

## Liberator Plane Crash

The article below appeared in *The Times* 23 November 1945.

**27 KILLED IN AIR  
ACCIDENT**

**LIBERATOR CRASH ON  
DEVON HILLSIDE**

A Liberator aircraft bound for India crashed on the Blackdown Hill, Devon, yesterday, and all 27 occupants—22 Army passengers and the crew of five—were killed.

The Liberator, which had taken off from an aerodrome near Ilminster, about six miles away, had apparently not attained sufficient height to clear the hill. It struck a tree, crashed, and burst into flames.

A communiqué issued last night stated:—

The Air Ministry regrets to announce that a troop-carrying Liberator aircraft of R.A.F. Transport Command crashed shortly after taking off from the R.A.F. station at Merryfield, Somerset, to-day (Thursday). There are no survivors from the 22 Army passengers and the crew of five. Further details will be available when the next-of-kin have been informed.



*Consolidated Liberator C Mk VIII*

The following appeared in the *Somerset County Herald*—24 November 1945

### TWENTY-SEVEN KILLED IN SOMERSET 'PLANE CRASH

#### R.A.F. LIBERATOR STRIKES HILLSIDE IN A FOG

#### ARMY PERSONNEL ON WAY TO INDIA

Names and addresses of the 27 victims of the Liberator crash at Castle Neroche, on the Blackdown Hills, Somerset, which occurred Thursday at about 11 a.m. had not been revealed yesterday by the R.A.F. and Army authorities.

They are anxious that the next-of kin of all of them shall be officially notified before they hear from any other source.

It is known, however, that the 27 victims—26 died practically outright and one died in the ambulance on the way to hospital—were five members the Liberator's crew and 22 British Army personnel.

It is understood that four were British military officers attached to the Indian Army and that the 18 other ranks belonged to the Royal Corps of Signals. One officer is believed to be a Somerset man and the homes of the other 21 military personnel are in many parts of the country. <sup>1</sup>

#### FROM MERRYFIELD AERODROME

The Liberator, of R.A.F. Transport Command, was bound for India, where some of the passengers were returning from leave and others were being posted.

The crash occurred shortly after the Liberator had taken off from Merryfield, an R.A.F. station near Ilminster, a few miles away.

<sup>1</sup> Probably Lieutenant A. G. QUICK (Indian Signal Corps).

The 'plane did not clear the hilltop, but struck a high hedge and was smashed and burnt out. There was no eyewitness, but Mr. George Hill and Mr. L. Lindley, who live in the district, heard an explosion and were soon on the spot. The only one still alive died on the way to hospital.

Parts of the 'plane fell on the side road, which was blocked, but the bodies were in a field near the major portion of the wreckage.

### STRUCK A HEDGE

Mrs. H. J. White, wife of the licensee of the Castle Inn, Buckland St. Mary, said: "It was very foggy over the hill at the time. Our house is almost in direct line with the point where the crash occurred and might have been hit if the 'plane had continued flying a little longer at about the same height. Evidently the 'plane struck a hedge on the side of the hill."

**Probable cause:** "The captain completed the first turn to the left after takeoff at a too low altitude, about 800 feet instead of the minimum 1,500 feet as mentioned in the departure procedures. Low visibility due to poor weather conditions was considered as a contributory factor."<sup>1</sup> [The hill is approximately 890 feet.]

On 23 June 2000 a memorial stone was placed in Hare Lane, Buckland St Mary at the sight of the crash. It was attended by local and Polish dignitaries.

#### Victims of the crash

##### *Polish Air Force - 53 (R.A.F.) Sqdn.*

Flight Lieutenant L. MIELECKI (pilot)

Flight Sergeant J. BRZEZINSKI (flight engineer)

Flying Officer A. WIZE (wireless operator)

Flying Officer S. KLEYBOR (navigator)

##### *Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve*

Flying Officer G. J. MYERS (co-pilot)

Captain H. C. BUCK MC (1st Punjab Regiment)

Lieutenant P. BILES (Royal Indian Army Service Corps)

Lieutenant A. G. QUICK (Indian Signal Corps)

Major H. W. G. STAUNTON (Indian Medical Service)

##### *Royal Corps of Signals*

Signalman R. C. ANDERSON

Signalman R. O. ANDERSON

Signalman J. ATTWOOD

Signalman D. B. BENJAMIN

Signalman A. BIRCH

Signalman J. BREWIS

Signalman W. CHARLTON

Signalman A. CLARK

Signalman L. J. CURRY

Signalman H. DONOVAN

Signalman L. DOWNES

Signalman L. R. DYER

Signalman P. B. FAIRBURN

Signalman R. D. FARRANCE

Driver (i/c) B. W. FOX

Signalman F. W. GENT

Signalman O. WILLIAMS

Signalman R. E. C. WILLIAMS



*The memorial in Hare Lane*

1 <https://www.baaa-acro.com/crash/crash-consolidated-lb-30a-liberator-raf-merryfield-27-killed>.



## Additional Materials

These materials are taken from OS and War Office maps, further press reports, a further witness report, two obituaries, the Official Accident Investigation Report,<sup>1</sup> the Commonwealth Graves Commission listing and a 2021 review of the evidence submitted to the Court of Inquiry. (Blue text indicates pencil amendments / corrections on the originals.)

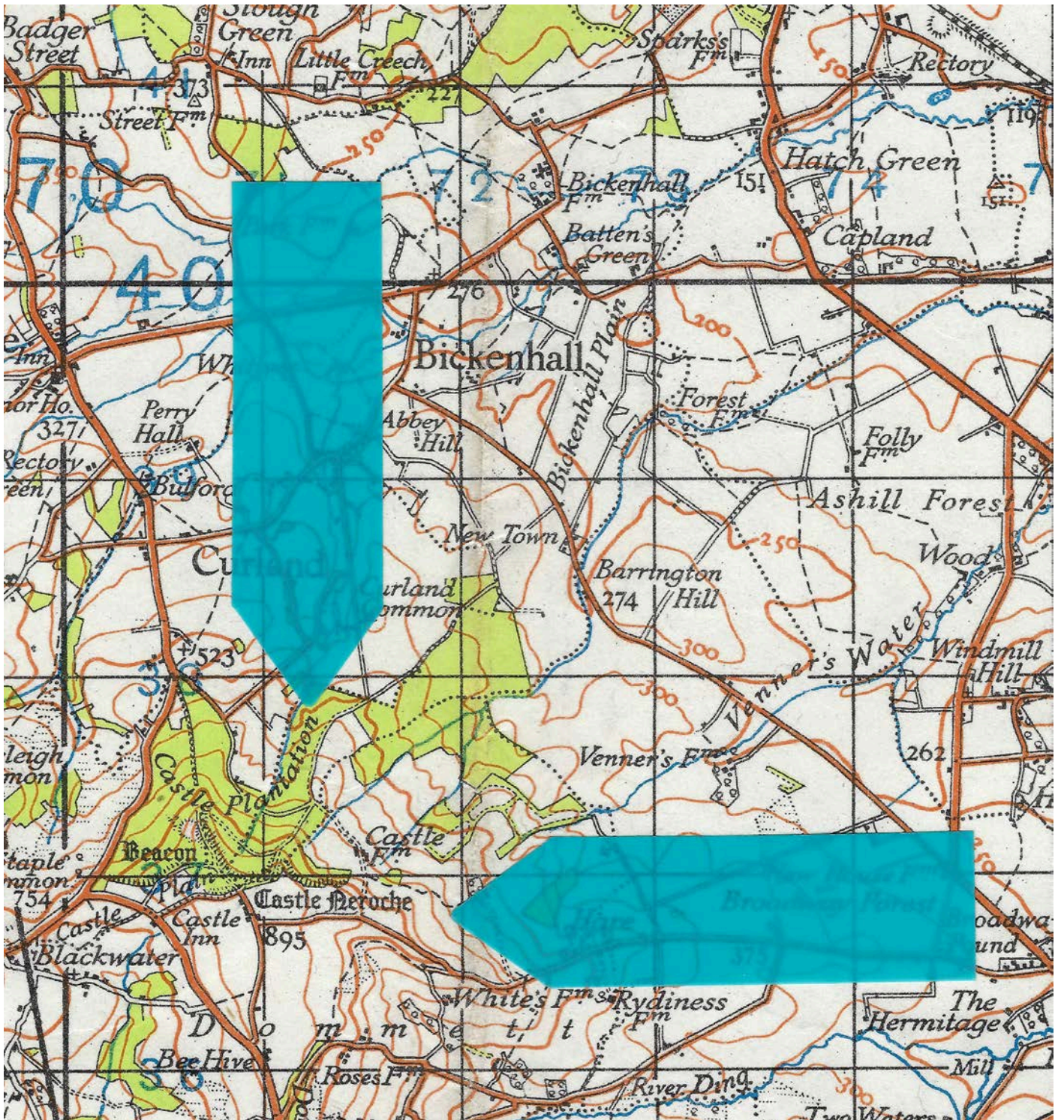
The biography of Captain Buck was placed at the Hare Lane Memorial in 2019. It is secured to the ground by a spike. Its provenance is unknown.

The mention of Broadway Pound in the report is confusing as that area is more than two miles from the actual site of the crash.



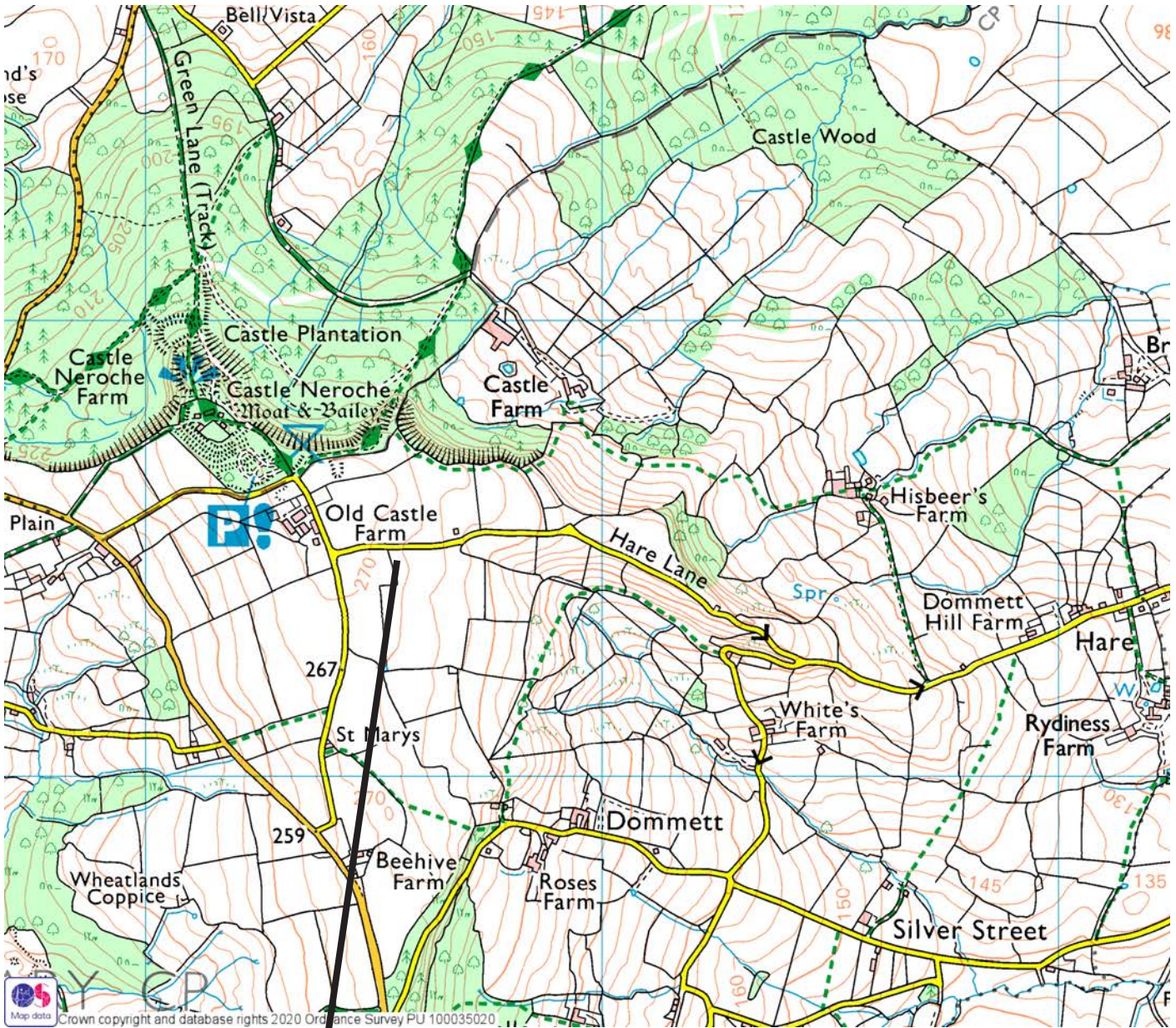
<sup>1</sup> National Archives - AVIA 5/27/W2296.





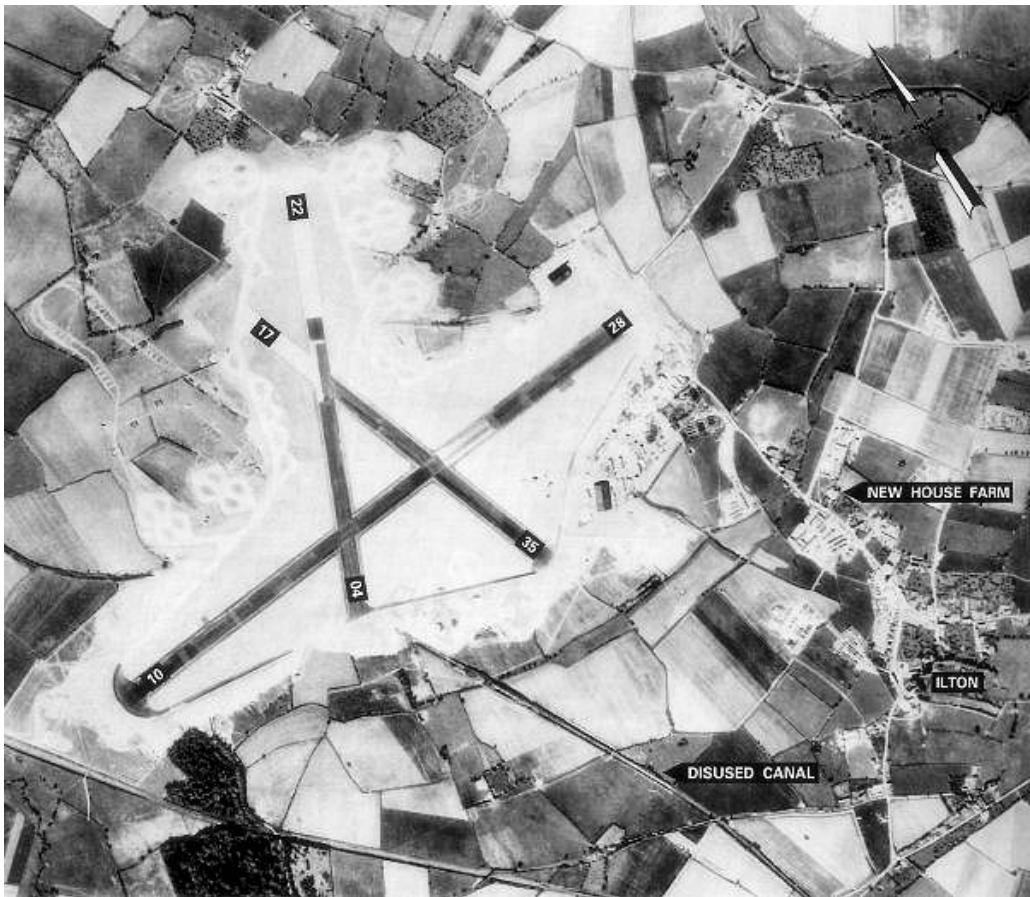
Detail of the crash site from OS ST 129 War Office map



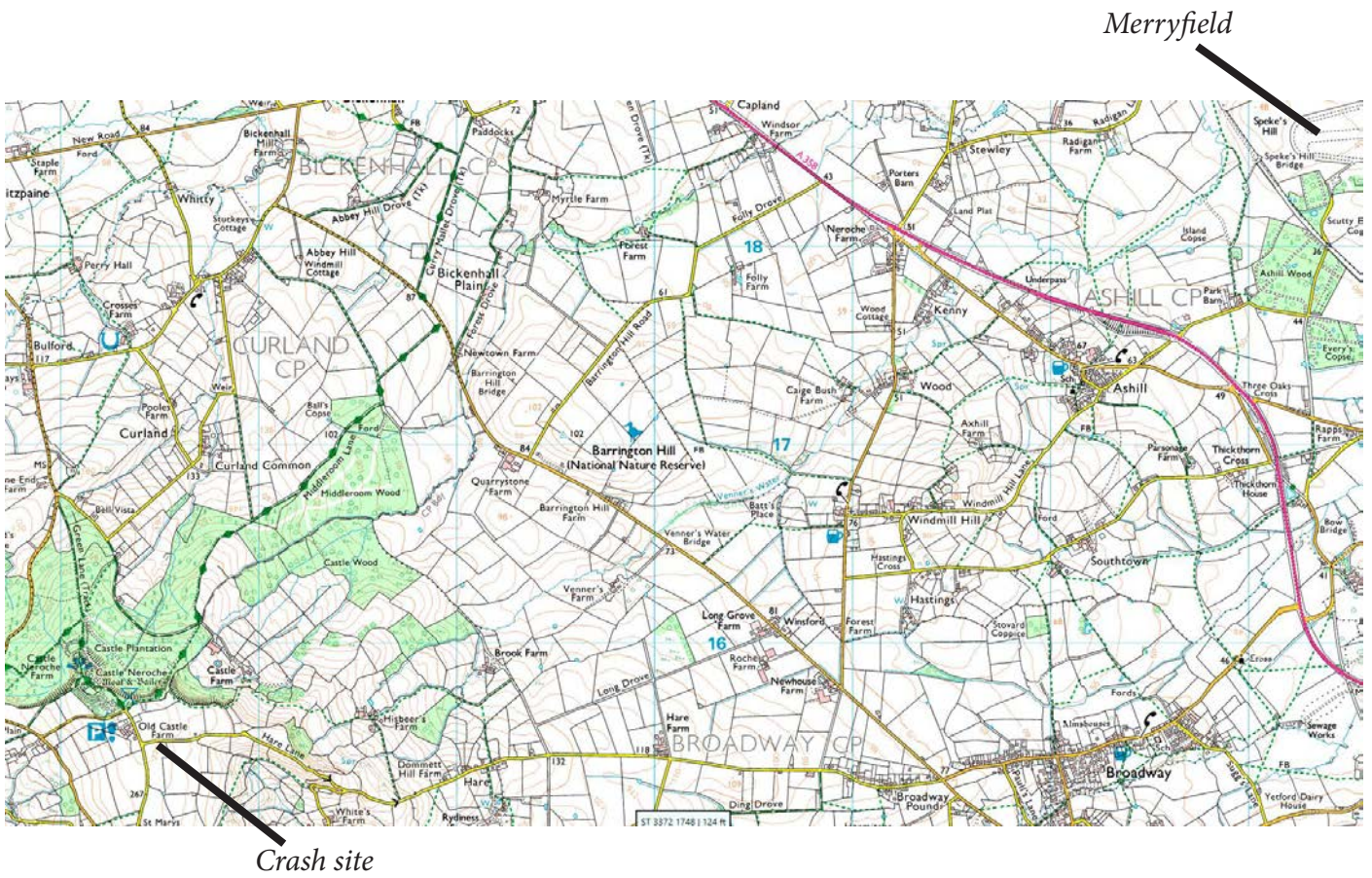


*Detail of the crash site from OS ST 129 1:25,000 (2021)*





Runways at Merryfield - 1943



ACCIDENTS BRANCH.Investigator's Report.

1. Type and marking of aircraft: Liberator Mk. V111 KH.126
2. Type and number of engines: Twin Wasp R.1830-65A.  
Port Outer No. 327355/A.572945  
Port Inner No. 329506/A.589623  
Stbd Inner No. 329376/A.589617  
Stbd Outer No. 329094/A.589621
3. Type of propellers: Hamilton Hydramatic Mk. A5/127.  
Part Outer No. FC.280  
Port Inner No. 41-34773  
Stbd Inner No. 90213  
Stbd Outer No. NK.8627
4. Owners of aircraft or Service Unit: Transport Command. No. 53 Squadron, Merryfield.
5. Date and time of accident: On 22.11.45. at 1010 hrs. (day).
6. Exact location of accident: White's Farm, Nr. Broadway Pound, Somerset.  
1" sheet 129 ref. 712/368.
7. Notification: Date signal received - 23.11.45.  
Date crash visited - 23.11.45.
8. Weather conditions:  
From Met. Office, R. A. F. Merryfield. Thursday 22nd November 1945. At 1006 hrs. G.M.T., the actual time of take-off.
- Visibility: 2,000 yards.  
Cloud base estimated at 300-400 ft.  
Wind: Calm.  
Slight drizzle.  
Pressure at Aerodrome level 1017.6 mbs. or 30.05"  
Pressure at M.S.L. 1021.9 mbs. or 30.18"  
Tendency of the barometer was steady.
9. Object of flight:  
Air Trooping from Merryfield to Castel Benito.

10. Pilot's History, Licences and Injuries:

F/Lt. I. Mielecki (76675) - Polish. Killed. Certified as 1st pilot, day and night as per following list.

Day			Night		
Type	Date	Unit	Type	Date	Unit
Magister	29. 3. 40.	15 E. F. T. S. <sup>1</sup> Redhill	Oxford	25. 1. 42.	3 F.T.S. S. Cerney <sup>2</sup>
Battle	7. 4. 40.	15 E. F. T. S. Redhill	Well: 1V.	22. 12. 42.	6 (C) OTU. <sup>3</sup> Thornaby
Valentia.	29. 6. 41.	Signals Squadron	Well: V111	28. 1. 43.	6 (C) OTU.
Dominie	4. 10. 41.	1st Signals School.	Well: 1c.	4. 3. 44.	304. (P) Sqdn
D. H. 86B.	8. 10. 41.	1st Signals School	Well: X	18. 3. 44.	304. (P) Sqdn
Oxford	3. 1. 42.	3 F.T.S. S. Cerney	Stirl: 1	12. 8. 44.	H. C. U. 1651. <sup>4</sup>
Well: 1A & 1C	9. 10. 42.	18 O. T. U. Bramcote	Lib. 111.	23. 10. 44.	301 (1526) Flight
Wellington X	5. 5. 43.	304 (P) Sqdn. Docking	Warwick 1	13. 6. 45.	304. (P) Sqdn.
Stirling	6. 8.44.	1651 H. C. U.	Experienced in bad weather conditions.		
Liberator	18. 10. 44.	1586 (P) Flight			
Warwick	15. 5. 45.	301 (P) Squadron			

His assessment as a Medium Bomber pilot day was "Average"	June 1939
" " " Medium Bomber " " "	June 1940
" " " Multi Engine " " "	December 1941
" " " Radio Range " " "Proficient"	December 1941

Up to the time of the crash he had flown single engined aircraft Dual 11 hours 45 minutes, as 1st pilot 62 hours 5 minutes, by night [sic] dual 35 hours 5 minutes, as 1st pilot 27 hours 35 minutes. Multi engined aircraft by day dual 31 hours 50 minutes, as 1st pilot 648 hours 20 minutes, as 2nd pilot 82 hours 20 minutes, by night dual 25 hours 10 minutes, as 1st pilot 466 hours 20 minutes, as 2nd pilot 9 hours 30 minutes, as passenger 53 hours 15 minutes.

Instrument and cloud flying: dual 8 hours 50 minutes, pilot 9 hours 35 minutes.

His grand total was - Dual	103 hours 50 minutes
Solo	1,205 hours
Passenger	53 hours 15 minutes
2nd Pilot	9 hours 30 minutes
Link Trainer	48 hours 45 minutes
Hours flown on type 1st pilot day	85 hours 5 minutes
" " " " " " night	154 hours 15 minutes
Grand total on type " "	239 hours 20 minutes

- 1 Elementary Flying Training School
- 2 Flying Training School South Cerney
- 3 Operational Training Unit
- 4 Heavy Conversion Unit



"	"	"	"	Day dual	2 hours
				Night dual	1 hour

Had he been tested recently? (yes once 18/11/45)

How many flights from this airport? (one 18/11/45)

When did he last fly this type of day bomber? (When checked 18/11/45)

11. Crew:

2nd Pilot	F/O G. J. Myers (165008)		Killed
Flight Engineer	F/Sgt. J. Brztvizinski (J.780234.)	Polish	Killed
Navigator	F/O S. Kleybor (P.2416)	Polish	Killed
Wireless Operator	F/O A. Wize (P.2441)	Polish	Killed

12. Passengers:

Signalman	A. Birch	Royal Corps of Signals				Killed
"	R. Anderson	"	"	"	"	
"	R. Anderson	"	"	"	"	
"	J. Attwood	"	"	"	"	
"	B. Benjamin	"	"	"	"	
"	J. Prewis	"	"	"	"	
"	W. Charlton	"	"	"	"	
"	A. Clark	"	"	"	"	
"	L. Currey	"	"	"	"	
"	H. Donevan [sic]	"	"	"	"	
"	L. Downs	"	"	"	"	
"	P. Fairburn	"	"	"	"	
"	M. Farrance	"	"	"	"	
"	B. Fox	"	"	"	"	
"	O. Williams	"	"	"	"	
"	F. Gent	"	"	"	"	
"	R. Williams	"	"	"	"	
"	L. Dyer	"	"	"	"	

Lt. A. Quick	R.I.A.S.C.	"
Lt. P. Byles	R.I.A.S.C.	"
Capt. H. Buck	Punjab	"
Major H. Staunton	R.A.M.C.	"

13. Airframe History:

Manufactured by the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft, Louisville, Kentucky and completed on 17.7.44. It was delivered to S.A.L. Prestwick on 24.7.44, and then to 120 Squadron on 5.1.45. It was transferred to 59 Squadron on 20.6.45. and to 53 Squadron on 24.7.45. It crashed at 725 hours 50 minutes. Terminal Inspection carried out on 19.11.45. On 20.11.45. Co-pilot's heater unserviceable (igniter) no time available for servicing.



#### 14. Engine History:

Port Outer No. 327355/A.572945. Manufactured by Aviation Engine Plant, Chevrolet Motor Division, Tonawanda, New York and completed on 26.5.44. Fitted in airframe on 8.11.45. at Merryfield. Hours flown 52 hours 35 minutes. Terminal inspection carried out on 19.11.45.

Port Inner No. 329506/A.589623. Manufactured by Aviation Engine Plant, Chevrolet Motor Division, Tonawanda, New York and completed on 20.7.44. Fitted in airframe on 8.11.45. at Merryfield. Total running time 52 hours 35 minutes. Terminal Inspection carried out on 18.11.45.

Stbd. Inner No. 329376/A.589617. Manufactured by Aviation Engine Plant, Chevrolet Motor Division, Tonawanda, New York and completed on 17.7.44. Fitted in airframe on 8.11.45. at Merryfield. Total running time 52 hours 35 minutes. Terminal Inspection carried out on 18.11.45.

Stbd. Outer No. 329094/A.589621. Manufactured by Aviation Engine Plant, Chevrolet Engine Division, Tonawanda, New York and completed on 7.7.44. Fitted in airframe on 8.11.45. at Merryfield. Total running time 52 hours 35 minutes. Terminal Inspection carried out on 18.11.45.

Port outer engine on 20.11.45. Constant speed unit control unserviceable. Complete unit fitted, ground tested and found serviceable.

#### 15. Loading, armament and/or special equipment:

All-up weight 57,827 lb.

Tare weight 36,586 lb.

Fuel 2,000 gallons. Oil 110 gallons.

No armament or gun turrets were fitted.

Special equipment IFF, GEE and Radio Altimeter.

#### CG Position OK? (Yes)

#### 16. Circumstances of flight

The pilot and crew of four with twenty-two passengers took off from Base at 1006 hrs. and was briefed to fly on an air trooping mission to Castel Benito. The weather conditions were not very favourable at the time of take-off but he was given permission to proceed by the Duty Executive Officer, 53 Squadron Wing Commander. Prior to entering the runway a pause was observed for the usual engine run-up and cockpit check. The take-off was quite normal and the aircraft was seen to be airborne and flying straight and level and when last seen the under-carriage was being retracted; this was at an approximate distance of 2,600 yards. The aircraft was then obscured in low cloud, the base of which was 300-400 ft. with slight drizzle underneath. At 1007 hrs. a message was received over the R/T stating 'airborne, climbing'. This was the last message from the aircraft to be received after which the frequency was quiet.

The direction of the runway in use was 280° and 2,000 yards long and at 1010 hrs. according to witnesses' statements the aircraft struck the tree tops on the crest of a hill and crashed on a bearing of 215°, a distance of 6,800 yards from the end of the runway.

The 2nd pilot was still alive when found but died when being placed in the ambulance, the remaining four crew and twenty-two passengers were killed.<sup>5</sup>

The aircraft was not seen flying by any witnesses near the scene of the crash, only the noise of engines running normally and flying very low, then an explosion followed by fire.

The first intimation of the crash received by the Flying Control Officer was at 1030 hrs. by telephone from one of the farms. Another Liberator KH.346 flown by F/Lt. Adams left the runway, on the same mission at

5 This is the official report so it would appear that the reference to the pilot being the survivor on p.21 is incorrect.



1016 hrs. in similar weather conditions and was heard by witnesses to pass over the scene of the crash at a good height.

17. Distribution of wreckage:

The wreckage was distributed over a wide area on a bearing of 215° and extended to approximately 350 yds. from the point of first impact.

The port wing struck the trees at about 6 ft. above the ground, cutting off the branches and 17 yds. further on the wing-tip struck the ground leaving the port wing-tip in two pieces together with the red navigation lamp. The wing then trailed along the ground for 7 yds. the port outer and inner propellers cutting deep ruts in the ground at about 18" intervals. The port outer engine then struck the ground, leaving marks and portions of engine rocker boxes and valve rocker arms. About this time the starboard wing struck the trees on a 9 ft. higher elevation and ploughed through the hedge, leaving the bomb bay doors behind; this proves that the pilot possibly saw the hill and tried to bank and turn to port at an angle of approximately 20° in order to avoid it. Later the starboard inner and outer propellers struck the ground and cut similar marks in the ground, at first all the propeller cuts were sharp and deep, but as the aircraft proceeded and the blades bent, the cuts became more shallow and very much wider. All four propellers broke away from their respective engines and were found in the following order along the wreckage trail:- port outer, port inner, starboard inner and starboard outer, all propellers were intact, in fine pitch and the blades badly bent.

The aircraft then went forward, the main portion of the fuselage breaking up into small pieces as it went along and being widely distributed. The rear of the fuselage approximately 8 ft. from the leading edge of the tailplane had broken away and remained more or less intact with tailplane, elevators, fins and rudders still attached; the port fin was still in its correct position on the tailplane but the rudder was broken in the middle, the starboard fin and rudder was lying at 90° to its original position. Fire had burnt the bottom of the port fin and the metal had melted, the elevators and rudders had all their fabric burnt away.

To the right of the wreckage trail a portion of the port wing (6 ft. long) and a corresponding amount of aileron with fabric intact were found and nearby the port flap. In the sunken road tight up to the bank the port wing complete with retracted and locked undercarriage and inner portion of aileron still attached lay almost completely destroyed by fire; the wing had broken away at the fuselage joint, all tanks were burnt and melted. The port inner and outer engines had become detached and lay quite close together one in the road and the other just behind the hedge.

Further along the trail to the left in the next field lay a completely burnt out and melted petrol tank from the starboard wing and near the hedge the starboard outer engine was found. Just beyond the hedge in the next field the wreckage of the cockpit and nose was found, very badly broken up and mostly destroyed by fire, the nose wheel [was] retracted. To the left of this was found the starboard inner engine, this engine had most of its cowlings still intact and the gills were found to be closed. Beyond this in the same field lay the starboard wing completely destroyed by fire, the flap had broken away previously and was found in two pieces, the aileron was attached, the flap jack and cables were found here and it was in the fully retracted position for closed flaps. The wing had broken away at the fuselage joint and was the most distant object found in the wreckage trail. The undercarriage was retracted and locked.

The wireless and oxygen equipment was spread out along the latter part of the wreckage trail. The four Turbo blowers were found near their respective engines and the waste gates were all found to be fully open.

18. Sketch map: Attached. [missing]

19. Witnesses' statements:

F/Lt. A.A. Hunt, Navigation Briefing Officer, R.A.F. Merryfield, states:

"On the morning of November 20th 1945 at 1130 hrs. I briefed F/Lt. Mielecki and crew for a trooping flight to Castel Benito. Full briefing and meteorological briefing was given. The aircraft was then postponed for 24 hours. A further briefing was given at 1130 hrs. on the following morning (November 21st 1945)



but the aircraft was again postponed for scheduled take-off of 1000 hrs. on the 22nd November. Final meteorological briefing was given at 0800 hrs. morning of November 22nd 1945. At the preliminary briefing I pointed out high ground between the aerodrome and the English Coast on the aircraft's track. Displayed in the briefing section is a cross section of the route showing high ground within 20 miles and 60 miles of track. The height shown at Base in this profile is 1,100 ft. The 47 Group Briefing Clearance Proforma and navigator's duplicate flight plan have been produced as exhibits at the Court of Inquiry".

(Sgd). A.A. Hunt, F/Lt.

W/Cdr. D. MacKenzie, No. 53 Squadron, Merryfield, states:

"I have the honour to report on the take-off of Liberator KH.126 at 1006 hrs. on 22.11.45. I proceeded to the vicinity of the Airfield Controller's Van in company with S/Ldr. Isted and F/Lt. Owen. Prior to turning on, the Captain appeared to carry out the normal check. The take-off was normal and we saw it leave the runway and the undercarriage was retracted before the aircraft was obscured by haze. It disappeared at a distance of 2,500 - 3,000 yards and was flying straight ahead and level at the time".

(Sgd). D. MacKenzie, W/Cdr.

S/Ldr. D.J. Isted, No. 53 Squadron, Merryfield, states:

"I have the honour to submit the following report in connection with Liberator KH.126. On the 22nd November 1945 at about 1000[Z] I watched this aircraft taxi to take-off position, stop, run each engine in turn, set flaps to about 50%, then turn on to the runway and take off. The take-off seemed quite normal, the aircraft being airborne after about 1,400 yards. I last saw it at a distance of about 2,500 yards at 200-300 ft. climbing".

(Sgd). D.J. Isted, S/Ldr.

F/Lt. P. Owen, Flight Engineer Leader, No. 53 Squadron, Merryfield, states:

"On the morning of 22nd November 1945 I was observing Liberator KH.126 taking off. I was sitting in a car alongside the Airfield Controller's van. The aircraft stopped before turning on to the runway to complete his take-off check. I observed the engines being run up to check magnetos. The flaps were in the take-off position. The aircraft turned on to the runway and took off. The take-off was quite normal, the aircraft leaving the ground in the normal manner, the undercarriage being retracted. The last I saw of the aircraft it was climbing and disappeared into the haze at about 2,000 to 3,000 yards distance".

(Sgd). P. Owen, F/Lt.

F/O C. Pottinger, R.A.F. Merryfield, states:

"Whilst on duty on the morning of November 22nd, 1945 as P. & F. Officer, I supervised the loading of passengers on Liberator aircraft KH.126 at approximately 0915 hrs. The passengers were loaded strictly in accordance with the loading data and each passenger was strapped into his seat by the airman loaders on duty, under my supervision. When I left the aircraft at approximately 0950 hrs. each passenger was in his correct place and securely strapped in with safety belt. The baggage of the passengers had been loaded earlier, in the correct stowages. When outgoing passengers arrive at the Station for emplanement they are briefed on the trip and are instructed that they will be strapped in aircraft prior to take off and are not to move about the aircraft unnecessarily. They are not again told by P. & F. but usually have a few instructions given to them by the Captain of the aircraft just before take-off. I was told by the Captain of KH.126 that the 2nd pilot being English would give the passengers a few instructions".

(Sgd). C. Pottinger, F/O.

F/Lt. N. Hatch, Flying Control Officer, R.A.F. Merryfield states:

"I was on duty as Flying Control Officer at R.A.F. Merryfield on the morning of 22nd November

194.5. Liberator KH.126 was due to take off at 1000 hrs. for Castel Benito. The aircraft requested permission to taxi, which I gave, but informed the pilot that I was contacting L/Cdr. MacKenzie to confirm that the weather was O.K. for take off. Within the last few minutes the visibility had reduced considerably due to mist swirling over the airfield, W/Cdr. MacKenzie, the Duty Executive Officer, came immediately to the Control Tower and he decided that the weather was fit for take-off. I accordingly gave permission to the aircraft to go, informing him that if he had to return St. Mawgan was open. The aircraft then appeared to make a normal take-off at 1006 hrs. and disappeared into the mist a few seconds after leaving the end of the runway. At 1007 hrs. the aircraft called "airborne, climbing" and this was the last call from the aircraft. At approximately 1030 hrs. I received a call from Mrs. Lindley who informed me that an aircraft had crashed near Broadway Pound. I informed the Station Sick Quarters, Commanding Officer, 53 Squadron and Chief Technical Officer and immediately despatched an ambulance and fire tender. I left the stand-by Control Officer on duty and proceeded to the scene of the crash with the Commanding Officer. We then identified the aircraft as Liberator KH.126".

(Sgd). Norman Hatch, F/Lt.

F/Lt. C.L. Johnstone, Meteorological Officer, R.A.F. Merryfield, states:

"The Captain and crew were briefed at 0800 hrs. on 22nd November 1945 in accordance with the route forecast supplied to the Captain, a copy of which is attached. At the briefing it was pointed out that all cloud heights given in the forecast were above mean sea level and that the cloud would be on the hills in places over south England. It was also stated that the cloud base at R.A.F. Merryfield at 0800 hrs. was 500 ft. and that it was expected to lift slowly during the morning, but in the event of having to return after being airborne and landing conditions at Merryfield not being favourable, St. Mawgan would be a good diversion. At 0930 hrs. a slight drizzle commenced and at 1000 hrs. a deterioration took place with visibility varying between 1,500 and 2,000 yards and cloud base estimated at 300-400 ft., wind calm. This information was immediately passed at 1000 hrs. by the Duty Meteorological Officer to the Duty Flying Control Officer and the Duty Executive Officer. At the same time, the Duty Meteorological Officer gave the conditions at St. Mawgan as visibility 30 miles with a trace of cloud at 2,000 ft. The Flying Control Officer informed the Captain of the aircraft over the R/T that the conditions at St. Mawgan were good. At the actual time of take-off, 1006 hrs. G.N.T. the visibility in the direction of the runway in use was 2000 yards, cloud base estimated at 300-400 ft., wind calm, slight drizzle. Pressure at aerodrome level, 1017-6 mb. or 30.05". Pressure at M. S. L. 1021-9 mb. or 30.18". Tendency of the barometer was steady".

(Sgd). C.L. Johnstone, F/Lt.

S/Ldr. N. A. Lindley, R.A.F.(Ret'd), Dommatt Farm, Buckland-St-Mary, states:

"I am a retired Squadron Leader and reside at Dommatt Farm, Buckland-St-Mary. On Thursday 22nd November 1945 at about 10 a.m. my wife and myself were in the house when we felt a blast effect which, from past experience, I thought must be a crashed aircraft. My wife remarked that she had previously heard an aircraft engine. We ran out into a field and could then hear burning but owing to fog nothing was visible. We noted the direction of the burning sound, got in the car and drove to Hare Lane, picking up a Mr. Hill and his housekeeper on the way. We stopped the car and hearing a burning sound close by, we could then see flames in fields on the right hand side towards which we ran and found a burnt-out cockpit and debris. We started walking up the track of aircraft wreckage, looking for any possible survivors, calling out at the same time. We came across one survivor, so I sent my wife and Mr. Hill's housekeeper off to telephone R. A. F. Merryfield, which they did from Mr. Pym's farm. I noticed that this airman was badly injured and was lying in an awkward position, we did what was possible to make him comfortable. The body of another airman was lying near but lifeless. Mr. Hill and myself continued the search for any possible other survivors, we could find none so we returned to the injured airman. Mr. Pym arrived followed by various other persons who I asked to continue the search and bring me any papers for identification purposes, Mr. Hill was meanwhile collecting some loose money and other articles which were subsequently handed over to the R.A.F. My wife then returned and said that an ambulance was on the way. The R.A.F. ambulance arrived shortly afterwards and the injured man was taken away on a stretcher. During the search we came across part of the fuselage



and one wing in the lane (Hare Lane) also two bodies which were burning, we pulled them clear and put the smouldering out (on the bodies). Further debris and many bodies were on the north side of Hare Lane, together with the tailplane of the aircraft, however, all these bodies were lifeless. One body we noticed was smouldering and we covered it with earth. The Station Commander and other officers from Merryfield having arrived on the scene, I handed over to them together with effects collected. I have heard of no-one who actually saw the crash".

(Sgd). N.A. Lindley, S/Ldr.

Mr. Alfred George Hill, Farmer, Blackwater, Buckland-St-Mary, states:

"I am a farmer and reside at Blackwater, Buckland-St-Mary. On Thursday 22nd November 1945 at about 10.10 a.m. I was milking cows in cowsheds adjoining the Castle Inn, Buckland-St-Mary. I heard an aircraft in the distance and the engines seemed to be running smoothly, and the noise of engines seemed to come closer. Suddenly I heard a crash and then an explosion. My housekeeper who was helping me said:- "That aircraft has crashed". We both left the milking and started to walk in the direction the explosion had come from. When we came out of the cowshed there was dense fog. We came across a field to Old Castle where we met Mr. Lindley of Dommatt Farm, Buckland-St-Mary, who was with his wife and driving a car. He said he had heard the crash and asked me where I thought it was, and I said "down the lane" meaning Hare Lane. My housekeeper and I got in the car and Mr. Lindley turned right by Old Castle and proceeded down Hare Lane. The fog was very thick and when we got about 300 yards down the lane, we saw a blaze on our right hand side of the road. We all got out of the car and went into the field on our right. We searched around and found an airman badly injured, but still breathing, we did what we could for him. Mr. Lindley sent his wife and my housekeeper to get help. After we had put the airman as comfortable as possible, we made further search and found a portion of the crashed plane in Hare Lane, this portion of the plane was ablaze and burning fiercely. I noticed several bodies but all were lifeless. By this time a Mr. Stoodley of Blackwater, Buckland-St-Mary and a Mr. Pym of The Beehive, Buckland-St-Mary were on the scene and assisted. I went into the field on the north side of Hare Lane and there saw another portion of the plane, this was not alight. There were many bodies scattered over the field and I noticed that one of the bodies was smouldering, Mr. Pym who was with me and myself put soil on the smouldering parts to put it out. By this time more persons had arrived and an ambulance, I think from Merryfield. I assisted in removing the survivor from the field to the ambulance. During the whole of the time I was with the injured man he did not speak. All the bodies I saw, with the exception of the airman we attended, were lifeless. I do not know of any person who saw the actual crash".

(Sgd). G. Hill.

Mr. J.R. Palmer, White's Farm, Buckland-St-Mary, Chard, states:

"On the morning of the 22nd November at approximately 10.15 I was standing just outside the house and heard a tremendous explosion, we could not tell what had exploded as there was a thick mist at the time. Whilst my wife and I were discussion [sic] what the explosion might have been we heard the approach of an aircraft which appeared to us to fly over the house at a good height, this I should say took place two to three minutes after the explosion. Then there were further smaller explosions and we decided to investigate the direction they came from, we scrambled across a couple of fields and saw the aircraft blazing away. We soon came across the pilot who was still alive and did our best to make him comfortable whilst the women folk endeavoured to call aid by 'phone".

(Sgd). J.R. Palmer.

Mr. John Gent, Farmer, Castle Farm, Buckland-St-Mary, states:

"I was milking at the time the plane approached, it was dense fog at the time. The plane was flying rather fast and according to the noise it was undoubtedly low and it appeared to just pass over the house and buildings. Next there were two loud reports and the noise ceased (of the plane's travelling). I went out in the meadow underneath the hill and shouted in the hope of getting a reply, but was not answered. The visibility

was practically nil. I came into the house to 'phone for the authorities but the 'phone was dead, the wires having been cut by the crash. When I arrived at the top to try and find where it had occurred the Red Cross Van was already there. The time was 10.10 when the crash occurred".

(Sgd). John Gent.

### Examination of Wreckage.

#### Main Structure.

##### 20. Port wing:

The wing-tip was broken off in two pieces due to impact with the ground. Six feet of the outer portion was broken away from the wing. The wing had broken away from the fuselage joint at the root. The majority of this wing was badly disintegrated and destroyed by explosion and fire.

##### 21. Starboard wing:

The wing had broken away from the fuselage joint at the root and was in one piece and was completely destroyed by explosion and fire. It had mostly melted away.

##### 22. Centre-section:

All four engine mountings and nacelles and cowlings were completely torn away and were distributed over a wide area in the wreckage trail. The undercarriages remained in and were burnt up in the fire.

##### 23. Fuselage:

The nose and cockpit portion became detached and was badly broken up, it contained the nose wheel. Fire had destroyed almost all the internal parts. From the rear of the cockpit to within 8 ft. of the leading edge of the tail-plane, the fuselage had completely broken up into small pieces and was strewn along the wreckage trail and was unrecognisable. The remaining rear portion was more or less intact and had been partially burnt in the fire.

##### 24. Fin:

The port fin was still attached to the tailplane and the lower portion had melted away in the fire. The starboard fin was still attached to the tailplane but was bent over outboard at 90° to its original position.

##### 25. Tailplane:

The tailplane was still on the fuselage in one piece but had been burnt in the fire.

##### 26. Undercarriage:

The port and starboard undercarriages were found in their respective wings in the retracted position with the locks still on, both were badly burnt and only the metal portions remained,

##### 27. Nose Wheel:

The nose wheel was found in the nose portion of the fuselage in the retracted position and partially destroyed by fire.



## Control Surfaces.

### 28. Ailerons:

The port aileron was still attached to the wing and badly burnt, all fabric was burnt off, the outer portion, 6 ft. long had broken off with the piece of wing that had become detached and had the fabric still on. The starboard aileron remained on the wing and was completely burnt in the fire, all fabric being burnt off.

### 29. Aileron tabs:

Both port and starboard tabs were still on the ailerons but were completely burnt up in the fire. They were set in line with the trailing edge.

### 30. Elevators:

Both port and starboard elevators were still attached to the tailplane and were hardly damaged except for the fire which had completely burnt off all the fabric.

### 31. Elevator tabs:

Both port and starboard tabs were still attached to the elevators and were set at 3/4" down from the trailing edge of the elevator (nose up).

### 32. Rudder:

The port rudder was still attached to the fin but was bent inboard in the middle, all the fabric was burnt off. The starboard rudder was still attached to the fin but lay at 90° outboard, all the fabric was burnt off.

### 33. Rudder tabs:

The port rudder tab was still attached to the rudder. It was bent inboard and followed the shape of the damaged rudder, the top portion was set in line with the trailing edge. The starboard rudder tab was still attached to the rudder and was undamaged. It was set in line with the rudder trailing edge. The rudder trimmer handwheel in the cockpit was set at neutral.

### 34. Flaps:

The port flap was completely torn away from the wing and was in one piece. The starboard flap was completely torn away from the wing and was in two pieces. The flap ram was found with cables attached near the rear spar of the starboard wing root end, the ram was fully in, indicating that the flaps were in the fully closed position.

### ? Sink

### 35. Slats:

Not fitted on this aircraft.

## General.

### 36. Flying Controls.

The controls in the cockpit were very badly broken up and badly burnt, most of the light alloy parts had melted.

### 37. Power Units:

All four propellers became detached on impact and were in fine pitch. The four engines became detached from their mountings on impact. The four turbo blowers were also detached and the waste gates were found to be in the fully open position. The starboard inner engine was almost completely cowled and the gills were in the closed position, the other three engines were practically bare of cowling and only parts of the engine mountings were attached. The port inner engine was badly burnt in the fire. The pressure oil filter had become unsoldered owing to the heat. All four oil pressure filters were removed and were found to be clean and filter gauzes had not collapsed.

### 38. Engine Installation:

All four engine mountings were badly broken up and distributed along the wreckage trail, the parts which remained with the wings being burnt up in the fire. With the exception of the port inner engine all the engine nacelles and cowlings had been torn away and distributed along the wreckage trail. The engines were not buried in the ground. The oil tanks were all detached and damaged. One petrol tank became detached from the starboard wing and was completely burnt out, there was an outline of the tank but the metal had melted and fused together into an irregular strip about 4. ft. in length. The remaining petrol tanks were all badly burnt up in the port and starboard wings.

### 39. Cockpit:

The cockpit was very badly disintegrated and burnt. The instrument panels were very badly burnt and smashed up and whilst trying to remove some of them they dropped to pieces, their casings having melted away.

The directional gyro was not caged.

The pilot's altimeter was the only instrument successfully removed from the remains of the instrument panel and the inches of mercury scale was set at 30.1. The altitude recorded on the dial was 2,700 ft. but the latter figures cannot be relied upon owing to the heat of the fire to which the instrument was subjected, which possibly affected the aneroid capsules.

The rudder trim tab handwheel was set at neutral. The aileron and elevator handwheel settings could not be relied upon owing to the damage sustained. The pilot's coupe was found in small pieces and widely distributed.

### 40. Oxygen:

Fitted but not in use at the time of the accident.

### 41. Miscellaneous:

The telegraph wires were cut and the local farmers had difficulty in 'phoning the Flying Control Officer at Merryfield. This caused the delay and was the reason for the call being as late as 1030 hrs.



42. R. D. A.'s Defects:<sup>6</sup>

Noted.

4.3. Fire in air or on ground:

Fire on the ground after impact.

44. Interference with wreckage:

The rear portion of the fuselage with tail unit attached was moved slightly for the M.O. to recover the bodies.

45. Date and time of Inquest:

No Inquest - Service action.

46. Service Investigation:

S/Ldr. Walker of D.P.A. visited the scene of the crash on 24.11.45.  
Court of Inquiry: President: G/Capt. J. Warburton, 47 Group Investigator,  
R.A.F. Station, Holmsley South, Hants.  
Members: W/Cdr. H.J.L. Hawkins, R.A.F. Station, Lyneham.  
S/Ldr. E.K. Creswell, No. 24-6 Squadron, Holmsley South.

47. Investigator's Opinion:

The cause of this accident was an error of judgement [airmanship] on the part of the pilot during bad visibility with low cloud base.

Although he was warned of the hills in the close vicinity of the airfield and instructed to fly straight off the runway and climb to 1,000 - 1,500 ft. before turning, he did not do so, but instead he took a normal left hand circuit and did not gain sufficient height to clear the crest of the [Castle] hill which was 840 ft. above aerodrome level.

The pilot had only been at the Station for five days and had only flown one Liberator during this time on local night circuits so his experience of the local surroundings was limited. The fact that he was turning to the port side with no wind would not help his climb with a heavily loaded aircraft. This was the first time he had flown this particular aircraft.

The Barometric Pressure inches of mercury scale at Aerodrome level was 30.05" and the Altimeter was found to be set at 30.1", a difference of 45.9 feet, lower than what his altimeter scale would have registered whilst flying. [indicating that the A/C was approximately 45 ft lower than the height indicated on the altimeter].

---

6 The meaning of this acronym is unclear.

## ACCIDENTS INVESTIGATION BRANCH

### Precis of Investigation No. W.2296.

Aircraft: Liberator VIII KH.126 Engines: Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp

Command: Transport

Unit: No. 53 Squadron, Merryfield.

Pilot: F/Lt. L. Mielecki (Polish) - Killed.

Crew:

2nd Pilot F/O G. J. Myres - Killed

Navigator F/O S. Kleybor - "

Place: White's Farm, Nr. Broadway Pound, Somerset

W/Operator F/O A. Wize - "

F/Engineer F/Sgt. Brzezinski, J. "

Date & Time: On 22.11.45 at 1010 hrs.

22 Passengers - All Killed.

---

### Brief Description.

The pilot and crew of four were briefed to fly on an air trooping mission to Castel Benito with twenty-two passengers. The weather conditions were not very favourable but permission to take off was given by the Duty Executive Officer. During the briefing the crew were warned of high ground between Merryfield and the coast; they were also told to fly straight off the runway and climb to 1,000 to 1,500 ft. before turning.

At 1006 hrs. the aircraft took off normally on runway 28 which was 2,000 yards long. It flew straight and level and when last seen the undercarriage was being retracted. At a distance of approximately 2,600 yards it became obscured in low cloud; at the time there was a slight drizzle and the cloud base was 300 - 400 ft.

A message was received from the aircraft over the R/T at 1007 hrs. stating "airborne, climbing". This was the only transmission.

At 1010 hrs. the aircraft struck the tree tops on the crest of Castle Hill, 840 ft. above the airfield level, and crashed on a bearing of 215° at a distance of approximately 6,800 yards from the end of the runway. The 2nd pilot was still alive when found but died when being placed in the ambulance. The remainder of the crew and all the passengers were killed.

The aircraft was not seen flying by any eye-witnesses near the scene of the crash because of the low cloud, but a noise was heard as of an aircraft flying very low with its engines running normally. This was followed by an explosion and fire on the ground. The first intimation of the crash was received by telephone at the airfield Flying Control at 1030 hrs. from a farm near the crash.

Another Liberator which took off at 1016 hrs. on the same mission and in similar weather conditions was heard by witnesses to pass over the scene of the accident at a good height; it could not, however, be seen.

### Examination of the Wreckage.

Investigation at the scene of the accident showed the wreckage to be distributed over a wide area extending 350 yards from the first point of impact. Although the structure had been broken and burnt a careful examination of the remains was made, but no evidence was found to suggest that any defect in the airframe or its engines had developed before impact. The altimeter from the pilot's instrument panel was found set at 30.1". (The barometric pressure as given to the pilot before take off from the airfield was 30.05".)

## Weather Conditions.

As recorded at Merryfield at the time of take-off:

Visibility - 2,000 yards.

Cloud - 10/10, base estimated at 300-400 ft.

Wind - Calm.

Weather - Slight drizzle.

Pressure at airfield-level 30.05"

Pressure at M.S.L. 30.18"

The tendency of the barometer was steady.

## Pilot's History.

F/Lt. L. Mielecki commenced training in the U.K. in 1940 and had been assessed as "average" on multi-engined aircraft. He was a qualified 1st pilot, day and night, in Liberators. During the few days he had been at the Unit he had made one flight, a test in a Liberator which was lightly laden, so that his experience of the local surroundings was very limited. The take-off for that flight was in daylight and the landing was made in darkness. His total solo flying amounted to 1,205 hours. As 1st pilot in Liberators he had flown 85 hours by day and 154 hours at night. His Link Trainer time was 49 hours and instrument and cloud flying 10 hours.

## Aircraft History.

Manufactured by the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, Louisville, Kentucky and completed on 17.7.44. It was delivered to S.A.L. Prestwick on 24.7.44 and to 120 Squadron on 5.1.45. It was transferred to 59 Squadron on 20.6.45 and to 53 Squadron on 24.7.45. A terminal inspection was carried out on 19.11.45. Total time-in-air was 726 hours.

## Conclusions.

The cause of this accident was an error of airmanship on the part of the pilot. He had been warned of the hills in the vicinity of the airfield and briefed to fly straight off the runway and climb to over 1,000 ft. before turning. Nevertheless, in conditions of bad visibility and with low cloud base he permitted the aircraft to turn to port before safety height for the area had been reached with the result that it struck a hill approximately 840 ft. high and to the left of the briefed track.

### NOTE

As a result of this accident certain irregularities at the Unit were brought to light which have been dealt with in the Form 412. It is understood that in view of the conclusions in the Form 412 G.C.M. proceedings are being taken.

R. C. WARREN

for C.I. (Accidents)

## C.I. (Accidents).

5/3/46.

### Distribution:

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D.P.A. Folder/KH. 126/LIB.

G.120109.



## Additional Witness Statement

1945

Sadly before Victory came a plane crashed in Hare Lane killing all 45 people on board – Polish troops and crew. The Dakota aircraft had taken off from Ilton Airfield<sup>1</sup> on a foggy day and did not attain sufficient height to clear the hedges which had tall ash broods. I heard the crash and getting there on my bike was the second on the scene with Squadron-Leader Lindley from Dommett. We ran around the wide area of the scattered wreck. It was a terrible sight of the Polish crew the pilot was the only one breathing but he died shortly afterwards. They were on their way to Burma and were all wearing tropical clothing. (*Memoirs of Richard Pym* – 1994)

---

1 Merryfield

### Obituaries

#### Major

### HENRY WILLIAM GILBERT STAUNTON

MZ/13494 Indian Army Medical Corps

(19 May 1908-22 November 1945)

Died aged 37

Yeovil Cemetery

Div. A. Grave 2344.

#### Harry Staunton (1908-1945)



Harry Staunton holding a cine camera on roof in Gyantse (Tibet)  
(Detail of 1999.23.1.2.1, copyright PRM)

Harry Staunton was born on 19th May 1908 in Redhill, near Durban, South Africa where his father, Gilbert Patrick Staunton, practised as a doctor. At around the age of ten he left South Africa and became a pupil at Norwich Grammar School. On finishing school in 1925, he registered as a medical student at St. Bartholomew's hospital London where he graduated in 1931. He began his military training at Aldershot the same year. In 1934 he joined the Indian Medical Service and left for Bombay on the *HMS Dorsetshire*. His first posting was as Lieutenant (on probation) in Rawalpindi where he took charge of the the Indian Medical Hospital. He helped with the rescue work at Quetta after the earthquake in 1934 and was promoted to the rank of Captain in February 1935. Thereafter, he was with Western Command, Quetta where he specialised in Otology, Rhinology and Laryngology.

Staunton's connection with Tibet began on the 7th January 1940 when he was appointed Captain (on deputation) accompanying Basil Gould to Lhasa to attend the installation of the 14 th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso). Harry Staunton thereby became one of two Westerners ever to have witnessed the installation ceremony of a Dalai Lama. Gould, Staunton and some fifty non-British members of the Mission staff were present on the second day (23 February 1940) of the eight-day ceremony. When Gould returned to Gangtok (Sikkim), Staunton stayed on in Lhasa and, from August 1940 - January 1942, he served as Civil Surgeon: Bhutan and Tibet assisted in his duties by Dr Rai Sahib Tonyot, a Sikkimese doctor. Staunton reputedly treated the young 14th Dalai Lama for measles in 1943.

In August 1940 the construction of a new Mission hospital was completed under Staunton's supervision and it was used thereafter used to treat the residents of Lhasa, as well as villagers and nomads who traveled from far afield. Unfortunately none of Staunton's diaries or reports have survived so we have no written documentation of his time in Lhasa. However, it can be assumed that the medical conditions he treated would not have been too dissimilar from those listed in a report by William Morgan, the doctor for the 1936 Mission, where venereal disease and cataracts were the most common ailments. Staunton's achievements and the overall impact of British medics working in Tibet was summarized by Hugh Richardson: "Over the years our friends among lamas and monks as well as laymen continued to widen, helped greatly by the work of doctors at the Hospital of the British Mission at Dekyi Lingka." (Richardson 1993:8)

In 1942 Staunton met his future wife, Silvia, a nurse in the Queen Alexandra's Indian Medical Nursing Service in Bombay. At the time of his death in 1945, he had become Registrar at a large general hospital in Bombay. Major Staunton died in an aircrash on 22nd November 1945 when returning to India from England where he had been on compassionate leave to visit his mother. The plane crashed shortly after take-off from Yeovilton, Somerset, killing all 27 passengers and crew. His widow gave birth to their second child, Diana, a week later in Bombay.

*Compiled by Krystyna Cech*

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- © 2006 Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PP

Captain

**HERBERT CECIL BUCK**

**1117 1st Punjab Regiment - Special Air Service Regiment, A.A.C.**

**(12 December 1916-22 November 1945)**

**Died aged 28**

**Reading Crematorium**

**Panel 1**

Dear folks that visit this place;

By all means read, photograph, **BUT**

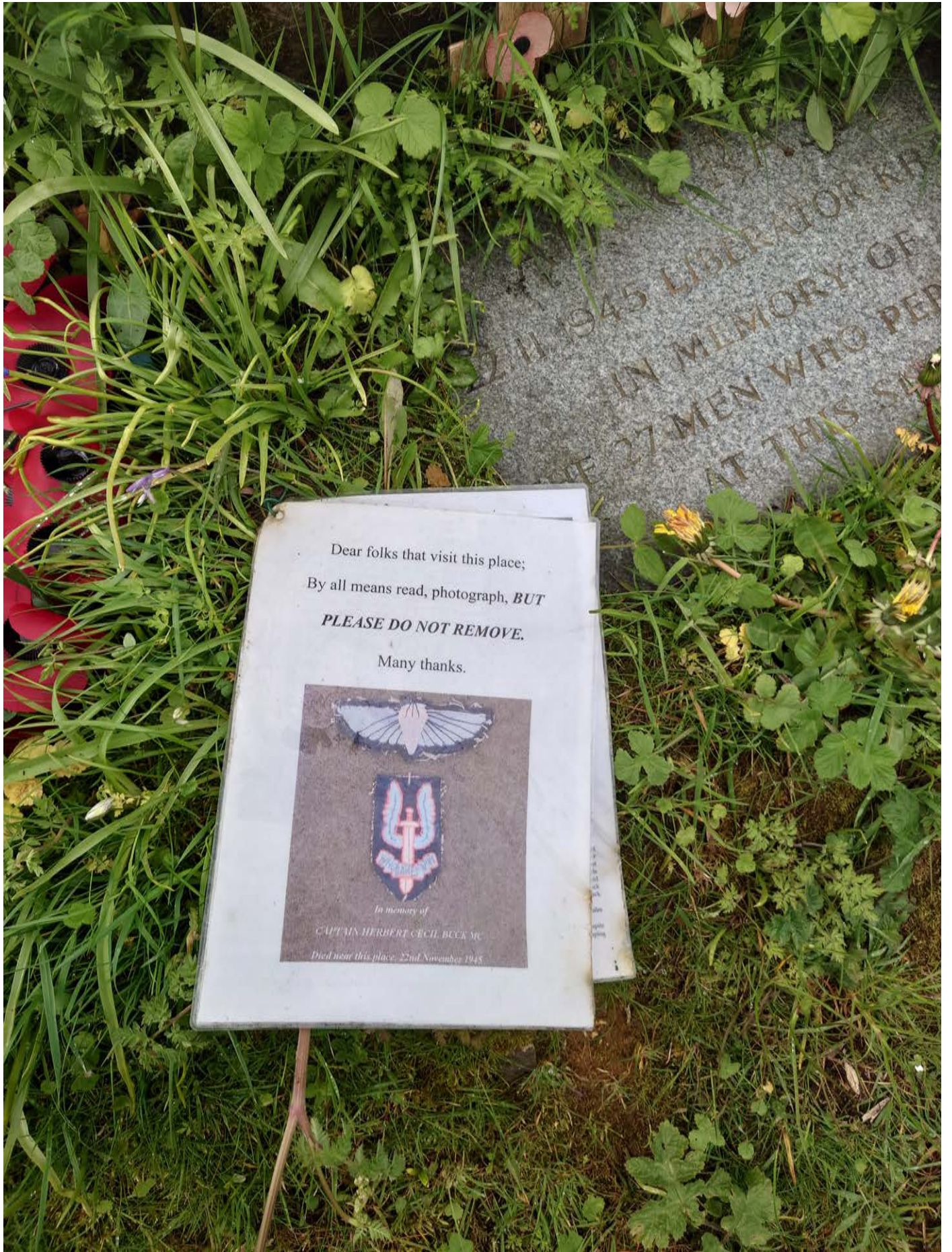
**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE.**

Many thanks.

**IN MEMORY OF CAPTAIN HERBERT CECIL BUCK MC**

*Died near this place, 22nd of November 1945.*







## READING CREMATORIUM

The war graves plot is situated on the southern edge of Reading (Henley Road) Cemetery that surrounds the crematorium itself. Within the plot a screen wall commemorating thirty Commonwealth servicemen and women of the Second World War whose remains were cremated here. In addition, 118 other such personnel are buried here or within the wider cemetery, two Polish servicemen also being buried in the CWGC plot.

The entrance to cemetery is at the end of All Hallows Road, just to the north of Henley Road (A4155). GPS coordinates: Latitude 51.47547, Longitude -0.95511.

### **CAPTAIN HERBERT CECIL BUCK MC (IA/1117) GENERAL LIST, 1ST PUNJAB REGIMENT, (G) R (SIG), SOE (SIG, MIDDLE EAST COMMANDO) ATT L DETACHMENT SAS BRIGADE**

Herbert Buck was the only son of Lt-Colonel Cecil Henry Buck of the Indian Army. He was born in India through a second marriage on 12 December 1916 but spent much of his childhood in Germany. Having boarded at Pennell House, Eastbourne College, he went up to St Peter's Hall, Oxford. Here he briefly read French and German was before switching to PPE. Outside his studies he was a key member of the University Fencing team, the 'Assassins', representing in the sabre during the trip to the University of Bonn at the end of 1936. He was also a member of Oxford Jujitsu team as well as the Officer Training Corps.

After graduating Buck was attached to the 2nd Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment, at Soberton for two weeks in August 1938 whilst holding a university candidate commission on the general list (TA) (*London Gazette* 02/08/38). Ten days with the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers, followed straight after. That November he disembarked in India and was attached to the second Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment, at Sialkot until March 1939, its commanding officer noting:

this officer has a university degree, is a linguist, and is intellectually above the average. So far, he has not developed military qualities and can hardly be described as a potential cavalry officer, which he intends to be. Of average physique and a thinker rather than a doer. If he is to be a good officer in the Indian army he will have to change his character in many ways. This report is not adverse.



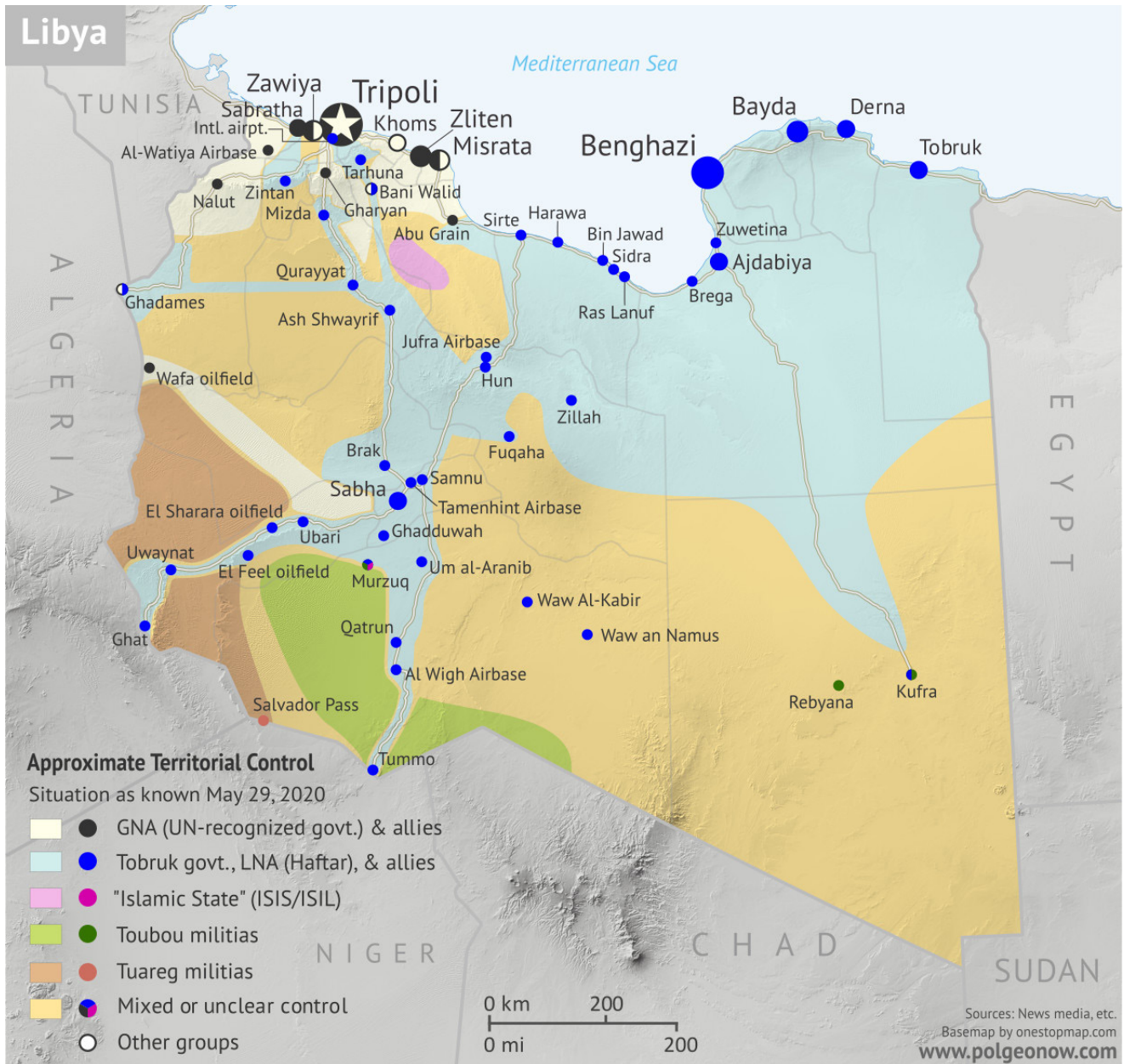
*Herbert Cecil Buck*

Evidently the report was adverse, as Buck soon joined the fifth Battalion, first Punjabi Regiment, i.e. the infantry. Although briefly posted to the first Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment, at Rawalpindi he was back with the Punjabis by the beginning of 1940. By January 1941 he was serving as an instructor at the regiment's training school, using his free time to qualify as a German interpreter. Early the following year the Punjabis disembarked in the Middle East and the beginning of February 1942 the 3rd Battalions B and D companies, under the now captain Buck, were in Libya dug in astride the Derna by-pass to repulse the advancing Afrikakorps. Although supported by a troupe of 25-pounders and another of anti-tank guns, the Germans bluffed their way through Punjabi lines using a captured British tank. Within 15 minutes Buck's position was overrun, he and the majority of his men being captured. The narrative is best taken up by the citation accompanied the award his immediate Military Cross:

Captain Buck was captured south of Derma on 2.2.42. and consistently tried in vain during the first forty-eight hours to escape with some of his men before he was separated from them.

On 4.2.42 he planned to escape from Barce with a sergeant, but was moved to Benghazi. They arrived at 1700 hours and by 2000 hours were ready again, but the necessarily hasty reconnaissance caused them to

mistake a sentry box for an extra sentry and they postponed the attempts till the next day. Unfortunately everyone was being moved to Tripoli, so Captain Buck feigned sickness and avoided the move. That evening, 5th February, Lt McKee was brought in and they decided to escape together.



The P/W camp had been used for interning Italian civilians. After a further quick reconnaissance they chose the most feasible of two excellent escape plans. They slipped into an army shed with a window blown in overlooking the wire, and, having timed the sentries beat, escaped through the wire in two to three minutes.

They worked their way through the hills and crossed the Barce plain on the night of 11th February to a position on the main road in the wooded hilly country west of Technis.

Here they waited until a suitable vehicle came by – a Ford 15cwt truck. Captain Buck, who speaks German, in a waterproof, leather jerkin and a cap resembling a German cap, stopped the driver, saw that he was alone, so asked him for his pass in German and where he was going, then held him up with a spanner held to look like a revolver. Lt McKee came up with a rifle and they bound and gagged the driver and left him behind a bush. They decided to go via the desert driving through Lamluda where there had been a petrol point. While scouting for petrol at Lamluda they were seen but escaped into the scrub followed by pistol shots although they lost their lorry.

They wandered about on foot from 12.2.42 till 20.2.42 and were joined by two officers of the Norfolk Yeomanry, a sergeant and four ORs [other ranks] of the Welch regiment, and a flight sergeant of the RAF.

On 20.2.42 they arrived on the main Derna-Tmimi road about 3 miles west of Umm Er Rzem and 400 yards east of the German camp. After careful reconnaissance of the German troops in the district, with a German rifle over his shoulder, a British great-coat and jerkin and his 'German' cap, Capt Buck stopped first a large staff car, but considered it unsuitable for this purpose, then at 2000 hours a German lorry. He asked the driver how many people he had (to ascertain if there were troops in the back. He replied two (they were seated in front) so Capt Buck said 'Hande hoch', the cue for Lt McKee and another to come up on either side with pistols. While a third drove the truck down the road to where the remainder of the party were waiting and checked its petrol, oil and water, Capt Buck and McKee gagged the two Germans. Then they climbed into the front of the lorry, wearing the German's caps.

Within five minutes they were on their way and, after driving by devious routes, reached the British lines 8 miles west of the Acroma at dawn February 21st.

Capt Buck's escape is remarkable an example of gallant, consistent and ingenious efforts to get away in spite of tremendous odds, supported by some extra-ordinary quick thinking. He showed unselfishness in not escaping immediately after capture, but preferring to wait and help others. His powers of leadership in this direction were amply displayed when he afterwards led his little band of escapers back so gallantly to British territory. His courage skill and initiative was mainly responsible for the escape of three other officers and six ORs [London Gazette 23/04/42, WO 373/19, recommended by Lt-Colonel Dudley Clarke, Middle East representative for M19]

This series of events gave Buck the idea of a German-speaking subunit of the Middle East Commando, No.51 (Middle East) Command's War Diary recording that on 17 March 1942 at Burg el Arab 'Buck selects German speaking personnel with view to certain work' (WO 218/159). On 20th his team detached itself from the Commando, a contemporary memo to GHQ's Deputy Director of Operations from G(R), the Middle East sub-branch of MI(R), the War Office's clandestine warfare department, noting:

It is intended that this subunit should be used for infiltration behind the German lines in the Western Desert under Eighth Army. The strength of the special group would be approximately that of a platoon. The personnel, a portion of which had already been selected, are fluent German linguists. They are mainly Palestinians of German origin. Many of them have had war experience with 51 Commando. They will frequently be dressed in German uniform and will operate under the command of British Officer who has already proved himself to be an expert in the German language. It is suggested that, if successful, the unit can be expanded ...

It is proposed to give them the cover name of 'Special Interrogation Group' [WO 201/732].

The men were separated from British units and drilled a German platoon. In November 2000 The Times interviewed a Ariyeh Shai, a CIG veteran who recalled how Buck explained that a Jew masquerading as a soldier of the Master Race is finished: 'Captain Buck has warned that our lives would depend on our ability to wear disguises faultlessly, to learn to perfection the slang prevalent among the soldiers of the Afrika Korps and to drill in accordance with all the German methods.' Buck had told them: 'If your true identity is found out, there is no hope for you' (*Times* 2, 17 November 2000).

In April 1942 Buck was absorbed into MO4, one of the many cover names for the Special Operations Executive (SOE), although he remained in command of SIG. The unit's first mission, carried out in June 1942, was to escort a party of prisoners, in reality fifteen Free French parachutists attached to L Detachment, SAS Brigade, to attack airfields at Derna and Martuba. Initially guided to the target area by New Zealanders of the Long Range Desert Group's R.1 Patrol, Buck and eleven members of SIG pushed on in two separate parties. The Derna party was betrayed with only one of its number, lieutenant Augustin Jordan, avoiding death or capture (for full details see entries for Private Eliahu Gottlieb and Corporal Petr Haas under Alamein Memorial, Egypt, Volume I). Buck believed his Martuba party destroyed 15-20 aircraft. Although the men were seen and fired upon by a spotter plane during their withdrawal they 'apparently satisfied it by displaying the German flag' (WO 218/91). Having later lost all its trucks bar one, the party reached its rendezvous with the LRDG at dawn on the 16th, returning to Siwa three days later.

Buck led a party of his men during OPERATION AGREEMENT, an attack on Tobruk Harbour designed to disrupt Rommel's supply chain and destroy his fuel reserves. Lieutenant Tommy Langton's report confirms



the party 'included a detachment of SIG (Capt Buck)' and that it proceeded to Tobruk via Kufra from Cairo in seven three-ton lorries 22 August 1942: 'The invention intention was to drive into Tobruk in three of the three-ton lorries disguised as British prisoners of war with a guard made up of the SIG party in German uniform (increased in numbers by Lt McDonnell, Lt Harrison, and myself) (WO 201/751). On the evening of 13 September the party infiltrated the town and split into two groups to carry out their tasks. Unfortunately, reinforcements were not landed once the harbour had been captured and it wasn't long before the party itself was taken prisoner, Buck falling into enemy hands for a second time on the 14th. Private Leo Hillman, one the few members of SIG to escape, and who was awarded the Military Medal to which he later added an MC whilst commissioned in SOE, recalled that: 'Pte Roer was wounded. Capt Buck went to help him. He carried Pte Roer into the Wadi' (WO 201/751). Meanwhile Buck's SOE personnel file, HS 9/231/9, consists of just a single memo that confirmed he was posted missing at this time. His obituary, which appeared in the *Camberley News* during December 1945, takes up the narrative:



*Certosa di Padula Monastery*

Captain Buck was in the desert two days before he was recaptured. He was taken to Italy by submarine where he again escaped [he was imprisoned in PC 35 (Certosa di Padula Monastery) near Potenza from January-August 1943 and at Bologna until October 1943]. Once more he was recaptured and sent by train to Germany. During the journey he cut a hole in the side [*sic* – floor] and again escaped [near Bolzano, remaining at liberty for three days]. By this time he had gained the title of 'Escapee' and was locked in solitary confinement for fourteen days.

Buck had attempted to escape at Strasbourg by hiding under a drain-cleaning vehicle dressed as a Frenchman. According to his mother's statement filed alongside his MI9 liberation questionnaire, Buck subsequently: 'tried to contact a German coal merchant, who he had been told, would help him. He was, however, recaptured'. Solitary confinement followed before being imprisoned at Oflag Va in Heilbronn from November to December 1943 and Oflag VIII/f at Mährisch-Trubäu until his transfer to Oflag LXXIX near Brunswick in July 1944. He had kept up correspondence with the Vice-Master of St Peter's who later recorded:

As a prisoner of war in Germany he [Buck] not only introduced into his Oflag fencing and highland dancing, but conducted a class in Indian mysticism and wrote a thesis on a metaphysical subject which he has since worked up into a serious attempt to reconcile Indian mysticism with Western philosophy [courtesy of The Master, Fellows and Scholars of the College of St Peter le Bailey in the University of Oxford].



*Oflag LXXIX*

As *The Camberley News* reported Buck's endeavours did not stop with the liberation of his camp:

He, with others, volunteered to stay in Brunswick after the liberation and help with the superhuman task of controlling the riotous displaced person. He was leader of the band ... Captain Buck first said about organising French and Polish prisoners of war as armed guards. This was essential. Order was the most needed thing in confusion. In his district he had to control at least 1,500,000 people of all classes and nationalities. His tact, sympathy and understanding of 'the other fellow' enabled him to work wonders. He bought the electricity and water systems into efficient working order, and took over the feeding in the Town Hall. He also commandeered a complete German field ambulance crew and set them about the task of repairing the injured and comforting the sick. Probably the most remarkable of his feats was the uniting of Russians, Poles, Czechs, Germans, Italians and French prisoners into an efficient welfare staff. He supervised the transit of 5,000 Russian and French prisoners each day, and still controlled the other masses who would have to stay in his district [December 1945].

On his return to the UK Buck was earmarked by Major Roy Farran, DSO, MC\*: 'Every effort must be made to get this officer of SAS Bde, preferably for 2 SAS.' Buck's own correspondence with the unit, all dated 31 July 1945, recorded that he was keen to go with them to India if required: 'At the moment I'm being handled by the India office (Secretary, Military Department) as a normal Indian Army casualty. It should, however, make my detachment from regimental duties easier, if it be pointed out that I have not been released from special service.' At the time preparations were being made for the regiment to support SOE's Force 136 in the Far East. Whether his proposed transfer was actioned before his death is unknown. However, his last unit, SIG, was under the command of L Detachment SAS at the time of his capture and he therefore warrants inclusion within this Roll of Honour.

Buck was killed in air crash on the morning of 22 November 1945 at White's Farm near Broadway Pound in Somerset. This was just two weeks after he married his childhood sweetheart at St Peter's Church, Yateley, and just before the last members of the Regiment were posted to other units on disbandment. He was en route to India aboard a Liberator that had taken off from RAF Merryfield:

A/C crashed into hillside 900' feet high 4.5 miles from A/F [airfield] soon after TO [take-off].

Pilot failed to maintain a straight course whilst climbing in cloud after TO made a turn to port & struck high ground. Had been briefed to climb to 1500 feet before turning.

Flight should not have been authorised as the pilot was not sufficiently trained and had not been checked by CO or Flt Commander [RAF Aircraft Accident Card].

All those aboard, five aircrew and twenty-two army passengers, were killed, the squadron log noting:

Local residents were first to arrive on the scene, quickly followed by Station and squadron personnel. The aircraft found in flames and all occupants dead except the pilot who, however, died before he could be taken to hospital.

Judging from the debris the impact must have been tremendous and it is some consolation, poor though it may be, that the deaths were instantaneous. The aircraft was a complete write-off [53 Squadron's Operations Record Book, November 1945].

Two days later *The Somerset County Gazette* reported:

Apparently it did not obtain sufficient height to clear the hillside (which rises to 930 feet), struck a tree, caught fire and burned out in a field not far from Castle Neroche, belonging to Mr J. Gent of Castle Farm, Buckland St Mary.

Buck's death certificate states his death was due to 'War Operations', his Mention in Despatches presumably awarded for his activities as a prisoner, being published in the *London Gazette* on 23 January 1947.

Son of Lt-Colonel Cecil Henry Buck and of Eleanor May Buck of Oakhurst, Yateley, Camberley, Hampshire – Husband of Celia Buck (née Wardle) of Yateley who served in the WRNS – Buck's father is known to have dedicated his unpublished memoirs to his son.

Age 28.

Panel 1. Also commemorated on Yateley's war memorial, on a memorial stone to the victims of Liberator KH126 on Hare Lane near White's Farm, within Eastbourne College's Memorial Building and on a tablet in St Peter's College chapel.



*WWII Memorial at Reading Crematorium*





7503945 Mielecki, Leopold 'P/76675' Iminster Cemetery Section D2 Grave 5.



## NEWSPAPER REPORTS

### AIR CRASH ON

### BLACKDOWNS.

### LATE ARRIVALS' ESCAPE.

ONLY through missing the Yeovil-Ilminster 'bus by a few minutes did a Yeovil soldier and his North Country friend escape being among those killed in the recent crash of a Liberator R.A.F. 'plane on the Blackdowns, near Buckland St. Mary, in which 27 Service personnel lost their lives.

He was Signaller Kenneth John Barber, only child of Mr. and Mrs. J. Barber, 8, West Coker-road. His wife is the eldest daughter of Mrs. and the late Mr G. Bird, of 13 Woodland-terrace. They were married only five weeks ago at the end of a 28 days' leave from Germany. Signaller Barber had served in the West since D-Day in June of last year. He was then stationed near London, and on the Monday before the crash was sent to Ilton, near Ilminster, a few miles from Merrifield Airfield, from which the 'plane took off.

On the day prior to the disaster (Wednesday last week) he and his friend, Lce.-Corpl. Frank Bowen, were given 24 hours' embarkation leave. As he had not time to go to his home, Lce.-Corpl. Bowen accompanied Signaller Barber to his home. Both were bound for India, and were due to report back next morning. They missed the 'bus at Yeovil and "hitch-hiked." but arrived at the airfield too late. The 'plane had left. A short while later they learnt that the 'plane in which they should have been travelling had crashed, killing all on board. Some of Signaller Barber's kit and personal belongings were in the Liberator. That evening he 'phoned his wife, telling her he was safe and well, and that he had missed the 'plane. He did not tell her of the crash. Only next day did she learn what had happened.

It is understood that both Signaller Barber and his friend have now left this country for India.

### NAMES OF CASUALTIES

Among the 27 killed when a Liberator of R.A.F. Transport Command crashed shortly after leaving Merrifield R.A.F. Station near Ilminster, on Thursday last week, were four Polish members of the crew and second pilot, Flying Officer G.J. Myers, R.A.F. states an Air Ministry communique on Saturday.

Other fatal casualties were Major H. W. G. Staunton (Indian Medical Service), Capt.

H. C. Buck (1st Punjab Regiment). Lieut. P. J. Biles (Royal Indian Army Service Corps), Lieut. A. G. Quick (Indian Signal Corps), and the following Signalmen of the Royal Corps of Signals: A. J. Birch, R. C. Anderson, R. O. Anderson, J. H. Attwood, B. Benjamin, J. W. A. Brewis, W. Charlton, A. E. Clark, L. J. Currey, H. Donovan, L. H. Downs, L. R. Dyer, P. B. Fairburn, R. D. Farrance, F. Gent, R. Williams, C. Williams and Driver (i/c) B. Fox.

### MILITARY HONOURS FOR FIVE

### VICTIMS.

### BURIED AT YEOVIL.

With full military honours five of the young victims of the Ilminster air crash were buried at Yeovil on Wednesday morning. They were Major Harry William Gilbert Staunton (37), Indian Army Medical Corps; Lieut Peter Biles (22), Indian Army Medical Corps; and three Signalmen of the Royal Corps of Signals - Ronald Oswin Anderson (22), Owen Williams (19) and Robert Charles Anderson (19).

Lieut-Col, the Rev. W. H. King, M.C., T.D. deputy-assistant Chaplain-General, attended, and also represented Major-General M. E. Dennis, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. The Chaplain expressed to the relatives who were able to be present the Army's heartfelt sympathy, and said it was tragic loss of young lives which might have meant so much to the country. Last post was sounded, three volleys were fired over the graves, and Reveille concluded the military ceremonial. The Rev. G. Daunt, H.C.F., and the Rev. H. J. Pollard (Methodist) conducted the service and read the lesson, respectively.

Nearly 200 officers, N.C.O.s and men took part. Capt. J. A. G. Braithwaite (Adjutant), No. 6 Training Battalion, R.A.S.C., had charge of the local arrangements, and Major J. A. G. Tozer and Lieut. K. D. Cottingham, R.A.S.C. officially represented the mourners for the officer victims. Fifty other ranks provided bearer parties, firing party and buglers. Three officers and 100 N.C.O.s and men of the 618th Regiment Royal Artillery, stationed at Barwick, formed a guard of honour.

Messers. G. H. Cook and Son. Bond-street, Yeovil, carried out the funeral arrangements.

*Somerset County Gazette*

**AIR CRASH**  
**Liberator Hits Hillside**  
**Near Buckland**  
**27 KILLED**

A terrible 'plane crash occurred in the fog on the Blackdown Hills, near morning. The crew of five and 22 passengers, all British Army personnel returning to India after leave, were killed – 26 outright, the other dying on the way to hospital.

The aircraft, a Liberator of R.A.F. Transport Command, had taken off from the Merryfield R.A.F. Station, near Ilminster, some four or five miles away, at 10 a.m. Apparently it did not attain sufficient height to clear the hillside (which rises to 930 feet), struck a tree, caught fire and burned out in a field not far from Castle-Neroche, belonging to Mr. J Gent, of Castle Farm, Buck-land St. Mary.

“It was an appalling spectacle, with wreckage strewn about the grass field,” states a “News” reporter, who visited the scene. “Part of the 'plane had gone over the hedge into Hare Lane, which runs alongside the field. One propellor was two fields back from the lane, while other wreckage was in a field on the opposite side of the lane. Articles of Service-men's clothing, respirators, foodstuffs and personal possessions were scattered about. The lane itself was blocked to traffic. It is a lonely spot and no other property was endangered. I gather that two men for whom accommodation had been reserved on the 'plane arrived at Merryfield too late for the journey.”

No one appears to have witnessed the actual crash. When last seen in flight the troop carrier was very low.

Several people living near heard the crash and hurried to the scene. They found the 'plane smashed to pieces and blazing furiously.

The Air Ministry announced last night that further details would be available when all the next-of-kin had been communicated with.

It is understood that a R.A.F. Court of Inquiry will be held at Merryfield, where – as, indeed, all over the neighbourhood – the affair has caused a profoundly painful sensation.

Saturday Nov. 24th 1945

7503677 Kleybor, Stanislaw  
'P/2416' Ilminster Cemetery  
Section D2 Grave 25.



## Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Id	Surname	Forename	AgeAtDeath	Honours	Rank	Regiment	Secondary Regiment	Unit	CountryOfService	ServiceNumber	Cemetery	GraveRef	AdditionalInfo
2692504	ANDERSON	ROBERT CHARLES	19		Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals			United Kingdom	'14902515'	YEOVIL CEMETERY	Div. A. Grave 2725.	"Son of Alexander Charles and Caroline Kezia Anderson, of Sherbrook, Derbyshire."
2692505	ANDERSON	ROLAND OSWIN	0		Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals			United Kingdom	'14311367'	YEOVIL CEMETERY	Div. A. Grave 2600.	
2706609	ATTWOOD	JAMES HENRY	22		Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals			United Kingdom	'14216739'	MARLOW CEMETERY	Sec. A. Row E. Grave 5.	"Son of James Henry and Violet Maud Attwood; husband of Winnifred Adalaide Ivy Attwood, of Marlow."
2408854	BENJAMIN	DONALD BERNARD	19		Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals			United Kingdom	'14438298'	LEEDS (LOUIS STREET) POLISH JEWISH CEMETERY	Row R. Grave 115.	"Son of Louis and Rachel Gertrude Benjamin, of Chapel Allerton, Leeds. His brother, Sidney Montagu Benjamin, also died on service."
2692508	BILES	PETER JAMES	0		Lieutenant	Royal Indian Army Service Corps			Indian	'EC/7914'	YEOVIL CEMETERY	Div. A. Grave 2362.	
2706766	BIRCH	ANTHONY JOHN	20		Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals			United Kingdom	'14621486'	WEST WYCOMBE (ST. LAWRENCE) CHURCHYARD		"Son of Stanley William and Margaret Ruth Birch, of Beaconsfield."
2452381	BREWIS	JOHN WILLIAM ALEXANDER	22		Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals			United Kingdom	'14649020'	EDINBURGH (WARRISTON) CREMATORIUM	Panel 1.	"Son of Victor George and Marion Brewis, of Wooler, Northumberland."
7503275	BRZEZINSKI	JAN	25		Sierzant	Polish Air Force		53 (R.A.F.) Sqdn.	Polish	'P/780234'	ILMINSTER CEMETERY	Section D2 Grave 55.	



2421873	BUCK	HERBERT CECIL	28		Military Cross	Captain	1st Punjab Regiment	"Special Air Service Regiment, A.A.C."	Indian	'1117'		READING CREMATORIUM	Panel 1.	"Son of Lt.-Col. Cecil Henry BUCK, Indian Army, and Eleanor May BUCK, of Yateley, Hampshire; husband of Celia BUCK (nee Wardle), of Yateley. M.A. (Oxon.)."
2696895	CHARLTON	WILLIAM ARMSTRONG	21			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14366015'		SUNDERLAND (MERE KNOLLS) CEMETERY	Ward 12. Sec. A. Grave 1728.	"Son of James and Mary Elizabeth Charlton, of Southwick, Sunderland."
2431149	CLARK	ARTHUR EDWIN	18			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14957177'		GREENFORD PARK CEMETERY	Sec. C.4. Grave 25072.	"Son of Frederick William and Annie Martha Clark, of Ealing."
2412555	CURRY	LAURENCE JAMES	24			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'2368080'		LIVERPOOL (YEW TREE) ROMAN CATHOLIC CEMETERY	Sec. 2C. Grave 70.	"Son of Charles Joseph and Elizabeth Curry, of Moreton, Cheshire."
2722207	DONOVAN	HERBERT	20			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14646239'		LEYTONSTONE (ST. PATRICKS) ROMAN CATHOLIC CEMETERY	Screen Wall. Plot 11C. Grave 2.	"Son of Michael and Grace Donovan of Stepney, London."
2722417	DOWNES	LEONARD HENRY	0			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14622999'		MANOR PARK CEMETERY	Sec. 52. Grave 372.	
2722928	DYER	LESLIE RAYMOND	19			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14939236'		BRIGHTON (WOODVALE) BOROUGH CREMATORIUM	Panel 2.	
2451848	FAIRBAIRN	PETER BROWN	19			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14916092'		EDINBURGH EASTERN CEMETERY	Sec. D. Grave 644.	"Son of James and Margaret Fairbairn, of Edinburgh."
2655351	FARRANCE	RONALD DOUGLAS	0			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14945626'		"STONE CEMETERY, DARTFORD"	Grave 156.	
2714124	FOX	BRYAN WILLIAM	19			Driver	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'2392785'		ATHERSTONE CEMETERY	Sec. O. Grave 201.	"Son of Reginald Alfred and Gladys Fox, of Atherstone."
2402777	GENT	FREDERICK WALTER	0			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals		United Kingdom	'14394238'		KIMBERWORTH (ST. THOMAS) CHURCHYARD	Old part. Grave 2496.	

7503677	KLEYBOR	STANISLAW	25		Distinguished Flying Cross	Porucznik	Polish Air Force			53 (R.A.F.) Sqdn.	Polish		'P/2416'	ILMINSTER CEMETERY	Section D2 Grave 25.	
7503945	MIELECKI	LEOPOLD	34			Kapitan	Polish Air Force			53 (R.A.F.) Sqdn.	Polish		'P/76675'	ILMINSTER CEMETERY	Section D2 Grave 5.	
2408342	MYERS	GORDON JENKINS	21			Flying Officer	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve			53 Sqdn.	United Kingdom		'165008'	LEEDS (ARMLEY) CEMETERY	Sec. A. Grave 296.	"Son of William and Alice Emily Myers, of Leeds."
2692188	QUICK	ARTHUR GEORGE	26			Lieutenant	Indian Signal Corps				Indian		'EC/10780'	NORTH PETHERTON CEMETERY	Sec. 4.	"Son of Albert and Kate Quick, of North Petherton."
2692538	STAUNTON	HENRY WILLIAM GILBERT	37			Major	Indian Army Medical Corps				Indian		'MZ/13494'	YEOVIL CEMETERY	Div. A. Grave 2344.	"Son of Gilbert Patrick and Emily Staunton; husband of Sylvia Staunton, of Southbourne, Bournemouth, Hampshire."
2692546	WILLIAMS	OWEN	18			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals				United Kingdom		'14913071'	YEOVIL CEMETERY	Div. A. Grave 2727.	"Son of Edwin and Rose H. Williams, of Cockerham, Lancashire. His brother, Alan, also died on service."
2403797	WILLIAMS	ROY E. C.	18			Signalman	Royal Corps of Signals				United Kingdom		'14948895'	MANCHESTER CREMATORIUM	Panel 23.	"Son of John Clifford and Ethel Williams, of Urmston."
7504533	WIZE	ANTONI	30			Porucznik	Polish Air Force			53 (R.A.F.) Sqdn.	Polish		'P/2441'	NEWARK-UPON-TRENT CEMETERY	War Graves Plot Section G Grave 329.	

## 76 YEARS LATER

The aircraft was fully fuelled, but, without a bomb load, it was not at its maximum weight—passengers being lighter than bombs—and had the range to make a non-stop flight to Castle Benito, assuming more-or-less straight-line track over France. The take-off was reported to be normal, with flaps set correctly, and the undercarriage was seen to be raised or raising as the aircraft went into the low cloud base. The report could find no evidence of malfunction of the aircraft or its systems. Nevertheless, the climb rate after take-off would have been low, possibly as low as 300 ft/min.

A radio call about one minute later from the crew (not necessarily the captain) that they were ‘airborne and climbing’ would be normal and indicate that the undercarriage was up and probably that the flaps were retracted. This ‘cleaning-up’ of the aircraft would normally be done maintaining the runway heading.

When the aircraft crashed four minutes after take-off it had already turned onto a heading of 215° (some 65° from the runway heading), possibly because the pilot had already started his turn onto his probable route heading of about 165° for Castel Benito. Contrary to the briefing he had been given to climb straight ahead to 1,000-1,500 ft after take-off, he would probably have started a gentle turn to port soon after raising the flaps. Banking the heavy-laden aircraft would have reduced the already low rate of climb and it does not surprise me that he had not made the height required to clear Castle Hill after such a short time from take-off. The pilot would have been flying on instruments in cloud and I doubt very much whether he would have had time to alter the aircraft’s heading significantly to avoid the ground, even if he had seen the ground at the last moment—very unlikely if he was concentrating on his instrument flying. If this was the actual sequence of events, the track of the aircraft would have been a straight flight of about two minutes, say, as the aircraft was cleaned up and then a gentle, climbing turn which ended as the aircraft passed through 215° and hit the ground. That fits with the crash point relative to the airfield.

It was a tragic and, in my opinion, an avoidable accident had the pilot been more aware of the local topography—he had only flown at night from Merryfield since his recent arrival there—and had he followed the advice of the briefing officer to climb straight ahead to safety height before turning onto his route heading. And, of course, the very poor weather (marginal for flying) did not help.

Wg Cdr W. A. Bell, R.A.F. (Ret.)



7503275 Brzezinski, Jan  
Ilminster Cemetery Section D2  
Grave 55.