

## Flight Sergeant Charles W Auld RCAF



*Commonwealth War Grave on the west side of the Churchyard.*

At 23:05 on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July 1942, a Vickers Wellington 1c bomber took off from RAF Pershore, Worcs, on a night cross country training flight. The aircraft, DV700, was part of 23 Operational Training Unit (OTU), which was one of several units set up to train Canadian airmen on Wellingtons for night bombing missions.

On this flight, DV700 was piloted by Sgt Robert Frederick Shirley RAFVR (1330958), with navigator Sgt C.L. Morton RCAF (R101074) and a second navigator Sgt J.R. Martin RCAF (R90393). The crew was completed with wireless operator/air gunner Sgt C.S. Coburn RCAF (R83906), air bomber Sgt S.M. Keon RCAF (R90710) and rear air gunner F/Sgt Charles W. Auld RCAF (R98159). Both Sgt Morton and F/Sgt Auld were formerly Americans, now serving in the RCAF. The aircraft was carrying 4 practice bombs and a flare.

Less than 3 hours later, whilst flying from east to west over Northants, the starboard engine carburettor iced up and failed, leaving the pilot unable to maintain altitude at 5,000ft. At 3,000ft he ordered the crew to bail out, which they commenced at 2,000ft before he attempted an emergency landing at 01:45 on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July.

The aircraft came down one mile north of Old village (approx 8 miles north of Northampton), but hit a tree in a hedge line and burst into flames, killing the pilot, Sgt Shirley. The aircraft subsequently completely burnt out. F/Sgt Auld, the last crewman out, was found nearby to the east as his chute did not have time to fully deploy.

The remains of Sgt Shirley and F/Sgt Auld were taken to the Royal Oak Inn, Walgrave, overnight until their bodies could be collected in the morning, whilst the injured crew were hospitalised at RAF Chelveston. The remains of the Wellington were eventually removed by 65 Maintenance Unit from RAF Blaby Wharfe, Leics.

Sgt Robert Shirley (19) is buried at square E, grave 818, Eastbrookend Cemetery at Dagenham. He was the son of Robert Amos & Lillian Nora Shirley of Dagenham. According to his brother, Robert was the first ATC cadet to gain his pilot wings and was presented with a wristwatch by the Mayor of Dagenham in 1941.

F/Sgt Charles Auld (23) is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave in the churchyard. He is presumed to have crossed the border into Canada and enlisted in the RCAF, forgoing his American citizenship and has therefore not been moved to the US forces cemetery at Madingley, Cambs, nor repatriated to his homeland. He was the son of Charles & Delia Auld of Chicago, Illinois. The church registers show that he was buried on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July 1942 by a catholic priest, Fr Bainbridge from Our Lady of the Scared Heart RC Church, Wellingborough.

The flower vase in front of his grave was donated by the Chelveston WI in remembrance of F/Sgt Auld.

Sources: Commonwealth War Graves Commission, RAF Air Historical Branch, BBC WW2 People's War Archive (Stanley Shirley), Northamptonshire Records Office, Northamptonshire Airfields & Aircraft Research Group and Rob Davis's Bomber Command 1939-45 database.