

# The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine  
December 2022 Issue 62**



**Stuart Keay  
Chairman of the 49 Squadron Association  
Remembrance Weekend 2022**

## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

**Mr John Crabb**

#### **New Associate Member**

**Mr Andrew Kavanagh, Mr David Anderson, Mr Markus Buckley**

**Mr Richard Drakes, Ms Lesley Anderson & Ms Katja Bauer**

**Honorary Friend—Ms Lynnett Bennings**

## **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to this issue of the 49er. As we approach a New Year I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who continue to show their support for the Association by submitting articles for inclusion in our Newsletter.

It is with great sadness that I must record the sad passing of Centenarian John Crabb. You will recall we covered John's 100 birthday celebrations in a recent Newsletter.

As the Associate Membership (Relatives) continue to increase I would ask all those caring for our Veterans to please keep in touch. We are keen to know that our Veterans are keeping well and as in the case of Fred Hill and more recently Alf Ridpath we would like to ensure we cover all major birthday celebrations.

I was pleased to be visit Fred Hill with my wife Annette in September and attend his 101st birthday celebrations please see a separate article in this Newsletter covering our visit.

Finally and as always, a special thank you to all those who continue to make donations to the Association. We continue to receive tributes from outsiders on the quality of our website and service. We have one of the best teams working within the Association and I am most grateful to The Crew, whose names appear on the back cover, for their continued support and devotion to the Association and its aims.

## **Fred Hill 101st birthday celebrations.**



Fred Hill together with Annette and Robert McEneaney celebrating Fred's 101st birthday in Exeter.

We were delighted to be able to visit Fred in September to celebrate his 101st birthday. Following lunch it was a great pleasure to sit with Fred as he recalled his wartime experiences with the Squadron. Later that afternoon we attended the birthday celebrations organised by Deborah Skinner and her team at The Lodge.

Deborah paid tribute to Fred and thanked him for his kindness, good spirits and overall contribution to the community spirit within the care home.

On behalf of the Association I paid tribute to Fred for his service to our Country and his valued contribution to the Association .

**Fred Hill**  
**Prepared by Association Archivist Ed Norman.**

In August 2019, The Sidmouth Herald reported on four WW11 veterans who were honoured during their air display. One of those veterans now lives in an Exeter care home and recently celebrated his 101<sup>st</sup> birthday in October. Fred Hill is a tall, unassuming gentleman who flew in the Hampden bomber on thirty two missions during the first few years of the war with No. 49 Squadron followed by fifty five sorties in Mosquitos operating with No. 692 Squadron during 1944-45.



Former Flight Lieutenant Fred Hill flew Hampden and Mosquito planes during World War Two carrying out 87 missions.  
Picture: Clarissa Place with permission from The Sidmouth Herald

Having progressed through several flight training schools, Fred graduated as an 'above average' pilot; praise indeed from a service that classed almost everyone – no matter what their trade - as 'average.' In very early August 1941, he was posted to No. 49 Squadron, then based at R.A.F Scampton, just north of Lincoln, and almost immediately placed on operations as a second ( under training) pilot. It was usual to allocate new pilots to more experienced captains of aircraft and Fred served as second pilot while gaining experience in captaining an aircraft under battle conditions.

His first sortie was to Magdeburg in Germany under P/O Falconer for a trip that lasted nine hours and ten minutes in a cramped compartment in the nose of a Hampden bomber. Remember, I mentioned that Fred is a tall gentleman and was a bit 'wider' as a lad. He flew with eight experienced pilots, but

mainly as second pilot to Sgt Donald, completing his first twenty operations over occupied Europe on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1941. The RAF was the only service able to hold and strike back against Germany in the early, very dark years of the war and strikes against Cologne, Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg and other locations are in his logbook.

As January opened in 1942, Fred was solely engaged in 'circuits and bumps' and navigation exercise as captain of an aircraft. On 14<sup>th</sup> January 1942, he took command of his own crew and flew Hampden P1153 on a sortie to lay mines around the docks at Emden which they successfully completed. Near disaster struck four days later on Freds' second outing as pilot, when his starboard engine seized but the airscrew kept turning and ripped itself off. Yet despite his young age and inexperience, he kept a cool head and safely landed his aircraft. He received a Green Commendation in his logbook for his actions:



*'On the night of 18<sup>th</sup> January 1942, when flying Hampden AT111, Sgt Hill lost his starboard airscrew whilst descending through cloud on an operational flight. He landed his aircraft at Coningsby safely, this being a most creditable performance in view of his experience at that date.*

*Signed: W/Cdr Stubbs O/C No. 49 Squadron'*

Sgt McGrenery (w/op) Fred Hill (centre) Sgt Ralph (a/g)  
source: 49 Squadron collection

Sgt Hill completed thirteen more operations over Europe and became 'Tour Expired' i.e at least thirty operations completed and was posted out in April 1942 to 'rest' and to teach and pass on his flying experiences at No. 14 Operational Training Unit.

In August 1944, Fred, now a Flight Lieutenant rejoined operational Bomber Command with No.692 Squadron flying the 'Wooden Wonder' otherwise known as The Mosquito.



Fred with fellow  
Hampden wireless  
operator, the late Eric  
Clarke beside the  
memorial marking  
Fiskerton airfield 2013.



Fred Hill with Reg Woolgar  
2015  
49 Squadron collection

And by the end of March 1945, he and his navigator F/O Simpkin D.F.M would complete their second tours and win the accolade of being the first crew to complete the increased Mosquito tour of fifty five operations, visiting Berlin twenty one times within this tour. Fred had twice been Mentioned in Despatches and collected a rather overdue D.F.C. at this juncture of his R.A.F career.

The 49 Squadron Association first met Fred when he attended the reunion in June 2013 where he enjoyed exchanging experiences with F/Lt Eric Clarke, a former wireless operator on Hampden bombers, then a venerable 99 year old.

Fred returned to Lincoln for our 2014 reunion and for 2015, where he met with another Hampden wireless operator, Reg Woolgar, no doubt exchanging tall tales of past events and people with whom they flew. Fred recalled:

*“I was then posted into Transport Command for ferrying and instructing. I took demob when my number came up and trained as a teacher, took an external degree and spent the last twelve years of my career as head of a grammar school in Plymouth.”*

This article was requested by Deborah Skinner the Manager of Fred’s Care Home for inclusion in a magazine to be circulated shortly in the Exeter area.

Perhaps some of their readers may now recognise their old Headmaster.

## Alf Ridpath

Brave and funny' Liverpool man who has lived in same house for 75 years



The incredible life of Alf Ridpath who recently celebrated his 100th birthday

It's not every day you get to meet your heroes, but for many who attended Alf Ridpath's 100th birthday celebrations, that's exactly what happened.

For Liverpool born Wing Commander, Chrissy Ashton, it was the equivalent of a die-hard Liverpool fan "meeting Jurgen Klopp". Alfred Ridpath was born December 10, 1922, and has lived in the same house in West Derby since leaving the RAF in 1947.

However, now struggling with dementia and with no surviving family - his wife Joan died over 10-years ago and his only son, David, died last year - it would be easy for Alf's story to become lost. Except, his friends don't want that to happen.

As part of the Liverpool ECHO's How It Used To Be series, we spoke to Alf about his amazing life. And when Alf's recall of events faltered due to the effects of the cruel disease, some of his closest friends were there to fill in the missing pieces.

An accomplished artist, Alf joined the RAF at the beginning of World War II aged just 17; he was part of a Lancaster bomber crew flying operations over Germany and parts of Nazi occupied Europe. After the war, he bought a house in West Derby using the £100 he received on leaving the forces as a



deposit, and there he set up home with wife Joan and son David. We spoke to Alf at his surprise 100th birthday party on December 10, 2022, which had been organised at his favourite cafe, Maggie May's Community Cafe in West Derby. Asking Alf about signing up to such a dangerous role during the war, he told the ECHO:

"I never gave it any thought. It was who I was and what I was," adding: "I did what I had to do".

An encounter with a well-spoken flight commander in a "posh suit" shortly after signing up led to him being invited to train as part of a Lancaster bomber crew: "He asked me if I'd like to work for him and fly with him? So I said okay, fair enough."

Training as a wireless operator and air gunner as part of the crew, the perilous nature of Alf's role aboard the bomber can not be overstated. This was apparent in the quick and clear answer he gave when asked of his most enduring memory of his time serving during the war - "the horror".

His thoughts flitted to those of wartime friends lost and his life after the war with his family, where he worked at Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and as a steward at Anfield. But speaking to Alf, it's as if he still feels he is part of the forces - "I never left the army". Perhaps a trick of memory, but maybe the result of the intense wartime experiences that never left him, something his friend Roger Bedford spoke about.

Roger's dad, George Bedford, was an engineer and part of the same Lancaster bomber crew as Alf (49th and 83rd squadron). They remained great friends after the war, and despite George dying in 1993, Roger and Alf remained friends.

Speaking of the "unbreakable" friendship Alf and his dad had, Roger said: "Whenever you saw them together, whatever the number of years was before they last met, it was like just yesterday. They just talked about what they remembered.

"And he [Alf] would never talk about those things with many other people, it was only because he'd been in that same experience." Through his dad,

Roger had been a part of Alf's life since he was young.



Alf Ridpath (standing, right) with other Lancaster bomber crew members during World War Two (Image: Liverpool Echo)

He said: "Alf was a fantastic story teller, but he would put humour to gloss over the horror." Roger's voice begins to crack as he remembers the warmth Alf showed him over the years, just because he was his father's son. He added: "He's done well, if you consider there were certain raids he went on where he wouldn't think he might live another hundred minutes. "I've known him for so many years, and heard stories about him, heard stories from him. He's just a great man to come and see, and it's an achievement for a World War II bomber command veteran to live this long.

"Many of them didn't. If you look at the figures, over 55,000 casualties - they were lucky." Adding: "I think they're very brave."



Lancaster bomber 49th Squadron with Alf Ridpath (fourth from left)  
And crew (image: Paul Davis)

Many of the friends and neighbours who had packed Maggie May's to celebrate Alf's birthday, were there through the fantastic organisational skills of cafe owner, Maria Checkland. The day had a 1940s theme including a singer belting out some of his favourite songs from his youth. There was also an RAF cadet guard of honour lined up to greet the RAF vet as he arrived, accompanied by his round-the-clock carers. An impressive '40s style spread made up of many of Alf's favourite foods had also been laid on, enjoyed by the many guests and dignitaries, including forces veterans and Liverpool's Lord Lieutenant. Maria told the ECHO: "There's a beautiful community that's been built around the cafe, all different ages, all different walks of life.

"Alf and David had been coming here pretty much since I opened (five years ago). He's really chatty, always joking. You can always have some banter with him.

"He always says he loves coming here. He's eaten all around the world and says this is his favourite place. Whether it's true or not, I'll take it."

**Alf Ridpath surrounded by friends and well wishers during his 100th birthday celebrations at Maggie May's Community Cafe in West Derby (Image: Chrissy Ashton)**

The cafe that day was filled with photographs of Alf during the war, including a collection of impressive drawings he had made during those years. Asked what should happen to the photographs and sketches, Maria said: "I hope they go to the bomber command museum, I hope they go somewhere where they're going to be appreciated and people will see them. They're far too precious to go back into a draw or cupboard.

"His story definitely needs to be out there. Not many people have achieved what Alf's achieved."

Speaking about the military parade made up of young RAF cadets that greeted his arrival, Maria added: "They've actually met somebody who has lived through things all of us will only ever read about. When they saluted him, he saluted them back. I thought that was beautiful."



Article by kind permission of Lee Grimsditch—Liverpool Echo

## From the daughter of John Crabb.

Dear Robert,

I am the daughter of John Crabb and am writing to you to thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for the beautiful, amazing wreath you so very kindly sent me for my father's funeral. My husband, sons and I were absolutely stunned when it was delivered and seeing it brought joy on what was a very sad day. We put it at the back window of the hearse, so it could be clearly seen and then at the crematorium it was positioned looking up the aisle, again in clear view of everyone. To say it was a talking point would be an understatement!! It was a very fitting tribute to my father who survived 73 operations, 30 of which were as part of 49 squadron.

Then as if that wasn't enough, at the crematorium we were met by 3 members of 602 Glasgow Auxiliary Squadron, in full uniform with medals. My father would have been so honoured by their presence and by the wreath.

I cannot thank you enough for all that you have done to make his funeral so memorable for all who attended.

We would very much like to continue to receive the Association Newsletter

We would also like to provide a donation towards the cost of the wreath and it's postage and the cost of the newsletter, so could you please forward on the appropriate bank details.

Thank you once again Robert for arranging such a beautiful tribute-it was very much appreciated.

Kind regards,  
Lesley

**From Andrew Kavanagh , Royal Marine,** I am currently a serving member of the armed forces . I will be leaving the service next year completing 22 years service and would like to pay my respects to my great uncle P/O Bernard John Saville 170452 RAF. It will be my last opportunity to lay a wreath in his honour as it will be my last Remembrance parade in uniform.

The Association assisted with providing a wreath via the British Legion carrying the Squadron Crest and we await a photograph of the event for inclusion in our next Newsletter.

## **Letters to the Editor**

### **Eindhoven—Repatriation of Drakes personal effects From Researcher Colin Cripps.**

Just an update to a wonderful and memorable weekend meeting Lynnette and Jan Bennings, Richard and Cassien Drakes.

The Overloon Military Museum hosted our get together and segregated off the tableau in the Lancaster Pavilion to the recovered Lancaster NN775 from Belgium, where we met and discussed the chain of events that had occurred. The repatriation was also covered by a photographer from a national paper, who were alerted by Lynnette of the event and wanted to cover the story. The photographer will pass a link with photographs so that they can be downloaded in better quality, as soon as I get the link I will forward it to you. Needless to say this drew a crowd from the Museum visitors!

Lynnette presented Richard with the family Bible and King and Country commemorative certificate.

I had updated our Chambers database and gave Richard a copy of his Grandfathers Operations and Pilot Debriefs from the Squadron Operational Record Book. I also gave Richard details and a picture of the medals which were probably awarded to his Grandfather which included the Bomber Command Clasp.

Richard would like to apply for replacement medals that were awarded, I will assist him with the appropriate forms. I still have to check with RAF Innsworth Medals Office, as it is beyond belief that David Drakes flew on 48 Operations, including being shot down and returning to duty, and was not awarded any other medal. The London Gazette only shows his two promotions!

I ask of the 49 Squadron Association, that Richard is allowed to become an Associate Member as he had a relative that served with the Squadron, and that Lynnette is allowed to become an Honorary Friend for her caring perseverance and diligence in the repatriation of the effects and coordinating the meeting at the Museum.

Kind regards  
Colin



## Letters to the Editor

Phil "Griff" Griffiths

Dear Robert,

This article is a summary of my impressions on the aftermath of Nuremberg plus a few facts about Bomber Command.

This follows up something I wrote about Bomber Command's two blackest days – the Berlin Raid, 16 Dec 43 (70 lost), and Nuremberg, 30 March 44 (96 lost). My description of these two raids was published in the Feb. 20, 2020, issue, #56 of the 4T9er. I did send an aftermath write up with the original, but I guess it was lost with the organization change.

As I used to tell Alan, if you use this write up, feel free to edit as you wish – this worked out very well for us.

I am at this time, a young 99 years old! I must be one of the few remaining survivors of the "big city" and Ruhr battles – I did 7 to Berlin!

I do look forward to receiving the 4T9er as it is my last contact with the air force and England.

*Greetings Robert,*

*I am Phil's "Griff's" daughter-in-law, Judy, and I have typed and am sending the attached article to you at his request. If you have any questions about the article, please let me know by return email and I can connect with Griff. We look forward to seeing it in the next edition of the 4T9er.*

*Thanks for your help, and warm regards,*

*Judy*

## **Aftermath after Nuremburg**

### **By Phil “Griff” Griffiths**

All aircrew at the debriefing following the March 1944 Nuremburg raid reported seeing bomber after bomber going down in flames, blowing up or spiraling down out of control. The debriefing officers were skeptical of our reports of so many downed aircraft as it was way in excess of the usual number. They put it down to exhaustion and stress after a very long mission. The following day proved our reports were accurate and in fact even we were horrified at the extent.

The shocking news of the losses was released the following day and the news spread quickly around the squadrons that 96 of our heavy bombers and their gallant crews had been lost on the raid itself, plus 10 crashed on landing and 36 suffered damage from fighters and AA fire. This was the greatest lost ever experienced by any bomber force.

That day, when the full extent of the losses was generally known, a strange “stillness” pervaded the air at the 49 Squadron Fiskerton. I believe that Nuremburg signaled the end of our age of innocence, nothing was quite the same afterward. I do believe we looked deeper into ourselves and our fellow fliers, there was more kindness and appreciation of one another and the realities of life. I was even nice to a gentleman who had the annoying habit of constantly whistling tirelessly through his teeth!!

I also knew that the “it can’t happen to me” feeling was dispelled, and we were introduced to the intimate reality of fear. We each had felt that we were almost invincible, “a thousand shall fall on your right and five thousand on your left but no harm shall become thee”.

As an extreme example of the altered feelings toward us, my good pal Jimmy Bartle (a fellow Yorkshireman who flew with one of the Eric Jones’s) and I went for a pint or so at the “Travelers” in the village and the landlord actually treated us to a pint each – a very rare gesture!

On our next mission we climbed into our J-JIG folly serious – with none of our normal sense of adventure and anticipation at all – we were super alert and, on our toes, every second of the mission.

It was very noticeable that on the mission following Nuremburg we taxied up to the take off point at the head of the runway where we paused before take off, there was the usual gathering of officials and off duty personnel to wave us off, except the group was many times greater than usual. It seemed like everyone off duty had gathered to wave and wish us the best of luck. We really appreciated their gestures as we gave the mighty merlins their full power and lumbered off down the runway to a hostile world. This gathering of well wishers continued at a high level at least to the end of my tour of operations.

Yes, Nuremburg changed our lives in so many ways – the price in aircrew was devastating but the effect on their families and sweethearts must have been heartbreaking and would continue for many years.

In this day and age and looking back over the years, it's getting harder to realize that over the war years, some 65,000 fine young men in the prime of their lives, were lost in their doomed planes.

### **Just a Few Facts Related to Nuremburg and Bomber Command in General:**

A well-known historian called Nuremburg the “greatest air battle of all time”. In most opinions he lied – it wasn't a battle it was sheer slaughter.

There were three classified “Battles of the Air”: Berlin; the Ruhr; and Hamberg

#6 Group had a number of rare Lancasters with radial engines and a belly gun position the “Schrage Music” fighters must have had a shock when the belly gunners opened up on them. In fact, 10 enemy fighters were shot down on the “long leg”.

To my knowledge, no one had received a warning regarding the night fighters equipped with the “Schrage Music”, probably because no one had previously survived the attacks or perhaps had been POWs.

Note to recap a little bit on the “Schrage Music” weapon – their fighters were equipped with a deadly new weapon – 2 x 20mm

or 2 x 30 mm cannon were mounted on top of the fuselage facing upwards and forward with the gun sight in the cockpit. It was designed for the fighters to come under the bombers blind spot and fire into the wing between the two engines, thus piercing the fuel tanks. The Tracer shells then started a fire that quickly spread, eventually reaching the bomb bay and blowing up the bomber. The lapse in time for the flames to reach the bomb bay gave the fighters time to get away unscathed. The Luftwaffe called it the “Schrage Music” which we called the “Slanting Music” (black humour!). This weapon was so accurate an ME110 pilot landed at his base to refuel and rearm, and the armourer advised him he only needed 57 shells and the pilot had shot down 3 Lancasters!

Oberleutnant Martin Becker flying an ME110 equipped with “Slanting Music” was credited with shooting down 7 Lancasters on that Nuremburg night.

In 103 Squadron no crew had survived the required 30 missions for 7 months!

101 Squadron based at Ludford Magna lost 7 of the 20 dispatched – one of the crews lost were on their 29<sup>th</sup> operation!

One miner was killed and one injured when a Halifax ran out of fuel and crashed into the yard of a local coal mine near Rythorpe, Yorkshire.

4 Group had the highest percentage of losses, some 17 percent.

Aircraft which crashed in England following a raid were not included in Bomber Command’s official loss figures. It has been estimated that these occasions would have added some three percent to the loss figures.

51 Squadron at Snaith had 5 missing out of 17 dispatched plus two crashed on landing.

It has been said that the only thing Nuremburg achieved was to raise the moral of the Third Reich.

The pathfinders of 8 Group did not have a very successful night – Schweinfurt had been erroneously masked and markers were spread widely over the target and these soon disappeared quickly through the clouds.

Squadron Leader “Turkey” Laird DFC, a very experienced Canadian pilot of 427 Squadron (known as the “Lion” Squadron) based at Leeming, Yorkshire, was advised by his navigator to make a course alteration to port – in doing so, his Halifax collided with a Lancaster from 622 Squadron. Both aircraft were fatally damaged and crashed in Belgium. Only John Moffat, the rear gunner in the Halifax survived the crash. They were about 40 miles off course after a return leg of close to 300 miles. These two losses were really tough luck as it’s such a big sky! Flying Officer “Red” Socker was on his 30<sup>th</sup> operation.

W.O. John Merrit in the Lancaster had been married to a Hampshire girl just 10 days previously.

By a coincidence, the navigators of both aircraft were from the same town of Saskatoon (Western Canada).

The “long leg” accounted for approximately one heavy bomber shot down every 2 ½ miles – a deadly trail across Germany.

The average number of missions for a crew before becoming a statistic was just 10 at the time of the Battle of Berlin (the big city) and Happy Valley.

Some 10,000 air crew were made prisoners of war during WWII

Two Lancasters out of the 16 dispatched by 49 Squadron were missing and two landed badly damaged. One of the crews lost (pilot PO Leslie Killear) was on their first mission and sadly the only survivor of the two missing aircraft was Sgt. McAvoy, a mid upper gunner whose face was terribly burned and suffered through many operations for his injuries. The other crew, that of

F.O. Calhoun were on their 6<sup>th</sup> mission – 3 of this crew were made POWs, two were never found and two were killed.

The accuracy of our bombers on target was often mentioned whereas we suffered deadly accuracy from the German bombers – they used a device called the X-Gerant Beam to guide their bombers to the target – they were able to take the centre out of any city they attacked – for example, Coventry. Their system of accurate bombing was at least two years ahead of anything we had. We were still attempting to pinpoint targets using dead reckoning navigation – which included the attempted use of a sextant through a vibrating Astro dome! One of our “advanced” systems was useless after the enemy coast as it was hopelessly jammed – another required considerable concentration and interpretation and was rumoured to act as a beacon for German radar! We may have improved later but not on my watch!

I lost three of my old pals that night. We had been together throughout our training and had cemented our friendship with many a pint at various fine pubs (we had been posted to different squadrons). All three have no known grave but are remembered at the magnificent RAF memorial at Runnymede (which is dedicated to those with no known grave). I visited Runnymede with three of my old crew some years ago. I had many memories of my pals as I placed my palm over their names permanently carved on this soaring edifice.

The most tragic loss ever of the 49<sup>th</sup> Squadron was the raid on Wesseling on 21st June 1944 (just below the Ruhr, 15 miles south of Cologne). W/C Crocker who gave the briefing, announced he would be flying the mission – on this flight he had an observer from the BBC aboard. Just 130 Lancs from 5 group made the raid (20 from 49<sup>th</sup> Squadron). At the after raid briefing all crews reported intense fighter activity and reported many bombers going down in flames. When the losses were tallied in included no less than 6 aircraft from 49 Squadron, the other squadrons did not get away lightly:

49<sup>th</sup> Squadron lost 6 out of 20

44<sup>th</sup> Squadron lost 6

619<sup>th</sup> lost 6



557<sup>th</sup> lost 6

207<sup>th</sup> lost 7

630<sup>th</sup> lost 5

It amounted to the loss of 28% of the attacking force. W/C Crocker and his crew perished along with Kent Stephenson observer of the BBC (he picked one hell of a night to fly!)

An Australian pilot P.O. Bomly of 429<sup>th</sup> Squadron was asked that morning to act as a pall bearer for a fellow countryman who had been killed in a Wellington on a training flight. He did his duty and returned to his squadron in time for the Nuremburg raid. Unfortunately, he didn't return and no doubt joined his fellow countryman in the "great beyond"!

**AVAILABLE SOON**

**49 Squadron**

**By Chris Ward**

The latest in his series of squadron profiles

Published by Mention The War Publications

And will be available from Bomber Command Books

And Amazon

## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY WEEKEND 2022

### CENOTAPH LONDON

In her 70 years of duty at the Cenotaph , or so the story goes, the late Queen Elizabeth II did not feel a drop of rain.

As the new King honoured the nation's war dead for the first time in his own right, his mother's good fortune held out.

Under cloudy but dry skies over London, the next generation of the Royal Family undertook their most solemn of duties seamlessly, just as the late Queen would have wanted and just as she prepared. As the King laid a wreath signed Charles R, and thousands upon thousands of military veterans streamed past, it seemed at once as if both everything and nothing had changed.

New was the thoughtful rendition of God Save the King, sung by the crowds who seemed to already be used to the lyrics of the Carolean era. But for those present, it was continuity in the face of change that provided the comfort.

### FISKERTON, LINCOLNSHIRE

As in previous years members of The Association gathered in Lincolnshire for Remembrance Sunday Weekend.

The Crew together with members of the Association met at the Bentley Hotel on the Saturday afternoon.

That evening we were treated to a presentation by our Webmaster Malcolm Brooke . ***The DDR Revisited—A maze of Military History.***

The presentation covered the journey undertaken by May and Malcolm who travelled almost 5,000km in 38 days exploring the former East Germany. The presentation recorded a wide range of locations, several having a direct connection to 49 Squadron..

The event was thoroughly enjoyed by all those in attendance and our thanks to May and Malcolm for the most interest presentation.

The group then enjoyed a relaxing dinner together with the overall attendance numbering 25 with conversation drifting into the late evening.

Also present at our gathering was artist Simon Attack who was commissioned by Colin Cripps to undertake a painting honouring Colin's uncles crew and the story is covered in a separate section in this Newsletter. Simon went on to tell us that he served in the RAF and when his commanding officer saw his sketches of groundcrews getting RAF and Royal Navy Harriers ready for combat sortie over the Falklands, he was asked to make further drawings for the Squadron messes and offices. As a serving military artist the RAF gave him access to aircraft and aircrew on operational duty that other artists could only dream of.

### **Sunday morning Service at St Clement of Rome Church, Fiskerton.**

The main centre of the 49 SA Remembrance took place at Fiskerton where 49ers, villagers and the 5th Lincoln Scout Group attended a service at St Clement of Rome Church.

Prior to the commencement of the service Rev Penny Green kindly accepted the position of 49 Squadron Association Padre. Colin Cripps and Dom Howard presented a Squadron Padre badge to Rev Penny Green.

The Padre Badge was kindly donated by Colin & Dom.



The Sunday morning service was very well attended and we again enjoyed a very thought provoking sermon by Rev Penny Green. As always on the day of remembrance those from the Village who had fallen in both wars had their names read out .

During the service our Roll of Honour, recording the 906 aircrew who lost their lives in WW2, was placed on the alter as the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop presented their standards to Rev Penny.

The reading during the service was delivered by Mrs Barbara Parr. The Association Researcher Colin Cripps laid a wreath at the 49 Squadron memorial within the church where a minute's silence was observed.



Barbara Parr reading the lesson on Remembrance Sunday

The Scouts making a tribute avenue for the 49 Squadron Association Chairman Stuart Keay together with Rev Penny and other dignitaries .

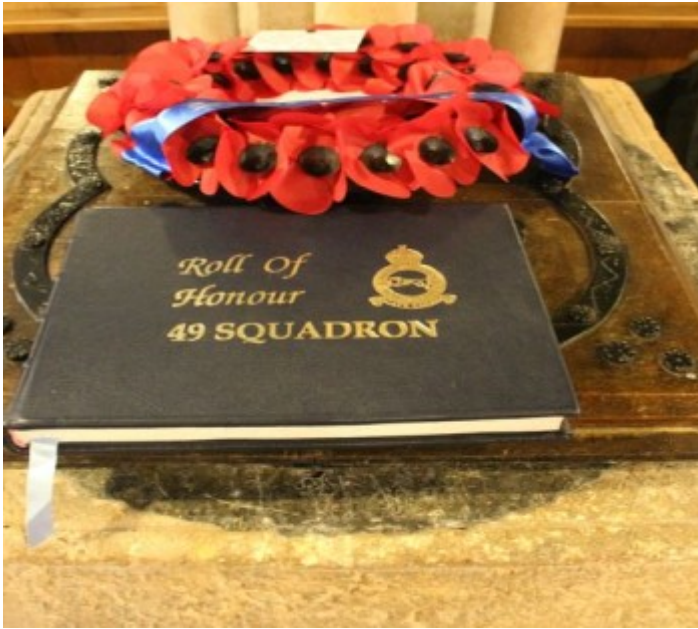




Rev. Penny Green with  
Association Chairman  
Stuart Keay

The 49 Squadron Memorial at Fiskerton Airfield following the wreath laying ceremony





Picture above:  
Roll of Honour  
At Fiskerton Church.

Opp: Robert McEneaney  
Secretary carrying the  
Roll of Honour up to the  
alter of Fiskerton church.



**Fulbeck Memorial Remembrance  
Sunday 13th November 2022**



Carol Hare lays a wreath on behalf of the Association at recently restored Fulbeck Memorial. The work to restore the crests on the memorial stone funded by the Association and Fulbeck Parish Council.

Carol who recently sadly lost her husband Peter has continued with the general maintenance of the memorial.

## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY WEEKEND 2022

### BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL, GREEN PARK, LONDON.



The 49ers were well represented at the relatives Remembrance Service held at the Bomber Command Memorial, Green Park.

As is customary a large crowd of Bomber Command relatives gather at the memorial to lay wreaths on behalf of Squadron Associations and to remember individual relatives by placing a Cross of Remembrance.

The 49 Squadron Association were represented by members of the Hoole & McEneaney families whose great uncles served together with the Squadron .

Also remembered were our most recently departed veterans John Crabb, Sydney James Richards. Finally a Cross of Remembrance was placed at the foot of the memorial on behalf of Chris Beare in honour of her uncle, Dennis Blumfield.

Notice to all Association Members who may not be able to attend a Remembrance Sunday Service and would like a relative remembered please let us know at the Association. We place our order with the British Legion during the summer months for the wreaths placed at the various memorial sites mentioned in this Newsletter.

The British Legion provide us with a Cross of Remembrance for the sum of £2.70 and we are happy to inscribe it with the name of your relative and place it at the Memorial in Green Park if it helps. A small donation to the Association covering the Cross is all we ask.

### **National Memorial Arboretum**



A wreath was kindly placed at the Squadron Memorial at the National Arboretum by Barbara Parr honouring all those who served and died serving with the 49 Squadron.



Photo received from Marilyn Nissen with a cross of remembrance placed at the grave of Bob Slaughter uncle of the late Alan Parr.

## Photos covering the Remembrance Weekend 2022



A very informative presentation by Malcolm Brooke where together with his wife May travelled the entire length of the former German border and visited many interesting locations..... Three of the many highlights must be Peenemunde, Dresden and Colditz.

## Evening meal with members of the Association



A plaque honouring the service of Alan Parr, unveiled last year by Barbara Parr and family now in placed in the 49ers bar at Fiskerton Village Hall.



Colin Cripps together with Simon Attack presenting a framed print of ED 584 to the Committee at Fiskerton Village Hall.

The framed print will now form the centre piece in the 49ers bar at Fiskerton Village Hall.



Robert thanking Ann Chesman and her team of helpers for the wonderful lunch.

Also included were the Fiskerton Church Committee and we are most grateful to Mary Stuffs and her son Karl. Mary's husband Geoff kindly donated the ground for our memorial and is presently maintained by Karl.



49ers enjoying lunch.

**Colin Cripps (Researcher)**

**presented with the picture of ED584**

**painted by Simon Attack**

After 24 years researching the loss of my Uncles aircraft and Crew, Lancaster ED584, I have decided to close the book unless any further information arises. What could I do as a fitting tribute for the closure, I decided to have a painting commissioned in their honour.

Recently I had seen works by Simon Attack, and approached him with the offer to which he jumped at immediately. Within 20 minutes he had visualised the finished painting and we both agreed its title.

My Uncle and Crew were posted into 49 Squadron at RAF Fiskerton from 1654HCU RAF Wigsley, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 1943. Their first Op was on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June to Düsseldorf, returning on the 12<sup>th</sup> the Rear Gunner fired at a twin engined aircraft submitting a report as an action. That night, the 12<sup>th</sup>, they flew their second Op to Bochum.

Returning from Bochum they inadvertently flew over Almelo and were subjected to a heavy calibre Flak barrage. The barrage set the starboard wing on fire between the two engines and disabled the starboard outer engine causing a list and loss of altitude. Such was the ferocity of the attack, the Flak Unit claimed a 'kill' Thirty five miles further on they approached the village of Marienheem.

Alerted by the Flak Units actions and fire, they were detected by a German night fighter.

Flying a Me110 G-4 was Leutnant August Geiger and Fw Dieter Koch, an "Experte" with 28 kills to his name.

From eye witness reports; Geiger attacked from the rear, slightly above and to port, firing with heavy cannon. Destroying the rear turret he sustained the firing along to the mid upper turret and breaking off at the cockpit. ED584

immediately banked to starboard in a curve and lost altitude, with Geiger still firing. One witness stating “He looked like he was pushing the bomber into the ground”. Because of the low altitude, ED584 “pancaked” heavily.

All seven Crew were killed, such was the carnage inflicted that the Pilot and Mid Upper Gunner were never identified or found. It is believed that their remains were placed with the Flight Engineer, a photo of his grave with a white cross bears their three names. However, post war this could not be confirmed(?) and as such only the F/E’s CWGC stone just bears his name. The five other Crew are buried nearby at Raalte, Pilot and MUG at Runnymede.

This painting is not only a tribute to the Crew of ED584, but to the almost 58,000 Bomber Command Air Crew missing or killed who “Never Came Home”



Colin Cripps with ED584 by Simon Attack



Further extracts from Paul Gaunt's tribute to his father, reproduced here with his kind permission.

## **SHADOWS OF THE PAST**

### **BY Paul Gaunt**

#### **Chapter Six**

Flight Sergeant Bob Foster Rear Gunner (Who Flew With Tubby Once) As war broke out, Bob was attending Riverdale Collegiate in Toronto. In 1942 he left school; all he wanted to do was to emulate his father, who was a First World War pilot. He was disappointed when he applied at the recruiting office: he was rejected and offered air gunnery course. Bob was not a happy man and objected, but was subsequently told he would have a ground trade if he did not accept gunnery.

Reluctantly Bob accepted, and was soon at MontJoli - home of No 9 Bombing and Gunnery School. He arrived in the autumn of 1943, the school being the largest of 10 B&G schools, having 1,000 staff and 600 students. Nearly all had turrets for air -to-air firing (the targets were drogues towed by other Battles and Nomads).

The course was only six weeks ground school and six weeks of air firing. Bob had a close friend who was tragically killed in a mid-air collision on the last morning of his air schooling. Bob went on to finish first in his class (winning the Skeet shooting trophy). He received his air gunner's beret on November 11th 1943; they were presented to him by his father, Lieutenant Harry J Foster.

Foster was soon on his way to England and to No 26 OTU at Winey, Buckinghamshire. He did a few operations dropping Nickels and during one trip to Paris was astounded when his Wimpey was pummeled by flak; he never thought anyone would actually shoot at him! After a short period in India, Foster was posted to 142 Squadron at Cerignola for a few days, only to be posted to 37 Squadron, where he met Tubby. Soon on operations, Foster would sometimes be spare bod (front or rear gunner )mainly to build up his experience and confidence – when a spare bod was required by a crew, it was totally on a volunteer basis.



*Sgt Bob Foster (left) with his father, Canada, 1943, who was the Station Commander & presented Bob with his A/G brevet.*



*Bob Foster (2nd left, top) with Sgt Duncan & other aircrew in London, 1944.*



*Bob Foster & an u/k aircrew, Tortorella olive grove, 1944.*



*The grave of Sgt Duncan, Bob's pilot, Bari, Italy, November 15th, 1945.*



*The now late Bob Foster (2nd right) with his fellow barber shop singers, 1996.*

On November 25th, a couple of weeks after flying as a rear gunner for Tubby, Foster was flying with his regular crew on a raid with two other Wimpeys. Coming home he realised the pilot was having difficulty controlling the aircraft. A Mosquito came up from behind and signaled that he wanted to 'play a bit'. Foster signaled negative, they were in trouble. The Mosquito escorted them back to Tortorella, where on landing the Wimpey pitched up, crashed and exploded. Foster was still alive and tried to escape through the fuselage, but the heat and flames beat him back. Closing his hatch he started to drift into euphoria, flames all around he screamed for help. Outside the whole area was an inferno, the aircraft had blown up in the dispersal area, other aircraft were burning and explosions were numerous. Two ground crew who had fled to the trenches heard Foster and ran across to drag him through a small panel in the turret. Although badly burned and with a damaged leg, Foster would be healed within a few months. His four crewmen were all killed in the crash and are buried in the commonwealth war graves at Bari, Southern Italy.

Foster later met his rescuers, who joked that it was because they were tired of his screams that they pulled him free. The two airmen were: 14433911 CPL Smith ARMOR 37 SQDN 1417240 and LAC Williams FMA 37 SQDN Both the ground crew involved were commended for their action. Footnote: - I had the pleasure of meeting the sadly now late Bob Foster in October 1992, in To-

ronto, where he ran a very successful automobile dealership with his son. His location in Scarborough, Toronto, is famed for the large RCAF ensign, which flies over the building. Bob was, like me, pleased that we had met and on my return to England he presented me with the book, The Royal Canadian Air Force at War 1939-45. He said that he wanted to write something in remembrance of my late father, "he thought something flowery , no", Tubby was not a flowery person, so he wrote, "In remembrance of a true gentleman of the air force, a professional and a friend, Philip Henry Tubby Gaunt. Bob Foster ex-Air Gunner 37 Sqn 2.10.92".

Tubby Gaunt & Crew  
by

Dave Scanlan, Sergeant Navigator

Quastina, No 77 OTU, Palestine.

I have not many memories of training at Quastina; we were a very efficient crew and a happy crew at that. I made many friendships among other navigators. We were very much Tubby Gaunt's crew and we went about together. One weekend, with a two-day pass, we went to Tel Aviv for a couple of days enjoyment. At Quastina, our crew stayed in the same hut and if we had no money , we would pass the time playing cards and cribbage, no bets though. I usually partnered your father (Tubby) .

'Geordie' (Sergeant Hazeldin)

He was an ex-army truck driver in North Africa and came over to the RAF as an air gunner, taking a six-week course as rear gunner. Geordie was a salt-of-the-earth rough diamond; he helped to keep the crew alive and would scrounge food from 'who knows where' on a continual basis (we didn't ask where). Dave, Scats, and Mac were 21 years old: Tubby was much older, in actual affect he was 27 in 1944. Geordie was 23. Dave actually thought Tubby was about 30ish. Tubby never said a harsh word about anyone and to my mind was a very agreeable person.

Foggia

When we arrived at Foggia, we had two kit bags, one held flying kit helmet and mask and the other our Khaki wet weather uniform, shorts, shirts, etc. Arriving at Foggia 17-10-44, Tortorella, food was awful. An NCO met us at Tortorella; he gave us two scratchy, itchy blankets and a palliasse, this being a material type mattress that had to be filled with straw . He took us to the barn

and told us what to do. We were then told to go and find a tent and that one person went in one, and two in another, this was the first time our crew was split up. After searching for some time, looking in tent after tent and being told to 'sod off', I eventually walked into one that had a vacancy and announced that my name was Jock and proceeded to settle in, whether they liked it or not. I was very despondent and conditions were just 'awful'. On May 7th 1943, my brother died in a flying accident near Birmingham. I was very upset and despondent and was concerned about my performance as a navigator. I was not a gung ho type and the conditions were rotten, but accepted the situation. Tubby made friends with the Americans on the other side of the airfield. The runway was pierced steel planking which interlocked together, the mud just oozed through and when we got a lift, the truck frequently got stuck and we had to push it out, 16 of us at a time.

At meal times, we had two rounds of bread; the other food was just terrible. The Sgts. Mess had so much scotch whisky and this was traded to the Americans for two trays of doughnuts per day, we were allowed two or three doughnuts each per day, also once a day we were allowed a slice of what one can only described as cake. Quite a different consistency, like a solid ginger cake; this, the doughnuts and tea kept us alive. One lunchtime I met a young pilot on his way to lunch. He asked me what we were having to eat. Potatoes I said, usual mush - this turned him off and he turned and walked back to his tent. It bothered me the way this state of affairs was allowed to persist, that this pilot and probably most pilots would be on operations that evening and would not have a proper meal inside them. The Americans across the airfield ate the most delightful meals, three times a day, every day, perhaps Tubby's fraternising with them had another reason. When we were invited to the P.X. American NAAFI, we filled our stomachs with as much food as was possible and took back all we could reasonably carry. Tubby one day was given a jeep to take us back to our tents, this we kept for some time. Tubby was quite a driver. We skidded the jeep so accurately within 3 inches of our tent. We went over to the PX three times a week. Tubby fell in with the American Ground Crew. Their tent was dug in the ground, with proper bunks, switch lights, and radios. The British Commonwealth Air Crew thought the Americans were spoilt, but I blamed the British Government for our very poor food and living conditions; how we operated so professionally with our poor back up at base amazes me.

### 'Tubby'

Asking Dave for his reactions to my father as a leader (skipper), his reply was, 'Just a super guy; put a white beard and a red suit on him and he would be just perfect as Santa Clause'. 9½ hours at Grading School told me I would not be a good pilot as I had a nervous disposition. Tubby was just coolness personified

- today's American 'Mr Cool'.

### Crash-landing

13,000 feet, stalled, pulled out at 8000 feet. Keep stalling speed by keeping nose up slightly. This lasted for 10-15 minutes, safety height 10,000 feet, losing height all the time. In cloud - mountains, 6,000 feet, should bail out. I suggested this; Tubby said we would stick together, as it was, this turned out for the best. We continued to fall due to the ice - 7,500 feet - 7,000 feet - 6,500 feet - 6,000 feet - 5,000 feet - 4,500 feet - 3,800 feet - altimeter last reading. Someone up front called out "ground below",

almost instantly Tubby put the nose down. Frank, the rear gunner, said land on both sides, we were flying down a valley - broke clear of cloud, south, south east, the mountains were 5,500 feet. Pilots were supposed to be strapped into their seats,

unfortunately Tubby was not. After we stalled and pulled out, he dare not let go of the controls to buckle up, so he had to do without his safety belt. Despite a perfect wheels up belly landing, Tubby was thrown forward into the windshield and badly bruised and cut his forehead. The next day, I went back to the stricken aircraft and sure enough, a panel in the screen was broken and pushed out. I put my hand through the hole where Tubby's forehead had hit it; fortunately he had no serious injury. I smashed the Gee box green radar tube as much as possible, although I thought the Germans by now would be well acquainted with this piece of equipment. We spent a couple of days in Gerovo before moving off in a south easterly direction. I remember the partisans being dressed in British battledress and greatcoats with their green forage caps and red star. No doubt the uniforms were taken from the stricken Wellington's containers.

### Bombing Runs

Scats had said that Tubby did not like going over the target a second time, although on more than three or four low level operations we had to go round three or four times dropping two or three bombs at a time on various targets on the mountain roads. On one operation, with Flight Lieutenant Cooke present in the aircraft, he asked that each time we went round on a bombing run to go lower and lower, to obtain more accurate results and bring the front and rear guns to accurate fire against the retreating Germans. The low level bombing raids were against motor transport and troop concentrations on the mountain, in target areas such as Stenica Priboj — Visegrad Prijipoli - Bugojno and Uzice town. Sometimes three squadrons would be on such operations; the overall effect was devastating, causing immense damage to motor transport and death and injury to German infantry. These raids were organised with the help of the Partisans on the ground. Nickels were dropped during each of these

raids.

### Nickels - Leaflets

These were full of information for the civilians, not to join or help the Germans. Dave went on to say that the Tito Partisans were told that all the supply and bombing raids were being carried out by Russian aircraft and such was the level of education (could not read), they firmly believed this, the majority of supplies were dropped by the British, using Halifax and Wellington aircraft. They would not know a British aircraft from a Russian one. This was possibly some of the first communist propaganda.

### Gerovo

Soon after we crash landed, we were met by the locals and partisans in uniform, who treated us very well, sharing with us both warmth and shelter and what food they could. At one of our brief two - three day stops, we met a British officer in charge of the local mission, Captain Harrison, whom we visited each day for information and some supplies. Food was scarce, cigarettes were more abundant and although we did not all smoke, we said we did and would obtain cigarettes for bartering purposes, to obtain food, if any, from the locals. The purpose of these missions was to work with the partisans, obtaining information on the organisation and coordination for supply drops and best military targets, such as the low level bombing and strafing operations against the retreating Germans.

### Slunj – Zadar

The mission at Slunj - the officer offered us money for anything personal or not, that we had lost, sold or bartered during and after the crash for food. Tubby was the only one to obtain payment for his silver cigarette case he had exchanged for food, a payment of £10 - we let him off lightly. The last three nights were spent at a house, which was occupied by a grandmother, daughter and almond faced children - boy of 12, girl of 1 and a baby. Coarse grain maize corn was ground and made into porridge (polenta) or finely ground for bread making. An unpleasant memory was the bad habit everyone had of spitting. They all spat, mother, daughter, even the baby spat on his mattress on the floor. I used that as an educational purpose how human nature habits can be passed on (after the war Dave became a teacher in Canada). The Partisan with us at the time had been shot in the ankle and although he was in pain, he never complained. I enjoyed borrowing their skis and made one or two runs down the hills. The timber they cut was very neatly stacked and in varying sections, to dry and use in the stoves. Slunj No British mission, no cigarettes, but there were sticks of tobacco that were sliced off with a razor

- rolled in newspaper/magazine paper.

DRAVO - Good day, Good morning, Good evening. PADOBRAN was the Croatian name for parachute. The crew took their parachutes with them, as they were much sort after. A segment of parachute could be exchanged for almost anything and as food was the priority, most, if not all, the chutes were exchanged and some for cigarettes, or for a night's rest – these good people would have been shot had the Germans found out. The villages and towns we went through would have plenty of apples or nuts, but not both. Some villages, although less than 7 miles apart, would only have what they grew. Transport between them was none existent, food did not move about. The locals would live almost only on one or the other, they either grew it, had it, or nothing at all. While at Slunj, we managed to buy a chicken, which was wonderful, and we made sure some was left for a second day. Upon going to prepare what was left, we found just a carcass, someone, we think the cook, had enjoyed some pickings. Whilst at Slunj we were joined by an American liberator crew who had force-landed due to fuel shortage and they were to be taken with us on to Koronica, where lorries would take us down to Zada.

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### February 9th recalled getting back to Foggia.

#### Foggia Tortorello

Our washing would be done by locals for five cigarettes a week. We were a happy lot - in the Sergeants' Mess we would drink the local wine and listen to Foggia radio. We made our own radios by using razorblades and use our own flying helmet headsets. We played soccer and the Squadron's CO, Wing Commander Langham, was a pleasant boss - he even let me borrow his football boots on one occasion!

#### Operations

On the low level attacks on the German infantry, Flight Lieutenant Cooke had us attacking from about 500 - 600 feet, with both front and rear gunners



belting away at the troop concentrations on the roads below , causing catastrophic damage and death. Tubby and Cooke were so calm and matter-of-fact. The danger situation just did not become a factor in the very professional way in which attack after attack was carried out. Compared with a tour over Germany, with heavy anti-aircraft fire and fighters attacking to Tubby and Cooke, this was a piece of cake/stroll in the park.

### Korenica – Captain Harrison

Miro injured foot (shot). The two young Dutch lads (press-ganged into German navy). Tubby led by appearing not to lead. If there was a problem he would suggest ways of overcoming the difficulty. Tubby was like a captain and centre-half of a football team. Tubby was well above average, he led by suggesting ways of overcoming a problem, he was not a bossy person and he was able to overcome problems before they happened.

### Naples – Potechì

Transportation of goods/food was rare during wartime and between small villages, was non-existent. Foggia - Cigarettes 50 free, others were duty free.

### Dave Scanlan Remembers

How did you feel when you were looking back? Well; I felt generally fine, I enjoyed it, I think. I am no storybook hero. I must admit, I didn't like the low level troop attacks, I just hated them. ACK, ACK was very frightening. Some said ACK ACK was more frightening at night rather than day, but I thought otherwise. At night, tiny fireworks flaring up and disappearing during the day, ACK ACK would explode and leave patches of smoke and to fly through these recently exploded shells was very (intimidating) frightening. On the ground in Yugoslavia I felt fine, in the air I was not as comfortable. I took my boots off in the tent and not entirely in jest; I said these used to be my flying boots! When we walked through the enemy lines, I thought, would the Germans attack us if we were discovered, or would they be content to keep their heads down, not wanting to attack an unknown number of armed partisans, remembering that they were the retreating, beaten army. Just hoping to get through Yugoslavia and nearer to home, as safely as possible, capture meant certain death unless you were a fairly high-ranking officer who could be exchanged for partisan prisoners. I was not particularly afraid while passing through the German lines, but was relieved when our courier said we could walk slower and relax a little, as the main danger was passed. I was an amateur footballer before the war in civvy street and would sometimes play the game all day and back at the Squadron I played when I could, so physical-

ly I was very fit and able to withstand the arduous trek back to safety, but ever since this experience, I do not like the cold, although it didn't seem to bother me at the time. Looking back, I quite enjoyed escaping - it was an adventure I will always remember. I was not at all at my wits end and cannot ever remember saying to myself, this is awful, I can't stand it any more, so I was fairly comfortable, certainly happier on the ground than dodging the flack and bullets in the air.

Just before leaving Foggia for home, the Italian lira was devalued by 100%, so doubling our exchange money from 400 lira to 800 lira to the English pound, unfortunately we were only there a further two weeks and so we could not make use of it like our fellow crews. We were to be sent home on survival leave and as such, were looking forward to seeing our families - Tubby had been away for nearly two years. The troopship took about 10 days from Naples to Liverpool, all the troops on reaching Liverpool were jubilant and disembarked. We were repatriated prisoners and so had to stay on board a further night to our disappointment.

#### Last night on the troopship

We played cards and drank a bottle of plonk which we purchased in Naples. Back home in Glasgow, I was given a desk job, just ten minutes from where I lived and later went back to Quastina until the end of the war.

#### Tent at Foggia

In the tent at Foggia, we had a drip feed fire that kept us warm. Geordie Stole bread, we toasted on stove. Many tents went up in flames, the drip feed fires were dangerous - I never heard of anyone being disciplined. Bedding and equipment were lost in these fires. A group of Australians around the base scrounged a jeep to carry materials and built themselves a cabin out of materials from here and there. Their beds were made of intertwined cable; this made a far better bed than the standard pallyass. We were invited to the Australian cabin for a little party at Christmas, they had cakes sent from Australia and 100% proof spirit that came in Aspirin bottles, Tubby got on with everyone and we were fortunate to be two of very few who had been invited to the party, this was entirely due to Tubby's way of getting on with every nationality.

What a lovely party we had. We also acquired some Italian whisky - it was not drinkable. We poured this whisky down the mouse holes and put a match to it. These mice soon ate our short supplies of bread, sometimes we would watch two or three of them, mesmerised for two or three minutes at a time. It was at that time whilst shaving outside the tent, using our metal mirrors, we saw Bob Foster's plane go and blow up in the dispersal area. The local Italian barber

would cut our hair, it took about 30 minutes each and if there was half a dozen of us waiting, it still took him 30 minutes for each person, so sometimes we could wait two or three hours for our turn. He charged 10 or 20 lira. My daughter asked me how long we had known each other – not quite 9 months, not long but so much happened to us.

### Bill Hunt Recalls.

It has to be said that in comparison with the summer of 1944, when 205 Group was heavily engaged in operations against the Romanian oil industry, the last six months of the war for 205 Group saw relatively few casualties. There was often quite a lot of flak over industrial tar gets, most of these were railway marshalling yards - but not many searchlights and very few fighters, either by day or night. Most bombing operations, but not all, were carried out at night. Supply drops to the Yugoslav partisans were carried out sometimes by day, sometimes by night. I don't recall that we ever met any real opposition on these trips. The Russian advance had removed Romania from the target list and most raids were within Northern Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia. The weather conditions though were appalling and this accounted for some losses and abandoned operations, where containers would be brought back and some bomb loads, although jettisoning of bombs was common to ease the landing of the aircraft. Operating conditions, as distinct from domestic conditions, were fair to moderate. Tortorella had a runway surfaced with PSP - which I understand means pierced steel plank, 'though it is said there are other versions'. The PSP was raised 9 inches above ground level and was like giant pieces of Meccano that linked together to make a sort of mat.

The runway made a dreadful rattling noise whenever an aircraft moved on it and after rain, muddy water would squish up through the holes in it. At one end of the runway was a shallow railway embankment, which didn't help in establishing a calm state of mind on take off. Aircraft were dispersed about the airfield in the usual way and crews taken in trucks to these when going on operations.

### Nickels – Leaflets

'Nickels' was the name given to leaflets that were dropped in thousands over enemy occupied territories. They informed enemy personnel of various information. One in particular was a safe conduct pass, it read:

the German soldier who carries this safe-conduct is using it as a sign of his genuine wish to give himself up. He is to be well looked after , to receive food and medical attention as required and is to be removed from the zone of combat as soon as possible. The Nickels would arrive at the airfield in lorry loads and were distributed to the various aircraft and loaded near to the side flare chute for subsequent dropping. The wireless operator would usually be given the job of untying the bundles of leaflets and pushing them down the flare chute, which was first extended into the slipstream. If this was not carried out the nickels would be blown straight back into the aircraft.

### Three Wings

231 Wing with 37 and 70 Squadrons, 236 Wing with 40 and 104 Squadrons and 330 Wing with 142 and 150 Squadrons each operated the Wellington Mark X bomber through most of 1944 from their bases in Southern Italy. It had been withdrawn from Bomber Command and home-based squadrons the previous year as being no longer adequate for the job in the night skies over Germany . The aircraft though was much respected by the crews who flew them and the Wellington was known affectionately to them as the ‘Wimpey’



*One of the Ploesti oil fields  
after a visit from Foggia-  
based squadrons, 1943/44.*

## More Memories

### Sergeant Bryney Watkins 37 Squadron 205 Group

#### Italy July – December 1944

It all started at I.T.W.Hillside Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia where after 2½ years on the staff, during which time I spent leaves at Victoria Falls Hotel, Salisbury, and many other places of interest. On many occasions, I visited the Hills of Matapas (Worlds Eye View). It is here that John Cecil Rhodes is buried, his grave being hewn out of solid rock. It is here that the Welsh Exiles met to have one large picnic on St. David's Day and in the evening held a dance in the Grand Hotel, Bulawayo. As I said, it was 2½ years and feeling it was time for a change, I remustered to go on an Air Gunners course, after being accepted, I did part of the course here at I.T.W.Hillside. After passing my course, I went on to the Gunnery School, Moffat near Givelo on Ansons, using the old water - cooled Vickers guns. It was a hard struggle having had no secondary schooling, my parents just could not afford it, but I managed to squeeze through. It was now time for me to embark on my journey of a lifetime, which was to take me through Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, Belgium Congo and over the lake Tanganyika which took 11 hours by paddle steamer then on to Kisumu on the edge of the lakes Victoria in Tanganyika itself. I spent a day here enjoying a swim in a part of the lake which had been meshed off, to keep the crocodiles out. The following day saw me flying by Loadstar aircraft over the Sudan and touching down at Khartoum to spend a pleasant evening in the faithful Sergeant's Mess, followed by a good nights sleep. Next morning after breakfast, went to see the place where, Gordon was slain, and sat down on the very steps where he died. A little later I was back in the air leaving the Sudan behind and on over Egypt to touch down at main airfield. I spent a few days billeted in a Royal Palace. I did not enjoy the same comforts as King Farouk as I had to sleep on the cold marble floor, but apart from this, it was quite an experience. The few days I spent in Egypt I visited many places of interest, the Pyramids, Museum and of course certain places of entertainment, belly dancers, the dance of the seven veils and several exhibitions, which was enlightening to a young inexperienced lad like me. All good things must end, so once again I was on my way by road to Palestine to do my O.T.U. For a few days, I was billeted in the Italian Hospital. It was so cold at night and to keep warm, one had to sleep in full flying kit including boots. I never for get the night I arrived in Jerusalem there was barbed wire everywhere. Armoured vehicles were in the streets, this was because of the Jewish terrorist's storm gang led by Mr Begin, later to become Prime Minister of Israel. It was not safe to go out at night anywhere in Jerusalem. Many of the servicemen died by the hands of Jews, the very people we were fighting for in Europe. On now to 77 OTU. At Gastineau Quastina near

to Tel Aviv to join three other crews in “B”, flight to train in Wellingtons. Out of the four crews in “B” flight, ours were the only crew to survive. Two crews on returning from cross-countries over Cairo and Alexandria, crashed near to the runway killing all the aircrew. I was one of the bearers at their burial at Ramleh Cemetery near Jerusalem. The other crew were scrubbed, Pilot unsuitable, both the aircraft that crashed we flew in on the previous nights on cross-countries. Half-way through the course we had a weeks leave in Jerusalem, during this time I was able to visit those places we have read about in the bible, namely Church of Nativity, Mount of Olives Garden of Gethsemane, Bethlehem, Wailing Wall, Dome on the Rock, River Jordan, Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee and a visit to Jericho. On the completion of the course, I spent a week’s leave in Tel Aviv. It was there I met an old friend from Brynmawr, namely Cecil Ciddle, who was a Jew, he was on leave from Ismailia, and was an instrument mechanic in the R.A.F. Of course, we went to all the best places and it was all on the house. It was here I had my photograph taken with another Air Gunner, Jimmy Miller in Ben Kirken Street, the street of a thousand prostitutes. Jimmy went missing on his final op over Yugoslavia. Once again, I was on the move by road back to Egypt and to Almagi transit camp just outside Cairo. It was here that I met Jonathan Brynmawr’s lad, a W/O WOP Jack Williams who had done a tour during the desert campaign and now on his way to South Africa as an instructor. We met later back in Brynmawr had a few pints together and just after Jack went berserk, apart for a short spell he has been a patient in Tolgarth Mental Hospital. Leaving Almagi transit camp, I was taken to the American airbase at Payne’s Field just outside of Cairo to be flown over to Italy. While having a cup of coffee in the canteen I saw this group dressed in strange uniforms and being nosy, I asked them who they were. It turned out that they were the equivalent to our Ensa, and they were Andre Kastelanetz, his wife Lily Pons (The pocketsize Prim Ad Dona and the Orchestra. They were also on their way to Italy to entertain the troops.

We chatted together until it was time for take off in one D63 and us in another. We flew down to North African coast over many of the battle zones—Benghazi, Tripoli, landing at Castle Benito for a M.V. lunch then over the Messina Straights to land at Naples Airfield.

I must say what charming people the Americans were to talk to; they wanted to know all about us, where we were from in the United Kingdom. We parted at Naples; they wished us all the best and safe landing. Meeting them and talking to them was one of my happiest memories of the war. From Naples, it was transit time again, this time at Portici not far from Mount Vesuvius. I was here in 1944 when it erupted .



*The new Liberator bombers arrive, Tortorella, 1944.*



*Typical Italian country scene.*



*Foggia*



*A smouldering Vasuvius.*



*70 Sqn Liberator, Foggia, 1945.*

They went again to visit many places out of the history books, Pompeii, Sorrento, Isle of Capri, Isle of Ischia, and Salerno. It was now time to join the Squadron, which was 37 at Tortorella near Foggia, Northern Italy. Our first trip was on the 7/8.8.1944, it was to be the airfield at Szombathely in Hungary, a good start, plenty of fighters, flak. No.2 was the marshalling yards at Kraljivo in Yugoslavia, plenty of enemy action. No.3 was again the airfield at Hadjie Baszonmany in Hungary, crawling with night fighters. No.4 was a raid on Marseilles the night before the Southern Italy invasion. As we returned over the sea, I could see from my turret the ships going in for the landing. No.5 was to be the Xenia Oil Refinery in Rumania but had to return early due to oxygen failure. Was put on close arrest when landing until oxygen bottles were checked, my bottle was empty, no lack of moral fibre.! No.6 – this was a spare trip, as my pilot Dicky Ockendon was grounded because of a nasty carbuncle on back of his neck, which had to be lanced. I did four spare Dicky trips. The crew I went with was F/O Reed Pilot, his navigator Sgt Bone, the rest of the crew was made up by F/Lt John Archer bombing leader, the wireless operator an Australian known as Shorty and yours truly. The target was the German Goring tank works in Austria. We took off at 19.40 hours; after being airborne for about 2 hours, the voice of the navigator came over the intercom telling us we were lost and saying how sorry he was. You can imagine what it was like. This is the patter that went on – Dicky - “Sorry Pilot”, Pilot – “too bloody late to be sorry, get us back on track” Pilot to Bombing Leader - “what do you think we should do Sir”, his reply “carry on regardless, Wireless Operator – “drop the bloody bombs and turn round”. This went on for another hour, I was in the turret laughing my head off, I couldn’t help it, it was funny, and it would be great for television. Pilot to Wireless Operator “Throw some window out?”, shortly in reply, “What do you think I have been doing this last hour?”. Then the voice of the Navigator came over to say he had worked it out and gave the Pilot the reading, and by now, we were only a half hour late and as we approached the target area once again Pilot to Shorty - “Throw more windows out”. Shorty “Its all bloody gone drop the bomb and turn back” At last we reached the target, bombs away, there was no enemy action, they must have all gone home to bed as we were so late. After this episode the Navigator was known as Sgt. Bonehead.



## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **SHADOWS OF THE PAST**

By  
Paul Gaunt  
Part 11

Page 133—Chapter six

To be continued in the next newsletter.

## **DONATIONS**

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

A Campbell  
W. Woodhead  
Ms J Williams

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

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