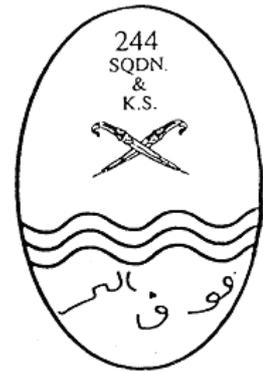




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 28

FROM JIM Reunion time is upon us! .We reckon that in October over 100 of you will arrive in Southport. Don and myself are busy making final preparations for your reception. We hope to make our informal 'Family Affair' as good or better than our previous four soirees.

Our programme for the weekend is listed below. For the benefit of early arrivals, Frances, Audrey, Don and Self will be present in the Baron's Bar, Scarisbrick- Hotel between 1730 and 1930hrs. on Thursday 7th October. For all arrivals your personal envelopes will be available at Reception in your Hotel (Scarisbrick, Balmoral or Carlton Lodge). For those making their own billeting arrangements, your envelopes await you in the Isherwood Suite on Friday evening.

As usual, our Shop will be open on Friday evening only. One bit of advice. For those members staying at the Scarisbrick and travelling by car. It may be advisable to arrive as early as possible, as owing to building re-arrangement, car parking is not as extensive as usual. Anyway, safe journey for all, and have a super weekend.

N.B. The Scarisbrick indoor swimming pool is now open.

Now, owing to Computer 'glitch', the publishing of Newsletter No. 27 did not come out correctly. in fact the sense of 'Battle of Britain Memorial' was partially destroyed. I am therefore repeating the whole article in its correct form (Sorry Harry!). However, I do hear that the 'Duff printing' has not stopped several members from visiting the site.

PROGRAMME FOR REUNION WEEKEND

Friday 8th October '99 (Isherwood Suite, Scarisbrick).
Bar opens 1800hrs.
Sherry Reception from 1800hrs.
Welcome from your Officers 1845hrs.
Photo Call
1945hrs.
Buffet
2015hrs.
Slide Lecture (Shaibah, Sharjah mostly) Dr. Morris 2115hrs.
Close - Midnight
Saturday 9th
October '99
A.G.M. (Scarisbrick) 1000hrs.
Bar opens 1800hrs.
Sherry Reception from 1800hrs.
Officer's Address 1855hrs.
Dinner 1900hrs.
Dancing and Entertainment (?) follows
From 2100hrs.
Close at Midnight

FROM DON (Your ever practical treasurer!)

Nearly Southport '99. However, some of you have not yet paid your June instalment towards our 'do'. It is now end of August and final instalment was due on the 31st. So, fingers to be pulled out chaps, as final payments are due at the Scarisbrick.

On a sadder note, several of you have yet to pay your 1999 Subs (due 1/1/99). As you can understand we cannot afford to subsidise non-payers. It is not fair to the other members. Failure to pay means this is your last Newsletter.

This Newsletter will carry a notation if you have yet to pay.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN MEMORIAL Capel-le-Ferne Dover, Kent

Our squadron badge has now been installed as one of the first six squadron badges to be displayed in the "HUNTING LODGE" conservatory windows at the Capel-le-Ferne memorial site. The "HUNTING LODGE" is a new feature at "Capel" and houses the coffee shop, souvenir shop and other facilities.

The Memorial site is open from APRIL 1st until the beginning of October, admission is free of charge, but a one pound charge is made for car parking. Coaches and passengers are admitted free of charge. The Memorial site is a seven acre cliff top site donated by the Dover District Council. With magnificent views across the English Channel to Cap Gris Nez.

About three miles away at the old Battle of Britain airdrome at "Hawkinge" (now a housing estate) is the Battle of Britain museum which is open from Easter to September.

Twenty miles or so along the coast behind the seaside resort of Ramsgate at Mansion Airport is the Spitfire and Hurricane museum. Well worth a visit, entrance is free of charge, but you won't be able to resist buying something. It is open all year round from 10a.m. to 4p.m. during the winter months and 10a.m. to 5p.m. during the summer months.

Apart from the above, there are some other minor attractions in the area, such as Dover, Deal and Walmer castles, and of course the beautiful city of Canterbury.

Finally, don't forget the "Booze cruising "from Dover & Folkestone to Calais, Boulogne and Ostend.

If you have any questions, ring me any evening on 01304-822650, if I don't answer I shall either be on holiday, booze cruising or drunk Cheers.

Harry Savage (Mem. No.83)

NEWS IN TEHRAN

Last June, Jim and I had the great pleasure to meet Bill Allan (member No.104) from 'Down Under' at the Scarisbrick Hotel here in Southport.

After a few beers the chat got round to Sharjah and Iran. Bill amazed me by saying one thing he could remember was that whilst on leave in Tehran. They were staying in the Legation grounds. Whilst having a swim, there appeared from the Embassy two senior officers. One, in Air Force uniform came over to the pool and spoke to Bill and his Skipper (Tony Tubbenhaur - .Mem. No.112). He asked how the 'Bombing of sharks' was getting along. The amazing thing was that I was also there at the time, but did not remember either Bill or Tony being present.

The Air Force officer was Tedder, later to be Lord Tedder. He came over to our group and asked what Unit we were from. When telling him 244, he said, "How are those clapped out Blenheims getting along?". Our reply was "Just about airborne". He then asked "Are there any rumours about replacement?". We said we had heard we were getting Hudsons. His reply was that we were getting Bisleys. Seeing our faces light up (as we had never heard of Bisleys) he said not to get too worked up, as they were actually Blenheim V's. They were new

and would be o.k for about 240 hours. We all know what happened to them after the 240 hours had been reached. He wished us well and returned to the Embassy.

We all thought how incredible it was that such a high ranking officer knew about 244. We must be far more important than we had imagined. When we got back to Sharjah no-one would believe us. But when the Bisleys turned up in due interval, they changed their tune.

Fancy Bill Allan turning up from the other side of the world to find we were in the same place at the same time so very long ago!

Don James (mem. No.49)

244 (AIR SEA RESCUE SQUADRON) THE LAST OF THE SHAIBAH TALES

In the Vincent days at Shaibah, when going down the Gulf we always flew in pairs. This enabled a fitter or a rigger to be carried in addition to the W.op Air gunners. We could then be self-sufficient for servicing, and stay away for long periods. One day we were going to either Sharjah or Muscat, I can't remember which. We flew down the middle of the Gulf. It was blowing a strong Southerly, and our ground speed cannot have been much over 70m.p.h. Visibility over the sea was good, but the water was rough, white horses all round. As we passed over Faylakal Island we saw a dhow on the rocks. She was getting a terrible pounding and was breaking up. There were four men on deck, one on land, and one was in the water. Wreckage was floating all around the stricken vessel. For a moment we thought of throwing a dinghy overboard, but with land so near, it did not seem a helpful idea.

There was no W/T watch in Kuwait (the nearest port). All we could do after flying around at low altitude several times, was to report the situation by W/T to Shaibah. With instructions for the message to be relayed to the Political Agent Kuwait (by telegram).

A week or ten days later, on the way back to Shaibah, I called in at Kuwait, having some business with the Political Agent. When we met he said, "Thank you for your wire, you will be pleased to hear that all the men were saved, and the name of your squadron is very high here". "how come", I asked. He said, "The rescued mariners are the celebrities of the week and are holding court in the cafes. Their tale goes like this - Our boat was on the rocks being pounded to pieces in the rough sea. We thought our last hour had come when two Hawai ji ha: (Ships of the Air) flew round, and each let down a ladder for us to grasp (our training aerals!). They passed too quickly for us to lay hold, and after several attempts to gather us up they flew away on a southerly course. As everyone knows, it was a boat from our home port which eventually picked us up from the waterless island. We learned that they had heard of our plight, as these airmen in some way sent a message, when they tried to snatch us up. Indeed, these men of the air are resourceful men. We thank Allah the Merciful for sending them to us in our hour of need!".

Howard Alloway (Mem. No.309)

COMMUNICATIONS FLIGHT, HABBANIYA 1942-43

Among the wartime R.A.F. stations in Iraq, Habbaniya was probably the only place that offered a touch of civilised luxury, and was indeed a comfortable posting despite the searing dry heat that came with this 'jewel in the desert'. But the limited publicity given to this station has been restricted largely to the gallant defence of the camp by 4 F.T.S. during the siege of May 1941 when Hitler's attempt to annexe Middle East oil was foiled by a handful of trainee pilots backed up by a tireless ground crew. Some months later, however, another even lesser known unit was formed, rising from the ashes of bomb-scarred 4 FTS., but having since disappeared in the mists of time as if it never existed.

When I arrived at Habbaniya in April 1942 a large shell hole in a hangar door and a handful of airmen left over from the 'panic of 1941' as they called the siege, were the only reminders of this little-known war. The Oxfords and Audaxes which gave such a good account of themselves in 1941 were assigned to far less dramatic duties, and became part of the Communications Flight, a non-combatant unit that must have been quite unique in the R.A.F. of the day, at a time when Whitleys and Wellingtons, Blenheim and Battles, Hurricanes and Spitfires were doing battle in the skies over Europe. The Flight was unique if only by virtue of the mind-blowing weird assortment of aircraft that gave the interior of the hangars museum-like appearance rather than a fully active flying unit. A fairly average complement of airworthy aircraft in regular use would be three Tiger Moths, three Oxfords, two Audaxes, two Lockheed Hudsons and a Lodestar, three Vickers Valentias, two Blenheims, three

Gladiators, and a Fairchild Argus. In addition to these, making short term visits were a Vincent, a Wellesley, a Bristol Bombay, a Dragon Rapide, and a B17 Fortress, while others stopping by for refuelling and servicing on almost a daily basis were Bostons, Mitchells, Baltimores, Dakotas, and Hurricanes.

The main function of Comm. Flight was to transport passengers and freight between all R.A.F. stations in Iraq, Iran, the Persian Gild, Saudi Arabia, Aden, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Egypt, and Palestine. The Hudsons and Valentias were used on the longer trips and Oxfords and Blenheims the shorter runs. The huge Valentias were used also for parachute training jumps, and Oxfords for army co-operation exercises. Gladiators performed meteorological duties, one aloft daily at 4a.m., and Audaxes towed target drogues for ground gunnery practice, with the odd crop-spraying exercise thrown in. Tigers were for pilot training and the occasional joy ride by the C.O.

On long haul flights the crew consisted of a pilot, navigator, wireless operator, engine fitter, and airframe rigger, the pilot and navigator having S.N.C.O. or commissioned rank, while the others ranged from A.C.1 to corporal. Ground crews serviced and refuelled aircraft between flights away from base, loaded and unloaded freight as needed, and acted as cabin crew attending to passengers when aboard. Considering the varied nature of the tasks they performed, often using out-dated Heath Robinson equipment, it was small wonder that they could relate stories that would not seem out of place in the film, 'Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines', what with wheels-up landings, tailskid fracture, sandstorm disorientation, wood warping, stretched rivets, and sagging fabric. The versatility of both pilots and ground crew knew no bounds, and log hooks made interesting reading. One fitter logged 1200 hours, while another fitter and a wireless operator (now active members of 244 and K.S. Association) earned membership of the Caterpillar Club after jumping from a burning Comm. Flight Blenheim.

Losses of men and machines were thankfully few, but no less tragic, and empty beds were an occasional reminder that mistakes with elderly aircraft could seriously damage your health. But it was not all doom and gloom. Hard work and risks were sometimes lightened by moments of fun, and I defy anyone to take seriously three men holding hands, one grasping a rope attached to a leather bag that fitted over a Valentia prop tip. Someone yelled 'Go' and they ran like hell to swing the prop, which sometimes started the engine but mostly didn't. And during the slack moment, numerous ground crew up in a Valentia on air test, waiting for the pilot to trim it 'Hands off' and then walking to the tail to upset the trim.

Not having squadron status, no badge was issued and no place accorded in the history books. To all intents and purposes Comm. Flight never existed, and I sometimes wonder if the R.A.F. would admit to it anyway. But ask any crew member who took a vintage Valentia across to Heliopolis and back, 22 hours of stomach churning flight at 70m.p.h., and a week later took a Hudson to the same place via Shaibah, Sharjah, Aden, Mogadishu, Port Sudan, and Lydda, returning to do a target-towing stint over the lake in an ancient Audax. And for an encore, dropping trainee paratroopers at 300 feet from another Valencia. All this at temperatures up to 120 degrees (in the shade, if you could find any). Ask anyone who flew with Comm. Flight in 1942-43, but please, try to resist the temptation to say "pull the other one".

Alec Alder (Mem. No.26).

SEE YOU IN OCTOBER!

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James