



The crash of a Halifax in Ardleigh.

During the evening of 25th February eleven Mk2 Halifax bombers of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron took off from RAF Pocklington as part of a raid on Nuremberg. They experienced severe weather conditions and two aircraft returned to Pocklington because of the icing. An hour after its take off, at 8.24pm, a third aircraft, DY-P, crashed in Ardleigh. The aircraft came down in the fields of Home Farm, now Peake Fruit, heading towards Badliss Hall Farm. The aircraft exploded on impact creating a crater about 30yds in diameter and 8ft deep and all the crew were killed. About 30mins after the crash the 1000lb bomb which they were carrying in the aircraft exploded. The crash badly damaged Badliss Hall Farm and destroyed some of their outbuildings. There were numerous small fires, two straw stacks were badly damaged, and it took the Fire Brigades of Manningtree and Colchester two hours to get the fires under control. The RAF Accident Report said that the cause of the crash was not established but it was probably loss of control in bad weather conditions.

The crew were:

Flt Sgt Charles Henry Bray RAF, Pilot, aged 27, buried at St Catherine, Ringshall, Suffolk. One of eight sons born to Joseph and Ada Bray, Charles was born and brought up in South Croydon. After school he joined the RAF and served in Palestine before converting to the Halifax. He had married Rowena Angus in 1940 and left two young daughters. After the War Rowena remarried and the family emigrated to New Zealand.

Flt Sgt Cyril James Drane Smith RAFVR, Wireless operator, aged 23, buried at Patna Old Cemetery. Son of Denis Drane Smith and Gladys Matilda Smith; husband of Mary Blane Smith, of Carnshalloch, Patna, East Ayrshire. He had considerable operational experience and had flown over 50? missions, mainly in Hampdens with 49 Sqn. He had married Mary Blane Watt in 1942 and left a daughter, born 3 months after the crash. (Over 50 missions seems unlikely and I suspect that some were just training flights. I am waiting for documentation from his daughter.)

Sgt Thomas Bertram Barfoot RAFVR, (Tommy) Bomb aimer, aged 19, buried at St Leonard's, Birdingbury. Son of Charles and Constance Barfoot, of Birdingbury, Warwickshire. He won a

scholarship to Lawrence Sheriff School in Rugby and then did his RAF training in USA and Canada. He was a last minute replacement for one of the regular crew.

Sgt John Dudley RAFVR, Air Gunner, aged 20, buried at St James, Titsey, Kent. Son of George William and Grace Dudley, of Titsey, Oxted. He was educated at Limpsfield Church School and after he left school he became a gamekeeper on the Titsey Estate in Surrey, seat of the Levenson-Gower family. He was a last minute replacement for one of the regular crew.

Sgt Leonard Victor William Herbert RAFVR, Navigator/observer, aged 22, buried at the Eltham Cemetery, Woolwich. He was the son of William and Louisa Herbert, of Welling, Kent; and husband of Evelyn R Herbert who he had married in 1942. His mother had died in 1936 and he is buried in the same grave. Evelyn remarried in 1947.

Sgt Irving Louis Sanitsky, RCAF, Air Gunner, aged 22, buried in Norwich Cemetery. Son of Simon and Ida R. Sanitsky, of Fall River, Massachusetts, USA. He was president of his high school class and later studied aviation mechanics at the NYA school at Quoddy, Maine. He joined the RCAF in April 1941 and arrived in England a year later.

Sgt Edward Leslie Widgery RAF, Flight engineer, aged 35, buried at Oystermouth Cemetery, Swansea. He was the son of Albert and Ann Widgery, of Ammanford, Carmarthenshire and was educated at Taunton School and Swansea Grammar School. In 1938 he married Iris Mary Jones and the couple who lived in Sketty, Swansea, had two sons.



A Mk2 Halifax of 102 Squadron at Pocklington in 1942.

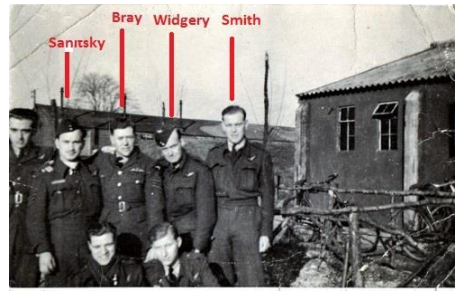
Current photographs:



Bray



Original crew



Final crew, Herbert unidentified.



Dudley



Sanitsky



Widgery



Barfoot

27 EE Tommy Barfoot



Tommy as a young boy at Birdingbury School (1933). He won a scholarship to Lawrence Sheriff School.....



Other casualties:

V1 which hit on 27th September 1944.

Ada Cheeseman, 35, of Thatched Cottages, Harwich Road. Wife of Sapper Arthur John Cheeseman RE, who was serving abroad,

Rosemary Cheeseman, 8,

Pamela Cheeseman, 18 months,

Wilfred Jaggard, 70, ("An elderly gentleman") also of Thatched Cottages. Husband of the late Mary Jaggard.

P47 crash **2Lt Samuel Keith Batson**, 22. Only? child of Henry and Therese Batson of Los Angeles, California and buried in Cambridge. He took off from Boxted and then had engine failure and crashed on Wick Farm on 30/12/1944. He appears in 2 family trees, I have contacted both authors. He was flying a P47D which was quite an old airframe, originally used by Hub Zemke. A static reproduction with the same number on show at Duxford.

