

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR AWAY...

Memorial Piece on the Bredfield B24 Liberator Crash

21st September 1944

Even though I consider myself one of the longer standing residents of Bredfield; having lived here for now 50 years, there are always new snippets of village history that come to the surface that I know nothing about, but want to understand. This is one such snippet that turned into quite an interesting and poignant research project...

It all started by me watching an inconsequential observation comedy TV show, which featured a group of amateur Metal Detectorists in an Essex fictional village (actually filmed near Framlingham) who held a Detectorists Rally on a field identified as the site of a WWII German Military Airplane crash.

This all brought to mind that I had heard of a WWII military plane having crashed in Bredfield. After receiving some basic information kindly given from our Village Recorder, though there was not enough detail to satisfy my query – so I went a step further...

Knowing that Bredfield is geographically close to Debach; which had been an active military airfield during WWII and now has the Debach Airfield Museum, I wondered if they would have more information- perhaps even know if it was one of their stationed planes back then that had crashed? And years back, I had even worked with a chap who volunteered at Parham Airfield Museum and had friends that took me to Martlesham Tower Air Museum Open Day too. Having such local links would surely help with my search – or would it?

The first problem to be pointed out to me, was that the whole of East Anglia was a hive of military aircraft activity during WWII; both with RAF and United States Army Air Forces Squadrons, so the odds of the plane crash in Bredfield being a really local Squadron were not good. Plus, it turned out that Woodbridge Airfield had a special Emergency Landing Ground Runway area for stricken military aircraft; usually returning after being attacked during missions to/from Europe.

The search seemed then an enormous task and one which might not be fully resolved. But I had underestimated the British determination and the willingness to help get historical facts of importance correct. Every single Museum contact, with the exception of one, went above and beyond to find the details I had requested- even to the extent of involving their source contacts, who in turn got in touch with more less known contacts etc.

After only a very short time the Aviation History Network was buzzing and viable suggestions were being sent to me from all sides. Clearly not all the contacts knew Bredfield or its geographical location in regards to other places. And in the heat of war some records were obviously not that well-kept or references of crash sites deliberately made a bit vague if the plane did not actually make it to a safe Airfield. I was told this was common so as to play down the state of affairs when their loved ones heard of events back home.

Eventually the information was filtered down enough and confirmed from two separate sources to be the most likely aircraft that crashed in the village. And so Bredfield became the final place of action for the ill fated 10 aircrew from 'The Bungay Buckaroos' Airfield at Flixton, nr Bungay; the base of the United States Army Air Forces 446th Bomb Group.

The B24 Liberator Bomber had been on a mission to Koblenz, Germany when the aircraft had been hit by flak and forced to turn back from the target area. The aircraft was advised to divert to RAF Woodbridge owing to the sustained damage and was headed for the emergency landing runway when it crashed at Bredfield in the early evening of 21st September 1944. The Pilot 2nd Lieutenant Robert Goletz along with his 9 crew were killed. Perhaps even more tragic was the death of the Co-Pilot Kenneth Dellow, who had been substituted onto that very B24 Liberator Bomber aircrew to fly their first mission.

The B24 Liberator Bomber Plane itself had flown 52 missions prior to this one and was painted in the military 'olive drab' green. Although it did not have a full nose art name given to it as many other bombers did during the war, this B24 was marked as 'T.S' which clearly had some personal significance to the original aircrew.

The aircrew were believed to have been buried in the Cambridge American Cemetery and despite St. Andrews Church in Bredfield not commemorating their sacrifice for Britain during WWII I am hoping this article might go some way to honouring their memory.

I also hope that this has brought them to mind, to those who either remember the crash (77 yrs ago) or has highlighted to those with no knowledge of the crash, that military aircraft crashes are more than just merely metal wreckage with no significance. It should still mean something to society today to acknowledge the importance of preserving historic events. To reflect on how everyone did their bit back then to the best of their ability and how their actions affected the here and now... Striving for a safer sustainable life for future generations to embrace and to maintain all aspects of freedom.

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