



244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 24

JIM SAYS At last! News from the RAF Museum. Details are:- Presentation of the 244 Squadron Association Crest will take place at the RAF Museum, Hendon. (Grahame Park Way, Hendon. Nearest Tube station is Colindale) on Wednesday, 29th July at 11a.m. Please try and make the journey to this event. Apart from being an important landmark in the history of our 'Band of Brothers', it will be an opportunity to meet members old and new. For identity purposes, if possible, members should wear the Association tie, lapel or blazer badge. If not, a cry of "Anyone for 244!" will suffice.

Now, our new blazer badge. These are now available at a price of £15 (post free). Please state whether navy blue or black backing. Those members who have ordered may now forward payment. Members who have already ordered will receive their badges forthwith. For the benefit of our 'Kindred Spirits', it must be explained that the badge is the logo of the 244 Squadron Association (it says so in the roundel of the badge). As our 'Kindred Spirits' are members of the Association they are entitled to wear the badge. So, if they wish to order, don't hold back They have entitlement.

We now have copies available of the Association Coat of Arms. These are in full colour and gloss finish; There are two sizes, 10"x8" and 7"x5". Priced at £7 and £5 respectively and post free. They are most suitable for framing. Each print is authenticated by Garter, King of Arms.

Bad news just received We hear that Gerry Leach (member No 43) has passed on. Gerry attended every Reunion in Southport. Members who have attended our 'Shindigs' will remember him as part of the singing duo with Peter Lyons (the organist left the room!). Gerry and Peter trained together in South Africa and flew together with 244 from Masirah.

DON SAYS. Well, here we are midway through 1998. How time flies when you are having fun! Jim and myself have spent a great deal of time together over the last six months, mainly on the Squadron Crest and also on the 1999 Reunion. We would like to thank all those members who have sent their very generous donations towards the cost of the Association Crest. I have written to every member who donated. Also, many thanks to those members who have paid their 1998 subs. There are still a number of you who are still outstanding. Please see notation at the head of this newsletter (if a non-payer). Also, thanks to those who have already paid for 1999 and 2000. I am sure that some of you must think you have already paid (especially if you attended the last Reunion). Please make my day by sending me a cheque for £5 and also your membership card for updating. If you think you have paid, and are mentioned as a non-payer above, please contact me without fail. Please join us at Hendon.

RAS AL HAD

Imagine paying to go to Ras al Had when you actually got paid a shilling a day to go there! The travel ad says:

"Ras al Had. Nearby is the town of Sur, famous for its Dhow building yards. Across a narrow sound can be found the village of Ayega, an intriguing place where the boat builders live in a setting untouched by the 20th century. The area offers beautiful beaches and a lovely coastline".

Do you recognise it chaps? Additional stops at Salalah, Khasab, Muscat and Dubai. Now the bad news. It will cost you from £3695 to £6400 in a luxury sailing ship from the Red Sea via Oman, The Gulf India and Ceylon to Thailand. A bit like being posted from Suez to Burma - but without transit camps! Contact Noble Caledonia Ltd. (Chris Morris Member No. 191)

Reminiscences of an Armourment Officer

Pleased to receive Newsletter 20, interesting as usual. Particularly interesting to me was the belated emergence of the former 244 Squadron CO., W/Cdr R. Rotherham, whom I remember well..

He may remember me since he was the first arrival at a belly-landed Wimpy out of which, I scrambled, and he bawled at me "Kerrigan, you're a F..... Jonah! Keep out of my aircraft!" One or two days before that, the same thing had happened after I had been up aloft, air testing a flare-chute rectification, and the undercart hydraulics had failed.

A very short time before that I'd escaped unscathed from a pranged Bisley, a complete write-off! A F/Sgt pilot was ferrying me in a Bisley to progress bomb-dump work at either Ras al Had or Jask. At the usual, fast shallow-angle landing, he failed to see the perimeter wire until I elbowed him in the ribs from my second-dickie seat. Result- stick right back, stalled, crashed down, half a wing and undercart gone. Huge bounce, thud, and most of both wings gone! Repeat bounce, and tail end of fuselage gone! veered, and careered through stacked 4 gallon fuel cans and pipes of an underground fuel store being built! Both lucky! Pilot banged his head. I hadn't a scratch (had got my feet up sharpish, braced against the dash) First chap at the aircraft was my breathless Sgt. Fitter/armourer Back. Surprisingly, I was myself able to slide back the hatch, stood up in my seat-fuselage hard against the bottom thereof. Decided on a 'line shoot' action. Smiled down at him and said, "Good morning Sgt. Back, How's the job going? Let's get cracking, haven't got all day to waste". His reply was, "You jammy sod"! And so I was!

Mike Kerrigan Member No. 19

A 244 Three-Some

The greater claim to fame that Woolwich County School has, is that Frankie Howard was a former pupil! However, it also has the distinction of being the school where three of his contemporaries who became members of 244 Squadron were educated. Not only were they at the same school, but also in the same class!

Had the three, Don James, Don MacDonald and Pat Pattenden been on the Squadron at the same time they could have formed a crew, being Wop/Ag., Pilot and navigator respectively.

The paths of the two 'Dons' did cross at Sharjah, long before the arrival of Pat Pattenden. Don MacDonald died suddenly of a heart attack in 1972, and had he been alive at the formation of the 244 & Kindred Spirit Association, would have been an active member.

Who could have imagined that 65 years ago, three 12 year olds would serve the same squadron thousand of miles away.

Pat Pattenden member No. 159

Shaibah's Phoney War

Everyone knows about the Phoney War in Europe, when over a period, little happened. Shaibah had one too. When Rashid Ali and the Golden Square seized power in Iraq in '41, it was known they were anti-British and pro-German. We were in Iraq by treaty entered into after the termination of the Mandate to which Britain had been appointed. Rashi Ali did not abrogate to this treaty immediately, so there were no instant hostilities.

One morning we discovered that an Iraqi Army Brigade had overnight occupied the tamarisk groves, a mile to the west of our camp. Such an act in itself was not illegal, but was nonetheless threatening. Their concealment in the tamarisk woods was quite good, and we could not see if they had artillery. We had to prepare for the worst and slit trenches were dug between the barrack blocks and the work area. Our ground defence was not strong. There were no British Army units in Iraq ever since the introduction of Air Control shortly after the termination of the great rebellion of 1920/21. Airfields were defended by the Iraq Levies, a British force locally recruited and controlled from A.H.Q. and under the immediate command of seconded British Army Officers At Habbaniya there were seven companies of Assyrian troops. They were tough and completely reliable. At Shaibah there was one company of levies recruited from Arab tribes. They could not be relied on to fight their compatriots.

We stood to each day at first light ready for a dawn attack. The Vincents were bombed up at the ready, and we were reinforced by three Fairy Gordons (F/O Cleaver). A company of British infantry was promised from India, but was days away. The position was hardly comfortable. Even if we had a strong hand we could not have made a pre-emptive strike because of the Treaty. It was up to the Iraqi Army to make a move. Indeed they did, but it took us completely by surprise. They folded their tents and marched away under the cover of darkness. The next day we could see nothing. The only area which they could have disappeared into was Basrah City.

The next day The Kings Own (Lancasters) arrived from India by air (31 Sqn.) believing RAF Shaibah to be invested they landed at the far side of the airfield, and as soon as the first aircraft door opened two machine gun sections deployed and set up their guns in double quick time, pointing in our direction. Infantry from other aircraft scattered in several directions, and then advanced towards us in extended order, small arms at the ready. We had to explain lamely that the enemy had, 'hoofed it' during the night, and that a hot meal was ready for them in No. 1 hangar.

There were about ten happy days when we and our new found friends could relax a little after a tense time. Games were played. The Kings Own C.O. told me that five days after their arrival was their Regimental Day. Might they have their parade on the airfield? He said normally that all ranks wore a red rose of Lancaster on their headress. Looking at the desert around he said this year this custom would have to go by the board. I did not tell him that we had three or four moth-eaten rose trees kept alive with old bath water. On the day we were able to muster nine red roses, one for each officer to wear in recognition of their regimental tradition. The parade was extremely smart. We later received a copy of their Regimental magazine, "The Lion and the Rose", in which the parade was reported. It said it was the first occasion on which the salute at a Regimental Day parade had been taken by a RAF Officer. It was a compliment and recognition to all ranks for the happy relations that had been established.

After two or three days we heard that things were going really wrong at Habbanyia. F/O Cleaver had been recalled with his Gordons, and the Kings Own had winged their way north. The Iraqi army complete with artillery had taken up positions on the plateau, an area of high ground which dominated the airfield and camp into which their guns were firing shells over open sights.

We were much saddened to hear later that four of the Kings Own Officers and a larger number of their men were killed in the Battle of Habbanyia. Our breather at Shaibah was not to last much longer.
(to be continued)...

Howard Alloway Member No. 309.

Kicked Out of Khormaksar (or how I joined 244)

If Masirah had been a penal colony, then when I arrived there at the beginning of 1944, on the coastal tub 'El Hak', chartered by Dinshaw Cowasjee of Aden, I was going to the right place, for I was a criminal awaiting charges. Breaking out of camp, breaking into camp, acting in an unairman-like manner, involved in a fracas at Toby's Bazaar, breaking Middle East Command Medical Orders by not wearing a sun-helmet, wearing yellow Air-tex shirt, and wearing non-issue desert boots.

Sentence was delivered in Masirah, Confined to camp for one week!

Sam Harrison Member No. 174.

Double Dutch to Double English

The following is from Colin Richardson's book on Masirah. The Newsletter will let you know when it is to be published, but this extract on the Dutch amphibious Catalinas at Masirah in 1944 is a foretaste. The records written for the RAF are quite dull, but the following was written in Dutch for the Netherlands authorities in the UK. Colin asked his friend, Freek Zijl to translate it, and the result is so charming that it is reproduced here with only the spelling and punctuation cleaned up for the sake of clarity. So, from Double Dutch to Double English:-

"The Dutch became also situated by the British and were brought under British command. Soon after the incoming of the flyboats the 321 Squadron also put some amphibians in. Masirah showed lots of equals with Socotra, it existed for a great part of sandy hills, but there was a little bit more plants grown. The livestandard were more favourable as specially because of the Americans which shared with their British and Dutch brother-in-arms their overwhelming supplies. The big advances of the supply traffic with the in and outcoming aircraft to

the Far East frequently American cabaret-groups travelled; which were on tour along the American troops. These groups didn't let the temporary inhabitants of Masirah down, and gave during their stay one or two nights open air performances. In this context some of the famous movie stars as Betty Grable, Bob Hope, and Eddy Nelson brought much enthusiasm on this bare and deserted place. The Dutch pilot's flight programme was not less busy than anywhere else in the squadron Here it was that as well as the South African the Suez Canal convoys passed and it was the Dutch Catalinas which must accompany them to Karachi and Bombay. Not only the German, but also the Japanese submarines were operational in this area, and gave them hands full of work.

There was also the weather as a big enemy. There could be days of low hanging clouds over the Arabic Sea which could bring back the sight to only a few hundred metres. In that case you could only fly on radar and the Dutch were also brought in at day time. In addition it could between June and September in this area be very rough weather. Within a few hours the wind could come from another direction and also changing of windforce. This meant that the utmost effort was demanded from the navigators in the search for convoys or the base camp.

An emergency landing on the Arabic coast was a harsh adventure because the Arabs which swarmed around in those areas were of a dangerous and bandit kind. The chances of getting away alive were not particularly big. It was therefore regulation that every crew member must be armed during the flight, and every plane had an Arabic written recommendation letter with the request to help and protect the strangers. Especially in the surroundings of the Gulf of Oman north of Muscat was known as dangerous. Here there were lots of whimsically shaped bays. More often the Allied pilots must conclude that a hunt for enemy submarines lead to nothing because the enemy searched for protection in one of these bays in which they could come very close to the coast. After a while they discovered that the submarines in these areas were supplied of oil and gasoline by bandited Arabs, and later the tracks in the sand showed what had happened. Then the procedure was that an official letter of the Allied authorities was sent to the Sultan which requested them to get a close inspection, but reality in secret was playing on the same side with the bandits. This because the Germans paid high amounts of money for these illegal helps, which made it possible for them to continue operations far from home.

The biggest terrifies of Masirah was formed by the sandstorms which a few times in a year did occur on the site. When this happened there was over the whole island a layer of sand and dust which sometimes reached a height of 400 metres and blocked the sun. Sometimes it was so terrible that men could not see the next barrack which was about 30 metres separated to another. During the walkover the Dutchman consistently must be aware of not being hit by empty gasoline-tins or even drums which then with an amazing noise sometimes thrown around the campsite. In the barracks the sand was several centimetres on the tables, chairs, beds, and suitcases, and this continued as long as two or three days".

Colin Richardson Member No. 125

SEE YOU AT HENDON:

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James