



USAAF Liberator "A Dog's Life" crashes in Old Catton on 13th February 1945.



"A Dog's Life" was a B-24 Liberator in the 2nd Air Division 458th heavy bomb group, 753rd bomber squadron, stationed at RAF Horsham St Faith, now known as Norwich airport. The aircraft serial number was 44-40281.

Shannon's crew had only been assigned to the 753rd at Horsham less than two months earlier and in that time they flew ten missions into Germany. Two of those missions were in "A Dog's Life".

Dreadful weather conditions in the early part of February 1945 saw many operational missions into Germany cancelled. This offered an opportunity for training flights. At about 12:40 on 13th February 1945, the Liberator "A Dog's Life" piloted by Lt. Lawrence R. Shannon took off from Horsham St Faith loaded with sand filled 500lb bombs and headed south.

A few minutes after take off, Shannon radioed the control tower reporting engine problems and a feathered propeller. Lt. Shannon was cleared to land immediately. The aircraft, at about 700 feet, turned left heading north east back to the runway.

At around 12:46, the left wing dropped completely and the aircraft began breaking up around the southern end of what is now known as the Deer Park, finally crashing into a house on the corner of Church Street and Spixworth Road in Old Catton. A civilian lady living in the Church Street house suffered leg injuries.



Rick Rokicki, a gunner aboard the Liberator "Briney Marlin", was on leave that afternoon and was in the vicinity of Horsham St Faith airfield. He gave an account stating that *"one aircraft was only 800 feet high when I noticed he was trying to turn with two feathered propellers. I said to my buddy, 'He'll never make the field'. We cycled like mad but before we could reach the wreckage a fire-truck and other equipment were already there. A guard group prevented anyone getting close. One of the crew got out and walked towards the ambulance. Everyone tried to get to him and tell him to lie down but he kept coming. He died from delayed shock before they could get him to the ambulance"*.

All nine crew members of the Liberator died.



The crash scene on the corner of Church Street and Spixworth Road in Old Catton near Norwich.

The crash only narrowly missed the house next door; the house where Anna Sewell wrote her famous *Black Beauty* book. Today, it is easy to see the brickwork used to repair the damage to the house in this picture.



Robert L. Ward
Engineer

Frederick M. Caudell
Gunner

Grant D. Ordiway
Gunner

Charles E. Given Jnr.
Gunner

Gene P. Hamilton
Gunner

William L. Webber
Radio Operator

Leslie J. Gruner
Navigator

Allen K. Jewett
Co Pilot

Lawrence L. Shannon
Pilot

Norman Cameron
Bombardier

The photograph above is of the "A Dog's Life" crew. Bombardier Norman Cameron (mentioned above) did not board the aircraft for its ill-fated final flight. When he discovered that the scheduled mission into Germany was cancelled and it was to be a training flight instead, Cameron was excused flight duty on sickness grounds. The day after the death of his crew mates, Norman was removed from flying duties until February 18th 1945.



This page is a memorial and tribute to the nine crew-men (listed below) who gave their lives in the line of duty and in defence of the freedom that many of us now take for granted.

The roll of honour for the crew of USAAF Liberator "A Dog's Life" who sadly died in Church Street, Old Catton on the 13th February 1945.

Lawrence L. Shannon
Pilot

Allen K. Jewett
Co Pilot

Leslie J. Gruner
Navigator

Robert L. Ward
Engineer

William L. Webber
Radio Operator

Frederick M. Caudell
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Gene P. Hamilton
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Charles E. Given Jnr.
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Half way along Church Street in Old Catton is a memorial plaque. Many people walking through the historic heart of the Old Catton stop, read the inscription, and then move on without knowing more about the two US bombers or the pilots that gave their lives in early 1945. This article has been researched and produced to keep the memory of these brave souls alive.

Interestingly, the memorial plaque in Church Street mentions 20 valuable lives lost as a result of this and the Tommy Thumper II crash. But from the official crash reports, 18 crew men died, not 20. There were no civilian casualties as a result of these accidents. The reason for this disparity may lie in the fact that the initial crew of a B-24 consisted of 10 men. But later on in the war, this was reduced to 9 men when the ball turret was removed. Even after that turret was removed, some B-24's flew with 10 crew and others flew with 9. In the case of one bomber, "A Dogs' Life", the reason was simpler and the crew member – Norman Cameron - very lucky!

It would seem that at the time the memorial in Old Catton was commissioned, no one checked the crash reports. As no names are given on the memorial, someone must have presumed that the aircraft were each flying with a ten-man crew.



The Church Street memorial plaque.



Larger versions of the photographs in this article, together with additional photographs and copies of the USAAF crash reports can be viewed in the photo archive at www.oldcatton.com.

We are extremely grateful to Norman Cameron for providing the crew photograph and to Tony North and Darin Scorza for contacting us with additional information for this article.

We are also very grateful to Martin W. Bowman for his assistance and we strongly recommend his book, *Fields of Little America*, which gives a detailed account of the 2nd Air Division in East Anglia between 1942 and 1945.