

THOUGHT for the week



Hoping for 'happy landings' in 2014!

THE recently-unearthed Parable of Bracknell Forest's Flying Fortress has lessons in fortitude, duty, and big-heartedness. It goes like this. On a wing and prayer, low and slow, in the evening murk of October 14, 1943 – historic Black Thursday – out of fuel and battle-damaged over Schweinfurt, dodging our church spires at Bracknell and Ascot, B17F No 3351Z of the American 92nd Group limped homewards.

Pilot Rich Lyng, 22, saw a haven – the tiny RAF airfield beyond St Mary's Church at Winkfield. The plane tumbled in, pancaked and burned up – just short of today's Tally Ho Farm Shop. Nine of the dazed crew returned to Podington in Bedfordshire. Wounded gunner Jack Disher, 20, went to hospital in Oxford. Next day the USAAF salvaged the scrap. Over 70 years, the event became buried.

Until Sunday, October 20, 2013 – when I uncovered four used cartridge cases... Curiosity and Googling dug up the stories around them.

Apparently, all save one of the crew survived their grim war to be good citizens and family men. Jack volunteered for a second tour – and was killed just weeks before the end of the war, one of the 26,000 boys of the 8th Air Force lost in liberating Europe.

Their many memorial associations show great community spirit. The 92nd Group's has raised thousands of dollars for education and healthcare projects around Podington – as well as restoring the organ in the village church (neatly, another St Mary's).

And I've learned that the people of Schweinfurt and the peacetime US troops based there have been models in generosity of spirit and reconciliation.

So I've been able to send some surprise news and smiles to the present-day Disher, Lyng and other families. To them and everyone over there and over here, Happy Christmas – and Landings in 2014!

Hugh Gibbons
Parishioner

South Berkshire Catholic pastoral area