

The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine
November 2014 Issue 35**



Photo: Janet Norman

888,246 ceramic poppies at the Tower of London, each representing a British or Commonwealth soldier who died during the First World War. This view shows just one side of three.

IN MEMORIAM

Air Cdre J Langston CBE A W Vidow D Harris DFC

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

**David Etherton Andrew Etherton Philip Etherton
John Vidow Rita Harris**

NEW HONORARY FRIEND

Rev. Penny Green

EDITORIAL

Well here we are in the early days of winter in Britain after what has been a generally very pleasant summer during which, no doubt, many of you saw the Canadian Lancaster, VeRA, during her visit to the United Kingdom. Thankfully, due to the result of the Scottish referendum, I can still call us that! What a wonderful experience it was, the visit not the referendum, and those six weeks that they were here simply flew by, no pun intended! Barbara and I, together with Ed and Janet Norman, were amongst the five thousand who bought tickets for the 'Three Lancs' event at East Kirkby. Apparently all tickets were gone in 48 hours so a repeat event was organized for the following weekend. As it happened, due to an engine problem, VeRA was grounded for the first date so the second event had the privilege of seeing three Lancs in one place first. However, East Kirkby, BBMF and CWHM are to be warmly congratulated for arranging a further gathering on September 14th. Whilst the weather was overcast on this date if anything the brooding sky enhanced the solemnity of the occasion. If you have access to the internet and wish to watch my tribute to Bomber Command based on the event the Video URL is:

<http://youtu.be/XMJnpsSettU>

Whilst in the area we visited Coningsby and were most impressed, as I'm sure were the Canadians, by the display of Canadian flags that adorned houses and businesses in the village. Well done the good folk of Coningsby.

My thanks, as always, to those who have made donations of cheques and postage stamps. I assure you that your contribution is spent wisely in ensuring the association's future, thus perpetuating the memory of those who served and

died with 49 Squadron. I also thank those who have submitted articles and photographs for publication in The 4T9er. It would be a very thin and boring magazine without your input.

I regret to record the death of Air Commodore John Langston CBE, the penultimate Officer Commanding 49 Squadron, having held that position from 17 December 1962 until 15 December 1964. Originally serving as a wartime navigator with 630, 189 and 246 Squadrons John then flew with 617 Squadron. During his period with 49' the squadron was equipped with the Vickers Valiant. He was in command when HRH Princess Marina of Kent presented the squadron with its Colour Standard on June 5, 1964. Also, Allan Vidow, who died on October 15th, flew in the crew of F/O Johnny Young, the same crew as our late chairman, Ted Cachart. Like the rest of the crew he became a PoW on January 4th 1944 when their Lancaster was involved in a mid-air collision whilst on the way to Berlin. Desmond Harris died on October 31st aged 93. Desmond and Rita were regulars at reunions until five years ago. He flew 24 ops with 49 Squadron between 12th May 1943 and 8th October 1943. Unusually, for a navigator, he was later awarded the DFC.

Welcome to five new Associate Members. David Etherton and his sons Andrew and Philip are the son and grandsons, respectively, of Sgt. H J Etherton who flew as a wireless operator on 49 Squadron Hampdens between August 1940 and June 1941 before going on to a second tour with 207 Squadron. John Vidow is the son of former flight engineer Allan Vidow whose passing is noted above. Rita Harris is the widow of the late Desmond Harris.

As most of you know, it is our practice to invite those whom we consider to have been of great service to the Association to become Honorary Friends. I'm sure that nobody who has attended any of the services at Fiskerton in recent years can deny that the Reverend Penny Green has shown a feeling for Bomber Command in general and 49 Squadron in particular. After inviting Penny to join us I was delighted, as I am sure many of my readers are, when she accepted.

On Sunday October 5th a Service of Harvest Praise was held at Fiskerton Parish Church, also to dedicate the new building works which comprise toilet and kitchen facilities. Stan Smith and his late wife Dot's brother Ken represented the Association. When I saw the new facilities on Remembrance Sunday it was quite a disappointment when I didn't need to use the sumptuous toilet.

The International Bomber Command Centre, which includes the Lincolnshire Bomber Command Memorial, has been awarded a £3.1 million grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Work is due to commence in December this year with phase one complete by June 2015. "Once complete the centre will provide a

world class facility to serve as a point for recognition, remembrance and reconciliation for Bomber Command.”

The current issue of Mainspar, the newsletter of Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, East Kirkby, included an article by F/Lt. Mike Chatterton RAF (retired) which I found both interesting and amusing. I felt that I would like to share it with you so I am grateful to both Mike and editor of Mainspar Louise Bush, for granting me permission to publish it in The 4T9er. Whilst it does not show Mike on the stairs he does make a brief appearance during the BBC programme, at 13-50 on: http://youtu.be/KS_nBmJIQjg Mike flew the BBMF Lancaster for many years alongside his day job of flying Nimrods. He keeps his hand in on Lancasters by regularly driving Just Jane during her taxi runs at East Kirkby. Mike was in the left-hand seat for the visit of the two Lancs on September 7th.

I have been pleased to hear that a number of our veterans who flew after D Day have applied for the Legion d'Honneur as outlined in the August issue. I am particularly pleased for those who did not fly before D-Day and therefore failed to qualify for The Aircrew Europe Star. Until the issue of the Bomber Command Clasp they had only the France and Germany Star, as did anyone who set foot on the Continent regardless of whether they were exposed to danger. In other words nothing to indicate that they had risked life and limb. At last they have recognition by a government, although sadly not British, in the form of an eye catching medal. It is so sad that so many did not live to receive it.

I read in the heritage railway press that railway companies are using hitherto obsolete diesel locomotives because an EU directive, in an attempt to reduce engine emissions, has messed up yet again. The current range of new diesel locomotives cannot continue to be built because they do not comply with the new emission standards whereas locomotives currently in use are allowed to continue mainline duties regardless. It now means that it is cheaper for freight operating companies to buy a heritage diesel locomotive and overhaul it to operating condition than buy a brand new one. Is it beyond the realms of possibility that this bungling could be applied to the aircraft industry? Could we once again be flying in a Constellation or even a Dakota?

In the August issue Editorial I mentioned the book by Pat Cunningham DFM 'Through Enemy Skies.' I am grateful to Bill 'Titch' Cooke for sending me a copy which I thoroughly enjoyed. As well as Bill's story, there is Ron Eeles' who originally told me of the book, Ted Cachart's and Eric Clarke's. Four 49ers out of ten stories, definitely a must for all 4T9ers.

Referring to the website of the RAF Museum at Cosford I am excited to pass on that the unique Dornier 17 fuselage has been moved from its hydration tunnel and moved into the Conservation Centre. It had been washed continuously, the

remaining parts of the aircraft still are, with citric acid based solution to remove marine deposits and neutralise corrosion impurities in the aluminium structure. Following a thorough wash down, work has now commenced on removing any remaining internal marine deposits using plastic scrapers. Doesn't sound very exciting but knowing the exacting standards to which the Centre works it will be done with total commitment. The Centre's annual open week took place between November 9th and 15th. It was open from 9-30am until 1-30pm each day. Admission was £5 which will be spent on aircraft conservation and maintenance. If you wish to make a donation you can do this online www.rafmuseum.org For more information call 01902 376200. All things being equal I shall have visited and a report will appear in February's issue.

From time to time I have mentioned the Worthing Pier Memorial to the 49 Squadron crew of Lancaster PB355 which crashed on the beach. Ed Norman passed me a copy of a new booklet that he received from the author entitled 'A Lancaster on Worthing Beach' by Graham Lelliott. It gives some background information on the crew then goes on to describe the events of December 17th 1944. Details of the fatal flight are followed by eyewitness accounts and details of the locality and surrounding area of the crash. Details are given of streets named after the gallant crew as well as other examples of the appreciation of the people of Worthing towards the airmen who prevented any loss of life in the town whilst sacrificing their own.

On November 22nd 1942 a 49 Squadron Lancaster W4107 crash landed on Sark after receiving damage during a raid on Stuttgart. Captained by Sgt. E.J. Singleton, the crew became PoWs. A year ago Ed Norman received an e-mail from Ian Le Gresley who lives in Jersey saying that, as a boy, he had relieved the wreckage of some parts including an undercarriage retraction strut. These he had kept in his garage for many years but had decided that it was time to donate them to a museum. I had planned to holiday in Jersey and bring them back but due to Barbara's ill-health wasn't able to go. Happily, during a visit by the two Lancasters, Vera and Thumper, in August Ian arranged through his local RAFA branch for the BBMF Lancaster to bring them back to Coningsby, for which we are most grateful. In the process further poignancy was added to these parts. At the time of writing the BBMF are kindly holding them pending collection by RAF Scampton Museum to return them whence they came in 1942.

In closing I draw your attention to the fantastic work that 'the crew' puts in on behalf of the association. Without their expertise, enthusiasm and dedication it is difficult to envisage the association's future existence. Well done and thanks lads.

A happy Christmas and New Year to all 4T9ers wherever you are.

WHAT A WAY TO GO

By Mike Chatterton

Part 1

Saturday the 9th of November 2013 was my very last day in the Royal Air Force after a career spanning five decades. It was a very special day for me for several reasons. I spent most of the day in the Royal Albert Hall in London taking part in the annual Festival of Remembrance, and in the evening led out half of the RAF contingent for the final muster of the combined services in the presence of HM the Queen, being watched by several other Royals, many VVIPs, several thousand Royal British Legion members in the audience, and a few million TV viewers. What a way to go!



Photo: UK MOD Crown Copyright

For as long as I can remember, without fail, my family had always watched the Festival of Remembrance on TV. It was a special annual event for us just like birthdays and Christmas. The whole idea of course was to remember the many, many thousands of Servicemen that had lost their lives in the line of duty for their country. On a lighter side, as kids, for the final Muster of the Servicemen and women we used to see who were the better marchers – the RAF, or the WRNS, as my Father had been a bomber pilot in WW2, and Mother had been decoding at Bletchley Park. After I joined the RAF myself I had always watched

the RAF contingent at this event with a certain amount of envy and wondered how on earth they had managed to get chosen to do that. Unlike most of my colleagues I had always enjoyed the ceremonial aspects of being a member of the RAF. Maybe it started when I was an ATC Cadet and had proudly marched through Horncastle on Remembrance Sunday. Going through initial training at Cranwell my new uniform had fitted quite well and so I had been chosen to be Parade Commander for various events during my time there. The cattle gave me some strange looks when I went out into the fields at home to practise shouting and giving orders from my stomach as opposed to throat as I had been told to do by the Drill Instructors. Throughout my 40 years in the RAF I continued to wonder how they selected the individuals for this magnificent event in the Royal Albert Hall.

Having reluctantly delivered the last two Nimrods on their final flights when the aircraft was prematurely (in my opinion) taken out of service, my final two years of full time service were spent somewhat frustratedly behind a desk at Waddington as a Station Flight Safety Officer. During one of the many tedious days there, sometime in the Spring, a colleague, who had been reading something on the computer announced "I think I'll volunteer for that!". When I enquired what?, he explained that a request had been put out for volunteers for the Festival of Remembrance in London. Perhaps if I had read Station Routine Orders more diligently as I was supposed to have done I might have noticed this before. I then read that they were looking for two volunteers of my rank and trade and that the event was to be held on Saturday November the 9th 2013. That would be my very last day in the RAF and I would have had to have handed all my kit back in by then, "Cleared" from the station, and completed my Resettlement and Terminal Leave, but I thought I would apply anyway and sort that problem out later, it was unlikely that I would be chosen anyway from the hundreds of applications they must get for the two places. I quickly got on to our helpful admin staff and they sent off the appropriate application.

I was amazed the very next day to be handed an e-mail saying that I had been successful, and that I would be one of a small group representing the RAF at the Festival of Remembrance in November! My colleague across the desk who had not received such an e-mail was not too impressed! But later it was confirmed that he too, had been selected.

There were then many long months of waiting during which time I completed my last working day in the RAF, handed most of my kit and documentation in and attended several Resettlement Courses. Whilst chatting to various people I was surprised to find that several had taken part in the Festival of Remembrance in the past. They all said the same thing – it was the event of a lifetime! My previous colleague was still working away at Waddington and so made sure I

was sent any appropriate Admin Instructions about the big event. I was quite surprised when reading through the Instructions how many other events involving RAF personnel were taking place in London over the same period. There would be people at Westminster Abbey, in the Lord Mayor's Procession, at the Cenotaph, at the RAF Church of St Clement Danes as well as the RAH.

I had done some homework by finding previous events on Youtube and noted that the steps I would have to march down were quite steep and that my predecessors all looked very serious and were looking straight ahead as they descended from opposite sides into the display area. I realised that I would probably be at the front of one group! Would I be able to maintain that high standard??

Early on the Monday morning before the Saturday of the event I joined the Coningsby contingent for the MT journey down to RAF Northolt, near Ruislip in London. It would be odd putting a uniform on again for the first time in four months. We were going to be trained by Drill Instructors of the RAF Queen's Colour Squadron who were based at Northolt. Everyone had seen the immaculate silent drill routine of QCS, it was acknowledged to be some of the best ceremonial drill in the world, now their instructors would be taking on this motley bunch of RAF individuals drawn from all stations, all trades, and all age groups and trying to get them to a standard where we could perform acceptably in front of HM The Queen and the world – quite a challenge!

We assembled in the large briefing room at QCS at the appointed time to be given the obligatory H&S brief, and be introduced to our instructors. The staff were quite surprised to find that every single person in the room had volunteered. They obviously weren't used to this, there was then some muffled amusement as the Squadron Warrant Officer continued with his stern warning that if anyone thought they could get out of these duties by mis-behaving his wrath would fall upon them. We all WANTED to be there!

They explained that there would be intense drill instruction each day morning and afternoon, with occasional coffee breaks, that on Friday afternoon we would go to have a familiarisation visit at The RAH, and have the chance for a few "run throughs" down the steps. There would be a full dress rehearsal on the morning of Saturday the 9th and then two performances, one in the afternoon, and one in the early evening. This was quite an enlightenment – I had always thought that what we watched on TV was a live performance, but actually the late evening TV broadcast was a combination of bits filmed from the dress rehearsal and the two performances. Just goes to show you can't believe what you see on the TV. More importantly this meant that if we fell headfirst down the steps it hopefully wouldn't be shown on TV!

Out on the Parade Ground we were first divided into our two groups, (we

would enter the arena from opposite sides of the Hall), and it was confirmed that I would be leading our half (pride, and apprehension!). We were then marched up and down in our two groups trying to remember which was right and left, which foot you halt on and “T,L,V” for About Turns. We were shown the two training aids that we had for this very high profile event. One was a set of Fire Escape steps on a nearby building, and the other was a plan view of the RAH steps and display area painted on the Parade Ground. No expense spared!!



All photos: Mike Chatterton unless otherwise stated.

It transpired that the most critical aspect of all this (apart from not tripping on the steps) was setting off at precisely the correct moment with the music, i.e. the first note of the RAF March-past, and as I was at the front this was all down to me. I would have one of the Drill Instructors talking quietly in my ear at the top of the steps telling me when to step off, but I soon realised that his sense of beat was worse than mine and he kept sending me off at the wrong time so I determined that I would ignore him and just go on the preceding drum roll. If I got this wrong when I met up with my counterpart coming from the other side I would be out of step and so would everyone behind me, and on TV it would be extremely noticeable. No pressure!

The next few days consisted of hour after hour of marching down the Fire Escape steps NOT LOOKING DOWN but straight ahead at all times, once on the flat - swinging the arms to the precisely the correct height, and stepping out at precisely the correct pace. We also spent hours marching in the painted “Royal Albert Hall” on the Parade Ground to practise the “Join Up” in the middle with our colleagues from the other side and then peeling off again to form up in our blocks for the subsequent service. Stepping “down” the flat painted steps – keeping to the beat of the music often resulted in something looking like a Monty Python sketch. But the Drill Instructors seemed to be happy with our progress and the coffee breaks became longer and longer. During one of these breaks, whilst gazing out of a window, I was extremely

surprised to see a Lancaster go past! Wonderful! It turned out to be a privately owned nose section that was parking at Northolt prior to taking part in the Lord Mayor's Parade. It certainly received a very close inspection over the next couple of days.



Emphasis now turned to our kit. We had several inspections of our uniforms, especially shoes. I was relieved when they said my "10,000 hour" SD hat was just acceptable – it was the only one I had! And I was pleased when they suppressed their laughter at my first attempt at bulling my shoes. They patiently explained about the technique of cotton wool balls, polish and cold water; fortunately the on-base Spar shop had plenty of the first two. It was suggested that being an obviously well-off officer I might be better off to pay one of the young airman a few quid to do my kit but I declined this option. We were expected to spend at least two hours each evening bulling shoes and pressing uniforms and shirts; this came as a bit of a shock to me initially but slowly but surely I got my uniform up to a satisfactory standard; everyone had their own little tips to achieve the best results. On the actual day my shoes were the shiniest they had ever been at any time in the previous 40 years.

Our drill routines were finally checked by the QCS Warrant Officer and OIC and we were declared fit to perform in front of HM The Queen. There was an excited babble on the coach into London on early Friday afternoon for our familiarisation trip to the RAH as the enormity of what we would be doing the following day sank in. We entered the magnificent building by the "Tradesmen's entrance" round the back. The first thing that struck us were the vast security measures in place all around. You don't see any of this on TV. We were issued passes and shown deep in to the bowels of the structure where we would get changed the following day. We were then allowed to go and sit in the audience galleries and watch what was going on in the arena. It was mainly the producers going through all their setting up procedures checking lighting, sound levels, timings and positions. There were cameras absolutely everywhere which explained why we had been warned that on the night - once inside you can't relax because whatever you did, - you were probably being watched.

To be concluded.

In the August issue of The 4T9er we published a report on a ceremony at Ugny-sur-Meuse commemorating the crash of Lancaster LL908 which resulted in the deaths of her crew members. The article was compiled from a report by Associate Member Terry and Ann Atkinson. Unfortunately space did not permit the inclusion of the eyewitness reports but we are pleased to publish these now.

TESTIMONIES AND MEMORIES COLLECTED BY MADAME LEFRANC, UGNY-SUR-MEUSE, 2014

Memories of 27th April 1944, Alfred Delcuvelierie:

He was seven years old and lived in Saint Germain-sur-Meuse. Two miles from Ugny. He arrived with his parents, walking along the railway line. He recalls: "The bodies had already been placed in coffins and taken away. I only saw the remains of the aircraft. What struck me, and I still remember it, were the dents in the soil made by several of the airmen's bodies. I felt that the airmen must have hit the soil very heavily. I saw brown stains on the ground, my father said it was melted chocolate, yet I now wonder whether it was blood."

Memories of 27th April 1944, Marthe Houzelot:

The oldest woman in Ugny sur Meuse (89 years). She recalls, "I lived in Vaucouleurs, four miles away. I knew a young man from the village called Raymond Houzelot. When I arrived the next morning at the Berthelot sewing factory my fellow workers asked me if I knew what had happened during the night in Ugny. They explained during the night they had heard strange noises, an aircraft with its engines misfiring followed by an explosion. No one dared to take a look immediately out of fear of reprisals. As I hadn't seen Raymond for a week I wasn't aware of what had happened. The next day the workers at Berthelot told me that an aircraft had crashed in the fields at Ugny.

"On Sunday, with Raymond, we left for Ugny by bike, me riding on the back. We arrived at the place where the plane had crashed and I received red hot splatters on my face. I was almost knocked out and still have the marks on my forehead from the incident.

"The bodies were no longer visible, just the engines."

Memories of 27th April 1944, Rene Petitcolas:

Rene Peticolas, 88 years old, recalls: "I was seventeen years old in 1944 and I have not forgotten the night of April 27th. I was asleep in the kitchen's alcove when around midnight I was woken up by an astounding noise and explosions. The sky lit up as if the sun was hitting on the window panes. It lasted quite a while.

“I thought, ‘The house is on fire.’ The whole family got up and everyone ran to the end of the garden. Almost everyone from the village was there. In the meadow, near the Grande Voute, it was like a fireworks display. Lights and explosion noise all at once. G. Vincenot, my neighbour, shouted, ‘An aircraft has crashed and firebombs are exploding.’

“My mother screamed ‘Our oxen! The bombs are going to kill our oxen! It’s next door to our meadow.’ At one o’clock in the morning she ran towards the aircraft on fire. Our three oxen were our only wealth, without them we had no means to do our work on the farm because the horses had been requisitioned by the German army. My mother returned fairly quickly, she had not been able to get near, the bombs never stopped exploding. The oxen were still alive.

“Other people also tried to get near to see if the airmen were inside the aircraft but it was impossible to tell as it was too dangerous. The Ugny villagers gradually returned to their homes.

“On the next day the German soldiers, who had been informed by a collaborator, surrounded the wreck and prevented anyone from approaching. I can still remember them menacing the audacious ones with their guns shouting, ‘Heruas, heraus.’ (Outside, outside.) We did not resist.

“From a distance we could see some of the bodies that appeared to be intact. Debris from the aircraft was scattered over several miles.

“Alex Schwalbach (who spoke German) arrived with the Mayor of Ugny, Mr Gilbert, and the bodies were carted away. Later on that day, we learned that Mr Schwalbach had had the courage to refuse that the airmen’s bodies be buried in a mass grave and so the Municipality bought seven coffins.

“After the Germans had left, many people from Ugny and the surrounding villages gathered to the place where the crash had taken place and they picked up some pieces of the aircraft. The marks of the airmen’s bodies were still visible.

“It is a good thing that this piece of history is not forgotten.”

Memories of 27th April 1944 by Andre Schwalbach:

“I was seventeen years old and I remember very well what happened especially because my father, who spoke German, was requisitioned to go to the place where the plane had crashed down.

“I was in my bed when it happened. Almost every night French and allied airplanes flew over us carrying out bombing missions into Germany. So we no longer paid much attention to it in spite of the loud deafening humming. As for me I just slept and slept well as anyone does at the age of seventeen.

“I learned about the crash on the following morning whilst taking the cows to the fields. I saw smoke and a gathering of German uniforms securing the

area and the wreck of the aircraft. It was a Lancaster, a four engined aircraft loaded with phosphorus fire bombs. They had been heading for Munich.

“My father gave me further details. The Lancaster had exploded in flight and debris was found as far away as two miles from the impact point. The engines fell over several miles and were recovered about eight or ten years ago. The accident caused seven deaths, five found in the cabin and two outside because they had tried to jump to parachute out, but they were flying too low and crashed heavily. “My father’s role, my father spoke German and the Mayor, Mr Gilbert had requisitioned him. My father was worried because he was hiding a young man from Alsace, a resistance fighter from the ‘Malgre Nous’ (In spite of us). He had been incorporated by force in the Hitler Youth and he had fled whilst on permission. My father had some false papers made for him in Vaucouleurs by Monsieur Pink, a Resistance Fighter.

“The villagers were very scared. They were sorry for the young men, yet at the same time they were relieved by the fact that the aircraft had not crashed onto the village.

“So far it was commonly believed that the DCA (Defence Control Avion) - Aviation Defence – from St Dizier had hit the aircraft, but actually it was an elite German gunner.” (See note below. ED.)

“What was the German’s attitude? The Germans wanted to have their way, they wanted to bury the airmen in a mass grave without any funeral. My father opposed them. He declared the seven airmen would be buried as soldiers, not like animals, each one in his own coffin. My father heard a German saying to others, “The old man isn’t scared”, but actually he was trembling because he was afraid of any possible revenge. The seven bodies were placed on a cart and pulled by horses and the Germans escorted them up to the placing of the bodies.

“The funeral was held on the next day, all the villagers accompanied the soldiers to the Ugny churchyard. French guards watched out in case the Germans would come back, but the funeral was held with a lot of emotion and without any incident.

“The years have passed...the tombs have always been looked after and flowered by the Municipality. Relatives or fellow companions continue to visit.”

LL908 was the third Lancaster shot down in 10 minutes by Hauptmann Helmut Bergmann flying a Messerschmitt Bf110 based at Juvenecourt with 8/NJG4. He penetrated the bomber stream over St Dizier and was guided onto 106 Squadron Lancaster JB601 which he shot down at 0050hrs. His radar operator then picked up 49 Squadron Lancaster JB679 which went down at 0057. Finally LL908 was shot down 4 minutes later, it was Bergmann’s 28th victory. The Editor is grateful to our Researcher, Colin Cripps for this information.

4T9ers REMEMBER

As usual on Remembrance Sunday ceremonies were held at many locations. Following continuous rain the day before, Sunday November 9th was mainly calm with blue skies. A good number of 4T9ers attended the annual service at Fiskerton. Rev'd Penny Green conducted the church service at the parish church which was standing room only. She then led the wreath laying service at The Airfield Memorial, Bill Cooke laying 49's wreath with the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop forming the Guard of Honour. An excellent cooked lunch, prepared by the ladies of the village and generously sponsored by The Hodgson Charity, a Fiskerton organization, was enjoyed at the Village Hall. Once again the warm relationship between the Association and the good folk of Fiskerton was amply demonstrated.

John Lowe told us of a ceremony at the memorial, 1,700ft. up on Hameldown Tor, Dartmoor, to the 49 Squadron crew of Hampden X3054. This was attended by 43 people, the eldest of whom was ex Fleet Air Arm and 90 years old.



Photo: John Lowe

Robert McEneaney e-mailed; "My sister Elizabeth, as part of her work in Singapore, was given the honour of laying a wreath at Kranji War Cemetery yesterday. The British High Commission allowed those chosen to dedicate the wreath to a relative. Elizabeth dedicated her wreath to her Uncle Terence, the crew of ND474 and all those who served with the 49 Squadron." Robert continued: "We were sent photographs from a chap who visited Durnbach in MARCH and could see that we had made a group visit as all the wreaths to the crew were still in place. He kindly made a further visit yesterday to mark Remembrance Sunday and sent us the attached. [See E-Supplement. ED.] People are very kind and thoughtful." Robert further told that a couple of dozen 4T9ers, many being youngsters from the McEneaney family, were at the Bomber Command Memorial in London at 11-00am.



Photos: Robert and Annette McEneaney

Further ceremonies, of which the writer is aware, involving 4T9ers took place at The Fulbeck Memorial, The Bransby Memorial, Aabenraa Cemetery in Denmark and no doubt many more.

MY SERVICE CAREER IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE 1940/68
INCLUDING BOMBER OPERATIONS WITH
No. 49 SQUADRON IN 1943/44

By
SQUADRON LEADER T.J.PAGE DFM

Part 2

It was not long before my servicing party went to service a Boston aircraft at Royal Air Force Manston in Kent. This was the airfield of my boyhood dreams when living close by. The work was in a hanger that had escaped the German bombing; it still stands today, and is close beside the road that goes through the centre of the aerodrome. I have such memories of travelling that road in the years before the war.

One morning there was a damaged Short Stirling bomber standing outside the hanger. It was very long and tall and the biggest we had seen. This type of aircraft was new to the Royal Air Force. The aircraft had landed there after a bombing raid on Cologne and had received damage to the port fuselage. The basic wing and engine were of the Short Sunderland seaplane design. The sight of the Stirling was very impressive.

This was the day, the 2nd of May 1942, when I flew on my first ever flight. The Station Commander had come to the hanger to fly a small tandem two-seat aircraft and I ask him if I could fly with him. He replied by saying, "Go and get a parachute". We flew over Canterbury to see the damage caused by the German raid during the night. This day would trigger a drastic change in my service career.

After the servicing of the Boston aircraft at Manston, the party returned to Slough travelling by train with heavy toolboxes. A few days later there appeared on the Daily Routine Orders an appeal for Aircraft Fitters to volunteer for flying duties as Flight Engineers to assist Pilots in flying the new four engine bombers that were rapidly coming into service; the Stirlings, Halifaxes and Lancasters. The experiences at Manston made me volunteer.

My next servicing party duty was at RAF West Malling where they were flying Bostons. Here I was able to get a flight in the back cockpit with the Radar Operator.

I was then required to report to the Aircrew Selection Centre in Euston Road, London for a medical examination to see if I was fit enough for Aircrew. I passed the examination and went to RAF St Athan in South Wales for aircrew training as a Flight Engineer.



Self, back row third from right.

It was October 1942 when training commenced.

Being an Airframe Fitter the first part of the course was on the theory of aircraft engines and their construction, working, servicing requirements and finally on how to operate them for maximum efficiency particularly in relation to range flying.

After engine theory, it was instruction on the airframe side of the Lancaster, the flying controls, the fuel system, and the hydraulics that operated the undercarriage and the flaps and other miscellaneous services. There were vacuum and air pressure systems to drive instruments, automatic pilots, wheel brakes and other emergency apparatus. The aim of the course was to understand the whole aircraft. Part of the course included a week's visit to the Rolls Royce Engine factory at Derby and a week's visit to the aircraft factory of A.V. Roe at Chadderton.

Finally, there was a short course at Stormy Down in South Wales on air gunnery and gun turrets. For the Flight Engineer to know something of gun turrets and gunnery was to not only complete the knowledge of the aircraft but also so that an Engineer could operate a gun turret especially during low level, mine laying when the Bomb Aimer was busy.

The course was finished at the end of December and the successful course members promoted to the rank of Sergeant Aircrew and awarded the coveted Flight Engineer's flying badge. It was time to leave Wales where it seemed to be always raining.

Lancaster Aircraft - Flying Training

My new unit was No.1661 Heavy Conversion Unit at the Royal Air Force Station at Winthorpe just outside the town of Newark in Nottinghamshire. Here I joined the following aircrew to form a seven man crew to fly Lancasters.

922297 Sgt T J Page Flight Engineer Self



1345759 Sgt J Morrison Pilot “Jock”



1479510 Sgt J Dorian Navigator Jimmy



1553978 Sgt H C Annett Bomb Aimer Hughie



1294976 Sgt R I Green Wireless Operator Ralph



1580722 Sgt E Green Mid Upper Gunner Ernie



1578799 Sgt H. T. Maggs Rear Gunner Hayden (Taffy)



On the 20th February 1943 the all sergeant aircrew assembled at the aircraft dispersal point with a Flight Sergeant Staff Pilot Instructor to fly on their first flight together as a crew. This was to familiarise themselves with a new type of aircraft. Disappointedly we found that the aircraft was an Avro Manchester and not a Lancaster. The Manchester was a two engine aircraft and was unsuitable for Squadron operational service. The shortage of Lancaster aircraft had made it necessary to use them for the initial conversion of new crews at the Heavy Conversion Units. This particular Manchester was No.L7398, which had seen operational service on Nos.49, 97 and 106 Squadrons. It was in poor condition and did not inspire confidence.

All external protective covers, flying control and undercarriage safety struts on the aircraft had to be taken off and panels checked for security as they could cause a great hazard if they came off in flight. The caps of the petrol tank filler had to be checked for security before priming the engines with petrol ready for the start up. With pre-flight checks done both outside and inside the aircraft by the Flight Engineer the crew would board and each would do their respective checks for their station. I would secure the entrance door, stow the entrance ladder and go to my position beside the Pilot to start the engines and assist with the preparations for take-off.

On this first conversion flight, the Instructor said to me, "Watch what I do." This was to be only my third time in the air, an event in its own right. Now I was to be instructed how to assist the Pilot in flying the aircraft. The Instructor did the take-off, talking and demonstrating as he did so to both the Pilot and me. Away from the airfield, he showed the handling characteristics of the aircraft, its flying and stalling speed in various configurations. The Pilot would then try the various manoeuvres himself to get the feel of the aircraft. The duration of this first flight was 1.55hrs.

On the 6th March 1943, the day came for conversion to the Lancaster and after three hours flying with an Instructor we took off in Lancaster No.W4190 for a further period of practising circuits and landings. On the 13th March, we flew Lancaster No.R5541 on a six-hour cross-country flight followed by periods of flying by night with the emphasis on taking off and landing in the dark. On the 24th March the crew became proficient and ready for full operational flying after a total of 53 hours flying.

On the 26th March 1943, we went to No.49 Bomber Squadron at RAF Fiskerton, an airfield about five miles east of Lincoln. Lincoln Cathedral was to become very prominent to us in the next few months for on most take offs the runway used was East to West which took the aircraft directly over the cathedral.

On the 31st March, we flew our first flight on an operational squadron with some local flying in Lancaster Mark III No. ED 452, followed during the next two weeks, with practice bombing sorties, air firing and cross-country flying. On the ground, there were practice drills for emergencies and explanations as to what to do in a crash landing and how to escape from the aircraft by parachute. In addition, survival if forced down into the sea.

By the 12th April Jock, the Pilot, had already flown on two operational bombing flights over Germany as second Pilot with other crews to gain experience of flying amongst enemy defences before taking his own crew as Captain of an aircraft.

To be continued.

ADVENTURES OUT EAST

By Malcolm Brooke

The aim of photographing the cemeteries/headstones of aircrew killed following their service with 49 Squadron is well advanced thanks to contacts from within the Association.

However, there are six airmen who were killed whilst serving outside north-west Europe. Fortunately, existing contacts have photographed Montecchio in Italy and Adelaide River in the Northern Territories.

Association funds wouldn't allow a trip to Rangoon in Burma (now Yangon in Myanmar) so I looked to see if any Facebook 'ex-pat' group existed there.

Daniel Kiggins, who is the service manager for Ford/Jaguar in Yangon, responded to my 'post' and offered his assistance.

There are two cemeteries in Yangon, both on the same road. The first location was closed and Daniel had to pay a bribe to get in but, unfortunately, he was at the wrong cemetery!

Daniel is tenacious and after more research found and photographed the grave of S/L P Massey...it involved a short drive that took almost two hours.



I also contacted the Facebook page of the "Mount Gambier Gun Club" in Southern Australia with a request to photograph the grave of Flying Officer G K Peacock who was killed in a flying accident.

A few days later, to my great joy, an email arrived from Liz Rymill with just the photographs we required.

It is hard to express ones feelings when such generous support is offered by complete strangers...and marvel at the wonders of technology that enabled the contacts to be made.

The remaining two cemeteries are more problematic...Iraq and Israel. RAF Habbanyia, located 60km west of Baghdad was a jewel in the desert with tree lined roads, lawns and flower gardens. In 2005 great efforts were made to restore the cemetery which had become overgrown and used as a dumping ground.

Sadly, today, the area is now inaccessible once again and the state of the cemetery is unknown.

Christopher Morris, the Honorary Secretary of the RAF Habbaniya Association has provided details of the crash that killed WOII P F Higgins but they have no image of his headstone.

BEAUFIGHTER X BV 558

16 December 1944 River Bank Euphrates 5 F.U. *

Pilot; F/Sgt Farrer A.J. 1331817

Crew; W/O Higgins P.F. 1182127

Flt Sgt Oehrli M.A. 1804210

All killed and buried RAF Cemetery RAF Habbaniya

Graves Plot 6 Row E Graves 4,6&5

After T/O P.E.** failed A/C climbed slowly to 300feet

P wing dropped- crashed-burnt

A/C appeared to stall after slow climb, Pilot lost control after P.E failed

No proof that pilot did not run up engine prior T/O

P.E failed due to master con rod

See also report AIR 28/330 ***

* Ferry Unit

** Port Engine

*** National Archives/Public Record Office, Kew

Christopher

Dr C D E Morris

Honorary Secretary, Archivist & Editor

RAF Habbaniya Association

This morning, Daniel Kiggins contacted me again to say that he has military contacts in Iraq and may be able to help!

All we need now is somebody going to Israel...any offers?

All the images can be seen on our website by visiting the Cemeteries page.

‘THE BOYS’ - THREE DAYS IN SEPTEMBER

By John Lowe

The telephone rang and a pleasant sounding voice on the other end said, ‘Hi John, it’s Mike from the National Park, have you got a moment?’

‘Of course old chap; what can I do for you?’

‘A researcher from the BBC has asked for your telephone and email address and before passing them over I just wanted to check that that was ok with you’

Rather taken aback I replied, ‘Well, yes of course, but why, who?’

The voice of my friend replied, as if it were an everyday occurrence, ‘It’s just that a researcher from the BBC’s ‘Countryfile’ programme is looking to perhaps film the story related to ‘The Boys’ and the archaeological survey that’s planned.’

And so began what was to become known as, ‘Three days in September’.

As the research project grew into what had become known as the story of The Boys, so too, had the need to search, literally deeper, become ever more apparent. The Dartmoor National Park had adopted my story because its sentiments paralleled the needs of their initiative, ‘More than meets the eye’, a project which tells the story of the people and the landscape of Dartmoor over 4,000 years.

The previous August, for the first time since that 49 Squadron Hampden had crashed onto the slopes of Hameldown in 1941, I brought the direct descendant of the 2nd pilot to the monolithic stone that now stands as a memorial to that incident. It was whilst we were stood together, gazing over the heather covered landscape and on into the valley below, that the Niece quietly asked, ‘Where was Richard’s body found?’

At that moment I had no idea that, in a little over a year, I was going to be able to answer that question with an accuracy that was unimaginable then.

My Home Office Licence was now going to allow me to conduct a fully supported geophysical archaeological survey, supported by the National Park and the Duchy of Cornwall, of the area immediately surrounding the memorial stone. Combined with my research into what the effect extremely high temperatures would have had on minerals found within the soil and peat I was confident that given a little luck, I would be able to discover something that would lead towards establishing where the impact had occurred.

Events began to move rapidly once the production team got the go ahead from the National Park and soon we were all stood knee deep in heather; I can remember it was a wonderful feeling to think that this was my story, and that the BBC wanted to know everything about The Boys. They continually asked for opinion regarding ideas for filming and constantly referred to The Boys booklet and my bank of research material. Eventually the plans were made and as

I walked away from that meeting I realised the gravitas of what was about to happen. I no longer had control; I had handed that over to a young, highly intelligent lady who looked no older than twelve!! I realised then too, how old I was and rather worriedly turned to my archaeological colleague and friend and said,

‘What if my sums are wrong, what if I’ve missed something. Ross, this could all go badly wrong, especially with cameras and such.’

‘I don’t think you’ve got it wrong John; everything stands up. All will be good, I’m sure.’

I was not confident but those around me were upbeat and raring to go, the BBC would be there to film the last day of the archaeological survey on Dartmoor and what’s more a presenter, called Matt Baker was going to be there too. No turning back now.

I don’t fully understand the language spoken by Geophys boffins – something to do with nano’s I think – but I do understand smiles, thumbs up and nodding heads and that was what I was seeing from these scientist within minutes of the Geophys starting; relieved or what!

I need not have worried, the BBC were brilliant in every respect; they knew what they wanted and how to get it. Matt Baker; so professional, grasped the situation very quickly and realised that what was happening was for real and utterly un-staged. At one point, very early in the filming he turned to me and said, ‘You’ve got something very special here, but I expect you know that. This could make a feature film. We will have enough for Countryfile but there is much more here than just that.’

What a feeling that was.

Tanya, the Great Niece of Richard Ellis had agreed to be present and she had brought with her the wonderful scrap book that Richard’s parents had raised in his memory and one of the ‘stills’ I took shows the Director setting eyes on that book for the first time, and hastily rewriting the script! Another, which was cut in the final edit, because it was considered just too emotional, shows Tanya and Matt together with the open book, in front of them; in Matt’s hand she has just placed a lock of Richard Ellis’s hair taken from that book. His expression underlines the moment.

Those three days in September gave me the privilege of turning the clock back over seventy years for just a short while and yes; we found the gouge marks and the fire damaged soil hidden for so long from view by the landscape. Lady Marjorie, the pilot’s mother wrote in a letter in 1941 that this was a wonderful place, covered in heather, overlooking the head waters of the river Dart. But I must warn you, she says, it is nine miles from the nearest rail and bus stop and invariably covered in cloud.

Hameldown is now quiet: walkers still make the climb to look at the stone; many now more aware of what it marks and for those who care to, they can look, over its drooping shoulder towards the place this young crew had been to, all those years ago, Lorient.

The other day the telephone rang and a pleasant sounding voice at the other end said,

‘Hi, John, I’m Rebecca Ricks from British Forces TV – I’m on a train from London to the West Country at the moment, reading your story of The Boys; it’s great. I want to film it, an hours’ documentary; will ring you this evening.’



A general shot of the BBC crew and presenter discussing how things should be arranged for the filming later in the day. John Lowe is on the extreme right.

The Director looking, and seeing, for the first time that amazing scrap book that Tanya brought to the moor; she is rapidly rewriting the script to accommodate that work of historic importance!

All photos: John Lowe

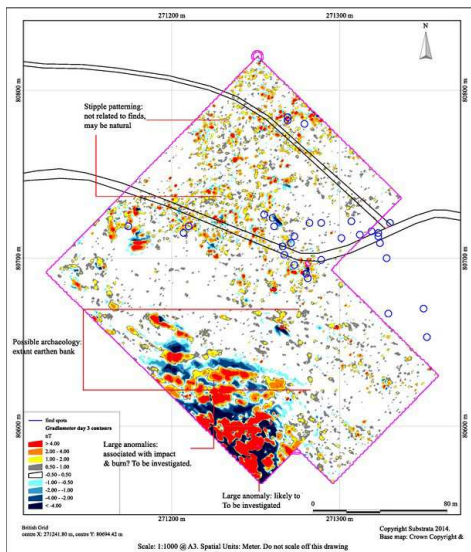


Matt Baker and Tanya; this was cut from the film, I believe because it was considered too emotional - she has just placed, in the presenters hand, a lock of Richards hair taken from that wonderful book. Look at his reaction; now you can see why it was cut, in preference to the letter that Tanya read which in itself was quite something.



Matt Baker, the presenter, becoming aware of the gravitas of the situation shortly after he arrived at the location – again, the body language says it all.

This last picture, for me, is the most important of all. Day three's printout of the archaeological survey; the area inside the magenta line measures an area of about three hectares – I know every single inch of that ground – and the significance of this picture is that it illustrates the arrival point of X3054 on Hameldown together with the associated area of 'burn' in relation to the Stone. (I reconstructed the fire to the intensity of the original, which enabled me to calculate and record those anticipated temperatures – in excess of 600 – 680 degrees, centigrade – I knew that if that had been the original heat, then the polarity of minerals found in the peat, would have been significantly altered, that being the case, it would, in all probability, show on our instruments; and as you can see, it did. On the following Monday we returned to the site and located the 'Gouge' marks as witnessed by Boy Leonard seventy three years earlier. Sadly, Leonard left us this year without me being able to share this important discovery with him. He now lies in Widecombe Churchyard, looking towards Hameldown, so I guess he knows.



All in all, the BBC's Countryfile professionalism and expertise did The Boys proud. Matt was marvellous throughout the filming and was genuinely stunned with the story and of course the archaeology that was taking place. Very quickly the BBC guys realised that what was being done, was for real, and not reconstructed for their programme; and when we started to discover what we had been searching for, that was the icing on the cake. We all celebrated. I had been so nervous because the Geophys survey, all the archaeology, and the expense that that had entailed, rested with me, funded from the £3.9 million MTME programme because of my research and calculations. I so hoped that I had got my arithmetic right; especially, as on top of all that, it was being filmed for 9 million people to see, and what I now know to be even more, from around the world! In the end; the perfect result. Delighted for The Boys.

ASSOCIATE MEMBER, DON HENDERSON WROTE TO THE EDITOR IN FEBRUARY 2011:

We were last in touch re. S/Ldr. Denis 'Dusty' Miller's obituary, which you published in Issue 15. (August 2009)

Denis was my late father's first ops pilot, at both 44 & 49 Squadrons (ie. uniquely as a crew both Dunholme 'Residents', then 'Lodgers'. Transferring in on 8/10/43!)

As I mentioned to you I traced and met Dusty in 2001/2. I seem to remember mentioning in a telephone call to you that my father's logbook includes a stuck-in cutting of a War Correspondent's account from the English Digest, published in May 1944.

The Correspondent was Robin Miller, Dusty's brother and he flew in my dad's crew on the Berlin op. of 2/1/44...

I enclose a photocopy of the cutting...note that Robin Miller has become Capt. Mills for the records; apparently it was common practice to give War Correspondents identities from other armed forces.

The first BBC War Correspondent to fly with Bomber Command was Richard Dimbleby, on 16/1/43; advice from the BBC was for him to report 'in a scientific way' but this was ignored in paying tribute to the outstanding bravery of the Command crews....

Ironically the navigator of the Miller crew (P/O Leslie Benson) was KIA on the disastrous Wesseling raid of 22/6/44 when flying with BBC War Correspondent Kent Stevenson under pilot W/C Crocker. [49 Squadron's Officer Commanding. ED.]

...I also sent a copy to Dusty Miller in 2003; he was flabbergasted as, after nearly 60 years without a mention, Robin (who lives in New York) had asked if he remembered the event/report only a few days earlier. Neither had a copy of the account and so you can imagine how shocked Dusty was when completely out of the blue, my envelope dropped through his letter box; he referred to 'strange forces being at work'! Equally strange/shocking or surprising to Ted Cachart was my producing his unique crew photograph (the one that he'd been trying to track down for 58 years) at about the same time...made me feel a bit 'alternative' as well as privileged to have been the 'transmission vehicle'!

I asked Dusty to send a copy of 'Bomber over Berlin' to Robin for a signature. (I had no idea at the time where he lived and didn't want to pry) Back from New York it came as requested, along with the comment that he, "only wished now that I had talked less about myself and more about that great crew!"

A follow-up thank you letter brought his war-experiences response. He was obviously well travelled/experienced in all theatres of WWII, but this was his only Bomber Command flight.

Sadly Robin died in 2009, a few weeks before Dusty. They both in their different ways made a significant contribution to the war effort.

Robin Miller's letter, dated July 14, 2003, reads:

Dear Mr Henderson,

Many thanks for your letter and its enclosure. Yes, Denis had told me of your efforts to reconstruct your father's war career, I must congratulate you on your perseverance and results.

I'm afraid my memory is not good enough to recall more of my trip with Denis and your father than appears in the broadcast. The most I can offer is an explanation of how I happened to be there.

At the outbreak of the war I was enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and went with its first units to Egypt in early 1940. I trained as a motorcycle despatch rider but when the army realized I had been a newspaper reporter in civilian life I was promoted from despatch rider to despatch writer with the rank of sergeant (eventually lieutenant and captain and served with our divisions in Greece, Crete and Libya. Back in New Zealand in 1942 I served for several months with U.S and N.Z. forces in the Pacific. In 1943 I was sent to Britain, at the request of your Ministry of Information to do a lecture tour on war experiences, in factories, towns and villages around Britain - a sort of morale building affair - and there of course I caught up with Denis. The BBC got me to do some broadcasts in their.....Service, and this gave me the idea of trying to arrange a trip with Denis and his crew. It took a bit of doing because my Government was a bit nervous of two members of the same family being put at risk. (Two brothers on the same warship had been lost at sea.). However, all went well and you know the result.

I am not sure that my one trip justifies my adding my name to your picture, but I am putting it on a card for you to decide.

Thank you again, and I express again my admiration for your work in recapturing your brave father's career.

Yours sincerely

Robin T. Miller

BOMBER OVER BERLIN [From the English Digest - May 1944.]

In a fantastic dream on my mind I can see my head in the transparent dome on top of a huge bomber, looking back on a sight that gives me a prickly feeling down my spine, and thinking to myself: "So this is what it feels like to bomb Berlin!"

Probably at some time or another you have been through an experience so startling, so much out of the ordinary run of your life, that looking back on it you wonder whether it wasn't just a dream. It is vivid in every detail, and yet it seems too fantastic to be true. Your mind gropes for some little bit of proof that it did really happen.

My dream is such as your imagination could hardly have served up even in its most feverish moments. A fantasy of fire and colour and fury – a battle fought

three or four miles off the face of the earth, between the bright cold stars and a sea of cottonwool cloud. But the most incredible thing about the dream is that it was real. It *did* happen. I *was* in a bomber, and the bomber was over Berlin.

You probably read the communiqué. It said that Lancasters of the Bomber Command in great strength attacked Berlin in the early hours of a Sunday morning. It didn't say anything about an extremely humbled New Zealander who went along for the ride and who stood there trying to swallow what felt like an apple stuck in his throat and feeling his insides tie themselves into a knot. They don't put much emotion into those communiqués, but there was plenty of it in me.

Yet the possibility that I mightn't get back had gone completely out of my mind. That round in the Battle of Berlin was a kind of family affair. Up in the pilot's seat of our huge Lancaster, V for Victor, I had a good, solid reason for being sure of coming back safely. It was my young brother Denis.

It wasn't merely that the squadron-leader's insignia on the shoulders of his battledress meant that he had been doing this sort of thing for a long time and doing it well. People had protested about the idea of us going out together in the same machine. We didn't see it that way. With two Millers in the one plane, nothing could possibly happen to it. There'd be a double dose of the Miller luck riding through the German sky. And there was.

This dream that is real starts in the briefing room of my brother's squadron. We listen in silence to the weather, the course, the method of attack. A kind of shiver runs through me when I hear that the target is Berlin; but I'm pleased in a way that it is the Big City, for otherwise I may not be satisfied with just one trip to Germany.

My brother takes me to meet his crew – six young gentlemen from Yorkshire, London and Wales. They have friendly smiles. Their handshakes are warm. But I can't help feeling a bit apologetic at the thought of being excess baggage on a journey to Berlin. I breathe a prayer that I won't do anything wrong and that I won't get in their way.

I have no sooner prayed to avoid those things that I begin to do them. We are in our places in the bomber, bundled up in Mae West life jackets and parachute harness and thick clothing, waiting for the take-off. Our four motors burst into life one by one. Somebody gives me a flashlight to hold. A minute later I am asked to give it back. I find I haven't got it any more. I don't remember when it left me, and I don't know where it is. There is some scrambling and some searching – and some swearing. I feel pretty badly about that.

Then suddenly, when it's time we were taxiing out to the runway, the motors are switched off. Something is the matter with the oxygen control. I sit there feeling more miserable, because my inner self is beginning to taunt me: "This is

all your fault. You're a jinx, that's what you are. If we ever get off the ground now we'll never come back alive. Get out of this plane and stay out!"

I squirm in my seat. "No, no – I'm not a real jinx. We're just getting our bad luck over while we're still on the ground and it's safe. Besides, I've already bought my return ticket for the train back to London. We have to come back all right."

Luckily for my peace of mind this argument between myself and the critic within me is cut short by the motors starting up again. Under my brother's firm touch V for Victor lifts her heavy load of petrol and men and bombs towards the stars.

Among other things there is a cookie in the bomb bay, and a cookie is a bomb so big and so evil that if it landed in your street you'd have a long way to walk to get a new roof over your head.

Our cookie, like our Lancaster, is only one of hundreds. A thousand tons of high explosive are on their way to Berlin tonight. As our propellers grip the air, we look back and down on our aerodrome's flarepath twinkling with lights like a country fair. But not only ours, another and another and another until all England seems to sparkle with those necklaces of light. And we know that to those who watch and listen on the ground the air seems filled with thunder. For the dozens of planes in the sky are becoming scores and fifties and hundreds.

I stand with my hand in the transparent bubble on the roof of the plane, breathing oxygen through a mask. Looking down at the cloud banks below us, I get a sense of loneliness, as if our Lancaster and the eight of us inside her are flying on a mission alone. Yet I know that if some giant floodlamp could be turned on to the sky those hundreds of other machines would still be all around us. Indeed, we see one veering towards us now and then, and occasionally we lurch a little in the slipstream of a plane up ahead. You'd wonder that collision in midair isn't the biggest hazard in these mass attacks.

The cloud is thicker than ever below. I know only from what the crew says that we're well over the coast of the Continent. It is too thick for searchlight beams to reach us, but the night fighters are there. Once, twice, three times I hear my brother say: "Combat ahead", which means that he has seen the exchange of fire between a Lancaster and a German interceptor; and once we see a flaming thing curve across the sky and fall sharply away. One less German night fighter – or that's our fervent hope.

Things begin to happen all around: lights and explosions that tumble one on the other so rapidly I can't follow them. Weird, misty pools of light form in the clouds – searchlights, I suppose. Ack-ack shells burst ceaselessly above the pools, twinkling like fireflies.

About this time that inner self of mine starts having words with me again. It

demands to know what in the name of heaven I am doing here, anyway, and now that I am here why don't I creep into a corner of the plane, take off my oxygen mask, and quietly pass out. But, be it to my credit, I brush it aside, gulp that apple down my throat a bit further down, and turn back to the battle.

Yes, "battle" is the word for it. You can see the tactics now. That leaping, pulsing glow in the clouds away off to the left is Hamburg – dummy for tonight. Hamburg gets a pretended attack, a feint, to draw off the night fighters while we in the main force roll on to the main target.

At last the target is in sight. Berlin, dead ahead!

I crane my neck to look, and something inside me seems to slip a notch. I have seen some fantastic sights in this war: a blue sky full of confetti that turned out to be German paratroops; a night action at sea; a tank battle in the desert, but I can roll all of those into one and still get no spectacle as eerie, as incredible, as this mad dream that is coming to life in front of me.

For it is not a burning city I see, but a witches' cauldron in which all the thunder and lightning the sky needs for the next century is being brewed. How can I let you see it in simple terms of flak and flame? Berlin is being boiled in a stew of fire and brimstone, and this is the top of the stew I can see, this great fester that seethes and sparks and glows in a sea of clouds. Some giant is even shaking red and green peppers into it, as if it wasn't hot enough.

I feel the lift under my feet as our own cookie plummets into that fiery stew. There's no knowing what it will do to Berlin, but you can bet it will touch bottom.

READER'S LETTERS

Those who watched the BBC Countryfile programme featuring Dartmoor will have seen John Lowe's contribution and be familiar with his interest and involvement in 49's Hampden X3054 memorial He e-mailed the following update:

"I am very pleased to say that the lettering on the stone has now been recut by the National Parks' Stone Mason. With a little help!! Have clients to escort to the crash site on Sunday, so all being equal, I should be able to photograph the finished work.

"Also, Lord Nunburnholme has said that he is very touched by the efforts that are being undertaken to remember Robert and his crew. He will be joining me to visit the site in September. More on that nearer the time.

"The HLF £3.9m funding is in and as such, the small portion that is ours now means that the go ahead for the Geophysics is on too. Busy couple of weeks on the

hill I think. Furthermore, My detection archaeology has produced the 'draw catch' to the navigator's table from X3054 so that is two items we now have that can be positively linked by touch to both Lyons and Ellis. Makes the venture so worthwhile and very personal, especially with the combined support of descendants."

Malcolm Brooke drew The 4T9er's attention to non-member Sarah Walker's comment on the Association's Facebook site:

"My Great Uncle Tommy (Thomas Fazakerley) 614144, a 49er, was killed in action on 30/03/1943. My Grandad spoke often of his little brother, who was only 23 when he died.

"I, his Grandaughter, have a 23 year old son and find it so hard to comprehend my Great Grandparents loss. I know from what I have been told that my Great Grandma never got over the loss.

"I thank you, because through your work and the work and compassion of The War Graves Commission, my Great Grandparents were able to say goodbye. Your website also enables Uncle Tommy's family to, in some small way, connect with him.

"Thank you."

Former 49er, Dave Harrison, e-mailed:

"It was bad luck on your visit to East Kirkby not being able to see all three [Lancs]. My uncle kept the village stores during the war and I regularly cycled the fifteen miles from my home at Fishtoft to visit my uncle and aunt. My route was often by the airfield and the Lancs on the dispersals. I remember the hushed tones of the villagers in the shop. ie "Three never got back last night," and, "one 'went in' trying to land" etc, I'll never forget the awful images and accounts to be seen and heard during my wartime visits to Kirkby."

WWII veteran 49er Tom Page, whose story is currently being serialized in The 4T9er, e-mailed:

"Having read your very fine Newsletter and noting the photograph of the Wreath Laying at this years Reunion I am reminded of the day helping to plant the "Old Chestnuts" with Tom Gatfield, Geoff Stuffins and his son. My how the trees have grown over the long years since that day.

"The very spot beside the short runway reminds me of the night we did an early return on three engines with bombs on and a large amount of fuel. We were ordered to land on the short runway to avoid messing up the long runway for the rest of the returning squadron. At that spot on the short runway where the Memorial now is Jock Morrisson the Pilot realised that he could not stop before the end of the runway was reached and shouted "Brace". So off the runway we went and the undercarriage collapsed. Quick exit and run. The only casualty was

Taffy Maggs the Rear Gunner who got badly shaken up and was invalided out.”

John Ward forwarded the following e-mail that he had received from non-member Tracey Criscione:

“I want to say thank you for the Squadron 49 website. My great uncle Sgt. George Stanley Cole was a part of 49 Squadron and is buried in Oosterbeek, Holland. My gran told of her brother as a happy go lucky who enjoyed board games. Through my random genealogy searches I was able to come across your website and see a photo of him. My grandmother could not tell me the stories that I found on your website over the pain of losing both of her brothers within 6 months of each other. I wish there was more on his brother William John Cole but I have yet to come across it in my searches. Thank you for your service and for providing a way for me to learn about my family history.”

Associate Member, Graham Bairnsfather, drew our attention to a feature published in The Times on October 25th concerning his great uncle Bruce Bairnsfather. It states that, as Captain Bruce Bairnsfather, he started sketching cartoons in the trenches to relieve the boredom. However his cartoons became so popular that he became a household name, General Sir Ian Hamilton calling him the man who “made the empire laugh in its darkest hour”. His drawings appeared on postcards, pottery, playing cards etc. and his most famous creation, the lovable walrus moustached soldier Old Bill, became a global star of stage and screen.

In 1916, the War Office appointed Bairnsfather as an official cartoonist working for the Military Intelligence Section 7B, which dealt with propaganda. It is suggested that this appointment was made so that an eye could be kept on his activities as some top military brass disapproved of his depictions of soldiers. However his morale-boosting services were in demand by the French, Italian and American armies requesting that he draw their soldiers.

During WWII Bairnsfather was an official cartoonist with the US forces and painted Old Bill on a B-17 Flying Fortress which flew alongside Memphis Belle in the original wartime documentary.

Bruce Bairnsfather died in 1959, aged 72.

“Now the Royal Shakespeare Company is bringing Bairnsfather and Old Bill to life as characters in a new play by Phil Porter, The Christmas Truce, which is inspired by real events a century ago when German and British soldiers, including Bairnsfather, met in no man’s land to talk, swap presents and play football. In addition, a free exhibition at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon examines Bairnsfather’s life and work.”

The Bruce Bairnsfather exhibition is at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, until March 15, 2015. The Christmas Truce will run between November 29, 2014, and January 31, 2015.



The 4T9er

E-Supplement

November
2014



Photos: Phil Waterfield

The high point of the summer. The BBMF and CWHM Lancasters, Thumper and VeRA, fly over Jane at East Kirkby on September 14th. This never to be forgotten sight, and sound, thrilled the 5,000 people present after the disappointment of a fortnight earlier when Vera went u/s. Although those who had booked the event on the 7th were the first to see and hear the wonderful spectacle under cloudless skies I feel that the brooding Lincolnshire clouds on the 14th gave it more poignancy.

The 4T9er E-Supplement is compiled and edited by Alan Parr and published with The 4T9er magazine by 49 Squadron Association.

All photographs are by Alan Parr unless credited otherwise.

© Copyright 2014 49 Squadron Association



Photos: Phil Waterfield





A QUICK VISIT TO RAF CONINGSBY

Whenever I go to East Kirkby I can't resist a look at Coningsby. Following the Three Lancs event we found the 'Baby Spitfire' outside the hangar This is the aircraft that performed our flyovers at Bentley Hotel in June. In the background are the ever present Typhoons.



Alongside the Spitfire was the Hurricane showing of her smart new South East Asia Command colours.



These photographs were taken at Dunsfold Wheels and Wings, August bank holiday weekend, by Jo Cockburn.



Phil Waterfield e-mailed these stunning shots of Thumper and VeRA over the Derwent Dam on September 23rd.





Photo: Janet Norman

JUST 50 OF THE 888,246 POPPIES AT THE TOWER OF LONDON



REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2014

Photos: Dave Etherton

Above: The Fiskerton Airfield Memorial.

Below: Association Chairman, Stuart Keay, thanks Alan Gibson, the ladies of the Village Hall and The Hodgson Charity for the excellent Sunday lunch which they provided.





STOP PRESS.

THE MICHAEL BEETHAM CONSERVATION CENTRE OPEN DAY

I visited the centre on November 13th, during its open week. The fuselage and tail unit of the Hampden are making excellent progress. Conservation Manager and Honorary Friend Darren Priday told me that 50% of the tail section is original. The salvaged elevator can be seen on the bench in the background where a new one is being manufactured.





THE DORNIER 17 AT COSFORD.

As has been covered in The 4T9er the fuselage and engines, together with the tailplane and propellers, have now been moved into the workshop. Whilst the propeller and reduction gear are in remarkable condition considering they have been under the sea for over 70 years the air frame, not surprisingly, has not fared so well. However, the items of the First Aid Kit form a fascinating collection. A phial containing iodine, hypodermic syringe, bandages, safety pins and tourniquet are just a few of the relics recovered from the seabed. A more comprehensive report of my visit will appear in the February issue.



The editor accepts no responsibility for the content of this article as he doesn't understand a word of it!

THE NEW 49 SQUADRON WEBSITE

By Malcolm Brooke and Martin Gautier

For some years I was becoming aware that the old software used to build our website had certain limitations. Trying to transfer the website into a more modern program simply produced a jumbled mess of no value. However, inertia had set in and I continued to update the website using the existing software.

Unfortunately things came to a head when I bought a new Windows 8.1 computer. My wife is convinced that this was a cunning plan to buy a new printer and scanner. These items and several pieces of software...including our website editor wouldn't work with the new version of Windows.

Through our Facebook page I published a plea for help and fortunately, Associate Member Chris Beare answered my cry; through her good offices we were put in touch with Martin Gautier from a company called "Fear of Mice"...it took me a few days to realise the significance of the name!

I asked Martin to describe what was involved in the process of rebuilding our website using modern techniques and I now hand over to him...

"Fear of Mice is a south Devon based IT company looking after home users and small businesses in the area. We do basic repairs and virus fixes for home users along with full network management and bespoke software development for companies.

We were tasked with bringing the 49 Squadron Association's website into the 21 century through Malcolm Brooke, the webmaster.

We decided to move the site into a Content Management System (CMS) to make the site management easier, to integrate searching facilities and to enable quick and easy backup of the data. We chose Fuel CMS – an Open Source PHP based system that uses the CodeIgniter framework in the back-end. We chose Twitter Bootstrap CSS in the front-end.

Fear of Mice do a lot of web development and manage a large number of existing sites. We recently decided to move our main development methodology away from an in-house system we'd developed and used successfully for a number of years and into Fuel CMS. This has meant that a lot of the reusable modules we had developed in the past would need to be reworked and we were keen to use 49Sqn's site as a guinea pig to work through initial implementation issues and expose areas where extra internal development would be needed to facilitate future projects.

Some 4000+ HTML pages needed to be imported into the system which required scripting. Most of these were personnel records which required us to build our own personnel database and the Fuel CMS module to handle them.

The site also had a large library of multimedia assets (images, PDF documents, movies etc) and it turned out that Fuel's native assets handling mechanisms weren't up to the task of managing this number. The great thing about Open Source software is that the source-code is available for anyone to inspect and the Open Source movement encourages users to contribute to projects to further the community and enhance the software they use. In consultation with the Fuel CMS project leaders, we developed a new plugin for Fuel CMS to enable the system to manage large numbers of assets and this module has been released to the project and Fuel CMS users worldwide.

One of the main objectives of the new website was to re-present the data in an easily accessible fashion and ensure that the current range of devices able to view websites, were able to do so as well as possible. To this end Bootstrap CSS was employed. Twitter – the famous messaging site – develops Bootstrap for their own website and have released the system as Open Source for others to use – for free. Using Bootstrap meant that we were able to design our front-end layout of the site once for all devices; the resulting pages are clever enough to reshape and resize themselves depending on whether you view the site on a 22" widescreen PC monitor or a 640x480 pixel smartphone.

Fear of Mice were proud to have been chosen for the project and enjoyed the challenge of applying and refining their new development technologies as part of the project. As a result of this work, we've already rolled out SalcombeRugby.org.uk, SalcombeBoatHire.co.uk and a new website for the Marine Biological Association's MarLIN project is ongoing (due in Jan 2015)."

As you might realise after reading the above description, I am on a very steep learning curve. However, thanks to Martin's patience, I now understand how to continue developing the site using the framework he has created. Following the conversion, there have been small edits: spaces and full stops to add and new lines to insert. These edits have been applied to literally thousands of pages.

This project is now almost complete and I hope you agree that the new look site is a tribute to the Association and Martin's technical wizardry.