

THE photograph of the handsome young airman had always fascinated Linda Helsdon. The picture of her uncle, Walter Perkins, hung on the wall in her grandmother's Calverton home.

Linda wanted to know all about the boyish warrior in full flying gear, posing with a smile for the camera.

"I used to ask my Nan (Walter's mother) but she would just say, 'he's away in a different country, he's at war and he's not coming home'. She wouldn't talk about it."

The truth was that Walter Perkins was killed in 1945, long before Linda was born. He never did come home to Calverton but today lies at rest in Durnbach War Cemetery, in Bavaria, alongside his fallen comrades.

The Calverton teenager was just 19 when his plane, Flying Fortress HB785 of 214 (Federated Malay States) Squadron, was shot down on a raid designed to destroy a synthetic-oil plant near Leipzig.

All ten crewmen were killed.

As she grew up, Linda became determined to piece together the story of the uncle she never knew and embarked on a research project that has turned up photographs and documents about him.

"He should not be forgotten. He was an air gunner, one of the most dangerous jobs there was," she says.

"I have such a fascination with the war, I am just so proud of all of them – not just heroes to me, but legends."

Walter was the eldest son of Calverton miner William Perkins and his wife, Alice Gladys.

"It must have been a terrible shock to lose their first-born," says Linda, who also lives in Calverton and is an enthusiastic member of the local Royal British Legion branch.

"Today and every day I think of my uncle Walter. I have found it all very disturbing but it has made me more determined to march for our heroes on Remembrance Day and to honour and respect them."

Whether it was anti-aircraft fire or a German fighter plane, exactly how HB785 was lost is not known. But there were no survivors when the huge bomber crashed in the Black Forest.

Source <http://www.nottinghampost.com/Calverton-air-gunner-s-memory-kept-alive/story-15736287-detail/story.html>