



## 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



### Newsletter No. 23

Jim says Belated New Year greetings from Don, Frances, Jim and Audrey, and many thanks for host of Xmas cards received

We are now on our way towards Southport, 1999. The Scarisbrick has been booked for Friday/Saturday, 8th and 9th October, 1999. See below for details.

After some years of trying (our latest effort commenced last June), we have now received the 244 Squadron Association Crest from the College of Arms. It has been described as "Superb", which description I fully agree with !

The cost has been heavy (£330), but we can now join the other squadrons whose badges hang in the RAF Museum.

I have been in contact with the Museum, and they propose, initially, to have our Crest on cabinet display together with the 244 Squadron history. It will eventually join the other squadron badges on the walls. In connection with all this we have had to sponsor a squadron shield for the exhibition. (More expense! But worth it!). Any small contributions would help towards the cost. (Many thanks to those who have already come forward). We hope to announce a date in our next Newsletter, when a presentation of our badge to the RAF Museum will take place. This will give us a chance of all meeting together, especially our South country members (Watch this space!).

As regards our badge, this leads us on to such things as blazer badges, and other items of memorabilia. Details will be given in our next Newsletter. However, anyone interested in a blazer badge could give me a ring. We could then see what interest there is.

We are now running short of good copy for future Newsletters. A number of you have promised a story or anecdote, but they have yet to materialise. So come on you budding journalists, pens to paper please! DON says Annual Subs are still £5 per year, and current years 1998 were due on 1st January. Many thanks to the 100 plus members who have already paid; but the rest of you JUMP TO IT!

Referring to the Reunion Balance Sheet (see previous Newsletter), none of you spotted the deliberate (?) mistakes. As a matter of fact, neither did Jim or myself. The amount paid in by our members should have read £100.35, and the item Meetings re Reunion' should have read £42.85 and not £48.25. Please forgive me! The only excuse is old age, but I still keep taking the pills so should be o.k. for some time yet. !

A few words on the 1999 Reunion. As stated, bookings have been made for 8th and 9th October, 1999. The cost of staying at the Scarisbrick will be:-

- |     |   |                             |
|-----|---|-----------------------------|
| (a) | B B, Buffet (Friday), Dinner (Saturday) wine etc. | Twin/Double £113 per person |
|     |   | Single Room £123 per person |
| (b) | Buffet & Dinner only £33                          |                             |
|     | Dinner only £20                                   |                             |

As agreed at the AGM, to help us plan ahead, could interested members (by end of September) forward a £10 (returnable) deposit per person. As you know, to obtain the Isherwood Suite we have to book up at least 18 months ahead.

## **HOW I ARRIVED AT 244 ('S' SQUADRON)**

After the siege at Habbaniya, owing to severe losses in aircraft, the ground crews were posted around Iraq. My own destination was '5' Squadron (244) at Shaibah.

We were detailed to collect rations for the journey from our cook (Glover). There were three of us on this posting, McCartney, 'Chalky' White and myself. We were issued with a large box of rations, and left Habb in a 30cwt van bound for Baghdad where we boarded a train for Basrah.

Bearing in mind that for the last four weeks trying to kill as many Iraqi soldiers, you can imagine our feelings when the train stopped at the first station out of Baghdad, the platform was crowded with armed Iraqi troops

Now, McCartney who had been captured and tortured by the Iraqis, was not very fond of them. One of these soldiers looked in our compartment and Mac' in a very broad Canadian accent told him to 'Go away!' At the same time giving him a push in the face!

When the train restarted we asked the conductor if he would make us a cup of tea each stop. We also promised him any remaining rations at the end of the journey. (We reckoned about four stops). Unfortunately, owing to flooded tracks on the way down, the train was obliged to stop about every hour. All through the night at every stop, we were woken at every stop, with a cup of tea! The conductor meant to fulfil his part of the bargain in order to obtain the remaining rations.

Sadly, my two companions are now no longer with us. Chalky passed away a couple of years back McCartney was shot down and killed whilst serving with 224 Squadron later in the war.

Jim McKnight No. 22

## **A TRIP TO THE NAVY AT BANDAR ABBAS, OCTOBER 1943**

The purpose of this trip was liaison between 244 squadron aircrews and the navy who were convoying tankers from the Gulf through the Indian Ocean. I have taken this account, with very little editing directly from my diary, which I kept for the whole of the war, and since I was only 21 at the time it was rather naive, but, I tell myself, that is how we thought at the time. The account starts below.

"Twelve were to go in all, a Sqn. Leader, whose name I don't know, F/Lt Bennet, F/Sgt Dicky Larcombe and crew, F/Sgt Sam Vesey and crew, and ourselves, me with Mark Rowland (nav) and Palmi Palmerston (wop). The garry from camp took us to Sharjah village, going down the creek, past the beached dhows, between the filthy hovels and down the stinking streets of Sharjah where we absorbed a greater variety of odours than I knew existed. We piled ourselves into an Arab punt, and were propelled across the narrow waters of the very shallow creek. Here we jumped out and walked past several more hovels, across the sand bar and to the sea. From here a couple of Arabs rowed us out to the Tosiri, an 800 ton Dutch East Indies coaster, which was to be our transport. Funny way these Arabs row, sometimes backwards, sometimes sitting on the side of the boat, all the time keeping up a mournful chant, or else talking to each other at a tremendous rate.

The nature of the trip was to attend a convoy briefing at Bandar Abbas, and also to eat as much as possible in the time available. Sharjah nosh not being .... well. It took 17 hours sailing to reach the convoys mustering point in Clarence Strait, and we didn't arrive until the morning of the following day. It was rather warm here, Bandar Abbas being cut off from winds by great mountains... Visibility was good, and the Islands of Qism and Hormuz were quite distinct, whilst the small Persian port of Bandar Abbas appeared: due north. It looked much like Sharjah from this distance. Only a few miles inland the desert became vertical, soaring to the great rocky summit of Kuh Ginau (7700 feet), appearing from where we were to rise from nothing in a terrific elliptical sweep. Other giant peaks reared to right and left to 8000 and 6000 feet respectively, whilst the 10,100 foot summit of Eurgan was visible behind, and all a perfection of desolation. We pulled alongside the Alonia, and it was here that the conference was held, with the masters of all the M. V's and tankers in the convoy attending for briefing. The Alonia was the naval base ship (14,000 tons) and contained all the stores etc. It was revealed that three Jap., U boats were known to be operating quite close to our area. We wandered back to the Tosiri again to partake of another great meal. We really did stoke up, all this good food just for the eating.

Left Bandar Abbas and passed between the rocky barren islands of Qism and Larak on our way to Khor Kuwait - where we were to drop some passengers. About 5 p.m. we arrived, passing between the small rock bound island and the rock bound mainland, which formed the harbour. After a short period we passed on down the

channel, which became narrower. The cliffs on either side also became higher and more precipitous, the mountains of northern Hadj rising beyond. It was dark and almost full moon when we passed out of the channel and headed towards Sheik Masud, the cliffs under a ghostly illumination, flanking either side of the exit, and the cape and mountains forming a gloomy skyline. Arabian nights ! ! The following morning we were back at Sharjah, having again eaten well and not looking forward to the food to come, no fault of the cookhouse, just supplies. We left the Torisi on the RAF launch. The crew of the Torisi were British and Dutch officers and Javanese hands, waiters etc. Benny, our friend the chef has his home in Batavia , and is pretty good on the guitar.

We have to cross the creek again on an Arab punt, and find that since we left a goat has died and is beginning to get rather high, but its owners, having turfed it out of the parlour, seem to be leaving it at that. Still the dead goat smell blends perfectly with the numerous other distinctive odours. At Sharjah find that Tommy Leicester and Jim Knapp have gone down to Masirah whilst we have been away."

Frank Mosely No304

## **THE TROPHY ( A Shaibah Tale)**

The day after 244 got to Shaibah, the outgoing squadron (no 84 - Blenheims) left for Greece. They took off in threes and we were all out to see them off. There had been a hitch in loading the lead aircraft of the last three (The C.O. S/Ldr Lewis). His small Staffordshire brindle Bull Terrier bitch 'Jody' showed reluctance to leave Shaibah, but was finally caught and bundled into the aircraft.

The last three took off into a stiff northerly and were soon at a couple of hundred feet not far beyond the edge of the airfield. There was a gasp of horror as a black object fell from the lead aircraft. Everyone, including myself thought of 'Jody'! We all ran, puffing, towards the spot, presumably to administer the last rites to 'Jody'. As we ran, I then wondered if it could be "The Trophy", which was to be packed in the same aircraft. Had it been left, overlooked on the wing ? We arrived at the spot out of breath, with sweat pouring from us all, to find, not the remains of 'Jody', but a Form 535 (later form 700) in its serviceability board and chain, which had been accidentally left hanging on the lead aircraft.

You may wonder why I thought of "The Trophy", and also what I knew as the last of 84 took off with a piece of Shaibah history. It came about like this, and is rightly an 84 squadron story. However, there is no member of 84 to tell the tale, so I relate what I know.

In the late thirties Imperial Airways, before the introduction of the Empire flying boats, flew on the Sidney - London route an ungainly hi-plane with a fixed undercarriage. In 1935 I was, for a while, at RAF Drigh Road (Karachi). Once a week I used to watch this slow ungainly aircraft come in. The fuselage was banana shaped and between the two mainplanes there was a generous supply of interplane struts and bracing wires plus four engines. There was an almost equally generous biplane tail assembly stuck on the back end, and the whole thing looked to me like a giant aerial hen-run! Doubtless, Imperial Airways had a more flattering description. To be fair, it was a very reliable aircraft, and regularly once a week, flew the Empire route in short hops from Sydney - up Malaya - across India to Karachi, and then by arrangement with Persia, along South Persia up the Gulf - across Iraq to Egypt and onto Croydon.

The exception to its reliability was when one day, the Westbound aircraft took off from Jask (S. Persia) after refuelling, and disappeared. Eventually, after two or three days 84 squadron found it down the in the Persian desert, west of Jask. It was the hot season and the crew and passengers were in a distressed state. None was hurt, indeed the aircraft was undamaged. The Captain, not knowing how long help might be in coming, had, quite rightly, rationed the limited water supply on board. Everyone on board stripped down to the bare essentials and were under the wing for shade. It was very hot. One passenger was a particularly fetching Australian girl - Miss Jane Smith.

In due course Miss Smith wrote a letter of thanks to 84 and asked if they would accept a piece of silver as a memento, or perhaps they would prefer something else? They wrote back and said that a piece of silver was a very kind thought, but as Shaibah was a very monastic place, there was absolutely nothing they would appreciate more than the clothes she stood up in the day they found her. After a while, a parcel arrived containing a pair of panties and a bra. They were duly framed and hung at Shaibah for several years until 84 flew them away.

Jane Smith used to fly once each year to London right up to the outbreak of war. The old flying banana used to stage through Shaibah. There were two standard type hangars at Shaibah and one odd shaped building still

known in 244's time as Imperial Airways hangar. The land planes were replaced by the Empire boats which staged through Basrah. Each year Jane Smith would let the squadron know when she was coming through, and some of the squadron would go to meet her again. Little did she know that in 1940 her panties and bra would fly as a squadron standard into the battle of Greece!

Howard Allowat (mem. No. 309)

### **AND YET ANOTHER "HOW I ARRIVED AT 244 SQUADRON"**

I was originally posted from 107 M.U. (Egypt) to Comm. Flight- Aden (Khormaksar). After a short stay my posting to 244 came through (this was around the end of August 1944.) For some reason I will never understand, I had to go over to the U.S.A. base at Sheik Othman for my flight to Masirah by South African Dakota.

The next morning I was sent complete with arrival 'chit' to the Flight lines. I was well on my way around the perimeter, when I stopped to watch one of our Wimpeys take off. Not quite sure what happened, but the 'plane appeared to be swinging, and then the undercart collapsed and she slid alone on her belly, before bursting into flames. Glad to say that the crew got out o.k. I did hear that some of them had removed their shirts prior to take-off, and these were lost in the fire, along with money and pay books in their pockets [Editor confirms - My mate Monty Plotzka, flying spare as navigator, left his shirt hanging on the flare-chute, lost all his personal possessions, and escaped, much singed, clad only in his shorts!] I cannot remember any of the crews names [Pilot was F/O Adcock - Aussie - Editor], except the pilot was a very rosy cheeked young chap (young compared to my mature 22 1/2 years!).

I do remember that, after a night flying exercise a few weeks later, this same young officer was told off by W/Cdr Hankin in front of some of we ground crew, for not completing that particular mission. He stood up to Hankin, saying he didn't deserve that criticism, when his commanding officer (Hankin) failed the same exercise a night or so earlier. I think Hankin got a bit red in the face and left.!

I think I was in Hut 60 on the Island with the Welsh choir. (I'm not Welsh and can't hold a note!). The names Glidden and Alder seem to ring a bell.

Peter Patmore-Went (mem No. 63) Canada

### **RIGGER NEARLY MORTIS**

I wonder what proportion of wartime narrow squeaks could be put down to 'temporary brain malfunction' Like the rigger, fitter, or armourer who was holding the tail down during the run-up and didn't get off smartly enough to avoid doing a circuit with an over-keen fighter pilot.

It seems every airman you met knew at least one. And like the Wimpy navigator who shinned down the nose ladder at night to relieve himself over the mainwheel and walked into the prop. Apparently there were multiples of him, too, until the prop tips were painted yellow. And of course there was a WAAF balloon operator who was taken aloft by the trailing rope of a rogue balloon and dragged across country until a Hurricane was scrambled to shoot it down. All due to 'temporary brain malfunction'. At Comm. Flight, Habbaniya one tedious job not requiring much grey matter was lofty as ballast on a drogue-towing exercise to provide a duck shoot for army ground gunners scattered along the shore of Lake Habbaniya. The ingredients were a bone-shaking Audax that flew when Pontius was a pilot, a volunteer rigger or 150 pounds of lead weights, a pilot who didn't believe he was doing this in World War II, and a target drogue on the end of cable that seemed a bit shortish when the tracers were queuing up to get one up your shorts.

My pilot on one occasion was Gerard J. Thiabault, a roisterous French Canadian known to all as Joe, and about the last person you would choose for two hours of level flight in an ancient bi-plane. He never brought a spare helmet and goggles, and gave you the impression that it made no difference to him whether a rigger or a bunch of lead weights were in the back seat. Mind you, there were some folks on Comm Flight who couldn't have told the difference anyway. But I jest.

Start her up with the fitter, sit on the tail for an early morning sand blasting, then de-chock and throw yourself into the rear cockpit before he forgot about you and turned the fan on full pelt. Taxi out to pick up the drogue, and take off over the plateau from where Raschild Ali's guns had shelled the camp last year. Then head for the lake, keeping your head down for numerous reasons, probably the least obvious of which was to avoid being

seen from the hangar since you were playing truant. After ten or more passes, the gunners were so wide of the mark that I thought to show my contempt by standing up to give them the sign of the flushing toilet, holding my nose and raising the other hand aloft, whereupon the propwash slammed my fist into my eye. I was at once reminded of the scene in 'Hell's Angels' when the stricken German pilot, heading earthwards in a screaming dive, raised a hand and saluted his British executioner hovering above. No chance. It would have torn his arm off. Suddenly I was treated to a mini firework display too close to the tail for comfort. The cable snapped and the drogue fell into the lake, leaving a stump of useless cable wandering around like a spare groom at a wedding. I tapped Joe's leather hat and mimed the message in my best Flying Corps sign language. With a thumbs up, he did a tight U-turn that nearly took out my eyeballs, went into a shallow dive and dropped the cable on the sand. The gunners waved, obviously elated, and Joe pulled the stick back and turned the power on.

The climb got steeper, and if I'd had half a brain I would have guessed what came next. And I would have strapped myself in, a practice often overlooked on routine level flights. At about 4,000 feet he tipped the old Audax on her nose, and aimed it at the lake, causing me to become instantly weightless, my body striving to remain at the height we had just vacated I started to exit sharpish, straight up. Now it doesn't take too long to react in such a situation, and with the Audax and Joe falling away beneath me I made a desperate grab for the longerons, but they were already beyond reach, and even with billowing fabric there was no room for fingers. I cursed all riggers, I cursed Thibault, and I cursed the Air Force for good measure, but the same force ten gale that was trying to suck me into the atmosphere rammed my words down my throat facing forward, I arched my back and jammed my backside against the gunrail, grabbing the sides with palms outwards. Joe's helmet was below me, its occupant oblivious to the fact that he was about to shed his ballast, not that he needed any now with the drogue gone. I prayed - more like threatened, really, that my fingers had better not lose their grip, and for what seemed like a lifetime I managed to hang on until he reached the end of the dive and pulled up to do an encore. I hit bottom, slammed the seat back down, secured the safety belt and clipped on my parachute. I thought, if he's going to play silly buggers I'm ready for him. He did so for another three encores and then turned for home, unaware that he was carrying a shaking wreck in the back seat.

Before he climbed down I had the wheels chocked, still trying to compose myself. "Enjoy the ride, you? ", he asked in his clipped Canuck. My hands ached, my eyes hurt, I couldn't get a comb through my hair, and I hadn't had breakfast. Plus, I would probably get a rollicking for flying without permission. I can't remember, but I probably said something silly like, "Wizard".

Alec Alder (mem. No. 26)

Jim Heslop (Secretary & Supplies)    <sup>w</sup>/Cdr Ron Rotherham (President)    Don James (Treasurer)