

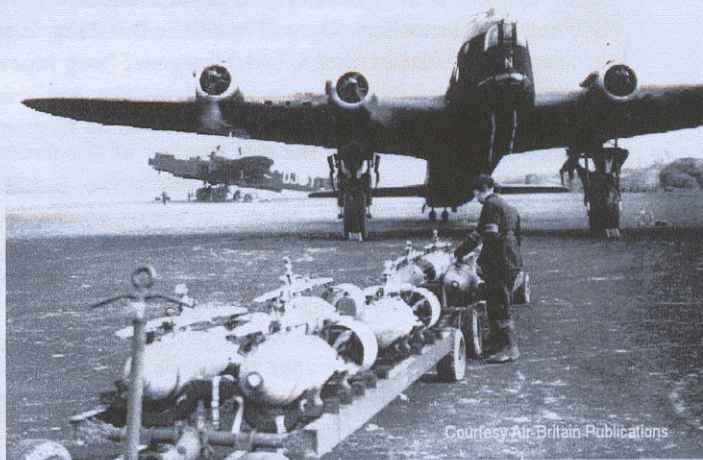


NEWSLETTER  
WINTER 2008

# THE MILDENHALL REGISTER

15, 90, 149 AND 622

BOMBER SQUADRONS' ASSOCIATION



Courtesy Air-Britain Publications

149 Sqn's N for Nuts EE 872 running up, Jul/Aug 1943.

## Cover story - The Last Operation of Stirling III, EE872, N for Nuts

Stirling III serial number EE872 had been allocated to Flt Sgt Andrew Brown and his crew two days after his joining 149 Squadron at Lakenheath on the 27th May 1943. His crew, (crew 6), consisted of Alex Holms (Nav), Adrian Douglas (W/OP/AG), David Badcock (Bomb Aimer) all from New Zealand. Doug Guest (Flt Eng) and Henry Saunders (AG) were both from London, and Harry Barnard (AG) was from Huntingdon. They had completed 49 trips in this aircraft, with 20 as confirmed Operational Sorties. These had included Wuppertal, Dusseldorf, Le Creusot, Krefeld, Mulheim, Elberfeld, Gelsenkirchen, Koln, Hamburg (4 times), Remscheid, Nurenburg, Berlin and Munchengladbach, amongst others. Andrew's flying logbook shows a total of 555 Hrs and 54 Mins at this time.

The aircraft took off from Lakenheath at 19.36 on the night of the 5th September 1943, en route for Mannheim in Germany via Beachy Head. 149 Sqn was to lose three aircraft that night. Relatives of two of the crew of OJ-O, which was also lost that night, have been in touch with me during my research. The exact time OJ-N fell is unclear, but the claim by Leutnant Hoppner was timed at 00.20, and the Searchlight crew's report confirms this as the likely time. The sole survivor of the aircraft loss was the tail gunner, Harry Barnard, known to the rest of the crew as "Barney". He was to spend the rest of the war as a POW, and pass away in the 1970's.

The rest of the crew were dead, with only Doug Guest and Alex Holms being positively identified when the German police picked up the bodies the following day. It is presumed (by Richard Braun, an historian from Ludwigshafen-Mundenheim) that all six fatalities were originally buried at Ludwigshafen main cemetery, although the photograph I have of Andrew's (and David Badcock's) initial internment, does not list Doug and Alex with them. They all now lie in Durnbach War cemetery, Bayern, Germany, with Andrew, Alex, David, Henry and Doug together in Plot (Coll) 8 J. 1-18 and Adrian in Plot 8 K3.

Graham Barnard, the son of the sole survivor of the aircraft loss, "Barney" Barnard, recounted what his father told him in these words: (comments in brackets are those of the author).

*"As they approached Mannheim, they were hit early by Flak. (It now appears that it was the Me110 flown by Heinz-Wolfgang Hoppner) "My father knew the aircraft was in trouble. It was banking over the target. One of the other gunners came through to the rear and told my father that they were the only ones alive on the aircraft. He went through the aircraft, checking this was true. It appeared to him that the pilot (Andrew) and the co-pilot (presumably David Badcock) had been hit early, and were slumped over the controls - dead. (Unlikely, as the Stirling was not noted for flying well with two bodies leaning forward on the controls!). The other gunner ran to the rear, opened the rear turret (probably the rear exit) and jumped out. (This may have been Adrian Douglas, the wireless Operator/Air Gunner). My father did not see the parachute open. He then saw that the aircraft was only 400ft, approximately from*

*the ground. He jumped clear of the aircraft, pulled his parachute and hit the ground 5 seconds later. As my father said, he was a very lucky man. He started to recover his chute, but within a minute was arrested by a soldier who said to him, 'Nein, nein, Johnny'. My father said the aircraft was in one piece, so it appeared that the bombs had been dropped".* Accounts from Herr Braun, the Ludwigshafen-Mundenheim historian, say that incendiary cases were found after the crash. N-Nuts had a history of Hang-ups, so this should not be viewed as conclusive).

Thanks to Alan Fraser, the nephew of Flt Sgt Andrew Brown, for permission to use this account, the full story may be viewed on his web site [www.stirlingpilot.org.uk](http://www.stirlingpilot.org.uk).

## Chairman's Report

The past twelve months has seen much change in the organization of the Mildenhall Register. In May at the AGM our long serving Secretary, founder and stalwart member, Mr Don Clarke MBE, resigned his position after 32 years service. We are indeed eternally grateful to Don, nobly supported by his wife Winnie, for all his hard work over the years to ensure the success and development of the Register. Andrew Bridgwater, whose Wife's Uncle was Jim Adams, a Flight Engineer on XV Squadron killed in action, volunteered to become the new Secretary. Geoff Reynolds, a nephew of Sgt R Norris, a XV Sqn WOP, killed in action, also joined the committee. As some of you may recall after a chance meeting, Fred Coney asked me to act as the Vice Chairman of the Register a couple of years ago. I had been a navigator in the RAF's transport fleet flying Hercules C Mk1s and whilst I searched for a connection with Bomber Command, I could find none. Eventually I realized that the village, Exning, in which I was born in 1944, was at the time home to HQ 3 Bomber Group under whose command the Register's four squadrons came. So I am connected!!!! Smiley Mildwater, our treasurer completes the band of youngsters (we are all under sixty five, just!) who together with Jim Hammond, Douglas Kebbell and Fred form your committee. We are determined, subject to your approval, to keep the Register going for years to come in memory of all who served on the Squadrons and at Mildenhall.

Unfortunately since the reunion in May 08, Fred Coney has not enjoyed the best of health and has been in and out of hospital two or three times. I try to visit him frequently and on the last visit he indicated that he hopes to make the reunion in 2009. Please make the time either to drop him a line or call him on the telephone. He still has the interests of the Register very much at heart, although I have assumed responsibility for its day-to-day running.

The Reunion in May 08 was another great success, whilst numbers were down on previous years, Fred welcomed nearly 150 members and guests to the Formal Dinner on the Saturday and the attendance at Chapel on the Sunday was excellent.

This year sees the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of RAF Mildenhall, and the USAF intends marking it with a special event on the Friday of our reunion, 15th May 09.

The publication of this newsletter was delayed in order to include the preliminary details. The USAF plan to stage, around the passenger terminal, various displays of the work carried out at RAF Mildenhall today together with a static aircraft display that will include the various USAF aircraft stationed in Europe and hopefully a XV Sqn Tornado. At times there will be fly pasts of USAF aircraft and hopefully also the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight complete with the Lancaster, the Red Arrows and a XV Sqn Tornado. Possibly also present will be the De Havilland Moth Club who hope to mark the occasion on which the UK to Australia Air Race was started at Mildenhall in the 1930s. Food stalls will serve snacks throughout the day at a reasonable cost. It promises to be an excellent day and the Base Commander, Col Eden Murrie is extremely keen that the Register's members attend the event and hence we are all invited. The gates will open at 10 o'clock with the flying around late morning. Please indicate your intentions on the enclosed application form, which will serve for the whole weekend's activities. Security will be at the normal high level and we must co-operate by supplying the information required. Further details, once they are known, will be posted on the Register's new web site (see inside back page) and be available on request from the Secretary. Those who indicate an interest in attending will automatically receive these.

Finally may I on behalf of your committee wish you all belatedly a very Happy New Year and we hope to see many of you at Mildenhall over the weekend of 15-17 May 09.

John Gentleman, Acting Chairman

### Programme for Reunion 2007 Weekend 15 - 18 May 2009

Friday 15 May	10:00 - Onwards RAF Mildenhall 75 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event 18:00 - Dinner in Wellington Room, Middleton Hall 20:00 - AGM in Stirling / Lancaster Rooms Middleton Hall
Saturday 16 May	11:00 - Morning get-together in the Bird in Hand 18:15 for 19:00 - Dinner (Main Function) in Galaxy Club
Sunday 17 May	09:30 - Combined Service of Remembrance in Base Chapel

*Note: The rooms at the Bird in Hand have been renovated since the last reunion and are now of a reasonable standard. See enclosed application form for further details*

#### Important Plea from the new Secretary:

*With the change of Secretary, I would be grateful if all correspondence is now sent to me at:*

*Andrew Bridgwater, 6 Overlangs, Kingston, Kingsbridge, Devon, TQ7 4PF*

## "Bomber Command to be honoured after 63 years"- hopefully!

The Bomber Command Association, with the help of the Heritage Foundation, is raising funds to erect a permanent memorial in Central London to the 55,000 bomber aircrew killed in WW2. The Daily Telegraph is supporting the appeal and giving it publicity.

In mid November, less than three weeks after the campaign was launched, the appeal was well on course to raise the £2 million needed to build a long-overdue monument to the 55,000 men who died carrying out bombing missions during the Second World War. Donations have been pouring in from as far afield as New Zealand, America, Australia and Switzerland, taking the total raised so far to just over £550,000. The worldwide support for the appeal reflects the diversity of the men who served in Bomber Command, with thousands of airmen coming from Commonwealth and Allied countries. The appeal is also being supported in Dresden, the target of one of the most controversial bombing raids of the war.

Joerg Mehle, Head of Sales at the Elsner Pac plant nursery, which sends flowers to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight headquarters in Lincolnshire every year, said: *"In a town like Dresden there were a lot of prejudices against RAF pilots because of the bombing. Now, I think that many people recognise the courage and heroism of individual fliers."*

*"In Germany we understand the horrors of war. While these fliers live they are pieces of living history, able to relate their stories. But one day they will all be gone and I think that is why it is important to have a memorial to the men of Bomber Command and is a project we would wholeheartedly support."*

Former Bee Gees singer Robin Gibb, a supporter of the memorial campaign, said: *"The memorial will be in Regent's Park. We have agreed a site, but we still need to raise a bit more money. I feel very emotional about this. These guys are heroes. Everyone in Britain and the rest of Europe owes them a debt. It has been 63 years and yet successive governments have failed to honour them. This is not about glorifying war, it is about honouring sacrifice."*

The singer, who is president of the Heritage Foundation which honours noteworthy British achievers, said the memorial would take the form of seven bronze statues of crew members in uniform, facing outwards in a circle.

John Nichol, 44, who was shot down in an RAF Tornado bomber over Iraq in 1991, said: *"It will be a great day for the men of Bomber Command and their relatives. Many of them still feel today that the country is ashamed of what they did, and that's terribly sad and wrong when you're talking to 80 and 90-year-old men. More Bomber Command aircrew were lost in a single night in February 1944 than all the fighter pilots killed in the Battle of Britain."*

Douglas Radcliffe, a former Wellington Bomber wireless operator and secretary of the Bomber Command Association, said: *"The response has been overwhelming. We have had so many letters from people saying they either lost someone in the war or they have some other personal connection, such as a grandfather or grandmother who was involved with the RAF, and it just shows the depth of feeling there is out there in support of this. We're so grateful to everyone who has given money, and the donations are still coming in thick and fast."*

If you feel able to contribute now to the Memorial please send a cheque, payable to Bomber Command Memorial Fund to:

Doug Radcliffe MBE  
The Secretary  
Bomber Command Association  
RAF Museum  
Grahame Park Way  
Hendon  
London  
NW9 5RR

### **XV(R) SQN - Message to Mildenhall Register Dinner 2008 - from Wing Commander Mike Saunders**

I thought as the current Officer Commanding of No XV(R) Squadron, I would take this opportunity to wish each and everyone of you best wishes from the current members of the Squadron, and I sincerely apologise that I am unable to join you in person at your Annual Dinner. However, I thought you might wish to receive a quick update on our recent activities.

I myself have been in the 'hot seat' as Officer Commanding No XV(R) Squadron for just over a year now and I can honestly say with confidence that the Squadron continues to make an extremely valuable contribution, both directly and indirectly, to the demanding pace of Operations around the world today.

Over this past year, many Squadron personnel, including one of my very youngest Senior Aircraftsman have been stationed for up to 4-months at Basrah in Southern Iraq, in support of Operation TELIC. During this time they have had to endure often fairly intense, yet sporadic, mortar and rocket attacks undertaken by Iraq insurgents, during both the day and night. I am sure that many of you will appreciate the special type of courage that must be shown in carrying out duties under such a constant and close threat and I am extremely proud of their efforts.

Additionally, No XV(R) Squadron has supported Nos 12, No 617 and No 14 Squadrons by deploying a number of our own pilots and navigators to Al Udiad Air-base in Qatar. From here they have conducted demanding flying operations in support of ground

troops in Iraq. These sorties range from MOSUL in the North, to Baghdad in the Centre and to Basrah in the South of Iraq. They require the use of air-to-air refuelling, and last for up to 8 hours, strapped tightly to the ejection seat in the cockpit. The aircrew make use high definition thermal imaging targeting pods, and they relay high-quality pictures and information in real-time directly onto laptops carried by our soldiers on the ground, who are engaged in direct contact with the Iraq insurgents. Often our Squadron aircrew are called upon to provide close air support to our troops and they have delivered weapons such as strafe gunnery and precision bombing against the insurgents and their equipment; I can honestly say that this invaluable support has saved lives. Over this last year I have had the honour to present over 20 operational medals, along with several special awards and commendations, to my Squadron personnel. I trust you can rest assured that No XV(R) Squadron will continue to provide this invaluable direct support to operations, as I fully expect my people to continue to deploy to areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan and the Falklands for the foreseeable future.

Back here at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland our core business remains the high quality training of Tornado GR4 pilots and navigators before they move onto their front-line Squadrons, and over this past year we have continued to deliver a constant stream of fresh, keen young male and female aircrew officers onto their first operational tours. Indeed, on many occasions, they can leave my office, having received my special 'pep talk' on what lies ahead, and then be operational over Iraq within just 2-months; this is an impressive feat given the complexity and demands of current operations; but it is also testament to the high level of instruction and training that they receive during their time on No XV(R) Squadron. I am pleased to also say that, by way of recognition of our instructional role, the Squadron was last year awarded the Central Flying School (CFS) Trenchard Memorial Trophy for our "outstanding contributions to the art of flying instruction".

Much of the credit for our achievements must go to my Engineers, Operations Staff and Administration Staff who, alongside the aircrew, display a first-rate dedication and effort to whatever task I ask of them. I consider morale on the Squadron to be very good, and this is despite the significant challenges that the Armed Forces face today. As in years gone by, we continually ask a lot of our people and, as you all did in your time, my people constantly step up to the mark and deliver an outstanding and courageous performance each and every time; thus I am extremely proud to be their Boss.

This has been another demanding year for the Squadron and the coming year promises more of the same, and I believe we are ready for that challenge.

To conclude, on behalf of the current squadron members and our families, I would like to wish the Mildenhall Register good health and best wishes.

## Why I joined the Register: by Sue Bridgwater

I joined the Mildenhall Register after researching the war service of my Uncle, Jim Adams, and learning that it was from RAF Mildenhall he flew to his death in 1944.

Jim was born on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1924 at Greenbank Nursing Home in Plymouth and was educated at Salisbury Road Junior School and Sutton High School. He was a gifted artist and liked to make model aeroplanes too. In the summer of 1940, he left school to get a job as a Telegraph boy, remaining in the same job until he began his war service.

Jim enlisted in the RAF on 29 December 1942. After training, including the Lancaster Finishing School, RAF Feltwell, Jim was posted to XV Squadron based at RAF Mildenhall on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1944. One month later on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1944 he was posted *Missing* then later on the same day his status was amended to *Killed in Action*. Lancaster 111 ED 473 LS-D was totally destroyed and all seven of the crew lost their lives on this sortie, *Operation Nantes*. Jim was the Flight Engineer and the names of the other six crewmembers were:

Pilot Officer JONES Thomas George 174018 Pilot  
Flying officer JONES Philip Chambers 151767 Air Bomber  
Sergeant GILL Albert James 1462241 Wireless Operator / Air Gunner  
Flight Sergeant TYLER Frank Thomas 1812660 Air Gunner  
Sergeant BENJAMIN Thomas Evan Edwards 1255181 Air Gunner  
Flying Officer HORTON George Aubrey James 142461 Navigator

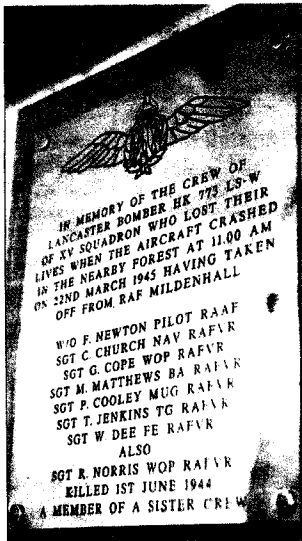
*Operation Nantes* was part of the air campaign to reduce the effectiveness of German military installations and communications prior to D-Day. Seventy three Lancasters attacked Bouguenais, Brittany, where there is still an airport today. Only ED 473 failed to return. While over the target area it was hit by anti-aircraft fire and exploded on impact with the ground. After the crash the Germans removed the bodies of six of the crew and buried them together at Bouguenais Cemetery in six graves marked "Unbekannter Englisch Flieger" - Unknown English Airmen. Fg Off Horton's body was flung 200 yards away from the crash and lay undiscovered for three months. Bomber Command's operational loss record for this sortie records that a main navigational point for the crew on their way to Nantes from Mildenhall was Start Point in Devon. Hopefully this brought some happy memories of home to Jim in his last few hours.

After the war an Officer of No 1 Missing Research and Enquiry Unit discovered the graves. The six crew were laid to rest side by side in a War Graves Commission plot where they still lie, in the Communal Cemetery at Pont-du-Cens, a suburb of Nantes. Jim rests in Grave 22 Plot L, Row C. Fg Off Horton lies separately from the others in Plot L, Row B, Grave 19.



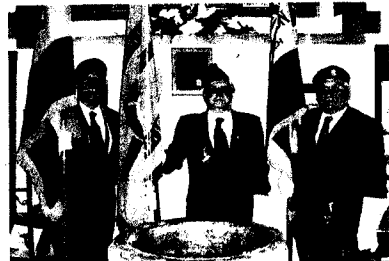
The Lancaster crashed in a field at the village of Ville-au-Denis just south of Nantes; there on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2004 a solemn procession remembered the young crew. The municipality of Bouguenais has erected a memorial in the corner of the field listing the young men's names and giving details in French and English of their sacrifice. My Husband, Andrew, and I visited the memorial later in 2004, and one gentleman who lived in the village came up and thrust a plastic carrier bag at me. Inside was a piece of the Lancaster that he had picked up as a boy. I said to Andrew, "He's had this for 60 years and he has given it to me!" Andrew said that perhaps now the man knew why he had kept it.

### A Crew Honoured and Remembered by Geoff Reynolds



**Dedication Service  
St. Leonard's  
Church  
Mundford**

**Saturday 17th May  
2008**



The reunion weekend of 2008 saw the fulfilment of a quest for Pat and Robin Tuck.

Mrs Pat Tuck and her husband Robin, who live in Mundford, had been trying to get a permanent memorial plaque erected in St Leonard's Church, Mundford to the crew of Lancaster HK733 coded LS-W. The aircraft, from XV Squadron based at Mildenhall, had crashed in the forest near the village. Shortly after takeoff, on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1945, it suffered engine failure and plunged to earth where its bomb load exploded killing all the crew and leaving a permanent crater in the forest. It was the last operational loss of this type from XV Squadron during the war.

The crash-site was known, a tree and commemorative plaque being installed at the crater side during the reunion weekend of 1999. Pat had already got its existence more widely publicised; it was a destination of a local walking club, guaranteeing

regular visits from villagers and the public. Along with friends and villagers she and her husband (along with some assistance from the Forestry Commission) had cleared the site and made it stand out more. Parts of the Lancaster are still being found today, and some of these have been placed upon the memorial site.

However, Pat, Robin and the villagers realised that these things were not going to last or be properly maintained forever. Pat wanted a permanent memorial mounted in the church.

So, with hard work and dedication, she finally brought together members of the Mildenhall Register, Squadron representatives from today's XV Squadron at Lossiemouth and RAF personnel from Mildenhall and Honington. Gp Capt Peter Norford, CSC, the Australian Air Adviser, travelled from London to honour the fact that the pilot was a fellow countryman. The vicar, the Rev Peter Farrow conducted the service and the dedication was by the Rt Revd James Langstaff, Bishop of Lynn. It was standing room only in the church, as many villagers and local people paid their final tributes to the crew.

Pat and Robin very kindly provided refreshments at their home following the service, where young and old alike mingled and spoke of their memories of the time. For those who had never seen the crater, including the Australian Air Attaché and the XV Squadron personnel, Robin arranged an escorted visit. All were stunned and amazed at the size of the crater (a 4000lb cookie plus full fuel load) can make. It was a sobering thought to take home at the end of a truly memorable occasion.

Many thanks are due to Pat, Robin and all their many helpers. Well done.

Sadly absent amongst those present was John (Swifty) Swallow, a veteran of 622 Squadron. He had trained with the tail gunner and they were close friends. He had related previously to me how he remembered seeing the departing Lancaster and seeing his pal waving from the rear turret. Soon afterwards he was informed of the total loss of the crew. Ill health had prevented his travel to the reunion in 2008. However, he sent his thoughts by mail, and we at the memorial and reunion compiled a notebook of our best wishes for him, which Pat sent off to him in Canada along with numerous photographs and a DVD of the event. Our good wishes must have worked as, in a recent e-mail, he tells me there is a chance he will be allowed to join us all in 2009. Our best wishes go out to him with this newsletter.

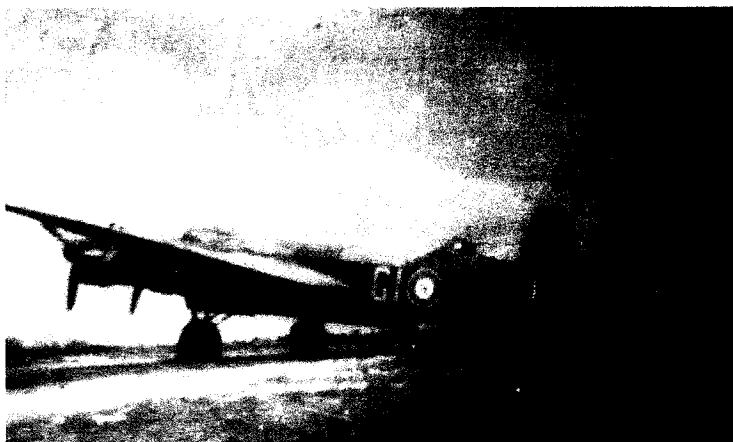
**We are very keen to update our records and would appreciate your completing and returning to the Secretary the enclosed form whether or not you intend coming to the Reunion in May. Thank you!**

## Centurion Lancaster- LL885 GI-J

The chances of any Lancaster bomber reaching 100 operational missions were less than favourable, in fact out of the 7,366 Lancasters built 3,400 were lost on operations and 200 were destroyed in crashes. Only 35 Lancasters went on to complete 100 operations. 622 Squadron was to produce a centurion Lancaster that proudly displayed the GI-J squadron marking and the individual serial number of LL885. This Lancaster completed 113 operational missions by the end of the war.

The first 622 squadron Lancaster to display the 'J' squadron marking was LL828 which was lost to flak over Stuttgart on the night of 15/16<sup>th</sup> March 1944 with all the crew parachuting into occupied France. The pilot Flt Sgt Peter Thompson and two others were taken prisoners of war and four crew members evaded with the help of the French *résistance*.

The loss of LL828 was a shock to the squadron, however a replacement soon arrived bearing the serial number LL885 and the ground crew soon painted the GI-J squadron markings on the fuselage.



LL885 photographed shortly before the Lancaster's first operation on 30/31<sup>st</sup> March 1944-target Nurnberg.

The first operational sortie undertaken by LL885 was on the fateful night of 30/31<sup>st</sup> March 1944 to Nurnberg when Bomber Command lost 97 bombers due to high winds and German night fighter activities. The pilot with the honour of taking a brand new Lancaster on its first sortie was Plt Off Jack Lunn, who over this tour of operations would fly GI-J on no less than 15 occasions and receive the DFC at the end of his tour. Plt Off Lunn recalled that he wanted to fly higher than any other Lancaster on this night to avoid the danger of being hit by falling bombs from aircraft above.

Having a brand new Lancaster meant that the aircraft would have better performance than older aircraft and be able to attain a greater altitude than most. His theory did not work and GI-J was hit by falling incendiaries over the target which cracked the main spar making the Lancaster extremely difficult to control all the way back to Mildenhall. L1885 was out of action until May when it resumed operations against French targets as a part of Bomber Commands support for the impending invasion force on D Day 6<sup>th</sup> June.

Uneventful missions continued for GI-J throughout May and June and most of July until the night of 28/29<sup>th</sup> July en route to Stuttgart. This particular night was blessed with bright moonlight and the crew knew that it was ideal night fighter conditions and their apprehension grew prior to the raid. Many crews were convinced that the raid would be cancelled. The mission was not cancelled and Bomber Command lost 39 bombers to night fighter activity. GI-J had a lucky escape when a JU88 night fighter near Orleans in France attacked it. An experienced German pilot called Heinz Rokker who would go on to achieve 65 kills before the end of the war and be awarded the Knights Cross with Oak leaves, was flying the Night Fighter.

The pilot on this particular mission was Flt Lt Richard Allen DFC, a Flight Commander and an experienced pilot. The rear gunner Flt Lt John Gray DFC had not seen the Night Fighter approach and the first he knew about the attack was when the bullets from the German fighter were shredding the metal in and around his rear turret. He immediately ordered the pilot to 'corkscrew' and Flt Lt Allen threw the Lancaster down hard into the night sky. Due to the damage sustained in the attack the Lancaster proved very difficult to pull out of the dive and Flt Lt Allen instructed the crew to put on parachutes. The mid upper Gunner Flt Lt D. Mason must have misheard the pilot's instruction for he bailed out into the night sky thinking that the bomber was doomed to crash. (Flt Lt Mason's experiences with the French *résistance* would earn him the Air Force Cross before his liberation at the hands of the advancing American Army).

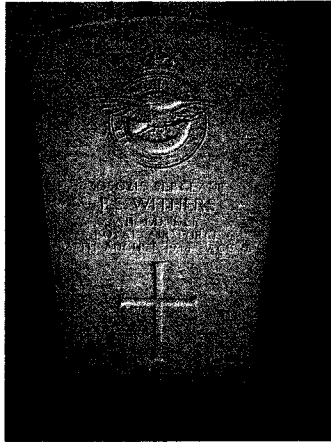
The Lancaster lost considerable height and at 2,000ft Flt Lt Allen finally managed to gain control again and take stock of the damage inflicted. The aircraft was difficult to control and the rear ailerons were extensively damaged. The bombs were jettisoned and a course was set for Mildenhall. The endeavours of the bomb aimer, rear gunner and the pilot were recognized when they all received the DFC for bringing home the Lancaster.

The photographs below show the damage inflicted by the German Night fighter and show how lucky the crew were to return. The next day the rear gunner examined his parachute which was stored just outside the rear turret and it was found to be riddled with bullet holes. Had he been forced to jump out of the Lancaster then he surely would have fallen to his death.



Damage sustained to LL885 on the night of 28/29<sup>th</sup> July 1944  
by a JU88 Night Fighter.

GI-J underwent another period of repairs and returned to operations on 25/26<sup>th</sup> August against Russelsheim. The very next night on an operation to Kiel, LL885 would suffer the tragic loss of the rear gunner Sgt B. Withers to a fighter attack. The fighter, a FW190 was seen on its approach and Sgt Withers instructed the pilot Fg Off Thompson to 'corkscrew'. The instruction came too late and the fighter opened fire on the Lancaster hitting Sgt Withers in the back with cannon shells. The rear gunner turned the turret to defend the Lancaster against further attacks whilst badly wounded and he was hit in the chest killing him almost instantly. After the attack no word came from the rear turret and the bomb aimer went aft to find the gunner dead. The bomb aimer had to chop away the rear turret doors because of damage to the lock. Sgt Percy Withers was just 18 year old when he died and he was a popular character on the squadron. At the time of his death there was a famous American film actress called Jane Withers and Sgt Withers was nicknamed 'Jane'.



The grave of Sgt Percy Stanley Withers in the churchyard of St. John's Church Beck Row Mildenhall.

In tribute Wing Commander I.C.K. Swales DSO DFC DFM wrote:

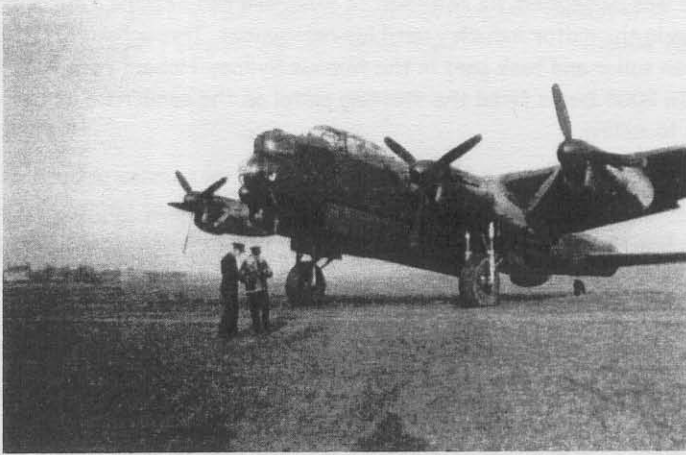
*"You will always treasure the thoughts and indeed the knowledge that your son engaged in action against the common enemy, gave his life in the cause of freedom which you may be sure will not be in vain".*

The Lancaster continued to build up its number of missions during September, October and November 1944 on both targets in France and deep into Germany. It was not until 11<sup>th</sup> December 1944 on a daylight trip to Osterfeld that GI-J sustained some flak damage in the port wing and Flt Sgt Stille successfully brought the Lancaster back trailing fuel from a ruptured fuel tank in the wing. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1945 on a sortie to Munchen-Gladbach the starboard outer engine feathered on its own accord and would not stay un-feathered resulting in an aborted mission.

On 6<sup>th</sup> March 1945 LL885 flew its 100<sup>th</sup> mission on a daylight trip to Salzbergen an oil refinery at the helm was a proud Fg Off C. Moore RCAF. On 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March GI-J sustained further minor flak damage and on both occasions the ground crews patched her up.

LL885 added six Manna and three Exodus trips to the 113 operational sorties bringing her total to 122 missions in total.

On 27<sup>th</sup> August 1945 the Lancaster was moved to No. 44 Squadron and after a short period with No.39 MU, GI-J LI885 was eventually struck off charge on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1947.



A war weary LL885 at Mildenhall Dispersal.

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*Howard Sandall has been co-opted to the committee as the member responsible for writing the Six Two Two Squadron History. See his letter further into the newsletter. We are grateful for his permission to reproduce this article.*

## Obituaries

### **Flt Lt Denis Mason AFC, 1916-2008 Dunkirk Medal, French Resistance Medal**

Flight Lieutenant Denis Mason was an Englishman with a sense of adventure and he was on Bondi Beach in Australia when he heard that World War II had broken out. He immediately decided to return to England to help and worked his passage to England on a ship as a stoker. Shortly after joining the RAF, he took a small boat across the English Channel to help evacuate British and French troops at Dunkirk, an action that won him the Dunkirk Medal. After he successfully completed his training he was posted to No 102 squadron on Wellington Bombers and completed a full tour of operations rising to the rank of Flt Lt. He then spent a period of time as a gunnery instructor on the Isle of Man before returning to Bomber Command with 622 Squadron. He joined the crew of Sqn Ldr Richard Allen DFC as a MUG in May 1944 and commenced operations in early June. On the crew's twelfth operation to Stuttgart on 28/29<sup>th</sup> July, their Lancaster was attacked by a night fighter, which sent the Lancaster into a spin, resulting in Flt Lt Mason bailing out near Orleans in France. He joined the French Maquisard résistance movement and fought with the resistance against the Germans until the advancing Allied Armies liberated him in late 1944. His exploits with the resistance movement earned him the French Résistance Medal.

After he was demobbed, he returned to Australia and became a successfully executive in the motor industry until his retirement. Throughout his life Denis Mason was a keen sailor and took part in the famous Sydney-Hobart race in 1948 finishing fourth. In 2006 Denis fired the starting pistol on the same race as recognition of his services to sailing.

Howard Sandall

### Mr Ken Matthews - (Mid Upper Gunner 622 Sqn)



John Cox (standing) talking with Ken

My mid upper gunner, Ken Matthews, sadly passed away 24<sup>th</sup> July 2008. He had not been well for some time but was nevertheless thinking about another reunion! We were very glad we were able to see him last May. With Elisabeth I went up to Liverpool to attend Ken's funeral. It was a very moving occasion and the huge turnout showed how many lives he had touched. There were at least 150 people present including a contingent from the Air Crew Association with their banner.

Alas I think that is the end of my crew.

John Cox Capt 622 Sqn

### Mr A V Wood

I am writing to you in your capacity as Honorary Chairman of the Mildenhall Register. I note that your organisation has distributed a copy of the Winter 2007 Newsletter to Mr A V Wood of 18, Bloomfield Road, Harpenden, Herts. Sadly Mr Woods died in June 2008.

Paul Mason - Joint Estate Executor

### Sqn Ldr Ed Parrington, 90 Squadron

Mrs Beryl Parrington, of Dayton, Ohio, USA has informed the Register of her husband's death.

### Letters

Please can I apologise for not keeping in touch, it is bad manners of me. I enjoy your news and I am proud to have been a member of 149 Sqn. I was at Coningsby as an engine fitter on B29s and Canberras. The squadron leader was a Sqn Ldr D Adams and the Station CO was group Captain Terpitz Tait, a gentleman. His wife did a lot of work for Woodall church. My best wishes.

Edmund Niland.

It is a long while since I last wrote to you, but I thank you for sending me each year the Mildenhall register newsletter as thanks to your untiring efforts it is very interesting to read. My grand daughter has joined the City of Cambridge ATC and I



am very proud of her and she has read your newsletters etc. Myself when in ATC in '42 was attached to RAF Feltwell, my old "home town"!  
Claude Peacock.

### Can you help?

1. Thank you for sending me the information about the Mildenhall Register. I was particularly interested to see the extracts from Ron Middleton VC's diaries as he flew these operations with Mr Jim Coman's crew. I hope that you will not mind if I take this opportunity to make an enquiry on behalf of a friend, Flt Sgt N. 'Greg' Gregson, who flew with an Australian pilot, C J 'Joe' Merryfull on Special duties with 100 Group. A close friend of Joe was Bill Patterson who flew with 15 Sqn from Mildenhall. When Joe was taken off operational flying to develop his designs for an automated 'Window' dispensing machine, Greg lost touch with Bill and Joe was sadly killed during test flying his machine. Has anyone information on or contact details for Bill Paterson that can be passed to Greg?  
Sam Mealing-Mills.

2. I thought that I would write to you to introduce myself formally due to my absence from the reunion in May. I was proposed and elected to be the 622 Squadron historian, an honour that I will endeavour to fulfil. My interest in 622 Squadron originates from my Uncle, Flt Lt John Gray who flew with Sqn Ldr Richard Allen in 1944 and won the DFC for his actions over Stuttgart. Around four years ago I started to research his operational history as a means of replacing his lost logbook and through this avenue I have corresponded with veterans and families from all over the world. My intention is to preserve and perpetuate the memory of the Squadron and to act as a reference point for all things related to it. I am nearing the completion of the operational history in manuscript and am indebted to Martin Ford-Jones for his guidance with my book. Please would you forward any enquires for 622 Sqn information on to me, as I am sure I can answer the majority of requests.

#### **Howard Sandall**

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Enroute62@aol.com Tel 01529 241379

**Correspondence** - If you did send a letter and it has not appeared in this issue we would be very grateful if you would resend it to the new Secretary, Andrew Bridgwater, whose contact details are inside the back cover.

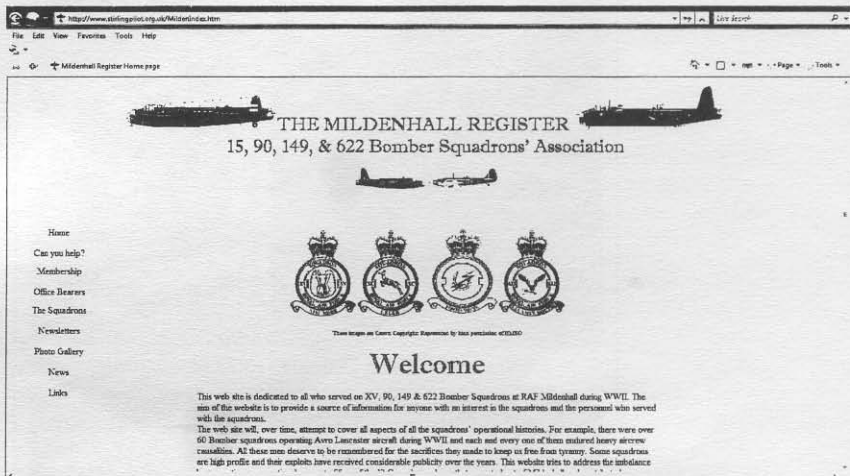
Your committee is very keen to develop the Register's Web Site. If you have photographs and stories that could be published on the web then please send them to the Vice Chairman whose contact details are also inside the back cover. He will handle all photographs and material with care and ensure that they are safely returned to you!

## Summary of AGM Minutes held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Full version may be viewed either at [www.mildenhallregister.stirlingpilot.org.uk](http://www.mildenhallregister.stirlingpilot.org.uk)  
or by requesting a copy from the Secretary)

1. In attendance the Committee plus 37 members and friends.
2. The Chairman welcomed everybody and gave a resume of the weekend's event. He had welcomed, on behalf of the Register, Colonel Eden Murrie, USAF the new Base Commander and Sqn Ldr Rick Fryer, RAF, the RAF Commander and wished them well.
3. The Officials gave their reports: The Secretary announced his retirement after 32 years, which the meeting reluctantly accepted. Tributes were paid to Don on behalf of the Register's members. The financial report may be found in the newsletter, the current balance is £4,984.78. The Accounts were accepted. Balance sheet is available from the Secretary.
4. Election of Officials to be as follows:
  - Chairman - Fred Coney
  - Vice- Chairman - John Gentleman
  - Hon Secretary - Andrew Bridgwater
  - Hon Treasurer - Smiley Mildwater
  - Committee - Jim Hammond, Douglas Kebbell,  
Geoff Reynolds
5. The meeting elected Mr Don Clarke MBE as Life President.
6. Mr Robert Oakley was appointed as Honorary Auditor.
7. Mr Howard Sandall co-opted to the committee as the Member responsible for writing the history of Six Two Two Squadron.
8. Votes of thanks given to:
  - Mr Don Clarke and his wife Winifred for their tremendous dedication and devotion to the Register over so many years.
  - Mr Dave Smedley for his help in producing the newsletter.
  - Col Eden Murrie USAF and her staff for entertaining the Register over the weekend at RAF Mildenhall and making its members so welcome.
  - Pat and Robin Tuck for their hard work and dedication to the memory of the Mundford crash crew. *(See newsletter)*
  - Fred Coney for his continuing work in running the register at the ripe old age of 91!
9. Message from OC 15 Sqn was read to members. *(See newsletter)*
10. The next reunion will be over the weekend of the 15/17 May 09.

# The Mildenhall Register now has its own web site!



Thanks to the help and huge efforts of Alan Fraser, whose Uncle, Flt Sgt Andrew Brown flew with 149 Sqn and was killed in action; we now have our own web site. Alan has not only developed the site but has generously agreed to host it, at no cost to the Register, on his own site - [www.stirlingpilot.org.uk](http://www.stirlingpilot.org.uk). This site is respectfully dedicated to the young men who flew and fought in the SHORT STIRLING Aircraft during World War Two and all their comrades, wherever they served. The Register's site may be directly viewed at [www.mildenhallregister.stirlingpilot.org.uk](http://www.mildenhallregister.stirlingpilot.org.uk). The site is in the early stages of development and is intended initially to publicise the working of the Register, detail the histories of the Squadrons and above all provide a point of contact for those who wish direction in tracing the contribution of relatives and friends to the war effort whilst serving on, and with, the four Squadrons. It is your, the members, site and the committee welcomes your suggestions as to what should be placed on the site together with any material that might be deemed suitable. E-mail contact details are available on the site, alternatively, you may contact the Vice Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer by other means (See Below).

## Mildenhall Register Officers:

### *President*

Mr Don Clarke MBE

### *Hon Chairman:*

Mr Fred A Coney  
14 Wells Court  
Mildenhall IP28 7BW

### *Hon Secretary:*

Mr Andrew Bridgewater  
6 Overlangs, Kingston  
Kingsbridge TQ7 4PF  
01548-811-200

### *Vice Chairman*

Sqn Ldr John Gentleman RAF (Rtd)  
29 Brinkley Road, Dullingham  
Newmarket CB8 9UW  
01638 -507-211

### *Hon Treasurer:*

Mr Smiley Mildwater  
33A Hardwicke Fields,  
Haddenham Ely CB6 3TW

### *Committee*

Mr Jim Hammond  
Mr Douglas Kebbell  
Mr Geoff Reynolds

## Photographs from recent reunion weekends

(Kindly supplied by Mrs Elisabeth Cox)



The crash site of Lancaster HK733 explained



After the service in Mundford Church



A chat in the grounds of the Bird in Hand