

‘HOFFNUNG’ (Hope) - THE ROCKING HORSE

AND

THE RECONCILIATION

BETWEEN

LLANBEDR and HUCHENFELD

THE BACKGROUND STORY OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN FORMER ENEMIES



PRODUCED BY 214 (FMS) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

NOTES

This document was written in August 2003 by the Secretary of the then No. 214 (FMS) Squadron Association, Peter Walker, for the grandson of a wartime Squadron B17 Flying Fortress aircraft crew member, who baled out of his aircraft over Germany and was brutally murdered by a Nazi youth mob; it was/is intended to give the background and explain why he was Christened in the church of a small German town where his grandfather was murdered.

The German town is called Huchenfeld, on the outskirts of the larger town of Pforzheim and about 35km west of the city of Stuttgart in south-west Germany.

Peter Walker compiled this document from information obtained from various sources, mainly from Renate Beck-Ehninger's book 'The Plaque', but also from letters and conversations with John Wynne, the pilot of the aircraft from which the crew, less himself, had baled out, and Tom Tate one of the baled out crewmembers. Further information was taken from a tape of a December 2002 BBC Radio broadcast 'A Rocking Horse called Hope'. It is based on the facts that were available at the time of writing to Peter Walker, a story which he had 'not sought to sensationalise in any shape or form.....leaving it for the reader to decide'.

It has been reproduced from the original hard copy using OCR techniques. Peter Walker's original wording has been retained with only typo corrections with some minor editorial contextual alterations, re-formatting and additions.

Vic Pheasant
June 2021



Peter Walker (right) with Pippa and John Wynne. May 2003

The Plaque on the Huchenfeld Church

IM GEDENKEN
AN DIE AM 17./18. MARZ 1945 AUF NS. BEFEHL
UMGEBRACHTEN BRITISCHEN FLIEGER
FO. HAROLD FROST
FO. GORDON HALL
FLT. LT. SIDNEY MATTHEWS
FLT. SGT EDWARD PERCIVAL
FO. JAMES VINALL
VATER VERGIB LK 23,34
DEN LEBENDEN ZUR MAHNUNG
1992

The translation of the wording

IN MEMORY
OF THE BRITISH AIRMEN
KILLED ON 17/18 MARCH 1945 ON NAZI ORDERS
FO. HAROLD FROST
FO. GORDON HALL
FLT. LT. SIDNEY MATTHEWS
FLT. SGT. EDWARD PERCIVAL
FO. JAMES VINALL
FATHER FORGIVE LK 23.34
LET THE LIVING BE WARNED
1992

BACKGROUND

The grandson of JAMES VINALL was Christened in the parish church at Huchenfeld on Sunday 20th July 2003. The grandfather, was an RAF Flying Officer (Fg Off) Flight Engineer who baled out of an RAF aircraft and had been taken as a Prisoner Of War (PoW), but was then brutally murdered in Huchenfeld on 18th March 1945.

What happened in the 58 years since is told in an amazing story in 'THE PLAQUE', a privately published, limited edition, book produced in English in Germany by a resident of Huchenfeld, Mrs. Renate Beck-Ehninger.

In order to understand why all these dreadful things were happening in the early part of 1945 it is important to have at least a background knowledge of the attempt by the Allies to quickly bring an end to a war that had been raging since September 1939. This is however a very complex subject which requires a great deal of study, probably over many years.

In March 1945 it was only a matter of weeks before Germany surrendered, leaving her towns, industry and people in ruins. In the meantime, the British and American aircraft continued their relentless attacks against a variety of targets, and from the east the huge Russian armies were almost at the German borders. Germany should have surrendered but was led by a fanatical leader, Adolf Hitler, who appeared to prefer to see his country and people utterly destroyed rather than face reality.

On the night of 23rd February 1945, 367 RAF Lancaster bombers and 13 Mosquitoes attacked the city of Pforzheim near Stuttgart. In good clear weather and bombing from only 8000 feet, the RAF aircraft accurately dropped 1825 tons of bombs. 17,600 citizens were reported to have died and 83% of the built up area of the city was destroyed in the 22 minutes of the raid. This attack took place only ten days after much of the city of Dresden had been destroyed by RAF heavy bombers at night and American heavy bombers by day.

At this time the Nazis were still launching their VI flying bombs and V2 rockets against London and south east England, causing considerable damage and loss of life.

This very brief background is intended to explain why your grandfather and thousands of other young airmen took off from airfields in England to do their duty as they saw it; to finish the war and get back to rebuilding their lives in peace and prosperity. No doubt millions of the German people felt the same way but they lived under a dictatorial regime and dare not speak out for fear of their lives.

Our young airmen aircrew, groundcrew and airwomen, came from all over the world to help get rid of a tyrant and his regime. They came from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA; from Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, Holland, Norway, and indeed from many other countries, to serve in the RAF.

THE RAID ON WHICH THE CREW BALED OUT

On the night of 14th/15th March 1945, 244 RAF Lancaster bombers took off from airfields in eastern England to attack a synthetic oil plant at Lutzkendorf near Leipzig. They were

accompanied by three B17 Flying Fortresses of 214 Squadron, 100 Group, RAF Bomber Command. The Fortresses took off from RAF Oulton, near Blickling, in Norfolk.

Unlike the Lancasters they did not carry bombs but were fitted with sophisticated electronic equipment, then highly secret, for identifying and jamming the German radars controlling anti-aircraft guns, searchlights and night fighter control. A few hours before the raid the crews attended the usual briefing. The Lancaster crews received instructions to carry out the raid from 20,000 feet and the Fortresses to operate above the main bombing force at 22,000 feet. On the return journey they were briefed to come down to lower levels and return at 3000 feet to avoid night fighters

The weather forecast was high westerly winds on the outward journey and light winds from the west on the homeward leg. In the event this latter was to prove inaccurate as further reading will show.

Of the crew, your grandfather was the Flight Engineer, his job being to assist the pilot throughout the flight by managing the engines, advising on various controls, fuel state, temperature gauge readings and a host of other tasks to make sure that all ran smoothly. On the Fortress the Flight Engineer sat in the right hand seat in what would be, in USAAF aircraft, the co-pilot's position. RAF Fortresses did not carry a co-pilot.

After the attack on the synthetic oil plant at Lutzkendorf the Lancasters and the three Fortresses started to come down to lower levels as instructed, and by the time they had travelled about 60 miles they were down to 3000 feet.

However the weather forecast was inaccurate, the winds at this level were much stronger than anticipated and as a result the whole force was pushed off course to the south and east of where they thought they were. (There were no accurate long range navigational aids in those days.)

The Fortress in which your grandfather was flying was hit by flak in the wheel-bay of No. 2 engine (port inner). The oil pressure on this engine was then seen to be falling fast, the propeller would not feather and within minutes the engine caught fire. The fire extinguisher button was pressed but had no effect on the fire. (When a propeller driven engine is damaged, or out of action, the blades of the propeller can be turned to offer the least resistance to the airflow, this is called 'feathering'. The propeller can then be stopped from turning by disengaging it from drive shaft.) From the Fortress flight manual the pilot and your grandfather knew they had a safety margin of about 20 minutes before the firewall behind the engine burnt through into the wing. In the wing were the fuel tanks, by now half empty, but also with a large volume of petrol vapour, which would almost certainly cause a severe explosion if the fire reached this area.

According to the navigator's log they were 50 miles east of the river Rhine and had travelled 80 miles with a vibrating and disintegrating engine on fire. With the firewall 20 minutes 'safety' margin the pilot considered that he had time to cross the Rhine before baling out his crew.

At this time the Allied armies were occupying most of the territory west of the Rhine and therefore if the crew baled out in this region they should parachute down into a friendly area. It

was very dark and little could be seen from the air and, as a result of those much stronger winds, they were actually further south and east of where they thought they were. (This situation applied to most of the Lancasters as well as the Fortresses.) The Fortress flew on until they thought they had crossed the Rhine, the pilot then gave the order to 'abandon aircraft'. Eight of the crew baled out and your grandfather (Fg Off Vinall) then went through the aircraft to check that they had all baled out. He reported 'all gone' to the pilot and, after a brief discussion, he then baled out from one of the open escape hatches. (See pages 62/63 in 'The Plaque' for a more detailed account of these tense moments.) A pilot, as captain, is not only responsible for his crew but also for his aircraft and equipment carried on board. He is usually the last to leave the aircraft unless in dire circumstances.

With his crew safely gone, the pilot, John Wynne, had to decide whether he could save his crippled aircraft and bale out before it was too late. He was now alone, with the risk that the aircraft could disintegrate at any moment. He was down to only about 1500 feet above the ground, travelling at about 120 mph, in darkness and with no navigational aids to guide him.

We will now leave John Wynne and his predicament but will return to him later. In the meantime the account of what happened to the nine crew members after they landed by parachute is now related.

PRISONERS OF WAR

Of the nine airman who had bailed out, two, Heal and Pow had been injured and taken to hospital after their capture. The other seven, Bradley, Tate, Frost, Matthews, Hall, Percival and Vinall were also captured, interrogated and taken to a civil prison at Buhl, near Baden-Baden. On the morning of Saturday 17th March 1945 they were taken by lorry to Pforzheim. They were then marched through the centre of what remained of the city, mostly rubble after the RAF raid of February 23rd, and then on to the village of Huchenfeld. This was the local centre for the registration of prisoners of war who afterwards should have been taken to the POW camp, Stalag 5a, at Ludwigsburg. This did not happen; instead they were put in the boiler room of the local school. (See pages 76/77 of 'The Plaque'.)

They were not long in the basement boiler room when they were roughly removed and marched through the village until they came to a barn with large closed doors but with a small service door that was open. Tom Tate saw that an electric light was on and ropes were hanging from a beam. There were lots of people around, shouting and jeering, and Tom's first reaction was that they were all going to be lynched. His second reaction was to put his head down rugby style and run, charging through the crowd of German civilians. So surprised were the guards and civilians that, with their attention on Tom running away, they took their eyes off the other prisoners for a moment. This gave Norman Bradley and James Vinall their opportunity and they ran away in the opposite direction.

In bare feet Tom ran up the road, turned into an alleyway, over fences, hedges, anything, he just ran for his life. He crossed a field, came to a pine forest and then to a small plantation of oaks. Here he lay on the ground and covered himself in leaves. He heard a lot of gunfire coming from the direction of the village. Norman Bradley also ran, running into a steep wooded valley and hid himself in the darkness of the night. James Vinall apparently hid in a dark doorway for a few

moments until he too ran off into the wooded valley. Within a few minutes the remaining four airmen, Harold Frost, Sidney Matthews, Gordon Hall and Edward Percival were pushed towards the churchyard in Huchenfeld, and here they were shot - almost certainly the gunfire that Tom Tate had heard. Next day, 18th March, all of the other three were either recaptured or gave themselves up to German troops. Tom Tate and Norman Bradley were, after more interrogation, and traumatic happenings, sent by train to the POW camp at Ludwigsburg.

Tragically, James Vinall, although captured by German troops, had the misfortune to be found by the Nazi Youth and others of the lynch mob who proceeded to overrule the guards and dragged him away and shot him. (Pages 88/89 in 'The Plaque'.) Tom Tate and Norman Bradley were eventually marched, together with thousands of other Allied prisoners, south east into Bavaria, ending up at the small town of Ettringen.

The five murdered airmen were provisionally buried in the churchyard at Huchenfeld, but a few weeks later, when the Allied armies overran the area, French soldiers reburied them properly and erected five wooden crosses on their graves. After the war, a large RAF cemetery was established at Durnbach, south of Munich, and here the young airmen were permanently laid to rest in a peaceful place with thousands of other RAF and Commonwealth airmen.

When Tom Tate was recaptured for the second time he asked his guard for news of his comrades and was told that they were 'all well, but one was slightly injured!' With the war at an end, Tom and Norman were, in common with thousands of other Allied prisoners of war, returned to England in May 1945. A few months later, Tom was ordered to return to Germany by the British War Crimes Commission to visit the scene of the crime and give his evidence of the happenings there. At Huchenfeld he was shocked to see five graves with the names of his comrades. He later had to give evidence at the trial of the perpetrators held in Cologne in June 1946. The British Military Tribunal held the trial at Essen-Steele in the Autumn of 1946 and the three Nazi ringleaders were sentenced to death. Five members of the Hitler Youth were sentenced to between 10 and 15 years. Probably because they were so young they were pardoned after four years. (See pages 92/93 of 'The Plaque'.)

JOHN WYNNE'S LONG, LONE FLIGHT

The B17 Flying Fortress HB 799 'K' had been hit by light flak at 49°08 North/09°30 East at 23.12 hours. At 49°00 North 09°00 East at 23.20, about 15 miles NE of Strasbourg, the No. 2 engine caught fire and burned badly. At about 5 miles NW of Strasbourg the pilot altered course to 280° heading for the emergency airfield at Rheims in France. These figures are from the navigator's Log but, as mentioned previously, due to inaccurate weather predictions and strong winds they were further east than they thought. After the crew had left the aircraft the pilot decided that he would try to make Rheims but was unable to make contact by radio.

He flew on with the engine still burning, the propeller still wind-milling, the aircraft vibrating, the roar from the open escape hatches, and the autopilot out of action. Because the propeller was trying to turn a disintegrating engine it created an asymmetrical load on the aircraft which, in turn, meant that the trimming devices on the control surfaces were not working effectively. This meant that, if the pilot took his hands off the control wheel, there was the risk that the aircraft would not continue level flight for long and would likely drop its port wing and spiral down,

probably turning on its back before crashing, now only 1500 feet below. The pilot then decided he would bale out because he was lost and unable to get any help from the ground, ie, radio or radar directions. He trimmed the controls as best he could, took off his flying helmet, left his seat and dashed down the short ladder to the front escape hatch, knowing that in only a few seconds the aircraft could explode or plunge to earth.

Halfway down the ladder he was brought to a sudden halt and, in the semi darkness of the cockpit, he did not know why - but he soon found out. His oxygen tube was caught up with his parachute harness. The only course of action was to remove his parachute pack and then remove the helmet and oxygen mask but, before he could carry this out, the aircraft started to drop its port wing. He rushed up the ladder back to the cockpit, grabbed the control wheel and gradually brought the Fortress back under control and into level flight. In doing so he had lost a little height but was still flying. He was now able to undo his parachute pack, remove his helmet and place it on the co-pilots seat. He then put the parachute back on again followed by the helmet, but this time with the oxygen tube on the outside of the parachute pack. But then, glancing at the altimeter he realized that he was now too low to jump out.

John now decided to fly the aircraft from a standing position, one foot near his own seat and one near the co-pilots seat. He had to lean over to take hold of the control wheel. From this position he could control the aircraft but had only half the distance to cover if he had to get to the escape hatch in a hurry. After about half an hour in this position the pilot thought that the fire appeared to be dying down and indeed the vibrations were not so severe. Within a short time the fire did go out although the propeller was still wind-milling and some sparks could still be seen coming from the area of the engine.

By now he realised that he was somewhere over France but with no hope of finding Rheims. His thoughts were now whether he had a chance to reach England. However without knowing his position he could not be sure what course to alter to for home. He decided that the best course of action would be to go down into the navigator's position in the nose of the aircraft and retrieve the navigator's logs and charts. He could then work out a rough position to set course for England. But before he could do this he had to be sure that the aircraft could be trimmed sufficiently to maintain level flight.

He made this journey three times before he was able to find the correct logs and charts. Returning from his third trip to the navigator's position, he caught the parachute release handle on something and it billowed out into the cockpit. Gathering it up, he operated the harness release and threw the whole lot into the position under the top gunner's turret. Now he had no choice but to continue his flight and dashed, with more charts in his hand, back to his seat to return the aircraft to level flight.

Now that he had the correct log and charts, he could work out where he was and set a rough course for the French coast. But now the engine started burning again; fortunately after another ten miles the fire died down and went out. From the log he knew roughly where he was and altered course 300° for England. He crossed the French coast at 02.40am, crossed the Channel and could then see Beachy Head. By now the wind-milling propeller had sheared from the drive

shaft reducing the asymmetric load from the aircraft. The speed picked up to about 160 mph and by putting on 2° of flap the speed increased further.

Crossing the English coast the pilot saw an airfield beacon, circled it, and fired a flare showing the colours of the day. The airfield did not respond, in any event it was probably a south coast grass airfield, unsuitable for landing a crippled heavy bomber. He flew on, continuing on a course of 300° for fifteen minutes until he saw a searchlight, fired a red flare and flashed his landing lights. The searchlight pointed in a north east direction over London. He altered course to 360° and passed over London at about 160 mph and 3000 feet. Once over London he flew on for a few more miles and then saw an airfield all lit up. He fired another flare and circled the airfield twice before receiving a green flare indicating permission to land. He lowered the undercarriage, which fortunately came down successfully, and approached to land. On touchdown he immediately felt that the tyre on the wheel under the damaged engine had burst from the flak or the fire and he went down the runway for about 1000 yards until he could no longer hold it and down it went onto the wheel rim. With the aircraft now slowing down, the propeller, freed from the air pressure, flew off and hit the fuselage just in front of the cockpit, fortunately not hitting the pilot. The aircraft stopped, John fired another flare, and shortly afterwards a crash wagon arrived.

He collected his kit, jumped down from the aircraft and requested that, because it was carrying highly secret equipment, that a guard be put on the plane. But where was he? The crash crew were Americans - John had landed at the USAAF heavy bomber airfield at Bassingbourn, then in Hertfordshire but now Cambridgeshire. He had been in the air for 9 hours and 40 minutes since taking off from Oulton. Bassingbourne was home to the 91st Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, USAAF, and the Americans were amazed that an RAF B17 had landed at their base, and in the middle of the night and with only the pilot on board. The USAAF heavy bombers generally only flew by day and the 'Yanks' had no idea that the RAF even flew B17s.

After he had landed John Wynne requested to be taken to the airfield control tower in order to telephone to his own airfield at Oulton in Norfolk. He reported that he had landed at Bassingbourne and next day Bob Davies, John's Flight Commander, flew over to collect him and take him back to Oulton. In the meantime the Americans offered him a hearty breakfast, with a choice of bacon and eggs, pancakes with maple syrup, currant buns, as much butter, sugar, coffee and variety of fruit juices as he wanted; such luxury in rationed wartime Britain! Afterwards he was taken to a bedroom in the officers' quarters and fell into a deep sleep. Next day, back at Oulton, John Wynne filed his report to the Squadron Commander and was then sent off on a few days leave.

A few days later he received a telephone call from his Flight Commander to inform him that there was no news from France about his crew. The navigator's log and the logs of some of the Lancasters had been examined and these confirmed that the strong low level winds had affected the aircraft on the route from Nuremberg to the Rhine. John was shocked; after all his efforts to get his crew across the Rhine and into Allied territory, it looked as if they had baled out east of the Rhine. It is now known that they must have baled out near the German town of Buhl, just across the river, a few miles north of Strasbourg. So near and yet so far. John wrote to the next of kin to inform them that it was likely that the crew were Prisoners of War (PoW) and it could be a

while before they were returned with thousands of other PoWs at the end of the war, which was only a few weeks away.

Note: The strong winds had also affected the Lancaster force, eighteen aircraft were lost.

RETURN TO ENGLAND

The Second World War in Europe ended on 7th May 1945 when, at Rheims in France, Germany signed the surrender document in the presence of the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower. Two days later, at the insistence of the Russians, it was ratified in Berlin. The war against Japan continued until the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August 1945. With the war in Europe now at an end, Tom Tate and Norman Bradley, in common with thousands of other former prisoners of war, were flown or shipped home to Britain. Some were sent off on immediate leave, others returned to their units before receiving leave. Those who were sick or injured had to receive medical attention before they could return home or back to their units.

In the summer of 1946 Tom Tate and Norman Bradley were sent back to Germany to give evidence at the enquiries and trial of the Huchenfeld murderers. A few weeks after the end of the war John Wynne moved on to the Radio Warfare Establishment at RAF Watton, Norfolk, and never saw or spoke to Tom again until the end of December 1994 when Tom was 'found' by chance and John rang him at his home at Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire. Tom had remained in the RAF, in a London desk job, until 1946, and then returned to civilian life. It is not known for certain how long Norman remained in the RAF, but probably not many months. With so many airmen leaving the RAF at the end of the war or posted elsewhere, it was inevitable that many soon lost contact with old comrades and never knew what happened to them. Most were just pleased to return to civilian life and pick up the threads of their careers. Most of the Commonwealth airmen returned home within a few weeks or months at the latest after WWII ended. As the years rolled by and they all grew older, many had time to think of their former comrades and wondered if they were still alive and where they lived. Through various organisations such as Squadron Associations, many were able to make contact and meet up with old friends, even in such distant places such as Australia and New Zealand.

Of the crew who did return 'Tubby' Pow, being injured after bailing out, was repatriated by the Red Cross and nothing more is known of his whereabouts after the war. Dudley Heal, the navigator, also injured and sent to a POW hospital, also 'disappeared' until by chance Tom Tate tracked him down living in Southampton in 1995. Sadly he died in 1998, but not before Tom was able to tell him the story of 'The Plaque' and what happened to his fellow crew members. John Wynne, the pilot, stayed in the RAF until the 1970s, ending up as a Wing Commander attached to NATO. After the war John flew Lancasters, Mosquitoes, Canberras, Valiants (the latter with 214Sqn. at Marham) and B52s on secondment to the USAF.

THE PLAQUE AND COMMENCEMENT OF RECONCILIATION

In 1989 a German parson, Curt-Jurgen Heineman-Gruder, retired to Huchenfeld. He later heard rumours of the barbaric murder, as scapegoats for the air attack on Pforzheim, of five British airmen on 18th/19th March 1945. Investigating further, he eventually came forward to reveal the true facts of just what had happened and the story was printed in a leading local newspaper. He

wanted to confront the past and fight for a plaque to be erected on the wall of the churchyard in Huchenfeld. After much debate it was decided that it would be cast in bronze and fixed to the outside wall of the church and not the churchyard wall. On 18th November 1992 the dedication service was held, attended by members of the church and a large congregation. (Pages 32 to 36 in 'The Plaque'.)

The plaque on the church wall commemorates the five airmen, and a copy of the names and wording is the front of this document. As you get older you will no doubt visit the village and see it for yourself. It will be a moving occasion for you but a moment when you can feel proud that your grandfather died, as did thousands of other young men and women, in the service of their country. Attending the dedication service on that day was the widow of one of the murdered airmen, Mrs. Marjorie Frost-Taylor, whose first husband was Flying Officer Harold Frost. As you will see, when reading the book 'The Plaque', she became a central figure in the reconciliation until her death in April 2001.

The next person to be 'found' was John Wynne. A journalist from the Daily Mirror, who had reported on the story of the dedication of the plaque in Huchenfeld, managed to trace John living in Llanbedr in North Wales. When he was told the story of the murder of his crewmen and the dedication of the plaque he was extremely surprised and deeply moved. This was at the end of 1992 and, shortly after this, he spoke on the telephone to Marjorie Frost-Taylor. Until 1992 neither of them knew that the young airmen had been murdered. Marjorie knew that her husband had not returned after the war, and by 1946 the Air Ministry informed her that her husband was not then expected to be alive. Similar letters must have been sent to the families of the others.

This was a disgraceful state of affairs, especially after the war crimes trials when the Air Ministry would almost certainly have been informed. Tom Tate and Norman Bradley would have known because they had been called as witnesses at those trials. However, they were no longer in touch with John Wynne and knew nothing of Marjorie. John would have assumed that the five crew members had returned home after the war and gone their various ways without ever seeing each other again. After writing for a second time to Marjorie Taylor-Frost in 1945, he heard no more until the story broke in 1992. John was determined to get involved with the reconciliation process and felt that he wanted to make his own contribution, something that would be long lasting and which would provide enjoyment to many. He came up with the wonderful idea of a beautiful carved wooden rocking horse to be placed in a newly built kindergarten in Huchenfeld for all the children to enjoy over many future generations. The horse was carved in Wales and sent to Huchenfeld where John and his wife Pip attended the presentation ceremony at the kindergarten.

The horse was called 'Hoffnung', which in English means Hope. Since that date in 1994, many hundreds of children have ridden, every morning, on that wonderful rocking horse and hopefully will do so for generations to come. A small plate is fixed to Hoffnung and says, 'To the children of Huchenfeld from the mothers of 214 Sqn. RAF'.

In January 1995 Tom Tate happened to pick up a copy of the SAGA magazine and saw an article about the Huchenfeld reconciliation and the presentation of Hoffnung in 1994. There was even a picture of John Wynne and another of Edward Percival. Tom was amazed, and then wrote a letter

from SAGA magazine who in turn had contacted John. A short time later, Tom received a phone call from John, the first time that they had spoken to each other since May 1945. Tom eventually visited Huchenfeld in April 1995 and has since been back many times. He is now in his middle 80s but hopes to continue his visits into the future. As a German speaker, he has become a central figure in the ongoing reconciliation process.

Tom Tate had often wondered what had happened to his comrade Norman Bradley who he had not seen since the War Crimes Trials in Essen in 1946. He also thought of the navigator, Dudley Heal who Tom last saw just before they had bailed out of the crippled Fortress. By making various enquiries, and with a little luck, Tom found both men in 1995. Dudley Heal was living in Southampton and Norman Bradley in Newton Abbot, Devon. Tom met them both and told them the story of the reconciliation, John Wynne and Hoffnung. Dudley Heal was not a well man and died in 1998, but Norman has since visited Huchenfeld and the graves of his comrades at Durnbach. Last but not least is the lady who wrote the book, 'The Plaque', published privately in 2002, Mrs. Renate Beck-Ehninger. She speaks fluent English having attended university in Leeds in the 1950s. With her husband, Gotthilf, and other good people of Huchenfeld, she has become a pillar of strength in the reconciliation process. Also, in 1994, the Llanbedr/Huchenfeld Children's Friendship Fund was set up, and in 1996 the first schoolchildren from Llanbedr visited Huchenfeld. In 1997 the first visit of children from Huchenfeld was made to Llanbedr. Visits have continued since and hopefully will continue into the future.



JOHN WYNNE AND HIS OFFICER CREW MEMBERS (IN THE SNOW)
OUTSIDE BUCKLING HALL. FEBRUARY 1945

Standing, left to right:	Fg Off Tom Tate Flt Lt John Wynne DFC Flt Lt Sidney Matthews DFC Flt Lt Dudley Heal DFM Fg Off James Vinall DFM	Special Wireless Operator Pilot/Captain Rear Gunner Navigator Flight Engineer
Front row, left to right:	Fg Off Harold Frost DFM Flt Lt G Pow DFC Fg Off Gordon Hall	Top Gunner Bomb Aimer/'Carpet' Operator Wireless Operator

This photo was taken by Dudley Heal using a camera with a timing device. A short time before Dudley died in 1998, his wife found a small negative of the photo, about 2" square. It was sent to Tom Tate who had the photo made. The quality is poor but is the only known photo of this crew

THEFULL CREW OF BOEING B17 FLYING FORTRESS MK III. HB799 BU-K
214 SQUADRON, RAF OULTON, NORFOLK-100 GROUP, RAF BOMBER COMMAND

Flt Lt. JOHN WYNNE DFC - Pilot & and Crew Captain

- Survived

Although only 23 years old, he had a great deal of experience of bomber operations, having previously served as a Wellington pilot with 40 Squadron in North Africa in 1942/43 and subsequently as an instructor at OTUs (Operational Training Units). John and his crew were on their eighth Fortress jamming raid when their aircraft was hit over Germany.

Flt Lt DUDLEY HEAL DFM - Navigator

- Survived

Dudley Heal had a wide experience of bomber operations having also previously served with 617 Squadron. (The 'Dambusters'; it was said that he was one of the best low level navigators in RAF Bomber Command.) He baled out of the Fortress safely but landed flat on his face on the ridged roof of a high building and had to be rescued by some German soldiers and the fire brigade. Taken prisoner, he did briefly meet up with Tom Tate, but because he was concussed he appeared not to recognise him. Because of his injuries he was separated from the others and eventually returned home at the end of the war, in May 1945, not knowing what had happened to his comrades. By chance in 1995, Tom Tate 'found' him living in Southampton and the two met up for the first time in 50 years. Sadly Dudley did not enjoy good health and died in 1998.

Fg Off JAMES VINALL DFM – Flight Engineer

- Murdered

At 40 he was the oldest member in the crew, with a wealth of operational experience. After the rest of the crew had baled out he went back through the burning aircraft to make sure that they had all gone, and then reported this to the captain before baling out himself. It was a brave action to carry out when the aircraft could have exploded at any moment.

Flt Lt G ('Tubby') POW DFC - Bomb Aimer/Radar Jammer ('Carpet' equipment)

- Survived

Sadly, he came down onto some telegraph wires and was severely scorched on his face and hands. It was also reported that he had broken an ankle or leg. He was captured and taken to hospital, eventually being handed over to the Red Cross and repatriated to England. He must have been quite seriously injured. Nothing is known of his whereabouts after the war and trying to trace him since has not proved successful.

Fg Off TOM TATE - Special Wireless Operator ('Jostle' communications jammer)

- Escaped and Survived

Special Wireless Operators needed an understanding of German in order to identify the enemy transmission signals. Tom was on his 45th Operation when he was shot down. Subsequently he became a central figure in the reconciliation process and visited Huchenfeld many times since 1995. (Tom Tate died in 2016 aged 98, see note on his funeral on the end page.)

Flt Lt GORDON HALL – Wireless Operator

- Murdered

Flt Lt SIDNEY MATTHEWS DFC – Rear Gunner

- Murdered

His rank of Flight Lieutenant and a holder of the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) would indicate that he had considerable operational experience. He was on his 78th operation when he was shot down, having volunteered for a 3rd operational tour.

Fg Off HAROLD FROST DFM – Top Turret Gunner

- Murdered

With the award of the DFM (Distinguished Flying Medal) indicating previous SNCO (Senior Non-Commissioned Officer) service would again indicate a considerable amount of operational experience. He had only been married for two months when he had to bale out of the Fortress on 14th/15th March 1945. His widow Marjorie Frost-Taylor was a central figure in the reconciliation process from 1992.

Flt Sgt EDWARD PERCIVAL DFM – Waist Gunner

- Murdered

Flt Sgt NORMAN BRADLEY DFM – Waist Gunner

- Survived

Shortly after landing from baling out he met up with Tom Tate and, in the dark, they soon found themselves in a German cemetery, but still not knowing if they were in enemy or Allied-occupied territory. They soon found out when a group of German soldiers took them as prisoners of war. After interrogation Norman was taken to a civil prison at Buhl near Baden-Baden where he met up again with six of his comrades, Tom Tate, Sidney Matthews, Harold Frost, Gordon Hall, Edward Percival and James Vinall. In September 1995 Tom Tate 'found' Norman Bradley living in Newton Abbot, Devon. They soon met up and both men have since played a part in the Reconciliation that started in 1992.

THE AIRCRAFT IN WHICH THE CREW FLEW - BOEING B17G -40-VE

US serial 42-98029, built by Lockheed-Vega in Burbank, California, USA, in 1944 and supplied to the RAF on a Lend/Lease basis by the US government. The RAF Serial Number was HB 799 and her squadron code letters were BU - K, the latter being the aircraft's individual radio call sign letter. Powered by four 1200hp Wright Cyclone GR-1820-97 engines, the maximum speed was 280mph at 20,000 feet with a maximum ceiling of 31,500 feet. The normal range was 1,140 miles. From 1943 to 1945 many thousands of these aircraft were in service with the British based American 8th USAAF (United States Army Air Force) as heavy daylight bombers. (The United States Air Force (USAF) was not formed until 1947.)

In service with 214 Squadron, the Fortress was painted in a green and brown camouflage on the upper surface and black on the fuselage undersides and underwing. The squadron code letters and individual aircraft letter, ie BU-K, and the aircraft serial number, ie HB799, were painted in dull brick red.

Tom Tate's Funeral

Aged 98, Tom died on 19th January 2016. He had lived his final years in a care home and, apart from a step grandson and step granddaughter, Tom had no close relatives and few remaining friends. Fearing a minimal attendance at his funeral, the humanist minister who was to conduct the service, Ros Curtis, contacted the 214 Sqn Association Secretary, Peter Walker, seeking help to bolster attendance. In just over a week, word got about. At the 'Commemoration Of His Life' ceremony at the Chilterns Crematorium, Amersham, on 10th February 2016, over 80 personnel were in attendance. This included a large uniformed contingent from nearby RAF Halton headed by a Group Captain, and members of nearby RAFA, RBL and Air Crew Association groups. Three standards were paraded, one from the British Legion and two from RAFA Branches, and the Last Post was sounded by a Sgt bugler from the RAF Central Band. Ros Curtis gave a full account of Tom's life, not only his war time exploits, but also his civilian love of gardening and golf, while his step grandson spoke warmly of the times he spent with Tom, their bicycling exploits, and his respect and love for the man. In her eulogy and tribute to Tom, Ros Curtis said *'To Tom and to men like him we all owe a huge debt of gratitude which should never be forgotten. The value and meaning of life is to live it fully and to live it well, and I think we can all agree that Tom did just that. Some go through life leaving little mark behind them. Tom was not one of those, he has touched the lives of many, some of whom never knew him and his life is an inspiration to those who have learned about him.'* At the wake in a nearby pub, it was agreed that Tom had been given a 'good' send-off and, should he have been looking down, a smile would have been on his lips.

