

EXERCISE EAGLE PROJECT



For those who don't know me my name is Darren Bond, I am an amateur historian from the UK after moving to Leicester, I started to learn more about the American GIs who were based in Leicestershire in 1944. I was privileged to be able to speak to a number on the phone, one in particular told me about a training accident in which his commanding officer was killed in only weeks before the invasion of France in May 1944 near March, Peterborough. With this snippet of information I started to research the accident and find out that fourteen men were killed in it. The accident took place on the homeward journey of the exercise when two squadrons of the 316th Troop Carrier Group (TCG) were turning to fly back to their base in Cottesmore when one of the lead plane of the 44th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS) being piloted by Lt Joseph Sharber Jr pulled up into the path of another lead plane being piloted by Major James Farris of the 36th TCS with tragic consequences. From eye witness accounts of others flying that night "The Sky lit up with a large explosion". On returning to Cottesmore it soon became clear to the aftermath of what had just taken place. The Commanding Officer of the 316th TCG, Lt Col Burton R Fleet had been killed, as well as the groups Chaplain a Capt Floyd N. Richart. Both were on board acting as observers. The pilot of the second lead plane was the highly decorated 36th Squadron commanding officer, and these are but to name a few of the fourteen men.

During months of research, exchanging emails and phone calls with veterans from the 316th TCG who were flying the night of the accident, family members of the victims of the crash as well as locals who remember the burning wreckage in their fields. It soon became clear that limited information had been published about what had happened and what information was to be found was incorrect. It frustrated me to the lack of correct facts available. To me it was it was sad enough to know that these men were lost in such a tragic way. But to think that their story and the real men behind the names were getting 'lost' in Time. This drove

me to find a way that would be a fitting tribute so that they wouldn't be forgotten. Again it was back to the phone and keyboard to hatch a plan. I soon decided that the only thing fitting that would stand the test of time is a memorial. With that in mind I got in contact with local parish councils and mayors to see if they would agree to this idea. Thankfully they did so the ball started to roll... I would add started to roll very slowly, at times I thought it was going backwards but it was rolling none the less.

After almost a year of sending emails to the local powers that be, sending another email to chase up the one I sent weeks before. I have finally been given the green light to start raising funds to hear this after so much time of what seemed to be nothingness came a little out of the blue and a bit of a shock. This surprising but fantastic news came through at the beginning of December 2016 so it is now full steam ahead to make sure the funds are in place so a fitting tribute can be erected so that those 14 young men are remembered for years to come. After speaking with their family members it brings it more to life. They are more than just names on a headstone. They were, sons, brothers, and husbands who had plans and a life they wanted to lead to the fullest. Five of the men killed still lie in the American Cemetery in Cambridge. The rest were repatriated back to the US in the late forties.

I have set up a Just Giving page to support the fundraising for the project, as well as help advertise what I am trying to achieve. More detailed information can be found on there or on The Eagle Project Facebook page where I have shared my research and project progress. If you can spare any funds I would be so very grateful for your support. It's a good cause that as you can guess I feel very strongly about. I am hoping to raise £2250 for the making of the memorial as well as a tree or trees to be planted at the crash site.

I would like to say a big thank you to the Troop Carrier/ Tactical Airlift Association for your very generous donation, and the continued support you offer with the project. The funds go a long way to help get the memorial made.

<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/TheEagleProject>

Once funds are collected and the memorial is made I hope to hold the memorial unveiling in May 2017 in the village church of Holy Trinity, Coates, Cambridgeshire. This is to mark the 73rd Anniversary of the crash. Please see the above pages with regards to updates. Of course all are welcome. I am hoping have a current USAF honour guard from the US base at Alcornbury, as well as historical displays and fingers crossed a C47 fly past.

Images provided are of the first design of the memorial, and myself next to the headstone of Floyd V Asleson, who was one of the men killed and still buried in the US cemetery in Cambridgeshire.

For more information please see the attached link. I can also highly recommend the book "Valor Without Arms the 316th TCG unit history" by Michael Ingrisano a Radio Operator from the 37th TCS.

<https://www.facebook.com/Exerciseeagle/>

If any members of the TC/TAA are WW2 vets and remember the exercise or maybe a family member shared a story about it I would love to hear about it.

Thank you for your time.
Darren "Daz" Bond