



## 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



### Newsletter No. 19

DON & JIM SAY Very many thanks from ourselves, Frances and Audrey for the scores of greetings cards received here from our members. We could not possibly answer them all. May we wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

Now, to business. The current 1997 Subs are now due (still £5). Many thanks to those of you who have already paid, but don't forget to enclose your membership cards when making payment. We have now moved up a gear in preparation for September's big event. Already, 109 have booked in, surpassing 1995's total attendance of 99. As regards accommodation, we still have a few twin rooms left at the Scarisbrick Hotel (anyone prepared to share a twin room ?)

To those members who have not yet finalised a 'billet' a copy of the 1997 Southport Tourist Guide should now be in your possession. A word of warning however, The Catholic Women's League is holding its annual Conference in Southport the same weeks as 244. It seems that most of the cheaper accommodation may have already been taken up. Any difficulty in booking, give us a ring. To avoid disappointment - BOOK NOW! Don't forget, even if booking your own hotel, we still need a deposit (£10 per head) towards the cost of the weekend's buffet and dinner.

We have received, read and digested Fred Hitchcock's (mem. No. 272) book ("A Shillingworth of Promises"), and have found it a good read (our ladies, especially, thought it excellent). An excerpt appears in this Newsletter. Fred's opus costs £5.50, and can be obtained from:- Mrs K. Ward, 41 Birkdale Drive, Folkestone, CT19 5LP.

In the near future we will be producing a ring binder containing issues nos.. 1 to 19 of our Newsletters. These cover our early beginnings in 1991 up to current date, and will be of great interest to our newer members. The binder will retail at £4 (post free). Send no money, ring Jim if interested.

Now, an apology! The article in Newsletter No. 18, "Shaibah (sometime late 1942)" was wrongly attributed. The true contributor was 'Mel' Melluish (mem. 268) of Attleborough, Norfolk - sorry Mel! Finally, in addition to our usual stocks of Association plaques (£20 and £10), ties (£10), blazer badges (£15) and bookmarks (£2.50) we now have a new line. These are small 4 inch plaques on which are mounted the official RAF badge of Masirah Island (the turtle!) These are £10.50 post free. All orders to Jim.

### **Rescue at Ras-al-Hadd (see Newsletter No. 18)**

I was very interested in the article which appeared in the last Newsletter, as *we were* involved in this. On checking my log-book, I find we were airborne from Masirah on 24/3/44 at 0440hrs. We were bound for Ras-al-Hadd on an air ambulance flight to pick up survivors from a merchantman which had been torpedoed the night before.

On landing at Ras-al-Hadd we found that we had three stretcher cases with horrific burns. They were to be transported to Karachi. Incidentally, one was a fellow countryman (Australian). Our biggest problem was to get the stretchers into the aircraft (Wellington) without knocking the occupants about too much! Eventually, this was achieved by jacking the tail up high enough to allow entry through the belly hatch. On completion of this *we* were airborne at 0710hrs. bound for Mauripur

One of our patients died soon after, and I've often wondered what became of the Aussie, and if he came through. I can always remember seeing his signet ring burned into his finger. This *was* my first experience of what our merchant seamen had to suffer after being torpedoed on an empty tanker.

Glen Anderson (Australian) Mem. No. 47

### **Extract from "The Listener" dated 18th May 1944**

Ivor Newton has recently visited the Persian Gulf area with Miriam Licotte, Nancy Evans, Walter Widdop, Dennis Noble and Alfred Cave. He said, "I shall never forget a place called Sharjah - there are jokes about it all the whole length of the Persian Gulf. It's seven hundred miles from anywhere and summer lasts for ten months of the year. It's so hot that the men out there say there is only a sheet of paper between them and hell. I remember during one of our concerts at Sharjah it took me all my time and skill to flick the flies off the keyboard. We played in an open air Theatre and our stage was built out of petrol tins and concrete. Every seat in the sweltering Auditorium was just a petrol tin. Every man in the audience carried a bundle with him, which turned out to be an old coat or blanket; those tin stalls certainly needed some upholstery!!

"When we arrived at the Island of Masirah, where Captain Kidd's tomb is supposed to be buried my piano was sadly out of tune. I was lamenting this to a young American officer standing by. 'Coo' he said, 'if I could get hold of a socket wrench from the aircraft guys I might tune your piano for you.' This he did and made such a good job of it that I asked him "But surely you must have had something to do with pianos?' 'I guess so' he replied, 'perhaps you've heard of my family, my name is Steinway'.

Ray Scott Mem. No. 222

### **Monsoon at Ras**

Can't be sure of the exact date of the happening, but it was probably August, 1943, at Ras-al-Hadd in mid-afternoon. A dense black cloud approaching from the sea, made us expect an almost unheard of downpour. Within minutes it was upon us. Not a downpour of rain, but hail, accompanied by howling winds. The hail was not hailstones as we know them, but chunks of ice with sharp corners. All this, thankfully, lasted only a few minutes.

Those lads caught in the open suffered lacerations to the face and upper torso, and there was some anxiety about the life of one erk, whose pulse rate dropped to a dangerously low level.

Roofs of buildings were ripped off, and all our possessions soaked. The only welcome part being the temporary coolness of the atmosphere. Happily, the airman recovered within a few days, and the buildings were quickly made whole again by a company of Indian Army Engineers camped nearby. The Met. 'bods' subsequently described the incident as a 'line squall' a fringe effect of the Indian monsoon.

Jim Bradley Mem. No. 126

### **Life and Times of Masirah - Chapter 3**

During my time at Masirah there was one fatal crash, a DC 4 from the U.S.A.F. crashed on take-off at night. It ploughed into the flat sandy area to the south east of the airstrip and broke up completely. I never heard what happened, it was empty. Just the crew of three on board - and we found four bodies!! Apparently the M.O. had cadevacted one of our lads, an instrument maker who found that he could not sweat, a serious situation in the tropics. His passage to the U.K. via Karachi was all fixed up. We were flying Bisleys. Back in the U.K. 2 Group situated in the SE corner of England had made themselves specialists in anti-shipping strikes in Blenheims but their losses were very heavy. The Bisley was the interim answer to their problem. It was an armourplated Mark 4 Blenheim with so much armourplating that it could hardly get off the ground, and if it did it couldn't carry enough of anything to make it worth while - the ideal aircraft for 244 sqn!!

In fact, by the time we had got rid of all the armourplating and there was a hell of a lot of it, and trimmed the war-load down to 4 x 100 lbs. Depth Charges it proved itself to be a pretty good aeroplane for close convoy escort. But it did not have the range for anything more ambitious than that. In February, 1944 the squadron was re-equipped with Wellingtons, and that meant that all the pilots had to go back to Egypt to deliver the Bisleys to 161 M. U. at Fayid, and then undergo a conversion course onto the new type at No. 5 M.E.T.S. Shallufa. This suited me well because I received my posting to take over the command of 294 Sqn. the Eastern Med. Air/Sea

Rescue organisation, on the 20th February, and it gave me time to get some 20 hours flying in on Wellingtons - I knew that 294 was equipped with Wellingtons and Warwicks and Walrus. So it was with this thought in my mind that I said farewell to Masirah and the Persian Gulf, and Sharjah and the Persian Gulf, and Shaibah and the Persian Gulf, and, in the immortal words of Dereck Walker, my namesake who composed and wrote The Shaibah Blues while a pilot in 94 Sqn., whose spiritual home was Shaibah before war broke out, "Gulf of Persia is the Arsehole of the World and Shaibah is 500 miles up it."

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

### **Vincent's Over Masirah (circa 1938)**

We were heading for Masirah Island off the southern coast of Oman and, on reaching the coastal strip, all that one could see was the cotton-wool top of uninterrupted cloud tucked into the mountains, and stretching right to the horizon. Somewhere under that was Masirah.

Squadron Leader Howe disappeared down into the mass of cloud, and the rest of us remained circling above. Fifteen minutes or so later, he reappeared, wagging his wings. Then we formed up line astern, and descended through this all embracing blanket that, fortunately, bottomed out at about five hundred feet. And there we were, right over Masirah. Navigation had been pin-point perfect, but, the look of the boulder strewn coastal landing strip seemed to be far from perfect. Luckily it provided all that was necessary for the whole Squadron to make a successful landing.

After refuelling from the stockpiled cans, and carrying out routine inspections, a meal was enthusiastically prepared. This simply involved opening enough tins of McConachie's beef stew to fill a large cooking pot, to be heated up, served out and eaten with the appreciative relish of deprived but hungry gourmets!

This activity had been watched intensely by the only Arabs we saw on the island. Just one man and his son peering over a ridge of sand. They eventually made tentative and shy contact, making signs that they wanted to take away the empty stew cans. A prize beyond measure it would seem, and an unbelieving starting point from just fifty four years ago to the air conditioned modern Masirah of today. That night we slept under the wings within sight and sound of the sea, too tired to think of any unwanted sleeping partners, such as centipedes or scorpions. I slept soundly until being nudged awake by my immediate neighbour, "Can you hear anything?" he whispered. I listened, but all I could hear was the gentle rustle in the distance of waves breaking on the shore. "No, nothing" I said, and dropped off again. But another nudge and a curt injunction to "listen" woke me once more. This time I could hear the irregular scraping sounds that were disturbing him. We scrambled out of our bags and stood up. The scraping noises suddenly increased and as suddenly stopped. We had been surrounded by a small army of land crabs, that had quickly disappeared down their individual holes on being disturbed! We disappeared back into our sacks, and slept erratically, and somewhat warily, until dawn. The following morning the low cloud was still with us and, after the sparsest of toilets and a quick breakfast, we took off to fly some three hundred and fifty miles along the coast to arrive at Merbat in time for another McConachie's lunch.

Fred Hitchcock (Mem No, 272) France.

**SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!**

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