

KENNETH BRUCE 'HOLLY' HOLLOWELL A.F.C.

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'ONE OF THE FEW'

Holly died at Green Gables Nursing Home, Grayshott in 2007 aged 91 after being resident in Crossways Road, Grayshott since 1980. He had been a member of the Village Hall Committee, overseeing the maintenance programme, a keen gardener and member of the Horticultural Society, a Tree Warden and Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator.

He joined the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve in January 1938 and had over 50 hours solo flying before being called to the colours before the outbreak of war. After further training, he joined No. 25 (Night Fighter) Squadron in June 1940, flying Blenheims and then Beaufighters throughout the Battle of Britain. The Squadron, flying from North Weald and Debden, defended the Greater London area and later the Midlands and Liverpool from a base at Wittering, Northants. During this period he destroyed 4 enemy bombers (2 Heinkel 111's and 2 Junkers 88) probably destroyed 2 Dorniers, and damaged other bombers.

He had quite a few 'scrapes'; losing a propeller at 8,000 ft., engine failure at 10,000 ft. and a wheels-up crash landing in both cases. While attacking one of the Heinkels the guns jammed 3 times, he tailed the bomber while the observer attempted to free the guns, eventually succeeding and they went in for the final attack. The German air-gunners were firing at the Beaufighter all the time and put the port engine out of action. The Heinkel went down, engine on fire. The Beau was losing height and 'Holly' ordered the observer to bale out (he landed safely). Holly stayed with the aircraft eventually conjuring a crash landing in a Norfolk field next to the coastline. Temporarily 'knocked out' he came too, to a find himself surrounded by the Home Guard with rifles cocked. He was in action again 2 days later.

While he was stationed at North Weald, the airfield came under specific attack by the Luftwaffe; a few of the aircrew were sheltering in a dispersal bay when a huge sea mine parachuted down to block the only exit. Luckily it did not explode and the aircrew had to squeeze past with 16" to spare and live to fight another day.

After the Battle of Britain the squadron were 'rested' in Northern Ireland, where Holly took part in several air-sea rescue attempts. He left for the Middle East in February 1942 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant. After a voyage round Africa by sea, he spent a short time based near Cairo before being put in charge of the Test and Despatch Flights at Takoradi, West Africa, where crated planes were shipped from the US and UK, assembled, tested and despatched across Africa (a series of temporary airfields had been cleared) to reinforce the Allied Forces in the Middle East. While testing a Kittyhawk the single engine caught fire at 10,000 ft over the sea. Although being continually badly burnt, he nursed the plane back to crash land on a beach. After 5 weeks in hospital, he insisted on getting back to work. He subsequently married Marianne, one of the P.M.R.A.F. nursing sisters who had tended him in hospital. They were married for 64 years.

In 1943 he returned to the U.K. to an experimental unit where he helped pioneer the then new techniques of Blind Approach and Landing, now used in all passenger aircraft. During his service he flew over 40 different types of aircraft, and landed at 49 different U.K. airfields during 2,200 flying hours.

After the War he joined B.O.A.C. in Air Traffic Control in Africa and India and then for 28 years at Heathrow in Flight Operations, mainly trans-Atlantic routes, and played a major part in planning the first Concorde flight to the U.S.

In November 1990 he was one of only six ex Battle of Britain pilots who took part in the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall on the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

Roy K Hollywell

Grayshott Village Archive

<http://www.grayshott-archive.org.uk>

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David Barrett, a member of Grayshott Village Archive adds,

'I first met Holly when, as a driver for 'Care in Grayshott' I took him to Guildford for an outpatient appointment at the Royal Surrey Hospital.

As Treasurer of the Grayshott Village Hall I had come across the name 'Hollywell' a number of times on the Hall's water bills because for several years Holly was, as Roy Hollywell notes, he was a much-valued Maintenance Officer for the Hall. However, I had never associated the name with the partially sighted gentleman with his white stick who bravely and very skilfully and very regularly crossed and re-crossed the racetrack that is known as Headley Road, Grayshott.

I always tried to put my 'Care' passengers at ease and I was very pleased when they responded by telling me about their lives and experiences.

World War II fighter pilots were and indeed still are my idols, so the journey to and from Guildford that day with Holly was an absolute privilege and delight. Holly told me much of what his brother has set out above and especially about his use of early air-borne radar to find, stalk and destroy enemy bombers in the dead of night. On one occasion, he crept too close to his quarry and nearly destroyed his own aircraft, his navigator and himself when the bombs on board the enemy plane detonated when hit by his gun fire.'

'Yes' he then added in a very quiet voice, devoid of any bravado, any pride and I believe with a note of sorrow, 'I killed Germans'.

I had never heard anyone admit to killing another human being, but a boyhood reaction generated by the Second World War automatically and immediately kicked in when I commented, 'And I am jolly glad you did'. Immediately, I regretted this remark, for over the years I have come to dislike war and the sorrow and waste it brings to people. But at the same time without the efforts of brave, courageous young men such as Holly, my contemporaries and I would not have had the comfortable and safe lives that we have enjoyed since 1945.'