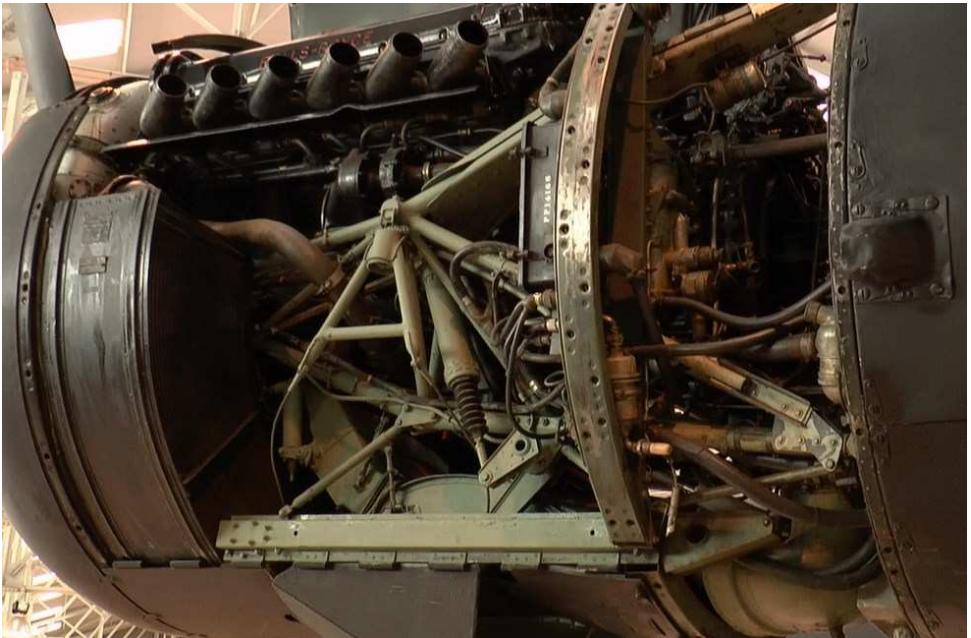


The 4T9er



**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine
February 2015 Issue 36**



One of the four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines on the Avro Lincoln B2 displayed at the RAF Museum, Cosford. From October 1949-July 1955 49 Squadron flew Lincolns, fitted with Packard built Merlin 68A engines. Doubtless, a number of our ex groundcrew members would have been very familiar with the engine's innards.

IN MEMORIAM

E. Holmes H. Smith H. Nissen

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

NEW MEMBERS

Eric French Roy Amerena

COME BACK (MEMBER)

Donald Andrew

NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER

Marion Coleman

NEW HONORARY FRIEND

Alan Gibson

NEW FRIEND

Cath Robertson

EDITORIAL

I don't know for how long one continues wishing people a Happy New Year but as this is the first issue of 2015 I extend that greeting to all our readers. Besides, it's never the wrong time to wish one's friends well. Thank you to all who sent Christmas and New Year greetings to myself and the Crew. Our thanks also go to those of you who have sent donations of money or stamps, the Association couldn't exist without you.

And now I have to apologise to the readers of our printed copies. Our printer experienced two separate problems in the production of November's issue of The 4T9er. I always take a look at a sample copy before leaving the premises but unfortunately the problems occurred spasmodically and the chances of spotting them were therefore greatly reduced. The flaws in question related to occasional reversed positioning of the two central pages and/or the incorrect register of a number of pages. Although neither of these faults resulted in unreadable copies I nevertheless apologise for any inconvenience.

I regret to announce the passing of the following members: Associate Member

Eileen Holmes, fiancée of F/O Edward Essenhig who was piloting the Lancaster which crashed on Worthing beach, died on November 9. Hazel Smith, Associate Member and widow of Paul Smith DFC, died November 10 aged 92. In Reader's Letters on page 25 their daughter, new Associate Member Marion Coleman, tells of the early days of 49SA when her parents were very much involved. Honorary Friend Hans Nissen died on January 13 aged 81. I met Hans and Marilyn, who live near the crash site of JA691, after a visit to the graves of my uncle and his crew in Aabenraa, Denmark in 1994. Since then we have enjoyed a warm friendship and they have placed poppies on the memorial stone and the graves on Remembrance Sunday, flowers on the crew's graves on the anniversary of the crash and on my uncle's on his birthday. Although he was not a member I record the death, on January 20, of S/L Graham Day, former A Flight Commander.

It is always a delight to welcome a new member who served with 49 Squadron and in this issue we have two with Eric French who was an LAC with the squadron between April 1944 and June 1945 and Roy Amerena who flew six ops with 49' before going on to 9 Squadron and the Tiger Force based in India. He was navigator in the crew of F/O H.R. Smith between March 5 and April 8 1945. Friend of sculptor Philip Jackson, Roy advised on the navigator in the Bomber Command Memorial group. We also welcome back Donald Andrew who flew 26 ops, including twelve visits to Berlin from August 1943, as navigator with P/O G.P. George .

New Associate Marion Coleman is the daughter of Paul and Hazel Smith and has been introduced above.

In appreciation of his kindness and co-operation we are pleased to welcome, as an Honorary Friend, Chairman of Fiskerton Village Hall committee, Alan Gibson.

New Friend Cath Robertson was a close friend of Eileen Holmes who is remembered in the IN MEMORIAM section. Cath has followed the 49 Squadron story through Eileen and is most keen to continue her connection.

Changing one's e-mail address for many people is a fairly frequent occurrence as they shop around the many service providers looking for the best deal. It is however causing a great deal of work for myself when I send out magazines or other messages by e-mail which are then rejected 'Address Unknown' and I have to investigate the new address. I regret that this has reached such proportions that I can no longer allocate the time to trace addresses and therefore if you do change your address and fail to notify me you will cease to receive messages from the Association until you contact us. The publication

months of The 4T9er are February, May, August and November so if you fail to receive your copy in those months, ask yourself if you have changed your e-mail address and failed to advise me.

With this issue of The 4T9er you will receive a preliminary booking form for the 2015 Reunion. This form is not binding but it gives me a rough idea how many rooms I need to reserve so if you expect to attend please complete and send it to Ed Norman whose postal details are on the form. Those of you who attended last year will have fond memories of the flyover by the Spitfire on the Sunday at Lincoln and the Lancaster at Fiskerton Memorial after the Monday service. We are most grateful to Honorary Friend Jack Hawkins who has again applied on our behalf and received word that similar events are 'in the book' for this year.

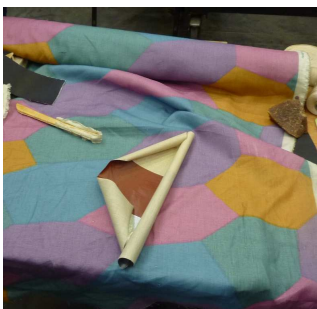
On December 21 a current affairs programme was screened in Germany featuring the visit to the crash site near Laumersheim of relatives of F/O Alexander Bone, pilot of 49 Squadron Lancaster ED427, who was lost on April 16 1943. I found it most disturbing that the programme included images of the human bones found on the site and of them being displayed as exhibits. Those who have read Issue 27 of The 4T9er may recall that I got hot under the collar because of a video on the web showing some human remains recovered from the same aircraft. These heroes deserve greater respect than this. If I were a relative of the crew I would be most disturbed that the Bone family were shown walking on the crash site picking up small pieces of aluminium and Perspex. I believed that the site had been cleared but if it is still possible to find aircraft debris is it not conceivable that human relics also remain? As I commented in Issue 27, "...it would appear that the stringent laws regarding the recovery of human remains that apply in Holland, Great Britain, [France] and no doubt many other European countries, do not apply in Germany." If ever there was a need for Brussels to act to create a common code of practice this is it.

Regular readers of The 4T9er will be familiar with the reports on the investigations carried out by Dom Howard, assisted by German friends, into the fate of a number of 49 Squadron Lancasters. During a trip to Germany in November Dom was taken ill to the extent that he spent a few days in hospital in Worms there after he was nursed by Katya Bauer in Herxheim until he was able to drive home shortly before Christmas. I am happy to say that Dom has now recovered and I would like to express the association's appreciation of the care that he received. He is now proceeding with an investigation into the loss of Lancaster JB301 near Altdorf, assisted amongst others, by Association Friend Peter Schreiber. JB301 was piloted by F/S Dave Stanton whose crew were on their third operation. Dom hopes to report on progress in August.

In December the Association presented a framed testimonial to Uwe Benkel and Arbeitsgruppe Vermisstenforschung in recognition of their work in the research and recovery of 49 Squadron aircraft.

In February's issue Flypast magazine carried the exciting news that Avro Shackleton AEW.2 WR963 fired up all four Griffon engines at Coventry on November 16. This aircraft, younger sister of the Lancaster and Lincoln, is being restored to flying condition which raises the mouth watering thought of a flight comprising The BBMF Lancaster, Just Jane from East Kirkby and the 'Shack'. The fact that this Shackleton is a tail dragger is an added bonus. A further significant event took place at Duxford on November 20 when Blenheim Mk. 1(f) L6739 took to the skies for a 26 minute test flight, its first since a landing accident in 2003. The aircraft was originally flown as a Mk.IV but during the rebuilding it was decided to fit the shorter nose of the Mk.I thus making a considerable change to its appearance. I for one look forward to seeing it perform at airshows this year. If, like me, you are a lover of De Havilland aircraft you will be excited to learn that Sea Vixen XP924 has been delivered to Yeovilton, Somerset, in order that it can rejoin the airshow circuit. Until recently, painted in the Red Bull colours, it has been refinished in the beautiful Royal Navy 899 Squadron scheme of dark blue and white. How appropriate that in the 75th Anniversary year of the Battle of Britain a genuine Bf109E is based in the U.K.. An actual Battle of Britain veteran, *White 14* is one of only two 'Emils' flying in the world. The prospects for the 2015 airshow season are truly mouth watering. Once again I am grateful to FlyPast editor Nigel Price for allowing me to quote from his magazine.

On November 13 last year I visited the Michael Beetham Conservation Centre Open Day at the RAF Cosford Museum. As the visit took place after the hard copy of The 4T9er had gone to press I was only able to include a few 'Stop Press' photos and comments in the E-Supplement. I have included a full report of my visit from page 16 in this issue and hope that readers of November's E-Supplement will bear with me as some of the photos are republished here for a wider audience. I always wondered why the Germans in WWI went for such a labour intensive camouflage, the so called lozenge pattern, on their aircraft. I used to think that it must have taken hours to paint on....wrong! They used printed linen, a sample of which was on display at Cosford....Obvious I suppose, "stupid boy", but we live and learn.



All the very best to you and yours for 2015.

WHAT A WAY TO GO

By Mike Chatterton

Part 2

We sat there for a while taking in the grandeur and incredible size of the place. Our “co-stars” – James Blunt, Katy Melua, the Poppy Girls, and others were going through their routines, it seemed odd to see the Marines and RAF Central Band practising dressed in T-shirt and scruffy jeans as opposed to their normal immaculate uniforms. I was pleased and impressed when everyone in the Hall – EVERYONE, stood up when Johnnie Johnson – the last remaining Dambuster came on stage.

No-one seemed to object so several of us started practising coming down our allocated steps. It quickly became very apparent that these steps were entirely different to the ones that we had spent hours practising on back at Northolt. They were wider, so needed a longer pace, the darkness and layout meant that when looking straight ahead peripheral vision did not give you the same sense of position and balance as it had done on the Fire Escape, there was a flat section towards the bottom, and then the remaining steps were a different width and height again! I practised over and over again, (I noticed my opposite number on the far side was doing the same), but I could just not get all the way to the bottom without catching a heel, or missing a step altogether, and of course there was a huge black camera nearby positioned precisely to watch us descending into the arena. I decided there and then that after a few steps I would have a crafty glance down, it might risk the wrath of the DIs but save the embarrassment of falling down the steps in front of the Queen, (and several million TV viewers!). Having made that decision I relaxed slightly and we got ready for our run through.

As usual in rehearsals there were lots of hold ups and delays but eventually our moment came. We set off down the steps precisely at the right time and met up at the bottom and formed up with the Army and Navy contingents. The marshals and organisers then fussed a lot and moved us about all over the place so again all that rehearsing on the parade ground seemed rather a waste of time. I remember casually chatting to the Army chap standing next to me and asking how many days he had been practising for. I was rather surprised at his answer which was “we just started this afternoon”!! We then stood there for what seemed like hours. Up to this point all the emphasis had been on the march down the steps and then forming up. I hadn’t thought about the fact that we now had over an hour stood on the spot whilst other events and then the Church Service took place. The mobile cameras were moving about trying to work out good angles and find interesting faces to home in on. They seemed to like

the fact that the group of people where I was were all belting out the hymns as loud as we could. The producer said later that he had never heard such enthusiastic singing at a rehearsal before. (He didn't say "good", just "enthusiastic").

It was quite late when we got back to Northolt – just time for a final polish, iron, and a couple of beers in the old Battle of Britain Mess.

We were up early on the Saturday morning loading up all our No 1 uniforms onto a rather decrepit looking MT lorry – hope it made it into London. Then onto the coach into London again, a lot quieter journey this time, partly because we now knew what to expect, and partly the time of day. We unloaded - relieved to find that our own uniform hanger was not the one streaked with oil, and made our way to the changing rooms. I was amused that the vast organisation that had gone into all this had allocated the RAF contingent separate changing areas for males and females, but that the males were sharing with the Central Band which was mixed male and female. Ah well, no room for modesty! We were actually in a function room in the depths of the Albert Hall, so no lockers or hanging facilities. I managed to get a space near the bar area and hung my No1s on the security grill, which was firmly locked down, - probably a good idea. There was a TV monitor showing what was going on in the arena, and there was nowhere else to go so we just settled down to watch. We were briefed that the morning Full Dress Rehearsal would go ahead just as if it were the real thing, - there would be no holdups. Far earlier than we needed to we got ourselves dressed into our No1s, there were no last minute panics, - no one had forgotten their tie or hat, although I'm sure a few of the immaculate toe caps would have been trodden on in that confined space. We formed up in our allocated waiting area and checked each other over one final time. Slowly but surely our moment arrived, the curtain was quietly pulled aside and I moved on to the top step. The Drum Roll commenced and then I was off, oblivious as to whether my Drill Sgt had got the timing right or not. I got to the bottom of the steps without embarrassment and a couple of crafty peeks down, - we met up in the middle perfectly in step and formed up as briefed. I then realised that there was one major difference with the Full Dress Rehearsal – the Army chaps in front of us were Guards, and as opposed to the berets of yesterday they were now sporting their wonderful Busbies. This meant that we could not see a thing in front! Fortunately I was on the end of our row but for anyone in the middle it must have been quite claustrophobic. As expected the cameras came over to us during the hymns and we belted them out even louder reading from the huge screens in front. Then it was over, and that was it – no more practising, next time it would be for real in front of thousands of members of the public.

Over lunchtime some of us had been selected to give interviews to the MOD Media people. I wasn't too worried about this, I had given many in the past and

this wasn't live or TV. I had a few standard answers ready about the pride of being involved and it being a great way to finish a career etc, but one of the interviewer's questions floored me completely. She said, "What would your Father have thought about you being here today?" Well I had never thought about that and gulped that I thought he would be very proud, I had a huge lump in my throat and it brought me close to tears. She could see my reaction and apologised for upsetting me, but I said it was fine, just that during all this preparation that point had never occurred to me before.

There were several photos in various poses and then I returned still watery eyed to find my colleagues finishing lunch in the canteen over the road that had been provided for participants. It tasted good.

Before long the audience were flooding into the RAH. The afternoon performance was primarily for Royal British Legion members with a few general public, but the evening performance, in the presence of HM The Queen was exclusively RBL. I managed to "acquire" a couple of brochures for souvenirs and then returned down into our dressing room. One of our number had been here before and knew how to get to a good viewing spot way above the audience on the very top the gallery where some of the lighting was set up. We went up there to watch the start of the performance as we were not required until near the end. It was an incredible view looking down on everything; we were even above the Poppy dispensers. The sound of the bands was fantastic live; it's never the same on TV. I resolved there and then that I would come back one day as a member of the audience and experience all this again. We eventually tore ourselves away to go and get ready once again. I don't remember any nerves at this stage, we must have been well trained. There were certainly some butterflies as I stepped through the curtain again into that huge Hall now packed full of people, but I was confident in my "Step Technique", and after that there was no pressure, apart from not fainting during those energetic hymns. It seems that the Poppy dispenser immediately above our group was not working so I was rather disappointed not to have any land on my hat or shoulders, but it was traditional that after the event the participants collect up poppies and hand them out to members of the audience, so I spent some time doing this and then realised I was almost the last one in the arena so scooted off to find my colleagues who were more interested in getting their tea!

It was apparently also traditional that the participants nip off to a nearby pub in between the two performances. Surprisingly, rather than ban this the QCS had actively encouraged the idea. Initially I thought that this would be a bit risky, but got swept away in the atmosphere of the moment and went along. This resulted in a couple of the best pints I have ever tasted! Most of the other customers in the pub had either just come out of the RAH, or were about

to go in. We got chatting to an old RAF veteran and his good lady who were about to go off to the evening performance. We found out where they would be seated and explained which aisle we would be marching down. We told them that if they waved at us as we marched in we would wave back – the beer was good!!

For the second performance we went up to “The Gods” again to watch the arrival of all the Heads of Government and then the Royal Party. It seemed odd to be standing to attention all that way up in the dark but we did so proudly. Again the time to leave came and we went back to the dressing room to get ready for the final time. It then dawned on me that not only was this the beginning of the end of this amazing experience, it was almost the end of my 40 years in the Royal Air Force. I was determined to enjoy every last second of it. Again we formed up, again the butterflies as the curtain opened, then we were in, down and formed up – all the tricky stuff was over – just make the most of it now. I vaguely remember all the singing and the music but most of that second performance was a blurr with lots of different thoughts racing through my mind. At the very end we all turned to face HM The Queen and the Three Cheers could have been heard in East Kirkby without any TV. After her departure we distributed poppies again although I kept a good handful for myself. On the arena itself there were lots of group hugs and group photographs – must have been carefully concealed very thin mobile phones in the No1s! From my group there were a lot of handshakes, they knew the significance of the day to me. Then before I knew it I was the last one left again. I nipped off to find that most people had left the changing room as well – better not miss the bus. No worry they were waiting for me. Once sat down on the coach – my first moment of peace for many hours, I felt a wave of calm. I sent a text to my wife to say we had finished, I knew that many family and friends would be just starting to watch the TV programme. We were planning to get back to Northolt and watch the programme on the TV in the QCS Coffee Bar, even though it would not be coffee that we would be drinking!

We arrived just after it had started and the tins came out of the fridge. I announced that as it was my last day in the RAF I would buy a drink for everyone; a bit rash as there were over a hundred in the room but never mind – the pension would cope! The atmosphere was fantastic, every time there was a close up on the Navy or Army there was a huge BOO, and every time it was one of us there was an almighty CHEER. I got several cheers – maybe it was the beer. Again it was good to see that despite the “high spirits” the Queen always got a cheer and the politicians – a loud boo! So that was it –What a Way To Go!

Having officially left the RAF, - the following day I joined with other Veterans and ambled past the Cenotaph in Whitehall, quite a comparison.



Watching rehearsals.



Photos: Mike Chatterton

Mike, right, relaxes with a pint.

MEMORIAL SERVICE AT HORSTEL

**By Alan Parr including information provided by Peter Harvey
and Uwe Benkel.**

On November 21 1944 a force of 138 Lancasters, including ten from 49 Squadron, attacked the Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst. Two of the latter, piloted by Fulbeck Station Commander G/Cpt. C.T. Weir and F/O E .C. Maul were lost. ‘Ginger’ Weir became a PoW after a remarkable escape and was the only survivor from the two aircraft. The two 49 Squadron aircraft were the only losses from the attacking force. The canal was successfully breached.

Whilst Bomber Command suffered thirteen aircrew killed there were also twenty two civilian deaths. Herr Brink, who lives in Horstel, initiated a Service of Remembrance in Horstel Church on Sunday 23 November.

The 49 Squadron aircrew who lost their lives were:

From Lancaster PB300: F/O F.A. Wooding, F/E — S/L P. Kelly Nav. — P/O A.W. Bishop ,W/Op — Sgt. P.Telford, A/G — F/O H.W. Hayward, B/A — F/O A.R. Verrier A/G.

From Lancaster PB354: F/O E.C. Maul, Pilot — Sgt. W. Cooper, F/E. — Sgt. S.D. Bolton, Nav — P/O I.G. Williams, W/Op — Sgt. E. Battye, A.G. — F/S A.L. Jackson, B/A — Sgt. J. Houghton, A/G.

Initially the airmen were buried near the crash sites but were then moved to the cemetery near Horstel and finally reburied at Reichwald Forest Cemetery.

Tragically, of the twenty two German civilians who died seven were from one family, their ages ranging from 2 to 45 years. Their headstone is shown on the left.



The Memorial Service, lead by Pastor Mark Thomalla, was held at St. Bernhard Church, Gravenhorst during which the name of each of the thirty five people who perished was read out by eighteen year old Hanna Redder. For each victim a candle was lit by the Pastor.

4T9er Dominic Howard sent a wreath which was placed on the memorial on behalf of 49 Squadron Association.

Peter Harvey, nephew of pilot Ted Maul, e-mailed this short report:
‘We visited the Reichswald Forest Cemetery on the Friday and laid family wreaths on Ted's grave and a rose on the graves of the crews of both Lancasters lost that night.

‘On arrival we were met by Herr Brink and his wife, they made us feel very welcome.

‘The next day we met Herr Benkel at the memorial service.

‘It was a very moving experience and one which none of us will forget. We are already planning a return trip next year... We have made some fantastic friends and plan to keep in touch, Uwe Benkel is going to find some research work for my Scout group, hopefully a trip to Germany with them too...’



Above: The Gravenhorst Memorial.

Above right: Left to right: Peter Harvey, Gertrud Brink, Joseph Brink, Maurice Harvey, Interpreter Herr Pleace, Liz Feller, Jon Coleman, Karen Maul Harkell and Uwe Benkel.

Below right: At the crash site, Left to right; Karen Maul Harkel, Peter Harvey, Liz Feller, Joseph Brink, Maurice Harvey, Interpreter, Jon Coleman.



THE MEMORIAL TO 'THE LAND GIRLS AND LUMBER JILLS' AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM.

On October 21 2014 The Countess of Wessex unveiled this wonderful memorial to The Women's Land Army and Women's Timber Corps.

'During the First and Second World Wars, 240,000 Land Girls and Lumber Jills provided food and timber for the war efforts, on behalf of our nation, we extend our thanks for the commitment and endeavour shown by these young women.'



Fog investigation and dispersal operation, or FIDO as it was known, was a method of dispersing fog by burning petrol which was fed through pipes alongside the runway and vaporized at intervals through burner nozzles.. FIDO was installed at only 15 RAF airfields of which Fiskerton was one.

ANOTHER USE FOR FIDO

By Bill ‘Titch’ Cooke



It started as just another normal ‘op’, a meal, briefing, out to pick up our gear and catch the crew bus.

Our usual plane was ready and we began the normal checks carried out before each flight.

All went well until we did the engine run ups when one of the Merlins developed a ‘mag drop’.



The fitters were on it right away but it appeared worse than usual. After a while a senior officer came over and told us to take the standby aircraft.

By now we were already late and other aircraft were taking off so we nipped over smartly and began the pre-flight tests. All completed we moved out to find that a Lanc had burst a tyre just as we turned on to the take off runway.

This meant that each aircraft had to turn around, taxi down the take off runway and turn again before they could roll. It was getting later and later and we were at the end of the queue. At last we made it to the runway and began to move to the end.

The Lanc was still there and we were moving towards it at a pace when the skipper shouted, “Oh dear, Oh dear,” (or words to that effect) “We don’t have any brake pressure.”

Our pilot made the only possible manoeuvre revving up the port engines and swinging to starboard just before we reached the folk at the end of the runway waiting to wave us off.

The ‘FIDO’ pipes will stop a fully loaded Lanc, they just get bent.

Thinking this was it we offloaded to hear some senior officer say, “Their own aircraft is serviceable now so if they cut out the dog legs and fly straight to the target they will only be a bit late.”

I still go cold thinking about it-5 Group on one course and us on our ‘tod’ going direct to the target.

Fortunately common sense prevailed, we didn’t fly and I’m still here.

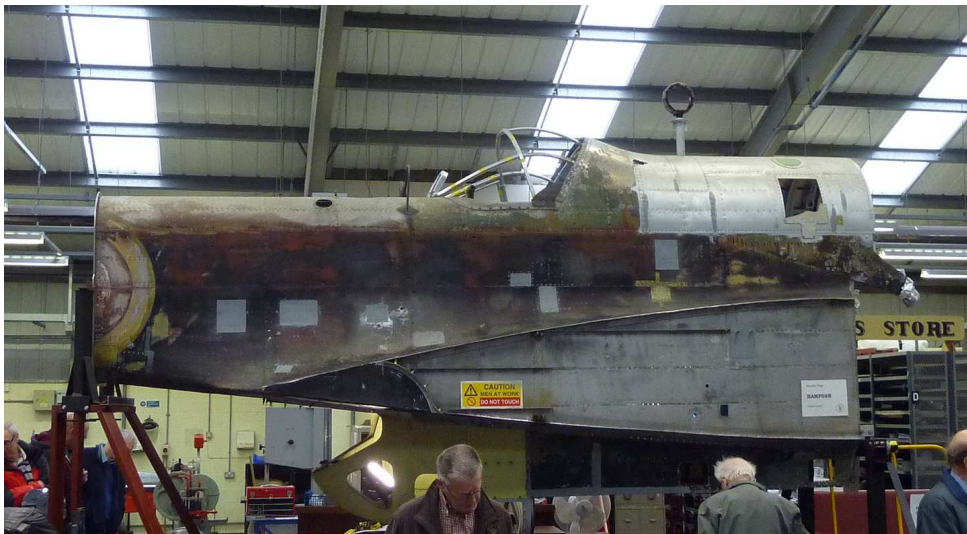
OPEN DAY AT THE MICHAEL BEETHAM CONSERVATION CENTRE, RAF MUSEUM COSFORD.

A big week in the historic aircraft enthusiast's calendar falls in November when the Michael Beetham Conservation Centre holds its open week. I chose Thursday November 13 for my visit.



The rebuilt tail and unrestored fuselage boom.

I had last been there in March when I accompanied John Lowe with Hampden and Mosquito veteran Fred Hill. I was astonished at the progress that had since been made on the Hampden, particularly the empennage which Conservation Manager Darren Priday told me comprises 40% original parts.



**The rear section of the main fuselage clearly showing the wing root profile.
‘The Tin’ is the zinc chromate painted section, bottom centre.**

‘The Tin’, as Hampden gunners call the lower rear turret, is virtually complete leaving mainly the forward fuselage and cockpit to be restored. Coincidentally,

this is the section that has progressed most in the Hampden restoration at East Kirkby so between the two virtually all the details of construction can be seen.

In March the biggest aircraft in the Centre was the Wellington which had been stripped of all its fabric. The fuselage,



and wings which are standing on edge adjacent to it, are still 'naked' which gives a unique opportunity to study the complex geodetic construction and the internal details. Walking beside the fuselage one can clearly see the various crew positions and the very prominent flare chute mounted in the centre. Unfortunately, once the fuselage is recovered in fabric these fascinating details will no longer be visible to any but the fortunate few allowed internal access.



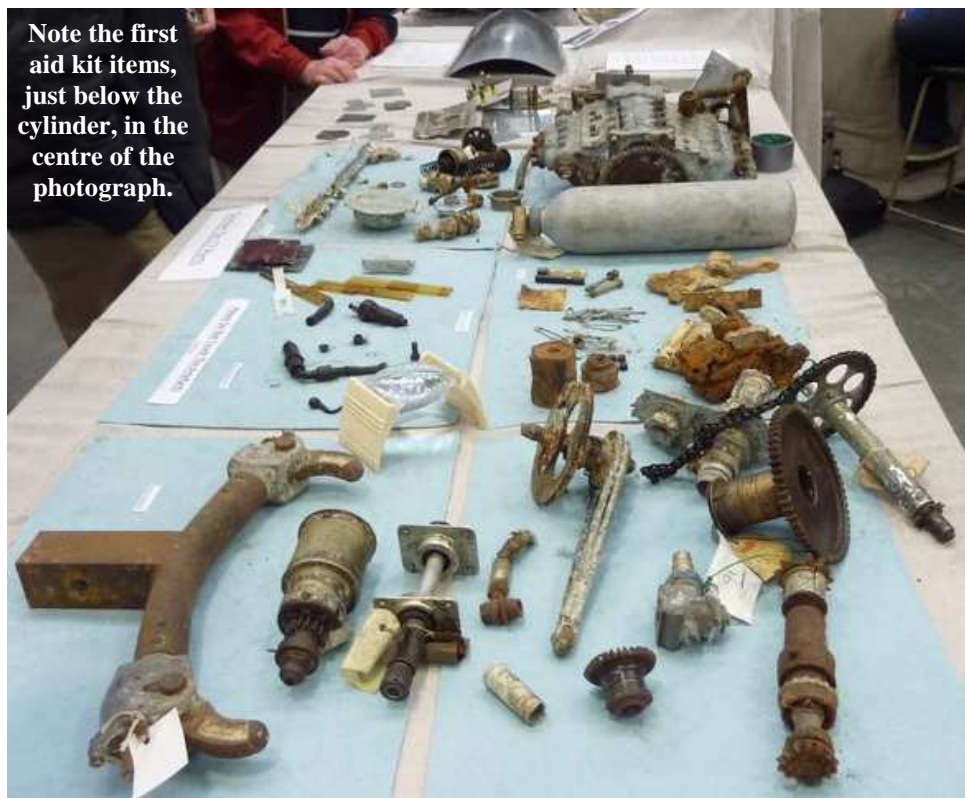
In this interior photograph the flare chute can be clearly seen in the centre.

It may be the fact that the Wellington, or Wimpey as it was known, is located in the relatively small workshop but it certainly looks a big aeroplane.

As reported in the November issue of The 4T9er, the moving into the conservation area of the fuselage, tail section, propellers and engines of the



Dornier 17 is an important step forward in the preservation of this unique relic. Whilst the airframe shows the ravages of 70 years under the sea the engine reduction gear in particular and the propellers are remarkably well preserved. On a poignant note there was displayed the first aid kit which included a phial of iodine, hypodermic syringe, bandages and safety pins.



Note the first aid kit items, just below the cylinder, in the centre of the photograph.



Two views of the inverted fuselage:

Above: The forward section.

Below: The rear.



One cannot speak too highly of the standard of the work carried out on these aircraft. In the case of the Hampden for instance, every part is logged so that in future years its provenance can be confirmed.

I am most grateful to Darren and his staff for their hospitality.

**MY SERVICE CAREER IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE 1940/1968
INCLUDING BOMBER OPERATIONS WITH
No. 49 SQUADRON IN 1943/44**

**By
SQUADRON LEADER T J PAGE DFM
Part 3**

Before we commence serious bombing operations let us look inside the Lancaster to give you some idea of the duties and conditions under which the crew work. Starting at the entrance door immediately inside the fuselage there is a flare chute. This carries a high velocity flare that is dropped at the same time as the bombs to photograph and record the bomb strike. To the left are two stowage's one for the Rear Gunner's parachute and one for a portable oxygen bottle. We then see into the rear gun turret to the back.

Above the entrance door is stowage for the entrance ladder. It was my duty as the engineer to see that the ladder was in the stowage and the door locked and so inform the pilot. Close by the door to the front is suspended a remote recording compass positioned here away from all radio and electrical interference; the readings were shown on instruments in the pilot's and navigator's positions.

Going forward up the fuselage we pass under the Mid Upper Gun Turret. On the port side is a rest bed for use if a crew member is injured. Underneath it are 16 oxygen bottles for the supply to the crew at altitude. In the air I would monitor the supply to each crew member from my position. Then there is the main spar of the aircraft with parts of the hydraulics and compressed air systems attached. There is only small gap through which to get to the front cockpit.

Immediately after the spar on the port side is the Wireless Operator's position. In fact he sits with his back to the spar – he does have a cushion.

Next on the port side is the Navigator's position which is directly behind the Pilot.

Now we come to the front cockpit with the Pilot's control column and his flight instruments on the left. On the right are the Engineer's engine controls and instruments. There are further Engineer's fuel controls and instruments on the right side of the cockpit.

From the Engineer's position he looks down into the Bomb Aimer's compartment. He does have a drop down seat but most of the time he stood up being required to move about.

On the 13th, our names appeared on the Battle Order for operations that night to fly Lancaster Mark III No. ED 620. The decisive moment had come for us, the apprehension before each bombing operation was to start. These feelings were relieved to some extent by doing all the preparations necessary before take off.

The first thing to do was to fly the aircraft on a Night Flying Test (NFT). This was to ensure that everything was working satisfactorily before the bombs and the correct fuel load for the flight were loaded on the aircraft. Afterwards the time was with things personal, this included having a meal and resting.

Later we would dress in the clothes suitable to withstand the cold of the particular aircrew position in the aircraft. Air from the two inboard engines warmed the main cockpit.

Soon it was time for the briefing. There was a buzz of excitement as we trooped into the briefing room. There was a gasp as the route map on the wall was uncovered and the target shown as the docks at La Spezia in the north of Italy. This would be a very long flight requiring full petrol tanks and flying for maximum range. Two hundred and eight Lancasters and three Halifaxes were to attack. A good point about this operation was that the route was out and back over the South Coast of England and the South of France where the defences were relatively light.

The next thing was to go to the Locker Room to collect flying kit, helmet, parachute and flying boots. I also carried a toolkit. During the flight I completed a log of engine conditions every twenty minutes. The other crew members would also collect their flying kit together with those things necessary to their particular duty; maps and charts, target details, radio frequencies, a sextant for the Navigator a carrier pigeon for the Wireless Operator. Each crewmember would also have received in flight rations of sandwiches, a tin of orange juice and a bar of chocolate.

Now came the worst part of the preparations, waiting outside the locker room for the buses to take each crew to their aircraft. It was at these times that the stomach would churn needing a call to the latrines as one thought of what lay ahead. This could be a nuisance when all dressed up and ready to go. There would be banter for some, quietness for others at this time and during the drive out to the aircraft dispersed around the airfield.

At the aircraft, the Pilot and Engineer reported to the dispersal Flight Office to check the aircraft loading and talk to the ground staff and the Pilot would sign the aircraft logbook.

Before flight, as the Engineer I would check that a battery trolley was plugged in for starting the engine and there was ground crew standing by to prime the engines with fuel. With the crew aboard I would secure the entrance door and stow the ladder. Moving forward up the fuselage I would see that the oxygen supply under the rest bed was turned on and the electrics were connected to the external battery trolley. I would then take my place on the right hand side of the cockpit beside the Pilot where we would start the engines and do the pre-flight checks.

On seeing a green Verrey light from the control tower, it was time to taxi to the runway for take-off. I was checking engine temperatures and oil pressure, as it was easy for engines to overheat at this stage. The Pilot called up each member at his crew position to see if all was ready for take-off.

At the threshold of the runway we would do our last minute take off checks before the Pilot turned ED620 onto the runway to await the green light to go. Each aircraft took off at 30-second intervals after a signal from the Control Tower. Our take off time was 20.50hrs.

On seeing the green light from the runway controller, the Pilot eased the throttles forward leading with the port outer and when the aircraft was running straight, he called for full power and I pushed the throttle levers fully forward. The aircraft gathered speed down the runway and this was one of the most anxious times as the loss of an engine when fully loaded with fuel and bombs would be disastrous.

It took the entire 6000ft runway to gain flying speed. When safely clear of the runway, the Pilot said, "Undercarriage", and I lifted the undercarriage lever, secured it into position, checked to see that the undercarriage was fully up and locked.

When safely airborne I reduced the engine power to complete the initial climb to a safe altitude and closed the flaps in 5 degree stages from their one-third take-off position. The aircraft then flew over the airfield for the Navigator to set the correct time of departure and to set the first course. I reduced engine speed to the climbing power.

At this time it was still daylight. The rendezvous point was on the South Coast of England and we could see the other aircraft around us.

We settled down to our individual routines for the long flight with me monitoring and recording, at twenty-minute intervals, the engine speeds, their temperatures and the pressures of the oil and coolant, whilst keeping a check on fuel flow and other things and keeping a look out for other aircraft. I was fortunate to have a view from the cockpit of the full 360 degrees around the aircraft.

Darkness closed in as the coast of France was crossed. All went well as the flight progressed. Occasionally we would get a glimpse of a silhouetted aircraft below.

Eventually the Navigator gave an estimated time of arrival (ETA) at the target at Spezia. The ETA time came and passed and so did the H-Hour, time of attack, but there was no sign of a raid anywhere. Raids could normally be seen from many miles away especially from altitude. The aircraft was over the sea and it was soon realised that it was off course and the correct position not known. With the bombs still on and over half of the petrol gone I said to the Pilot, "If

we don't get rid of these bombs we shall not get back to base". We released the bombs into the sea.

We turned for home and as we did so I distinctively saw high ground which I later thought would have been Corsica or Sardinia. The intended landfall was on the South Coast of France at Montpellier but it was not until 30 minutes after that time that the Bomb Aimer saw the coast. After a series of course changes we eventually crossed the French coast at Boulogne at 4000ft. Some light opposition anti-Aircraft fire came up from the sand dunes but fortunately no damage occurred to the Aircraft. It is a long story of flying alone across hostile France.

Over the channel there was very little fuel left in the number one tanks, tanks number two and three were empty. It was necessary to find an airfield soon for landing. Throughout this time there were anxious moments watching for any engine to cut out for want of fuel. After getting no reply to emergency calls for identification and landing, the misty coast was crossed and by chance, we saw an airfield. Without contact with the control tower, we landed the aircraft. The airfield was Dunsfold. The time was 07.40hrs and the flying time had been 10.50hrs. The aircraft had flown alone across the hostile territory of France expecting opposition at any time. Inspection of the number one tanks with the aircraft's tail down showed only the bottom of the tanks.

After a meal we flew back to Fiskerton who had posted the aircraft and crew as missing.

An examination of the navigation chart, and a check of the two compasses, revealed that the main one was under reading by thirty degrees and that the courses flown had always taken the aircraft to the right of the required track. This meant that on the outward flight the true track had been down into the Mediterranean whereas the return brought the aircraft back on track to the south coast of France. Afterwards the track had been northwards around Paris before the turn westwards. This very long first operational bombing flight at maximum range had been quite a lesson.

The Battle of the Ruhr started in March 1943. The aircrew, because of the intensity of the defence's searchlights, fighters and anti- aircraft fire, knew the Ruhr area as Happy Valley.

On the 26th April, we attacked Duisberg with five hundred and sixty other aircraft. The Ruhr area was visible from miles away, a solid ring of searchlights surrounded it. Inside the ring, it was a fireworks display of rising shells, shell bursts, tracer gunfire and marker flares. Seeing the Ruhr for the first time made me gasp and I said, "How do we get through there?" No one answered, each had his own thoughts, the Navigator in his blacked out compartment declined to look.

Soon we passed through the searchlight belt and were amongst the anti-aircraft bursts and tracer fire, the Pilot, the two Gunners and me, keeping a sharp look-out for other aircraft to avoid collision and for enemy fighters. We saw aircraft exploding, some catching fire and going down, others in searchlights. I was standing up at this time being required to move about to operate controls and to be able to read and to make a record of the instruments. The run up to the target flying straight and level seemed to take a very long time although in reality it was only minutes. When the bombs left the aircraft I would feel the movement of the cockpit floor. This was a relief. The aircraft would rise up from the sudden loss of weight but remain on course until the photoflash had gone off and the camera had recorded the bomb strike. Only then was the aircraft turned and dived away to get out of the target area. To look down from 20,000ft and see the great area of fire and the bombs bursting was a sight I would never forget. The explosions of the heavy 4000lb bombs affected the aircraft. This flight took five hours and was without mishap but 17 other aircraft were lost that night.

On the 28th April, we tried to drop magnetic mines off the coast of Juist in the Fresian Islands together with two hundred and six other aircraft. The weather was bad in the area, dark, rain and low cloud. At 500ft in cloud and bad visibility, the target area could not be located. Because the position of mines in the sea had to be known, they were returned to base. One hundred and sixty seven of the aircraft laid 593 mines in the area of the islands that night. Twenty-two aircraft failed to return. This was the greatest loss on any mining during the war. It was the only mining sortie undertaken by us.

It is not practicable to describe each raid as some were much the same as another but some are worthy of note especially the first two raids on Hamburg that started those great firestorms. This was the night when we first used Window.

There was the instance where the target was the Skoda factory at Pilsen a place deep in the east of Europe. Out over the North Sea, the starboard inner engine shed its exhaust flame cover and some of the cylinder exhausts. In the dark a long sheet of flame curled back over the leading edge of the wing, this would have been a fire risk and a beacon to enemy night fighters. The engine was shut down and the airscrew feathered. The aircraft now lost air speed and was no longer able to keep up with the rest of the force; it would become a sitting duck to the opposing fighters. It was time to return to base to live to fight another day. It was dangerous to land with a 4000lb bomb on the aircraft so it was dropped into the North Sea.

To be continued.

READER'S LETTERS

Member John Guthrie e-mailed:

Thanks again for a great read. Sorry to hear of the death of Air Cdre Langston. I was the Sqn. clerk from July 1963 to August 1964. I had only just entered man service after 18 months as a Boy Entrant so everything was quite new to me but he was a good boss. I was on the parade mentioned and Plt Off/Fg Off Deakin was the Ensign Officer. In those days the ground crew did not mix with the air-crew except on duty. So imagine my surprise when in 1988 when I was now a Flt Lt Admin Officer in Germany only to find out that the Sqn. Ldr. in the flat upstairs was Paul Deakin. Small world.

The parade mentioned was the presentation of the Squadron Colour Standard by HRH Princess Marina. Paul Deakin is also a Member of 49SA.

New Associate Member Marion Coleman e-mailed:

My mother, Hazel Smith, died on the 10th of November aged 92 years. She was the widow of Paul William Smith DFC, a 49er from the beginning. I have lived with the 49ers for over 60 years. My father was navigator of 'Uncle Will' Hay's crew and I remember some of them, Harry Jenkinson, Bill French, Jack McKay. My parents were involved with organising the early reunions, Mum doing the typing for Reg Denny. For many years after the Saturday night (men only) do the family members met on Sunday for tea usually either at the Hay's or the Smith's homes. I remember, with a chuckle now, my annual chat with Uncle Leslie as to my educational and social progress - once a policeman always a policeman!

In their later years my parents were great friends with Tom and Marion Gatfield and attended many happy reunions in Lincolnshire. Following my father's death in 2000 I think Mum continued to come along for a couple of years but it was not the same without him. Tom, Marion and John Hall would visit on their way home and keep her up to date with events and friends. Sadly as time went on friends passed away but she continued to be an avid reader of The 4T9er until her last few days.

In the November issue of The 4T9er there appeared a feature on the filming of the Hameldown Memorial to 49 Squadron's Hampden X3054 for BBC's Countryfile programme. Honorary Friend John Lowe has dedicated much time and energy into researching the crash and its circumstances and has e-mailed with the following announcement:

You may already know I have been requested to give the illustrated presentation of ***The Boys*** in the Chapel of Rest at Higher Cemetery, Exeter, during the afternoon of Saturday, 21st March, 2015. (The Anniversary of the

tragic loss of X3054.) Recently, I had an escorted private visit to the Chapel; as a result of which I have been greatly moved by its simplicity and perfect setting; truthfully, I cannot think of a more fitting and poignant place to fulfil my obligation; to say it will be a privilege is pure understatement. I know that plans are being made for those attending to spend time at the grave side of Sgt Ellis and Plt Off Wilson prior to moving into the Chapel, more on this as details emerge. Flowers will be laid and I am arranging to have a wreath replicated along with the blooms placed by the then Lord Winterton and Wilson family.

My Dear Friend, Flt Lt Fred Hill, DFC will accompany me as Representative of 49 Squadron.

Seating within the Chapel of Rest is very limited – 60 – therefore, anyone wishing to attend is requested to ***reserve their seat or seats with me urgently***. This presentation is going to receive prior advertising, (including radio/press, Friends of Higher Cemetery network etc.) and it is likely to be filmed for British Forces Broadcasting TV on the day.

Obviously, vehicle parking is also at a premium too. (***‘Reserved’*** parking within the Cemetery itself is greatly restricted and only organised by prior arrangement) My suggestion would be, for those that can, to visit the location and judge for yourself the problematical on street resources and act accordingly! To put this churchyard into perspective it holds in excess of 70,000 burials.

John e-mailed on January 20:

Plans are now well in hand for the illustrated presentation planned for the 21st March at Higher Cemetery. The organisers feel that a simple ceremony at the grave side of P/O Wilson and Sgt Ellis would be appropriate. I hope to be able to source wreaths, made with similar flowers as those used on the original. Sgt Ellis’s niece has agreed to attend and so I expect she will lay the wreath. Fred Hill, representing 49 Sqn might take the role of Lord Winterton by presenting the display of primroses, again as in 1941. After this we will all move into the Chapel of Rest for the illustrated presentation of The Boys story.

Just before Christmas I was invited to present their story in a village close to Hameldown; as I was packing away an elderly gentleman came forward and explained that he had a large piece of ‘your’ aeroplane; and after a pause he continued by saying, “but I can’t find it!” Pleasantries were exchanged and then he departed towards the door and off into the deluge. Before he completely vanished he said over his shoulder, “and yes, it’s got bullet holes in it!”.

I searched for him; but he had vanished. The need to find him is acute; the village is not that large so I am hopeful that my spies will eventually come back with the right answer. Then what? Ransack his home?

Throughout the research I have laid aside, as it were, the reports that I had stumbled on that pointed in the direction of a forced landing. Due, I was given

to understand, to the fact that the pilot, or indeed others on board were wounded. Principal reasons came from the metrological data combined with the remains and debris spread of the aircraft. Now, if that item can be found and what that gentleman described can be substantiated; then, a different story might be in the process of emerging. This week might also bring the long awaited medical report of the aircraft's pilot from the MOD; if that suggests his injuries were anything other than would have been expected as a result of a crash of this nature and intensity, then again, a rethink has to be undertaken. This is what is so intriguing; fulfilling and frustrating in equal measure about this project. No sooner do you think you have completed the work then something else comes along. The waiting game once again.

Interest in The Boys story has grown since the broadcast in September; with the expected world-wide transmission due this week, who knows what might come along.

Book Review by Andy Thomas

‘Valiant Boys’

by Tony Blackman & Anthony Wright

Grub St

ISBN 978-1-909808-21-8

£20

The latest in the excellent ‘Boys’ series from Grub St covers the first, and least known, of the RAF’s ‘V-bombers’ – the Vickers Valiant. Sub-titled ‘true stories from the operators of the UK’s first four-jet bomber’, in 190 pages it does exactly that. Whilst the technical descriptions are well covered it is the personal and human stories that really give colour to history and in this the Authors serve the reader well. It is particularly good to see significant contributions from the oft overlooked groundcrew for the history of any aircraft or unit is as much theirs as of the aircrew. Well illustrated throughout and, with some useful larger inserts, the story of the development of the UK’s nuclear weapon programme is very well described – indeed the Valiant is the only British aircraft to have dropped a live nuclear weapon. Its use in the strategic reconnaissance and of pioneering air-to-air refuelling in the RAF is also well covered. The sole surviving Valiant is now a major exhibit in the RAF Museum at Cosford and the preservation of that aircraft makes fascinating reading. It is an enjoyable read that will be of interest to all ex members of 49 Sqn, whether they flew the Valiant or not.

2015 CALENDAR

A group of military wives and serving female personnel have joined forces to raise money for the Royal Air Forces Association by producing a 1940s themed calendar- *Women of the War*. The project is dedicated to the many unsung female heroes of WWII. The calendar costs £9 and is available from: **www.rafcaldargirls.org.uk**



The 4T9er

E-Supplement

February
2015



The BBMF Lancaster flies over the Fiskerton Airfield Memorial following our reunion service in June last year. Our application for a repeat at this year's reunion is in the BBMF diary. The photo is a 'still' from a video on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/ueKNnSbXDFM>



The Falklands Memorial



The Berlin Airlift



Auxiliary Territorial Service - ATS



Above & right: The Bevin Boys



**SEVEN OF THE MEMORIALS AT
THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM,
ALREWAS, STAFFORDSHIRE.**



Battle of the River Plate
The profiles at the front of the memorial show the actual sizes of the ships' shells: Admiral Graff Spee, left - HMS Exeter, centre - HMS Ajax & HMS Achilles, right.



The Naval Service



The Royal Air Force Medical Services



THE HAMPDEN AT COSFORD.

Above: The primary actuating crank for both rudders.

Inset: The final rod and crank to the starboard rudder. Note also the rather flimsy appearance of the rudder framework.

Below: Rear view of the empennage showing the recess for the full width elevator.





DORNIER 17

**Above: There is a bullet hole in one of the propeller blades.
(One might also observe that I have shot myself in the foot!)**

Below: A view of the underside of the tailplane and port fin. The fact that the aircraft lay inverted on the sea bed probably accounts for the missing fin above tailplane level.



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In this, the 70th anniversary year of the raid and the end of the war, Tony Redding explores each facet of the offensive within its wider historic context, describing the build-up, the strategic reasons why Pforzheim was chosen as a target, the consequences of the raid in terms of human casualties and aircraft losses, and its aftermath.

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