James Frederick Colin Cliffe





Rank: - Leading Aircraftman

Regiment: - Royal Air Force serving on H.M.S. Ark Royal

Service Number: - 635084

Missing, presumed killed in action: - 27 September 1941

Memorial: - Runnymede Memorial, Surrey Panel 56

Batley News, 18 Oct 1941 (photo)

Family Details

Colin, as he was known, was born in Drighlington in 1921 the son of Beaumont Radley and Irene Ivy Cliffe, nee Hemsworth. He lived with his grandparents Mr & Mrs Fred Hemsworth at 13, Victoria Avenue, Batley from the age of four to fourteen. Colin attended Park Road School and Batley Grammar School afterwards working in the Batley Co-operative Dairy before joining the R.A.F. in March 1938. He became an instrument repairer. In his last letter home to his mother, he said he was hoping for leave soon and was longing to see her and all his friends. His brother, John, was in the Home Guard but had enlisted. They lived at 16, Birklands Estate, Birkenshaw. His mother received a telegram from the War Office to say her son was missing, he was serving on the H.M.S. *Ark Royal.*

Service Details

H.M.S. *Ark Royal* (1937-1941) was the first purpose built large aircraft carrier to be completed for the Royal Navy. For the first two years of the war, she was in the Mediterranean but she took part in the campaign off Norway in the hunt for the *Bismarck.* The *Ark Royal* could operate sixty aircraft, although she rarely carried the full complement.

Ark Royal and the ships of Force H returned to Gibraltar on 29 May 1941. Despite the boost in Allied morale from the sinking of the battleship *Bismarck*, the war in the Mediterranean was going against the Allies. Greece and Crete had fallen to the Axis Powers, and the Afrika Korps was preparing to launch a final push into Egypt. Malta remained an important stronghold in the Mediterranean, but was coming under increased pressure from Italian and German air attacks, and could no longer be supplied from the east since the fall of Crete.

Ark Royal was pressed into service, delivering aircraft to Malta during several supply runs throughout June and July, and escorting the convoys of Operation Substance in July and Operation Halberd in September.

Operation Halberd was a British naval operation that took place on 27 September 1941, during the Second World War. The British were attempting to deliver a convoy from Gibraltar to Malta. The convoy was escorted by several battleships and an aircraft carrier, to deter interference from the Italian surface fleet, while a close escort of cruisers and destroyers provided an anti-aircraft screen. The aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* operated 12 Fairey Swordfish and 27 Fairey Fulmars of 807 and 808 Naval Air Squadrons.

The Italian fleet sortied after the convoy was detected, but turned back after learning the strength of the escorting force. Air attacks by Italian bombers and fighters damaged several

ships, and forced one of the merchant vessels to be scuttled. The rest of the convoy arrived at Malta and discharged their cargo. Four aircraft were lost and eight people were killed.

Colin was one of the eight who lost their life on the 27th September 1941.

He was awarded: - Air Crew Europe Star; 1939-45 Star; 1939-1945 War Medal

Colin is remembered with Honour at Batley Central Methodist Church (Zion); Batley Grammar School and Batley War Memorial.



Researched by members of

Batley History Group



BATLEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL
"OLD BOY" MISSING.

A telegram from the War Office has been received by Mrs. Ivy Cliffe, 18, Birklands Estate, ...kenshaw, announcing that her son, Leading Aircraftman Jas. Fredk. Colin Cliffe, R.A.F., who was an instrument repairer, is missing. He was born 20 years ago at Drighlington and lived with his grandmother, Mrs. Fred Hemsworth, 12, Victoria Avenue, Batley, from the age of four to 14. From Park Road School he went to Batley Grammar School and was in Batley Co-operative Dairy before joining the R.A.F. in 1938.

J. F. C. Cliffe.

In his last letter to his mother he said he was hoping for leave soon and was longing to see her and all his friends.

Mrs. Cliffe's other son, John (18), who is in the Home Guard, has registered. He also attended Park Road School.