Gerald Stalker HASLAM (1918 – 1945)



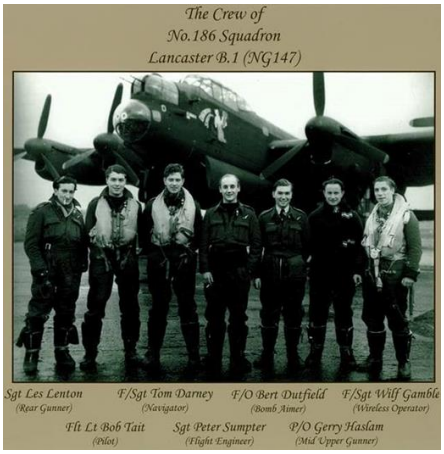
P/O, 56419
Mid-Upper Gunner
Gerald Stalker Haslam
RAF
186 Squadron

16 January 1945

Age 26

HIS DUTY DONE;
RECALLED

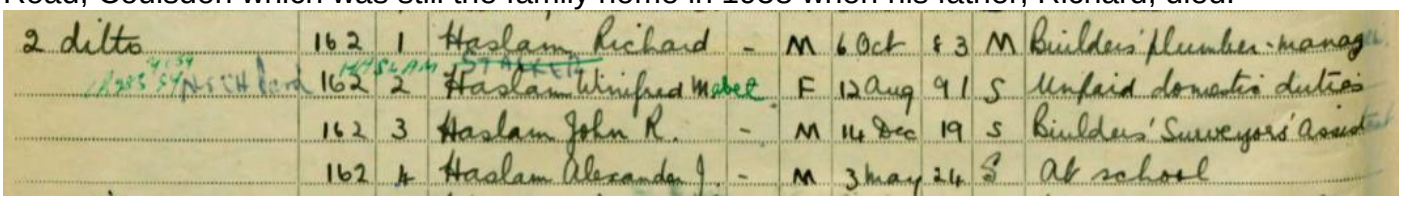




Gerald Stalker Haslam was born on 10th September 1918 in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. He was the son of Richard Haslam who was born in Bolton and his wife Winifred Mabel nee Stalker who came from Kendal. The family were obviously fairly mobile as from Gainsborough they moved to Leicester and later Coulsdon, a suburb of Croydon.

Gerald had two younger brothers, John Richard Haslam, who was born on 14th December 1919 in Leicester and Alexander James who was born on 3rd May 1924 in Croydon, Surrey.

At the time of the 1939 Register, the Haslam family (apart from Gerald) was living at 2 Coniston Road, Coulsdon which was still the family home in 1958 when his father, Richard, died.



We have not been able to find out about Gerald's life before he joined the RAF. The London Gazette listed his promotion to Sgt as from 18th November 1944. He was of course, posted to 186 Squadron and as a member of a Lancaster crew he was kept very busy. This photo shows the crew in front of Lancaster NG137. They flew around 24 operations in this aircraft.



Left to right
Sgt T L Lenton, Tail Gunner
F/Lt R R Tait, Pilot
F/Sgt T B Darney, Navigator
Sgt P A Sumpter, F/Eng
F/O H C Dutfield, Air Bomber
P/O G S Haslam, Mu/Gunner
F/Sgt W S Gamble W/Op.

Photo courtesy aircrewremembered.com

On 1st January the crew took part in a raid by 146 aircraft of No 3 Group on the railway yards at Vohwinkel. They were one of several aircraft diverted to land at Linton on Ouse.

BOMBING - VOHWINKEL.

Summary. 14 Aircraft were detailed to attack the target. All took off and completed their duty. On their return aircraft were diverted, 10 landed at LINTON-ON-OUSE and remaining 4 at HOLME, EASTMOOR and MARSTON MOOR/ respectively. Weather was clear with good visibility. Target indicators were seen to drop somewhat late but were accurately concentrated. Bombing was concentrated round the marked area and target seemed tobe well ablaze. Smoke was seen rising to 5000 feet. 2 violent explosions, orange in colour were seen at 19.51 hours. Slight heavy flak in target area 18-20.000 feet mainly bursting below. Some Searchlights effective but no flak co-operating. One Aircraft attacked by F.W. 190 and after taking evasive action and fire exchanged enemy aircraft fell away to port. Generally considered a good attack.

LANCASTER I "D" NG. 137	F/L. TAIT R.R.	PILOT	15.52	22.17.	Bomb load 1 X 4000 HC and 14 X 500 MC. Target VOHWINKEL. Weather: Clear, visibility good. Target identified on Red Target Indicators. Bombed at 19.38 hours from 21.000 feet. A large orange explosion was seen at 19.41 hours, this lasted several seconds. Considerable smoke. Good attack. Landed at LINTON-ON-OUSE.
	P/S. DARNEY T.B.	NAV			
	P/O. DUTFIELD H.C.	A/B			
	SGT. GAMBLE W.S.	WO/AIR			
	SGT. HASLAM G.S.	M/G			
	SGT. LENTON T.L.	R/G			
	SGT. SUMPTER P.A.	F/E.			

Two days later on 3rd January the crew were in action again, taking part in a daylight raid on the Benzol plants at Castrop Rauxel near Cologne.

Bombing. - CASTROP RAUXEL (Daylight)

Summary. 12 Aircraft were detailed to bomb the target, all took off and after completing their duty, returned safely to Base. Target was covered in 10/10ths Cloud and no results apart from smoke was observed. All aircraft bombed on Navigational Aid Leaders. Moderate Heavy Flak at times accurate 19-21.000 feet. Bombing generally appeared concentrated.

LANCASTER I "D" NG. 147	F/L. TAIT R.R.	PILOT	09.58	14.58	Bomb load 12 X 500 GP, 3 X 500 MC and 1 X 4000 MC. Target CASTROP RAUXEL. Weather 10/10 Cloud. Bombed on Navigational Aids Leader at 12.58 hours from 21.000 feet. Concentration of Red Target Indicators seen over target. Bombing seemed very good and Fighter escort was excellent.
	P/S. DARNEY T.B.	NAV			
	P/O. DUTFIELD H.C.	A/B			
	SGT. GAMBLE W.S.	WO/AIR			
	SGT. HASLAM G.S.	M/G			
	SGT. LENTON T.L.	R/G			
	SGT. SUMPTER P.A.	F/E.			

On 16th January 1945, the crew were in action again. According to records, ground fog increased with heavy condensation during the day reducing visibility to 20-30 yards. Twelve aircraft were detailed for a daylight operation but this was cancelled at 10.30 hrs and rescheduled for that night.

The first aircraft allocated to pilot F/Lt. R R Tait (Bob) and his crew was declared unserviceable at some point during the day and the crew given a prepared spare - Lancaster NG 147 AP-C.

At 23.15, the aircraft took off from 186 Squadron's base of RAF Stradishall, Suffolk, to take part in a mass bombing raid (involving a total of 138 aircraft from 3 Group) on another Benzol plant, this time at Wanne-Eickel, near Dortmund. Some 3 minutes after take off, the aircraft crashed near Gt Wilsey Farm between Kedington and Haverhill, and, with its full bomb load, exploded on impact killing all seven of the crew and creating a scene of devastation.

16.1.45.	WEATHER.	Ground fog which increased with heavy condensation during the day. Visibility 20-30 yards.
	OPERATIONS.	12 aircraft were detailed for operations, but these were cancelled at 10.30 hours, being again laid on for the night 16/17 January.
	(Night)	12 aircraft took off on a night attack on WANNE EICKEL. Aircraft 'C' NG.147 crashed three minutes after take-off, exploded on impact, killing the

Extracts from 186 Squadron Records and Summary of Events from National Archives.



Gerald was buried in Section U, Grave 201, Haverhill Cemetery.

Four members of the crew were returned to their home towns for burial but F/O Herbert Charles (Bert) Dutfield and Sgt Peter Allan Sumpter joined Gerald in Haverhill Cemetery.

F/Lt R R Tait, Pilot, was buried in Beverley, East Yorkshire
F/Sgt T B Darney, Navigator, was buried in Hindley Churchyard, Greater Manchester
F/Sgt W S Gamble W/Op., was buried in York Cemetery
Sgt T L Lenton, Tail Gunner was buried in Ashton under Lyme Cemetery.



The 75th anniversary of the crash was commemorated in 2020 when Marcus Field-Rayner, Kevin Betts and Jock Whitehouse visited the location to lay a bouquet of flowers and leave an accompanying note explaining what happened.

Photo by Steve Barton, Haverhill Echo

Local Kedington man, Kevin Betts, who has a keen interest in military history, is responsible for a fundraising effort to provide a memorial to commemorate the men who were killed in five aircraft crashes within the Parish during WW2.

One of these aircraft is the one in which Gerald died.

George Smith an off duty home guardsman who rushed to try and help those in one of the aircraft is also commemorated.

The bronze memorial, being created by sculptor Sean Hedges-Quinn, will be placed in Kedington Community Centre.

The names will be on a separate vellum scroll.



Photo: The memorial – a work in progress photo courtesy of Sean Hedges-Quinn.

The artwork, which is currently in mould form, reveals an angel on a plane's propellers, with the five doomed aircraft in the sky and features flowers and plants from the states and nations of the aircrew, including survivors, with an oak leaf for George Smith.