

Documents and Memorabilia to be sent to University of Lincoln for Bomber Command digitization.

Name: Compiled by Rosemary McNamara youngest daughter of Lawrence and Eileen

Lawrence Gerard Lyons McNamara [DoB 8th April, 1915 -- KIA 19/ Dec. 1942]

1.] Lawrence was born on the 8th April 1915 in Jubbulpore India. He was the second, of three sons, born to LT. Col. John Daniel McNamara and Winifred Sarah Lyons. [British Officer, Indian Army,] The three boys, Bernard, Lawrence and Vernon were sent to the UK to attend St John's College, Grove Road, Southsea, Hampshire, PO5 3QW. Lawrence was a good sportsman and was awarded medals for several different sports. The boys spent their school holidays with Henry and Eileen Lewis. Eileen [McNamara] Lewis was their aunt and sister of John Daniel McNamara. The Lewis's lived at Combwell Priory on the Kent Sussex borders. Eileen and her husband, Henry had two daughters, Annabell, who later married Lord Masserene, and Sheila. She married a Mr Alexander, who was involved in breeding Irish race horses. *

With a Matriculation qualification from school in June 1932, Lawrence was awarded a certificate of the Institute of Chartered Accounts in September 1932 aged 17. Henry Lewis, before he died 1936, got Lawrence a job as a chartered accountant at Chantry Button.

Lawrence worked for a while in the UK, but later he decided to travel and to join the British South African Police in Southern Africa. He sailed by Union Castle boat from Southampton to Cape Town { Two weeks} and then by train, { three days } to Gwelo, the third largest town, in what was then Southern Rhodesia. On the boat he met Frederica Eileen Davies, { Judy}. It is a mystery why Lawrence called her Judy. *

The long journey on the ship from Southampton to Cape Town and the three days on the train to Southern Rhodesia allowed Lawrence and Frederica Eileen { Judy} time to get acquainted. She was born in Cardiff South Wales and later moved to London. Her parents were civil servants, in the English Civil Service, working mainly in Wales. Lawrence and Eileen(Judy) spent happy times in Gwelo. Lawrence initially worked in the police, but on his marriage certificate he wrote his job as 'journalist'. Eileen(Judy) was a qualified nurse and Midwife having trained in the UK, and she worked at the local hospital in Gwelo. They were married in QueQue Southern Rhodesia on the 12th May 1938. They had good friends and spent week-ends enjoying the surrounding countryside. Eileen (Judy) left Gwelo hospital after she married having worked there for two years. 1936-38. She worked at the Memorial Hospital, Bulawayo from May 1940 until April 1941.

***** Frederica Eileen Davies(Judy) attended the Queen Mary's hospital for East End, Stratford, London and trained to become a nurse. She was received as a probationer on the 8th August 1928. Her training lasted four years, until 8th August 1932. [27/November 1931?*. She completed her Midwifery course there in 13th August 1932. She transferred to King Georges Hospital, Ilford on the 8th August 1932 and became a Staff Nurse there until January 1934. She was very proud of her success. This period of her life had a lasting effect on her. In 1934 she left the East End, and applied for a post at The London Clinic, Harley Street, London. Her memories of working there included some highlights. She nursed

Paul Robeson's son and Ethel Merman's father. Ethel Merman sent a 'Thank you' letter to my mother. She kept it for a long time, but then sent it to Mr Tinker, the Theatre critic who was a huge fan of Ethel Merman. Eileen was Welsh, and enjoyed music and musical theatre. One November morning in 1936 she went in to the hospital, and reported to Matron to receive her instructions for the day. She was told to go to a particular room and on entering saw a man lying in the bed. Her walk to work had been cold, through a dense freezing fog. She was hugging her arms in an effort to warm herself. She was small, but proudly dressed in her nurses uniform, and started on the tasks required of her to 'special' her patient. They talked about the grey cold day that he could see through the window, and observed her attempts to warm her arms. He suggested that it would be pleasant to live in a warm climate. She agreed, not realizing that the conversation would lead to a decision that would change her life. He told her that he was the High Commissioner for Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and that the country was seeking trained nurses to work there.*****

With news of tension back home in the UK, and opportunities made available to him, Lawrence made a decision to train to become a pilot 1938/39. He started training with the Rhodesian Air Force at Heaney Barracks, just outside the second city, in the colony, Bulawayo. *

The war had started by the time he left for the UK in September 1941 to join the RAF. Lawrence travelled back to the UK on 6th September 1941. He wrote on behalf of his mother to Peggy, his brother Vernon's wife in Umtali, S.Rhodesia. [29th Oct 1941] He apologized for not being able to get up to Umtali to say 'Chin chin to you and Vernon'..... He had taken his 'Wings Exam' -- at Heaney, Bulawayo. He sailed on Sept. 6th 1941 from Cape Town in the HMT Renia del Pacifico. ' We made Halifax Nova Scotia in 17 days, on 23rd Sept, where he experienced American life in general' They stayed there for about 16 days, at the end of which time (October 7th) 'we transferred to the HMT Andes in which we completed the journey in convoy' to Liverpool. 'Arrived there 15th October but confined to ship for 2,1/2 days.'

When Lawrence arrived back in England he spent initial and subsequent leave with his parents at their home, The Glen, Dry Hill Park Road, Tonbridge, Kent. He had left his pregnant wife, Eileen and daughter Jill at their new house 23 Jameson Street, Bulawayo. Southern Rhodesia. Lawrence wrote to his brother Vernon, he elaborated on the description of the journey from Cape Town. After his enforced stay on the ship in Liverpool he was sent to Bournemouth. About the 22nd October he arrived in Tonbridge on a fortnights leave. His mother was very ill. On November 2nd 1941, after only 10 days he was recalled, to travel to Bournemouth, he 'drew flying kit' and from 3rd November-16th December 1941 proceeded to South Cerney, Oxfordshire, to do a refresher course -- No1 A.T. he described this as "stooging" around doing 'what they called a' Refresher Course' He enjoyed the beer there, but said the price was 'extortionate'. His letter of the 21st January said 'after about 3 1/2 months in this country I have not yet done my operational training'. He signed off his letter saying 'Well old chap that is not my exciting time I have had in the RAF so far so you have not missed much.' From 17th December 1941 - January 2nd 1942 he was in Upwood, Huntingdonshire on a blind flying course 'learning how to land planes in nil visibility using Lorenz ?... beams' He spent Christmas and New Year '41/42 in Peterborough, the neighbouring town. On January 7th 1942 he returned to Upwood, and then went to Bournemouth

pending posting to O.T.U. On January 9th 1942 according to the letter he wrote to Vernon he reported a swelling in his neck. He was then waiting for a bed in the hospital to have the cyst removed.

Vernon, Lawrence's younger brother had travelled to S.R. a few years after him, to join the BSAP where he remained. His brother Bernard was managing the estate at Combwell Priory, home of Eileen Lewis, his aunt, in Hawkhurst on the Sussex/Kent border as her secretary Barbara Travers had been in the W.A.A.F.S. and had been called up in August 1939. Bernard was a keen amateur photographer. He had problems with his hearing, but according to Lawrence's letter to Vernon's he was hoping to join the RAF. as an 'A.C. 2.'*

Bernard photographed Lawrence on many occasions, in uniform and also with his parents and wife and Jill, and Rosemary his second child, when they arrived in the U.K. after their adventurous journey to join Lawrence.*

Eileen(Judy) made the decision to return to the UK to be with Lawrence. Eileen(Judy) and the children arrived in the UK after a lengthy journey. Eileen(Judy) wrote in our Baby books. ' We left Bulawayo on 3rd June 1942. First by train to Cape Town[with her friend and her children Bridget and Ann Willis.] We stayed in a boarding house for three weeks waiting for a ship. This was a challenge for the women with two very young babies each. The boat journey was hazardous, as the ship travelling in convoy, still had to avoid the U-boats. We sailed from Cape Town on the passenger boat "Nestor". Rosemary was 3 months old, the youngest passenger on board, and we arrived in Sierra Leon without mishap. It was very hot and were there for about a 1 week and then transferred to the troopship Empress of Canada which brought us to England unescorted and without incident.' We arrived in Liverpool on August 4th 1942 and travelled down to London where Grandfather McNamara met us and took us to his house in Tonbridge. Lawrence arrived on leave, that evening.*

Eileen wrote in Jill's Baby book 'that Lawrence came home to Tonbridge on the 13th September and there was a party for Jill's birthday[which had been on the 9th September.] it was a happy and joyful event. Eileen and Jill went to see Lawrence in Lincoln on 13th October, and stayed in the Grand Hotel. Eileen(Judy) also recorded that ' my Daddy came home for 7days leave on 2nd December and Uncle Bernard, who is also in the RAF, arrived the day after. We had lots of fun and I missed my daddy when he went away'.

Ray Bloyce, a Lancaster enthusiast, contacted us when we put an article in Airmail Magazine in the summer of 1998. He wrote with detailed knowledge about one of the photos which my mother had kept. The photo showed a Lancaster and underneath the name Genoa the dates 13/14th November 1942. The crew were all named and 44 Squadron written as well. He wrote 'The serial number of the Lancaster—was W4126 Code Letters KM-BJ KM being 44 Rhodesia Squadron) based at that time at Waddington.' Harry Irons DFC, a member of Bomber Command, explained that the photo referred to the raid by 67 Lancasters and 9 Sterlings to Italy on the dates in November '42. He wrote 'this picture was only given to a crew that made a direct hit on the target and was signed by commanding officer of the bomber group.' the name at the bottom is A.Pollen P/O 1942

This is the last information of Lawrence.

1st February 1943 Winnie, Lawrence's mother wrote to tell Vernon and Peggy that Eileen(Judy) had received the news from the Air Ministry on Saturday 30/1st that Lawrence was missing. The news

had come from the Red Cross, Germany that he had been killed, but they could not be certain as they were waiting for confirmation. Apparently several cases were proved false, so Lawrence was still posted as missing.

- In a cutting from a Rhodesian newspaper (Probably The Rhodesian Herald) it stated that "Flying Officer McNamara...was employed by Messrs. Speight, Goldby and Webber as a audit clerk.(where?). He attested in December 1940 and after preliminary[Airforce] training in this Colony proceeded overseas in September 1941"

***** Eileen(Judy) Jill and Rosemary continued to live with Lawrence's' parents, John and Winifred, through the rest of the war. Winifred died in 1945/46 and John Daniel remarried, Gwen. She lived in Heathfield Sussex. Eileen(Judy) made a decision to return to Southern Rhodesia in 1946, with her two children. Eileen (Judy) Lawrence's widow kept in touch with Eileen Lewis and her family, and Gwen throughout her time in Rhodesia and on her return, with Jill, to the UK in 1964. Rosemary came to the UK to complete her training in 1962/3. She returned to live in the UK in 1965. *****

Eileen(Judy) my mother died in April 1996. All her life and in all the moving around, she returned to the UK in 1964, she had kept a photo of Lawrence beside her bed. With the photo, was a letter, and a photo of the plane. Alan my partner was very moved by the photo and letter when he saw them. He produced a beautiful presentation of the items. Alan, then wrote a letter which was published in Airmail Magazine, with the picture, offering to send copies to any families or friends who might be connected to our story. We were contacted by Harry Irons DFC, who had flown the same mission, and he sent his log book and a description of the raid from his perspective. Ray Bloyce, was an enthusiast and was helpful in explaining man things. Peter and Anne Cook, who were based in Zimbabwe, communicated with us. Their daughter, Jane Beale, who was living in the UK, had seen our letter in Airmail magazine. Peter and Anne were working to 'record and preserve' details for the Air Forces Association of Zimbabwe. They were compiling a Roll of Honour of Rhodesian Airmen KIA. This was to ensure that the Rhodesian air crew, KIA, which included Peter's two brothers, would be remembered. Peter and Ann were pleased to have information about Lawrence. Beryl Salt was tasked by the Rhodesian/Zimbabwe Air Force to produce a book 'A Pride of Eagles'. Peter and Ann were assisting Beryl in the project.

*****My mother had been a member of a group called the War Widows and Associates, which was started in the early 70's. Iris Strange, the founder, herself a Was Widow, had for some years been campaigning for Parity of Pensions for WW11 widows with the Falkland war widows. She and Nicholas Winterton MP for Macclesfield, had been successful for all the resident war widows. In 1992 they were able to get that same parity for my mother Frederica Eileen McNamara. Her pension had diminished to a pittance, as the Zimbabwean government kept a large percentage of the money. The WW&A with the help of Tangmere Aviation base in Sussex, built a memorial garden. Trees, plants and plaques were planted to commemorate the sons, brothers and husbands of this small group of dedicated war widows. Alan and I offered the presentation, that Alan had produced to Tangmere Museum. They accepted it. In 2012 we attended an annual meeting of 44 Squadron Lawrence's Squadron, at Waddington Air Base. We transferred the original presentation, from Tangmere Museum to Waddington. We decided that as Lawrence had flown from there, that is where he should be

remembered.

References

- * Sheila Alexander's letter to me. Annabel's note and photos, Family documents, Personal anecdotes.
- * Matron's reference April 1941. and Leisure time and work photos
- * Certificates/ References from Dr's and Surgeons.
- * Photos: Rhodesian Army/ Airforce Base Heaney Barracks, Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia.
- * Lawrence's letter to Vernon 21st Jan.1942
- * Eileen's letter to Mr Tinker and his reply.
- * Eileen's(Judy) notes Jill Baby book (Eileen's account Rosemary Baby book)
- * Photos of Lawrence, Jill, Eileen(Judy) Last photo to Eileen (Judy).dated 5/12/1942

- * Photo, South Cerney. The photo of Lawrence and Eileen(Judy) was possibly taken at Lincoln October 13 1942. Grand Hotel Lincoln. (Ref see Eileen's(Judy's) baby notes)
- * Mums' memorabilia, Alan's presentation, correspondence from Harry Irons, and Ray Bloyce, Peter and Ann Cook.