

# The Mildenhall Register

XV, XC, 149, 218 and 622 Bomber Squadrons' Association  
Supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron

NEWSLETTER  
WINTER 2021/2



Squadron Leader Alastair Balmer



Colonel Gene Jacobus



Group Captain Dorian James



## Front Cover

The top image shows a 'working drawing' of the proposed Ribbon of Remembrance stone which is currently being carved for later installation at Canwick. Following the many generous donations received we were able to get this magnificent commemoration stone designed and 'chiselled' by stone mason Brian Downing. More on this in other parts of the newsletter.

There were three Changes of Command during our lockdown break.

Top left is Squadron Leader Alastair J. Balmer the new RAF Mildenhall Base Commander.

Centre is Colonel Gene A. Jacobus the 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refuelling Wing Commander at Mildenhall.

Last, but not least, Group Captain Dorian 'Doz' James who has taken the reins at 622 Squadron, replacing Squadron Leader Rosh O'Brien.

## Roll of Honour 2021

Rev	N	Norman	<b>Berryman</b>	York	XV	F/E
Mr	R	Robert (Roy)	<b>Davie</b>	Williston	622	Pilot and F/E
Mr	J	John	<b>Johnson</b>	Charlotte, NC.	149	Radio/radar Tech.
Mr	A E	Albert (Dusty)	<b>Miller</b>	Southampton	149 & 138	Flt Eng.
Mr	T	Tom	<b>Payne</b>	Melbourn	XC/XV	Pilot
Mr	J	Jeremy	<b>Powell</b>	Bury St Edmunds	149	Son of Gp. Capt. J A Powell.
Mr	J W		<b>Smyth</b>	Ongar	XV	Ground crew
Mr	W K	Kenneth	<b>Thomas DFC</b>	Coventry	622	Pilot
Mr	E J	Ed	<b>Turner</b>	Bristol	149	Flt Eng.
Mr	E J	Eric	<b>Willis</b>	Moffat Beach	622	Pilot.

## Words from the Chair

Good morning to all those who are reading this, our latest newsletter from a sunny (for a change) Essex. (*Although that was on the day Dee wrote this and may not apply to your morning as you open this! Ed.*)

We have all had a pretty difficult last couple of years. Covid has devastated lives, made our daily lives difficult and kicked our chances to keep up with each other into touch. I hope you are all well currently and are looking forward to the next few years as Covid regulations have been reduced to more manageable levels.

I know the rest of my committee as well as myself and the team at RAF Mildenhall have been very sad to have had no reunions for the last few years. I am glad, therefore, that the reunion for next year will go ahead on 13th -15th May 2022. The plans are on-going but I am sure that Geoff and Smiley will inform you more about the ideas we have to make it a special reunion since we missed a special anniversary.

During the last few years we have lost more of our veterans and we will miss them all at the reunion. It has been so difficult to not be able to go to their funeral services and to know that they have not been honoured in quite the same way. Hopefully the ones we still have will be with us for some time longer so we can show them how much we think of them.

I was grateful to get back to visit both the Memorials in London and Lincoln recently. Hopefully the work done in the many towns and villages both in the UK and abroad will get back to normal so we can all take part.

Stay well over the winter. Hoping you've had a good Christmas and start to 2022 and I look forward to seeing you all in May. The more the merrier is all I can say.

Best wishes to you all

Dee

### **From The Treasury**

Well, dear reader, here we are at the end of another very odd year and the start of what I hope is to be a more normal year. I hope I find you well and in good heart and I wish you a happy, healthy and safe New Year.

The fund raising for the Ribbon of Remembrance stone went very well indeed and we actually passed the figure needed for a 'Wellington'. However, it was suggested that, for the same price, we could get a double 'Stirling' sized stone which would fit our proposed layout much better and also give us over 50% extra space over the 'Wellington'. Job done so a very big "thank you" to all of you who supported the scheme and I am looking forward to the dedication in May.

Other than that it's been an uneventful year with the usual potter over to St John's to lay the wreath by our plaque on the 11th November.

The friends of 75(NZ) Sqn invited the Operating Authority and myself to join them for their annual dinner at the George Hotel in Huntingdon. A jolly good evening ensued and on the Sunday we joined them at Mepal for their Service of Remembrance at which I laid a wreath on behalf of the Register. No pictures this year as I'm sure you're fed up of seeing the same little short, fat, hairy bloke in his posh frock.

Well dear reader, if you've made it this far that just about raps it up from the Grunty Fen chapter of UBWOH (Unruly Boozers with Oddish Habits).

Looking forward to seeing you all at the Reunion and/or the Dedication. Smiley

## **Scribblings from your Secretary**

Happy New Year to all. Let's hope the horrors of Covid 19 can be put behind us as we move forward into 2022. Hopefully all fully jabbed, fit and healthy, life can return to the 'new' normal.

It has been sad to lose yet more of our staunch veteran membership, faces names and deeds we shall forever remember, but never see again. Fitting tributes are enclosed.

As I sit here compiling the newsletter, I was reminded that I should be at East Kirkby today meeting with the Baumann family from Switzerland. You may recall the story from last year of the research Fritz has done to find out what happened to the crew of the Lancaster which came down near his childhood home. Sadly Fritz and his wife have both been suffering poor health (non Covid related thankfully) It was thought better to delay the visit and taxi ride in 'Just Jane' to a better time in 2022. I look forward to that happening.

As you will have seen on the front cover and in Smiley's report, we were able to get a magnificent stone carved to be installed in the Ribbon of Remembrance at the International Bomber Command Centre at Lincoln. Photographs of the actual stone were not available at the time of going to print, so you'll have to make do with the 'working drawing' by designer and stone mason Brian Downing. I must add my grateful thanks to those of Smiley, to all those who gave most generously towards making this happen. When the weather improves, the stone will be laid in position along the Ribbon of Remembrance. As it is an individual size, this laying has to coincide with a 'straight edge' formed by the others around it.

Jumping ahead just a little, we intend to take reunion attendees to a special unveiling and dedication as the Saturday trip this year. Arrangements will be made for reunion attendees to be transported to the site, with buffet lunch provided at the venue. Prices on the booking form. There will be time to look around the open areas, maybe find the name of your lost relative on the memorial walls and visit the Peace Garden and the Spire.

When I know the timings of this they will appear on the booking form, Facebook and web page. Members unable to attend the reunion are welcome to join us for the unveiling on the day or view the stone at another, more convenient time to suit them. On the 14<sup>th</sup> May, if not attending with the coach party, you can be included in the lunch and parking package we are hoping to negotiate with the IBCC, just let us know. Access to the research centre is not included in the price we negotiate, nor to those arranging their own visit. However, at £9 for an annual adult ticket, with reductions for concessions, disabled and group visits (see the website here: - <https://internationalbcc.co.uk/your-visit-events/plan-your-visit/>) and a £3 parking fee it offers very good value for money in my view.

Also on the front cover are pictures of the three new appointees who have direct links with The Register. Our congratulations and welcome go out to all three and we send their predecessors best wishes in their new appointments. A little biography of each can be found in the following pages.

As you might have guessed from what has been written earlier; after our enforced two year break, there will be a reunion this year. We can finally get together to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Mildenhall Register. The planning for this has all been happening at the very last minute. What normally takes us nine months or more is being crammed into about the same number of weeks, so please bear with us when this arrives late. Details of what we are proposing can be found near the back pages. A booking form has been included with your newsletter which should have correct venues and timings. We hope to see as many of you as possible at Mildenhall once again.

My grateful thanks (and that of numerous folk who write in), must go out to the other members of your committee. Dee for her unstinting leadership, attendance at events, wreath laying and running the Facebook page. To Smiley and his long suffering wife Cheery for taking on the bulk of all the arrangements for this year's reunion, the memorial stone and representing the MR at the base Change of Command ceremony, 75's Remembrance ceremony and laying a wreath at Beck Row too. Also my wife who runs the website and supports me through the year.

So, without further ado, let's get on with the rest of the news and stories.

Here's to a Happy and Healthy 2022.

Geoff

### **From the new C/O of 622 Squadron RAuxAF**

*Once again, despite their very demanding and punishing schedule, I'm grateful that the new C/O has taken a few minutes to file his report, compiled with able assistance from Rosh.*

"Having recently taken command of 622 Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadron from Squadron Leader Rosh O'Brien, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank her for a fantastic handover. For those that have met her, will realise that she is an exceptionally talented person and has been an excellent officer commanding for the last 8 years. I am very happy that she has kindly agreed to provide an extended handover and will remain as the Squadron 2<sup>nd</sup> in command for a few more months!

The Squadron, as with all of us, is still living through the COVID pandemic and although some of the restrictions have recently eased, we have continued throughout the last year to provide support to the Government in the UK through Operation RESCRIPT (*the code name for the British military operation to help tackle the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom and its Crown Dependencies. Ed.*) whilst also maintaining ongoing global operations. Our personnel have flown vaccinations to all UK dependencies including the Falklands, Bermuda, Gibraltar and Ascension Island (which was the first country

to be fully vaccinated). The UK support has consisted of testing on base and in local schools, with some personnel having deployed around the country to manage testing and vaccination centres. We have also had our fair share of infected personnel, but thankfully all have come through unscathed.

Global Operations have continued unabated, with many of our personnel flying in Iraq and Africa. However the biggest operation of the year was most certainly Operation PITTING. (*British military operation to evacuate British nationals and eligible Afghans from Afghanistan following the 2021 Taliban offensive. Ed.*) The speed of reaction required for the evacuation from Kabul, taking everyone by surprise. Plans had been put in place, but the agreement with the Taliban to remain outside the capital for 1 month was not to be and we had crews flying in to evacuate entitled personnel. Thankfully the evacuation was peaceful but some will have lasting memories of what they witnessed in the desperation of families trying to escape, tired, hungry and scared.

Our support to the UK Defence Exercise Programme also had 622 Squadron personnel operating around the World. Of specific mention are the parachuting exercises in California, Spain and Norway and a remote Forward Operating Base being used at West Freugh for low flying in Scotland.

We have also been supporting the Carrier Strike Group (based around HMS Queen Elizabeth) in its maiden voyage to the Far East. Our personnel that are qualified to support the VIP Voyager aircraft on Operation VESPINA, have operated three tasks to Germany and Greece for Clarence House and then to the UN (New York) in support of Downing Street. (*See a photograph of this beautifully patriotic 'new' Airbus A330 below*)



*The Airbus A330 Voyager, named 'Vespina', might be kitted out as a VIP transport, but crucially, can still be used in its tanker roll. Here seen refuelling two F-35B from RAF Marham. (Image: RAF/Crown Copyright) The Union flag is in National colours on a white background, although I still think it looks very smart in black and white. Ed.*

Unfortunately, COVID has impacted the social calendar this year, with all bar Rosh's leaving function having to be cancelled. Fortunately, the Squadron gave Rosh a great send off! The easing of restrictions also allowed us to send a small contingent to this year's Bomber Command Memorial Service in October. We are already planning for next year and hope to be back at Mildenhall for the reunion.

A highlight of the year has been one of the Squadron cabin crew. Corporal Hayley Court, won Reservist of the Year which was presented by the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire in a recent ceremony. Hayley has a truly impressive resume, having been involved in supporting local authority's with COVID activity at Brize Norton and Manchester. She also flew a number of missions on Op PITTING where she has been complimented for her efforts in dealing with challenging overloaded aircraft full of families with very young children. However it is her charity efforts that make her stand out. She has started a fundraising campaign called Healing Military Minds to raise funds for Combat Stress. She organised a March in March, a climbing of Snowdon and some other activities and has already raised over £20,000. If anyone would like to follow her endeavours, they can be found on most social media outlets as 'Healing Military Minds'. She is aiming to reach £30,000 by March 2022, however any donations would be greatly accepted!!

The pandemic has made the last year one of the busiest for the Squadron, however our personnel have risen to the exciting challenge. We have seized the market opportunity to recruit and augment the Force where needed, allowing us to continue supporting the Air Mobility Force where Operations and Exercises have remained consistent. We have represented the RAF Reserves in front of the public in support of the pandemic and on home base. The Squadron represents the efficiency of the RAuxAF and has once again improved the good name of the Reserves throughout the year".

Kind regards Wg. Cdr. D J James

**Squadron Leader Alastair (Al) Balmer** assumed the role of RAF Commander at RAF Mildenhall in November 2020. *(Sadly, due to Covid and other family circumstances, to date, I've not been able to meet up with him, but he has kindly supplied the following brief introduction. Ed.)*

Sqd Ldr Balmer was commissioned in 2000 and gained his wings in 2002. He was posted to the Hercules C-130K as a co-pilot where he was employed on worldwide operations to locations including Afghanistan, Iraq and the Falkland Islands. A short while after gaining command on the Hercules in 2006, Alastair was selected to complete an exchange tour with the United States Air Force

based in Little Rock, Arkansas. He is one of a very small number of UK personnel to have been awarded the US Air Medal for his contribution while deployed with the USAF on Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On returning to the UK, Alastair converted to the C-130J. He continued to deploy regularly on flying operations with the RAF, primarily in Afghanistan, culminating in the withdrawal from Camp Bastion in 2014.

Upon promotion to squadron leader in 2015, Alastair converted to fly the Airbus A400M Atlas and was appointed to an executive role on XXIV Squadron – the RAF's Air Mobility Training Squadron. He remained here until he retired from regular RAF service in April 2019.

He then added this personal note: - "I was fortunate enough to be offered this role at the beginning of the second peak of the COVID pandemic and it has been something of a rollercoaster ride ever since. We've managed to negotiate it safely so far, keep RAF Mildenhall's mission output going and we look forward to building back our relations in the future even stronger than before."

*In an accompanying e-mail Alastair told me that he and Col. Hood of the U.S. 100<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Unit, attended the Remembrance Day ceremony at Mildenhall's War Memorial.*

*Then on November 29<sup>th</sup>, together with U.S.A.F. Chief Master Sgt. Michael Venning, they carried out a small ceremony at the grave of P/O R.H. Middleton VC in St John's churchyard, Beck Row. (Right) It is hoped to hold something larger next year to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Middleton's death. (Photo courtesy of Mildenhall.af.mil website)*



**Col Gene A. Jacobus** took over from Col. Pananon as the new Commander, 100th Air Refuelling Wing. *(The following résumé is used, with permission, from the Mildenhall.af.mil website)*

Their task is supporting four U.S. Air Force major command flying programs and more than 16,800 military, civilian, dependent, and retiree personnel. With 15 KC-135 aircraft, the wing is the only permanently assigned air refuelling operation in the European theatre.



Prior to assuming his current position, Col Jacobus served as the Vice Commander, 92nd Air Refuelling Wing, Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington where he assisted the Wing Commander in leading activities and assigned functions of the base, providing support for 23 associate units, and daily operations of 63 KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft performing refuelling, airlift, and aeromedical evacuation missions.

Col Jacobus was commissioned through Air Force ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) at Florida State University in 2000. He began his flying career at Charleston AFB, S.C. and has primarily flown the KC-135R/T and C-17. He has commanded at the squadron level and has experience in air refuelling, airlift, air operations centre, and contingency response operations.

Since being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in May 2000, Col. Jacobus has progressed through various ground and flying posts and ranks to his latest position here at Mildenhall. He has amassed over 2500 flying hours in various types, including Beechcraft T34 and T1 Jayhawk trainers, Boeing C17 and KC135 and is currently rated as Command Pilot.

*It is sincerely hoped he will accept the position of President of The Mildenhall Register during his time in post here at Mildenhall as has been the practice over many years now. (Ed)*

Ira Sinclair, the daughter of former member **Albert (Joe) Barber**, F/E with F/Lt A R Phillips DFC on 622 Squadron, wrote to Howard asking that we share his memoirs, just as he wrote them. So here they are: -

### My Recollection of 3 Group Bomber Command – Flight Engineer A J ‘Joe’ Barber

I joined the RAF on the third of December 1942 and was selected to start a Flight Mechanics course at Locking near Bristol. On completion of this training a call was made for flight engineer volunteers, for the new four engine bombers coming into service. I put my name forward and after a spell of duty at 39 MV Colerne I was posted to St Athan in south Wales to commence training as a flight engineer. I elected to train on Lancasters I's and III's. On passing out I was posted to 1653 Conversion Unit (CU) at RAF Chedburgh, Suffolk.

After more than forty years I can recall a small group of engineers (about half a dozen) standing at one end of a large hall, at the other were six groups of six men, these were operationally trained crews who had just completed their OTU course mostly on twin engine Wellington bombers. The groups of six were told by the Chief Flying Instructor to pick themselves an engineer, no criteria was advanced, we six flight engineers felt like slaves on the block or oranges on a stall! Various remarks could be overheard from these groups of six judges such as “He looks a bit of a young sprog to me!” Odd, I thought nobody in that room was over thirty except one RAAF flight sergeant pilot, who we discovered later was 32. I was ‘taken on board’ by the ‘Aussie’ pilot’s crew. After the crewing up was completed the Chief Flying Instructor said ‘It’s circuits and bumps for you chaps tomorrow, I have some notes on the Stirling for you pilots and engineers’. Most of us engineers were familiar with Hercules XVIs but electricians and

extractor controls were something we had to 'bone up' on. This boning up included the airframe and fuel system, and 24 hours was scant time for all this, but we all made it.

As we learned of 'negative earths' and manual emergencies, such as the laborious business of winding under-carts up and down, also tail wheels and that the RAR air compressor was inadequate for circuits and landings on a repetitious programme of circuits and landings. The reaction amongst the engineers was 'the sooner we get away from Chedburgh the better!'

I well remember we were doing take-offs and landings at night. A booth had been set up on the perimeter track to supply Stirlings with fully charged air bottles as a precaution against the brakes failing on landings, for lack of air. One night I plugged in the Inter Com and said 'Hopping out for more air' walked over to the booth, exchanged two bottles, and when I turned round found the Stirling taxiing away at about 20 mph. Eventually it did stop and wearing sweaters and flying boots I clambered aboard. There had been a complete stuff up with two crews aboard and the pilot who had got my message before I disembarked had forgotten I had gone!

There were two grim prangs whilst we were at 1653 Con Unit, one belly landing causing a few bruises and a take-off crash from about 200 feet. This Stirling had taken off with empty tanks. The CFI was furious, "A case of careless negligence of the first order!" he shouted at all of us. "They have 'had it' and I should not speak disrespectfully of the dead, but they had their bloody fingers well in" he bawled.

During our training at Chedburgh we carried out two diversionary or 'bulls eyes' on the Dutch coast and met flak for the first time. *(At this point, I apologise to Ira and Albert for messing with his narrative, but I suspect that Albert has failed to mention that on these operations, they also encountered Lancasters. Ed.)* Back in the billets the crew gathered round me and asked 'Do you think we will find them when we go to Finishing School at Feltwell?' "They're the bees knees compared to these lumbering boxes of strife". I may have said.

The seven young men who were about to fly one of the RAF's first line heavy bombers were all under 22 years of age, except for the Pilot, the aforementioned Flight Sergeant Phillips, RAAF, who was 32 and often referred to as 'pop' or 'flip'. The bomb aimer was Flight Sergeant Smart of Chigwell, Epping who continually reminded all and sundry that 'Winnie is our MP.' The young ginger headed tail end rear gunner 'Bluey' York from London cheekily replied "\*\*\*\* Winnie, he's just a war mongering bastard." Bluey had come from Canada where he re-mustered to gunner 'after dipping out' on a pilots course. He sported a RCAF 'AG's badge with its' extra-long wing.

The wireless operator was 'Dizzy' Burton a 19 year old Yorkshireman of a very quiet disposition. The mid-upper gunner was a Welshman from Rhyl, North Wales. He spoke Welsh and a smattering of Afrikaans he had picked up during his training in South Africa. He was also a 'dipped out' pilot name of Taffy Morgan. Paddy Lowrey from Brighton was navigator, he had just started his career as a chemist when he joined the RAF.

After we had completed our training; consisting of navigation exercises and fighter affiliation, we clambered into a truck one hot summer morning and journeyed forth to

Feltwell No 3 Lancaster Finishing School. The other crew in the truck with us informed just that “there are no runways at Feltwell, you take off on the grass!”

I remember the Sergeants Mess, it had a large oil painting of Sgt Ward VC a New Zealander who flew from Feltwell in '42 with 75 squadron on Wellingtons. He had chopped footholds across the main plane in order to get to the starboard engine which was on fire. He smothered it with a cushion, I think.

At St Athan I had chummed up with a fellow trainee, Flight Engineer Harry Keeling was his name. We often had mutual tutoring sessions before examinations, he had a bed opposite me in our Nissen hut. Harry accompanies me through Con Unit, LFS and eventually we arrived at Mildenhall together. He ‘bought it’ on his first trip, to Saarbrücken, I think it was. I really felt the loss of Harry, we had become real pals.

I recall the crews going by truck to Mildenhall from Lakenheath one hot summer afternoon of '44. The other entertainer was a bomb-aimer Sergeant called simply ‘Frater’ – I forgot his actual name but he was around 20, of cadaverous visage, similar to Group Captain Cheshire’s. He insisted we join in his ribald and outrageous songs, one had the unique title of ‘The Kidney Wife’. Our skipper referred to here on as ‘Flip’ was word perfect with his “Abdul the Bulbul Emir”. To decline making a contribution to the merriment could entail severe penalties!

Seated amongst the balladeers was a disconsolate F/Lt Pilot, who had spent about two years as an instructor pilot in Canada, ‘You know’ said he ‘I was very settled out there, at Medicine Hat, now those damned bureaucrats have rooted me up and made me stick out my neck at cost.” We all deeply sympathised.

The LAC truck driver told us of the ‘do’s’ that went on in the ‘Bird in Hand’, we all agreed that the ‘Bird in Hand’ was indeed, very handy to the station, a straight walk there and maybe, a jinky’ coarse back.

We arrived at the orderly room and were allocated a ‘peace-time’ married quarters house the previous occupants had recently ‘bought it’ or gone for a Burton’ as those sayings went. We met the stations ‘enfante terrible’ SWO Crisp. Six of us had the house and Flip tripped off to the officers’ mess, you were allowed to die together but not eat that way; tradition dies hard too.

We met our C.O, he was Wing Commander Blondie Swales, a bomber pilot of many lengthy and lucky operations going way back to Wimpys and Stirlings. He was modest, and tremendously popular with his crews at 622 Sqdn. Moreover he always gave most of the credit to the ground crews, “Could not have done it without you”, he was wont to say. He liked to mix in with the boys, and never failed to visit every Lanc before take-off and wish his boys “Good Luck”.

Our crew started off a tour of thirty operations bombing the V1 launching ramps at the Pas de Calais, we took in most of the Ruhr targets, Bonn, Stuttgart, Essen etc, in December 1944 we were sent to Woodbridge, Suffolk. It was a ‘prancing’ station, equipped with FIDO. It was used at the time of the Rundstedt push to Antwerp. Our crew had done G/H training, we took off in the fog. The last we saw of England was a red glow in the gloom. We bombed on GH and our navigator Flight Sergeant Paddy Lowry put us right over the glow on our return, he was a very competent navigator. We

were shot up over the synthetic fuel plant at Homberg, I had to use 'emergency air' to get the undercarriage down.

Over Dortmund we were well and truly hit by flak and our port outer was set afire. I feathered, operated the 'Graviner' and we made it back to base on three.

On December 16th 1944 we bombed Siegen with 1x8000lb 'cookie', 1x1000lb and five 500 lb bombs. Years later I was to learn that it was the home town of Joseph Deitzgen who wrote 'The Nature of Human Brainwork', and 'The Positive Outcome of Philosophy'. Deitzgen was to greatly influence my ideas in later life.

I remember that just after we returned from the Homberg op. it was about a couple of days, I was lying on the bed reading, when the crew minus the skipper walked into the room and gathered around me. I thought what are these buggers up to now? Killer Smart the bomb aimer stepped up to me and proffered a small packet. "What's that?" said I? "We want you to accept this trifle gift as a token of appreciation" he said. "What the hell for" I asked. "You got us back from Homberg and Dortmund Joe" said the Killer. With a lump in my throat I unwrapped the package. It was a Collins Aero Diary for 1944, inscribed with five names, at the head of the list it said "With appreciation to Joe Barber". I have it still. I value it as it proved to me that Flight Engineers most earned their corn.

Between ops we spent most of our spare time going on visits to Cambridge and Ely, we often went to the 'dos' at the "Bird in Hand." I recall one officer who did a great performance on the bagpipes, the pint drinking contests, the record was always under half a minute. We had an armourer, one Bill Beston LAC. He was always good for a quip. At the camp cinema, the patrons were always having a dig at the operator at times of breakdowns etc. One memorable night the power cut out completely. A mighty bawl arose from Bill "By God I've gone blind". It was the best laugh of the night and brought the house down. I've forgotten the film but not the irrepressible Bill.

I will never forget those breakfasts of eggs and bacon in the Sergeants' mess, so often ruined by the sight of empty chairs, whose departed occupants were the youthful and gay companions of my long fled youth.

I remember returning from one operation, when after clearing the target 'Killer' reported a hang up of a 500lber. I had a look through the inspection hole and sure enough there it was. I told the skipper that once we were over the Channel, I would try to manually operate the slip and drop it 'safe'. The navigator Paddy put us over a dropping zone and I made an attempt to free it. It was really frozen and stuck solid! On returning to base we were instructed to "stooge around" until the last Lanc was clear of the runway. We made a gingerly approach but when the wheel touched – off came the 500lber and crashed onto the bomb doors. The bomb had wedged between the edges of the doors and was starting to force them apart. I set the control lever to the 'Doors Closed" position and hoped it would not fall onto the runway. There was nobody in sight!

We slowly taxied to the dispersal, clambered out and saw the bomb, about one third of its casing protruding from the crack between the doors! Then a small truck appeared with our ace armourer driving, LAC Beston was about to take over the situation. Ready with a large step ladder, and a tool in his hand he popped up to the bomb and had the pistol and detonator out in a matter of minutes. We stood Bill a few in the Bird in Hand that night, he had certainly earned them.

Before his departure in June, Col. Troy Pananon, the outgoing 100<sup>th</sup> Air Refuelling Wing Commander and our former President, sent Dee a letter of best wishes for the future. It is reproduced here, along with Dee's reply: -



**100th Air Refueling Wing  
RAF Mildenhall**

Dear Mrs. Boneham,

As my time in Command of the 100th Air Refueling Wing comes to a close, my family and I cannot help but reflect fondly upon all of the treasured relationships we've gained! We stand in awe of the seemingly endless-well of support you have provided, and are truly overcome with a sense of gratitude and sincere appreciation for what you continue to do in support of our Airmen, families, and this incredible community.

This special relationship has proven time and time again to be absolutely essential to our ability to accomplish the mission, and the partnership is indelibly woven into the storied tapestry of the Bloody Hundredth's legacy. Specifically, your advocacy and support throughout the pandemic made it possible for our team to stay focused, and has ensured our doors would remain open for years to come. Your genuine interest in Team Mildenhall is why we are no longer closing, which shouldn't come as a surprise...you've always been the key to our success!

This summer, we will be passing the torch to a new leadership team eager to invest into a community that has already invested so much into our own. And it's on behalf of a grateful community that I thank you for your friendship, your hospitality, and your undeniable commitment to teamwork.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Pananon", is written over a white background.

S. TROY PANANON  
Colonel, USAF  
Commander

Dee replied on behalf of The Mildenhall Register: -

*Dear Colonel and Mrs Pananon*

*Just a quick note to wish you good luck in your new posting. You had, I hope, an enjoyable posting at Mildenhall, if complicated by the constrictions that Covid has placed on you and your team.*

*My committee and I were very disappointed not to be able to spend more time with you all at Mildenhall. We always felt welcomed, with great enthusiasm by everyone that we met there, which we appreciated greatly, especially the veterans, of which there are sadly fewer.*

*I hope we shall be able when Covid restrictions lift again, be able to visit and look forward to meeting your successor.*

*Best wishes to you and your family*

*Denise Boneham MBE, VR, Cert. Ed. Mildenhall Register.*

### **Obituaries of members we have lost this year.**

The following is taken from (*and further edited by me. Ed.*) the obituary given by Wg. Comm. Ray Kidd at **Reverend Norman Berryman's** funeral. It was sent to me by his daughter, Judith Arnott, along with many photographs and interesting snippets.

I am honoured to say a few words about Norman, he was a man whom I hold in high regard. One thing we had in common was that we were both Scarboroughians and I could see from my surroundings much of what motivated him to join those heroic fellow countrymen as they flew out over the North Sea on their dangerous missions almost daily in wartime. The Initial Training Wing (ITW) of the RAF was based at Scarborough and with it an abundance of young men in uniform. Out in the harbour was stationed a boat of the Air Sea Rescue Service, frequently called upon to help and rescue our brave aircrew who had to ditch in the sea before they could make land on return from operations

Norman was always keen on aeroplanes and joined 313 (Scarborough) Squadron ATC when it formed as a fifteen year old. Later Norman said, "This had a great influence on me and it also gave me a chance to advance educationally". Prior to that Norman had joined the Auxiliary Fire Service as a messenger on a voluntary unpaid basis.

Thanks to his niece, Judith, I can share with you much more of his personal details than hitherto. I wish that I could have known some of that information when Norman was still with us.

In 1942 Norman volunteered for aircrew duties, heard from the Air Ministry that a new category of aircrew namely that of Flight Engineer had been introduced and promptly re-mustered for that. He passed the basic training and qualified at RAF St. Athan, with further training at Vickers Armstrong Factory. Having qualified and been awarded his brevet he was posted to No XV Squadron at Mildenhall initially flying in Stirling bombers and then Lancasters. He completed a full and dangerous tour of 32

operations, which was no mean feat in those times. Following his tour, he was posted to No 17 Operational Training Unit (OTU) first as a ground instructor and later as a flying instructor. His final posting was to No 3 Glider Training School until his demobilisation in 1946.

On return to civilian life he entered the Inland Revenue Tax office, became interested in and ran the local Church Youth Club. It was at this time that he felt called to the church and was ordained in the Methodist Ministry in 1957. His first church after being ordained was Armadale in Scotland and it was there that the Reverend Berryman met and married his girlfriend Isabel. After this he moved to the north east and later on he moved down to Queen Victoria Seaman's Rest in Victoria Dock, which was a mission for seamen, ex-service men and the homeless run by the Methodist Church. It was as a result of his being so involved there that he was offered a church at Wesley House on Gibraltar, where he was appointed Officiating Chaplain to all HM Forces stationed on the Rock. Clearly this experience motivated him to volunteer later for the Homeless Centre in Peasholm Green, York

He was always ready to help those around him both locally and nationally and when in York he also returned to the ATC serving as the Chaplain to 2434 Church Fenton Squadron. It was here that someone asked if there was a common thread running between his wartime service and his involvement with the church and the ATC, to which Norman replied, "It has been the spirit of comradeship experienced throughout that has been a major factor in shaping my life and the decisions I have made".

Typically he also joined the RAFA where he was a loyal and active member and also became a member of the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington on the site of the former RAF Station. He shared the chaplain's duties with The Reverend Leonard Rivett and stalwart of the museum, Derek Reed commented that Norman always proudly wore his Flight Engineer's brevet when he was attired for his ecclesiastical duties. He also spent many hours with his friend and RAFA colleague, Maurice Vaux reconditioning some of the older aircraft at the museum and frequently their wives would accompany them when they would be busy with old uniforms and archive work. It was also here that Norman attended a special ceremony with several other valiant men when they were presented with their Legion d' Honneur medals for their contribution to the liberation of France.

Norman was a fine person for whom nothing was too much trouble when helping others.

*Back in 2019, I were advised by the US Postal service that Robert 'Roy' Davie had passed away and so an obituary was written by Howard and included in the newsletter. Happily at the time, this seems to have been a mistake. However, earlier this year Roy's son, George, contacted me to say that Roy had definitely passed away this time. George went on to say: -*

*'As with all veterans who served we are thankful and grateful for his service. He passed away peacefully. In his later years he enjoyed the return to Mildenhall for reunions. We are fortunate to have his uniform which will go to one of his grandsons*

*who is involved in the Space X program. I have his medals which I plan to have encased and displayed in honour of my dad'.*

*So here, for a second and, sadly, final time is Robert's obituary. Ed.*

**W/O Robert 'Roy' Davie** lived his later years in Vermont, USA. He was originally trained as a pilot at No.22 EFTS at Caxton Gibbet, a satellite field near Cambridge. From here he was posted to No 32 EFTS in Bowden, Alberta, Canada and finally to No.32 SFTS at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan where he gained his pilot wings. On arrival back in the UK it was apparent there was a surplus number of pilots therefore, he chose to be re-trained as a flight engineer. Roy wanted to play his part in the war and considered this his only option.

Roy joined the crew of F/O J. 'Bluey' Ingram RAAF and completed operations during 1945 with No. 622 Squadron. His first operation was to Gelsenkirchen on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1945 and over the next three months the crew undertook both daylight and night operations. On an operation to attack Kiel on 9/10<sup>th</sup> April 1945, the crew were attacked by a Ju88 night fighter which aborted its attack at a crucial moment. Roy finished his operational tour with Operation Manna & Exodus.

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

**Corporal John Johnston.** Ex 149 (East India) Squadron, RAF. By Alan Fraser.

With huge sadness I report that my Friend, Mentor and author of the book "149 (East India) Squadron. History and Memories 'Strong by Night'", John Johnston, left us peacefully on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 1921 at the age of 95. With the assistance of Nick Carter, John produced the definitive squadron history which so many of us have searched for.

Happily referring to himself as an 'Erk', John left us a superb book, containing many priceless memories and anecdotes from squadron members and their relatives. Its popularity is shown by the difficulty many have found in trying to source a copy. He also wrote many other things, including an, as yet, unpublished short history of himself and his time in the RAF, titled, 'Erk'.

A proud Scot who could trace his family back to almost 1600, John served with two Australian Halifax squadrons before joining 149 (East India) squadron at RAF Methwold. He joined the RAF at seventeen and a half "to be a flyer..." but his weak eyesight meant that this was not to be his path. Instead he entered the trade of 'RDF/ Wireless mechanic', which duly morphed into Radar – the very secret and highly technical trade he was to follow for all his RAF career.

After training he was posted to RAF Driffield and No 4 group, with 462 and 466 Australian squadrons flying Halifax Mark III's - and after that to 149 squadron at RAF Methwold. He dearly loved his 'Lanc' aircraft and could recite the full pre-flight schedule well into his 90's.



After VE day John was selected to be posted to the proposed 'Tiger Force' for the Far East. This was an attempt to allow the use of the heavy Lancaster bomb load in the war on Japan. Hiroshima and Nagasaki removed that need and John left the RAF.

His subsequent career was an indication of his worth. Head hunted by an American chemical pharmacy company called Scholl's, he rose to be a world renowned chemical scientist.

His awards include:

War Medal 1939-1945 (UK)

Defence Medal (UK)

1999-Honorary Life Member of the Pressure Sensitive Tape Council of North America

2006-Man of the Year of the American Society of Conservators

2006-Lifetime Achievement Award of the Pressure Sensitive Tape Council of North America

2007-American Academy of Forensic Science Regional award (Southwestern Association)

2008-FBI Appreciation Award

2012-FBI Appreciation Award

He is survived by sons Ian, Trevor and Alan, 10 grandchildren, 20 great grandchildren and 4 great, great grandchildren

He was laid to rest on Saturday, June 5 2021.

Go with God, John.

*On a personal note, I too am grateful for knowing John as a friend and knowledgeable reference point. Throughout my time as secretary he was an almost constant source of information, not only for 149ers, many of whom are mourning his loss, but for many other RAF subjects.*

*Numerous people have had his very special guided tour of the old Methwold airfield. Some of their stories have appeared in these pages in the past. He was an enthusiastic person who loved what he was doing, and it showed. So yes, he will be missed by so very many. Ed.*

*It was with a great deal of sadness that I opened an e-mail in May to learn of the death of **Sergeant Albert Miller**, Flight Engineer, 149 Squadron. An irrepressible cheeky chappie who had graced so many of our reunions over the years, often accompanied latterly by his family. Members who have attended those reunions may well remember that one of his claims to fame was that his picture was on the wall in the Bird in Hand! Alan Fraser produced a rather large dossier on Albert and his crew and I have used extracts here as his obituary. Alan wrote: -*

(Flight Eng. training information adapted from the website <http://rafww2butler.wordpress.com/> with permission and grateful thanks)

In early 1944, Bert received instructions to attend a two-day assessment at an Aviation Candidates Selection Board (ACSB). As directed, he packed a small suitcase, his civilian respirator and the requisite paperwork and travelled to No 2 Recruit Centre at RAF Cardington in Bedfordshire. Over the next couple of days he undertook a series of medical examinations/tests which assessed his aptitude for the six aircrew categories, namely pilot, navigator, bomb-aimer, air-gunner, wireless operator and flight engineer.

On the second, he was interviewed by an Aviation Candidate Selection Board (ACSB) and at the end of the process, the board recommended him “for training as flight mechanic, potential flight engineer”. Albert was sent before the Attestation Officer where, after formally signing his Notice Paper (Form 2168), he was asked to swear allegiance to his King and Country. Having completed his assessment, ‘Bert’ was enlisted in the RAF “for the duration of the present emergency” and placed “on reserve”.

Albert was eventually called up and went to his Initial Training Wing (No 3 ITW) at Torquay in Devon. He was posted into No 2 Squadron, No 21 Initial Training Wing (ITW), which specialised in basic service training of flight engineers. The next stop for Bert was RAF Locking, near Weston Super Mare, to train as a Flight Mechanic (Engines). The initial training was in the use of hand tools - files, hand drills, micrometers, Vernier’s, etc. Various exercises were carried out to increase the student’s hand skills, including stripping down a radial aircraft engine, rebuilding it and test running it. The final examination consisted of written papers and an oral examination in identifying various engine parts. Most students passed out as Aircraftsman 2nd Class (A/C2). Bert successfully “passed out” from the course. He was posted to No. 4 School of Technical Training (4 S of TT) at RAF St Athan in South Wales to start his “trade” training as a flight engineer.

Following a successful six month course, Bert was awarded the Flight Engineer's brevet and the rank of Sergeant. Albert passed out from RAF St Athan on the 6th September 1944. He was posted from St.Athan, now in the rank of Sergeant, to 1669 HCU (Heavy Conversion Unit) at RAF Langar. Here he would begin his flying on the 17th October 1944 and become a member of a crew of seven. Pilot, Navigator, Bomb Aimer, Flight Engineer, Wireless operator, Mid Upper Gunner and Rear Gunner. Their crew training was initially on the Halifax aircraft operated by 1669 HCU, but then they were posted to No 3 LFS (Lancaster Finishing School) at RAF Feltwell in November 1944, where they converted to the Avro Lancaster bomber, staying there until late November 1944. Their next posting as a crew was to 149 (East India) Squadron at RAF Methwold, making their first squadron flight on the 14th December 1944. During their introduction to 149 Sqn they did manage to clock up four Ops, being Siegen, Trier, Hangelar and Rheydi. All were carried out successfully.

Alan records that the crew went on to complete 26 operations, whilst Bert managed to cram in another three with other pilots before the cessation of hostilities. There followed one Manna trip, a number of Exodus trips and one Baedeker tour. Very little was then happening to break the boredom of no operations, but before leaving 149 Squadron they did carry out the odd test bombing, further Baedeker and some 'Virtue' (area mapping) exercises.

The crew left Methwold for the Lancasters of 138 Squadron at Tuddenham in November 1945. It was from here in April 1946 that their illustrious war finally came to an end. Against all the odds, they had survived and completed their tasks to the very best of their abilities. A job well done.

*Whilst all our veteran losses are very sad, there are some which hit home even harder. One of these was long-time member, regular reunion attendee, regular contributor to the newsletter and my data files and affectionately known by us all as **Tom Payne**, with a 'Y'. There are numerous entries for him on the internet as he loved sharing his flying stories. The one I most enjoyed reading was published in the Chiltern Aircrew Association newsletter, twice! So, as his obit. and with their consent, I reproduce Tom's story on the next page: -*

### **FLIGHT LIEUTENANT THOMAS 'TOM' PAYNE**

"Tom died peacefully in his Care Home on Sunday 7 February 2021 in his 97th year. He was forever linked with Hemel Hempstead having lived there for most of his life. He joined the Hemel ATC and a few years ago donated books and memorabilia to the Squadron. He was a strong supporter of the ACA, The De Havilland Moth Club and his beloved Aylesbury and Halton RAFA.

He often talked of his entry to the RAF. Like many wanting to serve, he lied about his age and was not caught out. Throughout his life Tom was 'a giver' in everything he did".

#### **Tiger Moths to Lancasters**

"The first time I flew in a DH82 Tiger Moth was November 9th 1942, a year and 3 days after Attestation and 6 months after joining the RAFVR. It lasted 30 minutes but they were the most exciting 30 minutes of my life to date. The instructor was a Sgt. Inman and it was at No.4 EFTS, Blackburn Aircraft Company airfield, Brough near Hull.

I recall it was very cold and we had to march from our billets round the perimeter to the flight offices and aircraft dispersal area. Before flying we had hours of practice in prop swinging and aircraft handling on the ground. The following 4 weeks were filled with lectures and flying. Flights lasted from 30 to 60 minutes with various lessons in stalling, spinning, aerobatics and recovering from unusual positions until finally on December 2nd after 12 hours dual I had my solo test and first solo flight which lasted all of 10 minutes.

Departing from Brough on December 10th in high spirits thinking at last I am a flyer, reality sunk in when I arrived at Heaton Park Manchester with thousands of other would be pilots waiting to be sent overseas for further training.

My next flight was to be on March 29th 1943 at 35 EFTS Neepawa, Manitoba Canada, in their version of a Tiger Moth the DH82C which had the luxury of a canopy. The hours of circuits and bumps mounted up, after 5 hours dual I was off solo and life was very good as I gained experience and confidence.

Sadly my first instructor, Sgt. Smith killed himself, but his pupil escaped, after he "beat up" a recovery truck on an airfield and misjudged his height. I was on a "precautionary approach" at the time when my instructor suddenly took over and flew at low level back to Neepawa to advise them of the crash.

The lesson learnt by witnessing such a tragedy has stayed with me ever since, whilst the temptation sometimes when low level flying is to go lower still, I always refrained from doing so. Tree tops and chimneys belong where they are, keep well clear and you can't go far wrong.

Whilst flying in Canada was regarded as safe it was easy to get lost with the featureless landscape. No radios were installed in our aircraft, the railway line running East-West was a main feature as were a few rivers and lakes. Grain storage silos alongside the rail track usually had the name of the "town" (village in UK term) painted on them so they could be read and checked on the map.

Several fellow trainees fell by the way side on the course, some applied for re-training as navigators, bomb aimers, flight engineers or wireless ops, very few chose to return to civvy street and wait for call up.

The servicing at Neepawa was carried out mainly by civilian engineers, unfortunately I think that their skilled personnel had all joined the services and the men left to undertake the work did not perform too well. The number of aircraft that were rejected by instructors and trainees meant that practically every day time was lost.

My first major scare whilst flying happened quite unexpectedly, I was solo practicing aerobatics so was at about 6,000 feet, I had dived and pulled up or a stalled turn which fell away. Muttering to myself I then attempted a slow roll, it was a disaster, the plane just wouldn't go where I tried. Still puzzled I re-checked the controls. Having walked round and checked all movements manually on the ground before start up, I was sure everything was O.K.

To my horror I found that the port aileron wasn't responding to the stick. I tried "slow" flying and found that the aileron drooped as the speed decreased, this acted like flap! Only having heard about flaps in theory of flight lectures, I was getting a lesson in real life which I wasn't prepared for. Without radio contact I was on my own, I tried landing approaches whilst still at around 4,000 feet and worked out the only way to land was by doing a 'wheelie'. Keeping flying speed and just hope the runway was long enough for me to get the tail down and brake safely. Yes we had brakes, but no tail skid, as we had concrete runways.

I managed to land safely on my first attempt, it was harder to taxi back to the parking area but after shutting down and reporting to the Flight Commander. I was sent to talk about the problem with the Maintenance Section. They examined the controls and checked the plane out, finally apologising to me for one of their staff who had "used incorrect wire", I questioned them further and it turned out that fuse wire was commonly being used to connect several linking sections throughout the system as there was a shortage of pins. Unfortunately he had used 5 amp instead of 30 amp which was why it failed.

I passed all tests and with some 74 hours flying Tigers moved on in mid-May to continue my pilots training on twin engined Oxfords at Swift Current.

Here I succumbed to Scarlet Fever which had broken out on the troopship, this delayed my getting my pilots wings until late October 1943.

This probably saved my life, many of my earlier mates returned to the U.K. and reached Squadrons only to lose their lives. It took me another year to get to OTU flying Wellingtons, flying Lancasters at a Conversion unit in early 1945 meant that the war in Europe ended before I reached a Squadron".

*MF-J tells me that he did manage four Baedeker trips, one Dodge trip & a Post Mortem exercise. Released from service on 4th November 1946, he re-enlisted in 1949. He was promoted to the rank of Flight Lieutenant on 5th March 1954.*

*RIP Tom you will be sadly missed by all who knew you. Ed.*

As mentioned before, Tom nearly always sent in something for the newsletter. We couldn't always oblige with inclusions, but I thought it poignant that this year, before his sad demise, he'd sent details of three Ribbon of Remembrance stones he'd had laid in memory of a XV Squadron Blenheim crew.

His cousin, Sgt. Frank Vivien Gunning was observer in Blenheim IV, L3747, LS-B which had been tasked with attacking German troop columns in the area around Le Bourget (according to <https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/229267>). They had taken off from Wyton just before lunch time and appear to have been hit by gunfire from the ground. The aircraft crashed at Malleville-les-Grès, where all three crew are buried. Sgt Gunning was just 19 years old. Interestingly, his pilot was a Greek national, P/O Alexander Takideli, just 20 years old and their gunner was Sgt. David H Peuleve aged 21. Tom says he wasn't able to visit the IBCC to see these three stones, which are laid side by side in The RoR, but that they sent him photographs.

*This got me thinking; we always remember those who served in the Wellingtons, Stirlings and Lancasters but the earlier crews on the Fairey Battles and Bristol Blenheims who suffered terrible losses in the early months of the war, never appear to get a mention. So, if anyone has stories about these rarely remembered losses from our squadrons, I'd happily put something in a future newsletter. (Ed.)*

*Continuing with the remainder of the obituaries, it saddened me to learn of the passing of **Jeremy Powell**. Son of the highly respected and decorated Group Captain John A (Speedy) Powell DSO, DFC, OBE who commanded 149 Squadron*

*and appeared in the film 'Target for Tonight'. A regular attendee and supporter of The MR until ill health prevented him from attending latterly.*

*Like many of our ground-crew membership **J.W. Smyth** was one of the many unsung heroes of Bomber Command who kept the force mobile through thick and thin. As an engine fitter/mechanic he would have worked on one particular aircraft of, in his case, XV Squadron. Rarely inside the shelter of a hanger, in all weathers. Come rain or shine, frost, snow or summer heat they had to ensure the engines, the very heart of those mighty bombers, were up to the task of carrying their heavy loads and seven man crews safely on their given operations. Post war he remained in the service, working on the Boeing B29 Washingtons.*

*Other members of his family also served in the RAF, with his father being a Medic at Elsham Wolds and his brother-in-law performing another vital task as a parachute packer for aircrew.*

Once again I have sad news to impart regarding **Flight Lieutenant W. K. 'Ken' Thomas DFC** who passed away on 2nd March aged 99 years. Ken was an advocate for all things Bomber Command related and a regular at the Mildenhall Register reunions with his son Graham. It was always a pleasure to be in Ken's company, I will treasure the memories of him relaying his experiences to me for the Squadron history, 'We Wage War by Night.'

Perhaps Ken's most memorable operations were to Homberg in November 1944 and Chemnitz in February 1945.

On 8th November 1944, the crew attacked the oil plant at Homberg and received a direct hit by flak in the navigator's position over the target resulting in the starboard inner engine being hit and rendered useless. The flak explosion seriously wounded the navigator F/O Berry and injured Sgt J. Kingston in the mid upper turret. Fragments of shattered windscreen sprayed Ken in the pilot's seat.

Despite his serious injuries, F/O Berry continued to navigate the aircraft back to England. Due to his injuries and the damage to the aircraft, Ken decided to land at the emergency landing field at Woodbridge. Flying Officer Berry was given the immediate award of the Distinguished Flying Cross. By the time his medal citation appeared in the London Gazette he was a Flight Lieutenant.

With the bombing of Dresden still being debated by Allied Command, the city of Chemnitz was another target identified under Operation Thunderclap. Therefore, Allied Air Command issued the instruction to bomb the city on the night of

14th February 1945. Chemnitz was an eight and a half hour return trip that was exhausting for the bomber crews and when the target was announced at squadron briefings around the country, gasps of derision rang out across the rooms. When the battle order was promulgated there were fourteen Lancasters and crews assigned to the mission. Ken and his crew were assigned the spare aircraft, GI-H, NN709 due to his usual mount GI-M, HK646 undergoing essential maintenance. Ken and his crew had arrived on the squadron in September 1944 and were about half way through their 'tour', and a well-respected crew among the squadron.

After briefing, the crew boarded their Lancaster and signed the ground inspection form. All the crew readied themselves for the long trip to Chemnitz. The four Merlin engines were 'run up' and the flight engineer, Sgt Ralph monitored his dials and engine pressures. Almost immediately the starboard outer engine was problematic and only producing 2,800 revs instead of the required 3,000. This was the usual sign that the flame traps were beginning to block up. After a quick discussion with the crew, the decision was made to continue with the mission in the hope the engine would perform better once airborne.

Ken coaxed GI-H into the air at 20:19 hours and set course for the target. En route to the target the starboard outer engine continued to cause concern and eventually caught fire fifteen minutes before the target resulting it having to be feathered. The whole process sounds routine, however, nothing could have been further from the truth as described by Sgt Bill Ralph the flight engineer below. His position beside the pilot gave him an eyewitness account of proceedings:

"Approximately four and a half hours after take-off we were approaching the target, when the starboard outer engine caught fire. Feathering procedure was carried out, fuel switched off, mags switched out, throttle closed, props feathered and the fire extinguisher operated putting out the fire.

A few moments later, to our amazement, we noticed the starboard inner engine was also feathered. How this happened is still not clear, but the instant reaction was to press the feathering button to get the engine started again. During this procedure, the airflow caught the props, and the engine sprang to life, with all the controls in maximum power and boost. The roar was frightening and we wondered how it stayed on the wing. During the confusion, we lost height from 19,000 to 17,000 feet. Ken somehow kept the starboard wing from dropping, thus avoiding a spiral dive to certain death, and this story never to be told. On composing ourselves we continued to bomb the target at 00:35 hrs and set off home on three engines."

The Chemnitz raid was not an overall success mainly down to the cloud over the target and poor target marking. Ken touched down on the runway at Mildenhall at 04:59 hours with an exhausted crew on board. The journey home on three engines meant that they had fallen further behind the bomber stream and therefore vulnerable to night fighter attack. Fortunately, they were unmolested on the route home.

On completion of his tour of operations, Ken was also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for numerous encounters with the enemy, outstanding courage and devotion to duty.

Per Ardua ad Astra.

**Sgt E J (Ed) Turner** has sadly passed away. He was a Flight Engineer with the 20 year old Flt. Lt Bernard Williams, an Australian, as the crew pilot. The aircraft they were crewing, Lancaster OJ-H, NF972, was hit in the right wing by Flak en route to the Schalke Coking Plant at Gelsenkirchen. The aircraft was seen by others to fall near Wesel and the pilot, Flt. Lt Williams and the Wireless Operator Flt. Sgt A. London (also an Australian) were both killed. The other five crew, including Ed Turner, survived.

This Operation was part of the Allied drive to eliminate the fuel supplies available to the German Forces. To this end, Coking Plants and any areas involved in the production of the synthetic oil being used by the Germans, were hit hard and often. The crew had been posted in to 149 (East India) Squadron from No 5 LFS on 8th December 1944 and were shot down on the 5th March 1945 during their 15th Operation.

I understand that two of the crew still survive. I would be delighted to hear from them or their relatives. Alan Fraser, 149 (East India) Squadron Historian.

**Flying Officer Eric J. Willis RAAF** a former pilot who served on 622 Squadron has passed away at the age of 100. I had the pleasure of meeting Eric and his daughter a few years ago when they came to a Mildenhall Register reunion. As a group we paid a visit to the Lancaster at Easy Kirkby and Eric was able to climb aboard and sit in the pilot's seat once again - wonderful memories!

Eric always had a dream to fly, especially as a pilot. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was in a reserved occupation working on the family farm in Biloela, Queensland Australia. The journey towards finally joining the Royal Australian Air Force would not be a smooth transition and only by sheer persistence and endeavour would he fulfil his dream.

The road to operational status for Eric and crew began in earnest when the crew were formed at No.84 Operational Training unit at Desborough in Northamptonshire. Eric Willis had completed his pilot training in Canada as a part of the Commonwealth Air Training plan and he graduated as an above average pilot. The RAF 'crewing up' process was haphazard to say the least and crews were formed on instinct and first impressions.

First Operational sortie - Target Wesel

Eric's first operation was on 18th February 1945 to attack Wesel in daylight navigating by means of G/H radar. Wesel was now on the front line and the Allied Army had asked Bomber Command to bomb the city to prevent troop movement, concentrating mainly on the railway installations. The crew was allocated to fly aircraft HK628, GI-X a Lancaster that had been modified to carry a .5 calibre machine gun in the mid under gun position.

Eric kept a remarkable log of his operations and perhaps his most eventful operation was to Potsdam on 14th April 1945. The log entry records the crew flew aircraft Lancaster HK787, 'F' on an 8 hour 50 minute night operations flight to Potsdam.

This raid on Potsdam was the first and last night bombing raid Eric and his crew took part in. The official reports stated that the raid was something of a milk-run. Eric and his crew would have differing memories on that one, they would come within a hairs breadth of being a second Lancaster lost that night.

The rear gunner, Sgt Farthing was unavailable for this operation and he was replaced by F/Sgt Cheeseman. Having formatted over Lakenheath they turned south. Normally they flew south, skirting around London before crossing the



southern coast finally turning east and heading towards France and then their target for that particular day. For some unknown reason the authorities decided this day to allow the force to fly over London, shortening the flying time. In order to reach Potsdam, a suburb on the far side of Berlin, the bombers had to fly over the heart of Berlin. Their target for the night was the largest staging area for the German Army at this late stage in the war. The Germans were marshalling all their reinforcements for the Russian front in Potsdam adjacent to the city's outer suburbs. En route to the target Eric decided to engage the automatic pilot system called 'George', His reasoning was to rest for part of the eight and a half hours flying time. You could use the automatic pilot over the channel and over some of recaptured France. You would not dare use it over occupied Europe, the night fighters could attack at any time and instant reactions would very often mean the difference between life and death. On this occasion the automatic pilot was malfunctioning which was a common occurrence in many Lancasters.

Approaching the target the crew spotted a night fighter and the replacement rear gunner, F/Sgt Cheeseman screamed out a warning "fighter" just as it commenced turning away. The sky was heavily congested with bombers and obviously the night fighter wanted an easier target and not one sat centrally in the bomber stream. Whilst over the target the crew's Lancaster was caught in a master searchlight, the second plane over the target. It was one minute past midnight and he was not getting any benefit from 'Window' because the wind was blowing it behind them. Because it was cloudy, just as they got over target the Pathfinder aircraft crossed underneath them and dropped the target flares. The master searchlight came on, catching their aircraft. From the time the searchlight came on, one had about eight seconds before the first shells arrived. The master searchlight controlled the master anti-aircraft gun. When the master searchlight came on, all the other manually operated searchlights came on as well, the whole sky lit up like day.

Eric instantly threw the Lancaster into a corkscrew, putting it into an 80 degree bank. Extensive fighter affiliation training had accustomed the crew to the capabilities of the Lancaster and he had no hesitation in pushing the boundaries in a violent corkscrew manoeuvre. Unfortunately the machine wasn't the only thing copping punishment, the bomb aimer, Henry Pam, was looking through his bombsights and not strapped in which resulted in him becoming pinned to the roof in the corkscrew and suffering ear damage which caused considerable deafness later. As they flattened out on the bottom of the first turn, the bomb aimer somehow managed to release their bomb load calling out "Bombs gone", at which point they shot up 500 feet adding an extra dimension to their already violent corkscrew.

Eventually the searchlight went out, obviously some bombs landed on it and as soon as that happened all the little searchlights lost him, darkness was never so beautiful!

Eric was always very proud of his humanitarian operations to supply the starving Dutch people with food. The Dutch food trips were officially credited as 'ops' because of the truce with the Germans being of such a doubtful nature. For although the truce was arranged with the Germans to allow the food drop to take

place, several 'Lancs' were fired on and each aircraft flew fully crewed and armed just in case. The mission had been put off for three days because of atrocious weather, but the conditions in Holland were so acute that Bomber Harris said "It's either them or you, so it's got to be you." He made a command decision to risk his aircrews' lives for the sake of the starving Dutch population. The weather was appalling, it was pouring all the way to the Dutch coast. It was very heavy rain and the visibility was just about zero. They flew the channel at about 20 feet. As the crew got to the coast, the winds hitting the coast pushed the rain clouds up and the rains stopped and they got ahead of the front.

Getting to the coast, they went up to 500 feet. The Germans had said they were not to fly under 500 feet, for fear of them spying on their armaments; they had threatened to shoot anyone who did so. Once they had crossed the coast and over the gun batteries, they dropped down to 300 feet, gradually reducing height as they flew further inland. As they neared the airport, which was the 'target area' for their food drop, they flew across a road. The crew were flying at around 100 feet and looked down into the eyes of three German soldiers on one side of the road. On the other side of the road were a group of Dutch people happily waving Union Jack flags and crowds of people with Union Jacks waiting at the airfield.

Some of the Lancasters came back with bullet holes in their wings from individual German soldiers who had fired on them; just some hotheads really, nothing organised. The Germans had covered the airfield with concrete posts to guard against any aircraft landing. The Germans had the airfield cordoned off, holding back the crowds until the food began to tumble out of the bomb bays and the crowds surged forward. The Germans did not have a hope in Hades of holding the crowd back. They claimed they wanted to see the food was distributed properly, but realistically they really meant to get their share.'

I will always remember meeting a humble unassuming gentleman who was very proud of his part in fighting tyranny as part of the Commonwealth. Eric reached the milestone of 100 years of age recently and had his family celebrations. I was very grateful to Eric and his son James for allowing me to include Eric's experiences within the Squadron history, 'We Wage War by Night.'

Per Ardua ad Astra.

Howard Sandall 622 Squadron Historian

### **A very tragic Accident**

No sooner had the New Year started than I received an enquiry from Mickey Mace. He wrote: - *"I am trying to find out a few details about my grandfather who served with the Royal Air Force at RAF Mildenhall in 1943. All I know is his name and rank (Reginald Bertie COBBIN Ass. Grdsmn (MT)) and that he was accidentally killed whilst at work on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1943. My curiosity was aroused when I found his old ID card in some of my mother's possessions. Sadly she is no longer with us and she never spoke about the incident"*.

Well, my curiosity was also aroused and I set to work trying to find an answer. As many of you will know, it is extremely difficult to find details of groundcrew, which is

a great shame. Despite the amazing work they put in throughout the hostilities keeping the aircraft serviceable and aircrew safe, sadly, they get very little press.

Only XV and 622 Squadrons were stationed on base at that time so I approached both historians in the hope of a mention of an accident in the records. Martyn's pure guess work, that he might be a civilian contractor working on base as a driver, was the best that could be come up with. So, in the depths of another Covid lockdown, and nothing much else to do, I set about trawling the web with his name.

I soon found the CWGC records for Reginald, which stated he was buried in Mildenhall Rural District cemetery and gave his parents' names. There was nothing else. So, a civilian, employed on military business was confirmed.

Then a snippet from an old copy of the Bury Free Press, dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 1943, caught my eye. On a page advertising Brooke Bond tea at nine and a half pennies per quarter pound, Whitbread Brewers and something called Phyllosan! was a coroner's report.

**FATALITY AT  
AERODROME**  
**Man Killed by  
Tailplane**

Mr. Thomas Wilson, Coroner for the Liberty of Bury St. Edmunds, held an enquiry on Thursday evening concerning the death of Reginald Bertie Cobbin, aged 41, of 7, Cucks Road, West Row, who was killed at an aerodrome in East Anglia when the tailplane of a four engined bomber hit the cab of a lorry in which he was sitting.

Mr. V. O. D. Cade, of Cambridge, represented the Air Ministry.

Evidence was given that a party was paint spraying on a runway on an aerodrome with a spraying plant drawn by a lorry of which deceased was the driver. Another runway intersected this one and a plane came taxiing along and went straight towards the men and the tail plane hit the cab of the lorry.

The foreman said that he had seen to the Control Officer and got permission to be working at that point. The lorry was just on the runway down which the plane was taxiing.

Mr. Cade: Have you ever been warned in the course of your duty to be on the look out for aircraft?—Yes, it is one of our instructions to keep a look out and we have to have permission from the Control Officer to be out on these runways.

The Coroner: Was there no one there whose special job it was to keep a look out?—No, Sir.

The pilot of the aircraft said when taxiing along the runway, he saw the lorry about 150 yards away. It started to move forward and he applied his brakes, bringing the aircraft almost to a standstill. He then saw one of the workmen wave and concluded it was safe for him to carry on and the tip of the port wing passed over the lorry. Next he felt a bump and stopped the aircraft.

A R.A.F. Station Medical Officer said the cause of death was laceration of the brain.

The verdict was "death from misadventure," and the Coroner expressed the view that, with these parties of workmen, there should be one man whose sole job was to keep a look out.

Under the headlines the report reads: -

*Mr Thomas Wilson, coroner for the Liberty of Bury St Edmunds held an enquiry on Thursday evening concerning the death of Reginald Bertie Cobbin, aged 41 of 7 Cucks Road, West Row, who was killed at an aerodrome in East Anglia when the tail plane of a four engined bomber hit the cab of a lorry in which he was sitting.*

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*Mr Cade: "Have you ever been warned in the course of your duty to be on the lookout for aircraft?" – "Yes, it is one of our instructions to keep a look out and we have to have permission from the Control Officer to be out on those runways".*

*The Coroner: "Was there no one there whose special job it was to keep a lookout?" – "No Sir".*

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*The verdict was 'death from misadventure' and the Coroner expressed the view that with these parties of workmen, there should be one man whose sole job was to keep a look out.*

So there it was, Mickey had his answer and the family rumour that it was a spinning propeller that had brought about his grandfather's demise was untrue. The work crew were painting or re-painting the marker lines on the newly laid concrete runways.

No record of the incident has been found in either Squadron records. Was the man who waved trying to attract the attention of the pilot and indicating that something was wrong? It would, almost certainly, have been a Stirling aircraft belonging to one of the squadrons that was involved, but I doubt we shall ever know the identity or any more than revealed in this report. With the pilot some 24 feet in the air whilst taxiing, he wouldn't have had a great view, especially as the very thick wing appears to have passed over the lorry. A very tragic end indeed.

**A Poem** Former Chairman John Gentleman sent me in this item, entitled The Chedburgh Airman. With 218 Squadron flying from there I thought I'd include it. Someone might just know who penned it: -

I was an airman flying from the airfield here,  
I was sent on flying missions, and each time was filled with fear,  
I drank at the Marquis with its wonderful beer,  
It helped, but always, I still had that fear.

I met a Chedburgh girl, but dare not call her dear  
In case I should not return, I lived with that horrible fear.  
After every mission, as Chedburgh drew near,  
My heart relaxed from that constant fear.

The church that I attended, and wise words I would hear,  
They helped to control my worry and that awful fear,  
At the school, the children would call out, and cheer,  
So I smiled, and waved, so hiding that aching fear.

Then one day, while returning at the end of the year  
My plane was hit, exploding, now no time fear.  
We all died on that mission, never more to appear  
But at last I will not have to live with that fear.

I am at in Chedburgh, and your voices I can hear,  
With no pain, and no worries, but mostly, I have no fear.

*What poignant sentiments, which I'm sure were shared by so many of the young men from our squadrons. Ed.*

**In memory of Steve Stevens and Tom Maxwell. Farmers Club 10/12/21.**

*A report by Adrian Maxwell, which begins with a 'Thank you' to Dee, who attended on behalf of all the MR Committee who were sadly, otherwise disposed that evening. (Ed)*



The picture (left) shows Dee with Adrian and his Dad's memorabilia displayed in the club.

Thank you for coming to the Farmers Club on Friday evening when we remembered the lives of Steve Stevens and Tom Maxwell.

Tom was a Lancaster rear gunner with 622 Squadron, shot down in 1944, evaded capture through France and over the Pyrenees. Steve was a Lancaster pilot with 57 Squadron. A

number of times Steve brought a badly crippled aircraft and crew safely back to England.

Tom passed away in 2019 and was cremated in Exeter with full military honours. But Steve passed away in 2020 amid Covid so sadly only 6 people were at the graveside. We thought it fitting to celebrate their lives. It was a great and fitting tribute to their memory that so many of you came to meet, reminisce, remember and celebrate their lives. It was important that we did that. We had been planning this event for over 12 months. We assumed Covid would have ended by now and the coast be clear. So, we were very pleased that, despite all the current problems, so many were able to come and remember with us.

A special mention should be made of Dee Boneham MBE. She attended as Chair of the Mildenhall Register, the organisation for veterans of 622 and other squadrons based at RAF Mildenhall in WW2.

On Friday afternoon, before coming to the club, Dee laid, at the Bomber Command memorial, Hyde Park, a wreath on behalf of the Register and in memory of Steve and Tom and those who did not return. The wording on the wreath can be viewed in the pictures.

*For those who can't follow the link to the pictures, Dee's note read: - 'In memory of all those on the Mildenhall Register Squadrons both those who gave their all during war and all special veterans who have died since. Special thoughts for those who are remembering Steve Stevens DFC and Tom Maxwell DFC, Legion d'Honneur at a memorial service today'. 'Lest we forget'.*



As the evening came to a close a modicum of levity appeared as if from nowhere. We can say with absolute certainty that Steve and Tom arranged it that way.

Per Ardua Ad Astra.

Pictures of the event can be viewed on this link:-  
<https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0S5UzI7Vjci9u>

## The Heligoland '39 Project – updates.

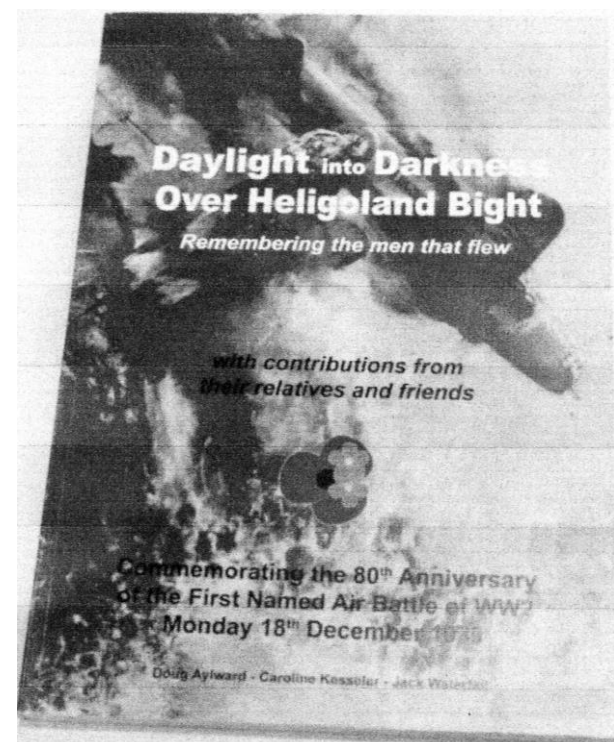
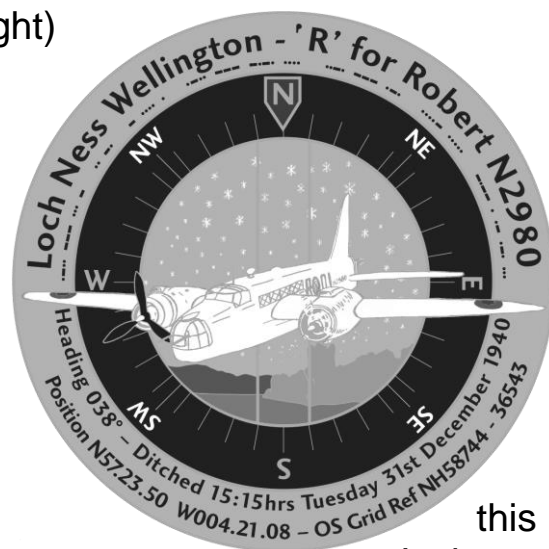
As we all know a lot of work went on in Ely in 2017/18 that culminated in a ceremony at the Cathedral's Bomber Command Memorial. This marked the beginning of the eightieth anniversary year of The Battle of Heligoland Bight which in turn led to marking the actual Anniversary at the RAF Memorial at Runnymede on 18th December 2019.

One thing has led to another and last year it was planned to organise a gathering in Inverness on New Year's Eve (Hogmanay). This would have marked the eightieth anniversary of Wellington N2980's ditching. Alas most of the best laid plans have been disrupted by COVID-19 although an RAF Typhoon flypast was achieved at the end of October '20 to mark the spot where 'R' for Robert sank.

The Loch Ness Wellington 2020 Project Badge (right) conveys some further details.

Everything is on hold at the moment but post pandemic plans are currently being hatched.

Arrangements to gather on Loch Ness on the 21st September 2022 are considered to be realistic. The date will be the anniversary of N2980's lifting from the deep. Post midge season. Hopefully calm weather for a cruise on the loch.



Further to this update from Jack Waterfall, I was contacted by Doug Aylward who, along with Caroline Kessler, have worked closely with the project and Jack. The intentions have changed somewhat and the following is from their latest website newsletter.

The project is now scheduled to conclude in July 2022 with the publication of a book.

*The title is 'Daylight into Darkness over Heligoland Bight' which I think is very appropriate. This disastrous raid changed the RAF's view on daylight operations and for the main, they converted to night operations from then until virtually the end of the campaign. Ed.*

Thank you to all those who have contributed information so far. If you have any information or memorabilia which may be useful to include in the book then please get in touch with the team. <https://www.heligoland39.org/>

*As some of you might be aware, I'm a keen model aircraft pilot. The following caught my eye. Written by someone from a Pathfinder Squadron, I've copied it here (with the kind permission of S&T magazine) in the hopes it might stir a few memories and provide enjoyment to others. Ed.*

### **Aeromodelling in a German POW camp By S A C Smith**

The following account of events which occurred in Germany as a sequel to the last of 35 operational raids (4 to Berlin) will be of interest to many aeromodellers. The story begins when the author arrives in Germany by parachute on one very dark and windy night after being forced to leave an extremely unserviceable "Pathfinder" Lancaster in the March of 1944. It must be remembered that the apparent early inactivity was occasioned by recovery from wounds sustained when exiting the author's aircraft after it was shot down.

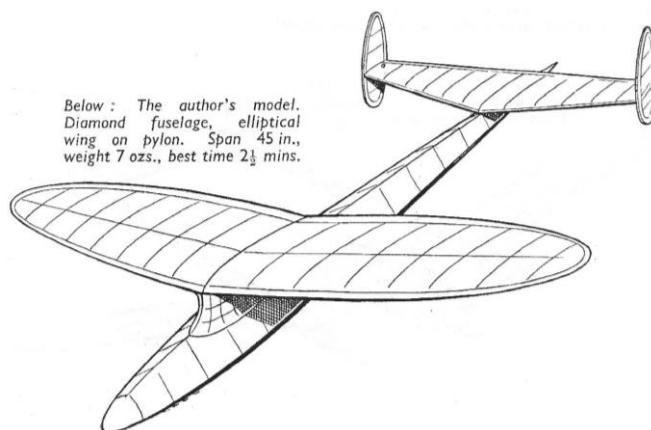
After landing by parachute and a rather hectic journey across Germany, I eventually arrived at Stalag Luft. VI Heydekrug, East Prussia, and very quickly settled down to the problems of life in a PoW Camp. After spending about two months just kicking around doing nothing, I began to think about finding something to occupy my mind and, being an extremely keen "aero-modeller," my thoughts naturally drifted in this direction. It was about this time that I bumped into a fellow PoW who turned out to be Maurice Curtis of the Croydon M.A.C. We decided to find out if there was anyone else interested in aero-modelling, etc., and with this in view, put a notice up on the Camp notice board. Much to our surprise about twenty 'bods' turned up, and after a discussion we decided to form the Heydekrug Model Aero Club.

After about a month of weekly meetings, lectures on theory, etc., by Mr. Curtis and the author, we began to toy with the idea of trying to build a flying model. We had to choose a glider as rubber (power) was entirely out of the question. After quite a lot of scrounging we finally persuaded the Germans to part with a three-ply wooden crate. This wood was extremely heavy and very poor quality, but by careful splitting and scraping with glass, we managed to get several fairly decent pieces out of it, about 1 mm. thick.

From this we built our first model; three feet span approximately, weight about 14ozs based on a design from a book by Warring on gliders that one of the chaps was lucky enough to get sent out. The whole model was built entirely from ply, and covered with paper from Red Cross cigarette packets. This paper was in pieces 2 by 3 ins., and there were about 300 pieces of paper on the model. The glue used was some we managed to pinch from the German stores. Its chief draw back was that in warm weather the model was likely to fall to pieces. This nearly always happened on the way up on the tow-line. This model and several others of similar design were flown for several months on the camp football pitch, durations being in the neighbourhood of 45- 75 secs. About this time we began to talk of things like formulas, etc., and rumours began to float about that there were several very interesting models under construction, and the author decided that something should be done to stage a competition. After consultation with the other chaps it

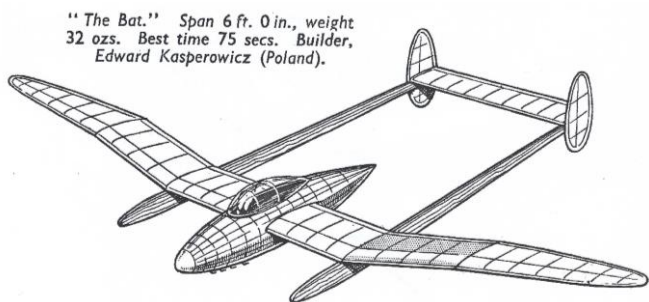
was decided upon. Also the club elected a Chairman, Secretary, and Comp. Secretary. This latter office was filled by the author.

The long awaited competition day eventually arrived, and I would like to record that there were 14 models entered for this event, all of them being to an extremely high standard of workmanship, the finish on most being quite comparable with models built under entirely different surroundings. You can imagine our amazement when one of the models, after coming off the tow-line (we had - progressed to winch launch now, made from an old gramophone motor), hit a riser at about 200 feet and was eventually timed 20.5 minutes, out of sight. This performance deserves all possible credit to its builder, Mr. K. Trott, and also the designer, Warring.



Below : The author's model.  
Diamond fuselage, elliptical  
wing on pylon. Span 45 in.,  
weight 7 ozs., best time 2½ mins.

*I think the authors model (above), with its elliptical wings, angled tail-plane and elliptical rudders bears resemblance to a number of WW2 aircraft, Spitfire, Halifax and Lancaster. Whilst that of Polish airman Edward Kasperowicz strongly resembles the P38 Lightning. (below) Ed.*



"The Bat." Span 6 ft. 0 in., weight  
32 ozs. Best time 75 secs. Builder,  
Edward Kasperowicz (Poland).

Unfortunately, the Germans really sat up and took notice after this performance, and even suggested that we were sending messages, etc. This fact and, happily, the prospects of the war finishing in the near future prevented further activity.

During my stay in this camp I saw many extremely interesting examples of the aeromodellers' art in various parts of the camp. They consisted of solid and built-up scale models of all types, including a 1 in. to 1 ft. Sunderland, several highly streamlined gliders constructed from plywood. These were even planked with thin sheets of ply, and we also did a spot of stunt flying, pick-aback launch and Drogue towing.

*So come on, who were these budding aircraft designers? Does anyone have any similar stories? Ed.*

*I couldn't let former 622 (Aux) Squadron, John Myhill off with just the one article, now could I? So now that he has finally retired (or has he?) I asked him for another interesting and sometimes funny follow-up to his life in the Forces. Ed.*

## 2020 Vision – Part 2

For those of you fortunate enough to read last year's Mildenhall Magazine and who were less fortunate to stumble onto my article "2020 Vision" in the back pages, just before the missing sports section, you may have been wondering "What happened



next". If so, you are in luck as 2021 happened, turning out to be 2020s bigger, badder, brother. Much stayed the same but so much of our lives changed.

A quick recap. After 28 years in the RAF and a further 8 years on 622 Sqn as a reserve, I was mobilised back into the Regulars. Much to my surprise I had been given to the Army; a "Boy in Blue" turned Green, something that I thought had ended in 1919 with the RFC handing over the reins to the newly formed RAF. Another tenuous link to the past was that I was an Auxiliary, a volunteer and now mobilised like the majority of our Bomber Command Veterans. Last year's story ended in Sep 2020, but just like the War(s), Covid would not be over by Christmas and I was duly extended in service again, into Op WINTERPREPARE - at last an Op which does exactly what it says on the tin. The military had been called in to set up the Covid Mobile Testing Units, and were providing logistic support in finding sites to be vaccination centres. We had assisted in the first whole school testing trials- years of training to be "On Time, On Target" and being able to march, somehow relates very well in emergency planning. I was about to learn why local authorities dread winter, as the seasonal pressures combined with the pandemic were creating the "Perfect Storm".

Winter brings concurrency, which in local government speak is multiple Major Incidents with an outbreak of Avian Flu and flooding across the South West – it never rains but it pours. At a time when the NHS had reached their highest state of emergency in January the military provided Medics and general duties to assist and support. I was given 3 hospitals and became Troop Commander to 30 Medics and 90 Royal Marines. For some reason an influx of highly fit, motivated superheroes into District Hospitals boosted morale..... amongst the nurses. But the young medics provided issues of a younger generation, and I found myself having to deal with depression, broken hearts, cases of AWOL, lack of connectivity, picky diets and writing a commendation citation for one outstanding young man who sat all night with a dying patient during their last lucid moments without their family. I thought back to those wartime days of seasoned flight commanders trying to deal with spirited young men who were trying to live out their teenage years while fighting a ferocious air campaign - children having to grow up far too quickly.

I remember a conversation I had with our dear departed Chick Chandler about his run-ins with Service authority and the acknowledgement that he would have been a nightmare to manage. I choose to remember our Vets while imagining their youthful personality and for that reason Chick is unforgettable. At an RAF Benevolent Fund event in 2019, Chick was asked if he liked fast cars. "No", he replied instantly, "I like slow cars and fast women".

The passing of the Duke of Edinburgh involved more civil leaning in with Op BRIDGE, the code word for Royal deaths. This operation must hold the record for the longest running and most amended, with the thoroughly good innings shown by latter-day Royals. Variants of concern threw another spanner in the works as far as civil emergency planning, with the introduction of traffic light classification of Countries. For the military, the inclusion on the Green list of The Falklands, St Helena, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands could have started a trend

in extreme camping. I am one of the few human beings who have ever ventured towards the South Sandwich Isles but even then, 100 feet above was as close as I cared to go. The inclusion of Israel on the Green list also didn't spark a deluge of extreme campers even though the daily firework show at the time must have been spectacular. The upshot of the traffic light system was the establishment of Managed Quarantine Hotels with Defence being asked how much 5\* accommodation we could offer. This was a very difficult, split second response: none.

Which brings me to the current crop of "Worst case scenario" planning for the G7, COP26 the Climate Change forum and the Euros and Commonwealth Games destined for our shores. Not wanting to name drop too much but during the pandemic I have (virtually) met numerous VIPs from all trades and professions, many Royals, Cabinet Ministers, Foreign dignitaries, a Worshipful Company, 1000s of US Secret Service agents pretending to be Cornish yokels, and perhaps the star of the show "You have no Authority here, Jackie Weaver" who was guest speaker at a Cotswolds local government agency catch up. For those of you who were not aware of the viral internet sensation that is Jackie Weaver, it demonstrates how people act differently virtually rather than in person - as hopefully you shall all realise at the next Mildenhall Register weekend planned for May '22.

Throughout the year, the Military had been involved in flying Afghan interpreters and others who had assisted us in 20 years of conflict. Sometimes it is what we do in the shadows that has the most effect; this operation then had to ramp up hugely during the fall of the Afghan authorities and turned into a full-on refugee crisis. While the Air Force, Brize Norton and of course 622 Sqn were involved in Op PITTING - the repatriation of the entitled out of Afghanistan- local authorities were focussing on the what and how of integrating large family groups into society, which is a problem that will be very complex for many years to come. The plight of



Afghanistan quickly left the media gaze, and the repatriation returned to its former role in the shadows.

*John, with wife Helen and Hannah Bower (far right) from the RAFBF at the Bomber Command memorial, with a message for Bill (Gould).*

Further support to local authorities came with military drivers and combat medics assisting the ambulance service, as they were in danger of collapse from having to run at their highest level for extended periods of time. More drivers were needed in the fuel crisis, driving fuel tankers being similar to driving tank transporters. We are still providing HGV instructors to assist with the backlog of driving tests which were unable to be taken during the pandemic.

Op WINTERPREPARE was now being extended to Jun 22 and I was settling in for another long slog when with three days' notice I was 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 had no job to return to. I wonder if the RAuxAF will want me back now that I may have been institutionalised by the Army way.

In the same week of getting my demob, I was awarded the "Blondie Swales" award, named after 622's wartime OC. As one door was slammed firmly shut a ray of light shone out as a new door opened. I was duly marched, (saved me walking) by the new OC 622, Wg Cdr Doz James, to the Vintners Hall in London hosted by the squadrons Livery Company, the Worshipful Company of Arbitrators, for their Master's Installation banquet. The OC gained the rights of an honorary Freeman of London to herd sheep across London Bridges, to have a silk rope if he was hung, the right to carry a naked sword in the square mile and a blue light police taxi home if found drunk and incapable on the streets of London. The banquet didn't allow us to get in such a state and no emergency services were needed back to camp.

A few days later the Squadron sent a different sort of party to the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park for the first face to face gathering of the pandemic. I was delighted to see that some Vets were able to travel, with a few more signing in on the virtual service. The Many have now become the Few, but their memory will go on. We will remember them.

## **Golaten Lancaster**

*Things with this research have rather slowed. There has been little headway in finding crew relatives. We did discover that navigator Cedric Nabarro is related to former MP Gerald Nabarro and the current Special Envoy on Covid-19 for the World Health Organization, Dr David Nabarro.*

*Daniela tells me her parents health is improving and a new date for the 'Just Jane' taxi ride has be arranged for August. We hope this can go ahead and that the pilot's daughter and wireless operator's son (both members) can all meet up.*

*There is one post script to the story so far. Member, Christopher Cope contacted me to say that his father, Flt Lt Philip Henry Cope, DFC, had flown in her during his first tour with XV Squadron as a navigator. So here is his story.*

I read the article on the Golaten Lancaster with interest, not least because my father completed his first tour of operations in that same aircraft W4355, LS-A, on January 20th 1944 with a raid on Berlin. It was their 21st operation but only their second operation with this aircraft, having previously flown Stirlings.

Dad's personal operation notes for that first trip attacking Brunswick include this observation. "This was our first trip in a Lancaster, and ours being as old as it is we were a bit dubious as to whether she would stand up to the test, but she did and came through with flying colours '.

After the Berlin trip the aircraft was taken out of service for battle damage repairs and was returned to service on 23rd February 1944. The rest is taken up by your splendid article.

I am very much indebted to Martin Ford-Jones for that information. He prepared a wonderful dossier of dad's full service history, following my father submitting his personal notes written immediately following each of his first 21 operations. My father completed another 11 operations in 1945 up to VE day, also assisting with troop rehabilitation from mainland Europe.

The pilot on that first tour was Flight Lieutenant Douglas Boards DFM. My father and he kept in touch until death within a year or two of each other. In fact they only lived 12 miles apart in Yorkshire and met regularly for lunch until very near the end. He also kept in less regular touch with other crew members.

As you will know, in May 2005 XV Squadron celebrated their 90th anniversary. My father (*on the right right*) and Douglas Boards were invited to join the party and I was fortunate to accompany them. We were treated royally and the two old guys thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The modern day navigators were fascinated to hear of dad's methods of navigation with rudimentary electronics which often required the back up of dead reckoning with use of coloured pencils!

Christopher John Cope.



*Despite Covid and the stringent restrictions in France Alain Founé yet again managed to pull off a spectacular remembrance ceremony in the forests of "La Fourchue-Eau" this year, at night, with floodlighting. See the very atmospheric photographs on the back cover. So here, in his own (edited) words is the story.*

### **LANCASTER L7576 GI-K No. 622 SQN RAF**

Bellamus Noctu. We wage war by night

Echoing the motto of 622 Squadron, for the third consecutive commemoration in front of the "Lancaster Memorial" erected in tribute to the crew of the Lancaster L7576 shot down on the night of July 28 to 29, 1944, I had proposed to Philippe Arnould to organize a night commemoration, Saturday July 24 in the evening. This proposal was immediately accepted with enthusiasm.

There were many constraints related to the holiday period, the weekend, the very late hour, and the remoteness of the site. Also the health measures decreed at the last moment by the President of the Republic and the strong meteorological depression that hit eastern France. And so, on the evening of the 24th, after a last storm, at moonrise, between the black clouds, the miracle took place!

Much more numerous than we had invited (and that's good, it's a sign that our ceremony has a good reputation!) the faithful to our commemoration arrived: elected officials, authorities, soldiers, patriotic associations, civilians and flags. Many had travelled a long way to attend.

Not very far away, the same night of July 1944 and during the same mission, a Lancaster fell near the village of Glonville (*This was a 103 Sqdn aircraft ME799, PM-K from which three men died, two were captured and two escaped. Ed*) and another near Blâmont (*A 550 Sqdn aircraft LM455, BQ-T, with the loss of all crew*). For this special ceremony, I wished to associate the 21 brothers in arms of these three planes in the same commemoration. An announcer read out the names, crew positions and fates of the aviators. In the silence of the night, the names of these aviators aroused a strong emotion in my heart. Others told me it was very much the same for them.

After the three anthems and the historical reminder, the lights were turned off to plunge the "Lancaster Memorial" into darkness. There echoed in the clearing of "La Fourchue-Eau" the engines of a wave of Lancasters, machine gun fire from a Messerschmitt, and the surprisingly calm cockpit conversations of the British bomber crew under enemy fire. Then, after a loud final explosion of an aircraft crash, the silence. A startling silence.....Another strong emotion.

After a pause the site was lit again; the time came for the wreath laying. Flowers with the "Lest We Forget" ribbon was the first to be laid by General Air Force (2s) Philippe Adam and me. It is a great honor that the GAA (General RCAF / Air Chief Marshal RAF) Philippe Adam has rendered to the crew of the L7576, but it is also a great honor to have welcomed them in front of the Lancaster Memorial.

The Mayor of Saint-Sauveur, Philippe Arnould, accompanied by Michel Marchal and Valérie Payeur, our two Departmental advisers, then laid the wreath for the town. Finally, Jean-Noël Jolé, and Jean-François Weimann, both Chairmen of "Souvenir Français" Committees, accompanied by Rose-Marie Falque, Mayor of Azerailles and President of the Association of Mayors and Inter-municipal Chairmen of Meurthe-et-Moselle laid the wreath of the "Souvenir Français".

A bugle played "The Last Post" and "To the Dead".

Marking the end of this moving ceremony, Philippe Arnould finally took the floor to thank the guests and participants in this emotionally charged ceremony and invite them to a very friendly reception served at "La Maison de la Forêt". Right there where the exhibition "The three days of the Lanc L7576" was held in July 2019, where it all began.....No, the crew of L7576 is never forgotten!

*Alain has asked me to point out to all our readers that he gets great loyalty and support from the Air Base Historical Documentation and Research Centre, 133 de Nancy-Ochey (CDRH BA 133) during all commemorations at the Lancaster Memorial. This association, of which he is also a member, is commanded by Wing Commander Jean-Claude Barral.*

*Following on from the previous report on L7576 comes a story of the only, successful, escapee and evader from the crew. It was sent to me by Canadian Jon Peck, a relative of F/O R L Fiddick RCAF, the bomb aimer in the crew. In the new book by author Damien Lewis, entitled "SAS: Band of Brothers" Fiddick's story is told. With Damien's kind permission I've picked out some of the salient points from Chapter 7 leaving you, dear reader, to buy the book, which is available through all good book stores, via the net and on electronic platforms like Kindle.*

"On the night of 28 July 1944, Fiddick lay on his belly in the forward nose blister of Lancaster L-7576, bound for Germany. All around him the dark skies were thick with similar-looking Avro Lancasters, the iconic British heavy bomber designed for long range night raids. The massed ranks of warplanes thundered onwards towards the German frontier, which was soon visible to Fiddick in the eerie glow of a low, bright moon. Their target for tonight was the German city of Stuttgart, situated in the southwest of the country, sixty miles or so on the far side of the border.

The crew of Lancaster L-7576 were tasked to drop their deadly cargo over Stuttgart's main rail hub. It had been a late decision to include L-7576, a first generation Lancaster nicknamed 'K for King', on tonight's mission. K for King had completed ninety-eight sorties and was the oldest aircraft on the squadron's airbase. As the veteran Lancaster – the 'King' of 622 Squadron – tonight would be her ninety-ninth combat flight, a gargantuan achievement considering that such aircraft were typically either decommissioned or lost long before that. Fiddick recalled that 'the Wing Commander wanted to fly the one hundredth trip', keen for the prestige this 'retirement flight' would bring the squadron, for it was sure to feature on the newsreels. The choice had been made to include the venerable warplane on tonight's raid only because a brand-new Lancaster, meant for Fiddick and crew, had suffered engine trouble and been grounded.

From an early age Fiddick had been fascinated by aeroplanes, remembering of his youth that whenever he saw aircraft in the sky, 'I did have a desire to fly.' Yet as the son of a Canadian farmer from the small village of Cedar, on Vancouver Island, and with 'no money to do very much', his hopes of becoming a pilot were limited. That changed with the outbreak of war, when the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) began calling up young men to train as aircrew. Fiddick undertook his flight training in Canada, and soon after qualifying had crossed the Atlantic to the UK. There he underwent a course in 'bomb-aiming' so that he would have the versatility to switch between roles – pilot and bomb-aimer – depending on wherever he could be of most use. To be 'doing something useful' was Fiddick's primary motivation in the war.

As the bomb-aimer, he was responsible for spotting the 'primary visual markers' of 'mixed red and green' signal flares, laid out by the pathfinder aircraft which were flying ahead of the main fleet of bombers. Once spotted, he would communicate their positions to his two fellow RCAF officers, seated above him in the cockpit – twenty-year-old pilot Harold Sherman Peabody and twenty-two-year-old navigator James Harrington Doe. They were all so young, but none gave much thought to that at the time: there was a war to be fought, after all. Fiddick, Peabody and Doe

possessed strong bonds of friendship forged in the fires of combat. They had been flying together and billeted in the same hut since February that year, and were based at RAF 622 Squadron's Mildenhall, Suffolk, aerodrome. Doe's diary from the time confirmed how intense the combat sorties had been, but Fiddick also recalled that between missions, they would spend time together in the Suffolk pubs: 'no heavy drinking – just friendly pub-crawling.' Together with Peabody and Doe in the Lancaster's cockpit were RAF flight engineer George J. Wishart and radio operator Sergeant Arthur Payton. Flight Sergeant Richard Proulx – another Canadian – manned the aircraft's mid-upper gun-turret, boasting formidable Browning 7.62mm machine guns, while Sergeant Percy Buckley – a Brit, and at eighteen, the youngest of the crew – manned the rear turret, defending the Lancaster from an assault from that direction".

*(Ed) Ju88 night fighters began to attack the bombers and.....* "at 0130 hours on 29 July, K for King herself became the target. Fiddick felt the aircraft shudder, as repeated bursts ripped through the plane. 'We did a corkscrew and came back up, and almost immediately as we levelled off we were hit,' Fiddick remarked. 'I still remember the bullets hitting the airplane – just a steady stream.' The German gunner had found his mark, the bullets shooting away 'all the tail controls, so there was no control of the airplane anymore', Fiddick recalled.

Peabody fought to keep the stricken warplane in the air. But as further bursts tore into them, the surviving crew realised they had no choice – they would have to bail out. Extricating himself from the cramped forward turret, Fiddick was joined in the nose section by Flight Lieutenant Wishart, who had clambered down from above. They needed to jump before Peabody lost control of the aircraft, or they would lose any chance of getting out at all. Wishart lifted the release handle of the escape hatch, which tumbled away into the night. A freezing wind tore through the gaping aperture at their feet, as Wishart pushed himself through the opening and was gone, whisked away into the howling darkness.

Fiddick moved into position to follow, yet he just couldn't bring himself to jump. Loyalty and friendship trumped his desire to save himself. Turning away from the hatch, he crawled up into the cockpit, to join his friend above. That way, he figured he could at least help Peabody free himself from the notoriously tight pilot's seat when he activated the auto-pilot, which meant they might both stand a change of getting out alive. Fiddick clambered into the seat beside Peabody, trying to help as he fought to keep the dying warplane airborne. 'I held the airplane steady as long as I could,' Fiddick remarked of this desperate moment, as the stricken Lancaster juddered and shook horribly. But eventually the damage proved too much. There was a massive jolt to the aircraft, as he and Peabody lost all control. From his seat, he was 'more or less thrown into the nose compartment and out through the escape hatch'.

Recovering his senses, he activated his 'chute, which snapped into shape above him, capturing the air with a crack like a ship's mainsail. He gazed around. Though the night was brightly lit by the moon, he could see no sign of the other crew members, Peabody included. He figured they must have been 'scattered to the four

winds'. As he drifted towards earth Fiddick reckoned he was coming down in the far north-east of occupied France, in what looked like the Vosges Mountains. If he made it safely to the ground, Fiddick might either be welcomed by friendly Maquis – French resistance fighters – or handed over to the enemy by villagers loyal to the Fatherland. 'I landed in a forest about 8 miles SE of Cirey-Sur-Vezouse [sic],' Fiddick's escape report noted, Cirey-sur-Vezouze being a village in the central Vosges region. 'I remember breaking branches off trees as I fell, but I went right to the ground.' Fiddick's survival instincts kicked in right away as he set to work concealing his presence, for there was a good chance that he had been spotted bailing out. 'I buried my parachute and my vest,' he explained. That vital task done, he simply sat on his buried parachute for the remainder of the night hours, stunned by the rapid series of events that had deposited him alone and unarmed in the depths of remote and hostile territory. As he well knew, the nearest Allied positions were several hundred miles away across occupied France.

'It was the next day when I decided I'd better do something about getting myself out of this mess,' Fiddick recalled, 'so I got up and I started to walk.' It was only as he began to move that he became aware that one of his knees had been injured and that he had lost his boots. He figured they had either been ripped off as he had tumbled out of the aircraft, or torn away with the shock of his parachute opening. Getting on the move as best he could with no footwear, and hampered by his injury, Fiddick found his bearings using his escape compass. He set a course back along the same direction as the Lancaster had flown in on and began his barefoot march. The journey through the thick forests felt never-ending, especially as he tripped and stumbled painfully. But Fiddick had been a woodsman back in his native Canada, and he knew how to drink from the streams that cascaded through the terrain, to keep himself going. While the human body can do without food for days, it cannot last for long without water".

*(Ed) He makes his painful way across country without being spotted and finds a village. Not sure whether it might be friendly to his cause he spends some time observing from a distance, before a child spots him and runs away. Fearing discovery, he takes refuge in a hayloft. His hiding place doesn't remain undetected for long!..."*The villagers had roused the Maquis as soon as the mystery man in uniform had been spotted. A patrol led by one Raymond Freismuth tracked Fiddick to his hayloft hideout. Freismuth made it clear to the wounded and exhausted Canadian how close he had come to falling into the clutches of the enemy. Clearly visible from the hideout, one of the nearby buildings was actually a Gestapo outpost, for they were doing all they could to counter Maquis activity in the region. Had Fiddick approached that place, the game would have been well and truly up.

They fetched a village priest, Father Rohr, who was clearly there to determine whether Fiddick was the genuine article or not. Father Rohr had spent thirty years living in Fraser Valley, a point on mainland Canada lying just across the sea from Fiddick's home, on Vancouver Island. This strange coincidence proved a streak of good fortune for Fiddick, for the priest was able to probe the airman's story with the kind of questions only a man familiar with the area would be able to answer".



*(Ed) There followed many days of eating and recuperation, whilst moving from safe house to safe house. All the time aware that he (Fiddick), now in civilian clothes, and those aiding him could, at any minute be in mortal danger. News came of the fates of the other crew members, none of it good. The bodies of W/Op Payton, who had baled out too low, was found near the crashsite and the two gunners, Proulx and Buckley were found in the wreck. Peabody and Doe were executed after miraculously landing with the aircraft and initially escaping. Wishart became a PoW, confined to hospital until the end of the war, and so they moved on, deep into the Maquis stronghold. Then on 13<sup>th</sup> August.....*

“Fiddick sensed that something significant was afoot. The Frenchmen returned with news that a stick of British paratroopers had landed in the forest nearby. The Maquis leader asked Fiddick if he would like to join the newcomers. Fiddick replied that he would very much, for at least it would give him ‘somebody to talk to’, as hardly any of the Maquis spoke English. Fiddick’s escape report tells of how, on 15 August, he made the journey ‘to another Maquis camp about 8 miles away’, where he ‘met 15 SAS troops. The Frenchmen knew where they were and took me right to the camp.’ These were the advance party of 1 Squadron, 2SAS, engaged on reconnaissance for a major SAS mission, codenamed Operation Loyton. They were there to pave the way for a far larger contingent to drop into the area, tasked to cause chaos and havoc behind enemy lines.

Deep in the forested highlands of the Vosges, Fiddick was introduced to a stocky, dark-haired twenty-three-year-old dressed in the khaki battledress of the British Army. ‘I met a chap there – a captain – by the name of Henry Druce,’ Fiddick recalled of the commander of the SAS advance party. This fortuitous meeting would lead to a lifelong friendship, one that would not only enrich the lives of both men and their families, but also play a crucial role in the coming chapters of the war here in the Vosges. Druce promptly invited Fiddick to join their ranks. His instinctive assessment of Fiddick proved accurate. He ‘would turn out to be one of our best soldiers’, Druce would remark. For his part, Fiddick was overjoyed at his reception. ‘I was finally among people I could understand! I was also impressed by the fact that they had dropped into an area so rife with Germans!’

Not long after Fiddick’s arrival, Druce learned that German troops were sweeping the area in a force some 5,000 strong. Fiddick’s own escape report noted of this moment: ‘After we had been at the camp for three days, the Germans got wind of us, and came to search the forest.’ The nearest German patrols were barely a few miles distant, the ‘SAS’s position becoming ever more unhealthy’, according to Druce. With the enemy drawing close, Druce had little choice but to abandon the camp. He arranged for Fiddick to be issued with British Army battledress complete with regimental flashes on the shoulders, to replace his peasant attire”.

*(Ed) and so, like John Myhill, Fiddick crossed from blue to green and a new chapter of his war began. Numerous acts of daring do followed as the joint SAS/Maquis vigilantes moved through the Vosges mountains and forests, all the time gathering information. But more importantly disrupting the German’s operations in the area. Fiddick quickly became an excellent member of the squad, performing his new role*

*well. So, when important intelligence needed to get through enemy lines, it was he who volunteered to go, with Druce. Eventually, after a further number of scares and false attempts, they crossed no-man's land, making contact with an elite Free French unit on the other side.*

“For Fiddick, that crawl through no-man's-land would mark his final act of daring as an honorary member of the SAS, and indeed as a Canadian flyer. He was grounded for the remainder of the war, for he was deemed to know far too much about the inner working of the SAS and the French resistance to risk him falling into enemy hands. He would spend the rest of the war training new bomber crews, before returning to his civilian life in Canada”.

*Once again, my grateful thanks to Damien for allowing me to edit his story about Fiddick in this way. I hope he likes what I've done. It is a tremendous story and there is much more you can read by purchasing the book, or maybe a second instalment next year?*

**Another ton-up veteran** The 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021 saw the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Roland J Spencer, Flt Lt bomb aimer on John Hebb's crew at XV Squadron. We'd been in touch previously following enquiries about their aircraft, which had Walt Disney's 'Goofy' painted on the nose by their tail-gunner.

Roland included a picture of himself, stood outside the house in Niagara Falls he shares with his wife. He also enclosed a short history of his life.

Born April 6, 1921, in Grays, Essex, England, eldest of three sons of Arthur and Daisy Spencer. He completed secondary school at 16 and began working.



He joined the Home Guard and was once on night duty when a German plane crashed nearby. In 1942 he volunteered for the Royal Air Force (rather than being drafted into the Army.) He took flight training in England, USA and Canada for pilot, bomb aimer and gunner, and was assigned to Lancaster bombers as a bomb aimer. He served at Mildenhall.

On one holiday in Niagara Falls he met Muriel Jackson from Toronto. They became friends and corresponded. She had volunteered for the St. John's Ambulance Brigade in Canada, and later applied for a transfer to London (UK) where they were able to meet each other again on brief leaves. They married in Oct. 1944, in Grays, after Ron had finished flying duty and had been made an instructor.

In 1946 the couple emigrated to Canada aboard a "bride ship", and stayed with her parents in Toronto. Ron soon got a job and a place of their own. He built a house (from scratch), and they raised three sons. Ron worked for an electrical manufacturing company, and eventually made a career in electrical design, retiring at the age of 58. Muriel passed away in 2010.

Ron later married Linda Heath, an American, and they have resided in Niagara Falls since 2013. He says “About the most fun my wife and I have now is working in

our back garden, and the occasional take out hamburger from a drive thru". *You're looking well on it Ron, so here's to the 101<sup>st</sup>! Congratulations. Ed.*

**A New Member's story.** By Eric Baker - My uncle was Sgt Eric James Burbridge 1392526 a mid-upper gunner on Stirlings. I had always known that my aunt's husband died very young. When they were married Eric was just 20 years old and Joan 18 years old. Eric was only 21 years old when he died on an operation to lay mines off the French coast. Their aircraft crashed on take-off from Newmarket Airfield.

I was in contact with Kelvin Young of the Aircrew Remembered website who passed on an invitation from The Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron to attend the dedication of a new plaque at Newmarket for my uncle's aircraft R9245 AA-N. (*Reported on in the 2017 newsletter*) There Kevin King invited me to their annual Remembrance Day weekend 2017 and I have attended every year since.

I have to admit that the strength of my emotions at the dedication took me completely by surprise as I know nothing of Eric except for a few details from when I was a child.

Now I feel very much at home with my friends at 75 Squadron and look forward to my first trip to Mildenhall.

As always, I was pleased to hear from **Nita and Chris Best**. Staunch supporters and 149ers; Chris' father, John, having been a MUG with the Squadron at Methwold. The whole crew being: Flt/Lt HA Cowing, F/O Wally Ross, F/Sgt AF Thomas, F/O B Button, F/O Curly Brown, W/O Jock Murray and Sgt Mal Davis.

Whilst doing a spot of 'spring cleaning' Nita came across a lot of photographs that had been in John's possessions that they'd kept after he passed away in 2004. Nita was just a little concerned that they might be 'Top Secret' or perhaps handed back long before now. She also thought they were bombing pictures.

Anyway, she shared them with me (*that's it, let's get Geoff into trouble! Ed.*) So to



share them out, I similarly shared them with Alan Fraser, the 149 Squadron historian.

So now I'll share them with all of you and we'll all be 'in the can' if we've got it wrong!

This first one can't possibly get us into trouble as it's a picture of the crew, in front of their Lancaster and includes a number of ground crew, taken before or after one of these sorties maybe. All photographs on next page IWM copyright, courtesy of Nita & Chris Best.



Krupp works in Essen (above, right & below)

Kamen (below)



Hamm (below)

Wesel (right)



Alan wrote: - Yes these are definitely 'Cooks Tour' or 'Baedeker' Operations (two

*different names for the same thing). You can tell from the oblique camera angles that they were not 'Revue' photos (which were vertically taken, in pairs and overlapping), and from the daylight time that they were not 'Bombing Photo' flare photos. The camera was probably the ubiquitous K24 which was used as the post bomb-drop camera on Ops.*

*In case I haven't explained before, the 'Revue' photos were taken with a downward pointing stereoscopic camera and were to map both the UK and any possible aggressor nation. The photos still exist in various archives - the Scottish ones are great! The Baedeker Ops were not so successful, with many crews and ground crews being traumatised by the damage they had inflicted or supported. They caused quite a few mental problems and did not prove a success.*

*A good report is here – <https://raf-pathfinders.com/2019/01/29/cooks-tours/>*

### **A very strange coincidence.**

Early in 2021 I was contacted by Michael Clark. He told me he was doing research for a neighbour into the service of Albert George Nicklin. He had joined the RAF aged 19 and became a Navigator? The first entry into his Log book was when posted to 1651 C.U. at Wrattling Common. From there he'd been posted to 149 Squadron on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1944. On the 9th September he went onto GH Training. Overall, he successfully completed 31 operations - one more than the normal tour to cover illness in another crew. Michael included this picture.



I naturally turned the enquiry over to Alan Fraser, but I always like to have a look on the net myself, just in case there's a story there. Lo and behold I immediately stumbled on a website; <https://susangoode.medium.com/albert-george-nicklin-born-8th-february-1923-died-9th-october-2014-1151bb23298a>

and there, staring out at me from the screen was the very same picture. But there was so much more. Susan had obviously done an awful lot of research. Turns out Albert was a flight engineer, not a navigator and was Susan's Uncle. He'd passed away in October 2014 and she'd had saved all his records.

Could this be who Michael was helping? It didn't make sense, there was so much information on this website. I contacted Susan through the website to find out more.

At the same time I went back to Michael. No, it wasn't Susan he was working for and he and his enquirer had no knowledge of Susan or her research, but were pleased with what I and Alan had been able to find out.

Michael said "Ian (Spreadbury) has been so amazed; Gob Smacked, about how things have progressed with your kind help. Ian had tried before to locate his "Great, Great" Uncle and has asked his elderly relatives for Information regarding

him, with no success. He gave me the go ahead to see what I could find. It now appears that there are two 'distant' relatives are doing the same research".

At this point, and with so much information available, I put all parties in touch with the other. I hope that, once again, The Mildenhall Register has carried out one of its main aims. By its continued existence, we are providing answers to families everywhere who have the need to know. And bringing families together is another bonus.

**40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion 2022** Well, we are hoping to offer a reunion in the usual, pre-Covid, format. As this is being written, some of the details haven't been finalised. These should be correct on the booking form, which accompanies this newsletter, or they will be accurately supplied with your tickets, in due course.

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May Starting at 1300 hrs, we will have a base tour, with a bit of luck. This may have to leave from a different pick-up point and time. Final details will be sent out with your tickets. Base imposed limits on numbers mean that priority will be given to new attendees and those attending the whole weekend.

Following the tour (but with time for the 'tourers' to wash and brush up) we shall hold our meeting buffet meal on base. 17.30 for 18.30. Venue will be advised with your tickets. Smart, casual dress code.

Immediately after the meal we will hold the AGM in the same room. This will be followed by a guest speaker who will give a presentation on his father's service career. There should be time afterwards for a Q & A session, before we retire to our accommodation.

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May We shall need a prompt start for our visit to the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln. The coach will have to leave the Travelodge car park at Barton Mills by 09.00hrs. The purpose of this visit is to see the newly installed Mildenhall Register stone in the Ribbon of Remembrance. A short dedication service is planned and there will be a buffet luncheon provided on site. Time will also be set aside for you to wander around the outdoor areas, the Memorial Walls, the Peace Garden and the Spire.

For those who would find it more convenient to make their own way to the IBCC, please let us know and, by paying the cost of the buffet, we'll ensure you join us for the unveiling and dedication ceremony.

Entry to the museum and research centre is not included in the package Smiley has negotiated with the centre. Again, for the very good price of £9, giving you annual membership, you may go on the day and anytime in the next 12 months! A prompt departure will be necessary to return you all to your lodgings to smarten up for the formal dinner back on base in the evening.

Our formal dinner will be held in The Galaxy Club as it has in previous years. 18.00 for 19.00 are the provisional times. Price and definite timings will appear on the booking form. Any amendments will come with your tickets.

There **will not** be a raffle this year. Please don't bring anything or send money to buy prizes.

As John used to write, carriages at 22.00. Time for bed, it's been a long day!

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May 10.15 There will be a wreath laying at the memorial plaque on back wall of St John's church, Beck Row.

This will be followed at 11.00 by our annual Remembrance service in the church. Hopefully, we can coax the Ladies of the church to rustle up a light buffet lunch before we all bid farewell for another year. Hopefully, the break won't be as long as the last time we did this!

**PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF THESE IMPORTANT CHANGES FOR THIS YEAR**

The Greene King owned Bird in Hand is not offering bed and breakfast at the moment, so accommodation elsewhere will be required and at a premium as it's Newmarket racing too! Early booking is strongly advised!

They are also not happy for us to park our cars there for boarding the coaches. Negotiations are ongoing. Watch what comes with your tickets.

Tied in with this is the fact that no walk-ons through the Bird in Hand gate will be allowed this year. Everyone attending on base events will have to go through the main entrance security posts on the Mildenhall to Beck Row road.

Secondly, all attendees MUST HAVE photographic identification to get on base.

I do hope these enforced changes don't put you off joining us. We will be trying our best to make it all go smoothly so that you may enjoy the special occasion, which is our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

So, as they used to say at the end of a certain cartoon at Saturday morning cinemas in my youth "Th-th-th-that's all folks". 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, 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 or find us on the web. 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
Leaden Roden	Gosberton	Haddenham
Dunmow, Essex	Spalding, Lincs.	Ely, Cambs.
CM6 1QD	PE11 4NQ	CB6 3TW
Tel 01279 877935	Tel 01775 841585	Tel 01353 749509

COLOUR PHOTOS OF THE L7675 CEREMONY 2021 FRANCE

