

# The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

The 49 Squadron Association Magazine

November 2016 Issue 43



**THE FUTURE OF REMEMBRANCE.**

Cora 3, Harry 4 & William 2- great - grandniece and great- grandnephews of  
F/S Terence McEneaney. See page 16.

## IN MEMORIAM

**R. Hayward   P. Gibson   K. N. Manning**  
**WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.**

## NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

**Helen McClure   Verden Walker**

## EDITORIAL

Here we are on the run up to Christmas having just completed Remembrance Weekend when Barbara and I enjoyed meeting our friends from the association and Fiskerton. A report appears within this issue.

I must start by thanking those of you who responded so generously to my initial appeal for donations towards the establishment of a permanent memorial to 49 Squadron at the National Memorial Arboretum. I visited the Arboretum a few weeks ago and a photographic feature is presented herein together with a more formal appeal for donations. I hope that you will respond to enable us to provide a memorial that is worthy of the sacrifice that was made by so many 49ers. Following my visit I e-mailed the Head of Operations and received a most courteous and informative reply. The following extract gives an indication of the process involved: *“The National Memorial Arboretum has memorials that represent a very diverse set of organisations that date back to our early years but in more recent years we have had to limit memorials to those organisations that are in line with our charitable objectives. The memorial has to commemorate those who died in the service of their country or those who served or suffered in the service of their country. 49 Squadron would clearly meet that criteria.*

*“All proposals need to be approved by our Landscape and Memorials Advisory Committee which sit once a quarter. Once approval is given in principle the Landscape and Memorials Advisory Committee require engineers scale drawings of all proposals together with details of materials to be used together with any signage/text and the method of construction...As far as the actual design is concerned there are no hard and fast rules though it is probably safe to say that an application for a blue brick plinth with a brass plaque would probably not get through the committee now. It can also depend on where on site the memorial goes – in some areas we would expect that the memorial included some soft landscaping but in other areas a memorial might work*

**Cover Photo: Robert McEaney**

*perfectly well in the existing landscape. The usual approach is that an organisation comes to visit and gets some inspiration from the existing memorials though we do encourage creativity rather than reproducing more of the same."* I am holding discussions with a Lichfield monument company which has experience of installing memorials at Alrewas and which is willing to quote for the complete package. As you can appreciate there is no 'quick fix' and it will probably take up to two years. I am currently working on what I consider to be a realistic budget of £7,000.

In the August issue I had to report the ill health of Stuart Keay and Dom Howard. Well, I am absolutely delighted to tell you that both have made excellent recoveries and attended the Remembrance Day Service at Fiskerton. As I said to Stuart, "We expect a substantial period as Chairman from you yet!"

Sadly I have three deaths to announce this issue. Bob Hayward always said that he felt an imposter as a full member of the Association as he was only attached to 49 Squadron for a few days however that was sufficient as far as I was concerned. Bob lived near to our late centenarian Member Eric Clarke and in latter years made arrangements for Eric to visit many places that he otherwise may not have done. Associate Member, Pat Gibson, died on 22nd September at the age of 93. She was the widow of former Gunnery Leader, the late Ken Gibson. Ken Manning, who died on October 6th also aged 93, flew 29 ops in the wireless operator's seat of F/O Norman Alty DFC's Lancaster between August 3rd 1944 and 7th January 1945.

I have pleasure in welcoming two new Associate Members. Helen McClure is the granddaughter of S/Ldr D.A.J. McClure who, as a Pilot Officer, flew 49 Squadron Hampdens on 21 and 19 ops, as 2nd pilot and skipper respectively, between 26th February and 23rd September 1940. It was during his time on the squadron that fellow 49er F/L R.A.B. Learoyd became Bomber Command's first Victoria Cross recipient for his attack on the notorious Dortmund-Emms Canal. Whilst David did not fly on that raid he did attack the canal on September 19th. He was killed on March 12th 1943 whilst on 83 Squadron, aged just 22. Verden Walker's uncle, Sgt. Alfred Cole Walker, lost his life in the early hours of 29th of September 1941 when the Hampden that he was piloting from Scampton suffered a double engine failure shortly after take-off and crashed near Lincoln killing all on board. He had flown 22 ops as 2nd pilot, the majority with late 4T9er Frank Lowe, and 14 ops as skipper. He was 23 years old when he died.

There is exciting news from East Kirby regarding Lancaster 'Just Jane'. Work has commenced to return her to the air and reports on progress appear in this issue. Dom Howard dropped in on his way to the Remembrance Day gathering and has supplied some photographs.

In my Reunion report in August's edition I expressed the hope that in the future we will use the Scampton Air Show as a focus for meeting up each year. Well the 2017 air show dates have been announced as September 9th and 10th. and I immediately booked thirteen rooms at the Bentley Hotel. I anticipated a high demand but that was all that I could get. I circulated the regular reunion attendees and at the time of writing only two room remain available. Tickets for the air show went on sale just prior to Remembrance weekend and are only available online from: [scamptonairshow.org](http://scamptonairshow.org) . So far the majority of those having booked will attend on the Saturday. No formal events are planned by us, it will just be nice to have a get together.

Also in the August issue we featured a report by Dom Howard on the saga of the return to England of the remains of Lancaster ED427. I sent a brief report to FlyPast magazine of which a précis was published in the October issue as follows:

'Parts of Avro Lancaster B.1 ED427, which was lost during a raid over Germany on April 17, 1943, have been recovered and taken to East Kirkby's Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre. They will eventually be put on display in memory of Fg Off Alexander Bone and his 49 Squadron crew. The crash site was excavated in September 2012. Human remains were found and buried with full military honours in Durnbach cemetery. Relics from the aircraft, mostly parts from one of the engines, were returned to England by road on June 12 this year. A stop was made at Fiskerton Airfield Memorial where Rev Penny Green conducted a service in memory of the crew.'

I bet that's the first time that Penny has had her name in a popular flying magazine!

Whilst on the subject of FlyPast, November's issue featured a special V-Force edition. Naturally the ex49 Squadron Valiant XD818 which resides in the Cold War Museum at RAF Cosford gets a mention as the only complete example in the world but, like me, some readers may be unaware that the nose section, including the cockpit, of XD816 still exists. Although it is located at Brooklands it is actually on loan from its owners, the RAF Museum. Former Valiant aircrew are welcome to share their experiences with the restoration team. Unlike XD818 I understand that access to the interior will be permitted. The website of Brooklands is: [www.brooklandsmuseum.com](http://www.brooklandsmuseum.com)

That issue of FlyPast also carries a very interesting feature on the 'V-Bomber Nearlys'. Whilst the Valiant B1 was designed for high altitude service a low level version, B2, was designed, specially beefed up, for the higher stresses of low level flying. Whilst an order was placed on Vickers for 17 aircraft the contract was cancelled in 1952 when the prototype was 60% complete. It was decided to complete the aircraft however, and painted all black, and not surprisingly known as the 'Black Bomber', a very handsome aircraft resulted.

Its maiden flight was made from Wisley in September 1953. After 167 hrs, 35minutes in the air on a wide variety of test flights this lovely machine was struck off charge and suffered an ignominious end as a ballistics target at Foulness, Essex.

Some years ago I mentioned that my youngest daughter lives on the former RAF Lichfield airfield, also known as Fradley. In fact her house is built on the site of a dispersal on which Wellingtons once stood. The point of my raising the subject was that the roads in the area are named after the boys, mainly Australians, who are buried in Fradley Churchyard, hers being Baker Drive. Well there are further houses being built on the airfield and Lichfield District Council, to their credit, have proposed that the eleven streets, which will follow the line of the former runway, will continue the practice. Consequently, the council are seeking any surviving relatives to gain their consent to use the suggested names which are:

\* Pte. Arthur C. Bridgwood 21, 29.8.20. 3rd Battalion, Durham Light Infantry.

\*Pte. Fredrick J. Lakin 43, 28.3.19. 23rd Battalion, The King's Liverpool Regt.

\*F.Sgt. Francis T.J.Bryant 23, 11.12.42. RAFVR.

\*F.O.Alfred R. Heins 26, 16.3.43. RAAF.

\*Sgt. Bernard Poupard 21, 15.12.41. RAFVR.

\*F/Sgt. Jack S.R. Woolnough 24, 17.1.42. RAAF.

\*Aircraftsman 1st Class George W.H. Stapleford 29, 15.9.41. RAFVR.

\*F.O. James Love 33, 20.11.42. RAAF.

\*Sgt. John B. Muir 25, 3.12.42. RAAF.

\*F.O. Denis M. Murphy 24, 19.10.42. RAAF.

\*Sgt. Harold P. Wishart 25, 22.12.42. RAAF.

Councillor Chris Spruce said, "Considering the area's aeronautical history, naming roads after the fallen Royal Air Force and British Army heroes, who lost their lives fighting in the First and Second World Wars, is a fitting tribute.

"As part of the street naming process we need to give any relatives the opportunity to tell us if they would rather the names are not used. A number of the soldiers fought in the Royal Australian Air Force so this is a bit of an international search."

A 12th road, Violet Walk, is being named after Violet Mornington, who lived in Fradley until her death at five years of age in 2013. Violet's family have set up a charity in her name, Violets in Bloom, to raise funds and awareness of Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) which is the condition that took little Violet's life.

'Bargain Hunt' featuring John Ward is scheduled to go out 21st November, 12-15pm, on BBC1.

On behalf of Barbara, the crew and myself I wish all our readers a very happy Christmas and New Year.

'Til the next time.

# **THE LANCASTER RESTORATION COMPANY**

## **An extract from the October Newsletter of Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre.**

The Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre is, as many of you will know, the company that operates and maintains Avro Lancaster NX611 'Just Jane'. However in order to make advancements with the restoration to airworthy condition with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) there is the requirement to establish and register a company to undertake and be responsible for the restoration work.

All of the restoration work is planned to be completed at the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre by the Centre's engineering team. In order to comply with the CAA regulations we have set up a company which we have called 'Lancaster Restoration Company', it is our A8-23 company and recognised by the CAA as the company that will be completing the work on NX611. This company name will begin to be seen on paperwork but rest assured this is purely an engineering arm of the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre. Our new fundraising stand will also be appearing at air shows promoting the restoration of NX611.

Along with the new A8-23 company there have in turn been some changes implemented at the Centre in order for our operation to comply with CAA regulations and best practices. These changes are mainly around the 'behind the scenes' operating of the engineering aspects of the Centre but it will have a knock on affect to what you see in the hangar as you visit the Centre including the building of a new stores system and demarcation of working areas. We appreciate that change isn't always deemed to be good, but this one represents a major move forward to having another airworthy Lancaster in the UK.

The costs accrued with complying with the A8-23 requirements and appointing an A8-25 company are in excess of £5,000.00. If you would like to help with these costs you can make a donation by sending a cheque made payable to:- 'Panton Bros Museum Donations' to:- Lincs Aviation Heritage Centre

East Kirkby  
Spilsby  
Lincs  
PE23 4DE

PLEASE NOTE- The ownership, restoration and operation of Avro Lancaster NX611 and the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre still remains with the Panton Family. This is merely the establishment of a partner company to complete the works required.

## **FURTHER ADVENTURES OF 'JANE'.**

### **THE LATES NEWS FROM EAST KIRIBY.**

The winter of 2016/17 will see some major works carried out on Avro Lancaster NX611 'Just Jane' to make huge steps forwards in the project to restore her to airworthy condition.

***"This is the biggest news for NX611's restoration in the last 20 years." - Andrew Panton.***

Following the application for our A8-23 approval with the CAA we are now able to attend to some of NX611's future needs and address the long list of work we need to do to make her airworthy once more.

***"The goal of "Just Jane" becoming only the third airworthy Lancaster in the world feels closer than ever before." - Andrew Panton.***

This winter will see a complete strip and re-paint of the aircraft which will facilitate an assessment of the aircraft's aluminium skin and permit any problems encountered to be resolved.

To facilitate this work, NX611 will appear at the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre as she never has done before as she will be rigged in a flying attitude on trestles and jacks with the following removed - Bomb doors, Ailerons, Elevators, Rudders, All turrets, Propellers, Cowlings, Wing tips, Undercarriage doors, H2S blister, Engine nacelles, Fillet panels.

Once the components and the paint are removed we will be assessing the condition of the airframe and rectifying any problems discovered along the way. This will provide an excellent base point to determine the extent of work required to be done over the winter overhaul periods. If all goes to plan, our target is to have all of the external airframe work completed.

The work to be performed during the winter maintenance season amounts to an investment in the region of £250,000. Not only does this work represent a significant step forward in the programme to return NX611 to airworthy but it also creates a unique opportunity for the general public to come and visit us to see NX611 in a stripped down condition- something that has never been on offer before- certainly not up close as will be on offer at the Centre. Because of this opportunity we will be offering tours of the overhaul area to enable you to get a close look at the work being done and gain an understanding of the restoration effort. Further information on these tours will be released in due course and will be available on our website ([www.lincsaviation.co.uk](http://www.lincsaviation.co.uk)).

***"Visitors to the museum will see a Lancaster like it has never been seen before, we're so excited to be able to offer this unique opportunity to the public." - Andrew Panton.***

With such a significant investment to be made this winter we are also launching a new club called **'The Rivet Club'**. Although the Club requires a monthly donation it is solely centred around the restoration of NX611 and will give you special access to news updates and the weekly overhaul reports not available to non-members. Members of the Just Jane Supporters Association you will be included in the update emails.

Any donations towards the restoration project are gratefully received and of course the more funds we have available to us the more work we can complete and the sooner NX611 will return to flight condition.

***"We really hope the public will support our work this winter and really get on board with the aim of restoring 'Just Jane' to her rightful airworthy condition." - Andrew Panton.***

The stripping and re-painting of NX611 is a considerable undertaking and we are very fortunate to be supported this winter by MAAS Aviation ([www.maasaviation.com](http://www.maasaviation.com)) who is performing this task on a pro-bono basis. MAAS Aviation is an Irish/Dutch headquartered company which has been painting aircraft for 34 years. The company is one of the leading specialist aircraft painting companies in the world and operates aircraft paint shops in the Netherlands, Germany and in Alabama, USA. MAAS is an Airbus qualified company and operates paint shops in Germany and in Alabama for Airbus. This project has particular resonance for one of the directors of MAAS whose father was a Lancaster pilot in 514 Squadron based in Waterbeach, Cambs. In addition to the support from MAAS, the repainting project is also being generously supported by Akzo Nobel Aerospace Coatings which has agreed to provide the paint material; Larchfield Graphics Ltd which is supplying consumable materials; Sea to Sky which is supplying the coating removal material and other sponsors will join the project in due course.

***"Having the support of an international company such as MAAS Aviation who are experts in their field really gives the project a level of credibility we've been hoping for." - Andrew Panton.***

The winter of 2016 marks exciting times for Avro Lancaster NX611 and the World's warbird community. Will you join us in the next step in the history of 'Just Jane'?

For further information contact :-

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Tim Macdougald - MAAS Aviation  
E: [timmacd@maasaviation.com](mailto:timmacd@maasaviation.com)





**Work is progressing rapidly stripping down 'Just Jane'.  
Dom Howard visited East Kirkby on November 10th and took the following  
photographs. As in the newspaper cartoons, Jane has ended up half naked!**





**The top view shows that the rear turret, elevators and rudders have been removed.**

**With all the engine cowlings removed the radiators, exhaust stubs and oil tanks are most prominent.**







**Above: The H2S ground scanning radar dish can be clearly seen.**

**Below: I'm sure that I am not the first person to think, 'Airfix Kit'.**





**Above: The elevators and a rudder are on show here.**

**Below: Here we see the huge bomb bay doors.**







**49 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION REMEMBERS**

As usual, the main centre of 49 SA remembrance took place at Fiskerton where 4T9ers, villagers and the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop attended a service in St. Clement of Rome Church, Fiskerton followed by wreath laying at the Fiskerton Airfield Memorial. An attractive long weekend deal by the Bentley Hotel brought Barbara and myself, Stuart and Pat Keay, Colin and Pam Cripps and Dom Howard together for three enjoyable days.

We gathered late on Friday afternoon and met in the restaurant in the evening for the Table d'Hôte dinner that was included in the package. Saturday was a free day which for most of us meant, inevitably, a shopping spree at Pennells. Oh joy!

On the Saturday evening we enjoyed bar meals and were delighted to be joined by Associate Member Stan Smith and our former padre Revd Tony Buckler.

It was rumoured that the A46 Lincoln bypass was closed for resurfacing so we took the 'City' route to Fiskerton on the Sunday. We arrived in good time however for the 10-30 service. A substantial congregation once again enjoyed a typical Revd Penny Green service. Penny's sermons are right out of the top drawer, this years theme being 'The power of silence'.



During the service our Roll of Honour was placed on the altar as the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop presented their standards to Revd Penny. 49SA Chairman Stuart Keay laid our wreath on the Fiskerton Memorial. Sadly there was no representative of 576 Squadron present so Gill Walkinton deputised. John Fletcher laid the wreath on behalf of the Royal Observer Corps. I had earlier reflected that on my first Fiskerton Remembrance Service, seventeen years before, quite a number of WWII veterans had been there. Significantly the only one present this year was Bill 'Titch' Cooke Ld'H. Long may he honour us with his presence.

Following the church service we made our way, as is the custom, to the Airfield Memorial for the wreath laying. Bill Cooke laid our wreath, Gill again did the honours for 576' and Andrew Cooke laid the scouts wreath. The Guard of Honour was once again formed by members of the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop. A special word of praise for the young members of the troop who, Andrew Cooke told me, all volunteered to parade that day. We are indeed privileged to have them with us.







**Photos: Dom Howard unless stated otherwise.**

Once again this year the Village Hall stalwarts had prepared a wonderful lunch for us. Those of us who have to travel a distance home on the Sunday afternoon are particularly grateful as it allows us to leave, albeit reluctantly, at a reasonable time to get home in daylight.

John Lowe sent the following report of the ceremony on Hameldown Tor, Dartmoor at the memorial to the crew of 49 Squadron Hampden X3054: “Two wreaths were placed; 49 Squadron by Fred [Hill] and The Not Forgotten by two Scholars from Blundells School. About forty people made the journey to attend what was a very simple ceremony of Remembrance held high on the slope of Hameldown. They

came of their own volition; stood in solemn silence and then quietly left, sure in the knowledge that they had just witnessed something very special. For the first time all those gathered there were able to look upon the faces of the four young airmen remembered on



**Photo: Via John Lowe.**

that stone and to have been in the company of someone who was there.

“Without the help, support and enthusiasm of the national Park then it is doubtful that this would ever have taken place.”

Robert McEneaney wrote: “The 49ers were well represented at the relative’s Remembrance service held at the Bomber Command Memorial, Green Park on Sunday.

“Chris Beare joined Louise Dexter of the Hoole Family together with members of the McEneaney Family to remember their relatives who served with 49 Squadron. Chris Beare made a very moving speech reminding us all that the loss of her uncle, Dennis Blumfield – 18/19 July 1944, not only cost her Mother her only brother, her Grandmother her only son but explained how the tragic loss of one’s loved ones continues to effect families today.

“Tom Hoole, representing the Dexter/ Hoole Family, the Grandnephew of Ronald Hoole – ND474 15/ 16 March 1944 - recited the poem High Flight by

John Magee.

“Robert McEneaney spoke about the loss of ND474, his uncle F/S Terry McEneaney was the Navigator together with Ronald Hoole the Flight Engineer. Robert reminded those in attendance of the story surrounding the loss of ND474 following a mission to Stuttgart. Although the crew sadly never made it home they continue to be remembered by the villagers of Bolstern who helped to erect a memorial at the crash site in 2014 and continue to remember them.”

Other Acts of 49 Squadron Remembrance, of which I am aware, took place at The Bransby Memorial, wreath laid by John Galloway, The Fulbeck Memorial, wreath laid by Peter Hare, and I am personally grateful to Marilyn Nissen who placed Remembrance Crosses on the graves of my uncle’s crew, plus fellow 49er Tom Tomlin, in Aabenraa, Denmark. I’m sure that there were many others but as I said, the foregoing are those of which I am aware.



Photo: Via Robert McEneaney

**Harry Irons DFC laying a wreath on behalf of Bomber Command together with Robert McEneaney representing 49 Squadron Association. Robert said, “Harry asked about my uncle’s crew and the loss of ND474. Looking towards the memorial he added, ‘I was just lucky to make it home.’ “**



**A VISIT TO  
THE MICHAEL BEETHAM CONSERVATION CENTRE  
RAF MUSEUM, COSFORD.  
15 November 2016**

**By  
Alan Parr**

Since my previous visit a year ago tremendous progress has been made on the museum's Handley Page Hampden. A complete front section, including the pilot's cockpit, has been fabricated as the original suffered considerable damage when it crashed in Russia 4/5 September 1942. The remains of the original front section can be seen in the left foreground. The photographs on the following page illustrate the extremely narrow fuselage which is only marginally wider than a fighter. This type of aircraft is of particular interest to 4T9ers as the squadron flew Hampdens from the beginning of the war until April 1942. Indeed it was in the type that 49er Rod Learoyd won Bomber Command's first VC of the Second World War.











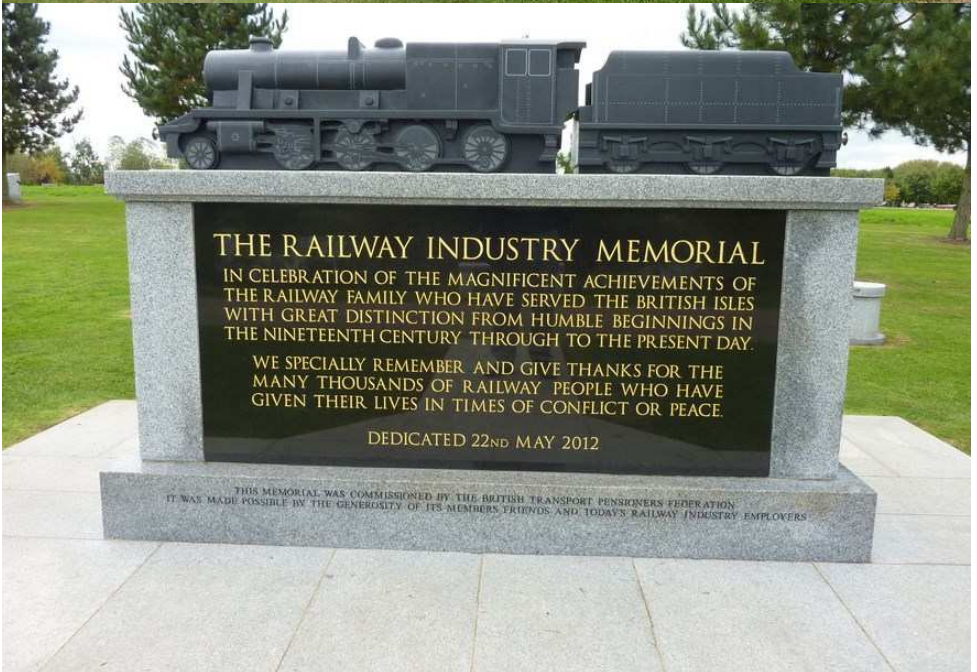
Pictured below is one of the trio of Hampdens known to exist today, P5436, the last of 80 built by Canadian Associated Aircraft between September 1940 and August 1941. This aircraft ditched in Saanich Inlet, Vancouver Island 15 November 1942 whilst serving with RCAF/32 OTU. All the crew survived. The Hampden was raised from a depth of 600ft. In the summer of 1986 and is now displayed at Canadian Museum of Flight, Langley Regional Airport, Langley, British Columbia.



**Photo: Nick Trudgian.**

The third example is AE436 which is the subject of a long term restoration project at East Kirkby. Built by English Electric, Preston it crashed into Tsatsa Mountain, Sweden on September 5th 1942 whilst in transit to Northern Russia. Three of the five man crew were killed. It was recovered by the Swedish Air Force in 1976 and returned to Britain.

## THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM ALREWAS, STAFFORDSHIRE.







**The Army Chaplains.**



**The ATS Ack/Ack Girls.**







General Post Office  
Workers  
and  
their colleagues  
who served  
in the Armed Forces  
Memorial



## 49 SQUADRON MEMORIAL APPEAL.

As can be seen in the adjacent pages the memorials at the National Memorial Arboretum are most varied, some large some small, some simple some extremely elaborate.

Do you wish to see 49 Squadron and her personnel remembered in this very special place?

If so, play your part in making this come about by sending your donation cheque, made payable to:

49SA PETWOOD and marked on the back: MEMORIAL to:

49 Squadron Memorial Fund  
c/o 21 Julian Close,  
Great Wyrley,  
West Midlands.



**The beautiful Boy Scouts Association Memorial.**

## READER'S LETTERS

*Whilst kindly making a donation Member Dennis Colquitt responded to John Ward's piece in the August issue as follows:-*

“With regard to the article about SX974 I remember that aircraft being on the squadron strength at RAF Upwood during 1954. It caused great interest at the time. The bomb bay doors and rear turret had been removed and basic streamlining added. Also the radar scanner and dome and all the electronic gear, which took up a considerable amount of space in the fuselage, had gone.

“Nowadays the electronics would be much smaller. Not visible on the photo were about six small perspex windows in the top of the fuselage.

“We called it ‘The Moonship’ as we understood it was going to a great height to observe some celestial event. It only stayed with us for a few weeks and was never seen again.”



Photo: Phil Waterfield.

**Two Lancasters flying over the Derwent Dam.**

**With the exciting prospect of ‘Just Jane’ becoming airworthy again how long will it be before we see and hear this wonderful event once more?**

# **THE WAR...**

**By**

**Tom W. Reed**

## **Part 4**

That wasn't the end of the matter however. My leg had been badly twisted and the orderly had applied a liquid of some sort which smelled like turpentine (and probably was) and my knee, apart from the actual swelling, came up in a huge burning blister. I got someone to call sick quarters and when the MO saw me I was immediately shipped to the base sick quarters at Scampton where I was kept for three weeks before being allowed home for a week's sick leave.

On my return to Fiskerton I found my motorbike looking like a Christmas tree with labels hanging all over it. It had been cannibalised for spares. After some discussion I was given a Standard 10 pickup, which was soon replaced with an Austin 6 wheel bomb tender, as after the debacle at Scampton when eleven aircraft of 59 Squadron were written off, it was made compulsory for the NCO I/C armoury to install and remove photo flash bombs.

The incident at Scampton occurred after operations were cancelled at the last minute due to fog and the aircraft were left marshalled nose to tail near the end of the runway.

Next morning the sergeant armourer with a corporal and LAC were on the way out to remove the photo flashes when that vehicle went off the road and got stuck in the mud. The sergeant said he would stand by the vehicle till help arrived and detailed the corporal and airman to remove the photo flashes and lay them on the dispersal and he would pick them up as soon as possible.

Off they went and as they approached the first aircraft the corporal said he would unload it and instructed the LAC to do the next one. As the LAC started to remove the photo flash he had to lift the 'top hat', the name given to the lid of the (now armoured) flare chute, he removed the locking pin and pushed the top hat over on its swivel too quickly so that the steel cable attached to the flare locked in its pulley and withdrew the safety pin from the flare, which immediately started fizzing with the usual seventeen seconds delay.

The LAC panicked and got out of the aircraft quickly shouting a warning to all. After seventeen seconds the photo flash went off still in its armoured chute, but as it exploded like a bomb it started a fire which engulfed the aircraft and about fifteen minutes later the 'cookie', 4000lb blast bomb, went off, the burning debris setting fire to the next aircraft. The same thing happened until seven aircraft were destroyed and two were left with corrugated sides.

On the airfield at Fiskerton I heard the first 'crumps' until all went quiet. I

realised the explosions were occurring at Scampton so I rang Warrant Officer Cook, the 57 Squadron armament officer, and asked him what had happened. He told me the grisly story. There have been many different stories about what happened that day but this one was straight from the horse's mouth.

When 49 Squadron moved from Scampton a new squadron, '617', was formed by taking selected aircrews and ground tradesmen from various squadrons in the group and the embryo 'Dambusters Squadron' took shape. We frequently saw Lancasters with a 'bite out of their bellies' flying over us, eventually the space was filled with what appeared to be an oil drum.

A few weeks later I received a call from 'Doc' Watson the warrant officer armament officer of 617 (he had been with 83 Squadron) at Scampton before 57 arrived. He knew that I always kept a spare rear turret available, which I used to replace a damaged turret whilst it was being repaired.

He asked whether I still had one as one of his aircraft had damaged its rear turret and he needed an urgent replacement, if so could I bring it over to Scampton as he was unable to pick it up himself.

I loaded the turret and drove over to Scampton but wasn't allowed to enter. I told the sergeant I/C police to ring 'Doc' and tell him I had arrived. 'Doc' duly turned up and took my lorry in and eventually brought it back with the remains of the damaged turret on board, he couldn't stay but said he would contact me later, so I returned to base.

That evening I was out on the airfield with Chan, where we had been harmonising his guns, we saw 617 flying over in formation Vics of three and he remarked they must be practising formation flying, but I said they were on 'ops'. No one knew where they were going until next morning when we learned that they'd carried out the raid that gave them their name The Dambusters.

When we met next time 'Doc' Watson gave me one of the safety plates from Wing Commander Guy Gibson's aircraft, which I used as a key ring and still have it somewhere. He told me that the turret which he had replaced had been damaged whilst dropping a practice weapon at low level and was caused by the weapon bouncing off the water or by the splash when it dropped.

Remembrance Day, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1943, was just that for the crew of 'P' Peter at Fiskerton when about two thirds of the way down the runway on take-off the port tyre burst and the aircraft swung, demolishing the undercarriage and catching fire.

The crew were out like a shot rivalling Bannister the four minute miler. The Tannoy sounded, warning everyone to open their windows and the usual fifteen minutes elapsed before the 'cookie' exploded, at which time myself and the armourers had moved behind a revetment next to our office (Nissen hut).

The only reported damage we heard about was that all the windows in one street in Lincoln miles away had been blown out. As a result of this incident

operations were carried out from Dunholme until the runway was repaired.

On another occasion whilst bombing up a cable snapped whilst loading a 4000 lb GP bomb. I was immediately informed and as I got to the scene I was passed by airmen running in the opposite direction. As I knew from the loading instructions it was a delayed action fused bomb, I checked it straight away for the smell of acetone which was evident. I immediately contacted the station commander, Group Captain 'Ginger' Weir, whom I had known as our previous group armament officer, who arrived within minutes. We discussed options, which were to dig a deep hole down a fairly steep incline, deposit the bomb and as it had an anti-handling fuse, wait for seventy-two hours approximately for it to explode, or get the aircraft pilot to deliver it as briefed. It was agreed to let the pilot decide, so he was contacted by the commanding officer and agreed. I suggested that the bomb be returned to the bomb dump and brought out on a new trolley with a new slogan written on it and it went on its way and was duly delivered.

When, at debriefing, I asked the bomb aimer whether there had been any problems as usual and specifically mentioned the 4000 GP, he 'smelled a rat' and asked why. The skipper then enlightened the crew to the fact that they had delivered a 'live' bomb, the language was unprintable, but they soon realised why he hadn't told them before.

There were several other incidents that occurred at Fiskerton. One occurred when after a raid on Hamburg, Flight Sergeant Cole and crew were circling the airfield trying to land and all the crew except the gunners were trying to encourage the pilot who was apparently extremely fatigued and after four attempts he hit a tree on approach. They were all killed except the mid-upper gunner who was able to walk out of the aircraft where it had broken in half next to his turret.

Another incident involved 'C' Charlie which had previously been flown by an older pilot, 'Pop' Hogg, an Australian who was a little older than the average pilot, who had completed his tour with 49 Squadron successfully.

On this occasion FIDO (Fog dispersal) was being used operationally. It had been used for familiarisation before but this was the first operational use.

As the aircraft were 'stacked up' for landing, 'C' Charlie came round in turn and started his approach to the runway. He must have mistaken the cleared dark area for a solid area or been dazzled by the threshold light, in the event he touched down short of the runway and upended the aircraft. The mid-upper gunner managed to get out and in his dazed state realised he was the only one, went back into the aircraft to try to rescue the pilot and was still trying when the crash crew arrived. With the aircraft on fire they had to drag him out and managed to get the rear gunner out of his turret, which was sticking up at 90 degrees, before the aircraft exploded. This was Sgt. Richardson's first

operation. He had taken his crew to Berlin and back and got within yards of safety.

FIDO was an arrangement of pipes in triangular format down each side and about fifty yards from the runway. Holes were drilled at intervals along the pipes pointing upward from the pipe whilst the holes in the bottom two pipes were directed at the top pipe. Petrol was pumped into the pipes at 17,000 gallons a minute and ignited, which created a blow-lamp effect of roaring flames, the heat so generated lifted the fog and aerated a clear tunnel 400 feet high. There was a similar pipeline across the threshold. Sergeant Mahoney and the tail gunner, Sergeant Winterborne, both survived their first operational sortie but I never heard any more about them. (*'Spud' Mahoney is a Member and still lives in Australia. ED.*)

The next morning as usual at first light I was out at the crash site searching for any explosives and what remained of the guns with the smell of burnt flesh in my nostrils and human debris lying around in the chaos of the wreckage, as I recalled having their meal with us in the mess before take-off. (No counselling in those days.)

In a non-operational accident I lost one of my senior armourers. After a visit to Lincoln, returning by train it was necessary to cross the river by ferry, a flat-bottomed craft with side rails and winches midships on either side. As usual there was a train load of passengers to get across, and after the first load crossed the ferry was winched back for the second load, and as the armourers were expert winch men spending much of their time winching up bombs they usually got the job.

The second ferry started across when someone started 'rocking the boat' and as the passengers on one side got their feet wet they moved sharply across to the other side and the ferry capsized and everyone was left swimming for the bank.

It was assumed that everyone had got out. Next day there were two bodies found trapped underneath, LAC Brown and another airman who had been manning the winches. It was a very sad day for the armourers and the squadron.

On a more cheerful note Sergeant Lol Watson, my second-in-command, had been courting a young lady from Cherry Willingham, a village adjacent to the airfield, and they had decided to make the big decision and asked me to be best man. The ceremony went off very well and a joyful time was had by all.

At about the same time Warrant Officer Spradbury, the armament officer, offered me the opportunity to bring my wife Deenie and daughter Heather to Lincoln to stay with them for a few days at their home in the town. Whilst there Deenie met the two WAAFs Lil and Joan, who were the girls who hauled out the bomb trams to the aircraft in all weathers, a highly dangerous job as there were many incidents when tractor drivers were killed by the bombs they were towing blew up.

Deenie also had the opportunity to visit the Adam and Eve, the armourers' pub, and meet a number of the armourers there. Some time later Lil and Joan disappeared overnight and I found that they had both been posted to RAF Finningley at short notice. The armourers were very disappointed that they had been unable to give them a farewell party.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1943 a second Reed arrived, another baby girl, Wendy or Patricia Wendy Reed. She was born in a nursing home at Gilsland in Cumbria and I managed to get a few days leave to bring her home to Framwellgate Moor. At first she was rather noisy crying every night from about 6 p.m. till 8 p.m. so we christened her 'Windy Wendy', fortunately she was quiet during the night and as she progressed the crying stopped. We never found out why she cried.

In early 1944 Warrant Officer Spradbury, the squadron armaments officer, was posted and I was appointed his replacement pending the arrival of another warrant officer who never arrived. I carried on in that capacity until the squadron was moved to Fulbeck in October 1944, when I moved in with the advanced party whilst it was still occupied by the rearguard of the American Forces who went to Nijmegen in Holland.

I found the building allocated as the armoury was a large Nissen type building containing a quantity of parachute silks, some very lightweight and some heavy knitted silk much appreciated by the wives who eventually got it. The building was ideal as we were operating the combined servicing of 49 and 189 Squadrons who followed us.

The billets were another matter - most of the Nissen huts had lost heating stoves and internal doors which had been taken in the gliders to act as roofs and heaters in the dugouts by the US forces.

My billet, a wooden hut, was pretty well intact but was surrounded by duck-boards as there was always water around in the Fulbeck marshes. Unfortunately I felt ill and was shipped to the Army run hospital in Newark. I was taken into a ward where all the patients seemed to be lying on their stomachs. When I queried why I found out that they all had shrapnel wounds in the back or buttocks. There was no smoking allowed, strictly enforced by the army nurses.

On 19 March I received news that my dad had been killed, torpedoed off Great Yarmouth. His ship, a brand new vessel SS *Rogate*, was hit for'ard by a torpedo from a German E-Boat which was raking it with cannon fire and being engaged by an army gunner on the bridge.

The crew were sheltering on the port side and my dad volunteered to prepare a motor launch on the starboard side when a second torpedo hit the ship right where he was working. Nothing of him was found.

I applied for a compassionate posting which was granted.

*To be continued.*