

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Association I would like to welcome you all to St Denys' Church this afternoon. To those who 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 Navigator in the RAAF, flew his second tour with 550 Squadron from North Killingholme.

There are local people and people who have travelled from all over the UK and Ireland to be here with us today. Some have travelled from even further afield.

We warmly welcome John Arnold and Tim and Heather Vance from Australia. We are delighted that you are also able to be here with us today.

It is always a delight to see that people will travel from near and far to be here, even if only for a few brief hours, to remember the Squadron and its service personnel.

Welcome all.

Most years there are a number of ceremonies in Europe to commemorate 550 Squadron crews. This year it was not possible for the Association representatives to attend the planned remembrance ceremonies in Europe. Two commemorations were planned to take place in Belgium this year. In Rebecq at the site of the loss of the P/O Purney crew of JA712/BQ-H. This however did not take place following the passing of our good friend Wilfred Burie. Wilfred went to tremendous lengths to remember all of the six 550 Squadron crews lost over Belgium and indeed was a frequent visitor to North Killingholme. Just before Christmas last the Association lost another good friend William Albertyn of Sint Niklaas, Belgium. William did so much on behalf of the families remembering the P/O Dukelow crew of LL851 lost over Sint Niklaas. We will miss Wilfred and William, but remember them with affection and deep gratitude for all their efforts to commemorate 550 Squadron crews. In Westerlo the P/O Hinde crew of DV309 were remembered in a commemorative service there. At Rhenen in The Netherlands the F/O Neilson RCAF crew of LM134 were remembered on 15/16th June on the 80th anniversary of their loss. Relatives of the crew from both Canada and England were in attendance for those ceremonies.

On behalf of the Association I would like to express thanks to all the communities and individuals in Belgium, The Netherlands, France and Denmark where memorials to 550 Squadron air-crew have been raised. These young men are still remembered in the communities where their lives were sadly cut short.

550 Squadron was born out of 100 Squadron at RAF Waltham and only operated for a short time, just two years in total from first flights out of RAF Waltham to disbandment in North Killingholme. Each year at this time we remember the men and women of 550 Squadron and the efforts and sacrifices they made, in that very short time 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" that extends over all parts of the globe.

I would like to conclude with a couple of items of thanks. First our thanks to Mike Leeman for looking after the "550 shop" in the village hall and the fantastic job he does looking after our wonderful museum. To Kath Robinson, who sadly could not be with us today, who also looks after

visitors for the museum in Mike's absence. Having close at hand so many people who are happy to give their time to ensure that 550 Squadron is remembered is indeed a blessing.

Thanks to Sylvia Pexman and her team of ladies who provide the tea that we will enjoy later in the Village Hall. Once again the quiet of the village is disrupted by this invasion of friends and relatives of airmen who once, so briefly, called this place "home". But we find, always, warmth and appreciation and we enjoy some wonderful hospitality. Thanks to our organist Chris and to minister Rev. Trevor Riess for leading our services of remembrance today.

Thanks also to George Turner. George maintains the Memorial Stone and the surrounding area. The Memorial Stone marks that point close to the former airfield, which is an such an important place for visitors seek to out. Or passers-by who stumble upon it and learn of the brave men once stationed here. George, thank you for maintaining it so well year-round, especially at this Reunion time but also on Remembrance weekend when it really is the place for us to gather and remember.

Finally! Thank you, to all of you for being here today. You each have your own personal reason for being here today. Perhaps it is an airman who did not make it back. Or perhaps one who did and lived to tell the tale. Or perhaps a member of the ground staff without whom the aircraft and the crews could not have stayed in the air to continue the fight against the enemy. Whichever is the case above all it is for someone who served regardless of the cost and who, for a short time, called North Killingholme "home".

We will remember them.