



244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 25

JIM SAYS We had a great day out at Hendon, and so nice to meet those members who made the trip, and to put faces to names we hadn't met before (see full report below).

Here we are halfway between Reunions, and already we have laid the groundwork for another successful (we hope!!) get-together (see Don's report). Don tells me that already 73 persons have booked in or have signified their intentions of attending. May we thank once again all those members who subscribed towards the cost of our Association official Coat of Arms, which is now on display at the RAF Museum. We ended up with a small surplus of your givings.

Don and I have given careful thought to another method of putting our Association firmly on the map for posterity. Please see enclosed details of The National Memorial Arboretum Appeal. This gives a full explanation. We intend to sponsor a tree on behalf of the Association. Don tells me we are in a financial position to afford this without stretching our cash at Bank. We hope our members will approve.

Finally, copy for future Newsletters. We are extremely short of your tales and anecdotes. Don't be chary of sending your stories along. If need be, your Sub-Editor will knock them into shape for publishing.

DON SAYS, How time flies when you are having fun. Jim and I have been very busy recently with preparations towards Reunion 1999. I know it's a long way ahead, but how times goes by.

Before going into Reunion details, I have one unpleasant thing to say. This will be the last Newsletter going out to non-payers of the current 1998 subscription. Jim has put a note on your Newsletter as a final reminder. Obviously, we cannot continue to send owing to the expense, and the unfairness to other members.

REUNION DETAILS

N.B.. £10 deposit. per person, due September 1998. Package for Scarisbrick Hotel - Two nights .B&B (Friday & Saturday 8th & 9th October '99), Buffet (Friday), Dinner (Saturday), Sherry receptions, Wine with Dinner.

Inclusive:- Twin or Double Rooms - £113 per person. Inclusive:- Single Rooms - £123 per person. If you stay over Saturday night, B B and Carvery, special price of extra £35 per person:

Any other nights Twin or Double £40 B B; Single B B £45 .all per person per nights. Dinner, B&B - .£145 for twin or double and for single - £50 per night.

When booking, please let me know if single, twin or double, and also how many nights. Plus a deposit of £10 per person. Those of you who have already paid a deposit, please let me know how many nights, plus twin or double etc. So far I have followed what happened at the last Reunion.

In the past some of you have complained about the noise from the Night Club at the Scarisbrick. All will be well, as the hotel is closing this venue in January 1999. This will be replaced by a swimming pool and gym. So bring your costumes!!.

Package at the Balmoral Lodge, (of course including Buffet, Dinner etc., etc. at the Scarisbrick).

Twin or Double for the two nights (as above) B B - £89 per person. Single rooms - all fully booked. Garden Wing de Luxe Twin £93 per person. There is a single Garden Wing de Luxe at £137, and a single Business Class at £113. All rooms are of course en suite.

Carlton Lodge prices are for two nights. Twin or Double £73 per person (en suite)

Single room £69 per person (NOT en suite)

All these prices of course include all functions at the Scarisbrick.

PRESENTATION OF THE 244 SQUADRON COAT OF ARMS

The two yokels (excuse me your officials!!) arrived in the 'big city' at P.M on 28th July. After booking into our pub, we swiftly: sped to the RAF Museum, Hendon. We contacted Richard Simpson (The Keeper of aircraft and exhibits). Arrangements were made for the presentation of our badge on the following day. Mr. Simpson, who is also an aeronautical historian, was most interested in our squadron history, and kept us in conversation for over an hour. Don was able to correct the curator on the history of the locust flight in which 244 were involved. Afterwards, we had a brief look around the Museum. Sorry to say, no Vincents or Bisleys on view, and the Wellington was a Mark X!!.

On the next day, 29th July, we returned to the Museum at 0900hrs. Already some of our members had arrived. A steady trickle of stalwarts (and their ladies and friends) continued. By the time of the presentation at 1100hrs, over 50 people were present, who had travelled from all points of the compass, including Scotland and South Wales.

Don and I made brief speeches. Our President, W/Cdr Ron Rotherham (who had travelled in from Andover) after a short speech, handed over our badge to Mr Simpson, who then replied at length.

Owing to the coming refurbishment of this section of the Museum, our badge, together with that of 681 sqdn., (who, like ourselves, have recently been awarded a badge) will be on show in a showcase of their own, together with a short squadron history. At some time in the future both badges will join the other 550 squadron badges on permanent display.

After the ceremony, we all repaired to the Restaurant/Bar of the Museum. The event then became a mini-reunion. I could see at a glance the armourers all clustered together in earnest conversation. There was the usual hub-bub of chat that always occurs at our Southport 'do's'. All in all a most successful day (as agreed by all) 244 Squadron is now firmly 'ON THE MAP'!

Postscript. The following letter was received from the RAF Museum on 25th August.

"Dear Jim, it is now some weeks since the presentation took place and your letter of the 30th July.

I would like to thank you and the other members who attended and I am pleased that they found the event to their liking, and that my enthusiasm did not dampen the proceedings.

It would be churlish in the extreme to discuss the badge production costs, so the Museum will absorb these in one of its display budgets.

Thank you, and your members once more.

Yours sincerely, R. Simpson, Keeper of Aircraft and Exhibits.

A.C.1. RUSSELL JAMES NEAL.

Do you remember this bod who served with 244? Son Keith says his late father seldom talked about his RAF experiences. Luckily, his photograph albums survive, beautifully kept, fully inscribed and a wonderful record of his wartime service in the Middle East. They include all sorts of theatre, cinema and sports programmes, tickets, stamps, receipts and even a beer bottle label.

From them I have been able to deduce quite a lot of details of his service in Iraq.

629997 A.C.1. NEAL R.J. served in Iraq from 24.3.1940 to 16.8.1943. He started off in Habbaniya and was friendly with Bob Burns and Ginger Raeburn. A bit of a joker and pretended he was in the S.I.B. and on photographs by the lake he is wearing a Naval cap and a fisherman's jumper with BP Aviation Service on the front.

He then appeared to be part of S. Squadron when it formed at Habbaniya in 1940 and there are several group photographs. One is titled Frank, myself Frank, Peter "5" Squadron Iraq, but I do not recognise the background scenery and another shows them lined up on a Hab road waiting to go riding. Usually wearing KD & fore & afts, on others sola topees like the official group photo of 42 Officers & Men in front of a single engine bi plane, I presume a Hab hangar and labelled The Famous "S" Squadron of Iraq 1940. There are two photos of burials at Habbaniya cemetery, wearing 'blues', so in the winter. He earned his swimming certificate at Hab on 9th September 1940.

The documentation in his albums shows he was definitely a member of 244 and at Shaiba. On 29.3.41 he had the honour to request an interview with his Commanding Officer for the purpose of keeping a horse at RAF Station Shaiba. Recommended by Flt Lt D.C. Wellburn, Commanding "A" Flight and authorised by Sqn Ldr Howard Alloway without interview.

There are numerous photographs of A.C.1. Neal riding 'Prince' and a programme for the First Shaiba Autumn Race Meeting, 13 September 1941. On a sadder note there is the Order of Service for a Memorial Service at St Peters Church, Ashar, Basra for ii named personnel on Tuesday 8th July 1941 (list appended, were they 244 personnel?). There is a group photo taken at Shaiba in 1941 of Officers of 244 Squadron in Blues amongst some shady trees and their names are included.

It is difficult to know what he did. He was a bit of a joker so the photos in flying kit may be spoofs. There are many photographs of him with crashed aircraft in the desert so I suspect he was an airframe fitter of some sort, possibly a rigger/airgunner. He claims his first aircraft in Iraq was a Vincent, and there is a photograph of 'my first Blenheim crash'. He went down to Sharjah, has an aerial photo of Little Quin Island and some wonderful ones of Muscat - but none of Ras al Hadd or Masirah and this fits in with him leaving 244, because we have his BOAC passenger ticket from Basra to Habbaniya, departing at 0530 on 3rd September 1941.

What did he do then? There are photos of him in Teheran and other places in Persia, programmes from Haifa and Egypt and photographs of action in the Western Desert, including crashes, so was he with a squadron (? bomber transports) or an MU on aircraft recovery. When was he at Mosul and did he go to Ser Amadia leave camp, as there are photos of both places. I thought the leave camp closed with the outbreak of war and did not re-open till 1944 (possibly 1943). I must tell you about Ser Amadia cool mountain air, chilled beers, spectacular scenery, rushing rivers, refreshing swimming pool - so different from sweating it out in the Gulf & Masirah!!!

One final difficulty - not all photos are what and when they seem because mates shared them round and the camera shops definitely sold stock photos. That explains why the same photos crop up from people who were in Iraq at totally different times. His Habbanyia from the Air definitely isn't, and I would like to know if the theatre at Hab really was still being built in 1940!

The albums add much to the record of 244, Hab Shaiba and I have made lots of slides to show at the next reunion,

CAN YOU HELP TO SORT OUT THE MYSTERY OF A.C.1. RUSSELL JAMES NEAL ?

His son would dearly like to know the story of his father's service. Do any of you remember him? Names in the Memorial Service, not buried at Hab so presumably in Basra Military Cemetery. Gordon William Arthur, George Wislon Grove, Roland Cecil Harris, James Edmund Burley Souter,

Philip Henry Spermon Tozer, Sidney Charles Braybrookes, Maurice Barry Burns, Charles Thomas Dennet, Ernest Thomas Godsell, Kenneth Frank Hannett, Robert Jope-Slade.

Chris Morris (Member No. 191)

COM FLIGHT MEMORIES

My crew, Gordon and Bill, both Aussies, had left 70 OTU at Nakuru in Kenya and travelled back to Egypt by a mixture of aircraft, Nile passenger boat and train before being posted to 244 at some place called Sharjah that no-one seemed to know anything about. Innocent souls, we eventually boarded the Nairn bus for the dash across the desert to Habbanyia.

Hab must have been short of pilots, because we were grabbed and put to work in the Communications Flight.

The aircraft were mainly aerial hen-coops, wings, struts and bracing wires aplenty, complete with built-in headwinds. Surely the ancient Valentias must have been designed by the same committee that, charged with the job of designing a horse, had come up with a camel.

First thing they did was to issue us with snazzy white flying suits and didn't we look smart, or so we thought. Amongst the vintage aircraft there was a Gladiator or two and at least one Audax. After an hour solo in a Gladiator, thinking to myself 'thank the Deity that looks after young pilots, that I'd not had to fight modern enemy machines over Malta in one of those', I was told off to go out into the desert, find an Army group and tow a drogue target so they could expend some ammunition trying to hit it. My instructions didn't include a warning that the drogue towed a good deal lower than the aircraft towing it.

Flying at a few hundred feet I found them, went on, turned, lost a bit of height and started my first run. Looking back over my shoulder on the first pass I thought I'd give them a bit of variety and dropped lower on the second one. Strange, I thought, this time they're being friendly, waving at the sky and leaping about. What a matey mob. Then I changed my mind as red Very lights, looking as though they were aimed right at me, began flashing past the Gladiator, far too close for comfort. Better return to base I reckoned.

Back on the field, carpeted, belatedly it was explained that as the drogue towed low and an enraged Army captain had called up asking why the hell I'd dragged it on the ground right through their encampment. No sense of humour, those Army guys.

Tony Tubbenhauer (Australia) Member No. 112).

To 244 SQUADRON

1. *We're the boys who live at Shaibah
Right out in Iraq's blue,
Where there's never anything to see
And even less to do.*
2. *We're not a crowd of tough blokes,
And we may not have much brain,
That's because there's too much sun about
And no enough sweet rain.*
3. *Still we never seem to worry,
Life doesn't hold a care.
We're a marvellous bunch of fellows,
On the ground or in the air.*
4. *We ride the winds and scatter
Peace and goodwill where we go,
Whatever work we have to do
Is always a "good show".*
5. *From Shaibah down the Persian Gulf
To Muscat or Bahrain
Or far up North to Mosul,
Or Cairo and back again.*
6. *The distance doesn't mean a thing,
We like to get away,
Especially if there's a good bazaar
Where we can spend some pay*
7. *We never have a breakdown,
The maintenance is superb
Though the Vincent's that we fly,
Well - years past they got "The Bird".*
8. *There's a war over in Egypt
But however folks may rag,
If we ever have to do our bit
We'll do it and not brag.*
9. *We'll write the name of Two Four Four
All over Egypt's land
And when the Ities hear of us
They won't dare to make a stand.*
10. *We'll write them off in one fell swoop
And then will come our chance,
To show that we're THE Air Force,
We're the Eagle with the pants.*
11. *The Fuher is our next big job,
He thinks he's mighty tough,
And though we're not all from the West
We'll easily call his bluff*
12. *And then we'll go to England,
The Blighty of our dreams,
To satisfy our dearest wish,
Fulfilment of our schemes.*
13. *But we shall not find happiness
Until we've won the game
By adding to the glory
of our England's greater fame.*
14. *War is a ghastly parody
Of Hell-fire at it's worst.
It's tough and cruel, and unjust
So we'll finish it or burst.*
15. *It's not a one-man business
It's - All together, Heave,
And then you bung your chitties in
And get a spot of leave.*
16. *And when you then come back, refreshed,
To pull your weight again,
You'll help us keep our chins up,
Forget the fright and pain.*
17. *Then we'll go to it with a will
Our enemies will know
That they are against Two Four Four,
And finish off the show.*
18. *But we shan't get the credit, no!
We don't want it, understand?
We only want folks proud to shake
Englishmen by the hand.*

THE REBELLION BEGINS (The armoured train and other actions).

Not long after The King's own had flown onto Habbaniya, the shelling of the camp there began, and hostilities were under way in the Shaibah sector for 244 Squadron. The Iraqi army was in possession of the Civil airport at Basra. Targets of opportunity were attacked, and P/O Braybrook and his crew were lost north of the Civil airport.

The Iraqi barracks at Diwaniya 100 miles north were also bombed. No. 814 Squadron Fleet Air Arm were disembarked to Shaibah from their carrier in the Gulf and joined in the fray (with gusto!). They were so

keen that their sortie rate would have run us clean out of bombs if the insurrection had gone on for two days more. There was no hope of early re-supply.

One day we got news of an armoured train moving south from Ur of the Chaldees towards Basra. It was a real armoured train and could not have been put together just for the rebellion. Presumably, it had been rusting away in some Baghdad siding since the early days of the railway, which was completed just after World War I. The railway was continually under attack during the great rebellion of 1919/20 period. Armoured trains with steel sides and loopholes were used to counter these attacks.

We wondered why an armoured train should be moving to Basra, and we could think of no role for it. Was it the intention that it should leave the main railway before Basra and chug up the spur line to Shaibah, crash the flimsy main gales, and halt at the buffers at the end of the siding in front of Station H.Q.? We had heard of the Wooden Horse of Troy and were not taking the chance of a repetition with a steam driven model!

Two Vincents (ED Wooley and PO Haywood and crews), each armed with 2 X 250lb bombs attacked at right angles to the railway line from a low height. Probably, Haywood had not dropped 250 pounders before and did not realise fully the blast effect, and was too low. The result was that they stopped the train and Haywood so damaged his aircraft that it flopped into the desert a little over a mile from the damaged train. Haywood had a leg badly damaged below the knee by shrapnel splinter. In the meantime, angry rebel soldiery detrained and started an advance towards the wrecked aircraft. Wooley quickly sized up the deteriorating situation, landed alongside the wreck, loaded the crew into his own Vincent, and took off under fire from the approaching enraged Iraqi soldiery. He was awarded the D.F.C.

Haywood (a most sterling character) was in hospital a long time as his wound would not heal in the Basra climate, and he was evacuated to a hospital in Bombay. I saw him there shortly before his discharge on his way home in January '42. Later, I tried to contact him in England only to learn he had been lost in Bomber Command. Wooley survived the War. Some years later there were several unsolved Canberra crashes which were later explained by the discovery of a design fault in the tail assembly. Wooley was lost in one of these accidents.

Howard Alloway (Member No. 309).

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James