

EDITORIAL

I have been unable to be present on any of the visits that Russell Bailey has organised this year but Russell has kindly done a report on each one so those of us who missed out can read all about it. Tony Errington has reported on a very successful visit to RAF Lakenheath and has also compiled a short history of that Station.

An obituary for one of our keenest and most helpful members who died earlier this year. Mike Richards was well known to all of us and will be sorely missed. The parish magazine for Martlesham for the month of May carried a picture of the Armstrong Whitworth Ensign airliner landing at Martlesham in 1939. The editor of the Martlesham Monthly was sent details of the history of this aeroplane and has kindly sent them to me for inclusion in to our Newsletter. I always try to include a piece about the wartime history of RAF Martlesham Heath but apart from the gentleman's name I don't have any further details about him.

I intended to include a small article about a rather desperate scheme to obtain details of the German Enigma cipher by someone whose name we would all eventually recognise. However, the whole story about intelligence and counter-intelligence is such a fascinating aspect of WW2 that I got rather "carried away" and I just had to elaborate!

As usual a touch of humour to add to the mix. Hope you enjoy reading this issue.

ED

ARMSTRONG WHITWORTH ENSIGN G-ADSW

The aircraft shown landing at Martlesham was the sixth Ensign off the Coventry production line and was given the name, "*Eddystone*" and flew for the first time in April 1939. The aircraft was delivered to the Aeroplane and Armaments Experimental Establishment at Martlesham Heath at the end of that month. It was to undergo the usual programme of tests and to evaluate the Tiger IXC engines with which she was fitted. The tests showed that she was longitudinally unstable, which resulted in amendments to the airworthiness certificate.

Eddystone was delivered to Imperial Airways in August 1939. However, with the outbreak of the war the Ensign class was taken over by the Air Ministry and *Eddystone*, along with other Ensigns, was flown to Bagington, Coventry – her birthplace, and then to Whitchurch near Reading. All Ensigns were then transferred to the newly formed British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), in November 1939.

It was recognised the class was under-powered and in line with the other aircraft, *Eddystone* was re-engined with American Wright Cyclone engines of 1,000-hp during the summer of 1940 for service as war transport aircraft.

The Ensigns flew mainly in the Middle East and the European theatres, where they gave good service and were never involved in a fatal accident. Ironically, *Eddystone* was the last of the class in operational service. Following a wheels-up landing at Castel Benito, Libya, she was repaired and flown back to Britain in June 1946 and scrapped at Hamble.



"Eddy" of the Ensign class landing at Martlesham in 1939. The Black Tiles is on the right of the picture and hidden behind the trees.

OPEN DAY – 14TH SEPTEMBER 2003

Once again Bob Dunnett has thrown his considerable enthusiasm into organising another "Fun Day" and we hope y'all will come along and enjoy it. There will be a display by a Spitfire of the "Battle of Britain Memorial Flight" and we are pleased that we have once again obtained the promise of an aerobatic display by the Yak 52 that many on the Heath saw last year. The two Boeing Stearman biplanes will also again be overhead and maybe we will have other light aircraft over to "give us a look".

Come and have a really enjoyable day. Judging by our previous efforts the atmosphere will be great and we are sure that everyone will have a good time. Look over the Control Tower Museum and enjoy the static military vehicle and vintage cars as well as the many stalls and refreshment facilities that will be present.

Volunteers to give maybe a couple of hours on the stalls are urgently needed.

A visitor to our museum contacted a friend of his in New Zealand who he knew was a fighter pilot, to ask him if he had ever flown into Martlesham. This was his reply. ED

VISITOR TO “THE HEATH”

I only landed at RAF Martlesham Heath on two occasions. My first operational trip on 18th December 1941 terminated at Martlesham!

I was with 485 Squadron, stationed at RAF Kenley and the operation was to cover minesweepers in the English Channel. The Spitfire V only had a flying duration of 1.5 hours and as we did not have sufficient fuel to return to base, we were directed to Martlesham Heath.

The weather was appalling but the Flight Commander instructed our flight of four aircraft to land in formation!

It must be appreciated that at that time I was inexperienced with few flying hours in Spitfires. I came in to land at a higher speed than specified because I was the outside aircraft of the formation and when I actually landed I did not have sufficient space to stop before the boundary fence. Furthermore, I was heading for a petrol tanker refuelling several aircraft. A collision seemed inevitable and the result would have been conflagration.

Luck was with me that day. The aerodrome had been bombed the previous night and my ‘plane ended its life when it went into a bomb crater! The undercarriage collapsed, resulting in one badly damaged Spitfire – and my survival!

The second occasion I landed at Martlesham was August 2nd 1942. I was still with 485 Squadron which was now based at RAF Kingscliffe. A satellite of RAF Wittering.

The operation that day was a “Rhubarb”, which was a low level operation carried out when the cloud base was low and involved searching for and damaging by gunfire, ground targets such as trains, barges, etc.

On this day I led our flight of four Spitfires across the Channel at very low level to avoid German radar and, as planned, we reached the Belgian coast and I led my No.2, crossing the south coast below Ostend and my No.3 led his No.2 north of Ostend.

I shot up a locomotive and west of Bruges, shot up a number of barges. My No.2 was inexperienced, having flown few operations and he did not follow the golden rule of keeping on my starboard side. In order to check if he was OK I turned my aircraft. In doing so I gained height enabling the German guns to line me up.

I was hit by a 40mm shell which eliminated my rudder and shattered my port tailplane. Shrapnel peppered the mainframe and broke my cockpit hood but did not damage the engine. I reacted automatically and managed to avoid hitting the ground and gained partial control of the aircraft, which was behaving

sluggishly. My speed was reduced and I was a “sitting duck” for enemy aircraft and flak.

I managed to fly out south of Ostend without further incident and then had 100 miles or so of sea ahead of me to Martlesham Heath, which was the nearest RAF aerodrome.

Again my No2, through inexperience, panicked and instead of escorting me, disappeared in a southerly direction.

The damage to my tailplane and rudder created difficulty in climbing and in the 100 miles I only gained 4000 ft.

My reception at Martlesham was expensive, with fire engines and an ambulance and although I did expect to crash land I actually landed quite normally with my wheels down. The aircraft was a complete “write off!”

In essence, my wartime visits to Martlesham Heath were traumatic but good fortune was on my side.

Doug Brown.

VISIT TO RAF LAKENHEATH.

At 11-00 hrs. On Tuesday, 6th May our coach, containing over forty members including friends pulled up at the Security Point of Lakenheath USAF Air Base. We were paying a return visit, the last being on the 7th September 1999. Technical Sergeant Claudette Hutchinson climbed aboard the coach and welcomed us. She started by apologetically telling us that we were the first group that she had taken on a guided tour around the Base. We commenced the tour by taking a "windshield tour around the accommodation area, i.e. the blocks of flats where single airmen lived and the bungalows for the married couples. From there, we viewed from the outside, the very extensive facilities, hospital, sports centre, cinema, theatre and the shops and clubs.

Around 11.45 we entered the Liberty Club and enjoyed a very fine "serve yourself" lunch. All the food is airlifted in from the States. After coffee we were then taken in the coach, to the Control Areas, including Security, Administration, and Maintenance.

On our last visit we visited the Control Tower and the-underground Control Room, these two very important facilities were apparently "off-limits" on this occasion. However the next items on the agenda certainly made-up for any disappointment. We disembarked from the coach to enter one of the Hardened Aircraft Shelters and waiting to greet us alongside one of the F-15 Strike Eagle Fighters were the Pilot and Weapons Systems Operator who gave us a very absorbing talk on their training and then answered many of the questions from their very enthusiastic audience. Walking out of the H.A.S. we were greeted by the sight and certainly the sound of F-15's approaching along the perimeter track, passing our group standing about 20ft from the wing-tips. The aircraft passed through two very wide security gates on to the warm-up pad and began

taking off, at first in singles and then in doubles followed by three and four at a time. Fortunately earplugs had been provided but many of our group were seen covering their ears as well. The concrete on which we were standing vibrated and it was certainly an awesome experience to be so close. It was almost as though Lakenheath had put on an Air-Show for our benefit. The aircraft circled around, occasionally coming down for a touch and go. With great reluctance at around 16.00 hrs. We boarded the coach and returned to the Liberty Club for tea or coffee and cakes. An hour later we left the Club and everyone in turn shook the hand of our guide, Claudette and a very enthusiastic vote of thanks took place in the coach before we left the Base. I know I express the thanks and gratitude of all who were fortunate enough to be on the trip. To Tarkey, (It's not what you know, it's who you know) Barker for the arrangements, and Russell (Travel Agent) Bailey for organising the outing.

Tony Errington

VISIT TO KELVEDON HATCH AND NORTH WEALD

On 5th July 29 of our members visited the secret cold war bunker at Kelvedon Hatch and were amazed at the facilities provided there. The whole complex was on three levels and built into a hillside in remote Essex countryside.

Its original purpose was as an RAF Control Centre in the event of a nuclear attack but its main role became the HQ for Government and other military commanders who would have run the region after such an attack. It could have supported 600 personnel for up to three months, with all the necessities. Food, water, filtered ventilation etc. There was even an operating theatre and hospital ward. Communications with the outside world would have been by underground landline or radio and the BBC also had a studio there.

The complex was built in 1952 in great secrecy using 40,000 tons of concrete encase all within protective walls 10ft thick. Despite the tremendous amount of work involved and installing all the necessary equipment, it was operating within seven months.

Approach to the site was originally by a farm track and entrance was through what seemed to be an unobtrusive bungalow set among the trees. A 100yds of underground passageway led to huge blast proof steel doors protecting the inner complex.

We spent 2.5 hours there and it was a sobering thought to realise how serious the situation was then deemed to be that such a building was considered necessary.

After lunch we continued to North Weald where we visited the Airfield Museum situated in the former Station Office. Here was depicted the history of this famous airfield which was opened in 1916, a year earlier than Martlesham Heath.

Of course, the Battle of Britain featured prominently as this was one of the main Stations during that period. It was also the home of 331 and 332 Squadrons of the RAF, which were manned by members of the Royal Norwegian Air Force until 1945. Near to the Museum there is a memorial dedicated to them and others who died whilst serving here. 71 and 121 RAF Squadrons were also here during 1941/2. They were the American Eagle Squadrons. Together with other squadrons based at North Weald they often visited Martlesham Heath.

Before closure in 1964 the airfield was used by early jets such as Meteors and Vampires and was the home of the "Black Arrows", who flew Hunters and were the forerunners of the "Red Arrows".

North Weald remains a live aerodrome used by several civil operators, one of which was our next call, "Aces High". This company is renowned for its provision of aircraft for various films including the James Bond epics. The hangar doors were opened to allow us to see the aeroplanes but photographs were not allowed! The Company is rather sensitive to pictures of aircraft which may be earmarked for future films. There were two DC4's outside and photos could be taken of these. They are to be used in a forthcoming film about the Berlin Airlift.

We then called at the squadron, where refreshments were most welcome and then walked along the flight lines to see more aircraft, including a static T-33 in "Skyblazers" aerobatic team livery.

All in all a most satisfactory and enjoyable day out.

Russell Bailey.

THE ULTRA SECRET

Our success in breaking the Enigma cipher has been well documented in several books on the subject. The failure to read the German naval version Enigma until well into the war had proved costly in terms of shipping and lives. The success of the U-boat packs roaming the North Atlantic sea routes between North America and Britain almost brought us to our knees.

The Poles had managed to obtain the Enigma typewriter-like machine which was used to encrypt and decrypt messages and they had done valuable work in cracking the system. The Germans were, of course, constantly refining the system and it became an enormous battle of wits to continue to read the signals. We were desperate to obtain anything that would help us decipher enigma messages.

In the autumn of 1940 an assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence offered a cunning plan. This officer suggested that an airworthy German 'plane be obtained from the Air Ministry. A tough crew of five, including a fluent German-speaking member should be dressed in Luftwaffe uniforms. They should "pancake" the aircraft on to the sea after making a plain language SOS transmission. Once aboard the rescue boat they would overpower the crew and

return to an English port, hopefully complete with up to date Enigma codebooks etc. The operation, which was code-named "Operation Ruthless" was eventually abandoned because no suitable potential German rescue boats operating at night could be found.

The name of the young officer with the fertile imagination? None other than Fleming, who as Ian Fleming was to become the author of the James Bond novels and "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang!"

Then came a period during which we started to have some success with reading the German Naval Enigma and during the second half of 1941 U-boats patrolled the Atlantic, sometimes for weeks at a time without sighting our vital convoys. Monthly tonnage sunk fell below 100,000 tons for the first time since June 1940. This, despite the fact that the number of U-boats had increased by 50% since the start of the war. This was partly due to our successful reading of the signals and being able to route our convoys around the "Wolf Packs", as the Germans called them. Another reason at this time was the need for the enemy to deploy more submarines in the Mediterranean to try to reduce German losses of ships supplying Rommel's forces in North Africa.

The situation changed when the Enigma machines were supplied with extra rotors and once again our merchant ships were at the mercy of the U-Boats. The Americans were now in the war with us and the recent American film which portrayed the capture of a German submarine with the missing rotors on board was one of a number of intercepts of that sort which eventually led to us once again reading the Enigma signals. It was actually a British navy ship which had captured the rotors but it made for a good yarn and clearly made for the American home market. Proper recognition of the true facts and the name of the Royal Navy ship was shown in the credits at the end of the film.

As late as March 1943 the Germans were sinking ships at twice the rate the allies could build them. But the Battle of the Atlantic was soon to draw to a close. The Enigma was being read and read almost as soon as it was received at our intelligence headquarters at Bletchley Park. Longer-range aircraft and a lot more of them were patrolling the seas. In only the next month (of April 1943), the Germans sank 12 merchant vessels, but at a cost to them of 7 U-boats.

Then Churchill was able to announce to the House of Commons in September that no merchant vessels had been sunk during the four preceding months. The bloody Battle of the Atlantic had been won and Donitz had been forced to withdraw his U-boats from the North Atlantic down to the Azores.

Admiral Donitz, who commanded the U-boats in the Atlantic and whose son had lost his life in a U-boat, had suspected for a long time that we were reading the Enigma signals but always he was persuaded that other factors were responsible for unexplained Allied success in avoiding the Wolf Packs.

A British Lancaster bomber had crashed at Rotterdam and the discovery on board of a new type of Radar gave credence to the theory that we were able to "see" U-boats without them being able to spot us. The Cavity Magnetron

revolutionised airborne Radar and the very short wavelengths employed enabled objects such as U-boats to be detected from a distance from which the enemy would be unaware of us. Additionally they had no reason to tune their receivers to the ultra short wavelengths that we employed and were therefore for a time, were entirely ignorant of our success.

Many reasons such as this were offered and it remains a fact that throughout the war the Germans never felt that their "invincible" Enigma was being broken. Of course the enemy had success in reading our signals and this often proved very costly but at least we were under no illusion that our system was unbeatable. Churchill knew how vital it was that the enemy should remain unaware of our knowledge of Enigma and insisted that whenever possible another explanation for our intelligence should act as a "cover". The RAF patrols over the Mediterranean during the North African campaign were often flown in order to convince the Germans that our sightings were the reason for our intelligence. In fact we often knew beforehand of the movements of the enemy because of the Luftwaffe Enigma signals we had deciphered.

The very existence of our knowledge of Enigma was kept secret for 29 years after the end of the war until it was finally revealed in a book by FW Winterbotham entitled, "The Ultra Secret".

Alan Powell

VISIT TO THE 93RD BOMB GROUP MUSEUM, HARDWICK.

Our annual evening outing this year was on Friday, 1st August, when 55 members visited the museum. The exhibits are displayed in 3 Nissen huts and were collected by a small group of keen volunteers. One hut is dedicated to the Eighth Air Force and includes many artefacts and pieces of aircraft recovered from various digs in the area.

The RAF is commemorated in the second hut, together with the American 93rd Bomb Group, who were based here from December '42 to June '45, flying various marks of B24 Liberators. They were the oldest B24 Group in the Eighth Air Force and flew more missions than any other Bomb Group in the USAAF.

Although never based at this airfield, the third hut depicts the history of the 489th Bomb Group, who also flew B24's, but from their base at Halesworth.

For all those who were unable to accompany us on this evening a visit to the museum is to be recommended. It is open on the 3rd Sunday of each month from May to October. 10am to 5pm. You may even be treated to a flypast by Maurice Hammond in his P51!

This aircraft is based a short distance away on the airfield together with other 'planes he owns. We had arranged for the hangar to be opened and were very grateful to Maurice for allowing us free access. Our members were most impressed with the immaculate condition of all the aircraft, which apart from the P51, included a T6 Texan, (Harvard, to us!), an Auster AOP, Cessna 172

and a Lazer 200. Of course, pride of place goes to the P51, which is superbly finished in the livery of the 353rd FG, which was based at Raydon, near Ipswich in 1944.

Although this particular aircraft passed through several owners it was originally delivered to the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1945. Maurice made a special visit to the USA in 1997 and chose this airframe for restoration. After nearly five years of meticulous work it was complete and the aircraft is now a regular performer at air shows, both here and abroad. There is a very good article about this P51 in the August issue of "Flypast".

To complete the evening we journeyed to the nearby "Queens Head" at Hempsall to enjoy a splendid buffet. (chips with everything!).

Russell Bailey

AIRLINE QUIPS

Airline Attendant during safety demonstration: "There may be fifty ways to leave your lover, but there are only four ways out of this airplane".

Loudspeaker announcement after landing: "Thank you for flying Business Express. We hope you enjoyed giving us the business as much as we enjoyed taking you for a ride".

Stewardess: "Your seat cushions can be used for flotation. In an emergency water landing, please take one with our compliments".

Stewardess: "As you exit, please make sure to gather your belongings. Anything left behind will be evenly distributed among the attendants. Please do not leave children or spouses".

Pilot: "We are pleased to have some of the best flight attendants in the industry...sadly none of them are on this flight".

Pilot heard over loudspeaker during touchdown: "Whoa, big fella, WHOA!".

Steward: "We'd like to thank you folks for flying with us today. And the next time you get the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurized metal tube, we hope you'll think of us".

R.A.F.LAKENHEATH - A BRIEF HISTORY

In the summer of 1941 construction was completed of a satellite airfield for Mildenhall and named after the local village of Lakenheath. In the autumn of that year 149 Squadron moved some of their Short Stirling bombers from Mildenhall and in April 1942 the Squadron was formally moved into Lakenheath.

September 1943 saw the initial trials of FIDO (Fog Intensive Dispersal Operation) take place, but this fog dispersal system was not suitable for continuously operational airfields due to the time that it took in clearing the

smoke. The system was suitable for R.A.F.Woodbridge in its use as an Emergency Landing Field.

An early problem at Lakenheath proved to be the occasional dust storms, which could last two, or three days, extensive grass seeding in the surrounding areas helped to overcome the problem.

May 1944 the two Squadrons of Stirlings moved to North Creake and the airfield was closed for an expansion programme. The work was not fully complete until after the Second World War and then placed on a "Care and Maintenance" period.

The late 1940's saw the beginning of the "Cold War" and in July 1948 groups of B-29 "Superfortresses" began to arrive, these heavy bombers usually stayed for a 90-day deployment- This was the start of United States occupation of the Base. The B-29's started to leave the airfield in August of 1949 and during the 1950's Lakenheath received a number of heavy bomber groups visiting the airfield, some for short stays and some for longer.

Then followed another "Care and Maintenance" period until France decided to cancel the arrangements for American Bases on their soil bringing the USAF. Over to England to establish themselves with their F 100D "Super Sabres", the first flight arriving in January 1960 at Lakenheath. Six years later, in 1972 the "Super Sabres" were replaced by F-4 "Phantoms" and in time, 1977 the F-111F "Aardvark".

Demonstrating its variable-geometry (swing wings) at Air Shows at Lakenheath it was quite a popular sight. The F-111's attracted a lot of publicity when they bombed Libya as a reprisal for terrorism allegedly supported by the Libyan President.

In the mid 1980's a number of Hardened Aircraft Shelters were built to safeguard the aircraft, this was a complete departure from the traditional hangar accommodation. Extension of the Airfield had been going on almost since the area was first developed. In the 1940's the airfield occupied an area of around 1,000 acres and is now covering 2,290 acres, over twice the area of Mildenhall village.

In 1992 pilots from Lakenheath began training in the United States on the F-15E "Strike Eagle" one of the most potent fighter-bombers in the world today, with a "declared" speed of Mach 2.5. These aircraft became operational in 1993 at Lakenheath, still home to the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing.

Tony Errington.

MONTHLY MEETINGS ROUNDUP

Our meeting for the month of May featured Mr John Warwicker MBE. He gave a most lucid account of the, so called, "Secret Army". Back in 1940 we fully expected an invasion attempt by the Germans and in southern England a number of underground "Operational Bases" were constructed. From these

underground bunkers volunteers, some of whom are local and still alive, were briefed to attempt to disrupt the enemy advance. The whole scheme seems to have been shot through with potential disaster. No contact between different organisations was allowed. This was so that in the event of capture, they would not be able to reveal any secrets beyond their own knowledge. This had obvious and unexplained complications. How would these “freedom Fighters” have been supplied? The unfortunate likelihood was that they would be quickly rounded up and shot. On mainland Europe Resistance Organisations did invaluable work but they were supplied by the Allies. Gordon Kinsey gave a vote of thanks in which he paid tribute to the brave volunteers who, fortunately were not put to the test.

June, and our guest speaker was Mr Alan Crouchman who is General Manager of North Weald Flying Services at that famous old “Battle of Britain” airfield. Alan gave a talk which was illustrated throughout with a video presentation from actual colour cine footage of the American Ninth Air Force in Essex. He talked mainly of the Martin Marauder and the fearsome reputation it initially had with the pilots and crew. It had a very high wing loading and the video clearly showed that the Marauder had to be “flown in” rather than set down gracefully. I personally remember as a young lad, cycling with my mates the five or six miles to the nearest base which was at Boreham and scrambling through the hedge to get a close look at the “action”. At any moment one of the battle damaged ‘planes could have veered off on to the grass where we were. I can remember seeing the sparks off the runway as the Marauders often hit with the tail dragging along the surface before the plane settled on to its tricycle undercarriage. What it is to be young, fearless and foolhardy! A vote of thanks was given by Tony Errington.

Our July meeting featured one of our own members. Peter Verney was a Sergeant Navigator on Night Fighters. Peter showed us, by way of a video projector, aspects of his career, which, for the most part took place in Egypt in the 1950’s. The Egyptians wanted us to vacate our many bases in their country and were in a threatening mood, so it was very much an “active service” posting.

We were still using De Havilland Mosquitoes but this was at the time when the change over to jets was taking place. Peter went into some detail about navigating with the “Mossie” and spoke with feeling at just how cramped was the “office” which was shared by pilot and navigator! He eventually flew mostly in the Meteor NF11 but talked also about the De Havilland twin boom configurations like the Venom. A vote of thanks was given by Gordon Kinsey.

Alan Powell

YOU GOTTA LAUGH

Wise old Mother Superior from County Tipperary was dying. The nuns gathered around her bed trying to make her comfortable. They gave her some warm milk to drink but she refused it. Then one of the nuns took the glass back to the kitchen. Remembering a bottle of Irish whisky received as a gift the previous Christmas, she opened it and poured a generous amount into the milk. Back at the Mother Superior’s bed she held the glass to her lips. A little was drunk and then a little more and before they knew it the glass was empty. Mother, the nuns asked with earnest, please give us some wisdom before you die. Barely audible and with a serene look on her face she said – “Don’t sell that cow!”

And finally.... We welcome the following new members.

Paul Atkinson (junior member).
Keith Brechin
Group Captain JFH Chick.
Mark Durrant.
Colin Mackenzie.
Mr and Mrs A McClelland-Brown.
Martin Rose.
George Thompson.
Ian Walden.

We welcome back Fred Eley and AJ Barnard.