

2021

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Bristol Beaufort Mk. I X.8931 L2
No. 5 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit
Courtesy of North Devon Athenaeum

THE LAST FLIGHT OF:

BEAUFORTS L.9943, L.9829, L.9858

A narrative of the last flights of Beaufort L.9943, which crashed near R.A.F. Chivenor on the night of 19 December 1940, killing the pilot, Sgt J. BLATCHFORD and severely injuring the air gunner; Beaufort L.9829 which crashed on 18 February 1941, mortally wounding the Australian pilot, Sgt A. H. S. EVANS, and Beaufort L.9858, which crashed on 24 February 1941, killing the South African pilot, P/O H. MUNDY.

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The Last Flight of Beaufort L.9943, L.9829 & L.9858

Version: V3_4
This edition dated: 4 May 2021
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

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Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:
www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

The author wishes to thank the niece of James BLATCHFORD, Kate DODD;
and the daughter of Roy WATLING-GREENWOOD, Ann,
for their support and assistance in providing information and photographs
for inclusion in this booklet.

Without them, the story of these two remarkable men would not be complete.

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¹ In some sources, the pilot's surname is given as MUNDAY, but the Grave Registration Certificate and C.W.G.C. give the surname as MUNDY, and this is taken to be the correct spelling of his surname.

Introduction

The first Royal Air Force unit to occupy the airfield at Chivenor in North Devon was No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit, administered by No. 17 Group, Coastal Command. On 13 January 1941, No. 1 Course of Instruction – Beauforts, commenced at R.A.F. Chivenor. At this stage of the war, Germany controlled the majority of Western Europe, Italy had entered the war in support of Germany, and although Japan had not yet entered the war, it was involved in a full-scale war with China, and tension was rising in the Asia region. The United States of America was still pursuing isolationist policies, with public opinion against American involvement in what was seen as yet another European War.

The training of pilots to fly under operational conditions meant that they had to master flying at night, as well as by day. At night, there are few visual references for the pilot to use, so they have to rely on their instruments. It was both demanding, and unnerving, for a young and inexperienced pilot to fly alone at night, but they had to do it to qualify as operational pilots. It is no coincidence that the first, second, and third fatalities at R.A.F. Chivenor were during night flights, with the first occurring on 19 December 1940, the second on 18 February 1941, and the third on 24 February.

Before the advent of modern flight simulators, there was limited opportunity to learn flying technique on the ground, most of it had to be learned in the air. The Link Trainer was an early form of flight simulator or synthetic trainer, designed by Ed LINK in the U.S.A. in 1929, and manufactured by the Link Aviation Devices Inc. Looking like a small, stubby aircraft, mounted on a moveable base, the trainer was equipped with a cockpit, fitted with a hood, and it responded to the inputs of the trainee pilot, and gave accurate readings on its instruments. These Link Trainers were few and far between at the beginning of the Second World War, and the R.A.F. wartime training programme was still in its infancy, so for the young trainee pilots, it was a daunting case of trial and error. This claimed its victims, with the first pilot to die in training at R.A.F. Chivenor being a young man from Bedford, Sergeant James BLATCHFORD, who died on 19 December 1940.

The second fatality claimed the life of a young pilot, who was born in Australia, but who was living in the United Kingdom. His father had died in the First World War, so his mother suffered the trauma of losing both her husband and her son in two different world wars. The third pilot to die was a South African, who came to the U.K. prior to the outbreak of war. The Second World War was not popular in South Africa, with its large Afrikaan population, and the vote in Parliament to declare war on Germany in support of the U.K. was passed only narrowly. Jan SMUTS was instrumental in raising support for the U.K., but it remained tight. Yet, several South Africans (mainly of British heritage) left South Africa and travelled to the U.K. to join the war. Herbert MUNDY (known as 'Bob') was one of these men, yet he did not reach an operational squadron, and he became the first service person to be buried at St. Augustine's church at Heanton Punchardon, where there are now one-hundred and twenty-nine Commonwealth War Grave Commission burials.

The Bristol Beaufort

The Bristol Beaufort was the standard torpedo-bomber and maritime strike aircraft of the Royal Air Force Coastal Command from 1940 until 1943. It replaced the Vickers Vildebeest biplanes, which were obsolete by the outbreak of the Second World War. The Bristol Aeroplane Company Limited, based at Filton, on the northern outskirts of the Gloucestershire city that it was named after, developed the Beaufort in response to two Specifications issued by the Air Ministry. Specification M.15/35 was for a three seat, twin-engine, monoplane for use as a torpedo-bomber, and G.24/35 for a four seat, general reconnaissance bomber.

The Bristol Aeroplane Coy Ltd saw an advantage in combining both roles into a single design, and the proposed aircraft was known as the Type 152. Blackburn Aircraft Limited had developed their design, which was known as the B-26 (later known as the Botha) in response to the same two specifications, and because Blackburn had less work than Bristol (who were building the Blenheim light bombers), the B-26 was chosen to become the principal R.A.F. torpedo-bomber. Because there was little to choose between the two designs on paper, orders were placed for both aircraft. The Air Ministry decided to use the Botha to replace the Avro Anson and Vickers Vildebeest at home, while the Beaufort would replace the Vildebeest overseas. The priority given to the Blackburn design can be seen that by the time that orders for the Botha had reached one-thousand, two-hundred and fifty-six aircraft, those for the Beaufort were only four-hundred and twenty-six aircraft.

The prototype Beaufort (L.4441) first flew on 15 October 1938, and the Air Ministry issued a contract to build seventy-eight aircraft to the Specification 10/36. The production aircraft differed from the prototype in several details, but in essence, they were still the same design. The aircraft was a torpedo-bomber, with a crew of four: pilot, observer/navigator, wireless operator, and air gunner. It had an all-metal, stressed skin construction, and weighed 13,107 lbs (5.85 tons) when empty, and 21,228 lbs (9.5 tons) when fully loaded. The aircraft was powered by two, 1,010 horsepower (hp), Bristol Taurus Mk. II air-cooled, radial engines.

The Beaufort had a wingspan of 57' 10", a length of 44' 7", a height of 12' 5", and a wing area of 503 square feet. The maximum speed of the Beaufort was 265 mph at 6,000 feet, with a cruising speed of 200 mph. Its range was 1,035 miles in normal operation, with a maximum range of 1,600 miles. The endurance of the aircraft was six hours, and it had a ceiling of 16,500 feet, although this was used rarely. The Beaufort was originally armed with one 0.303 machine gun in the port wing, and a single Vickers K-type gas fed 0.303 machine gun in the B.IV Mk I turret. The aircraft was designed to carry four 250 lb bombs in the bomb bay, and one more on each wing. In theory, the Beaufort could carry six 500 lb bombs, or one 1,605 lb, eighteen-inch torpedo semi-enclosed in the bomb bay. In practice, the restrictions on range and performance imposed by a full bomb load, meant that Coastal Command restricted the aircraft to carrying up to 2,200 lbs of bombs or mines.

Both the Blackburn Botha, and the Bristol Beaufort, were planned to be powered by two, single-row, sleeve-valve, air-cooled, Bristol Perseus engines. It was predicted that this would leave both aircraft underpowered, and in order to get the Beaufort into service as quickly as possible, and because a proven low-altitude engine of higher power was not available, the Air Ministry agreed to that the new and compact, twin-row, Bristol Taurus engine would be substituted. This turned out to be a flawed design, which had been rushed into production before full testing and development had been completed. Availability of this new engine was limited, and Bristol gave priority to their own design of aircraft, leaving the Botha to continue with the Perseus engine. This effectively condemned the Blackburn Botha to failure as an operational torpedo bomber.

Problems persisted with the Bristol Taurus Mk II engines fitted to the first production Beaufort aircraft. Frequent failures with a bolt led to the connecting rods slipping from the crankshaft and thereby wrecking the engine. This would result in the loss of an engine, often accompanied by fire, with catastrophic results at low altitude. The view of the Bristol company was to use high revolutions and maximum continuous speed, but although this may have reduced the incidence of failures, it reduced the range of the aircraft significantly, and simply wore the engines out early. The de Havilland propellers were variable speed, but they could not be fully feathered, meaning that a failed engine caused a lot of drag to the aircraft. As late as March 1940, the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment (A. & A.E.E.) refused to give full and final clearance for the aircraft to enter operational service because of its poor performance on a single engine.

There were also problems with the tailwheel and tailplane, but it was engine overheating that was the main issue delaying the Beaufort's operational debut. In October 1938, the Beaufort was grounded for modifications to the cowlings and cooling gills. This still caused problems with running the engines on the ground, but in the air, matters were improved. It was decided on 16 March 1939 that of the first seventy-eight aircraft ordered, five would act as prototypes, two would be used for trials, and twenty-one would re-equip No. 100 Squadron in Singapore. The other fifty would be supplied to the Royal Australian Air Force, with No. 36 Squadron to be equipped with aircraft from the next batch. Matters changed with the increasingly disappointing performance of the Blackburn Botha, and so the Air Ministry agreed to divert all Beauforts to home based squadrons. On 1 July 1939, an order for fifty aircraft was placed with the Australian government to supply squadrons in the Far East.

Beams guns were added to some aircraft from May 1940 onwards, and from W.6538 onwards, a Browning machine gun was fitted in the starboard wing. Then problems with the supply of the Daimler built B.IV series turrets arose. The Blenheim type turret was modified for use in the Beaufort as the B.I Mk. V turret, and this mounted twin Browning 0.303 machine guns. The first aircraft so fitted was AW.335, and these had a strengthened airframe and were designated as Mark IA Beauforts. On 27 May 1941, the Air Staff decided that Beauforts allocated to torpedo bomber squadrons should have a single Vickers K machine gun installed in the nose, but these were fitted only in aircraft used by No. 22 Squadron.

Problems with the Bristol Taurus Mk II engine nearly led to the end of the Beaufort as an operational aircraft, but there was nothing else. On 28 August 1940, due to the persistent problems with the engines, the Beaufort was withdrawn from front-line service to allow two-hundred and fifty-four aircraft to be returned to Filton for the improved Mark VI engine to be fitted. Operations resumed with No. 22 Squadron on 31 August, with No. 42 following on 28 September. The Mark IA version was fitted with the Taurus Mk. XII engine, and these were retro-fitted to surviving Mark I aircraft.

The search for a better engine led to consideration of fitting the Rolls-Royce Merlin, but this was discounted for reasons of range and performance, but the Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp S3C4 engine, was found to be suitable. Beaufort N.1110 was used as a prototype, and this led to the production of the Mark II version of the aircraft. The prototype flew for the first time in November 1940, with the first aircraft, AW.244 flying on 17 August 1941. The Twin Wasp engines developed 1,200 hp, but other than a few improvements made through operational experience, the basic aircraft was the same. The Beaufort squadrons found that the Taurus equipped aircraft performed better in temperate climates, but the Twin Wasps were better in hotter and more humid climates. Four-hundred and fifteen Beaufort Mk. II and Mk IIA aircraft (the Mark IIA having the strengthened airframe and new turret) were built before production ceased in 1944. The Taurus equipped Beaufort was declared obsolete in 1944, and the Twin-Wasp version a year later.

One-thousand and thirteen Beaufort Mk. I aircraft were built by the Bristol Aeroplane Co. Ltd. at their main works at Filton, and at a shadow factory at Banwell, Somerset. The Australian government built additional Beauforts in Australia for use by the Royal Australian Air Force. Total production was two-thousand, one-hundred and twenty-nine Beaufort aircraft, including seven-hundred built in Australia. Thirteen Beauforts were supplied to the Turkish Air Force, and these were flown until 1950. The last Beaufort was flown in the U.K. in 1946, and a consideration of its status is that it was never awarded a Civil certificate of airworthiness by the U.K. authorities. No flying examples remain today, and only two as static exhibits. Beaufort Mk. VIII (the Australian version of the Mark IIA) A9-557 can be seen at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. There is a Beaufort on display at the R.A.F. Museum, which is displayed as Mark IIA, DD.931. It is in fact built from parts from several Australian Mk. VIII aircraft, the main airframe coming from A9-559.

Operational Deployment

The Bristol Beaufort was approved to be allocated to R.A.F. squadrons in September 1939, and they entered service in November 1939, with No. 22 Squadron, based at Thorney Island, Sussex. The Beauforts superseded Vickers Vildebeest biplanes, and were a marked improvement in capability for the squadron. The conversion to the new aircraft continued until the last Vildebeest left in February 1940. A problem arose as it was realised that although the R.A.F. had a new torpedo bomber, it had no torpedo capable of being dropped from the Beaufort. The simple issue was that the design of British air-launched torpedoes had fallen behind the improvement in aircraft design.

The torpedo in use at the time was the Mk. XII, which had been designed during the First World War to be fired from Motor Torpedo Boats. The most modern Royal Navy torpedo carrying aircraft was the Fairy Albacore, a development of the Fairy Swordfish that remained the principal R.N. torpedo bomber. These were biplanes, with a top speed of about 160 mph, and different from the Beaufort. Trials at the Torpedo Development Unit at R.A.F. Gosport showed serious problems with torpedoes dropped from high-speed aircraft. To remedy this, a larger and detachable air tail was fitted, which resulted in the torpedo being carried in a nose-up attitude, as opposed to the preferred nose-down manner. These issues were overcome, and the Beaufort had several successes as a torpedo-bomber, particularly in the Mediterranean.

On 8 April 1940, No. 22 Squadron moved to R.A.F. North Coates in Lincolnshire, to cover the North Sea, as a consequence of the German invasion of Norway. The first operational sortie by No. 22 Squadron using their Beauforts was on the night of 15/16 April 1940, with a mine-laying operation in the mouth of the River Jade. The squadron dropped their first bomb on 7 May 1940.

The second squadron to receive the Beaufort was No. 42 Squadron. This unit had been formed in August 1939, from a flight of No. 22 Squadron. It was equipped with the Vickers Vildebeest biplane torpedo bomber, but it received its first Beaufort (L.4489) in April 1940. This coincided with a move to R.A.F. Thorney Island to replace No. 22 Squadron, which had moved to North Coates. The move was to allow the conversion of No. 42 Squadron to the Beaufort. In June 1940, with the conversion completed, the squadron moved to R.A.F. Wick, in Caithness, to fly operational sorties over the North Sea to Norway.

The third squadron to be equipped with the Beaufort was No. 217 Squadron. This pre-war squadron had been based at R.A.F. Warmwell, Dorset, at the outbreak of the Second World War. In October 1939, it moved to R.A.F. St. Eval in Cornwall, to cover the Western Approaches. It received its first Beaufort in May 1940, just after No. 42 Squadron started to receive its Beauforts. Due to the shortage of aircraft and trained pilots, with effect from 19 October 1940, other Beauforts were transferred from No. 48 Squadron, which had flown only one sortie with the Beauforts on 17 October 1940. No. 217 Squadron remained at R.A.F. St. Eval until October 1941, when it moved to R.A.F. Thorney Island, however, the squadron maintained a detachment at R.A.F. St. Eval. No. 217 Squadron remained a bomb (and mine) only squadron well into 1941, before torpedo training was undertaken, however, the squadron had a trials detachment at R.A.F. Chivenor testing A.S.V. radar, and the use of depth charges.

The fourth, and last, squadron in the U.K. to receive the Beaufort was No. 86 Squadron. This squadron was formed at R.A.F. Gosport, Hampshire, on 6 December 1940. The new squadron was equipped with Bristol Blenheim Mk. IV aircraft. It spent a month at R.A.F. Leuchars in Fife in February 1941, and it moved to R.A.F. Wattisham in Suffolk in March 1941. It moved to R.A.F. North Coates in May 1941, where it began to receive Beaufort aircraft in June of that year.

The first Beaufort sortie was flown on 11 June 1940, but in practice, it acted as a holding and dispatch unit for No. 39 Squadron in Egypt. The Beaufort Mk. II was issued to No. 217 Squadron beginning in November 1941, and to No. 86 Squadron with effect from January 1942.

The only other Home-based squadrons using the Bristol Beaufort were No. 489 Squadron, R.N.Z.A.F. and No. 415 Squadron, R.C.A.F.. The former was due to receive Beauforts in August 1941 at its base at R.A.F. Leuchars, but it converted to Beaufighters instead. For a short period of time, the latter operated some Beauforts while stationed at R.A.F. Thorney Island from September 1941 until January 1942.

The early sorties were against targets in Germany, mainly the naval bases on the north coast, and the area of Heligoland. The aircraft were armed with bombs, meaning that they were specialist air crew attacking a standard target suitable for bombers. The opening of hostilities in Norway meant a realignment of the sorties undertaken by the Beauforts. On 21 June, No. 42 Squadron conducted a strike against the battlecruiser Scharnhorst off Norway. There were no hits on the German warship, but the weakness of the defensive armament of the Beaufort was exposed, especially when attacked by the German Me 109 aircraft now based in Norway. To counter this, Beaufort sorties were provided with escorts, with Beaufighters becoming common in this role. Due to the limitations of engine power, additional armour could not be fitted to the aircraft.

Shortly after the Scharnhorst incident, persistent trouble with the engines led to all the Beauforts being grounded, and for a time, it was a possibility that the aircraft would be declared unsuitable for operational duties. On 28 August, the Bristol Aeroplane Co. Ltd. agreed to fit an improved version of the Taurus, the Mk. VI, and this allowed No. 22 Squadron to resume operations on 31 August 1940. No. 217 Squadron resumed operations on 25 September, followed by No.42 Squadron three days later.

With the fall of France, the German Navy took over French ports in Brittany, and on the Bay of Biscay. This led to another change in the tasking of the Beaufort squadrons, with attacks against French ports, in particular Brest, becoming frequent. No. 22 Squadron undertook its first sortie with torpedoes on 11 September, and then a new form of sortie commenced four days later, when the first 'Rover' patrols were flown. Prior to this, the R.A.F. relied on aircraft carrying out reconnaissance sorties, and then if they found something of interest, they would radio back to base for a strike force to be dispatched. This introduced delays, so that most strike sorties failed to locate any meaningful targets. The Rover patrols were an attempt to overcome this, by dispatching aircraft, often armed with a mix of torpedoes and bombs, so that any target of opportunity could be attacked. The first success with a torpedo came on 17 September, at Cherbourg, when the small merchant vessel Johann Blumenthal was sunk by either L.4508 or L.9790.

No. 42 Squadron gained its first success on 26 October, with two ships being torpedoed off the coast of Norway by L.9813, and N.1159, but both aircraft were shot down. New bombs were introduced late in 1940, being modified sea mines, but these could only be carried by Beauforts and Hampdens. Bremerhaven was attacked with these bombs on 25 October by five aircraft from No. 22 Squadron. No. 22 Squadron gained further success on 18 September, with the sinking of a naval tanker, the sinking of Sperrbrecher 17 on 27 December, and the cargo-line Mar Del Plata on 26 March 1941. On 6 April 1941, three aircraft from No. 22 Squadron were tasked to attack the German battleship Gneisenau at Brest on 6 April. F/O K. CAMPBELL and his air crew flew in one of these aircraft, and he succeeded in hitting the German warship. The heavy flak brought the aircraft down in the harbour, and all four men died. F/O K. CAMPBELL was awarded, posthumously, the Victoria Cross for his selfless gallantry.

The entry of the Bismarck into the North Atlantic led to all three Beaufort squadrons being placed on readiness to attack the warship, when located. In addition, aircraft from the Torpedo Training Unit at R.A.F. Abbotsinch were placed on stand-by. No. 217 Squadron stood by at St. Eval, armed with bombs as they were not ready to fly with torpedoes until 8 July 1941. From mid-1941 onwards, the number of successful operations by the four-homebased squadrons declined. This was due to a combination of factors, including the shortage of torpedoes, and the lack of experienced pilots and air crew. The pilot aimed and dropped the bombs or torpedoes. The torpedoes had to be dropped at low speed, about 160 mph, at a height of about seventy feet, and at a range of about 750 yards from the target, to achieve the likelihood of a hit against any target moving at speed. The course at the Torpedo Training Unit in Scotland taught pilots to drop torpedoes at small and slow (often stationary) targets, from a range of 1,500 yards; a situation not rectified until the Spring of 1942. To obtain a hit, the pilot had to fly in the face of heavy light flak from the ship, or escorts, with a high degree of determination, discipline, courage, and hope. In the light of these facts, it is not surprising that a study undertaken in November 1942 revealed that flying a torpedo-bomber was the most dangerous role in the R.A.F. at that period. A tour was intended to last for three-hundred hours operational flying, but only 17.5% of pilots survived one tour. If a pilot was fortunate to survive one tour, and commenced another tour, they had only a 3% chance of surviving both. In comparison, a day fighter pilot had a 43% chance of surviving one tour, and an 18.5% chance of surviving two, and for a night bomber pilot, the figures were 44% and 19.5%. The highest chance of survival came from flying Catalina flying boats, giving a pilot a 77% chance of surviving one tour, and a 60% chance of surviving two. In spite of this, the number of cases of men refusing to fly, and being labelled as 'Lack of Moral Fibre', was no worse than for other types and categories of flying duties.²

During 1942, the level of operations in the Mediterranean increased, and those in Home waters declined. This was because of the change of priorities, and the lack of targets for U.K. based squadrons. No torpedo hits were scored by any U.K. based Beaufort in 1942, and R.A.F. strike aircraft bombed no vessel larger than 400 tons.

² HADAWAY, Stuart *The British Airman of the Second World War* (Oxford, Shire Publications, 2013) p.33

Attacks by No. 22 Squadron against the Scharnhorst in July 1941 were adjudged to have failed, as was another attack in May 1942 against the Prinz Eugen, with No. 86 Squadron even failing to find the German battle cruiser.

After the entry of Italy into the Second World War in June 1940, the Mediterranean became the main areas of operations for the British Armed Forces. Requests were made from late-1940 onwards for Beauforts to be deployed to the Mediterranean, but the Air Ministry blocked these due to the problems with engine cooling persisting. The strategic considerations led to the move east of the Beaufort Squadrons, leaving the Hampdens to cover Home waters pending the development of the Beaufighter as a torpedo-bomber. Three of the four U.K. Beaufort squadrons were sent overseas in 1942. The first to leave was No. 22 Squadron, which left for Ceylon in February 1942. In June 1942, No. 42 Squadron left the U.K. bound for Ceylon, while No. 217 Squadron left in the same month for Malta. No. 217 Squadron later moved onwards to join the other two squadrons in Ceylon. No. 86 Squadron remained in the U.K., and it served at R.A.F. St. Eval between January and March 1942, and R.A.F. Wick from March until July 1942. In that month, it moved to R.A.F. Thorney Island, and commenced converting to fly Liberators on anti-submarine duties.

In the Mediterranean, No. 39 and 47 Squadrons operated Beauforts from August 1941 onwards flying from Egypt and Malta, but by June 1943, both had converted to other types of aircraft. No. 39 Squadron had moved to Singapore from India at the outbreak of war, as a day bomber squadron. In April 1940, it moved to Aden to support the British operations in Eritrea and Ethiopia. In January 1941, the squadron was tasked with maritime reconnaissance, and commenced equipping with Blenheim and Maryland aircraft. In August 1941, the squadron began to receive Beaufort torpedo bombers, acquiring aircraft and air crews from No. 86 Squadron. The first operation mounted by the Squadron using Beauforts took place on 28 January 1942 with an attack on an Italian convoy.

A detachment of No. 217 Squadron arrived at R.A.F. Luqa on the island of Malta in June 1942, and they launched a successful attack on the Italian fleet on 15 June. By July 1942, Beauforts of No. 86 Squadron had also arrived on Malta, and these were absorbed into a reconstituted No. 39 Squadron, which had suffered heavy casualties. This allowed No. 217 Squadron to move onwards to Ceylon. No. 47 Squadron had started the war based in the Sudan. It moved to Egypt in December 1941, and in July 1942, it began its conversion to the Bristol Beaufort. The Squadron's first operation using the Beaufort took place on 8 October 1942, in an attack on the Axis supply convoys prior to the major battle of El Alamein. With the end of the campaign in Tunisia in May 1943, the Squadron moved there and re-equipped with the Bristol Beaufighter.

R.A.F. Chivenor was the only Operational Training Unit serving the Beaufort squadrons based in the U.K. and abroad, from its inception as No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit in late 1940, until 16 May 1942. It was redesignated as No. 5 (C) O.T.U. on 1 August 1941. On 3 May, No. 5 (C) O.T.U. began its move to R.A.F. Turnberry, on the west coast of Ayrshire, which was completed on 16 May. This ended one chapter in the history of R.A.F. Chivenor, but it allowed another to commence.

R.A.F. Chivenor and No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit

The North Devon Airfield was officially opened in April 1934 and comprised a large grass field of about three-hundred yards by two-hundred yards, a clubhouse, and workshop buildings. The field was situated roughly where the officers' married quarters now stand, and the airport buildings were erected immediately to the south of the Barnstaple – Braunton railway line some three-hundred yards east of the Duckpool level crossing. Flights commenced to the island of Lundy in the summer of 1934 with a De Havilland Dragon aircraft, which in the following year, were extended to provide 'on demand' services to Cardiff.

The first building work for the new Royal Air Force station began in May 1940, and on 21 June 1940, the first sod was removed to inaugurate work on the runways. The initial plans provided for three runways, each one-thousand yards long and fifty yards wide, on the alignment of the present runway layout. The building plans, when completed, left the Station virtually as it is today, the only major later additions being the two airmen's brick barrack blocks and the married quarters. The eastern boundary of the airfield was extended in 1941 to take in the North Devon Airport, and between then and 1944 the east-west runway was progressively lengthened to its present two-thousand yards. In 1942, the dispersal pans and taxiways on the present married quarters site were constructed. Post-war, concrete aircraft servicing platforms were built, and the married quarters were constructed on the site of the pre-war aerodrome. R.A.F. Chivenor was extensively rebuilt in the 1970's, with all but one of the original wooden huts replaced.

The first Royal Air Force unit to occupy the Station was No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit, administered by No. 17 Group, Coastal Command. Flight Lieutenant (F/L) E. D. BRADFIELD arrived on Friday, 25 October 1940, from R.A.F. Mount Batten in Plymouth, to take up the position of Senior Equipment Officer. He was accompanied by Pilot Officer (P/O) A. C. SHARPE, who was posted from R.A.F. Gosport as an Equipment Officer on the same day. These two officers were the first personnel to be posted to the new R.A.F. Chivenor, to establish the Operational Training Unit there. It opened formally on 27 November 1940 and assumed responsibility for operational training of Beaufort crews from R.A.F. Silloth in Cumberland. On 27 November, the unit's first aircraft arrived from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth, with their pilots and crew on attachment for flying duties. The Bristol Beaufort Mk I aircraft were:

1. L.4498 – F/L D. B. M. WRIGHT and four crew,
2. L.9905 – P/O J. F. PERCIVAL and three crew,
3. L.9932 – Sgt J. BLATCHFORD and three crew,
4. L.9949 – F/L G. H. B. HUTCHINSON and three crew,
5. L.9952 – S/L A. T. NAISH and three crew.

On Thursday 28 November, five Avro Anson aircraft arrived from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. flown by officers who were on attachment to R.A.F. Chivenor for flying duties.

These aircraft were:

1. N.9634 – F/O R. P. J. RADBOURNE,
2. N.9641 – P/O B. J. KLECHA,
3. N.9679 – P/O J. POLNIK,
4. N.9726 – P/O F. JAKUSZ-GOSTOMSKI,³
5. N.9891 – S/L J. W. BUCHANAN.

There were five Flights within No. 3 (C) O.T.U., allowing two courses to run concurrently for each aircraft type, and they were:

'A' Flt.	Bristol Beaufort
'B' Flt.	Bristol Beaufort
'C' Flt.	Avro Anson and Bristol Blenheim
'D' Flt.	Avro Anson and Bristol Blenheim
'F' Flt	Fairey Battle (later Westland Lysander) – for target towing

On 1 August 1941, the unit based at Chivenor became No. 5 (Coastal) O.T.U.. This change of style does not seem to have altered the work of Chivenor in any respect, as the conversion courses continued in an unbroken sequence, and the personnel on the unit remained the same. This came about because of the expansion of Coastal Command, with the added requirement to train crews on Whitley and Wellington aircraft. It had been intended to move the Beauforts to R.A.F. Turnberry, in Scotland, but this airfield was not ready in August 1941 to accept this unit. Hence, the training of Whitley and Wellington crews consolidated at R.A.F. Cranwell, with the training of Beaufort crews remaining at R.A.F. Chivenor. The O.T.U. at Cranwell was formed as a new unit, although some personnel transferred from R.A.F. Chivenor to R.A.F. Cranwell. Other personnel and aircraft came from R.A.F. Silloth in Cumberland.

Most pilots were regarded as a 'cut above' the other members of the crew. At this stage of the war, the officers were either pre-war members of the R.A.F., or were university educated. The formation of the crews was a lottery. Although the crews would fly, fight, and sometimes die together, they lived separately at R.A.F. Chivenor and other bases. The officers lived in the Officers' Mess, and the sergeants, flight sergeants and warrant officers lived in the Sergeants' Mess. No matter how close an officer was to his crew, all officers were to be addressed as 'Sir' or 'Pilot' if appropriate, although the more colloquial term of 'Skipper' was often used. Not all officers adhered strictly to this, but it appears that for most crews, some degree of formality remained in place.⁴

Most of the Wireless Operators/Air Gunners (WOp/AGs) had been together through training at Blackpool and Yatesbury, and so tended to know each other well. They were generally working class men, often qualified in a trade, from across the U.K..

³ In the O.R.B., his name is spelt as JAKURR-GOSTOMSKI

⁴ MAYNE, Maurice with RYAN Mark *Down but not out – The incredible Story of Second World War Airman Maurice 'Moggy' MAYNE* (Stroud, The History Press, 2014)

WOp/AGs tended to have lower educational attainment than the pilots or observers, or they were older and above the age limit for becoming a pilot (25 years). They would often stick together at the O.T.U., and sometimes chose their captains rather than the other way around. They wanted a steady driver, one most likely to ensure their survival. They chose the men that they could care to live with, and possibly die with.⁵

When not on duty, some men would go swimming at Croyde, the cinema in Braunton, and they would go to dances or drinking in Barnstaple or Ilfracombe. Many men would take a bus into Barnstaple at about 5.00 pm, but there was no bus back. Some men used to sleep in railway carriages at Barnstaple, and one morning a Sergeant was absent at breakfast. Then he phoned up, from Bristol, having slept on a carriage that formed an early morning train to Taunton and then onwards to Bristol where he woke up.⁶

By the time that they reached R.A.F. Chivenor, the four men who formed an air crew had endured several stages of selection and assessment. This began with the initial interview and medical examination, then onwards through other training units with more exercises, tests, and examinations, plus of course, drill and physical fitness training. Generally, the pilots streamed for Bomber and Coastal Command were seen as:

- Being cool, steady, and tenacious,
- To have stamina,
- To have initiative,
- Having powers of leadership.⁷

In terms of flying skills, they had to be reliable on the use of instruments and have a flying accuracy required to ensure efficient coordination between the pilot and navigator (observer). At no point was it explained to the other air crew how dangerous their operational role was going to be. This was war, so everything was dangerous, and all the air crew were volunteers. All they wanted to do was to get on with it. There was no question in the minds of the young men training at Chivenor of transferring away from this role, and they had no chance to take a different direction; from the moment you joined up, you did as you were told. There was little choice. R.A.F. Chivenor took an official photograph of the students early in the course, as soon as they had crewed-up. An example of the dangers these men faced can be seen from the photograph of Course 7A. Of the twenty-eight men in the picture, twenty died, one became a prisoner-of-war, four were injured, and two were branded 'Lack of Moral Fibre' and taken off flying duties. Only Sergeant (Sgt) Bill CARROLL was destined to survive the war unscathed.⁸

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ THORNING, Arthur G *The Dambuster who cracked the Dam – The story of Melvin 'Dinghy' YOUNG* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2008)

⁸ ALDRIDGE, Arthur with RYAN, Mark *The Last Torpedo Flyers – The True Story of Arthur ALDRIDGE, Hero of the Skies* (London, Simon & Schuster Ltd., 2013)

On Monday, 13 January 1941, No. 1 Course of Instruction, for Beauforts and Ansons, commenced, but the number of students on this course is not recorded. This course concluded on Sunday, 2 March 1941. These were the first students to undertake the two-month operational training course, including the formation of an aircrew of four to include a pilot, observer, and two wireless operators/air gunners. The course comprised three stages. These were:

- Weeks 1 and 2
 - Ground Instruction/Crewing Up/Familiarisation/Circuits and Landings,
- Weeks 3 to 6
 - Ground Instruction/Basic Air Training Day & Night/Bombing/Air Firing/Cine Gun,
- Week 7 & onwards
 - Ground Instruction/Applied Air Training/Cross Country/Advanced Navigation/Fighter Affiliation.

Elements of the training syllabus included:

- Synthetic training:
 - Link Trainer,
 - Bombing Teacher,
 - Clay Pigeon Shooting,
 - Turret Training,
- Gunnery:
 - Combat Manoeuvres,
 - Air-to-Sea Firing,
 - Air-to-Air Firing,
 - Fighter Affiliation,
- Bombing:
 - Bombing Target Practice,
 - Mine Laying,
- Navigation:
 - Dead Reckoning Navigation,
 - Cross-Country Navigation Exercises,
 - Cross-Sea Navigation Exercises,
- Drills:
 - Ditching and Dinghy,
 - Parachute,
 - Fire,
 - Crash,
- Operational Procedures:
 - Formation Flying,
 - Attack Profiles.

Throughout the course there were daily classroom lectures, navigational exercises, morse practice in the air and on the ground. The first element of the training programme at No. 3 (C) O.T.U. was for the pilots to be assessed by an instructor (also known as a Screened Pilot) and passed for solo flying. The instructors taught the pupil pilots to: *'Always trust your instruments'*, and not to rely on their instincts. Any conflict between a pilot's instincts and his instruments could result in spatial disorientation, particularly in cloud, and no doubt led to many aircraft stalling and crashing. Many pilots avoided flying in cloud, unless taking evasive action, for this reason.⁹

Once a pilot was passed as competent for flying solo, they would team up with an Observer (Navigator), and two Wireless Operators/Air Gunners (WOp/AG). It was the practice of Coastal Command to train aircrew as both wireless operators and air gunners to allow flexibility in their duties, so they could interchange roles on long sorties to avoid becoming stale.¹⁰ The process for forming up crews was informal, with the pilots, observers and WOp/AGs all meeting up in a room and choosing their crews by discussions, and then reaching an instinctive decision.

The next stage for the crews was for the pilots to qualify for night flying. Many did their first sorties at dusk, before being passed for solo flying. It should be remembered that the aircraft of this period lacked many of the sophisticated flying aids fitted to modern aircraft. Most pilots relied on their experience, judgement, and luck. Each pilot went solo at night to do an initial circuit and landing. In the dark, a pilot would take off and then turn to port to keep the flare path in sight while flying downwind. It was often pitch black for the pilots, with the blackout in force on the ground.

The O.T.U. course included navigation, bombing and air-combat exercises, with one of the last elements being formation flying. This was because the anti-shipping aircraft would usually fly and attack in 'vics' of three aircraft, so this skill had to be learnt. It was a perilous climax to the course. One pilot's misjudgement, or a lapse in concentration, could result in a collision with one or both aircraft crashing.

Once the training programme was completed, the course would be concluded, and the crews posted. Most crews were posted as formed crews, although some would be split up according to operational requirements. Some crews were posted direct to either No. 22, 42, 86, or 217 Squadrons, the four Beaufort equipped squadrons in Coastal Command at this time. Other crews were posted to the T.T.U. at R.A.F. Abbotsinch, near Glasgow, and some were posted to prepare for deployment overseas to the Mediterranean.

The first operational squadron at Chivenor was No. 252 Squadron, equipped with Beaufighters, and initially some Blenheims. On 4 December 1940, S/L R. G. YAXLEY reported from Headquarters Coastal Command with instructions to form this squadron at Chivenor.¹¹

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ See Footnote on Page 3.

¹¹ Some sources give the official date of formation of No. 252 Squadron as 21 November 1940, but these dates are taken from the R.A.F. Chivenor Operational Record Book AIR 27/152

This squadron was designated to be the first unit in Coastal Command to be equipped with the Beaufighter, in anticipation of service overseas. The first Beaufighters arrived in December, but the embryonic squadron used Blenheims until April when it became fully operational. The first fifteen Beaufighters flew out to Gibraltar on 1 May 1941, with the rest of the squadron joining them on 15 June. The squadron was to spend the rest of the war in the Mediterranean.

During the evening of 19 December, R.A.F. Chivenor and No. 3 (C) O.T.U. suffered its first fatal air crash. Sergeant (Sgt) James BLATCHFORD, R.A.F.V.R. had arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor from R.A.F. Silloth on 27 November, with his crew of three, flying Beaufort L.9932. That Thursday evening, Sgt BLATCHFORD took off in Beaufort L.9943, together with Leading Aircraftman (LAC) GREENWOOD, for a night flying training sortie. The aircraft crashed soon after take-off, killing Sgt BLATCHFORD, and seriously injuring LAC GREENWOOD. The aircraft was destroyed.¹²

Despite the rigours of food-rationing and wartime shortages, on the station's first Christmas Day, six-hundred and ten airmen, and thirty-four of the 10th Bn. The Royal Berkshire Regt. (attached for airfield defence duties) were served with a Christmas dinner of turkey and Christmas pudding by the officers and senior non-commissioned officers (N.C.Os.). Until the end of 1940, the domestic arrangements were complicated by the fact that neither the Officers' nor the Sergeants' messes had been completed, and all the officers and senior N.C.O.s had to be billeted out. On 26 December, the Officers' Mess was opened for luncheons, a sign that progress was being made.

A major event in the history of R.A.F. Chivenor occurred on 30 December 1940, when twenty pilots of No. 42 Squadron arrived to undertake a conversion course on Bristol Beauforts, which included Sgt A. H. S. EVANS. The actual course commenced the next day. The end of the year saw the strength of R.A.F. Chivenor, including the operational training unit, as seventy-nine officers, three W.A.A.F. officers, one-hundred senior non-commissioned officers, and seven-hundred and forty-six airmen. Of these, seven-hundred and thirteen non-commissioned officers and airmen lived on the base, all the others were living in billets in the Braunton and Barnstaple districts.

The construction programme for R.A.F. Chivenor was reaching its conclusion at the turn of 1941, marked by the opening of the Officers' Mess on 3 January, and the Sergeants' Mess the next day. These were wooden huts, as were most of the buildings (other than the hangers) at R.A.F. Chivenor. W/C RIDGEWAY and thirty-one officers moved into the Officers' Mess, and eighty-nine senior non-commissioned officers into the Sergeants' Mess from billets around the locality. During the Second World War, the R.A.F. maintained a distinction between commissioned and non-commissioned aircrew, so men who flew together, fought together, and sometimes died together, could be living in separate messes at their base.

On Monday, 13 January 1941, No. 1 Course of Instruction – Beauforts, commenced, but the number of students on this course is not recorded. It was to conclude on Sunday, 2 March 1941. These were the first students to undertake the two-month operational training course.

¹² Form 540 ORB November 1940 AIR

A flight (or course) usually comprised twenty-eight men, forming seven crews. On 16 January, a revised Establishment was issued for R.A.F. Chivenor and No. 3 (C) O.T.U. from Headquarters, Coastal Command. This showed a considerable increase in personnel to be stationed at R.A.F. Chivenor. With the increase in the Establishment, the status of the Commanding Officer was raised with the posting of Group Captain (G/C) J. H. SADLER from No. 9 Air Crew Selection Board to command R.A.F. Chivenor. The change in command took place on Thursday, 23 January, when G/C J. H. SADLER took over command of the station from W/C M. V. RIDGEWAY. W/C RIDGEWAY signed off the Operations Record Book for the last time as Commanding Officer, and assumed his new appointment as Chief Instructor at No. 3 (C) O.T.U.. S/L G. C. WALKER became the Chief Ground Instructor at the O.T.U..

The month of February began with some inclement weather. On Sunday, 2 February, heavy snow required the activation of the Snow Plan to clear the runways for use. On Wednesday, 5 February, the first notable V.I.P. landed at Chivenor on the B.O.A.C. service, namely Mr. Wendell WILKIE, the U.S.A. envoy. He was received by G/C J. H. SADLER, and they were photographed walking through the snow at R.A.F. Chivenor. After a short stay on the unit, Mr. WILKIE left by air the same day for the United States, via Lisbon, taking off during a heavy snowstorm.

No. 3 (C) O.T.U. suffered its second fatality in the evening of Tuesday, 18 February 1941. That evening, at about 21.40 hours, Sgt A. H. S. EVANS took off from R.A.F. Chivenor on a solo night flying training flight in Beaufort Mk. I L.9829. The aircraft was seen to climb too steeply. It then turned through 180 degrees and flew into a hill about one mile north of Chivenor, near Heanton Punchardon church.¹³ The aircraft burst into flames on impact, but Sgt EVANS, the only occupant, was rescued alive, albeit seriously injured. An ambulance took him to the North Devon Infirmary in Barnstaple, where he died from his injuries the next day at 16.45 hours.¹⁴

On Sunday, 23 February, tragedy came to the base with the death from gunshot wounds of Pilot Officer M. A. ESPLIN. Malcolm Alexander ESPLIN was a member of the Royal Air Force, who was granted a short service commission of four years on the active list with effect from 23 October 1939, with the rank of Acting Pilot Officer.¹⁵ He was promoted to the rank of Pilot Officer, on probation, with effect from 25 May 1940.¹⁶ Twenty-five-year-old P/O ESPLIN was the second son of the late Alexander and Eva Cameron ESPLIN. His family home was at 11 Alexandra Road, Great Crosby, Lancashire, and he was buried in Grave 5587 of Section R Nonconformist, of the Southport (Duke Street) Cemetery.¹⁷

¹³ The Operations Record Book (AIR 28/152) describes the location of the crash as '*near Chivenor Church*'. There is not church at Chivenor, so it is assumed to mean the Parish Church at Heanton Punchardon, just above R.A.F. Chivenor. The O.R.B. records his name as Sgt H. S. EVANS,

¹⁴ See: <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R2094483/> and AIR 28/152

¹⁵ <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/34727/page/7500>

¹⁶ <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/34898/page/4363>

¹⁷ <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2700549/ESPLEN,%20MALCOLM%20ALEXANDER>

Monday, 24 February 1941, was to bring further tragedy to R.A.F. Chivenor with the third fatal aircraft crash since the opening of the base. This was just six days after the crash that ultimately claimed the life of Sgt A. H. S. EVANS. At 20.20 hours, P/O H. MUNDY crashed while night flying, with the aircraft bursting into flames, killing the pilot and sole occupant. He was flying Beaufort L.9858, which was one of those delivered from R.A.F. Abbotsinch in January. The aircraft dived into the ground at Braunton Great Field, close to the airfield, for an unknown reason. Herbert MUNDY, who was known as Bob, was a South African from Durban.

With a total strength of almost one-thousand, eight-hundred personnel now based at R.A.F. Chivenor, concern was raised about the possibility of the unit suffering heavy casualties in the event of such an enemy air attack developing, and so one-hundred and fifty airmen, and soldiers, from the station were provided with dispersed sleeping quarters off the station. Wrafton Rectory, Chivenor Cottage, St. Brannock's Hall, and the Masonic Hall, Braunton, were all requisitioned by the Air Ministry to provide this dispersed accommodation. No. 1 Beaufort Course finished on 2 March, although the next destination of the aircrew concerned is not recorded.

Circumstances of the Crash – L.9943

745212 Sergeant J. BLATCHFORD and his crew of three arrived on attachment to No. 3 (C) O.T.U. from No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth on 27 November 1940, flying Beaufort L.9932. At 20.10 hours, on Thursday, 19 December, Sgt BLATCHFORD took off from R.A.F. Chivenor in Bristol Beaufort Mk. I L.9943 on a night-time, solo, flying training exercise, which is shown on the Form 1180 as a 'Practice Flight'. He took with him 907094 Leading Aircraftman Roy Watling GREENWOOD as air gunner.¹⁸

745212	Sgt J. BLATCHFORD, R.A.F.V.R.	Pilot & Captain
907094	LAC R. W. GREENWOOD, R.A.F.V.R.	Fitter II (E) (AG)

Personnel at R.A.F. Chivenor saw the aircraft begin to climb, but then it lost height and crashed alongside the Braunton to Saunton road at Warren Farm, about one and half miles north-west of Chivenor. The aircraft clipped the top of a large tree just on the northern side of the road, crossed over the road, crash landed in a field, and slid along the ground. The aircraft killed a shire horse, which stood at seventeen hands, which had only recently been released out into the field with another horse belonging to the farmer. The aircraft slid along the ground until it came to boggy section of the field, where it ploughed into the mud, and came to an abrupt halt.

¹⁸ LAC GREENWOOD was a Fitter II (E), i.e., an engine fitter class II. The Air Gunner's badge was introduced in December 1939, and on 27 May 1940, the Air Ministry decided that all Air Gunners should hold the rank of at least the rank of Sergeant. With the fall of France, this decision took time to take effect throughout the Royal Air Force. In the Casualty File (see Bibliography & Sources) LAC GREENWOOD is consistently referred to as an Air Gunner. It is not known whether he was a regular member of Sgt BLATCHFORD's air crew who had not yet been informed of his promotion, or whether he flew on this flight as a supernumerary member of air crew. As GREENWOOD's wife and child lived in Barnstaple, it is more likely that he had been posted to R.A.F. Chivenor as an engine fitter, and was flying as a supernumerary member of the air crew, possibly at the invitation of the pilot.

The aircraft burst into flames upon impact. It finished up a few metres away from an occupied cottage on the Saunton road, now called Horseshoe Cottage.¹⁹

The pilot died instantly, but the passenger survived, albeit seriously injured.²⁰ The Beaufort was completely 'smashed up' and spread over a considerable area. The two engines had both separated from the wings, with the airscrews off both engines. The port engine's rear vertical downward cylinder was off, and the connecting rod broken. One airscrew had come away from the engine with the reduction gear. The other engine's reduction gear had broken away from the engine, with the airscrew coming off the shaft.

As was usual in the death of a member of the Royal Air Force in the United Kingdom, the R.A.F. discussed with the family about the funeral arrangements. R.A.F. Chivenor sent a telegram to Sgt BLATCHFORD's parents outlining the procedure under these circumstances. If they decided to have James buried with full military honours at Heanton Punchardon church, the local church to R.A.F. Chivenor, the cost would be borne by public funds.

If they wished to attend the funeral, Mr and Mrs BLATCHFORD would be allowed a return railway warrant (issued at the local police station) for two persons to travel to Chivenor if they could not afford the train fare. If they desired a private funeral, a maximum of £7-10-0 would be allowed, to include the cost of the coffin. The cost of conveying the coffin (usually by rail) to the home was allowed as well. Mr and Mrs BLATCHFORD decided to request their son's body be brought home to Bedford. The body of Sgt BLATCHFORD was repatriated to his hometown of Bedford, where he was buried in the town's cemetery on 27 December 1940.²¹ He lies in Section R., Grave 734 of the Foster Hill Road Cemetery. The service was conducted by the Rector of St. Cuthbert's church in Bedford.

L.9943 was one of the second batch of Beauforts Mk. I aircraft built by the Bristol Aircraft Company, numbering two-hundred and twenty-one aircraft, and delivered to the R.A.F. between March and August 1940.²² Both Beaufort aircraft L.9943, and L.9932, were delivered new to No. 1 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit at R.A.F. Silloth, in Cumberland.²³ When No. 3 (C) O.T.U. was formed at R.A.F. Chivenor, and assumed responsibility for the training of Beaufort air crew, they were transferred to Chivenor. Beaufort L.9932 was one of the first five aircraft delivered to R.A.F. Chivenor on 27 November, but the date of arrival of L.9943 is not recorded.²⁴

¹⁹ At the time of the crash, what is now called Horseshoe Cottage was two cottages called Warren Cottages. They were tied accommodation for Warren Farm, but Horseshoe Cottage is now in private hands.

²⁰ AIR 28/152

²¹ <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2705817/BLATCHFORD,%20JAMES>

²² The engines were Bristol Taurus Mk. II (Modification I) 130476 (Port) and 130514 (Starboard)

²³ HAYWARD, Roger *The Beaufort File* (Tonbridge, Air Britain Publication, 1990) p.39 and 41.

²⁴ HAYWARD, Roger *The Beaufort File* (Tonbridge, Air-Britain (Historians) Ltd., 1990) p.38, and AIR 28/152

Court of Inquiry

Sgt BLATCHFORD an inexperienced pilot, having flown a total of one-hundred and eighty-eight hours on all types of aircraft, but only two and half hours had been flown at night. Sixteen hours and fifty-five minutes had been flown on the Beaufort aircraft, of which nine hours was on dual instruction. Fifteen hours had been completed on the Link Trainer, but crucially, only one-hour night flying. Indeed, this flight was possibly the first night-time solo flight undertaken by Sgt BLATCHFORD.

The Court of Inquiry concluded that the pilot had failed to set his altimeter to zero before take-off, causing him to stall and crash.²⁵ The Form 1180 (R.A.F. Accident Record Card) states:

*A/C lost height after T.O. (take-off) and struck ground after a steady power glide – thought that pilot misread his instruments or failed to set his altimeter to zero before T.O. – incorrect instrument flying or careless cockpit drill prior to T.O. – Accidents of this type will not occur when pilot have been given adequate synthetic training, before being trained in night flying.*²⁶

The Air Officer Commanding No. 17 Group (or his representative) endorsed the Form 1180 to confirm that the aircraft was seen in a shallow dive, due to poor instrument flying, and added that the pilot may have lost his nerve.

The Form 765 (C) 'Report on Flying Accident of Landing Not Attributable to Enemy Action' contains the same comments as the Form 1180, but with the addition of: *'The aircraft did not stall and appeared to be under control until it struck the ground'*. The Form 765 (C) is signed by W/C RIDGEWAY, the Commanding Officer of R.A.F. Chivenor.

The weather on that day shows a low-pressure system over the Baltic which was feeding a North-North-Easterly flow of air over North Devon. This should have meant clear air over R.A.F. Chivenor with a cloud base of above 2,500 feet, well above the minimum required for local flying. The runway in use was probably Runway 34, which meant taking off virtually straight into the wind. The pilots would then execute a left turn to avoid the village of Braunton to commence their circuit. The moon was to the north-east of Chivenor, but it did not rise until 22.45 hours, so at the time of the crash, it was 20 degrees below the horizon, and with some ambient, but not full, moonlight.

The conclusions recorded about the cause of the accident are confusing. The Court of Inquiry concluded that BLATCHFORD failed to set his altimeter and that this *caused* the crash (my Italics), yet any failure to properly set an altimeter, in itself, would not *cause* a stall. The Court of Inquiry is contradicted by the Commanding Officer who states that the aircraft did not stall, and the witness evidence indicates that the aircraft was under control when it crashed. The primary instrument for night flying is the artificial horizon, which must be caged/uncaged prior to departure.

²⁵ Air Ministry Casualty File L.9943 The National Archives, Kew (TNA) Air Ministry Files AIR 81/4612

²⁶ Form 1180 Beaufort L.9808

If this was not completed in the pre-flight checks, it may have led to confusion in the pilot as to the correct attitude of the aircraft. Likewise, if the aircraft was not trimmed correctly, the aircraft may enter a gentle (and almost imperceptible) descent. The location of the crash is not usually where an aircraft would be completing a circuit of the airfield, suggesting that the pilot is possibly confused, or is distracted due to problem with his instrumentation, or some other factor.

Accidents Investigation Branch

The Accidents Investigation Branch of the Air Ministry may have investigated this accident, but it appears that any accident report has not survived.

The Air Crew

745212 Sergeant James BLATCHFORD, R.A.F.V.R.

James BLATCHFORD was born in Dover, Kent, on 16 January 1920, the eldest son of James Henry and Mary BLATCHFORD. James Henry had been born in Kent circa 1890. He had a sister, Ethel Mary, born in 1891, and two other brothers, John William (born circa 1893) and Robert Frederick (born circa 1895). The family lived at No. 8, Maison Dieu Place, Dover, where his father worked as a fire insurance agent. In 1911, James Henry was boarding at 14, Peel Street, Bedford, and was working as a picture framer.

James Henry BLATCHFORD married Mary WRIGHT in the first quarter of 1915. She originated from Grimsby, Lincolnshire.²⁷ Their first child was a son, who they called James, who was born in 1920, in Dover. Two years later, Mary had twin boys, William, and John, who were born in Luton, Bedfordshire. John died soon after birth, apparently because his family could not afford to treat a cleft palate he was born with. This experience left Mary with depression, which affected the whole family. William grew up in the shadow of his elder brother, and they shared a bedroom together until James enlisted in the Royal Air Force. James was gifted academically, while William was not; probably as William suffered from what we now know as dyslexia. William left school at the age of fourteen years to start work, while James continued to study. This difference in lifestyles led to some tension between the brothers, as their lives took different courses. Yet despite the sibling rivalry, William was to feel the loss of his elder brother very badly in 1940.²⁸

James BLATCHFORD enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (R.A.F.V.R.) on 2 March 1939, at Luton in Bedfordshire. At the time, he was living at 256, Bescot Road, Luton. He commenced his flying training at No. 29 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School (E.R.F.T.S.), based at Luton.

²⁷ See: www.Ancestry.co.uk

²⁸ Information provided by niece, Kate DODD, and confirmed by Ancestry. See: www.Ancestry.co.uk

This school, which was run by Birkett Air Services on behalf of the Royal Air Force, used De Havilland Tiger Moths to provide initial training to members of the R.A.F.V.R..²⁹ He underwent some flying training between 7 May and 21 June 1939, at Luton. BLATCHFORD's service number, 745212, was one of those allocated to R.A.F.V.R. pilots from January 1937 onwards, i.e., pre-war.

James BLATCHFORD was 'called up' on 2 September 1939, and on 25 November 1939, was posted to No. 4 Initial Training Wing, which had recently been opened at Bexhill-on-Sea in Sussex. This was merely a holding posting, while the Royal Air Force geared up to wartime, including expanding its training provision for air crew. He was placed in the H.Q. Pool on 27 April 1940, while awaiting a place at a Service Flying Training School. Sgt BLATCHFORD moved onto No. 2 Service Flying Training School, at R.A.F. Brize Norton in Oxfordshire on 15 August 1940. By June 1940, the unit was equipped with twin-engine Airspeed Oxfords delivering the multi-engine service flying phase of the programme of pilot's training. James BLATCHFORD was awarded his Flying Badge ('Wings') on 16 September 1940.³⁰

BLATCHFORD was posted to Coastal Command, and he transferred to No. 1 (C) O.T.U. at R.A.F. Silloth in Cumberland on 21 September 1940 to complete his training prior to his first tour of operations. Sgt BLATCHFORD was posted to No. 22 Squadron with effect from 29 October 1940, but on 27 November 1940, he transferred to R.A.F. Chivenor from R.A.F. Silloth with his crew of three, when Beaufort training was transferred there in November 1940.

At the time of his death, James BLATCHFORD lived at 61, Rosamund Road, Bedford, which may have been his parent's address. His effects of £188 10s 1d were left to his father, James Henry BLATCHFORD, an engine fitter.³¹ James Henry BLATCHFORD, James's father, died on 11 November 1964 at The General Hospital, North Wing, Bedford. At the time of his death, he and his wife were living at 21, Wendover Drive, Bedford. James Henry's estate of £658 passed to his widow, Mary.³²

907094 Leading Aircraftman Roy WATLING-GREENWOOD, R.A.F.V.R.

Roy Watling GREENWOOD born on 7 April 1919 in Brentford, Middlesex, to Arthur Ernest and Violet Mary Celine GREENWOOD, with Watling being his mother's maiden name. At some stage in his early life, Roy appears to have adopted his second forename as a double-barrelled surname, becoming Roy WATLING-GREENWOOD. Roy's father died on viral meningitis in 1935, so his widow Violet remarried, and went on to have four more children with her new husband.

²⁹ This information is taken from his Service Record (Form 543), which does not name the E.F.R.T.S., but merely states Luton T.C.. The Form 1180 states 29 (or it could be 24) E.F.T.S., but this is not borne out in his Service Record, and is believed to refer to the pre-war E.F.R.T.S., which was opened on 1 August 1938.

³⁰ The Form 1180 gives the date on which he was awarded his wings as 2 August 1940. The date of 16 September 1940 is taken from his Service Record (Form 543), and this seems the more probable date.

³¹ See: www.Ancestry.co.uk

³² Ibid.

Roy married Adelaide GOODERE in the second quarter of 1939 in Brighton, Sussex, and they had a daughter in the summer of 1939. Roy and Adelaide lived at 88, Mansfield Road, Brighton following their marriage, until they moved to Barnstaple when Roy was posted to R.A.F. Chivenor. He enlisted in the Royal Air Force, and in December 1940, was a Class II, Engine Fitter, based at R.A.F. Chivenor. He was injured seriously in the crash, and he was taken to the North Devon Infirmary at Barnstaple. At the time of the air crash, the family were living at 8, Margrove Terrace, in the Yeo Vale area of Barnstaple, and it was to here that the telegram was sent advising the family of Roy's injuries and location. After a period in hospital in Barnstaple, WATLING-GREENWOOD was taken off the serious ill list on 22 December 1940, and later was transferred to a R.A.F. Hospital for further treatment and rehabilitation. He suffered some permanent damage to one of his arms, which he could never raise about his shoulder. These injuries appear to have led to his retirement from the R.A.F. on the grounds of disability during the war.

After the war, Roy WATLING-GREENWOOD set up his own car body repair business. His disability did not stop him following his passion of racing motor cars, and between 1950 and 1957, he competed in twenty-one races, at Goodwood (10), Brands Hatch (4), Silverstone (4), Thruxton (1), Snetterton (1) and Jersey (1). He had to retire in one race, but finished won seven races, was second in two others, and third in four more. On twenty of these races, he drove a R.W.G. racing car, built by himself, and on the other occasion, a Lotus. He became a Life Member of the British Racing Drivers' Club, having joined in 1955. He built racing cars and was an expert panel beater.

Roy WATLING-GREENWOOD also developed a passion for flying light aircraft, and owned an aircraft called a Turbulent. He established a firm called RWG Propellers, and he gained a great reputation for making propellers for aircraft. He lived at 20A, Lewes Road, Ridgewood, in Sussex, and died on 3 February 2011. He was cremated at Eastbourne Crematorium on 17 February.

Conclusions – L.9943

The loss of Sgt BLATCHFORD was the first casualty incurred at R.A.F. Chivenor, and it occurred before the base became operational. It appears that he had commenced his operational training at R.A.F. Silloth and transferred with his crew to complete his training at R.A.F. Chivenor. Sadly, he was destined not reach an operational squadron. It was necessary for the pilots to qualify in night flying, a very demanding skill, and the circumstances suggest that this flight was his first, or an early solo night sortie for him to qualify as an operational pilot.

Night flying was difficult and dangerous during the Second World War. Black out conditions applied across the U.K., meaning that many useful landmarks were not available. If the moonlight was poor, or cloud obstructed the moonlight, then pilots had to fly in blackness with few, if any, external references. It must have been daunting for a young pilot to undertake their first solo flight at night, there was a lot to remember, and no-one sat beside you to support you and correct you if you missed something. The pilots were completely reliant on their instruments when night flying, and a simple mistake could prove costly, even fatal, as sadly happened to James BLATCHFORD.

In Memoriam

19 December 1940 – Bristol Beaufort Mk. I – L.9943

No.	Surname	Forenames(s)	Age	Date of Death	Rank	Role	Service	Service Number	Place of Burial	Grave
1.	BLATCHFORD ³³	James	20	19/12/40	Sergeant	Pilot	R.A.F.V.R.	745212	Bedford Cemetery	Sec. R. Grave 734.



Left – The scene of the crash taken in April 2017. The aircraft came in above the two large trees left of centre, crossed the road and crashed into this field. The boggy area where the main wreckage came to rest is in the immediate foreground.

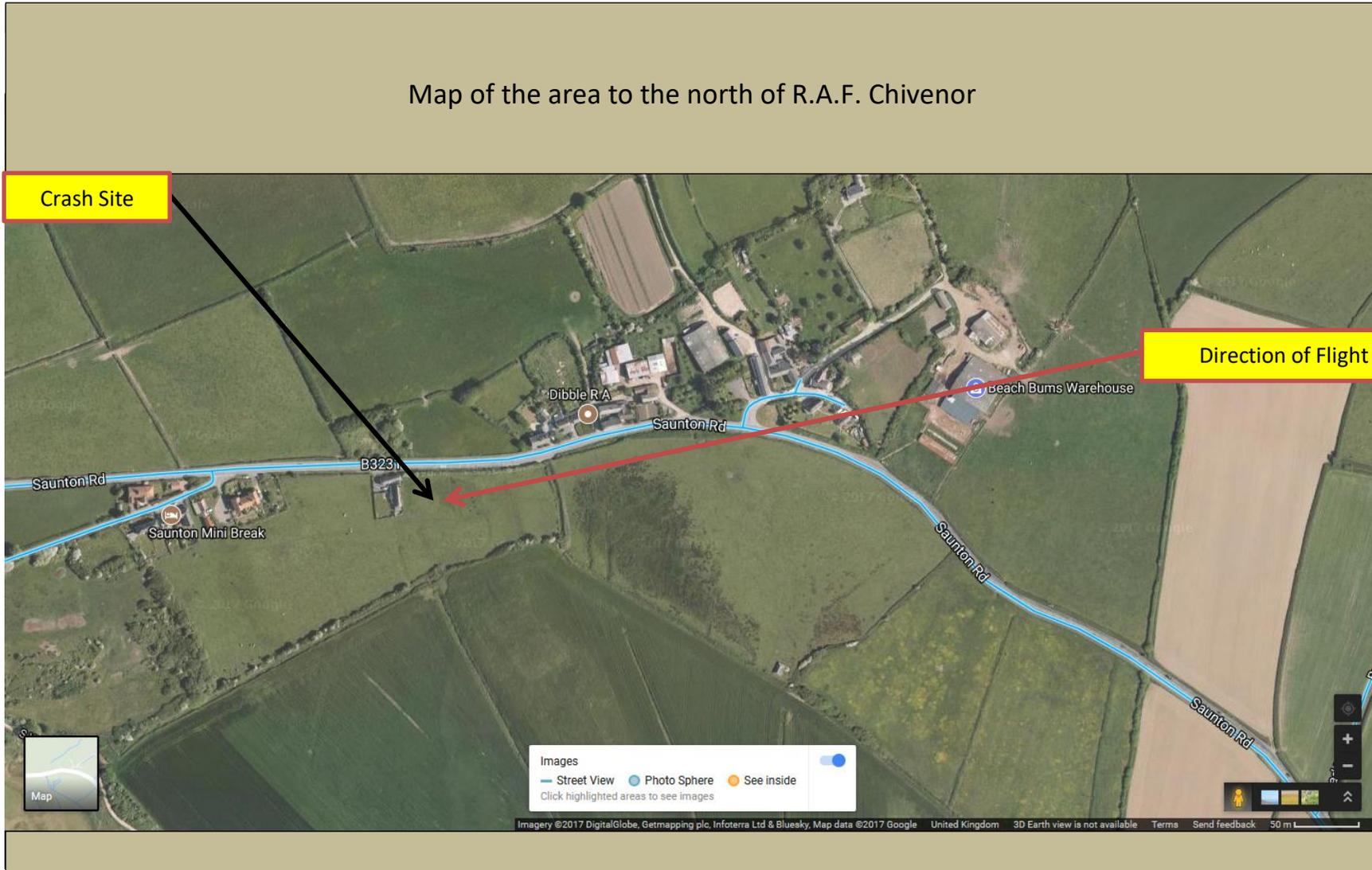
Taken by: Graham MOORE, April 2017

³³ Son of James H. and Mary BLATCHFORD, of Bedford, Bedfordshire.

Map of the area to the north of R.A.F. Chivenor



Map of the area to the north of R.A.F. Chivenor

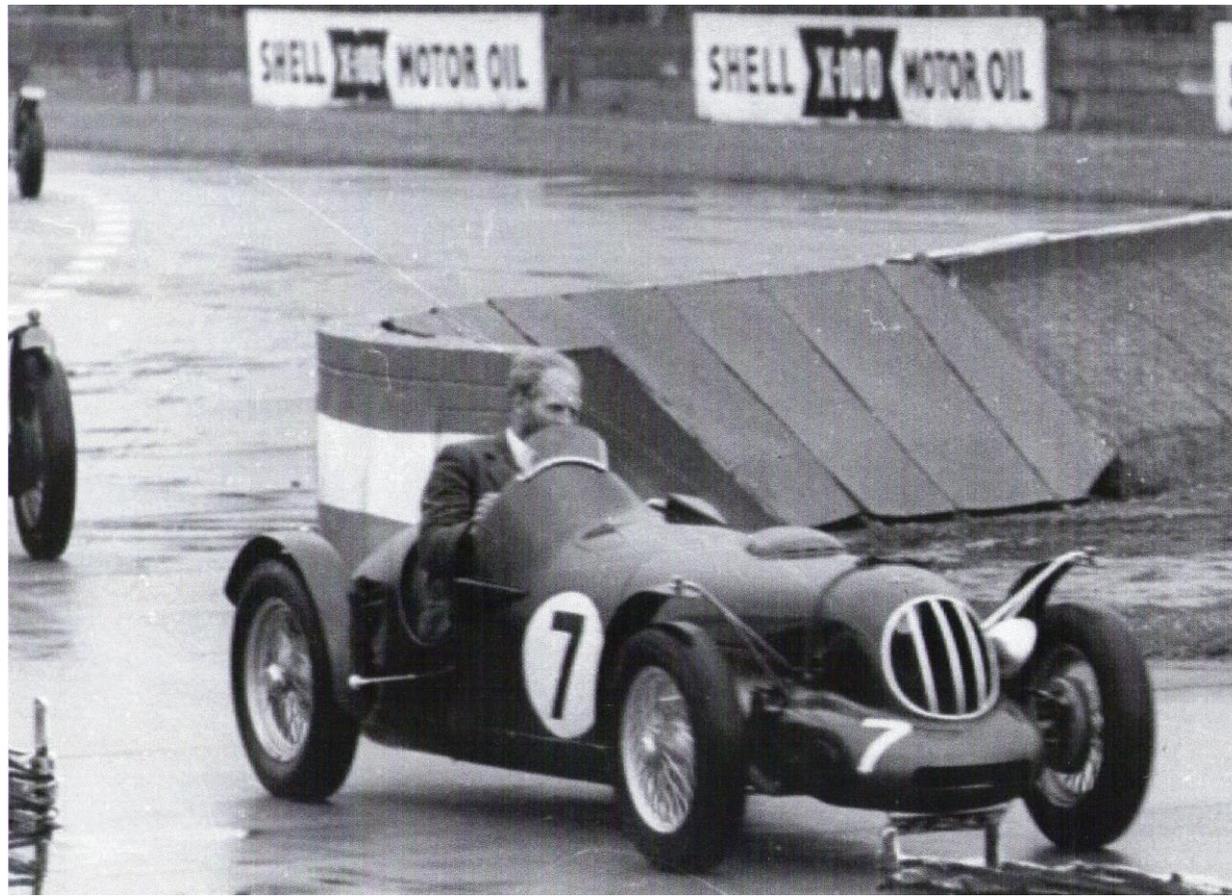




Left – Sergeant James BLATCHFORD, proudly displaying his pilot wings, probably shortly after passing out from his Service Flying Training course in 1940.

Courtesy of Kate DODD, Niece

Right – The cockpit of a Beaufort, an Australian version



Above Left – A portrait of Roy WATLING-GREENWOOD.

Above Right – Roy driving the RWG racing car he built and raced successfully.

Courtesy of: Anne WATLING-GREENWOOD



*Above Left – Roy and his daughter Ann stood by one of his beloved cars.
Above Right – Roy posing with a wooden propeller he had made.*

Courtesy of: Ann WATLING-GREENWOOD

Circumstances of the Crash – L.9829

At 21.45 hours in the evening of 18 February 1941, Sgt A. H. S. EVANS, R.A.F.V.R. took off from R.A.F. Chivenor on a solo, night flying, training flight in Beaufort Mk. I L.9829. Witnesses saw the aircraft climb too steeply, turn through 180 degrees, and then fly into a hill about one mile north of Chivenor. The crash site was near St. Augustine's church in the village of Heanton Punchardon, and it has been identified as a field immediately below the Heanton Nursing Home.³⁴ The pilot and sole occupant of the aircraft was:

741895	Sgt A. H. S. EVANS, R.A.F.V.R.	Pilot
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The time of the crash was about 21.40 hours.³⁵ The aircraft burst into flames on impact, but Sgt EVANS was rescued alive, albeit seriously injured. An ambulance took him to the North Devon Infirmary in Barnstaple, where Sgt EVANS died from his injuries the next day at 16.45 hours.³⁶

At the request of his mother, the body of Sgt EVANS was taken to Cockburnspath Parish Church in Berwickshire for burial, and he lies today in Plot Section 80, Grave 220 of the churchyard. His grave is inscribed with the words: *'God will Bind, The Broken Chain, Closer when we meet again, Mother.'* In addition, he is commemorated on the Memorial inside the church at Cockburnspath, and on the Luton Vauxhall Motors War Memorial.³⁷

Bristol Beaufort Mk. I L.9829 was one of the batch of two-hundred and twenty-one aircraft delivered to the R.A.F. between March and August 1940. It was fitted with two Bristol Taurus engines, 130827 and 130626. It was delivered new to No. 22 Squadron, and presumably saw some operational service. The Beaufort arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor on 8 January 1941 from R.A.F. Silloth. The Form 1180 records the fate of this aircraft as: *'Flew into hill on take-off, Chivenor, 18.2.41'*.³⁸

Court of Inquiry

Although the Operations Record Book for No. 3 (C) O.T.U. does not record the convening of any Court of Inquiry for this crash, The Air Ministry directed that one be convened to investigate this incident.³⁹ The Court of Inquiry reported that, as far as they could ascertain, the crash was not as a result of airframe or engine failure.

³⁴ The *R.A.F. Chivenor Operations Record Book* (TNA AIR 28/152) describes the location of the crash as *'near Chivenor Church'*. There is no church at Chivenor, so it is assumed to mean the Parish Church at Heanton Punchardon, just above R.A.F. Chivenor.

³⁵ The ORB (Ibid) states the time of the crash was 21.40 hours, but the Form 1180 gives the time as 21.45 hours. Australian sources state 20.35 hours.

³⁶ *R.A.F. Chivenor Operational Record Book* (TNA AIR 28/152)

³⁷ See: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2812310/EVANS,%20ANDREW%20HAROLD%20SARGENT>

³⁸ HAYWARD, Roger *The Beaufort File* (Tonbridge, Air Britain (Historians) Ltd, 1990) p.37

³⁹ TNA AIR 28/152

Witness stated that in their opinion, the Beaufort climbed too steeply, then made a turn through 180 degrees when only 150 – 200 feet up and flew into the top of a hill. It concluded that the pilot failed to maintain control after take-off, because:

- 1) He did not go over to instruments command after take-off,
- 2) Bad instrument flying,
- 3) Panic resulting in pilot turning too sharply to see the flight path.

The Commanding Officer annotated the report to state that the pilot had been told of a slight tendency of the aircraft to turn to starboard, which could be corrected by the trimmer. Other pilots flying the same night stated they had no difficulty in take-off.

The outcome was a series of recommendations about flying training at R.A.F. Chivenor. The layout of the flight path and landing lights was to be reconsidered. A Blenheim Hood was an internal fabric hood that could be fitted to replicate the conditions of night flying during daylight hours, and it was recommended that the fitting of these hoods in Beauforts should be expedited. Lastly, it was stated that provision be made for further Link training (an early form of flight simulator), and that instructors improve the standard of blind flying.⁴⁰

Accidents Investigation Branch

It was likely that the Accidents Investigation Branch of the Air Ministry would have been notified about this crash and resultant fatality, and they would have appointed an investigator to conduct an enquiry into the circumstances however, no record of any enquiry has been located.⁴¹

The Air Crew

741895 Sergeant Andrew Harold Sargent EVANS, R.A.F.V.R.

Andrew Harold Sargent EVANS was born in Adelaide, South Australia in 1917. His father, Harold Easton EVANS served as a Private (service number 2409) in the 48th Australian Infantry Battalion, during the First World War. He had been born in January 1890 at Kangaroo Island, South Australia, a son of Isaac Sargent and Sarah EVANS. He was educated at Goodwood School, and then Goodwood Public School, in the suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia. He listed his religion as Methodist, although it is not known how active the family were in terms of their faith.

Harold EVANS became a butcher in Goodwood, South Australia, which is where he met and married Mary Helen EVANS.⁴² They set up home at 14, Ada Street, Goodwood, and later moved to Hyde Park, Adelaide.

⁴⁰ The Court of Enquiry report has not been located, this information is taken from the Form 1180.

⁴¹ A search has been made of the AVIA files at TNA,

⁴² Mary's middle name is sometimes given as 'Ellen'. It is not clear which is correct.

Harold Easton EVANS enlisted on 8 July 1916, in the rank of Private, and formed part of the Fifth Reinforcement for the 48th Battalion. His unit embarked on board H.M.A.T. Anchises at Adelaide on 28 August 1916. Private H. E. EVANS served in France and Belgium, until he was seriously wounded. He was evacuated to the 5th Casualty Clearing Station, where he died of his wounds on 15 May 1918, at the age of twenty-nine years. Private H. E. EVANS is buried in Plot II, Row B., Grave 18., of the Crouy-Sur-Somme British Cemetery, Crouy St. Pierre, Amiens, France.⁴³ This means that Andrew would have never known his father, other than through artefacts and the memories of others.

Andrew was educated at the Unley Central School (also described as the Unley Model School), and the Thebarton Technical School in Adelaide. After leaving school, Andrew gained employment with an Adelaide motor car firm. Mary Helen EVANS left Australia with Andrew to live in the United Kingdom circa 1938. Mary EVANS had been born in Duns, Berwickshire, so she returned to her roots. Her family had emigrated to Australia when Mary was seventeen years of age, with her father dying in Adelaide in 1926.

When he joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in 1938, Andrew EVANS was living at 153, Crawley Green Road, Luton, in Bedfordshire, and he was working for Vauxhall Motors in the town. EVANS started his flying training at the same school as James BLATCHFORD, namely No. 24 Elementary Flying Training School (E.F.T.S.), at Luton. Originally known as No. 23 E.F.T.S., this school was formed at Rochester, Kent, in April 1938 by Messrs. Short Brothers (Rochester and Bedford) Ltd., under contract with the Air Ministry. It moved to Belfast in January 1939, and then to Luton in Bedfordshire in July 1940. In February 1942, it moved to R.A.F. Sealand in Cheshire, returning to Rochester following the end of the war.

EVANS was awarded his Flying Badge ('Wings') in May 1940, and he was posted to No. 1 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit at R.A.F. Silloth in Cumberland, which had opened the previous month. Sgt EVANS was posted to No. 42 Squadron at R.A.F. Wick in Caithness on 8 October 1940, along with three other Sergeant pilots. The Squadron was undergoing a period of transition, with reliability problems evident with the Bristol Taurus engines that powered the Bristol Beaufort. Only a few operational sorties were being flown, and so on 4 November 1940, Sgt EVANS flew a couple of sorties with No. 269 Squadron, which was also based at R.A.F. Wick. This Squadron was equipped with the Lockheed Hudson, and Sgt EVANS flew as the navigator with P/O PHILLIPS as the pilot. Their first sortie was on 1 November 1940, when they were airborne from 09.30 until 15.15 hours on an uneventful patrol.

On 4 November, they took off at 14.47 hours on a patrol along the Norwegian coastline. While on patrol, they sighted and attacked a German Heinkel 111 aircraft about eighty miles east of the Shetland Islands. After overhauling the Heinkel, P/O PHILLIPS fired a burst from the front guns from slightly above the port quarter.

⁴³ <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R1722631/>

The Hudson's rear gunner, Sgt COPELAND, fired a good burst from between fifty and seventy-five yards, putting the top turret of the Heinkel out of action. After some manoeuvring, the Hudson formatted on the starboard side of the enemy aircraft, allowing the rear gunner to fire some more bursts from only about twenty yards away. The port engine of the enemy aircraft caught fire and the lower turret was put out of action. The enemy aircraft returned fire from its remaining machine guns, and Sgt EVANS was hit in the leg. As a result of the Hudson being hit by incendiary bullets, the cockpit filled with smoke, and as a result, P/O PHILLIPS lost contact with the Heinkel. The enemy aircraft was last seen with its port engine on fire, gradually losing height towards the water.

After recovering from his wound, Sgt EVANS flew a sortie back with No. 42 Squadron acting as the navigator for the pilot, F/L BAILLON. Sgt PUGH and Sgt HALEY were the two wireless operators/air gunners on this flight. They took-off at 11.50 hours in Beaufort L.9890 on a patrol over the Norwegian coastline. They made landfall, but insufficient cloud cover meant that F/L BAILLON decided to return to base, having sighted no shipping or enemy aircraft. They landed at 14.20 hours.

On 19 December 1940, Sgt EVANS was one of nineteen Sergeant Pilots from No. 42 Squadron who left R.A.F. Wick for Barnstaple (R.A.F. Chivenor) for conversion training on Beauforts. They were accompanied by P/O TERRY who was attending the same course. Twenty pilots from No. 42 Squadron arrived at R.A.F. Chivenor on 30 December 1940, to undertake a conversion course on Bristol Beauforts. The actual course commenced the next day.

Sgt EVANS died on 18 February 1941 when this course from No. 42 Squadron progressed to night flying practice. At the time of his death, he had flown a total of one-hundred and ninety-one hours on all types. He had flown fifty-four hours on Bristol Beauforts, all within the past six months, but only twenty-nine of them were solo, with nineteen as Second Pilot and six on dual instruction. EVANS had spent twenty-nine hours on instrument training, and twenty hours in the Link Trainer. The crucial information is that Sgt EVANS had only flown five hours (out of the total of fifty-four) at night, and only two of those were solo.

The mother of Andrew EVANS, Mary, was living at Akieside Cottage, Cove, Cockburnspath, Berwickshire, but it is not known when she moved there.⁴⁴ His estate amounted to £306 16s 10d, which was left to his mother. The Berwickshire News and General Advertiser for 4 March 1941 contained the following report:

Military Funeral at Cockburnspath

Mrs. Evans, of Adelaide, Australia, at present residing at Akieside Cottage, Cove, Cockburnspath, received information last week that her only son, Sergeant Andrew Harold Sargent Evans, R.A.F., was seriously ill at a hospital in the south of England. She immediately prepared to journey to the hospital, but before setting out received notice that her son had died.

⁴⁴ <http://ww2talk.com/forums/topic/33548-air-force-deaths-involving-raafraf-australians-in-scotland-chronologically/>

Mrs. Evans, a daughter of the late Mr. James Doughty, contractor, Duns, and of Mrs. Doughty, Adelaide, emigrated to Australia with her family when 17 years of age. She eventually married Mr. Evans, an Australian, who, while gallantly serving in the A.I.F. during the last great war, died from wounds received on the Western Front. Her son was educated at Unley Model School, South Australia, and at the Technical High School at Thebarton. Flying, however, was his ambition, and, early in 1939, he came over to join the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve, Mrs. Evans accompanying him to the Mother Country. Last November, while on duty, he was wounded, and on February 18, he was seriously injured through a flying accident, dying the following day before his mother could reach him.

The funeral (which Mrs. Evans could not announce to her Duns friends because of interrupted and uncertain traffic services) took place, with military honours, at Cockburnspath Churchyard on Monday afternoon, detachments from local K.O.S.B. and R.A.F. being present, in addition to mourners from Cove and Cockburnspath. The services were conducted by the Rev D. F. Philip, Parish minister. A piper preceded the funeral cortege, a firing party was at the graveside and a bugler sounded the Last Post.

Sergeant Pilot Evans, who was 24 years of age, gave promise of a brilliant career in the R.A.F. and was popular with his officers, fellow N.C.O.s and men. His Group Captain has sent Mrs. Evans the following letter:- "It is with the deepest regret that I write to you on behalf of my officers, N.C.O.s and men, to sympathise with you in the loss of your son. He was doing very well and would, I feel sure, have distinguished himself when he had passed out of his Training Unit and joined the Operational Section. He will be greatly missed by his brother pilots, but you have the satisfaction of knowing that he died on active service, and I, for one, could not wish for a finer end."

Sergeant pilot Evans, like his father, has made the supreme sacrifice in fighting for the freedom of his country and Empire, while Mrs. Evans, having lost her husband and son on active service, has been called upon to bear a double cross and a heavy burden which she knows will not be in vain. Her many friends in Cockburnspath district and at Duns, Luton, London, and other places where she is known (and when the tragic news reaches them) will join in expressing their deepest sympathy to Mrs Evans in her irreparable loss.

The Adelaide Advertiser of 3 March 1941 reported how Flying Officer A. H. S. EVANS, of Erskine Street, Goodwood Park, had been killed abroad following a flying accident.⁴⁵ It stated that EVANS had been wounded in action against German aircraft in November 1940, which refers to his sortie of 4 November 1940. There were two obituary messages placed in the Adelaide Advertiser in respect of Andrew, one from his Auntie Irene and Roma (cousin), and the other from his grandma, M. DOUGHTY.

⁴⁵ The newspaper quoted an incorrect rank, as all other sources confirm his rank as Sergeant (Pilot).

Her tribute concluded with the words *'Too dearly loved ever to be forgotten'*, and included the passage:

*When I saw your smiling face,
You looked so bright and well:
Little did I think in parting,
It was our last farewell.*

The Adelaide Chronicle of 6 March 1941 correctly reported his death as being the result of a flying accident, and that he was the dearly beloved son of Mrs M. H. EVANS, formerly of Goodwood Park, and now of England.

Conclusions – L.9829

Sgt EVANS was about six weeks into his eight-week training programme at R.A.F. Chivenor with his colleagues from No. 42 Squadron. This period was consistent with the commencement of night flying, and this flight was an early solo night flight undertaken by Sgt EVANS. He was the first student at No. 3 (C) O.T.U. to lose his life while undertaking operational flying training at R.A.F. Chivenor.⁴⁶ Sadly, he would not be the last.

The Court of Enquiry made a series of recommendations to improve flying safety at R.A.F. Chivenor. The circumstances of the crash suggest that Sgt EVANS probably stalled the aircraft due to losing his spatial awareness while flying in darkness, exacerbated by his lack of experience in this form of flying. It must be placed in context that the aircraft of this period lacked so many of the flying aids a pilot can now take for granted, and the exigencies of wartime meant that pilot training was under pressure to meet the demands of the R.A.F. in terms of expansion and replacement of losses.

The R.A.F. was learning as it grew, and as the realities of wartime became apparent. The improvements could not come quickly enough, for on 24 February, just six days later, another pilot (MUNDY) from the same course was to lose his life under similar circumstances. Matters did improve, with the next loss at night occurring on 29 April 1941, and then engine failure becoming a more significant issue. Tragic as the loss of Sgt EVANS and his two colleagues was, it was not to be in vain as flying training did improve at R.A.F. Chivenor, with better night flying familiarisation. They were unlucky to be training at the beginning of the war, but that is how it was.

⁴⁶ Sgt BLATCHFORD lost his life on 19 December 1940, while serving at R.A.F. Chivenor, but his status is not known. No courses had officially commenced at the time of his death, other than a conversion course for instructors.

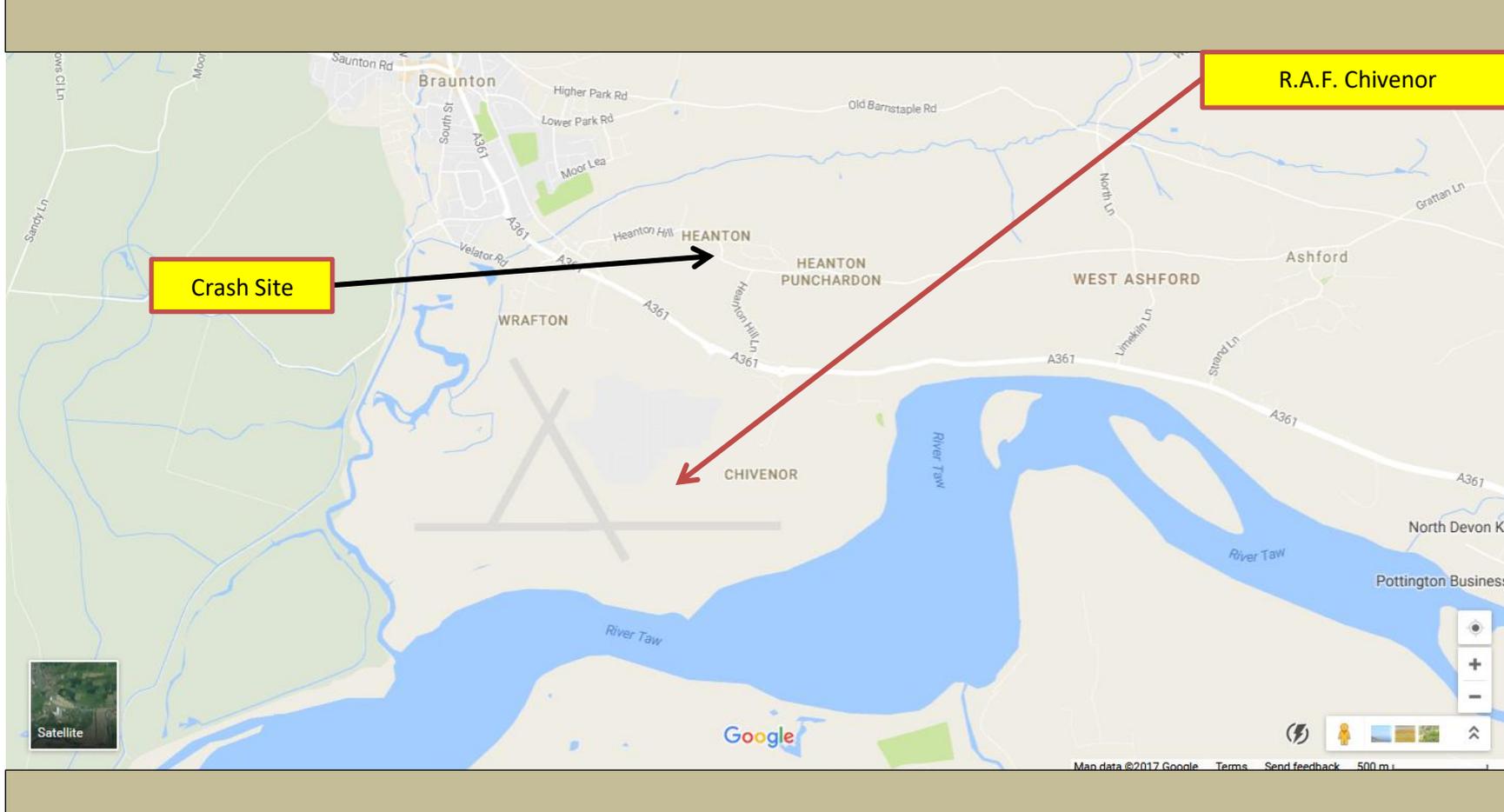
In Memoriam

18 February 1941 – Bristol Beaufort Mk. I – L.9829

No.	Surname	Forenames(s)	Age	Date of Death	Rank	Role	Service	Service Number	Place of Burial	Grave
1.	EVANS ⁴⁷	Andrew Harold Sargent	24	19/02/41	Sergeant	Pilot	R.A.F.V.R.	741895	Cockburnspath Parish C'yard	Sec. 80. Grave 220.

⁴⁷ Son of Harold Easton and Mary Helen EVANS, of Adelaide, South Australia.

Map of the area to the north of R.A.F. Chivenor



Map of the crash site of L.9829 – 18 February 1941





Above Left – Photograph of the grave of Sgt EVANS at Cockburnspath Parish Church, Berwickshire.

Above Right – A plaque inside the Parish Church at Cockburnspath.

Courtesy of: <http://warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com/warmemscot-ftopic6007.html>



Left – Photograph of the Vauxhall Motors Memorial, Luton.
 Courtesy of <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=cr&CRid=2591877>
 Right – Private Harold EVANS and Mrs Mary EVANS
 Courtesy of Graham MOORE

Circumstances of the Crash – L.9858

On 18 February, No. 3 (C) O.T.U. lost its first student pilot in an air crash, when Sgt A. H. S. EVANS crashed near Heanton Punchardon church in Beaufort L.9829. He was undertaking a solo, night flying sortie, appearing to climb too steeply before stalling, and crashing only about a mile from R.A.F. Chivenor. Just six days later, No. 3 (C) O.T.U. lost its second student pilot.⁴⁸

Bristol Beaufort Mk. I L.9858 was one of the batch of two-hundred and twenty-one aircraft delivered to the R.A.F. between March and August 1940. From its acceptance, it was allocated to the Torpedo Training Unit at R.A.F. Abbotsinch, Renfrewshire, and was transferred to No. 3 (C) O.T.U. on 15 January 1941.⁴⁹ At about 20.25 hours on Monday, 24 February 1941, this aircraft took off from R.A.F. Chivenor on a solo night flying exercise. Immediately after take-off, the aircraft was seen to dive into the ground at the Great Field, Braunton; just one and a half miles distance from the airfield.⁵⁰ The aircraft burst into flames upon impact, killing the pilot and sole occupant instantly. His body was taken to Braunton Mortuary.

33573 P/O H. MUNDY, R.A.F.⁵¹ Pilot

The pilot was Herbert MUNDY (who was known as Bob), who was born in South Africa. Both his parents had pre-deceased him, and although he had three brothers studying at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, his sister still lived in South Africa. All efforts to trace next-of-kin following his death were fruitless, both by the Royal Air Force and the Police, so the remains of P/O MUNDY were interred at parish church of St. Augustine's, Heanton Punchardon, St. Augustine's, which is located nearby and overlooking R.A.F. Chivenor.⁵²

The funeral service for P/O MUNDY was held on 1 March, at St. Augustine's Church, at Heanton Punchardon, overlooking the airfield. W/O LOVELL, was senior non-commissioned officer and Station Warrant Officer at R.A.F. Chivenor, paraded the funeral party at 14.30 hours at the Station Headquarters, from where the cortege left, with the coffin on a lorry, and an honour guard either side of the lorry. At the church, other aircrew acted as bearers to take the coffin into the church, and for the burial. Full military honours were accorded to the young South African, who became the first Second World War serviceman to be buried at the church.⁵³ He was to be joined by eighty-seven colleagues before the end of the war.

⁴⁸ *R.A.F. Chivenor Operational Record Book TNA AIR 28/152*

⁴⁹ HAYWARD, Roger *The Beaufort File* (Tonbridge, Air Britain (Historians) Ltd, 1990) p.37. The engines were Bristol Taurus Mk. II Mod I design, with 130831 on the Port side and 157318 on the Starboard side.

⁵⁰ HAYWARD Op. Cit. The crash site has been identified by Graham MOORE, as shown on the maps on Pages 9 and 10.

⁵¹ In some sources, the pilot's surname is given incorrectly as MUNDAY, but the Grave Registration Certificate and C.W.G.C. give the surname as MUNDY, which is the correct name.

⁵² <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2441691/MUNDY,%20HERBERT>

⁵³ AIR 28/152 Op. Cit.

Court of Inquiry

A R.A.F. Form 765 (C) was completed in respect of this crash.⁵⁴ It states that no evidence was forthcoming of any technical problems with either the engines or the airframe. Bob MUNDY had flown a total of one-hundred and forty hours, ten minutes on all types of aircraft; a typical amount for a pilot having completed his elementary and service flying training elements. Of these, only four hours and forty-five minutes had been flown at night, and most of that was probably dual instruction. In respect of flying the Beaufort, MUNDY had flown this type of aircraft for thirty-five hours and fifty-five minutes, with three hours and ten minutes at night. In addition, he had flown a total of six hours and fifty minutes using instruments only, and eleven hours had been flown using the Link Trainer, a ground based early flight simulator. The amount of time that MUNDY had spent in the air reflected the training programme of the early war period. It was limited, and there was relatively little time spent on night flying using instruments, which was a gap in training as many operational sorties in Coastal Command would be undertaken at night.

Under General Remarks, it states:

It has been discovered that some pupils have not followed the instructions given them by their Instructors and have been attempting to take off by using the 'rate of climb' indicator. This instrument is very sensitive and may mislead a pupil, causing him to pump handle violently in an endeavour to follow the instrument. While this is going on the pilot possibly puts on rudder – the aircraft banks and the pupil watching the rate of climb indicator pulls back the stick to raise the nose of the aircraft. The result is a steep turn at low altitude with fatal results.⁵⁵

The Commanding Officer of R.A.F. Chivenor, G/C SADLER concurred with this analysis. He added that all pupils were carefully checked on instrument flying. In addition, a new system of landing lights was being tried out. At the time of the crash, P/O MUNDY had flown a total of one-hundred and forty hours on all types, of which thirty-five hours and fifty-five minutes were on Bristol Beauforts. Tellingly, only four hours forty-five minutes had been flown at night, of which three hours ten minutes were in a Beaufort. Only six-hours and fifty minutes had been flown using instruments only, and eleven hours had been spent on the Link Trainer.

Accidents Investigation Branch

It was likely that the Accidents Investigation Branch of the Air Ministry would have been notified about this crash and resultant fatality, but that no investigation by them was deemed appropriate.

⁵⁴ Form 765 (C) – Report on Flying Accident or Forced Landing Not Attributable to Enemy Action. Casualty File TNA AIR 81/5246.

⁵⁵ Form 765 (C) *ibid.*

The Air Crew

33573 Pilot Officer Herbert MUNDY, R.A.F.

Herbert (Bob) MUNDY was the son of the late Dr Herbert MUNDY, F.C.R.S., and his late wife, Olive Liddel MUNDY, of 170, Florida Road, Durban, South Africa.⁵⁶ They had six children, namely:

- Raymond MUNDY – Born 1912
- Norman Butlin MUNDY – Born 8 June 1913
- Malcolm Lockwood MUNDY – Born 1914
- Barbara Joan MUNDY (later CHADWICK) – Born 1918
- Herbert MUNDY – Born 1920
- Giles Firbank MUNDY – Born 1922

Dr. Herbert MUNDY had been born in Kennington, Oxfordshire, on 16 July 1871, the son of a farmer. He attended Faversham School, and trained as a surgeon at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, in London. In 1894, he won the senior anatomy prize, and in 1898, the Brackenbury surgical scholarship. In 1903, having already established his credentials as a surgeon, he left the U.K. for South Africa. He established a general practice in Durban, in partnership with a friend of his, and learnt Tamil and Hindustani to be able to treat Indian patients. He married Olive Liddell STEVENS on 26 April 1911, who was a trained nurse, and they went on to have six children: five boys and one girl.

During the First World War, Dr. MUNDY served in East Africa, returning to his practice after the war. He died on 26 May 1932, from malaria, which he contracted having visited his farm in Zululand. His car broke down on the way back, and he was forced to spend one night sleeping on the veld, during which he was bitten and contracted the disease. He was buried in Durban, with over one-thousand people attending his funeral. Following the death of her husband, Olive, brought her family to London, where three of her children became students at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. She died on 8 June 1938, in London from pneumonia.

Herbert MUNDY was born on 29 October 1920 in Durban, South Africa. He attended Highbury School in South Africa from 1928 until 1931. After the family moved to London in 1932, Herbert attended the Leinster House School at Putney Hill in London SW 15 from 1933 until 1934. He then St. Edward's School at Oxford, from 1934 until 1939. After the death of his mother, HERBERT's guardian became Mrs. Norah MOORE, of 11, Glebe Avenue, Enfield, London. She pre-deceased Bob, although this was not known to the authorities at the time of his death, and his next of kin were identified as his brother, Surgeon Lieutenant N. B. MUNDY, of Chatham Naval Barracks, or Dr. MOORE (the daughter of Norah MOORE) who lived at West Cottage, Horton Emergency Hospital in Epsom, Surrey.

⁵⁶ See: www.Ancestry.co.uk

MUNDY joined the R.A.F. having achieved entry to the R.A.F. College at Cranwell, where he came a Flight Cadet with effect from 27 April 1939. He trained to fly at R.A.F. Cranwell, he was awarded his Flying Badge (Wings') on 30 November 1939. MUNDY graduated from the College on 6 March 1940, and he was granted a permanent commission with effect from 7 March 1940 in the rank of Pilot Officer, on probation. Twenty-five students had commenced the course with him, with MUNDY listed at sixteenth in the order of merit on joining. Twenty-two students graduated, but the order of merit is not shown.

On the completion of his training, P/O MUNDY was posted to R.A.F. Abbotsinch in Renfrewshire with effect from 23 March 1940. This was the home of the Torpedo Training Unit, and on completion of his course, P/O MUNDY would have been posted to an operational squadron. He was aged twenty years when he died, and he was single. The total hours flown by P/O MUNDY at the time of his death were one-hundred fifty-two hours, but the most telling statistic was that P/O MUNDY had only flown five hours in total at night, of which only three were on the Beaufort aircraft.

The youngest of the six children, Giles Firbank MUNDY, joined the Scots Guards during the Second World War. On 25 May 1944, Lieutenant 247098 Giles Firbank MUNDY was killed on active service with the 1st Battalion, Scots Guards, in Italy. He is buried in Grace III, A, 17, of the Caserta War Cemetery in Italy.⁵⁷

Conclusions – L.9858 and Overall

Without a copy of any Court of Inquiry, or report from the Accidents Investigation Branch, the cause of the air crash that claimed the life of P/O Bob MUNDY must remain speculation. It is assumed that P/O MUNDY was a student on No. 2 Course at No. 3 (C) O.T.U., as he was not one of the pilots from No. 42 Squadron undertaking their training at Chivenor. He had reached the stage of their training programme where they had to qualify for night flying. Following an assessment from an instructor on a dual flying sortie, a pilot then had to undertake solo night-time sorties. It appears that both Sgt EVANS and P/O MUNDY died undertaking a night-time solo sortie during their training.

The crash of Beaufort L.9858 differs from that of L.9829 flown by Sgt EVANS, in that P/O MUNDY crashed into a field on a level plain about one mile from R.A.F. Chivenor. The Great Field is an ancient field system developed on the fluvial plain of the Rivers Taw and Caen, and it is at the same height as the runways of R.A.F. Chivenor. As the aircraft dived into the ground, this would suggest a catastrophic loss of flying control by the pilot. It is possible that the cause of the accident was spatial disorientation, brought about by flying at night, with few visual references, and insufficient training on instrument flying.

⁵⁷ See: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2067449/MUNDY,%20GILES%20FIRBANK>

Following the deaths of Sgt BLATCHFORD, P/O MUNDY and Sgt EVANS, all within the first months of the operation of R.A.F. Chivenor as a training base, the syllabus for pilots was changed to give greater time flying in the 'Link' simulator and practicing instrument flying before flying solo at night. As W/C RIDGEWAY stated in his report on the crash of Sgt BLATCHFORD, once the training had been improved, there were no further losses of pilots undertaking their first night-time flights from R.A.F. Chivenor, although on 28 April 1941, Sgt MORRISON died on a night-time solo flight.

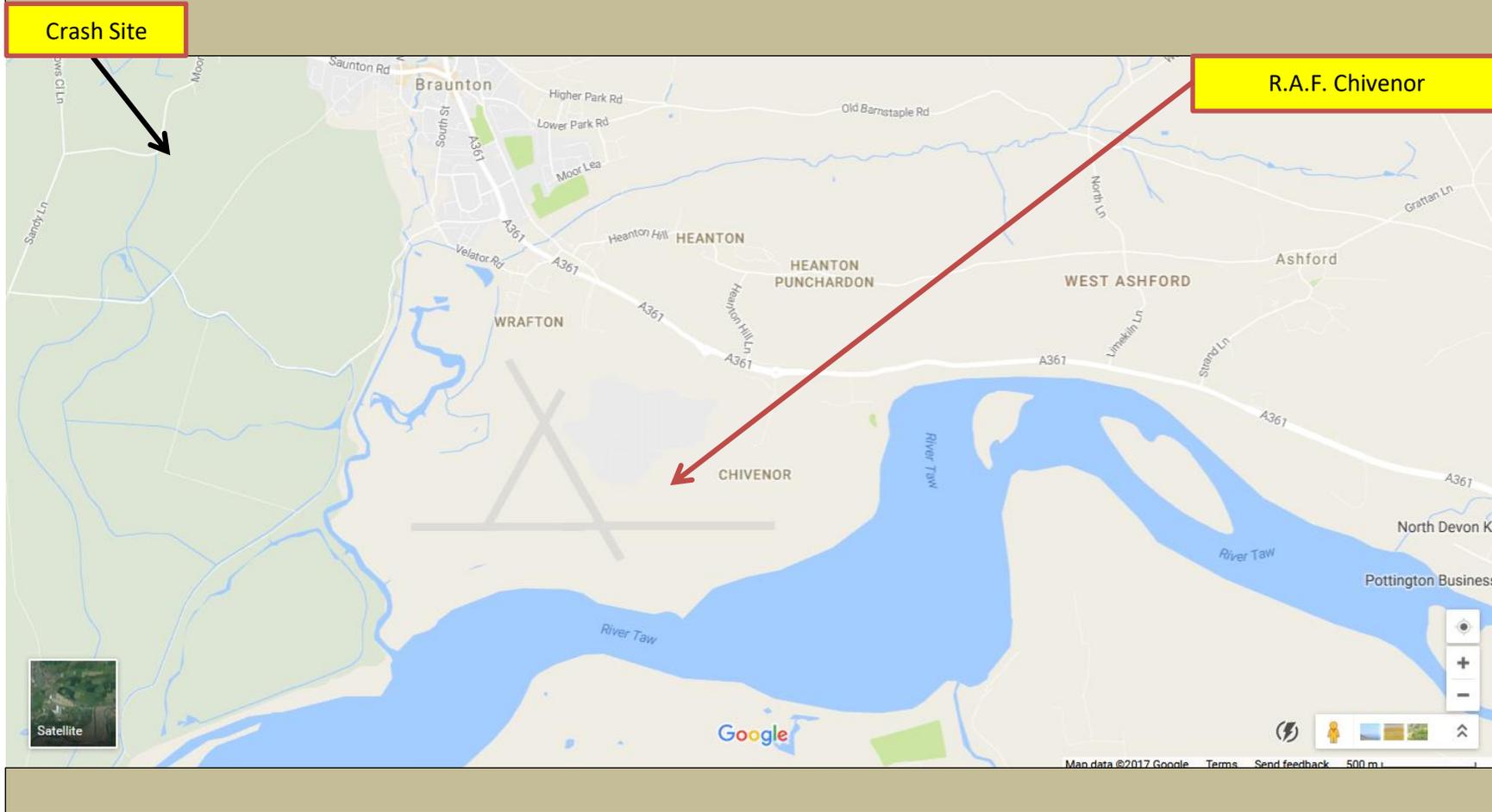
Sgt BLATCHFORD, Sgt EVANS and P/O MUNDY were simply victims of a training programme not yet fit for purpose, not having sufficient instrument training, nor night flying experience, to cope with issues that arose in their flights. It is to the credit of senior officers at R.A.F. Chivenor and within Coastal Command that inadequacies in the training programme were addressed and the training improved over time. They were unfortunate in undertaking their training so early in the war, when the demands of producing front-line pilots meant that their training was in some ways deficient. That was not their fault: they were unlucky.

In Memoriam

24 February 1941 – Bristol Beaufort Mk. I – L.9829

No.	Surname	Forenames(s)	Age	Date of Death	Rank	Role	Service	Service Number	Place of Burial	Grave
1.	MUNDY	Herbert	20	24/02/41	Pilot Officer	Pilot	R.A.F.	33573	Heanton Punchardon	Row R. Grave 7.

Map of the area to the north of R.A.F. Chivenor



Map of the crash site of L.9858 – 24 February 1941





Left – A photograph of the medical staff of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, around 1900. Dr Herbert MUNDY is seated on the extreme left of the front row, and his shown as the House Surgeon. Courtesy of Christine MUNDY



Above – 'B' Squadron, R.A.F. College, Cranwell in July 1939. Herbert MUNDY is stood at the extreme right of the third row, and he is marked with the addition of a blue arrow.

Courtesy of: R.A.F. Cranwell



PILOT OFFICER HERBERT MUNDY, R.A.F., who was killed in an aircraft accident in England recently. He was the fourth son of the late Dr. and Mrs. Herbert Mundy, of Durban. Educated at Highbury, Hillcrest, he later went overseas to St. Edward's School, Oxford. From January, 1938, to January, 1940, he went to Cranwell. Fifteen months ago he received his commission in the R.A.F., and served in a bomber squadron on the east and south coast of Britain. He was 20 years old.



Left – A newspaper report of the death of P/O Herbert MUNDY.

Above – Grave of P/O H. MUNDY at Heanton Punchardon Cemetery, Braunton, Devon.

The Author 2016

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www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

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Published by: The Author.
