BLACK, Reginald Thomas

Corporal, 567249
9 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Place of Birth: Reading
Date of Death: Monday, 18th December 1939
Lost over the North Sea
Memorial: Runnymede
Aged 20 years

Reginald Thomas Black was born in Reading on 13th April 1919, the elder son of electrical engineer Arthur Glover Black and his wife Dorothy Emily nee Moore.

His brother Gordon was born some 5 years later in Basingstoke.

The family photo on the right shows Reginald aged about nine years with his parents and brother, Gordon at the beach.





On 21st August 1934 Reginald, now aged 15 years joined RAF Halton as an aircraft apprentice.

His 18th birthday in 1938 saw Reginald joining the RAF, signing on for a period of 12 years. We know from his military records that he had auburn hair and brown eyes.

Description of Person.	Height. Feet.	Height. Inches.	Chest. Inches.	Hair.	Eyes.	Complexion.
On entry as an apprentice or boy	5'	9½"	32"	Auburn	Brown	Fresh
On attaining the age of 18 years or on first entry as aircraftman	5'	10½	36½"	Auburn	Brown	Fresh

Reginald was posted to RAF Stradishall with 9 Squadron, a heavy bomber squadron flying the Vickers Wellington and the Avro Lancaster. It was while he was here that he, along with others from the RAF base, ventured into Haverhill probably to enjoy the dances at the Town Hall.

The evenings in the Town Hall were very popular with all the servicemen stationed locally. They were also popular with the young women from the town and it is likely that it was at such an event that Reginald met Doris Freeman of 8 The Pightle, Haverhill.



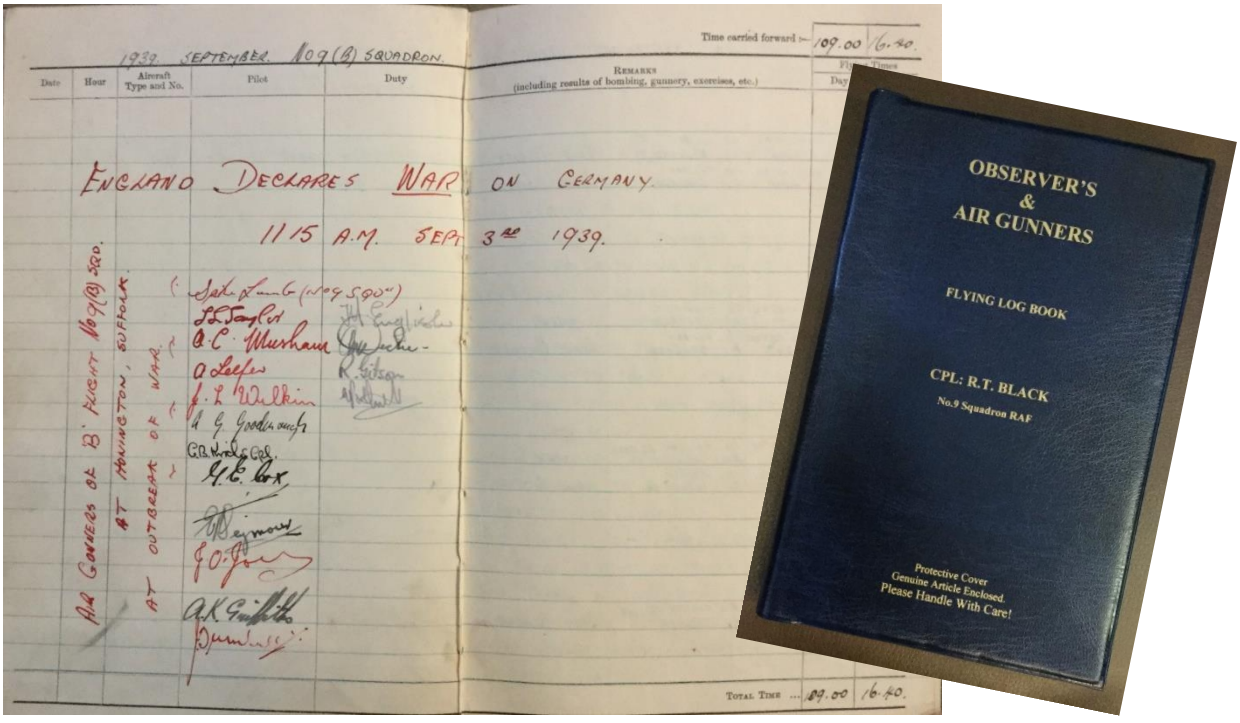
Left: Doris and Reginald enjoying a day out in Clacton.

Doris was the daughter of Cliff Freeman and his wife Florence "Floss" (nee Darking). Two of her brothers Phil and Donald were also serving in the RAF. Phil had also been an apprentice at RAF Halton as a boy so one can imagine that the two had plenty to talk about when he visited Doris.

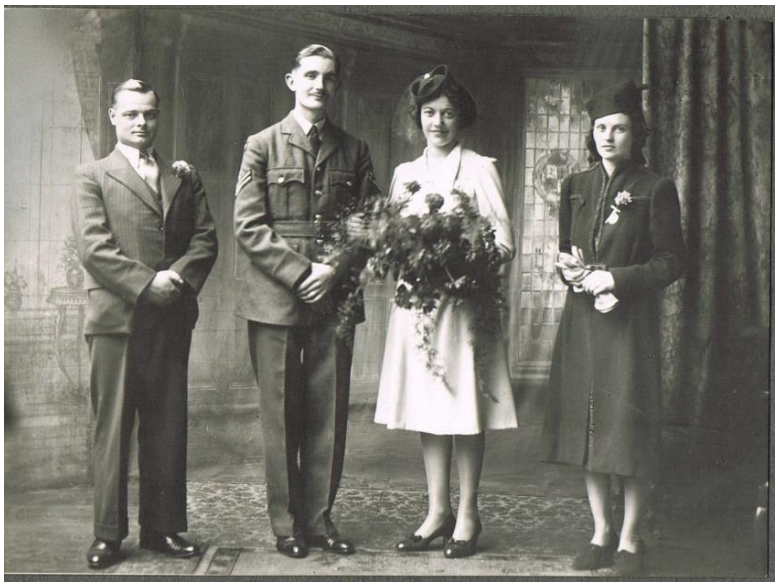
In August 1939, 9 Squadron moved from Stradishall to RAF Honington.

This page from Reginald's logbook records the day that war was declared.

Members of the section signed their names.



On 23 September 1939, Doris and Reginald were married in the West End Congregational Church. The South West Suffolk Echo reported:



'The wedding of Miss Doris D. Freeman, only daughter of Mr and Mrs C. Freeman of 8, The Pightle and Mr Reginald T. Black, eldest son of Mr and Mrs Arthur G. Black of Langham, Colchester, was solemnised at the West End Congregational Church on Saturday. The Rev. F. Andrew Willmot (minister of the church) officiated.

The bride, who was given away by her father, was attired in a powder-blue cloth frock with navy blue hat and eye veil, and matching accessories and was carrying a shower bouquet of yellow chrysanthemums and fern. The duties of best man were carried out by Mr Cyril Basham of Steeple Bumpstead: a friend of the bridegroom. About 40 guests were entertained at the subsequent reception which was of a quiet nature owing to the prevailing circumstances. Later in the day the newly-wedded pair left for their honeymoon which is taking the form of a motor tour.'

For the first four months of the war, 9 Squadron conducted daylight anti-shipping sweeps over the North Sea.



Crew No 7 (9 Squadron) taken at the outbreak of war.



No 3 Section of 9 (B) Squadron, Honington October 1939. Reginald is seated 4th from left. Next to him is Tom English whose name also appears on the Haverhill War Memorial.

It was decided that the RAF should mount a reconnaissance mission on the German fleet at Wilhelmshaven on 18th December 1939 and orders were received for 24 Wellington Medium bombers to participate, including nine from 9 Squadron. They were to carry out reconnaissance in the Schilling/Jade Road and to attack any battleships or cruisers in Wilhelmshaven. The orders stated that 'Great care is to be taken to ensure that no bombs fall on shore'.

Unknown to the bomber force the Germans had been tracking them for many miles using the experimental early warning Freya Radar System and this information was passed to Luftwaffe fighters.
At 09.00 the nine Wellingtons took off from RAF Honington. One of the aircraft, N2941, carried a crew of: F/O Douglas Bellamy Allinson, F/O Douglas Charles Ephraim Bailey, Sgt John Archibald Brister, Sgt Joseph Buglasi Adamson Turnbull, LAC Albert George Goodenough and Cpl Reginald Thomas Black.

A force of three Vickers Wellington squadrons attacked ships in the Battle of Heligoland Bight but they were detected on radar long before they reached their target.

At 12.30 hours and just south of Wilhelmshaven they were attacked by approximately forty enemy aircraft and this attack continued until they reached Wilhelmshaven when additional heavy Anti-Aircraft fire was encountered from both shore based batteries and

Naval vessels. In total, ten of the twenty-two bombers were shot down, with another two crashing in the sea and three more written off on landing. In shooting down the fifteen bombers, the Luftwaffe lost only two fighters in return.

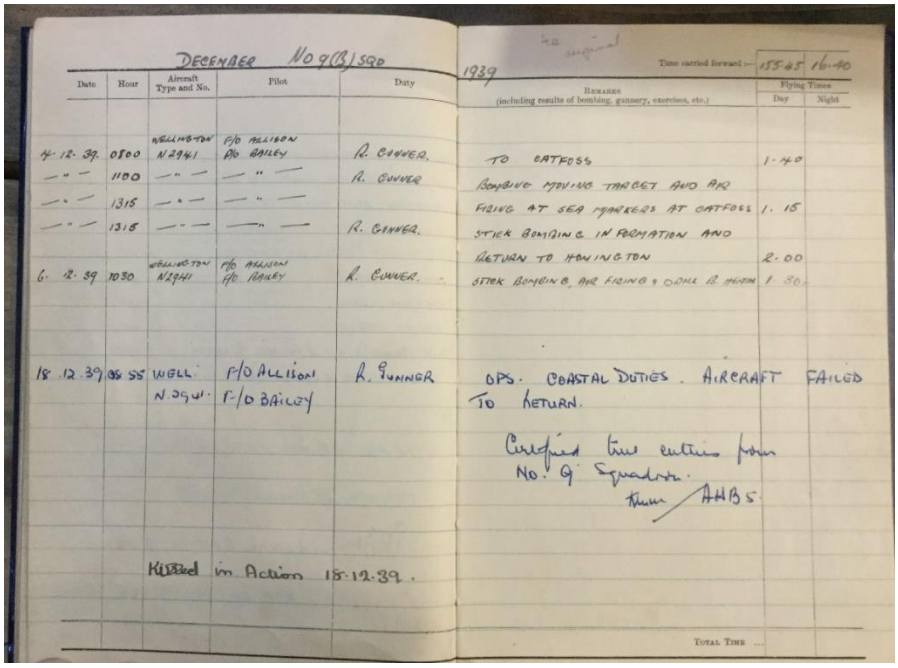


Wilhelmshaven November 1939

No 9 Squadron lost five Wellington aircraft in this mission. Reginald was one of twenty-four men who lost their lives that day.

It is thought that his Wellington was shot down or hit by flak and lost in the North Sea off the coast of Germany. The bodies of the crew were never recovered. After this, daylight RAF raids were suspended and crews were trained for night flying.

The final page of Reginald's Log Book records that his aircraft failed to return.

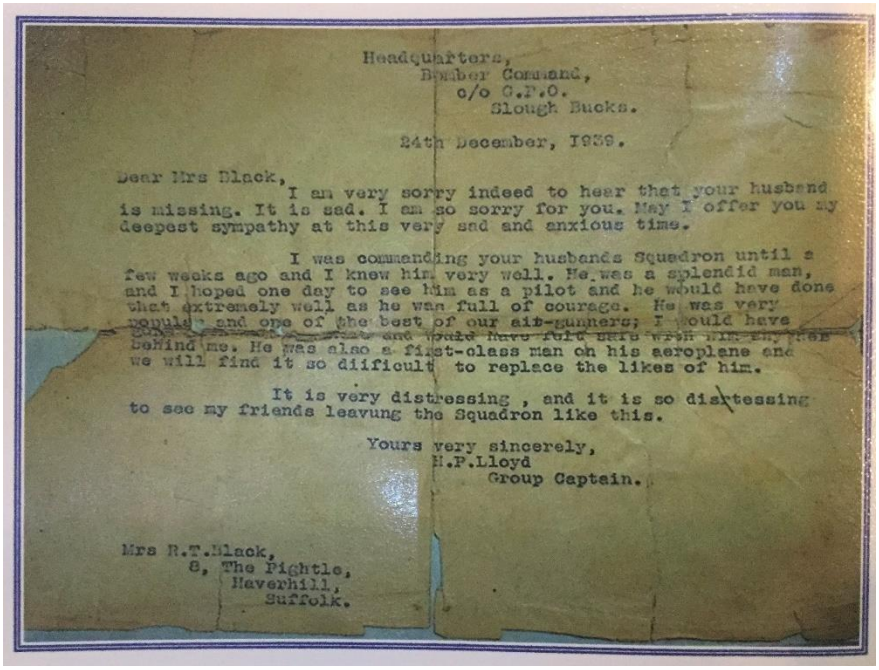


DECEMBER No 9 (B) SQD

1939

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times Day	Flying Times Night
					Time carried forward	155·45	16·40
4·12·39	0800	WELLINGTON N2941	F/O ALLISON P/O BAILEY	R. GUNNER.	TO CATFOSS	1·40	
" "	1100	" "	" "	R. GUNNER	BOMBING MOVING TARGET AND AIR FIRING AT SEA MARKERS AT CATFOSS	1·15	
" "	1315	" "	" "				
" "	1315	" "	" "	R. GUNNER.	STICK BOMBING IN FORMATION AND RETURN TO HONINGTON	2·00	
6·12·39	1030	WELLINGTON N2941	F/O ALLISON P/O BAILEY	R. GUNNER.	STICK BOMBING, AIR FIRING & DOWN TO HONIN	1·30	
18·12·39	0855	WELL N2941	F/O ALLISON F/O BAILEY	R. GUNNER	OPS. COASTAL DUTIES. AIRCRAFT FAILED TO RETURN.		
					Certified true entries from No. 9 Squadron. AHBS		
					Killed in Action 18.12.39.		
					TOTAL TIME		

Reginald's widow, Doris, received this letter from Group Captain Lloyd who had commanded 9 Squadron.



Headquarters,
Bomber Command,
c/o G.P.O.
Slough Bucks.

24th December, 1939.

Dear Mrs Black,

I am very sorry indeed to hear that your husband is missing. It is sad. I am so sorry for you. May I offer you my deepest sympathy at this very sad and anxious time.

I was commanding your husbands Squadron until a few weeks ago and I knew him very well. He was a splendid man, and I hoped one day to see him as a pilot and he would have done that extremely well as he was full of courage. He was very popular and one of the best of our air-gunners; I would have [illegible] and would have felt sure with him behind me. He was also a first-class man on his aeroplane and we will find it so difficult to replace the likes of him.

It is very distressing, and it is so distressing to see my friends leavung the Squadron like this.

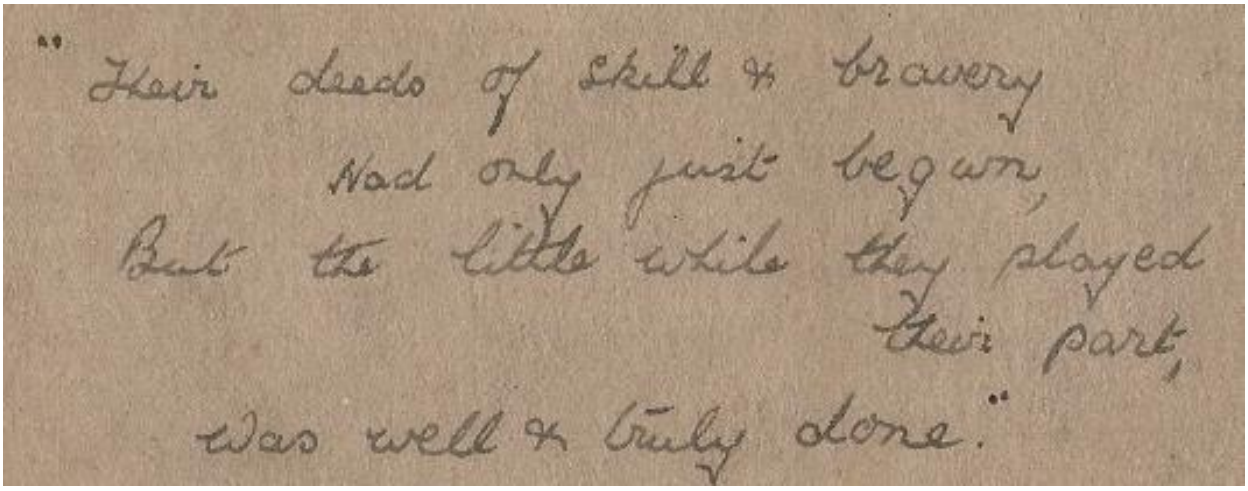
Yours very sincerely,
H.P.Lloyd
Group Captain.

Mrs R.T.Black,
8, The Pightle,
Haverhill,
Suffolk.

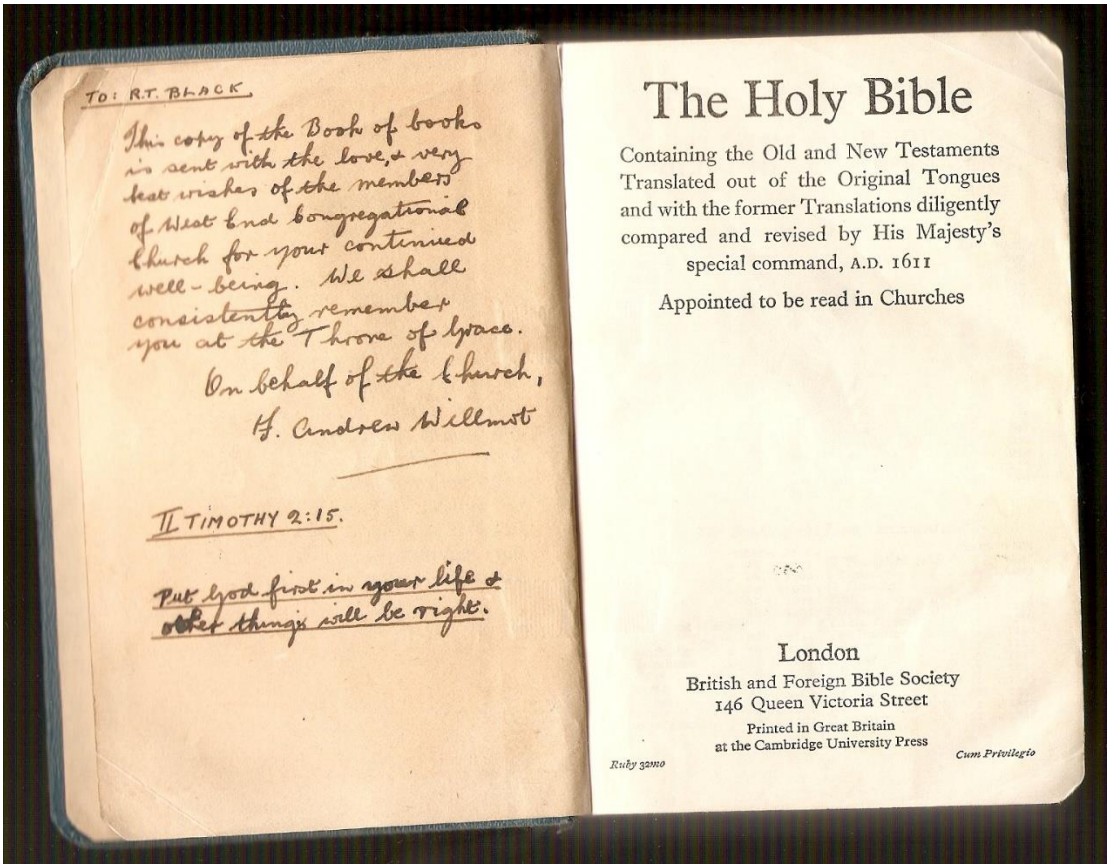
Reginald is remembered with honour on the Runnymede Memorial,



"Per noctem volamus" - Throughout the night we fly


"Their deeds of skill & bravery
Had only just begun,
But the little while they played
Their part,
Was well & truly done."

Written by Doris Black in her photograph album under the photo of her husband with crew No 7.


TO: R.T. BLACK

This copy of the Book of books is sent with the love, & very best wishes of the members of West End Congregational Church for your continued well-being. We shall consistently remember you at the Throne of Grace.

On behalf of the Church,
H. Andrew Willmott

II TIMOTHY 2:15.

Put God first in your life & other things will be right.

The Holy Bible

Containing the Old and New Testaments Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty's special command, A.D. 1611

Appointed to be read in Churches

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British and Foreign Bible Society
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Printed in Great Britain
at the Cambridge University Press

Ruby 32mo

Cum Privilegio

The West End Congregational Church had presented Reginald with a Holy Bible. Reverend Wilmott who wrote the inscription officiated Reginald and Doris' marriage.

Reginald's brother-in-law Phil (Phillip Roy Clifford) Freeman's name also appears on the Haverhill War Memorial. Phil, also serving in the RAF, was captured in the Far East after the Fall of Singapore. He died as a POW in the Sandakan Death Camp in Borneo.

The Haverhill Family History Group are indebted to Colin Freeman, youngest brother of Phil Freeman, casualty, and Claire Shelton-Jones, daughter of Doris and her second husband for information about Reginald and Doris and permission to use treasured family photographs in this tribute. Also to Michael Black, son of Reginald's brother Gordon, for allowing us to use images of the Log Book and other items in his possession.



The 9 Squadron Wellingtons were up against a German night fighter ace, named Helmut Lent (13 June 1918 – 7 October 1944). Lent shot down 110 aircraft, 102 of them at night. Born into a devoutly religious family, he showed an early passion for glider flying; against his father's wishes, he joined the Luftwaffe in 1936.

On 18 December 1939, Lent, took part in the Battle of the Heligoland Bight shooting down three RAF Wellington bombers attacking German naval vessels off Wilhelmshaven.

On 5 October 1944, Lent flew a Junkers Ju 88 on a routine transit flight from Stade to Nordborchen, 5 kilometres (3 mi) south of Paderborn. On the landing approach one of the engines cut out and the aircraft collided with power lines. All four members of the crew were mortally injured. Three men died shortly after the crash and Lent succumbed to his injuries two days later on 7th October 1944.