

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Association I would like to welcome you all to St Denys' Church this afternoon. As ever the church is full. There are many local people and people who have travelled from all over the UK and Ireland. We also have friends from Belgium and Denmark with us. It is really quite a thing that people will travel from all over to be here to remember the Squadron and its service personnel. Finally, I'm pleased to welcome our 550 veterans. Sadly, of course, they are fewer in number each year. So welcome Jack and Maurice. You and your colleagues of many years ago are the reason the rest of us are here in the first place; so welcome and thank you for being with us today.

Notable among those no longer with us is Philip Blackham. Philip was a regular attender at reunions and was with us in the last couple of years even when it was very difficult for him to be here. Many will remember him well. It is with sadness we record his passing earlier this year.

In case you do not know me my name is Peter Coulter and I am involved with the 550 Squadron Association because my father-in-law F/Lt James (Jim) Cassidy, who was a Nav in the RAAF, flew his second tour with 550 Squadron from North Killingholme.

This has been a big year for the Association. Again! What other Association do you know where anniversaries come in twos! Last year it was the 75th anniversary of the formation of 550 Squadron in November 1943. This year it is the 75th anniversary of 550 Squadron operations from North Killingholme because those commenced in January 1944. It's a nice trick, but why not celebrate twice when you can!

It is also just a few weeks ago to the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings, an event forever linked to the crew of F/O Bowen-Bravery of 550 Sqdn acknowledged as having commenced proceedings that memorable day by leading the Bomber Command attack on targets on the Cherbourg peninsula at Crisbecq. A fact commemorated by the Croix de Guerre, awarded to the crew by the French Government, on that wall over there by the Memorial window.

The Association attended two commemorations in Belgium this year; the unveiling of a new memorial plaque in Sint Niklaas to the P/O Dukelow crew, and the commemorative event in Rebecq to the P/O Purney crew, and all of the other 550 Sqdn crews lost over Belgium. And here is another duplicate. Last year a new memorial plaque was unveiled in Sint Niklaas to the P/O Dukelow crew in the town cemetery where the crew are buried. This year a wonderful new memorial was raised close to the crash site. It is with pleasure that we note Andy Daelman and party are with us this weekend. Andy was key in organising this wonderful memorial.

In the Netherlands a new/replacement memorial to F/O Lesley Pulfrey was raised in March this year.

This very weekend there is a commemoration in the north-east of France to the W/Commander Connolly crew; this is the 75th anniversary of the loss of this crew. W/Commander Connolly was the Squadron CO for a short period. A wreath will be laid on behalf of the Association by a relative of the rear-gunner Cecil Watson.

Just last evening I heard of a wonderful memorial event at Blamont in France for another 550 crew (P/O Roche and crew) organised by local people. Relatives of the crew were completely overwhelmed by the respect and honour afforded to the crew by local people.

Our profound thanks go to all the communities and individuals in Belgium, The Netherlands, France and Denmark where memorials to 550 Sqdn aircrew have been raised. It is wonderful that even after all the years have passed these young men, and many were so very young, are still remembered and held in honour and respect in the communities where their lives sadly came to an end.

The operational life of 550 Sqdn was so short; a mere two years. Although I expect that at the time the men did not think it short. But only two years from first flights to disbandment. Two years that changed so many lives forever. Two years that changed North Killingholme too.

So today we remember the men and women of 550 Squadron three-quarters of a century ago and the efforts and the sacrifices they made, in those two short years of operations from North Killingholme. We also think of the men and women of the Association, the people here today, and the ones who could not be with us today, but who nonetheless are part of the "550 family". All of us working to ensure that those two years are remembered.

I'll conclude with a last couple of items. First a mention of the "550 shop" where a selection of badges/ties/posters, etc" are available for sale. Kath Robinson will be at the back of the church after the service; or indeed contact Kath or Mike Leeman wherever you come across them and I am sure they will be delighted to part you from your money! Our thanks go to Kath, and also to Mike for looking after the shop and indeed the fantastic job he does in our wonderful museum. Note also there are some RBL 75th D-Day pins also available at the back of the church,

Now I would like to say some thanks.

First to Sylvia Pexman and her team of ladies who provide tea that we will enjoy, as we always do, later in the Village Hall. Every year there is this invasion of North Killingholme by us "outsiders" for a short period and things just run so well, and we get fed and watered. Thank you.

Thanks also to our organist Wendy Pankhurst and the minister Rev. Mark Hutson for leading our service of remembrance today.

Then thanks to Richard McCormick. The 550 Squadron sign on the village green was looking a bit weather-beaten and has undergone a bit of a refurbishment. The model Lancaster has been removed, restored and replaced looking better than ever by Richard! Thank you.

At the dinner this evening George Turner will say thanks to the many and various people who have over the past year, and indeed in previous years, done so much to keep the Association alive and active. So I will not repeat those thanks here; George will do a much better job of it than me! But I will mention the one person that George will not be mentioning this evening. And that is, of course, George Turner. It is probably not widely known that it is George alone who looks after the Memorial Stone and its environs. He sees to the flowers in tubs, seeks to keep the gravel weed-free, maintains the hedge and is responsible for the flags and flagpoles. The site of the Memorial Stone is such an important place for so many people. All our visitors head there. Chance passers-by stop there. It

marks an important spot in close proximity to the former airfield; thank you George for maintaining it so well year-round, and especially at reunion time and Remembrance weekend when it truly makes a suitable place for our remembrance. But it doesn't get that way from one weekend's work the weekend before. So thank you George.

And thanks to all of you for just being here.