

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Association I would like to welcome you all to St Denys' Church this afternoon. There are many local people and people who have travelled from all over the UK. We also welcome a visitor from The Netherlands, a member of a scheme whose members adopt a grave in a CWGC cemetery in this case 550 airman Lesley Harvey RCAF. It is wonderful that people will travel from so far afield to be here to remember the Squadron and its service personnel.

My name is Peter Coulter and I am involved with the 550 Squadron Association because my father-in-law F/Lt James (Jim) Cassidy, who was a Nav in the RAAF, flew his second tour with 550 Squadron from North Killingholme.

For the first time no 550 veterans are present at the reunion. This is sad, but inevitably this was always going to come to pass. Jack Harris is not able to be with us this year. The journey to North Killingholme is just no longer possible. When I say that Jack will celebrate his 102nd birthday in September, then you can perhaps understand why the journey is now just too much. But I am sure he will be thinking of us today, just as we are thinking of him. Notable among those others no longer with us is Maurice Snowball. Maurice passed away before even the reunion last year that was in the end cancelled due to the pandemic. Maurice was especially proud, and rightly so, of his flights to provide food for the starving Dutch people in Operation MANNA. To Jack, Maurice, and their colleagues of many years ago, you are the reason the rest of us are here today; so thank you for your service.

Two years ago was a big year for significant anniversaries and we were not able to meet up in NK to celebrate any of them! 75 years since the end of the war. 75 years since the liberation of the concentration camps. Thus it also marked the 75th anniversary of the end of 550 Squadron operations from North Killingholme and 75 years since the squadron was disbanded on the last day of October 1945. But we missed the opportunity to remember those anniversaries together in this place. So we remember them today.

On the other hand this year is full of anniversaries for the Association. It is 30th anniversary of the first reunion meeting in RAF Hendon in 1992. It is the 40th anniversary of the unveiling and dedication of the Memorial Stone in Lancaster Approach. Finally it is the 25th of the unveiling of the Memorial Window in this church just behind me.

Just a few weeks before the 2021 reunion would have been held a new memorial to the D-Day landings in Normandy was unveiled. We salute the more than 22000 service personnel commemorated on that memorial, many also from Bomber Command. We remember that here in this church is the CdG awarded to the 550 Squadron crew of F/Lt Kenyon Bowen-Bavery recognised as having opened proceedings for the D-Day landings. Sadly earlier this year Mary Bowen-Bavery, wife of Kenyon, died at the age of 101. She had already making plans to be here with us in NK this weekend.

The Association was represented by Gary Berg at a commemoration in The Netherlands this year; the memorial in Gendringen to the all the casualties in, around and over Gendringen including the S/Ldr Smith crew of 550 Squadron. The Association was also represented at two commemorations in Belgium this year; the commemorative event in Rebecq to the P/O Purney crew, and all of the

other 550 Squadron crews (six in total) lost over Belgium, and the memorial in Westerlo to the P/O Hinde crew.

Our profound thanks go to all the communities and individuals in Belgium, The Netherlands, France and Denmark where memorials to 550 Squadron air-crew have been raised. It is wonderful that these young men are still remembered and held in honour and respect in the communities where their lives were sadly cut short.

The operational life of 550 Squadron was also short; a mere two years. Only two years from first flights to disbandment. Two years that changed so many lives forever.

Today we remember the men and women of 550 Squadron more than three-quarters of a century ago and the efforts and sacrifices they made, in those two short years of operations from North Killingholme. We also think of the men and women of the Association, the people here today, and the ones who could not be with us today, but who nonetheless are part of the "550 family". All of us working to ensure that those two years are remembered.

I'll conclude with a last couple of items. First a mention of the "550 shop" where a selection of badges, ties, books, etc. will be available for sale in the village hall after the service. Our thanks to Mike for looking after the shop and indeed the fantastic job he does looking after our wonderful museum. Second, there has been a late update to the Order of Service. The poem "Another Op" that was to be read by Honor Redshaw will now be omitted because Honor has not been able to be with us this weekend.

I would like to say some thanks.

First to Sylvia Pexman and her team of ladies who provide the tea that we will enjoy later in the Village Hall. Every year for a brief period there is this Association-led invasion of North Killingholme and everything just runs so well, and we enjoy some wonderful hospitality. Thank you.

Thanks also to our organist Wendy Pankhurst and the minister Rev. Peter Green for leading our services of remembrance today.

At the dinner this evening George Turner will say thanks to the many people who have over the past year, and indeed previous years, done so much to keep the Association alive and active. So I will not repeat those thanks here. But I will mention the one person that George will not be mentioning this evening. That is, of course, George Turner. George looks after the Memorial Stone and its environs. The site of the Memorial Stone is such an important place. All our visitors head there. Chance passers-by stop there. It marks an important spot in close proximity to the former airfield. So, George, thank you for maintaining it so well year-round, most especially at reunion time and Remembrance weekend when it truly makes a suitable place for our Remembrance.

Finally! Thank you, to all of you for being here today. You are the people who keep the memory alive, who spread the message. That message is clear and simple: "Heroes once were here".