



Newsletter  
August 2014

# The Mildenhall Register

**15, 90, 149 and 622**

**Bomber Squadrons' Association  
supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Sqn  
and 218 (Gold Coast) Sqn**



**The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight,  
a Lancaster led by a Dakota  
and flanked by two Spitfires over the  
Commonwealth War Graves Commission  
Cemetery at Bayeux**

## Chairman's Remarks

Welcome to this special edition of the Mildenhall Register's newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading it. The reasons as to why we have this extra copy are explained more fully in the Secretary's report. As editor of the newsletter I have concentrated this edition on articles around three themes - this year's Reunion weekend, the format of future weekends and the D-Day 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations. I am grateful to all those who have contributed copy and apologise to those who have produced articles but have yet to see them published. Rest assured they will appear in the next edition. Please continue to send your stories and reminiscences to the Secretary for inclusion in future editions of the newsletter.

Many thought this year's reunion programme, devised by the committee, was one of the best so far and as the pictorial record in the centre pages show it covered a wider range of events. I am grateful to my committee for the support given in organising these. In particular my thanks to Clare More for organising the visit to the Stanford PTA, to Smiley and Cherry Mildwater for dealing with your applications for the weekend and for arranging the raffle and the picnic at Methwold Church, to Geoff and Debbie Reynolds for dealing with all the correspondence and to my wife Jill for organising the table decorations for the Saturday dinner and the floral arrangements in the Church and generally keeping me focussed on events!. Thanks are also due to Colin and Beryl Neville for their work in entertaining us so well at Methwold, not only this year but for the last 30, Geoff Denness and his son for parading the standards at the Church Service and to Rev Rosemary Rycott and her team at St John's Beck Row for allowing us to use the Church and entertaining us so royally in the Church Hall afterwards. Finally of course to Col Bibb and Team Mildenhall for allowing us once more to use their facilities, supporting us and entertaining us so very well.

The only disappointment at this year's reunion was the relatively low attendance. If the reunion is to continue in its present format more members need to attend to make the various events viable. **It is up to you.** Next year's reunion is planned for the 15 - 17 May, please make a note in your diary now and make a provisional hotel booking if required!

At the AGM, Geoff Reynolds, Smiley Midwater, Clare More and I were re-elected to the committee where we are supported by Martin Ford-Jones, Sam Mealing-Mills, Alan Fraser and Howard Sandall who as the Squadron Historians are ex-officio members of the committee. Regrettably since the AGM, Clare has resigned and I wish to formally record on your behalf, our thanks to her for all her work and assistance. The Historians provide tremendous help to the Register's members is helping with research and recently assisted members when obtaining the Bomber Command Clasp. The other three committee members carry out the administration, accounts, production and distribution of the newsletter and organisation of the reunion weekend. The Register's committee needs more support from

the younger members of the Register as Reunion weekends and newsletters do not just happen! A lot of work is involved and I feel the load should be spread more widely.

If you feel strongly about the Register continuing its reunions and with it the chance of meeting fellow members and remembering the sacrifices and duty shown by our veterans both past and present, your help is needed now. Please contact me if you feel able to assist in anyway.

Finally I wish to thank all of you for the generous contributions you have made to Register funds thereby enabling the Register to keep in contact with its members all over the world through the newsletter.

**John Gentleman, Chairman Mildenhall Register**

## **Secretary's Report**

A very warm 'hello' to you all for the second time this year! Just over 6 months have passed since our last issue, but it was felt we had to get some feedback from you, the members who make up this organisation you have called The Mildenhall Register. I'll therefore try to keep my secretary report short so that we can concentrate on the other important issue in more depth afterwards.

Just to say, that those who missed this year, probably missed one of the best in my memory. Starting with the base tour on the Friday, which many newer members found amazing and those of us who like being around big aircraft were equally impressed. The attendance was down for the Friday evening meal and AGM, but as John was heard to say throughout the weekend, it was a select, if small gathering, quality against quantity.

Clare's organised tour of the Army Training area was excellent and gave us a whistle stop tour of the world's battle zones and two of the beautiful but beleaguered churches that still remain from when the villages were closed and everyone moved out. We followed this with the visit to Methwold and this too turned into a bit of a celebration as it is thirty years since The Register first made its annual sojourn to this lovely old church which houses the 149 Squadron Roll of Honour and has a wonderful cut glass screen in front of the bell ringers chamber depicting the squadron.

Saturday evening's dinner was also light on numbers, but was very enjoyable none the less. With just seven veterans, who became very much the celebrities of the night, everyone had a lovely meal and chat with friends old and new. Alongside it ran another fine display of model aircraft from Bomber Command's past.

Finally, we again took the opportunity of holding our Sunday morning remembrance service in the little church at Beck Row, which is proving a firm favourite with attendees and the villagers alike.

As I announced at the AGM, The Register continues to grow in numbers despite the inevitable march of time that robs us of those who served and survived to be with us for so long. Current membership is over 550 following the inclusion of members of 218 Squadron Association who had expressed a wish to join us. The greatest number of new members besides this are the families of past squadron members who are researching or have researched the service lives of their relatives.

At a recent members funeral, I was discussing this with a member of the family and they were quite convinced that the erection of the Bomber Command memorial and the award of the Bomber Command clasp (although many years too late in virtually everyone's eyes) has been a great boost to the morale of the veterans and has finally removed the stigma that was wrongly heaped upon Bomber Command by those who chose to use the Command to greatly assist in gaining victory, but who, when the war was won, then turned their back on the leaders, the men and the actions that had won that victory for us.

The inclusion of the Commands actions and the war in general in the school curriculum has brought the deeds of their forebears to the notice of a much younger audience. This is witnessed by a recent enquiry from a woman whose relative had served during the war and whose daughter was now studying this at school. The enquiry was triggered by the youngster, rather than the mother.

Our excellent website, run by Alan Fraser; 149 Squadron and Stirling aircraft historian, is a great source of new members following up on their initial enquiries. Alan reports that we have thousands of new or unique hits (or looks) in a year. Not all come for membership, but what the website offers; for researchers, where to find facts and figures, how to continue research and get relatives records are all a source of information. Also on the internet is our Facebook page which has a small, but active group of followers and is slowly increasing its numbers.

Lastly, although it should be a major priority really, I must thank the other members of the committee and the historians who make my life easier by their help and support throughout the year. My thanks to our various partners who are always there to offer their support. Special thanks must go to John, who struggled on through his health problems last year to bring together another great reunion.

## **The Future of the Mildenhall Register**

So I come to this other pressing point which we'd like to discuss with you all. Hence the enclosed short questionnaire which we would be very grateful for as many returns as possible. Even if you live abroad, around the world and will never get to a reunion again, we'd

still like to hear your views. It is your organisation, so it is your views that are important to us.

I'm sure we all realise the frailty of the human form and have to accept that over time, what we could do 30 years (even ten years) ago is no longer possible. I'm also sure that this year's slump in numbers was not entirely due to lack of interest. We all have busy lives and it isn't always possible to get our plans to come together every year.

Of as great an influence on future events were the announcements that both John and Smiley wish to stand down at the next AGM. They have been such a backbone of The Register in recent years that their departures will be greatly missed.

I have just learned that the USAF at RAF Mildenhall plan at last 12 months ahead so for next year's reunion we are tied in to the same weekend, the third weekend in May. However, in future years we will be guided as to the date by your comments on the questionnaire. **We would appreciate your prompt responses** as we intend to hold a special committee meeting in early October.

I'd like to canvas support to keeping this 'thing', The Mildenhall Register going for as long as I can, but ultimately, how that happens and how we move forward will rest on your decisions. My reasons for wanting The Register to continue, have reunions and be a source for research, researchers and family members and a fount of gathered knowledge are summed up in my emotional outpourings that I delivered at the AGM.

Many of us know the story behind The Register's existence. As I see it, The Mildenhall Register was started by just one man, our founder Don Clarke, on a whim one day at an air show. It was meant to be a comrades or veterans association if you like, with a loose remit of the squadrons and their personnel from Mildenhall. The founding members were not as old as I am today in many cases and so I guess you could say it was more a comradeship thing at that time. It steadily expanded with the influx of other squadrons and folk with an interest in the aircraft, crews, and operations.

It has, over the years become what we would today call a veterans association and those early members grew old running it for their comrades. When the old order were sadly unable to continue the great and time consuming duty of running it, younger people like John and Smiley were literally roped in to take it on. With the help of Andrew initially and continuing with myself, it was carried forward and expanded to include family members (as its formative documents allow). These new members are mainly made up of the people who wanted to know what Dad, Granddad, Uncle Fred and Cousin Jimmy had done; but there are many supporters too.

These are now our bread and butter membership, but all the time we didn't and couldn't forget those whom it was set up for. The Veterans, our ancestors. Some of whom survived and could tell the tales we love to hear, others who weren't able to put their part in our history into words because what they witnessed was too terrible or they didn't think they had done anything special. And of course, those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and never returned. Their heroic deeds only paper records, but records no less and we now hold many of those records.

Our dedicated team of historians are always there to assist with any enquiry, to guide people through the channels and paperwork that are necessary to obtain the official records. Interpreting these, the historians can flesh out the detail and make history come to life for those who want to know. And who do they want to know about, it is those once young fellows who have grown to become known as veterans, the folk we are all here because of and whom The Mildenhall Register was initially set up for. It is sad, as the years pass, that the veteran membership and attendance is quietly diminishing, but until the time comes that we know non will attend and eventually the day comes when their will be non to receive the newsletters, but we, as custodians of this venture, have to continue.

Maybe in a new format, possibly reunions less often, maybe increasing the newsletter frequency (the stories are out there) but keeping the size more manageable. A greater use of technology, with the website and Facebook carrying more information out there across the world. We must retain our knowledge database and the ability to supply information and assistance to researchers from member's families.

We have to appeal to the younger family members; provide something that they would want to attend here at Mildenhall, be it on base with the continued support of the USAFE or at another venue. Maybe special celebrations at five yearly intervals on VE day for example (which incidentally would be the 70th anniversary next year on May 8th, a Friday) or VJ Day (whose 70th anniversary is September 2nd next year, but mid-week)

My personal view is that none of this should happen until a number of factors have been fulfilled.

1. No veterans can attend at Mildenhall.
2. No veterans are on our database.
3. The membership has again been consulted before both these events.
4. The family members, (who in some cases will also be reaching veteran status) are happy to attend such events en masse. It would be no point attempting such an undertaking without very good support.

We are entering a new phase of The Mildenhall Register, one of change, but one that I wish to support and continually develop in memory of our veterans. One of whom was my relative and never returned.

So what we need is to hear from you and we need your replies promptly so that we can formulate not just next year, but for the future.

It's your Register, tell us what you want!

Geoff Reynolds Secretary Mildenhall Register

## Memories of Mildenhall 2014

It was our first visit to Mildenhall and when we arrived on a warm sunny day in May one was immediately aware that one was at a place that was the scene of events that had been instrumental in creating the world that we all know today, for, it is not an exaggeration to say, that without Mildenhall and the other RAF stations situated along the Eastern fringe of England the Second World

War might well have been lost and rather than celebrating, as we did just a few days ago, the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy that lead to the liberation of France and the subsequent elimination of the Nazi tyranny from Europe we could well have been forced to celebrate the continuing presence on our continent of a regime whose brutality and wickedness seemed to know no limit and

which, as its architects projected, by eliminating all opposition, was designed to last for a thousand years.



John Brooke and his wife Sheena  
at the Reunion Dinner speaking with Howard Sandall

That Bomber Command was successful in performing its many missions was, of course, due entirely to the quality of the men and women who served within it and when we arrived at Mildenhall we were aware that these men and women had lived their sometimes very short lives at this place. The pub, the church and a good many of the other buildings remain essentially the same as they were during the 1940s and here also were lived the emotions that are impossible to understand from the perspective of today's relatively peaceful and stable world.

Essentially, we attended the reunion of the Mildenhall Register because my father had been the wireless operator in one of the Lancaster s of 622 Squadron based at Mildenhall during the Second World War. During the reunion by meeting some of the elderly veterans as well as the families of those who had served one became aware of how events of so long ago were still important and after departing from Mildenhall, and upon reflection, one realised how the importance of the Mildenhall Register lay far beyond the confines of the families whose dear ones had served there.

During the Second World War Britain was never invaded or occupied. Many lost their lives during the Blitz, but there are no sites, the reminders of war, to compare with those that cover mainland Europe: the vast cemeteries where lie the dead of two world wars, the sites of massacres and the concentration camps where can still be seen the instruments of mass murder. From a relatively early age, the children of France and other European countries are taken to these sites, for; with reason it is believed, that by being present at a place where events of enormous importance to humanity have taken place there is an impact on the emotions that can never be achieved by books or films. This impact, it is hoped, will aid this young generation to understand the consequences of war and hatred between men and thus be better equipped to take the necessary steps to avoid such a catastrophe in the future.

In the setting of the United Kingdom the Mildenhall Register has a unique capacity to perform the same role as do these many sites in Europe. But the Mildenhall Register can go much further, because there are elements related to Mildenhall and the other Bomber bases that are unique because they relate to the understanding of our capacity to carry out our duties and obligations as human beings whether or not we are at war.

As we all know the risks to those who served in Bomber Command were enormous.

Churchill, with his natural eloquence described so well the situation of those who served at Mildenhall and the other stations of Bomber Command when he wrote:

"Night after night, undeterred by the fury of guns and new inventions of death they battled their way across Europe and paid a terrible price."

For me, a doctor of many years standing who has treated with great regularity the stresses of daily life, it is difficult to understand how the crews of Bomber Command withstood the repeated and exceptional stresses of the situations that they faced each night. Perhaps the only word that describes this capacity is the word courage. Courage in the context of a life that was so uncertain that one could not assume to meet ones friends for a pint at the "Bird in the Hand" (the pub adjacent to RAF Mildenhall) the following day and let us remember that all these brave men were volunteers who were not ignorant of the risk.

It is not the mechanical relics of war that make the Mildenhall so precious, it is to remember that here, at this place, through determination, courage and teamwork, men working against enormous odds achieved their objectives.

This is a message that can benefit all humanity and the Mildenhall Register has the capacity to deliver this message by providing as it does so well a historical perspective of all the squadrons that served at Mildenhall and an understanding of the exceptional difficulties that they faced.

I would propose that The Minister of Education should be informed of how the Mildenhall Register could be used to inform the younger generation of this essential part of their history and that in the future Mildenhall like so many places in continental Europe might become a site visited by schools and colleges.

John Brooke Nice, France 22<sup>ND</sup> June 2014

## From Margaret Still, Secretary of the Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron as written for their newsletter.

Unfortunately there were only 6 of us representing the Friends of 75 NZ Squadron at the Mildenhall Register. The numbers are going down but hopefully next year we can have at least 20 attending. The Mildenhall Register really put a lot of effort into this dinner and it was lovely when John Gentleman introduced each table, I knew a few people and went and spoke to them, it was a very friendly and enjoyable night, so next year let's beat the other Squadrons with us all attending.



Margaret & Roly Still entering St Johns Beck Row for the Reunion Service

### The Bomber Command Clasp

I am very pleased to report that family members are beginning to receive their relative's clasps at long last. If anyone still has not applied for their relatives clasp and would like details of how to and where to claim, then contact me at the usual addresses and I will assist in any way I can.

Geoff Reynolds, Secretary Mildenhall Register

# 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Several of our members visited France either just before or during the D-Day 70<sup>th</sup> commemorations in Northern France. There follows their individual stories of their experiences

## John Brooke's account of the D-day commemorations

We arrived at the small airport of Caen (Carpquet) on the sunny morning of 5<sup>th</sup> June. The airport is set in the lush green Normandy countryside. Beautiful flowers greet you at the entry and as one would expect at this time of remembrance and emotion that will bring together the heads of so many states, there is an impressive police and military presence. Our first stop is the town hall of Caen, a town that has been recreated since its total destruction during the battle of Normandy that followed the D-Day landings. Two thousand of Caen's civil population died during the battle that the allies fought to gain control of this town during the summer of 1944.

The stone used in the reconstruction of Caen blends naturally with the luminosity of the region and as one walked towards the elegant building that is the town hall, between borders of flowers in their full freshness of early summer, the calm of the place seemed to extinguish the capacity to recall the image of total destruction of seventy years before that we had seen in the documents of that time.

Once in the town hall we were directed to the office of the British Ministry of Defence.

With a father who, In June 1944 had taken part in Operations Neptune and Overlord and the Battle of



Crew of Lancaster W4158 June 1944

I to r: Hillford, Joy, Guilt, Dawkins, Andrewes, Struthers, Brooke

Normandy in the Lancaster W4158 of 622 Squadron RAF we were entitled to attend some of the official events of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

We were issued with identifying badges that were hung round our necks and a large sticker for our hired car. This sticker was essential as most of the road system of this part of Normandy was closed to the public on 6<sup>th</sup> June.

On the afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> June we travelled the dozen or so kilometers to Ouistreham, a small town set just behind the wide sandy beach that was given the code name "sword" for those who landed there at dawn on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944. For us, it was a personal pilgrimage as we thought of the crew of Lancaster W4158 and all the aircraft and crews of 622 Squadron RAF, who, on the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> June 1944, took off from Mildenhall, with for their mission, the destruction of the enemy defenses behind "Sword" beach.

The Lancaster W4158 returned to Mildenhall at 03h30 on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> June. The bombardment by the Lancasters having terminated, the Cruisers of the Royal Navy continued to target the shore defenses with their large guns until just before the landing craft full of troops arrived with the first light of dawn.

We visited one of the German fortifications at Ouistreham that is now a museum. This particular battery did not appear to have been significantly damaged either by the bombardment of the Lancasters or the guns of the Royal Navy and many of the troops landing on "Sword" beach must have perished because the deadly fire from this position was able to continue. One believes that other gun emplacements near Ouistreham were destroyed, but we have no details.

On Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June we awoke ready to start the day at 06h30. At that hour seventy years ago many of the troops in their landing craft would have either just landed or be about to land on the beaches just a short distance from where we were staying.

Certainly proximity to the place where one of the great events of world history had taken place made one feel almost implicated in the event and the certitude that already by this early hour 70



Two young airmen of the RAAF both 20 years old lie side by side in the cemetery at Bayeux  
"Together they fought together they died"  
is written on the tombstone

years ago there would be many thousands of young men lying dead on the beaches where we had walked so peacefully the evening before overwhelmed all other thoughts, particularly as it was such a beautiful morning with the sun rising into a cloudless blue June sky.

After breakfast we were en route for The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Bayeux, Cemetery where lie the British and many of the allied soldiers, sailors and airmen who died during the D-Day landings and the Battle of Normandy that followed. A journey that should have taken less than half an hour ended up taking more than three times as long to accomplish. Even with our sticker that gave us authority to drive on the roads of Normandy that day, there were roads that were closed to all except the convoys of the many heads of state. But by taking the small country roads we appreciated the countryside and also the difficulties encountered by the allied troops 70 years ago. Much of the low lying land had been purposely flooded before the paratroopers jumped and the small fields of the region, partitioned by high banks with a thick hedge on top rendered the landing of thousands of gliders almost impossible even before the fields themselves had been filled with anti-glider obstacles.

Finally we arrived at Bayeux where we walked to the Cemetery along narrow streets lined by the population of this small town. The Veterans, all who had taken part in the D-Day Landings and the Battle of Normandy, now in their nineties, were for the main part in wheelchairs pushed by their carers but some walked the kilometer or so between the cathedral and cemetery unaided and were clapped all the way for their effort but mainly of course for what they had done 70 years

before, for, it was much appreciated and remembered that their determination and courage had contributed to the liberation of France and helped to bring to an end a terrible war.

Initially, one felt rather uncomfortable being in a group that was being clapped, knowing that one had done nothing to deserve such applause. But looking around it became clear that we, the relatively young relations of those that had fought in 1944, represented the majority of the group that was making its way to the cemetery. The crew of Lancaster W4158 could not be present but we were proud to be there on their behalf seventy years later.



The Queen lays a wreath  
at the Commonwealth Cemetery Bayeux

We continued to the Cemetery on the higher ground of Bayeux seated near the white stone monument in the midst of the thousands of identical gravestones perfectly aligned and impeccably maintained. Before each grave were small, sometimes almost inconspicuous

flowers, and as happens in the month of June, all of nature, the trees, the hedges and the freshly cut grass were at their best.

Her Majesty the Queen arrived clad in light green with Prince Philip. Prince Charles and the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and France came shortly afterwards. The service was beautifully conducted but the emotions that rose up evoked by the poetry that was read and the thought of the event that we were remembering, the loss of so many thousands of young lives, was so overwhelming that it was sometimes difficult to sing the hymns. Her Majesty the Queen laid the first wreath followed by the other dignitaries and at the end all present circulated and spoke freely. The emotions were eased as the remaining airworthy Lancaster from RAF Scampton flew above our heads accompanied by a Dakota and two Spitfires who returned some time later to demonstrate their amazing agility.

On the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> June we attended another service at Arromanches. It was here that was constructed the artificial port that enable the off-loading of heavy equipment and supplies during the period before the ports of Cherbourg and Le Havre had been liberated. At the service Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge were accompanied by the French Ministre de l'Intérieure and the Mayor of Arromanches.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with the French Ministre De l'Intérieur to the left of the Duchess with the Mayor of Arromanches

By good fortune, at Arromanches we met the treasurer of the Mildenhall Register,

Smiley Mildwater with his wife Cherry and their family. We remained with them for the rest of the evening and together we all watched an impressive firework display at the conclusion of a very memorable day.

The next day, all the roads that had been closed on 6<sup>th</sup> June were reopened, but as the population of Normandy was double its normal, there were significant traffic jams. We returned to Bayeux and took the chance to look at the Bayeux Tapestry that depicts the



**The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with the French Ministre De l'Intérieur to the left of the Duchess with the Mayor of Arromanches**

# Friday's Events the Base Visit & AGM

A briefing from Air Traffic Control inside the Mildenhall Tower



The party is briefed on the capabilities of the KC-135



# Friday's Events the Base Visit & AGM



Vets Francis Hogan (left) & Tom Payne in the Aircrew bar of Middleton Hall with Alan Fraser, John Gentleman & a visiting American guest



Val Davies shares her "won" bottle of wine with husband Mike & Debbie Reynolds

# Saturday Activities



Inside the WestToff's Church in the Stanford  
TA



Register members at Methwold Church  
discussing the exhibition

## Saturday Activities

Gp Capt Paul Nicholas & his Wife Sarah with Geoff Reynolds & Terry Moore



Clare More sits between our friends from Methwold Colin & Beryl Neville

# Scenes at Beck Row Church

The Standards are marched into  
St Johns Beck Row



People visit the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at St Johns Beck Row after the Thanksgiving Service



# Scenes at Beck Row Church



John Brooke's article continued...

Normandy landings in reverse; the departure from Normandy to England by William, Prince of Normandy and his subsequent victory over Harold in 1066.

In the afternoon of 7<sup>th</sup> June, again in bright sunshine, from the cliff-tops near Arromanches we watched an aerobatic display by the Patrouille de France, the equivalent of the Red Arrows and in the evening attended with many thousands of others the picnic that had been organized on Omaha Beach, a stretch of sandy beach several kilometres long where the American forces lost many thousands of their troops on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.

On our last day we visited the Caen Memorial, an enormous museum dedicated to peace, but which is an exceptional archive of the battle of Normandy. In the grounds of the memorial is the British Garden and within this beautiful and peaceful place, is placed the memorial to the allied airmen who lost their lives in the D-Day Landings and the battle of Normandy.

It was fitting that on the last evening of our visit we read these words that explained so well the reason why we had come.

Here are honoured the airmen of the Royal Air Force, the Commonwealth and other Allied Air Forces serving under RAF Command, who contributed to the success of the Normandy invasion of 1944. Many of them gave their lives.

A hundred bomber and fighter squadrons of the Second Tactical Air Force, together with many squadrons from bomber Command, helped with the battle for air supremacy, prepared the way for the assault, and flew in direct support of the land forces. Transport aircraft delivered the airborne forces and assisted the Free French, aerial reconnaissance provided essential information, deception operations misled the enemy, maritime aircraft helped the Royal Navy hold the ring, and the home bases were defended. On the ground, making these operations possible, were countless airmen, airwomen and civilians, all adding their contributions to the Allied Victory.

**In Memoriam**

*Plaque on the Monument commemorating the airmen  
who fought in the Battle of Normandy in 1944  
British Garden, Memorial de Caen, France*



Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip speak to Veterans after the service in Bayeux Cemetery



Prince Charles speaks to a Veteran in wheelchair

## Geoff Reynolds' story - 70 Years to the Day

With everything else that was going on to remember the other great 70<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, my little trip was more like a drop in the ocean. However, it would mean so much to me and my brother. We would represent our Dad (soon to be 92) at the crash-site, memorial and grave of our Uncle, his adopted brother.

Sgt Raymond Geoffrey (Geoff to everyone) Norris perished along with all the crew of Lancaster LM121 C-Charlie of XV Squadron when they were intercepted by a night fighter near Meru on the Trappes railway marshalling yards raid on the night of 31<sup>st</sup> May/1<sup>st</sup> June 1944.

My brother, along with Mum and Dad had been the first members of the family to visit the CWGC in Beauvais where he and the crew were eventually buried when they took a trip to Paris in 1985. At that time, I hadn't done any research into Geoff's life and it would be almost 15 years before I had the time and resources to start what became an amazing journey.

Not only was I able to research his private, early life before he was taken in by my grandparents, but I had Dad's help in his later life. Martyn Ford-Jones then helped me delve into his service life. From there, I was able to discover who had shot them down, where they had crashed and ultimately find the crash site.

By pure chance, in the little village cemetery of Lormaison, just a few hundred yards from where the aircraft had impacted the ground, I found a grave of the landowner mentioned in the records I'd been using. A very kind old lady listened as I explained in very halting schoolboy French why I was looking for information. She indicated that the family were still alive in the village and that I was to meet with them. With her as my guide we made our way to a farm house where M. Postolle told of watching the aircraft shot-down and witnessing the fiery end in his father's field when he was seven years old. Other family members joined us and it was decided that the village should erect a memorial to what they saw as 'their' Lancaster.

I was then given the task of locating all the crew relatives as the family wanted to make this all happen the very next year! Much luck and some skill enabled me to locate most of the relatives and all were invited to join us in France for 1st June 2003. A number of factors influenced this date, not least the impending death from cancer of M. Doutreleau, a prime mover on the French organising committee. The other was it would be a weekend and a French Bank holiday to boot.

It was absolutely amazing to have the family members and his former girl-friend together in a hotel the night before the ceremony. They all got on like a house on fire and I was moved to ponder that if the family members could get on this well, what would the bond between the crew have been like? They would have trained together for months and become a tight knit group, relying on each other and their training to get them through. I think I could begin to imagine, just watching and listening to the conversations.

Since that day, my wife and I have been back on a number of occasions, once as the guests of the Magnier family who have been so helpful with everything over the intervening years.

So it was decided that with the date falling at a weekend again and it being the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the loss we should make another trip of remembrance. It would be the first time my brother had been back since that first trip in 1985. He had never seen the crash-site or the wonderful memorial stone in the village cemetery and so we set about a plan.

We wanted to leave the UK at about the time that the crew were leaving Mildenhall on the original fateful night. Also, although we couldn't make the whole trip in the exact time, we would be able to get from Calais to Lormaison in a similar time to that taken by the crew from Mildenhall to their eventual deaths in a field nearby. We then had to return as my brother works and needed to get back home to Gloucester for some sleep before work on Monday.

The closest to 23.54 (the crew's take-off time) that we could get a ferry was 23.15, so we took that. It meant that, on corrected time when we arrived in Calais the crew would have been dead in a French field.

Arriving in France we found somewhere to park up and grab some sleep. (Already we had both been on the go for some 15 hours). It is amazing how adrenalin and the noise of many chiller lorries' compressors thumping away keeps the much needed sleep from coming! Although apparently it was my snoring that stopped brother from sleeping! And we could still see Dover across the Channel!

As dawn began to break we set off in the hopes of finding a decent breakfast and we both knew that would get us through the day. We made good time and stopped at the lovely Baie de Somme services for a welcome meal. Then it was back on the road for the remainder of the trip to Beauvais and the graves that are so well maintained by the CWGC and the French people.



**Geoff & his brother John stand between the Crew's graves in the CWGC section of Marlsell French national Cemetery Beauvais**

As you can see in the photograph above, there are ten headstones and due to an administrative error, the crew are split up. On the left, just visible behind the tree is the grave of Flt Sgt Frank Reid, the tail-gunner on Geoff's crew from Australia. To the right are the three headstones, containing the six names of a 622 Squadron aircraft (ND926) that was shot down by the same German pilot, just minutes before he pounced on Geoff's. Their tail-gunner was the only survivor when the aircraft exploded mid-air. The next three stones are those of Sgt Len Gearing, the Flight Engineer also from UK, then Flt Sgt Laurence Jamieson, bomb-aimer from New Zealand and Flt Sgt Steve Long, navigator from Australia. On the left My brother and I stand flanking Flt Sgt Stan Nystrom's stone. He was their MUG, also from Australia, as was Plt Off Peter D'Ombrain the Pilot whose stone is to my left, right next to the tree. Almost hidden beyond the tree is Sgt R Geoff Norris the crew W/O.



**Geoff & John beside their Uncle's stone**

Having left our thoughts in the cemetery memorial book, we set off for Lormaison. As it was on the way, I just had to stop outside Beauvais and show my brother the amazing memorial to the crash of the R101 airship. I'd found this by accident some years before, but thought it was something he shouldn't miss.

The experimental airship crashed just outside the city on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1930 on her maiden voyage. The death toll was 48 of the 54 souls on board and it effectively brought to an end British airship development.

Arriving at the motorway (A16) bridge from where I had originally taken a 360° degree photograph in the hopes I'd captured the crash-site, I was surprised at how high the trees now were! It was impossible to see the impact point from here now and so we drove closer to the village and parked illegally down a motorway service road to take this picture. The impact point was towards the tree line above the poppy in the foreground.



From here, it was a few minutes drive to village cemetery. Uncannily, as we entered through the gate and began to walk towards the memorial, the village church clock began to strike 11 o'clock.

An already emotional moment was made even more so by this unintentional coincidence and we both paused for a moment as we listened to the soulful sound drift over the quiet graveyard.

I set up the camera on the tripod and we prepared to lay the poppy cross and individual wooden crosses before the magnificent roses that have grown so well since we planted them 6 years ago. The four golden ones, representing the four Australians have definitely done the best, but the two red for Britain and one (almost) black for New Zealand have played their small part in what was a beautiful display. They almost completely cover the black granite memorial stone, but enhance the appearance when you realise the significance of the colours and the numbers.

The final picture show the memorial stone and a close up of the names.

Just as we were preparing to leave, a familiar face (to me) came through the cemetery gates. M. Christian Vansteene, a member of the French Veterans Association in Lormaison came to meet us as he'd noticed the English registration on the car and wondered who could be there. We both reminisced about the original ceremony and the sad loss of M. Doutreleau since. We asked that he make our sincere apologies for not being able to stay longer and to pass our grateful thanks to those who were looking after the memorial and flowers so well.

John and I then drove back to Beauvais for a hasty meal before returning to the ferry at Calais. We arrived back in Dover at 18.00, still only having had a few hours sleep, but it had been well worth all the deprivations. John's comment to me a week later when we met up again was that it was like having his own personal tour guide. I think he politely meant I talked too much!



## A letter from Sue Bridgwater tells her tale.

Dear Friends

Some of you will know that my non-attendance at Mildenhall this year was due to my wish to carry out the plan Andrew and I had made to go to the Cemetery at Pont-du-Cens, Nantes, and the crash site at Ville-au-Denis to commemorate this anniversary. Thankfully my son

Martin came with me, I was glad of his support on a very emotional day; May 8th was Andrew's birthday as well as VE day and the anniversary of the loss of the air crew.

For this special day we placed a pot of flowers on each crewman's grave along with a BL Poppy Cross. The gentleman who owned the flower-shop across the way from the cemetery kindly lent Martin his (squeaky) wheelbarrow to transport the flowers. We took a further plant to Ville-au-Denis to place by the village memorial.

As it was VE day, the municipality had placed a tribute wreath for all the fallen in the War Graves section at Pont-du-Sens; and we were very touched to note that the small informal memorial in the village was also tributed, by the Mairie of Bougenais and by the villagers.



Sue's son Martin photographs the graves of members of her Uncle Jim's crew at Pont-du-Cens

Hoping to be with you all next year at Mildenhall - all the very best.

Sue joined the Mildenhall Register after researching the war service of her Uncle, Jim Adams, and learning that it was from RAF Mildenhall that 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 are:

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.

## Next Year's Reunion

Planned for weekend 15 -17 May

Reserve the date now! If accommodation is required try contacting:

The Bird In Hand- on the doorstep	01638-713247
The Riverside Mildenhall - one mile away	01638-717274
The Olde Bull Barton Mills - two miles away	01638-711001
The Travel Lodge Barton Mills - two miles away	0871-984-6006
There are other private B & Bs around -	search on Google!

# Treasuer Smiley Mildwater's Normandy 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Thanks to the hospitality of our daughter, Sharon, and her family who invited Cherry and myself to join them for a week during their holiday in Normandy, we were able to lay the 149 Squadron wreaths ourselves (normally Sharon and co are more than happy to lay them on your behalf).

The 6<sup>th</sup> June dawned sunny and warm so, bright eyed, bushy tailed and posh frocked, we all hot footed it to Baudre Churchyard to lay the first 149 Sqn wreath only to find the villagers had beaten us to it. The lovely thing about the Allied war graves in local cemeteries is that they are regarded as 'our boys' and kept in spick and span condition with all due respects being paid.



Baudre Churchyard

This is the collective grave of Sqn Ldr Hutchins and crew of Stirling III LK 385 QJ-C. Departed RAF Methwold 2228hrs 5<sup>th</sup> June 1944 on an Operation Titanic Special Duties mission in tactical support of the D-Day landings. Crashed Baudre 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.



The CWGC War Cemetery

Then it was off to the CWGC War Cemetery at St. Manvieu, Cheux to pay our respects and lay the 2<sup>nd</sup> 149 sqn wreath on the graves of Pilot Officer Mayo and the crew of 149 Squadron Stirling III LJ 621 QJ-M. Departed RAF Methwold 2209hrs 5<sup>th</sup> June 1944 on an Operation Titanic Special Duties mission in tactical support of the D-Day landings. Crashed Marcelett 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.



The British Cemetery at Bayeux

After the lockdown of the beach areas had been lifted we finally made it to the British Cemetery at Bayeux where we laid a wreath on the altar on behalf of the Mildenhall Register.

Then it was off to Arromanche for a well earned beer and firework display.

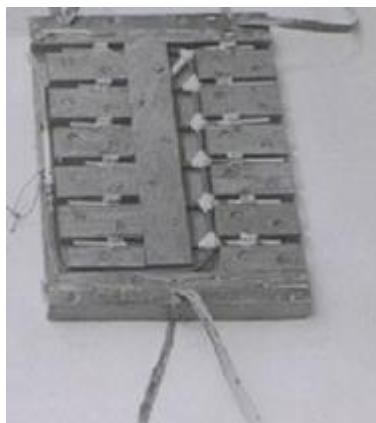
There now follows a couple of articles which give an insight into what the Register's squadrons were doing in the build up to D-Day

## Operation Titanic

Operation Titanic was one of a series of Operations carried out by the RAF as part of their contribution to D-Day. It was carried out on the 5-6 June 1944 by the Royal Air Force and the Special Air Service. They tried to confuse the German forces by dropping 500 dummy parachutists in places designed to deceive the defenders into believing that a large force had landed, drawing their troops away from the beachheads.

Operations Glimmer and Taxable, executed by No. 218 Squadron and No. 617 Squadron, and radar deceptions by No. 101 and No. 214 squadrons were also used as diversions.

For Operation Titanic, the Royal Air Force provided four squadrons from No. 3 Group RAF. The special duties squadrons, No. 138 and 161 were joined by two other squadrons No. 90 and No. 149. The mission for 149 was to drop dummy parachutists which contained rifle fire simulators, Window and an explosive charge.



Para-dummies, (nicknamed Ruperts) were actually nothing more than a few cloth or burlap bags, connected in a cross like shape, to give the appearance of a human figure, and attached to parachutes. To help the deception, they were equipped with rifle fire simulators.

Titanic I was the simulated drop of an airborne division north of the Seine River. On these four drop zones 200 dummies and two SAS teams were parachuted in. Titanic II was cancelled just before 6 June.

Titanic III was the dropping of 50 dummy parachutists in the Calvados region near Maltot and the woods to the north of Baron-sur-Odon to draw German reserves away to the west of Caen.

Titanic IV was the dropping of 200 dummies near Marigny in the Manche. Two SAS teams were also dropped near Saint-Lô.

Operation Titanic, from 149 Squadron's viewpoint was a "Special Operation" in support of the invasion. Along with 90, 138 and 161 squadrons they provided a series of diversionary raids on this day by dropping one-third scale dummy paratroopers with scaled down parachutes. 149's

aircraft were assigned to Titanic III, the area south-west of Caen, where 50 dummies were dropped in support of a genuine drop from the 6th Airborne Division, giving the impression of much larger forces. This succeeded in drawing large forces away from the invasion beaches and saved many lives. Sadly two 149 Stirling aircraft and their crews were lost during the Titanic III operation in the Calvados region and eight of the twelve SAS were killed in action or taken prisoner.

One of these 149 Squadron aircraft was a Stirling III, serial number LK385 coded OJ-C, it took off from RAF Methwold at 22.25 and failed to return. The crew for this trip were:

Sqn Ldr C J K Hutchins	Pilot
Fg Off J B Hornby	Navigator
Flt Sgt H R Wincett	Air Bomber
Flt Sgt W McCoy	Flt Engineer
W.O W Hannaford	W/Operator
Sgt A H Browne	Rear Gunner

And, unusually, two ancillary crew,

Sgt F W Bellamy	2nd W/Operator
Sgt R H S Hart	2nd Nav

Both the above were from the No 3 Group Aircrew School at RAF Methwold and were only on this trip as "Extras" as were Flt Sgt J MacFarlane and Sgt F C Heal.

The other crew were in Stirling LJ621 coded OJ-M. They were:

Plt.Off. W H Mayo	Pilot
W.O. C G C Holmes	W/Operator
Flt Sgt J MacFarlane	2nd Pilot (ancillary)
Flt Sgt H F Munday RAAF	Air Bomber
Flt Sgt R Parker	Navigator
Sgt H J Mather	Flt Engineer
Sgt T C Heal	2nd Navigator (ancillary)

Alan Fraser 149 (East India) Squadron Historian

## XC Squadron, D-Day and the Lancaster Debut.

From the early Spring of 1944, XC Squadron had been operating its Stirling aircraft in two roles, those of mining the waters of the European coast and dropping supplies to the allied operatives in occupied France, or 'Special Duties'.

These types of operation were extremely important in the build up to the opening of the Second Front; destroying enemy war materials and hampering his movements. They were also carried out at quite a low level well-suited to the Stirling Mk. III operated by the Squadron, which could only reach a limited altitude.

A change was coming and in May 1944 XC Squadron pilots began flying operations on 622 & XV Squadron Lancasters as second pilots. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1944 the Squadron Operational Records Book (ORB) recorded: 'The Squadron to-day commenced to convert and re-arm with Lancaster I/III Aircraft. Reestablishment was authorised w.e.f. [with effect from] 15.5.44'

The conversion to the new type was not a quick business. On various occasions Lancasters are listed in the ORB for May and June as being detailed for training sorties, but withdrawn or cancelled with no reason given. Squadron pilots continued to train with squadrons at Mildenhall.

While the Lancaster enjoyed a good reputation, its arrival was not absolutely welcomed by aircrews. Jim Coman D.F.C. was a wireless operator at that time, serving a second tour: "It got round to just before D-Day - everybody knew something was in the wind - and we went over to Mildenhall to convert onto Lancasters... Lancasters were alright, but they were not comfortable. They were really very small inside; it was a struggle to get past the mid-upper turret and then you had to climb over the main spar. The front face of the main spar was the back of the wireless operator's seat. It was not as comfortable as a Stirling. It was very tight and very, very small compared to a Stirling."

On the last day of May, the Squadron made its first operational sorties with the Lancasters. The ORB records: 'Three Lancaster aircraft were engaged in Air Sea Rescue searches...No sightings were made by any of these crews.'

On the night of 5<sup>th</sup> June events were gathering pace, again the ORB provides contemporary narration: "4 Lancaster and 15 Stirling Aircraft were detailed and prepared for operations in connection with the invasion of France. The 4 Lancasters were withdrawn before take-off but the 15 Stirlings carried out their operations successfully.'

'Special Duties' and mine-laying were to remain the Squadron's contribution until 10<sup>th</sup> June, when 7 Lancasters were on the Battle Order to attack a railway target at Dreux.

Smoke obscured the target and five aircraft bombed on target indicators. Luftwaffe night fighters were encountered in some force at Dreux and the remaining two aircraft failed to return to Tuddenham. F/Lt Thatcher and his six crew were killed, so too was P/O Burnett RAAF and 2 of his crew. Three others evaded capture and one was taken p.o.w.

These two aircraft were the first of 25 Lancasters posted missing from the Squadron during the war. One of them, NE149, had flown 31 hours and in that time made three firsts with XC Squadron: flying the first sorties (the Air Sea Rescue in May), flying on the first operation and failing to return. It was a difficult start, but the Squadron would use the new type tactically and strategically in the coming campaigns, and achieve good results in the attacks on transport, oil and V weapon sites in particular.



**Monument in the British Garden of the Memorial  
de Caen, France in honour of the Airmen who  
fought at the Battle of Normandy in 1944**