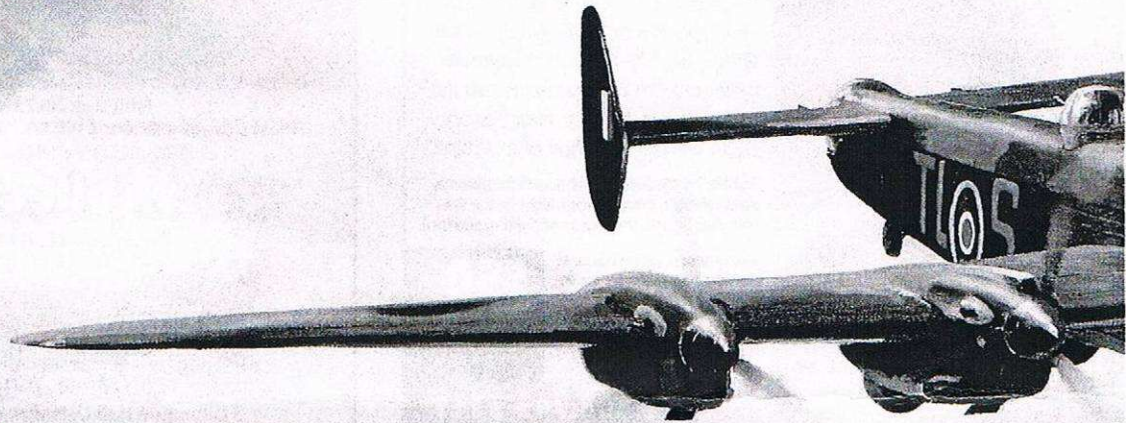


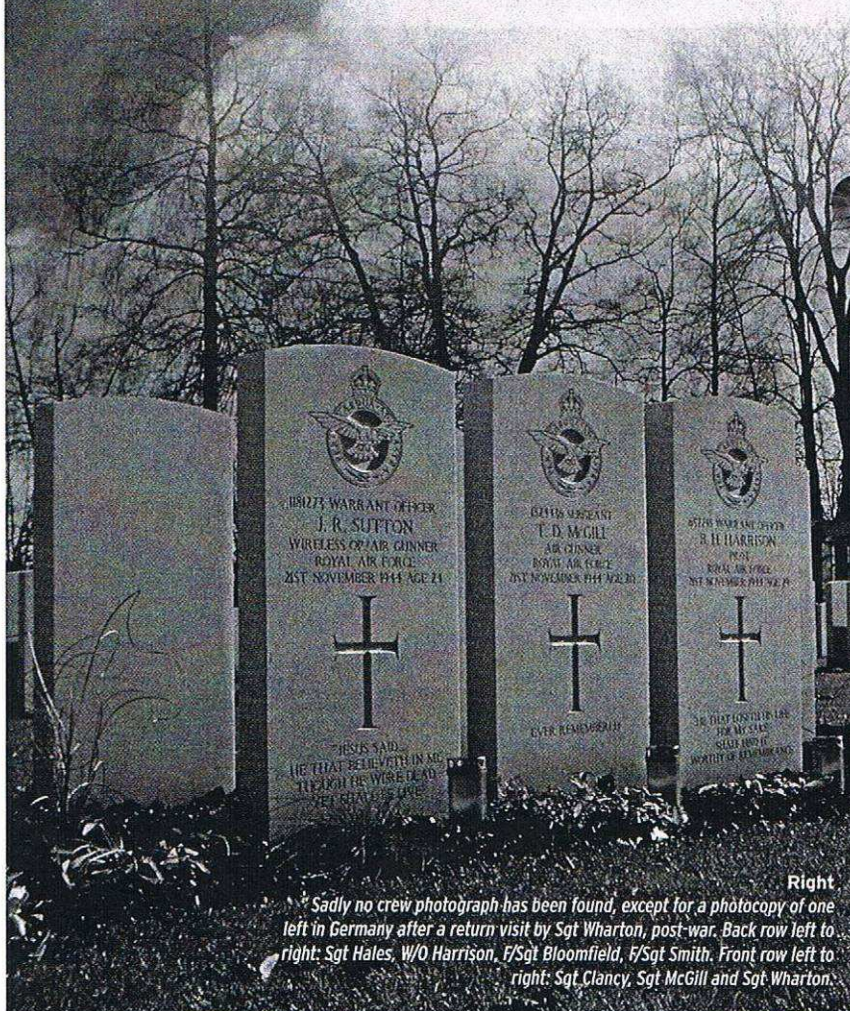
TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION

A night-fighter put paid to a 'spoofing' Halifax high over Frankfurt. **Alan F Crouchman** describes the fates that befell its crew

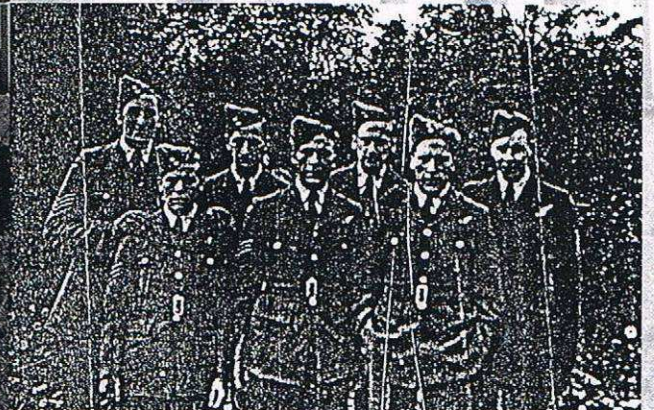


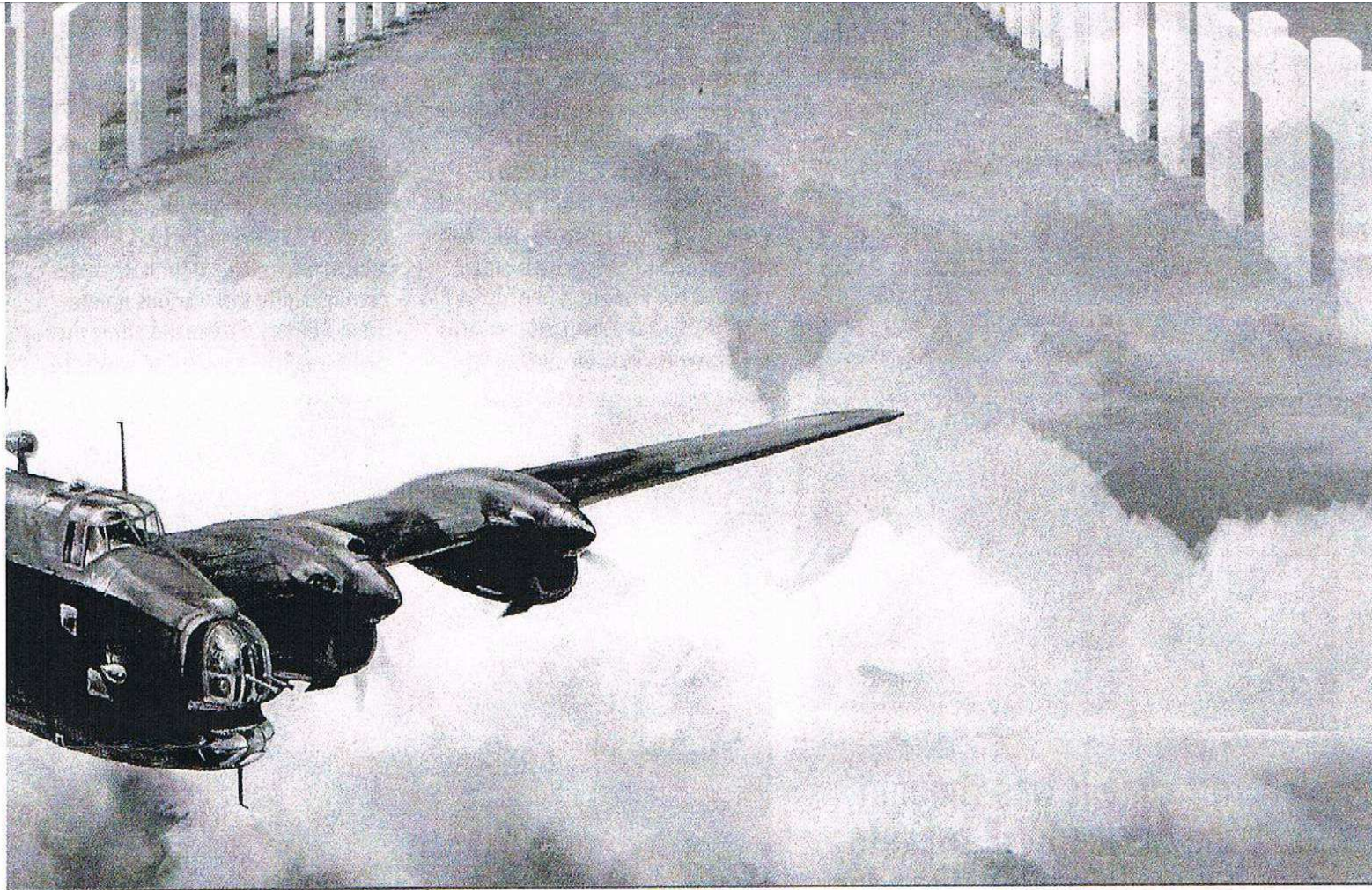
HALIFAX MZ806'S ALL-NCO CREW

W/O Bernard H Harrison	Pilot	killed in crash
Sgt Richard B Hales	Flight engineer	murdered upon capture
Sgt Stan Wharton	Navigator	prisoner of war
Sgt Alec P Bloomfield	Bomb aimer	murdered upon capture
F/Sgt Jack G Smith RAAF	Wireless operator	prisoner of war
Sgt Roland P Clancy	Mid-upper gunner	killed in crash
Sgt Tom D McGill	Tail gunner	killed in crash
W/O J R Sutton	Special operator	killed in crash



Right
Sadly no crew photograph has been found, except for a photocopy of one left in Germany after a return visit by Sgt Wharton, post-war. Back row left to right: Sgt Hales, W/O Harrison, F/Sgt Bloomfield, F/Sgt Smith. Front row left to right: Sgt Clancy, Sgt McGill and Sgt Wharton.





When taking part in Bomber Command operations one's destiny could be determined by sheer luck – or a lack of it. On the night of November 21/22 1944, Sgt Richard Hales, Flight Engineer on Handley Page Halifax III MZ806, and the remainder of his crew sadly found the latter to be the case. The end result saw two survive as prisoners of war, four killed in action and two murdered.

Sgt Hales was posted to 41 Base at Marston Moor, Yorkshire, home of the Halifax Heavy Conversion Units. Marston Moor hosted 1652 HCU with two satellite airfields at Rufforth and Riccall housing 1663 and 1658 HCUs respectively. (See the panel on page 27 for Richard's path to becoming a Flight Engineer.)

To which HCU Richard was assigned is not known, but it was here that he crewed up. The remainder - all NCOs - had come together at an operational training unit prior to joining the HCU. Upon completion of final training they were posted to 192 (Bomber

Support) Squadron at Foulsham, Norfolk, on October 23, 1944. This unit was equipped with a variety of types. As well as the Halifax, there were Vickers Wellingtons and de Havilland Mosquitos as well as a detachment of Lockheed P-38 Lightnings from the USAAF. As part of 100 Group, 192's duties included listening out for new frequencies in use by the Germans or using counter-measures and assisting in spoof raids.

The Halifax was much better suited to this role than its counterpart the Avro Lancaster, as it had a much roomier fuselage that could accommodate the extra equipment and the specialist to monitor it. The extra man was not a formal member of any crew and was tasked separately for each operation.

Upon reaching 192 Squadron, W/O Harrison and the crew (with the exception of the nav, Sgt Wharton, and Sgt Hales) were detached to 1692 (BS) Training Flight at Great Massingham, Norfolk, to undertake a Night Vision Training Course returning to Foulsham on November 10, 1944.

SPOOFING AND PROBING

The next evening they were scheduled for their first operation, flying MZ564 'DT-W' to drop 'window' in the area between Koblenz and Mainz, one of two aircraft that 192 Squadron despatched on this spoof raid. ('Window' was the codename for bundles of foil strips that confused radar operators.) For this, there was an additional gunner on board, Sgt W C Powell, no doubt to assist in the dropping of the 'window.' Take-off was at 16:47 hours and the trip was uneventful, *W-for-William* returning to Foulsham at 21:05.

They were rostered for another sortie the following day and while bad weather hampered most 'ops', 192 managed to put up a Wellington and a Halifax during the day to patrol off the Dutch coast. W/O Harrison and crew were joined by specialist F/Sgt D W Rendall and they flew MZ795 'DT-V'. The Wellington had departed earlier and returned at 14:30, while the Halifax was airborne at 12:54 so that a constant listen out for new

Above
Those lost on MZ806 are interred alongside each other at the Durnbach War Cemetery, the pilot, rear gunner and specialist operator sharing a communal grave. DAVID HALES

Above left
'Halifax Legend' by Robert Taylor. THE MILITARY GALLERY, ENGLAND





"At this time it was thought that the German V-2 rockets were being controlled by radar or wireless and much effort was expended on searching for possible frequencies..."

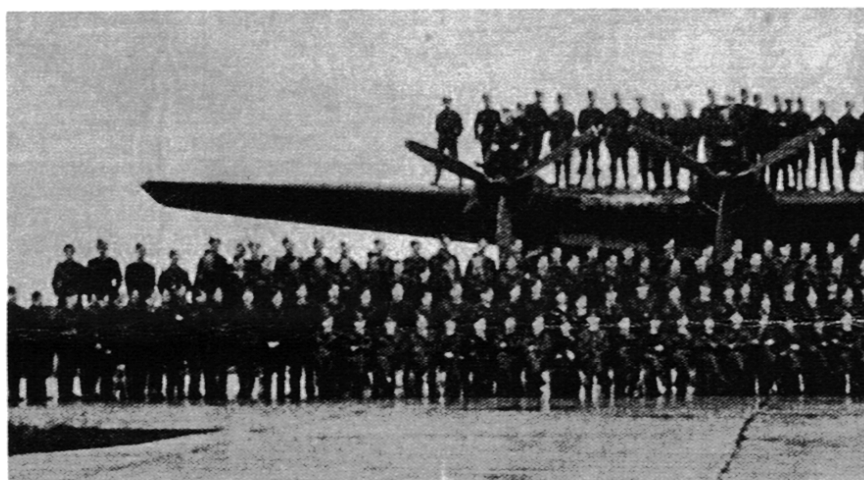
frequencies was maintained.

At this time it was thought - wrongly as it turned out - that the German V-2 rockets were being controlled by radar or wireless and much effort was expended on searching for possible frequencies being used to direct them. Following a fruitless search, *V-for-Victor* landed back at Foulsham at 18:30.

'Op' No.3 was scheduled for November 15; another 'window' trip in the area of Aachen and Gladbach. For this trip, in MZ706 'DT-P', Sgt McGill took the position of mid-upper gunner while additional gunner, F/Sgt R Porteous, who had only joined 192 three days earlier, manned the rear guns. Shortly after take-off the airspeed indicator became unserviceable forcing an

rotating Freya radar installations, for which purpose they were joined by specialist W/O John R Sutton. They were to accompany the main bomber stream in an attack on the marshalling yards at Aschaffenburg, near Frankfurt.

Main 'ops' that night were divided between the oil refineries at Castrop Rauxel to the north of Germany by 6 Group Halifaxes with Path Finder Force (PFF) support from 1 and 8 Group and the marshalling yards at Aschaffenburg to the south by 1 Group Lancasters. Both raids were timed to be over the targets between 19:00 and 19:15. Other attacks were planned for later in the evening along with various spoofs. Total Bomber Command effort that night was 1,345 sorties, of which 14



abort, the crew putting down at Woodbridge, Suffolk, at 00:43.

LONE HALIFAX

Fate decreed that the next trip, on Tuesday November 21, would be their last. The task was to investigate transmissions from

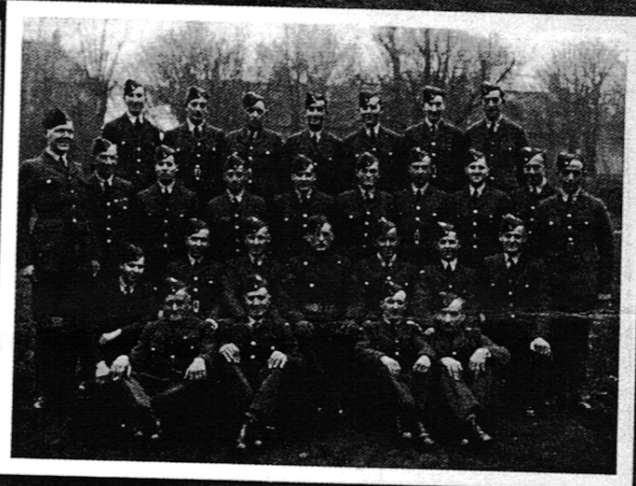
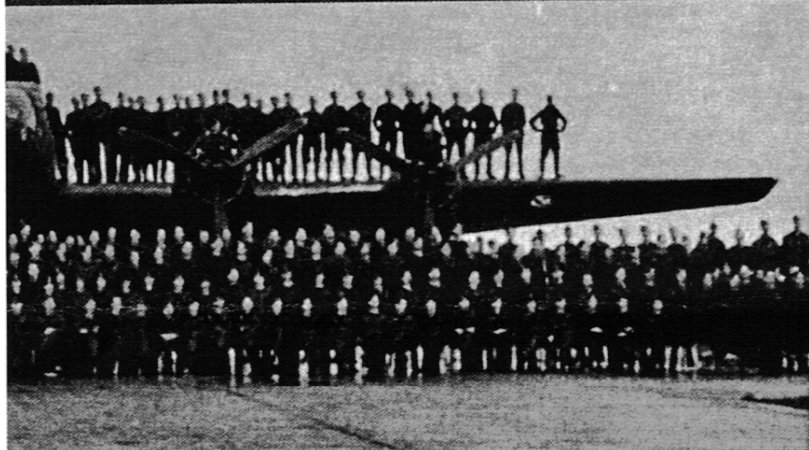
aircraft were missing in action, a loss rate of 1.04-percent.

For the attack on Aschaffenburg, 1 Group despatched 238 Lancasters, accompanied by 36 Lancasters and 8 Mosquitos from 8 Group PFF. W/O Harrison was piloting MZ806 'DT-R' - it was the only example of





Above
Some of the hangars still
stand at the former RAF
Foulsham. AUTHOR



its type on the raid. This was *R-for-Roger's* 18th operation, having entered service with the 192 on September 8.

The station commander bade them a personal farewell and MZ806 took off at 15:58 to join up with the main stream. The course took the formation south to exit the English coast at Beachy Head, entering France to the south of Abbeville then taking an easterly heading. As they entered enemy-controlled territory a couple of dog legs were carried out on the final approaches to the target.

Weather en route was good at first but cloud built up over France and gradually increased all the way to the target, which was mostly obscured with the tops at 8,000 to 9,000ft (2,438 to 2,743m). Because of the cloud cover, the Master Bomber ordered release using navigational aids as the target could not be marked properly.

For Aschaffenburg, this was the worst raid endured during the war, with 268 Lancasters and 3 Mosquitos releasing over the target. About 50 bombs landed on the marshalling yards, but most fell in

the centre and north of the town, killing 344 people, destroying some 500 homes and damaging 1,500 others. Of the main force, two Lancasters, both from 460 Squadron RAAF failed to return, both falling to enemy aircraft on the home run.

CORKSCREW STARBOARD

Until arriving at the target the crew of MZ806 had quite an uneventful trip. Small amounts of flak had been encountered on the way and at the target, but no damage had been sustained. Sgt Stan Wharton, the navigator, later reported: "As we did not carry bombs we were ordered at briefing to skirt the target. I instructed the pilot to turn to port, did a 180-degree turn south east of the target and came on to my return to base course. On both sides of the track were German air flares lighting up the return course like a main road. I instructed the pilot to increase to maximum speed nose down and after a few minutes in this attitude I heard the rear gunner shout 'Fighter attacking, corkscrew

starboard skipper'. Tracer bullets passed between my feet and the starboard engines were on fire.

"As there was no response from the pilot I gave the order to bale out, jettisoning the escape hatch in the forward part of the aircraft. I pressed the destroy buttons for the secret equipment and went through the hatch. In my haste I had forgotten to unfasten my oxygen supply and found myself dangling under the crashing aircraft. I felt a boot on top of my head, which I think belonged to Sgt Bloomfield, which snapped the oxygen connection and I lost consciousness.

"The next thing I knew I was tumbling through space, I first saw stars and then fires from the target. I pulled the ripcord and after what seemed to be about five seconds, I hit the ground."

PARACHUTE IN HAND

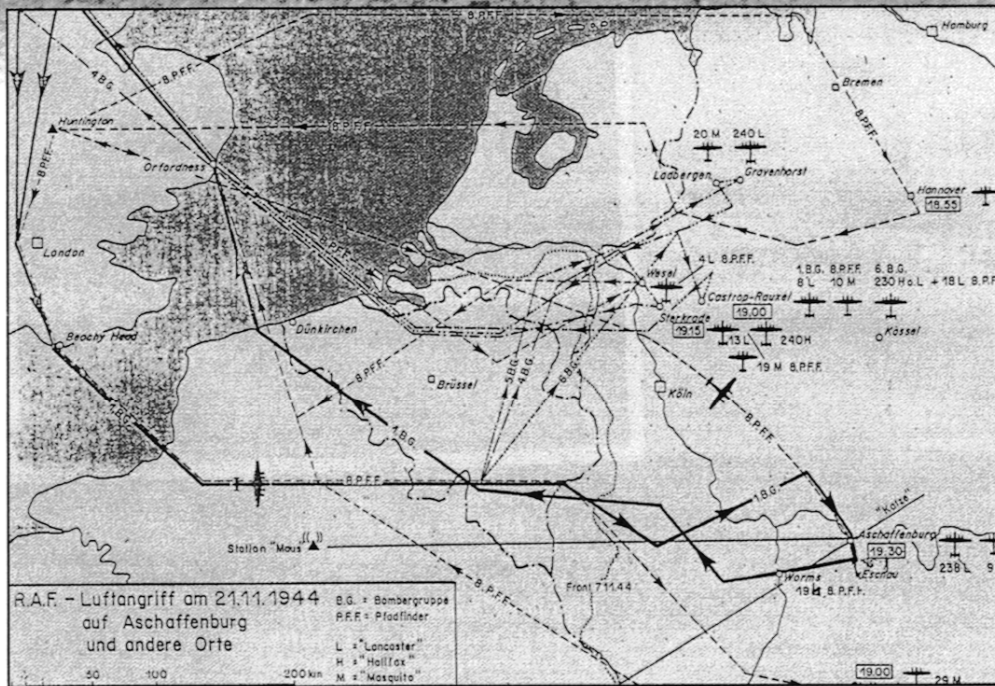
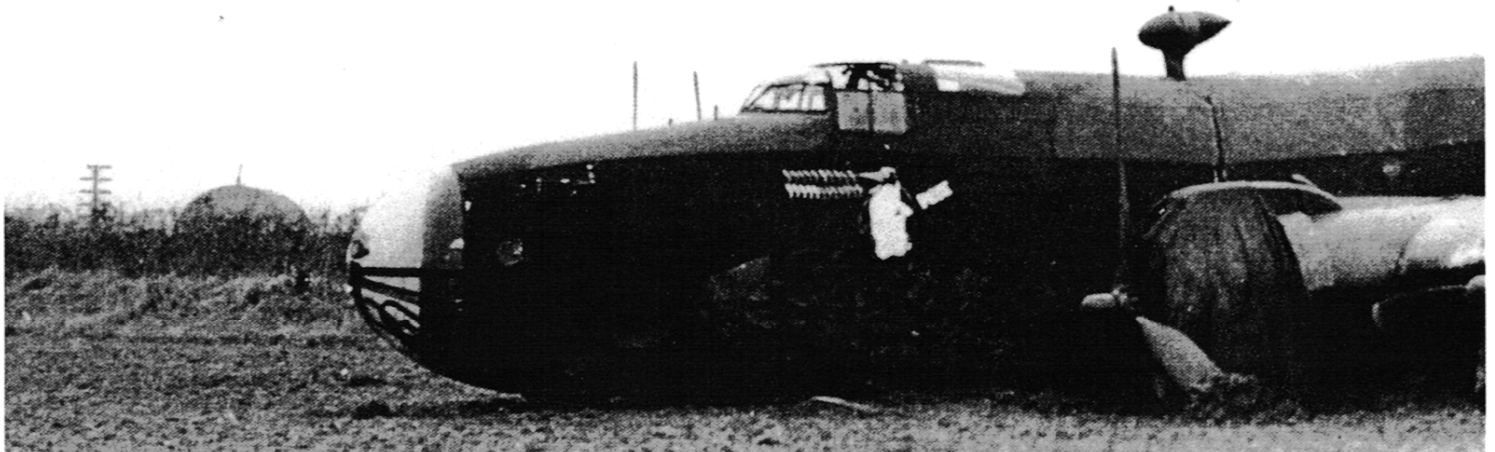
Also desperately trying to escape the doomed Halifax was F/Sgt Jack Smith, the wireless operator who remembered: "We were over the target at about 19:15 hours and I was sitting next to the pilot

Top left
Sgt Richard Hales, known as Ben to his family, the Flight Engineer on Halifax MZ806. VIA DAVID HALES

Above left
Personnel of 192 Squadron pose with the unit's mascot. JOHN REES

Above
Richard Hales, top left, probably taken during his basic training. VIA DAVID HALES

Left
Halifax MZ795 'DF-V' of 192 Squadron. W/O Harrison and crew flew MZ795 on November 12, 1944. JOHN REES



appeared to be pulling out of the dive when it suddenly turned to port and crashed straight into the ground and exploded about two miles from me.”

Their adversary that night had been Fw Konrad Beyer of 1/ NJG4, who had taken off from Langendiebach. His was one of a number of night-fighters vectored south to intercept the Aschaffenburg raid. This Beyer was his eleventh and final claim of the war.

STATION REUNION

R-for-Roger came down near the village of Kirch-Brombach, carrying the pilot and the three crewmembers in the rear to their deaths. All are interred in the Durnbach cemetery south of Munich. The state of carnage and devastation is clear from the fact that three of the crew (W/O Harrison, Sgt McGill and W/O Sutton) share a communal grave.

Those fortunate to have escaped the doomed Halifax came down in the villages near the crash site. It appears that they exited in the following order: Sgt Stan Wharton, Sgt Bloomfield, Sgt Hales and F/ Sgt Smith. Once on the ground

Above
German document detailing RAF activities over Germany on the evening of November 21, 1944. The Aschaffenburg raid is the one to the south. VIA DAVID HALES

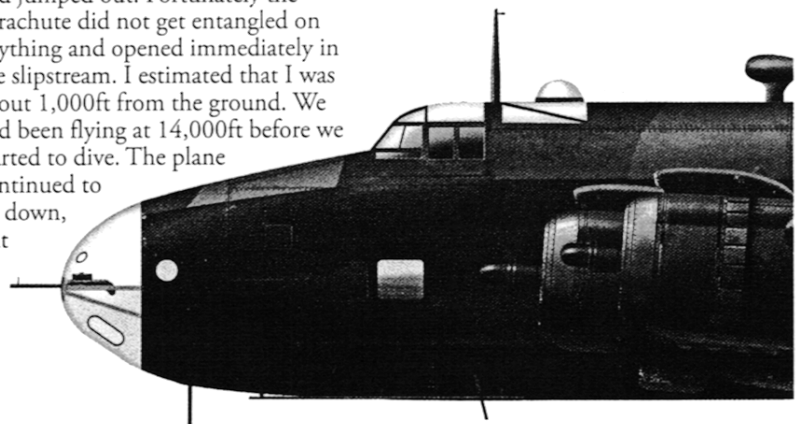
acting as an extra lookout as I was not due to take a broadcast until 19:30. We were flying above the main stream and could see planes silhouetted against the bomb flashes. About ten minutes later the rear gunner came on the intercom with an order for the pilot to corkscrew to starboard and, at the same time, he opened fire on the enemy aircraft.

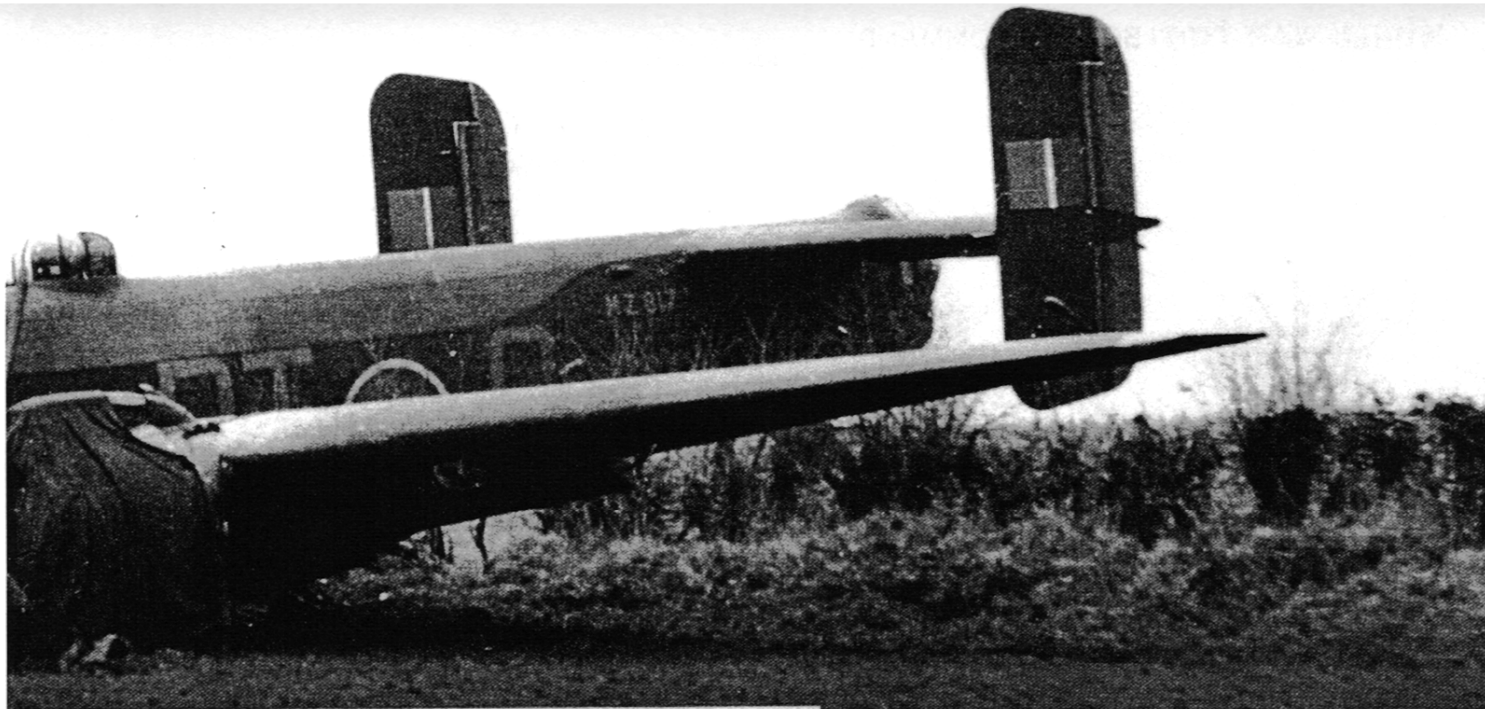
“A few seconds later we were hit in both starboard engines, both of which caught fire. Bob, our pilot, had difficulty pulling out and, as he thought that he would probably not succeed in doing so, he gave the order to abandon. I slipped down to my position, which was under the pilot on the left side. The bomb aimer and navigator were getting the bottom escape hatch open and eventually they jumped out. I was having difficulty putting on my parachute as the Flight Engineer was

in my way, he managed to push past me and baled out.

“As I stood up my ripcord caught on my wireless set, it opened and silk spilled out onto the floor. The plane was still going down so I picked up my chute, held it to my chest, sat on the edge of the escape hatch and jumped out. Fortunately the parachute did not get entangled on anything and opened immediately in the slipstream. I estimated that I was about 1,000ft from the ground. We had been flying at 14,000ft before we started to dive. The plane continued to go down, but

Right
Halifax III MZ806.
PETE WEST 2011





FROM BUILDER TO ENGINEER



AC2 Richard Hales aged 18, shortly after joining the RAFVR. VIA DAVID HALES

Born on March 20, 1924 Richard Benjamin Hales, known as Ben to his family, was brought up in the east end of London and prior to his enlistment, on October 12, 1942, was employed as a builder.

Following medical and aptitude tests he was sent to 11 Recruitment Centre at Skegness, Lincolnshire, on October 22, 1942 for his six weeks basic training. This was followed by a short stint with 2 Air Grading School, then a posting to 14 School of Technical Training (SoTT), at Henlow, Bedfordshire, on January 6, 1943 where he trained as an electrician.

Upon completion of this course he was then sent to 59 Operational Training Unit at Millfield, Northumberland, where he arrived on June 3, 1943. This OTU was equipped with Hawker Hurricanes and Typhoons.

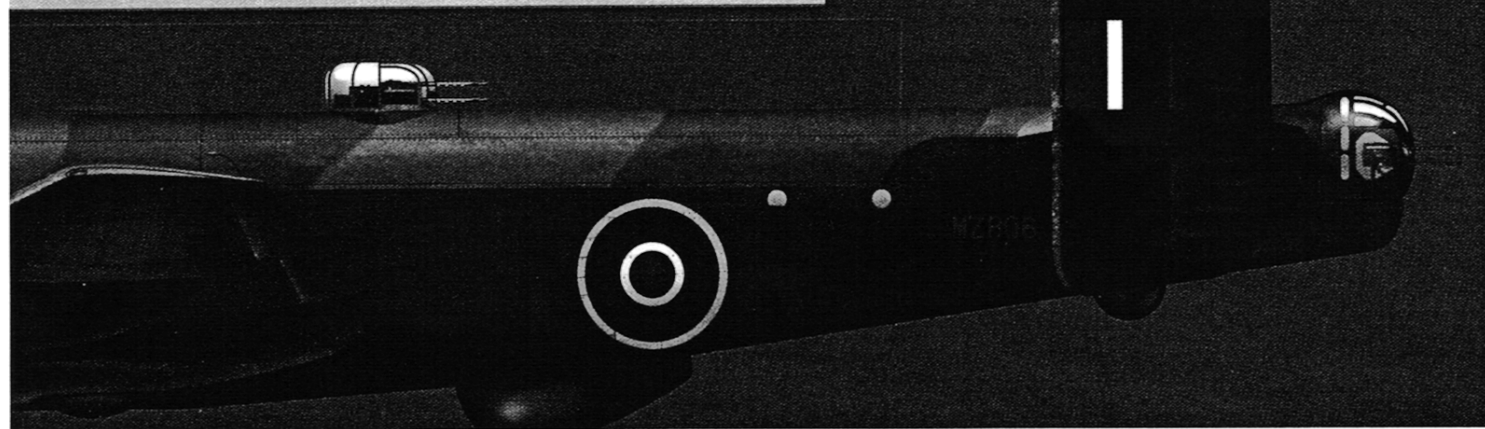
Ben must have volunteered and re-mustered for aircrew duties for, on November 1, he went to Abbey Wood, close to Regents Park in London, for assessment and then to 16 Initial Training Wing at Whitley Bay, Northumberland, where he arrived on November 20. He attended an Aircrew NCOs course prior to being posted to 4 SoTT, St Athan in South Wales on January 12, 1944, to train as a Flight Engineer from where he graduated on July 24, 1944, with the rank of Sergeant.

fate intervened and they faced very different circumstances.

Sgt Wharton broke his ankle and ribs upon landing and, unable to move, lay in the darkness for some hours. At about 1am he began to crawl until he reached the village of Hembach. Knocking on a door he was taken in, given some food and locked in the kitchen where he remained until the following afternoon whereupon he was taken, by the local Volkssturm (people's militia) to a nearby military hospital where he received treatment to his ribs but not his ankle.

After two days Wharton was taken to a railway station where he met up with F/Sgt Smith who had lost one of his flying boots in parachuting but was unhurt. Smith had walked to a wooded area where he hid and slept till the morning. The next day he trekked westwards but during the afternoon was arrested as he tried to cross a main road. Taken to the local Burgomeister's house at Langen-Brombach he was locked up and the next day taken to the railway station. The two men were sent to Oberursel, ➔

Above Halifax MZ817 'DT-Q' of 192 Squadron was lost just after take-off on December 9, 1944. None of the crew was seriously hurt in the crash. IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM HU-060601



Charge _____ d. _____
 POST OFFICE
 TELEGRAM
 No. _____ OFFICE STAMP
 Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.
 37
 From _____ m _____
 137 2.57 FI/T GHNS PTY 68
 To _____ m _____
 PRIORITY CC MR G HILL 210 GROVE RD LONDON E 3
 DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON SGT RICHARD BENJAMIN HILL IS MISSING AS THE RESULT OF AIR OPERATIONS ON THE NIGHT OF 21ST AND 22ND NOVEMBER 1944 ANY FURTHER NEWS WILL BE CONVEYED TO YOU IMMEDIATELY LETTER FOLLOWS PENDING RECEIPT
 at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope

Above
 The telegram that no one wanted to receive, notifying the loss of a loved one. To add insult to injury, Sgt Hales is incorrectly named Sgt Hill. VIA DAVID HALES

Right
 It was not until the summer of 1946 that the Hales family received a letter notifying them that their son had been murdered. VIA DAVID HALES

Bottom right
 Initially Sgt Hales and F/Sgt Bloomfield were interred in the local cemetery at Konig. VIA DAVID HALES

Below
 Halifax MZ806 came down in the field in the foreground, close to Kirch-Brombach. DAVID HALES

Frankfurt, where they were processed prior to being sent to a PoW camp near Breslau, Upper Silesia.

NOT SO FORTUNATE

By this time, their two other surviving colleagues had suffered a terrible retribution, at the hands of local Nazi Party members.

Both F/Sgt Bloomfield and Sgt Hales landed close to the small town of Nieder-Kinzig. Because of the raid most of the population had taken to their cellars. Adam Wilhelm, a painter by trade, emerged from his shelter and spotted a white object that he later assumed was a parachute, with an airman close by. This was Bloomfield who approached explaining he was an Englishman. Offering no resistance, he followed Wilhelm to the local Burgomeister, Adam Hofferberth. About 200 yards down the road they met other townsfolk, who had heard of the downed RAF flyer and they followed inquisitively.

One of these people was Peter Schanz who, after helping to deposit Bloomfield at the Burgomeister's house, set off for his home. On the way he found Hales outside a barn, nursing a painful shrapnel wound to his upper left thigh that was

bleeding quite badly. He too was escorted to Adam Hofferberth.

The two airmen were well treated at the Burgomeister's house and Sgt Hales had his wound washed and dressed while some sacking was found to wrap the bare foot of F/Sgt Bloomfield so he could walk slightly better - he had lost a boot in the descent. As they chatted with the local people they showed photographs of their families and loved ones.

In accordance with standard procedures the Burgomeister rang the nearby town of Konig. He spoke with Heinrich Knoess, who ordered that the prisoners were brought to him so that they could be forwarded to the appropriate authorities the next day. The Burgomeister asked Sgt Hales if he could walk to Konig, about 2 miles away. After circuiting the room a couple of times Hales confirmed he could.

LONG MARCH TO KONIG

Escorted by the head of the local police and three others they set off for Konig, but due to Sgt Hales' wound and the bulky wrapping around F/Sgt Bloomfield's foot progress was slow, the four-man escort at times offering a helping hand. Arriving at Konig, at approximately 21:55, they were rested

at the local Sergeant's office and given water prior to being sent to the local gaol for the night.

Meanwhile at nearby Erbach, the Volkssturm unit, having just finished a course, had staged a farewell party for the Army officer in charge and his NCOs. As the celebration broke up, with several of the men being slightly the worse for drink, the Army officer, a Lt Otto Maurer, decided to go to the local cinema.

Having heard of the downed Halifax, one of the local Volkssturm leaders, an enthusiastic Nazi Party member named Georg Jaeger got in touch with others and sent for Lt Maurer. They met up with the local Kreisleiter (Party leader), Wilhelm Schwinn, who ordered that any surviving crew were to be captured and instructed those present with an ominous tone: "You know what to do".

Using a large car that belonged to the local fire brigade, Lt Maurer and four of his men, along with Nazi Party members Georg Jaeger, Johann Meyer, Fritz Horn, Wilhelm Haigis, and two others named Giesler and Sauer, went in search of the airmen.

They visited the crash site and called at both the Burgomeister's house, and that of the man who had led the escort, leaving little doubt as to their intentions. Finally, they caught up with the prisoners as they were leaving the Police Sergeant's house en route to the local gaol. Jaeger stopped the car and Lt Maurer demanded the hand-over of the prisoners. The sergeant readily agreed thinking that, as an Army officer, he would be the correct person to deal with the prisoners.

The sergeant took Lt Maurer to his office where he handed over the papers he had removed from the airmen. Sgt Hales and F/Sgt Bloomfield were marched out of town, in the direction of Erbach, under the escort of Horn, Meyer, Haigis and Geisler.

Having collected the papers, Lt Maurer, with Jaeger driving, left the town overtaking the prisoners and their escort on the way. Stopping a short distance in front of them, Jaeger stepped out and stood by the side of the road. As the prisoners and escort approached he ordered them to turn



left off the roadway onto a path.

Suddenly, and without warning, shots rang out. The helpless airmen stood no chance, F/Sgt Bloomfield fell instantly to the ground but Sgt Hales disappeared into the dark and could not be found, being left to his fate.

The following morning the local authorities found F/Sgt Bloomfield's body lay where he had been shot and, after a short search, Sgt Hales was discovered 100 yards away. It was assumed that he had managed to run away from his executioners but had collapsed and died from a single bullet wound through the chest. Post-war examinations confirmed Bloomfield had been hit four times while Hales had been shot by a single shot fired from a distance of no more than 3ft.

Hearing of the fate of the airmen the local Police Sergeant tried to instigate an investigation. Jaeger openly admitted to the shooting, claiming that the prisoners were trying to escape. However this didn't get very far when the Chief of Police refused to accept the report as it involved a party matter.

Of those responsible for the crime, Jaeger and Sauer were killed in a car crash three weeks after the shooting. Geisler was never traced and it was thought he was within the Russian zone and Horn committed suicide ten days before a war crimes trial was held at Hamburg, on July 18, 1947, to investigate the killings.

Only Schwinn, the Kreisleiter, Lt Maurer and party members Meyer and Haigis were brought to justice. The latter two claiming that it was Jaeger and Horn who actually fired the shots both of whom were, by then, dead. While details of the shootings were sketchy they were all found to be guilty, receiving sentences from 5 to 15 years imprisonment.

Sadly such acts of retribution were not uncommon in war-torn Germany. In this case those who could be traced were brought to justice but so many other Allied airmen simply disappeared over the skies of Germany, their true fate unknown.

Initially the bodies of F/Sgt Bloomfield and Sgt Hales were buried in the cemetery at Konig but were re-interred at Durnbach War Cemetery. They lie alongside their fallen comrades from Halifax MZ806.

The author would like to thank David Hales for all his help and for the generous loan of all the documents relating to this story that he has painstakingly gathered.

Tel. No.:
GERRARD 9234, Ext. _____
Correspondence on the subject of
this letter should be addressed to
THE UNDER SECRETARY
OF STATE
AIR MINISTRY (P.4 (Cas.)),
and should quote the reference
P.425709/44/7.



AIR MINISTRY
73-77 OXFORD STREET
LONDON, W.1

26th June, 1946.

Your Ref. _____

Dear Mr. Hales,

I am writing to let you know that we have received from the War Crimes Section of the Judge Advocate General's Branch, British Army of the Rhine, a most distressing report about the fate of your son, Sergeant R.B. Hales.

The report states that seven Germans, by name, Wilhelm Peter Johann Schwinn, Jakob Arndt, Otto Horst Maurer, Friedrich Karl Horn, Johann Leonhard Meyer, Wilhelm Haigis and Wilhelm Geisler, all of whom are in custody, will be brought to trial in the near future and charged with having committed a war crime in that they were concerned on the 21st November, 1944, in violation of the laws and usages of war in the killing of your son and his colleague, Flight Sergeant Bloomfield, whilst they were prisoners of war.

The report states that on the 21st November, 1944, your son and Flight Sergeant Bloomfield baled out of a British bomber which was taking part in a raid on Aschaffenberg and which crashed near Langen-Brombach, were arrested and taken to Koenig where they were handed over to some of the accused who had arrived by car. They were then marched to a village about a mile away and shot near the road.

I am deeply sorry to have to communicate this very sad news to you and I want to assure you of our deepest sympathy with you in the additional distress it must cause. If any further information becomes available that can be communicated to you we will let you know at once.

Yours sincerely,

G. Hales, Esq.,
210, Grove Road,
Bethnal Green, E.2.



A. Beckess
(Sgd) A. BECKESS

"...those who could be traced were brought to justice but so many other Allied airmen simply disappeared over the skies of Germany, their true fate unknown"

