



Cumbria at War 1939 - 1945

A Role Play Exercise in seven chapters, for use in secondary schools

Chapter 7

Not Coming Home *The Fallen.*

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A Cumbria Archive Service learning resource for secondary schools,
created by Guy Woolnough September 2009, modified for the web April 2011



Sergeant Navigator

John Scaife Sanderson

son of

Mr and Mrs Sanderson,
farmers,
of Row End Farm, Tebay.

John was just one of
many, many Cumbrians
who never came home
from the war.

John's brother kept a file of all the documents connected with John's death in the war. The file is now kept in the Archive Centre in Kendal.

The file is a fitting tribute to the sacrifice of one family, and must stand as an acknowledgement of the sacrifice of so many families in the war.

This is a newspaper cutting, reporting John's loss.



3rd January 1945

P.S. Your photo
enclosed. O.K.?
I'm giving one to
Mother. Will send
N.C. to you if you
wish.

16 P5244 Sgt. J. Henderson
Sgt. Max
Rkt. Station, Foulsham,
Nr. Dereham, Norfolk.
3rd Jan 1945.

My Dear Tom and Gladys,

A Happy
New Year to you. Trusting you are
both well; as I am, despite the
frost, fog, damp, and perpetual
refrigeration conditions of this
station, where I now reside (I'm sorry
to say!) Well, Well! That's a nice
beginning for a New Year; and a
letter, eh!

Never mind, I'm going on leave
next week, all being well! There's
a silver lining to every cloud
isn't there?

Oh! Thank you very much for the
card, sorry I nearly forgot, but
I'm a bit disorganised with my
correspondence. These moves are a

2.
took off at 2.30 Monday morning. We had
bad weather over France with Cu + CB
up to 20,000 which meant climbing
over it and using more juice. We were
on Daishura (again) at 06.30, and they
certainly gave us a warm reception.
On the way back the hydraulics went
u/s. which impeded us further, having
to fly with bomb doors open. We
were getting pretty low in the tanks
so put down at Bruntingthorpe in
Warwickshire as it happened to be
right on our track. (I didn't discover
until later that it was only 9 or 10
miles from Crick). We discovered on
landing that our starboard tyre
had been burst, but made a safe
landing. (That was the only damage
we had, thanks to Roy's ability to
keep out of the way). They are
certainly pretty accurate, as we could

John's last
letter home to
his brother. He
said he would
be on leave
next week. In
the end, he
never went on
leave.

The full letter is
10 pages; he
mentioned
comrades who
had been lost.

He described a dangerous operation over Germany, from which they were lucky to
return safely



This is a Halifax, the same type of heavy bomber that John was flying in when he was lost.

8th January 1945

The letter from Dad to Tom, telling him that the policeman brought a telegram to say John was reported missing. **"We had a bright, cheery letter on Saturday morning to say he was coming on leave this week. . . . It is grand to know that he was ready. There are lots of sad nearby homes but we know where to seek strength and grace for our time of need."**

Row End.
Libby Gannon - 45.

My dear Thomas & Edg.,

We had very sad news yesterday. When Mother & I got back from Sawmill Chapel, where I had been taking the service. The policeman came with a telegram from John's commanding officer to say that he was missing from Sat. night - Sunday morning operations. He tendered his deepest sympathy & said a letter would follow. So we expect it in the morning. You would perhaps know that he moved from Driffield just after Christmas & was at Foulsham, near Xeteham in Norfolk. We had a bright cheery letter on Sat. morning to say he was coming on leave this week. He was on special secret operations, & not bombing.

We can only hope for the best & be prepared for the worst.

It is grand to know that he was ready. There are lots of sad nearby homes, but we know where to seek strength & grace for our time of need. This morning we had a card to say Abraham had died in a nursing home in backle, & is buried at Oulton Road, Service in the Meth. Chapel, Nicob 8. I was a great friend. I have just written Mrs. Bunn.

We will write & let you know any particulars when we get the letter or any further news.

May God bless & support you both.

With much love from home,
Dad.

Telephone No: GERRARD 9234. COPY.
Trunk Calland) "Air Ministry", London.
Telegraphic Address)

P.18/101/2/P.4.A.2.

AIR MINISTRY
(Casualty Branch.)
73-77 OXFORD STREET,
LONDON. W.1.

19 April 1945.

19th April 1945

Sir,

I am commanded by the Air Council to inform you that they have with great regret to confirm the telegram in which you were notified that your son, Sergeant John Scaife Sanderson, Royal Air Force, is believed to have lost his life as the result of the air operations on the night of 6th/7th January, 1945.

Information has been received from Royal Air Force authorities in France that your son was killed when the aircraft in which he was flying on that night crashed at Jemelle, Belgium, and that he was buried in the Military Cemetery at Marche, Belgium.

Although there is unhappily little reason to doubt the accuracy of this report, the casualty will be recorded as "missing believed killed" until confirmed by further evidence, or until, in the absence of such evidence, it becomes necessary, owing to lapse of time, to presume for official purposes that death has occurred. In the absence of confirmatory evidence death would not be presumed until at least six months from the date at which your son was reported missing.

The Air Council desire me to express their deep sympathy with you in your grave anxiety.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd) CHARLES EVANS.

T.S. SANDERSON. Esq.,
Row 4nd,
Tebay,
Penrith,
Cumberland.

The official letter from the Ministry, telling John's Dad that he was missing, presumed dead.

The plane crashed in Belgium. When it crashed in January, Belgium was in German hands. By the time of this letter, the crash site was in British hands, and the wreckage had been identified. But there were only 4 bodies out of the crew of 6, and John's body had not been identified.

It was often not possible to identify human remains in the wreckage of a plane crash.

The Air Ministry (Casualty Branch.)
73-77. Oxford Street,
LONDON. W.1.

2. May. 1945.

Dear Mr. Sanderson

I am sorry to have to refer to the sad news about your son, Serjeant John Seafie Sanderson, which was conveyed to you by the Air Council in their letter of 19. April. 1945, but further information has now been received, which unhappily confirms the previous report.

The latest information which has come to hand is from a British Army Unit in Belgium. It appears that on information given by local inhabitants they discovered two more members of the crew, some little ~~xxxx~~ distance away from the ~~plane~~ wrecked aircraft. These airmen were taken to the town of Marche (Belgium.) where your son was identified from particulars on his clothing. Unhappily the other airman could not be identified, but was stated to be a Serjeant Bomb-aimer. They were both buried in the Military Cemetery at Marche., which is situated some 26 miles SE of Namur. The Director of Graves Registration and Inquiries has been requested to have your sons grave registered and suitably inscribed.

Serjeant Sanderson will now be recorded as "Killed in action" and the action to presume death, for official purposes, will no longer be necessary.

It is hoped that this definite knowledge of your son's resting place, will afford you a small measure of consolation in your great loss. May I tender you our sincere sympathy in your great sorrow and long period of anxiety.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd) J. PARSONS. R/Lt.
Casualty Branch.

2nd May 1945

A few days later, another official letter told John's family that his body had been found, *"some little distance away from the wrecked aircraft."* He was identified by his clothing. *"It is hoped that definite knowledge of your son's resting place will afford you a small measure of consolation in your great loss."*

A Surprising Letter

13th June 1945

copy of Mr C A Topham's letter
to Benson R.
Irene
Dear Mr Sanderson 13. 6. 45

You will be surprised to know there was a survivor of the ill fated Bomber - F. Sgt Lawrence (Euly). The Australian wireless operator. He has just spent a couple of days with us before returning to Australia. His story is as follows:- They left Foulsham on the evening of the 6th of January on a "distraction flight" around the lighthouse at about 7 P.M. when flying at 18,000 feet. there was a sudden explosion which immediately rendered him unconscious. When he came round the plane was hurtling out of control to the earth. There was a gaping hole in the side of the machine and a small fire in front of him. the fire went out as he sat dazed looking at it. He could not hear any signs of life in the plane. he is confident that they were ^{then} all dead. He adjusted his parachute and was in the act of turning round when there was a second explosion. he then knows no more until he found himself gliding down on his chute. He saw the plane crash in two parts about 1/2 a mile apart and then burst into flames. he has no idea of what hit them but imagines that it was a new type of shell or that they ran into a flying bomb. He was taken prisoner soon after landing. They carried no bombs, they were just engaged in dropping silver paper. He is convinced that there was an additional man on board an Australian Sgt. You will also be interested to know. I have written to "Le Mairie de Jemelle" in hopes of getting information from local inhabitants. I will acquaint you with the reply if and when it is received. I think I have told you everything I have discovered if however you think I have missed any detail please do not hesitate to ask. We trust you are recovering from the shock which the year has brought. With kindest regards
Yours Sincerely
Claude A. Topham

Amazingly, one of the crew survived the crash. He had been taken prisoner by the Germans, and only recently "turned up." Here the survivor explained exactly what happened on the plane.

6th September 1945

Tel. Worcester, 3411.
Any communications on the
subject of this letter should
be addressed to:
THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE,
and the following number quoted:
PP.344004/45/Accts.13.

AIR MINISTRY,
Whittington Road,
Worcester.

6. September. 1945.

Sir,

The late Sergeant S.L. Sanderson.

I am directed to inform you that the out-turn of your son's
Service Estate is as follows:-

	£.	s.	d.
Balance of Pay.	17.	2.	9.
Cash in effects.	13.	2.	4.
Post War Credit at 6d per day.	21.	14.	0.
Income tax refunded on Service emoluments.	34.	1.	1.
	£ 86.	0.	2.

There is no trace either in this Department or at ~~any~~ your
son's Royal Air Force Unit of any will having been executed by him
and in accordance with the English Law of Intestacy the Service
Estate is divisible equally between yourself and your wife.

Accordingly a payable order for £86. 0. 2. in your joint favour
will be forwarded to you under separate cover at an early date.

I am to add that a sum in respect of War Gratuity will
be paid at a later date in accordance with the public announcement
that has been made on the subject.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

(SGD) W.J.HOLLYS.

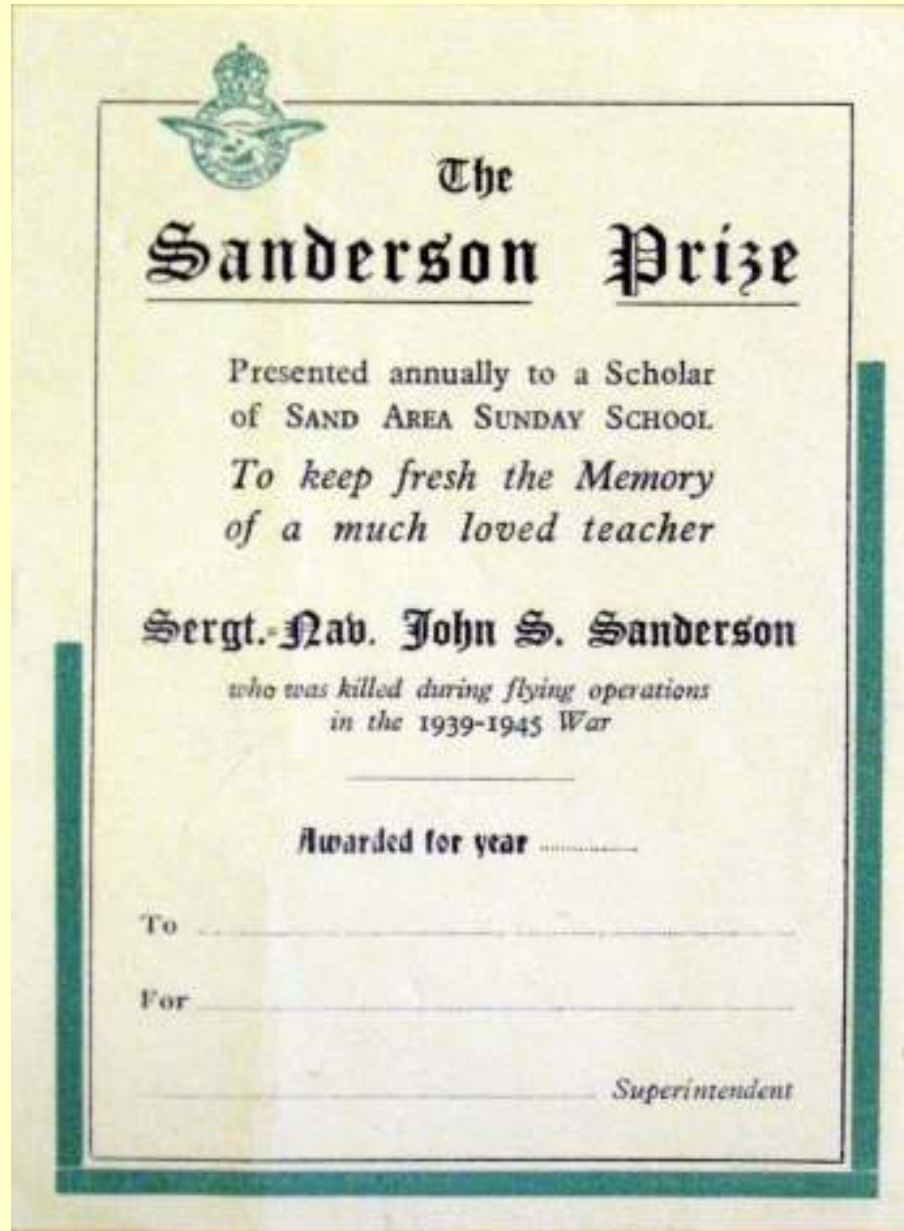
for Director of Accounts.

T.S.Sanderson, Esq.,
Row End, 1
Tibay,
Penrith,
Cumberland.

The last letter from
the ministry.

It told John's father
how much pay John
was owed when he
died. He was also
entitled to an income
tax refund, because
of his sudden death.

The total amount the
family received was
just over £86.



John's family used the money to set up a prize fund for the Sunday School where John had been a teacher.

<u>Grave</u>	<u>Actual</u>
185 2943. Sgt. V.C. TOPHAM. RAF. 7.1.45:-	do. 6.1.45.
159 4654. Sgt. J.D. BEARDSMORE. RAF. 7.1.45:-	do. 6.1.45.
AVS/417761. P/S. L.G. NANNEL. RAAF. 7.1.45:-	AVS/429082. P/S. L.G. M. MANNEL. 6.1.45.
3050406. Sgt. E.G. BAKER. RAF. 7.1.45:-	do. 6.1.45.
AVS/417761. P/O. M.W. ROHLACH. RAAF. 7.1.45:-	do. 6.1.45.
1399 603. P/S. W.S. SCOTT. RAF. 7.4.45:-	1399 603. P/S. W.S. SCOTT. 6.1.45.
1635 244. Sgt. J.S. SANDISON. RAF. 5.1.45:-	1685 244. Sgt. J.S. SANDERSON. 6.1.45.

A couple of year's later, John's brother Tom visited the grave in Belgium. He was angry to discover that the grave stones were incorrect. You can see that John's name and date of death are wrong. On the left, Tom has noted down what was on the "Grave," on the right "Actual" is what it should be.

Tom wrote several letters to the ministry before they corrected it.



The war took the lives of many people who were not in the armed forces.

Dear Madam,
It is with the deepest regret that I have learned that your son, Mr. George Acton, who was serving in the Merchant Navy as A.B. has been recorded as supposed drowned whilst on service with his ship.

Your son upheld the noble traditions of the Merchant Navy and I may perhaps hope that the realisation of this may help to soften the heavy blow that has fallen upon you.
Believe me, yours sincerely,
Leathers
Minister of War Transport

You can see this letter at [BBC People's War Website](https://www.bbc.com/ww2peopleswar)

This document is included in "WW2 People's War," an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. Article ID: [A4268243](https://www.bbc.com/ww2peopleswar/article/2019/05/20190519-acton-george) The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](https://www.bbc.com/ww2peopleswar)

George Acton was a crew member on the British ship, SS Empire Leopard. The ship was sailing from America with supplies for Britain when it was torpedoed by a German U-Boat on 2nd November, 1942. You can find full details at: [BBC People's War](#)

George was one of four Whitehaven men serving as sailors on the Empire Leopard. None of them was ever found.

Mrs Acton must have been very upset by the letter; she had heard nothing for six months. Mrs Acton had two sons on the Empire Leopard. Although Lord Leathers' letter mentions only George, his brother William had also been lost.

Caught Under Fall

Whitehaven Miner's Fortitude

A 33-year-old coal hewer, father of three children, Mr. John Hornsby, 29, The Ginns, Whitehaven, died in Whitehaven Hospital on Monday after being injured in an accident at Haig Pit.

Deceased was one of a company working on the morning shift at No. 4 South Bank face. A huge slab of stone is reported to have fallen from the roof and pinned Hornsby by the lower part of the body. Whilst his workmates toiled to release him and assistance was given by the mine ambulance workers. Hornsby never lost consciousness and showed great fortitude.

At the hospital several fractures were discovered and Hornsby died five hours after admission.

An inquest was opened by Mr. R. W. Marley, Deputy Coroner, on Tuesday, and adjourned for a week.

Evidence of identification was given by William Hornsby, Loweswater Avenue, Woodhouse, who said he last saw his brother on Saturday night. Deceased, who had worked for 15 years in Ladysmith, Wellington, and Haig Pits, had no physical defects. He had worked as a hewer at Haig Pit for nine years.

The Coroner expressed his sympathy with the relatives.

Mining became more dangerous in the war.

The miners worked hard to extract more coal, but were short of men and equipment. Many young and inexperienced men were drafted into the mines. For these reasons, the accident rate went up.

Cumbrians like John Hornsby lost their lives while they were doing their duty and helping Britain to win the war.

Cumbria at War, 1939-1945

A Role Play Exercise in seven chapters for use in secondary schools.

Chapters:

1. Introduction: VE Day, Cumbria, May 1945.
2. In Uniform: those who served in uniform in Cumbria.
3. Working: those who worked in Cumbria to help win the war.
4. Home Supplies: how Cumbrians got what they needed in the war.
5. Away from Home: evacuees, and Cumbrians serving overseas.
6. Missing Home: prisoners of war, Cumbrians and Germans in Cumbria.
7. Not Coming Home: remembering those Cumbrians who fell in the war.