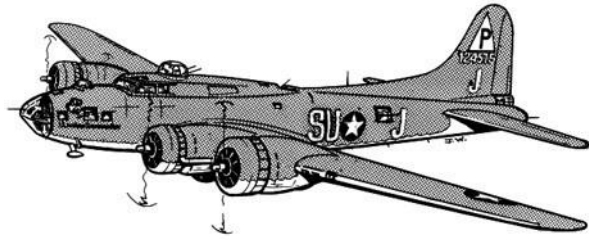


B17F Flying Fortress Memorial Dedication Service

13th November 2014



One tragic event to happen in the Wargrave area during World War 2 was the loss of an American B17 'Flying Fortress' bomber "Sunrise Serenader" that crashed in the riverside fields of Shiplake and on the Wargrave riverside with the tail falling in what is now Hennerton Golf Club, killing 9 of its 10 man crew, on November 13th 1943. Fortunately nobody on the ground was killed in the incident, as the pilot turned away from the village centre.

Amongst those who witnessed the accident were 14 year old Wargrave schoolboy Jim Waldron and Shiplake schoolgirl Mary Burge. Subsequently, Jim discovered the names of the crew, the details of the aircraft and its mission. The plane was a Boeing 'Flying Fortress' type B17F, serial No. 4142575, built at Seattle, USA in 1941. It was originally allocated to the USAAF 305th Bomb Group at Chelveston airfield, and carried the name "Sunrise Serenader", with a "Rooster Cock" as its Nose Insignia. During an earlier air raid on Germany, it was attacked and heavily damaged, and had to crash-land and be towed off the runway (not before it had shot down an attacking Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighter.) It was then returned to the Base Repair Unit, and reissued to the 384th Bombardment Group. The 544th Bomb Squadron, by whom it was crewed in November 1943, was part of this Bombardment Group, based at Grafton Underwood, near Kettering, in Northamptonshire, and it was on its way from there to a raid on Bremen on the fateful day.

The accident caused damage to windows and ceilings of buildings in the village, but the crew had managed to drop the bombs - eight 500lb GPs - along the river Thames, where they landed on both the Shiplake and Wargrave sides. One fell into the garden of Marsh Acres in Willow Lane. The RAF Bomb Disposal Flight removed most of the bombs on November 16th, but two could not be found, and were officially 'abandoned' in 1944 - they were eventually removed in 1947

Jim Waldron was able to made contact with the families of those who died, and also with the sole survivor, Alan Purdy. Although the cause was never fully explained, Alan had written to the mother of the pilot, Ralph Connell, in 1944 as to what he could remember:-

"I sent no distress signal! But my set is a wireless set and there are two wire sets in the cockpit. The message could have been sent by your son. We had no idea the ship was on fire. We went into a spin and everyone left the intercommunication system to run for the door. The bombardier was in the radio room and he said "Don't jump yet". We were caught in a thunder head which tore the plane to pieces and started a fire. Our plane had to have certain combat modifications made to it and was not ready. Since we were a new crew we had an old plane. It was our first mission and it was to go to Bremen, Germany. You are not supposed to take anything with you on a mission. I always took my watch for I needed it in my radio work, so do pilots and navigators. We are issued special watches for this"

"I will tell you how the accident happened. We were at about 14,000 ft and we felt the ship shudder so, the tail gunner, waist gunner, ball turret gunner, bombardier and myself were in the radio room. There were two chutes in the radio room and I put on one while the rest ran back

into the waist to the main door. The bombardier had no parachute on and as I turned to go into the waist he was coming back having recovered from losing his head, incidentally heading for the nose and his parachute. As he passed me he said "Don't jump yet". By this time we were in a tight spin and we tried to pull out. As we pulled out of the spin we were all forced to the floor by the force. I was still in the radio room or just outside of it. When the pressure eased I was sliding towards the edge. The force of pulling out of the spin had broken the plane in half at the radio room. I found myself sliding towards the edge, which was only about two feet away. I let myself go and slid over the edge. I pulled my chute and sprained my ankle when I landed. From what I am told after the plane broke, one wing was blown off by an explosion. The other man in the waist, with me, did not have time to come forward to the radio room and jump as observers say I bailed out at about 800 ft. The back door was jammed so the only way they could possibly have gotten out was the way I did. The rest of the front part of the plane fell into a small river. I am sorry".

The parts of the plane were widely scattered on farmland. It had long been Jim's aim to have a memorial placed to remember the crew of "Sunrise Serenader", but a suitable and accessible location on the fields was not identified. However, with members of the Wargrave Local History Society and the Wargrave branch of the Royal British Legion, plans were made to create a memorial, which could be sited at the Hennerton Golf Club, overlooking the whole area where the incident took place. Further research was done into those to be remembered, and their names were incorporated into a design that shows the sequence of events.



A ceremony to dedicate the memorial was held on November 13th 2014 - 41 years to the day after the crash. The unveiling was performed by the Rt. Hon. Theresa May, MP, the Home Secretary, assisted by Jim Waldron and Mary Burge, in the presence of Brig. General Dieter Bareihs, US Defense Attaché.

The dedication ceremony was led by the Vicar of Wargrave with Knowl Hill, the Rev.d John Cook, and attended by many members of the Royal British Legion local branches, as well as other residents of Wargrave and Shiplake.

The unveiling of the memorial took place at noon with music provided by the music master and pupils of Shiplake College.

A video of the ceremony was made by members of the College's Media Studies Group, and a copy of this video can be viewed [here](#)

A part of "Sunrise Serenader" was dragged out of the Thames by fishermen in 2003 and this together with other mementoes including part of the survivor's parachute was on display at the Golf Club on November 13th.

Relatives of the crew have visited Jim Waldron many times over the years including members of the families of the pilot and of the survivor, and subsequently, relations of several of those who are named on the memorial have visited the site, to view the dedication, and see where the crash took place.

This whole wartime event has been documented by Jim Waldron and Tony Elliott

Any further enquiries about this topic may be addressed to the [WLHS Secretary](#)



This crew photograph was taken in the summer of 1943, at Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Standing, left to right, are Connell (pilot), Cavanaugh, Gober, Angthuis.

Seated, left to right, are McCulley, Bryant, Wick, Purdy (survivor), Calder, Barr

As Lt Cavanaugh held a higher rank than the pilot, 2nd Lt Connell, he was given his own command at Prestwick when they arrived in Britain.

The replacement co-pilot was 2nd Lt S Scharff. However, as this was the first mission for the crew, he was replaced by an experienced co-pilot, 2nd Lt A H Doman. Although 2nd Lt Scharff completed 30 missions, he did not survive the war, as his plane disappeared over the Atlantic on its way to Iceland



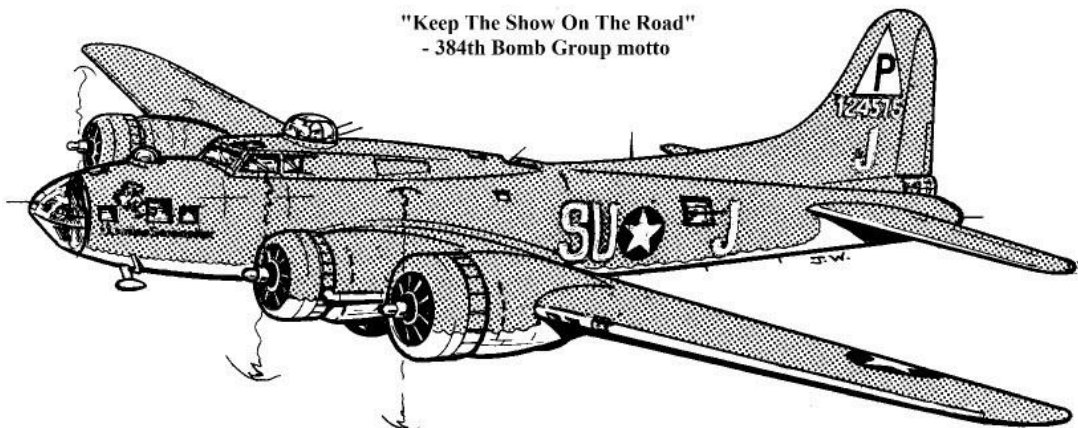
The unveiling of the memorial, November 2014, with crash witnesses Jim Waldron (left) and Mary Burge (right) holding the Union Jack, and Home Secretary the Rt Hon Theresa May, MP standing centre

The memorial seen after the unveiling, with the commemorative wreaths laid below



We Will Remember Them

"Keep The Show On The Road"
- 384th Bomb Group motto



Pilot 2nd Lt Ralph J Connell
Co Pilot 2nd Lt A H Doman
Bombardier 2nd Lt Claude Gober
Navigator 2nd Lt Lawrence H Anghuis
(also known as Lawrence H Anghuis)
Gunner S/Sgt William H McCulley

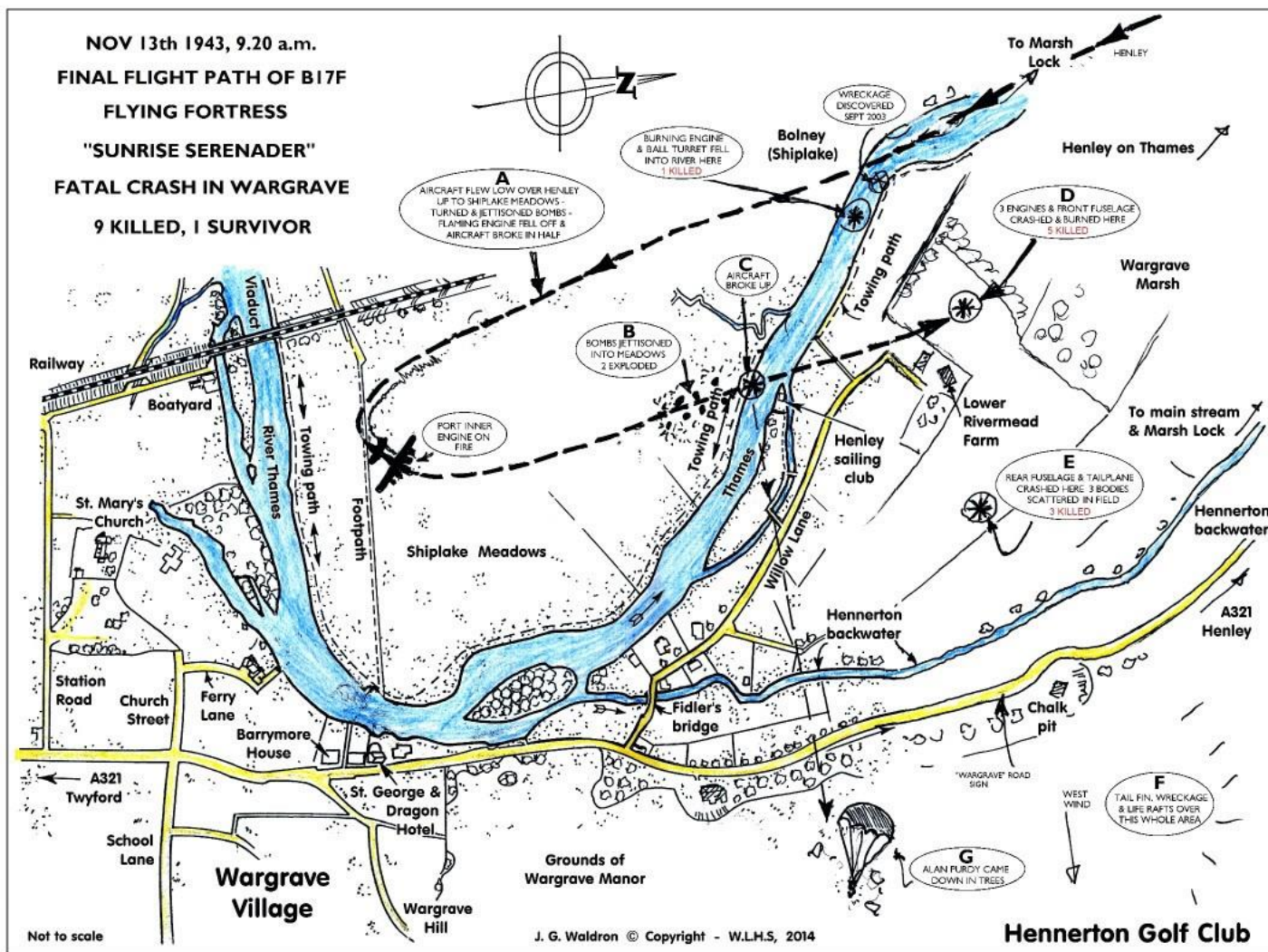
Gunner S/Sgt Robert Bryant
Engineer T/Sgt Harvey A Wick
Ball Turret S/Sgt Ellsworth Calder
Rear Turret S/Sgt Kenneth D Barr
Radio Operator T/Sgt Alan B Purdy
(Sole survivor)



U.S.A.A.F.



544th Bomb Sqdn



The design of the memorial panel, showing the sequence of events on 13th November 1943



A piece of wreckage from the B17 Flying Fortress bomber 124575, Sunrise Serenader, was recovered from the River Thames in 2003, and is the access panel from between the rear fuselage and tail fin. It (top right), along with the radio operator's headphones (top left), and part of his parachute (framed, front, centre), were part of a display relating to the crew, the aircraft, and its mission, that was on view at the time of the memorial dedication