

Washington Times



Newsletter

Issue 13

October 2007



Cover Photos

- Top WF512 (44 Squadron) at dispersal, RAF Coningsby. (*Ernest Howlett*)
- Middle EE Canberra WK163 a B2/B6 hybrid maintained and operated by Air Atlantique as part of their Historic Flight. Painted in early Bomber Command colours it took part in Duxford's spring airshow. (*Chris Howlett*)
- Bottom Reunion members gather in front of *It's Hawg Wild* at the end of the guided tour provided by Ivor Warne. (*Chris Howlett*)
- From left to right: Richard Sloane, John Cowie, Chris Howlett, Sheelah Sloane, Adrian Stephens, Alan Haslock, Pat O'Leary, Derek Mobbs, Kevin Grant, Paul Stancliffe, John Laing, Bryan Jordan, David Stanford, Mike Davies and Keith Dutton.
- This Page The Reverend Peter Smith leads a short service of dedication as the wreath remembering those who died in the various Washington crashes is tied near the nose of the B-29. (*Chris Howlett*)

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Subscriptions

Unfortunately the time has come when I have to ask for a new round of subscriptions. Also, due to the increase in postal charges I have to ask for an increase in the rate – sorry.

To cover the reproduction, postage and packing costs I need to ask for £7.50 to cover the next four issues. If you remain interested in receiving the Washington Times please make the cheque out to me (Chris Howlett).

The last few issues have made use of various colour photographs and, although the cost of colour copying is prohibitive (note the £20 fee needed for the colour version of issue 12) if you are able and willing to receive your copy of Washington Times by e-mail you will get the colour photos in colour. Receiving it by e-mail will also help me keep my costs down as e-mail is much cheaper than printing and posting. I can make colour versions available at cost if wanted. They will be costed individually Issue 12 was £20; this issue would be £7. Let me know if you would like a colour copy.

Letters

Tony Whatman wrote:

I would just like to mention one little bit of excitement we had at RAF Waddington. This was when 57 Squadron had Avro Lincolns. On this occasion, flying out to Heligoland on a bombing exercise one bomb failed to release from the bomb shackle. This happened from time to time as the linkages would freeze in the cold air at the high altitudes flown on the way out. On the homeward journey they would usually fly low over the North Sea. With the air temperature being higher the ice causing the bomb shackle to jam would melt, the shackle would operate and the bomb would drop onto the closed bomb bay doors. Unfortunately on this occasion they were too low to jettison the bomb safely and orders came through to land with the live bomb still on board. The landing was successful and the aircraft was towed to a safe place. A heavy duty mesh net was put under the bomb doors and fitted around the fuselage. Then, by operating the bomb doors manually from the crews quarters they slowly opened the doors until the bomb was lying in the net. An armourer climbed into the net and made the fuse safe – a scary moment but we all lived to tell the story.

At 20 years old it seemed just one of those days – looking back it all feels a little bit more frightening!

I hope you find this little bit of information interesting.

Don Neudegg wrote:

The photo I sent of 115 Squadron has come out well (in issue 11 – Chris). I can recognise faces easily. In the enlarged photo of the trophy I can see three members of my crew including the skipper, Flt Lt Wellum (sitting next to the CO).

There have been a number of references to the task of polishing and shining the Washingtons for the Odiham review. On 115 Squadron the aircrew didn't take on this task. We knew that aircrew of other squadrons had been given the job and guessed it wouldn't be long before we were ordered to do the same. When the day came however, a Flight Sergeant Gunner (who shall remain nameless) refused to do it. The Flying Officer who had given the order called in a Flt Lt who also got a point blank refusal. The Flight Sergeant had spent five years as a POW and with his seniority didn't think polishing an aircraft was appropriate. He was ordered several times and stubbornly refused. Finally we were all dismissed and heard no more about it. What happened after that I don't know. The Flight Sergeant in

question never spoke about the incident and the aircrew of 115 Squadron never polished a Washington! I would add that the Flight Sergeant was held in high regard and was a quiet serious man of unblemished character. I can only assume that his superior officers recognised that his decision to refuse an order was a deeply emotional one and had not been taken lightly and to have pursued the matter further would have been as distasteful to them as it would have been disastrous for the man – and, after all, it was none other than Nelson who had shown that the ‘blind eye’ was sometimes the wisest choice.

Phil Rivkin wrote:

The photo plate (in issue 12) showing the signaller’s crew station brought back memories. When I was sending a position report one day, we finished up doing an air / sea firing exercise and the skipper banked the aircraft over and the CFC fired the front upper 4 x 0.5" barbette turret at a smoke / flame marker we dropped. I found out then that firing that turret when you weren’t expecting it must have been one of the finest and most efficient cures for constipation known to mankind!

Basil Dilworth wrote:

We had quite a thorough training course at RAF Marham in 1951 before we went ‘solo’, although the delivery in rapid Brooklyn accents by some American civilian instructors was difficult to follow. However, Disney-like cartoon films explaining the systems got one’s attention more than the formal RAF instructional films we were used to!

Dave Villars wrote:

My involvement with the B-29 began about Nov 1951 when I arrived at RAF Coningsby as a brand new AC1 ELECT/MECH/AIR to be greeted with these words from the Electrical Section W/O “You can forget all you have learned at Melksham, this is a totally different aircraft”. Good start! Thereupon he posted me to 44 Squadron, probably to get rid of me! There were only 3 Squadrons when I arrived; I think 57 Squadron came a little later to make 4.

Life at dispersal was very good, more informal; you were part of a team rather than one of a number. Very bleak in winter but beautiful in summer! We were involved with snags, daily and minor inspections – all done in the open of course – day and night flying and every so often all Squadrons were armed with 25lb smoke and flash bombs and sent to bomb a rock off Malta. Eight hours they were gone (bliss!!)

There was keen competition between the Squadrons to send as many aircraft as possible on these trips. Four was considered a poor show, seven very good. I don’t think anyone ever managed eight for various reasons, major checks etc. On their return it was quite common to see one engine feathered and on at least one occasion two, which appeared to be a major cause for concern.

A highlight of my time there was going to another station to give a demonstration for Battle of Britain day. I flew out seated in the mid upper gunner’s (CFC) position with mainly a good view of the sky! However, I flew back just behind the pilot. We flew very low past a line of spectators, flat out, the aircraft shaking itself to bits. I can still see their upturned faces through the Perspex as we shot over them. The pilot later said we were doing nearly 300MPH!

The other highlight was going to RAF Marham on a 2 week gunnery course. A feature of the course was a black and white film with cartoon characters running up and down wires from black box to black box – my first taste of this type of training and very effective.

Reunion Scrapbook



Top: The tour started in Duxford's impressive new AirSpace Hanger. Ivor Warne, an explainer at Duxford (fifth from left) led the tour. (*Chris Howlett*)

Middle: British classics displayed in the AirSpace hanger. Left, Lightning and Vulcan with (just visible) Lancaster, Concorde and York behind. **Right:** The ill fated TSR-2. (*Chris Howlett*)

Bottom: Waiting for the land train outside the AirSpace Hanger. In the end the train did not come so we all walked to the American Air Museum at the far end of Duxford airfield – passing the train on the way! (*Chris Howlett*)



Inside the American Air Museum Ivor continued his tour with descriptions of the B-52, B-24 and B-17 before culminating at the B-29.

Top left: Ivor, explaining the history of the B-17 stored in the American Air Museum, is upstaged by Duxford's other B-17, 'Sally B' performing a practice display outside (**top right**). (*Chris Howlett*)

Bottom: The tour culminates at the B-29. (*Chris Howlett*)

Memorial Service

During the years that the Washington served with the RAF five aircraft were lost while flying. In one of these (WF555) all crew members escaped uninjured. In the other four 26 aircrew lost their lives. It was to remember and honour these men that the remembrance service was held during the reunion.

The service was taken by the Reverend Peter Smith in Duxford's chapel. During the service John Laing, former Air Gunner in 207 Squadron, spoke of the memories, both good and bad, from the Washington years while Sheelah Sloane daughter of Sqdn Ldr Sloane OC 90 Squadron who died in the crash of WF502 spoke of the father she had hardly got to know before the crash robbed her of him. Sheelah later laid a wreath at the altar.

After the service the wreath was moved to the American Air Museum where, in a second short service, it was fastened to the railing at the nose of the B-29 where it remained until Monday.

Below is a list of those who perished in the Washington crashes while on the following pages are John and Sheelah's readings.

WF570 35 Sqdn RAF Marham	14.12.52	Flt Lt M.J. Creighton (1 st Pilot) Plt Off D.P. Ballard (2 nd Pilot) Sgt W.O. Hanna (Nav) Sgt J. P. Crowe (Sig)
WF553 XV Sqdn RAF Coningsby	5.1.53	Flt Lt F.A. Rust (1 st Pilot) Flt Sgt E. Mathews (2 nd Pilot) Flt Sgt R. Howes (Nav) Flt Sgt G. Tomlin (Eng) Flt Sgt L.T. Lloyd (Sig)
WF502 90 Sqdn RAF Marham	8.1.53	Sqn Ldr W.R. Sloane (1 st Pilot) Plt Off C.B. Speller (2 nd Pilot) Plt Off M.J. Lightowlers (Nav) Sgt E.D. Pearton (Nav) Sgt A.G. Martin (Eng) Sgt R. Anderson (Sig) Sgt K.A. Reakes (Gunner) Sgt M.J. Clifton (Gunner) Sgt E.F. Wheeler (Gunner) Sgt R.G. Hughson (Gunner)
WF495 35 Sqdn RAF Marham	27.1.54	Flt Lt R.N. Williams (1 st Pilot) Wg Cdr A.K. Passmore (2 nd Pilot) Flt Lt R.A. Kirkland (Nav) Sgt M.J. Kennell (Nav) Flt Sgt B.W. Noble (Eng) Flt Sgt G.W. Clamp (Sig) Sgt G. Johnston (Gunner)

Memories of Squadron Service – John Laing

We are here to share memories, memories from deep down, obscured by fifty-six years or so of time. Time in which to forget and time in which we have remembered the past in fleeting moments. Today we have gathered to remember fellow Washingtonians who did not survive the experience we shared.

While we think of these men we can't help looking back to those days of our youth and to the aircraft which was so central to us in that distant time. It is the thing that brings us together, and here I must pay tribute to Chris Howlett because without his enthusiasm we'd not be here today. A day on which to view the B29. A day to remember events and people from our past.

The past which was our youth – some of us just out of school: irresponsible teenagers holding down responsible jobs, and oblivious to the dangers or careless of them though I recall my mother's barely suppressed fear that I was exposed to danger: and that was only the flying!

Memories flood back as we leaf through log books, look at photographs, and stand looking at what was then a large aircraft: a plane full of things that were not encountered in Lancasters and Lincolns.

That aircraft is evocative of Squadron life and the people we knew: the people we remember 56 years on, the times we shared: the highs and the lows, the boredom of 14 hour flights, bombing and navigation exercises, the odd moments of fear when an engine failed and flamed or the skipper cut it fine on circuits and bumps on that short runway. For us AGs the pre-flight inspections, walking along the top of a Baker 29 - nothing to it!! until one frosty morning, you slipped and found yourself clinging to the twin point fives of the rear dorsal turret. The emergency closing of the bomb doors which involved a step across space to a narrow catwalk. Our ground crews servicing the aircraft in the open in the brutish British winter. Aircraft had to be really sick to be taken into a hangar!

The camaraderie of Squadron life. We aircrew were fortunate. Discipline was more relaxed, but for all of us I'm sure that distance lends enchantment because for many, things were rough. My Squadron history sheds some light on what it was like for married couples living off base. Their memories in retrospect are amusing but only because they can now laugh at the conditions they endured. The late Arthur Haines told of having a weekly bath in the Sergeant's Mess but his wife had to make do with a tin tub at the fire in their primitive lodgings - privy at the foot of the garden.

We looked out for each other at all levels. I recall one bright autumn morning on crew parade at which our senior gunner was not present. "Where's Colin?" said the skipper, "We're flying in an hour". Quick as a flash came the response from Sid Taylor [the Squadron con man]; "Having a bite in the mess, sir" Colin lived out in Shouldam, a few hundred feet below Marham and had awakened to thick fog, pulled up the covers and went back to sleep. A quick phone call ensured that Colin, after being assured that it was no leg pull, got to base on time. I'm convinced that Alex Stewart, our skipper, knew the true circumstances but he himself was not above escapades which brought him close to landing in the thick brown stuff! Such was the comradeship and loyalty we enjoyed.

Thinking about this service, names and forgotten faces came flooding back. Jock Gallagher who was told on a medical that he'd not enough blood in his alcohol stream. John Miles DFC AG on 35 Squadron who later, as a SWO, often found that men of air rank were on first name terms with him - much to the discomfort of his Station Commander! Master Gunner, Matthews of 35 Sqdn. Jock Lovie DFM the uncompromising signaller. Geoffrey Walter O'Neil Fisher OBE, DFC* 207 Squadron CO who demanded high standards, and I like to think got them. 'Feather'em' Petherham, who, as his nick name suggests, frequently came back on less than four engines. Alf Edge whose run in with a Service

Police corporal almost caused me to burst out laughing as escort on his appearance before the CO. Of my fellow National Service gunners ['his little boys' as I recently discovered Geoff Fisher called us] Ginger Challis, John Money, Spud Murphy and others. Where are they? How are they? If not dead they are +/- 75 but I hope that they are as young as I feel and remember their RAF days with the same affection.

My Squadron was lucky in that we had no losses but others were not so fortunate and today we remember those who lost their lives in air accidents. I always find it rather sad that on Remembrance Sunday we fail to remember service personnel who lose their lives in the course of their peace time service. It's an omission I correct when taking a Remembrance Day service. Let's think of them today particularly The Washington people. Those we knew and those we did not know but with whom we have the common bond of The Washington. For myself I'll remember Paddy Hanna my fellow flanker in Marham's rugby team - a typical Irish forward. Also his crewmate 'Jim' Crowe with whom I was attending sick quarters. Declared fit for duty with a boil on his neck he was excused wearing a collar and tie - his white bandage earned him the nick name of 'The Rev'. Both were on WF570 of 35 Squadron. The loss of Michael Kennell on 26th January 1954 was particularly sad because he was the uninjured survivor of the crash of WF570.

I left the Royal Air Force and RAF Marham on 9th January 1953 just as the news broke of the loss of Squadron Leader Sloane and his crew. It was on 15th October 1952 that he on behalf of 90 Squadron had accepted The Laurence Minot Trophy from Marshal of The Royal Force Sir John Slessor.

I still have my programme of that occasion and find it sad to think that S/L Sloane had but three months to enjoy the success of the team he led.

Today his daughter Sheelah, is here to share with us her thoughts as we honour the lost airmen of The Washington Era.

The Royal Air Force does not ignore their sacrifice because you'll find their names in the Memorial Book which sits on a lectern in the south transept of St. Clement Danes.

Thoughts on our Dad – Sheelah Sloane

My brother, Richard and I are here today to pay our respects to our dear father, Squadron Leader Bill Sloane, who was tragically killed with nine other crewmen, while piloting a B-29 on a bombing mission over Wales in 1953.

I have always found it so sad that my Dad survived the War years, having seen action in India and in the Middle East, but then was so tragically killed in action eight years after the war ended. My mother, whom he met in Algiers in 1944, spoke very little to us about my Dad, as she was so devastated by his death and we left RAF Marham, shortly after he died in 1953 when I was one and my brother was three.

It is only just recently, since my mother died, that I have found the courage to find out more about my Dad, what kind of person he was and about his life in the RAF. Through my research I have met and spoken to some wonderful people - Air Chief Marshall Neil Wheeler, who was stationed at RAF Marham at the same time as my Dad and who kindly invited me to lunch at his house in Sussex; Ron Street, who now lives in Portugal and was great mates with my Dad, as they used to go off rally car driving together when they were stationed at RAF Marham; Alex Hughson, the brother of one of the Gunners, also killed in the accident and who now lives in California.

There are still a lot of mysteries about my Dad that I will probably never be able to find the answers to. From his Record of Service, I know that he was honoured with the Atlantic Star, the Burma Star and the Italy Star and also with a Defence medal and a War Medal, but I have no idea what he did to deserve these honours. If only I could find his logbook, that might tell me something. What I do know is, that he was a born and bred Belfastman – his mother used to traditionally send us a sprig of shamrock every St. Patrick’s Day – and people who knew him tell me he was a gentleman with a great sense of Irish humour and he used to speak to everyone, no matter what their rank. And for this reason, he gained a great amount of respect.

Wherever you are, Dad, may your soul and the souls of all the other brave men who died with you, serving your country, rest in peace.

Amen.



Washington Times Reunion in front of *It's Hawg Wild* and wreath.

Left to Right: John Cowie, Mary Cowie, Paul Stancliffe, Richard Sloane, Alan Haslock, Pat O’Leary, Sheelah Sloane, Kevin Grant, Peter Smith (Lay Preacher), John Laing, David Stanford, Adrian Stephens, Mike Davies, Mary Laing, Keith Dutton, Derek Mobbs, Bryan Jordan. (*Chris Howlett*)



After the memorial service the remainder of the Saturday was spent looking around the IWM Duxford site. Duxford is more than a museum with much space being devoted to active restoration projects or flying aircraft. The ability to get close to these historical icons is one of Duxford's greatest attractions. All photos Chris Howlett:

Top Left: Sally B being prepared for the air show on Sunday.

Top Right: A late mark Spitfire reveals its Griffon engine.

Above; A Gloster Gladiator undergoing restoration.

Above Right: One of several North American P-51 Mustangs based at Duxford.

Right: A new build Focke Wulf 190 with Hurricane in the background.

Lower Right: An early and energetic arrival to the air show was this twin seat Supermarine Spitfire IX in Royal Netherlands Air Force colours.



Sunday dawned reasonably bright with a high overcast making some nice weather for the Duxford Spring Air Show. All photos Chris Howlett:

Top Left: Several Tiger Moths operated pleasure flights before the air show began.

Top Right: The flight line with a fine array of classic fighters.

Above Left: One of the fighters, P-51 Ferocious Frankie.

Lower Left: Duxford's pristine Hawker Nimrod II
Below: Air Atlantique's English Electric Canberra WK163 a B2/B6 composite painted in early Bomber Command colours performed a faultless display evoking memories of the Washington's successor.





Some more of the flying from the Sunday air show. All photos Chris Howlett:
Top Left: Some thought there were too many helicopters but few could fail to be impressed by the energetic display put on by the RAF Chinook.
Top Right: The Grumman Triplets; Wildcat, Bearcat and Hellcat.
Lower Right: Wing walking with smoke.
Above: The Battle of Britain memorial flight's Hurricane Lancaster and Spitfire.
Right: B-17G Sally B in her element.





On Monday a few made the trip to RAF Coningsby and the BBMF hanger. All photos Chris Howlett:
Top Left: General view of the hanger with the BBMF's DC-3 in the foreground.
Above Left: The BBMF's Lancaster sporting her new nose art.
Above: The Lancaster's rear turret complete with teddy mascot.
Left and Below: Coningsby's current occupants in action. Typhoon Eurofighters photographed from the viewing gallery adjacent to the main runway. A strategically located burger caravan provided welcome tea and hot dogs!



Reunion 2008?

The reunion last May seemed to go off well and, with time moving on it is perhaps time to consider the possibility for a repeat performance next year. As for venues, Duxford worked for me. It has a B-29, an air show and reasonable and reasonably priced accommodation. However, I have had a request to visit one or other of the two main Washington operating bases and am happy to entertain this if people wish. Whether we will be able to gain access to the active RAF stations I do not know – but I can try!

Anyway, your views on the desirability of a second reunion and the location would be welcomed. As a starter I will offer a return to Duxford for July to coincide with the Flying Legends air show. Flying Legends is the big brother to Duxford's Spring air show which we attended this year. If this is taken up I would suggest a suitable timetable would be (actual dates not yet known):

Arrive Friday – accommodation at the Red Lion as this year.
Saturday morning Memorial service
Saturday late morning / afternoon Flying Legends Air Show
Saturday evening reunion dinner at the Red Lion
Sunday Depart or visit to either RAF Marham / RAF Coningsby

Prices would be approximately as for last year but I will get accurate figures once I have a better idea of the venue and numbers attending.

I hope that you can make it and if so I look forward to meeting you next year.



Nothing to do with the reunion but these two photos from Dave Villars filled the gap at the bottom of the page!
Top and Bottom: Two views of the 44 Squadron dispersals at RAF Coningsby circa 1951.
(*Dave Villars*)

Request for Information

Hi Chris!

My name is Alex Hughson and my brother, Bobby, was the tail gunner on WF502 of 90 Squadron which crashed on Jan 8th 1953.

I have been corresponding with Sheelah Sloane for about a year. Her dad was the squadron leader and the pilot of the Washington that night.

She was fortunate enough to go to the reunion you held in Duxford in May (I did not know of the event or would have requested permission to attend). There, she tells me, she met quite a few crew members who remember Bobby. Some of them have been in contact with her since the event.

I asked if she might give me the contact info for those who knew my brother so that I might get in touch with them. She does not feel comfortable doing this however, so I am asking if YOU might give MY contact details to those folks and ask, if it pleases them to contact me.

I was seven when Bobby was killed and you will appreciate that my "big brother" was my hero. But being so young, I have no real knowledge of what kind of person Bobby was in the adult world. I would love to hear what kind of impression he left with his fellow RAF buddies.

I do remember Flt Lt Ramsey coming to visit our house shortly after the crash. He was the regular pilot of Bobby's crew but was ill that day so Squadron Leader Sloane took the mission. I've tried to find out more about the events surrounding the crash, including contacting the records office in England and visiting the crash site, but it all still seems surrounded in mystery! I do regret not getting in touch with Flt Lt Ramsey before his passing.

I'm hoping that you might hold another gathering of Washington crewmembers soon. I live in California but would happily make the trip to attend, and meet with Bobby's colleagues, if allowed.

FIFI which is the last still flying B29, owned by the Commemorative Air Force in Midland, Texas, came to an air show near where I live some years ago. I made contact with the crew and they were kind enough to allow me to crawl up the tunnel and sit in the seat which Bobby would have been familiar with! What a thrill; maybe one day I'll get to take a flight in that seat!

Thanks for all that you've done for those Washington flyers. I've found a few of the Washington Times issues on the Internet and have enjoyed them immensely. Hoping to hear from you.

Best Regards

Alex

If anyone can remember Bobby Hughson please contact Alex at:

e-mail EurolinkAl@aol.com or Post Alex Hughson
2645 Sevada Lane,
Arroyo Grande
CA 93420
USA.

The Blitz on Britain revisited...

Chad Parker of the Lincolnshire Aviation Society reproduced John King's article on errant bombing over the UK which appeared in Washington Times issue 2 in their magazine. Following its printing he received the following information from one of their members, Barry Moores.

Issue 2 of Washington Times included an amusing account of bombs which accidentally or otherwise fell where they were not intended. One incident which caught my attention was the incident at the Prussian Queen at Saltfleetby. The credit, or discredit, was given to 101 Sqn when in fact it was the responsibility of fellow Canberra squadron at Binbrook, IX squadron. The event happened around 1952 and the following Christmas the station put on a pantomime in which an anonymous contributor modified the nursery rhyme concerning 'ladies locked in a lavatory'.

The scene opened with a blacked out stage and a voice giving the standard bomb aimer's patter; left, left, right, steady etc and following a flash and a loud bang the lights came up to reveal three 'ladies' in night attire who sang:

Oh Dear? What can the matter be
Three old ladies locked in the lavatory
Hiding from bombs from Monday till Saturday
Nine Squadron knew they were there

The first one's name was Elizabeth Bonner
She moved away for safety from Donna
But the bombs that were dropped still fell upon her
For nine squadron knew she was there.

The second one's name was Mary Lou Giles
She thought she was safe by four or five miles
Till down came the bomb which banished her smiles
For nine squadron knew she was there.

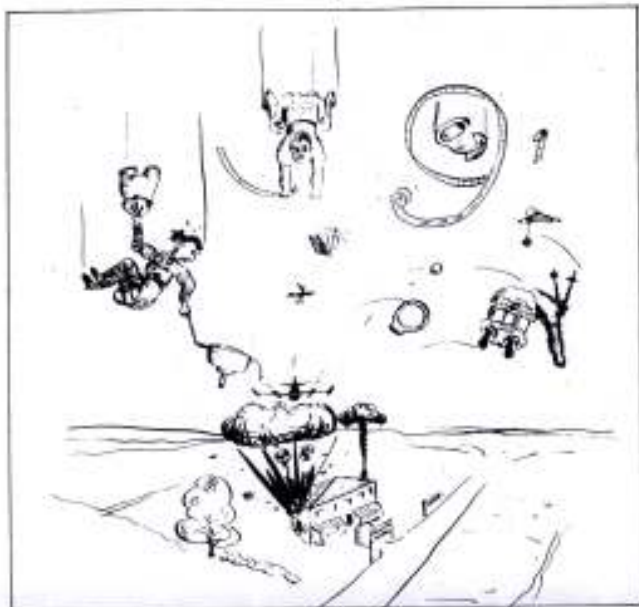
Our third victims name was Mrs O'Connor
The other two ladies, they blamed it upon her
But Flavel knew better upstairs in his bomber,
For he knew those ladies were there.

Our story's nearly over, and I'm sorry to say
That nine Squadron's aircraft are bombing today
So the ladies of Saltfleetby are moving away
For the Prussian Queen's bog is their target today!

One further point of interest is that the pilot of the aircraft which scored a direct hit on the Prussian Queen's bog was also in the IX squadron team which won the GEE-H trophy in 1954.

Barry Moores, Lincolnshire Aviation Society

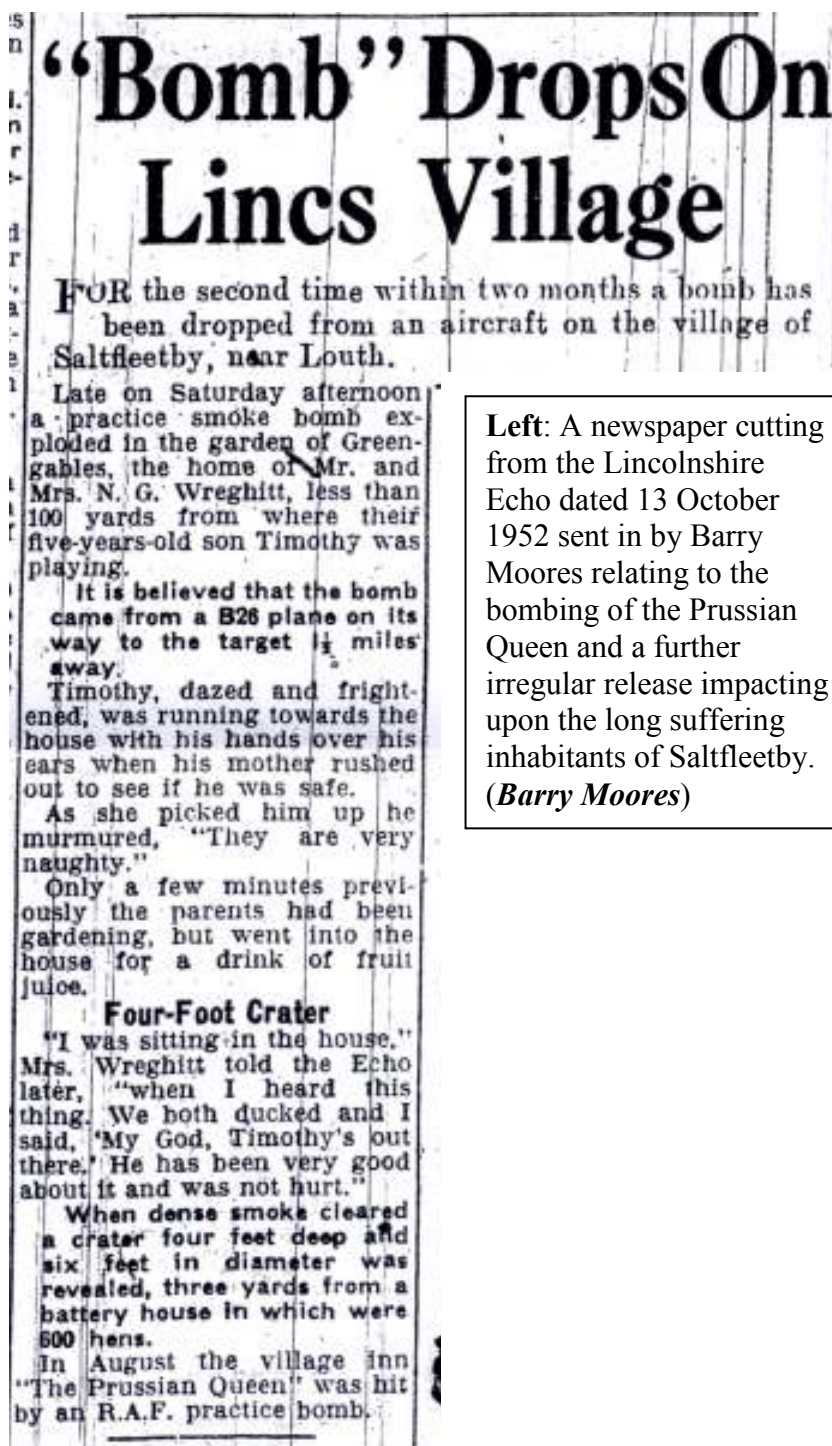
When I sent the above response to John King he had this to say....



Above: An unidentified cartoon depicting a Canberra attacking the Prussian Queen pub and the unfortunate three ladies.
(Barry Moores)

Thanks so much for the poem and correction to my article. Sorry I got the squadron wrong. The Gee-H system he speaks of was the only blind bombing aid available to the Canberra. I have been doing some research on it for some time now and have just recently detected how the two Warning Points, associated with the correct bomb-release position, were determined. The B-29 was not equipped with the necessary receivers to use the system, although it stemmed from WWII era and was used by Bomber Command in the late war period when daylight formation bombing was employed by the RAF. It was a relatively accurate system but had a limited operational range and, like all electronic ground-based aids, was liable to jamming.

The reference in the poem to 'Donna' concerns the many bombing ranges that existed down the Lincs coast from Cleethorpes down to the Wash area. They included the Donna Nook ranges of North & South Donna, Theddlethorpe, Saltfleet and Wainfleet.



Left: A newspaper cutting from the Lincolnshire Echo dated 13 October 1952 sent in by Barry Moores relating to the bombing of the Prussian Queen and a further irregular release impacting upon the long suffering inhabitants of Saltfleetby. (Barry Moores)

QUESTION: Is there a real story behind the rhyme 'Oh dear, what can the matter be?'

FURTHER to earlier answers, in the early Fifties, one of our Canberra aircraft from Binbrook, while practising bombing, mistakenly dropped a flash bomb on the ladies' lavatory of The Prussian Queen pub, Mablethorpe, Lincs.

That Christmas the station commander's wife had organised a Mother Goose pantomime in which the stage was blacked out and, to the sound of an aircraft, instructions were given to a pilot: 'Left', 'Right', 'Back a bit', followed by the sound of an explosion.

The stage lit up to reveal the pub's ladies' loo, and three old ladies in nighties, carrying candles, sang 'Oh Dear, What Can The Matter Be?' but ... 'Nine Squadron knew they were there!'

J. C. Lee, Amesbury, Bucks.

Above: A much later newspaper cutting, this time from the Daily Mail and dated 16 July 1997. Sent in by Barry Moores it answers a question posed to the Daily Mail with reference to the bombing of the Prussian Queen. (Barry Moores)

All in a Flight Engineer's Day

By John King

On the R.A.F. B-29 Washington Squadrons it was the accepted practice that the minimum sortie length would be six hours – regardless of the type of exercise the crew were authorized to carry out. When weather or equipment unserviceability precluded completion of the original plan, such as visual or radar bombing, the Captain often had to delve into his imagination in order to devise a task which would provide both useful crew training and also absorb some of the remaining flight time.

Consequently crews sometimes found themselves completing impromptu cross-country flights to some of the more obscure parts of the British Isles. On such occasions a popular solution by the Captain of WF 508 was a jaunt down to Bristol Filton airfield to carry out some ILS approaches. This instrument approach aid was then, unlike today, a rare item in the UK; furthermore, the sight of the giant Bristol Brabazon airliner undergoing flight tests in the area often rewarded the journey.

On one particular occasion, (possibly March 1952,) when faced with a solid cover of stratus over much of the UK which precluded any chance of completing the scheduled visual bombing sortie, Flt. Lt. G.W. O'Donovan opted to give his crew a chance to carry out some emergency procedures. The Washington was provided with several back-up means of lowering the undercarriage and flaps and it was towards this area that 'G.W.' turned the attention of his crew. The normal means of lowering the gear and flaps was by way of electric motors. For emergency lowering of the main gear and flaps a portable electric motor was available in the rear bomb-bay which, when necessary, was operated by the waist scanners, entering from the rear pressurized compartment. In the event of a total electrical failure the main gear could also be lowered by means of a manual hand-crank, also in the rear bomb-bay – a most tedious operation. The nose-wheel gear was lowered in an emergency by a hand-crank by the flight engineer, unless he could conn the co-pilot into doing it for him!

On the occasion in question this was the first time that any of our crew had practiced this emergency procedure. However, the two scanners, using the portable electric motor to lower each gear in turn, affected the emergency lowering of the main gear normally. It was completed without any problem with them standing on the bomb-bay walk-way. It may be noted that throughout the procedure the bomb-doors remained closed. For myself, the flight engineer, the task comprised opening the main entrance hatch and setting up the support bar for the hand crank. This was a hinged bar that lay across the front isle behind the two pilot's seats. But before the nose gear could be lowered a clutch lever, mounted inside the roof of the nose-wheel bay, had to be moved to disconnect the normal electrical drive and engage the manual drive. This item can clearly be seen in the excellent photo depicting the forward entry hatch on page 5 of issue 12 of Washington Times. The clutch is situated just ahead of the front edge of the entry hatch and to the right of the nose-wheel bracing strut. The photo also draws attention to the hand-crank mounted in the underside of the entrance hatch.

Once the entry hatch was opened and with the nose-gear in the normal retracted position, I was able to reach the clutch lever by lying on top of the twin nose-wheels. With the lever securely engaged in the manual position I closed the entry hatch and commenced the lengthy 275 turns required to extend the nose-gear. As I recall it was not a difficult operation and there was not a great deal of physical exertion involved. It was merely time-consuming. Nevertheless, once he was satisfied that the object of the exercise had been achieved – as indicated by the encouraging sight of three green lights indicating the gear down and locked – 'G.W.' opted to spare his crew any further exertion by announcing the gear would now be retracted by the normal means. For the scanners in the rear bomb-bay this presented no

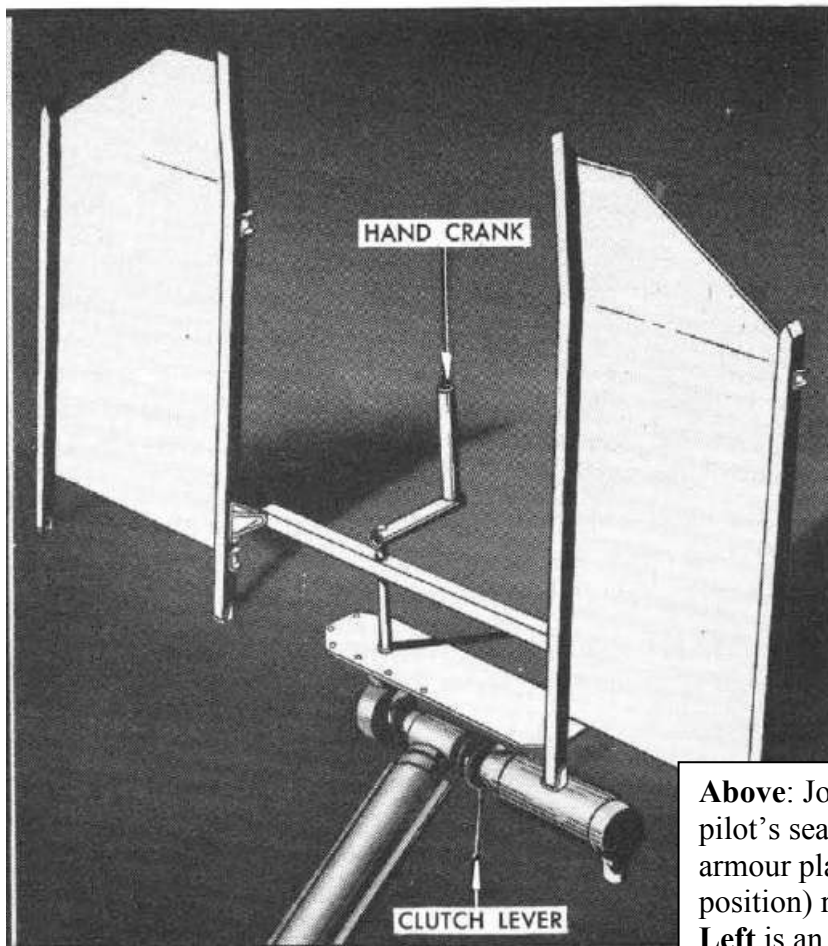
problem; they had only to disconnect the portable motor and return the clutches to the normal flight position before exiting the bomb-bay and returning to their seats. For myself, I was presented with a somewhat different situation. In order to retract the nose-gear by the normal method I had first to return the clutch lever to the normal position – easier said than done.

Picture if you will, the interior front compartment just aft of the pilot's seats. It is not altogether overly roomy at the best of times, even with the entry hatch closed. But once the hatch is opened there is precious little space to move around in, without facing the prospect of stepping over the opening. Prior to this occasion I had never opened this hatch at any time other than when we were firmly on the ground. This time, once I opened the hatch I was faced with some 8,000 feet of fresh air in very close proximity – far too close not to be wearing a parachute. This had fortunately occurred to me before opening the hatch but it did not prevent a very considerable wave of vertigo from welling over me. All that was to be seen below was the very solid cloud cover that totally obscured all sight of the ground.

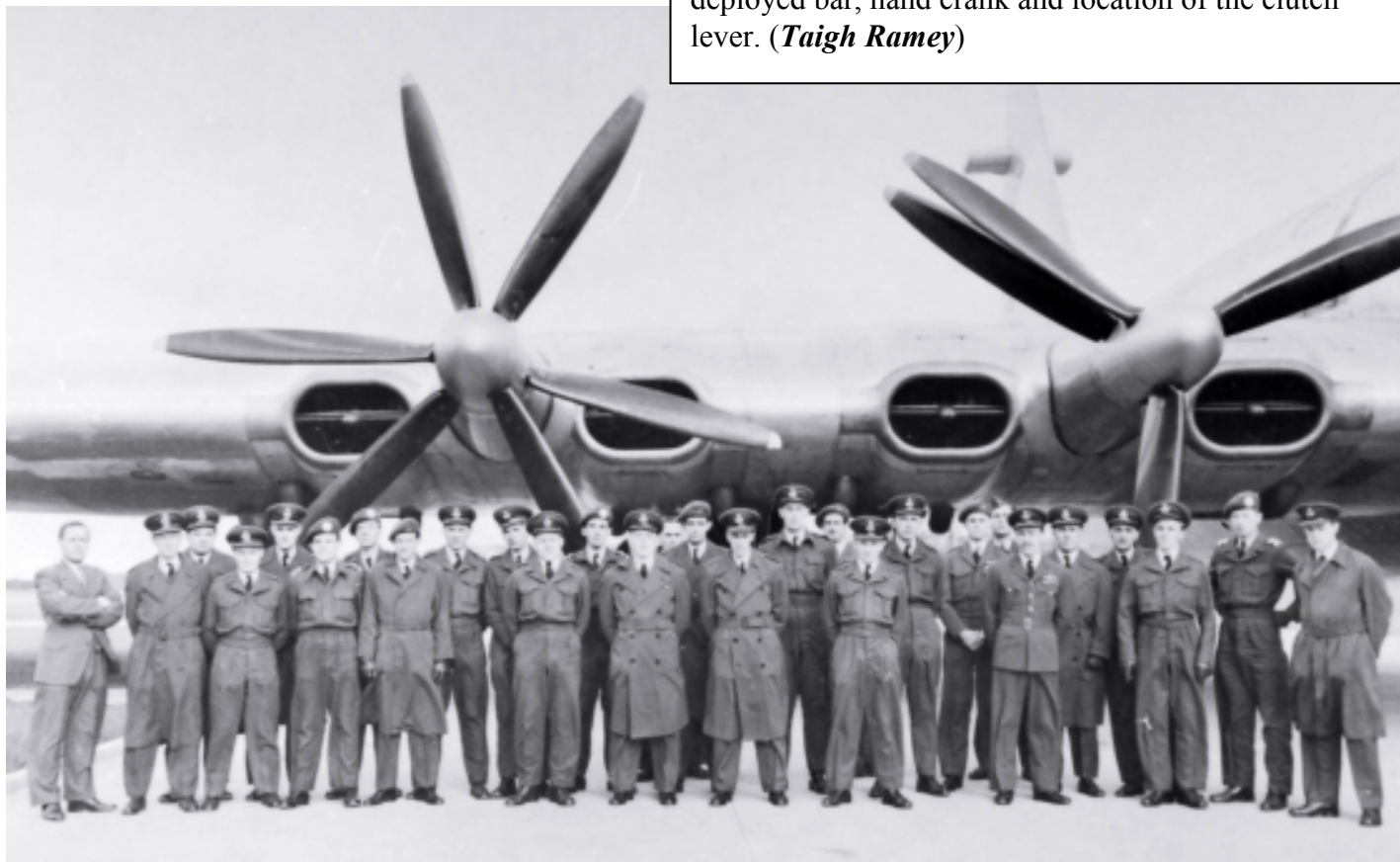
The photo referred to above is, perhaps a little misconceiving. One does not get the true impression of how difficult it would be to reach the clutch lever whilst the wheels were down, particularly whilst wearing a chest-type parachute pack. The only logical path to approach the problem was from in front of the hatchway, between the pilots. It would appear to be a simple thing to reach down and forward to manipulate the clutch lever from that position. However the presence of the central isle stand blocked all my attempts to reach the lever. I tried getting at it from my seat but then my arms were just not long enough. It soon became obvious that there was only one way to reach the elusive lever and that was for me to climb down into the open wheel well. It was not a prospect that I relished!

Glance again at the photo of the forward entry hatch and you will notice there are hand/foot holds on either wall. These we used as our normal entry and exit means and we gaily scaled them with ease when the aircraft was on the ground, even when loaded with flight rations, log-books, parachutes and all the other essential paraphernalia required to operate a B-29. Now they seemed to be little more than minute ledges that I was expected to stand on, legs fully astride the gaping void. As I gingerly commence to lower myself into the well, our nav/plotter Flt. Lt Gerry Maloney stood above me and gallantly held onto the upper portions of my harness. I doubt that he would have been able to prevent me from falling had my feet slipped, but I felt a considerable sense of comfort from his support.

By the time I was fully into the wheel well I was able to reach forward (oh! How I hated to let go the one hand!) and move the clutch lever out of the manual position. Instantly a most unexpected reaction occurred. Immediately the now un-engaged nose-wheels, being connected to neither the manual nor electric drive, became free to react to the airflow, and commenced to retract. The two wheels came rushing towards me at a high rate of knots – I followed suit but with a full half knot to spare I reached the safety of the flight deck before the wheels could knock me off my precarious perch. However, it was too much to hope that the wheels would continue their upward swing and completely retract – they in fact reached a balance between their weight and the pressure from the airflow and lazily swung in a semi-retracted position. Obviously this situation could not be permitted to continue and so I was once again committed to go down into the well and complete the movement of the clutch lever. It was an extremely relieved Sergeant Flight Engineer who finally closed the forward entry hatch and returned to the more humdrum task of monitoring the health of WF 508.



Above: Jock Milne from 44 Squadron inhabits the co-pilot's seat. Immediately behind him can be seen the armour plate and the hinged bar (in its stowed position) referred to by John. (*Eddie Malpas*)
Left is an extract from the B-29 Erection and Maintenance Instructions AN 01-20EJ-2 showing the deployed bar, hand crank and location of the clutch lever. (*Taigh Ramey*)



Above: Not in flight but the Bristol Brabazon forms an impressive back drop to a group of 207 squadron personnel during a visit to Filton. (*John Laing*)

Contacts

A list of those people who have made contact with me (**new contacts in bold**) – if you wish to contact any of them, let me know and I will pass on your request:

Michael	Achow	General Interest
Thomas	Adams	Flight Engineer 44-69680 (WF437)
Oliver	Adamson	'Bad Penny' 42-65274 (WF442)
David	Alexander	ASF RAF Marham
Ken	Alderman	Bristol Aeroplane Company, Filton
Derek	Allen	192 Squadron
Neil	Allen	Bombardier 44-69680 (WF437)
Trevor	Allwork	149 Squadron Engine Fitter
Brian	Armstrong	XV Squadron Association
Roy	Arnold	44 Squadron Air Gunner
Vic	Avery	90 / 44 Squadron Navigator
Phil	Batty	44 Squadron Signaller
Gerry	Beauvoisin	57 Squadron Air Gunner
Ray	Belsham	ASF Engine Fitter RAF Marham
Cliff	Bishop	115 / 90 Squadron Engine Fitter
Bunny	Bowers	Crew Chief WF437
Maurice	Brice	General interest
Joe	Bridge	Webmaster, RAF Marham Website
John	Bristow	207 Squadron Airframe Mechanic (WF564)
John	Broughton	207 Squadron Engine Fitter
Jeff	Brown	149 Squadron Air Gunner
Mike	Brown	115 Squadron Airframe Mechanic (WF446)
Eric	Butler	207 Squadron Armourer
Michael	Butler	Son of Harry Butler, 207 / 35 Squadron Signaller
William	Butt	115 Squadron Crew Chief
John	Care	149 Squadron Pilot (<i>deceased</i>)
Katie	Chandler	Widow of Vern Chandler, A/C 44-69680 (WF437)
Pat	Chandler	Daughter of Vern Chandler, A/C 44-69680 (WF437)
Brian	Channing	149 Squadron Navigator
Wendy	Chilcott	Sister of Ken Reakes 90 Squadron Air Gunner
Bob	Cole	149 Squadron Electrical Fitter (WF498)
Terry	Collins	XV Squadron Engine Fitter
Doug	Cook OBE	44 Squadron Co-Pilot (WF508)
John	Cornwall	192 Squadron Aircrew
John	Cowie	207 Squadron Air Gunner
John (Buster)	Crabbe	207 Squadron Crew Chief
Don	Crossley	90 Squadron Signaller
Howard	Currie	44 Squadron Pilot (<i>deceased</i>)
Bernard	Davenport	90 Squadron Air Gunner
Mike	Davies	90 Squadron Air Gunner
Gordon	Dickie	35 Squadron Airframe Mechanic
Basil	Dilworth	XV / 192 Squadron Navigator
Keith	Dutton	90 Squadron Air Gunner
Ray	Elliott	Pilot 'Bad Penny' 42-65274 (WF442)
Peter	Fahey	35 Squadron Electrician
Peter	Fairbairn	35 Squadron Engine Fitter

Tony	Fairbairn	Lived near 23MU, RAF Aldergrove
Les	Feakes	149 Squadron Air Gunner
Geoff	Fielding	Air Gunner
Ken	Firth	44 Squadron Air Gunner
Charles	Fox	Bombardier 42-94052 (WF444)
Dave	Forster	Researching RAF ELINT Squadrons
John	Forster	207 Squadron / WCU Air Gunner
John	Francis	192 Squadron Engine Fitter
Ray	Francis	57 Squadron Association
Gordon	Galletly	44 Squadron Navigator / Bombardier
Norman	Galvin	XV Squadron Engine Fitter
Alan	Gamble	90 Squadron Radio Operator
Brian	Gennings	Ground Maintenance Hanger
Bob	Goater	XV Squadron Instrument NCO
Tony	Goodsall	90 Squadron Air Gunner
Kevin	Grant	207 Squadron Air Gunner
John	Hanby	207 Squadron Engine Fitter
Ken	Harding	44 Squadron Signaller
Alan	Haslock	ASF Turret Armourer
Charles	Henning	CFC 'Bad Penny' 42-65274 (WF442)
John	Hewitt	Fire Section RAF Coningsby
Peter	Higgins	207 Squadron Air Gunner
Roy	Hild	Pilot 42-94052 (WF444)
Tony	Hill	Archivist P&EEE Shoeburyness
John	Hobbs	149 Squadron Air Gunner
Julian	Horn	RAF Watton Website
Henry	Horscroft	44 Squadron Association
Brian	Howes	115 Squadron
John	Howett	A/C 44-61688 (WF498)
Ernest	Howlett	44 Squadron Engine Fitter (WF512)
Alex	Hughson	Brother of Sgt Hughson 90 Squadron Air Gunner
Tamar	Hughson	Neice of Sgt Hughson 90 Squadron Air Gunner
Ken	Hunter	90 Squadron Navigator
Paul	Hunter	Flight Engineer 'Bad Penny' 42-65274 (WF442)
Jimmy	James	Engine Fitter
Ron	Jupp	Vickers Guided Weapons Department, Weybridge (<i>deceased</i>)
David	Karr	Nephew of William Karr, XV Squadron Air Gunner
J.	Kendal (Ken)	90 Squadron ??
R (Dick)	Kent	35 Squadron
Andrew	Kerzner	Tail Gunner 44-69680 (WF437)
John	King	44 Squadron Flight Engineer
John	Kingston	CFC RAF Marham
John	Laing	207 Squadron Air Gunner
George	Lane	Navigator 44-69680 (WF437) (<i>deceased</i>)
Peter	Large	Brother of Edward Large, 44 Squadron Pilot
Pete	Lewis	149 Squadron Engine Fitter
David	Male	Bristol Aeroplane Company, Filton
Gerry	Maloney	44 Squadron Navigator/Bomb Aimer (WF508)
Patrick	McGrath	115 Squadron Pilot
P.	McLaughlin	Engineering Officer, Pyote Texas

John	Moore	Air Traffic Control, RAF Coningsby
Peter	Morrey	57 / 115 Squadron Air Gunner
Mo	Mowbrey	57 Squadron Air Gunner
Don	Neudegg	115 Squadron Air Gunner
Pat	O'Leary	RAF Coningsby Armourer
Brian	O'Riordan	192 Squadron Ground crew
Ralph	Painting	57 / 192 Squadron Flight Engineer
Harry	Palmer	44 / 57 / 115 Squadron Air Gunner
Tom	Pawson	35 Squadron Signaller
Bob	Pleace	XV Squadron Pilot
Chris	Petherington	207 Squadron Pilot
Ian	Qusklay	90 Squadron Air Gunner
Harry	Rickwood	149 Squadron Electrical Fitter
Phil	Rivkin	90 Squadron Signaller
Harold	Roberts	Witness to crash of WF502
Ivor	Samuel	207 Squadron Air Gunner
William	Santavicca	Gunner 'Look Homeward Angel', 6 th Bomb Group Association
Sheelah	Sloane	Daughter of Sqdn Ldr Sloane, OC 90 Squadron
Richard	Sloane	Son of Sqdn Ldr Sloane, OC 90 Squadron
Steve	Smisek	Son of A/C of City of San Francisco (K-29, 330 th Bomb Group)
Joe	Somerville	RAF Marham Engine Fitter
Paul	Stancliffe	192 Squadron Co-pilot
David	Stanford	192 Squadron Radar Mechanic
Derek	Stanley	57 Squadron Radio Engineer
Jim	Stanley	
Adrian	Stevens	192 Squadron Air Wireless Fitter
Bill	Stevenson	35 / 635 Squadron Association
Harry	Stoneham	44 Squadron / A.S.F. Engine Fitter
Ron	Street	90 Squadron Pilot (WF503)
Harold	Tadea	'Bad Penny' 42-65274 (WF442)
Tim	Thewlis	General interest in Washingtons
Albert	Urquhart	Left Gunner K-39, 330 th Bomb Group
Dave	Villars	44 Squadron Electrical Fitter
Peter	Walder	44 Squadron Radar Fitter
Geoff	Webb	57 Squadron Engine Fitter (WF558)
A	Whatman	
Colin	Williams	XV Squadron Navigator / Bombardier
John	Williams	XV / 207 Squadron Air Gunner
Robert	Willman	A/C 42-93976 (WF440)
Charlie	Woolford	90 Squadron
Stephen	Wynne	Son of Sgt Jack Wynne 57 Squadron co-pilot