

Cheshire's 1941 Norfolk rescue :

**The untold story of Halifax bomber
L9524**

Anne Wells

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07 October 2016

Alan Womack
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Dear Alan

I saw one of the eye witnesses when I went to RAF Linton on Ouse in Yorkshire and he added a little extra information to the Halifax bomber article. I have enclosed two copies of the addendum so please keep one for yourself and give the other to the Fornsett Local History Society. Hopefully there will be no more 'evidence'.

Mike (my husband) and I have just returned from France, spending some time in pretty North Brittany. Great weather for late September ☺. John and his partner were in the Netherlands at the same time so we have only just met up to agree this addendum. We did love the display in Fundenhall Church.

Hopefully all is well with you. Thank you again for helping with this project.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne'.

Anne Wells

Addendum

Additional information following a meeting with Kerry Ludkin on 6th September 2016 at his farm in North Yorkshire.

Kerry remembered seeing RAF transport bringing a large piece of equipment he thinks was an engine cooler and a bowser with fuel. RAF personnel worked on the plane for some time to make it safe to fly. If this is the case, and it seems likely that some replacements would have been needed, then the cooler probably came on a second lorry, after those on the first transport from Coltishall had been able to inspect the plane and check what required repairing. Leonard Cheshire would have taken about an hour to fly the 140 miles (as the crow flies) from Linton to Coltishall and up to another hour by road to Tacolneston after he received the report of the landing. The Halifax takeoff was in daylight so not much later than 4pm. Between 9 am and late afternoon there would have been RAF activity on the Great Field – sufficient time to strip the plane, replace the cooler, and re-fuel.

One of Kerry's friends later told him that that he remembered seeing people tying the tail up in a tree at the edge of the field. Kerry believes that the tail wheel was slightly over the edge of the field which is (and was) at a higher level than the surrounding lanes. It could have hit a bank if it was not raised above the edge and so it would have been necessary to lift it for takeoff. He does not recall any preparation of the field, such as filling in ditches but is perhaps unlikely to have noticed something rather commonplace. However, he says *"the field, (all 55 acres of it), had no ditches as it was underdrained. I know this as I recall seeing the open channels and witnessing some soil being returned to cover and make the area level for cultivation. The area would have been harvested and a cultivator used to kill any weeds emerging after the operations"* So perhaps 'ditches' is a slight exaggeration for uneven ground.

Kerry is also certain there was no material of any variety laid down to assist the take off. This confirms part of Dennis's diary entry about the need to raise the tail. A rope strong enough to lift the tail of a very heavy plane would have to be of some strength and thickness not to break without the help of an axe.

AEW

29 September 2016

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2. Halifax bomber – distant view with crew. Dennis Hunt is standing far right
3. Halifax bomber and crew - a later photograph than the event described. Probably Dec 1941. Three of the crewmen pictured were part of the crew landing in Tacolneston Great Field. Sgt Dennis Hunt is second from right, Sgt Henry the navigator is on the far left and Sgt Lowe, the tail gunner, is probably the man third from left.
4. Map of the North Sea area showing takeoff, target and landing locations.
5. Map of the landing area with locations of eye-witnesses marked with their initials
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11. RAF Form 541 Operations Record Book of 35 Squadron page 58 © Crown Copyright, National Archive
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Cheshire's 1941 Norfolk rescue : the untold story of Halifax bomber L9524

Civil Defence report 11th OCTOBER, 1941. Norfolk

0930 Weather - Rainy - Overcast - Fresh N.W. wind.
1506 (7) From SOUTHERN. Halifax bomber came down at 0730 in a field at Tacolnestone (sic). Crew safe.

This article tells the story that lies behind this terse Civil Defence report. It starts from the memoirs of one of the Halifax bomber's crew and extends by eye witness reports from people who were present on the day that a Talcolneston, South Norfolk field had an unexpected visitor in the form of a Halifax bomber which was later flown out of the field by Leonard Cheshire (World War Two bomber legend, pilot in the 'dambusters' 617 Squadron, British observer of the atomic bomb attack on Nagasaki, and founder of the Cheshire Homes). Information was also obtained from newspapers and museums. All the sources are recorded at the end of this article.

The night of Friday 10th October 1941

The passages in *italics* are extracts from the memoirs of Dennis Hunt, 568994, Flight Engineer on Halifax L9524 (V) No. 35 Squadron based at Linton on Ouse, Yorkshire where the Halifax bomber entered service in November 1940, flying their first operational sorties for 35 Squadron in March 1941 and affectionately known thereafter as the 'Halibag'.

Dennis was one of the early Halifax flight engineers.

"Five aircraft took off from Linton to deliver an attack on Krupps' Armament Works at Essen....." RAF Form 541 (Operations Record Book of 35 Squadron p56)

Trouble started soon after take-off from Linton. The engines were set to rich mixture to give maximum power for take-off and in this condition the fuel consumption was very high. So as soon as maximum power was no longer required the engines were changed back to weak mixture for cruising, but on this occasion the mixture control on one engine would not function and the engine remained in rich mixture. In rich mixture the engine emitted long exhaust flames which could make the aircraft easily

seen by German night fighters or possibly also by AckAck crews. We had no choice but to continue onto Germany in this state.

Anti aircraft fire was particularly heavy over the Ruhr that night and we took a lot of shrapnel damage. After our bombing run we found that we could not close the bomb doors and concluded that our hydraulic mechanism in the bomb bay had sustained some damage. My duties included checking all the instrumentation regularly, including fuel consumption, and logging readings. I had noticed that the fuel in the tank serving the rich mixture was also lower than expected and it was doubtful whether we would have enough fuel to get us home.

The captain ordered the navigator to set the most direct course to hit the English coast and the radio operator to send out a distress call as soon as we were approaching the coast. But we ran into thick overcast cloud and had no sight of ground for a long time and no means of checking our course and position as no stars were visible. Eventually we ran into an area of broken cloud and the captain said he could see a coast ahead but nobody could identify it so the pilot and navigator decided to fly south along the coast until they could find a landmark they could recognise. Soon the pilot said that although he was following the coast which was expected to run north and south he was now in fact flying around a large bay and was now headed first west and then north. The navigator decided this was the Wash and the pilot ordered the distress call to be sent. Almost immediately the runway lights of an airfield appeared below us. The pilot circled preparatory to landing and I moved back to release the undercarriage locks so that the wheels could be lowered when required. As I did so the wheels fell down unexpectedly and locked in the down position (due to lack of hydraulic power to hold them up). Whilst we were trying to cope with this surprise the second pilot spotted a bridge or causeway ahead crossing the bay, and the navigator, after consulting his maps, announced that we were not flying around the Wash but this was in fact the Zuyder Zee (sic) and the airfield we were approaching must be an enemy one. We were now in an awful dilemma; with bomb doors open and undercarriage down the aircraft was just wallowing along. We were already down to 3000 feet and could not climb away, furthermore we were so low on fuel that it was touch and go whether we could reach the English coast. As we set course for the nearest spot in England the airfield lights went out and we flew through a barrage of enemy gunfire. Miraculously we were not hit directly but we did take a lot of flak fragments.

Neither the RAF Operations Record Book Form 541 nor the Accident Report AM Form 1180 refer to this incident over the Dutch coast. It may have been unreported and Dennis's writings are the only record of a near miss. What Dennis omits in this section of his memoirs are the additional official written details ".... of the remaining two aircraft, one was unable to attack primary, practically 10/10 cloud, but dropped its bombs on a railway line believed to be some miles east of Essen. Green flares were observed from H.Es and small fires from incendiaries. This aircraft was unable to close its bomb doors and also had one undercarriage leg down throughout the greater part of its return journey, having an adverse affect on petrol consumption, necessitating a forced landing in a field in East Anglia, which was successfully carried out with no damage to the aircraft." RAF Form 541 op cit p56. Dennis's son-in-law Chris Tasker writes "I assumed that Dennis dropped both aircraft legs

but looking back I remember a conversation in which he said that he removed the pin before he should have done (it was only his second trip after all). It makes sense that each leg would have a pin and so the captain would have stopped him dropping the second leg". This second leg must have been released at some point close to the actual landing.

Saturday October 11th 1941

And so we set off across the North Sea. Fuel was now the main issue together with our ability to maintain height. All the fuel gauges were showing low and in fact the one serving the rich engine was showing empty but the engine was still running so the gauges were obviously not accurate. Normally as soon as a gauge showed empty we would change to another tank but in present circumstances we knew we were going to have to squeeze every drop of fuel out of our four tanks. The captain and I decided we run that engine on the seemingly empty tank until the engine started to cut and then I would change it to another tank. Provided I could do this quickly enough to prevent the engine stopping completely and getting air into the whole fuel system we could also do the same for the other tanks. There were other complications but the biggest difficulty for me was the fact that the fuel tank change levers were under the rest bench seat in mid fuselage and I had to lie on my stomach and reach under the seat to operate them. In this position it was impossible to reach an intercom point to communicate with the pilot. However I could tell from the engine notes when an engine started to cut and which engine it was so I lay on my tummy for a long time manipulating the tank controls whilst the rear gunner acted as communication link between me and the captain. Fortunately this all worked.

Our progress across the North Sea was painfully slow. We were still losing height and attempting to drain all the tanks when we saw the English coast in the distance – it now being daylight and we all raised a cheer. We crossed the coast at less than 1000 feet and looked for somewhere to land.

Dennis does not write about the lack of wireless communication. The report in RAF AM Form 1180, written shortly after the incident, is difficult to read but, with expert assistance from the Air Historical Branch (RAF) it can be interpreted that it includes information that there was 'considerable static and W/O unable to read loops'. This situation seems to have been unresolved so the pilot had neither means of communication nor any accurate indication of their location. Form A M 1180 also confirms accident type 74 with open bomb doors which failed to close after the attack. The report also states that the Flight Engineer had accidentally released the port undercarriage, high boost and revs (revolutions) were needed to maintain height and the half an hour ETA over the Dutch Coast was incorrect, so they had circled the coast for an hour before realising this. And as we read from Dennis's account the fuel level was dangerously low as the plane crossed the UK coast.

There was no airfield that we could see and it was a misty morning. The two pilots saw a likely looking park below but could not find a path between widely spaced trees that was long enough to take a Halifax landing but at this point another engine cut

and with all the gauges showing empty the captain had no choice but to put down immediately.

An eye-witness, Kerry Ludkin, writes "The aircraft must have been low on fuel and had to get out of the air quickly so the pilot took a risk and landed the great aircraft over two fields, stopping at the high border (earth) between my father's farm and Jennifer's (Spratt) father's farm." In 1941 Kerry was 10 years old and lived at Hill Top Farm, Forncett St Mary (see illustration map of landing area).

In 1941 Russell Falgate was 11 years old with five brothers and sisters all close in age. They lived in Hapton, the next parish to Forncett St Mary in South Norfolk, about 9 miles south of Norwich, where his grandfather farmed. Early in the morning of Saturday 11th October Russell and a few friends were wandering around the main street of Hapton doing nothing in particular. They heard a noise in the sky approaching from the east.

Russell told me "I don't know what time it was but early and I remember a plane coming over very low. The noise was getting louder as it was so low. There were three or four others with me but I don't remember who, one was probably my brother and some other boys. I had two brothers and it was probably one of them. I did not see the plane land but it was coming down towards The Forncetts a couple of miles away or less and we ran to have a look. There were already lots of people in the field when we got there, perhaps twenty or thirty, although it was quite an isolated place"

Alan Womack is a few years younger than Russell and in 1941 lived in Forncett St Peter. He remembered that morning. He and his friend John were scrumping greengages when the plane came down near Tacolneston, flying from the direction of Long Stratton from the east. Alan said "It came down on what we know as the Great Field that is marked on the OS map and John, my friend, and I thought it had come down there because that was the largest field in the area. Maybe they spotted that because it was daylight? We didn't see it come down but news spread quickly around the village. It came over Hurn Lane, the bit up Hurn Lane where there are no banks. Down at the bottom end by Cheyney's Lane there are high banks and houses. He landed on the Long Field. We called that the Great Field." (see photographs of the field today in illustrations)

Dennis's words describe the landing:

With the exception of the two pilots we crew were ordered to adopt crash positions which meant sitting on the floor in the fuselage with our backs against some solid support and that was the last I saw of our approach and landing. We could feel the initial bump as the aircraft struck the ground but then we were flung about as it careered on over very uneven ground and we were all waiting for the final crash as we hit a tree or something – but it never came. After much banging and bumping the plane slowed and came to a stop. I opened the rear hatch and looked out and what did I see – cabbages.

We all piled out breathing sighs of relief and, congratulating the pilot for getting us safely down, we took stock of our situation. We could see our tracks across the parkland and we had ploughed through two hedges across two cultivated fields and were now stuck in a cabbage field. The plane appeared to have suffered no serious damage although the fuselage, wings, rudder and engine cowlings were peppered

with shrapnel holes. Amazingly the undercarriage seemed ok and to have stood up well to the rough landing but a hydraulic pipe had been cut through by shrapnel causing the loss of hydraulic power.

There was no sign of life anywhere though we could see some farm buildings in the distance. But while we were inspecting the plane and thanking our lucky stars a policeman arrived on his bicycle. He was relieved to find it was a British plane and not a German one as he had anticipated. He had imagined the plane had crashed and he had already called for an ambulance expecting casualties, this soon turned up. A small crowd of people gathered from nowhere together with members of the Home Guard. Then a tractor came dashing along the track of our landing and proved to be the farmer – owner of the land. He had brought with him a bottle of brandy which we soon put away between us but he was not pleased about the amount of damage done to his fields, crops and hedges.

The captain decided that he and other members of the crew, except me, would use the ambulance to take them to the nearest RAF airfield which was 12 miles away. He would report to the Flight Commander (Cheshire) and arrange for transport back to Linton. I would be left behind together with the Home Guard to protect the aircraft against souvenir hunters and further damage. To this end I got the farmer to return to his farm to bring some ropes and posts that we could erect around the plane to hold back all the inquisitive people who had now arrived. He came back not only with ropes and posts but also with a big bag of sandwiches and two big thermos flasks of coffee for me and the Home Guard lads.

The farmer was Walter Spratt who lived at St Mary's farm, now a private residence. Russell and his excited friends were running and would have been at the field in 20 minutes or so before the RAF personnel from Coltishall arrived. He took me to show the exact spot where he and his friends watched the plane - from Hurn (turns into Stickler Lane on the OS map) Lane, the large field on the right hand side of the road to Hapton. This is still called Tacolneston Great Field. The fields on the left are open now but were smaller in 1941, Russell told me, with more hedges and trees. They could perhaps have looked like parkland from the air on a misty morning as the Halifax came down over the Tas river valley? He was certain this was the place even after all these years. This, plus the locations of my other eye witnesses, and the likely landing place of the Halifax, are marked on the attached local map.

In those days, Russell recalls, there were actually fewer hedges on the Great Field side but he commented that it has not changed very much. The plane was well down the field, not close to the road, but Alan and his friend John could not get anywhere near from their viewpoint in Cheney's Lane. There were lots of people involved he remarked. Officials and ambulance were there earlier in the day but he did not remember seeing the Home Guard. He too recalled that the land belonged to Walter Spratt. It seems possible that plane also traversed the neighbouring Ludkin farm fields.

Russell remembers a young woman with a small child in a push-chair, her husband was in the RAF. One of the RAF crew came towards them and the little girl called out 'daddy'. Russell mused that when they landed they did not know where they were so that must be

why the crew member came to speak to people. He didn't speak to him though. Because Dennis had bright red hair I asked if he could remember anything significant about this man or the other crew such as height or colouring or appearance. After all these years it is hardly surprising that he was remembered simply as a man in uniform.

Although the boys reported they could not get close Jennifer Hazell, nee Spratt, the farmer's seven year old daughter remembers clearly the crowd of locals that soon formed in the field around the plane. She believes that were allowed to go into the Halifax to look around. Her mother did not like this invasion as they were trampling all over the farm crops so she went to the farmhouse, found an empty biscuit tin and Walter Spratt, Jennifer's father, knocked a hole in the lid of this so her mother could make a voluntary collection for the RAF Benevolent Fund. Other eye witnesses are sure that cordons kept back the onlookers so it may be that this invitation to enter the aircraft, if it is correct, was only available to very early comers and curtailed once local RAF staff arrived from RAF Coltishall. Jennifer has a vivid recollection of the name of the charity and this is confirmed by a short report in the Journal section of the Norwich Mercury on 18th October 1941 "Tacolneston: Field Collection on behalf of the RAF Benevolent Fund, organised by Mrs Walter Spratt, raised £6.17s.6d." so viewers were certainly invited to donate for viewing the plane, at least from the outside. Jennifer also recalls seeing people filling in ditches so the plane could take off from the field. Kathleen Pinchen, now a centenarian with a vivid memory, was a young farmer's wife living at Old Hall Farm, Hurn Lane, Tacolneston and still has a clear picture in her mind of joining many other people running to take a look at the plane. Word spread fast.

I had no idea how long a wait I might have had but I was pleasantly surprised when I saw some cars and an RAF lorry arriving. It turned out to be FI/Lt Cheshire with his own Flight Engineer and the Flight Sergeant (maintenance) from Linton together with a maintenance crew from RAF Coltishall 12 miles away. Cheshire had flown over from Linton in an Anson and after hearing from me that the Halifax seemed to be airworthy except for having no hydraulics to close the bomb doors or raise the undercarriage and of course no fuel. He decided it might be possible to fly the aircraft back to Linton for thorough inspection and repair. We had landed downwind and if we turned the aircraft round he thought he might be able to take off along the same track this time into wind. We would have to widen the track through the two hedges, fill in the ditches and compact the ground in the two fields. He decided to give it a go.

With the help of the farmer and his farm implements we made a fair job at preparing the ground and at Cheshire's instigation we built a mound on which we would lift the tail of the Halifax so that it was almost in the flying position. With the tractor and assistance from the Home Guard lads we turned the plane round and turned it back and lifted the tail to rest on the mound.

Coltishall is about 20 miles distant by road so it would have taken an RAF lorry perhaps an hour to arrive. Norfolk Police records were destroyed in 1946 so it has not been possible to check if the constable on his bike, who made the initial call for assistance, filed a report that might help with the timing.

Kerry Ludkin recalls that the crew were quickly evacuated but one of them was left behind to ensure that security was maintained and was in the aircraft to make sure that no-one

entered the plane to see any of the secrets. This was rather a disappointment to the lads, including Kerry, who had gathered there hoping to get some souvenirs. Their only reward was from the crewman who appeared briefly to hand out some biscuits that had not been consumed in flight.

Alan recalled that the plane had bumped over two fields and stopped just before hitting another hedge and, to get the plane off again, they filled in the dyke and removed a hedge where there is now a footpath. Kerry does not remember any ground preparation and thinks this was because much of the land was dry and crop free, apart from the swede plot. Russell recalls that they put down large flat sheets to make a runway but did not remember these arriving although he commented that they must have come on a lorry probably from Coltishall. He thought the sheets were metal. I was told later by Bob Collis, Aviation Historian, that is unlikely to have been PSP - pierced steel planking also known as Marston Mat - as that was introduced by the USAAF when the USA entered the war after the events described here. So any runway base was something more locally available. Bob also told me that since the 1970s he had heard a story about a "Four-Engined Allied bomber" (one witness claimed it was a B-24 Liberator, which is similar to the Halifax in configuration in that it had four engines and twin tail-tins and was rather plentiful in these parts 1943-45) which had landed wheels-down at Tacolneston and was later flown out on a temporary runway". He adds "This was probably one of the first instances of a four-engined aircraft being flown out of the site where it had landed, certainly in this region." So Russell's recollection may have been of the later event. After so many decades and so many memories this is a possibility. Or perhaps our Halifax was Tacolneston's unique event?

Bob Collis also refers to the Air Britain list of L-serial aircraft used by the RAF including the units they flew with and their ultimate fate. This lists L9524 as "Ran out of fuel after attack on Essen and crashed off Dutch coast" which, he comments, we now know is incorrect and I believe that the erroneous information almost certainly came from somebody misreading the F.1180 reference to the Halifax circling over/off the Dutch coast which led to the fuel shortage that forced it down in a Norfolk field.

The maintenance team, Kerry says, arrived to replace a leaking oil cooler on one of the engines. He recalls that this was done efficiently as the boys watched and a fuel tanker arrived to refill one of the tanks so the engines could be started.

A starter trolley and a petrol bowser that had been ordered from Coltishall had arrived. Cheshire decided he wanted only enough fuel to get him to Linton so only one tank on each side was partially filled. Again at Cheshire's suggestion we tethered the tail wheel with rope to a substantial tree trunk in the hedge behind. The idea was that only Cheshire and his Flight Engineer would be aboard. They would start up and run up the engines to full power which would pull the rope taught (sic) and at a signal from his flight engineer standing looking back from the astro-dome I would cut the rope with an axe and hopefully the plane would leap forward with its tail already up and so take-off. I was concerned that there was a mound running across the take-off track some distance away in the park which we had not levelled but Cheshire thought this was at such a distance that it might throw the plane into the air and he would have sufficient speed to remain airborne. It all sounded most hairy and improbable but Cheshire was a fine pilot and seemed quite confident and without more ado he decided to go. We jettisoned everything that was not absolutely

necessary for flight and closed and roped shut the bomb doors, test ran the engine and checked all the controls. We wedged the flaps in the down position where they would have to stay.

Alan has spent a lot of time metal detecting in the local fields over the years but although the plane was stripped down to reduce its take-off weight he has never found any debris. The RAF staff clearly made a good job of removing all the evidence. Alan is a member of the Fornsett History Group and has written a short book about his experiences during the war but the Group has no information about this Halifax event.

None of the eye-witnesses remembers the plane tail being tied to a tree (and any remaining trees old enough are not in the location identified by eye witnesses) but Kerry comments that he was two fields away from where the tree would have been and was told that this operation was carried out to assist take-off. He writes "I assume the rear wheel was small and could easily act as a brake in the soft earth. The aircraft might not then have got airborne". Alan did notice that the plane had no visible bomb doors.

With the engines going full bore and with the rope straining near to breaking point anyway I got the signal and chopped through the rope. The Halifax leapt away and careered across the fields into the park and when it hit the mound just as Cheshire had predicted it remained airborne – cleared the wood on the other side of the park and headed straight off towards Linton with its wheels hanging down and my prayers that they would make it home.

The picture of the take-off remains a vivid one to Kerry. "The engines roared into life and the replacement pilot moved the aircraft over the border, turned it round and down the two fields to the side of the road, turning it round again. A terrific roar ensued as the engines gathered power and once the brake was released the aircraft began to roll forward and rose into full flight, gathering height, circled around in a complete turn, returning over us waving its wings as a farewell gesture." Kerry adds ".... .. the only other thing that day was the diminishing number of swedes left in my father's fields by the lads who attended!"

Word of the landing had spread and from Jolly Farmers Hill in Tacolneston eleven year old Austin Brundle and his friends from the nearby village of Bunwell also watched the take off towards Norwich. Austin, a farmer, tells me that the cabbages remarked on by Dennis would most likely have been kale for animal feed.

Alan Womack was sure that they turned the plane round and so would have flown off in the direction they landed, broadly a north-west direction, over where a hedge that was removed and over the dykes by the lanes. He thinks that they must have refuelled just enough to get them home and to keep the weight down. This seems likely given the damage sustained on the raid and the short take-off distance available.

Biographies of Leonard Cheshire by both Richard Morris and Andrew Boyle include a short paragraph of an incident that took place in October 1941 and it seems likely to be this event. "Gloomily he set about the dull task of ferrying Halifaxes from 24MU at Ternhill and conveying senior offices from A to B. The retrieval of a Halifax from a ploughed field in Norfolk provided a diversion" Morris 'Cheshire: The Biography of Leonard Cheshire VC' p86 2000. "Had the job of trying to fly a Halifax out of a ploughed field where it had forced

landed, out of gas" he stated briefly in one of his letters. "Just managed. Cleared the trees on the edge of the field by three or four feet, much to the excitement of the five hundred or so of the local inhabitants. Came back before they scattered and caused some panic by shooting them up". Boyle 'No Passing Glory' p140 1972. This seems very likely to be 'our' incident. At first I thought there was maybe a little embroidery in Cheshire's account of the number of spectators and any 'shooting up' or 'buzzing' as none of my eye witness recalled this, something they seemed likely to remember clearly. Indeed, they all replied "it went straight up and off" with a few differences in the direction of flight, However, I heard later from Kerry and his account (above) confirms that the wings did indeed wave in farewell. This would be consistent with Leonard Cheshire's apparently extrovert character.

Such minor variations in accounts of eye-witnesses are to be expected after 75 years, it would be surprising if there were none.

But all the eye witnesses agree that they did not know then that the pilot was Leonard Cheshire, a man later to become Group Captain and eventually Baron Cheshire VC, OM, DSO & Two Bars, DFC, a highly decorated Royal Air Force pilot during the Second World War and later a significant philanthropist .

Dennis concludes his memoir of the event.

After thanking the farmer for all his help and giving him all the details he would require if he decided to make a claim on the RAF the lorry took us all back to Coltishall where I met up with the rest of my crew. It was now late afternoon and they were quite incredulous when I told them that Cheshire was now probably back at Linton in our aircraft. I was just about out on my feet whilst they had been enjoying a big breakfast and a good lunch in the mess.

All of the Linton people then climbed aboard the Anson and our skipper flew us back to Linton.

A postscript from January 1942

After this adventure Dennis flew more operations, nine in total from the Operational Records, until 4th January 1942, including the bombing of the Scharnhorst and Gnesenau in Brest Harbour in December.

I received instructions to report to Air Ministry at Adastral House for an interview, but not until I arrived there did I find that in fact it was a Commissioning Board. The RAF was short of Engineering Officers and they decided that those of us of the 32nd and 33rd entries who had done well in the Halton, passing our exams, should be considered for short service commissions in the Engineering Branch. It was quite a lengthy interview and I was sent back to Linton after being told I should hear further in due course. A few days later I received notification that I had been selected for training as an Engineering Officer subject to undergoing a 6 month intensive course at Battersea Polytechnic to obtain the Higher National Certificate in Mechanical Engineering and Aeronautics and subsequently 3 months technical and

administrative training at RAF Cosford Officers School. Satisfactory achievement in all of these would lead to a Short Service Commission in the Technical Branch.

This was the end of my quite short period of operational flying and I think I was extremely fortunate to survive unscathed.

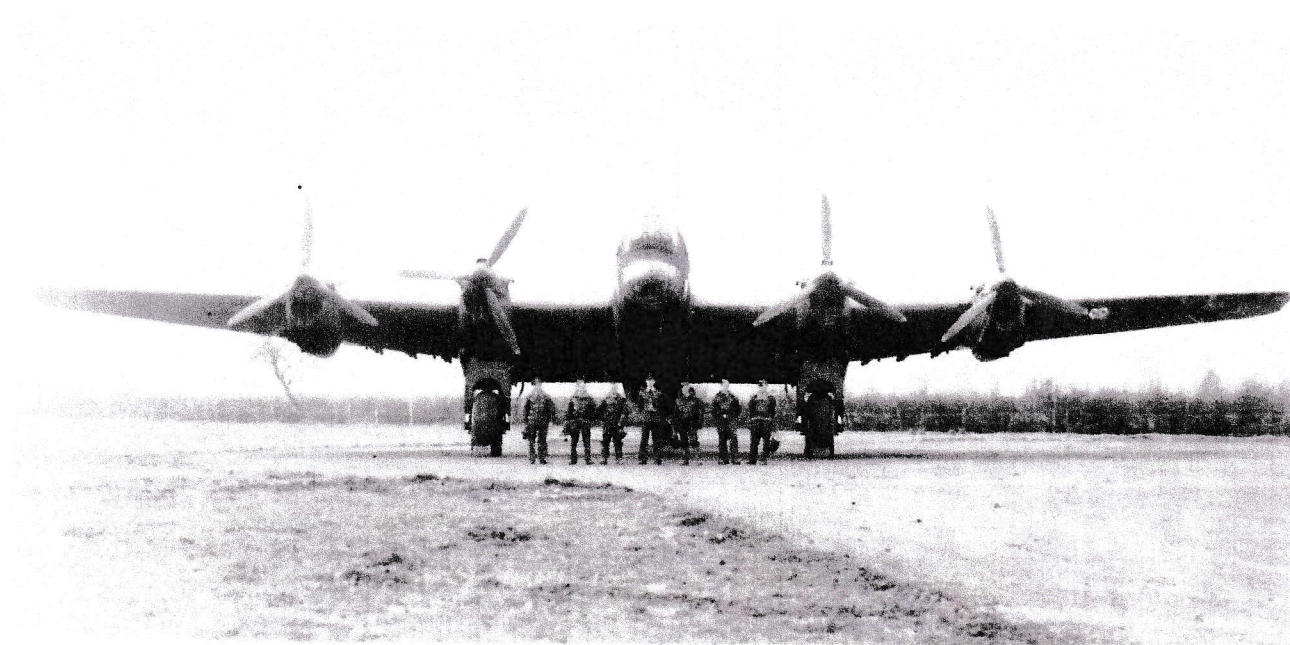
Fortunate indeed. The crew he joined for his later operations, piloted by F/Lt Pooles, were shot down the following April 27th in an attack on the German battleship Tirpitz which was moored in Faettenfjord, Norway. They all died in the crash.

The Halifax operated in Bomber Command until the end of the war. Significant design modifications were made after inexplicable losses of fully loaded aircraft showed it was possible for the Halifax to enter an inverted and uncontrollable spin when attempting to 'corkscrew', the manoeuvre used by bomber pilots to escape night fighters. Cheshire was amongst the first to note this problem and the very low return rate of Halifax bombers on three engines. He played a key role in pushing for modifications. Despite these problems the Halifax was a sturdy and reliable aircraft and generally well-liked by its crews. A total of 6176 were built and a few remained in service with the RAF until 1947.

Promoted to Flight Lieutenant, Dennis Hunt 49446 left the RAF in Feb 1946, having been commissioned in the Technical Branch on 18th August 1942. He joined Stanton Ironworks near Ilkeston, Derbyshire where he spent the rest of his working life, becoming Chief Executive of the Stanton and Staveley Group, retiring in June 1981 aged 61. He sent for and received copies of his service records on 13th August 1999. Although he did not have his flying log book he was able to get accurate dates for his wartime movements. Dennis wrote his memoirs mainly from memory from 1997/8 until 2000 or 2001 when he was 80/81 years old. The account of his time in the RAF covers 88 handwritten pages from his time on joining the 33rd Entry as a 'Halton Brat' in 1936. He died aged 91 in Derby on 11th July 2011 after a short illness.



1. Halifax Bomber



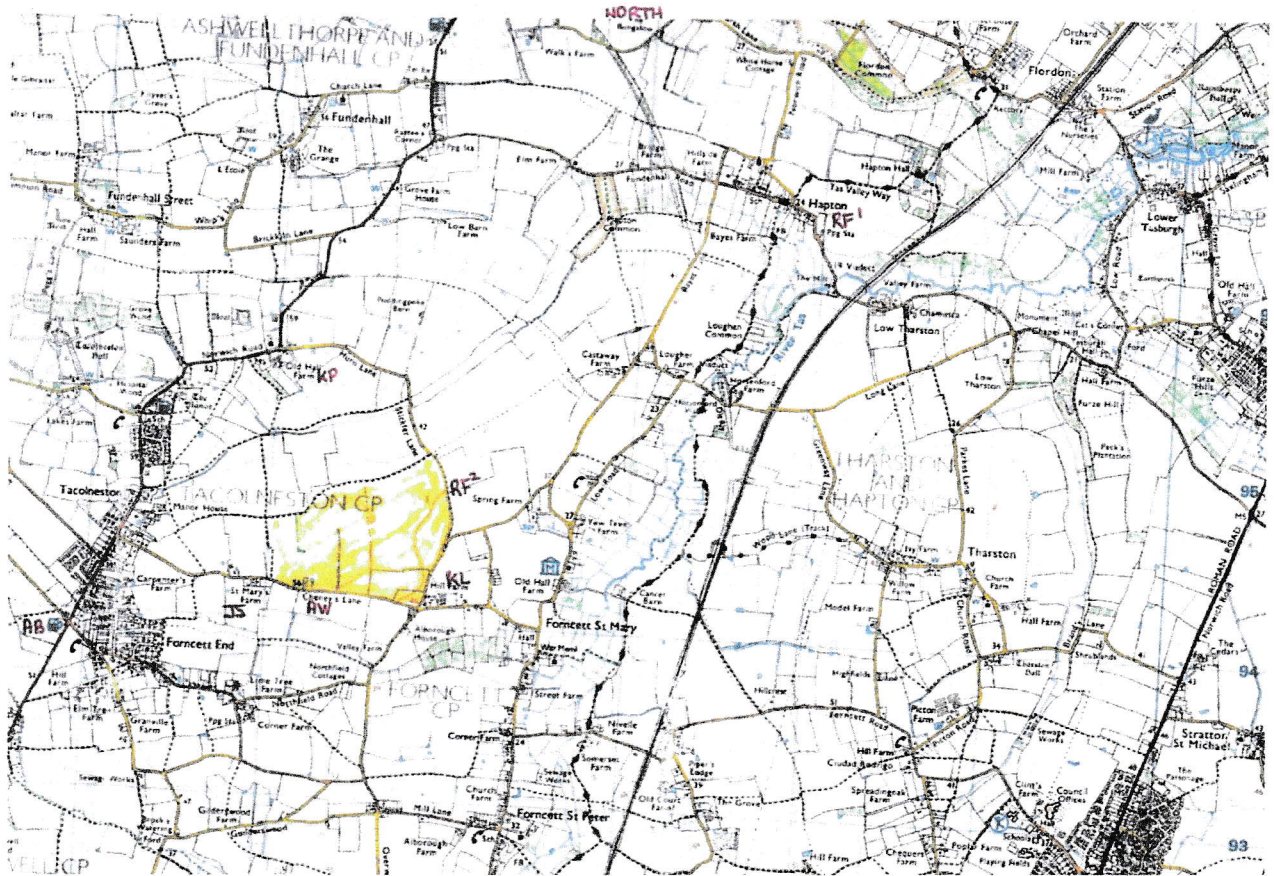
2. Halifax and crew, distant view. Dennis Hunt standing far right



3. Halifax and crew. Dennis Hunt standing second from right



4. Map of North Sea showing, take off, target and landing locations



5. Map of landing area with eye witness locations marked by initials

... Mrs. E. ...
... P. Lock, ...
... A com- ...
... Miss M. ...
... S. Nichols, ...
... en by Miss ...
... r, were won

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Monday Joan
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en she saved
drowning in
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s the Rector
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s Medal, to
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... and Miss L. Dower (daughters).
Mrs. Post (Maidstone), Mrs. Hewitt
(London), Mr. A. Lovell (son-in-law),
Mr. H. Price (son-in-law), Mrs. Barham,
Mrs. Gower, Mr. and Mrs. T. Leist.
Others present included Mr. and Mrs.
E. W. Flatt, Mr. and Mrs. J. Hunter, Mr.
A. J. Brame, Mrs. West, Mrs. Rusted,
sen., Mrs. Rusted, jun., Miss Copping,
Mr. and Mrs. G. Harper, Mrs. Larter,
and Mrs. Buggs.

TACOLNESTON

FIELD COLLECTION.—The field collection on behalf of the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund, organised by Mrs. Walter Spratt, raised £6 17s. 6d.

WINFARTHING

HARVEST FESTIVAL.—In addition to the collections a sale of produce realised over £6 at the close of the harvest festival at Winfarthing (Hall-rd.) Methodist Church on Wednesday.

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6. Report of Field Collection. Norfolk Mercury 18th October 1941



7. Tacolneston Great Field looking west from Hurn (Stickler) Lane 2016



8. Tacolneston Great Field Looking west from Hurn (Stickler) Lane 2016



9. Tacolneston Great field looking east from footpath 2016



10. Tacolneston from Cheyney's Lane looking north 2016

PCN FM ABOK TCDM ETPV ARM XOK WOK A.M. Form 1180

33 D M Y Unit 11 10 41 55 Sq op B

Signal No. 1545 A 1545

Duty NIGHT. Attack on Essen

Fire in air or impact NO

Para chute Used

Aircraft HALIFAX I 49524

W.R.M. Pinned

Flotation Gear Worked

Lives saved

A/c salvaged

Place Smeaton

Merlin

A) (Vault doors & safe) A.T. (14) Record WIRELESS

① Bomb doors failed to close after the attack. ② They accidentally released ph. ap. ③ High bomb & vents maintain ht. ④ Considerable smoke & w/o unable to read logs. ⑤ STA. Intake Court in his, during, ended the coast for 1 hr before realising. 2 hr shortage of fuel.

L-23B ORILL

11. RAF Form A M 1180 11th October 1941 page 2

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT.

From hrs / / to hrs / / By No. 35 Squadron. No. of pages used for day

Aircraft Type and No.	Crew.	Duty.	Time Up.	Time Down.	Details of Sortie or Flight.	References.
RAID CARRIED OUT NIGHT 10/11 October 1941.						
L. 9486 (9)	P/O. Robinson, DFC. Sgt. Greenham. P/O. Abels Sgt. Wood Sgt. Connor Sgt. Nivedal Sgt. Hindle	See remarks	0041	0830	Took off at time stated for ESSEN. Attached ESSEN area at 0250 hrs from 15000ft level. Bomb flashes seen in area attacked and four medium fires started. Low sounding mist; cloud tops 2-3000ft, occasional gaps. Visibility very bad, making observation difficult. Landed safely at base at time stated.	
L. 9504 (H)	P/O. Norman Sgt. Brunsell P/O. Baker Sgt. Isaac Sgt. Long Sgt. Olsen Sgt. Palmer, W.E.	" "	0046	0420	Took off at time stated for ESSEN. No attack made owing to Pilot's escape hatch blowing off and causing crew's goggles to ice up. Furthest point reached RXXX 3646. Two 1000lb bombs jettisoned safe in sea at 0303, position ZKUF 2248. Remainder of bombs brought back. Landed safely at time stated.	
L. 9584 (V)	P/O. Greenwell Sgt. Drummond Sgt. Henry Sgt. Turner Sgt. King Sgt. Lowe Sgt. Hunt, W.E.	" "	0044	0730	Took off at time stated for ESSEN. Unable to attack primary owing to 10/10 cloud. Attacked railway line in RUHN area from 16000ft, believed to be 20 miles East of ESSEN. Green flashes from H.E. and small fire from incendiaries were observed. Unable to close bomb doors after bombing, owing to hydraulics being unserviceable. Force landed at LONG STRATION at time stated. Aircraft undamaged.	
L. 9606 (H)	P/O. Wilkerson Sgt. Rowley-Blake Sgt. Hewitt Sgt. Perry Sgt. Hatcher Sgt. Ranker Sgt. Stewart	" "	0045	0650	Took off at time stated and attacked ESSEN area at 0303 hrs from 15000ft level. Three large bomb bursts observed. Cloud prevented other observation. 8/10 cloud with few breaks. Landed safely at base at time stated.	
L. 9579 (P)	Sgt. Williams P/O. Mason Sgt. Sykes Sgt. Thorpe Sgt. Crocker Sgt. Fennell Sgt. Stocker	" "	0048	0655	Took off at time stated and attacked flak and searchlight concentration in ESSEN area at 0308 from 16000ft level. Two large fires started in area attacked, causing a series of explosions. 10/10 cloud with tops at 10000ft. Landed safely at base at time stated.	

12. Operations Record Book. 35 Squadron October 1941

Place	Date	Time	Summary of Events	Page No. 59 References to Appendices
LINTON-ON-OUSE.	9 OCT.		prisoners of war except Sgt. YOUNG who was killed. No mention was made, however, of P/O JAMES. The following Pilots reported on posting from No:19 O.T.U. KINLOSS :- P/O BLACKWELL, R.R. P/O MACINTYRE, D.F. A/S/O ELLIS, E., arrived on attachment to take over duty as Squadron Operations Officer No: 35 Squadron.	XL1
	10/11 OCT.		<u>BOMBING RAID ON ESSEN.</u> Five aircraft took off from Linton to deliver an attack on Krupp's Armament Works at ESSEN, but encountered cloudy conditions and bad visibility over the target area. Level attacks were delivered by three aircraft at heights between 15,000 and 16,000 feet. One aircraft observed four medium fires started by its bombs; another three large bomb bursts, whilst the other observed two large fires started, but cloud and bad visibility prevented further observations. All three were in or about the target area, but accurate pin-pointing of results seen was not possible due to the weather conditions. Of the remaining two aircraft, one was unable to attack primary, practically 10/10ths cloud, but dropped its bombs on a railway line believed to be some miles East of ESSEN. Green flames were observed from H.E.'s and small fires from incendiaries. This aircraft was unable to close its bomb doors and also had one under-carriage leg down throughout the greater part of its return journey, having an adverse effect on petrol consumption, necessitating a forced landing in a field in East Anglia, which was successfully carried out with no damage to the aircraft. The other aircraft lost its pilot's escape hatch which resulted in icing up of the crew's goggles, and so interfered with the operation that the pilot had to abandon his task and return to base.	
	11 OCT.		Sgt/Pilot Fettingale, S.L. posted from 58 to 35 Squadron. Sgt/Pilot Archibald, W.B. arrived on posting from 108 Squadron, Topcliffe.	

13. RAF Operations Record book page 58. 35 Squadron October 1941

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RAF Air Accident Report Form A.M 1180 11th October 1941

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RAF Linton on Ouse memorial Room: Curator Wing Commander (Rtd) Alan Mawby
RAF Museum, Hendon, London: Assistant Curator Belinda Day
Robert Collis, Aviation Historian
The National Archives, Kew

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A very special thanks to those I cannot thank in person:

The Crew of Halifax L9524 (V) No. 35 Squadron on 10/11 October 1941

Pilot	P/O Creswell
Co Pilot	Sgt Drummond
Navigator	Sgt Henry
First and second wireless operators/ nose gunners	Sgt Turner & Sgt Wing
Rear Gunner	Sgt Lowe
Flight Engineer/ mid upper gunner	Sgt D S Hunt (wrongly listed in the Operations Record Book as W.R Hunt)