

The Mildenhall Register

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

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023/4



Front Cover

Top/Main image is the Operations Room reconstruction at the RAF Air Defence Radar Museum at Neatishead. This museum will be the subject of our Saturday visit for the attendees at the reunion in May. Whilst some of you may have joined us on the visit some years ago, I am reliably informed that it has expanded considerably and there is far more to see. (Image courtesy of Joe Holloway)

The three lower images (left to right) show a Bloodhound missile used in the 1960's as a primary Air Defence weapon against long range attacking aircraft. (Courtesy of Tom Devereux)

The mascot, 'Biggles'. (Courtesy of Vicky Robinson)

The huge radar array in the grounds above the museum. (Courtesy of Neil Fellows)

These items and so many more will be available to see when you get there.

Roll of Honour 2023

Mr	A	Tony	Adams	Sydney	149	W/Op
Mr	P C	Peter	Beckett	Holywell Row	622	Groundcrew
Mrs	A	Audrey	Brown	Witham	218 & 149	WAAF W/Op
Mrs	G	Gwynne	Clarke	West Huntspill	XV	Daughter of Sgt S F Evans.
Mr	M	Mike	Davies	Dover	XC	Post war, Washingtons, Air gunner.
Mr	T	Tony	Dryland	Guildford	622	Son of Sgt. Edward James Dryland
Mr	B	Bill	Green	Marlow	218	
Mr	G V	Geoffrey	Hancock	Wolverhampton	149	M U G in L J Drummond's crew 1942/43
Mr	W	Wallace	Lee	Consett	149	W/Op - Ag
W/Cdr	W A	Walter	Mildren CD CAF (Retd)	Winnipeg	622	Bill Richards crew.
Mrs	N V	Nancy	Morgan	West Wickham	149	WAAF MT Driver
Mr	G P	Gordon	Rutherford	Hedon	218	Brother of F/Sgt Kenneth Rutherford KIA 23/9/42
Mr	E J	Ted	Smith	Tunbridge Wells	XC	Rear gunner

May they Rest in Peace.

Obituaries will be found later in the newsletter.

Words from the Chair

Well I don't know about you all but this year seems to have gone really fast. Must be my age, but time seems to pass quicker each year! Time for my bit of the newsletter!

I was a just bit disappointed that we had to move our venue for last year's reunion, but actually I gather from the feedback that it worked really well. So much so we are returning there this year. Hopefully this year we can persuade the Air Attaches to join us since they won't have commitments of national importance to attend to. It was so good to see Commonwealth troops at the forefront of the Coronation. Hope you all got to watch as I did before going off to a night shift.

You committee has again done sterling work to organise an interesting Saturday trip for you as you will see from this newsletter and booking form and we have already scoped out a possible for 2025! No further clues for you but I hadn't been there for about 15 years and its improved and grown and will be a chuffing good visit!

Looking forward to seeing you all in 2024 (going to book that weekend as leave rather than trust work not to change things!). Hope you all have a happy and healthy time till we all meet in May 2024.

Dee

From The Treasury

Well, Dear Reader, another year has rocketed past leaving me to wonder "Where did it all go?" Here we are in February and I'm told it's already December.

Of great and monumental importance, please note my new e-mail address.....

smiley33a@gmail.com

On the Register front it has been fairly serene, the Reunion went off smoothly and was enjoyed by all, which was a weight off the committee's shoulders.

Looking to the future your committee has been investigating the 2025 day out with a 'fact finding' mission to Bressingham Steam Museum where a most enjoyable visit was had by all. (See pictures on back cover.Ed)

The Register remains, financially, in a comfortable situation with, after all expenses and invoices paid, not much change over previous years with some £6500 in the bank.

Over the Remembrance weekend we, Cherry and myself, had our trip to St John's, Beck Row, to lay the Register wreath, then a most enjoyable dinner with the Friends of 75(NZ) Squadron before participating in their commemorations on the Sunday at Mepal.

In November the Register was invited to attend a meeting held in Mildenhall town community centre concerning events to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of RAF Mildenhall, the Great Air Race to Australia and the 80th anniversary of

D-Day. As it was just a preparatory meeting nothing concrete was decided on but a number of ideas were 'kicked around'. Quite what, as an association, we will be asked, or expected to do, is unclear at this time but, in preparation, any photographs and reminiscences will be greatly appreciated. If sent to me I will pass on as required and ensure that they are returned after the event.

That just about covers it for now, hope to see as many of you as possible at the Reunion in May. **We need a minimum of 40 for the weekend to go ahead.**

Stay well, warm and safe and best wishes for the New Year. Smiley

Scribblings from your Secretary

May I first of all wish you all A Happy and Prosperous 2024 with no nasty surprises around every corner.

As I sit down to write this, the strains of the Last Post and Reveille are still ringing in my ears following the service of remembrance at our little village war memorial. A time when we remember all those who fell in both World Wars and, in some cases, the more recent conflicts that have ravaged our planet. For me, I give thanks that my paternal Grandfather served and survived the whole of The Great War or I shouldn't be here. Secondly, I remember my Uncle who served and sadly died in the RAF, XV Squadron, during that second great conflict. With the 80th anniversary of his death on 1st June 1944 coming along next year, I shall be going to his grave in Beauvais with my brother and to the memorial that the French people of Lormaison, where the aircraft came down, erected a memorial stone in their little cemetery to Geoff and his whole crew. With it being the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and the many advances across the occupied territories that followed that great day, I don't think we shall be the only people going to the Continent. Nor shall we be the only ones around the world remembering the sacrifices that family members had made through that whole terrible war.

As you will see later on, the current conflicts across the globe have meant we shall not be returning to Mildenhall Air Base for this year's reunion. I'm pleased to report that the rather truncated reunion we held in 2023 was very much appreciated by those who managed to attend and we shall be using the same venue to host this year's event. Those attending the AGM voted in favour of continuing the reunions, sad as it is that we cannot get on the base. We have to understand that operations in the various theatres of conflict currently disturbing the peace, are far more important than our small social gathering. The golf club were excellent hosts and the food wasn't half bad either. The Baumann family from Switzerland were so grateful they were made to feel so welcome and included in the event, despite the language barrier that existed. They will be back for another attendance, health of parents permitting.

It was decided to go back to the WHOLE WEEKEND format. With a gathering meal on the Friday, followed by the AGM. This will be a buffet, much the same as last year, with the Salmon en Crout or Roast Beef as the main options.

A Saturday visit, by coach, to an interesting venue not too far away. (about one and a half hours was thought a good time to spend on a coach.) This will be the RAF Radar Defence museum at Neatishead. Returning in time to refresh before the reunion dinner in the evening. Menu choices for this are on the back of your booking form. **Please complete and return by 20th April 2024.** Sunday church parade for the wreath laying at the memorial behind the church and service. It is hoped the ladies of Beck Row will provide some light refreshments to see us on our way home. Full details, with times and prices are on the included booking form.

With Mildenhall Air Force Base celebrating its 90th year of operations next year, there are plans for some celebration events around the town. You'll have seen what Smiley had to say on this subject, so, watch this space.

In other news, I've been kept on my toes by numerous enquiries about the squadrons and personnel. Where possible I've enlisted the help of the various historians and the Internet. With Howard Sandall (622) and Kevin King (75NZ) being the only active historians at this time due to a number of factors affecting Martyn Ford-Jones (XV), Alan Fraser (149), Steve Smith (218) and hearing nothing from Sam Mealing-Mills (90) I do the best I can (and secretly enjoy it!). Some of these enquiries have reached a conclusion, others are ongoing, I'll include and update the items as time and space permits.

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I know of another 2 centenarians who have or will be celebrating their 'ton up' this year, depending when this newsletter goes out.

R.W. (Bob) Smith from Australia. Navigator on XV Squadron in F/O Ron Hastings crew will be 100 on 10th January 2024. Bob completed a full tour of operations. Coincidentally another XV Squadron navigator,

George Thomson will get his 100 up on the same day, in Newton Mearns, Glasgow. George was shot down on a raid, survived and made a valiant attempt at escape and evasion. He has written about these exploits and given many talks about it, both at the Mildenhall Register reunion (where I was proud to read it out after an AGM. George then answered questions. Ed) and at venues in Scotland. The Mildenhall Register hope you both have a wonderful day.

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And so, on with the rest of the news and stories from this year, beginning with a report from **Group Captain Dorian "Doz" James, OC 622 Squadron (RAuxAF)** at Brize Norton. In such busy and uncertain times, I am grateful that he was able to spare the time to write this report and include some photographs.

"Once again it may surprise you to hear that it has been another frenetic year for 622 Squadron and its personnel. With the Squadron being reformed in 2012 to directly support the C130 Force with aircrew and operational staff, the withdrawal

of the C130 Hercules aircraft in June has led to some squadron personnel retiring earlier than possibly expected.

However, I am pleased to report that the Squadron is morphing with the times and has taken on more Voyager aircrew as well as having the very first ATLAS A400M reservist aircrew. The majority of the new personnel are senior instructors who left full time employment but wish to continue supporting the RAF and the Air Mobility Force. Our Squadron members are playing a vital role ensuring that the next cohort of aircrew and engineers meet the high standards expected of today's serving personnel. The loss of the C130 cadre has reduced the squadron to approx. 80% manning at the moment, however we are waiting for an influx of new members in 2024.

It was with both great pride but also sadness that during a squadron social event, we said goodbye to 11 personnel who had served for a total of almost 450 years. Of particular note was Squadron Leader Derek Oldham who retired having served for an unprecedented 57 years of service, making him probably the longest ever serving military officer.

The Squadrons support to MOD Global Operations continues unabated, with many of our personnel providing support to operations around the World. This



includes the new 2nd in Command, Sqn Ldr Nat Winsor who, whilst maintaining his flying currency as a Mission System Operator on the Voyager Force training our Fast Jet fleets in air to air capabilities, also took up a role as the Voyager detachment commander in Cyprus.

The Squadron continues to support as many commemorations as possible. In addition to attending the Mildenhall weekend in May (below),





Members of the Squadron also attended the Bomber Command memorial in July (Left) Reception at The RAF Club afterwards.

As well as the RAuxAF commemoration at the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln. (Below)



Once again the squadron took the opportunity to have a Force development trip to Europe. Flight Lieutenant John Myhill led seven personnel as part of Exercise NACHT UILEN MANNA, the aim was to commemorate the Battle of the Scheldt, Op MANNA and the end of WW2 in Europe. Op MANNA was a humanitarian relief effort that saw the RAF using some of their heavy bomber force to drop food to the starving people of the Western Netherlands from 29th April to 8th May

(VE Day) 1945. RAF Brize Norton's 622 participated in this wartime operation. As part of the event, squadron members took the opportunity to visit 2 war grave sites with 622 Squadron personnel, laying wreaths and poppies at each site. As part of the visit, the team were hosted by a French aviation enthusiast group who had built a memorial site for the crash of a 622 Squadron Lancaster site in France (Below). Opportunity was again taken to lay wreaths at the memorial (Below left) as well as visiting the actual crash site in a forest. (Below right)



The Squadrons Blondie Swales award was once again given by the London City Worshipful Company of Arbitrators to Squadron Leader O'Brien. The Squadron reciprocated the generosity of an evening meal in London with a day at Brize Norton which included a brief on the RAF, Air Mobility Force, RAF Brize Norton and 622 Squadron. The visitors also had an opportunity to hone their flying abilities in the A400 simulators as well as visiting a Voyager aircraft.

As one of the last surviving members of 622 Squadron, it was with great sadness that we heard of the passing of Peter Beckett in September. John Myhill, having met him on numerous Mildenhall register weekends, represented and laid a wreath at his funeral.

Finally Corporal Hayley Court, has continued in her challenge to raise money for the Combat Stress charity through her very own Healing Military minds charity. In addition to more climbing of Snowdon, attending numerous events and collecting money in buckets, her 2nd autumn ball with over 300 guests raised more than £27000 in one evening, bringing her total to nearly £100,000 over 3 years.

Wishing register families and friends a merry Christmas, happy New Year and a prosperous 2024.

Kind regards Wg Cdr D J James | OC 622 Sqn | RAF Brize Norton

The keen eyed amongst you may have noticed young Flt Lt John Myhill in some of these photographs. Well John was one of those who retired from the Royal Air Force, amongst those other 10 stalwarts shown in the first photograph. Since then I've asked him to give us a write-up of his service, not only with 622 (Auxiliary) Squadron, but his whole career. I, and I hope you have too, enjoyed the pieces he has written for us in the past. However, since retirement (far too young, in my opinion, he doesn't look old enough!) John has been on a mammoth walk through northern Spain, the Camino de Santiago Compostela and moved house. So I'm afraid you see, he hasn't really had time to write something for this edition. I'll keep after him in the hopes we get something in next year's edition. In the meantime, I'm sure you'll join with me in wishing him a long and happy retirement.

622 Squadron Obituaries by Howard Sandall and Editor.

Peter Beckett 22nd December 1925 – 10th September 2023

We heard, at Peter's funeral, that he had joined the ATC before war broke out. This had given him the chance of flying, long before he was eligible to volunteer for the RAF when he reached the required age.

Peter Beckett joined the RAF in late 1943 as aircrew under training. His aptitude tests showed he would be best suited for a role as a wireless operator/air gunner. His training venues were:

- ACRC- St John's Wood London (remembers the V1 flying bomb attacks on London witnessing them first hand. The V1 campaign against London started in early June 1944 therefore, we can reasonably assume he was at ACRC in June 1944. Stayed in the Viceroy Court Hotel, Prince of Wales road.
- RAF Bridlington (ITW) Peter became sick here with dysentery from the food and he was sent to the sick bay.
- No.4 Radio School Madingley flying in de Havilland Dominies & Percival Proctors. Learned Morse code here and achieved the required level of 24 words per minute. Peter said that the training was so good that he can still remember it to this day and often turns words into Morse. At course completion the students were brought into a room and asked to sign up for a long term commission in the RAF. Nobody volunteered for this, Peter was subsequently regraded to a ground

crew occupation, MT Driver. Peter and the students had not completed the gunnery course so did not get awarded their brevet.

- Posted in RAF Mildenhall in the late summer of 1944 as a MT Driver.
- 61 Maintenance Unit (MU) RAF Handsford, Stockport.
- RAF Eastchurch, Isle of Sheppey
- RAF Hinton in the Hedges, Northamptonshire.
- RAF Bicester
- Demobbed in 1947

Daily MT Driver Routine

Peter stayed on base despite his parents living in Mildenhall village. Peter reported to the MT section every day where he would report to a corporal for his jobs. Peter remembers pulling up outside the MT section and how slippery it was from the vehicle oil spillages. Peter mainly drove the Hillman cars.

On certain days he would transport bombs from RAF Barnham, Suffolk on a flatbed lorry. When he arrived he would drive down a slope and the bombs would be craned on to the lorry. There were pieces of 2x2 wood nailed to the flatbed lorry to stop the bombs falling off. Sometimes he would have an additional trailer hooked up to his lorry to carry more bombs. On one occasion he was fully loaded with the extra trailer attached when the trailer came loose and dug itself into the side of the road. On arrival at Mildenhall the bombs would be taken to the bomb dump where the armourers would crane them off.

Peter's RAF training stood him in good stead post war when he joined the Royal Observer Corp for over 30 years. Peter married Jill and became a father and then grandfather. Latterly he enjoyed attending the Mildenhall Association reunions and tracing the history of the aircrew who rest in Beck row churchyard. He will be sadly missed by all of us who knew him.

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Tony Dryland sadly passed away in 2020, but we were not made aware of this sad news until March 2023.

Tony was the son of Sgt. Edward James Dryland 1895943 who served on the squadron as a Flight Engineer. *(This story is taken from the 2014/5 newsletter. Ed)*

On the 20th September 1944, a tragic event sent a shockwave around RAF Mildenhall, one that is still vivid in the minds today of those who witnessed the event 70 years ago. The base was instructed to attack the German positions around Calais on a daylight operation. 622 Squadron sent 17 Lancasters to the target. At the pre-flight briefing all assembled were told to fly in three 'vic' formations. Shortly after take-off, the 'vic' formations were established much to the consternation of the pilots. Whilst climbing the aircraft entered thick cloud, perilous for formation flying.

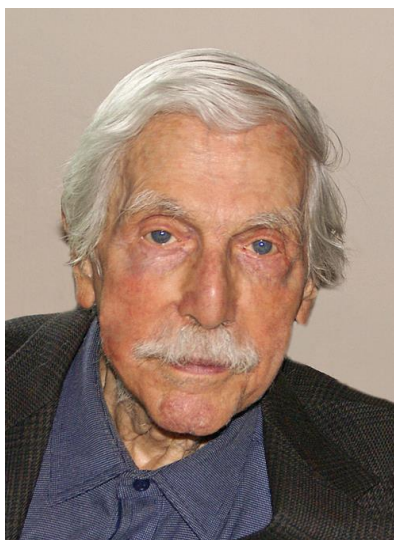
From his rear turret, W/O Bill Hickling witnessed what happened next: -

“We were losing sight of the Lancaster on our starboard side, when we veered too much to port. It was the most intense and frightening experience imaginable, it felt like ages before we finally broke through the clouds. What happened next is etched in my memory and at the time it was a surreal incident that I could not believe was happening. Two Lancaster’s appeared out of the clouds together in a grotesque embrace after obviously colliding in the cloud. The two aircraft appeared to hang in the air for a brief period and then fall backwards out of control and start spiralling down.”

The two aircraft, LL802, in which Sgt. Dryland was Flight Engineer and LM167 crashed near the village of Wormingford north-west of Colchester taking fifteen young men to their deaths. LM167 was carrying an additional airman. He had been seen the night before partying with an attractive blonde lady who served behind the bar at the ‘Bird in Hand.’ Superstitious aircrew named her the ‘Chop Blonde,’ everyone who got close to her failed to return! Sgt. Dryland is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves plot at Beck Row church.

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Wing Co W.A. (Wally) Mildren C.D., P.Eng. (SM), LMCSCE. CAF (Retd)



Wally Mildren was born on February 24, 1923 in London, England and took his early education and engineering studies in Barking, Essex, obtaining a National Certificate in mechanical engineering. He joined the Royal Air Force in December 1941 commencing his aircrew training in May the following year. Wally took part of his flying training in Canada under the BCATP and graduated from No.5 Air Observer School in Winnipeg with the rank of Pilot Officer in October 1943. He completed a tour of thirty operations on Lancaster bombers with No.622 Squadron, at Mildenhall, between August and December 1944. A member of the Bill Richards crew, with Ted Papp

as their mid upper gunner.

Howard adds - The crew completed their 30 operations from 26th August '44, when they went to Kiel, through to their last on 23rd December '44, with a visit to Trier.

They were hit several times by flak especially on a trip to Cologne on 27th November '44 when the R/G was badly injured in the leg by flak. He never flew with the crew again for the remaining 5 operations.

When the crew were posted to 622 Squadron, Walter Mildren was the only Officer in the crew, Bill Richards was commissioned to F/O in October '44.



In the picture above of the Bill Richards crew, with their regular Lancaster, L-R: Sgt H. A. Papps (MUG), F/O W. A. Mildren (B/A), F/O W. E. Richards RAAF (Pilot), F/Sgt R. D. Kidd (Nav), P/O R. Martin (F/E), F/Sgt J. Doyle (W/op).

Absent is Sgt K. Nicholson the rear gunner who was injured in the leg by a flak burst on a mission to Cologne on 27/11/44. (From Howard Sandall records)

He then served in India from April 1945 to August 1946 on Movement Control duties latterly as Officer Commanding No.3.

Movement Control in Madras with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

On being allowed to resign his commission Wally immigrated to Canada in December 1946 in, of all things, a converted Lancaster, and arrived in Winnipeg on New Year's Day, 1947.

In the 1950s, the Mildren family established a summer cottage at the Lake Winnipeg community of Victoria Beach, north of the city of Winnipeg. In recognition of his RAF posting,

Walter decided to give the cottage the name, *Mildrenhall*. (Right, courtesy of Fred Cross, who notified us of Walter's passing.)



He led a very full and interesting life in Canada until his passing in September 2022 aged 99 (or, as he would say, in his hundredth year). Whilst working with the City of Winnipeg he completed his studies at the University of Manitoba and worked with the Board of Parks and Recreation, the Manitoba Power Commission and Manitoba Hydro as a civil engineer until his retirement in February 1986.

He joined the Air Cadet Movement as an instructor with 220 (Red River) Squadron in 1947 serving, eventually, as Adjutant and Commanding Officer. He was promoted to Squadron Leader in 1952. In 1957 he was appointed CO of No.3 Air Cadet Wing with the rank of Wing Commander; subsequently receiving the Canadian Forces Decoration and clasp and the Centennial Medal. Upon relinquishing the position as CO of the Wing he was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Manitoba Provincial Committee of the Air Cadet League becoming Vice Chairman in 1973 and Chairman from 1975 to 1978. In June of 1978 he was appointed to the National Executive Committee of the Air Cadet League of Canada, was made a Vice President in 1981 and became President in 1984-85. In 2003 he was awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. He is a Life Member of the Air Cadet League of Canada (Manitoba) Inc. and was recipient of the Manitoba Movement's Distinguished Service Award in 2008. Wally received the National League's Certificate of Honour in 2005.

He was a Life Member of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba and a Life Member of the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering. He was a Past Group President of the Air Force Association of Canada.

He is survived by his wife Gladys of 73 years and his daughter Gail.

(My grateful thanks to the Provincial Chairman of the Air Cadet League of Canada (Manitoba) and the Neil Bardal funeral home whose additional tributes I've used to compile this obituary. Ed.)

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I am grateful to our good friend Alan Founé for the following report on the visit mentioned in Doz's report. Between Google translate, myself and Alain I hope it reads well! Ed

CDRH BA 133 / 622 SQN RAUXAF: MEETING BETWEEN AVIATORS.

Heirs of No 622 Squadron formed in 1943 (80 years this year), a detachment of seven airmen from No 622 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force / RAF Brize Norton (Oxfordshire) came to visit us in Petitmont (Meurthe-et-Moselle).

No. 622 Squadron RAuxAF.

No 622 Squadron was formed on 10 August 1943 at RAF Mildenhall (Suffolk) from the C Flight of No. XV Squadron. Equipped with Shorts Stirlings then Lancasters MKI then MKIII from December of the same year. No 622 Squadron

was one of several squadrons making up No. 3 Group, part of Bomber Command's main force which took part in night bombing raids over Germany until the end of the war. Their motto is "We wage war by night".

It was during a bombing mission over Stuttgart on the night of July 28 to 29, 1944 that one of the bombers of this unit, the Lancaster L7576 (GI-K), hit by Messerschmitt Bf-110 fire in the region of Saint-Dié (Vosges) crashed about thirty kilometres further north in a forest of Petitmont. The aircraft was performing its 98th operational mission that night.

Towards the end of the war, after a short period of troop transport bringing in prisoners of war and troops from all over Europe, the squadron was disbanded on 15 August 1945. It was briefly reformed on 15 December 1950 at RAF Blackbushe (Hampshire) as the only Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF) transport squadron operating the Vickers Valetta until disbanded again on 30 September 1953. Reformed again in 1994 as 1359 Flight RAF, the unit was incorporated as the "Hercules Operational Conversion Unit" (OCU) at RAF Lyneham (Wiltshire) and moved to RAF Brize Norton (Oxfordshire) in 2011. On October 1, 2012, it was authorized by the "Standing Committee of the Air Force Board" to resume designation as 622 Squadron RAuxAF (Royal Auxiliary Air Force) and has the mission of providing aircrew and operational support personnel to maintain the operational capability of the "RAF Air Mobility squadrons".

RAF Brize Norton, which has around 20 units based, is today the RAF's largest base with around 5,800 airmen, 300 civilian employees and 1,200 contractors. It is home to RAF's Air Mobility Force encompassing the forces of Strategic and Tactical Air Transport and Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR). (Source R.A.F.)

The detachment from No. 622 Squadron RAuxAF.

Modern day members of the original No 622 Squadron, which had been formed in 1943 sent a detachment of seven airmen from No 622 Squadron RAuxAF, on July 29, to visit us at Petitmont in the footsteps of the crew of L7576 shot down here, 79 years ago to the day. This detachment led by Group



Captain Dorian James, Officer Commanding, notably included Squadron Leader Nathaniel Winsor, Executive Officer, and Flight Lieutenant John Myhill, known to members of the CDRH for having participated with them in the inauguration of the "Lancaster Memorial" in Petitmont in 2019. He was also the organizer of this visit as part of a broader memorial journey in the Grand-Est (Verdun, Petitmont, Struthof camp, MM Park La Wantzenau, Juvencourt).

Chatillon Castle.

"Estimated Time of Arrival" surely calculated by a navigator, the minibus of our airman friends coming from Verdun parked "at 3 o'clock" on the village square, at the precisely fixed time and meeting place three months earlier. After the presentations with our delegation of six members of the CDRH, including its president, Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Claude Barral, everyone then took the road to the Château de Chatillon, the first traces of a fortress of which date back to the 14th century. This is where Marie-Thérèse André, the very kind owner of the place, welcomed us for "The time à la Français" in the courtyard of her house converted into a living room for the occasion. After the first friendly exchanges, the story in English by John of the epic of L7576, the French afternoon tea, a few glimpses in the tower and in the cellars of the castle, thanks to our hosts Marie-Thérèse, Jean-Philippe and Paul-Louis, then finally the souvenir photo in the lawn, the group of airmen undertook the visit of the proposed sites.

Petitmont Cemetery.

It is in this cemetery that were buried Sergeant Arthur Payton (RAF), Sergeant Percy Buckley (RAF) and Flight Sergeant Richard Proulx (RCAF), the three "gunners" found dead near the wreckage of L7576 on the morning of July 29, 1944. Their funeral was celebrated the next day, Sunday July 30, in the church of Petitmont. Shortly before, Madeleine Schultz, a resident of the village, had celebrated the baptism of her daughter on the same day in this same church. Since then, Madeleine had associated the two events and discreetly taken great care of the graves of the three gunners, decorating them with flowers throughout her life, to the limit of her strength. It was near the three graves of the Commonwealth of "her" airmen that she was buried, almost a century old, at the end of 2021. Time for meditation and laying of a wooden cross bearing the insignia of No 622 SQN on each of these four graves. In the background, the nearby reliefs in which the plane crashed. (*See the picture in Doz's report, bottom left. Ed*)

"Lancaster Memorial" of La Fourchue-Eau.

It was on July 29, 2019 that the "Lancaster Memorial" was unveiled by the family members of the shot down crew during a moving inauguration ceremony presided over by Colonel Yann Bourrion, commander of BA 133 in Nancy-Ochey, and in the presence, in particular, of Doctor Bryan Pattison OBE, vice-president of the Royal Air Forces Association and president of the Swiss committee, of Flight Lieutenant John Myhill representing No 622 Squadron

RAuxAF, of Lieutenant-Colonel Yves Gagnon representing the British Ambassador to France and Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Jacques Lignier (†), President of the CDRH. This ceremony was honoured with the flight over the memorial by a patrol of two Mirage 2000 Ds from BA 133. Four years later, to the day, the ceremony gave way to a moment of reflection between airman friends on both sides of the Channel, without protocol and much more modest but just as dignified: readings by Flight Lieutenant John Myhill, laying of the Poppy Remembrance Wreath of No 622 Squadron RAuxAF by Group Captain Dorian James, and laying of the wreath of families by Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Claude Barral, Group Captain Dorian James and Flight Lieutenant John Myhill followed by a minute of silence.

Crash site at a place called “Le noir trou”.

The Lancaster L7576 crash site is in a private forest. Accessible on foot by a sometimes very steep uphill forest path, the site is located on the side of the slope of a narrow, dark and deep valley, and can only be accessed after forty minutes of effort. On the spot, the fir trees mowed down on July 29, 1944 by the bomber have again taken possession of the places where traces of the drama no longer remain. A lucky and informed eye may however still find debris from the wreckage there, as was the case for our friends from No 622 SQN and for those of us who were able to discover this forgotten site. Twenty minutes of descent in a light wind allowed all the shirts to be able to dry on the way back... *(See the picture in Doz's report, bottom right, of the wreckage found at the site. Ed)*

Hamlet of “Pot-de-Vin”.

Only two airmen managed to escape the falling bomber, whilst still in flight. Flying Officer R.L. Fiddick, bombardier, jumped a dozen kilometres southeast of the point of impact. He was eventually returned to England with the help of the Resistance and the Special Air Service. Flying Officer G.J. Wishart, flight engineer, jumped at the last moment and landed in this hamlet located in a very isolated clearing. Wounded in the leg, he was taken prisoner and then released at the end of the conflict. There was a reading, in English, by Flight Lieutenant John Myhill of the report of Flight Lieutenant G.J. Wishart D.F.C. and more particularly the chapter devoted to his capture, in front of the meadow where he landed by parachute, in front of the house where he was collected and then arrested by the Germans, but also in front of the sawmill in which three coffins were summarily made for the “gunners” killed in the crash, only one kilometre away.

Sausserupt hut.

It was a few kilometres away, deep in the forest of Sausserupt that we finally sat down in the refuge kindly made available to us by Georges Boyadjian, passionate about the history of France and eminently attached to his adopted homeland. After the exchange of gifts and a (few) glasses of cold beer, the evening organized by Evelyne continued around a typical Lorraine meal shared

by candlelight and during which everyone was then able to freely practice their English or his French with his neighbours at the table. It was around midnight that we had to separate, our friends leaving us to take the road to Sarrebourg (Moselle) for a brief night's rest before resuming early the next day the direction of the Struthof camp where it was possible that H.S. Peabody and J.H. Doe, the pilot and navigator missing in the L7576 crash, were brutally executed after their arrest.

Alain FOUNÉ CDRH

As a post script to the above comes this (again Google translated) newspaper report, also via Alain.

Vosges Matin SAINTE-BARBE edition, newspaper report. A Canadian visitor presents a model of Lancaster L7576.

Jon Peck, a Canadian citizen, went to the town to attend the commemoration days of the Second World War. He presented, with Alain Founé from the Centre for Documentation and Historical Research, the Lancaster L7576.

As part of the commemoration which took place on May 6, 7 and 8 in Sainte-Barbe, the Documentation and Historical Research Centre (CDRH) of the Nancy-Ochey air base Nr.133 had set up a team of enthusiastic specialists on the theme: "Sky of Sainte-Barbe, night of July 28 to 29, 1944." "The last flight of Lancaster L 7576".

That night, a wave of nearly 500 Lancaster bombers on a bombing mission over Stuttgart flew over the area after taking off from RAF Mildenhall (Suffolk). One of these bombers, the L7576, was shortly after hit by a Messerschmitt at 5,000 m altitude in the region of Saint-Dié to finally crash in Petitmont (Meurthe-et-Moselle).

This forgotten fact of war was mentioned during a conference given by Colonel Pierre-Alain Antoine, André Beaudot having taken charge of presenting a selection of the most famous aircraft models of the time, including a perfect replica of this Lancaster.



A very special visitor was discreetly among the audience.

Responding to the invitation of Mayor Christophe Lemesle, Jon Peck, a Canadian citizen, crossed the Atlantic to arrive discreetly in Sainte-Barbe to attend this commemoration.

Cousin of Flying Officer Harold Sherman Peabody (Royal Canadian Air Force), pilot of L7576 whose body was never

found, Jon Peck left just as discreetly as soon as the event ended.

With the tenuous link of Stuttgart, (both the 622 and 75(NZ) loss had that target as their mission on the nights they were lost, just over one year apart) I move on to our next tale of Remembrance, this time in Belgium. It is a ceremony that I and a number of Friends of 75(NZ) Squadron attended a few years ago, pre Covid. Howard and I also visited the site, with Guy and his charming wife on one of our 'graveyard tours'.

Guy Lapaille and his team has done a splendid job organising the 80th anniversary event this year at rather short notice. Sadly I and many others from the earlier event weren't able to go. What follows is his short, Facebook

posted, summary of the ceremonial events, with some photographs.



On April 14th 1943 towards the end of the day, a MKIII BF 513 Short Stirling from 75(NZ) Squadron, coded AA-E, took off from the Newmarket airfield for an operation on Stuttgart. Once its mission was accomplished, while flying back home on April 15th around 2.30 PM, the bomber was shot down by a Messerschmitt BF110 flown by Lt Fritz Graef from the 1/NJG4 based in Florennes. The crash happened in the forest of Nismes, near the

hamlet of Regniessart, which is part of the commune of Viroinval. The crew of the Short Stirling BF513 consisted of: -

P/O MCCASKILL Donald Gordon (Pilot) NZ 413573 R.N.Z.A.F.

P/O GRAINGER James Kennedy (Navigator) NZ 42295 R.N.Z.A.F

Sgt ELWELL Bertram (Air Bomb aimer) 519416 RAF

Sgt GREEN Reginald Thomas Charles (Wireless Operator/Air Gunner) 1211032 RAF.V.R

Sgt MCVICAR Angus (Flight Engineer) 1371651 RAF.V.R.

Sgt COOK Ernest Desmond (Air Gunner) 1609864 RAF.V.R.

Sgt SMITH Ronald Alexander (Air Gunner) NZ 415378 R.N.Z.A.F.

This year, April 15th will marked the 80th anniversary of the loss of this crew. In this context, a tribute was paid to them on this Friday April 14, 2023 according to the detailed program below.

Memorial in Regniessart

- 6:00 p.m. laying of wreaths and floral tributes.

Cinema Chaplin in Nismes

- 6:45 p.m. Reception –cocktail diner

- 7:30 p.m. Conference by MM Sylvain Hottiaux and Guy Lapaille

"The Short Stirling BF 513 failed to return" April 14-15, 1943

- 8:15 p.m. Broadcast of the documentary film "A plane for memory"

Well done Guy, with your enthusiasm, this crew too, will never be forgotten. Ed

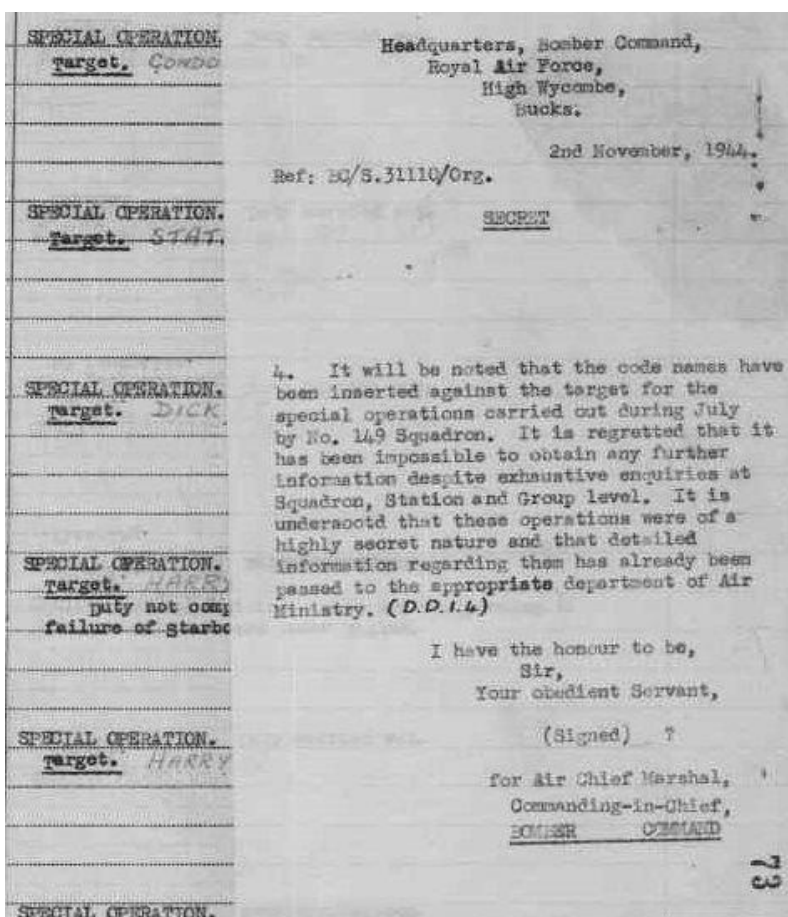
Despite Alan not enjoying the best of health these days, he was gracious enough to run off a couple of obituaries for two of the airmen from 149 Squadron.

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Flt. Sgt. A. Adams. 424605 AUS. Tony first appears in the 149 Squadron ORBs on the 8th May 1944, when the squadron was very busy with the D-Day preparations and operations. He was flying in Stirling aircraft with Fg. Off. Cryer's crew, part Australian and part British – always a good combination. On the run up to D-Day, the crew were employed on Special Operations and Mining. The squadron had pioneered the technique of dropping mines from low altitude and used these skills very effectively to place mines to deter E-boats and others from

attacking the invasion craft which were shortly coming their way. So, also, were the Special Operations carried out in support, mainly of Marquis groups in France. Both of this type of Operation were carried out at low level, the Special Ops usually at night, with very high risk factors. As can be seen from the attached image, the targets for these drops were SECRET and finding actual locations for research has proved a tricky task up until date.

A sequence of Special Ops and mining trips followed, interspersed with bombing trips and Air-Sea Rescue trips – almost all such searches being fruitless. The early days of September saw the last of



the Stirling Operations for the crew before being retrained and allocated Lancaster aircraft. The pace did not slacken and the crew completed 36 Operations, including 2 ASR trips – a superb total accomplished in just eight months. Throughout this time the crew stayed together and in December 1944 were rested. Tony, as the Wireless Operator and a trained Air Gunner, survived this period and has died this year.

Another of our squadron 'family' has passed – rest in peace.

Alan Fraser 149 Sqd Historian

Flt. Sgt Wallace Lee. Wallace Lee, coincidentally, was also a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner, on the crew of Fg.Off. G. Meadon. The crew first appears in the ORBs for a bombing Operation to Boulogne – a duty successfully carried out. They were amongst the first of the squadron crews to be trained using the Lancaster Bomber – an aircraft they flew all of their Operations on. 149 started re-equipping with the Lancaster in late August and early September 1944, whilst the Stirling was still a vital part of the squadron. The crew were rapidly drawn into the very high efforts being used to press the Allies breakout from Normandy. To this end they completed 12 Operations in their first six weeks on the squadron – an impressive achievement. Wallace was a native of Consett, County Durham and duly returned there after successfully completing his 'Tour' of Operations and his Service. He took employment with the local Iron Company, which later became British Steel. Not for him the lot of the steelworker – Wallace was a Carpenter – and a good one! He advanced up the ranks until he was Head of Department. He and his wife were married for 60 years and he leaves behind 2 children, 3 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. A brave man, who lived a long and fulfilled life, he died peacefully in hospital on the 22 August 1922 at the ripe old age of 100. Rest in Peace

Alan Fraser 149 Sqd Historian

To my eternal shame, I've lost the notification of Mr G V Hancock's sad passing but with it, I was sent the most comprehensive story of his service with 149 Squadron and so I shall use parts of this as his tribute. The full story is on our website under 'Stories and articles to read' "Air Force Days" by GV Hancock.

Air Force Days by G V Hancock

On my eighteenth birthday on November 19th 1940, I caught a bus into Manchester from my home in Handforth, Cheshire, and at the recruiting office in Dover Street, joined the Royal Air Force. Afterwards, being too excited to return home immediately, I saw a show at the Palace Theatre.

I could have waited another year or so before being called up, but like so many of my own age I was anxious to be involved. France had fallen in the summer of that year and although the threat of invasion was receding, our situation was a desperate one, few people outside this country giving much for our chances. Night after night our cities were being attacked by the enemy bombers and although a substantial part of our army had escaped from the Continent through

Dunkirk, it was desperately short of arms and equipment. Yet though the situation seemed hopeless, there was a marvellous determination in the country not to give in, people of my generation were fired by it.

I joined the Royal Air Force because I had long been fascinated by the story of flight and partly, no doubt, because being an incompetent and unenthusiastic swimmer, the Navy was clearly not for me. The Army I never considered, I wanted to serve as a Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner, but because there was a shortage of pilots at the time and because I was the proud possessor of a Higher School Certificate, I was persuaded to take a pilot's course. It was a decision about which I had misgivings and one which, knowing my mechanical ineptitude many would share. I was sent off to R.A.F. Padgate for physical and aptitude tests. These I passed. My mother, horrified at my joining the Air Force was, nevertheless, pleased that I had passed the exacting physical requirements demanded of air crew, since as a young child I was not considered very strong.

Having successfully completed our examinations at the end of our Initial Training Course, we waited to be posted to our flying schools. To our great delight we learned that we were to be trained abroad and soon we were on our way to R.A.F. Wilmslow where we were to be kitted out. There we were issued with tropical kit. The method of deciding what size uniform we should have was rather a novel one. The Warrant Officer responsible for this lined us up, made us stand to attention and then, walking briskly down the line, shouted a series of numbers to an underling as he passed each of us in turn. The result of this was that I spent part of my time abroad with a tunic that was far too small and a suit jacket that was far too large! The camp at Wilmslow was less than two miles from my home in Handforth and I naturally spending quite a lot of time there.

However we were only in the camp three days. They did allow us out once and I took half a dozen of my friends home with me. Mother gave us all a marvellous meal. I don't think I realised it at the time that most of the family's weekly ration went on that meal, and I don't think either that I gave much thought to the anxiety felt by my family at the sea journey ahead of me, at a time when large numbers of British ships were being sunk by German U Boats.

Just before midnight on September 3rd 1941 we left RAF Wilmslow at the start of our journey. At this time, we had no idea where we were going; ordinary airmen were not trusted with such important information. In three long columns we marched to the station, at our head two men carrying lanterns, and each man sagging under the weight of kit bag, knapsack and respirator. There was a full moon which cast an eerie light on the strange procession. Early next morning found us in Glasgow and it was here that we learnt that our destination was North America. The ship we travelled on was "The Pasteur"* a French liner of 30,000 tons. After one false start we sailed down the Clyde in the evening sunshine. We were all very excited at the great adventure ahead of us and some of us were much moved by the splendid scenery on either side. Out to sea my

decision not to join the Navy was amply justified by prolonged bouts of seasickness. Mind you, our quarters didn't help. We were down in the bowels of the ship, over a hundred of us crammed into a room in which half that number would have been a crowd. In that room we ate and slept and the atmosphere was appalling. Sleeping wasn't easy since we had to make do with hammocks. The gift I now enjoy of being able to fall asleep in any place and at any time had not then been bestowed upon me and I suffered some discomfort.

We crossed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in only six days, our speed keeping us safe from U-Boats. My other memory of Halifax is of the splendid peaches we bought with the first of our Canadian dollars. Soon we were on a train on our way to Toronto, a journey that took us the better part of three days. Our new destination was the American state of Arizona. We crossed the border at Detroit and headed south through Kansas and New Mexico. On the way we passed through El Paso and alongside the Rio Grande which sadly failed to impress. Since the United States was not officially involved in the war we had to masquerade as civilians and we all therefore exchanged our Air Force blues for two-piece grey flannel suits. As all these were exactly the same so we might just as well have kept our uniforms on. Our base was Falcon Field in Mesa, Arizona.

We were not there, however, to admire the scenery, but to learn to fly, and here, I am afraid, I did not distinguish myself. Perhaps with more time I might have managed, but time was short, there was a war to be won and I made progress too slowly. The only vehicle I had handled up to that time was a pushbike and I found the co-ordination of hand, foot, mind and eye a difficult one. It was landings that really did for me. Take-offs and aerial manoeuvres such as getting in and out of spins I found I could manage all right, but judging the height at which to level out on coming in to land I found difficult. I would either level out too high and drop with a great crash on to the ground, or leave it too late and proceed in a series of kangaroo hops across the airfield. This was not considered good for the aircraft, or indeed, the nerves of my instructor. So in the end it was decided that my contribution to winning the war would have to be in another direction, and very sadly I climbed aboard the train at Phoenix station to return to Canada. After over seventy years my failure still rankles!

We sailed home on the 10th January, 1942. When we climbed on board our ship, the "Stratheden", the pipes had frozen and it was bitterly cold. I've always had a fondness for a good stew and the one the ship's galley provided for us on this occasion lingers pleasantly in the memory. We travelled with one other merchant ship and two rather ancient destroyers that the Americans had leased to the Navy escorts. Once again, we were untroubled by U boats.

From Glasgow we travelled by train across an ice bound Britain. The journey to Bournemouth took us twenty five hours and during that time we had no food, the heating having broken down on the train. Another splendid stew on our arrival raised my spirits considerably. I remember, too, the phone call I made from the

Winter Gardens telling my family of my safe arrival home and the pride and joy with which on going home on leave I put out in front of them the tins of food I had bought for them before I left Canada. By this time in the war there were great shortages of food in Britain.

There had been some criticism in Britain of the high standards of flying demanded by our American instructors and the serious failure rate, so most of us were offered a chance of another flying course. A number accepted, but I declined with thanks and asked to be trained as an air gunner. After some weeks flitting between Bournemouth, Hastings and Regents Park in London where we were quartered in flats later made famous by the Beatles, Abbey Road, we went north to Bridlington to begin our course. Two pleasant months of spring and early summer followed in this interesting town and then on we went further north still, to Morpeth in Northumberland for the flying part of our course. There we trained in a quite extraordinary and somewhat alarming aircraft called the Blackburn Botha. To reach the gun turret of this we had to crawl on hands and knees along a narrow passage and worm our way into the turret. Once there the sense of being trapped was rather an unpleasant one. From that turret my fellow gunners and I fired our Browning machine guns at targets floating in the coastal waters or at drogues towed by positively heroic pilots - many were the stories of towing aircraft being shot down by over enthusiastic gunners. When we passed out at the end of the course and received our coveted sergeant's stripes and gunner's badge, the comment on my efforts was, "Theory: above average. Practical: average." Quite par for the course!

Early in August, 1942, I arrived at Waterbeach near Cambridge. This was a Conversion unit where pilots, trained on two engined aircraft, were taught to fly a four engined bomber. Here also crews were put together. I discovered that apart from Bob Henry and me, ours was a New Zealand crew. I count myself singularly fortunate to have been a member of such a crew. Our captain was Lin Drummond, a most friendly chap. An excellent pilot; cool under pressure. I owe my life to his great skill and courage. George Patrick, the navigator, on deck was a bundle of nerves, but once aloft remarkably calm and efficient. Bill Harvey, the wireless operator, was, like Scotty Craw, the rear gunner, a farmer's boy. 80th were very fit and very tough. I recall Bill, on a bitter January morning when most of us were cowering in our bunks, flinging open the barrack room door and, clad only in a shirt; breathing deeply the arctic air and exclaiming with every sign of satisfaction, "Ah, Fresh! Fresh!" He, like our bomb aimer, Bob McNary, was to lose his life later in the war. Finally, Bob Henry, the flight engineer, was a most amusing and cheerful character, infinitely skillful at getting the best out of the engines in his charge.

At Waterbeach we were introduced to the aircraft we were going to fly. This was the Short Stirling, the first of the R.A.F.'s four engined bombers. Those who flew in it became very attached to it. It was capable of withstanding a great deal of

punishment and still getting home, but it had serious faults, one of which was a rather unstable undercarriage. Unless you kept it on a straight line on landing or take-off there was a danger of the undercarriage snapping. Its most serious fault, however, was its low ceiling which made it more vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire than the Lancasters and Halifaxes. When the Lancasters were bombing from twenty thousand feet, we were hard pressed to get to fifteen, Mont Blanc, the French mountain is some fifteen thousand feet high and I well remember our anxiety when we sought to clear that height as we passed close to the peak in several bombing raids on Northern Italy.

Two days after our abortive trip to Bremen our crew was posted to Lakenheath in Suffolk to join 149 Squadron. Formerly equipped with two engined Wellingtons the Squadron had recently moved from Mildenhall to Lakenheath and was now equipped with Stirlings. In the next four and a half months I took part in twenty raids over enemy territory. The first of these was to lay mines in the sea off the Frisian Islands; an operation with the code name 'gardening'. The mines dropped from about eight hundred feet were laid in the main shipping channels used by the enemy. It took us three and a half hours to fly there and back and the comment I made in the little notebook I kept in those days recorded "a quiet trip". I know that the sun was setting as we flew out across the Suffolk coastline and the golden light upon the fields and houses below us somehow enhanced the feeling of excitement that we all felt.

Various successful raids to Germany followed none without incident, but all survived. Then after a break in operations of about 3 weeks, it was 28th November 1942 that we set off once more. This time it was to Turin and I remember the occasion very clearly on this sortie that one of our squadron, Flight Sergeant Middleton, won the Victoria Cross. The main attack that night was on Turin itself, but three other aircraft from our squadron had a special target, the Fiat works, just outside the town. The three crews were those of the station commander, Middleton himself and our own. It was a difficult target to bomb. For reasons that now escape me we had to attack from just over a thousand feet, perhaps the most dangerous height for an aircraft to do so. We kept seeing the factory and then as we circled round to begin our bombing run, losing it. We spent forty minutes over the target, Scotty and exchanging fire with the enemy. I recall vividly a beautiful white stone palace on a hilltop over which we passed several times. When we had got rid of our bombs, we set off home. Turin, of course lies at the foot of the Alps and we had to climb quickly to cross them. The Stirling, admirable aircraft though it was in many ways, was not a speedy climber and we had some anxious moments as we laboured up one of the valleys with high mountains on either side.

When we landed at base after an eight hour flight, we enquired about the other two crews. The station commander was on the circuit coming into land, but the news about Middleton was disquieting. His aircraft badly damaged and short of

fuel* he was hoping to ditch In the Channel. Later we heard that he was hoping to make landfall and that the lights at Manston in Kent had been switched on for him. He never got down there, though four of his crew survived to tell the tale of what had happened.

A number of German targets followed and it was on the way back from one of these that a rather strange thing happened. We had been warned before we set out that a British convoy passing down the Channel. "Keep well away" was the advice given, the Navy having a reputation among the bomber boys for firing first and asking questions afterwards. It was thought however that by the time we were re-crossing the Channel the convoy would have passed on its way. But the weather changed, and strong tailwinds sped us home in under four hours. Now the strange thing about these night sorties of ours was that although you were part of a large bomber force, you rarely saw any of the other aircraft, except over the target, In fact you seemed to be flying all by yourselves. On this night while was gently brooding on life in my turret and thinking of the eggs and bacon waiting for me back home, there was a series of flashes down below on the sea and soon some heavy stuff started to arrive about us. Bill Harvey grabbed the Verey pistol, already loaded with the colours of the day, and spurred on by all of us, fired them off. These star shells designed to identify us to the Navy below produced this evening two green stars and very pretty they looked, too. And then to our amazement the sky was full of green stars. Wherever we looked, above, below, on either side, there was the night sky lit by these green stars, and suddenly it came to us that we were indeed surrounded by a great fellowship of fellow airmen. The Navy, far below, was, no doubt, laughing its socks off.

When it was time, we got dressed. This was quite a performance, over our battledress and large white sweater we wore two flying suits; an inner and an outer. During the worst of the winter we also wore an electrically heated waistcoat with leads which ran down into our flying boots and also into our gloves. I think we wore three pairs of the latter as it got very cold at fifteen thousand feet in those unheated aircraft. A flying helmet with headphones and mike attachment completed the outfit.

I ought of course to have mentioned the oxygen mask necessary at such altitudes and that reminds me of the fun and games involved in going to the loo during the course of such flights. For me this involved taking a few deep breaths of oxygen, unplugging the tube, disconnecting my electrical leads, pulling out the split pin that held my seat in place and then climbing backwards down the steps that led to my turret. Having arrived in the main fuselage I then had to make my way down to the tail of the aircraft where the Elsan was stored. Near this was another oxygen point. It wasn't easy to get there on a few breaths of oxygen and understandably I made sure on these sorties that I didn't have to leave my turret!

Various operations continued into early 1943. Then on February 15th, 1943 came my last operational flight. We were to lay mines in the estuary of the

Gironde, not far from Bordeaux. This involved a long journey across Brittany and down France's Atlantic coast and I remember having to look for two islands that lay off the coast, the Isle de Re and the Isle d'Oleron, There was a full moon that night and all looked very peaceful as we arrived over the target, beautiful, too, with the moonlight on the water below. We came down to one thousand feet, the height at which we had to lay our mines.

Nothing stirred as we circled round and the bomb aimer lined us up for our run in. The mines were released in sequence and the first one was just about to go when all hell broke loose. Guns from both sides of the estuary and from ships beneath seemed to open fire at the same moment.

On such a night and at that low attitude they couldn't miss and didn't. We were hit repeatedly. Scotty and I fired back, aiming for the starting point of the tracer. The front gunner joined in, too, but it wasn't long before both front and rear turrets were out of action. Scotty had a lucky escape when a bullet grazed his flying boat and some of the ammunition in his turret started to explode. During the attack some thirty large holes were made in the aircraft and more than two hundred small ones. One shell had apparently gone straight through the aircraft without exploding. Typically the skipper refused to budge from his course until the last mine had gone and I remember how agonisingly slowly those mines were counted off, Once the last one had gone the skipper stood the aircraft on its nose until we were at wave top height and flew it away up the estuary until he was clear of enemy fire. When he came to set the course, he found that all three compasses were reading differently. Part of the wireless operator's equipment had exploded and Bill himself had been wounded in the forehead. Despite his injuries he managed to get some radio fixes that greatly helped the navigator to get us home. At some time during the attack the intercom system was put out of action so that those up front had no idea what had happened to Scotty and me. When they got clear of the target area, someone, Bob Henry, I think, came back to check and met Scotty coming forward from his wrecked turret. They found me collapsed unconscious over my guns, removed me from the turret and carried me forward to the emergency bed we had amidships. Then Scotty climbed into my turret, the only working one, and kept watch from there, He must have had a rough journey home since most of the Perspex covering had gone and this was February.

I had been firing my guns when a small calibre shell exploded at the side of the aircraft below my turret, it was like being kicked in the pants and I was flung against the front of my turret from shrapnel that hit me in the buttock, knee and hip. I am a little vague about the sequence of events after that. I think tried to continue firing, but then the aircraft went into the steep dive that I've already described. With the intercom dead and knowing how much damage the aircraft had sustained, I assumed that it was going down out of control. Not fancying being trapped in my turret when the aircraft hit the water, I tried to get out. In the

state I was in I couldn't undo the split pin that held fast my seat and prevented me from leaving the turret. After some moments of struggling with it, I lost consciousness. I came to after they had taken me forward and remained so on and off during the course of the long journey home. It took four hours and very long and unpleasant hours they were for me. My crew did the best they could for me in what must have been terribly difficult circumstances for them. I was in a great deal of pain - the injury to the buttock had damaged the sciatic nerve - so they tried to inject me with morphine, but this didn't seem to do much good, when you've never done it before, in an aircraft bucking about all over the place.

People who lose a great deal of blood become very thirsty and the memory of that thirst overshadows all the other recollections of that journey home. That night we had all been issued with a tin of orange juice and my kindly crew collected all the tins and poured them one after the other down my throat. When at last we came into land it was feared that after the damage the aircraft had sustained, the undercarriage might well collapse and so the crew took up crash stations. I couldn't do this, of course, so Bill Harvey spread his body across mine, pinning me down so that I shouldn't be flung off the bed if the aircraft made a rough landing. For his work that night Bill Harvey was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. A year later, with another crew, he was posted "Missing, believed killed." Our other medal winner that night, Lin Drummond, awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his great skill and courage, happily survived two tours of operations, and looked in on us a number of years ago in the course of a visit to Britain, still as cheerful and pleasant as ever.

To finish my tale, we landed safely. The Medical Officer and an ambulance were waiting at dispersal. "Where are you wounded? The officer asked, "In the arse, sir", I was about to reply, in the language of the day, when I recollected myself and said, "In the right buttock, sir". Just before we set off in the ambulance for the R.A.F. hospital at Ely, I was asked if my home address was the right one to send the news of my injuries to. I said it was and then suddenly remembered that the telegram would almost certainly be delivered when my mother was alone at home, so I asked them to send it to my father at the bank in Portland Street, Manchester where he was manager. It's one of the few things that I've done in my life of which I'm proud!

Later that day the telegram was delivered to my father. He knew very well what this buff coloured envelope with the blue "Priority" flash was likely to contain, and he told me later that he sat and looked at it for some time before he made up his mind to open it. It read, "Regret 1085457 Sergeant Hancock G. V. dangerously ill in R.A.F, hospital, Ely, with gunshot wounds to right buttock and left knee". The wound in the buttock was so deep and I had lost so much blood that for a while it was touch and go whether I would survive. It wasn't until a month later that my parents received a note from the hospital saying that I was finally out of danger. The wound took a long time to heal and the damage to the sciatic nerve caused

many problems, so that I spent the better part of a year in hospital, much of that time in bed. After a number of operations, I returned to the Air Force on light duties, worked for a time in the Intelligence Section at Lakenheath, and as an instructor at a gunnery school at Husbands Bosworth. When more problems arose with my leg I was finally invalided out of the Air Force in December of 1944, and went up to Oxford in the following January. A further operation at the end of my first year there enabled me to dispense with the leg caliper which I had worn for nearly two years.

A year or two ago I came across a book that listed all of the sorties made by Bomber Command during the war and turned with some eagerness to February 15th, 1943, to see what they had to say about the exciting events of that night. Under the heading, "Minor Operations", the greatest adventure of my life appeared thus. "Four Stirlings laid mines in the river Gironde. No aircraft was lost."

It would, of course be wonderful to have an obituary for each of those members we lose each year. It would have been interesting to hear more about our lovely WAAFs. This isn't always possible, especially when we don't have informed historians to write up these stories. So I shall just have to say "Rest in Peace" to all our other veterans on the list, "Thank you for your service".

*There is just one other that I do have, and that is for **Michael (Mike) Davies**. He was a 'Cold War' veteran really, being an air gunner on the mighty B29 Stratofortresses (RAF Washingtons) that XC Squadron operated post WW2. Mike, along with his charming wife, Val, was a regular at reunions and I think the following, which came from his family after his passing, is such a fitting tribute. "Mischief maker, meeter of notables, film maker, defier of prognoses, rescuer of waifs and strays, teller of anecdotes, collector of number plates, eater of puddings, bon viveur, uncle, grandfather, father, husband. May 1932 - July 2023, peacefully and painlessly in his sleep, with his wife beside him".*

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Mail Box. From which I can choose the most interesting stories and prove I don't sit around twiddling my thumbs for most of the year.

The first one to drop in this year was of particular interest, to me, anyway. It came from Julie Taylor, daughter of Katherine Garrard (late of Sydney), and niece of Laurence Seymour Jamieson. F/Sgt. Jamieson was the bomb aimer on the crew who perished, with my Uncle, at Lormaison, 1st June 1944.

The e-mail began: -"I'm just writing to let you know that I'm finally (and excitedly!) preparing for a long awaited trip to France in mid-April. My husband Alan and I are spending a few days in Paris and plan to visit the memorial in Lormaison and also my uncle's grave in Beauvais.

I was recently in New Zealand to visit family in Wellington and spoke with my cousin Deborah about her visit to the memorial which was about 15 years ago.

Her father John (younger brother of Laurence) died several years ago but her mum Dawn is still well and active at 89”.

What Julie didn't say at this time was that they'd have no car, nor any idea how to achieve this in a country they'd never visited or knew about getting around. So I drew up a travel plan for them and asked that, if successful, they would allow me to include their story in the newsletter. This was agreed and what follows, with just a smidge of editing, is their Lormaison/Beauvais visit story.

“I'm very happy to be able to let you know that, with my husband Alan, I was able to visit both the memorial in Lormaison and my uncle's grave in Beauvais yesterday Saturday 22 April.



The weather has been beautiful except, of course, for yesterday, which was the day we had put aside for the trip to Lormaison and Beauvais. It was raining and cold when we set off, catching the nearby metro to Gare du Nord. Due to your advice about public transport we had a good idea about how to get to each location. So we took the train as far as Meru initially and got off, not quite sure how we'd get to Lormaison and it was pouring with rain. Fortunately a very helpful lady in the train station gave us the number for the local taxi. The taxi driver picked us up from the station, took us to the cemetery at Lormaison, waited for us while we visited the memorial, and then

drove us back the station in Meru.

It was very moving to see the memorial in person and to read the names of all the crew including my Uncle Laurence. We stayed for a short time. The memorial seemed to be well looked after.

We then caught the next train from Meru to Beauvais, and visited my uncle's grave at the military cemetery. The rain had eased by then. I hadn't realised that the graves of some of the crew members were all in close proximity. Seeing them all together was quite an emotional experience for me.



As a youngster Neville Selwood was fascinated with aeroplanes. He lived near Invercargill's airfield where he could go and watch the aircraft. He was keen to volunteer as a pilot, but an early rugby injury made that impossible.

Instead, he trained as a navigator and was posted to 75 Squadron in RAF Mepal. On one flight he and the flight engineer put out a fire on their aircraft with fire extinguishers. On their next flight the Gee broke down and he had to navigate to and from Munich by dead reckoning. On the way back they were attacked by two night-fighters. Neville and his crew took part in Operation Manna. They also brought civilians home to their countries after spending the war as refugees in England and so had the experience of seeing prams and suitcases in the bomb bay.

In an interview with Glen Turner for IBCC in 2018, Neville said "I'm very proud to have belonged to it (75 Sq.) and I'm mindful that, through age only, I was there in the latter months of its operations. From the beginning of January 1945 to VE day really and am conscious of the huge losses that that squadron suffered so much earlier. And other squadrons too. You think of that night on Nuremberg when ninety-eight planes were lost to German flak and fighters and then a few more crashed returning to the UK and more crews wiped out.

So, I've written this little song, and it touches upon the things that men that flew went through, and those that came home with a few wounds unhealed, wounds and griefs. And its set to the metre that can be sung to the tune Melita, which is so well known. JB Dykes wrote the tune way back in the 1700s to 1800s. It's the one that the naval men sing, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save." So I've usurped it and set an airmen's song to it now."

Well Neville, I think it warrants inclusion in our Remembrance service in 2024, alongside the hymn written by Rodney Pope a tail gunner with XV Squadron.

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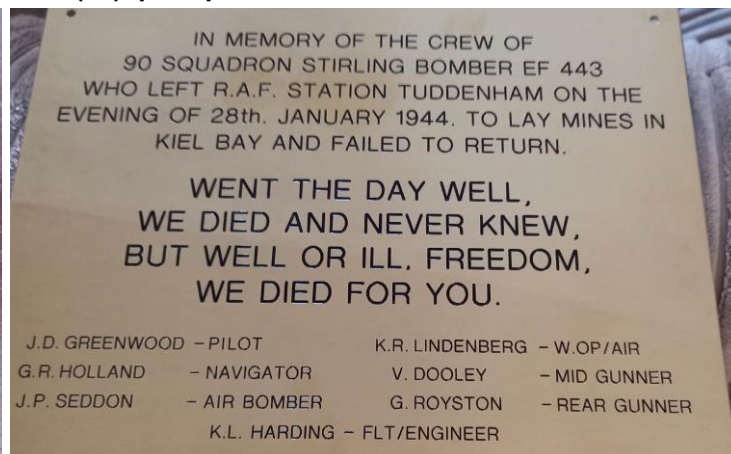
There then followed, in quick succession, two XC Squadron enquiries. Not great when I no longer have the services of an historian for the squadron. However, with the Internet being so helpful these days, if you ask the right questions!

The first was from Steve Brown who said that a lady from Brisbane, Australia had noticed that her Uncle's initials were wrong on a brass plaque in Tuddenham church. The plaque commemorated the loss of Short Stirling EF443 XY-M on a mining operation to Kiel Bay, 28th January 1944, with all souls.

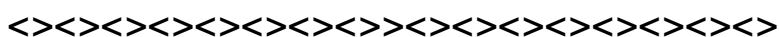
The plaque recorded her Uncle as being A R Holland – Navigator, when in actual fact (after a bit of searching to corroborate the facts) it should have been G R (Gordon Reginald) Holland of Liverpool. Rev. David Butcher was most helpful in corroborating these facts from the Roll of Honour in St. Mary's Tuddenham. He has been liaising with the family and the church councils to get a new plaque installed. (David is the vicar for not only Beck Row, where we hold our annual service, but he and his Reverend wife cover a lot of the rural churches in the

area). So a new plaque has very kindly been donated by Mr Brown and it is hoped a small dedication ceremony can be arranged in the New Year.

Below, a comparison of the old (L) and new (R) plaques.



I am in contact with all parties involved with the rededication and will post out information for anyone wishing to attend the ceremony when it happens. Watch out for Facebook and website and e-mail notifications. Ed.



The second XC Squadron enquiry came from Philip Jennings, a member of the Buckley Chatterboxes group in North Wales. "We are all Stroke Survivors who meet up for a coffee on a Monday morning. One of our group is a lady who is trying to find out some detail of her father's service history.....like so many of his generation he didn't speak of his wartime service.

We are trying to determine how he won the DFM. (See picture below right) His daughter remembers him being the only DFM recipient in Bangor North Wales. We can see the summary of the London Gazette entry but have no further information thereafter.

The details we have are for Flt Sgt James Gordon Ashton, service number 2210851, rear gunner in 90 squadron".

Well, over to the Internet once more, where I learned that there were two types of DFM awards. Wikipedia says: -

An "**Immediate**" award was one which was recommended by a senior officer, usually in respect of an act or acts of bravery or devotion to duty deemed to command immediate recognition. In such circumstances, the recommendation for the award was passed as quickly as possible through the laid down channels to obtain approval by the AOC-in-C of the appropriate Command to whom, from 1939, the power to grant immediate awards was designated by King George VI. "**Non-Immediate**" awards were made by the monarch on the recommendation of the Air



Ministry and were to reward devotion to duty sustained over a period of time. This category of award could be made at any time during an operational tour but, in a large number of instances, the award was given to recognise the successful completion of a full tour of operational flying. So which, was that given to Flt Sgt Ashton? Philip, our original enquirer, and I spent some time trying to find answers, culminating with the following results obtained from the internet and sight of F/Sgt Aston's logbook that were shared with his daughter and granddaughter.

- We now know him to be a mid-upper gunner and can see his full flying record through from Air Gunnery School on Avro Ansons, into his Operational Training Unit in Vickers Wellingtons (where interestingly he appears to have crashed somewhere around St Albans following engine failure on return from a sortie to Paris in 1943), and on into his Heavy Conversion Unit where he appears to have flown in the Short Stirling.
- He then undertook one operation with 75 (New Zealand) Squadron before joining XC Squadron on Avro Lancasters where he undertook a full tour of duty from 30 June to September 1944 as mid-upper gunner on the crew of Sgt (subsequently Warrant Officer and furthermore commissioned) Kluczny. It is this name that I'm excited to say has shed further light on the question of the DFM award.
- There's some intriguing entries in F/Sgt Ashton's logbook – on one sortie to Holland on Sept 17 1944 he makes reference to a Special Duties Operation, annotated PUT.S.L.OOT! On a second entry, dated August 25 to Russelheim/Frankfurt your grandfather has appended FW190 in brackets.....this leads me to question whether your grandfather successfully accounted for one of the Luftwaffe's most feared aeroplanes, the Focke Wulf 190 on this particular mission.
- As mentioned above we know your grandfather successfully completed an operational tour of 35 missions flying with Mr Kluczny, and I'm delighted to say I think I've traced his detail here: -

[The Reluctant Bomb Aimer -- Elinor Florence](#)
You'll be able to see the detail, and hopefully recognise your grandfather in the crew photograph. (Reproduced right, courtesy of the afore mentioned blog) Mr Kluczny was known as



23.26hrs for a raid on Köln. The aircraft was subsequently shot down, either by flak or night fighter. The claim by Major Hajo Herrmann of the Nachtjagd Versuchs Kommando, flying from München-Gladbach airfield was later confirmed. The aircraft crashed on the west bank of the Rhine near Mehlem. Six crew were lost. Initially they were buried in Plot GGG-4-91, Allied cemetery Margraten, Netherlands. Later, (01/05/1947) reburied in Overloon War Cemetery, Netherlands.

Pilot F/Lt. R.C. Platt 139424 RAF

Flight engineer Sgt. H. Murray 632757 RAF

Navigator P/O. A.P. Gilmour 148843 RAF

Bomb aimer Sgt. R. Freeland 1553565 RAF

Wireless op Sgt. O. Beard 1379617 RAF

Air gunner P/O. G.C. Smith 155192 RAF

With Air gunner Sgt. I.H. Norris 1315147 RAF Surviving as a POW

Next I went looking for the name of the person enquired upon, a nightmare with the name of Smith, so no help there. Then a further search on the aircraft codes revealed that the renowned artist Ivan Berryman had done a picture of the exact aircraft and crew waiting at dispersal. See below, reproduced with kind permission of Cranston Fine Arts.



Preparing To Go - Crew of a Short Stirling by Ivan Berryman.

The crew of Mk.III Short Stirling WP-M of No.90 Squadron RAF prepare for a flight test on the morning of 3rd July 1943. Aircraft BK718, with designation WP-M, of No.90 Squadron RAF was lost over Germany in the early hours of 4th July 1943. Six of the seven crew were lost in the crash, the rear gunner surviving to be taken prisoner.

I wrote to the artist, via his websites, to see if this had been done from a photograph. Sadly the reply was in the negative “drawings were done from information from one of the families’ connections of Fraser Murray who works here”. I was allowed to use the picture and description though. Further taken up by Hans Ooms on their website.

I had hoped to hear more from Hans about their search, but, with permission to use what I liked from their site granted, I looked up their latest research in an effort to bring this search to a conclusion. It looks like they’ve been successful in finding the family story, but sadly still don’t have a photograph.

“Geoffrey Charles Smith was born on 8/4/1923 in St Helen’s, Lancashire. His parents were Charlie and Ellen Smith. Charlie was born on 11/9/1893 and Ellen on 27/10/1895. Charlie Smith married Ellen Bellis in 1918 in St Helen’s.

In June 1921 Charlie and Ellen Smith were living at 102, Birchley Street, St Helens, with Ellen’s parents, William and Emily Bellis and their other daughter, Elsie Bellis. In 1911 Charlie had been described as a Glass Cutter – now he was working as a Foreman Plate Glass Cutter at the long established Pilkington Brothers Glass Works in St Helen’s. Prior to her marriage Ellen was an Apprentice Confectioner. Geoffrey was born two years later in 1923. They went on to have another child, William Brian Smith, on 7/5/1931.

By September 1939 Geoffrey C. Smith was living with his father at 16 Devonshire Gardens, Winchmore Hill which is now part of Enfield in North London. Charles was now described as a “Foreman Plate Sheet Cathedral Glass” and Geoffrey was working as an Engineering Junior Draughtsman. Geoffrey was still single. Charles was still married but neither his wife nor other son were present. Ellen Smith appears to have been living at 110 Birchley Street, St Helens at that time in the household of John E and Martha Edwards together with widow Lillian Naylor, but no child was present. She may have just been visiting them on the date of the register. No family connection with the Edwards is known – but they only lived a few houses away in Birchley Street from where Ellen and her parents lived in 1921 so they were probably friends. William may have been with other relatives.

Ellen Smith died on 3rd September 1956. She was living at 16 Devonshire Gardens in Enfield. At the time of her death Charles was shown as a Factory Foreman. Charles himself died on 15 July 1967 with his address still given as 16 Devonshire Gardens. Geoffrey’s brother, William Brian Smith, administered his estate. William was living at 24 Andrews Road, Earley, Reading at the time. He is thought to have married Margaret J Campbell in 1955 and had a daughter Amanda J Smith in 1956, both in Wokingham District. He is believed to have died in Reading in 2017.

Geoffrey Charles Smith is commemorated on a memorial to ten men who died in WW2 at Grange Park Methodist Church in Enfield, close to Devonshire Gardens. The Church is built in the Art Deco style and only opened in 1938. It is also known as “The Church in the Orchard”. Researched by Elske van Kammen and Elaine Gathercole

If anyone can add anything to this or has a photograph of Geoffrey SMITH or the crew, Hans and his group will be very grateful. There is an excellent link on the website above that further expands on this crew. [The Fate of the Crew of Short Stirling III WP-M BK718 - Overloon War Chronicles](#) (Well worth a read. Ed.)

Next up was an enquiry, via Dee, from Jean Teriel in France, Lisieux to be precise. It read "Next year the town of Lisieux, like many others in the region, will commemorate the Battle of Normandy and its Liberation. From now on it is looking for contemporary documents, in particular photographs.

During the night of 6 to 7 June 1944 it was bombed by the Royal Air Force; Squadron 622 took part in the bombing raid.

Do you have any documents relating to this bombing in your archives, particularly but not exclusively, aerial photographs (preliminary reconnaissance, strike photos, subsequent reconnaissance for damage assessment)?

If so would you be willing to provide copies of these documents?"

Well, at least this time I didn't have to resort to any internet searching, just drop a line to Howard Sandall and await the results. These came back smartly and were sent on to Jean and others of the committee. Howard wrote: -

"D-Day 80th Anniversary No.622 Squadron Contribution

"...The air offensive against the Transportation before D-Day has produced a state of virtual paralysis in the railway system of Northern France and Belgium. This was the air's decisive contribution to that wide complex of operations by which Allied military strength was re-established in Western Europe". Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander, SHAEF

On 6th June 1944 the Allies launched one of the most momentous military feats of all times, the seaborne and airborne assault upon the coastline of Normandy-Operation 'Overlord.' A major factor to the success of the D-Day campaign was the contribution of the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command, who waged an unrelenting campaign in the run up to D-Day.

The last phase of the 'Transportation Plan' was to isolate the assault area by destroying all rail and road bridges on the routes leading into it. To keep the exact landing area disguised, strategic bombing took place along the French coastline. The build up to D-Day included 200,000 operations in various guises connected with operation 'Overlord.' Over a period of two months some 190,000 tons of bombs had fallen upon the enemy. On the day itself, and in the subsequent months, Bomber Command aircrew were omnipotent attacking railways and communications targets to prevent the battle area from enemy reinforcement. They bombarded enemy positions, supplied the French Resistance and deceived the enemy as to the true location of the beach landings.

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

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

- 1st May Chambly- Railway stores and repair depot.
- 7th May Nantes Airfield
- 8th May Cape Gris Nez- coastal batteries in the Pas de Calais area.

- 10th May Courtrai-Railway Yards
- 11th May Louvain-Railway Yards
- 19th May Le Mans-Railway Yards
- 27th May Boulogne-Coastal gun positions
- 28th May Angers-Railway yards and junction
- 30th May Boulogne-Coastal gun positions
- 31st May Trappes-Railway Yards- 2 Lancasters lost, 9 aircrew KIA
- 2nd June Wissant-Coastal gun positions
- 3rd June Calais-Coastal gun positions
- 5th June Ouisterham-Normandy Coastal Batteries
- 6th June Lisieux-Road & rail centres behind the Normandy battle area.

622 Squadron aircrew D-Day memories

Peter Atkinson (*seated right-hand side, middle row, below*) was a navigator in the all



NCO crew of F/Sgt Jock Walker. Having returned from a week's leave on 24th May 1944 and half way through a tour of operations, the crew were kept busy with operations on 24th, 28th, 31st May and 2nd & 3rd June. Activity was in support of preparations for the invasion of Europe, attacking the German V bomb sites and the attack on other targets in Germany. On 5th June it was known that there was to be a maximum effort but no

more. The crew were sent to collect Lancaster R5514 from RAF Tuddenham, very near Mildenhall. It was being used for circuits and bumps by 90 Squadron who were converting from Stirlings to Lancasters. After a 30 minute air test it was clear that the Lancaster had many faults. Peter's usual Lancaster was being serviced therefore they were due to fly that night in this Lancaster but luckily it was declared not fit to fly on operations.

On the morning of 6th June the whole station heard about the Armada of ships seen by the crews on the early morning raid to Ouistreham.

Peter picks up the story: -

"We were made aware that our Lancaster ED747 'S' was ready to fly and we flew that night to Lisieux to support troops on the ground. As navigator I was too busy to view the proceedings on the ground but our crew witnessed quite a lot of activity.



D-Day Armada Google Images Courtesy IWM.

The following night 7th June we attacked Massy-Palaiseau, a railway junction south of Paris to help stop the advance of German troops against our troops. We lost two aircraft out of seven attacking the target. Our thoughts at the time are hard to remember as we were too busy, but we felt at last something more was being done to bring the war to an end and that our families would soon be saved from doodle bugs etc, but we realised we still had a lot to do.” (Right, ED747, GI-S. The nose of Peter’s plane)



Charles Bright was the rear gunner in the crew of F/Lt Derisley DFC. “We awoke to find ourselves on the battle order to attack the coastal batteries at Ouistreham, our first daylight operation. On the way to the target I looked down at the sea and I have never seen so many ships together before, it was a sight that I will always remember. On this trip I witnessed a Lancaster being hit by flak and begin its spiral death plunge. The guns in the rear turret seemed to be firing all the way down. On our return to Mildenhall the ground crews sprang into action quickly refuelling and rearming our Lancaster, it did not take a genius to guess that we would be on another mission very shortly. That mission was again in support of the Normandy battle area and we were sent to attack the railway and road centres at Lisieux, just behind the front lines. Our target now were all concentrated on the support of the invasion and on the 8th & 10th June we attacked the railway yards at Fougères & Dreux respectively.”

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

There were 16 participating crews from 622 Squadron on the Lisieux raid.

Take off at 00:05 landing around 03:50 hours

Bombing times ranged from 01:35 to 01.42 Hours

Pilot / Lancaster / Comments:

P/O W.E. O’Brien RNZAF ED430 Bombed red TI’s at 01:38 hours from 3,000feet all bombs on TI, large amount of smoke over target.

F/O R.W. Trenouth RAAF R.5625 very good attack, bombed from 4,000ft, bombing wonderfully concentrated, TI’s obliterated.

F/Sgt C.P. Chorley LM491 Bombed red TI’s from 9,000ft, good concentration

P/O A.R. Taylor N.146 Bombed visually from 5,000ft on red TI’s, saw bombs burst centre of town, a very good raid.

P/O R.J. Rawshorn LL803 Bombed red TI’s, very excellent bombing.

P/O J. Hall L7576 Bombed red TI’s at 5,000ft, bomb burst and smoke in target area.

P/O A.B. Robbins LL885 Bombed red TI's from 6,000ft- bombing very concentrated, had to wait a while whilst target was re-marked. Bombed at 01:41

F/Lt T. Hargreaves LM477 Bombed red TI's at 3,300ft, bombing very concentrated, good fires burning.

F/Sgt A.G. McQueen LL802 bombed red TI's at 5,000ft, a highly concentrated attack.

F/O A.L. Smith ND765 Bombed red TI's at 5,500ft, River Seine pinpointed, bomb bursts seen on target.

P/O K.J. Derisley LM466 Bombed red TI's from 4,000ft, River Seine visually identified.

F/Sgt S. Nielsen LL859 Bombed red TI's from 3,000ft- River Seine pinpointed and target area seen.

F/Sgt J.L. Walker ED474 Bombed red TI's from 4,000ft- River Seine pinpointed, target area seen but observations difficult due to smoke. Master bomber heard but radio transmission interrupted.

F/Sgt T. Wilson LM443 Bombed red TI's from 3,000ft, very good concentration.

F/Sgt H.C. Struthers RAAF W.4158 Bombed red TI's from 2,800ft, very concentrated attack, lots of smoke and dust over target.

F/Sgt M. Thomas RAAF LL812 bombed yellow TI's from 4,000ft, on Master Bomber's instructions, smoke made observations difficult.

622 Squadron Operational Record book records the raid as 'A very concentrated highly successful attack'.

Further research on a website supplied by Howard, the Bomber Command records for the day gave the following insights: -

'Lisieux – Controlled OBOE ground marking – 5 Oboe equipped Mosquitos were to drop Red and Green TI's. The Master bomber was to assess the accuracy of these and, if possible, release Yellows or Whites. Otherwise main force were to be ordered to attack the centre of the Reds and Greens. H-Hour for Lisieux being 01.35.'

This is followed by a summary of the results, comprised of the reports from above: -

'The Lisieux – Mezidon track was cut by five direct hits on the loop SW of the town. Three road bridges and four main roads sustained direct hits. Much destruction was caused in the town, particularly around the gas works.

From the Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt Bomber Command War Diaries I was able to precise these snippets of information to back up Howard's report: -

1065 aircraft were involved on damaging the communications networks behind the Normandy battle area. All the targets were in or near French towns. 3488 tons of bombs were dropped on the allocated targets, Lisieux being just one of these. Every effort was made to bomb accurately, but casualties amongst the French civilian population were inevitable. Cloud affected the accuracy at many of the targets. Some details are available of the effects of the bombing.....Lisieux; much damage was done to the railways, although the town in particular, was hit by many bombs.

Sadly, despite every effort to protect the French towns and people and the reports of the bombers in action that momentous night, there were, as in any war, casualties. We can only hope that the sacrifices made by Bomber Command are remembered in the 80th celebrations being held across France and occupied Europe next year. Ed.

Next in was a story from Kevin King, Chairman of the Friends of 75(NZ) Squadron, about a 'FIRST'. It's a large story on the 75(NZ) blog page: - [S/L Nick Williamson & crew – landing a Lancaster in Normandy | 75\(nz\)squadron \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.75nz.com/2017/07/03/s-l-nick-williamson-crew-landing-lancaster-normandy/) but, with his permission, I reproduce the 'meat' of it here. It consists of the letter which S/Ldr Nick Williamson wrote to The Editor in Chief of N.Z. War Histories, in Wellington on 3rd July 1947, with additional notes and photographs from the blog site: -

Dear Sir, I wish to submit the following information concerning one of the "FIRSTS" which may be of some interest in connection with the N.Z. War Histories you are at present compiling.

This, as the newspaper cutting discloses, is about the landing of the first four engined bomber on a fighter airstrip in Normandy shortly after D-Day and was the subject of a B.B.C. broadcast.

As a Flight Commander of 75 (N.Z.) Squadron at Mepal, England, I made my first trip of my second operational tour and my first trip in a Lancaster to Villers-Bocage, not long after D-Day, in the raid described as the first stage of Monty's left hook, which eventually lead to the Falais Pocket.

Just as we were about to make our bomb run the Flight engineer F/Sgt McDevitt was severely wounded and was in great distress requiring immediate medical attention. As soon as we had completed our bombing run, I decided to risk an emergency landing on a fighter air strip near the beach head and immediately dived the aircraft down towards this strip. The landing had to be made downwind as the circuit was over enemy lines, but fortunately was made without mishap and McDevett was very soon in an ambulance and on the way to medical care, we on our way to the Officers' Mess.

AIRMEN IN FRANCE

FIRST BOMBER LANDS

A GISBORNE PILOT

KISSED IN ESTAMINET

(Special Correspondent)
(Reed. 5.35 p.m.) LONDON, July 5
The first bomber to make a landing on an airfield in Normandy was a Lancaster piloted by Squadron-Leader N. A. Williamson, D.F.C., of Gisborne. These airfields, with only a landing-strip, are really meant for fighters.

In a broadcast, Squadron-Leader Williamson said: "Our Lancaster was hit by shell fragments during an attack on Villers-Bocage, and shrapnel tore away the flight-engineer's kneecap. He did not even murmur until we finished bombing German tanks and troops. Then I noticed he was in distress and losing so much blood that I decided to

maintenance personnel. We had an excellent meal and then set off to see the front line in a jeep.



Squadron-Leader N. A. Williamson

"We met troops who had seen our attack, which they said was a wonderful show. Immediately they heard we

The paper cutting [above] covers many of our activities while we were on the strip, and on the second day we visited our plucky engineer, who now did not require his leg amputated and was feeling much better.

"Later we went to Bayeux, which seemed scarcely touched by the war, and visited our flight-engineer, who was in a mobile field hospital. He had just had a blood transfusion and was in high spirits. "On the way back we stopped at an estaminet, but Madame coolly told us she had no wine left, until an Army officer whispered. 'Aviator Anglais.' To my embarrassment, she threw her arms round me, kissed me repeatedly and cried, 'Bon, bon.' Most important of all, she produced bottles of wine.

“When we returned to the landing strip we found the weather had cleared and that the ground crew had done a grand job, although they were used to fighters and not bombers. We decided to take off.

Petrol could not reasonably be obtained from the strip tankers as it would have taken several of them quite some time and the high octane petrol was required for the grand fighter boys on the strip, quite a few of them being New Zealanders. For the take off an extra (long?) run was made into a wheat field, and not realising the danger from swing during take-off, Army vehicles of all shapes and sizes had lined the strip, two and three deep each side, and even at the far end, to wave us an enthusiastic farewell.

The four Merlins, however, and good luck, took us off without mishap and not having our Engineer I hoped I had turned all the petrol cocks on correctly. Our escort of Spitfires and Mustangs led us 100 feet over Mulberry Harbour and to many waves from tanks and ships, we made for home.

Visibility was bad and we first had to make a landing near Manston, but later managed to get permission to make for our home drome, where we received a great welcome from the Station Commander G/Capt. Campbell, W/C Leslie D.S.O., A.F.C. and almost the whole station, as we had been reported as missing, seeing that we had been unable to contact Command until the end of the second day, and two crews had reported seeing my aircraft diving towards the ground over the target area.

Even the Committee of Adjustment had packed away our personal belongings, but once these were released from bondage, the Red wine we had located flowed freely and all was well.



If this material is of some interest, more information could be supplied, such as the fact that the Bomb Aimer, F/Sgt. Graham Coull had his 22nd birthday while we were there and of course we celebrated correctly, and each member of the crew presented him with a highly smelling

“Camembert” cheese as a birthday gift. An Army reporter took an excellent photo of the presenting of the cheeses in a Jeep and is an ideal photo for reproduction if the more human side of the war is required to be portrayed.

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My next contact was with Colin Lee from Rothbury House Retirement accommodation in Northumberland. Colin wrote: -

I'd like to introduce myself as the Independent Living Manager at the Royal Air Forces Association, a charitable organisation that provides life-changing support for serving RAF personnel, veterans, and their family members.

Please find attached a poster for our retirement accommodation at Rothbury House in Rothbury, Northumberland. Developed for RAF veterans and their spouses, suites are now available for the whole military veteran community over the age of 60. We have found that having moved around frequently during their military careers, our tenants have moved to us from all over the country (and Europe) hence reaching out to you.

I would very much appreciate it if you could make aware anyone whom you feel would benefit from our services or who may be interested.

At Rothbury House, the welfare of our veteran community is our top priority. Each resident at Rothbury House benefits from: -

- Trained staff on hand 24 hours a day.
- All bills included: rent / utilities / meals / telephone
- Large and attractive communal spaces, including a magnificent garden
- Communal activities, including coffee mornings
- Delicious meals cooked by our excellent kitchen staff
- Digital accessibility tools in rooms
- A welcoming, like-minded and tight-knit community

We offer experience visits and can arrange overnight accommodation as required. We would be delighted to discuss this with anyone eligible and interested.

If you have any further questions about Rothbury House, or know someone that might benefit from our support, please get in touch with us on

retirementhousing@rafa.org.uk or call 0800 018 2361.

Dee has visited here, as she says it is very nice and would highly recommend it. If anyone would like to try out the trial visits or find out more about residing here, please use the contact details supplied by Colin in the article above. Ed.

Next come a couple of 'pipes' from our Treasurer again. Smiley continues: -

Further to my earlier pipe, in August we had to 'dog sit' near Uttoxeter while pygmy 2 (*if you need a translation, I guess the closest would be No.2 child!*) and his family were gallivanting around Florida. So we took the opportunity to visit the National Memorial Arboretum for the first time in twelve years.

So much has changed in those years, it was difficult to take it all in. But for those of you that have never been I can heartily recommend a visit. However, the main reason was to locate and check on the Mildenhall Register plaque. Not a problem as they have a comprehensive computer based location system.

The plaque was quite weathered so we cleaned it up as much as possible with our limited resources, my handkerchief and spit. As you can see it didn't clean up too well. Looking at the plaque, though, I realised that as we are now six squadrons perhaps we need a new one to reflect 90, 218 and 75(NZ) squadrons joining the Register. I am endeavouring to find out the possibility and cost of a new plaque so we can discuss the subject at the AGM in May.



Secondly, as in his earlier 'pipe' about his wreath laying, came the introduction of a new member from 75 (NZ) Friends event at Mepal: -

Geoff, could you please add the following chap to the membership: -

Peter Wilson, who is the nephew of Ken Hollins, crew member (*air gunner it turned out. Ed*) in 75(NZ) 1944-45. He survived a crash in January 1945 and, after recovery, was posted to one of the Mildenhall Squadrons.

Well, that got me into research mode once more and, with a bit of luck and help from Google I managed to find on 75(NZ) blog site once again: -

16/17.1.45 Operational Flying. Seventeen aircraft attacked a Benzol plant at Wanne Eickel in ten tenths cloud, tops 6/7000 feet. They were carrying a large variety of munitions, including 4,000lb H.C., 500lb G.P. 500lb ANM, 500lb M.C. 250lb G.P. and Munro(e) bombs. (*These I had to look up. They are like armour piercing shells used in tank warfare. The charge inside is focused by a cone into a high intensity 'cutting' flame, rather like an oxyacetylene torch. Probably very useful against well protected highly flammable liquids stored in armoured tanks! Ed.*)

Crews bombed with the aid of instruments and sky markers. Flak was moderate. The general impression was that bombing was concentrated on markers and a red glow was seen through cloud. The aircraft captained by F/S J. Wood, was attacked by a F.W. 190. The rear gunner opened fire, but no hits were observed and their aircraft suffered no damage. The aircraft captained by F/L T. Blewett (*with Peter's Uncle as*

one of the gunners) unfortunately crashed in this country. Coming down at Wood Ditton, to the east of Cambridge. The captain and bomb-aimer F/O J. Wilson were killed. The Navigator F/S B.T. Cornell, died later as a result of severe injuries. Both New Zealanders are buried in Cambridge City Cemetery. F/S Cornell is buried in Southgate cemetery.

After a few month's recovery, Ken went as an air gunner to XV Squadron, based at Mildenhall, from April to June 1945.

(Part 2 of the e-mail said: -) Could you also, please, e-mail Peter the Cranwell address for getting relatives details?

Well this proved very enlightening as my reply to Peter explains: -

Having done a bit of quick research regarding getting your Uncle's records, it would seem that both Smiley and I are a little out of date about these applications.

It appears that all military service personnel records are in the process of being (or have already been) transferred to the National Archives, Kew. Therefore our website is out of date and will need updating. *(This has now been done. Ed)*

According to the website: - [Get a copy of military records of service: Apply for the records of a deceased serviceperson - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) applications can be made online and they will tell you where the records are held and the fee involved in getting them. The lead time seems to have massively increased from the 'few months' I've often quoted (and know they were achieving) to anything up to a year!

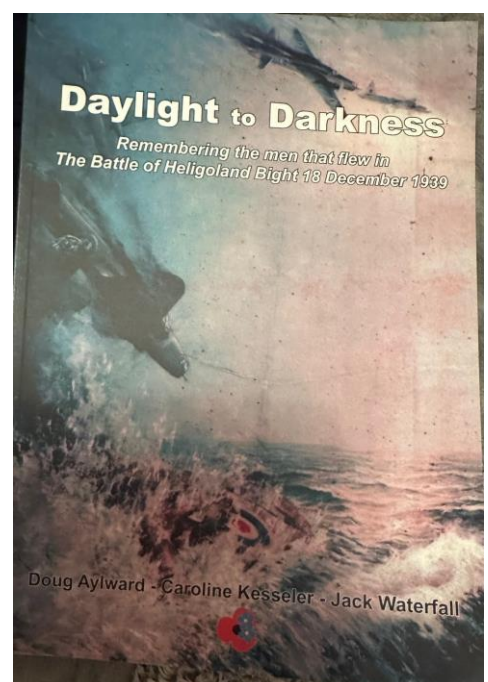
So, for anyone out there who wants their family member's service records, I'm afraid you have to use the Gov.UK website to get them from now on.

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To the right you will see the cover of the long awaited book from Jack Waterfall and team. I'll leave the story telling to their own web blog: -

On 18 December 1939 the Battle of Heligoland Bight, the first named air battle of World War Two, took place. This daylight operation was a baptism of fire for the RAF with the loss of 57 airman and 12 Wellington bombers. As a result of this disaster the tactics of Bomber Command changed to predominantly night time operations and informed RAF tactics for the rest of the War.

The aim of this project was to find as many relatives of those that participated in this battle in order that they may come together for various



commemoration events, remember their relatives, share memorabilia, and ensure that their relative's service is remembered.

Inception of this project was in July 2016 and research began in earnest when The International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln agreed to collaborate in a search for the relatives of all the RAF airmen who participated in the battle. This partnership has proved to be tremendously effective and over 80 relatives attended a very successful commemoration event at Ely Cathedral in December 2018 which marked the beginning of the 80th Anniversary Year of the 1939 action. (*Dee, Smiley, Cherry, and I attended that day, representing 149 Squadron and Alan Fraser. Ed*)

A second very successful major event - An Act of Commemoration - was held on the 18th December 2019 at The RAF Memorial Runnymede in Surrey to mark the 80th Anniversary of the Heligoland event. This was immediately followed by a reception and exhibition for guests at nearby Brooklands Museum where Wellington N2980, which took part in the battle, is on permanent exhibition. (*Dee and I attended this event also, reports of both events in previous newsletters. Ed*)

Despite restrictions due to the Covid 19 Pandemic some commemoration events in 2020 and 2021 were able to proceed. You can read about these in our October 2021 Newsletter.

OUR HELIGOLAND39 BOOK IS NOW AVAILABLE TO PURCHASE DAYLIGHT to DARKNESS

Remembering the men that flew in The Battle of Heligoland Bight 18 December 1939

A4 size paperback; 585 pages; Over 500 photos and illustrations.

For further details please email: caroline.kessler@ntlworld.com

I am awaiting my copy to come in the post, so can't comment on how this has finally come to print. Dee was at the launch and has given her approval, so I'm expecting a great read. Ed.

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80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION

SETTING UP OF THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE & APPROVAL OF PROJECTS
By Alain Founé

In 2024 and 2025, France will commemorate the 80th anniversary of the landings, of Liberation and Victory. The Liberation left a lasting mark on the whole of France, and many events and ceremonies will be held to mark the occasion. In an interministerial circular dated 23 November 2023, departmental prefects were

required to set up 80th anniversary of the Liberation departmental committees in their respective departments.

These departmental committees will provide an overview of the initiatives taken by local authorities and all local players as part of the commemorative cycle for the 80th anniversary of the Liberation in 2024 and 2025 and formulate an opinion on local projects submitted by local players requesting national recognition for the 80th anniversary of the Liberation.

We are applying for a national label to mark the 80th anniversary of the Liberation. The departmental committee for the 80th anniversary of the Liberation, chaired by Françoise SOULIMAN, prefect of Meurthe-et-Moselle, is the main contact for the implementation of commemorative and memorial projects. This department is responsible for awarding the "80 YEARS OF THE LIBERATION" label (*see top right*), which is intended as a mark of seriousness and recognition of the quality of the projects carried out by those involved in the department.

The label gives project sponsors the opportunity to use the "Mission de la Libération" logo on their communication materials and to be included in the official 80th anniversary programme. It is intended for projects that correspond to all or some of the main themes set out by the national mission: -

- Historical accuracy and inclusion in the context of the actions to liberate French territory, from the liberation of Corsica in September 1943 to 1945;
- Dissemination of historical knowledge;
- Tribute to the dead, honouring the survivors;
- Mobilising young people and passing on the memory of the Liberation;
- Celebrating the values of courage and commitment linked to the Liberation;
- Promoting and teaching younger generations the democratic values defended by those involved in the Liberation (civic commitment and promotion of the ideals of the Republic);
- Ability to mobilise a large audience and ensure a popular dimension to commemorations and/or cultural and scientific events;
- Highlighting the names and individual destinies of the heroes, possibly leading to the naming of public places;
- Enhancement of local heritage, local impact of the event; with a strong international or European dimension.

Alain asked me to include this write up and if he could name The Mildenhall Register as a supporter. I replied that we were only too happy to have been involved, as we had, in the past and that he should include Howard Sandall, historian and author of the wartime 622 Squadron, our committee and members. A number of our members are related to the crew who lost their lives in L7576.

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Details about this year's reunion plans. To avoid disappointment, please see included booking form and cut-off date for making your bookings.

Well, it's almost back to normal, except the venue for the meals is Bury St, Edmunds Golf Club and there's no base tour or access.

Buffet meal - Friday 10th May. Times on booking form. Tickets are £33.

A.G.M - Friday 10th May. Times on booking form.

Trip to the RAF Air Defence Museum - Saturday 11th May. Pick-up point and times to be advised. Excellent food available at site café. Pre order before going on guided tours to avoid disappointment at lunchtime. Tickets are £9.

Reunion dinner - Saturday 11th May. Times on booking form. Tickets are £36.

Remembrance service at St John's Church, Beck Row – Sunday 12th May.

10.45am for Wreath laying and 11am for church service.

The **menu** for the **Friday** has been pre-chosen on the recommendations of the attendees last year. There is a choice of two mains freshly carved by the chef.

Salmon En Croute or Roast Topside of Beef (cooked medium-rare)

Choice of the following salads

Sweet & Sour & Bean, &/or Greek Feta,

Followed by a choice of three seasonal desserts

Lemon Tart, Fresh Fruit Salad, Cheese Board

All desserts followed by *coffee or tea & chocolate mints*

MILDENHALL REUNION DINNER SATURDAY 11TH MAY 2024

On Arrival

Basket of mixed artisan breads

To Begin

French onion soup (v) | toasted cheese croute

Cured fish platter (p, df) | rollmop herring, smoked salmon, peppered mackerel & crayfish

Chinese style duck bon bons (df) | hoisin sauce, leek & cucumber ribbons, sesame seeds

Mushroom & applewood smoked cheese crostini (v) | sorrel sauce & watercress salad

Main Course

Tufted roast leg of lamb (gf) | pine nuts, feta & marinated tomato, gremolata potatoes

Chargrilled chicken breast (gf) | *smoked bacon mousse, thyme roast potatoes, seasonal cabbage & apricot jus*

Sesame & soy baked sea trout fillet (p) | *stir-fried vegetables & orzo pasta*

Beetroot en croute (v, gf) | *creamed leeks & spinach, crushed potatoes*

pudding

Chocolate & hazelnut praline roulade (v) | *crème fraiche*

Lemon & lime bavarois (v) | *lemon curd, raspberries & Italian biscuits*

Normandy apple tart (v, gf) | *salted caramel fudge ice cream*

English cheese selection (v) | *crackers, chutney & grapes*

To Finish

Freshly brewed coffee or tea | *milk chocolate after dinner mint*

(df) = Dairy free (v) = vegetarian (p) = parvé, neutral, not dairy or meat – kosher.

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A special thank you to Jake Walton at Welland Print, Spalding who stepped in at a very late stage to do our printing for us. I hope the results are to your liking. Comments welcomed? Ed.

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My grateful thanks to your committee members who work so hard on your behalf. Also our amazing historians for their constant help in resolving member and enquirer research issues whenever they can. Although the internet is very good these days, there's nothing like that 'personal' touch!

My apologies to those who submitted stories or provided information that I just haven't had space to squeeze in. There's no favouritism, just too little space!

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



Your committee 'researching' 2025's reunion venue.

The sign above and to the left of Smiley's head reads 'Children must be accompanied by an adult'. We couldn't find any, so rode the merry-go-round alone!

