

HANDLEY PAGE HALIFAX V - LL145 - 517 SQUADRON, R.A.F. SKIBBEREEN, 21 APRIL 1944



On April 21, 1944, M. Jennings of Skibbereen must have thought that his field, 'The Marsh' was going to become an airfield, when for the second time in less than a month, an Allied bomber chose his field to make an emergency landing. On March 16th previous, an American B-26 Marauder had made an emergency landing in the same field next to Skibbereen town.

The incident of April 21st is recorded in the Irish Army reports G2/X/1307 and ACF-S-217. Prior to the landing, the aircraft had been reported flying around the south Cork area by army and police posts.

The station master of Skibbereen station later reported, on April 21, 1944, at mid day, he lit some straw to attract the attention of an aircraft flying around the town. The aircraft, a Halifax bomber, landed thereafter at 12:16. bounced twice, passed through a fence and hitting a grazing heifer. The unfortunate animal subsequently had to be destroyed. The station master at that time was one Thomas "Toss" Barry who was an early aviator it seems. If this is the man recorded in the Irish Military Archives Report, then it explains his actions in lighting the straw.

Members of the Local Defence Force (LDF) took the crew into custody at the site until regular Irish Army troops could arrive.

The Irish Army recorded the names of those on board and using the information received in this research they were:

Sgt Arthur W Ashworth 1474249	- 1st Pilot
of Hayburn Court, Shipley, Yorkshire (See below)	
Sgt Jack Musk 1331422	- 2nd Pilot
67A Higher Bents Lane, Bredbury, Nr. Stockport (The Irish Army recorded his name as John)	
F/Sgt Alan Stewart Lawes 417206 RAAF	- Navigator
of Moore St., Gawler, New South Wales, Australia	
Sgt. Donald Travers 1819689	- Engineer
of Stapleford, Nottingham	
Sgt Alan Mitchinson 1040987	- Wireless Operator / Air Gunner (W/O AG)
of Rossmere, Stockton Road, West Hartlepool, Co. Durham	
Sgt Robert Wright 656650	- W/O AG
of Westquarter, Falkirk, Stirlingshire	
Sgt Frederick John Pouné 1336836	- W/O AG
of Boulton St, Alvaston, Derby	
Sgt John Alan Barthram 1876801	- Meteorological Officer
of Newivham Manor, Crownmarsh, nr Wallingford, Berks	

The crew first reported that they were undertaking a search and rescue mission but the Irish Army report later records that they did admit to being on a Meteorological reconnaissance flight out into the Bay of Biscay from their base of "St. Davids" (sic), Wales.

Gerald O'Brien, of Skibbereen recalls *"Now 72 years old, I have retained a vivid memory of the events of that day of April of '44 all through my life. I was just turned nine at the time and, not surprisingly, I was in class at school when the drama began. Our first apprehension was that of sound - a very loud roar from the four 1800 hp Bristol Hercules aero engines roaring over our heads, not much short of roof-top altitude as the cool headed Pilot, with great skill, coaxed the aircraft from the skies onto a large field, known as "The Marsh", right beside the town. Fearful for our safety, the Headmaster ordered all out of school without delay into the adjoining play yard. I am glad he did so, for it was from there that I had witnessed the image of the Halifax on her last circling before coming to earth. The surrounding buildings precluded all possibility of seeing the actual touch-down. Suddenly the noise had ceased, after which we were ordered back to our seats in the class rooms. Before resuming studies, our teacher told us that all was well, that the 'plane which we had seen had by then "landed safely on the Marsh". At lunch time, we got a fine view of the undamaged bomber resting on the grass, across the river, from a porch off North Street."*

One of the crew men, Arthur Ashworth is reported to have requested a doctor and upon being seen was confined to bed for 2 days although little else is mentioned about this and it is unknown if he missed the ensuing entertainment. The aircraft and it's crew had by now become a center of local attention with the aircraft visible from across the river. In an effort to show them hospitality before being processed by the authorities they were taken to the nearby West Cork hotel and Alan's description above relates the story thereafter. The local Red Cross members attempted to invite the men to a local dance but were refused permission by the military authorities due to the level of hospitality shown to them already! The crew were accommodated in the West Cork Hotel. The files report that on April 23rd, seven men were brought to Rinneanna military post, the location of modern day Shannon airport. Later that day they were further driven to the border with Northern Ireland and handed over to the British authorities. John Pounes log book shows that some or all of the crew were picked up at Ballyhalbert airfield in Northern Ireland by Halifax 'C' of 517 Sqn on April 25th.

Pat MacCarthy from Drinagh, Cork, then a member of the Irish Army 2nd Cycle Squadron based at Bantry and now a retired farmer of 88 years, wrote in reply to the letter in the Southern Star: *"In my youth I was a member of the Irish Army and one of those who took over responsibility for the Halifax bomber after the landing on the Marsh near Skibbereen town"*

"This plane was later dismantled and transported across the border into Northern Ireland in exchange for a consignment of tea as this was a very scarce commodity in Ireland at the time.

At the time the pilot made a perfect wheels down landing on the Marsh with nothing to guide him but his own good judgment. This was a great achievement to be able to land a four engined Halifax bomber plane without the use of any modern technology."

Pat was photographed by Frank Roche with five of his comrades standing below the partially dismantled hulk of the bomber. This photo appeared in a 1985 copy of the Southern Star where some of the veterans remembered they had to pitch tent on the Marsh while the aircrew were accommodated in the West Cork Hotel.

Local man Cornelius Connolly reported to Gerald O'Brien in late 2007 that he recalled, also having seen an aircraft land on the marsh, that before there was any dialogue with the LDF personnel on the ground, "*the entire crew lined up to give a special salute to the Pilot, of thanks and admiration for what he had just accomplished*".

The aircraft, Handley Page Halifax V, serial number LL145, of RAF 517 (Meteorological) Squadron, had taken off for an 'Epicure B' weather reconnaissance flight over the Bay of Biscay from its base at Brawdy in Wales at 01:15 that day. Brawdy - 45N08W - 43N 14W - Brawdy (positions approximate).

Eleven and a half hours later they had to make their impromptu visit to Skibbereen. John A. Barthram, then the Meteorological Air Observer (MAO) on board the aircraft describes what happened to the crew thereafter!

"You may be interested in my recollections of the flight - errors and omissions accepted !! One incident, which I am sure was not mentioned at the debrief, was that due to an unfortunate misunderstanding the pitot head cover was left on during pre-flight inspection. The mistake did not show itself until the aircraft was gaining speed on take-off, then too fast to abort. The aircraft was very heavy with extra fuel tanks in the bomb bay. The problem was overcome by using an axe to smash the Perspex window in the bottom of the fuselage just below my "desk" at the front. By lying sideways against my seat the Canadian (?) managed to extend his arm far enough out to remove the cover. I had tried but found the airstream too strong to reach that far, so full marks to the RCAF/RAAF. Also I then went back to help pump up the undercarriage as its hydraulics had failed ! As far as I remember the weather was benign though a lot of cloud and the trip then seemed routine. The outbound leg finished with a " box climb " to about 18,000ft (500mb). At around this time the radio operator told me he had been unable to pass my last two messages so hold the next for the time being. Apparently no radio bearings could be obtained , and also no astro-nav. We were now returning and to conserve fuel a gradual descent (not box) was made. Eventually we were placed well west of track and too low on fuel to make England. We diverted to Skibbereen which was marked as an emergency landing ground on our maps. Arthur made a very good landing (wheels pumped down) though it did entail going through a dividing hedge/wall that separated the two fields that were the landing area, and it was said we hit a cow!

We were taken to a nearby hotel - I can't remember the name but it would be to the S-SE of the town and near a bridge. Here we were generously but excessively supplied with strong drink and my memory definitely fails ! I do remember somebody saying that a Court had been in progress in the town and when they heard an aircraft had landed just everybody left to look ! I think it was one of the solicitors that told us this, and vaguely I think he was in Army uniform, Within days we were taken by car to Belfast and debriefed at Stormont - they may have more accurate records. (John Barthram, E-mail 28th January 2007)

Donald Travers passed away in hospital in Nottingham in September 2008, after helping his sisters to recount what he could of the incident. Don Travers sisters still live at the address that Don gave to the Irish Army all the way back in 1944. He was able to retell a quite a story however.

Glennis Travers, sister of Donald Travers, recounted Donald's story:

"He remembers the Skibbereen incident and he really appreciated hearing your letter. He said it had been an interesting afternoon.

Don often used to bring Air Force mates with him when he came home on leave and we think that Fred Pounes may have been one of those who came. Alan Lawes is a name that Jean and I remember well though we're not certain that he actually came to the house.

Don was only 19 at the time of Skibbereen and we think he was the youngest member of the crew. He may, I think, have had the nickname 'Titch'. He is non too tall.

Your letter was most interesting to us as until then, although we were familiar with the Skibbereen incident and "being held prisoner in the pub!", we did not know the full details of the circumstances which led to the emergency landing, nor did we know the name of the pub/hotel where they were housed. We did, however, know that they landed in a field and unfortunately hit a cow.

Over the years Don's told us many stories of his time there and we must extend our thanks to the people of Skibbereen for their kindness and generosity to Don and the rest of the crew at that time.

Being on duty, Don of course, only had his flying boots as footwear and one day whilst he was in the town, someone in the town, presumably a resident, took him into a shop and bought him a pair of shoes, allowing him to pick any pair he wanted.

We've been given to understand, over the years, that there actually was a dance to which the crew were invited.

On one occasion Don was a bit 'merry' one night (which we seem to think was also the night of the dance) and when he woke up the next morning, he found that five pounds had been tucked into his pocket. Five pounds was quite a considerable amount of money in those days.

We've also always understood that the local authorities were originally going to allow them to fly the aircraft out, but later decided against this on the grounds that it was too close to the town for safety and that was why it had to be dismantled.

Sorry, but we can't throw any light on who was writing to the young lady you mentioned.

Regrettably his log book no longer exist.

517 is the only squadron I can recall him mentioning.

Don volunteered for service whilst he was 17. He was a Flight Engineer in Coastal Command. We think he was demobbed sometime in 1946.

In his early days in the RAF he was based in the Torquay area (this may possibly have been whilst training). There was a bomb raid whilst he was there and a school was hit. Don was amongst those who helped with the rescue/recovery operation.

After being demobbed Don returned to his occupation as a motor mechanic, and worked in the motor trade for many years. At the time of his retirement, however, he was working for British Rail in a supervisory capacity on the engineering side."

One of Donald first postings was to Initial Training Wings in Torquay in the spring of 1943. On Sunday 30th May 1943 the St. Marychurch parish church was bombed in Torquay killing a number of children. Donald then trained with the School of Technical Training at St. Athan before being sent to the Meteorological Conversion Unit (MCU) in January 1944 where he no doubt met his future crew. His posting to the MCU and 517 Squadron matches that of Frederick Pounes and Jack Musk. He flew with 517 Squadron up until September 1945 where he was posted to three training units, including 4 O.T.U which flew Sunderland flying boats.

One small mystery was raised by Donald Travers whose sister provided us with a copy of a rather battered photo of Don standing beside an Irish army soldier. Not knowing who

this was, the Southern Star newspaper were kind enough to print the photo and a small letter. This raised the interest of Gerald O'Brien quoted above and also succeeded in finding the Irish soldiers identity. He was one Denis Twomey, a solicitor, then serving with the Local Defense Force (LDF) in the area. His daughter, Ann Twomey Bell, recalled that she heard *'many stories of about the 'capture' of the RAF men and the wonderful time that followed!! He was a great pianist and there was lots of music and song during the lock in'*. Denis, sadly, passed away in 1992. He may well be the gentleman that John Barthram remembers in his story above.

A letter in the Falkirk Herald put me in touch with the Wright family. Bob Wright, son of Robert Wright on LL145, remembered his father telling him the story of the Skibbereen landing but in his own words: *"I have told this story to friends for years, some from Ireland, not knowing how true it all was."*

"My recollections of the story was that they made an emergency landing in the south of Ireland (did not know exactly where), they killed a cow, and he went into great detail how they were shown a great time in the town and the prison, I mean pub!!!! My mum also told me she received a telegram from the government stating my Dad was taken prisoner (POW), but it did not say where. Unknown to her he was having a whale of a time in Skibbereen, Cork"

"He never spoke much about the war and the RAF, but I'm so glad he told me about the time he visited Skibbereen on the 21st of April, 1944. Which believe it or not, is my dad's birthday! Maybe that was the real reason for the visit?"

"They also said he spoke of "Titch"(Don Travers) highly. I'm sure I can remember him saying that "Titch" banged his head on the door of the Halifax, when exiting on the "marsh" in his hurry, which they found funny as he was the smallest of the crew!"

Bob and his sister and her husband visited Skibereen in April 2008 on the anniversary of the landing and their fathers birthday. Bob reported back:

The family of Alan Mitchinson were very helpful in their responses to my letter in a local Hartlepool paper. Daughters, Jan and Anne and Son David were delighted to be shown the collection of photos and to get details of the incident at the heart of this story.

Alan Mitchinson passed away in 1990 but had passed on the tale of his adventures to his family over the years. Like Fred Pouné, Alan also joined the police after the war but returned to his first trade, that of a plasterer, setting up his own business in 1960's. David his son recalled of him *"My father told me many years ago about this event, although his words are now very vague I shall always remember the gratitude he paid to the people of Ireland who showed him grate respect and compassion. He said he would never forget them."*

David Mitchinson and his son visited Skibereen in December 2007 to visit the town for themselves. Alan reported to me *"The marsh in Skibbereen is now being excavated for what appears to be a large Housing Development as you had previously mentioned so it was no surprise to us that we would find it difficult to imagine where the Halifax V landed in relation to the town of Skibbereen, thanks to photo's of events of that day we managed to pinpoint with almost certainty where the Halifax came to rest and the direction in which the Aircraft came in to land, can you imagine our excitement, we only wish we could have walked to the spot on the marsh where Dad and his bewildered crew members had touched terra ferma, a moment missed for my son and I but one I am sure my Dad always remembered."*

Whilst staying in the West Cork Hotel in Skibbereen we decided to tour the local area, we couldn't help but notice the hills and mountains on our journey to Baltimore where it was said the Halifax was seen on that day flying over the southern part of the mainland, I find it remarkable that given the terrain in this area the pilot and crew of the Halifax ever found there way to the marsh in Skibbereen, perhaps they followed the

river Ille inland until they came across what must have been utopia to them when they spotted the marsh, a daunting task for any pilot to land an aircraft of that size and weight given that the ground must have been soft or waterlogged especially at that time of the year, the marsh must have been the only possible area where the pilot could have landed the aircraft, an amazing feat for any pilot I would imagine which makes it even more remarkable. You will also have noticed that the pilot landed the Halifax very close to the banks of the river Ille, this I believe was probably because the ground close to the river would have been better drained and perhaps a more favourable area on the marsh to land the aircraft, who knows, either way looking at the area it was a miracle that the Halifax landed in one piece, I couldn't imagine that a wheels up landing was an option given the size of the aircraft, it's gun turrets beneath and the size of the propellers."

And what of the Halifax, LL145? This was one of a batch of almost 500 aircraft built by the Rootes Securities company. It was a Halifax Mark V aircraft powered by four Rolls Royce Merlin 22 engines. While it was able to land in 'The Marsh' it was not possible to fly the aircraft out and so the Irish Air Corps proceeded to dismantle the aircraft in a 23 day operation bearing in mind that the aircraft's basic dimensions were a wing span of 104 ft (31.7 m) and a length of 71 ft 7 in (21.8 m). The disassembled aircraft was then trucked across the border. Local man Frank Roche seems to have been able to get quite free access to the aircraft during this time as he was able to send a number of pictures of its arrival and dismantling to John Pouné.



517 Squadron formed from No 1404 Flight at St Eval on 11 August 1943. It continued to conduct meteorological reconnaissance duties after this. Intended to be equipped with Halifaxes, it used Hudsons and Hampdens until October.

In between the Hudsons leaving in September 1943 and the arrival of the Halifaxes in November, four B-17s of the 379th Squadron USAAF were attached. Halifax Vs arrived in November and at the same time the squadron moved to St David's. In February 1944 it moved again, this time to Brawdy, where it received Halifax IIIs in February 1945. The following November a further move took place to Chivenor, where the squadron disbanded on 21 June 1946. See map at end of this document. *(Text and squadron crest from website,*

www.rafweb.org)

Tragically, two members of the crew that day would be dead before the end of 1944, Jack Musk* and Arthur Ashworth. Both were lost at sea while on flying operations.

Arthur W Ashworth, aged 21, was lost at sea 30th July 1944 when Wellington HF449 of 172 Squadron was lost after having radioed that they were going to make an attack on a submarine. Arthur is remembered on panel 215 of the Runnymede Memorial to RAF Airmen whose remains were never recovered. Arthur was the son of Herbert and Gladys Mary Ashworth, of Shipley but who later moved to Hest Bank, Lancashire. Speaking to local's in Hest Bank in 2007, revealed that the family no longer lived in the area but there was a memory that a family named Ashworth did live in the village. The Bradford Library local history office was able to find a small article in the Bradford Telegraph and Argus, from March 12, 1943. L.A.C. Ashworth received his 'wings' at a flying training school at Estevan, Saskatchewan, Canada, most probably with 38 Service Flying training School and passed as a bomber pilot. He attended Keighley Grammar School, and was formerly a member of the Shipley (387) A.T.C. Squadron. Aged 19, he was previously employed by a firm of accountants. His parents, Herbert and Gladys Ashworth, lived at 43, Leyburn

Grove, Shipley. Sadly, Arthur was their only child. A letter in the local paper however found four people who knew Arthur and his parents. One former RAF airman called to say that he knew Arthur when both of them served in the ATC and he went on to serve alongside Arthur at RAF Chivenor where 172 Squadron was based and had nice memories of Arthur. Another very kind friend of the family contacted to tell what they knew. Mrs. J Walker's family moved to the same street as the Ashworth's in 1943. She never met Arthur herself as he was away on service but one thing she remembers clearly is that Arthur once sent a crate of Bananas to his parents from his overseas service, perhaps from a trip to North Africa or else where. His instructions were that all the children of the street were to get one. Later, Herbert and Gladys moved away and eventually lived in Hest Bank where they are named on the CWGC records. Gladys passed away in the early 1960's. Mrs. Nancy Gingell called also to say she remembered the Ashworth's from their time both in Shipley and Hest Bank. Her brother Dickie Wadsworth had been very close friends with Arthur and the two of them lost their lives in separate aircraft losses within weeks of each other in 1944. Finally, a school friend of both Arthur and Dickie Wadsworth, Mr. Harry Clough wrote to include his memories of Arthur. Both he and Arthur had worked as article clerks for the same accountant in Bradford. He recalls Alan Lawes visiting on leave with Arthur and they also became friends.

Jack Musk, aged 22, was lost on November 10, 1944 when the Halifax of 518 Squadron he was with reported an engine failure. Nothing further was heard from Halifax LK706, L for Love, or its eight man crew. Jack is remembered on Panel 220 of the Runnymede Memorial. His niece's husband Mike Brown has researched Jack's life and wartime career. It was because of Mike's letter about Jack in the Macclesfield School 2006 Gazette Newsletter that I was able to make contact with him. He was married in December 1943 and he and his wife Joan lived at Higher Bents Lane in Bredbury near his parents. His story is presented below from Mike Brown's letter in the The King's School in Macclesfield Gazette.

In 2007 I asked Brian Booth if he might have any further information regarding the crew men on board the aircraft. It turned out that John Barthram was a senior weather forecaster in the 1960's while Brian was beginning his career as forecaster. While they were both civilians they worked at the Main Meteorological Office at RAF Upavon and the two now live a short distance from each other. As Brian explained, other than during the war, or whilst on active service, Met Office staff have always been civilians. John Barthram flew only once or twice with Arthur Ashworth's crew and hence does not know the men well.

And how did we find the Lawes family? The Australian National Archives and Australian War Museum Nominal Roll both list Alan S Lawes as coming from Gawler, I mailed the local newspaper and within a week Heather was able to contact me. Alan S. Lawes passed away in June 2004. He was the local President of Returned Soldiers League for many years, and a State Councilor for 11 years. It seems that Alan tried to convince both Don Travers and Robert Wright to move to Australia after the war's end but neither of them made the move. Heather recalls that Alan never mentioned much about the war but he did tell them some stories

"We did know a bit about Ireland but the story like all of his war tales came in fragments. Dad was a navigator in the Halifaxes and I remember Dad saying ... they had gone off course...not sure why.... Maybe something went wrong with some instruments.... they ran out of fuel and were forced to land ... the words he used were they were 'interned' in Ireland. I have this vague recollection that stuck in my mind that they

had to eat? papers before they landed.... That bit stuck in my mind from a very early age. I vaguely remember him saying they also had to burn papers in the plane before they landed... all of which I would have imagined to be highly dangerous. These papers were obviously highly secretive and not to enter enemies hands.

My older brother Barry thinks that when Dad's crew crash landed they managed to land but the plane was badly damaged and couldn't be flown back."

I found it interesting that you mentioned the date of 21st April ... so close to Anzac day. Dad always treasured the 25th April (ANZAC day) for Australians that day is very significant."

As luck would have it, there was but one Poune named in the 2007 phone directory for Derby. A letter to that address received a warm reply from Sue Poune, Frederick John Poune's wife. Sue remembered that:

John often spoke of his time in the RAF and I am aware of the landing in Ireland. He mentioned the unfortunate incident with the cow, and being plied with lots of booze and being welcomed rather than being interned which I understand they should have been by a neutral country.

Fred Poune was later known as John and passed away in 1992 but he left after him an impressive collection of photographs and his log book.

Investigation of these photos and documents shows that this was not the first time some of the crew were in Ireland as six of them at least were put together as a crew whilst training with 7 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit (C) O.T.U.) at Limavady in County Derry, Northern Ireland. It would appear that local Skibbereen photographer Frank Roche swapped addresses with F J Poune and sent him copies of photos taken on the day of the landing and also of the dismantling of 'George', as the plane came to be referred to locally. On leaving the RAF, John worked for the railway works in Derby. After a time he joined Derbyshire Constabulary, on the beat and then in CID. When he left the Police he started work as a Private Investigator. Investigation of John's log book shows that he first flew with Arthur Ashworth on 7 September 1943 in Wellington, number 52 from Limavady in Northern Ireland. They then went on the MCU based at Tiree and from there to 517 Squadron where John's first flight was on 23 February 1944 with Ashworth in Halifax 'K'. John's last flight with Ashworth was on 12 June 1944 and Arthur would be lost little over a month later in the action described above.

John's log book goes on to show the 517 Squadron missions that brought him to Port Lyautey in French Morocco, Gibraltar and Rabat, Casablanca. No doubt, some more of the LL145 crew were with him or on similar missions, missions that are recorded as lasting up to 10 hours at a time.

Robert Wright's son Robert (Bob) kindly replied to a letter I had printed in the Falkirk Herald in October 2007. Robert Wright left the RAF in 1946 and finished his working life with the British Aluminium plant in Falkirk. Robert was married at the time of the landing and had two daughters until Bob came along. Both Robert and his wife Mary have passed away but they are survived by a large group of grandchildren. In April 2008, Robert and his sister Rosina and her husband visited Skibbereen where Gerald O'Brien showed them around the local area. Robert reported "*We had a good journey down and arrived just after lunch and booked into the West Cork Hotel, where my dad and the rest of the Halifax LL145 crew were housed in 1944. I must say it is a lovely hotel with friendly staff who knew about the landing and were interested to talk to us about it.*

We did not do to much on the Saturday (19th) apart from walk around the town and sample the local hospitality and down a few Guinness's!!!!

That all changed on the Sunday when we met, as arranged, Gerald O'Brien, who you had put me in contact with. What a great man, what a character, what a gentleman. He made our day and our trip so worthwhile. You would not believe his 74 years and the fact he was there at the landing at the age of 9.

After meeting in the hotel, he went through the old original RAF photos of my Dad as well as old photos of our family. We then showed him my dad's old flight log book, which being a historian, absolutely amazed him. We all commented that the book had returned to the west cork hotel, Skibbereen, again 64 years since it's first visit. He took great delight in seeing the entry for the 21st of April 1944, "forced landing in Eire". Gerald then showed us his "and time stood still" book of the local pictorial history of Skibbereen, which Gerald help to put together. And there on page 138 is a picture of my dad, Don Travers, and Fred Pouné, as well as Frank Roche's wonderful photos of the Halifax on the marsh. It is amazing to think the plane and crew are a part of this towns history.

Gerald was then kind enough to show us his old school and recount the day the Halifax flew over the school as though it was yesterday. We then took a trip up to a vantage spot above the town to look down at the marsh, which is undergoing lots of drainage work, but you could imagine in your minds eye, the landing and what a difficult task it must have been for Mr Ashworth to land the plane safely.

After that Gerald took us sight seeing. Firstly to Lough Hyne, a beautiful tranquil place, then down to the lovely harbour of Baltimore. He took us up to the breathtaking cliffs at Baltimore Beacon where the Titanic sailed by on her fateful journey. It really is beautiful part of the world. After a late dinner, Gerald took us back to our hotel, a full 6 hours after we first met, which just flew by. We could not thank him enough.

We sat and recounted our day in the hotel bar with a few of the staff. Gerald is a bit of a local celebrity. Next day, the actual anniversary of the landing we met Gerald for tea, before setting off back to Cork airport. He wrote a thoughtful message on the Skibbereen book and gave me the book. An amazing gesture."

And what of the man who took those superb photos?

Frank Roche replied to me in 2008 to say hello. He lives now in Dublin having retired from his job in the motor industry some time ago. He has two sons but sadly his wife passed away some time ago. In his letter he does say 'we did everything for the crew during the time they were in Skibbereen. I wrote to sergeant Pouné often.' With his card he included this article which was written about him at his retirement.

Long link with motor trade

FRANK ROCHE of Walkinstown, Dublin, who retired recently after 31 years service with Motor Distributors Ltd., Dublin, is pictured here with the last Volkswagen beetle to roll off the assembly line at the Nass Road factory in Dublin.

A native of Skibbereen in West Cork, Frank worked for twenty years in the assembly line, nine years in Volkswagen leasing and

for the last two years with Motor Distributors Ltd., as security officer.

He was made presentations of a gold watch, a silver tea-set, an automatic tea-maker and a wallet of notes by the management and his former workmates.

Frank served his time in W. G. Woods garage, Skibbereen.

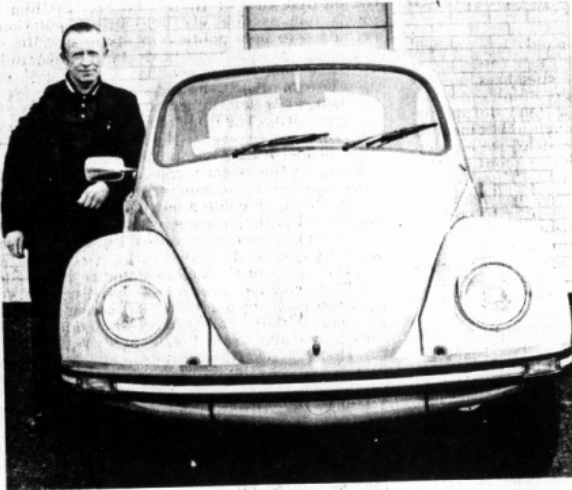
He joined the Local Defence Force (now the FCA) during the Emergency

years (1939-45) and was for a number of years in the local fire brigade.

He also spent a period as mail car driver from Skibbereen to Crookhaven.

A keen photographer, he has a large collection of albums of historical interest.

He always maintained his links with Skibbereen and spent his holidays there with his sister, MRS. JACK POWER.



Note: Compiled from

- 1.) Information from notes taken by Martin Gleeson and myself from Irish Military files, by Martin's review of the Squadron records,
- 2.) From the assistance of Adrian Healy in Skibbereen who supplied us with extracts from the 2003 Past Pupils Union of The de la Salle school book titled 'As Time Stood Still'. The book contains 3 photos of the event, including a photo of 3 crew members. Adrian is involved with the Heritage Center in Skibbereen.
- 3.) Brian Booth was the man kind enough to put me in touch with John Barthram and Brian has been able to inform me well of the technical aspects of Met Flight operations.
- 4.) From John Barthram, has been a wealth of information for us and been able to give us a great insight into this incident and MET operations in general from some one who was actually there.
- 5.) From the sisters of Donald Travers, Glennis and Jean, were kind enough to send a very informative and entertaining letter on behalf of their brother, Donald.
- 6.) Heather Lawes in Australia was kind enough to contact us with information about her father, Alan.
- 7.) From Sue Pouné who was willing and able to give us such wonderful help and shared with us John Pouné's photos and documents.
- 8.) From Bob Wright, for his enthusiastic help and interest in his father's 1944 birthday activities. From information supplied by Mike Brown about his wife's uncle, Jack Musk.
- 9.) Also, Ann Bell from Skibbereen who's father Dennis Twomey was pictured with Donald Travers in 1944.
- 10.) Gerald O'Brien from Skibbereen, 9 years of age at the time of the landing, gave us his memories of the day also.

11.) Pat MacCarthy from Drinagh, then a member of the Irish Armies 2nd Cycle Squadron based at Bantry who shared his memories.

12.) From the Mitchinson family, Ann, Jan and Alan for your interest and information shared.

13. Correspondences with H. Clough, J. Walker and N. Gingell

14. Correspondence with Frank Roche, the photographer of G for George.

* The Irish Army recorded Jack's name as John Musk.

Images

For a greater collection of photos visit secure album on the internet at
<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=18779&l=4a7c5&id=689447657>
[Note New address 26th May 2008]



Halifax LL145 at Skibbereen. Photo taken by local man Frank Roche who still lives in Dublin.



LL145 may have flown in but she left as shown above, dismantled and carried away on lowloader lorries.

This superb photo was among John Pounes and is captioned:
7 (C) OTU Limavady NI September 27 1943.



On the back are the signatures of:

W/O AG
A Mitchinson

1st Pilot
A Ashworth

W/O AG
F J Pounes

2nd Pilot
J Musk

Navigator
A S Lawes

W/O AG
R Wright

John Barthram was kind enough to provide this photo of himself from 1949. He has very few photos from his war time service. And making up the full crew of LL145 is Don Travers:



John A Barthram



Donald Travers



This was taken clearly during the mens training with 7 Coastal Operational Training Unit based at Limavady in Northern Ireland. The above photo was among those of John Pounes also but unfortunately carries no names or caption. From the other photos I would suggest that the back row contains: Lawes, Pounes ?, Mitchinson, Wright
Front Row:
Travers and Unknown.

This photo was among those retained by John Poune. It had been printed in the local Skibbereen de la Salle school book 'As time stood still' and was understood to have been taken by local Cork photographer, Frank Roche, of some of the crew members. The copy held by John Poune was dated May 12, 1945.

Donald Travers is unmistakably the man right hand lower, John Poune is top right. Robert Wright is the man at lower left. It is thought that the airman standing at left is Squadron Leader Kemp, the pilot who took over from Arthur Ashworth.



Heather Lawes, Sue Pouné and Bob Wright all have copies of this photograph. I believe it is taken sometime later probably in 1945.



Only 5 men are known at this time, Far left, Don Travers, next to him seated Alan Lawes, note darker RAAF uniform. Alan Mitchinson may be the man behind Alan Lawes. The two men at far right are, Robert Wright sitting and Frederick John Pouné, standing. I would guess that this was taken later and two of these men are the new pilots. S/Ldr Kemp may be one of them.

517 SQDN. BRAWDY (MET)				APRIL		Time carried forward - 140.20 27.10	
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
6-4-44	0955	HALLIFAX L	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	LOCAL FLYING DCO.	3.00	
7-4-44	0950	J.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	PRACTISE II. HAWING TO A/L DCO.	7.55	
9-4-44	21.25	W.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	CIRCUIT → BUNPS A/L A/L		0.15
12-4-44	23.50	W.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	LOCAL. NIGHT FLYING DCO.		2.10
15-4-44	21.35	C.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	NIGHT CROSS-COUNTRY DCO. (LANDED AT ST. DAVIDS)		3.55
16-4-44	03.30	C.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	ST. DAVIDS TO BRAWDY		0.05
17-4-44	15.15	B.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	AIR TEST. DCO.	0.30	
21-4-44	01.15	G.	SGT. ASHWORTH	W/O P AG.	OPPS BLOWRA B DCO (FORCED LANDED IN AIR.)	5.25	6.05
25-4-44	13.55	C.	A/O DAWSON	PASSENGER.	TRANSIT BALLYMOLBERT TO BRAWDY	1.05	
High Command.						TOTAL HOURS FOR APRIL 30 DAYS	
S/LDR						17.55 12.40	
						TOTAL TIME ... 159.15 39.50	

This the page from Fred John Pouné's log book recording the landing in Ireland. The previous flights and landing in Ireland correspond to those found in Robert Wrights log book.

This map shows the relation between the RAF home base and their eventual landing site in Ireland.



All maps from Google maps.

This page shows a map of the locality of St. David's and Brawdy airbases in Wales.



Correspondences:

Full text of John Barthram's Email, January 2007:

Hello Dennis.

Many thanks for the email. I too was surprised to receive any contact about this incident after all these years. I thought it was buried for good in RAF records. Certainly it was a remarkable coincidence that the person you contacted was a long time colleague and friend of mine - there must be a God !

Unfortunately I can offer little help on the names. I only flew with this crew two or three times and apart from Flight Sergeant Arthur Ashworth all the names mean nothing. My memory leads me to think there was a Canadian not an Australian member. I can only recall being with an RAAF navigator on one flight and that was captained by a Sd/Ldr James. Also very vaguely I feel that the second pilot was commissioned but again I could be wrong. Yes I heard that sadly Arthur Ashworth was killed - I believe when a Warwick he was flying out of St Eval/ St Mawgan on an air-sea rescue crashed into the sea. That though is hearsay and you may know otherwise. One small point. One of the crew became friendly with a girl in Skibbereen and they corresponded. In one letter she included the remark " Gee, its getting smaller". G was the aircraft's identification letter and we assumed dismantling was going on. Whether the friendship developed further I do not know.

You may be interested in my recollections of the flight - errors and omissions accepted !! One incident, which I am sure was not mentioned at the debrief, was that due to an unfortunate misunderstanding the pitot head cover was left on during pre-flight inspection. The mistake did not show itself until the aircraft was gaining speed on take-off, then too fast to abort. The aircraft was very heavy with extra fuel tanks in the bomb bay. The problem was overcome by using an axe to smash the Perspex window in the bottom of the fuselage just below my "desk" at the front. By lying sideways against my seat the Canadian (?) managed to extend his arm far enough out to remove the cover. I had tried but found the airstream too strong to reach that far, so full marks to the RCAF/RAAF. Also I then went back to help pump up the undercarriage as its hydraulics had failed ! As far as I remember the weather was benign though a lot of cloud and the trip then seemed routine. The outbound leg finished with a " box climb " to about 18,000ft (500mb) . At around this time the radio operator told me he had been unable to pass my last two messages so hold the next for the time being. Apparently no radio bearings could be obtained , and also no astro-nav. We were now returning and to conserve fuel a gradual descent (not box) was made. Eventually we were placed well west of track and too low on fuel to make England. We diverted to Skibbereen which was marked as an emergency landing ground on our maps. Arthur made a very good landing (wheels pumped down) though it did entail going through a dividing hedge/wall that separated the two fields that were the landing area, and it was said we hit a cow!

We were taken to a nearby hotel - I can't remember the name but it would be to the S-SE of the town and near a bridge. Here we were generously but excessively supplied with strong drink and my memory definitely fails ! I do remember somebody saying that a Court had been in progress in the town and when they heard an aircraft had landed just everybody left to look ! I think it was one of the solicitors that told us this, and vaguely I think he was in Army uniform, Within days we were taken by car to Belfast and debriefed at Stormont - they may have more accurate records.

I would like to thank you for the time and trouble you must take to record these incidents which otherwise would be lost for ever.

I am quite happy for you to pass some or all of this epistle to the researchers mentioned.

With very best wishes,

John.

Full text of John Barthram's Email, 7 March 2007:

Hello Dennis,

Many thanks indeed for the photographs which I was very pleased to receive. It amazed me to see the aircraft after such a long time.

I can't help much naming the crew members shown, though I'm reasonably confident that top right is F/Sgt Arthur Ashworth, possibly lower right the flight engineer, and lower left a WOP/AG. The top left is intriguing . He doesn't appear to have a rank chevron on his arm (though that may be my printer !) and he wears his ordinary tunic, not the usual blouse type worn on trips. The pockets are pouches, the type for Warrant Officers or Commissioned Officers jackets. I still have the feeling that one crew member was commissioned so he may well be the co-pilot. Does the Kew ORB give names and ranks ? The blanket rank of SGT given on the Defence Forces file is misleading so if the ORB give names and ranks then he should be identifiable as I think there was only one P/O F/O or W/O amongst us, but my memory is hazy to say the least !

Yes, I would very much like to see the other photos but no hurry - wait until your internet returns to normal - what is a few months after 63 years ?!

Thanks once again for the photos, very best

wishes,

John.

Hello Martin,

Thanks very much for the details on the hotel where we stayed. From there we went by car to an Army camp in the Foynes area . Then next day to a military camp (Army / Air Force ?) near Dublin, before finally making Belfast. We were picked up by a Squadron aircraft at Ballyhalbert and thence back to Brawdy.

I'm afraid I have not much else to offer, my spell as a MAO was regrettably short, curtailed by illness. However I phoned Colin " Tiny " Mentz who was a very very experienced MAO who flew with the USAAF, and he is happy for you to contact him. He appears several times in *Even The Birds Were Walking* so you can get a bit of background - just don't mention Middlesbrough football team !! Unfortunately his e-mail is U/S at present, but he would be quite happy if you phoned on a Sunday morning, any time after 0830 - he is often out other days and evenings. He too was a colleague and friend of us at Upavon , and now lives in Bournemouth. His phone number is 01202 432541 . Peter Rackliff is a friend of his.

Regarding the routes shown on page 201, they were standard and flown every day. On a few occasions they were amended and the new route became standard. Yes the Epicure route did become a bit confusing.

The Epicure A is the one now marked as Allah and was flown from St Eval and Bovingdon. Epicure B is the one marked Epicure and flown from Brawdy. My memory of B was a simple out and return on a slight " dog-leg" to the position shown at 43N, not the triangle in the book. This first route seems to be the track shown in Appendix 3 for Jan 1945, so I don't know when it was changed.

Many thanks for your e-mail, this is rather limited help I'm afraid but I'm sure Tiny will be able to contribute.

With best wishes, John.

Full text of John Barthram's Email dated 25th of May 2007.

Hello Heather,

I am very pleased to be able to contact you and pass on in a very roundabout way a " Thank you " to your father for his efforts that avoided an embarrassing and possibly tricky situation on a meteorological flight that ended in Eire. I was the met. observer on that flight , and I believe Dennis Burke has given you a lot of the details, so I will try and fill in some background.

Firstly I must apologize for saying Allan was Canadian (not that I have anything against Canadians - my sister was happily married to one for many years) but of course nationalities should be correct. Maybe it was because there were several Canadians in my Nissen hut sleeping quarters, but somehow it had got into my mind he was one. However when I saw the portrait photo you kindly sent it jogged my memory about several details of the event. It was definitely Allan who managed to lie sideways between my seat and the fuselage - a squeeze in itself - and reach out far enough against a 200mph airstream and untie the pitot cover. The pitot head tube was mounted some 18 inches below the fuselage but not directly below the broken window he was using. (Just in case this is all jargon to you the pitot head points forward and funnels air through a tube to the airspeed indicator) .

Some further background may be of interest. RAF Station Brawdy in the extreme SW of Wales was opened in January 1944 as a base for weather recording flights by a Halifax squadron. The crews consisted of eight people - 2 pilots, a navigator, a flight engineer , three wireless operators/air gunners who rotated between the set and the gun turrets, and a met. observer. A standard route was followed with, at that time, one take off late in the evening each day. The route was to the west of Spain, via a small " dog-leg ". Outbound it was flown at 2000ft with a descent to 200ft (night) or 50ft (day) every 200 miles. A climb was made to around 18,000ft at the extremity of the route, and half the return, which followed the outbound track, was made at height. The flight I took with your father was due to follow this standard route. A month or two after the Station opened some Halifax crews were transferred away to glider towing/covert operations prior to D Day, and these included the crew I was attached to. This meant a few met. observers were without a permanent crew and we flew with crews on a chance rota. So I was with F/Sgt Ashworth and his crew (including you father) only a few times and did not really get to know the members.

On this flight it must have been frustrating for Allan , no radio contact to get a positional fix and the cloud preventing any star checks. Consequently in these circumstances he would be totally reliant on the forecast winds given a briefing. Unfortunately due to the war the information to provide these winds was very scarce and their accuracy suffered. Eventually when contact was established we were well off course and had insufficient fuel to make England. We were

diverted to Skibbereen which was marked as an emergency landing ground on our charts and Allan was able to route us accurately there. The rest I think you have learnt from the great efforts Dennis has made to make a permanent record of these events. By the way the girl in Skibbereen wrote to a WOP/AG not your father !!

A brief personal detail:- A month or two after this flight I had to stop flying due to illness. However I kept with the Met. Office both in the RAF and then as a civilian until I retired in the mid 80's. I now live quietly with my wife in a small market town, my son and family live not far away and my daughter and family to the north of London.

I hope all this is of interest and makes sense !

Best wished, John

Glennis Travers Letter August 2007

Dear Mr. Burke,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 13th July regarding the emergency landing of the Halifax at Skibbereen on 21st April 1944.

The 'J' Travers you wrote to is my sister Jean with whom I live at the above address. I'm Glennis, and as Jean has various problems with her eyesight it's me that is writing in reply.

Donald is our brother and happily still in the land of the living, though sadly, not in such good health as we'd like of late. Although suffering from Diabetes for many years he was otherwise quite well and active until a couple of years or so ago. At that time he suffered a series of attacks, seemingly Diabetes related, and following these had to surrender his driving licence. This was a big blow to him as he has always been someone who likes to be on the go, not content with just sitting about the house. Since then his health has deteriorated. He is sadly now quite frail, cannot walk very far and slowly at that, plus his eyesight is none too good. Also he now has a certain amount of dementia, which among other problems causes difficulties with his memory.

Had he been fit enough we would have passed your letter to him so that he could reply to you himself, but unfortunately his problems with dementia and eyesight difficulties would make this impossible.

We have, however, been over to see him and have read your letter to him. He remembers the Skibbereen incident and he really appreciated hearing your letter. He said it had been an interesting afternoon.

After reading the names of the crew to him, Don immediately said that he remembered Arthur Ashworth, whom he thought came from Hucknall (Notts.). Alan Lawes is also a well remembered name. Don said that Alan had tried to persuade him to move to Australia.

Jean is closer to Don's age at 80 later this month. I am now 71. Fortunately, we both have many memories of Don's time in the RAF, (the Skibbereen incident in particular) and the stories he has told us over the years, so we will give you as much information as we are able.

After reading the crew names again myself, later, but whilst we were still at Don's, I found that reading 'Fred' instead of the full name, the name Fred Pounes definitely rang a bell. I mentioned this to Jean and she agreed. Don then also recognised the name and said he thought he came from Derby. Whilst I am confident that Don remembers the men themselves, as I've mentioned, his memory is patchy and I would not like to rely on the place names.

Don often used to bring Air Force mates with him when he came home on leave and we think that Fred Pounes may have been one of those who came. Alan Lawes is a name that Jean and I remember well though we're not certain that he actually came to the house.

Don was only 19 at the time of Skibbereen and we think he was the youngest member of the crew. He may, I think, have had the nickname 'Titch'. He is non too tall.

Your letter was most interesting to us as until then, although we were familiar with the Skibbereen incident and "being held prisoner in the pub!", we did not know the full details of the circumstances which led to the emergency landing, nor did we know the name of the pub/hotel where they were housed. We did, however, know that they landed in a field and unfortunately hit a cow.

Over the years Don's told us many stories of his time there and we must extend our thanks to the people of Skibbereen for their kindness and generosity to Don and the rest of the crew at that time.

Being on duty, Don of course, only had his flying boots as footwear and one day whilst he was in the town, someone in the town, presumably a resident, took him into a shop and bought him a pair of shoes, allowing him to pick any pair he wanted.

We've been given to understand, over the years, that there actually was a dance to which the crew were invited.

On one occasion Don was a bit 'merry' one night (which we seem to think was also the night of the dance) and when he woke up the next morning, he found that five pounds had been tucked into his pocket. Five pounds was quite a considerable amount of money in those days.

We've also always understood that the local authorities were originally going to allow them to fly the aircraft out, but later decided against this on the grounds that it was too close to the town for safety and that was why it had to be dismantled.

Sorry, but we can't throw any light on who was writing to the young lady you mentioned.

Regrettably his log book no longer exist.

517 is the only squadron I can recall him mentioning.

Don volunteered for service whilst he was 17. He was a Flight Engineer in Coastal Command. We think he was demobbed sometime in 1946.

In his early days in the RAF he was based in the Torquay area (this may possibly have been whilst training). There was a bomb raid whilst he was there and a school was hit. Don was amongst those who helped with the rescue/recovery operation.

Prior to his dementia, I did manage (with the help of a young man in the bookshop in Nottingham who came from the Brawdy area and was interested in the subject) to get Don a total of four books which dealt with Coastal Command, and he said there were some people in them that he recognised. He seemed particularly interested in the first one we got which was Mike Hughes 'The Hebrides at War'. He was stationed at Tiree at one time but we're not sure exactly when this was. Apparently there is a crash mentioned in this book that actually happened just when he was going to or returning from the Mess.

At the end of his service we believe he was stationed at Kinloss.

As well as Torquay, Brawdy, Tiree and Kinloss we also remember Lossiemouth as stations where he was based. We think also possibly Wick was one. I'm sorry but we do not know the timescale.

Don gets confused when trying to remember so it's difficult to question him these days, but one station he has remembered since reading him your letter is St. Athan.

I also think that, for some reason, there were visits to, I think, the Azores. I vaguely remember him bringing a pineapple home and my teacher asking me to take it to school to show the other kids. Being wartime none of them had seen one before.

Don also flew in Sunderlands but we do not know what station he was based at then.

After being demobbed Don returned to his occupation as a motor mechanic, and worked in the motor trade for many years. At the time of his retirement, however, he was working for British Rail in a supervisory capacity on the engineering side.

Don was 82 last December. He married in 1957 when he was 32 and it was his Golden Wedding Anniversary earlier this year. They have a daughter born in 1969. Don and his wife currently live about 8 miles away from us.

In recent years two old airforce comrades have been in contact and have been to see him and us, but neither of these were with the Skibbereen crew.

We cannot positively identify Don from the photos you supplied, owing to the lack of clarity, but of the one of the four crew members the one on the bottom right looks very much like him. On the one from Heather Lawes showing the crew he could well be the one on the extreme left. See photocopy enclosed.

We are enclosing three photos of Don. One on his own, one with a guard which was actually taken at Skibbereen at the time, and one of the squadron. The squadron one is non too clear but Don is 9th from the left of the sitting down ones on the front row.

Jean and I were on holiday on a bus tour based in Killarney last year. We took a copy of the photo of Don and the guard with us in the hope that we could get down as far as Skibbereen and make some enquiries. Unfortunately, however, time and transport difficulties did not allow for this. We were, therefore, more than happy to receive your letter.

We hope such information as we have been able to supply is of interest to you.

Neither Jean nor I are computer literate and do not own a computer so it would be difficult for us to access your website.

If you are able to come up with any more information of the crew and Skibbereen, therefore, we'd be most grateful if you could possibly write to us again as I'm sure Don would be most interested in hearing any further information we could tell him about.

Yours sincerely,

Glennis Travers.

Text from John Barthram's Email August 2007

Once again many thanks for getting my memory stirred about an event so long ago. This time it was the mention that Don Travers was the flight engineer. I clearly recall him as a cheerful and friendly, possibly I related to him more in the short time we were together because we are of a similar age. The name on its own meant virtually nothing - I never was much good at names. The last time I saw him was on a train from Haverfordwest to London when we were starting some " survivors " leave. I said Cheerio at Didcot and he continued on. (It was about 4 AM so I had a 8 mile walk to Wallingford to where my parents were then !). Please send my best wishes when you write again, I am so sorry he is now unwell.

Letter from Gerald O'Brien, Skibbereen October 2007

Gerald O'Brien,

Sunday Night, October 7th, 2007.

Curragh, Skibbereen , County Cork.

Re/Emergency landing of RAF Handley Page Halifax VI Bomber aircraft in Skibbereen, April 21st,

Dear Dennis

Publication of your photograph of your picture of Sgt Donald Travers from the crew of the above with the late Denis Twomey, then of the LDF, caused quite a stir this past week here in Skibbereen. Only yesterday I met Dr Ann Twomey-Bell, Daughter of Denis, who told me she had already written you confirming her Father's identity; for that reason, I do not propose to tell you what you already now know.

Now 72 years old, I have retained a vivid memory of the events of that day of April of '44 all through my life. I was just turned nine at the time and, not surprisingly, I was in class at school when the drama began. Our first apprehension was that of sound - a very loud roar from the four 1800 hp Bristol Hercules aero engines roaring over our heads, not much short of roof-top altitude as the cool headed Pilot, with great skill, coaxed the aircraft from the skies onto a large field, known as "The Marsh", right beside the town. Fearful for our safety, the Headmaster ordered all out of school without delay into the adjoining play yard. I am glad he did so, for it was from there that I had witnessed the image of the Halifax on her last circling before coming to earth. The surrounding buildings precluded all possibility of seeing the actual touch-down. Suddenly the noise had ceased, after which we were ordered back to our seats in the class rooms. Before resuming studies, our teacher told us that all was well, that the 'plane which we had seen had by then "landed safely on the Marsh".

At lunch time, we got a fine view of the undamaged bomber resting on the grass, across the river, from a porch off North Street. Just to show how keenly we remember it here, I should dearly love if you could get a copy of this letter to Sgt Travers and to his Sisters. Also, sometime, if you can get around to it, I would greatly appreciate just a copy list of crew members which I presume you may have. Unfortunately I am not on internet.

Hoping you keep well and wishing you every success with your research into the landing we have never forgotten I remain

Yours sincerely

Gerald O'Brien.

Letter from Ann Twomey-Bell

Dear Mr. Burke,

it was with great interest that i read your letter in the Southern Star this week.

The person in question is in fact my father Denis Twomey. He died in 1992. I heard many stories about the 'capture' of the RAF men & the wonderful time that followed!!

He was a great pianist & there was lots of music and song during the lock in. I think it may have been in the West Cork Hotel.

How did you become involved - I would be interested in any further information available.

He was working as a solicitor at the time & the LDF was 'if needed'. Thankfully I think this episode was their only involvement in the war!

Your faithfully

Ann T Bell

The King's School in Macclesfield, Cheshire

Gazette 2006

From the Former Pupils' Contributions

The following was recently received from Mike Brown in Glossop, and relates to his wife's uncle, JACK MUSK.

Jack Musk was an old pupil of the school who would be on the Second World War Memorial of 'Old Boys'. I knew there was a book about the First World War 'Old Boys' and indeed actually saw a copy in a Buxton bookshop recently and wondered if a similar one was planned by the school or author for the 'Old Boys' of World War Two. In case it helps, here is the information I have.

Jack was my wife's Uncle. He was one of a family of three, Mary, Jack and Margaret Joan, the children of Betsy and Robert William Musk and living in Bredbury, Cheshire. Robert was a Local Authority Sanitary Inspector at Bredbury, although the family had moved about the country as Robert took jobs in his profession, gaining promotions. Jack was born in Bacup, Lancs.

During the period of the War, all three children were in the services.

Mary, being a nurse, was an officer in the Army Nursing Service (QAs) and Margaret (usually, and still, known by her second name Joan) was in the ATS, although at the start of the war she was still at Manchester Grammar School for Girls.

Jack and Joan were both very clever and Jack was particularly good at sport. He won several sporting cups while at King's and both sisters still have a cup that he won. When Jack was killed, both of his sisters were serving in different places and the only information they received by his parents would be the usual 'Missing' etc notification. Jack had apparently been missing previously, according to information passed on from Joan, and

naturally for some time it was hoped he would turn up again.

The sisters possess very few photos of Jack apart from some of them as children, but there are a couple of wartime pictures which would pass as a typical RAF poster view of a smiling young pilot in flying helmet and jacket.

Jack married while he was in the RAF – in December 1943 – so his wife (also called Joan) had his possessions and nothing was returned to his parents when he was finally officially notified as KIA and when she remarried later in the war nothing of his was returned to his parents or family.

Jack's name is recorded on the Runnymede RAF Memorial and on the War Memorial in Bredbury and before they moved a long way from the area, a wreath was always placed there for him, from his parents and sisters, in November.

What I know of the rest of his RAF service I have collected while doing Family History in the last few years.

The basic information from CWGC gives the usual Name/Rank/Number and Squadron, date of death and next of kin.

The rest I got from the RAF records office at Innsworth and Ross McNeill on the internet.

As follows:

Flight Sgt Jack Musk 1331422

Aged 22

518 Squadron,

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Died 10th November 1944

Commemorated on Panel 220 of the

Runnymede RAF Memorial.

Enlisted 2/1/41, trained as pilot and awarded pilots flying badge 26/1/43 and had completed 3 years and 314 days service in the RAF when he died.

His records would seem to show that he joined the RAF at Uxbridge and then went to Penarth, then did basic training at several stations and by the end of January 1942 was at

'Moncton' (sic), Canada and by May of that year was in the USA at USNAS Washington. He is listed as having 14 months overseas service. Most of the RAF units he passed through are only listed as abbreviations on his records and I have yet to find out what several of them mean, or more correctly where they were.

By January 1st 1944 he was at RAF Tiree MCU in the Inner Hebrides, then first in 517 Sqn and then 518 Sqn. He was reported missing and then Killed in Action on the same day, November 10th. 517 and 518 Squadrons were Coastal Command Sqns part of 15 Group. They were flying meteorological missions over the Atlantic, gathering information to help weather forecasting by the RAF.

Apparently the mission Jack was on was one type given the code name BISMUTH (no doubt the last two letters stand for Temperature and Humidity).

It involved flying on a triangular pattern out into the Atlantic towards Iceland and back.

The aircraft used were Handley Page Halifax GR MkV's that had been specially fitted with meteorological equipment by Cunliffe-Owen at Eastleigh, for weather missions.

The Merlin engines were not suited to long missions in wet/freezing conditions far out over the Atlantic and many others were also lost due to engine failure. Jack's plane, code name

'L-Love' sent a message that they had engine problems before being reported lost.

The family believe he had 'ditched' a plane and been reported missing before. There are several pictures of this Squadron's white painted planes on the runway at Tiree and elsewhere in the winter of 1944 in the Osprey publishing book on Coastal Command

and no doubt L-Love is one of them, but apart from the closest (P for ??? I think) the serials are not all visible. It is reported that in spite of the losses of aircrew and planes, one plane and crew on such a mission was worth more to the war effort than many similar ones on bombing missions over Europe. Recently, a memorial to the Coastal Command crews doing this hazardous work was put up, but I have forgotten where.

I hope this information will be of use to the school's historian, particularly if there is anything being written about the Old Boys lost in WW2. If anything else about Jack's school career turns up, especially sports photos, the family would be pleased to know.