



TALES FROM THE ARCHIVE

RAF PATHFINDERS ARCHIVE - New & Historical Items, No.2 – 10 December 2017

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NEW: RONALD PARKER, REID CREW, 97 SQD



Laney Parker has sent details of her father, Ronald Parker, (*left*), who in the summer of 1944 was based at Coningsby, flying with 97 Squadron with what was evidently a top crew, the pilot being F/L W. M. Reid.

97 Squadron was now attached to 5 Group (see **TALES**, No.1)

Reid's crew, of which Parker was Navigator, took the role of Deputy Controller of the bombing raids on at least two occasions, as on the 9/10 August operation against Chattelerault. The ORB entry below gives the crew's report on what was a very precisely timed operation.

9/10 AUGUST 1944 - CHATTELERAULT

'ND495N F/L W.M.Reid, F/Sgt W.Richards, F/L R.L.Parker, F/Sgt T.Savage, W/O B.Harthill, F/Sgt D.P.Cannings, F/Sgt G.Brown. (**Deputy Controller I – Target 1**). Up 2054 Down 0246. 9 x 7" clusters, 4 x 1000lb ANM 44, 1 x 1000lb ANM 65, 2 Wanganui flares. Thin cloud layer 10,000', hazy below. Target identified on H2S, Gee and ETA. [...] Main Force ordered to bomb. This carried on and at 0008 hours "Cease bombing" order given while more greens were put down. At 0012 hours 9 seconds delay was given for bombing and this was immediately followed by "Complete bombing and return to base". (0013 hours).'

Despite the late stage of the war, these operations could still be extremely dangerous. Not long after the Givors operation, on 16/17 August, came the Stettin Bay mining operation, in which the aircraft of the Controller, Wing Commander Edward Leach Porter, was shot down with the loss of the entire crew. Before the Lancaster went down, Porter (*left*) transmitted a message which was picked up by his Deputy Marker, Squadron Leader Locke:



"At approx 0115 hours, W/C Porter (Controller) called up on VHF to say his aircraft had been hit and that he was baling out; we replied wishing him the best of luck and he thanked us."



Parker's crew was also one who heard Porter's voice for the last time. When they returned to Coningsby, they gave this information at the debriefing: "Told to go home at 0113 hours. **At 0116 hours heard Controller say he was hit and was baling out.**" (97 Squadron ORB.)

Four of the Porter crew, including Porter himself, are buried at Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, the same place where the ashes of the RAF officers murdered after the Great Escape are interred. The cemetery is located in the west of Poland, approximately 200 miles east of Berlin, and after the war it became the final resting place for RAF prisoners of war who had died at Stalag Luft III, the scene of the Great Escape, and at other POW camps in Poland. The graves work was supervised by RAF Officers of the Missing Research and Enquiry Service, the MRES.

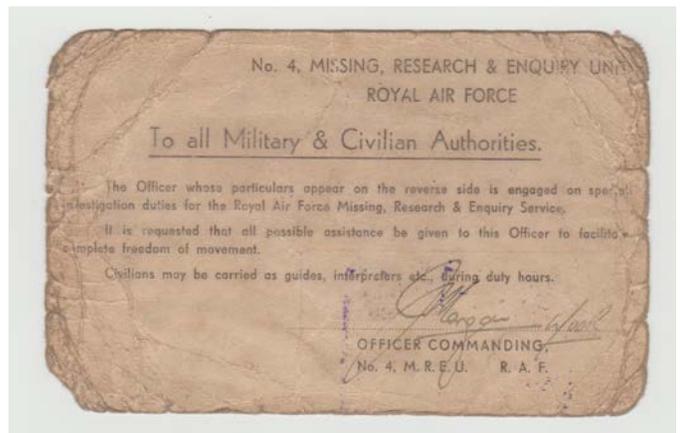


NEW: HAROLD WILSON, LASHAM CREW, 97 SQD, & MRES

All officers serving in the MRES were volunteers. Importantly, they were also surviving ex-aircrew who felt a strong degree of involvement in the task. Amongst their number was Harold Wilson, who had flown with Bob Lasham's crew during the war.

Left top : Exhumation at Borkum, German Frisian Islands. On 4 August 1944, Borkum was the scene of one of the most notorious war crimes against airmen, the murder of 7 members of the USAAF. Left: Harold Wilson; below his MRES pass card. (Barbara Armstrong)

Harold's daughter, Barbara Armstrong, has sent us information and photographs of her father and his MRES work, which are extremely welcome as he is the first 97 Squadron, and indeed Pathfinder, MRES officer that we have come across. Information about individual men who served in the MRES and its Army equivalent, the Graves Service, is very difficult to come by. *Below: a mixed Army and RAF team, working on the identification of the dead, on Schiermonnikoog in the Dutch Frisian Islands. (Jennie Gray)*



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