

## EDITORIAL

When I wrote my editorial for the May issue I expressed relief that what had seemed such a long winter had come to an end. Well, as I write this Mother Nature seems to be making up for it. Whew, it's hot!

Another comment I made in the May newsletter editorial was that our Museum Archivist, Alan Smith, has written an interesting account of the hazardous delivery of Spitfires to the beleaguered island of Malta in 1942. Due to gremlins in the system this was not included in the May issue and I have included it here. It was intended as a postscript to the adventurous 2005 "Merlins Over Malta" flight of a Spitfire and a Hurricane organised and executed by our friend Clive Denny and his family and associates.

We had a summer visit to the secret Defence Intelligence and Security Centre at Chicksands in Bedfordshire. They have an interesting museum there devoted to the various aspects of military intelligence from its beginnings. One of the rooms is devoted to the "Y" Service and I couldn't resist looking into some of the work carried out by that enormously important branch of intelligence.

Alan Smith has sent me a couple of interesting stories relating to recent artefacts acquired by the Control Tower Museum.

This and other light-hearted snippets that I hope you will enjoy.

I should remind folks of our excellent web site [www.mhas.org.uk](http://www.mhas.org.uk) The Guest Book is often visited by veterans and now the children of veterans. Some very interesting stories are added from time to time.

Finally don't forget our Control Tower Open Day on September 10<sup>th</sup>. Bring the children and the grandchildren for a great day of fun and entertainment.

**ED**

### SPITFIRES TO MALTA- 1942

The first Spitfires to be sent to Malta were a batch flown from HMS Eagle in 'Operation Spotter' on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1942 when 16 aircraft flew off the carrier and all landed safely at Malta.

The second reinforcing flight 'Operation Picket 1' took place on 21 March 1942 when 9 Spitfires took off from HMS Eagle for Malta, all of which, again, reached Malta safely. A second flight of seven Spitfires did not take off as the Blenheim, which was to guide them failed to materialise. These returned on HMS Eagle to Gibraltar.

Because of the losses of Spitfires at Malta, it was necessary to send a further batch of reinforcements but HMS Eagle was laid up for a month with defects in her steering gear.

Churchill contacted President Roosevelt and requested help to use the carrier, *USS Wasp*, for a trip. This was agreed and the *USS Wasp*, under Capt. J.W. Reeves Jr, arrived in the Clyde and took on board 52 Spitfires on 12 and 13 April. She then sailed for Gibraltar with the Spitfire pilots of 601 and 603

Squadrons on board. During the voyage they were briefed on the mission, 'Operation Calendar'

It was intended to fly 48 Spitfires off in two groups, the first led by Sqdn. Leader Gracie who had been flown to Gibraltar from Malta for the purpose. The second group was to be led by the CO of 601 Sqdn, Sqdn Ldr J.D. Bisdee DFC.

47 Spitfires took off starting with S/Ldr Grace at 0545, followed by 46 more Spitfires. The 48<sup>th</sup> aircraft went u/s and was returned to Gibraltar with the *Wasp*. This ferry was successful, all 47 reaching Malta safely, although heavy air raids and the condition of the aircraft on arrival led to delays and losses before getting them into action.

A further reinforcement was planned for early May and the *USS Wasp* arrived at Gibraltar to take on board 50 Spitfires, and this time she was to be accompanied by a repaired *HMS Eagle* who carried a further 17 Spitfires.

At Malta arrangements were made to refuel and rearm the Spitfires as soon as they arrived in order to repel the expected enemy raids on their arrival. Because of complaints about the state of the previous delivery and the inexperience of many of the pilots, these aircraft had been better prepared than the previous machines and there were some more experienced men amongst the pilots.

Sqdn Ldr Grant, was sent to Gibraltar, together with three other pilots, to lead the formations to their destination. They took off from the *Wasp* at 0643 and were followed by a succession of Spitfires. Unfortunately the 23<sup>rd</sup> aircraft, flown by Sgt R.D. Sherrington failed to gain sufficient flying speed through inadvertently setting his propeller into coarse pitch, dropped from the flight deck with the airscrew catching the bows as it did so, and was run over by the carrier and lost his life.

Another pilot, Canadian, Pilot Officer Jerrold Alpine 'Jerry' Smith, found that when he got BR123 into the air, the pump in his long-range fuel tank was faulty. Against orders, he turned back and circled the carrier while the rest of the Spitfires got airborne. All of these Spitfires, 62 in total, arrived safely in Malta and were quickly in action against the expected enemy raids.

Meanwhile, Jerry Smith, having seen the last of the Spitfires airborne, made an approach to land back on the *Wasp* despite the initial orders stating that pilots in trouble were to bale out. On his first attempt he was too high and the Deck Landing Officer, Lt. Cdr David McCampbell, waved him off. Smith made another attempt to land, and although approaching a little too fast, was given the signal to cut his engine by McCampbell. The Spitfire bumped down on the deck. Smith immediately applied full brakes and, although he took almost the full length of the deck, managed to stop about fifteen feet from the end.

This was the first landing of a Spitfire on a carrier deck, which was quite a feat without an arrestor hook.

The US Navy pilots of VF-71, the Wildcat Squadron on board the *Wasp*, were so impressed that they presented Smith with a cake and a pair of Navy Wings in appreciation of his feat.

Although Smith's fuel tank was repaired, he was not allowed to attempt to fly to Malta on his own and had to return to Gibraltar with the carrier.

On 18 May 1942, P/O Smith was able to reach Malta when he was one of 17 Spitfire pilots who flew from *HMS Eagle* on 'Operation LB' to bring more Spitfires to Malta. All of which arrived safely.

*HMS Eagle* made another delivery of Spitfires on 3 June in 'Operation Style', when it carried a further 31 Spitfires for delivery to Malta. This time, for the only occasion, the Luftwaffe managed to intercept the delivery and four of the Spitfires were shot down.

The next delivery by *HMS Eagle* took place on 20 July in 'Operation Pinpoint', when 32 Spitfires, which had been carried as deck cargo, were ferried to Malta. Only 31 arrived because one crashed into the bridge on take-off, and was pushed overboard to enable the following aircraft to take off. Amongst these pilots was Pilot Officer Roderick Illingworth Alpine 'Rod' Smith, the brother of 'Jerry' Smith. Their story will be completed at the end of the delivery details.

*HMS Eagle* made a further delivery of Spitfires on 21 July when, in 'Operation Insect' of the 32 Spitfires on board, 30 took off, one crashed into the sea soon after take-off and one hit a Bofors gun on the carrier and aborted without injury to the pilot. The remaining 28 reached Malta safely.

As part of 'Operation Pedestal', the convoy operation to supply Malta with food, petrol and equipment that met with very heavy opposition and losses, *HMS Furious* was employed to carry more Spitfires for Malta.

During this operation, *HMS Eagle*, which was this time carrying naval fighters and anti submarine aircraft in support of the Fleet which was trying to protect the convoy, was torpedoed by a U-boat and sunk.

The carrier, *HMS Furious*, was carrying out 'Operation Bellows', the attempt to fly 38 further Spitfires to Malta. In this, she succeeded. One aborted and landed on *HMS Indomitable*, which was with the convoy escort. All the others reached Malta safely.

*HMS Furious* now took on the task of delivering Spitfires to Malta and on 17 August carried out 'Operation Baritone' to deliver of 32 Spitfires. Of these, one was lost on take-off and two were abandoned by the pilots because they could not retract their undercarriages. These were picked up safely by escorting vessels.

The final delivery was made on 29 October on 'Operation Train', when *HMS Furious* took 29 Spitfires to fly to Malta. All reached there safely.

To go back to the two brothers Smith; they were put together into 126 Squadron and often flew together on operations.

Both achieved successes. 'Jerry' finished with a total of 3 destroyed, 1 shared, 1 probable and 4 damaged. On 10 August 1942, 'Jerry' he took off, without 'Rod' to patrol over some minesweepers which came under attack. He was last seen pursuing a Ju.88 towards Sicily but failed to return. In spite of Rod and others searching for him no trace was ever found.

Rod continued flying in Malta with some success. He later returning to the UK where after a period of instruction he attended a Fighter Leader's Course, and after leave in Canada, returned to 412 Squadron. He then went on to command No. 401 Squadron. After completing his second tour he returned to Canada where he was released from the RCAF in June 1945, returning as a Squadron Leader with a DFC and Bar. His victories totalled 13 destroyed, 1 shared destroyed, 1 shared probable and 1 damaged.

This is not the end of the story however. It has been followed up on the web site [www.rafcommands.com](http://www.rafcommands.com) to which I subscribe. Here a member of the forum reported that he interviewed Rod in later life about his brother. On going through the story of the first Spitfire landing on a carrier, Rod went out of the room and returned with the very set of wings which had been given to 'Jerry' on the *USS Wasp* in 1942.

On further checking, it turned out that the Deck Landing Officer on the *Wasp*, Lt. Cdr David McCampbell, became the highest scoring ace in the US Navy in the Pacific. Unfortunately, a year or so ago, Rod died.

The website member, who attended last year's 'Merlins Over Malta' celebration, spoke to Ray Polidano of the Malta Air Museum. Ray told him that the sister of Rod & Jerry, Wendy Noble, had arrived in Malta from Vancouver to honour Rod's last wish, which was to have his ashes scattered into the Mediterranean to be close to Jerry. The member who was staying in the same hotel as the 'Merlins to Malta Team' managed to get Charlie Brown and Wendy together and as a result, was able to arrange for Rod's ashes to be poured from the Spitfire, flown by Charlie, while he was flying on Malta's east coast in the direction of Sicily.

Thus, through a chance meeting, Rod, in the form of his ashes, flew in a Spitfire for the last time, and was reunited with his brother again in the waters off Malta.

**Alan Smith, Museum Archivist.**

## OBITUARY

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of one of our long-standing and enthusiastic members. Derek White died on May 1<sup>st</sup> at Hyde in Kent. He was diagnosed about six months previously with Asbestosis, a form of lung cancer associated with asbestos dust. The cremation was at South Shields. **ED**

## VISIT TO CHICKSANDS

Our member, Pat Smith, is a "Friend of Chicksands" and had made the suggestion that we should pay a visit to that most secret of establishments, the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre at Chicksands in Bedfordshire.

Accordingly a full 46-seater coach load of members and friends made was what should have been a two-hour journey. In the event an accident on the Newmarket by-pass prompted our driver to make a detour and we eventually arrived at about 10.50am

The Military Intelligence museum is situated in the grounds of what is still today a most secret installation and strict security was in force. The museum is indeed fascinating and consists of separate rooms housing, the Intelligence Corp Museum, which outlines the history of British Military Intelligence from the time of Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup>. It also recounts the story of the Corps since its formation in 1914. The Medmenham Collection covers the history of aerial photographic interpretation from the Great War up to the present day. The USAF Commemorative Room remembers the work of the United States Air Force personnel stationed here throughout the Cold War. They carried out crucial Signals Intelligence missions. The "Y" Service Collection pays tribute to the Wireless Operators who intercepted Axis transmissions before forwarding them to "Station X" at Bletchley Park during WW2. Finally the Brixmus Collection shows materials relating to the Cold War intelligence gathering in East Germany.

The whole museum complex is constantly being added to and indeed, men were installing important artefacts when we were there. Our party was split into two groups and knowledgeable retired members of the Secret Service guided us around. It was such a pity that because we were unavoidably delayed on the road, we were unable to spend as much time as we all would have liked at the museum.

At 1pm we were dropped off at the most impressive Chicksands Priory, which itself has a fascinating history, both in past times as a minor Country House and because it was part of the "Y" Service during and after WW2. The Americans were present during the time of the Cold War and the whole Chicksands complex was once more handed over to British Intelligence in the 90's. After a brief lunch a serving Army officer gave a short talk about the Priory. With the help of English Heritage and lottery grants the historic Priory has once more been returned to its former glory.

Then it was time to leave and it was suggested that we call at nearby Old Warden, to have a cup of tea at the home of the Shuttleworth Collection. A Hawk in the colours of the Red Arrows was circling in the sky to greet us when we arrived.

Our thanks are due to Pat Smith for suggesting a very special trip and also to Martin Cook who "volunteered" to organise the trip.

**Alan Powell**

## LETTER SPOT

Still the rumours persist.....! ED

Dear Mr Powell,

I served at the Bomb Ballistics Unit, RAF Martlesham Heath during 1948 - 49. I recently paid a visit to the Control Tower museum and was given a copy of "Runway 22", your society newsletter, dated May 2004. In it I saw an article about the airfield being haunted - so I thought you might like to hear my information on the subject.

In 1948-49 there were a lot of National Service personnel from the London area and a coach was hired to take us to and from the campsite for weekend leaves. A coach would leave Charing Cross about midnight for the journey back to camp on Sunday night and arrive back at Martlesham in the early hours of Monday, all the occupants being half asleep. Several of the occupants at various times allege to have seen the ghost of a woman running across the heath with her head on fire. The popular explanation was that this ghost was an unfortunate wartime WAAF who was pregnant but abandoned by her lover. She is supposed to have committed suicide by placing a Very pistol in her mouth.

My own explanation is that the Heath at night is prone to give off wisps of mist, (Will of the Wisp) which I observed at times, which could account for these stories.

I hope you find this story of interest, I could perhaps tell you some more of my experiences at Martlesham if you wish. Yours faithfully,  
Martin (Les) Golledge (Ex Cpl Wireless fitter – BBU)

I have had another interesting letter from one of our long distance members. John McCulloch lives in Houston, Renfrewshire, (no, not the Texas one!), and has sent me some reminiscences of his time at Martlesham as a National Serviceman. With his permission I have highlighted a few of his experiences in those early post-war days. **ED**

John was posted to Martlesham in Air Traffic Control and one of his duties was manning the black and white chequered caravan located at the end of the runway. He continues, "We were equipped with a pair of binoculars and a Very pistol and our job was to keep a watch on the runway for obstructions and to examine incoming aircraft to ensure their undercarriage was down. On one occasion I noticed that an incoming Meteor NF11 had its landing gear retracted. I considered that it was too late to warn the Tower so I loaded the Very pistol and fired a red cartridge across the nose of the aircraft, which stood on its tail and zoomed skywards. Immediately the intercom buzzed and I was asked in most immoderate terms what I thought I was doing! When I

explained, I was told that the aircraft had not been landing but was making an approach before going round again. I politely and respectfully pointed out that 'someone might have told me!' No more was said although the pilot F/Lt. Slater, would later refer to me as 'the bugger who tried to shoot me down!' Something the Germans had failed to do!

Martlesham was used as a dropping point for Martinets from RAF Stradishall. The Martinets would tow the drogues over the Orfordness firing range and Meteor 8's from Wattisham fired at them. The pilots released their drogues near the Martlesham Control Tower and we retrieved them, rolling them up until one of their pilots landed at the end of the exercise, to collect them. Their R/T procedure was very formal, archaic even. They couldn't communicate with the Meteor pilots, not having a common radio frequency so we were asked on occasion to pass messages between them. One day an excited Polish accent came over the R/T. "Martlesham Heath, this is Oddball One. Would you please tell these Meteor pilots we are pulling the drogues, not pushing them!" We were always ready for a little light diversion!"

John also related a story about the unique mixture at Martlesham of stabilised earth and bitumen that had served well for runways whilst aircraft were propeller driven. John continues, "The angle of the Vampire's jet was such that the surface of the runway would receive too much of a blast which might cause damage. We were able to prove this theory! One day an aircraft called for emergency landing instructions and coming into view, proved to be a Vampire. It duly landed and taxied away to dispersal. A few days later it was readied for the return to its home base. F/Lt Cooper gave the pilot take-off instructions and then called us all to the windows and told us to observe what followed. We were not disappointed! The Vampire backtracked to the end of the runway for take-off position and opened the throttle. It began to roll, gathering speed and as it did so the runway behind it disintegrated into great chunks, thrown into the air by the force of the aircraft's jet. We watched with barely-concealed glee until the aircraft had left the ground; the runway was a mess! We were not so happy when we were ordered to collect shovels and go out to do some repair work! Outside help had to be obtained before the runway was back in use. A matter of a day or two."

Another memorable event occurred during February of 1953. John takes up the story, "Severe gales, accompanied by torrential rain devastated the East Coast with serious flooding and extensive damage. At Martlesham we were in the thick of things. Our proximity to the coast causing many calls for help from people in trouble. All officers were instructed to cut their staffs to the absolute minimum and make work parties available at a moments notice. I found myself part of a lorry load of men en route to Purfleet, on the Thames in Essex, where the sea wall was breached, causing great damage to warehouses and their contents. It was the hardest day's work I have ever done! All day long, in pouring rain, we filled sandbags from a barge, climbed out with the sandbags,

carried them several yards and stacked them where directed. It was backbreaking work; the sand was wet and very heavy. We were fed from field kitchens and allowed a half hour break for lunch and a NAAFI break in the morning and afternoon. I used my Billycans for the only time in my service life and we were issued with strong coffee laced with rum. We arrived back at camp about midnight and were given large amounts of hot food before going off to bed. We had a few hours sleep before going off to repeat the process. Work parties were coming and going all the time and the cookhouse was operating a round-the-clock where anyone could eat at any time.

I later pondered the amazing efficiency and organisation with which the emergency was dealt. RAF, NAAFI, Salvation Army, as well as all the various civilian authorities co-operating with each other without any apparent hitches.

Prince Philip decided to visit the affected areas and he chose to land at Martlesham, which was the closest airfield to the coast. I was put on a guard of honour, having to polish boots, press my best blue and for the only time in my service life, wear white webbing. Even in such circumstances the Service still managed to observe the formalities. Prince Philip's flight was announced and we fell in, torrential rain soaking us and streaking our greatcoats with white Blanco! He duly landed, having piloted his aircraft himself, (oh yeah. ED!), he disembarked and without even a glance in our direction, climbed into a waiting Land Rover and was driven off. We were furious! He might have nodded to us or made some remark about the weather. It took ages for us to get dried out and our uniforms cleaned. I don't know if he said anything to the C.O. but no formalities were observed when he returned to the camp to fly off.

We received a call from the local villagers where the Deben had overflowed its banks. As senior airman, (now SAC), I was put in charge of a work party and we spent the next two nights filling sandbags and stacking them on the river bank. We had the signals truck with us and I was able to radio the Tower, manned 24 hours a day during the emergency, for more men and materials as the need arose. The villagers pitched in with us and the ladies kept us well supplied with tea and sandwiches. After that episode any of our work party who visited the Red Lion always received a pint on the house!"

#### **John McCulloch.**

The East Coast floods of 1953 truly were disastrous. Over 300 people lost their lives and more than 40 people were drowned at Felixtowe alone. The cause was a freak combination of wind and tides. **ED**

Let's lighten it up a bit...

### Old Man

An older, white haired man walked into a jewellery store one Friday evening with a beautiful young girl at his side. He told the jeweller he was looking for a special ring for his girlfriend.

The jeweller looked through his stock and brought out a \$5,000 ring and showed it to him. The old man said, "I don't think you understand, I want something very special."

At that statement, the jeweller went to his special stock and brought another ring over. "Here's a stunning ring at only \$40,000," the jeweller said. The young lady's eyes sparkled and her whole body trembled with excitement. The old man seeing this said, "We'll take it."

The jeweller asked how payment would be made and the old man stated, by cheque. "I know you need to make sure my cheque is good, so I'll write it now and you can call the bank Monday to verify the funds and I'll pick the ring up Monday afternoon," he said.

Monday morning, a very teed-off jeweller phoned the old man.

"There's no money in that account."

"I know", said the old man, "but can you imagine the weekend I had?"

### THE "Y" SERVICE

I have for a long time been fascinated by the undoubted success of British Intelligence during World War Two. Much has been written about Station X at Bletchley Park and to the Ultra traffic that emanated from there.

However, Bletchley Park was firstly dependant on the interception of radio traffic from the enemy in order to be able to decipher it. This is where the "Y" Service comes in...

The "Y" Service was manned by both men and women who were responsible for listening in to both plain language (RT) and morse code messages in order to relay them to Bletchley Park, but also the Service developed so that it could itself decode low grade intelligence signals from the enemy. It was then also the responsibility of the Y Service to distribute this intelligence to the various Operational Commands. Thus the Y Service was much more than just a listening service. It evolved into a decoding arm of the forces as well.

Initially monitoring in the UK was confined to morse code traffic and many of the officers posted to the signals intelligence units were ex "ham" operators whose pre-war hobby had been searching the wavelengths for interesting radio traffic.

However, early in 1940 the Air Ministry set up a unit at the "Battle of Britain" airfield at Hawkinge, near Folkestone. They were to listen in to RT transmissions from enemy aircraft. These were broadcast on VHF and the excitement of listening into Luftwaffe pilots was somewhat tempered by the

fact that there was an acute shortage of linguists! It seems incredible that nobody had thought of this but somehow it fits with the sheer lack of preparation of the British when they first went to war.

I have just been reading a fascinating book by one of the WAAF linguists. Aileen Clayton joined the WAAF in 1939 and was hastily recruited into the Y Service because she had spent time in Germany before the war and could speak fluent German. She was one of many WAAF's and airmen who were to staff this vital new service. Radar was already being manned by WAAF personnel in the radar stations and Filter Room at Fighter Command HQ and the Y Service was another perfect use of women in the armed services.

In her book, "The Enemy is Listening", Aileen Clayton describes those hectic days of the Battle of Britain in that area between Folkestone and Dover known as "Hellfire Corner". She describes being posted to a Kentish cliff top in a caravan and airmen tuning into RT transmissions by Luftwaffe pilots. As soon as a German voice was heard the airman would shout "I've got one!" and one of the young WAAF linguists would start to write down the words. It was all so amateurish in those early days!

This was not the case as far as WT traffic was concerned. Since before the outbreak of hostilities we had been monitoring German Morse code at Cheadle and Chicksands and Y Service stations at home and abroad. This information was already proving invaluable to interpret German battle orders etc.

As for the young WAAF linguists like Aileen Clayton they began to recognise German voices. She recalls hearing one Luftwaffe pilot chatting away to them. "I know you English are listening, can you hear me, would you like me to drop a bomb on you? Listen – whee, boomp!", and he would chuckle into the microphone. Unfortunately for him he had not realised the importance of keeping his mouth shut. He was "bounced" by a Spitfire and was unable to get out. His screams were heard as he fell to the ground. Aileen Clayton said that she went outside to be sick. A middle class girl, who should have been perhaps thinking of tennis, was thrown, like so many, into the maelstrom of the horrors of war.

The Luftwaffe aircrew as well as the RAF fighter pilots soon learned that "careless talk costs lives" and strict RT procedure was vital.

"Surfing the net" is a habit of mine and I soon discovered the reminiscences of another WAAF Y Service veteran. Dalma Darnley Taylor was a German linguist and when the recruitment officer became aware of this she was soon whisked away to be trained as another Y Service WAAF.

She recalls that one of her colleagues "talked down" a Luftwaffe pilot in her perfect German. She managed to guide the disoriented pilot in to RAF Manston, where he was made a prisoner of war. He must have been surprised to find himself on English soil!

Dalma Taylor was posted to a small village on the top of the cliffs between Dover and Folkestone. Her unit was situated on 100ft high cliffs and they could

see the church tower at Calais on clear days. She also recalls that it was somewhat unnerving to witness German ME109's fly straight up about 100yards away as they reached the cliffs after flying at sea level to avoid Radar detection!

Successes there were on both sides but the German love of order played into the hands of British intelligence and was a great weakness of the enemy that we were able to exploit in all the intelligence services. With them everything followed a set pattern. There seemed little room for individuality. There was a regularity of transmissions that made repetition inevitable. Repetition is music to the ears of the code breaker.

Aileen Clayton was commissioned in July 1940 and was the first WAAF to be commissioned for intelligence duties. She was posted to the Middle East after a couple of years and was awarded the MBE before eventually taking over as Chief Signals Intelligence Officer at Headquarters Mediterranean Allied Air Forces. She married and lived at Ipswich post war and her book, "The Enemy is Listening" is a must-read!

So, from small acorns great oaks do grow and the Y Service developed into a highly sophisticated vital arm of British Intelligence. Aileen Clayton wrote about her own experiences in the RAF "Y" Service but the Army and the Royal Navy contributed enormously to the fund of knowledge with their own Y Services.

When the Americans entered the war they naturally had their own comprehensive intelligence service. Nevertheless, RV Jones, in his book, "Most Secret War" says that in the radio war the Americans left Intelligence to us and concentrated their efforts on countermeasures. The Germans would have been envious indeed if they knew to what extent the British and American Intelligence services co-operated together. The Germans not surprisingly distrusted their Italian allies and co-operation between them was poor to non-existent.

The Military Intelligence Museum at Chicksands that some of us have just visited has a section devoted to the uses that the Y Service was put to.

**ALAN POWELL**

### **The Positive Side of Life**

Living on earth is expensive but it does include a free trip around the sun every year.

How long a minute is depends on what side of the bathroom door you're on.

Birthdays are good for you; the more you have the longer you live.

Happiness comes through doors you didn't even know you left open.

Have you ever noticed that the people who are late are often jollier than those who have to wait for them?

You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person.

### ***Ken Forester (90 Sqdn)***

#### **FLYING WEST**

I hope there's a place, way up in the sky  
Where pilots can go when they have to die.

A place where a guy could buy a cold beer  
For a friend and a comrade whose memory is dear.

A place where no doctor or lawyer could tread,  
Nor a management-type would ever be caught dead!  
Just a quaint little place, kind of dark, full of smoke,  
Where they like to sing loud, and love a good joke.

The kind of a place that a lady could go  
And feel safe and secure by the men she would know.

There must be a place where old pilots go,  
When their wings become heavy, when their airspeed gets low,  
Where the whiskey is old, and the women are young,  
And songs about flying and dying are sung.  
Where you'd see all the fellows who'd 'flown west' before,  
And they'd call out your name, as you came through the door,  
Who would buy you a drink, if your thirst should be bad,  
And relate to the others, "He was quite a good lad!"

And there, through the mist, you'd spot an old guy  
You had not seen in years, though he'd taught you to fly.

He'd nod his old head, and grin ear to ear  
And say, "Welcome, my Son, I'm proud that you're here!"

For this is the place where true flyers come  
When the battles are over, and the wars have been won.

They've come here at last, to be safe and alone,  
From the government clerk, and the management clone;

Politicians and lawyers, the Feds, and the noise,  
Where all hours are happy, and these good ol' boys

Can relax with a cool one, and a well deserved rest!

This is Heaven, my Son. You've passed your last test!"

***Captain Michael J. Larkin, TWA (Ret.), 'Air Line Pilot' magazine, February 1995.***

### **MUSEUM JOTTINGS**

One of the items that we have had on display since the Museum opened was the original wooden cross that was placed on the grave of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Lovell, who was killed in France in 1917. This is the original cross, which was

afterwards replaced by a permanent stone memorial by the War Graves Commission.

The wooden cross had been donated by the Right Reverend Jeremy Walsh, who is a nephew of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Lovell.

Revd Walsh has now kindly donated the flying greatcoat and boots. These, together with a photograph of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Lovell wearing them, were found in a loft and are in amazingly good condition despite their 88 years.

This has encouraged me to research the circumstances of that death, so very many years ago.

On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1917 Lt Lovell of 25 Squadron left Auchel in France at 1425hrs on a photographic mission. He was flying Airco DH4 A7479 and was accompanied by his gunner, 2nd Lt Fitzgerald. They were involved in combat and were shot down at 1645hrs near Foufflen. Both were killed and are buried at Lapugnot in France.

25 Squadron was formed at Montrose on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1915 and went to France in February 1916 equipped with FE2b aircraft. They were employed on fighter-reconnaissance work and were re-equipped between June and August 1917 with the Airco DH-4. They were then engaged on long-distance photographic reconnaissance and high altitude bombing raids on distant targets which included railway junctions and airfields.

Both the greatcoat and knee-length boots, together with their studs and heel irons weighed quite a considerable amount and when put with other protective clothing against the cold at height in the open cockpits, must have affected the load of bombs etc. the aircraft could carry.

Another interesting acquisition is a ball gown made from a WW2 German parachute. Myrtle Ratcliff is the owner and she had an interesting story to relate: -

“During the last war a German plane was coming from Stowmarket towards Needham market, probably following the railway line on its way out to the coast.

My father and I were at Needham Market and were watching as searchlights were playing on the plane, which was on fire. We saw something dropping from it and my father immediately pushed me into a deep ditch of stinging nettles. The bombs dropped quite near but did not explode.

We had also seen a parachute floating down and a few minutes later a German, wearing all the trappings from the ‘chute, came up to us with his hands in the air. My father took him to our house and I remember my mother saying, ‘The boy only looks about 16 or 18.’ He was shaking. He put his revolver on the table and my father picked it up and put it in his pocket. My mother then gave him a cup of cocoa, which he soon drank.

Father called a neighbour and the three of them set out to take the airman to Needham police station. He was walking between the two of them and on the

way they passed groups of Home Guard who took no notice of the German whose harness clinked as he walked. All they said was ‘evening Fred’ as they passed!

The prisoner and his revolver were then handed over to the police at Needham Market police station.

On his return, my father looked in the field in which the airman had landed and collected the parachute and brought it home with him. He tried to bundle the parachute in through the door and my mother was trying to push it out saying, it did not belong to them. My father won the battle by saying that as clothing was strictly rationed the parachute would be very useful to supplement the ration.

A court dressmaker, who had been evacuated to Ipswich from London, made a ball gown for me with it.”

The ball gown is now on loan and is on display in the museum. Anglia Television heard about the story from the local press and the museum, with its new acquisition, have featured on regional television.

I have researched the raid and can reveal the following information:-

Junkers JU-88A B3+AL of 3/KG54 was part of a force of 285 bombers who targeted London on the night of 29/30<sup>th</sup> January 1944. It was one of the last attempts by the Luftwaffe to bomb Britain in force and was part of “Operation Steinbock”.

On that night Beaufighter V8740 of 68 Squadron was engaged in landing practice at Coltishall when Neatishead ground controllers diverted them and vectored them towards an enemy bomber that had crossed the coast at Lowestoft. The Beaufighter located the bomber at 16000ft and followed it for 10 minutes before opening fire with two bursts. The Junkers was hit in the starboard wing and engine and caught fire.

The bombs were jettisoned and the crew started to bale out. The aircraft was picked up by searchlights and was seen heading for the coast and on fire. It then turned as it descended before diving down over Shrubland Park near Ipswich. It cut a path through trees before crossing the old Norwich road and came to rest in a meadow next to the river Gipping at Barham. A loud bang was reported and flames shot into the air.

Of the crew, the pilot, Uffz. H. Goergen, was killed when he struck trees near the crash site with a partially opened parachute, which left him hanging from a tree.

Uffz Alois Zehetner landed safely at Stonham Aspel . (I suspect he may have baled out first and at a greater height and drifted further from the bomber’s track.) Uffz Wolfgang Bruning landed in a field by Gipsy Lane, Needham Market and was the airman involved in the ball gown story.

Uffz Jurgens Sprenger, the observer, severely injured his knees when he parachuted out and was unable to walk. It is not known where he came down. He was taken to hospital and, when he had recovered and had learned to walk

again, was later sent to Wyoming in America from where he was repatriated in 1946.

Some reports stated that the bomber was heading for Bury St Edmunds but the German Observer later stated that the target was Silvertown Docks in London.

Two Extracts from the Martlesham Heath Operations Record Book which I found quite amusing.

**27.8.40**

A 'Bison' arrived today. This is reputed to be an invention of the British Army. Its "distinctive" colouring clashes delightfully with the English countryside. It would appear to consist of a motor chassis groaning under the weight of a vast concrete box punctured by many apertures surmounted by something resembling an aviary.

Instructions were given that it was only to proceed at 4 mph and then only over smooth ground, other wise the tyres will be set on fire by friction between them and the wings.

It has been claimed by the Padre for the exclusive use of his Broody Hen and her family of 13 chicks.

**29.8.40**

The 'Bison' departed today being intended for Ipswich Airport. Only the hen was sorry.

**21.10.40**

Five Humber Snipe carloads of assorted Brigadiers, Majors and Captains descended on this station in a state of great excitement. They had just received 50 new tanks and some were being offered to us for use with station defence. The station defence officer dealt with the situation.

**22.10.40**

The Army came again, this time armed with many maps, charts, tape measures and three of their new toys. A great conference was held; a gaping hole was made in the Dunnert wire boundary; a nearby pheasant covert was ruined; a sign post knocked down; and the Army departed rather worried because a small bridge over a lane leading to the aerodrome had been found on a map and this lane would need to be "traversed" by the tanks in the event of them being called upon to thunder to our rescue. As the bridge appeared to be both low and narrow, and no one present knew the dimensions of the tanks, a delicate situation arose.

**24.10.40**

An alternate route for the tanks has been found. (I am glad to say they were never needed!!)

**ALAN SMITH – ARCHIVIST**

## **OPERATION STEINBOCK**

I was intrigued by Alan Smith's reference to "The Steinbock Operation", in his "Museum Jottings"

Most people think of the "Blitz" as that period from September 1940 to May 1941. However during 1943 deciphered Enigma messages alerted the British authorities that the Luftwaffe was planning a major new bombing offensive. This was to become known as the "Mini Blitz".

The Germans had assembled a total of 524 bombers, including 46 of the new HE 177 Greif four engined heavy bomber that were to attack Britain for the first time.

The first air raid occurred on the night of 21<sup>st</sup> January 1944 when 227 bombers were involved. They used "Dueppel", which was the German equivalent of our "Window". These were strips of metal foil designed to confuse radar defences.

Then a repeat raid was made during the latter part of the same night. Some of the returning Luftwaffe bombers had been refuelled and these were joined by other bombers. In this second raid a total of 220 bombers took part.

London had been the target of both raids but only 44 incidents in the London area were logged. The bombs fell mostly in Sussex, Kent and Essex. The Luftwaffe admitted losing 25 aircraft on the two raids. British sources claimed 18 fell victim to the lethal De Havilland Mosquito night fighters. Most or all of the remaining 9 bombers were downed by anti-aircraft flak. A further 18 bombers were destroyed in non-combat accidents, including mishandling, navigation errors or crashes at dimly lit bases.

More raids occurred in February and caused little damage, apart from a raid on 18/19<sup>th</sup> of that month. About 200 German bombers dropped 140 tons of bombs in the London area on that night.

Further attacks continued in March and Hull and Bristol were also targeted. In May Weymouth, Torquay and Falmouth received attention from Operation Steinbock before the offensive was abandoned.

Air raid casualties in Britain totalled 1556 killed and 2916 seriously injured. During that five-month period the Luftwaffe lost 330 bombers. For every 5 citizens killed the Germans lost 1 bomber and four trained aircrew either killed or captured. It had been a costly failure.

We should not forget, however, that Nazi Germany had the "V" weapons to continue attacking us.

**ALAN POWELL**

## MONTHLY MEETINGS ROUNDUP

May and our meeting was once again extremely well attended to listen to a most interesting and entertaining talk by Wg Cdr. Bryn Lewis, (Retd).

The talk was entitled “Five Vulcans Around the World – One Came Back”. The year was 1949 and the Air Ministry, in their wisdom, had decided to respond to a request by the Royal New Zealand Air Force to send aircraft to be present at the opening of the then new Wellington International Airport. The RAF used the opportunity to send a flight of their new Avro Vulcan V bombers on a round the world proving flight. The back- up aircraft was one of the then, also new, Bristol Britannia propjet airliners.

Wg Cdr Bryn Lewis was the navigation leader and flew in the lead ‘plane. His account of all the trials and tribulations on the way was fascinating.

In the event only one Vulcan arrived back in England at the scheduled time but they all eventually arrived safely. Average actual flying speed was 565mph and distance covered was 28,251 miles.

Our June meeting was what might be considered an offbeat subject and the large audience who attended must have wondered what to expect. In the event it was a highly entertaining evening featuring a retired Sqdn Ldr who gave an illustrated talk and demonstrated cloudscapes in oils.

Mr Graham Cook came all the way from Grantham in Lincolnshire and delivered a most humorous talk with amusing anecdotes from his RAF career spanning some 39 years. He was involved for most of that time with weapons and armament technology.

Graham is a member of The Guild Of Aviation Artists and had brought along some of his stunning paintings. He is now able to devote his retirement to his life-long interest as a painter in oils.

July and our meeting featured another retired Sqdn Ldr who had served at Martlesham Heath in the early post war era. Neil Pollack joined the RAF in 1942 and whilst at Martlesham was involved with the Bomb Ballistics Unit He flew the only Avro Lincoln to be fitted with two conventional RR Merlins and two Armstrong Siddeley Python contra-rotating propjet engines. This was a flying test bed and Neil Pollack flew it from Martlesham to the Woomera Rocket Range in southern Australia. During atomic bomb trials the Lincoln was flown up to 43000ft – well above its official ceiling.

**ED**

Finally finally. Please remember to keep that camera clicking away. The Holly Hall Photographic Competition is held after our AGM next April and the subject this year is – Well, anything about aviation. Anyone with an interesting pic about any aspect of flying is in with a chance. **ED**