

Robert Kilroy-Silk writes...on Britain's Membership of the European Union

*Note: This article was first published in the Sunday Express on 28 November 2004*

Last week I visited the former RAF base at East Kirby in Lincolnshire in my East Midlands constituency. It has now been turned into an Aviation Heritage Museum by the brothers Fred and Harold Panton. .

The highlight of the visit for me was, of course, the Lancaster bomber in which my stepfather, John Kilroy, served as a flight sergeant and rear gunner – Tail End Charlie – in World War II in 10 squadron. He completed one operational tour – 29 sorties – involving 229 daylight hours and 164 night hours.

Crawling along the icy cold fuselage to sit in his cramped and isolated rear turret I could imagine how terrifying it must have been for the young men about to fly over a hostile country – especially as they all knew that only one in three of them would come back.

Fortunately, he survived. Many of my stepfather's comrades did not. Only once could he bring himself to tell me how he saw them bleed or, worse, burn to death. He never forgot.

He was deeply scarred by his war. For years afterwards he had nightmares and flashbacks. More than once as a ten year old – five years after the end of the war – I discovered him sitting up in bed, his chest drenched in sweat, his fists gripping his imaginary gun handles at chest level, swinging the machine gun left and right, up and down, swearing profusely all the time at the German fighters attacking his plane.

Clambering into the cockpit and the bomber aimer's spot, you will, I know, forgive me when I say that I thought it very strange that while younger men of his generation should be prepared to put their lives on the line – and in the case of my own father, William Silk, sacrifice it in action in the Royal Navy – so that we could live in a free and independent country, Tony Blair's generation is giving it away to the EU.