

Harleston Remembrance Event – 9th March 2022

80th Anniversary of the aircraft tragedy that occurred on 9th March 1942



Photo Credit: Kim Collinson

It was during the middle of World War Two that the Mark III Wellington Bomber X3643 from 9 Squadron RAF Honnington was part of an operation of 9 Aircraft that were tasked for an attack target on Essen in Germany. The aircraft took off on this operational flight from RAF Honnington at 2008 hrs on 9th March 1942 and it was only some 41 minutes later at 2049 hrs that it was requesting a return to base due to engine trouble. A short while after, it was heard by the Bungay Observer Corps Post running on one engine and then by the Harleston Observer Corps Post who heard it circle the town and finally saw it crash in flames at 2121 hrs in the vicinity of Briar Farm and Jays Green. It was only in the air for a total of 1 hour 14 minutes. Sadly, all the six occupants of the aircraft were killed.

The Crew of The Wellington – X3643



In Memory of
Sergeant Pilot
James Cartwright
1110531, 9 Sqn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who died on 09 March 1942 Age 26
Son of James William and Annie Cartwright, of Stockport.
Remembered with Honour
Stockport Crematorium

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In Memory of
Warrant Officer Observer
Terence De Valera Dignan
581147, 9 Sqn., Royal Air Force who died on 09 March 1942 Age 21
Son of Patrick James Dignan and Rose Dignan, of West Derby, Liverpool.
Remembered with Honour
Honington (All Saints) Churchyard, Suffolk

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In Memory of
Sergeant Wireless Op./Air Gunner
Thomas Hunter Errington
1063724, 9 Sqn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who died on 09 March 1942 Age 19
Son of Ralph Pattison Errington, and Elizabeth Errington, of South Shields.
Remembered with Honour
South Shields (Harton) Cemetery

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In Memory of
Sergeant
David Stanley Nicholas
534052, 9 Sqn., Royal Air Force who died on 09 March 1942 Age 27
Son of Henry and Elizabeth Nicholas, of Treadlaw.
Remembered with Honour
Treadlaw Cemetery

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In Memory of
Sergeant Pilot
John Andrew Rogers
1365260, 9 Sqn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who died on 09 March 1942 Age 26
Son of George Austin Septimus Rogers and Beatrice Rogers, of Chopwell. His brother, Denis Alan Rogers, also died on service.
Remembered with Honour
Chopwell (St. John) Churchyard

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

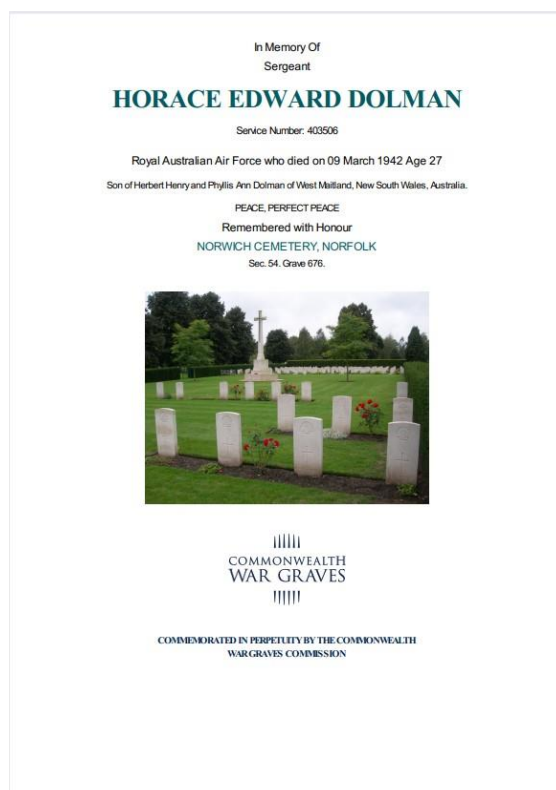
In Memory of
Sergeant Air Gunner
Albert Edward Singerton
647330, 9 Sqn., Royal Air Force who died on 09 March 1942 Age 21
Son of Harold George and Edith Singerton: husband of Gladys Ruby Singerton, of Barking.
Remembered with Honour
Barking (Rippleside) Cemetery

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Also, tragically on this same day an RAF Hawker Hurricane crashed nearby at Redenhall. The Hawker Hurricane was from No 56 Operational Training Unit based at RAF Sutton Bridge in Lincolnshire. The unit trained fighter pilots for 'RAF Fighter Command'.



The pilot that died was from the Royal Australian Air Force and was changing position during a cloud formation practice flight when the accident happened.



Brief History of No 9 Squadron RAF Honnington

9 Squadron was formed at St Omer, France, on 8 December 1914 and served with distinction throughout World War 1, in the roles of Army co-operation, reconnaissance and bombing. They also carried out pioneering work on airborne wireless communications.

In January 1939, 8 months before the start of the Second World War, 9 Squadron started flying Wellingtons from Stradishall, before moving to Honington in July 1939. 9 Squadron conducted the first operational bombing sortie of the Second World War on 4 September 1939 against the German Fleet at Brunsbuttel. As the war progressed, the Squadron's Wellingtons were steadily upgraded with important modifications like self-sealing petrol tanks and more powerful engines. 9 Squadron built a reputation as a specialist bombing unit.

By the time of the tragedy in Harleston, the Wellington was in its last 4 months of operational service with 9 Squadron. By pure coincidence, the first ever Operational Lancaster sortie, was flown by 44 Sqn to bomb Essen the following day, on 10 March 42. On 1 August 1942, 9 Sqn flew the last of 2,458 operational missions against Germany. In those 35 months of war, the Squadron had lost 210 aircrew, 4 groundcrew and at least 45 Wellington bombers.

9 Sqn started flying the Lancaster bomber and quickly established outstanding standards of bombing accuracy. The squadron was chosen, along with the newly formed 617 Sqn as the RAF's two specialist bombing squadrons and together, they carried out many famous raids, including the 3 raids to destroy the Tirpitz battleship, in OPs Paravane, Obviate and Catechism from Sep 44 to Nov 44.

Following the Second World War, 9 Sqn flew Lincolns for 6 years, then Canberra bombers for 10 years, then Vulcan Bombers for 20 years and in April 1982, 9 Squadron became the world's first operational Tornado bomber squadron.

In its 37 years flying the Tornado, 9 Sqn flew in Gulf War 1 & 2, the Balkans crisis, Afghanistan, Libya & Syria. On 1 April 2019, 9 Sqn moved to RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland and currently flies the Typhoon multi role aircraft.

9 Squadron deploys regularly to Romania to deliver enhanced Air Policing as part of the ongoing NATO assurance measures in Eastern Europe.

A selection of photographs from the Remembrance Event. Photo Credit: Harleston RBL



RBL & RAF Flags in Harleston Town Centre

The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA
The Royal British Legion Harleston & District Branch (BR 0647) – Registered Charity Number: 219279



Opening address and welcome by the RBL Branch Chairman: Jim Keywood



RBL Branch Secretary Terry Pegg flanked by the 9 Squadron RAF Association Standard Bearer Mike Inder and the Officiating Clergy Reverend Nigel Tuffnell



4 Standard Bearers from left to right

Diss & District Branch of The Royal Air Force Association
Harleston & District Branch of The Royal British Legion
Dickleburgh & District Branch of The Royal British Legion
9 Squadron Royal Air Force Association

Poem – The Moon Shines Bright, written by Flight Sergeant Jim Brookbank who was a 9 Squadron Lancaster Bomb Aimer. The poem was recited during the service on 9th March 2022 by Nigel Nickles from 9 Squadron RAF Association.

THE MOON SHINES BRIGHT

The moon shines bright
On the Ruhr tonight,
A Wellington make its attack.
The gunner peers
And controls his fears
That perhaps he won't get back.

The target burns
And the aircraft turns
To avoid the vicious flak.
The gunner grins
As the fighter spins
"I'll be glad when we get back".

With its tanks on fire
The Wimpy climbs higher,
A salvo has broken its back.
The whole crew dies
In those horrible skies
And they won't be coming back.



Nigel Nickles reading the poem 'The moon shines bright'



Harleston RBL Vice Chairman Jon Duckworth reading out the names of the Aircrew. Redenhall with Harleston Town Council Chairman Trevor Graham placing a remembrance cross.



Bob Collis from Lowestoft Aviation Society placing a remembrance cross.



District Councillor Jeremy Savage placing a remembrance cross.



Malcolm Fearnside had travelled from France to attend the Service. Malcolm's father was a 9 Squadron Bomber Pilot, Flt Sgt Alan 'Kitto' Fearnside, who was killed in a December 1939 raid over Heligoland Bight.





Diss & District RAF Association placing a remembrance cross



Harleston Schools laying a wreath



The Harleston Schools were well represented





Redenhall with Harleston Town Council Chairman Trevor Graham

The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA
The Royal British Legion Harleston & District Branch (BR 0647) – Registered Charity Number: 219279



So pleasing to have the schools involved.

The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA
The Royal British Legion Harleston & District Branch (BR 0647) – Registered Charity Number: 219279



A crowd of over 150 had gathered for the service



Bob Collis from the Lowestoft Aviation Society with a piece of the propeller blade from the crashed Wellington Bomber X3643.

The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA
The Royal British Legion Harleston & District Branch (BR 0647) – Registered Charity Number: 219279



Remembrance Crosses for the Aircrew

The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA
The Royal British Legion Harleston & District Branch (BR 0647) – Registered Charity Number: 219279



Chris Lown the standard bearer for Harleston & District Branch of The Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA
 The Royal British Legion Harleston & District Branch (BR 0647) – Registered Charity Number: 219279