

“Lest we forget”



Today **76 years ago**, on 21 December 1941 a Sneaker Operation begins.....

A seasoned aircrew took the controls of the RAF 106 Squadron Hampden **AE151 ZN-F** for their next bombing mission, scheduled for lunchtime. This aircrew with pilot **Reginald Stanley Hartgroves**, navigator and bomb aimer, **Anthony Carter**, wireless operator and upper rear gunner **Ronald Yearsley** and lower rear gunner **Douglas Martin**.

Sneaker Operation, daylight attacks on factory targets in various parts of **North Western Germany**. The pre-flight briefing included the instruction that an aircrew should abort the mission at the **PNR** (Point of No Return) over the **North Sea**, should cloud cover reduce to less than five tenths. Mission start time 12.00 Hrs., the **Hampden AE151 ZN-F** was on its way to the target zone over **Oldenburg** in **Germany**.

At the **PNR**, the crew agreed that sufficient cloud cover existed, so the **Hampden AE151 ZN-F** pressed-on. The five other Hampdens of 106 Squadron experienced poor cloud cover and turned back as briefed. At 15.30 Hrs., Bomber Command transmitted a morse code signal, officially aborting the mission. This recall order, did not received the **Hampden AE151 ZN-F** and the crew continued alone on its mission.

Several FLAK batteries protected **Oldenburg** and the solitary **Hampden** would soon become the focus of all attention. Fire from at least four FLAK batteries then erupted all around the aircraft and several shells penetrated the cockpit, port wing and the port engine. Descending in its fast “bomb-run”, the entire fuselage suddenly shuddered as the crew heard an ear-shattering, almighty crack. The **Hampden AE151 ZN-F** had taken a massive, direct hit on its fragile Perspex nose cupola, tragically Pilot Officer **Anthony Carter** quickly succumbed to the extensive wounds, received directly from the impact and ensuing conflagration. It is believed that he died instantaneously at his post.

Meanwhile after aborting the mission, the **Hampden AE151 ZN-F** flew in a west direction with a gaping hole, no elevator trim, one suspect engine and the magnetic compass as the only working instrument. Just before reaching the **German/Holland** border, the port engine stopped. The situation then became worse, the previously extinguished fire in the nose cone, sprung back into life. Passing the **Dutch** border, after sharing his concerns with the two-remaining aircrew, **Reg Hartgroves** decided to descend, with a view to making an emergency landing in **Holland**.

At about 16.15 Hrs., just east of **Schoonebeek**, a suitable farmer’s field was selected. Unfortunately, the over-stretched starboard engine, which had performed so faithfully, for so long under such adverse conditions, refused to respond. This resulted in the aircraft ploughing straight through the Oak trees at about 150 mph before it hits the ground. The impact force threw up sufficient soil and dust and **Reg Hartgroves** gave the order to quickly abandon the aircraft.

Within minutes of the impact a Dutch police officer showed on the scene and the remaining crew members surrendered and a few hours later a Luftwaffe officer took the surviving **Hampden** crew to a **German** frontier

post, where they stayed the night. The next morning after a short interrogation, two German soldiers escorted them by train to the prisoner of war camp Dulag Luft at **Frankfurt am Maine**.



R.S. Hartgroves
Pilot
England
POW

A. Carter
NAV/AB
England
KIA

R. Yearsley
WOP/AG
England
POW

D. Martin
Air Gunner
England
POW

Let's keep the remembrance alive of what Flight Sergeant **Reginald Stanley Hartgroves**, Flight Sergeant **Cha Ronald Yearsley**, Flight Sergeant **Douglas Martin** and in special Pilot Officer **Anthony Carter** did for our freedom.

Anthony Carter is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves section of the Municipal Cemetery at **Schoonebeek** in the Netherlands.

Rest in Peace.