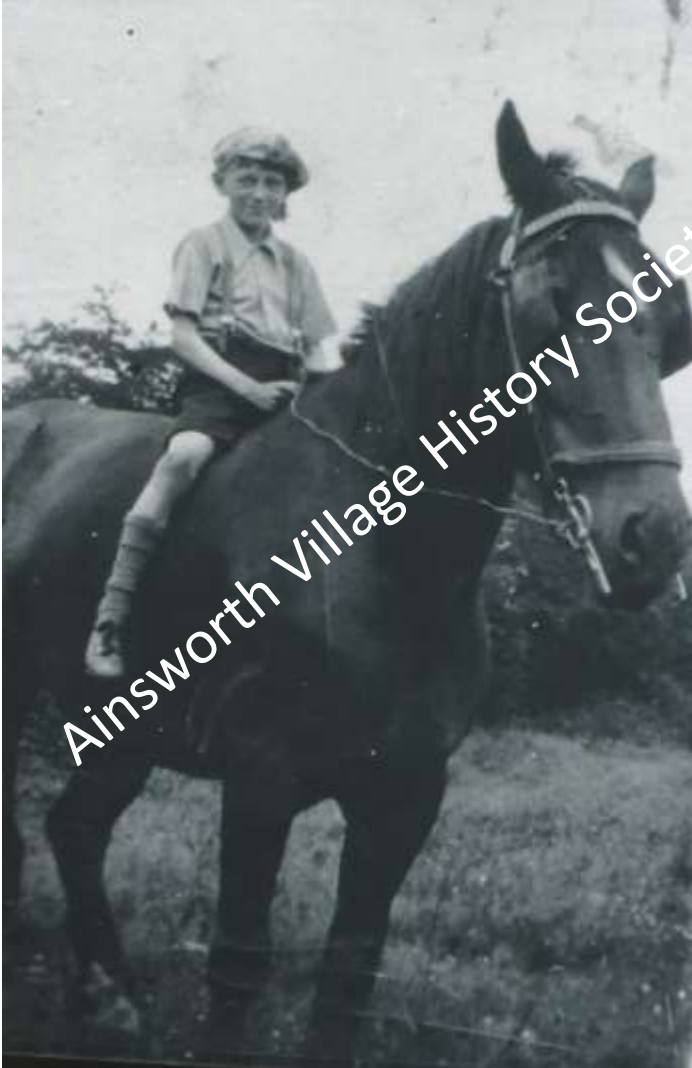


Billy Barlow



The Journey to Vessem

Jack Barlow followed his brother Billy's journey from landing at Juno Beach



The Pier at Coursullers-sur-Mer, Juno Beach, Normandy
The 2/5th battalion The Lancashire Fusiliers landed on June 30th 1944, possibly where the pier is now standing on the beach



2/5th battalion The Lancashire Fusiliers first saw action on 8th July 1944 at 07:30 by walking up the hill, and attempting to cross open, waist high, corn fields to the east of Cambes Wood and west of a ruined village La Bijude (top left of the field, to the left of the trees), where the “killing fire” came from.

(this is a modern photo – in 1944, it may have been a series of smaller fields)

Cambes-en-Plain, Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, showing main memorial cross and headstones of Lancashire Fusiliers killed in their first action, to east of Cambes-en-Plain.



Tesel Woods (Bomb Happy Woods) where Billy, in D company, was involved.
It may have been here that Billy suffered from shell-shock

The Lancashire Fusiliers liberated
Villers Bocage on 4th August 1944,



Goupillieres, where The Lancashire Fusiliers regrouped (and were
also disbanded into other regiments after the battle of
Normandy)



Haut-d-Ouilly is a village on the crest of a long hill with a deep valley to the north. This was the valley that the Lancashire Fusiliers had to climb out of to capture Haut-d-Ouilly and was their last engagement as the 2/5th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers

Ecouis church



The Lancashire Fusiliers were disbanded and redeployed. According to Billy's war records, on 28th August he was transferred to the East Lancashire regiment , in the area around Les Mesnil vert Lives, about 2 miles north of Ecouis

Billy was transferred with the D coy of the , Lancashire Fusiliers and at Mesnil-Verclives, on 30th August 1944, D Coy Lancashire Fusiliers were again transferred, to the 7th Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers.





My photo. Bridge over The Somme at Picquigny. This is where The 53rd Division, including The East Lancashire Regiment (that both Ted Cheetham and Billy were part of) crossed on 2nd September 1944 the day after the Division had "over run" "flying bomb" launching sites at Pontremy and Berguenfuse.



Dennis Brookes was a rear gunner in a Halifax bomber and was killed in a raid on 25th June 1944, four days before Billy landed in Normandy. He is buried at the side of the church in Fontaine l'Étalon, 8 miles south of Hesdin. His grave is the fourth from the left (with the remembrance cross)





The inscription reads:

2209373 SERGEANT
D. BROOKS
AIR GUNNER
ROYAL AIR FORCE
25 JUNE 1944 AGE 20
"SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS"
ONE OF THE BEST,
LOVE MOTHER, DAD,
TOM AND BRENDA



The canal north of Lommel, looking east along the stretch where Billy with D Coy. 7th R.W.F. crossed, looking much like it may have been in September 1944, according



The crossing of the canal north of Lommel was to be carried out on 18th September, on either side of a demolished bridge, with the opposite side of the canal being heavily wooded.

At 11:30 pm the boats were launched – not easy as the banks were steep and it was a very dark night

The initial crossing was successful – although a few boats sank – but then trouble began as the opposition was heavier than expected,

but by 5am the following morning, the battalion was dug in

The 7th Battalion RWF bivouacked at Veldhoven on the night of 20th September and the next day moved through Knegsel to Vessem.
“D” company being sent after 12:00 noon





This is the ditch on the road from Knegsell to Vessem where Billy and Fred Hallam took cover from mortar shells fired when D company were advancing into Vessem on 21st September. Fred was killed and Billy wounded in this ditch.





The farmer took Billy from the ditch when he was found to be wounded and not dead and carried him to the farmhouse. There he put Billy in a chair, where he died of his wounds





Billy and Fred's original graves near where they were killed at the edge of a field of wheat

There is a cherry blossom tree in the field behind the hedge and ditch at the side of the farmhouse.

It was planted by the people of Vessem to mark the place where Billy and Fred Hallam were first buried (by Eddie Lofthouse).





IRMA DE ROOY 'KRACHT' 2013

The villagers asked the British Army if they could rebury the pair in their church cemetery and were told they must get permission from the families.

Irma wrote to the two families and both gave their permission.

Although that was the end of the involvement of Fred's family, the Barlows have stayed in touch, with Irma visiting Ainsworth and the Barlows going to Vessem.

Billy's mother had asked if it was possible to get back the crucifix which she had given Billy.

Irma was there when Billy was exhumed and saw a soldier pull back the blanket in which Billy's body was wrapped and undo the crucifix from around Billy's neck.

He handed this to the officer, who gave it to Irma. She kept it until the Barlow family visited in 1947

Billy and Fred were wrapped in new blankets and taken to the church cemetery. There they were re-buried by the army burial party, with only a priest in attendance.



Later on the people of Vessem had a commemoration ceremony



Irma felt that a proper memorial stone should be erected on the grave because they gave their lives for the population of Vessem

Through house-to-house collections and a contribution from a family in Eindhoven enough money was raised to erect this stone cross.



Jack went again in 2015



