KEN STEWART’S REPORT ON A VISIT TO:
No 10 Downing Street to receive his Bomber Command Clasp from the Prime Minister in March 2013

PRESENTATION OF BOMBER COMMAND CLASP - LONDON - 19 MARCH 2013

You may have heard, or seen, on the news that the first presentation of the Bomber Command Clasp were given at Number 10, Downing Street on Tuesday 19 March 2013, by the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon David Cameron MP.
A former 10 Squadron navigator, Ken Stewart represented 10 Squadron when he received his Clasp together with other Bomber Command veterans. Former Fg Off Stewart is seated at the left rear of the photograph.
Ken has kindly sent this report of the event and the photographs are taken from the ITV news coverage of the event.

The day started with the arrival of approximately 30 Veteran Aircrew members of RAF Bomber Command during World War II and their guests, at 1130 hrs, at the RAF Club in Piccadilly, London. We were met and greeted by serving Royal Air Force officers. Morning coffee was served, as we gathered in the Cowdray Lounge.
At 1215 hrs, we travelled by dedicated transport, with hosting officers, to Downing Street, arriving at 1245 hrs, where, after very thorough security checks of the vehicles, we entered No 10 and were met by the staff and directed to the Presentation Room. The veterans were seated in 3 rows of named chairs, their guests being seated separately and we were then addressed by The Master of Ceremonies, the Defence Secretary, Rear Admiral Simon Williams.
The Prime Minister was introduced at 1315 hrs and made a very thoughtful and sincere speech, praising the veteran Bomber Command Aircrew members for the vital part they played throughout the whole of the War and apologising for the 70 year delay in granting them just recognition for their service between 1939 and 1945.
Mr Cameron then went along the rows of veterans, spoke to and shook hands with each one and presented him with his boxed Clasp, as his name was called out.
A very moving Ceremony, after which we transferred to the Reception Room, where tables were laid out and refreshments and snacks provided. During the meal, the Prime Minister visited each table and spoke to the veterans and their guests.
A most memorable, interesting and well organised day, much appreciated by all concerned. We departed Downing Street, individually, from 1430 hrs onwards.

Fg Off Ken Stewart.

Navigator, 10 Squadron
UK, India and Burma 1945 -1946
Ken is seated on the extreme left of this picture captured from the ITV website 13 March 2013

See Next Page for Transcript of the PM’s speech............
The Prime Minister gave this speech at a special Downing Street ceremony honouring veterans of the Bomber Command.

Prime Minister -

“Well, above all, an incredibly warm welcome here to Number 10 Downing Street; I’m really proud that you are here and this decision has been taken. A right decision, a correct decision, I’m afraid to say a long overdue decision, but nonetheless one that has been made and I think the whole country owes you a big debt of gratitude and I’m delighted to have you here at Number 10 Downing Street so that we can make that happen today.

I want to commend everyone’s made this possible: the MoD and others for working so hard and fast to get this decision implemented, and to produce the clasp today. But above all, on behalf of the whole country I want to thank you for what you did all those years ago. It is an incredible thought for my generation, who’ve had to suffer so little, to think of the extraordinary odds that you faced and the incredible sacrifice of the Bomber Command crews.

It’s worth remembering just some of the reasons why today’s decision is so justified. Bomber Command was one of the few commands that flew missions from the very start of the war, to the very end of the war. Bomber Command was absolutely vital in defeating Nazi Germany and in saving our continent for freedom. The figures are – to people of my age and my generation – completely spellbinding and terrifying. 125,000 people joined Bomber Command; 55,000 people died. Of every 100 who started 30 missions, at the end of those 30 missions, only 16 people would still be part of that air crew; the others would either be captured, wounded or killed. It was an incredible scale of sacrifice in an absolutely vital task for our nation.

And to those who want to know the real contribution that Bomber Command made to winning the war, it is worth remembering that your bravery destroyed 10% of the invasion fleet that Hitler had prepared to invade our country; that it was your action that was absolutely vital before D-Day to make a success of that, the most important operation that British forces were involved in probably in the entire war. That it was your action that completely destroyed the steel production in Nazi Germany and it was your action that reduced to a trickle the supplies of oil and petrol and diesel that the German forces had; so that famously in the Battle of the Bulge, the great counter-attack that Germany attempted towards the end of the war, ran dry because they simply didn’t have the fuel to go any further.

So I’m in no doubt that Churchill was absolutely right when he said that fighters may be our salvation, but bombers are a key means of delivering victory. He was right to say that; you’re right to put it on your great memorial now in Green Park, and it’s right today that we put in place something that should have been put in place before: that just as Fighter Command have a clasp to go on the medals that they earned during the war, so Bomber Command should have that clasp too.

So I’m delighted to be the Prime Minister who’s, I hope, played some small part in helping that to come about so that we as a country can look at all those who served and all those who didn’t make it through the war, and all those who’ve died since, and say from the bottom of our hearts, we’re incredibly proud of you, we’re very grateful for what you did, we’re sorry that it’s taken 70 years to recognise properly the full scale of the action, the courage, the bravery and the sacrifice that you showed, but we’re proud to say that today and to thank you for all you did for our country, for our freedom and for our safety. Thank you. “