



remembrance ni



Crew members of 514 Squadron based at RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire who died when their aircraft crashed killing all 7 onboard were honoured in a service of commemoration on Friday 28 April 2017 at Heverlee War Cemetery, Belgium. Gordon Kerr, the pilot was from Lurgan.

Ni air crew honoured at Heverlee War cemetery in Belgium



Flying Officer Lloyd Burgess RAF delivers the RAF Collect at the Service of Commemoration.

Heverlee war cemetery, in Vlaams-Brabant, Belgium, is three kilometres south of the city of Leuven and thirty kilometres east of Brussels.

The area was important during different stages of the war. The British Expeditionary Force was involved in the later stages of the defence of Belgium following the German invasion in May 1940, and suffered many casualties whilst covering the withdrawal to Dunkirk. Commonwealth forces did not return until September 1944, but in the intervening years, many airmen were shot down or crashed in raids on strategic objectives in Belgium, or while returning from missions over Germany. The bodies of crews of planes which crashed in the region were ultimately brought to this war cemetery.

There are ten fatalities from Northern Ireland interred at Heverlee. Amongst them is Gordon Kerr, a pilot from Lurgan in 514 Squadron

and two men from Belfast men who were sergeants in 57 Squadron.

Lancaster W4822 of 57 Squadron

The sergeants were in the crew of Lancaster W4822 of 57 Squadron which took off from RAF East Kirkby at 1722 hours on 03/11/1943 to bomb Dusseldorf.



Harry McKernin was the wireless operator and William Neill was the Flight Engineer. Their graves are beside each other.

Lancaster W4822 DX-P, piloted by Lieutenant Don West, USAAF, was one of a large force of 588 airplanes which were tasked to bomb Dusseldorf. The raid marked the first large scale test of the G-H blind bombing device used by 38 Lancaster MkII aircraft from 3 and 6 groups, against the Mannesmann tubular steel works.

US pilot

Donald West was a 1st Lieutenant. U.S. Army Air Force, attached to 57 Sqdn. (R.A.F.).

He was born: 14/08/1918, in Fresno, California, USA, the son of Floyd and Maybelle West, and the brother of Floyd Junior. His family called him Don and they lived at 1433 Vagrdes Avenue in Fresno, California. Don West joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) on 27/08/1941. At the time,

America had not yet entered the war. Western Europe was occupied, and Great Britain stood alone in the West in "her finest hour." On 07/09/1943, Don transferred to the US Army Air Force (USAAF.) Since he was a trained pilot with experience in flying Lancaster bombers, the USAAF simply left him at his post at East Kirkby when he changed services. The USAAF listed him as being on "Detached Service" with the 57 Squadron of the Royal Air Force.



W4822 was intercepted near Monchengladbach whilst outbound to the target and shot down at 1936 hrs by Oblt. Werner Baake of 3/ NJG1, his 20th such shooting of the war. W4822 subsequently crashed at Hechtel in Belgium.

Three crew members of W4822 managed to bale out. Fg Off Robert Clements, RCAF, who was along for a familiarisation flight, and Fg Officer James McP Elliott managed to evade capture. Plt Off Norman Buggy, the navigator, was taken POW.
The crew members -

1Lt	Don West USAAF	Pilot
Fg Off	Robert Clements RCAF	2nd Pilot (Evaded capture)
Sgt	William Neil	Flight Engineer
Plt Off	Norman Buggy	Navigator (Taken POW)
Fg Off	James McP Elliott	Bomb Aimer (Evaded capture)
Sgt	Harry McKernin	Wireless Operator
Sgt	Francis Heaton	Upper Gunner
Sgt	John Edmunds	Rear Gunner

57 Squadron

57 Squadron began the Second World War as a Blenheim squadron, and in September 1939 was one of the first RAF squadrons to move to France, where it operated as a strategic reconnaissance unit.

After the start of the German offensive in the west, on 10 May, the squadron began eight days of costly attacks on German columns, before a combination of heavy losses and the rapid German advance meant it had to be withdrawn to England.

Reconnaissance missions continued throughout June, before in July the squadron was moved north to Scotland.

A few months of anti-shipping operations over the North Sea followed, before in November 1940 the squadron moved south to convert to the Vickers Wellington. On 13 January 1941 the squadron flew its first night bombing mission, the role it would continue to perform for the rest of the war. Lancasters arrived in September 1942, by which time the squadron was part of No.5 Group. The squadron operated the Lancaster as part of Bomber Command's main force from then until the end of the war, taking part in the 25 April 1945 attack on Hitler's mountain retreat at

Berchtesgaden, and in the final Lancaster operations of the war, when four aircraft from the squadron dropped mines in Oslo Fjord

Flying Officer Gordon Kerr

In 1945 Flying Officer Gordon Kerr from Lurgan was serving in 514 Squadron, which was involved in air support for the advancing allied armies during the last months of the war. It was in the course of such action that F.O. Kerr died, on 5th March, 1945.



Gordon was educated at Lurgan College from 3rd September

1934 until 31st July 1940. Soon after leaving school, he joined the Belfast Banking Company and worked in Rathfriland branch.

Gordon volunteered and enlisted in the RAF with promotions taking him to Flying Officer with Service Number 185226. He served with 514 Sqn Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

Stationed at RAF Waterbeach, Cambridge, England, on the night of 5th March 1945, the crew flew Lancaster bomber aircraft (l

NN775 JI-F2) on an operation to Geisenkirchen targeting a Benzol Plant.

British Ambassador to Belgium, Alison Rose laid the first wreath at the Service of Commemoration of Gordon Kerr and his crew.



While flying near Tirlemont, the aircraft suddenly went into a dive from which the pilot was unable to recover. The plane crashed at Bunsbeek, Belgium and all seven crew were killed. Three bodies were recovered and placed in a communal grave with seven headstones in Heverlee War Cemetery. Gordon was not one of them. The others, including Gordon remained buried with the wreckage of the plane.

A memorial ceremony was held at the crash site on Remembrance Sunday, 11/11/2015 with officials attending from Germany, UK, Australia and the Belgian Air Force.

Also, the Mayor of Bunsbeek, Belgium together with the British, Australian and German Ambassadors attended a Remembrance service to commemorate the crew from 3 aircraft (A Wellington, a Junkers 88 and Lancaster NN775) that crashed near the village.

Gordon and his crew were honoured again in a service of commemoration on Friday 28 April 2017 at Heverlee War Cemetery, Vlaams-Brabant, Belgium. The service, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services was conducted by the Reverend (Wing Commander) Ashley Mitchell RAF and supported by RAF Defence Staff based in Belgium. The ceremony was attended by British and Australian Defence Staff, 514 Squadron representatives and local dignitaries.

Beverley Simon, JCCC said: “It has been a tremendous privilege for the JCCC to have organised this service of commemoration for the 7 crew members of Lancaster NN775 and to ensure that the appropriate level of dignity, ceremony and respect has been afforded.

“We are especially delighted that so many of the crew’s families were able to attend the service, some from as far afield as the USA.”

Rank and name	Role	Age	Place of birth
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Sergeant Christopher George Hogg	Mid-Upper Gunner	20	South Yardley, Birmingham
Sergeant William Marsden	Flight Engineer	20	Chorley, Lancashire
Flying Officer Holman Gordon Stanley Kerr	Pilot	23	Lurgan, Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland
Sergeant Herbert Percival Thomas	Rear Gunner	23	Clarendon, Jamaica
Flight Sergeant Allan Olsen RAAF	Wireless Operator/Air Gunner	21	Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia
Flight Sergeant Sidney Smith	Navigator	21	Not stated
Flying Officer Frank Clarke	Air Bomber	Not stated	Not stated

NORTH IRISH

ROYAL AIR FORCE ROLL OF HONOUR HEVERLEE WAR CEMETERY

+BELL, Ernest

Sergeant (Flight Engineer). 548837. Died 30/05/1943. Aged 25. 35 Sqn. Royal Air Force. Halifax II, DT 804, from RAF Graveley, Huntingdonshire was tasked for operation over Wuppertal. The aircraft was shot down by Lieutenant Heinz Wolfgang Schnaufner and crashed at 0143 coming down at Duras, Limburg. a 178 aircraft took part. It was a very successful attack. 4 aircraft of the squadron were lost that evening with the loss of 15 lives and 14 taken prisoner of war. Son of Arthur and Nancy Bell, of Belfast; stepson of Alice Bell, Cliftonville, Belfast. Nine men in same squadron killed on same date and buried at the airfield of St Trond,

home base of II/NJG on 01/06/1943 and then in 1945 were re-interred at Heverlee War Cemetery.

+JAYE, Alan Gordon

Sergeant (Air Gunner). 1043669. Died 25/03/1942. Aged 19. 83 Sqn. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Avro Manchester Mark 1. Flying From Scampton on operation to Essen, was attacked and crashed at Lichtaart (Antwerp), 12 km SSW of Turnhout, Belgium. Aircraft claimed by Lt Kurt Loos 2./NJG1 - Between Lichtaerts & Herentals at 23:44. The seven members of the crew died and are interred at Heverlee. Son of John Alan and Evelyn Lancaster Campbell Jaye, Downpatrick. Heverlee War Cemetery.

+KERR, Holman Gordon Stanley

Flying Officer 185226. Died 05/03/1945. Age 23. 514 Sqn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Son of Thomas John and Evelyn Margaret Kerr, of Lurgan. Heverlee War Cemetery. Lurgan WM

+ McKERNIN, Harry Francis

Sergeant Wireless Op./ Air Gunner. 1079134. Date of Death: 03/11/1943. Age: 23. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, 57 Sqn. Son of H. and Minnie McKernin, of Belfast, Northern Ireland. Heverlee War Cemetery.

+McKINSTRY, John

Sergeant (Air Gunner). 1040701. Died 08/06/1942. Aged 24. 35 Sqn. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Son of James Flack McKinstry and Elizabeth Gault McKinstry, Larne. Heverlee War Cemetery.

+NEILL, William Frederick

Sergeant (Flight Engineer). 531666. Date of Death: 03/11/1943. Age: 25. Royal Air Force, 57 Sqn. Son of William Frederick and Margaret Neill, of Belfast; husband to Mary Elizabeth McCombe Neill. Heverlee War Cemetery.

+SCARLETT, William

Flight Sergeant (Bomb Aimer). 1027850. DFM. Died 04/07/1943. Aged 27. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. 166 Sqn.- at this date, a bomber squadron based at Kirmington, Lancashire, flying

Wellingtons. Son of William and Sarah Jane Scarlett, Sydenham Park, Belfast.

+SYNOTT, DFO

Sergeant (Air Gunner).1796523630. Died 12/05/1940. Age 19.
Newry, Co. Down

+WEST, Thomas Ronald Augustus

Sergeant (Pilot). 1110187. Died 02/06/1942. Aged 27. 76 Sqdn.
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Halifax W1064-MP-J AT Grez-
Doiceau. Son of John and Sara West, Ballinamallard, Co.
Fermanagh. Buried beside JR Thompson, of same squadron and
date.

+WHITESIDE, Thomas John

Sergeant (Radio Operator (Air)). 1513141. Died 28/05/1944. Aged
22. 427 (R.C.A.F.) Sqdn. Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Son of
James N. and Sarah Whiteside, Belfast.

*Further relevant information on any of the above would be most
welcome*

Heverlee's three RAF Victoria Crosses

**In Heverlee War Cemetery there are the graves of three
members of the RAF whose actions were acknowledged by the
award of the Victoria Cross.**

They are **D E Garland** and **J Gray** who died in the same plane on
12 May1940 and **LT Manser** who also died in action 31 May1942.

D E Garland and J Gray were serving with 12 Squadron. On the
first day of the Second World War 12 Squadron moved to France to
begin operations.

Early in the morning of 10 May 1940 the German forces
commenced their Blitzkrieg advance through the Low Countries.
On the 12th May, 12 Squadron was tasked with destroying vital
bridges over the Albert Canal.

The whole Squadron volunteered so it was decided that the six crews already detailed on the readiness roster should undertake the mission.



**Possibly unique - Garland VC and Gray VC,,
Two VCs in the same crew, side by side.**

Flying Officer Donald Garland was to lead 3 aircraft against the Veldwezelt Bridge in a low level attack. **Sgt Tom Gray** was the Observer/Navigator on Fairey Battle P2204 PH-K, piloted by **F/O Donald Garland** with **LAC Lawrence Reynolds** as rear gunner.

They flew below the cloud base at 1000 feet and on reaching the Veldwezelt area started a shallow bombing run. There were estimated to be some 300 guns entrenched in a defensive ring around the bridge, and the aircraft was blasted into the ground.

The second Battle L5439, piloted by PO I A McIntosh, was hit in the main fuel tank, setting the aircraft ablaze, he jettisoned his bombs and made a forced landing and survived as a prisoner of war.

The third Battle L5227, piloted by Sgt Fred Marland, released its bombs but then lost control and dived into the ground.

When the smoke cleared it was seen that the western end of the bridge was shattered, and evidence suggested the damage was caused by Garland and Gray's cool attack. It had been Gray's first operational bombing raid.

Flying Officer Garland and Sergeant Gray were both posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

Born in Ballincor, County Wicklow, Donald Garland was a pupil at Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, Holland Park, London from 1929 to 1935.

After spending some time at an insurance office, he joined the RAF on a short-term commission. Mgr. Canon J. Vance, who became headmaster of Cardinal Vaughan School in 1928: "In those days I questioned young men closely before recommending their applications for short-term commissions because of a lurking fear that they might be forced to start life again at an awkward age, for Donald I had no misgivings whatever. He could start his life again at any time and was bound to succeed because of his independence and of his resourcefulness. I salute Garland's great heroism."

Donald Garland had three brothers, all of whom served with the RAF and also died on service:

- Pilot Officer Desmond William Garland, killed in Belgium on 5 June 1942 aged 27
- Flight Lieutenant John Cuthbert Garland - died on 28 February 1943 aged 32
- Flight Lieutenant Patrick James Garland - killed in Holland on 1 January 1945 aged 36

The announcement and accompanying citation for the decoration was published in supplement to the London Gazette on 11 June 1940, reading

"Air Office, 11th June, 1940

The KING has been graciously pleased to confer the VICTORIA CROSS on the undermentioned officer and non-commissioned officer in recognition of most conspicuous bravery :-

Flying Officer Donald Edward Garland (40105)

563627 Sergeant Thomas Gray

Flying Officer Garland was the pilot and Sergeant Gray was the observer of the leading aircraft of a formation of five aircraft that attacked a bridge over the Albert Canal which had not been destroyed and was allowing the enemy to advance into Belgium. All the aircrews of the squadron concerned volunteered for the operation, and, after five crews had been selected by drawing lots, the attack was delivered at low altitude against this vital target. Orders were issued that this bridge was to be destroyed at all costs. As had been expected, exceptionally intense machine-gun and anti-aircraft fire were encountered. Moreover, the bridge area was heavily protected by enemy fighters. In spite of this, the formation successfully delivered a dive-bombing attack from the lowest practicable altitude. British fighters in the vicinity reported that the target was obscured by the bombs bursting on it and near it. Only one of the five aircraft concerned returned from this mission. The pilot of this aircraft reports that besides being subjected to extremely heavy anti-aircraft fire, through which they dived to attack the objective, our aircraft were also attacked by a large number of enemy fighters after they had released their bombs on the target. Much of the success of this vital operation must be attributed to the formation leader, Flying Officer Garland, and to the coolness and resource of Sergeant Gray, who in most difficult conditions navigated Flying Officer Garland's aircraft in such a manner that the whole formation was able successfully to attack the target in spite of subsequent heavy losses. Flying Officer Garland and Sergeant Gray did not return".

Leslie Thomas Manser VC (11 May 1922 – 31 May 1942) was a bomber pilot and was awarded the VC posthumously following an attack on the German city of Cologne.

He was accepted by the Royal Air Force in August 1940, and was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in May 1941. After a navigational course and final operational training at 14 OTU, RAF Cottesmore, he was posted to No. 50 Squadron (which was operating the Hanley Page Hampden) at RAF Swinerby, Lincolnshire on 27 August.

Two days after joining his squadron Manser experienced his first operation: as a second pilot, he took part in a bombing raid on Frankfurt. During the next two months he flew six more sorties against targets like Berlin, Hamburg, and Karlsruhe, before being posted to 25 OTU, Finningley on 7 November and a month later posted back to 14 OTU as an instructor.

Manser served briefly with No. 420 Squadron RCAF (Hampdens) from March–April 1942 when he rejoined 50 Squadron then operating from RAF Skellingthorpe, and converting to the new Avro Manchester heavy bomber. He piloted one of the new aircraft during a leaflet drop over Paris, and flew a further five sorties during April and May. Manser was promoted to Flying Officer on 6 May.

For the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne on the night of 30 May 1942, Manser was captain and first pilot of Avro Manchester bomber 'D' for Dog.

As he came over the target, his aircraft was caught in searchlights and although he bombed the target successfully from 7,000 ft (2,100 m) it was hit by flak. In an effort to escape the anti-aircraft fire he took violent evasive action, this reduced his altitude to only 1,000 ft (300 m) but he did not escape the flak until he was clear of the city. By this time the rear gunner was wounded, the front cabin full of smoke and the port engine overheating. Rather than abandon the aircraft and be captured, Manser tried to get the aircraft and crew to safety. The port engine then burst into flames, burning the wing and reducing airspeed to a dangerously low level. The crew made preparations to abandon the aircraft, by then barely controllable and with a crash inevitable. The aircraft was by now over Belgium, and Manser ordered the crew to bail out, but refused the offer of a parachute for himself. He remained at the controls and sacrificed himself in order to save his crew. As the crew

parachuted down they saw the bomber crash in flames into a dyke at Bree, 13 mi (21 km) north east of Genk in Belgium.

P/O Barnes was taken prisoner, but Sgt Baveystock, P/O Horsley, Sgt King, Sgt Mills and Sgt Naylor all evaded capture and made their way back to the UK. The testimonies of the five evaders were instrumental in the posthumous award of the VC.

The citation for the VC read:

...In pressing home his attack in the face of strong opposition, in striving, against heavy odds, to bring back his aircraft and crew and, finally, when in extreme peril, thinking only of the safety of his comrades, Flying Officer Manser displayed determination and valour of the highest order.

Manser was the brother-in-law of British Army Captain John Neill Randle who was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross in 1944.

Acknowledgments

Aircrew Remembered

Back to Normandy

CWGC - Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Lurgan College War Memorial by Ian Wilson in Craigavon Historical Society Journal

Northern Bank Roll of Honour

Danielle Roubroeks

57-630 Squadron Association

207 Squadron Association

Wickapaedia

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The **remembrance ni** programme is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD who served as Chaplain to 102 and 105 Regiments Royal Artillery (TA), as Hon. Chaplain to RNR and as Chaplain to the RBL NI area and the Burma Star Association NI. Dr McKelvey is a Past President of Queen's University Services Club. He may be contacted at houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com

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