

Sergeant Arthur Harding's Final Flight

In Liberator KH 274 "H"

215 Squadron RAF



Photo of Arthur David Harding

(courtesy of Mrs. Lilian M Smith)

Sergeant Arthur David Harding, RAFVR (1357558) was the youngest son of Walter Henry and Daisy Ellen Ann Harding of Plaistow, Essex. The son of a close-knit family, Arthur was aged 4 when his father died. Aged 24, he was the rear gunner of Wing Commander Bleadon's crew and killed on the 1st of January 1945, on a low level mission to bomb the Japanese supply trains on the Bangkok- Chiengasi Railroad in Thailand.



Photo of Liberator KH 274, "H", 215 Squadron RAF.
(courtesy of Mark Smith)

Crew of Liberator "H" KH 274

Pilot-Squadron Leader Clive Bleadon
2nd Pilot-W/O A.C.Combes
Navigator-Flying Officer H.F.Kerley
Bomb Aimer-Flying Officer J.Johnstone
Flight Engineer—Sergeant R.L.Hindson
Wireless operator-Pilot Officer G.Griffin
2nd Wireless operator-Sergeant T.Bennett
Nose Gunner-Sergeant E.C.Hill
Top Gunner-Sergeant R.M.Cunningham
Ball Gunner-Sergeant D.J.Morgan
Rear Gunner-Sergeant Arthur Harding

After being hit by Japanese anti-aircraft fire and with Liberator KH 274 on fire and extensively damaged, Wing Commander Bleadon managed to fly the 1000-mile trip back to base in India. His co pilot W/O A Combes was able to extinguish the fire but sadly, Sergeant Harding was fatally wounded

Sergeant Ken Kemp flew as Rear Gunner to Squadron Leader Roy Williamson and trained and joined 215 squadron at the same time as Arthur. They were good friends, sharing the Sergeants mess, looking out for each other and even growing identical moustaches. Ken was flying in the Liberator behind Wing Commander Bleadon's on the same mission and saw it being hit by anti-aircraft fire, sadly later, he was to be a pall bearer at Arthur's funeral

Sergeant Harding is buried in Grave 8 E2 at Ranchi War cemetery, India.



Photo of Arthur Harding's Grave
(courtesy of Mrs. Lilian M Smith)

Additional Notes:

Wing Commander Bleadon was awarded a DFC for this and other missions (London Gazette 17th January 1945)

The aircraft involved, Liberator KH 274 "H" of 215 Squadron RAF was damaged to such an extent by the flak that it was "written off" by the RAF on January 25th, 1945.

Photo credits and info from Mark Smith (nephew) and Mrs Lilian M Smith (sister)

Written by Linda Ibrom
cathogs2000@tiscali.co.uk