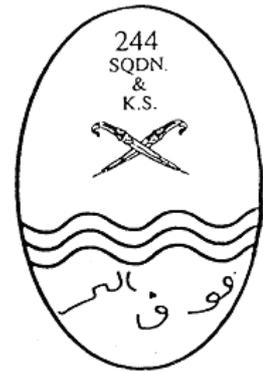




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 20

JIM SAYS At last we have a President! Don and I have considered such a post for some time, and have been awaiting a suitable candidate. My research and trawls for new members came up with, a name which seemed familiar. A check on my log book revealed the counter-signing officer was 'R. Rotherham' W/cdr. who was officer commanding 244 Squadron from March 1943 to June 1944, at both Sharjah and Masirah. (Members who were aircrew with the Squadron during this period should check their flying log books). Ron Rotherham has joined our Association (Mem. No. 265), and has accepted the offer of the post of honorary President. He cannot attend our Reunion, but has already sent us an address to be read out at Southport '97. Welcome aboard Ron!

Another member has broken into print. Les Jackson (Mem. No.89) is the author of 'Aboard the Drunken Duchess'. This is a diary of a wartime voyage by sea on the troopship 'The Duchess of Bedford'. Excerpts from this missive are included in this Newsletter. This is a 10,000 word diary on 26 x A4 sheets. Cost is £9 per copy, including postage etc. Cheques should be payable to 'L. Jackson'. Send to 6A Claire Court, Higher Erith Road, Torquay, TQ1 2NQ.

Now, on a sad note, Bill Goddard (Mem. No.16) passed away recently. Bill aged 87 was one of our original members. He attended every Reunion, and was looking forward to September. He was discip Warrant Officer at both Sharjah and Masirah. Preparations for the Reunion go on apace. At present 116 members and ladies have booked in, but see below.

'Your Friendly Treasurer. (or should it be fiendly Treasurer!) Quite a number of you have not yet paid your 1997 Subs. (due 1st January 1997), and still only £5. For the benefit of you non-payers, a sticker is affixed. I know that 'memory' is not too good, so forgive me for the reminder.

Speaking of money, (do I ever get off the subject?), the next half instalment for the Reunion is due by the 30th June. The balance being due by 31st August. Members who are coming and are booking their own 'billets' are reminded that I still need a deposit towards the buffet and dinner. We still have a double and a few twins available at the Scarisbrick. So, if you are attending please let us know as soon as possible. Looking forward to renewing friendships, and making new ones.

From your 'patient' treasurer.

Follow up to 'Monsoon at Ras' (see newsletter No.19)

The article by Jim Bradley about the monsoon at Ras. This event stays in my memory. We were on our way from Sharjah to Ras al Hadd, and as we approached the headland we saw a very black cloud in an otherwise blue sky. Thinking it was a flight of locust, we carried on, and as we landed, the heavens opened, the sky darkened, and down came chunks of ice! We just made it to a hut in time. It was of very short duration, and we took off later that day for Masirah. The date in my log book was 31st March, 1943.

Cyril Stone (Mem. No.158)

Life and Times at Habb.

In 1946 life was still going on at Habbaniya with ATU-Comm Flight and 249 Fighter Squadron as one daily servicing unit. 249 being with us, as their Mossies had been scrapped out due to them coming apart at their

wooden joints in the slight heat generated during an Iraqi summer!! In the meantime to reiterate it seemed as though 249 would be with us for some time, awaiting replacement aircraft (Tempests) suitable for local conditions.

One night being on duty crew with all snags done I decided to teach myself to drive our tractor as I could already ride a motor cycle. Came 01.00 and I wandered back to the crew room, having finished the driving lesson. Sergeant Maguire was there and he said to me, "Albert, you can drive, can't you?" "Yes Mac, I can, nothing to it !!". "Well, take the tractor and go over to the airmen's mess for the wads and chai' ". So off I went, full of new found confidence.

Coming back with the supplies, as I turned a corner by the airfield guardroom, the big chai thermo fell over and I grabbed at it, and the steering wheel spun out of my remaining hand and Bang!! I had run into one of the large concrete blocks lining the road. The block had, been completely knocked out of the ground, so I pushed it back into position with the tractor. Much to my surprise no one came out of the guardroom when all this happened, so I then continued back to the crew room. After my break, I drove over to the tyre bay and left the tractor there, being as the tyre on the nearside front wheel had suffered a puncture in how not to pass your driving test. !!

How that tyre was punctured has remained a mystery for over fifty years, until my confession in this issue of the Newsletter, so if Corporal Williams, who was our daytime tractor driver and now lives on the Isle of Wight, reads this, sorry Tich it won't happen again.

Maurice Burnell alias Albert 'The Phantom Rigger' (Mem. No. 193)

January 8th 1942 Disembarked "Duchess of Bedford" in Bombay, and boarded 9000 tons "City of London".

Sunday January 11th. Pulled up anchor and departed Bombay at 06.30 hrs.

This old tub can only do about 9 knots, and has over 1000 troops on board. We are crammed like sardines, but I have craftily found a spot way up above the Mess Deck on the ventilation shaft and have tied a blanket on the shaft, which is only around 18 inches wide, and I am sleeping up here nights as Hammocks below are side by side. I tie a rope around myself nights as if I fall out it is around 15 feet down on to the Mess Deck table. No Enemy action today. We are bound up the Persian Gulf for Basra, via Abadan. Still Bombay was an experience after all that sailing out of Liverpool.

What will tomorrow bring ?

Monday January 12th Just Straight Sailing. Course North. No Enemy Action.

The days have passed, and we have slowly progressed from Bombay across the Arabian Sea, and through the Gulf of Oman, into the Persian Gulf heading approximately North North West bound for Basra. Sailing monotonous, with little to see, until finally we reached the mouth of the Shat El Arab waterway, and passed Abadan and the large Oil Refineries.

Sunday January 18th ??? Arrived and disembarked Basra Docks in great disarray, with our Deep-sea Kitbags and other gear thrown on the dockside in large heaps. We were transported to a nearby tented encampment, in the desert, near to an Arab village named Zubair, and now await whatever the future may bring. Conditions here are harsh, and it is bitterly freezing cold at night, after hot January temperatures. This is Iraq, and we are all browned off as there does not appear to be much organisation, and no one knows where we are finally bound.

Monday January 19th. 6 of us slept the night in this small tent on blankets and ground sheets. This morning I had the shock of my life. When I awoke I had a large reptiles head with vicious teeth, sticking out of the sand alongside me. A huge type of horny backed lizard. We pulled it out of the sand by looping a kitbag rope over it's head, and it took two of us to pull it out. Over 3 feet long, with razor sharp cones on it's tail and we have been told today that they are nicknamed Shaibah Sharks. Lovely grub !! Don't think I am going to like Iraq. We have little or no money, and we have been told that there is little chance of getting any as we were not really expected here, as apparently we were on our way to Singapore, but our destination was cancelled in Bombay, and here we are. Nearby we have a shack run by an Arab which has a few items of Arab type food to sell,

chappaties (bread) etc., but we have little cash to buy things so we must await whatever develops in due course, and hope for a pay day soon.

Have just worked out that we spent 70 days (10 weeks) from embarking Liverpool to arriving at Basra, and disembarking, and have in that time crossed two oceans, namely the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean, also the Arabian Sea, and The Persian Gulf. And here I Shall Final Finish My Diary for

The Time Being. Must wait and see what the future brings.

The above being excerpts from:- "Kitbags & Oceans & Deserts to Cross" by L. Jackson This softback being a day by day original diary (often referred to as "The Duchess Diary" of the convoy and voyage from the U.K. November 11th 1941, to Bombay and Basra, with posting to Shaibah 119 M.U.

Get Yer Knees Brown Laddie - And Skin Cancer

If you went to the Middle East before the war you were issued with a pith helmet (sofa topi*) and you could be put on a charge if you were caught not wearing it. They were done away with at the beginning of the war - probably for logistic and financial reasons, rather than common-sense or medical reasons. Was there any reason to inflict a thick, heavy pith or cork helmet on the heads of British personnel in the hottest parts of the world (sorry Empah) when nothing could have been so hot, uncomfortable and impractical. No Reason Whatsoever - or rather they were for the prevention of heat-stroke but probably actually caused more heat stroke than they prevented.

Which misguided idiot (b* * * *d) was responsible for inflicting this headgear on the long suffering pbs. ?+

Something like the French Foreign Legion Kepi with the large peak and neck flap or the Aussie hat, light and comfortable with an around brim to protect against the sun's rays would have been more sensible. That was needed all along and as a result all you old stagers (and even not so old) of the pbs are now getting skin cancers. The fierce rays of the sun in the Middle East, especially Iraq and the Gulf would nowadays carry a recommendation for sun screen factor 100 ! Yet there was no advice whatsoever beyond the fear of being put on a charge for getting sunburnt (which I remember as an MO even in the '70s) As children at Hab in the '50s we had no protection at all. No kiddie will keep a sunhat on and of all the photos I have of Hab there is only one showing a sunhat being worn. It is now we reap the grim harvest.

The most feared malignant melanoma is actually uncommon, only 2% of all skin cancers and is not particularly more common in ex-servicemen because the sun exposure occurred after childhood. It is most likely to be on the trunk in men generally, but the type arising in older men more likely to be on the head and neck Tropical service will have increased other types of skin cancer. Squamous cell carcinoma is now much more common, half on the head or neck, a quarter on the arms and hands (so beware shirtsleeve order). Rodent ulcer or BCC grows very slowly but, can be hard to sort out from the other cancers and pre-malignant lesions like solar keratoses.

so - if you develop anything on your skin go and see the MO. It may be something harmless like those waxy seborrhoetic warts but YOU cannot tell. Even we MOs find it difficult and often have to slice bits off for analysis.

If you are unlucky, don't forget to apply for a War Pension as some compensation for having got yer knees brown laddie.

* Hindustani for the pith from an Indian leguminous swamp plant (sofa) and hat (topi).
+ pbs = poor bloody soldiery.

Dr Christopher Morris (ex Hab '55 aged 11 & Flt Lt 508348 Medical Branch (Mem. No. 191

The Locust Hunt.

One of the many tasks that 244. was required to perform was that of the 'locust hunt'. The Allies had realised that locusts did an immense amount of damage to crops, and the squadron was detailed to co-operate with the Russians to deal with the problem in our area.

A Russian scientist was seconded to the squadron, and our job was to discover the locust breeding grounds. The Russians would then spray the area. On 26/10/42 two Vincents took off from Sharjah. Our aircraft (K6350) was piloted by F/Lt Riddell, I was the wireless op, and the Russian was our passenger. We flew to Bandar Abbas and stayed the night. The following morning our job began. We landed at several dried up lakes where the Russian took samples. Then, back to Bandar Abbas, then onto Jask where we night-stopped. On the 28th we recommenced our locust hunt, and eventually arrived at Gawada. We finally decided to make the short flight to Jiwani, where there was more activity, and then flew over Jiwani to alert the people concerned, and look for a landing ground.

Below was a large stretch of fenced off sand, and a windsock flying, so down we went. Just as we touched down, I disconnected the monkey strap. The next thing I knew, I was sitting in the sand some twenty yards in front of the Vincent, which was upside down, with the pilot and the Russian hanging down, unable to release themselves!! I got up, quite unhurt, and released them both. Quite a task as it's a long drop from a Vincent the wrong way up! But neither of them was hurt.

In a short time a crowd of natives had gathered to help, but they were a mixture of Indians and locals, and presently a fight developed around the aircraft, which looked like us being involved. As luck would have it, for the trip I had been issued with a Thompson sub-machine gun. After retrieving it from the aircraft, I pointed it in the general direction of the mob, whereupon the fighting subsided.

The other aircraft had seen the happening, and landed safely on a nearby dirt road. The windsock was for the benefit of flying boats landing on the nearby inlet. The fence around the sand was to keep people off, as it was very soft. So, as soon as we touched down the wheels dug in, and over we went, myself going straight on! We later returned to Sharjah by way of a Catalina lift.

By way of a footnote to this saga, three of our 244 Association members were involved, Bill Williams (31), Bert Hartley (51) and Bill Westwood (151). These three were sent from Sharjah to salvage what they could from the Vincent wreck

Don James (Mem. No.49)

Memories of Sharjah (1942)

I remember arriving at Sharjah in '42. What a place ! Not a drop of cold water to be had. But you could get a bottle of local lemonade (small bottle with a glass stopper that you pushed in). Also, some local biscuits, plus water melons.

Also living on the camp was a small boy, the camp mascot called "Hookie-Hookie". Also, a good camp interpreter, Mohammed. The station Medical Officer was Dr Markham. He went out at night shooting wild dogs!

Do you remember all this Jack Irlam?

Bill Stockman (Mem. No.75)

Doc Markham and I used to sit at the rubbish dump and blast pi-dogs that made such a nuisance of themselves around the cookhouse. Try to blast, that is, for we were using a .32. revolver given to me by the police, who had thoughtfully gone out and nicked a few crooks before we left 'Aussie', so we could be well protected. Made a satisfying sound, but we never hit a pi-dog. I Only thing I ever hit was Doc! He was standing in front, but well off to one side when I fired, and he was hit in the chest by a tiny sliver of lead which just penetrated the skin. We found that, probably because of the Sydney crooks shooting at one another, and thus wearing the action, the bullets did not quite line up with the barrel, and small bits of lead would fly off at a tangent. I can still see him, roaring through the camp in a 4x4 blitz wagon, screen flat, motor screaming, firing madly at the pi-dog, running like the wind for its life! Great guy Doc, but not a crash-hot shot. Didn't get many pi-dogs, but sure frightened the bejasus out of lots of them!

Tony Tubbenhaver (Mem. No.112) Australia.

'Going Native' at Jask!

We went ashore at Jask sometime in 1943, in an Arab dhow. There were three of us, Jock McCandlish, 'Archie' Archer and myself (Cpl F2E. Officer I/C Jask!!)

Our quarters were a small adobe hut, with open space for doors, windows etc. There were, as I remember, three small rooms, and a washroom, with water from the village in four gallon petrol cans. We had an outside kitchen, and we employed a local native to cook for us on a wood fire.

There was a native from the village called Hassan - a fisherman with a small row boat. He frequently took us, and visiting Bisley crews out fishing at night. Just after we arrived he told us that, a week prior to our arrival, a small rubber dingy had come ashore with two men in similar uniform to us, - except they had "eagles on their breast, not shoulders" like ours !

Obviously from a U-boat !!

This worried us just a little, since, as I said, we had no doors, and I had the only rifle! However, nothing untoward happened for a few weeks, until one night! I was lying on my charpoy, with Jack McCandlish in the other corner. (Archer had been banished to another room, since he talked non-stop all day about sex, and drove us mad).

Around 10pm, lying there in complete silence, save for the soft sighing of waves on the adjacent beach, suddenly I heard a rustle and a metallic clank from outside. "My God", I thought, "It's bloody Jerry?" I fly and quietly reached for the rifle which I kept under my charp. With trembling less I got up carefully and brandishing the rifle shouted "Come on, I'm armed, give yourself up"!!

Slowly, an apparition appeared in the doorway - an Arab 'bint' bedecked in an old issue 'mossie' net, with arms and legs covered in brass bangles She was shaking like a Leaf ! - more terrified than I! She whispered, "Archie Sahib?" Jack and I howled with laughter, and much relieved, I shouted, "Archie, you've got a visitor".

I should point out that sometimes we would have two or three Bisleys a day coming in for fuel etc. Then, perhaps we would go for a week and see nobody. When aircraft did land, a party of natives from the village (some distance away) would come up and help refuel the aircraft. They formed a long line from the fuselage onto the mainplane, passing four gallon cans to each other, chanting as they did so. Presumably, Archie had arranged his 'tryst' with one of them.

To our discredit, we watched surreptitiously, as Archie took the 'bint' into our washroom, and after emptying several cans of water over her naked body, he scrubbed her thoroughly from top to toe with an issue floor scrubbing brush and soap!! Jock and I were beside ourselves with laughter, as Archie took her to his 'boudoir' for an "all night sesh" I However, shortly after midnight, the poor girl emerged, exhausted and covered in sweat (and her 'mossie net). She fled back to the village.

Which reminds me of an old ballad "Saida Bint, I love your charming manner, to be with you would be my one desire. So, I'd like to call you Lena, as it rhymes with Talahena you're my little Gyppo Bint, you're quoisekateer"*

Ron West (Mem. No. 231)

*As sung by Eddie Leicester at every Reunion.

Jim Heslop (Secretary) Ron Rotherham (President) Don James (Treasurer)

Roll on September