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My late husband had a career in the Royal Air Force spanning the ages from 18 until 55 years. He served both as crew and on Air Traffic Control duties. During the war I was employed in Operations/Intelligence on Bomber Command Stations, & on demobilisation enlisted on the "Reserve" for ten years.

At a time in World War Two when there were so many incidents to recall I will relate the story of one in particular that remains imprinted on my memory as I was on duty in the Operations Room at the time, but, at that time did not know any of the personnel involved.

On the 1. December 1943 at 2240hrs in a Stirling aircraft EH 880 from 75 Sqn based at Mepal, Nr Ely, Cambs. as a member of the crew, my husband, aged 20 yrs. was returning from an operational mission. The aircraft had developed a problem, & was diverted to RAF Acklington, Northumberland.

The On-site impression of a policeman serving in the Northern Constabulary was that it was far too low, and needed at least another 30' in height. Unfortunately, this was not achieved and the aircraft crashed on Cliffe House Farm at Amble.

Downstairs at this time the farmer & his wife Mr. & Mrs. Robson had been entertaining old friends, Mr. & Mrs. Rowell a butchers from Ambleside - actually they had recently slaughtered a pig, & were rolling the bacon.

The impact of the Bomber split the farmhouse in two, & very sadly to say five children aged from one to eleven were killed in their beds in upstairs rooms (A child's cot was intact with a baby still unseparated)

The fire had already broken out in the wreckage, & as the occupants left the debris they noticed an Airman in the field with his clothes ablaze. Mr. Rowell, regardless of his own safety succeeded in extinguishing the flames by rolling him on the ground, and saving his life. He received a commendation for his bravery.

My husband suffered very severe burns & received wonderful hospital care & attention at R.A.F. Halton, Bucks.

It is very sad to say, - & all these years on, - that the remaining six members of the crew were killed (They were all about 20 years of age.) Unharmed. All the mothers concerned travelled long distances to see my husband at Halton to wish him a speedy recovery, & that they were so pleased he had survived, which I think in the circumstances, a wonderful display of courage.

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My husband then returned to 75 Sqdn. for operational flying three months later.

* It was then, on the 13 March 1944, when all the pre-activity for D-Day was under way that 16 Stirlings were sent with mines to St. Nazaire, Cherbourg, La Rochelle & Brest. My husband's aircraft was forced to abandon the mission before they had all been dropped & was forced to land at a very small satellite airfield at Castle Coombe which was used by training aircraft & did not have runway. The Stirling could not stop before reaching the boundary when the undercarriage collapsed. The crew all escaped from the aircraft; the CO, who was flying with them at the time, the only one injured in climbing a large fence in the hasty departure, injured his leg. The aircraft then caught fire & the remaining mines blew up. Even after 50 years I remember the incident so well as I was "on duty" at the time, & would have recorded it in my log book. (By then ... I had met the Airman in question.)

My husband was indeed fortunate to survive 85 bombing raids over enemy territory and

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remained dedicated to the Royal Air Force during his lifetime.

As we approach the 50th Anniversary of VE Day it is a timely reminder of the gratitude that the "survivors" owe to those service & civilian personnel who were less fortunate.

NOTE *

In March 1944 75 Sqn RNZAF were involved in "Special Operations". Although Bomber Harris was still trying to smash the heartlands in Germany he also had to divert some of his effort into the pre-invasion tasks. This included hitting railway systems, road bridges, & other lines of communication vital to the Germans on the Continent.

The Resistance Movement in France needed to be supplied with the tools to help with the demolition of road & rail traffic. 75 Sqn were called on to assist other Sqns in dropping supplies and explosives, & one was to blow up at Castle Combe. The recognised ton of operation was 30 ops.)