

# The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine**  
**August 2017    Issue 46**



An interesting Petwood photo with a strong 49 Squadron connection. Left is John Woodroffe who flew operations with 49 Sqn from Fiskerton before transferring to Coningsby becoming a Bombing Leader. Post war he was Station Commander of RAF Wittering when 49 Sqn were resident with the Vallants. John was sadly killed in a flying accident whilst in the USA. Centre, Guy Gibson's connection with 49 Sqn is that his Navigator on their fatal last operation was Jim Warwick who completed a tour at Fiskerton in 1943. Right is G/C Evans Evans who's Bomb Aimer on their fatal last trip was Bill Fitch. See page 14.

**Photo: Via John Ward**

## **IN MEMORIAM**

**N. K. Wilkins**

**WE WILL REMEMBER HIM.**

## **GONE AWAY**

**Alan ‘Spud’ Mahony**

## **EDITORIAL**

As always I must start by thanking all of you who have made donations towards the proposed 49 Squadron Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. I am delighted to tell you that the MoD has at last given us permission to incorporate the Squadron Badge into the memorial stone. This has been a long drawn out affair but at last we are free to submit our proposal to the NMRA. This will be done by the end of August.

I regret that I must record the death of long standing Associate Member Norman Wilkins who died on April 24th. I regret that I have no further details.

Long time Member and former mid-upper gunner Alan ‘Spud’ Mahony lived in Coombahbah, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia but his mail has been redirected to an address in Australia then ‘Returned to sender’ by them. Can anyone help us locate ‘Spud’, assuming of course that he is still living?

Those who responded requesting accommodation for the Scampton Air Show on September 9th have now been informed that their booking is confirmed. Their names have been given to the Bentley Hotel informing the hotel that the reservations will now be managed by the individual members themselves. John Ward tells me that he has been able to reserve a stand for the Association inside the Heritage Hangar on both days of the show, 9th & 10th, so if you attend drop in and make yourself known to John.

In June the exciting news was released from The Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre that De Havilland Mosquito NF11 HJ711, following many years residence at the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington, is to move to a new location at East Kirkby. Owner Tony Agar expressed excitement at the new home for HJ711 and the additional facilities that will be available allowing him to complete work to enable HJ711's engines to be run for the first time in over 70 years. Anyone wishing to donate retrospectively to help with the costs of the move, please contact either Elaine Wilcox via the Facebook group, Andy Dawson via the Mossie.org website, or the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage

Centre. I say retrospectively as the latest news bulletin for East Kirkby bills the Mosquito to be on show in a disassembled state at the Air Show on August 5th. As most of you will be aware Lancaster 'Just Jane' is taxiing once again.

Barbara and I have developed a penchant for 1940's events at local heritage railways. This year we attended the 'Return to the 40's' at the Severn Valley Railway and once again I have posted a video on YouTube which gives a flavour of the nostalgia to be gained by all attending. The main impact for me was the sight of 'American GI's' making a fuss of young children. During the war I lived in Frome, Somerset where close by were a number of American camps. On the build up to D-Day we watched a continuous, though stop/ start, flow of convoys making their way to the coastal area. Each time that they stopped my sister and I were lifted into the vehicles and given gum and Superman comics. You can see the video on the following link: <https://youtu.be/QSr3R5WIPRQ>

Yes, the lady walking along the platform in a 40's dress is Barbara. I must point out that not all her current wardrobe is that old! The old station master at the country halt is me! Well there was a war on and I had been recalled for the duration!

I am typing this on August 1st and over the past few days many of you will have seen the events commemorating the Battle of Passchendaele. Barbara and I were able to attend the July 31st event at the National Memorial Arboretum in the excellent company of 49 Squadron WWII veteran Bill 'Titch' Cooke and his son Steve. Bill was there to remember his father who was taken prisoner during the battle. Following the service a large screen carried the BBC broadcast from Tyne Cot Cemetery near Ypres which is the largest Commonwealth cemetery in the world containing 11,965 graves. In the entrance hall of the Arboretum stood a particularly poignant life size sculpture.



'Til the next time.

# MAILLY LE CAMP COMMEMORATION 2017

By

**Michael Brunton**

This year my son Charles attended and laid the 49 Squadron wreath therefore involving the third generation, hopefully for the duration.

Unfortunately the event was very low key, there were very few military personnel, no dignitaries or Defence Attaches and local attendance was definitely down. This was due to the impending French Presidential election and the law that public gatherings are banned immediately prior to the election. It was however refreshing to see an RAF attendance although not in



**Photo: Nikki Peskett**

**Charles Brunton lays a wreath on the Mailly le Camp memorial whilst his father Michael looks on.**

uniform or involved in the ceremony other than the laying of the wreath. Only 49 and 101 Squadrons were represented.

As the service was short we were invited to another ceremony at Poivres, about 5kms away, we had not previously been there.

A very poignant and moving event... 5 Lancasters crashed on Poivres that



dreadful night, there are as a result 35 graves of the crewmen that perished.

A flower was laid at each grave, the name read out by the Mairie and the statement "For our freedom" repeated at each. Members of the assembly were invited to lay a flower, there were no shortages of volunteers, it was good to see the young RAF boys and girls willingly step forward.

We were then asked to turn around as flowers were laid on the graves of the locals who died that night, again names were read out as family members laid the flowers, some graves with up to five flowers laid on them. It was extremely moving.

It would be interesting to know if any of those lost at Poivres were from 49 Squadron as there was no mention on the graves of the squadrons the airmen flew with. [No 49ers are buried here. ED.]

We visited the graves of my father's crew at Herbis (coincidentally close to Mailley le Camp) where we laid a 49 Squadron wreath and left a weatherproof resume of the loss and the background that resulted in my father surviving. This crash was of course after the Mailly raid when they were fortunate



Photo: Via Nikki Peskett  
**Charles Brunton, Nikki Peskett,  
Michael Brunton**

to survive due to flying through an explosion as result of the Lancaster in front taking a direct hit, an engine was taken out and the nose cone blown off. The fact they got home is certainly a tribute to the rugged design of the Lancaster and the skill of the crew coaxing the aircraft home in difficult and incredibly cold conditions as the air blew straight into the flight deck.

Also we laid another wreath on the grave of Madame Huguette Rouillard who died last year and who was singularly the driving force behind establishing the Mailly Association and the Memorial Service, a well-known and sorely missed character known to all who attended in particular 49 and 101 Squadrons and the Lincolnshire Mailly Association.

I am most pleased we have another Brunton generation attending for 49 Squadron.

# **VOLUNTEERING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE**

**By**

**Steve Cooke**

As a veteran of Bomber Command and 49 Squadron my dad was interviewed for the International Bomber Command history project. The project is capturing the experiences and stories of the veterans and their families involved in Bomber Command during the Second World War. The voices of veterans will be forever available for future generations.

I sat with my dad for part of his interview. The IBCC protocol requires a family member to be around as part of their 'protection of vulnerable people' policy. An important policy but somehow ironic considering what many of them have been through nearly 80 years ago.

Recently retired I thought this was a really worthwhile project I'd like to be involved with. Soon I was off to Lincoln University for training on interviewing techniques for a history project. The training follows a protocol developed with the Imperial War museum. The tapes are transcribed slowly and accurately using well tested historical recording methods and a copy placed in the archive available for access via the internet. A copy is also sent back to the veteran.

My training complete I nervously set up my first interview with a veteran from the Polish WAAF. We sat together for two hours as she shared memories of the outbreak of war and a desperate refugee journey through Eastern Europe into the Middle East finding safety in Iran. She then made her way to England via the Mediterranean in response to a call for men and women to join the newly established Polish RAF squadrons.

Seven more interviews have followed in my 'area' of the East Midlands and each has been a unique insight into the experiences of different people doing different jobs but all doing their bit for the war effort.

Stan from Derby was part of a salvage team literally picking up the pieces after the many crashes around East Anglia - often a gruesome and difficult job. Jack from Nottingham was on a searchlight battery protecting airfields against enemy attack but often using the light to help guide lost planes back to safety.

Richard was an electrician with Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons in Yorkshire. He remembers being press ganged into escorting two airmen on a charge for not wearing caps whilst in uniform in the local town. The case was brought by the military police and heard in front of their much loved and respected station commander – he asked for the charge to be read out – both airmen had been seen walking from the Black Bull to the Red Lion without caps. The

station commander asked the airmen if they had anything to add and they replied that they agreed with the summary except they were not walking from the Black Bull to the Red Lion but from the Red Lion to the Black Bull. On hearing this the station commander dismissed the case with the caveat 'incorrect evidence'.

Perhaps the most poignant interview has been the most recent with Penny from Nottingham. She was only 18 months old when her pilot father was killed at the start of the war. Her story is one of a family left permanently damaged. Her father was one of two brothers both killed in the war. Her mother and grandparents were devastated by their loss and Penny feels they never really recovered. She still has a letter from her dad to her mum dated the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939 – it reads

*"In this dark hour I cannot think of very much to write about except that you and Penny are as safe as can be expected. I am ready now for anything, feeling quite peaceful inside. May God protect you from the terrors of war. If the worst should happen tell my children that I was one of the first to go. Teach them how to live with all people and you will sow the seeds of happiness in their hearts"*

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September he wrote in his log book;

*'Great Britain and I declared war on the German Reich at 11.00hrs on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939'*

The following day he and his crew were lost on their first mission.

Without exception the stories I've heard and recorded have been fascinating, moving and always delivered with a humility that is quite humbling. It's been a privilege to meet these people and be involved in some small way with the IBCC project.

If you know anyone who might like to be interviewed or want more information the contact details are below.

## **Can you help us to find more stories?**

For every aircrew member on a bomber station there were up to ten people who worked on the ground to keep them flying. At this stage, the vast majority of our oral history interviews are with those who flew. We need your help to put us in touch with RAF ground crew, ground personnel and WAAFs. We are also keen to interview men and women who worked in factories, on farms and in the villages near RAF stations and those who experienced the bombing war in any way.

People from 62 nations served in Bomber Command. As an international project we need to record their stories, the stories of those in occupied Europe, as well as German and Italian military personnel and civilians. All these stories are important to us. Can you help build the archive for future generations?

Please contact: [archive@internationalbcc.co.uk](mailto:archive@internationalbcc.co.uk) (+44) 01522 837707

# **THE WAR [And after]**

**By**

**Tom W. Reed**

## **Part 7**

On my last visit to hospital I had been told there were three polyp buds that needed attention in the future, and as quite a while had passed I was called to Ely for a check-up by a new consultant who told that that Squadron Leader Lewis had died. He had been hit by a car whilst he crossed the road outside the hospital to his house. He examined me and decided to wait longer.

I returned to work on the following Monday and on Wednesday afternoon I went back to work with two of my armourers to finish a job and was in the flight office to sign the aircraft logs when there was a knock on the door. I shouted, "Come in!" and a chap a trifle shorter than me entered and said, "Where is everyone?" He looked rather dishevelled in an old tweed jacket and scruffy looking trousers and was unshaven, so I said, "Who wants to know?" He replied, "You must be Flight Sergeant Reed." I nodded and asked who he was.

I was shaken when he said he was our new commanding officer and promptly shook hands. He explained that he was on removal leave and had just moved into married quarters.

He said he had taken over when I was at the hospital and had inspected the armament set-up and was very impressed. He then said, "I want you to do the same at this side of the hangar, similar treatment." I replied that this was not my territory and Flight Sergeant Gimblet was the NCO I/C the squadron. He then said, "In the politest possible terms I am giving you an order." He then asked me to accompany him to the airmen's crew room and said "You can start here, it's like a pigsty" and then left.

My two airmen started removing the furniture etc. and I started doing the necessary paperwork for the items to be exchanged and took them to the equipment section where the duty commanding assistant said he couldn't cope with 'this lot'. I told him that Wing Commander Bird-Wilson expected them to be delivered by 8.30 a.m. the next day so I told him to get some help.

The new furniture was delivered on time and the loading of the old was in progress when Flight Sergeant Gimblet arrived saying, "What the \*\*\*\* is going on here?" I explained to him what had happened the previous day and was greeted with "We'll bloody see about this! Come with me, I should have been consulted."

I accompanied 'Oggy' to the CO's office where we were invited in, but before



'Oggy' said anything the CO said, "I understand that you would like a posting near your home."

Oggy said, "Yes, who wouldn't?"

"Chivenor is nearest I believe," 'Birdie' said, "Would you go back to the mess and pack your belongings in a crate marked with your details addressed C/O Equipment Officer, RAF Chivenor, pack your small kit and be back here in an hour and I'll take you down there."

He then turned to me and said, "Get the Meteor 7 ready, you are now NCO I/C AFDS."

I told him the NCO I/C must be either a fitter/eng or fitter/airframe and I was an ARMT/fitter, so there would be repercussions from the WINCO/TECH and if he insisted, my appointment must be in writing.

The bell was pressed, the adjutant entered and was given instructions to do so (copy to WINCO/TECH).

As I left his office I observed a crowd round the notice board reading the notice of my appointment as NCO I/C.

As I had predicted Wing Commander Bird-Wilson had a call from the wing commander tech about my appointment, but was told that he was the CO of AFDS and could appoint anyone he liked as his NCO I/C F700 (aircraft Log) to confirm that they had completed their DIs, which was countersigned by their NCO and after inspecting all signatures I now had the responsibility to sign the aircraft fit to fly.

The pilot inspected the log and checked that I had signed before signing himself, he then did a personal external check of the aircraft before climbing in ready for take-off.

As the aircraft were being flown to the limits, albeit by qualified test pilots, I was worried about the state of manning and felt that an effort should be made to improve the situation and make recommendations to the commanding officer on this and sent him my report.

One of the Venoms had been stripped of its guns and all the other non-essential equipment to give it a greater ceiling and was being flown at 60,000 feet and was a particular worry for me (A/C No. 382).

All the Venoms had to be rigidly checked for distortion of the shroud ring at the rear of the engine as it could damage the impeller blades.

On one occasion I was in the pilots' crew room when I overheard them talking about 382, they were alternately flying the aircraft on a special trial.

Squadron Leader Vaughan Fowler was asking his fellow pilot if he had noticed any undue vibrations on the A/C, and a slow response to the throttle. I didn't say anything.

I immediately returned to the flight office and entered U/S for engine checks.

When Sergeant Southwood, the engine NCO, came in to sign the aircraft logs, he immediately asked who had put 382 U/S and when I told him I had, he was not amused. I explained that I'd like him to take the aircraft out on the airfield apron and carry out stringent engine checks. He seemed very reluctant to do this, insisting that he should put the A/C serviceable.

I didn't tell him why I'd put it U/S but asked him again, so he got on with the job and I could hear the engine screaming at high revs then going quiet intermittently, and after about half an hour he returned.

I questioned him about his findings and he said there was just the normal vibrations but it was sluggish on the throttle so he had adjusted that and now it was serviceable, he would sign it S. I told him I was not completely satisfied so would he take it into the hangar and take the cowlings off and give it a thorough going over.

He reluctantly obeyed and got his tradesmen to remove the engine cowlings.

In about ten minutes he came into the offices with a squadron leader from the technical wing. The squadron leader ordered me to allow his sergeant to sign the F700, I refused so he then ordered me to sign it. I refused and suggested he sign it himself.

He then said, "Come with me to see your CO."

I followed him and accompanied by the sergeant we went and were offered a seat. The squadron leader opened the proceedings by saying that I had refused to obey the order of an officer and had refused to let his sergeant sign the 700.

'Birdie' then said, "He is not your sergeant, I am his CO."

I said, "I'm not happy with it."

Birdie then said, "If Flight Sergeant Reed is not happy with it nor am I, dismiss."

Within minutes the bell rang for me to go to the CO's office and as I went in the CO said, "Take a seat Flight, how's your bank balance?"

I said "Very 'iffy' at the moment, why do you ask?"

He went on to explain he'd just had WINCO TECH on the phone to say they had decided to put a new engine into 382 and send the old one back to de Havilland for a major inspection and if nothing was wrong with it Flight Sergeant Reed would have to pay the costs.

He asked me to remain and asked the exchange to put him through to de Havilland. He spoke with John Cunningham, their chief test pilot, who had been a member of the AFDS which 'Birdie' had commanded previously.

He asked John to keep an eye open for a ghost engine which was being sent from CFE and let him know the result of its major inspection. He then explained the circumstances. I was then dismissed.

About three days later the WINCO's bell rang and I was called and told to sit.

He told me that he had just had Cunningham on the phone, that the engine was in a terrible condition as seven of the combustion chambers were severely cracked and the remainder were hairline cracked.

The reason the engine responded to the throttle was the gas escaping from the chambers and adjusting the throttle to compensate compounds the situation. With the throttle wide open for maximum 'take-off' it was certain that this engine would disintegrate in a catastrophic explosion.

The commanding officer thanked me for sticking to my guns and I in turn thanked him for supporting me. I was asked to remain and he then rang the WINCO TECH and told him what had transpired saying, "I think your squadron leader owes my flight sergeant an apology, send him over."

The squadron leader, with a rather sheepish grin, said, "I apologise."

I replied, "Apology accepted."

It is, however, a fact that several Venoms in 2<sup>nd</sup> TAF had exploded on take-off with suspected fuel leaks as the cause without any other explanation as the pilots did not survive.

On my next visit to the pilots' crew room I was approached by Squadron Leader Vaughan-Fowler who commended me on my vigilance. I learned later that the Venom trial was actually to test a prototype space helmet for NASA.

I learned that Wing Commander Bird-Wilson was actually acting group captain who had relinquished his rank to return to AFDS where he was with his contemporaries, including Chuck Yeager, for two years.

He followed this appointment as air attaché in Washington, but on his return was reluctant to return to a desk job and was willing to revert to wing commander on a temporary basis to return to AFDS.

Once a test pilot always a test pilot.

During my time with AFDS the Duke of Edinburgh arrived to convert on to jet aircraft. At about 5 p.m. one evening a small aircraft arrived on the tarmac carrying the Duke's security officer who checked to see the RAF police were present with their dogs, and carried out a quick survey of the security arrangements. A de Havilland Dove then circled the airfield and landed with the Duke at the controls accompanied by his instructor, Flight Lieutenant Carrol. They taxied round to the squadron dispersal where a Meteor 7 trainer aircraft was parked. He got out to be met by our Wing Commander Bird-Wilson. He noticed a crowd of ladies and children in the vicinity and in fluent Naval language asked, "What the \*\*\*\* are that lot doing here?"

The Wing Commander replied that word had got round that he was coming and they were there to welcome him.

Get rid of them, I'm here to work," he said and promptly went over to the Meteor 7, and after an external check got in with his instructor who taxied out

and took off.

With a circle of the airfield to check instruments and controls the Duke landed the aircraft and carried out 'circuits and bumps' for about an hour.

He had his own maintenance crew, a warrant officer and three or four airmen, so AFDS carried on as usual with the dog patrol on duty for twenty-four hours a day wandering around the hangar.

The Duke was with us for about three weeks 'logging the necessary hours on type'. He 'lived out' with his wife, the Queen, at Sandringham, so I suppose it was a welcome break for her.

As an 'officer and gentleman' Wing Commander Bird-Wilson had no equal in my eyes and from the number of visitors we had at the squadron it seems I was not alone in my assessment.

We had frequent visits by his contemporaries, Battle of Britain pilots, Douglas Bader for one who as a civilian worked for Shell as a roving ambassador. Ober L/T Masso Von Perl, a German pilot whom he had shot down, Adolf Galland the German fighter ace, and even Hanna Reitsch who was the flying bomb test pilot at Peenemunde. Also several American pilots and dignitaries, were visitors.

When he suggested that he and his wife would like to visit myself and family I said we would be honoured to see them. I thought at the time there must be a reason. He and his wife turned up on time and we had a very pleasant evening. His wife hit it off with Deenie and after a couple of hours we bade them goodnight.

Some weeks later the Wing Co. called me into his office and said he intended to recommend me for a commission and it would mean going to Group HQ for interview. I told him I had already passed a commissioning board and when he asked when and what for, I told him it was for fighter controller but I never was called, he then asked how did I know I had passed. So I told him Air Commodore Atcherly, who had been station commander at West Raynham and whilst there was a regular visitor to AFDS and knew me.

He then asked why I hadn't been informed why I hadn't been called. I said I presumed as my initial was R they had got their quota. He then told me to prepare the Meteor 7 and as he was going to a meeting in Air Ministry he would make enquiries as to why I hadn't been informed.

He returned later and rang for me and told me why I hadn't been selected. "You were rejected because of your hearing. You came 21<sup>st</sup> in selection but your hearing was below the necessary standard. I still intend to recommend you for a commission in the technical branch."

I was soon ordered to report to Group HQ and had my second commissioning board interview and again had my final interview with AOC Air Vice-Marshal

Gresham, an Irishman who had also been OC CFE and a regular visitor to AFDS, he informed me that I had passed the board. He then said when I was flight sergeant at AFDS he was always prepared to accept my advice, but as a junior pilot officer I would be at anyone's beck and call and would get all the 'gash' jobs going, and he hoped I knew what I was doing, shook hands and wished me luck.

On one occasion when the then Group Captain Gresham was running around the airfield in an old Ford Anglia looking for mushrooms, he met me coming home with a horse mushroom the size of a ten inch plate and as I had more I offered it to him.

He said, "This can't be a mushroom, I've never seen anything like it but thanks all the same I'll have it."

I then told him where to look, I'd learned where they could be found when I was I/C the bomb dump.

Within a week I was sent to Jurby in the Isle of Man for cadet training and found myself in Yellow Squadron. The majority of the cadets were much younger, mostly direct entry from university, and the remainder flight sergeants and warrant officers, 'old sweats' we were christened.

There were six instructors, all commissioned, mostly ex-aircrew and admin with one RAF Regiment, Flight Lieutenant Parsloe (the sadist). Primarily much of the time was spent in the classroom on lectures after early morning PT and marching drill.

Eventually the squadron was detailed for a fortnight's camp under field conditions at Point of Ayr, Cadets were appointed to various executive duties i.e. 'officer commanding', 'adjutant', etc., to act with full responsibility in each role. I was appointed 'equipment officer' with the prior responsibility of ordering all the necessary equipment and transport to move it and the squadron's personnel and its reception at the camp area.

Unfortunately, I had contracted a severe infection on my left thigh which required hospitalisation and treatment with antibiotics as time was running out. After three days in hospital I requested my discharge from the hospital which was granted provided I continued my treatment. I was given the necessary antibiotics etc. and was able to start my logistics effort.

I managed on schedule and the squadron took off for camp. I was in the lead vehicle followed by a coach load of advance party to rig up tents etc.

When the troops arrived I was able to issue all the equipment, including bedding and dustbins, to each tent commander. I had to account for every item from tent pegs to field kitchen equipment on paper, in triplicate. I was then forced to repeat the paperwork to hand over to my successor.

*To be continued.*



**F/LT WILLIAM CROSS FITCH DFC., GM**





By  
**John Ward**

P/O Bill Fitch was posted to 49 Squadron RAF Fiskerton from 1660 HCU RAF Swinderby on 29th October 1943. He came with F/O Don Bacon's crew as their B/A although he sported Pilot's Wings.

In fact his first two ops were as 2nd pilot with the Hilderley crew but he then reverted back to being a B/A in the Bacon crew. It is also noted that Bill flew an operation in August 1943 before joining 49 Squadron.

After completing 21 ops with 49 Squadron he decided to volunteer for Pathfinder duties and transferred to 83 PFF Squadron which had just relocated along with 97 PFF Squadron to RAF Coningsby. These two units were retuning to Lincolnshire after being poached in 1942 to form part of the new 8 Group Pathfinder Force. They were now to become 5 Group's Marker Force. F/O Fitch completed a further 15 ops on 83, bringing his total to 37 operations for which he was awarded the DFC. He continued to serve on RAF Coningsby as a Master Bomber on the training programme.

EXTRACT FROM LONDON GAZETTE DATED 14 NOVEMBER 1944

THE KING has been graciously pleased to approve the following award in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations:

Distinguished Flying Cross  
Flying Officer William FITCH (143764)  
RAFVR No 93 Squadron

F/O Fitch has now completed 37 operational sorties against the enemy, as Bomb Aimer and Set Operator, in the Pathfinder Force. The duties of a Bomb Aimer in the P.F.F. requires involved and much more complicated type of work than a Bomb Aimer in the main force squadrons. If they are to be successful a correspondingly higher standard is required. F/O Fitch has achieved this required standard and has always shown himself to be a reliable set operator who has never failed to display courageous zeal and persistence in order to press home his attacks to the utmost, in spite of concentrated and accurate anti-aircraft fire and enemy night fighter activity.

As an example, on the night of 24th April, 1944, F/O Fitch was bomb aimer of an aircraft detailed to illuminate a selected aiming point in Munich. In spite of his aircraft being the target of concentrated and accurate cones of searchlights and flak, he remained undaunted, so that his coolness and courage made possible an accurate flare run over the aiming point. His flares played a large part in the accurate marking and ultimate success of this most devastating of raids on Munich.

In the earlier part of his tour, F/O Fitch's crew attacked major targets in Germany, including three on Berlin. More recently he has been engaged on attacking targets in occupied territory.

Many hoped this long war would be over by Christmas 44, but the failure at Arnhem and then Hitler's push in the Ardennes ensured that the struggle would continue.

On the night of 8/9 February 1945, Lincolnshire's Lancaster force ventured to Politz to deliver a successful attack on the strategic oil target. As usual there was a cost to pay with ten Lancaster crews reported missing...the human reckoning; 47 killed in action, 23 Prisoner of War and one airman interned in Sweden.

49 Squadron had not escaped unscathed, W/O Cluer was last to land back at Fulbeck, touching down at 03.20hrs, which left just one 49 Squadron aircraft outstanding...Jock Galloway (ME353) and crew flying their 26th operation failed to return. All very popular characters with the squadron, the sad loss of Galloway's crew was deeply felt by everyone: F/Lt Somerville Russell Galloway along with five members of his crew have their graves in Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, Poland. It was unknown at the time, that F/Sgt Ernie Ellis the mid-upper gunner, had managed to escape with his life.



**The 'Galloway' crew failed to return from Politz 8/9 February 1945.**

**Back row L to R; F/O George Kidd B/A, F/S Tom Bolton Nav, F/L Sam 'Jock' Galloway,  
F/S Les Randall W/Op, Sgt. John Hardy F/E.**

**Front row L-R; F/O Billy Dron Pilot rear gunner, F/S Ernie Ellis Mid upper gunner (PoW)**

One close flak burst actually blew W/O Cluer's (SW274) aircraft over on its back. With great skill and effort, the captain managed to regain control of G-George, but tragically during this action, the mid-upper gunner, Sgt. Ron Wiggins had been killed. It is believed that he died from asphyxiation, strangled by his own communication cord during the aircraft's violent manoeuvres; the 28 year old gunner is buried in Danbury Churchyard, Essex.

On that frozen Friday morning **9th February 1945** the squadrons licked their wounds as notification came through from Group of a 'Stand Down', for the next few days, due to weather.

As Lincolnshire shivered the Air War over Bomber County still continued as crews continued with training. But it was not always in the air that the Reaper exacted his toll.

At RAF Coningsby shortly after midday on 9th February, bombs tumbled from a trolley and detonated. In close proximity, LAC Tom Graves and AC2 Ron Mures never stood a chance. Two 83 Squadron Lancasters were destroyed, PB479 (OL-E) and NG453 (OL-M).

Saturday **10th February 1945** saw Bomber Command still on Stand Down with bad weather forecast over the continent. UK weather permitted training flights but there were threats of snow showers later on.

Just after 10.15hrs a 189 Squadron Lancaster departed RAF Fulbeck and headed the short journey to RAF Metheringham, there to rendezvous with 1690 Flight Hurricane for a planned Fighter Affiliation exercise. At around 11.00hrs the fighter accidentally collided with the bomber necessitating the Hurricane pilot F/L Ian Hanlon RNZAF, to take to his parachute. His aircraft fell to the ground near to the railway station at Seacroft.

The damaged Lancaster managed to put down safely at Fulbeck, but tragically the navigator F/Sgt. Bill Gothard had received fatal injuries in the incident.

Lancaster PB812 from 460 RAAF Squadron had taken off at 11.24hrs from RAF Binbrook for a cross country exercise. Flying their last leg from Luton to Scunthorpe, as the aircraft passed over Caythorpe a witness in another aircraft saw PB812 dive almost vertically from through the clouds. The stricken bomber struck the ground near Fulbeck Railway Station at 15.50hrs. There were no survivors from F/Sgt. Richard Miller's crew.

On this short winter's day the darkness was hurried in with sleet showers. Early that evening farmer John Holden was busy in the stockyard at Oaklands Farm, New York, just south of RAF Coningsby. As John sheltered from the weather, he may have heard the Merlin engines of a Mosquito VI HR178, a long way off from her Suffolk home RAF Fersfield. Her crew, Pilot F/L Frank Holdsworth and navigator W/O Alan Folwell strained for any sign of sanctuary on this filthy night.

Suddenly out to the left, as if by a miracle, the runway lights at RAF Coningsby flashed past in the blizzard. This was their chance of safety and in an instant reaction, Frank banked his nimble craft in a sharp turn to port, desperate to keep the beacon of hope in sight.

On the farm, again John may have heard the Mosquito as she clawed her way through the dark...and he may have thought how low and close it sounded...we shall never know because in an instant John's world literally collapsed around him. With tremendous force HR178 smashed into the farm buildings killing the young crew instantly and burying John under burning rubble.

The RAF rescue teams arrived to see a scene of utter devastation. Aircraft wreckage and aviation fuel burning fiercely with the heat cooking off ammunition with possible lethal consequences. One of the first Officers arrived to hear cries of help coming from a corner where the fire was fiercest. The Officer went into the inferno crawling over fallen masonry and found the farmer inside, trapped by fallen brickwork and beams. He quickly freed him and carried him to safety. Tragically the farmer, John William Holden died some hours later in hospital. The valiant Officer who made the rescue was F/L Bill Fitch DFC.

On Sunday **11th February 1945** 49 Squadron W/Op Jack Shearing returned



back to camp after his leave. Catching the 05.05 from Kings Cross, he got off at Newark Station. During the evening of his return to Fulbeck, Jack recorded the following sentiments in his diary:

*"I came up on the Cranwell bus from Newark and walked to the camp from the cross-roads. On reaching the Mess, I saw Lefty and he told me the bad news that Galloway and the boys were missing...you could have knocked me down with a feather, it seemed incredible that Les, Ernie, Tom and John should have gone...we all felt it very much. The hut seemed cold and foreboding and there was an atmosphere of death over the whole camp. The boys went down at Politz and 189 lost 4 kites at Karlsruhe, Galloway had done 26 trips, a nasty business. Naturally everyone felt very upset, it seemed that everything had come to an end..I have not felt so miserable in a long time."*

## **21/22 February 1945: GRAVENHORST (MITTELLAND CANAL):**

A force of 165 Lancasters led by 12 Mosquitoes (all 5 Group) sallied forth from Lincolnshire once again in an attempt to breach the Mittelland Canal. This time in clear visibility the attack was successful.

Of the 165 Lancasters sent to Gravenhorst, 13 failed to return and 2 of these were from 49 Squadron. F/O Mallinson (PB568) and crew flying their 35th operation were posted missing...a severe blow to the Squadron's moral and coming so soon after the demise of Galloway's crew. A few weeks later, much to everyone's relief, six of the Mallinson crew were reported as being PoW's. This included the crew's bomb-aimer, F/Sgt. Le Marquand whose brother was still on his tour as a pilot with 49 Squadron. The unfortunate crew member to lose his life was F/Sgt. John Gascoyne A/G; he is buried in Reichsald War Cemetery.

The second aircraft reported missing contained F/O Ed Smith RNZAF (NG327) and crew. Tragically none of them survived this, their fourth operation. Six members are buried along with their 27 year-old skipper in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, whilst the bomb-aimer, F/O Edwin Hook is at rest in the Durnbach War Cemetery.

Another Lancaster lost that night was piloted by Group Captain Evans-Evans DFC. As Station Commander of RAF Coningsby, he had put together a very experienced crew which included Master Bomber F/Lt W. C. Fitch DFC.

The 83 Squadron Lancaster (NE165) was shot down by a night fighter over Holland with the R/G P/O Eddie Hanson RAAF being the sole survivor. At the age of 43, the Group Captain was the oldest senior officer killed on bomber operation during WWII. Contrast this with his highly decorated navigator S/L W. G. Wishart DSO, DFC and Bar at 22, was one of the youngest to be killed.

Bomb Aimer Bill Fitch died not knowing he was to receive the George Medal for his heroic actions on 10th February 1945.





EXTRACT FROM LONDON GAZETTE DATED 3 JULY 1945

THE KING has been graciously pleased  
to approve the following award:

George Medal

Flight Lieutenant William Cross FITCH D.F.C. (143764)  
RAFVR (Since deceased) No 83 Squadron

One night in February, 1945, a Mosquito aircraft crashed into some farm buildings at New York, Lincs, setting them on fire. Flight Lieutenant Fitch was one of the first to arrive at the scene of the crash and started searching the blazing buildings despite the fact that cannon and machine gun ammunition and signal cartridges were exploding. On hearing cries coming from a corner where the flames were fiercest, he went into the inferno, crawling over fallen masonry, and found the farmer inside, trapped by fallen brickwork and beams. He quickly freed him and commenced to carry him away before further assistance arrived. Unfortunately the farmer died in hospital some hours later. Flight Lieutenant Fitch showed complete disregard for his own safety and his gallant but unavailing efforts to save a civilian's life in conditions of great danger, are worthy of the highest praise.



## READER'S LETTERS

*Associate Member, Robert McEneaney sent e-mails with the two following reports:*

“Visit to Durnbach War Cemetery, Germany.

“Mrs Deborah White together with her husband Pat were recently at Durnbach War Cemetery to visit the grave of her uncle Flt Sgt Terence Conlon McEneaney. It was Deborah’s first visit to Durnbach and said she found the whole experience very emotional as she remembered her uncle and his crew members of ND474. Deborah said the lasting memory of her visit to Durnbach will be “so many and so young”. The average age of the crew of ND474 was just 21 year old.

“A floral tribute was placed at the Cross of Remembrance in honour of all those who are buried there.”



**“Lest we Forget.”**

“On Sunday 25 June more than 100 people gathered in Green Park at a ceremony to honour the 55,573 airmen of Bomber Command who lost their

lives in WWII. The Act of Remembrance was held at the Bomber Command Memorial, which was unveiled five years ago by Her Majesty the Queen to remember those who perished. The Venerable Canon Brian Lucas CB, Honorary Chaplain of the Bomber Command Association led the service and a wreath was laid by Air Commodore Charles Clarke on behalf of the Bomber Command Association. An RAF wreath was laid by Chief of Air Staff Sir Stephen Hillier and a wreath on behalf of the 49 Squadron Association was laid by Robert McEneaney nephew of Flgt Sgt Terry McEneaney ND474.

“The memorial is a place where friends, family, comrades and loved ones of the fallen have a place to come and to remember. Of the 125,000 men who flew in Bomber Command, nearly half perished.”

**“We Will Remember Them.”**



***Associate Member, Trevor Arnold e-mailed:***

“The reference to & photo of the graves of Sgt Cole & crew prompted this for the next issue of the 4T9er?

“My heartfelt thanks to Eric & Ann van der Meiden who now tend the graves of the Sgt Cole crew who are shot down on June 15 1943. My father James Francis Arnold ( G1331734) was one of two survivors of the Lancaster ED432 which crashed following a raid on Oberhausen. Sgt Cole & crew were shot down by a German night fighter and their aeroplane fell at Castle Doorwerth west of Arnhem. My father (Sgt Arnold) sustained shrapnel wounds to his legs & was thrown clear. He subsequently became a POW.”

***Our Webmaster Malcolm Brooke e-mailed ‘the crew’ with the following which related to Reavell Carter:***

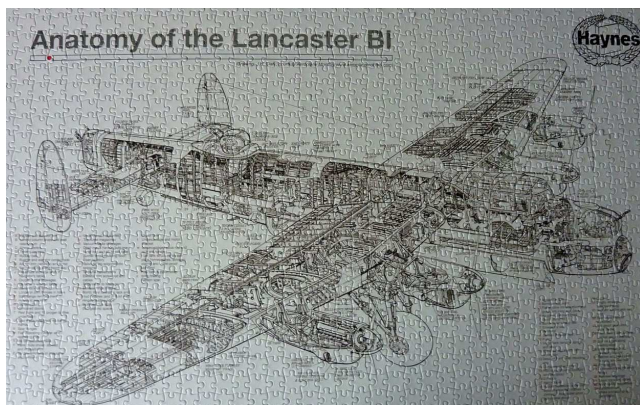
“I was watching "Trading History" last night and it showed a Rolex owned by the above named who was a PoW. Said he was shot down and showed pictures of Hurricanes etc. Thought the name was familiar and he was a 49 Hampden man. So much for TV researchers!”

***Hon. President John Ward replied:***

“Reavell Carter was the chap who, In the Great Escape put his head out of the tunnel only to see a German Guard standing over him, which as things turned out, ultimately saved his life. Had he made the break, he would most likely have been murdered along with the 50.”

## **CAN YOU HELP?**

Two separate TV programme researchers are trying to contact ex 49er Alan Pringle who took part in Operation Grapple. One also asks if there are any other Valiant veterans out there who would be interested in speaking about their experiences in the Vickers aircraft? If you can contribute on either of the foregoing please let the Editor know at the earliest opportunity.



### **FOR JIGSAW MASOCHISTS**

My daughter gave me a 1,000 piece jigsaw recently which, in completed form is shown here. Whilst quite challenging I found it most interesting as it gave a good insight into the construction and function of the aircraft.