

EDITORIAL

First let me wish everybody a very Happy New Year!

Our “Big Day” on September 23rd. was a culmination of work put in by many members to ensure that the aviation history of Martlesham Heath is preserved. We were so pleased to be able to entertain our friends of the 356th Fighter Group Association and past RAF personnel, on a day blessed with glorious weather.

From the opening of the Control Tower Museum in the morning to the Dedication Service of the new stained glass windows in the afternoon it all went without a hitch and Martlesham Brass did a great job to enhance the atmosphere of an enjoyable day.

We can be proud of our Society in the way that it has saved for posterity the prestigious aviation history of Martlesham Heath. Although we say it ourselves, we do a great job!! Of course the weather was perfect. It wouldn't have dared be anything else!

I have included a piece about September 23rd. which Bob Dunnett put in our monthly parish magazine, “Martlesham Monthly”.

Eddie Malo was responsible for organising the contingent from the 356th. Fighter Group and has kindly written an article about their return to Martlesham. They love to come back and we certainly love to have them.

Sid Hewett, accompanied by his wife Doris, was one of those who returned in September. Back in 1994 Sid had related to the late Charles (Holly) Hall, his experiences as a P47 pilot whilst based here. The article was published in “Wingspan” and Vicky Hall has kindly let me reproduce it here. I am sure Sid will forgive me!

ED

RETURN TO ENGLAND 2000

Some 30 former veterans and their families who served at Martlesham Heath during World War-11 returned during the week of Sept.18th, 2000. We came to celebrate the dedication of the stained glass windows in the Church of St. Michael's & All Angels and the opening of the Control Tower Museum on the former Martlesham Heath Airdrome.

It was a very busy week starting at Gatwick Airport, London where we were greeted by some MHAS members who were waiting to take us to our hotel by coach. That evening we had our first meeting and members of the Martlesham Heath Aviation Society outlined the plans for the rest of the week.

Tuesday morning we were taken to have an advanced view of the new Control Tower Museum. To say that we were surprised at the great work that had been done on the Museum and the many great displays of the history of the Martlesham Heath Airdrome and those that served on the airfield is an understatement. We were overwhelmed! We then went to see the twin War Memorials dedicated to the personnel of the Royal Air Force and the members

of the 356th Fighter Group who were killed while serving at Martlesham Heath. That evening we were treated to the usual fare that we had grown accustomed to during WW-II. - Fish and Chips in Felixstowe!

The next day we had a bus tour of the Suffolk countryside and that evening live entertainment by the Melody Makers led by Don Kitt of Martlesham Heath Aviation Society.

Thursday Sept. 22, we made a memorial visit to the American Cemetery in Cambridge. The superintendent of the cemetery had displayed an American and British flag at the gravesite of every member of the 356th Fighter Group buried in the cemetery. Also, while at the altar, the Star Spangled Banner, volley of gunfire and taps were played. We then journeyed to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford and spent the rest of the day viewing War Birds and the American Air Museum.

Friday was a more relaxed day when we visited a medieval cathedral at Ely in the morning and then rested in the afternoon as our visit to RAF Mildenhall was cancelled due to a US Air Force unit on the base going on an alert. Friday evening we enjoyed a banquet at our hotel along with about 40 RAF personnel who had been stationed at Martlesham Heath at sometime in their career, along with members of the Martlesham Heath Aviation Society and many other dignitaries.

The banquet was hosted by the Ipswich “Evening Star” newspaper and the editor, of the newspaper presented each family attending the reunion a medallion in honour of the Martlesham Heath Aviation Society 2000 reunion. The Evening Star also ran newspaper articles every night during our reunion about the history of the Martlesham Heath Airdrome and the wartime activities of the 356th Fighter Group and the Royal Air Force.

Saturday was the biggest day of the reunion with the cutting of the ribbon during the formal opening of the Control Tower Museum in the morning attended by some 300 people and the viewing of the archives on display in the Museum. In the afternoon we attended the Dedication Service of the stained glass windows in the Church of St. Michael and All Angels, in memory of all who gave their lives or served at Martlesham Heath from 1917 until 1963. After the dedication we adjourned to the Douglas Bader pub for lunch and to watch a flyby of a P-51 Mustang and view numerous World War-11 vehicles privately owned. Finally we attended another banquet with Martlesham Heath Aviation Society people, former RAF personnel and the 356th Fighter Group visitors. We were each presented with a beautiful Norfolk China cup with a RAF emblem on one side and an 8th AF 356th Fighter Group emblem on the other side. Part of the inscription on the Cup States that: *"Take these men as your example Remember that posterity can only be for the free That freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it"*

I am sure I speak for all your friends from the 356th Fighter Group, who came to this reunion, when I say THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts for a wonderful reunion. We want to especially thank Bob Dunnett and all the members, who are too numerous to mention, of the Martlesham Heath Aviation Society. Also a thank you goes to the Ipswich Evening Star for the wonderful banquet, the newspaper articles and the beautiful medallion.

Finally, lets me express our sincere thanks to all the people in England for the wonderful manner in which we are greeted when they learn that we are veterans of World War-II.

Ed Malo

September 23rd 2000 " Oh what a wonderful Day."

Well, what a memorable day September 23rd 2000 turned out to be. Beautiful weather, our American 356th Fighter Group and Ex R A F Martlesham Heath friends were there, plus of course our own members and many, many visitors. We were also pleased to welcome Lady Bader, Air Marshall Sir Ivor and Lady Broom joined by Air Vice Marshall Sandy Johnston, with 356th guests Maj. Gen. Don Strait, Major Eddie Malo and Capt. Bob Barnhart who all took part with our President, Mr Gordon Kinsey in the opening of our Control Tower Museum and it all took place without a hitch. I would like to thank Martlesham Brass who played 1940's and 50's music during the opening as well as playing hymns in St. Michael's and All Angels church for the dedication of the stained glass windows in the afternoon. Also a big thank you to the Ipswich and Felixstowe ATC who came along and helped the day go smoothly, their C.O. should be justly proud of them all. Grateful thanks also to the people who came with their WWII military vehicles, also to Lee Rofix for bringing his Scout helicopter in, giving it an active feeling. We must also thank Robert Davies from Kent, for the loan of his P51 Mustang, which gave us a splendid arial display. Our local BBC Radio and also our Evening Star newspaper also gave us support. To date we have had about 1300 visitors to the museum; more than we had anticipated and are very pleased indeed. We have had our first group bookings, the first being Woodbridge RAFA and the second, 140 children from Gorseland School, Deben Avenue, Martlesham. The school has made provisional bookings for 2001.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to our Museum in so many ways, whether by donating anything from brass buttons to creating wonderful models or by coming along and helping. A special thank you to the Wednesday Morning boys and girls, every week for months we have met to work inside and out, sometimes working three days in a week. With out such great team effort we would not have a little piece of history to hand on to the younger generation. Yes, September 23rd 2000 was truly a "Wonderful Day" for all of us at Martlesham Heath Aviation Society.

Bob Dunnett.

OBOE

During 1940 we became aware that the Germans were using a system of radio beams to home in on targets in England. This system was known as Knickebein (crooked leg) and consisted of two parallel beams. One transmitted Morse code dots while the other transmitted dashes. Thus a corridor to the target was formed. Other ingenious devices were tried, including something known as X-Gerat, which employed radar as well as radio beams. Ominously the X indicated that a system, which marked the actual target, was being attempted. How we so successfully countered the German systems is related in the fascinating book by Prof. RV Jones, "Most Secret War" which, incidentally, is available from our little library in the Control Tower.

The accuracy of our all-weather bombing at night left a lot to be desired. The Germans had been able to pinpoint English cities from the outset of the war with their own electronic systems, whereas we often dropped our bombs literally miles from the target. However, the ultimate precise bombing system of the war was surely Oboe. An aircraft flew in an arc at a constant range from one station (called Cat), by sending out pulses from the ground, which the aircraft would pick up and amplify and then return to the ground station. The range of the aircraft was calculated from the time it took the pulses to return. A second transmitter (called Mouse), located in another part of England signalled the aircraft as it passed a number of "milestones" on the way. All the variables, such as height and speed, wind conditions and bomb "trail" were calculated by the Mouse computer, (aptly named Migestro!). The system was so accurate that specific targets, such as factories, could be pinpointed by a release order from a station in England. Initially the Germans were convinced that a radio beacon was being transmitted from the target area by allied agents.

The system was installed in Mosquitoes, against which the enemy had no answer and because we had developed the Cavity Magnetron, the centimetric wavelengths used could not be countered. The Mosquito flew at a height of about 30000ft and dropped a pyrotechnic marker and in this way act as a pathfinder for the actual pathfinders. Oboe operated on a transmission of pulses and there was therefore no beam as such and the enemy were unable to jam the system as we had been able to do to their beam.

We entered the Second World War in a state of complete unreadiness and the aircraft and equipment at our disposal were woefully inadequate to say the least. That we subsequently achieved what we did in so short a time was extraordinary. The Cavity Magnetron was the greatest British contribution to the development of Radar and its secrets were delivered to the Americans by the Tizard mission in 1940. From then on American expertise and manufacturing capability also advanced the new science considerably. However, this is not to detract from the brilliance of our boffins and our innovative expertise. After all, who first split the atom? Just down the road at Cambridge.....

Alan Powell

Mr Noel Langdon lives at Woodbridge and as Lieutenant Langdon, RNVR, he was a Walrus pilot with 277 (ASR) Squadron at Martlesham. In the March, 2000 edition of "Runway 22" I related an incident which involved Noel Langdon's Walrus, when he picked up the crew of a ditched Halifax and taxied home. Noel sent me a cartoon, dated August 1943, which was published in "Tatler" magazine. Maybe it relates a similar incident!

ED



CLARKIE GOES TO WAR (As related to Charles (Holly) Hall)

"My first assignment was to Maxwell Field in Alabama for six weeks initial training. We learned to fly in Stearman PT-17s, Vultee BT-14s and AT-6 Texans culminating in P-40s for advanced training. The 356th Fighter Group was forming at Westover Field in 1943, and we became the first pilots to join the new group, flying P-47 Thunderbolts." The 356th comprised three squadrons, the 359th, 360th and 361st.

"Our aircraft were delivered by sea to the UK while we travelled in the troopship Orion, arriving at Glasgow in August 1943. From there we continued to Goxhill near Hull where our fighters were awaiting collection and delivery to our operating base at Martlesham Heath in Suffolk. I was allocated P-47D-GRE, serial number 42-74702 with the squadron letters QI - F of the 361st."

At this time, the Thunderbolts were of the early razorback type and painted in olive drab with US star and bar markings on the fuselage, above the port wing and below the starboard. It soon became apparent that there was likely to be confusion between the radial engine P-47 and the similar Fw 190, so the Americans painted the front of their cowlings white, with white bars across wings and tail units.

Many of the fighters were adorned with names and illustrations. "Mine was named after the girl I left behind in the States, Doris Clark . . . And so it was that Clarkie came with me and brought me luck. Before I left for England, Doris had given me a tiny check shirt on a hanger, as a memento. This was always hung in the cockpit whenever I flew." I asked Sid if he could remember the first time that he engaged an enemy aircraft. "It was in January 1944, with Lt David Thwaites as my wingman, returning from an escort mission, that we saw a Ju 88 away down below, somewhere near Cambrai. With permission to break formation, we dived on the bomber at something like 250 to 300 kts. Of course I opened fire much too early in my eagerness. but closing in, a long burst hit the 88 and one engine caught fire. Dave also had a go at him. No chutes were seen, but we saw the aircraft crash into the ground. Camera-gun films confirmed our success and we were both credited with half a Ju 88."

Three weeks later, on 13 February, Sid Hewett was engaged in a sweep into France, led by Lt Col Coen, when they were bounced by a mixed group of 109s and 190s near Chartres. In the fight that followed, pilots claimed five enemy aircraft destroyed without loss to themselves. "It was like a rat-race, with fighters milling about all around. One 190 appeared in front, long enough for me to fire off a burst. My hits were sufficient to destroy it although I was too busy to watch it go down. I was also credited with two more 190s damaged in this scrap."

I asked about the capabilities of the P-47 in combat and was told that it could not turn inside the Fw 190 but could usually out-manoeuvre any adversary. Knowing that the Thunderbolt was renowned for being a lot of heavy metal. I invited comments on this subject. Sid recalled an intentional split-S dive from around 18000ft "I remember seeing 460 kts indicated. But you have to understand that, when corrected for altitude. this gives a speed of 680 kts . . ."

During a bombing attack by B-17's on Berlin on 6 March, another 109 was added to his score. A month later. The 356th Fighter Group escorted bombers to Brunswick but no enemy fighters were encountered. "We went down to search for ground targets and arrived over Gifhorn airfield, where we found aircraft lined up in rows, just asking for trouble. The whole of the 361st joined in the

attack, coming in low, one behind the other, each making three passes. We could see the Germans running everywhere, trying to escape. By the time we were through, it seemed that every enemy aircraft on that airfield had been destroyed." Sid was credited with the destruction of two Ju 88's plus a shared 190 and a Ju 52, although his friend Ernie Parham was brought down by ground flak.

However, luck eventually ran out for Lt, (now Capt.) Hewett , on 4 May 1944, after 166 hours of combat flying. "It was about 10.30 to 1100 am, on the way back, near to Steinhuder Lake . . . we were bounced from above and behind. There were about 15 of them, long-nosed 190's with yellow noses and our group numbered about the same. They opened fire on the way down and one shell exploded on my canopy, showering me with perspex fragments. A second hit the wing root on the right side sending splinters across the fuselage and injuring my left leg. I guessed that others had probably entered the engine cowling through the gills. We were at 18,000 ft and although the Pratt & Whitney continued to run, oil pressure was rapidly falling. My canopy had been jammed by the explosion and it looked impossible to get out through the small breakout panel while wearing a parachute. The engine soon stopped but the aircraft continued to fly reasonably under control despite the steep dive. A small wood of pine trees appeared ahead with open ground beyond... this was one time when the big, bulky P-47 was definitely to be preferred rather than the lighter P-51 with its underslung radiator. Braced for the impact, I felt the first contact with the treetops as we cut a swathe through them, which cushioned the descent. Emerging from the wood, the aircraft slithered to a halt in a small wheat field. The wings stayed on and there was no fire. Without a parachute it was possible to vacate the cockpit, but in my haste I forgot to release my oxygen tube and radio connection. This prevented me from reaching the ground and left me hanging upside down from the cockpit. Two victorious 190s made a low pass but fortunately did not open fire – no doubt thinking that I was a gonner. Although my leg was quite badly injured, four times I went back to my aircraft, after the crash. First to switch off the fuel, second to try to set it on fire, third to acquire the escape pack from the parachute and finally, to retrieve my lucky mascot, the little check shirt. To this day, it remains one of my most treasured possessions."

Footnote: A kind, elderly German lady wrapped his leg in a sheet and later he was taken to the town jail at Diepholz, to the west of Hanover. On 29 April 1945, he was released from prison camp, flown back to France in a Dak, and then shipped back to New York, without returning to Martlesham Heath.

OLD AIRFIELD

*I lie here still beside the hill,
Abandoned long to nature's will,
My buildings down, my people gone,
My only sounds, the wild bird's song.*

*But MY mighty birds will rise no more,
No more I hear the Merlin's roar,
And never now my bosom feels,
The pounding of their giant wheels.*

*From the ageless hill their voices cast,
Thunderous echoes from the past,
And still in lonely reverie,
Their great dark wings sweep down to me.*

*Laughter, sorrow, hope and pain,
I shall never know these things again,
Emotions that I came to know,
Of strange young men – so long ago.*

*Who knows, as evening shadows meet,
Are they still with me – a phantom fleet,
And do my ghosts still stride unseen,
Across my face, so wide and green.*

*And in the future, should structures tall,
Bury me beyond recall,
I shall remember them,
My metal birds and long dead men.
Now weeds grow high – obscure the sky,
Oh, remember me when you pass by,
For beneath this tangled, leafy screen,
I was your home – your friend, "Silksheen"*

Walter Scott – ex 630 Squadron RAF

VISIT TO RAF COLTISHALL

On 12th. October our party of 46 members and friends visited this Norfolk aerodrome. Our excellent guide was W/O Mick Jennings who first of all took us to a building where his team are currently restoring the cockpit sections of an English Electric Lightning and a Phantom. Mick, who is very keen on preserving RAF history, travels the country to locate the various genuine parts needed to restore cockpits to their original condition.

We then walked through the two maintenance hangars where several Jaguars were undergoing repair and routine maintenance. The work being done on each aircraft was explained to us. Close liaison with the manufacturers ensures that correct procedure is followed. One of the main problems is bird strike and two examples were shown to us illustrating the major damage they can cause

After this we visited the “pan” with the intention of taking a few photos. Unfortunately only two aircraft were available. The others being away on detachment or exercise. However, we were lucky in that while there a flight of six Jaguars landed and taxied by our position.

Time did not permit the last item on Mick Jenning’s itinerary, which was to have been a slide presentation on the history of RAF Colishall. Mick has promised, however, to visit us at one of our monthly meetings and present his illustrated talk here at Martlesham. Incidentally, he has written a very good booklet on the subject and many of these were sold on the coach.

All told, an excellent afternoon which was thoroughly enjoyed by those of us lucky enough to be able to attend.

Russell Bailey

MONTHLY MEETINGS ROUNDUP

September and the speaker, who came all the way from Bristol, was Mr. Edwin Shackleton. Edwin has been an air show commentator but his particular claim to fame is that he is recorded in the Guinness Book of Records as the person who has flown in the greatest number of different aircraft types. In fact no fewer than 714 different types!! It was a talk illustrated by slides of many of the aircraft that he has flown in. A Harrier jump-jet is unlikely to be added to his score. Age prevents him from being allowed to fly in a ‘plane fitted with an ejector seat.

Mr. Graham Symonds visited us all the way from Peterborough for our October meeting. Graham gave a talk entitled “Aviation Humour in Publishing”. He was a founder member of the original Duxford War Museum and also owns his own company, “GMS Publishing”. He was once a member of a team who purchased an insurance write-off De Havilland Rapide. They managed to get it flying again and Graham wrote a book about the rebuild and about the De Havilland Rapide. It was this that sparked an interest in writing and resulted subsequently in his own publishing company.

November, and our own talented member, Geoff. Pleasance, gave a most interesting talk about his 29 years as an artist. His work is mostly as an aviation artist and he works in acrylics, gauche and pen and ink. He is currently providing aircraft illustrations in a children’s book and another one has recently been finished which contains illustrations of ships. An artist who produces technical drawings by freehand (if that is not a contradiction in terms – and it probably is!). A very special talent.

December and the occasion of our Christmas Social. This year Don Kitt and his “Melody Makers” entertained us with a medley of songs from the shows, such as “White Christmas”, followed by a sing-along with carols. The “Melody Makers” give small concerts in aid of Ipswich Holiday Help for Children, which Don founded with his late wife, Maureen.

ED