

Marshall Bailey Collings



Flying Officer Nav./W.Op. 129729. 29 Squadron.
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Died May 21st 1943, aged 21

Son of Leonard and Marie Collings of Polruan



Marshall at home with his parents



Flying Officer Marshall Bailey Collings with Radio Operator (RO) wings and VR badge, signifying Volunteer Reserve

Marshall Bailey Collings was born August 8th 1921 at Trehaverock cottage, St Endellion. He was the only son of Leonard Collings (*born at Plain Street in 1896*) and Marie Elizabeth Collings (*nee Blake – born at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in 1901*). Leonard's farming family moved to Port Quin and later to Treswarrow. Marie's family moved to Rock, where her father began the first bus service to Wadebridge in the form of a coach and horses. Marshall and his parents moved to Burrow Park where he cycled to the school in Tredrizzick, and later they moved to Pennatillie, a farm near St Columb, where Marshall continued his schooling. He later attended Fowey Grammar School.

Marshall was always interested in communications and was involved in wireless and the early television industry, working for Murphy whilst continuing his studies. His father acquired a second farm in an endeavour to keep him home when 'call up' was due, but Marshall was determined to join the RAF and in time became a radio operator. His VR lapel badge confirms he was recruited into the RAF Volunteer Reserve. This was formed in 1936 and confined to men between 18 and 25 who had been accepted for part-time training as Pilots, Observers or Wireless Operators. This was the principal means of aircrew entry to serve with the RAF. By the end of 1941, more than half of Bomber Command aircrew were members of RAFVR, eventually reaching 95%. In 1943, the Air Ministry issued orders to remove the VR badges as they were regarded as divisive.

He was a member of 29 Squadron, based at RAF Bradwell Bay in Essex. 29 Squadron is one of the oldest fighter squadrons in the world, formed in 1915 as a unit of the Royal Flying Corps. From June 1940 it was a night fighter squadron, receiving some of the first Bristol Beaufighters in November 1940, only a few months after this aeroplane entered service with the RAF.

The Bristol Beaufighter was fitted with the first Airborne Interception night fighter radar sets, which would have been operated by Marshall as the wireless operator. By fighter standards, the plane was rather heavy and slow, with a maximum speed of 335mph. They were fast enough to catch German bombers and were an effective counter to Luftwaffe raids. However, it was heavy on the controls and not easy to fly, good landings being a particular challenge. The Beaufighter was prone to engine and airframe problems and was never popular with pilots. In May 1943 they were being replaced with faster De Havilland Mosquitos.

On the evening of May 21st 1943, Marshall and his pilot, Flight Sergeant Frederick Patrick O'Brien from Plympton, were returning from a defensive patrol along the English coast in Bristol Beaufighter R2184. The aircraft was seen to crash into the sea off Brightlingsea, Essex, only 5 miles NE of their base. No SOS or emergency call was received from the aircraft. Both bodies were washed ashore. Flight Sergeant O'Brien was 23 years old, and is buried at All Saints Church in Brightlingsea.



Bristol Beaufighter Mk 1F night fighter

Flying Officer Marshall Bailey Collings is buried in St Endellion Churchyard.

The whole extended Collings and Blake families were devastated by the news of his death. His uncle, Marshall Blake of Trelights, composed this poem in commemoration.

MARSHALL

*He went on the wings of the morning
and his heart – it was aglow.
With courage he followed his calling.
He is gone – it is all we shall know.*

*In the midst of our sorrow and anguish,
We will pick up the thoughts that remain –
Of a love that we now fondly cherish,
'Til in heaven we can share it again.*

*There in the Valley of Shadow –
Like a beam of the rising sun,
Stands the loved one we're waiting to follow,
We long for the words – Well Done!*



The grave of Flying Officer Marshall Bailey Collings in St Endellion Churchyard

RAF Bradwell Bay was in service from 1941 to 1946. During that time, 121 airmen took off and failed to return. A war memorial has been erected on the corner of the old airfield, honouring those brave men.



RAF Bradwell Bay War Memorial to the 121 men lost, and the plaque listing Marshall Bailey Collings



Sources

RAF Volunteer Reserve: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force_Volunteer_Reserve#History
29 Squadron: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._29_Squadron_RAF#Second_World_War
Bristol Beaufighter: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Beaufighter
RAF Bradwell Bay: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Bradwell_Bay
and http://www.controltowers.co.uk/B/Bradwell_Bay.htm
Bradwell Bay Memorial Photos: <https://www.flickr.com/search/?q=Bradwell+Bay+Memorial>
We are grateful to Peter Blake for the family information he provided.

In Memory of
Flying Officer Nav./W.Op.
Marshall Bailey Collings

129729, 29 Sqdn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who died on 21 May 1943 Age 21

Son of Leonard and Marie Elizabeth Collings, of Polruan.

Remembered with Honour
St. Endellion (St. Endellientia) Churchyard

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission