

David Lord VC

Wrexham

1944



## Wrexham

Flight Lieutenant David Lord. VC. DFC. 1944  
Buried in the Oosterbeek Military Cemetery  
Holland

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*Bale out, for God's sake! Bale out!*

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When he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross the Chief of the Air Staff, Lord Portal of Hungerford, wrote to David Lord's parents.

*I have read of many great deeds for which the Victoria Cross has been awarded but I do not remember one which surpassed in gallantry the action of your son. His sacrifice will have an illustrious place in the annals of the Royal Air Force.*

How right he was.

There are two memorials to David Lord in Wrexham. One is in St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral and the other is an impressive and informative display outside the Memorial Hall at the other end of the town, on the edge of the leisure centre carpark. He is remembered in other places too, the church in Down Ampney in Gloucestershire where his squadron was based and in the Airborne Forces in Oosterbeek in the Nether lands. That is where he is buried, in

the Oosterbeek Military Cemetery, for David Lord was killed in the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944.

He was born in Cork in Ireland in 1913, His father, Samuel, was a warrant officer in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers who, whilst stationed in Cork, had married Mary Miller, a sailor's daughter. Samuel's service career took the family next to Malta and then to India before they settled in Wrexham, where he worked as a civilian clerical officer at Hightown Barracks.



David was brought up as a catholic, attending college in Aberystwyth before beginning his training for the priesthood at the English Ecclesiastical College in Valladolid in Spain. It would seem that he began to doubt his calling and he returned to Wrexham and worked first as a photographer's assistant and then as a freelance writer, struggling always to make ends meet. Eventually, the direction of his life changed completely when he joined the RAF and trained as a pilot.

He served initially in India, flying supply missions on the North-west Frontier, before seeing action in Iraq in 1941 and then in Syria, Pakistan and North Africa, often in planes that were not provisioned with parachutes. David refused to swear, which earned him his nickname, '*Lummie!*' after the expression he used whenever events troubled him – and

inevitably they did. He was shot down over the desert by three German fighters, surviving a forced landing. By 1942 he was back in India, flying missions over Burma to re-supply the Chindits, British Special Forces operating behind enemy lines in the dense jungle. During these operations he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his work as 'an exceptional' pilot and navigator. On his one visit on home leave in 1943, he attended Buckingham Palace to receive his DFC, though he avoided all publicity. There are no photographs of him with the medal, for he said that he did not deserve it. The Virgin Mary had protected him whilst he was on his missions and she was the one who deserved such recognition. He told his parents that he had decided to resume his training for the priesthood in Valladolid.

He was next trained for the support of troops during the Allied landings in Normandy, flying from Down Ampney with 271 Squadron on a resupply and evacuation mission. He once, significantly, nursed home his damaged Dakota aircraft rather than bale out, and for this action he received the King's Commendation.

His squadron was part of the airborne assault on Arnhem. The objective was to seize the bridge over the river Rhine and hold it until land-forces could battle through seventy miles to meet them. It would be a decisive and bold attack, allowing the allies to enter Germany and perhaps end the war quickly. This was Operation Market Garden, made famous in the film *A Bridge Too Far*, and sadly of course, it didn't work out.

The assault began on 18 September 1944 and for David Lord it didn't begin very well. His first assignment was to tow a glider across the Channel to be released as part of the assault. Despite his plane having a faulty starboard engine, he managed to deliver the troops to the drop zone west of Arnhem. Now that the soldiers were on the ground then a supply operation would begin the following day.

The weather however was poor. The departure of the Dakotas was delayed until 13h.00 but due to poor visibility a flying formation could not be coordinated and so each crew had to find its own way to Arnhem. Neither was there a fighter escort to protect them. They had set off at the original departure time and so by the time the Dakotas were in the air, the fighters were running out of fuel and had to return to base. The skies cleared over France and so they were able to form an untidy, disorganised and unprotected formation, arriving at Arnhem at 15h.00. The aircraft could communicate with each other, but they had been told to ignore any messages they might receive from the ground, in case they were false messages sent by the Germans, so they were not fully aware that Operation Market Garden had gone terribly wrong and that the Allied forces were being over-run.

As Lord approached the Rhine his plane was hit twice by anti-aircraft fire which seriously damaged that troublesome starboard wing. He could have turned away at this point but none of the crew had been injured and they were determined

to complete the delivery of vital supplies, especially since the drop zone was only three minutes away. It was at this moment that they realised that the starboard engine was on fire.

Other pilots in the ragged formation were very concerned that Lord's Dakota could veer out of control and crash into them. They did not understand why he did not crash-land whilst he could still do so. But David Lord was determined to complete his mission, to help the soldiers who were in such a parlous situation.



When they reached the drop-zone the fire from the ground was heavy and, not surprisingly, concentrated on the already stricken aircraft. They had to reduce speed and fly at 800 feet to perform the drop and this obviously increased their

vulnerability. It also became clear that the area where they were to drop the supplies was still in German possession – in fact they had never lost it. The decision was taken to abandon the drop and the planes swung away to release the supplies in the area where the gliders had landed the day before. David Lord followed and managed to release his panniers, suspended on coloured parachutes. There is some uncertainty about what happened next but it seems that he was told that there were two panniers left on board. He re-joined the formation and dropped them in the correct place, still under heavy fire.

By now the plane was in a terrible condition, fatally wounded. Lord shouted out *'Bale out, for God's sake! Bale out!'* and a white parachute descended to the ground with Pilot Officer Harry King suspended beneath it. The plane was so low that it only just opened in time. The idea was that he would show the rest of the crew how to do it. But there were no others. The wing broke off and the plane spun into the ground before they could escape. David Lord and six crew members died, buried initially in the field where they crashed and were later reburied in the military cemetery at Oosterbeek. Their plane was one of the thirteen Dakotas that were lost that day.



The greatest irony was that it was only the last two panniers dropped by Lord on his final run that reached Allied ground forces. The rest were picked up by the Germans.

The full story of his actions only emerged in 1945 when Harry King was released as a prisoner of war and it was corroborated by the soldiers on the ground who watched in awe as the stricken plane, clearly doomed, went round for a second time.

On the 13 November 1945, fourteen months after his death at the age of just 30. David Lord received his posthumous Victoria Cross. On the third anniversary of his death on September 1947, at the junction of Grosvenor Road and Regent Street in Wrexham, an impressive memorial was unveiled. It was later moved to the Memorial Hall where you can see it, just to the left of the entrance, along with a display board. There is another memorial now in the field in Wolfheze, where his plane fell to earth.

His sacrifice however is perhaps most appropriately recognised on his grave in Arnhem which reads

*Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends*



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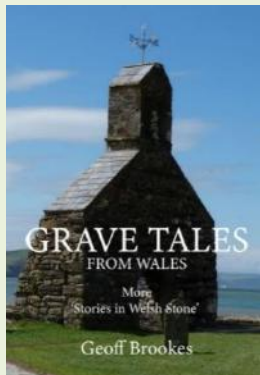
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## Volume One

An introduction