

**Eric John Richards 1920-1942**



Eric Richards was born in 1920 and attended Glyn School from 1932-1936. Whilst at Glyn, he was a member of Tudor House and won Form Prizes in 1934 and 1935, as well as the Maths Prize in 1935. After leaving Glyn with his School Leaver's Certificate, Eric obtained a job as a Clerk at the Post Office.

In September 1939, Eric joined the RAF and soon began training with Bomber Command. By 1941 he began flying combat missions, bombing targets in Germany and Occupied Europe. On 15 January 1942, Eric and his crew clambered aboard their Whitley Bomber and flew off on another mission. They were not to return.

Below is the telegram sent to Eric's parents informing them that their son was missing.

Charges to pay s.      d. RECEIVED	<b>POST OFFICE</b>  <b>TELEGRAM</b>	No. <u>799</u> OFFICE STAMP
Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.	12/49    Dorroughbridge    33	
From <u>L.P.O.</u>	To	16 JAN 42
Mr P.A. Richards    St Philip's Ave WORCESTER PARK		
Regret to inform you your son 1162205 Sgt. Richards S.G. failed to return from operation this morning letter follows. Adst 51 London.		
For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope. B or C T 51-206		

For the next three years, Mr and Mrs Richards sent a deluge of correspondence trying to find out what had happened to their son. Eventually, they were to find out that he'd been shot down over Holland and was buried in a churchyard close to where his plane came down. Despite this, they still had no idea what had happened to make his plane crash. In August 1945, a member of Eric's crew, who had survived, sent a letter to Eric's parents outlining exactly what had happened.

Dear Mr Richards,

*Before setting off on that fateful trip I had this uneasy premonition that something unpleasant was due to happen. I even went so far as to ask a pal to send home my personal possessions the next day. I didn't say anything to the rest of the crew for fear of upsetting them. However, we arrived at the target (Emden) and made 3 runs over the target without any 'incidents'. For the first time that day I felt at ease and turning our nose for home my thoughts began to dwell on the eggs and bacon waiting for me.*

*These thoughts were rudely shattered by a terrific rattle along the fuselage, which I thought was flack hitting the fuselage. (We had a similar experience on the previous trip over Brest when only Eric's skill got us out of a tight corner. The Gerries (Germans) had us coned in a box barrage and gave us a rather warm time for a few minutes.)*

*Within ten seconds of the first burst we were hit again and this time the machine started bucking wildly. I 'plugged in' to Eric just in time to hear him say "OK fellows - bale out". I told the 2nd W/Op and we immediately grabbed our chutes and made for the escape hatch. The plane started to dive and on the way forward I looked through the 'Astro-dome' - the machine was just a mass of flames and diving out of control. I sat down by Eric's side - he was struggling desperately with the controls but I'm afraid they were shot away with the first burst.*

*I'll never forget those last few seconds as we dived to destruction. Needham the second pilot had the exit open and I could see his legs reflected in the glow of the flames. Camp, the navigator, was kneeling at my feet struggling with his chute. It was impossible to get out and I realised that death was a matter of seconds - I patted Eric's arm - he stuck to the controls fighting to the last - and said "Cheerio Eric - this is it".*

*The machine started spinning and I got a crash on the head which knocked me unconscious and the next thing I knew was that I was turning over and over in the air - it was very cold, which undoubtedly saved my life by reviving me in time and pull my chute open.*

*Bits of wreckage were dropping all around me and below I could see a wing spinning in flames. I didn't see any of the crew on the ground until I was captured the next day and then we pieced the whole series of incidents together. We were hit by fighters - White the rear gunner stuck in his turret firing his guns the whole time. I am convinced he shot one of them down because there was still part of a flaming machine above me whilst our machine was well below me. Also I definitely saw 3 parachutes. 2 below me which must have been Needham and Muirhead and above me which was no doubt was the German Pilot. The high wind separated us however and I couldn't find out who they were. I didn't see Eric, Camp or White again, so was unable to verify their death. The Germans told us they were killed but of course that was no proof to me. I hoped for the best and tried to make enquiries whilst in camp, but with no success. I thought I had been successful but you received definite news from the Dutch Red Cross to the contrary.*

*I felt a personal loss and I know the RAF lost a good pilot and you a good son. I only hope Mr Richards that you will forgive me for not writing you earlier. I do feel it rather badly so please write me your forgiveness. You should be proud of Eric - I know I was proud to be one of his crew. A hero to the end.*

*If you have a photograph you could spare I would be more than grateful if you would send me one, please.*

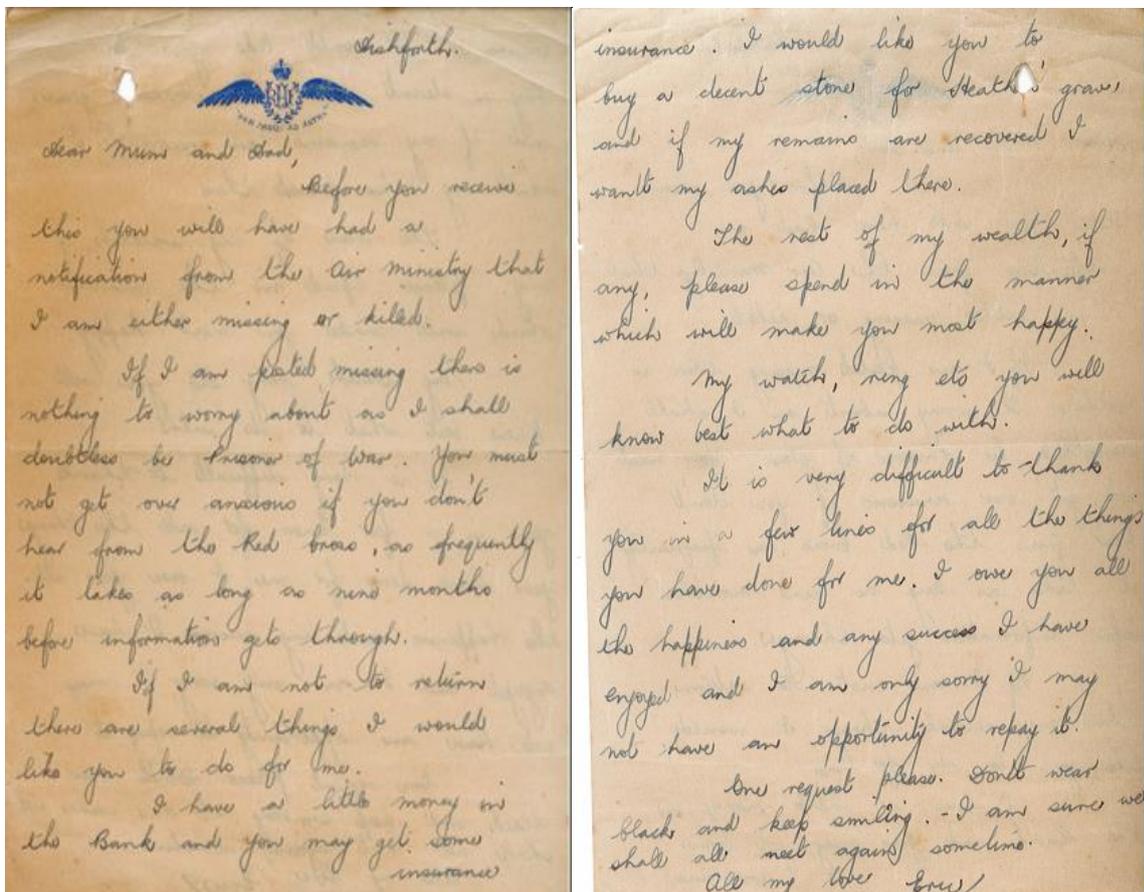
My very deepest regards and good wishes,

Sincerely yours,  
Gerard S. Booth

This letter spells out the horror that confronted Eric and his crew in the final few seconds before their plane came down. Eric had a choice to make as pilot; try to get out and cause the plane to come down quicker and kill all of them, or hold on and give his friends, like Booth, the chance to escape and to carry on. That is the sign of true courage; being aware of the consequences of your actions, no matter how bad the consequence, and still carrying on.

Sacrifice like this enables us today to live in a tolerant and civilized society with freedom of expression. Every year at Glyn we remember the 33 old boys who gave their lives preserving this freedom. Many were so young they had barely made the transition from the classroom to working life. The fact that they took on this responsibility without question makes us proud of them at Glyn and they will not be forgotten.

Below is the last letter Eric Richards ever sent to his parents, it shows us vividly the loss felt by family and friends of those who did not come home. We also remember what they lost and the grief they had to go through. We remember so we do not have to add any more names to the war memorial and that loss on this scale is never repeated.



*Dear Mum and Dad,*

*Before you receive this you would have had a notification from the Air Ministry that I am either missing or killed.*

*If I am posted missing this is nothing to worry about as I shall doubtless be a prisoner of war. You must not get over anxious if you don't hear from the Red Cross as frequently it takes as long as nine months before information gets through.*

*If I am not to return, there are several things I would like you to do for me. I have a little money in the bank and you may get some insurance. I would like you to buy a decent headstone for Heather's grave (Eric's sister who had died when they were teenagers) and, if my remains are recovered, I'd like to be buried there. The rest of my wealth, if any, please spend in a manner that will make you most happy. My watch, rings etc. you know what to do with.*

*It is very difficult to thank you in a few lines for all the things you have done for me. I owe you all the happiness and success I have enjoyed. I am only sorry that I may not have the opportunity to repay it.*

*One request please. Don't wear black and keep smiling. I am sure we will all meet again somehow.*

*All my love,*

*Eric*



**They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.**