

The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

The 49 Squadron Association Magazine
May 2023 Issue 63



Alf Ridpath



Fred Hill



Phillip Griffiths

NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

IN MEMORIAM

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

Alf Ridpath, Philip Herbert Griffiths (Griff)

Fred Hill.

Mr S Manger

New Associate Member

**Bruce Griffiths - son of Philip Griffiths (Griff).
Michael O'Leary - nephew Timothy O'Leary ED426.**

NEW FRIEND

Wing Commander Christine Ashton.

EDITORIAL

I apologise for the late publication of this issue due to family and work commitments and I hope it is worth the wait. As always I thank all you kind people who have made donations of cash, cheques and stamps to ensure that the old dog's tail keeps wagging.

Sadly it is also time to record the passing of three of our members. Fred Hill, who flew 34 Hampden Ops as a Pilot. Phil Griffiths, Wireless Operator of the Lancaster of P/O Russell Ewens and Alf Ridpath, Wireless Operator on P/O A.Edgard crew. All three contributed so much to the Association over the years and will be sorely missed.

We pay tribute to our three veterans in this issue of the 4t9er and my thanks to all those for their welcomed contributions.

I have often commented on the close friendships that have been forged at home and abroad as a result of the sacrifice made by our relatives who served and died, with the squadron. In my case my Uncle Terry, who was killed on the 15 March 1944 when his Lancaster was shot down over Bolstern in Southern Germany is responsible for forging friendships with relatives of the other crew members and also the Villagers from the crash site in Germany. Last week we were informed by the Local Mayor Anton Stork that the last surviving eyewitness Alfons Hauser had sadly passed away. Cutting a long story short through the help of the Association we were able to establish friendships with the local people and with their help we have placed a memorial at the crash site.

In the Readers letters, I thank Chris Beare for her email telling of the recent contact with a relative from her uncles crew, Dennis Blumfield, of Lancaster ND684. I will leave you to read the letter received from Chris where again it demonstrates the important roll the Association plays in providing contacts and research material to relative groups.

The Association Photographer, Dom Howard, is in the process of arranging a service of remembrance to honour the crew of Lancaster ED427 lost on the 16/17 April 1943.

Dom has worked tirelessly on this project for some years and is in contact with several relatives of the crew. The aim is to include a memorial service at East Kirby as part of our Remembrance Sunday Weekend in November.

Further details will follow once final arrangements are in place.

‘Til the next time.

Once again we ask all those who can receive our Newsletter via email to do so as it will reduce our printing and postage costs considerably.

This request is made to our Associate Members as we will ensure our Veterans receive a copy by post as usual.

**REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2023
SATURDAY 11TH—SUNDAY 12TH NOVEMBER**

***The Association will be meeting as usual at the Bentley Hotel, Lincoln.
Please contact secretary for further details***

Alfred Ridpath.

Personal tribute for Alfred Ridpath by Roger Bedford



10th December 1922—17th January 2023

These notes formed the basis of a personal tribute to W O Alfred Staveley Ridpath who died aged 100 on January 17th 2023.

The tribute was given by Roger Bedford at the Aintree Crematorium service on 28th February 2023.

The first matter to be dealt with is how to refer to Mr Alfred Ridpath. He has been addressed variously as Mr Ridpath, Alf, Alfred and “Rid”. More recently his team of formidable carers have addressed him as “Sir Alf” – a measure of their affection for him.

When I first met him I could address him only as Mr Ridpath. In more recent times I could call him Alf. His beloved wife, Joan, always addressed him as Alfred. The fellow members of the RAF aircrew in which he was the Wireless Operator called him “Rid” – and he always signed his letters in that fashion.

My association with Mr Ridpath was through my late father, George Bedford, who served in the same aircrew as “Rid” and whose captain was A G Edgar DFC. Their operational time was with 49 Squadron at RAF Fiskerton and 83 Squadron at RAF Coningsby.

The crew first met as a crew at 1661 HCU at RAF Winthorpe – now the Newark Air Museum.

I met Alf, his wife Joan and their son David for the first time about 45 years ago. However, a long while before that I was aware of him and of all of the other members of the crew. I knew that the relationship they had between them was close and if help was sought no explanation was required.

Such are the bonds formed when you serve together and the survival of each depends on the actions of each – particularly if, as in their case, someone shoots at you intending to do you some serious harm.

Before I arrived at Alf's home for the first time my dad had been in touch and mentioned that I would be in contact with Alf.

Arrangements were duly made and when I arrived I was given a warm welcome. Whenever I visited that was always true. No explanation was necessary – it was enough that I was my father's son.

I am sure that when Philippa Harrison, the daughter of the pilot, visited with her husband and their family the same level of welcome was extended without question. I would visit when I was in the area for business reasons – in the area might mean that I was in Manchester or Birkenhead. There were also occasions when I would drive up on a Sunday afternoon from where I live near Cambridge (and close to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford) to visit. I would need to make sure that I had time to visit the Sainsbury's store near East Prescott Road so that I could obtain some of the wine I knew they liked.

Some of you will know the area.

I recall the first time I turned into Eaton Road towards the Alder Hey Children's Hospital and saw the Knotty Ash Post Office.



That was a surprise as I thought that Knotty Ash was a name that Ken Dodd had made up !

Roger Bedford and Robert McEaney remembering Alf.

If the visit included staying for dinner it would usually be a three course

affair and Alf would have done most of the preparation work and supervised the cooking himself. He was very accomplished in the kitchen. A skill used years later when he had to care for his wife and then, when Alf was in his eighties, son David.

When I first visited Alf and Joan they had two springer spaniels. I think they were a mother and daughter. Exercise for these necessitated daily visits Croxteth Park – not far from their home. It was good exercise for the dogs and their owners. As time passed so did one of the dogs. It wasn't replaced. When the second one died Alf and Joan felt that they would not be able to give a new dog the exercise it required so after many years they were without a dog in the house.

Holidays were spent at comfortable (and dog-friendly, when necessary) hotels



in their favourite locations at Abersoch and in the Lake District. A good restaurant was also a requirement. Alf told me on one occasion that as they were going into the restaurant they saw Air Marshal Sir Ivor Broom just departing. (Sir Ivor was a Welshman and had been a Sergeant pilot. He flew Mosquitos in the Light Night Striking Force. His navigator was Tommy Broom – no relation. Who says that the RAF Brass have no sense of humour.)

Picture of Alf Ridpath in his service uniform

As Alf and Sir Ivor passed Alf said something along the lines of “A bit better than the Sergeants mess at Scampton, sir !”. An understanding chuckle from Sir Ivor. There is no disrespect intended to the catering in a Sergeants Mess. Perhaps WW2 catering was different to today. It is my understanding that an invitation to dine in the Sergeants Mess is one to be accepted with pleasure these days.

Alf had a tremendous fund of stories. Usually with an element of humour – and usually without any malice. I liked to talk to him about the operations the crew did – especially the “hairly” ones and particularly after my dad died in late 1993. Alf was very generous in sharing his recollections. May 1944 on 49 Squadron was a particularly dangerous month for them. Only a few people

knew that what they were doing was in preparation for D-Day in June 1944. With what I've seen in my dad's log book, some operational records passed to me by Paul Davies – whose mum lives next door to Alf – a book called *Beware the Dog at War*, an operational history of 49 Squadron and a book called *Men of Air* by Kevin Wilson – which includes a number of quotes from Alf Ridpath – it would have been quite frightening.

Initially the crew were all NCOs – the RAF chaps were Sergeants and the two Australians were Flight Sergeants (for some reason unimportant here the Australians were always one rank ahead).



Guard of honour at St Mary the Virgin, West Derby, Liverpool.

As a result of an edict from Bomber Command or 5 Group all pilots were to be commissioned. So their pilot, Alfred George Edgar (known as Al or Eddie), was a Sergeant on Saturday 11th March 1944 and a Pilot Officer on Sunday 12th March. That promotion to a commissioned rank meant that he had to use the Officers Mess and was not entitled to use the Sergeants Mess. Not entirely happy with that Alf tells me that Al Edgar borrowed an NCOs battle-dress tunic from one of the crew and had a drink with them in the Sergeants Mess. Maybe it was a last drink with them as he would have been discovered impersonating an NCO sooner rather than later.

Alf's operational time in the RAF was a small part of his long life. That time brought together people from different backgrounds and countries who would probably never otherwise have met. The crew included one born in Canada (my dad) and two Australians from Queensland (though they might say that they were Queenslanders rather than Australians). They remained in contact for the rest of their lives – though Alf has been the last man standing for a long time.

You've heard how Alf and crew served with 49 Squadron at Fiskerton (a squadron they enjoyed being on) and 83 Squadron at Coningsby – where he told me they were doing something every day : if not on operations they were doing cross-country exercises, bombing practice at Wainfleet near Skegness,

mock battles with fighters – called fighter affiliation. That's not to say that life was easy at Fiskerton – it wasn't.

A poignant story about his time at Coningsby. 100 years ago, Mrs Ridpath was pushing her pram with Alf in it alongside Mrs Bradley with her son Sydney in it. Alf and Syd were friends as boys living quite near each other. Time passes – different schools, different jobs. War comes – unknown to each other they join the RAF. Alf trains as a Wireless Operator and Air-gunner (one of the last to train in both trades he told me) Syd trains as a Navigator. Operational

service. Eventually Alf is at RAF Coningsby on 83 Squadron. Syd is an officer and on 97 Squadron at Coningsby also – but they never met there. After WW2 Alf goes to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board and Syd becomes a Maths teacher. By chance several years later they encounter each other in Liverpool and, of course, they discuss their experiences and then discover that they had been on the same station at the same time but did not know it.

Syd died a few years ago. His family arranged for a tree to be planted in his memory at East Kirkby – home of the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre and their Lancaster and Mosquito - which each get taxied on a large field . Syd had spent some time at East Kirkby with 630 Squadron. Alf and his family attended the dedication ceremony for his friend. He told me about it so I went along as well. The tree is flourishing.

Alf's peacetime working career with the Mersey Docks and Harbour board was his only employment. In due course, David worked there too. One of Alf's roles was to provision ships for their next voyage. Necessarily he met a number of the Sea-faring Captains. Alf, Joan and David met many of these men socially : entertaining them to dinner at their house or at a suitable restaurant. Alf and these captains kept in touch as friends outside of their working environments for many years. While I was on a visit he would often relate how he had heard from a sea captain friend of many years. This would have been by card or letter and particularly at Christmas time.

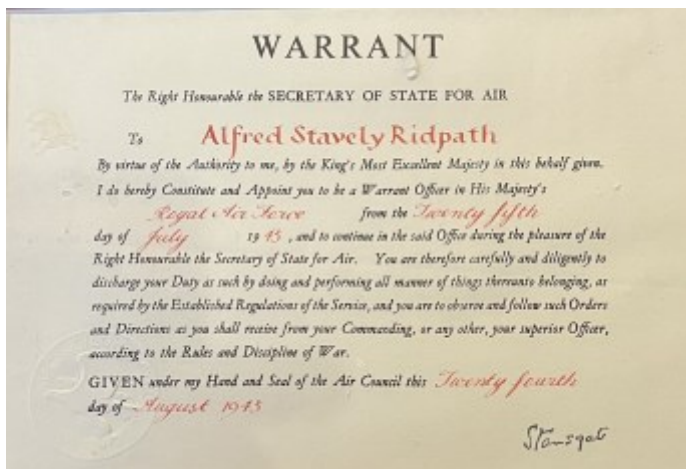
Alf and Joan had a favourite restaurant. He refers to it as TREE TOPS. It is closed now. He took me there on one occasion. I'd arranged to visit Alf, Joan and David with Geoff Brunton, a Flight Engineer from another 49 Squadron crew. His pilot, William Green DFC, a New Zealander, was a close friend of Alf's A G Edgar DFC pilot so they had a lot to talk about.

Some years ago a history of 83 Squadron was published. Pre-ordered copies were being distributed at an event in the officers' mess at RAF Coningsby. I went with my dad : Alf, Joan and David went too. We must remember that when the crew was stationed at Coningsby they were NCOs except for the

pilot. Alf murmured to my dad “Bl**dy hell, George, we weren’t allowed in here the last time we were on this station”.

Over the years, Alf has related his adventures while on operational service to me and to others. Some of the stories might seem a little extreme. We had a letter from the Navigator, Bob Brooks, in May of 1994 in which he covers many of these events. I took a copy and sent it to Alf.

He had a copy made and lent it to one of his friends. Alf wrote to me in July 1994 telling me that he was sure that his friend thought that he, Alf, had made up tales of his exploits.



However, now that the friend has seen corroboration from the other side of the world Alf thinks that the friend may be convinced that they really happened. The log-books and Operational Records don’t always tell the whole story. One such story which Alf related to Kevin Wilson appears in his book Men of Air.

The target was Bourg Leopold, a military camp in Belgium. They had a bomb load of 14000 pounds (about 6.25 tons). They were ordered not to bomb but to return with the bombload. Having a recall message happened more than once. Alf nearly missed one. I’m sure he was always up to mischief as a boy. His practice on an operation was to search the airwaves for music broadcasts and listen in and switch back to his listening out frequency every so often. He caught the tail end of one recall message and had to ask for confirmation due to a momentary “technical glitch”. I don’t suppose he was the only one.

As Alf relates the story about the Bourg Leopold recall he injects a little humour into it. He says that they were on their way home and had reached the point where they thought it was safe to get the Thermos flask out. Bob Brooks (the Australian Navigator) had just taken a navigation fix as they approached the Dutch coast when they were attacked by a night-fighter from below. They suspect that it was equipped with Schrage-musik – an update firing cannon. Equipped with this the night-fighter can approach from below in the bomber's blind spot and fire at the fuel tanks and the bomb bay. The cannon shells hit the aircraft just forward of the rear turret and made that unserviceable and severed control cables. Alf says the aircraft went into a dive which took the pilot, the bomb-aimer and the flight engineer to counteract by hauling on the control column. There's a bit of contradiction on this next point : Alf relates that they jettisoned the bombs – the Operational Record records state that they didn't.

Just a thought : If I'm attempting to fly a severely compromised aircraft and I have just over 6 tons of, essentially, ballast I think I would let the ballast go.

However, there was an explosion which Alf reckons was made by the jettisoned bombs and which made the night-fighter think that he'd downed the bomber. Eventually they got some rope around the control column to help the physical strain on the pilot.

The Elsan chemical toilet had been hit and spilled its chemicals. Some oil in the fuselage ignited and Alf and the mid-upper gunner extinguished the flames by using their boots and gloved hands. Al Edgar, the pilot, didn't think they would make it to a safe landing from which they would walk away. Alf said that he thought the same.

They had a vote on whether to bail out or stay. The pilot thought it best if they abandoned the aircraft. Alf said "We're over the North Sea and I can't swim. I vote we stay." Alf would have been busy also with talking to their base and the Navigator would be telling Alf their position. They made for RAF Woodbridge near Ipswich. This was designated as an aerodrome set up to receive damaged aircraft. They did land safely.

Clearly the aircraft was seriously damaged. When they looked at the rear-gunners parachute they saw that the cannon shells had rendered it useless – so if he'd used it to bail out it would not have done its job. Al Edgar was awarded an immediate Distinguished Flying Cross so you know he'd done something special. The citation describes the damage and the difficulty in controlling the aircraft and concludes "This officer displayed great skill and resolution in the face of heavy odds."

This is the citation in the London Gazette Supplement 36555, Page 2755 published on 6th June,

Pilot Officer Alfred George EDGAR (172180), Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, No. 49 Squadron.
One night in May, 1944, this officer piloted an aircraft to attack a target in Belgium. On the homeward flight the aircraft was intercepted by a fighter and sustained much damage in the ensuing fight. The aileron controls and the trimming tabs were severed, whilst a fire broke out in the fuselage. The flames were extinguished but the aircraft was difficult to control. To keep the aircraft level it was necessary for Pilot Officer Edgar and another member of the crew to apply their full weight against the control column. In this manner the aircraft was flown for 2 hours until an airfield was reached where Pilot Officer Edgar executed a masterly landing. This officer displayed great skill and resolution in the face of heavy odds.

The 1994 letter from Bob Brooks describes the same event in the same way so Alf was telling his friend – and me – the truth ! I like the way Alf injects a bit of humour to defuse the danger : “We thought it was safe to get the Thermos Flask out” (i.e. time for a tea break) and “I can’t swim, I’m staying”

I know that the crew had the highest regard for each other and especially the pilot’s skill.

He had a phrase he used to give an affirmative answer. If you asked him A few years ago the Inland Revenue rang him up and said “Mr Ridpath, we’re conducting an enquiry into your affairs”. His response to them : “I haven’t had this much excitement since I was in Bomber Command in WW2”. I don’t know what the outcome was nor what they thought of his response. For the younger members here, the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise merged to form HM Revenue and Customs. Their job now, as then, is to take as much of your money as they legally.

“Was that situation dangerous ?” He wouldn’t just say “Yes” he would say – and this needs to be said with a Liverpool accent - “Oh God, Aye” and depending on what it was he was remembering he might pull a face and suck through his teeth – a bit like a builder does when you ask him to consider something you want done and you know it’s going to cost.

In 2014, the Canadian Lancaster – named for Pilot Officer Andrew Mynarski VC – visited the UK and toured air shows and events alongside the BBMF Lancaster. My son Paul and I arranged to take Alf and his son David to see the display at the Southport Air Show. The two Lancasters appeared and entertained the crowd with their display. The sound of the 8 Merlin engines and the sight of the 2 Lancasters was very moving to all of us in our little group and particularly to the veteran Lancaster crew man there with us. Alf had begun to show signs of dementia at that time but you could see that the sight and sound affected him. Alf’s carer team have taken him to the Southport Air Show in recent years. However, a particularly memorable event for him occurred by chance : the BBMF Lancaster had been requested to overfly the local golf course not far from where Alf lived. It was on its way back from a display. The carers got wind of this and, knowing how much the aircraft meant to him, had him outside at the expected time. The Lancaster flew directly over him – the carers told him that it was just for him. Who would disabuse him of that moment ? Someone has a picture of Alf saluting the aircraft.

In moving to a close, I’d like to mention some pertinent passages in a speech Winston Churchill made in the House of Commons. It is the speech that mentions “The Few”. The speech was made on August 20th 1940

In paragraph 30 of 48, he says :

The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

That led to the coining of the famous term “The Few” – and a convenient sound-bite. Rarely if ever does the next passage get quoted. The speech goes on with Paragraph 31 of 48 :

All hearts go out to the fighter pilots, whose brilliant actions we see with our own eyes day after day; but we must never forget that all the

time, night after night, month after month, our bomber squadrons travel far into Germany, find their targets in the darkness by the highest navigational skill, aim their attacks, often under the heaviest fire, often with serious loss, with deliberate careful discrimination, and inflict shattering blows upon the whole of the technical and war-making structure of the Nazi power.

On no part of the Royal Air Force does the weight of the war fall more heavily than on the daylight bombers who will play an invaluable part in the case of invasion and whose unflinching zeal it has been necessary in the meanwhile on numerous occasions to restrain.

So Alf

you are reunited with your beloved wife Joan and your Son David
and you are re-joining your other 6 crew mates who have gone before :

Alfred George “Al” Edgar DFC, the pilot,
the Australians/Queenslanders Bob Brooks, the Navigator, and Allan
Millard, the Bomb aimer,
Johnny Watters and Don Harwood DFM, the air gunners
and George Bedford, the Flight Engineer

All of you are in our hearts and minds today
And as Mr Churchill said:

We must never forget.

All Photos kindly provided by Roger Bedford

Tribute to Alf Ridpath
By

Wing Commander Christine Ashton
(FMC-Ifra-Cap-Air-StratCom)

The Wing Commander Chrissie Ashton met Alf at the local Remembrance Sunday Service in his home City of Liverpool. Having chatted with Alf about his war time experiences they remained in contact and the Wing Commander paid the following tribute to Alf during the funeral service.

Per Ardua Ad Astra

The motto of the Royal Air Force is Per Ardua Ad Astra. It means, through adversity to the stars.

Those four words tell us that to achieve triumph, glory and success we must also live through terrible sadness, dark and troubled times.

When we lose someone in the Royal Air Force we say to each other 'Per Ardua'. Those two words mean 'I know you are suffering and I see you and I am with you. But we have to hang on and dig deep because these dark times will pass and we will make it to the stars and, when we get there, those that we have lost will be there with us.

These two words mean a lot. Per Ardua. Through gritted teeth, through fire and fear we say... Per Ardua. Alf knew this better than most.

Alf served in Bomber Command during the war and he would have known fire and fear. Over 55,500 of his colleagues did not make it.

I wonder how often Alf and his colleagues said 'Per Ardua' to each other during those years.

Or whether, day after day they no longer needed to say it. It is easy to be brave once. But to be brave day after day over many months is something quite exceptional.

Even when Alf's crew hit their quota, they kept going, And against all the odds, they made it. And we sit here today in this uniform, in this place thanks to him and his crew and those like him.

In the many decades after his service, Alf knew glory and success in the form of a peaceful, loving life caring for his son David with his wife Joan and, later, with his carers.

But what a man does in a small window of time can echo through decades and Alf's service and sacrifice has done just that bringing us all here today. So, today. I thought I would say 'Per Ardua' to you all but, for Alf, there is

an overwhelming sense of a wonderful life of triumph and success and humour and singing.

And I think it is more fitting now to say 'Ad Astra'. To the stars. Because he showed us the way; and set such example for us all in facing adversity with courage and then living a life full of love.

So Alf, we will not forget you, nor what you did and even our youngest cadets here today will carry your memory and example in to their futures. Our debt to you and our thanks cannot be measured.

WO Ridpath, the tyres have been kicked, the engines are running, the bomb bay is clear, the flight plan looks perfect and your crew are all here.

Feel the aircraft lift and the ground drop away from you and then bank through clouds up and away.

As you level out, we wish you endless blue skies, fair winds and all the stars in the heavens.

We salute you Alf and, always, Per Ardua Ad Astra.

A final message of Thanks

It was a privilege for my wife Annette and I to be present at Alf's funeral and our heartfelt thanks to all present for the warm welcome we received.

To Alf's neighbours, friends at Maggie May's café, Wing Com Chrissie Ashton and Association member Roger Bedford who worked tirelessly to ensure Alf got the send off he deserved.

THANK YOU.

Personal tribute for Fred Hill by John Lowe

A celebration of the life of

Fred Hill



5th October 1921 - 8th March 2023

Fred was born on 5th October 1921 in Featherstone in Yorkshire. He had a brother who died in infancy and two sisters. The family weren't well off, his father was a miner and had been injured in a coal mine and they ran a fish and chip shop. Fred was hard working and bright. He passed the 11 plus and went to The King's School in Pontefract.

Fred signed up to join the RAF on his 18th birthday in 1939. He did two tours in Bomber Command, flying Hampdens and Wellingtons in his first tour, then working as a flying instructor for which he was mentioned in Dispatches. Fred then volunteered to do a second tour flying mosquito planes. On New Year's Day 1945 as part of the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes, Fred had to fly at ground level along a railway cutting and drop a bomb into the entrance of a railway tunnel, the bomb then bounced into the tunnel before exploding. He was mentioned in Dispatches for this. Fred's second tour ended in May 1945. He then went into Transport Command, flying troops around and acting as a military airline. He went to Cairo and Algeria and flew Mosquitos to Egypt. Transport Command wanted to keep the ground troops happy, so on one trip Fred flew a cricket team to Naples and on



another he flew a group of boxers to Italy for a boxing championship. At the end of the war, aged 23, Fred was awarded The Distinguished Flying Cross and had been mentioned in Despatches twice.

It was during the War on 20th May 1942, that Fred married Roma. They had two sons, Wyn who was born on 14th August 1943 and then Nicholas born 21st May 1948.

Fred left the RAF in 1946. He then went into teaching, teaching PE, Maths and Biology in a Secondary School back in Pontefract. In September 1952 the family left England and went to Kenya. Fred taught at the Nairobi Primary School. He worked hard and through a correspondence course at the University of London obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology graduating in 1957. From here, he moved to the Prince of Wales School in Nairobi and taught Maths.

They left Kenya in 1963. Fred taught in schools in Blackpool and Hampshire before moving to Devon in 1973 where he was Headmaster at Tamar High School in Plymouth. He retired in 1985.

Fred's son Wyn had two daughters and one son but died in 2001, his wife Roma died in 2009 and son Nicholas in 2021. Fred leaves behind Wyn's three children and four great grandsons.

After Roma's death, Fred went to a Residential Home in Bishopsteignton and then to Cotmaton House in Sidmouth. Fred enjoyed his time at Cotmaton, he became involved with Sidmouth Parish Church and The Not Forgotten Association which raises money for military personnel and is our chosen charity today. With his great friend John Lowe, Fred visited many events through The Not Forgotten Association sharing his experiences of the war and flying and raising money at various fundraising events.

At the age of 97, Fred decided he needed more assistance and moved to The Lodge Nursing Home. His last few years here were very happy, participating fully in all the Home's activities, trips to the seaside for fish and chips and ice cream, yoga classes and sherry mornings. Fred was thrilled



to discover that the manager of The Lodge, Debbie Skinner's uncle had been his boss in the War, Wing Commander Joe Northrop and Debbie used every opportunity to write about his life in Devon Life. Fred will be missed so very much by all those who were lucky enough to have had their lives touched by him and he was a real hero.



Personal tribute by Bruce Griffiths



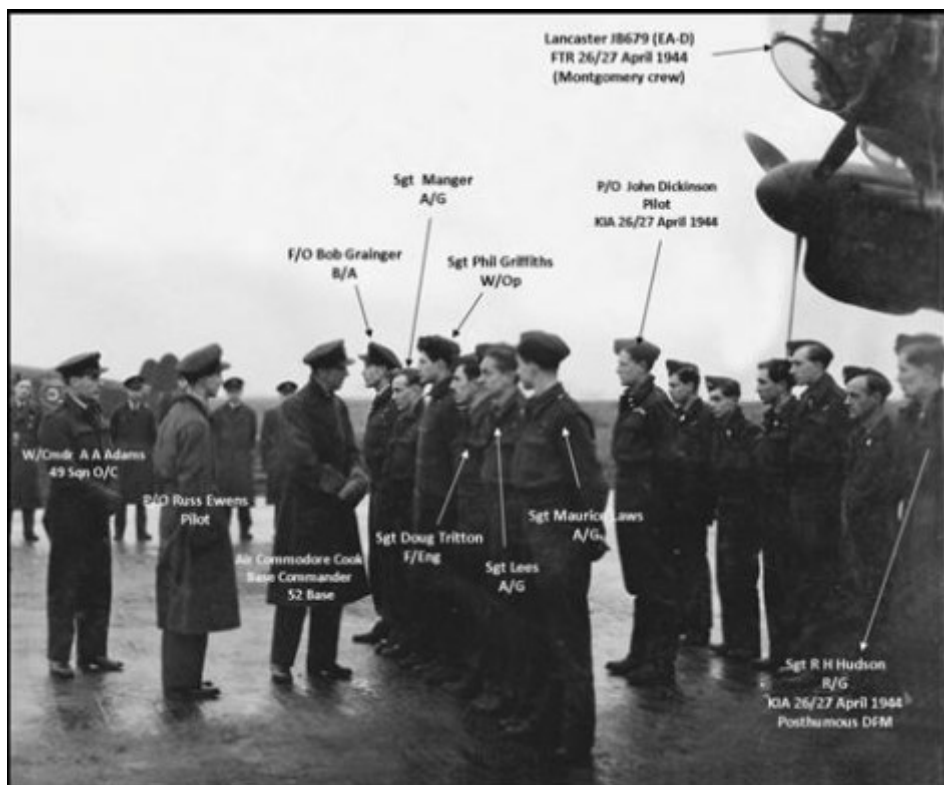
29th April 1923—12th January 2023

Griff was predeceased by his wartime sweetheart Polly (nee MacLean), his beloved daughter Linda, his sister Joan of New Jersey (a US war bride), and his parents Alf and Monica Griffiths.

Griff is survived by his caring son Bruce, his daughter-in-law Judy, his grandchildren Colin (Alison), Jenna and Abigale (Colin), his great grandchild Charlie, his three nieces and one nephew of New Jersey, and his cousins Wilf and Jean of Rotherham, Yorkshire.

Griff was born on April 29, 1923, in Rotherham, Yorkshire to a Welsh father and Yorkshire mother. Though spending little time in Yorkshire after 1940, he retained a deep attachment to his Yorkshire heritage. He was also a proud Canadian and loved his adopted land having immigrated there in 1947.

Griff volunteered for air crew in the Royal Air Force at the age of 17. He subsequently flew 30 missions over Europe in 1942/43, when Bomber Command were experiencing losses of 70%. Following Bomber Command, he was posted to Ferry Command, based at Dorval Airport in Montreal, where he delivered aircrafts to the UK and Burma. While in Burma he was “conned” into doing several low-level flights through a Japanese barrage of Nambu machine guns and light AA fire to drop supplies to the British regiments trapped and surrounded on Kohima Ridge.



He was later posted to Miami, then Nassau with the unbelievable job of transporting young ladies from Washington back to their homes in the West Indies, in particular Trinidad, Belize and Jamaica. Griff thoroughly appreciated this part of his service and gave his all to this tough assignment! He used to say, “what a life for a lad from Rotherham”.

Griff was a keen golfer and long-time member of Belle Park Fairways where he had many good friends, some of whom were there to cele-

brate his hole in one in 2007. He was well known in soccer circles in Montreal and Kingston as a player, referee, instructor, and referee assessor. He particularly loved to referee his “Golden Girls”. Somehow, Griff found time after his retirement to go to aquafit, square dance, ballroom dance and was a member of the Canada/UK dance club. He was also an active member of the Kingston Seniors Association where at one time or another he took lessons in ballroom dancing, tai chi, fencing, Zumba, line dancing, table tennis, and often dined there with dear friends. Griff was a 3rd degree member of the Knights of Columbus; and was a member of the Silver Wings, a veteran’s group in Kingston, where he felt so much at home. Griff continued many of his activities through his 91st birthday when a fall made it necessary to cut back considerably.

He loved living in his home on Glen Cairn Terrace, and he referred to it as his “street of friends”. He had many good friends there who kindly included him in their parties and celebrations, even though he was a “couple” of years older. They were always solicitous and helpful in every way, and without these neighbours, and his son, he could not have managed to live alone in his home until the end.

Whenever possible, Griff attended his squadron reunions in the UK until their ranks became sorely thinned. He kept in touch with his old Bomber Command even until the last of them flew into that “great unknown”.

He asked that we include this quote from his favourite poet, Dylan Thomas. “He did not go gentle into that good night, but raged, raged at the dying of the light.” Griff was one of a breed of men, the like of which we may never see again.

In keeping with Griff’s wishes, there will be no viewing or visitations. Cremation has taken place and his ashes will be buried alongside his beloved wife in the Cataraqui Cemetery. The family will hold a memorial service and celebration of life on April 29th, what would have been Griff’s 100th birthday. Any charitable donations should be directed to the Canadian Cancer Society.



March 1944

P/O Russell Ewens' crew completed their tour.

The photograph (from left to right) shows....

Sgt Doug Tritton, flight engineer;

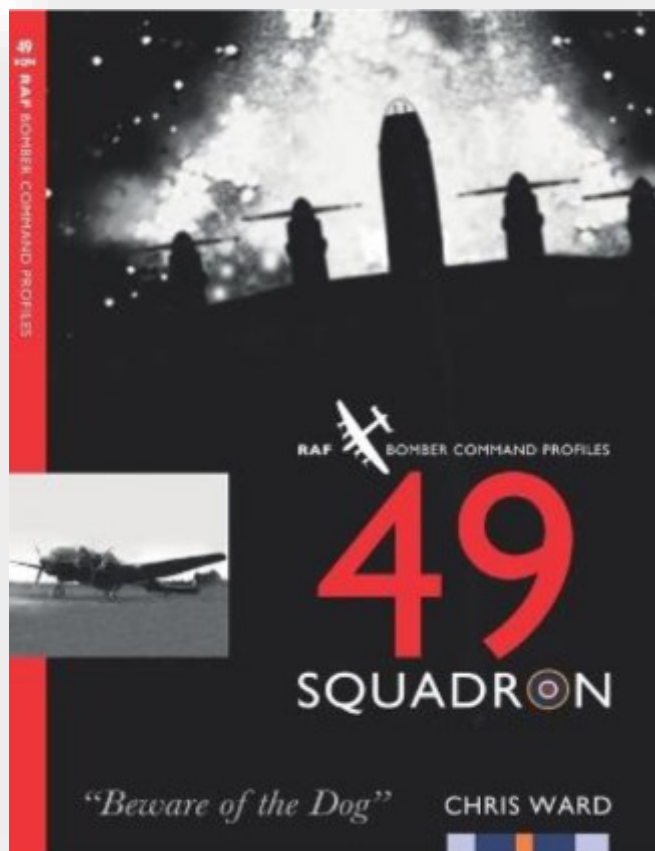
Sgt Maurice Laws, air gunner;

P/O Russ Ewens, pilot;

Sgt Joe Pitcher, navigator;

Sgt Phil Griffiths, wireless operator (in doorway);

F/O Bob Grainger, bomb aimer.



49 Squadron by Chris Ward

now available from Amazon £20

An A4 sized soft cover book running to 485 pages
the latest in his Bomber Command Profiles series

*This wartime history of 49 Squadron is dedicated to the memory
of John Ward, a close & valued friend & outstanding human being.*

Chris' style differs from Johns and is intended to stand
alongside 'Beware The Dog at War' and not to eclipse it

The following article in an SSFA magazine was kindly sent in by researcher Charles Abate:

David Hills was the bombaimer in the Eric Singleton crew and although he mentions that it was their second operation together, he had previously completed one to Wilhelmshaven with Sgt J.W. Heard. The Singleton crews' sortie to Stuttgart took place on November 22nd 1942 in Lancaster W4107. Curiously, a few years ago we had been offered wreckage from W4107 which crashed on the tiny island of Sark. *Read on.....*

There is no date to this article in The Soldiers', Sailors' & Airmen's Families Association magazine:

'Continuing publication of the winners of our recent War Story Competitions we publish here an exciting account of capture by the enemy.'

THE ONE WHO DIDN'T GET AWAY

by David Hills

It is 11.30pm on the clear moonlit night of November 22, 1942 and we can see what must surely be Stuttgart aflame before us. We had lost our bearings a little on the journey and spent some time in pin-pointing Strasbourg on our way in, so we must be nearly the last aircraft to attack the target.

My heart begins to flutter with fear as we make our approach at 8,000 feet. I wonder if one ever becomes inured to this deliberate and seemingly slow approach to what may be sudden death, whether one ever loses the desire to say let's turn round and go home before we are committed". Just don't know — its only our second trip. 8,000 feet the ideal "height for ack-ack — still the intelligence wallahs ought to have known what they were talking about when they said the Germans would not be expecting us after the two or three weeks concentration of raids on Italy.

Bomb doors open. Bombs fused. "Left, left" I say to Eric, our pilot, as the target approaches. "Re-i-i-ight. Steady, steady" I direct him as the bomb sight tells me that the moment of bomb release is near. "Bombs gone" I cry. My God! The aircraft is getting a pasting. The anti aircraft guns are flashing left, right and centre. We can see the guns illuminated as they fire. Shrapnel is peppering into the belly of the plane and she is rolling in the blast of the shell bursts, Damn! The switch panel, shows that all the bombs have not got away. "Hang-up" I report to the pilot. He shakes the aircraft in an attempt to free the reluctant fire bombs, until we don't know whether its the flak or Eric who is buffeting us so. Suddenly I can see a bright orange glow behind me as I sit in the nose. "The bomb bay's on fire" I call over the intercom. "The starboard inner engine is on fire"— shouts the flight engineer, and almost immediately Eric retorts "So is the port inner". Then the wireless operator tells us

(David Hills: the man who didn't get away) that there is a fire amidships. We seem to be losing height and all the anti-aircraft guns in Stuttgart are belching forth their hail of death at us as if we were the sole occupant of the skies—"Bale out" commands Eric.

I am supposed to go first so I try to release the hatch in the nose. Blast! it's stuck. I kick at it but it remains wedged half out. Ah well what's the use the aircraft is bound to blow up any minute anyway. Might as well sit back and wait for it. "Bale out you....." swears Eric horribly—and I have a quick impression of him struggling with the controls. Under the stimulus of this curse I take one last almighty kick and the hatch falls away. Right! out I go, head first.

I look down and already the snow-covered ground, clear in the moonlight, seems to be rushing towards me. Pylons over there to the right—am I drifting towards them?—no we're going to miss them, A paralyzing jar as I hit the ground and I lie there winded for a few moments until the lectures we have had on escaping from enemy territory begin to go through my mind. The first step is to bury the chute. A moment and the harness is off and I am free of the parachute and its trappings. I am in a field. Out with the knife then and dig. A few minutes hacking at the iron-hard ground and it is obvious I shall be at it all night to dig a large enough hole. There is a hedge over there to the right. If I can hide the thing in that it will escape a casual inspection of the field. Another five minutes work cutting the chute away from its harness and thrusting the pieces into separate parts of the hedge and I am the sole immediate evidence of foreign intrusion into the Fatherland.

The way to freedom lies just west of south towards Switzerland, and I take out the compass so thoughtfully provided with the escape kit we all carry. It is such a puny thing though, like a child's toy and the needle sticks. Luckily there is Polaris clear and bright in the sky and I start walking with the star just over my - right shoulder. Through a few fields and I reach a wood. No sign of people at all. I wander deeper into the woods and I find some dummy anti-aircraft guns, quite unattended. You must conceal yourself somewhere. I wander hither-and thither and finally settle down in a ditch.

It is wretchedly cold. The electrically-heated flying boots offer little warmth with no aircraft engine to provide electricity, and I have buried the equally useless flying jacket in the hedge with the chute—particularly since it was so distinctive. I am much more likely to get by at a casual glance in the darkness with battledress on. As an afterthought I rip the observer's badge from the battledress tunic and put them in my pocket. Fortunately I have a few bars of chocolate in addition to the Ovaltine tablets in the escape kit box, and I eat a bar. Despite the cold a little sleep comes and I doze fitfully towards a cold,

wet, grey morning.

The obvious thing to do is to move at night so I spend that day — I know not how — dejectedly moving quietly and in very small circles to keep warm. Not a soul to be seen all day — although my heartbeats quicken from time to time as I see a movement in the distance.

This wood must be on the outskirts of Stuttgart. How strange it is that no one seems to be looking for me. A half hour, an hour — I don't know how long, and I come to the edge of the wood and there are houses across a short field. Beyond the houses a road. Well, the plunge must be taken, and I move towards a path at the side of the houses which leads towards the road.

Halfway across the field and I stop transfixed. A woman is entering the path from the road. A quick weighing of the alternatives — bolt and she would surely raise the alarm. No there is only one thing to do and I walk steadily forward. The woman and I pass and suppressing with great difficulty a desire to run like the wind I stroll on to the road. To the right of me stretches a magnificent highway, banked up from the surrounding countryside.

This must be one of the much vaunted autobahns and it heads almost due South. Just about the direction I want.

My heart still thumping as I expect any moment to hear the hue and cry raised by the fraulein I have just passed, I push onwards. A mile or so covered and still no one giving chase and I begin to relax again. Then a car swoops out of the night towards me its lights blazing. I dive instantly into the bank which slopes away from the road and press myself hard on the ground. The car passes. I get up and resume my march. A few eventful miles and then the road-climbs steeply and I can see the silhouette of a town flanking it at the top of the rise. It would be risky to try walking through a town so I strike off westwards through fields again. Soon there are more houses in front of me. No avoiding them. There are lights in some of the windows and the sound of voices reach me. I shall have to take my chances and I boldly walk between the houses and on to a path behind them.

More houses still, and then another path through a wood. I stumble forward, the leg I jolted when I hit the ground on landing is quite painful now, and my foot falls through the thin ice over a rut and I have a bootfull of freezing water. My hands are bitterly cold too and I am beginning to lose heart. Perhaps a pep tablet would help. I swallow one and feel more resolute, although disappointed that there is no apparent accretion of energy.

Onwards through the weary night the walk continues until near dawn. I begin to think of a hiding place for the day. A barn would be ideal and by good

fortune I find one just as the sky begins to lighten, 50 yards or so away from a farmhouse. The door is not well fastened and after a little wrestling with the bar I am inside. There is a ladder leading to a hayloft and I am soon buried in the hay. Through clinks in the barn I can see the light of day growing — I can feel a cold draught through the chinks too:

It is a long day. Hunger gnaws at me — and I gnaw at a little more chocolate and suck a few Ovaltine tablets from the escape kit. It is bitterly cold too and my hands are numb and beginning to swell. One way to pass the time is to smoke and I puff away at some of the 1000 or so cigarettes I have distributed about my pockets. There is a little warmth to be derived by cupping my hands about the burning tobacco — no thought of the danger of fire buried as I am deep in the straw. As the hours drag by I hear mice or rats moving about, my companions in the straw. At last night comes again, and I steal away from the barn to continue the south westerly trek. It is fine and clear — and freezing. Still wet from the first night and days soaking my feet have less feeling despite the action of walking my hands are stiff, unmanageable hunks of flesh. Belly pangs pull at me which my small stock of chocolate and tablets cannot quell. I David Hills today walk half doubled up and the image of the eggs and bacon which I have kept before me, as the reward for crossing the frontier into Switzerland, somehow does not seem a strong enough incentive. More and more frequently I have recourse to the pep pills. More frequently than the packet prescribes, but somehow although they give no sense of well being they do give an increased will to go on. Towards dawn another barn offers its shelter and a further cold hungry day stretches its interminable hours before me. The fourth night comes at last and I haul my reluctant body out of the barn. The lurches forward between pauses become shorter — the pauses between lurches become longer. No food to be found anywhere. I do not get enough energy from the Ovaltine tablets which remain and only the pep pills keep me moving. There interest as I come to a wooden pavilion in the middle of nowhere. It is an experimental station where small panels of wood of many different varieties are despoiled on the outside walls and exposed to weathering. How many miles I cover during the night I do not know — it does not seem to matter any more. The only thing is to keep moving. The fourth dawn comes before I have found my customary barn. It is quite light when I come to the edge of a village. There is indeed a barn on its outskirts — but this one is firmly secured and I do not succeed in opening it. Voices come up from the village. There is the sound of movement, and dogs bark. Nothing for it but to retreat to the wooded slopes I have left a mile or two behind me. On the way back I half-heartedly try to get into some empty chicken coops but they have entrances which will allow the passage of chickens only. Back in the woods I have to move about. Concealing myself behind trees as far as possible in order to avoid freezing solid.

After an hour or so I suddenly see a huge figure swinging towards me, with an axe in his hands. I throw myself on the ground in the hope that once again I shall not be noticed. I can hear the man coming nearer. A little prayer that he will not see me and I remain motionless. "Was macken sie hier" a voice thunders and I look up to see a broad Wurtenburgian over me with his axe poised above his shoulder. I drag myself to my feet and in a half strangled voice I croak "Kamarad". It is the only German I know — and it's not very effective. I feel sure the man is going to slice off my head as he screams at me in threatening tones. Fortunately he has a companion who quickly approaches and restrains him. This second man has a hook on his right wrist instead of a hand, and after much argument he persuades the first into taking me a live captive and they tie my hands behind my back. On the walk to the village I gather mainly by sign language since neither of us can speak the other's tongue that the saviour of my life lost his hand fighting on the Russian front — he has a fellow feeling.

In the village I am made to stand in the middle of the square, my hands still tied behind my back, while the children stand and gawk at the strange unkempt wretch from who knows where. A sense of failure is about all that remains to me apart from the all pervading desire for food. My signs result in some kind individual bringing me a chunk of the bitter rye bread which I am soon to get to know so well, and even enjoy and as I hold it in my freed hands, now swollen to twice their normal size I cannot help a feeling of relief that the lonely battle with my weak flesh has been settled for me and that soon I shall know warmth and the comfort of a full stomach again.
S.S.A.F.A

The Soldiers', Sailors' & Airmen's Families Association,
27 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9BZ.

The saga continues:

Lancaster W4107

The Lancaster that landed on Sark. it was on 22 November, 1942 Ground haze and thin cloud over Stuttgart prevented the Pathfinders from locating the centre of the city. With the help of a bright moon, the 7 Lancasters from 49 Squadron, did manage to pick up the river from the north and were able to gain good fixes. The Main Force arrived over Stuttgart just after 22.00hrs, and for the next hour over 200 bombers dropped their loads mainly in the south of the city.

At Scampton, 5 of the unit's Lancasters had returned safely. Eventually, it became apparent that Sgt Singleton and crew (W4107) had failed to return. Some fifty years later, Eric Singleton recalls the reason why his Lancaster was prevented from returning to base:

"After dropping our bombs, unfortunately before getting clear, the aircraft was shot at, and received several direct hits. The starboard inner engine was on fire and there was fire in the fuselage... I thought we were going to have an explosion."

After a deterioration of the situation, four members of the crew baled out, but Sgt Singleton decided to see just how far he could continue to fly the damaged aircraft. The two remaining crew, mid upper gunner Eddie Pope and rear gunner Les Saunders, with great effort succeeded in extinguishing the fuselage fire, and miraculously, a short time later, the engine fire went out. Eric continues: "We crossed the coast, and I thought we were North of the Cherbourg Peninsula en route for England. After a short time, seeing apparently 'friendly' land below us, I decided to bring the Lancaster down."

After a rather bumpy descent, skirting one field, shooting through a hedge before eventually coming to rest in a second field, Sgt Singleton and his intrepid gunners clambered out of the aircraft to find a reception party waiting. Eric later proclaimed: "I thought it was the Home Guard, but as they asked us to put up our hands, we realised they were Germans!"

The Lancaster crew had erroneously landed on the Channel Island of Sark which was occupied by Germany during the Second World War, and as a result, Sgt Singleton and crew (including those who had baled out earlier) were to spend the rest of the war in POW camp. This 49 Squadron Lancaster was the only plane to land on the Island during the war.

S.S.A.F.A

The Soldiers', Sailors' & Airmen's Families Association,
27 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9BZ.

Their support covers both regulars and reserves in the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the British Army and the Royal Air Force and their families, including anyone who has completed National Service. They are all entitled to life-long support from SSAFA, no matter how long they have served.

SSAFA helps the armed forces community in a number of ways, though their focus is on providing direct support to individuals in need of physical or emotional care.

Addiction, relationship breakdown, debt, homelessness, post-traumatic stress, depression and disability are all issues that can affect our members of our Armed Forces community. Many of these problems only become apparent when an individual has to leave their life in the Forces and join 'Civvy Street'. SSAFA is committed to helping our brave men and women overcome these problems, and rebuild their lives.

Letters to the Editor

Chris Beare

Finding connections ND 684

As an enthusiastic researcher of Family history I find it can become an all consuming pastime. Following a lead and finding correct historical information to back it up can become very addictive, exciting to prove facts, and time wasting when it leads to a dead end. Sometimes there are just too many routes to follow and its necessary to back off for a while and come back to it fresh at a later stage. One such case has been the life of my uncle Dennis Blumfield navigator on 49 Squadron ND684.

I knew he was lost with all crew on the night of 18/19 July 1944 and they are buried in the churchyard at Granges Sur Aube in France near their crash site. I knew that my mother had never really recovered emotionally from the death of her brother. I knew that my grandmother, already a widow, had shown great strength in coordinating correspondence and exchange of photos with the parents of the rest of the crew. I had visited the graves and been taken to the crash site by the mayor of the French village. I had walked through rows of sunflowers growing in the farmers field where the plane had crashed and collected a bag of small plane parts still visible on the surface after all these years, a very emotional experience. However making contact with other crew member families was still a puzzle to be solved.

Along with my mother, before she died, we joined the 49 squadron association and we were able to take her to Fiskerton airfield and visit RAF Scampton. We never achieved Mums desire to meet someone who remembered her brother from his RAF days. Over the years I have been able to lay tributes and place poppies on behalf of all the seven crew members at memorials in Green Park, Lincoln, Fiskerton airfield the National Memorial Arboretum and on the graves in France. I had success finding the brother of Air Gunner Bob Viollet and we were able to attend a 49 squadron memorial service together before he died a few years ago. We were able read together the story of our crew in the book 'D Day Bomber Command Failed to return' in a chapter beautifully compiled and written by Steve Darlow. My hope was that the book would be seen by others connected to the crew but I heard nothing.

I had my grandmothers letters exchanged with the other families in 1944 but following up leads to addresses in Australia and Canada eluded me. Were

there any family members still alive and, if so, were they even interested in looking up the RAF service of their family member? Lo and behold, to prove patience can be rewarded, in recent weeks in 2023 the niece of pilot Bill Appleyard contacted 49 squadron association from Australia and was put in touch with me. Her father is still alive and had always hoped to write a book about the life of his brother and, due to his dementia, Wendy Appleyard was trying to help him. To say that Wendy was delighted to make contact would be an understatement! We exchanged many emails and messages in the following weeks. I was able to supply photos and facts that I already had and we compared log books. Wendy was full of questions and also full of praise for Ed Norman who had been able to supply facts and information from the 49 squadron association archives. Exchanging information has been hampered by the fact that Wendy can only read emails on her phone and not on a computer screen but we continue to be in contact. My next task is to re read all the letters I have which were exchanged between my uncle and his mother & sister and also my grandmothers letters to the other parents. Wendy is keen to know anything I can supply her with to help fill in the story. Sadly no crew photo appears to exist but we do have the individual photos of them all. I am so pleased that I have been able to supply her with photos of poppies I have placed beside Bill Appleyards name on memorials at various times. Wendy has such a regret that in Australia there are no such memorials for her to visit.

Our story continues as we share our research and is an encouragement never to give up looking for information. We all know that the crews themselves were very close and a tight knit team together. What would they think of us, their families, making contact now? Maybe if they had lived we would all have met under happier circumstances.

We will never know.

Chris Beare Niece of F/S D.W. Blumfield.

FTR ND684	F/O W.D. Appleyard	Pilot	(killed)
(EA-V)	P/O H.E. Turner	F/E	(killed)
‘B Flt’	F/S D.W. Blumfield	NAV	(killed)
	F/S G.J Perry	W/AG	(killed)
	P/O E.M Matheson RCAF	A/G	(killed)
Crew on their	F/S G.W. Jameson B/A		(killed)
26th operation	Sgt. R.F.H. Viollet	A/G	(killed)

Letters to the Editor

From Mrs Shirley Moxon

49 Squadron Roll of Honour The Wesseling Raid 21/22 June 1944

Dear Robert,

I am an associate member of the 49er and would like to give you more information while I am still able to do it.

My husbands uncle was George Witty who flew Lancaster Bombers from Fiskerton airfield which I visited and was met by the lovely helpful John Ward, sadly not with us now, he kindly did a photo for me of George, meeting us on his motorbike at the Fiskerton Memorial. You kindly did a report of our visit in an earlier 49er possibly 2018 edition with Colin Cripps and others, I was in touch with the Pilot F/L J R Hill of Lancaster's ME 675 (EA-R) relative Jennifer D Wykle who wrote a book which I purchased and wondered if anyone else would like to purchase it. Jen De W Publications. Sadley Jenny died soon after she wrote this from a brain tumour but her book lives on. I am enclosing a copy of the cover of the Lancaster ME 675 and would be amazing if any relatives are alive of the remaining crew other than George Witty and John Hill. I previously sent photos of George's wedding and the grave in Eindhoven at Woensel, they were most helpful writing to me from Neuenen and sending information and photos.

Best wishes Robert,
From Shirley.

**A timely reminder of our losses for June 1944.
BLESS THEM ALL.**

49 Squadron Roll of Honour The Wesseling Raid 21/22 June 1944

49 Squ Lancaster ILL900 EA-T Op: Wesseling t/o 2317 Fiskerton—W/ C M Crocker DFC & Bar

Outbound shot down by a night-fighter and crashed in the general area of Julich-Mersch. All, including their British Broadcasting Correspondent, Kent Stevenson, are buried in Rheinberg War Cemetery. Both DFM recipients had their awards published on 25 January 1946. It is believed P/O Creighton RCAF had recently arrived from 619 Squadron. The parents of W/C Crocker lived in Boston, Massachusetts.

Pilot W/C Malcolm Crocker DFC & Bar RAFVR age 27
F/E F/L Albert Edward Anderson Matthews DFC RAFVR age 30
Nav P/O Leslie Bernard Benson DFM RAFVR age 24
B/A F/O Kenneth Dutton RAFVR
W/Op F/O James Robert Worthington DFC RAFVR age 30
M/U P/O Allan David Creighton DFC RAFVR age 26
R/G P/O David Hounsell Car DFM RAFVR
War Correspondent Mr Kent Stevenson, BBC Reporter

49 Squ Lancaster I ME675 EA-E op: Wesseling t/o 2303 Fiskerton—F/L JR Hill.

Crashed near Lage Mierde (Noord-Brabant) a Dutch village close to the border with Belgium and roughly 23 km WSW from the centre of Eindhoven, where all are buried in Woensel General Cemetery. F/L Hill held a Bachelor of Science degree.

Pilot F/L John Rowland Hill RAFVR age 29
F/E Sgt George Frederick Witty RAFVR age 34
Nav F/O Kenneth Walton Jones RNZAF age 27
B/A Sgt David McFarlane Forsyth Bell RAFVR
W/Op Sgt Thomas Birtwhistle Whewell RAFVR age 21
M/U Sgt Thomas Albert Hall RAFVR age 23
R/G F/S George Frederick Wood RAFVR

49 Squ Lancaster I ME808 EA-D Op: Wesseling t/o 2314 Fiskerton—S/ L LE Cox.

Crashed at Loenhout in the province of Antwerpen, 24 km NNE from the centre of Antwerpen, where all are buried in Schoonselhof Cemetery. F/O Freckleton had served previously with 100 Squadron, while F/O Mather had flown with 97 Squadron, their awards being Gazetted on 19 October and 15 June 1943 respectively.

Pilot S/L Leonard Edgar Cox RAFVR age 30
F/E F/O John Herbert Ingram RAFVR age 29
Nav F/O Mervyn James DFC RAFVR age 34
W/Op F/O William Mather DFM RAFVR
M/U F/O William Edward Day RAF age 25
R/F F/O Aldred Hambly RAFVR age 30

49 Squ Lancaster III ND683 EA-K Op: Wesseling to 2311 Fiskerton—P/O AW Shinn DFC.

Crashed in the sea off the coast of Holland. Four bodies were later washed in by the tides and now rest in various Dutch cemeteries. Three others are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial. P/O Shinn had been involved in a crash late in March while engaging on operations to Essen.

Pilot P/O Albert William Shinn DFC RAFVR age 30
Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery, Runnymede Memorial

F/E Sgt Norman George Valentine Pettit RAFVR age 20
Bergen-op-Zoom War Cemetery, Runnymede Memorial

Nav F/O John Bottomley Stanley RAFVR age 26
The Hague (Westduin) General Cemetery, Hook of Holland General Cemetery

B/A WO2 Victor Charles Cully FCAF
Runnymede Memorial

W/Op Sgt Stanley Hawes RAFVR age 22
Runnymede Memorial

M/U Sgt Albert Edward Dicken RAFVR age 19
Runnymede Memorial

R/G Sgt Arthur Armstrong RAFVR age 20
Runnymede Memorial

**49 Squ Lancaster III ND695 EA-B Op: Wesseling t/o 2318 Fiskerton—
P/O AR Ross.**

Lost without trace. All are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

Pilot P/O Alexander Robert Ross RAFVR age 23
F/E Sgt Dennis William Palmer RAFVR age 23
Nav F/S Charles Gregory Morton RAFVR
B/A F/S Gordon Fraser MacGregor RCAF age 24
W/Op Sgt Clifford Charles Holden RAFVR age 31
M/U Sgt Arthur Desmond Griffin RAFVR
R/G Sgt Douglas William Edward Hardy RAF age 22

**49 Squ Lancaster III NE128 EA-J Op: Wesseling t/o Fiskerton—
F/O LN Simpkin.**

F/O Simpkin and Sgt Maton are buried in Rheinberg War Cemetery.

Pilot F/O Leslie Norman Simpkin RAFVR age 24
F/E Sgt AH Ladkin pow
Nav F/S TAF Wilson pow
B/A WO2 EN O'Reilly RCAF pow
W/Op W/O RS Phillips RAAF pow
M/U Sgt W Watson pow
R/G Sgt James Alfred Thomas Maton RAFVR age 20

A Special Visit to East Kirby.

Over ten years ago, during a 49 Squadron Association arranged visit to the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, I first discovered the wonderful aircraft 'Just Jane' or officially Lancaster NX611.

During the same weekend, the late and much missed Alan Parr had introduced me and my family to Annette, Robert, and Terry McEneaney. This was the first time that two families of the ND474 crew had met each other. My uncle Ronald Hoole - Flt Engineer and Terence McEneaney Navigator - were both lost together with their crew aboard Lancaster ND474 during a mission to Stuttgart on 15th March 1944.

Now nearly 79 years since the loss of ND474, Robert and I, found ourselves standing beneath this majestic aircraft, imagining our lads climbing aboard such a machine and rumbling down the runway at Fiskerton, their Lancaster full of aviation fuel and bombs and heading towards occupied Germany.



Robert McEneaney and Louise Jennings-Hoole holding their respective relatives pictures of Terence McEneaney and Ronald Hoole which they took with them in 'Just Jane'.

During our visit to East Kirby, we discovered that Just Jane was being restored and the plan was to ensure that NX611 returned to an airworthy condition. The work continues as does the fund raising and taxi runs, which finance the development of the Lancaster and other WWII aircraft that are maintained by the centre. The aviation heritage centre is operated by the Panton family, who are restoring Just Jane as a tribute to family member Christopher Panton, who died over Germany in 1944. By coincidence Christopher Panton is buried at Durnbach War Cemetery where the crew of ND474 are also laid to rest. As a family group we have visited Durnbach many times during which, we have also visited Christopher's grave to pay our respects to him and his crew.

Although on our first visit we were not able to climb aboard Just Jane, we were delighted to discover that as part of the long-term restoration project, taxi rides were available, and Robert and I both agreed that such an adventure must be added to our bucket lists.

So now roll forward ten years and with several birthdays and Christmas presents later, Robert and I finally found ourselves with two golden tickets to a taxi ride on Just Jane. I can't describe the excitement I felt as we planned our visit to East Kirby.



Robert and Louise outside of 'Just Jane'

There was no way that Robert and I would climb the steps of a Lancaster unless we were together, after all we were to be the first relatives of the McEneaney and Hoole family to board a Lancaster since the 15th March 1944.

On our arrival to the hanger, we were welcomed by Andrew Panton and Lizz Dobbs who having learnt about our family members, ensured that we could take up the engineer and navigator crew positions for the entire taxi ride. They also expertly guided us throughout our tour of the aircraft and provided detailed and interesting facts about what it would have been like to work and serve as a Lancaster crew member.

Once inside the Lancaster and when our eyes had adjusted to the darkness, our first impression was the extreme lack of space. From the outside, the aircraft seems huge but inside it was very tight due to various obstructions like the main wing spar which made our progress to the cockpit a challenge.

The main spar was apparently inside the aircraft fuselage in order to provide longer and greater bomb capacity below. However, during the war, the crew

members would have had to climb over, under and around different pieces of equipment and parts of the aircraft, wearing heavy clothing and large flight boots. Trying to make that same journey at night while in battle conditions or worst, on fire and in a dive, explains one of the reasons why so many young men failed to return.

Robert and I were wearing jeans and trainers and although we were given time to manoeuvre ourselves into the various areas of the aircraft; it was a challenge and a very interesting obstacle course. With excitement and some emotion, we climbed small ladders, squeezed pass the radio equipment and slivered into the pilot's seat and belly surfed headfirst into the bomb aimers position. I'm sure our exploits provided some amusement to the crew of NX611, as there was certain amount of creaking joints and moaning going on, as we clambered about the aircraft.

It was nice to discover how close our uncles would have been positioned. The navigator just over the shoulder of the flight engineer although the navigator would have been separated by a heavy curtain to keep his map light from being seen outside the aircraft.

Holding the photos of our uncles, Robert and I listened with pride and some sadness as our flight engineer started up the four Merlin engines. This was it, we were finally on the move and off on our long awaited taxi ride. Still thinking of the crew of ND474, those young men full of anticipation and probably fear, we were now listening to the same sounds from the cockpit of a Lancaster. Tissues were out mopping the moist eyes and the drips of rainwater coming through the Perspex canopy, these were amazing bomber



The Chapel at
East Kirby,
Lincolnshire
Aviation
Heritage Centre

aircraft but apparently not waterproof.

Our taxi ride took us across the grass around the airfield, stopping once or twice while the pilot opened the engines and gave us a full demonstration of the power of those Merlin engines. Meanwhile, our family braved the down pour and from under large umbrella's, waved with enthusiasm from the viewing area.

Once we returned to the hanger Liz Dobbs gave an excellent presentation, explaining the different areas of the aircraft and each role of the crew. The details were fascinating and very informative. The whole experience was excellence from start to finish.

After we said our goodbyes to the crew of NX611, we all decided to visit the lovely RAF chapel which is also in the grounds of the centre. We sat in the peace and quiet for a few moments of reflection and then with perfect timing, our two favourite hymns were played, Jerusalem and Danny Boy. We all felt that Our Boys were there with us, as on many occasions over the years, our family group have included those same hymns during our visits of remembrance to Durnbach. How comforting that those hymns were now being played.

For anyone who has an interest in the Lancaster aircraft, the visit to Just Jane at East Kirby is a must. There's many interesting exhibitions and facts to discover, the staff are all very welcoming and the cream teas are certainly worth considering. During the last ten years of research, I have learnt many facts about the Aero Lancaster but seeing the aircraft first hand was a fantastic experience. We are grateful to the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre for a wonderful day, for letting us step back in time and for being able to share in an experience which we will never forget.

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

No 7, this was again a spare Dicky trip with Sgt Reynolds Pilot, the target Szony Oil Refinery in Hungary, once again heavy enemy flak and fighters on our way back. Then the Bomb Aimer informed us that we had a 500 lb bomb hung up. Luckily for us, however, he got rid of it into the sea before crossing the Italian mainland. I was to go with the same crew the following night, their own gunner Sgt Kilner was grounded for sleeping in the turret two nights before. Another aircraft damaged part of the tail plane. I was on my way back to pick my gear up from the tent when the Wingco told me not to bother; their own gunner had learnt his lesson. There for the grace of god go I, they went but never returned even after identifying.

No 8 again spare Dicky with Sgt Malcolm Jones the Marshalling Yards at Bologna, Northern Italy, plenty of flak.

No.9 back with own crew this was what we call a battle stooge, we were requested by the eighth army to do a low level bombing raid on the Gothic Line at Pesaro, where Field Marshall's troops were dug in, could not be moved (Kesselring). Our troops lit fires on their side of the line as markers. We went in at four hundred feet and all our bombs fell on the German line. Next day our army broke through, we had a thank you very much from our Commanders.

No.10 again a Marshalling Yard in Italy, this time Ferraro, very little enemy action.

No.11 the same target as No.10.

No.12 Marshalling yards - this time Ravenna, Italy.

No.13 as raids nos. 10 and 11.

No.14 A full moon, which meant mine laying, a trip up the Danube in Hungary, two mines at a thousand pounds each.

These raids we called the "splash raids" because we had to come down to below one hundred feet to drop the mines and when they entered the water, the splash came up over the aircraft, there was even water in my turret. Many of our aircraft were forced to ditch because of the heavy gunfire. Our aircraft

Seemed to be on fire because of the flaming onion they were throwing up at us. We seemed to be looking down the gun barrels.

On pinpointing our section of the river , the mines were dropped and after much evasive action, we headed back to base and all the way back I could see aircraft that had crashed, up in flames like Guy Fawkes night. These were all pinpointed by our Navigator. Only once did I go on these drops and once was enough to last me a lifetime, it was flak all the way there and all the way back.

No 15 a change of scenery, this time a raid on the aerodrome of Eleusis near Athens, Greece. This was to prevent the Germans using the runways in their evacuation, not much enemy action, and light flak. No 16 another battle stooge, bombing of troop concentrations around Rimini, Northern Italy, and some flak. No 17 Hungary once again, this time the Marshalling Yards, Hessayshalom. Much enemy action, fighters, heavy flak, there and back.

It was now time for a spot of rest leave, we travelled by road, some parts were very hair -raising, just as dangerous as flying. At last, we reach Sorrento and it was here in the Minerva Hotel we were to spend a week to recuperate. Again, I was to visit most of the tourist attractions as I did whilst in transit in Poritici earlier.

Leave over, we returned to Tortorella to continue our tour of ops: -

No 18 a change of venue this time, it was to be a bridge near StBenedetti, Italy – a quiet trip.

No 19 this time it was to be a Viaduct at Borovnica in Yugoslavia, some fighters, much flak.

No 20 this was a most interesting raid – the Marshalling Yards at Verona. We did not have a chance to say hello to Romeo and Juliet, we were too busy with the Germans.

No 21 back once again to Hungary , the Marshalling Yards at Szekesfeneryar. On this raid, we carried the four thousand cookie and by god were we happy to hear these words “Bombs gone”, much flak, fighters.

No 22 this time the yards at Zagreb, East Yugoslavia, not too much enemy action.

No 23 once again to Hungary the Zombatheley Aerodrome, as before heavy flak and fighters.

No 24 something different for a change, a daylight supply drop to the Yugoslavian Partisans up in the mountains. I could see the white V marked on the ground, surrounded by waving partisans.

No 25 as No.24

No 26 as No.24

No 27 as No.24

No 28 bombing raid on Marshalling Yards, Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. Slight enemy action on the way back to base. One of our aircraft was right behind and the Pilot a French Canadian F/O Lavack was giving me the old V sign up-you -Jack, I replied up-you-too. He tried to beat us back to join the circuit, but anyway we landed first. We were halfway down the runway, my turret turned to starboard when all of a sudden there was this bloody big bang. Dick my Pilot came over the intercom "Bryn what's that", I replied "its okay here", but on turning the turret astern I could see this other Wellington not far behind us up in flames. It was the aircraft of the French Canadian, they had landed with a bomb aboard. Instead of usual crew of five there were six, and the Pilot walked away unharmed, but the rest of the crew were killed. There were so many bits and pieces covering the runway that the aircraft that were still in the air, were diverted to other airfields. Unknowing to my Pilot Dick, his cousin an Army Officer was waiting for us in dispersal. He was on leave from the Front and someone had told him that it was our plane that had blown up and when we got out of the aircraft he saw Dick and put his arms around him and started to cry like a baby, he was so glad to see him alive. No 29 Now this was the worst of all. It was to be a supply drop to the Italian Partisans near Genoa. The day started with heavy rain, thunder and lightning, there was no changes come dinnertime and we were all sure it would be scrubbed, but no, it was still on and the weather was the worst I have experienced. Time for briefing, it was still very bad weather with low cloud, rain, thunder lightning and strong winds – the lot. We took off at 17.56 hrs, but were unable to climb more than a few thousand feet because of the low cloud and the only way over the sea was through the cloud. A break in the Manfrederici Mountains marked by a white flashing beacon. We set course, but it was not long before we could see it was impossible and the compass packed up because of the conditions. We were lost after about an hour, the Wireless Operator tried to call Darkie for a fix, but no joy, we were dropping as much as five hundred feet. All round the aircraft was a halo of static and there seemed to be lights like

Containers dropping in Slovenia, 1945.
Photos: Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana



electric bulbs on the end of my four guns also we were so low I could see the white horses on the rough sea. I thought – Oh God, this is it, a grave in the angry sea. The Pilot decided to abandon this mad, stupid venture and told us to look out for the beacon. I spotted it on our starboard beam and called up the Pilot to tell him, straight away we headed for it back over the mainland. Then we could not find our airfield at Tortorella, we had to land at Foggia Main. The outcome of this bloody escapade was that we lost thirty aircraft, Wellingtons and Liberators out of a force of one hundred, all because of bad weather. One of our crews, the Pilot being W/O Jeremy Pike, were on their 70th op, they crashed in the hills near to our airfield and they all died of exposure, six aircraft got through to drop supplies.

Supply drop, Xmas Day, 1944. All crews returned safely for Xmas dinner



In my logbook, it says, “Returned early , bad weather 2 hrs 35 mins. What a waste of good aircrew and aircraft. Lest we forget – I shall never”.

No.30 this was a repeat of No.29 but in good weather. We all got to the dropping point and all got back safe, supplies were dropped on target.

No.31 a raid on the bridge and troops at Podgorica, Yugoslavia, some flak.

No.32 another raid in Yugoslavia, the town of Visegrad, roads and troops as the Germans were retreating. Flak.



The Sorrento coast, & view from the Minerva Hotel, 1944, where most crews spent some leave.



No.33 Yugoslavia once again, the town of Uzice and troops. There were many thousands of Germans in and around the town. There were heavy casualties amongst the enemy.

No.34 again a supplies drop to the Yugoslavian Partisans near Tuzla, up in the mountains. This was our last trip and after we dropped, our supplies out Pilot flew very low in salute to the Partisans who were waving to us.

I threw them the small tin of boiled sweets we had in our iron rations. I have often wondered if they enjoyed those sweets. My assessments read so, above average, a good hard working Air Gunner, keen and reliable, should make a useful instructor . H A Langton W/Cdr now known as Sir Henry Calley D.S.O. D.F.C. (This was not too bad for a lad who just managed to scrape through in Rhodesia.)



Supply drop, Circhina, January 18th, 1945



Shirts being made from parachutes,
Paka, NE Slovenia, July 1944.
Photo: Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana

I spent Christmas 1944 with the lads at Tortorello, then back on the road once again to Portici. In transit I met two more boys from Brynmawr, one was an airman the other a sailor, Jack Thomas and Tom Vaughan. They were both on the Isle of Ischia and I spent a weekend with them, very nice it was too, living with an Italian family, mama was very kind to us. All good things come to an end and I was on my way by train to Taranto, which took 15 hrs, what a nightmare. There were no lights and no heating and on top of this I had one of my kitbags stolen, it happened to be the one with all my flying kit and souvenirs in. Then by American Liberty boat to Egypt back to Almaza. The Americans were great to us on the boat over kindness itself. What a contrast to the way we were treated on the awful boat Empress of Scotland one of our own. They treated us like dogs and we were ordered to do gun watches, then straight after, boat drill. We had no sleep and we were begrudged a cup of tea after being on watch for hours. We were on this 'bloody' boat for six weeks, calling in at Algeria, Gibraltar and Malta and not being allowed to set foot on land – so much for our wonderful Merchant Navy.

We disembarked at Liverpool and as we stood on the quay, we told these kind sailors what we should like to see happen to their lousy boat. Then on to West Kirby to be kitted out and given ration cards and pay, then a nice warm meal of sausages and potatoes (the best meal for seven weeks).

After good nights sleep, it was time to catch the train for South Wales. I arrived in Newport station just on midnight; the last train had gone up the valley, so after over three years abroad I was so near and yet so far away from home. I thought to myself, it's a night in the Chapel on Stow hill for me, but suddenly a voice came over the tannoy asking passengers for the Western Valley to go to the Station Master's office. When I got there, it was full of sailors, soldiers, and airmen. One of the soldiers was a boy Addis, whom I knew. The Station Master told us he would put on a train as far as Aberbeeg, God Bless Him. When we got to Aberbeeg, apart from us two Brynmawr boys, the train was empty. We got off the train and were about to walk away, when the driver asked us how far we had to go, we told him Brynmawr, he said jump back on I will take you there – what a wonderful gesture after the way I was treated on that terrible boat. I shall always remember this driver, bless him, he made up for those on that boat.

We got to Brynmawr just after one o'clock, the station was all in darkness and locked up, and so we had to climb over the fence. As I had a suitcase and three kit bags I decided to leave two kitbags on the station and before I got up the following morning, my bags were brought up to our house by Mr Edgar Simmons the drayman. On arriving back home in Clydach Street, I found the street full of flags and all the neighbours and my family waiting for me, what a

homecoming. I had tears of joy and felt like the Prodigal Son. Here I was, back in my hometown after three years of travel from the Clyde to Durban, then from Durban to Cairo, from Cairo to Tottorello, Italy and from here to fly over seven European countries, to me it was a journey of a lifetime.

Now to end I must tell you a story; when I look back upon it, I have had many a laugh, but it could have had serious bearings on my RAF career.

One morning not long after returning from a raid, I was trying to get some sleep, which was not always easy when the blankets are damp and your bed is a lid of f a packing case. I heard someone asking for Bryn Watkins and there in the opening of the tent stood this soldier, he came in and then I could see he was a Brynmawr boy named Jack Williams. I asked him how did he find me and he replied that he had met another Brynmawr boy, Jack Cable in Foggia who told him about me. I then asked him what he was doing and he replied that he was on leave from the front and that he was in the same mob as a cousin of mine, namely Gareth Davies who won the Military Medal, but died of his wounds a couple of years ago.

He had nothing with him, only what he stood up in, so I gave him spare battle blouse to wear with stripes, he then came to have a meal with me in the Sgt's Mess and I gave him a few lire to have a drink of wine in our farmhouse converted mess. When the week was up, he asked could he have a look inside an aircraft, as he had never been in a plane, so I showed him over a Wellington. We then started to walk along the side of the runway and I could see this Wellington up on an air test, there was no other aircraft about. As the Wellington came into land she seemed to wobble; we continued further up the runway, the aircraft wings started to flap and I could see she was going to crash. I grabbed my friend and pulled him down into a slit trench. When the plane crashed it came down about fifty feet from the bomb dump and apart from the rear gunner, who was dragged from the turret, the rest of the crew were burnt alive. As you may know, normally on an air test, it is the Pilot and one other, who sit in the turret who go, but this was a new crew, straight from O.T.U. who were all keen to fly. It was now time for Jack Williams to return to his unit, so he told me; I loaded him up with Cigs, as they were plentiful, razor blades and soap and asked him to share them with my cousin. On meeting my cousin some time later in Brynmawr, I asked him, did he enjoy the Cigs etc., which I had sent him via Jack Williams, he laughed, explaining to me that Jack had been a deserter and he had been on the run all the time he was with me. I have not seen him since.

Comrades, every word I have written is the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help me God. In my logbook, I have the dates and times of all my

ops, but the stories are in my mind forever. Note: -

In recognition of the part I played in the liberation of Yugoslavia, I am a member of the British Yugoslav Society; this is to continue the close comradeship that had been built up during the war years.

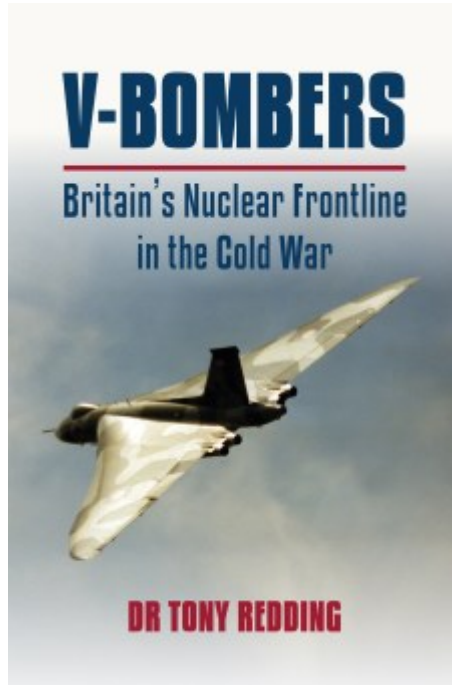
My wife Rose and I have been honoured guests of the Ambassador and his wife at their Embassy in London on many occasions and have been treated as V.I.P

In recognition of my 34 ops over seven European countries, I received only the Italian Star, but did not get the Aircrew Europe Star because I did not start my tour until after the 5 th of June 1944 – what a load of rubbish. Many hundreds of Aircrew were killed after this date, fighting the same war and some did a lot more than those who received the award.

Tortorella, Italy: No 37 Squadron

To be continued:-

V-Bombers
Britain's Nuclear Frontline in the Cold War



I am writing to announce the publication this Autumn of a definitive history of the V-Force in its nuclear role: “V-bombers: Britain’s nuclear frontline in the Cold War”. This book is the product of seven years’ research, including interviews with over 70 former V-Force aircrew and groundcrew.

I would much appreciate it if you would kindly include a reference to the book in Association circulars/newsletters or on the website. With this in mind, I have attached: an image of the front cover; the advance information from the publishers (Grub Street), a brief overview of the book and a short text from the author.

I would be grateful for your support in raising awareness of the new book.

With best wishes,
Dr. Tony Redding

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

By
Paul Gaunt
Part 12

Page 142—Tororella, Italy:- No. 37 Squadron

To be continued in the next newsletter.

DONATIONS

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

Mr R Hounslow—stamps
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I would like to thank everyone else who regularly donates to the
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