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Vickers Wellington Mk. IC N.2887  
Central Gunnery School, R.A.F. Sutton Bridge, circa 1943

## THE LAST FLIGHT OF:

# WELLINGTON DV.433

A narrative of the last flight of Wellington DV.433, which crashed near R.A.F. Finningley, Yorkshire, 9 September 1942, killing the four air crew onboard, including Sergeant Reg TURPITT, from Tawstock, Barnstaple, North Devon.

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## **The Last Flight of Wellington DV.433**

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## Introduction

In the quiet churchyard of St. Peter, Tawstock, near Barnstaple in North Devon, there is a Commonwealth War Grave Commission headstone to a Sergeant R. V. TURPITT. Tawstock is a small village, now with no shop or pub, but retaining its thatched school. The church is down a lane below the former Tawstock Court, a large private house that was the home of the WREY family, who were Earls of Bath, local landowners, and rectors of the church. The Reverend Sir Albany Bouchier Sherard WREY, 13<sup>th</sup> Baronet, let Tawstock Court to become a school in 1940, but it is a private residence again now.

Sgt TURPITT lies alongside his parent's grave, in this peaceful countryside location, a victim of the global and all-encompassing Second World War that affected all corners of the United Kingdom. He died in a training accident in the Royal Air Force in 1942, and this is his story.

## The Vickers Wellington

The Vickers Wellington was the mainstay of Bomber Command from the beginning of the Second World War until supplanted by the Avro Lancaster in 1943. Affectionately known as the 'Wimpey', the aircraft continued in training roles and operationally with Coastal Command and in the Mediterranean theatre. The Air Ministry issued Specification B.9/32, in 1932, for the design of a heavy bomber. Vickers developed a design, using the geodetic structure designed by Barnes WALLIS, who was a senior engineer for the company. The airframe was constructed with a metal structure and covered with fabric. Vickers used this method for the single engine Wellesley bomber, which was then entering service with the Royal Air Force. The prototype Wellington made its first flight, at the company's airfield at Weybridge, Surrey, on 15 June 1936.

The first production Wellington Mk. I aircraft were delivered to No. 9 Squadron in October 1938. They were fitted with two 1,050 Bristol Pegasus Mk. XVIII engines. These aircraft had a turret in the nose and tail, and a retractable Nash & Thompson ventral turret under the aircraft. The Mk IA Wellington had powered Nash & Thompson turrets instead of the original Vickers design, and in the Mk. IC, the ventral turret was discarded, but two beam guns were added. The Mark IC was the main version used early in the war, with 2,685 built.

The Wellington Mk. II had two Rolls-Royce Merlin Mk. X engines, each developing 1,145 hp, as the Bristol Aircraft Company anticipated a shortage of Pegasus engines. In fact, the shortage arose in the supply of Merlin engines, so the Mk. III design had two Bristol Hercules Mk. III or XI engines, each developing 1,370 hp. The Merlins were liquid cooled, in-line engines, while the Hercules were air cooled radials. The Mk. IV Wellington was fitted with American Pratt & Whitney R-1830-S3C4GT Twin Wasp radial engines. The Wellington Mk. V and VI were experimental, high altitude versions, and the Mk. VII was cancelled. The final bomber version was the Mk. X, which were delivered to the R.A.F. from July 1942 onwards.

These were constructed of light alloy instead of mild steel, so the geodetic structure was lighter, yet stronger, than its predecessors were. The Mk. X had two Bristol Hercules Mk. VI or XVI engines. There were 1,519 Mk III aircraft produced and 400 Mark II. The Mark X was the last of the bomber variants, with 3,804 manufactured and delivered to the R.A.F. To increase production, Vickers opened a new factory in Chester, and later another was opened at Squires Gate near Blackpool. The first Chester built Wellington had the serial number L.7770 and the first built at Blackpool being X.3160. At the beginning of the Second World War, Bomber Command had six squadrons equipped with Wellingtons. On 4 September 1939, fourteen Wellingtons from No. 9 and No. 149 Squadrons were the first British bombers to attack Germany in the Second World War, with the attack directed at German warships.

On 18 September 1939, twenty-four Wellingtons from No. 9, 37 and 149 Squadrons set out to attack German warships and naval docks at Wilhelmshaven, but they were intercepted by enemy single-engine Me 109 and the twin-engine Me 110 fighters. Ten Wellingtons were shot down, and three returned badly damaged. The R.A.F. concluded that daylight bombing operations against Germany were not feasible, as they resulted in heavy losses of aircraft and aircrew. Simply, British bomber aircraft were too vulnerable to German fighters and air defences to operate effectively. The British switched to night-time attacks, with the Wellington becoming the main aircraft used by Bomber Command, until the four-engine 'heavy bombers' began to make an appearance in 1942.

Overnight 25/26 August 1940, nine Wellingtons from No. 99 Squadron and eight from No. 149 Squadron joined with twelve Hampdens and fourteen Whitleys in the R.A.F.'s first attack on Berlin. In the winter of 1941 and into 1942, no less than twenty-one squadrons of Bomber Command were equipped with the Wellington. In the first 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne in May 1942, over half the aircraft taking part in that raid were Wellingtons. A Wellington was also the first aircraft to drop a 4,000 pound 'cookie' bomb in a raid on 1 April 1941. On 15 August 1942, two Wellington squadrons, No. 109 and 156, joined the newly formed 'Pathfinder Force' to guide the main bomber stream to the correct target. On 5 August 1941, Sgt J. A. WARD, R.N.Z.A.F., a member of No. 75 (New Zealand) Squadron climbed out onto the wing of a Wellington using the geodetic structure to put out a fire that was threatening the safety of the aircraft. For his gallantry, he was awarded the Victoria Cross, but he sadly lost his life shortly afterwards. The Wellington developed a reputation of being a sound and strong aircraft able to take significant punishment from enemy anti-aircraft fire or from being attacked by enemy fighters.

The crew of a Wellington was usually five or six. The pilot was sometimes accompanied by a second pilot on long flights, and initially in the war, a second pilot acted as the navigator. Once observers became established, they formed part of the crew, and were also responsible for dropping the bombs until September 1942, when the Air Bomber (or Bomb Aimer) role was created, and Observers became Navigators. The wireless operator was also trained as an air gunner, so they were dual rolled as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (WOp/AG). There was usually either a second WOp/AG and an Air Gunner (AG), or two AGs per crew, one for the front turret, and the other for the rear.

By the autumn of 1943, the Wellington had been replaced in R.A.F. Bomber Command in operations over Germany. The Wellington continued in effective use as a bomber in the Mediterranean, and South-East Asia. The first Wellingtons arrived in Egypt in the autumn of 1940, and they remained operational in the bombing role until the end of 1944. Wellingtons flew more operational hours in the Middle and Far East than in Western Europe. No. 37, 38 and 70 Squadrons became the first long-range bomber squadrons in the Middle East, where they formed No. 202 Group. By October 1942 and the decisive battle of El Alamein, six squadrons were equipped with the Wellington and operating in Egypt. Wellingtons also travelled out to India, with No. 99 and 215 Squadrons beginning to operate in South-East Asia in early 1942.

The threat posed by German mines around the coast of the United Kingdom grew to serious proportions by early 1940. The advent of magnetic mines was a major problem, so as one of the British responses, a Wellington Mk. I bomber was fitted with a ring around the entire aircraft, which was magnetised by a generator on-board the Wellington. This created the Wellington DWI Mk. I aircraft, which proved to be of limited effect operationally. The use of Wellingtons in the maritime role had commenced, with No. 221 Squadron being the first equipped with Wellingtons for the maritime reconnaissance and strike role.

The Germans and Italians both had large submarine fleets within their navies. These submarines were known to the British as U-boats. The term U-boat is an anglicised version of the German word U-boot, a shortening of the German Unterseeboot, which literally means 'underseaboat'. The U-boats commenced operating in the Atlantic from French bases shortly after the collapse of France in June 1940. They could operate on the surface with impunity at night, as they were virtually undetectable by British aircraft and warships because of their low silhouette. The scientific development by the British of Air-to-Surface Vessel (A.S.V.) radar meant that enemy ships, including U-boats, could be detected on the surface at night. Although A.S.V. could detect a surfaced U-boat from up to twelve miles away, as the aircraft closed in for an attack, the background returns from the surface of the sea obscured the location of the U-boat within a mile of the target.

A Squadron Leader LEIGH invented a mechanism by which a searchlight could be fitted in the vacant space left by the former retractable ventral turret underneath a Wellington aircraft. Using the generator fitted to a DWI Mk I aircraft to power the searchlight, a Wellington was modified to carry the A.S.V. Mk. II radar and searchlight (known as a Leigh Light). The initial trials proved successful, so other aircraft were modified and designated as General Reconnaissance Mark VIII versions. No. 1417 Flight was formed at R.A.F. Chivenor equipped with G.R. Mk. VIII aircraft to develop these aircraft for operational use. This Flight grew into No. 172 Squadron in early 1942, and the first operational sorties in June 1942 resulted in an Italian U-boat being located, illuminated, and attacked. The impact on the U-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic was dramatic and long-lasting. 394 Mark VIII aircraft were manufactured.

The Wellington G.R. Mk. XI was a maritime version of the Mk. X aircraft, and although fitted with the A.S.V. Mk. II radar, few (if any) were fitted with the Leigh Light. These aircraft were used for attacking enemy surface vessels, particularly in the Mediterranean region and 180 were built at Blackpool. The Mk. XII Wellington was another maritime version, with some fitted with the Leigh Light, of which, 58 were built at Weybridge and Chester. The invention of the centimetric A.S.V. Mk. III radar, with a revolving scanner, led to two further General Reconnaissance versions of the Wellington. Both the G.R. XIII and G.R. XIV had the new radar installed in the nose, covered by a blister, and were powered by the improved Hercules Mk. XVII engines. The Mk. XIII was used for shipping strikes, and could carry two 18" torpedoes, and the G.R. Mk. XIV was fitted with the Leigh Light and armed with depth charges to attack U-boats. It is believed that the maritime versions of the Wellington accounted for in whole, or in part, the sinking of twenty-seven U-boats. 843 Mk XIII aircraft were built at Blackpool, commencing with HX.551, and 841 Mk XIV Wellingtons were built at Blackpool and Chester.

In the Mediterranean, the Wellington was used as a torpedo bomber and for maritime reconnaissance with six squadrons used in this role in the theatre. Wellington Mk VIII aircraft equipped with A.S.V. radar were popularly known as 'Snoopingtons' or 'Goofingtons', and their role was to patrol the shipping lanes throughout the night and use flares to illuminate enemy convoys. The torpedo carrying Wellingtons were known as 'Torpingtons' or 'Fishingtons' and they were directed to attack enemy shipping. No. 179 Squadron operated from Gibraltar with the Air to Surface Vessel (A.S.V.) radar and Leigh Light equipped Mk VIII, and later Mk XIII and Mk. XIV aircraft.

The Wellingtons operated by Coastal Command and on maritime roles in the Mediterranean usually had an aircrew of six: a pilot (who was also the captain of the aircraft), a second pilot due to the length of the sorties, an observer/navigator, and three dual rolled wireless operators/air gunners. These three men would rotate around between the W/T (wireless telegraphy), S/E (special equipment, or radar set) and rear turret seats during the ten-hour long sorties.

11,461 Wellingtons were built in total, of which 3,406 were manufactured at Squires Gate. The last Wellington built by Vickers was delivered to the R.A.F. on 13 October 1945, one of the few R.A.F. aircraft to be built throughout the six years of the Second World War. The last Wellingtons used by the R.A.F. were retired from their training role in 1953.

All versions of the Wellington were 60 feet, 6 inches in length, with a wingspan of 85 feet, 10 inches. As the engines became more powerful, from the 1,000 horsepower Bristol Pegasus Mk. XX fitted to the Mark I aircraft, to the 1,675 horsepower Bristol Hercules Mk. XVI engines in the Mk. X, XIII and XIV, so the performance of the aircraft improved. The maximum speed of 245 mph for the Mk. I, rose to 254 mph with the Mk. X and derivatives. The ceiling increased slightly from 21,600 feet to about 22,000 feet, but this was irrelevant in the maritime reconnaissance roles, as the usual operating height was only about 1,500 feet.



## R.A.F. Finningley and No. 25 Operational Training Unit

R.A.F. Finningley is situated in the south of the county of Yorkshire, close to the town of Doncaster. It was opened in 1936, as one of the pre-Second World War airfields constructed under the expansion scheme of the mid to late 1930's. The first two squadrons to occupy the airfield were No. 7 and No. 102 Squadrons, equipped with the Handley Page Heyford bombers, with the official date of opening being 3 September 1936. At the outbreak of the Second World War, No. 7 Squadron and No. 76 Squadron were based at R.A.F. Finningley, equipped with twin-engine Handley Page Hampden bombers.

By October 1939, the two operational squadrons had been transferred to R.A.F. Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire, with No. 106 Squadron moving into R.A.F. Finningley, as a reserve squadron equipped with Hampdens. This unit began to take responsibility for operational training of air crews for No. 5 Group, Bomber Command. On 1 March 1941, No. 106 Squadron was designated as No. 25 Operational Training Unit. Initially, the O.T.U. operated Ansons and Hampdens, but by early 1942, Vickers Wellington bombers had replaced the Hampdens, and the station was now under No. 92 Group, and later No. 93 Group.

On 7 January 1943, No. 25 O.T.U. was disbanded, with its aircraft dispersed to No. 27 and 30 O.T.U.s. No. 18 O.T.U. moved into R.A.F. Finningley in March 1943, with the station remaining a training base for the duration of the war.

## The Crash

On Wednesday, 9 September 1942, at 23.25 hours, Wellington Mk. IC DV.433 took off from R.A.F. Finningley in Yorkshire for night circuit training. The air crew of four were:

657241	Sgt R. V. TURPITT, R.A.F.	Pilot (Pupil)
118547	P/O P. W. DORMON, R.A.F.V.R.	Pilot (Pupil)
1289382	Sgt L. H. DAVIES, R.A.F.V.R.	WOp/AG
1052819	Sgt D. C. A. P. R. DENVILLE, R.A.F.V.R.	AG

Sgt TURPITT was flying the Wellington on his first night-time solo flight, having only been signed off to do so earlier that evening. Five minutes later, as he came in for his first landing, the Wellington hit the ground heavily at No. 1 Flare, bounced about thirty to forty feet back into the air. It appears that the pilot then took overshoot action. There was a light wind at the time, only about 5 – 10 mph, and the Wellington was unable to clear a ridge of trees located about 500 yards from the boundary of the airfield. The aircraft crashed into the ground on the far side of the trees, where it burst into flames, killing all four crew members on-board.

At the time, the wind was light, and although the Wellington lifted from the runway, it flew into trees nearby having failed to gain altitude.



The four crew all died instantly in the crash. Their bodies were recovered and were identified by means of their Identity Discs, all four having suffered multiple injuries and partial incineration. They were repatriated to their home areas for burial.

The aircraft, Vickers Wellington Mk. IC, DV.433, was built to contract B.1243662/40 by Vickers Armstrong Ltd., at Hawarden, Chester. It was completed and ready for collection on 20 November 1941. On the same date, the aircraft was received into R.A.F. ownership at No. 23 Maintenance Unit, from which, it was allocated and taken on charge by No. 25 Operational Training Unit on 17 December 1941. At the time of its loss, it had flown a total of three-hundred and sixty-four hours. The Wellington was powered by two Bristol Pegasus Mk. XVIII engines, both of which were fitted on 18 and 19 August 1941 as the aircraft was constructed. DV.433 was written off as Category E2/FA, and it was struck off charge on 17 September 1942.

## Court of Inquiry

The Commanding Officer of R.A.F. Finningley decided that there was no purpose to be gained from holding a Court of Inquiry, or from referring the loss of Wellington DV.433 to the Accidents Investigation Branch of the Air Ministry. A Form 765 (C) 'Report on Flying Accident or Forced Landing Not Attributable to Enemy Action' was completed, on which the Unit and Station Commanders were able to state the cause of the loss of the aircraft with a high degree of probability.

The circumstances of the loss of Wellington DV.433 were known, and no technical issues were found to have been involved in the crash. At R.A.F. Finningley, the angle of approach indicators and a double row flare path was in use at the time of the crash.

The unit commander, the Wing Commander O.C. of the Training Wing, in his remarks stated that the decision whether to land or not to land after a bounce can only be one taken by the pilot at the time. His view was that there are so many factors involved in that decision for a pilot to consider, that to attempt to lay them down as hard and fast rules would only confuse the average pilot. In this particular case, he considered that the pilot (Sgt TURPITT), made the right decision, in that to motor down to the ground in a light wind from a height of about thirty feet would almost certainly have meant an overshoot. He concluded by stating *'It is unfortunate that he did not succeed in gaining a little more height'*.

The Station Commander attributed the primary cause of the accident being the bounce of between thirty to forty feet on touching down by No. 1 Flare. He added that the pilot had just completed his final one hour dual instruction before being assessed as competent to fly solo at night. Having bounced into the air, the Station Commander imaged that the nose of the aircraft would have been 'well-up', which combined with the slow climb of a Wellington IC from ground level with the flaps down, gave the pilot little chance of gaining sufficient height. He doubted that the pilot could have avoided the accident by motoring down, and that this action would also have been disastrous for all four men.

## Accidents Investigation Branch

The loss of Wellington DV.433 was not referred to the Accidents Investigation Branch of the Air Ministry for their investigation.

## The Air Crew

### 657241 Sergeant Reginald Victor TURPITT, R.A.F.

The pilot of Wellington DV.433 was Sergeant Reginald Victor TURPITT. His father, Edward William TURPITT (who was known as William) was born in Lynton, North Devon, in 1881, when the large family lived at 5 Orchard Place, Lynton. On 27 January 1904, Edward William TURPITT married Thirza SLEE, who had been born in Chittlehampton, North Devon. They married at the Registry Office, Barnstaple, and both were living in Lynton at the time of their marriage.<sup>1</sup> Edward worked as a farm labourer, and in 1911, the family had moved to South Radworthy, North Molton.

Their first son, William John TURPITT was born in 1905 in Lynton, North Devon. Their second son, Charles Edward TURPITT, was born on 25 August 1907, also in Lynton, North Devon. Edward and Thirza had further children, a daughter who married and became Mrs. H. ABBOTT, and two further sons, W. G. TURPITT and Reginald Victor TURPITT. Reginald (known as Reg) was born on 22 July 1919 in South Molton, North Devon, presumably while the family were still living at South Radworthy. Edward and Thirza were clearly a hard-working and determined couple, as they moved to Little Pill, in the village of Lake, in the parish of Tawstock, North Devon. It appears that William was employed at Pill Farm, in Lake.

It is not known where Reg was educated, but it appears that his brothers attended West Buckland School, near Barnstaple, a private school that was popular amongst local farmers to educate their sons. After leaving school, Reg TURPITT started work at Messrs Trumps Ltd., in Barnstaple, a firm of seed and manure merchants. It is assumed that because of his work, Reg moved to Stanway, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, where he met and married Evelyn PARNELL in the last quarter of 1940. They had a daughter, who was still an infant when Reg was killed in September 1942. The family were living at The Old Bakehouse Café, Stanway, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, at the time of Reg's death in 1952.

Sgt TURPITT's service number was from the batch issued from September 1939 to transferees from the Army. It is not known when he joined the Army, nor what Regiment or Corps he was a member of. It is significant that TURPITT was serving in the Royal Air Force, and not the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, which suggests that he volunteered to join the R.A.F. early in the Second World War. He was twenty-three years of age when he died. Sgt TURPITT had flown a total of one-hundred and fifty-four hours on all types of aircraft, but with only twenty-hours flown at night.

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<sup>1</sup> North Devon Journal-Herald January 28, 1904

Twenty-two hours had been flown on instruments, and only five hours 'flying' on the Link Trainer. Tellingly, Sgt TURPITT had only flown five hours on Wellingtons, all at R.A.F. Finningley.

The funeral of Sergeant Reginald Victor TURPITT, of Little Pill, Lake, and of Stanway, near Cheltenham, took place at Tawstock on Monday, 14 September 1942.<sup>2</sup> The funeral was reported in the North Devon Journal-Herald newspaper, and the Western Times. In the latter, it was described as a: '*Much regretted death*'.<sup>3</sup> The Rector of Tawstock, the Reverend Sir Bouchier WREY, Baronet, and the Rev A. O. D. FELL officiated at the service. The principal mourners were the widow; Mr. E. W. TURPITT, father; Messrs W. J. and E. G. TURPITT, brothers; and Mr. and Mrs. J. S. ABBOTT, brother-in-law and sister. Many other relatives and friends also attended, but the deceased's mother (Thirza) was unavoidably absent, suggesting she was seriously ill at the time. There were many floral tributes and wreaths, including:

- From the widow
- One expressing deepest sympathy, from the Commanding Officer, Officers, Airmen and Airwomen of R.A.F. Finningley,
- In loving sympathy from all friends at Stanway,
- From Alan serving in the Royal Artillery,
- The staff at Trumps Ltd.,
- All the villagers at Lake, with the endorsement 'Thy Will be Done',
- All at the Corner House Hotel in Barnstaple.

Reg's elder brother, Charles Edward TURPITT, joined the Royal Navy on 1 January 1929, his occupation being shown as a farm labourer. He was accepted as a Telegraphist, initially on a three-year engagement, and given the service number J/D 107675, his Port Division being Devonport. As a telegraphist, Charles TURPITT was responsible for the radio communications of warships, most of which was by Morse code. He commenced his training at H.M.S. Vivid, which was a depot ship, and was then drafted to H.M.S. Caledon, a 'C' Class Cruiser. He joined H.M.S. Devonshire on 19 November 1930 and served in the Mediterranean. On 4 September 1931, Charles TURPITT started training for submarines, which at this period was a voluntary drafting. He was posted to the Depot Ship, H.M.S. Medway, on 12 April 1932, serving on H.M.S/M Oswald and Pandora. On 1 July 1935, Telegraphist TURPITT was posted to H.M.S/M Oxley, and then H.M.S/M H-32.

On 11 February 1938, TURPITT was drafted to H.M.S. Diamond, a 'D' Class Destroyer as a Telegraphist. On 17 July 1938, he was promoted to the rate of Acting Leading Telegraphist, while serving aboard H.M.S. Diamond. He spent three months serving on the aircraft carrier H.M.S. Eagle, after which he was drafted to H.M.S. Daring with effect from 1 April 1939. TURPITT was promoted to the rate of Leading Telegraphist on 17 July 1939 and was now wearing three long-service and good conduct chevrons, or badges. As a 'Three Badge' Leading Telegraphist, Charles TURPITT would have been one of the senior ratings on board H.M.S. Daring.

<sup>2</sup> North Devon Journal-Herald 17 September 1942

<sup>3</sup> Western Times Devon 25 Sept 1942

His conduct throughout his service was satisfactory, and his character rated as 'Very Good'. He was described as being 5' 9" tall, brown hair, hazel eyes, and a fresh complexion.

On 18 February 1940, H.M.S. Daring was torpedoed by German U-boat U-23 in the Pentland Firth. She sank quickly, taking with her all but five of the crew. Leading Telegraphist Charles TURPITT was not one of the survivors. He was aged thirty-two years. A memorial to commemorate the five men of Tawstock who gave their lives in the Second World War was placed in the parish church. It is in alabaster, with crown at the top and a scroll 'For God, For King and Country'. The general inscription reads: To the Glory of God and in honour of the men of Tawstock who gave their lives in the second great war, 1939 – 45; Thomas Frederick ALFORD Recce Corps (Chindits), Charles Henry HARVEY, H.M.S. Dorsetshire; Charles Edward TURPITT, H.M.S. Daring; Reginald Victor TURPITT, R.A.F., and Reginald John WILLIAMS, Beds and Herts. The memorial is in keeping with that erected after the 1914 – 18 war and was executed by Messrs YOUINGS and Son, monumental masons of Barnstaple.

On 11 December 1948, Thirza TURPITT died at her home of 15, South Street, Newport, aged sixty-one years. William and Thirza had moved to Newport, Barnstaple, when William retired from farming. She was well-known in Barnstaple for several years as secretary of the Conservative Ladies' Whist League. Her funeral took place in Tawstock Church on Wednesday, 15 December 1948, conducted by Archdeacon Denis JAMES.<sup>4</sup>

The principal mourners were the widower, Mrs. H. ABBOTT, daughter, Messrs W. J. and W. G. TURPITT, sons; Mrs. L. WINROW, sister; Mr. C. SLEE, brother; Mrs. O. TURPITT, daughter-in-law; Mr. J. ABBOTT, son-in-law; Mrs. C. SLEE, sister-in-law; and Mesdames E. YEO, G. MAYNE, and J. FRIENDSHIP, cousins. Two brothers, Messrs W. and J. E. SLEE, and one sister, Mrs. E. PIKE, were unavoidably absent. Wreaths were from the widower, and all her children, Rosemary and the twins, Lesley and Reggie, Lorna, Charles, and Keith; Louie, Char and Min; Annie and Nancy (Swansea); All her cousins at Chittlehampton, Rose, Doris and John; Sir Bouchier and Lady WREY; All at Pill Farm, Lake; The Villagers of Lake; The Conservative Whist League; the members of Tawstock Women's Institute; and other individuals.

#### **118547 Pilot Officer Peter Wren DORMON, R.A.F.V.R.**

The second pilot on DV.433 on 9 September 1942 was P/O P. W. DORMON. Peter Wren DORMON was born on 1 October 1915, in Barnet, Hertfordshire, the youngest of four sons of Charles Herbert and Mahala Alice DORMON. His father was born in about 1879 in Kentish Town, London, and his mother was born in about 1883 in Hillingdon, Middlesex. The forename Wren given to Peter comes from his mother's family line. The family were of the Roman Catholic faith. They married on 15 August 1908, in the parish church of St. Andrew in Uxbridge, Middlesex, and their son, Charles Bernard Ebdon, was born in Barnet on 15 August 1910. In 1942, he was living at 47, Vineyard Hill Road, Wimbledon Hill, London SW19.

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<sup>4</sup> North Devon Journal-Herald 22 December 1948

The 1911 Census shows Charles and Mahala, and their son Charles, living in Chipping Barnet, with two young women, one employed as a Domestic Servant and the other as a Domestic Nurse. Charles gave his occupation as an Export Merchants' Clerk, dealing in general merchandise. Their second son, Lewis Graham, was born on 21 July 1911, followed by Jack Barrett on 2 September 1913, and lastly, Peter Wren. All were born in Barnet. Charles Herbert died on 6 January 1962 in Surrey, while living at 91, Cottenham Park Road, Wimbledon, Surrey. In 1942, he had been living at a house called 'Streetly', Fourth Avenue, Frinton-on-Sea, Essex, which is why his son was buried in Frinton-on-Sea. He left his estate of £1,012 7s 6d to his sons Charles (a chartered accountant) and Jack (a chartered surveyor). Mahala died in December 1978 in Poole, Dorset. The eldest son, Charles Bernard, died in Dorset on 1 August 2003, Lewis died in Bournemouth on 1 April 1986 (having apparently lived in Kenya during the 1950's), and Jack died in Enfield, Middlesex, on 1 October 2000.

Peter DORMON married Patricia Rosemary Sybil DORMON (nee RICE, date of birth 15 July 1918 in Hampstead, London) in the fourth quarter of 1938 in Westminster, London, and they had one child. Peter DORMON was granted a commission on 27 March 1942, in the rank of Pilot Officer, on probation (Emergency), on completion of his pilot's training. At the time of his death, DORMON's wife and child were living at 37, Rutland Court, Hove, Sussex. After his death, his wife remarried in the first quarter of 1943 to an Edward E. HARRIS in Hove, Sussex. Patricia HARRIS died in Lewes, Sussex, in May 1997.

#### **1289382 Sergeant Leslie Hugh DAVIES, R.A.F.V.R.**

The Wireless Operator/Air Gunner aboard Wellington DV.433 on this fateful flight was Sergeant Leslie Hugh DAVIES. He came from Burry Port, Carmarthenshire, a son of John and Mary Jane DAVIES (nee HOPKINS). Leslie was born on 10 March 1920 in the Llanelli district of Carmarthenshire, which includes Burry Port. His family were of the independent religion, or as it is simply known in Wales as 'Chapel'.

Leslie married Ceinwen DAVIES (nee LLOYD) from Llanelli, Carmarthenshire in the first quarter of 1940 in Llanelli. Leslie and Ceinwen lived at 17, Gorse Road, Burry Port, which is now known by its Welsh spelling of Gors Road. Leslie enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at some date after May 1940, probably at Penarth, near Cardiff.

He was laid to rest in the cemetery at the Dolau Fan in Burry Port on 13 September 1942, and his headstone bears the inscription '*YEA, HE DID FLY UPON THE WINGS OF THE WIND PS.XVIII.IO*'. This is taken from Psalm 18 of the Bible. His neighbours from Gorse Road and friends provided a small memorial to him that sits upon his grave.

#### **1052819 Sergeant Dennis Charles Alfred Peter DENVILLE, R.A.F.V.R.**

The rear gunner of the Wellington was Sgt Dennis Charles Alfred Peter DENVILLE. He was born on 7 May 1922, as the only son, into a family of actors and producers of plays.

His father, Charles Alfred was born about 1899, the son of Alfred DENVILLE, a theatre producer, and a Conservative Member of Parliament. Dennis's parents, Charles and Lily DENVILLE, married in the fourth quarter of 1931 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, suggesting that this was either Charles's second marriage, or that Dennis was born out of wedlock. The family were of the Roman Catholic religion.

Dennis was educated at Ushaw College, Durham, and for a time worked for his father's repertory company, which was based at the Grand Theatre in Halifax, Yorkshire. The family settled at Camm Cottage, Horley Green Road, Halifax, where Charles became the manager of the Grand Theatre in the town. Dennis was engaged in theatrical work before joining the R.A.F. in 1940 and appeared for the first twelve weeks of the 1940 repertory season in his father's theatre.

The youngest of the four men who died in the crash of Wellington DV.433, Dennis DENVILLE was buried in the Stoney Royd Cemetery in Halifax on 14 September 1942, and he is commemorated in the Halifax Town Hall Books of Remembrance, on the memorial at St. Thomas the Apostle Church at Claremont Road, Halifax, and at St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church in Halifax. He left an estate of £113 12s 6d to his father, who was still living at the family home of Camm Cottage. It appears that Charles may have lived at this same address until his death in December 1967 in Halifax.

## Conclusions

Like so many aircraft losses of the Second World War, the full circumstances of this accident will never be known, in part due to the policy of the U.K. Government in not placing the personnel files of deceased service personnel on-line, as Canada and Australia have done. Initially, information was drawn from Form 1180, which records the loss of the aircraft, and the Operations Record Books of the units and/or bases involved. Recently, the National Archives have been releasing the R.A.F. Casualty Files in the AIR 81 series, and the one for this incident is now available. The examination of the file at Kew has assisted in clarifying some information and adding additional material to our knowledge of this crash.

The circumstances indicate that both Sgt TURPITT and P/O DORMAN had arrived only recently back in the U.K. from the Service Flying Training School abroad where they had obtained their Flying Badge ('Wings'). A short spell at a (Pilot's) Advanced Flying School in the U.K. would have followed, prior to their arrival at R.A.F. Finningley. The two pupil pilots were at the beginning of their course, which consisted of converting to fly the Vickers Wellington in daylight and at night. By now, most bombing sorties were carried out at night, so it was important to move on quickly to solo night flying. It is presumed that in the late evening of 9 September, both pupil pilots were given some dual instruction, and then passed to fly the Wellington solo. The crash happened on the first solo landing by either pilot. The wind was calm, so that the lift generated by headwinds acting on the wings dropped considerably, and following a heavy landing, Sgt TURPITT decided to go around again, but the Wellington simply could not generate enough lift in time to prevent the crash.

## In Memoriam

### 9 September 1942 – Vickers Wellington Mk. IC – DV.433

No.	Surname	Forenames(s)	Age	Date of Death	Rank	Role	Service	Service Number	Place of Burial	Grave
1.	TURPITT <sup>5</sup>	Reginald Victor	23	09/09/42	Sergeant	Pilot	R.A.F.	657241	Tawstock Churchyard	
2.	DORMON <sup>6</sup>	Peter Wren	26	09/09/42	Pilot Officer	Pilot	R.A.F.V.R.	118547	Frinton-on-Sea Churchyard	Row D. Grave 21.
3.	DAVIES <sup>7</sup>	Leslie Hugh	22	09/09/42	Sergeant	WOp/AG	R.A.F.V.R.	1289382	Burry Port Cemetery	Block A., Grave 141
4.	DENVILLE <sup>8</sup>	Dennis Charles Alfred Peter		09/09/42	Sergeant	AG	R.A.F.V.R.	1052819	Halifax (Stoney Royd) Cemetery	Sec. J., Grave 250.

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2811976/TURPITT,%20REGINALD%20VICTOR>

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2721768/DORMON,%20PETER%20WREN>

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2965322/DAVIES,%20LESLIE%20HUGH>

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2408138/DENVILLE,%20DENNIS%20CHARLES%20ALFRED%20PETER>

<sup>5</sup> Son of Edward William and Thirza TURPITT; husband of Evelyn TURPITT, of Stanway, Gloucestershire.

<sup>6</sup> Son of Charles Herbert and Mahala Alice DORMON, of Frinton-on-Sea, Essex.

<sup>7</sup> Son of John and Mary Jane DAVIES; husband of Ceinwen DAVIES, of Llanelly, Carmarthenshire.

<sup>8</sup> Son of Charles and Lily DENVILLE, of Halifax, Yorkshire.



Map of the area around R.A.F. Finningley, Yorkshire.



**REPORT ON FLYING ACCIDENT OR FORCED LANDING NOT ATTRIBUTABLE TO ENEMY ACTION.**  
Form 765 (G) (Revised Dec. 1941)

Indicate here by an X to whom this copy is addressed.

One copy direct to Air Ministry, C.I. (Accidents).  
One copy direct to Air Ministry, S.4. Statistics.  
One copy direct to Ministry of Aircraft Production (R.M.L.).  
One copy, through usual channels to Command Headquarters.  
In addition, and only if casualties to airmen are involved, one copy direct to Records Office.

If this incident has been reported to the Air Ministry by signal, quote Reference No. and date.

1. UNIT: 25 Q. T. V. 16 SEP 1942  
Group No. 93 Confirmed: ROYAL  
Serial No. of Form: 67

2. DATE OF INCIDENT: 9.12.42  
TIME: 23.30  
SITE OF INCIDENT: 1/2 mile south of PLYMOUTH, ARRONCHES.

3. NATURE OF AND PURPOSE FOR WHICH FLIGHT AUTHORIZED:  
Nature: (i) Operational or Non-operational? NON-OPERATIONAL  
(ii) Day or Night flying? NIGHT  
(iii) Purpose: TRAINING CIRCUITS AND LANDING

4. TYPE OF AIRFRAME AND ENGINE and extent of damage (see footnotes to this section).

Details of Airframe and Engine.	Airframe	Engine			
		Single or Port.	Starboard.	Centre Port.	Centre Starboard.
Type: WELLINGTON	PEGASUS	PEGASUS			
Mark or series: IC	XVIII	XVIII			
R.A.F. No. (and makers' No. for engines): DV.433	1300908/	878125/			
Total hours run: 361.20	128804/	100903/			
Date last installed in Airframe: 18.6.42	69.30	69.00			
Extent of damage:	18.6.42	19.8.42			

5. ALL OCCUPANTS OF AIRCRAFT and FLYING EXPERIENCE OF PILOTS.

Duty.	Nationality (Nationality to be quoted if not British).	Rank.	No.	Degree of Injury.	Flying Experience of Pilots and Pupil Pilots. See Note (i) below.				
					Part A. Total Solo (Day & Night).	Part B. (See Note (ii) below). Solo (Night).	Part C. (See Note (iii) below). Solo (Night).	Part D. (See Note (iv) below). Solo (Night).	
1st Pupil Pilot: BURITT R.V.	SGT	65721	K	5	154	111	24	22	5
2nd Pupil Pilot: DORRAN P.E.	/O	118947	E						
Pupil WO/AC: DAVIS L.H.	SGT	1289382	K						
1st A/C: DEWILLIE D.C.	SGT	1052819	K						

NOTE (i) Part B only to be quoted if incident occurred during night flying. (ii) Part C only to be quoted if loss of control at night or in bad visibility or cloud by day is a possible contributory factor.

6. STAGE OF FLIGHT:  
A. Pickered or at moorings. F. In flight.  
B. Starting up. G. Landing.  
C. Stationary other than A or B. H. Towed or manhandled.  
D. Taxying. I. Not known.  
E. On ground. J. Not known.

7. LIGHTING CONDITIONS:  
A. Day (daylight). B. Day (half light of evening). C. Dawn (half light of morning). D. Dark (no moon or moon obscured).  
E. Moonlight. F. Not known. G. Dark (no moon or moon obscured).  
H. Quote as A or B or C, etc., as appropriate and amplify in Part 1(a) if necessary.

8. IF INCIDENT OCCURRED WHILE TAXYING OR ON GROUND, state "Yes" or "No".

11. REMARKS BY APPROPRIATE SPECIALISING OFFICERS (A. E. Nav. &c.) — (i) If technical failure is involved information as to the nature and cause of the failure is required; (ii) If the non-embodiment of an authorized modification is considered to have contributed to the accident, the serial number of the modification and reason for non-embodiment should be stated.

No technical aspect.

12. REMARKS BY UNIT COMMANDER (to be given under three separate headings) —  
Part A. Remarks as to conduct of the incident. (If it occurred at night or on or near an aerodrome, the nature of the lighting system in use at the time is to be noted in Part A.)  
Part B. Diagnosis of all contributory factors. The manner in which any particular factor contributed to the accident is to be clearly indicated.  
Part C. General remarks (including any recommendation with regard to personnel, training, airframe, engine, accessories, etc., and notes of any action taken as a result of this incident).

A. Two angles of approach to the runway and double row flare path was in use.

B. Pilot on first landing solo night hit ground heavily at No. 1 flare, bounced and took overshoot action. In the light wind prevailing, approx. 5-10 mph, he was unable to clear a ridge of trees situated some 500 yards from the aerodrome boundary. Aircraft crashed into ground on far side of trees burst into flames and all members of the crew were killed.

C. To land, or not to land after a bounce is a decision which must be left to the pilot himself. There are so many factors involved that to try and cover them all by hard and fast rules would only confuse the average pilot. In this particular case I consider the pilot took the correct action, to have rotated down to the ground in a light wind from a height of about 30 feet, would almost certainly have meant an overshoot. It is unfortunate that he did not succeed in gaining a little more height. ~~He was not able to clear the trees and crashed.~~

Signature: E. Deane, 4/c Commanding, 25 Q. T. V. Date: 13.9.42

13. REMARKS BY STATION COMMANDER (and notes of any action taken as a result of this incident) —  
(i) Was any assistance rendered in rescue work after the accident, which is considered worthy of recommendation? Yes  
(ii) If any such assistance was rendered, the recommendation is to be forwarded separately.

1. Primary cause of accident due to a bounce of 30' - 40' on landing down by 1st flare.

2. Had just received a check 1 flare back before being judged expected to go solo by night.

3. Having been bounced into the air, I imagine the nose of the aircraft would have been well up, which combined with the clear side of a hillside to have caused level with flare down, gave the pilot little chance of gaining sufficient height.

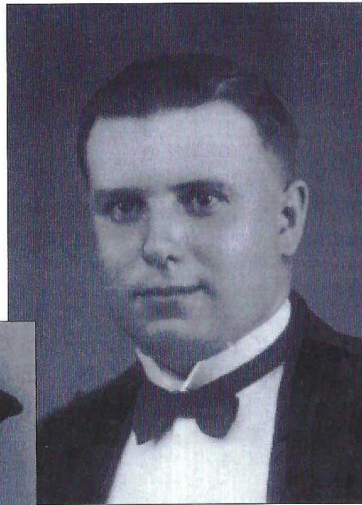
It is doubtful if the pilot could have avoided any accident had he bounced down at height, although I think such action would have been less likely.





◀ Reginald Victor Turpitt  
Royal Air Force. Sergeant Pilot. Died during air training exercise at RAF Finningley Sept. 9th 1942, age 23. War grave in Tawstock churchyard.

Charles Edward Turpitt ▶  
Royal Navy. On HMS Daring (Destroyer) as Leading Signalman and Wireless Operator. Torpedoed early 1940, age 33. His name is on the R.N. Monument on Plymouth Hoe for those with no known graves.



▶ George Henry Harvey  
Royal Navy. Served on HMS Dorsetshire (Aircraft Carrier) as Wireman responsible for launching planes. Sunk Indian Ocean. April 5th 1942, age 21.

◀ Richard John Williams  
Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regt. Served in Burma. Died Aug. 3rd 1944, age 23. War grave in Burma.

▶ Thomas Frederick Alford  
Territorial Army. Joined Gen. Wingates Regiment in Reconnaissance Corps. Chindits - Burma. Died 1944, age 23. All Photos courtesy of their families.



*Left – The five men from the village of Tawstock, near Barnstaple, who died during the Second World War. Reginald TURPITT is top left and his brother top right.*

*Taken from: The Parish of Tawstock*

*Below – The Reverend John CARVOSSO, a former R.A.F. Chaplain and Vicar at Tawstock with Graham MOORE at the grave of Sgt TURPITT.*

*Taken by the Author (2020)*







Above – The two tablets in St. Peter's church at Tawstock, the parish church for the area.



*Left – Grave of Sgt R. V. TURPITT, in Tawstock churchyard, North Devon. The Inscription reads: 'In Ever Loving Memory Dear Youngest Son of Edward and Thirza TURPITT'.*

*Right – Grave of Thirza and William TURPITT, alongside that of their son (actually on the left-hand side of his grave), in Tawstock churchyard.*

*The Author – 2016*





Left – Grave of P/O P. W. DORMON, in Frinton-on-Sea.

Courtesy of: <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fq.cgi?page=qr&GRid=74063952>

Centre and Right – Grave of Sgt L.H. DAVIES, at Burry Port Cemetery in Carmarthenshire.

Taken by the Author in September 2020





Grave of Dennis DENVILLE, in Stoney Royd Cemetery, Halifax.

Courtesy of: <http://graveyarddetective.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/?m=0>



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# The Last Flight of Wellington DV.433

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[www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk](http://www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk)

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Robert PALMER M.A.

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Published by: The Author.

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