

Winkfield Witnesses

**ACCOUNTS AROUND A DAY'S
HISTORIC HAPPENINGS**

**IN THE WORDS OF
PEOPLE INVOLVED**

**IN THE AIR AND
ON THE GROUND**

**IN A CORNER OF
BERKSHIRE IN
ENGLAND**

**AND THE CITY OF
SCHWEINFURT
IN GERMANY**

THANKSGIVING FIELD

Home of Uplifters Celebration Park



Winkfield Witnesses

The story of Thanksgiving Field has many unusual twists.

One is the surprising hoard of first-hand accounts of witnesses to what happened on 14 October 1943.

This little guide draws together the written and oral tales of those in the air, on the ground; military and civilian; elderly people and children; verbatim crew debriefing notes; BBC and American press reports; and semi-autobiographical and history books.

Some were set down at the time; some vividly recalled decades later. Together they paint quite a picture – not just of personal and collective bravery but of common humanity and compassion. And they've guided how I've developed the Field and Park as a unique sort of showcase of cultural diversity in the many uplifting people celebrated – see the Guides to Mission 115Z and the Plaques on the website.

I unearthed quite a corner of history. On the morning of Sunday 20 October 2013 I was out with a metal detecting club at Tally Ho Farm. Almost at once I found empty cartridge cases stamped TW43, lumps of molten aluminium, and some intact bullet rounds. Back home, I casually googled "Winkfield Flying Fortress" and found I was looking at the long operational report for what I knew was a famous 8th Air Force mission – almost to the day 70 years before.

This gave me the number of the plane, which I was found was made in May 1943 at Long Beach in California. And all the crew names! So within a very short time I was able to be in contact with some of the their families today in the USA. And before long I was in touch with the Second Schweinfurt Memorial Association, which led me to their fine memorial garden – and on to the Lutheran and Catholic churches in the city. Bracknell Forest Library Service unearthed some eye-witnesses, alive and well and living in Winkfield! And much later, out of the blue, came the stories of chewing gum and parachute silk from the on-the-spot Grant family.

So to everyone who has contributed to this guide in whatever way, my many thanks. And quiet heroes since 2013 have been the Thomas family of Tally Ho, with their generosity of spirit in letting this corner of history happen.

Enjoy the read. Imagine you were there. And happy landings!

Hugh Gibbons
hughgibbons@just1.org.uk



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Alf Wight witnessed the tiny RAF Winkfield in Spring 1943 – recorded under his more familiar pen-name

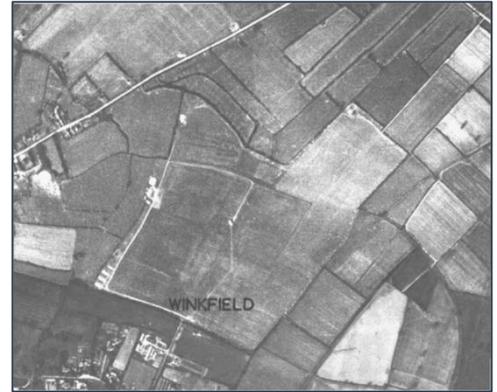
At last we were on our way to Flying School. It was at Windsor and that didn't seem far on the map, but it was a typical war-time journey of endless stops and changes and interminable waits. Two hours later, sweaty, unshaven, half asleep, laden with kit, we shuffled into the airfield at Windsor. Sitting in the wooden building we only half listened to the corporal giving us our introductory address. Then suddenly his words struck home. 'There's one other thing,' he said. 'Remember to wear your identity discs at all times. We had two prangs last week – couple of fellers burned beyond recognition and neither of 'em was wearing his discs. We didn't know who they were.' He spread his hands appealingly. 'This sort of thing makes a lot of work for us, so remember what I've told you.' In a moment we were all wide awake and listening intently, Probably thinking as I was – that we had only been playing at being airmen up till now. I looked through the window at the wind sock blowing over the long flat stretch of green, at the scattered aircraft, the fire tender, the huddle of low wooden huts. The playing was over now. This was where everything started.

The food was so good at the Winkfield flying school that it was said that those airmen whose homes were within visiting distance wouldn't take a day's leave because they might miss some culinary speciality. Difficult to believe, maybe, but I often think that few people in wartime Britain fared as well as the handful of young men in the scatter of wooden huts on that flat green stretch outside Windsor.

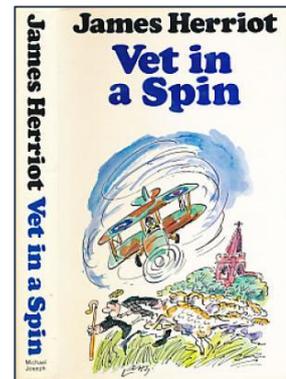
Flying Officer Woodham was waiting for me there. He was to be my instructor and he glanced at me apprehensively as though he didn't relish the prospect. With his dark boyish good looks he resembled all the pictures I had seen of Battle of Britain pilots and in fact, like all our instructors, he had been through this crisis in our history. They had been sent here as a kind of holiday after their tremendous experience but it was said that they regarded their operations against the enemy as a picnic compared with this. They had faced the might of the Luftwaffe without flinching but we terrified them.

I was only the third man in our Flight of fifty to go solo and it was a matter of particular pride to me because so many of my comrades were eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds. They didn't say so but I often had the impression that they felt that an elderly gentleman like me in my twenties with a wife and baby had no right to be there, training for aircrew. In the nicest possible way they thought I was past it.

He went solo on 7 June 1943. A medical problem meant his discharge from flying training – just a few weeks before Events in the Field!



RAF Winkfield was home to No 18 Elementary Flying School 1941-5. It was a largish grass field on land owned by the Grant family in Winkfield Lane. The longest runway was about 900 yards – fine for the usual Tiger Moths but a squeeze for a 4-engined, 10-ton, battered Flying Fortress. Ours approached from the bottom left and ended up in the top right-hand corner. It later became a satellite-tracking station.



And how things are today. The fields are home a great variety of creatures great and small – in the air and on the ground



Denis Vince also witnessed RAF Winkfield. The USAAF were having less happy landings

www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/53/a2841653.shtm

With twenty or so other aircrew cadets I travelled from Manchester to Fair Oaks airfield near Ascot and from there to an outlying airstrip near the village of Winkfield.

The airfield was nothing more than a large field which had been part of a farm with newly erected accommodation huts, an ablution block, a kitchen and dining room, a Flight hut, a hangar and a small guardroom at the entrance. The Flight Commander and the other flying instructors lived at Fair Oaks and travelled daily.

The only people living on site were two service policemen, two cooks and we aircrew cadets who, in addition to learning to fly, carried out all the everyday administrative tasks such as sweeping up, preparing vegetables for cooking, lighting and maintaining the coke boiler for the ablutions and the coke fires in the huts and, also, mounting guard at night.

One of the Corporal policeman took the morning roll call before the Flight Commander arrived and gave out any notices. One day he said, "I have some free tickets for a dance in the village hall tonight. Who hasn't got any money?" Six hands are raised, including mine. "Right then", said the policeman, "You won't be able to buy any beer will you? So you can do guard duty and the rest can go to the dance". Lesson 1 - Never volunteer.

We stayed at Winkfield for about 4 weeks, including the Christmas period, in order for each of us to complete 12 hours flying instruction in Tiger Moth aircraft. These are (they are still flying) small single engine biplanes with two open cockpits, one behind the other, the minimum of instruments and controls and with voice communication by speaking tube. We dressed in flying overalls, gloves and helmets and carried parachutes which doubled as seat cushions. In addition to the Winkfield strip we used a large grass area in Great Windsor Park (known as Smiths Lawn and now a polo field) to practice take offs and landings.

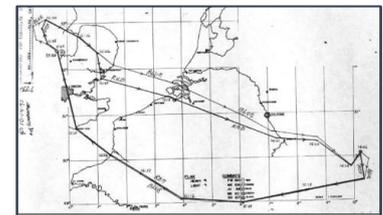
However, it did not take me long to find out that I was a poor judge of height having almost removed the chimney of the flight hut when taking off and attempting to land from twelve feet up on several occasions.

It was therefore no surprise to me that, on our return to Heaton Park from Winkfield, I was informed that my future training would be as a Navigator/Wireless for combined navigation and wireless flying duties in aircraft manned by two aircrew (pilot and navigator) such as Mosquitos and Beaufighters. I was promoted to AC1 and my pay, which included extra money for flying duties, increased to 7/9d per day (HG That's about 40p...)



Tiger Moth at RAF Winkfield

While the skies above Winkfield were mildly noisy with Tiger Moths, from 1942 across mainland Europe people heard a deeper sound by day. Massed formations of the newly-arrived 8th Air Force flew often fierce missions in service of the liberation of Europe.



On the morning of Thursday 14 October 1943, 351 planes set off on Mission 115 to attack the ball-bearing plants of Schweinfurt – a round trip from the English coast at Orfordness to Beachy Head of 833 nautical miles in 274 minutes. 60 aircraft and 650 men were lost to fighters or flak; 17 could not fly again; 121 had varying degrees of battle damage. Approaching a million rounds of .5in bullets were fired.

The day made history as Black Thursday.

"The 92nd Bomb Group dispatched twenty-one aircraft, three aborted, and six were missing in action. Of the twelve which got back to England, only three landed at our base in Podington. Of the nine which came down at dispersed fields, throughout England, two crash-landed with one burning after a ground loop."

So wrote Carol Rose Offutt in *For This Marvelous Country*. That last plane, burning after a ground loop, touched down – so the pilot reported – at 6.24pm.

At, you guessed it, RAF Winkfield...

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Old Bogonian Percy Hathaway witnessed a B17 en route to Winkfield

"Later in the war a group of us were standing down by Bog Bridge in South Ascot when we heard the noise of an aircraft approaching from the south. Looking up, we saw an American Flying Fortress coming towards us about one hundred feet up. It had great big holes in it, as well as bits and pieces hanging from it. We thought that it was going to crash on Ascot, but it carried on and crashed in a field in Crouch Lane in Winkfield."

The official report for the USAAF 8th Air Force high command on 15 October 1943 included the crew's witness statement (and an American-style airfield name)

A/c no. 351 piloted by 1 Lt. R. W. Lyng tried to land at 1824 hours at Swink Field low on gas. Hit mound at end of field, ground-looped and burned up. Crew all safe and has been interrogated.

Casualties: S/Sgt. John W. Disher hit of piece of 20 mm in right foot, 2nd General Hospital in Oxford. Lt. Lyng gash left forefinger extending length of finger

Battle damage: Antenna of ship was cut off by fire Landed at Winkfield. Hit two-foot mound at end of field. Left landing wheel collapsed. Left wing hit ground and ship ground-looped. #1 engine started to burn and crew abandoned ship. Completely destroyed.

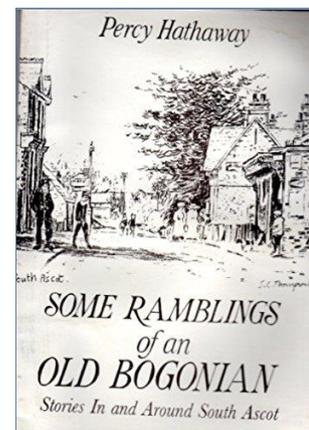
This B-17 crashed on landing. All equipment and records destroyed. Escape kits and money pockets were burned in plane except one which co-pilot had on his person.

Did you get over the target? Yes. # of bombs dropped: 0. If not all, why? Hung up. Bombs could not be dropped. Bombs loaded on ship: 6x1,000s. Bombs jettisoned: 6x1000 near coast of France by salvo.

Enemy fighter opposition: 500 e/a during 1 1/2 hours of running battle which started just after P-47 terminated escort. Fighter support good as far as it went on route to target. No escort on return.

"Don't send us far inland without fighter support all the way" was a common plea by crews. The official report noted that: *The P-47 support was declared fine while it lasted. On the journey out from the target P-47s were reported in small numbers only in the Paris area and for only a very few minutes. No Spits were seen*. All returning crews believed long-range fighter escort is the only solution to the new enemy fighter tactics.* The great loss of planes and crews on Black Thursday led to a suspension of deep missions into Germany until the arrival of the P51 Mustang as an outstanding escort fighter in early 1944.)

*In The Big Show written about 1952, RAF Spitfire pilot Pierre Closterman spoke of being witness over Holland in the early afternoon: *"At last, the bombers! A scene of frightful panic. It was the first time that under the concerted efforts of the flak and the avalanches of Junkers 88's and Messerschmitt 410's armed with rockets, boxes of Fortresses had been broken up, dislocated, reduced to shreds. The big bombers were scattered all over the sky, vainly trying to bunch in three or fours to cross their fire."*



Not our B17 – but it must have been like this



The mound that the plane hit – there is still a very discernible dent in it.



The endpoint of Z – with the hollows in the ground. The wreckage of the plane was salvaged and presumably recycled as scrap.

Left behind embedded in the earth were a handful of .5in cartridges, burnt duralumin and odd plane tubing and knobs found by chance during a metal detecting club morning on 20 October 2013 – almost exactly 70 years to the day.



Around 1960, Martin Caidin interviewed some members of the crew of 3351Z – as author of one of the many books and military studies of Black Thursday

It is generally agreed by many veterans of the raid that 351Z was the outstanding performer in defending itself...This airplane's saga during Mission 115 is one of the most remarkable of all World War Two.

The harried crew stated to the debriefing officers that they were *"too god-dammed busy to worry about what time and where they hit us. There were fighters everywhere, and they never let go."*

B17 Number 351Z flew the lead position on the right flank of the bomber box. Colonel Peaslee remembers this unit as being subjected to *"constant and fierce enemy air attacks"*.

B17 315Z was a busy airplane. Score: nine enemy aircraft destroyed, one probable, one damaged.

A big gaggle of Ju88s had rushed through the formation, going like hell and firing steadily at all the B17s in front of them. Then a single Ju88 closed in from five-o'clock level. Sergeant D Radney in the tail tracked him and fired short steady bursts. The Junkers poured in his shells: his nose was lit up like a Christmas tree. The fighter closed to 200 yards, Radney still firing, when it broke away sharply. Fire licked back from the engine along the whole fuselage. Nobody saw it crash or the crew go out. A disgruntled Radney received a *Damaged* claim for this one.

Staff Sergeant Dorwin "Jack" Radney in his diary 15 October 1943

A day I'll never forget. Moderate to heavy flak – more than 600 fighters hit us. Plane got shot up so bad we wonder how it flew. Ball turret gunner hit in foot by 20 mm. Our crew got nine fighters for sure. I got one positive and three probables.

We limp back alone – low on gas over England. Crashed. Landed on small field. Plane completely destroyed. All got out safely. We lost a hell of a lot of buddies on this raid. God sure was with us today. I pray that he sees us through the rest as safely. Don't believe any mission can be any rougher than this was.

Ball gunner Jack Disher in BBC interview early 1944

Well – the worst experience I guess was Schweinfurt October 14th. Just over the target and some fighters came, then about forty and sixty of them at a time. I ran out of ammunition – got up to reload it – just had my right foot hanging in the ball and got a direct hit on the turret with a 20mm – kind of blew pieces out of it.

407th Squadron
a/c 23351 Z

P	1 Lt. R. W. Lyng
C	F/O H. L. Smith
N	2 Lt. P.L. Stebbins
B	2 Lt. K.A. Pfleger
R	S/Sgt. Peter Waranicha
TT	T/Sgt. B. L. Bootwell
BT	S/Sgt. J. E. Disher
RW	S/Sgt. N. J. Barbato
LW	S/Sgt. C. T. Hultquist
T	S/Sgt. D. M. Rabney

CREW LISTED IN OFFICIAL REPORT

P=Pilot. C=Co-pilot. Navigator. B=Bombardier.
R=Radio Operator. TT=Top Turret Gunner. BT=Ball Turret Gunner. RW-=Right Waist Gunner. LW=Left Waist Gunner. T=Tail Gunner.



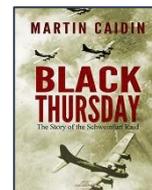
Jack Radney, Nick Barbato, Clarence Hultquist at the B17's base at Podington



Pete Waranicha



Bob Disher's foot recovering in the 2nd General Hospital in Oxford



Stork Visits Home Of Veteran of 22 Bombing Missions

Brother Is Born Sept. 18;
Wife Gives Birth to
Daughter Nov. 21.

Lt. Richard Lyng, 23 years old, 7521 Wabash ave., flying fortress pilot, has had to contend with two winged forces in the past three months — the German Luftwaffe and the stork. The latter delivered a baby brother on September 18 and returned to the Lyng home on November 21 to deliver a daughter to his wife, the former Rita Cook.



LT. RICHARD
LYNG

The brother's name is Patrick Lyng and the daughter has been named Patricia Margaret.

Lieutenant Lyng, who has been stationed in England as pilot of a flying fortress since March, 1943, recently completed his 22nd successful mission over Nazi-held Europe. During this mission the crew was unable to drop their bombs on the target—Schweinfurt, Germany—because the bomb control release was frozen. This meant that the crew had to work against time to release the explosive load before landing at their home base. They finally dropped the explosives over France and none too soon, for the plane hit an embankment and caught fire while landing at the home base.

Lieutenant Lyng enlisted in the air corps a year ago last April. A graduate of De LaSalle institute, he received his wings and officer's bars in February, 1943. On September 9 he was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant. He has been awarded the DFC and two oak leaf clusters.

Having completed 22 missions, the young lieutenant expects to get leave soon so he can go home and meet the two new members of his family.



This news report appeared in the Chicago Tribune in late 1943

You'll see that it carries a very human-interest story about what was going on back home.

For 26,000 homes across the USA the news was not so good. That's the number of airmen killed on service with the USAAF 8th Air Force in their contribution to the liberation of Europe 1942-5. Another 47,000 were wounded.

It's perhaps just as well that the Lyng family — and particularly Rita — didn't know what else Rich was up to. On 5 November he lost an engine over Gelsenkirchen. And on 30th November he got further experience in crashlanding a B17, again away from the base at Podington — this time # 31042 at Little Staughton.

Like many who returned from their arduous tour of duty with the 8th Air Force — actor James Stewart, for example — Rich Lyng kept his memories much to himself. It was only at his funeral in 2001 that his big family learned of his role in making history. One wrote to Hugh Gibbons: "Richard was charmingly tall, kind, handsome...a quiet force when he entered a room — tall, lanky, charming smile. Very humble man".

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S/Sgt John Disher Congratulated By General Eisenhower



S/Sgt. Johnnie Disher

Staff Sergeant John W. Disher, son of Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Disher of Route 3, Fredericktown, is shown above, broadcasting from the American Red Cross Rainbow Corner in London, England, in the BBC programme 'The American Eagle In Britain'. S/Sgt. Disher holds the Purple Heart and Cluster, D. F. C. and Cluster and Air Medal and Cluster and is also a member of the Goldfish Club, for those who have fallen into the English Channel. He was congratulated by General Eisenhower, who personally visited the Rainbow Corner during the rehearsal of the programme.

S/Sgt. Disher arrived at Jefferson Barracks Friday on a 20-day furlough en route to the home of his parents. Disher, formerly of St. Louis, visited his sister, Mrs. V. E. Lloyd in that city before leaving for Fredericktown.

One harrowing experience which Disher had, following a bombing raid over Germany, the Flying Fortress on which he was acting as ball turret gunner experienced engine trouble over the coast of Holland and was forced down in the channel. A fellow crewman pulled Disher from the Fortress which sank in less than 30 minutes. The crew of the bomber was adrift for 13 hours in the cold waters before they were sighted and picked up by a

(Continued to Page 8)

S/SGT. JOHN DISHER

(Continued From Page 1)

British vessel.

The Democrat-News Monday received the following letter from the British Broadcasting Corp., Broadcasting House, London.

March 22, 1944

Editor The Democrat-News
Fredericktown, Mo., U. S. A.

Dear Sir:

I have the pleasure in sending you herewith a photograph of S/Sgt. J. W. Disher of Fredericktown, speaking into the British Broadcasting Corporation microphone during the weekly broadcast to America from American Red Cross Rainbow Corner in London, England. I also enclose a verbatim report of his broadcast.

I hope that you may find this of sufficient interest to publish in The Democrat-News. If this is so, I would be grateful if you could mail me a copy of the issue in which it appears.

Yours faithfully,
R. Brenard
Overseas Press

The broadcast follows:

Staff Sergeant J. Disher of Fredericktown, Mo.

Interviewer — Captain Ken Treadwell of New Rochelle, New York.

"Interviewer: And here's a man that should really be weighed down by a chest he can be proud of. It's Staff Sergeant Johnnie Disher. Johnnie Disher your home town?"

Disher: Fredericktown, Mo.

Interviewer: Are you married Johnnie?

Disher: No.
Interviewer: Boys, I've just got to pull back this lapel and see what we've got. We've got a D. F. C. and Cluster, a Purple Heart and Cluster, and Air Medal and Cluster and the E. T. O. Wow! Johnnie Disher hasn't been on K. P. duty believe me.

Disher: To hell he hasn't.

Interviewer: What sort of ship are you in Johnnie?

Disher: Forts.

Interviewer: Oh, and what is your position in the Fort?

Disher: Ball turret.

Interviewer: Ball turret in a Fort. Will you tell us a little bit about that D. F. C. and Cluster which means two of them.

Disher: Well I got the D. F. C. for fifteen raids and two enemy ships, and that Cluster was for ten raids and three ships.

Interviewer: You've got five Jerries to your credit?

Disher: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Tell us about an outstanding experience you've had.

Disher: Well—the worst one I guess was Schweinfurt, October 14th. Just over the target and the fighters come then about forty and sixty of 'em at a time—maybe a couple more! I ran out of ammunition—got up to reload it—just had my right foot hanging in the ball and got a direct hit on a turret with a twenty mm.—kind of blew pieces out of it.

Interviewer: Boy, his guiding star has taken care of him—that became a hot seat, is that right? Johnnie what are your plans now?

Disher: Planning to go back to the States now shortly to go through O. C. S.

Interviewer: Will all those who'd like to have that warm, wonderful soil kissed for them put up their hands please. America, you've got a young son coming home who has really been fighting, so when he gets there

you'd better o
Johnnie Disher,
American fight
luck Johnnie."



Jack Disher had quite a set of experiences while on his first tour in England 1943-4. From a large family in a small town near St Louis, his role as ball gunner squeezed for hours underneath the plane meant he got the best view of Europe to offset the cramp. As you can see from these articles, he was feted as quite a hero. The plaque on Uplifters Fence was placed by his nephew Bob visiting ThanksGiving Field with his wife Colleen. Bob took away Jack's Eye View, an artwork made by Hugh Gibbons with a cartridge case slung underneath local oak – also also a lump of B17 duralumin found by serendipity.



THANKSGIVING FIELD

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JOHN DISHER ON FORTRESS WHEN BOMBS FROZE

The Associated Press, last week, carried the following story of a thrilling bomber exploit in which Sgt. John Disher, son of Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Disher, of west of Fredericktown, played an important role:

"At a U. S. Bomber Station in England, Nov. 30.—Unable to drop their "frozen" bombs on a target at Schweinfurt, a Flying Fortress crew "sweated out" a worrisome homeward trip which was completed safely—but their bomber was destroyed by fire after an emergency landing.

All the airmen got safely out of the flaming ship, including Staff Sgt. John W. Disher, of Route 3, Fredericktown, Mo., who was seriously wounded in the right foot during the tough battle with German fighter planes on the October raid.

Disher didn't mind the foot injury a bit, explaining "I was lucky I wasn't killed."

Gets Two Nazi Planes

The sergeant, ball turret gunner, ran out of ammunition in firing at the flocks of fighters—he shot down two. A 20mm Nazi shell exploded in the turret just as he was climbing out to reload. Only his right foot, still dangling in the turret, got hit.

First Lieut. Richard W. Lyng, of Chicago, pilot of the Fortress, said:

"Disher never said a word about his injury. It was 10 minutes before I knew he was hit."

Disher put a tourniquet on his leg and the bombardier, Second Lieut. Kenneth A. Plegar, of Rochester, N. Y., bandaged the injured foot.

Crash in Landing

Plegar's troubles began when the bomber got over the target. His bombs wouldn't budge. He sweated over them until the ship got back over France, where he was able to salvo them.

The airmen came down on a small training field with a runway only half large enough to accommodate a Fortress. At the end of the runway a small embankment cut off the plane's left landing gear, spun her around, and fire broke out. The crew watched her burn.

The bomber bore no name on her nose, but was sometimes called "Caboose" because she flew the "tail end Charlie" position so much.

"Caboose" went to an honorable death, as her crewmen were officially credited with six "kills."

JULY 8, 1943.

Sgt. John Disher Injured In Action In Europe; Was Aerial Gunner On Fortress

The War Department announced last week that Sgt. John W. Disher, son of Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Disher of Fredericktown, had been wounded in the fight in Europe. The Dishers lived at Vinegar Valley Resort on Route 3.

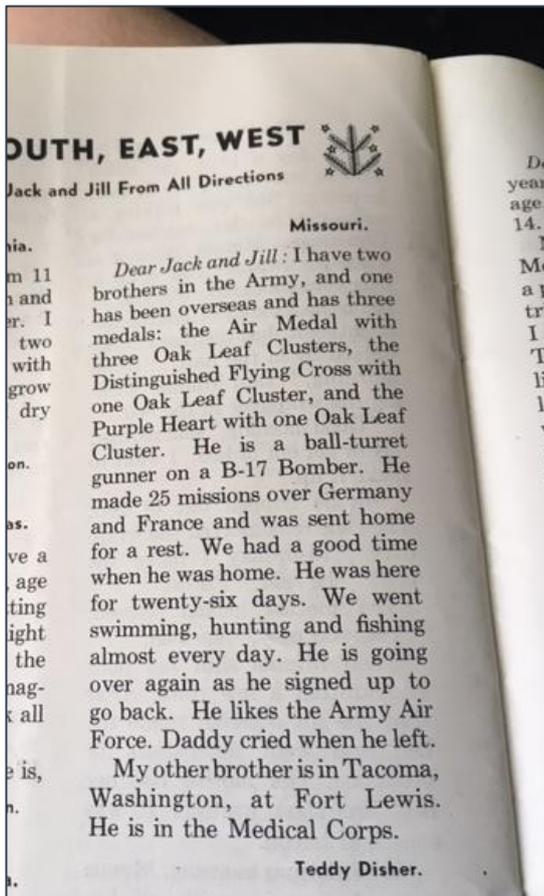
The wounded gunner was promoted to the rank of sergeant on February 27th of this year after graduating from the Aerial Gunnery School at Fort Myers, Fla. He enlisted on December 8th, 1941 and went to Sheppard Field, Texas for his basic training. He was then sent to Napier Field, Dothan, Ala. for duty. On April 1st, 1942 he was promoted to Pvt. 1st class and in August was transferred to the Stuttgart, Ark. Glider School for glider training. After school hours he chaffered the commanding officer, Col. Todd and was promoted to the grade of Corporal on December 1st.

While in Arkansas he applied for Aerial Gunner Training and



Sgt. John W. Disher

was sent to Fort Myers. He was trained as a gunner on a heavy B-17 Bomber, the Flying Fortress.



This poignant letter appeared in the well-known US children's magazine Jack and Jill in early 1944. Jack Disher - unusually - volunteered to return to Europe, this time as a radar operator. He was killed on 13 March 1945, a few weeks before the end of the war. The only known member of the crew to have died in in WWII, his grave is with nearly 9000 others in the Netherlands American Cemetery at Maargraten.



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Marie Andrews has a Winkfield witness statement in a letter to Hugh Gibbons on 29 May 2014

In 1943 I was about nine years of age at the time, and on a late sunny afternoon I was playing in the back yard of our house in North Street, Winkfield.

I gradually became aware of an aeroplane overhead that seemed to be constantly coming and going. I could see it was an American plane by the stars on its wings.

I began to wonder if it was in trouble, and then as it became lower and lower still on the same flight path its engines began to sound rough and I become convinced something was wrong.

As the plane became out of view over fields and trees that stretched beyond the track of our house, we suddenly heard a sickening thud (it had hit a tree) and a terrible scraping noise and we guessed the plane had crashed.

People started to appear and began to run across the fields towards the noise. The plane's ammunition began to fire off in bangs and pops, very fast one after the other. My mother, sister and I began running over the fields, but all these bangs became so loud that my mother decided we should go back.

We heard the following day that, thankfully, all the men had got out of the plane, including one that had an injured ankle and who was helped out by a farm worker who was on hand. This casualty was taken to hospital.

I went to view the crashed plane a few days later with some of my friends. It had caught fire and was just a shell.

Marie is seen below – the person in the centre with a red top, watching Hugh Gibbons explain the 1943 events at the opening of the Park in June 2014.



Liz and Sid Mitchell were also local school children who witnessed the final minutes of #3351Z.

They are seen here at the Warfield Library Reminiscence Group in 2014.

Their married home at Hope Farm in Winkfield Lane also has a WWII memory – being where a stray V1 flying bomb ended up. It's probably another good place for metal detecting!



Rosemary Graham sends an eye-opening E-mail from Ireland in August 2018

Dear Mr. Gibbons

Recently I read in the Irish Times about the death of Mary Ellis (of the Air Transport Auxiliary based at White Waltham) and this sparked memories of Winkfield Aerodrome during WW2. Out of personal interest, I googled it, and lo and behold I came across your story.

Briefly, the "country house" mentioned was the house in which I was born, and lived in for almost 12 years; my parents, Major and Mrs. Grant having been there since the 1920's. It was called Dairy Farm.

What might be of interest to you is that when I was just 8 years old I witnessed that crash landing. It was on our land, the War Office having requisitioned some fields for the aerodrome, that the crash happened, and all the crew came to our house. I remember sitting on the knee of one of the crew, and they gave us chewing gum, which I kept in a matchbox for weeks!

There is much more I could tell you, but not here. So, if you are even remotely interested let me know, and I will send you a letter. I have photos and maps also, among other things.



Rosemary Graham nee Grant (top) and sister Sister Eileen Grant MBE

Rosemary's witness statement August 2018

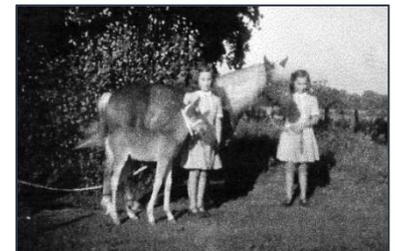
The evening of Thursday, 14 October, 1943 was one that I and my twin sister Eileen will never forget.

We were born and lived in deep in the countryside in a rambling old farmhouse called "Dairy Farm" to the south west of Windsor. We were always roaming the fields catching butterflies and moths, pressing wild flowers, searching for skylarks' nests and, horror of horrors, picking up random incendiary bombs and throwing them around. Our mother would frequently be getting messages from worried Air Raid Police calling to get us back to the house where we would be safe.

That evening, we had refused to go to bed. Finally it was agreed that we could go out to the Rickyard where the back of a barn was situated, and we could get to spot our resident barn owl. We left by the back door, passed the coal shed and crept towards the barn. But in order to be that bit more daring we went as far as a field gate at the other side of the Rickyard bordering on Winkfield Lane.

Then we heard a huge roaring sound overhead in the direction of Mr. Day's lands and Winkfield Place and Orchard Lea. We saw this huge great thing like a battleship kind of flopping in the sky. We ran for home as fast as we could – it looked as though it would land on Mr Day's large fields. But we were subsequently told that because there was a herd of beautiful cows in the field that that the crew decided not to land on them.

Our first thoughts were that Hitler had come! So we fled back to the house, calling our mother. We were all instructed to go into the air raid mode – under the big long dresser, with gas masks and blankets. Then came all the crashing sounds and the sky lit up the dining room window which looked out towards the fields to the south where the aircraft crashed. (Ctd overleaf)



The twins in the 1940s with ThanksGiving Field in the background



Rosemary's witness statement August 2018 ctd

It must have been a while later that Mr Shefford – "Sheffie" as we called him -our wonderful and a devoted farmworker came rushing in to give us the news. Sheffie and his son Basil lived in Sheffie's cottage, along Crouch Lane just behind the Tally Ho public house. So they were only a few acres from the scene of the crash. Probably the reason they came to our house was because we had a telephone (Winkfield Row 179!)

The house was suddenly full of huge men dressed in uniform, voices everywhere, full of emotion. Some were shocked and crying and lamenting the loss of their beloved aircraft. I am not sure if Jack Disher came right into the house. He may have been just inside the side door in a small room as he was bleeding and in pain. They stuffed chewing gum into his mouth to help quieten him. He and others were shocked and weeping.

My mother was heroic. She managed the farm on her own throughout the war with great courage. A Mr Palmer used to come from time to time and give agricultural advice. Everyone was drilled to be extra careful when strange folk might turn up. Were they bona fide? We were drilled not to talk to strangers in case they were Hitler's spies. So everyone was given an identification number to quote and never to reveal your real name!

Anyway, once we knew the men were bona fide USA guys, all the stops were pulled out. The fire was restoked, hot drinks made. Someone was sent across to the Tally Ho pub to get something stronger – us children were not meant to hear this!

I sat on one of the crew's knee, and was given chewing gum which I kept in a matchbox for weeks.

The telephone was in a little room off the main room, which we called the cubby-hole. Several guys were talking non-stop giving number after number and names which we found difficult to translate to our young minds. I expect they were giving identification numbers etc.

There were some neighbours and evacuees from London in the house. Father was away fighting in the war (in the Royal Artillery) and had always told us that he would never let Hitler get over Staines Bridge!

We were then sent to bed and for the next few days kept close to the house. But not long afterwards we went hunting the fields, and brought home yards of parachute silk caught on the barbed wire rolls and hedges. We would squeeze through one end of the barbed wire and scuttle along the length until someone spotted us. I remember asking my mother to make me a silk dress, but I think she used it in the kitchen garden.

So who would have thought that all these memories would come alive again in 2018? I salute all these brave guys, and their children and children's children. And I know that in the immortal words of Vera Lynn, "we'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when".

Everyone did their best. But, oh, the pity of war.

That sentiment was echoed in many places that day – which saw courage and compassion by civilians and soldiers, in the air and on the ground. Overleaf is a poignant story of events in Schweinfurt, on the day and in the decades after.



Sheffie at the cottage



Dairy Farm in the 1930s



Crouch Lane today - old Tally Ho pub on right, and Sheffie's cottage just beyond the trees

Tally Ho Farm and its equine shop and centre – and Thanksgiving Field - are about 300 metres further along on the right.



The Forts Come Home

In Black Thursday by Martin Caidin

There is one last episode to which the surviving crews must contribute. This is the debriefing. Intelligence must get its information at once, before the crews are relieved.

In the debriefing rooms each crew collects at a large table. The questions are asked quietly, with more than a little consideration. But the answers must be obtained now. It is vital. The war still goes on.

"What was your bombing altitude? Your magnetic heading? Your position in the formation? How many fighters? What types? What kind of attacks? What kind of weapons? Any special markings? What about flak? Where? What kind? Accurate? How much?"

"Any comments?"

"Yeah, Jesus Christ, give us fighters for escort!"

Usually, the debriefings are less solemn. The men are relieved to be home, to be alive.

On this afternoon the relief is buried deep, swamped by the shock of the mission. Few of the men can find it in themselves to laugh, even with a touch of hysteria, at the thrill of just being *alive*. Many of these men still don't believe they are here, safe, on the ground.

They are tired and bone-weary and they are sick. Their faces reflect death. It has missed them but it has struck down their friends, their brothers. They stare at the floor, suck on cigarettes, tastelessly drink coffee. They answer the questions numbly, hands moving in fitful jerks, eyes glazed.

In one room a pilot abruptly moves his chair and leave the debriefing table. He shuffles awkwardly to a corner of the room, where he hides his face. Wordlessly, his crewmen stare at him, then turn away. The lieutenant is weeping.

He cries for all of them...

At Dairy Farm, the debriefing for our crew was done differently. As Rosemary recalled: *The telephone was in a little room off the main room, which we called the cubby-hole. Several guys were talking non-stop giving number after number and names which we found difficult to translate to our young minds. I expect they were giving identification numbers etc.*

But the emotional response was the same.

He and others were shocked and weeping.



Eye-witnesses of 14 October 1943 in Schweinfurt

Steve Liewer writes in "Stars and Stripes"
October 18, 2004

By all rights, Arvid Dahl and Kurt Mohr should never have met.

One fall afternoon long ago, Dahl — then a U.S. Army Air Corps officer in the 524th Bomb Squadron of the 379th Bomb Wing — led his squadron of B-17 Flying Fortress bombers across hundreds of miles of enemy territory and dumped his load of bombs on the ball-bearing factories of Schweinfurt.

Beneath the factory where he worked, the 15-year-old Mohr lay huddled and frightened in a storage tank. At the end of the half-hour raid, during which more than 3,000 bombs were dropped on the industrial city of 50,000 residents, he ran through the burning wreckage of the building. Unlike many of his co-workers, he got out alive.

They should have been enemies. But last week, 61 years after the day now called "Black Thursday", the two men embraced and cried at a ceremony in Schweinfurt commemorating the friendship of Germany and the United States, and the hundreds of people on both sides who died that day.

"While this memorial recalls a darker time in history, when men as enemies fought for the cause," John Noack, a veteran of the raid, said in his speech, *"it serves as a challenge to find a better way to solve our differences."*

Noack and Dahl were two of the 62 Americans, including 14 veterans of the raid, who traveled to Schweinfurt last week for a week of commemoration and sightseeing. On Thursday, the anniversary of the raid, they attended a memorial church service and laid a wreath at a monument built jointly by Americans and Germans.

Those who lived through "Black Thursday," whether on the ground or in the air, remember it as a day of terror.

Then-Lt. Colonel Arvid Dahl of Gig Harbor, WA., was the lead pilot of the 379th Bomber Wing during the Oct. 14, 1943 "Black Thursday" raid against Schweinfurt, Germany. He was one of 62 Americans who traveled from the United States last week for German-American ceremonies commemorating the battle, which was devastating to both sides.

"The floor was filled with petroleum products. Everything was in flames," Mohr said through a translator, tearfully recalling how he escaped that day.

Gerhard Bellosa, then 15, had been conscripted as a "flak helper," one of about 2,500 German students ordered to man anti-aircraft batteries around Schweinfurt. The city's status as the center of German production of frictionless ball bearings, a key component in many military vehicles, put it near the top of the Allied target list. Two months earlier, Bellosa had been at home with his mother when a 500-pound American bomb had leveled their house and destroyed all their possessions. They had survived in a bunker underneath. The family moved to a new house, and Bellosa was home again on Oct. 14. They hid in the bunker.

"The house was shaking when the bombs fell," he recalled, *"but the house was only partially destroyed."*



Kurt Mohr, Arvid Dahl, Gerhard Bellosa who Met up at the American German Air Memorial Garden



Eye-witnesses in Schweinfurt Ctd

After leaving his base that morning in Kimbolton, England, Dahl and the pilots of 290 other B-17s had endured wave after wave of attacks from Luftwaffe fighters. The Luftwaffe fought more fiercely than anything the bomber crews had seen before.

Over Schweinfurt, even flying at 25,000 feet, the bomber crews braved what seemed like a solid wall of flak to drop their bombs. After the first bombing raid in August, the Nazis had beefed up anti-aircraft defenses around the city.

Those crews fortunate enough to have reached the target found themselves chased by fighters for hundreds of miles home, across Germany, Holland and Belgium. The Germans shot down 60 Flying Fortresses that day, killing or capturing 639 airmen. An additional 121 had been damaged so badly they needed major repairs before they could fly again. Dahl's crew lucked out; it brought its aircraft home with only one bullet hole. *"It surprised me,"* he said. *"I expected to be full of holes. We were constantly being shot at."*

The bombs took a fearful toll in Schweinfurt, killing 276 Germans, mostly civilians. All five ball-bearing factories had been hit, and Allied commanders at first labeled the raid a success. Only after the war did they learn the damage to the machines producing the bearings had been limited, and production quickly bounced back. The Nazis scattered the factories around the country, so there would be no crippling blows in the future.

In the postwar years, U.S. veterans of the raid formed the Second Schweinfurt Memorial Association, which holds regular reunions. On the German side, the city's defenders formed the Luftwaffenhelfer Der Schweinfurt Flakbatterien (Air Force Helpers of the Schweinfurt Flak-Batteries).

In 1996, the Americans contacted the Germans about a joint reunion. Together they erected the peace monument, which stands in a little downtown park, next to what was Schweinfurt's largest air-raid shelter. Since then, the groups have met on both sides of the Atlantic. *"All these guys are just so close,"* said Dick Fox, the son of a "Black Thursday" pilot and an officer in the Second Schweinfurt group. *"The American guys are close, the German guys are close, and they have a lot in common."*

"'Black Thursday' was a fatal day, for you as well as for our town," Gudrun Grieser, the Lord Mayor of Schweinfurt, told Americans at the ceremony, *"but now it is your home, too."*

What many in war zones witness – noted by Uwe Muler in the catalogue to the city's exhibition on Schweinfurt in the Air War 1943-5

"An unexpected, and for its human touch, welcome side effect of the raids was an improvement of relations between the Germans and the many civilian foreign workers and prisoners of war and forced labour from concentration camps..."

The fact that there had been many victims of the bombings in the workers' camps showed suspicious Germans that the foreigners were not spared by the Americans. The foreign workers, on the other hand, saw that, if it was possible at all, they would be pulled out of the rubble just like the Germans were. All in all, both parts of the population closed ranks."



The American German Air Memorial Garden at Spitalsee.

"Dedicated by some who witnessed the tragedy of war, now united in friendship and the hope for lasting peace among all people"

The designer – local teacher G Hubert Neidhart 1928-99 - noted that *"the rust-coloured rectangular heavy steel slab has come out of plumb. Declining obliquely, it plunges down into the ground, thereby splitting an erratic boulder. Under enormous pressure of this violent impact from above, the boulder is slashed, bent and torn open. A deep, gaping gash has been inflicted upon it. The deep cleft remains open, visible for all times, showing serious injury, a wound not yet healed..."*

The inscription, however, contrasts this unbalanced image. It is an appeal to remember, to commemorate, to reflect - a reminder, a request for more humanity."

"The Memorial is not a glorification of war, not an appeal for hero-worship, but simply a quiet, modest warning reminding us of a fateful past."



Art work gifts were made for churches and other communities in Schweinfurt by Hugh Gibbons – using fragments from our B17 placed on 200-year-old oak from Lily Hill Park in Bracknell, possibly overflown by #3351Z towards the end of its long saga of a day.

The Angel on the right was a small gift to St Josef's Catholic Church which was destroyed in the bombing – with two children and the parish priest killed. The current pastoral assistant at the rebuilt church – Michael Pfrang - kindly brought some soil from St Josef's to add to that from the Memorial Garden, the airfield at Podington, and Central Park New York, when trees were planted at the opening of Thanksgiving Field in June 2014. And he also brought ballbearings...



