

# Christ Church Southgate 12 June 1942

# OPERATION SQUABBLE

## The Story of a Southgate Hero



### A SYMBOL OF HOPE

In an act of defiance against the occupying forces and in support of the French people, the mission to drop a Tricolore on top of the Arc de Triomphe was conceived. Ken and his navigator, George Fern, practiced on a shipwreck in the English Channel, using a variety of techniques to weight down the flag, so it landed unfurled. The initial mission on 13th May had to be cancelled due to poor visibility over the French coast. Ken and George took off on 12th June 1942 for a repeat attempt, flying from Thorney Island at 11:29 and circled the Eiffel Tower at 12:17.



### MEMORIES OF A DARING FLIGHT

Above the west door in church hangs a Tricolore – the French Flag. The flag replaces one which was dropped on top of the Arc de Triomphe on 12th June 1942 by the crew of a Beaufighter Aircraft in one of the most daring – but now forgotten – acts of precision flying in WW2. The pilot of the aircraft was Alfred “Ken” Gatward, a Southgate resident, who lived at 27 Meadway. Ken volunteered for “Operation Squabble” after his skills as a pilot in low-level attacks came to the attention of his commanding officer.

Intelligence had shown that the Germans paraded down the Champs-Elysees every day between 12.15 and 12.45.



### MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Unknown to Ken Gatward and his navigator George Fern, the parade up the Champs Elysees had been cancelled but their mission continued and at 12:28 the Tricolore was released by George Fern down the flare chute over the Arc de Triomphe. The crew returned home and landed at RAF Northolt at 13:53.

The replica flag which hangs in church was presented to the Southgate and Wood Green Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association by representatives of the French Government at a special ceremony in Broomfield Park on 28th July 1949 and has hung in our church ever since.



Alfred “Ken” Gatward



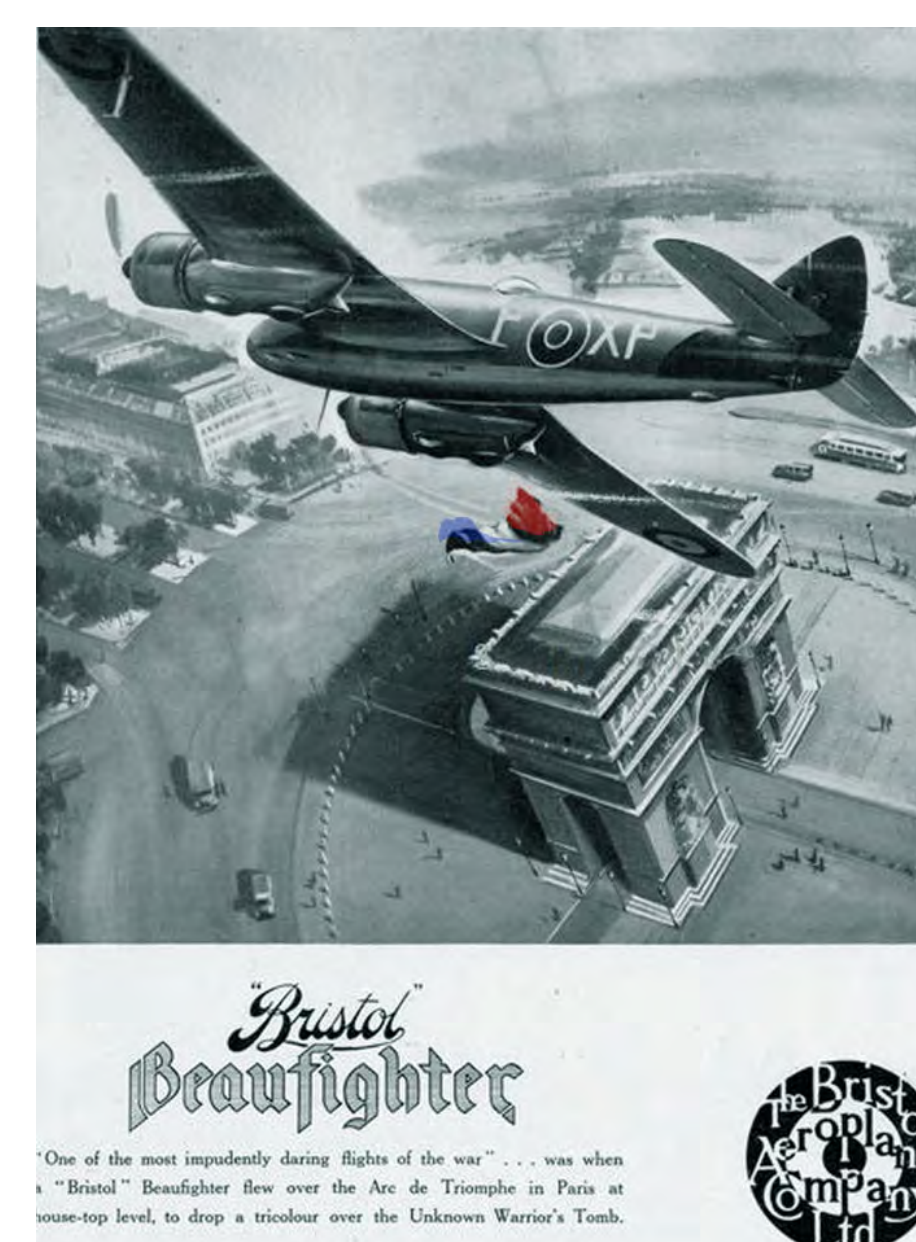
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## The View From The Cockpit

### MISSION PHOTOGRAPHS

These photographs were taken by George Fern during the mission. They were published in LIFE Magazine on 10th November 1942. As well as documenting the mission on his camera, George Fern was navigating the plane and had the task of launching the Tricolore from the flare chute!



Above: Photographs taken during the mission by George Fern. The images were published in LIFE Magazine on 10/11/42

Above: Newspaper cartoon  
Right : Bristol Beaufighter Advertisement



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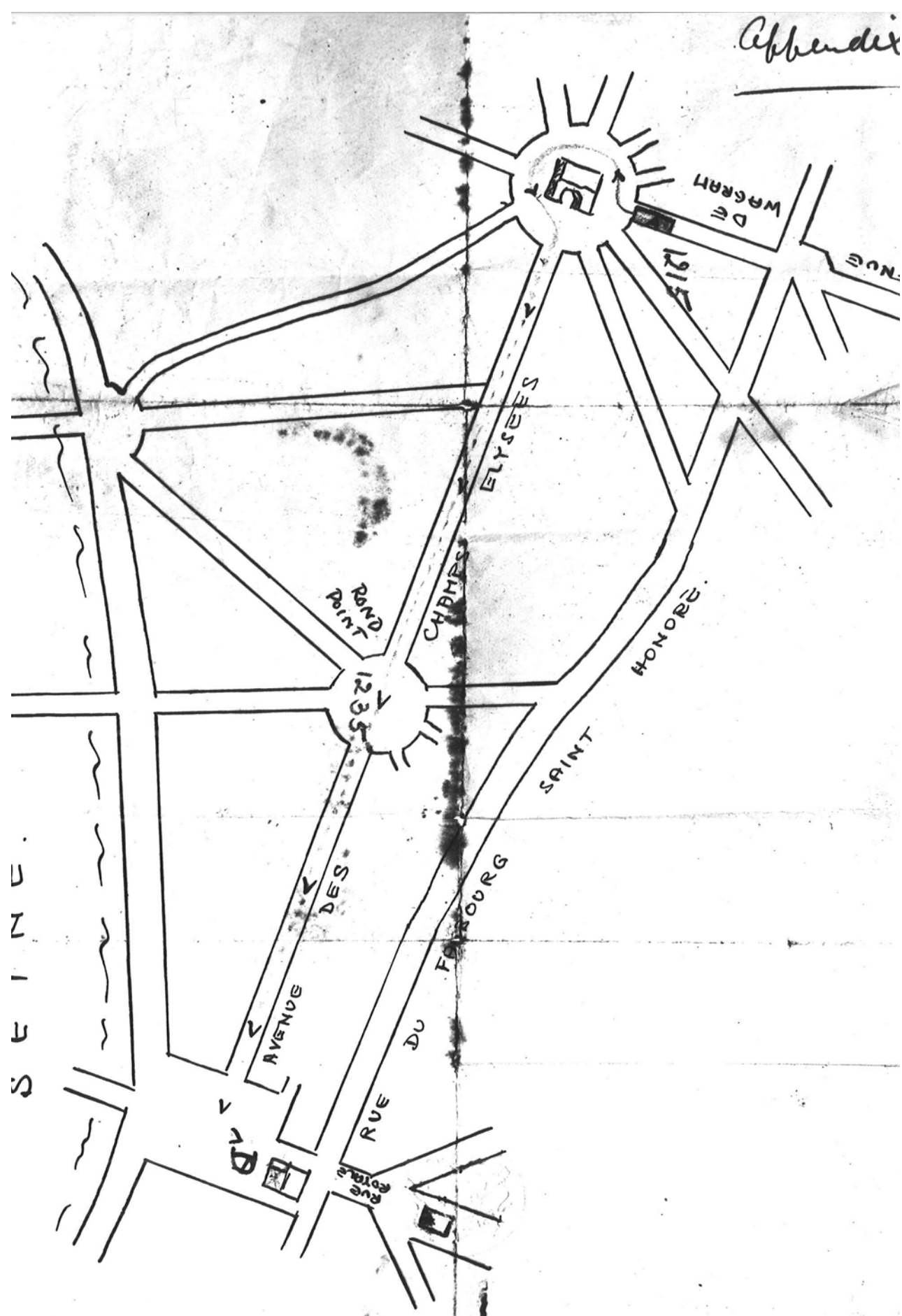
## In His Own Words

## KEN GATWARD SPEAKING ON 17 JUNE 1945

I'd never been to Paris before, but it looked exactly as I had imagined it would. We studied a lot of guide books and photographs before we set out. We flew very low all the way across to avoid attack and saw a mass of horses in the fields. The Beaufighter is pretty quiet and we didn't disturb the horses and cattle over much, but we took some photographs of them. Some of the horses were rearing up as we came over the fields and one of them was a white horse and you can almost see the whites of his eyes in our picture. We could see the Eiffel Tower when we were 30 or 40 miles from Paris which helped with our navigation, because we were much too low to look at Paris from above.

It was a very nice day, plenty of sun and we quite easily where we were going. We took a bearing from the Eiffel Tower and came in smack over the Defence Monument and then headed straight for the Arc de Triomphe. I said to my observer, "Are you ready with the first flag?" and he said "Yes, I'm all ready, but the slip-stream is nearly breaking my arm." He was pushing this furled flag down a flare chute into the slipstream from the propellers, and at the right moment he let it go.

We had experimented quite a bit with the flag before we started and they were both weighted and folded so that they would both steam as soon as they were released. However we couldn't stop to see exactly where the first dropped, but Vichy says it fell right on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, which is of course just where you'd want it to be. One of the things we wanted to look at particularly was the Ministry of Marine because it was crammed with huns and we had something for them. We spotted that quite easily and turned north towards the opera house and then out again. On this first circuit the people in the streets didn't seem to pay a great deal of attention to us. Of course there was a certain amount of traffic in the streets which may have covered up the noise of our engines, but there wasn't anything like the traffic there is in London and we saw no motorbuses in the Champs-Élysées.



We didn't get very far before we turned for our second circuit, and this time we came in as low as we dared, in case they had any light ack-ack on the roof-tops. Actually I was too busy watching out for chimney-pots and steeples to notice any ack-ack, but Sergeant Fern warned me that some tracer did actually pass close by us, but the aircraft was not hit.

On this second circuit we didn't make quite the same tour. We turned south a bit towards the river so we could come square up to the Ministry of Marine, and we were right in line at a range of about 500 yards before we let fly with our four cannon and saw the sparks flying off the building. We hadn't time to see whether the shells burst inside, but a good deal went through the window. We sprayed the pace from base to apex and we only cleared the roof by about five feet. Whilst I was doing this, Fern was shouting encouragement and pushing out the second flag which we hoped would fall slap across the front door.

There was much more interest taken in this second circuit of ours. People were running about the streets to have a good look at us, and we noticed one or two faces at the windows actually peering down at us. We saw a number of German military cars stopped in the streets with Huns standing round them, and others of them were dodging round the trees in the avenue but we couldn't let fly at them because there were too many civilians about. Most of the civilians were waving to us. Fern said he saw some German soldiers were trying to take cover behind a lorry. One of them was very fat, and he was shaking his fist at us.

I'm sorry I can't tell you more about our visit to Paris. It was very short, only five or six minutes, but I'd like to go again with all the photographs we took and see how it looks with both our feet on the ground.



# OPERATION SQUABBLE

# Presentation in Broomfield Park 1949

## PRESENTATION OF THE TRICOLORE

On the evening of Thursday July 28th 1949 over 12,000 people are reported to have packed into the sports arena in Broomfield Park to watch what is described as the biggest spectacle Southgate has ever seen. Monsieur Louis Roche, First Counsellor of the French Embassy in London presented a Tricolore the Royal Air Forces Association Southgate and Wood Green Branch. Wing Commander A. K. Gatward received the Tricolore from Madame Jane-Luc, the English wife of a Frenchman, who witnessed the daring flight.

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**ROYAL AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION**

*A Souvenir Booklet*

TO MARK THE

**Presentation of a Tricolour**

on Thursday, 28th July, 1949, at Broomfield Park, Palmers Green, N.13  
to  
WING COMMANDER A. K. GATWARD, D.S.O., D.F.C. and BAR  
*President of the Southgate and Wood Green Branch*

**BY THE GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE**



*The historic event commemorated by this presentation is fully described in the pages of this Souvenir.*

**Price One Shilling**

*(By Courtesy The British Aeroplane Company Ltd.)*

Madame Jane-Luc, the English wife of a Frenchman who witnessed the daring flight, presents the Tricolore to Ken Gatward in Broomfield Park.