

**Friends of
75 (NZ) SQUADRON RAF
ASSOCIATION
UNITED KINGDOM**

APRIL 2012

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FROM THE SECRETARY

After spending 6 months in New Zealand we are so pleased to be back home in England. We had a wonderful time with family and friends and yes with all the lovely farm killed meat and home cooking and of course after a few bottles of our lovely wine I did manage to put on 20lb ! I must say that the food in NZ is really fresh with us having asparagus, avocado, oranges and grapefruit, with fish and whitebait straight out of the water. I met up with Jack Meehan in Tauranga, who has a brilliant set up with a flat at the RSA, so is on hand to have a lovely meal or the odd beer. I also went to see Ken Dalziel in Thames, and both Jack and Ken hope to be coming over for the Bomber Command Reunion. Just to remind you that we won the Rugby World Cup, the whole of the country went wild; it was a great party time in NZ.

SUMMER REUNION 2012

We are having our summer reunion Friday 29th and 30th June. We will be staying at the Crown Hotel at Mundford, near Thetford. We are expecting quite a number of NZers to attend the reunion. They are coming over for the Bomber Command Memorial unveiling on the 28th June, and then will be travelling up and staying in the Thetford area on the 29th. On Saturday we will be going with the NZ party to Feltwell and then to Mepal, where we will hold a service at the Memorial Garden. This will be followed by a buffet lunch in the village. From Mepal we will go to Newmarket to visit the Squadron marker at the racecourse. In the evening a reunion dinner will be held at the Crown Hotel.

Double Room £79.50 ; Single Room £49.50

Menu for Saturday

Homemade Roast Tomato Soup
Medallions of Pork
Homemade Apple and Strawberry Crumble
Tea Coffee with Minted Chocolates
Cost of meal: £17.95 per head.

Please ring me on 01621 843 935 or email mstill81@talktalk.net or mstill81@hotmail.com
(Margaret Still).

RAF BC VETERAN RECALLS HIS OWN ESCAPE.

A Belfast veteran who fought in WWII has made an emotional journey to re-visit old friends and memories thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund. A grant from the Big Lottery Funds Heroes Return programme has allowed 90 year old Royal Air Force veteran Lithgow John McFarland, who lives in south Belfast, to return to his flight base in England to commemorate the battles he fought in and the comrades he lost during the Second World War. When John decided to join up in 1940 he could never have imagined the adventure which lay ahead. But the fact that a young man of just 18, son of a local farmer and more used to hand milking the cows, would end up being shot down and imprisoned in an infamous Nazi Stalag, is a story worth telling.

Like many of his fellow servicemen though, John (now a great-grandfather) never spoke about the war for over 40 years. And even now Elsie, his wife of over 60 years, says there are things she doesn't know about from that time. John's story began when he came to Belfast in 1940 to sit a Latin exam for a pharmacist's apprenticeship he'd secured at home in Londonderry. *"I'd always found the Latin a chore and a friend had told me about the great time he was having in the RAF, so when I was in Belfast I went to the RAF recruiting office and joined up."* In June 1941 John was formally called up and began training as a navigator. After graduating he should have gone to an Operational Training Unit where the air crews were put together, though they were infamous for their 20% loss of life. *"But then word came through that I was to bypass this. I never knew why, and joined a crew before going onto the 75 New Zealand Squadron as a replacement navigator and you never asked who you were replacing!"*, said John. We flew from a remote base near Ely in East Anglia and were engaged mainly in sea and French railway yard mining operations as well as drops to the French Resistance. *"It was during one of these trips that we were shot down. The Germans had the capability to fire vertically upwards. We were over Denmark and it was around midnight when my navigator's table shattered and I knew we'd been hit from below. Everything happened so fast, we had to bail out and use our parachutes. The parachute wrappers used to put little notes in which the silk saying things like 'all the best'. Only three of us survived that night, the rear gunners parachute failed to open. That could have been any one of us, because you just grabbed any parachute on your way out to board the aircraft."* John landed in a ploughed field and was rescued by the farmer's son whose family sheltered him for three days before the Germans found him. *"I was sent to the same prison camp which featured in The Great Escape. Life there wasn't great, but some of the lads had built a radio and brought us news every day so we heard about D-Day and thought we'd be home by Christmas - of course we weren't."*

In January 1945 with the Russians advancing the POW's were put to march, sleeping in barns along the roadside, despite the bitter winter. *"I've never experienced cold like it!"* says John. *"One POW found a rat and held onto it just to keep his hands warm. I remember one morning though two British fighter planes were circling overhead, making to attack because they thought we were Germans. We tried to spell out "POW's" with towels on the ground but they came in all guns blazing and twenty men died. Friendly fire I think they would call it today. Just days later we were freed by the British."*

Despite his stoicism in recounting the story, the tragic irony of that loss of life still sits heavily on John's heart. *"Back in the UK we were de-loused de-briefed and told we could go home, so home it was"* he said. *"That's when I understood what it must've been like for our families. Our Commanding Officer, a wonderful man, had sent a personal letter to them when our plane hadn't come back that night"*.

Whether or not John thought about that time as years went by, he doesn't say. He certainly didn't speak of it until 1984 when a commemoration was organised in Denmark and the McFarlands had the chance to meet again - the family which had sheltered John so long ago. He has since kept in touch with other ex servicemen and last year on a trip funded by the Big Lottery Funds Heroes Return programme, visited his old Ely base- Mepal, with his comrade in arms Norman Allen from Loughgall, who also flew on 75(NZ) Squadron. *"It was a great experience to go back to the base and we were very well looked after. We enjoyed it immensely and it brought back old memories,"* said John.

"We appreciate very much that the Big Lottery Fund gives people like us a chance to remember those times and those friends again, for the bonds of war are very strong."

At the 75 Squadron winter reunion in Mepal, someone had a book about airfields and much to John's amazement on the front cover was a crew of six airman - and yes there was John McFarland, bright eyed and good looking at the age of 19. You are still good looking John.

To find out more about funding visit www.biglotteryfund.org.uk or phone 08450000121.

REMEMBRANCE SERVICE, MEPAL, NOVEMBER 2011.

On Friday 11th November, Dawn and I attended a Remembrance service at Mepal which was very well attended with 41 sitting down for dinner on the Saturday night.

It was organised by Ernie Barlow, and as many of you know Ernie has been seriously ill in hospital while in Canada then back in Cambridge and Ely. Ernie conducted the short service from his wheelchair with all the dignity he has always shown. A class of children from the local school were present and laid a wreath at the plinth. Ernie is now well back on the road to recovery and we all look forward to seeing him in June.

We were pleased to welcome for the first time, Mike Molony's two nephews and their wives, and Simon Sommerville, with his wife Dawn, his sister and her son. Simon's father, Robert (Jock) Sommerville, DFC who served on the squadron in 1943, and again in 1945 as a bomb aimer. Sadly, Jock died a few weeks before this reunion. I was pleased to put Simon in touch with one of our members Jack Jarmy, DFC who was on the same crew as his father during his first tour. The nephew of George Curry, DSO DFC who served on the squadron in 1941, Neil Findlay also attended this weekend. Though unfortunately Jack and Gladys Richards were unable to attend the dinner, as both were unwell. The raffle was a great success raising £151 for association funds.

Sunday was bright and sunny for our service at the plinth. It was great that Jack Richards did manage to be at the service, being driven to Mepal by his driver Denny. Before the service we had the scattering of the ashes of Robert Douglas Sommerville, DFC. The service was conducted by Marshall Allen, a Methodist lay preacher, the son of Norman Allen. Marshall had kindly agreed to conduct the service at the plinth, war memorial and chapel, as Peter Parker and Ernie Barlow were both too ill to attend. Marshall did a wonderful job of the services, and his sermon was thought provoking and original. Thank you Marshall.

Everything was going so well until after the service we went to the village hall for refreshments. There were no refreshments which was due to me not organising it. We managed a cup of tea/coffee and biscuits thanks to the kindness of the villagers.

My fault entirely !

NB: The ashes of George Wilks had been scattered in the plinth garden the previous week by his family members.

LANCASTER #HK569, SERVICE, KESSEL, JULY 2010.

Associate member Dee Boneham attended the unveiling of a memorial to a 75 crew in Holland on 21 July 2011. Dee tells the story....

Having been in Holland in Nov 2010 and May 2011, I found myself escorting Glen Turner the Secretary of the NZ 75 Squadron Association to Holland in July 2011 for the dedication of another memorial for one of our crews.

This was for Lancaster HK 569, AA-Q which took off from Mepal to bomb Homberg in Germany on the 21 July 1944. Attacked by a fighter on it's way to the target over Holland, it crashed into a river bank near Kessel after the pilot avoided a village called Reuver.

The crew were:

Captain : F/S N. D. Davidson, RNZAF

F/Eng : Sgt R. G. Sloman, RAFVR

Nav : Sgt A. E. J. Goddard, RAFVR

W/op : Sgt D. Corris, RAFVR

M/Up Gnr : Sgt R. S. Lang, RAFVR

A/B : Sgt T. G. Little, RAFVR

R/Gnr : F/S H. J. Hiscox, RAFVR



Sgt Little and F/S Hiscox survived the crash, however F/S Hiscox died on the river bank and is buried in the village of Beesel, where his grave has been tended since then by the Claessen family. Sgt Little became a POW and survived the war, but has since died.

Some years ago, two Englishman living in Beesel, Barrie Davies and his friend Chaz Walbran, decided to make a memorial to this crew, and had to work hard to get approval from the Kessel Council. Barrie also received help with contacting people from all of the families of the crew, and those they found were invited to this dedication service. It was lovely to meet the families who were able to make the trip, including a contingent from New Zealand. The Dutch people as usual made everyone - including me - feel very special. F/S Hiscox's family had been to Kessel before, and were welcomed as old friends by the Dutch towns people.

The dedication started in the local town hall with coffee and cake (provided by the lovely cafe where the plaque was placed as it was right next to the crash site), and speeches by dignitaries including mayors from Kessel and the German town with which it is twinned (the Dutch are very into reconciliation), plus Glen Turner and the NZ Ambassador, George Troup.

We then moved outside for the unveiling of the large metal plaque, which a lot of the people from Kessel had turned out to see. It had been half paid for by the Kessel council and half from donations - including some from the 75 UK Association. The brother and sister of the pilot, Don and Shirley - from New Zealand, unveiled the plaque and soon after Shirley made a very moving speech about her brother and his crew.

Wreaths were laid by the mayors, RAF and Dutch Air Force representatives, the NZ Ambassador and Glen (on behalf of the two 75 Assns and the RNZAF). Each person was helped by a couple of local school children who carried the wreaths, and then the people moved to the rivers edge and cast wooden crosses (with the names of the crew) and flowers, into the water to commemorate the airman and aircraft that had crashed into the river Maas. A really spooky thing happened when Barrie was throwing the first of the flowers onto the water. A huge clap of thunder sounded overhead - as though the lads were showing their thanks from above. Finally there was a reading of the Kohima, playing of the Last Post and the Dutch National Anthem. There was also a Scottish piper called Ken, who played beautiful haunting melodies and pipe music at appropriate times during the proceedings.

The invited guests then returned to the town hall where there was a chance for everyone to get to know each other and circulate. We had special guests Ria Schmeider and Roel Rijks from the Heythuysen 75 Squadron Lancaster Memorial. The Heythuysen and Kessel Lancasters were two of the seven that crashed on the night 21 July 1944. 75(NZ) Sqns greatest single loss of the war. Also from Markelo, Benny and Rika Scheurs, who have created a 75 Squadron Stirling Memorial. Glen and I visited Benny's home the next day and were shown around the Stirling crash site and memorial. Other important guests included David Forsyth, a representative of Bomber Command Association who had brought along the famous Harry Irons, DFC (a veteran of 62 Ops as a Tail Gunner). And Sef Willems, the local lad who had found F/S Hiscox's body before the Germans did.

Barrie and I also introduced Glen to Tiny Claessen (I think he's gained a fan!). After the service with Tiny, we visited F/S Hiscox's grave in Beesel, which is just across the river and was also shown the memory wall in her home. But what a surprise it rained and rained !

In the evening we had a meal at a very nice local Chinese restaurant with the visiting family members who were still in the area, and we all agreed a fabulous day was had by everyone who attended and there were many lovely memories for all of us. Many thanks should go to Barrie Davies, ex Army Air Corps, for his dedication to the crew and tracing the families. Unfortunately Chaz, who was a large driving force for the memorial, had been ill for some time and had died only several weeks earlier, but I'm sure he was watching down on us with a huge smile. For anyone with Facebook, I have many photos from the dedication plus visits to Heythuysen, Markelo and Soarremoarre. So, ask me to make you my Facebook friend, and I'll accept you so you can access the pictures.

Ake Ake Kia Kaha

Dee



LANCASTER #HK594, SERVICE, MEPAL, AUGUST 2012.

Some time ago I was contacted by a Swedish aviation researcher with regard to a 75 Lancaster, HK594, that crashed in Sweden 29/30 August 1944. I was able to make contact with a relative in Scotland of the W/Op, Charles Hill. Since then the research has grown, and Jake Drummond, a friend of the Hill family has made extensive enquires about the crew and how the aircraft came to be lost. Jake has travelled to Sweden to meet with Lars, the researcher, and has visited the crash site. The pilot, D King, was the only survivor of the crew and was interned by the Swedish. The rest were killed or died in the Baltic after bailing out. Charles Hill and both air gunners are buried in the Halsingborg (Palsjo) Municipal Cemetery, while the others are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial panels. Jake has traced all of the crew's relatives, except those of Sgt Callan, who originally came from Gateshead, Co Durham. With all the information Jake has accumulated he is writing a book on it.

On the 29th August this year Jake, Lars and family members of the crew will attend a Memorial service at Mepal. If you would like to attend, please contact me nearer the date for times etc. The crew were:

Capt F/S D. A. S. King, RAFVR
 F/E Sgt J. P. Callan, RAFVR
 Nav F/S W. D. Watson, RNZAF
 A/B F/S J. Fitzgerald, RNZAF
 W/Op Sgt C. B. Hill, RAFVR
 M/U Sgt D. L. D. Moon, RAFVR
 R/G Sgt H. W. Causley, RAFVR

OBITUARIES

It is with sadness that I have to report the deaths of the following members.

Alf Proctor DFC. Completed two tours with 75 and 218 Squadrons. Aged 100.

David Lewis CBE FCA. Joined 75 in early 1945 as a navigator. Post war became a very successful businessman. With his brother founded the High Street clothing chain, River Island. A very generous man, he entertained his former crew members on his yacht and hotels in Israel. He was well known for his charitable works. He made the largest single contribution of any one veteran to the Bomber Command Memorial Fund.

Norman Waite. No service or other details available.

Rev. Peter Parker. Peter for the last few years has conducted the services at Mepal on Remembrance Day. A quiet man, but when he spoke you always listened. Peter did his National Service in the RAF being stationed in Hong Kong in the 50's. He was taught Chinese and had to listen in to communist radio transmissions. Having told me this he ended with "I was a spy". His sermons were always worth listening to, and were always relevant.

Vera Fairfax. Vera was the wife of the late Ivan Fairfax. Ivan was a Fitter Rigger AC2 with the NZ Flight Wellingtons at RAF Marham from Jun to October 1939, before 75(NZ) Squadron RAF was created.

Peter Lonke. Peter was a great friend of the association dating back to 1981. Up until 2009 Peter was a Sgt in the Belgium Air Force. He, with a number of others, recovered the remains of a 75 Lancaster that crashed near to where he lived on 23 May 1944. This aircraft was captained by Edgar Burke, the uncle of Margaret Still. My own uncle was part of the original crew, but was killed in March 44. Through his efforts to trace the families of the crew he made contact with Margaret and her family. In 1986 myself, Margaret and other members of the association travelled to Belgium for the unveiling of a stained glass window in the church at Lommel. The stained glass window was of the squadron badge. Over the years Peter has been involved in many projects involving the recovery of crashed WW2 aircraft, and the setting up of memorials. For his hard work and dedication he was awarded the British Ambassadors Meritorious Commendation. The only Belgian to be so honoured. In the mid 80's Peter was flown to NZ by the RNZAF. There he was treated to a flight around NZ in a 75 Squadron Skyhawk. He over flew Margaret's home where her father waived to him as he passed over. Peter married Connie in 2005 and moved to America. There he was involved in many activities endearing him to the local community.

As you may have read or seen there was a coach crash in Switzerland involving Belgian school children. They came from the Lommel area where 75 have strong links. Our thoughts are with those that are bereaved and the recovery of those injured.

Member Ron Brown's companion, Milly passed away recently. A lovely lady who accompanied Ron on his many service related trips.

A warm welcome to the following new members.

Geoff Howells, whose father, Harold Howells DFC served two tours on 75.

Fred Winch, who served on 75 as an air gunner 42-43.

Denis Jacobson, whose father, Gerald Jacobson RNZAF was killed on operations 17 December 1942.

Wing Commander Gerald Lane DFC, who commanded the Squadron December 1942 to May 1943.

Yvonne Lane, whose father, Russell Gill served as a Bomb Aimer 44-45. Yvonne would be pleased to hear from anyone that remembers her father. Please send any information to me, Kevin.

A request from **Phillip Martin** of Mepal. Phillip is gathering information on RAF Mepal up to the 1960's. He hopes to exhibit the information. If you can help with personnel information and photos please contact Phillip at 20 Witcham Road, Mepal, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2AG.
Tel: 07984473168

I look forward to seeing you at the reunion. Those that cannot attend please accept the good wishes of the Association. Please keep in touch. I'm always pleased to hear from you.

Kevin King

Ake Ake Kia Kaha

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