



5th January 1944

January 2015 saw the 71st anniversary of the death of eight US airmen and the serious injury of one other when the B-17 #42-3544 “Stars and Stripes”, based with the 385th Bomb Group at Great Ashfield, crashed just outside Badwell Ash. The following details have been supplied by Ian McLachlan, the military historian and author of several books about the US Army Air Force:

“Weather conditions were bitterly cold and icy which may have contributed to the crash. The aircraft was serial number #42-3544 Stars and Stripes with the target assigned as Bordeaux, France. After taking off at 0725 hours, the plane climbed to about 200 feet then a wing dropped and it struck the ground at Brook Farm, Badwell Ash in Suffolk. It was carrying 16 M31 bombs, two exploded and the rest were scattered over an area of approximately 300 to 400 yards along with the wreckage.”

I couldn’t understand why the Stars and Stripes was over Badwell Ash when it was on its way to Bordeaux. My thanks go to Roy Barker who explained to me that at the time there were air force bases every five miles across this area. Before leaving for a mission up to 100 aircraft would gather together in formation in the skies above Badwell Ash and Great Ashfield, creating a colossal amount of noise and making the ground shake. On that day the Stars and Stripes was one of 117 B-17s set to target the Bordeaux/Merignac Airfield.

Crews were named after their pilot. The Stars and Stripes belonged to the McIlveen crew who did not fly that day, so on 5th January it was flown by the Morris crew. The men in the Morris crew that day were:



Flying Officer William H Morris was on his second mission from Great Ashfield as the Pilot. On 4th January he had flown the B17 #42-39925 Pistol Packin’ Moma when four hundred and thirty nine B-17s were despatched on a bombing raid to the port area of Kiel. With the exception of Stanley Lowitz and Robert Totaro, all of the men named here flew with him on the Kiel mission.

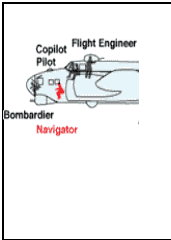



William was the son of Ullman and Lueva Morris from Jane Lew in Lewis County, West Virginia, born on 21st January 1922. He died just before his 22nd birthday. He is buried at Broad Run Baptist Church Cemetery, Lightburn, Lewis County, West Virginia.

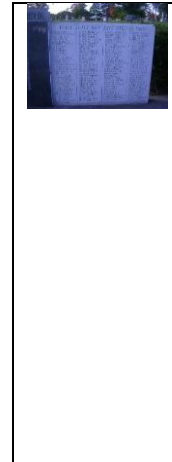



2nd Lieutenant Dennis J Ziebarth was the Co-pilot. He was the son of Julius and Magdalena Ziebarth, both born in Germany, from Scranton, Bowman County, North Dakota, born 25th August 1916. He enlisted on 29th January 1941 in Spokane, Washington. He died aged 27 and is buried at Peace Lutheran Cemetery, Scranton, Bowman County, North Dakota.



2nd Lieutenant Robert M Totaro was the Bombardier. He was the son of Mrs Jules Legare of Delaware Avenue Tonawanda, Erie County, New York, born in 1921. He enlisted on 14th November 1941 at Buffalo, New York. He died aged 23 and is buried at the Madingley American Military Cemetery at Coton in Cambridgeshire

	<p>2nd Lieutenant Richard S Proctor was the Navigator. He was the son of George, a filing clerk at the General State Authority Office and Irene Proctor and husband of Sarah Proctor of Pennsylvania Avenue, Matamoras, Pike County, Pennsylvania. He was born in 1920 and enlisted on 30th January 1942 at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He died aged 24 and is buried at the Madingley American Military Cemetery at Coton in Cambridgeshire.</p>
	<p>Sergeant Stanley Lowitz was the Waist Gunner. He was the son of Abraham and Tillie Lowitz, both born in the USSR, of Neck Road, Brooklyn, New York. Abraham and Tillie both worked as clerks in a candy store. Stanley was born on 22nd February 1922 and in 1940 he was working as a shipping clerk for a silverware company. He enlisted in Brooklyn on 16th October 1942 and died just before his 22nd birthday. He is buried in Mount Lebanon Cemetery, Glendale, Queens County, New York.</p>
	<p>Technical Sergeant Russell A Stevens was the Top Turret Gunner. He was the son of Irvin, a brakeman on the steam railroad, and Beatrice Stevens, of Cleveland Street, Houlton, Aroostook County, Maine. He was born on 24th October 1921 and enlisted in Hartford, Connecticut on 21st September 1942. He died aged 22 and is buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Houlton, Aroostook County, Maine.</p>
	<p>Staff Sergeant Walter A Stuebgen was the Ball Turret Gunner. He was the son of Ruth Query Stuebgen of Hamilton Avenue, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. He was born on 15th December 1923 and enlisted in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on 29th March 1942. He died aged 20 and is buried at the Madingley American Military Cemetery at Coton in Cambridgeshire.</p>

	<p>Sergeant Chester A Rober was the Radio Operator. My thanks go to Bill Varnedoe, a USAAF veteran who was based at Great Ashfield during the War, for explaining to me that whilst radio silence was maintained over Germany the Radio Operator would switch to Gunner as attack by fighter aircraft could be expected. Chester Junior was the son of Chester, a shipyard foreman, and Catherine Rober of Richards Road, Weymouth, Massachusetts. He was born in 1923 and enlisted in Boston, Massachusetts on 20th November 1942. He died aged 21. The intersection of North and Commercial Streets in Weymouth Heights was named after him. His name can also be found on the Immaculate Conception Grotto, where he attended church, and on the War Memorial Wall. His name also appears on the WWII Memorial located at Mount Wollaston Cemetery in Quincy, Massachusetts.</p>
	<p>Staff Sergeant Burnell W Hamilton was the Tail Gunner and the only survivor. He was seriously injured but later returned to duty.</p>

Acknowledgements:

8th Air Force Historical Society Chronology Jan to Jun 1944

<http://www.8thafhs.org/combat1944a.htm>

385th Bomb Group Association <http://www.385thbga.com>

American Battle Monuments Commission <http://www.abmc.gov>

Find A Grave <http://www.findagrave.com/index.html>

Ian McLachlan <http://www.amazon.com/Ian-McLachlan/e/B001JAR6X4>

Bill Varnedoe

http://blog.al.com/breaking/2009/10/world_war_ii_veteran_takes_fir.html

Keith St Thomas

and Roy Barker