



Confound & Destroy

The magazine of RAF 100 Group Association

SUMMER
2021



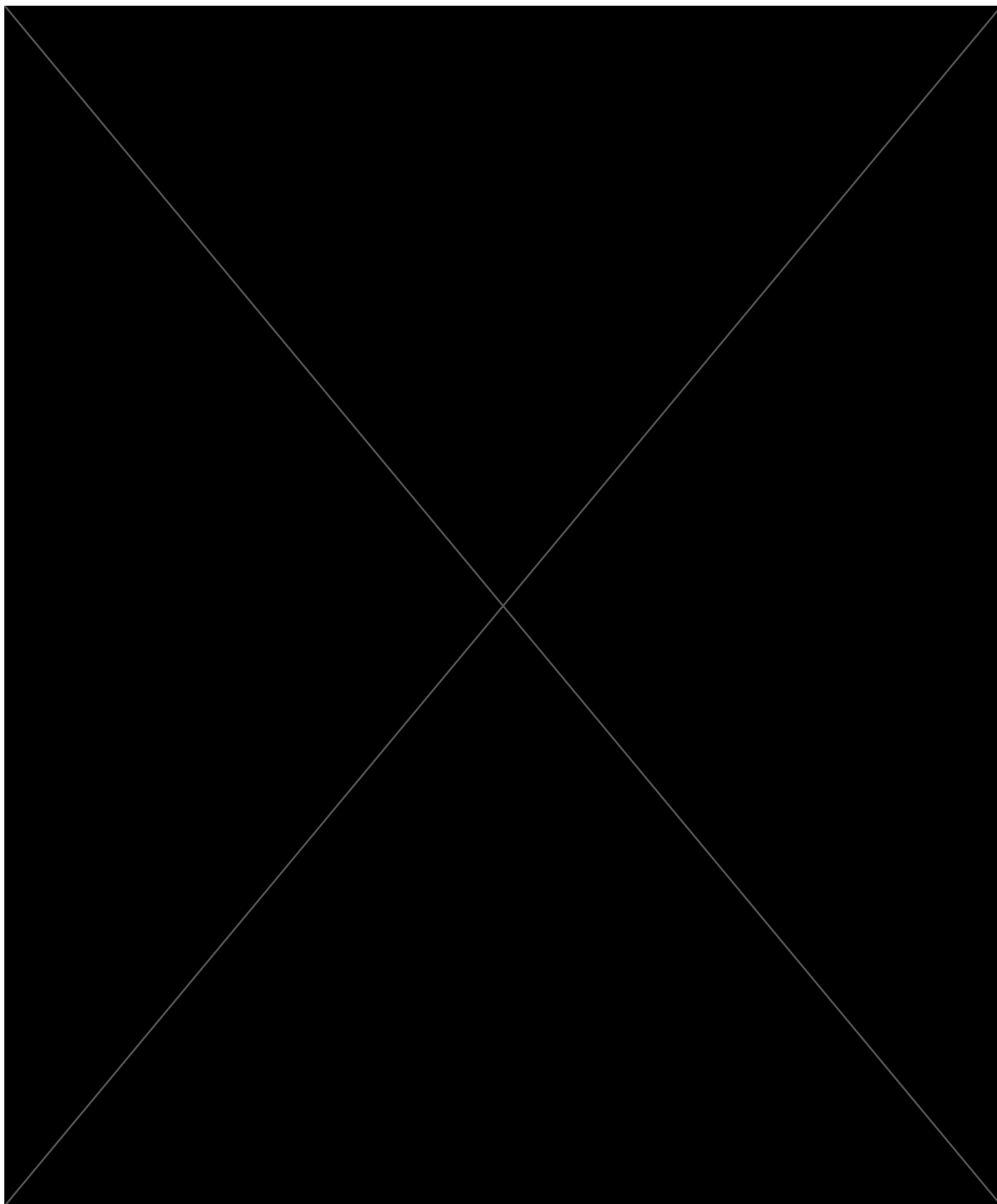
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RAF 100 Group Association Committee



OUR PRESIDENTS PAGE

Hello Everyone

Hope this letter finds you all safe and well. We have all encountered a most traumatic and life changing past 15 months or so, and now we must prepare ourselves for major changes and a 'new normal' way of life as we know it.

Speaking of changes, we as a group, are losing our lifelong Secretary Janine Harrington who is stepping down from her position as Secretary. It is difficult to put into words our thanks for all the work she has undergone as Secretary. How she manages to gather so much interesting and relevant information, and keeping all the members of 100 Group in touch with stories from around the world I don't know! We are going to miss her input, friendship, knowledge, creativity, keeper of the 'Kindred Spirits', and everything else that she does.

I can only wish her the fondest farewell, but know that we will keep in touch. Hopefully Janine will have all the help, support and love that she needs to help her through her illness.

From us all a huge **"thank you"**!

We in 100 Group, also appreciate the input that Stuart Borlase has made in supporting Janine in compiling our Magazine these past few months, and sincerely hope that he continues to do so.

Finally, it only leaves me to say to you all, **"take care, stay safe and help to keep RAF 100 Group alive"**.

Phil James

**Philip James MBE
President 100 Group**



RETIRING EDITORS PAGE



Dearest Kindred Spirits,

Whoever you are, wherever you live in the world, please know you are precious to me. My feelings on receiving a card, an email, a letter, a gift, a bouquet of flowers is beyond words. And when I say I am retiring from the Association Committee, it is with the deepest sadness and regret. Please know that I am still happy to maintain contact and stay in touch.

My passion for RAF 100 Group Veterans and their families will never die. It lives on in my writings, and in memories of times shared. I shall never forget the joy and sparkle in my mother's eyes as she received her first phone calls and letters from people her wartime fiancé Vic Vinnell served with under 192 Squadron ... firm friendships which have built through the years. The Association wasn't yet formed when we first made contact with Len & Evelyn Bartram and Martin Staunton with sister Eileen. Yet they worked miracles in reaching out and putting us in touch with people who, throughout their lives, remained Kindred Spirits, sharing their knowledge and experience, and times shared with Vic and Jack Fisher, his pilot. There were those who recalled them leaving for their final fatal flight on 26/27 November 1944 in Mosquito DK292 never to be heard of again. Only in recent times was I sent a document from a Dutch contact - a Report written in 1946, by a Flying Officer tasked with finding out what happened to them. Therein were the answers we sought. Sadly, Mum died of Cancer in 1996. But I like to think of her and Vic now, reunited and at peace.



There have been many such stories, and ways in which the Association has enabled people to find truths about what became of loved ones. I send a heartfelt thanks to Phil James MBE. His first letter to Mum remains a treasure. God Bless, Phil, for all your help, support and strength through the years and that special connection we continue to share today xx

For me now, Life is about Endings and Beginnings. Due to severe stress and its effect on my terminal Cancer and Chronic Exhaustion, I feel I have no option but to resign from the Committee. Stress has triggered Meniere's Disease, causing vicious attacks whereby I lose both my hearing and balance, with sickness and a head filled with cotton wool making it impossible to think or do. However, I offer the reassurance that it does not mean I am walking away from you, my Kindred Spirit family. Far from it! You remain far too precious. Firm friendships have been forged over the past 27 years, throughout my involvement with the Association. I value those friendships too much to let you down. So, I am still here if you want to write and make contact, especially those of you already doing so, sharing everyday lives. I am resigning from the Association Committee from 1st June this year but remain as ever delighted to hear from you ... whoever you are, no matter where you live in the world. I can no longer organise Reunions and all that entails, nor continue in any of the many other roles I have had in the

past. But I continue to treasure the many coloured threads of friendship we share which creates a rich tapestry made up over many years by Kindred Spirits.

You will always have that special place in my heart. I remain as ever a firm friend, someone who will respond to your letters, and keep in touch.

Sadly, we need to say a fond farewell to more of our Kindred Spirits:

- **Cyril Piper** who took his Final Flight at the end of last year, 2020. Known as 'Pip', he served with Sid Pike in F/Lt Don Austin's crew in 214 Squadron at RAF Oulton. Sid's story was shared in the Spring magazine.
- **Peter Rose**, son of **Alan Rose** who served in 192 Squadron; died in August 2020. Peter's story is a sad one as he never knew his father, who died four months before his birth in 1960. Peter was a quiet, shy, retiring young man who initially wrote to me, before agreeing to meet during a Reunion at the City of Norwich Aviation Museum, eager for any information I could provide about his father.
- **Andrew Barron**, a long-standing member of this Association who attended many Reunions in the past, took his Final Flight early in May this year. Andrew served during the war in 223 Squadron at RAF Oulton. Our fondest best wishes and love go to Dorothea, his wife, and his family during this difficult and very sad time.



I just had to share this wonderful photograph taken by me at one of our Reunions. Andrew and his wife Dorothea look stunning, dressed for the occasion of the main Reunion Dinner one Saturday evening! This I share in loving memory of them, and all our good times shared through the years.

As you might imagine, this was a particularly difficult and sad letter to write. So many memories spilling through my head, tears flowing as I remember you all ... every one of you I keep in regular contact with, or have met either at a Reunion, or in your own home whenever Stuart and I have been on our travels around the UK.

Remember, I am still here for you if you want to write and share. Meanwhile, never lose touch with those memories of people and places which live on in our hearts.

Thank you ALL for the joy you bring, the love we continue to share!

God Bless you all xx

*Love & Hugs,
Janine xx*

Items for the magazine (Newspaper articles etc) should be sent to:

**Linda & Arthur Reid,
23 Esk Valley Terrace, Eskbank,
Edinburgh EH22 3FT**

Postal Mail remains as usual:

**Ms Janine Harrington
7 Ashley Court, Filey, North Yorkshire YO14 9LS**

Email and electronic articles for the magazine as usual to:

raf100groupassociation@gmail.com

JOINT EDITOR'S PAGE



Hello Everyone,

As I write, ANZAC Day, commemorated here in New Zealand and back home in Australia, was just over three weeks ago on the 25th April. For the second year running, we were once again in a lockdown in parts of Western Australia because of a Covid scare, but this time for only three days. Dawn services were cancelled in many places and as we did last year, many people stood quietly at 6am on their driveways, street corners, on balconies, holding torches and candles.

Anzac Day commemorates in a very real sense the birth of Nationhood for New Zealand and Australia. The 1915 landings on the shores of the Gallipoli Peninsular was one of the biggest blunders of military history. But the evacuation of the troops which began on 15th December, ranks as one of the most clever and successful military strategies ever. Around 36,000 troops were shipped out over four nights in a coordinated withdrawal from the front-line trenches. At 4.10 a.m. on the 20th, the last of the men lifted their feet from the sands of Anzac Cove.

Our Prime Minister Mr Scott Morrison in his speech at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra said;

" Here in our nation's most sacred place, and in thousands of places across our land, we stop to reflect, remember, give thanks and draw strength ... (in) our national place of remembrance and memorial.

This time last year - like so many other times in our history - we faced a defining moment as a nation, a moment of uncertainty and danger when the future seemed so uncertain.

We couldn't gather, but we held candles in driveways and on balconies and we played the Last Post on radios and iPhones, as some, especially in our West, will do again today.

On this Anzac dawn we remind ourselves of the sacrifices, the courage, the selflessness which helped make our country what it is today. Some might think that our Anzac story began on this morning 106 years ago, as quiet rowboats waited just off the peninsula at Gallipoli. Now that is true, that's when we entered our first conflict as one people.

But the story of those times - and all the times since - didn't begin on battlefields, on land, at sea or in the sky. It began in the homes and the farms and the towns and the suburbs across our great country. It's in those places that selflessness, duty, respect and responsibility were learned. Where love of family, the community and country is warmed and is kindled in the youngest hearts and the oldest minds. It is also where the pain of loss is felt most acutely."

This loss of friends and colleagues in conflict is still keenly felt by our surviving Veterans and no less so by the families of those who served and never returned home (see the story later in this issue).

Media reported crowds gathering in the dark in greater numbers than last year, when the beginnings of the coronavirus pandemic saw people gather in driveways and front yards rather than at packed dawn services. Even my sister and her family met this year for the first time, along with hundreds of others of all ages at the Dawn Service their city's Cenotaph.

Whether it is at Memorials here in New Zealand, or Australia, Canada, the United States or other places that we have a close affinity with and have personal significance – Foulsham, Oulton, North Creak, Great Massingham or West Raynham, remembering those who have significance to us is not just a responsibility but a meaningful pleasure.

And we have over very recent times, very sadly lost two more of our number, the last, Andrew Barron only a few weeks ago – which makes our surviving Veteran family that much more precious.

We are also losing two more of our number in retirement from the Committee. Our friend from North Carolina and US Representative Stephen Hutton is stepping down from his position around the end of June. He will be missed for he has contributed much in his work to preserve the history and memories of the US 36th Bomb Squadron and it's very close wartime partnership with RAF 100 Group. He has been involved with Chas Jellis and Brendon Maguire in the creation of a number of Memorials commemorating those who served with the 36th and ultimately gave their lives.

(Stephen and Pam Hutton at the "Mighty 8th Airforce Museum" in Savannah, Georgia)



He will be remembered for his gentleness, genuine caring for Veterans, diplomacy, good humour and vast knowledge of the history of both Groups.

And if Stephens departure isn't sad enough, the fact that Janine is having to step down after being intimately involved with the Association for around twenty seven years is truly upsetting.

There are now only a handful of people in our Association family who can equal that. There were many difficulties and very real challenges in the early days of bringing together the magazine,

having to work from a caravan, photocopying all the material in the local Library, collating and bringing everything into a publication, and posting everything off.

There were the headaches and heartbreaks along the way with having to deal with some terrible events at one long past Reunion, then working hand in hand with our president Mr Phil James MBE to birth the Association as we know it today.

Her deep interest for RAF 100 Group was born out of her Mums loss of her wartime fiance, Vic Vinnell, who failed to return from a Group Operation in November of 1944. Janine's passion and dedication remains for the 100 Group Story but *especially* for its Veterans and their families. It is the people in the Association that mean the most to her and she cares deeply for the RAF 100 Group family, many of whom she has known well for a great many years. Yet she has never had the opportunity to personally meet many of them and I know that this will always be a source regret and sadness.

She is loved, admired, respected and will be so terribly missed.



I wanted to let you know that there was an inadvertent miss-accreditation in the last magazine, in the story featuring Sidney Pike. These two photographs shown were incorrectly attributed to Mike Hillier.



Photographs of Sid Pike were courtesy of Chris Lambert.

I want to take this opportunity to warmly welcome **Mr Gordon Mercier** to our 100 Group Association family. Mr Mercier is a RAF 100 Group Veteran who served during the War with both 51 and 78 Squadron's, before being posted to 171, which flew Operations out of North Creake, in Norfolk.

See a little of his story on page 15.

I came across a very poignant story this morning on the 78th anniversary of one of the finest accounts of bravery and heroism exhibited during the Second World War. I thought I would share this truly remarkable account in the next issue.

Until then, take care.

With my warmest greetings,

Stuart.

If you would like to drop me a line you are most welcome to so.

You can reach me at:

raf100groupassociation@gmail.com

or at

mosquitofbv1@gmail.com

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER



Dear Friends,

It has been an eventful six months since my last letter. In December 2020, the UK was in lock down and we were in the midst of an escalating health crisis. The only positive was the prospect of the Pfizer Vaccine. Today in the UK we are beginning a return to a new normality thanks to the remarkable success of the roll out of more vaccines especially that from Oxford-Astra Zeneca and the exemplary behaviour of most citizens in observing Covid rules. The cost in bereavement (almost 130,000 deaths) and cost to our economy has been immense. Although our situation in the UK is good there are worries about other parts of the world especially Africa and India where the pandemic still rages.

As with every part of life our Association has been affected and we have had to adapt to new challenging circumstances. In January we took the difficult decision to cancel for the second year running our May Reunion. I am writing this near to the planned timing of the Reunion and we now know the cancellation decision was the correct one.

There have been positives even in bleak times. The Committee traditionally has met annually at the start of Reunions. This year we took advantage of Zoom technology. There were virtual meetings in January and in March. A further meeting is planned for June. This has proved a tremendous development and despite spanning 13 time zones from Western Australia to North Carolina members of the Committee have been able to discuss and debate effectively. We took decisions on important matters. I have already referred to cancellation of this year's Reunion. The good news is that 2022 is booked for Friday May 20th – Sunday May 22nd and we have agreed a provisional programme. We also decided to further develop our website which raised issues of copyright which we now understand better and data protection. Len Witts has agreed to be our Data Protection Officer and has already drafted a policy which I hope we will be able to adopt. There is a separate reference in the magazine to the website which I hope you will read. Andrea Sluman our Treasurer reported on our finances. Despite losing income because we have been unable to run the Reunion raffle and auction our accounts are in good order and the bank balance is still healthy.

Because of health problems and the logistical challenge of integrating production across the globe last spring's magazine did not go through the usual checking process. As a result, a part of the editorial was interpreted by some readers in a way that was not intended by the author who has apologised. We have now adopted a verification process that should avoid this problem in future.

You will read elsewhere that two members of the Committee are stepping down. Stephen Hutton has been a member of the Committee for some years, making a unique and positive contribution to the Association's development. He has promoted the important role the 36th Bomb Group played in electronic warfare initially as part of 100 Group. Stephen embodies all that is good in the US – UK alliance.

Janine Harrington will be relinquishing her role as Secretary after many, many years tireless dedication to the work of the Association. Janine has long been the heart of the Association. In addition to her prodigious organisation and administrative competence we have been fortunate to benefit from her skills as an accomplished author. These have been ably displayed in over sixty editions of the magazine.

I believe the magazines will be a lasting archive which will be an important source of information for future generations. On top of all that Janine has been a conduit for contact between the many people who have an interest in the those who served in 100 Group. Although no longer on the Committee Janine and Stephen will continue with us as members. I am sure you will all join me in wishing them all the very best for the future.

I am pleased to announce that Stuart Borlase, our man in Australia, has agreed to take up the role of Secretary. In recent years Stuart has provided invaluable help to Janine in producing the magazine and some of you may recall his fascinating talk about his experience interviewing veterans.

You may be surprised that I am still writing this column given that I planned to stand down as Chair at the 2020 AGM. As we all know Covid has upset lots of plans and our AGMs have been no exception. The Committee has agreed that I should remain in post. Hopefully, many of us will meet again face to face in May 2022.

Until then, keep safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. G. W.', written over a horizontal line.

8th AIR FORCE REPRESENTATIVE



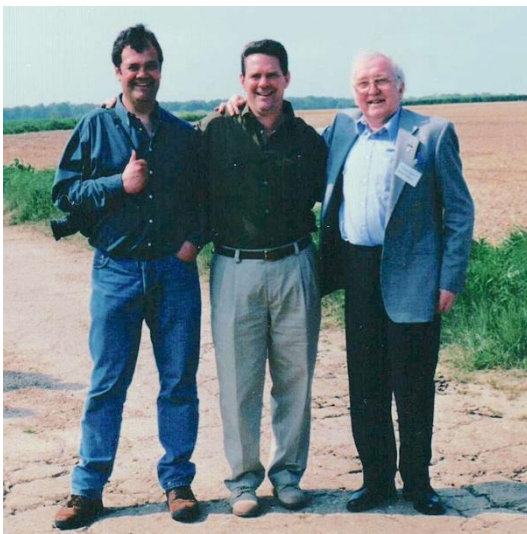
Stephen Hutton



Dear Friends of the RAF 100 Group Association,

Having served as our 8th Air Force Representative on our Association committee since 2015, it is with my deep regret that time has now come for me to step down in order to attend to important family commitments and demands. I do this with a heavy heart because my wife Pam and I have experienced great pleasure in being able to meet so many fine veterans, families and association members over the years. Before leaving, let me tell you some about this wonderful journey in my life.

I joined the RAF100 Group Association years ago because my father Iredell Hutton served as a B24 Liberator tail gunner and flew on 55 missions with the 803rd Bomb Squadron and the later 36th Bomb Squadron. His 8th Air Force radar counter measure unit flew almost half of its missions alongside RAF100Gp squadrons. Their first electronic warfare mission was together with 214 Squadron on the morning of D-Day. It has been recorded that *"This mission proved very effective in countering the enemy warning system and contributed materially to the success of landings on the beachhead"*.



In the early 1990's I corresponded with Eileen Boorman when beginning my research for my unit history book *Squadron of Deception*. It was published in the fall of 1999 and that next Spring I met with Martin Staunton during my first RAF100Gp reunion.

In 2015, after being nominated by our Association Secretary Janine Harrington, I was honored to be elected to join the RAF100Gp Association committee. There I was proud to serve amongst a group of dedicated individuals whose aim was to promote and extend the legacy of those who served RAF 100 Group during WWII.

Over past times I have worked diligently with enthusiastic friends toward three 36th Squadron memorials. In Holyhead, my Welsh friend Brendan Maguire rallied the community to create a memorial that honors the loss of airmen from my father's B24 Liberator nicknamed *"The JIGS UP"*.

And in England my friend Chas Jellis inspired the local community to create two memorials remembering lost Squadron Airmen – first in Ivinghoe in 2009 and then in Long Marston in 2011.



We came to know and love their families and they came to America to visit with us. Along the way with the help from Geoff Sykes, Kelvin Sloper and Mike Hillier, I have added Squadron memorabilia and photographs to Blickling Hall, the City of Norwich Aviation Museum and to the RAF Swannington exhibits.



Association Curator for City of Norwich Aviation Museum, Rob Walden and I even searched and dug Alconbury airfield grounds for buried 36th Squadron .50 caliber machine guns. We didn't find any .50 cal's, but we did dig up a rusty tin can when looking! What a fun and memorable day that was!

Here Stateside I witnessed my father's WWII special unit reconstituted to become the 36th Electronic Warfare Squadron (36EWS) based at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

Pam and I traveled there to meet the new unit personnel and learn of their mission. Today's special unit is responsible for the operational testing and reprogramming of all Electronic Warfare Systems in the Combat Air Forces. We have met many of the squadron commanding officers and staff and have attended several change-of-command ceremonies. Some of my greatest pleasures has been to host three 36th Squadron Reunions, the last being at the U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. What a truly wonderful and splendid time it was to join the WWII veterans and their families on these occasions.

Another most notable and memorable occasion was in 2017 when I joined Lt. Col. Thomas Moore, the 36EWS Commanding Officer with four members of his outfit (right) plus two Veterans of my father's WWII unit and RAF 100 Group Veterans at our annual Association Reunion.



Des Howarth and Rafi Ramos at the Reunion 2018.

I shall never forget that joyous experience!

The next year our Australian friend and *Confound & Destroy* Co-Editor Stuart Borlase gave us a kind visit in the States. For a special treat we took a trip to the Mighty 8th Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia. That's a terrific stop to see so much history on display! (This Museum is a must see. It is brilliant- Ed)

I was Blessed to see my book *Squadron of Deception – The Story of the 36th Bomb Squadron in WWII* published in 1999 and the following year my website at www.36rcm.com joined the internet world. Just as importantly I was quite honored when asked by Janine to contribute 36th Squadron material to her RAF 100 Group books. Then too, I have been pleased to add squadron information and photos to Darren Rose and Donna Grey's extensive website "*Heroes of our Time*". I would encourage all our members and friends to view these terrific sites as well as our own Association site at <https://raf100groupassociation.org>

Yes, these days I find my plate is full helping to attend to Pam's 94yr old father Deroy. He's a great guy and a WWII Navy Veteran, having served as a Hospital Corpsman on the Battleship U.S.S. Wisconsin. We also stay busy maintaining two other homes at quite a distant from our own.



So now, although I only leave the Committee and the writing of this column, my membership in our Association continues. Quite naturally, if anyone has questions concerning 8th Air Force connections to the RAF100Gp they can still email or write to me. And finally, I would encourage someone to come forward to follow me to continue as an 8th Air Force representative on our RAF 100 Group Committee.

Allow me to close in saying to you of the RAF 100 Group Association, your friendship has been a large and valuable part of my life and an amazingly grand adventure! I thank the committee and all our members for the great love Pam and I have experienced over the years. We have been truly blessed with many kind relationships and memorable times together!

Here's wishing each of you good health and great happiness! May God Bless you and the entire RAF 100 Group Association always!!

With fondest regards,

Stephen Hutton

Author: '*Squadron of Deception*'

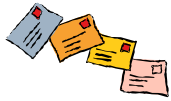
8th Air Force Historical Society Unit Contact

36th Bomb Squadron RCM

Website: www.36rcm.com

Email: ww2ewlib@gmail.com

LETTERS PAGES



Hello Janine,

I have just come across Norman Storey's account of his time in the RAF on your blog and was wondering if you were able to tell me any more about him.

The reason I ask is that it appears he was in the same crew as George Hathaway who served as a bomb aimer on Lancaster's during the war and who I met as a schoolboy back in Birmingham back in the 1970s.

George very kindly lent me his logbook and several photographs which I returned to him but in those days of course there were no photocopiers - if only there had been! I didn't keep in touch with him - much to my regret now - and I believe he died some time ago.

It's been wonderful to come across a mention of him - I can't imagine there were that many bomb aimers from Birmingham on Lancs so I imagine it must be him! It would be wonderful too to find out some more about one of the men he served with.

I appreciate you may not be able to tell me any more about Norman than was contained in his account on your blog. Never mind, it's good to have found out just a little more about one of George's crew.

Kind regards.

Tom Kilkenny
tfkilkenny@aol.com



Hi again Janine,

It was great to hear back from you with the gen about Norman and about the association. I think Norman's connection with 100 Group was after his time in the same crew as George Hathaway - they all went their separate ways after their first tour with 103 Squadron - but I would very much like to join the association and am attaching a completed application form.

Thanks for the audio files. I've not listened to all of both of them yet - so far I've heard part of Boothby's speech which is of course very entertaining. Is Norman Storey also on this one?

Thanks too for the notes from Norman's niece. Do you think she'd mind if I emailed her direct? I'd be especially interested in getting a decent print of the photo of Norman and his crew. I'd like to

imagine George Hathaway is one of them, but of course it depends on when it was taken and that's something I guess it might not be possible to find out.

Yes, I'd be very grateful if you have any other audio files or information regarding Norman. Over the past couple of decades I've often wondered if it would be possible to discover more about George Hathaway - it would have been a privilege to have been able to speak to Norman while he was still around.

Regards,

Tom.



Hi Janine,



I joined the RAF VR in March 1943 and I trained as an Air Gunner at Stormy Down. I then went to 14 OTU to be Crewed-Up.

My skipper's name was Warrant Officer Digby, and our crew became known as **'Land Away Digby and His Crew'**!
We flew in a Halifax 3.

We flew with 51 Squadron and 78 Squadron before we went to 171 Squadron at North Creak. We arrived there in September 44 with an extra crew member, James McDonald and a brand-new Halifax 3 filled with special Radar equipment. We did 13 trips. Our last trip was Leipzig where we had a lot of damage.

On return the CO looked at the damage and said: *'Ok lads, you have finished your tour'*!
We completed 14 trips with 171, finishing our tour in February 1945.

Our crew was as follows:

Pilot - Warrant Officer Digby,
Rear Gunner - Ken Adams,
Navigator - Jonny Dibbs,
Flight Engineer - J. Robertson,
Wireless Operator - Wallis Brown,
Special Wireless Operator - James McDonald
Bomb Aimer - Ken Smith
Mid Upper Gunner - myself

Our last and worst trip was Leipzig in February 1945. I completed 39 trips altogether and left the RAF in 1947.

Gordon Mercier

gordon.mercier@me.com



Hello,

I hope you have an Archive section. Looked at many of your USAAF sites. Love them. Can you help identify the attached pictures?

Leo Carter was in No 9 Squadron Bomber Command (3 section) in 1941-1942. Seconded to ATA 1943-1944, returned to RAF 1944-1946. Attached is part of his Record of Service.

Leo could have visited a nearby USAAF Base from whichever Station he was at. There are hundreds of USAAF Bases in Norfolk. Can you possibly shed any light on where this picture was taken. Where was the Wellington taken? Nothing is written on the back. I will be very grateful for any ideas.

Kind regards

Carolyn Dee

Hello Janine,

Thank you for your reply. How lovely to hear you are so connected to the USAAF and help them so much. Charles Leo Carter was my partner and photographer (hence several boxes of photograph), a Pilot in the RAF and ATA. He was based at **RAF Honington No 9 Squadron (Group 3) Bomber Command**. He went on the German raids completing his 30 tours before being seconded to the ATA, later recalled to the RAF to Eastchurch, where somewhere in Norfolk the picture was taken of him in a jeep

Leo was in the ATA at Ringway in August 1943 and about to go to RAF Eastchurch. I don't think he had any association with the 100 Bomber Group, unless Eastchurch was a shared Base. He did say he dropped leaflets.

For your interest I attach a few pictures of him at Honington and copy of the maps he kept from the raids. I don't know if they were in conjunction with the 100 Group Bomber Command. Also, part of a small book I am writing of his RAF days for his nephew.



I contacted you because Leo is in a Jeep which I surmise was on a USAAF Base. The last RAF Stations Leo was at were Eastchurch, Wymeswold and Castle Donington. They don't have Control towers with a water tank on the top, that I can see. Eastchurch airfield don't seem to have any pictures of a control tower. It is frustrating Leo didn't write on the back of the picture. I didn't think it would be so difficult to find an answer.



I assumed the Wellington picture was taken at Honington, I don't know. The more you enlarge a photograph the fuzzier it gets. The original photograph is tiny, 9cm x 6cm. If I hadn't enlarged it, I would never have seen the men and the stepladders ([Resting under the Port wing – Ed](#)). Leo is wearing a Flying Officers uniform indicating it was after 1943/4 and based at one of the mentioned Stations. Having a car, they could drive all over Norfolk to visit any of the USAAF Bases. I thought there may be a clue in the fact that there is no writing on the number plate.

I haven't till now thought there might be other RAF Stations apart from those mentioned. The RAF and USAAF did sometimes share the same aerodrome.

Thank you for your help.

Kind regards

Carolyn

* * * *

Part of the small book I am writing about Leo Carter's life for his nephew as described to me by Leo and from items he kept.

"Leo was posted to No. 9 Squadron (Group 3) Bomber Command based at RAF Honington, Suffolk (1 July 1941 – 3 December 1941). At No. 9 Squadron (Group 3) Bomber Command he was flying hazardous night operations over Germany in Vickers Mark 111 Wellington bombers with Hercules engines. No. 9 Squadron took part in all the major raids and big battles in the strategic offensives over Cologne, Bremen, Hamburg, Dunkirk, Munster, Keil, Berlin, Nuremburg, Mannheim, Aachen, Brest and Wilhelmshaven. Leo kept a couple of the bombing raid maps of Keil and Dunkirk.

He kept a faded newspaper cutting about a notable raid on Berlin, published in the Sunday Graphic on the 9 November 1941. The crews of the Wellington described the freezing conditions, icicles forming on the pilot's oxygen masks, frost on moustaches and chins and frozen hands. The navigator steered by the stars because of cloudy conditions. He removed his leather gloves to hold the sextant, but even with his silk gloves on he could only hold it for 30 seconds because the cold was so painful. He couldn't put his leather gloves back on as they were frozen solid like a board.

Most of the way they were in cloud until a window opened over Berlin and they were able to drop their bombs: 'We got a warm reception with shells bursting all around us, the shells made two holes in the

front turret.’ They returned safely but 37 planes were lost that night. Leo experienced these conditions and was one of the lucky ones to return safely.

Checking through his logbook it appears that he was one of the pilots amongst those squadrons that were on that mission to bomb Berlin. One of the notes in his logbook reads: ‘Reached target area, none claimed to have bombed primary due to cloud and severe icing—Target Berlin’. 7 November 1941 and: ‘Icing at 12,000ft – out of control to 5,000ft. over sea’.

Another night returning from Hanover whilst over the North Sea, his plane was struck by lightning. He described the loud crack and very bright white flash of light lighting up the cockpit and the crackle of the bolt went from the front to the back of the plane in an instant as it hit the metal sides of the plane, which became too hot to touch. Quite frightening.

Bomber Command groups pioneered and proved new tactics and equipment and became one of the two specialized squadrons attacking precision targets. A combination of luck and skill enabled Leo to fly his crews and survive their tours (30 missions) of night operations over Germany and Italy and return his crews and planes safely back to England without any serious incidents.”

Carolyn Dee
carolyn.dee@ntlworld.com



Hello Janine,

I was wondering if you could help me. My mother was in the RAF during the War and I often hear stories in the family of her being at Blickling Hall in the kitchen, but mainly as I believe a singer in the concert party during the time of the "White Lady" by Deana Durban.

My mother's name was [Kathleen Muir Bruce](#) at the time, and I believe she was close to an American who died in a plane crash, a '[Neville Pergrubi](#)'.

I am new to looking into the family history and would appreciate any help, advice, or information on the lives of the people involved

Thanks in advance

Doug

Doug Daley

daleydougy@blueyonder.co.uk



Hello Janine,

A gentleman in New Zealand by the name of **John Beeching** was a pilot flying Mosquitos in 100 Group during WW2. A friend of his, by the name of **Reg Dobson**, who came to UK at same time flew Lancasters and was apparently with 103 Squadron at Elsham. On the night of 23rd February 1945, he thinks flying PM-Z, his friend was killed on a massive raid on Pforzheim. The crew of 7 are buried in a row in Dumbach Bavaria Military Cemetery. John Beeching visited his friend's grave a number of years ago.

He has apparently always wondered if they were shot down by a night fighter, hit by flak or even involved in a mid-air collision. Is there any way of accessing such information?

I look forward to hearing from you,

Best wishes,

Paul

Paul Mellor,
Elsham Wolds Association,

* * * *

Hello Paul,

I have been passed your email for any information on the circumstance of the loss of 103 Squadron Lancaster RA515 PM-N on the Pforzheim raid 23/24 February 1945.

Bomber Command Losses for 1945 by Bill Chorley does not state the cause of the loss, merely that the aircraft took-off from Elsham at 15.46 hrs to attack targets in Pforzheim with a crew of 8 as follows;



Flight Lieutenant R.F. Dobson – Pilot (Pictured)

Warrant Officer E.E. Standing - 2nd Dickie

Sergeant A.K. Parker - Flight Engineer

Pilot Officer L.P. Curtin R.A.A.F. - Navigator

Warrant Officer A.N. Fletcher R.A.A.F. - Bomb Aimer

Pilot Officer W.J.N. Bailie R.A.A.F. - Wireless Operator (P.O.W.) the only survivor

Sergeant R. Nolan - Mid Upper Gunner

Sergeant D.J. Reeves - Rear Gunner

“The Nachtjagd War Diaries” Volume two written by Dr Theo Boiten, has the aircraft claimed as shot down by two Luftwaffe Night Fighter Pilots:-

**HAUPTMAN GERHARD FRIEDRICH OF STAB 1/NJG 6.
SOUTH-EAST OF PFORZHEIM AT 20.07**

**OBIT WILHELM ENGEL OF 3/NJG 6 AT A HEIGHT OF 8,200 FT
(2,500M) TIMED AT 20.18**

I must point out that the Luftwaffe Abschuss Reports at this stage of the war were very hard to confirm for obvious reasons, and a good many documents' were being destroyed by the OKW around this time. A lot of the claims and records were anecdotal and compiled from Pilot Logbooks after the war, so the records should not be held as definitive.

Kindest regards,

Graham Brell

* * * *

Morning Janine,

Events have overtaken us. I have just received a reply from John in New Zealand with a rather amazing sequel to the story.

I shall copy this to you straight away. I have told John that I shall be doing so as you initiated the enquiry on his behalf. I shall also copy it to Paul Mellor of Elsham Wolds Association whose Dad was a Lancaster Navigator and who wrote a book with an account of escaping capture after being parachuted into Germany.

As far as the Summer Magazine goes it is fine with me, but presumably you would wish to clear it with John and incorporate his reply in it.

I had no idea that the two men were not New Zealanders.
Cold morning with some snow in North Scotland.

Kind regards from Barrow,

Bill Hossack

* * * *

Dear Bill,

You are a champion, and I cannot thank you enough. Thanks, too of course to those kind people who found the information for me. This brings the sad story of Reg's demise almost to closure, except for an amazing coincidence which you will find hard to believe and will certainly end the story. I certainly did.

Yesterday I finished reading a book from our well stocked local library about the war I was in called: '*Duel under the Stars*', by a German ex Luftwaffe night-fighter pilot named Wilhelm Johnen, ([pictured](#)) now long since departed this life. In your email, your contacts give the name of one of the pilots who was believed to have shot down Reg, Hauptman Gerhard Friedrich of 1/NJG6.

Now for the amazing bit. Towards the end of the above book, there are quite a few pages of photographs of Luftwaffe night-fighter aces, among them a full-page picture of the man himself, with rank of Major. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 15 March 1945 but was shot down and killed the next night at a place called Bohlingen (*by a Mosquito, I wonder?*) So, Reg got his '*eye for an eye*'!

What an amazing coincidence which might be of interest to your historians. The book is a recent translation. of Johnen's book, '*Duell Unter den Sternen*' with a Foreword by James Holland, who we see on TV History now and again. Apparently, there was an earlier translation, the newer one being dated 2018. I used to write to Theo Boiten when he first started writing all those histories. Quite an author!

Just for the record, neither Reg nor I are Kiwis; Reg came from Broadstairs and I am a Cockney from Lambeth but went to school in Hornchurch Essex.

The raid on Pforzheim was a terrible business, much worse than Dresden as it sits in a sort of valley and burnt like a cauldron. What an awful time the war was; we were so young and stupid, led by the nose to do those dreadful things, like killing those Luftwaffe pilots of our own age and then being told we were heroes.

I am quite overwhelmed by the assistance I have been given regarding the story regarding Reg Dobson and am deeply grateful.

Anyway, thanks again, Bill; leave us with our memories,

John

**John Beeching,
Veteran: 169 Squadron, RAF 100 Group**

* * * *|

Hi John,

It has been a pleasure to be of assistance. Janine was the catalyst!



Following my request to source information, Paul Mellor, (Elsham Chairman), Robin Lingard and Graham Brett have been the moving forces behind the Reg Dobson enquiry.

Robin is in charge of the Elsham Museum (see Google). He is ably supported by Graham Brett who lives in the Elsham area. My understanding is that Graham is ex R.A.F ground crew; I have never met him, According to Robin, he is very experienced in Computers, Digital imaging and photo editing. It is he who would be dealing with the photographs on your behalf.

Janine mentioned that you were a Mosquito pilot. I was a primary schoolboy here during the war. In that era, the skies were heavily populated by Mossies of the Strike Wing stationed at RAF Banff and commanded by Group Captain Max Aitken. Stirring times!

Every Good Wish to you and yours.

Bill

Bill Hossack

*To all these Gentlemen who gave their consent to having their stream of correspondence published
- Thank you!- Ed*

There is now a Postscript to this story ...



Hello Janine,

Many thanks for your kind email and for including me on Stuart's circulation list. Reading the list of crew members in Flight Lieutenant R.F. Dobson crew, I notice that the Navigator on the flight was Pilot Officer P.I Curtin RAAF. **(Seated on the left)**



He was in fact one of the twins that served at Elsham on 103 Squadron, his brother surviving the war and returning to Australia. I have attached a photograph of them in happier times.

Some time ago as volunteers at the Elsham Wolds Association museum, we had the pleasure of a visit of Paul Johnstone and his wife from Australia who are relatives of the twins, they were over here in the UK to visit his wife's ancestral roots in the North East of England. Her mother and father were what the press called in the 1960s £10 Poms.

At the time of their visit, they had no idea that the museum and garden existed, they had just come to see the airfield where the twins had flown from, they were advised by a local that there was a museum on the old airfield, so, decided to pay us a call. I have attached a photo of their visit dated 24th June 2015

What we learned from the relative Paul, was that P.I. Curtin was asked to volunteer for the operation (he was tour expired) and apparently his parents found this hard to accept or understand, the decision cost him his life and his loss became a source of great bitterness for the family.

I know Paul found his visit very moving, realizing that the Curtin twins are commemorated and remembered in the UK, along with all the other brave Commonwealth Volunteers that served at Elsham Wolds and in Bomber Command.



I wish you well, Janine, take care.
Kindest regards from Lincolnshire,

Graham
gpbrett@aol.com



Greetings Stuart, Phil and Janine,

I have just read your Editor's Page message and I would like to say that I agree with you completely and absolutely 100%. The extent to which Truth has become subverted into all manner of fictions is a serious problem across the World. There are indeed several primary causes with social media in general being one primary cause, closely connected with the global spread of the embedded algorithms which select and target specific messages to specific groups of people.

In so many cases, the industrial scale of disinformation and misinformation by some national agencies, such as The People's Liberation Army to name just one, is corroding trust in democratic governments and our election processes.

I am confident that our members will not be led astray within the context of the 100 Group Association, even if some members are vulnerable to other media - so I congratulate you for making the argument in the Magazine and raising awareness.

With my very best wishes,

John Stubbington

Wg Cdr Ret'd
Tel: 01420-562722

Thank you, John, and to all of you, including two of our Veteran family who have been kindly encouraging in your responses. Thank you. – Ed.



Hi Janine,

Hope this finds you well and coping with your illness.

This is just a quick line to let you know that I've been in touch with Dad's pilots Daughter, (Flt Lt Smyth). Her name is Sally and lives in Australia and has been excited to hear about the news. I'll give her your email so she can contact you and tell you herself if you don't mind.

I'll try and compose a piece with a lovely photo of both men in their mosquito cockpit for you and the magazine in the near future. Is there any chance of a paper copy of the latest magazine just in case I lose attachment, I always prefer paper.

I'll let you go, stay safe and well

Kevin C.
kevingt750@live.co.uk



Hi Ya Janine,

So sorry to hear about your recent health problems. Glad to hear you are feeling better. I did think that would be the case at Foulsham regarding the secret work done there, it would be helpful if you could put a request in the Summer Edition.



I grew up around the airfield and my Dad worked the fields around the Drome. During holidays I would go with Dad and spent many a happy hour playing in the old Tower.

I was wondering if you could help me?

I am looking for photos of the old Foulsham Control Tower as it was during the War. I have some of it as a wreck, but I cannot seem to find any of it when it was operational.

I am sending you some photos I took from a Stearman in 1994. Sadly, now many of the buildings have gone.



With Kind Regards,

Andy

Andy Wells
andyem40@gmail.com

I too am looking for photos of the old Foulsham Tower as it was whilst operational during the War. Can anyone help us with this please? We both would love to hear from you - Ed



Dear Janine,

Of great importance to me as most know, is RAF West Raynham in Norfolk. This was where I lived when first married in 1988. I am now on the Committee of the West Raynham Association helping to raise funds for something close to our hearts, to have names of these men who were lost during WW2 put on our Memorial. We would be most grateful if you can donate or buy raffle tickets for this beautiful painting.



If you have been following our events earlier, one of our Members, renowned Aviation artist Michael Daley, has kindly donated an acrylic painting of our former gate-guard, Gloster Javelin XH980 to the Association. This will form part of our Fundraiser aimed at adding the names of those who were lost during WW2 to ensure they are remembered.

The cost of the Memorial will be approximately £7500. I am currently consulting with the Mason, but you can imagine 308 names, dates and Squadron numbers will not come cheap!

The above painting is to be raffled at £1 a ticket. This means for a mere £1 you can win this unique artwork valued at £295. I have set up a PayPal pool so you can buy tickets, with all costs going to us, no fees. Please use the following link below.

<https://paypal.me/pools/c/8yvsFGSrfK>

Once I have payment, I will put your name on a raffle ticket and give you the number. If you want to pay other ways, via cheque, PO, cash, then please let me know. You DO NOT NEED a PayPal account to pay using a Credit or Debit card.

The raffle will be drawn on Memorial Saturday, 25 September, at 15:00 and will be live-streamed.

Donna Cunningham
donna.cunningham65@googlemail.com



This letter was received via the association Website. - Ed

I am trying to track down information on my late Father's flying in WWII. I have his log books, one of which contains entries from Oct 1944 - Jan 1945 for 105 Squadron OTU flying the Wellington X.

There is also a pencil entry for 2 Nov 1944 for "Special attachment" to 157 Squadron 100 Group with a Mosquito FB Mk VI. It says that a separate Log book was requested. Other names mentioned are Nav Murray, F/O Birch and ? Murphy. It also mentions PRU BSU and Little Snoring.

I wonder if you have records which might confirm and/or explain any of this. As I suspect is often the case, I now wish I'd asked him more when I could.

Kind regards.

Anthony JN Holt,

Notary Public,
74 Leicester Road
Wigston Leics LE18 1DR

0116 2108731
07776240257



Dear Mr Holt,

Thank you for your enquiry. Your mail will also have been directed to Janine Harrington Secretary of the Association who I expect will reply to you directly if she has any knowledge of your Father's service with 100 Group.

I am copying my reply to Mike Hillier, who represents RAF Swannington on our Committee. Swannington, is where 157 Squadron was based and Mike may know something more. Little Snoring was also an RAF 100 Group airfield.

You are not alone in wishing you had learned more from your Father. Many of us are in the same position. Of course, our parent's generation were very reluctant to talk about their experiences and this was particularly the case for personnel engaged on special operations which was covered by the Official Secrets Act. If you haven't done so you may wish to ask for your Father's service record which you are entitled to. Good luck.

Kind regards,

Roger Dobson.
Chairman, RAF 100 Group Association.



Good Morning Anthony

I'm sure you would have noted, the request for information which you sent to Roger Dobson, was forwarded on to me in respect of your Father, Clifford William Holt, and questioning the reason behind his posting to 157 Squadron at RAF Swannington.

I will be more than happy to research, to see if I can find any information on your Father's time on that Squadron. Because of the work that 100 Group undertook during the war, information can sometimes be difficult to uncover, however I will do my very best and will of course keep you updated on anything I do manage to find.

If you could let me know what information you already have about your Father, that would go a long way in allowing me to research in the right direction. From a very short glimpse I can see that he joined the RAF at RAF Cardington as a Volunteer Reservist, where his service number then was 1222013. Upon being commissioned his number changed to 125731. If it's possible for me to see a scan of his Log book from his time on 157 Squadron, that would be of great help as I may possibly be able to glean other information from the page(s) which could be useful.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Mike

Mike Hillier.
m.hillier091@hotmail.com



Dear Richard, (copy to Janine, Mike Hillier and Stuart)

I hope this email finds you are well and safe.

I am sorry that it has taken me so long to read the Spring 2021 edition of the Confound & Destroy Magazine. It was ANZAC Day here in Australia yesterday and so my mind was on my past research.

I am responding to Richard's entries on Page 26 and 27 of the Spring Magazine.

I became a member of the Association, probably over ten years ago, the aim being to try and find more information about my uncle, *P/O William Searle Vale* but also about his navigator *RAF Flight Lieutenant Alfred Edward David Ashcroft, DFC, both with 157 Squadron at RAF Swannington*. I can't believe our paths haven't crossed before. Bill's story was published in the magazine and in Janine's book "*Kindred Spirits*".

I have been writing to Janine for many years. I did put research calls and photos in the Magazine (to no avail) and was also honoured to have poetry of mine included in the magazine.

I was first in my family to do the research. It's a bit of a story. Suffice to say, a second researcher in Belgium put an article in the English papers and then it went from there. A cousin took up the baton and she and my Aunty Grace and others went over to Belgium. I couldn't afford to go. I do hope I get there one day to visit Bill's grave, and to visit England and Swannington.



I am delighted to hear that an avenue of trees has been planted there. At the time I wondered if Bill's name was on a plaque there under a tree. ([Photo courtesy of Mike Hillier](#))

Anyway Richard, I was delighted and shocked to see your letter to Mike with the photos.

On page 27 of the Spring magazine the title says: '[Missing or Killed](#)' and arrows for [VALE](#) and [ASHCROFT](#) say '[missing](#)'. There was only a two-day delay between '[missing](#)' and KIA telegrams to my grandparents.

I want to correct this as they are not listed as '[Missing](#)'. They are both buried at Brussels Town Cemetery. I thought you would like to have this information updated.

A lot has happened since I first began researching. I attach a link to a special event that happened in May 2015 and my speech from yesterday's ANZAC Day Service at Dookie Victoria. I think it is the easiest way to tell you everything!

[Alfred-Ashcroft-VE-day-Belgium-1944-relatives-Sunday-Express-campaign](#)

One more question ... does the Association have a Facebook page?! I'd like to connect with that please. ([Yes, it does - Ed](#))

Yours sincerely,

[Helen Rankin](#)

(My mother, Barbara Schier, née Vale is Bill's youngest sibling)

Helen Rankin,
Australia.

Updates and Follow Up

Control Tower Calling



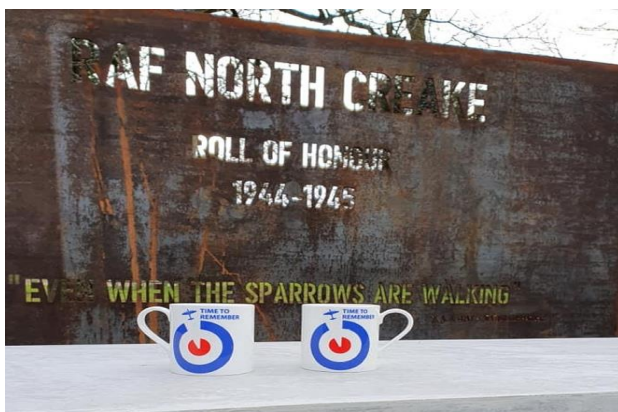
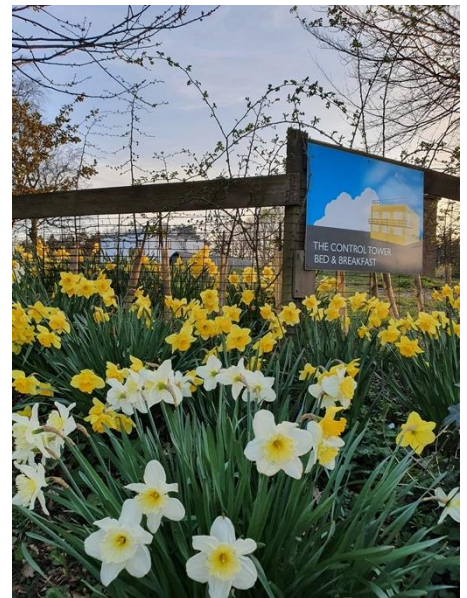
We are delighted to announce that we shall be re-opening **from Monday 17th May 2021** (subject to Government advice). Since the road map out of lockdown was published, our bookings have gone a little crazy, so if you are planning a visit this year, please let us know as soon as you can.

Once again, we would like to thank all of you for being so understanding when you had your bookings cancelled, for allowing us to carry forward your booking deposits towards future stays - we couldn't have got through this period without you. If you have not re-booked your cancelled stay, yet please get in touch so we can get you booked back in.

We are restricting our bookings to two rooms until social distancing restrictions have been lifted, so generally we are still only booking out The Stirling Suite and The Signals Room unless you are doing a multi-room booking for one group (we are getting plenty of these too as family and friends want to get back together). We really feel we can see the light at the end of the tunnel now. Please note we are fully booked until mid July.

Now we have a date to reopen, we are cracking on with many projects - not least the re-rendering of the last face of the tower. Finally, all four sides have been given a new coat of render and paint and the old girl is standing very proud and sparkly. We have lots of projects on the go too but we will reveal these as and when they are completed or indeed when you come to stay.

We have also been working on getting the memorial site complete - the Roll of Honour has been installed and the final landscaping is due this month.



We are sad that we can no longer have the big celebration we planned, but we shall have a small private dedication in June so that Bernie How, a RAF North Creake Veteran can be there to officially cut the ribbon.

Nigel has been busy building a new double-sided bookcase/room divider out of old 1930s wardrobes we couldn't use. Made to measure and looks great - a brilliant use for big old furniture which would have gone to landfill. We take 'made do and mend' very seriously here at CTHQ.

This is the opposite of how we had planned to celebrate the memorial of the airfield, but it feels good that the culmination of many years of work is coming together now.

We do plan to have a bigger celebration in the future, especially for family members of those who served here, we will circulate information about this when planned.

We really looking forward to re-opening and hopefully welcoming you to The Control Tower soon.

Very best wishes,

Claire & Nigel xx

mail@controlltowerstays.com | www.controlltowerstays.com



An interesting but sad fact about RAF North Creake.

After the War, North Creake was taken over by No 274 Maintenance Unit RAF. It was used as a storage facility for De Havilland Mosquito's that were flown in from Squadrons based elsewhere.

They were eventually scrapped and burned.

The fires blazed for weeks ...

Over the past few decades, the passion and absolute dedication for restoring and preserving old Aircraft, especially from WW2, has been enormous. We look back now - and weep! Ed

Features

TARGET GERMANY

A WARTIME MEMOIR OF 214 SQUADRON

By

ALASTAIR McDERMID



Call Up and Muster

When war was declared I was already in France. I was aged fifteen and was on an exchange visit. Uncertain what to do, I telegraphed home: "Should I return home immediately?" In transmission however, the "I" was lost, and whilst I waited in France for instructions my father waited at Leeds railway station for me.

I never dreamed that the war would last long enough for me to serve. My call-up would have been due in August 1942, on my eighteenth birthday. However in the July I was in Leeds with Ken Murgatroyd, at the recruiting office which was the Hoover Building in Claypit Lane, near Lower Headrow and the bus station. I had decided to get preference of service by volunteering for the RAF. I thought the RAF would be more interesting – in those days flying was still relatively new and exciting – and I certainly didn't wish to be a soldier.

With ghastly memories of the First War hanging over us we expected the ground war to be trench warfare. Talking to soldiers in later years however I was to discover that they would not have wished to change places with airmen, thinking our service far too dangerous. My parents were a bit surprised when told. I think they had hoped I might become a conscientious objector, as many Quakers did. My father had been in the Friends War Victims Relief Corps (Warvics) in the First World War, serving at

Etrepay in France. My younger brother was to follow in his footsteps by joining the Friends' Ambulance Brigade. My elder brother however had joined up upon receiving his call up papers.

In November I received notice to attend for aircrew medical at Padgate, near Preston and having passed A1 was told to return home and attend the local Air training Corps until further notice (Deferred Service). This was due to the training backlogs. The ATC was at the old Friends (Quakers) School at Low Green, Rawdon, with quite a lot of recruits. I had to attend two nights and Sunday morning. If I remember correctly we had to study navigation, Morse code and aircraft recognition, plus regular drilling. There were a number of us on Deferred Service. I think I had a weekend at Dishforth with them in around May 1943. They would not let the deferred men go up in the air, for fear of accidents.

After about ten months I received notice to report to the Aircrew Receiving Centre (ACRC) at Lords Cricket Ground on the 20th of September 1943. As a sport lover I was interested to see this famous place which I had not previously visited. I was lucky enough to travel down in the company of two local lads whom I had met at ATC. One of these was Albert Hogg, from a Guiseley family. I used to bump into him often after the war. In the sixties we saw each other at Yeadon RAFA club, by which time he was in charge of the fire tender at Yeadon Airport. On arrival at ACRC he departed to join a PACT course (Pre-Aircrew Training) to be of a standard to start aircrew training proper. The other young man, Kenneth Stanley, was also from a well-known Guiseley family – his uncle was the leading newsagent. He was the Senior Cadet, and usually took us for drill (square-bashing).

We reported together and were allocated the same billet, in a large block of flats in St John's Wood. This was a classy area overlooking Regent's Park Canal. We spent most of the first few weeks here being kitted out, having our preliminary medicals and getting acquainted with RAF procedures, such as short tidy haircuts, polishing buttons, and getting a shine on our boots. If you were unlucky enough to get a greasy pair this could entail much hard grind, and maybe much hassle from the Squad Drill Corporal, who was in charge of us. We spent much of our time being smartened and knocked into shape with marching and drill, with breaks for lectures and vaccinations. It was interesting to note that the ones most nervous about injections were usually big strong recruits. Most recruits were young and fit – only really A1 candidates were accepted for aircrew training – and with mind and body exhausted we were ready for sound sleep at the end of the day.

With boots clean, and the white flashes on our caps straight, we would go out to our squads for the 9 am parade (and mail). Drill or lectures followed, until 12 noon, then dinner. If we were lucky there would be a tea break during the morning, at the NAAFI, or the NAAFI van or similar, such as the Sally Ann Van. Then followed afternoon parade until 6 pm and tea. After tea there would be leisure time.

During the hours of darkness, which could also be our "Off Duty Hours", we could be employed on fire-picket or guard duties. Fire-picket involved an NCO and usually six to eight airmen. In the event of a raid they patrolled attics or roofs and other vulnerable sites, chiefly to deal with incendiary bombs and minimise fire risk. This was normally an overnight duty, hopefully with the opportunity for some shut eye.

Even in wartime, London had quite a variety of entertainment to offer. With the underground near we could soon be in the West End or elsewhere, with pubs, clubs, cinema shows or on Saturdays, League football (our favourite). Our most popular retreat was I think the Queensbury All Services Club in central London, especially on Sundays. This was fairly convenient and not too expensive on our limited pay. There was food and drink, dancing, music and usually plenty of mixed company. We seemed to hit it off best with the Wrens, who appeared to circulate more with aircrew cadets. Sunday teatime was rather special, and with a full house there was a live BBC Radio Variety Show, very popular, with

some Top Turns, and as I remember hosted by Gerry Wilmot, the Canadian Services Overseas Radio Reporter, who was allegedly the fastest speaking radio announcer. It was something special to be at a live BBC programme, with the added advantage of seeing celebrities in the flesh (no television of course, in those days – that was to come later in peacetime).

The white flashes on our caps denoted Aircrew (Officer) Cadets, and as such we were often allowed into Officers (only) clubs. On one of our first outings in London four of us went into an Officers' Bar, and were enjoying a drink in new surroundings when we were joined by a smart looking young woman (a bit older) who whilst talking spilt some beer down the inside of her blouse and producing a handkerchief asked one of us to mop it up, all four of us refusing in turn, being too coy and well brought up, might have been different if it had not been so public. Modern youths might not have batted an eyelid. I think she was disappointed at not getting a customer. You cannot win them all, remember we were still almost strangers to London, and not used to city life. It was the first time that I anyway had been accosted by a Lady of the Night! We were being educated in more than drill and aircraft recognition.

We only had time off in daylight at weekends. Then we could visit the sights. Across the road from our billets in St John's Wood was the Regent's Park Canal, and London Zoo was not very far from there.

Initial Training Wing at St Andrews

After about three or four weeks, if my memory serves me well, we were ready to move on to the next stage of training – for most of us a posting to Initial Training Wing (ITW). This was a heavy educational course. Navigation was the main thing; we also learned about the engines, hygiene and wireless and of course drill and PT. Ken Stanley and I were to remain together, posted with a squad of fifty cadets to 12 ITW St Andrews, on the east coast of Fifeshire, Scotland well known of course as "the home of golf". Our billet was a small, requisitioned hotel near the railway station and five minutes from the seafront. They just managed to squeeze our squad in there on its own. We were in three small beds in what was probably a single bedroom in peacetime. There were other squads billeted in the Grand Hotel and The Marine Hotel, both well known and overlooking the eighteenth hole; some also in The Golf Hotel on the seafront.

At St Andrews I was in sick quarters with a heavy cold which caused me to miss two sessions of navigation, so I had to be re-flighted with the lads of the next PACT, and was separated from Ken Stanley. I was now in a new billet at The Marine Hotel. Our room was over the kitchen and even that was cold, so what must the others have been like? The door was wedged ajar and on one occasion a cat crept in and left a souvenir on the floor, where McGregor's bare feet found it in the morning! The smell and the language were appalling! McGregor was a Keighley man.

The RAF were not the only troops inhabiting St Andrews at this time. There were also a number of Norwegian soldiers under training. Many towns especially the seaside ones had their share of troops of many nations at this stage of the war (1943-4). One evening three of us had gone to the cinema and some of the Norwegians were sitting gabbling away in the seats immediately behind us. It was fairly dark, as the film sequence being shown did not reflect much light. All of a sudden there was the most unusual and frightening occurrence immediately behind me, which didn't half make me jump. A sudden bright flash and a noise like a gun or a bomb - certainly something which remained in my mind for a long time. Apparently, the soldier was trying to light a cig with a match and somehow in the dark he set the whole box alight. He was probably as surprised as me and didn't know whether to drop it or throw it before it burnt him – stuck in confined space in a crowded cinema. I don't think many of them spoke English in those days so it was a while before peace was restored.

Talking of speaking English, many continentals, I believe learnt the language or some of it to enable them to tune in, illegally of course on their wirelesses to BBC broadcasts in the UK. This enabled them to follow the course of the war, as they were only told what the Germans wanted them to know, with much propaganda I expect.

Gas training was given one day. We had to go into a gas chamber and take off our masks. No one could leave until everyone had taken off their mask. This gave us a sample of the different types of gas on offer. Even a short trial was deeply unpleasant. We had the next hour off most of which I spent leaning out of a window to get some fresh air.

Halfway through the course we were told that we could have Saturday afternoons off. Other ITWs worked them, but there being no nightlife in St Andrews (tea at the Salvation Army or go to the pictures) meant that we were not distracted during the week and got through the work quickly. So on Saturdays I used to travel into Dundee with Cliff Jones and go to the pictures, the Varieties or have a meal. There was also a weekend leave to Edinburgh, where the civilians were pleased to put us up.

At the end of the course we waited to see when and where we were to be posted, which was done on Tuesday night. With our group there was a delay for the first time. We were expecting a posting to Elementary Flying Training School, but as this did not materialise we were given a short weeks leave – return Monday in time for next Tuesday's posting. This was my first leave since call up in September, five months ago. Travel took nearly a day each way.

The following Tuesday we were again disappointed and had to wait another week before being sent up to Perth, to Scone Airport EFTS. We learned later that the delay had come about to enable the ITWs on the south coast to finish their courses and evacuate their hotels. These were needed for the American troops who were massing for the landings in Europe in June. This was my second variation from the normal course of training.

Flying Training

The trip from St Andrews to our new station was not a long one. After reporting to the guard room at Scone EFTS we were taken with our kit through the hanger which contained a number of aircraft, namely Tiger Moths. These were two-seater aircraft that we would be given flying instructions in. Our first impression of these close up was that they appeared rather frail and Meccano-like. Did we have to fly in those? But later having actually flown in them, we were to develop a warm affection for their safety and quality and enjoyed flying in them.

We would receive twelve hours flying and instruction, with an instructor in the second seat after which, if the instructor gave the ok we could fly a solo circuit. I was very unlucky in having three different instructors and was disappointed not to have been allowed to go solo, like many of the others.

We left for three weeks embarkation leave at home, and then reported to Heaton Park at Manchester. This was the nearest posting to Leeds that I ever got, but as it was a very short stay I remember less about it than any other venue. At this point the unsuccessful ones would be rooted out and the successful continued, though not told their marks. Then we would expect to be posted overseas, to Canada or Rhodesia, for the next step in our training. However, I believe there were many others waiting ahead of us, so normal procedures were about to change. We were surprised to be given two alternatives – to leave the RAF or to go back to ACRC for some Prof Myers tests to assess our aptitude for other aircrew trades such as air gunners, flight engineers or additional wireless operators. I, like

many others, chose the tests, which were held in London. If I remember correctly, we were offered two weeks leave as bait. I think we were there about two weeks and able to enjoy the entertainments of the Big Smoke. We were billeted again in flats at St John's Wood, opposite Regent's Park, against the canal.

I remember hearing one afternoon a loud aircraft and we went to the back of the flats to see a Dakota weaving round the barrage balloon cables with one wing half torn off. It passed very low above us towards Regent's Park apparently landing. Soon there was a flash and a big bang. We dashed to the park to see what we could. It had landed in open park opposite the zoo, but it had been unable to avoid a Chinese pagoda. It hit this and burned with no survivors. What it was doing in the balloon barrage area in daylight we did not find out, but the pilot had managed to avoid hitting a densely populated area.

Having been remustered as an air gunner, I and sixty others were sent as a flight to Walney Island Gunnery School at Barrow in Furness, for a ten week course on wireless, pyrotechnics and air gunnery. We were told that we were the brightest flight of cadets they had ever had – under training Pilot, Navigator & Bombers.

Gunnery training included rifle shooting, but also firing from Avro Ansons at drogues over the Irish Sea. One of the gunners had to wind the undercarriage up, which took a hundred turns, a very tiring experience. On the day that we were assessed my pilot was in a hurry to get into Barrow and told me to fire both guns together, which should not have been done. When the hits were counted I scored 17% hits with one gun – unheard-of accuracy - and none with the other. Obviously they were not synchronised. This missed me winning the silver cup for the best cadet – as it was I came second, out of sixty. I couldn't say anything without dropping the instructor in it, but I always felt bitter about it.

Graduating from Walney Island, we had a Passing-Out Parade where we were presented with our Air Gunner brevets and Sergeant's stripes; from there to Station guard room to collect our leave passes, for a welcome spot of leave at home. This leave would continue until such time as we received a telegram, which would inform us where and when to report for posting to our new station.

After a week I received a telegram telling me to report to Alness (near Inverness) presumably to fly Coastal Command. This was quickly cancelled and I was told to remain on leave until I received a further posting. Another week and I received a posting to Enniskillen (Northern Ireland). My course mates who received this posting flew in Sutherland Flying boats from the Western Approaches out into the Atlantic on Submarine patrols. This posting also received a quick cancellation and after another week's wait I was instructed to report to Husbands-Bosworth, I believe for further Bomber Command Training. Again a quick cancellation and I was beginning to wonder if I was ever going to progress further, but the next posting followed quickly to Stradishall, where I actually did report. This was for a two week course on .5 Browning machine guns, as previously we had only been taught .303 types. They had a range of about eight hundred yards, as opposed to the five hundred of the .303s.

Stradishall was a peacetime barracks, with top rate, centrally heated rooms. At lunch we played housey housey (bingo) I also saw forty six aircraft and gliders set out, a most spectacular sight. Later I learned they had gone to Arnhem. From Stradishall, we went to Oulton (September 1944).

1699 CU : FINGER TROUBLE

Crews came to Oulton from a Heavy Conversion Unit where they had learned to work together and had acquainted themselves with four-engined aircraft - Lancasters or Halifaxes, which is what they

would expect to crew in Bomber Command. The Oulton squadrons 214 and 223 however, were equipped with the American B17 Flying Fortress and B24 Liberator. These aircraft, modified and equipped to do Special Duties, formed only a part of 100 Group – the Bomber Support and Radar Group. So it was necessary for crews to pass through 1699 Conversion Unit (at Oulton) to familiarise themselves with these aircraft, their equipment and capabilities. With so few aircraft and crews on our particular Operations it was wise to be as competent as possible.

214 Squadron was the only one in Bomber Command to be equipped with Fortresses, though I believe other Commands may have had some. Crews were increased from the standard seven members by the inclusion of a Special Wireless Operator (who spoke German) and two waist gunners. There were more gun positions, equipped with the longer range .5s. We practiced air firing, fighter affiliations and night cross country flying, to prepare for operations. This would be a flight to Scotland, avoiding Bomber aerodromes so as not to interfere.

Whilst at 1699 Conversion Unit, one of our exercises was air to air firing practice for the gunners (in daylight of course). The target was a drogue (a long white material sock), which was towed at a reasonable distance behind a small single engined aircraft. On this particular day we were joined by a Canadian Officer sporting a camera, wanting a joy ride. He stood behind me in the waist gun position of our B17 aircraft, where he had a reasonable view of the proceedings. After I had fired my gun he was keen to get a photo of the towing aircraft. Directly above the gun in line with the gun sight was a little plastic window, about six inches square held in position by four screws. This particular one was rather scratched. I said I would take it off for him to get a clear view with his camera. I had no previous instruction about this procedure and on removing the fourth screw to my horror the plastic was ripped out of hand to the outside by the slipstream and disappeared, soon followed by the Rear Gunner coming on the intercom to enquire if we knew what it was that had just sailed past his window.

I informed him and thought no more about the matter - until I was called to see the Training Officer in his office to explain what had happened. The aircraft had been grounded until the long slash on the landing edge of the tail plane (as it joined the fuselage) could be repaired. After receiving a severe lecture about the treatment of aircraft, I was dismissed to wonder the consequences after the matter had received further consideration. Fortunately nothing further was said.

Joining 214

We were told to pick a crew to join. The names of a few pilots needing crew were listed on a board, so David Nutt and Bob Carrott chose a pilot on 223 Squadron, flying B24s. Sergeant Nutt went sick soon after and was grounded for sometime. Later he went back into flying and went to Watton with those who were going back to ops. He decided to stay in the RAF and was I believe soon made an officer. Sergeant Carrott was not so lucky. Barely had he begun Ops when he was lost in a B24 in October 1944. Terry Sullivan and I chose Sergeant Crosbie's crew (214 Squadron, B17's).

Jimmy Healey, in his teens had been active in Spain in the Civil War so he had had his baptism under fire before joining us and had some idea of what to expect – we were all rookies on this score but he had now matured and rarely could we get him to speak about this period of his life.

Crosbie's crew were already in billet before we joined and there were no vacancies there so Terry and I then needed to find a 214 billet, Bob Carrott and David Nutt going to a 223 billet.



From left to right:

Sgt Lindsay Odgers, Special Operator – (Australia)
Sgt Jimmy Healy, Rear Gunner –(London)
Sgt Les Billington, Flight Engineer – (Manchester)
Flt Sgt Eric Brazier, Wireless Op – (Argentina)
F/O Jack Carter, Bomb Aimer – (Canada)
F/Sgt Spencer (Ted) Edwards, Mid Upper Gunner – (London)
Sgt Alistair McDermid, Starboard Waist Gunner – (Leeds)
Sgt Terry Sullivan, Port Waist Gunner – (London)
P/O Michael Crosbie (Bing), Skipper – (London) -

We were directed to a Nissen hut on the main site, just past the camp cinema and close to a long narrow boundary of trees, running down to the Aylsham Road. The Sergeants' Mess and Airmans' Mess were in this area, just a short walk back towards the airfield. In the hut were just two inhabitants, one of whom left soon to remuster. Here we were joined by Flight Sergeant Bennett and six of his crew, who had just arrived at Oulton. The other three of Bennett's crew were the special Wireless operator, Steve Nessner, a Canadian officer in billet with Murray Peden and the two W/O waist gunners waiting to do a second tour, who were already settled elsewhere.

These Nissen huts were corrugated iron on a cement base. They were cold in winter and were provided with a coke stove which we had to clean and tend. A coke ration was dumped in the middle of the site once a week and hopefully one of us was about soon to collect our share before it had all disappeared (or it would be a very cold week). Rarely did the stoves burn all day as there was only enough coke for

the evenings. Most days we were not back in the hut till after tea, presuming of course we were not flying. My bed was by the stove, which was the warmest spot so it was a popular seat for everyone, and could be difficult to keep tidy. One day a week the billet and beds had to be left in 'Special Inspection Order' (Thursday), spick and span for a possible CO's inspection. A bit of order and discipline once a week to keep the aircrew on their toes (Bull, or similar, we called it). On a morning aircrews would go out to their aircraft and clean their guns. It was a work of art getting on the aircraft wing and cleaning the mid-upper turret guns and it took all four gunners. This would take a while and afterwards being thirsty or cold we would often retire to the Sally Ann for tea and a bun, doing very little else before going to the mess for dinner. About midday a message would come from Crosbie if we were flying that evening. Otherwise we might call at the shop and post office run by Mrs Pask. This was back along the village road, by the main airfield gates. This shop was very handy, selling stamps, writing paper, doughnuts, cups of tea and newspapers. It was in fact the only shop outside Aylsham. Several of us would often buy the same newspaper and after dinner would retire to the restroom and see who could finish the crossword first. We might have a drink and smoke too as the afternoon was usually free if we were not flying. Most of us were smokers in those days and the overseas lads (Canadian, Aussies, etc) were supplied with several hundred duty free cigs per month. They would pass on a generous share to the other six of us, so we were not short. Normal price in those days was twenty for a shilling if I remember rightly. We were not exactly overpaid, but operational aircrew were paid an additional shilling per day extra by Lord Nuffield. A very nice gesture from him, as sergeant's pay was then seven shillings per day. Pay parade was held fortnightly.

Operational aircrew were always well fed to keep us fit and alert. It took a lot of time and money to train us. Feeding was not the problem, but timing was. When ops take off was early, as in autumn and winter, when it got dark early, the Flying Meal would be soon after normal dinner. Normal meals were taken in the Sergeant's Mess, but Flying Meals were always taken in the Airman's Mess.

We were issued with boiled sweets, gum and raisins to eat whilst flying and also a flask each of hot coffee. Flying meals were usually either steak and chips or bacon and eggs, a welcome luxury in those wartime days. Flying meals were usually before an Op, but if it was a very long one we might get something on return. When we got back we were always offered coffee and rum whilst awaiting interrogation. The rum was optional and I didn't have it as I didn't like it. Then we were allowed to go to bed. If we arrived back after midnight we did not have to report to our sections the following day until after dinner (14:00 hours).

After the flying meal all crew members would report to the operations room for briefing. Only crews and personnel (usually officers) involved in the "Target For Tonight" were allowed to be present. The Target, weather report and any information discussed was for their eyes and ears only and not to be repeated to anyone outside. If the Op was cancelled because of poor weather it was vital to keep the target secret in case it was repeated again soon.

After briefing we would go and don our flying kit, collect a parachute and wait for a lorry to take us round the airfield to our aircraft (dispersals). Take off was often just before dusk, it being easier to see the runway in daylight.

When we were not flying we might decide to go up to the camp cinema, have a pint in the Sergeants' Mess or have a lazy night in the billet. Some of the trees outside were sweet chestnuts – not very common in England and we could gather some of the very prevalent nuts and cook them on the hot coke stove tops (a rare delicacy in wartime). I was very popular when I took some home with me on leave. This was also a time when we could get down to a bit of letter writing – to post on our way to the A/G section in the morning. On many occasions a number of us spent many hours (in the billet)

playing cribbage – just for the fun of it – no money, Bennett forbade it - and it did tend to occupy (relax) our minds. For a change – every week or so – we might go into Aylsham or Norwich, but we did not have any "Liberty Buses" a bit surprising for an operation station one would think. It was a 20 to 25 minute walk in the pitch dark (autumn/winter) into Aylsham, about two miles. The village sported, as I remember a cinema, pubs, fish and chip shop and Town Hall for dances. If transport was available, we preferred Norwich on days when we had early flying stand down or bad weather. There was a bus and taxi service from Aylsham to Norwich, but it was not always convenient because of limited services. Nevertheless, we did sometimes use this, staying the night in Norwich Sally Ann and returning straight after breakfast. This had bunk beds. For a comfortable night it was better not to have a stranger in the top bunk, especially if he'd been on the binge – anything might happen!

It must be remembered that airmen were front-line troops, even if stationed in England and aircrew had noisy wild parties at times! When not on Ops they might want to relax and forget for a short while, before the concentration and tension of the next Operation, which might be the following day, weather permitting, and subject to the serviceability of the aircraft.

We had no bicycles as there were not enough to go round on such a large unit. Crosbie had his mother's small car and as often as petrol ration would permit, he always took the same six of us, himself, the F/Engineer, and four gunners (did he feel safer with four observant A/G's?) into Norwich either for a café meal or to the cinema and we always stayed together as a group.

Dancing was not one of our favourites, possibly because of Ted, our mid-upper, who was married with family, our father figure. He organised things and sorted out our problems, either personal or between the crew. Being over thirty, he was nearly ten years older than most of us and probably much wiser.

The cold weather and snow in January 1945 curtailing flying and we had a bit more free time in daylight hours. When the Canadian officers in our crew said there was ice on the lake at Blickling, two or three of us said we would join them in the afternoon with our ice-skates. When we got there, we got a boot-polish tin and found some suitable short tree branches and made an attempt at playing ice hockey, against the Canadians, which we found both enjoyable and relaxing – a real change. Unfortunately, the opportunity to repeat this pastime did not occur.

Lindsay Odgers was a friendly, sociable and serious young man in his twenties. If we had not been flying on a Sunday evening he might go assist with the Religious Interlude at Aylsham Sally-Ann canteen. He was a conscientious crew member, who when we were on Ops would relieve each of the waist-gunners in turn on the home leg. This would give them five minutes to sit under the lamp in his cabin and have a cup of coffee from the Thermos. This was a welcome relief from standing in the dark, staring into empty space. A tiring job, made more difficult if the aircraft was taking evasive action, corkscrewing violently, or weaving whilst dropping Window. This was the waist-gunner's job whilst in enemy territory.

Officers and WAAFs were billeted at Blickling Manor, about a mile away, halfway to Aylsham. It is to be hoped that their facilities were better than our overcrowded ones, where we queued for meals, washing facilities and toilets. Partly this was caused by our additional crew members – Fortresses and Liberators had ten crew members as opposed to seven in our Bomber aircraft

First Operations

I think we were all curious and had mixed feelings as to how we would react with our first Operation ("Op"). We were hoping it would be not too distant and with minimum hassle. How glad we were to get it "under our belts" and then gain confidence with each succeeding one.

After our first Op we landed at a very crowded Manston, supposedly to take off again for a second spoof that night. We got bogged down and had to stay the night. When bad fog materialised and we had to stay for two days. Back at base those ignorant of our dilemma thought we had 'bought it' on our debut.



At this stage of the war we would be expected to complete thirty full Ops as a first tour, then have a six month break doing other duties. Usually this was training new crews at training centres. Then maybe a second tour of twenty Ops. Whilst on Ops, crews could normally expect to have a week's leave after six to eight weeks – a pleasant break to look forward to. During October Bob Carrott and his crew were lost on a 223 Squadron Liberator. David Nutt had gone sick and was not with them. I would meet him sometimes in the Sergeants' Mess.

Alistair pictured in 1944

We got a few Ops under our belts in October and early November and then unfortunately I got a dose of flu and head cold. I reported sick as I did not wish to take any risks with my eardrums when flying at different altitudes. This is why we were issued chewing gum – to keep the ear and sinus free when changing heights.

I was put into sick quarters for two to three days and as a result I missed two trips with the crew, which I would have to make good when the opportunity arose, if I was to finish my tour with the rest of the crew. Sick quarters were on the far side of the airfield with the Sally Ann canteen nearby, close to the crossroads for Blickling, where the pre-set memorial stands.

It was about this time (November) that we had a foggy spell for two or three days. Four American Liberators had landed at Oulton and had to wait until the weather improved to leave. When they were able to take off, one aircraft went round the circuit and was coming back in to land when it was unable to make the runway and it crashed in the belt of trees close to our billet, which was fairly close. We walked from the billet to inspect the damage, glad it missed us. What a mess, and as I recall no survivors. It was only about a cricket field's width from our hut!

During the autumn we had another potentially dangerous problem, namely flying Buzz-bombs, which sometimes came near or over us. These were being carried by specially adapted Heinkels. They were carried over the North Sea, released just short of the east coast, and pre-set to target London. As soon as the engines stopped the nose would drop, they would lose height fast and explode on hitting the ground. It was known for the odd one to abort. During the autumn one did cut out as it went over and landed in a field just beyond the airfield, in the Blickling direction, with a terrific blast. We were in the billet at the time, about half a mile across the fields. It just sounded as if it had straightened and bent again the grooves in our corrugated iron roof - a strange and frightening experience. What would it

have done if it had been closer? If the engine cut before going over, you were advised to fall flat and keep your fingers crossed (or pray).

During November our crew went to Little Snoring, Monday to Friday, on a night vision course. I don't remember whether Benny's crew did this as well later. About this time, we had a week's leave.

The Role of 100 Group

Perhaps in these short extracts, I have not made it sufficiently plain about the work 214 Squadron was doing. Late in 1943, after rising and unacceptable losses in aircraft crews, 100 Group (Bomber Support) came into being to make life a little easier for the Target bombers.



It was led by Air Vice Marshall Addison (pictured), who was very experienced in electrical warfare.

100 Group had, I believe, eight airfields in North Norfolk, with headquarters at Bylaugh Hall, near Swanton Morley. There were four bomber Squadrons and seven Squadrons of the twin-engined Mosquitos. The role was to harass the night fighters, attack them on take off and also to carry out diversions (spoofs). The four bomber squadrons were: 171 Squadron at North Creake flying Halifaxes; 214 Squadron (FMS - Federated Malay States) at Oulton operating B17 Flying Fortresses and 233 Squadron, also at Oulton, flying Liberators. I was with 214 Squadron.

This was an interesting squadron to be on with varied duties. We carried no bombs. Our purpose was to support and protect the bombers over Europe, by jamming the early warning systems, and the ground instructions to the night fighters. For this we were equipped with the latest electronic gadgets, many of which were highly secret and not supplied to Bomber Command aircraft.

We had two types of operations: Spoof and Target. On Spoofs we flew to an area well away from the 'Target for Tonight', and 'Windowed'. This was the dropping of bundles of metal strips to flood enemy radar. This was about twenty minutes before the bombers went in over the real target and the idea was to attract the night fighters. Hopefully they would not catch us and would not be able to get back in time to harass the bombers.

Normally we would do perhaps three Spoofs and then go on a Target Op with the bombers. When we started Ops in October '44 the Spoofs were only credited as half an Op, being promoted to a full one in about November, I think. Targets were always a full Op.

Some of our aircraft carried the top secret Jostle in their bomb bays. It was too large for Lancasters or Halifaxes, which is why we were equipped with B17s. Jostle was operated by a German Speaking Wireless Op. In our crew this was Lindsay Odgers, in Bennett's Crew, Steve Nessner, a Canadian. This device jammed ground instructions to the airborne night fighters. When doing this our aircraft worked one of three overlapping shifts over the target, to ensure that cover continued if one aircraft were hit. The three shifts were H-5 to H+5, H to H+10 and H+5 to H+15 minutes, H being the time scheduled for the Pathfinder bomber to drop his first Target Indicators, for the bombing to commence. Normally a bombing run would last half a minute, Pathfinders stayed three minutes and 214 aircraft remained over the target ten minutes. Some fun!

We were later told that when the Jostle was switched on, the night fighters could home in on the beam. We also became aware that Bomber command believed that we might be subject to heavy losses, but fortunately this was not so, until we lost six B17s during March/April 1945. As far as I am aware, from October '44 to that time our losses were only two aircraft; one in November '44 and one in February '45 (landing on FIDO at Foulsham). This was very encouraging to our crews. Bomber losses were probably much higher in comparable sorties. I believe that 214 was the only squadron with Jostle. It was Top Secret for many, many years after the war. Crews were not to discuss the Special Op's job or equipment within at any time. It was assumed that the ground staff did not know what we were doing (their job was purely maintenance) or what the Window we carried was used for. Our work was not made public until the 1970s or 80s. We were little known then and remain so today. Even the Bomber crews knew very little about us. So if our "Spec Op" Lindsay, as instructed, said little about what he was doing, you may now understand.

Over the course of the war there had been a series of technical aids introduced by both sides, to help the combatants in the bombing campaign. One of the earlier ones was Moonshine, an allied deception measure first used in August 1942. It greatly amplified the return pulses of the German early warning radar (Freya) to give the impression of a much larger force, and hopefully provoke wasted enemy interceptions. It remained in use until October of that year. Mandrel was introduced in November for the same purpose.

Measures to disrupt air to ground communication with the night fighters began with tinsel (November 1942) and continued with ABC which was airborne transmitter to jam their VHF radios (October 1943). Jostle IV was an improved version which blotted a spread of frequencies, instead of one at a time (August 1944).

Window had been introduced in July 1943. German responses were SN-2 (a night fighter radar not affected by it) (October); Wurzburg (a radar modification, which under good conditions distinguished the aircraft from the almost stationary Window cloud – introduced November); and Nurnburg (radar modification enabling skilled operators to aurally distinguish a Window radar echo from that from an aircraft – also introduced November). Window strip sizes were altered in September 1944, to enable them to jam SN-2 and Piperack introduced in October. This was an airborne transmitter, which jammed SN-2.

Target Gdynia and Back

Each time we were informed to prepare for an Op that night our normal curiosity would make us wonder, will it be a long or short mission? The risk presumably increased with depth of penetration and to a degree the type of weather. This particular afternoon, the 18th December, the flying meal was not early, nor was take off before dark, so we were surprised at briefing to see long route tapes – the target was to be Gdynia ([Northern Poland, on the southern coast of the Baltic - Ed](#)).

First reaction - a long trip, but much of it over sea, maybe less demanding than usual for the distance, with less flak and hopefully fewer fighters. It did though have an interesting appearance of being different to the normal run of Ops. To distant Poland and past neutral Sweden, both new experiences and as I said over many sea-miles, whatever that may entail?

The reason for the choice of target was soon explained to us. There were at that time seven warships in the harbour at Gdynia, all now in good sea-worthy condition, ready to sneak out through the North Sea into the Atlantic to cause havoc amongst the convoys. Known ships such as the Admiral Scheer, Lutzow, Prinz Eugen and Gneisenau. It was hoped that tonight's mission would greatly delay that possibility.

It was suggested that in the event of an aircraft being seriously damaged, we could travel eastwards, where the Russian lines were now only about 120 miles away. If we did this, after landing, hopefully, should leave the aircraft we would keep our hands in the air when approached by the Russians, then ask for contact with British Military Mission for our future guidance. Incidentally with this risk or possibility in mind, we had an additional safeguard. Each of us was issued with a small silk Union Jack, about the size of a writing pad, to hang round our necks before alighting. The disadvantage in opting for Sweden would have meant the aircraft and crew being interned for the duration.

Whether we would be less likely to get enemy intervention before or after the target area, because so much of this mission would be across the sea, we would no doubt find out. One thing that was certain in our minds, we could not expect it to be a piece of cake. One warship could put up quite a barrage of flak so what could we expect from seven?

So, briefing over and much to occupy our thoughts, en route to the Locker Room. Then, aboard the Crew Bus in flying kit with parachute, and out to the aircraft. We were airborne at 17.15, on our way now in a steady climb onto a course out over the North Sea. Denmark crossed, then a most wonderful and pleasant vision unfolded before our eyes - the most clear and colourful town and street lighting as we approached Sweden. It was a sight so looked forward to in the future, when you remember the dismal Black-Out which covered most of Europe, during the War Years. We actually flew over part of Southern Sweden before turning on a direct course for the target, Gdynia. The Swedes did fire anti aircraft shells into the air, not I believe directly aimed at us, but more to show that we had not observed their neutrality, so a direct invitation to leave their territory.

As we approached the Target there was a fair level of activity, but not quite the welcome we might have anticipated. We later learned that this was because the warships had only skeleton crews aboard at the time. Our Skipper always flew over the Target for our 10 minute shift, rather than round it, as he believed that to be the safest course, less likely to meet fighters though we were not totally convinced. Meanwhile the crew members were doing their specified checks; the waist gunners still "windowing"; the Special Wireless Operator listened to, and then attempted to jam, the enemy Ground Controller passing messages to his night fighters, as the Bombers came into the Target on their bombing-runs.

With our shift over, we would have turned and be heading in the right direction, homeward bound, always a pleasing thought. We had not travelled very far before being faced with a serious problem with one of the engines. I do not know whether the cause was mechanical, overheating or flak, but it had to be "feathered". We still a long trip ahead, much of it over the sea, on three engines and still well inside enemy controlled area.

This had been the longest trip of 214 from Oulton to date – over 10 hours. I had to stand for the whole time. We had a busy run of Ops in December. Many crews completed their tours and went to become Trainers, so we became Senior Crew. There was a dance on Christmas Eve which we were unable to attend, as we arrived back late from Ops and were not allowed in, in battledress. We were out again on New Year's Eve.

Target Nuremburg

We had a trip on 30th December in J-JIG to Duisberg, one on 31st December in Jig to Osnabruck, so excused duties for New Year's Day and then back to business on January 2nd. This night we would go with the Target Bombers. As the Flying Meal followed hard on the heels of the normal dinner we had just devoured, it had every appearance of being either an early mission or most likely a larger than

average one, but to where, we wondered. Stuttgart? Munich? Almost certainly, a deep penetration in Germany. Well, we were soon to find out.

Back up on the 'drome all the participating crews were assembled for Briefing in the Operations Block. The Wing-Co entered; silence ensued as he went to draw back the curtain which covered the map showing the "Target For Tonight". We held our breath as the long length of route tape led to Nuremburg, deep in the south of Germany. This would be our crew's furthest trip into enemy territory to press. As briefing continued, we were told where other aircraft were directed on diversion or other missions designed to assist the Main Target aircraft. Information was also given about what "Met" (weather) to expect over our route, such as winds, clouds or moonlight and if we would have risk of mist or fog for landing on our return to base – remember of course that this was midwinter. We were also advised where night fighters were most likely or known heavily defended ground areas – Antiaircraft guns or searchlights.

After briefing we always retired to the Locker Room to change into our flying kit. This was a matter of personal choice, but included electrically heated one piece zippered base suits, sheepskin lined leather boots and leather helmets with earpieces and wiring for the intercom. Gloves consisted of three pairs, thin silk, padded electric and leather gauntlets.

Our money and valuables were put into a bag to be left in our lockers. We collected escape kits, which were about the size of an average library book and slid them inside our battledress tops so they didn't get lost. Then last but not least we picked up a parachute. They were put somewhere handy and not worn until it was deemed urgent. We were now ready to board the perimeter bus to take us to the dispersal point and our own aircraft. As you will have noticed, much time could be spent preparing for the flight, before boarding the aircraft. This day we were airborne at 15.15. Being early January, it was nearly dark. What might fate have in store for us? There was not a lot of general activity about, yet, that night we were on the early duty, which meant we had to do the 100 Group Jamming on Target - 5 to +5 (5 minutes before, until 5 minutes after H Hour. H-Hour was the time Pathfinders dropped colouring flares to show the bombers where to start bombing). The night was fairly dark with little to bother us on the outward leg. When flying at ten thousand feet or more the Skipper called every fifteen minutes to check we were all alert, with our oxygen working properly – twenty minutes without oxygen could be fatal.

When we got near the target of course, I was busy Windowing. However, our main purpose for being at the target was for our special wireless operator with his electronic radar equipment to listen in to the enemy ground controller, and then attempt to jam whatever radio frequency he chose for his broadcast to the fighters. He continued to do this whatever the rest of the crew might be doing. Not appearing to have the company of fighters, searchlights or of friendly bombers, we might thankfully have felt lonely, but with H Hour very near, the situation was always likely to alter fast - in the event much faster than we expected.

Our thoughts were interrupted by the intercom; the Skipper requested "info" regarding our actual position from the Navigator, to be told that he believed we were seven miles due north of the city. Hardly had he said this when everything was lit up – we were "coned" by searchlights with flak bursting too close for comfort. We immediately took violent evasive action. But there was no immediate relief and we could still see flak following us with shrapnel hitting the aircraft. This was an eerie sensation, each piece sounding as if it had hit the nose and then bounced on and off the skin to the tail end, like a pebble skimming over water. It was not always easy to lose the "coning" which was synchronised with the ack-ack guns – in this instance we were finally successful – probably more quickly than it seemed at the time. Meanwhile the Skipper attempted to keep us within the Target area.

Whilst this was happening, I was still attempting to Window. Parcels of the larger M-Type Window contained twelve bundles, each about twelve inches by two inches by one and a half inches, which were opened and ejected by touch in the darkness. I had dispatched about three bundles and felt for the next under my left hand, but to no avail. Mystified I reached for the next parcel and restarted the procedure, which was soon interrupted by my companion Terry, the port waist gunner, who pointed at his oxygen gauge, situated on the wall about two feet forwards from his gun position window. It was not registering and hung from the wall by its pipe. I signalled to him to get himself connected up to one of the spare oxygen cylinders, which he did while I restarted the job in hand. He informed the Skipper at the next check.

With our ten minute shift on Target now completed (though our special wireless operator still had duties to perform) we set course for home. One of the engines had been damaged, so we were now flying on three. As the Lancaster and Halifax bombers we were flying with had a faster cruising speed than B17s, even with the nose down, we decided to keep height and stooge along as fast as we were able, as we would not be clear of enemy territory for at least an hour. I was expected to Window for another fifteen minutes, dropping the rate every five minutes. When going into the target we dropped for about twenty minutes from five to twenty. The navigator informed us when to change or stop, as he had a small light and could see his watch.

We realised now that we had actually been over the city on H-Hour, as the first Pathfinder dropped his marking flares. The enemy defences had decided to stop their waiting game when it was obvious that they were the target and had caught us on their listening devices, coning us and not the Pathfinder. It was apparent that we had sustained some damage, as our progress home had been slowed, but exactly what did it entail? That we would find out later.

Before we cleared hostile territory, we had two separate sightings of enemy JU88 fighters flying above us. To our relief neither of them engaged us in combat. Either they had not spotted us, or possibly they had exhausted their ammo in previous attacks. Like us they might have been airborne for some considerable time.

Approaching friendly territory, it was time to make future plans. We decided to head for Juvincourt, an American emergency landing 'drome, recently recaptured, in the Rheims area. But to our dismay we were informed they were not operating because of the very poor visibility. With this knowledge, Ted the mid-upper gunner, our wise old father figure, came on the intercom, to ask the Skipper the view of our prospects, as he personally, would rather bail out over France than ditch in the Channel, if there was a high risk. What did the other crew members think? It was decided that as we had made it so far, with no more obvious development, we would proceed to Manston (Kent), where incidentally we had landed on our first Op. One must remember that in the dark, it was difficult to assess how bad the damage was, the faulty engine apart. The Skipper then said that if on arrival at Manston things remained the same he was going to try and make Base. So, with fingers crossed we pressed on without further mishap to a smooth touchdown just after midnight, then into dispersal and engines off. What a relief to be home after a trip of nearly nine hours. Ready for a spot of shut eye.

May the Crew bus get a move on and get us back to Station HQ! We still had to return the parachutes, go to the locker room, get a welcome cup of coffee with rum to cheer us up, and hopefully get into interrogation pretty quick. Fortunately, we did. I still remember when the navigator explained to the Intelligence Officer how he wiped the water off his map, only to have to repeat the process a number of times. Strange happenings, but we all had Gremlins at times - like I'd had with the window bundles. After further discussion we were excused to make our ways to our various billets. One consolation was

that we could sleep late on the morrow, as landing after midnight we were entitled to report to our sections later the following day. Sleep came quickly.

The following day when we gunners went to clean guns, we were in for a number of surprises, and answers to the mysteries of the previous night. A piece of flak had come through the fuselage and forced the port gunners oxygen gauge from the wall, crossed the area behind me, torn the Window bundle under my hand to shreds and left a hole in the floor the size of a cricket ball. Slivers of Window covered the compartment floor like confetti. Flak had pierced the nose of the aircraft going right through the navigator's parachute (fortunately not needed) and passing just above his head, cut a hand fire extinguisher in half. This had gone off on the ceiling and dripped on his table and maps. There were large gashes in the fin and rudder, also in the tailplane close to the rear gun position. The engine also had been hit; fortunately for us the fuel had not ignited. With scars up and down the fuselage, the aircraft had more holes than a pepper pot. We were amazed that none of the crew had been injured. The ground crew certainly had a job on their hands before the aircraft was again serviceable.

It might be interesting to note that when flying J-JIG on Diversion we never caused the ground crew any unusual servicing.

Juvincourt

There was no flying the second week of January because of snow on the runways. Aircrew were provided with shovels to clear it away, but this was a thankless task and had to be abandoned. An attempt was made to clear it with a B17 piloted by Crosbie. It was parked wrong way round at the end of the runway with brakes on and engines at full revs to clear the snow with slipstream, but this also proved fruitless, so it was left to nature.

On the 17th January we did a Spoof raid to Giessen. With bad fog on return we had to land on FIDO at Foulsham, the neighbouring airfield, where we spent the night. In the morning we discovered that Crosbie, unable to sleep had gone by car to Oulton and Bennett came to fly us and the aircraft back to base.

Next, we had a Target Op to Sterkade which was a vital oil producing plant, very memorable for what looked like a gigantic firework display of different colours. On February 2nd another Spoof Raid, which was very routine.

On the 3rd we had a pleasant surprise – Crosbie with a skeleton crew was to take an aircraft in daylight to Juvincourt airfield in the Ardennes. This was newly captured – an advanced base for damaged aircraft to land. This was to bring back a repaired aircraft of 214 and for the purpose we had Bennett and another skeleton crew on board. Bennett and Crosbie and his gunners came from London and we were going to fly very near in daylight, so they were very interested. In fact the whole trip had great appeal, to be able to naturally see an area we had crossed many times in the dark. Normally the only sight recognisable in the dark was the seashore when crossing the coastline. When this happened I would inform the navigator, so that he could check the accuracy of his plots. On the way down Crosbie slipped on an aircraft gangway and discovered on seeing the Medical Officer at Juvincourt that he had broken his ankle, so was unable to fly us back.

In the late afternoon we were given sleeping quarters and a meal and then taken by Liberty Bus to Rheims for the evening. We were attracted to a building with a crowd outside, which turned out to be a dance hall, but not being terribly impressed we decided to find a pub or café where we might sample some local brew – namely champagne – which we did.

It was busy all the time with US troops everywhere. The following day we had chance to sample an American Mess for breakfast and dinner. We were very impressed with the items on their regular menu – things we had very rarely seen in wartime such as chicken, ice cream and tinned pineapple. We all left together after dinner, with Bennett flying us back to Oulton - a memorable, if abortive trip. As our pilot Crosbie was now incapacitated, we went on a week's leave.

Intruder

I did not fly again until the 3rd March. I then heard Bennett had a trip that night, so seeing an ideal chance to make up an Op with a crew I knew, I asked Benny if I could go with them, as I knew he was four crew short. This was a result of his previous nightmare trip in which they were attacked by a night fighter. His gunner shot down the raider from his fixed gun – a work of art – not before they took casualties, including the navigator, F/O "Paddy" Paddick. Furthermore Steve Nessner, the Special Operator of Bennett's crew was down with tonsillitis and though keen to go, was talked out of it.

Bennett was pleased to accept my offer and collected three other experienced airmen from Crosbie's crew to fill his gaps. These three were not pleased, not wishing to be out of synch so late in their tour. They complained to the Squadron Leader, who told them that it was unavoidable.

We left at about 18.15 on a routine Bomber Support mission to the Ruhr, radar jamming and Windowing. Take off and outward leg proved uneventful. After we turned for home and I stopped opening and ejecting my packets of window, I resumed careful observation from my starboard waist gun position. The Spec. W/Op relieved me for a few minutes while I got a cup of coffee from my thermos. Resuming duty we arrived back at base without a mishap at around midnight in advance of target bombers. The Skipper contacted Control (Woodside Jig to Azure) and was instructed "Your turn to land No.3". We now joined the circuit until the prior two had landed safely. Then it was our turn. The 'drome was lit up. We had our lights on, flaps down, wheels down and were coming into the funnel when suddenly another aircraft called control stating they had a damaged engine and requesting permission to come straight in. This was granted. Control shot us a red flare and we turned away to complete another circuit.

Nearly in the same instant I observed tracer coming in from behind and going into the distance. With no bandit warnings and no action calls from the other gunners on the intercom my first thought was that it was some careless air gunner unloading, but I quickly realised that it was far more serious as flames began streaking from the wing. From the window they appeared within touching distance. There were still no calls or instructions over the intercom. Perhaps it was damaged. I bent down and put on my chest parachute, so the port waist gunner did the same. I intended next to remove the rear door, which was specially hinged to be ready for a quick exit, but fate now took a hand.

It must have been at this moment that we hit some tall oak trees at the side of the main road. Our pilot had possibly tried to come in the other runway, but had not enough control of the damaged aircraft. I was told later that the aircraft had exploded, disintegrating into small pieces, none much larger than an engine nacelle and spreading over a wide area near the sick quarters. So near in fact that the medics only needed to walk out the door to look for survivors rather than getting in their ambulance. The M/O told me later in the hospital that he found me sitting on an ammo box, rounds popping in the heat, which reminded him of Guy Fawkes. If it had been less serious he would have been tempted to go back for his camera!

I was transferred to Norfolk and Norwich Hospital along with W/Op, A/G, and F/Sgt Carroll who had been hit with shrapnel in his elbow. I had been unconscious since the time of the explosion. The first

memories I have after the crash were a nurse cutting me out of my clothes in hospital. Examination showed only concussion and bruises.

There were only two survivors, the other being W/O Church, the port waist gunner from Bennett's crew. It was rather unusual as far as I am aware for gunners to be the only survivors. The other three from our crew were killed, Les Billington, Lindsay Odgers and Jimmy Healey. Bennett was shot in the buttocks as his navigator 'Paddy' Paddick had been on the previous op of 7 February. (On that op Paddy was the only member of the crew to lose his life). They were unable to stop bleeding in time and bled to death. Bennett's parents lived just outside London. Steve Nessner took the body of his former skipper and friend home for the funeral.

Flight Sergeant Barnfield, Bennett's original navigator had just recovered from frostbite and was also in the crew, making his first and last Op.

The other members of Bennett's crew who were killed were Leslie Hadder, William Bridden and Frank Hares.

When after a week I had recovered enough to travel, Carroll and I moved to the RAF Area Hospital for East Anglia, a smart modern centre at Ely. I recuperated for two weeks and was deemed fit for a spot of sick leave before reporting back to 214 Oulton, where Crosbie's crew with its four replacements (the Flight Engineer and Spec Op ex Bennett and two spare gunners) were just finishing their tour. So this was the breakup of a friendly, keen, conscientious and experienced crew. I had lost many of my friends in both crews, almost half the people I knew well at Oulton.

Ours had been a well mixed bunch – two Canadians, one Australian, one Argentinean, four Londoners, a Mancunian and one from Leeds. Not unusual for a 214 crew. Les Billington was the only crew member to meet my parents, and stay at our house. Had he survived, we would probably have kept in touch down the years. Les was jolly, lively and entertaining, a typical Northerner, full of beans, and a clever, mechanically minded and interesting person. He had shared all my trips and unforgettable experiences.

Les is buried in the parish church graveyard at Blickling, next to the Manor, where the officers and WAAFs were billeted. This is the only RAF grave at Blickling, and I have a "silent moment" there when the opportunity occurs.

There is a Memorial Book at the church, dedicated to those who served and died at Oulton, including a number of my personal friends and acquaintances, Les among them – bless him.

The Last Months

On returning from the hospital I began to realise how many friends I had lost. I moved into a new, strange hut further away from the mess. Crosbie finished his tour with a patched-up crew including the F/Eng, Spec Op and Rear A/G from Bennett's and was ready for reporting.

It had been the largest intruder raid of the war. Others of 214 were attacked that night; at Woodbridge (down and landed); and at Peterborough (escaped). It was the beginning of a period in which 214 took its heaviest losses whilst based in Oulton. Five other aircraft were lost in the next month.



I learned that in my absence, in fact almost all the time I had been away, I had missed a great occasion. A film crew and top British stars had been filming "The Wicked Lady" at Blickling Hall, the Officer and WAAF billets. After filming, Margaret Lockwood, Pat Rock, James Mason and Stewart Grainger attended a party in the Sergeants' Mess.

I was now a half-fit odd-bod with very few official duties, roaming the Unit to amuse myself. Occasionally I was asked to "throw" clay pigeons for the officers, or some similar task. We did now have a Liberty Bus some days to Cromer, where some of the beaches had been cleared of mines etc. I went a few times with David Nutt, who incidentally had been in the Control Caravan the night of the intruder and had been worried about what was happening to me. He was posted to Walton with the aircrew who were still hoping to fly.

It was now Summertime, and I went for a week to North Creake where the RAF had a rest camp in tents by the seashore. We would do PT in the mornings and amuse ourselves in the afternoons, perhaps swimming.

After VE day it had been expected that 214 Federated Malay States Squadron would have an early posting to the Far East. Crews to remain operational were transferred as a group to Walton. David Nutt went in late June, I think, so I lost my last close friend from 214.

I was still stationed at Oulton in August when many of the others had been posted away. I had my twenty-first birthday almost by myself in the Sergeants' Mess. Soon after, I was posted to Eastchurch (Isle of Sheppey, Kent) to remuster from aircrew. I was graded unfit for air duties, but remained as a Sergeant. In October I was a clerk, general duties, with Transport Command at Bourne, five miles from Cambridge. They were engaged in returning demobbed troops from the Far East. These were pleasant days, as I was the only sergeant in the orderly room. I was a clerk of documents and had a few perks as a man who knew things.

In February 1946 I was posted to the Record Office at Barnwood, Gloucester, rated Grade 3, UK only. I served five all night duties in a fortnight. Chasing up my demob details I asked why I had not been rated Class B. This was a priority discharge, as the building tradesmen were needed to help rebuild the country. I found that I had been mistakenly classified as an artist and had this corrected.

Finally, I was demobbed in September 1946 at Warton, near Preston in Lancashire.

Addendum to the Section on the Intruder at Oulton

These further notes were written by Alastair McDermid after these memoirs had been written up.

On the night of 3/4 March, F/Sgt Carroll, W/Op who was in hospital with me, was in the Wireless Office when the Junkers 88 which shot us down strafed across the Aerodrome. One of its cannon shell's went through the office safe, causing a lump of shrapnel to damage his elbow. He was with me in the ambulance travelling to the Norfolk & Norwich District General Hospital (Norwich) and he told me that I'd kept asking him "Where am I and how did I get here?". If he'd answered me once he must have

answered thirty or forty times – perhaps keeping his mind off his own injury. Of course I was still concussed and in my last conscious thoughts we had still been flying. He had been courting a girl in Aylsham and she brought him a dozen eggs (1 a week on the ration in those days) and when I started eating again after the fourth day, he and I had boiled eggs and toast for breakfast, quite a treat.

Strangely enough, the first thing I remember on arriving at the hospital, was that I started coming round as I was laid on the stretcher or table and a nurse was removing my clothes. Being possibly a bit coy I was going to say a "I will take them off", and then I thought what the heck, she will have done it before – in actual fact she was cutting me out of the clothing as they were unaware of and investigating the extent of my injuries. I had cuts or grazes on the head and large bruising on the forearms from the elbow. I am of the opinion now that having the chest parachute on could well have saved me from much more serious injury as I would appear to have been thrown forcibly forward. I was put to bed and then taken for X-Ray and then returned to the ward surprisingly still in one piece - no sign of breakages. I was feeling weak, groggy and through not taking or fancying any food for three days I was sick at times on an empty stomach – ghastly. During this time, I had a lady from some welfare organisation like Sally Ann or WMCA to see if I wanted fruit, cigs or writing paper – very kind of them – but I was not interested at the time. Terry and Ted (Crosbie's gunners) came to visit me and gave me the impression that the others I had flown with were about on the Unit and leaving me disappointed to think I should be the only one injured. It would have been better I thought for me to realise how lucky I had actually been. My parents were informed and came to see me and wished me well - a day or two later they received a telegram from Air Ministry to say with regret that I had been killed in the crash – but fortunately did not believe it until they had a chance to check with the Squadron. An error which I later told the Squadron Adjutant was very careless and should have been avoided. I think someone at Air Ministry did not read the notification accurately.

On the fourth day I had a glass of milk and some soup and was moved into a nicer side ward (away from the geriatric patients) to join Sgt Carroll.

GISELA: The Raid of 3/4th March 1945

By David.M.McDermid

By October 1944 Intruder raids - fighter raids over Britain - had died out. General Major Josef Schmid, General of Nightfighters, began planning a heavy blow against the British bomber fleets. By December he was ready to brief his crews. They were shown sketches and descriptions of airfield lights and given instructions on how to attack landing bombers from behind. Following large postings to Europe, they were told, Anti Aircraft Command was so depleted that only the cities were covered, and as the blackout was only partial, they could be avoided. The codeword to set the Operation in motion was "*Gisela*".

However, following the forced landing of a German aircraft in Luxembourg on January 1st 1945, the Allies became aware that a large-scale Intruder action was to take place. AA Command and Fighter Command planned their countermeasures. It was true that with the departure of large detachments for Europe with the invading armies AA Command was much depleted, and the night fighter defence consisted of three squadrons of Mosquitoes. The rump of the AA forces was deployed to counter flying bombs, and at night ran the risk of engaging friendly aircraft. A new plan codenamed "*Trigger*" aimed to coordinate the scanty defences. The guns would fire at any target. The nightfighters would operate solely out to sea or in the eleven-mile Yarmouth – Skegness gap in the gun line known as the Gate. The bombers would be routed either through the Gate, or west of London and over the south coast. However, Bomber Command was grimly aware that if intruders mingled with the returning bomber stream the guns would be powerless, and that defence would rest with the Airgunners.

Operation *Trigger* was to begin on February 27th, and on the 25th the orders went out.

On the night of 3/4 March the Main Force target was the destruction of the synthetic oil installations at Kamen, and the equipment of the Dortmund Ems Canal at Ladbergen. Eight hundred and seventeen aircraft set out. The bombers were to return over the North Sea. It was a night of low cloud, and as it would be hard for the returning aircraft to avoid AA in the Allied zone, *Trigger* was suspended.

Meanwhile, German intelligence has estimated that some five hundred aircraft were out. *Gisela* was passed to the Nightfighters, and by 23:00 hours a hundred and forty-two Junkers 88s were airborne, eager to avenge the attacks on their homeland. They roared low over the North Sea, at the difficult and dangerous height of 160 feet to come in below the coastal radar. Once over England they climbed steeply to attacking height, and spread out over a wide area.

The first victim was a Fortress of 214 Squadron (Flight-Sergeant Kingdon), which escaped, damaged. At about midnight Oulton airfield reported a suspect aircraft overhead, and as reports of hostiles began to mount up, 100 Group gave the order "Scram", to divert its aircraft to alternative airfields.

Meanwhile Bennett's crew was approaching the runway at Oulton:

"The skipper contacted control and was instructed: "Your turn to land No.3." We now joined the circuit until the prior two had landed safely. Then it was our own turn. The 'drome was lit up. We had our lights on, flaps down, wheels down and were coming into the funnel when suddenly another aircraft called control stating that they had a damaged engine, and requesting permission to come straight in. This was granted. Control shot us a red flare and we turned away to complete another circuit.

"Nearly in the same instant I observed tracer coming in from behind and going into the distance. With no Bandit warnings and no action calls from the other gunners on the intercom, my first thought was that it was some careless airgunner unloading, but I quickly realized that it was far more serious as flames began streaking from the wing. From the window they appeared within touching distance. There were still no calls or instructions over the intercom. Perhaps it was damaged. I bent down and put on my chest parachute, so the port waist-gunner did the same. I intended next to remove the rear door, which was specially hinged, to be ready for a quick exit, but fate now took a hand."It must have been at this moment that we hit some tall oak trees at the side of the main road...I was told later that the aircraft had exploded, disintegrating into small pieces..."

Murray Peden, a Canadian, was watching from the ground. Earlier that day he had persuaded his friend Steve Nessner, with great difficulty, to remain off duty as Nessner's tonsillitis had left him still too sick to re-join Bennett's crew.

"...cycling back to the hut as our returning operational Fortresses began droning into the circuit. As I was propping my bike against the side of the hut, I heard the noise of an unfamiliar engine. We were so used to the sound of our own Wright Cyclones, and the Merlins and Hercs of the ubiquitous Mosquitoes, Lancasters and Halifaxes, that anything outside that category attracted attention. This one was definitely out of place. I looked up, but could not see any navigation lights in the area from which the sound appeared to be coming.

For a few moments I stood uneasily looking over in the direction of the aerodrome, then saw a pair of navigation lights heading steadily towards the funnel. A few seconds later I heard, and saw, a long burst of fire streak towards the aircraft in the funnel. It was not machine gun fire but the slower heavy

pounding of cannon fire. The target aircraft burst into flames, but maintained for several seconds its steady descent toward the runway; then as the flames spread and leapt in the clear night air the dying aircraft slumped into a gentle curving dive and crashed a few hundred yards away from the hospital. Every member of the crew died. It turned out to be Bennett's crew, the boys Steve Nessner had been so determined to fly with".

... from Murray Pedens book " A Thousand Shall Fall" 1979 -Page 462-, published in England by Imperial War Museum, distributed by Janes Publishing Co, London)

Contrary to expectations, the attack had come in bright moonlight. Even with radar it was almost impossible to distinguish friend from foe. The AA guns fired very little and claimed no hits. The RAF claimed six. Many attacks were made on bombers, airfields, and civilian targets. Bomber Command lost twenty-four aircraft, with twenty others damaged (thirteen Halifaxes, nine Lancasters, a Fortress and a Mosquito. But the Luftwaffe had also suffered a major blow, with thirty-four aircraft destroyed or damaged. No such large attack was ever mounted again, and after a few smaller raids, Intruder activity ended.



ALISTAIR McDERMID WITH HIS FAMILY.

His story was published in 2004 and used here with permission and we want to express our thanks to Linda and David McDermid for being able to share their Fathers's story. His writing has been modified a little to fit comfortably in our magazine – Ed

AN ANZAC DAY TRIBUTE:

*An Address by Helen Rankin given at the Dookie Return Services League
Anzac Day Service, 25th April 2021.*

Good Morning everyone.

Some of you will know me for different reasons:

As a music teacher at Currawa and Dookie Primary School

As lyricist for John Head's 'Dookie'~ the play,

As co-lyricist for 'Dookie The Musical'

As co-author with Dianne Feldmann of the research book:

'Remembering the Dookie Fallen: 100 Years On', discovering the faces and stories of the 16 men on the Memorial behind me who paid the ultimate sacrifice in WW1. A true story of tragic loss in my OWN family 77 years ago led to my early years of curiosity.

My Uncle Bill Vale was killed during WW2. As a child, growing up in the 60's and 70's, I was warned not to bring the subject up for fear of upsetting my Grandma. I always noticed a photo of Bill on the mantelpiece, and this inspired my first poem as a teenager. Many years later I would return to my curiosity once again.

William Searle Vale, known as Bill, was the eldest of ten children to Searle and Marion Vale, of Picola. My mother was only six years old when he was KIA, so her only memory is of him carrying her on his shoulders as he walked up the drive on his last visit home. Quite a picture that creates in the mind.

Bill joined the RAAF in 1941 and attended No. 7 Elementary Flying Training School (7 EFTS) at Western Junction Aerodrome, Launceston, Tasmania flying Tiger Moths. After passing this initial training, he then went to Wagga Wagga in NSW. One day he made a very cheeky flight over the family farm at Picola. He clearly loved what he was doing, being young and daring.

Bill left Australia from Newcastle on November 17th, 1941. He really wanted to stay home in Australia because he felt things were heating up on our shores. But that was not to be. At first, he served with the RAF 600 Squadron at Setif, North Africa. After the Allied Victory he returned to England and joined 157 Squadron, initially based at Predannack, Cornwall then eventually at Swannington, Norfolk.

During this time, Bill flew different planes, including Airspeed Oxford's, Beaufighters and ultimately Mosquitos. At times Bill was flying patrols to help protect England against the barrage of V1's known as *Doodle Bugs*. The German's were launching these across the English Channel in great numbers.

157 Squadron was the first Squadron to use the Mosquito as a night fighter. The family were told Bill was a reconnaissance pilot, which was part of his role for sure, but there was more.

Commissioned as P/O William Searle Vale, he flew Mosquitos for 100 Group, in support of Bomber Command. The squadron was based at Swannington, Norfolk and only the best pilots were chosen for this dangerous and top-secret work.

On November 16th, 1943 Bill married his love, an English woman, Georgina. Tragically, when Bill was killed, Georgina lost the baby she was carrying. He never knew she was expecting his child, as she was waiting for his next Leave to tell him. She continued to write to my Grandparents throughout her life and when my Grandma was 81, she travelled to England to finally meet her daughter-in-law who had always called her Mother.

Most pilots had a very short life expectancy of a couple of weeks. It is a mark of his skill that Bill lasted many months, having 95 operational and training flights with his navigator RAF Flight Lieutenant Alfred Edward David Ashcroft, DFC. Bill had 705 hours and 20 minutes total flying time recorded in his logbook.

The aim of 157 Squadron was to attack German fighters before they even left the ground if possible, otherwise fighting them in the air, ahead of the arrival of the RAF Bombers. Sometimes they did diversionary work like dropping 'Windows': strips of aluminium, picked up by German Radar, confusing the real position of the Allied planes.

On October 6th, 1944, Bill and his navigator Alfred flew out of Swannington at 1807 hours. The plane was a De Havilland Mosquito NF. Mk XIX Reg. No: MM678, and they had flown in it on previous occasions. They were ordered on Intruder Support Patrol, the targets being Bremen and Dortmund, Germany. They flew in support of Bomber Command as a 'High Level Intruder' over the Ruhr area. Their plane failed to return and came down in an already liberated Belgium, 5 miles north-east of Tirlemont, in the village of Drieslinter, now Linter. There were no radio communications. There is no record of the strike by the enemy, which is most unusual as both sides apparently recorded their 'hits'. We will never know why.

More than ten years ago, with the help of the internet, I started researching again and was amazed at what was available at the National Archives of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and other sites. Some of the paperwork can be hard to read. My grandparents first received a 'Missing' telegram followed by a 'Loss of Life' Telegram 2 days later. Heart-breaking. This was happening to so many others.

In January 2012, I began to make connections with people overseas. So many amazing things have happened in the time since. I had made links with a man in Belgium who was researching Bill's story. I received hard copies of a page from a Book of Remembrance, kept at St Clement Danes Church, the Central Church of the Royal Air Force, The Strand in England.

I have had many years of contact with Janine Harrington, editor of RAF 100 Group Association's magazine *'Confound & Destroy'*, in which I have had my poetry, photos and letters published. I was given excellent opportunities to share photos and place enquiries about Bill and his navigator, whom the family had never learnt anything about. I have also purchased books published by Janine with Bill's story included. One book even included limited-edition collectable autographs by important personnel of RAF 100 Group, still living.

Curiously, at the exact same time as I was researching, other people from Belgium were trying to contact the family at Picola. I was helping the family with this communication at first. It was a bit unnerving – a bit like a prank call. Were they genuine?

One day I saw Dr Brendan Nelson AO on ABCTV at The National Press Club. He had been the High Commissioner for Belgium and spoke passionately about his time there. I decided to email him that same day to ask what he thought of these introductory letters. He graciously answered me back that same afternoon! He then put me in contact with the High Commission in Belgium. The feedback I

received, and Brendan's opinion was, that the approaches would be genuine. Brendan said Belgians hold Australians in the highest regard to this day, as they will never forget what the Australians did for them.

Thanks to a very driven researcher in Belgium, Lisette Wouters, through her article in the Daily Express newspaper, searching for any living relatives of Alfred's family in England was achieved with the discovery of a niece.

[Alfred-Ashcroft-VE-day-Belgium-1944-relatives-Sunday-Express-campaign](#)

The people of Linter in Belgium were so happy. They were able to continue with a full weekend of dedications to honour Bill and Alfred in May 2015, just in time for the 70th Anniversary of the end of WW2. There was:

a Mass

an unveiling of a plaque on the church wall

a visit to the men's graves, where they lie side-by-side in Brussels Town Cemetery

a display in a hall with afternoon tea and

a tour of the site of the crash, where family members of mine who made the journey to Belgium for this amazing event, were able to pick up and bring home, small remnants of the plane, still lying in the place where it came down.

Locals said that there was a trail of oil on that fateful day, which marked the path where Bill flew the plane. To me, my family and to the people of Linter, Belgium, William is a hero who flew the plane down to the ground in such a way that he avoided the township and its people. The people of Linter have never forgotten this bravery and thanks to researcher Lisette and the Historic Circle of Linter, William and Alfred are remembered as heroes forever.

One of the entries in Bill's Logbook reads:

"Chased out by 2 Jet A/C. Evaded by flying low in bright moonlight. "0 feet"

The bravery speaks loudly. The sacrifice, selfless. So many bright young lives lost.

LEST WE FORGET.

Helen Rankin,

Australia ANZAC Day, 2021



Of Friends and Comrades

Of friends and comrades with whom I served
Now spread about this earth
Long lost, never to be seen again
To know of friendships worth.

Where are now, these missing friends of mine
Would chance to meet them be
Now gone and never to return
And sadly, no more to see.

These ghostly figures in my mind
Those faces I see with closed eyes
The voices I hear remind me of them
Whenever thoughts of them rise.

How can I forget all those days that I served?
Those times of a friendlier bliss
When today all I have is the memory of those
I once knew, and truly do miss.

By Mike Hillier



The first verse of Mike's poem is particularly poignant. All the Airmen featured here were tragically lost on Operations with Bomber Command and four of them with RAF 100 Group.

Top Row;

Ft/Lt Reg Dobson 103 Squadron; **Ft/Sgt Colin Ashworth**, 214 Squadron; **P/O P Curtain** RAAF, 103 Squadron

Bottom Row;

Ft/Lt Vic Vinnell 192 Squadron; **P/O William Vale** 157 Squadron; **P/O Jack Fischer**, 192 Squadron.

THE ELY CATHEDRAL **BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL WINDOW**

BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL

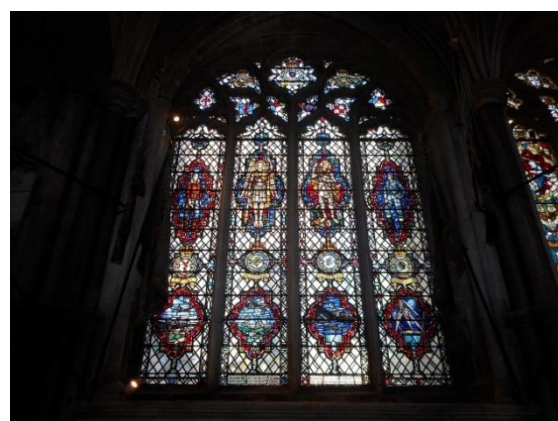
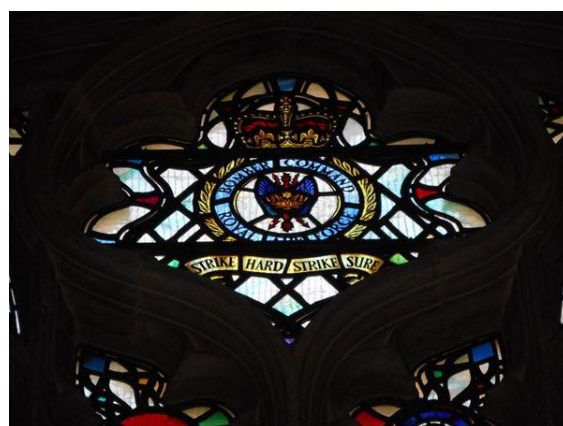
Ely Cathedral Window

A memorial window to the men of Nos. 2, 3, 8, and 100 Groups, R.A.F. Bomber Command who fought and died in the 1939-45 World War was unveiled in Ely Cathedral yesterday by Air Vice-Marshal A. McKee. The window together with Rolls of Honour naming the 19,000 dead of the groups was dedicated by the Bishop of Ely, Dr Edward Wynn.

Air Vice-Marshal McKee, now A.O.C.-in-C. Transport Command, was one of many New Zealanders who served with No. 3 Group during the war. Unveiling the window he said the cathedral was a symbol to all airmen operating from the area.

"Never can it have been so much appreciated as it was during those sombre war years. To us who returned it spelled the way to home and loved ones and thankfulness that one more task had been accomplished. To those who never returned their last sight of Ely was the last glimpse of their heritage."

The service was attended by more than three thousand, including two thousand relatives and friends of those who died.



Photo's courtesy of
International Bomber Command Centre
in Lincoln

*Thanks to Mike Hillier for the old
Newspaper clipping.*

****We will remember them****



John Beeching with the Rachel Reese, Mayor of Nelson with the Presentation of the Poppy Bowl

John Beeching considers himself extremely fortunate to have lived to 97, surviving one of the most dangerous operations of World War Two. He is the second last remaining Veteran of the New Zealand Bomber Command Association in Nelson.

He joined the Royal Air Force in 1941 at just 17-years-old. *"I got sick of working 73 hours a week and thought there's got to be something better than this!"*

John initially volunteered for the army but was denied due to his flat feet which were better suited to flying planes. He still vividly recalls flying the de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito, the fastest aircraft in the world at the time, over Germany in the dark of night.

"I was too young to be scared, but it was just something you got used to. We knew our chances of survival weren't good. I'm amazingly fortunate."

Bomber Command had a 46 per cent death rate with over 55,000 casualties. John recalls losing a number of very close friends. *"Recently I was reading a book and found the German pilot who shot down my best friend in 1945."* However, John bears no grudges. *"I have no anger for anyone, I lived in London during the Blitz, so I got some of my own back."*

John says his family was a stoic bunch, and simply took him being at war it in their stride. *"I often wonder how my Mum felt about it as she never let on, but she was glad to see me when the war was over."* When the fighting ceased, John moved to Canada for seven years before the winters drove him to sunny Nelson in 1960.

At 97, John is still working three days a week at the Cawthron Institute where he will fix anything that gets broken. He says he will continue to work until he is physically incapable.

Today is New Zealand's annual Poppy Day Appeal with collection buckets around the country raising funds for the RSA. ANZAC Day will be commemorated on April 25th.

***Written by Jonty Dine,
Nelson News, New Zealand.
(Reproduced with permission - Ed)***

In Memory

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ANDREW J K BARRON

**RAFVR, NAVIGATOR, 223 SQUADRON,
RAF 100 (BOMBER SUPPORT) GROUP, BOMBER COMMAND**



On Saturday 1st of May 100 Group Association lost one of our dwindling wartime Veterans with the passing of Andrew Barron. All our losses are sad but this was particularly so because he was one of our founder members who attended the memorable first reunion in May 1994. He was one of our stalwarts and faithfully attended all subsequent Reunions with his wife Dorothea and supported by members of his family in recent years.

Andrew was among the many young men who volunteered for service in the RAF. He appeared before an Aircrew Selection Board (ACSB) being accepted for Pilot training. He would probably have proceeded to a Receiving Wing (RW), or an Aircrew Reception Centre (ACRC), where he would have a thorough medical examination, inoculations, issue of uniform and kit, and introduced to the delights of drill. The next move would have been to an Initial Training Wing (ITW) located mainly in seaside towns because of the ready availability of hotels and guest houses. Here the recruits would receive instruction in variety of subjects including Principles of Flight, Air Navigation, Meteorology, Maths, Theory of Bombing Procedure, RAF Law, Administration, Discipline and Organisation. There would be more drill and PT and it would be an intense spell of training. As an Aircraftman 2nd class (AC2) he would be paid 3 shillings a day. Throughout the post ITW training, until awarded his aircrew badge, he would remain an AC2 (but see 8 AOS (RCAF) later) with a rate of pay of 7/3d per day including 1/- a day flying pay.

With the Initial Training Wing course successfully completed he reported to No 1ACRC St John's Wood on 8th August. This was a brief stay, and he was on the move again to Brighton on the 22nd. His flying

training commenced in early September 42 with 6 Elementary Training School (EFTS) at RAF Sywell in Northamptonshire. Here he would receive instruction on the RAF's primary trainer the De Havilland Tiger Moth. In Andrew's case this would have almost certainly limited to about 12 flying hours and be used to confirm his potential for full pilot training. Known as Grading School it was intended to reduce wastage and the expense of further training for candidates who were unlikely to make the grade. It was probably at the end of his course that he was warned for overseas having satisfied the instructors of his potential for pilot training.

A posting sent him to the Aircrew Dispatch Centre (ACDC) at RAF Heaton Park near Manchester on 20th October where Drafts were formed to dispatch Aircrew overseas. There were big delays in getting drafts away at this time and Andrew did not set sail until the mid-March 43. This was a frustrating period and Andrew was probably farmed out to units doing gash jobs. He was destined for Canada and travelled across the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth. On arrival in Canada, he would have initially checked in to RCAF Moncton before allocation to 32 Elementary Flying Training School at Bowden in Alberta. Unfortunately, Andrew failed to reach wings standard, and was posted to Edmonton to await his fate. He was re-mustered to Navigator (Bomber) or Nav (B), with or without his approval. The Nav (B) had replaced the old Observer aircrew category. This had introduced training changes which had resulted in Nav (B)'s attending a 6-week course at a Bombing & Gunnery School (B&GS) followed by 14 weeks of navigation at an Air Observers School (AOS) which included 4 weeks of Astro.



Andrew commenced his new specialisation at 6 B &GS (RCAF) at RCAF Mountain View, Belleville from 28th June 43 to 20th Aug 43 on Course 83 Class A. This was followed by 84 (?) B Course at 8 AOS (RCAF) at Ancienne Lorette, Quebec from 6th September 43 to 28th January 1944. It is clear on the Course photo that the move to AOS had resulted in a promotion to Leading Aircraftman (LAC). Successful completion of the course resulted in the award of the coveted half wing navigators flying badge. No doubt this would have been well celebrated prior to their receipt of posting notices. In Andrew's case this was to 111 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit (111 (C) OTU) in Nassau in the Bahamas. A spot of leave would have followed before he commenced a long rail journey down to Miami, Florida in the USA.

It is possible that he was commissioned at this time in the rank of Pilot Officer (Plt Off). On arrival in Miami he joined other Nassau bound airmen on a ship to take them to their next step in the long trail to operational flying.

111 (C) OTU consisted of 3 squadrons. 1 and 2 Squadrons operated from RAF Oakes Field with about 40 B-25 North American Mitchell medium bomber. Its role was to provide a conversion to nose wheel aircraft. 1 Squadron trained Pilots and Navigators before they moved to 2 Squadron where they were joined by Wireless Operators (WOPs) and air gunners. The nucleus of the new crews would form at Oakes Field comprising a 4 man crew made up of a pilot, 2nd pilot, navigator and wireless operator (WOP). Andrew had no memory of crewing up. He believed that he and "Pop" Hedges (so called because of his advanced age of 26) were appointed 2nd Nav and 2nd Pilot to the embryo crew captained by "Scottie" Steele with Freddie Freake as 1st Nav and Norman Giles as the WOP. This resulted in Andrew flying only half the hours that a fellow Nav, Ron Johnson, flew during the OTU training.

Training completed it was time to leave Nassau for return to UK. This involved a sea trip back to Miami and train north, almost certainly to RCAF Moncton to await sea passage home. Andrew had been away

from home for a lengthy period and would have enjoyed his time away from war torn Britain, the black out, and rationing. He would be looking forward to seeing friends and family to an operational Squadron.

Andrew's destination in UK was 7 Personnel Reception Centre (7PRC) at Harrogate where he and his fellow Nassau graduates would await their next posting. But frustratingly they had a long wait although there would have been time for some disembarkation leave. Eventually, an aircraft captain, Flt Lt "Jock" Hastie journeyed down to HQ Coastal Command to demand some action. The news was bewildering, the crews were posted to 100 Group. Who were 100 Group and what did they do? They realised that 100 Group was not in Coastal Command. The Nassau crews were bound for RAF Oulton in Norfolk where they were to join the reforming 223(Bomber Support) Squadron re-equipping with Consolidated B-24 Liberator H & J aircraft. The squadron's role was to be Radio Counter Measures (RCM) in support of Bomber Command Main Force operations. The squadron's ORB records 33 officers and SNCOs arriving from 7 PRC on the 31st August 1944 including Plt Off A J "Barrow". and eager for next posting

Initially the 12-man crews would come largely from Coastal Command sources until Bomber Command crews could be converted by 1699 Training Flight also based at Oulton. The crews would consist of Pilot, 2nd Pilot, Navigator, Flight Engineer, WOP, 4 Air Gunners and 2 Special Operators, the latter to operate the RCM equipment.

There was a lot of pressure to get 223 operational because of the perceived threat from the German V2 weapon system which was initially thought to be electronically guided. 223's aircraft and the Fortresses of its sister squadron, 214, at Oulton were to carry equipment to detect the essential parameters of the guidance transmissions to enable them to be jammed – known as BIG BEN Ops. Once it was established that the V" was not guided the two Squadrons reverted to their normal Bomber Support roles.

Andrew was initially disappointed not to be a permanent crew member. His first flight took place on the 23rd September with "A" Flight Commander, Flt Lt Carrington. He completed 11 training flights most of which were flown with P/O Steele's crew where he was employed as a front gunner| and 2nd Navigator. On the 12th October he flew the first of 4 BIG BEN ops off the Dutch coast with Steele's crew. Andrew was to benefit from the misfortune of a fellow navigator. Fg Off J Wallace RCAF was seriously injured by flak over Rotterdam, and he was replaced by Andrew in the crew of Fg Off Tony Morris RCAF.

He was to fly with Morris's crew for the rest of his Operational Tour. Ops were flown with the bomber stream using their various jammers to protect the Main Force. They flew Window ops, dropping the metallised strips to jam enemy radars, and screen Main Force changes of course. They flew as part of the window Force to simulate Main Force ops to divert German night fighters from the real target(s). Target ops involved flying ahead of the Main Force to arrive over the target with or just behind the Pathfinders. They would orbit the target area for approx. 15 minutes, being relieved in the duty by other 223 or 214 aircraft, whilst the Main Force bombed.



F/Lt Tony A E L Morris's Crew May 1945 (F/Lt Morris is behind the camera)

Back row left to right;

F/O Andrew Barron, Navigator; **F/O Mervyn Utas** (RCAF) 2nd Pilot; **Sgt Jim Bratten**, Wireless OP; **F/Sgt Mick Stirrop**, Waist Gunner.

Front Row left to right;

F/Sgt W. Mulligan (RCAF), Waist Gunner; **F/Sgt Jonny Parrack** (RCAF), Rear Gunner; **F/Sgt Vic Green**, Flight Engineer; **F/Sgt Ted Sims**, Mid Upper Gunner.

The navigator was a key member of the crew and a very busy one. After the main ops briefing Andrew would be preparing the Captains of Aircraft map giving essential details of the sortie and would enter the crucial way points on his chart and tracks and distances entered in the log. Quickly donning his flying kit, he was the last to arrive at the aircraft, engines running, throwing his nav bag aboard and closing the bomb door after he had climbed in. His position for take-off was at the rear of the flight deck. Once in the climb he would descend to the front of the bomb bay and crawl forward through the tunnel into the nav's position in the nose. He would update his chart every 6 minutes throughout the flight, and he would also alert the crew to the times required to start and stop Window dropping.

He flew his final op on the 2nd May 45, having completed 38 Sorties with 32 completed Ops.

Flying Officer Barron was posted to 102 Squadron based at RAF Pocklington in Yorkshire on 10th May. A wartime Halifax Squadron, 102 had been transferred to Transport Command at the end of the War and was converting to Liberators (Mks CVI and CVIII) before being employed on trooping flights between India and the UK.

Andrew was to continue with aviation after the war flying with civil airlines and later as an Air Traffic Controller. He was to enjoy a long and contented life with his wife Dorothea and the family of which he was so proud. He passed away on the 1st May just a matter of weeks before his 98th birthday.

Written by Richard M Forder with help from Dorothea and Kati Barron.

Richard is the co-author of:

'Special Ops Liberators 223 (Bomber Support) Squadron 100 Group & the Electronic War'



Personal Tributes to Andrew.



So sad, I was expecting it given his age, but it doesn't make it any easier to accept. Andrew was so proud to recite the Kohima at the Oulton remembrance ceremonies and we were so privileged to have him do it for us.

*"When you go home
Tell them of us
And say
For your tomorrow
We gave Our today".*

God bless you Andrew.

Chris Lambert



Thank you, Janine and Andrea for the information concerning Andrew's passing. He was a great fellow and always fun to be around.

That family was so very spirited and a pleasure to be with. Andrew will certainly be missed. He and his family shall be in our prayers.

With best regards,

Stephen

Stephen Hutton



... And a Personal Tribute to Fred (Doc) Elliot



We regret to report the passing of Doc Elliott on the 16th April last year. He was a Warrant Officer/ Navigator posted to 192 Squadron in June 1944.

On 16th August 1944 Doc was a member of the crew of Don Earl's Wellington XLP345 (D Dog) a replacement aircraft scheduled for a night operation to the Friesian Islands.

During take-off, the starboard engine failed. The pilot managed a circuit at about 200 feet and then made a hard landing which set fire to the bomb bay overload tanks. Despite the fire and subsequent explosion all the crew escaped without serious injury. The incident is commemorated by this tree planted at Foulsham in 2000.

Doc was a regular and popular presence at May Reunions. He exhibited a quiet reserve along with an upright military bearing. He was welcoming to me when I joined the Association, and we compared his logbook with that of my Father Navigator/Special Operator Richard Dobson which proved that they had flown together. Doc explained that he had no memory of my Father because the Special Operator was locked away in a separate compartment and the rest of the crew had no contact with him.

Our condolences to his family and friends.

Roger Dobson

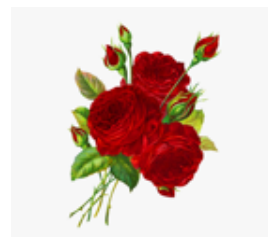




FINAL POSTINGS

Friends we've had to say goodbye to:

*Martin Albert Staunton, Eileen Boorman
(nee Staunton), Len Bartram*



Founders of RAF 100 Group Association - Remembered in love

2018

- 9 Squadron** Rex Waters, New Zealander, took part in raids on *'Tirpitz'*, died February 2018.
- USAF 36th BS** Sergeant Lester Jones, Liberator B-24 Aerial Gunner, Sgt Landberg's crew, flying night missions w RAF 100 Group, died 16.1.2018, remembered by his family & all who served with him
- 223 Squadron** Dr Peter Lovatt, Squadron Leader, died in hospital 5.3.2018. Remembered with love by daughter Nina & Family. A well-known, well-loved Association member who regularly attended Reunions.
- 171 Squadron** Ernie Hughes, Flight Engineer. Died 11 June 2018. Remembered by crew member Jim 'Ginger' Fawcett, post-war friend Mel Carey, with fond memories carried by Janine H. & Stuart Borlase.
- 223 Squadron** Pilot Officer P. G. Nash. Died 5th May 2018. George is remembered with love by daughter Barbara, and friend Richard Forder.
- 223 Squadron** Ron Simmons, Mark Levy's Navigator, Mark Levy's Navigator; Aircraft: A for Apple, Name: AD LIB died November 2018. Loved & missed by all.
- 199/171 Sqn** Peter Sclaverano, W/O in 171, 199, 462 Sqns at North Creak. Died June 2018. Remembered with love by Janine as a good friend and all who knew him.
- 214 Squadron** Paul Henry, Navigator died Aug 2018. Remembered with love by cousin Victoria, & all on the Association. Attended Reunions regularly with wife Peggy, as a Founder Member.
- 214 Squadron** Flt/Lt James Wharton 'Dinty' Moore DFC died Aug 2018. Founding member of Association.
- 214 Squadron** Wing Commander John Wynne DFC died 19 November 2018. Remembered with love by wife & daughter. Son died just over one week previous to his father in a farming accident.
- 192 Squadron** Stanley Forsyth DFC, Special Operator. Died night of 22.9.2018. Remembered with love by his Family, Janine & Stuart, and all who served with and knew him. God Bless, till we meet again xx
- USAF 36th BS** S/Sgt Deacon Joseph 'Joe' Melita, Radio Operator on B24 *'Lady in the Dark'*, died 2018. Remembered for his 40+ years in the Roman Catholic Church, his deep faith, courage and love.
- USAF 36th BS** Art Brusila, Pilot, died 2 June 2018. Remembered by all who knew him.

2019

- 169 Squadron** Brian Odam, Groundcrew, died 7 Feb 2019. Missed & loved by daughter Rosemary.
- 171 Squadron** Jim 'Ginger' Fawcett died 1 March 2019. Remembered with love by wife Ruth and family.
- 171 Squadron** Henry 'Harry' Freegard died 8 July 2019. Lovingly remembered by son Alan & family.
- 214 Squadron** Wing Commander John Wynne DFC died 19 November 2018. Remembered with love by wife & daughter. Son died just over one week previous to his father in a farming accident.
- 214 Squadron** Flt Lt Vern L. Scantleton DFC died 11 April 2019. Received Legion D'Honneur in 2015
- 214 Squadron** WAAF MT Driver Daphne Rowlands serving w Win & Irene: *'The 3 Musketeers'*. Much loved xx

- 92 Squadron** [Flt/Lt Signals Officer Arthur Baxter Reid](#) died Saturday 14 Sept 2019. Remembered with love by son Arthur & Linda & his family; together with all who knew him. God Bless, till we meet again x
- 199 Squadron** [Flt Lt Roy H. Smith, Navigator](#) died 1 Aug 2019. Remembered in love by family.
- USAF 36th BS** [Donald Burch, Lt Boehm crew.](#) Remembered with love by all who knew him.
- USAF 36TH BS** [John 'Des' Howarth, Lt McCarthy crew in Lt. Boehm's B24 'Beast of Bourbon' when it crashed on Feb. 19, 1945.](#) Died Sunday 9.6.2019. Remembered with love by son Brian & all his family.
- USAF 36th BS** [Sgt Jack Hope, Tail Gunner for Lt Brookshire crew.](#) Remembered with love by wife & family.

2020/2021

- Co-Founder** [Evelyn Bartram, co-founder of this Association w husband Len, Martin & Eileen; has died.](#) Loved & remembered by family & all who knew her.
- 192 Squadron** [Warrant Officer Frank Elliott](#) died 16 April 2020. Missed & loved by son Paul & family, together with all in the Association who knew him.
- 192 Squadron** [Leading Aircraftsman Joseph Henry Sayers.](#) Joe died in January this year and is loved and missed by wife Mary and family, as well as his worldwide Family of Kindred Spirits.
- 171 Squadron** [Squadron Leader David Butler DFC, Rear Gunner,](#) died 2 February. Missed by wife Edna and family, together with all who knew him.
- 214 Squadron** [Ken White, known as 'Chalky', served as Air Gunner,](#) died 21 May. Chalky was the final survivor of his crew who he remained in touch with through his life. Loved by son Ken and family.
- 223 Squadron** [Mr Len S Davies; passed away 25th August. Served at RAF Oulton](#) and is believed to be the last of Flight Lieutenant Brigham's crew.
- 214 Squadron.** [Cyril Piper. Passed away December 2020.](#) Known as "Pip", he served with Sid Pike in F/Lt Don Austin's crew at RAF Oulton and then with F/Lt John Wynne until May 2nd 1945.
- 223 Squadron.** [Andrew Barron, aged 97 years and 9 months.](#) Served with 223 out of Oulton. Passed away peacefully on Saturday May 1st with his Wife Dorothea and Daughters Kati and Fiona by his side.

100 Group Order of Battle

SQD	AIRCRAFT	1st 100 GROUP OPERATION	BASE	SORTIES, LOSSES ROLL
192 US RCM	Mosquito, Halifax Wellington Lightnings	Dec 1943 Aug 44 – March 45	Foulsham	2171/5 Losses Electronic Intel/Elint
141	Beaufighters, Mosquito	Dec 1943	West Raynham	1214/11 Losses 80 EA, 58 Trains, 7 Ships Destroyed
219/239	Mosquito	Jan 1944	West Raynham	1394/9 Losses 51 En AC Destroyed
515	Mosquito	March 1944	Little Snoring	1366/21 losses 29 En AC Destroyed
169	Mosquito	Jan 1944	Little Snoring, Great Massingham	1247/13 Losses 25 En AC + 1 V1 Destroyed
214	Fortress	April 1944	Sculthorpe, Oulton	1225/13 Losses Electronic Jamming
199	Stirling, Halifax	May 1944	North Creak	1707/6 Losses Electronic Jamming
157	Mosquito	May 1944	Swannington West Malling	1336/6 Losses 37 En AC +39 V1 Destroyed
85	Mosquito	June 1944	Swannington West Malling	1190/7 Losses 71 En AC+30 V1 Destroyed
23	Mosquito	July 1944	Little Snoring	1067/8 Losses 18 En AC Destroyed
223	Liberator Fortress	Sept 1944	Oulton	625/3 Losses Electronic Jamming
171	Stirling, Halifax	Sept 1944	North Creak	1583/4 Losses Electronic Jamming
462 RAAF	Halifax	Jan 1945	Foulsham	621/7 Losses Jamming/Windows
36 & 803 BS	Boeing B-17F P38	Jan 1944	Sculthorpe, Oulton	1211/0 Losses Electronic Jamming
857 & 858 BS	Consolidated B-24G	Jan 1944	Oulton	280/2 Losses Electronic Jamming

Created by Stuart Borlase. Edited by Janine Harrington.

The front cover features the Halifax 3 that our President Mr Phil James MBE, served in as Flight Engineer, flying Operations out of Foulsham.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped bring this magazine together with a collection of rare and wonderful stories & photographs.

To Arthur and Linda Reid,
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You are all very much appreciated.

