

15th. April, 1982.

Miss Effie McClean,
Elwinside Cottage,
Strawberry Bank,
Linlithgow.
EH49 6BJ.

Dear Miss McClean,

The Aeroplane Monthly has taken a few days to forward your letter of 31st. March, but I am very glad that you decided to write to me. It is a pity that your father did not live long enough to learn that there was a brief tribute to your brother in my writing.

I first met Charles (we always used surnames or nicknames in the RAF, for some reason) at Prestwick in September 1940. Enclosed is a course photograph, showing Charles fourth from left top row and myself fourth from left middle row. Perhaps because of the alphabet (Mc and N) we were usually billeted together during training and formed a friendship which lasted into the dangers of operational flying. You will see your brother's signature on the reverse of the photograph (perhaps you could return this eventually).

Another person on the course was Richard "Ginger" Pape. He is the chap in the rowing boat, playing the fool. He was shot down over Germany, broke out of POW camp and was tortured by the Gestapo. He wrote a book called "Boldness by my Friend", which is still around. Charles, Richard and myself used to share a billet.

The photograph of the hotel is the Officers Mess for 217 Squadron at St. Eval in Cornwall. It was called the Waterbeach hotel and still exists. The chap with the stick seems to be a civilian. The one with the sunglasses is F/O Spencer-Schrader, who was killed. In the middle is S/L A. H. "Junior" Simmonds, who was Charles' pilot before Halley; he is still alive and remembers Charles as an excellent navigator. I can't remember the chap standing. In the chair, reading as usual, is myself; they used to call me "Nibs".

George Halley was a smallish, decent, quiet sort of chap, a bit older than most. I tried hard to find out what happened to them. It was at night, and they must have been hunting for shipping off the Dutch coast and were probably shot down. They were carrying a secret piece of equipment, called ASV (an elementary form of radar meaning air to surface vessel). We'll never know the details now.

I have had several letters from relatives of those lost in the squadron, as well as a few from survivors. I feel deeply that the country lost some of its best men in those days and that we have all been the poorer for it - perhaps one gets nostalgic as one gets older.

Perhaps I could keep the remainder of your photographs for a short while to show them to other survivors, who may help me to identify them. My account in "Navigators Progress" has been published in book form (cover enclosed) in case you want to get a copy from your library.

Thank you once again for writing to me.

Most sincerely,

Ray Nesbit

Miss Effie McClean,
Elwinside Cottage,
Strawberry Bank,
Lindlithgow,
EH 49 6BJ.

22nd May 1962

Dear Miss McClean,

Here after a delay of some weeks are the remainder of your photographs, which I have shown to a couple of 217 Squadron survivors.

Sergeant Childs was readily recognised by Ken Reeves, my air gunner. The inscription on the cross means "given up by the sea 12 December 1941".

The four outside the woods but must be Charles and his crew. Next to him must be Halley, but it doesn't look quite like him, so I am not absolutely sure.

The chap looking at the rocks is Jim Hunter, a commissioned navigator who was a friend of Charles' and myself. He was shot down off the west coast of France and, most unusually, survived and is alive today. We spoke on the 'phone recently and will meet again, after forty years.

No other information on the group outside the Mess, except that I have a vague idea that the chap with the stick is Gould, our intelligence officer, and that the other standing figure is Graham, a pilot who was killed.

I hope that these notes revive memories of Charles, and I am sure that you feel very proud of him. Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything else you wish to know.

With all good wishes,

Most sincerely,

Ray Nesbit

PS Please excuse paper and my scribble - am without a typist at present.