

The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine
May 2018 Issue 49**



**The 49 Squadron Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum
which is to be dedicated on June 18th.**

IN MEMORIAM

J. Shearing H. J. Cole M. Walsh

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER

Michael Butcher

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 'Forty-ninth' issue of The 4T9er in which I can finally announce that 49 Squadron is now remembered in the National Memorial Arboretum. The memorial has now been installed and the dedication service is due to take place on June 18th this year. I thank all of you who have made this possible by your donations. If you haven't made a donation it still isn't too late to do so. If you visit the Arboretum then the route to our memorial is as follows:-

From the reception desk pass into the restaurant area then exit through the glass doors in the left hand glass wall. When outside turn right and you will see the large Armed Forces Memorial atop its mound. Heading towards this descend the steps or curved wheelchair ramps to the road which runs at right angles to the steps. Turn left onto this road and in the far distance you will see the gates of the Prisoner of War Memorial. Head towards this, passing the Gallipoli Memorial on your right and then the Land Girls Memorial on your left. Continue until you see the large RAFA Memorial on your right. Turn towards it and pass straight through the segmented roundel. In front of you, and along your left flank, is a row of benches at the end of which is the R.C.A.F. Memorial. At this turn right and you will be facing the Armed Forces Memorial in the distance with the 49 Squadron Memorial in the silver birch grove before you.

By the time that the fiftieth issue of The 4T9er is published I shall, if spared, have become an octogenarian. Whilst I suppose that I should be happy to reach this milestone it also carries some disadvantages, besides the obvious. My bank account no longer provides free travel insurance, although they haven't mentioned a reduction in charges, and I no longer qualify for automatic acceptance for most of the many funeral care schemes with which we are bombarded on daytime TV. On the other hand I believe that I will receive a further 25p, yes twenty-five pence, per week on my pension, or Benefit as the Department of Work and Pensions insultingly call the return of the many thousands of pounds that I have paid in over the forty-five years of my working

life. Oops, nearly fell off my soap box!

Sadly, as time marches on we have lost three more of our number. I regret to announce the death of Jack Shearing from who's diary John Ward freely quoted in his masterpiece 'Beware of the Dog at War'. Jack, who sadly suffered from severe dementia and was bedridden at the end of his life, flew twenty-one ops in the wireless operator's seat of F/L L. Mellor's crew. Commencing 11 November 1944 they flew on ops until 4 May 1945 after which they flew two Exodus trips, the ferrying home of released PoWs. Our old friend Bert Cole died on March 18th, aged 95 years. For many years Bert and his wife Joan attended reunions until the advancing years took their toll. Bert flew eleven ops with F/S L.E. Watson before being shot down during a raid on Mannheim on 9/10 August 1943, all the crew becoming PoWs. Bert told the remarkable story of how he and Len Bradfield became close friends having trained together as air bombers passing through OTU and HCU then remarkably being posted to 49 Squadron together. It doesn't end there however as the day following Bert's going down Len too was shot down, he and his pilot Johnny Moss being the only survivors. Bert had been incarcerated in Luft 6 Camp and to his amazement who should come round the corner but Len Bradfield. I had the privilege of meeting them both at reunions until Len died in November 2005. On November 8th 1941 Hampden P1206 was shot down over Holland. The bodies of the pilot and navigator were recovered and buried in Bergen Cemetery. However, the bodies of the two gunners sank into the soft ground with the remains of their aircraft. In 2007 a Dutch salvage team led by Capt. (later Major) Paul Petersen recovered the remains of the two airmen and on May 7th 2008 they were buried with full Military Honours adjacent to their crew mates. The funeral was attended by a number of 4T9ers and it was here that we met Margaret Walsh, sister of one of the gunners, Sgt. John Kehoe. It was with sadness that we learned of Margaret's death on November 18 at the age of 98.

Welcome new Associate Member Michael Butcher son of Sgt. A.F. Butcher who was the rear gunner in F/O A.J. Bolter's crew which was shot down on 7/8 January 1945 during a raid on Munich. Sadly all the members were killed, they were on their fourth operation.

Six months ago a friend told me of a feature on Facebook and furnished the link. I entered this and duly read the piece. To my surprise I found that my name was now on Facebook and 'Friends' were trying to contact me. I tried unsuccessfully to withdraw my name and have now received e-mail messages telling me that 95 people have tried to get in touch. If you are one of those and think me ignorant for not replying I apologize but please be advised that I have no desire to be involved with Facebook.

'Til the next time.

TRIBUTES TO JOHN WARD

I received many tributes to our late Hon. President and Historian but perhaps the most poignant was written by Phil (Griff) Griffiths, former 49 Squadron wireless operator.

“I really felt a deep sense of loss when I read of the passing of John Ward, he was an important part of our core and will be sorely missed. However, I feel sure that wherever he is he will always be part of us and will be keeping a close eye on his beloved 4T9ers.

“In the previous issue (November 2017) I must admit that my eyes were wet when I’d finished reading John’s words. I found them so courageous, thought provoking, sensitive and brave and I only hope when I face the inevitable that I can face it with such grace.

“I’m not quite sure whether this is appropriate or not but the following poem came to mind. It certainly helped me when my Nova Scotian bride of 60 years of togetherness passed away. I think the words are beautiful and may help others:

“And if I go while you are still here know that I live on — but vibrating to a different measure, behind a veil you cannot see through, you will not see me so you must have faith — I wait for the time when we can soar together again both aware of each other — until then live your life to the fullest — and when you need me just whisper my name in your heart and I will be there with you.”

“Thank you so much for taking the time to update us all. Such a sad loss, at such an early age, of a truly wonderful man. My thoughts will be with all on that day, although I am several thousand miles away.” RBM

“I cannot say that I really knew John - I knew of him and could pick him out in a crowd and I'm very much aware that he was a key man with respect to the 49 Sqn Association.

“I would pay tribute to him for his mammoth work Beware of the Dog at War. I refer to it often. It is a very useful reference. For that alone he deserves to be remembered with gratitude and affection but, of course, there are many other reasons for him to be remembered...” RB

“I passed on this terrible news via the 49Sqn Facebook page. In only a few hours this has been seen by over 1200 people...a measure of the man.

“There are also some very heart warming comments from readers.” MB

“The comments are now slowing down but Facebook reached over

2,500 people.

“A great number of people knew John or knew of John and his work.” MB

“I am pleased that we got the chance to chat with John at Scampton in September and discuss our progress with the search for information on my uncle’s crew ND474. John mentioned then that he was enduring quite a challenging time but as always he was happy to offer advice and support as he manned the 49ers information centre.

“Once you informed me that John’s health had started to deteriorate even further I dropped him a message thanking him for his support and encouragement during our preparation for the memorial to our relatives in Germany. I remember asking John’s permission to use certain information in his book and with his customary generosity he replied, ‘Please do, very happy to help.’ I believe he was quite pleased that his research could be used to help others. A smashing man who will be greatly missed.

“...We will continue to keep John and his family in our thoughts and prayers at this difficult time.” A & R M

“Joyce and I would like to express our sadness at the loss of John a courageous worthy irreplaceable man. So sorry, especially for Diane and family.” D & J H

“We are sad to hear this bad news! I did not have the pleasure to know John very long, but I really appreciated him and his knowledge of 49 Sqn. It was always a pleasure to hear his presentations.” R & S W

“What sad news. Although I only met John a few times, when he was able to come to Duxford, his books and association with Ted Cachart made it feel as though I had known him for some time. What a loss to his family and also to the Association.” DV

“Will be greatly missed not only as the man, but also for his great contribution to the success of the Association.” AE

“John was indeed a very special man and so kind and helpful to those of us trying to research the lives of our family members with his extensive knowledge and enthusiasm.

“I was so pleased that I was able to express my appreciation to him before he died. Very sad news and a great loss for his family and all at 49 Squadron.” J & CB

“Thank you for letting us know. Well John will be busy now with all ‘The Boys’ Bless him.” DH

“John’s contribution to researching and recording the history of 49 Squadron together with the development of the Squadron Association was immense, and I know he will be greatly missed by all.” AM

“John kindly sent me a signed copy of his book and further information that started me on my journey to find out about my cousin Donald Stevens, and associate membership of 49 Squadron Association.

“We will remain grateful for his kindness and help at restoring knowledge to our family that was lost of how brave this forgotten generation of WW2 was.” CS

“What very sad news. He was a great guy.” MM

We received many more messages of sympathy and condolence to this very special man. How we miss his friendship and courtesy, his sense of humour, his immense knowledge and so much more. Our thoughts are always with Diane and John’s lovely family. When we dedicate the 49 Squadron Memorial on June 18th we will surely also remember John Ward, Honorary 4T9er.

SHOT DOWN IN FLAMES!

By

Frank Lowe DFM

At the end of July 1942 I was recalled from a short spell of leave to captain a pupil crew on a "1000 bomber raid" to Hamburg. The date was July 28th. Hampden pilots were not too keen on the Wimpy 1C, partly because of its comparatively poor performance and manoeuvrability and partly because of its poor downward visibility i.e. a much larger blind spot underneath. For this latter reason an old friend and I had arranged to fly the trip in formation to give mutual cover.

We flew the usual pre-operational Night Flying Test in the afternoon, during which the emergency escape hatch, in the roof of the cockpit, suddenly flew open. We managed to close it and at the time did not regard this occurrence as an ill omen. However, there were two other happenings which did not bode well. My old crew and I had had a spirited encounter with a night fighter about half way through my tour and on every subsequent trip I always took with me as a good luck charm a bullet which had been recovered from one of the Hampden's petrol tanks. Now I could not find it. We took off without it. My prospective formation partner was due to take off next but had to stay on the ground due to a technical problem, so we pressed on by ourselves.

The trip across the North Sea was unusually quiet. We saw some flak over Heligoland, and a few searchlights further South. I found out why it was so quiet several weeks later. There had been a general recall, because of bad weather coming in over England. Unfortunately my pupil W/Op did not get the message, so we blithely carried on.

It was a dark night, with rather poor visibility, so we had to rely on dead reckoning to decide when we had crossed the coast and it was time to turn to starboard to fly parallel to the river Elbe. A few minutes later a burst of tracer from below shot up in front of me, hitting the fuselage between the cockpit and the front turret, a second burst hit the port engine. There was immediate fire, both in the forward fuselage and in the engine.

I gave the order to abandon aircraft. By this time flames were licking into the cockpit, so I opened the top hatch, which had given a free demonstration that afternoon, released my harness, unplugged my intercom and struggled out though with immense difficulty because of the slipstream. I then got caught on the radio mast, with my head and arms one side and my legs the other. The aircraft was now well alight and I was convinced that even if I did manage to wriggle off the mast I would hit the tail and break my back. Fortunately I finally squirmed free and missed the tail.

I pulled the ripcord and the chute opened O.K.. I saw the blazing aircraft hit the ground and its load of incendiaries burning. The landing was heavy, as it was too dark to judge my height above the ground during those last few vital seconds and I badly sprained one ankle. I hid my parachute in a ditch and started walking but very soon revised that. I would have to rest my ankle so took refuge in a small barn where I was found by a policeman soon after daylight.

I was taken to the crash site, where I saw the pitiful remains of three of my crew. I also met there the pilot of the ME.110 (fitted with 'Schrage musik') responsible for our downfall. [*Schrage musik was the name given by the Germans to two upward firing cannons mounted on top of the fighter's fuselage which enabled it to approach its victim from beneath, a notorious blind spot on most British bombers. However, it was only introduced in 1943! ED.*] I was then put into a truck where I found my rear-gunner, who had bailed out but suffered a broken leg on landing. The third survivor of the total crew of six, the second pilot, had been taken to hospital with burns. He reached Sagan about a month after I did. He was one of the fifty who were shot on Hitler's orders after "The Great Escape" from Luft 3. They took the rear-gunner to hospital and me to the local aerodrome. From there I was taken to Dulag Luft, near Frankfurt. I was there for about a fortnight (the first week in solitary) before being transferred, with others, to Sagan. It must have been about the third week of August 1942.

Frank Lowe DFM died November 29th 2009 aged 89.

THE INSTALLATION OF THE 49 SQUADRON MEMORIAL AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM



1

1. The centre point of the four bordering silver birch trees is carefully measured.
2. A long stainless steel retaining rod is driven into the earth.



2



3



4

- 3 & 4. Mastic is added to the holes in the base and the stainless steel pegs in the headstone are located.



5



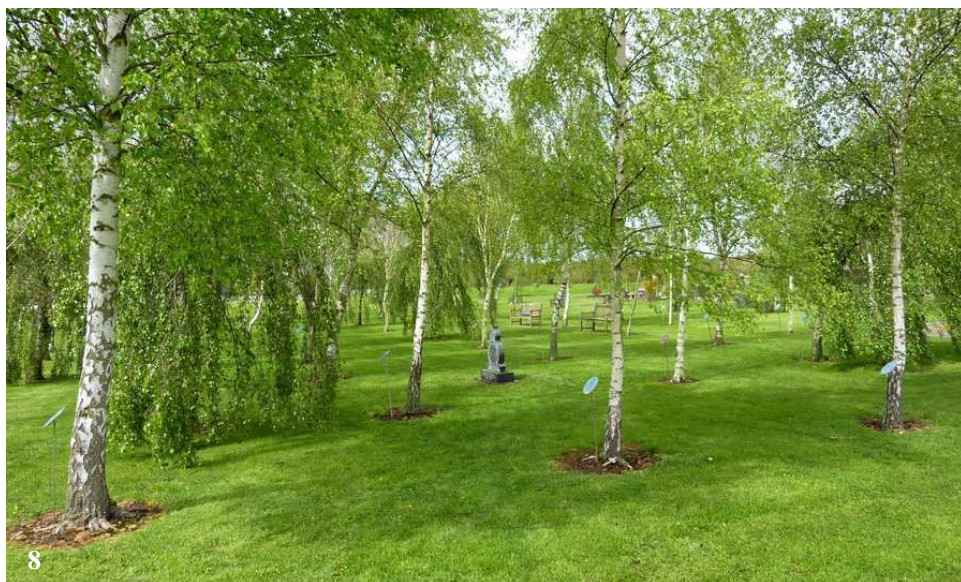
6

5. The headstone is lowered into position and 6. The memorial is cleaned up.

7. Viewed from the rear, the memorial faces the Armed Forces Memorial.



8. The beautiful RAF Section silver birch grove in which our memorial now sits.



**Photos 1-6: Anna Allan, Crown Memorials
Photos 7 & 8: Alan Parr**

THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE

By

Pat Keay

On a cold, grey and quite misty April 12th, Dom Howard collected Stuart and me from our daughter's home at Coleby. On arrival at the IBCC we were lucky as we had a parking permit for the event and were able to park within a few yards.

On getting out of the car the first people we saw were Fred Hill along with Zena and John Lowe. We were signed in then a young Wing Commander came over and introduced himself saying he would be our escort should we have any questions. We were then taken to the hospitality tent for a very welcome cup of coffee.

In our seats by 10-30, we were served more hot coffee. We were under cover but there were two wings of seats outside and also people standing. We had taken a blanket from our daughter's and when we shook it out we had a small hay storm, at least we had a laugh. It was bitterly cold and eventually warm blankets were distributed to those who needed them. We then saw Bill Cooke and his son Steve and also Chris Beare.

Due to the volume of people present the ceremony started late, at 11-35. Because of the adverse weather conditions there was no fly past as the cloud cover was down to around 300 feet.

There was an introduction by John Sargeant then music from the Lincolnshire Military Wives Choir, RAF Waddington Pipes and Drums, The Lincolnshire Male Voice Choir and RAF Cranwell College Band. The speakers were Sir Peter Luff, who told of the support of The Heritage Lottery Fund and The Rt Hon Earl Howe, Home Office Minister. Then Nicky Barr, a tireless worker for this project, (if anyone deserves an honour in the New Year's Honours list it is that lady) paid tribute to Tony Worth who did not live long enough to see this project come to fruition. Nicky then thanked all the hundreds of people who had interviewed veterans, recorded their histories and their log books. "They are the heroes behind the scenes," she said. She also thanked her 'Girl Friday', Sue Taylor.

There were a few hundred veterans present from nine different countries. We were told that there are 1,700 surviving veterans and that during WWII 57,861 Bomber Command personnel died, the average age at death being 22.

The Bishop of Lincoln led us in prayer which was followed by the Last Post, then God Save the Queen.

The veterans each had a pair of scissors so that all could cut the continuous ribbon simultaneously thereby, every one of them performed the opening ceremony. What a nice gesture!



Stuart and Pat with Bill and Steve Cooke and... Nicky Barr.

Photos with this article: Dom Howard

THE SPIRE MEMORIAL

The Spire is the UK's tallest war memorial at 31.09m (102ft), the same as the wingspan of a Lancaster Bomber.

The walls list those who died with Bomber Command during the war. The inner circle records losses from 1 and 5 Groups. The outer walls record those killed from other UK-based bomber Groups.



Find out more on the IBCC App.



I am grateful to Chris Gilson, the Editor of FlyPast magazine, for giving his permission for me to use material from his excellent publication in The 4T9er. The following text is from an article by Simon Vaughan which appeared in the December 2017 issue. The photographs are not from the original article.

UNLEASHING ARMAGEDDON

Simon Vaughan recalls a memorable interview with Gp Capt Kenneth Hubbard, the man who dropped Britain's first H-bomb.

His left hand was on the control yoke and his right was resting lightly on the throttles while his eyes intently scanned the scratched and paint chipped instrument panel. Gp Capt Kenneth Hubbard was sitting on the flight deck of Vickers Valiant XD818.

He turned to look at me with clear eyes glassy with fond memories, while one hand tucked his 49 squadron tie back inside his navy blue blazer. "It's still a magnificent aircraft even now. Of course this isn't in Grapple mode. There were modifications made for the tests that this one doesn't have, but



it's basically the same. You know, the Valiant was always my favourite.

"I also flew the Vulcan and Victor and both were brilliant. But the Valiant was the most delightful. If it hadn't been for the airframe fatigue that grounded it long before its time, it would have flown forever, I'm sure."

Ken had been at the controls of Valiant BK.1 XD818 when it had dropped Britain's first H-bomb in the South Pacific on May 15th, 1957 as part of Operation Grapple. Three decades later and barely out of my teens, I found myself in the RAF Museum at Hendon alongside Hubbard on the flight deck of that very same aircraft.

My interest had stemmed from my father, Brian Vaughan. He had spent 12 years in the RAF, much of it in Bomber Command. I had grown up on a steady diet of tales about his time in places such as Scampton, Waddington, Gibraltar and Libya along with stories of work on legendary aircraft including the Washington, Canberra, Shackleton and my particular favourites the mighty V-Bombers.



My father had once given me an unused envelope from Grapple with 'First British Megaton Trial 1957' emblazoned at the bottom. I thought little more of the memento until one day as a teenager, thumbing through a book of aviation records, I came across a reference to Wg Cmdr Hubbard. I decided to try to track him down. I wrote to the Ministry of Defence asking if they could assist. They agreed and my treasured postal cover was soon winging its way to Hubbard.

It was the start of a correspondence and a friendship that lasted almost 20 years. Gp Capt Kenneth Gilbert Hubbard OBE DFC AFC died on January 21, 2004 aged 83. The following year XD818 was moved from Hendon to the National Cold War Exhibition at the RAF Museum Cosford, Shropshire.



WELLINGTONS TO V-BOMBERS

Ken Hubbard was borne in Norwich in 1920. His father had been a professional footballer and he had grown up as a proud supporter of Norwich City, but it was aviation that had truly grabbed his interest.

When World War Two began Ken applied to join the RAF but was turned down twice before being accepted in 1940. He was commissioned as a pilot in 1941 and qualified as a flying instructor. From 1941 until 1943 he served with 12 Flying Training School, Grantham, before serving two tours in Wellingtons in the Middle East and Italy.

With 70 Squadron, Ken laid mines in the River Danube from a height of only 100ft (30m) and strafed a string of barges. In April 1944, he participated in the first attack on the heavily defended Herman Goering Works at St Valentin, Austria, while a month later he also took part in a low-level attack on the Latisana railway bridge in northern Italy.

For those operations and many others, including supply dropping and bombing operations in support of the partisan forces in Yugoslavia, he was awarded the DFC and promoted to squadron leader. Early in 1945 he was posted to Qastina, Palestine, as a flight commander with 77 Operational Training Unit.

He returned to 70 Squadron to fly Liberator VIs and remained with the RAF post war. Ken was posted as commanding officer of 104 Squadron based at Abu Sueir and later Shallufa in Egypt. By 1948 he was at Manby with the Empire Air Armaments School (EAAS) and he flew Lancaster PB873 *Thor* to South Africa and Canada-trips that he thoroughly enjoyed.

At Manby, EAAS was absorbed by the RAF Flying College in 1949 and Ken became part of its directing staff and converted to Meteor jets. He was appointed as commanding officer of Shaibah in Iraq and was awarded the OBE for assisting with the evacuation of British personnel from Abadan after the nationalisation of the oilfields by the government of Mohammed Massadeq in 1951.

Ken recalled an unusual dinner date at that time: "I was once flown out to an aircraft carrier for dinner. The flight was on a Fairey Gannet and as we headed out to sea I could see this tiny speck of a ship in the distance. I couldn't believe that we were actually going to land on that minute deck, but the pilot was brilliant and we did. As the take-off would be after dark and even more frightening, I decided to drink enough during the meal to dull my nerves for the return flight!"

After a conversion course on Canberras, Ken took command of 49 Squadron at Wittering, Cambridgeshire, in 1956. The unit was flying Valiants and a special task awaited him.

INTENSE TRAINING

When 49 Squadron was tasked with the live drops element of Grapple, the Director General of Personnel told AVM Wilfred E Oulton, the Task Force Commander, that Ken was the perfect person to lead the effort, describing him as: “an absolutely first class chap”.

In March 1957, Ken led the squadron to Christmas Island, on the eastern edge of the Indian Ocean, south of Indonesia and north of Western Australia. The island was British territory; it had been administered by Singapore, but sovereignty was transferred to Australia in 1957. The route took the Valiants to Goose Bay, Newfoundland; Edmonton, Alberta; Travis Air Force Base, California and onward to Honolulu. The Valiants arrived at Christmas Island on the 12th.

Ken remembered the preparations for the operation: “There were a lot of modifications made to the Valiants. We had special navigational, bombing and scientific instrumentation, bomb bay cameras and metal anti-flash screens over the windows to stop us from being blinded by the explosion.

“The training for the drop was intense. We had to release the bomb at 45,000ft, 1.5 miles from the target while flying at exactly Mach 0.76. Brian Trubshaw—who was the Vickers deputy chief test pilot at the time— had worked out our escape manoeuvre to avoid the nuclear burst. We’d practised everything of course, but you still can’t be complacent on the big day.

MUSHROOM CLOUD

“We also had a plan in case the bomb didn’t release properly.

We obviously couldn’t return to Christmas Island with a live nuclear bomb, so the plan was for the three crew members behind us to bale out near one of the navy ships that were monitoring the test. Bob Beeson-my co-pilot-and I would then fly 50 miles further on. Before ejecting we’d set the auto pilot to continue for another 200 miles where it would crash in the sea.”

Aware that Ken was one of the very few people who had ever actually dropped a nuclear bomb, I asked him what the detonation looked like. “It would have been beautiful if you didn’t know what it really meant. When we removed the shutters we saw an enormous, billowing, whirling white mushroom cloud towering thousands of feet above us. It’s base was a great mass of fire that just seemed to continue to grow before our eyes. Just an incredible sight that I will never forget.

“I later found out that that first detonation had actually yielded only 200 to 300 kilotons instead of the one megaton that we had hoped for. That was still about ten times the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Through Operation Grapple Britain became the third nation to possess a nuclear weapon and the first to do so with its initial test-Ken's flight aboard XD818-being airborne rather than ground based. A total of nine bombs were dropped during the programme, the largest of which yielded nearly three megatons. Ken and



his crew were awarded the Air Force Cross for their part in the operation.

MEGATON CLUB

Afterwards, Ken was appointed to Bomber Command headquarters responsible for the operational requirements of the V-bombers.

He went on to command El-Adem in Libya and Scampton before ending his RAF career as Group Captain Training Command. He retired from the RAF in 1966.

“I could have stayed longer and I would certainly have inched further up the ladder, but my RAF flying days were over and I really didn’t enjoy being behind a desk.

“If I have one regret from my time flying, it’s that I never exceeded the speed of sound. I toyed with the idea of buying a ticket for Concorde just to have achieved that, but it’s not the same as being at the controls, you know”.

Ken was always delighted to hear from anyone with an interest in the RAF and especially from those who had served with him and particularly at Christmas Island. He also never missed a reunion of the Megaton Club, for those who had participated in the H-bomb tests.

On one of our visits to Hendon, as we stood looking at the display board beside XD818, I had suggested to Ken that one day his medals and logbook would be in there alongside the photos and information panels. His modesty shone out: “They wouldn’t want those. I’m not important enough to be in here.”

In September 2006 Ken’s medals, logbooks and other items were auctioned. I have no doubt that Ken would be surprised—and delighted—to know that they were acquired by the RAF Museum Cosford; the home of XD818.

THE PEOPLE OF BOLSTERN REMEMBER THE CREW OF ND474

By

Robert McEneaney

On behalf of the ND474 Relatives Group.

On the 15 March to mark the 74th Anniversary of the loss of ND474 and all its crew, the people of Bolstern held a prayer service of remembrance and reconciliation at the Memorial placed at the crash site in 2014.

As readers of The 4T9er will know from earlier reports the people of Bolstern have continued to remember our relatives with a prayer service that has continued since the loss of ND 474 and its crew back in 1944.

The aircrew were initially buried in Bolstern and their graves tended to by the villagers until 1948 when they were interred at the Durnbach War Cemetery near Munich.

As part of the Unveiling ceremony in 2014 the Relatives Group placed seven lanterns together with photographs of the crew at the base of the Memorial. The photographs of the crew were later placed in the local Council Office building but the lanterns were retained by the villagers and are placed each year at the memorial as the prayer service takes place.



A kind and thoughtful gesture by the villagers of Bolstern who were in turn remembered by a Mass here in London on Sunday 18th March. The mass by Fr John McKenna, great nephew of F/Sgt Terence McEneaney, was attended by relatives of the crew.



Also remembered during our Mass in London was our friend John Ward and the 4T9ers committee “The Crew” who were instrumental in the delivery of the memorial back in 2013. We the Relatives Group will remain forever indebted to you all.



RAF LANCASTER ND474 LOST ON A MISSION TO STUTTGART 15th MARCH 1944



Crew of ND474



Sgt Douglas Brigg Birbeck 21yrs
Sgt William Edgar Hardy 22yrs
Sgt Ronald Houle 20yrs
Flt Officer John Joseph Knowles 23yrs
P.O. Thomas William Waugh 23yrs
Sgt John Grenfell Wise 19yrs
Flt. Sgt Terence Conlon McEneaney 22yrs



Bolstern Memorial - Germany

In the February issue of The 4T9er we featured, in Reader's Letters, a story by former 49 Squadron wireless operator Phil 'Griff' Griffiths. Phil explained that each year, on his birthday, he told a story of his wartime experiences. As he is now 94 years old I thought that there must have been many stories told in the past so I asked if he would recall another for us, and here it is:

A TYPICALLY HOT VISIT TO 'THE BIG CITY'

The following is the truth and nothing but, as I recall it!

Well we were eating high off the hog again, bacon and 'real' egg (as we called it). The thought occurred to me, what happened to all the eggs in WWII – also, and another thought – were we like lambs being fattened for the slaughter?

Somewhat later, as the crews gathered in the briefing room loaded down with our respective equipment (the navs were the heaviest carriers), these unbelievably high spirited young men were laughing and joking almost like they were going on a picnic, then as the group captain walked in we rose and were quiet.

The covering was then removed from the large map of Europe and on this day the tape revealed we were going to Berlin again. There was a huge concerted groan from the crews as the 'big city' always gave us a warm welcome.

It was acknowledged at the briefing that crossing the Dutch coast was not much fun anymore as it was now heavily fortified with batteries of AA and nearby fighter fields, so the 'bright' idea was to circle and gain height over our own fields and then head east.

We did go along with this and circled in controlled orbits and designated rates of climb over our own fields in 7/10 cloud!

Can you now imagine perhaps 250 Lancs doing this, considering the close proximity of the 5 Group fields? We carried out this procedure with hearts in our mouths as our kite was almost continuously rocked and buffeted by the slipstream of adjacent aircraft. This fun piece of the trip was, I am sure, responsible for the grey hair of 5 Group aircrew. I don't believe this was done again, primarily due to our opinions rudely and positively expressed at the de-briefing.

Anyway, we proceeded on to Berlin to find it was a city in flames, with constant eruptions below as our bombs dropped. The sky was bright as day with dazzling white parachute flares, AA bursts, crossing paths of tracer and searchlights waving back and forth. Oh, and a new thing called a 'scarecrow' which simulated a bomber blowing up, we really needed that! *[Post war it was discovered that 'scarecrows' were not an artificial German ploy but were actually bombers blowing up. ED.]*

Prior to the run in we saw about 150 yards on our starboard beam a Lancaster

corkscrewing like mad and firing on an ME110 which was about to start his deadly 'curve in pursuit'. We opened fire from our mid and rear turrets which along with the subject Lanc's guns were twelve streams of tracer heading towards the fighter, he obviously didn't like the odds as he banked away smartly, off to find a less wary target.

We were straight and level on our bomb run, our most vulnerable time, and had just dropped our 'big ones' when we were attacked by a fighter and raked by his 20mm cannon and machine gun fire. We were lucky however as we continued to fly. We assessed the damage as best we could, which consisted mainly of one of our starboard wing tanks holed and leaking, the incendiaries still held up in the bomb bay and hydraulic damage so that our bomb doors were still open, we were to find out later that our brakes were also u.s.. A jagged portion of the skin of the port mainplane was loose and flapping away in the slipstream (increasing our drag), the mainplane near the WOP's and the rear gunner's positions was badly holed and we could see lots of holes all around the fuselage. We found, a little later, that two of our superchargers had been damaged. 'Spike' Triton, our flight engineer, sprang into action immediately, he switched the fuel system so that we were feeding the engines from the damaged tank in order that we could use all the gas remaining and then revert to normal usage when we had sucked it almost dry. It was Spike's great sleight of hand and super efficiency that saved our bacon, otherwise, as it turned out, we would never have made it home.

We headed for home with our bomb doors still open and 'things' flapping in the breeze, which gave us lots of drag and a worry of having enough gas to make it to a friendly shore. With eyes constantly on the fuel gauges, with a nose down attitude and judicious use of engine controls we made England. We were lucky we were not attacked by fighters or lit up by searchlights as all we could do was fly straight and level-just!

We crept home and were of course way behind everyone else and Lincolnshire was dark beneath us, no welcoming runway lights, just darkness. We were by this time on 'fumes' and were a little desperate so we sent out a distress call for lights and lo and behold runway lights came on just ahead of us and down we went immediately with the starboard outer coughing for fuel. Russ put her down beautifully but we then found out that due to the hydraulic damage we had no brakes. Fortunately it was a grass runway which slowed us a little and at the end of the runway we turned rapidly on to the taxiway at such a speed we were fearful of a ground loop – somehow we made it. Our engines cut out as we hit the runway and we had to exit the plane there on the taxi strip. I should mention that we got out in double fast time with the thought of the incendiaries hanging up in the still open bomb bay!

Well, what a welcome we received, we found out that we had landed at a Polish training airfield and they were wonderful to us, they escorted us to the Sergeants mess which was opened up for us, it was 3 am, and we were offered, for a start, a glass of their homemade vodka (made legally of course), which they proudly acclaimed to be double distilled. Before long Polish aircrew, staff and cooks got up and joined us, they opened the kitchen and we were treated to some hefty and well seasoned sausages, home made bread, an apple strudel and more of their excellent 'jungle juice'. It was an unforgettable party as it turned out for at the end no one was feeling any pain!

We all had a well earned hangover and pleasant memories. Their hospitality was tremendous and I will always remember their efforts on our behalf.

The next day our crew chief came over to look the aircraft over and decided to drain the tanks for a start and behold there wasn't enough to fill his Ronson lighter (we all carried one of these in those days). He also found that the incendiary containers were torn and riddled with shot and shell.

The Navy had a satirical saying for a mission like we had, it was, "If you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined".

This experience with the Poles I think influenced me for some time. After the war I was a soccer referee on the Montreal semi-pro league and frequently refereed the Polish White Eagles and I found myself favouring the Eagles on those 50/50 decisions.

I also never accepted my fee from them, (a very rare thing for a soccer ref.) but put it back into their entertainment fund. I and other favoured refs were always invited to these monthly socials where my wife and I were soon doing the polka and sampling their legal vodka.

Just a little more, traditionally the small Polish liner Batory was the last ship to dock in Montreal before the ice closed the St. Lawrence river and it was customary for the team from the ship to have a soccer match with the Montreal referees team (which I played for) and afterwards our team along with our ladies were invited back to the ship for memorable hors d'oeuvres and of course a shot or two of vodka, triple distilled this time, so – my Polish experience didn't end in 1944.

As a matter of interest, I don't know to whom, I refereed my last game at the age of 88, I am 94 now. It was a game featuring 'the golden girls', ladies over the age of 40, very good players who generally had been playing since high school. There were two leagues each of eight teams and they were a real delight to referee. I hung up my cleats as even I noticed I was a step or so slower than I had been at 25 and in addition, there were more suggestions regarding the placement of my whistle!

A good time to say Au Revoir!

AVRO MEMORIAL APPEAL, OTLEY, WEST YORKSHIRE.

By

Alan Parr

Some time ago our webmaster, Malcolm Brooke, advised me that a memorial is to be created at the site of the former Yeadon Avro Works at Otley and at the same time suggesting that the association make a donation. I agreed to this and a £50 donation was subsequently made and I received a letter of appreciation from the Otley Town Mayor, Coun. Nigel Francis, thanking all concerned.

The site of the huge factory is now an industrial estate adjacent to Leeds-Bradford Airport however, between 1939 and 1946 the Avro factory, covering a million and a half square feet, employed 17,500 people.

Almost 700 Lancasters, 4,500 Ansons and a number of other aircraft types were produced at Yeadon which made it a high risk target for enemy bombers. As a consequence the factory was well camouflaged with the roof being covered with grass with various other details added which resulted in the factory escaping attack during the war.

I am grateful to our researcher, Colin Cripps, for supplying the following information;

“Here are the seven Lancasters that were produced at Yeadon that were lost on Air Operations whilst with 49 Squadron.

- 1. 15-16 August 1943, Milan, Lancaster LM337. Shot down by combination of Uffz Albrecht Kreuzer 2./JG2 (Wilde Sau) & by light Flak.*
- 2. 21-22 May 1944, Duisberg, Lancaster LM539. Obstlt Günther Radusch, or Lt. Hermann Leube of 4./NJG3.*
- 3. 16-17 March 1945, Wurzburg, Lancaster ME454. Poss. Hptm. Helmut Gaul 1./NJG6.*
- 4. 4 April 1945, Nordhausen, Lancaster ME308. This aircraft exploded mid air by what is believed to be a bomb collision when the load was dropped.*
- 5. 7-8 June 1944, St Lue D'Esserent, Lancaster LM541. Lt. Siegfried Elsässer Stab II./NJG2.*
- 6. 24-25 June 1944, Pommereval, Lancaster LM572. Oblt. Adolf Kaiser 1./NJG2.*
- 7. 8-9 Feb 1945, Politz, Lancaster ME353. Poss. either Hptm. Ernst-Georg Drünkler 1./NJG5 or Fw. Egon Engling 12./NJG3.”*

It is the aim of the organizers to raise sufficient funds to get the memorial in place by 2019.