

ALBERT EDWARD TAYLOR

Sergeant

906563

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

who died on

Saturday, 23rd November 1940, aged 20.

Arthur Jesse Taylor served in the Great War in the Royal Engineers. This photograph, taken after the war with his wife Lilian, shows him as a signaller who had earned two good conduct stripes and the three medals – “Pip, Squeak and Wilfred” awarded for service throughout the war.



The couple lived at Tinkleton, Dorset, where their son *Albert Edward* was born in 1920. The family moved to Hart's Lane, Everton, when Arthur became gardener to Major Hunt at Yeovilton Cottage there.



ALBERT, NINA, FRANCIS, A COUSIN

Lilian later gave birth to twin girls - Nina Doris and Frances Joan. Albert, two years their senior, became very proud and protective of his twin sisters. In 1935, the family moved to Middle Road, Sway which was to remain their home.

After schooling at Hordle, Albert furthered his own education in Maths and French by a postal course and at Bennett's College and served a two-year apprenticeship with Klitz, the music and radio retailers of Lymington. Albert set himself up with his own radio transmitter and receiver in a hut at home communicating by morse code with other enthusiasts. This, however, caused some annoyance to his neighbours when it interfered with their reception of national radio programmes.

Albert was a keen swimmer and belonged to the Lymington Swimming and Water Polo Clubs. He entered the Southsea to Ryde races and swam from the Lymington Yacht Club to The Needles with friends, including Monty, from the club.

Albert was called up on 11th November 1939 and in view of his wireless experience, he volunteered and was selected for aircrew training in the Royal Air Force. From his letters home, generously lent to us by Frances, it is possible to piece together his service. By June 1940, he was at No. 11



ALBERT IN THE GARDEN AT SWAY

School of Technical Training at RAF CREDENHILL. The following month he moved to RAF YATESBURY for wireless operator training.

Promoted to Sergeant, he was posted to No 15 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at RAF HARWELL near Didcot, Berkshire. Operating Avro Ansons and Vickers Wellingtons, here Albert learnt to apply his wireless and gunnery skills as part of a crew and on the aircraft he would be flying in operationally. He was also concerned for his family with the German air raids in the area and his letters provide a poignant mixture of everyday events alongside descriptions of operational matters as these snippets illustrate:

*“Thank you for the socks...” “Can you send my washing on?”
“Can you find my football boots?”*

and

*“we flew up to West Freugh in Scotland, over to Aldergrove and back”.... “there have been German raids on the airfields”
and recalled from leave in August “...because there was threat of invasion...sending us to attack the barges – but nothing happened.”*

Albert was posted to 214 Squadron in October 1940. It was a bomber squadron of No. 3 Group, based at newly-operational RAF STRADISHALL in Suffolk. It was equipped with the twin-engined Vickers Wellington Mark Ic long-range bomber, designed by Barnes Wallis and famous for its geodetic form of construction.

According to the squadron Operational Record Book Albert flew his first operational mission on the night of 25th/26th October 1940 to Hamburg in Wellington T2709, taking off at 6.29 p.m. and landing safely on their return at 17minutes after midnight.

The crew consisted of captain: Sergeant G.E.Turner; second pilot: Sergeant S.C.Chester; observer: Sergeant H.W.Brooke; wireless operators/air gunners (W.Op/AG's): Sergeants R.C. Bishop and Albert Taylor and rear gunner: Sergeant A. Hyam. This crew had already flown seven operations together before Albert joined them and took the place of one of the W.Op/AG's. He undertook his second raid in the aircraft T2470 shown below, with this same crew on the night of 28th/29th October when the target was Kiel.



Wellington T2470 of 214 squadron being towed into a hanger at Stradishall. Albert flew his second operation in this actual aircraft and it was the one in which Sgt Turner and crew lost their lives. (IWM CH1415)

At this stage of the war, crews were allocated their targets and then they planned their own routes and flew individually to them. There was no bomber stream of aircraft as developed later and the methods of navigation were basic - relying on dead-reckoning, with the possibility of radio bearing or a visual fix by sight of the ground. But the difficulties of recognising a particular location at night, in variable weather and after many hours of flight did reduce the chances of successful target location.

The next mission for Albert was to Emden on 5th November, on which the pilot was 21 year-old Sergeant Stanley Chester who, having gained enough experience as second pilot, could now captain his own crew. Pilot Officer Pears joined as second pilot and the other four positions were as before. The Operational Record Book records that the primary target of Emden was successfully attacked and fires were observed in the target area as aircraft were leaving. On the same night, Sergeant Turner and his new crew were killed when another landing aircraft cut across their flight path. Sergeant Turner lost control and the Wellington T2470 dived into the ground, crashing at Denston - just east of Stradishall.

906563 Sgt. A Taylor
Sergeants Mess
RAF Stradbushall
Suffolk.

10.0 clock Sun Night 17th November.
My Dear Mother
and all.

You must excuse the writing but I have just come back from the Ruhr valley and my head is aching like hell from eye strain. I have to look for all the beacon lights and it was very cloudy and raining at the time and made it most difficult to see them. Anyhow we left at ten minutes past five and

Albert continued to fly on night operations with missions on the 7th November to the Krupps works at Essen and on the 17th he was on another operation to the Ruhr Valley in Wellington R3208. They were airborne at 5.09 p.m. and landed at 9.14 p.m. Albert described the return flight in a letter to his family here. The beacons he refers to were lights flashing a morse code group that identified the individual RAF airfields.

Their last operation, undertaken on 23rd November 1940, in Wellington T2471, is recorded in the Operational Record Book:

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.						
DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT.						
From hrs. / / to hrs. / /		By 214 Squadron.		No. of pages used for day		
Aircraft Type and No.	Crew.	Duty.	Time Up.	Time Down.	Details of Sortie or Flight.	References.
Wellington T 2471	Sgt. Chester. P/O. Pears. Sgt. Brooke. Sgt. Bishop. Sgt. Taylor. Sgt. Ryan.	Ops 23/24 November.	17.00	unknown	This crew set out to bomb the Chancellery at Berlin, since when nothing has been heard of them.	C 55

TNA AIR27/1319

As *Albert* has no known grave he is commemorated on the **Air Forces Memorial** at Runnymede on

Panel 20

Following the notification of Albert being missing, the Reverend HW Rider wrote to the Red Cross, as he did for other families with similar losses during the war. The mother of the skipper, Sergeant Stanley Chester, also kept in touch with the crew's families in the hope that any news received could be quickly shared. A letter from the Officer Commanding 214 squadron to Mr Chester, the father of the crew's skipper, in July 1941 states:

"I feel sure you will understand that it is almost impossible to know what definitely happened in such cases, but it seems certain that

your son's aircraft was engaged, probably over Holland, and most likely by enemy aircraft."

This memorial has been completed with the assistance of Albert's sister Frances, seen on the right in this photo-montage, which includes Nina and Albert.

Albert's sisters made their own contributions to the war effort.



Nina worked for Ampress for eight years on the machines. Sadly she died in 2001.

Her twin, **Frances**, joined the WAAF - despite her mother's opposition - in October 1942. She was trained at Hereford, specialising in safety equipment - dinghies and parachutes - and served at RAF PENRHOS, a training station for air gunners. She had post-war postings to Egypt, Northern Ireland and Singapore.



Frances left the WAAF in 1952 and transferred to the Merchant Navy where she served for seven years as a stewardess, completing five New York trips and one to Hong Kong.

She still lives in Sway and is well remembered as the village post-lady, as well as for her support of the Royal British Legion. Until infirmity prevented, she maintained the war memorial, providing flowers and trimming the hedges of rosemary for remembrance and holly for the crown of thorns.