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## AIRCREW OBITUARIES

### December 2019

Flight Lieutenant Mounsdon was a fighter ace and one of the last of The Few who distinguished himself in the Battle of Britain. He was born on 11 February, 1918, and died 6 December, 2019, aged 101.

### December 2018 to February 2019

Following three WWII obituaries in the February 2019 Newsletter there are obituaries for six more of that rapidly diminishing band who saw service in WWII. These were:

**Lieutenant-Colonel Ken Mead OBE, DFM** - army aviator who flew a glider on D-Day, fixed-wing aircraft in Germany and Malaya, and helicopters in Britain. Born 10 August 1923, died 17 December 2018, aged 95.

**Wing Commander Tim Elkington** was one of the last surviving pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain, and was one of only two survivors of the RAF Hurricane Wing that operated with the Russians from the Arctic port of Murmansk. Born December 23 1920, died February 1 2019 aged 98.

**Fred Sutherland** was one of the only two survivors of the men who flew on the Dams Raid in May 1943. Sutherland was the front gunner in the aircraft piloted by Les Knight, which dropped the 'bouncing bomb' which broke the Eder Dam. Born February 26 1923, died 21 January aged 95.

**Dick Churchill**, RAF bomber pilot and tunneller who became the last survivor of 'the Great Escape' from Stalag Luft III; Born 21 January 1920, died 13 February 2019 aged 99.

**Donald MacIntosh, DFC**, Lancaster pilot whose 40 missions included the sinking of the giant German battleship Tirpitz. Born 28 May 1922, died 10 January 2019, aged 96

**Air Vice-Marshal William 'Paddy' Harbison CB, CBE, AFC**. British fighter pilot who saw combat flying Spitfires in the Second World War and, unusually, American jets in the Korean War. Born 11 April 1922, died 25 December 2018, aged 96

Below are the six obituaries in full.

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## OBITUARY –MAURICE MOUNSDON, RAF

*Credit: The Times, 10 December 2019*

Flight Lieutenant Mounsdon was a fighter ace and one of the last of The Few who distinguished himself in the Battle of Britain. He was born on 11 February, 1918, and died 6 December, 2019, aged 101. His death leaves only three known survivors from Battle of Britain aircrew: Wing Commander Paul Farnes, DFM, 101; Flying Officer John Hemingway, DFC, 100; and Flight Lieutenant William Clark, DFM, 100.

Photographed in 1940 in his leather flying jacket, Maurice Mounsdon looked every bit the Battle of Britain hero with his dashing moustache and nonchalant expression.

He would live up to this image during the ferocious dogfights that ensued above southern England in the summer and autumn of 1940, shooting down several German aircraft and helping to ensure that the heavily outnumbered RAF would not buckle under the might of the Luftwaffe.



Mounsdon's final action in the Battle of Britain on August 31, 1940 was to bale out of his Hawker Hurricane at 14,000ft after being hit. Because his hands and legs had caught fire in the burning cockpit he let his descent quench the flames before pulling the ripcord of his parachute at 10,000ft.

What happened next was more like a scene from Dad's Army. Landing in a farmer's field near the village of High Easter in Essex, the badly burnt pilot found himself surrounded by members of the Home Guard armed with pitchforks, fearing he might be a "Hun".

Their suspicions had been roused because as Mounsdon's abandoned Hurricane spun out of control above High Easter, its guns started firing of their own volition. Luckily no one from the village was outside at that moment. Cannon fire smashed tiles on several roofs; a cat, belonging to a Mrs Mead, was killed. It soon became known that the pilot was a British fighter ace who had tallied two confirmed kills of German bombers and fighters, two probable kills and a share in the destruction of two more fighters. Mounsdon would spend ten months in hospital recovering from horrific burns to his hands and legs.

That day RAF 56 Squadron had been scrambled at 8.30am from its base in North Weald, Essex, to intercept 15 to 20 Dornier Do 17 light bombers. The squadron engaged enemy aircraft near Colchester. Mounsdon attacked an escorting Messerschmitt Bf 110 (Me 110) on the starboard side and then had to break away because he was being attacked himself.

"I glanced over my left shoulder to see a Messerschmitt Bf 109 (Me 109) with yellow spinner as he opened fire close behind and beneath me," he recalled. "He couldn't miss. Shrapnel hit my leg, then the instrument panel shattered, and glycol and petrol spilled everywhere. Then up it all went.

"Suddenly, I was sitting in a blow lamp. I undid the Sutton harness, put the aircraft into a roll to starboard, stood up and pushed myself over the side. I was conscious all the time. When you are in a situation like that the adrenaline kicks in and you know straight away what needs to be done: either stay in the aircraft and be dead, or get out and have a chance of staying alive. Simple as that.

"Falling, I could see my trousers were nearly all burnt away, but the remaining cloth and my tunic edges were still soaked in petrol and burning. The flames soon went out." It was the first time that the young ace had used a parachute.

The Hurricane descended in two wide circles with smoke billowing out. Mounsdon was observed as a black dot leaping out. Children saw him land in a field and raised the alarm. He had lasted two months in the air — the average time an RAF pilot survived against the Luftwaffe.

Although he had survived, it appeared he was destined to be maimed for life. His luck changed, however, when the 22-year-old went on to have treatment under the plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe. Mounsdon became one of the first members of the so-called Guinea Pig Club, in which pilots who had been horribly disfigured by burns during dogfights underwent what was at the time revolutionary surgery to restore their bodies to something approaching what they had been before. Mounsdon had a series of pioneering skin grafts at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead. The pain of his treatment was assuaged somewhat by marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Mary.

Reflecting later on the sensation of being burnt he conceded, with some understatement, that it did hurt a bit.

"I wasn't in pain at the time; I was in acute discomfort. The pain comes later. Burns are rather uncomfortable," he said. "You just get over these things. I joined the air force to fly and I just wanted to get back in the air."

Maurice Hewlett Mounsdon was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, in 1918. His father, Herbert, worked in electrical engineering, served in the London Regiment during the First World War and later became a wine merchant. The family lived comfortably in a spacious house.

After leaving school Maurice joined General Electric to train as an engineer. He enlisted in the RAF on a short service commission in August 1939, two weeks before war broke out. Elementary training started at Burnaston Hall, Derby. The same year he was transferred to Hastings, East Sussex, where he was commissioned. In May 1940 he was supposed to be posted to 56 Squadron, but was sent to 66 Squadron in error. The mistake was quickly corrected.

Now ensconced at 56 Squadron, Mounsdon flew repeated combat missions in July and August 1940 as one of nearly 3,000 airmen who fought in the Battle of Britain — 544 of whom lost their lives. On July 3 he shared in the destruction of a Do 17. He probably destroyed a Junkers Ju 87 dive bomber on July 25 and an Me 110 on August 13. He destroyed an Me 110 and damaged another on August 18, damaged a Heinkel He 111 bomber on August 24 and destroyed a Me 109 on August 26.

After he was shot down he spent much of the next year in various hospitals. Remarkably, given his injuries, he returned to duty in June 1941 on the staff at HQ in North Weald. He later became a flight instructor at RAF Cambridge where he taught young men to fly in Tiger Moths. He finished the war in Germany where he was posted to the Air Disarmament Wing.

Mounsdon left the RAF in 1946 as a flight lieutenant. The landing lamp from his Hurricane shot down over High Easter is on display at the Battle of Britain museum in Kent.

On returning to civilian life Mounsdon used his pre-war training at General Electric to go into business as an inventor, specialising in patents. One of his creations was a pulley for sailing masts. He moved with his wife to Hertfordshire before they retired to Menorca in the Seventies. She died in 1993.

Mounsdon was honoured by the elite pilots of the Red Arrows with a tribute to mark his 100th birthday in 2018. In a spectacular display over the Mediterranean off Menorca they carved out "100" in the sky in red, white and blue smoke trails.

Frail and unable to walk unaided, Mounsdon watched the 30-minute show from a friend's apartment on the coast as nine Hawk jets twisted and turned above them at speeds of up to 360mph. He still sported the same dapper moustache as he had all those years earlier when he was one of The Few.

Captain Mark Fieldsend, the defence attaché at the British embassy in Madrid, presented Mounsdon with a sector clock, which were used during the Battle of Britain to organise which squadrons would be sent up to fight the Luftwaffe and to raise the alert about approaching enemy aircraft.

The Red Arrows had been in Menorca to carry out a display to raise funds for a military hospital there. When the team discovered that Mounsdon lived there, they decided to dedicate their display to him.



The Menorca flypast brought memories of the Battle of Britain flooding back for Mounsdon. "The dogfights were pretty frightening. Everyone was firing at the same time. It was a matter of luck if you survived or not," he told The Times last year. "But at the end of it all, it was the happiest time of my life, though I lost a lot of good friends."

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## OBITUARY – KEN MEAD – ARMY PILOT

*Credit: The Times, 25 January 2019*

Lieutenant-Colonel Ken Mead OBE, DFM - army aviator who flew a glider on D-Day, fixed-wing aircraft in Germany and Malaya, and helicopters in Britain. Born 10 August 1923, 17 December 2018, aged 95.



*left: Ken Mead in 1958 after his tour of Malaya*

As he scoured Dartmoor by helicopter in search of schoolchildren lost in foul weather Ken Mead contrasted the situation with that on D-Day. Then he had searched the designated landing ground north of Ranville for a clear spot on which to put down his Horsa glider packed with a platoon of Royal Ulster Rifles. At least no one was shooting at him from Dartmoor. Both endeavours ended in success: he landed safely at Ranville and he found the children after a protracted search, for which he received the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air in 1962.

Operation Mallard, the delivery of 6th Airborne Division beyond the Normandy beaches, was Mead's first taste of active service. His second, Operation Market Garden, the attempt to capture bridges over the Lower Rhine at Arnhem by the 1st Airborne Division, had a less fortunate outcome for him.

On September 18, 1944, the day he flew, 24 British gliders were lost en route, but the rest got through to land seven miles west of the bridges. After the troops carried had been deployed, Mead and his co-pilot joined other glider pilots fighting as infantry. When, faced with an attack by two panzer divisions, the order came for the survivors of the division to withdraw across the Rhine Mead was with a small group taken prisoner. He was held in Stalag IV-B at Mühlberg until he was freed by the advancing Red Army in April 1945.

Kenneth Andrew Mead was born in Southampton in 1923, the son of Lionel Read, a customs officer, and his wife, Ada. He was educated at St Mary's College, Southampton, enlisted at the age of 16 as an apprentice and trained as a surveyor with the Royal Engineers. When the recently formed Glider Pilot Regiment called for volunteers in early 1943 he jumped at the chance, despite scepticism about the feasibility of training army junior NCOs as pilots. The deputy chief of the air staff damned the idea as fantasy, stating that there was no higher test of piloting skill than landing a large aircraft without power, but many qualified and flew gliders for the invasion of Sicily, the Normandy landings, at Arnhem and for the crossing of the Rhine. The regiment had a great esprit de corps and Mead returned to it immediately after his repatriation.

The Korean War and communist insurgency in Malaya increased demand for light aircraft for reconnaissance and control of artillery fire. Mead converted to fixed-wing light aircraft and joined 1912 Squadron in Germany, where Cold War tension was high. A posting to Malaya to join 656 Squadron of the Army Air Corps won him a reputation for resilience under stress and a determination to succeed, whatever mission came his way.

Finding communist terrorist camps in the Malayan jungle depended on a chance sighting of movement, but clearings to grow tapioca were a giveaway. Mead became an expert in this work, flying in support of the 26th Gurkha Brigade in the southern states of Johore, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang. The citation for his award of the Distinguished Flying Medal in 1957 focused on his resolution and technical efficiency, concluding that "the most difficult sorties are invariably done by him".

Towards the end of his tour in Malaya, someone thought of dropping thousands of surrender safe conduct passes over the jungle using Austers. This resulted in many starving terrorists turning themselves in to military or police posts clutching their passes. He had married Joyce Welsh in 1946 and she accompanied him to Germany and Malaya. Tragically, their only child, Kevin, born in 1958, was lost at sea while canoeing in rough weather in 1973. Mead's wife also predeceased him.

Mead converted to helicopters in 1959 and after qualifying at the Central Flying School became a flying standards officer with the British Army of the Rhine and then, with worldwide responsibility, based on Boscombe Down. As a lieutenant-colonel he was appointed OBE for his contribution to army aviation and retired with 8,000 flying hours in his log book.

In retirement he became a researcher at the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop in Hampshire. As when he flew, he had time to hear everyone's inquiries. Patient, thorough and good-humoured, he became the go-to man for information about army flying.

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## OBITUARY – TIM ELKINGTON – Battle of Britain PILOT

*Credit: The Daily Telegraph, 3 February 2019*



Wing Commander Tim Elkington, who has died aged 98, was one of the last surviving pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain, and was one of only two survivors of the RAF Hurricane Wing that operated with the Russians from the Arctic port of Murmansk.

He was still only 19 when he joined No 1 Squadron at RAF Northolt in July 1940, during the opening phase of the Battle of Britain. Flying a Hurricane fighter, he shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 109 on August 15. The following day, he was on patrol over Portsmouth when his section ran into a large formation of enemy fighters near Selsey Bill.

The Hurricanes were separated during the engagement and Elkington pursued a lone Bf 109. But others attacked him from the rear, and his starboard fuel tank was hit. His aircraft burst into flames. He was slightly injured and forced to bail out off the coast, and his wingman flew close by so as to allow the slipstream from his Hurricane to blow the parachute inland.

After recovering from his injuries, Elkington returned to 1 Squadron, now based at Wittering near Peterborough. On October 9 he took off with a second aircraft and the two of them chased a lone Junkers 88 bomber to the coast. After the first pilot caused some damage to it, Elkington attacked from close range with his machine-guns before the Junkers disappeared. Shortly afterwards a Royal Observer Corps post spotted an aircraft crashing into the sea and Elkington was credited with having probably destroyed the Junkers. Two weeks later he shared in the destruction of a Dornier bomber.

John Francis Durham Elkington, always known as "Tim", was born in Warwickshire on December 23 1920 and educated at Bedford School. He gained a cadetship to the RAF College Cranwell, where he trained as a pilot before joining 1 Squadron. After the Battle of Britain, he spent some time as an instructor at a fighter unit and in July 1941 joined 134 Squadron, which was forming at an airfield in Yorkshire prior to sailing for Russia.

After Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, was launched on June 22 1941, the Prime Minister Winston Churchill broadcast a promise of assistance, and on July 12 an Anglo-Soviet Agreement was signed in Moscow. It was decided that the airfield at Vaenga would be used as a fighter base to defend ships unloading supplies at nearby Murmansk. The RAF sent two Hurricane squadrons, 81 and 134, to form 151 Wing, the unit given the task of helping the Russians.

Twenty-four of the fighters were loaded on-board the aircraft carrier HMS Argus. On September 7, Elkington and his fellow pilots took off from Argus and landed at Vaenga. Additional Hurricanes were shipped in crates and assembled on arrival in Russia. The primary role of the Hurricane pilots was to escort Soviet bombers on raids over Finnmark in north-eastern Norway and also to defend the Russian airfields. On October 6 a force of German bombers raided the airfield at Vaenga and Elkington was scrambled: he shared in the destruction of one of the escorting fighters.

With winter weather approaching, 151 Wing began training Soviet air and ground crew to use the Hurricanes, and when the RAF contingent departed in late November, the Soviet Air Force took over the planes. During five weeks of operations, 151 Wing claimed 16 victories, four probably destroyed and seven aircraft damaged, for the loss of one RAF pilot. Four pilots were awarded the Soviet Union's highest decoration, the Order of Lenin. In 2014, the surviving members of the Wing, including Elkington, received the Ushakov Medal for bravery, at a ceremony in the Russian Embassy in London.

Elkington continued to fly fighters as the war progressed. In April 1942 he joined the Merchant Ship Fighter Unit, flying converted Hurricanes carried by CAM (Catapult Aircraft Merchant) ships, which escorted convoys. Whenever a German reconnaissance aircraft was sighted, the "Hurricat" (a modified Hurricane) would be catapulted from the deck of the ship to carry out an intercept. On return, the pilot either bailed out or ditched alongside the CAM ship. Elkington completed one round trip to Canada in the MV Eastern City, but was not called into action.

After converting to the Typhoon fighter, he joined 197 Squadron on the south coast to fly defensive patrols and bomber escort missions. In late 1943 he headed for India and joined 67 Squadron at Alipore, flying Hurricanes in defence of Calcutta.

In early 1944 Elkington was given early promotion to work at the Air Fighting Development Unit, which played a crucial role in developing tactics and testing captured enemy fighters. During the year he spent with the unit, based at RAF Amarda Road in north-east India, he realised that he enjoyed a fair measure of good luck. On one occasion he was flying a US-built Mustang which crashed soon after take-off because of an engine failure: as the cockpit filled with fumes the emergency release failed, but he managed to break through the canopy and escape.

He experienced another close shave when fuel sprayed into the cockpit as he was testing a Japanese Zero fighter, but he succeeded in landing safely. And while flying a Hawker Tempest he was overcome by fumes in the cockpit after fuel leaked into the engine bay. He tried to bail out, but managed to recover and land at Cawnpore. He also suffered a number of tyre bursts, on one occasion when he was carrying a bomb. In 1946 he returned to Britain and served at RAF Turnhouse near Edinburgh, where he met Pat Adamson, whom he would marry in May 1948.

He later served at HQ Fighter Command before a tour in MoD. He converted to the four-engine Shackleton maritime patrol aircraft and in November 1955 joined 240 Squadron based in Northern Ireland. In March 1956 he flew a Shackleton to Christmas Island in the Pacific for Operation Grapple, the testing of Britain's first hydrogen bomb. It was the responsibility of 240 Squadron to search and police the extensive ocean area where shipping was banned during the tests. On the day of the first test, the Shackletons ensured the area was clear before a Valiant dropped an H-bomb over nearby Malden Island. During the detachment, three nuclear weapons were detonated, with the Shackletons flying at a safe distance to provide air-sea rescue if needed.

Six months later Elkington was back in Britain training as an instructor at the Central Flying School, Little Rissington in Gloucestershire. It would be the beginning of a long association with the Cotswolds. He commanded the multi-engine squadron at the school and, on one occasion, flew a Vickers Varsity aircraft on a visit to Ghana in support of a detachment of Jet Provost training aircraft.

He remained in the RAF for a further 12 years, which included a tour in Cyprus, commanding the RAF Radio Apprentice Wing at Locking outside Weston-super-Mare, and two years in the MoD running air-sea rescue policy. He retired to his home in Little Rissington in late 1975.

There he established a picture framing business, finally retiring from that in 2005. He coaxed into life exotic plants in his greenhouses and was an early adopter of biological controls as an alternative to pesticides – having previously used a flame-thrower to get rid of weeds.

In March 2013 he and a number of his colleagues were invited to Downing Street where the Prime Minister, David Cameron, presented them with the newly created Arctic Star.



Tim Elkington, second from right, at 10 Downing St after receiving the Arctic Star from the PM

Elkington attended many reunions to commemorate the Battle of Britain and in 2017 was one of only three veterans able to attend the annual service in Westminster Abbey.

He supported the 151 Wing Association and received numerous anniversary medals from the Russians. In 2016 he visited Archangel for the 75th Anniversary of the first Russian convoy.

Tim Elkington is survived by his wife Pat, with their two sons and two daughters.

Wing Commander Tim Elkington, born 23 December 1920, died 1 February 2019 aged 99.

## OBITUARY – FRED SUTHERLAND – Dambusters AIR GUNNER

*Credit: The Daily Telegraph, 22 January 2019*



Fred Sutherland, who has died aged 95, was one of the last two surviving airmen who took part in the Dambusters raid. Only Johnny Johnson is now left.

Sutherland was the front gunner in Pilot Officer Les Knight's crew, which formed part of the main formation tasked to attack the Möhne dam on the night of May 16-17 1943. After flying at very low level over Holland and Germany they arrived at the dam as the leader, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, began his attack. After the fifth aircraft had breached the dam, the three aircraft that had not dropped their "Upkeep" bouncing bombs headed for the Eder Dam led by Gibson.

Surrounded by hills, the approach to the Eder was much more difficult and each aircraft had to make several dummy runs before achieving the critical height of 60 ft and the exact speed. The first two bombs failed to breach the dam, leaving Knight and his crew as the last chance for success.

On his second attack, the bomb was dropped accurately and, as the water subsided, the dam wall began to crumble before collapsing. In the meantime, Knight was using all his strength to haul the Lancaster over the fast-approaching high ground of the Michelskopf.

Sutherland, in the front turret, had a grandstand view as the aircraft just cleared the ridge. In later life, Sutherland praised his pilot when he said: "Jumping over the hill and hitting the right speed and the right height was an act of genius."

*Right: Fred Sutherland with his crew, at the back, centre, with no hat*

The danger was not over as the Lancasters headed back at low level, and two were lost on the return flight. Knight and his crew arrived back at Scampton in the early hours to discover that eight of the 19 crews had failed to return.

The son of a doctor, Frederick Edwin Sutherland was born on February 26 1923 at Peace River, Alberta, Canada. Aged 18 he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 1941 and trained as an air gunner.

He arrived in England in 1942 and joined the crew of the 21-year-old Australian, Les Knight, before they were posted in September to No 50 Squadron to fly the Lancaster bomber. Over the next few months they completed 25 operations, attacking some of the most heavily defended targets in Germany, including those in Berlin and in the industrial Ruhr.

When two crews on No 50 were asked to volunteer to join a new squadron for a "special mission", Knight and his close-knit crew immediately offered themselves. They arrived at RAF Scampton near Lincoln in March 1943. There, they met other crews and their new CO, Guy Gibson. None of the crews were aware of the role of the squadron, soon to become No 617 Squadron, or the likely targets.

Training was all at low level, some at night, and dummy attacks were made against various reservoirs. Finally, during a briefing on the afternoon of May 16, they discovered that they were to attack the major dams in the Ruhr. When Sutherland saw the photographs of the gun towers mounted on the Möhne dam, his immediate reaction was: "We didn't have a hope."

After the raid the squadron received 34 gallantry awards, including the Victoria Cross for Gibson. Knight was awarded the DSO and two other members of the crew received the DFC. The quiet, modest Knight was embarrassed that the



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whole crew had not been rewarded. He is reported to have said: "I'm wearing the DSO for all you guys, you all did something for it."

Sutherland and his crew remained on the squadron. On the night of September 15-16, eight Lancasters took off to attack the Dortmund Ems Canal on what was to become a disastrous sortie. The aircraft flew low over Holland to reach their target, an embanked stretch of the canal near Munster. Knight's crew were in the first formation of four aircraft led by the new squadron CO, George Holden. As they flew over the small town of Nordhorn in Holland, Holden's aircraft was hit by flak and his aircraft exploded. On board were four of Gibson's Dams Raid crew, including two of Sutherland's friends and fellow Canadians.

Weather conditions in the area were poor, with mist making target identification difficult. The Lancasters flew orbits at low level trying to pick up the line of the canal. On one of these, from his position in the front turret, Sutherland saw treetops emerge out of the mist but was unable to issue a warning in time. The Lancaster struck the top of a tree-covered ridge, but remained in the air.

The two port engines were damaged and had to be shut down; Knight struggled to control the aircraft with only two of the four engines working, its tail unit damaged and a 12,000 lb bomb on board. The bomb was jettisoned, by which time a third engine was also failing. All non-essential equipment was thrown overboard in an attempt to keep the Lancaster in the air as Knight climbed to 1,000 ft and headed for the Dutch border, but it was soon obvious that the aircraft was doomed.



Knight ordered the crew to bail out as he tried to hold the aircraft steady. All jumped free before he attempted a crash landing. He succeeded but the bomber hit a bank and the gallant young Australian was killed.

Sutherland landed in a field near the Dutch town of Zwolle, where he hid overnight before meeting a friendly farmer who gave him shelter and alerted the Dutch Resistance. After two days he met up with one of his crew, and the Resistance hid them in woods for a month before they were taken by train to Paris, where they were sheltered in safe houses,

Later, they were escorted to Toulouse and on to the Pyrenees. Guides took them over a high route in the Central Pyrenees, later dubbed the Chemin de la Liberté, or "Freedom Trail", and into Spain. The two men were taken to Madrid and on to Gibraltar before flying back to Britain. They had been on the run for two months, arriving back on December 6 1943. Five of the eight-man crew evaded capture and two spent the rest of the war as PoWs.

*Left: Fred Sutherland depicted in oil by Dan Llywelyn Hall*

Men who had travelled down the escape lines did not return to operational flying, and Sutherland was repatriated to Canada. He was commissioned and was an instructor at an aircrew training school. He later served as a gunnery instructor, and left the RCAF in June 1945 to study forestry. He became a forestry inspector for the government of Alberta and in 1964 was made the forestry superintendent in the town of Rocky Mountain House, where he retired.

In 2010 he paid a return visit to the Pyrenees and met the people who had helped him.

Fred Sutherland married Margaret Baker in 1945, and they had three children.

Fred Sutherland, born 26 February 1923, died 21 January 2019 aged 95.

## **OBITUARY – DICK CHURCHILL – BOMBER PILOT AND ESCAPER**

RAF bomber pilot and tunneller who became the last survivor of 'the Great Escape' from Stalag Luft III; born on 21 January 1920, died 13 February 2019 aged 99.

*Credit: The Times*

After two nights on the run in March 1944 from an estimated 50,000 German policemen, thousands of members of the Hitler Youth and elite squads of the SS, the two RAF pilots Richard Churchill and Bob Nelson were cowering in the back of a hayloft in rural Lower Silesia.

Two days earlier Churchill, known as Dick, who had adopted the identity of a Romanian, and Nelson, who was pretending to be Swedish, had been the 50th and 51st of the 76 Allied airmen to escape from the high-security German prisoner-of-war camp Stalag Luft III.



*Dick Churchill in his RAF days*

That extraordinary venture was known to them at the time as Operation Escape 200 - but would become immortalised after the war as the "Great Escape"; Churchill would go on to become the last survivor, a mantle he reluctantly assumed in old age.

Rather than look back at his role in an episode that has been mythologised in books and film (and have to put up with being pestered, as he saw it, by journalists, historians and autograph hunters) Churchill preferred to look forward. "I'd rather not dwell on what happened nearly 60 years ago," he said in 2004 at the age of 84. "I'd rather concentrate on what my five grandchildren are going to do with their lives."

As they lay in that hayloft Churchill and Nelson might have suspected that their audacious bid for freedom — their plan was to try to make it to

Czechoslovakia and from there to make their way back to Britain — had enraged Hitler, whose internal security chiefs had ordered every barn within 100 miles of the camp to be searched.

A group of local farmers duly turned up at the loft and began methodically working their way through the hay. Churchill and Nelson knew their game was up as the pitchforks came ever closer to stabbing them and eventually they emerged with their hands above their heads. They had travelled some miles during their two nights of freedom, walking in thick snow through forests and wading across icy streams to avoid using roads and bridges, but the freezing conditions of the late German winter had driven them to seek shelter.

As they were frogmarched off, once again in captivity, what Churchill and Nelson did not know was that Hitler had ordered that all of the escapers be shot, as the Third Reich smarted from the humiliation of a mass escape from one of its most tightly guarded camps. In the event 50 Allied officers were executed and three made it back to Britain while the rest, Churchill and Nelson among them, were held. They were among thousands of prisoners who were forced to march across northern Germany as the Wehrmacht retreated from the advancing Soviet forces during the following winter.

Both Churchill and Nelson survived that ordeal and the immediate aftermath of the escape, which Churchill put down to their famous surnames. Arthur Nebe, head of the Nazi Criminal Police and a mass murderer later hanged for his part in the July 1944 plot to kill Hitler, was given the task of selecting recaptured prisoners for execution. He ordered that any who might be of use to the Nazis should be spared.

Churchill was convinced that Nebe and others thought he must be related to Winston Churchill, which he was not, and allowed him to live on the basis that he might prove to be a useful pawn in future negotiations. Nelson appeared to benefit in this way as well, even if his apparent famous family connections were a little more tenuous. He died aged 84 in 1999 after a distinguished career as a commercial pilot and aviation investigator.

A bomber pilot with No 144 Squadron Churchill had been shot down at the controls of his Handley Page Hampden on his 26th combat mission in September 1940 over Ludwigshafen. He was first sent to Stalag Luft I near the town of Barth on an isthmus of sand dunes on the Baltic coast. There he played a supporting role in various escape plans until he was moved to Stalag Luft III near the town of Sagan, 100 miles south of Berlin — now Zagan in Poland — which was reserved for officers of the Allied air forces.

The camp stood in a clearing in a pine forest with huts on short stilts to try to prevent tunnelling. This, famously, did not deter the inmates. Like many of his fellow prisoners Churchill had no interest in becoming, as he put it, "a dope sitting out the war". He wanted to get back home to carry on flying; he could also see that successful escapes would not only hurt Nazi pride, but distract German forces from the war effort.

In all, he reckoned he was involved in 72 tunnelling projects, but none quite as comprehensive as Operation Escape 200. Under the leadership of Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, known as Big X, whom Churchill described as "a man of great determination", the escape committee aimed to get 200 men out of Stalag Luft III using three tunnels. Known as "Tom", "Dick" and "Harry" these were dug 9m underground and were intended to reach the woods surrounding the camp.

The tunnelling effort consumed 4,000 bed boards, 90 double bunk beds, 635 mattresses, 192 bed covers, 161 pillow cases, 62 tables, 34 chairs, 76 benches and 1,212 bed bolsters as the airmen used everything they could get their hands on to build escape routes that would remain structurally sound in soft sand.

In the event "Tom" was found by the Germans during construction and "Dick" was eventually used for storage, leaving "Harry", which opened in a concrete plinth under a stove but finished short of the perimeter, as the only route out.

Prisoners were selected for this mass breakout from three groups. The first were experienced escapers and German speakers; the second group were those who had contributed most to the plan; and the remainder were drawn by lots. Churchill was in the second group having been, as he put it later, "up to my neck in it" working as a digger.

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He was clearly inspired by Bushell's leadership but also by one of the senior British officers, Wing Commander Harry "Wings" Day, who, like Churchill, narrowly avoided being shot by the Gestapo after the escape. According to Churchill, "Day was a man who commanded such respect that if he had told us to storm the wire, a hundred of us would have done so without the slightest hesitation, even if it would have been a suicide mission."

Initially Churchill was paired with Gordon Kidder, an officer with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Both learnt Romanian phrases to go with their fake papers, hoping that if they were captured the Germans would not be able to find a Romanian at short notice to disprove their nationality. But in response to a sudden transfer of inmates out of the camp by the Germans the escape committee paired Churchill with Nelson the day before the breakout on March 24, 1944. Kidder was paired with Squadron Leader Tom Kirby-Green; they were both shot after being recaptured.

While being held in prison at Görlitz, Churchill said it was obvious to him that the groups of six or seven men who were selected from crowded cells for removal were being taken to their deaths; the people escorting them wore the heavy leather coats of the Gestapo and he knew what was likely to happen. His descriptions of the Germans involved in the killings of his fellow escapers were later used by the RAF police in their investigation of the murders.

Richard Sydney Albion Churchill was born in 1920 and was brought up close to Hampton Court in southwest London. His father, Sydney, was a civil servant; his mother, Elsie (née Taylor), was from New Zealand. He was the second of their four children.

Richard attended Hampton Court School where he trained as a boy soprano and learnt the violin, acquiring a lifelong passion for classical music and opera. He also spent much of his time on the Thames. "I became a water baby," he told *The Times* in an unpublished interview last year. "I swam in the river, sculled on the river, rowed on the river, played water polo and did marathon swims in it." He went on to Tiffin School for Boys in Kingston upon Thames, from where he was due to study engineering at a college in London. Instead, he took a 12-month management apprenticeship with a firm of engineers in Surbiton.

He entered the RAF on a one-year commission as a general duties pilot in 1938. At the end of the war he wanted to remain in the service, but he failed a medical because of damage to his hearing incurred when he was shot down in 1940. Instead, he worked for a transport company, then the Dunlop Group, for which he travelled widely.

He met his wife, Patricia, shortly after the war while he was living with his parents at Esher in Surrey. As he recalled, their eyes met on a railway platform. "The train service was atrocious as a result of all the wars, so you hung about waiting for trains," he said. "There was a girl about 50 yards away who was also waiting for a train. It was just the two of us on the platform and we waited.

Before the train came in, the girl started walking towards me and when she was about two feet away she held out a rather grubby paper bag, looked at me and said in dulcet tones: 'Would you like a sugared almond?' I didn't know her, she didn't know me. I was mesmerised by her eyes and said: 'Yes. I'd like one.' We caught the train, talked through Waterloo and arranged lunch in a restaurant."

The couple were married in 1950 and had two sons: David owns a company that sells houses and used cars; Roger is the managing director of an engineering company.



*Churchill at home in Devon, 2015*

For many years the family lived in St George's Hill in Weybridge, Surrey, before moving to an old farmhouse near Crediton in Devon where Churchill spent his final years after the death of his wife in 2013. He missed her deeply and knew, to the day, how long she had been gone.

Next month marks the 75th anniversary of the Great Escape. Over the years the survivors dwindled in number until in 2015, with the death in Perth, Australia, of Paul Royle, at the age of 101, Churchill was the only one left. "I called Dick Churchill and said 'I'm bringing you the news that you're the last one,'" said Royle's son Gordon at the time. "He was sad, but stoic."

Like many former veterans of the escape who kept in touch through an informal club, known as the "Sagan Select Subway Society", Churchill was not hugely impressed by the 1963 film *The Great Escape*. This starring Steve McQueen, Richard Attenborough and Charles Bronson. Partly this was because it portrayed Americans taking part in the escape, when none did. They had already been moved to another compound.

Churchill made another point about the film, which seemed to him at odds with the grim reality of what he and his fellow prisoners, among them Flight Lieutenant Tony Bethell, had gone through. "Tony Bethell and I always

commented on the Technicolor of the film," he told The Times. "It was bright and cheery. It should have been shot in black and white; it was grey and cold."

## OBITUARY – DONALD MACINTOSH – BOMBER PILOT

Donald MacIntosh, DFC, Lancaster pilot whose 40 missions included the sinking of the giant German battleship Tirpitz. Born 28 May 1922, died 10 January 2019, aged 96

*From The Times 12 Feb 2019.*



*Donald MacIntosh, back row centre, during the war*

Returning from his first operation, a night raid in a 600-strong stream of bombers attacking Stuttgart, Flying Officer Donald MacIntosh reflected on the key events: evading the ring of searchlights; witnessing the inferno below; repeatedly corkscrewing to dodge enemy fighters.

"As dawn lit the cockpit, I became aware that I was not the same person as the one who took off in the twilight the day before," he wrote later. "All the reading, all the talk, all the training was one thing. Now I knew."

He had already seen, from the other side, the devastation such bombing wreaked when the Luftwaffe had attacked his own community. It was his experience of the Clydebank blitz while he was a police cadet that spurred him to join the RAF. He asked to be released from his reserved occupation on his 19th birthday.

That night over Stuttgart, with the roles reversed, the "chop rate" was high — 65 aircraft failed to return. Although the young Lancaster pilot made it safely back to Britain, he knew, logically, that the chances of surviving the experience another 30 times — the usual length of an operational tour — were poor. He always had faith, however, that he would survive.

This self-belief, aided by generous doses of courage and skill, not to mention luck, helped "Mac", as he was known to his crew, to complete 40 missions, including the raid that sank the German battleship Tirpitz. Branded "the Beast" by Winston Churchill, Tirpitz had already been attacked by the RAF and the navy. Now a new weapon, the 12,000lb Tallboy bomb, which was capable of piercing the ship's armour plating, was available.

By the autumn of 1944, a fresh assault was planned. MacIntosh and his crew from No 9 Squadron, flying with No 617 Squadron — 38 Lancasters in all — set off on the ten-hour, 2,000-mile flight to an airfield at Archangel in northern Russia. From there, on October 29, they launched their first attack on Tirpitz, which threw up a smokescreen just as the British bombers approached.

As MacIntosh headed back to RAF Lossiemouth on Scotland's northeast coast, all four engines began to surge, but he later landed safely. After returning to Archangel for another attack, the crew discovered that the Russians had filled the Lancaster with 80 octane fuel, which was great for running a car, but not recommended for a Merlin aircraft engine. The second attack was thwarted by murky cloud, and a third attempt was made on November 12.

In his autobiography, *Bomber Pilot*, MacIntosh wrote: "I turned in for our own bombing run, and a minute later, for the first time, I saw our quarry. There, squat, grey and massive, even at 12 miles out, sat the Tirpitz, just like the model we saw months ago . . . not a cloud, not a ripple on the water, and no smoke. I watched fascinated and saw the long sheets of flame as she fired her main armament."

At that moment the Lancaster's bombsight stopped functioning and they had to turn away while the calculations were done manually. Through a sky thick with brown smoke from the German flak they finally dropped the bomb and then heard the rear gunner exclaim: "She's turning over! What a sight!" The ship received two direct hits, but MacIntosh never knew whether his bomb was one of those responsible for the destruction of the ship. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. "I didn't feel any elation," he wrote later, "only relief."

Donald MacIntosh was born in Glasgow, the son of Donald McIntosh, a policeman, and his wife, Janet (née McFarlane). In later life he changed the spelling of his surname. He went to Clydebank Secondary School, leaving at the age of 14 to become a telephone operator for Clydebank police.

After joining the RAF, he was sent to flying school in Florida. He eventually joined No 9 Squadron at Bardney in Lincolnshire, leading his crew against targets across occupied Europe. His final mission, on April 25, 1945, was Hitler's

home near Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. On the way back he noted that the ruins of Munich and Stuttgart lay "peaceful and shattered beneath us, all their terrors gone".

After the end of the war in Europe the squadron started recruiting for "Tiger Force" in anticipation of the invasion of Japan. By this time MacIntosh wanted a career in civilian flying and headed to group headquarters at Coningsby, where he found the female auxiliary in charge of postings. He asked to be put on the next conversion training course at Transport Command at Dishforth, Yorkshire, and gave her a pair of nylon stockings "to help her remember". Two weeks later he was in Dishforth.



*Left: Donald MacIntosh in 2007 at a squadron reunion event*

He spent the next 30 years as a civilian pilot, "some of which was almost as lethal as wartime", he said. Based in the Bahamas, he flew for British South American Airways; he also met his first wife, Brigid O'Toole, who was a flight attendant. They were married in Nassau on Armistice Day 1948, but divorced more than 20 years later. The couple had four daughters and a son

MacIntosh went on to become one of the first pilots to fly the de Havilland Comet 1, the world's first passenger jet, in the early 1950s. He was once again lucky to survive: the aircraft was withdrawn from service after a series of crashes.

He was later briefly married to Elizabeth Kendall, an Australian model whom he met flying first class with BOAC from London to Sydney. His third wife was Joan Gibbs, who was employed by Lady Margaret of Kippenross. They were married for 31 years and worked as personal assistants to Miles Copeland, manager of the rock band the Police. Joan predeceased him.

For many years MacIntosh lived in Crieff in Perth and Kinross, and instructed young pilots at Scone. Indeed, his love of flying remained with him to the end.

## **OBITUARY – PADDY HARBISON – FIGHTER PILOT**

*Credit: The Times, 31 January 2019*

Air Vice-Marshal William 'Paddy' Harbison CB, CBE, AFC. British fighter pilot who saw combat flying Spitfires in the Second World War and, unusually, American jets in the Korean War. Born 11 April 1922; died 25 December 2018, aged 96

*Below: Harbison with his Spitfire in the 1940s*



In an ominous sign Paddy Harbison arrived at Kimpo Air Base during the Korean War to find the flags at half-mast in honour of one of his friends, a fellow pilot who had been shot down.

He was there as an RAF observer and soon realised that aircraft manoeuvres would be a delicate and dangerous dance because only half the runway was in use, the rest being under repair. The near-constant take-offs, landings, crash landings and emergency landings by aircraft that had run out of fuel created a risky environment, even before taking into account the threat posed by the enemy's advanced Soviet-made MiG-15 jet fighters.

Not yet 30 Harbison was, like many pilots in the Korean War, a veteran of the Second World War where he flew Spitfires and P-51 Mustangs in the RAF. The 1950s heralded a new era: the widespread deployment of jet fighters with swept wings that were far faster than the old propeller-driven machines.

Above north-western North Korea, where the Yalu River meets the Yellow Sea, United Nations forces fought North Koreans who were supported by the Soviets and Chinese. The area became known as "MiG Alley" and was the scene of many skirmishes between MiG-15s and their American rival, the F-86 Sabre.

The RAF was keen to learn more about jet-versus-jet combat, which is where Harbison came in. He had been posted to California in 1948 on a pilot exchange scheme with the United States Air Force where he became one of the first to fly the F-86. The RAF had limited involvement in the Korean War, but persuaded the Americans to allow a four-man team of observers.

After a training programme at Kimpo (today, Gimpo international airport, in Seoul) with the merciless-sounding nickname "Clobber College", Harbison started to follow operations from the cockpit of an F-86. He later called it "the

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best seat in the house". It was, however, something of a hot seat. The MiG fleet had a numerical advantage but were cautious, waiting patiently to attack and doing so in large numbers. Radar tracking was limited, so pilots had to keep their eyes peeled. "The main warning for us was the Mark I eyeball, suitably bloodshot," he said at a symposium in 2000.

Harbison was far from a passive onlooker and at one point damaged a MiG, as well as finding himself under fire. "I was very nearly shot down once, but I got away with it," he recalled. "I was pursued from some 35,000ft down to the deck level with a MiG on my tail firing all the way, and the only time he left was when he had run out of ammunition."

Harbison delivered a 152-page classified report for the Central Fighter Establishment, a tactical division of the RAF that was formed in 1944 with the aim "to increase the efficiency of the fighter aircraft and the man who flies it" and disbanded in 1966.

The F-86 v the MiG 15 by Squadron Leader W Harbison was an authoritative assessment that contained several insights, including that the MiG could outclimb the F-86 regardless of altitude and was faster above 30,000ft, but the F-86 was superior in a sustained dive. The report was handed an improbable new lease of life nearly fifty years later when, to Harbison's surprise, it was reproduced and included as a strategy guide in the box of a 1999 PC flight simulation game, MiG Alley. Harbison is not believed to have played it, although he was said to be flattered and amused that a once-secret document could gain a new following among a younger generation of gaming enthusiasts.

Better known as Paddy, William Harbison was born in Govan, Scotland, in 1922, to the former Isobel Strachan and William, a police officer in the Royal Ulster Constabulary. He grew up in Northern Ireland, where he was educated at Ballymena Academy, and was the oldest of five siblings.

While in California he met his future wife, Helen (née Geneva), a flight attendant from Illinois. They married in 1950 and ultimately settled in Falls Church, Virginia. She survives him along with their two sons, Eric, who lives in Malaysia, and Michael, a semi-retired IT consultant in the US.

Harbison joined the RAF in 1941 and was trained in Canada before flying missions with 118 Squadron. One of the most hazardous came in March 1945, only six weeks before VE Day, when he led an escort party for more than a hundred Lancaster bombers heading for Bremen. They were attacked by Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighters and an intense dogfight ensued, with the British struggling to hold off their quicker adversaries, although Harbison managed to damage an enemy plane.

He had another close shave when his Spitfire suffered engine failure over Germany, but as the ground loomed large he was able to restart the engine by furiously working a hand pump in the cockpit.

The end of the war brought its own challenges. Asked to round up men to fly to the Channel Islands, where the German surrender had been delayed by a day, Harbison had trouble finding sober pilots, and a mess hall somehow caught fire amid the celebrations.

Harbison was sent to West Germany to command 67 Fighter Squadron after his stint in Korea. In 1969 he became director of operations of National Air Traffic Services; three years later he was air attaché for the British embassy in Washington. Rising to the rank of air vice-marshal in 1975, he became commander of No 11 Group, tasked with defending UK airspace.

After retiring from the RAF in 1977 he joined British Aerospace as a vice-president in its Washington office. One of his prized possessions was a leather-bound logbook in which he meticulously recorded his sorties.

***THE END***