

Keith John Claridge

Keith John Claridge was my mum's grandfather. He was born on 13 May 1922. When World War Two broke out in September 1939, conscription was introduced under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act. This meant that if men and women eligible for service in the armed forces didn't join themselves, they could be assigned to a force by the government.

Keith was 17 and a half years old, and chose to join the 283 (ASR; Air Sea Rescue) Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF). He trained as a Wireless Operator, and flew in Wellington bombers and Warwicks, undertaking a variety of missions around the Mediterranean. He was stationed in Malta, Palestine and Northern Africa for the war years. On 15 January 1946, the Warwick returning his crew to Malta experienced engine trouble, and had to ditch in the Mediterranean. Another allied aircraft reported his crews' position, but the crew had to swim over a mile to shore. One of the crew sadly lost his life that night.

Keith passed away on 8th August 2000, having lived a happy and peaceful life since WWII. He didn't really speak about his experiences during the war, but remained the rock of the family until he died. In 1995, he discovered the Goldfish Club. This is a club for all armed forces, particularly RAF, '*.. to keep alive the spirit of comradeship arising from the mutual experience of members surviving, "coming down in the drink".*' It was formed in 1942, to catalogue the amazing stories of bravery and, as they say themselves, sometimes sheer luck, for personnel coming down in water.

Keith is my great grandfather and I sadly didn't get to meet him. His story means I'm very proud of him and all our armed forces, fighting for the freedom my mum and dad, and my brother and I have grown up in to date.

Ralph Wormleighton, Class 1A

1-squadron badge 283 (ASF). 2-Goldfish Club emblem. 3- My great grandfather soon after he joined in. 4- In Egypt, on exercise



283 Air



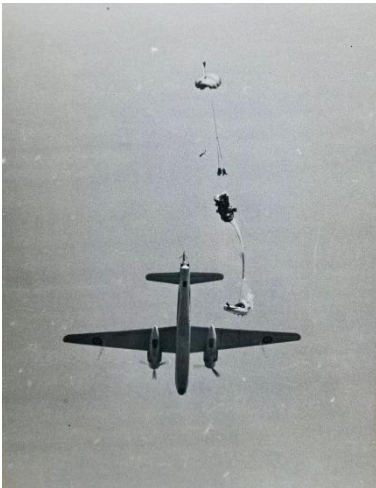


NO. 1 COURSE, A.C.O.S.



Photograph by VIVIAN'S

Sea Rescue Squadron; my great grandfather circled.



Images of a) a plane dropping an airborne lifeboat, b) the boat dropping and parachutes deploying, c) the boat reaching the water.