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***SQUADRONS'***  
***ASSOCIATION***  
***NEWSLETTER***



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## EDITORIAL

The reunion weekend will likely be only 2 months away by the time you read this. Do please come if you can, there are details in the newsletter about the Skellingthorpe supper and the reunion dinner. We do hope to see as many old and new friends as possible.

Peter Jacobs' biography of Sir Michael's life in the RAF was formally launched at the RAF Club on 3 Mar. There are details of the launch in this newsletter together with a review of the book by one of our vice-presidents, AVM Nigel Baldwin, for the RAF Historical Society Journal. We will have copies of the book available during the reunion weekend and Sir Michael and Peter have kindly agreed to sign them for members. Peter has provided details of how to purchase the book and obtain signatures.

David Layne, a member living in the USA, has sent us much information about his father, Wally Layne, a rear gunner who served on 50 Sqn with the Hampden aircraft. We devote Tail End Charlie to Wally and we plan to have more articles and old photographs to interest members and possibly jog memories.

We are very grateful to Peter Small for the splendid article on the history of our memorial at Skellingthorpe. It just shows what can be done. It is a tremendous mark of respect to the brave members of both our sqns. It also serves to preserve the memory of Ralph Gilbert and his epitaph in tribute to his friend Sgt Sid Fox: "Requiem for a Rear Gunner".

We reported the sad news of the death of Dr John Cook in the last newsletter. In this edition we have provided an extract from James Flowers's excellent Veterans Album to report a little of this gentle man's long and full life of service to his country, to Africa and to the Salvation Army.

Any opinions given in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Association. Moreover, the accuracy of the submissions is also the responsibility of the author.

**Richard Jones & Mike Connock**

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

The weather has taken a turn for the better in the last few days and it felt quite like Spring this morning, which can only mean that the annual reunion weekend cannot be too far away; it hardly seems possible. As we look forward to the reunion we have continued to work behind the scenes to improve the Association's Room in the Leisure Centre - thanks to a grant from the Lincoln City Council - and there are now further ideas being discussed on how we can further improve our presence in the Leisure Centre as we preserve the legacy of RAF Skellingthorpe and our two squadrons; the vice-chairman has a short report on progress.

I can also inform you that the long awaited biography of our President - 'Stay the Distance, the Life and Times of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham' - has now been published after a most successful book launch, which was held at the RAF Club. The event was attended by 90 guests including members of Sir Michael's family. It was a wonderful evening and the fact that so many distinguished guests travelled from all over the country to join Sir Michael is a mark of how highly regarded Sir Michael is.

Finally, in the last newsletter I mentioned what life is like in the RAF in the aftermath of the Defence Review - as we continue to draw down in size - but I could not have imagined then that we would soon be in action in the skies over Libya; it only goes to show just how uncertain the world is, particularly in the Middle East, and just how vital air power is in any future conflict. These are, once again, interesting times!

I would like to thank, as always, the members of our committee as we make the final plans for the reunion weekend in June and I look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible.

**Peter Jacobs**

## **ASSOCIATION TIES**

As agreed at the last AGM, we have purchased another batch of 20 Association ties and they will be available at the AGM on Sat and at Skellingthorpe on Fri and Sun. They will be £10 each or £11 by post.

## **“STAY THE DISTANCE” BOOK PURCHASE**

The book is available through all major book shops or can be ordered on-line but if you would like an author-signed copy, at the reduced rate of £20 + p&p (£5.50 per copy for the UK), then please send a cheque (payable to P C Jacobs) to 61 Fulmar Road, Lincoln, LN6 0LA before 15 May. If you live in the Lincoln area and wish to save the p&p then please feel free to collect your signed copy (just ring 01522 826635 first) or I can give it to you at the reunion weekend. Sir Michael will be available to sign your copy at the reunion weekend on Sun 12 Jun. However, if you are unable to attend the weekend and would like your copy signed by Sir Michael then please let me know and I will get it signed and then post it to you afterwards.

For those of you who pre-ordered a copy from the last newsletter then I have your copy waiting for you. All you need to do now is send payment and tell me whether you want the book posting - in which case please give the full postal address - or whether you would like to pick it up or collect it at the reunion weekend in Jun.

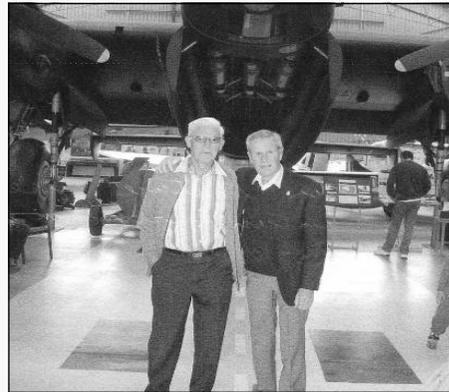
**Peter Jacobs**

## **SECRETARY’S PIECE**

I was pleased to help Matthew Grey by visiting the Airman’s Chapel on the anniversary of his uncle death, kia 25 Feb 42 with 50 Sqn Lancaster ED387 over Nuremberg. I placed a cross at the Skellingthorpe memorial for him too.

Roy Day, 50 Sqn, was at a Christmas dinner with Falmouth RAFA last Dec, where he was told that a member of a local branch, also at the dinner, was “on Lancasters”. This turned out to be Nigel Winter, a 50 Sqn AG. Also, Roy met up with Max Galbraith his WOp, and the only surviving member of his 50 Sqn crew, in Perth Australia last Jun.

**Gerry Collins**



Max (L), Roy (R) and a Mk VII Lancaster at the Aviation Heritage Museum of Western Australia in Bull Creek.

## REVIEW OF SIR MICHAEL'S BIOGRAPHY

**Stay the Distance** – The Life and Times of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham by Peter Jacobs with a Foreword by Sebastian Cox. Frontline Books, 2011. £25.00

Being the biography of this Society's long-serving President, this book is close to our hearts. The author, Peter Jacobs, a serving wing commander, took on the task when the initial author, the late Air Commodore Henry Probert – the biographer of Sir Arthur Harris, who had already done much research into his second subject's early days – died suddenly at the end of 2007. Peter Jacobs first met Sir Michael in 1989 at Birchwood near Lincoln, when the latter unveiled a memorial to the two Lancaster squadrons that had operated from the site, then called RAF Skellingthorpe. Peter took on the task of producing a Roll of Honour for the Nos 50 and 61 Squadrons Association, recording the names, aircraft and date of some 1,976 aircrew (and some ground crew) lost by the two squadrons during the strategic bombing campaign.

Fg Off Beetham joined No 50 Sqn as a 20 year old Lancaster captain in October 1943 and survived with his crew through that long hard winter when Bomber Command's losses were at their greatest. As a crew, several members of which still meet every June at Skellingthorpe, they participated in ten, of the sixteen, raids made on Berlin that winter and finished their tour of operations before their captain's 21st birthday – and before he had a driving licence! To me this chapter was an eye-opener: as an ex-OC 50 Squadron (in Vulcan days at Waddington, when our editor was my navigator plotter), I thought I had a feel for what our predecessors went through. I finished the chapter mightily humbled.

Sir Michael's RAF career began in 1941 and culminated in 1977 with his appointment as Chief of the Air Staff, in which capacity he served for over five years – second only in length to Lord Trenchard. The book chronicles his life throughout WW II and goes on, via post-war survey work in Africa, to command of one of the first Valiant squadrons. During his Valiant tour he took the lead in the development of practical air-to-air refuelling procedures, in the course of which he made several record breaking, non-stop flights to southern Africa, thus beginning the process of accumulating the experience that would eventually pay dividends during the Falklands campaign in 1982. Then come chapters describing his time as Gp Capt Ops at HQ Bomber Command during the Cuba crisis in October 1962, as Station Commander at Khormaksar, then the RAF's largest base, during what became known as The Emergency, and culminating in his tour as CinC RAF Germany and ultimately as CAS, all

interspersed with staff tours at MOD and High Wycombe. In his research into these later appointments, Peter Jacobs has drawn on the experiences of most of Sir Michael's Personal Staff Officers to capture what it was like to be just outside the great man's office door. All of these PSOs, incidentally, survived the experience to become Air Officers themselves!

As Sir Michael was coming to the end of his time as CAS in 1982, the Argentineans invaded the Falklands. Initially, as Acting CDS, he was instrumental in coordinating action across Whitehall and then had to fight hard to make politicians and, particularly, the Royal Navy's leadership understand that air power would have a major role to play in any campaign to defend our assets and in the re-supply of the forces that would need to be deployed in order to regain the islands. Sir Michael's clarity of vision and determination shine through this chapter. Members will read – not always between the lines – of tensions at the top of the MOD and I for one finished this chapter with a much greater respect for the then Secretary of State for Defence, John Nott, than had previously been the case.

The book, a 284-page hardback, is well illustrated throughout and concludes with descriptions of the many, mostly RAF-connected, activities and enthusiasms in which Sir Michael has involved himself since he handed over as CAS. Marshals do not retire – they remain on the Active List for life – and if anyone should ask why, I encourage them to note Sir Michael's later career. At the top of the list must be his chairmanship, for sixteen years, of the Trustees of the RAF Museum. His work alongside the Director General, Michael Fopp, saw the Museum being put on a sustainable financial footing, the opening of the Michael Beetham Conservation Centre at Cosford and the initiation of the National Cold War Exhibition – all of which became the national gems they are today. Equally important must be his twenty-four-year, and continuing, presidency of the Bomber Command Association which is leading to the creation of a memorial, in London's Green Park, to those 55,573 half-forgotten young men of Bomber Command. The remaining veterans are nearly there with their final project and Peter Jacobs has done them a great service in describing the life of their inspirational leader so conscientiously and clearly. **AVM Nigel Baldwin** (Acknowledgements to the RAF Historical Society Journal)

### **OP FAILED TO RETURN DVD**

Copies of our dvd "Op Failed to Return", the unveiling of our memorial at Birchwood by Sir Michael on 3 Jun 89, will also be available for members to buy if they wish. They will be available for £4 each, as p&p will not be required, at the AGM on Sat and Skellingthorpe on Fri and Sun.

## “STAY THE DISTANCE” BOOK LAUNCH



Sir Michael and Peter in front of the portrait of Sir Michael, as CAS, at the RAF Club

Peter Jacobs’ book about Sir Michael’s career in the Royal Air Force, “Stay the Distance” was formally launched at the Royal Air Force Club on 3 Mar. It was very well attended by members of Sir Michael’s family and past and present friends and Service colleagues. The distinguished invitees included 2 former Chiefs of the Defence Staff, FM Lord Bramall and ACM Lord Stirrup; the present Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Sir Simon Bryant and 3 former Chiefs, MRAF Lord Craig, ACM Sir Michael Graydon and ACM Sir Richard Johns; one of Sir Michael’s former PSOs, AM Ian Macfadyen; and ACM Sir Douglas

Lowe, one of Sir Michael’s oldest Service friends.

**Richard Jones**



Sir Douglas Lowe, Sir Michael’s son Alex and grandson Rory

Guests enjoying the function with ACM Sir Richard Johns and Sir Michael’s daughter Lucinda in the foreground



## BIRTH OF A MEMORIAL

Having been born just 10 years after the Second World War and being brought up in Skellingthorpe during the 1960s surrounded by my relatives living in the village, stories about the airfield and its occupants were often told and heard. My late father Harold, whose life long interest in aviation and aero modelling obviously rubbed off on me, and his cousin,



Peter Small and the late Ralph Gilbert

the late George Grantham DFC, who served in 4 Group as a navigator with 51 and 578 Sqns. In Yorkshire, staying in the RAF post-war until retirement in the late 60s, you can probably begin to see why I never knew a time when I was not making model aircraft or reading books about the RAF's war and the exploits of its men and women, especially, Bomber Command and of course RAF Skellingthorpe.

As I learnt more and more about the sacrifices made during the war I became aware that there was nothing in the parish to even say that there had ever been an airfield there, let alone about the people and their exploits. So early in 1989 with the 50th anniversary of the opening of RAF Skellingthorpe in 1941 fast approaching, I decided to see if we could get a permanent memorial to the airfield and its personnel. It might enable future generations to be prompted to ask "what was that all about" and keep the memory of Skellingthorpe airfield alive.

I approached the Parish Council Chairman, the late Mrs Pauline Harley, and explained my idea and gave her a brief rundown of what I knew about the history of the station and she was "hooked" from day one on the idea. Pauline formed a memorial sub committee and I explained to them the history involved and what we wanted to achieve, i.e. a

permanent memorial; they also became coverts to the cause. Pauline was untiring in her efforts and we set up monthly meetings to discuss what form the memorial should take. John Atkin a local architect soon joined us as did David Butler a local builder, and their expertise in building proved invaluable to keep us within the bounds of reality. Several schemes were considered such as opening up the front of the existing war memorial at St Lawrence's Church and having a plaque erected there. The local Vicar at the time, the Reverend Kay, objected to the image of the Lincoln Imp being on church land, so it was actually considered that the war memorial should be bodily removed to the Community Centre grounds and set up there along with our new memorial, and to create a memorial garden in that area. Finally after much debate it was decided that one of the three flower "tubs" should be opened up and a wall built halfway across it, against which the plaque could be fixed. The bricks on the floor were to be laid yellow, blue, white and red in the form a wartime aircraft roundel, and the front section to be opened as a gate to give access to the plaque.

Much debate took place as the form of wording to be used and I came up with the wording which is now so focal a part of, and much commented on part of, the memorial. "The Requiem for a Rear Gunner" was found in a "bomber book" and simply said everything about the Bomber Command experience in one short verse, and to this day still makes the back of my neck tingle.

It was written by Ralph Wilson Gilbert who for some time we could not trace to ask permission for use. We tried the publishers of the book but they knew nothing of him and suggested that we simply credit Mr Gilbert with the words on the plaque as they believed he had been killed in the war and could not trace him. I received a letter some time after the memorial was dedicated from a collector of RAF poems and prose who told me that R W Gilbert was alive and well and living in Newport in Wales and still writing poetry. He was duly contacted and came up to Skellingthorpe for a memorial weekend and was overjoyed to see his words used in so fitting a style. We became close great friends with Ralph and his lovely family and they have visited Skellingthorpe several times. Ralph was an air gunner in Bomber Command and was shot down just before D Day and his rear gunner was killed.

Shortly after forming the Committee, Pauline learnt of the Association's efforts to get their own memorial raised on Birchwood, the actual site of the airfield. This led to our meeting the stalwarts of the 50 and 61 Squadrons' Association Memorial Committee. Members Les Bartlett, Eddie Davidson, Doug Gregory, Reg Payne, Dennis Abrahams and Ron Snelling became great friends and supporters of our efforts. It was decided that our memorial would be of the same black marble as the Birchwood obelisk and this would be a tangible link between the two memorials. The Skellingthorpe memorial was dedicated on 2 Jun 91, the 50th anniversary year of the opening of RAF Skellingthorpe.

Very early on it was decided that Skellingthorpe Parish Council would like to be part of the memorial weekend and Mrs Pam Connock was brought in as caterer along with her band of lady helpers. Dances were held on Friday nights, services on Sundays and meals were provided. The Freedom of Skellingthorpe in was granted in 1996 and a huge bond of friendship between the Association and the village has built up over the last 25 years. Thanks to the inclusion of the two local schools, we will see the men and women of RAF Skellingthorpe remembered long into the future, and as sadly the number of veterans decreases, their place is taken by family members. Long may it continue.

**Peter Small**

*Peter is a member of the Association and has always been a long standing supporter behind the scenes and was involved with working on the original museum at the Lawns in Lincoln.*

**Mike Connock**

### **SKELLINGTHORPE SUPPER**

The Skellingthorpe ladies will again be very pleased to provide the popular Skellingthorpe supper on Fri 10 Jun. Details are in the enclosed weekend programme. The evening serves as a welcome to friends old and new. Unfortunately the price has had to be increased to £10 per head; pay at the supper please. I would appreciate it if you could let me know if you are attending; I do need some idea of numbers in advance. My home tel no is 01522 683997.

**Pam Connock**

## **SQN LDR HUGH HORSLEY AND CREW**

In the last issue we introduced a new member from Holland, Adrian Van Zantvoort, who was researching crews who came down in Holland and in particular, Lancaster LM718, Sqn Ldr Horsley and crew. We received details of Sqn Ldr Horsley from 2 of our members: Emlyn Williams, an ex 50 Sqn MUG, and Frank Mouritz, an ex 61 Sqn pilot.

Sqn Ldr Hugh Horsley (61 Sqn) was killed on 1 Feb 45 in Lancaster NF912 (QR-L) departing Skellingthorpe for the raid on Siegen. Frank reports: *“Take off time came and we were taxiing along the taxiway in fading daylight. Aircraft L was two or three planes ahead of us. He took off and had an engine failure just as he got airborne. All further take offs were halted as he did a slow flat turn at a few hundred feet and lined up on the grass beside the runway, as his speed was too slow to lower his undercarriage. He landed on his belly, skidded about 200 yds and then hit a bitumen taxiway. The bomb load of 4,000 lb Cookie and 12,000 of 4 lb incendiaries instantly blew up. We were waiting on the other side of the aerodrome and felt a heavy blast and 4 lb incendiaries landed all around us. Horsley and 5 of his crew were killed in the explosion, but the rear turret was blown free and the rear gunner, although badly injured, survived.”* Emlyn also witnessed the incident from the ground and tried to assist in the recovery of the crew; sadly in vain. He adds that: *“Mrs Horsley was kind enough to write thanking those who did their utmost to help at the scene of the accident.”* The incident was all the more poignant for Frank and his crew as their aircraft, QR-M, was unserviceable so they were allocated QR-L for the Siegen raid. But the take-off time was delayed by 2 hours, by which time QR-M became serviceable so they were given back their own aircraft and Sqn Ldr Horsley took QR-L.

Frank Mouritz has written an excellent book about his wartime experiences entitled: “A Lanc Called Mickey”. The nose art on Frank’s aircraft (QR-M) was Mickey the Moocher. The BBMF Lancaster (PA474) is re-painted in a wartime sqn livery every few years, and the previous scheme was Mickey the Moocher. Members with access to email and pdf files can find Frank Mouritz’s book on our website.

**Richard Jones**

## **REUNION WEEKEND DINNER**

My how time flies. We are rapidly approaching our deadline to get those cheques in, should you wish to join us for the re-union dinner on Sat 11 Jun at the County Assembly Rooms on Bailgate. I know the price (£33) has gone up considerably, but as you are aware, everything in general has increased in price over the last year, which means the Assembly Rooms have put their prices up as well. Please can we once again appeal to your kind generosity and bring a raffle prize on the night? This can be handed to either Alan Biggs or myself. The raffle cost remains the same - £1 per strip. Thank you in anticipation.

**Lynda Skinner**

## **ASSOCIATION MEMORIAL ROOM UPDATE**

In the last newsletter we reported that we had been offered a grant by the local authorities. You will be pleased to know that we were granted £1,000 and have spent the money on refurbishing the memorial room. There is still work to do, but we believe you will be impressed with it if you are able to attend the reunion weekend. We still have more to do and are keen to have more on the stories of Sir Michael and Jimmy. Earlier this month I attended a meeting with the Deputy Contracts Manager of Active Nation, the managing contractor for the Birchwood Leisure Centre. There are to be some alterations to our memorial room but it will have little impact on us and the redecoration and new furniture will be very welcome. If funds allow, the room will become an occasional cafeteria. It will be strictly controlled and we are pleased that more members of the public will be able to see our sqns' histories.

The better news is that again, if funds allow, and the contractor is very optimistic, we shall have a much larger and secure room on the ground floor, currently a changing room, as a museum. You may know that there is a room upstairs with some sqn photographs and uniforms, but access is difficult for our older and bolder members. We hope to re-site much of what is there to our museum. We will then be able exchange exhibits with the Leslie Manser School, so that both the school and our proposed museum stay interesting. Maybe we could even seek the loan of memorabilia from members to display there. We'll keep you posted.

**Richard Jones**

## Dr JOHN S COOK MB CH BD TMH DFC



Flt Lt J S Cook DFC Heavy Conversion Unit training.

John Cook was born in Findochty on the Moray coast of Scotland in and was raised and went to school in Dundee. He left school aged 14 years and volunteered for the RAF on his 18th birthday. Whilst waiting for his enlistment, he joined the Air Training Corps and was called up on his 19th birthday. After initial training, he underwent air navigation training at No 44 Air School in Grahamstown, South Africa. He returned to the UK in 1943 and reported to the Operational Training Unit at RAF Upper Heyford. This was followed by a posting to RAF Shawbury for

In Jun 43, John Cook joined Plt Off Willsher's 61 Sqn crew at RAF Swinderby. Unfortunately after only 9 trips with Willsher's crew, he broke his leg. By the time he returned to operational duties he flew with a number of different crews before becoming a member of Flt Lt Norman Turner's crew, replacing Reg Freeth. In May 44 the Turner crew, except Cook, completed their tour. John still had 6 trips to do to complete his tour, so once again he found himself without a crew. But this time he had to change sqns and joined 207 Sqn at RAF Spilsby to become a member of the crew of the CO, Wg Cdr John Gray. John Cook completed his tour with distinction and was awarded the DFC. He ended his time in the RAF as an instructor at RAF Syerston and on 617 Sqn as part of the Tiger Sqn in India.

He was demobilised in May 46 and studied medicine, graduating from the St Andrews Medical School in 1955. He went on to studied tropical medicine in Liverpool and, as a life-long Salvationist, moved to Africa. He served in Central Africa and Northern and Southern Rhodesia as a missionary doctor with the Salvation Army until 1978. He then returned to England and served as a general practitioner and at Guys Hospital in London until his retirement in 1988. In 1952 John married his wife Gwen, a school teacher, and they had 4 children, 3 of them born in Africa. Sadly Gwen died in Mar 02 and John continued to live in Eastbourne where he died last Dec.

**Richard Jones**



John as we remember him

## CAN YOU HELP?

Tom Allett seeks information on 61 Sqn Lancaster W4270. He writes: "I am the editor of "Memorial Flight", the journal of Lincolnshire's Lancaster Association. We are the official support group for the RAF's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. I am researching the loss of a 61 Sqn Lancaster, W4270, which was lost along with all 7 crew on a night cross country exercise from RAF Syerston on February 18, 1943. Despite our best efforts we have been unable to find the individual identification letter to go with its QR codes. I have looked at the Squadron's ORB and the aircraft's record cards held at the RAF Museum and Air Historical Branch at Northolt, but none list the individual code letter. I know it is a long shot, but do you think any of your 61 Sqn Lancaster veterans may have flown on W4270 before its loss and recorded this missing letter in their log books?" Tom can be contacted on 07951 764698 or editor@lancaster-association.co.uk.

Cyril Dennison from Australia is seeking information about his uncle, Flt Sgt Arthur Bradley Woodvine, 61 Sqn. Arthur Woodvine, from Rhodesia, was kila on ops over Aachen on 11/12 Apr 44 in Lancaster JA695. Sgt A D M Anderson was the only survivor and was taken prisoner. Does anyone know any details of Sgt Anderson as Cyril Dennison would dearly like to contact him or his family. Please contact Cyril by email: cyril.dennison1@gmail.com.

## ABSENT FRIENDS

**John Wheeler.** Adrian Zantvoort advises that he had a letter from John Wheeler's wife Nan, telling him that John died on 19 Feb in Margate, John served on 61 Sqn and was Sqn Ldr Hugh Horseley's Bomb Aimer on Lancaster LM718.



John Wheeler

## NEW MEMBER

**Michael F Plumber,** Woodhall Spa. Mike was a signaller on 61 Sqn Feb 53 - Jun 54. He was with Flt Sgt Carlick's crew. He later flew with Sqn Ldr Huchlral at Waddington and Eastleigh.

## TAIL END CHARLIE

A very fitting story for Tail End Charlie about a rear gunner called Walter Henry Layne. Thanks to his son David for the information. Wally Layne served on 50 Sqn from Jul 41 to May 42 as a gunner in the Hampden aircraft. He and his crew had a traumatic experience in aircraft AE116 on 3 Sep 41.



In this painting of AE 116 by Mark Postlethwaite, pilot Plt Off Carter has slid his canopy back; the navigator Plt Off Davidson is in the nose and Sgt Layne the rear gunner has opened his canopy. All are searching the mist covered Lincolnshire countryside for Waddington airbase moments before running out of fuel and crashing. On arrival at Waddington the starboard

engine cut out and a one engine circuit of the airfield was made. Mist prevented the aerodrome from being seen and the aircraft made a forced landing in a ploughed field going through a fence in the process. Fortunately without injury to the crew. It was later determined that the fuel gauges were inaccurate.

Wally later flew in the Lancaster, as a Pathfinder on 97 Sqn. He was shot down (on his 64th op), during a raid on Mannheim by an ME 110 and taken prisoner after evading capture for 10 days. Wally was liberated on 2 May 45 and was informed that he had been granted a commission and awarded the DFC for completing 2 operational tours. A brave man indeed. Wally died in Feb 95 aged 78 years.

**Richard Jones**



Lancaster JA 708 in which Wally Layne was shot down on 23 Sep 43