

Lancaster Bomber LM307

(near Crow Lane, South Muskham, OS Ref: SK785575)

'Thundering through the clean air'



The evening of 16th December 1943 was reported to be overcast and particularly dark. The landing lights of Winthorpe airfield had failed and the runway was being lit with glim lights - battery operated mobile lights with blue domes for landing strip lighting. The remarks of the unit commander, in the paperwork associated with the crash report, were as follows:

"The [Lancaster LM307] aircraft flew steadily over Winthorpe and called up on the radio with no difficulty being mentioned. The aircraft was told to 'stand by' and repeated this back. Shortly afterwards the crash was observed and the usual action regarding Ambulance and Fire Tender was taken".

Winthorpe airfield, now Newark Showground, was built in 1940. It was used as a satellite airfield, first to RAF Swinderby and, later, RAF Syerston. Although sited well in the landscape, on take-off, planes would have to fly over Newark risking disaster to the town and the vital ball bearing factory, Ransome & Marles - now NSK.

By 1943, Winthorpe was a Heavy Conversion Unit (HCU). These units were to train pilots used to flying lighter bomber, such as the Bristol Blenheim, to handle the big beasts, like the Avro Lancaster. Crashes were not infrequent and Thursday 16th December proved no exception.

In 2003, the run up to the sixtieth anniversary, I was told the story of the crash of LM307 and that the location was believed to be between South Muskham and Bathley. At the time, I was involved with FARI Archaeology, the Farndon based archaeological group, and was asked if we could help pinpoint the crash site. We were advised of a possible location and told permission had been gained to undertake a fieldwalk.

Some time earlier, I had been involved with such a walk over a Lancaster crash site near Staunton. This had led to a memorial being erected in Staunton churchyard, where there is still annual remembrance.

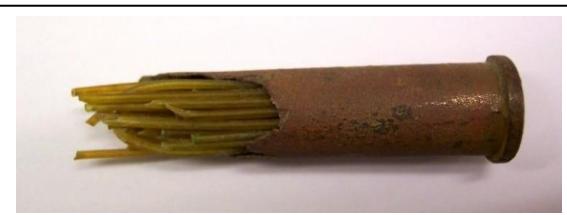
For the South Muskham crash, our job was just to identify the site. The proposal was to grid out an area of the field and to walk the transects searching for evidence. As there was likely to be some metal finds, we had two people with metal detectors sweeping the area behind the walkers.

It was one of those English days. We were about ten brave souls and gridded up a large area, under a leaden sky; the heavens opened. Worse still, we found absolutely nothing! Undefeated, we ignored the weather, and the specified location, and I decided to page the oracle - ask someone who knew the immediate area.

As double luck, the person I asked was Mick Swallow of South Muskham. I knew he farmed in the area but, unbeknown to me, had farmed the field which proved to be the crash site. When ploughing and working down the land, odd pieces of metal had come up in the soil and, in general, they had been slung into the hedge bottom without much ado.

I had taken a very simple – no toy - metal detector. Mick poked the business end into the hedge, moved it around a bit, and it screamed. Almost as quick as that! We pulled out a strip of metal over a foot long, dark green, with rivets along an edge which could have been a piece of fuselage or wing. Excitement rose.

We field-walked the adjacent area picking up pieces of window material, Perspex or similar. We also found the remains of a bullet, with cordite stands still inside. Later, I found that the cordite was viable, even after 60 years in the soil.



Bullet identified as a Mk7 antiaircraft bullet, manufactured by Greenwood & Batley (Leeds) in 1943. Standard ammunition on the Lancaster.

A Personal Story

From the crash reports we discovered that, instead of the normal 7 crew, this flight had 8 (see list below). The extra man was Flying Officer (Pilot Instructor) William Hedley Eager DFC.

When details of the project emerged, and reported in the Newark Advertiser, an extraordinary story came to light. William Eager was married and, at the time of the crash, his wife was pregnant with twins. A man then living on The Park, North Muskham, had been born in the same hospital, on the same day, as the twin girls. The two families remained in touch with William Eager's widow for many years.

The Crew (Note the ages, given in brackets.)

Laurence Bert Lawrence (19) Sergeant
William Hedley Eager DFC (23) Flying Officer
Kenneth Clifford Hampson (20) Pilot Officer
Stanley William Austin (29) Navigator
Roy Henry Woolcock (21) Sergeant
Robert William Baldwin (28) Flight Sergeant
Philip Dillon (19) Sergeant
? East (age unknown) Sergeant

Sgt Dillon and Sgt East survived the crash and were taken to Newark Hospital. Sgt Dillon died the next day and Sgt East is believed to have recovered.