



WARRANT OFFICER CHARLES WAGSTAFF

SERVICE NO. 370171

NAV/BOMBER WIRELESS, ROYAL AIR FORCE

DIED 8th MARCH 1945 AGED 40

Research on Charles Wagstaff has been difficult, partly because his Commonwealth War Graves Commission memorial entry does not give details of his RAF Unit. Details of his service given below are therefore sketchy and may be subject to amendment.

Charles was born in Walthamstow, Essex, in 1905. He was the second of five sons of Alfred and Florence Wagstaff. Alfred was a general toolmaker who worked on horse clipping machines. In 1911 the family were living in Reading.ⁱ In 1931 Charles married Gladys M White, the daughter of George White. The White family were living in Buffins Lane North Warnborough in 1911, George having worked as a general labourer with the District Council.ⁱⁱ In 1931 Charles and Gladys were married within the Hartley Wintney registration districtⁱⁱⁱ, almost certainly in All Saints Church, Odiham. At the time of Charles's death in 1945 his home with Gladys was Sandys Lane, Basingstoke^{iv}.

A detailed search of the internet has provided some information about Charles' RAF unit, which I believe to be 22 Heavy Glider Conversion Unit. This unit was set up at RAF Keevil, near Trowbridge, Wiltshire 15 October 1944 and continued there until 21 June 1945. At this time it was specifically set up to provide two week conversion courses for pilots transferring to Horsa and Waco Hadrian heavy gliders^v, probably in preparation for Operation Varsity, the Allied airborne assault over the Rhine on 24 June 1945. The gliders of No. 38 Group, RAF, based at the Keevil satellite, RAF Fairford, were involved in this operation. The station opened with a commitment to five courses, each of 14 days duration, comprising 35 first pilots and 35 second pilots converting to Horsa and Waco Hadrian gliders.

Charles was reportedly "killed in an aircraft crash"^{vi}, although no source for this information has yet been identified and the date of death in this report is incorrectly given as "8 May 1945, the day the war in Europe ended" and not 8 **March** 1945. His death certificate issued in the Watford Registration District gives his cause of death as "Due to war operations" and the place of death was Wall Hall Farm, Aldenham, Hertfordshire. It appears that Wall Hall was a Gothic mansion which was occupied by the US Ambassador Joseph Kennedy in the early part of the war. It then became

a hospital for recovering soldiers and may, therefore have been close to the alleged crash site.

Charles is buried in the general section of Odiham Cemetery.



ⁱ 1911 Census, Reading, Berkshire, ref: RG14PN6596 RG78PN327 RD121 SD2 ED17 SN207

ⁱⁱ 1911 Census, Odiham, Hampshire, ref: RG14PN6246 RG78PN296 RD109 SD1 ED12 SN97

ⁱⁱⁱ GRO Marriages, www.findmypast.co.uk

^{iv} Source: CWGC – casualty/commemorative details and death certificate

^v Source: Swindon Advertiser Archive, 22 November 2005, *War and Peace*, <http://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/archive/2005/11/22/>

^{vi} Bob Merryweather, Armistice Day Tribute, *Hampshire Voice*, November 1996, p.11;