

ALAN KENNETH WARD

a memoir

By
Rodney Ward

Growing up in Bluntisham

Growing up in Bluntisham, a small village in Huntingdonshire, in the 1940s and 50s, with my parents and brother Peter, Remembrance Sunday was always a sombre occasion in our home. For one thing there was the general atmosphere. The radio sounded a solemn note and locally a service was held alternatively at St Mary's Church of England and the Baptist Meeting House, when we invariably sang Isaac Watts' "O God, our help in ages past" and J.K. Arkwright's "O Valiant Hearts, who to your glory came". The latter hymn is not sung so often now and its sentiments would not be popular but its words and tune, "The supreme sacrifice", made an impact on me at an impressionable age. After the service we walked around the village our destination being the war memorial at the junction of Hollidays Road and Rectory Road, where the last post was sounded. On the memorial were the names of those who had died in the First and Second World Wars, a long list for the First War, but for the Second there was only one name, that of my uncle, Alan Kenneth Ward, known to his family as Ken. It was in this way that the personal tragedy of war came home to his family.

Ken was born in Bluntisham on April 3rd 1923. He was the youngest of a family of seven born to Joseph and Eliza. They were, in order, Evelyn Ruth (Evelyn or Eve also known as Ruth b. 1911), Cyril Joseph (Joe b. 1912), Frank Daniel (Dan b.1915), Arthur Charles (Charlie or Chas b. 1917), Muriel (Babe b. 1919), Ernest Stanley (Ernie or Nib b. 1921), and Alan Kenneth (Ken also known as Alan b. 1923). Dan, the third in the family, was my father. When Ken was born the family lived in a house at Wood End in the village but after this had blown down in 1929, they moved to a council house in Wood Hurst, a neighbouring village and then to Bluntisham to what was at first called 9, Council House, but afterwards, more picturesquely, 9, Rectory Road, the address by which I always knew it. In the book "Bluntisham-cum-Earith - Records of a Fenland Parish" by C.F. Tebbitt, first published in 1941, there is no mention of the Wards, but they hold centre stage in my Uncle Ernie's books, "Bluntisham - A village remembered" (1989) and "War-time experiences and changes in village life after the Second World War" (1994). His wife, my Auntie Marjorie, also writes about the village and the Wards in her autobiography, "Ninety and nine" (2003). All of that generation of the family have now died.

I was born in June 1941 and Ken, dying in 1943, knew me as a baby. I was the eldest of all the grandchildren and so would have had sole claim on his attention. Although I never consciously knew him he was a presence in our home. I still have the tinted photograph of him in RAF coat with upturned collar, which was displayed in our living room. Visiting my grandparents, in the neighbouring Rectory Road, there was the same photograph in the front room.



Judith and I acted as Auntie Evelyn's executors when she died and among her possessions we found various documents relating to Ken and his death. It is on these that I have based this account in the hope that members of the family will find it of interest.

Ken's boyhood

From these papers we gain occasional glimpses of Ken's boyhood. There are, for instance, the two birthday cards sent by Evelyn, who was by this time working in service for the Tebbitts in Hitchen. At the time the address was still No 9 Council House and the cards have one penny stamps, one showing Edward viii and the other George vi, Edward viii having abdicated when Ken was 13. Another document tells us that Ken became a juvenile member of "The Prudential Approved Societies" on March 29th 1938, which gave the right to a medical card "evidence of title to medical benefit". Other evidence of pre NHS days is provided by his membership card of "Addenbrooke's Hospital Maintenance Fund" granted on April 4th 1938 into which regular contributions were paid. Thus he became a member of this fund the day after his fifteenth birthday. Another shows that he became a member of "National Health and Pensions Insurance" on April 3rd 1939, Ken's 16th birthday. The earliest document I have is of a form showing that he sat for the Scripture Examination organised by The National Sunday School Union in the Upper Junior Division, in March 1934, being 10 at the time. This was taken at the Baptist chapel, all the children of the family attending there, though not the parents. From the following year there is a note from the Money Order Department of the GPO referring to enclosed Savings Certificates registered in the name of Alan Kenneth Ward, dated 25th March 1935. This may be evidence that the family living on farm labourer's wages was now becoming better off, with more people contributing to the family income. Finally there is a ration book issued on 8th July 1940 enabling the consumer (Ken) to buy meat from H Purchas and Son, Butcher of Bluntisham and bacon, butter, margarine, cooking fats and sugar from R. Bonnetts of Somersham. Though these documents are scanty they build up something of a picture of the times in which Ken was growing up.

We get more of a personal view of Ken from the answers he gave to the "Second Term Examination 1936" when he was 13. Ken, like the other members of the family, attended the Church of England School in the village which people attended up to the age of 14. Some of them were bright enough but not wealthy enough to go to Grammar School. It would appear from Ernie's book "A Village Remembered" that Mrs Christmas was headmistress at the time, she being the same headmistress when I started to attend the school in 1947. Ernie says that Mrs Christmas encouraged him to stay on at school for an extra year beyond the school leaving age so perhaps the same thing happened with Ken. It says something for the family allowing this to happen in a culture where parents wanted their children out of school and into work, earning money as early as possible. This culture still prevailed when I was growing up in the village in the 1950s.

The answers Ken wrote to his exam questions are in extremely neat handwriting of a copybook type. He wrote on "Christmas" for the "Essay" (10/10); did an "Arithmetic" paper (12/14); wrote on "The Life of Moses" for "Religious Knowledge" (10/10); did a "Writing" exercise (10/10); wrote on "Lumbering" and "British Columbia" (illustrated with pictures cut out) for "Geography" (29/30); for English did "Letter Writing", "Finish the Story" and "Sentences" (40/40); "Dictation" gained 30/30; "History" included "The Old Stone Age Man"; "The Romans", "The coming of the English", "The Vikings" (39/40). Perhaps the most interesting paper is on "General Information" because it

locates Ken more firmly in his times. The first question is “What great historical event happened on December 10th 1936?” the answer being that Edward VIII abdicated. The next “What ceremony took place in London last Saturday?” evokes the answer that the Duke of York was proclaimed King. We learn that princess Elizabeth was heir to the throne and that Mrs Amy Mollison held the Cape Record (for flying). Rather incongruously the next answer is on “Owls” in which we learn about “five different kinds of owls” (25/25). We get the impression of a bright boy favoured by his teacher. If the education was basic it would have given those so inclined the incentive to continue their education after leaving school. The fact that I have a French/English Dictionary inscribed with his name appears to be evidence for this.

Of the photographs that have survived two show him as a boy with wavy hair that persisted.



Later he is photographed on his own and with Evelyn outside the Bluntisham home. He is smart, cheerful and upstanding.



Ken and Evelyn



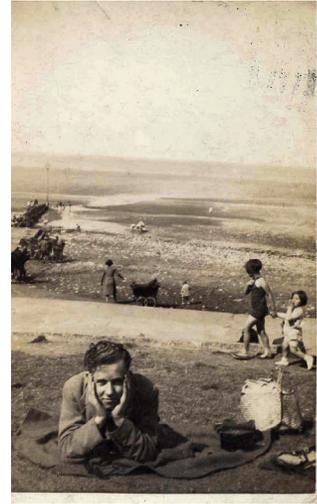
One series of photographs shows him at Hunstanton, the nearest seaside place to Bluntisham and a venue for outings, with Evelyn and Muriel. He has a case and a coat. Is he being seen off somewhere? In this way, old photographs are informative and elusive their questions forever unanswered.



Muriel and Ken



Evelyn and Ken



The same day?

Ernie tells us in “War-time Experiences” that at the time of his deferment for call-up in 1940 Ken “was working for Cyril Watts the auctioneer in St Ives”. Probably he went to work there straight from school, an example of the family breaking away from the land.

Missing

Attending the Baptist Church we could see a plaque on the front wall with one name on it, Alan Kenneth Ward, killed in the 2nd World War. His gravestone is in the cemetery of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Berlin, which Judith and I visited a few years ago. The Commission told us how to find the grave, Plot 4, Row J, Grave 11, the Cemetery being in the district of Charlottenberg, 8 kilometres west of the city centre, on the south side of the Heerstrasse. I believe we are the only members of our family to have visited the grave.

Ken was aged 20 when his plane was shot down over Potsdam. He presumably parachuted out but landed in the river Havel. We were always told that he drowned tangled in the parachute, but how the family knew that I don't know as it isn't in the official documents. It was on the night of November 26 1943, the same night in which the famous Kaiser Wilhelm Church in Berlin was bombed. Alan Cooper's book “Bombers over Berlin” describes the effect on Berlin that night. “The Germans recorded the following for the night 26/27th November raid: Berlin was attacked between 8.52 and 10.30 p.m. and some 60 mines, 650 HE bombs, 10,000 phosphorus and 100 incendiary bombs, plus 100 flares were dropped. 470 people died, 2,099 more injured and 25,000 made homeless. Eleven industrial firms were destroyed and 37 severely plus 42 slightly damaged. The official figure for HE bombs dropped was 859 plus 717 incendiaries” (page 91).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor and theologian, was in Tegel Prison, in Berlin, awaiting trial. In his letter to his friend, Eberhard Bethge, he writes on the 27th November, “Meanwhile we've had the expected large-scale attack on Borsig. It really is a strange feeling, to see the ‘Christmas trees’, the flares that the leading aircraft drops, coming down right over our heads. The shouting and screaming of the prisoners in their cells was terrible. We had no dead, only injured, and we had finished bandaging them by

one o'clock. . . The fact that the horrors of war are now coming home to us with such force will no doubt, if we survive, provide us with the necessary basis for making it possible to reconstruct the life of the nations, both spiritually and materially, on Christian principles" ("Letters and Papers from Prison - The Enlarged Edition" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edited by Eberhard Bethge, page 146). Borsig was the locomotive works in Berlin.

Ken was a sergeant, and a flight engineer flying in a Lancaster bomber from the RAF station of Binbrook (RAF Waltham), in Lincolnshire, with the 550 Squadron which had only been formed the day before from 100 Squadron. There is a full list of those who served with 550 Squadron at

http://www.550squadronassociation.org.uk/php-library/mysql-utils/reports/rpt_squadron_servicemen.php.

I am told that none of the air crews had a rank below that of sergeant, which meant they got better treatment if captured.



Five members of the crew were killed and two became prisoners of war. Until September 1942 Vickers Wellington Bombers had flown from the airfield ("West Lindsey Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage"). The entry in "Bombers over Berlin" says that "550 Sqdn: Lancs LN 379-S (late 100 sqdn) crashed at Havel Bie, Potsdam, on the outskirts of Berlin" and the crew members were

F/Lt P.J.M. Prangley Killed

Sgt A.K. Ward Killed

F/O G. H.R.F. Harris killed

P/O J.W. Lowe POW Stalag LI

F/Sgt P.W. Smith POW

Sgt R. Redfern Killed

Sgt F.C. Diggle Killed

P.W. Smith and F.C. Diggle had replaced Sgt C.E. Chandler and Sgt L.R. Chisnall who were unwell at the time. In the Appendices I have included a section from the "Failed to Return" website which has more up-to-date details of what happened to the plane LM 379 (apparently not LN 379 as Alan Cooper reports).

In his letter to his mother written on the 24th November he says, "Last night we went to the big city" - Berlin, of course. "Tonight we are going down to the village to have a game of darts for a change." Another letter to Evelyn, eldest in the family, started on the 24th

but was finished on the 25th, his last known words.

The first intimation of Ken's fate that the family received was a telegram of 27th November saying he was missing. A fuller letter was sent on the 28th from the RAF station which confirmed that he was missing but held out the hope that the crew might be prisoners of war. This matter of uncertainty was brought home to me by Pat Barker's novel "Toby's Room" set in the First World War. Toby is Elinor's brother reported "Missing, believed killed". As it turns out in the novel the reality was quite different but that was what Elinor believed at the time. "At first, this limbo state didn't bother her, but then as the days and weeks went by, not knowing how he'd died became a torment" (page 82). "She knew so little. What did 'Missing, Believed Killed' actually mean? What degree of certainty did it imply?" (page 82). "She was left with nothing to fill the gap but her imagination, and even imagination needs some facts to work on" (page 83).

Letters the family received must have kept the hope alive. One is from Mrs Redfern, mother of Sergeant R. Redfern written on January 10th 1944 to say that P/O J.W. Lowe "is fit and well and a prisoner in Germany. Surely it renews the hope in your heart as it certainly does in mine that all the rest of the crew are in the same position, and hope that soon we too shall have this news". Two letters undated were also received from "Chuck" Sergeant Charles Chandler. I "know that in another month or two's time he will be knocking at our door as large as life". He writes of "Fellows like Alan (i.e. Ken) who have walked back through Germany, France, Spain and via Gibraltar have returned to England".

Official communications kept coming:

a brief note from the Base Effects Officer, on 1st December 1943, says his bike is at the RAF Base - "Let me know your wishes regarding its disposal".

The bike was eventually dispatched by Passenger train on 15th February 1944.

A letter from the RAF Benevolent Fund on 3rd December says the family can continue to cash the orders for his pay for a period.

A letter from the air ministry of 17th January 1944 says there is no definite news of Ken but two crew members had been captured and three were known to be dead, and as the dead hadn't been identified they didn't know if Ken was alive or not.

On 26th January a letter from the RAF Central Depository says his personal effects as listed are in safe custody.

A letter on 31st March says these effects have been dispatched.

A letter to Evelyn from the Red Cross dated May 16th 1944 tells her that Flight-Lieutenant Prangle has been buried in Geltow near Potsdam.

A letter from the Air Ministry on 1st August says that the body of Flying Officer G. H.R.F. Harris was washed ashore on 15th April.

The letter says that before Ken is presumed dead for official purposes the family is requested to confirm they have no evidence of his survival.

A telegram from the Air Ministry on 18th August says that Ken is believed to have lost his life on 26/27th November.

A letter from the Red Cross on 22nd August says that Ken's body was recovered from the River Havel and he had been buried at Getlow.

A letter from the Air Ministry confirming all of this was sent on 23rd August.

A letter on 14th October includes an order for £34.7.4 being Ken's pay, post war credit, cash and refund of tax.

A Notification of death was sent on 23rd May, 1945.

A letter on 13th September 1947 says Ken's grave has been removed from Geltow to

Berlin.



Grave at Getlow



Grave at Berlin

Appendices

Post Office Telegrams

Postmarked Earith, Huntingdon 27 No 43

O.H.M.S

(Priority CC) Mr J Ward, 9, Rectory Road, Bluntisham, Hunts

Regret to inform you that your son Sgt Alan Kenneth Ward is missing as the result of air operation on the night of 26/27 Nov. 1943 Stop letter follows Stop Any further information received will be immediately communicated to you

Aeronautics

Grimsby

Postmarked . . . Huntingdon 18 Aug 44

O.H.M.S

Priority cc

J Ward Esq 9 Rectory Road Bluntisham Hunts

From air ministry 73/77 Oxford Str W1 P.C. 299. 17/8/44 deeply regret to advise you that according to information received through the International Red Cross Committee your son Sgt Kenneth Ward is believed to have lost his life as the result of air operations on 26/27 11//43 Stop the air council express their sympathy Stop letter follows shortly Stop Under Secretary of State Stop

1743 B

Recent Research (from the website "Failed to Return - F/Lt P J M Prangley & Crew)

"There is some information about this aircraft because research into the complete Berlin raid has been extensive, and for most of the aircraft it has proved possible to establish their crash sites.

It is likely that the aircraft was set on fire at 21.52 hrs local time by Flak (1.-3./128,

2./390, 3.+5./370, 3./535 and 3./808) which were claiming one Lancaster at Potsdam-Wildpark. At the same time (21.52 hrs) Lt. Josef Kraft II./NJG 5 had a four engine aircraft (without further details) confirmed claim. So it is "very likely" he shot at **LM379** as well. No positive identification of the crash site is available.

For the night in question most of the exact locations of the night-fighter force were lost (not transferred onto microfiche) and so it is only possible to say "very likely" about night-fighter claims, but exact details about flak claims are available.

During this raid **LM379** was the only one which crashed in the vicinity of Potsdam and the flak battery claimed just one hit over Potsdam. There is this night-fighter claim from Josef Kraft at the same time as the flak battery made their notation. However, flak claims are generally more exact because they sent teams to the wreckage to confirm the downed target.

LM379 crashed in the vicinity of Potsdam-Wildpark. As can be seen from the Google maps link, there are many lakes in this area.
<http://maps.google.de/maps?hl=de&tab=wl>

Thanks to Jörg Helbig for providing the Association web-site with results from his investigations."

The webpage includes a link to the 550 Squadron Roll Of Honour, and a photograph of the crew of which I have included a copy from my original, elsewhere in this paper.

Obituaries in the local press (sources unknown but will include "The Huntingdonshire Post" for which there is an invoice)

Ward. Treasured memories of our dear son Sgt. Alan Kenneth Ward, who lost his life in flying operations over Germany, Nov. 26th, 1943.

"There is never a day that we forget you.

In our hearts you are always near;

God only knows how we miss you,

Bringing many a silent tear."

From mum and dad, Muriel, Evelyn and all brothers, serving somewhere in England and abroad. 9 Rectory Road, Bluntisham.

Ward. In loving memory of Ken Ward (Sgt. Alan Kenneth).

"There's a face that is always with us.

There's a voice we should love to hear.

There's a smile we shall always remember

Of a son we all loved so dear.

From Mum, Dad, and all Brothers and Sisters (9 Rectory Road, Bluntisham)

Ward. In loving memory of our dear son and brother, Ken, Sgt Alan Kenneth, who lost his life in flying operations Nov. 26th 1943.

He gave his greatest gift of all,

His own unfinished life,

In all the glory of his youth,

He died that we might live.

From Mum, Dad, Evelyn, Muriel, and all brothers (9 Rectory Road, Bluntisham).

Letters from Ken

1607007 Sgt. Ward A.K.

Sgts. Mess,

R.A.F.Waltham,

Nr. Grimsby, Lincs

(Envelope dated September 8th 1943 posted from Gainsborough - All the letters to Evelyn are addressed to "The Walnut Trees", Bluntisham - I have retained the original punctuation and spelling in the letters but have standardised the dates).

Dear Evelyn,

Thank you very much for your long letter and the photo, it is very good but you look a bit serious. I'm glad you've had a nice holiday and was able to get back to London o.k. The trains are a nuisance nowadays aren't they? When I was coming from St Athan to this place we had special carriages on the train just for our party but the civvies still crowded in and got most annoyed when we told them they weren't for public use. They all seem to think that we are going on leave when they see a party travelling about.

I suppose everyone at home is pleased that the fruit picking is finished aren't they? I hope father will soon get better, I know he doesn't like being at home all the time. I've finished my flying for a little while now so am having a pretty easy time at present. I'm going to the pictures tonight to see Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, it's a good picture I think.

Well I must close now so

Goodbye

With love,

Ken.

1607007 Sgt. Ward A.K.

Sgts. Mess,

R.A.F.Waltham,

Nr. Grimsby, Lincs

November 8th 1943

Dear Evelyn,

Thanks for your letter received today. I'm glad you enjoyed the film. I've only been to one since I was on leave, I suppose the reason is there is no cinema on the camp. I usually go down to the village canteen with Ginger as there's not much to do. I'm sorry to hear that Basil is on embarkation leave, he hasn't been in long has he? I'm glad you have heard from Nib and that he is getting on o.k. I know his pal, the one I saw at Cambridge when I went back with him once. I expect I shall go to see Olive's sister (*Charlie married Olive*) soon when I find time. She lives about a couple of miles from here from what I gather so I could bike there sometime.

How did you like your ride to Chatteris with Olive's sister Elsie, did she bike all the way from Doddington? Well I'll have to say Cheerio now so until next time.

Goodbye

With Love,

Ken.

*Talbot House Services Club
(Grimsby Branch of TOC H.)
9, Victoria Street,
Grimsby.*

November 17th 1943

Dear Evelyn

Here are a few lines to let you know I hope to be home on leave next Tuesday or Wednesday depending on how the trains run. I'm writing this in the TOC H writing room where I got this paper free. I'm going to the cinema tonight to see "Hit the ice" I think it is a good film, I was in Grimsby last night too and saw another good one.

On Thursday I went to see Mrs Howard, Olive's sister and stayed for supper, I left there about 12 o'clock. They are very nice people and were pleased to see me, they have one daughter 24 who is married, her husband is in the Middle East.

I spent a long time looking at her photos and I showed her mine, they were disappointed that I hadn't one of Charlie's wedding as they haven't seen it yet. Mr Howard is an air raid warden in his spare time, he is a window cleaner by trade and keeps some pigs. It is not far to ride from the camp, I can do it in 10 minutes easily.

My mates are a present playing table tennis in the other room, I can't play very well. I suppose you heard about our last raid on Mondane, I was amongst them as I suppose you guessed.

I think I replied to your last letter didn't I, I was expecting to hear from you this morning but didn't get any mail so wondered if you hadn't received my last letter, I forget sometimes which ones I have answered. Charlie wrote me the other day and said he would be coming to N. Somercotes for his leave next week so I expect I shall miss him if he doesn't come to Bluntisham. He said he was in hospital with tonsillitis and boils so wasn't in the mood for writing letters, he had seen Olive at the weekend I think. Well I must close now so

Goodbye

With fondest love.

Ken.

1607007 Sgt. Ward A.K.

Sgts. Mess,

R.A.F. Waltham,

Nr. Grimsby, Lincs

November 24th 1943

Dear Mother,

Just a few lines to let you know that I got back in camp about 7 o'clock on Monday evening. My pals didn't get back until early in the morning. Last night we went to the big city. I suppose you heard about it on the radio. Tonight we are going down to the village to have a game of darts for a change.

We've just been to get some wood and coal for our fire which is now blazing away merrily. I shall be going down to tea soon. I didn't get up this morning until 11.30 but we

didn't have to go on parade. There's no fog here now but it's rather windy at present. I ate the Christmas pudding when I arrived back and it was very nice after travelling all day. Well I will close now so
Goodbye with lots of love,
Ken

*1607007 Sgt. Ward A.K.
Sgts. Mess,
R.A.F. Waltham,
Nr. Grimsby, Lincs
November 24th 1943 (in an envelope stamped Grimsby 26th November 1943).*

Dear Evelyn,
I arrived back at camp about 7 o'clock on Monday evening and soon had a good fire going. Then I went down to the Church Army Canteen and had some spam on toast and coffee. My pals came back early next morning and Chuck didn't get back until yesterday afternoon. We went to (you know where) last night, it wasn't a bad trip.

Well I didn't finish this letter on Wednesday but will endeavour to do so now. I was pretty busy yesterday so didn't get much time to write. Chuck and Chis (*short for Chisnall*) are both on the sick list now. Chuck has a bad cold and Chis has conjunctivitis, you know what Joe had the matter with his eyes. We shall have to fly with two fresh chaps until they are better.

I think we shall be moving soon but don't know when, it will be about 5 miles from Grimsby so it can't be far from here. It's rather cold here today but the sun is shining. I suppose Chas went home again didn't he, I expect he went to N. Somercotes after all?
Well I must close now so
Goodbye
With love,
Ken

"In fact the squadron was still flying out of Grimsby and had not yet moved to North Killingholm" (see website "Failed to return - F/Lt P J M Prangley & Crew").

*Letters from family
1173688 Ward C.J.
RAF Boltishall
Nr Norwich
Norfolk
undated*

Dear Mother,
Just a few lines to let you know that I'm quite well, hoping you are the same.

Well Im glad to hear that one of Ken's crew are safe, so I surpose we shall hear from Ken shortly, some get word through a long while before the others, but we know now they never came down in the sea, which I thought might have happened, so I should say he is prisoner of war so I should not worry too much.

I shall be home on the 18th of the month for nine days, so will you see if father can get

ready for spraying, if fine I hope to get it done.

I am writing this letter Sunday afternoon, its raining fast outside and Ive time off, but I can't go out. I've just written to Chas and told him when I'm coming home so he might get a few days off.

Well thank you very much for the cigs you sent last week, well I must close now all the best Mum
with fondest love
from Joe

26, High Road E.
Felixstowe,
Suffolk
November 29th 1943

Dear Mother,
What can I say to you except offer my loving sympathy. I know that won't help much. Dan and I are very upset, but our sorrow cannot compare with yours, which must be very great indeed.

Nobody could know Ken without feeling an affection for him. We can only pray that he is somewhere safe and may come back to us.

If God wills otherwise I pray you may receive His help and comfort.

God bless you,
Yours lovingly,
Madeleine

26, High Road E.
Felixstowe.
December 4th 1943

Dear Eve and Babe,
Madeleine and myself are sending you these two books as a Christmas present and hope you will get some pleasure from reading them. You can change over when ou have each finished.

Now that we have recovered from the first shock of knowing that Ken is missing I feel able to write more fully to you. I have written to Nib as unlike Charlie I feel he should know. He is not a child and must know sometime. Nobody will feel it more than he and I have written as encouragingly as possible.

Please don't worry too much. We know it is heartbreaking but if after all our hopes he does not return let us thank God for having him with us all this time. It has been lovely having him with us. What memories he leaves us! Never have I known such an affectionate and happy boy. Everyone with whom he came in contact immediately loved him and all will miss him.

But if God has called him home who are we to say otherwise. His was a beautiful life and

God who created us all has most right to the best he created. We may not think so when our minds are distorted with grief, but if we have any belief at all we are not true to that faith if we think otherwise. Jesus said that Heaven is a far happier place than this cruel world and if we as Christians believe this we cannot feel sad for long. Let us rather remember all the beautiful things of his life and believe him in better surroundings than we ourselves, and then if by the grace of God we hear that he is safe and sound our joy will be none the less great.

Give my love to all at home.
Goodbye
With fondest love,
From Dan
Madeleine and Rodney

1440144 Ward E.S.
"SE" Flight 2926 Squadron
RMF Regiment M.E.F.
November 5th 1943

Dear Ken,

Received your air-letter 18th Oct. yesterday. I see that you wrote it while on your 7 day leave. I'm so glad you managed to get it the same time as "Dan". Guess it was grand seeing him, "Mad" and little "Rodney" after such a long time. Also to be home once again away from the binding routine of the air force I don't suppose you as air crew escape them. You certainly deserved a leave after all your courses. Can't blame you for doing nothing but eat, sleep and drink. We must all have a break at times. I see you and "Dan" worked on the accounts is nice to know have had a fairly good year.

So you received the magazine. I thought it would give you a few laughs. I haven't heard from "Joe" lately - it seems as though he is doing pretty well sending home rabbits, hares and pheasants. Suppose he still in "Norfolk". I received a present from "Marjorie" today was sent the 1st of Sept. It was quite intact the best one I've received so far. I suppose Father is muttering about "Rushbrooke Good's" giving us 6 months notice for the first acre and a half of land. Not a very nice trick is it. Still we shall gain over them. There's worse things happen at sea. Since last writing to you we've moved. Are now camped on the shores of the blue "Med" is quite nice here, get plenty of swimming . . . in the morning. I don't fancy this much though, for it is rather chilly first thing. It's funny the days are quite hot, but the nights bitter cold. I've been swimming this afternoon. Was smashing in the water. You wouldn't believe it was November. To think that you are perhaps experiencing cold, frosty, foggy weather at home. No "Ken" I do very little driving now. Really there is very little to do at present. My pal in the same tent as me here was showing me his snaps yesterday. He has a brother a navigator on a "Lancaster" who has just finished his training. He resembles you a bit as well. Well I can't get half in here I would like so I'll write another letter at the first chance. Don't forget to write "Ken" and give me all the gen. Best of luck Ernest.

"Mad" was Madeleine, my mother. These two letters from Ernest are taken from photocopies which are faint in places and hard to read . . . indicate words that are illegible.

1440144 Ward E.S.

“SE” Flight 2926 Squadron
RMF Regiment M.E.F.
November 30th 1943

Dear Ken,

Received your air-letter of the 19.11.43 yesterday. Was very pleased to know you have managed another 7 days leave. You air-crew do deserve it, especially when on ops. So you have done two up to the present. Good show. Muriel said in one of her letters that you had been to Dusseldorf. You are lucky being stationed close to one of Olive's sisters it's nice to have somewhere to go when off duty. Still I suppose your life is pretty crowded these days. I see you have your old bicycle with you is it the same one as you had at home. Yes Ken we have a radio quite a good one. . . As you say a little music makes the world of a difference I like listening to the Forces programme Tommy Handley etc. Is the radio at home still going strong. I suppose father's still as interested in the news. Berlin is getting a bashing these days isn't it. Glad you get good food Ken. We don't do too bad here. I've had much worse. Won't be long before we are eating the old Xmas turkey will it How time passes Ken it will soon be two years since I left Blighty. I suppose great changes have taken place since then. Had a nice letter from Chas yesterday and a parcel from home it arrived intact the cigs this time were o.k. How do you manage for cigs. Do you smoke much? We used to get a little beer once in a while but now it has stopped altogether. They don't mean us to drown our sorrows do they. I am not worried though for I was never a great lover of beer. I can do well without it except when I get one of those terrific desert thirsts. Then I wouldn't say no to a pint. I still receive the old Hunts Post. There's quite a lot in about St Ives nowadays. Do you still hear from Joe Jefferies I haven't heard yet. I had a letter and snap from Tom Laud not long back. He still looks the same. We're getting quite a few inoculations these days. I've had four in the last fortnight three against typhus. My arm is a bit stiff apart from that I am in the best of health. We are getting some grand weather still just the opposite to what you are getting at home. We get some bitter cold nights though. I still go swimming in the Med. whenever I get the opportunity its o.k. Ken I miss the old river at home though. Used to have some good times there. Do you go to the pictures much I go now and again, have seen two pictures recently both of which were quite good. One was "Assignment in Brittany" and the other "The Arabian Nights" in Technicolor have you seen either of these. The mail has just arrived there are two for me one from Eve and one from "Joey Mansfield". I'll read Joey's. Well he says they are getting some terrible weather in Italy worse than the monsoons in India. He says he can hear the guns at the front. From what I can make out of his letter it's rather a job driving there. He was surprised to hear you were sergeant. He says Doug Morgan's out there.

Cheerio Ken and all the very best of luck in future operations.

Ernest

This letter was written four days after Ken died.

Letters from local people
Bluntisham
Undated

Dear Mrs Ward

Basil wrote this morning to ask me to tell you how sorry he and we all are to hear about Ken. We do hope that you will soon get some good news of him, it is so very hard for you. I hope the other boys are alright.

Ivy Merryweather

*Longacres,
Colne,
Huntingdon*
November 29th 1943

Dear Mr and Mrs Ward,
My husband and I were very distressed to hear that Kenneth did not return from the raid on Berlin.

You will all be filled with anxiety I know, for a time, but keep on trusting and believing that there is no place where God is not.

His courage and devotion to duty have been remarkable, and realizing that he played his part so gallantly, that we at home might be kept in comparative safety, makes our hearts swell with pride that Bluntisham has produced such a son.

We shall look forward to hearing soon, that Kenneth is safe and well.
Yours very sincerely,
G and S Christmas

*West Farm
Godmanchester
Hunts*
August 28th 1944

Dear Miss Ward
We are all very sorry to hear of the news of dear Alan, although we hadn't known him long we had all thought of him as a great friend and are very proud to have known him. My heart aches for you all.

I had hoped and prayed that he might be safe, but God had other work for him. Only those who have gone the same know what it means to part with those we love but I do pray that God will give you comfort and strength to carry on as the dear boy would have wished. We have some news of Geoff last week we had a message in Belgium through the Foreign Relations Red Cross Department saying "Geoff is in good health hopes to see you soon, don't worry" but this was dated May 13th days after he was missing so I do pray that he is still safe and well, but it is a worry. I only wish dear that you had better news too. Come over when you like we will keep up our friendship for the sake of our dear boys.

God bless you all. You are always remembered in my prayers.
Sincerely Yours
C.Congreve

*"Windsor"
Kirkgate
Waltham
Grimsby*
December 27th 1944

Dear Muriel,

First of all I hope you'll forgive me for taking the liberty of calling you Muriel, but Miss Ward would appear rather formal, and please don't call me Miss White, it makes me feel far too businesslike!

Secondly thanks so very much for your kind letter and the lovely photo of Allen (sorry Alan), it was very sweet of you to have thought of me and I really don't know how I can thank you.

Yes, I have heard of you through Mrs Redfern, as a matter of fact I heard from her Xmas morning and she said she had received a nice letter and calendar from you, also a letter from George Harris' sister. She always gives me whatever news she receives from any relatives of the crew.

You all certainly did love your brother, you make me very envious. How lovely to have four more brothers Muriel, how many sisters have you, or am I wrong in surmising you're the only girl? Are any of your brothers in the R.A.F. aircrew? Is your brother in the army overseas?

As for Chuck and Chis, well I'm afraid I can't give you any more news of them whatsoever, for you see I never corresponded with them when they left Waltham. They were nice boys, but they just weren't "my type" I knew them as Chuck, Chis, Alan and Ron always came into the canteen together, but Ron and Alan were the two I knew most well and Ron I knew more than Alan, but they were the two I particularly liked, they were so young and so different from the usual boys of today. I knew them for only about six weeks if that, but I used to see them regularly in the canteen where I did voluntary work and Ron and Alan came home with me together more than they did with Chuck and Chis. It was news to me when Chuck and Chis told me the remainder of the crew were missing and like yourself, even now, I can hardly believe it's true. There's one thing I'm sure of, Ron and Alan were together because they were inseparable, and think the only time they were parted was when Ron was with me and even that wasn't very frequent for I hardly saw Ron unless Alan accompanied us too.

Well I do hope I haven't bored you Muriel and if you would care to come over you're very welcome indeed. I have asked Mrs Redfern, but Mrs Redfern can't come, though I haven't finished trying to persuade her too yet, and if she won't come perhaps Mr. Redfern will, anyhow maybe you don't feel the same way about Waltham as they, and do please come over and stay with us sometime. I don't know how you're fixed for holidays etc. but at the moment I'm not working, only at home, as I'm expecting my boy friend home from India any day and we're then getting married so if you could come in the near future it would be better, then I shall be single still, and we could go dancing and have a much "gayer" time than if I was married, otherwise it would have to be after I'm married! Still I'll leave it to you, and if you don't wish to come, I shall quite understand,, otherwise here's hoping to hear from you again soon and preferably to see you. Once again thanks for your lovely letter and photograph, which I will always treasure.

My very best wishes to you and the remainder of the family for 1945, may Health, Wealth and HAPPINESS always be yours.

Yours sincerely,

Thelma

P.S. Sorry if I've bored you.

Letters from R.A.F. member and one of the families

4 High Street

Newport

Salop

December 6th 1943

Dear Mr and Mrs Ward,

On behalf of Mr Redfern and myself may we convey to you our very deep and sincere sympathy at the terrible news you have just received about your dear son Allen. We too have received that dreaded telegram, but in spite of all my sorrow and grief, I remembered somewhere there must be others like myself and I hasten to try to comfort you. My son Ronald was a special pal of Allens, and in their name I beg you to try and face whatever lies ahead of us in that fine and brave spirit that those boys showed on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Although my heart is broken, God has given me strength to bear it all, and I pray he will do the same for you. We just worshipped our little kid (he was just 19) and at least I have the consolation of knowing he just lived for his job. As one mother to another, I say be proud of your son, their dear memories demand this from us, and perhaps one day God in his great Mercy will yet be kind to us and send them safely back to those who loved them so, if my letter has given you the comfort it intended, then my object in writing it will have been achieved. May I add that my dear Ron, loved all his crew and often spoke of "Allen". May God bless you his parents.

Sincerely Yours,

Mrs R.A. Redfern



Written on back of photo "Taken 14.3.43 - In remembrance of Ron Age 18"

4 High Street

Newport

Salop

January 10th 1944

Dear Mrs Ward

I had to write to you, just to make sure that you have heard from Mrs Lowe telling you her wonderful news that her husband is fit and well and prisoner in Germany. Surely it renewed that hope in your heart as it certainly does in mine that all the rest of the crew are in this same position, and hope that soon we too shall have this news I know only too well Mrs Ward what you have suffered and still suffering during this last awful six weeks. The anguish and anxiety we have had to bear is terrible, but please God it may soon be turned to joy. Indeed I sincerely hope our dear boys are prisoners we should at least know, that never again would they have to fight. So take heart and keep on praying that

our loved ones are safe and well. If you should hear, will you please write at once, and I will do the same,
Sincerely
Mrs Redfern

Sgt Chandler 1387838
Sergeant's Mess
R.A.F. Waltham
Grimsby
Lincs
Undated

Dear Mr Ward,
This is the saddest letter I have ever penned and may I never see the day when I shall have to pen another. I was Alan's pal as well as being a member of his crew and although circumstances stopped us being on that trip with him I feel his loss but I am not giving up hope of seeing him again for nowadays it is not an uncommon thing to meet fellows who have walked back through Germany, France, Spain and via Gibraltar have returned to England and I, knowing Alan as I did, know that in another month or two's time he will be knocking at our door as large as life. To me he was one of the greatest fellows going, while in the crew he was extremely popular and well liked and respected by all who worked with and under him. I have not written this epistle to revive old memories but more to ask you to have courage and fortitude and to impress upon you the knowledge that he will be back, I know and am positive of it, and until such time as he does return to you, I offer you the heartfelt sympathy of his rear gunner and of his greatest pal
Sgt Charles E. Chandler

Sgt Chandler 1387838
Sergeant's Mess
R.A.F. Waltham
Grimsby
Lincs
undated

Dear Mr and Mrs Ward,
Many thanks for your very welcome letter which I received the other day on my return from a 48, I am very sorry that I have not answered before but we have been very busy doing one thing and another, and now that we have a little time to spare I am taking it as an opportunity of writing to you.

Yes, Alan was quite right when he said that he would have some snaps taken and in compliance with your request I am enclosing one of all the boys, it was the best one we had and I am sure that you will like it as much as Chis and I do.

The other day we saw a notice (official of course) that a crew who were reported missing about a fortnight before the boys were o.k. and were prisoners of war, we are keeping our fingers crossed now and if I do get any news then I will let you know immediately.

At the moment the hut seems empty without Alan and Ginger and the larking about that

used to go on between us all but I am sure that in the future sometime we will be having a grand re-union party, but until that time we want you to know that if ever there is anything you want done then all you have to do is ask us and if it is in our power to do it then we shall be only too happy to oblige.

Well Mrs Ward I am afraid that I must close now and so once again hoping that you will like the photo I will say that until I hear from you again

I Remain

Yours sincerely always

“Chuck”



The boys are L to R

“Ginger” mid upper gunner

“Myself” wireless operator

“George” navigator

“Pete” Pilot

“Jake” bomb aimer

“Ken”

“Chis” rear gunner

The Squadron Webpage says that Charles Chandler and Sgt L.R. Chisnall (Chis) were posted to 180 OTU w.e.f 18.12.43

Other photos showing Ken -



Second from left



Far Right



Third from left on front row



Parts of this memoir were given as talks at Rose Hill United Reformed Church on 8th November 2015 (Remembrance Sunday) and the Chesterfield Local History Society on December 7th 2015

Chesterfield January 2016