

Sqn.Ldr Stanley Booker MBE RAF (Rtd)

- Navigator in RAF Bomber Command 10 squadron – Halifax shot down over France 3rd June 1944, betrayed to the Gestapo, interrogated and survived imprisonment in the notorious Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Held hostage by Russian troops until the end of May 1945.
- Stanley was born in Gillingham, Kent and at the age of 17 joined the RAF as an apprentice. He trained as an Observer in Wales and then joined 10Sqn as a navigator flying Halifax Bombers, mission to target the railway lines and marshalling yards in France and Germany to impede the resupply of German troops and armaments to the French coast ahead of the D Day landings.
- On the night of 3rd June at 1am in the morning, his Halifax was shot down in flames and crashed in St Andre de L'Eure, near Dreux, in France. His pilot and wireless operator were killed and 5 other members of the crew escaped by parachute and all eventually found refuge with various members of the French resistance in Eure.
- Stanley was hidden by the members of the resistance in several farms and local chateaux; he was provided with a civilian suit and a false identity card in the name of "Pierre Le Comte". Several weeks after D Day he and another member of his crew were being passed further down the escape line towards Paris when they were betrayed to the Gestapo by a Belgium traitor Jacques Desoubrie.
- Stanley was captured and sustained many severely brutal interrogations by the SS / Gestapo but he did not betray the brave members of the resistance who sheltered him. He was interned in Fresnes prison with French members of the resistance and captured SOE officers. Stanley was denied prisoner of war status and any contact with the International Red Cross. He was treated as a spy.
- On 15th August, five days before Paris was liberated, all the special inmates of Fresnes were assembled and under threat of being shot, were taken to the Gare de L'Est railway station in Paris and packed into filthy cattle trucks. Stanley found that there had been 168 allied airmen who had been imprisoned with him in Fresnes. The Allied airmen included RAF crews, USAAF, New Zealand, Australian and Canadian. "Terror Fliegers"
- The frightening and stifling journey took five days; the airmen experienced extreme privation, starvation and dreadful thirst. Several prisoners were killed en route. Eventually to their despair and bewilderment they found they had arrived at the notorious Buchenwald Camp.
- The prisoners were segregated and a small party of RAF and US aircrew were taken away to a special quarantine area near the crematorium known as the "Little Camp". They were "processed" stripped and shaved and all their clothes and possessions were taken

away. They had no shoes and had to sleep on exposed stony ground with no blankets or covering.. They experienced atrocities; inhumane treatment; beating and starvation. They were injected with experimental drugs by an SS Doctor and experienced the worst cruelty imaginable. They were under sentence of death.

- Eventually, through the assistance of the secret Communist camp underground, the Luftwaffe obtained their release. The surviving airmen were transferred to Stalag Luft 3 in Poland. They were within 2 days of being executed by the SS.
- After a few weeks, with approach of the Russian Armies, the prisoners were turned out on the road to make a three week forced march back into Germany. It was January with snow and freezing temperatures, conditions were appalling. Stanley and his compatriots arrived exhausted at Luckenwalde POW camp near Berlin and then became prisoners and hostages of the Russian Army.
- They were held as political prisoners whilst the Russians negotiated the release of some Soviet prisoners held by the British and American forces. Finally they were liberated by the Americans – three weeks after VE Day and eventually flown back to the UK on 29th May.
- Back in England they were debriefed by MI9 but no one was interested in the story Stanley had to tell about his “missing year” and the brutality he had experienced. He was denied appropriate medical treatment for the injuries he incurred during interrogation and incarceration by the Gestapo. He was expected to “get on with it” and take some repatriation leave.
- Stanley experienced the worst and the best of mankind and remembers the comradeship and bravery of his fellow prisoners.
- Stanley has devoted his retirement to searching for the truth and he travelled regularly back to France and Germany in his determination to find documentary evidence of his betrayal, capture and detention in Buchenwald. He wanted the British government to recognise that he and the other Allied airmen had been illegally been held by the Gestapo, mistreated. All the survivors suffered physical and mental problems until their deaths. He strove to obtain compensation for his fellow prisoners.
- He sought official recognition for the 37 SOE members who were in Buchenwald with him; 31 were murdered by the SS. A memorial is now in place to recognise their bravery and loyalty to Britain.
- In 1965, Stanley was awarded an MBE by the Queen for his specialist work during the Cold war.
- VE Day 2020 Stanley was honoured by a Spitfire Flypast by Daily Mail
- 21st December 2020, Stanley was appointed Chevalier in the Ordre national de la Legion d’Honneur by the President of France.