



## British Army Staff Sergeant Leonard Wright

Len Wright was born in Whitehaven in Cumberland in 1918. Educated at Whitehaven School he played rugby and cricket and joined the Army in June 1939 at Carlisle Castle. Although 'mad keen' on flying, having trained in chemistry and analytical chemistry on leaving school, Len was in a reserved occupation and was unable to join the R.A.F. After being sent to the Royal Engineers, Len ended up billeted in the pavilion at Old Trafford cricket ground and had an eventful time mining bridges in case of an invasion, building pill-boxes and even attending a bomb disposal course.

As his promised transfer to the R.A.F failed to materialise, after about 3 years in the Royal Engineers, Len volunteered for the Glider Pilot Regiment. His initial training was at Tillshead in the middle of Salisbury Plain and from there he went to Booker near High Wycombe where he did about 100 hours pilot flying in Tiger Moths and Magisters. After this elementary flying, Len went on to Gliders (Hotspurs) before going to Brize Norton to a heavy glider conversion unit where he trained on Horsas.

Len's first tour of operation was to North Africa and after the Sicily invasion, Len and his fellow pilots had to continue to fly Horsas out to North Africa. He was later told that if the invasion in Sicily had gone according to plan, the subsequent move through Italy would result in Rome being declared an open city and the Airborne would have landed around Rome to preserve its open status. After the Sicily landings Len trained to fly Hamilcars and his first operation in this particular glider was on D-Day, for which it carried a Locust tank. He was with the 6th Airborne Division which landed to the east of Sword Beach to guard the flank of the beach landings.

As well as taking part in the D-Day landings, Staff Sgt Len Wright took part in another two large-



'C' Flight R.A.F. Booker, 12 June 1942.  
Len is fourth from the left on the back row.



A letter from Lt Frank Davies to Len Wright's mother, 31 August 1943, informing her that Len is missing but reassuring her that there are good grounds to assume that he is safe and well.

Len was in Portugal at the time, with Staff Sergeant Les Ridings. Les was killed in action in N.W.Europe.



The Second World War Experience Centre  
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<http://www.war-experience.org/collections/land/alliedbrit/wright/default.asp>

scale operations - Arnhem (when he was wounded in the knee) and the crossing of the Rhine. For the latter, Len was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal, for landing his glider successfully after being hit by anti-aircraft fire, despite it having unserviceable flaps and brakes.

Flying a glider on tow was a difficult job, causing severe physical strain for the pilots. Len had to think of not just his machine but the tow in front. If he allowed himself to fly too high then there was a good chance he would pull up the tail of the tug and send it down. If he flew too low he could pull the tug nose up, causing it to stall. Len was involved in many scrapes, including landing in the Bay of Biscay and crash landing in Portugal.

Having had his wedding cancelled on D-Day, and once he had recovered from his leg injury at Leicester Royal Infirmary, he got leave and went home to get married. Len was demobbed in 1946 and returned to Whitehaven where he decided to become a PE teacher. He taught at Kells School for 25 years and now lives in Lancaster.



With Staff Sgt Les Ridings in Portugal



Len with an American liberator crew, also interned in Portugal.



## Transcript of Audio Clip

Len describes the confusion and fighting after landing at Arnhem:

Anyhow we were under bombardment; it was a real heavy day this afternoon and we were down and this one landed fairly close and I thought well, keep your head down and I heard somebody shout for medics and when I looked the two Paras were covered in and the two, the ones on the right hand side they were half covered so, and my own second pilot, he had a cut on his head, he was badly cut on his head, and I went to try and get the lads out, the Paras out, but one of them was dead and the other was in a bad way and I went to try and get the glider pilots out. One of them was dead and the other one was, he didn't know what he was talking about and my own second pilot was really bad and he decided that he was going to go to the first aid zone you see, which was in the cellars at this time I said, "It's pointless going there because there are too many in it. I will put my own battle dress bandage on him and leave him with that", and he said "No, I am going", because he was a bit shell-shocked as well I think and so anyway, he set off on his own. I got, the medics came after about half an hour or so and they moved the two Paras that were both dead and they moved the other glider pilot and then blow me, our boss came through. The Major came and he said, "We are pulling out tonight". I said, "Good God", I said, "Les Ridings has just gone back to the dressing zone, can I? . .". He said, "Well, you can go and get him out if he is walking wounded", but he said, "Don't let the others know because we don't want a panic in the dressing room, in the dressing station".

So I set off to go back to get him out and again it was plastered with these howitzers and what not and you got to such a state where you could tell if one was coming near you, you know, you got so used to them and I could hear this one whining. I thought "Good God, that is coming here". So I dived into a ditch and I got everything in but my left leg and of course, it hit the left leg and I was cursing myself and I thought, I won't be able to walk, you know, and I was going out and all the rest of it. Anyhow I got on my feet and I couldn't go back for Les. It was too far to go, but I had to leave him.

To escape, Len had to swim across the river, being picked up by a boat close to the other side. He was exhausted and his wounded leg gave him trouble in the cold water. He thought it was rain on the roof of the ambulance evacuating him but was corrected by the ambulance man who told Len, "Is it hell, it's shrapnel!"



## Inventory of the Donation

- Papers and magazines regarding D-Day and Arnhem. Including some articles relating to Len Wright
- Civil defence armband
- Modern pictures of aircraft, the Hotspur and the Hamilcar
- 5 photographs
- Arnhem commemorative flag
- Recommendation for commendation document, 4th June 1945
- Notes on various subjects including formation of 298 Squadron; history of the Glider Pilot Regiment; Operations; invasion of Sicily; etc.
- Air map to Arnhem, issued 17th September 1944
- Leaflet on being demobilised
- Tape-recorded



The official notification of Len's injury, 8 October 1944.

Scrapbook (on loan) including photographs, letters, telegrams, theatre programmes etc.



Len's telegram to his fiancée, Vera Isherwood, to tell her to cancel their wedding plans.



Telegram from officers and men of No. 1 Wing Glider Pilot Regiment congratulating Len on his award of the Distinguished Flying Medal.



Recommendation to award Len the Distinguished Flying Medal



A photograph taken by the Bournemouth Times on VE Day. Len is pictured far left.

## Transcript of Audio Clip

The interviewer is John Larder:

I had shrapnel in my knee, you see, I was on my back for about three weeks. They wouldn't let me move and I didn't realise it at the time but they were waiting to see if this shrapnel would move, to lop my leg, because if my leg was lopped I couldn't fly again. I remember, I was waiting to get married. I had had my marriage cancelled on D-Day. So I thought I better get home and get it finished with, and I remember the RSM of the base came into hospital and he said, how do you feel? I said, I feel great, because I had been demanding to be let out you know, all this time. He said, right, well you are playing football this afternoon, so I said, fair enough. Then they must have decided it wasn't going to move, it was still there, and I went out and played football. Then I got a sort of PE job on there, you know, I kept the others fit until I could get my leave and then eventually I got my leave and . . .

[John Larder: And got married.]

And got married.

[John Larder: And then you went back to . . .?]

Well, I had to do another course to see if I was alright, so I went and did a few more trips in a Horsa, in fact I think it involved pathfinding as well. I went to Booker again and then I went to Brize Norton. All the time I was agitating to get back to Tang ..., because there was only one squadron of us you see, I mean Hamilcar pilots were pretty priceless in those days, and eventually I got back.