



57/630 Squadrons' Association

*President: Group Captain David Houghton
Vice President: Group Captain Tony Gunby*

Secretary: Gordon Lodge



Newsletter 2014



The Three Lancasters at East Kirkby

In Memoriam

We have lost four members who, over many years, supported the Reunion events.

Ethel "Babs" Littler

A bundle of fun, fanatical dancer, and during WW2 life and soul of the NAAFI at East Kirkby.

Harry Le Marchant

A big supporter of the Association and one of possibly a few who flew with both 57 and 630 Squadrons.

George Hassall

Attended the Reunions with Patricia for many years and the Dining-in Nights at RAF Wyton. Never a dull moment in his company!

Peter Goldsmith

Peter attended a number of Reunions with his family, all travelling from Australia. Peter had 20 missions on DX-Q and 12 on DX-N. The family are to continue membership of the Association.

Gordon Lodge

PRESIDENT'S PIECE

As I write this short piece, 2014 is drawing to a close and with it the formal events to mark the 100th Anniversary of the outbreak of World War One ('The Great War') will also come to an end. Of course, for the RAF WWI was a baptism of fire and where the Service came of age, initially as the RFC and RNAS before the RAF came into being officially as the world's first independent air force on 1 April 1918.

What WWI proved beyond a doubt is that, in a modern conflict, Air Power (in its many guises) is critical to success. For our Association, the contribution of 57 Squadron to the development of the RFC/RAF's capabilities are, of course, well known. Today, 57 Squadron remains at the forefront of the continuing development of the RAF. The Squadron's role as a flying training squadron is fundamental to ensuring that the next generation of RAF pilots have 'the right stuff'. I know I speak for all Association Members when I say how impressed we are by the young men and women training with 57 Squadron who we are fortunate enough to meet from time-to-time.

Our next opportunity to meet those future warriors (and share a beer or two) will be on 30 April 2015, when OC 57 Squadron, Squadron Leader Mike Waring, has kindly invited Association Members to join the current Members of 57 Squadron at a Dining-In Night at the Squadron's new home of RAF College Cranwell – details at **Page 28** in this Newsletter.

As we look ahead, the future of our Association is bright. Thanks to our Committee (whipped into shape by our Secretary, Gordon Lodge), the Association continues to evolve and to attract new Members, many of who will join us at our next Association Reunion in July 2015.

As ever, for those who are unable to attend the Association Reunions or Dining-In Nights, I hope that the information in this Newsletter about the 'goings on' at Woodhall Spa/East Kirkby and on today's 57 Squadron will show that the spirit of 57 Squadron and 630 Squadron remains in robust health.

I end by wishing all Association Members my very best for a peaceful 2015 from a chilly Poland where I continue to serve (until February 2015) as the UK Defence Attaché. I look forward to seeing all those who can make it at the Dining-In Night in April 2015 and at the Annual Reunion in July 2015. Until we meet again, my best wishes to you all.

Group Captain David Houghton

Secretary's Note

The Reunion Saturday afternoon had Members arriving and gathering on the Terrace and Gardens of the Petwood Hotel.

Afternoon tea served from 2.30pm with music provided by Heather Marie who proved to have a superb voice and attracted more and more Members to the room.

Dinner followed the usual format the Speakers being;

Our President, Group Captain David Houghton

Officer Commanding 57 Squadron, Squadron Leader Mike Waring

Grace by our Hon. Chaplain, The Rev. Richard Benson

Loyal Toast, Allen Hudson

Absent Friends, Allan Payne

Annual Accounts were approved by Members. The President managed the Raffle with his usual panache ably assisted by Wing Commander Mike Bracken.

The evening finished with Members 'supporting' the bar in the usual manner! For the first time we had eight of 57 Squadron attending from RAF Wyton who proved to be a superb bunch of guys who fully participated in the evening !!!

Sunday saw the Reunion moving to East Kirkby with some 200 people present for the Service in the Hangar by the Rev. Richard Benson. We were honoured to have the 57 Squadron Standard Party in attendance. Following the laying of Wreaths at the Memorial, we returned to the Airfield for the fly past by the BBMF and the taxi run by the East Kirkby Lancaster 'Just Jane'.

The Sunday evening Dinner Dance with 60 Members in the Woodland Suite had a firm route established between the bar and the floor - dancing of course! Due to the numbers and large size of the Woodland Suite, next year will see the Dinner Dance move to the Petwood Suite and rather than a band Heather Marie, from Saturday afternoon fame, will provide music for dancing or listening.

The Squadron moved to RAF Cranwell during September which will be the venue for the next Dining-in Night.

Finally can I take the opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support of the Association.

Gordon Lodge

Squadron News



No. 57(Reserve) Squadron Task

57(Reserve) Squadron is one of four squadrons under the command and control of No 3 Flying Training School (No 3 FTS). The Squadron operates Grob 115E Tutor aircraft owned and serviced by the RAF National Light Aircraft Flying Task (LAFT) Contractor, Babcock Dyncorp. The aims of the Sqn are:

- a. To carry out Elementary Flying Training (EFT) with RAF and International Defence Training (IDT) ab-initio student pilots in accordance with 22 (Training) Group and HQ 3 FTS published syllabi, following the successful completion of Officer Training and Elementary Flying Training (EFT) Groundschool at RAF Cranwell.
- b. To supervise the General Service Training, officer development and administration of the students.
- c. To provide other ground training as directed by HQ 3 FTS.

57(R) Sqn, 3 FTS was reformed on 1 October 2009 at Royal Air Force Wyton. The Sqn consists of two flights of student pilots on EFT courses. After completion of EFT, the RAF student pilots are streamed fast jet (FJ), multi-engine (ME) or rotary (RW) and attend the respective flying training schools.

57(R) Squadron Move

In September 2014, 57 (Reserve) Squadron moved from RAF Wyton in Cambridgeshire to RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire, co-locating the two RAF EFT Squadrons. For the first time in decades all RAF trainee pilots will undertake their training in one location. The Squadron had been due to move to RAF Wittering until late 2013 when the decision was made that it would occupy Aircraft Hall at RAF Cranwell.

Despite the upheaval of packing and preparing, No. 57(Reserve) Squadron managed to graduate a course on time before the move date. The Squadron personnel worked tirelessly to ensure that the physical move was completed in just 3 days with only 8 days of course flying lost in the process following a staged return to flying for students at their new base.

No. 57(Reserve) Squadron's new home, Aircraft Hall, was formerly used as the Engineer Officer Training establishment (which relocated in 2010). The building and hangar remained empty for little over three years before it was earmarked for use once more. Despite looking very much the same from the outside, inside it has been refitted and redecorated to make a modern training environment on an EFT Squadron for the development of the frontline pilots of tomorrow.

The move, over two years in the planning, culminated with a ceremonial diamond nine formation departure from RAF Wyton via the overheads of several RAF Stations on the way, arriving at RAF Cranwell with a flypast over College Hall Officers' Mess and opposition break to land.

257 Mile Charity Cycle

On the 2 October 2014, ten students from No. 57(Reserve) Squadron embarked on a 257 mile cycle from RAF Wyton to RAF Cranwell via the Squadron's WWII spiritual home of East Kirkby and the Sqn's birthplace, Copmanthorpe, York. They ambitiously aimed to complete the substantial distance in only 24 hours.

The students set off just after lunch and were blessed with good weather conditions and light winds on the route. Supported by four students in an LDV van laden with spare bikes, puncture repair kits, isotonic foods and drinks and a plethora of high energy chocolate rations they made steady progress into the night arriving at East Kirkby in the early evening where they were met by OC 57(R) Sqn and a few other staff who were less than optimistic on their chances of success. Taking a short break for dinner, they were soon on the road again and on their way to Copmanthorpe. Making the most of the light traffic, they made good time, arriving at 2am and taking a well deserved break with some nutritious cold pasta. As the weary riders departed Copmanthorpe and set off into the night morale was ebbing but they continued with the spirit of the Phoenix.

At 8am they were met by OC 57(R) Sqn and Flt Lt 'Charlie' Brown just north of Lincoln. Morale suddenly soared. There is a difference of opinion as to whether this was due to seeing the Boss, or due to the bacon sandwiches and coffee he brought along with him. Suddenly the end was in sight, OC 57 and Flt Lt Brown led the weary peloton home draughting them through the strong wind and they raced for home, arriving at Aircraft Hall, RAF Cranwell, just before midday. They completed the 257 miles (very apt) in little over 23 hours and raised just over £1000 for the RAF Benevolent Fund. A fine moment for all involved.

And the award for the best EFT Squadron goes to....

On the 30 October 2014, 57(Reserve) Squadron was awarded with the Sword of Merit. The sword, dating back to the 1950's, was originally presented to 3FTS by Lt Col R.W Bradley. The sword is now presented by OC 3FTS to the best performing EFT Squadron. The award is recognition of the tremendous effort and success the Squadron has been able to deliver in the past 12 months through hard work and determination. OC 57(Reserve) Squadron, Squadron Leader Mike Waring said:

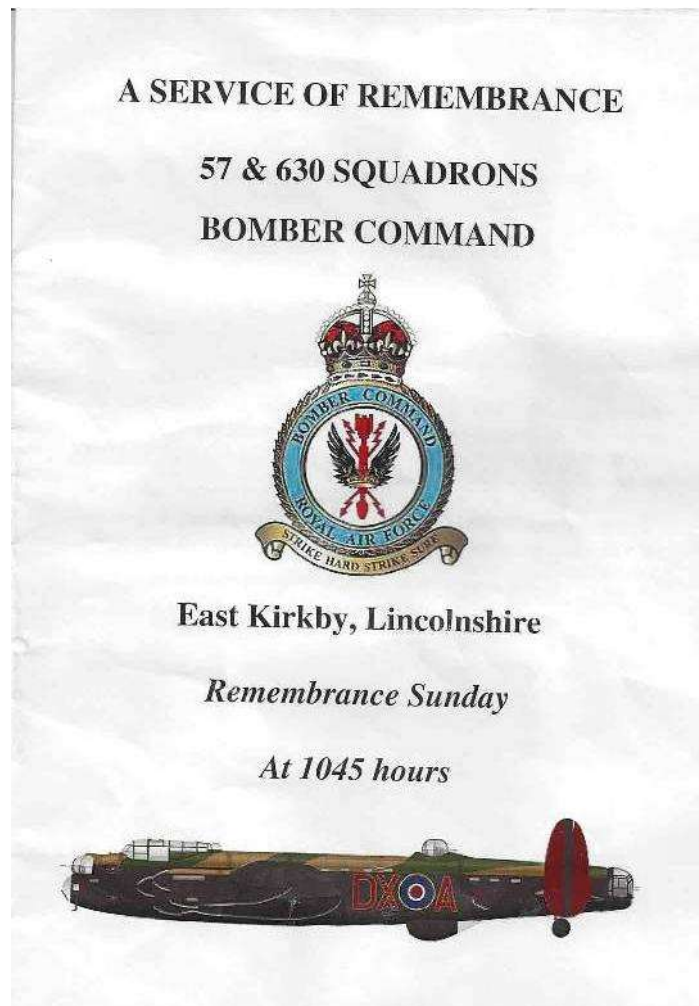
"The award of the Sword of Merit is recognition of the hard work that the staff and students of 57(R) Sqn have put over the last year. It has always fills us with extreme pleasure when we outperform our RAF Cranwell based sister sqn (16(R) Sqn). In the past our success has been assisted by our favourable location of RAF Wyton but our success has primarily been down to our people. The fact that we still continued to outperform 16(R) Sqn despite the significant challenge of moving the sqn to RAF Cranwell speaks volumes of the spirit and attitude of those on 57(R) Sqn. Our challenge now is to continue to outperform them now that we are co-located at RAF Cranwell"

The Squadron personnel are determined to ensure that the badge of considerable honour remains with the Squadron for the long term future.

Remembrance Parade at East Kirkby

On the 9 November 2014, OC 57(R) Squadron and 12 members of staff and students of the Squadron attended the Service of Remembrance at the WWII memorial at East Kirkby. The service, held in honour of 57 and 630 Squadrons, started at 1045hrs and was well represented from the local area. Flt Lt Tom Gallagher led the Standard party in front of the congregation and stood on parade during the service. Prayers were given for those who died serving with No. 57 Squadron and 630 Squadron during World War 2 and subsequently to modern times. After the service, the Squadron personnel were given a guided tour in and around the Lancaster, housed in the hangar at the former airfield. The Squadron members were then invited to the Petwood Hotel, the WW2 Officers' Mess of 617 Squadron for drinks with the Association Secretary.

Squadron Leader Mike Waring



Reunion 2015

Friday 3 July – Monday 6 July

Petwood Hotel Saturday 4 July

Saturday afternoon tea served from 2.30pm. We have asked for the RAF Band to play in the Open Air Theatre in the grounds from 3.00pm.

The Dinner will be 7.00 pm for 7.30pm in the Woodland Suite. Dress, lounge suits/ blazers.

Chief Guest and Speaker, Officer Commanding 57 Squadron.

Sunday Service 5 July East Kirkby

11.45am 57 Squadron Standard Party and Service

Remembrance Service – Medals

Memorial – Last Post – Laying of Wreaths

3.00pm BBMF Fly Past

Dinner Dance

Sunday evening, 7.00pm for 7.30pm, informal Dinner Dance, which in 2015 will be held in the Petwood Suite. Music by Heather Marie.

Petwood Hotel Costs

4 nights £335 pp (including function costs)

3 nights £254 pp (including function costs)

1 or 2 Nights Saturday rate £90 pp including afternoon tea, Reunion Dinner & BB

Sunday rate £85 pp including Dinner Dance & BB Reunion Dinner / Dinner Dance for non residents £37 pp for each function.

Those staying at the Petwood for any period will have the costs charged to the room. Those staying elsewhere will need to send me a cheque for the Dinner and /or Dinner Dance together with the Reunion Form.

Gordon Lodge

57 SQUADRON RFC

In the year when we mark the 100th Anniversary of 'The Great War', it is fitting that many newspapers have carried articles about those who fought and died in WWI.

One such article was written by Mr Martin Wade for the South Wales Argus (www.southwalesargos.co.uk) which includes details of a number of airmen who served with gallantry and distinction with 57 Squadron RFC/RAF. That article is reproduced below by kind permission of Mr Wade.

GWENT'S GREAT WAR – AIRBORNE ACCOUNTS OF DERRING-DO

As the war on the Western Front became bogged down in the horror of trench warfare, many sought to escape the stalemate, only to find a different kind of terror in the air.

During the darkest days of the air war over the Western Front in 1917-1918, an airman's life expectancy was 11 days.

Their aircraft would often be kept aloft by what would power a small motorbike today. And if their fragile craft, largely made of wood and fabric, fell from the sky, the hapless aircrew would have no parachute to save them.

It was into this new but terrifying form of warfare that a few brave Monmouthshire men went.

They came from all walks of life. Some were from well-to-do families – one was the son of the mayor of Newport, another the only son of an Abergavenny doctor.

Yet the county could also boast a sergeant pilot from Abertillery and an observer from Pontypool who both swapped life in the dark of a coal mine for the freedom of the skies with the Royal Flying Corp.



Miner turned Air Observer/Gunner: James Henry Wynn
(Picture: Pontypool Free Press)

Air Mechanic 2nd Class James Henry Wynn of Pontypool enlisted quickly on November 1, 1914. He left New Pits, Hafodyrynys to join the 2nd Monmouthshires and in February 1915 was drafted to France. He joined the RFC in February 1917 and was based at Bertangles where his pilot, another Monmouthshire man and ex-miner, was Sergeant Tom Whiteman from Abertillery.

As a Sergeant pilot and former miner, Whiteman would have made a most unusual airman. The fact that he was paired with a flyer, another ex-miner at that, from down the road, surely made this team exceptional.

They flew the FE2b, a spindly-looking fighter-bomber with a 250hp engine which took 45 minutes to climb to 15,000 feet.

It was at least well-armed, with a pair of Lewis guns firing forward, and another one or two guns which could fire to the rear of the aircraft.

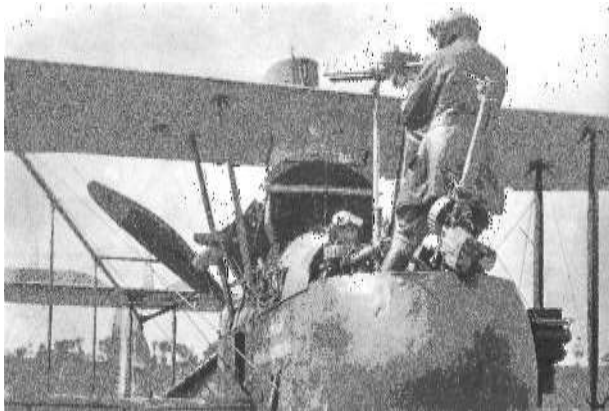
Initially an effective fighter, by autumn 1916 the arrival of more modern German aircraft such as the Albatros meant that the FE2b was out-performed and by April 1917 it had began to be withdrawn from offensive patrols. This was to be too late for our flying miners.

They took off on April 30 1917, the month that was to be known as 'Bloody April' such was the toll taken on British aircraft.

Tasked with photographing enemy positions, they came under attack about 12 miles over the enemy lines.

That day saw a change in German tactics, with flights combined as a massed fighting formation. The group which confronted Whiteman and Wynn for the first time that morning came to be known as 'Richthofen's Flying Circus'. Led by Manfred von Richthofen, the infamous Red Baron, they would go on to shoot down hundreds of British aircraft.

Among the flyers ranged against them was Hans Klein, one of Germany's top aces. He had only claimed his first kill at the start of April, but by this point he had down seven.



EXPOSED: An Observer demonstrates how the guns of an FE2b are aimed and fired. James Wynn would have had to do this to defend his aircraft.

Air Mechanic Wynn gave "a good account of himself" firing his Lewis guns when he was hit in the hand and his gun jammed.

Wynn's bravery is best explained by an observer who demonstrated how the FE2b's guns were aimed.

“When you stood up to shoot all of you from the knees up was exposed to the elements. There was no belt to hold you. Only your grip on the gun and the sides of the nacelle (body) stood between you and eternity.”. To fire to the rear the observer had to stand on the edge of the nacelle, exposing almost all their body.

Wynn’s efforts were to no avail as another bullet hit Whiteman under the left ear before smashing some of his teeth and becoming lodged under his right eye.

Blinded for some minutes, Whiteman managed to fly towards the British lines. He took the craft down from 12,000 feet to 2,000 feet, where they were met by furious ground fire from the German side.

With some of his vision returned, Whiteman somehow managed to put the machine down at Ribecourt. The undercarriage collapsed but the plane came to a stop.

The aircraft was riddled with bullet holes, the frame and tail were “badly shot through” according to a crash report and the engine too was peppered. It seemed Whiteman had performed a miracle, bringing himself and Wynn back to safety. But as the craft came to halt, Whiteman found his observer too was riddled with bullet holes.

Wynn later died of his wounds. He was 23.

Despite making a landing, Klein added Whiteman and Wynn’s craft to his list of kills.

His parents were sent tribute of Wynn’s skill, calling him: “a very good gunner observer” saying he had “done fine work here”. They added “He is missed very much by all in his squadron, as he was such a game, cheerful little fellow”. He is buried at Grevillers Cemetery near Arras.

James’s great-niece, Pauline Christopher and husband Michael from Pontypool, found out about him through the archive of the Pontypool Free Press. He has such an incredible story, Pauline said. “I’m really pleased it can be told.”.

Michael added, “After the appalling conditions of the trenches it’s no wonder that he wanted to move to the RFC. But it’s so sad how short his time was there.”.

Sergeant Whiteman was discharged from the RFC on August 10 1917, as a result of his wounds.

The RFC was continually savaged by the Germans with their superior machines and tactics.

In July 1917 the entire aircrew of 57 Squadron was killed, wounded or missing in action. To mark this turbulent time, a Phoenix rising from the flames of a fire was adopted as the squadron’s emblem.

It was into this reborn unit that two more flyers from Monmouthshire were thrown into battle.

As the FE2b was pensioned off, RFC airmen welcomed new, more powerful machines which promised to even the odds they faced.

The only son of Dr and Mrs Glendinning of Abergavenny, flyer 2nd Lieutenant James Graham Glendinning, would see action in the new DH4. A more conventional-looking craft, it was more powerful, faster and could climb higher than the FE2b. As an observer, he didn't have to take his life in his hands to fire his guns.



A De Havilland 4 of 57 Squadron, 1917 – The type of aircraft Leslie Simmonds and James Glendinning flew in

He had joined his home unit, the 3rd Battalion, Monmouthshire Regiment in April 1916, seeing six month's service in the trenches. By September 1917 he was at Ste-Marie Chappelle airfield in another part of northern France having been transferred to the Royal Flying Corp. He and his pilot 2nd Lieutenant J T Orrell took off on one of these missions at 10.10 am on December 2 1917, and headed for enemy positions. They did not return. Both were later reported by the Germans as killed. They were both 20 years old and Glendinning had lasted less than four months as a flyer, surviving longer in the trenches.

The roll of honour at his school, Epsom College, tells of the "deep regret" at the news he had been killed. It spoke of the "sincere affection" which ran through all the tributes to this "happy and kind" man.

Like Glendinning, Leslie Simmonds was the son of middle-class Monmouthshire. His father was the mayor of Newport in 1912-13 and ran a chain of provision merchants with shops in Chepstow Road, Caerleon Road, Shaftesbury Street, Stow Hill and Caerleon.



NEWPORT AIRMAN: Leslie Simmonds (Picture: Sally Burge)



2nd Lieutenant Leslie Simmonds (Picture: Sally Burge)

The adventurous spirit which saw him take to the skies also saw him leave the comforts of life at their home in Newport to work on the railways in Argentina before the war.

Unusual in having joined the RFC in 1914, he had cheated death already, spending time in England recovering in 1916.

By the time Simmonds returned to the front, joining 57 Squadron on August 18 1918, British air power was wielded by one arm – the Royal Air Force, formed in April 1918 as the Army's Royal Flying Corp and the Royal Naval Air Service merged.

He had a narrow escape again when the undercarriage of the aircraft collapsed on landing in late August.

The following month was another one of high losses for the British and known as 'Black September'. On the 18th Simmonds took off with his pilot, the South African 2nd Lieutenant Julian Ferreira.

Facing them that day would be one of the most deadly flyers the Germans had. Leutnant Fritz Rumeys was awarded the famed Blue Max medal in July 1918 for shooting down 29 enemy aircraft.



GERMAN ACE: Fritz Rumeys wearing his Blue Max

Simmonds and Ferreira were to become Rumeys' 35th 'kill'. In his agile Fokker DVII, he got the better of them in their solid DH4. The machine was "seen to fall badly out of control" and believed "last seen going down in flames" one mile east of Marcoing near Arras at around noon. The report given of him left "but a minimum hope that he and his pilot would escape with their lives.". Simmonds wasn't able to cheat death a third time.

Leslie Simmond's great-niece is Newport woman Sally Burge. Her dogged research has seen her uncover much of Leslie's fascinating life. "The fact that he went to work in Argentina before the war and then joined the RFC so early on mark him out as an incredible young man." she says.

Some vestiges of civilised behaviour held between airmen on both sides. Although the days when these 'knights of the air' would salute as they flew past each other had gone, they would exchange messages enquiring about airmen shot down in the hope of confirming if they were dead or alive.

Sally tells how the Argus reported Simmonds' commander's hope that they had cheated death. He assured them that "all possible inquiries are being made and his parents and their many friends still hope they may hear that he is alive though a prisoner of war."

September continued in this black vein for both sides. More RAF airmen were killed, with Rumeys chalking up his 45th victory on September 26. It was to be his last. Although the Germans were equipped with parachutes, his failed to open after he had bailed out.

Leslie has no known grave, but is remembered along with hundreds of other airmen on the Arras Flying Memorial.

Those flyers remembered elsewhere tend to be small in number. While the roll call of dead in the trenches and at sea is long, often, like on the memorial gates to Pontypool Park, they are in ones and twos.

While the volume of their sacrifice may be smaller than those who served elsewhere, that made by Monmouthshire's airmen was every bit as valiant.

Mr Martin Wade
South Wales Argus

THE GREAT ESCAPE 70 YEARS ON – REMEMBERING THE 50

On 24 March 2014, in my capacity as UK Defence Attaché to The Republic of Poland, I had the great honour to organize and lead events on the site of Stalag Luft 3, Żagań, Poland to mark the 70th Anniversary of 'The Great Escape' from the PoW Camp. Among those involved in the escape were Wing Commander Harry 'Wings' Day (OC 57 Squadron at the start of WWII, shot down on 13 October 1939 while carrying out 57 Squadron's first operational sortie of the war) and Flight Lieutenant Michael Casey (shot down on 16 October 1939 during the Squadron's second operational sortie of WWII). Both were recaptured after the escape from Stalag Luft 3 – Wing Commander Day survived, but Flight Lieutenant Casey was one of the 50 Allied airmen murdered by the Gestapo. The following article hopes to describe the commemoration events of 24 March 2014.



Flt Lt Michael Casey
(PoW 'mugshot')



Wg Cdr Harry Day
(post-WWII picture following
promotion to gp capt)

Under leaden skies and in freezing, driving rain, some 700 people gathered on the site of Stalag Luft 3, Żagań, Poland on 24 March 2014 to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of The Great Escape from the PoW Camp, and to remember the 50 Allied airmen who were murdered following their re-capture – 'the 50'. Amongst those at the Ceremony were family members of the 50, many of whom had travelled from as far afield as Australia, Canada and New Zealand to attend the Ceremony.



Defence Attachés and military representatives of the nations whose airmen were one of 'the 50'. Left-to-Right; Canada, Czech Republic, Greece, New Zealand, Lithuania, South Africa, France, Slovakia, Belgium, Norway, Australia, UK, with Polish military wreath bearers in attendance.

At 1200 hours, the names of the 50 were read, one-by-one, by Defence Attachés and military representatives of the nations whose airmen were amongst those murdered by the Gestapo. Supported by Polish military personnel, representatives of the UK, Australia, Norway, Belgium, Slovakia, France, South Africa, Lithuania, New Zealand, Greece, Czech Republic and Canada came forward to remember their comrades. As the names of the 50 were read, 50 RAF personnel, each carrying a picture of one of the 50, stepped forward and marched past the families of the murdered airmen and the other VIPs attending the Ceremony. Later, those same 50 RAF personnel set off from Stalag Luft 3 to march the 110 miles to Poznań Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, where 48 of the 50 murdered airmen are buried.

As the Standard Bearers of 57 Squadron, 1(F) Squadron, 51 Squadron and 72 Squadron (these squadrons, joined by representatives of IX(B) Squadron, 39 Squadron (as the direct successor to 1 PRU) and 405 Squadron RCAF, are the still-active squadrons whose airmen were amongst the 50) stood ram-rod straight in the driving rain, the assembled crowd heard from senior air force representatives about what the legacy of The Great Escape means to today's air forces. Major General Jan Śliwka, Head of the Polish Air Force, spoke of the enduring bond between the RAF and Polish Air Force (PAF). Lieutenant General Yvan Blondin, Commander of the RCAF, also spoke of the shared and unbreakable ties between the PAF, RCAF, RAF and all the air forces represented at the Ceremony. Representing CAS, Air Vice-Marshal Stuart Atha, AOC 1 Group, highlighted the bravery of those at Stalag Luft 3 and at all the PoW Camps, who knew that they were Prisoners at War, rather than Prisoners of War.



Squadron Standards from 1(F) Squadron, 51 Squadron, 57 Squadron and 72 Squadron are positioned in front of the replica Guard Tower built by Service volunteers, in preparation for the Ceremony at Stalag Luft 3.

The key-note speaker was Air Commodore Charles Clarke, President of the RAF ex-PoWs' Association – The Kriegies. Air Commodore Clarke served as a bomb aimer with 619 Squadron flying Lancasters. Shot down in February 1944, he was incarcerated at Stalag Luft 3 during the period of The Great Escape, and later endured the Long March to Spremburg, as German troops forced Allied PoWs to march Westwards ahead of Soviet forces advancing into Germany from the East. Air Commodore Clarke was joined at the Ceremony by two other veterans of Stalag Luft 3; Flight Lieutenant Andrew Wiseman and Lieutenant Colonel Charles Thelen USAAF. Lieutenant Colonel Thelen acted as a 'penguin' (distributing soil from the escape tunnel) in the build-up to The Great Escape but, like all US PoWs at Stalag Luft 3, he was moved to a new Compound shortly before the escape took place.



Flt Lt Andrew Wiseman and Air Cdre Charles Clarke at the Memorial which marks the exit point of tunnel 'Harry'.

As wreaths and floral tributes were laid at the monument that marks the exit point of tunnel 'Harry', and the rain continued to lash down, all those gathered at Stalag Luft 3 paused to remember again the bravery and tenacity of the 76 airmen who escaped from 'Harry' on the night of 24/25 March 1944, and 'the 50' who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their determination to continue to wage war against an enemy they knew had to be defeated.



Left-to-Right; Air Cdre Charles Clarke; AVM Atha; Maj Gen Śliwka; Lt Gen Blondin

Later, some 160 invited guests attended a formal Reception & Dinner to celebrate the lives of 'the 50'. Speaking at the Dinner, the Mayor of Żagań, Mr Daniel Marchewka spoke of his determination to ensure that the memory of the bravery of the 50 is passed on to each successive generation of those who live in and around Żagań.

In what may be the last large-scale commemoration of The Great Escape, all the air forces whose airmen were amongst the 50 came together to ensure that the memory of what happened after The Great Escape remains undimmed – we will remember them.

Group Captain David Houghton

JOHN STANLEY CLARKE – OBSERVER IN THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS

I received the following article from the Niece of John Stanley Clarke about her Uncle who served as an Observer with 57 Squadron RFC in WW1. He was killed above St. Eloi on 10 October 1917.

Gordon Lodge

John Stanley (Jack) Clarke (99044) died nearly a hundred years ago in the air above St Eloi, Belgium. He was 18 years old, an observer in 57 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps and he was killed on 10 October 1917. He is buried at Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium.

How can we commemorate the centenary of his death in the autumn of 1917? He leaves behind very few physical traces: his name on the gravestone of his grandparents and the church roll of honour in a small village in Gloucestershire, on the roll of honour in the Great Hall of Birmingham University, a battered leather autograph album, a copy of his casualty card and a small blurred photograph that may possibly be him. How can we fill in the gaps of his brief life from civil and army records and is there more still to find?

Brief Biography

Jack Clarke was the oldest child of Ernest Clarke and Emily Agnes Clarke. His family moved around the country; at times the family lived in Birmingham and at times with their grandparents in Beckford, Gloucestershire. Jack's grandparents, Joseph and Annie Clarke, were the parish clerk and head teacher of the school in Beckford and Jack went to Beckford school and Tewkesbury Grammar School. His name appears on the roll of honour for the First World War at Birmingham University, but it is not clear whether he was student or was employed in some other capacity.

He enlisted in the Army Ordnance Corps in May 1915 when he was under age for active service. He served in the Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders from October 1915 and transferred to the RFC in May 1917 being promoted Gunner Observer in July. (1)

The Album

The album has the signature *JS Clarke, Belgium 1917* on the first page. It contains an array of signatures, collected on different occasions, from Xth Corps Headquarters and from the Sergeants' Mess in May 1917 and Aerial Gunners on 57 Squadron RFC 16 July 1917, a summary of a bombing raid in July 1917, a drawing of a woman in black entitled '*Grief*' and a number of lines of prose and poems, including:

'Love is good, drink is better, but Death is best of all'

'The Gunners Motto. Never say Die till you are Dead. For there are always flights over head. May we never crash.'

'When you're looping the loop with a graceful swoop. And you don't know earth from heaven; you're afraid you'll bump your head on a cloud And of worlds you've counted seven –'

"Keep smiling Nobby!"

There are some entries from a home leave in Beckford in August 1917, including one from a local girl, Nora Keen, who would be about 17 years old:

'What is love that all the world talks so much about? What is love that neither you nor I can do without?'

Many of the pages of the album remain blank, waiting to be filled.

Casualty Card

The casualty card notes: Clarke, J S .

Date report received 17.10.17.

Date of casualty 10.10.17.

Result of Accident Missing Died G.S.W (Gun Shot Wounds) Back

Remarks. In the field. Laq Winkel St Eloi.

Royal Flying Corps Operations

We have gathered together other pieces of information which give some idea of his brief time with the RFC in the summer and autumn of 1917. 57 Squadron seems to have been based at Boisdingham (2) and Jack was an observer in DH4s engaged in photographing and bombing the German lines around Ypres. He recorded in his notebook an action of the 28 July, presumably copied from the official report:

Machine	Pilot	Observer	Height	Duty
A2147	Lt Biederman	JS Clarke	17.000	Bombing – Successful – --aerodrome Near Roulers 2 fires observed

Remarks

7 E.A Seen, 1 attacked and shot down by pilot, seen to burst into flames and crash, about 4 miles N.W. of Roulers

The RFC communiqué for the 28 July provides more detail for this action: "When returning from bombing Heule and Bissingham aerodrome 5 machines of 57 squadron encountered 30 enemy scouts, of which one was seen to break up in the air and at least 6 others were claimed as shot down out of control, ----- "when returning from a bombing raid De Havilland 4s of 57 Squadron met a formation of Albatross scouts Lt. Bierderman shot down one in flames, Major Joy shot down 2 others while Capt. Harker shot down one out of control".(2)

Under his notebook entry Jack has pasted the notice that Lt Biederman was missing and we know that he was killed on the 10 August 1917.

On the 10 October Jack was the observer in DH4 A2138 with the pilot Sgt Frank Legge (25233) on a bombing operation over Oostnieukerke leaving their base at 3pm. The plane was shot down about 4pm by a German fighter of Jasta 36 and Jack was hit in the back and killed. The information came from the Commanding Officer of the German unit Jasta 36, the ace Heinrich Bongartz.

The official record appears as:

10 October 1917 A2138 DH4 57 Squadron
B OOSTNIEUKERKE seen WOL on return MIA (Sgt FV Legge OK? JS Clarke KIA) left 3pm (DH claim combat WESTROOSEBEKE 4pm Lt H Bongartz Ja 36

B= Bombing Operation
WOL west of lines
MIA missing in action
KIA killed in action
Ja 36 Jasta 36 (2)

Frank Legge survived the war, returning to work in the family firm of lock makers in Willenhall and died in 1986.

Jack's commanding officer, Major Pattinson, (Lawrence Pattinson – later Air Marshal Sir Lawrence), wrote:

"I am very sorry to lose him, as he was an excellent gunner, and put up a good fight recently against a number of German machines, and shooting one down. He was very popular with all ranks in the squadron." (1)

We would like to know more about his service from Oct 1915 in the Ordnance Corps and about his training for the RFC and whether any photographs of him survive. We think it would be a fitting memorial to Jack Clarke if we were able to add detail to this outline, especially his service in the Ordnance corps and his training in the RFC before active service. A visit to his grave in Harlebeke cemetery in October 2017 would then ensure that his family still remember him.

References

- (1) De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour. Standard Art Book, London. vol 2 part iv, p32
- (2) T Henshaw (1995). The Sky Their Battlefield Grub St, London

Elizabeth Towner (nee Clarke – niece of Jack Clarke) and John Towner

Memorial – East Kirkby



During the Reunion in July it became clear that some refurbishment was needed to restore the Memorial to its former glory and original condition. This work has now been carried out successfully.

Gordon Lodge

Remembrance Sunday



On the 9 November 2014 I attended the Service at the East Kirkby Memorial. Squadron Leader Mike Waring and the 57 Squadron Standard Party were in attendance as were many from the local area including a Wing Commander from RAF Coningsby.

A beautiful Service organized by Flt Lt Mike Chatterton who was also a great help in refurbishing the Memorial.

Photographs supplied by Dave McLeavy, for which many thanks.

Gordon Lodge

Information Officer's Report 2014

The time to report my activity in 2014 has arrived although there have only been a very limited number of straightforward enquiries for information on the loss of aircraft and the crews. I suppose this is to be expected bearing in mind that the first generation are now in their sixties plus, and the second generation do not show the same interest in the matter of the losses of Bomber Command, 57 and 630 Sqn in particular, as the older group do. I have checked my records and 2014 produced 28 enquiries mostly directly connected to family members.

Contact with continental organisations has continued however and as we visited Dronten in late April to attend their Liberation Day service we received a welcome that has been the case for years in the past. Once again the figure was low, only 5 members of the old Air Gunners' Association being present. Nevertheless as we walked away from the ceremony in the town square, our small number received an outstanding ovation. In a way it is almost embarrassing.

I am in touch with at least 7 organisations that specialise in the recovery of crashed Bomber Command aircraft, and on 4 May I was invited to be present with my contact Chris Van Den Linden at a ceremony of dedication and wreath laying at the site of a crashed Lancaster, south west of Amsterdam at a place called Waverveen. Some 150 persons were present and I was asked to lay one of the wreaths. Again, I was impressed by the dedication of the Dutch people and the support they give to the maintenance of the headstones and the surroundings.

With 2015 upon us, I think it is time that I move out of my large bungalow and take up residence in some sort of retirement home. Accordingly I will be handing over the duties of Information Officer to Group Captain Wendy Rothery at some time in the near future and we are both considering a programme of handover and timing at the moment. I will of course still be available to provide backup, if and when necessary. I have been in the chair since 3 years after our very first gathering in the Petwood Hotel (1980 ??) and I have enjoyed every minute of it.

I will conclude my short report by stating that I hope to make a final visit to Dronten in 2015, and will certainly be at the Petwood in July 2015, all being well.

Allen Hudson