

Colin James Ashworth of Rangiora, New Zealand

Flight Sargent RNZAF. 427492. Pilot.



Flt/Sgt. C. J. Ash-
worth, of Rangiora,
killed on active service.

Colins death notice from English newspaper.

Colin was my maternal grandfathers' cousin. The Ashworth family was a large part of North Canterbury history.

I have some early memories of my grandmother telling a story of a relative who died in the war, in a plane crash. And my mother once said his surname was Ashworth.

On Anzac day 2018 I visited Wigram Airforce Museum and was looking across the names on the memorial board when a museum helper asked if I had any family in the board, I pointed to the name of C.J. Ashworth- a name I had also seen on the Memorial in Rangiora. The gentleman went away and came back shortly with a copy of For Your Tomorrow, by Errol Martyn. This book is a comprehensive list of New Zealand service men who died in war time.

It included some information about Colin Ashworth- from Sefton, as were my Grandparents. RNZAF training in New Zealand.

Embarked for England in August of 1943. Completed further flight training in England and flew Wellington and Stirling bombers before joining No.214 Squadron RAF.

Colin was killed when his Fortress III four engine bomber crashed while landing at RAF Foulsham in Norfolk upon return from a highly secret flight.

This visit started a small project for me, and I have spent some time researching both Colins history, His squadron, and the aircraft he was flying that night.

In January 2020 I received further information on his military service including that he served in the army before joining the air force, he trained at Harwood with the No.3 Elementary flying training school, then moved on to the No.2 Flight training school at Woodbourne. The information is not all in this project yet and in April 2020 I found a person in England who not only had a copy of the accident report, the Squadrons operational record book for the time of the accident and also knew another person who identified the crash site in 1995 and recovered some aircraft parts that were donated to the City or Norwich aviation museum.

More information to research and follow up on.

Of note, from the recently available crash information revealed several reasons for the accident including pilot inexperience, very poor weather- no flights possible 2 days before and 3 days after the night of the 15th November 1944 and an issue with poor radio communication which appears to be an incompatible radio system (or insufficient training on) in the American made bomber and the English ground radio.

Colin James Ashworth

Born 6.7.1922 at Rangiora

Son of Abram Ashworth (3.8.1894-5.6.1970) and of Jessie Mitchell Ashworth (-23.12.1968, aged 70-71, Nee McGowan), of Sefton, North Canterbury, New Zealand. (Married 16.6.1920)



Abram Ashworth.

Abram Ashworth had served as a Lance Corporal with C Squadron of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles in the NZEF during WW1 and was awarded the Military Medal – occupation listed as Farmer(sheep- 5600 as of 1915) (Father- James Ashworth, Harleston, Sefton, North Canterbury)- Left New Zealand for Egypt early January 1916.

My Great Grandfather also service in WW1 and received the military medal for his actions.

Colin received some schooling at St Andrews College, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Remembered and Honoured

Wigram Air force Museum

Rangiora War memorial

Sefton War memorial

Balcairn cemetery

St Andrews college roll of honour

International Bomber Command Centre- Phase 2, Panel 124.

Auckland War memorial

Known Information from Web and RNZAF museum book collection.

Died Thursday 16th November 1944, Aged 22.

Buried Cambridge City Cemetery- Grave 15351



RAF 100 (Bomber support) Group, 214 (Federated Malay States) Squadron.



No. 214 Squadron was commanded at the time of the crash by Wing Commander D.D. Rogers, RAF (Took command on 26.8.1944).

The Squadron had previously flown Vickers Wellington Medium bomber and Short Stirling Heavy Bomber as part of Bomber command.

In January of 1944, the Squadron moved under the 100 Bomber Support group and began converting from bombing to counter measures using Fortress Mk2 and Mk3 and Short Stirling (already in use by squadron).

The fatal flight was Colin's second operation after converting to the Fortress (Boeing B17). 17 Fortresses of 214 Squadron are known to have been lost during the war.

Total of 192 Radio Counter Measure raids in Fortresses of No. 214 Squadron 1944-1945

214 also flew B24 liberator after end of 1944- Unsure if used for counter measures or as a bomber force.



Unknown 214 Squadron Fortress III. England 1944.

RAF Boeing B17 Fortress Mk.III -BU-J

Serial HB787. B17-50-BO. 42-102438

F Tail- Staggered barrelled waist

Boeing built aircraft. Forced landing while still in the USA.

Colour scheme was an all black lower surfaces with a lighter RAF camouflage upper surface. RAF Roundel on sides and wings. BU-J and HB787 identification markings on sides. Lower ball turret omitted and chin bulge for radar installed in place of the front nose turret.

Boeing Fortress III HB787

Delivered Cheyenne 3/3/44; with McKinley Soffa force landed Gore Fd, Mt 8/3/44; Dorval 10/3/44; Assigned RAF [HB787]; 214 Sq BU-J RCM Oulton, Nfk.; on return from RCM mission approaching base crashed a mile south of Foulsham, Nfk.; 16/11/44 with C Ashworth, G. Hislop, A. Leitch, W. McLaren, P. Durman, E. Armstrong, T. McCormack, Ogilvie, R. Mooney, A. McLaughlin (10 Killed in Action), Salvaged & Written off.

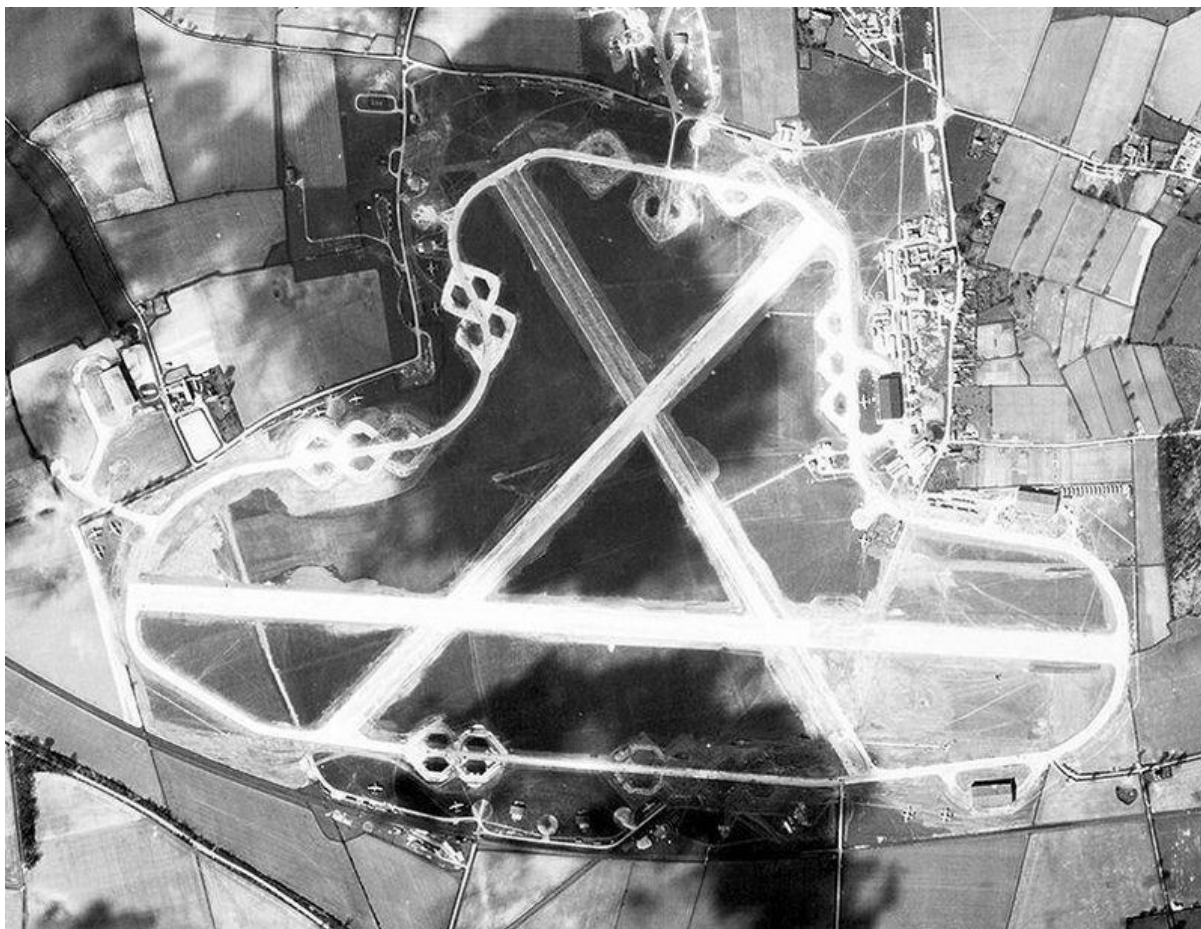


BU-W Fortress III in flight (BU-J would have looked very similar).



RNZAF Gunner L Budge in a 214 Squadron Fortress. Radar aerials are for the Airborne Grocer radar jamming equipment.

Airfields



RAF Oulton 1944.

Aircraft departed RAF Oulton 15.11.1944 23;30 on a “Window Drop” and radio counter measure mission in support of a Bomber command raid- unknown raid location at this time.

Approx. 5-hour flight- likely not active over Germany but over English Channel or low countries. As they were an inexperienced crew, they were likely doing window drop over the channel or Holland in support of a Bomber command raid.

Crashed in Twyford, England. Approx. 1 mile south west of RAF Foulsham, Norfolk 04;40 hours 16.11.1944

Take off from Oulton. The Aircraft crashed at 04;40 Hrs and burnt out while attempting to land. Roughly one mile S/W of Foulsham airfield in Norfolk

Took off at 2330 Hours and on returning to Norfolk in poor weather, diverted to RAF Foulsham. On approach there in poor visibility at 0436, with cloud down to

100 Ft, a faulty r/t (radio transmitter) and not forewarned of a crosswind, HB787 struck the ground several miles S/W of the air field, bounced, and climbed into the cloud, stalled and crashed into a wheat stubble field farmed by Mr Seaman of Twyford. All ten crewmembers died, 3 RNZAF airmen being buried at Cambridge, the last transported to Northern Ireland



Modern day disused RAF Foulsham

Foulsham had at some stage in 1944, FIDO (Fog Investigation and dispersal operation) system fitted to disperse fog. Basically, burning lines of fuel down either side of the runway to create heat to clear fog. May have also been helpful in marking the runway in poor visibility?



FIDO system in action, unknown airfield.

Other RNZAF crew on flight.

F/S Earnest Robert Armstrong- 427084- Wireless operator- 20 Yrs. Geraldine, New Zealand.

F/S Terence Francis McCormack-429183- Air Gunner- 24 Yrs. Hastings, New Zealand

F/S Alexander McLaughlin- 422972- Air Gunner- 27 Yrs. (Irish immigrant to New Zealand)

Four other crew, two RAF, four RCAF.

Possible RAF raid involved, or similar mission?

16 November 1944 – Bomber Command tasked with bombing Düren, Jülich and Heinsberg with just under 1,200 bombers. Düren was attacked by 485 Lancasters and 13 Mosquitoes, Heinsberg by 182 Lancasters, and Jülich by 413 Halifaxes, 78 Lancasters and 17 Mosquitoes of 4, 6 and 8 Groups. Three Lancasters lost over Düren, one over Heinsberg, but none over Jülich.



No. 214 Squadron Fortress III

No. 214 squadron Fortresses were fitted with some of the following:

H2S- Chin dome ground tracking radar in use

Cigar (ABC)- Large upper aerial for blocking R/T and homing beacons or

Jostle- Short upper aerial- Blocking of up to 6 radio bands

Piperack- Countermeasure against Lichtenstein SN-2 Radar intercept system- whip aerials above wings- counter air intercept.

Carpet- Under mid-fuselage aerial directed at Wurzburg GCI radar

Window- Chutes below waist windows.

Airborne grocer- Aerials mounted either side of tail- Jammer for Ai radar.

Monica- Mounted between tail guns- tail warning radar.

Jamming equipment was ground to air or ground to ground. Normal mission involved flying around target for approx. 20 Min at max height of 27,000 ft

before Bomber stream arrived, either jamming radio or if German speaking operators were available, redirecting air crew away from stream.

Sister squadron No. 223 Squadron, from 23 August 1944, also flew same B17 aircraft in same role for 100 group until converting to an all B24 squadron, B17s were then returned to 214 Squadron . Also based at Outon. 223 Disbanded 29 July 1945.

Jostle Patrol

Jostle – 2.5kW airborne jamming transmitter carried in sealed bomb bays of 100 Group Fortresses, from TRE.

Cigar, some form of radio jamming. Used German speaking operators to redirect fighters away from stream.

Airborne Cigar (A.B.C.) – Combination of high-speed scanner and three high-power transmitters. Operator would watch the scanner for broadcasts in the typical night fighter bands, if one was seen on the CRT, they would tune it and see if it was indeed an operator. If so, one of the three jammers would put out a warbling tone on that frequency, making verbal instructions impossible.

RAF use of B17

Although Bomber Command had no use for the Fortress as a standard night bomber following the early war experiences with Fortress Mk. Is, the B-17G nevertheless was to play a vital role in the RAF's night bombing offensive against Nazi Germany. This involved some Mk. IIIs being converted for Radio Counter Measures (RCM) work, later called Electronic Counter Measures (ECM), to fly with the RAF's specialist 100 Group. Their role was to combat German defences, particularly radar, to protect the RAF's Main Force of Lancaster and Halifax bombers. The Fortresses intended for this tasking were seconded to Scottish Aviation Ltd at Prestwick for conversion.

Most were fitted with a prominent radome under the forward fuselage for H2S radar equipment, replacing the standard Bendix chin turret of the B-17G. H2S was used as a ground mapping radar by the RAF as an aid to night area bombing, and was also fitted to Main Force Lancaster and Halifax bombers.

There were many other alterations made to the Fortresses, including the installation of various jamming equipment. Indeed, it appears that no two aircraft were the same in their equipment fits. In addition, the RAF also received 14 specially converted B-17Fs directly from Eighth Air Force stocks for ECM work (additional to the aforementioned Mk. II/B-17F airframes), which are sometimes called Fortress Mk. IIIA (serials SR376-SR389). The Eighth Air Force was additionally involved in this form of clandestine and highly secret electronic warfare, and there was considerable collaboration between the RAF and USAAF on this tasking.

Two 100 Group squadrons flew the Fortress Mk. III on Electronic warfare operations. The first of these, 214 (Federated Malay States) Squadron (code letters BU), was based at RAF Oulton from May 1944. Its Fortresses were joined by those of 223 Squadron (code 6G), a Consolidated Liberator unit at Oulton, late in the war; the latter unit flew its first RCM Fortress sorties in April 1945. The Fortress Mk. IIIs of these two squadrons flew in support of Main Force bomber operations with RCM, as well as 'Window' (chaff-dropping), support. A Fortress training unit, 1969 Flight, was also stationed at Oulton.

Involvement in the clandestine RCM war was no guarantee of safety for the Fortresses, however, and several were shot down by German defences. A particularly costly occasion was the night of March 14-15, 1945. Bomber Command's targets that night included oil facilities in the Lützkendorf area, as part of the significant oil/gasoline bombing campaign. 214 Squadron provided jamming support, but its aircraft appear to have become detached from the Main Force bombers, allowing Luftwaffe night fighters the opportunity to make several successful attacks. It was also costly for 214 Squadron itself and two of its Fortress Mk. IIIs, HB802 and HB799 (one published source claims HB779). Both were attacked by aircraft of NJG 6, the two Fortresses probably successfully fired upon by the radio/radar operator of the Junkers Ju 88G-6 night fighter coded 2Z+MF of Hauptmann Martin Becker, Kommandeur of IV./NJG 6. Crew members of HB802 baled out before the Fortress crashed, but the pilot of HB799 managed to bring his crippled Fortress in for a crash-landing at Bassingbourn after the remaining nine crew members bailed out over German-held territory.

The conclusion of World War Two in Europe was the end of the road for many of 100 Group's special Fortresses, and a number were put out to pasture at 51 Maintenance Unit, RAF Lichfield (Fradley). Most of the RAF's Fortresses (except for the Mk. I examples) were supplied under Lend-Lease arrangements with the Americans, who did not require their return, so many were simply

scrapped. However, some examples did soldier on into the early post-war era and the commencement of the Cold War. The need for ECM work did not stop with the end of World War Two, and several Fortress Mk. IIIs served with the Radio Warfare Establishment at RAF Watton in the months following the end of the war.

Every Anzac Day our Family remembers Colin and the other young Kiwis who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

This document is a work in progress as we find more information, I hope to have his full military records, schooling records and some more details on the crash location in Norfolk to add to the project.

Cymon Hewitt.

6.7.1922 Born Rangiora

St Andrews College

Farm labourer on Fathers farm.

NZ army territorial force (2 years) Canterbury Yeoman
Calvary.

11.7.1942 RNZAF Rukuhia- Aircraft hand Airfield Defence Unit
(ADU)

3.8.1942- Tauranga. Remuster as aircrew.

26.11.1942 Initial training wing.

4.2.1943 Remuster as Pilot. No.3 Elementary flying training
school- Harewood.

15.2.1943 First solo flight.

3.4.1943 No.2 Service flight training school- Woodbourne.

31.7.1943 Pilots badge and promotion to Sargent (with effect from 7.6.1943)

21.8.1943- Embarked for United Kingdom.

15.10.1943 No.12 Personal despatch and receipt center.

Nov 1943 Attached to Whitley Bay course for Non Commissioned Officers.

8.2.1944 15p Advanced flying unit- Tiger Moth and Avro Anson twin engine aircraft.

18-27.3.1944 Hospital?

5-9.4.1944 Beam Approach School. Navigational instruction in following radio beams.

16.5.1944 No.11 Operational training unit- Training on twin engine Wellington bombers.

3.8.1944 1657 Heavy conversion unit- Stirling four engine heavy bomber flight training

Unknown- 1944. Joined No.214 Joint Malay States squadron and attached to 1699 Heavy Training Unit- Fortress II training.

Operational flights for 214 Squadron in Fortress III

16.11.1944 Killed on air operation.

