

27th November, 2000
Loughborough Grammar School,
F.A.O. Rev. A.J. COX

18 Shepshed Road,
Mathera,
Loughborough,
Leics. LE12 5LL.

Dear Rev. Cox,

Following sight of the paragraph in the Loughborough Echo, requesting information on former pupils who lost their lives on active service during World War 2. I would like to put on record the following:-

My Brother, John Alexander Swift, of No.1, Derby Road, Mathera, who was a pupil at Loughborough Grammar School from 1932-1937, joined the R.A.F.V.R. in April 1941 and was sent to Canada to undergo training as a Pilot, primarily with Beaufighters. He was awarded his Wings, transferred to 2(c) Officer Training Unit, and then posted to 227 Squadron in June 1943 being commissioned as a Pilot Officer on October 3rd 1943.

227 Squadron was equipped with Beaufighters and based at Lakarania in Cyprus. On November 5th 1943 he was engaged in a daylight sweep with other Beaufighters around Rhodes when he was shot down, with 4 other Beaufighters by ME109 single seater fighters. The Islands of Cox and Rhodes had been over run by the Germans and their next targets were the Islands of Leros and Samos. 227 Squadron was providing air support to the ground forces but the Germans enjoyed air superiority.

The Bristol Beaufighter was a long range, twin engined fighter/bomber equipped with 20mm Cannons in addition to Machine Guns and occasionally Bombs. Their role was to attack shipping, landing craft and land based targets, but as fighters they were no match for the ME109 single seater fighters, and usually had to take evading action when 109's were sighted. Unfortunately the Beaufighters on November 5th were too far from base to have single seater fighter (usually Spitfire) escort, whereas the Germans had established airfields on Cox and Rhodes.

P.O. Swift's Beaufighter was seen to crash into the sea and no trace has been found of him or his navigator F/Sgt. Austin. Enclosed is the information given by the War Graves Commission advising that his name is commemorated on column 269 of the Alamein Memorial which is 130 Kilometres west of Alexandria on the road to Kersa Matruh.

The book by Roy C. Nesbit, called "The Armed Rovers", describes in great detail the role of the Beauforts and Beaufighters over the Mediterranean during World War 2. Their prime objective was to disrupt Rommel's supply chain from Italy to North Africa, which they did with success, although their losses could be as high as 50%.

The Beaufort had a crew of 4, carried Torpedoes and Bombs and usually attacked shipping at low level. The Beaufighter (crew of 2) had the job of flying at a higher altitude and strafing the shipping with their cannons and machine guns whilst the Beauforts despatched their Torpedoes and Bombs.

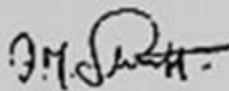
The lack of long range fighters has always been recognised as a

major defect in protecting our ground forces on the Dodecanese Islands as the Germans had control of the air which enabled their troops to be transported and supplied by sea as well as by air.

General Eisenhower had refused to allow any aircraft to be drawn away from the campaign in Italy until too late, when 6 Squadrons of Lockheed P-38C Lightnings were transferred to Gambut (Kr. Tobruk).

Later with the main war effort being concentrated in North Italy and Germany, the German and Italian Fascist troops on the Dodecanese Islands were left to stagnate, being denied supplies by the eventual superiority of the allied air and sea forces.

Yours Sincerely,



A.A. KIFT.

P.S. also enclosed 2 photographs.