



***Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe***  
***(Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons)***  
***Newsletter***  
***Issue No:10 Spring 2023***



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**Squadrons)**  
**www.no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk**

## **OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS/REFERENCES**

**<https://www.helloblackswan.co.uk/>**  
**<https://internationalbcc.co.uk/>**  
**<https://internationalbcc.co.uk/history-archive/losses-database/>**  
**<https://raflincolnshire.blogspot.com/2013/05/hidden-gems-of-housing-estate.html>**

## **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to the Spring edition of our newsletter for Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe. Previous newsletters can be viewed on our web site -

**[www.no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk](http://www.no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk)**

### **Chairmans report**

Here we are well in to another year, and I wish all members a happy New Year. Lets hope things will improve from the previous pandemic years, although COVID is still around.

Since our last newsletter we have had the Remembrance Service which was taken by our Chaplin Kevin Hart and well attended with the Lincoln Civic Party, 205 (City of Lincoln) Air Cadets and the Lincoln Scouts along with many members and the public.

The June Memorial service has been set for Sunday 11th June at 11.30hrs. Following this, members and guests are invited to lunch at Skellingthorpe Community Centre courtesy of the parish Council. After the lunch a service will be held at the village memorial at 14.00hrs. If you intend coming to the lunch can you please advise myself at [m.connock2@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.connock2@ntlworld.com) or Lynda Skinner at [parish.clerk@skellingthorpe.org.uk](mailto:parish.clerk@skellingthorpe.org.uk) This is just to give us some idea of numbers attending.

On Friday 28th October I had the pleasure of presenting a lecture on the history of Royal Air Force Skellingthorpe. This was held in the community centre with around 60 people in attendance. The lecture covered the full story of the airfield from its inception in 1941 to it being closed in 1955. For this and for the future we purchased a new projector and screen.

Proceeds from the lecture went to the funds of Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe and raised £221, which boosted the funds nicely. On the subject of funds, I can report that they remain fairly healthy and at the time of writing we have Circa £7,973 in the account. It should be remembered that we are committed to reserving £3,000 of this to ensure the maintenance of the association memorial.

As you are aware we publish the newsletter twice a year and a large percentage are sent by email. The cost of printing increases on a regular basis and at some time in the future we may have to consider all newsletters going out by email. If you currently receive one in the post and are agreeable to receiving the newsletter by email please let me know. For the last few editions we have managed to get the printing done FOC thanks to Scott Frances but this has now ended so we will have to pay for the printing.

Membership stands at around 90 and can I remind you that subs of £10 are now due for this year. I always try to put a note in with your newsletter to advise you if subs are overdue. If you do not get a note, take it that you are up to date. Payment can be made by cheque, standing order, or paid direct in to our bank. Please get in touch if you need the bank details. We have lost two of our long standing member since our last newsletter and this is reported on in our absent friends.

I look forward to perhaps seeing some of you in June.

Best wishes

***Mike Connock***

## Absent Friends

## Molly Jones

Molly Jones (widow of the late Fred Jones) sadly passed away between Christmas and New Year. She died peacefully, with her family around, as she would have hoped.

Along with Fred she was a regular supporter of the association. The connection with 50 Squadron and Skelly was a huge part of her life and she often talked about it in her final months. The funeral was held on Monday 23 January at St Mary the Virgin, Monken Hadley, Barnet.

**Thomas Victor Morris** - Passed away 12th January 2023

1817517 Thomas Victor Morris enlisted In the Royal Air Force on 21 December 1942.



Following his training he joined 61 Squadron  
On the night of 6th December 1944, LL777 took  
off from Skellingthorpe at 5.16 pm for an attack  
on Giessen. It flew into the Urselse track and was  
intercepted by a night fighter. The LL777 was hit  
by Flak, and above the target area by bombs  
from a Lancaster flying above it. A salvo  
knocked out the gunner, Sergeant Earnshaw  
Ashworth. New Zealand Flying Officer Byers

ordered his crew to jump. Sergeants TV Morris and RB Harsley, New Zealand Flying Officer WR Neave and Flight Sergeant HP Hardy parachuted out and were eventually taken prisoner of war.

A further crew member did not hear the command and remained seated. Eventually, the captain regained control of his machine and was able to fly it over liberated territory, landing safely at Ursel, Belgium. The ambulance services removed the dying Earnshaw Ashworth, who was immediately repatriated to Brussels, where he died and was buried in the capital's cemetery. The Lancaster LL777 remained at Ursel until New Year's Day 1945, when it was set on fire by the pilots of Jagdgeschwader 1.

Vic bailed out and parachuted. He landed in a wood and buried his parachute. He had a map and compass, so set off for Cologne. Next morning, a passing man took him to a farm where he was locked in a barn until two SS officers took him to a local airfield and he was locked in the guardroom with another prisoner called Flight Sergeant Brock. The following day, he was taken by Luftwaffe pick-up truck with five Australian prisoners to the railway station at Geisson, transported to Frankfurt, then on to Oberousel interrogation centre where he was kept in solitary confinement and interrogated for 14 days. He was then transferred by cattle wagon to Stalag Luft 7 at Bankau near the Polish border.

Two weeks later, they were evacuated from Stalag 7 and had to cross the River Oder before the Russians cut them off. They joined the Long March through Poland. He carried a New Zealand POW on his back for some time, to save him from being shot. This man remained in contact with Vic until his death approximately 6 years ago.

They were eventually liberated by the Russians, then taken by Americans across the river to the American sector, before being transported to Brussels in a Dakota and cared for by the Red Cross there. They were given American-style uniforms by the Canadian Second Army and allowed a big night out in Brussels. After that, they were flown home in a Lancaster to Oakington. Vic Morris's funeral was held on 17th February in Doncaster.

## THE ESCAPE

Despite the constant drain on the Bomber Command aircrew resource due to enemy action, accidents in training and tour expiries and the number of trained aircrew available to the operational theatres appeared to be satisfactory.

The Empire and Home Training facilities were maintained at capacity output from the holding centres that were set up to accommodate trainees between the various stages of instruction. Such a place existed in December 1943 at RAF Scampton. Written messages scribbled on the walls of the small rooms left no doubt in one's mind that it was also the home of 617 Squadron and that The Dambusters were here.

Standing in the gloomy cavernous atmosphere of the hangar I listened to the speculative comments of my crew and of these others around me and pondered, 'What the hell now? Will we ever get on 'ops'? How long is it?'

November 1941: Aircrew Receiving Centre, London; Brighton for kitting; Heaton Park; Moncton in Canada; Harrogate - in between the Initial Training Wing, Grading School; elementary flying training; senior flying training; advanced flying training back in the UK; Beam Approach Unit; Operational Training Unit and now here awaiting the four-engine conversion course.

"Pay attention everyone!" an Australian squadron leader had climbed on to a table, clutching a sheet of notes. "Now you are all going on an escape exercise tonight. You will be transported into the Lincolnshire countryside and dropped at least 30 miles away from the base.

You are to find your way back using any means whatsoever. This is to be achieved without being apprehended by the Home Guard, the police force and other army units, all of whom having been alerted to what is going on. You will be issued with a set of overalls and each crew will be left at a certain dropping point. Further details and answers to any questions can be obtained from the adjudicators sitting in the offices over there."

'Mmm... an escape exercise, eh? - not that we intend to be shot down - just in case - this could be a useful dummy run - get back by any means! Realistic and an exciting challenge!'

The crew was deep into a serious discussion on how to travel by rail without paying, whether to borrow a car (there could be a petrol problem), a bike and from the rear gunner (whose father rode to hounds) how about a horse? Breaking across the chat I said: "Come along you lot - let's find out what it is all about."

The Austin six-wheeled crew bus rumbled on through the stygian December evening - two crews had already been dropped off - each time the officer had descended from the front seat and quietly given the crew a verbal approximation of their position. The question in the minds of those people left in the bus was voiced by the wireless operator - a young man who had definite plans for the night - plans which only had a remote relationship to the escape exercise, providing one could get to a railway station of course!

"Skip" said the wireless operator, anxiously, "do you think we are still moving away from base - or what?"

e'll drop off at the next stop and risk it", I said. The rattling of the ill-fitting rear doors and worn spring shackles lessened



"OK chaps," I said "this is us - I'll go first." Lurching to my feet I opened the rear door, turned round and stepped down backwards on to the external drop step. "God, what a night," I breathed to myself. A dark overwhelming blackness oppressed everything. No stars - no hedges - no bus - no road.

I put my foot down to where it should be and as it found the ground and I transferred my weight to it, I released my grip on the crew bus and something brushed against my shin. 'What the devil's happening?' flashed across my mind as I lost my balance and fell backwards. There was a momentary glimpse of a yellow hole in the total blackness, the faint reflection of the masked headlights on the road, which I realised were moving towards me as I collapsed flat on my back.

"Christ Skip where are you, what's happened?" cried the rear gunner. No time to answer, to speak, to cry out, to...- 'On your side – roll! Miss the step. It's still rolling backwards - I'm going to be run over," I thought. 'Lie face up? Face down? How do I get away with this - what to do next?'

I was suddenly angry - what a stupid idiotic situation to get into! I could still see the glow in the blackness. 'Keep it in the right position'. 'Missed the step,' flicked across my mind. 'The 'diff' box! I'm a gonner! It will crack my head like an egg. Roll man! Roll sideways - miss it - watch the wheels. What a way to die - no - keep going. Is this where the Reaper lurks for me? Why here - no not here.

Why not that time in the Wimpey after all those hours in 10/10 cloud when we ran into the London balloon 'squeakers'. Why not when...?Ugh! Keep rolling - the second 'diff' - the wheels man! The front axle - the steering rods - they're low, you'll never miss them. Roll again. Lie flat - lie flat! Am I still alive or dead?!

After what seemed like an eternity but was only may be eight or nine seconds I lay in a crumpled heap on the roadway in the dim light of the headlamps. Not a sound had been uttered while I fought for life and limb, acting with animal instincts of self-preservation. I stayed there for what seemed to be another eternity, mind racing, but afraid to move and perhaps find broken bones or some other injury.

The cab door banged open, and an Aussie officer ran towards me. "Where the flamin' hell have you come from?" There was a tone of shocked, total disbelief in his voice. The adrenalin was still pumping in my body and instinctively I was on my feet checking arms, legs, body, head, even before the Aussie had reached me. 'Incredible, I thought. 'I'm moving - alive!'

"You've just run over me, damn it," I said wonderingly. "But I think I am OK, -all in one piece." Normality was returning and my actions slowed as I examined myself more carefully for injuries. It was suggested that I got back into the bus and returned to camp but the opportunity to miss the exercise didn't appeal somehow - there was this feeling that I was involved in a real thing - perhaps I was slightly concussed. "No", I said slowly. "No, there's nothing broken, bit shaken maybe, but who wouldn't be after bailing out!"

So, I walked back to camp, dodging imaginary Home Guard 'enemies' for the whole thirty miles, arriving at base half way through the following day, one of the last 'escapers' reporting to very disinterested adjudicators. There was no inquiry, and the incident was never mentioned again by the crew or anyone, such was the pace of life and death in wartime conditions.

My crew finally became operational on Lancaster's and although completing a lengthy tour, the escape exercise was never tested in reality. However, the possibility did arise on more than one occasion giving cause to reflect upon what a chancy occupation operational flying was - almost as dangerous as getting off a Royal Air Force crew bus on a dark winter's night!

***By Pilot Officer Don Street, DFC.***



## **The Invisible Beam**

By Dave Willey

A little while ago whilst browsing on a well-known auction internet website I bought a boxed lettered cam set. The stores reference number 5c/2210 on the box denoted they came from the RAF. Initially at first, I thought they were probably for creating the morse characters for an airfield pundit identification beacon.

Later research of the airfield morse pundit beacon indicated that the morse letters were created by a larger rotary stud contactor and the airfield identification required two morse characters (F G) for RAF Skellingthorpe.

I then looked up the stores reference number for the box 5c/2210 and the individual 24 lettered cams in the box. There was a nearly complete alphabet apart from the letters E and T.

In Morse code E is a single dot with T being a single dash. I think anyone reading the code characters E or T from a distance could easily misread them as they are comprised of only a single morse character and so the letters E and T were not included in the boxed set of 24 cams.

Further research on the internet revealed that the lettered cams worked in conjunction with a rotary flasher unit which was part of a long forgotten Type "F" Infrared Identification Friend or Foe system.

In the early part of the war UK aircraft would display resin lights (restricted intensity) on their wings on a Lancaster the lights were positioned on the rear of the wing tip.

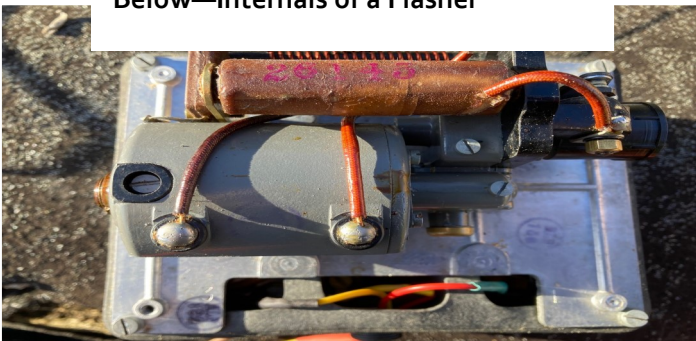
These were small low luminance lights of three different colours red, green, and yellow to coincide with the selected as the colour code sequence of the day. The resin lights which were visible to the human eye were a method of distinguishing whether the aircraft was ours or theirs (Friend or Foe). Throughout the second world war UK airfields were subject to German intruder attacks. One intruder would fly around the airfield

hoping to see the codes or colours of the day then transmit the information used to other intruders in the area. Our aircraft were usually attacked during take off and landing after an operation.

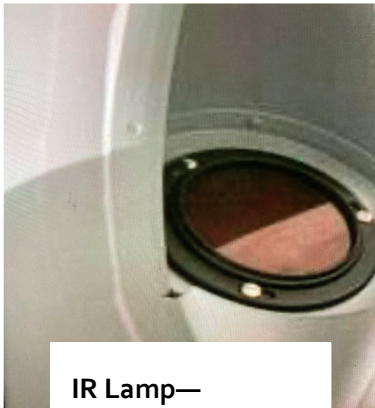
**Mosquito IFF Flasher**



**Below—Internals of a Flasher**



In 1942 a simple infrared resin light system was invented; infrared is invisible to the human eye. They modified a normal ident light with a normal filament bulb and a clear glass lens with an infrared filter between the bulb and the glass lens. This was the infrared emitter. The lamp was fitted to the rear of the fuselage. In the fuselage a rotary single letter morse flasher unit was added to the wiring feed so when switched on the infrared light would emit an invisible Morse code character.



**IR Lamp—  
Mosquito tail cone**

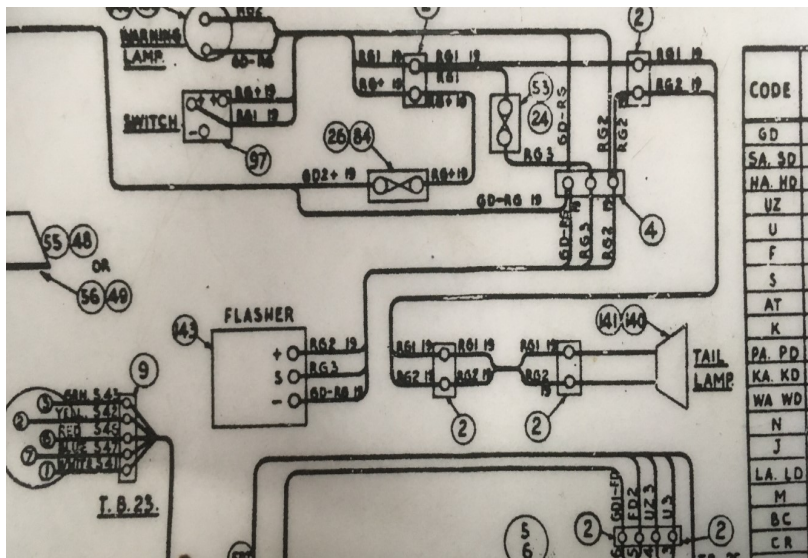


**Cam Flasher**

To receive the infrared emitted Morse letter inside the aircraft an infrared receiving cell was invented by EMI. The infrared receiving cell was incorporated into a telescope that the operator looked through. The infrared telescope needed a voltage supply of 3000 to 4000dc volts to operate. Initially a small battery was invented to supply the voltage at very low current called a (Zamboni Pile) this also made the receiving equipment portable so gun batteries and searchlight units could tell from the ground if the aircraft was friend or foe. later in the aircraft the high voltage supply was taken from the H2S radar modulator.

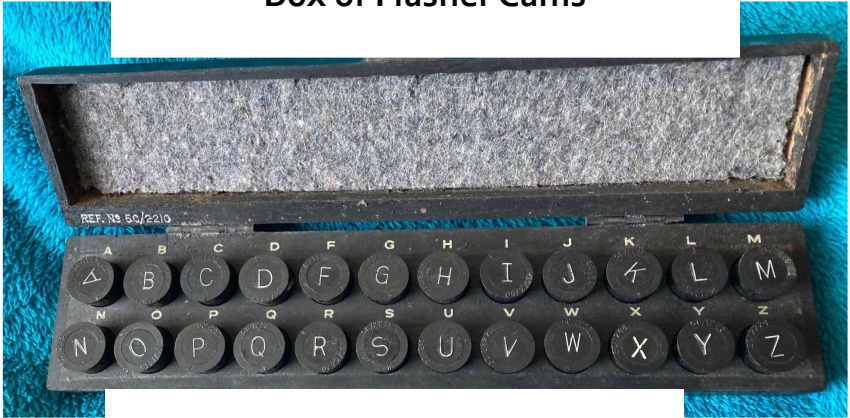
This was all pre health and safety. An operator viewing an image through the receiving telescope on a very cold night in a damp aircraft with the telescope up to your eye being supplied with 3000 to 4000 volts makes your mind boggle.

I would like to thank Tony Agar owner of De Havilland Mosquito HJ 711 for photographs and wiring diagram of the Type "F" infrared system on his Mosquito.



**Mosquito IFF Wiring**

**Box of Flasher Cams**



**Flasher Cam**



*Type "F" equipment photographs from equipment owned by David Willey.*



## **Crash - HE350**

RAF Skellingthorpe 2.5 miles West of the City of Lincoln opened in 1941 and finally closed in 1952. During RAF Skellingthorpe's history the airfield was home for various squadrons and training flights of Bomber Command during WW2.

*No. 50 Squadron.*

*No. 61 Squadron*

*No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit RAF*

*No. 14 (Pilots) Advanced Flying Unit RAF*

*No. 50 Conversion Flight RAF*

*No. 92 Maintenance Unit RAF*

*No. 93 Maintenance Unit RAF*

*No. 97 Conversion Flight RAF*

*No. 383 Maintenance Unit RAF*

*No. 1485 Target Towing Bombing Gunnery Flight RAF*

*No. 1506 (Beam Approach Training) Flight RAF*

*No. 58 Maintenance Unit RAF*

2023 marks the 80th anniversary of the crash of Vickers Wellington mk10 HE 350 from the No.1485 Target Towing Bombing Gunnery Flight. On Monday the 20th of September 1943 at 1537 hours Pilot Officer W.G. Brown and 6 crew took off from RAF Skellingthorpe's main runway to take part in an air gunnery training exercise. On the climb out from RAF Skellingthorpe with both engines at full power both engines suddenly failed. Four minutes later and unable to turn back Pilot Officer Brown attempted a wheels up emergency landing in a field at Lound farm some 2.5 miles Northwest of RAF Skellingthorpe.

The Wellington landed badly and was severely damaged sadly killing three crew and injuring four crew members included Pilot Officer W.G.Brown.

### **Crew of Vickers Wellington mk10 HE350**

P/O W.G. Baker pilot - Injured

Sgt J. Pemberton - Injured

Sgt A. Kirkman - Injured

P/O R.A. Baker D.F.C - Killed.

Sgt T.C. Newton - Injured

Sgt A. Bracey - Killed

Sgt T. Baker - Killed

Pilot officer R.A. Baker 50 Squadron was awarded his DFC posthumously on 16th November 1943.

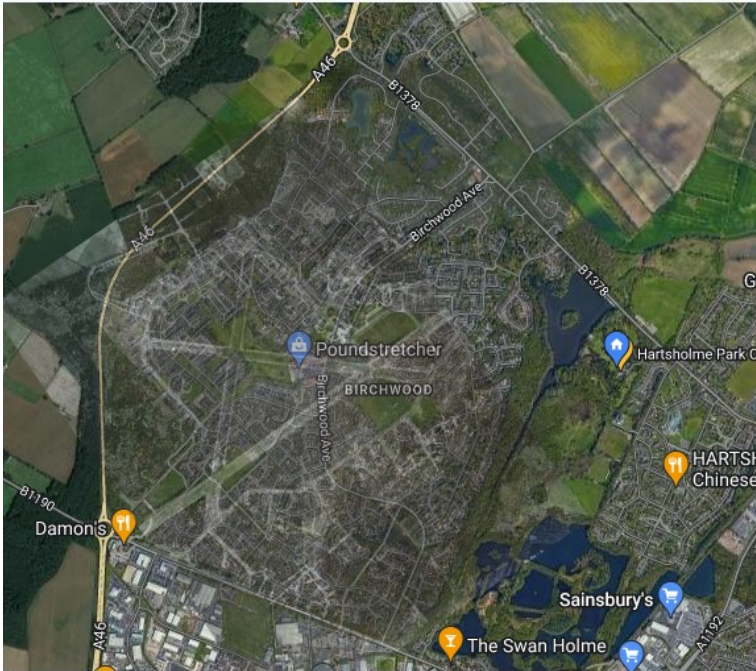
Sgt's Kirkman, Pemberton and Newton had been on attachment from 1654 HCU.

It was very unusual to have three crew members with the same surname "Baker".

## **Airfield Overlay**

*Accurate image of the Airfield over the Birchwood Estate as it is today*

Thank you to Julian Fisk for providing these fantastic “work in Progress” overlays. Interestingly, an original resident of the estate told Julian that the control tower stood on the site of the health centre that’s there now.



*Images on next page—TOP is the airfield plan and below is the Estate as it is today*

