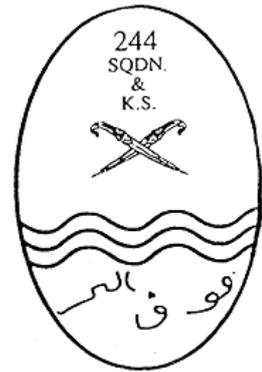




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 26

JIM SAYS Reunion Year dawns But, 1998 was a most climatic year for our 'Band of Brothers' (otherwise known as 244 Sqdn. and K.S.). First of all, the award of our official badge by Garter, King of Arms, and its presentation to the RAF Museum. The came our sponsorship of a tree at the National Arboretum (with our badge thereon in nickel steel). The Arboretum is situated near Burton-on-Trent. Directions on how to visit the site will be given in our next Newsletter. Should be handy for our Midland based members.

In October we received an invitation for the Association to attend the Rededication of the RAF church St. Clement Danes. What better person to represent the Association than our President W/Cdr Ron. Rotherham. His report is overleaf.

Finally our Badge is to be displayed, in the form of a stained glass transom window. This is at the Battle of Britain Memorial, situated at Capel Ferme, near Dover, Kent. This has been donated by our member Harry Savage. For which many thanks. More on this in our next Newsletter. Sadly, we have recently lost two of our earliest members. J. G. (Bill) Williams (FIIE). Bill attended all our Reunions, excepting 1997, in fact we had the pleasure of meeting him at the RAF Museum in July. The funeral took place at Melksham in December. 244 and K.S.. were represented by Frank and Jennifer Sheppard (Wallington, Surrey). Many thanks to both of you.

In January. we heard that E.A. (Pat) Pattenden (navigator) had passed on. We also had the pleasure of meeting Pat, his wife Maureen and daughter at the Museum, where we had a good 'natter'. The interment took place at Blandford on 25th. January last. Once again our Association was represented, this time by Ralph and Phyllis Godden (Christchurch). To repeat, many thanks to both of you. I served with Pat on Masirah (1944). In fact, for a period, we shared the same bed-hug infested hut, hut that's another story

DON SAYS Here we are in 1999, and a very happy, healthy New Year to one and all. Hope you are all well, or at least keep taking the pills. You have all to be fit for the Reunion, it may be the last!! So let's have a cracking turn out. There are quite a number of you I have not heard from yet, so flex those fingers and get writing. At the same time, do not forget Subs are due for 1999. Very many thanks to all those who have already paid. To remind you, they are still only £5.

The detail of the 1998 balance sheet is overleaf As you can see, we are in quite a healthy situation. It has been a very expensive year what with the Crest, Hendon and the Arboretum. It has certainly put 244 and K.S. on the map. I would like to thank those who have worked so hard, and sent many donations covering the expenses. A truly great effort .!

Jim and Audrey, Frances and myself wish to thank all of you who sent us Xmas cards this year. We look forward to meeting you at the coming Reunion. Don't forget, those of you who have not yet booked, £10 deposit per person.

Rededication of the RAF church at St. Clement Danes

Thank you again for letting me have the invitation to attend the ceremony at St. Clement Danes on 20th October. I duly arrived there on time, with no thanks to British Rail, which suffered a points breakdown on the way

This was my first visit to St Clement Danes, and I was vastly impressed by the beauty and magnificence of the interior of the church. I was shown to my place by a stately gentleman. in a morning suit, and I had plenty time to look around before the Service started. I found myself amongst a number of elderly, grey-haired gentlemen

like myself, in lounge suits. Some with full medals, some with miniatures, and some without any medals. There were quite a number of ladies present.

I think that most of the Air Council must have been there, along with the Duke of Kent and the Chaplain-in-Chief plus a vast number of Clergy. All the dignitaries were solemnly escorted to their places with great pomp.

Singing was provided by the Choir of St. Clement Danes, and the music by the Central Band of the RAF resulting in quite splendid sound.

The whole- service was most moving, and I am very glad that I had the opportunity of attending. A low pass by four Jaguar aircraft completed the Ceremony.

I feel that our representation at this service puts N^o. 244 Squadron and Kindred Spirits truly back on the map after years of obscurity.

Ron. Rotherham (mem. No. 265)

A.C.1. Neal (See Newsletter 25) and Other Speculations

According to my logbook A. C. Neal flew with me on many occasions and probably in many other' squadron aircraft. We (the squadron) made frequent trips to Mosul, and Neal may easily have gone there, but not in my aircraft

Alas, I cannot, after all these years put a face on A.C. Neal, nor do I remember his horse at Shaibah, though it must have been the only one there. Unlike Habbanyia, we did not have stabling. Perhaps the race meeting was organised in the large Army camp which sprang up between Shaibah and Basrah.

After I left Shaibah (Jan '42) the British opened up a supply line for armaments for Russia. Was A. C. Neil (after Shaibah) in a team in Persia assembling boxed aircraft ? This could :account for the Persian photos. I suspect he was either a fitter or a rigger as I see he crewed for me on test flights.

Seramadia leave camp closed at the outbreak of war, so I never went there. I believe it was- reactivated in summer of '43 or '45.

The memorial service was for personnel who were lost in the Shaihah area and had no known grave.

P/O Braybrook and crew (244) lost in the rebellion and never found afterwards. We concluded they went in water.

G/Cpt Jope-Slade and the wireless op., went down in the Gulf at night. The pilot F/Lt Wellburn (244) was picked up by dhow the next day from Kuwait.

F/O Arthur (4.F.T.S.) in an Oxford with a W/op and three or four Bankers going to a conference to stabilise the currency during the rebellion were lost, and the remains of the crash were not found for several weeks. The Vincent and the Oxford above were both lost in similar circumstances. They were both flying at night to Shaibah from Habb or Baghdad. On each occasion a gigantic dust storm blew up. Our D/F' station was pretty primitive (Bellini Tossi system). It gave an accurate track to Shaibah and onwards, but there was no system for telling the pilot he was overhead. He was meant to see the airfield or flarepath. If this was obscured, rockets were fired and if these were not seen, the aircraft sailed on, and on these two occasions were lost.

F/Lt Wellburn and G/Cpt Jope-Slade got out of the aircraft and swam. The Vincent sank at once, and the W/Op did not get out. They lay in the water (1.30 a.m. on a dark and dusty night), and swam on till dawn, expecting to see land when it got light. They were very disappointed Jope-Slade took off his Mae West, said goodbye to Wellburn and went under. Wellburn floated on, and by extreme good fortune, a Kuwaiti dhow, returning from pearling grounds nearly ran him down. Imagine our Joy when we got a wire from the political agent in Kuwait (Major Galloway), "I have Wellburn"!

F/O Arthur and his crew were not found for several weeks, but were eventually buried in Basrah.

Howard Alloway (mem No.309)

"Baksheesh"

On Masirah in 1952, apart from the much documented tin cans, there was also a large dump of vehicles. The inevitable Bedford QLO and 15cwts, Fordson 15cwt, Chevrolet 3 ton and 15cwts, left over from the British and American Air Forces.

Life for the dozen or so personnel, and the Squadron of the Aden Protectorate Levies was fairly quiet. Work as such, centred around the three times a fortnight visit by the 'route' Valettas from Aden, bringing fresh supplies, personnel, and the 'important' mails.

One day I was approached by an Arab of the meteorological staff. He told me that a contractor had arrived from Aden, to remove all these old vehicles. Only chassis, engines. and transmissions were wanted for onward transport from the Island. But he had a problem!

Although he could remove these items to the jetty, he was limited in the amount of time available for loading. The dhows could only use the jetty when the tide was in. "Could I use the Coles crane to Load these dhows?" Thereby decreasing turn-round time, and increasing the number of dhows loaded. He would pay me.

My reaction (of course) was that service transport could not be used for civilian purposes, and I told him so. I was then told that he would pay me well. I said I would consider it.

I thought, and thought and thought, but could not find a solution. I had an unblemished Service record, which I was not losing for an Arab contractor. And then, Eureka! The answer was simple - hire the crane, using J793 (Transport on Repayment).. Pay for it using monies received, and pocket the difference. All within regulations,

My speech rehearsed, I approached the C.O. I explained that I had been asked to use the crane at the jetty, but before I had time to elaborate, the C.O. interrupted. "That's o.k.", he said. "I have been instructed to help this man in any way". A quick change of track was indicated. "So, Sir", I said, "You'll sign the 658's" (Authority to use a service vehicle). He nodded assent.

I then told the Met. staff that I would take the crane to the jetty, and use it as required, but somehow forgot to mention that I had the C.O.'s permission. On a regular tidal basis I collected payments for services rendered. In those days the accounts clerk would ask how much pay was required on pay days. As a non-smoker and non-drinker my needs were few. So week after week I drew no pay. The NAAFI manager changed my rupees into East African shillings which were saved carefully

One day the pay clerk said, "For Pete's sake Geordie, draw some money before awkward questions are asked". I thought it pertinent to do so. I can honestly say that I enjoyed my stay on Masirah Island.

Bob Bolton (men. No.87)

Back to the Island

Ann and I were at Masirah on holiday for five days in December at the end of a month's rather expensive holiday.

We made our way down through Jordan, taking in a Crusader castle, Petra etc., and got on a 1000 ton boat at Agaba with 22 other passengers. We stopped at Sharm el Sheike (and from there visited St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai), and at Hodeida in North Yemen, Aden and Mukulla, which I remember, from the 1950's as a charming little seaside town.

Like Hodeida it is now awful, an ant hill 70,000 people spilling onto the streets, and causing gridlock to the traffic which sound their horns all the time. The wadi which was just to the West of the town in the 1950's is now part of the town, with houses stretching up into the hills as far as can be seen. The wadi itself is an open sewer. It's all horrible, so it was with some relief that we got back onto the boat. It's all now Yemen of course, but at least we were not kidnapped! Up until 1991, most of the male population worked in Saudi Arabia, but took the wrong side in the Gulf war. So the Saudi's kicked them out, so that they are all now back in Yemen, unemployed, except for kidnapping. There are three guns for each of every man, woman and child in Yemen.

It was pleasure to get ashore at Salalah in Oman, which is clean and uncluttered, and where we took a tour into the town and up into the hills. We sailed past Masirah, looking at it through binoculars, and went round Ras al Hadd at night. We did not stop at Sur as planned, because we were behind schedule. One of the boat's engines had blown up which slowed us down.

Next stop was at Muscat (or rather Mutrah, the next door town). The other passengers flew home that evening. Ann and I stayed in Oman for another 8 days. We had a hire car and got around northern Oman and saw many old friends. But most of the time was at Masirah, where we had a great welcome. The Station Commander (who I had taught to fly) lent us his 4 X 4 Nissan Patrol so we could get down the Island, I had many bear hugs and kiss on both cheeks from the locals, which is somewhat disconcerting for a cold-blooded Englishman! It was great to be back, if only for a few days.

Colin Richardson (mem. No.125)

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James