

No 25 O.T.U. 24.07.1942 WELLINGTONS T2701 AND DV476

At 0355 hr, Friday 24th July 1942, two Wellingtons collided on the perimeter of RAF Finningley and all members of both crews were killed. One plane was returning early from a practice bombing raid over the Theddlethorpe Bombing Range after experiencing engine problems and was set to circle the base until given permission to land. The second plane was practising night circuits and landings training exercises under control from ground control and, after overshooting the runway, climbed and crashed into the other plane. The subsequent Accident Report card and Summary of Events document contained significant errors.

The first, returning, aircraft, recorded as T2701 but was actually DV476, had a crew of four: Pilot W/O Smith 519241, Observer W/O Lutwyche 561197, W/Op Sgt. Barrows 1287636 and Air Gunner Sgt McDonald 544774.

The second aircraft, recorded as DV476 but was actually T2701, had a crew of seven: 1st Pilot P/O Beck DFM 402158 , 2nd Pilot P/O Robinson 119240, Air Bomber P/O Waterson 116706, Air Bomber Sgt Hyde 1088309, W/Op Sgt Plume 1376309, Air Gunner Fl Sgt Ethell 950909 and Air Observer Sgt Jelleyman 1381351.

The errors in identifying the aircraft correctly in the Accident Report were discovered by the son of Sgt Plume, Mr Alan Plume, in the early 1980s when he engaged an Accident Investigation Team who located the engraved watch of P/O Beck at the site in a position which did not match the entry. He went on to interview one or two members of the local population who remembered the incident and then produced convincing evidence that, I believe, led the Air Ministry to correct the record. Mr Plume contacted me in 1991 and left me with copies of his research papers which I have recently forwarded to the new IBCC archive at Lincoln.

My grandfather attended the military funeral at St Oswald's Church, Finningley on 30.07.1942 where my father, W/O C.E.Lutwyche, and others were buried – I have photos of that occasion. He was told by the Station Commander that mistakes had been made by those in ground control that night, but it was “hushed up” as one of them was highly decorated. It hardly matters nowadays whether that was true or not but the report entry that DV476 failed to notify ground control of their return seems somewhat questionable bearing in mind the experience of that crew. It was a sad loss of eleven good men. I was also told by my aunt Betty, my father's sister and who brought me up after my mother passed away, that my father's body was recovered from the river Torne just north-west of RAF Finningley, and the subsequent autopsy revealed that he actually died from drowning – a nice final touch of irony! That last piece of information also supports Mr Plume's conclusions with regard to which plane fell where.

David C Lutwyche 05/08/2017
Son of Warrant Officer C.E.'Bill' Lutwyche 561197