

BRAVE WARTIME AIRMEN WHO DIED ON LAND NOW OWNED BY SEMBCORP ARE REMEMBERED



The picture shows Geoff Davis (left) with the organiser, Royal British Legion Dormanstown branch chairman Bob Hampton, and Wing Commander Mike Warren, 93, who lives in Redcar and flew Lancaster bombers during his RAF career.

Sembcorp has helped ensure the memory of seven allied airmen who died in a night of wartime chaos and confusion on Teesside continues to be remembered by people in the area.

The men, members of 101 Squadron, were returning from a mine laying operation in waters near the North Sea island of Heligoland just off the German coast.

They were heading for an airfield near York but had drifted off course in dense fog when their Lancaster Bomber was mistakenly thought to be one of a number of Luftwaffe planes attacking Teesside at the same time.

The incident, on the night of 17th December 1942, resulted in the plane crashing on land close to what is now the McGowan Bridge. The bridge, constructed after the

war, is above pipelines leading from the Wilton International site to one of the tunnels under the River Tees.

For the past ten years the site of the tragedy has been marked by a plaque which Sembcorp was recently requested to help restore ahead of a Royal British Legion ceremony marking the 76th anniversary of the incident.

Geoff Davis of the Buildings, Roads and Land Management Group, whose father was also in the RAF during the war, said: "It was an honour for us to be asked to help mark the sacrifice that these brave airmen made for their country."

A website dedicated to fallen airmen records "The Lancaster's "friend or foe" transponder had ceased to work, or was not switched on and as a result the radar operators on the ground could not tell the Lancaster was a friendly aircraft. Given that they knew attacks were being made by enemy aircraft in the New Marske area at the time they assumed it to be hostile."

Flying over the nearby Warrenby Ironworks at around 250 feet, huge Bofur guns sited at the plant could hardly miss. Several hits were scored on the Lancaster which eyewitnesses described as being blown out of the sky. The majority of the aircraft landed on farmland near to Steel House, Dormanstown at 22.10hrs. The airmen on board died instantly.

Thankfully this kind of incident was not common and is believed to be unique to the North of England.

Those who died, including three New Zealanders and an American who are all buried at Thornaby on Tees Cemetery, were:

Pilot Sgt Marcel Alec Fussell RAF Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR), aged 20, buried in his home town of Dorchester in Dorset; Bomb Aimer Sgt Sydney Stewart McLean RNZAF, 29, from Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand; Flight Engineer Sgt Jack Worsnop RAF, 23, buried in his home town of Bradford, West Yorkshire; Navigator Sgt Monte Alan Gray McIntyre RNZAF, 29, of Gisborne, Auckland, New Zealand; Wireless Operator/Air Gunner Sgt Michael James O'Malley RNZAF, 21, of Wairoa, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand; Air Gunner Sgt George John Warren RAFVR, 19, of Dagenham, Essex; Rear Gunner - Sgt Gregory Manuel Georges RCAF, 22, of Whitman, Massachusetts, USA.

A Lancaster bomber is pictured below

