

106 SQUADRON

ROYAL AIR FORCE
VOLUNTEER
RESERVE



FLIGHT SERGEANT R.W.L. MUIR

1923 - 1943

RAF BOMBER COMMAND



FROM
HACKNEY
LAD TO AIR
BOMBER

THE SHORT
LIFE OF AN
EAST END BOY
WHO
VOLUNTEERED
TO SERVE
KING AND
COUNTRY

Early Life

My Uncle, Reginald Muir was born in Hackney, East London on 7 June 1923, the eldest son of Doris and George Muir and elder brother to Ronald (Ron) and Roland (Mo). Reg was a bright student at Hackney Downs School, one of the London's top grammar schools, founded specifically to educate the poor working class children of London's East End. Sir Michael Caine, Harold Pinter and Steven Berkoff would also be educated there. Comments left by school masters in Ron's reports showed that Reg's academic achievements set a high bar for his siblings.

Early life for Reg revolved around his home at 24 Holcroft Road, his younger brothers, and Arsenal Football Club. Reg assumed a natural authority over the household in the absence of his father who was serving with the Royal Engineers in Gibraltar.

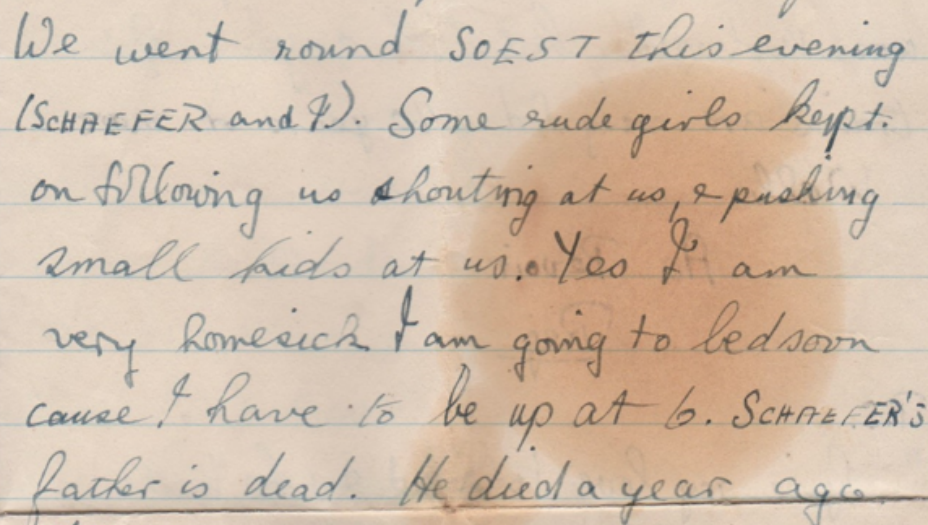


Hackney Downs School, formerly The Grocer's Company School, established in the late 19th century for poor families of London's East End, many of whom were Jewish immigrants. The school standing on the site today is the Mossbourne Academy, Hackney.



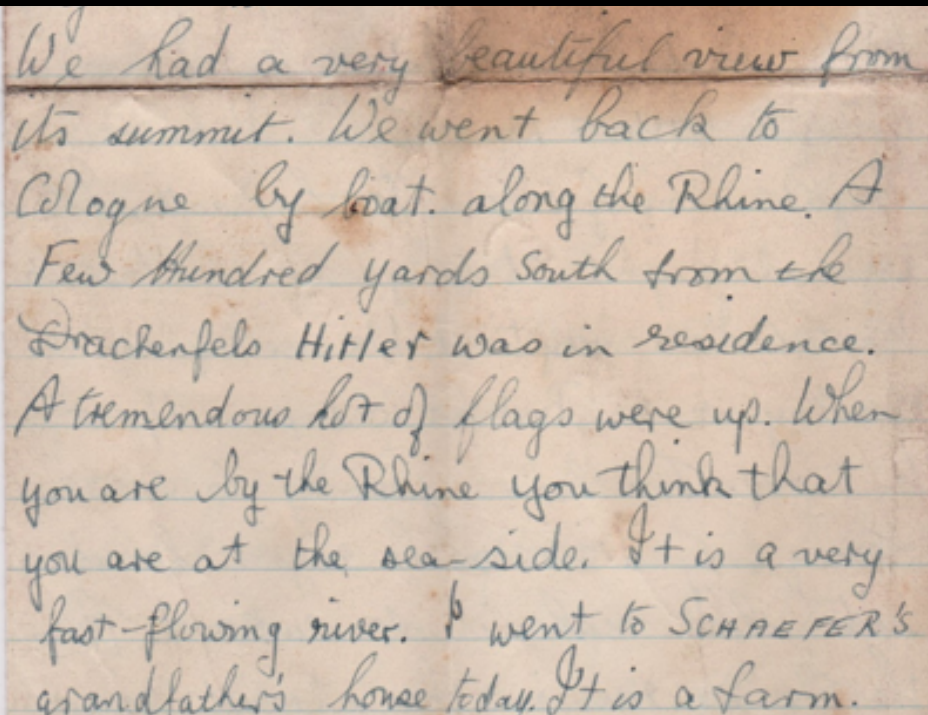
Reg, centre, with his mother, Doris and his brother, Ron

In 1937, aged 14, Reg traveled alone to Germany to take part in a student exchange program. His letters home portray a wide-eyed and observant youngster, alive to Germany's growing military might, but at pains to adjust to the rural farm life of his exchange partner, Schaefer. 'You should have given me more to eat.' Reg laments in a letter written on a train bound for Cologne, not yet realising how he would come to dislike German cuisine. 'I feel like Helmut when he first came to England. Very lonely in a strange land', which suggested that Reg had hosted an exchange student in the past. Once settled in Germany, Reg wrote again, marveling at the 1,200-year history of the local town Soest, and its church. Soest was the epicentre of his exchange because of the 'Oberrealschue', which still welcomes students through its doors today as the 'Aldegever Gymnasium'.

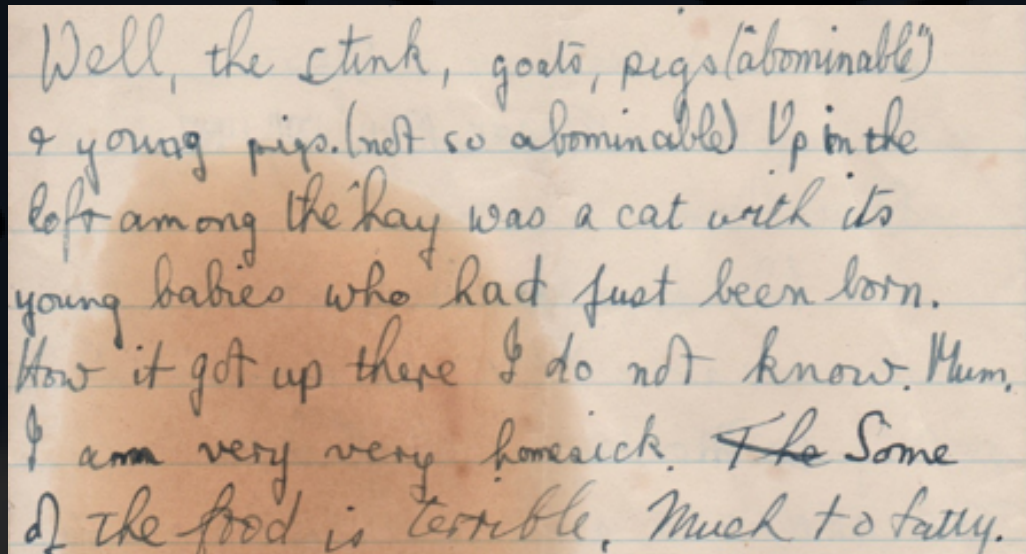
A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The handwriting is in cursive and somewhat slanted. The text describes a visit to Soest and mentions some rude girls and small kids. It also mentions that the writer is homesick and has to be up at 6 o'clock because Schaefer's father is dead.

We went round SOEST this evening
(SCHAEFER and I). Some rude girls kept
on following us shouting at us, & pushing
small kids at us. Yes I am
very homesick I am going to bed soon
cause I have to be up at 6. SCHAEFER'S
father is dead. He died a year ago.

No doubt Reg would have attempted to help out on the farm wherever he could. But this kind of existence would have been in stark contrast to the urban surroundings of pre-war Hackney. At heart, Reg was an East London lad and he missed his home and family.

A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The handwriting is in cursive and somewhat slanted. The text describes a view from a summit, a trip back to Cologne by boat along the Rhine, and a visit to Schaefer's grandfather's house, which is a farm.

We had a very beautiful view from
its summit. We went back to
Cologne by boat. along the Rhine. A
Few hundred yards South from the
Drachenfels Hitler was in residence.
A tremendous lot of flags were up. When
you are by the Rhine you think that
you are at the sea-side. It is a very
fast-flowing river. I went to SCHAEFER'S
grandfather's house today. It is a farm.



Well, the stink, goats, pigs (abominable)
& young pigs. (not so abominable) Up in the
loft among the hay was a cat with its
young babies who had just been born.
How it got up there I do not know. Mum,
I am very very homesick. The Some
of the food is terrible, Much too fatty.

In April 1941, a couple of months short of his 18th birthday, Reg's application to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve was accepted. He was advised to await a call up and to remain fit of mind and body.

The wait was a lengthy one, but in June 1942, Reg would leave Hackney and make the long journey to East London, South Africa, where he would train to be an aviator. The journey itself would not be without its risks. The seven-week voyage to Durban, probably starting from Liverpool docks, would have been in a large convoy out into the Atlantic, hoping not to draw the attention of patrolling U-boats.

After docking safely in Durban, Reg took the two-day train journey southward to East London to enroll at RAF Air School 41.

The Making of an Airman



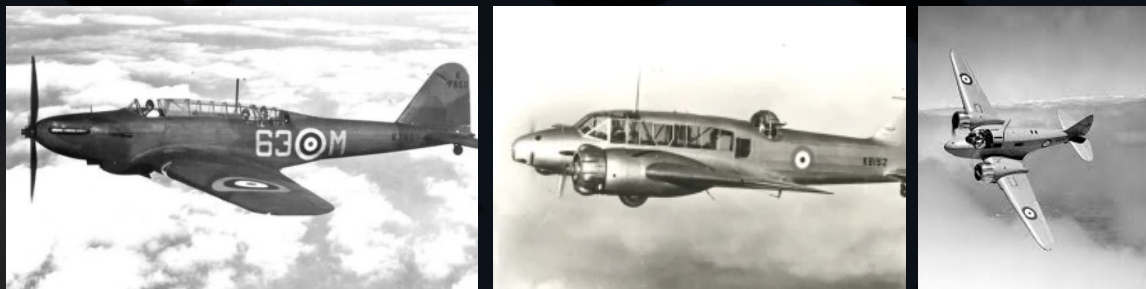
Sgt. Lobban
J. R. Tate
E. Hobson
T. E. Gold
J. Dwyer
G. Greener
Chambers
S. A. Jackson
J. Carson

J. A. Lobban
Mann
D. M. M'Callach
Chavez
J. Dommitz
J. R. Tate
J. M. L. Drummond
C. H. Adams

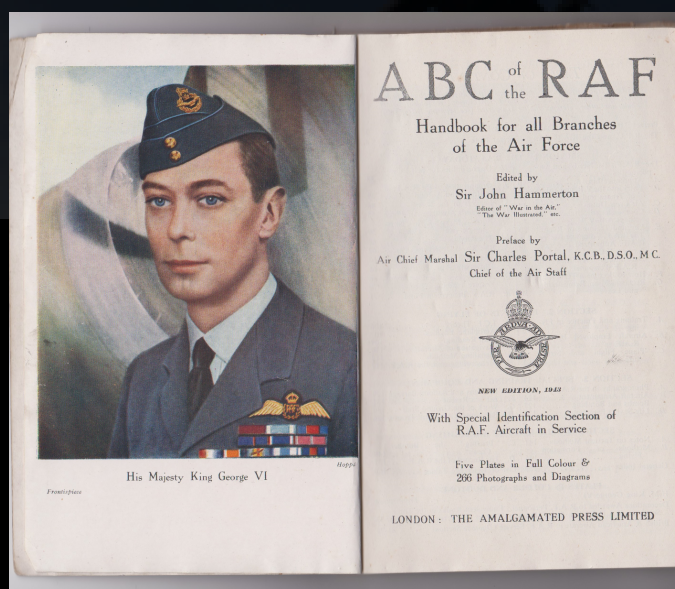
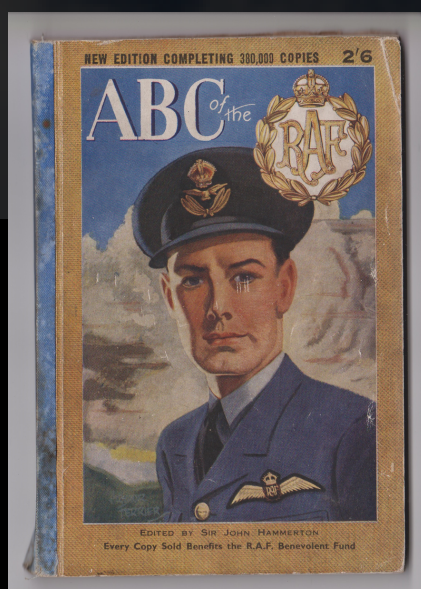
Above: Reg, 2nd row, 2nd from left with Air School 41 training officers and trainee aviators. To his right is Jacob Domnitz, also training to be an air bomber, and also from Hackney. He would go on to join 76 squadron. On 12 June 1943 at 2231h, Jacob and six other crew members took off from RAF Linton-on-Ouse aboard a Handley Page Halifax DK170. Their mission was to carry out a night raid on Dusseldorf. The aircraft was shot down by a Messerschmidt Bf 110 night fighter, flown by Oberleutnant Walter Barte based in Sint Truiden in Belgium. The navigator of the Halifax, Sgt J.A. Lobban would survive the crash but was later captured and detained as a prisoner of war.

Left: Signatures of the officers and trainees in the photo above.

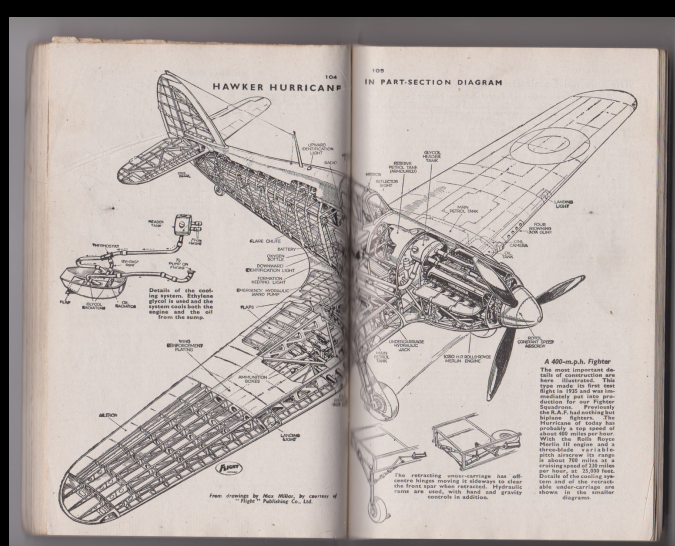
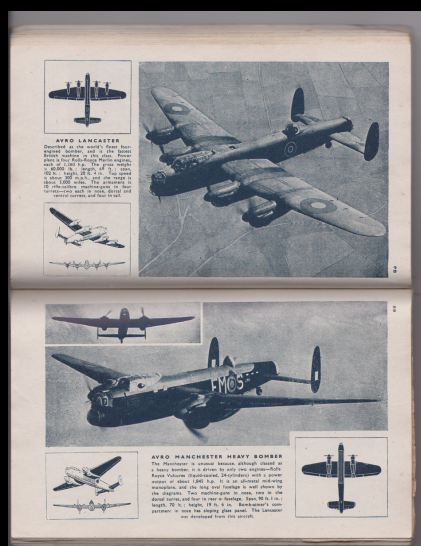
On June 28, 1942, Reg would experience the marvel of flight for the first time. He would assume the role of Observer on two aircraft; a twin engine Airspeed Oxford and a single-engine Fairey Battle. Reg's training would see him airborne every other day, or thereabouts, typically for two hours at a time. A different trainee pilot would fly each sortie, mainly in Avro Ansons, a stalwart Commonwealth aviator training since 1937.



Standard training aircraft the Fairey Battle (left), Avro Anson (centre) and the Airspeed Oxford (right)



Extracts from the ABC of the RAF which contained organisational and technical facts and figures about the organisation that the trainees were joining.



RESULTS OF AB INITIO COURSES AND REMARKS

Results of Ab Initio Gunner Course.			
From 29/6/42		To 2/10/42	
Held at EAST LONDON South Africa.			
Exercise	Points	%	Types of Aircraft
500 yd. Range	1/6	100%	OXFORD 04-35 BATTLE 01-50
No. of G. 23 films	N/A	100%	
Cine footage	N/A	100%	
Air to Ground	100	100%	Course Flying Times 06.26
Free Ascent			
Under Tail			
Beam			Exam. Marks % 85%
Beam R.S.	950	24%	
Quarter Cross Over	1100	24%	
Night			
Remarks: PASS/FAIL.			

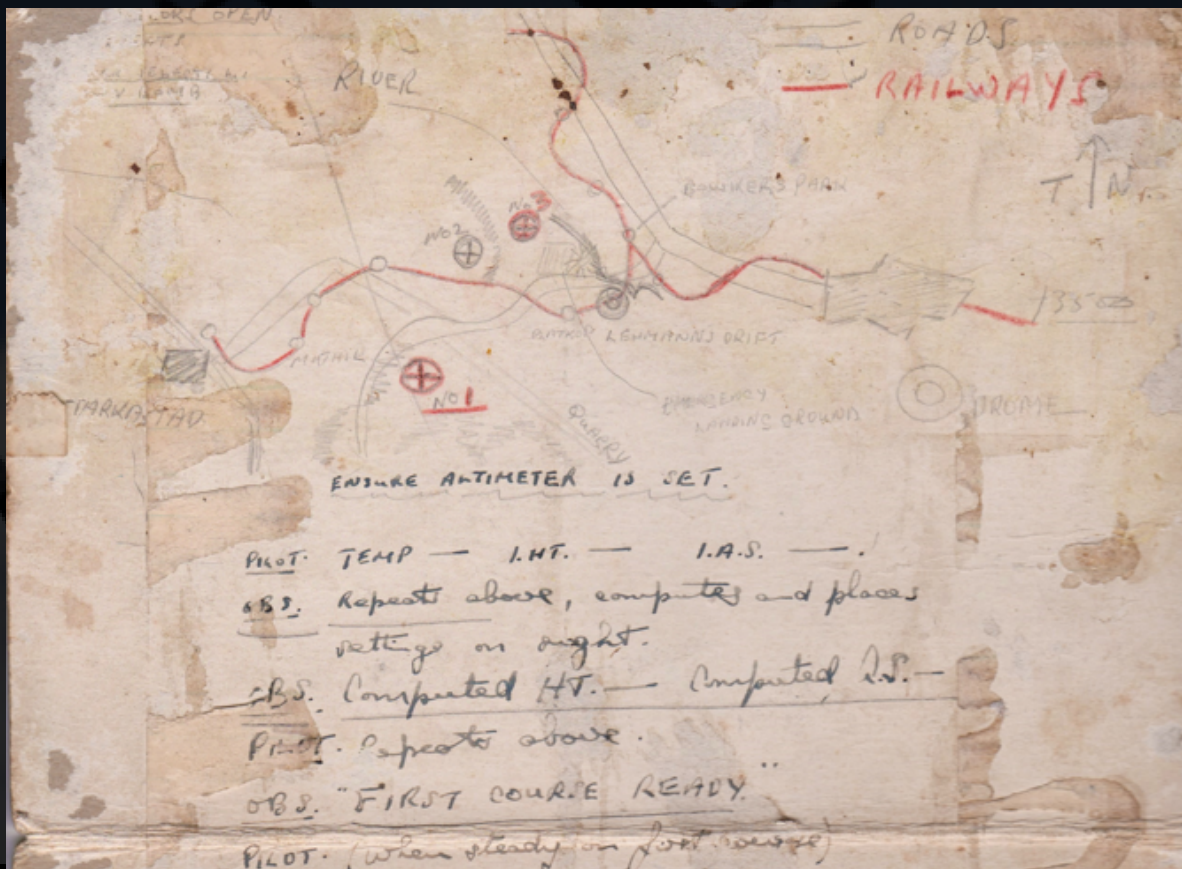
RESULTS OF AB INITIO COURSES AND REMARKS

Air Observer Navigation Course. 14					
From 29/6/42		To 3/10/42			
Held at EAST LONDON South Africa.					
Subjects	Poss.	Obtd.	Subjects	Poss.	Obtd.
D.R. Theory	100	73	Reconnaissance	100	97
D.R. Plotting	300	265	Photography	100	81
Compasses	100	72	Ship Recognition	2	2
Meteorology	100	75	A/C Recognition	2	2
Maps and Charts			Signals	100	86
Instruments	100	75	Astro-Navization	100	71
D/F W/T	100	81	Total Marks Obtd. %		82
Flying Times on Course:		Day	Night		
A/C Types		100	145	Passed	
For Exercise Placement		AA		Failed	
Remarks:					

RECOMMENDED FOR SPECIALIST TRAINING
AFTER FURTHER EXPERIENCE NO.

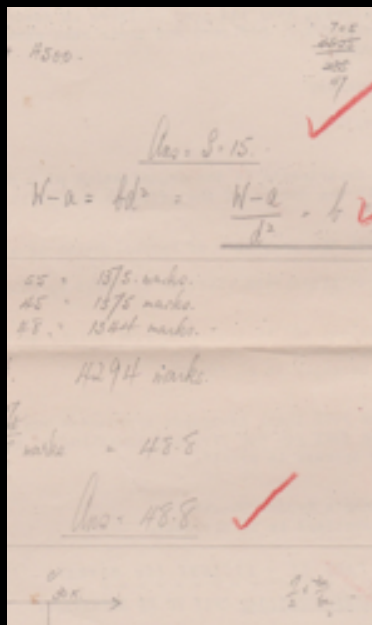
Entries in Reg's Flight Log Book detailing the date, time, aircraft, pilot and conditions of each sortie, purpose, performance and any other observations the trainers might wish to note.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No	Pilot	Duty	Time carried forward	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times Day	Night
1/8/42	08:47	Artisan S	LT. MC LINTOCK	1/1 OBS.	9L. 25m.	Ex. N2 (C)	21.05m	
7/8/42	13:41	Artisan M.	LT. HOFFE	1/1 OBS.		Ex. N3 (2)	35m.	
10/8/42	13:33	Artisan C.	LT. THOMPSON	1/1 OBS.		Dir. Plot Exercise	11.45m	
17/8/42	13:37	Artisan G.	LT. REYNOLDS	1/1 OBS.		Ex. N4 (b) 1st. Navigation	21.45m	
18/8/42	13:32	Artisan L.	W/O ROGERS	1/1 OBS.		Ex. N4 (c)	21.30m	
20/8/42	13:20	BATTLE 1008	LT. SCOTT	1/1 OBS.		Camera Gunnery F.S.C.G.	35m	
20/8/42	08:15	Artisan B1	LT. REYNOLDS	1/1 OBS.		Ex. N6(b) Modified 1st. Obs.	3.00	
27/8/42	09:15	Artisan N.	LT. ARENSTEIN	1/1 OBS.		Ex. Map Reading 500ft.	1.55	
28/8/42	10:50	OXFORD 3555	F/O T. DURHAM	1/1 OBS.		Ex. FGGG 1.	30m	
28/8/42	15:30	OXFORD R	LT. LONGMORE	1/1 OBS.		HIGH LEVEL BOMBING 6000' GROUPING.	2.00	
Total Time						26.55		



Above: One of Reg's sketched mission schedules, detailing a map of the target area. Annotated below are the communications between the Air Bomber and Pilot.

Below left: Extract from one of Reg's exams. Below right: Air Bomber's Form 3073 detailing key elements and calculations



For use with C.S.B.S. Dive Bombing overleaf.

11½ LB. PRACTICE BOMB TERMINAL VELOCITY 955 FT/SEC

* Columns marked thus only to be completed by bomb aimers engaged in collection of Statistics

PILOT		TARGET		STRIP	DATE
BOMB		FIGURE			
AIMER		TIME OVER		CIRCUIT	
		TARGET			
OMB	TIME OF STRIKE	W.S.&D M.P.H. FROM	RUN-UP * TIME	HEADING	REMARKS AND CORRECTIONS
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

Space for calculations

COCKPIT TEMPERATURE

METHOD OF FINDING W.S.&D.

T.V. SET

GROUND PRESSURE

TEMPERATURE

INDICATED HEIGHT

INSTRUMENT CORRECTION

CORRECTED HEIGHT

COMPUTED HEIGHT

* DIFF. BETWEEN HT. OF AEROPLANE & HT. OF TARGET

HEIGHT SET

INDICATED AIR SPEED

* INST. CORRECTED (INCLUDING POSITION ERROR)

CORRECT

In South Africa, Reg chalked up over 107 flying hours, mostly in Avro Ansons, where he was accompanied by a dozen different pilots. At the end of October, the Air School's Wing Commander would credit Reg with a pass on this section of elementary flight training.



Reg, centre back with fellow volunteers at Air School 41, South Africa. The air field is now occupied by East London Airport



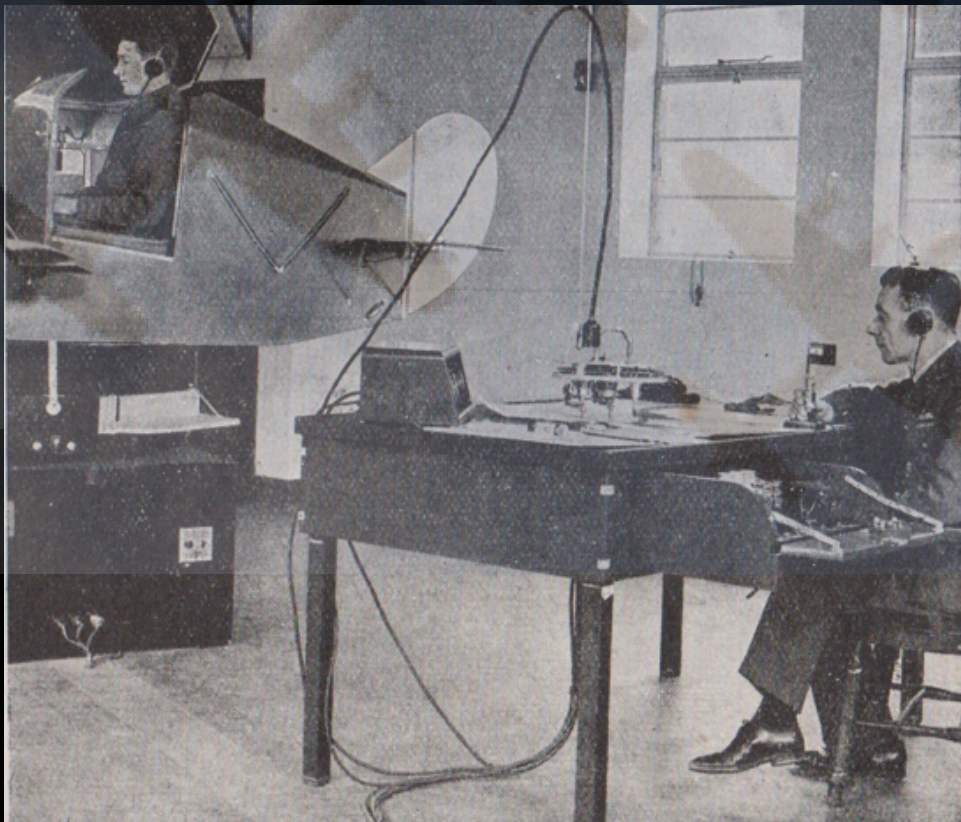
Above left: Reg, centre, with pals outside their quarters at Air School 41. Above right: Wings Parade, East London, South Africa, October 29, 1942



Reg in his flying gear, with woodbine. This picture was taken at some point in the summer of 1942 in South Africa.

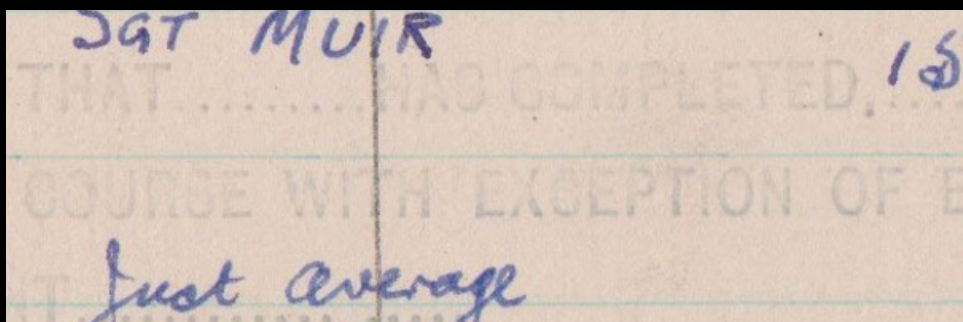
Back in Britain

Reg made the long journey back to Britain, but records of his whereabouts are scarce until March 1943, when he heads north of the Scottish border to RAF Kinloss. Here, Operational Training Unit 19 trained aircrews on the ground in a 'Link' - an early version of the flight simulator developed by Ed Link and sometimes referred to as the 'Blue Box'. The largely theoretical section of Reg's training at RAF Kinloss focused on navigational theory and plotting, reconnaissance, photography, instrumentation and recognition of other surface and airborne subjects.



In the Link Trainer pilotage is taught. Pupil and instructor—the latter seated at the instrument table in foreground—are connected by 'phone, and the track of the pupil's make-believe course is traced out on paper by the "crab" and compared with the course set by the instructor.

A section from Reg's ABC of the RAF explaining the aircraft simulator component of elementary flying training, known as Link



Sometime around early summer, 1943, Reg is posted with 106 Squadron at RAF Syerston in Nottinghamshire. His training hours would increase with practice bombing raids aboard Armstrong Whitworth Whitley's, a slim-line twin-engine bomber. Piloting the Whitley would be 20-year old Sergeant Kenneth Hector 'Wally' McLean, from Brant, Alberta, Canada. Wally's pairing with Reg would become a regular fixture. The two aviators shared 29 training sorties together, practicing high and low-level bombing, attacking targets over sea and land.



Sergeant Kenneth Hector 'Wally' McLean of the Royal Canadian Air Force who piloted 29 training sorties with Reg.

In June 1943, Reg and Wally would be introduced to their first four-engine bomber, the Avro Lancaster. The Lancaster first came off production lines just a year earlier and its Rolls-Royce Merlin engines made the Lancaster an effective centre-piece of the strategic bombing offensive over Europe. Its ample bomb bay enabled it to deliver a 6,400kg payload deep into enemy territory. It had an operational ceiling of 21,000 feet and could reach speeds of 280mph. Of the 7,377 Lancasters built, 3,249 would be lost in action.

Reg completed his final training flight on June 25, concluding a total of 180 hours of daylight flying, and 56 hours of night flying. With an 82% score in his final examinations, Reg's admittance to the ranks of qualified aircrew was approved by Flight Commander Williamson on June 29, 1943.

RAF on the Offensive

With war raging in Europe for nearly four years, Air Chief Marshal Arthur 'Bomber' Harris sharpened his resolve to break enemy morale with coordinated raids on key cities under the cover of darkness. His squadrons would launch fearsome attacks on factories as well as the residential areas of the workforces that filled them. Initial campaigns laid waste to vast areas of Hamburg. But since 1942, advances in radar technology and the introduction of pathfinder flares used to illuminate targets had improved the effectiveness of bombing missions.



Above: This famous image of two aircrews at RAF Syerston was taken on 23 October 1942 after a raid on Genoa. It features several Dambuster crewmen before their move from 106 Squadron to 617 Squadron and their celebrated assault on the Ruhr dams; *Operation Chastise*. Fourth from the right is Dambuster pilot Flt Lt Dave Shannon of the Royal Australian Air Force. He was a frequent co-pilot of Dambuster Wing Commander, Guy Gibson and he would go on to earn the Distinguished Service Order and Distinguished Flying Cross. Behind them all is R5573 ZN-B, the actual Lancaster that Reg, Wally and fellow crewmen would fly to Cologne on the night of July 8, 1943. The aircraft would complete a total of 477 flying hours.

Below: Total destruction of transport links and buildings in the city of Cologne after night time bombing raids by Allied Forces.



Life on the Station

By the end of his training, Reg had settled in well to his surroundings at RAF Syserston, and he awaited details of his first operational mission. Letters home depict a sociable life at the station where simple pleasures were appreciated. He describes receiving care packages from Aunt Lil and Mrs Crossman supplying 'very nice cake' and 'the usual cigs'. He also describes dances with live bands performing 'all the popular numbers', as well as a few pints at the Fosseway pub (now closed but still standing on the A46 near Thorpe on the Hill). This, he would enjoy with friends Ted and Tich, together with the odd cinema outing to Lincoln and Newark.



'Boy, could I go for Ingrid Bergman', Reg writes to his mum after seeing the new releases, *Casablanca* and *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*. He describes Abbott and Costello's *Pardon My Sarong* as a 'really good film' but laments a ten-mile walk back to the station after missing the last bus. Reg also mentions he 'had a letter from Rose, breaking everything off'. He promises his mother to 'tell you about it when I see you.' Reg would never get that chance.

Also had a letter from
Rose breaking everything off.
I'll tell you all about it when
I see you. Also a letter from
Mrs. Sheel so I'm not doing
too bad am I?

Zero Hour

As dusk fell on July 8, 1943, Reg and his fellow crew members would make final preparations for his first mission: a combined air assault on the city of Cologne in the west of Germany.

AIR BOMBER

Sgt Reginald William Lingfield Muir of Hackney, London

AIR GUNNERS

Sgt Leslie Johnson of Bowral, New South Wales, Australia

Sgt Edward Hannell of Hook, Surrey

WIRELESS OPERATOR

Sgt Ronald Barrett of Aldbourne, Wiltshire

NAVIGATOR

Sgt Donald McLeod of Alliance, Alberta, Canada

FLIGHT ENGINEER

Sgt Samuel Leigh of Warrington , Lancashire

PILOT

Sgt Kenneth Hector 'Wally' McLean of Brant, Alberta, Canada.

Their Lancaster, nicknamed Admiral Foo-Banc V, would fly with 281 others and 6 De Havilland Mosquitos, to industrial targets in the city's eastern quarter. As Air Bomber, Reg's mission would be filled with mental calculations, factoring air speed, wind speed, bearing, wind direction and altitude to work out when to release the payload and strike the target.



One new technology at Reg's disposal was the RAF's precision-bombing radar system 'OBOE'. It sent radio signals from two mobile base units in England to guide bombers along a narrow radar beam, and right onto their targets using triangulation. Importantly, any smog or cloud obscuring targets would now inhibit missions somewhat less than before. OBOE had first been used that March over Essen in an assault on the Krupps armament factory. The impact of OBOE was immediately apparent to Harris and his Chiefs of Staff.



Above left: As Air Bomber, Reg takes his position in the 'chin' of the Lancaster. If called upon to do so, he would also man the forward machine gun turret. Above right: A padded bench for the Air Bomber's chest is all there is for comfort in a somewhat cramped and technology-filled space.

Between 1.10-1.30am on July 9, Sgt McLean and his crew completed their raid on Cologne, before setting a course for home, heading west over Belgium.

The Lancaster was then spotted by Luftwaffe pilot StaffelKapitan Paul Anton Guido Zorner, patrolling south of his Netherlands air base in a Messerschmitt Bf-110. At 1.53am, approximately 70km west of Cologne, Zorner zeroed in on Reg's Lancaster delivering a fatal blow from its four nose-mounted 7.92mm cannons.

The bomber sustained catastrophic damage, sending it toward the village of Harzé, south of Liège, in flames. It crashed on farmland with the loss of all crew. The body of one crewman, believed to be rear-gunner Sergeant Edward Hannell, would be recovered some time later, a short distance from the crash site. It was presumed he had attempted to extract himself from his rear turret position to bale out to safety. 106 Squadron would lose two other Lancasters that night.

The townspeople of Harzé erected a plaque in 1981 to commemorate the valiant efforts of Wally McLean in guiding the aircraft away from buildings and avoiding civilian casualties on the ground.

R5573 ZN-B was Zorner's 9th victory. By the end of the war he had amassed 59 victories. This made him the Luftwaffe's 9th most successful fighter pilot in its history.



Left: Paul Anton Guido Zorner rose through the ranks of the Luftwaffe. Right: The Messerschmitt Bf 110 was a well armed nightfighter equipped with radar.

On 8 May 1945, war in Europe came to an end and Zorner surrendered with his men to US forces near Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia. His American captors handed him over to the Red Army. In October he was transported to a prison camp in the Caucasus Mountains and for the next four years, he would endure forced labour; drilling limestone, mining coal, and working as a carpenter in various locations. He would not be a free man in Germany until 3 January 1950.

Zorner returned to civilian life working as a manager in chemical engineering with Hoechst in Frankfurt, retiring in 1981.

He died in 2014, aged 93.

A telegram 'PRIORITY MRS MUIR' reached 24 Holcroft Road on July 9.

'DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU YOUR SON SGR RWL MUIR MISSING FROM OPERATIONS NIGHT 8/9 JULY = LETTER FOLLOWS AERONAUTICS SYERSTON +'

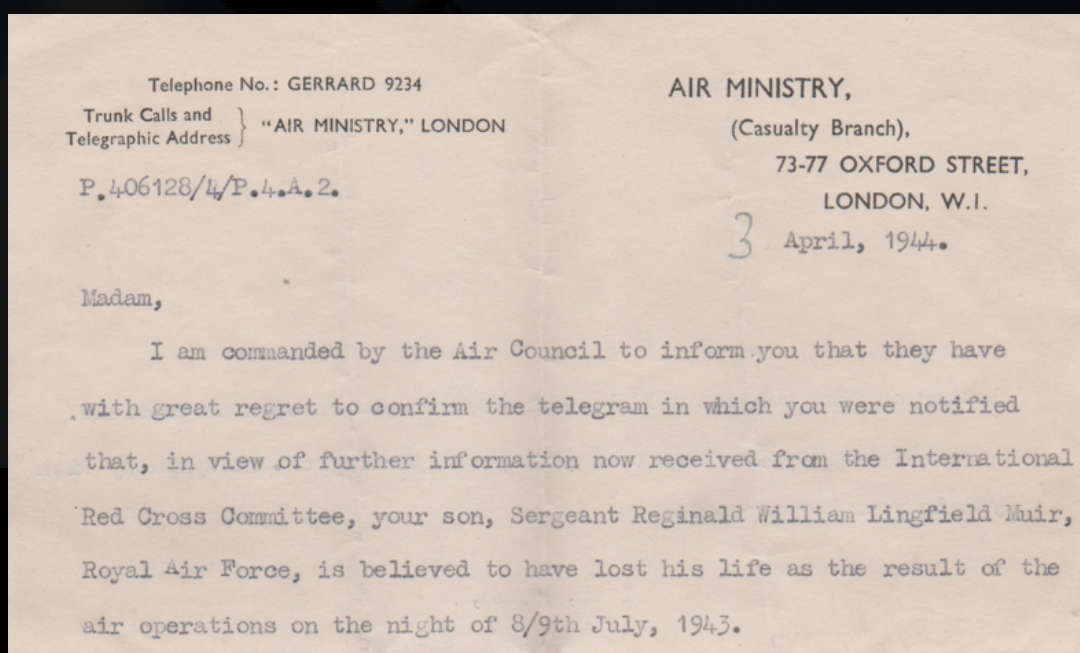
RECEIVED
TELEGRAM
Prefix Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.
66
From 166 12.20 NBD T OHMS 30 To
PRIORITY MRS MUIR 24 HOLCROFT RD LONDON-E 9 =
DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON SGR
R L MUIR MISSING FROM OPERATIONS NIGHT 8/9 JULY

Just twelve days after Flight Commander Williamson had sealed Reg's passage into 106 Squadron, he would be writing to Reg's mother to deliver the very news Doris feared most.

No. 106 Squadron,
Royal Air Force,
Syerston, Notts.
10th. July 1943.
EAW/DO.
Dear Mrs. Muir.
I am writing to express my sympathy in the anxiety which must be yours upon receipt of the news that your Son is missing from an operational flight.
He was the Air Bomber of an aircraft which left here on the night of the 8th. July 1943 to take part in a bombing raid on Cologne. Nothing was heard after take-off, and I regret that the aircraft did not return. It is impossible to hazard even a guess as to what happened, but there is a chance that the aircraft force-landed, or the crew baled-out and although prisoners-of-war are quite safe. We all hope that this is the case.
Your Son had been with my Squadron for only a few days and this was in fact his first operational flight. He came from his training unit with an excellent report and I was confident that he would have developed into a first-class member of an operational aircrew. It is indeed a pity that so many months of training should meet with such a poor reward.
Once again, both personally and on behalf of the whole Squadron, I offer my deepest sympathy.
Yours Sincerely
B.A. Williamson
Squadron Leader Commanding
No. 106 Squadron, R.A.F.

Sourcing accurate information of the crash and the fate of the crew would be challenging for Allied Intelligence. This meant an agonising wait for Doris and the other crew members' families. With assistance from the International Red Cross, news would emerge gradually that three crew members' bodies had been identified at the crash site, but Reg was not amongst them. The remains of three other servicemen had been located, but no further news was forthcoming.

Doris continued to receive letters from the Air Ministry, the International Red Cross and from 106 Squadron but it wasn't until 3 April 1944, eight months later, that a letter from the Air Ministry finally confirmed that Reg had been killed in action along with his fellow crewmen the previous summer.



The loss of Reg was felt deeply by his family, especially Doris. His youngest brother Mo, was still in full-time education and would miss out on a lifetime of wisdom and guidance that only a big brother can provide. Ron, aged 17, had recently completed training at the Royal Navy's No. 1 Radar Training School at Douglas, Isle of Man before he became a radio and radar operator in the merchant navy.



Post-war

On 8 May 1945, war in Europe came to an end and Zorner surrendered with his men to US forces near Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia. His American captors handed him over to the Red Army. In October he was transported to a prison camp in the Caucasus Mountains and for the next four years, he would endure forced labour; drilling limestone, mining coal, and working as a carpenter in various locations. He would not be a free man in Germany until 3 January 1950.

Zorner returned to civilian life working as a manager in chemical engineering with Hoechst in Frankfurt, retiring in 1981.

He died in 2014, aged 93.

George would return from service in Gibraltar, securing a post-war job with the Royal Mail, but years of combat using heavy artillery had taken a heavy toll on him. He died in 1966. Doris settled in North Ockendon, Essex. She died in 1991.

After serving in the Royal Navy from 1947-49, Mo emigrated to Saskatoon, Canada in 1950. He married Julie Krupski in 1953 and had four children. He died in 2008, aged 79.

Ron also joined the Post Office, albeit briefly, and went on to work in accounts for the shipping division of Anglo Iranian Oil, now BP. He married Elfrida Hickson in 1959 and settled in the Essex countryside and had four children. He took early retirement from BP in 1981 and lived happily until his death in 2006, just shy of his 80th birthday. He would often say that not a day would go by without a thought for his brother, Reg.



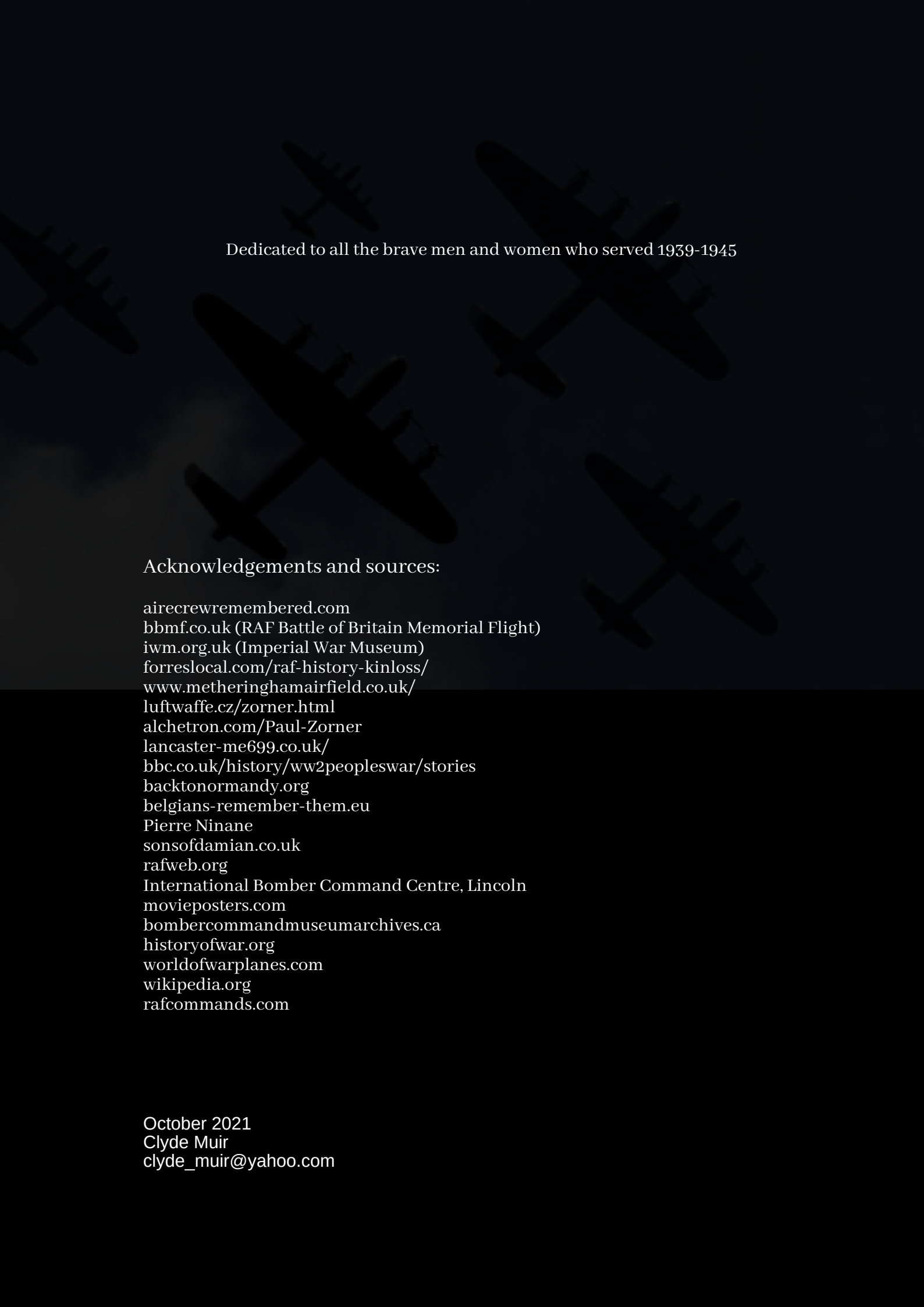
At peace. Reg, Wally, Ronald, Samuel, Edward, Leslie and Donald were laid to rest, side by side at Heverlee War Cemetery, near Leuven, Belgium.





Above: Reg's name is amongst those of over 57,000 other men and women who served Bomber Command. The memorial, at Canwick Hill, forms part of the International Bomber Command Centre. Its splendid spire and steel walls are inspired by their Lincolnshire surroundings, particularly the cathedral (visible above), which pilots used as a visual marker, with some relief. It was also inspired by the Avro Lancaster, whose wingspan matches the exact height of the spire.
Below: Reg's campaign medals and brevet.





Dedicated to all the brave men and women who served 1939-1945

Acknowledgements and sources:

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October 2021
Clyde Muir
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