



Newsletter
Winter 2011/12

The Mildenhall Register

**15, 90, 149 and 622
Bomber Squadrons' Association**



The Standards and Colours line up prior
to the Memorial Dedication Service

From the Chairman

The past year has been a very active one for the Association. Your committee has undertaken many tasks, some of which are detailed in this newsletter. On your behalf I want to give a big thank you to all the committee for their tremendous support and work. I must make special mention of our Secretary, Geoff Reynolds who has worked long and hard to establish contact with many "lost" members whilst dealing with a succession of enquires from the public, many of which have resulted in applications for membership! Further details of the results of Geoff's endeavours are to be found later.

The highlight of the year was on the Saturday of the Reunion weekend which saw the dedication of a plaque to all who serviced at RAF Mildenhall and its satellite bases during World War 2. Various pictures in this newsletter will detail events of the day which were also recorded in an edition of the BBC's Look East local news programme and I hope we can arrange for the clip to feature on our web site. The dedication ceremony was a great success, St John's, Beck Row was full. Our thanks are due to the Station Commander at RAF Honington for providing the No 1 Sqn (RAF Regt) standard party which was ably accompanied by Ron Pearson, the Bomber Command Standard Bearer and Geoff Denness, of RAFA Newmarket who paraded the Union Flag. A moving service was conducted by Flt Lt Richard Clement, a Padre at Honington but now serving in Afghanistan prior to a posting in Scotland. A member of the RAF Honington Band sounded the last post and the ladies of Beck Row Church and the WI provided an excellent post service spread in the Village Hall. The Association sent their sincere thanks to all these people for their excellent contribution towards the success of the day. We were also graced with the presence of the Air Attachés from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, the USAF Commander of the 100 ARW at RAF Mildenhall and representatives of RAF Mildenhall and Honington, together with a number of civil dignitaries. The remainder of the weekend followed the usual format and was very well supported and enjoyed by all. There was a problem with the food on Saturday evening, however, the matter has been resolved with an assurance that it will not occur this coming year! Our thanks are due to the Base Commander at RAF Mildenhall for allowing us use of the base facilities and for the Servicemen and their families who make us so welcome.

On a very sad note, August saw the death of our Founder, past Secretary and President, Don Clarke MBE. Don was known to many both in the Association and in a wider field. He will be sorely missed. The Association were represented at his funeral and formed a guard of honour for his coffin at the entrance to the Bedford Crematorium. Tributes to Don are paid in the newsletter.

At the 2011 reunion we were joined by members of No 75 (New Zealand) Sqn which was based at Mildenhall from August 1942 until March 1943 flying Wellingtons and Stirlings. This year we hope they will visit us again and that we will also be joined by 218 (Gold Coast) Sqn who flew Battles and Blenheims from Mildenhall for a couple of months in 1940. The link with these associations follows a decision to issue a wider invitation to other Mildenhall based Sqns to join us for the weekend, whilst maintaining their individual identities. We hope in time others will join in with us!

This newsletter is somewhat longer than normal, due to the vast amount of information provided by Association members. Unfortunately space has precluded me from containing everything and some items have had to be edited. Use will be made of the unused items in future newsletters and on the web site.

Finally, plans are well in hand for the 2012 reunion which will be held over the weekend of 11-13 May 2012. Details are included with this newsletter.

I wish you and yours all the very best for 2012.

John Gentleman, Chairman

The Secretary's Report

A Happy New Year to all our members as we enter this Diamond Jubilee and Olympic year of 2012. Looking back on 2011, it had its ups and downs. On the up side there was yet another excellent reunion at Mildenhall where we were so pleased to see so many of our friends again.

The big down came in August when we were advised of the sad death of our Founder and President Don Clarke MBE. As many of you who knew him are aware, (and as us youngsters were told at his funeral) he started what we now know as The Mildenhall Register from a chance whim at an air show at Mildenhall over 30 years ago. He got on the tannoy and asked if there were any folk out in the crowd who would like to stop by and have a chat about the old times. The rest, as they say, is history.

There is more about Don later, but I would just like to reflect on the fact that without this whim, none of what we have today would have been at all possible. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Don and his wonderful right hand lady, Win. Grateful thanks is due to Don and Win and may we long continue to honour their dedication and unbounded enthusiasm by keeping The Register going.

One positive came from this sad occasion when we met all of the Clarke family after the service. They have assured us that they do not intend to let the Clarke dynasty end with Don's passing. They have forged stronger ties, as more family have joined as members. All of Don's immense collection is to be sorted out and made available to the squadron historians. We plan to air many of the pictures at subsequent reunions and add them to our web page on the computer for help in identifying those shown. We are so glad to have the families continued support.

It has been a healthy year for enquiries and new memberships. Yet again I have kept our dedicated team of historians busy throughout the year. On balance I would say that it has been a 149 year, both for enquiries and new membership, with XV and 622 (helped, no doubt, by Howard Sandall's new book) running very close behind.. However, 75 (NZ) by far, has been the largest injection of new blood. Welcome to you all.

Membership, as gauged by those who have actively replied to our enquiries/questionnaires and including all the new members, has remained well over 400 despite the very sad number of deaths that have been reported to us. It is very encouraging to find that family of past members and service personnel at Mildenhall and associated bases are taking up membership when they contact us. With their continued interest and support we can continue The Mildenhall Register in honour of all who have served there.



The Secretary giving the Act of Remembrance at the Memorial Dedication Service

We now look ahead to a year of celebration, (No, neither the Olympics, nor her Majesty's 60 Glorious years celebrations) that not one but two Bomber Command memorials will be dedicated to all those who served. Bit like London buses really, you wait for ages and then two come at once. Let's hope many of you can make it to at least one of the events having waited so long for this honour to be bestowed. You deserve it. Well done and grateful thanks.

Geoff Reynolds, Secretary

Plans for the 2012 Reunion

The 2012 Reunion weekend promises to again be interesting. The format will follow that of previous years. On the Friday evening, after a welcoming drink and chat, we will go to the dining room in Middleton Hall at RAF Mildenhall for a buffet dinner followed by the Annual General Meeting.

Saturday will start with the coach leaving the Bird in Hand bound for a call to St George's Church at Methwold for morning coffee and viewing of the 149 Sqn Memorial. We will then go on to the Dads Army Museum in Thetford where we will take in a sandwich lunch and visit the exhibits. For the more energetic there will be a short, half a mile, tour around some of the sites used in scenes from the show! We will return in ample time for a wash and brush up before the pre dinner cocktails in the Galaxy Club which will be served from 18.00 hrs prior to the more formal dinner in the Galaxy Club at 19.00 hrs. Whilst taking pre dinner drinks it will be possible to view a collection of models of aircraft that have operated out of RAF Mildenhall over the years. This will be presented by the Bomber Command Group of the International Plastic Modellers' Society. Also on display will be a selection of paintings of aircraft by local Suffolk artist Geoff Pleasance. It should be an interesting start to the evening. Sunday will see our joint service with the Americans in the Base Chapel followed by drinks and biscuits and then farewells.

Everybody is welcome to join in all or any of these events. Ample time exists throughout the weekend to make individual excursions etc. A booking form is included with this newsletter. Please remember to provide all the details requested about yourself, guests and the vehicle you will be using. I hope to see as many of you as possible over the weekend. If you have any queries / problems, then please contact me, *John Gentleman* on 01638507211.

Places to stay during the Reunion Weekend

Here in response to a number of requests is a list of possible places providing accommodation in the Mildenhall area. No guarantee can be given as to the standards of the various places. Prices range from £30 to £70 per night - it is best to look up the establishment on its web site. Also it is useful to look up www.tripadvisor.co.uk. The Newmarket Information Centre also covers the Mildenhall area and may be contacted on 01638-719000 for advice on bed and breakfast establishments.



The Captain Mainwaring Statue in Thetford

Hotels and Guest Houses

**The Bell Hotel, Mildenhall - 01638583511. The Lord Mayor's Cottage, Barton Mills - 01638718947
The Riverside House Hotel, Mildenhall - 01638717274. The Golden Boar, Freckenham - 163872300
The Olde Bull Inn, Barton Mills - 01638711001. Flat 8 Mill Street Mews, Mildenhall - 1638711408
Walnuts Country House, Mildenhall - 01638714822. Worlington Hall, Worlington - 01638712237**

Motels

**Travelodge, Barton Mills 08719844296. Bird in Hand, Beck Row 01638713247
Premier Inn, Newmarket 08715279296.**

The Noticeboard

Erratum to last year's Newsletter

Many apologies to the family of Alfred Proctor for incorrectly giving his name as Albert in the article on his 100th Birthday. This was corrected in the 2nd Edition. Also apologies to Mrs Hazel Davis for giving her late Husband Douglas's rank as Sergeant when it should have been Flying Officer.

Thanks

We had a tremendous response to our request for articles etc for the newsletter. However, we regret being unable, due to postage and printing restrictions, to publish them all in this edition. We will endeavour to issue a second newsletter later in the year. However, please continue to send your written memories / funnies or comments to the Secretary whose address is below.

Reminder

Please return the enclosed reunion application form whether or not you are attending the Reunion. This will enable the Secretary to maintain an updated record of members. If you are coming to the Reunion (and we hope to see many of you over the weekend) please remember to include full details of yourself and your guests as requested on the form.

Request

The Register has no joining nor membership fees and relies on donations from members for its operational costs. The production and distribution of this newsletter costs nearly £3.00 per copy hence if you are in a position to make a donation to funds it would be gratefully received. I must add that we will continue to send the newsletter to all regardless of whether or not they have been in a position to donate!

Electronic Newsletter

To help reduce the costs of production and postage we wonder how many members would be happy to receive the newsletter via e-mail? - If you are let the Secretary know!

Contacts

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CB8 9UW**

**Geoff Reynolds Secretary 01775841585
61 Salem Street
Gosberton
Lincolnshire
PE11 4NQ**

Deaths notified since the last newsletter

Mr S A Abbott Axminster, Devon, Flt Eng, XV & 622 Sqn.
Mr George Allen DFC, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, 149 & XV Sqn.
Mrs Florence Allom, South Shields, Widow of George A Allom, XV Sqn.
Mr Colin Ayres, Greenwich, NSW, Australia, Pilot, XV Sqn.
Mr Albert Bale, Cardiff, Glamorgan, Bomb Aimer, 622 Sqn.
Mr Eric Bartholomew, Esher, Surrey, XV Sqn.
Mr Alfred F Belson AFC, Twickenham, XV & 622 Sqn
Mr Arthur Birch, Faversham, Kent.
Mr R C Bowyer, Edmonton, Canada.
Mr Eric Brazendale, Lymm, Cheshire. 149 Sqn.
Mr J Brigden, Bexleyheath, Kent, Rear Gunner 149 Sqn.
Mr Leslie Brown, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, XV Sqn.
Mr Roy Brunt, Winscombe, Avon.
Mr George Burnett, Aberdeen XV Sqn.
Mr D Carter, Portland, Dorset.
Mr B E Cecil, Ebbw Vale, Gwent, XV Sqn.
Mr David Chapple DFC, Wentworth Falls, NSW, Australia.
Mr Don Clarke MBE, Bedford, Beds, Ground Crew 15 Sqn.
Mrs C Cox, Melbourne, Australia. Widow of Wg Cdr R E Cox RAAF XV Sqn.
Mr Mel Davies DFC, Treorchy, Glamorgan.
Dr Peter de Rave, Oxford, Oxon, Navigator 622 & 504 Sqns.
Mrs Albert Duncan, Croydon, Australia.
Mr Bob Ellis, Bomb Aimer, XV Sqn.
Mr J W Farrow, Redcar, Cleveland, 622 Sqn.
Mrs G Ford, Seaforth, NSW, Australia.
Mr Alan Fulton, Pilot 149 Sqn.
Mrs B George MBE, Haverfordwest, Widow of Wg Cdr H George DFC XV Sqn.
Mr Arthur Gray, Lymm, Cheshire, Bomb Aimer 149 Sqn.
Mr Stan Groves, Essex, XV Sqn.
Mr John Hebb, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, Pilot XV Sqn.
Mrs I Hendon WAAF, Hailsham, East Sussex, Cook at RAF Mildenhall.
Mr Bob Johnstone, 622 Sqn.
Mr O A Jones, Longdown, Devon, Pilot 149 Sqn.
Mr L J Judson DFC, DFM, York.
Mr Philip Kerr, Navigator with Tom Condie's crew.
Mr Bob Kitchin, Ormskirk, Lancashire, XV Sqn.
Mr Ken Linsell, Birchington, Kent, XV Sqn.
Mr Gilbert Marsh, Ormskirk, Lancashire, XV & 622 Sqn.
Mr F C Martin, Doncaster, Victoria, Australia.
Mr Arnold Maw, Gainsborough, Lincs, XV Sqn.
Mr George Meadon DFC, Newcastle, Staffs, Pilot 149 Sqn.
Mr Joseph Merry, Sutton Coldfield, Rigger & Armourer RAF Mildenhall.
Flt Lt Phil Murray, Delta, British Columbia, Canada, Navigator XC & XC Sqns.
Mr B A North DFC, Chiswick, London, 149 Sqn.
Mr William Poole DFC, Wirral, Merseyside, Air Gunner XV Sqn.
Mr Alfred Proctor DFC, Orpington, Kent, Rear Gunner 149 & 75(NZ) Sqn.
Mr James Robertson, Hinkley.
Mr J B Robinson*, Liverpool.

Mr A V Savage, Birmingham.
Mr Geoff Schott, Cardiff, Glamorgan, Flt Eng XV Sqn.
Mr W Scriven AO, Leabrook, South Australia, Pilot 622 Sqn.
Mr Norman Searle, Peterborough, Cambs.
Mr Ray Seeley, Histon, Cambs.
Mr Alan Sellwood DFC, Bruce, ACT, Australia, XV Sqn.
Flt Lt Albert Shoreman, Seaton, Devon, 149& 617 Sqn.
Mr Patrick Simmonds, Rainham, Essex, MUG, 622 Sqn.
Mr W Sneddon, Calne, Wilts, Flt Eng XV Sqn.
Mr Wes Stratton, Liskeard, Cornwall, Pilot, 622 Sqn.
Mr Jim Studley, Sheringham, Norfolk, Electrician 149 Sqn.
Mr John Tate, Wirral, Merseyside.
Mr Michael Tavernor, Langport, Somerset. Navigator, 149 Sqn.
Gp Capt R G Uprichard, Woodhall Spa, Lincs, Observer 622 Sqn.
Mrs Peggy Westbrook WAAF, Redcar, Cleveland.
Mr L Whittaker, Lowestoft, Suffolk.
Mrs I Wililams, Caersws, Powys.

*Reported incorrectly last year as J B Robertson

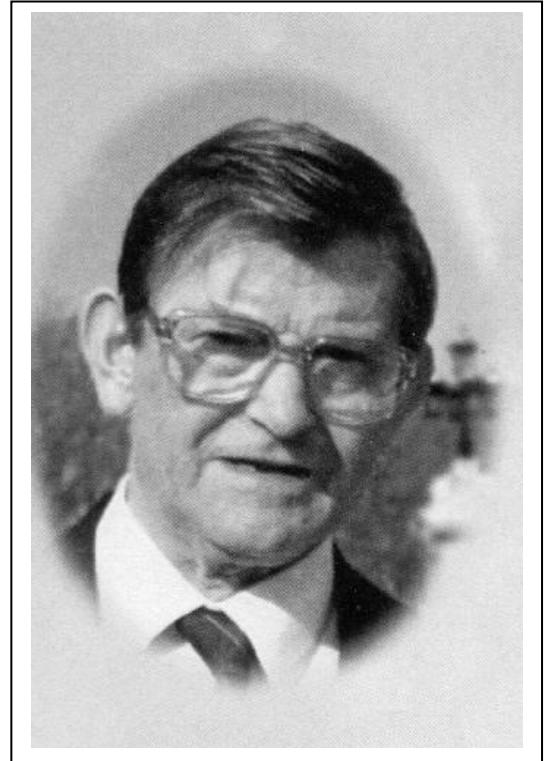
Donald Clarke MBE

An abridged version of a tribute given at his Funeral Service by Tim Small (a Grandson in law)

Better known to each of us as either Donald, Don, maybe even Nobby, Pal, Friend, Comrade in uniform, Brother, Great Granddad, Granddad, Dad, Loving Husband In the days since Don's sad passing each of us will have recalled treasured moments and memories. Maybe long since forgotten, but recalled in an instant; some very personal; some shared. One thing I think everyone will agree on is that we will never forget his wonderful and unique sense of humour.

Don was born at 33 Maitland Street, Bedford, a small end of terrace house with an outside loo. The Clarkes were a large family - Don being one of seven surviving children. He was first educated at Queen's Park School, going onto Harpur Central to finish his education before embarking on an Apprenticeship at W.H. Allen - where both his father and grandfather worked. Unfortunately ill health prevented Don from completing his Apprenticeship but they kept him on as a Production Controller until his early retirement a mere 47 years later! Over the years he represented W.H. Allens at Cricket and Table Tennis, both of which he loved and got recognition for by winning many trophies along the way.

War came and Don enlisted in the RAF, then at the age of 18yrs it was found that he had a growth in his neck. Fate would have it that this lump probably save his life - it prevented him going with his Squadron to Malta where the unit were bombed, sadly by all accounts killing everyone. That same luck saved him later in the war when the aircraft he had been due to bomb up exploded whilst being armed. Like many during this time, times were hard at home



for his family and Don, with the help of his mates used to snare rabbits on his day off and post them home to his Mum to make rabbit stew to last the week. He ended his RAF days as a corporal although he was tempted to stay on when offered a promotion to sergeant. He decided against it, but his love and passion for the Royal Air Force never waned.

One very, very important moment in time completes his time at RAF Mildenhall. It was when one of his mates came into the billet and announced '*There's a new girl started in the NAAFI - she's a good-looking girl*'. Don wasted no time in going over to see for himself and soon won over this innocent 17yr old girl from the wilds of Suffolk who he found shyly hiding behind a pillar. Later Don said to his mate '*See that one over there she's going to be mine*'. The rest is history because that meeting led to a life-long partnership with Win being the love of his life. They married and Alan was born soon after, followed by Peter, Sandra and Keith. Don was the world to Win, he was her rock and best friend and they had just celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary.

Don was without doubt a content family man. Although he had travelled to many countries he loved nothing better than to be at home in

Foxlease with Win, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren around him. For each of them Foxlease is synonymous with long, hot, hazy childhood summers - the wobbly path - climbing the tree - playing and larking around with sisters and brother and cousins. Later on for those of us in the extended family experienced the same warmth and welcome as we were flung into the seeming mayhem of this huge family with a knock at the door bringing yet more 'a visiting'. All the

children, grandchildren and great grandchildren have such happy memories of all sitting down and enjoying Win's delicious roast dinners or millionaire's shortbread. All accompanied by non-stop banter and jokes.

On attending a particular RAF function Don met Prince Charles and they had a slight difference of opinion! Charles had remarked that there was no such thing as a '10 ton bomb' to which Don replied '*Oh yes there was. I have a photo at home taken with me and two friends next to it*'. Quite impressive to disagree with royalty but he knew he was right! Don worked tirelessly and professionally for the Mildenhall Register and this work culminated in his receiving an MBE. What a proud day for the family when he went to Buckingham Palace accompanied by Win, Alan and Sandra to be presented to the Queen. It had all began when he went to Mildenhall with Dave his son-in-law and on a whim put out an announcement over the PA system for any aircrew that served at Mildenhall to go to the Bomber Command stand and have a chat. The response was amazing and that was the start of the Mildenhall Register. The yearly reunions and regular newsletter which Don organised established the means of veterans to get together to discuss old times and to keep alive wartime memories among friends and families of those who played such a big part in winning the war. He gave so much happiness down many years to hundreds of RAF fellows and their families.



Don and Win at home

Don had stood down from doing what he loved in 2008 after committing more than 32 years to the Mildenhall Register and he was duly elected as the President.

Before that he actively took part in helping out with the Bomber Command Reunions which included bringing together in 1975 more than 60 former Air Crews from 467 and 463 Sqns' of the Royal Australian Air Force.

This included all the former air crew from S for Sugar, the first Lancaster to complete 100 missions and now the oldest surviving plane of its type. Don's work on the Mildenhall Register bought him into contact with a few well-known names such as Actor David Niven at Hendon Museum, Sir Arthur (Bomber) Harris, Adolf Galland who was a German Luftwaffe General and flying ace of WWII. He even met John Inman from *Are You Being Served* whilst waiting at

Gatwick Airport before going on his World Tour (Don's that is!) and a string of other famous people. Not to forget the present Queen of England when he received his MBE. Perhaps one of Don's greatest gifts was his ability to treat all the same and gain their respect in return - whether princes, being on first name terms with lords and squadron leaders, or to be bemused and amused by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Don's family have been so overwhelmed by the many, many wonderful tributes they have received from members of the Mildenhall Register. Sadly, there is not enough time to mention all of them - but maybe they can be summed up with Scottish Airman Tam Condie's words: '*We should all feel a sense of pride that our lives have been touched in however little way, by such a Gentleman who espoused a way of British life that all who have come into contact with our organisation can readily identify with.*' Tam's words are very true and if there was one word to sum up Don it would be family - The family he brought together through the Mildenhall Register, born of comradeship - those who had the shared experiences of serving together, uniting people from almost every continent and their families too. And the true mark of the man as seen in the four generations here today - his love and pride in his own family. He was a truly great bloke in every sense. God Bless Don

A selection of the tributes paid to Don Clarke MBE

Don did a great job with the Register and gave so much happiness, down many years, to dozens, if not hundreds of RAF fellows and their families. Through him, I was enabled to have a number of happy reunions with my crew - if anyone deserved an MBE, it was Don. It was a privilege to have known him. *Syd Merrifield*

Don's passing diminishes all of 622. Pity he will miss the history of 622 Squadron to be published soon. *Tom Maxwell DFC Devon*

Sad news indeed. We should all feel a sense of pride that our lives have been touched, in however little way, by such a gentleman who espoused a way of British life that all who have come in to contact with our organisation can readily identify with. *Tam Condie*

Don worked tirelessly for reunions, and bringing people together, one hopes that all of his efforts will be continued as a suitable memory of him. *Cliff Flogdell*



Cpl Don Clarke

Soon there will be no more from that generation amongst us. Age has certainly taken its toll; I find it sad to think that soon there will be no more (WW2) veterans left. **James Willis** My wife and I met Don when he visited Canada soon after the formation of the Mildenhall Register, and again on two occasions when we attended re-unions. It was a real accomplishment on his part to establish the means of veterans of the squadrons to get together once a year to discuss old times and perhaps keep alive wartime memories among friends and families of those who played such a big part in winning the war. He fully deserved the honour of being awarded the MBE and I am sure he shared that honour with his fellow comrades in the squadrons he represented.

An auction sale was held at one of the early re-unions to raise funds to support the ongoing operation of the register and I donated two of my oil paintings. One was of a Lancaster over target and the other was of some dispersal huts housing aircrew at North Luffenham. Don said he won the latter and it was probably hung in his home. I have recently re-married and we are seriously thinking about attending a re-union. **Ron Spencer Flt Lt 15 Sqn Canada**. He was such a help to me when Frank and I joined the Register and we have very great memories of him and Win. He will be greatly missed. **Celia Savage**

They, both Don and Win, were like brother and sister to me. Found it quite upsetting to get this news. **Swifty Swallow**

I know he would not wish for any deep mourning, but a happy one. **Rocky Knight**
Don was a tower of strength to The Mildenhall Register and will be sadly missed.

Dennis C (Mickey) Mason

Obituaries

Mr Eric Brazendale Son Neil wrote "Now and again Dad would talk about his flying over Germany. He bombed the synthetic oil plants 21 times and places like Gelsenkirchen, Essen and Dortmund. I know there are very few of Bomber Command left. He loved his flying, even though it was very risky and fraught with danger".

Mr J Brigden Member of caterpillar club and was a prisoner of war. Son Neil has memorabilia that he would like put to good use.

Mr L Brown Wop/AG in Flt Lt Harry Clayton crew, flying 37 ops. mainly over Germany. In 1946 he was posted to Furth, Germany in charge of a small detachment of RAF personnel who welcomed the judges for the Nuremberg trials. Last survivor of the 7 man crew he served with. Survived by Phyl, they had been married for 61 years.

Mr I (Mel or Taff) Davies DFC Daughter Ceri writes: - "We have many items of Dad's. This includes his original telegram from King George V telling him of his award of the DFC. Wartime activities included dropping food over the Netherlands and further droppings over Norway, both of which he was given invitations from their governments to visit during later years. Both Mammy and Mel attended an invite from the Dutch Embassy in London to celebrate 21 years following these drops and Mel was one of a party of veterans invited to Norway for a two week visit. Following discharge, Mel became actively involved in the VR as CO to two local ATC squadrons, namely 2423 squadron, Treorchy and 415 Merthyr. His day time job was an EO in the Royal Mint. In latter years Mel became President of the local Royal British Legion branch and was actively involved in the area RAFA branch, both as a Welfare officer and other posts.

Dr P de Raeve Mrs R K de Raeve, a WAAF during the war wrote:- "Peter was in the crew of Flt Lt R C L Neilsen (RAAF), completing a tour with 622 Sqdn Sept '44 - Apr '45. He was also a navigator in 504 Sqn".

Mr K Linsell He served on the same crew as Australians W/Op Dudley (Slim) Noble and Pilot F/O N G (Bill) McLennan, completing 11 Ops plus 4 Manna and 5 Exodus ops. Slim wrote: - "Ken's happy disposition endeared him to all our crew members, especially me. Being the youngest did not deter him from carrying out his duties as mid-upper gunner in a most exemplary manner, particularly when things got a bit serious!"

Mr G Meadon DFC Son Simon said: - "Dad died one week short of his 90th birthday.

Although it was a sad time just then, that if you had told his Dad that he would live to such a grand old age when he was flying Lancasters over Germany at the age of 20, he would never have believed it! He had a full life"

Mr J Merry His son Paul wrote - "Joe was born 24/6/1920. He joined the RAF (just) before the war in July 1939. After training as a rigger/Armourer, he was posted to 30 Sqn, first in Egypt, then Ceylon, India and Burma. In India/Burma he was co-opted as a medical orderly as the mosquitoes were killing and disabling more of the squadron than the Japanese! Contracting beriberi, he was posted back to the UK and to Bomber Command, mainly at Mildenhall. Demobbed in 1945 he re-entered the Royal Mail, later the GPO/BT Telecoms, retiring in 1982. He had become increasingly disabled and sick in the last 2 years and died after 8 months in a care home in Birmingham, aged 90. He is survived by Paul and his sister Elaine who is married to an ex- RAF Regiment erk and by 5 grandchildren. He remained loyal to his comrades in the RAFA to the end.

Mr B A North DFC Roy Davie records that "Bernie was one of the most kindly, thoughtful and humble individuals one could wish to know. He had a distinguished operational record with 149 Sqn, later serving as an instructor with H C U, then flying Yorks with B O A C and in civil life was Principal of a Technical College in the London area".

Mr Alf Proctor Flew with Pilot Sgt Dave Gibbs (NZ) in 149 Sqn, then transferred to 75 Sqn (with same pilot) 1/4/44. Celebrated his 100th birthday on 1st September 2010. Alfred died on 17th August 2011.

Mr E G (Geoff) Schott His daughter Jacky Burt sent a copy of his obituary that appeared in the South Wales Echo.

"The last member of a bomber crew who carried out crucial missions over Germany during World War II has died aged 87. Geoff Schott, who passed away at Llandough Hospital, had been the last member of his Lancaster crew at XV Squadron at RAF Mildenhall. Multiple strokes had left the staunch veteran unable to speak for nearly 40 years but he still attended annual reunions with old comrades and was renowned for his lone escapades on his electric scooter.

The former Flight Engineer, who lived in KingV Drive with his wife Nancy and daughters Carole and Jacky, was laid to rest after a service at Thornhill Crematorium's Briwnant Chapel at 2.15 pm on Tuesday, 21st December 2010. Geoff bluffed his way into the wartime RAF despite never having finished high school. The skilled carpenter had a German great-grandfather who was monitored as an enemy alien throughout World War I. In his 20s, the young RAF man completed dozens of bombing sorties that were sent out by the British High Command in response to the Nazi Blitz of Britain. The St Athan trained young airman broke his leg in one crash landing but otherwise completed his full quota of missions without injury. Geoff and his brothers-in-arms were among the first to pioneer mid-air refuelling post war.

That shared wartime experience bonded him to crewmates he kept in touch with for decades despite his own poor health - even flying years later to visit his old skipper in Canada. Later he worked in several businesses and built many bungalows in Rumney and Rhiwbina before becoming a master carpenter at the Welsh National Opera. Sadly, the first of a series of strokes at the aged of 47 forced him to give up work.

Daughter Jacky Burt told the Echo: "Dad was very close to his crew and met them every year. He was the last survivor - but he got into the RAF telling 'porkies' because they rarely took anyone who hadn't finished high school. Sadly, he didn't last long enough for me to keep my promise to take him to the new Bomber Command Memorial in London once it's finished. In many ways, he had a sad life unable to talk after a number of strokes over 40 years. But he was still intrepid, determined to go out on his mobility scooter but he was unable to tell us where he was going or where he'd been when he got back. He used to disappear down the Bay for hours - it used to frighten us sick but he wouldn't give up."

Mr N Searle Flt Lt Searle completed a tour 1942/3 at from Wratting Common. He was the last secretary of 90 Sqn Ass until it disbanded in 2000.

Bob Johnston - "In Memory of Ten Tents"

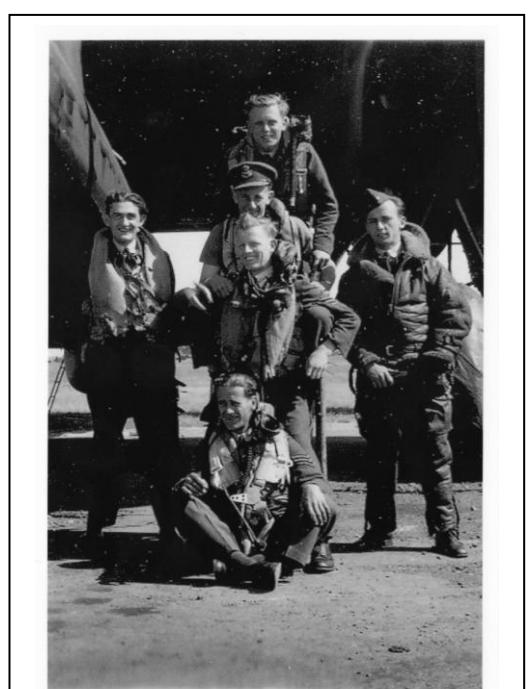
We called him "Ten Tents" because his head was always in the clouds, blissfully oblivious to the Hell that was going on around us. Earphones on, fiercely concentrating on the wireless messages that were so vital to our very existence.

Bob Johnston was my special pal. We were the teenagers in a crew that consisted of mainly middle aged men--some as old as 27 I would have you believe. Callow youths who gave each other courage and confidence in a changing crew that included three different navigators (the original one we discarded during training because he could never find his home base) and three different gunners.

A motley bunch, with one New Zealander and one Canadian, an Essex man as captain, two Brummies, a Scouse, a Lancastrian and a boy from Berwick upon Tweed we got on very well together. There was little discord except, on occasions, when bomb aimer Frank announced he couldn't spot the target and we would have to go round again.

Now I am the only one left and I feel proud, humble and astonishingly lucky, to still be carrying the flag on everyone's behalf.

I was never sure how devout Bob was but I suspect that, like me, he had a rather muddled faith. I remember that we went to church together in Newmarket at Christmas 1943, before we started our tour of operations. We had just survived a bad crash in a Wellington bomber that, by the Grace of God, did not catch fire although we had practice bombs on board that exploded on impact. Both engines had cut out on take off and we belly flopped into a ploughed field. Saved by the skill of our pilot, Alex and, I believe, because someone up above decided our time was not up.



Mar 44 Artie perched behind skipper Alec and Bob Johnston just below him. Minus bomb aimer Frank who said it was unlucky to be photographed.

When we started our tour of operations I used to mutter a little muddled prayer as I sat in my turret before take off, On one occasion I must have left the microphone on because I heard a couple of voices whisper "Amen". One surely belonged to Bob.

Being an inexperienced lad I had never had a proper girl friend and was terrified that I would go out of this world without experiencing the great act of love. So I was terribly envious of Bob when that beautiful NAAFI girl smiled on him from her mobile canteen as she dished out our tea and wads. What a wonderful support Mary was to Bob, both in those dangerous days and for so much longer in life. He was incredibly lucky to find her. I last saw Bob when he and Bev came to Devon during their last trip to the old country several years ago and we had a wonderful lunch and day of reminiscence together in the shadow of Exeter Cathedral. At 86 plus I am still writing and broadcasting and, be assured, I shall be telling the world what a fine chap I flew with all those years ago. Rest in Peace Bob. You deserve it.

Your good friend Lincoln (Artie) Shaw. (Bob christened me Artie and it has stuck forever).

Flt Lt John Thomas Walter Gray DFC 4th January 1919- 12th July 2011

Howard Sandall- Nephew of John Gray and the 622 Sqn Historian writes:

"Flt Lt John Gray DFC died peacefully in hospital on 12th July 2011. John joined the RAF in 1943 and passed the aptitude tests to become a pilot however, keen to join the war at the earliest opportunity, he underwent the available training as an air gunner.

His air gunnery training took the usual route commencing at No 3 AGS in Castle Kennedy Scotland and quite remarkably he repeated the course again at his own request at No. 10 AGS Walney Island. From here John was posted to No. 12 OTU at RAF Edgehill where he 'crewed up' with Flt Lt Richard Allen DFC. From here the crew were posted to No. 1678 HCU at RAF Waterbeach and finally to No. 622 Sqn in May 1944. John and the crew were quickly into the action directed to various targets by Bomber Command. However, one of the crew's most memorable missions was to Stuttgart on 28/29th July 1944. En route to the target over France they were attacked by a night fighter piloted by Hauptmann Heinz Rokker (65 Kills) who riddled the rear tail section of the bomber with his cannon shells. F/Lt Allen threw the Lancaster into a corkscrew manoeuvre and John Gary stayed at his guns to repel the enemy. John and two other crew members were awarded the DFC for their actions. Missions continued throughout the summer and during a mission to Stettin in August 1944, John shot down a FW190 fighter over the target.

In late October 1944, John was recognised as having the attributes to train as a 'Gunnery Leader' and was therefore posted to the Central Gunnery School at Catfoss. On 1st January 1945 the crew undertook their final mission with 622 Sqn and John was posted to No. 90 Sqn as their Gunnery Leader, until the end of the war.

John remained in the RAF for thirty years, initially developing air gunnery techniques and latterly in the role of air traffic controller. This obituary would not be complete without mentioning a few words from John's DFC citation, written by his Commanding Officer:

'Indeed, by his high sense of duty he commands the respect of everyone with whom he comes into contact, thus confirming the opinion held by his superiors that he is an Officer of more than ordinary merit. For his meritorious service and outstanding devotion to duty I strongly recommend this gallant Officer for an award of the Distinguished Flying Cross.'

Fg Off Arthur Maxwell (Max) Bourne RAAF

Howard Sandall writes that Fg Off Max Bourne, a former member of 622 Sqn passed away on 18th July 2011. Max was born in Western Australia and prior to enlisting in the Royal Australian Air Force he was a junior salesman.

Max joined the RAAF on his 18th birthday and he was recognised as having the potential to become a pilot and completed his training in Australia and then posted to No 18 Advanced Flying School at Snitterfield England, for acclimatisation to the English weather conditions. From here he was posted to No. 26 OTU at Wing and formed a crew of three Englishmen and three fellow Australians. No. 1653 HCU and No 3 LFS completed the crews training. On 2nd August 1944, Max and his crew joined No 622 and almost immediately commenced operations. Bomber Commands objectives were to support the Allied armies advance and to deliver the 'Point-blank' directive as agreed by the Allied leaders.

Perhaps Max's most memorable moment at Mildenhall was when he taxied out of his dispersal point in readiness for a flight test in October. He inadvertently caught the wingtip of another Lancaster with his propeller whilst being guided by a ground crew member. He was summoned to appear before Wg Cdr 'Blondie' Swales and was posted to a disciplinary course at Sheffield for three weeks. It later transpired that the other Lancaster had parked onto Max's dispersal point and should not have been there at all.

Max and his crew finished their tour of operations in December 1944 and he was posted to No 1668 Conversion Unit as a pilot instructor. After being repatriated in 1945 Max returned to his pre-war occupation in the jewellery industry in Perth, finally settling on retirement in Applecross Western Australia.

Warrant Officer Alfred Frank Belson AFC

Howard Sandall writes that it is with deep regret that I have to report the death of Warrant Officer Alfred Frank Belson AFC in September 2011. Alfred transferred from XV squadron on the formation of 622 Sqn in August 1943. Alf was the flight Engineer in the crew of Pilot Officer D. Jackson flying the Short Stirling bomber.

The Short Stirling was renowned for struggling to gain height over the target and so it was that on a mission to Hanover in September 1943, Alf and his crew were struck by falling incendiaries from above. On arrival back at base P/O Jackson was given the all clear to land on the main runway. He carried out a spotless landing but soon realised that the Stirling had no brakes resulting in the bomber overshooting the runway and belly landing in an adjacent field.

With nineteen missions under their belt, the crew were selected to join the 'Pathfinders'. Whilst they were deliberating their extended tour of operations they were all posted to training duties at Heavy Conversion Units.

OC XV (R) Sqn, Wg Cdr Jon Moreton reports:

It was a cold and snowy start to the year as shovels were required to dig out the aircraft from XV(R) and 12(B) Squadron post Christmas leave. Despite the heavy snow in January the Squadron did enjoy much valuable flying over the beautiful wintery Scottish countryside. Not all XV(R) Sqn personnel would suffer from the cold as many staff aircrew and groundcrew deployed to Afghanistan in support of other frontline squadrons. Over the year XV(R) Squadron would continue to send personnel out of area in support of Operations in Afghanistan and Libya. The big shock for the Squadron was the loss of a

Tornado on the West Coast of Scotland, due to a fire in flight, at the end of January. Thankfully the staff and student crew ejected safely with only minor injuries. Having only just recovered from the shock of losing an aircraft, 2 weeks later a XV(R) Squadron staff crew ejected from their Tornado as it departed the runway at RAF Lossiemouth at high speed. Once again the Squadron was relieved to hear that the crew suffered only minor injuries, the aircraft also suffered minor damage as it came to rest a few hundred yards off the runway in soft ground. The Squadron held its breath in March in the hope that our luck would change; thankfully the Squadron did enjoy a quiet month. Half of the staff and students of XV(R) Squadron, including 103 engineers, deployed to Canada in April to take part in Exercise ALBERTA FOCUS. This was a heavy weapons detachment at Canadian Air Force Base Cold Lake. XV(R) Squadron was asked to take part in this exercise due to 11 (AC) Squadron being unable to take part as they were deployed to Op ELLAMY at short- notice. As the year progressed it soon became apparent that the summer was going to set the tone for the rest of the year. When 14 Squadron disbanded the crews all crossed the airfield to fly with the OCU, this put a huge strain on resources for several months until the crews were re-homed across the Station. The now yearly Qualified Weapons Instructors Course was in full swing on the Squadron and would graduate successfully in September. The Tornado GR4 Role Demo Team was once again supplied by XV(R) Squadron and they gained Public Display Authority after an extensive work-up in May. XV(R) Squadron would support many airshows across Europe over the coming months, including the Association Reunion at RAF Weyton, attracting high praise throughout. July was a difficult month for the Squadron as half of our engineers were deployed in support of Op ELLAMY, with only a few days notice to move and with little granularity on when they would return. The effects of having so many personnel away were felt immediately. A reduced flying programme was enforced over those months as maintaining the Tornado became increasingly challenging. However, both aircrew and groundcrew alike worked tirelessly to maximise training opportunities both in the air and on the ground. For the remainder of the year Squadron life remained busy but rewarding.

XV(R) Squadron was praised by Senior Commanders for its fortitude in maintaining the highest possible standards both in theatre and at home - it is clear that XV(R) Squadron played a pivotal role in the success of the Libyan Campaign.

I took Command of XV(R) Squadron from Wg Cdr Brian James in September; although, I was already well established having been on XV(R) Squadron for a number of months. I had taken Command of 14 Squadron in February 2011, only for the Squadron to be disbanded in



A Tornado GR4 performs the 2011 Role Demo at the Southport Airshow July 2011



The Change of Command ceremony at XV(R) Sqn

June. It was clear that my 5 years of experience (1999-2004) running the Qualified 'Weapons Course provided me an ideal opportunity to move across the Station and command XV (R) Squadron. I am looking forward to the challenges the lie before me in an ever changing Royal Air Force. The Squadron is now looking forward to a well- deserved break over Christmas - the shovels - are at the ready!

No XV Squadron Update from the Sqn Historian

Martyn Ford-Jones, writes: As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter , the structure which was known as Building 538 at RAF Mildenhall, the wartime hanger used by No XV Squadron, was demolished during the summer

Last August I made one of my regular trips to RAF Lossiemouth, to visit No XV (R) Squadron. I was accompanied on the trip by Pat Young, a member of the Mildenhall Register whose half-brother, Edward Utting, was a bomb aimer with the squadron in early 1945. In true XV Squadron tradition, Pat was given a full tour of the Squadron's H.Q. facilities, including, the Operations Planning room, the aircrew dressing room, the 'Ops' Desk and the crewroom. He got up close and personal with a Tornado GR.4, in whose cockpit he was allowed to sit and was given a 'guided tour' around the flight instruments etc. A visit to the simulator, to watch a XV Squadron crew undertake a simulated bombing mission, was also arranged, as was a visit to No 202 (Search and Rescue) Squadron.

During his visit to No XV, Pat was made an Associate Member of the XV Squadron Association. He was presented with a letter of welcome by Flight Lieutenant Stan Boardman, the Association Secretary. A visit out to No XV Squadron's flight-line concluded with an invitation to join a Champagne Reception, alongside a Tornado, which had just landed after having taking the Station Commander on his last flight from RAF Lossiemouth, before handing over command.

Two weeks after the Station Commander handed over command of the Base, Wing Commander Brian "Sumo" James, was to hand over command of No XV (R) Squadron to Wing Commander Jonnie Moreton. Jonnie is no stranger to XV, having been an instructor with the squadron earlier in his career. Wing Commander Moreton had also been OC No 14 Squadron until its disbandment last February.

The tragic recent loss of the two Red Arrows pilots in quick succession stunned most people. However, the demise of Flt Lt Sean Cunningham left many of those connected to XV Squadron even more shocked. During his eleven years in the RAF, Sean Cunningham had served with No 617 'Dambusters' Squadron, with whom he completed several operational tours in Iraq. He then completed a posting with No XV (R) Squadron, where he flew and served as a Qualified Pilot and Tactics Instructor. During his time on No XV he became an efficient and respected member of the squadron.

The requests for information and assistance from families whose respective relatives served with No XV Squadron continue to be received via No XV (R) Squadron, the Mildenhall Register, the XV Squadron Association and the Internet.

Apart from the solace and gratification felt by these respective families when they receive the answers to their searches for information, they are also able to relate to the squadron and feel a part of that bond which binds the members of the Mildenhall Register. Some of those relatives join the Register and become members in their own right. Two particular ladies who have taken this action in the recent past are Maureen Kirkland and her sister Di

McKie, whose uncle sadly perished when his aircraft crashed shortly after take-off, on 22nd March 1945. Maureen and I have exchanged much information relating to her uncle, Sergeant George Cope, a wireless operator. Maureen also welcomed Valerie and me into her home at Leigh-on-Sea, where her hospitality was second to none. It is hoped that both Maureen and Di will be able to join us in May at the next reunion, where we can give them a warm welcome. My task of documenting and updating the details and records of former members of No XV and the aircraft the Squadron operated with continues. Any information, documentation or copy photographs relating to all former members of No XV, whether air or ground crew/staff, of any era, would be gratefully acknowledged.

It's RAF Mildenhall - But Not As We Know It!

Martyn Ford-Jones, XV(R) Sqn Historian writes - Monday, 21st, March 2011 dawned bright and sunny and, having set myself up for the day by devouring a large cooked breakfast, I set off towards the main gate at RAF Mildenhall. The main entrance to the base is no longer where the World War Two veterans would have remembered it being, but is now situated at the eastern end of the airfield, near the Holywell Row roundabout. The main entrance now consists of a parking area, a canopied-structure vehicle entry point, a search 'barn', where any door, bonnet, tailgate or other open-able object on your car is opened for inspection and finally, a Visitor Pass Office. It was to the latter that I reported the fact I was to meet Mr Gary Wenko, a retired member of the United States Air Force, who now works for the Ministry of Defence. The purpose of my visit was to have a last look at a particular 'C'-type hanger which is due for demolition. It was not any old hanger, but the one occupied by No XV Squadron during World War Two; Hanger 538. Gary, being an American with a sense of history, and knowing the significance of the hanger, contacted Geoff Reynolds, Secretary of the Mildenhall Register, who in turn contacted me.

With all the necessary permissions and clearances in place, and the car having passed its security inspection, I was permitted to follow Gary's car on to the operational side of the perimeter wire fence. Riding with Gary in his car was Rachel Waller, a member of the USAF Public Affairs. Rachel's brief was to ensure I did not point my camera in the wrong direction and generally behaved myself. Our first port of call was Gary's office, situated directly opposite the above-mentioned hanger. It was sad to see this historic building surrounded by a two metre high metal enclosure. Having been an Architectural Surveyor in my professional life, I could see a majestic sense of design in the structure and one, in my view, which should have been retained as a 'Listed Building'. Expressing my personal views to Gary, he informed me that both he and Sqn Ldr Richard Fryer, the RAF Commander on the base, had endeavoured to gain this status for the building, but higher authority had already bestowed this accolade on a similar 'C'-type hanger at the former RAF Station at Bicester.



Hanger 538 at RAF Mildenhall

It was whilst we were enjoying a mug of coffee and looking at some photographs of RAF Mildenhall that I had taken along from my own collection, that Sqn Ldr Fryer joined us. Unfortunately, given the demands made on his time, Sqn Ldr Fryer was not able to join us when we departed the office for a stroll around the impressive structure I had come to view.

Walking round the end of the hanger to the south face of the building, the bright sunlight heightened the colour of the red face of the brickwork, displaying the structure in an almost defiant glory. Yes, there were one or two cracks in the brickwork and some areas where expanding reinforcement rods had "blown" away pieces of the concrete lintels, but this grand old structure has given approximately eighty years of continuous service both in war and peace. What a

shame a dignified "retirement" could not have been granted to this building as a memorial to all those who served at RAF Mildenhall.

Hanger 538 is being demolished to make way for a new larger facility which will house a new generation of American transport aircraft. My comment about doing what the British did with the Short Stirling bomber, cutting the wingspan down to make it fit into the existing hangers, was greeted with a wry smile.

Situated in the grass, on the southern elevation of the hanger, Gary drew my attention to a stone marking the last resting place of 'Honorary' Sqn Ldr Bill Prune. Bill Prune was the Bulldog mascot of No XV Squadron, who was killed in an accident on 30th December 1943. His funeral took place at 11 am on 1st January 1944. Gary arranged for the stone to be rededicated during 2003. By a strange co-incidence, a week before my visit took place, a lady sent me a copy of her late father's log book, plus a copy of the original Obituary Notice relating to Bill Prune. Fortunately, care is being taken not to impede on this memorial.

Wanting to show me a really impressive view of Hanger 538, Gary suggested we jump into his car and go for a ride. That ride took us around the perimeter track, across the runway at the east end of the airfield and then along the southern side of the airfield. It is when one crosses the end of the runway and looks down its length, that one gets to realise what a vast area RAF Mildenhall covers. Getting as close to the runway as regulations permit, Gary turned the car to face back across the airfield and stopped. There before us was a stunning vista bathed in glorious sunshine, comprising of the shimmering concrete parking ramp, red brick hangers, including Hanger 538, cream-coloured painted single-storey buildings, and a sky blue backdrop. One of those images which leaves a lasting impression.

Continuing our ride, Gary headed around the west side of the airfield and back into the domestic areas on the north side. Some twelve or so years ago, when writing '*Oxford's Own*', the history of No XV Squadron, I was given permission by the USAF to take some photographs on and around the base and, although many changes have been made during the airfield's long and illustrious history, it is amazing how many changes have been made over those last twelve years. It was a revelation to me so goodness knows what those who served



A heap of metal was all that remained!

at the base would have made of it. I can only sum it up by saying, "It's RAF Mildenhall, but not as we know it".

There is an old saying that 'Time waits for no man' and whilst one can mourn the changes which have taken place at RAF Mildenhall, one can see the necessity for those changes. However, it must be recorded that many of the wartime buildings, used by members of No XV Squadron and other units, have been retained by the USAF. These buildings have become part of the Heritage Trail and, although not open to members of the public, serve to inform each new generation of American airmen who are posted to RAF Mildenhall, of the historic past of this Suffolk airfield.

We are indebted to Register Member Gary Wenko, who kept a photographic record of the demise of this building and presented The Register with a complete set of photographs for the archive.

The launch of 'We Wage War by Night' by Howard Sandall

It was with a sense of pride that my family attended the launch of 'We Wage War by Night'. I thought the day would never arrive after 8 years of research and compilation.

I can remember the time all those years ago when my Uncle asked me to research his missions whilst on 622 Squadron, due to the loss of his logbook. The last eight years have been a labour of love for me corresponding and meeting veterans.

Compiling their particular memoirs into interesting chapters was an enjoyable and enlightening experience.

As a regular attendee of the Duxford air shows, I have always been impressed by the excellent events hosted by 'Vector Fine Art'. The owners are Colin & Rose Smith and I approached them earlier in



622 Sqn Veterans at the book launch Duxford

the year regarding launching my book. They committed to the idea there and then. After writing to the 622 veterans I was delighted to hear that most were able to come along for the day. Twelve veterans attended on the day and I was very humbled to see that they had travelled from far and wide to attend. I must give a special mention to Tom Maxwell (Exeter), Ron Pepper (Plymouth) and Bill Hickling (Wigan) who made an especially long journey to attend.

The signing started at 09.30 hrs and finished at around 13.30 hrs. The flow of people having items signed was continuous and Colin at 'Vector' will be making a donation to the Bomber Command Memorial Appeal in appreciation of the veterans attendance on the day. Colin & Rose provided lunch which gave everyone time for a quick chat and to view the air display. Around mid-afternoon everyone started to disperse for their long journeys home.

I would like to finish by expressing my sincere gratitude and thanks to all who arranged the day. The biggest thank you from me must be reserved for the twelve veterans who made the day so special. Their enthusiasm and contribution was exceptional.

Howard J. Sandall 622 Sqn Historian

Howard's book (ISBN- 978-0-7643-3814-4) can be purchased from Bushwood Books Bushwood Books, 6 Marksbury Avenue, Kew Gardens, Surrey, TW9 4JFT: www.bushwoodbooks.co.uk

Failed to Return - BK710

Paul Winchester, Son of Fg Off H.S. Winchester writes: The Second World War claimed the lives of 116,000 men and women of the Air Forces of the Commonwealth, of which 55,000 were from Bomber Command. Those lost in operations from bases in the UK and Europe, with no known graves - more than 20,000 - are commemorated at the Air Forces memorial at Runnymede. Appropriately the Runnymede Memorial overlooks the meadow where the Magna Carta was sealed by King John in 1215, enshrining man's basic freedoms. This is the story of one aircraft which failed to return. My father, Flying Officer H. S. Winchester, was one of the seven crew members who died.

1943

On the night of 25/26 May 1943, 759 aircraft attacked Dusseldorf, and 27 failed to return, amongst which was Stirling BK 710 from 149 Sqn, the aircraft in which my father was Bomb Aimer/Front Gunner. This is a review by the "Aircrew Remembrance Society", BK710 took off at 23.44 hrs from Lakenheath, Suffolk, England to bomb Düsseldorf. 759 aircraft took part (323 Lancaster's, 169 Halifaxes, 142 Wellington's, 113 Stirlings and 12 Mosquitoes). The raid was considered a failure - there were two layers of cloud over the target and the pathfinders had great difficulty in marking it. It is also believed that the Germans were operating decoy markers and fire sites resulting in the main bomber force becoming scattered over a large area. No concentrated bombing fell in the target area of Düsseldorf, which recorded only 50 - 100 buildings destroyed and some 30 people on the ground killed. The raid cost was high with 27 aircraft lost, 161 crew members killed and another 7 injured (405 Sqn, Halifax II HR806 LQ-D crashing shortly after take-off) A further 27 were made Prisoners of War.

Stirling BK710 OJ-A was shot down on the journey home by Uffz. Georg Kraft of 12./NJG1. The claim stated the attack was over the North Sea, 40 Km North West of Texel (North Holland, Salzherring) at a height of 800 metres at 03.04 hrs on the 26th May. Uffz. Kraft had a total of 13 kills credited before he was shot down and killed on the 17/18th August 1943 by a 141 Squadron Beaufighter flown by Wg Cdr Braham. Most of the crew of OJ-A had done 8 -10 sorties, and were due a few days leave upon their return. Wives and girl friends had arranged to meet under the clock at Waterloo Station. After many anxious hours waiting it became obvious that the crew were missing. Letters of encouragement from the Squadron and Red Cross were received saying not to give up hope - they could have escaped or become POWs. Finally in September came the devastating news that the body of rear gunner Sgt Percival had been found "on the shore, but no location was given". Later it was determined that it was on the Heligoland shore that the body was found.

And that was that - Dad's plane had gone down in the North Sea; no other bodies were found. Mother and I didn't talk about this much - it was too painful for both of us, so we just put it to the back of our minds and locked it away.

The war came to an end, and Churchill, despite having said at the beginning "Fighters are our salvation, but the bombers alone will provide the means to victory," decided (in a moment of political correctness, that in my opinion destroys his stature as a great leader) not to

recognize Bomber Command. In his 1945 Victory broadcast he thanked all sections of the RAF except Bomber Command. Time passed.

2008/09

In December 2008, in the IJsselmeer (formally the Zuider Zee) a small boat with engine trouble was attended by a rescue boat. Upon retrieving the anchor, they found a piece of metal attached. It was taken to Mr Johan Graas of Aircraft Recovery Groep (ARG) 1940-1945 who recognized it as a part of the landing gear of a Stirling Bomber. The serial number indicated it was made by Austin Motors. In April 2009, volunteer divers recovered various artefacts, which included a panel with the aircraft identification number.

Because the paint, long since disappeared, had etched into the aluminium panel, it was identified by Dutch Police forensics to be BK710. Amongst other pieces recovered were 3 parachute buckles, which imply that at least three crew members did not exit the plane and their remains must be in the vicinity. The water depth is only 3-4 metres, but visibility is nil and the wreckage is buried in mud. Divers must therefore feel around in the mud until they come across any debris.

The ARG then visited London archives and obtained the names of the crew before making every effort to locate their descendants.

Eventually, in November 2009 I was contacted. I was the most difficult to locate in that I took myself from the British electoral roll when I went overseas to work, and subsequently emigrated to Australia. My mother also emigrated to Australia some years later, which made contact even more difficult.

Relatives of six of the missing crew have now been successfully contacted, and regular correspondence between us has been maintained since.

In the meantime, volunteer divers had made many visits to the site, and recovered many pieces, all of which have been identified and catalogued. Most are in remarkably good condition since the water is fresh, and the mud prevents oxidation. Aircraft Recovery Groep decided to dedicate a room in their museum to BK710 to house the recovered pieces.

Unfortunately, both my mother and dad's sister died shortly before the wreckage was found, but I still had mum's ashes stored, not quite knowing where to scatter them. It became obvious that they should be scattered on the water above the wreckage.

2010/11

In June 2010, along with Gill my wife, two daughters Sara and Merran, and grandson Mussa, I travelled to Holland to scatter the ashes. At the same time, Sandra Uden, the nearest descendant of the pilot Sgt. Jack Uden, along with other members of the Uden family.....

Continued over page



A driver recovers wreckage

arranged that we should all go together to the site. Johan Graas of ARG arranged for the local rescue boat to take us to the site, along with the divers.

We must have anchored in exactly the right place (almost as though we were guided there, said Merran) because the divers brought up several pieces from the front of the aircraft where Dad and Jack would have been seated. We then had a short service. I recited the Ode and scattered Mum's ashes on the water.

In early 2011 I received the message that the room dedicated by the ARG to BK710 was to be officially opened on 26 May, the 68th anniversary of the plane going down. This opening was attended by local dignitaries and TV, radio and newspaper reporters, as well as many of the relatives of the crew. It was a moving ceremony, with the Union flag flown at half mast, a lone piper playing and the last post sounded.

Group Captain J A 'Speedy' Powell

For those who do not know his history, Group Captain J A 'Speedy' Powell commanded 149 Sqn from 28/11/1940 to 8/5/1941. During this time he starred in the film 'Target for Tonight'. He went on to command RAF Feltwell from 10/8/1941 to 21/8/1942, before taking over at RAF Mildenhall from 22/8/1942 to 27/3/1943. He had been decorated with his DSO by King George VI on his visit to RAF Mildenhall in January 1941.

His son Jeremy sent the following article:

"The following is taken from "The amazing Mr Doolittle, Literature and History of Aviation" by Quentin Reynolds. It is the biography of Lieutenant General James H Doolittle of '30 seconds over Tokyo' fame. My father and he became good friends when they came together in North Africa."

There wasn't much left of the harem scarem Doolittle who had once been the bane of Colonel Burwell's existence at Rockwell and who has been known as the Chinese Ace. But occasionally the ghost of that younger Doolittle did manage to break through the uniform with its two stars. When he met a man like Speedy Powell for instance, he had to respond to a kindred spirit. Group Captain Powell was the senior RAF man attached to the air staff. Powell, a bomber pilot, had played the leading part in the great documentary film, *Target for Tonight*. Powell had an English accent you could cut with a crummet; he



The Service at Sea



General Doolittle commanded the 12th & 15th USAAF in N Africa & Med and later led the 8th Air Force in Europe

also had about every decoration the British awarded their combat fliers.

"*I wish you'd find a mess of your own*" Doolittle grumbled. "Either that or learn to speak basic English. That accent of yours is apt to corrupt my men".

"*It'll do 'em good to listen to pure English, ol' boy,*" the irresistible Powell grinned. The Doolittle mess, as a matter of fact, was considerably enlivened by the smiling bomber pilot. He'd really been through the desperately fought Battle of Britain. This campaign to him was a "piece of cake," and his complete disregard for his personal safety, his unfailing good humour and his willingness to take the inevitable kidding about his accent made him a favourite not only with Doolittle but with the whole staff. The only thing he couldn't stand was inaction. When a stretch of bad weather would remain as it was for a week, he chafed under the strain of inactivity.

"*Weather's jolly good west*" he said to Doolittle one afternoon.

"*We're not fighting anyone west of here.*" Doolittle said glumly.

"*You are obtuse,*" Powell said sadly. "*I'm talking of England ol' boy . . . jolly, jolly England. We'll have to hang around here for another week or so, if you'll forgive the expression, sitting on our respective arses. But the sun is shining on Merry England. We could hop on the Wimpy and be there in no time.*"

Doolittle raised his head. He was tired and he knew it. There wasn't a thing he or the staff could do with runways ankle deep in mud. A couple of days in London.....

"*Why not, Speedy?*" he grinned.

"*My aircraft is fuelled,*" the delighted Powell said.

They stepped into a jeep, roared out to the rain soaked field and climbed into the big twin-engined Wellington (always called the Wimpy). With no bomb load and only a small supply of ammunition to hamper it the huge plane managed to tear away from the clinging mud, and a few moments later, with Speedy Powell at the controls, it was headed across the Mediterranean and aiming for occupied France. Doolittle relaxed in the bombardier's seat. He could always sleep better in an airplane than a bed, and he dozed off while Powell roared out a lusty chorus of the unexpurgated RAF song. "All day long we haven't flown above five hundred feet.....the weather it was blessed cold and full of blessed sleet....."

An hour later Doolittle was awakened by the swinging gyrations of the plane. To his amazement the cockpit was filled with golden light. Out of the window he saw that the night was dotted with hundreds of exploding stars - all close.

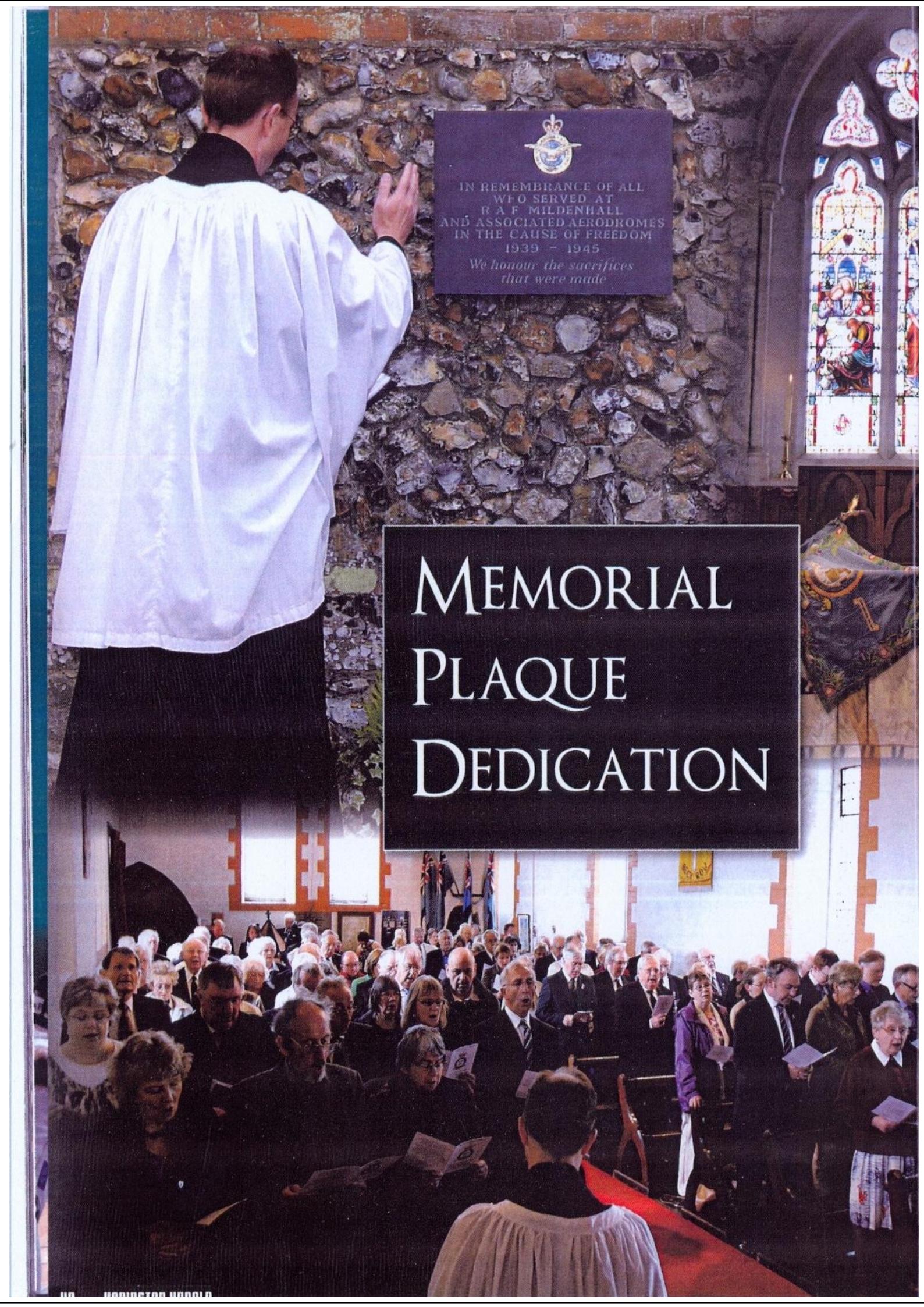
"*The Frogs,*" Powell yelled happily from his bucking pilot's seat. "*Stupid beggars - don't know who we are. Their flak is really wizard, what?*"

Powell managed to get clear of the flak area and Doolittle dropped off to sleep. A half hour later he was flung from his seat. Powell was taking violent evasive action, and was first in and then out of the clouds. "Now what?" Doolittle called, irritable.

"*Only a Hun fighter, laddie,*" Powell said calmly. "*Nothin' to fret about.*"



An early infra-red camera captures Wg Cdr Powell and his 149 Sqn Crew being driven to dispersal for a raid on Kiel 11/12 Mar 41



IN REMEMBRANCE OF ALL
WHO SERVED AT
RAF MILDENHALL
AND ASSOCIATED AERODROMES
IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM
1939 - 1945

*We honour the sacrifices
that were made*

MEMORIAL PLAQUE DEDICATION





"It's showing a yellow light," Powell yelled at him. Doolittle saw the yellow light, but it wasn't moving. As a matter of fact, the yellow light was a million miles or so away. It was the planet Venus which Powell had been fleeing.

They arrived unannounced and unheralded at a bomber base in southern England, and two hours later were in London. A shower and a change of uniform at Claridge's and both were ready to see the town.

"I'll tell the operator where we're going, in case Jack or Larry Norstadt want us." Doolittle reached for the phone.

"I'm glad you told headquarters you were staying here," Powell said casually. "Forgot all about letting them know myself."

"I didn't tell anyone we were leaving," Doolittle said startled. "Jack and Larry will be out of their minds. I'll send them a message where we are."

Allard, Norstadt and the whole staff back in North Africa were frantic. No one had any idea where the Boss and his RAF staff senior officer were. The message brought great relief to 12th Air Force headquarters, and Allard soothed the ruffled feelings of those who had done so much fruitless worrying.

"Don't ever try to predict what Jim will do. I learned that twenty five years ago."

Three days later Doolittle and Powell were back in Africa. Powell, who had done most of his bombing at night, was anxious to master the technique of day operations, and Doolittle sent him off one morning on a daylight strike. The B-24 was new to Powell, so he didn't attempt to fly it - he was along merely as an observer. The plane, returning from the target, inadvertently flew over the front lines in Italy and was immediately shellacked with vicious and accurate flak. The pilot and navigator were both killed instantly. The co-pilot, hit badly, slumped from his seat. Powell dragged the pilot's body from the cockpit and sat in front of the unfamiliar controls. Two motors were gone, both wings were shattered, and the rudder half shot away. He fingered the controls hoping at least to find the throttle. He did and headed the broken Liberator toward the African shore, far across the Mediterranean.

Back at the 12th Air Force the plane was reported first as overdue, then as missing. It was a gloomy group which gathered at dinner. A mess attendant silently removed Powell's chair from the table. This was the thing that war never accustomed you to, and Doolittle found that he couldn't eat. He left the table with Allard and went to their office. You couldn't live with the ghosts when you were a commanding general, he told himself. Doolittle tried to concentrate on the reports in front of him. He and Allard worked until midnight, and then the door opened and a battered, bruised figure of a man limped into the room. It was Powell. He told of the flak which had killed the two flying members of the crew. He told of experimenting with the gadgets on the instrument board until he had found a few which seemed to react. By some miracle he had gained altitude, and then a third engine conked out. Half a mile from the African coast the last engine quit. Powell had managed to glide the huge plane to the beach where he had crash landed. Then he had pulled the badly wounded co-pilot from the wreckage, put him on his back and stumbled half a mile to find help. Now the wounded man was in the hospital.

"A bad show laddie," Powell said sadly. "A bad show all around."

Doolittle recommended Speedy Powell for the American Distinguished Flying Cross for that. It arrived a month later - two days after the British officer had been killed while flying another bombing mission.

Elizabeth Orbell reports on the 90 Squadron crash at Hengrave.

Lancaster Mk1 HK610 coded WP-Z for an operation to Wiesbaden on February 2/3 1945. The aircraft departed from Tuddenham at 20.52 hrs but collided in mid air, 33 minutes later, with another 90 Squadron Lancaster, PD336, returning from a mission. HK610 went out of control, crashing and exploding at Hengrave, all onboard were killed. However PD 336, although damaged, landed safely back at Tuddenham with only one injury to a crew member. PD336 was repaired and returned to service, coded WP-P. On 19th February 1945 it set off for an operation to Wesel to attack a rail junction. On the final run-in to the target, with the bomb doors open, the aircraft received a direct hit by flak, disintegrated, killing all on board. The aircraft crashed in the Rhine near Xanten. (Eds Note: - This follows on from the story in last year's magazine in which this incident was reported and shown in a photo kindly supplied to me by Britain at War Magazine. It was the only loss on that raid.)

Crew of PD 336

Wg Cmdr Peter Dunham DFC	4295 7	Pilot	aged 32
Sgt James Edward Bennett	2211401	Flight Engineer	aged 29
Fg Off Thomas Metcalf RCAF	J38224	Navigator	aged 26
Fg Off Howard Francis John Carlton	157180	Bomb Aimer	aged 30
Flt Sgt Leslie Alfred Page	552485	Wireless operator	aged 23
Sgt Joseph Edward Bozeat	1881699	Air Gunner	aged 33
Plt Off Frederick Alan Cresswell	190372	Air Gunner	aged 24

Crew of HK610

Wg Cmdr William Geoffrey Bannister	36022	Pilot	aged 33
Sgt Robert Swan	1596938	Flight Engineer	aged 19
Flt Lt Henry Arthur Wellington Williams	60770	Navigator	aged 29
Sgt Alan Moore	1685098	Bomb Aimer	aged 22
Sgt Jeffrey James Chidwick	1892895	Wireless operator	aged 19
Sgt George Leonard Webb	1813422	Air Gunner	aged 20
WO John Train RCAF	R208304	Air Gunner	aged 20
Sgt Donald Frederick Luxford	1813498	Air Gunner	aged 19

A group of like minded enthusiasts has been formed with a purpose to recover HK610 from the crash site at Hengrave and to erect a memorial to the crews of both HK610 and PD336. Some of the artefacts recovered will be placed in Rougham Tower Association Museum and some to the Landowner. We have so far conducted a Geophysical (*underground mapping*) survey of the site to establish where she lies, we have the landowner's permission, and at this point we are waiting for the MOD licence to be issued. Subject to this we are aiming for a start date of February 2012.

Amongst our group we have witnesses to the crash, who, although young children at the time, have related their memories to me. My thanks must go to Norman Billimore, David Brown, Pat Howard, Tony Pattle, Kenny Phillips, John and Dixie Pryke.

On the night of the crash, David Brown remembers the horrendous "bang", and visions of the aircraft on fire silhouetted against, the sky. The engines screaming as the pilot fought to land the aircraft avoiding the village. One Fire Engine, a Coventry Climax, was sent to the site from Hengrave Hall, along with engines from The National Fire Service.

The aircraft came to rest in a field close by the homes of Tony Pattle and Norman Billimore. Norman and Tony recall the RAF disposal team returning to the site the next day and telling everyone they were going to blow up the bombs and to open all the windows. Tony recalls his parents going down to the crash but never talking about what they saw.

John Pryke tells me his Father was a special constable and was called to the crash site, giving instructions to John "not to go near the plane" but of course he did, a sight which remains with him to this day, as indeed it does with Pat Howard, Kenny Phillips, and Dixie Pryke all recalling hearing the plane crash and the vibration from the crash which shook a wide area and the blast effect causing damage in the nearby villages and town.

If reading this article sparks off any memories of these two aircraft, or indeed of 90 Sq. at Tuddenham I would be very pleased to hear from you.

Elizabeth Orbell E-mail risbyvillage@btinternet.com or contact Geoff Reynolds

The Royal Air Force Career of Harry Leslie Duckworth

John Johnson wrote this detailed account for Harry's grand-daughter Yvonne Hayes.

Harry Duckworth was born of catholic English parents on the first of November 1911 in Preston, Lancashire. After completing school he worked as a company secretary for a company called Harry Dyson Ltd in his home town. At 20 years of age Harry decided to get married, and as he was under-age he would have needed his parents' permission. This was on Boxing Day, the 26th of December 1931.

He and his wife Theresa had a baby boy on the 25th of June, 1936 who they called Arthur Peter. While the war clouds were already overhead in early 1939, but it was still peace time, Harry decided to join the regular RAF, enlisting for 6 years, and arriving at Cranwell Recruit Depot on the 14th of March to begin his new career. That meant leaving his young wife and two year old son behind, and as Harry was already well into his 27th year, there must have been some compelling driving force behind his decision.

Up to this point, Harry's life had been a clerical one of files and paperwork, but he decided that he needed a change in life and in reviewing the many trades available; he chose to be an aircraft engine fitter, Grade II. This was a Group I trade and as a qualified tradesman Harry would have received the highest rating in pay. Cranwell was the home of several trade schools, so as an aircraftsman second class, Group V, the lowest paid in the RAF, after the typical introductory shots and kitting out then several weeks of basic training, he probably began his training there. While in training he would earn two shillings a day plus sixpence per day later as war pay, but the RAF would whittle that down by deductions. His wife would receive a family allowance directly plus a little extra for one dependent.

He completed his training satisfactorily qualifying as a Fitter, Grade II, aero engines, Group I on the pay scale, on the 28th of February, 1940. His daily pay would now jump up to four



Harry in the cockpit of a Hampden

shillings and three pence. While Harry was in training, war had been declared with Germany. By this time, Britain had already been at war for six months.

From Cranwell, on the 1st of March, Harry was posted to No 83 Squadron, at Scampton, Lincolnshire, in No 5 Group, Bomber Command, which at that time was equipped with Handley Page Hampden twin engine bombers. This gave him radial engine Hercules Pegasus engines to keep in good working order. To start and run the engines up for testing, Harry would need to take over the pilot's seat. The Hampden was incredibly narrow, so there was no room for anyone else beside him, and it became a 'one man show'.

On the 6th of November he was posted, still in No 5 Group, but to No 207 Squadron at Waddington, equipped with twin engine Avro Manchesters. Now it was the 24 cylinder most troublesome in-line Rolls Royce Vulture engine. This engine would seize up very easily resulting in very high accident rates, especially over enemy territory, adding to the losses by enemy action. Eventually the Manchester was withdrawn, and redesigned as the four engined Avro Lancaster. But Harry would struggle with the Vulture engine until the end of 1941.

With time and experience Harry was ready to take another trade test which he did on the 12th of December 1940, and which he passed, promoting him to Leading Aircraftsman, the highest qualification that the RAF gives for its trades. Any other promotion is administrative. For this his pay jumped to five shillings a day.

On the 13th of January Harry was sent on a one week course to Duxford given by Rolls Royce, no doubt further indoctrination on their Vulture engine. He took a further course at Cosford, this one beginning the 15th of May, 1941 lasting three weeks, which covered both the Bristol Pegasus 18 and the Rolls Royce Vulture engines, and on completion he returned to 207 Squadron.

On the 17th of November 1941, 207 Squadron moved to Bottesford, no doubt in preparation to receive the new Avro Lancaster to replace their Manchesters. Perhaps Harry moved with them, but it was common on a Squadron move to move just the aircraft, aircrew and key administrative personnel, and leave the rest of the ground personnel to the incoming squadron. In December Harry received his corporal's stripes and another two shillings a day. Bomber Command was now moving from twin engine to four engine bombers, beginning with the Short Stirling, and the Handley Page Halifax and Avro Lancaster were not far behind. This step-up now called for an added aircrew member, the flight engineer, who would tend the engines and fuel system in flight, taking the responsibility away from the pilot who, with a four engine bomber to fly, already had his hands full. These flight engineers were needed in quantity and in a hurry. Who better qualified to be flight engineers than engine fitters? With this need, it would be very logical to assume that in late 1941, following a directive from Bomber Command Headquarters; Harry was receiving some pressure from his superiors to transfer to air crew as a flight engineer. So on the 3rd of January, 1942 Harry wound up at No 10 Aircrew Grading School to go through the necessary physical and mental qualifications as to his suitability for aircrew in general and flight engineer in particular. Harry was already well qualified in aircraft engine care and maintenance and no doubt his training was considerably trimmed short because of it. So in February he was sent to No 1651 Conversion Unit in No 3 Group at Waterbeach, which was flying Short Stirlings, where he would receive the necessary extra training that he needed and also be selected as a permanent member of a seven man crew. This flight engineer's course included a one week course at the Technical School of Bristol Aero Engines to learn all that he needed to know about the Bristol Hercules engine of the Short Stirling. Somewhere along this journey Harry

would be considered a qualified flight engineer and be awarded his flight engineer's 'E' half-wing plus his sergeant's stripes, now getting ten shillings and sixpence a day, plus hazardous duty pay later when he would go on operations.

On the 8th of May 1942, on the completion of the seven training as a crew together at Waterbeach, they were posted to Lakenheath to become part of No 149 Squadron in No 3 Group, which had not long converted from Vickers Wellingtons to Short Stirling Mk Is, in November 1941, the third squadron in Bomber Command to fly this new bomber. It is to be noted that Harry was now 30, and that was quite old for operational aircrew.

Sadly, Harry's service with No 149 Squadron, and his life, was cut short when three Stirlings of No 149 Squadron, Harry's Stirling being OJ-A, took part in a 21 Stirling raid on the night of the 16th of July, 1942 as part of 'Operation Pandemonium', which were attacks on German U-boat manufacturers. Their target was Lubecker Funklundewerke AG at Herrenwyke near Lubeck. They were hit by anti-aircraft fire and shot down, crashing at Steinfeld in Germany, Harry and one other, Sergeant Shepherd, being killed.

A Canadian Enquiry

Geoff Reynolds writes: Eric Murray initially contacted me from Canada regarding the advert on our website by an artist offering personalised aircraft artwork of any wartime (and subsequent) aircraft. As a non-member, (that soon changed) he wasn't sure if he could get one done of his late Uncle's Wellington. Having sorted out the membership, which is not a prerequisite of this offer, we struck up a chain of communication about the loss. Eric has been researching for over 5 years. He has quite a portfolio now that he wishes to pass down through his family.

As a 149 Sqn enquiry, I again turned to our dedicated 149 Sqn Historian, Alan Fraser and my knowledgeable friends John Johnson and Jim Coman to see if they could add any more information. Sgt Robert H Crafts RCAF was a W/Op on Wellington R1343 OJ-B on the night of 1st/2nd July 1941 attacking the French port of Brest. **I will let John J continue the story:**

The port of Brest became a major anchoring point and repair depot. And so it was that on

June 1st 1941 the German cruiser Prinz Eugen put in to Brest for major repairs of its propulsion system which would take eight months, joining the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at anchor. Together with the German battleship Bismarck the Prinz Eugen had just fought the Royal Navy battlecruiser HMS Hood and battleship HMS Prince of Wales, the Hood being sunk and the Prince of Wales severely damaged. The Bismarck was in turn sunk shortly afterwards. Those eight months in the repair dock was when the Prinz Eugen was most vulnerable, a sitting target, and so it was continually under air attack. One such raid was on the night of the 1/2 of July when 52 Wellington bombers from various squadrons in 3 Group



The Prinz Eugen in Brest

were sent to attack the German warships in Brest Harbour. The effects of the raid were reported as good, but two of the Wellingtons were shot down, both being from No 149 squadron. All twelve crew were lost.

OJ-J, Serial R1408 with Plt Off Horsfield at the controls crashed near the target area, the crew being buried in the churchyard at Plouzane. OJ-B Serial R1343 with Australian pilot Plt Off St Vincent-Welch crashed into the Prinz Eugen one of its bombs exploding inside the ship. Sixty of her crew died including the executive officer. The crew of OJ-B, as follows, are buried in the Kerfautras cemetery in Brest.

Plt Off S.L. St Vincent-Welch RAAF	Sergeant W. M. Symmons RAAF
Sergeant W.J. Megran	Sergeant R.H. Crafts RCAF
Sergeant C.C. Reidmuller	Sergeant A.R.J. Harrison

Eric has been to Brest on a couple of visits and continues the story: -This is where my friend Gildas comes in once again. Originally the Germans were laid to rest in Kerfautras Cemetery. There are a couple of photos; one on the Prinz Eugen website depicting the original burial. They were at some later date then exhumed and moved to the German Military Cemetery about 20 minutes north of Brest in the town of Lesneven. I never would have known this however Gildas researched it.

We visited the cemetery in Lesneven twice. The Prinz Eugen crew are buried in one row. We counted 52 dead on July 2 and another 8 a few days after.

On another note we did also visit Plt Off Horsefield's grave and crash site. My friend Gildas also excavated that site. The bomb disposal crew came in during the summer of 2006. Plouzane was evacuated and they removed, I believe, three or four 250 pound bombs from well below the surface. Some aircraft parts were also recovered. Gildas and his team put together an information display for the locals as they are all familiar with this crew and keep their gravesites well maintained. During his little seminar two elderly ladies stepped forward. It turns out they were twins and were there the night the aircraft crashed into the field alongside the farmhouse. They shed some interesting details on what took place.

Finding crews' relatives

Geoff Reynolds writes: It was back in August 2011 that I was first aware of Duncan Howatson, from Canada and his search for information regarding his late father, Plt Off Robbie Howatson's RAF service. Duncan had only his father's two dog tags, all the other memorabilia being lost in a house accident some years earlier. He knew the names of a XV squadron crew his father served with for 16 operations from copies of the squadron records. Using the internet, he then found that many of this crew, minus his father, had perished on a 'gardening' sortie off the island of Sprogo in 19 Sep 42. (gardening = mine laying).

Plt Off Robbie Howatson an air gunner/screened instructor whose RAF career spanned 1935 - 45 and had joined XV Squadron from 21 OTU on 1st May 1942. His first operation had been to Cherbourg on the 29th May. The pilot of their Stirling bomber was Sgt Millar Steel. Howatson had completed 16 sorties with this crew by the time they went to Dusseldorf in Stirling 9351 on 31st July 1942. By that time, Millar Steel had been promoted to Pilot Officer. Robbie transferred to another crew and Millar was joined by some new crew members, including W/Ops Thomas Smith. It was this crew that, in Stirling 9351, perished in September, all except Steel, who survived to remain a prisoner of war for the duration.

Duncan was soon in contact with Julie Smith (niece of Thomas) who lives close to me here in Lincolnshire and Ronnie Steel, the son of the pilot, Millar Steel. By a strange coincidence just a couple of years ago, both these people had made contact through their family research and a Danish website (run by Soren) that commemorates the loss of Stirling 9351 and its crew.

Ronald also sent copies of 4 letters of support that had been sent from Duncan's father to Millar's wife. They provided a poignant glimpse into the lives of the men and women who served at this time.

Duncan, like Julie and Ronald has joined the Register. He said: "*Because of organizations and people like yourself scattered around the globe who keep these memories alive and who offered advice, direction and encouragement, I have been able to piece together much of what I have been seeking - this for me is simply priceless!*"

The second crew where relatives have been located is yet another XV Squadron loss, this time much closer to home in Mundford forest. You may recall that when the initial memorial was placed in the forest back in 1999, every effort was made by the XV Squadron historian to find relatives. When Pat and Robin Tuck 're discovered' the crash site and memorial and strove to place a more permanent one inside the church at Mundford, we still knew of no relatives.

However, last year we reported on the Stewart family, relatives of pilot W/O Newton coming to England and discovering the two memorial sites. This year, Di McKie, her sister Maureen Kirkland and their Mum Pat were all able to locate the site of the loss of their Uncle and visit the church. Sgt G A Cope was the W/Op on the ill fated flight, the last operational loss that XV Squadron suffered during the war.

Di had written on the BBC website WW2 Peoples War that when her Nan, Georges Mum, had died, she had been given two letters and a diary, mementoes that had been kept since the war. They both have graphic descriptions of raids he has been on. The second one describes seeing a V2 launch, with the rocket passing below the aircraft as they return home from Germany.



Ronnie sent Duncan a picture of a XV Squadron Stirling in which both their fathers are pictured. Ronnie 2nd row bottom 5th from right. Millar 2nd row top 10th from left.



Jacky Stewart with her husband John and daughter Laurine at the 2011 Reunion. Here they are talking to Martyn Ford-Jones

Di and her family have joined the Register and I look forward to meeting them at the next reunion. I wonder if we can get some more relatives together from one crew? For myself, I am still in touch with relatives of six of the seven crew that my Uncle flew with. These are scattered around the globe in New Zealand, Australia and the UK.

Jim Coman DFC tells us what it was like to be a W/Op.

Jim Coman wrote to one of our newer members who had been researching the job of a wireless operator in wartime. I thought it would be of interest to many of our 'younger' members who perhaps have no idea what the various crew members jobs involved.

(Maybe we could get some more like this from various other crew positions? Ed.)

I flew two tours as a Wireless Operator with 149 Squadron in 1941/42 and 90 Squadron during the first eight months of 1944.

The aircraft I flew in were Wellington I's, Stirling I and III's and the Lancaster III.

Training started with learning the Morse code up to 8 words per minute minimum speed. We had to know about how a basic radio worked (electron flow, etc.); the aircraft electrics from the engine driven generator to our aircraft batteries. These were lead/acid and nickel/iron cells. Then there were magnetic fields, generators and motors to gain knowledge of.

The second phase was at our Radio Air School where we had to have minimum Morse speeds of 25 words per minute, both sending and receiving. We were taught the Radio Wiring Circuits and fault finding on the main General Purpose Sets, also the high frequency crystal set for Pilot/Base use. Rather importantly, the Identification, Friend or Foe (IFF) that was used when crossing the coast inward bound.

Initially the GP sets were the R1082 and T1083, the crystal set was a TR9. Towards the end of 1941 when we changed to Stirlings the GP set was a T1154/R1155 and the short wave set a TR1196.

Training time from induction into the RAF if he was an Air Gunner as well was approximately 1 year to reach a Squadron. Aircraft were air tested by the crew before each operation (sortie) and in action the Radio Operator received transmissions from Base on the hour and half hour. Between times he would sweep different frequencies to find various neutral or other known radio station positions where he would use his loop aerial to take a bearing which he would pass on to the Navigator to plot.

He would also plot aircraft position on the GEE set, our first radar aid, as prior to getting the four engined aircraft we had to navigate using dead reckoning and astro navigation. Later on we had H2S which scanned 15/30 miles ahead giving a picture of coastline, rivers and block schematic of the towns. The same scanner centre was then displayed on a 6" diameter CRT (cathode ray tube) with rings 1 mile apart, the centre being ones aircraft. On this display all aircraft showed as blips and the Wireless Operator could see any faster moving blip; if it was closing on your aircraft the gunners were warned where



The radio operator's seat in the Lancaster with the transmitter T1154 and receiver R1155. notice the "bathtub" morse key

to look. If it passed within the last ring without being seen the Wireless Operator instructed the pilot to take evasive action.

I have tried to give you an idea of how busy the Wireless Operator was on most squadrons. Besides this, he would be able to do everyone else's job in an emergency, such as gunnery, navigation and landing the aircraft.

Memories of Mr Cyril Biggs DFC 115 and 149 Squadrons.

The following are two extracts from a large personal history

After the war I busied myself with a civilian career and thought I had forgotten all about the war; but memories have been bursting out during the past couple of years, and I spent two days in the public records office at Kew, and in February 1992, I found an old file in which my father had kept my wartime letters, from which I will quote. I have also found some artefacts - a plotting chart showing the routes of all the Operations from East Wretham with 115 Squadron, a Douglas protractor, my navigator's watch, escape map and saw, and a piece of "window"

They thought it was safe!

In Oct. 1940 - I began attending the Law Faculty of King's College, London University, which was evacuated to Bristol, because it was thought to be safer there!

24/25 Nov/40, The First Air-Raid on Bristol. My letter written the following day gave a graphic description of it and the destruction wrought. The University Great Hall (where I had been fire-watching 2 nights before) containing the King's College library was burnt out, together with much of the centre of the city.

"All Sunday was very quiet, not one air raid alert. It was so suspiciously quiet that we thought Bristol was the next on the 'Blitz' list. Sure enough it was. It opened up at 6.30 very shortly after the alert went. The Hawkes (our landlady & family) were all down in the centre of the city in the Olympia of Bristol, namely the Colston Hall. Mr H gives a musical show there every Sunday evening. Therefore I was at home with de Keyser (fellow law student) and Mr Bray (2nd Viola in the BBC Symphony Orchestra).

We were sitting in front of the fire at the time but when we heard the firing, we decided to turn off the light and stand at the door to see what was doing. A 'plane was about somewhere. Suddenly an amazingly brilliant star seemed to hatch out of the heavens. It slowly glided down somewhere over the centre of the town. Even at our distance we could almost read from it. This was the first flare I have seen. From that we saw that they meant business. Then four more flares were dropped away to our left. The guns were going fairly well. Then we heard some heavy gunfire round the front side of the house where Filton aerodrome is. We stayed there for sometime, when Mr Bray noticed a whole lot of searchlights converging on one point. We looked up there and saw one of the raiders. Then the guns let lose at him. He was brought down away to the north. All this time there was a hearty din coming from behind. Then the place seemed lit up. We thought it was another flare or two; but when we turned round to look, it seemed that the entire town over the hill was ablaze. There were tremendous clouds of smoke, as big as a thundercloud coming up from the city. The centre of the cloud was a beautiful scarlet, and at either extremity there were other lesser fires.

"A soldier walked in as he heard us talking. He had had his tin hat pinched that dinnertime. We remarked that the guns were going nicely. He wondered whether it had beaten the original record in Bristol. He told of one afternoon raid on Bristol before we had got here. He said that the guns in Bristol (he wouldn't say how many) had fired 185 rounds in 3 seconds. They got 37 'planes down then with the help of the fighters. When the soldier had gone in a 1/2 minute lull, we decided to go right upstairs to see if we could see the fires. We saw two sets of flames licking hungrily up to the sky, but we could not see what it was that gave the huge glow in the centre of the cloud. 'Planes were coming over by the dozen and there was very heavy firing, so we went down. There was another short lull, and so we went upstairs again and Mr Bray took a photo of the fires. I doubt whether it will turn out.

"Later Mr Bray walked slowly down the front steps and stood about 3 feet away. Suddenly there was a buzz and something hit the steps midway between the two of us. We bent down and found a nice little bit of shrapnel - a collector's item!

"By about 10.45 all was quiet and we went downstairs to eat a very nice supper. The Hawkes had not come home by 11.30, so we went to bed. The All Clear went about 11.50 when we were in bed and we were just trying to forget everything at about 12.10, when we heard the familiar shrieks and bangs, denoting the entry of the Hawkes. They came in and Billy said that the Centre was in a dreadful mess. We knew the University was fairly near there and asked him about it. He said that when he passed it, flames were pouring out of the side windows and the museum next-door was ablaze. We wondered what on earth we were going to do. (We studied in the University library every day).

"This morning the fires were still blazing by the look of the sky at 7.15am. We had a tutorial (Roman Law) at 9.10 at Prof. Lewis's house, so decided we had better go anyway for instructions. We went early to see some of the damage.

"As we approached from the back of the University, we could not see anything wrong, but as we got closer, we saw one of the buildings was gutted. We went round the front and saw the Museum still ablaze, also a couple of shops on the right of the road. The Tower was still standing; we could see nothing wrong except a great many panes of glass absent. We walked up towards the railings against the right wing.

Then we noticed just in front of us a chalked notice on the low wall - "DANGER, UNEXPLODED BOMB". We made a strategic retreat, as we were standing not more than 2 feet from the hole!

"We walked along towards the Victoria Rooms and found 80% of the shops were still alight, mainly just smouldering. The roadway was littered with hoses and AFS trailer pumps. As we were going along this road, we noticed that it was getting muddier and muddier. Then we saw that a bomb had landed in Lewis's front garden. It had broken all the windows in his house and thrown his fence down. We met others outside and were just going to climb over the rubble to what were his front door steps, when a cheery face grinned out of the second floor



Bristol ablaze after an attack

window and told us there would be no tutorial. We then decided to go sightseeing. We wandered right the way down to Bristol Bridge. The destruction was dreadful and there were many half-put-out fires everywhere. We tried to get thro' about 6 different roads but they were covered with rubble. Surprisingly, the Bridge was undamaged, but only 1 building around seemed undamaged. St Mary's Church was gutted and still burning. There were 4 fire engines drawing water from the river. The road was covered with hoses and water running like a river. There was a blazing warehouse on the other side. There was tremendous destruction everywhere. Goodness knows how many casualties there were. It seems a dreadful shame.

"We decided to go to the Assizes before we went back, as there was a murder trial on. The Courts were undamaged and, thro' the action of a friendly policeman, we sat on the solicitors' benches. We waited about an hour and the court hadn't started. The judge was quite alive because he kept summoning conferences. He then came in and told us he was adjourning the case because one of the counsel and one witness hadn't turned up - thought to have been hurt.

"Soldiers were directing the traffic and clearing the debris and some were parading the streets with fixed bayonets. We returned by the University and then discovered that the roof of the Great Hall was missing - it had been completely gutted - and it contained our (King's College, London University) library. We had been spending virtually the whole of our working week in the library, because all our lectures were crammed between 4 and 6 pm on three afternoons! We wandered around and found that bombs had exploded around the buildings.

"The nearest bombs to our digs were both unexploded and were about 50yds away. Thousands of incendiaries were dropped, and a dreadful noise they made too and a terrific flash as they burst alight. I hope you have not got too fed up reading about a city which you have never seen."

16/17 March 41, The Second Air-Raid. My digs now were nearer the centre of town and a nearby timber store was set alight which attracted many bombs. An incendiary bomb hit our stirrup-pump, and another came down the chimney and burnt itself out in the grate!

20/21 April 41, The Third Air-Raid. None of the digs I was in was damaged.

The second piece is taken from a chapter entitled: -

I remember D-Day

"I was a navigator of a Stirling 4-engined bomber on Squadron 149 engaged on "special duties" - mainly, dropping supplies to the Maquis, which required flying low-level, at about 500 feet above enemy occupied territory at night.

"We learned fairly early during the morning of 5th June 1944 that "Ops" were planned for that night. Then stories came from the armourers that the "bomb" load we were to carry was extraordinarily light in weight and that they had been told that if any canister failed to release, they would be court-martialled! As the day wore on, we learned that the interior of our aircraft was being filled with 2 tons of "Window" - metalised strips of paper of varying lengths in bundles, each of which looked like an aircraft on the enemy's radar screens - and that we were to take with us two extra volunteer aircrew, who would help us throw it out!

"At the navigators' pre-briefing that afternoon, we learned that the dropping point for our canisters was beside Caen in Normandy, and that two other crews were detailed for the same dropping point. This was a great relief, as our usual trips entailed long flights into France and occasionally, Belgium. However, our route was to fly from Portland Bill, then to the west of the Channel Isles, turning east once we had passed south of Jersey.

"At main briefing, we were told nothing about the purpose of the trip - nor did we guess, even though it was common knowledge that an invasion was planned! It seemed an unnecessarily long way to get to Caen, since Caen was only a dozen miles from the coast, but it was not ours to question why. From

Portland Bill, our bomb aimer was required to throw out of the front hatch two bundles of "Window" every 20 seconds and our flight engineer to throw one bundle of a different size down the flare chute every 10 seconds. The two volunteers were required to carry supplies to them. We were to cross the Channel at 1000 feet and keep our height 500 feet above the hills of Normandy, then gently dive when we came to the plain surrounding Caen so that we would drop the load from 500 feet at an airspeed of 130 knots. This would necessitate the flaps to be lowered to slow us down. Unusually, I was required to drop the load on specified co-ordinates of my navigational radar. We always asked whether other aircraft were expected in the area, because they attract enemy fighters, and we were astonished to be told in a matter-of-fact voice "about 1000". But we still did not guess the purpose of the trip! Maybe our minds were on more practical matters.

"When we arrived at the aircraft at 9pm in the gathering gloom, we were glad that we were all slim young men, because the interior was filled on both sides with boxes of "Window" to the roof, leaving a corridor about a foot wide. I had difficulty dragging my bag of navigation equipment through. The hour before take-off was always the most worrying part of an "Op" if all the instruments etc. were performing properly, because there was nothing to keep one's mind away from the trip ahead - but this night we had to appear nonchalant to our volunteer aircrew.

"We took off at 1010pm and had no difficulty in keeping to track. Fortunately, over France there was intermittent cloud cover, because in the clearings we saw many flashes of small-arms fire shooting at us. The load was dropped according to plan - there was some light flak and we turned starboard returning on the same track and arrived back at Methwold, Norfolk at 3.30 am.

"To our very considerable surprise, the other two aircraft did not return. We learned later that one pilot had miraculously managed to make a wheels-up landing and the whole crew had escaped uninjured, and were smuggled back across the front line a couple of weeks later."

Long afterwards, we learned that we had been simulating a parachute drop, in order to draw German troops away from the shore just before the army was to land on the beaches. The "Window" was intended to make our three aircraft appear on German radar to be an armada, and the "bomb-load" was fireworks, which appeared and sounded like small-arms and mortar fire etc. (*The remainder of the history will appear on the Register's web site*)



Window seen in the air

Undertaking Research!

Many people wish to undertake research themselves into the service career of their friends and relations, what follows is a list of useful sites compiled by our web master **Alan Fraser**. Alan says during searches for relatives and aircraft information he has come across and joined the following Forums, or Internet Discussion groups. Please note the comments about the sites are Alan's alone. Those interested in research may like to explore:

12 o'clock High. - The definitive World War Two Aviation Forum. Here you will find discussion groups on Luftwaffe, Allied and other topics. The forum members are unashamed enthusiasts with an amazing depth of knowledge. Whatever your question, there will be someone here who can answer it, or point you in the right direction. Many authors of reference works frequent the forum; Errol Martyn: RNZAF casualties, Chris Goss: Luftwaffe expert, Steve Smith: No 3 Group Bomber Command historian and many others. Find them at <http://forum.12oclockhigh.net/>

Stirling Aircraft Society. - The forum for those with a Stirling interest. A slightly quirky site to navigate, but worth the effort.

Find them at: <http://sas.raf38group.org/forum/viewforum.php?f=4>

RAF Commands Forum - A thriving discussion and reference forum which includes guidance on the National Archives and how to access them. Useful and knowledgeable members, including the Register Historians. Find them at:

<http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?1-Main-Category>

WW2TALK - A site that not only covers discussions on Air Warfare but Army and other, more specific topics. A more relaxed and friendly forum, with a good spread of content and a responsive readership. The discussions on this forum are the most diverse I have come across. Find them at: <http://www.ww2talk.com/forum/war-air/>

Air War over Denmark - A slightly more specialised site, dealing purely with aircraft losses over Denmark or its coastal region. It commemorates Allied and German flyers that flew over Denmark during the Second World War and lost their lives in Denmark and the surrounding seas. A useful resource. Find them at: <http://www.flensted.eu.com/>

Bombercrew.com Forum - Slightly similar to the RAF Commands forum site, with less constant flow of enquires. Never the less a useful and valuable source of information.. Find them at: <http://100548.activeboard.com/f321311/bombercrewcom-forum/>

I am sure there are other, valuable sites out there, along with innumerable Squadron sites. If your favourite has been left off, please share it with us through the Register website, <http://www.mildenhallregister.stirlingpilot.org.uk>

A Slow Story (a more modern Mildenhall story provided by Terry Mobley)

As a former SR-71 pilot, and a professional keynote speaker, the question I'm most often asked is "How fast would that SR-71 fly?" I can be assured of hearing that question several times at any event I attend. It's an interesting question, given the aircraft's proclivity for speed, but there really isn't one number to give, as the jet would always give you a little more speed if you wanted it to. It was common to see 35 miles a minute.

Because we flew a programmed Mach number on most missions, and never wanted to harm the plane in any way, we never let it run out to any limits of temperature or speed. Thus, each SR-71 pilot had his own individual "high" speed that he saw at some point on some mission. I saw mine over Libya when Gaddafi fired two missiles my way, and max. power was in order. Let's just say that the plane truly loved speed and effortlessly took us to Mach numbers we hadn't previously seen.

So it was with great surprise, when at the end of one of my presentations, someone asked,

"What was the slowest you ever flew the

Blackbird?" This was a first. After giving it some thought, I was reminded of a story that I had never shared before, and relayed the following: I was flying the SR-71 out of RAF Mildenhall, England, with my back-seater, Walt Watson; we were returning from a mission over Europe and the Iron Curtain when we received a radio transmission from home base. As we scooted across Denmark in three minutes, we learned that a small RAF base in the English countryside had requested an SR-71 fly-past. The air cadet commander there was a former Blackbird pilot, and thought it would be a motivating moment for the young lads to see the mighty SR-71 perform a low approach. No problem, we were happy to do it.

After a quick aerial refuelling over the North Sea, we proceeded to find the small airfield. Walter had a myriad of sophisticated navigation equipment in the back seat, and began to vector me toward the field. Descending to subsonic speeds, we found ourselves over a densely wooded area in a slight haze. Like most former WWII British airfields, the one we were looking for had a small tower and little surrounding infrastructure. Walter told me we were close and that I should be able to see the field, but I saw nothing.

Nothing but trees as far as I could see in the haze. We got a little lower, and I pulled the throttles back from the 325 knots we were at. With the gear up, anything under 275 was just uncomfortable. Walt said we were practically over the field—yet; there was nothing in my windscreen. I banked the jet and started a gentle circling manoeuvre in hopes of picking up anything that looked like a field. Meanwhile, below, the cadet commander had taken the cadets up on the catwalk of the tower in order to get a prime view of the fly-past. It was a quiet, still day with no wind and partial gray overcast.

Walter continued to give me indications that the field should be below us but in the overcast and haze, I couldn't see it. The longer we continued to peer out the window and circle, the slower we got. With our power back, the awaiting cadets heard nothing. I must have had good instructors in my flying career, as something told me I better cross-check the gauges.

As I noticed the airspeed indicator slide below 160 knots, my heart stopped and my adrenalin-filled left hand pushed the two throttles full forward. At this point we weren't really flying, but were falling in a slight bank.

Just at the moment that both afterburners lit with a thunderous roar of flame (and what a joyous feeling that was) the aircraft fell into full view of the shocked observers on the tower.



The SR-71 once deployed at RAF Mildenhall

Shattering the still quiet of that morning, they now had 107 feet of fire-breathing titanium in their face as the plane levelled and accelerated, in full burner, on the tower side of the infield, closer than expected, maintaining what could only be described as some sort of ultimate knife-edge pass. Quickly reaching the field boundary, we proceeded back to Mildenhall without incident. We didn't say a word for those next 14 minutes.

After landing, our commander greeted us, and we were both certain he was reaching for our wings. Instead, he heartily shook our hands and said the commander had told him it was the greatest SR-71 fly-past he had ever seen, especially how we had surprised them with such a precise manoeuvre that could only be described as breathtaking. He said that some of the cadet's hats were blown off and the sight of the plan form of the plane in full afterburner dropping right in front of them was unbelievable. Walt and I both understood the concept of "breathtaking" very well that morning and sheepishly replied that they were just excited to see our low approach.

As we retired to the equipment room to change from space suits to flight suits, we just sat there; we hadn't spoken a word since 'the pass.'

Finally, Walter looked at me and said, "One hundred and fifty-six knots. What did you see?" Trying to find my voice, I stammered, "One hundred and fifty-two."

We sat in silence for a moment. Then Walt said, "Don't ever do that to me again!" And I never did.

A year later, Walter and I were having lunch in the Mildenhall Officer's club, and overheard an officer talking to some cadets about an SR-71 fly-past that he had seen one day. Of course, by now the story included kids falling off the tower and screaming as the heat of the jet singed their eyebrows. Noticing our HABU patches, as we stood there with lunch trays in our hands, he asked us to verify to the cadets that such a thing had occurred. Walt just shook his head and said, "It was probably just a routine low approach; they're pretty impressive in that plane."

Impressive indeed, little did I realize after relaying this experience to my audience that day that it would become one of the most popular and most requested stories.

It's ironic that people are interested in how slow the world's fastest jet can fly.

Lots of Hard Work - the toils of James Harris

James Harris from Newcastle has set himself up for a great deal of work. Not only is he researching the crash of a 7 Sqn Stirling near the garden of a house in Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire, he is researching the life of his uncle, Fred Harris, shot down by a night-fighter during the war too.

He initially contacted me to say that he was looking for someone to tell him more about the landing of Stirlings at night. How the runways were lit, the approach procedures etc. As usual in these cases, I rely heavily on Jim Coman for input and so it was in this case. Jim has been in touch with James and given him some valuable information. By strange coincidence, the pilot Flt Lt Cruickshank had flown Wellingtons in 149 Sqn before moving on to Stirlings and thence to 7 Sqn.



The HABU Patch

James has written to the MOD for permission to excavate at the site, from his application, I enclose the following:-

"During the Second World War my Mother and Aunt were evacuated to Dry Drayton in Cambridgeshire. At 02:30 in the morning of the 3rd of May 1941 Stirling Bomber N6012 (MG-D) crashed when making its final landing approach to Oakington Airfield and came to rest at the bottom of their garden.

I am undertaking research to discover just how far they were from becoming casualties of war (and from my never being born). During this research I have uncovered many interesting facts and human stories which I plan to amalgamate into a documentary.

An important part of this research is to determine the exact location of the crash, while I believe I know the location to within 50 yards, finding positive, physical remains would improve the accuracy of my findings, hence this application."

Six of the seven man crew were killed at the crash-site, the tail-gunner survived for one day in hospital before succumbing to his wounds. Prior to the crash, the crew had featured in a propaganda film "The Lion has Wings" which, with the aid of actors mainly, had depicted a raid on the Kiel Canal. James has begun to make a filmed documentary about the events and I have seen some of the early work. It is quite amazing. Using computer generated images; he has been able to recreate the buildings, land and trees around a 'virtual' picture of the house. Another computer generated image shows the aircraft in its landing approach, wheels down, all with good sound effects.

James tells me the research into the loss of Frederick George Harris, his Uncle, will have to go on hold. Fred was F/E on Halifax JB918 DY-T of 102 Sqn attacking Duisburg on 26/27th April 1943. They were shot-down by Georg Kraft 12 NJG.3 over the Zuiderzee at 04:29. He is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

James also has plans to restore to working order a Link trainer for his local museum.

More news from your Secretary

Mr E J (Ted) Smith a 90 Squadron rear gunner spoke to me from Kent to say he would love to chat with folk about his memories.

He said his only ambition on joining up was to be a rear gunner in a Lancaster at night. Out of the 32 operations that he successfully completed in the last 6 months of 1944, only two were carried out at night! The other 30 were all daytime operations.

If anyone would like to chat about the good old days with Ted, then please contact me and I will gladly put you in touch.



This Photograph is believed to show the crashed aircraft during recovery

A Tale from 'overseas'

A letter from my home, the Isle of Wight, recounts some ground crew memories. Lawrence Kearns, an 'A' flight fitter II (engines) served with 149 Sqn from December 1943 to the end of hostilities in 1945. He was then posted to Germany to work on Spitfires for 2 Sqn which he describes as "quite a great change from the great big Stirlings and Lancasters." He was one of a group of six pals who always kept in touch and attended the reunions each year until one by one their number slowly diminished. As the youngest of the group, he is now the sole survivor.

He clearly remembers getting to fly on one of the Manna operations. "We flew in over the flooded Walcheren Island and were amazed to see people up on their rooftops waving flags at us as we passed overhead. We went even lower over the dropping zone, which was surrounded by great crowds of people waving at us".

He continues "Many of the Dutch and occupied people were much more appreciative of the efforts of Bomber Command than was the case of our own government. I feel the treatment of 'Bomber' Harris and his many officers and men was shameful. But there I must get off my 'box' and close."

That reminds me

In March, I was officially told by the Assistant Defence Attaché to the Netherlands Embassy, London, that my attempts to get further Manna medals for our members who had not received one had been unsuccessful.

Quite a number of you saw the press releases and took up the offer of receiving one of these. Officially, according to Rob van Dijk, these were "not an official Netherlands decoration, but a one off token of gratitude from the National Committee on behalf of the people of the Netherlands to our liberators."

These were issued from 2000 onwards, with the press advertising their existence after an initial 'official' distribution at ceremonies in Holland and this country.

It goes on to say that since the stocks are now depleted, there will not be any further issues.

His letter finishes "Please be assured of the gratitude of the people of the Netherlands to (all) our liberators for the sacrifices made. This will never be forgotten."

That also reminded me

During a number of letter exchanges with Squadron Leader Walter, an air gunner with 622 Squadron, he sent me information that a book was still available about the Manna operations. It is entitled 'Operation Manna/Chowhound: The allied food droppings April/May 1945' by Hans Onderwater. Many of the sources of this are on the Internet, but if anyone would like a copy and have family friends who have access to a computer, it is out there to buy.

Norman arrived at the very end of the war, only completing 4 operations to Germany before the cessation of hostilities. On one of these to Cologne the crew were surprised to look down on the devastated city.

The Last Stirling Operation

Mr Gookey, a W/Op with Derek Jackson crew, July - Dec 1943, first with XV Sqn, then with 622 Squadron after the 'C' flight split, wrote in reply to the article last year 'A dreadful night for Mildenhall'.

Their crew was on the Mannheim raid that saw the loss of 10 Stirlings of the 138 despatched. Six of those had belonged to Mildenhall. The crew also went on the Berlin raid on 22/23rd November 1943. That night just six Stirlings were lost, with just one from 622 Squadron. This was the last raid carried out by a Stirling from Mildenhall. Following this raid, Bomber Command withdrew the Stirling from all bombing duties over mainland Germany.

Searching out their results

At the reunion in May, John Healy, a 90 Squadron mid-upper gunner, thrust a piece of paper into my hands. It was a photocopy of an Operations Record Book pertaining to 90 Squadron at Tuddenham.

It detailed three raids, but the important one for John and his bomb aimer, who had gone to The National Archives in Kew with him, was the attack on Nuremburg on 2nd January 1945. They had obtained the photo-flash image for their load that night too. From his obvious pleasure at being able to do this, I would say the results were rather good.

On a number of visits that I have made to the PRO, as it was, I was amazed at the information stored there and the ease (once you learn a few facts) with which much of it can be looked at and copied. It is a marvellous resource for historians and others with an interest in the past. I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone doing research into family who have served in the forces and for genealogy studies.

Please can you help?

"One night in August, 1944, Sergeant Fry was mid-upper gunner in an aircraft detailed to attack a target in Brunswick. After the target had been successfully bombed, the aircraft was attacked and damaged by an enemy fighter. The rear gunner was killed and Sergeant Fry was seriously wounded in the leg. Although suffering great pain from his injury, this airman remained in his turret and gave his pilot concise directions in order to evade further combat. It was not until base was nearly reached that Sergeant Fry revealed the severity of his wound. Shortly after the aircraft had landed, it was found necessary to amputate his left leg below the knee. His courage, fortitude and devotion to duty were of a high order."

This is the extract from the London Gazette on the award of the D.F.M. to Sergeant Sidney Francis FRY, R.A.F.V.R., 90 Squadron.. I managed to find this for Deborah Fry, Sidney's daughter. Deborah is trying to find anything pertaining to her father. Particularly, she would like photographs of her father, either with his crew or individually. She has been searching for many years, with little success.

Does anyone know him or remember him? Were you a member of his crew or squadron? Can anyone help? If so, please contact the Secretary who will put you in touch with Deborah.

A very strange enquiry

Hi, I am trying to locate my paternal grandfather. All I know about him was that he was an American military chaplain in WW2 based somewhere near to Cambridge. He had Clinton as either a first name or surname. Can you help me please? He fathered my Dad in approx 1944 so was around near to the end of the war. Anna.

Our Secretary comments: I almost didn't get involved with this next one. Surely it was some kind of joke. Just reading the name raised a little chuckle, but there was just something that made me follow it up. I phoned Anna and although we both had a little giggle about the name, it was indeed a serious enquiry. I was hooked as Anna revealed the story. Anna had been adopted as a child, but always had the feeling that her adoptive parents were not her blood parents. As she grew older she set out to find her blood relatives. When I was speaking to her in August, she had located her father, a £10 pom, in Australia and been out to visit him. Although he has Clinton as his middle name, he wasn't inclined to help her in her quest. Following the visit she had found further family and learned a few more snippets of the story. Her grandmother had met Clinton in Cambridge where she lived and worked. Sadly, by the time the child was born, Clinton was gone. Anna bears no ill feelings for these happenings so long ago, but would love to trace this long lost link. As time passes there is less and less likelihood of finding the man, but she hopes to trace relatives, who would also be a part of her family. *If you can help, please contact the Secretary who will put you in touch with Anna.*

A 75 Sqn Lancaster becomes the first to land in occupied France

It was during a raid on France that New Zealander Nick Williamson, a pilot with 75 Sqn inadvertently became the first man to land a Lancaster in occupied France during the war. On 30 June 1944 he took part in a daylight raid by 150 Lancasters on the crossroads at Villers-Bocage in Picardy where German armour was massing to attack. As he approached the target, his Lancaster was hit by flak and the engineer Pat McDevitt was badly injured. The other crewmen could not stem the blood, so after bombing Williamson decided to peel away from the bomber stream and try to land in a makeshift fighter airfield. Despite the narrowness and shortness of the airstrip he brought the plane down successfully and stopped it with a gentle ground loop on a rough area. When Williamson climbed out of the plane he heard a local fighter commander lecturing his pilot to the effect that they should not complain about the strip if a Lancaster could get down they should have no trouble! McDevitt was taken to a field hospital and made a swift recovery. Two days later he was ready to return with Williamson's crew. A large contingent of British troops lined the runway as the Lancaster taxied into position loaded with wine, cognac and captured German souvenirs including a swastika flag and even a Spandau machine-gun!

The Post-war career of John Johnston, ex-radar mechanic, No 149 Sqn.

I always felt that my future career lay somewhere in science. So did the RAF, in that when I volunteered for aircrew in mid-1943 they promptly redirected me into that very secret branch of military science called 'RDF', later renamed 'radar'. While serving with No 149 Squadron I attended the G-H radar school at Feltwell. Getting top marks there may well have been the reason for my winding up in the Bomber Command radar development team of Central Bomber Establishment post war. It was also a good reason for the RAF to keep me

back for two years while everyone else was being de-mobbed 'The exigencies of the service' I didn't get out until late 1947.

I had planned to become a science teacher. But after one year as an 'un-certificated' teacher, I found that the backlog to get into Teachers' Training College was so long that I wouldn't be admitted for another five years. Those two extra years in the RAF had come back to haunt me. As I was married then, and with a family on the way we couldn't continue to live on the meagre salary that I was being paid. So I gave up teaching and wound up in the Esso lab at their oil terminal at Saltend near Hull, testing various petroleum products. I tested the cargos of the ocean-going tankers coming in and the delivery trucks and coastal barges going out. As I was the only lab technician that they had, I'd need to stay at the terminal testing the pipelines from the discharging tankers, which could take as long as 36 hours, until they had fully discharged into the storage tanks. Then the storage tanks needed to be tested. I wound up working up to 80 hours a week for a 40 hour pay, with 6d extra for tea and 1/- for dinner. So I quit and moved on to Smith and Nephew's laboratory where I began to learn what was eventually to be my profession, that of adhesive tapes.

I had my matriculation, but I needed a better education, so studied for my BSc at evening classes which took forever, but I finally succeeded. I was then offered a mere 10/- a week raise, and with a company who wasn't interested in my ideas, I knew that I needed to move on. By chance an advert appeared in the local paper looking for someone with my background and capabilities. It turned out to be Dr Scholl in the USA. I applied for it, spent three days with Dr Scholl in London, and was accepted. So with my wife and now three sons, I emigrated to the USA in early 1959 to start life anew.

I wound up in Dr Scholl's adhesive tape plant in northwest Indiana as a research chemist, fixing problems which some of his products had, and adding new products to the company's adhesive tape line. Within a few years I was made assistant director of research and development, and only six months later, their director of R&D. I was highly ambitious so asked the company president what I had to do to become a vice president! The answer was to keep doing what I was doing, and within three years I was made a VP.

While we all knew how to make adhesive tapes, how and why they worked was still somewhat of a mystery. So during the time that I was with Dr Scholl I would go back to the lab in the evenings and see what I could find out. This resulted in the publishing of my findings in the technical journals, and also the need for me to present them at various technical conferences, helping me to build a professional reputation.

I was also asked for temporary help by Purdue University North Regional Campus when their evening class chemistry teacher was sick. That 'temporary help' teaching first and second year chemistry in the evenings lasted six years

On Dr Scholl's death his company was bought out by an ethical pharmaceutical company who had no interest in industrial tapes. So the tape division was spun off and sold separately. I had climbed as far as I could on the company ladder but I was still very ambitious, looking for bigger and better opportunities. So the next move in 1975 was as technical director for Johnson and Johnson in Chicago. That lasted only two years, as J&J decided to close their Chicago plant down. Once again I moved on, this time to the research lab of Tuck Tape, in



John in Battle Dress

New Rochelle, New York, as their director of research and development. At that time Tuck was the second biggest tape company in the USA, following 3M.

After 12 years once again the company that I worked for was taken over, this time by Beiersdorf in Germany who own Tesa Tape. I was about to retire, but was persuaded to stay on as their Director of Technical Service running my own show, helping Marketing and Sales, solving customer problems, and acting as consultant for research and development, and for manufacturing. Anyone in the country could reach me by dialling 1 800 DOC TESA. The Corporate Headquarters together with R&D was moved to new facilities in Charlotte, North Carolina, and I moved with it where I live today, although I retired at 70.

On retirement I now had the opportunity to work on the notes that I had been collecting for years, much from going over the squadron records at Kew, and with Nick Carter as my mail-box and collaborator in England, put together 'Strong by Night', the history of No 149 Squadron, which was published by Air Britain. I also wrote what is now the textbook of adhesive tape technology, used world-wide, and am five-sixths of the way through writing the story of airborne radar in the RAF in World War II. The



John on the right helps out the mighty 8th

history of WWII aviation is still my primary hobby, and my knowledge of adhesive tapes is still put to good use as a professional consultant, which has taken me across Europe and to New Zealand, China, Japan, Taiwan and Mexico. I also teach the forensics of adhesive tape when found as evidence at the FBI in Quantico, Virginia, and to other forensics conferences, and act as consultant on cases when needed.

So it has been a full life, and I am now known as the Godfather of the US tape industry. But looking back, having given many technical talks to hundreds, and having trained thousands in the art and science of pressure sensitive adhesives, plus my Purdue contribution, I turned out to be a science teacher after all.

I have that feeling that there's still another chapter in my life to write!

What's Up Doc? (A little light humour)

Tony Britton writes: I am sure that most of us will have seen Bugs Bunny popping up from his hole with a carrot in his hand saying 'What's up Doc', well, this is a true story, of an event during the middle 50's, on a Bomber Command Station, flying the English Electric Canberra Aircraft B Mark 1, that is XV Squadron. Have you ever had the feeling that everything is not just quite right, something missing, but you cannot put your finger on it, well read on, and see for yourself: Its Thursday morning, just after 08.00 hrs: the ground crew are arriving at the dispersal. Wimpy Wade with the Squadron tractor moves the generator set near the aircraft, starts it up and plugs it in the aircraft. Sgt Kim (Cats Eyes) Peacock with a clipboard in hand places names of the ground crew who are to service the aircraft against their repective trades, -, engine, airframe, radar, instruments, electricians and armourers, so that the next aircraft to be serviced is not done by the same crew. (This is what Cats eyes means

by time and motion, his new system, so that every crew member has a set number of aircraft to service during the week.)

The aircraft in question has been serviced, the time approx 09.00 am, the aircrew arrive and climb aboard whilst the pilot does his external aircraft checks, then climbs into the cockpit, and straps in. The generator set is already ticking away at the side of the aircraft. The pilot gives the signal, and I point to the port engine. The starter bursts into life thrusting the smell and smoke of the cordite through the exhaust ports as the engine starts to cough into movement and noise. The starboard engine does the same, and so we carry on with the aircraft checks, that is to say, flaps, airbrakes, rudder, and last, bomb doors. Checks complete; the pilot motions "chocks away", I motion to the lads, chocks away, remove the gen. set lead from the aircraft, pull the chocks from under the wheels, I signal the pilot that all is clear and he moves the aircraft onto the concrete perimeter track. I salute, he nods, and off he goes. Just another normal bombing sortie of around three to three and a half hours flying.(or so we thought)

Back at the dispersal, Sgt. Peacock asks Wimpy and I to have early lunch, and return at noon so someone is there to see the aircraft in when it returns. At about 11.00 am Wimp and I are about to knock off a little earlier than normal for early lunch when I see that the aircraft is returning down the runway. Cancel the early lunch, we dash down to the apron to see the aircraft in and turn it round so as it is ready to fly again later.

As the engines stop, it is now that I say to myself "There's something not right, but what is it?" The rest of the lads now arrive to do their service on the

aircraft, as I carry out one engine check whilst Wimpy does the other. The fuel tankers arrives, I climb on to the aircraft, Wimpy passes the hoses to me for the port side, one for the drop tank, the other for the main tank. Next, on to the starboard side, he passes one for the main tank and then the drop tank. I dash to the starboard side of the aircraft to fill the drop tank, climbing over the main fuselage and engine nacelle I slide down on to the wing to fill the tip tank. The idea being that your left leg is hanging over the wing so as to stop you falling off when you reach the drop tank, unfortunately it's not there and I fall on to the grass area. That was it, the drop tank was missing, no wonder there was something wrong, and why I was wondering what it was.

It transpires that during the flight there was a blockage in the line from the drop tank to the main tanks. When the port tank was empty the starboard was still full and the pilot had to struggle to keep the aircraft on an even keel so to speak. So he had only one thing to do and that was to jettison the tank and return to the airfield as soon as he could.

I had a jolt after I left the aircraft, but it lasted only a couple of hours. So that was 'What's up doc'!



A Canberra B Mk 1 with drop tanks!

This story and the one about the SR-71 are included to show that the Register invites membership from the post war era. This includes RAF & USAF personnel & civilians.



The Veterans prepare to sign the 622 Sqn History Book



Bob Kendall and George Thompson XV Sqn present a raffle prize
at the May Reunion



John Gentleman and Smiley Mildwater lay a wreath on Remembrance Sunday by the Plaque at St John's Church Beck Row