

# **‘HANG THE EXPENSE’ AND BILLY DRAPER’S FARMYARD**

We retell the story of the well-known legend of the crash into Billy Draper’s farmyard by ‘Big’ Frank Valesh

The photo below appeared in the centre-spread of the very last edition of The Century Bulletin (December 2024). It was one of a few new photographs that arrived from America. It shows B-17 ‘Hang the Expense’ burning in Billy Draper’s farmyard.

The wreckage of farm buildings are piled up on top of the blazing plane, while the Fire Department were trying to extinguish the fire.



In the bottom left-hand corner, is a farm worker and someone in an A2 flight jacket trying to peer into the barn. Could this have been when the elicited parts were almost discovered? We tried to find the identity of the farm worker. One of our long-term museum members, Mr Ray Hubbard, who worked on the farm looking after the horses when he was a boy during the war, looked at the photograph, but he couldn’t identify him. (Sadly, Ray died in the Spring of this year).



The photo on the left shows another view of the crash site



The tree subsequently died and the photo on the left shows the tree as it was in the 1980’s.

The photo above shows the wreck of ‘Hang the Expense’ between the two trees on the righthand side. You can just about make out the damaged bark on the tree that the wing hit – see circled area.

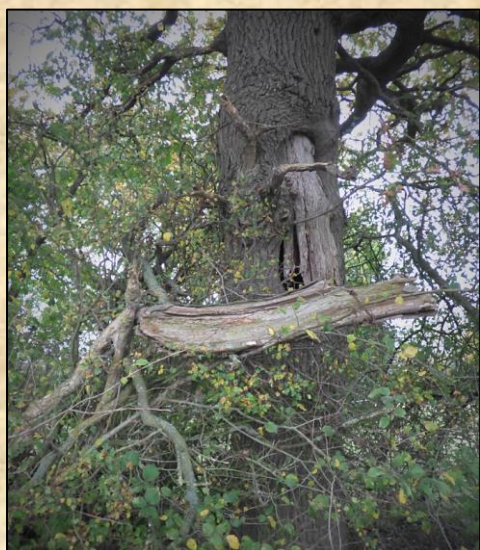


The photo on the right is the spot where 'Hang the Expense' ended up after demolishing the farm buildings.

The new barn on the right was erected in the 1960's/1970s to replace the steel tube and asbestos buildings that were erected after the crash. The large tree to the right of the photo is the one that the wing tip hit after taking the radio repair tent away with it.



The photo above shows the same tree in the centre taken from the perimeter track. Hard Stand No 6 was on the very right of the photo and the Radio Repair Tent was just in front of the tree.



The photo above shows the damage to the tree trunk where the wing tip removed the bark.



Tyre marks across the perimeter track which would have been moments before the wing tip of the plane hit the first tree. This is consistent with Frank's description of losing No 4 engine as No 1 and 2 engines would have pulled the aircraft to the right-hand side leaving the pilot very little time to figure out what had happened before hitting the trees.



Replacement Radio  
Maintenance Tent

Tree damaged by 'Hang the Expense'

Asbestos Buildings



The photo above shows a view of the crash site taken from the pilot's side window of a B-17 taking off from the south east to north west runway. The B-17 on Hard Stand No 6 we believe to be 'Humpty Dumpty' II.



This photo taken in 1944 shows Lt Col George Dauncy in a Morris armoured car outside Draper's farmyard. He was in charge of the station's inspections.



The same view as it is today taken from the public road. The crash site was to the left of the tree at the rear.

Photos on the right shows Lodge Farm in WW2 – home of Billy Draper opposite the farmyard.





## BILLY DRAPER DIES

William John Draper, aged 80, passed away peacefully at Chapel Farm, after a long illness, on January 27. Billy was the highly respected and friendly farmer who lived with his parents and sister Alda in the lovely brick home across the road from the Tower. It was on this farm that the flying field, RAF 139, later the 100th BG, was constructed, and it was in his barn that 351st Engineering kept its excess supplies.

Billy will always be remembered for his pleasant and gracious manner in dealing with many strange requests under the most difficult of circumstances. All during the war, with B-17s flying over them every day, Billy and his family continued to farm and produce record harvests of desperately needed food. He was never too busy to exchange pleasantries, and soon

the Drapers were the friends of dozens if not hundreds of homesick GI's. He never wavered in his support and friendship of the 100th and this was maintained even when a B-17 crashed into his barn, killing his prize bull and creating true havoc. In spirit, Billy Draper was one of us.



Submitted by Bill Carleton

*The article above appeared in the Fall 1986 issue of Splasher Six (Vol 17#3). Our thanks go to Nancy Putnam, Editor of Splasher Six (newsletter of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Foundation), for letting us reproduce this article and photo.*



Another photo of Billy Draper holding a shield with the Eighth Air Force symbol. Whoever made the shield has the star upside down. The shield is on display in the Museum.



**THE EXTRACT BELOW IS BILL CARLETON'S DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENT, WHICH APPEARED IN THE MUSEUM'S LAST EVER NEWSLETTER IN DECEMBER 2024 – ORIGINALLY TAKEN FROM 'THE CENTURY BOMBERS' BOOK**

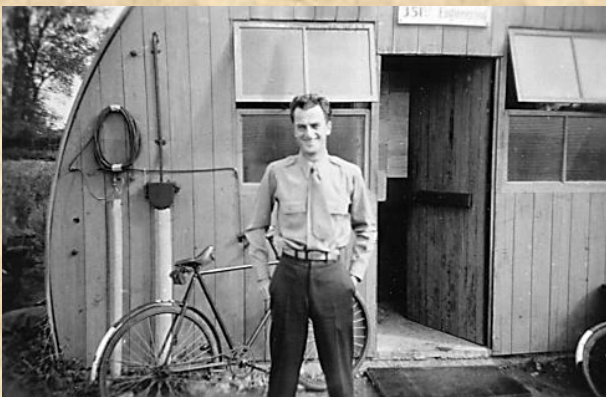
Further on in this article, we feature Frank Valesh's reminisces of this incident

Engineering Officer, Captain Bill Carleton, who was a very good friend of Frank Valesh, writes in The Century Bombers book - about the crash. 'On the way from the runway to the farmyard, the right wing hooked the pyramidal tent, which housed our bomb sight repair unit, much to the surprise of the Sergeant inside, he was suddenly standing outdoors without having taken one step. The plane continued into the meadow and the right wing struck a large tree and the tree won. However, the airplane continued on and the left wing struck another tree near the number 1 engine. This tree won also and the unhappy fivesome were now driving an airplane without any wings, but they were headed straight towards Draper's Barn ... By this time, I think all five of them had abandoned the flight deck and were on their way out the back door...'

Luckily, neither girl suffered serious injury, other than shock and bad bruises and both were able to scramble out of the wreckage assisted by the crew. Lieutenant Campion, who 'was sitting in the nose', also suffered from cuts. All 5 were taken to the base hospital, but were soon discharged.



Captain Carleton – there was a corollary to the story of 'Hang the Expense' in Mr Billy Draper's barn yard which was of considerable concern to both the Colonel and to me. With Mr Draper's permission (and in return for a carton of cigarettes weekly), we kept a lot of aircraft parts, including tyres, batteries and generators, in Mr Draper's barn. We kept them there for two reasons. One was, we were short of space, and secondly, and perhaps the most important, these parts were above and beyond our authorised inventory.



We had not been in combat more than two or three weeks before we were able to determine that the chair born colonels in Washington didn't know very much about how many parts and pieces it was going to take to keep our airplanes flyable, to get these regulations changed, it would have taken longer than the war was to last, so we did the next best thing: we increased our inventory by what is known as 'midnight requisition' and we kept the overage in this barn..... There were 100s of people around, including the fire trucks and the inspectors, but luckily, no one opened the door to the barn.

# THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE 'HANG THE EXPENSE' FARMYARD SAGA



Photos left and right - Frank Valesh



Photo left  
- Andrew  
Campion



Above photo – Russell 'Pinky' Flack



The photo on the right is from 1943 showing Red Cross personnel. We believe the girl on the left is Mary Jane Cooke and the girl on the right is June Jaeger,



# **FRANK VALESH'S DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED TO 'HANG THE EXPENSE' IN THIS INCIDENT**

Information taken from an interview in the early 1980's – written as Frank described the incident and using his terminology

"The Red Cross Girls – Mary Jane Cooke and June Jaeger.

I believe June's husband, Lt Col George Jaeger was a POW in the Phillippines. They gave us doughnuts. We got to be neighbours and friends through the doughnuts and drinks at the club and one time, I don't know if I said, 'Would you like an airplane ride?' So, it happened to be that day I was a Pathfinder at the time. That day they could not bomb due to weather, so could not go. They took the bombs out of the airplane and left it. About 3 to 4 o'clock, a friend who I lived with, Pinky Flak, was a Pilot and Andy Campion was Bombardier, had just landed. I said 'As soon as Pinky gets back, I'll take you girls for an airplane ride.'

As they pulled onto the next hard stand, I said 'Pink, I need a Co-Pilot. Let's take the girls and do a ride around the landing pattern'. Campion said 'I'll go with you'. I said 'Go in the nose'. The Co-Pilot and I are going down the runway. I lose No.4 engine. I think I've got it. Maybe I could have got off, maybe, but I didn't. It pulled off the runway to the right. Now there are trees, a grove of trees coming. So, I said to Pinky, 'You better get the wings off'. It's loaded with gas from the scrubbed mission. One of the trees tore the right wing off. I thought the thing would never stop. So, I pulled the gear up and the trees were splintering. The girls are standing. We slide, smashing trees and through a brick barn and into a house. I looked to my right and there are people running out of, I think, their living room. I turn around. Mary Jane Cooke had fallen down the little passage into the nose section. The belts of ammo from the top turret had fallen on her. June Jaeger was kind of a little groggy, having hit her head on the Co-Pilot's seat armour. I said 'The noise is just atrocious. We gotta get outta here.' I said 'June, go that way'. 'Pinky, get her out of here.' Pinky grabs June and goes back through the bomb bay. I get the ammo belts off Mary Jane and say 'Let's get outta of here'. We get into the radio room and the door is open to the waist gun compartment. There was smoke everywhere. Pinky said 'Come on - the door works'. I said 'Let's go to Mary Jane'. We are all out. We run behind some kind of abutment, then I think, my god, Campion. So, I run to the other side of the airplane.

The front is all smashed in. I reach in and think it's Campion's head, but it is a pulled parachute. I go back under the trees and fire engines arrive. It didn't blow up, it's burnt out. It's terrible. My flight surgeon said 'Get in the ambulance, you gotta go' and I said 'Fine, where's Camp?' We get to the hospital and they take Mary Jane and June away. I said 'Doc, I wanna know where everybody is. Doctor Cliff Kinder says 'Hey Frank,'. I said 'Where's Campion, I killed him didn't i?' 'No, you didn't kill him, he's down there in the bed.' I said, 'You're lying to me, I killed him'. 'Alright, you want to see him – come on'.

I go down there and here's Campion. I've never seen a guy bandaged like this in my life. I said 'Hey Camp, I'm sorry about this'. He said 'You didn't do it. When we went through the barn, I fell out. A big ball and 4 horses hit me on the way out and they hit me with every foot.' I said 'Are you gonna be alright?' 'Hey, Franki, I hope so.' I said 'OK Pal, gotta go see Pink.' 'Where's Pink Doc?' 'Well, Pinky's here Frank.' I said 'What's wrong with him'. Doc replies, 'Well, I don't know'. Pinky's laying there hanging on with both hands. I said 'Pink, what's the matter?' 'They're trying to throw me off this bed.'

Unfortunately, that is the end of the interview. They all recovered and resumed operations."



The Russell J. Flack Crew pose with "PICCADILLY LILLY II": Standing from left: Jack S. Neal, Russell J. Flack, Henry J. Quilici and Andrew H. Campion: Kneeling from left: Gonzalo A. Perez, Joseph King, Elliston P. Hall, Justin S. Berrick, Carlos R. Contreras and Winfred L. Tee. Detailed Information (100th Photo Archives) Don Tee Baby Tee, bottom right, says photo was take January 27, 1944.

Of course, 'Pinky' Flack and Campion were Pilot and Bombardier of this famous 100<sup>th</sup> B-17 'Piccadilly Lilly 11'





*Big Frank Valesh Crew, Ground Crew And Hang The Expense*

*"HANG the EXPENSE" (All of Big Franks aircraft were named Hang the Expense I, II, III etc.) with both her Flight and Ground Crews. Standing from left: John (NMI) Mytko, John R. (Dick) Johnson, Frank E. Valesh, Maurice G. Zetlan, John E. Booth, Paul J. Carbone and Sherman M. Nelson: Kneeling from left: Nels O. Davidson, Lloyd M. Holland, Louis (NMI) Black, Jr., Roy (NMI) Ulrich, Herschel H. Broyles, J. Sambrailo, Ernest M. Jordan and Harold D. Wildrick (The Crew Chief) Detailed Information Les Lautman Collection*

Boeing B-17G Serial No: 42-31035 the third B-17G model off the production line arrived at Thorpe Abbots on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1943 and assigned to the 351<sup>st</sup> Bomb Squadron and coded EP-E. The aircraft was salvaged after the crash on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1943.

We would like to thank the Smith family who live in Lodge Farm today, for giving us permission to visit the farmyard and take photographs of the crash site. During conversations, the family donated a rusty German helmet and a B-17 oxygen bottle to the Museum.



The items had been found during building work in the 1990s. The oxygen bottle is of some interest as it from a D-E or very early F model B-17. It has been modified to either be used as a drip feed gasoline heater or a tank for holding gasoline with a tap at the bottom for washing off oily parts by ground crews.



# COINCIDENCE

We always marvel at the way events happen when we are carrying out research projects.

As we drew nearer to finalising this project, we had the pleasure of a visit by Kevin and Debi Flack. Kevin's father was Russell 'Pinky' Flak

The visit gave Kevin and Debi the opportunity to visit the place where 'Hang the Expense' crashed and the site of Hard Stand No 8 by the side of the Control Tower where his father's plane 'Piccadilly Lilly 2' stood.



Site of Hard Stand No 8



Kevin pointing to damaged tree



Kevin and Debi on crash site with friend!



Kevin and Debi by the Control Tower