

**EVIDENCE, ANECDOTES, AND RELATED FINDINGS ON:**

**The 26 July 1945 Aerial Collision Between Two R.A.F. Liberators,  
EW225 and EW247,  
and the Burials of the Fourteen Airmen Who Died**



*(photo courtesy of Clark Day)*

**Researched/Compiled by Matt Poole, with special thanks to  
Patricia Lanegan, Yvonne Colebatch, George Geeson, and Ron Bramley**

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VERSION 6, 27 November 2008

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#### **Table of Contents**

##### **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION**

- 1.A. Connecting the past to the present: my links to 26 July 1945
- 1.B. Historical overview: 26 July 1945 and the graves of the fallen airmen

##### **PART TWO: BASIC DETAILS ON THE AIRMEN WHO DIED AND THEIR NEXT-OF-KIN**

- 2.A. The crew of Consolidated B-24 Liberator EW225
- 2.B. The crew of Consolidated B-24 Liberator EW247

##### **PART THREE: EVIDENCE OF THE COLLISION, FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS, EYEWITNESSES, AND OTHER AIR FORCE PERSONNEL**

- 3.A. Excerpt of 31 October 1985 letter sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch
- 3.B. Transcript of the official accident report sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch, in a letter dated 16 June 1995
- 3.C. Excerpt of 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident
- 3.D. Excerpt of 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett, Padre of RAF Station Amarda Road
- 3.E. Excerpts of logbook and diary entries made by 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road
- 3.F. 1998 printed book recollection of the collision, and of meeting Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Tom Winup
- 3.G. 29 September 2000 recollection of the collision from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Tom Winup, in letter to George Smith, ex-South East Asia Command Liberator veteran

- 3.H. Excerpts of 2 November and 12 December 1998 letters to Matt Poole, from F.B. Murray, Electrical Engineering Officer at RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the collision
- 3.I. Excerpts of 1998 letters to Matt Poole and Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, from Robin Brown, student in the Air Fighting Training Unit's Fighter Leaders' Course at Amarda Road at the time of the crash
- 3.J. Excerpt of 1 November 1998 letter to Matt Poole from Kenneth King, ex-RAF, who helped to bury remains of the airmen and to erect memorial crosses at the site
- 3.K. Excerpt of the 1947 biographical summary of Pilot Officer Raymond Maurice Bullen DFC, held in the archives of the New Zealand Defence Force
- 3.L. Excerpt of the 159 Squadron's July 1945 Monthly Report (RAF Form 540)

**PART FOUR: EVIDENCE OF THE COLLISION, AS ATTRIBUTED TO THE NEXT-OF-KIN OF THE VICTIMS**

- 4.A. Excerpt of 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 4.B. Excerpt of 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith
- 4.C. Excerpt of 21 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert
- 4.D. Excerpt of 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert
- 4.E. Excerpt of 16 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger
- 4.F. Excerpt of 11 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Clara Herbert, mother of Alfred Herbert

**PART FIVE: EVIDENCE OF THE SEARCH AND RECOVERY EFFORTS AT THE CRASH SITE, PLUS ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE MOVE OF REMAINS TO MADRAS WAR CEMETERY**

- 5.A. Excerpts of logbook and diary entries made by 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road
- 5.B. Excerpt of 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident
- 5.C. Excerpt of 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett, Padre of RAF Station Amarda Road
- 5.D. Excerpt of 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident
- 5.E. Excerpt of 4 October 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from W/Cdr Paul Louis, successor to G/Capt D. R. Biggs as Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road
- 5.F. Excerpt of 31 October 1985 letter sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch

- 5.G. 29 September 2000 recollection of the collision from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Tom Winup, in letter to George Smith, ex-South East Asia Command Liberator veteran
- 5.H. Excerpt of 2 November 1998 letter to Matt Poole, from F.B. Murray, Electrical Engineering Officer at RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the collision
- 5.I. Excerpt of 22 October 1998 letter to Matt Poole from S/Ldr Edward Hearn DFC, instructor at RAF Station Amarda Road
- 5.J. Excerpt of 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith
- 5.K. Excerpt of 2 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger
- 5.L. Excerpt of the 1947 biographical summary of Pilot Officer Raymond Maurice BULLEN DFC, held in the archives of the New Zealand Defence Force
- 5.M. Excerpt of 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 5.N. 1998 and 2002 recollections shared with Matt Poole (via letters and phone conversations) by Kenneth King, ex-RAF, who helped to bury remains of the airmen and to erect memorial crosses at the site
- 5.O. 18 August 1948 letter to Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen, from Air Department, New Zealand; sent in her 14 March 1949 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson

#### **PART SIX: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO CYRIL GEESON AND HIS FAMILY**

- 6.A. 1998 and 2002 details shared with Matt Poole by George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson
- 6.B. 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident
- 6.C. 4 October 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from W/Cdr Paul Louis, successor to G/Capt D. R. Biggs as Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road
- 6.D. Excerpt of 29 July 1945 letter to Cyril Geeson's parents, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India
- 6.E. Excerpt of 27 August 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India
- 6.F. Excerpt of 26 October 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India
- 6.G. Excerpt of 8 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India
- 6.H. 8 November 1945 letter to George Geeson Sr, father of Cyril Geeson, from British Air Ministry, London
- 6.I. 22 January 1946 letter to George Geeson Sr, father of Cyril Geeson, from S/Ldr [unclear]-Lindop, RAF Benevolent Fund
- 6.J. Excerpts of 27 October and 24 November 1998 letters to Matt Poole from Tom Scott, former crewmate of Cyril Geeson
- 6.K. Excerpts of various 1944 / 1945 letter from Cyril Geeson to his brother George

- 6.L. An undated (likely 1945) list of 26 July 1945 casualties and next-of-kin names and addresses, sent to the family of Cyril Geeson by an unknown source

#### **PART SEVEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO ARNIE BRIDGMAN AND HIS FAMILY**

- 7.A. 20 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Marjorie Bridgman, widow of Arnie Bridgman
- 7.B. 15 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Marjorie Bridgman, widow of Arnie Bridgman
- 7.C. 1 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Marjorie Bridgman, widow of Arnie Bridgman
- 7.D. 22 June 1998 letter to Matt Poole from Carol Bridgman, whose husband, Lewis Kim Bridgman, is the nephew of Lewis Arnold "Arnie" Bridgman
- 7.E. A strange premonition of danger, experienced by Bill Kirkness, the best mate of Arnie Bridgman, as told to Matt Poole in 1991

#### **PART EIGHT: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO RAY BULLEN AND HIS FAMILY**

- 8.A. 2 January 1946 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 8.B. 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 8.C. Excerpt of 24 February 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 8.D. 13 October 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 8.E. Undated (but after 13 October 1946) letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 8.F. Excerpt of 14 March 1949 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen
- 8.G. 22 September 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Mrs. Walder, Ray Bullen's "step-mum" in England
- 8.H. Excerpt of 4 November 1998 letter to Matt Poole from wireless operator Dennis Tunnell, crewmate of Ray Bullen on 358 Squadron
- 8.I. Excerpts of 28 October and 25 November 1998 letters to Matt Poole from nose gunner Ted Smales, crewmate of Ray Bullen on 358 Squadron
- 8.J. Excerpts of 3 March and 7 November 1999 letters to Matt Poole from mid-upper gunner John H. Clarke, crewmate of Ray Bullen on 358 Squadron
- 8.K. Citation of the Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to Ray Bullen posthumously on 1 October, 1945
- 8.L. Official 1947 biographical summary of Pilot Officer Ray Bullen's Royal New Zealand Air Force service, held in the archives of the New Zealand Defence Force

#### **PART NINE: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO PETER ETTLINGER AND HIS FAMILY**

- 9.A. Summary of the collision, sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch, in a letter dated 31 October 1985
- 9.B. 16 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger
- 9.C. 2 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger
- 9.D. 18 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger
- 9.E. 22 September 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger
- 9.F. 11 November 2001 Remembrance Day service in London, organized by Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger

#### **PART TEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO ALFRED HERBERT AND HIS FAMILY**

- 10.A. 6 June (phone) and 7 July 1998 (letter) details shared with Matt Poole by John Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert
- 10.B. Excerpts of diary entries made by 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road
- 10.C. 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert
- 10.D. 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Clara Herbert, mother of Alfred Herbert
- 10.E. 10 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert
- 10.F. 11 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Clara Herbert, mother of Alfred Herbert
- 10.G. 10 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert

#### **PART ELEVEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO FELIX HEYNERT AND HIS FAMILY**

- 11.A. 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident
- 11.B. 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett, Padre of RAF Station Amarda Road
- 11.C. Excerpt of 22 October 1998 letter to Matt Poole from S/Ldr Edward Hearn DFC, instructor at RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident
- 11.D. 21 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert
- 11.E. 27 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert, from navigator Don Morrison, crewmate of Felix Heynert on 159 Squadron

- 11.F. 21 October 1946 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert, from Warren P. Phillips, Felix's housemaster at school
- 11.G. Citation of the Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to Felix Heynert on 23 March 1945
- 11.H. Citation of the Vliegerkruis (Dutch flying medal) awarded to Felix Heynert posthumously on 22 September 1945
- 11.I. Excerpt of 6 February 2002 letter to Matt Poole from Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert

#### **PART TWELVE: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO ROBERT MANSON AND HIS FAMILY**

- 12.A. 22 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from R.A. Manson, father of Robert Manson

#### **PART THIRTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO GEORGE PAFFEY AND HIS FAMILY**

- 13.A. 20 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Gladys Paffey, widow of George Paffey
- 13.B. Summary of 2008 details learned from Paul Knighton, son of Gladys Knighton, widow of George Paffey

#### **PART FOURTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO WILLIAM SMART AND HIS FAMILY**

- 14.A. 19 November 1945 letter from Mary Smart, mother of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson
- 14.B. 2 January 1946 letter from Mary Smart, mother of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson
- 14.C. 24 March 1946 letter from George Smart, father of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson
- 14.D. 5 May 1946 letter from George Smart, father of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson
- 14.E. Excerpt of January 1947 letter from Mary Smart, mother of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson
- 14.F. 1945 Portadown (Northern Ireland) newspaper article on William Smart's death (exact date and name of newspaper unclear)
- 14.G. Excerpts of two 26 June 1998 Portadown Times (Northern Ireland) newspaper stories on William Smart and his family, including an interview with William's brother Blacker

#### **PART FIFTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO PETER SMITH AND HIS FAMILY**

- 15.A. 15 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith
- 15.B. 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith
- 15.C. 29 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith

- 15.D. 3 April 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith
- 15.E. 10 June 1946 letter to George Geeson and his wife, Viola, brother and sister-in-law of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith

**PART SIXTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO SYDNEY WELLS AND HIS FAMILY**

- 16.A. 18 November 1945 letter to "Miss Geeson" (really George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson), from Florence Wells, mother of Sydney Wells
- 16.B. Excerpt of 27 September 2008 e-mail to Matt Poole from Pam Oxenbury, cousin of Sydney Wells:

**PART SEVENTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO WALTER WOOD AND HIS FAMILY**

- 17.A. 15 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Heydon, mother of Walter Wood

**PART EIGHTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO PADRE STANLEY BENNETT, WHO LED THE RECOVERY / REBURIAL PARTY TO THE CRASH SITE**

- 18.A. Excerpts of 25 October and 13 November 1998 letters to Matt Poole from Joe Shortland, friend of Padre Stanley G. Bennett
- 18.B. Excerpt of 4 December 1998 letter to Matt Poole from Sue Riley, daughter of Padre Stanley G. Bennett

**PART NINETEEN: BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE AIR FIGHTING TRAINING UNIT (AFTU), RAF STATION AMARDA ROAD**

- 19.A. Excerpts of 23 November and 28 December 1998 letters from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road

**PART TWENTY: DETAILS ON MADRAS WAR CEMETERY, INDIA**

- 20.A. Historical Information
- 20.B. Location

**PART TWENTY-ONE: PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO, AND A MAP**

- 21.A. Photos of some of the airmen who died in the collision
- 21.B. Photos of the Madras War Cemetery graves
- 21.C. [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) video of Madras War Cemetery and the 26 July 1945 airmen's graves, taken in 2007
- 21.D. William Smart's name on the Portadown, Northern Ireland war memorial
- 21.E. Portadown, Northern Ireland newspaper story on William Smart's death
- 21.F. Kenneth King's photos (with his captions) of the 1945 expedition to recover and bury the remains of the crash victims
- 21.G. Wartime map showing Amarda Road and crash location



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## **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.A. Connecting the past to the present: my links to 26 July 1945:**

I am an amateur British Royal Air Force researcher with an avid interest in South East Asia Command B-24 Liberator bombers and the men who flew them. In particular, I have focused upon 159 Squadron, for whom my mother's first husband flew. He was killed on an operation to Japanese-held Rangoon on the night of 29 February / 1 March 1944.

In 1995 Yvonne Colebatch of London wrote to me for help in learning more about her father, Flying Officer Peter Ettlinger, who had died in India in an aerial collision between two RAF Liberators, EW225 and EW247, on her 10-month birthday: 26 July 1945. Needless to say, she never knew her father. Stan Sampson, Secretary of the 159 Squadron Association, had directed Yvonne to write to me, owing to the fact that Peter, on paper, had some connection to 159 Squadron, and also because I was considered a student of this bomber squadron's history.

I immediately pointed Yvonne toward some excellent sources of basic information on her father's RAF career, to supplement what she had already gathered through her own research. The following year I had the pleasure of meeting Yvonne for the first time during my travels through the UK.

In 1997 I received a letter from Mrs. Patricia Lanegan, then residing in Canterbury, Kent. She, too, had been sent to me (by Group Captain John Musgrave, ex-159 Squadron pilot) while searching for information on the death of a loved one – in this case, her beloved first husband, Squadron Leader Felix Heynert. I recognized his name instantly. A Dutch pilot, he had flown a full tour of combat operations with 159 Squadron in 1944 and had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism and leadership displayed during this tour. (He was also the best mate of another Dutch pilot who had been shot down with my mother's first husband – aboard a second Liberator lost that night).

Patricia recounted the circumstances of Felix's death: He was piloting a Liberator which collided in mid-air with another Liberator in Indian skies on . . . 26 July 1945! It turns out that Felix and Peter Ettlinger, Yvonne's father, were aboard the same aircraft.

Patricia sent me copies of photos, letters, and documents pertaining to Felix, including post-accident letters of consolation from some of the men closely involved with her husband. In return, I gave Patricia what few research references I could provide, but more significantly, I put her in touch with Yvonne. They were instant friends, and remained so until Patricia's death in 2005.

In 1998 I decided to investigate the 26 July collision story more thoroughly, for the sake of Yvonne and Patricia. Over a period of several months, writing from my home in Maryland, USA, I succeeded far beyond my expectations. "Help" advertisements in two veterans magazines elicited responses from associates of the casualties of 26 July 1945, as well as from others with a direct connection to the tragedy and its aftermath.

Among these men were eyewitnesses to the collision and one of the five RAF personnel who journeyed to the remote crash site in 1945, located and buried remains of the fallen airmen, and erected two memorial crosses at the gravesite. Via internet hometown newspaper appeals, I also reached the next-of-kin of five more of the casualties.

As a result of my snooping, a tremendous amount of new evidence came my way. Some of it was dry, even boring and trivial in nature, but much of the information brought heartrending insights into the suffering of loved ones back home.

My short burst of intense investigation wound down in early 1999, as I moved on to other projects. Then, in late summer 2002, I received a phone call from George Geeson, brother of 26 July casualty Cyril Geeson. Four years earlier George had told me of writing in 1945 to the kin of all thirteen men killed with Cyril. Eleven families wrote back, but in 1998 George could not find these letters. Most (perhaps all) of these correspondences resurfaced in 2002, along with other official communications and Cyril's wartime letters to George. Letters from the kin of eleven other families of 26 July casualties are among the new cache, providing a great wealth of additional insight.

The evidence I have recorded in this report is far from complete; over time it will still be possible to learn more and perhaps even to find additional families of the casualties. Time, naturally, is the enemy when it comes to finding comrades of the men who died, or family members who personally knew their loved one. Finding time to continue my investigations is another obstacle.

What follows below is a wide-ranging assemblage of details pertaining to the men who fell on 26 July 1945, their families, the accident, and the graves. Although the evidence in some instances may be regarded as inconsequential, the sum total offers numerous poignant reminders of the depth of the tragedy.

#### **1.B. Historical overview: 26 July 1945 and the graves of the fallen airmen:**

On the morning of 26 July 1945, less than three weeks before the end of World War II, two British Royal Air Force B-24 Liberator four-engine bombers, EW225 and EW247, collided at low altitude in the monsoon skies over India. Based at Amarda Road airfield (100 statute miles southwest of Calcutta), the aircraft were part of a six-plane contingent from the Air Fighting Training Unit (AFTU) engaged in a formation flying exercise. (See PART NINETEEN for a more detailed explanation of this unit's history and how it was still referred to as "AFTU" despite its May 1945 disbanding and immediate absorption into another unit.)

Fourteen airmen – the crews of the two aircraft – died quickly due to the violence of the collision and resulting crashes, from less than 2000 feet altitude, into paddy fields swollen from the monsoon rains; there were no survivors.

Immediately efforts were made to reach the site, located approximately 47 statute miles (straight line distance) northeast of Amarda Road. Given the remoteness of the locale, the lack of roads and bridges, and the severely limiting monsoon conditions, little could be done in the short term. Some human remains were reportedly discovered and then buried on site during the initial search efforts, but the evidence of this is vague and insufficient.

Several weeks after the accident (exact date unknown, but most likely between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September), Squadron Leader Stanley Bennett, the Padre of RAF Amarda Road, led a party of eleven or twelve men (five RAF members, five or six Indians) on a trek of nearly four day from Amarda Road to the crash site. By this time weather conditions had improved and monsoon floods had subsided somewhat.

The mission of the Padre and his men was to recover what human remains could be found, to bury them on higher ground, and to erect two large memorial wooden crosses bearing the names, ranks, and service numbers of the fourteen casualties.

The Padre's team located substantial wreckage and some previously unrecovered human remains. Photographs (see Items 5.N and 21.E) were taken showing Padre Bennett leading four other RAF personnel in prayer, with heads bowed, in front of the freshly erected memorial crosses (one for each crew) at the gravesite. This photograph was sent to some, if not all, of the families of the deceased airmen.

Oddly, one New Zealand Air Department correspondence from August 1948 to the family of casualty Ray Bullen (see Item 5.O) added to their suffering, and to that of at least one other casualty's family (the Geesons in the UK). George Geeson, brother of victim Cyril Geeson, had received the details from Ray's sister, Edna, back in 1949, but never directly from an official source.

According to this 1948 communique, the British Air Ministry (London) informed the New Zealand Air Department that a Graves Concentration Unit, despite extensive searches, had been unable to find the three year old burial site in the inhospitable country near the crash site. It was suggested that the site had probably been effaced by the local Indians. Consequently, wrote the Air Department, as an airman with no known grave, Ray Bullen would eventually be commemorated by name on a memorial to be built in the future. (A memorial to the missing was indeed built: the Singapore Memorial at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore Island.)

No subsequent correspondence from the Air Department to the Bullen family has materialized. No evidence of similar correspondence received by the other families has emerged.

I have concluded with confidence that the 1945 burial site was eventually rediscovered. Official word stated that in 1953 the British Army Graves Concentration Unit transferred these remains hundreds of miles to the newly established Madras War Cemetery, where they were reinterred as "Collective Grave 9.A.1-14." A collective grave refers to recovered remains which, though not individually identified, nonetheless can be positively associated with a small group of known individuals. Often a collective grave was of one bomber crew, but in the case of Collective Grave 9.A.1-14, two crews were linked in death.

Thus fourteen individually named headstones, arranged side-by-side, mark the Madras War Cemetery gravesite where remains of the 26 July 1945 accident victims lie buried.

The headstones, some inscribed with words of remembrance chosen by loved ones, are accented with native shrubs and flowers in the beautifully maintained cemetery today. In the 1950s next-of-kin received photographs of their respective loved one's headstone.

Had the crew remains not been found in the paddy field, there would have been no collective grave reinterment in Madras in 1953. Instead, the fourteen airmen would have been individually commemorated by name only – inscribed on the Singapore Memorial to missing Far East Commonwealth airmen. The absence of their names on the Singapore Memorial is further proof that the remains linked to the two crews lost on 26 July 1945 were, indeed, transferred to Madras War Cemetery in 1953.

## PART TWO: BASIC DETAILS ON THE AIRMEN WHO DIED AND THEIR NEXT-OF-KIN

### *(Ranks as per Commonwealth War Graves Commission)*

#### **2.A. The crew of Consolidated B-24 Liberator EW225:**

**149322 Sqn Ldr Félicité Pierre André HEYNERT DFC (Britain), VK (Netherlands) - Pilot;** age 31 (born 22 January 1914). Staff, Air Fighting Training Unit (posted 20 October 1944). Previous RAF duty: pilot, 159 Squadron (B-24 Liberator bombers), 1944; awarded the British Distinguished Flying Cross (23 March 1945) and Dutch Vliegerkruis (VK, or Flying Cross, 22 September 1945) for gallantry and devotion to duty during his full operational tour with 159 Squadron. Citizen of the Netherlands.

Son of Mr. and Mrs. F.A.H. Heynert; husband of Patricia Heynert of 1 Ashton Road, Ealing, London.

Inscription on grave marker:

*IN PROUD AND LOVING MEMORY*

*Felix's widow, Patricia Lanegan, made contact with me in 1997. Patricia passed away in Danbury, Essex in 2005.*

**NZ 425880 P/O Raymond Maurice BULLEN DFC - Pilot;** age 27 (born 8 January 1918). Staff, Air Fighting Training Unit. Previous RAF duty: pilot, 358 Squadron (Liberators), November 1944 to June 1945; posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (1 October 1945) for gallantry and devotion to duty during his 29 operational flights with 358 Squadron. Total flying hours: 908 (493 solo on Liberators).

Son of William Edward (died 1920) and Flora McLean Bullen of 111 St. Martins Road, Christchurch, New Zealand.

There is no family-chosen inscription on Ray's grave marker.

*Ray's nephew Peter was located in Christchurch in April 1998.*

**191889 F/O Robert Stanley MANSON – Wireless Operator/Air Gunner;** age 25. Previous RAF duty: Joined RAF September 1939, flew many operations over Europe in Wellington bombers (squadron or squadrons unknown) before coming to the Far East. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records link him to 159 Squadron in India, but his name does not appear in the surviving squadron archives.

Son of Mrs. (died 1919 or 1920) & Mr. Robert Alfred Manson of 33 Muirhead Ave East, Liverpool; and stepson of Kathleen Margaret Manson (also at father's address).

Inscription on grave marker:

*GOD TAKES THE BEST  
FOR REASONS DIVINE  
BUT MEMORIES LIVE ON  
TILL THE END OF TIME*

*I have not located any of Robert's next-of-kin.*

*(continued)*

**Crew of Liberator EW225 (continued):**

**186422 F/Lt Alexander Norman BORROW - Navigator/Bomb Aimer;** age 27.

Previous RAF duty: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records link him to 159 Squadron (Liberators) in India, but his name does not appear in the surviving squadron archives.

Son of Rev. Ernest John and Winifred Mary Borrow of 12 Moorland Close, Collier Row, Romford, Essex.

Inscription on grave marker:

*DEFUNCTUS ADHUC LOQUITUR  
HEBREWS XI 4*

*The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records give Alexander's service number as being 186421, not 22. I have not yet located any of Alexander's next-of-kin.*

**197830 P/O Lewis Arnold "Arnie" BRIDGMAN - Wireless Operator/Air Gunner;** age 25.

Previous RAF duty: Completed tour of operations with 159 Squadron (Liberators) in India in May 1944. No further details of his RAF flying career are known.

Son of Frank and Ellen Bridgman of Heckmondwike, Yorkshire; husband of Marjorie Bridgman of 5 Farfield Avenue, Carlinghow, Batley, Yorkshire.

Inscription on grave marker:

*TREASURED MEMORIES  
SILENTLY KEPT*

*June 1998: Arnie's brother Syd was located in Heckmondwike; he has since died, age 90. Their nephew Kim was also found.*

**187482 F/O Peter ETTLINGER - Flight Engineer;** age 30.

Staff, Air Fighting Training Unit. Other RAF duty: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records link him to 159 Squadron (Liberators) in India, but his name does not appear in the surviving squadron archives.

Son of Peter and Madeleine Ettlinger of Shirley, Southampton; husband of Lilian Ettlinger of "Cofton", Bursledon, Hightown, Southampton. Lilian and Peter had one child, daughter Yvonne (now Yvonne Colebatch of London).

Inscription on grave marker:

*ALWAYS IN OUR THOUGHTS.  
MUM, DAD  
AND DAUGHTER YVONNE*

*A letter from Peter's daughter Yvonne in 1995 ultimately led to my research into the story of 26 July 1945.*

**Crew of Liberator EW225 (continued):**

**103003 F/Lt Sydney Wilfred WELLS - Navigator/Bomb Aimer; age 27.**

Previous RAF duty: Flew on operations dating back to 1941, but squadron(s) are unknown. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records link him to 159 Squadron (Liberators) in India, and a mention of his death was made in the 159 Squadron monthly report for July 1945. However, his name does not appear anywhere else in the squadron's records.

Son of George Wells (died 1918 or 1919) and Florence Maud Wells of Oxford Street, Lambourn, Newbury, Berkshire. (The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records list the address of Mrs. Wells as Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, but her November 1945 address was in Berkshire.)

Inscription on grave marker:

*WE WILL REMEMBER*

*Sydney's kin, Pam Oxenbury, found me through the Internet in September 2008.*

**1397658 F/Sgt Walter Reginald George WOOD – Air Bomber; age 22.**

Previous RAF duty: Flew on operations with 355 Squadron (Liberators) in India, may have completed his tour. No further details of his RAF flying career known.

Son of: Reginald George Slocombe Wood and Lilian Maud Wood (née Jones) of Dartford, Kent [per Commonwealth War Graves Commission].

Son of: Lilian M. Heydon of 5 Bow Arrow Lane, Dartford, Kent [per her 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson].

Inscription on grave marker:

*HIS MEMORY REMAINS WITH US.  
MUMMY, POPS.  
WENDY AND KINGSLEY  
DARTFORD, KENT*

*I have not located any of Walter's next-of-kin.*

**2.B. The crew of Consolidated B-24 Liberator EW247:**

**191880 F/O Alfred HERBERT - Pilot; age 29.**

Staff of Air Fighting Training Unit. Previous RAF duty: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records link him to 205 Squadron, but there are no further details known. 205 Squadron (anti-sub and air/sea rescue) operated PBY Catalina seaplanes from Ceylon.

Son of Arthur and Clara Herbert of 10 Top O'Th Bank, Thurstonland, Yorkshire.

Inscription on grave marker:

*TIME MAY PASS  
AND FADE AWAY  
BUT MEMORIES OF YOU  
WILL ALWAYS STAY*

*June 1998: Alfred's brother John was located in Thurstonland.*

**Crew of Liberator EW247 (continued):**

**165506 F/O Peter Hubert Ash SMITH - Navigator/Bomb Aimer;** age 23.

Previous RAF duty: Flew with 205 Squadron (PBY Catalina seaplanes) on anti-sub and air/sea rescue operations from Ceylon.

Son of Hubert Ash Smith and Agnes Emma Smith of Sheffield; husband of Margaret Eden Smith of 18 Verdant Way, Shiregreen, Sheffield.

Inscription on grave marker:

*MEMORIES KEEP HIM EVER NEAR.  
MUM, DAD, AND WIFE MARGARET*

*I have not located any of Peter's next-of-kin.*

**1584886 F/Sgt Cyril William GEESON - Flight Engineer;** age 23.

Staff, Air Fighting Training Unit. Previous RAF duty: Wounded 10 December 1944 on 4<sup>th</sup> operational sortie with 215 Squadron (Liberators) in India, during low-level attack on Burma-Siam Railway. Upon recovery, assigned to AFTU Amarda Road early June 1945.

Son of George Edward and Elizabeth Fanny Geeson of Fox Inn, Great North Road, Colsterworth, Nr Grantham, Lincolnshire.

Inscription on grave marker:

*LIKE AUTUMN LEAVES,  
YEARS GO BY.  
BUT MEMORIES OF CYRIL  
WILL NEVER DIE.*

*June 1998: Cyril's brother George was located in South Witham, Lincolnshire.*

**1021128 W/O William Joseph SMART - Wireless Operator/Air Gunner;** age 26.

Previous RAF duty: Joined the RAF 14 Sept 1940 and went overseas in January 1942. Flew with 205 Squadron, but there are no further details known. 205 Squadron (anti-sub and air/sea rescue) operated PBY Catalina seaplanes from Ceylon.

Son of George A. Smart and Mary Smart of 241 Bognor Terrace, Portadown, County Armagh, Ulster, Northern Ireland.

Inscription on grave marker:

*FOR EVER IN THE HEARTS  
OF THOSE YOU LEFT BEHIND.  
TILL WE MEET AGAIN.  
MUM, PAP, & BROTHERS*

*June 1998: William's two brothers, George and Blacker, were located in the Portadown area.*

**Crew of Liberator EW247 (continued):**

**2247714 A/C 1 George William PAFHEY – Instrument Repairer (II);** age unknown.  
Attached to the electrical section. Other RAF duty: unknown.

Husband of Gladys Paffey of 150 Highlands Boulevard, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

There is no family-chosen inscription on George's grave marker.

*Gladys Paffey was George Paffey's widow. Later she remarried. Paul Knighton, a son by that later marriage, located me through the Internet in 2008.*

**IND27616 A/C 2 P.V. MATHAI – Instrument Repairer (II), Royal Indian Air Force;** age 28. Other RIAF duty: unknown.

Son of P. M. Varkey and Eali Varkey of Karicode, Cochin, India; husband of Mary Mathai of Karicode.

There is no family-chosen inscription on Aircraftman Mathai's grave marker.

*I have not located any of Aircraftman Mathai's next-of-kin.*



### PART THREE: EVIDENCE OF THE COLLISION, FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS, EYEWITNESSES, AND OTHER AIR FORCE PERSONNEL

*PART THREE, which begins the examination of the collision evidence, focuses solely upon details derived from official documents, eyewitnesses, and other RAF personnel. It does not present collision evidence attributed to the next-of-kin of the victims; PART FOUR addresses this latter evidence.*

*The evidence pertaining specifically to the search for victims and the burial of remains is presented and analyzed separately in PART FIVE.*

*Refer to Item 21.F, a wartime map upon which the locations of Amarda Road and the crash site have been annotated.*

**3.A. Excerpt of 31 October 1985 letter sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch:**

Flying Officer P Ettlinger's aircraft [EW225] was one of 6 Liberators which took off from Amarda Road Airfield at 9.15 am on 26 July 1945 to carry out a navigational exercise in formation. Approximately half an hour after take off the aircraft entered cloud which could not be avoided, whilst changing course to open formation Liberators EW225 and EW247 collided. Once the collision occurred neither pilot had any chance to execute a reasonable forced landing, nor was there sufficient time for any crew members to make a parachute descent, both aircraft being at between 1000 feet and 2000 feet at the time.

*See Item 9.A for the full contents of this Air Historical Branch report on the collision and burials.*

**3.B. Transcript of the official accident report sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch, in a letter dated 16 June 1995:**

date/time	unit/group/command	type, mark of aircraft	location
26.7.45	AFTU, 228 Group,	LIBERATOR Mk BVI EW225	22° 04' N
09.55 hrs	SE ASIA COMMAND	LIBERATOR Mk BVI EW247	87° 43' E

**SHORT ACCOUNT OF ACCIDENT**

- a) At 09.15 hrs on 26 July 1945, six Liberators of AFTU took off from Amarda Rd Airfield to carry out a navigational exercise in formation.
- b) At approximately 09.45 hrs the formation, which had been encountering medium to bad weather, approached a heavy bank of cloud. The leader, Sqn Ldr Heynert, commenced to lose height in an attempt to fly underneath this, but reached the cloud before he was quite low enough and the formation entered the cloud.

Number 6 by this time was some little way behind the formation.

On entering the cloud visibility was reduced to nil and numbers 2 and 5 in the formation altered course starboard and number 4 altered course port.

On coming out of the cloud aircraft number 1 (EW225) and aircraft number 3 (EW247) captained by PO Herbert, were seen to be in close proximity, and number 3 was then seen to pull up and collide with number 1. The tail unit of number 1 was torn off and the aircraft crashed out of control, and one wing (which one not established) of number 3 was torn off, causing the aircraft to crash.

Once the crash occurred neither pilot had any chance to execute a reasonable force landing, nor was there sufficient time for any member of the crew to make a parachute descent, the aircraft being at between 1000 and 2000 ft at the time of the collision.

**3.C. Excerpt of 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident:**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> July, during the morning, two aircraft collided during an exercise. Your husband was flying in one of the aircraft. Both aircraft immediately crashed and both the crews were killed.

*A nearly identical letter from G/Capt Biggs to Ray Bullen's mother in New Zealand was found in Ray's Royal New Zealand Air Force personnel file. There is little doubt that the next-of-kin of all fourteen deceased airmen received such a letter. G/Capt Biggs also wrote a 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson, presented as Item 6.B.*

*See Item 11.A for the 28 July 1945 letter in its entirety.*

**3.D. Excerpt of 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett, Padre of RAF Station Amarda Road:**

'Bunny,' as we knew him, had returned from leave and reassumed command of his Section. The whole Flight had gone up on formation practice. It was reasonably good flying weather. But, as so often happens here at this time of the year, the weather closed down very suddenly. Orders were given to break formation and in preparing to do so the two aircraft collided. The official inquiry into the accident attributed it solely to the unpredictable suddenness with which the weather changed. The aircraft were all piloted by selected men.

The accident occurred about 70 miles from here. You will find the spot from this map reading:

22,04° North; 87,42 1/2° East.

*The true straight line distance (which was less than the distance by vehicle) is approximately 47 statute, or 40 nautical, miles.*

*See Item 11.B for S/Ldr Bennett's complete 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert.*

**3.E. Excerpts of logbook and diary entries made by 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road:**

*On 1 April 2000 I received photocopies of two 1945 records of the collision and its aftermath from Ron "Bram" Bramley of Nottingham. The material included this information on the collision:*

**FROM RON'S LOGBOOK:**

<u>Date:</u>	26.7.45
<u>Hour:</u>	0910 [time of takeoff]
<u>Aircraft Type &amp; No:</u>	LIB. 243 [presumably EW243]
<u>Pilot:</u>	F/Lt Scott [Ian Scott]
<u>Duty:</u>	Gunnery Instructor
<u>Remarks:</u>	G7 Formation. No. 1 & 3 collided in mid-air. Weather u/s. Landed Khargpur.
<u>Flying Time, Day:</u>	1.20 [one hour and 20 minutes]

## FROM RON'S DIARY:

July 26<sup>th</sup>

Down to the flights this morning at 7-30 as we weren't taking off until 9-15. The weather was very bad & at 10-00 we went into cloud & just as we came out No 1. & 3 collided in mid-air & both fell to pieces & crashed to the deck. That was Herbie & S/Ldr Heynert [two of the pilots: P/O Alfred Herbert aboard No. 3 (EW247) and Sqn Ldr Felix Heynert DFC aboard No. 1 (EW225) ]. We circled until the weather got worse & then landed at Khargpur.

*A gunnery instructor, Ron flew on 26 July with Tom Winup, whose comments are found in Items 3.F, 3.G, and 5.G. Ron's good friend, pilot Alfred "Herbie" Herbert, died in the collision.*

*"Khargpur" was really the RAF airfield at Kharagpur, India. "G7" was a specific part of the training syllabus. The term "u/s" is RAF slang normally meaning "unserviceable", as in an aircraft with a serious mechanical problem. Here it means unsuitable, as in poor flying weather.*

*Item 3.E, above, is only the collision evidence from Ron's logbook and diary. Search evidence noted by Ron in 1945 is found separately in Item 5.A.*

*See Item 10.B. for Ron's logbook and diary entries of 27 July and 2 August, pertaining to Alfred Herbert.*

### **3.F. 1998 printed book recollection of the collision, and of meeting Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Tom Winup:**

*In December 1998 Pete Bailey, an ex-159 Squadron flight engineer, read in his local newspaper about my search for the kin of Alexander Borrow, killed in the collision. My friend since 1990, Pete surprised me this time with a photocopy from a 1998 book entitled "Wings on the Whirlwind" by Anne Grimshaw, which is a collection of flying tales. One such recollection, printed on pages 255 and 256, is that of navigator/bomb aimer T.C.H. (Tom) Winup, who flew in the Liberator formation exercise of 26 July 1945. Here is an excerpt from Tom's story, taken from the book:*

#### **Mid-air collision**

I was on a bombing leaders' course at Amarda Road camp in the Indian state of Orissa. Six of us were to fly in close formation on a fighter affiliation exercise with American Thunderbolts.

A New Zealander who had served in my squadron (358) had a reputation for being the worst pilot in the world for keeping in formation. [Tom is referring to Ray Bullen. See John Clarke's fierce rebuttal of Tom's opinion, in Item 8.J, below.] He had just been commissioned and sent to the unit as a staff pilot. My first thought was, "Right, I'm not flying with you, chum!"

However, I didn't have much choice and I was Number 4 with my aircraft's nose right under the leading aircraft which had our New Zealand friend as co-pilot. (He had, however, redeemed himself before he came to us by having plenty of guts and being awarded the DFC as a warrant officer -- even so, his reputation stuck.)

The weather was bad -- it was the monsoon -- but all was going well, even the New Zealander out in front was holding course. Suddenly the aircraft to port hit the leader. With all four engines screaming the New Zealander's aircraft, minus its tail unit, went down into a paddy field whilst the other aircraft lost a wing and also crashed.

Debris flew all over the place. I was waiting for something to hit us. Would we too follow him into the paddy field? However, a smart diving curve got us out of the way and, apart from superficial strikes by debris, we were unscathed.

All the crew of the lead aircraft, including the New Zealander, were killed. In total fourteen men were lost in this incident.

(In 1998 I was on holiday in Madras and took a taxi to visit the military cemetery where I found the graves of all fourteen. I remembered most of the names and it struck me how young we all were -- twenty was the youngest but the oldest was only twenty-six.)

There's a follow-up to that story. About two or three years ago, quite by chance, at the RAF memorial at Runnymede, I met the daughter of one of the fourteen crew members who had been killed. She told me that her family had never spoken of her father's death but she had been researching it. Her name was Yvonne [Colebatch] and she was the daughter of F/O Peter Ettlinger - a father she never knew. We are still in touch.

*In the spring of 2002 Dr. Peter Schmitthenner, my friend from university days and an Indian scholar, visited Madras War Cemetery to photograph the fourteen graves. The chief caretaker of the cemetery told Peter of a visit in recent years by an English gentleman who had witnessed the crash that had killed the fourteen airmen. Most likely this was Tom.*

*Tom erred somewhat in his comment on the ages of the men who died. The age of one (Paffey) is unclear. Of the thirteen others, the youngest was 22, the oldest 31, and the average age 26 – still so young! See PART TWO for the age of each man, with the exception of Paffey.*

*See more on Yvonne in Items 1.A, 3.H, 3.I, 6.A, and PART NINE.*

*The final segment of Tom's story printed in "Wings of the Whirlwind" was a summary of the official UK Ministry of Defence accident investigation findings: the same details cited in Items 3.A and 3.B, above, which he received from Yvonne.*

**3.G. 29 September 2000 recollection of the collision from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Tom Winup, in letter to George Smith, ex-South East Asia Command Liberator veteran:**

*In November 2002 George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, sent me a letter he had received from India Liberator veteran George Smith. Enclosed with Mr. Smith's letter was a copy of a letter written in September 2000 by Tom Winup. Tom's eyewitness account of the accident, from his vantage point directly behind the colliding Liberators, paralleled his tale found in "Wings of the Whirlwind" (Item 3.F) and provided additional details. Here is an excerpt of Tom's letter to George Smith:*

In July 45 I was sent on a Bombing Leader's [course] at the Advanced Flying Training Unit [Air Fighting Training Unit], R.A.F. Station Amarda Road, Orissa, India. The unit trained Bombing and Gunnery Leaders, who were the students, while all other air crew were on station strength as instructors, or staff crew who flew the students.

On 26 July 45 we were on an exercise which entailed fighter affiliation with U.S.A.F. Thunderbolts. We took off at 09.15 on a very hot, stormy day, with much low clouds, with the intention of flying in a formation of six Liberators.

*[A diagram of the positions of the six Liberators followed, but the aircraft were much closer than indicated here.]*

+<sup>1</sup>  
+<sup>3</sup>      +<sup>2</sup>  
+<sup>4</sup>  
+<sup>6</sup>      +<sup>5</sup>

I was flying in No. 4, with our nose immediately below & to the rear of No. 1. It seemed to me that No. 6 chickened out & never joined the formation because of the weather conditions, but the rest of us formed up in very close formation.

About 30 or 40 minutes after take off we were encountering very bad weather and approaching a heavy bank of cloud. We commenced to lose height in an attempt to fly underneath it, but reached the cloud before we were low enough and the formation entered the cloud in nil visibility.

We adopted the normal procedure of moving port & starboard, as applicable (wing aircraft) while the leading A/C maintained course.

On coming out of the cloud No. 3 was in very close proximity with No. 1, & collided with it. The tail unit of No. 1 was completely torn off & No. 3 lost one of its wings.

At the time of collision we were at about 1400 feet & no-one had a chance to bale out. I saw No. 1 hit the deck – it dived nose first into a paddy field, & there was firstly a splash of water followed immediately by a sheet of flame which quickly extinguished leaving only a large black hole.

Fourteen were killed in the two aircraft, three of them (including my room-mate F/O Peter Smith) were on the Bombing Leader's course, so we started as 7 & finished as 4.

F/Sgt. C.W. Geeson was in the same aircraft as F/O Smith – this was No. 3 piloted by P/O. A. Herbert.

There were six in Lib. No. 3. In addition to F/O Smith & F/Sgt. Geeson, there were the pilot, P/O Herbert, and W/O Smart; also two young Indian aircraftmen who were there simply for the ride – G.W. Paffey and P.V. Mathai. *[Paffey was from England, actually, but Mathai was a member of the Royal Indian Air Force.]*

I think this covers this very sad story – we should never have been up in that formation in that weather, but ours is not to reason why.

*Perhaps the most important revelation in Tom Winup's report was his observation of flames. This is the only such evidence I have found, and it applied solely to the lead aircraft, which lost its tail unit. However, the brief flash fire described by Tom could not possibly have caused suffering to the men aboard this Liberator, because it occurred only after the violent impact with the flooded rice paddy, when the crewmen were no doubt already deceased.*

*See statements concerning Robin Brown (Item 3.I), Kenneth King (Item 5.N), and Robert Manson's father (Item 4.A) for evidence dismissing the fire factor.*

*My conclusion is that neither plummeting Liberator went down in flames. Thus, none of the fourteen victims suffered from fire between the moments of collision at low altitude and impact with the flooded ground.*

*Item 3.G, above, is only the collision evidence from Tom's September 2000 letter. Burial evidence noted by Tom in this same letter is found separately in Item 5.G.*

**3.H. Excerpts of 2 November and 12 December 1998 letters to Matt Poole, from F.B. Murray, Electrical Engineering Officer at RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the collision:**

*I received a letter dated 2 November 1998 from F.B. (Brian) Murray of Danbury, Essex. Here is an excerpt of his letter:*

Regarding your message in the Oct/Dec issue of the RAFA magazine 'Airmail' re: the very tragic accident to two Liberators on 26/7/1945. I was stationed there at this date as Electrical Engineering Officer, and such circumstances as were known to me at that time still remain, never to be forgotten.

I cannot now remember any names of those involved, but I do call to mind that the Dutch Squadron Leader pilot had only a short time before been awarded the DFC, the promulgation of which had been delayed until after Holland had been freed from German occupation, due to fear that his family might have been endangered during the occupation.

I assume you are related to Flying Officer, flight engineer Peter Ettlinger, who was the father of a child born to his wife after he was posted to India. My memory is very hazy, but something tells me that it was a son. I guess that is how you know his service number! *[Peter's child was a girl, now Yvonne Colebatch. See more about Yvonne in Items 1.A, 3.F, 3.I, 6.A, and PART NINE. ]*

As for the circumstances of the crash, three Liberators set out on what was known as a Fighter Affiliation Exercise and were required to fly in formation for this. The weather was typical monsoon type with much dense cloud to low level. The fighters were cancelled due to the poor weather conditions but the three Liberators continued in formation.

The cloud was patchy in places and the formation flew rather unexpectedly into a low cloud base. On coming into better visibility, the third Liberator crew saw to their horror that the two had collided and were locked together, one having severed the tail of the other, both went down very quickly from low level straight into the ground. It seems both the crews must have been killed instantly by the violence of the crash.

To my understanding the crash site was about 50 miles from the station in difficult terrain. It took a rescue party 48 hours to reach the place and I was given to understand that all the bodies were buried there.

The third Liberator crew were not able to see exactly what happened due to the dense cloud.

I trust this meagre information may be of some use in your research after more than half a century, I guess there may not be many others still alive who were there at the time and also still able to read the RAFA Journal!

Yours sincerely,

F.B. Murray

*Of course, there were six Liberators on the exercise, not three, but Brian's details on the collision are mostly correct. His estimate of the crash site being "about 50 miles from the station" is excellent and within approximately three miles. His observation of the doomed Liberators locked together was unique.*

*In a follow-up letter dated 12 December 1998, Brian added this sad footnote:*

The RIAF ground crewman, Mathai, who was killed was attached to the electrical section and had just begged the joy-ride! This I did myself on a number of occasions.

**3.I. Excerpts of 1998 letters to Matt Poole and Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, from Robin Brown, student in the Air Fighting Training Unit's Fighter Leaders' Course at Amarda Road at the time of the crash:**

*I received a letter dated 3 September 1998 from Robin Brown of Glasgow, Scotland. An excerpt of his letter:*

I have just read your letter relating to the collision between two Liberator bombers at Amarda Road, India, in July 1945.

At that time I was Flight Commander on No. 155 Fighter Squadron which was based at Toungoo, Burma, and had joined No. 26 Fighter Leaders' Course at Amarda Road at the beginning of July.

You may be interested in the following excerpt from the diary which I kept at that time:

"On 19<sup>th</sup> July we practised air to ground firing. We made a low-flying approach to avoid flak, and a steep pull-up just before firing bursts at three targets 400 yards apart.

On the next day we were to practise attacks on a low-flying Liberator bomber taking violent evasive action. We were warned about the danger of flying into the ground during the attack. But the outcome was a disaster for the station. Two Liberators on a formation flight collided when going through cloud at 800 feet. Both went straight into the ground, with the loss of fifteen crewmen. The weather was very bad, and the exercise should never have been attempted."

You will see that there are two discrepancies from your account. My diary puts the accident on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July instead of the 26<sup>th</sup>, and speaks of fifteen, not fourteen airmen. I cannot after so many years vouch for the accuracy of my version. It is more probable that yours is correct, since it is presumably based on official documentation.

*Robin next contacted Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by letter. An excerpt of his 23 September 1998 letter:*

First let me hasten to explain why you are receiving a letter from someone you never heard of.

In a recent issue of "Dekho", the journal of the Burma Star Association, I read a letter from Matthew Poole about the collision between two Liberator bombers at Amarda Road, India on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1945. As I had been at Amarda Road on that date, I wrote to Mr. Poole. I enclose a copy of my letter and Mr. Poole's reply.

As you will see, he asks me to let you have any information relating to the death of your father, Pilot Officer Peter Ettlinger.

I was at the time seconded from a Spitfire squadron to take the Fighter Leader's course at Amarda Road. I did not know your father, although we must have shared the same officers' mess. I did not witness the accident, although my log book tells me that I flew on that day. I can however reassure you that both aircraft crashed without catching fire.

I can fully understand your sadness at never having known your father. You can be very proud of him.

A passing thought - the discrepancy between the date I mention in my letter to Matthew Poole and the actual date of the accident is easily accounted for by my habit of writing up my diary in arrears.

I hope that the little I have been able to tell you is of some comfort.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Brown

*For more about Yvonne, see Items 1.A, 3.F, 3.H, 6.A, and PART NINE. After contacting Yvonne, Robin wrote me a follow-up letter dated 14 December 1998, in which he added:*

I decided that it might be better to write to Mrs. Colebatch rather than to telephone her, in case such a call proved upsetting.

I have to admit to you that my grounds for assuring her that the Liberators did not go down in flames was simply that if they had I would have known, being a course member at the time. We used to carry out dummy attacks on Liberators as part of the course.

*See statements concerning Kenneth King (Item 5.N) and Robert Manson's father (Item 4.A) for evidence agreeing with Robin Brown in dismissing fire as a factor in the suffering or deaths of the airmen.*

*Tom Winup (Item 3.G) revealed that he observed flames – the only such evidence I have found. It applied solely to the lead aircraft, which lost its tail unit. However, the brief flash fire described by Tom could not possibly have caused suffering to the men aboard this Liberator, because it occurred only after the violent impact with the flooded rice paddy, when the crewmen were no doubt already deceased.*

*My conclusion based on all evidence is that neither plummeting Liberator went down in flames, just as Robin Brown stated. Thus, none of the fourteen victims suffered from fire between the moments of collision at low altitude and impact with the flooded ground.*

**3.J. Excerpt of 1 November 1998 letter to Matt Poole from Kenneth King, ex-RAF, who helped to bury remains of the airmen and to erect memorial crosses at the site:**

*From a letter dated 1 November 1998 which I received from Kenneth King of Worle, Weston-Super-Mare:*

*If my failing memory is at all accurate the crash was in acres of "paddy fields" about 3 miles from a place called CONTAI.*

*Kenneth correctly recalled the name of the nearest town, but the crash was approximately 20 miles away from Contai, not three miles – according to the official word (see Items 5.E and 5.F).*

*See Item 5.N for Kenneth's long account of his participation on a burial expedition to the crash site in 1945, after the monsoon floods had subsided.*

**3.K. Excerpt of the 1947 biographical summary of Pilot Officer Raymond Maurice Bullen DFC, held in the archives of the New Zealand Defence Force:**

*Pilot Officer Bullen was the pilot of a Liberator aircraft which collided in mid-air with another aircraft on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1945, and crashed near the Parada Road, all the members of the crew, including P/O Bullen, losing their lives.*

*See Item 8.L for the complete 1947 biographical summary.*

**3.L. Excerpt of the 159 Squadron's July 1945 Monthly Report (RAF Form 540):**

**CASUALTIES.**

*F/Lt. S.W. Wells, No. 103003, Nav. B. was killed in an aircraft crash on 26.7.45, which occurred at R.A.F. Station, Armada [Amarda] Road, where he was on attachment for a Bombing Leaders Course. The aircraft in which he was flying Liberator VI. E.W.255 [EW225] collided in mid-air with another Liberator, E.W.47 [EW247], and crashed to the ground. The aircraft was completely smashed and there were no survivors. A Memorial Service was held at R.A.F. Armada [Amarda] Rd. on 2.8.45, at which members of the Squadron were present.*

*No other men are mentioned, yet Felix Heynert, Arnie Bridgman, Robert Manson, Peter Ettlinger, and Alexander Borrow are also linked to 159 Squadron. Heynert and Bridgman flew extensively on ops with the squadron, but it appears that the others did not fly operationally with 159.*

*The Memorial Service is mentioned in the wartime diary of Ron Bramley (Item 10.B).*



## **PART FOUR: EVIDENCE OF THE COLLISION, AS ATTRIBUTED TO THE NEXT-OF-KIN OF THE VICTIMS**

*PART FOUR continues the examination of the collision evidence that has come to light.*

*The evidence pertaining specifically to the search for victims and the burial of remains is presented and analyzed separately in PART FIVE.*

*Refer to Item 21.F, a wartime map upon which the locations of Amarda Road and the crash site have been annotated.*

### **4.A. Excerpt of 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

Unfortunately when we received news of the accident, we were unaware that both planes had crashed, but the message read that Ray was one of a crew of eight who lost their lives when they collided in mid-air with another plane.

Mr. Manson [*father of casualty Robert Manson*] was able to inform us that the planes did not catch fire.

We understand that the accident was due to the suddenness with which the weather closed down & in attempting to break formation under those conditions, the accident occurred.

*According to Edna, Robert Manson's father received word dismissing fire as a factor in the suffering or deaths of the airmen. See statements concerning Robin Brown (Item 3.I) and Kenneth King (Item 5.N) for evidence agreeing with this.*

*Tom Winup (Item 3.G) revealed that he observed flames – the only such evidence I have found. It applied solely to the lead aircraft, which lost its tail unit. However, the brief flash fire described by Tom could not possibly have caused suffering to the men aboard this Liberator, because it occurred only after the violent impact with the flooded rice paddy, when the crewmen were no doubt already deceased.*

*My conclusion based on all evidence is that neither plummeting Liberator went down in flames, just as Robin Brown stated. Thus, none of the fourteen victims suffered from fire between the moments of collision at low altitude and impact with the flooded ground.*

*See Item 8.B for Edna Bullen's complete 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson.*

### **4.B. Excerpt of 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Last Sunday my parents & my parents-in-law had a visit from a demobbed airman who was bomb aimer in one of the planes in the same formation as our loved ones, & he witnessed the whole accident. He says the collision occurred between the second & third planes in the formation & that my husband, whom he knew fairly well, was in the third plane.

He himself was in the fourth plane & his pilot swooped down over the scene of the crash dropping food & medical supplies while the fifth plane went back to base to report the accident. He said they circled round for 3½ hours & saw no sign of life at all. They were only sorry that they were unable to make a landing, but it was quite impossible owing to the flooded areas.

*The letter gave the name of the visiting airman, Cyril Thompson, and his address.*

*Based upon Margaret Smith's details, it is clear that Cyril Thompson was aboard Aircraft #4, the same Liberator as Tom Winup and Ron Bramley.*

*In comparison to the official crash details (Item 3.B), Tom Winup (Item 3.F, but particularly Item 3.G), and Ron Bramley (Item 3.E), it is apparent that Mrs. Smith, or possibly Mr. Thompson, was slightly mistaken in describing the collision. In fact, the accident involved Aircraft #1 (the lead plane in the six-aircraft formation) and Aircraft #3 (Peter Smith's Liberator, flying to the port rear of the leader). Thus, the collision was not between the second and third planes in the formation, as Margaret's letter stated.*

*The chronology of Aircraft #4's immediate post-crash actions, as written by Margaret, was also slightly in error, when compared to Ron Bramley's precise logbook and diary entries (Item 5.A). In fact, after the 10 am collision, Aircraft #4 was only airborne for another 35 minutes before landing at Kharagpur. Then came the early afternoon flight back to the crash site to drop supplies. Ron's logbook and diary entries show that they spent 90 minutes of their 3 hours and 10 minute second flight over the crash site.*

*See Item 15.B for Margaret Smith's complete 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson.*

**4.C. Excerpt of 21 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert:**

I expect you have had the same details that I have – that it was attributed to bad flying weather and cloud.

*See Item 11.D for Patricia Heynert's complete 21 November 1945 letter to George Geeson.*

**4.D. Excerpt of 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert:**

It was certainly a terrible calamity when Alf's plane crashed on July 26<sup>th</sup> and although we knew that 22 had lost their lives we didn't know the names of any of the others.

One of Alf's best pals, "Brad" has been to see us since he arrived home from India and he told us that 22 were killed and offered to let us read a list of the names but mother wasn't equal to reading it at the time.

*In the letter Derrick made an error when he said "Brad" had told the Herbert family that 22 airmen died in the collision of the two bombers. It is well established that the true number was 14. "Brad" is most likely Ron Bramley, Alf's mate. Ron's nickname is "Bram". Ron's diary and logbook extracts are found in Items 3.E, 5.A, and 10.B.*

*See Item 10.C for Derrick Herbert's complete 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson.*

**4.E. Excerpt of 16 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger:**

My husband was the flight engineer of the first plane leading the first formation, please let me know if your brother was in the same plane.

I had a letter from one of the boys and he told me they were flying 6,000 feet high, when they entered a Culamus [*cumulus*] cloud. The second kite in the first formation caught up with my husband's kite, they swooped down to get away from each other, but crashed in mid-air, not one were saved, they fell into a paddy field.

*The figure of 6,000 feet was inaccurate. The official evidence in Items 3.A and 3.B gave the distance as being between 1,000 and 2,000 feet, while Tom Winup (Item 3.G) remembered it as 1,400 feet.*

*See Item 9.B for Lilian Ettlinger's complete 2 December 1945 letter to George Geeson.*

**4.F. Excerpt of 11 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Clara Herbert, mother of Alfred Herbert:**

On Alf's death certificate which I got from the Air Ministry it says he was killed at Bhuinsari Bazaar, nr Midnapore India. They were flying through the Monsoon weather which is very stormy and cloudy I believe.

*This is the only evidence which mentions "Bhuinsari Bazaar" near Midnapore. However, Midnapore was 35 statute miles distant (straight line) from the known latitude/longitude of the crash site – a very long way away. None of the casualties died near Midnapore. A British military hospital was located at Midnapore, so possibly the death certificate was completed by a medical officer at this hospital.*

*See Item 10.F for Clara Herbert's full 11 December 1945 letter to George Geeson.*

## **PART FIVE: EVIDENCE OF THE SEARCH AND RECOVERY EFFORTS AT THE CRASH SITE, PLUS ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE MOVE OF REMAINS TO MADRAS WAR CEMETERY**

*PART FIVE presents the examination of the evidence that has come to light concerning the search for victims and the burials of remains. The evidence of the collision and crash is presented separately in PARTS THREE and FOUR.*

*In truth, there are gaps in what is known about the precise chronology and results of the search and recovery efforts. Some of the evidence presented below is vague and is suspect in its accuracy. It seems that some remains may have been found and buried in an initial visit to the crash area soon after the disaster. Without a doubt, several weeks after the accident Padre Stanley Bennett's party trekked to the site and recovered and buried human remains.*

*Kenneth King's superb recollections in 1998 and 2002, in regard to this visit led by Padre Bennett, provide some modern clarification, outlined in Item 5.N. (This visit most likely took place some time between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1945.) Nevertheless, not all points of confusion have been eliminated.*

*The last item (Item 5.O) is especially perplexing but can now be dismissed as inconsequential: an official New Zealand Air Department letter sent to the family of pilot Ray Bullen in 1948. Based upon the evidence, below, indicating that remains were indeed moved in 1953 to the newly-established Madras War Cemetery, I have concluded that the 1948 report of lost remains was later made moot when the 1945 gravesite was rediscovered.*

*The fact that all fourteen airmen's names are absent from the Singapore Memorial to missing airmen at Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore, is further proof that the remains were rediscovered and moved to Madras.*

*There is, as of yet, no direct paper evidence, in public hands, to prove when the rediscovery took place.*

*The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, keeper of casualty records, is very secretive. In the Commission's archives, likely, is a Graves Concentration Report containing a brief summary of the disinterment of the original gravesite and the reburial of crew remains at Madras. The problem is that the Graves Concentration Report would be extremely difficult to wrestle out of the Commission's archives without the aid of "friends in high places." In the future, an effort to acquire the specific Report may be attempted.*

### **5.A. Excerpts of logbook and diary entries made by 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road:**

*On 1 April 2000 I received photocopies of two 1945 records of the collision and its aftermath from Ron "Bram" Bramley of Nottingham, who flew that day aboard Aircraft #4 in the formation. The material Ron sent to me included some information on the initial search:*

#### **FROM RON'S LOGBOOK:**

<u>Date:</u>	26.7.45
<u>Hour:</u>	1405
<u>Aircraft Type &amp; No:</u>	LIB. 243
<u>Pilot:</u>	F/Lt Scott
<u>Duty:</u>	Gunnery Instructor
<u>Remarks:</u>	Searched for & located crash. Dropped dinghy radio & first aid. Dropped message to ground party & circled crash for 90 minutes.
<u>Flying Time, Day:</u>	3.10 [three hours and ten minutes]

**FROM RON'S DIARY:**

July 26<sup>th</sup>

... We circled *[the crash site, immediately after the accident]* until the weather got worse & then landed at Kharagpur *[Kharagpur]*. Organised a search party & then took off after lunch & orbited the crash for over an hour. Located the search party at the Ferry & dropped a message to them & also dropped the dinghy radio at the crash. Came back & landed. Not a hope for anyone in either a/c - 14 people altogether.

*A ground search party immediately set forth to reach the crash site from the RAF airfield at Kharagpur, which was closer to the scene than Amarda Road. The wreckage was identified again from the air by Ron's crew, who also dropped supplies in case they were needed. Presumably the message dropped to the ground party included directions and a fresh assessment of the crash scene. There is no mention of the recovery of human remains in Ron's diary or logbook.*

*Item 5.A, above, is only the search evidence from Ron's logbook and diary. Collision evidence noted by Ron in 1945 is found separately in Item 3.E.*

*See Item 10.B. for Ron's logbook and diary entries of 27 July and 2 August, pertaining to Alfred Herbert.*

**5.B. Excerpt of 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident:**

We at once sent out a rescue party and due to the difficult country it was not possible to return to this Station *[Amarda Road]* for the funeral. Your husband and the other thirteen members of the crews were buried near the scene of the crash.

Within a few days our Padre will again be proceeding to the graves and we shall erect the proper memorial. We intend to make a pleasant surrounding and shall see that it is properly looked after.

*The "we" in the Group Captain's first sentence presumably referred to a group effort which set off from Kharagpur airfield, not Amarda Road. See Ron Bramley's diary (Item 5.A) and S/Ldr Bennett's 10 September 1945 letter (Item 5.C) for clarifying evidence about the link to Kharagpur.*

*This information implied that the actual burial of the remains of all fourteen casualties was accomplished, near the crash site, by a rescue party soon after the crash, and that the Padre's upcoming mission would be to better prepare the existing gravesite as a memorial, rather than to search for more remains. Kenneth King's information (Item 5.N) proved that the Padre's team found and buried remains – in the process accomplishing more than just the erecting of a memorial.*

*The statement that "our Padre will again be proceeding to the graves" can be interpreted as implying that Padre Bennett had previously been to the site. This is the only evidence of such a trip.*

*The Group Captain's "within a few days" became a few weeks, due to adverse weather and flooding.*

*See Item 11.A for the complete 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert from G/Capt Biggs.*

**5.C. Excerpt of 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett, Padre of RAF Station Amarda Road:**

On receipt of the *[crash]* report a party went immediately to the place. Nobody had survived. It is also certain that nobody had suffered. The aircraft crashed in an area under monsoon floods. All that could be done under such conditions was done. Soon the floods will begin to subside and we shall then return to build a memorial at the spot. We shall take photographs and will forward copies to you. May I ask you to drop a line to the C.O. of R.A.F. Kharagpur, S.E.A.A.F. Lads from his station were first on the spot and they spared no effort.

*The flooded crash site restricted what the search party was able to accomplish. The expression “all that could be done under such conditions was done” is vague and does not definitively mean that human remains were found and buried by those who reached the site first. It could be interpreted as meaning that the search team had been unable to gain access to all remains in the wreckage due to the impact of the aircraft into the flooded fields. It was a difficult crash site to investigate.*

*This letter provides strong evidence that RAF personnel from Kharagpur, not Amarda Road, were first on the scene. Ron Bramley’s diary entry for 26 July (Item 5.A) explains the cooperation between Amarda Road Liberator airmen (including Ron) and the ground search party from Kharagpur.*

*The Padre’s stated plan to return in the near future, in order to build and photograph a memorial after the floodwaters dissipated, gave no indication that any remains had already been recovered; the wording did not mention a gravesite or whether a future attempt by the Padre to recover remains was a priority. He mentioned only a memorial to the fallen.*

*However, per Kenneth King’s recollections in 1998 and again in 2002 (Item 5.N), the Padre’s team did much more than just erect a memorial; they discovered remains, dug a grave, and then erected the two crosses (one per crew) atop the grave.*

*Note that when the Padre wrote this letter on 10 September – six and a half weeks after the accident – he still had not been able to journey to the crash site because of monsoon-related conditions. However, in his 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson (Item 5.D), G/Capt Biggs said that the Padre “will have visited the graves” by then.*

*This might have been an erroneous presumption by the Group Captain, but if the statement is assumed as being correct, then the Padre and his team reached the crash site sometime between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September. The timing also correlates well with Kenneth King’s statement (Item 5.N) that “some weeks” passed between the date of the accident and the timing of their visit.*

*See Item 11.B for the complete 10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert from S/Ldr Bennett.*

**5.D. Excerpt of 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident:**

*My posting [from Amarda Road to a new assignment] had come through about a week before your brother was killed but I was waiting for my relief to arrive.*

*Since I have left the Padre will have visited the graves and placed crosses over them as I had made these arrangements.*

*G/Capt Biggs was no longer stationed at Amarda Road when he wrote this letter. It is not known whether G/Capt Biggs had definitely received word of the Padre’s visit to the site when the 24 September letter was written. G/Capt Biggs’ new assignment meant that he no longer worked at the same location as the Padre, thus lessening their frequency of communication. The Group Captain’s wording in the 24 September letter may be interpreted as being simply his unverified presumption that the Padre and his team had by then accomplished their mission. Then again, and more likely I think, “will have visited the graves” might very well be a statement of fact from someone who would have followed events closely due to his association with some of the men who died, and with the Padre, while C.O. of Amarda Road.*

*The 24 September letter is the first evidence I have seen which mentioned the Padre’s mission in other than future tense. If the assumption is made that G/Capt Biggs had, by the time of his 24 September letter, received word of the Padre’s successful visit to the crash site, then the trek must have taken place sometime between 10 September (the date of the Padre’s letter to Patricia Heynert – see Item 5.C) and 24 September. The timing also correlates well with Kenneth King’s statement (Item 5.N) that “some weeks” passed between the date of the accident and the timing of their visit.*

*As with his 28 July letter to Patricia Heynert (Item 5.B), G/Capt Biggs' wording implied the previous burial of airmen's remains, far preceding the Padre's visit to erect crosses over those graves. Again, Kenneth King's information (Item 5.N) proves that the Padre's team found and buried remains – accomplishing more than just the erecting of a memorial.*

*See Item 6.B for the complete 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson from G/Capt Biggs .*

**5.E. Excerpt of 4 October 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from W/Cdr Paul Louis, successor to G/Capt D. R. Biggs as Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road:**

Owing to the circumstances of the crash and the nature of the country, the bodies of the crews were buried near the scene of the accident, and the location is approximately 20 miles north of Contai, a market town, in Orissa, India.

*This was written from Amarda Road, where Padre Bennett was also stationed. As the C.O. of Amarda Road, W/Cdr Louis would have known the Padre, and he also would have been well aware of the Padre's trek to the crash site, whenever it finally occurred. The 24 September letter of G/Capt Biggs to George Geeson (Item 5.D) and Kenneth King's statement (Item 5.N) of traveling to the accident scene with the Padre "some weeks" after the accident support the theory that the Padre had successfully reached the crash site and returned by the time of this letter (4 October).*

*Thus, it is likely that the Wing Commander's letter was written after the date of Padre Bennett's visit to the gravesite with Kenneth King .*

*However, the Wing Commander's letter is vague in the sense that it does not explain precisely when human remains were buried and when the memorial crosses were erected.*

*See Item 6.C for the complete 4 October 1945 letter to George Geeson from W/Cdr Louis .*

**5.F. Excerpt of 31 October 1985 letter sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch:**

Your father and his comrades were buried in a paddyfield, 20 miles north of Contai, Orissa. In 1953 their bodies were exhumed and reinterred in Madras War Cemetery in a comrades grave.

The reburial was in accordance with the policy agreed upon by His Majesty's and the Commonwealth Governments, that our fallen should be transferred to specially selected Military Cemeteries, where the graves will be maintained for all time by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

*The letter stated that remains buried in 1945 were found and moved eight years later to Madras, where they were reinterred in a "comrades", or collective, grave. This is strong evidence that any difficulty in rediscovering the original burial site in the late 1940s, as explained in the New Zealand Air Department's 1948 letter to the Bullen family (Item 5.O), was overcome by 1953.*

*See Item 9.A for the full details found in the 31 October 1985 letter to Yvonne Colebatch from the Ministry of Defence.*

**5.G. 29 September 2000 recollection of the collision from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Tom Winup, in letter to George Smith, ex-South East Asia Command Liberator veteran:**

All fourteen were buried in a paddy field, 20 miles North of Contai, Orissa, but in 1953 the bodies were exhumed & buried in the Military Cemetery in Madras.

In 1998 my wife & I were on a Q.E. II cruise which called into Madras for a day, & in the morning we took a taxi to the cemetery and visited the graves where we paid our respects to our friends who died when they were all very young, 53 years earlier.

The cemetery is immaculately maintained & very peaceful & beautiful. The boys are buried in a comrades' grave, which means they are side by side in one line.

*George Smith sent this letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, who then forwarded it to me.*

*The origin of Tom's information is almost certainly the basic accident investigation transcript sent by the Air Historical Branch of the UK Ministry of Defence to Yvonne Colebatch (Item 5.F). After meeting Tom, Yvonne sent him a copy of the 31 October 1985 letter containing this official account.*

**5.H. Excerpt of 2 November 1998 letter to Matt Poole, from F.B. Murray, Electrical Engineering Officer at RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the collision:**

To my understanding the crash site was about 50 miles from the station in difficult terrain. It took a rescue party 48 hours to reach the place and I was given to understand that all the bodies were buried there.

*Mr. Murray remembered hearing about the difficulty in reaching the remote crash site, which was not very far away as measured in straight mileage. I do not consider his recollection of "all" bodies being buried at the site as being definitive in nature, although he was accurate in stating that the distance was roughly 50 miles from Amarda Road.*

**5.I. Excerpt of 22 October 1998 letter to Matt Poole from S/Ldr Edward Hearn DFC, instructor at RAF Station Amarda Road:**

I remember that our first attempt to find the crash was abortive & we sent out a ground search party.

*Edward was understandably vague as to date and results. It could be that Edward was implying that this first attempt was an aerial operation. Then the ground search party was sent out. If so, the air flight to which he referred may have been an aircraft which took off from Amarda Road upon word of the crash. The search flight may have aborted due to the inclement monsoon weather.*

*I have seen no other evidence of a failed attempt to reach the crash site, either by ground or by air, soon after the accident. Ron Bramley's logbook and diary (Item 5.A) define what his Liberator did in the hours after the crash; after landing at Kharagpur, it took off again in the afternoon and found the crash site. Cyril Thompson, also aboard their Liberator, provided some details to Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith (Item 5.J). (Crewmate Tom Winup's two accounts mention nothing of the post-crash flying.)*

*Nobody else specifically mentioned an air search after the crash. No doubt, in the weeks which followed there were overflights – some for no other reason than curiosity, but others to assess the flood level in anticipation of the Padre's planned visit to the site.*

*See Item 11.C for more of Eddie Hearn's recollections in his 22 October 1998 letter to me.*

**5.J. Excerpt of 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Last Sunday my parents & my parents-in-law had a visit from a demobbed airman who was bomb aimer in one of the planes in the same formation as our loved ones, & he witnessed the whole accident.

He said the search party took so long to reach the scene because of the difficult transport. They even had to build two bridges. He said he went with some other boys to try to take photographs for us, but they were unsatisfactory.



*The letter gave the name of the visiting airman, Cyril Thompson, and his address. Cyril Thompson was aboard the same Liberator, Aircraft #4, as Tom Winup (Items 3.F, 3.G, and 5.G) and Ron Bramley (Items 3.E and 5.A). The general description of difficulties in reaching the crash area is echoed by what others said (as per various entries in PART FIVE).*

*Margaret Smith's letter did not state when, exactly, Mr. Thompson and "some other boys" made a journey to try to take photos. It is unclear whether this was a ground expedition or a Liberator overflight to take aerial photos. Kenneth King in November 2002 told me that Cyril Thompson was definitely not one of the three other RAF blokes who accompanied the Padre and himself on the journey to the crash site.*

*Thus, Mr. Thompson may have been referring to a flight he was on to take overhead photos.*

*The "unsatisfactory" results may have been due to camera malfunction, operator error, bad film, bad developing, or poor conditions (i.e., haze, low cloud, or rain).*

*See Item 15.B for the complete 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson from Margaret Smith.*

**5.K. Excerpt of 2 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger:**

*One of the men that was stationed at Amarda Rd is now home for good. He called to see me with his wife & little girl. It nearly broke my heart to think that Peter will never come back, however he told me that 10 days after the crash 2 of the men were found, but neither of them were Cyril or Peter.*

*About 2 months ago one of the rescue party called on me, and I begged him to tell all. He informed me that none of the men were found and all that was traced of the aircraft was 2 pieces of wing which was put in the ground like this – [drawing a "V" or "X", as if the wings were protruding from the ground] and that was considered their grave. You see, it was a paddy field which they crashed into which is of course a swamp, so anything coming down with terrific force would sink right in.*

*I forgot to add the government bought this plot of land in their memorial.*

*Lilian was given conflicting information, some of which is unique and no doubt accurate, but some very wrong. The problem comes in separating the reality from the inaccuracies.*

*The first Amarda Road returnee, who visited at an unknown date, told Lilian that two sets of remains were recovered just over a week after the accident. I have found no other evidence to corroborate this precise evidence, but that does not mean it was in error. The first caller's statement that neither set of remains was Cyril Geeson or Peter Ettlinger is unverifiable.*

*The second visitor, "one of the rescue party", said that not one casualty was found – which is contrary to the truth. Perhaps his particular rescue party failed to locate remains, but clearly remains were found by others – possibly during searches conducted soon after the accident, but certainly during the visit by the Padre's team after the floods subsided weeks later (as described by Kenneth King in Item 5.N).*

*The second visitor's statement that only two pieces of wing were found sticking out of the ground suggests that he was a member of an early search party from Amarda Road, which reached the scene while the fields were flooded to their fullest. His description may have been more or less accurate at the time, before sunken or embedded wreckage became more visible and accessible as the waters receded.*

*By the time of the Padre's visit, as borne out in Kenneth King's photographs, badly twisted wing and fuselage remnants were found, but it is unclear if they represent one or both of the fallen Liberators. Some fuselage wreckage, said Kenneth, was substantial enough to enter, and human remains were found within. (Again, see 5.N for more on Kenneth's details.)*

*Lilian's statement that "the government bought this plot of land in their memorial" seemingly ties in with something mentioned in G/Capt Biggs' 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert (Item 11.A). In that letter, the Group Captain said, "We . . . shall see that it [the memorial] is properly looked after." This implied a money payment to the local Indians for upkeep of the memorial. Perhaps Lilian was given similar information and believed that the British had actually purchased the land.*

*See 9.C for the complete 2 December 1945 letter to George Geeson from Lilian.*

**5.L. Excerpt of the 1947 biographical summary of Pilot Officer Raymond Maurice BULLEN DFC, held in the archives of the New Zealand Defence Force:**

P/O Bullen and the other members of both crews were buried near the scene of the crash.

*Most likely this conclusion was simply based upon the general knowledge that 26 July 1945 casualty remains were found. No details have yet materialized which prove that Ray Bullen's remains were actually among those recovered.*

*See Item 8.L for the complete 1947 biographical summary.*

**5.M. Excerpt of 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

I expect you will have received photos of the grave showing the two large white crosses. The grave is 20 miles north of Contai in the State of Orissa, India.

*See Item 8.B for the complete 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson from Edna Bullen.*

**5.N. 1998 and 2002 recollections shared with Matt Poole (via letters and phone conversations) by Kenneth King, ex-RAF, who helped to bury remains of the airmen and to erect memorial crosses at the site:**

*In late 1998, and then again in late 2002, I corresponded with Kenneth King of Worle, Weston-Super-Mare. His recollections and photos added tremendously to the little I knew about the crash site and the recovery/burial of casualties by the team led by Padre Stanley Bennett. Many questions remain unanswered, however. My comments and analysis are interspersed with Ken's words.*

*In his 1 November 1998 letter to me, Kenneth said the following:*

I was involved in going to the crashed aircraft and in burying the remains of the 14 airmen involved. We were sent to the crash from the Amarda Road, India airfield where I was a member of No. 138 R.S.U. (Repair & Salvage Unit). I regret that at my advanced age I am unable to remember the exact date when we set off for the crash site.

I well remember the lengthy journey which involved obtaining transport on rivers and ferries for our personnel & lorry. As a guess, I would say we eventually arrived at the crash scene some weeks after the occurrence. If my failing memory is at all accurate the crash was in acres of "paddy fields" about 3 miles from a place called CONTAL. We were a party consisting of: PADRE, TECHNICAL OFFICER, SELF & 2 OTHER AIRMEN, plus a photographer and about 5 or 6 native employees.

I have photographs of the journey, our handling of the burial (on suitable ground), the actual burial by the PADRE, and pictures of the memorial crosses in position, close up and in the distance. I do assure you that this is not a fantasy. The photographs clearly show (on the crosses) the names of the 14 dead airmen & the date 26.7.45.

*The difficulty of the journey, as described by Kenneth, is consistent with other observations of an arduous trek to reach the crash site, described elsewhere in PART FIVE. Although he could not pinpoint the timing of his team's visit to the crash site, his recollection of it being "some weeks after the occurrence" (meaning the accident) fits quite well with my guess of the 10 September to 24 September window, when I believe the journey most likely took place. See Items 5.C and 5.D for my reasoning for choosing these dates.*

*Patricia Lanegan, Felix Heynert's widow, received two photographs of the crosses, erected side-by-side by Kenneth and the others. (Each cross recorded one Liberator's aircrew -- by name, rank, and service number -- and carried the date of death and the words "LEST WE FORGET".) The photos make it clear that Kenneth's information concerning the crosses was accurate. The Padre appearing in the group photo of five RAF men praying at the gravesite, mentioned in Kenneth's letter, has since been verified as being S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett.*

*With his follow-up letter dated 30 November 1998, Kenneth King enclosed copies of his photographs, complete with captions. (All of these photos, with the exception of the first, are found in Section 21.E.) Excerpts from that letter, and my comments:*

Enclosed are the copies of my photographs of the fateful crash. The back of one set is numbered with information, as much as I can remember.

#1: Sength Ghopal. Station photographer - Amarda Road. Indian, but a member of the RAF. Prior to the war he was a photographer at the "Times of India" in Bombay.

#2: Two of these aircraft were lost.

*I don't know what Kenneth based this upon, but it is possible that the airborne Liberators in this photo -- including the aircraft in which the photographer of this print was riding -- were four of the aircraft assigned to Amarda Road.*

#3: The start of our mission. Camp to crash: 70 miles, which took us 4 plus days, with rough sleeping and a few problems.

*This shows the Chevrolet lorry carrying the men and equipment, as viewed from a slightly elevated frontal angle. The two memorial crosses, to be erected at the burial site, are strapped to the roof of the vehicle.*

*The straight flying distance from Amarda Road to the crash site was just short of 50 miles. However, Kenneth stressed that the long journey was less than direct. Whether its length was closer to 70 is just not known.*

#4, 5, 6: The journey to the crash scene.

*These photos depict river scenes en route. The Padre is in all three photos. One bloke in photo #6 has two bottles of liquor, and he seems to be faced with a pleasant dilemma: which to open first. In photo #5: these are the same five RAF men standing at the grave in #12.*

#7, 8: Crash scenes. No fire -- thank God.

*In photo #7 I can recognize a Liberator center fuselage section (the bomb bay and bomb bay doors), an engine supercharger, and part of a wing.*

*Photo #8 shows the underside of a starboard Liberator wing, including the tire, part of a landing gear door, and another supercharger that appears to have come from the Number 3 (starboard inner) engine. A wingtip is evident on the far right. The RAF men in this photo are obviously serious in their facial expressions as they view the sad scene.*

*Kenneth told me in a subsequent phone conversation that one of the fuselage sections was intact enough to be entered and its interior negotiated. Some remains were found inside.*

*I cannot tell if Kenneth's two wreckage photos are of the same Liberator or each of the two Libs.*

#9: The search to find a little raised ground, in an endeavour to find a suitable spot for burial away from the wetlands.

*The environment is still mucky, even after the monsoon floods have subsided. One gets a feel for the terrain here, with a dike in the background.*

#10: Best spot selected.

*Kenneth is pictured with a shovel, and the cross being held is the one bearing the names of Felix Heynert's crew. A small crowd of Indians watches the activity with solemnity. The ground here is firm and unflooded.*

#11: Doing the best we can!!

*The photo shows the efforts to prepare the site with dignity. The Heynert crew's cross is shown, positioned in place.*

#12: The funeral service. It could not have been more reverent if it had been Westminster Abbey.

*This photo of the five RAF men, in prayer with heads solemnly bowed, had been sent to the next-of-kin in 1945 or 1946. Kenneth emphasized to me over the phone that all present, including the Indians, were intensely moved by the service.*

#13: We all prayed that those we lost were at peace at last and free from pain.

*This is a close-up of the finished memorial, with the two crews honored with name, rank, and service number.*

#14: In the distance. Goodbye & God Bless.

*Taken as the burial detail departed, this evocative photo shows the brilliant white memorial crosses standing out from the flat surroundings, as viewed from a distance.*

#15: On the way back to base.

*This caption is slightly in error. Actually, this photo shows the party fording a river on the outbound journey; one can see the two crosses still strapped to the roof, prior to reaching the crash site.*

*In this same 30 November 1998 letter Kenneth also wrote:*

Shortly after this I had my first attack of malaria. As you can imagine, there were no refinements on this trip, no mosquito net, but we did have a supply of mepachrin tablets. These, no doubt, helped in some way.

I well remember that we were all cigarette smokers except the F/Lt. Yes even the Padre. When we ran short of cigarettes, democracy was very evident. Each member having a "puff", officer, N.C.O. & other ranks had an equal share.

*Kenneth ended his 30 November 1998 letter with a touching comment:*

I do hope that these photographs will make any persons concerned realise that in those distant lands, someone cared.

*In two phone conversations Kenneth provided additional details about the gathering of the remains, their burial, and the erection of the handsome side-by-side crosses. The crosses had been constructed and skillfully painted at Amarda Road. Kenneth cannot recall how many sets of remains were buried.*

*There were few roads for the party to traverse on the trip between Amarda Road and the remote crash site, and the difficulty of this terrain, with many streams and ditches to negotiate, made for an arduous and slow journey.*

*In Kenneth's words, there was "nothing horrific" to be found at the crash site -- no remains considered grisly to the men involved. Kenneth and the others were extremely surprised to find a complete lack of evidence of fire at the crash scene. Note that his photo captions for #7 and 8 said "No fire -- thank God." This answered Yvonne Colebatch's most troubling question: "Did the men suffer at all from fire?" They absolutely did not, said Kenneth.*

*See statements concerning Robin Brown (Item 3.I) and Robert Manson's father (Item 4.A) for evidence agreeing with this.*

*Tom Winup (Item 3.G) revealed that he observed flames -- the only such evidence I have found. It applied solely to the lead aircraft, which lost its tail unit. However, the brief flash fire described by Tom could not possibly have caused suffering to the men aboard this Liberator, because it occurred only after the violent impact with the flooded rice paddy, when the crewmen were no doubt already deceased.*

*My conclusion based on all evidence is that neither plummeting Liberator went down in flames. Thus, none of the fourteen victims suffered from fire between the moments of collision at low altitude and impact with the flooded ground.*

*The terrain at the crash site was, indeed, quite flat with rice paddies all around and few trees. The site chosen for the graves was the highest spot in the area: an important consideration given the intensity of the flooding during the lengthy Indian monsoon season.*

*Kenneth's full set of prints was smuggled to him by Sength Ghopal, the Indian photographer who accompanied the burial detail to the crash site. Sength was well-liked by Kenneth and his mates at No. 138 Repair & Salvage Unit.*

**5.O. 18 August 1948 letter to Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen, from Air Department, New Zealand; sent in her 14 March 1949 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

Air Dept.,  
Wellington N.Z.  
18<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1948.

Dear Miss Bullen,

Further to my previous correspondence concerning your brother, Pilot Officer Raymond Maurice Bullen, D.F.C., I regret to have to advise that information now received from Air Ministry states that in spite of extensive searches, conducted by the "Graves Concentration Unit", it has not been possible to locate the graves of your brother or of other casualties who had been reported to have been buried in this area.

It can only be regretfully concluded that all traces of your brother's grave, which was situated in a paddy field in very inaccessible territory, has become effaced, due to the agricultural activities of the local natives.

Arrangements are being made to have your brother's name commemorated on a suitable memorial to be erected to those of our airmen who have no known grave, & when the nature & location of this memorial has been decided by Air Ministry, you will be further advised.

I am fully aware of the distressing nature of this information, Miss Bullen, & I am writing to you in order that you may acquaint your mother with the contents of this letter in the most suitable way.

Once again on behalf of the Air Board, I desire to express my deepest sympathy in your great loss.

Yours faithfully,

T. A. Barrow,  
Air Secretary

*In 1948 the Bullen family in New Zealand received this shocking letter concerning the unsuccessful search for the remains buried in 1945 by Kenneth King, Padre Stanley Bennett, four other RAF men, and their Indian laborers.*

*The letter caused the Bullen family, and no doubt the Geeson family in the UK, much heartache more than three years after the initial news of the tragedy hit them. See Item 8.F for Edna Bullen's reaction to this letter in her 14 March 1949 letter to George Geeson. She was most concerned that the news of the missing graves not reach her mother, who was in very poor health.*

*No other letters survive to indicate whether any of the other families received a similar letter concerning lost remains. In my correspondence with several of the families of the fallen airmen, never was this concern raised by any of the kin. At this date (20 December 2002), I have only directly asked the kin (George Geeson, brother) of one casualty (Cyril) about what he knew. To the best of his knowledge, George or his family never received such information from the British Air Ministry.*

*George has uncovered no follow-up correspondence with Edna Bullen about this issue.*

*Because remains were officially moved to Madras War Cemetery for reburial in 1953, it can only be assumed that the 1945-buried remains were, in fact, rediscovered. Thus, the August 1948 letter's sad news was premature. The failure to rediscover the remains, as described in the 1948 letter and no doubt real, was superceded by a success on a later search. Documentation on this rediscovery has not yet come to light.*

*Had the crew remains not been found in the paddy field, there would have been no collective grave reinterment in Madras in 1953. Instead, the fourteen airmen would have been individually commemorated by name only – inscribed on the Singapore Memorial to missing airmen at Kranji War Cemetery on the north side of Singapore Island. The absence of their names on the Singapore Memorial is further proof that the remains linked to the two crews lost on 26 July 1945 were, indeed, transferred to Madras War Cemetery in 1953.*

**NOTE: PARTS SIX through SEVENTEEN contain expanded details relating to twelve of the fourteen casualties and their families. Some excerpts of letters/documents which follow are also presented in PARTS THREE and FOUR (*evidence of the collision*), and PART FIVE (*evidence of the search and recovery efforts*).**

+ + + + + + + + + +

## **PART SIX: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO CYRIL GEESON AND HIS FAMILY**

*George Geeson, brother of casualty Cyril Geeson, has generously provided me with a wealth of information, as the reader will clearly understand after perusing the entire research summary.*

*My correspondence with George is the subject of Item 6.A.*

*Most of the surviving 1940s letters incorporated into the various chapters of this report have come directly from George. Chosen for inclusion in PART SIX are Items 6.B through 6.I – eight post-crash letters to George or his parents dating to 1945 and 1946. (The remainder of the letters originating from George are shown in other chapters, as dictated by content.)*

*One of Cyril's 215 Squadron crewmates, Tom Scott, offered some wartime recollections of Cyril in a 1998 letter presented as Item 6.J.*

*Excerpts from Cyril's own 1944 and 1945 letters are found in Item 6.K.*

*PART SIX concludes with my comments about a listing of next-of-kin addresses sent, against all rules, to the Geeson family by an unknown source. This information streamlined some of George's attempts to make contact with the kin of the other airmen killed on 26 July 1945.*

### **6.A. 1998 and 2002 details shared with Matt Poole by George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

*My June 1998 Grantham (Lincolnshire) newspaper appeal regarding the whereabouts of Cyril Geeson's next-of-kin was answered by Cyril's then-87 year old brother, George, of South Witham, Lincs. Excerpts from his first letter of 20 June 1998:*

Dear Matthew,

Your name & address appeared in our local paper regarding the flying crash of 2 American Liberators [*American built, but British flown*] at the near end of the war. It was a devastating blow to us. I will always remember the date of July 26. Cyril was 23 years of age & a very bright young man.

When the crash July 26 came, I had difficulty getting the names & addresses of the other 13 men. I had to write 13 letters & send to a government dept. & they posted the letters on to the other 13. I had replies from I think 12 of them. The one I didn't hear from was an Indian. From memory, one came from Ireland, one from New Zealand, & here one from Sheffield & one Southampton. I think I may still have the letters from the 12 or so. I will search for them among my papers.

We don't mind being reminded of Cyril's death. I have his photograph near my clock in the workshop, so I see him every day. It's difficult to keep the tears back, but life must go on.

George's memory was excellent; William Smart was from Northern Ireland, Ray Bullen from New Zealand, Peter Smith from Sheffield, and Peter Ettlinger from Southampton.

I phoned George soon after his initial June 1998 letter for a nice chat, during which he enlightened me further on matters pertaining to Cyril, the accident which took his life, his correspondence with the other families, and subsequent events.

After the Geeson family received notification of Cyril's death in India, George wrote for information to the British Air Ministry. Few details were provided. One of the frequent visitors at the family's guest house (at their farm on the A1 motorway) was an older RAF officer of high ranking. As he was involved in RAF accident investigations, the Geeson family decided to approach him for help in learning details of Cyril's death.

He graciously offered to use his rank to optimal advantage when looking into the matter, and he promised to post a letter with his findings to Cyril's parents on one condition: that they burn it after reading it. This, in fact, was done, apparently to protect the RAF officer. The details were confidential and, per regulations, they should have remained off-limits to the next-of-kin.

Item 6.L, a listing of the thirteen other next-of-kin names and addresses, may have been provided by this officer; there is no accompanying letter for this listing.

George specifically remembered the name "Ettlinger", without my prodding, as being that of one of the men who died in the collision. In fact, in 1946 George and his wife Viola traveled to Southampton to visit with Peter's widow and baby girl in Southampton. I told him that this baby was my friend, Yvonne Colebatch, of London, and that my desire to help her learn more about the collision was what spurred me into searching for the Geeson family!

George remembered that the liner Queen Mary or Queen Elizabeth was leaving Southampton during his and Viola's visit to Yvonne and her mum (Lilian), so the four of them went out to see the liner's departure. This incident was vivid in his memory. He recalled that Lilian presented him with a photo of Peter, her late husband.

I phoned Yvonne soon after my chat with George to surprise her with George's recollections.

In a July 1998 letter George wrote of his own recent thrill – a reunion by voice after more than 50 years:

I had a call from Yvonne Colebatch. She was surprised to learn that Viola & I stayed the night with her & her mother. We had quite a long chat.

George also mentioned in his July 1998 letter that he had corresponded with Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen, for several years. I told George that Edna had died in the 1990s – news that I heard from Peter Bullen, her nephew in New Zealand.

According to George, his brother Cyril was "badly shot up" by shrapnel while flying combat, a fact verified in a 27 October 1998 letter I received from Tom Scott, Cyril's pilot at the time (Item 6.J). My own records of RAF 215 Squadron confirmed that Cyril was wounded during a 10 December 1944 low-level attack on the Burma-Siam Railway.

George recalled that Cyril was off recuperating for three months. He sent me a copy of Cyril's logbook, but no mention of the injuries was recorded in the logbook. However, the logbook shows that following the 10 December 1944 operation, he did not fly again until 12 April 1945 (still assigned to 215 Squadron). It appeared, then, that Cyril's wounds required a four month break from flying duties. When he began flying with AFTU from Amarda Road on 7 June 1945, Cyril had flown only four combat sorties totaling 41.25 hours – far short of a full tour of roughly 30 ops or 300 hours, but more than enough time to face great peril and frightening injury.

In a 28 November 1998 letter George passed along some additional news about Cyril's operational flying and crewmates at 215 Squadron:



I have had a talk to Tom Scott [Cyril's navigator/bomb aimer ] & also Tom Brooks [pilot], have also learned more about the operations that Cyril took part in. They were all non commissioned officers & were a very happy crew. Tom Brooks may come up this way. If so he would give us a call. I certainly would like to meet him.

*Nearly four years later, in August 2002, George rediscovered a cache of missing letters from the next-of-kin of the casualties and from others with a direct link to the men and events of 26 July 1945.*

*Also found were twenty-four of Cyril's letters from India, including several highlighting his air combat injuries and recuperation while generally downplaying the severity of the wounds (Item 6.K). One letter from Cyril's pal, John Rosewall (Item 6.G), also talked of Cyril's injury.*

*The letters from the next-of-kin are priceless because, in addition to providing some important details on the crash and the resultant recovery efforts/burials, they paint a picture of heartbreak and love like no official documents could. The majority of these letters are presented, family by family, in the pages which follow.*

*See PART NINE for Yvonne's mother's letters to George, which include additional details on George and Viola's then-upcoming visit to Southampton.*

*Finally, when George telephoned in August 2002, he told me that he and his wife Viola had taken a coach holiday perhaps two years earlier (circa 2000). By pure chance, aboard the coach George struck up a conversation with a gentleman who had been an airman aboard one of the four Liberators which survived the calamity of 26 July 1945! Unfortunately, this man's name and address are now lost.*

**6.B. 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs, Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident:**

907 Wing,

South East Asia Air Forces

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I have just received your letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> September which has been delayed due to my posting from Amarda Road.

My posting had come through about a week before your brother was killed but I was waiting for my relief to arrive.

In view of the above I have forwarded your letter for the attention of my old adjutant and he will send you details of the addresses and the exact location of the burial.

Since I have left the Padre will have visited the graves and placed crosses over them as I had made these arrangements.

I hope this information will arrive in due course.

My address is Trentmore, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, but I shall not be home for a year!

Yours sincerely,

D.R. Biggs G/C

*G/Capt Biggs also wrote the 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert presented as Item 11.A.*

**6.C. 4 October 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from W/Cdr Paul Louis, successor to G/Capt D. R. Biggs as Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road:**

AMRD/C.563/14/Pl.

R.A.F. STATION  
AMARDA ROAD,  
S.E.A.A.F.

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Receipt is acknowledged of your letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> September, addressed to Group Capt. D.R. BIGGS, who has now been posted from this Station.

2. You should, by now, have received a personal letter from G/Capt. Biggs, and he has instructed this Station to reply to the other points raised by you in your letter.

3. The names and ranks of the other members of the crews who were killed are shown on the attached list. It is, however, pointed out, that it is contrary to Air Ministry policy to disclose information of this kind, but the names of the deceased are given, and if any correspondence is sent to this Station, it will be forwarded to the next-of-kin.

4. At the moment, photographs are not available, but it is hoped that these will be available at a later date. Owing to the circumstances of the crash and the nature of the country, the bodies of the crews were buried near the scene of the accident, and the location is approximately 20 miles north of Contai, a market town, in Orissa, India.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Louis  
Wing Commander, Commanding,  
R.A.F. STATION, AMARDA  
ROAD.

*Enclosed with the letter was a listing of the deceased & their next-of-kin. The information on the airmen consisted of service numbers, ranks, names, and trade/crew position. The detail for each next-of-kin included only a name and relationship to the deceased (i.e. wife, father, mother), but no address.*

**6.D. Excerpt of 29 July 1945 letter to Cyril Geeson's parents, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India:**

3025141. F/SGT. ROSEWALL. J.  
Section 18  
Headquarters  
Base Air Forces  
South East Asia

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Geeson,

The reason I am writing this short & brief letter is because I learnt with much regret yesterday the death of your son Cyril, who was a very close friend of mine whilst we were in the squadron together. The tragedy happened when two aircraft collided in mid-air on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> July [actually, the 26<sup>th</sup>], in which your son was a screen instructor.

We had made arrangements between us whilst we were on ops, that if anything happened to one of us, the other would let his people to know as far as possible the whole story. He also mentioned what to do with his personal kit & his personal stuff. Well Mr. Geeson, I am more than sorry to inform you that I shall not be able to carry out the promise we made, as I am now stationed somewhere in Delhi & the station on which Cyril was is two & a half days train journey from here & I won't be able to get over to get things straightened up. Also I know of no one there who would do the necessary for me.

Well Mr. Geeson, I could write more as regards to the past, but I don't wish to, as it would only make things worse for you & your wife & that I would not like to do. If there is anything more you would like to know Mr. Geeson, I will do my utmost to let you know of it.

I will bring to a close now, by tendering my greatest sympathy to you & your wife over the loss of your son, who was a great friend & liked by everyone.

I Remain,

Yours Truly

J. Rosewall

**6.E. Excerpt of 27 August 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India:**

I was sorry to learn that the sad news reached you, prior to you going on a holiday Mr. Geeson, because after 6 long years of hard work & the strain of war one certainly needs a long holiday. I hope by now that you have recuperated & are away on your holiday. Please remember me to Mrs. Geeson & I trust all is progressing gradually after the sad news.

**6.F. Excerpt of 26 October 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India:**

I was ever so pleased to learn that you had had a letter from the padre, giving you the information etc on the accident & it must have put your mind to rest a little Mr. Geeson, knowing now the full story. I see by the letter Mr. Geeson, that you are trying hard to get the names & addresses of the others who were killed. I have made a few inquiries, & the following information is what I have gathered. The Pilot was P/O A. HERBERT. No. 191880. The Wireless Operator was W/O. W.J. SMART. 1021128. The Navigator was F/O. P.H.A. SMITH. 165506.

I am afraid that the above will not help you a great deal Mr. Geeson, but prior to the accident, we held all records of the above personnel, but now they have all been forwarded to the UK for retention. If only I thought about it at the time I could have given you all the necessary information or their next-of-kin etc, still there we are, could not be helped.

**6.G. Excerpt of 8 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Cyril's friend John Rosewall in India:**

I see by your letter that you had heard from some of the next-of-kin when you wrote. Well Mr. Geeson, it was depressing to learn exactly what had happened, but there we are, it was just one of those things which happen the one's life I suppose. The skipper of the aircraft, when Cyril got wounded, was called Tom Brookes [*Brooks*], the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pilot, Ken Morley, but their address I am afraid I cannot supply Mr. Geeson.

I was not flying with Cyril at the time, but was on the same raid & almost every aircraft got shot up, we had 2 engines put out of action but managed to get back OK. We were bombing from only 300' & practically a rifle can damage you from that height. I can't give you any real information about Mr. Geeson, but I know he was badly injured & was flown to Calcutta Hospital the following morning. Still if ever I see any of the crew at any time Mr. Geeson I will try to get some information for you OK.

*See Cyril's various letters to brother George in Item 6.K for his own explanations of his wounds.*

6.H. **8 November 1945 letter to George Geeson Sr, father of Cyril Geeson, from British Air Ministry, London:**

AIR MINISTRY  
73-77 OXFORD STREET  
LONDON, W.1

Reference P.433525/3/P.4.A.3.

Sir,

I am directed to refer to your letter of 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1945, and to explain that it is contrary to Air Ministry policy to reveal the addresses of the next-of-kin of Royal Air Force personnel.

Letters, which need not be stamped, may however, be addressed to:-

*[Errors in initials are noted in brackets.]*

Mr. A. Herbert, father of Flying Officer A. Herbert  
Mrs. P.H.A.*[M.E.]* Smith, wife of Flying Officer P.H. *[P.H.A.]* Smith  
Mrs. Smart, mother of Warrant Officer W.J. Smart  
Mrs. G. Paffey, wife of Aircraftman G.W. Paffey

The above officers and airmen were members of your son's crew, and it is regretted that particulars of the next-of-kin of the remaining member, Aircraftman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class P.V. Mathai, are not held by this Department as the airman was a member of the Royal Indian Air Force.

Next-of-kin of the crew of the second aircraft are:-

Mrs. P. Heynert, wife of Acting Squadron Leader F.P.A. Heynert  
Mrs. Bullen, mother of Pilot Officer R.M. Bullen  
Mr. Manson, father of Pilot Officer R.S. Manson  
Rev. E.J. Borrow, father of Pilot Officer A.N. Borrow  
Mrs. M. Bridgman, wife of Pilot Officer L.A. Bridgman  
Mrs. P. Ettlinger *[L.]*, wife of Pilot Officer I. *[P.]* Ettlinger  
Mrs. F.M. Wells, mother of Flight Lieutenant S.W. Wells  
Mrs. G.L.M. *[L.M.]* Heydon, mother of Flight Sergeant W.R.G. Wood.

These letters will be redirected without delay if forwarded to this Department in the enclosed prepaid envelope.

I am, Sir,  
Your obedient Servant,

A.W. *[unclear]* Livingston *[Livingstone?]*

*This letter was written to the father of Cyril Geeson, whose name was also George. This is the only official Air Ministry letter that has resurfaced, although the family did receive earlier ones, plus telegrams. The standard policy in regard to revealing next-of-kin addresses is clearly spelled out in the letter, and George took advantage of this opportunity. However, someone broke the rules and sent George the actual addresses, as explained in Item 6.L.*

6.I. **22 January 1946 letter to George Geeson Sr, father of Cyril Geeson, from S/Ldr *[unclear]*-Lindop, RAF Benevolent Fund:**

The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund  
67, Portland Place, London, W.1

Dear Sir,

On the occasion of the death of your son on Active Service with the Royal Air Force some six months ago, it was my sad duty to write conveying the deep sympathy of my Council in your irreparable loss.

While it would appear that you have had no occasion up to the present to avail yourself of their offer of help, my Committee have asked me to write reminding you that should you be in need of assistance either now or at any time in the future, they will be only too pleased to help you out of your difficulties.

Yours truly,

[unclear]-Lindop  
Squadron Leader,  
Secretary

*The letter was written to the father of Cyril Geeson, whose name was also George.*

**6.J. Excerpts of 27 October and 24 November 1998 letters to Matt Poole from Tom Scott, former crewmate of Cyril Geeson:**

*I received a letter dated 27 October 1998 from ex-215 Squadron navigator/bomb aimer Tom Scott of Shillingford, Oxfordshire. Here is an excerpt from his letter:*

During the course of a recent crew meeting (only our second since 1945!) the tragic crash of the two Liberators was recalled.

Although at the time the crash occurred, we were in Burma flying Dakotas, we had previously completed a bombing tour on Liberators with 215 Squadron. Our overall concern and sadness at the news of the crash acquired a more personal note when we learned that C. Geeson was amongst those killed. He had been a member of our crew until he had been wounded during an "op" on the Burma/Siam railway in December 1944.

*See excerpts of Cyril's various letters in Item 6.K for his explanations of his wounds.*

*In a follow-up letter dated 24 November 1998, Tom added more:*

In April last year, [he and three of his former 215 Squadron Liberator crewmates] held a reunion dinner (with wives). It was the first time the four of us had met up since 1945 when we were back on Libs flying aviation fuel into China over the Himalayas (the famous Hump) from Imphal to Kunming. Since the reunion we have kept in touch and it was during the course of a second reunion that we had talked about the crash and Cyril - "Charper" as we knew him from his addiction to his bed - a charpoy in Urdu.

You will be pleased to know that I have been in touch with George Geeson, who proved to be all you said about him. I have asked Tom Brooks [their pilot] to give him a ring. Tom probably knew "Charper" better than any of us.

**6.K. Excerpts of various 1944 / 1945 letter from Cyril Geeson to his brother George:**

*In the summer of 2002 George rediscovered twenty-four of Cyril's letters dating back to 2 February 1943. Most of these letters concentrated upon family matters which are not copied below. Due to censoring rules, Cyril rarely referred to anything of a military nature, although in letters from 1945 he did mention his air combat injuries and subsequent healing. Very concerned for his family's anxiety back home, he obviously chose to downplay the seriousness of the injuries. Here are the most pertinent excerpts from late 1944 until ten days prior to his death:*

**5 December 1944:**

*This letter was written five days before he was seriously wounded on a 215 Squadron Liberator bombing operation to against the Burma-Siam Railway.*

Here we are having sunny days and cool nights, which taken around is very pleasant. I'm glad to hear that everyone at home is keeping fit and well. I'm quite well at present and looking forward to leave in the near future. I have only had two lots all the time that I've been out here. The first lot I spent in Bangalore.

I have sent [pounds] 12.15.0 home which you will get in the near future. It may take two or three months. I have bought some cigars and I'll try to buy some more of a different type to send you. They are quite cheap out here. The box I bought cost me about 10/- s.

**10 January 1945:**

*This one was written exactly one month after his injury in action.*

I hope by now you have received my previous letters. I must apologise for the worry the telegram from the A.M. [Air Ministry] must have caused all concerned. The injuries I received were not of a serious nature and I am now walking about again and in a few weeks I shall be perfectly normal and shall suffer no ill effects later. I can assure you that you had no need to worry.

**18 January 1945:**

I have just received a batch of letters from home. I'm very sorry to hear how worried you had all been. The telegram should not have been sent. I rang up the Orderly Room and told them not to send any notifications whatsoever. The injuries were only slight and you are always admitted to hospital. When x-rayed no broken bones or anything that could have caused complications. I was rather surprised when these letters arrived.

I'm afraid I shall not be coming home for some considerable time. I have now been walking around for over a fortnight and have been doing a round of the cinemas.

I was the only unlucky one and I did every thing possible to spare you from worry, which was entirely unnecessary.

**22 January 1945:**

At present I'm quite fit and well and getting around perfectly normal.

The war in Europe looks as if it may finish this year. The quicker it's over the sooner I'll be back and that cannot be too soon for me.

**31 January 1945:**

I'm sorry you had such an anxious just before Xmas. I was entirely ignorant of the fact that you had been notified and was surprised when a batch of letters arrived on the 10<sup>th</sup> Jan. I hope by now everyone has got over it and everything has settled down to normal. I'm now about to go on fourteen days leave.

**5 February 1945:**

You may be relieved to know that I'm now walking about and feeling no ill effects and unfortunately shall not be coming from these foreign shores for some considerable time, worse luck!

**12 February 1945:**

*It may not have been until this letter, two months after his injury, that Cyril went into detail about how he was shot. Even then, he downplayed the severity of the wounds. (There would have been other letters to the family, or to Cyril's parents, which discussed the injury. These letters have not materialized.)*

I have now arrived up in the hills on three weeks sick leave. It was about two days train journey to get here. The hill stations are now out of season, so I look like having a very quiet time. After getting off the train we had about a seventy mile road journey. It was quite a new experience traveling on these roads. It's quite cold in the day time and very cold at night.

The wounds I received were caused by a bullet that came up through the floor of the machine. It passed through the fleshy part of my leg about the ankle. It struck a hand held camera and got deflected through my thigh. I have still got a fair number of pieces of shrapnel in my leg.

**16 March 1945:**

I'm about to have a medical board in the next few days. The wounds have healed up O.K. but the scars are still very noticeable and are quite likely to remain so for some considerable time. Up to now I'm hoping to be home by the end of this year, whether I do remains to be seen, anyway I live in hopes.

**12 April 1945:**

Unfortunately I passed my Medical Board and so will tell you more when I know what's happening to me.

**27 June 1945:**

*This is the first of four surviving letters written by Cyril from RAF Station Amarda Road, where Cyril was based at the time of the accident. According to his logbook, his first flight at AFTU Amarda Road was made on 7 June.*

I'm very glad to see that you are now using my new address, which I think will be permanent for some time. At present I'm in the best of health and I can assure you that you have no need for worries in that direction. I expect you have seen in the papers how long single men in the R.A.F. are going to be overseas. I hope the present government is kicked out and that the new one will do something for us.

We have bags of insect life here. Beetles grow nearly as big as house sparrows. The other night I killed a scorpion in the billet about three inches long. They come inside to keep out of the rain. Now and then we manage to do a bit of shooting, with a shotgun. Game is somewhat scarce about here and you are glad to take a pot at anything.

**5 July 1945:**

At present I'm in the best of health and I've not been taken off flying, at the present moment I have a flying job. I'm not suffering any ill effects from my brief contact with shrapnel. Quite a few pieces (five) have worked their way out and are now just below the skin. They give no trouble and will remain there.

**11 July 1945:**

Where I am now [*Amarda Road*], I'm not working hard and its very unlikely that I shall ever do any more opps. After Xmas I shall be eligible for [*unclear*] months leave in England.

**16 July 1945:**

*Sent from Amarda Road, this is the latest-dated surviving letter that George has found.. It was written ten days before Cyril died. It is reproduced in its entirety.*

Dear George,

Sincerely hope this letter finds you in the best of health. I have just received your letter posted on July 9<sup>th</sup>. Very glad to hear that all are keeping well at home. At present I'm in the best of health and look like remaining so. I'm afraid your letter is somewhat short.

Up to present we've very little news as to how many groups have been demobed. I'm sorry to hear things have not started to improve. The next few months should see a big improvement.

Now you have had this latest cut in rations, I can't imagine how people in the towns are managing to live, especially those who are not earning these high wages. From the papers that do arrive out here I notice the female population are having a controversy over the fellows in Germany fraternizing [*fraternizing*] with the German women. In my opinion they are being paid back in their own coin, when the Yanks and "what-have-you" were in England the women would not give the ordinary fellow a second glance. They have had their fun so I can see no reason for them to shout now. I wish I was in Germany and had the chance.

I notice too that a number of big strikes having been taken place. People should soon begin to realize that the war is not going on for ever, neither are the high wages. No doubt when things get more plentiful and at lower prices the problem will solve its self. I'm sorry to hear quite a number of things are difficult to get. Perhaps my suggestion of buying a fair stock of small tools in case things do not improve for some considerable time or you may likely already got the stock. I'm afraid this is all for the present. I'm going to try and get into a town in the near future and buy a few things to send home.

Wishing you all the best. Hoping to hear from you in the near future.

Yours Sincerely  
Cyril

**6.L. An undated (likely 1945) listing of 26 July 1945 casualties and next-of-kin names and addresses, sent to the family of Cyril Geeson by an unknown source:**

*Despite strict guidelines which forbade the release of the casualties' next-of-kin's addresses, someone with access to these details chose to break the rules by providing them to the Geeson family. There is no accompanying letter or envelope which might offer more evidence. Perhaps the sender was the same high-ranking RAF officer mentioned in Item 6.A – a frequent visitor to the Geeson family guest house who defied the regulations by sending the family confidential crash investigation details.*

*The source did not know the addresses of three next-of-kin: Bullen, Borrow, and Mathai. Of the addresses provided, there were two street misspellings, but all other information was correct. (See PART TWO for the correct addresses, where known, of the casualties.)*

*This listing was invaluable to George Geeson, because it enabled him to write directly to these folks rather than rely solely on the Air Ministry to forward his letters to the families (as was the standard policy; see Item 6.H). George's efforts paid off handsomely, as he received replies from all but the Borrow and Mathai families.*



## PART SEVEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO ARNIE BRIDGMAN AND HIS FAMILY

*Items 7.A through 7.C are letters written by Arnie's widow, Marjorie, in 1945 and 1946. Arnie's nephew's wife, Carol, wrote me the letter presented as Item 7.D, while the last item, 7.E, is a fascinating tidbit that I gathered, by chance, while researching an altogether different RAF Liberator loss, dating to 1944.*

*The return address on each of Marjorie's letters was 5 Farfield Avenue, Carlinghow, Batley, Yorkshire, although the first two were posted from Doncaster.*

**7.A. 20 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Marjorie Bridgman, widow of Arnie Bridgman:**

*[posted from Doncaster, Yorks]*

Dear Friend,

Your letter has been forwarded to me by the Air Ministry.

It is very kind of you to think of me in the midst of your own trouble and I appreciate your message of sympathy very much indeed. Will you please accept my sincere thanks for your message and believe me when I say that I sincerely feel for you in your great loss.

I have had a somewhat similar message to yours from New Zealand. It does help one to realize that in this great trouble one is in the thoughts of others who have suffered a similar loss.

Once again, thanking you from the bottom of my heart,

I remain,  
Yours sincerely,

(Mrs) Marjorie Bridgman

**7.B. 15 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Marjorie Bridgman, widow of Arnie Bridgman:**

*[posted from Doncaster, Yorks]*

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Please accept my apologies for not answering your letter earlier. I have been away from home, and have not had much time for letter writing.

I also received a letter from Air Ministry, giving information about the accident. I have had a letter today, concerning my husband's estate, I suppose you too will have had the same. If you can give me any information about the accident, I would be very grateful, I have heard nothing apart from that one letter from the Air Ministry.

Yours faithfully,

Marjorie Bridgman

P.T.O. *[please turn over]*

The address you asked for.

Miss E. M. Bullen,  
111 St Martins Road  
Christchurch, S.E.2.,  
New Zealand

7.C. **1 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Marjorie Bridgman, widow of Arnie Bridgman:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thank you for your letter. I must apologize for taking so long to reply.

I thank you also for telling me how the accident occurred, it is very distressing, but as you say, it is better to know the hard truth. I gather from your letter you have seen a photograph of the grave, is this correct? I have not received one, if others have, I must write to the Air Ministry about it. Have you received any personal belongings? I have not, and I think it is taking a long time. I did receive a letter a few months ago, giving a complete inventory of the things which they were sending, but since then have heard no more.

If you care to run out here any time we should be pleased to see you, but when you decide to come, please let me know which day. I quite frequently spend a few days in Doncaster, and, although my parents would be at home, I would not like to be away when you call.

You ask for a photograph of my husband. I cannot oblige at present, but hope to be able to do so soon. I am going to have some taken from a good one I have, it was taken before he went to India. I had quite a number of snaps sent from there but no really good photographs. I would like one of your brother if you have one to spare.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. M. Bridgman

7.D. **22 June 1998 letter to Matt Poole from Carol Bridgman, whose husband, Lewis Kim Bridgman, is the nephew of Lewis Arnold "Arnie" Bridgman:**

*On 22 June 1998, I received the following letter from Carol Bridgman of Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire:*

Dear Mr. Poole,

With reference to your letter in the Yorkshire Evening Post, we are the family of the Late Mr. Lewis Arnold Bridgman.

My husband is named after Lewis Arnold, he is called Lewis Kim Bridgman (he is known by his second name).

So Matt – you have managed to track down one of the remaining families.

I will forward a copy of this letter to our War Graves Commission, asking for further details. It would be nice to have a list of the other servicemen who perished in the crash, so they could all be traced at the same time.

We have connections with the Royal British Legion – I am the local Poppy Appeal Organiser, Kim is our Branches Secretary, part of the Legion's War Graves services involves laying a wreath at the grave (if known), and taking a photograph of the headstone. This seems just what Yvonne Colebatch and ourselves are looking for! (They offer this service for a small donation – just to cover their costs really).

Our family lived in Brighton Street, Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire.

Two sons were killed, Howard Harry and Lewis Arnold. Their names are etched on a beautiful memorial in the centre of Cleckheaton – the next small town to Heckmondwike, although no one knows why they didn't have their names on the Heckmondwike Cenotaph.

It has been quite difficult trying to trace the graves of Howard Harry and Lewis Arnold, because we didn't have much information to send to the War Graves Commission.

What a coincidence seeing your article in one of our local papers – Yorkshire Evening Post. At the moment we are in the process of clearing Kim's only remaining uncle's house. His uncle has just gone to live in a local nursing home. Uncle F. Sidney Bridgman is the only surviving child of the late Frank and Ellen Bridgman.

We have found some newspaper cuttings on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June, giving details of the "Bridgman Family at War." It stated that during the close of war – all the Bridgman family were in the services (their father was in the Home Guard).

The day after – Friday 19<sup>th</sup>, on the same night your article was published, we were actually quizzing Uncle Sid about Lewis Arnold, who my husband is named after.

List of Frank and Ellen Bridgman's children:

Frank Wilfred (Fred)  
Colin Bernard (Bernard)  
Howard Harry (Harry) – killed W.W. II from injuries sustained playing Regimental Football  
Frank Sidney (Sid)  
Lewis Arnold (Arnie) – killed W.W. II in an air accident over the Indian Ocean  
*[They soon learned that it was not over the Indian Ocean, but over land.]*  
Rupert  
Gerald  
Joyce  
Ken (my late father-in-law)

Your article not only gave us Lewis Arnold's R.A.F. Squadron, but also his service number and date of accident. It's amazing! Thank you.

We have also found details of his best man, Mr. Bill Kirkness, who we are eager to get in touch with. We would like to know what kind of a man Lewis Arnold was, as much details of him as possible really.

You may think we didn't communicate much as a family, because our knowledge is sparse, but all the family were serving overseas when the tragedies happened, and it wasn't talked about much when everyone returned home.

Uncle Sid was the last one to arrive home, having spent four years as a prisoner of war in a Japanese labour camp – he was captured at the fall of Singapore, and was mining underground on the very outskirts of Hiroshima when the allies dropped the atom bomb – luckily for him!

We are actually going on a Burma Star Reunion this weekend to Blackpool (a small coastal town), and are taking Uncle Sidney with us for a birthday treat (he will be 90 years old on the Monday when we arrive back – the 29<sup>th</sup>). We are very proud of him, and despite all the traumas he has been through during the war, he is only a little bit CANTANKEROUS!!

I will show your letter to the chaps at the reunion, I'm sure they will find it interesting.

Thank you again Matt for your most wonderful help.

Keep in touch,

Carol L. Bridgman

*Bill Kirkness, mentioned above, was Arnie's crewmate on 159 Squadron Liberators in India. Sadly, he died in 1994, before I found Carol and husband Kim. See Item 7.E for Bill's wartime premonition about Arnie's death.*

*After receiving the above letter from Carol, I telephoned and spoke with her and Kim. I soon mailed them a listing of Uncle Arnie's wartime combat operational flights with 159 Squadron in 1943 and 1944. Unfortunately, they knew nothing of the whereabouts of Arnie's widow, Marjorie, over the years. This is not surprising, as Carol had mentioned in her letter that "it" – the war and its affect upon the family – was not talked about when the family reunited after the war.*

*On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, not long after his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, Uncle Sidney passed away – the last of the Bridgman siblings.*

*Jumping ahead to December 2002, as I write this, I now have copies of Marjorie's wartime letters to George Geeson to send to Carol and Kim. As Marjorie's wartime address is just down the road from their home, perhaps in the future they can learn something more about her post-war life.*

**7.E. A strange premonition of danger, experienced by Bill Kirkness, the best mate of Arnie Bridgman, as told to Matt Poole in 1991:**

*An intriguing and eerie story, which pertains directly to the collision which took the fourteen lives, was related to me in 1991. Back in the spring of that year I spent a month traveling around the UK and meeting with RAF 159 Squadron veterans and their families (the first of five such trips related to my 159 Squadron research). One of those with whom I stayed was Bill Kirkness, who had been a B-24 Liberator wireless operator with 159 Squadron in 1943 and 44 before moving on to various other assignments in India.*

*During my interviews with Bill in his Horsforth, Leeds home, he talked about many different things, and I kept my tape recorder running to capture anything and everything coming from his mouth. Bill flew on the operation to Rangoon of 29 February 1944, the night my mother's first husband was killed when his aircraft was shot down by Japanese night fighters (as was a second B-24). Thus, I wanted to record his first-hand accounts of the men who were lost, and of the actual operation.*

*Back in 1991 or 1992 I gave the tape a listen and took a few notes related to 29 February '44. However, I did not fully transcribe the tape until 1996. To my amazement, at one point Bill started talking about the accident which I now know killed the fourteen airmen on 26 July 1945. Bill's crewmate from his first tour of combat flights, Arnie Bridgman, was lost in that collision, and Bill just wanted me to know about this strange happening related to that incident.*

*Bill was Best Man for Arnie's wedding back in England during their training days in 1942 or thereabouts. They were both from the Leeds area, which no doubt helped to cement their friendship.*

*Here below are Bill Kirkness's words, as taken directly from my taped interview. Bill died in late 1994. He mentioned a "John," who was his and Arnie's pilot, John Gauntlett DFC (who also died in late 1994):*

*But poor old Arnie, he bought it. Had a strange experience with him. Arnold Bridgman. He'd gone down to Amarda Road, I think. To do a fighter affiliation exercise or gunnery leader's course or something. And I'd been in the mess that night and had a few drinks. Quite sober. And I went into bed, took the mosquito netting, and went to sleep, and I sat bolt upright at 3 o'clock in the morning. And he was stood at the end of the bed. You wouldn't like to say ghosts...He was as solid as you are. He said, "I'm off, Kirkie." I said, "Ta ta, Bridge." I was half asleep, I dropped my head down again. But it was so vivid, it stayed in my mind.*

*So I went to see the adjutant the next morning. "Can you ring Amarda Road up and see how F/O Bridgman is?" "Well, it'll take all day to get through, but I'll let you know." I was having an evening meal in the Mess and the bearer came up and he said the adjutant wishes to enter the Mess, which was customary -- that the officer had to ask to enter the Sergeants' Mess. So I said, "Take him into the bar and get him a drink. Tell him I'll join him shortly."*

And I had a horrible suspicion, so I went in, and he was standing with his back to me. "Is he dead?" And he said he had died this morning in a flying accident. And I think, and John says I was wrong, there were 5 Liberators that this Dutchman flew into a cumulonimbus cloud, and I think it was Heynert.

Unusual, wasn't it? It's the only experience like that I ever had. I dreamt that my son died 3 nights before he did. I got out of bed and walked into his bedroom, and he was alright. Just a nightmare. Makes you wonder. They say tragedies cast long shadows before them, and by Jove, they're right!

*Bill knew of Dutch pilot Felix Heynert from 159 Squadron, where they each flew a tour of ops against Japanese targets in Burma and Siam. Felix Heynert's tour on 159 Squadron commenced in early 1944, not long before Bill's tour ended. See PART ELEVEN for more on Felix Heynert.*

## PART EIGHT: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO RAY BULLEN AND HIS FAMILY

*One of Ray's sisters, Edna, corresponded with the next-of-kin of airmen killed with her brother, and also with some of his 358 Squadron crewmates. Several of her long letters to George Geeson survive (brother of Cyril Geeson), plus one to Patricia Lanegan (widow of Felix Heynert). There are some fascinating details in these letters, presented below as Items 8.A through 8.F.*

*All of Edna's letters were written from the home that Ray owned and built himself, at 111 St. Martins Road, Christchurch, New Zealand.*

*Item 8.G, a letter dated 22 September 1946, was penned by Mrs. Walder of Brighton, England, who offered Ray an occasional "home away from home" between his August 1943 and May 1944 postings in the UK.*

*Three of Ray's crewmates at 358 Squadron sent me recollections of their skipper, and these are found below as Items 8.H, 8.I, and 8.J.*

*The wording of Ray's Distinguished Flying Cross citation (Item 8.K) was provided by one of these former crewmates, Dennis Tunnell, while Ray's Royal New Zealand Air Force biographical abstract (Item 8.L) was obtained from the New Zealand government. These two items complete the section on Ray Bullen.*

### **8.A. 2 January 1946 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

Dear Mrs. Heynert,

Please forgive me for the delay in replying to your very comforting letter; but the mail has been very heavy & I have had to wait until my present holiday, to attempt to reply to each.

Very many thanks for your message & also for the photo, which we will treasure greatly. Your husband must have been a very fine type of man, for the photo shows a very noble face.

You mentioned that your husband was the pilot of the one plane. My brother was on the plane with him & was, I think, the co-pilot. At the time of writing my first letter, I was not aware that two planes had crashed, but thought there was the one only, with eight occupants. The Air Ministry forwarded my letters to the next-of-kin of the occupants of that plane & later, I received the names & addresses; but as yet I do not know anything of the next-of-kin of the occupants of the other plane.

You mentioned that Felix had been awarded the D.F.C. I can well imagine how proud you would be; for Ray was also awarded the D.F.C. for his operational work but unfortunately by the time the papers went to England etc., we did not receive news of the award until after his death.

My brother-in-law's nephew was shot down over Holland about eighteen months ago. The rest of the crew baled out & were taken prisoner & they had no doubt about Keith being safe but unfortunately there has been no word of him & he therefore has been classified as 'presumed dead'. For the parents, the mental torture of that uncertainty must be terrible.

I have now received replies to four of the letters sent through the Air Ministry, & have learned much that I did not know before. Out of the fourteen men, my brother was the only New Zealander.

No doubt you will have received, as we have, photos of the place where these gallant lads were laid to rest.

Mother & I send our love & kindest thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Edna Bullen

**8.B. 17 January 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I am writing on behalf of mother who is in ill health.

We were very grateful for your letter & we greatly appreciate your message of sympathy & in turn we desire to express our sympathy to you in your sad loss.

Only those who have lost loved ones under similar circumstances, can understand our feelings.

No doubt, you will be surprised to know that one of your letters found its way to New Zealand. Pilot Officer R.M. Bullen, (Ray), was the only N.Z. airman in the crash.

I understand that all the others are from England. Ray was my youngest brother, & would have been 28 years of age on Jan. 8<sup>th</sup> last. Father passed away when Ray was only two years of age.

The news of the accident reached us on the anniversary of my father's death.

A few weeks after receiving the above news, we received advice of the award of the D.F.C. to Ray for some conspicuous work while on operations.

Naturally we were very proud of him earning such a high award, but it was sad to think that he did not live to know that it had been awarded.

Now, about your letter, addresses, etc., I will enclose the addresses which I have, you may probably have received them before this arrives, but that won't matter.

Unfortunately when we received news of the accident, we were unaware that both planes had crashed, but the message read that Ray was one of a crew of eight who lost their lives when they collided in mid-air with another plane. We were unable to procure addresses shortly afterwards, but I wrote seven letters to be forwarded through the Air Ministry to the next-of-kin to those in the plane with Ray. Shortly afterwards I received the list of names & addresses of next-of-kin to those in the same plane as Ray, but, although I have inquired, I have not as yet received addresses of the other next-of-kin; so you will realise just how grateful we were to receive your letter this week.

Only today we received a visit from an airman who has just returned from India. He was not at Armada [Amarda] Rd, with Ray but had been with him on a previous station. He told us of a boy who will soon return & who was on that station at the time of the accident.

I have had five replies to my letters sent through the Air Ministry; & I have learnt much from these people.

Mr. Manson was able to inform us that the planes did not catch fire. Mrs. Ettlinger is to have a visit from one of the rescue party & will perhaps be able to give other details.

I understand that S/Ldr. F. Heynert was pilot & my brother was either an instructor or co-pilot. He had flown more than 400 hours taking supplies to Burma & Thailand.

We understand that the accident was due to the suddenness with which the weather closed down & in attempting to break formation under those conditions, the accident occurred.

We each feel our loss terribly, but how grateful we really should be, to know that our loved ones passed from this world without suffering. How much harder must it be for those who have lost their boys whilst in enemy camps or who are still posted as missing.

My brother-in-law's nephew came down over Holland & has "disappeared" in enemy hands. He has been posted "presumed dead," but was known to have landed alive. He was the pilot, all the rest of the crew were taken prisoner & are now released & some are home.

Yes! We have much to be grateful for, but it is not always easy to see things in that light.

In our family there were three boys & three girls. My two older sisters & two brothers are married. Ray & I were the youngest & we had not married, but made a home for mother.

Mother, Ray & I & his Scotch Terrier, "Bruce", were a very happy little family. The home belonged to Ray & was completed only two years before he joined the air force. Before leaving, Ray saw that everything was in order & his home today is beautiful & is valued at well above [*pounds*] 2,000. You can appreciate just how much we had looked forward to his home-coming, that he might reap the benefit of his work.

Mother has been ill for a long time, & about twelve months ago, doctor requested that Ray be brought home but, that was not granted because he had not completed operations. Unfortunately, when he lost his life he had been posted to that station after completing operations. You can well imagine how I feel about that side of things. Of course mother does not know that Ray was sent for & Ray was not informed of the serious state of her health; so if you reply to this letter please do not mention the above.

Ray was an extremely popular boy & took a very active part in the Methodist Church & in Youth Organizations & did everything in his power to treat alike the boy from the poorest or richest home.

He was extremely considerate & kind to mother & I & nothing was ever too much trouble. We miss him terribly for he was the main stay & the real bright spot in our home.

My eldest brother & his wife are living with us now, for someone has to be with mother all the time & I was unable to give over my work entirely. Unfortunately this brother, Eric, has been seriously ill & has been off work for four months & will not be able to resume any work for at least another two months; so as they say, 'everything comes at once'.

Please excuse all my alterations, but I am a dental nurse & doctor & I have had a hectic day today, but I did want to get this letter written.

I don't suppose we'll ever meet, but I would like you to correspond. We are just ordinary homely people & when not at work, I'm the odd job person about the house.

May I, at least, remain a pen friend, as I feel sure my brother would have wished.

Yours sincerely,

(Miss) Edna M. Bullen



P.S. My brother frequently visited a Mrs. Walder of 64 Sandown Rd., Brighton 7, Sussex, Eng. These people were very kind to him & we have corresponded regularly since.

P.S. I expect you will have received photos of the grave showing the two large white crosses. The grave is 20 miles north of Contai in the State of Orissa, India. EB.

*Edna enclosed a listing of the crews of the two Liberators, plus the names and addresses of the next-of-kin of her brother Ray's Liberator crewmates. With the exception of George Geeson, she did not yet know the addresses of the other Liberator crew's next-of-kin. Having already written letters to the kin of Ray's crewmates, she had received replies from all but two (Borrow and Wells). Edna listed the addresses of the Heynert crew next-of-kin. An "X" indicated that she had made contact with the family. The address for Peter Ettlinger's wife had changed, or possibly the address Edna had was that of Peter's mother and/or father. The listing:*

S/Ldr Heynert F.P.A. D.F.C.	X WIFE. Mrs. Heynert, 1 Aston Rd., Ealing, London W.5.
P/O. Manson R.S.	X FATHER. Mr. Manson, 33 Muirland [Muirhead] Ave. East, Liverpool 11
P/O Borrow A.N.	FATHER. Revd. E.J. Borrow, 12 Moorland Close, Collier Row, Romford, Essex.
P/O. Bridgman L.A.	X WIFE. Mrs. M. Bridgman, 5 Farfield Ave., Carlinghow, Batley, Yorkshire.
P/O. Ettlinger P.	X WIFE. Mrs. P. Ettlinger, 197 King George Ave., Shirley, Southampton.
F/Lt. Wells S.W.	MOTHER. Mrs. F.M. Wells, Oxford St., Lambourne, Berks.
F/Sgt. Wood W.R.G.	X MOTHER. Mrs. G.M. Heydon, 5 Bow Arrow Lane., Dartford, Kent

**8.C. Excerpt of 24 February 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Many thanks for your lovely long letter & photos. I feel that I now you & the family much better now.

Thanks very much for the lovely photo of Cyril. He must have been a fine lad, he has a wonderful face. He had certainly done his duty & done it well.

Please try to understand me & don't think of me as a religious maniac, when I say that I'm sure it will not be very long before our loved ones are with us again. The present trouble in Palestine etc., would suggest that 'the' day is fast approaching.

Unfortunately I do not know my bible inside out as some do & I am unable to go to church very often, but I think very deeply & I endeavour to do as much to help others as is possible.

Sorry, I didn't mean to give you a sermon, but I had to mention that point, for I strongly believe that the return of Christ will take place soon.

I've done so much writing lately that my main worry is to try & remember what I've told to who, so please excuse me if I've repeated previous information.

Our family comprised three boys & three girls. Father died of Sleeping Sickness an African disease, on Aug 1<sup>st</sup> 1920. He was then 48 years of age. Mother will be 71 this year. Father was born at Kent, Eng., & came to New Zealand with his parents.

*Edna then went into detail about her siblings Myrtle (age 48), Eric (47), Mildred (45), and Reg (37), and then their children, before providing a few more details about herself and brother Ray. I located Reg's son Peter in 1998, but except for a phone call we have had no further contact. The letter continued:*

I come next, Edna, nicknamed Ted, aged 35. I'm a 'jack of all trades' & master of none. I worked for a chemist for nine years but left at Xmas & am Dental Nursing now for Dr. Spitzer. He has the ideal name for a dentist, don't you think.

Last but not least & definitely the pick of our bunch was Ray who would have been twenty-eight on Jan 8<sup>th</sup> last. Ray followed in dad's footsteps. He worked for Paynter & Hamiltons, Architects & Builders, where my dad was for years shop foreman.

Ray was very popular & took a very active part in church affairs. He was a Sunday School teacher, Bible class leader, an officer of the Church, leader of the Boys Brigade, youth representative to the central council of the Men's Fellowship & captain of the Badminton Club, & was a member of the Harriers Club.

To me, Ray was what I'd call a real 'corker' pal. In the past, we did long cycling trips together.

Ray loved his home & many a time when Mother, Ray, Bruce (the scotch terrier), & I were sitting by the fire, Ray would say, "Isn't it lovely being together in our happy little home!"

By the way, when writing to Ray, I used to get Bruce to add his signature (an imprint of his paw after pressing on the ink pad).

The hour is getting late to I'll finish this tomorrow.

Well dear friends I thought I'd never get an opportunity to finish this letter which I started about a week ago. However here's hoping that I'll manage it today. I'll return your photos together with others in the next mail. Any of our photos which I send to you, with the exception of a slightly larger one of Ray, which you may keep; would you please send on to Miss or Mrs. Walder, 64 Sandown Rd., Brighton 7, Sussex, England. (See Mrs. Walder's letter to George Geeson in Item 8.G.)

About the larger photo of Ray, it is not very clear. Ray had the photo taken in Eng., & I have had a negative made from it; but it is not very sharp when enlarged. The small one you have was taken from this negative.

While on the subject of addresses, many thanks for sending the list of names & addresses. I will write as soon as I get an opportunity.

By the way, a friend has loaned us some Psychic News. I have become interested because I am slightly psychic; so if in the future I receive any messages in connection with Ray or any of the other boys, I'll let you know.

I expect that at this stage, you'll probably be considering me to be a half wit or something of the sort.

From time to time I have had visions of various things, which have happened some weeks later & because of this gift, or whatever it may be, I feel that nothing is impossible & I therefore cannot condemn anything.

I'll be looking forward to your next mail; but when criticising this letter please do not be too hard on me.

I really must say cheerio, so here's wishing you all of the best & love to you all from mother & the family.

Your sincere friend.

Edna Bullen.

**8.D. 13 October 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I was very sorry to hear of your further sadness. 'Tis said that trouble never comes alone. It's always so sad when a person has reached that stage of their life when they expect to reap the benefit of their labours, & their health breaks down. Yours would be a very difficult task, breaking the news of the pending parting from this life of your father-in-law; but I'm sure you could not wish him back to a world of suffering. These, our loved ones, I am sure, are better off than we, but none of us go before our time.

Perhaps at this stage I should answer your question re the 'Psychic News', yes I do read them and I'm very interested. I received a message some months ago, to sit for what is known as the 'direct voice.' This is a rare gift, & I feel greatly honoured. I have always been a bit psychic & am a very deep thinker on religious matters, but do not claim any particular religion.

Ray has come to me many times in my dreams & has talked very naturally & yet each time during the 'dream' I realize that he has parted from this earthly life. I don't mean to be giving you a sermon, but so many things have happened which makes one think, that there's a lot more in this life & what comes after, than many of us can imagine.

I had visions of a city fire, many weeks before it happened & I prophesied the sinking of the 'Niagra' about four weeks beforehand. Recently I was called to a wee boy who had fallen from a gate. I told the parents that his arm was broken. He was taken to hospital & was told there that it was not broken.

The following day, a Sunday, I was out in the car when suddenly my arm became so painful, I didn't know where to put myself. The pain was in the same arm & in the part where I suspected the wee boy's fracture. I made enquiries & found that at approximately the same time the wee boy went to do something with that arm & screamed with the pain. His father took him back to hospital & demanded an X-Ray. The arm was then found to be broken & was put into plaster.

Well I'm afraid I've very little space left. The photos of the grave arrived many months ago. An Indian boy I met, who is attending College here, will return to India in 18 months & intends to visit the grave. Ray's personal effects arrived in perfect order about 3 weeks ago. Some of his medal ribbons have been issued to mother but the D.F.C. has not yet arrived. Thanks for mentioning the Log Book. I will make application here. Ray always said he hoped to be able to keep it.

Eric my eldest brother, is still off work. He had another operation a few months ago & is very much better now.

The doctor has sent me off work indefinitely & I am going deaf. Unfortunately there is nothing they can do about it here; so I will not be able to resume my usual work. However I'm having plenty of sunshine & getting my sewing done, so mustn't complain.

Lots of love & best wishes to you all, from us all.

Edna Bullen

**8.E. Undated (but after 13 October 1946) letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Many thanks for sending these photos. I don't feel that we're strangers any longer.

I hope these other photos will help you to know us & little N.Z., better.

I've no objection to you letting Mrs. Ettlinger or other people see these, but I would like you to see that they are later sent on to Mrs. D. Walder, 64 Sandown Rd., Brighton 7, Sussex, England. I have written to her & she will expect them. She acted as Ray's foster mother while he was in England.

All best wishes from us all,

Edna Bullen

P.S. Please keep the larger photo of Ray. Thanks again for the lovely photo of Cyril.

*The following notes by Edna helped George Geeson understand the photos she sent. All photos were returned, as requested, except the photo of Ray in uniform.*

The clue to it all. The family.

Father, not living. Passed away Aug 1<sup>st</sup> 1920 result of Sleeping Sickness (an African Disease)

Mother – who has been wonderful to us all.

Eldest, Myrtle – Husband, Charlie, daughters Merle & Wendy. Merle is married.

Next, Eric – Wife, Nell.

Next, Mill – Husband, Bob; family Bob jnr, Noelene, Malcolm, Bruce & Beth.

Reg – Wife, Ivy; sons Douglas, Peter & Colin.

Edna – “Bachelor Girl”

Ray – who lost his life was the youngest of our family & by far the best of the bunch.

Bruce – his pal, the Scottie.

**8.F. Excerpt of 14 March 1949 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Edna Bullen, sister of Ray Bullen:**

*This is the last letter surviving, of the correspondences sent by Edna to George. Enclosed with Edna's letter was her handwritten copy of the 18 August 1948 letter from the Air Department, New Zealand, which is reproduced and analyzed in Item 5.O, above. Her concerns about this dreadful news are presented in the following letter:*

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Mother & I were very pleased to hear from you again but you shouldn't have apologised for not writing, for it was I, who was owing the letter to you. However, when I explain the activities of the past twelve months, I'm sure you'll understand & maybe, forgive my 'laziness'.

Thanks muchly for the lovely photo of Robert Edward; what a dear wee soul he must be. He has an extremely intelligent face & so lovely & chubby. He doesn't exactly look starved does he? I compared the photo with the one we have of Cyril & they are very much alike in many ways.

At this stage, I feel I should refer to your last question in which you asked about the grave etc.

I'm really sorry that it has fallen my lot to convey this news to you, but I really can't understand why you have not already been informed, for I was notified by letter dated 18-8-48.

I find it best to enclose a copy of the letter I received & you can then make enquiries, for there must be something wrong somewhere.

Please do not let this news distress you, for no action by the natives can harm our boys. I realise that the news is unpleasant & I know that when I received it, I became very depressed but couldn't tell a soul. I didn't see any of the family for a few days & then we decided not to tell mother.

I advised Air Dept. to send any further details to me, as we had, in mother's interests, decided not to tell her & I was then advised that further information was expected from England & this would most likely come to me direct, as they said, it was usual in such cases. However, no more news has arrived, but I can't understand why you've not been advised.

As a matter of fact, mother looks forward to reading all the mail, especially from overseas & I was dreading the fact that you might write & mention this latest information, before I could write & ask you not to.

I realise there may be questions you'd like to ask, in connection with the copy of the letter enclosed, & as I don't want the news to get to mother would it be too much to ask you to address any mail dealing with that particular subject to me, i/c/o Mrs. C. Gudge, 282 Marine Parade, New Brighton, Christchurch, N.Z. She is my sister, & will see that I get the letter without mother seeing it.

Other letters, just send the same as usual to St. Martins Rd. Now that mother is walking a little she likes to collect the letters from the box & I'm continually on edge for fear she collects one from Air Dept.

I'm wondering if any of the other next-of-kin have been advised or if we should enlighten them.

Now the reason why I've not written earlier is that mother had a second stroke in Feb. 1948 & the doctor informed me that it was unlikely that she'd ever walk again. However, with lots of will power & plenty of massage I've managed to get her onto her feet again & the front gate is as far as she can make these days. Unfortunately she is very tottery & has lots of falls, so I'm on edge all the time wondering what the next fall will mean.

Under those circumstances you can understand that I have a full time job being nurse, housekeeper, gardener, carpenter etc., for mother & I are alone in the home. But it doesn't stop there, because I think I told you that I was losing my hearing in both ears & 2½ years ago, I had to give up work because of ill health.

When my health showed improvement, I tried to find suitable employment in which the deafness would not prove a handicap, but before I launched out, mother became ill & doctor said she would have always to have someone with her, so that squashed any ideas I might have of going to work. As a result, I've had two & a half years with no wages & mine was the only one coming in, after we lost Ray.

Just how long we can go on as at present, I don't really know, but we're still managing to get three meals a day & the doggie is well fed.

I probably mentioned previously about two Indian students who were here, training for their diplomas. They used to visit us often. They were fine boys & the colour of their skin made no difference to us. For them, our place was a second home & they both called mother 'Mum'.

Well one of them, Mr. A. Malik, left for India just over twelve months ago & the other, Mr. M. Tauheed, left here last Dec. for America, where he spent a short time at the Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa. He will leave there about Mar 16<sup>th</sup> for Eng & after a short stay in your country, he will return to India. Their homes are situated in Bihar, Patna, India. They are both Moslems & therefore come under Pakistan rule.

Mr. Malik was going to try to visit the boys graves. However, I've asked Mr. Tauheed to pass on the latest information.

Mr. Tauheed will probably visit Mrs. Walder, 65 Sandown Rd., Brighton 7, Sussex, Engl, so if you would like to contact him, that's the only address I can give at the moment.

Well you'll probably want to know lots more about every thing, so just send all your queries & I'll do my best to answer them & I hope I don't keep you waiting so long for a letter in the future. We all send our love & best wishes & hope you are all in good health. All kindest thoughts & a special little love & hug for Robert Edward.

Edna Bullen

*Enclosed with the letter was a poem which is now legendary, having been written by an American Spitfire fighter pilot who was killed in a flying accident in England during the war:*

"High Flight"

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed & joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds -- & done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of -- wheeled & soared & swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,  
I've chased the shouting wind along & flung  
My eager craft through footless halls of air.  
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue,  
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,  
Where never the lark or even the eagle flew;  
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand & touched the face of God.

---

This was written by a 19 year old American Pilot, John Macgee, who later gave his life. I thought it might appeal to you. Edna B.

P.S. Robert's frock is beautifully made. Tell Viola I think she's made it perfectly. How you'll treasure it too, being made from parachute silk.

**8.G. 22 September 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Mrs. Walder, Ray Bullen's "step-mum" in England:**

64 Sandown Rd  
Brighton 7.

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thank you very much for the snaps safely received. Yes, Miss Bullen had told us about your brother. We were very sorry indeed that one so young should have lost his life in such a tragic accident. We knew Miss Bullen's brother Ray very well indeed. He was stationed here in Brighton, & after he left the town he spent all his leaves with us until he went abroad. He was a fine man & liked by all who met him here. I'm sure if your brother knew him they must have been real pals. We have thought of you with sympathy & kind thoughts often & wish very kind regards.

I remain yrs sincerely,

D. Walder

**8.H. Excerpt of 4 November 1998 letter to Matt Poole from wireless operator Dennis Tunnell, crewmate of Ray Bullen on 358 Squadron:**

*I received a letter dated 4 November 1998 from Dennis Tunnell of Arundell, Ely, Cambridgeshire. Here is an excerpt from his letter:*

Ray Bullen was my skipper on 358 Sqdn, based at Jessore and we did a whole tour of ops together at the end of which Ray was commissioned as a Pilot Officer and awarded the DFC. The navigator also had the DFC.

I have the commendation which reads: "*Pilot Officer Bullen is a skillful and resolute captain of his aircraft who has carried out a large number of sorties with conspicuous success. By his skill and devotion he has set a fine example to the rest of his squadron.*"

When we had completed our tour Ray went to instruct to Amarda Rd and I was posted back home to instruct on the Lincolns which were coming to India but in fact the day I arrived home the atom bomb had been dropped and that was that.

I carried on flying with Transport Command and on landing at Church Fenton I was speaking to a chap in the Mess exchanging experiences and he produced a photo of Ray's grave which read P/O Bullen DFC as plain as a pike staff *[for something like this?]*. Beside it was another cross with 13 other names on -- what a coincidence.

I was in touch until 4 years ago with Ray's only relative (sister) who has now died.

**8.I. Excerpts of 28 October and 25 November 1998 letters to Matt Poole from nose gunner Ted Smales, crewmate of Ray Bullen on 358 Squadron:**

*I received a letter dated 28 October 1998 from Ted Smales of Gaywood, Kings Lynn, Norfolk. Like Dennis Tunnell, Ted flew with Ray Bullen. Here is an excerpt from Ted's letter:*

I first met Ray Bullen at 1673 Heavy Conversion Unit in September 1944 at RAF Kolar in Southern India. Ray was then a Flt Sgt pilot looking for extra crew members to make up a crew of eleven for the Liberators (B24). I joined his crew as nose gunner.

We completed our training 7-11-44 and the next day 358 Sqdn was formed. We then commenced Sqdn training which included close formation flying, etc. Having finished that we then went to Digri in the Bengal area prior to ops mainly daylight bombing.

After one operation the Sqdn was allotted to special duties. This consisted of dropping agents and supplies into enemy occupied territory. Also with the start of special duties the Libs were stripped of their front guns, ball turret and waist guns. So I found myself with approx 60 more air gunners *[who were now]* surplus. After about a month most of us found ourselves on the boat bound back to the UK.

I learned several years ago that Ray had been killed, by that time he had been commissioned, a great NZ guy and a fine skipper. I have still got a set of his pilots wings.

I last flew with Ray when the Sqdn moved from Digri to Jessore 1.2.45.

*In a follow-up letter dated 25 November 1998, Ted added the following interesting details:*

Now to Den Tunnell. I, like Dennis, was one of Ray Bullen's original crew members on Liberators at 1673 H.C.U. Kolar in Southern India, prior to forming 358 Sqdn. Since I got your letter I have been to 358 and 357 Sqdn's annual reunion, this year held in Blackpool.

It is great meeting some of the chaps again. Whilst there I was introduced to a 358 pilot who possibly flew with 159 as well. During the conversation I mentioned your name and the fact that I had written to you regarding Ray Bullen's last flight.

Tom Winup was also posted to Amarda Rd and the first chap he met in the Officers' Mess was Ray Bullen. He then said, "This may surprise you, Ted. I was pilot of one of the other Liberators on that fateful day and saw both the planes go down." Again what a coincidence.

*Tom Winup was a navigator/bomb aimer, not a pilot. For his anecdote about Ray Bullen, see his story, "Mid-air collision", reproduced in Item 3.F, above. His eyewitness account of the crash also is found in Item 3.G.*

**8.J. Excerpts of 3 March and 7 November 1999 letters to Matt Poole from mid-upper gunner John H. Clarke, crewmate of Ray Bullen on 358 Squadron:**

*I received a letter dated 3 March 1999 from John H. Clarke of Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. Like Dennis Tunnell and Ted Smales (Items 8.H and 8.I, above), John flew with Ray Bullen. Here is an excerpt from John's letter:*

Ray Bullen was my Pilot on 358 Squadron. I was his top upper gunner. We crewed up in U.K. operating on Wellingtons at O.T.U. training and shipped out to S.E.A. Command, and we went past our regular tour of operations on special duties until replacement crews arrived. After a short rest off operations, the crew was all split up and sent to various locations. I, myself, was sent home and landed back in U.K. on V.J. day.

Ray was posted as an instructor on B-24s, instructing formation flying, as we had gotten lots of practice on formation flying since 358 Squadron was intended to be a bombing squadron. But after a couple of *[bombing]* ops orders came through and turned 358 into a special duties squadron.

Ray was a great pilot and got the crew home after many difficult operations. Ray, our navigator, and myself were always together, both on ops and leisure time in U.K. and S.E.A. Ray was from Christchurch, New Zealand. I got to know of his fate after a short time back in U.K., when I reunited with a few of our squadron members. They gave me the devastating news. Apparently, I was told, 2 of the aircraft went through a bad patch of cloud formation, and coming out of the cloud collided with each other, with no survivors.



Also sad to say, he received his commission to officer status, also his D.F.C. for his operational duties, on the day he was killed. I will always remember this wonderful gentleman for his great personality, and his ability to get his crew through rough times.

*After I sent John a summary of my findings, he wrote back to me in a letter dated 7 November 1999. He had read Tom Winup's recollection, presented in Item 3.F, above. Outraged at Tom's low assessment of Ray's formation flying skills, John wanted to set the record straight, once and for all. An excerpt from this letter:*

It was a great moment for me to have the photo of Ray that you sent, along with the photo of his awards. He was a beautiful and wonderful human being. I don't think there were many of his kind in this world at that time. A great friend who was always wonderful to be around. I miss him deeply.

Ray, Smithy - our navigator - and myself were always together, on ops, leisure, or leave time. We were the only three members that crewed up back in U.K. at O.T.U. "Operational Training Unit" Didcot, flying on Wimpeys - "Wellingtons". I see by your information "Smithy", our navigator, also was awarded the D.F.C.. Another wonderful guy.

As I say, we were like three peas in a pod. I tried hard to find Smithy's whereabouts back in New Zealand but so far no success. He was a great navigator. With the long ops averaging 16 hours non-stop and in treacherous monsoon weather, he would practically bring us on target every time.

When we left England we sailed to India with our original crew, to H.C.U. - "Heavy Conversion Unit", converting from small bombers - Wimpeys - to Liberators. We were then at the Kolar Gold Fields in southern India, where the H.C.U. was located.

In the course of training we did a lot of formation flying to prepare us for the future operations. I was Ray's mid upper gunner -- top gunner - and had the best view of the complete formations, as did all mid upper gunners of the other aircraft in the formation.

When I read in your letter of what Mr. Tom Winup remarked about Ray's skills as a pilot on formation flying, I could not believe his vindictive remarks, and I cried a tear for wonderful Ray at such an outrageous, arrogant observation by a so-called fellow member of our squadron.

**8.K. Citation of the Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to Ray Bullen posthumously on 1 October, 1945:**

*I received a photocopy of Ray's DFC citation from his former crewmate, Dennis Tunnell, who had obtained his copy from Ray's sister Edna. Of course, Ray died before he could ever read or hear these words. The actual citation, framed with Ray's medals and pilot's wings, is in the possession of the Bullen family in New Zealand.*

Government House  
Dominion of New Zealand

Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross to Pilot Officer  
Raymond Maurice Bullen, Royal New Zealand Air Force - 1945

"Pilot Officer Bullen is a skillful and resolute captain of his aircraft, who has completed a large number of operational sorties with conspicuous success. By his keenness and devotion to duty he has set an inspiring example to the other members of his squadron."

8.L. **Official 1947 biographical summary of Pilot Officer Ray Bullen's Royal New Zealand Air Force service, held in the archives of the New Zealand Defence Force:**

425880 : Pilot Officer Raymond Maurice BULLEN  
MOTHER : Mrs. F. M. Bullen of Christchurch.

Raymond Bullen was born at Christchurch on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 1918, and received his secondary education at Christchurch Technical College, which he attended for one year as a day scholar and for five years at night classes. He was successful in passing the Technological Examination in Carpentry and Joinery. He was interested in football and badminton. After leaving college he was employed as a carpenter and joiner by Paynter & Hamilton Ltd., Christchurch, and was still in their employ at the time of making application for aircrew on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1941.

Pilot Officer Bullen was enlisted at Wigram on the 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1942, and employed there and at Nelson on ground duties until remustering to aircrew and posting to the Initial Training Wing, Rotorua on the 12<sup>th</sup> October. After completing his initial training he was posted on the 26<sup>th</sup> November to No. 2 Elementary Flying Training School, Ashburton, and on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1943, to No. 1 Service Flying Training School, Wigram, where he was awarded his flying badge on the 20<sup>th</sup> April, and promoted to Sergeant on the 5<sup>th</sup> June. He was promoted to Flight Sergeant on the 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1943, and to Warrant Officer on the 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1944, and commissioned in the rank of Pilot Officer on the 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1945. He embarked on the 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1943, for the United Kingdom.

P/O Bullen arrived at No. 12 (RNZAF) Personnel Reception Centre, Brighton, on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1943, and was posted to No. 11 (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit, Shawsbury, Shropshire, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the same month. During September he completed a course at the No. 1520 Beam Approach Training Flight at Holme, Yorkshire, and was posted on the 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1944, to No. 11 Operational Training Unit, Westcott, Buckinghamshire. He crewed up there and completed his training on Wellington bomber aircraft before proceeding late in May to the Personnel Despatch Centre at Blackpool, for embarkation to India to join the South East Asia Command.

In September and early November he converted to Liberator aircraft at No. 1673 Heavy Conversion Unit, Kolar, India, before posting on the 8<sup>th</sup> November to No. 358 Squadron. With this squadron first at Kolar and afterwards at Digri and Jessore, as pilot of Liberator aircraft, he took part in 29 operational flights. This completed his first operational tour and on the 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1945, he was posted to the Advanced Flying Training Unit, Amarda Rd., India, for his rest period. *[It was actually named the "Air Fighting Training Unit".]*

Pilot Officer Bullen was the pilot of a Liberator aircraft which collided in mid-air with another aircraft on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1945, and crashed near the Parda Road, all the members of the crew, including P/O Bullen, losing their lives. P/O Bullen and the other members of both crews were buried near the scene of the crash.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1945, P/O Bullen was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for distinguished services, the citation reading as hereunder:

"Pilot Officer Bullen is a skillful and resolute captain of his aircraft, who has completed a large number of operational sorties with conspicuous success. By his keenness and devotion to duty he has set an inspiring example to the other members of his Squadron."

5/2/10242 A32  
908 hrs. as pilot.

Mrs. F.M. Bullen (M) *[Mother]*  
111 St. Martins Road,  
CHRISTCHURCH

## **PART NINE: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO PETER ETTLINGER AND HIS FAMILY**

*It was Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of casualty Peter Ettlinger, who first brought the story of 26 July 1945 to my attention in 1995. (See PART ONE: INTRODUCTION for more background.)*

*In addition to the official accident report presented in its entirety as Item 3.B, Yvonne also sent me the important details of Item 9.A when she first contacted me by letter.*

*Following her beautifully scripted Remembrance Day 2001 offering to the students and faculty of London's Westminster Under School, Yvonne so kindly shared the details of that service with me, as presented in Item 9.F.*

*Items 9.B through 9.E are letters Yvonne's mother, Lilian Ettlinger, wrote to George Geeson in 1945 and 1946.*

### **9.A. Summary of the collision, sent to Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger, by the UK Ministry of Defence, Air Historical Branch, in a letter dated 31 October 1985:**

Flying Officer P Ettlinger's aircraft [EW225] was one of 6 Liberators which took off from Amarda Road Airfield at 9.15 am on 26 July 1945 to carry out a navigational exercise in formation. Approximately half an hour after take off the aircraft entered cloud which could not be avoided, whilst changing course to open formation Liberators EW225 and EW247 collided. Once the collision occurred neither pilot had any chance to execute a reasonable forced landing, nor was there sufficient time for any crew members to make a parachute descent, both aircraft being at between 1000 feet and 2000 feet at the time.

Your father and his comrades were buried in a paddyfield, 20 miles north of Contai, Orissa. In 1953 their bodies were exhumed and reinterred in Madras War Cemetery in a comrades grave [Collective Grave 9.A .1-14].

The reburial was in accordance with the policy agreed upon by His Majesty's and the Commonwealth Governments, that our fallen should be transferred to specially selected Military Cemeteries, where the graves will be maintained for all time by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

*The following four letters were all written by Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger, from "Cofton", Bursledon Rd, Hightown, Southampton, Hants.*

### **9.B. 16 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger:**

Dear Friend,

Many thanks for your kind letter which the Air Ministry sent on to me.

May I express my deepest sympathy to you, at first I couldn't believe that God had taken my dear Peter from me, but as time wears on and I get more mail, I begin to believe the terrible truth.

I have one baby girl, she was just 10 months on the day her Daddy was killed, her Daddy she never saw.

My husband was the flight engineer of the first plane leading the first formation, please let me know if your brother was in the same plane.

I had a letter from one of the boys and he told me they were flying 6,000 feet high, when they entered a Culamus [*cumulus*] cloud. The second kite in the first formation caught up with my husband's kite, they swooped down to get away from each other, but crashed in mid-air, not one were saved, they fell into a paddy field.

If you have more detail of the accident perhaps you would let me know.

Hoping to hear from you again.

Yours very sincerely

L. Ettlinger

**9.C. 2 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Very many thanks for your letter of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Nov, which I was very pleased to receive.

I will certainly send you a photograph of Peter, but as you will understand I can't possibly part with one I have, so I have decided to take one along to have some taken from it. I would very much like one of your brother Cyril, as I would like to get a photo of all the lads that went together.

I would also be very pleased if you could let me have the names and addresses of any of the others, so that I could write to them.

One of the men that was stationed at Amarda Rd is now home for good. He called to see me with his wife & little girl. It nearly broke my heart to think that Peter will never come back, however he told me that 10 days after the crash 2 of the men were found, but neither of them were Cyril or Peter.

About 2 months ago one of the rescue party called on me, and I begged him to tell all. He informed me that none of the men were found and all that was traced of the aircraft was 2 pieces of wing which was put in the ground like this – *[drawing a "V" or "X", as if the wings were protruding from the ground]* and that was considered their grave. You see, it was a paddy field which they crashed into which is of course a swamp, so anything coming down with terrific force would sink right in.

I hope I haven't distressed you unduly in telling you this, but myself I would rather know the truth whatever it was. Maybe you had better keep this to yourself and not tell your dear mother.

I forgot to add the government bought this plot of land in their memorial.

I have been going through all my addresses but can't find anyone who was at 215 Squadron, but I will ask all the men that I write to in India to see if they can help.

I think this is all now. I will write again when I get the photographs, but I expect they will take some time as we have been badly bombed and have to wait ages to have anything done.

My deepest sympathy to you all.

Your true friend,

Lilian Ettlinger

9.D. **18 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Many thanks for your photo of Cyril. I see he was also a F/E. I enclose one of Peter they have just been completed, this one or rather the original was taken in India, hence the tropical dress.

I should very much like to see you at any time you can manage. I wish now Peter hadn't sold his car before he went abroad, I miss it very much now, trying to get around with Yvonne, as cars are bringing such fearful prices.

I feel I must wait until they become more normal, otherwise I would pop up and see you all when the weather gets brighter.

Have you received any of Cyril's personal effects, or a photo of the grave? I haven't received anything yet, but I feel it is rather a long while.

Please give my love to all the family, I hope to see you all one day, I feel it would be our loved ones wish.

Lots of love

Lilian & Yvonne Ettlinger

9.E. **22 September 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Ettlinger, widow of Peter Ettlinger:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thank you very much for your letter. I shall be very pleased to see you which ever weekend you would care to come. I shall be able to sleep you and your wife quite alright and will endeavour to make your stay as pleasant as possible.

I am sure you will both love my little girl, she is so grown up in her way although she is not quite two.

I would like you to bring all the photos & everything that you have as I would really like to see them.

I am sorry I have not answered before as I have been away for a few days.

Let me know when to expect you, if you are coming by train I will meet you at the station but if coming by car the Bursledon Rd is the main Rd from Portsmouth to Southampton and my bungalow lies back a little on the main road on the right about 200 yds past the "Target" which is a big public house also on the right traveling from Southampton. I mention this as everyone knows the "Target".

All the news when I see you, trust it will be soon.

The very best of luck to you all.

Lilian & Yvonne

9.F. **11 November 2001 Remembrance Day service in London, organized by Yvonne Colebatch, daughter of Peter Ettlinger:**

*Yvonne Colebatch organized a Remembrance Day church service held in 2001 in conjunction with London's prestigious Westminster Under School, where she taught English. Her address, appearing halfway through the service, was inspired by her own very personal tragedy: losing her father in the collision of the two Liberators.*

*The letters she composed and read to the assemblage of students, faculty, and other churchgoers were based upon fact, including actual correspondence. Yvonne's words magnificently convey the themes of love of family; homesickness in time of war; sudden, maddening tragedy in a tropical land; duty in recovering the dead; and, finally, remembrance of those who sacrificed for our freedom.*

*The order of the service:*

Hymn: *"I Vow to Thee My Country"*

Reading by a boy

Trumpeting of *"Reveille"*

Yvonne Colebatch's address

Trumpeting of *"The Last Post"*

Choir recital: *"For the Fallen"*, by Lawrence Binyan

Brief Prayer

Hymn: *"Jerusalem"*

*Yvonne's first reading was a letter from her father to his mother, written on the final morning of his life:*

Amarda Road  
India  
26<sup>th</sup> July 1945

My dearest mother,

The Reveille has just sounded as I start this letter to you. Today is your birthday and I wish that I could be there to see you blowing out those 65 candles! What with rationing I doubt if you'll even have a cake, let alone candles. No matter what, I hope you still have some of that home made wine to help you feel in a festive mood. I guess Lily will bring Yvonne along to join in the fun. She is 10 months old today and I can't wait until I'll be home so I can see her. Is she walking yet?

No letter is complete without mentioning the weather – why is it the English always moan about the weather, so here I go.

It is foul – monsoon season, wet, cloudy, ferociously hot, stormy.

In an hour's time I'll be in the air. Six Liberator B-24s – you know, those huge American bombers, will be flying in close formation on a fighter affiliation exercise with RAF Spitfires.

We've had a really enthusiastic group of youngsters here – from all over the world. Holland, Canada, New Zealand. The average age is 20 – they have got on well and have finished their two week course learning how the Liberators fly.

Anyway must dash – had a call that my bomber's ready, will finish this later. . .

*Yvonne continued:*

This letter was posted to his mother unfinished.

*Yvonne read a second letter:*

Amarda Road  
India  
28<sup>th</sup> July 1945

My dear Elaine,

Still no mail from you – I long to hear your news.

My two week course here is finished – my heart is very heavy as I write this.

We were flying in formation in this monsoon weather. There were bags of nasty clouds about with a very low base. The formation was pretty close, 6 planes flying, and we kept losing sight of each other. I had a feeling something was about to happen. It was eerie. I was feeling uneasy.

It did – we flew into a cloud and when we came out of it we saw the two planes next to us collide. The aircraft, port, hit the leader. With all four engines screaming, minus its tail unit, it went down into a paddy field whilst the other aircraft lost a wing and also crashed. Debris flew all over the place. I was waiting for something to hit us. Would we too follow them into the paddy field below?

All the crew, fourteen in total, were killed in this accident. Ray, my chum from N.Z., went down. We should never have flown in formation during this filthy weather.

We feel rather bitter about it. We also feel bitter about what is happening in England. I was talking to one of the chaps who has just returned from a month's leave in Blighty. He was pretty mad about the genial attitude back home. Most people in England have decided that the war is over and don't give a damn about our particular effort. I'd like them to spend a few months in the jungle or to fly during a monsoon – it would certainly make them realise that the war against the Jap is no way over. I can't write anymore, I'm too emotional.

All my love,

Tommy

*Yvonne spoke again:*

So far you've heard two voices from my past and now I'd like to read an account from a member of the RAF Repair and Salvage Unit.

*She continued with a letter from Kenneth King (also see Item 5.N):*

I was involved in going to the crashed aircraft and in burying the remains of the 14 airmen involved. We were a party consisting of the Padre, a technical officer, and two other airmen, photographer and 6 native employees.

I well remember the lengthy 3 day journey which involved obtaining transport on rivers and ferries for our personnel and lorry and the wading through the endless paddy fields.

We eventually arrived at the crash scene exhausted and disheartened at what we saw.

We found suitable ground, dry ground, to bury the bodies and took pictures of the two wood memorial crosses. You can clearly see the names of the 14 dead airmen and the date 26.7.45. And there they remained, the airmen, from England, Northern Ireland, Holland, New Zealand, and India united in death.

In 1953 they were reinterred in the Madras War Cemetery where they now rest in peace. The young men from England, Northern Ireland, Holland, New Zealand, and India. And their 14 granite crosses.

*Yvonne finished with her most moving words:*

The last voice is mine.

I visited the War Cemetery.

I sat.

I reflected.

I recalled my father's life – a man I never met.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.



## **PART TEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO ALFRED HERBERT AND HIS FAMILY**

*Alfred's brother John still resides in Thurstonland, Huddersfield, where I located him in 1998. Item 10.A highlights the information John shared with me by telephone and letter in 1998.*

*Item 10.B offers the diary extracts of Ron Bramley, Alfred's friend at the Air Fighting Training Unit at Amarda Road, India.*

*Items 10.C through 10.G are the 1945 and 1946 letters from Alfred's brother Derrick and their mother Clara to George Geeson, brother of Alfred's flight engineer, Cyril Geeson, on the doomed flight.*

### **10.A. 6 June (phone) and 7 July 1998 (letter) details shared with Matt Poole by John Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert:**

*On 6 June 1998 I phoned John Beckwith Herbert of Thurstonland, Huddersfield after finding a Herbert listing in the Thurstonland phone directory. John is one of Alfred Herbert's three brothers. Alfred was the oldest, followed by Derrick, then John, then Edward. Of the four brothers, only Alfred was deceased, as of 1998.*

*Alfred, over 11 years John's senior, left England as a young man for Abadan on the Persian Gulf. His position as an Anglo Arabian Oil Company chemist, however, was abandoned at the war's outbreak, when he came back to Britain to join the RAF. Following pilot training in Canada, Alfred returned once again to the UK, and then at some point he flew a Wellington bomber to his new assignment in India.*

*Their mother, Clara, died in 1958. Their father, Arthur, remarried 13 years later, and when he died all of the materials relating to Alfred's death apparently went to the widow's family. John did not know of any letters or details, and the only memento he has is Alfred's pilot's wings.*

*John did not know details about Alfred's connection with 205 Squadron, which is noted in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.*

*The family did eventually receive a photo of Alfred's grave in Madras War Cemetery in India. Having noticed Alfred's age (29) and date of death inscribed on his headstone, the family realized that John, on the very day the photo arrived, was the EXACT same age as Alfred when he died! Exact to the day. John clearly remembered that the photo was delivered in November, soon after his birthday (the 1<sup>st</sup> of November). Since John turned 29 in 1956, and Alfred's birthday was in June, the photograph of the Madras grave must have arrived at the very end of November of that year.*

*John was not well-informed about the circumstances of his brother's death. He was called up into the RAF on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1945, which was just barely three months after Alfred's death. His RAF service took him away from home at a time when, otherwise, he would have been more familiar with the few details of the collision which reached the family in Thurstonland.*

*Following our conversation, I mailed John copies of the findings I'd compiled up to that time. I received a letter from John, dated 7 July 1998. It opened with this:*

*If I was surprised to receive your phone call, I was more astonished with your letter containing facts and information going back 53 years, much of which I never knew about.*

*The first thing he did after receiving the information was to give photocopies to his brothers and to each of his two children.*

*I came to learn that ex-AFTU gunnery instructor Ron Bramley had been Alfred's friend. Soon after I located John in Thurstonland, Ron was informed of his whereabouts. He subsequently made contact with John. They soon met and became friends, and Ron was most pleased to show the Herbert family his logbook and diary passages describing the collision and loss of comrades (Item 3.E), the search (Item 5.A), the sad task of inventorying Alfred's personal belongings (Item 10.B), and the Memorial Service held at Amarda Road one week after the crash (also Item 10.B).*

**10.B. Excerpts of diary entries made by 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road:**

July 27<sup>th</sup>

Down to the flight at 7-30 & the phone was going all morning about yesterday's crash. Came up at 9-30 & started sorting all Herbie's kit out. Took me all the morning & still I haven't finished. Borrowed Barry's typewriter & made lists out of Herbie's kit in duplicate. Destroyed all correspondence & photographs except for those about his Mother & his girl.

August 2<sup>nd</sup>

We all went to the Memorial Service at the Church for Herbie & the boys who were killed last week. I took a photograph of the Church to send home to Herbie's people.

*For more of Ron Bramley's diary excerpts, see Items 3.E and 5.A. The Memorial Service on 2 August is also mentioned in the 159 Squadron Monthly Report for July 1945 (Item 3.L).*

**10.C. 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert:**

10, Top O'th Bank  
Thurstonland.  
Nr. Huddersfield  
Yorkshire

Dear Mr. Geeson,

We were very pleased to receive a letter from you on Friday. The Air Ministry had forwarded it on, and for once didn't waste much time either. Before I go any further I had better tell you who I am. I am Alf's oldest brother Derrick, but Alf was the eldest son, nearly 10 years older than me. I shall be 20 in January.

I am writing on behalf of all of us for the moment, but mother is writing you a letter also.

It was certainly a terrible calamity when Alf's plane crashed on July 26<sup>th</sup> and although we knew that 22 had lost their lives we didn't know the names of any of the others.

One of Alf's best pals, "Brad" [*probably Ron "Bram" Bramley, Alf's mate*], has been to see us since he arrived home from India and he told us that 22 were killed and offered to let us read a list of the names but mother wasn't equal to reading it at the time.

You said you would like to meet us, well I assure you of a hearty welcome when you come to Thurstonland some week-end. When you are coming please let us know as we can then be in and send you scratch directions for getting here.

I should like to go down to Grantham and call on you sometime too, if I am not called up in the meantime.

One of my younger brothers 'John' (the other is Eddie) has to report to Padgate on Wednesday so I am afraid you won't be able to meet him.

Even though Alf and Cyril are now but a memory we know that they left life in splendid company. But I am afraid that's poor solace to you or I.

I would now like to take the opportunity of expressing the deepest sympathy of all of us.

Yours Faithfully,

Derrick Herbert

**10.D. 18 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Clara Herbert, mother of Alfred Herbert:**

(same address as son Derrick's letter, 10.C)

Dear Mr. Geeson,

We, my husband and myself, were very pleased to receive a letter from you. Thank you very much for your sympathy in our great loss. We also wish to express our deepest sympathy to all your family in your sad loss.

Alfred was our eldest son, age 29 last June, and was the pilot of one of the aircraft that collided in the air. We should very much like to get in touch with you, and you must visit us sometime to talk things over.

Derrick my next son has also written to you on our behalf, and his brothers. I have now three sons left. Derrick 20 in Jan, John 18 Nov. Eddie 16 last Feb, and John goes in the Air Force next Wed. Well Cheerio for now hoping to see you soon.

Yours Truly,

Clara Herbert

**10.E. 10 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert:**

(same address as 10.C)

Dear Mr. Geeson,

We were all very pleased to receive your letter of the 4<sup>th</sup> inst, and quite appreciate that you were unable to reply sooner through having so many letters to answer.

I am afraid we cannot include a photograph of Alf in this letter as we have only one of him in uniform, and although we had another dozen taken from it about two months ago no sooner had we got them, than we had to give them all away to relatives and friends of Alf's who were wanting a photograph of him.

However we have ordered some more and as soon as we receive them, I will see to it that you receive one too.

We would appreciate it very much if you could send us a photograph of Cyril because although we have a photograph of the crew Alf trained with in Canada, we have no photographs of any of his friends who flew with him in India. Or I should say we have only one for we have a photograph of one of his pals (Ron Bramley).

Before I close I must take this opportunity of thanking you for your kind invitation to visit you. Most probably I shall come down some week-end soon after Christmas, but I will let you know when I shall be coming in good time.

You must certainly make a point of coming to see us during the coming summer for I am sure you will be pleased with the scenery round here, which will be vastly different from Lincolnshire a very flat county so I imagine, and we are all looking forward to seeing you.

Well on behalf of Mum and Dad, John, Eddie, and myself, I wish all of you, as merry an Xmas as will be possible in the circumstances.

Yours Respectfully

Derrick Herbert

**10.F. 11 December 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Clara Herbert, mother of Alfred Herbert:**

(same address as 10.C)

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I was very pleased to receive a reply to my letter to you. Yes, Alfred was pilot of one of the planes, and I know your loss must be terrible. Only those who lose them so suddenly know the shock it brings, and we feel so helpless about it. Nothing we can do at all.

I will let you have a photo as soon as I get them. He had his photo taken only in June, whilst on holiday at Darjeeling, and I received it on a Monday, and the following Monday I got the telegram to say he was killed, so it had only been taken one month before he died.

In your letter you mention a lady's address you was going to send. I am afraid you forgot to put it in the letter as there is no address in it. I should be very glad to write to anyone who was amongst the sufferers through the accident, if it is not too much trouble for you to forward me the addresses you have managed to get. I can't send them now to Amarda Road to be forwarded as that Station is closed down according to a letter I have had from a friend of Alf's. He has been moved to be C.O. at another Station in Bengal. He also told me the Padre had written to me and sent a photograph of the graves, but I have not received either letter or photo.

On Alf's death certificate which I got from the Air Ministry it says he was killed at Bhuinsari Bazaar, nr Midnapore India. They were flying through the Monsoon weather which is very stormy and cloudy I believe.

Since I wrote last to you my other son John has been fetched into the Air Force. He was only 18 1<sup>st</sup> Nov, and was off on the 21<sup>st</sup> Nov. Derrick the eldest now is 20 on Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> and he volunteered when he was 17, but they kept him at work as he is a fitter at David Brown & Sons Park Works Lockwood. About 3 months since he was called again for interviews and is put down for the R.A.F., so he may too be called anytime. The youngest Eddie is 17 in Feb. He is farming. I think, according to your letter, your family consists of boys too.

There was only one consolation for us when we got to know of Alfred's death, and that was it would be quick, we should not have liked him or any of the others to suffer a long time and then lose their lives. When I feel overcome about it all I just think what Alfred would say to me, "Don't worry Mother" and try to look on the bright side again, and hope to meet him again someday.

Like your Cyril, Alfred would never tell us anything, everything was "always alright" and we never knew anything about his life in India, only that he was a Bomber Pilot. He never mentioned anything about his job nor what Squadron he was in. He always said he couldn't say anything for security reasons.

Thank you very much for your invitation to my sons and Derrick is going to come some time in the New Year.

You will like it up here in summer I think. We live at the top of a big hill on the Pennine Range not very far (about 2 miles) from Holmfirth, and have a glorious view. Well I must bring my letter to a finish as I have lots of work to do and please give my best wishes to your parents and brother and wife, and best wishes for the New Year and may it be a happier one for all of us.

Yours Sincerely,

Clara Herbert

P.S. I return your forms and *[thank]* you very much for letting me see them.

**10.G. 10 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Derrick Herbert, brother of Alfred Herbert:**

(same address as 10.C)

Dear Mr. Geeson:

Thank you very much for the photograph of Cyril.

I shall be coming down to see you next Saturday March 16<sup>th</sup> and my train arrives in Grantham at 11-27 a.m. according to the time table but I think 11-50 will be nearer as it is improbable that the train will run on time.

I'm afraid I cannot give you longer notice as I'm expecting to be called up shortly.

Your sincere friend

Derrick Herbert

## PART ELEVEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO FELIX HEYNERT AND HIS FAMILY

*As explained in PART ONE, my "out of the blue" encounter with Yvonne Colebatch in 1995 was followed two years later by a similar letter received from Felix Heynert's widow, Patricia Lanegan, then of Canterbury, Kent, who passed away in Danbury, Essex in 2005. Yvonne and Patricia did not know of the other's interest in the story of 26 July 1945, so it was especially gratifying to bring them together.*

*In 2002 George Geeson rediscovered a letter penned to him by Patricia in November 1945, four months after the tragedy. Patricia's pain is evident in this letter, but so is her compassion for the suffering of George's family. This letter is offered as Item 11.D.*

*Item 11.C was written to me in 1998 by Edward Hearn, an Amarda Road associate of Felix Heynert.*

*I am indebted to Patricia for the seven other items found in PART ELEVEN, plus Item 8.A, the letter she received in 1945 from Edna Bullen, brother of Ray Bullen.*

**11.A. 28 July 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from G/Capt D. R. Biggs. Officer Commanding, RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident:**

RAF Station  
Amarda Road  
South East Asia Air Forces

Dear Mrs. Heynert,

It is with profound regret that I write to inform you of the details of your husband's death. You will have already received the cable from the Air Ministry.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> July, during the morning, two aircraft collided during an exercise. Your husband was flying in one of the aircraft. Both aircraft immediately crashed and both the crews were killed.

We at once sent out a rescue party and due to the difficult country it was not possible to return to this Station for the funeral. Your husband and the other thirteen members of the crews were buried near the scene of the crash.

Within a few days our Padre will again be proceeding to the graves and we shall erect the proper memorial. We intend to make a pleasant surrounding and shall see that it is properly looked after.

I have given you the details and I know there are many questions you want to ask on the other hand I may have said too much. I feel it is much nicer for you to know the facts as every little scrap of information must mean so much to you at this terribly sad time.

I wish to convey to you not only my personal sympathy but that of all my Station where he had so many friends.

Yours sincerely,

D. R. Biggs  
Group Captain

*A nearly identical letter from G/Capt Biggs to Ray Bullen's mother in New Zealand was found in Ray's Royal New Zealand Air Force personnel file. There is little doubt that the next-of-kin of all fourteen deceased airmen received such a letter. G/Capt Biggs also wrote the 24 September 1945 letter to George Geeson, presented as Item 6.B.*

11.B. **10 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert, from S/Ldr Stanley G. Bennett, Padre of RAF Station Amarda Road:**

79348 S/Ldr. S.G. Bennett  
SEAAF RAF Amarda Road

My Dear Mrs. Heynert,

Thank you for your letter dated the 18<sup>th</sup> August. I told the Group Captain that now that we knew all that could be known concerning the terrible crash and that all had been done that could be done at present, I would write to the relatives of both crews, not only offering my deepest sympathy but explaining how the accident came about - and such details as we are able to tell you. Please accept my deepest sympathy in your bereavement. You and all to whom sorrow has come in this way have been regularly in our thoughts and in our prayers. Such a catastrophe shattered all of us. We pray that you have found strength to face such sudden calamity.

In answer to your questions I hope the following information will help.

'Bunny,' as we knew him, had returned from leave and reassumed command of his Section. The whole Flight had gone up on formation practice. It was reasonably good flying weather. But, as so often happens here at this time of the year, the weather closed down very suddenly.

Orders were given to break formation and in preparing to do so the two aircraft collided. The official inquiry into the accident attributed it solely to the unpredictable suddenness with which the weather changed. The aircraft were all piloted by selected men.

The accident occurred about 70 miles from here. You will find the spot from this map reading:

22,04° North; 87,42 1/2° East.

On receipt of the report a party went immediately to the place. Nobody had survived. It is also certain that nobody had suffered. The aircraft crashed in an area under monsoon floods. All that could be done under such conditions was done.

Soon the floods will begin to subside and we shall then return to build a memorial at the spot. We shall take photographs and will forward copies to you. May I ask you to drop a line to the C.O. of R.A.F. Kharagpur, S.E.A.A.F. Lads from his station were first on the spot and they spared no effort.

You will receive all Bunny's effects through the Adjustment Committee.

May God Bless you and strengthen you!

Yours very sincerely,

Stanley G. Bennett  
Padre

*According to the 159 Squadron records (Item 3.L) and Ron Bramley's wartime diary (Item 10.B), a memorial service was held at RAF Station Amarda Road on 2 August 1945. Presumably Padre Bennett presided. PART EIGHTEEN contains some additional biographical details on Padre Bennett.*

**11.C. Excerpt of 22 October 1998 letter to Matt Poole from S/Ldr Edward Hearn DFC, instructor at RAF Station Amarda Road at the time of the accident:**

*This letter was posted from Brussels, Belgium, where Edward resided.*

I was at Amarda Road as a Squadron Leader instructor (having been posted to SE Asia after being shot down & escaping in France). I remember the unfortunate accident & I knew F/Lt Heynert & indeed believe flew with him on one or two occasions. I remember that our first attempt to find the crash was abortive & we sent out a ground search party.

Also our C.O. was indeed Group Captain Biggs. After leaving Amarda Road for a posting to Ranchi I lost touch & have never had news of him since.

At Amarda Road we were a happy team & at first I regretted my posting to Ranchi. All this is of course over fifty years ago!

**11.D. 21 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert:**

1, Aston Road.  
Ealing, London W.5  
21.X1.45.

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I received your letter through the Air Ministry last week, and was very glad to hear from you. I too hope eventually to contact all the relatives of the men who lost their lives with my husband on July 26<sup>th</sup>. It has been a terrible blow and it seems doubly sad that it should have happened like that after all they had been through. My husband was piloting one of the aircraft. He was such a conscientious & careful pilot. It's hard to understand how such an accident could have happened.

I expect you have had the same details that I have – that it was attributed to bad flying weather and cloud. It's useless to speculate and wish and there is little comfort one can offer or get in the face of such tragedy. But I would like to offer you my very sincere sympathy and if it is possible for us to meet one day, I would be glad to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Heynert

**11.E. 27 September 1945 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert, from navigator Don Morrison, crewmate of Felix Heynert on 159 Squadron:**

F/O D. Morrison  
Communication Sqdn.  
H.Q. Base A. Forces

My Dear Mrs. Heynert,

I sincerely trust you will forgive the very belatedness of these lines but duty has found me away from India these last five weeks and upon my return only did I learn such saddening news.

I'm afraid that letters of this strain do not run easily from my pen, and perhaps you do not even know who I am, & yet I hope you do for I had the privilege, and it was nothing less, of flying as navigator to Felix. And believe me, when I really got to know him, (and that did take a little time) there is no one I would have preferred to fly with as my skipper no matter where.



Only some two weeks before I left on this extended tour I bumped slap bang into him en route back to camp after a well earned break & we had a most pleasant natter over happy 159 Sqdn. days.

Far be it from me to go to great lengths to describe what I thought of him, suffice it be to know that your ideal was found in him & your choice was perfect.

My grandest recollection of him, if you will allow me it, was a certain visit he paid to the Sgts Mess (when I was still a member) and of the way he somehow made the party 'tick' tho' drinking naught but squash himself.

I must close quite quickly now for I fear I may have already upset you afresh no little and in closing I must send to you from myself and from Micky Jacks who was mid-upper gunner our most sincere condolences in your great loss & how sincerely I would enjoy just a few lines from you.

Believe me always yours, so very sincerely,

Don Morrison

P.S. I hope it is unnecessary for me to offer my help in any possible way for you have but to ask.

Yours,

Don M.

11.F. **21 October 1946 letter to Patricia Heynert, widow of Felix Heynert, from Warren P. Phillips, Felix's housemaster at school:**

Tomlin  
Milesplit Hill, N.W. 7  
Telephone: MILL HILL 2878

Dear Mrs. Heynert,

I'm so glad to have your address at long last to be able to write to you about your husband, who was always a favorite of mine at school.

I was his housemaster for the last year he had at Mill Hill, & I have such a vivid recollection of his charm & his most marked personality.

I don't think I met him again after he left, but in spite of the lapse of all these years I felt a very real sense of loss when I heard he had gone. I at once wrote to his people at the only address I had, but as I heard no more I supposed that they had left.

My wife & I do so very deeply sympathize with you & we both of us send our very kindest regards to you.

Yours very sincerely,

Warren P. Phillips

**11.G. Citation of the Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to Felix Heynert on 23 March 1945:**

Distinguished Flying Cross

Flight Lieutenant Felicite Pierre Andre HEYNERT (149322), No. 159 Squadron.

As captain of a Liberator aircraft this officer has completed many operational missions of a varied nature, including bombing and minelaying by night and by day.

In March, 1944, he was detailed to attack Rangoon. Opposition from anti-aircraft fire was intense over the target and difficulty in identifying the target was experienced.

Five runs had to be made before the exact objective was located and, on the fifth, the aircraft was illuminated by search lights and attacked by two night fighters.

Despite this, Flight Lieutenant Heynert continued the run until the bombs had been released and a photograph obtained. Several further attacks were made by the fighters.

Flight Lieutenant Heynert, displaying great skill, eventually evaded the attackers and returned to base safely.

This officer has proved himself an exceptionally able pilot who has, at all times, displayed the utmost gallantry and devotion to duty.

*The combat operation cited was an attack on Kemmendine railway station in Rangoon on the night of 1 / 2 April 1944, not in March as the DFC citation states. An excerpt from the post-sortie interrogation report gives more detail of the fighter attacks on Felix Heynert's Liberator:*

No enemy a/c seen. Source of fire not observed. Rear Gunner injured by first burst. Thought possibly two a/c attacking, judged by direction of bright red trace which appeared to be type fired by 4 guns.

Immediately after bombing at 2231 hrs at 13,000 ft RANGOON, own a/c was caught in S/L's. A few seconds later trace observed coming from astern, slightly to port and below. A pattering noise was heard at the rear of a/c and it is presumed this was the burst which injured Rear Gunner.

Evasive action taken, consisting of violent weaving, corkscrewing and losing height. At intervals.

During following ten minutes when our a/c was passed on from RANGOON to MINGALADON S/L's, eight more bursts of tracer came from astern, three slightly from starboard; 3 from port and 2 dead astern. Since no directions could be obtained from Rear Gunner, source of enemy fire could not be observed.

Own aircraft did not return fire. All tracer appeared slightly behind tail during turns in evasive action as though not enough deflection allowed. Duration of combat approx. 10 mins, height lost from 13,000 - 10,000. Opening range of enemy fire not known.

Sgt. W. J. Knight. Rear Gunner injured.

A/C 'V' B.Z. 960 Cat I [damage] as result of enemy action.

**11.H. Citation of the Vliegerkruis (Dutch flying medal) awarded to Felix Heynert posthumously on 22 September 1945:**

*Patricia, Felix's widow, was presented with her husband's posthumous award at a ceremony in London in 1945. The wording of the citation, signed by the Queen of the Netherlands, is as follows (taken verbatim from a typewritten copy):*

22<sup>nd</sup> September 1945  
75

WE, W I L H E L M I N A, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, QUEEN No.  
OF THE NETHERLANDS, PRINCESS OF ORANJE-NASSAU,  
ETC., ETC., ETC.

AT THE RECOMMENDATION OF OUR MINISTER OF WAR OF  
THE 14<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1945, NO. X 14;

HAVE APPROVED THE AWARD  
OF THE "VLIEGERKRUIS" TO:

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant,  
F.P.A. HEYNERT,

"In recognition of his courage, perseverance, capability, and devotion to duty, whilst attached to a unit of the Royal Air Force taking part for a considerable time in operations against the enemy."

Our Minister of War has been instructed with the execution of this Decree, a copy of which will be despatched to the Commandant of the Military House and the Chancellor of Netherlands Decorations.

THE HAGUE, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1945.

THE MINISTER OF WAR,  
Signed J. MEIJNEN

signed WILHELMINA

**11.I. Excerpt of 6 February 2002 letter to Matt Poole from Patricia Heynert, widow of S/Ldr Felix Heynert**

*Patricia wrote this short reflection on events of long ago after receiving my research summary:*

Dear Matt,

. . . 26<sup>th</sup> July 1945. So long ago and yet still so fresh in one's memory it seems like yesterday. The telegram from the Air Ministry reached me on a Sunday afternoon, dropped through the door. I suppose the boy who delivered it was aware of the contents and didn't stop – I don't blame him!

Only my father was at home. My sister was out visiting a friend in London, our mother had died in January after a long, 12 year illness after a stroke. Our only brother had died of wounds in Tunisia in April 1943.

It is all as clear in my mind now as if it had happened yesterday. And now I am 86 & Felix would be 88. A whole life-time ago.

## PART TWELVE: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO ROBERT MANSON AND HIS FAMILY

*Only one letter has surfaced from the kin of Robert Manson. The family details in this letter gave me hope that I might yet find a relative, including his stepbrother and stepsister. This, however, has not happened. A BBC Radio Merseyside appeal broadcast in late 2003 brought no responses. In February 2004 I sent a letter to the wartime home of Robert Manson's father. The present occupant learned from neighbors only that the Mansons moved to the Bradford area of Yorkshire. I have been unable to track down the family via the telephone directory.*

*Item 8.B, written by Edna Bullen to George Geeson, made mention of the fact that she, like George, had also corresponded with Robert Manson's father.*

**12.A. 22 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from R.A. Manson, father of Robert Manson:**

Mr. G. E. Geeson,

33 Muirhead Ave East  
Liverpool 11

I have received your letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> [unclear] – same having been forwarded on to me by the Air Ministry. I am very sorry to hear that your brother was lost in the same plane accident as my son was. I can feel deeply for all your family, as it was a sad blow to me when I received the dread news last July.

I don't know how you have got my name, I can only presume your brother had mentioned my son – perhaps in some letter. Was he a pal of my boy out in the Far East?

My son Flying Officer R.S. Manson was the Wireless Operator on one of the planes – he had been in the R.A.F. since early Sept 1939. Starting as a private – (the same I suppose as your brother) – and he had had many flights over Italy, Germany, & France. He used to fly in Wellingtons.

Perhaps I might give you a little of his history. His mother died when he was 10 days old (I had only been married 13 months at the time) & he was brought up by my parents until he was 12 yrs old, when I remarried & he lived with me until he was about 15 yrs old, when he started to work, and as his grandparents were like his parents I consented to him going back to them as they were getting old & he would be a help to them financially. This arrangement was carried on until he enlisted & you can imagine how the old people, both 80 yrs of age, took this terrible blow. He was their all.

When he was 21 yrs of age he came into a fair amount of money from his grand-father on his mother's side & since joining the Air Force had been very keen to take advantage of the Training for Careers they offered, & he had decided to adopt the profession either of a Doctor or Dental Surgeon. He only had one more exam to pass for entrance in the University. Alas all his plans came to nothing but I feel that, like your brother he gave his life in the service of his country. He never grumbled, & he never caused me one minute of worry in the whole of his 25 yrs. He was indeed a fine lad. Still, enough. I should very much like to have a further letter from you & would certainly like to meet you in the near future.

By the way I have a daughter Pat age 12 & a son Peter aged 6. They are of course Step Sister & Bro to Stanley, & he thought a lot of them. They are two bonny kiddes. I myself work for the L-poole Corporation – P.A.C.

I hope this letter may lead to a further exchange of correspondence. Yours very sincerely,  
R.A. Manson.

P.S. I have had quite a lot of correspondence from other officers out East & perhaps could put you in touch with them.

## **PART THIRTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO GEORGE PAFFEY AND HIS FAMILY**

*In 1945 George Geeson wrote to Gladys, George Paffey's widow's, who responded thoughtfully. Certainly George was relieved to hear that Gladys was grateful to have received his unexpected letter.*

*The beauty of the Internet was demonstrated again in March 2008 when Paul Knighton, Gladys's son from her second husband, read a version of this research report on the website of my friend, Robert Quirk of Winnipeg, Canada (<http://www.rquirk.com/seac.html> ). Paul immediately contacted me, and I now have some wonderful new information and, at last, a photo of George Paffey.*

### **13.A. 20 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Gladys Paffey, widow of George Paffey:**

150 Highlands Boulevard  
Leigh-on-Sea  
Essex

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thankyou so much for your letter and also your sympathy, my dear husband's death was a great shock to me indeed. We, like so many others, had so much to look forward to. Knowing what this loss means to me I would like to offer you my deepest sympathy in your great loss.

Your letter was a surprise to me but also a pleasant one.

Hoping to hear from you again.

Yours Sincerely,

Gladys Paffey

### **13.B Summary of 2008 details learned from Paul Knighton, son of Gladys Knighton, widow of George Paffey:**

#### **Excerpt of 23 March 2008 e-mail from Paul Knighton to Matt Poole:**

My niece Jennifer Taylor was surfing the net for George and came across your website regarding the collision of RAF Liberators over India.

George William Paffey's wife was Gladys Marjorie French who, in 1950 became Gladys Marjorie Knighton. She married Edwin, had me, Paul Edwin, in 1953 and my sister Diane Frances in 1956. Mum never discussed George with me except once when, at the age of about 14, I came across my birth certificate and noticed that her maiden name was Paffey and not French as I had expected. I was told that George had died in an aircraft accident during the war.

I cannot really remember any details but can recall the feeling of surprise - not that mum had been married before but that she felt a need to conceal it from us kids. She was very traditional in her outlook, and very prone to deep sadness if anything untoward happened. I imagine that she wanted not to revisit the tragedy of losing George, which would have been utterly devastating to her.

Thank you for your research - Diane and I have discussed it at length and find the episode most poignant.

**Excerpt of 24 March 2008 e-mail from Paul Knighton to Matt Poole:**

*I sent Paul a scan of his mother's handwritten 1945 letter to George Geeson; see Item 13.A for its content. Paul comments on this letter are as follows:*

Many thanks for this. Mum died in 1996 just short of her 76th birthday, and I have not seen her writing for as many years, but it is unmistakeable. These things really take you aback .... handwriting is such a personal thing.

I have gotten Diane into the loop. She has more memorabilia than I and may be able to help with a photo. I am not sure that we have ever had one or seen one, but two of mum's brothers are still alive and we may be able to shed more light on the matter through them. I will write to my cousin Gina.

**Excerpt of e-mail from Paul Knighton to Matt Poole, 24 March 2008:**

Diane has found some photos of airforce comrades without our dad in them, so they might contain George and friends, or they might just be of dad's friends - he was a fitter armourer with the RAF. Will let you know once we have talked to mum's brothers. I've asked Diane to scan and send them. Perhaps you can tell who the group is and eliminate names and faces that you can identify.



**Excerpt of 8 May 2008 e-mail from Paul Knighton to Matt Poole:**

My cousin Gina got the photo to her Dad, Owen French, the brother of my mum Gladys Knighton/Paffey/French. He had no hesitation in spotting George and phoned me up tonight to tell me which of the faces was his. He is sitting on the front bench bang in the middle, between two bereted corporals, and he is wearing a forester cap.

Uncle Owen must be well into his 80s but is still remarkably youthful in terms of his voice, lucidity and diction. We talked for over an hour about the events surrounding George's death and wider matters. The news was broken to her by Bertie, her eldest brother and head of the family as their father had died in 1933. He waited until after the evening meal so that she had some food inside her. She was, of course, devastated.

Owen did not know any other precise details of George, so I'm afraid we still cannot help you with a date of birth or other next of kin. We think he was 5 years older than mum, which would give him a birth date of 1915. Owen did speak of George in glowing terms, though. "Not tall, but a man's man who knew his own mind". He was a brilliant mechanic in the 'rag trade' (apparel make-up) and Owen was keen to get into engineering, so George took him to where he worked to show him the kind of complex machinery that he, George, had to maintain.

One thing of interest is that mum and George got married quickly after he was drafted in 1943 to ensure that, as a married woman, she would not be drafted as well. What the deeper background to that was, and whether it was the whole story, I cannot say.

It was a most warm and rewarding chat with Owen, so thanks again for your lighting of the blue touch paper.

Best wishes,

Paul

*George Paffey, per the description, is easy to find in in the photo, reproduced in its entirety above. A close-up of George is included in PART TWENTY-ONE, the photo section.*

*In the first paragraph of his 8 May 2008 e-mail Paul mentioned a "forester cap". I am familiar with a different term for this peaked cap, which can be draped flat across one's belt when not worn: a forager cap.*

## PART FOURTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO WILLIAM SMART AND HIS FAMILY

*I reached the brothers of William Smart in 1998, after I posted a message to an internet message board for the town of Portadown, Northern Ireland – William's hometown. Upon reading my plea, Portadown photographer Jim Lyttle took it upon himself to search for the Smart family. A check of the telephone directory led him immediately to William's brothers, Blacker and George.*

*Jim then put the local newspaper in touch with the brothers, resulting in the two stories which comprise Item 14.G. Blacker and George were also proud to share recollections with Jim during his visits to their homes.*

*Items 14.A through 14.E, the wartime letters written by William Smart's parents, were mailed from "241 Bognor Terrace, Portadown, County Armagh, Ulster, Northern Ireland". Item 14.F. was a local newspaper announcement of William's 1945 death.*

### **14.A. 19 November 1945 letter from Mary Smart, mother of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thank you very much for your letter dated 9.11.45. I got it two days ago.

Billy's Father, his two brothers, and myself send you all especially your Mother our very sincere sympathy in your great loss. It's a dreadful blow we have all met.

I got the telegram myself on Monday morning 30<sup>th</sup> July. The others were all at work & I can't tell you how I lived through it. Poor fellows, it's hardly believable. Billy was my eldest. 26 years old.

He was a wireless operator air gunner and he loved his job.

I did my best with him to stay on the ground but no he wanted to fly.

What position had your brother. Billy joined up on 14 Sept 1940 and went overseas in January 1942 and the sad part was he didn't get leave before going so we didn't see him since July 1941. I have photos of his old crew but none of the boys from Amarda Road. In fact I had a letter a few days ago from his old pilot F/O Roy Harling of Oxford. It was lovely to hear from him or from any one who knew him. We would like very much to get in touch with all the relatives of both crews, but living as we do here in Northern Ireland we haven't the same chances as you have.

Aren't the Air Ministry people blunt. Why would they not give you my address. Death seems to mean nothing to them. I think at a time like this Red Tape should be put on one side.

I never had one line from the Padre. Don't you think this disgraceful. Did you have any. I had a note from his Group Captain but it was of little use. What I want to know is what caused the accident, did they suffer, and were the Drs sent at once to the spot, but these are things I have already asked. Another thing I would like to know did the plane catch fire or were the bodies recognizable. Maybe you could tell me.

I had an air mail letter just 3 days after the sad news, and in it he was telling me he hoped to be out by next June or maybe sooner and he said the boys were all counting the days. He was joking about the demob rig. I had his watch last Monday. A chum of his sent it to me through a Mr. Browne of Ropsley Grantham. I do wish you could get in touch with him and maybe he could tell us something more.



I needn't tell you how heart broken we all are. For us this world has just ceased to exist. The brave new world won't mean much to Billy's Father & I.

I know we are only one of many and we are glad for the sake of all other crews that this terrible war has ended. The R.A.F. in this war surely suffered.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yrs faithfully

M. [Mary] Smart. Mrs.

**14.B. 2 January 1946 letter from Mary Smart, mother of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thank you so much for your long letter & your snaps. I hope you get them back safely. You will wonder at me not writing to you sooner but for us that old saying as run true one, trouble never comes alone. My second boy he is 24 years. He has been very ill this past 7 weeks. He got a pleurisy & he has had the fluid lifted twice. I kept him at home as we don't like the idea of hospital. So you will see I haven't had one minute. In fact I had to ask what day Xmas was on so you will have some idea of my Xmas but thank goodness my boy is on the mending side now.

I expect just like ourselves a few days before Xmas you got the photos of the grave from the Padre. It's dreadful to look at but I am very thankful for it. I also got a statement yesterday about Billy's private money. All told they say it amounts to pounds 246 & he left no will. They then say at a later date we will get his War Gratuity. This is some thing we don't know any thing about. Could you tell us. He joined in Sept 1940.

Have you got any of Cyril's belongings yet, we haven't. We got the statement some time ago of what to expect. I had a nice letter from the Padre. How I would love to go and see that spot but I am afraid I wouldn't be strong enough.

Billy's Father would like to meet you & he says he will see you this summer. He is a heavy lorry driver in the N.I.R.T.B. and my other boy is a motor fitter. He is in a pretty big firm. It's a private firm but he says he would rather be in a public garage, so he was interested in your snaps.

I am sending you a photo of Billy and will you please send it back to me. I will certainly let you have one but I have a few to get taken for friends & we will send you one of them in the meanwhile. This will give you an idea of what he looked like. Your brother is a very nice lad but he looks much younger than Billy. Billy was 26 in Sept last. Isn't it all too dreadful to think we will never see them again.

When I hear & read of all the boys coming home some times I wonder will I ever be able to bear it all. I know there are much harder cases than mine but Billy was so good and this picture is just him. Same as if you were looking at him. I keep one on the radio in the kitchen and he is just looking at me every turn round. I feel he is just here watching and listening to everything.

I hope you are all well & I trust your mother & father are feeling better by now. After all we are only parted for a little while from them. When I think like this I don't feel so lonely. We will just have to be brave & wait. I will now thank you again for your letter, and on behalf of us all I wish you all a very happy New Year.

I remain  
Yrs sincerely

Mary Smart (Mrs.)

**14.C. 24 March 1946 letter from George Smart, father of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Just a line or so as my Mrs has broke her glasses and has asked me to drop you on a few lines in answer to your last letter. Thanks a lot for the photo of your dear brother, it's swell. Also many thanks for enclosing photos of the pilot. He's quite a nice guy. They must have been a very happy crew.

I am enclosing Miss Bullen's letter. I took the photo to a firm here to have it enlarged, to the same size as your brother's and Billy's. You see I also took one of Billy's over to have it enlarged too, as I know you would like to have one. So directly Mr. Geeson we receive them, they will be posted on to you.

We have not had any more news from the Air Ministry, neither have we received Billy's effects or money. Of course I have had to take out letters of administration and that takes a while. Its terrible what one has to do to get their own son's money returned. I know you will not be over the shock of the crash yet. How unfortunate in all war and I never look at an airman but I think of Bill. You see Mr. Geeson I am a heavy lorry driver in the North of Ireland Transport Board. I drove a Leyland diesel, and my job takes me around air dromes so I am constantly meeting air crew though I am never talking to them.

I would like very much to meet you and to have a good yarn, and I hope to do so later on. Your letters to wife have been very welcome as you are in a better position to hear all the details than we are here. And Mr. Geeson every little bit of news concerning our two boys is I am sure as welcome to you as it is to us. I am not a great hand with the pen so you will have to excuse me. My Mrs will write you later and also as I said send you the photos. I will therefore conclude wishing you all the best.

Yrs Sincerely,

G. A. Smartt *[spelled with double "t"]*

**14.D. 5 May 1946 letter from George Smart, father of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

At long last we have managed to send you Billy's photo. We hope it will match your other ones. It takes quite a long time to get anything done in this town. We have had Cyril's & the photos done the same size I enclose you the pilots snap. I am putting plenty of cardboard round it so as it won't get damaged. We got Billy's belongings on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March.

By the way Mr. Geeson we would like very much snaps of the rest of Billy's crew, to have them enlarged so if you ever manage to get them perhaps you could let us have them. You see this pilot is belonging to the other crew. I hope you are all well as we are at the moment. Today has been a lovely day. The good weather seems to have come.

You will remember Mr. Geeson my wife telling you about our second son been very ill. Well he is now for alright again though he will not be at work to the tatter end of the summer. He was in bed for 16 weeks. Suppose you are pretty busy these days.

I think this is all for the present.

Yrs Sincerely

G.A. Smartt *[spelled with double "t"]*

**14.E. Excerpt of January 1947 letter from Mary Smart, mother of William Smart, to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson:**

*Undated, but postmarked 16 January 1947*

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Thank you so much for your letter, it meant a lot to me as I haven't been so well this last 6 weeks. I have been very ill with Neuritis on the nerves, it's a dreadful pain.

First Mr. Geeson let me say how very glad we are to hear of your good news and my husband & I trust your wife will have good health until then and we hope she will get her wish. You didn't tell me what she wants, I guess a little girl.

How are all your family, especially your mother. Like myself I expect around Xmas she was feeling sad & lonely. Yes we got all Billy's belongings but I must say we did not know about his log book. I have written for this information. I don't know how to thank you. How we will treasure that & how I hope we get it.

You remember me telling you some time ago about my second boy been ill. He was confined to bed for 7 months, but thank God he made a perfect recovery and is now alright. It was the shock of Billy's death was too much for him.

So now Mr. Geeson again thank you for writing. Give my kind regards to your wife.

I will say cheerio for now  
& a very Happy New Year to you all,

M. Smart (Mrs.)

**14.F. 1945 Portadown (Northern Ireland) newspaper article on William Smart's death (exact date and name of newspaper unclear)**

*See Item 21.D for a reproduction of this newspaper cutting.*

**KILLED IN INDIA AIR ACCIDENT.**

**FORMER PORTADOWN VOLUNTEER.**

Warrant Officer Wm. J. Smart, R.A.F. V.R., Wireless-Operator Air Gunner, son of Mr. and Mrs. Smart, 241 Bognor Tce., Portadown, lost his life in a flying accident in India on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

Born at the residence of his grandfather, the late Mr. Wm. David Smart, Dundesart, Crumlin, Co. Antrim, deceased finished his education at the Lowry Memorial School, Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone. Before joining up in September, 1940, he was on the staff of Messrs. Henry Denny & Sons, Portadown.

Aged 26 years, he had 2,000 hours service flying experience and had served on three fronts – from England, in the Middle East, and Burma. He went overseas in 1941.

His father is an ex-member of the R.U.C., having served in Bushmills, Portrush and several stations in Co. Tyrone. With him and his wife sympathy is being expressed on the death of their gallant son.

**14.G. Excerpts of two 26 June 1998 Portadown Times (Northern Ireland) newspaper stories on William Smart and his family, including an interview with William's brother Blacker:**

*The stories are printed on the same page. They are accompanied by a photo of William Smart and a photo of five RAF men at the original gravesite (the Padre, Kenneth King, and three others; see Item 3.J).*

**THE FIRST NEWSPAPER STORY:**

**War accident in India that caused sorrow in the town**

It was July, 1945, the war in Europe was over and although the Japanese were still holding out in the Far East, a few weeks later two Atom bombs would bring an end to the costliest conflict in history.

But on a summer morning 14 RAF crew members – one of them from Portadown, Warrant Officer William Joseph Smart, were to lose their lives in a mid-air collision over the skies of India and bring sorrow to their families.

Fifty three years later an American woman is trying to obtain all the details of the collision and the subsequent burial of the 14 men.

Thanks to Portadown photographer Jim Lyttle, details of the family of Warrant Officer Smart are being sent to the woman, Mrs. Yvonne Colebatch.

Mrs. Colebatch is the daughter of one of the other airmen killed in the accident, and she is being helped in her search by a friend, Matthew J. Poole, from the town of Wheaton, Maryland.

**FLIGHT**

Mr. Poole, in a letter to the 'Times' said that already the families of three other airmen who were killed in the accident had been located, including the brother of William Smart's pilot on that fateful flight.

**APPEAL**

Mr. Poole also made an appeal on the Internet and this was noticed by local photographer Jim Lyttle, who checked the local telephone directory and found there were seven Smart entries.

On making his first call, Jim was lucky and discovered that the man who answered, Mr. George Smart, is a brother of Warrant Officer Smart.

George, who is 76 years of age, has another brother Blacker, who lives at Gilford, and he is proud but sad at the sacrifice of his brother whose life came to an end just a few weeks before peace arrived.

Mrs. Colebatch has a special interest in researching the tragedy as her father, Flying Officer Peter Ettlinger, was killed in the flying accident. She never knew her father, as he was away at war when she was born, and years of investigation culminated in her making the long pilgrimage to Madras, India, three years ago to visit her father's grave.

**MADRAS**

Mrs. Colebatch has forwarded a photograph showing the communal grave of the 14 airmen at the crash site which took place in a paddyfield.

In 1953 the remains of the RAF men were moved hundreds of miles south to Madras War Cemetery where they are looked after with great care by a dedicated staff of Commonwealth War Graves Commission gardeners.

Warrant Officer Smart was a 26-year-old wireless operator aboard one of two B-24 Liberator bombers which collided in poor weather during a training flight on the morning of July 26, 1945.

The bombers, part of a six aircraft formation, had taken off from Amarda Road airfield in India. William was normally assigned to RAF 205 Squadron in India, then a part of the British Empire, but he and several other airmen from 205 Squadron had been temporarily posted to a school called AFTU (Air Fighting Training Unit) at Amarda Road to receive additional instruction on the intricacies of flying the American B-24s.

Mr. Poole said he had been successful in tracing families of most of the airmen downed with William Smart, and he even found the 101-year-old mother of one of the airmen.

He will be getting in touch with George and Blacker Smart shortly to share what information he has about the death of Warrant Officer Smart.

*Yes, in my research I did succeed in finding a 101 year old woman, but she was the mother of an RAF crewman killed with my own mother's first husband on 29 February 1944, not the mother of a 26 July 1945 casualty.*

### **THE SECOND NEWSPAPER STORY:**

#### **Brother recalls sense of loss**

William Smart was brought up in Bognor Terrace, Obins Street, Portadown, and before joining the Royal Air Force he worked for Denny's pork processing factory a short distance from his home.

His brother Blacker (74), a widower living in Gilford, has vivid memories of his brother and the sense of loss the family experienced when news came through of his death.

"It devastated my parents and they never really got over it," said Blacker. He is two years younger than his brother George, who lives in Portadown.

"William was the oldest of three boys - he was four years older than me - and when war broke out in 1939 he joined right away. He wanted to be a flier and that's why he joined the RAF," said Blacker.

Their father, Mr. George Alexander Smart, was a native of Crumlin, County Antrim, and their mother, Mary Elizabeth (née Laycock) was from Newtownhamilton.

Blacker remembers them attending Drumgoose Primary School, before they started work. "Billy was working in Denny's at the time he joined the Air Force."

After training in gunnery and wireless operating, William served in Kenya and the Far East, and he kept in close contact with his family.

"We used to look forward to his letters and I think he had plans to settle in Rhodesia after the war - he seemed to love Rhodesia," said Blacker.

The war in Europe ended in May, 1945, but Japan fought on and although British and American victory looked certain, there was every reason to believe that it would drag on for years. The dropping of two Atomic bombs on Japan brought quick surrender but it came too late for William Smart and his comrades who died in that air accident in India a few weeks earlier.

"It was very sad and we didn't get many details of the accident for years. In fact we are only now getting the full facts, and I am grateful to Mr. Poole and Mrs. Colebatch for going to all that trouble," said Blacker.

His brother's name is on the War Memorial in Portadown, and although it is almost 53 years since William's death, neither of his brothers have forgotten him.

"We were fairly close although we all had our own interests, and we were looking forward to William coming home and telling us all about his experiences," he said.

## **PART FIFTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO PETER SMITH AND HIS FAMILY**

*Items 15.A through 15.C are letters from nurse Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith, to George Geeson, Cyril's brother. The letters were addressed from Nurses Home, City General Hospital, Herries Road, Sheffield 5. Items 15.D and 15.E were addressed from her home at 18 Verdant Way, Shiregreen, Sheffield 5, where George visited her in 1946.*

### **15.A. 15 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

Very many thanks for your kind letter of sympathy. I have written twice to try to obtain the names of the other casualties of the tragic accident, but so far I haven't had a reply. I too, felt I would like to get in touch with the other people who were bereaved, because I know how much letters of sympathy have meant to me.

I am so sorry to hear about your brother. It seems so hard that the accident should happen so near to the end of the war, when we were looking forward to having our loved ones back home again for good.

My husband was a navigator bomb-aimer, & was really attached to the Coastal Command 205 Squadron, based at Ceylon. He was sent to Amarda Road from Ceylon for a six weeks course in special bomb aiming. I have met most of my husband's own crew, but of course I did not know any of the crew he was flying with at the time of the accident.

I am so pleased to have heard from you & I do hope that one day I will be able to meet you. Sheffield is not such a long way away from Grantham, so maybe we will be able to arrange it. Unfortunately my work makes it very difficult, because I do not have any regular off-duty time, but I am sure that between us something could be arranged.

Yours very sincerely,

Margaret Smith

### **15.B. 20 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I'm so sorry not to have answered your letter sooner to thank you for the lovely photograph. When we pictures of our loved ones in the prime of their lives, it makes us wonder whether there is any purpose in life. I am enclosing a photo of my husband and I at our wedding (a year ago on Sunday). I'm afraid I've had to trim it a little at the top & bottom because it wouldn't go in the envelope.

Last Sunday my parents & my parents-in-law had a visit from a demobbed airman who was bomb aimer in one of the planes in the same formation as our loved ones, & he witnessed the whole accident. He says the collision occurred between the second & third planes in the formation & that my husband, whom he knew fairly well, was in the third plane.

He himself was in the fourth plane & his pilot swooped down over the scene of the crash dropping food & medical supplies while the fifth plane went back to base to report the accident. He said they circled round for 3½ hours & saw no sign of life at all.

They were only sorry that they were unable to make a landing, but it was quite impossible owing to the flooded areas. He said the search party took so long to reach the scene because of the difficult transport. They even had to build two bridges. He said he went with some other boys to try to take photographs for us, but they were unsatisfactory.

Unfortunately I was on duty last Sunday afternoon & I didn't meet him myself, but he as got a job in Sheffield & said he would come again when he could be sure of meeting me. I thought of you straight away & I feel sure you would like a word with him.

I'm sorry I can't give you a definite date on which to come, because my off duty time is so uncertain, but Sunday seems to be the most satisfactory day. I will try to arrange for him to come on April 7<sup>th</sup>, but I will let you know definitely nearer the day. If you would like to write to him, here is his name & address.

Mr. Cyril Thompson,  
41, Hallowes Lane  
Dronfield  
Nr Sheffield.

Well, my off duty time is nearly over, so I must close.

Thanking you again for the lovely photograph. I will always treasure it.

Yours very sincerely,

Margaret Smith

**15.C. 29 March 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I have written to Mr. Thompson asking him to tea at my home, 18 Verdant Way, Shiregreen, Sheffield 5. on April 7<sup>th</sup>. I will let you know as soon as possible whether this date is convenient for him. If he is able to come, I will also give you some sort of a play by which to find your way to our house. I don't want you to get lost!

Hoping to see you on Sunday week,

Sincerely yours,

Margaret Smith

**15.D. 3 April 1946 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I have received a letter from Mr. Thompson accepting my invitation for Sunday April 7<sup>th</sup>. He said he would arrive about 4.15 pm.

I will not get home until 3 pm, but mother will be at home & it is quite all right if you arrive before that. Just make your own arrangements, she will be pleased to see you whenever you turn up. Of course, I am expecting your wife and other members of your family coming with you.



When you arrive in Sheffield, you should make your way to the city centre. Then make your way to Firth Park tram terminus – we only live about 5 minute's walk away from there. From the terminus go up Bellhouse Road. Turn on the second road on the left (Torksey Road). Our road is the first on the right from there.

*[A detailed map showing the directions to the home appeared next.]*

I'm hopeless at drawing, so I do hope you can make head or tail of this.

Yours very sincerely,

Margaret Smith

**15.E. 10 June 1946 letter to George Geeson and his wife, Viola, brother and sister-in-law of Cyril Geeson, from Margaret Smith, widow of Peter Smith:**

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Geeson,

Many thanks for your letter & the enclosed list. So sorry to hear about your trouble at home & I hope your father is improving. It must have been a worry for you & a lot of work.

Peter's property arrived last week, but not in specially good condition. So far I haven't received any photographs of the grave, but I'll give them another week or two & if I get no reply from these people I should be very pleased if you would have some prints taken off yours.

I have just started my holidays. I'm spending this weekend at home & am going up to the lake district on Wednesday.

I'm trying to catch up my *[unclear]* of correspondence at present, so I'd better close. I've still got lots of letters to write.

Yours very sincerely,

Margaret

## PART SIXTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO SYDNEY WELLS AND HIS FAMILY

*In 1945 George Geeson wrote to Florence Wells, Sydney's mother. Mrs. Wells, in her thoughtful reply, revealed her unique pain – as a widow who then lost her only offspring when the future appeared safe.*

*For the second time in 2008 the Internet has led the kin of one of the 26 July 1945 casualties to make contact with me. (The first was in March, when George Paffey's kin wrote me an e-mail.) Pam Oxenbury, Sydney's relative, discovered a version of this research report on the website of my friend, Robert Quirk of Winnipeg, Canada (<http://www.rquirk.com/seac.html>). She immediately contacted me.*

**16.A. 18 November 1945 letter to “Miss Geeson” (really George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson), from Florence Wells, mother of Sydney Wells:**

Oxford St  
Lambourn,  
Newbury, Berks

Dear Miss Geeson,

I was very pleased to get your letter of the 9<sup>th</sup>, altho I am intrigued to know how you came by my name. I also had a letter from N. Zealand & probably you had too.

Yes, it was a terrible shock to me. My only son F/Lt S. Wells had been on operations since 1941, & I suppose I was thinking he had a charmed life. His father died just after the last war when Sydney was 9 months. Now I have nobody. War is a very awful thing, particularly for those left behind.

Personally, I am thankful they went quickly & absolutely my boy would never have been content to be maimed or blind, & I hope you all feel the same about your loved one.

All we can do now is to “carry on” as they would have wished.

With sympathy & kind regards to you all.

Yours sincerely,

Florence Wells.

**16.B. Excerpt of 27 September 2008 e-mail to Matt Poole from Pam Oxenbury, cousin of Sydney Wells:**

Thank you for the wonderful information about the crash of the 225 and the 247.

My Mother's cousin Sydney Wells was on the 225, and she has always wondered how the crash happened. Before he died they were quite close. He used to have a small teddy on his navigator's table called Lucky, but on the flight in question he left Lucky behind. Subsequently Sydney's mother, Florence (known as Floss), gave Lucky to my mother, and she has passed him on to me.

I do have a photo of Sydney, and if you would like a copy I will try to scan it (I'm no expert though!).

As my Mother is terminally ill in hospital I am really pleased to be able to tell her about the crash and show her the picture of Sydney's grave.

**16.C. Excerpt of 30 September 2008 e-mail to Matt Poole from Pam Oxenbury, cousin of Sydney Wells:**

Thanks so much for the photo of Sydney's grave. Mum was very touched. I have scanned Sydney's photo, taken in 1936, and taken a picture of 'Lucky' the teddy bear.

I would really be interested to see a copy of the letter from his mother. I saw her quite often as a child, as she lived in a flat above my great aunt's in Westcliff on Sea (near my home) and then moved into the same nursing home as them until her death.

Unfortunately my mother does not remember anything about his RAF career. She does remember that he enjoyed going shooting with his uncle (S. G. Wells) and used to hang the pheasants and other birds by the front door in Lambourn, so she always went in the back door!



*Lucky, Sydney's teddy bear, not taken aloft on 26 July 1945*

## PART SEVENTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO WALTER WOOD AND HIS FAMILY

*Mrs. Lilian Heydon's letter to George Geeson spoke of a young man much adored by his mother. As with some of the other letters written at the time, Mrs. Heydon expressed, succinctly, the cruel blow of losing a loved one when, with the war's conclusion so near, it seemed as though the worst danger had passed.*

**17.A. 15 November 1945 letter to George Geeson, brother of Cyril Geeson, from Lilian Heydon, mother of Walter Wood:**

5, Bow Arrow Lane,  
Dartford, Kent

Dear Mr. Geeson,

I was very pleased indeed to receive your letter today. May I express my and the family's sincerest sympathy with you & your people in your tragic loss, which you must feel as deeply as I do mine.

My darling son Walter was Air Bomber on the Liberator. He was 22 years old, charming, gay, a delightful person to have near you. His letters were thrilling and regular, I loved receiving them.

He was attached to 355 Squadron in India and had completed his tour of "ops". I felt so happy he had come through safely. He was excited when chosen for this Bombing Leaders course at Armada [Amarda] Road. If you receive any further information will you please let me know & I will do the same. I can't express fully my satisfaction of being in communication with you. I want to know about your dear brother who lies with my son in that far distant spot.

Yours very sincerely,

Lilian M. Heydon

## **PART EIGHTEEN: EXPANDED DETAILS PERTAINING TO PADRE STANLEY BENNETT, WHO LED THE RECOVERY / REBURIAL PARTY TO THE CRASH SITE**

*Padre Bennett's important role in the post-collision events is highlighted elsewhere in this report, especially in Kenneth King's recollections in Items 3.J and the Padre's own letter to Patricia Heynert in Item 11.B.*

*After my 1998 plea for information into Padre Bennett's post-war whereabouts was printed in the Royal Air Forces Association magazine, "Air Mail", I received four letters giving descriptions of an RAF padre by this name. However, I soon determined that only one of the four – Joe Shortland of Knaresborough, North Yorkshire – knew the Stanley G. Bennett who presided over the burial. Item 18.A reviews Joe's offerings.*

*I was disappointed, of course, to receive word of the Padre's death, but I was very pleased to learn more about this man and to reach his widow and daughter. Sue Riley, the Padre's daughter, wrote me the letter excerpted in Item 18.B.*

### **18.A. Excerpts of 25 October and 13 November 1998 letters to Matt Poole from Joe Shortland, friend of Padre Stanley G. Bennett:**

*Here is an excerpt of Joe's first letter, dated 25 October 1998:*

I was interested to read your appeal for information concerning S/Ldr the Rev Dr Stanley G. Bennett. I regret to inform you that he died four years ago, at the age of 86. I attended his funeral service at St Mary's Church, Burley-in-Wharfedale, Nr Leeds, where you will not be surprised to hear, the Church was crowded. He was always so very popular.

On reading your appeal I immediately contacted his widow, Vera, now in her 91<sup>st</sup> year, and read out your message to her and she has asked me to reply to you on her behalf -- she keeps in pretty good health, but finds anything out of the ordinary too much for her. She lives with one of their daughters, Susan, and a son-in-law Leslie, at Burley-in-Wharfedale.

I first met Stanley when I was a boy of 15 when he was Curate of my local Church (in those days), Holy Trinity, Idle, Bradford. It was there that he started a Men's Fellowship, where each week he used to organise well-known sportsmen and others to speak to us. At the end of the evening Stanley used to wind up by saying "That's it chaps, thanks for coming, don't let me down on Sunday". Sure enough, come Sunday the Church was packed with men. It was there also where Stanley and Vera first met, and later married.

We used to play for the same cricket club until WW2 broke out, when I volunteered for the RAF on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1939. Shortly afterwards Stanley followed suit, and we didn't meet again until after the War, when we all immediately resumed our friendship. Although his pastoral duties took him to various Yorkshire parishes as Vicar, we regularly phoned each other.

In 1977 when my father died, Stanley came out of retirement to conduct the Service. He was a wonderful friend to my wife and I. He is very sadly missed. As you probably know, he was a fine singer, loved Music, and up to his death was a member of the Burley-in-Wharfedale Musical Union.

So sorry to be the writer of bad news, but I'm sure you would have wanted to know what a fine chap he was.

*After replying to this letter, I received a second letter from Joe, dated 13 November 1998, which contained the verification that he did, indeed, know the correct Rev. Stanley Bennett. The photo referred to is the one showing the five men honoring their fallen comrades at the burial site. From Joe's second letter:*

Thank you for your letter of the 5<sup>th</sup>, received this morning. On opening it, and seeing the enclosed photograph, I immediately recognised Stanley as the person reading from the prayer book, and so did my wife.

I then phoned Vera at once and read your letter to her. As I was doing so she said "Oh yes, I remember Stanley writing to me and telling me all about that crash and burial in India." She also confirmed that he was stationed at RAF Amarda Road, SEAC.

I told Vera that you would be writing to her and sending a photograph, and she was so pleased, and sends you her kindest regards, as does her daughter Susan. I am delighted to have been able to clear up the mystery for you, and only regret that Stanley himself is no longer here. He would so much have enjoyed you getting in touch.

**18.B. Excerpt of 4 December 1998 letter to Matt Poole from Sue Riley, daughter of Padre Stanley G. Bennett:**

I can certainly confirm that the picture sent is that of my father Stanley Bennett. Mum has clear recollections of the accident and the letters that Dad wrote to her.

Whether we'll be able to find them is another matter. I can assure you that once the festive season is over we'll search in the many possible places they might be, and be whatever assistance we can.

I am writing on Mum's behalf, because although she keeps very fit for her 91 years, she does find it quite difficult to deal with letter writing, etc.

*Sue was unable to find anything specific to her father's involvement with the 26 July 1945 tragedy.*

## **PART NINETEEN: BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE AIR FIGHTING TRAINING UNIT (AFTU), RAF STATION AMARDA ROAD**

*The school where fourteen airmen were posted when their collision occurred began its existence as the Air Fighting Training Unit, 228 Group, located at the RAF airfield at Amarda Road, 100 miles southwest of Calcutta.*

*AFTU was established in 1943 under the command of Frank Carey, the legendary Battle of France and Battle of Britain Hurricane ace, who had also flown with great distinction against the Japanese in Burma and the Arakan.*

*The AFTU mission was to teach various flying tactics deemed valuable in the unique air war versus the Japanese. Carey was known in India as "Chota," which means "Little One," describing his short stature, but it was said that the term was no measure of this much-admired man.*

*According to the book "Royal Air Force Flying Training & Support Units" by Surtivant, et al, AFTU was disbanded on 25 May 1945 -- two months before the collision of the two Liberators. Its aircraft and personnel were transferred to the Tactical and Weapons Development Unit (T&WDU), which had been formed at Amarda Road the previous day.*

*T&WDU initially was a combination of two units: AFTU, already at Amarda Road, and the Ground Attack Training Unit (GATU), previously stationed at Ranchi, India.*

*On 15 July 1945 T&WDU absorbed the Jungle Target Research Unit (JTRU), also previously at Ranchi.*

*T&WDU was itself disbanded on 30 November 1945.*

*It is clear that both official and casual references to the Air Fighting Training Unit and AFTU continued to be made long after the absorption of AFTU into the newly-created T&WDU in May 1945. Five examples of this:*

- The official Royal Air Force accident report (Item 3.B) refers to "AFTU";*
- The official Royal New Zealand Air Force biography of casualty Ray Bullen (Item 8.L) refers to "the Advanced Flying Training Unit" (in error, but corresponding to "Air Fighting Training Unit");*
- Collision eyewitness Tom Winup's 2000 recollection (Item 3.G) refers to "the Advanced Flying Training Unit" (in error, but corresponding to "Air Fighting Training Unit");*
- Amarda Road instructor Ron Bramley's 1998 recollections (Item 19.A, immediately below) refer to "No. 1 AFTU"; and*
- The June and July 1945 pages of victim Cyril Geeson's flying logbook (not quoted elsewhere in this report) refer only to "AFTU". In fact, accompanying the Commanding Officer's signature at the bottom of the July logbook page (after Cyril's death) is a rubber stamp which reads "COMMANDING, AIR FIGHTING TRAINING UNIT, INDIA."*

*Because the terms "AFTU" and "Air Fighting Training Unit" continued to be used after the formation of T&WDU, I have chosen to use the original names in other parts of this report.*

*At AFTU / T&WDU many airmen were posted for a fortnight or more of rigorous instruction in such subjects as gunnery, navigation, bombing, fighter affiliation, and formation flying. Ron Bramley, whose diary extracts are presented in Items 3.E, 5.A, and 10.B, instructed at AFTU / T&WDU from its founding in mid-1943. He provided some background details in two letters from late 1998, excerpts of which I have combined:*

19.A. Excerpts of 23 November and 28 December 1998 letters from 26 July 1945 Liberator flight participant Ron Bramley, Gunnery Leader's Course Instructor at Air Fighting Training Unit, Amarda Road:

I was one of the original ex-operational air crew who had done the Gunnery Leaders Course in the U.K. and was posted to No. 1 AFTU to get it started (June 1943) with W/Cdr Horley for the Gunnery Leaders, W/Cdr "Chota" Carey DFC & bar, DFM & bar, as C.O. and Fighter Leaders, and later F/Lt Saunders for Bombing Leaders.

We [*the Bombing Wing staff*] started with Blenheims, on to Wellingtons, and then on to B-24s, all flown by ex-operational crews from the squadrons (on "rest"). Fighter Flight at first had Hurricanes. I was the Gunnery Leader Instructor (Flying).

Pupils were withdrawn from operational squadrons to be taught to be Fighter Leaders, Gunnery Leaders and later Bombing Leaders. The fighter pupils brought their own planes, and we also had a Drogue Towing Flight (Vultee Vengeance).



## **PART TWENTY: DETAILS ON MADRAS WAR CEMETERY, INDIA**

*The remains of the fourteen airmen are buried in Collective Grave 9.A.1-14 of Madras War Cemetery in the Indian city of Chennai – formerly named Madras. I have gathered some background information on the cemetery from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as well as from an Indian travel internet site located at this address: <http://travel.indiamart.com/tamil-nadu/monuments/madras-war-cemetery.html> .*

### **20.A. Historical Information:**

The MADRAS WAR CEMETERY was set up in 1952 by the Imperial War Graves Commission, which is now known as the "Commonwealth War Graves Commission" (CWGC). The cemetery, maintained by the CWGC in partnership with the Indian Government, was created to receive Second World War graves from many cemeteries in the south and east of India where their permanent maintenance could not be assured.

Of the 857 war graves in the Madras War Cemetery, 659 served for the forces of United Kingdom, 110 served for the forces of West Africa, 49 for undivided India (India before partition), 17 for Canada, 14 for Australia, 5 for New Zealand, one for Burma, one for Malaya, and one for Poland. There are also three non-world war graves.

The Stone of Remembrance greets the visitor to the Madras War Cemetery with the words from the Book of Ecclesiastes, "Their Name Liveth For Evermore". Then there is the Cross of Sacrifice, which is set up on an octagonal base bearing a bronze sword upon its shaft. These two monuments are common to all large CWGC cemeteries.

The MADRAS 1914-1918 MEMORIAL is situated at the rear of the cemetery. It bears the names of 1,039 servicemen who died during the First World War and who lie in many civil and cantonment cemeteries in various parts of India where it is not possible to maintain their graves in perpetuity. The Memorial honors 936 men from the forces of United Kingdom and 103 from undivided India.

### **20.B. Location:**

Madras War Cemetery is about 5 kilometers from the airport and 14 kilometers from the central railway station. The GST Road (Great Southern Trunk Road) leads from the airport past Trident Hotel to Kathipara roundabout - there is a Commonwealth War Graves Commission road direction sign on a small triangular island showing the way to the cemetery via Mount Poonamall Road, passing at the foot of St. Thomas Mount. The cemetery can easily be located on the right hand side of the road 1 kilometer from St. Thomas Mount. From Madras Central Railway Station the route is up Mount Road (Anna Selai) and over the bridge which crosses the River Cooum. The route passes St. Mary's Cemetery on Pallawan Road and is via LIC building (Life Insurance Corporation Building) situated on Mount Road, which leads to Anna Flyover and to Kathipara Junction.

## PART TWENTY-ONE: PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO, AND A MAP

### 21.A. Photos of some of the airmen who died in the collision

*At this time I only have photos of ten of the men (including one unnamed airman).*



**Felix Heynert** (*Patricia Lanegan*)



**Peter Ettlinger**  
(*Yvonne Colebatch*)



**Raymond Bullen** (*Dennis Tunnell*)



**Peter Ettlinger** at AFTU Amarda Road, 1945. The inked halo indicates that he died. (*Ron Bramley*)



*Above and below:*

**Cyril Geeson**, right, with mates,  
215 Squadron, India

*(George Geeson)*

*Above and below:* **William Smart**

*(Above: Blacker Smart, via Jim Lyttle;  
below: Blacker Smart, via James Kane)*





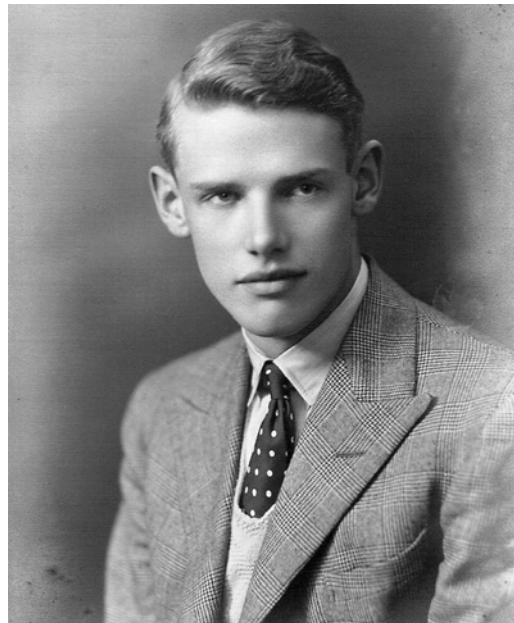
**Arnie Bridgman** while an airman with 159 Squadron in January 1944 (*Tom Hopkins*)



An undated photo of **George Paffey** in the RAF (*Paul Knighton*)



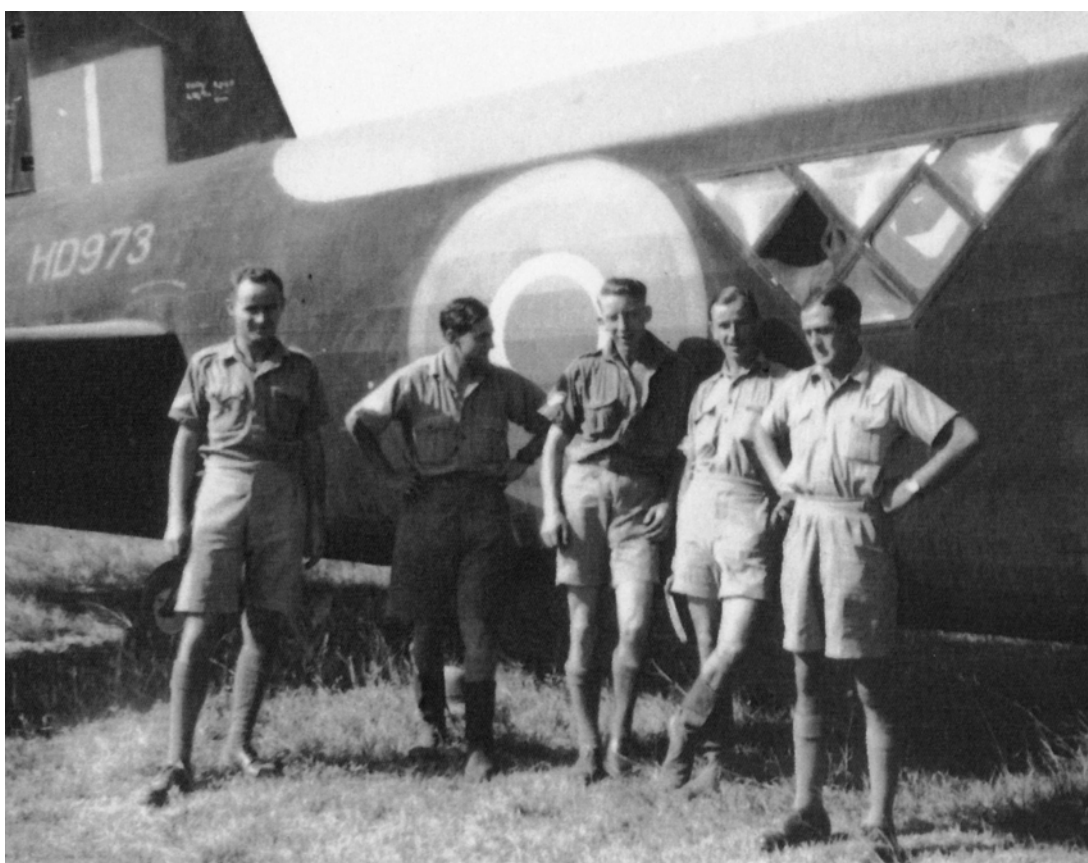
**Arnie Bridgman**, right, with a mate, 159 Squadron, India (*Robert Smith*)



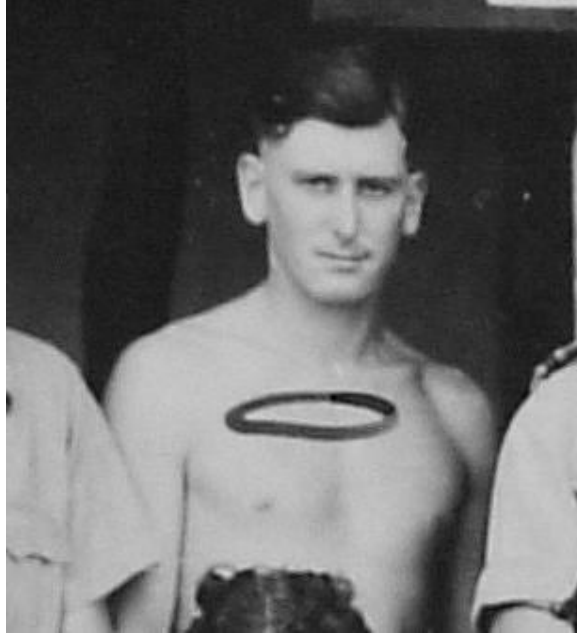
**Sydney Wells**, 1936 (*Pam Oxenbury*)



**Alfred Herbert**, left, with Ron Bramley, his best mate from AFTU Amarda Road. See Items 3.E, 5.A, and 10.B for Ron's logbook and diary entries pertaining to Alf, the Liberator collision, and the aftermath. (*Ron Bramley*)



**Alfred Herbert**, center, with his Wellington crew in the UK, 1943 (*Ron Bramley*)



(Ron Bramley)

This is the face of an **unknown victim** of the 26 July 1945 collision, from an AFTU "Bomber Wing" staff group photo taken in 1945.

Ron Bramley, who was in the same photo, said that this airman was killed in the collision of the two Liberators. Many years ago Ron had inked a halo onto the photo, to signify this man's death in the tragedy.

Peter Ettlinger, who also died, is the only other casualty of 26 July in this group photo. (Peter is similarly marked with a halo.) Of the other twelve victims, I have photos of Bridgman, Bullen, Geeson, Herbert, Heynert, Paffey, Smart, and Wells. The mystery victim's features do not match any of these faces.

Ron had this to say about the unidentified airman: *"No name, but I think he was one of the Bombing Leader instructors...and was probably a Warrant Officer."*

Bearing this in mind, I have eliminated the names of Paffey and Mathai from the list of possible names for the mystery airman. These two were groundcrew.

This leaves four men. My take on each:

- R.S. Manson: Because he was a Wireless Op/Air Gunner, not a Bomb Aimer, I disqualify him.
- A.N. Borrow: P/O rank for this Navigator/Bomb Aimer is one above W/O rank, so it is reasonable to consider him, still.
- W.R.G. Wood: F/Sgt rank for this Air Bomber is one below W/O rank. Probably not the mystery man.
- P.H.A. Smith: F/O rank for this Navigator/Bomb Aimer is two above W/O rank. Probably not the mystery man.

My conclusion is that **Alexander Borrow** is the leading candidate, but this is only a guess.



21.B. **Photos of the Madras War Cemetery graves** (via Jagan Pillarisetti, Feb 2007, except first photo)



Madras War Cemetery in Chennai (formerly called Madras), India. The 26 July 1944 airmen's graves are on the right but far in the background. (Peter Schmitthenner, 2002)



The imposing entrance to Madras War Cemetery, February 2007





Two views of the fourteen casualties of 26 July 1945, starting from the left end, front row:

*Borrow, Bridgman, Bullen, Ettlinger, Geeson, Herbert, Heynert, Manson, Mathai, Paffey, Smart, Smith, Wells, and Wood.*







Alexander Norman BORROW



Lewis Arnold "Arnie" BRIDGMAN



Raymond Maurice BULLEN DFC



Peter ETTLINGER





Cyril William GEESON



Alfred HERBERT



Félicité Pierre André HEYNERT

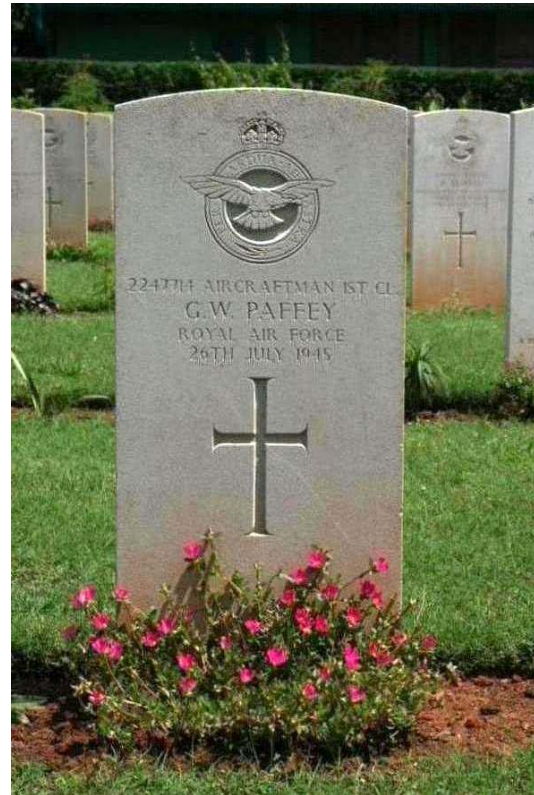


Robert Stanley MANSON





P.V. MATHAI



George William PAFHEY



William Joseph SMART



Peter Hubert Ash SMITH





Sydney Wilfred WELLS



Walter Reginald George WOOD



"THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE"  
Madras War Cemetery, February 2007





An enlarged photo of Peter Ettlinger's headstone. In 1995 Peter's daughter Yvonne, whose name graces Peter's tombstone, introduced me to the story of 26 July 1945 when she asked for my help in further unravelling the mystery.

**21.C. youtube.com video of Madras War Cemetery and the 26 July 1945 airmen's graves, taken in 2007**

The fourteen victims' graves are on youtube.com for the world to view, at:

[http://youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Madras+war+cemetery&search\\_type=](http://youtube.com/results?search_query=Madras+war+cemetery&search_type=)

Indian researcher Jagan Pillarisetti shot this footage in February 2007, on the same day he took the still photos which I have added to Section 21.B.

You will note that there is a time counter below the video. At :44 on the counter the camera pans across the 26 July 1945 graves, which are in the front row of their section. Starting at :49 Jagan focuses from left to right on these graves, which are in this order:

**Borrow, Bridgman, Bullen, Ettlinger, Geeson, Herbert, Heynert, Manson, Mathai, Paffey, Smart, Smith, Wells, and Wood.**

Royal New Zealand Air Force pilot Ray Bullen's marker includes a distinctively larger cross than found on the other headstones. This is the pattern found on all New Zealand grave markers.

The resolution is not good enough to read most names.

At 1:08 Jagan focuses in on a closeup of P.V. Mathai's marker. Jagan has a website dedicated to the history of the Indian air forces, so he wanted to get a good shot of this marker. Mathai was a Royal Indian Air Force instrument repairer who, like fellow groundcrewman George Paffey, had simply gone up for a ride on that fateful day.

At 1:16 Jagan continues going down the first row of graves. At 1:17 to 1:18 he sweeps by George Paffey's grave marker. The four after George's are the last of the men who died.

The video coverage of the graves ends at about the 1:30 mark.

**21.D. William Smart's name on the Portadown, Northern Ireland war memorial**



(James Kane)

## KILLED IN INDIA AIR ACCIDENT.

FORMER PORTADOWN  
VOLUNTEER.

Warrant-Officer Wm. J. Smart,  
R.A.F. V.R., Wireless-Operator Air  
Gunner, son of Mr. and Mrs. Smart,  
241, Bognor Tee, Portadown, lost his  
life in a flying accident in India on  
28th July.



Born at the residence of his grand-  
father, the late Mr. Wm. David  
Smart, Dundesart, Crumlin, Co.  
Antrim, deceased finished his edu-  
cation at the Lowry Memorial School,  
Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone. Before joining  
up in September, 1940, he was on  
the staff of Messrs. Henry Denny &  
Sons, Portadown. Aged 26 years, he  
had 2,000 hours service flying experi-  
ence and had served on three fronts  
—from England, in the Middle East  
and Burma. He went overseas in  
1941.

His father is an ex-member of the  
R.U.C., having served in Bushmills,  
Portrush and several stations in Co.  
Tyrone. With him and his wife sym-  
pathy is being expressed on the  
death of their gallant son.



21.F. **Kenneth King's photos (with his captions) of the 1945 expedition to recover and bury the remains of the crash victims**

*Kenneth's captions are added below the photos. Refer to Item 5.N for the full story of the recovery efforts, and for a more detailed explanation of Kenneth's captions.*



#2: Two of these aircraft were lost.



#3: The start of our mission. Camp to crash: 70 miles, which took us 4 plus days, with rough sleeping and a few problems.





#4: The journey to the crash scene.



#5: The journey to the crash scene.



#6: The journey to the crash scene.



#7: Crash scenes. No fire -- thank God



#8: Crash scenes. No fire -- thank God



#9: The search to find a little raised ground, in an endeavour to find a suitable spot for burial away from the wetlands.



#10: Best spot selected.



#11: Doing the best we can!!



#12: The funeral service. It could not have been more reverent if it had been Westminster Abbey.



#13: We all prayed that those we lost were at peace at last and free from pain.



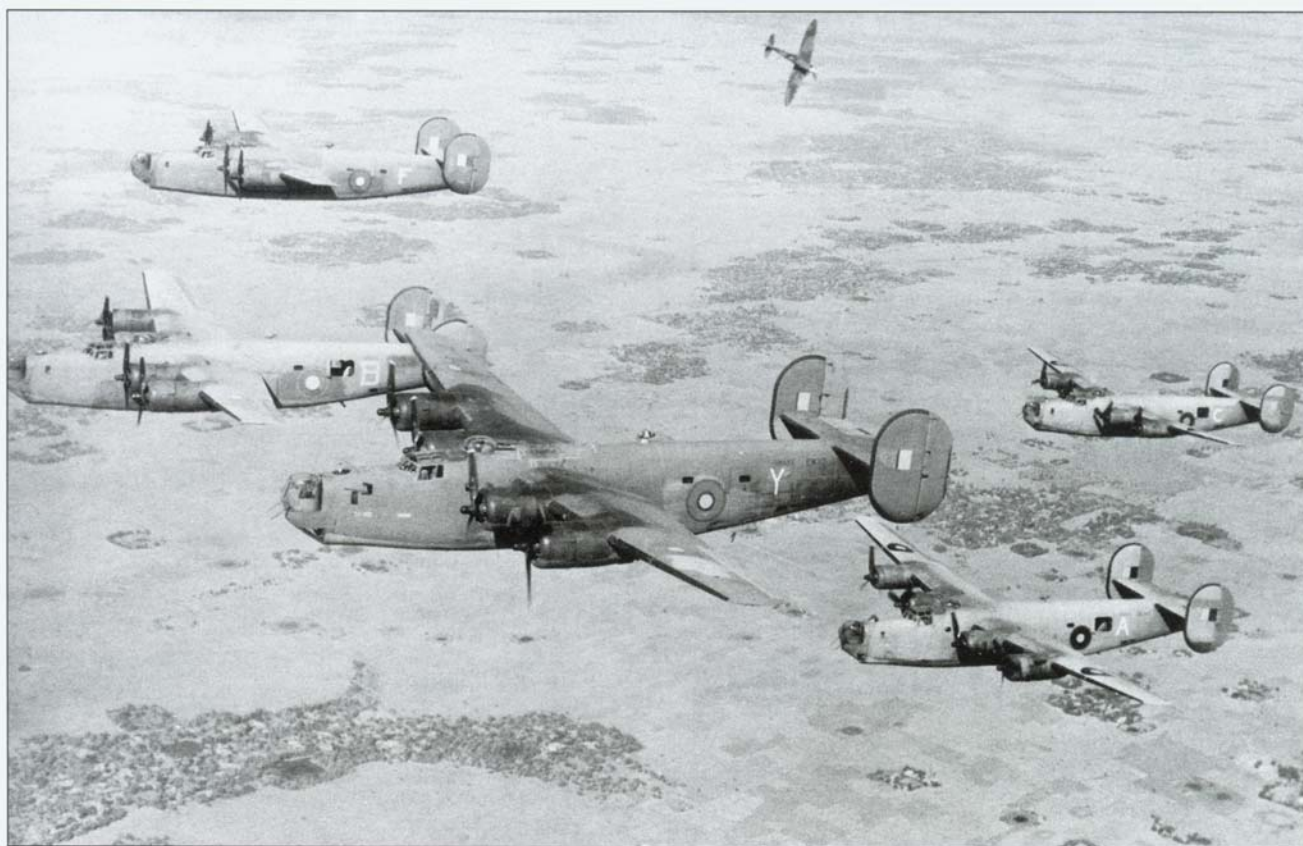


#14: In the distance. Goodbye & God Bless.



#15: On the way back to base.

21.G. Air Fighting Training Unit in flight, with at least one of the lost bombers from 26 July 1945 visible.



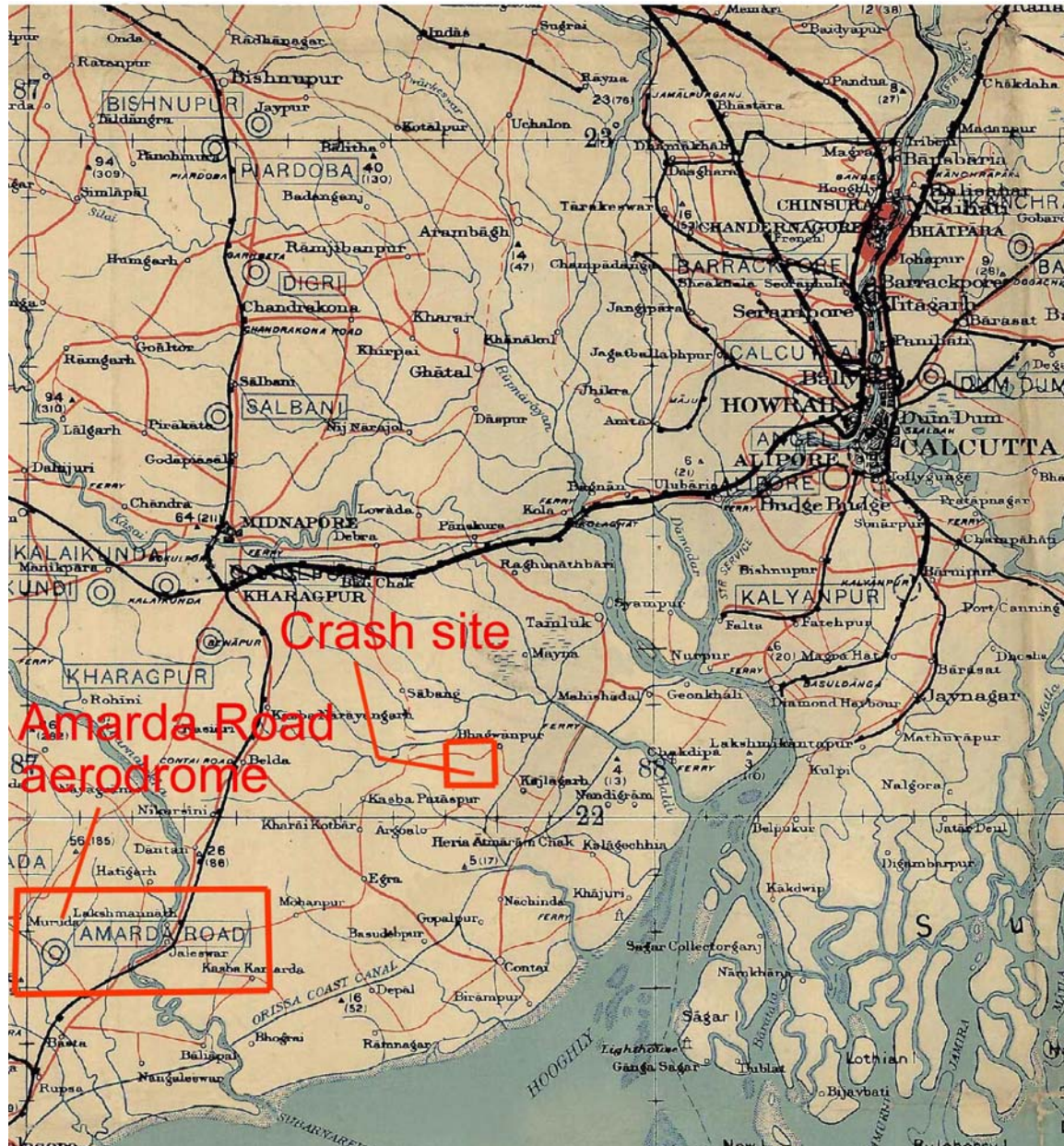
*A Spitfire makes a mock attack on five Liberators of the Air Firing Training Unit, Amarda Road. Identifiable are EW113 [Y], EW247 [A] and KG833 [B].*

Liberator **EW247** [fuselage code **A**] , which collided with **EW225** on 26 July 1945, is at lower right in this undated photo. Currently the letter code applied to EW225 is unknown, so there is a possibility that EW225 is also in this photo. The caption is slightly wrong; it was "Air Flying Training Unit", not "Air Firing Training Unit". (From the book "The Liberator in Royal Air Force and Commonwealth Service" by James D. Oughton with John Hamlin and Andrew Thomas.)



## 21.H. Wartime map showing Amarda Road and crash location

This official map, printed in 1945, shows the locations of airfields. Amarda Road is highlighted, as is the approximate crash area (22° 04' North; 87° 42.5' East). The latitude and longitude lines on the map are at an interval of 5'. The distance between Amarda Road and the crash location is approximately 47 statute miles. Amarda Road is roughly 100 statute miles southwest of Calcutta.



(F/Lt. Percy Miller DFC, via Martin Bond)

The End