

The Crew of Lancaster R5679 QR-O

Mike Brewser & David Geddes

The Crew of R5679 were posted from 61 Conversion Flight with effect from Wednesday 22nd of September 1942. Sgt Cormack was not listed in the transfer and only joined the crew on the night of the raid.

The 24/25th September raid was to be the crew's first and only mission.



Sgt Cedric Nils Coldicott
1920-1942
Flight Engineer
Service No. 570285 RAF

🇬🇧 Cedric Nils was born 5th June 1920 he was the son of Reginald John Coldicott and Olga Neudam. The Coldicotts were Gloucestershire folk and are easily traced back to a long family history at the quaintly named tiny village of Cow Honeybourne, a few miles from Evesham, Gloucestershire. Reginald during his life worked as a railway clerk and dental assistant. He served in the Somerset Light Infantry from December 1915 to May 1918. Other members of the family were settled in the picturesque Bourton on the Water, Chipping Campden and Long Marston. Olga was the daughter of Johannes Niels Peter Neudam, originally from the Copenhagen district. She died in 1986 in Somerset. So Cedric Nils gives the crew of R5679 a direct link to Denmark and her people. He was educated at the Moseley School near Birmingham and is commemorated on their web pages.

Cedric Nils had a sister Florence Coldicott, who may have lived beyond 2000. Olga had a sister Jella, and Reginald had two sisters, Ida Kathleen who married Sidney Elson and Edith May. Perhaps through the descendants of those relatives we may yet re-establish contact with the Coldicott family.



Sgt Edwin Dyson
1920-1942
Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner
Service No. 1059428 RAFVR

🇬🇧 Edwin Dyson is known to be the son of Arthur Dyson and Lily Williams of Hillsborough, Sheffield England, both born in 1874. He had an elder sister Amy, born in 1908. The Dyson family have not left many clues as to their history. It is confusing that there are two Arthur Dysons born in 1874 in Northamptonshire, England, both chronicled in various family trees.

Arthur and Lily may have emigrated to the USA in the early 1920s. For his parents to have an address in Sheffield during the war suggests, if so, that they returned. The Arthur and Lily Dyson that emigrated were living in Bordentown, Burlington, New Jersey between 1920 and 1940, but not beyond.

Lily appears to land in the USA in 1897. There is a son Thomas B Dyson who does not show in English records. Edwin was the mid upper gunner. R 5679 did not have a mid belly gun position, this was built into some MkII and beyond Lancasters.



Sgt John Alvin Duffield
1919-1942
Navigator
Service No. R/68670 RCAF

🇬🇧 John was always known as Jack. His parents were Charles Emms Duffield and Leticia Priscilla Russell. They lived in what is alternatively described as Thunder Bay, and Fort William, Ontario, Canada. These are in fact one and the same place, now a considerable city, on the north shore of Lake Superior. Jack was one of the youngest of eight children born between about 1900 and 1926.

European settlement in the region began in the late 17th century with a French fur trading outpost on the banks of the Kaministiquia River. It grew into an important transportation hub with its port forming an important link in the shipping of grain and other products from western Canada through the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence Seaway to the east coast. Forestry and manufacturing played important roles in the city's economy.



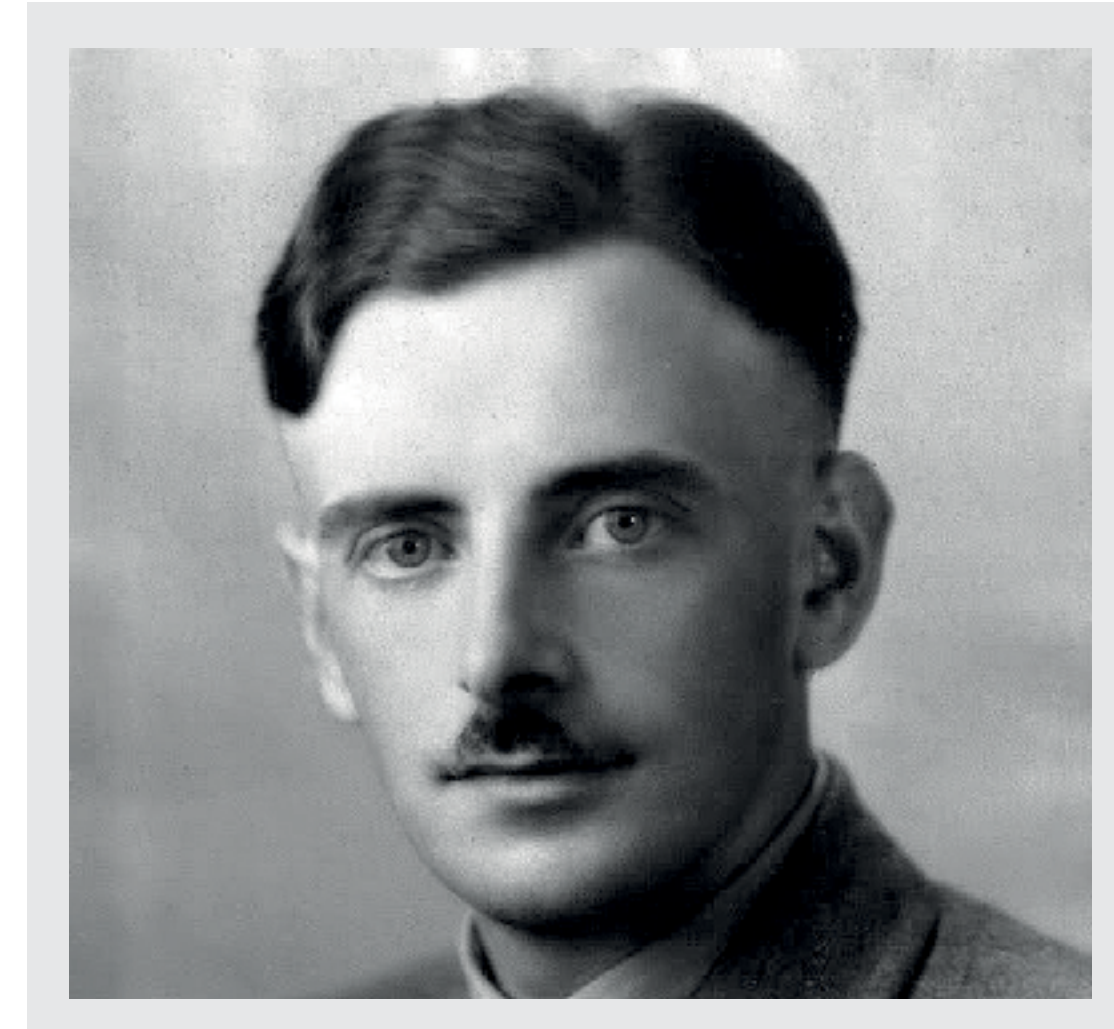
OTU posting.
John Alvin Duffield is towards the left. Lewis Wilson Morrison is towards the right. When Sgt Pilot Lewis Wilson Morrison was choosing his crew he is described as moving heaven and earth to have John Duffield with him on Lanc 5679.

Jack and Lewis Morrison were firm friends throughout their RAF training. They worked together and socialized together. Lewis wrote home about his friendship with Jack. They knew each others girlfriends. There was post war correspondence between the two bereaved families. Lewis stated in letters home that Jack was the only navigator who unerringly delivered them onto an exact target during bombing training and training operations over Germany. Jack called Lewis 'Red' on account of the family hair colour. The name stuck. Lewis moved heaven and earth to have Jack fly with him on QR-O R5679.

Jack's Great-Grandfather William originated in Great Holland in Essex , UK. His grandfather Samuel emigrated to Ontario and married Martha Ann Emms who was born in the USA. The parents of Jack's mother originated in Donegal, Ireland arriving in Canada before 1880.

The unusual forename 'Alvin' came from his older cousin George Alvin Jones. George was one of the children of Jack's Aunt - his mother's sister Ellen Russell, who married Alfred Jackson Jones.

George Alvin Jones was killed with the Canadian Forces, just south of Bethune, in the former province of Artois, France on 28 Dec 1917, just before the town was utterly destroyed



Sgt Alexander McGee Cormack
1908-42
Bomb Aimer
Service No. 1290672 RAFVR

🇬🇧 Email article written by Kev35 from key aviation forum. In September of 1942, Sergeant Alexander McGee Cormack failed to return from a gardening Operation. A few years ago I met his widow and had many conversations with her. Alex was her only love, she never remarried and she pioneered District Midwifery in Scotland, where Alex was born.

A quiet, studious and introspective man, Gladys told me he had been initially drawn to the Cloth and to that end went to Theological College. He was never ordained as a Priest. Gladys intimated, but never confirmed, that he had been in Spain at some point during the Spanish Civil War.

What is known is that Alex transferred his energies to Medicine and it is at this juncture that they met, Gladys being a Student Nurse. They fell in love and must have been a striking couple. Alex had film star looks and Gladys was a tall elegant woman, even into her eighties.

The War intervened and Alex, from a background in Theology and Medicine joined the RAF. Not in a medical capacity, he wanted to fly. I know he spent some time in Florida as part of his training and that he sailed back from Miami. He was qualified as a Navigator but at OTU he cross trained as a Bomb Aimer, and it was in this aircrew category that he was finally posted to 61 Squadron at Syerston in July or August of 1942. Sometime after he returned from America, Gladys and Alex were married.

Sadly, with Gladys working in London and Alex at OUT in Scotland their only home was the Hotels of London for 48 or 72 hours at a time. Alex was offered a Commission but refused it on the grounds that the expense of living in the Mess and the uniform would have seriously damaged his ability to visit his wife. I don't know how many Operations he was on but suspect it to be little more than a handful. Shortly before his death he applied for a Commission. Gladys told me that it was because he believed that if he was killed Gladys would receive a higher pension as an Officer's wife. I suspect this to be the case.

Less than a week before his death, Alex wrote letters, to Gladys, some friends in the Army, a friend from back home in Scotland and then his Parish Priest. You hear stories of many airmen having premonitions but Alex seems to have been very meticulous in putting his affairs in order.

The premonition must have been a strong one. I saw these entries in a battered Letts diary for 1942. This, along with all of his belongings was disposed of after Gladys died. In the early morning of September 25th, 1942, Alex's Lancaster was attacked by a Night Fighter and crashed in flames near Gronhøj in Denmark. All of the crew were interred in Denmark and their graves are tended by the Danish People. Just seven deaths among the 55,000 men of Bomber Command who gave their lives, and yet Alexander McGee Cormack fascinates me. What were the motives that set a Theologian on the course to becoming a Doctor of Medicine? Did he really go to Spain and was it something he experienced there that made him want to be a Doctor? And what then turned a man who was dedicated to the saving of life at its most human level to being a Bomb Aimer in a Lancaster over Denmark?

I know I shall never know the answers to these questions, or the questions you could ask about any of his 55,000 colleagues. I do know that the world is a better place for the sacrifice he and his colleagues made and that my world is poorer for not having had the opportunity to meet him.



Sgt William Young Emerslund
1920-1942
Air Gunner
Service No. R/92023 RCAF

🇬🇧 Bill Emerslund was a first generation Canadian. His father, Hjalmar August Emerslund, born in 1893, emigrated from Lillehammer, Norway. He married Edna Young Elliot and they had two possibly three children. Bill's sister may have died in infancy. Edna, the youngest, came from a family of 6 daughters and one son, originating in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, some 50 miles west of Winnipeg. Portage La Prairie is where 6 railway lines meet. It was essential to the development of western Canada. The area was inhabited by native Americans before European settlers began to arrive prior to 1850. In September of 1738, after the Fur Trade had extended into the West. Edna's great grand-parents Francis and Martha Graham came from Enniskillen in Northern Ireland in the early 1800s. Graham is a Scottish Borders name. The Graham clan was transplanted from Scotland to Ireland on account of its lawlessness and strong protestant beliefs!



Sgt William Young Emerslund RCAF - Mid Upper Air Gunner.

Both Hjalmar and Edna lived out their days in Ganges, Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada. This is a small community west of Vancouver. It is easy to believe that Hjalmar arrived most likely a fisherman (though perhaps a woodsman), from Norway, and continued those skills in Canada all his life. Hjalmar lived until 1975 and Edna until 1959. When WW2 was over, there was a move by the Canadian government to name landscape features after the Canadian war casualties. Bill Emerslund is remembered in the naming of two lonely lakes to the north west of the Butler Ridge Provincial Park and south of the Rocky Mountain Provincial Park, in British Columbia.

It is to be hoped that some of the descendants of the Elliot siblings will eventually recognise this story as of 'one of their own'.



Sgt Thomas Ralph Bevan
1923-1942
Rear Gunner
Service No. 1317942 RAFVR

🇬🇧 Thomas Ralph Bevan was known to family and friends as Ralph was bought up in the small town of Pontardulais "Bridge on the Dulais" in South Wales in the County of Glamorgan.

Ralph's parents John (Jack) Bevan and Annie Underwood meet during the 1914-18 war. Jack was with the Medical Corp after the war they settled in Jacks home town of Pontardulais. Annie Underwood was originally from Devizes in Wiltshire where there is still a large community of his relatives to this day.

Jack and Annie Bevan had 2 children Wynn and Ralph, Ralph being the youngest.

Ralph had reputation as a dare devil once when he was working in the steel mill cutting metal sheets through a guillotine, he was bet by a fellow worker that he could not jump through the guillotine in between the blade going up and down - he took that bet.

Jack like so many people in Wales worked as a collier and would come back absolutely black with coal dirt from working down the mines. At home they had a large metal bath in the front room and when my mother (Marjorie Underwood) came to stay at Ralph's she had to shut her eyes when passing through.

Annie had a very sharp sense of humour and asked my mother to shut her eyes for a treat then placed a very salty object on her tongue. Although she did give Marjorie a sweet treat afterwards.

Ralph's position in R5679 was as the rear gunner it has now become apparent that he exited the aircraft but was unable to deploy his parachute. On the following day his body was found by Marie and Edward Betzer, Monstedvej 16. He had fallen into a hen run behind what today is Monstedvej 18, Gronhøj.

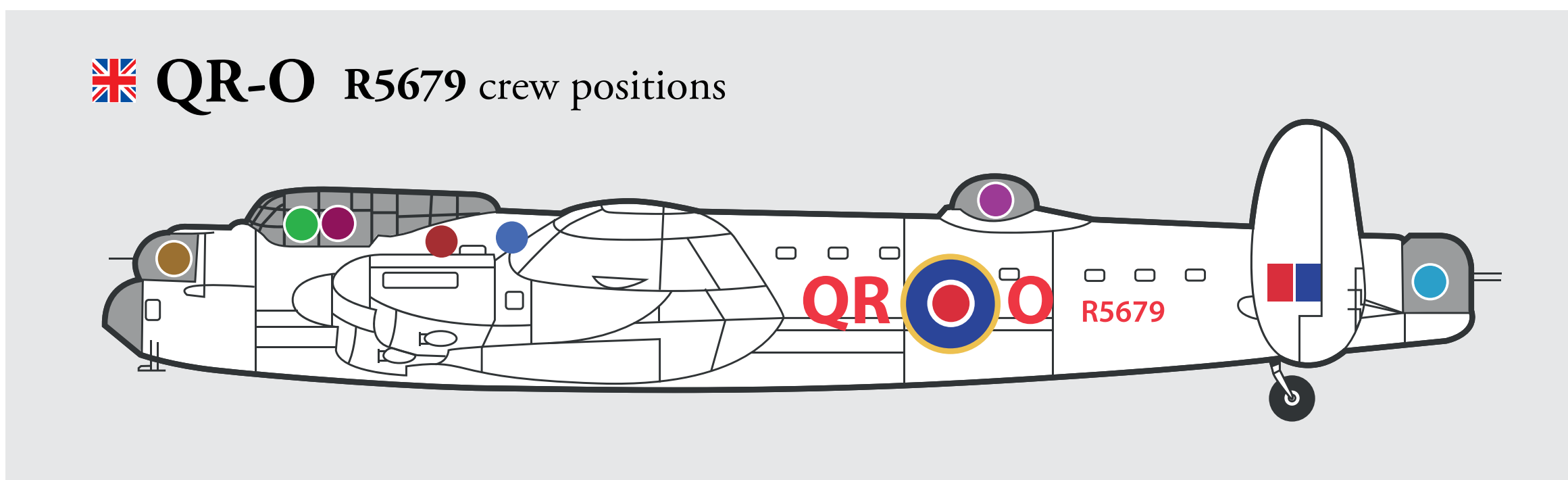
“One of the crew members had bailed out just before the crash, but the plane had come too low, so his parachute did not open up.”

It was reported to the Police who informed the Germans. They arrived with a truck and a coffin. The German soldiers threw the dead airman and his parachute on the truck body and clapped their hands.

After R5679 crashed on the 25th September, a picture of Ralph was sent to his family of him in his coffin he was stripped and his uniform was laid on top of him.

The loss of R5679 was the only allied aircraft lost that night, Lord Haw Haw broadcasting propaganda for the Nazis mentioned the names of the crew.

Ralph's father Jack died during the war in an accident whilst rewiring the local village hall. Apparently some one switched on the lights whilst he was working. Having lost her husband and son Annie needed to have an income so she converted part of their house 4 Uplands, Swansea Road, Pontardulais into a grocery/sweet shop.



Sgt Lewis Wilson Morrison
1915-1942
Pilot
Service No. 656649 RAFVR

The pilot, and the 7th member of the crew.
You can read more about his life on the poster
"Pilot Sgt Lewis Wilson Morrison" by David Wilson Geddes