Peter Grenville BROTHERS (1920 – 1942)



Sgt, 1250057

W.Op./Air Gnr

Peter Grenville Brothers

RAF

25th June 1942

Age 22

214 Squadron

DARLING PETER. TO LIVE IN HEARTS WE LEAVE BEHIND IS NOT TO DIE





We are indebted to Neil B. Leveratt, from California, for his help in compiling this tribute for his uncle.

Peter Grenville BROTHERS, was born on 20th March 1920 in Croydon, Surrey, the seventh born of the eight children of commercial traveller, John Archibald Brothers and his wife Lydia Mary nee Walker, of Lee, London. They had married in Farringdon in 1902.

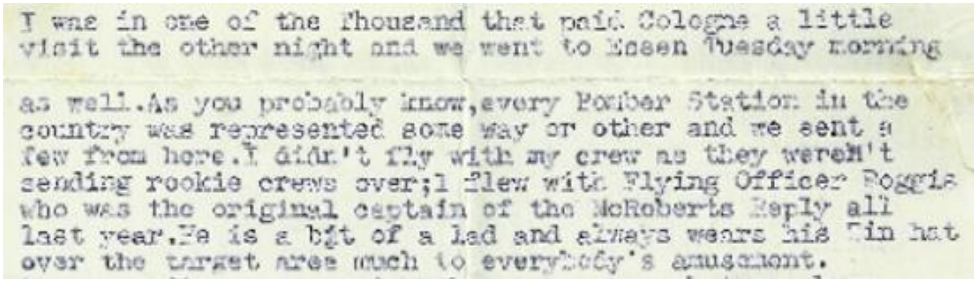
As a child, he attended private schools in greater London. When World War II began, Peter was a young man of only 19. He didn't have an established occupation and he had yet to make his mark on the world. At approximately 21, Peter volunteered to serve his country in the Royal Air Force.

Attached to 214 Squadron Peter was at the RAF Station at Waterbeach undergoing Conversion training as the squadron prepared to make the change from Wellingtons to Stirlings.



Three Stirlings from a conversion flight at RAF Waterbeach

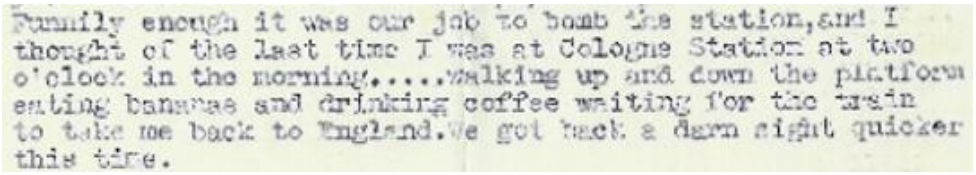
On 4th June 1942 Peter wrote a letter home from the Sergeants Mess, RAF Station, Waterbeach. This would be the last letter he wrote to his mother. In it, he told her he had taken part in the 1000 aircraft raid on Cologne. The largest bombing raid of World War II was the British attack on Cologne, Germany, on 30th May, 1942, when over 1,000 bombers were sent to destroy chemical and machine tool facilities there in a single-night attack.


I was in one of the thousand that paid Cologne a little visit the other night and we went to Essen Tuesday morning as well. As you probably know, every Bomber Station in the country was represented some way or other and we sent a few from here. I didn't fly with my crew as they weren't sending rookie crews over; I flew with Flying Officer Boggis who was the original captain of the McRoberts Reply all last year. He is a bit of a lad and always wears his tin hat over the target area much to everybody's amusement.



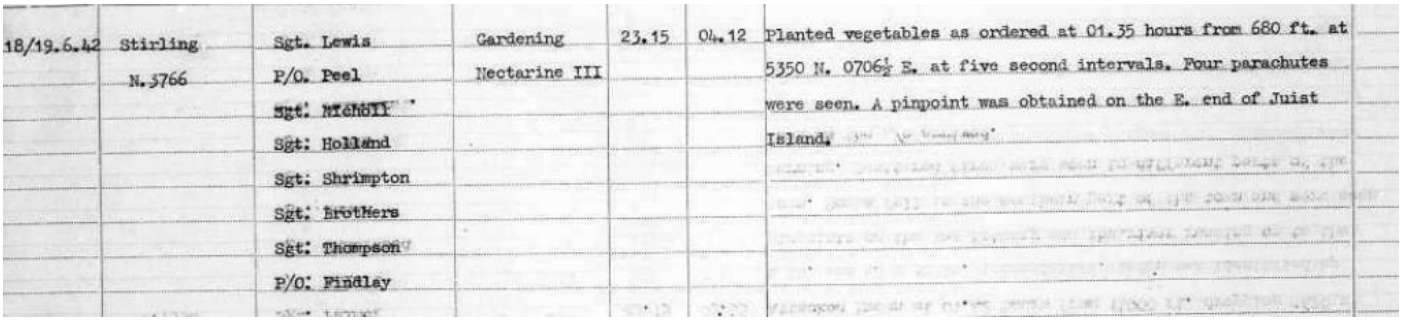
Peter hadn't flown with his own crew as they were not sending 'rookie crews' over. Instead, he flew with Flying Officer Boggis (right in photo) who was the original captain of the 'McRoberts Reply' the previous year. In his letter Peter remembered F/O Boggis as being "*a bit of a lad"* who *"always wears his tin hat over the target area, much to everybody's amusement"*.

(More about this aircraft later.)

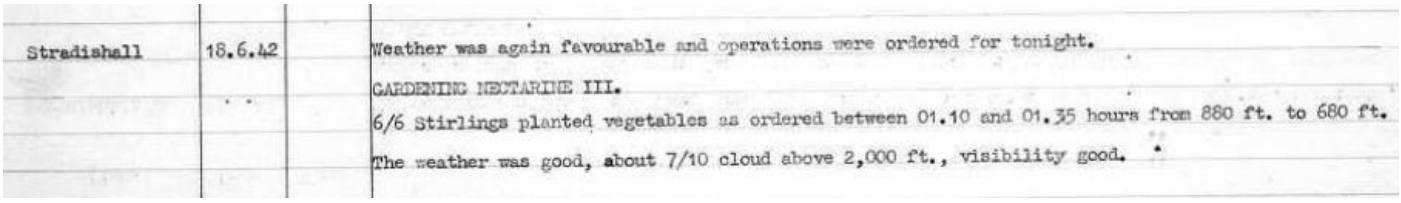

Funnily enough it was our job to bomb the station, and I thought of the last time I was at Cologne Station at two o'clock in the morning....walking up and down the platform eating bananas and drinking coffee waiting for the train to take me back to England. We got back a darn sight quicker this time.

In addition, Peter fondly reminisced about his own sojourn to Cologne before the war. It must have seemed tragic to him to drop bombs on the same place he had previously visited.

The squadron was kept busy during May and June 1942, with operations that took Peter to Bremen and Essen and undertaking mine laying duties as part of Operation Nectarine III.



18/19.6.42	Stirling N.3766	Sgt. Lewis P/O. Peel Sgt: Mitchell Sgt: Holland Sgt: Shrimpton Sgt: Brothers Sgt: Thompson P/O: Findlay	Gardening Nectarine III	23.15	04.12	Planted vegetables as ordered at 01.35 hours from 680 ft. at 5350 N. 0706½ E. at five second intervals. Four parachutes were seen. A pinpoint was obtained on the E. end of Juist Island.



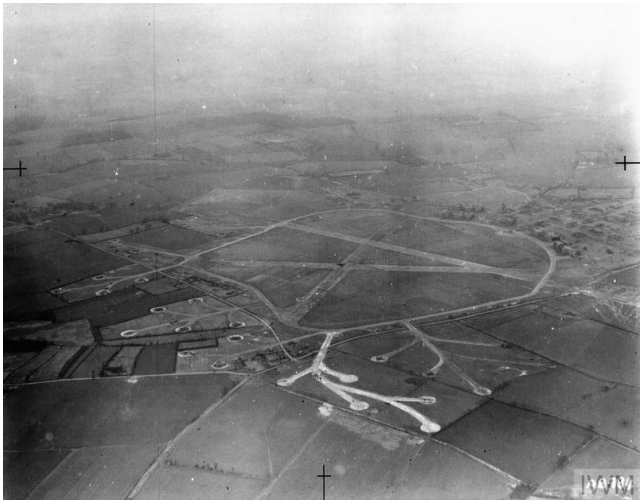
Stradishall	18.6.42	Weather was again favourable and operations were ordered for tonight. GARDENING NECTARINE III. 6/6 Stirlings planted vegetables as ordered between 01.10 and 01.35 hours from 880 ft. to 680 ft. The weather was good, about 7/10 cloud above 2,000 ft., visibility good.

On 25th June 1942 a small raid on St Nazaire was carried out by just 21 aircraft. Peter's Mark I Stirling aircraft DJ973 BU-A took off from RAF Stradishall but turned back before reaching the target with engine problems. The pilot turned around and they began to limp their crippled aircraft home. They almost made it! At approximately 0349 hours, and just a handful of miles from their base, they crash landed coming down at Bears Farm, Hundon, 5 miles NW of Haverhill, and less than 3 miles from their airfield.

The other Crew members on board Stirling Mark I DJ973 BU-A were:

Sgt R B Appleby, Sgt Horace Sydney 'Chic' Barker, 646994, Flight Engineer, RAF, Sgt Eddie Hester Brown, Air Gunner RCAF, R83258, FS William Neilson Craig, 996848, Pilot, RAFVR, Sgt Gilbert James Mugford, 1265929, Observer, RAFVR, Sgt Douglas Edward Shrimpton, 1183690, Wireless Operator / Air Gunner, RAFVR.

With no CWGC record, it is wondered whether Sgt Appleby might have been a sole survivor.



RAF Stradishall from the East South East.

Neil recalls *“Peter was an older brother of my mother, Valerie, and she was closer to him than any other sibling. She always said he helped protect her as a big brother and you could tell his death weighed on her heavily throughout her life. Valerie named her eldest son, Peter, in honour of her brother, and a large uniformed portrait of Peter always hung on the wall of their home in a place of prominence.”*

“Peter was a young man, only 22 when he died, and like so many other the families who lost loved ones in WWII, I can only imagine what kind of person he was and what he might have achieved in his lifetime had he survived the war.”

Peter was laid to rest at Haverhill Cemetery, section U, grave 244. His epitaph (from his family in a newspaper reporting his death) is “Darling Peter, to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.”

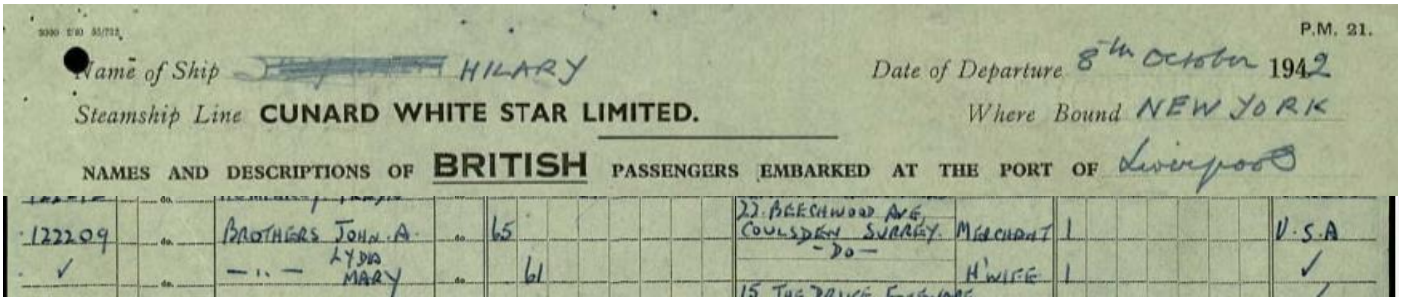
Also buried in Haverhill Cemetery are fellow crewmen, Canadian Sgt Eddie Hester Brown, Air Gunner RCAF, R83258, and Sgt Gilbert James Mugford, 1265929, Observer, RAFVR.

Sgt Horace Sydney 'Chic' Barker also lost his life in this accident. He was buried in ENFIELD (HERTFORD ROAD) CEMETERY.

FS William Neilson Craig was buried in WALLASEY (RAKE LANE) CEMETERY.

Sgt Douglas Edward Shrimpton was buried in SANDOWN-SHANKLIN (SHANKLIN) CEMETERY.

At the time of the 1939 Register, Peter’s parents were living at 93 Upwood Road, Lewisham. Shortly after Peter’s death they sailed to New York on the 8th October 1942, possibly to visit their oldest son who had emigrated to the USA in 1924, settling in California the following year. Their address at this time was 22 Beechwood Avenue, Coulsden, Surrey. In 1946 they too settled in California. Sadly Peter’s father died in Santa Monica in 1948. His mother died in Los Angeles in 1969. Peter’s older brother Kenneth died in 1939. All of Peter’s surviving siblings settled in the USA.



P.M. 21.

Name of Ship [redacted] HILARY Date of Departure 8th October 1942

Steamship Line CUNARD WHITE STAR LIMITED. Where Bound NEW YORK

NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BRITISH PASSENGERS EMBARKED AT THE PORT OF Liverpool

122209	do.	BROTHERS JOHN A.	do.	65		22 BEECHWOOD AVE. COULSDEN SURREY.	MERCHANT	1	U.S.A
✓	do.	— " — LYDIA MARY	do.	61		— DO —	H'WIFE	1	✓

Bears Farm, Valley Wash where this air crash occurred consisted of 150 acres, and was farmed by the Jolly family. It was sold in the early 50's to the Mizon Family. 20 Acres were sold to Mrs Richards and the remaining land was farmed by the Mizon family. The house and 20 acres were sold to Major General Gregson. This is home to The Old Suffolk Stud where Derby winner 'Sir Percy' was born.

The MacRoberts Reply



After the three sons of Lady Rachel MacRobert of Douneside, Aberdeen were killed in RAF service, she donated £25,000 to buy a Short Stirling bomber. It was given the serial number N6086 and had the MacRobert coat of arms painted on the nose. It was named, 'Reply' and presented to her crew at RAF Wyton on 10 October 1941. It was assigned to RAF 15 Squadron. The first operation flown by N6086 was on 12 October 1941, to bomb Nuremberg, Germany. On 28 October 1941, the 'MacRobert's Reply' sustained its first damage from anti-aircraft fire over Nieuport (Nieuwpoort), Belgium. On 18 December 1941, they took part in the attack on the German Pocket Battleship Scharnhost *and Heavy Cruiser Gneisenau in the French harbour of Brest. This was their second visit, in four days, this time they hit with their bombs the dry dock where the Gneisenau was berthed and saw black smoke rising from the warship. They were attacked by Luftwaffe fighters and managed to damage one of them with their guns.*

The 'MacRoberts Reply', was captained by Flying Officer Peter Boggis (right in photo) on 12 operations from October 1941 to January 1942.

On 7 February 1942, the aircraft veered during take-off at RAF Peterhead and collided with a damaged Supermarine Spitfire. It was repaired and flew again with conversion units before being written off in 1943.