George Russell Stewart GORDON (1922 – 1942)





1160229, Sergeant
GRS GORDON
RAFVR (Observer)
138 Squadron
28th Dec 1941
Age 19
138 Squadron



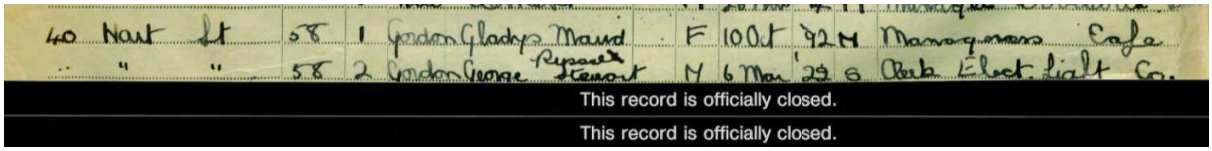
REST IN PEACE



George Russell Stewart GORDON, known as Stewart, was born in Plymouth on 6th March 1922, the son of Thomas Wardle Gordon and his wife, Gladys Maud nee Murton. They had married in Truro Cornwall in 1918. Stewart had two sisters, Hazel born in 1919 in Truro and Minnie Myrtle born in December 1924 in East Stonehouse, and also a brother, John who was born in 1932 in Salisbury.

His father, who had served in France during the Great War died in Henley in 1936, aged just 40 years of age.

In 1939, Stewart was living at 40 Hart Street, Henley with his mother, Gladys Maud, and was employed as a clerk for the Electric Light Company. The two closed records for the household are presumably for sister Minnie Mirtle and brother John.



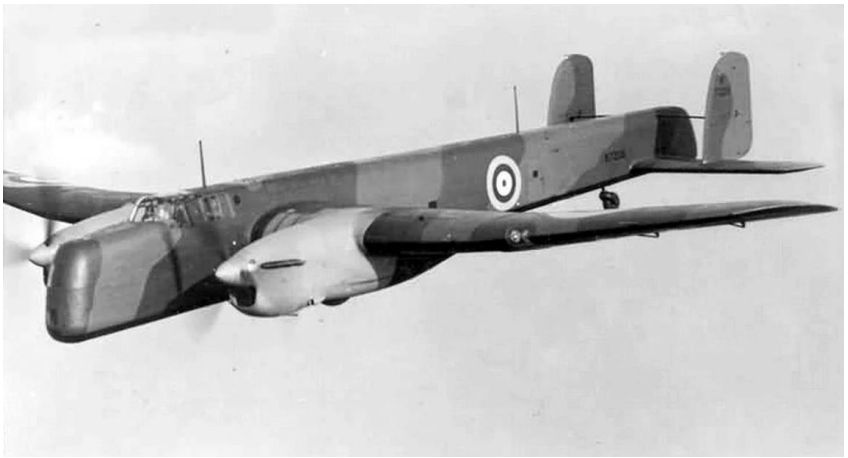
Nothing more is known of his pre-enlistment life or his route to becoming an Observer but he eventually joined the clandestine 138 Squadron based, at the time, at RAF Stradishall, Suffolk.

Reformed in 1941, No 318 was the first squadron of the Royal Air Force Special Duty Service. It was initially based at RAF Stradishall before moving to RAF Tempsford in Bedfordshire. The Royal Air Force Special Duties Service provided air transport to support the resistance movement in enemy controlled territories. Planes from the 138 Squadron were involved in top-secret missions to the heart of the war-torn Continent.

The squadron dropped supplies and agents for the SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) and the SOE (Special Operations Executive). The service helped develop and support the resistance by bringing in agents, wireless operators and supplies. They had to fly low and without lights in order to identify drop zones and deliver the supplies and secret agents that would help the resistance forces liberate Europe. Parachute drop was the primary method by which the Special Duties units delivered supplies and agents to the occupied countries. They also developed an air taxi service to pick up agents, political leaders and special communications from occupied Europe and bring them to England. They flew to target fields in Vichy and Occupied France, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece.

On Saturday, 27 December 1941, some aircraft of the 138 squadron, took off from RAF Stradishall for a mission to the Netherlands. This Operation Pickaxe II mission was planned for Sunday, 28 December 1941.

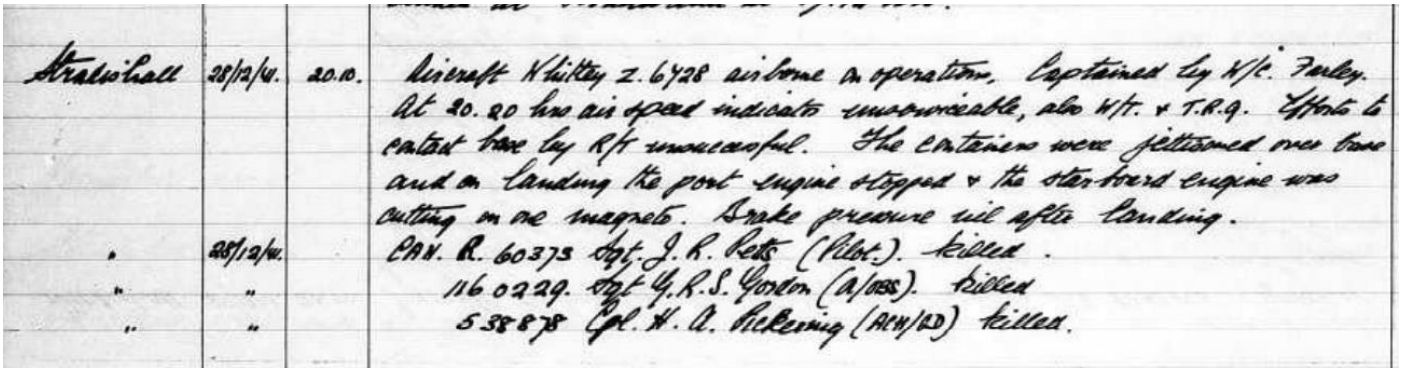
What was Operation Pickaxe? Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Churchill and Stalin secretly agreed that Britain would infiltrate Soviet agents into occupied Western Europe. Thirty-four men and women arrived in Scotland. To stop people finding out that Britain was helping the Communists, the agents were given false identities and provided with accommodation and training at remote country houses in southern England, including Beaulieu. Codenamed PICKAXES, they were sent for parachute practice at Ringway aerodrome, provided with documents, cover stories and wireless sets and sent on clandestine missions into France, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Germany and Italy.



Armstrong Whitworth Whitley V (Z9385 NF-) on its mission to Netherlands on 27/28 December 1941.

The Whitley had a crew of five: a pilot, co-pilot/navigator, a bomb aimer, a wireless operator and a rear gunner. The pilot and second pilot/navigator sat side by side in the cockpit, with the wireless operator further back. The crew members for this flight were F/Sgt Alvin Wilbert Reimer RCAF (Pilot), F/Sgt John Russell Petts RCAF (co-pilot/navigator), Sgt George Russell Stewart Gordon RAFVR (Observer), Sgt Herbert Andrew Pickering RAFVR and also an unknown rear gunner.

The detail of their flight is not known but on their return home in bad weather it is thought the aircraft was damaged when they engaged with a German ME 110 night fighter and that while attempting to land they collided with another Whitley over the airfield. The rear gunner and one other crew member are reported to have baled out before the plane crashed at 0400hrs.



Stradishall	28/12/41.	20.10.	Aircraft Whitley Z.6728 airborne on operation. Captained by W/C. Farley. At 20.20 hrs air speed indicator unserviceable, also W/T. & T.R.9. Efforts to contact base by R/T unsuccessful. The canteen were jettisoned over base and on landing the port engine stopped & the starboard engine was cutting on one magneto. Brake pressure nil after landing.
"	28/12/41.		CAN. R. 60373 Sgt. J. R. Petts (Pilot). killed.
"	"		116029. Sgt G.R.S. Gordon (A/Obs). killed
"	"		538878 Cpl. H. A. Pickering (AEW/AD) killed.

Sgt Gordon, F/Sgt Petts and Sgt Pickering were killed. F/Sgt Reimer suffered severe shock and multiple injuries and was not fit enough to be taken to the RAF Hospital at Ely so was admitted to White Lodge Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Hospital, Exning Road, Newmarket. (Now known as Newmarket General Hospital.) Despite efforts to treat him he succumbed to his injuries, dying on 12 January 1942.

Sgt Gordon was buried at Haverhill cemetery, Suffolk, England, grave 139, section U.

Sgt Alvin Wilbert Reimer (Royal Canadian Air Force) was also buried at Haverhill Cemetery.

F/Sgt Petts was buried at Chalk (St Mary) Churchyard, Gravesend and Sgt Pickering was buried at Saffron Walden Cemetery.

Stewart's mother and sister were living in Cambridge at the time of his death in 1941. His sister married an American airman from Massachusetts, Allen James Chalmers, in October 1945. They settled in Massachusetts. Stewart's mother also moved to the USA.