

Dear Don,

Thought you might be interested in this:

Recently the Arctic Convoy survivors have been awarded a long overdue recognition of their wartime duties, some 60 years after all others have received their campaign medals, whether in the Pacific or Atlantic theatre of war; Fighter Command, North Africa, etc. All except... those Arctic survivors AND Bomber Command.

Whatever one's thinking about Churchill and Harris, the Bomber Command lads did their duty too, and lost some 55,000 crew, not only pilots, but also engineers, gunners, wireless operators.

The late but welcome award to the Arctic crews surely could set a precedent for the Bomber Command crews, who have been ignored and suffered this unwarranted discrimination.

Today we have been informed of the existence of a petition website – this is:

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/BomberCommand>

May I ask you to take a look at it (the official website as above) and hopefully consider signing that petition. Would we all be around now, if it had not been for those brave young men in the 1940s?

If I understand correctly, all British and UK residents are eligible to sign, and I believe expatriates too.

Elisabeth (Cox)

29 May 2007

Dear Don,

It was good to see you and your family again at the *Mildenhall Register* reunion recently.

I am just dropping you a note to confirm what I said again this year at the AGM, that if you need any help at all with any of your work for the *Register* please feel free to contact me. All my contact details including address and phone numbers are at the head of this note.

In addition Sue and I had a very interesting conversation with Mrs Elizabeth Blake at the Bird in Hand. She is 98 years old (99 in July) and watched the building go up in 1935 before becoming the first joint licensee with her husband in 1935. They held this position throughout the war and until 1957 when her husband sadly died. She had many fascinating recollections of the second world war.

I thought you might want to invite her to next year's reunion, so below are her details:

With every good wish. Yours sincerely

Andrew Bridgwater

THE MILDENHALL REGISTER

15, 90, 149 & 622 Bomber Squadron's Associations

Hon. Chairman:

Frederick A. Coney

Hon. Secretary:

Don Clarke, MBE

Vice Chairman:

S/Ldr John Gentlemen, RAF(Ret)

Hon. Treasurer

Bernard Mildwater

Committee

Jim Hammond
Douglas Kebbell

WINTER 2007 NEWSLETTER

REUNION 2008

Friday 16 May 18.00 – Dinner in the Wellington Room (Middleton Hall).

**20.00 – Annual General Meeting in the Stirling/
Lancaster Rooms (Middleton Hall).**

Saturday 17 May 11.00 – Morning get-together in the Bird in Hand.

19.00 – Dinner (main function) in the Galaxy Club.

**Sunday 18 May 09.30 – Combined Service of Remembrance in the
Base Chapel.**

DUE TO STRICTER BASE SECURITY THOSE ATTENDING ARE ASKED TO FULLY COMPLETE THE ENCLOSED FORM AND RETURN TO THE SECRETARY BY 19th APRIL 2008 FOR ONWARD TRANSMISSION. THIS DATE IS ALSO THE LATEST FOR PROPOSALS/MOTIONS. (Discuss special items if adequate notice has been given prior to the Meeting)

Record of the AGM of the Mildenhall Register 18th May 2007

1. In attendance the Committee plus 70 members and friends.
2. The Chairman welcomed everybody and gave a resume of the weekend's events.
3. Officials gave reports -- the Financial Report is attached.
4. Resolutions passed:
 1. Accounts as presented by the Treasurer be accepted.
 2. Auditor as recommended by Treasurer be appointed and paid a yearly fee of £100 (one hundred pounds).
 3. Election of Officials to be as follows:
Chairman – F. A. Coney
Vice-Chairman – J. Gentleman
Hon. Secretary – D. Clarke MBE
Hon. Treasurer – B. Mildwater
Committee – J. Hammond, D. Kebbell
 4. Vote of thanks be given to the retiring committee.
 5. Vote of thanks be given to the Commander and Personnel of RAF Mildenhall for all their help, assistance and friendliness in making the reunion a success.
 6. Vote of thanks given to Mr Dave Smedley for his help in producing the magazine/newsletter.
 7. That Mr Bridgewater's offer of help to the Hon. Secretary be formally recorded.
 8. Members be urged to give the magazine/newsletter editor stories, anecdotes and news of whatever length for inclusion in the magazine.
 9. The next reunion to be held at RAF Mildenhall over the weekend of 16, 17 and 18 May 2008.
 - 10 Members urged to get as many friends and relations as possible to sign the Bomber Command petition on the Government web site. The address is:
<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/BomberCommand/>

Hon. Secretary's Report

Although we are getting fewer members coming to the reunions around 70 sat down to the meal in the Wellington Room followed after by the AGM. It must have been the quickest AGM ever with all officers being voted in office once more. It gave me a chance to present member Dave Smedley who has helped me for many years with the newsletter and bits and bobs that go with it. This was Dave's first attendance at our AGM although he has attended several previous reunion dinners. It was the first time he had had the opportunity to visit the old HQ building where he spent time as a National Serviceman in the signal section of HQ 3 Group Bomber Command during the period 1960-62. He said the front looked the same but it was different at the back of the building where the signals unit used to be. Dave is a retired printer and in his spare time carried on with his RAF interests. He became a Warrant Officer with his local Air Training Corps squadron (No. 54 Eastbourne) and became the Wing Warrant Officer for Sussex Wing Air Training Corps for a number of years, before retiring from uniformed service. He continues to serve the ATC as a civilian instructor. He is also involved with the Royal British Legion and is the Poppy Appeal Organiser for Eastbourne. The town raised a total of over £43,000 for the Poppy Appeal in 2007.

The dinner at the Galaxy Club was attended by 150 members and relations and we invited several senior American Officers from the base to be our guests. Our Chairman Fred then introduced them to the assembly. When my turn came I was once more able to introduce Robert Davie (Pilot 622) and Swifty Swallow (R/G 622) both from overseas. Swifty at the 2006 reunion did not think he would be able to attend, but after quite a spell in and out of hospital in Toronto was given the all clear to travel and he duly came with his daughter to keep an eye on him.

I was also able to ask our two PoWs to stand up, they were Don Shellock (622) and Arthur Edgeley (XV) who were both shot down in a Stirling Bomber from Mildenhall in 1943.

Our Treasurer Bernard Mildwater then told us the money matters and expressed his thanks to Olwen Williams for making the raffle so easy to do each year by preparing the raffle tickets. Thank you to all members who gave us the many prizes.

Once again the staff of the Galaxy Club did us proud, not only with the food, but the wonderful table presentation each year. Group Captain Ken Batchelor once said to me when in the old Galaxy; "Don, where would we get a better service than this anywhere in this country?". But what would his reaction be to see the new Galaxy Club?

OBITUARIES

BILL ATKINS died this year at his home in Abingdon. He was the W/Op A/G in Ray Trenouth's crew flying with 622 Squadron at Mildenhall during 1944. Other crew members were Francis, Good, Pulman, West and Harvey. Bill was married to Mary who died in November 2002. They met at Mildenhall while she was serving in the sick quarters.

JACK BENNETT was a F/E with XV Squadron at Wyton when the Squadron was flying the Blenheim twin engined bomber, and also when they changed to the Wellington. He was posted to 214 Squadron when they had the Short Stirling. He came from Biggleswade, near Bedford and often gave me a ring. He wrote a paperback book about his life in the RAF.

JACK BERRY DFC flew Stirlings with 149 Squadron at Lakenham in November 1943 to April 1944. He came from Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire, and passed away on 25th September 2006.

ARTHUR FITCH I am sorry to inform you that my husband Jim died suddenly on July 30th 2006. He flew with XV Squadron and finished doing two tours of ops without a break until the end of the war with Germany. He was a WO F/E and he loved flying. I have his log book which is a great part of our history and it makes interesting reading. He was 85 years of age when he died and we were married for 63 years. I miss him very much. PS – He loved reading the newsletters and his crew moved to North Creak with 199.

ALAN GAMBLE flew with Geoff Hammond (Aus.) at Mildenhall with XV Squadron. He was the Chairman of the Stirling Aircraft Association and will be sadly missed by them.

JOE LAIDLAW Jnr. "My late father was a member of the *Mildenhall Register*. Since his death you have kindly sent newsletters to my brother Joe Laidlaw in Nottingham. Sadly my brother Joe Laidlaw died in March 2005, so I wondered if you could send me the future copies of the newsletter. If so please let me know if there is a subscription charge." Rita Cox from Wales.

Joe (Snr) was a Cpl Armourer when I joined XV Squadron at Wyton in 1941 and one day in a lull in bombing-up Stirlings we were all having a smoke in the armoury, but one could hardly see across the room for smoke. Joe said to us why don't you try this instead of ciggies. It was tobacco for chewing. Well he gave us all a piece of and the result was we were all very sick. Joe was used to it and we were not. Never again – Don

ERNEST MARRIOTT came from Loughborough and flew with Aussie pilot Bill Clement and other crew members on 622 Squadron during early 1945.

GEORGE MATHEWS It is with great sadness that I have to inform you of the passing of George on January 24th 2007, aged 82 years. He much enjoyed the contact with the *Register* and looked forward to reading it. We proudly draped his coffin with the RAF flag as he was proud of his time with the Squadron at Mildenhall – Mrs P.A. Matthews.

ANGUS MEIKLE was a pilot with XV Squadron at Mildenhall flying the Lancaster Bomber. He passed away this year at Burleigh Head, Australia. Other members of his crew were: Welly Nunn, J. Whitehouse, Don Cherry, Fred Jacobs, J. Utting and Jack Palmer.

B. M. MORRISSEY flew as a pilot with XV Squadron in 1944 at Mildenhall. A lady from his house phoned me to say he had passed away in August with a glass of his favourite wine in his hand. Other members of his crew were Maynard (Nav.), Murphy (W/Op), Clark (B/A), Walker (M/Up), Clisby (R/G) and Michael Feit (F/E).

FRED MURRELL passed away in January 2007. He was the F/E flying with Aussie pilot C. Barnett with 622 Squadron at Mildenhall. Other crew members were Grimsey, Staplehurst, Sullivan, Hurditch and R/G Nichols.

GERRY MUSGROVE DFC lived in Ontario, Canada, and passed away in January 2007. He was a B/A with XV Squadron and his skipper was S/Ldr Lamason (NZ). The Nav. was Chapman, F/E Marpole, W/Op George, M/Up Aiken and R/G Dunk.

OSWALD PARRY served with XV Squadron at Wyton, Bourn and Mildenhall as a F/E. He died in June 2007 and came from Brierley Hill in the West Midlands.

DOUGLAS REECE was the W/Op A/G flying a tour of ops with F/Lt Bithel of XV Squadron at Mildenhall. In a letter from his widow she says how he love reading the newsletters and sent a donation to the funds.

RON WILSON lived in Margate and passed away in December 2006. He was a M/Up A/G, first flying with Olly Brooks DFC and then with F/Lt Jonny French where he met up with Harry Bysouth the R/G. Also in the crew were Nav. Stubbings, W/Op Hope, B/A Smith and F/E Pavey. They all flew with XV Squadron at Mildenhall in 1944.

Joyce M. Guile

October 21, 2006

Dear Mr Clarke,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to you with the sad news that my father, Arthur James May, passed away in summer at the fine old age of 96.

I would be obliged if you could insert this obituary in the Winter newsletter.

Arthur James May – died peacefully at Pudsey, Leeds, July 12 2006, after contracting a chest infection. At the grand old age of 96 years, I believe Arthur was the oldest member of the Mildenhall Register. He served with XV Squadron as a flight mechanic on Short Stirlings and Avro Lancasters, including the famous McRoberts Reply.

My dad always enjoyed telling the story of how he once persuaded the crew to take him up on a training flight. The pilot, flying too low, clipped a tree with the wingtip, damaging it. The pilot went into a steep climb to gain as much altitude as possible in case they had to bail out, telling dad to keep his fingers crossed that they wouldn't have to because, flying as a guest, there was no parachute for him! Needless to say a safe landing ensued.

Arthur enjoyed receiving the newsletters and was proud to be a member of the Register. My sister, Stephanie and I would like to thank you for enhancing our father's retirement with the *Mildenhall Register*. I would be grateful if you could send two copies of the winter newsletter to my sister at the following address.

Stephanie May, 40 Westover Road, Bramley, West Yorks LS13 3PG

I enclose a photograph from 1944 of the "G" Georgie crew. Arthur is third from the right.

Yours sincerely

Carl May



2007

Dear Mr Clarke

Thank you once again for sending the *Mildenhall Register* and notice of the Reunion.

I have been meaning to write to you for some time but events seem to have caught up with me.

My husband Wing Commander Harry Whitbread Guile died on May 14th 2005. He was better known as "Harry", and enjoyed his short stay at Mildenhall on 622 Squadron.

We weren't married until 1949, so I am enclosing a c.v he wrote a few years ago to put you in the picture.

I wish you well in the new year and my apologies for not writing sooner.

Yours sincerely

Joyce Guile.

c.v. H.W. Guile

Royal Air Force and Sultan of Oman's Air Force

Born 15 May 1924. RAFVR aircrew cadet 15 May 1942. Flying brevet awarded 3 December 1943 at No. 5 British Flying Training School at Clewiston, Florida, USA. Progressed to Lancaster captain on 622 Squadron, Mildenhall. 3 Group bomber Commander by spring 1945. After V.E. Day allotted to Tiger Force. After V.J. Day posted to 41 Group as a ATA replacement ferry pilot and later as a unit test pilot. Flew 30 types including 10 marks of Mosquito until mid 1949 when posted to 47 Squadron flying Hastings on the Berlin Airlift, 20,000lbs of coal each trip. Late 1949 posted to 511 Squadron, Lyneham, for far east schedule flights including Casevacs (aeromedics) until posted to 47 Squadron in June 1952. First Beverley conversion course April 1956. October 1956 posted to Air Secretary's Dept. April 1957 posted to RAF Staff College. Awarded "PSC" and posted March 1958 to reform 84 Squadron as first overseas based Beverley squadron. Managed to squeeze into RAF Khormaksar – a very busy airfield – by utilising the Beverley's ability to taxi backwards with pilots unable to see the sea! Posted back to UK 23rd September 1960 to Air Staff duties at HQTC and HQ 38 Group until January 1966 when selected for Beverley refresher course to take over command of 34 Squadron based at Seletar, operating mostly in Borneo in the disturbances. This second flying command post was with the rank of Wing Commander and lasted until January 1968. The airframes of the Beverley force were revealing much metal fatigue and the ground crews of 34 squadron were fighting a losing battle, but their efforts produced for our final flights on 29th September 1967 a gaggle of six aircraft out of seven airframes. Led around Singapore to join their fellow aircraft who had left on old Chinese lorries as scrap. Spent 1968 and 1969 on the Air Staff of first HQ 224 Group and then the HQFEAF in their joint warfare branch, returning to UK in May 1969 to the Ops Staff of the re-christened HQTC, now Air

Support Command. September 10, 1971 was posted to Joint Warfare Establishment as the Wing Commander Air Transport with tasks in the logistics team and the command and control team. April 1975 was posted to HQ STC as Wing Commander Contingency Plans until end of service on April 1979. Joined the Sultan of Oman's Air Force as Wing Commander Joint Staff from April 1979 to September 1983, *Henry Whitbread Guile*

Dear Don,

May I thank you for sending me the Mildenhall Winter Newsletter.

It is nice to think that although Les is not with me I have the contact with the people who meant so much to him, and to me too. They were without doubt marvellous men, and I am proud to have had a husband who served with the RAF.

I am enclosing a donation for help with expenses, and I am sorry I have not done this before now, still trying to come to terms with myself since I lost Les. It was a long time to be together, namely 60 years this year.

I am sending the copy of the newsletter to Les's ex-skipper's family in Western Australia. Sadly he died two years ago and his wife followed this last year. Now all the crew have gone. I miss them all, we kept up the friendship for some years with them all. Hopefully I am going out to Western Australia this year when I visit my family – this will be the younger members of the skipper's family I have now kept in contact with.

Thank you again for the help you have given me, I do appreciate this; I am only sorry I cannot come to the reunion, it is difficult for me transport wise.

Good wishes to all

Sincerely

Betty Mason (Mrs)

Dear Don,

Just a few lines to thank you and the Register Committee plus, of course, the people on the base who helped to make the reunion such a success. It was the first one that I had attended and hope not the last. – **Harold Briggs**

Dear Don,

Thank you and all concerned for another enjoyable reunion. Elizabeth and I know that it is a lot of work and worry to you all. We do so hope we will be able to get together in 2008. Best wishes. – **John Cox**

Dear Don,

Many thanks for the last issue of the *Mildenhall Register* newsletter, which I find most interesting and a reminder of the 39/45 period. If you can remember my twin brother F/Lt W. E. Palmer was a member of XV Squadron and was killed in action on June 7/8 1944. I can assure that the issue does get passed around for others to see. I enclose a donation to the funds. – **Arthur Palmer**

Dear Don,

As a point of interest I have looked through my records to see what befell the planes and crews that were mentioned in Battle Order for March 15th 1944 for a raid on Stuttgart. Eight of the aircraft on the battle order did not survive the war 50%. 12 crew members including the CO S/Ldr Lamason were either taken prisoner, evaded capture or were injured. At least 50 of the crew members listed were later killed 43%. It was a dangerous occupation. R5508 was lettered LS-C Charlie and was with 44 Squadron in which W/Comm Nettleton won his VC. With best wishes to all over there associated with the Register and trust a few younger and willing volunteers can carry on the reunions and newsletter for a few more years yet. – **R.W. (Bob) Smith**, Australia. Ex XV Squadron.

FRANK CAMPBELL wrote to say:

Thank you for the newsletters which I like to read. I am still going strong turned 83 on February 2nd 2007 and still in good health with two to three stubbies of beer at happy hour each afternoon and two to three glasses of red wine before retiring for the night. Most of my crew have passed on but Lillian my wife and I still keep in touch with Edna Davis in Devon and Lillian Price in Enfield Christmas time. Don Davis was my RIG and Glen Price the F/E.

W/Comm NIGEL MACFARLANE DSO was the last wartime CO of XV Squadron and is now living in South Africa, he writes to say:

Dear Don Clarke, Thank you for your kind invitation to the Mildenhall Register reunion on 18th May. Unfortunately I will be in Australia over that period on a visit to my son Alastair who has had a severe stroke. However I would like to send my best wishes for a very successful and joyous reunion. And thank you for doing such good work as secretary, sincere regards Nigel.

I read this message to the assembled members.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

This incident occurred on the 5th/6th July 1944

The Lancaster involved was G I P LM466 622 Squadron.

The crew F/Lt Hargreaves (Pilot), F/Lt Nichol (Nav.), F/S Burns (BA), F/S Crawford W/Op), F/S Malpass (M/Up), F/S Glynn (R/G), Sgt. Chandler (F/E).

We were on the return trip from our target (Wizernes) when after a short time another Lancaster formed on us. It was on our starboard side, range about 500 yards, slightly below and astern.

There was not a cloud in the sky and the moonlight was very bright so that the visibility was extremely good. From my position on the starboard of the cockpit I was in a good position to carry out our pilot's instructions "to keep an eye on him".

Its position, relative to us, remained unchanged for about seven or eight minutes. Suddenly, without any warning it disintegrated in a vast explosion and ball of fire. Almost immediately the gunner and myself saw a Me110 which seemed to appear from nowhere.

At the time of the incident the destruction of the Lancaster and the sudden appearance of the Me110 was a complete mystery but information gathered since the war would indicate that the unfortunate crew were victims of a *schrage musik* attack.

(*Schrage musik* was the code word used by the Germans for their aircraft fitted with upward firing cannon.)

The Me110 then positioned itself for a conventional attack on our aircraft. Three attacks were made, and at least, for some of the time, the encounter took place each gunner had only one gun firing from their respective turrets. (My efforts to confirm the exact sequence of gun failures were not successful because I was unable to contact either of the gunners concerned.)

However the W/Op did confirm that there were malfunctions in both turrets during the attacks.

After the ME110's third attack it broke off the action and was seen to dive away to port in flames. Claimed destroyed.

Almost immediately we were again attacked, this time by a Ju88. It made four attacks before breaking off the action. It too dived away to port in flames and was claimed destroyed.

The R/G F/S Glynn was awarded an immediate DFM.

It was some 50 years before I decided to put pen to paper and record this very unusual incident, and, since all the decisive action took place on our port side (and so out of my vision) I had some doubts as to the accuracy of my memories of it all. However, an aircraft enthusiast, Howard Sandall has carried out a very thorough and extensive in depth research into the activities of 622 Squadron during its fairly brief

existence. By checking ORBs and in this case obtaining an eye-witness account of this particular action he was able to establish the authenticity of the story.

The eye-witness account was given by Sgt Bernie Dye the M/Up in P/O Horton's crew flying "Q" Queenie of 622 Squadron. The initial account appears in the book *Bomber Squadron – The Men Who Flew With XV* by Martyn Ford-Jones on page 188. (This book was written in 1987.)

A second account is given in a letter to Howard Sandall as late as 2006. Both accounts are basically the same but there are discrepancies with target and aircraft types which is understandable when recalling incidents some 43 years and then 62 years after the event.

There is no doubt the Howard Sandall's research has clarified the whole situation and confirms that my account is accurate.

The following extracts were taken from Rawdon Hume Middleton's own diaries which were used by Stuart Bill when writing the life history of Rawdon (Ron) in his book entitled *Middleton VC*.

1st Operation, April 6th/7th 1942. Target Essen. Aircraft Stirling W3726 OJ-G

There were some nasty thunderstorms as we took off and we circled the airfield to gain height. We had not been very long on course when we ran smack into one of them. The big Stirling was tossed about like a cork and it took two of us to fly it. The electrical display was most amazing – the four propellers became blue circles of flame and the windscreen began to look like a fluorescent screen with little blue flames wriggling all over it. The trailing aerial was a round mass of blue fire and the guns were all blue and a one point we were lifted 1,500ft in a couple of seconds by a tremendous up-current. However, we managed to get out of the storm and gained height to cross the coast. There was 5/10th cloud by now and not much flak or searchlight activity over the coast.

Nothing more to report until about 20 minutes run to Essen. Then all at once as we were flying peacefully along there was a terrific bang in the starboard wing and a stream of tracer and incendiary streaked past my window. The rear gunner replied with a five second burst and the Me110 that had attacked us broke away and disappeared. We dived to shake him off and then surveyed the damage. Petrol was being lost rapidly so we had to jettison our bombs, run the two engines off the holed tank till it gave out and then feather our starboard outer engine. We stooged back to base like that, and, on landing the undercarriage collapsed, the aircraft spinning around like a top, but no one was hurt.

2nd Operation, April 14th 1942. Target Dortmund. Aircraft Stirling W7510 OJ-B

Nothing much of importance till we reached the Ruhr; although we saw a plane caught in a searchlight cone being given a hell of a welcome over Dunkirk. When we reached the target there must have been 500 searchlights around the place and they were firing into the apex of the cone. We had no instruments except for the gyro horizon. Stooaged around trying to identify the target and finally located it. Searchlights picked us up on the run-up and then started to give us hell. You could see the big whitish bursts around us and hear them go "whack-whack-whack". We heard Eddie (Observer) say, "Bombs gone", and then we tried evasive action but it was all round us and bits of red hot metal were flashing in through the plane and out the other side. Somehow we managed to get out of range and sorted ourselves out. The front gunner had been trying to get out of his turret but a piece of flak had jammed the doors. Eddie was almost in tears trying to get him out as we thought the port inner engine was going to catch fire and we were ready to bale out. South of Dortmund, on the way home, I saw a plane caught in a big cone of searchlights with a concentration of flak all about him. Suddenly he started to glow red inside and then began to dive earthwards. A big flash and then a glowing mass was the end of him. "Poor beggars!" The rest of the trip was uneventful.

3rd Operation, April 23rd/24th 1942. Target Rostock. Aircraft Stirling N6084 OJ-C.

We were airborne at 2304 hours and set course over the drome for the British coast. Passed through broken cloud. About 20 minutes after setting course for Denmark, Hanson, the rear gunner, reported that his turret was unserviceable but we decided to continue on the operation. At 2400 hours we sighted a Wimpy (Wellington) about 500 yards away going in our direction but more slowly and we soon left it. The coast of Denmark was easily seen and a wizard pinpoint obtained which showed us to be only two miles off track – a very good show. Soon crossed Denmark without anything more than a few searchlights here and there. To starboard Sylt could be seen sending up some heavy stuff. A large boat was seen in the Baltic by the M/Up going like hell. As we drew near Rostock we could see flares and bombs dropping and then large fires which increased in violence till they illuminated the whole area. We identified the target by a pinpoint and dropped bombs on a very steady run-up as the flak was very light stuff and well underneath us. Three photo flashes were dropped and some good photographs taken. Ten minutes out on the way home, the starboard engine stopped running and we had to fly home on three engines. Into bed by 0900 hours on Friday.

18 July 2007

Dear Don

Thank you so much for your phone call, it was so nice to have a chat.

I have sent you a few photos and an article in the Speak Up magazine that a friend of mine has just started up. She says there has been a lot of interest shown in the article and lots of people have been walking up to see the site and the plaque.

It will be nice to meet you all at your next reunion in May 2008. John and Ann are away at the moment but I will tell him when they get back.

Regards to you and your wife.

Pat and Robin.

DEDICATION TO DUTY

On 22nd March 1945 a Lancaster bomber crashed in woodland between Weeting and Mundford, killing all seven crew on board. This is the extraordinary story of the local residents who, more than 50 years later, felt they deserved a lasting memorial.

On 22nd March 1945, an Avro Lancaster Mk. I took off from RAF Mildenhall at 10.55am, detailed to attack "enemy transport" near the Belgian and Dutch Borders.

It was the aircraft's 22nd mission and the third sortie for the NCO crew on board. Within moments of take-off the aircraft's inner port engine ignited, which started a desperate struggle to try and avert disaster. However the wing's second engine cut-out and the Lancaster plunged to the ground.

The aircraft was carrying a 4,000lb "Blockbuster" bomb, which exploded on impact, killing all seven of the crew, and scattering wreckage up to a quarter of a mile from the crater it caused.

The story moves on more than 60 years, when local resident Pat Tuck was speaking to Irene Bennett, nee Jenkins, who was in her 80s, and had lived for part of her life in the Icker buildings, the forestry cottages in that area. Irene told Pat the story, and that a memorial plaque had been placed there in 1999, but although she'd lived close for so many years, she was too old to visit it and see for herself.

For three weeks Pat walked her dog around the area, trying to find the site, eventually chancing upon it, buried and overgrown in the undergrowth. She took photographs, but Irene died before she got a chance to see them.

Pat's husband Robin had been a nine year-old boy at the local school at the time of the crash, and vividly remembered hearing the explosion and feeling the shock wave from the exploding bomb as it crashed. He and his mates tried to ride to the crash site to see the plane but were turned back by the authorities. One local man who lived three-quarters of a mile away from the crash site later confirmed the windows of his cottage had blown out and the blast had brought down his ceiling. So Pat and Robin set about finding out more about the site.

It transpired that in May 1999, there had been a Dedication and tree-planting service at the site to provide a lasting memorial to those who lost their lives. One person who was there was F/S John "Swiftly" Swallow, who had travelled from Canada to see the unveiling, as he had known the unfortunate airmen well. John had met up with them in July 1944 at RAF Station Desborough, but had known two of the airmen, Tom Jenkins and Pete Cooley much longer, as they had trained together as air gunners. Like John Swallow, Pete Cooley was just 19 at that time. Their individual crews shared the same Nissan Hut, and in his own words, "became brothers-in-arms in the true sense, a bond that lasts even today".

Both crews were posted to Mildenhall, and John remembers waving the plane off on its last disastrous flight. He had been servicing the rear gun sights on his own aircraft, and having finished started walking back to the Coms site.

He noticed some of the crew on one plane standing about 25 feet away were waving at him, and giving a thumbs up. He recognised John Newton's crew, so waved back and watched them get airborne. He would be the last person to see them alive.

Pat and Robin got in touch with John Swallow, who told them the story. So between them, and with friend and fellow local resident John Nash they set about tidying up the site, and making it a permanent memorial. In October 2006 the three of them set about digging and mowing, and setting up a wooden surround to the memorial.

In November 2006 they received permission from the Forestry Commission to hold a Remembrance Service, which followed the same Order of Service carried out at the original ceremony seven years before. At the head of the newly cleaned memorial, they placed fragments found all around the site, which had laid untouched for 62 years.

Following the work of Pat, Robin and John, the Forestry Commission have now kindly cut proper paths from the main road to the memorial site. This should ensure that others who wish to pay their respects will be able to do so, and the history of this site will not be lost again.

The seven crew are buried in Cambridge City Cemetery – such was the explosion that all, except the captain, are in a collective grave.



**THIS PLAQUE IS DEDICATED TO
THE CREW OF LANCASTER BOMBER
HK 773 LS-W OF XV SQUADRON
WHO LOST THEIR LIVES WHEN THE
AIRCRAFT CRASHED IN THE NEARBY**

FOREST AT 11.00 AM ON 22ND MARCH 1945

HAVING TAKEN OFF FROM RAF MILDENHALL

W/O	F. NEWTON	PILOT	RAAF
SGT	C. CHURCH	NAV	RAFVR
SGT	G. COPE	WOP	RAFVR
SGT	M. MATTHEWS	BA	RAFVR
SGT	P. COOLEY	M.U.G.	RAFVR
SGT	T. JENKINS	TG	RAFVR
SGT	W. DEE	FE	RAFVR

ALSO

SGT	R. NORRIS	WOP	RAFVR
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KILLED 1ST JUNE 1944

A MEMBER OF A SISTER CREW

Layout of a plaque, brass on an oak backplate about 9in x 11in which is hoped will be placed as a permanent fixture in the local church

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