



# 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



## Newsletter No. 3

### 1992 'Get-together'

Owing to the moderate response for this proposed function, we have decided to abandon the idea (apologies to the fifteen who applied). We now look forward to the Scarisbrick Hotel, 1st and 2nd October, 1993. We will strive to make it even more enjoyable than 1991. Remember, we need an attendance of at least 100!

### Treasurer's Report

We now have (at 1/5/92) £386.29 in bank. There are 89 members, of whom 60 have paid their subs. To all you non-payers, you can imagine how costly it is to keep sending you Newsletters. We cannot carry on if you don't pay. Please let us know if you do not wish to continue your membership. You can see that it is not fair to paid-up members, to subsidise the non-payers.

So, lads, please send on your 1991/1992 subs. I am enclosing a separate note to those who have not paid. To those who have paid - thank you very much!

We will soon be making arrangements for the 1993 reunion in Southport, and will be looking for confirmation and your deposits. We will be letting you know the lists of hotels and meals etc in due course.

### Habbiniyeh

Whist in the York area, I met a Tornado pilot who had been shot down in Iraq (Gulf War). He was taken for interrogation to what looked like a RAF station. You guessed it! It was Habb! He said the old place had taken quite a pasting!

### Sharjah

Have discovered a near neighbour who holds a one hour video-tape, which shows the delights of Sharjah, as it is today. Included on the tape are at least 5 minutes of shots of the old Fort. The edifice is in dire need of repair, but is now in the hands of the local conservation society. A six-lane motorway can be seen to the background of the Fort (cutting across the old airfield) All this will be shown at our next Reunion.

### Masirah Island

Following the large colour-illustrated centre spread in 'RAF News', I wrote to the Commanding Officer of Masirah. The island base is now occupied by the Royal Omani Air Force (R.O.A.F.). My letter was passed to a squadron-leader Colin Richardson. This officer has many years service on the island, on both flying and ground duties, and is presently stationed there.

He was able to bring me up to date with the present situation. Squadron Leader Richardson was recently in U.K. on leave, and we had quite a chat over the 'phone. He has also provided us with documentation on the island as it is today.

Best of all, he has promised to attend our 1993 Southport reunion, and will give us a talk about the island.

## **Shaibah**

The gentleman named above would clearly like to know all the words of our squadron anthem, the 'Shaibah Blues'. Anybody know all the verses ? (only know a couple myself)

## **Masirah**

(as it is today) - Courtesy of "Royal Air Force News".

Along the coast, towards the right hand corner of Arabia, is another name which looms large in RAF history. Masirah, a strip of an island which is almost as isolated now, as it was reputed to be in the past. There is a ferry to the mainland, but no road to meet it on the other side!

The island may not look much at first glance (not much change from when I saw it nearly 50 years ago! - ED) Just flat expanse of dunes and sparse vegetation. But, even in a short time, its subtle appeal can be sensed. Turtles can be seen in the sea - and when they come ashore to lay their eggs, conservationists try to protect them (shades of 1944! - ED) The bird life is enthralling, as was graciously shown me by Conrad Greaves, a contract warrant officer after 30 years in the RAF - he came here on demob leave in 1976, and has been around ever since (Get some Masirah hours in! - ED). But back to business. The station has three roles, a home for No 20 squadron (RAFO) Jaguars, an area radar unit, and a training base. The Qaboos Air Academy has a department of Initial Officer Training which prepares entrants for Cranwell, and No 1 squadron equipped with 12 Strikemasters, and 4 Bravos (a Swiss-made light trainer). The C.O., W/Comdr Jerry Barret, is a long term islander, and very enthusiastic about it too!

## **Insight on Masirah**

(see newsletter No2) The RAF surveyed the island in 1930, and by early 1931, F/Lt R. L. Ragg and crew land in a Vickers 'Rangoon' (early flying boat) to establish a transit landing strip, fuel dump and seaplane anchorage. This was in operation at Umm Rassas by early 1933, mainly for 'Wapitis' on route from Aden to India. The main problem was the labour force provided by the local sheik. This gentleman employed a very shrewd 'shop steward', who had a preference for the much esteemed "Maria Theresa" dollar, and pushed up the rate per can of unloaded fuel! Five miles up the coast Sur Masirah was established for Wapitits and Heyfords, and by 1935 a new site at Ras Haif was envisaged. In 1942 this airfield known to 244 squadron, was to become the main island base.

'Our' squadron operated from Sharjah up to the end of 1943 (with a detachment on Masirah). In February 1944 the whole unit move to the island as the Wellington Xllls replaced the Bisleys. Your 'scribe' arrived in March with Joe Cross's crew. Squadron Leader Hankin was the O.C. Flying, and we soon welcomed Wing-Commander Brian Young, a very popular station commander. He made considerable efforts to improve living conditions. Soon, the R.C. padre, Father McEwan, initiated the building of a petrol can church. The C of Es, and O.D.s soon followed suit. How strange this seems in this ecumenical era!

Next issue I will tell you about the 'Monument', and some interesting wrecks around the island (if our editor approves!)

Tommy Hazell of Saltford

Note: Jim says there is too much about Masirah in these Newsletters. What about Habb, Shaibah, Sharjah or Ras al Hadd? All contributions to these Newsletters will be most welcome.

Roll on October '93! All the best from

Jim Hislop

Don James