



**“A fine ordinary chap...”**  
**Arthur Stewart King Scarf V C**



#### **4 Dunmore Road, Wimbledon.**

Arthur Stewart King Scarf was born in Wimbledon on 14 June 1913. He was the son of Arthur Samuel Scarf and his Lincolnshire-born wife, Florence.

The couple already had two daughters, ten year old Eileen and Mary, aged two.

As an insurance agent, Arthur's father earned a good wage and the family could afford to employ a number of domestic servants, including a nurse to look after the children.



### **The Great Hall at King's College School, Southside, Wimbledon.**

Arthur Scarf attended the school between 1922 and 1923.

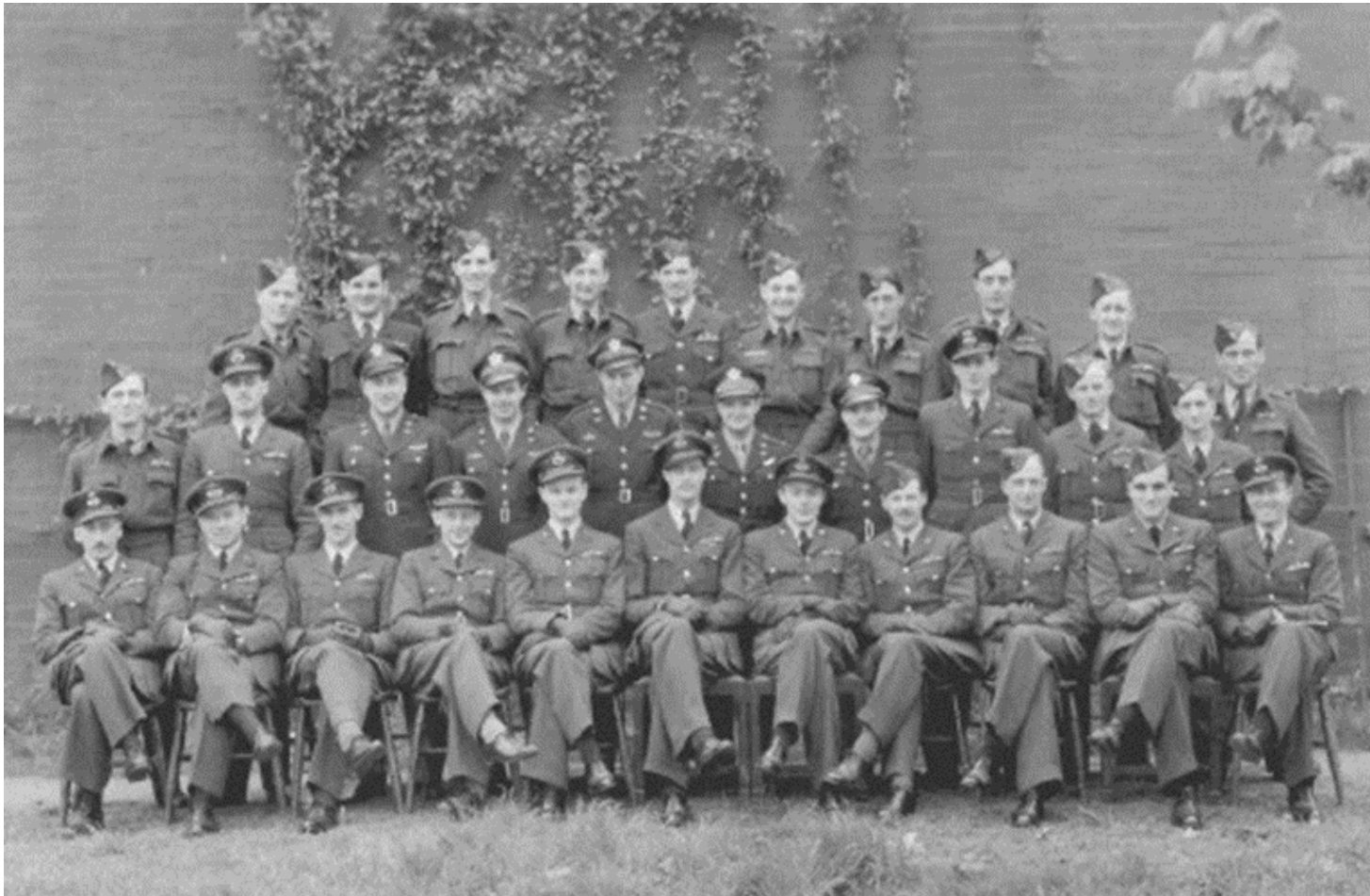
He was described as

*“willing rather than gifted – high spirited but not exceptionally intelligent...a pleasant boy, maybe not frightfully brainy but a fine ordinary chap.”*

This rather mediocre review of Scarf's abilities gave no hint of the incredible courage and presence of mind that he was to show in later life.

Arthur dreamt of being pilot from an early age – his class teacher remembered him as *“a fellow with a very restless nature, whose main ambition was to join the RAF”*





### **Trainee officers at RAF Cranfield**

Arthur Scarf enlisted in the RAF as a pupil pilot. He quickly earned his wings and joined 62<sup>nd</sup> squadron in 1937. The First World War had a devastating effect on the number of RAF squadrons and by the 1930s intelligence about the German Luftwaffe led the British Government to begin strengthening the air force. Cranfield airfield in Buckinghamshire, opened on 1 June 1937 and was described as a model of accommodation for all ranks. Scarf had joined 62<sup>nd</sup> squadron in April and later transferred to the 82nd squadron at Cranfield. This was part of No1 Bomber Group which initially used biplanes but switched to Blenheim bombers in 1938.



**Bristol Blenheim bombers of the type flown by Arthur Scarf.**

The Bristol type 142M Blenheim was originally a civilian plane, adapted for military use in 1934. A high speed light bomber, it outpaced any existing fighter and was one of the first aircraft to feature an all-metal fuselage, with retractable landing gear, a powered gun turret and variable pitch propellers.

A difficult plane to fly, especially as the pilot's station so cramped, its central yoke obscured all the flight instruments. The engine instruments also blocked the pilot's forward view when landing.

Secondary instruments on the left side of the cockpit and propeller controls behind the pilot had to be operated by touch alone.



### **High Street, Singapore, 1940.**

In August 1939 Arthur Scarf's squadron was sent to Singapore. In April 1940 he attended a dinner at a local hotel where Air Commodore Levy, a former Raynes Park resident, introduced him to Nursing sister Elizabeth ( Sally ) Lunn. She was also from Wimbledon, although previously unknown to Scarf. The couple enjoyed a whirlwind romance and were engaged after just one week - they were married within a year.





### **The crest and landing strip of RAF Butterworth, Malaya.**

After attacking Pearl Harbour, the Japanese turned their attention to Singapore and the Malayan coast – staging pre-emptive strikes on Allied forces who were woefully unprepared. In 1941 the RAF decided to turn Butterworth airfield, Malaya, into a care and maintenance base. However as its strategic importance grew, it was also used for reconnaissance missions. This small base, carved from the jungle, was suddenly filled with RAF Blenheim bombers and Royal Australian Air Force Brewster Buffalo fighters. Arthur Scarf's squadron was moved to Butterworth in preparation for a major assault. His wife was a member of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service and transferred to the Malayan Government Nursing Service at Alor Star airbase, Malaya, to be near husband.



## **Wartime Malaya, showing the location of RAF Butterworth and the Alor Star air base and Singora, Thailand.**

Known affectionately as Pongo, Scarf was now a squadron leader. On 9 December 1941, he was due to lead a formation sortie against an enemy base at Singora. The site had been captured by Japanese forces soon after their invasion of Malaya began. Singora air base was then used to set Mitsubishi assault aircraft against Allied shipping and troop convoys.

As senior officer, Scarf was the first in the air but by a quirk of fate, this coincided with a surprise enemy attack. This left much of the airfield devastated, with buildings, the runway and aircraft wrecked and burning. Scarf's plane was the only one to survive. It was this event which led him to carry out a lone assault on the Japanese base at Singora.

Blenheim's carried a crew of three – the pilot, a navigator / bombardier and a gunner who also acted as wireless operator. There was minimal support for a daring assault on the enemy.





**The aftermath of the Japanese attack of RAF Butterfield, December 1941.**

This photo shows just some of the wrecked Allied aircraft at the airfield - in this case the remains of Royal Australian Air Force Brewster Buffalo fighters.



**Artist's impression of Arthur Scarf's lone assault on the enemy air base at Singora, December 1941.**

Given the limited resources, the mission was surprisingly successful but Scarf knew it was of even greater importance in terms of public morale. The truth of this can be seen from the Victoria Cross citation which follows.



## **SQUADRON LEADER ARTHUR STEWART KING SCARF**

### **Royal Air Force, No.62 Squadron**

On 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1941, all available aircraft from the Royal Air Force Station, Butterworth, Malaya, were ordered to make a daylight attack on the advanced operational base of the Japanese Air Force at Singora, Thailand. From this base, the enemy fighter squadrons were supporting the landing operations.

The aircraft detailed for the sortie were on the point of taking off when the enemy made a combined dive-bombing and low level machine-gun attack on the airfield. All our aircraft were destroyed or damaged with the exception of the Blenheim piloted by Squadron Leader Scarf. This aircraft had been airborne a few seconds before the attack started.

Squadron Leader Scarf circled the airfield and witnessed the disaster. It would have been reasonable had he abandoned the projected operation which was intended to be a formation sortie. He decided, however, to press on to Singora in his single aircraft. Although he knew that this individual action could not inflict much material damage on the enemy, he, nevertheless, appreciated the morale effect which it would have on the remainder of the squadron, who were helplessly watching their aircraft burning on the ground.

Squadron Leader Scarf completed his attack successfully. The opposition over the target was severe and included attacks by a considerable number of enemy fighters. In the course of these encounters, Squadron Leader Scarf was mortally wounded. The enemy continued to engage him in a running fight, which lasted until he had regained the Malayan border. Squadron Leader Scarf fought a brilliant evasive action in a valiant attempt to return to his base. Although he displayed the utmost gallantry and determination, he was, owing to his wounds, unable to accomplish this. He made a successful forced landing at Alor Star without causing any injury to his crew. He was received into hospital as soon as possible, but died shortly after admission.

Squadron Leader Scarf displayed supreme heroism in the face of tremendous odds and his splendid example of self-sacrifice will long be remembered.

*Air Ministry, 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1946.*





### **Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf.**

The previous V C citation is accurate but fails to convey the chaos, confusion and true horror faced on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1941. From the air, Scarf had watched as his squadron colleagues were killed and the Butterworth air base was left to burn. He had to dodge anti-aircraft fire during his lone assault on Singora and was then attacked on all sides by enemy fighters.

Whilst trying to reach the relative safety of the Malayan border, he was shot several times, sustaining major injuries to his back and arm. Fighting to stay conscious, he was forced to take yet more evasive action as the Blenheim was raked by enemy bullets. Then with the assistance of Flight Sergeant Paddy Calder, he managed to stage a successful emergency landing at the abandoned Alor Star airfield. It was only after ensuring the safety of his crew, that Scarf finally weakened through blood loss and pain



**Colonial nurses in Malaya, World War II.**

*“Suddenly an ambulance arrived, it was Pongo Scarf, a young RAF officer I knew well. His plane had crash landed in a field nearby and Pongo was badly injured. He was given a blood transfusion but his condition was hopeless. His wife was one of our nursing sisters but during the previous day she had left Alor Star with the rest of the Service wives, so poor Pongo died without seeing her again. [ Medical teams were being forced further south as the Japanese invasion began and Scarf’s wife was several months pregnant. ]*

*I was determined that he would be buried properly. We managed to get a coffin from the jail.*

*Another sister came along with me in my Morris 8 and we followed the ambulance bearing the coffin to the local cemetery where a grave was dug.*

*On our way we met two army padres driving towards us. I stopped the car and asked them if they would come with us to say a prayer, so later when I saw Sally I could tell her that we had done all we could.”*

Phyllis Briggs, Nursing Sister, Alor Star Hospital



### **Refugees from the Japanese invasion of Malaya, January 1942.**

Scarf's wife used an old car to transport many colleagues to safety before the Japanese attack. Several months pregnant, she endured 11 days without food, after which she managed to get little more than scraps.

On the advice of Indian women, she and colleagues abandoned their medical uniforms, donned Malay costume and darkened their faces to avoid detection. After a lengthy harrowing journey, Sally arrived in India, alone and penniless, with only the clothes she stood up in.

In Calcutta she was helped by Lieutenant S Gunn of the Royal Corps of Signals, whom she later married. Her wartime hardships took a toll on Sally's mental and physical health but the birth of her daughter brought comfort.

After the war she returned to England and settled in Olton, Warwicks.





### **The grave of Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf V C.**

The lengthy Japanese occupation of Malaya and the destruction of official documents, meant that details of Scarf's heroic actions remained hidden until 1946.

In Scarf's case, his heroism was so great that numerous people, held in captivity throughout the war, were determined to remember it and bring him due recognition, no matter how belated.

Once returning POWs had given their account of events, Arthur Scarf was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

His remains were later retrieved and buried in the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery at Taiping, Malaya.

In 2017 the Prince of Wales visited the cemetery during an official tour of Asia and acknowledged the courage of Arthur Scarf during an official speech, before laying a wreath on his grave.



**RAF VC10 XV109, known as  
“Arthur Scarf V C” - a unique way of  
commemorating a heroic pilot.**

During the mid-1960s the RAF acquired a number of BC VC10s as long range transport aircraft. They honoured RAF personnel by naming each plane after a VC winner.

VC10 XV109 was named “Arthur Scarf VC” and remained in service throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Arthur Scarf is also commemorated on the RAF memorial at St Clement Dane, Westminster.