



244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 18

JIM SAYS Our fourth Reunion will take place on week-end 26th & 27th September, 1997. (See Don's report below). We have now commenced our preparations for the event. We will do our best to improve on '95's 'family do' - if that is possible. As regards booking for our 'shindig'. 42 deposits have been received. Currently, there is only one single room left at the Scarisbrick. Members who required accommodation at this hotel are advised to book urgently. At this rate there is every chance we will surpass our 99 in attendance in 1995.

A copy of the 1997 Southport Tourist Guide will be sent to all members early in the New Year. This will be of great assistance to those who wish to book their own accommodation.

Our membership has now reached 275 (gross). Which really means we have 182 paid up members. However, eight of you have yet to pay your 1996 subscription. We cannot afford to send out Newsletters to non-payers indefinitely. This current issue will show a reminder if you have not yet paid.

Also, I quote, "Wilf Cross (RAF Habbanyia, medical orderly, 1937-39-Member No. 196) has had 20 copies made of his RAF Iraq Command tie. Despite the age of the original, which is somewhat threadbare, the copies are good, are unusual with the winged horse emblem. He is offering them for sale at £12.50, and anyone interested can ring Wilf on 01865-515024".

An appeal.

Enid Walker (wife of the late Jim Walker-crew captain, flying Wimpey XIII's out of Masirah, July '44. to '45) has recently joined our Association. Enid would clearly like news of her husband's sojourn on the Island, or from anyone who flew with him (Ring 0151-336-4520).

To end with, we are still in urgent need of copy for future Newsletters. So, come on you budding journalists, anything interesting about life in the old days, about 244 or Paiforce will be used. NB As regards Reunion deposits, if for some reason you were unable to attend Southport '97, your money would naturally be refunded. So book NOW!

Don Says Now that holidays are mainly over, we can now get down to the Reunion. Details are shown below of the cost of the week-end 26th & 27th September 1997. The Reunion will be held in the Isherwood Suite of the Scarisbrick Hotel, Southport. On Friday evening the programme will be :- Sherry reception, group photos, Buffet, and general get-to-nether. On Saturday evening, there will be a sherry reception, dinner with wine, bags of it! (30 litres last time). All this to be followed by the usual self-inflicted singing/cabaret introduced by your favourite M.C.' (N.B. A more amenable organist will be in attendance!)

Details Friday and Saturday 26th & 27th September 1997. (These prices are very similar to 1995, and are possible through the good offices of the Hotel, and our satisfactory cash flow.)

1. Reunion Week-end. No accommodation required £30.00 per person
Dinner only (Saturday) No accommodation required £20.00 per person
2. Scarisbrick Hotel. All rooms en suite
Single Room, Friday & Saturday. B&B, Buffet, Banquet, Gratuities £118.00 per person
Twin Room, Friday & Saturday. B&B, Buffet, Banquet, Gratuities £108.00 per person
Double Room, Friday & Saturday. B&B, Buffet, Banquet, Gratuities £108.00 per person
If Thursday as additional night. B&B, Evening meal Double/Twin £40.00 per person

If Thursday as additional night. B&B, Evening meal. Single £42.50 per person

If Sunday as additional night. In addition to Friday & Saturday

Special Offer B&B and Carvery (taken noon to 8 p.m.) £30.00

N.B. To help with accommodation, would it be possible for members to share a twin room?

3. Carlton Lodge Hotel, Bath Street (short walk to the Scarisbrick)

Single Room (not en suite) Friday & Saturday, BB B. Buffet, Banquet £64.00 per

Double/Twin Rooms (en suite) Friday & Saturday, B&B. Buffet, Banquet £70.00 per person

Payment:- £10 per person now. Then 50% by the end of June '97. Balance payable by 31/8/97.

Drama at Ras-al-Hadd

The article "Air-Sea Rescue (umm Rasass 1944)" reminded me of a happening at Ras-al-Hadd sometime in 1944.

It was at about 4 'o' clock in the afternoon, the sea was at low-tide, when we heard the throb of an engine. Looking towards the Point all we could see was a yellow flag moving westwards. Thinking nothing of it I got on with what I was doing (de-coding some signal I think). After about five minutes or so later I heard shouting; the engine apparently was the engine of a lifeboat which contained 38 survivors from a torpedoed Norwegian tanker which had been en-route, in ballast, to Abadan. When I heard the tanker's Skipper's story I quickly dashed into the signal cabin and told the operator on the admin frequency to stop all traffic and to tell Masirah (control) to stand-by for an "emergency message".

My operator was delighted to be the centre of attention for once and acted accordingly causing, so we heard later, near panic in the signals and cypher sections at Masirah. The signal we sent gave the tanker's position when it was torpedoed and asked that arrangements be made to up-lift the survivors as we could only accommodate and provide for them with great difficulty. We believe the S.N.O. Aden was surprised to learn of a U-boat at large in the Arabian Sea. The sub had put three torpedoes into the tanker and its crew was subjected to gun-fire as they pulled away from their doomed ship; fortunately they were not hit. After several hours the survivors happened across an Arab fisherman who said he would take them to "the Inglise". During the voyage one of the survivors died, but his comrades could not bring themselves to put him overboard as the sea was shark infested. The dead man was still sitting upright when the life-boat reached Ras-al-Hadd. We had not had a death on the station before. One airman, a transport driver I believe, had a prayer book and as he had been a member of the Salvation Army he took the funeral service when the body was buried in a very shallow grave in the square marked out under the windsock.

The survivors were with us for over a week whilst signals passed too and from Masirah and Aden. The Arab who guided the lifeboat in demanded a reward and he wouldn't accept rupees and we wanted to be rid of the survivors who were eating into our rations.

Then one afternoon during a pay-parade a ship appeared on the horizon and started signalling by lamp. The C.O. called out, "Corporal there's a ship signalling, see what it wants". I dashed for our only Aldis Lamp but could read nothing so I gave "T" and in no time the navy man had adjusted his aim and I could read (with difficulty) what he was sending; it was "From HMS Investigator. Have you a message for me". I flashed "Q" (wait) whilst I consulted the C.O. who told me to say "No. Have you a message for me". This got me in no end of trouble so eventually I signalled "Have 37 survivors from torpedoed tanker can you take them". I had done no visual Morse since the hour or so spent on it on my training course over three years before and I was no match for the speed merchant on the Investigator.

In fact I was fast becoming a nervous wreck!! Then the Norwegian skipper came behind me and started to read off the signals so I handed him the Aldis and suggested he got on with it!

The upshot was, that the following day, the sloop would return but would stand-off about 3 miles to give herself sea-space should a U-boat turn up. We were then to ferry out the unlucky seamen in the HSL stationed with us operating from a tiny jetty in the creek.

The survivors were gone but the Arab fisherman remained - he wanted his reward. A strongly worded Signal to Aden brought a reply which read "From S.N.O. Aden. On my own responsibility I authorise payment of 50 (fifty) Marie Therese Dollars". Somehow these were obtained (how I know not) and the man was happy - and RAH returned to normal.

Does anyone know whether or not the Norwegian we buried beneath the windsock was later re-buried in a less remote spot?

Geoff Gibson (mem. No. 23).

Shaibah (sometime late 1942)

This was a busy place, supplying essential supplies to Russia via Iran. I was in my third year in Iraq and had been posted to 119 M.U. We were assembling Spits, Bostons, and Mitchels for our allies. Peculiar sense of technicality had our friends. I and several others were engaged in fitting the armament to these aircraft. On the Bostons the mounting brackets for the four Brownings (mounted two each side of the nose) were secured by two bolts (castle headed nuts) and one inch times one eighth split pins and were difficult to fit, being in a deep recess.

We sometimes had difficulty in setting these bolts, hence a delay, entailed, much to the annoyance of the Russian Inspectors. The powers that be realising that this delay, asked the American contingent if, they could help. "no problem", said the Yanks, "we always fit bolts with Symonds self locking nuts". So this is what we did, and found it quicker and easier than fiddling about with split pins. There were eight Bostons ready to be flown to Tehran. When one of the female interpreters came and stopped the departure. There had been a mistake in assembly she said. I was called over and told to remove the sun panels, this only meant releasing a few quick release studs. The woman, and a Russian officer: looked inside, and blew their tops, and pointed to the gun mounting brackets and the securing bolts with Symonds nuts. "No good", they said. "They must be changed". The planes were pushed into the hangar and every available armourer called to change the offending bolts.

It did not seem to matter that the stores had been trying for days to get castle headed nuts and bolts. Goodness knows how many people were involved, or the cost, but within 48 hours we had boxes of them. What amused me was the planes assembled by the Americans were quite o.k. with Symonds nuts, but the original planes sent by the British had castle headed nuts, so all planes supplied by the British had to be to that specification. Even the split pins had to be exact spec., no good putting in a longer pin and cutting off the surplus. The inspectors would poke you in the ribs, "Nicht gut", they would say and it would mean a change job.

Malcolm Robinson (mem. No. 273)

The Life and Times of Masirah Chapter 2.

The Tinombo deserves a separate chapter all on its own. Without the Tinombo Masirah would not have been able to operate. It arrived out of the blue from the Dutch East Indies and the big bearded Dutchman who commanded her merely said he wanted to get closer to the war. It used to bring us all our aviation fuel in 4 gallon tins, Leaking like sieves, and stacked on railway sleepers packed on top of all our Depth Charges - a more lethal cargo I just can't imagine. We welcomed the empty tins because with the tops off they became the building blocks of our accommodation when filled with sand and stacked up. We welcomed the sleepers because there was no wood on the island and they formed the roof supports. That's why Masirah was called the Tin Can Island. Later on, when the losses of fuel in transport became unacceptable, we started receiving it in 40 gallon drums. It made things easier for us because the drums would float and could be thrown off the Tinombo into the sea and collected and driven ashore by a hemp rope strung between the two Urekas - providing it wasn't too rough.

Many times I tried to get the Master ashore but he would not come. instead, I suffered many a morning after in the middle of the day from the lethal cargo of Schnapps that always seemed readily available on board...

Liberty Ships used to visit us but did not like staying long. I remember one visit very vividly. A boat was lowered and I received a visit from a very agitated young U.S. Naval Ensign who requested that I be good enough to come aboard and place his Captain under arrest - he had been blind drunk since leaving New York three weeks earlier, and the Ensign had been forced to run the ship and he did not feel qualified. I could only advise him visit the U.S. Authorities at his next port of call (Aden) and set them to do something about it - I certainly couldn't. Then there was the morning when -my marinecraft officer reported the arrival of three motorised life-boats plus inhabitants, from a Liberty Ship torpedoed some thirty miles south of the island. This was a bit of a puzzle because our Ops. Room had heard no S.O.S. nor MayDay, nor had Aden. But there it was, just as reported, a Liberty Ship with a slight list to starboard, engines stopped and crewless, drifting in a busy shipping lane. The inhabitants of the lifeboats were moved over to the American Camp and were flown out the next day before I'd had a chance to talk to-them, but one of our cooks reported that if we could get out to the wreck within the next 24

hours there was a refrigerator full of frozen duck there for the taking! Pity we couldn't take advantage of it. As far as I remember the Navy sunk the wreck a week later.

The arrival of the three Lifeboats gave us a lot more flexibility marinecraftwise. The Doctor soon put a stop to this by taking one out for a trip, running out of fuel and drifting over to the mainland. To teach him a lesson we left him there overnight and brought him back the next morning - to report that the boat had been holed on landing and was no longer seaworthy.

The diet on Masirah was monotonous, it bred in me a life-long hatred of the Soya Link sausage in any shape or form, and even the smell of one cooking or cooked put me off eating at a range of about ten feet. The same might be said of MacConnikies (and I don't care if I've spelt it wrongly) Meat and Veg. I was lucky in that I loved Corned Beef. The trouble was that we could not supplement the rations with local produce, there just wasn't any. The locals lived on fish, and the local fish were lovely, but we just could not get enough to feed everybody. I dug up some turtle eggs and tried them for breakfast. They are about the size of a table-tennis ball but are soft skinned so you have to tear the skin open to get at the white and yoke. The other snag is that no matter how long or hard you cook it, the white will not set - it remains a clear viscous fluid. So, my first experience was to face a circular yellow yoke sitting in a sauce of viscous fluid! The yoke tasted like a chicken's egg, but was a bit coarser in texture, there was no taste or smell of fishiness about it. So I suggested we remove the white and scrambled the yokes with a lot of milk. This was a lot better, but there was still a coarseness about the product. The cook suggested we introduce an amount of chopped onion, and this proved a great success, scrambled egg on toast was really palatable. He suggested we tried it out in the Airmen's Mess as an alternative, which we did. The first morning it went like a bomb, but no bidders after that because the Cook let drop that they were turtles eggs! I wonder if there are any survivors left who remember having scrambled turtles eggs for breakfast?

I found one of the coolies chewing what looked like a strip of leather, he told me it was shark. I had a shaving and it tasted like saltfish, but the more one chewed it and got rid of the saltiness, the more the taste of the fish came through and it was quite pleasant - and not unlike the Afrikaans Biltong. it solved for me a puzzle - I had noticed all along the sand bank to the east shore of the island I would come across piles of what looked like draughtsmen of varying sizes, some up to 2 inches in diameter and about 1 inch thick, all having three holes from the edge to the centre. One day I was lucky enough to see what it was all about. A shark fisherman brought his catch ashore, about 7 or 8 feet long, and with remarkable skill and I imagine a very sharp knife he cut a continuous strip of meat from behind the head down to the tail on both sides. He rolled the meat up and buried it about 2 feet down in the sand below the high water mark Cut the head off the backbone and stuck the backbone upright into the bank to mark the place where he had buried the meat. He would leave it there until the heat and the wind would disintegrate the backbone into a pile of circular vertebra (which I was finding) then he would dig it up and dry it out. During this period the meat would have been kept out of the air and gently salted by each wave that came in and sank into the bank.

R.G.M. Walker- (Mem. No. 91)

U.F.O's Over The Red Sea.

After Shaibah, Bahrain, Jask Ra's al Hadd and Salalah, Comm. Flight crews could look forward to the more civilised part of the A.V.M's tour of the R.A.F. stations with stops at Khormaksar, Socotra, Mogadishu, Scusciuban, (one to miss if possible) Asmara, Port Sudan, (refuelling only) Heliopolis, and sometimes Lydda. The favourite stopover was Mogadishu, where in 1943 Italian officers were still allowed to strut around with their Somali girl-friends and gave no trouble to the R.A.F. crews as they mingled in the town's brightly lit night spots. One brief for the ground crew was to bring back to Habb., assorted bottles of spirits from the Wine Lodge liquor store. These would always include a dozen bottles of the locally brewed Millefiori Cristalizatto, whose nickname was even more colourful and totally unprintable due to its ability to pass through the human system without touching the sides. Another favoured call was Asmara, perched on a plateau 7,000 feet up and pleasantly cool. The transit crew hut was on the edge of a thick wood, and the sight of a Lee Enfield just inside the door was both comforting and foreboding. Sleep was punctuated by the imagined roar of a dozen different beasts, but nights inevitably passed without incident.

The short runway was also a challenge, calling for running up on the brakes until the tail bounced, then a quick surge forward with 15 degrees flap - a real neck stiffener. My favourite seat on the Hudson was the step leading down to the bomb aimer's position. With pilot, navigator, and wireless operator comfortably seated, and the cabin occupied by the A.V.M. and his entourage, the fitter and the rigger had to muck in where space allowed. The nose position gave exhilarating sensations of speed at low altitude and compensated for the greenhouse effect from both the sun and the pilot's feet! We were belting down the Asmara runway when I was joined on my step by a fat seagull who had entered via the perspex nose, bounced off my left leg and breathed its last beside

me. I waited for the clunk of the undercarriage locks and then took the corpse up to 'Donny' Doncaster (Mem.213), our pilot. Harry Edgington, fitter, went back to tell the A.V.M. that we would have to go round again, and an hour later we took off with a patched nose, surgery courtesy of yours truly and the Asmara duty crew. Having spotted the inky blackness ahead, streaked with angry lightening flashes, Donny held the altitude, but we still ran into the mother of all electric storms, short and sharp, that passed quickly behind, leaving us with the phenomenon of a brilliant rainbow and its reflection in the Red Sea below, a sight that has haunted me ever since.

Donny was hungry after wrestling with the controls. "Anything to eat, Taff?" (to me). I went downstairs and re-emerged giving him a fanfare, Tah rah!', holding aloft a large tin of Yellow Cling Peaches, two dishes, dessert, airmen, for the use of, two spoons, ditto, and a tin opener with a bull's head. I held a dish while Henry, navigator, split open the tin and poured out the contents, whereupon the most ghastly stench filled the office. The peaches were rotten. "Kin ell!" said Henry. "Kill it for ...'s sake!" called Corbet, wireless operator, holding his nose. Only Donny stayed calm, mainly because he couldn't juggle with the stick and hold his nose at the same time. "Throw them out, quick!" he yelled. We all had visions of the A.V.M. deciding to come up front at that moment. Henry opened his window, tested for suction with his hand, and hanging on to the dish for dear life, I slung out the stinking peaches over the Sudanese coastline. Then we gasped open-mouthed as two peach slices appeared stuck to the next window aft, and we watched it in spellbound fascination as they slithered along the window and then took off. Another vision immediately crossed our minds. "I'll go", said Harry. He returned seconds later, patting his heart. "All clear," he said, "there was a slice right behind him, but it took off, and they're all asleep anyway". Sighs of relief all round!

After refuelling at Port Sudan, (four gallon tins, funnel and shammy, and hopping from one foot to the other on the sizzling wing) we landed at Heliopolis, where I found the lightning strike had stripped the paint from both landing edges. A night in Cairo, then non-stop to Habbaniya. A day later I received word of the Air Vice Marshall's report on the two- week trip. "Excellent airmanship", he wrote, "Marred only by some smeared windows, and the rigger had a hole in his sock".

I wonder what he would have said if he had seen a flight of peaches going aft past his window!

Alec Alder (Men.: No. 26)

Hon. Secretary: Jim Heslop Hon. Treasurer: Don James