

# The 4T9er

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET!

**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine  
November 2015 Issue 39**



**In the last few weeks of its flying life, Vulcan XH558 flies past  
the newly unveiled Memorial Spire at the  
International Bomber Command Centre on Canwick Hill, Lincoln.**

# **WALTER ERIC CLARKE**

**1913-2015**



**‘He has now joined his friends who left on an earlier flight.’**

At 3-30am on Monday November 2nd our dear friend, and most senior member, Eric Clarke passed away aged 102.

A native of Doncaster, Eric was posted to 49 Squadron, RAF Scampton, on September 21st 1941 having completed a twelve week wireless operator/airgunner’s course at 16 OTU Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire.

Eric was to fly 26 operations, which unusually involved three aircraft types. His first ten trips were on Hampdens in which his duties were either wireless operator or gunner. After the squadron converted to the notorious Manchester he flew a further four ops but thankfully their service with 49 was short lived and aircrew’s life expectancy took a turn for the better when, after three months, the Lancasters arrived. During the Manchester era Eric took part in two of the ‘Thousand Bomber Raids’. His final twelve ops were flown on Lancasters.

His commission coincided with the switch to Lancasters and he rose to the rank of Flight Lieutenant, with the ultimate responsibility of Signals Leader at 24 OTU RAF Honeybourne.

Postwar Eric was the Deputy Treasurer for Adwick-le-Street Urban District Council until 1974 and then on reorganisation in local government joined the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council in Technical Services until he retired in 1978.

**He was a founder member and keen supporter of RAFA Doncaster.**

**Following the death of his wife Gladys, whom he had nursed for some years, he said to me, "I'm about ready to shut the hangar doors now!" Happily he found a new lease of life and in his final years he became a Yorkshire celebrity appearing regularly with the dignitaries on Doncaster Mansion House steps during parades and celebrations. Perhaps his longevity owes much to his passion for swimming which he pursued regularly up until the age of ninety-two.**

**On his 100th birthday, Monday 22nd April 2013, a Civic Reception was held at the Mansion House where Air Marshal Sir Kenneth 'Dusty' Miller KCB, President of RAFA, presented him with his Bomber Command Clasp. The event, which concluded with a flypast in his honour by the BBMF Lancaster, was filmed by the BBC and went out on The One Show, a popular peak time programme.**

**As a present, on the following day Honorary Friend of the Association, Flt Lt Gary Mennell took Eric and his son David for a flight in a light aircraft from RAF Waddington. Eric took the controls for a short time during the flight over Lincoln and Scampton which brought back many memories of his operational career.**

**A visit to Holland in April 2011 fulfilled a lifelong ambition to visit the grave of his friend Brian Hunter. During the famous 'Channel Dash' Eric was in the locker room at Scampton when he was 'stood down'. Brian however was 'on' but had left his flying boots in the billet. He borrowed Eric's but he and the boots went into the Channel. Brian's body was washed up in Holland and buried in the Hook of Holland Cemetery. Our then chairman, the late Ted Cachart, had tipped off KLM that Eric was flying with them and he received VIP treatment including a visit to the flight deck for most of the trip.**

**Eric was a proud member of 49 Squadron Association and on attending a garden party at Buckingham Palace in May 2012 he was presented to H.R.H. The Duchess of Gloucester. He attended the unveiling by H.M. The Queen of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park but sadly was not well enough to attend the recent unveiling of the International Bomber Command Centre Memorial in Lincoln.**

**Eric always described himself as, "A lucky survivor" and one of his favourite quotations was from Alfred Lord Tennyson..."I would that my tongue could utter the thoughts that arise in me", which he oft used to express his appreciation whenever anyone did him a great favour.**

**Eric was loved and respected by all who met him and in my eyes was the absolute gentleman in every way... How we will miss him.**

## **IN MEMORIAM**

**R. H. Eeles   R. Bridger   T.D. Atkinson**

**W. E. Clarke   C.F. Hunter**

**WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

## **NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

**David Clarke**

## **GONE AWAY**

**G. Golledge**

## **EDITORIAL**

Having been late publishing the August issue this one, November, is upon me before I know it. I'm also reeling from the advert on TV for funeral plans according to which, in two years time I will be too old to qualify! My tempus is certainly fugiting! Nevertheless it's been an exciting time with the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial Spire on Canwick Hill, Lincoln and the wonderful news that the BBMF Lancaster is once more airworthy. A report on the former is included in this issue. Conversely, the wonderful Vulcan has flown its last.

Once more I must express our gratitude to all those who have made contributions of postage stamps and money without which we would have to consider limiting our operations.

Regrettably, I have to report the passing of five 4T9ers. Ron Eeles, inevitably known as 'Squiggle', died on 24th September aged 91. He is well known for his story in 'Beware of the Dog...' headed 'JUMP SON-JUMP'. Ron was rear gunner in the crew of P.O. Ted Ball and became a PoW after bailing out on the fateful Maily-le-Camp raid, their 16th operation, on May 3/4 1944. Jim Bridger was one of those fortunate people who arrived on the squadron just too late to fly in anger. He was a member of Robbie Robson's crew which arrived at Syerston on April 13th 1945. I have no details of Jim's demise as his August magazine was returned marked 'Deceased'. Associate Member Terry Atkinson

died on October 19th aged 79 after a short illness. Terry and Anne were regularly to be seen at association events. He was the nephew of Sgt John Ellenor whose touching letter to his daughter Barbara, written the day before his death, was republished in May's issue of The 4T9er. Eric Clarke's passing has been recorded in pages 2 & 3. 'Friend' Cyril Hunter died on October 13 2014, aged 86. Cyril's story of his visit, as an Air Cadet, to 49 Squadron at Fiskerton in July 1943 appeared in The 4T9er of February 2009.

David Clarke is the son of Eric and was previously a 'Friend'. We now welcome him as an Associate Member.

Since Eric has relinquished the title of 'Oldest Member' we need to establish the new incumbent...any advance, and I'm sure there is, on 94?

Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Michael Beetham died on October 24th aged 92. Although he didn't serve on 49 Squadron he did, as a twenty year old Lancaster pilot, fly 30 ops on 50 Squadron under our own W/C Jim Flint with whom he maintained a friendship until Jim's death last year. Whilst Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Michael masterminded the Black Buck raid on Port Stanley during the Falklands War when a Vulcan flew the longest raid ever, at that time. In recognition of his significant service to the Royal Air Force Museum the Trustees named their new conservation centre at RAF Cosford after him in 2002. A report on my recent visit to the centre appears in this issue.

October 2nd saw the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial Spire on the outskirts of Lincoln. Honorary Friend and eminent historian, Bill Chorley, wrote a page in the commemorative book that was issued which certainly opened my eyes. We all quote 55,573 as being the number of Bomber Command deaths suffered during WWII but Bill points out that this figure does not include those who died subsequently from wounds suffered whilst in service during the war. He writes: "Furthermore, often overlooked when quoting service casualties for the Second World War is that deaths up to December 1947, are included on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, thus allowing commemoration of those who died from wounds or injuries received on active service. Thus, the appendices for Volume 9 show an overall total of 57,205 fatalities; 39,804 for the Royal Air Force; 16,175 from the three principal Commonwealth and Dominion air forces, the remaining 1,226 being borne by the other air forces that contributed to the campaign-mainly the Polish Air Force and Free French Air Force with their own squadrons operating within the framework of the Royal Air Force." Obviously, the cut-off date for including subsequent deaths is somewhat arbitrary but accepting the end of 1947 shows an increase in the commonly accepted figure of almost three percent.

Two famous Avro bombers are in the news as I type this. After returning to the skies in 2007 the Vulcan has finally been grounded. Like me, many of you will have thrilled to the sight and sound of this fabulous aeroplane. On a much more positive note we welcome the news that the BBMF Lancaster is once again airworthy. I'm sure that you will join me in congratulating, and thanking, both the Vulcan to the Sky and BBMF for their magnificent achievements. It seems incredible that Lancasters and Vulcans were flying in service at the same time, albeit with widely varying air forces, from 1956 to the early 60's, the Vulcan being introduced in 1956 and the last Lancaster retiring in 1963.

I am grateful to Associate Member Gary White for providing an account of the burial with Full Military Honours of the crew of Lancaster ED427. Whilst it was hoped to bring the recovered aircraft remains back to the U.K. in September this did not materialize through circumstances beyond our control. We are in the process of obtaining authorization from the MoD and the German authorities in the hope that the remains will finally come home in the spring of next year.

Finally, below you see a photograph of The 4T9er postal department which shows a fraction of the postage stamps required to send out hard copies. This will give an indication of the cost of postage in the U.K. alone, on top of which is the printing cost of over £1 per copy. If you are currently receiving a postal copy when you are able to take an e-mail copy, which costs nothing but my time, I appeal to you to register for the electronic copy to keep our costs down.



‘Til the next time.

# **LANCASTER ED427, CLOSURE AT LAST.**

**By**  
**Gary White**

Lancaster ED427 of 49 Squadron took off from Fiskerton airfield in Lincolnshire at 21:14hrs on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1943 for a bombing raid on the Czech town of Pilsen. My uncle, Raymond White, or John as he was known, was wireless operator for this mission along with pilot Alex Bone, flight engineer Norman Foster, navigator Cyril Yelland, bomb aimer Raymond Rooney and air gunners Ronald Cope and Bruce Watt. Their bomb load was two 1000lb bombs and one 4000lb 'Cookie', their target being the Skoda factory making armaments for the German war effort at the time. ED427 was part of a force of 327 bombers that night. It was the largest bombing force ever assembled at that time but also suffered more losses than any other raid at that time losing 36 aircraft. To make matters worse, a nearby hospital had been mistaken for the Skoda works, which now became the target with some 300 patients being killed, along with over 1200 German soldiers and civilians killed or wounded. The Skoda works was untouched making the raid one of Bomber Command's biggest failures.

Having dropped its bomb load, ED427 made for home but was hit by flak from intensive ground fire. On fire and losing height, it was passing over the town of Laumersheim and according to eye witness reports exploded in mid-air and made three large craters when hitting the ground in a field on the outskirts of the town.

Families of the crew were immediately notified that the aircraft had failed to return and three months later Sgt White's family were notified that International Red Cross Committee records indicated that according to a German Totenliste (death list) he had lost his life as a result of that operation, his aircraft being shot down at Dirmstein on 17 April 1943. By 1949, families were told that the crew were still missing, presumed dead with no known graves and the story finished there, or so it was thought.

Peter Menges was 13 at the time and saw ED427 as it crashed. He developed an interest in helping find WW2 aircraft remains and bringing closure to families who thought their loved ones had no known graves. In 2008 he made contact with Uwe Benkel, a German archaeologist of WW2 aircraft, and now in his eighties, guided him to the area he remembered as being where the impact took place. Metal detection equipment was used to locate the exact spot and in 2012 Uwe Benkel and his team began excavating. They found various parts from one of the engines and undercarriage assemblies along with bits of

fuselage and ammunition. They also found human remains. It was clearly a Lancaster bomber and given that it was the only Bomber Command loss in that area on that date, it was officially confirmed as ED427.

Word began to spread to the families by now who eagerly awaited any fresh news. The MoD was informed and received the human remains. They officially told the families of the find and the fact that a burial would now take place.

As a child I can remember a picture of a man on the sideboard at my Grandparents and whenever I asked who he was, I was told, "That's Uncle John, he was killed in the war," and until recently, knew nothing more. News had now reached the national press and that very same picture, along with a tale of bravery of him and his comrades, had made it to the national dailies. That 19 year old, whose life had ended almost before it had begun, and was virtually unknown by my generation, at last received some recognition. Telegrams, letters and drawings now surfaced and the man in the



picture suddenly became a person, a person of whom my family was extremely proud. This was only his third operational flight and not only had he lied about his age to get into the RAF, he sought help from a friend to retake the entrance test having failed it the first time.

To add to the tragedy, my Grandparents both died unaware that the whereabouts of the aircraft and bodily remains were known about and documented from the time of the crash but due to bureaucratic errors, this information never got to them, robbing them of that all-important closure. So thanks to the perseverance of Peter Menges and the hard work of Uwe Benkel and his team, we were now on the way to that closure.

The burial of the remains, in one coffin, was to take place with Full Military Honours, at the CWG cemetery at Durnbach on October 21 this year but first we attended a service in the beautiful church of St. Ägidius in the nearby town of Gmund. The Queens Colour Squadron carried in the coffin, draped with the Union Flag. They looked immaculate in their dress uniforms with their white gloves and handled everything with great dignity. Various guests and dignitaries attended and the whole event was one of ceremonial splendour making it feel very special.

We then travelled through the beautiful chocolate box town of Durnbach to the





**Photo: Malcolm Brooke, 49 Squadron Association website.**

cemetery just outside. It was a lovely autumn day, cold in the shade but warm in the sunshine. There are fields and trees around the cemetery and in the distance were snow covered mountains. As we stepped off the coach we were greeted by the gentle sound of cow bells from the herd in the field opposite. I couldn't imagine a more beautiful and tranquil setting for laying the comrades to rest.

The cemetery itself was immaculate, the 2000 plus graves laid out in perfectly straight lines with a few autumn leaves to give it a natural look. We took our places by the graveside and awaited the coffin's arrival with the Queens Colour Squadron. They placed the coffin over the grave and spent several minutes ceremoniously folding the Union Flag. Prayers were read and the coffin gently lowered into the grave. A bugler then played the Last Post which for me was the crowning moment. Each family was presented with a Union Flag by the RAF chaplain in recognition of the service rendered by their relative. It was a very special and memorable ceremony.

Three headstones inscribed with the names now mark the grave of the crew of ED427. They flew together, died together and now lay together.

I like to think my Grandparents watched all from on high, and now, with all the other families have that closure.



**Right: The White family, front L-R, nieces-Sheliah Harris, Linda Turner, Sue Bannell, back L-R, Keith Turner, Author, Derek Harris.**

**Photo: Via Gary White**

**THE UNVEILING OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL Bomber Command Memorial  
OCTOBER 2nd 2015**

**By  
Alan Parr**



2,600 guests, including 312 Bomber Command veterans, gathered on a glorious Autumn day for the unveiling of the Memorial Spire atop Canwick Hill, just south of Lincoln.



**A long shot of Lincoln Cathedral from Canwick Hill.**

Music before and during the ceremony was provided by RAF College Cranwell Band and the Lincolnshire Massed Male Voice Choir. An anthem, 'Strike Hard Strike Sure', specially commissioned for the occasion, was performed together with 'If you hadn't done what you did' sung by Charlotte Mellor. The RAF Waddington Pipes and Drums preceded and followed the unveiling ceremony which was carried out by Earl Howe, Minister of State in the Lords in the Ministry of Defence. The Blessing was given by the Dean of Lincoln Cathedral.



Broadcaster, Dan Snow, performed the Master of Ceremonies duties whilst dramatic offerings, including 'Lie in the dark and listen', were performed by University of Lincoln Dramatics.

Aerial salutes were provided by present day RAF Hawks and Tornado GR4's one of which flew over with wings fully swept. During the ceremony there were flypasts by earlier aircraft...a Blenheim and Dakota. The latter was substituting for the BBMF Lancaster which, in spite of valiant efforts, couldn't be readied in time following its engine fire early in the summer.



Finally the last airworthy Vulcan, now in its last month of flight, wowed the gathering with a number of circuits.



The occasion was attended by a number of 4T9ers including, to my knowledge, three WWII veterans: Tom Page, Fred Hill and Bill ‘Titch’ Cooke plus post war pilot Stuart Keay. Associate Members included Robert McEneaney, Louise Dexter and myself plus ‘Friends’ Mike Chatterton, John Lowe and Steve Cooke and spouses, relatives and ‘minders’.



**Flt Lts Fred Hill DFC and John Lowe.**





**Louise & John Dexter**

**Photo: Steve Cooke**  
**Sgt. Bill 'Titch' Cooke**



**Brothers Robert and Paul McEneaney at the name of their uncle F. Sgt. Terence McEneaney.**



**Louise Dexter lays a wreath at the panel containing the name of her uncle Sgt. Ronnie Hoole.**

Photos on this page via Robert McEneaney unless stated otherwise.

A YouTube video of the event can be seen at: <https://youtu.be/TwY6ji7Hc0g>

## 49 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION REMEMBERS

By

Alan Parr



St. Clements of Rome, Fiskerton, was filled almost to capacity on November 8th for the annual Remembrance Sunday service which was conducted by Revd. Penny Green. The standards of the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop were paraded to the altar and our Chairman Stuart Keay laid the Association's wreath at the church memorial but as Ken Warner, who has laid 576 Squadron's wreath in the past, was unwell that duty was carried out by his daughter.

The weather forecast had been for light rain but fortunately it failed to materialize so following the church service we made our way to the Airfield Memorial where a short wreath laying ceremony was held, Stuart Keay once again doing the honours on our behalf. The Guard of Honour, as has become traditional, was provided by the scouts.

Following the ceremony we made our way to the village hall where an excellent roast lunch was served. Whilst we had fully expected to pay for our lunch we were once again moved when told that it was sponsored by The Hodgson Charity which is very active in Fiskerton village. I must add here that this charity, which provides for needy as well as nominated causes, is yet another indication of the kind spirit of the people of this wonderful village. We, as an association, are so fortunate that we have this relationship with them.

Our thanks, as always, go to Revd. Penny and our friends at the church, the Stuffins family, particularly Carl, for their ceaseless effort at the Airfield Memorial, Fiskerton Parish Council for their part in maintaining the memorial

grounds, Alan Gibson, Ann Chesman and the ladies of the village hall, the trustees of the Hodgson Charity and the leaders and members of the 5th Lincoln Scout Troop. If I have missed anyone out I sincerely apologize.



**One can only admire the dedication of the hardy souls who ventured on to Hameldown Tor, Dartmoor, to the site of the crash of 49 Squadron's Hampden X3054 on March 21 1941. John Lowe wrote:**



“As you can see from the attached, Hameldown was covered in cloud which combined with the wind and rain made for uncomfortable conditions. However, this did not prevent nearly thirty people from making the journey on Remembrance Sunday morning. I placed a 49 Squadron wreath between the graves of Ellis and Wilson about two hours later.”

**Photos: John Lowe**







At Lojt Kirkeby, Denmark, Honorary Friend Marilyn Nissen planted British Legion Crosses on the crash site memorial to the crew of Lancaster JA691, lost 17 August 1943, and on their graves in Aabenraa Cemetery plus the grave of 49er P.O. Tom Tomlin, killed on the same day.

Photo: Marilyn Nissen

A wreath was laid at Bransby, Lincolnshire, at a ceremony conducted by Honorary Friend Clifford Marshall, by 4T9er John Galloway to the crew of Hampden AT129 which crashed there on January 25 1942. Present at the

ceremony, attended by 30 people, was Mrs Paula Dakin, now resident in Spain, a niece of Sgt. Albert Hibbitt. The ATC formed the Guard of Honour and also laid a wreath.

Association Friend, Pieter de Vries arranged for flowers to be placed on the grave, in Westduin Cemetery, The Hague, of F/Sgt Stanley Hawes who died on June 22 1944 and was washed ashore in Holland near to where Pieter subsequently was brought up.



Photo: Via Pieter de Vries





Webmaster Malcolm Brooke sent the above photograph of Berlin War Cemetery where 34 serving 49ers and 15 former 49ers, subsequently killed, are buried. Malcolm says that wreaths were laid by British Embassy, The Local Authority, British Legion, Berlin British School, the ex-Berlin Security Police and others.



Associate Member Heather Burton sent the photograph of Chipping Norton Air Cadets parading at the local War Memorial. Heather's grand daughter Ettie is front row second right.

Honorary Friend Peter Hare laid our Association wreath at the Airfield Memorial at Fulbeck.

I don't doubt that there were many more and 49 Squadron Association is most grateful to all who made acts of remembrance on behalf of 49ers.

# REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2015 AT THE BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL. LONDON.

By

**Robert McEneaney**

We had a wonderful turn out at the Bomber Command Memorial in London yesterday. Following the remembrance service and wreath laying there was an opportunity to remember relatives and friends who served and those that were lost serving with Bomber Command. I have attached a photograph of the wreath placed at the foot of the memorial on behalf of the Association by the relatives of the crew of ND474. We also remembered our dear friend Eric Clarke and recorded that he had sadly passed away earlier that week at the age of 102. Many



of those who had attended to observe the minutes silence and pay their respects to the fallen were saddened to learn of Eric's passing. I had the opportunity to say a few words about my Uncle Terry and the crew of ND474 and the work of the Association. In addition I took the opportunity to pay a special tribute to Eric and record his service record and the fact that he was a great supporter of 49 Squadron Association. I mentioned how he encouraged many people to keep the memory of the fallen alive so that future generations will be aware of the sacrifice they made for our freedom and peace. In conclusion I reminded those present of Eric's little saying "In friendship and in service, we are pledged to keep alive the memories. If it is not written down, photographed or recorded, it is lost forever." How true those words are, may he rest in peace.

# THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF REMEMBRANCE



Left: Robert McEneaney speaks of his uncle, Sgt Terry McEneaney, and of the late Eric Clarke.

Below: The young members of the McEneaney family amongst whom the future depends.

Photos: Via Robert McEneaney





# THE MICHAEL BEETHAM CONSERVATION CENTRE RAF MUSEUM, COSFORD OPEN WEEK

By  
Alan Parr

I eagerly look forward to visiting the centre, not only to follow progress in the renovation of the Handley Page Hampden but also to see the many interesting projects that are underway there.

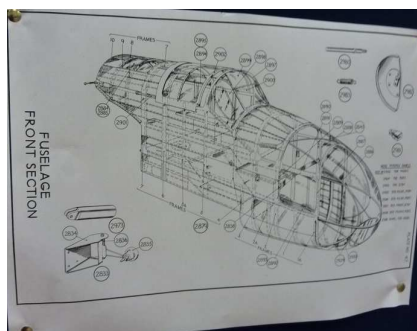
The centre was open from 9th to 14th November this year and I chose to visit on the Wednesday.

Without doubt the Hampden is the first aircraft that I focus on, it being an early wartime 49 Squadron type. It was in such an aircraft that 49's Rod Learoyd became the first Victoria Cross winner in Bomber Command.

Considerable progress has been made since my last visit. Compare the finish painted empennage, tail to most of you, with the photograph of the same item that appeared in The 4T9er of February this year. Within the main fuselage many internal fittings are now complete. (Below left).



Work has commenced on the repair of the tail boom and construction of the forward fuselage and cockpit.



Things have now reached an exciting stage where things are really coming together but I believe that there are still two years work to do before we see a complete Hampden once more.



Probably the best known aircraft in the centre, due to the media coverage since its recovery from the sea off the Kent coast in 2013, is the Dornier 17Z-2. It is believed to be Werk Nr 1160 which was shot down on August 26th 1940 during the Battle of Britain.

Initially it was housed in poly tunnels and sprayed constantly with a stabilizing solution. This

process has now been completed and the whole aircraft is now laid out on the floor of the centre.

Whilst I have previously marvelled at the condition of the propeller reduction gear, now that the aircraft is more accessible the condition of the tyres and fuel tanks is also amazing. When studying the wreckage and the photographs herewith it should be remembered that the whole aircraft is inverted, as it was when recovered from the seabed.

Much of the aircraft has been shown in previous issues of The 4T9er so only items that have recently become photographable are included here.



Another aircraft that interested me is the PR.XIX Spitfire PM651 which is currently held in the centre but which will be leaving to take part in events in Bahrain shortly.

The reason for my interest is that it was employed by the Meteorological Flight at RAF Woodvale near Liverpool in 1954. At that time I was training and cycle racing in that area and regularly saw the Spitfires in flight. Little did I think that sixty years later I would be within touching distance of one of them. Further examples are still flying with the BBMF.



I have illustrated the Vickers Wellington X in a few previous issues so I only include one photograph here that shows the pilot's position and particularly the amazing amount of wiring in the area. After battle damage what a job it must have been to disentangle and reassemble it all!



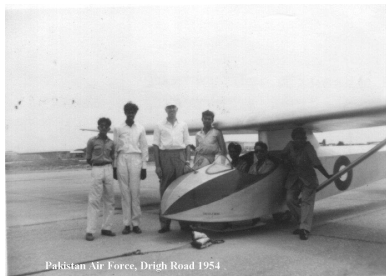
# **MY SERVICE CAREER IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE 1940/1968 INCLUDING BOMBER OPERATIONS WITH No. 49 SQUADRON IN 1943/44**

**By**

**SQUADRON LEADER T J PAGE DFM**

## **Part 5 - Conclusion.**

There was one highlight. At the Pakistan Air Force Station of Drigh Road was a Gliding School for training cadets and a Squadron Leader Jan Mikulski commanded this. Jan had been in the RAF during the war flying fighter aircraft. He came from a high-class Polish family. He and his wife Mary had been pre-war gliding champions. Jan escaped to England but his wife Tula (Mary) and their daughter became prisoners of the Russians. The daughter died in a Russian camp. After the war Jan, who was stateless, enlisted into the PAF for the gliding post and Mary was able to join him. They became great friends and were charming hosts.



Pakistan Air Force, Drigh Road 1954



Pakistan Olympia Flt Lt T J Page DFM 1954 Drigh Road

This friendship led to me being able to fly the PAF gliders. A total of 35 hours were flown over and around Drigh Road and Karachi in circumstances quite different from those in England. It was not wise to fly away from this area for any landing would be in remote and inaccessible countryside.

Thermals over Drigh Road were usually twirling 'Dust Devils'. They were very rough and restricted in height by the cooler sea breezes drifting in above the hot air over the land. When soaring, Kite Hawks, Buzzards and Vultures would take advantage of the thermal uplift and surround the sailplane. If, when flying and searching for lift, the sailplane pilot saw circling birds he flew in to join them. At over 7000ft. I circled with the birds of prey. This was a fascinating experience. It was certainly fascinating to fly with them and watch their flight feathers and manoeuvres although to see an ugly vulture peering into the cockpit from just above could be unnerving.

There was another pleasure at Mauripur. The Administration Officer was a service pilot who was required at the time to keep in flying practice and so to do this a PAF Harvard two-seater-training aircraft was used. I went with him and



had great fun flying a powered aircraft. All went well until the PAF started to send in bills for its use. The Headquarters Levant stopped the flying. Looking back on the two-year stay at Mauripur it was a great adventure.

In August 1954, during the tour at Mauripur, there was a detachment back into Iraq to take over the Accounting at RAF Shaibar in the desert. Shaibar was near to the town of Basra on the Shatt el Arab the river mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates, which led into the Gulf of Aden. The detachment was for six weeks to relieve the Accountant there who was going home to England to get married. Shaibah had a bad reputation in the RAF as one of the worst overseas postings.

Many are the songs 'Shaibah Blues' sung in the home messes, especially by old sweats who had served there in the inter-war years. I contracted some uncomfortable infections whilst there. I think it was from the swimming pool. This required me to do my work in the more comfortable air-conditioned Officers Mess. It was a relief to return to Mauripur.

April 1956 came and it was the time to hand over to my relief although the staging post was to close in the following December. Longer-range aircraft were now coming into service that could now over fly the area. It took a week to fly home to England because of having to wait for available seats on the various aircraft flying between the homeward staging posts. Two days were spent at Habbanyia and two days at Nicosia in Cyprus.

I was now required to study at RAF Bircham Newton in Norfolk on a Course of Administration after which I was posted to RAF Jurby on the Isle of Man to train Officer Cadets. Jurby held many memories; the stay there ended with promotion to the Senior Rank of Squadron Leader on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1958.

The next posting was to RAF Wellesbourne Mountford near Stratford upon Avon, which was the base for the RAF Airfield Construction Branch. The detail was to command a Squadron of Administrative personnel to accompany an Airfield Construction Squadron on a Task Force to construct a Rocket Tracking Station on the Island of St.Kilda. The island was in the Atlantic, forty miles west of the Outer Hebrides.

I received a quite unusual briefing from the Airfield Construction Group Commander. A Wing Commander of the Airfield Construction Branch was to be in charge of the Task Force and the building project; he was an Irishman of the building fraternity of uncertain temperament with little regard for RAF rules and Officer Conduct. This would require great





tact in dealing with him to keep to the normal rules of discipline, administration and accounting. The Commander in Chief said that the Wing Commander was the only Officer he had to do the building job and wished me the best of luck. This information was confidential.

The passage to St. Kilda involved a long train journey to Cairn Ryan on the shores of Loch Ryan near to Stranraer in Scotland. Cairn Ryan was the mainland depot for the stores and personnel to be shipped to the island by Tank Landing Craft of the Army; it was also the base for radio contact for administrative and emergency purposes. The twenty-four hour crossing took place during a most unpleasant and ill making storm. Landing Craft were the only ships that could transport the heavy vehicles, stores and building materials and are able to beach and unload on the only small sandy cove. The rest of the island's shoreline rose sheer out of the water to heights of up to five hundred feet above sea level.

The island was about two miles long and half a mile wide and very rugged. A hardy Scottish people had inhabited it up to 1930 until they became so impoverished they had to be evacuated to the mainland. The island was now a sanctuary for many types of seabird and a few Soya sheep and was overseen by the Scottish National Trust. The few stone houses that had formed a line near the seashore were now roofless and in collapsed piles although the more substantial Factor's house and the Manse had been rehabilitated to house the Officers and provided a recreation area for the airmen. The airmen lived under canvas and the messing was in a Nissen hut erected for the purpose.

At one stage, the Wing Commander of the Airfield Construction Branch was required to return to Wellesbourne Mountford and I remained in sole command. During this time a party from the Scottish National Trust led by Lord Wemyss, came to visit the island to see the flora and fauna. The ship anchored in the bay and the party was ferried ashore by a specially reinforced boat that could land on the very small and rocky slipway. The RAF personnel entertained the visitors within their very limited facilities and escorted them around the island. Afterwards the officers went aboard ship and dined with the Captain and the leaders of the party. The ship then sailed round the island for the visitors to see the many seabirds that inhabited the cliff faces and the gannet colonies on the offshore Stacks. This was a welcome break for the four Officers.

The construction of the Tracking Station continued throughout the summer months. The office was a mobile caravan and from there I was able to keep in radio contact with Cairn Ryan on the mainland. Finally, the summer ended and it was time to withdraw before bad weather prevented the Landing Craft from getting to the island. Everyone was glad to be going back to Wellesbourne for leave and to see his or her families. A small unenviable maintenance party came out to look after the installation during the winter months. At Wellesbourne I

completed the work necessary to close down the operation and then had some leave.

I had been out of England for five years and now it was to Royal Air Force Uxbridge to be the Senior Accountant Officer. Entering the gates and passing the parade ground my thoughts were of those far off days in 1940 when first reporting for duty on joining the Service. I had come a long way since then and had advanced to a remarkable degree never thought possible when lying down to sleep on that first night in the barracks beside the square. Now I was to be the Senior Officer responsible for all the financial affairs of the Station.

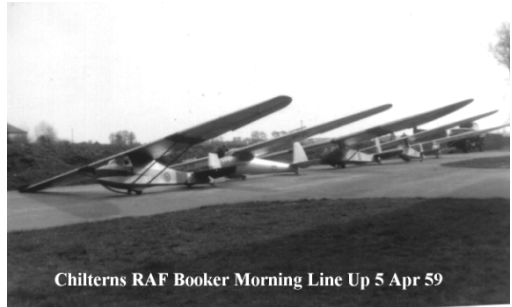
I was now able to resume my gliding activities with the Chilterns Gliding Club at RAF Booker which was not very far away.

In the evenings, using an available building on the Station, I was able to carry out repairs to the Club gliders, work that gave me great pleasure since my early days in the RAF as a Mechanic, Fitter and Engineer. Life was quite full and rewarding at Uxbridge.

A Royal duty occurred at one stage acting as an usher in the Central Nave of St. Pauls Cathedral when Her Majesty attended the dedication of a Memorial to the Americans who served and died in World War II.

One of the Units at RAF Uxbridge was the RAF Regiment whose duties, amongst others, were ceremonial and it was the Custodian of the Queens Colour for the Royal Air Force. The Borough Council of Uxbridge granted the Freedom of the town to the Royal Air Force Station, which entitled the unit to march through the town with drawn swords, bayonets fixed and colours flying. The station personnel had been practising for the ceremony for some time and the parade was to be under the Command of the RAF Regiment C.O.

A week before the ceremony the Officer became ill and was in hospital. The Station Commander detailed me to command the parade. This was a great Honour to troop the Queens Colour on that hallowed parade ground. Throughout the ceremony, my thoughts were back in 1940 when walking out of the station in uniform for the first time as an Aircraftman 2nd Class to go to the cinema.



Chilterns RAF Booker Morning Line Up 5 Apr 59



After the Parade, attended by Members of the Air Council, the Contingent then marched through the streets of Uxbridge with bands playing, colours flying, swords drawn and bayonets fixed. At this time I was remembering the day eighteen years ago when marching the same route as a new recruit with a heavy kit bag on the way to the railway station to go to Morecambe for Airframe Mechanic training.



After the parade, there was a reception in the Officers Mess for the Civic Party, Members of the Air Council and other honoured guests. The sick CO of the RAF Regiment was the President of the Officers Mess Committee and being Vice President it fell to me to take the Chair at the Formal Dinner.

The three years served at RAF Uxbridge were very rewarding.

My next duty was at the Ministry of Defence in London with the Personnel Department in the section that dealt with the forecasting of the number of recruits that would be required in the various trades in the coming years based on the expected wastage and the Defence Budget. As the defence requirements changed from year to year, the task was not an exact science and the tool of the trade needed to be a crystal ball. It was interesting work and it gave an insight into how a Government Department worked. It also involved on occasions to be the Duty MOD Personnel Staff Officer overnight and at weekends and being one of the Bowler Hat and Umbrella Brigade commuting up to London from Oxhey each working day from where I had bought a house.

Duty at the Ministry of Defence was an experience and whilst there I was also the Treasurer of the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association. It finally ended in June 1964 and I moved to RAF Wildenrath, Germany. This was another adventure and a challenge driving off to Dover to catch the boat to Ostende and then across unfamiliar Holland and Belgium and into Germany. Driving on the right and then through the centre of Brussels and going the wrong way down a one-way street in another town was quite hair raising.

RAF Wildenrath was just inside North West Germany over the border from the Dutch town of Roermond, a town handy for shopping. At Wildenrath I was the Officer Commanding the Personnel Services Squadron, responsible for about three thousand personnel including many German civilian employees, all the financial services of pay and allowances including the auditing of the non-public funds of the messes and all disciplinary matters including Court Martial, accidents and deaths. It was a full-time job, back in uniform and living in the

Officers Mess. There was one pleasing aspect of the posting and that was it was a flying station, so much previous service had been on backup and training units.

Wildenrath was on the western edge of the Ruhr area and had been heavily defended during the intense bombing by the RAF during 1943. The memories of that time twenty years before were still fresh in my mind especially when visiting some of the towns that I had helped to bomb. There was one visit with other Officers whilst attending a course in Hamburg that a call was made on the Burgomaster (Mayor) of Hamburg at the Rathaus (Town Hall)



and the Burgomaster was talking about, and showing large photographs of, the destruction of the city caused by the wartime bombing and the subsequent rebuilding. I hovered in the background; conscious of the nights in 1943 when taking part in those devastating raids and looking down on the inferno from above.

Whilst in Germany I was the Chairman of the Phoenix Gliding Club at the neighbouring RAF Station Bruggen and was able to continue gliding.

Finally in the early spring of 1967 the tour of duty in Germany was over and I moved to RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire to fill the same post as at Wildenrath i.e. O.C Personnel Services Squadron. It was No. 9 School of Recruit Training. This unit had been at Bridgnorth when I was there in 1951/2.

At RAF Swinderby I had done some flying training and instructing during the war in 1943.

Now aged 45, my RAF service was ending. It was obvious that there would be no more promotion from Squadron Leader to Wing Commander as I had been told that I would not be able to stay on until age 55 so I decided to take retirement, thinking of the future. On the 6th May 1968, with much regret I left the Royal Air Force. I was very sad to leave what had been my chosen career, it had filled my boyhood dreams.



## READER'S LETTERS

***Honorary Friend, Flt Lt Gary Mennell, e-mailed from his base in Italy in response to the photograph of the Scampton football team shown on page 27 of the August issue:***

“Just a quick thought from the Can You Help section. The Scampton F540 is particularly detailed in respect of the football team. On the day of the dams raid, there are 4 pages giving football results in such detail they include who scored a goal and in which minute. At the end of all that, it simply says 617 Sqn departed on their first mission tonight.

“In summary, if the person has a rough idea of the date and the station F540 at Kew has all the detail they could wish for.”

***From ‘Friend’ Ralph Gray in Auckland came:***

“When we were over a few years ago, we visited Ralph Bairnsfather’s grave in Germany. On the way we visited my wife’s granduncle’s grave in northern France – killed in 1918. His brother, her grandfather, served also, in Palestine and up into Turkey. As far as we know we are the only family ever to visit Charlie’s grave and no one had a picture of him, so memory of him is fading fast. My wife’s mother (she is 91) is his niece and while we were in Sydney, helping them move last week, we found a picture of him! She gave it to me in memory of the trip we had taken and our dedication to his story – I was very touched and moved for Charlie Godlee, lying over there in France. Just saying that pictures are important Alan, as you well know.”

***49er Tom Page, whose story is concluded in this issue, e-mailed prior to the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial Spire on Canwick Hill:***

“I retired from the Royal Air Force in 1968 and settled in a new bungalow at Bracebridge Heath just across the Lincoln/Sleaford Road from the Memorial Site. Oh how I have walked so many times on Canwick Hill.

“It was not long after retirement I became aware that there was a 49 Squadron Association and that they were to meet in the Observer Corp Building which was/is close by the site of what was A Flight Dispersal. [Fiskerton ED.] My wife and I went along and the place was crowded. So began my long membership of the Association.

“How well I remember Tom Gatfield and Geoff Stuffins collecting the Memorial Stone from Ancaster and helping to plant the chestnut trees. You should have in your Squadron Association Archives an Article I wrote called Bombers on the Farm.

“In 1996 I moved back to my home county of Kent where I trace my ancestors back to the 1700’s and so I have been unable to attend meetings since then.

“I look forward to Friday.”

***Following the unveiling of the Memorial Spire Tom e-mailed:***

"I was at the memorial dedication on Friday last but saw no 49ers at the Ceremony or in the White Hart Hotel. Still it was good to be among the Veterans and talk Bomber Language and with the Blue of the RAF Helpers and to be escorted by a pretty WRAF who took my arm and helped me through the crowd to the booking in and to a seat.

"Having lived in Lincoln just across the road at Bracebridge Heath for 30 years after 28 years service the memories came flooding back. Especially seeing the bungalow where I had lived and I also visited an old friend.

"The long journey by car to and from Hythe was well worth it. My Son from Aylesbury came and took me there on Thursday and back home on Saturday."

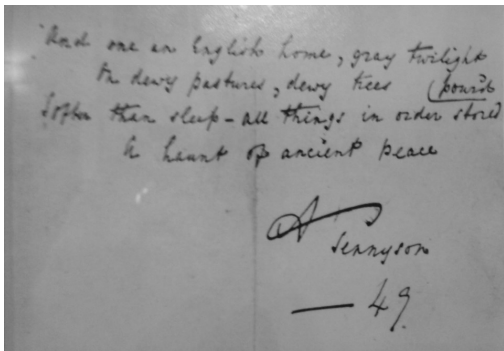
*With more than three hundred veterans present Tom was in good company.*

***Valiant era 49er, Alasdair Campbell e-mailed:***

"Recently, I have been reading again Patrick Bishop's excellent book "Bomber Boys", and the words by Noble Frankland that struck me most were: 'the great immorality open to us in 1940 and 1941 was to lose the war against Hitler's Germany. To have abandoned the only means of direct attack which we had at our disposal would have been a long step in that direction.' Need I say more."

***Our Hon. President, John Ward e-mailed the following, highlighting the '49':***

"Had the pleasure of visiting Gunby Hall (National Trust) which is situated towards the East where the Wolds flatten out towards the sea.



"On the wall above a fire place was an original part of a letter written by Alfred Tennyson..... attached.

"Tennyson often visited Gunby, living not too far from the hall.....The surrounding grounds inspired him to write these lines in his work 'The Palace of Art'.

Translated from Lincolnshire into English, it reads;

**‘ had one an English home  
Grey twilights on dewy pasture  
Dewy trees  
Softer than sleep  
All things in order stored  
A haunt of ancient peace....’**

"Alan...could he be our oldest member?"

***Webmaster, Malcolm Brooke, received the following e-mail from non Member David Thomas:***

*"I have in my possession the original plaque from the seafront at Bournemouth, the plaque relates to Flt Lt John Henry Green DFC, who lost his life on the 17th September 1947, the day I was born. During the War years he flew with 49 Squadron. I wish to donate this plaque to the museum at RAF Scampton. I am in Newark this coming weekend, that is Saturday, all day. I am committed all day Sunday, but returning to Wales, Monday morning. Is there anyone I can present this plaque to, to be placed in the 49 Squadron room?"*

*I collected the plaque from Newark Museum, where David had left it but as Scampton have declared their interest to be primarily in Scampton orientated exhibits I thought it would be appropriate to ask if it could be mounted in Fiskerton Church. I have left it with Revd. Penny Green who is looking into the matter.*

***A friend of mine, Phil Waterfield, a very skilled photographer, whose wonderful shots of the two Lancasters over the Derwent Dam have appeared in earlier issues of The 4T9er, decided to go to Doncaster Airport to photograph the Vulcan taking off and returning from its flight over the unveiling ceremony of the Bomber Command Spire. Below we see a shot of XH558's departure.***

***Further brilliant photographs, as seen through Phil's lens, appear in the E-Supplement accompanying the e-mail edition of this issue.***

