



Missing ...

Believed Killed!

**The Story of Flight Sergeant Leonard James Smith, Air
Gunner, R.A.F.V.R.**

**By
Terry Maker**

Aircrew Remembrance Society

A non-political society dedicated to helping relatives of fallen & missing airmen from the 1939-45 air war.
Preserving the memories, photographs and documents of those from all nations who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Missing - Believed Killed

Terry Maker is a retired computer engineer, who has taken to amateur genealogy, after retirement due to ill health in 2003. He is the husband of Patricia Maker, nee Gash, and brother in law of Teddy Gash, (the cousins of Fl/Sgt L.J. Smith). He served as a Civilian Instructor in the Air Training Corps, at Stanford le Hope from 1988 until 1993. The couple live in Essex, and have done so for 36 years; they have no children, and have two golden retrievers.

Disclaimer

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Front Cover Watermark: "JP292-W undergoing routine maintenance at Brindisi, 1944"
(Please note: This photograph is of unknown provenance, and is very similar to the "B-Beer, Brindisi, 1943" photo shown elsewhere in this booklet. It may be digitally altered, and could be suspect!)

A story of World War II

Missing... Believed Killed

By

Terry Maker

To the men, living and dead, who did these things?"

Paul Brickhill

Dedicated to the Memory of



(Enhanced photograph)

Flight Sergeant Leonard James Smith, Air
Gunner, R.A.F.V.R.

Service Number 1335817, 1921 - 1944, (Aged 22)

148 Squadron. R.A.F., (Special Duties - S.O.E),
Balkan Air Force

**“They shall grow not old as we
that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor
the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning
We will remember them.”**

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Foreword

The “Mystery Airman”

“He was a Spitfire pilot, and was shot down over Prague in 1944, and is buried there He lived in Tilbury, and his name is on the Tilbury War Memorial”

Pat Maker

The Mystery Airman of this story was Flight Sergeant Leonard James Smith, R.A.F.V.R., and this is his story.

To his surviving extended family, he was “The Mystery Airman”! He was believed to have been a “Spitfire pilot”, but my wife and brother in law, were not sure. All they had of him was a photograph. There was no name or address, or family connection. The photo had the narrative, “January 31st 1944, Italy” on the back. Another feature is an unintelligible 3 words on the front, due to age, and ‘weathering’, and no amount of trying seemed to make them readable. Probably a dedication of some sort, I thought.

As an amateur genealogist, I am not unused to tracing ‘lost’ family members, and this one intrigued me. All I had was “theory” and nothing more. It is said that *“All research, is theory, supported by evidence, which evolves in the light of fresh and better evidence, until the truth is known”** many ‘false’ leads, and discarded theory, are researched until the result is usually known.

So what else could I learn about him from this photograph? He is young, mid 20’s at most. He wears a ‘half wing’, probably denoting a ‘trained crew member’, i.e. Air Gunner, Wireless Operator, Navigator, Flight Engineer, or Bomb Aimer, rather than a pilot. This also infers he may have been an NCO; his uniform is R.A.F. but, this also means in wartime, that he may have served in the R.A.F.V.R. It was also very likely that he was in Bomber Command, rather than “Fighters”. “Grilling” my relatives yielded little more information.

Undoubtedly, this was no “Spitfire pilot”; this was a “Bomber Boy”! The photo, even after considerable digital enhancement yielded no discernible insignia, other than the ‘half-wing’, (*and I could not read the letter in its centre, they have a letter denoting the wearers speciality, ‘O’ is Observer, ‘AG’ is Air Gunner, ‘N’ is Navigator etc.*), so guessing, that he could be no older than his mid twenties, and that he had to have been at least eighteen to join the Royal Air Force, gave me a rough “Birth-year” of, somewhere in the region of 1919, to 1926, not much to go on, but at least it was a start.

Actually his story begins much earlier...

- Philip Hardin, Archaeologist, Time Team, Channel 4, 2001.

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Chapter 1

West Ham, Essex,¹ England

St Luke's Parish Church: West Ham, February 1921:

A wedding is announced between James Smith of this Parish, and Margaret Victoria Elizabeth Ebsworth, also of this Parish.

Both the Smith Family, and the Ebsworth Family were local people to St Luke's, (*in fact there are still, direct descendants of both, living in present day Newham. Ed.*) , and it was their Parish Church, (Anglican), and it was part of their life in Custom House, since 1886, when the first members moved into the area. Both families were large, even for those days.

The Brides family, the Ebsworth's, could count 13 members, (*not counting friends and neighbours, and 'courting couples'*), and the Smith family, boasted a further seven, and including extended family of both sides, St Luke's must have been filled with a very large, happy congregation of well wishers.

However, this was nothing new to this wonderful old church; St. Luke's has a proud history of serving its community. It has known good times and bad through the years, with its lowest point in the mid - 1990's when it became derelict, only to be saved, in the nick of time, by those very same 'East-Enders'.

With the Banns having been read, the couple were duly wed, and 'Churched', as they used to say in those days, in the eyes of the congregation, and the celebrating commenced.

The young couple, who were both in their early 20's, wasted no time in starting their family, and on 12th. September, 1921, their first child, a son, was born, (*the couple had other children later*)². They christened him Leonard James, Leonard for his great - grandfather, and James for his father. The boy's early years would have been spent in a busy, bustling, extended household, filled with Uncles, and Aunts, Parents, and Grandparents, in a quite different manner from today.

Unlike the modern-day London, East End families of that era, tended to 'stick together', and would often be found occupying adjacent houses, or groups of houses, sometimes even whole streets, if the family were a very large one, and many spent their whole lives there without ever leaving the area. Many often lived, and worked, their entire lives in the same room, of the same house. This was typical of the 'east end slums', often having as many as four people to a room.

As for his education, he most likely attended one of the local West Ham School Board, schools, which were built in 1920's, several of which were destroyed during the Second World War, "Blitz", by the Luftwaffe. Sadly, we cannot confirm this, searches for the relevant school records, proved fruitless, and they appear to have been destroyed by the bombing.

His education would have been completed in one of the State run schools, imposing edifices, built over the late Victorian, early Edwardian period when “Reading, Writing and Arithmetic” were the three “R’s”, that all children either loved, or hated!

There were no “11-Plus” or “A” levels in those days! However, the young Len would have received a solid education, delivered by teachers, wise in the ways of children, who knew how to nurture young minds, which would serve him well throughout his entire life. State funded education, ended early in those days, usually around thirteen, or fourteen, and it was rare that ‘ordinary’ pupils went on to further education, for Universities had to be paid for by fees, and were for the rich, and well off. So, nearing the end of his school days, the twelve year old Len would need to find a job, a daunting task in the early 1930’s in London.

So the family decided to ‘look east’, towards Essex, and Tilbury, where there was a new factory, and a new town, growing on the banks of the River Thames. Looking for work, and a new life.

Chapter 2

The Move to Tilbury

As we have seen, work, in those days was as hard to come by, as in any generation, and by his thirteenth birthday, James and Margaret, and the young Len, had moved to Tilbury in Essex, for a better life, where the thirteen year old Len, got a job with Tilbury Estates.

After a year or so, and ever seeking better employment for himself, Len, then fourteen, went to college, and trained to become an architect. He left Tilbury Estates, and began working for the British Bata Shoe Company on 9th March, 1936. He was to work there for the next five years in the Leather Factory.

East Tilbury in the 1930's was a 'Place of Hope' for the future. Here on the flatlands that bordered the river, with the onset of the recession in the 1930's, Reverend Brown of Tilbury, approached Tomas Bata to suggest the building of a British Factory, for Bata Shoes, at East Tilbury, thus supplying work for the youth locally. As work was very hard to find in the 1930's, men and women travelled from all over Thurrock, and from the East End of London, to try to get work in the new factory. Tomas Bata's representatives toured the local schools telling leaving age pupils, that if, "they were to work for the British Bata Shoe Company they would be able to afford a motor car!" In a world where there were very few cars, this seemed a Utopian dream to many.

The Bata Community at East Tilbury grew into an international one. Not only did the first people from Czechoslovakia, who set up the factory, move to this garden city, but they were joined by people from all over the British Isles, Poland, Malta, and many other countries. As the Factory and Community grew, others came from around the world

Just like the factory, Len was 'growing up' too, and now in his manhood, 'and a young mans fancy', as they say, 'turns to thoughts of love'. It was during that same five years that a pretty local girl by the name of Ethel Annie Percy was to catch his eye! Although they had been school friends for years, Len was smitten! So was Ethel! She was from Tilbury,³ and, she was to going to be his wife, of that, they both, were sure. *(She too, in later years, would work for Bata Shoes, but, that would be much later, from 1943, until 1945, during Len's absence during the war, and after his loss. So did Henry, Len's brother!)*

It is quite evident that the young Ethel felt the same way about this handsome young man, and they began 'walking out' together, as a courting couple.

East Tilbury, being 'international', and having a cosmopolitan attitude, remained unmoved by the sight of the young couple, and took it all in its stride. Lovers, it seemed were 'loved' anywhere! East Tilbury was no exception, and is that sort of place. This remarkable town has stood the test of time, and remained relatively unchanged, over the intervening seventy years that have passed, since then.

If they could return, Len and Ethel would still see the British Bata factory, and the very striking 'Art Deco' architecture of "Bata Ville" garden village, or (*"Bata Town", as the locals called it*), having an air of 'timelessness'. Did the young couple aspire to one of these very nice and, fashionable for the time, dwellings? We can only surmise on a future that would never be, the future would be very different for them.

In Europe, 'Dark Clouds, and Forces' were building that would have repercussions for the whole world, and Len and Ethel would be caught, like millions of others, in the maelstrom. This was their future, of which they had no knowledge, and still four years away. They had no way of knowing the tragedy that lay before them.

If you go there today, in the Library, behind Stamford House, you will find a display, called the Bata Reminiscence Centre, showing the history of Bata, in peace, and in war, manned by volunteers. I was happy to be able to present them with a copy of Len's photo, (*in better condition than the one they had*), and I was also able to update his story for them.

Chapter 3

The War and the R.A.F.

In May 1941, just after the Battle of Britain, the nineteen year old, Len, who was keen 'to do his bit', decided to leave the comparative safety of the Bata Shoe Factory, and volunteered for the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, and left the Bata Shoe factory for the duration of the war. His intentions were, doubtless to return to his job when the war was over. He had no knowledge that it would be for the last time, although he would stay in contact, by sending letters back to Ethel, and the factory and some were printed in the works newspaper, The Bata Record.⁴

After induction, he passed through his 'Aircraftsman' basic training, and quickly rose to Leading Aircraftsman, in a ground job. Due to the war effort, and the shortage of manpower, promotion came quickly in those days! The shortage of Air Crew, *(ever a problem for the R.A.F. in those days)*, presented itself, and, with the thought, and attraction of flying, the young Leading Aircraftsman either volunteered, or was selected for, Air Crew Training. Later, he wrote to the 'Bata Record' in June 1943 to say that he had completed his training for Air Crew, and should pass out soon.

Len "Passed out" of No. 1 Air Gunnery School, Pembury, Wales, on the 9th of May 1943, and was immediately 'posted' to No. 1 O.T.U. (*Operational Training Unit*), Lossiemouth, Scotland, where on the 11th of July 1943, he met and joined the then, Sgt. "Tom" Fairweather's crew as Rear Gunner. It was an association that was to remain solid until, their deaths a year, and 94 successful sorties, later. The crew "passed out" from 1 O.T.U. on 26th of July 1943 and went on "long leave".

With this 'passing out' parade, came a promotion to Airman, a raise in pay to 15/- per week, (Flying rate), *(equivalent to 75p in cash amount, but around £300, in buying power in those days! Ed.)*, and some leave. Although the time was fraught with uncertainty due to the War, they had enough money coming in to get married, and Len, and Ethel, became man and wife in autumn 1943.

It must have been a busy 'pre-posting' leave for the newly promoted Airman, getting married, Len and Ethel tied the knot on the 10th of September 1943, getting ready for his 'posting', but he also found some time to visit his Mothers sister, 'Aunt Het', and her husband, Ted, *(and the rest of the family we assume. Ed.)*, in war torn Custom House, London, and he gave a model of the aircraft that his new Squadron flew, to her son Teddy. It was a four engined Bomber. Little did Ted and Hettie know that this was the last time that they would see their nephew, gathering events in Europe, were going to overtake them all.

A few days later, he made his 'goodbyes' to Ethel, and his Mum and Dad, and Brother and Sisters, and left, but not for his posting, the O.T.U recalled them on the 14th of September for additional Halifax training, where the crew temporarily split up for specific flight duty training, the success of which brought a Sergeant's stripes for Len, and a Flight Sergeant's for Tom. By 17th of October, the war had called the young Len, and he and the

crew, were posted to "X" Flight, at Kabrit Egypt, the crew stayed with "X" Flight, being posted to Luqa, Malta, and on to Gambut, Libya, where the "X" Flight formed the basis for the "re-birth" of 148 Squadron, and by January 1944, he, was in Brindisi, Italy with his new Squadron. Len was now a Flight Sergeant, and Tom, a Warrant Officer.

Sometime in the February of 1944, a letter dropped through the letterbox of Ted, and Hettie Gash, in bomb ravaged West Ham, and in it, was a photograph of Len, looking very handsome, and debonair in his uniform. Aunt Het, duly placed it in her photo album, and there it was to rest for sixty five years. On the back, there was the wording, "January 31st 1944, Italy", which was almost a security breach in those wartime days⁵.

We now know from records that it came from Foggia, Italy, where as part of 148 Squadron, (Special Duties - S.O.E.), R.A.F, with the Balkan Air Force, operating out of Brindisi, he dropped agents, supplies, arms, and bombs, behind enemy lines in the occupied countries such as Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland.

This was one of the most dangerous assignments there was, their aircraft flew alone, without escorts, over enemy territory, re-supplying the Polish A.K., or "Home Army", or the Partisans of Josip Bros Tito. By the very nature of their assignment their losses would have been high. We can only surmise whether Len volunteered, or not. Knowing his previous choices, it is safe to assume that he would have done so, if not ordered.

Brindisi, recently liberated from the Axis forces, must have been a wonderfully exciting place to a lad from Tilbury, and East London, It was the home, along with Bari, and Foggia, of the Desert Air Force, The Balkan Air Force, (*both R.A.F.*), and the U.S.A.A.F. Fifteenth Bomb Group, with aircraft taking off day and night, weather permitting. With all of the Allied Nation's forces gathered there, it was a veritable League of Nations.

The crew were awaiting delivery of a new aircraft, their old one, JD172 had seen better days, and they were getting a new one! That was on its way from the manufacturers in England, being a 'Special' for S.O.E. use. (*Special Operations Executive*) Whilst waiting, the crew were sent out on other sorties, in various other aircraft, and on 'familiarisation' trips, where the extra man sat alongside the normal crew-member, and suffered the "Three F's", (*Flak, Funk, And Fighters*), along with him, and just observing.

On the 30th of May, their new aircraft, Halifax, JP292 FS-W, W-William, had made its appearance, and the crew, and aircraft was brought up to a state of 'Readiness' for operations. The record of their operations shows that they did their job well, and were a close knit crew.

Throughout June they were active in supply drops, and "Agent insertion" sorties alike. Len's Logbook shows that they were active almost every night on missions of up to eight hours duration.

And not without its "Trials and tribulations", on 15th December 1943, they 'lost' the starboard outer engine in JN925, and had to abort, (*with "X" Flight*). They had to abort again in BB441 on the 24th February 1944 due to

"P.1 U/S" (*Pilot taken ill*), the previous day they had gone to Cattania, in a Dakota, and returned, on a 'ferrying' trip, (*bad food perhaps?*) Another time, on the 11th of March, the "reception committee" at the drop zone did not give any light signals, so the drop was aborted, (*This was a common occurrence! Ed.*) An engine failure in JD172, and fatefully, on 26th of June 1944, in JP292, they were "bounced", by a Me109 Nightfighter, and they managed to escape.

This was just seven days before the operation that cost them their lives.

Chapter 4

The Final 'Op'

Even today, very little is known about any of 148 Squadron's operations, they were fraught with danger, due to the fact that in most cases, it was a single aircraft trying to slip through German defences, alone and unescorted, without getting attacked. Even less is known about these brave men who flew them, and even less so about Len's duties.

Bombers usually attacked in large formations, for there is 'safety in numbers', which suffered huge losses, when 148 Squadron suffered a loss, it usually meant that the entire operation was a total failure.

Bombers had two main enemies, Flak, and depending on your point of view, and day, or night fighters. Either one could mean destruction, and death, or a really 'iffy' trip back to base, or a ditch in the sea! Or worse still, it could mean bailing out over enemy territory, and spending the rest of the war in a prison camp, if you got lucky!

That then, was the 'standard' situation for a 'regular' squadron, 148 Squadrons task was 'Special Operations', black ops, or covert ops, as they would be called today. So there were no large formations. They flew alone! With luck, they returned, sadly the Roll of Honour tells us another story.

His last operation, like all those before it, was shrouded in secrecy, as were the 94 previous ones, so when you read the official report it is, in all respects, brief, the actual line from the page in the Squadron Operations Records Book, for 3rd/4th July 1944, reads:

"3/4: Halifax II JP292-W: Operation 401c: W/O Fairweather and crew as 2/3: time off: 20:45: Nothing further heard from this aircraft."

("the crew, as 2/3", refers to the previous night's operation. Ed.)

This single line in a record book was all that remained.

What this tells us is that: on Monday, 3rd of July 1944, Halifax JP292-W, "W for William", took off from Brindisi at 20:45, on "Operation 401C", and it failed to return.

The Squadron Operations Records Book, (O.R.B.), does not list a destination.

However, according to Polish records, they were 'en-route' to Mogielica, the highest mountain in the Southern Carpathians, south of Krakov. But, the mountain was not their target. Their destination was 'Target 401', to an agent, or group, (*this part is unclear, the Polish word translates as, 'institution'*), known as 'Jay', or "*Sojka*", (*after the bird*), in Polish, and was situated at the foot of the mountain. William and its Crew were on operation 'C', or the third drop to there.* It was a regular scheduled drop in the series, it should have been a 'milk-run', or as near to anything that could be called a milk run in the 'suicide-alley' that was the S.O.E.'s Polish

supply run. The 'run' was a 1260 mile round trip, 1000 of which were over enemy territory.

The crews used to say "it was the stuff that nightmares were made from!"

Only a crew, or a member of a crew, who flew the "Warsaw Run", can ever describe that 1300 mile flight, over enemy territory. It was five, or six hours in a noisy, shuddering, vibrating, uncomfortable aircraft, that stank of fuel, with a cargo of ammunition, or explosives, and occasionally, an agent.

Flying in total darkness, without communications, for fear of being overheard, in an atmosphere of fear, sweat, terror, and the threat of attack! At the onset of an attack, the pilot would throw the aircraft around to avoid being shot down, all the while there was the sound of gunfire, and holes appearing in the fuselage, with the airflow making a 'whistling' noise over them!

If they were lucky, they survived! If not the "Roll of Honour" gained seven more names.

One Bomber veteran of Halifax's said, "If you want to know what it was like, try getting into a steel rubbish bin, and have yourself rolled around the floor, with someone beating on the bin with a hammer, and blowing a whistle in your ear!"

The crews took this as part of their 'job', night, after night.

This was prior to the Warsaw Uprising, but the R.A.F., were still doing supply drops, and 'Nickel', (leaflet), raids into the region, and dropping supplies to the Resistance movements, as were the Polish Air Force's, (*in exile*), 1586 (Polish), Flight R.A.F., which later became 301 Squadron, P.A.F. The Poles, and quite rightly so, are fiercely proud of their "AK", and the Warsaw Uprising, and it is fully documented by them, in a wealth of personal diaries, and logbooks of the airmen themselves, and first hand accounts, (*at this time 1586 Flight did not have any "Squadron ORB's", they were 'officially' part of 148 Squadron according to R.A.F. records*), down to the last aircraft, and crewman, so though there are no 'official' records, there is a wealth of eye-witness accounts.

What is incontrovertible is that "W-William" was shot down by a night fighter over Sombor in Yugoslavia during this 'supply drop' operation.

It may have been a Luftwaffe night fighter, or a Croatian Battle Air Force night fighter,⁶ We simply did not know.

We can only contemplate their final moments. There was nothing unusual in the operation; it was a 'covert Op', a supply drop like many before it, and many after it, via Yugoslavia. But for "W-William",⁷ and its crew, it was to be their last.

At the Balkan Air Force, Group headquarters, the weather was bad, and all 'light and medium' bombers were grounded. Foggia was not an ideal 'take off' base. It suffered then, as now, with fog, and low cloud. There was 3

tenths cloud cover, over Brindisi, and worsening, (*The R.A.F.'s 205 group/U.S.A.A.F 15th Bomb Group Weather forecast for that day, for the Adriatic area*), the weather over the 'Central Balkans' was, and still is, for the time of the engagement, unknown. The prevailing winds for July, are from the North, or North, North-east.

However we can assume it was relatively clear, from the statement made by W/O L.J. Blattman, who was shot down, returning from Poland at 02:15 the same morning, in his report which states: *"Saw aircraft piloted by F/Lt Wood on outward journey explode a few miles from Budapest area Hungary. Explosion appeared to be internal, and mid aircraft, very similar to our own. Aircraft exploded on the ground..."*

(This was JP247-E, "E-Easy". Ed.)

Len was listed as lost on the '4th', and there seemed to be some discrepancy in the timings, since Sombor is only some 350 air miles from Brindisi.

As a former Air Navigation instructor, this gave rise to my interest. All wartime timings were given in 'GMT', (*Greenwich Mean Time*), so the 'time off' of 20:45, was as though it was at Greenwich, and Brindisi is one hour ahead of this, and Sombor, is two hours ahead. This is where confusion can creep in.

So, to explain:

Time off, Brindisi: 20:45 GMT, (21:45 *Brindisi Local time, GMT+1*).

Transit time, assuming a direct course: 1 Hour 15 Minutes, (*348 miles divided by Halifax top speed, 282 MPH = 1.21 hours, or 1 Hr, 15Min*).

Time over Sombor: 22:00 GMT, (*00:00 Sombor Local time, GMT+2*).

This gives an apparent flight time of 3Hrs, 45Min. when in fact it is only 1Hr, 15Min. or thereabouts.

This means that "W-William" was attacked over Sombor, allowing for winds, and weather, sometime between 23:45 Local time, and 00:00 Local Time, by the Nightfighter, I have allowed only a 15 minute 'window' for the action since, their mission was a "through flight", to the Southern Carpathians. The 'loss' report from the partisans, and local authorities, would have given the attack on "W-William", in local time.

From the "War and Game" Website, I read the following: *"The phenomenal range of the Halifax allowed over 10,500lb of stores to be carried, as only a minimum of fuel was required for each trip. The run-up to the dropping point was controlled by the bomb-aimer. The Halifax would begin the run over the target with the bomb doors open, the flaps partly down and the engine throttled back. With the Bomb-aimer calling out instructions, the pilot would finally call on the dispatcher to release the containers in the bomb bay. Dropping height was set at between 400 and 800ft, because below 400ft the parachutes would have insufficient time to open, and above 800ft dropping accuracy would deteriorate.*

During the night supply drops, the crew members who were arguably most at risk were the Dispatcher, and the Wireless Operator. Operating in total darkness in order to ensure that no light showed from the aircraft

when the bomb bay was open, they were obliged to attach themselves to the aircraft via static lines, and ropes tied to their parachute harnesses. A green light would go on and the parachuted loads would be forced out as rapidly as possible. A good Dispatcher, assisted by the Wireless operator, could drop half a ton of supplies in three seconds. The rear gunner would act as observer, reporting whether the containers had overshot or undershot the landing zone.” (warandgame.info)

Dispatch is singularly the most dangerous part of the mission, and when the aircraft is at its most vulnerable. This is where the night fighter strikes. If you can visualize a lone heavy bomber, flying over hostile territory, on a straight and level course, with the bomb bay doors open, perhaps in moonlight, then you may come to realize the risks that these young men took.

At this time, The Croatian Battle Air Force, alongside the Croatian Battle Force, and the Luftwaffe, were staging ‘*Operation Rouen*’, against Tito’s Partisans, where 2000 partisans were killed, wounded, or captured, and executed, by the Croats, and the Germans, so they would be on a heightened state of alert for incoming aircraft.

In wishing to close this episode, I endeavoured to find the name of the Night fighter unit, and perhaps the aircraft, and pilot, but the records were destroyed during the recent war with N.A.T.O. forces, which took both Luftwaffe, and Croatian Battle Air Force records, ironically in a bombing strike by the Americans N.A.T.O. contingent between the 3rd of August and 20th of September 1995!

There did not appear to be any Luftwaffe connection at this point, however, I have discovered that Luftwaffe pilots did fly Croatian Battle Air Force aircraft on many occasions, and many of these pilots were famous air ‘Aces’, on secondment to the Croatian Forces.

148 Squadron lost no fewer than four aircraft, all Halifax's, on different operations on the night of 3-4.7.44: one over Kaposvar, Hungary; the other three, including “W-William”, in the vicinity of Sombor in Yugoslavia. (See “*Roll of Honour*” for this date. Ed.)

There were 36 bombing missions, and 137 supply drops in July alone by 148 Squadron.

The whole crew of “W-William”, were lost, they were:

W/O. Charles Thomas Fairweather, R.A.F. Pilot.
F/Sgt. Richard Jacques, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
P/O. Allen Haigh, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.
F/O. John Stanley Brown, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.
F/Sgt. Ronald Frederick Houghton, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.
F/Sgt. Leonard James Smith, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
F/Sgt. John Easton, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All are buried in Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia, Collective grave 1. E. 1-7.

There was a 'standard operating practice' in listing bomber crews. It was not always adhered to, and it wasn't in this case, Len's position as last-but-one indicates he was the dorsal turret gunner, but in fact he was Tail Gunner.

The collective grave implies that the aircraft crashed, and burned, leaving no recognisable corpses to identify as individual airmen. It is a stark reality of war, that in these situations, that *"remains equal to that of a body"*, were usually placed in a coffin by the burial teams. Even this information carries with it some mystery, "Did W-William blow up in mid air, as the result of that attack, or did it fall to the ground and explode?"

I had been unable so far discover how "W-William" met its end. However, using crew reports from surviving aircraft, and Police reports, we can possibly build a scenario of the attack, and its outcome.

Night fighters use the dark, and stealth, to attack their target. The 'target' is approached from a 'blind spot', usually from behind, and below, and then raked with cannon, and/or machine gun fire, from stern to nose. Bombers have little or no armour plate, due to its weight. Sometimes if the fuel tanks were hit, the aircraft erupted in a ball of flame, or, the target's crew, are taken completely by surprise, and are either killed, or incapacitated, during this first strike. The night fighter waits in the dark, hoping that they lose control of their aircraft, 'spin in', then crash, and burn.

A report has been found, from the Royal Hungarian Police Archives, (*This area was annexed to Hungary by the Germans at the time. It appears that many places had 'Hungarian' names probably due to being part of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Royal Hungarian Police seem to have been the police force for all of the German Occupied Balkans, due to Germany's ceding of the area to their Hungarian Allies. Ed.***), Zombor, (Sombor), Station, which gives reports on all four of the aircraft lost that night, and with regard to JP292, W-William, it states that on the, 4th July 1944:

"During the night, near to Pacser, (Pacir), an Anglo-American four-engined bomber crashed. From the crew of the bomber, no one bailed out, all seven airmen crashed and burned with the plane."

Pacir, is some 7.15 Km SSW of the 'point of engagement', and appears to have been some kind of Administration Centre, for the area, since the Death Certificates were issued there, along with the Police reports. There were also four Luftwaffe Nightfighter Radar guidance stations in the area as well; these were KALB, KELLER, WACHTEL, and MILBE. The reference to, *"an Anglo-American four-engined bomber"*, is somewhat enigmatic, the Crew, it is true to say, were "Anglo-Canadian", (*not "Anglo-American"*), but this may have been the Local, or German, way of referring to the Allies.

A survivor of that night, was W/O Jack Pogson, who flew JP254 FS-D "D-Dog" who gave his son Bill, a contemporary account of 3rd/4th July 1944:

"The OP of 3.7.44 as recalled by my Dad."

Sq. Ldr. Bird had just been assigned to the squadron from England. He had that night's OP organized to fly as a formation to near Bucharest and then disperse to their individual drop zones. Being my Dad's 42nd Op, he had a bad feeling about flying in formation and found the usual on-your-own method much more in line with his survival instincts. He was concerned they'd be identified as a bombing operation and attract too much attention. Once airborne he polled his crew and proposed breaking off and going it alone. The crew threw in their lot with Dad and agreed to back him up.

They broke formation and he recalls seeing a lot of flashes off in the distance and knew they were catching hell. His possibly fallible memory recalls 8 aircraft leaving and only his returning...and as the record shows, Bird did not return. He was told to report as soon after he had slept...possibly for disciplinary action as they somehow knew he had broken formation. He reported and was asked, "Do you know we lost 7 (???) Aircraft last night?" He answered "yes" and then he was dismissed with nothing further being said."

W/O Jack Pogson, flew 50 plus missions without mishap, and now lives quietly in Florida.

Sadly, Sq. Ldr. Bird's tragic decision, was to cost him dear, his aircraft JP286 FS-S "S-Sugar" was shot down over Kaposvar, Hungary with the loss of all the crew, only 8 bodies were recovered which meant that the four agents he was carrying were dispatched into the night, and completed their mission.

The sad news that Len was reported as "Missing after Air Operations in the Mediterranean Theatre of War Area" was published in the 'Bata Record' on 21st July 1944. *(And is still on the Bata Reminiscences Website. Ed.)*

The S.O.E. being very security conscious, placed a thirty year "D"⁸ notice, on the details of the raid, and those details rested in 'Air 27/996' in the National Archives, closed, until 1974. When the restriction expired, they still lay, uncalled for, and gathering dust. They were to lay there for another thirty five years, awaiting a call.

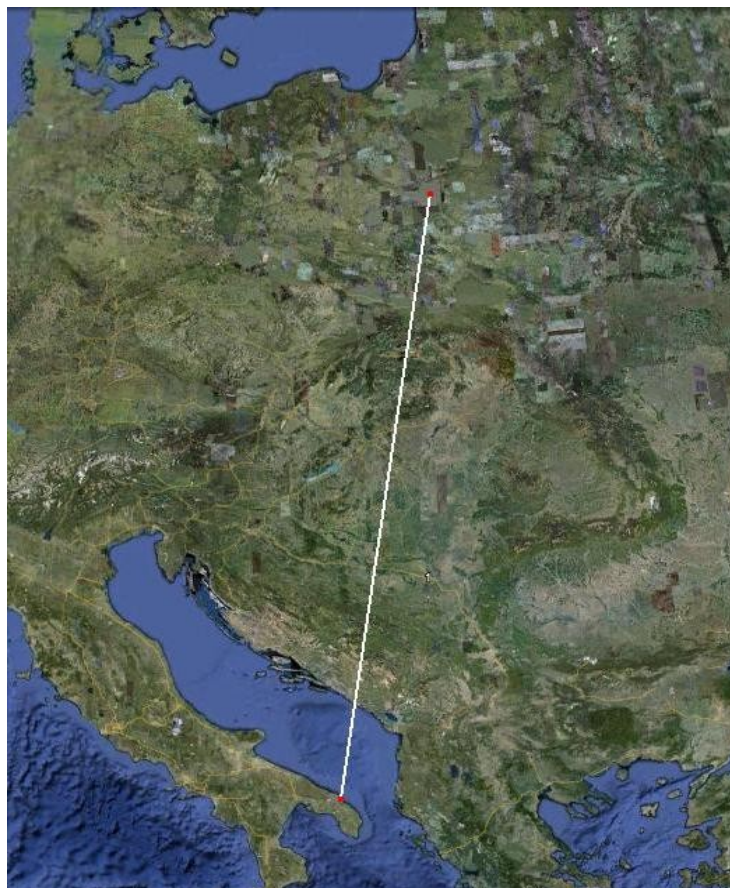
That call would come from an unexpected source.

**This version of events was discovered in a Polish Language book, 'Lotnicze Wsparcie Armii Krajowej', by Kajetan Bieniecki. There is no English version unfortunately, which is probably why it was overlooked by previous researchers. Whilst it is largely based upon diaries, logbooks, and eye-witness accounts, it fits all of the known and documented facts, and must therefore be our best evidence of the operation.*

***A note on 'Balkan' territories. During WWII most of the Balkans were annexed by the Third Reich, which makes Boundary and Border placements very difficult. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, which largely disappeared after WWI, became part of the Third Reich when the German forces marched into, and occupied Austria, claiming the old Empire, as part of Greater Germany'. It appears that the Royal Hungarian Police was a remnant of that empire also since the Germans referred to the whole area as 'Hungary', and ceded the whole area to them. The map over the page shows the area as it was in 1910.*



Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1910 and population nationalities



**“Suicide Alley”: The S.O.E.’s
Warsaw run**

Chapter 5

Aftermath

Due to the 'sensitive' nature of this mission, Ethel, and the rest of the family were given only the barest of details, "Missing: Believed killed in action".⁹ Being active with the S.O.E. also meant that for many years Len's only 'marker', was to be an entry on the Tilbury War Memorial, *(and, as we now know, one on the Bata War Memorial as well. The Tilbury War memorial one had to be fought for by the family, due to the secret status, the Council could get no confirmation. The Squadron returned all of Len's effects, including his Logbook. Ed.)*

After being married for just a few short months, Ethel was a widow.

I have not been able to trace her movements since that fateful day in 1944. We know she was employed with Bata Shoes, between 1943 and 1945. After that we lose track of her, she simply "drops off the radar", it may have been a desire to start afresh in a new place, or simply grief, over Len's loss, and to get away from constant reminders.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission¹⁰ lists her as "of Coventry", *(which was her mother's home town, so she may have moved to be with her)*, I have not been able to ascertain any further accurate information about her, and these types of details are hard to verify without "living memory" family members, and none, so far, have been forthcoming.

However, my curiosity being what it is, I kept searching, and, eventually, an enquiry via the memorial page on the Aircrew Remembrance Societies website, that brought forth a sister of Len's, *(Vera Jean, who kindly gave me a copy of Len's Logbook which allowed me to fill in all these details. The last time we had personal contact was 41 years ago at my wedding, then they moved to Norfolk, and we lost contact. Sadly Vera Jean passed away soon afterwards in February 2011, and this information would have been lost forever. Ed.)*, who told me that Ethel had re-married, and immigrated to Australia, and had a long and happy life, having children, and grand children, with her new husband, Robert Marner, who was an engineer. She returned to the United Kingdom on several occasions, and never lost touch with Len's sister Vera. Ethel had passed away in Australia, peacefully in 2003.

Following the cessation of hostilities, The Commonwealth War Graves Commission began to write to the next-of-kin of all those casualties, with a questionnaire that was ultimately used to compile the Register entries. These were originally issued as printed books from the late 1940's, a copy of the relevant register is still held in a small 'cabinet' at every major war cemetery and memorial to the missing.

With the advent of the internet, the books are no longer printed and sold. I mention all this as it may explain why Ethel was apparently in Coventry. She may well have moved there, in 1945, and not received her questionnaire until 1946 or 1947. When you have trawled through hundreds of Commonwealth War Graves Commission records you will soon

see many next -of-kin living many miles from where they were at the time their nearest and dearest was lost, many also with new surnames following a second marriage.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission could only record what was on the returned questionnaire, *(if it was returned at all, some people choosing not to, others never having received theirs due to moving away and leaving no forwarding address)*. So some entries show full names and places of residence, of both parents and spouse, some even mention siblings also lost as war dead, some respondents add academic awards and professions, while others are very sparse and some have no genealogical-type details at all.

Here the story of Flight Sergeant Leonard James Smith, Air Gunner, R.A.F.V.R. seemed to end. Or had it?

His fate, and final resting place, would lie dormant for 65 years, until his cousins, one of whom was not even born, when Len died, would start asking questions!

Slowly, and with great reverence, we began to lift the “Curtain of Time” that had lain silent, and shrouded these events for 65 years.

Chapter 6

The Crew

For the uninitiated, Len was part of an aircraft's 'Crew', a group of seven very young men, (*the R.A.F. crew average was 21*), sometimes, there was an eighth, (*or even 9th!*), crew member who, was usually a Second Pilot, (*generally someone fresh from training, and making a few familiarisation ops with the unit, before being given an aircraft of his own*), who took the air war, to the enemy.

They had an assigned aircraft, and, each had his 'Duty Station', that they had been trained for, and in 'a pinch', they could usually 'fill the gap', at another station when a crew mate was injured, or killed.

All were strangers to each other before the war, but during war they were closer than brothers, more likened to 'limbs of the same body'. Each one looked after the other's backs, through thick and thin. It would not be fitting to speak of Len, without speaking of these gallant men who fought their last battle with him.

The following is written in simple terms, for those of us who have never had to be in that situation, so that we may understand, their effort, their dedication, and their sacrifice...

Warrant Officer Charles Thomas Fairweather,
Service No. 656958, Royal Air Force.



The Pilot
W/O Charles Thomas
Fairweather, 656958, R.A.F.

The Pilot.

Born on the 22nd of February, 1920, in North Shields, Northumberland, he was the son of Charles, and Catherine Fairweather, of, 17, Fir Tree Avenue, Percymain, North Shields. He was affectionately called "Tom" by his parents, to avoid confusion with his Father who had the same first name. Nor was he an only child, having an elder Sister Jean, and younger Brothers; Harry, Charles and Alfie. Tom attended Western Boys School in North Shields, and in July 1933, received the honour of "Top Boy".

Prior to the war, Tom served time as an electrician at Hawthorn Leslie Shipyard, on the Tyne. After joining the R.A.F. Tom, received his wings at Leconfield, (near Beverley), in Yorkshire, in March, 1942.

The now, W/O Fairweather had flown 94 sorties, and 550 Hours, and was on his second tour of duty, and only needed 50 hours to complete his second tour of 300 hours of operational flying with this squadron. His Commanding Officer said of him: *"(He), was one of the 'Old Hands' of the Squadron, and an extremely capable pilot, who could be relied upon to react well in any emergency."*

He was the man who flew the aeroplane.

He was responsible for operating the flight controls, and getting the aeroplane there, and back again, following the course given to him by the navigator.

He was just 24 years of age

(Information kindly supplied by Gordon Pearson, W/O Fairweather's Nephew.)

Flight Sergeant Richard Jacques,
Service No. 1672823, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.



The Flight Engineer
Flt. Sgt. Richard
Jacques, 1672823,
R.A.F.V.R.

The Flight Engineer.

Born in March 1924 in Ashington, Northumberland. Son of George Jacques and Margaret Turnbull, Richard attended North Seaton School. He left school at the age of 14, and worked for Newbiggin Council, before volunteering for the RAF shortly after his 17th birthday in 1941.

He completed his training aged 18, at St Johns Wood, when he was promoted to Sergeant, and posted as a Flight Engineer on Halifax bombers. The posting date is unknown.

His cousin, Ella Jacques was an opera singer. In 1942, Ella was touring as part of an ENSA party entertaining troops when her clothing caught fire on stage, resulting in her death.

The Flight Engineers duty is a 'strange' one since it involves all of the 'knobs and dials' of all of the engines, fuel tanks, and all of the on board systems, he was almost the 'second pilot' on the aircraft.

He usually assisted on the throttles, and confirmed the check-lists with the pilot on take offs, and landings, and in all matters to keep the aircraft in the air.

He was just 20 years of age.

(Information kindly supplied by Richard Allan Jacques, Fl. Sgt. Jacques Cousin.)

Pilot Officer Allen Haigh,
Service No. 182988, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.



The Navigator
P. Off. Allen Haigh,
182988, R.A.F.V.R.

The Navigator.

Born in 1923, the Son of Mr Ernest and Isabella Haigh, of Birkenhead, Merseyside, on the Wirral Peninsula in Cheshire. He had a brother, also called Ernest, who passed away in 1991, in Merseyside.

He was the person, who read the maps and charted the course to, and from, the target. He had to know what the weather was doing, take 'star-shots' with a sextant, and read the terrain below, comparing it to the map, and make notes on changes and discrepancies. All of the mid course adjustments were his responsibility.

He was 21 years of age.

Flying Officer John Stanley Brown,
Service No. J/22188, Royal Canadian Air Force Air Bomber.



The Bomb Aimer
Fl. Off. John Stanley
Brown, J/22188, R.C.A.F.

The Bomb Aimer.

John came from the City of Wetaskiwin*, in Alberta, Canada. He was born on the 23rd of January, 1920, the son of Mr. and Mrs H. Brown, of Wetaskiwin.

In Grade school, it is on record that he was a keen student, and had a very good attendance record.

He was the person responsible for 'laying' the bomb load on the target.

During the 'Bomb Run', a straight run to the target, it was he who, had to give directional instructions to the pilot to stay on course, and calculate the 'release point' to ensure that the bombs hit their target, often whilst taking fire and 'flak', in the exposed 'glasshouse' nose of the aircraft.

He was 24 years of age.

**(The city name comes from the Cree Indian word 'witaskiwin-ispatinaw', meaning "the hills where peace was made".)*

(Information and Photograph courtesy of Wetaskiwin City Archives.)

Flight Sergeant Ronald Frederick Houghton,
Service No. 1146101, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.



The W/Op-Nose Gunner
Fl. Sgt. Ronald Frederick
Houghton, 1146101,
R.A.F.V.R

The Wireless Operator/Air Gunner.

Born in 1921, the son of Frederick and Clara Houghton, and the husband of Betty Houghton, of Blackpool, Lancashire.

During the course of an 'Op', it was his job to stay in contact with other aircraft on the same mission, and their base.

The radios of this era were mostly short range VHF for voice, long range was more usually 'Medium Wave' Morse transmissions. In the bombing phase of the 'Op', or when attacked, he would switch to the forward turret as defensive armament came into play.

The Air Gunners were the 'eyes, ears, and claws' of the aircraft, relaying observations and information to the pilot, and emergency manoeuvres when attacked, whilst firing back at enemy aircraft.

He was just 23 years of age.

Flight Sergeant John Easton, Service No. 1568744,
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.



The Dispatcher
Fl. Sgt. John Easton,
1568744, R.A.F.V.R

Air Gunner/Dispatcher.

Born in 1924, the son of John and Mary Cook Easton, of 27 Park Wynd, Dundee. Affectionately called "Jack" by his mother, Mary, who received the telegram advising her of his loss, whilst she was working at Tay Rope and Brattice Cloth Works, Dundee, packing parachutes. His loss was to affect her, and her husband, John for many years after.

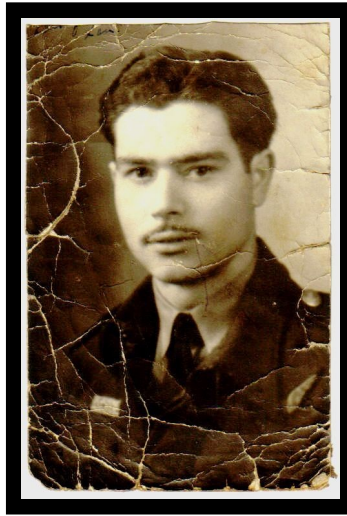
The dorsal, or 'Mid-Upper' turret was, as the name implies was on the top of the fuselage, in the middle of the aircraft, the gunner was in the turret, with his feet at everyone else's head height, swivelling the guns around in a 360 degree field of fire, horizontally, and 270 degrees vertically, and firing at incoming fighters. JP292 had no Dorsal Turret, "Jack" had retrained as a Dispatcher and retained his Rank and Title.

In his Dispatcher duties it was he who stood in the open bomb bay pushing out the supplies to be dropped.

He was just 20 years of age.

(Information kindly supplied by Jack Cook, Fl. Sgt. Easton's Cousin.)

Flight Sergeant Leonard James Smith,
Service No. 1335857, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.



The Tail Turret Gunner
Fl. Sgt. Leonard James
Smith 1335857, R.A.F.V.R

Air Gunner.

Born in 1921, Son of James and Margaret Smith, and husband of Ethel Annie Smith. Known affectionately, to his brother, and sisters as "Lenny".

The Tail turret, is at the rear of the aircraft, and defends from rear attack. It is the most dangerous to enter and exit, and is the single 'saviour' of many aircraft, it was part of the 'eyes, ears, and claws' defence system of the aircraft. Operators usually gave reports to the pilot on the success, or failure of the bomb run.

He did this on 94 Sorties, the 95th was his last, and he had accumulated 530 operational hours, and was on his second tour of 300 hours. He was just 70 hours away from completing that second tour.

He was just 22 years of age, and the subject of this story.

Just seven ordinary young men, drawn from all walks of life, and from different nations, who, you would not have taken a second look at in 'civvie' street. Seven young men that a most 'extraordinary' set of circumstances threw together in the skies over Europe in 1944.

This then, was the crew that took Halifax JP292-W, "W-William", to war over the Balkans, and onward onto the pages of history.

It was thought that no pictures remained of "W-William" or of its crew, due to the secrecy that veiled their operations. With dozens of fruitless searches, none came to light. Then I found a photo of "W-William" on the ground! The title read: "*JP292-W undergoing routine maintenance at Brindisi, 1944*". The photograph was of unknown provenance, and is very similar to the "*B-Beer, Brindisi, 1943*", photo shown elsewhere in this booklet. It may be digitally altered, and could be suspect, but it purported to be "W-William, and it is the 'watermark' on the front cover.

By this time, I had already started to build the 'Memorial' on The Aircrew Remembrance Society's website, it was seen by Richard Allen Jacques, the cousin of the Flight Engineer, (*and with an almost identical name*), and he contacted me.

Then, after a newspaper appeal, I was contacted by the City of Wetaskiwin Archives, Archivist, Mrs. Angela Smith, the result of which brought a picture of Flying Officer Brown, The Bomb Aimer, and a biography.

A similar newspaper appeal brought Mr J. Cook of Dundee, a surviving cousin of Fl. Sgt. Easton.

The next to answer the appeal were the relatives of W/O Fairweather, with a wealth of photos and information.

The veils of time were lifting!

Chapter 7

The Aircraft

The Crew's aircraft was the, Handley Page Halifax B Mk II, one of the two following series:

(a), The Halifax B.II Series I (Special), SOE Special version for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) used to drop supplies over Europe. Nose armament and dorsal turret removed, the nose being faired over, as well as changes to the fuel vent pipes and exhaust shrouds. Or,

(b) The Halifax B.II Series I (Special), generally similar to the aircraft used by the SOE, these were employed in the bombing role. These aircraft were more varied in appearance, especially concerning the fitting of dorsal armament with some aircraft retaining the standard Boulton Paul "Type C" turret in different mounts with others mounting a "Type A" turret. There were also examples with no dorsal turret, similar to the SOE-aircraft.

As the crew had a Bomb Aimer, (*however, both types carried bomb aimers. In the S.O.E. version, the dorsal turret gunner adopted a, 'Dispatcher' or 'Loadmaster' role*), it was most likely type (b) which gives even more credence that JP292 was a B.Mk. II series I (Special). Len's position as the dorsal turret gunner/dispatcher again tends to confirm the Halifax build as a B.II series I (Special), rather than an out-and-out SOE aircraft. Even the latter, normally carried a Bomb Aimer, his job being to drop the supplies, and agents, on target rather than live bombs.

It was one of 250 Halifaxes built to Contract B124357/40 by the London Aircraft Production Group, made up of with Chrysler, Duple, Express Motor & Bodyworks Limited, and Park Royal Coachworks, L.T. formed the London Aircraft Production Group (L.A.P) in 1940. The L.T. chairman, Lord Ashfield, also became chairman of the L.A.P. Final assembly, flight testing and delivery of these machines took place at Leavesden. JP292 was one of a batch delivered between 13 March and 20 April 1944.

It went first to No. 1 OAPU (*Overseas Aircraft Preparation Unit*), then to No. 1 FU (*Ferry Unit*), which latter presumably delivered it to 148 Sqdn. Clearly, it had not long been in service before it was lost.

For the reader, having read the foregoing story, you would think that there were no surviving aircraft after the war. This was not the case, 6176 were built, and many hundreds were scrapped when hostilities ceased, some were pressed into other service, and remained so until the mid 1950's, and a few, a precious few, still remain, dotted across the world, where they stand as permanent memorials, in tribute to the crews who flew them.

Halifax JP292-FS-W, W-William:- The Crew.



The Pilot
W/O Charles Thomas
Fairweather, 656958,
R.A.F.



The Flight Engineer
Flt. Sgt. Richard
Jacques, 1672823,
R.A.F.V.R.



The Navigator
P. Off. Allen Haigh,
182988, R.A.F.V.R.



The Bomb Aimer
Fl. Off. John Stanley
Brown, J/22188,
R.C.A.F.



The W/Op-Nose
Gunner
Fl. Sgt. Ronald
Frederick Houghton,
1146101, R.A.F.V.R



The Dispatcher
Fl. Sgt. John Easton,
1568744, R.A.F.V.R



The Tail Turret Gunner
Fl. Sgt. Leonard James
Smith 1335857,
R.A.F.V.R



Return of Air Force Personnel Killed in Action or who have died while on Service Abroad
In the War of 3rd September 1939 – 30th June 1948

Name in Full (Surname First)	Rank and Unit	Age	Country of Birth	Date of Death	Place of Death	Cause of Death
JACQUES Richard	Sgt. 1672823 148 Sqdn.	20	England	4. 7. 1944 Presumed	Pacir, Yugoslavia	Air Operations

An entry relating to the Death of.....Richard Jacques

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of the *certified copy of* an entry made in a Service Departments Register.
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the

9th day of March 2009

*If the certificate is given from the original Register the words "the certified copy of" are struck out.

Section 3(2) of the above mentioned Act provides that "The enactments relating to the registration of births and deaths and marriages in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (which contain provisions authorising the admission in evidence of, and of extracts from, certified copies of registers and duplicate registers) shall have effect as if the Service Departments Registers were certified copies or duplicate registers transmitted to the Registrar General in accordance with those enactments."

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE.
©CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.



Richard Jacques Death Certificate, Issued in 2009,
(from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records.)

And a Poem, Written By Richard:-

Yes I will fight, and if God's will be done.
Then I will even die, As one of Britain's grateful sons,
Proud in death to cry: "God Bless You
Little Emerald Isle
Guarded by a Silver Sea",
Carry on, forever smile,
Carry on to Victory.

Fl. Sgt. Richard Jacques, c1944

(Images by kind permission of the Jacques Family)



St Luke's Church Circa 1985



James & Margaret Smith,
("Aunt Mags") in later years



The British Bata Shoe Company's Factory, East Tilbury, Essex



Bata Ville, East Tilbury, Essex



A Halifax B II Series I, similar to "WJWilliam"



Henrietta Gash (Aunt Het) in 1960



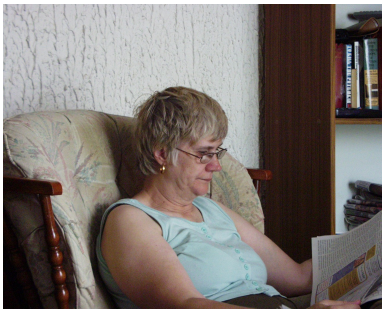
Edward Gash, (Uncle Ted) Died 1950



The 148 Squadron Crest from
1943 - 1945



148 Squadron Halifax "B-Bear" at Brindisi
1943



Pat Maker, nee Gash



Tilbury War Memorial, in the Civic Square



Teddy Gash, 2009.



And some came back! A Halifax Mk III, landing after a successful sortie



The original as found, and...
enhancement and repair



After digital
enhancement and repair

The "Mystery Airman" Photograph.



Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia.



An Artist's impression of a Halifax B II 1A, JP292-FS-W "W-William" in 148 Squadron colours and markings



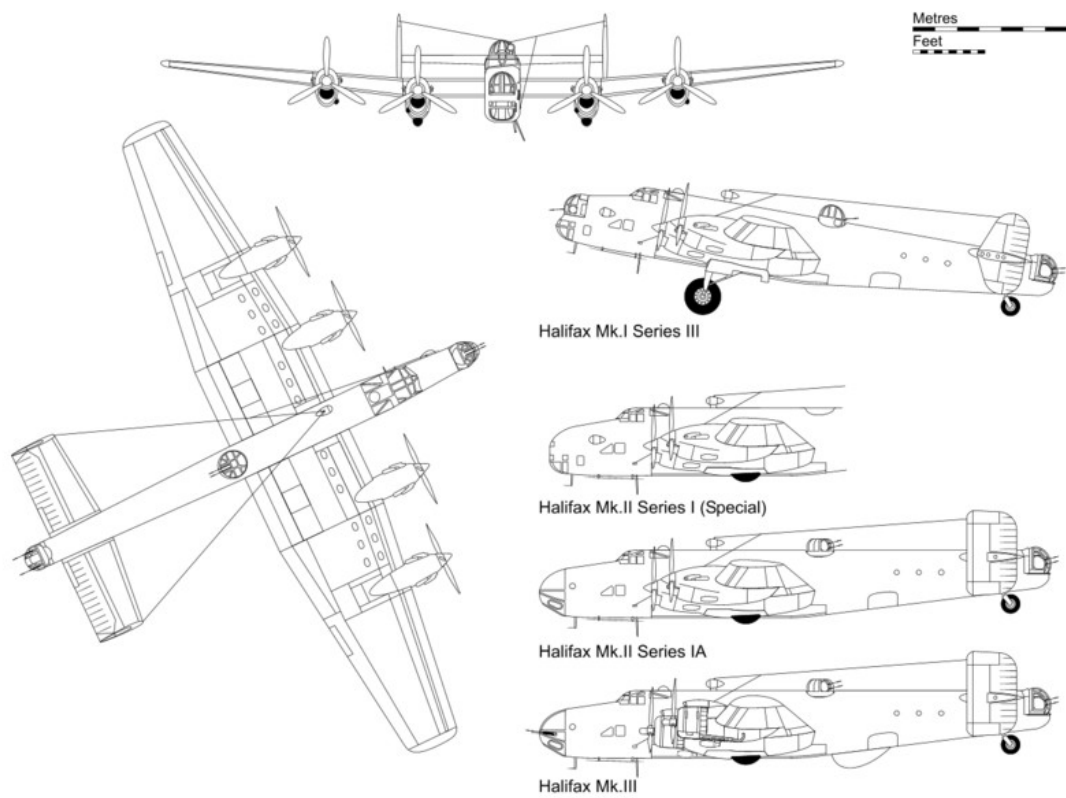
A rare picture of 148 Squadron's "S-Sugar" in flight



The Bata Website Photo



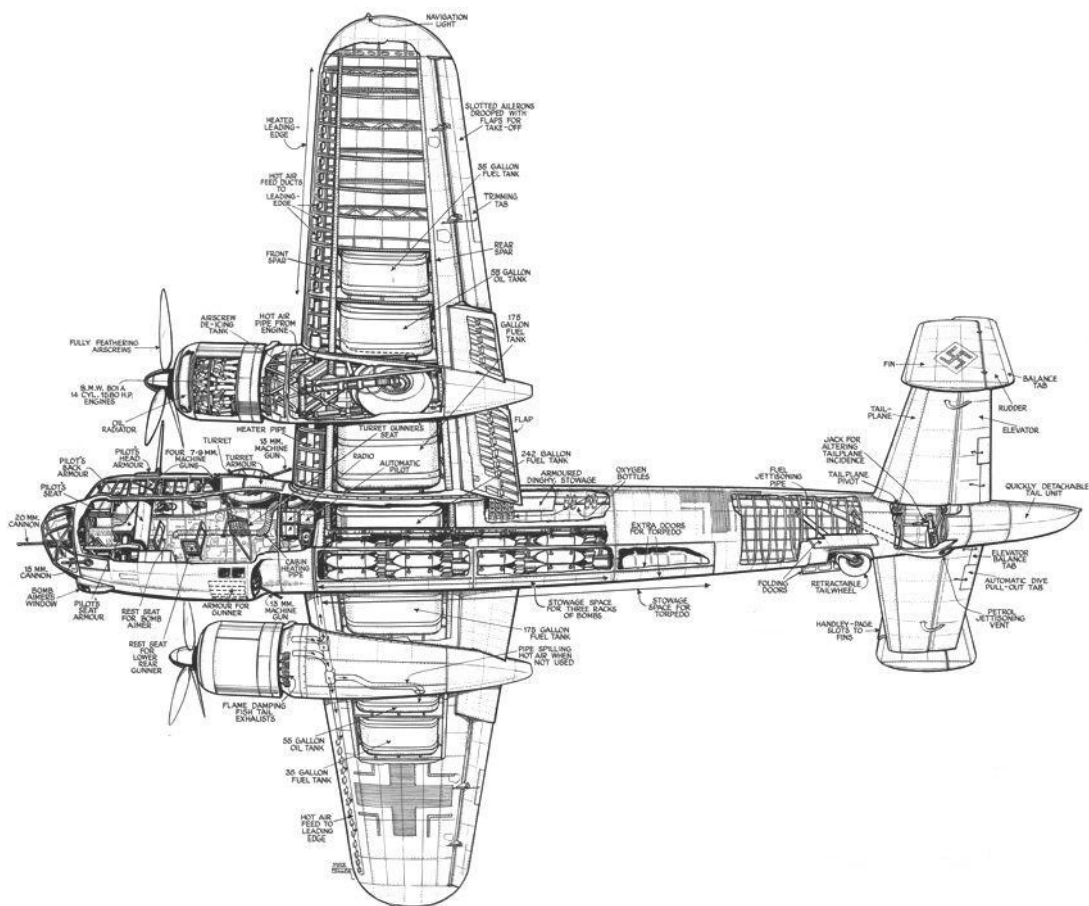
Ober Leutnant Johannes 'Hans' Krause KC. The Luftwaffe 'Ace' that shot down W-William, on 03/07/1944



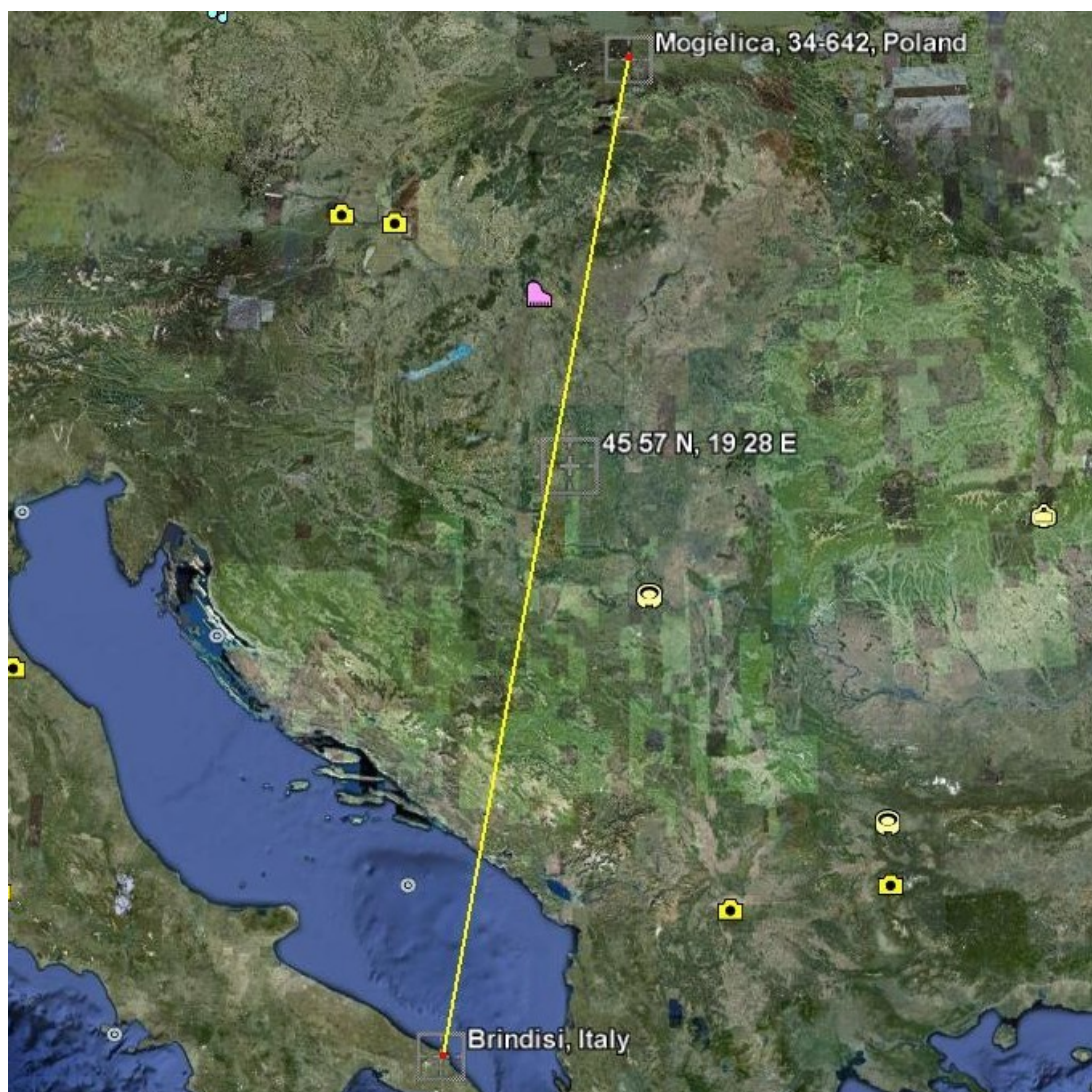
External Schematics of a Halifax Bomber



A Dornier Do-217 Nachtjager similar to the one that attacked W-William on the night of 03/07/1944



A cut-away schematic of a Dornier Do-217 Nachtjäger



The Flight plan of JP292 FS-W "W- William's" course and distance travelled on the night of 3rd - 4th July 1944, to Sombor, Yugoslavia, (now Serbia). This relatively short flight for a Halifax Bomber was to be the last for this Aircraft and its crew. They rest in Belgrade War cemetery. The crash site is 348 miles from Brindisi, on a course of 010 degrees true. The flight would have taken approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes, at a height of 11,500 feet.

(Picture, and details, courtesy of Google Earth.)



Park Royal Aircraft Factory where JP292 was built in March 1944



Building Halifax Wings at Park Royal

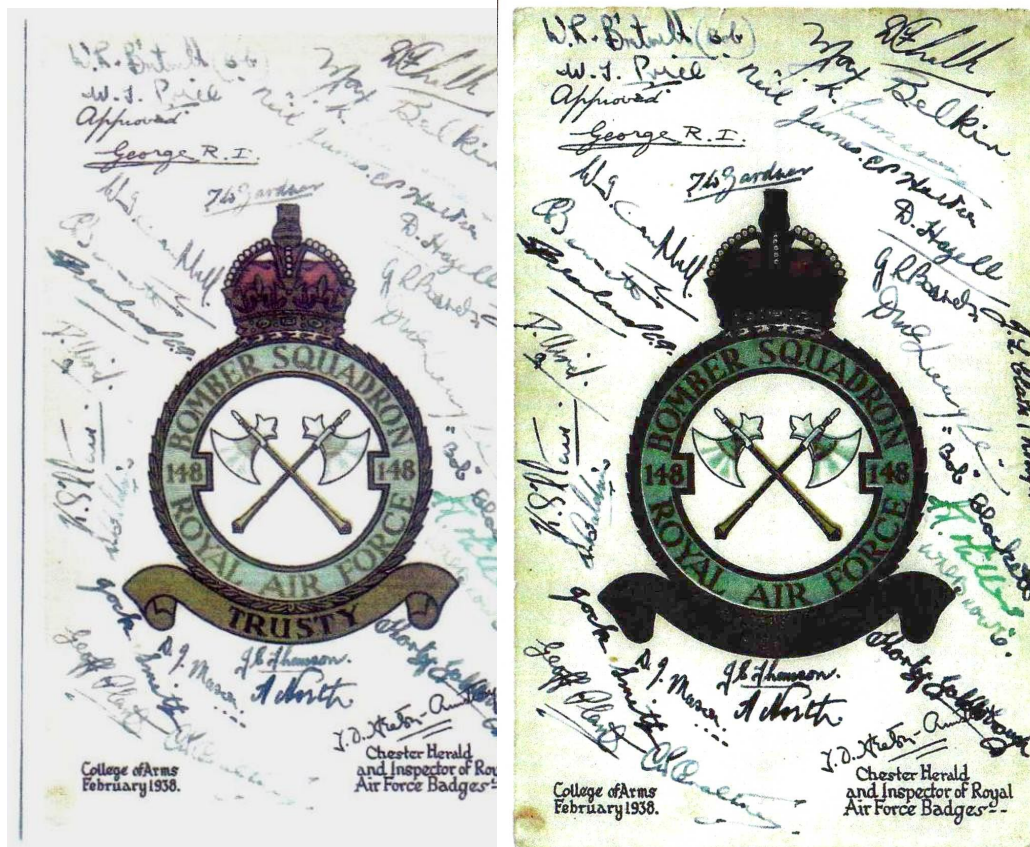




The Halifax "London Pride" built by the London Aircraft Production Group, Park Royal Coachworks, that built JP292, seen here in 'fly-past'



The Halifax "London Pride" built by the London Aircraft Production Group, Park Royal Coachworks, that built JP292, seen here on 'Take-Off'



A Souvenir Squadron Crest Card

Issued at the time of the granting, and approval of, the Squadron Crest by King George the Vth R.I., and signed by him in approval. These were issued to Squadron members, along with models of the Squadron Aircraft, such as the one given to Teddy Gash. Issued between October 1943, and August 1943 this card was passed to Mr Steve Andrews, of OPERATION: Dark of the Moon, and remains in his possession. (I thank him for his permission to reproduce it here).

There is a surviving model aircraft in the possession of the extended Jacques Family.

The card is faded with age, and bears the signatures of twenty-nine Crew members and the King's. The card on the right is digitally enhanced so as to read the names, sadly none of them give ranks, and most have no information available on them.

They are: George V R.I. (The King),

W.R. Britnell (Bomb aimer, JP254 FS-D), Max Belkin, (Pilot, BB429 FS-V) , Bennet, (F/Sgt A. Bennet, Bomb aimer, JP181 FS-X?), Beanland C.A. (F/Sgt Charles A Beanland, Bomb aimer JP181 FS-X), D. Aird (Sgt Dennis Aird, Bomb aimer JP181 FS-X), E.P. Holter (Sgt E.P. Holter, Air Gunner, JP162 FS-S), J.B. Thompson, (Fl/Sgt John Thompson, Flight Eng, JP244 FS-S?), D.J. Mason (F/Sgt Dennis Mason, Navigator, JP181 FS-X), S. Baldwin (Fl/Sgt S Baldwin, W/Op JP254 FS-D), K.S. Leleu. (Pilot Off. and pilot JP239 FS-C), W.J. Price, D.F. Chalk, Dave Lieugle, Geoff Plant, C.S. Ceraltiey, Jock Smith, D. Hazell, G.R. Boarels, J.L. Clash, Bob Clackett, K. Miller, W.E. Browle, 'Shorty' Goldsborough, A. North, T.D. Nelson-Armstrong, J.K. Jameson, Neil James, Neil James, T.W. Gardner, W.G. Campbell.



Another picture of Len in flying battledress, and worn under the flying suit. (Note the whistle, used for location when bailing out into the sea at night.)



Len and Ethel, on their Wedding day on the 10th of September 1943



Present day farmland outside Pacir, Serbia.

The Fairweather Collection

By kind permission of Gordon Pearson and the Fairweather Family



Charles "Tom" Fairweather, in the cockpit of an unidentified Halifax, presumed to be JP292 FS-W, at Brindisi



L -R: Ron Houghton, Jack Easton, Richard Jacques, Tom, Allen Haigh, and "Unknown" Could have been taken at Brindisi, or earlier, with "X" Flight, at Gambut, Libya



Crew Photo taken sometime between, January 1944, and June 1944.
 Back Row, (Standing): John Brown - Richard Jacques - Len Smith - John Easton.
 Front Row, (Seated): Unknown Fl.Sgt. AG - Ron Houghton - Tom Fairweather - Possibly
 Sgt Arthur Pinder



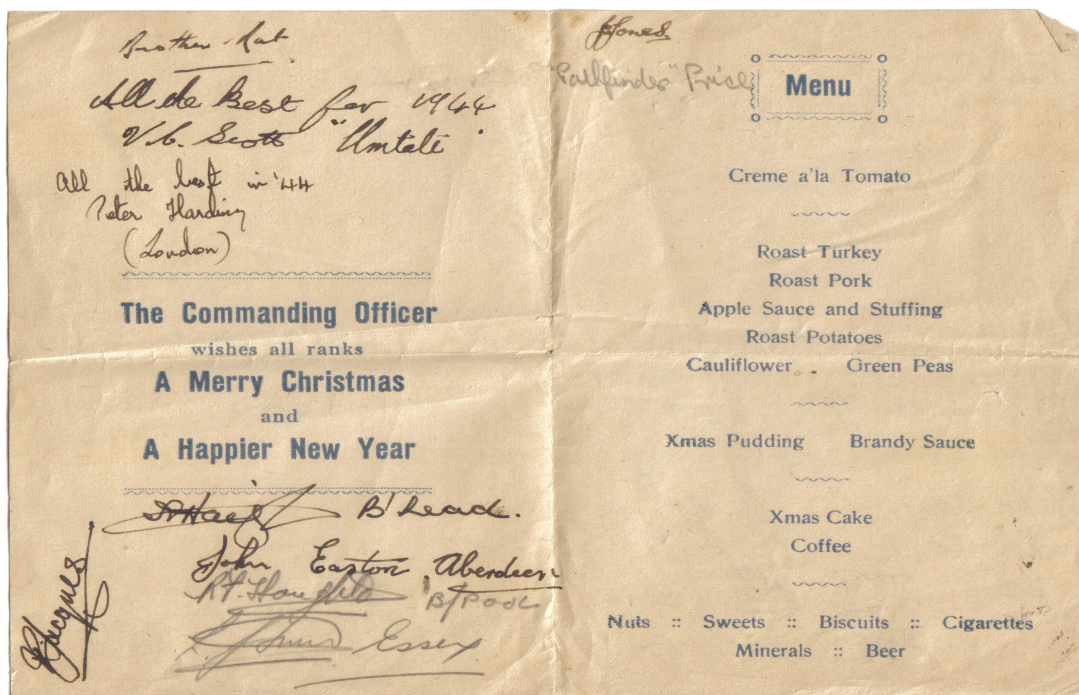
Allen Haigh, Ron Houghton, and Tom Fairweather, outside their 'Billet', at Brindisi, where they lived in Tents.



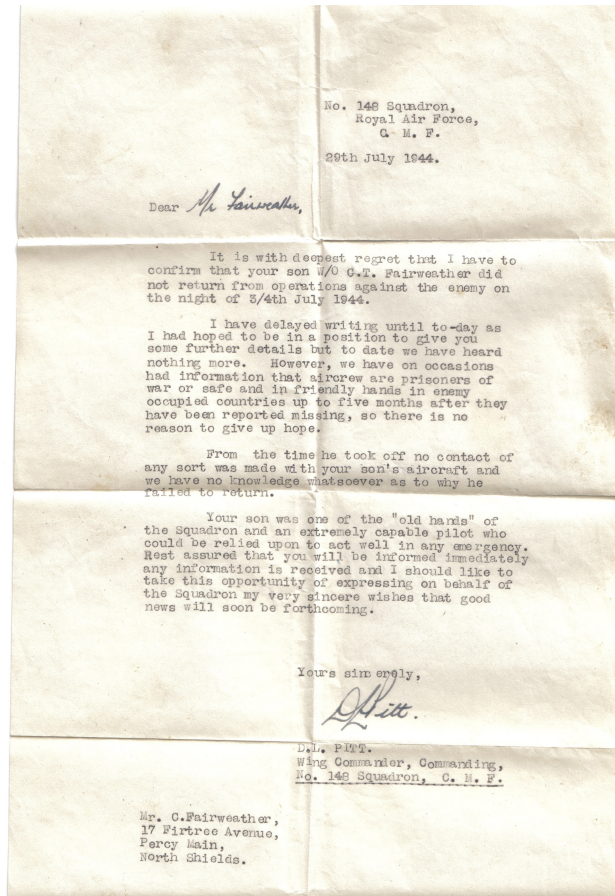
**Tom Fairweather, Crew, and Ground Crew, in front of an unidentified Halifax bomber,
Possibly JP292 FS-W**



**Tom Fairweather, Crew, and Ground Crew, on the wing of an unidentified Halifax bomber,
Possibly JP292 FS-W**



Although at war, it was still Christmas!
The Commanding Officers (W. Cdr. D.L. Pitt), combined Christmas card and Menu
For the Squadron Christmas Dinner, 1943, "L. J. Smith, Essex " is just visible on the
bottom of the left hand page



And a copy of W. Cdr Pitt's Letter of Condolence, just seven months later.

Charges to pay _____ s. _____ d.

RECEIVED

10/3/45

45

POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

From VW 45 9:36 LONDON TELEX OHMS 97 To _____ m.

PRIORITY-CC C FAIRWEATHER ESQ 17 OR 18 FIRTREE AVE PERCYMAIN NORTH SHIELDS -

MINISTRY 73 OXFORD ST W 1 PC 51 10/7/44 REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON 656958 WARRANT OFFICER CHARLES THOMAS FAIRWEATHER IS REPORTED MISSING AS THE RESULT OF AIR OPERATIONS ON NIGHT 3/4 JULY. ENQUIRIES ARE BEING MADE THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL

J.D. & Co. Ltd. 51-7406.

And the dreaded Air Ministry Telegram that informed Tom's Parents of his loss

F/L. D.H. Blackeby (89859)
No. 148 Squadron,
Royal Air Force,
C.M.F.

10 October 1944.

Dear Mrs. Fairweather,

An answer to your letter of enquiry has been delayed in the hope that additional information might become available. Unfortunately this is not the case. No more is known now than was known at the time Tommy was reported missing.

Regulations preclude your request from being excused to as we are not allowed to furnish the addressed of the next-of-kin of the rest of the crew. We gladly supply you with the names of the next-of-kin and should you wish to write to any of them we will forward the letters if you send them to us in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,

D.H. Blackeby

Mrs. C. Fairweather,
17, Firtree Avenue,
North Shields,
Northumberland.

When Tom's Mother, Catherine, requested more information from the Squadron, about his loss, she received this letter, and the following page. She followed the requested procedure, and did in fact contact all of the crew's families.

Member of Crew

Name of next-of-kin.

F/O. J.S. Brown.

Mr. H. Brown (father)

Sergeant Allen Haigh

Mr. E. Haigh (Father)

Sergeant Richard Jacques

Mr. G. Jacques (father)

Sergeant John Easton

Mr. J. Easton (father)

F/Sergeant Leonard Smith

Mrs. E.A. Smith (wife)

F/Sergeant Ronald Houghton

Mrs. D. Houghton (wife)



Another crew photo taken outside the tent that was their billet. Tom wrote home to say that he was unable to sleep properly due to the noise of aircraft taking off and landing. L to R: Allan, Tom, Jack, Ron. Seated Len. Presumably behind the camera, Richard and John.



A 'continuation photo" of the crew on the wing of an unidentified Halifax, possibly JP292 FS-W W-William, note that there are different people on the wing in this photo to the previous one.



Tom, (*Extreme Right*), and two unidentified sergeants, possibly extra crew members, or replacements, or friends from other crews. A 'posed' photograph, note the 'stage flat' piece of scenery behind them.

The Crew form a "Human Pyramid" outside their "Billet", such 'high jinks' were not uncommon amongst aircrew. Their stressful life meant they had to 'let off steam' occasionally, usually fuelled by high spirits rather than alcoholic ones.



Chapter 8

The Squadron

148 Squadron R.A.F.¹¹ Squadron motto: **“Trusty”**

148 Squadron R.A.F., was formed on 10 February 1918 as a night bomber unit at Andover, Hampshire, England, equipped with FE2b and 2d aircraft. These were taken to the Western Front in April 1918, where it began attacks against German airfields, communications and other targets behind the lines. It continued to operate the out-dated FE2s until the end of the war and it eventually returned to the UK in February 1919, disbanding at Tangmere on 30 June 1919.

The squadron reformed on 7 June 1937 at Scampton as a light bomber squadron equipped with Audaxes. However, within a month these had been replaced by Wellesleys, but it soon became obvious that this aircraft possessed inadequate defences for a European war and these were replaced by Heyfords in November 1938. Modern equipment arrived in March 1939 in the form of Wellingtons, however, the following month it became a Group Pool Squadron. In this role it acted as an operational training unit for the other units in its group, operating Ansons as well as the Wellingtons, moving to Harwell on the outbreak of war, where on 9 April 1940 it was disbanded by being re-designated No 15 Operational Training Unit.

Following the entry of Italy into the war on 10 June 1940, detachments of UK bomber squadrons had been sent to Malta to carry out attacks against targets in North Africa. Three of these detachments (from No 38, 99 and 115 Squadrons) were amalgamated into a new No 148 Squadron on 14 December 1940 at Luqa. It continued its attacks against targets in Libya, Sicily and also the Italian mainland, from Malta, until March 1941 when it moved to a new home at Kabrit in Egypt. From here it supported the 8th Army during its battles for control of the North African Desert, operating from a number of desert landing grounds. On 7 December 1942 a detachment of 12 Wellingtons was sent to Malta, leaving six at LG167 in Libya, which were transferred to No's 30 and 70 Squadrons. A week after arriving in Malta, the squadron disbanded, with the crews being absorbed by other units on the island.

Three months later on 14 March 1943, No 148 Squadron reformed at Gambut in the 'Special Duties' role, equipped with Halifaxes and Liberators. It was now responsible for supplying Partisan groups throughout the Balkans and as far a field as Poland as well as undertaking normal bombing missions when not otherwise occupied. With the end of the war the squadron re-equipped with standard bomber Liberators, moving back to Egypt in November 1945, where it disbanded on 15 January 1946.

It was soon back in the battle order, when it reformed at Upwood in November 1946, equipped with Lancasters, with Lincolns arriving in February 1950. The Lincolns were used operationally in Malaya as part of Operation Firedog during 1954 and 1955, but the unit disbanded again in

July 1955. Its final incarnation began on 1 July 1956 at Marham as a Valiant V-bomber unit and again used this type operationally during the Suez crisis of 1956. However, when metal fatigue was found in the main spars of the entire Valiant fleet, the type was grounded and No 148 disbanded in April 1965.

From "History of War" website, we get a broader picture: *"The third and final incarnation of No.148 Squadron was as a special duties squadron, formed from the Special Liberator Flight (X Flight) at Gambut (Libya). This incarnation of the squadron used a wide range of aircraft, starting with the Consolidated Liberator but then adding the Handley Page Halifax.... This version of the squadron carried out supply drops to resistance groups across the Balkans. After a move to Italy in January 1944 the squadron also began to carry out pick-up missions. The squadron was also used in an unsuccessful attempt to fly supplies to the besieged Poles in Warsaw."*¹²

In this "Special Duties" mode 148 Squadron flew many different types of aircraft, such as the Lysander, mainly used for inserting and extracting agents. The Dakota, used for heavy supplies, and large groups, as well as the Halifax, and the Liberator. They wanted, and took only the most experienced crews.

Many of these aircraft were lost due to enemy fire, and fighters, and some, when on really clandestine operations, were lost to Allied fire, simply because the mission was 'too Secret', to even let our own forces expect an unidentified, or unidentifiable and unmarked aircraft, passing overhead in any direction, in the darkened sky.

If we were able to add up their WWII tonnage, we would get an impressive figure indeed, unfortunately there isn't a figure available, only that the squadron flew 'approximately 3500 sorties in its 18 month existence in the "Special Duties" guise. Although we do not have individual figures for the Squadron, an overall total for the Balkan Air Force is given in the next chapter.

Some of their operations were so sensitive there are still no details available today.

"The life expectancy in the 148 Squadron was one month. Most of them weren't coming back. You knew your odds were slim to none. It was a job. We just did our job!"

This statement was passed to me from a 148 Squadron veteran, a Canadian, who has since passed away, and wished to remain anonymous.

Wing Commander Richard Gordon Pryor



Wing Cdr. Gordon Pryor,
DFC and Bar Polish Cross of
Valour

In August 1944, due to the many and continued losses of aircrew in the squadron, Richard Gordon Pryor, the last remaining officer pilot in the squadron, was promoted to squadron leader. *(He had volunteered for Bomber Command, and in July 1944 was posted to 148 Squadron in Brindisi.)* He and his crew, flight engineer, navigator, wireless operator, bomb aimer and gunners, were to remain a close-knit group throughout their successive tours of duty, for the rest of the war.

'Gordon' Pryor was awarded a DFC, and he was one of six British airmen to receive the Polish Cross of Valour for his part in attempting to bring relief to Warsaw, and so was given command of 148 Squadron. In May 1945, Pryor was awarded a Bar to his DFC having been promoted to wing commander.

He remained its commander until the end of hostilities, and its disbanding in Egypt, on 15 January 1946.

After the war, he was closely involved with the Warsaw Airbridge Club, which encompassed ground and aircrew of the British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African, and Polish units that had flown to Warsaw, and maintained the memory, and dedication to duty of some 200 R.A.F., P.A.F., R.A.F.V.R., R.C.A.F., R.A.A.F., R.N.Z.A.F., and S.A.A.F., and "Americans in the R.C.A.F.", aircrew, who lost their lives in flying, and maintaining the Warsaw link.

Wing Commander Pryor, DFC and Bar, Polish Cross of Valour, was chairman of the 148 Squadron Association and continued in the post, until his death on September 3, 2009, aged 88.

Chapter 9

The Special Operations Executive

The Special Operations Executive, usually shortened to its initials, or “The S.O.E.”, was a WWII, wartime British, “Black Ops”, (*not unlike the American O.S.S., [Office of Strategic Services]*), organisation that had some 13,000 personnel operating in every theatre of war from Europe to the Far East. It came into being on the 22nd of July 1940, at the behest of Winston Churchill, and, the then Minister of Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton. And its remit was to wage war by any other means than direct confrontation. In plain terms, to encourage, and engage in, espionage, sabotage, and resistance support, in all war zones.

Throughout its existence it was seldom referred to directly as “The S.O.E.”, having more oblique references and titles, as, “Churchill’s Secret Army”, “The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare”, “The Baker Street Irregulars”, (*possibly a humorous link, to Sherlock Holmes group of ragamuffin informants, since their offices were in Baker Street!*), “The Dirty Tricks Department”, and “The Back-room Boys of Baker Street. These were the soubriquet’s that can be printed, there were, among the rank and file regular services, many other soubriquet’s that cannot be printed here!

It was in fact a merger of three existing departments. These were Foreign Office’s Department EH, who dealt in propaganda; MI6’s, (*also known as the Special Intelligence Service, or S.I.S*), Section “D”, who researched the use of sabotage, propaganda, and other irregular tactics; and the War Office’s Department MI (R), who dealt in guerilla warfare.

Initially, they were weak in resources, and their work overlapped, fortunately the Heads of Department, knew each other, (*they were officers of the same regiment*), and were eventually able to agree to a rough division of duties, with MI (R) in covert ops using regular troops, and Section “D” doing the undercover missions.

On 13th June 1940, Winston Churchill, and Lord Hankey, convinced the fledgling organisation that their efforts should be better coordinated, a cabinet meeting on the 1st of July, formally founded the S.O.E., and on the following 16th, Hugh Dalton was created ‘political head’, and its first Director, (codename: CD), was Sir Frank Nelson.

On the 22nd of July 1940, The S.O.E. became an 'active' unit, and its original Heads of department reverted to their active service regiment. Dalton modelled the organisation, on the IRA, (*Irish Republican Army*), as it was during the Irish war of Independence.

However not all of the aspects of the founding bodies were transferred over to the S.O.E. Department "C" of the MI (R), which was weapons development, and 'gadgets', became an independent department, Codenamed: MD1, officially, unofficially it was called "Churchill's Toyshop", due to his enthusiasm for it! (*The same department was rumoured to be the basis for Ian Fleming's "Q", and his department, in the "James Bond" books!*)

During this formative period and throughout the war, the department saw many changes of department head; Dalton was replaced by Lord Selborne, who replaced Nelson, (*due to the latter's failing health due to his hard work.*), during this time the propaganda department was separated to become an executive in its own right. Nelson was replaced with Sir Charles Hambro of banking fame; these remained until 1943, when they were transferred to other active roles. Their replacement was Major General Colin Gubbins, an 'Old Hand' from the IRA days, and fluent in both Commando and Clandestine operations through links with Combined Operations Headquarters.

Always at odds with its colleagues, the relations with S.I.S, and the Admiralty, were often strained, the S.I.S were against the S.O.E.'s agent infiltration, and sabotage, wanting only to gather intelligence quietly. Governments in Exile complained about not being informed of operations that brought reprisals. The S.O.E. had to work with a, "No bangs without Foreign Office approval." Foreign Office rule, and largely accepted it!

The S.O.E. constantly, grew and changed throughout the entire war, finally having offices, or "Sections", in every theatre of war. Many countries had more than one section, France, for instance had six! There were sections in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Greece, The Balkans, The Near, Middle, and Far East, even one in New York, for liaison purposes, with the O.S.S.!

Upon the 'outbreak' of peace, the S.O.E. was officially dissolved on the 15th of January 1946, and all of its active members 'disappeared', after 48 hours notice! Some 280 were taken into the Special Operations Branch of

MI6; the remainder just reverted to their peacetime occupations, and kept silent, until the 30 year "D" notices ran out.

This then was the organisation that directed the Operations of 148 Squadron, (Special Duties - SOE), R.A.F, and all of the other "Special Duties" Squadrons and Flights, who were engaged in, Agent insertion and extraction, Supply and Re-supply of Partisan and Resistance Networks, Covert Bombing Missions, Leaflet dropping, and even wounded personnel recovery and extraction.

The following is a list of R.A.F. Squadrons, wholly engaged in, or called upon to fly, Special Duties Missions using customised Halifax Bombers:

- 138 Squadron R.A.F
- 148 Squadron R.A.F
- 158 Squadron R.A.F
- 1586 Special Duties Flight P.A.F
- 161 Squadron R.A.F
- 296 Squadron R.A.F
- 298 Squadron R.A.F
- 624 Squadron R.A.F
- 644 Squadron R.A.F

Their crews were never fully recognised for the service they gave, being secret.

Their sacrifice went unnoticed, and is largely unrecorded.

Their losses run into the many hundreds of aircrew, many, with no known grave.

Chapter 10

The Balkan Air Force

The Balkan Air Force was a late-World War II allied air formation. It was based at Bari in Italy, and activated on 7 June 1944 from AHQ 'G' Force to simplify command arrangements for the air support of SOE-operations in the Balkans, i.e. across the Adriatic and in the Aegean and Ionian seas. The Desert Air Force had been responsible for those operations, but its prime job was the support of the troops of the Commonwealth Eighth Army, thus making operations over the Balkans a distraction. The Balkan Air Force was a subordinate to Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, the overall allied air formation in the Mediterranean.

The BAF mainly supported the operations of the Partisans, led by Josip Bros Tito, against German forces in Yugoslavia, but also provided support to Greek and Albanian resistance organizations. It transported supplies to the partisans, evacuated wounded, dropped agents to help them, and provided air support in their operations against German troops.

The Balkan Air Force was a multinational unit, with 15 types of aircraft and men from eight nations: Greece, co-belligerent Italy, Poland, South Africa, Yugoslavia, the UK, USA and USSR (*a transport squadron*). Between its inception and May 1945 the BAF flew 38,340 sorties, dropped 6,650 tons of bombs, delivered 16,440 tons of supplies and flew 2,500 individuals into Yugoslavia and 19,000 (*mostly wounded*) out.

Towards the end of its existence, it operated a small number of units from Yugoslav soil to harass the retreating Germans. However, disagreements with Tito (*particularly the arrest of members of the Special Boat Squadron on 13 April 1945, although they were quickly released*) meant that all British ground forces were withdrawn, although BAF aircraft operating from Zadar continued to support the Partisan offensive. Between 19 March and 3 May they flew 2,727 sorties, attacking the German withdrawal route from Sarajevo to Zagreb and supporting the Fourth Yugoslav Army advancing from Bihac to Fiume.

The Balkan Air Force was disbanded on 15 July 1945. During its short existence, it was commanded by (*British*) Royal Air Force Air Vice Marshals William Elliot and George Mills.

Chapter 11

The Nightfighter

Now I know that there are those, who will view my inclusion of this chapter as 'not befitting'! However as a genealogist, and now a historian, I have a duty to tell the truth, and tell it all, however unpleasant, and distasteful, that telling may be. In all things, both sides of a story need to be investigated, and reviewed. I would fail in my duty to tell Len's story, if I left out half of the circumstances surrounding his, and his crew-mates, untimely demise. I must also be impartial, so, I neither endorse, nor apologise for the following.

Ever since the advent of aviation, and night bombing, the defender has relied upon the night fighter, to guard against the bomber. It is a specialist aircraft, usually with on-board radar, or similar detection equipment, and having a crew of highly trained specialists. None of these were feared more than the 'Nachtjagdgeschwaders', (*or Nightfighter Groups*), of the Luftwaffe, and their feared 'Nachtjagdflieger', or Night Fighter Pilots.

These aviators were usually 'Aces', (*credited with shooting down five or more enemy aircraft during aerial combat. Ed.*), More than likely, the sons of the aristocracy, they likened themselves to the 'Knights' of the mediaeval times, as being honourable, and respecting a fallen foe, who died in action in the line of duty. It was rare, but not unheard of for captured crew members, (*of officer rank*); to be wined, and dined by their captors, at a Luftwaffe mess, with all formal honour's being observed, before being sent off to a prison camp! If the crew had perished, they usually made sure that all of the remains were buried with full military honours. To them, the war was not one of ideology, but a matter of personal combat, a game of tactics, and valour, and above all, personal honour.

Like their counterparts in the Royal Air Force, The anti-nightfighter nightfighters, who flew the De Havilland Mosquito, (*which the Luftwaffe Nachtjagdflieger respected as much as the Spitfire*), they were an elite group of fliers.

Their aircraft usually fell into a specific format, a light, to medium fighter-bomber, specially adapted for nightfighter use. The most popular aircraft were the Junkers JU-88 Bomber, which appeared as the JU-88G, and as the JU-188, the Messerschmitt Bf-110G, and the Dornier Do-217. In all cases, the 'glasshouse' nose was removed, and a solid one fitted, to house the fixed guns, and the radar antennas.

As previously stated, Nightfighters use the dark, and stealth, to attack their target. The 'target' is approached from a 'blind spot', usually from behind, and below, and then raked with cannon, and/or machine gun fire, from stern to nose. Bombers have little or no armour plate, due to its weight. More weight means less bombs, or supplies, the bombers function is payload. Sometimes the fuel tanks were hit, and the aircraft erupted in a ball of flame, or, at other times, the target's crew, are taken completely by surprise, and are either killed, or incapacitated, during this first strike.

The night fighter waits in the dark, hoping that the bomber crew will lose control of their aircraft, 'spin in', then crash, and burn. If this doesn't happen, he carries out a second attack, into the guns of the Bomber, and their fury. This continues until one side, defeats the other or the action is broken off, leaving the survivor to 'limp' home.

Late in 1944, and in early 1945, as the war approached its conclusion, and Germany needed more and more defence aircraft, the newer Heinkel, and Focke-Wulfe, night fighters, and the worlds first service jet aircraft, the Me-262A-1a day fighter, used by the "Wilde Sau (*Wild Boar*)" Nachtjager, (*which actually had an upward firing cannon, mounted in the fuselage, behind the wings*), for night fighting. These were rushed into service, and with them came newer, more inexperienced crews, from all walks of life, which reflected the pressing need for aircrew in the latter days of the war. There were no more than a thousand in total of these aircraft produced before the war came to an end, and, whilst effective, and undoubtedly courageous, their crews lacked the same sense of 'Honour and Valour', of the Nachtjagdflieger, of the early years of WWII.

The Croatian Battle Air Force was a Luftwaffe supported, but separate, air arm, of an axis aligned Croatian 'government'. It is here that the search for the nightfighter that shot down "W-William" becomes blurred. So we have the same question in different forms. Was it a Luftwaffe nightfighter? Or, was it a Croatian Battle Air Force nightfighter? And to confuse the picture even further, Nachtjagdflieger, flew for both forces, so we now have the possibility of a Luftwaffe Nachtjagdflieger, in a Croatian Battle Air Force night fighter!

To find the aircraft, and pilot, that shot down "W-William" was not going to be an easy task.

I contacted the Bundesarchiv, in Germany, they were helpful, but there was little success, it seems that in late 1944, the retreating Luftwaffe, destroyed much of their paperwork, and records, rather than have them fall into enemy hands, by being captured by Tito's Partisans.

Not without some feelings of hopelessness, I approached the Luftwaffe Archives & Records Reference Group, (LWAG), for assistance. They are an internet based group, and in all parts of the world, they are apolitical, and take no sides, just wishing to keep the history available, and alive, for posterity. Moreover the Luftwaffe kept good records. So I registered to join the group, was accepted, posted my question, and waited! Could they answer the riddle of, "Who shot down W-William?"

It seems that the relevant 'Croatian' records, and any captured Luftwaffe records, were destroyed in a later war, by N.A.T.O. when they ironically bombed the building where they were housed, I learned from a posting on the Luftwaffe Archives & Records Reference Group forum that:

"Unfortunately, a large, and important, part of the Croatian documents from WWII are buried in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in the Archive of the Military Institute, in a building that received a direct hit from a bomb, in a US attack on Belgrade in 1998/99. The documents are safe underground, but the Institute will be closed for the next two years, at least."

I also learned from the same sources, that the 'Luftwaffe Records', were largely, ground troop, Flak troop, and ground crew records, and probably of no use to my search. I continued my search for newer information that the Archives may have been re-opened, but found none.

All I could hope for now is that a veteran of that theatre of war, or a group member could answer the riddle. Then I got search results on Sombor, at Cieldgloire.com, which led to another website, Das-ritterkreuz.de, then to Feldgrau.com, and Axishistory.com, and then I started to piece things together, then another website appeared, Luftwaffeexperten.com, by using all of these resources, the picture gradually emerged from the fog.

First, came the pilot's combat reports of 'kills', over Sombor on the night of the 3rd and 4th of July 1944. There were only four confirmed 'kills', by Nachtjager's, these were in time order: (Berlin time= GMT+1)

22:26 Berlin, Halifax, at 2600 Metres, Oberleutnant Johannes Krause.
22:52 Berlin, Halifax, at 3500 Metres, Oberleutnant Johannes Krause.
00:25 Berlin, Wellington, at 7500 Metres, Oberleutnant Johannes Krause.
02:15 Berlin, Halifax, at 1700 Metres, Leutnant Heinz Bock.

We can immediately discount the 02:15 attack because it is just too late, (*this was W/O Blattman returning from Poland*)! W-William was on an earlier mission. This leaves us with two types of aircraft, and one Nachtjagdflieger! Now I could also discount the Wellington as the wrong type of aircraft which left us two 'possibles'.

But which aircraft was W-William? This was where the navigation training came into play.

To keep it simple, I left out head or tail winds, and kept to 'time over distance' to get an estimated arrival time over the shoot down point. Now the Halifax, (*as with most aircraft*), has different cruising speeds at different heights, for instance, at 20,000 feet, it has a cruising speed of 195 mph, whilst the lower altitude of 11,500 feet, allows it to zip along at 282 mph.

Now in direct line of flight, Sombor is 348 miles from Brindisi, if we divide the mileage, by the speed, at 11,500 feet, (*3,500 Meters*), we get an estimated transit time for the flight, which equals 1Hr 15min, which when added to the take off time of 20:45 GMT gives us an estimated time of arrival at the shoot down point of 22:00 GMT, (*00:00 Local*), allowing for winds, weather, and moon.

When we factor in other known 'quantities', such as height, and take off times, If W-William were in the delivery phase, then they would have been low, to avoid the supply parachute drifting too far, and as previously stated, and it would have been an 'in and out' mission, but W-William was at 11,500 feet when attacked, so we can discount the delivery phase. We know that F/L Wood in JP247 E on Operation 106A, was seen to go down on his way outward bound at 22:26, (*Berlin! 23:26 local*), by W/O Blattman, so we can now discount the 22:26, shoot-down.¹³ This leaves us with the 22:52, (*Berlin! 23:52 local*), attack as the one on W-William. W-

William was at 3500 metres, (*approximately 11,500 feet, normal cruising altitude*), and just “passing through” when they encountered Oblt. Johannes Krause in his Dornier Do-217, and the Nachtjager was on a normal night patrol, at grid reference, 14 Ost Nord NT 36, and due to the heightened readiness of Operation Rouen, looking for infiltrating aircraft. W-William was a ‘sitting duck’ and was shot down at 22:52, (*Berlin! 23:52 local*), on the 3rd of July 1944, reported as lost by a message received on the 4th July 1944, at Brindisi, the reported time being entered as date of loss!

W-William’s final resting place eluded me for a while, due to the complicated ‘grid reference’ system that the Luftwaffe used for their Nachtjager, but after further searches, I can now confirm the crash site of Halifax Mk B II Special, JP292, “W-William” of 148 Squadron RAF. (Special Duties – SOE), Balkan Air Force, was shot down by Oblt. Johannes Krause, KC, on the night of 3rd/4th July 1944, at 23:52 Local time, (*Berlin + 1*), whilst undertaking Operation 401C, is now known.

The foregoing was merely theory based on known facts, without ‘official’ confirmation. However, a recently discovered report from the Royal Hungarian Police, confirms my conjecture, and states that on the night of the 3rd/4th July 1944:

“During the night, near to Pacser, (Pacir), an Anglo-American, (Anglo-Canadian Ed.), four-engined bomber crashed. From the crew of the bomber, no one bailed out, all seven airmen crashed and burned with the plane.

The plane was claimed by Luftwaffe pilot Oberleutnant Johannes Krause of unit NJG 101 at 22:52 on the 3rd July 1944 at 3500 Metres hitting the plane over Sombor.” (Royal Hungarian Police.)

In the same report, there are portions of a ‘de-briefing’ given by W/O Blattman, who was pilot of JP179, FS-P “P-Peter”, flying Operation 101A to Poland, who was shot down on his return journey:

“(I was), Flying at 8500, (Ft), returning from target No.101A (Poland,) 3rd July 44 when explosion occurred mid aircraft. Fire spread quickly and all controls went U/S...!”

The plane was claimed by Luftwaffe Leutnant Heinz Bock of unit NJG 101 at 02:15 on the 4th July 1944 at 1700 Metres at Sombor.” (Royal Hungarian Police.)

W/O Blattman in his report also states, *“(I) Saw, (the), aircraft piloted by F/Lt Wood, (that was JP247FS- E, “E-Easy”. Ed.), on (the), outward journey explode a few miles from Budapest area (in) Hungary. Explosion appeared to be internal and mid aircraft. Very similar to our own. (The) Aircraft exploded on the ground...!”*

The plane was claimed by Luftwaffe pilot Oberleutnant Johannes Krause of unit NJG 101 at 22:26pm on the 3rd July 1944 at 2600 Metres hitting the plane over Sombor.” (Royal Hungarian Police.)

W/O Blattman survived the war as a P.O.W.

The Luftwaffe, notified the International Red Cross, who informed the British Government, of the place, and date, of the issue of death certificates, as Pacir, Yugoslavia, 4th July 1944

I had now discovered how “W-William” met its end. Using crew reports from surviving aircraft, and the Royal Hungarian Police report, we can possibly build a scenario of the attack, and its outcome.

W-William was approached from a ‘blind spot’, i.e. from behind, and below, and then raked with cannon, and/or machine gun fire, from stern to nose. They had little or no armour plate, due to its weight. Most likely the fuel tanks, or explosive supplies, were hit, and W-William erupted in a ball of flame, the crew, were either killed, or incapacitated, during this first strike. They lost control of W-William, the aircraft ‘spun in’, crashed and burned.

The place where W-William was shot down is at 45.57.30.00 N, 19.28.20.00 E, in present day Serbia, and is located over rural farmland some 32.5 Km, North/North-east of Sombor, and 7.15 Km North/North-east of the village of Pacir. Allowing for the ‘fall of wreckage’, the actual crash site could be located within a radius of no more than 5 Km of this point. Armed with this information, I contacted the Museum of Sombor, in



“W-William’s” presumed crash site in present day Serbia

Sombor, Serbia, and received a reply from the Curator, who, sadly, could not help me, but they did refer me to the National Archive of Sombor, and their curator.

The Archive took up the search for any possible 'eye-witness' accounts of the crash, and also, they also searched for any surviving, eye-witnesses! *(Serbians, it seems are very long lived, and there is just a possibility that someone is still alive who may remember it.)* So now, there is the intriguing possibility of speaking to someone who saw W-William crash! Sadly, they had no relevant records, or surviving eyewitnesses on record but, they did refer me to the Mesna Kancelarija Backi Gracac, *(Local Office, Backi Gracac)*, which is the equivalent of a Local Council Office.

I wrote a letter to them, *(they have no email address)*, and on the 1st of August, 2010, I received the following email from Mr. Bojan Sunajko, M.Sc.E.E, which read:-

"Dear Mister Terry,

We recently received your letter about your Cousin's aircraft loss in WWII. To be precise, the letter came to Mesna Kancelarija Backi Gracac and they gave your letter to my father because he is doctor (he is considered to be educated man) from that village.

The letter interested me very much and I begun to search for eye witnesses from that period. I am glad to inform you that I found a person, (Mr. Banjari), who said that his father is the witness of that night. His father is still alive.

I will be free to give him your email address and I send to you his email. (Email: banja06@nadlanu.com). I think that these people will contact you soon.

On the end, I must tell you that I will be very happy if you can send me PDF copy of your book. I hope if this will help you, and I will be pleased if we stay in contact.

*Sincerely,
Bojan Sunajko, M.Sc.E.E
(Son of Doctor Savo Sunajko)"*

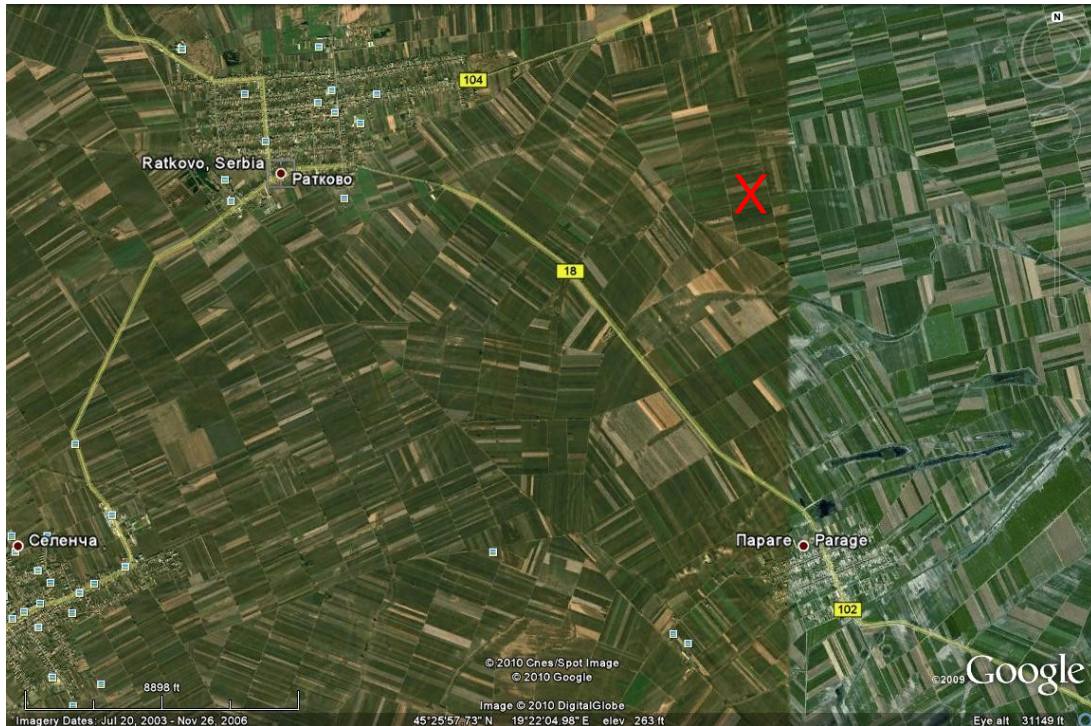
My reaction was one of incredulity! There was someone still alive, who remembered the crash! I duly sent Dr Sunajko, a copy of this booklet, *(without this section of course)*, and waited in nervous anticipation for the aforementioned Mr Banjari, and his father, to contact me. I was, in fact contacted by the son, Lt. Col. Antun Banjari, Yugoslavian Air Force, *(Retired)*,

"Dear Terry

I am Lieutenant Colonel Banjari Antun, ex Yugoslav Air Force pilot. Now in Srebia, (Serbia). Today is, 02. August 2010. I receive your letter from my friend.

My father (has) live(d) in Odžaci since 1938. He was, (born, in), 1925. He is still alive. He was a fireman in 1944. He saw that one British airplane, how he said, “four engine, big plane”, was shot-down about 3rd or 4th July, but it was about one o'clock am. The aircraft normally land at (see the satellite image where, (it landed)). The crew were alive.”

(My spelling and grammar corrections. Ed.)



Lt. Col. Antun Banjari's location of the Halifax crash site that his Father attended as a Fireman on the night of 03/07/1944

This statement probably relates to, JP247 FS-E, “E-Easy”, and Fl.Lt. G. R. Wood’s crew. The time, and the fact that there were survivor’s, points to the Halifax being, JP247-E, “E-Easy”, the aircraft of Fl. Lt. G.R. Wood, and crew, they were shot down at 22:26, (23:26 local), this being the closest combat engagement to the time datum given in the statement. Giving an allowance for fire service response time, in getting to the crash site, which is 17 Km, (approx 10.5 miles), South east of the known ‘William’ shoot-down point, and 18Km east from Odžaci.

We can arrive at, allowing for say, the alert being received at 23:35, 5 minutes the fire-fighters to ‘gear-up’, 30-40 minutes for an 18 Km, (11 miles), drive in pitch dark wartime conditions, 5 minutes to get set up on arrival, gives us a total of 40-50 minutes total, and an ‘on-site’ time of 00:15 – 00:30 am local. This is a ‘best fit’ choice, and not too far removed from Mr Banjari Sen.’s version of events.

The other possibility would be, JP179-P, “P-Peter”, with W/O. L. J. Blattman, and crew, who were shot down at 02:15 Berlin, (03:15 local), time, which is far too late.

The only other candidate in the area was a Wellington Bomber that was shot down at 00:25 Berlin, (01:25 local), nothing is known of this crew, or squadron, and it was a two engined aircraft anyway, and so can be ruled out.

It is fair to say, that a similar report would have completed the story of the final moments of "W-William", and its crew.

A short time later, the German armed forces would have come, and claimed the remains of, "Tom" Fairweather, Richard Jacques, Allen Haigh, John Brown, Ron Houghton, Len Smith, and, "Jack" Easton, to give them a military burial.

After the war, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission re-interred them to their current resting place, in Belgrade War Cemetery, with full military honours.

I have left out their military ranks, deliberately, to remind us of who they really were, seven very young men, who gave their lives, for what they believed in, and who would never know the a 'real' life of, a home, family, marriage, children, and growing old.

This one single incident had 'frozen' them in time, forever!

At last, I had all of the main details regarding the aircraft, and the 'shoot-down', so now what of the German pilot!

The Luftwaffe, are as bad as the R.A.F., (*if not worse*), when it comes to "Bumphf", (*or slang for paperwork*)! It seems that Oberleutnant Johannes Krause was no ordinary Nachtjagdflieger, and documented! But sadly, what biography I do have on him is very brief.

Chapter 12

The Nachtjagdflieger



Ober Leutnant
Johannes 'Hans' Krause, KC

Oberleutnant Johannes 'Hans' Krause KC

Born, Johannes "Hans" Krause, in Rheinhausen, in the Rheinland, on 13th of January 1920,

He joined the Luftwaffe at the outbreak of the war, and in 1940, on August the 3rd, he was awarded the Fliegerschützenabzeichen, or, Air Gunner/Radio Op/Flight Engineer's Badge, with Lightning Bolts.

He presumably rose quickly to pilot. He first served in NJG 3 which was flying the Do 217 before he transferred into NJG 101. By 1944, although just 24, he was an 'Ace'.

At least 14 victories were attributed to Oblt. Hans Krause, flying with 6/NJG101, on nights between 3-4 April, 10-11 May, 3-4 July, (*double kill*), 21-22 July, 20-21 August, 13-14 October (*by that time Oblt. Krause reached rank of Hauptmann*), 21 October, 5-6 November (*double kill*), 17-18 November (*another double kill*) and 23-24, November (*the fourth double success*).

Hauptmann Hans Krause of the 11/NJG101 was awarded the Ritterkreuz, (*Knights Cross*); following that 14th kill flying a Do 217 N over Hungary and the Adriatic in 1944, (*and still a rising star to boot*), NJG 101 had Bf 110G-4's at it's disposal, which he used by late 1944.

On the 7th of February 1945, he received the Knights Cross, and by August of the same year, such was his fame, that he was destined to take command of his unit, the II./Nachtjagdeschwader 101, until the end of 1944,

He later transferred into NJG 4, and later in 1945 flew one of the Ju 88G-6's with the Berlin 240 radar.

After the war, he had 28 recorded victories to his credit, and he returned to his home in Rheinhausen, in the Rheinland. I have found no details whatsoever of his later life, perhaps like all of us, he just wanted to forget.

He died there on 30th of December 2006, at the age of 86.

His night fighter unit, II./Nachtjagdeschwader 101, was based at Parndorf, in present-day Austria, (*Hungarian: Pándorfalu*) between 13.05.1944 and c. 27.11.44.

It came into existence as Nachtjagdschule 1 (*Night Flight School 1*). Its commander, Oberst Harry von Bülow-Bothkamp (19 November 1897-27 February 1976), Royal House Order of Hohenzollern, Iron Cross, was a German fighter ace, notable for being one of the few two-war aces in history.

After scoring six victories in World War I, he became a Luftwaffe Ace in World War II, with 24 additional victories. He remained in command of this unit through its re designation as NJG 101, until October, 1943.

The unit flew the Dornier Do-217-N2 Nachtjager. The first Do 217 N-2 produced was Wk. No. 174 coded PE+AW. The N-2 was the best of the Do 217 night fighters. The N-2 could reach 310mph, giving it a good chance of catching the British heavy bombers. It was armed with eight forward firing guns - four MG 151s and four MG 17s, and four MG 151s firing upwards at 80 degrees. The N-2 had a very short service career, entering testing in November 1942 and being replaced from early in 1943.

Chapter 13

The Present Day

As an amateur genealogist, I am not unused to 'hunting' people. Being disabled, means that I have plenty of time on my hands to do so.

In July 2009, just days after my Brother-in-law Teddy's 70th birthday, (*for which I had researched his childhood home, and Pat and I, had given the findings to him as a framed photo and file, for his birthday*),¹⁴ , my good lady, Pat, walked into my 'office/study/spare bedroom/junk room/computer room', as she calls it, and laid a much worn, 'dog-eared' photo on my computer desk.

It was a picture of an "RAF type", *"That's my uncle, or my cousin,"* she said, *"I'm not sure which, and he died 4 years before I was born. He was killed in action, in 1944, and I don't even know his name, and now, there is no one left alive who can tell me! Is there any chance that you can do a search, like you did for Teddy, about who he is, and what happened to him, for me?"*

Just who was the airman in the picture? Our living family members, all of whom were born during, or just after WW2, have no idea of his "identity", other than he was my wife's uncle, or cousin. Our family's 'Common Perception' of him goes thus:

*"He was a Spitfire pilot, and was shot down over Prague in 1944, and is buried there. He lived in Tilbury, and his name is on the Tilbury War Memorial".*¹⁵

The photo has the words, "January 31st 1944, Italy", on the back, there was no name, another feature is an unintelligible 3 words on the front, top left, no amount of enhancement seemed to make them readable. So what else could I learn from it? He was young, mid 20's at most. He wears a 'half wing', probably denoting a trained crew member, rather than a pilot. This also infers he may have been an NCO, and he may have served in either R.A.F, or the R.A.F.V.R. I was sure that this picture was of no Spitfire Pilot, the airman in the photo, was most definitely in bombers, or something similar.

Now aviation, and war research, is a 'tricky' area! It is one thing to find a 'Spitfire Pilot', and totally another thing, to find that a 'Spitfire Pilot', spent the war flying as a load-master in a Dakota! One has to be very aware of family perceptions, and the "not my boy" syndrome!

Whilst both fought an honourable war, each in their own way, living family members want only 'the best' for their lost loved ones, and often the truth doesn't measure up to their expectations, or more simply put, they expect a "Knight in Shining armour" only to be given a "Ruddy Delivery Driver"!

Everyone, who served their country is deserving of the respect of us all, in whatever capacity they served, high or low, commonplace or exalted.

Passing this information on, and forewarning Pat that the results may prove disappointing elicited the response that she wanted to go ahead anyway, with the words, *"No matter what he was, or what he did, he is still my relation!"* On those grounds, I agreed to proceed.

My searches revealed that there was an operational Spitfire Squadron in Czechoslovakia, but it was solely manned by Czech Nationals. Searches of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for Prague, show no likely matches for the time period,¹⁶ of a 'Spitfire Pilot', or any connection with Tilbury. Knowing the almost 'mythical' aura surrounding the Spitfire, the families 'Perception' is forgiveable, in view of the R.A.F.'s most famous aircraft's reputation.¹⁷

In the light of his 'half wing', I pursued the idea that it was likely that he was in Bomber Command, and was a 'trained specialist', i.e. Air Gunner, Wireless Operator, Navigator, Flight Engineer, Bomb Aimer, etc, but that left the question as to where, and with what unit? Once again using my own researches, and using the date on the back of the photo, I ascertained that he could have been deployed in the Desert Air Force,¹⁸ the 'Italy' posting, with 205 group, in 231, 236, 240, or 330 wing, or deployed with the Balkan Air Force. With his squadron number unknown, his aircraft remained unknown.

The R.A.F. Archives are very accurate and precise, in as much as, give them a name, and they will give you the entire service history of the person, if they were in the Service. But I had no name! After a fruitless telephone conversation with them, the suggestion was *"Try an on-line historical group, they may be of assistance."* As part of my genealogical research of our family, I am a member of one such group anyway, for the purpose of area history, which is WestEast-NewhamLondon, but again, I needed his name to proceed.

Clearly I had to identify him first, from the photograph. My brother in law, Teddy, met this airman, once, during 1943, when he was home on leave, one supposes, or in the UK as part of "Re-equipping", or "Operational Training", and he gave my brother in law, who was then 4 years old, a model of, as he recalls, a 'Lancaster', which Teddy had for many years, until it was lost in a house move in the late fifties.

Now, R.A.F. aircrew are relatively predictable, in as much, as they usually gave models of their own aeroplanes, or those they were going to fly, to family, or children. It was a breakthrough, at least we were in the realms of bombers with twin tail fins. In late 1944, many of the Desert Air Force, Wellington's, were being 'phased out' in favour of the newer Lancasters. But, so were the Balkan Air Force. We had gone from nothing, to two bomber groups, and a single profile of aircraft with twin fins.

I still needed a name. Sadly, by the end of 1944, our mystery airman was among the 'Fallen'. This young airman was related to my wife, via her mother Henrietta Gash, nee Ebsworth, *(who had 13 brothers and sisters)*,¹⁹ and was believed to be the son, or the husband, of one of her sisters. Although he was undoubtedly known to his close family, who had all probably passed on, he remained 'unknown' to my wife, and she

obviously wanted to bring her own 'Missing In Action' "home". Somebody, somewhere, must know his identity!

All of my research had, so far, helped to contradict the 'Spitfire' myth, and directed us towards Bomber command, and prompted the question:

"Why would a Fighter pilot give a young boy, a model of a Lancaster bomber?"

Curiouser and Curiouser!

It was at this point my trail went cold, and we were looking for a needle in a haystack....

Chapter 14

The Final Act

Tilbury, Essex: A sunny morning in August, 2009, found my wife and I, taking photographs of the R.A.F. section of the war memorial, with local people passing us by, and not even taking a second look. The names displayed were all strangers to us. We had no starting place to work from. Pat said that the name 'Smith', kept jumping out at her, but she said it was just a 'feeling'.

Later, at home I read over the names on the telephone to Teddy, and he did not recognise any of the names either. There were two avenues open to me, one, research every name in the R.A.F. section for possible clues, and two, cross reference that with the existing family tree that I had constructed over the last 13 years. I went back to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, and slowly worked my way through the names, without success. There were very few who stood out, the website isn't easy to navigate if you are new to it and although you have the correct details, it may not return the information if you have not entered the name exactly as they have it on file.

The only way to know for sure would be to research via the family tree. I had to start with my wife's mother, and work back through the family tree, to her mother and father, then their children, checking and cross-referencing all of the seven sisters, out of the thirteen brothers, and sisters. Even with discounting the brothers, the task seemed endless! Pat, however encouraged me to start with the name of "Smith, L.J." from the war memorial, based solely on her 'feeling'. Now normally I would not do such a thing, I would work systematically, tracing and confirming or denying each of the family. To jump directly on a hunch was, simply not my way of working. Rather than risk her annoyance, I ran a search on Ancestry, for Smith, L.J. and strangely enough, I got a 3 star 'hit' on Leonard James Smith, Mother: Ebsworth! Now which Ebsworth, and what part of the family?

On Thursday the 24th of September 2009, after a five week search, I opened a search on Ancestry and got a 'hit' on our "Aunt Mags", (*Margaret Victoria Elizabeth Ebsworth, Aunt Henrietta Gash's maiden name was "Ebsworth"*). Which 'turned the key', and finally unlocked part of the mystery.

There were successive 'hits' on James Smith, (*Father*), then Leonard, then the whole family history just seemed to fall into place. Still I had to tie in the Service History. I went back to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, armed with the name of Leonard James Smith, a search returned no record. Despondently, I tried several versions to no avail, another dead end! So I decided to enlist the help of my friends on the WestEast-NewhamLondon group, for any information regarding Leonard Smith, as an ex-West Ham person, and what I had discovered so far. The first piece of information came from Sue Keene, in Australia, who had found Len's name as part of an aircraft crew, and the web address where the details were, the second came from Richard Goring, who had

located Len's name on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, as part of a 'crew burial' confirming the details provided by Sue.

After these two pieces of information, the rest came in very short order, then with gathering speed, squadron, aircraft, details of operations, even information from a Luftwaffe Historical Group, (*There are no nationalities among the fallen! Ed.*), which led me to one website after another, and even more information, reproduced elsewhere in this story.

Finally, when the trail led to the Bata website, and an even worse copy of the photo, than I had, I knew that my search was over, and apart from "crossing the 't's, and dotting the 'i's", Flight Sergeant Leonard James Smith, Air Gunner, R.A.F.V.R. was "The Mystery Airman" no longer.

All of the questions that had nagged at me when I had been given the photograph were answered, and I was able to tell Pat, and Teddy, the facts.

We now know that he is Pat, and Teddy's cousin, and not their 'uncle'

His grave was marked by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission after the war, and he is buried in Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia, where he lies with the rest of the crew of "W-William", and that he was an Air Gunner, not a 'Spitfire Pilot'

The model he gave to Teddy in 1943? That was a Halifax, not a 'Lancaster'.

There are no unanswered questions, we know the manner of Len's passing, the where, the when, and the how, even unto the unit name, and the aircraft, of his attacker, and the pilot's name?

We had thought that there were no members of the immediate family left, but we have found that Len's sister is still alive and with her memories, and Len's Logbook, I was able to tell much of the story, but that came after this account was first written, and then had to be re-written.

Oh Yes! By the bye, the three unintelligible words on the top left of the photo? My wife Pat deciphered that! They were a dedication to his 'Aunt Het', (*Henrietta Gash*), when he sent her the photo in January 1944, from Foggia, Italy.

They just simply said, "Love x Len".

Epilogue

The time: Sunday 8th of November 2009, 11:00am. The place: Tilbury War Memorial, in the Civic Square.

We are attending an 'unofficial' Remembrance Day Service, (*the official ones here are Stamford le Hope, or Grays*), to lay a wreath in memory of Len, and the crew of "W-William":

W/O. Charles Thomas Fairweather, R.A.F. Pilot.
F/Sgt. Richard Jacques, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
P/O. Allen Haigh, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.
F/O. John Stanley Brown, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.
F/Sgt. Ronald Frederick Houghton, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.
F/Sgt. John Easton, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
F/Sgt. Leonard James Smith, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

Pat, and I, are here to represent the family, Teddy and Bab's couldn't be here, they are with their daughter, and grandchildren, because her husband is in Afghanistan, with the British Forces Contingent.

Considering its status, the group is a large one, Cadets of all forces, Scouts, Fire, Police, and Ambulance Services, Civic Dignitaries etc, plus the usual onlookers, elderly relatives, teenagers, young mums with kids, and so forth. The general 'chit-chat' passes by my ears, "*Why did they die Mummy?*" the mother, barely out of her teens herself, has no answer, and tells the child to "*Shhh*". "*There's a different age of veterans now...*" An unrecognised voice, the words come on the wind, and I can't identify the source, my eyes scan the group, looking for the speaker.

We have attended, although we aren't too well these days, we none of us are. But that's life at our age, we are now the 'interim generation', because that's how long has passed since the deaths of those we are here to remember. The Service starts, and the crowd becomes muted and respectful, and we have the Silence, and the 'Last Post', etcetera. I don't need to review the format for you, it's the same at every War Memorial, in every Service, in every town across the United Kingdom.

People of all faiths, creeds, and nationalities, come together for a 'Corporate Act of Worship'. Some, who's birthplaces are far away, watch from the sidelines, just to be part of the ceremony, some, remember, other wars, or 'actions', where they lost sons, daughters, friends, or family. There are no 'strangers' here, all 'just remember', for I have learnt that there are no nationalities in war, just the Fallen, who deserve the respect of all, whichever side they were fighting for, they fought, and died for what they believed in.

We get to the wreath laying; ours, which came via R.A.F.A.²⁰ carries the Bomber Command Crest, and our card:

"In Memoriam, of Fl/Sgt. Leonard J. Smith, Tail turret gunner, and all of the Crew of Halifax JP292, FS-W, "W-William" lost on 4th July, 1944. Sombor, Yugoslavia."

Len was ours, but they died together, and they will be honoured together. Seven young men, on a 'suicide' mission, in a 'Black Ops' squadron, literally living on 'borrowed time'. What was their life expectancy? "Just four weeks", facing the dangers, and the hazards, and the almost certainty of, "Failed to return", like untold millions of others. Why? Because it was their duty, and nothing else!

After the service, the crowd mingles, and chats amongst itself, suddenly, I'm standing by a complete stranger, a woman, *"Which one was yours?"* I ask, out of politeness. *"Him, that's my Dad, his ship went down with all hands!"* she replies, *"Yours?"* I nod, *"None really, but my wife, and her brother, are cousins of his."* I point at Len's name on the memorial. *"How old was he?"* she asks, *"Twenty two!"* I struggle to make the conversation, but it all seems a bit stunted into two, or three word, 'sound-bites', *"Younger than my dad!"* I nod in agreement. *"Why should we should we have to lose any?"* I enquire. She shakes her head, *"I don't believe that we should be in Afghanistan!"* she says." Again, I nod in agreement, I don't support the war, but I support the men and women fighting it. My enquirer suddenly ends the conversation with, *"See you next year God Willing! Nice talking to you!"*

I watch her walk away, an old lady with memories of her father. We need to be on our way as well, we are going to the Bata war memorial at Bata Ville to leave a Remembrance Cross there as well. My thoughts turn from Len and his Crew-mates, and Johannes Krause, to the other, newer, fallen young men, and women, who come home through the sleepy village of Wootton Bassett. Those who will never know another year! They are young, the same age as Len, and their sacrifice has been the same.

When will we ever learn?

Never, I suppose, but until we do, we will remember them...

We Will Remember Them,

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM!

Postscript

Spring, 2010

Early in April of this year, several events transpired to warrant the addition of this extra 'chapter'.

The first was the interpretation of the Nachtjager grid reference, 14 Ost Nord NT 36. With the help of my colleagues on www.armchairgeneral.com, and www.historynet.com, and a piece of software that they steered me to, I was able to translate the grid reference of, 14 Ost Nord NT 36, into a workable Latitude, and Longitude of 45.57.30.00 N, 19.28.20.00 E.

This definitely places the 'shoot-down position at 45.57.30.00 N, 19.28.20.00 E, in present day Serbia, and is located above rural farmland, some 35 Km, South South-east of Sombor, and 3.5 Km North Northwest of the village of Backi Gracac. Allowing for the 'fall of wreckage', the actual crash site could be located within a radius of no more than 5 Km of this point. Armed with this information, I contacted the Museum of Sombor, in Sombor, Serbia, and received a reply from the Curator, who, sadly, could not help me, but they did refer me to the National Archive of Sombor, and their curator.

The Archive are searching for any possible 'eye-witness' accounts of the crash, and also, they are searching for any surviving, eye-witnesses! *(Serbians, it seems are very long lived, and there is just a possibility that someone is still alive who may remember it.)* So now, there is the intriguing possibility of speaking to someone who saw W-William crash!

The second was a suggestion, by another colleague, Kelvin Youngs, of www.aircrewremembrancesociety.com that I write a 'loss-report' on the shoot-down of W-William, since neither the event, nor the crew, were recorded on their site. *(To be 'unrecorded', is the sad fate of many S.O.E. crews!)*

This I did, and the report is available on their site, to view at this address, <http://www.aircrewremembrancesociety.com/raf1944/fairweather.html> and listed, as all losses are, under the date of loss, and the Pilot's name. Along with the 'report', I submitted several photographs and a PDF version of this book available to download. I am pleased to say, that I now do limited work for them, as a volunteer researcher, and 'mock-up' artist, creating 'artist impressions' of 'downed' aircraft for surviving families.

The third, and most exciting event, occurred in my own home! My wife and I were having one of our yearly 'Spring-cleans', *(if you are married, then you will know what I'm talking about!)*, when my wife produced a very dusty box from the dark recesses of the cupboard under the stairs. It was a box from the home of my late mother-in-law, who passed away over twenty years ago, and had remained unopened since that time! When it was opened, it contained the usual mementoes, and 'knick-knack's that one tends to save, 'because they were mums', and will never see the light

of day again. But this one was different! Under the ornaments and glassware there lay an envelope, with two photographs, just two no more.

The first to emerge was a photograph of Len, in 'battledress order', (*the uniform that is worn under the flying suit*), the second, however was quite literally, 'Earth-shattering'.

It was a picture of Len and Ethel, on their wedding day in 1943, Len, resplendent in his wartime 'No.1' uniform, and Ethel, dressed very fashionably for the period. No wedding dress, it was wartime. It bore the date '10/9/1943'. From having no pictures of Ethel, and only one of Len, we could now see them as man and wife.

The fourth and last event was a full in depth review of the activities of 148 Squadron over the night and early hours of 3rd/4th July 1944, by Steve Andrews, Frances Gates, and myself, in tracing the operations of each of the aircraft posted as missing on that fateful night. Our combined efforts uncovered much new information which radically altered the perception of events, in as much as we were able to identify with almost 100% accuracy, which aircraft were on which mission, and ending a long period of ambiguity, and bringing closure to the events of the loss. The previous assumption of a Yugoslavia mission for JP292 FS-W, W-William, was found to be incorrect, in the light of the new evidence, and replaced with a destination to Poland mission.

This meant amendments to the foregoing account, as you will have already read, and seen, being written into the story.

This brings me into a philosophical frame of mind!

Will the full story of this wartime tragedy ever be fully told, and complete?

I doubt it. There are new pieces of information coming to light almost daily! A chance telephone poll of all of the Fairweather's in the North Shields area, put me in touch with Gordon Person, and with his collaboration came the "Fairweather" collection of photo's and memorabilia.

In September 2010 there was an article in a Norfolk local paper about Kelvin Youngs who is a member of the group that runs The Aircrew Remembrance Society website regarding their work. This was seen by the daughter of Len's sister Vera Jean, Donna, who contacted me for more information about Len, and she was able to verify, and amend many of the personal details here.

Would I want it to be complete? I doubt it.

So what is left to do?

To accurately locate the crash site and including any eye-witness accounts in this document, perhaps a 'dig', to recover 'William' from his lonely grave!

But, I am an old man, and this will probably take up the rest of my life.
Some of this will be for others with similar dedication to accomplish.

Appendix i **Roll of Honour**

148 Squadron. R.A.F., (Special Duties - S.O.E), Balkan Air Force

All of those who gave their lives between October 1943 and November, 1945

3/4.11.43: Aircraft: Liberator, AL509-Y, "Liberator 7"

F/Lt. Maurice Passmore, R.A.F.V.R. - Pilot
F/Sgt. Edwin Archibald Toole, R.C.A.F. Flight Engineer
F/Lt. Eldon Burke Elliott, R.C.A.F. A.M. (U.S.A.) Navigator
W/O. James Herbert Stevenson Clarke, R.C.A.F. Bomb Aimer
F/Lt. Harry James Crawford, R.N.Z.A.F. Wireless Op/Air Gunner
W/O. Ralph Edward Hawken, R.C.A.F. Air Gunner
F/Sgt. William Joseph Dowle, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner

All buried at Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

10.1.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, HR674-E, "E-Easy"

Fl.Lt. Forrester, Pilot
Further crew details unknown

10.1.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, HR660-A, "A-Able"

Fl.Lt. Bolton, Pilot
Further crew details unknown

10/11.2.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JN959-N, "N-Nuts"

F/Sgt. Ian McGugan, R.A.A.F. - Pilot.
F/Sgt. Nairne Edwin Plaxton, D.F.M. R.A.F. Flight Engineer.
F/Sgt. Bernard Austin Hough, R.A.A.F.
F/Sgt. Percy Garfield Mann, R.A.A.F.
F/Sgt. Edward George Lee, R.A.A.F.
Sgt. James Palmer, R.A.F.V.R. - Air Gunner.
Sgt. Frederick Moses Cyril Henry Harris, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
All buried at Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

24.4.1944: Aircraft: Halifax, Mk II, JP244-E, "A-Able"

W/O Storey, Pilot,
Further crew details unknown

5.5.1944: Aircraft: Halifax, BB438-S, "S-Sugar"

W/O. Eric Alfred Aldred, R.A.F.V.R. - Pilot.
F/Sgt. Michael Edwin Agar, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
F/Sgt Ralph Dawes, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op
F/Sgt Norman Wilson Johnstone, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
F/Sgt Ronald Albert Menday, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All buried Krakow Rakowicki Cemetery, Poland

30/31.5.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JD172-V, "V-Victor"

W/O2. Thomas Johnson Makepeace, R.C.A.F. Pilot.
Sgt. Ronald Charles James Cheesman, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
F/Sgt. John Stewart McWilliams, R.C.A.F. Navigator.
Sgt. James Henry Robson, R.A.F.V.R. Air Bomber.
Sgt. William Wycliffe Bright, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op.
Sgt. George Francis Hancox, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
Sgt. George Henry Hall, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All buried at Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

24.6.44; Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP237-?

F/Lt. Donald Ernest Hillman, R.C.A.F. Pilot.
Sgt. Arthur Pinder, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
P/O. Nicholas Holyk, R.C.A.F. Navigator.
F/Sgt. James Ross Robertson, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.
Sgt. Edward Geoffrey Chapman, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.
Sgt. Dixon Finlayson, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
Sgt. John Michael Sumner, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All buried at Staglieno Cemetery, Genoa, Italy

3/4.7.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP179-P, "P-Peter" (Operation 101A)

Sgt. Thomas William Hugh Tomlinson, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
F/Sgt. John Kennedy, R.A.F. Wireless Op.
F/Sgt. Evan Ffoulkes Jones, R.A.F.V.R. Gunner.
W/O. Harrison John Phillip, R.A.F.V.R. Gunner.

All buried at Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

3/4.7.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP292-W, "W-William" **(Operation 401C)**

W/O. Charles Thomas Fairweather, R.A.F. Pilot.
F/Sgt. Richard Jacques, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.
P/O. Allen Haigh, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.
F/O. John Stanley Brown, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.
F/Sgt. Ronald Frederick Houghton, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.
F/Sgt. Leonard James Smith, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.
F/Sgt. John Easton, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All are buried at Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

**3/4.7.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP247-E, “E-Easy”.
(Operation 106A)**

F/Lt. George Raymond Wood, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot.

F/Sgt. James William Hern, R.A.F. Air Gunner.

Both are buried at Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

**3/4.7.44: Aircraft: Halifax, JP286-S, “S-Sugar” (Op
Savanna101/Deerhurst)**

S/L. Surray Philip Victor Bird, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot.

P/O. Harold Pearson, R.A.F. Flight Engineer.

F/Sgt. Peter Lake, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.

W/O. Donal David Charles Stewart, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.

F/Sgt. Arthur Archer Lee, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op.

F/Sgt. Ronald Radford, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

F/O. Kenneth Peter Mcleod Cran, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

F/Sgt. Marcel Tilmont, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

Passengers: Lt. Col. E.P.E. Boughay. Maj. R.J.M. Wright.

Lt. A. Vincent. Sgt. A.S. Manley.

Aircrew are buried at Budapest War Cemetery, Hungary

2.8.44: Aircraft: Halifax, JP294-b, “B-Beer”

W/O Bettles, Pilot,

Further crew details unknown

4.8.44: Aircraft: Halifax, JP276-A, “A-Able”

F/Lt. Arnold Raymond Blynn, R.C.A.F. Pilot.

Sgt. Frederick George Wenham, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.

P/O. George Alfred Chapman, R.C.A.F. Navigator.

F/Sgt. Charles Burton Wylie, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.

F/O. Harold Leonard Brown, R.C.A.F. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.

F/Sgt. Arthur George William Liddell, R.C.A.F. Air Gunner.

Sgt. Kenneth James Ashmore, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All buried at Krakow Rakowicki Cemetery, Poland

4/5.8.44: Aircraft: Halifax, JP 181-X FS-X “X-X-Ray”

P/O. Charles William Crabtree, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot.

Sgt. Dennis Aird, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.

F/Sgt. Dennis John Mason, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.

F/Sgt. Alexander Bennett, R.A.A.F. Air Bomber.

W/O. John Aloysius Carroll, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op.

F/Sgt. Charles Alec Beanland, R.C.A.F. Air Gunner.

Sgt Alexander Sandilands RAFVR Air Gunner.

All buried at Krakow Rakowicki Cemetery, Poland

4/5.8.44: Halifax, JP162-S, FS-S, "S-Sugar".

F/Lt James Girvan McCall, 127340, RAFVR - Pilot - died

Sgt Clifford Aspinall, 2206350, RAFVR Air Gunner.

Sgt John Frederick Cairney Rae, 2210115, RAFVR Air Gunner.

All are buried at Krakow Rakowicki Cemetery, Poland

4.8.44: Aircraft: Halifax, EB 147-K FS-K

F/O L.G.J. King, Pilot.

All crew survived, but 6 were taken POWs, and 1 was looked after by AK partisans.

14/15.8.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JN926-FS-O, "O-Oboe", JN896 (TSS)

P/O. M.L. Casey, R.A.A.F. Pilot.

Sgt. Peter Henry Roots, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.

F/Sgt. R.C. Samways, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.

W/O. K.A. Bedford, R.A.V.R. Bomb Aimer.

Sgt. Robert Samuel Darling, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.

Sgt. Ronald Hartog, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner / Dispatcher,
(Sgt. Hartog served as Harwood).

Sgt. Thomas Law, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner/Dispatcher.

Sgt Darling, Sgt Hartog, Sgt Roots & Sgt Law, buried at Krakow Rakowicki Cemetery, Poland

14/15.8.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JN896-FS-L "L-Love"

Fl.Lt. Reynolds, Pilot,

Further crew details unknown

16.8.44: Aircraft: Unknown.

F/O. David Tabor, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot

W/O. Douglas Malcolm Quarendon, R.A.F. Co Pilot.

Sgt. Patrick King, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.

WO2. James Howard Inch, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber.

Sgt. Patrick Joseph Gallivan, R.A.F.V.R. Air Bomber.

Sgt. Charles Edward Baines, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Op/Air Gunner.

F/Sgt. Bruce George Harold Robert Bean, R.C.A.F. Navigator.

Sgt. Frank Stephen Knight, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

Sgt. Stanley Kenneth Morrison, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All buried at Assisi War Cemetery, Italy

? .8.1944: Halifax Mk II, JP293-C "C-Charlie"

Flg.Off. Clifford

Further crew details unknown, shot down near Corsica

11.9.44: Aircraft Halifax II, BB422-O, "O-Oboe"

Sgt McColl, Pilot, Further crew details unknown

17/18.10.44: Aircraft Halifax II, JD319-G, "G-George"

Fl/Sgt. Peter Harry Edwards, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot
Sgt. David Clark, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer
Fl/Sgt. Charles Gibson Steele, R.A.A.F. Navigator
Sgt. Kenneth Douglas Daker, R.A.F.V.R. Air Bomber
Fl/Sgt. Toft R.A.F.V.R. (on an 'acclimatisation' flight)

Buried in Belgrade War Cemetery

Fl/Sgt. Lewis Walter CALDER, R.A.A.F. Wireless Operator, Survived the crash with an injured ankle but was later killed by the Germans whilst in a secret partisan hospital on 12 March 1944.

Buried in Trbovlje Civilian Cemetery

Maribor, Yugoslavia, aircraft hit trees and crashed

22.10.44: (22.11.44?) Aircraft: Lysander, T1456

F/O. John Francis Anthony Rayns, (Raynes), R.A.F.V.R. Pilot.
2 SOE agents also killed, aircraft shot down en route by USAAF P-51

Buried at Udine War Cemetery, Italy

29/10/44. Halifax MkII, JP244-S, "S-Sugar"

F/O. E.J. Stubbley, 152396, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot
F/Sgt. J. Thompson, 642357, R.A.F., Flight Engineer
F/Sgt. E.L. Brown, 1494454, R.A.F.V.R., Navigator
F/Sgt. A. Donnelly, 975450, R.A.F.V.R. Air Bomber
Sgt. A. Coote, 1894920, R.A.F.V.R. Wireless Operator/Air gunner
Sgt. R.C. Knee, 1331866, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner/Dispatcher
Sgt. C. Mabbs, 1685949, Air Gunner

5.11.44 Halifax Mk II BB338-M, FS-M "M-Mother"

Aircraft lost on supply mission ICARUS 108 to Yugoslavia. Developed trouble with port engine, fire started, 15 containers jettisoned into sea. Aircraft ditched 2 km from land near Drvenik Island, Sevid, Yugoslavia, the pilot Fl.Sgt. Uttley was rescued from his dinghy.

6.11.44 Halifax Mk V, EB188-R, FS-R "R-Robert"

Aircraft crashed in target area in North Yugoslavia on supply drop mission

CUCKOLD 116. 7 crew returned

4.1.45: Aircraft: Halifax Mk V, LL380

P/O. Walker, R.A.F. Pilot, M.I.A.
Sgt. Bromley, R.A.F.V.R. Bomb Aimer, K.I.A.
2 other unidentified crew, K.I.A., and 1 M.I.A.

Aircraft lost on a mission to Glina, Yugoslavia. Hit 3 times by flak. 3 crew, K.I.A., 2 returned 2 M.I.A.

26.1.45: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP281-Q, "Q-Queen" ("Q-Queenie")

F/Lt. George Barrie Strang, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot.

F/Lt. Harry Edmund Horsfall, R.N.Z.A.F. 2nd Pilot.

Sgt. John Wardman Holmes, R.A.F.V.R. Flight Engineer.

F/O. Walter Harold Wilson, R.A.F.V.R. Navigator.

F/O. Raymond Howarth, R.A.F.V.R. Air Bomber.

F/O. Henry Oscar Mason, R.A.A.F.

Sgt. Denis Patrick Burns, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

Sgt. Gordon Diffey, R.A.F.V.R. Air Gunner.

All buried in Belgrade War Cemetery, Yugoslavia

1.2.45 Halifax Mk II JP277-C, FS-C, "C-Charlie"

Missing on supply drop TOFFE 2 to Yugoslavia carrying 15 containers; crash landed in drop zone 7 crew returned

14.2.45 Halifax Mk II, JP249-C, FS-C, "C-Charlie"

Mission 'ICARUS MINIMUS' to drop supplies, shot down by light AA, the pilot made crash landing at Daruvar, Yugoslavia because W.Op was wounded; crew rescued by partisans and 7 returned

1586 Flight, (Polish), R.A.F.

(Whilst attached to 148 Squadron.)

*(The unit used Liberators from the disbanded "X" Flight, and Halifaxes from 148.)
(Identification letters GR=1586, FS=148, where no letters are shown, none were available)*

20.8.43

5 Halifaxes lost on operations from Brindisi

29/27.8.43

4 aircraft lost while operating from Brindisi

5/6.1.44 Liberator BZ949

F/Lt Paszkiewicz PAF - Pilot - killed
F/Lt Domaradzki PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
F/Sgt Dunski PAF - Navigator - killed
F/Sgt Olkiewicz PAF - Air Bomber - killed
F/Sgt Magdziarek PAF - Wireless Op - killed
Sgt Halik PAF - Air Gunner - killed
Sgt Marchwicki PAF - Air Gunner - killed
Sgt Bucko PAF - Air Gunner - killed

5/6.1.44 Liberator BZ589

F/Lt Bohuszewicz PAF - Pilot - died
F/Lt Pulczynski PAF - Flight Engineer - died
F/Lt Kuzmicki PAF - Navigator - died
F/O Finder PAF - Air Bomber - died
F/Sgt Taczalski PAF - Wireless Op - died
F/Sgt Blazenski PAF - Air Gunner - died
Sgt Drong PAF - Air Gunner - died

2.8.44 Halifax JP283-G

W/O Lewandowski PAF - Pilot -died
Sgt Szejnowski PAF - Flight Engineer - died

15.8.44 Liberator KG890

F/Lt Szostak PAF - Pilot -killed
F/Lt Daniel PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
W/O Malczyk PAF - Navigator - killed
W/O Dubowski PAF - Air Bomber - killed
W/O Bielicki PAF - Wireless Op - killed
F/Sgt Rutkowski PAF - Air Gunner - killed
F/Sgt Witek PAF - Air Gunner - killed

17.8.44 Halifax JJ220

W/O Bohanes PAF - Pilot -killed

17.8.44 Liberator ??275

F/Lt Pluta PAF - Pilot - killed
Sgt Marecki -PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
F/O Jencka PAF - Navigator - killed
W/O Malejka PAF - Air Bomber - killed
F/Sgt Wichrowski PAF - Wireless Op - killed
F/Sgt Florkowski PAF - Air Gunner - killed
Sgt Dudziak PAF - Air Gunner - killed

27/28.8.44 Halifax JN895

F/Sgt Woroch PAF - Pilot - died
Sgt Kantowski PAF - Flight Engineer - died
Sgt Wantulok PAF - Navigator - died
Sgt Szmigielski PAF - Bomb Aimer - died
Sgt Klosowski PAF - Wireless Op / Gunner - died
Sgt Majewski PAF - Gunner - died
Sgt Augustyn PAF - Gunner - died

27.8.44 Halifax JD171

F/O Jasinski PAF - Pilot -killed
F/O W. Koziol PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
P/O Muhln PAF - Navigator - killed
F/Sgt Graff PAF - Air Bomber - killed
Sgt Paszkiewicz PAF - Wireless Op - killed
Sgt Szyller PAF - Air Gunner - killed

27.8.44 Halifax JD362

Sgt Jodis PAF - Pilot -killed
F/O Sorowka PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
P/O Kleniewski PAF - Navigator - killed
F/Sgt Radwan-Kuzelewski PAF - Air Bomber - killed
Sgt Witkowski PAF - Wireless Op - killed
Sgt Walaszek - Air Gunner - killed
Sgt Ogrodnik PAF - Air Gunner - killed

27.8.44 Halifax JP495

Aircraft missing on supply mission over Yugoslavia.

28.8.44 Halifax JP295 FS-P

F/Lt Omaylak PAF - Navigator/Commander - died
P/O Widacki PAF - Pilot -died
P/O Dunin-Horkowicz PAF - Air Bomber - died
F/O Mroczko PAF - Air Gunner - died
Sgt Ozga PAF - Wireless Op - died
Sgt Skorczyk PAF - Air Gunner - died
Sgt Balcarek PAF - Flight Engineer - died

2.9.44 Halifax DP180

F/O Baworowski PAF - Pilot -killed
F/Sgt Blazewski PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
F/Sgt Walezyk PAF - Navigator - killed
F/Sgt Polaczek PAF - Air Bomber - killed
F/Sgt Paetz PAF - Wireless Op - killed
Sgt Lojas PAF - Air Gunner - killed
Sgt Banasik PAF - Air Gunner - killed

2.9.44 Halifax JN889

F/Sgt Bar PAF - Pilot -killed
Sgt Marynowski PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
Sgt Tyrol PAF - Navigator - killed

2.9.44 Halifax BB389

W/O Nalepa PAF - Pilot -killed
F/Sgt Derewienko PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
F/Sgt Jag PAF - Navigator - killed
Sgt Pialucha PAF - Air Bomber - killed
Sgt Staniewicz PAF - Wireless Op - killed
Sgt Bialoszewski PAF - Air Gunner - killed

2.9.44 Halifax DK124

F/Lt Rosiniuk PAF - Pilot – killed

11.9.44 Halifax JP288

P/O Lach PAF - Pilot -died
P/O Kozlowski PAF - Flight Engineer - died
F/Sgt Fedzinski PAF - Navigator - died
Sgt Pazdzior PAF - Air Bomber - died
Sgt Mucha PAF - Wireless Op - died
Sgt Podsiadly PAF - Air Gunner - died
Sgt Dziadula PAF - Air Gunner - died

11.9.44 Halifax JP161 GR-N

Kpr Falc Mostar, Yugoslavia aircraft hit,
by night fighter and then brought down,
by flak over Mostar, Yugoslavia

11.9.44 Liberator EW278 GR-U

P/O Franczak PAF - Pilot -killed
F/O Foczpaniak PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
F/Sgt Truskowski PAF - Navigator - killed

13.9.44 Liberator KH101

F/O Woytanowicz PAF - Pilot - killed
P/O Rygiel PAF - Flight Engineer - killed
W/O Wawrzak PAF - Navigator - killed
W/O R. Sikorski PAF - Air Bomber - killed
W/O Weinz PAF - Wireless Op - killed
F/Sgt Weben PAF - Air Gunner - killed
Sgt Zielinski PAF - Air Gunner - killed

After this point, 1586 Flight ceased to exist as a section of 148 Squadron,
and became:

301 Squadron, P.A.F.

Their losses will be recorded on their own Squadron memorials

Unidentified Aircraft and Crews that 'Failed to Return'

Halifax BB435 FS-? 07/09/1943, Unknown
Halifax BB341 FS-L 01/01/1944, Unknown
Halifax BB371 FS-N 01/01/1944, Unknown
Halifax BB381 FS-? 24/04/1944, Poland
Halifax JN888 FS-? 14/07/1944, Unknown
Halifax JP284 FS-? 16/07/1944, Unknown
Halifax JP283 FS-? 03/08/1944, Hungary
Halifax JP131 FS-W 04/08/1944, Poland
Halifax BB412 FS-? 12/09/1944, Poland

Appendix ii

Known Prisoners of War, 148 Squadron

(Including Evaders & Escapee's)

10.1.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, BB445 FS-T "T-Tare"

Sqdn. Ldr. Jack Brotherton-Ratcliffe, R.A.F.V.R. Pilot
And entire crew, Evaded and returned

10/11.2.44. Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JN959-N, "N-Nuts",

Sgt. A. Elkes

28.6.44 Aircraft: Halifax Unknown

P/O Boyes - Pilot - Evaded

3/4.7.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP179-P, "P-Peter"

W/O. L.J. Blattman, Pilot.
F/Sgt. L.W. Davy, R.A.A.F. Air Bomber.
F/Sgt. W.F. Wicks, Navigator.

3/4.7.44: Aircraft: Halifax Mk II, JP247-E, "E-Easy".

F/O. N.C. MacPherson, Air Bomber.
F/Sgt. J.E. Taylor, Navigator.
F/Sgt. P.H. Hodgson, Wireless Op.
Sgt. W.B. Urwin, Flight Engineer.
W/O. M.C. McDowell, Air Gunner

4/5.8.44: Halifax, JP106-S, FS-S, "S-Sugar".

Sgt. R. O. Peterson, R.C.A.F. Flight Engineer
Sgt. P. J. Anderson, R.C.A.F. Air Bomber
Sgt. A. Jolly, R.A.F.V.R. W/Op/Air Gunner

18.10.44: Aircraft Halifax II, JD319-G, "G-George"

Sgt. Charles William Bromage, Air Gunner, Survived the crash without injury and with the help of partisans was repatriated to Bari on 8 November 1944.

Fl/Sgt. Stephen Heath Parker, R.A.F.V.R. Rear Gunner, Survived the crash with a broken kneecap. He lived with partisans until taken prisoner on 11 March 1944, then imprisoned in a civilian jail in Maribor. He survived the bombing of the city by the Allies on 1 April 1945, and was released on 8 May 1945, he made his way to the British Forces in Klagenfurt and was repatriated back to England on 24 May 1945.

4.1.45: Aircraft: Halifax Mk V, LL380

Fl. Sgt, Rowe, R.A.F.V.R. W/Operator, P.O.W.
Sgt. Breen, R.A.F.V.R. Evaded, returned
Sgt. Towner, R.A.F.V.R Evaded, returned

Known Prisoners of War 1586 Flight, (Polish), R.A.F.

(Including Evaders & Escapee's)

5/6.1.44 Liberator BZ589

F/Lt J. Drobrowski - Air Gunner - survived

2.8.44 Halifax JP283-G

P/O Domanski PAF - Navigator - POW
W/O Wolski PAF - Air Bomber - POW
W/O Chmaruk PAF - Wireless Op - POW
W/O Ptoszek PAF - Air Gunner - POW
F/Sgt Raflewski PAF - Air Gunner - POW

17.8.44 Halifax JJ220

F/O Schoffer PAF - Flight Engineer - evaded
W/O Owsiany PAF - Navigator - evaded
P/O Lopuszanski PAF - Air Bomber - evaded
P/O Bernhardt PAF - Wireless Op - evaded
Sgt Kretowicz PAF - Air Gunner - evaded
Sgt Denisienko PAF - Air Gunner - evaded
Sgt Luck PAF - Air Gunner - evaded

27.8.44 Halifax JD171

F/Sgt Danilkiewicz PAF - Air Gunner - POW

2.9.44 Halifax JN889

F/O J. Abezynski PAF - Air Bomber - evaded
W/O Sibilski PAF - Wireless Op - evaded
Sgt Michalkiewicz PAF - Air Gunner - evaded
Sgt Frankowiak PAF - Air Gunner - evaded

2.9.44 Halifax BB389

F/Sgt Jawor PAF - Air Gunner - POW

2.9.44 Halifax DK124

P/O Data PAF - Flight Engineer - POW
F/Sgt Jawonowski PAF - Navigator - POW
F/Sgt Rygielski PAF - Air Bomber - POW
F/Sgt Lebnowski PAF - Wireless Op/Air Gunner - POW
Sgt Ogledzki PAF - Air Gunner - POW

11.9.44 Liberator EW278 GR-U

F/Lt P.Nawalany PAF - Air Bomber - POW
W/O Bogdanowicz PAF - Wireless Op - POW
F/Sgt Ratlinski PAF - Air Gunner - POW
Sgt Zeiske PAF - Air Gunner - POW

I am indebted to the Carpetbagger Aviation Museum, Harrington, UK's list of Allied Force's Special Duty Operations & Associated Roll of Honour, for the foregoing details of lost aircrew. I feel that this list is, by no means complete, and should any reader know of the fate of crew-members, or crews that I have omitted, or any M.I.A.'s that have been found, or still missing, and not listed, please let me know, and I will include them in the next revision.

This list only covers the period, 14 March 1943, until November 1945, (*Cease of Hostilities*), from the time when 148 Squadron was reformed into the "Special Forces - S.O.E." guise, from "X Flight R.A.F.", and no other period. This in no respect, impugns the debt that we all owe to all the servicemen and women who fought and died in all wars and actions, and specifically to those who fought under the banner of 148 Squadron R.A.F.

Appendix iii

Editor's notes

1. During the WWII, both East, and West Ham, were part of Essex
2. They were: Henrietta, Vera Jean, Eileen, Violet, & Henry.
3. Orsett, Essex Registry Office.
4. The Bata Shoe Company's own "in house" newspaper. It still exists, as we found on our visit.
5. Knowing his area of Fl/Sgt. Smith's operations, and his duties, it's surprising that the Censors allowed this through!
6. National air force of the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. Luftwaffe inspired and supported, using a mixture of captured, and their own war planes, similar in structure to the U.S.A.F.'s "Aggressor Squadron" of the Vietnam War.
7. "W - William", is correct for the R.A.F. in 1944. The later "W - Whiskey" came with NATO.
8. A 'blocking' security blackout notice issued under the Defence of the Realm Act
9. This was later revised to "Killed in Action", at the time of the crew's grave 'adoption' by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
10. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (or Imperial War Graves Commission, as it was then), began compiling its records of casualties almost from the outbreak of war, relying on information passed from the armed services of Britain and the Empire countries.
11. The official stance was that 148 Squadron had no "Squadron Letters", and never had letters throughout WWII. Probably due to its 'clandestine' nature. The only time that it officially had "Squadron letters", was during the Munich crisis when it carried the letters "BS". There is however incontrovertible evidence, both written and photographic, that it had the Squadron letters "FS" from 1943 to 1945. I have also found a reference, to an aircraft with an 'FS-O' designation, (Roll of Honour), and the picture of B - Beer, (Illustrations), bears the letters 'FS-B'. I also noticed that the Bata website, reported Len's aircraft as 'FS-W'!
12. These are my highlights; the full resume is available on www.historyofwar.org/148sqdn.
13. 148 Squadron lost four aircraft over the 3rd and 4th of July 1944. P-Peter, take off time, Brindisi, 20:28 GMT, W-William, take off time, Brindisi, 20:45 GMT, S-Sugar, take off time, Brindisi, 22:11 GMT, and E-Easy, with no take off time from Brindisi recorded. This would tend to agree with my findings, of P-Peter being shot down at 22:26, W-William, being shot down at 22:52, by Oberleutnant Hans Krause, and E-Easy, probably being shot down at 02:15, by Leutnant Heinz Bock, and S-Sugar being shot down at 01:50 by Hptm Leopold Fellerer. P-Peter and E-Easy's crews had better luck. On P-Peter the pilot, bomb aimer, and the navigator became P.O.W.'s. , and on E-Easy, the Pilot and the dorsal turret gunner were killed, the rest of the crew survived as P.O.W's.
14. A 'potted history' project entitled "Leyes Road, Custom House E16, 1946 - 2009". Available from the Westeast-Newham London Group on Yahoo.

15. *I have never found how this misconception came about. Possibly it has something to do with Thomas J. Bata being Czechoslovakian, and Bata Shoes being a Czechoslovakian company, and Prague being the Czechoslovakian capitol, but this is only conjecture!*
16. *Period is from the date on photograph, until the end of WWII, including the Far East campaign, i.e. 31/01/1944 – 31/12/1945.*
17. *The legendary Spitfire won over everyone's hearts! Even Adolf Galland, the German air Ace! When charged by Goering to defeat the R.A.F., and Goering asked if there was anything he wanted to achieve this, Galland replied "A squadron of Spitfires please!" Every German pilot always claimed to have been shot down by a "Spitfire", even though there were relatively few Spitfire Squadrons in service. The Hurricane was by far, more prolific in comparison. It was the same with families, every mother's airman son, flew a Spitfire!*
18. *The Desert Air Force also flew from the same airfields as the Balkan Air Force, in the same time period, as did the U.S.A.A.F. 15th Air Force Bomb group*
19. *The brothers and sisters were: Henry Arthur, 1898. Florence May, 1899. Margaret Victoria Elizabeth, (Aunt "Mags"), 1901. Annie Elizabeth, 1902. Rosalie Florence, 1903. Archibald T.J., 1905. Henry, 1906. Thomas James, 1907. George, 1909. Henrietta, (Hettie Gash), 1911. William, 1914. Rose L, 1915. Ethel, 1916. Florence May, Archibald T.J., and Rosalie Florence, all died in infancy, their mother Florence Aley, lived into her nineties! Her husband, Henry Ebsworth died in 1934 aged just 56. They are now all deceased, the last to go was Aunt Mags, in 1997, and she was cremated at Hornchurch Crematorium, in Essex.*
20. *The Royal Air Force Association.*

Appendix iv

Acknowledgements

Ancestry.co.uk
The Bata "Reminiscences" Website
The National Archives
Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Westeast Newham London Groups
The Carpetbagger Aviation Museum, Harrington, UK. (S.O.E Mission Losses details)
Kajetan Bieniecki, 'Lotnicze Wsparcie Armii Krajowej'
Wikipedia
The R.A.F. Historical website
Historyofwar.org
Warandgames.info
Crew Family sources Jacques, Cook, & Fairweather, (Gordon Pearson)
F/O Brown, courtesy of City of Wetaskiwin Archives
Richard Goring, Dead of World War II & Revisions
Sue Keene, Hunter Valley N.S.W. Australia, (Crew Details)
Frances Gates, Australia, (1586 Flt, & 301 Sqdn. P.A.F. Details)
Steve Andrews, Norfolk UK, (S.O.E. and Squadron research)
Luftwaffe Archives & Records Reference Group
LuftwaffeExpertengroup.com
Feldgrau.com
Axishistory.com
Cioldigloire.com
Das-ritterkreuz.de
The Aircrew Remembrance Society
Armchair General
Bojan Sunajko, M.Sc.E.E
Lt. Col. Antun Banjari, Yugoslavian Air Force (Ret'd).

And Finally, the Royal Air Force Association,

My thanks to all the Ex-Halifax aircrew who with their memories, helped to 'fill the gaps'.

Photographs

The Maker/Gash family
Crew Family sources
F/O Brown, courtesy of City of Wetaskiwin Archives
The Bata Website
Wikipedia
The R.A.F. Squadron website
Royal Air Force Association,
Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Das-ritterkreuz.de
Steve Andrews

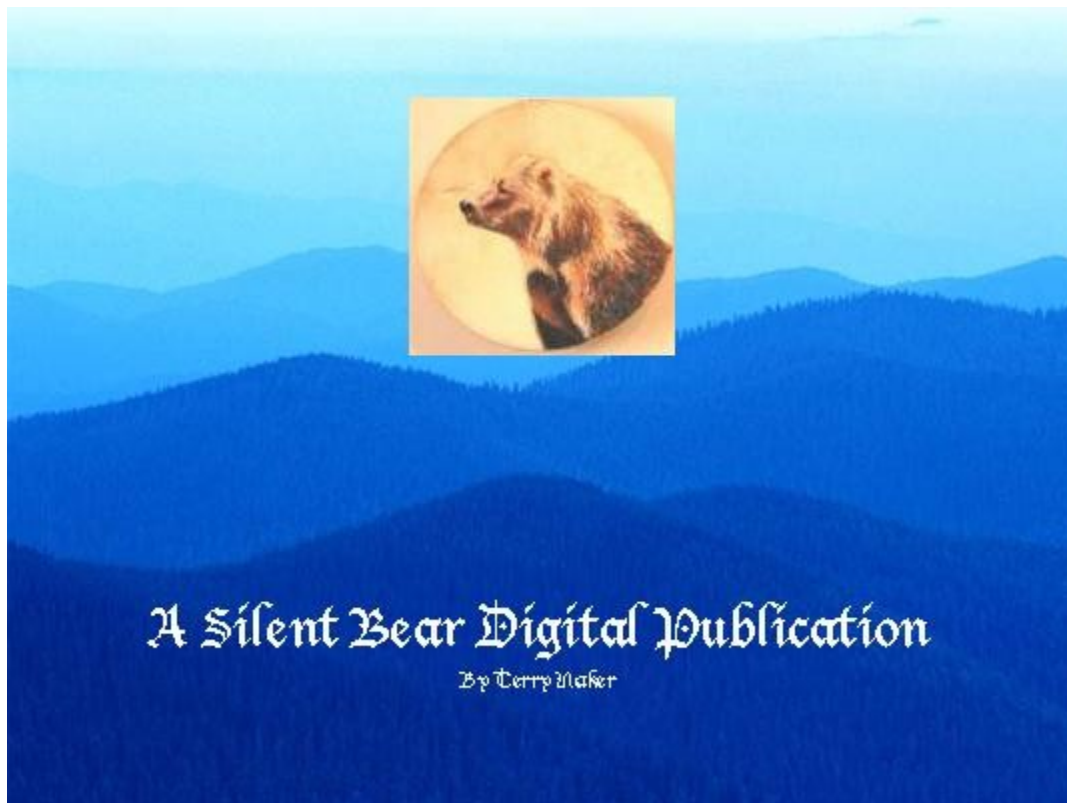
Drawings and schematics

Wikipedia
Historyofwar.org

Appendix v

Publishers Notes

Originally formatted and designed in using "Book Antiqua" font throughout. This was then printed as a PDF file for this version



About the Author



Terry Maker is a retired computer engineer, who has taken to amateur genealogy, after an 'enforced' retirement due to ill health in 2003. He was forced to retire at an early age, due to an 'aggressive' form of osteoarthritis. His 'pet hate' is the term 'Disabled' and regards it as society's worst insult to those who are 'Physically challenged'. His biggest regret is that he still cannot type with more than two fingers!

He is the husband of Patricia Maker, nee Gash, and brother in law of Teddy Gash, (the cousins of Fl/Sgt L.J. Smith).

He served as a Civilian Instructor in the Air Training Corps, at Stanford le Hope from 1988 until 1993 serving in various capacities on the unit, rising to Acting Adjutant. He left the Air Training Corps in 1993, (due to the onset of his condition), where, as the acting Adjutant of 1582 Sqdn, he saw the unit rise from 2243 detached flight of Basildon Squadron, to full Squadron status. He left the squadron as he had begun, as a Civilian Instructor.

He has held a Private Pilots Licence, and a Firearm Certificate. He has achieved 9 R.A.F.V.R.T. Instructor qualifications and a qualification in Law. He also holds an NVQ level 3 in IT, a City and Guilds in telecommunications, and a radio amateur licence with the call sign G6MLJ, and has security vetting to work for the military. He also has police, and military clearance to work with minors. For seven years he was a Grand National Archery Society County Coach. His personal motto is: "Per Ardua Obtinere Aequitas", (Through Endeavour Obtain Justice), and believes that the justification of trying is, winning! In the mid 1960's, he was a rally driver.

The couple live in Essex, and have done so for 36 years, they have no children, and have two golden retrievers. When not tracing his extended family tree, He likes nothing more than to watch birds at his local Country Park.

About this sad ending to a young life, he says: "If this story, serves to enlighten the people of today, about all of the young men and women, who died on our behalf in World War Two, 'to make the world a better place', then its telling, will not have been in vain, and by that fact alone, neither was their sacrifice."

His hobbies are writing, genealogy, and ornithology.

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