

A Survivor's War

1318195 Aircraftman Hedley (Eddie) Venning Philp

Hedley Venning Philp, known to all as Eddie, is the father of Annie, Amelia, David, Ellen and Ella Philp. He falsified his age to join up, and following his basic training was posted to RAF Stormy Down, two miles west of Bridgend. This station held No 7 Bombing and Gunnery School and was in use from the outbreak of war until 1947. Eddie trained there as an armourer, colloquially known in the RAF as 'pin-monkeys'. An armourer is considered the most specialised trade within the RAF, where they train for qualification in specific weapons, or in particular aspects of armaments, rather than jack of all trades. After training he was posted to No. 3 Group Bomber Command, whose headquarters were at RAF Exning in Suffolk, but had squadrons in about a dozen East Anglian airfields.

In 1943, No. 3 Group was split in two, as three squadrons were transferred to No 8 Group, and Eddie went with them. These were 'The Pathfinders' under the Australian Air Vice Marshall Donald Clifford Tyndall Bennett, the youngest Air Vice-Marshal in the RAF. No 8 Group were equipped with the latest navigation aids (*Gee*, *H2S* and *Oboe*) so they could find the target more accurately. After further armament training at Stormy Down, Eddie was proficient in preparing the fuses and loading 2,000lb and 4,000lb bombs, as well as Target Indicator bombs used by the pathfinders. These were flares that were dropped to light up the target for the main bomber force following behind.



Target Indicator Flares dropped by pathfinders over Berlin



Eddie Philp with his brother Morley

As one of the ground crew he was once offered a trip up in a Spitfire. Having been assured by the Polish pilot that there would be no aerobatics, he got in the plane. After the sixth loop the loop and barrel roll, a very green Eddie Philp was returned to earth, reassuring the pilot he was fine as he staggered off to spend the next few hours in the toilet!

Eddie was later back with No. 3 group as a member of No. 514 Squadron flying Lancaster bombers out of RAF Waterbeach, four miles north of Cambridge. 514 Squadron was equipped with the latest Gee-H radio navigation equipment. Due to its impressive results, 3 Group was allowed the latitude to operate independently of other Bomber Command groups, even allowing some Gee-H equipped squadrons to act as their own pathfinders, causing friction with No 8 Group whose job this was. Perhaps Eddie's experience in 8 Group was why he was clawed back to 3 Group to arm their Target Indicator flares.

Amongst the important actions of 514 Squadron was precision bombing of construction and storage sites of the V1 and V2 flying bombs menacing southern England in the months after D-day, decimating the German E-boat light naval strike force at Le Havre, and subsequently attacking German oil production.

In the course of its two year life, 514 squadron flew 3,675 sorties on 218 bombing raids in the course of which it dropped 14,650 tons of bombs. 426 aircrew and 9 ground crew lost their lives whilst serving with the squadron, and 66 Lancasters were lost on operations, with a further 14 crashing. On August 22nd 1945 514 Squadron was disbanded with no ceremony, just a farewell dinner in the Officers' Mess.

Eddie returned to Port Isaac after the war to raise his family. He died in 2011.

Sources

RAF Stormy Down: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Stormy_Down

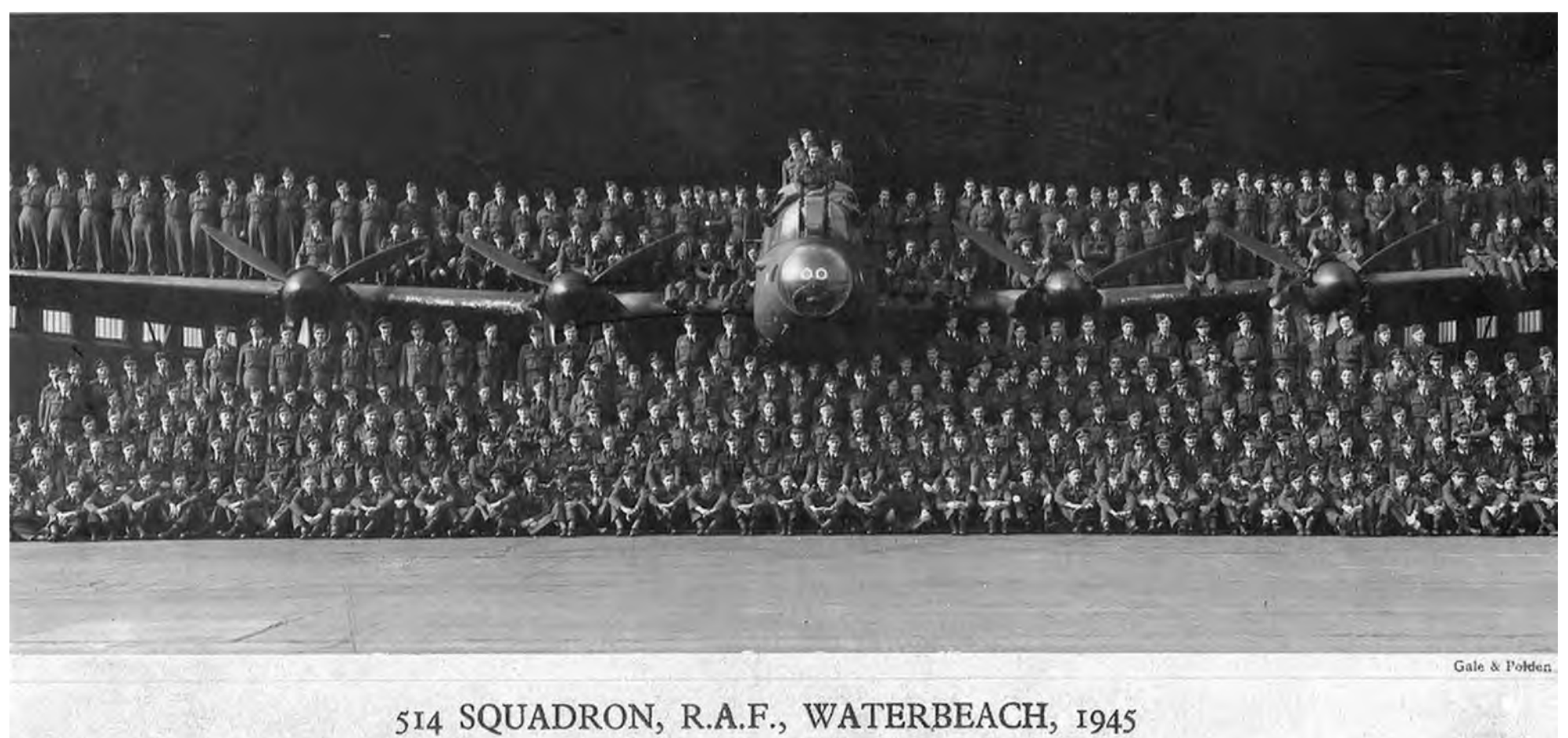
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514 SQUADRON, R.A.F., WATERBEACH, 1945

514 Squadron pose on a Lancaster at the end of the war