

# The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine  
February 2010 Issue 17**



**Liam O'Connor will design The Bomber Command Memorial. An example of his work, the wonderful Armed Forces Memorial at The National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire, can be seen in the distance.**

**IN MEMORIAM**

**F. Lowe   H. Palmer   G.P. Roberts  
N. Brown   E.J. Read**

**WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

**WELCOME TO:**

**NEW MEMBER**

**Ron Gadd**

**NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

**Rita Palmer   Graham Boyd   Tricia Joyce  
Ashley Hales   Barbara Lowe**



**A representation of Fiskerton's FIDO lit runway can be clearly seen in this photograph taken at St Clements Christmas Tree Spectacular. See page 31.**

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of 2010, I hope that the year will be kind to you. On behalf of the 'crew', Barbara and of course myself, thank you for the many messages of goodwill over the Christmas period. I wish that we could acknowledge them individually but I'm afraid that it is virtually impossible. Thank you especially to those who sent donations, the last thing I need is to have to worry about the Association's finances and I'm relieved to be able to report that, thanks to your generosity, we are just about holding our own in these difficult times. I am also most grateful to those who have sent in material for publication. Without them there would be no magazine. I appeal again to those who served with the squadron to put pen to paper whilst there is still time. Sadly for so many it is already too late.

With this issue you will find the booking form for this year's reunion. Do not delay if you wish to attend as in previous years we have booked up in eight days or so. Due to the increasing popularity of the event and also the greater number of single rooms that are being requested I regret that there will be a limit on the total number of rooms that an individual may reserve. Full Members are limited to three rooms and Associates two. 'Friends' must book through their sponsor. Whilst these limitations are regrettable it is the fairest way. There is no restriction on those wishing to attend the banquet only. For our Sunday evening gathering Malcolm Brooke is preparing an audience participation general knowledge quiz. On the Monday, as usual, we will hold our Services of Remembrance at Fiskerton which will be followed by a buffet lunch at Fiskerton Village Hall. The Banquet will then be held at Petwood Hotel in the evening. As we have just about exhausted the local points of interest there will be not be an organized trip on the Tuesday. In recent years I have cancelled coaches because the take up has been so low that costs per person would be prohibitive. However, if you wish to make a visit to somewhere of your own choosing by using your own transport then indicate it on the booking form and I will endeavour to make arrangements for your reception.

Barbara and I missed Remembrance Sunday services at Fiskerton for the first time in ten years. On the Friday previous I was rushed into hospital with a suspected minor stroke. The symptoms were complete short term memory loss for six hours. In other words I was conversing and moving as normal but nothing new was going into my memory, thus, six hours are now absent from my recollection of life. Although the medics suspected a minor stroke, TIA, when things returned to normal I was not convinced. The subsequent brain scan, artery ultra-sound etc. revealed nothing abnormal. Having spoken to a number of people who had experienced the same thing I am convinced that it was caused by

dehydration. On meeting the consultant two weeks later he informed me that they had found nothing abnormal and were puzzled by my experience. I waited until he had finished and with as much tact as possible told him of the dehydration theory. He agreed that it is a distinct possibility. The reason that I was so convinced is that I had been decorating the week previously and had sweated profusely which I had not replaced by drinking more water. The purpose of all this is to warn you of the dangers of not drinking sufficient water. I'm told two litres a day is ideal. Be warned!

As you can see from the IN MEMORIAM sadly we have lost five 49ers. Pilot, Frank Lowe, flew a Hampden tour with 49' before being 'rested' as an instructor at 16 OTU, Upper Heyford. During this time he was called upon to do an op and was shot down in flames in a Wellington and saw out the war as a PoW. An extract from the eulogy to Frank appears on pages 28 & 29. Harry Palmer was the rear gunner in F/L Len Mellor's crew which completed 22 ops by the end of the war. The wireless operator was 4T9er Jack Shearing. In 2003 a few of us visited Denmark for acts of Remembrance for the crews of two 49 Squadron aircraft brought down on August 18th 1943. Looking for a member living near Stansted we found Harry Palmer. Although we had never met he agreed to park our car on his drive and run us to the airport, returning to pick us up on our return. This is one of the finest examples of the 49' family spirit that I have experienced. Flight Engineer, George Peter Roberts was mid upper gunner in F/O J.B. Gibson's crew which in March 1945 was shot down killing the mid upper gunner. The wireless operator, F/Sgt D.J. Hughes survived the crash but was subsequently murdered by the Germans. The sad story is related in 'Beware of the Dog'. Neil Brown was a National Service airframe mechanic on W/C Hubbard's famous Valiant XD818 (Now in The Cold War Museum, Cosford). He served on Christmas Island on Operations 'Grapple' and 'Grapple Y'. Eric Read was posted in to 49' as a General Fitter having passed aircrew selection but was scrubbed when an eye defect was discovered. He retired from the RAF as a F/Lt in 1960. Eric named his house – Cave Canem.

We give a warm welcome to new Member, Ron Gadd who was Sgt Signaler (Later AEO) on Lincolns between 1952-55. He flew with Jack Higginbottom, 'John' Zmitrowich, 4T9er Stuart Keay and the C.O. S/L Newitt.

A warm welcome also to our New Associate Members. Rita Palmer is the widow of the late Harry Palmer, nursing him through the last two and a half years of his life. Graham Boyd is the son of the late Bill Boyd who was shot down on the Peenemunde raid in August '43. Tricia Joyce is the daughter of the late George Peter Roberts whose passing is acknowledged above. Ashley Hales is the nephew of Sgt. L.H. Nightingale, Wop/Ag in the crew of F/O D.G. Turner. All the crew, except Sgt. P. Velasco were killed when they were shot down



22/23rd March 1944 during a raid on Frankfurt. Barbara Lowe is the widow of the late Frank Lowe whose passing is acknowledged on the previous page.

A letter came in from Jim Lowrie who wrote of his meeting with Noel 'Taffy' Thomas after a period of 64 years which prompts me to pay tribute to my colleagues whose names appear on the back cover. Their single - mindedness, enthusiasm and dedication never cease to amaze me. Almost weekly we receive messages of appreciation from people who have been given details of kin or old comrades who served with the squadron. It truly warms the cockles of the heart.

I received a number of positive comments on November's issue of The 4T9er and I hope that we have served up an interesting magazine this quarter. An e-mail from Nicky Dumbell, the granddaughter of new Member Eric Dumbell, thanked me on behalf of her granddad and went on to say, "...it made him smile." I ask for nothing more!

Having missed Remembrance Sunday at Fiskerton a golden opportunity for a subsequent visit presented itself when Fiskerton Church held a Christmas Tree Spectacular in order to raise funds for the church. John Fletcher decided to dress a tree in an RAF theme and I had agreed that the Association would sponsor it. I was pleased to present John with a cheque for £30. Photographs of the event appear on pages 2 and 31 of this issue.

During October I received five 49 Squadron blazer badges through the post accompanied by a note which stated simply, "Compliments of The Megaton Club." I called Fred Vening, The Megaton Club's former Secretary, but he knew nothing about it. I would appreciate the kind sender getting in touch with me.

We wish Associate Member, Flt. Lt. Mike Ling, an enjoyable third and final year as a display pilot with The Red Arrows. Having flown Synchro 2 in 2009 Mike is flying Red 6, Synchro Leader in 2010. Our congratulations and good wishes also go to the first female pilot in the team, Flt. Lt. Kirsty Moore, as she commences her first year with them.

Whilst on the subject of The Red Arrows I'm sure that all 4T9ers join me in wishing them a very successful fund raising event when they and their support staff compete in the London Marathon in April. Their target is £40,000 in support of the RAF Wings Appeal charity to help RAF personnel serving in Afghanistan to keep in touch with their families.

Congratulations to Tom 'Taff' Morris on being awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honours List. The award was made in recognition of 'Services to the NHS and the Dersingham community.' As F/O Morris, Tom was AEO in the 49 Squadron Valiant crew of the late S/L John Cheesborough and retired with the rank of Wing Commander.

After buying a new car last year I received a circular which started “We are conscious that your time is valuable but we would appreciate you spending a few moments filling in the enclosed questionnaire...” Too true my time is valuable, every second only counts once and when past is gone forever. Although acknowledging that it is valuable they didn’t offer to pay anything for its use. When I receive a cold telephone call from someone conducting a survey my usual reply is, “You are getting paid for collecting this information as is your company, my charge is £15 for providing you with my thoughts.” This always results in the caller hanging up - mission accomplished! The purpose of this preamble relates to the requests that some of you receive for signing prints etc. Whether the caller claims that it is on behalf of The Bomber Command Memorial or any other charity remember that they are invariably a commercial organization and will be making a profit. Why should you therefore give your prized signature for nothing? It is of value because you risked your life in the service of your country. I suggest that a minimum charge of £1 per signature is appropriate if the signing takes place in your own home. Incidentally, I would be interested to know how they obtained your contact information as it is contrary to the Data Protection Act and the rules of the Association for anyone to divulge information contained in the Association Membership List without written permission from the Association Secretary.

Our Chairman, Ted Cachart, has asked me to thank all those who bought the Second Edition of ‘The Dog’ and who included a donation for The Bomber Command Memorial. From the Duxford signing (See The 4T9er issue 16 for report.) and the aforementioned donations Ted has sent a total of £1,050 to The Bomber Command Memorial Fund. Well done! A splendid effort.

In November 2008 a party from the Association visited The RAF Museum, Cosford, to view progress on their Handley Page Hampden I, P1344. (The 4T9er, Issue 13). I am informed that one of the Bristol Pegasus XVIII engines has been restored and is to be reunited with the airframe this year. A full report on progress of the Hampden project will be published in the May issue.

To those of you who are not enjoying the best of health our thoughts and prayers are with you.

**‘Til the next time.**

### **CORRECTION**

When introducing new Associate Member Penny Gilpin, in Issue 16, I erroneously described her father, S/L Gilpin, as ‘A’ Flight Commander. I quoted this from memory of my uncle’s ‘A’ Flight logbook which carried his signature for June 1943. On checking the logbook I found that S/L Gilpin had signed on behalf of W/C Peter Johnson, the Squadron Commander. S/L Gilpin in fact commanded ‘B’ Flight. I am grateful to Andy Anderson for bringing this to my attention.

# A HAMPDEN DITCHING

By  
**Reg (Jimmy) Woolgar**



At 1800 hrs on the 14th February 1942, Hampden AE397 - G for George, took off from Scampton for a bombing raid on Mannheim. The four crew were the pilot P/O R.A.P. Allsebrook (Rafe), navigator Sgt. P.T. Stanbridge (Bob), wop/ag Sgt. R.L.A. Woolgar (Jimmy) and rear gunner Sgt. J.W. Wilkinson (Jack). With the exception of Jack the crew had all completed over 20 operations and this trip was regarded as something of a 'milk run' - a piece of cake!! The outward leg was uneventful, a full moon with partial cloud - the cloud making the aiming point difficult to

identify, but the bomb load was duly dropped on the target. A little flak was encountered and Rafe took some mild evasive action but just as they were leaving the target area the port engine cut and stopped. Unfortunately it could not be feathered causing considerable drag to port.

A course was set for home but the aircraft lost height from about 18,000ft fairly rapidly. Soon efforts were being made to lighten the weight by jettisoning all equipment which could be dispensed with - including the bomb sight. Unfortunately, when Bob opened the lower hatch to offload the bomb sight out went his navigation bag in which he had packed all his nav. gear for safe keeping, as well!! At 4,000ft all hatches were opened and parachutes clipped on in readiness to abandon the aircraft should searchlights or flak be encountered. However, for some reason the aircraft leveled at that height so on they flew. After a while Rafe experienced severe cramp through holding opposite rudder as they flew on one engine and Bob attempted to secure the rudder bar with Rafe's scarf. When this didn't succeed Jimmy managed to tie it back and later recalled that for him these were the most scary moments of the episode, crawling back to under Rafe's seat, fumbling in the dark and without any intercom connection. At this point Jimmy sent out a plain language message saying that the port engine was u/s and they might be baling out.

Fuel began to run low and more height was lost until they crossed the coast and for some time they flew fairly low over the sea. Around 0230hrs, some five hours after leaving the target, the starboard engine ran out of fuel and Rafe made a very

good landing on the sea. The aircraft very quickly began to fill with water and the crew made the quickest ever exit, standing on the port wing expecting the self-inflating dinghy to pop out, there was great consternation when nothing happened. Bob quickly broke open the engine nacelle covering with the heel of his flying boot, put his hand inside and pulled the emersion switch. Slowly the dinghy began to inflate - but not fully, and there was a frantic search for the top-up pump which was located, attached and hurriedly used. Then, a long cord was seen attached to the dinghy and disappearing into the nacelle. Mindful that the emersion switch had not worked, and neither did a sharp tug, Rafe took out a pair of folding nail scissors from a small leather case in his tunic top pocket, hacked the cord free, folded the scissors, put them back into the leather case and restored it to his top pocket - before, as the last one, stepping into the dinghy. The paddles were found, and hastily used, to get the dinghy clear of the aircraft which rapidly sank. All of this took place within about four to five minutes of the ditching.

It was a cold night, and a long one, for the crew. In the early morning, with daylight, they could faintly see cliffs and some radar towers a long way off to their right. This led to some speculation as to where they were. After some thought and discussion they thought that they were probably somewhere of the Yorkshire coast having drifted too far north by over compensating for the port drag. Although it was cold and the sea choppy the sun came out and they took stock of what to do - apart from waiting. Quite soon the cliffs disappeared so they put out some yellow fluorescent sea markers and with the aid of two paddles attempted to paddle in their last direction. This was not very successful however and before long they returned to the position of the sea markers. During the morning there was a little light relief when a school of porpoises appeared, lying about nearby until someone asked what would happen if one of them tried to surface from beneath the dinghy - which quickly prompted more hasty paddling to get out of harm's way.

A little later an aircraft was spotted some distance away and a couple of distress flares were quickly let off - but to no obvious avail. Then, not long after noon, another aircraft was heard, much closer, and into view came the most welcome sight of a Walrus amphibian aircraft leading to much waving and shouting. The Walrus flew over them and waggled its wings several times before flying off. There was then a long wait of some two hours before there appeared on the horizon a motor boat heading towards them. This turned out to be a Royal Navy MASB, which quickly came along-side the dinghy and took the crew on board. They were very cold and wet but in high spirits at being rescued, which were made even higher by the very liberal hand out of rum rations by the Navy crew. In reply to the first question they asked, "where are we?" the response was, "Off St Catherine's Point". When this sank in to mean off the Isle of Wight imagine



the surprise after they had been convinced that they were off the Yorkshire coast. The 'drag' had taken them in a huge curve, heading down the English Channel for the open sea - luckily their fuel supply had run out when it did. Just to complete the saga, it took nearly two hours for the MASB to reach Gosport harbour, one of their two Packard engines becoming u/s on the way back. When the pilot of the Walrus visited them in Haslar Royal Naval Hospital the next day they realized just how lucky they had been. He said that he had been doing some 'circuits and bumps' in the Solent and had decided to go out on a short dog leg and by chance spotted the dinghy.

There have been other versions of the crew's rescue - one that they were rescued by a longboat and coast guards from Ventnor. A longboat did put out and the MASB picked them up on the return trip - allegedly allowing the longboat crew to claim the rescue so as to receive their fee of 2s 6d [25p Ed.].

Bomber Command War Diaries reports that of 98 aircraft, 67 claimed to have bombed the target in difficult conditions. The city reported only a light raid with two buildings destroyed and fifteen damaged, some railway damage, one wounded and fifteen people bombed out.

After returning to Scampton, and having some leave, the crew took their ground crew out to the village pub to celebrate their return - and particularly to thank the fitters of the starboard engine which had held out for so long. After a pint - or two - the ground crew confided that the squadron had never been able to keep a G for George, but of course could not mention this to the aircrew. As it was the aircraft was lost but the crew were saved.

Rafe, as F/L R.A.P. Allesbrook DSO. DFC, joined 617 Squadron and sadly on the 24th trip of his second tour, was killed on the 15/16th September 1944 on the last of the squadron's low level raids, when five out of eight aircraft were lost on the Dortmund - Ems Canal raid, largely due to low mist and fog. Jack, Sgt. J.W. Wilkinson, was killed on the 10/11th April 1942, still on 49 Squadron, a member of F/O Reg Worthy's crew, together with wop/ag Tom McGrenery, shot down by a night fighter flown by Reinhold Knocke over Holland whilst returning from a raid on Essen. Jack is buried in Stavanger, Norway. F/L R.L.A. Woolgar DFC, after instructing at the Central Gunnery School, completed a second tour as Gunnery Leader of 192 Squadron, 100 Group, and later joined the Movements Branch at Air Ministry in the Middle East finally flying with 38 Squadron at Ein Shemer in Palestine, before returning to the U.K. in September 1947. Bob, Sgt. P.T. Stanbridge is known to have survived the war but Jimmy's many attempts to locate him over the years have proved unsuccessful.

*Reg Woolgar (Jimmy) is a Member of 49 Squadron Association and lives with his wife, Doris, in East Sussex. Artifacts, from a 49 Squadron Hampden, similar to those mentioned in this story can be seen in RAF Scampton Museum. Ed.*

*This is the first part of the late Jim Lowe's experiences when he was shot down on the Peenemunde raid, August 17/18th 1943. This was the night on which 49 Squadron lost four out of the twelve aircraft dispatched. F/O W.J. Lowe was bomb aimer in the crew piloted by Sgt. C. Robinson, Peenemunde was their 13th op. I am indebted to Graham Boyd for sending us this story. His father, the late Bill Boyd, was flight engineer in the same crew and also saw out the war as a PoW.*

## **JIM LOWE'S STORY**

The home of 49 Lancaster Squadron in 1943 was the delightful Lincolnshire village of Fiskerton.

The main runway was in direct line with the Cathedral at Lincoln five miles away, and as we lifted off I always looked out to port and could see 'Holt Farm', the home of Les and Nancy Blackbourn, our very special friends. The peaceful view of the farm, Fiskerton village itself and the Cathedral in front was a sight that had never failed to impress me on the many times we had taken off. Little did I think that as we took off on the evening of August 17th that it would be two long years before I would see it again. Our target on this glorious evening was to be the 'doodlebug' experimental factory at Peenemunde.

The briefing had been specified to take us over Holland and along the Baltic Sea. Briefing had been very precise and detailed and of practical purpose as usual, for example it was necessary to fly at maximum height without using the supercharger to conserve fuel due to the rather heavy bomb load we were carrying. This consisted of two five hundred pounders, six one thousand pounders and one four thousand pound block buster. We were expected to do considerable damage as it was a virgin target, also a purely military objective.

Our journey across Holland was most peaceful and gave no indication of what was to come. As we cruised along the Baltic Sea at about ten thousand feet only the odd flack ship made us aware that we were over enemy territory.

By this time it was a beautiful moonlight night - a typical bomber's moon - and as the German coast was visible on our starboard beam we were able to ascertain our position by various landmarks, so that as we approached the target area it was quite simple to pick up our turning point on Rugen island, the twin bays very distinct, ready for the run in.

Opposition up to this stage had been virtually non-existent, only a couple of searchlights and light anti-aircraft guns, just as our intelligence officer had told us at briefing.

The purpose of the operation was now becoming evident, for in the distance we could already see the attack taking place by aircraft of earlier waves. As we were in the last wave this was possibly the cause of our undoing,

for by the time we arrived at the target, the German fighter force had been sent from the Berlin area. As we picked up our turning point and settled down for the run in, we had descended to four thousand feet, this being the safety height for our four-thousand pounder.

The brilliance of the moon influenced our decision to do a visual attack but as a precaution and double check we kept the stop watch going on a time and distance run. We were now coming up on the target itself, the buildings standing out quite plainly against the glare of the fires.

"Bomb doors open" - "Left - left - steady - steady - steady - bombs gone!"

Not that anyone needed telling for as the load left the aircraft it bucked like a living thing. At the instant the bombs were released the rear gunner shouted, "Scram port - scram port" and the sky was full of JU 88 night fighters, or rather it seemed to be. The rear gunner gave several bursts from his four Brownings as we went across the sights of the JU 88 and suddenly let out a jubilant shout, "Got him - he's going down". Then once again came the cry, "Scram starboard - scram starboard". The pilot threw the 'Lanc' viciously to the right and as he did so there was a terrific hammering and an awful pungent smell of explosives. Another JU 88 must have been sitting back on the starboard side and as we turned into the one on the port side he must have followed us round and clobbered us. In a very few seconds the port wing was a mass of fire which no extinguisher had any hope of putting out. By now we were clear of the target area and out over the sea - the way we were burning must have made a wonderful target. By this time all controls were sloppy and the aircraft would not respond. The only course of action now was to bale out! The forward hatch was then jettisoned and I left the aircraft. As I went out the slip stream took off my right flying boot and as I rolled forward I saw the aircraft pass over me on fire the whole of its length - I offered up a silent prayer for the rest of my comrades whom I was sure did not have time to get out before the aircraft dived to the ground and exploded.

As I floated gently down I now had a chance to collect my scattered wits and suddenly realised that I was over the sea, but thankfully being within sight of the coast I was able to steer the parachute to my advantage. The transformation from the crash and smell of cannon shells to the peace which I was now experiencing was indescribable - the loneliness being hung up there over the coast made me feel as if I was the only person in the world at that moment.

This feeling of well-being was soon to be shattered for as I looked down on the little village which lay beneath me, I could quite easily discern the local population making a circle for me to fall in, and once more I became very concerned as to what was going to happen to me once I landed. No sooner had this thought entered my head when I hit the ground - I experienced a sharp

pain in my right leg which I thought I had broken. By this time the first of the 'land watch' was on to me and with a cry of jubilation shouted, "for you the war is over" and promptly gave me a kick in the ribs. I was roughly pulled to my feet - it was then I realised what the pain in my leg was - I had broken my foot on landing without my flying boot. I was then led away to a barn and locked in. I could hear the last notes of our other aircraft as the lads turned for home and their bacon and egg breakfast which to me, just then, seemed to be the most important thing in the world. I looked at my watch and it was just ten minutes past one. I did not know at this stage that in the last few moments, two of my fellow crew members had died.

I sat in the barn until it started to get light then I made an attempt to get out, only to find I had a companion in the form of a rather large Alsatian who was accompanied by a German with a shot gun. Shortly afterwards the door was thrown open and about six of a party of 'land watch' beckoned for me to join them. I tried to tell them about my broken foot but they would not listen, and as they were armed I lost the argument. When I stepped outside I could see they had with them about another dozen R.A.F. chaps, also under heavy guard. I looked for some of my crew members but did not see any. We were then paraded through the village and across a couple of fields to a main road. Whilst crossing the field a solitary figure in R.A.F. uniform approached the party and I was overjoyed to see that it was our flight engineer - he must have just regained consciousness for he came up to me completely ignoring the rest of the party and our captors and asked where we were going!

When we reached the main road our captors stopped a Luftwaffe lorry and we were bundled on board and taken to the local headquarters and put in the guard room, this time under the watchful eyes of Luftwaffe guards. It was here that I met our wireless operator. It was here also we were given our first meal, such as it was, a bowl of boiled corn - hungry as I was by this time I could not eat it!

Once more we were taken outside to board a lorry and taken to Griefswald to a permanent Luftwaffe camp, where once again we were locked in. This time it was a proper cell and solitary confinement. I was here about 10 days with only one meal a day - a bowl of watery pea soup.

At the end of the 10 days we were all taken outside and I was surprised to see that our party now numbered about 40 which included our pilot. Yet again we were herded aboard a lorry and taken to the local railway station and all forty or so of us were locked in a cattle truck. This was the start of a most uncomfortable journey which was to last about 4 days - not once during this time were we allowed to leave the truck. I can leave it to your imagination what things were like towards the end of that trip!

I would have given anything for a hot bath and a shave. Our journey finally ended in a little siding from which we were marched to the well - known Dulag Luft - my first

experience of a prison camp. Dulag Luft was the German interrogation centre and was situated in a suburb of Frankfurt on Main and it consisted of a row of Nissen type huts in the grounds of a large hotel.

On arrival we were immediately put into solitary confinement in one of the huts which had been divided up into separate cells of about 6 feet by 8 feet. Once locked in, stock was taken of conditions which at first sight were very grim. At the one end of the cell about 2 feet from the floor were 3 wooden planks and one blanket. This was the provision that was made for sleeping quarters and comprised the total furnishing of my new abode.

It wasn't long before I realised that Nissen huts could have the same effect as an oven, for with the heat of the August sun blazing down on the corrugated shell the walls soon became too hot to touch. About mid-morning the door crashed open and there stood an armed guard with a mug of watery soup and a slice of black bread. He was accompanied by two more armed guards with rifles. This food was roughly pushed towards me, the guards withdrew, and once more the door clanged shut with the sound of heavy bolts being slid into place. This little episode was enacted every 24 hours and was the only time you saw another person, except for the occasional visit to the toilet. This again was quite a performance for it was no good leaving things until the last moment, for it took an average 2 hours to attract the attention of the jailer who would reluctantly come and open the cell and once again, in the company of two armed guards, you were taken to the end of the block where the toilets were situated. This was the pattern of life for the next two weeks. It was at the latter end of these two weeks when the door was thrown open to admit an American who was to provide some sort of company for the rest of my time in that cell. Sometimes I wonder if it was any advantage for all he could do was to squat on his haunches in the corner of the cell with his head in his hands bemoaning the fact that he was missing, "my mother's southern fried chicken - fried in butter" and he kept this up for about ten hours a day, and this, after a couple of weeks of watery soup and black bread!! He was an extremely lucky man, for I told him if he didn't shut up he would be chewing a mouthful of flying boot, for by this time I was ready to kick him in the teeth.

Then came the day when one glorious sunny afternoon the door crashed open and there once again stood the jailer and his by now familiar two armed guards. They motioned me to follow them and as they were armed I had no option. They led me around to the front of the hotel where there was a lawn almost as big as a football field. In the middle of this lawn was a solitary table with a chair each side. I was motioned to sit on the one chair and by sign language was told to wait. This I did not mind in the least, for at last I was out of the oven of the Nissen hut and in the fresh air. The guards left me and as I sat there all on my own I considered the possibility of escape



even though my foot was broken. But as I had what would appear to be a casual look round, I could see in the bushes around the field an occasional glimpse of several German steel helmets bobbing about. I then began to get a bit concerned, for without doubt I was completely surrounded by armed guards, and as I sat alone I had the uncanny feeling that any false move on my part and I would have been shot at. I had very quickly learnt the lesson that you can't successfully argue with an enemy who had a loaded rifle, so discretion being the better part of valour, I sat very still.

I sat there about ten or fifteen minutes, keeping a wary eye on the guards who were watching me, knowing full well they were not there for a joke and that this was the serious part of the proceedings.

In a short while I was joined by a Luftwaffe Hauptman, which gave me more comfort as regards my immediate safety, for this was the man who was to interrogate me.

As we had already been told on the Squadron what to expect under such circumstances, I was not surprised when he spoke to me in a very friendly manner in perfect English. His job was to extract from me any information he could possibly get. The first thing he did was to push across the table to me a packet of twenty Players cigarettes, no doubt pilfered from some Red Cross parcel. This was the first cigarette I had had for about three weeks and in my weakened state the first few puffs made my head swim and I almost fell off the chair. However, this feeling did not last long and almost before I knew where I was the questions started.

All that the Geneva Convention requires is that you give your number, rank and name. Of course, this would in no way satisfy my interrogator. However, he started off by producing a form with a Red Cross printed on the top. This also we had been warned about as it was a bogus form and had nothing to do with the Red Cross. Then, making sure I had seen this form, he asked me:

"Your number please."

To which I replied, "132024."

Following with, "Your rank, please."

I replied, "Flying Officer" which I was at that time.

"And now your name, please."

"William James Lowe."

Then the trouble started!! The next question was which Squadron was I from, to which I answered, "132024", and where I was stationed. The answer I gave here was, "Flying Officer", and so for the next few questions that was all I said. As he asked me a question so I answered with either number, rank, or name.

*To be continued.*

## **POPPY TRAVEL**

Poppy Travel, a part of The Royal British Legion, has been organising Remembrance Tours since 1927. This year tours are available to many countries throughout the world but of particular interest to 4T9ers are probably those to destinations within Europe. These include visits to France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and Poland. Heroes Return grants are available to WWII veterans who may be accompanied by their spouse or carer or to widows if the veteran is deceased. Medical staff accompany all tours.

For details of Heroes Return grants ring; 0845 0000 121

For more on Poppy Travel ring; 01622 716729

## **THE UNVEILING OF THE INFORMATION BOARD AT THE SONNEGA MEMORIAL**

At the request of The Board of Local Interest, Sonnega/ Oldetrijne, Holland, an information board was unveiled at the memorial to the crew of 49 Squadron Lancaster JB545. The event took place on December 16th 2009, the 66th anniversary of the crash. 49 Squadron Association was due to be represented by Honorary Friend, Douwe Drijver but unfortunately he was unable to attend due to illness.

The memorial was unveiled in May 2004 and has been adopted by the students of the public school, The Lantscheene of Oldetrijne. A DVD, entitled "That we will never forget" has been produced for the students to act as a permanent reminder of what happened to the Lancaster and its part in WWII. In addition all school leavers will be presented with a book, issued by the Ver. History Westellingwerf, entitled "Memorials in Weststellingwerf".

The crew members of EA-O JB545 were;

Pilot - P/O G.L. Ratcliffe, F/E - Sgt. A.E. Marsland, Nav.- Sgt. E. Holloway, Wop/Ag - Sgt W.T. Rees, A/G - F/Sgt. R. Losa RCAF, B/A - Sgt. W.R. Day, R/G - F/Sgt. R.V. King RAAF.

They were on their first operation, Berlin, and were shot down by the German night fighter ace Oberleutnant Heinz Schnauffer using the dreaded 'Schrage Music' in his Bf110. The aircraft came down between Oldetrijne and Sonnega where the recovery of the bodies proved extremely difficult due to the marshy ground. The crew members are buried together in Wolvega Cemetery.

## ***CALLING ALL EX 49 SQDN. WWII AIRCREW***

*Aces High propose to run a series of 'signings' at their Wendover Gallery featuring prominent WWII RAF squadrons. We have been invited to participate, probably in March. A fee plus expenses will be paid. If you would like to participate let the Secretary know as soon as possible. Time is short!*

*Here are extracts from an investigation report by a German researcher, Lothar Guenther, into a 49 Squadron Lancaster crash which took place near his home town.*

## **THE BOMBER CRASH AT THE GREAT CHESTNUT TREE AT SCHLEUSLINGEN ON THE NIGHT OF 31ST MARCH 1944.**

From the present perspective, the unwarranted Second World War which emanated from Germany, brought about deeds from the opposing forces which increased in consequence and dimension towards each other and increasingly had an effect on the civilian population. Being at the time in a superior position, the German Air Force bombed without scruple Rotterdam, Coventry, London and other towns with a destructive aerial bombardment...

...No reasonable person can appreciate the intentions which both sides had inflicted on the civilian population with their surface air raids. When we Germans morally evaluate the propriety of the attacks which ensued towards the end of the war, and regret the great sacrifices, we should never lose sight of the causality of action and reaction...

...The Fiskerton airfield was one of the many new bomber airfields which were set up for the Royal Air Force at the beginning of the Second World War. It was situated just north of the village in Lincolnshire and came under the command of 5 Group, Bomber Command. The heavy Lancaster bombers of 49 Squadron had occupied the airfield since 19th January 1943. One of the 16 bombers of this squadron was Lancaster LJ466. More about this aircraft later.

On 30th March 1944 brisk activity prevailed once again. This was a clear sign that squadron activity over enemy territory was imminent. In accordance with Churchill's wishes, Bomber Command was to fly its last mission before the Allied Powers concentrated on the invasion in northern France. The orders were already given on the morning of that day in the underground command post of the bomber fleet in High Wycombe and by midday the clock started ticking. The command into action was passed on to the group detachments.

The code word 'Grayling' was given as the target to all sections and all security measures came in to operation without delay. As always a general radio silence was ordered. Discussions of the plan of action took place in every unit. The town of Nuremberg was named as the destination for the forthcoming night. The armament factories of M.A.N. and Siemens were singled out in particular as important targets. The powerful fleet of 58 squadrons with a total of 820 Lancasters and Halifaxes was to take part in the action. 15 Mosquitoes were to take charge of defence. The start time was set for 2200hrs.

The bombing of the targets was ordered for the 31st March between 01.05 and 01.22. After indicating the three part target, the drop of 3,000 tons of

bombs was to follow within 12 minutes...

...The weather situation which the Meteorological Office had given was later shown to be wrong. Contrary to better knowledge the real situation was withheld from the crews. While the reconnaissance aircraft that afternoon still reported cloud cover over Nuremberg and low probability of clouds on the flight path, the officially published version said the opposite. This was later to prove disastrous. During the briefing the officer from the Military Secret Service hinted that there had been considerable discussion between the commanders of the bomber groups and the bomber fleet command. Despite gravely expressed concerns, the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command, Sir Arthur Harris, insisted on adherence to operational orders. The commanders now believed that a political decision had been taken. As a result, the known actual meteorological situation was withheld from the crews.

The crews were heartened by the remark that several actions were planned to hoodwink the German Air Force. So, at the time 50 Halifaxes began to drop mines on Texel and the Heligoland Bight; Mosquitoes were to undertake an attack on Cologne and a further 20 Mosquitoes were to drop beacon markers and tinfoil chaff [*Code named Window. Ed.*] on Kassel. The Germans were to believe that the Ruhr was the main target and their main forces ordered there.

The seven man Lancaster crew of JB466, EA-S, got ready for what was their sixth mission. They could not guess that their aeroplane would be one of two from 49 Squadron which would not return from the forthcoming mission. [*The other Lancaster was JB324, EA-Q, flown by P/O L.G. Kellow. Ed.*] In November and December 1943 they took part in several raids on Berlin.

The 25 year old Irishman, F/O W.A.L. Colhoun was the pilot, the bomb aimer was the New Zealander H.W. Anderson. At 31 years of age he was the oldest of the crew. The flight engineer was Sgt. A.W. Black. The 22 year old wireless operator was Sgt. K. Ellam, the navigator was Sgt. A. Prin and the two 19 year old gunners were Sgts. L.H. Broad and W.A. Simmons.

The first plane of the squadron took off from the runway in Fiskerton at 21.55. The squadron was led to the main formation under the command of W/C A.A. Adams. The large formation made for the first turning point over the North Sea. Until then they had been flying with navigation lights on.

To complicate matters for the German radar operations, a flying altitude of less than 600m was assumed over the North Sea. As the Belgian coast was crossed at an altitude of 2,400m, of the 782 bombers that had started, 57 had already returned to England as a result of technical faults. By this stage the formation of 725 bombers swung round at the next turning point just before Charleroi in an easterly flight direction. From here the rapid ascent to the drop altitude of 5,500m took place. Orders provided for the formation to head for Fulda in order to carry out a turning manoeuvre over the Thurlinger Forest to

the south and to make for the target.

Contrary to notification the night sky was well illuminated by the moon, no clouds hid the vapour trails which were visible from a great distance.

This was an unforeseen and unwanted invitation for the German army. This did not fall into the brief of the Royal Air Force manoeuvre. Immediately after midnight, as the first Lancaster was shot down by flak, 246 night fighters (Ju88 and Bf110) rose up into the black painted sky endowed with a smattering of flames. They deployed along the approximately 450km straight and direct route between the turning points of Charleroi and Fulda.

The fighters were organized with the help of a chain of radar stations.....A further provision of the night fighters which essentially contributed to their success was 'Schrage Musik'. The two guns, thus called in Air Force slang, were fixed behind the pilot's seat and were orientated upwards at an angle of 72degrees. This had the advantage of a fighter being able to shoot at a bomber whilst flying under him. In the process he had to avoid the risk of possible explosion of the bombs. The preferred target therefore was the fuel system divided between the bomber's wings.

The disaster for the bomber formation which was deployed over 110 km, began just at the German border. 12 Lancasters were shot down by the German fighters just on the 30 km long section up to the banks of the Rhine...

...It was 45 minutes after midnight when the leading bomber of the formation reached the turning point. There were no recognizable characteristics, no prominent towns over the Thuringer Forest. It was difficult to find one's way.

In the meantime, the Lancaster JB466 had reached the Thuringer Forest and carried out the prescribed turn to the south. They were to reach Nuremberg in 25 minutes at the latest. It can be assumed that the crew's apprehension increased considerably, being unable to escape from the disaster which could be seen all around. Certainly, all the members of the crew had the same desire at this point: let's quickly get the remaining part of the way behind us and then off home to safe territory.

This desire was not to be fulfilled. A night fighter got the plane in its sight. There was no escape. The fuel system of the plane was hit. It burst into flames and tried in the face of this to come to the ground in a level flight path with its full bomb load. Coming from the direction of Erlau the bomber flew out of control at a low altitude to the town of Schleusingen, like a fireball with a loud engine noise. A catastrophe threatened to break. As the plane flew along Suhler Strasse and over Bertholdsburg, it was only at a height of 150m at most. The sky was dyed a fiery red in the direction of Norden. A loud crack and the pressure wave of a huge explosion shook the town. Window panes broke and metal fragments were strewn as far as the town.

The aerial photograph of 22nd July 1945 can still be clearly recognized as the



crash site in the Nadelwald, the so called “eichrot” (red oak).

The air engineer, Sgt. A.W. Black and the navigator Sgt. R. Prinn succeeded in parachuting from the plane. One of them landed in a garden plot near Bergstrasse, between Eisfelderstrasse and Vogelhofstrasse. As for the parachute which had become entangled in the high tension cables on the Weuber Berg (White Mountain) near the Sieben Baume, it was possibly to do with the other Englishman. After their capture, they were taken first of all to the town hall to be handed over to the responsible military authority.

They spent their captivity in the camps L6 Heydekrug Ostpreuben and 357 Kopernikus in Poland.

All the other crew members lost their lives in the crash of the bomber in the forest between the “Grosse Kastanie and Gottfriedsbert.

The radio operator, Sgt. Ellam, the bomb aimer, Sgt. Anderson and the air gunner Sgt. Simmons were buried first of all in the cemetery at Schleusingen. Later there was a reburial in the Britischer Militärfriedhof (War Cemetery) on the Heerstrasse in Berlin. It was not possible to identify the pilot F/O Colhoun and the air gunner Sgt. Broad.

The sirens from the town hall, which warned the people of Schleusingen of approaching bomber formations in plenty of time, this time sent their alarming howl rather late into the night. Obviously, the bomber’s turn in the direction of Nuremburg was unexpected. The population of Schleusingen did not have time to reach the protective arches of the former “Felsenkeller “ brewery.

They had just got ready when the air battle in the sky was put into action. Never had aerial warfare come so close to the small town. Many of the citizens of the town and the surrounding area had followed this night time incident. The following morning there was much discussion about where the bomber had crashed. Many set out for the point of impact. It was in the middle of the forest near the “Grosse Kastanie”, 260m to the left of the road to Hildburghausen. The place was marked by the crater approximately 3m deep, and the building parts, metal fragments and body parts strewn around the area. An explosion, which must have occurred over the tree tops, had obviously broken the trajectory of the Lancaster and led to the wreck’s boring into the ground in free fall. The crater saw to it that the pressure wave of the second explosion which followed, spun the fragments up in a conical shape.

The following facts speak for this supposition:

- The burning plane, flying level and out of control did not cut a path in the 12m high spruce forest and the forest was not set on fire.
- The tree population was only destroyed for about 80m around in diameter. There was no trace of fire.
- The few objects which were in the crater had obviously been thrown out high into the air and fell back in again. Among other things there

was an intact bottle of oxygen among these objects.

- The explosion over the tree tops caused by the free fall was obviously the cause of the spread of the pressure wave and the fragments to Schleusingen, which lay 2km away.
- One of the dead crew members, still secured in his seat by the seatbelt, was found at a distance of 150m to the northwest of the impact point.
- There was no trace of incendiary bombs. Since no drop zone has been identified on the flight plan, it must be assumed that Lancaster JB466 carried exclusively high-explosive bombs.

Of the 782 bombers which started that night, only 512 reached the target area. Having been wrongly briefed, 48 planes released their bombs over Schweinfurt. Others bombed Bamberg, Lauf and other targets further away.

The German night fighters were concerned about the great number of casualties that night which the Royal Air Force suffered. 108 bombers were lost in this action. Of these 79 were shot down by night fighters, 13 by flak and 2 by a combination of both. The cause of the loss of the other 14 bombers was 9 crash landings on the return journey, 2 collisions and other reasons.

At that time each bomber had a value of £130,000. Even more considerable was the loss of the crew members, of which 150 were officers, 24 warrant officers and 371 NCOs. [*A further 200 were wounded. Ed.*]

Lt.Col. M. Becker of I./NJG6 alone shot down 4 bombers with his Bf110. Maj. M. Drewes of III./NJG1, Capt. G. Tham of IV./NJG5 and Lt.Col. H. Schulte of II./NJG5 each scored 3 hits in aerial combat. These pilots were also flying the Bf110.

From now on, 31st March 1944 was known as Black Friday in the history of the Royal Air Force.

Martin Middlebrook, the author of the book “The Nuremberg Raid” said the following about the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command.

“The justification as to why Sir Arthur Harris chose such a target on such a night was never known. He kept silent about this action in his memoirs and thus avoided the question consistently about the choice of such a distant target on a bright, moonlit night. He leaves us alone with our speculation.

“Bomber Command did not consist of a committee; it was one man. Sir Arthur Harris took the decision about the raid on Nuremberg; he had authorized the plan and the route; he would not let himself be persuaded to cancel the mission when Air Marshal Sir Robert Saundby showed him the revised weather report. On this occasion he missed the opportunity by a wide mark.”

Not a single trace bears witness today of the crash of Lancaster JB466.

*Attempts were made by 49 Squadron Association to trace Sgts. Prin and Black or their relatives but without success. Ed.*

## **A STORY ABOUT 49 SQUADRON LANCASTER - PB844 - EA-D**

**By F/O Dave Hytch's bomb aimer, Ken Read**

Lancaster Mk I PB844 was made by A.V. Roe & Co at Newton Heath, Manchester. Production from this point averaged 14 Lancasters a week. The aircraft was delivered to No. 49 Squadron in the beginning of December 1944. It was given the codes EA-D and became known as D for Dog. The first bombing sortie for D-Dog was on 18/19<sup>th</sup> December 1944 to Gdynia (Baltic coast-Poland) with a duration of 10 hours and 50 minutes.

Between 18<sup>th</sup> December 1944 and 16<sup>th</sup> March 1945 F/O D. Hytch and crew flew PB844 on operations to; Gdynia, Politz (three times), Brux, Dresden, Rositz, Bohlen (twice), Gravenhorst, Horten and Dortmund. In addition during that period she went to; Houffalize and Royan with F/O N.H. Alty, F/O L.G. Hammond took her to Houffalize, F/O J.M. Binns went to Merseburg, F/O H.E. Fricker to Siegen, W/O R. Cluer to Harburg and F/L R.V. Babb went to Lutzkendorf and Wurzburg. Thus D-Dog completed 21 trips with 49 Squadron.

She was later posted to 57 Squadron and was re-lettered DX-N.

On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1945 PB844 (Now N for Nan) crashed during take off from Bari in Italy when returning to the U.K. with Allied Service Personnel.

Records show that D. Hytch and crew flew out to Bari on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1945 in a 49 Squadron aircraft - PB991 - EA-H, on a Dodge trip. Their return was held up due to repairs to this aircraft. During this delay the airfield 'graveyard' was discovered and there PB844 was found where she had been taken after the unsuccessful take off a year before.

It is known that small memento parts from the aircraft came back to the U.K. with Dave Hytch and crew, in appreciation of the twelve safe operational trips they made with her.

*Post war 'Dodge trips' brought allied service personnel home from Italy. Ed.*

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# A SON'S PILGRIMAGE

By

**Richard Bartlett-May**

On the morning of December the 5<sup>th</sup> 1954, Avro Lincoln registration SX984 along with No 49 Squadron departed RAF Upwood for an operational tour of Kenya. This was the squadron's second tour in support of a period known as the Kenya Emergency enacted by the colonial government to combat the Mau Mau uprising. While departing the UK for RAF Eastleigh, SX984 piloted by Flying Officer Hunt made a pass over the town of Sandridge in Hertfordshire,



Photo; 49 Squadron Association

**The ill fated crew of Lincoln SX984. Sgt. Stan Bartlett is on the far right whilst the pilot, P/O Alan Hunt, is on his right.**

some 50 miles south of RAF Upwood, where his parents lived. They waved as the Lincoln passed overhead and watched until it disappeared from sight.

RAF Eastleigh is situated just to the East of Nairobi and played a significant role during the emergency period. Most of the operational sorties were carried out to the north of RAF Eastleigh as the main Mau Mau hideouts were in the Aberdare Range of mountains. Located 13 nautical miles north northeast of Eastleigh is the hill top town of Githunguri. Githunguri, which means small hill in Kikuyu, was the location of a Kenya Police Outpost housing a handful of European Police Officers along with several Askari Kenya Police. With its neat rows of white painted rondavel huts and the rocks spelling out Githunguri Police Station it made an excellent navigational waypoint to and

from the Aberdares. It was also common practice for aircraft to make a low pass over the outpost when returning from operational sorties.

On Friday February the 18<sup>th</sup> 1955 Pilot Officer Hunt flew a routine evaluation flight with No 49 Squadron's Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader Alan Newitt. This flight was somewhat unusual as routine flight checks were not normally carried out by the Commanding Officer. During this check flight Squadron Leader Newitt informed Alan Hunt that on no account were there to be any "beatups" or low flying of any nature below 300ft AGL.

On Saturday afternoon February the 19<sup>th</sup> 1955 P/O Hunt along with five crew members Sgt. North, Sgt. Holland, F/O Parry, F/O King and my father Sgt. Bartlett departed RAF Eastleigh at 13:15 local time. The mission was a sortie over the Kipipiri Forest in the Aberdares. On this same day Flt. Sgt. Tommy Thomas along with his crew from 49 Squadron were visiting the Police Station at Githunguri.

After completing the sortie some 01:33 minutes of flight time, Flying Officer Hunt, contrary to orders, carried out several low passes over the Githunguri Police Officers' Mess where he knew his RAF colleagues were spending the afternoon. The Mess was, and is, situated near the top of the police compound overlooking the town with the police station itself lying halfway down towards the main Uplands - Ruiru road. On the third beatup, SX984 failed to clear the top of the hill and parts of the starboard wing and tail plane were torn off after hitting the Officers' Mess chimney, the roofs of two rondavels and a barbed wire security fence. SX984's ruptured fuel tank caught fire and it climbed steeply before stalling and entering a near vertical dive, crashing in flames half a mile south of the police station.

Hunt and four other crew members died instantly in the resulting inferno but the tail-gunner, Sgt. Stanley Bartlett, still inside the rear turret was thrown clear. He was pulled from the wreckage by Sgt. Peter Pierson and taken initially to Kiambu Hospital and then to the British Military Hospital in Nairobi where he died four hours later as a result of burns and other serious injuries. Four civilians on the ground, two of them children, also died. The six crew members were buried two days later with full military honours in City Park Cemetery, Nairobi. A full Board of Inquiry was assembled to determine the cause of the accident by an RAF team sent from Aden. The findings of the Board of Inquiry were willful disobedience of orders and unauthorized low flying on behalf of Pilot Officer Alan Hunt.

I don't remember a time when I was not aware of the fact that my father had been killed in a plane crash. I was only 18 months old when it happened and unfortunately have no memory of him. After marrying, my parents lived in a small rented caravan in the tiny village of Bury near RAF Upwood. After my father's death, my mother moved back in with her parents less than a mile



away in the market town of Ramsey, Huntingdonshire. The house was a typical fenland council house, three up, two down, with no bathroom, no hot water or flush toilets. The only bath was a tin bath kept in the shed and brought into the kitchen to be filled with hot water drawn from a coal fired kitchen laundry copper. The only toilet was an outhouse with a large metal bucket which was emptied once a week by the local council. These buckets were carried from the back gardens to the street and emptied into a large truck with an open tank on the back. The smell of these weekly events on warm summer evenings is one I will never forget. Chamber pots were the order of the day in the bedrooms as nobody wanted to venture out on cold dark nights.

My mother remarried when I was nine and we moved away from Ramsey to the small village of Shenley in Hertfordshire, barely seventy miles away from Ramsey, but in the early 60's seemed a world away. My mother took her new husband's name of May but I kept my fathers name. When I was 18, I spent a weekend back in Ramsey and while there I was given a tin by an aunt that contained correspondence from the RAF regarding the crash along with many photographs and a few letters that my father had written to my mother and me.

While reading these letters I began for the first time to feel an emotional attachment with my father. My mother and I didn't talk often about my father, however occasionally she would ask me if I ever thought about him. I of course did but never relayed to my mother how much. I realized in



Photo; Via Richard Bartlett-May

**Githunguri Police Station. The Lincoln first impacted the buildings at the top right hand corner of the compound.**

my late teens that there was a man I so desperately wanted to know but unfortunately never could.

For the next few years life took over, I married, purchased a house, had a mortgage, children and emigrated to the United States. In the days before the internet, research was difficult at best and being now several thousand miles away from the UK and Kenya pretty much impossible. With the internet coming into most homes by the late 90's my horizons were broadened but still no matter how much I searched I couldn't find a single thing out about SX984 and its crew.

Around about 1998 I happened to get in touch with one Iain Aubrey-Rees. Iain was a retired Squadron Leader from RAF Wyton and lived in Ramsey, Huntingdonshire. Iain visited the RAF Historical Branch on my behalf and managed to get information that I couldn't regarding the accident including the findings of the Board of Inquiry. Sadly Iain was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a few months later and passed away in 1999 after a courageous battle. In

2001 my mother also lost her battle with Non Hodgkin's Lymphoma so my two sources regarding my father were no longer available to me.

Aviation has always been a passion of mine and a career goal. I hold an Airline Transport Pilot's License and am an FAA Certificated Flight Instructor. I also worked with a group of Aviation Safety Counselors and found myself trying to connect the dots regarding the accident of SX984. Every February the 19<sup>th</sup> I would search the internet for information but always came up blank. That was until 2008 when I found a website that not only had information on SX984 but also contained a photo of the crew including my father. The thing that



**Photo; Courtesy Richard Bartlett-May**

**Proud father and son.**

really astounded me was the photo, as I had that very photo and the negative to it from the tin my aunt gave me. Who out there had put this site together and what was their connection with the event?

After a few days of searching to find the author of this website I located one Alan Culpitt who turned out to be the son of Alan Hunt's sister. Alan's sister was only a teenager when her brother was killed. Several years later she married and named her firstborn son after her late brother. Alan didn't know

the details of the event and was also seeking answers; I was able to pass on what I knew and also give him copies of letters his Grandfather had written to my mother after the accident.

After many years of fruitless searching my research suddenly gained further momentum when I discovered that 49 Squadron, which finally disbanded in 1965, had formed an association shortly after WWII and had annual meetings and a website. Amongst its members were those who had served in Kenya alongside my father. I almost had to pinch myself as everything was happening so quickly.

My wife and I flew back to Blighty in the summer of 2008 and visited the new National Memorial Arboretum to see the names of the crew and from there spent the most wonderful day with Stuart Keay [4T9er] and his lovely wife Pat. Stuart was stationed at Eastleigh at the time of the crash but was flying a mission to Aden that fateful day to pick up more bombs. I got to hear stories about the squadron and the missions against the Mau Mau. I also spoke with a Tony Cheetham [4T9er] who told me that my father was found some distance from the crash site still inside the rear turret and that a Pete Pierson had helped pull him from the wreckage. My wife and I also visited the Church of St Clements Dane in the Strand, London and looked at the Book of Remembrance which contains the crew names.

I also discovered that the Commanding Officer of 49 Squadron, Alan Newitt, was in his 90's and living in the Channel Islands. I typed a search in the British Telecom website and found a Wing/Cmdr Alan Newitt DFC RAF (retired) living in Jersey. After a couple of days of plucking up the courage to call I picked up the phone and dialled. To my delight and surprise Wing/Cmdr. Newitt answered the phone and we had a long conversation. He remembered the accident well and although he didn't remember my father he did remember Alan Hunt and relayed his flight and the post flight briefing with Hunt the day before.

The more I learned about the crash and its severity the more I was intrigued how my father had survived at all albeit only for a few hours. I began to wonder if the tail section weakened by the initial impact had departed the aircraft prior to the crash or if the rear turret was thrown/blown clear as the aircraft crashed. No one could tell me where the rear turret was found so that mystery remained. My father's burns would appear to indicate that the turret was still attached as SX984 crashed but could the weakened tail be thrown far enough away from the crash site to allow a rescue?

It became apparent that my only chance of unravelling the mystery was to go to Kenya and hope that I could find answers there in the town of Githunguri some 54 years after the event!

*To be continued.*



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<b>Mon 1st May</b>	<b>1.30pm &amp; 4.00pm</b>
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## **CAN YOU HELP?**

*German researcher, Uwe Benkle, and members of Arbeitsgruppe Vermisstenforschung have located the crash site of 49 Sqn. Lancaster ED427 EA-O near the village of Laumersheim. All crew members are listed as MIA. From eyewitness reports it is believed that the remains of the crew are still in the wreckage. This spring they will try to recover the remains of the aircraft and crew and are appealing for help in contacting the crew's family members. The aircraft was lost on a raid on Pilsen, 16/17th April 1943.*

*The crew members are; F/O A.V. Bone - Pilot, Sgt. R.N.P. Foster - F/E, Sgt. C.W. Yelland - Nav, Sgt. R.C. White - Wop/Ag, Sgt. R. Cope - MU/Gnr, Sgt. R.J. Rooney - B/A, P/O B.E. Watt RCAF - R/ Gnr.*

*If you can help please contact Uwe on email: [mu.benkel@t-online.de](mailto:mu.benkel@t-online.de) or the Editor/Secretary.*

*The group's homepage is: <http://www.flugzeugabstuerze-saarland.de>*

## READER'S LETTERS

*I am grateful to Barbara, widow of Frank Lowe whose passing is recorded in IN MEMORIAM (Page 2), for sending me the eulogy which was read by their son at Frank's funeral.*

"...In 1938 he joined the RAFVR as a U/T pilot flying Miles Magisters, Hawker Hinds and Audaxes at 26 E&RFTS, Kidlington, where he proved to be a natural and passionate pilot. Mobilised on 1st September 1939 he was posted to ITW at Hastings 13th December 1939. Here the PT Instructor taught him a series of special breathing exercises to practice every morning, a ritual he maintained for the rest of his life. On 6th March he was posted to 9 SFTS at Hullavington, completing a course on Avro Ansons on 30th July. His next posting was to 16 OTU Upper Heyford where he flew Avro Ansons and his beloved Handley Page Hampdens. Having finished his conversion course he was retained as an instructor spending a fortnight at CTS Finningley until he was posted to 49 Squadron at Scampton arriving there on 1st December 1940. After completing a full operational tour of 30 trips, totalling some 200 hours he was honoured with a DFM presented by King George VI. Frank then returned to Upper Heyford, 17th July 1941 as a staff pilot / instructor flying Hampdens, Ansons, Oxfords, Lysanders and Wellingtons.



"At the end of July 1942 he was recalled from a short spell of leave to captain a Wellington Ic with a pupil crew on a '1000 bomber raid' to Hamburg. The date was 28th July. Strangely on the afternoon flight test the emergency escape hatch in the roof of the cockpit suddenly flew open and a good luck charm was mislaid, one of many bullets from the fuel tank of a Hampden that Frank had nursed back from an earlier trip to Hamburg having survived what he called, 'a spirited attack'.

"A few moments after crossing the coast and turning to starboard to fly parallel to the River Elbe a burst of tracer from below shot up in front of him hitting the fuselage between the cockpit and the front turret. A second



burst hit the port engine. There was immediate fire, both in the front fuselage and the engine. Frank gave the order to abandon the aircraft. By this time the flames were licking around the cockpit so he opened the top hatch, which had given a free demonstration that afternoon, released the harness, unplugged the intercom and struggled out with immense difficulty because of the slipstream. He then got caught on the radio mast with his head and arms one side and his legs the other. The aircraft was now well alight and he was convinced that even if he did wriggle free of the mast he would hit the tail and break his back. Fortunately he managed to struggle free and missed the tail. He pulled the ripcord and the chute opened obligingly. The landing was heavy and resulted in a badly sprained ankle.

“Having hidden the parachute in a ditch he started walking but quickly realised that he would have to rest and took shelter in a small barn but was found by a policeman soon after daylight. He was taken to the crash site where he saw the pitiful remains of three of his crew and met the pilot of the Me110 that had shot him down. He was then put in a truck where he found his rear gunner who had also bailed out but had broken his leg on landing. The third survivor of the crew of six, the second pilot, had been taken to hospital with burns. He reached Sagan about a month after Frank but sadly he was one of the fifty shot on Hitler’s orders after ‘The Great Escape’ from Stalag Luft 3.

“The rear gunner was taken to hospital and Frank to the local aerodrome from where he went to Dulag Luft near Frankfurt for a fortnight, the first week in solitary confinement before transfer with others to Sagan. Whilst Frank was held in Sagan unbeknown to him his brother Julian took photographs of his place of interment from a high flying Spitfire.

“In 1945, still a PoW, Frank together with thousands of others made the amazing ‘Long March’ of 500 miles in deep snow and temperatures well below freezing to avoid the advancing Allies.

“He was demobilised in January 1946 and such was his love of flying he wished to continue serving in the RAF however his father convinced him to join the family business...

“...He returned in 1983 and rejoined the RAFVR in 1951 flying Tiger Moths and Chipmunks from Filton. Flying stopped there two years later but The Air Experience Scheme began in 1958 and he continued this engagement for 27 years. Many hundreds of cadets benefited from Frank’s flying skills including on one occasion a catastrophic engine failure resulting in a successful emergency landing under pylons in a cornfield for which he received the honour of a green endorsement.

“Frank finished his flying on 24th February 1985, the day before his 65th birthday, having flown for 47 years.”

*Frank Lowe DFM died on November 29th 2009 aged 89.*



***Former rear gunner and PoW, Ron Eeles wrote;***

“I thought that you might care for a copy of a letter from the now extinct Air Gunners Association;”

**“NATIONAL STANDARD OF THE AIRGUNNERS ASSOCIATION**

Following a meeting of the Turret / Nottm. Air Gunners, and in conjunction with the Museum Directors of the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington, it was decided that as our Ex National Standard Bearer had refused for the last six years to return the above to its rightful owners, as was his duty, by March 31st 2003 (the closure date) a new National Standard will be produced, dedicated and laid to rest at a Ceremony in the Chapel at Elvington, followed later by being framed and displayed in the Air Gunners Memorial Room, which is supported by our Air Gunners Memorial Fund

This was outlined in our late revered Chairman of the Executives Final Report of 2004 of which every member of the National Association at March 31st received a copy.

Sadly and with sincerity, we see this state of affairs, after nearly seven years effort by the vast majority of Members who have existed, as the only alternative whereby we can Honour with Pride, the memory of our National Association, the envy of many and from which saw the birth of the Air Crew Association.

With the cooperation of The Yorkshire Air Museum, the date of the Ceremony has been arranged for ST GEORGE’S DAY...23rd April 2010 at 11.30am so if you are fit enough to make the journey, we will send you a programme closer to that date, which we hope will embrace a March Past and the appearance of the BBMF Lancaster.

The Air Crew Association have offered supporting attendance and their National and Branch Standards.”

***Associate Member, Dominic Howard, is investigating the crash of his great uncle P/O Cyril Anderson’s Lancaster which went down on September 23rd 1943 during a raid on Mannheim. This is just one example of the many researches going on and of the results that are being obtained.***

“Just to keep you up to date, I have been in touch with a researcher in Germany who has contacted the Mayor of Offenbach in an attempt to locate where ED702 finally came down. The Mayor placed an advert in the papers and there has been a response to which I have now been told the aircraft came down near a church at Insheim. I have asked if this is the church where the crew were first buried. Also there may be some pieces from the aircraft with the Mayor’s office. I will let you know as soon as I hear.

“I am planning a trip to the scene of the crash and to visit the crew’s final resting place later this year.”



## 2009 CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL ST. CLEMENTS CHURCH, FISKERTON

*Below left;* John Fletcher's RAF themed tree. The two vertical parallel rows of lights representing FIDO, which was installed on either side of Fiskerton's runway, point up to a photo of Lincoln Cathedral just as Fiskerton's main runway pointed to the real cathedral.



*Below;* The accompanying display which was located between the tree and the Fiskerton Memorial.



Lower photos; John Fletcher