

# The 4T9er



**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine  
June 2022 Issue 61**

**65th ANNIVERSARY MEGATON REUNION  
15/16/17 MAY 2022**



Attendees: Ken & Maggi Edmunds, Roger & Anne Carter, Bill & Rosemary Evans, Alan & Mary Pringle, Dave & Margaret Dent, Chris Jeffries, Mike Simmons, Roger Flavell

## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

**Mr Eric J North**

**New Associate Member**

**Mr Christopher Richards**

### **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to this issue of the 49er.

We continue to enjoy a steady exchange of correspondence with Members and Associate Members coming from the four corners of the globe. It was particularly pleasing to receive a letter from Phil “Griff” Griffiths, who served with the Squadron in WW2 and said “I really look forward to receiving my copy of the Newsletter as it is about the only tie I have left with the UK and the Squadron.”. Having moved to Canada in 1947.

Researching “Griffs” service record, I discovered that he was based at Fiskerton at the same time as my uncle. On the night of 15/16th March 1944 Bomber Command sent a force of 863 aircraft to Stuttgart. The 49 Squadron sent 18 Lancaster’s. Griff and the crew of JB714 123 returned safely. Sadly the crew of ND474, my uncles Lancaster, were lost shot down by a night fighter on the journey home and now lie peacefully at Durnbach War Cemetery, Germany.

We are also pleased to receive correspondence from Roger Carter with details and photographs of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 49 Squadron “The Megaton” Reunion held last month. Full details of the Reunion appear later in this issue.

As I mentioned in our last Newsletter part of the Associations ethos is to connect and assist relatives of those who served with the Squadron. The work that is undertaken by our Researcher Colin Cripps and our Archivists Ed Norman and David Boughton and Wed master Malcolm Brooke in helping the relatives of those who served with the Squadron has proved

invaluable over the years. We must all remember the committee are volunteers and they should be congratulated for their continued dedication to the Association.

A typical example of the level of investigative work and the dedication shown by our Committee is demonstrated in a recent letter received from Lynnette Bennings who lives in Holland. Lynnette found a Commemorative Scroll in an old Bible honouring Sqd Leader David Barron Drakes. Lynette, contacted the Association hoping that we could assist with returning the scroll to a family member. I will leave you to enjoy the article submitted by Colin Cripps on page 14 where he takes you through his journey and a successful outcome..

## **REMRBRANCE SUNDAY 2022**

The next gathering of the Association will now take place over Remembrance Sunday Weekend. This year the Remembrance Sunday Service will be held on 13<sup>th</sup> November at St Clement of Rome Church, Fiskerton followed by a short service at the Airfield.

**One of the main aims of todays Association is to preserve for posterity the memory of those who served and died with the 49 Squadron.**

We would therefore like to extend a welcome to you all and encourage those who may not have attended Remembrance Sunday Service to consider doing so this year. The Association has close links with the village of Fiskerton. Every year the 49ers are made welcome at the Parish Church and the village Hall. All members of the Association are welcome to join us and please do not hesitate to contact us if you require details of the weekend.

Thank you to all those who have submitted articles for inclusion in our Newsletter. We will ensure that all submissions are published, if not in this issue, then in subsequent issues as all contributions are much appreciated.

Finally, we have received some replies regarding the distribution of the Newsletter via email. Could I ask once again that those who can receive the Newsletter via email, please do so. Although we are committed to ensuring that all our Veterans receive a printed copy we would ask any Associate Members who have email please let us know as it helps to reduce our printing and postage costs.

## **BIRTHDAY BEST WISHES.**

### **A belated acknowledgement of another Squadron Centurion.**

Pilot Officer John L Crabb celebrating his 100th Birthday, pictured with his two daughters on the 30th November 2020.

The Association were recently notified that John had celebrated his 100th birthday as the country was in the grip of Covid. We are pleased to be able to extend our best wishes and thank the family for contacting us.



Opposite a small selection of photographs covering John's war time service.

*Back row (L to R):*

Sgt Reg Burnett R/G KIA, Sgt Don Bettinson M/U KIA, F/O John Millar AFM pilot KIA, Sgt John Crabb NAV, Sgt Phillips B/A KIA, Sgt Paul Goodyear F/E KIA.

*Front row (L to R);*

LAC Johnson, LAC Robertson, Sgt Freeman, LAC Sutcliffe, LAC Copping, LAC Sugg.

**Pilot officer John L Crabb with his crew of ED 726  
Summer of 1943**



**49 Squadron Megaton Club 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion.  
The Valley Hotel, Ironbridge.  
*Submitted by*  
**Roger Carter****

On the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1957 a 49 Squadron Valiant aircraft commanded by Wing Commander Kenneth Hubbard dropped Britain's first Hydrogen Bomb and ensured that the UK became the recognised possessor of thermonuclear weapons.

This series of tests in the South Pacific resulted in the restoration of the nuclear special relationship with the United States of America in the form of the 1958 US – UK Mutual Defence Agreement.



By the cabin of Valiant XD818 in Cosford

Left to Right :- Alan Pringle—(Co Pilot) David Dent (Wireless) Bill Evans (Airframe) Chris Jeffries (Radar) Roger Carter (Armourer) Ken Edmunds (Navigator)

The 49 Squadron ‘all ranks’ Megaton Club, was founded in 1960 to commemorate these tests and arranged to meet at regular intervals, primarily in London at the RAF Club and latterly at significant locations around the country.

These took place in Stamford for RAF Wittering, RAF Hendon (1990 – supposedly ‘final’ meeting) and following the Cold War Exhibition opening,



Ironbridge for RAF Cosford for the past 20 years or so.

Our numbers are increasingly diminished but on May 16<sup>th</sup> this year a small group were able to meet up at Cosford Museum for a photo call with 'our' Valiant XD818.

Whilst we were there we were asked by a teacher if we would talk to her pupils – they were fascinated and very keen to learn about our mission (their words) what each one of us did and why.

In the evening we held the final formal anniversary dinner at the Valley Hotel Ironbridge and paid tribute to those who were no longer able to join us. After the usual stories - (same ones every year) but getting better as the evening wore on, a free draw was held for the star prize of a case of 49 Squadron Special Bitter.

Toasting the 'Megaton Club' President Ken Hubbard said-  
For a group of young men who came together for the first time in the mid-1950s, this 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary reunion of the Megaton Club bears witness to a remarkable period in our lives.  
Our shared experience and the camaraderie we enjoyed on No.49 Squadron during the British nuclear tests in Australia and on Christmas Island in the South Pacific have been the reason that our Association has persisted for so long.

This is not the end of our friendship, we will always keep in touch and hopefully continue to meet up in the future as circumstances permit..

Ken Edmunds, President 'Megaton Club'.



The whole Grapple reunion group around the Megaton photographic display featuring Wing Commander Ken Hubbard 49 Squadron CO.



## **Inauguration of a Memorial Plaque for the Raph Allsebrook crew at Bergeshovede, Germany.**

When F/Lt Ralph Allsebrook DSO, DFC was posted to 617 Squadron he was a pilot with an impressive operational record, having completed fifty 'ops' with 49 Squadron. During training at Ternhill in 1940, he became a close friend of another trainee pilot by the name of Henry Maudsley. On completion of training, Allsebrook was sent to No.49 while Sgt. Maudsley was posted to No.44 Squadron before being gathered into 617 Squadron. It was quite probable that he recommended Ralph Allsebrook to Gibson as an experienced and dependable pilot as the Allsebrook crew were the first crew to join 617 after the Dams raid of 17<sup>th</sup> May 1943. So it was with very mixed emotions he joined his new squadron knowing his friend had been shot down and killed just three days previously on return from attacking the Eder Dam. In July 1943 Allsebrook was awarded the DSO to his DFC and 617 moved from Scampton to Conningsby in August 1943. Being a 'specialist' unit they did not undertake many operations during this period and Allsebrook's last sortie was to deconstruct the Dortmund-Ems canal. This canal connects the inland port of Dortmund to the seaport of Emden and the many small towns in between, making it a strategic target throughout the war in order to disrupt the huge amount of coal, commerce and supplies carried along it.



L-R: Grant; Lulham; Allsebrook; Botting; Hitchen; Jones; Moore

The 617 Operational Record book states:

*'The visibility over the target was very bad, a thick haze preventing accurate location of the target. On the inward journey S/Ldr Holdens' aircraft was seen to be hit by light flak and to crash. F/Lt Allsebrook took over the direction of the attack and dropped his load. F/Lt Knight called up on R/T and stated that his two port engines had stopped, he asked for permission to jettison and return to Base. Permission was granted but nothing further was heard from this aircraft. F/Lt Wilson asked for permission to attack, permission was given, but nothing further was heard from him as was the case of P/O Divall. No contact could be made with F/Lt Allsebrook so F/Lt Martin took over command of the remaining aircraft.  
.....Only three (out of eight) aircraft returned from this raid.'*

### **The Plaque Commemorates Tragic Crash in September 1943**

The following information submitted by author Chris Ward

From Dr.Klaus Werner Kahl to Dr. Andreas Wachtel of the local research team:

*'Attached is the report on the installation of a commemorative plaque on the stele in Bergeshövede about the bomber crash in 1943. The Heimatverein Riesenbeck strives to identify all people who were born and/or died in our village within the framework of genealogical research and to record them in a database. This also includes war dead like the eight English crew members of the crashed bomber. We would be very grateful if you could give us information about birth place, birth date and parents. Of course we are also interested in pictures of the people. '*

#### **News Article:**



**Bergeshövede.** On Friday afternoon, a not-so-beautiful event was commemorated in a beautiful place, at the Nassen Dreieck harbor: the Lancaster plane crashed on the night of September 16, 1943. All eight crew members died.

The Reisenbeck Home Club had invited the members of the missing person search group Ikarus - Josef Brink from Horstel, Harald Rduch and Joachim Eickhoff from Lingen - to the official installation of a commemorative plaque on a stele to commemorate the crash of the British Lancaster bomber. Eight

Lancaster bombers had taken off from Coningsby Airfield, of which only three returned.

At the start of the ceremony, Sandra Finkmann and Robin Jurgens from the Horstel Wind Orchestra played the national anthems of England and Germany. Chris Ward came from England with his friend Andreas Wachtel and thanked the initiators for putting up the commemorative plaque.

Mayor David Ostholthoff said memories also mean gaining experience, so you want to remember together. Joachim Eickhoff, chairman and founder of the missing search group Ikarus, initially recalled this event in detail, the attack on the Dortmund-Ems Canal on Ladbergen.

On behalf of the Riesenbeck local history association, Jorg Echelmeyer expressed his thanks to everyone who had helped to create the commemorative plaque.



Author Chris Ward stands beside the commemorative plaque  
For Ralph Allsebrook and his crew.

Our thanks go to Chris Ward who supplied the information and photographs on this commemoration of a 4T9 crew lost in action and to the local people of **Bergeshövede**

## Letters to the Editor



### A Family Visit to the 49 Squadron Memorial

Louise is the niece of Sargent Ronald Hoole a 49er lost returning from Stuttgart on the night 15/16 March 1944 Lancaster ND 474

Louise Jennings Hoole together with her father John and fiancé Ian Turner made a visit last month to the National Arboretum.

John and Ian, both ex servicemen, visited many of the memorials and finished their tour of the Arboretum at the 49 Squadron Memorial.

Louise continues a 10 years search for a photograph of John Joseph Knowles, Bomb Aimer if anyone can provide assistance please contact us.



## Letters to the Editor

**From Diana Wares,**

*A belated thank you for sending me the April issue of the 4T9er.*

*I was of course particularly interested to read the correspondence from Mrs Rosalind Knowles, the daughter of Sgt. Ray Barlow. It was good to see the photos of Ray and Peggy Barlow with Gill Attwood, and the Commercy forest pictures.*

*I have sent a message to Mrs Knowles and hope to hear from her in due course.*

**From Gill Lucas,**

We were pleased to receive a copy of the Service Record of F/S Ken Ingles prepared by his daughter Gill Lucas. A fascinating research document including many photographs of her fathers time in service. I have sent the document to our researchers and Webmaster Malcolm Brook for inclusion in Ken Ingles Squadron Profile Page.

*Gill went on to say in her covering note "on the back cover is a superimposed image of her son Jake who graduated from Cranwell in 2008, currently serving as a Wing Commander. Sadly his grandfather died before Jake signed up.*



Photograph of Ken Ingles with grandson Wing Commander Jake Lucas superimposed.

## Letters to the Editor

### From Roger Bedford,

Roger mentioned his irritation that a lengthy article in Sunday Telegraph under the heading “Bomber Command veterans reveal their sense of betrayal in the Lancaster documentary. Roger goes on to add , Winston Churchill made a speech in the House of Commons on August 20th 1940.This is where he refers to “The Few” and that reference is quite well known and often quoted.

The next passage in that speech is this( and it is by no means as concise as the reference to The Few):

*“All hearts go out to the fighter pilots, whose brilliant actions we see with our own eye day after day; but we must never forget that all the time, night after night, month after month, our bomber squadrons travel far into Germany, find their targets in the darkness by the highest navigational skill, aim their attacks, often under the heaviest fire, often with serious loss, with deliberate careful discrimination, and inflict shattering blows upon the whole of the technical and war-making structure of the Nazi power”*

This passage is rarely, if ever, quoted– particularly because it doesn't lend itself to a succinct sound-bite. I'm sure that we would take nothing away from the bravery of the fighter pilots but I wish the passage about the bomber crews was more widely known.

### From Jo Cockburn

As we approach the anniversary of the Peenemunde Raid next month 17th/18th August 1943. The loss of my Great Uncle George Silvester and his crew JA 851 as well as two other Lancaster crews over Denmark. In the past on every anniversary, Alan Parr of the 49 squadron association has sent an email simply reading “We will remember them” as his uncle was crew of JA 691, sadly he is no longer with us, so this is my turn to pay respects to all those lost.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM



George Bernard Silvester (Air Gunner)  
And the Crews  
Pictures via Jo Cockburn



## **An unbelievable story solved by our Researcher Colin Cripps**

### **Sqdn Ldr David Drakes**

After carrying out our personal and Association research for about twenty four years, it amazes me how once in a while an enigma presents itself, which is not connected to operational research.

Normal run of the mill enquiries are usually from next of kin looking into a relative's service with the Squadron, from authors compiling a new book and fellow researchers clarifying an event. When I first started researching, it would normally involve trawling through microfilm records or document files at the Public Record Office, Kew. Other sources would be visits to the Family Records Centre in Central London and liaising with other reference points such as Air Historic Branch and Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Nowadays some of the most important documents are "on line".

Another enquiry with a Hampden led me to becoming pig in the middle with three Governments over the recovery of two Crewmen declared "Missing in Action" and their re-internment next to their fellow Crew.

Recently Robert McEneaney, our Secretary, passed to Ed Norman (Archivist) and myself one such enigma. Unfortunately Ed couldn't provide any information that we could work on, as we had not had any dealings with the individual Airman concerned.

In April this year Robert had been contacted by a Dutch national, Lynnette Bennings, who lives in Amersfoort, Holland. Lynnette said that several years ago, her Mother had passed away and she inherited an old bible bought by her Mother in an antiques shop in the Netherlands, published pre 1880. Recently Lynnette looked through the bible and inside the rear cover found a commemorative scroll issued to a Squadron Leader David Barron Drakes. Through her own enquiries Lynnette ascertained that Drakes had been killed on Air Operations with 49 Squadron. Her wish was to now return the scroll and bible to any surviving relatives in the UK.

With nothing to go on, I could see this was going to be a challenge.

Squadron Leader David Drakes aged 17 joined the RAF, and in August 1938 after Pilot training was posted to 49 Squadron as a Pilot Officer, rising through the ranks to Squadron Leader. On the 2nd November 1941, he was killed on his 48th Operation with the rest of his Crew,



declared “Missing in Action”. Drakes aircraft was claimed by a Marine Flak ship off the Frisian Islands.

I contacted Di Abelwhite (known affectionately as “Chief Fairy”) at the new International Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln, to see what they might hold. To my luck she had found a photograph of Drakes, but wanted to know the background to its requirement. Passing on the enigma, Di and myself then began to search through various genealogy sites until we came across a family tree.

David had a son, Philip, born six months after he was killed. Unfortunately Philip died in 2005 in Paris with a surviving son of which details were not known. NEXT AVENUE WAS TO LOOK INTO David Drakes widow’s remarriage. This luckily provided a living contact who was Philip’s Nephew Ben, who knew his Uncle AND knows his surviving Son .....Richard Drakes.....AND.....Did we want Richards email address in Paris!

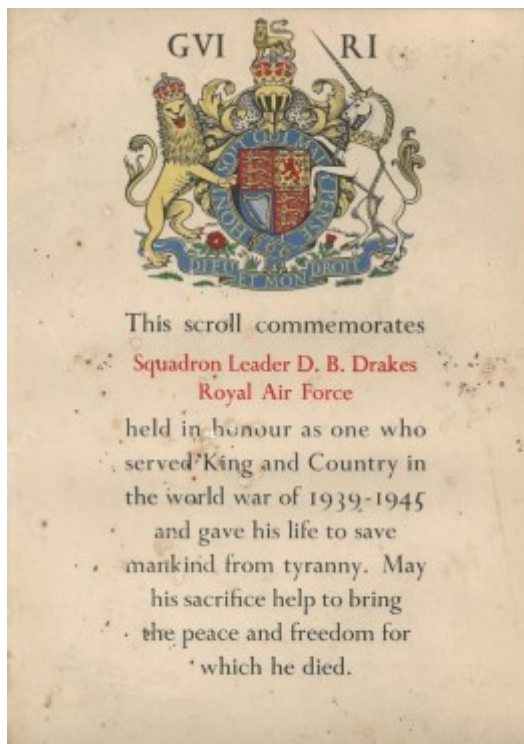
That has solved the scroll, but what of the bible, what is the connection? I imagined it to be a regular sized book, how wrong I was. Lynnette sent a picture of her holding it crooked in her forearm, it appears to be 14”h x 12” w x 4”d with two ornate shackles, red leather bound with gold lettering and very gothic in appearance.



Inside the front cover it had been endorsed with a signature, “Elizabeth Jane ? 21st of March 1880”, the surname was illegible, Di Abelwhite deciphered it as possibly being “Truelove” and when the full name was entered into the genealogy site came up trumps....It was Squadron Leader Drakes Grandmother!

I passed on the good news to Lynnette that we had solved the enigma. I made contact with Richard Drakes and he was over the moon that Lynnette wanted to return his families property and the research that I had carried out. Both have now been given each other’s contact details.

The return of the property. Lynnette has asked that Richard and I attend her address in Amersfoort as a gesture of gratitude and thanks that the property has been restored, and that a photographic record can be made of the occasion. However.....how did the bible get to Holland????



#### FOOTNOTE:

In studying the photo that Di Abelwhite sent from the IBCC of Squadron Leader Drakes, I noticed that he had a walking stick and only had a Pilot Officers stripe on his sleeve. The walking stick appears to be the result of a crash landing on the French coast due to an engine failure on his 5th op.

Another item is that Drakes flew 48 ops but was not stood down after completing the 30 ops 'Tour'.

A check of the "London Gazette" reveals that his promotions were mentioned but in all his service he was never awarded any other medal apart from the standard 1939-45 War Medal, 1939-45 Star and Air Crew Europe Star.

*Further extracts from Paul Gaunt's tribute to his father, reproduced here with his kind permission.*

## **SHADOWS OF THE PAST**

### **BY Paul Gaunt**

Pilot Officer Bill Hunt Foggia Main 1944/45: A Navigator Recalls 'I don't know whether the winter was colder and wetter than usual for that part of Italy, but there was certainly a lot of bad weather, with the Squadron being stood down for days at a time on account of low cloud, driving rain and poor visibility, not only in the Foggia Plain but over most of Italy, the Balkans and Austria. The wind howled through the Manfredonia Gap and drove rain like a shower of needles horizontally across the land. The officers' and sergeants' messes were established in farm buildings and were comfortable in a spartan sort of way. The CO had his caravan which also served as an office, the flight commanders and one or two other officers, such as the squadron medical officer, had rooms in the farmhouse. The tents the rest of us had to sleep in were rather old and decrepit, which I suspect had seen service in the North African desert and getting decidedly worse for wear. 'To make things more comfortable many people made improvements to their tents, digging out a little and making wooden sides with timber scrounged from the Americans who shared the airfields and who had vast quantities of packing cases in which their spares for aircraft and road transport came. Many air and ground crews heated their tents by means of home-made stoves. These were usually referred to as 'drip feeds', because of the principle of operation. The basic requirements were a metal pan, fairly shallow, a container of some sort to act as a reservoir for the diesel line fuel, some metal tube and a tap or stop-cock. Then a similar provision was required to introduce water to the pan. Sand was put in the pan, fuel added, and with luck this could be induced to burn after lighting. I don't pretend to understand the physics of the contraption, but adding water made it burn all the more fiercely and I suppose at a higher temperature. The aircraftsmen that had skill in metalwork and access to materials and tools had vastly superior installations, some of which had to be seen to be believed. You may think that they were highly dangerous devices, and so they were. Every few weeks there would be a tent fire during the night. I don't think anyone was badly hurt, but there was a court of enquiry into the incident. No one, so far as I know, ever got into serious trouble over these fires.





Bill Hunt visited the Foggia airfields in 1992, finding a section of PSP (Pierced Steel Planking), which made possible the building of improvised runways.

‘The cold was usually a raw, damp cold. There was little frost. ‘We did have some snow one day when I was still on 34 SAAF Squadron, very early January. Some of the South Africans had never seen snow and while the RAF chaps were huddled around the fire in the mess complaining, the SAAF (South African Air Force) boys were outside, some stripped to the waist, enjoying a colossal snowball fight. There were the odd mornings too, when I recall having to break the ice which had formed in the jerry can in which we kept water so that we could shave, but this was unusual. ‘The worst thing created by the elements was mud. In summer, the Foggia plain had been baked hard as iron, and every wind blew fine dust everywhere. By the time I arrived in the area, middle October 1944, the autumn rains had set in, the dust was laid and mud was king. Our usual transport was three-ton trucks, and these slithered about the makeshift roadways in an alarming manner. The mud in places was over the wheel hubs. Walking anywhere was a matter of difficulty and the aircraft inside were covered with mud when crews embarked. We had been issued with Wellington boots, but seldom wore them because they were so cold to the feet. Instead we wore our suede flying

boots and inside of these a pair of seaboot stockings. The boots were very loose fitting around the leg and diabolically awkward to walk in, but at least we could keep our feet warm. How the erks fared I really can't say, it was a great advantage having flying kit.

'Most of the crews wore our quilted inner flying suits under battle dress the whole time, we even slept in them. The bathing arrangements were primitive, once a week a truck took us to Foggia, to the bombed out swimming baths, where a sort of shower facility had been rigged up. There was a long metal pipe with holes in it at intervals, somewhere there was a boiler, which fed scalding hot water into the pipe, one stood beneath one of the holes and while trying to avoid the water falling directly on to the skin, caught a few drops on a flannel and soaped oneself. Removing the soap was an even trickier business, one crouched down as near the floor as possible to maximise the cooling effect on the water of its descent through the air.





Pictures on previous page and above:

At Foggia Main, 1944/45, mud was king, conditions appalling.

All photos this page, & two facing page, by John King.

Bomb damage:  
Foggia, 1944  
Photo Matt Muir





Bomb damage: Foggia, 1944  
Photo Matt Muir

‘Shower day was also laundry day; one called first at a farmhouse, whose ladies took in our washing, to collect clean shirts, socks and underwear, then to the showers for the uncomfortable ablutions and returned to the farmhouse with the dirty linen. During the winter, underwear was seldom removed at all between showers. One week a number of crews were on daylight operations on shower afternoon and that time, I have to confess, I went a whole fortnight without taking off my clothes. ‘Food was fairly indifferent, but in the officer’s mess, certainly the rations were made more appetising from the American Sergeants’ mess. It appears that hard liquor was not permitted for the American forces enlisted men and for a half a case of scotch from the mess ration, the Yanks would fill a fifteen hundredweight truck with all sorts of good things, from Spam to ring doughnuts (Tubby had his eye on an American air-crew flying jacket, that cost him 1 bottle of scotch and very little negotiating). The American food contribution made a most welcome change from bully beef and fritters and a vile concoction called M&V. This stood for meat and veg; it came in tins and had a hauntingly horrible flavour caused, it was said, by the inclusion of potatoes in the mixture. Whether the Sergeants’ messes had similar arrangements with their opposite numbers in the American camps I cannot say, but I would be surprised if it were not so.

‘In the messes there was not much of an Englishmen’s usual tipples to be had: a very small ration of bottled Canadian beer; perhaps two bottles a month

each in the officer's mess. My "skip" and I used to save ours up and share a bottle now and then after getting back from an operation. 'The rest of the time we drank a frightful rotgut Italian wine, known officially as Lacrima Cristi and irreverently by the RAF as 'Jesus Wept'. Sometimes we drank gin, whisky was rather scarce, most of it having been traded with the Yanks, and there was a sort of tacit understanding that one left it for some of the older men - the CO and so forth. Not that I drank whisky in those days, so it seemed no hardship. We would have given a great deal for a pint of good English bitter now and then though.



Excellent end of tour photo beside Wellington 'Flak Harry': Doug Skinner's crew, 104 Sqn, Foggia Main, 1945. From left: Wilf Eardley (nav), Charlie Williams (A/G), Jack Grey (W/Op), Doug Skinner (pilot), Jim Sterret (bomb aimer).

Photo: the late Doug Skinner





It was capable of flying at 255 mph. The heating system was primitive, it was almost impossible to maintain any suitable temperature for all the crew. The engines were two Bristol Hercules each delivering 1650 hp, each with two speed superchargers, giving maximum power at 7,000 feet and 14,000 feet. The power enabled the aircraft to take off and climb very well. The maximum all up weight (AUW) was approaching 3,6000 lb. With main tanks full, the Wellington carried 4,500 lb of bombs beside guns and ammunition. Operations close to base enabled the bomb load to reach 6,500 lb, with reduced fuel in the tanks. Targets a greater distance away could be reached using over load tanks, but a smaller bomb load was carried. 'The Wellington was armed with six .303 Browning machine-guns and had a general range (carrying 4,500 lb of bombs) of 1,325 miles. 'The aircraft unfortunately was rather prone to ignition; aircraft crash□landing nearly always burst into flames and were completely destroyed. Tubby's aircraft, when it crash landed in the Yugoslav mountains, did not burn after the crash landing, probably because it broke almost in two and scraped up a belly-full of snow, which covered the entire crash site some two – three feet deep. What was it like going on ops? 'How did we, as crew members, feel before going on operations? This is perhaps the most difficult question of all. In those war days the culture of the stiff upper lip prevailed, it is to me and perhaps to many of my generation, quite incomprehensible that media persons, with apparent insensitivity, microphone in hand, demand of the recently bereaved, But how did you feel, Mrs Robinson, when they told you your husband and two children had been killed by a drunken driver?''.



Sgt Norman Moseley & crew, 37 Sqn, Tortorella (Foggia). From left: Peter Boulton (nav), Bill Ward (W/Op), Moseley (pilot), John Bell (bomb aimer), John Flockhart (rear gunner ) Photo: Norman Moseley.

‘The Wellington was armed with six .303 Browning machine-guns and had a general range (carrying 4,500 lb of bombs) of 1,325 miles. ‘The aircraft unfortunately was rather prone to ignition; aircraft crash□landing nearly always burst into flames and were completely destroyed. Tubby’s aircraft, when it crash landed in the Yugoslav mountains, did not burn after the crash landing, probably because it broke almost in two and scraped up a belly-full of snow, which covered the entire crash site some two – three feet deep. What was it like going on ops? ‘How did we, as crew members, feel before going on operations? This is perhaps the most difficult question of all. In those war days the culture of the stiff upper lip prevailed, it is to me and perhaps to many of my generation, quite incomprehensible that media persons, with apparent insensitivity, microphone in hand, demand of the recently bereaved, “But how did you feel, Mrs. Robinson, when they told you your husband and two children had been killed by a drunken driver?”. ‘We had our feelings, of course, but we suppressed them. This was necessary in the interest of morale. The thing was neatly summed up by a colleague after the war who referred to the days when, “Death was something you didn’t talk about, that happened to other people”. This suppression of emotions was, I think, a factor in making recall, especially at this distance of time, difficult. I dare say that some people would still feel that to ask the question is to attempt to enter forbidden territory . However, I have no inhibitions about that, but no very clear recollections either. We went to ‘flights’ each morning, segregated by our functions, not as crews. That is, navigators went to the navigation section brief, wireless operators to their hut, and so on. After a time, a list would appear with crews for the night’s ops, or sometimes afternoon’s operation. Or, of course, there would be news of a stand down, usually because of extremely bad weather. If ones crew were on the ‘battle order’, I seem to recall a slight feeling which might be best described as a mixture of excitement and anxiety; but it was not a very strong emotion. One affected to take things in one’s stride and as a navigator one had at once to address one’s-self to the practical aspects of the matter. There was a laid down route to be flown, and a flight plan to be drafted out. ‘A time for the operation briefing would be announced, after which there was not much time to worry about the probability of things. ‘Before briefing, one put one’s flying kit on, plenty of warm clothing under battle-dress, flying boots, an Irvine jacket if one had been lucky enough to get one (there never seemed enough to go round in Italy). Then when briefing was complete, out to the three-ton truck which would take several crews out to their respective aircraft dispersals. ‘At some stage, one put on the Mae West life jacket and parachute harness. Parachutes were drawn from the stores for each flight and returned afterwards. Rear gunners usually wore their side flying suits on top of everything else except the Mae West and harness; rear turrets were very icy and draughty. They also wore silk gloves inside the leather gauntlets, which were part of the standard issue of flying kit. I could not work in gloves, but found that woollen mittens, knitted by some kind lady in Eng-

land, kept the hands warm while leaving the fingers free. In Liberator bombers, which the squadron went on to in February 1945, there were facilities for plugging electrically heated suit and some air gunners were issued with these. 'Once in the aircraft, one put on the flying helmet, from which dangled the oxygen mask fitted with a microphone. The headphones were in the helmet and one plugged in an intercom lead to check the equipment. 'However, before boarding the aircraft, there were usually a few minutes to spare and if there was still some daylight, we would walk about, joking about something or other, perhaps indulging in a little mutual chaff or mild horseplay and stopping alongside the forward landing wheels for a final 'nervous pee' before boarding - I do not think we ever speculated about the operation that lay ahead. Everyone had some sort of pre-flight check to carry out and this helped to suppress any nervousness one might feel. Once the engines were started, there was plenty to occupy the attention and this was focused on the immediate moment, not on what might lie ahead. We had, it must be remembered, very little flying experience and the very fact of flying was still in itself something of an adventure. 'Even approaching the target, while one might have a momentary feeling of butterflies in the stomach, there was too much to concentrate on to allow time for worrying about the possibility of disaster. It may have been different for those who had had bad previous experiences, but I was lucky and although not cast in a very heroic mould, had the necessary confidence that the worst simply wasn't going to happen to me. As it turned out, I was right, of course. 'This frame of mind, though totally unfounded in reason, was almost a necessary condition of operational flying. What things must have been like in Bomber command in the early days of the war, or even 205 group during the summer of 1944, I cannot imagine. True, we continued to have losses from time to time, but not to the extent that we ever questioned our probability of survival. 'While on this subject, it may be apposite to touch on the question of superstition. I suspect that some men had private and secret superstitions that others never heard of - never flying without taking some item a girlfriend had given them, for instance. I am not personally superstitious to any great extent and if I sometimes say 'touch wood' when something is in the balance, I like to think this is more a verbal habit than a serious attempt to influence the outcome of some matter in my favour. Even so, what has been called 'the long arm of coincidence' was sometimes apparent in operational matters. 'While I was on 70 Squadron at Tortorella, we had, I think, twenty aircraft. The usual thing was to give each aircraft on a squadron an identifying letter and for 'A' flight to have the first half of the alphabet, while 'B' flight's aircraft started from N. Now it happened before my time on 70 Squadron, that six aircraft had been lost over a short period of time. Three were lettered G-George and three T-Tommy. At this point, someone made the decision not to use these letters on the next replacement aircraft to arrive and the letters K and X were used instead. I imagine that crew members had commented on the coincidence and

because of the possibility that this might be a 'worrying factor' which could, albeit unconsciously, predispose to disaster, the powers that be, perhaps the squadron CO, decided to play safe.

'Another odd thing I noticed about this affair is that G and T were each the seventh aircraft in their respective flights. Bill asks was Tubby's aircraft that crashed in Yugoslavia numbered likewise. Coincidentally, yes, G for George LP6 14! Some time after the war, Bill was talking to a fellow navigator, who said that on his station they had a WAAF whom none of the aircrew would date. Apparently several had done so and in each case had been killed on operations shortly after. The unfortunate girl was referred to not, I hope, to her face - as a chop-WAAF. If you dated her you were lined up for the chop. The trouble with superstition is that while no one can prove that there is any substance in it, no one can prove that there is not. Tubby's wife, Florence, knitted an air force blue scarf that was a suitable size. Tubby wore it throughout the war during operations, except one particular day, January 8th 1944. Again, was this purely coincidence? Bill concludes: - 'One matter with regard to our feelings I can be sure about; we were perhaps without exception, very homesick. One chore, which developed upon officers, was censoring the other rank's mail for forbidden references to places, units and operations. On the back of envelopes there sometimes appeared cryptic words like SWALK (sealed with a loving kiss), but far more often there were simply the letters ROTB - roll on the boat, the troopship, that is to say that takes me home. We, of course, had no WAFs to date and that was no doubt part of the trouble. The longing for the homeward-bound boat even appeared in the words of an RAF song.

To be continued in the next newsletter from chapter six.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **SHADOWS OF THE PAST**

By  
Paul Gaunt  
Part 11

Page 114—Chapter Six

To be continued in the next newsletter.

## **DONATIONS**

We have received very generous donations from the following people:-

A Campbell  
R Knowles  
P T Williams  
P Griffiths

I would like to thank everyone else who regularly donates to the Associations funds.

**Cheques to the Association should be made payable to;  
49SA PETWOOD**

**Internet Banking:  
Nat West Bank,  
49SA Petwood  
Account No. 18546889  
Sort Code: 52 21 00**



## **LINCOLNSHIRE'S LANCASTER ASSOCIATION**

***Supporting the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight***



***needs YOUR support to  
keep these magnificent, historic  
aircraft flying***

**Membership details:  
[www.lancasterassociation.co.uk](http://www.lancasterassociation.co.uk)  
Tel: 01522 521512 please leave message.**

### **Chairman**

Stuart Keay. 39, Station Road, Moulton, Spalding, Lincs. PE12 6QE  
Telephone:- 01406 371547 Email:- chairman@49squadron.co.uk

### **Association Secretary**

Robert McEneaney. 23 Galley Lane, Arkley, Barnet, Herts. EN5 4AR  
Telephone:- 02084410673 Email:- secretary@49squadron.co.uk

### **Archivist**

Ed Norman. 14 Woodbrooke Way. Corringham. Essex. SS17 9DP  
Telephone:- 01375 672441 Email:- archivist@49squadron.co.uk

### **Archivist (Post War)**

David Boughton. 59 Redland Drive. Kirk Ella. East Yorkshire. HU10 7UX  
Telephone:- 01482 656324 Email:- postwar@49squadron.co.uk

### **Researcher**

Colin Cripps. Sunrise Villa. Redlingfield Road. Occold. Eye. Suffolk. IP23 7PG  
Telephone:- 01379-672945 Email:- researcher@49squadron.co.uk

### **Webmaster**

Malcolm Brooke. 23 Foresters Walk. Stamford Bridge. York. YO41 1BB  
Telephone:- 01759 373769 Email:- webmaster@49squadron.co.uk

### **Photographer**

Dominic Howard. 29 Yewdale Road, Carlisle, Cumbria. CA2 7ST  
Telephone:-07506100959 Email:-photos@49squadron.co.uk

**Association Website address; [www.49squadron.co.uk](http://www.49squadron.co.uk)**



‘The 4T9er’ is compiled & edited by Robert McEneaney  
Photographs by the editor unless credited otherwise.  
All enquiries to the Association Secretary.

© Copyright 2021 49 Squadron Association

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, recording, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.