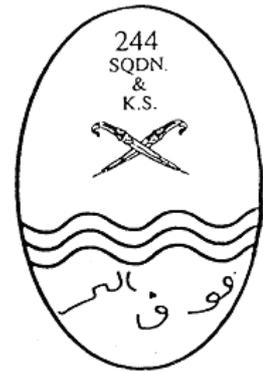




## 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



### Newsletter No. 22

DON & JIM SAY Another Reunion been and gone. From all reports received it was as successful as our previous three events. After two late cancellations (sickness) 115 members and their ladies turned up for the week-end, easily beating our previous record. Our fourth Reunion commenced on the Friday evening with welcoming speeches from Don and Jim. An address from our President, Ronnie Rotherham was read out (see below). This was followed by a solo version of 'Shaibah Blues' rendered by Chris Morris with guitar. The Week-end now commenced.

A general get-together occupied the evening. Our many exhibits were on show, and were much enjoyed, especially by our newer members. After the photo call, the usual excellent buffet was served. An illustrated talk was given by Chris Morris. His subject being Habb, Shaibah and the Rest Camp. The Aircraft Recognition competition was won by John Edwards (Cumbria). John took away a bottle of whiskey. All in all, judging from the hub-bub of conversation, many tales were being told of past times. An evening of remembrance.

Saturday (A.M.) The bi-ennial general meeting was held, and 62 members crammed the room. What was decided? Don and Jim were re-elected, and also John Edwards (Cumbria) and Bert Hartley (Bolton) again formed the committee. It was agreed that a fifth Reunion should be held (if Don and Jim remain hale and hearty!) Also, the annual sub should remain at £5. The meeting was followed by Colin Richardson giving his most interesting talk about Masirah Island and the progress of his coming book on this subject.

Saturday (P.M.) After a sherry reception, our members and guests sat down to a dinner of the usual Scarisbrick high standard. The service was swift, and our Association funds provided 42 litres of wine (which seemed to disappear rather quickly!). Background organ music was laid on. After the meal came the toasts. The Loyal toast was proposed by Don, followed by 'Absent Friends' given by Jim, who also remembered those who did not come home.

Our traditional 'sing song' now commenced, i.e. 'Sweet Somersetshire' followed by 'Shaibah Blues'. We have more extroverts than ever amongst our members, and many 'party pieces' were delivered from the floor. At intervals during the songs, recitations and anecdotes, the floor was cleared, and many couples joined in the dancing. Our 'Family Party' went on until midnight when, after 'Now is the Hour', 'Auld Lang Syne' terminated Reunion '97.

Our Reunions show old friendships renewed, and new friendships forged, which gives us both great satisfaction. Before closing, we must thank Sandra Edwards (John's wife) who did sterling work in running the 'Shop' single handed. Over £280 was taken over the counter! Also, members who were present on the Saturday evening will be glad to know that the lady who was taken ill (Bette Aindow, wife of Bob) left hospital after a few days and is now fully recovered.

Now, back to some proper soldiering! Our big news is that the award of our Squadron Crest is now imminent. The College of Heralds (Chester Herald) have been in contact. We are told that, apart from minor details, our suggested design is acceptable. The cost will be approximately £330 (will have to see how our bank balance stands!) However, there is no question of not proceeding. If only for posterity, our badge should at least hang with the rest of the Squadron crests at RAF Museum at Hendon. We will think about St. Clement Danes' after clearing our first hurdle.

You will note from the article 'A New Squadron for Iraq' that we have unearthed the very first C.O. of 244. Welcome aboard Howard! With Ronnie Rotherham, our President, we now have two ex Commanding Officers of the Squadron.

Finally, for those who have not yet paid. Don't forget that 1998 Subs are due from 1st January '98.

As the Festive Season is close upon us, may we wish you all a very Merry Xmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New year. from our President, our two selves and Audrey and Frances.

### **AN ADDRESS FROM OUR PRESIDENT**

Fellow Members,

It is an honour to be asked to be President of this Association and I have much pleasure in accepting.

I am only sorry that I cannot be with you at this meeting due to age and infirmity, but you have my very best wishes for the success of this Reunion and for the future success of the Association. I was with No.244 Squadron from March 1943 until June '44 and went through the period of Bisleys to the re-equipment of the Squadron with Wellington XIII.

Unfortunately, HQ Middle East used Sharjah as a dump for unwanted equipment and OUT Bisleys were already worn out by the time we got them. This made the task of maintaining them extremely difficult. I have nothing but admiration for all RAF personnel at Sharjah who managed to keep their aircraft in the air. The Squadron had to be grounded twice by myself before help was forthcoming with reconditioned engines from the Middle East. Even then, engine changes were necessary every 120 hours. Despite this improvement, we lost about fifteen aircraft through engine failure.

Apart from the conditions during the summer months, the quantity and quality of the food was basic and the supply of beer was down to one bottle a week - what a life! Conditions improved a bit when we moved the Squadron round to Masirah Island.

The bright spot of my time in Sharjah and Masirah was when Sgt. Chapman caught a German submarine on the surface in the Hormuz Straits, and sank it. We recovered a survivor and the submarine was officially credited to the Squadron.

Apart from other incidents, such as natives smoking in the petrol dump and blowing it up! and the Trucial Oman Levies shooting one another, we all managed to survive, thanks to the efforts of everyone at Sharjah and Masirah.

Thank you again for asking me to be your President, and I wish you all a very happy reunion. W/Cdr . R. Rotherham

### **A NEW SQUADRON FOR IRAQ**

Early in January 1940, my time as an instructor at 4 F.T.S. (which had moved from Egypt to Habbaniya on the outbreak of war) was up A.H.Q. Iraq had lost all its squadrons except 84 at Shaibah. No's 30,55 and 70 had all gone to the Western Desert or Canal Zone. I was called to A.H.Q. where I was told to form a squadron. It would be known as "S" squadron (Special ? Secret ?) Nobody seemed to know much, except that it would have Vickers Vincents. I asked what its role would be. Bomber Reconnaissance? Day Night? oh! It will have to do everything! It will be our only squadron (A clear hint that 84's days at Shaibah were numbered).

So we became a General Purpose squadron. For a while, one Flight only, as some of the aircraft had to arrive from Singapore. Two aircraft, some airmen and three pilots arrived within the next day or so, and we were in business! One of the pilots was a reservist who had not flown for several years! We gradually built up to two Flights, and practised all the skills we thought we might need. As we had no bombaimers or bombsights we limited our bombing to divebombing. Our air-gunners, who performed so well later at Shaibah during the Iraq rebellion were rightly sore, because they had no badge. As they had never passed through an Air Gunnery School, they were not allowed to wear the A.G. brevet. I asked if they could wear the old brass winged bullet in vogue for part-time A.G's before the war. The answer was "No., it is no longer recognised, and there are none left in store"! This grievance was still unresolved when I left the squadron after Xmas 1941.

During the summer of 1940 we trained hard at Habbaniya, and on 18th September took over from 84 squadron at Shaibah. On 15th November, 1940, "S" Squadron was redesignated 244 Squadron. Were we the re-incarnation of a World War I squadron ? There was no means of finding out at Shaibah. Shaibah was a very special place, and I could tell you several Shaibah stories sometime.

H. V. Alloway (mem. No.309)

The full history of 244 is continued in an article which appeared in 'Aviation News'. Copies of this can be obtained from Jim (£1.50 post free).

### **THE DELIGHTS OF BAGHDAD (circa 14/3/41)**

Habbaniya, a fairly big camp actually, half a dozen or more different sections. G.E.S. (ours), F.T.S., E.R.S., A.R.S., M.T., Armoured Cars, Hospital, etc., etc. Each section had its own NAAFI. It was a big occasion if you visited one of these other NAAFI's, say on a Saturday night or whatever. Some of the lads in our billet (DII-D-West) never went farther than their own NAAFI. the whole time they were at Habbaniya.

Perhaps, if they were lucky, someone would take them down to the Lake, occasionally, but I think this was eventually stopped. In my own mind I think I was down to the Lake only twice during my time. We were fortunate though. We had "Cheapside", in our area - the 'Lord Street (Southport)' of Habbaniya! So that made life more bearable. However, if you had wealthy parents, or a private income of some merit, then you could arrange for a week-end (Friday afternoon to Sunday evening) leave in Baghdad!!

We, actually, weren't badly paid, but even so, it didn't run to this kind of luxury. Not for the ordinary airman anyway. Needless to say, somehow or other, four of us raked up enough 'brass' to indulge in this never to be forgotten event. In my case, I was in charge of our Billiards Room (end of NAAFI). This paid me £1.10 shillings per month (PSI). So together with my skill at snooker, also a lucky streak at 'Solo' (now and again). My bank balance became respectable enough for me to participate. I think that Eddy Leicester's Crown and Anchor board had a bit to do with his stake. You can ask him if that's the case.

Came the big day! Four of the smartest lads in camp (in civvies of course) piled into the taxi, and away into the 'blue', heading for Baghdad. 56 miles or so, no roads, only large oil drums at various intervals to point the way. Booked into the 'Tigris Palace Hotel'. No 'B & B' this you know. Not likely, this was the real thins, room service, the lot! I remember thinking at the time - not bad this for a lad from a 'back to back' way back in Leeds! Who, in the early thirties, if you had a tanner each way on a ten to one winner it was like winning the 'Pools'. Well, not quite, but you know what I mean. After a quick wash and brush up, a drink, and then out on the town!

No pubs as such, but lots of places more like miniature music halls. Some had acts going on that wouldn't have been out of place in the 'Leeds City Varieties'! Plus, naturally, a fair amount of Belly Dancing. Not that this interested us of course. Most of these spots had rooms upstairs for other dubious activities - 'gambling' I expect. Poker schools, Mah Jong, and the like. I wouldn't have been surprised if there weren't a bit of 'strip-teasing' going on too!

Unfortunately, or otherwise, we never got as far as this. For the simple reason that I didn't feel so well, a bit bilious in fact. I never could drink like the other lads, although I did try now and then, but always ended up like this. Anyway, they got me outside, into the fresh air, and after ten minutes or so, the others came out, and decided to call it a day. Mind you, by now it was well after midnight.

After walking a while we called up a 'gharry' (horse drawn open carriage) to take us back to the hotel. The other three were more than a bit 'Merry', and all ended up taking a hand at driving this chariot affair by themselves, all budding 'Ben Hurs', driving like mad down the main street. This behaviour wasn't doing my stomach much good at all, but they were in no mood to stop for me. One of them shouted "Put your head over the side Nobby", ! (not wanting to be deluged himself). This I did, getting rid of most of my stomach contents, but unfortunately, something else as well! After a lot of shouting and gesticulating, I eventually got them to pull up. "What's up Nobby?", "What's up", sez "I've lost me bloody teeth"!

Well, we all got out, and started walking back up the road, all bent over, looking for said teeth. In no time at all, behind us, followed twenty or thirty 'Baghdad-ites', also bent double, looking for what, well they wouldn't know! When we looked back at it all, it really was hilarious, though not for me. I never did get my teeth!

It was shortly after this, when we got back, that the 'Panic' started, well, they couldn't be bothered with false teeth through all that lot could they? It was ages before I eventually did get some. Only then through a 'back-hander' to someone I got to know at the hospital.

No doubt some of you reading this, will yourselves have passed through Baghdad railway station since then. Well, now you know how it is that that old Arab, flogging newspapers outside, came to have a 'reight broad Yorkshire accent' and most likely singing "On Ilkla Moor Baht 'At" -nuff said!

Bob Norcott (mem. No.39)

Jim Heslop (Secretary & Supplies)    W/Cdr Ron Rotherham (President)    Don James (Treasurer)