

# The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine  
2021 Issue 59**



## **Commercy Forest, France**

Memorial to those killed when Lancaster ED 426 was shot down on  
8th October 1943.

Ann Thakur (nee O'Leary), niece of Sgt Tim O'Leary and Alex Wares  
grandson of the Pilot Donald 'Don' Wares placing the 49 Squadron  
Association wreath at the unveiling ceremony.

## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

**Mr John Taylor**

#### **New Associate Member**

Ms Roslyn Slater  
Mr Alex Wares

### **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to this issue of The 49er. As I complete my first year as Association Secretary, I would like to thank all those who have sent messages of support, they are all very much appreciated. To The Crew, our committee, my thanks for your unswerving commitment to the Association and to those who step forward to give their time freely to support the activities of the Association.

This year has provided its own challenges as we navigate our way through the ever-changing guidelines brought on by the pandemic. However, I can report that the Association was represented at the various acts of remembrance throughout the year, including the unveiling of a memorial to the crew of ED 426 in France details of the ceremony covered elsewhere in this Newsletter.

A particular thank you must go to all those who have made donations throughout the year towards the running costs of the association. Please remember our Association does not demand a subscription but depends entirely on the generosity of its members.

A warm welcome to our new associate Members Roslyn Slater, niece of F/Lt F M H Fisher 130524 and Alex Wares, grandson of Don Wares, Pilot Lancaster ED 426.

Finally I would like to draw you attention to the details for an Association Gathering planned for September 2022—see pages 30-31.

## **Memorial to the Crew of ED 426**

### **Commercy, France, 8th October 2021**

Pilot Sgt.	Donald Wares, Liverpool	(Evadee)
Sgt.	Raymond Barlow	(Evadee)
F/O	Elmer Hepburn, RCAF	(Killed)
Sgt.	Gill Attwood, Birmingham	(P.O.W)
F/O	A. Fitzgerald, RAAF	(P.O.W)
Sgt.	Archibald Brownlie, Aberdeen	(Killed)
Sgt.	Timothy O'Leary, Wexford	(Killed)

On Friday 8th October 2021, the municipality of Commercy unveiled a memorial to those killed when Lancaster ED 426 was shot down returning from a mission to Stuttgart on the 8th October 1943.

Two of the crew were made PoWs, whilst two managed to evade capture and the three were sadly killed are buried in Choley War Cemetery.

The story surrounding the crash was recorded by evader F/Sgt. Raymond Barlow, Wireless Operator/Air Gunner and kindly submitted to the Association in 1993. Raymond Barlow's account of the events that took place are titled "To Late on Target" and is available via a link from Sgt Barlow's page on the Association web site. In the document, Raymond Barlow expressed a wish to have a memorial placed at the crash site to honour the lost members of the crew.

Through the efforts of Jean Pol Charlier a local resident who on a visit to the forest of Commercy found fragments of the aircraft and decided to investigate the matter further. Jean Pol's research and determination finally lead to the unveiling of a memorial honouring the crew of ED 426 on the 8th October of this year, 78 years after the crash.

Through the work of the Association Committee we traced relatives of two of the crew and they were present together with the Association Secretary at the Unveiling Ceremony.

On the morning of the ceremony, a visit was made to Choley War Cemetery. Following a short service of remembrance a wreath was placed at the graves of Tim O'Leary, Elmer Hepburn and Archibald Brownlie.



The graves of the three crew killed in Choley War Cemetery  
F/O Hepburn and Sgts O'Leary & Brownlie.  
The four O'Leary family representatives frame Jean-Pol & Francine Charlier  
(Local resident and his wife) with the pilot's grandson standing centre.



Siobhan O'Leary. VJ Thakur, Francine & Jean-Pol Charlier, Anne O'Leary  
with son and daughter, Alex Wares (grandson of Don Wares-Pilot), Robert &  
Annette McEneaney (49Squadron Secretary).



Later that afternoon at the crash site in the forest of Commercy the Unveiling Ceremony was attended by the relatives of the crew, the memorial organiser Jean Pol and Francine Charlier together with representatives from the Canadian Consul to France, Heads of the Military Services, French Resistance organisations and residents from the local community.

The Ceremony commenced with a fly past by the French Airforce and was followed by speeches from the various groups represented. Alex Wares, grandson of the Pilot delivered a speech prepared by his mother Diana Wares, and included in this article by kind permission of the family.

### **Message from Mrs Diana Wares, the daughter of Pilot Officer Donald Wares.**

I am grateful for this opportunity to share my thoughts at this event in remembrance of the three crew members who died in the crash of Lancaster ED 426 on 7/8<sup>th</sup> October 1943, near the town of Commercy .

My father rarely spoke about his wartime service, but on just one occasion, I recall him telling me that his plane had been shot down on its return from a bombing mission to Germany. I do not remember him telling me many details about the mission ,and I was perhaps too young to appreciate the significance of the crash, but what I do remember is his sadness and distress at the loss of three of his crew, F/O Elmer Hepburn RCAF, Bomb Aimer, Sgt Archibald Brownlie, Flight Engineer, and Sgt Timothy O'Leary, Navigator.

I remember him saying, 'It was terrible, it was terrible', with deep emotion . The crash and the tragic loss of the three crew members were experiences that remained with him to the end of his life.

And so I can be certain that my father would be very moved and pleased that today's remembrance event honours those who lost their lives. And although I cannot be with you in person, I am pleased that my son, Alexander, eldest grandson of Donald Wares is able to attend the ceremony.

My father died in 1992 but I did not learn the circumstances of the mission, the crash and the escape to Switzerland until some while after this, when my family was contacted by the widow of my father's Wireless Operator and Air Gunner, Sgt Ray Barlow. On a visit to Mrs Barlow I heard the story and was given a copy of the booklet in which her late husband had written an enthralling account of the events of that night, how the crew carried out their

Mission in take off and being a sitting duck target for the enemy anti-aircraft guns. It is clear from that account that my father owed his life to the outstanding bravery of Sgt Barlow, who, after the crash, staggered through the burning fuselage looking for the other crew members. On reaching the cockpit, he found my father, slumped unconscious in his seat, and despite the intense heat and flames engulfing the plane, and the imminent likelihood of it exploding, he took the time to shake and slap my father into consciousness and together they got out of the blazing inferno.

As I reflect with huge gratitude on the selfless actions of Sgt Barlow, I would also like to pay tribute to the many French men and women who helped him and my father to escape to the neutral territory of Switzerland.

They began their long walk to Switzerland by hiding out from the occupying forces during the day, and breaking cover at night. They then made themselves known to local farmers, who helped them by giving them food and drink, and allowed them to sleep in a shepherds hut or a barn. They would be shown which direction to go where they could next be sure of getting help. Many local people, from a lock-keeper, a blacksmith, and many farmers, helped them out with food, clothes and shelter in barns or sometimes inviting them indoors to the luxury of a warm bed to sleep in.

This generous and courageous help was given despite the knowledge of how dire the consequences would be for anyone, together with their family and perhaps their entire village, who was found to have collaborated with the enemy.

I would like to take this opportunity to salute the courage of the people of Commercys and the surrounding region at that time, and for their descendants to know of the remarkable bravery their forbears showed to two stricken British airmen, despite the huge risks to themselves.

The brave help given by the French people continued as Sgt Barlow and my father were handed over into the care of the French Resistance, who gave them forged papers and a guide to take them across the border into Switzerland, from where they eventually reached home.

The foreword of Sgt Barlow's account begins with the statement that 'in war-time all fighting men were heroes'. This is true but let us also recognise with gratitude the courageous contribution made by the people of France.





The memorial is marked with the pin with the CWGC at Choley near Toul.



Over 100 people attended the ceremony, including local dignitaries and the Canadian Consul to France (photographed giving his address).



## 49 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION REMEMBERS

### IBCC 85th Anniversary event Bomber Command

#### Report from Chairman Stuart Keay

On the 14th July 2021 our Chairman Stuart and Pat Keay attended the IBCC to mark the 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of Bomber Command. Force.



Formed on July 14, 1936, the command was initially brought in to act as a deterrent to aggression, and eventually went on the offensive to help Britain in the Second World War.

Our chairman noted: “It was incredibly hot in the sun and I had forgotten my hat!”

AVM (Ret) Paul Robinson OBE gave the introduction This was followed by the reading of a lovely poem, Listen to the Wind, read by Graham King an IBCC volunteer.

Then came ‘They shall not grow old’ read by ACM Michael Graydon, IBCC Chairman

Last Post. Silence. Reveille

Wreaths were laid by several veterans with representatives from Canada, Australia and Poland. Prayer and final blessing. We were then treated to a BBMF Dakota fly past – on 3 occasions,, it was very low. There was a large marquee in which we had an excellent lunch, (all socially distanced) of course. This was followed by a comedian then a young lady singing a selection of Vera Lynn songs.

It was a lovely day.

## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2021 FISKERTON



The main centre of the 49 SA Remembrance took place at Fiskerton where 49ers, villagers and the 5<sup>th</sup> Lincoln Scout Troop attended a service in St Clement of Rome Church followed by wreath laying at the Fiskerton Airfield Memorial.

On Sunday morning a substantial congregation once again enjoyed a typical Revd Penny Green service. A very thought provoking sermon on the day of remembrance when those from the Village who had fallen in both wars had their names read out.



During the service our Roll of Honour was placed on the alter as the 5<sup>th</sup> Lincoln Scout Troop presented their standards to Revd Penny. 49SA Chairman Stuart Keay laid a wreath at the 49 Squadron memorial within

the Church where a minute's silence was observed. The reading Psalm 121 was delivered by Mrs May Brooke.



Following the church service, we made our way, as is custom, to the Airfield Memorial for the wreath laying. Following a short service by Revd Penny, the Association wreath was laid by our Chairman, Stuart Keay.

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 all volunteered to parade that day. We are indeed privileged to have them with us.

Once again, this year the Village Hall stalwarts had prepared a wonderful full Sunday Roast for us. We must pay tribute to Ann Chessman and her team for their wonderful friendly and welcoming hospitality.





## FULBECK MEMORIAL

On the lead up to Remembrance Sunday we learned from Carol and Peter Hare that the hedge to the perimeter of the memorial had been damaged and would need to be removed.

Our thanks to Carol and Peter for leading the charge and together with the generous assistance of a local building company, T. Balfe Construction Limited, the grounds surrounding the memorial were made presentable prior to the Sunday remembrance service.

Carol and Peter have informed us that a replacement hedge will be planted in the New Year.

We have received the address details for T. Balfe Construction Limited and we have sent them a note of thanks for their fine efforts.



## BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL, GREEN PARK, LONDON.



The 49ers were well represented at the relative's Remembrance service held at the Bomber Command Memorial, Green Park on Sunday.

Remembrance Sunday  
Tom Hoole, great nephew of Ronald Hoole, together with members of the McEneaney Family, relatives of Flgt Sgt Terence McEneaney stood together to remember the crew of ND474 15/16 March 1944.

A wreath was placed at the Memorial on behalf of the Association and a Cross of remembrance was also placed at the foot of the memorial on behalf Chris Beare in honour of her uncle, Dennis Blumfield - 18/19 July 1944.



## PLAQUE IN HONOUR OF ALAN PARR FISKERTON VILLAGE HALL

We are pleased to announce that a plaque honouring Alan's contribution to The Association was unveiled by his wife Barbara and granddaughter Evie at the Village Hall on Remembrance Sunday.

The plaque carrying the Squadron Crest, kindly donated by Margaret and David Boughton, also carried a brass plate inscribed with a tribute to Alan, acknowledging his service to the Association over many years.

The plaque will be placed in the 49ers bar area at the Village Hall a rightful place for the Squadron Crest finally returning to Fiskerton.



Our Chairman, Stuart Keay made an emotional speech outlining Alan's contribution to the Association and recalled the many years of friendship shared between their families, along with their many friends within the Association.

Barbara Parr was very kind in her words, thanking the Association for the tribute to Alan on what was a very emotional day for the family.

The Secretary closed proceedings thanking Revd Penny for the beautiful service, to Ann Chessman and her team at the Village Hall for the generous hospitality and warm welcome to Mary and Carl Stuffins our memorial benefactors for their continued support ensuring the upkeep of the Airfield memorial site and to the Local Boy Scout Troop for their contribution at the Church and the Airfield Service.

## PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE UNVEILING CEREMONY



Barbara Parr unveiling the plaque



## PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE UNVEILING CEREMONY



Carol, Barbara , Helen & Evie



Barbara and Dave Boughton



Annette presenting a bouquet of flowers to Anne Chessman



Jan Norman and Pat Keay.





**PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE AIRFIELD MEMORIAL SITE**





## PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE AIRFIELD MEMORIAL SITE



**PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE 49 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION  
REMEMBRANCE WEEKEND**



## **Nuclear test veteran backs campaign for medals**

‘Thank you ‘ to James Silcocks who allowed us to reprint his article.

A veteran of Britain’s nuclear testing programme in the 1950s has said he backs the campaign for military medals and for formal recognition to be given to those involved.



Bill Evans who resides in Louth, believes that there should be more recognition for nuclear test veterans.

As reported in the national press, an advisory military sub-committee determined at the end of last year that veterans of the nuclear testing programme, between the 1950s and 1990s, would not be entitled to ‘medallic recognition’. The committee justified its decision on the grounds that “although the efforts of those involved in the campaigns should not be discounted, the cases did not meet the level of risk and rigour which is generally required for the award of a campaign medal.”



The decision led to outcry amongst the 1,500 surviving nuclear veterans in the UK, many of whom did indeed risk their health and their life – and 89-year-old Bill Evans, who lives in Louth, is no exception.

Mr Evans spent 35 years with the RAF, starting in June 1951 when joining as an Aircraft Engineer (Airframes). After subsequent training on various types of aircraft, he was posted to the ‘V’ force, 49 Squadron Vickers Valiant in 1955, which was tasked to carry out nuclear bomb trials in Australia. During these trials, the Valiant became the first RAF aircraft to drop a British atomic bomb.

Mr Evans was later involved in three of the four trials at Christmas Island in the Pacific, and during these tests he personally witnessed and experienced five atomic bombs and three hydrogen bombs at distances of 15 to 25 miles. Mr Evans was subsequently involved with air photography and nuclear air sampling with No 543 Squadron, and was later involved with air defence in the Falklands in the early 1980s.

After retiring in 1986, Mr Evans – who was born in Dover – lived in Horncastle for 22 years before moving to Louth where he has lived ever since. Despite his involvement, Mr Evans says he was very fortunate not to have suffered any ill-effects, but many of his colleagues were not so lucky.

“There have been some awful deaths,” said Mr Evans. “So many have died in different ways, through cancers and all sorts.

“It was risky work, but the Government and the MOD just don’t want to know about it.

“There is denial of it, and it would cost them a lot of money (to provide medals to all of the surviving nuclear test veterans).

“The British Nuclear Test Veterans Association has tried for years to get recognition from the Government, but once again you’re hitting your head against a brick wall. They don’t want to know, but we’ve got used to that over the years. It’s a pretty sad reflection actually.”

He added: “Personally, I feel that there should be more recognition for these trials.

“It feels like they are just waiting for people to die off so there’s far less stuff for them to bother about. That’s how I feel about it.”

‘With thanks to James Silcocks for permission to reprint his article from the Louth Leader’.



## Did 49 start the Space Race?

Everyone has heard of 'Operation Dodge.' This was of course, the repatriation of P.o.Ws and our soldiers from Bari, in Italy to home. It must have been a very long and uncomfortable trip for the 17-20 passengers sitting on the fuselage floor. Equally so for the twelve German P.o.Ws flown to Schleswig under guard and the **return with ten guarded German prisoners.**

This was given the title 'Operation Paperclip' (The more innocuous the title, the more important or dangerous the sortie) and most people would not be aware of 49's involvement.

Terri Sandison is compiling a biography on her father, S/Ldr Arthur 'Sandy' Sandison and reveals:-

*'Sandys' next flights were on 27 October (1945) when his log book records that he flew from Mepal to RAF Wing in Aylesbury Vale, and then on to Schleswig with 12 Prisoners of War, 2 Guards and crew. Total flying time for both flights was 2 hours 45 minutes. As Guards were present, these must presumably have been German Prisoners of War being repatriated, despite a formal Government repatriation programme not starting until September 1946.'*

Nevertheless, Hansard (12 February 1946) records  
*'There are at present in this country some 19,000 anti-Nazi German prisoners-of-war who have been screened for consideration under this scheme. Some 2,200 have been selected as suitable for return to Germany. About 650 have been repatriated. Three hundred and fifty miners have also been selected for priority return. The Control Commission in Germany are ready to accept any number of anti-Nazi miners, bank officials, lawyers, factory managers, police, as well as experienced workers in agriculture and food processing, transport, post and telegraph services and public utilities. Repatriation of these prisoners is proceeding as fast as possible'*

Which explains the early return of the prisoners in 49s' PB982, an aging Mk 1 Lancaster.

*'The following day Sandy flew back from Schleswig to RAF Tibenham, on a flight lasting 2 hours 35 minutes, with 10 Prisoners of War, 2 Guards and crew. He then returned to Mepal as 2nd dickie with F/L Wright as Pilot.*

*None of Sandy's flights on 27 and 28 October are mentioned in the Squadron's Operations Record Book. '*

‘The return flight to Tibenham is of note as Sandy enjoyed recounting the arrival of the aircraft. Ground staff on the base had been informed that the aircraft was carrying Prisoners of War. They naturally assumed that this meant British Prisoners of War returning home, and duly turned out to line up and give them an enthusiastic welcome.

This caused huge embarrassment on board as the POWs were in fact Nazi scientists on their way to the USA via the UK, with the crew having to rapidly appraise ground staff of the situation and cancel the welcome. ‘  
Now, what if one of those scientists happened to be Werner von Braun.....

*Per Ardua ad Astra*

### **Bomber hero Ken’s Gong...75 years on**

Lancaster bomber hero, 97, can finally clasp long-awaited B.C. clasp  
Former Squadron Leader Ken Symonds, who lost an engine during final raid in Bavarian Alps in 1945, has been awarded clasp eighty years late.



Ken with MP Chris Loder

A BOMBER Command hero who attacked Hitler's mountaintop retreat has got recognition of his service in the Second World War – more than 75 years late. Sqn Ldr Ken Symonds, 97, was awarded the Bomber Command clasp after his neighbour learned he had never received it and asked local Tory MP Chris Loder to intervene. The clasp, introduced in 2013, has to be attached to Ken's 1939-45 Star.

Ken, a Flight Engineer, served on Lancaster bombers on seven sorties near the end of the war – including the raid on Hitler's residence in the Bavarian Alps.

He went on to serve in North Africa, Italy, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada, the USA and Vietnam. Of that last raid in April 1945 Ken from Martinstown, Dorset said "I remember Operation Berchtesgaden clearly. Mission accomplished, we high-tailed it back having lost one engine." Ken flew sorties in Lancaster bomber.



Ken Symonds on board a Lancaster in 1945

Damage caused to Sq Ldr Symonds's plane meant his was the last to return to RAF Syerston following the sortie on April 25, 1945.

Veterans who served with Bomber Command were only entitled to a clasp in 2013 in recognition of their bravery and sacrifice after being overlooked for decades because of the number of civilian casualties.

But Sq Ldr Symonds, from Martinstown, near Dorchester, Dorset, did not receive his clasp at the time.

It was only when his neighbour Deborah Follett took him to the Imperial War Museum Duxford for his birthday in July that it was noticed he didn't have the clasp on his medals.

Ms Follett applied to the MoD on Sq Ldr Symonds' behalf, only to be told it would take months to process. So she contacted their local MP, who also lobbied the MoD, and the clasp arrived days later.

Now the veteran has been presented with the clasp to go with his Air Force Medal and his other war medals.

The widower said: "I am very pleased to have it and am only sorry that I missed out on it first time around. It is extremely important to me to get this."

He receives his clasp from MP Chris Loder, who chased up the award. Ms Follett, who is also Sq Ldr Symonds' voluntary carer, said she didn't know why he did not receive the honour in 2013.

Chris Loder, Conservative MP for West Dorset, said: "This was a small but significant gesture of thanks to one of the last surviving members of our greatest generation, to whom we all owe so much."

Sq Ldr Symonds served in 49 Squadron and flew on seven bombing runs over Germany towards the end of the war.

On May 4, 1945, he flew British PoWs home from Europe and then piloted his Lancaster over Buckingham Palace on VE Day four days later. He remained in the RAF and saw service in North Africa, Italy, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada, US and Vietnam.



Bomber Command suffered the highest casualty rate of the British Armed Forces in the Second World War, losing 55,573 of the 125,000 who served. The average age of those who died was 23.



Articles and pictures courtesy of the Telegraph and Daily Express newspapers.

## **Above and Beyond**

### **The War Service History of Flight Sergeant Maxwell Elliott Whitehill (29 April 1913 – 7 June 1942)**

(Researched and written by Graham J. Inns AM, sole surviving male relative  
of  
F/S M. E. Whitehill – completed 29 April 2021, the 107<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his  
birth.)

Maxwell Elliott Whitehill (Max) was born in the town of Gawler South Australia on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1913; the first child of Herbert Adam and Ethel Whitehill (nee Elliott). Herbert worked in the office of a small drapery establishment in the town. One year later almost to the day (1 May 1914) a second child – Joyce Margaret (author's Mother) was born in the same town. The family shifted not long afterwards to Adelaide acquiring a house at 18 Wellesley Avenue Evandale an eastern suburb of Adelaide some 3 miles (5kms) from the city. Herbert became the Office Manager, then later the Accountant of what is now Myer Stores.

Max attended Wellington Road Primary School from 1925 -1928 (Gawler Primary School prior to that). There he obtained his Qualifying Certificate in English, Mathematics, Composition, History and Geography. Indications are that he was more technically directed in his studies rather than towards academic subjects. He undertook correspondence studies for a period before studying aero-engineering part time from 1935 – 1938 at the South Australian School of Mines (now the University of South Australia). His first job was as a Salesman with the Myer Emporium (now Myer Stores) and he remained in that position until enlisting with the Royal Australian Air Force in 1940, under the Empire Air Scheme.

He qualified as a pilot with the Royal Aero Club with 30 hours as a licensed pilot and was a member of both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Light Horse. Scouting was his teenage passion and he became a King's Scout in circa 1930. In his application to join the RAAF he lists swimming, tennis, wrestling, weight lifting and horse riding as his sporting activities.

Not a particularly big man – 5’-9” high and weighing 127 pounds – Maxwell Whitehill applied to join aircrew with the RAAF in December 1939. He was accepted for enlistment on his 27<sup>th</sup> birthday, 29 April 1940 with the rank of Aircraftsman – service number 407022. Although he applied to be trained as a pilot given his earlier training and flying hours, he was posted to the Wireless Air Gunners School in Ballarat on 28 May 1940 and graduated from that course as a Leading Aircraftsman on 10 July 1940. During a period of leave he married Jean Bessie Kirkwood in Adelaide on 17 August 1940.

He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant on 13 January 1941 prior to his departure for the United Kingdom on 1 February on board the troop/cargo ship the Memnon a 7,500 ton vessel under Captain J. P. Williams, the Memnon was bound for Liverpool via the west coast of Africa with its consignment of servicemen, crew and general cargo. Calling in at Capetown the ship sailed for Freetown, Sierra Leone, then on 9 March 1941 sailed from that port bound for its assigned destination of Liverpool.

Three days later and making a zig zag course, the Memnon was suddenly hit by a torpedo fired from a German submarine. From war service records it has subsequently been determined that the German submarine was the U106 commanded by Jurgen Oesten. (German war records indicate that Oesten survived the war and died in August 2010). The Memnon was hit on the starboard side, immediately started taking water and within 15 minutes had completely sunk. According to the official report of Captain Williams, two life boats were lowered with “22 (men) in our boat and 44 in the other boat in charge of the Chief Officer”. Max Whitehill who was in the latter life boat records in his subsequent letter back home, “we waited round for thirty hours in case someone had heard our S.O.S. and then started on our long trip to terra firma”.

In the haste to abandon ship six crew members who were working below deck went down with the ship. A distress message had been sent out which was answered by a Spanish steamship however, no assistance was forthcoming. Having come to the surface the German submarine made no attempt to fire upon or assist the life boat occupants and it eventually submerged.

It was estimated that at the time of sinking the Memnon was about 400 miles from land (nearest point Dakar) and on 13 March the two lifeboats, powered only by sail and a hand operated propeller, proceeded on what was to be a long and hazardous journey to the African coast.



Two days later the decision was made for the two life boats to separate as the larger craft was slowing progress. Max Whitehill's letter back home records the perilous journey; "our rations were half cup of water, two biscuits and a square inch of bully beef a day.....On the eleventh day one man died of exposure and we had to bury him at sea, two days later we sighted land.....Later in the day we found a native fisherman and he informed us that we were just north of (the French town) St Louis.

St Louis is some 100 miles north of Dakar and just over 200 miles from Bathurst, the closest British territory. The decision was taken to not land at St Louis but continue on to Dakar even though by this time several of the men were in a bad way. Reaching Dakar on 23 March they were advised by the captain of a French ship in the harbour not to go ashore, but rather continue on to Bathurst. After receiving water and food from the French ship that advice was accepted and one day later the exhausted company arrived in Bathurst to an enthusiastic welcome by the RAF personnel stationed there. The perilous journey had taken 13 days.



Meanwhile the second smaller life boat had also reached Bathurst and all the survivors were taken to the RAF base to recover from their ordeal. Three weeks later they were flown to Freetown by the RAF and from there, after further recuperation, proceeded on to their original destination – Liverpool.

The South Australian newspaper The Advertiser reported their arrival in England on 16 July 1941 ...”five months after they left Australia for England”. All of the surviving RAAF personnel were then posted to various RAF stations. Sergeant Max Whitehill was initially posted to Finningley, Doncaster where he was “engaged in instructional duties in gunnery”. He was promoted to Flight Sergeant on 1 September 1941 (see portrait photo opposite)

On 2 February 1942 Flight Sergeant Whitehill and a Sergeant Rollins wrote to the RAAF Overseas Head Quarters in London requesting that “Owing to the present situation in Australia and the Far East we respectfully submit application for posting to Australia”. A quick reply on the same day from Wing Commander E.G. Knox Knight declined the request stating, “...we who have been sent overseas must rely on the Commonwealth Government to decide where Australian forces are best located for the defence of the Commonwealth”. Following his promotion to Flight Sergeant, Max Whitehill requested a transfer to operational duties. His subsequent posting to 49 Squadron at the Scampton air base Lincolnshire on 3 April 1942 saw his first active participation in air raids over Germany. His initial sortie was in a Hampden bomber (AD 870) in a bombing raid on Essen. In the months that followed he flew 9 operations, 4 in Hampdens and 5 in Manchester bombers.

*(It is worth mentioning here that the Manchester bomber was a most unreliable aircraft. Powered by twin Rolls-Royce X24 Vulture engines it was slow and the engines were prone to failure and catching fire. The Manchester was withdrawn from service at the end of June 1942 and replaced by the Lancaster bomber, a four engine aircraft powered by Rolls-Royce V12 Merlin engines)*

Flight Sergeant Max Whitehill flew his final mission on 6 June 1942. In Manchester bomber L7469 he with 5 crew members with S/Ldr Peter de Mestre as pilot, took off from Scampton on a scheduled bombing raid on the town of Emden. Max Whitehill was mid- upper gunner on that fateful mission. In good weather conditions a main force of 233 aircraft from several airfields set out that evening to attack Emden. 49 Squadron dispatched 7 Manchester bombers from Scampton at 23.30hrs with only 5 returning –Max Whitehill’s Manchester was one of those not to return.

It is recorded that Manchester bomber L7469 was shot down at 00.20 hrs 20km North West of Borkum Island on the morning of 7 June. It had not reached its bombing target and crashed into the North Sea. There were no survivors. German war records indicate that L7469 was shot down by Luftwaffe pilot Oberleutnant Ludwig Becker. Reportedly flying a night fighter Bf110F Messerschmitt (see photo attached), Becker himself was shot down and killed on 26 February 1943 by an American B-17 Flying Fortress during a daylight sortie.

*(It is ironical if not tragic that a little over 2 weeks following the loss of L7469 the Manchester bomber was withdrawn from active service and replaced by the more reliable and faster Lancaster bomber)*

On Monday 22 June 1942 a German patrol boat recovered two bodies from the sea, one being identified as Flight Sergeant M. E. Whitehill, the other, Sergeant F. Buttel, second pilot of the ill-fated L7469. Other crew members of the aircraft were listed as missing in action, later presumed dead. Their bodies were never found and were presumed lost with the crashed aircraft in the North Sea.

On the same day (22 June) the two recovered bodies were taken to Borkum Island and buried with full military honours in a funeral service at the Lutheran Cemetery. Australian War Memorial papers record that “the funeral was attended by a guard of honour from the Luftwaffe, headed by an officer, a German naval band and two wreath bearers”. The service concluded with an address by the Chaplain, a presentation of arms by the military detachment and a firing of a salvo.

(see photo opposite)

At the conclusion of the war the remains of Flight Sergeant Whitehill and Sergeant Buttel were exhumed and reburied in the Sage War Cemetery, Oldenburg, Germany (see head stone photo attached).

*(The author of this war service history of Flight Sergeant Whitehill visited his war grave in Sage in March 1984.)*

Research into this war service project commenced in 2008. The author acknowledges with thanks the many people and organisations who provided material to put this history together. None more than Colin Cripps Research Officer of the 49 Squadron Association. The late Alan Parr Secretary of that Association, also provided valuable guidance as did personnel from Australian War Museum and The National Archives. Other material was obtained by personal research and family papers now held by the author.





Above: Bf 110F-4a of III./NJG 1 with four nose-mounted FuG 202 *Lichtenstein* BC radar antennae, each with four dipoles and four reflectors used jointly for transmission and reception, flown by *Fw* 'Teddy' Kleinhenz and his *Bordfunker*, *Uffz* Hermann Gampe, from Leeuwarden, Holland, February – April 1942. (via Theo Boiten)



Above: Bf 110F of 7/NJG 1 at Trondheim, Norway, in February 1942. (Dr. Dieter Schmidt-Barbo)

Below: Bf 110Fs of 11/NJG 1 at Trondheim, Norway, in February 1942. (Anneliese Autenrieth)



In Munich 1942 41 RAF heavy bombers were shot down including 27 by II./NJG 2 with six of these being credited to *Oblt* Ludwig Becker, *Staffelkapitan*, 6./ image II (pictured) and four each by I. and III./NJG 1. Becker's victims were a Manchester and Wellington on 8/9 March, a Whitley on 12/13 March, another Manchester on 25/26 March and a Stirling on 28/29 March, which took his score to 18 confirmed victories (Rob de Viss-er)

# The 4T9er

## GATHERING 2022



As you all will be aware the last gathering/reunion was back in 2016.

As we look to the New Year we would like to canvass our membership for their views on a 49ers get together in 2022.

The Venue:

### **THE PETWOOD HOTEL**

Petwood Hotel is among the most memorable places to visit, dine or stay in the heart of 'Bomber County' Lincolnshire.

## **DAY 1**

Late afternoon: Guests meet for a short 'meet & greet' session so that everyone will get to know each other from the beginning of the gathering.

Early evening: 7.00pm: Meet in the bar for pre-dinner drinks.

Dinner: Two course dinner followed by coffee and a presentation charting the history of the 49 Squadron.

## **DAY 2**

Breakfast and checkout

Drive to Fiskerton Church for a short ceremony

Reconvene at the airfield memorial

A short talk on the 'Airfields of the 49 Squadron'

Buffet Lunch at the Fiskerton Village Hall

Guests Depart

Suggested date to avoid family holiday commitments - TARGET DATE first weekend in September.

We hope that you will feel able to support this event, an opportunity to meet again with old friends and make new ones.

Our ability to secure the best overnight stay/dinner/breakfast package with the Petwood Hotel will be dependent on the numbers indicating the support for this proposed event.

Please indicate your support to: [secretary@49squadron.co.uk](mailto:secretary@49squadron.co.uk)

## **WELCOME TO NEW CREW MEMBER – DOM HOWARD.**

For many years Dom introduced himself as the Unofficial Association Photographer. We are delighted to confirm that Dom has accepted the roll as The Official Association Photographer.

Dom joined the Association in 2008 together with his Mother Rosemary Howard attending their first reunion in 2009 where Alan Parr noted that Dom was taking many photos and asked if he would make them available to the Association.

Dom's connection to the Squadron is through his great Uncle Cyril T Anderson who joined the squadron in March 1943. Having completed two dickie trips and 5 Ops with Sgt Gumbley & Crew he was sent to 617 for Operation Chastise. Cyril returned to 49 Squadron after the Dams raid completing a further 15 ops before being lost on his 24<sup>th</sup> Op to Mannheim, shot down on the homeward leg by Ob/Lt Heinz Grimm.

We welcome Dom on board and having photographed most of the significant Association events over the last 13 years will no doubt have captured a treasure trove of memorable moments in the recent history of the Association.





## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **SHADOWS OF THE PAST**

By  
Paul Gaunt  
Part 10

Page 88—Twenty-second operation; Bombing Dortmund

15/16th April 1942.

To be continued in the next newsletter.

## **DONATIONS**

We have received very generous donations from the following people:-

Mr Ian Weatherley  
Mrs D Bryan  
Mr D Harrison  
Cll. Woolhead  
Mrs J Stephenson  
Mis R Slater  
Miss J Williams

I would like to thank everyone else who regularly donates to the Associations funds.

**Cheques to the Association should be made payable to;  
49SA PETWOOD**

**Internet Banking:  
Nat West Bank,  
49SA Petwood  
Account No. 18546889  
Sort Code: 52 21 00**

### **Chairman**

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‘The 4T9er’ is compiled & edited by Robert McEneaney  
Photographs by the editor unless credited otherwise.  
All enquiries to the Association Secretary.

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