



Fateful Crew of Lancaster NN775 of 514 Squadron Commemorated

On the 05 March 1945, only 3 days short of VE day, Avro Lancaster NN775 took off from RAF Waterbeach in Cambridgeshire on a bombing mission over Gelsenkirchen but never returned. The 514 squadron aircraft came down in circumstances unknown in a Belgian field near the Flemish village of Bunsbeek. All seven aircrew were killed in the incident and what could be found of the remains of the airmen at the time were buried in a single grave at Heverlee war cemetery. The large hole created by the crash, which quickly filled with water, and was then filled in by a farmer.



The burial cross shortly after the war in Heverlee cemetery. The picture was taken by Sally Olson, the sister of the deceased Wireless Operator FS Allan Olson (RAAF).



From Left to Right

Pilot: F/O Holman Kerr (23, Co Armagh, Northern Ireland)

Air bomber: F/O Frank Clarke

Navigator: F/Sgt Sidney Smith (21)

Wireless Operator: F/Sgt Allan Olsen RAAF (20, Toowoomba, Australia)



From Left to Right

Mid Upper Gunner: Sgt Christopher Hogg (20, South Yardley, Birmingham, England)

Rear Gunner: Sgt Herbert Thomas (23, Jamaica)

Flight Engineer: Sgt William Marsden (20, Croston, England)

On 11 Nov 2016 work began by the Planehunters Group and the Belgium Aviation History Association Archaeology team (BAHAAT) to excavate the wreckage of NN775, with the permission of the Flemish official archaeological board. They found the Lancaster was still buried but in a badly damaged state.



Reconstruction of the NN775 wreckage.

Amongst the articles found relating to the crew was a wristwatch, oxygen mask, a uniform cap and British coins. Once the aircraft and any remains were fully exhumed it was fitting to

have a reburial commemoration service at the Heverlee war cemetery. This was held on the 28 April 2017, organised by the UK Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), based at Imjin barracks in Gloucester. Heading the RAF contingent whom attended from SHAPE was Wing Commander Gez Currie who gave a warm-hearted commemoration speech at Heverlee barracks to the dignitaries which included families of some of the fateful aircrew; British Ambassador Rose; Australian representative Cdr Gaudry and Mayors of Glabeek and Leuven. The contingent then relocated to the Heverlee CWGC cemetery for the main commemoration service which was conducted by the RAFA Belgian branch reverend (Wing Commander) Ashley Mitchell RAF. Wreaths were laid by the families of the fallen aircrew by the individual headstones. I had the honour of laying the wreath on FS Allan Olson's (RAAF) grave in the absence of his family.



SHAPE RAFALO Matt Bowen behind
the gravestone of FS Allen Olsen

The RAF Contingent from SHAPE,
from L-R, Cpl Lee Seville, F/O
Burgess, Reverend Ashley Mitchell,
Wg Cdr Gez Currie, FS Matt Bowen

Written by FS Matt Bowen
SHAPE RAFALO