.

The official ceremony closed, Mrs. Thierry Dedenon and Jean Jacquot invited the participants to a very friendly reception served in the courtyard of the village hall.

The crew of the L7576 will not be forgotten!

And, in the Forest at Mundford No, not a Teddy Bear's picnic, far from it!

Having been in contact with Rob Billen and Pat Tuck for months over the installation and re-dedication of a new memorial to the last operational loss of a XV Squadron Lancaster, one knew that it was not going to happen once Covid came along. Despite trying to rearrange a couple of times, lockdown saw to it that we weren't going to be able to have a ceremony.

In a letter sent to me by Pat and Robin Tuck, Rob says "Despite the best efforts of Storm Ciara and Covid, we were able to complete the plinth on time". He goes on to thank all those involved, including the Circle of Friends Fundraising Group, West Norfolk Aviation Society, Mundford Lunch Club and others who'd helped finance the project. Of special note is the thanks to Pat and Robin for their inspiration. Other's involved in the construction and design include Stefan Eyres, Kevin Grace, Simon Booth and David Nicholls. Of course, one can't forget the Forestry Commission for their cooperation once again.

It is hoped to have another attempt at a dedication ceremony when the dust settles and some sort of normality returns to our green and pleasant land.



The new memorial has been visited by a number of family members of the crew and, by all accounts, meets with approval. It consists of a poured concrete plinth containing a large lump of granite at the crater end. There is then a silhouette of a Lancaster beside the RAF roundel topped with the Union and Australian flags. Further down is the original plaque from the 1999



ceremony and finally, a small Remembrance ‘garden’ It remains surrounded by the slate shale and pieces (which are still being found at the site) of the Lancaster are arranged around the granite stone.

*Whilst preparing the newsletter I was in contact with John Myhill of 622 Squadron. He sends me many items (too much to include here, but some make it to the internet) throughout the year. Being part of the only active squadron that has ties to The Register these days it is always interesting to hear from him. It transpires that he’s had a ‘change of service’ brought about by the Covid pandemic, so I’ll let him explain in his piece entitled **2020 Vision**.*

It just amused me writing 2020 Vision, as I sit here bespectacled fearing failing eyesight and eyestrain (both age and computer-related), in the realisation that life at the sharp end of Defence refers to that bit of angular desk I smash into as I draw myself ever nearer the IT. The real 2020 Vision was more to do with “well we didn’t see that coming.....”

2020 was always destined to be an important year historically, marking 75 years since the end of WW2 and the commemoration of all those key events leading up to the end of the war. The Squadron’s Staff Ride this year - 18 months in the planning - was to head to the Netherlands to commemorate 75 years of Operation MANNA.

This operation, along with Op Chowhound, was the first mass scale air drop of humanitarian aid to a beleaguered population, brought on by the “Hungerwinter” and the Germans’ policy of stripping the Netherlands of all its natural resources in response to industrial action to bring the trains to a standstill. Our week-long trip was to take in Manna drop zones and the memorial in Rotterdam, with a successful bid for a flypast by the BBMF’s Lancaster, the aircraft that was quickly

adapted to drop the food bundles to the starving Dutch. We planned to take part in the Dutch Day of the Dead Parade, celebrated in May- their equivalent of Remembrance Day signifying their day of Liberation from the Nazi occupation.

We were to join up with our Canadian counterparts in Wageningen for celebrations of the signing of the surrender documents and to see the Canadian Food convoy commemorating Op Faust, their truck delivery version of our Manna.

We would also visit Walcheren to see the sites of the Squadrons bombing attack on the dykes of Zeeland; this controversial campaign was vital in denying the Germans their defensive positions in the Atlantic Wall by flooding the surrounding area. This attack was the prelude to the Battle of the Scheldt, to gain control of the vital port of Antwerp, securing the logistic hub needed to press on the attack into Germany. The Walcheren raid was led by 622 Sqn including our dear departed Tom Maxwell DFC. The Staff Ride was to have been followed by a UK based trip to Bletchley Park before joining the Register for their annual reunion at Mildenhall.

In late January, while working in Force Headquarters at RAF Brize Norton, home to our nation's transport fleet of aircraft, we had the first briefings of events that would govern the rest of the year. Looking back, it was like watching a slow train crash about to happen. In these days of cheap air travel, open borders, and a squeeze on the natural world, it was a train crash we couldn't stop. But the thought was...we had been here before, with previous outbreaks of SARS and Bird Flu. How little we knew!

In February life pretty much went on as normal, then March arrived. Our beloved Chick Chandler had a fall and hospital tests showed that he was seriously ill.

Helen and I drove to Basingstoke hospital, fearing the worst, and found Chick bemoaning hospital gowns and terrible food, ashen but unbowed. OC Rosh, Sqn WO Rick and new arrival Nige Painter followed up with a visit to the hospice he was moved to. Nige has a hobby job, flying with the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight as the Lancaster engineer, so was able to engage with Chick on all things mechanical. (See picture, above right)



After visiting Chick, Rosh, Nige and myself attended a Bomber Command Dining-In Night at Brize Norton to honour all our Bomber Command veterans, with Chick very much on our minds. This would end up being my last day at my

home station for 2020. Chick passed a few days later, within a day of Tom Maxwell DFC who left us the previous year.

April, and we are starting to get an idea that we are in trouble. Requests for volunteers arrived on the Squadron, and for some strange reason I found myself volunteering for everything. Signing up for something is a bit odd, if you don't know what it is, where it is and when it is, but having taken the Queen's shilling so many years ago it seemed the right thing to do. How many more National Emergencies will I get in my life? Much to my wife's dismay, I was sent for kitting. Helen is a declutterer of note and had only recently got me to turf out 35 years of military loft insulation. (The delight in the Military dealer's face was matched by the despair in my own, as I saw all of my working life driven away).

I also discovered that being medically fit for decades of global flying, inoculated against countless dodgy diseases, didn't allow me to work in my own country. The sticking point was that I couldn't prove to the military that I had had measles when I was eight, as my Mum's word would not be taken. So, jab parade.... things were getting serious.

The true enormity of the crisis was laid out as I was mobilised into the regulars - how bad has it got that I have become part of the solution? Op Rescript was the catchy title, giving away no clues to what I was destined for. I readied myself, with some gardening, DIY and decorating; being back in the Regulars was not as I remembered it. The rest of April revolved around cancelling my life for the next year, including all the 75th anniversary events that we had planned to be part of.

The RAF did a small media piece on Manna and signed up Bill Gould on his 95th birthday to record some of his thoughts on taking part in the Manna drops so many years ago. *(See page 41 for the link to this video on the internet. Ed)*

Another month of standby to standby, hoping that I didn't contract the disease before I joined the Task Force to defeat it.

Mid-June had me destined to work at Skipton House, NHS HQ in London and with 2 days to go my Activation Order arrived for a completely different role. Saturday morning's news was to report to the Department of Health and Social Care in London for 0700hrs Monday. (Is this any way to run a crisis?) So, on Sunday afternoon I got on a very empty train, destined for a very empty London.

In good RAF tradition my new home was the Strand Palace Hotel which had remained open in lockdown for key workers; however, in not-so-good RAF tradition, I had been mobilised into the Army. I was now an associate of 102 Logistics Brigade, hence the 0700 roll-call to start the day. The job was to set up and run the nationwide system for Mobile Testing Units (MTU's), I was allocated the South West and we built up to 30+ military mobile units delivering COVID testing to around 50 sites. Once the MTU system was fully functional the military had to step back, and civilian companies took over the capability.

I was now facing being demobbed, something I had in common with so many of the wartime Bomber Command volunteers. I wasn't going to get a pin-stripe suit

and I probably shouldn't recite the very rude poem Bomber Command had about de-mob.

Meanwhile, more of life was being curtailed. The Register was cancelled, VE celebrations were muted and the Bomber Command Memorial canned. I hope you all got to see our Bill Gould starring once more at the Virtual Memorial to Bomber Command in October. Another disappointment was that I hoped to join Alain Foune, an honorary 622 member, in France this year. You will hopefully remember Alain's work in securing a fitting memorial to L7576 from last year.

What should have been a glorious 75th anniversary passed by with a whimper and not the bangs, bells and whistles they deserved.

Shortly before de-mob, I was re-mobilised into Operation Winterprepare - at last an Op. which does exactly what it says on the tin. With the customary 1 days' notice, I was back in the Army, this time serving at HQSW Tidworth as Military Liaison Officer for Wessex North. My new role was to provide support for Military Aid to a Civilian Authority (MACA), namely Local Resilience Forums and Health Protection Boards. Large numbers of the communities great and good who sit on local government boards for the peace time planning of emergencies (in case anyone hadn't noticed, we are in one right now). But be cheered that there are plans in place in our communities for flooding, fire, nuclear accidents, Russian chemical attacks, industrial action, EU exit, Avian Flu, VVIP tragedies, Arsenal not winning the league (some plans are more up to date than others), in fact anything that poses a threat to life or property. National Emergencies obviously don't happen without a massive infrastructure of planners behind them to keep them on track.

In September we heard the sad news of the passing of my great-aunt, Olive Nicholson. This was significant not just for personal reasons, but also because she was the widow of my great-uncle Ken Nicholson, who served on 622 Sqn as a rear gunner during WW2. With her passing, it is as if part of my direct link to the wartime Sqn has now disappeared - another reason why Remembrance and keeping the memories alive is so important.

So mid lockdown, I'm none the wiser as to what will happen, but be assured that whatever happens it will be a part of a plan. The next phase for me in the next few days is dressing up in my Army kit, complete with non-standard issue face mask, and finding the coldest, outdoor spaces to stand in to check on suitability for Mass Vaccination sites. It looks as if vaccines will be the key to beating this disease but it's not going to get there in time to save the 76th anniversaries or the Mildenhall Register 2021 - but remember a few inspirational quotes from the past and present: Churchill's great oratory "Keep Buggering On" and Captain Sir Tom's "Things will get better". Wish I could come up with something along the same lines, but 2020 Vision has just given me very sore and sad eyes.

Stay safe and let's hope "We'll Meet Again" (not one of mine).

John Myhill 622 Sqn

The 'Knight of Shivers'

"It was 16.15 hours on 22nd October 1944 and we took off to lay mines off Borholm, which lay between Denmark and Sweden. The take-off was more unusual, as they were going to test out how long it would take twelve aircraft to take off. The idea was one aircraft taking off at the end of [the] runway, one aircraft taking off halfway down the runway and one aircraft just starting to take off at the beginning of the runway. It came to our turn and we took off when given the green light from ground control, and we reached a height of about 100' when we caught the slipstream of the preceding aircraft. Suddenly we started to slip to starboard and I heard the skipper grunting and straining and eventually (which seemed never ending), the aircraft slowly came back to level flight and started to climb. It was some time before we could get back to normal behaviour. It appeared that the ground personnel saw us dip below the [airfield] perimeter and thought we had had it. It certainly would have been a nasty mess if we had crashed as we were carrying six large mines. We flew on and dropped our mines with just a bit of flak, but no other interference.

We then started to return to base and were half way home when orders came through diverting us to Lossiemouth (Scotland) as it seemed our 'drome was fogbound.

Eventually we arrived at Lossiemouth at 23.15, feeling a bit tired and I think a bit shaken still over the take-off incident. The other thing was that we were the last aircraft to take off at Mildenhall because if another aircraft had followed us they would have had a good view of what happened.

The next day at 12.45pm we took off from Lossiemouth and arrived back at base (Mildenhall) at 14.15. Needless to say we were glad to get back and we went on six days leave.

Also, they never again tried out that system of take-off, and I can't remember the total time of take-off, but I'll never forget that operation in a hurry".

The above account is as written by 'Rockie' Knight, and sent to the XV Squadron Historian, during the mid/late 1980s. It begs the question "Is this how 'Rockie' got his nick-name?

Jack Waterfall continues his quest for Remembrance, Reconciliation and Commemoration through his Heligoland '39 Project and the newer, but no less impressive, Loch Ness Wellington 2020 Project. With space limited, interested folk should follow these links: - <https://www.heligoland39.org/> and <https://lochnesswellington2020.org/> to find out more about future events.

Sadly, many of the planned 2020 events were cancelled or curtailed by the same culprit, but the RAF were able to fly a Typhoon over the Loch on October 28th to commemorate the loss of N2980 R – Robert formerly of 149 Squadron. A video is available to watch here: - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ouQOLorFBC>
As reported in last year's newsletter, Dee and I were able to get to both events at Brooklands and Runnymede last year on 18th December 2019. Dee laid a wreath

on behalf of 149 Squadron at the ceremony. Afterwards we joined families and friends at the Brooklands museum where the restored wreckage of the Wellington takes centre stage. It is amazing to know that it crashed on New Year's Eve 1940 and, but for The Nessie myth that's where it would still be today! Recovered in 1985 it is even more incredible that when a fresh battery was connected to the circuits, some lights still worked!



All the events scheduled around both these projects will be rearranged in 2021.

A New Book Former 149 and XV Squadron wireless operator **John Meller** has been busy. The book is co-written with his daughter, former airline pilot Caroline Brownbill. They tell the story of his life, growing up in Warrington, his first job, volunteering for the RAF and his service within it. Entitled "The Boy with only one shoe" it is a great read for everyone, but especially for today's generations who



know little or nothing of that time. Proceeds of sales will go to The RAF Benevolent Fund.

Right, John (fourth from left) with his crew and their favourite D-Dog Lancaster. The nose art says 'Right over Might' and features a cross over the swastika with 43 bomb symbols or operations.

John stayed in the RAF for a while after the war. Eventually leaving in 1950, he joined the Metropolitan Police where he rose

to the rank of Detective Inspector in Scotland Yard. He was involved with many high level cases including The Krays, the Great Train Robbery and many major Post Office and Treasury Department frauds. His second book about this part of his life should be available soon.

Talking of books, 3 Group historian **Steve Smith** wrote in to say: - *"I have been entrusted in writing the history of No. 186 Squadron from its formation in October 1944 until its disbandment. It is something I have been wanting to do for a number of years but my involvement with No.218 (Gold Coast) Squadron meant that what little time I had was spent researching this squadron. I have just finished my last book on the exploits of 218 and can concentrate on 186 Sqdn.*

I have compiled a great deal of info on the squadron but very little on the crews that formed it in October from 90 Squadron. Thankfully 90 Squadron ORB is one of the best I have seen! On October 9th, 14 crews of 'C' Flight were, en-mass, posted to 186 Squadron”.

Intrigued by this, I did a bit of internet searching (<http://www.historyofwar.org/>) for just a little more information to impart. It turns out that the squadron had two very different incarnations during the war. First as a fighter-bomber squadron at Drem, Scotland, before the squadron reformed again from 'C' Flight, 90 Squadron at Tuddenham, with Lancaster bombers.

The squadron's first raid was an attack on Bonn on 18 October, and it remained part of the main bomber force to the end of the war. The squadron's late arrival in Bomber Command meant it suffered comparatively limited losses, with operational losses of four aircraft in 1944 and nine in 1945, for a total of thirteen.

The photograph, right, from Aircrew Remembered, shows the crew of Flt Lt Tait who all perished on the night of 16-17th January 1945.

Not all operational losses were caused by the Germans. One No.186 Squadron Lancaster was lost on 27 February when its bombs failed to release in their pre-planned order, instead all dropping at the same time. The single 4,000lb smashed into the larger number of 1,000lbs causing an explosion that destroyed the aircraft.



At the end of the war the squadron helped transport liberated POWs back to the UK, before being disbanded on 17 July 1945.

So, that's this issue disbanded too. My grateful thanks to all those who contributed articles that I have been able to use. My apologies to those who submitted items that haven't made it in (very few), maybe next time.

I'm always looking for interesting stories, so please do get in touch. All our contact details are contained in the box below. Geoff.

The Mildenhall Register Officers with Contact Details:

| <u>Hon Chairman</u> | <u>Hon Secretary</u> | <u>Hon Treasurer</u> |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Dee Boneham MBE | Geoff Reynolds | Smiley Mildwater |
| 13 Holloway Crescent | 61 Salem St | 33A Hardwicke Fields |
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| Dunmow, Essex | Spalding, Lincs. | Ely, Cambs. |
| CM6 1QD | PE11 4NQ | CB6 3TW |
| Tel 01279 877935 | Tel 01775 841585 | Tel 01353 749509 |

That was the year that was (n't!)



The difference 75 years and a virus makes. A street party somewhere in Suffolk 1945 on the left. On the right a street party in Chippenham, Suffolk 2020. Spot the difference. Courtesy of Suffolk News.

Smiley lays a wreath at St Johns church, Beck Row



Dee's seat in her garden.

The BBMF perform a VE Day 75 flypast.

