



## 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



### Newsletter No. 30

Jim says, Belated New Year greetings to all our members from Don, Jim, Frances and Audrey. Also, many thanks for all the Xmas cards received. We could not possibly answer them all.

Sadly, since our October Reunion, we have a number of casualties amongst our members, (see below). We offer our deepest sympathy to their families. I have written to them individually on behalf of the Association

After Southport 1999, we now move onto Cosford 2000. We have a common bond with our Habbaniya friends, and I'm sure the day will be a great success. I am in liaison with Chris Morris (Secretary) about final details. An application form to attend will be in our next Newsletter (early August), together with other information. Judging from my correspondence received, we (244 & K.S.) will have a large turnout. In fact, quite a few members' who have never arrived at our Southport weekends, have signified their intention of attending Cosford. Please see information below.

In closing, may I mention the number of members who have not paid the current years Sub. I feel this may be due to you not having the usual reminder, as this present Newsletter is the first of the year. See Don's comments below

Finally, my usual plea for more Newsletter copy from our members. We cannot continue to send out a decent Newsletter without your articles, stories and anecdotes.

Don says, As you will see from the Balance Sheet for 1999 we are in a fairly sound position. Unfortunately some seventy of you have failed to pay your Subs which became due on 1st January 2000. So please spare a moment to write a cheque, and make your Treasurer happy! The Sub is still £5 per year, and as agreed at the AGM it is our intention to keep it at that figure, and adjust our activities accordingly (in regard to Newsletters etc.). I think the Balance Sheet is fairly straight forward and within our planned forecast. Jim will be putting in a note to all non-payers, just to remind you if you think you have already paid.

Hope to see you all at Cosford! Could members who think they will attend please let me know. We want some idea of the possible turn-out.

### THEY HAVE PASSED ON

Les Batty (mem. 56) Les was an armorer, and had many friends amongst our members who shared his trade. He served with 244 at both, Sharjah and Masirah. He attended our first three Reunions, but ill-health forced him to miss both '97 and '99.

Bill Quick (mem. 64) Bill was a Fitter IIE and was one of our original members. He attended our first three Southport soirees with his lady wife, but like Les above, bad health prevented his further attendance. He was a squadron member, and served at both Sharjah and Masirah.

Val Richards (mem. 169) Australia. Val served with 244 as second pilot with George Pert (mem. 168) on the Wellingtons off Masirah. I remember (Jim) flying with him whilst on detachment at Mogadishu. He did not attend our Reunions, but kept in close touch by letter.

Jim Swann (mem. 115) Jim was a Fitter IIA and served at both Sharjah and Masirah. He was one of our earliest supporters. He and his wife Sarah attended all five of our Reunions. Jim was notable by the fact that he

organised a Reunion of our PAIFORCE lads in Wolverhampton when over 30 bods turned up. This was long before the days of 244 and K. S.

### R A F HABBANIYA ASSOCIATION

Dear Jim,

I can now confirm the date for our joint reunion next year.

SATURDAY, 14th OCTOBER 2000

We run the reunion from 10:30 to 18:00hrs.

The facilities are excellent. The function suite is very large with all the facilities we need and a public address system with a radio microphone that everyone can hear! The bar is adjacent and is where we have our coffee, lunch and tea as well as using the bar!! While we have our AGM in the main suite I am sure you would be able to have yours in the bar before the NAAFI staff lay out the food for lunch. I think we took between 30 to 45 minutes for the AGM. I enclose a copy of the programme for our last reunion. We had perhaps too much in the formal programme giving perhaps not enough time for personal socialising. We did however, have to take advantage of oldie talks from Dudley Ryder because they were so important (on the revolution in 1958 and the finale evacuation and close down of Hab.).

We promulgate the reunion in our December and April Habbites and then enclose the application form with the August Habbites. Let me know the publication dates of the 244 & K.S. and I will make sure you have the form well in advance.

As the cost is only £10 per head and the deadline for the NAAFI catering only a week before it takes the pressure off having numbers a long time in advance. The security arrangements for the RAF Police do however make it preferable for us to have details a couple of weeks in advance. We can discuss the arrangements sometime shortly. It was a unanimous decision at our AGM to welcome 244 to a joint reunion and with so many members with common interests I am sure it is going to be a great success. Bring the boards along!

With best wishes - Chris Morris

PD.R.O'S (Remember?)

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Date 30.9.44

#### SQUADRON DETAIL

BY

WING COMMANDER W.H. HANKIN, D.F.C.  
COMMANDING 244<sup>th</sup> SQUADRON R.A.F.

DUTIES	30.9.44	1.10.44
Officer i/c Night Flying	S/Lr. Burton	F/O. Biggin
Duty Operations Officer	P/O. Leach	P/O. Hall
A. C. P.	W/O. Jones	F/S. Aaron
	(u/t Sgt. Lloyd)	
Relief Duty Pilot	Sgt. Haines	Sgt. Dodman

"A" Flight Duty Crew 30.9.44 "B" Flight Duty Crew

Cpl Baxter  
LAC Duncan  
LAC Banfield

Cpl Wilson  
LAC Jordan  
LAC Conway  
LAC Williams

1.10.44

Cpl Casson  
LAC Wilson

Cpl Walker  
LAC Murrell

AC Jones  
LAC Richardson

LAC Wright  
LAC Nuttall

30.9.44 Base Flight Duty Crew  
292 Cooper & 521 Topping  
1.10.44 536 Hannah & 407 White  
2.10.44 955 Sainty & 170 Crabtree

#### 46. TOUR EXPIRED AIRMEN - Identity Photographs

The undermentioned airmen are

To report to the Photographic Section at 07:30 hours on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct.

R. 95986 Cpl Larock	571449 LAC Osborne	1029064 AC1 Lawrence
1148664 LAC Carr	1314373 LAC Murrell	1157123 LAC Allen
1496410 LAC Granharn	1482988 LAC Hirst	1222768 LAC Woolford
1222767 LAC Worthy	1218083 LAC Lesadd	1222542 LAC McLean
1160644 LAC Moss	1213467 LAC Milburn	1348195 Cpl Ritchie
131580 LAC Harris	1040474 AC1 Davis	641055 Sgt Lomas
1120706 LAC Roberts		1373703 LAC Allan

J. King  
Flying Officer, Adjutant,  
No. 244 Squadron, R.A.F.

### WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MASIRAH

During the second World War RAF Masirah was extremely basic, as I am sure you will remember. After the war the Americans left and the RAF moved out of the Petrol Tin Camp and -into American staging post accommodation. There wasn't much of it, and tented accommodation had to be used when Shackleton bombers were detached to Masirah for the Jebal Akhdar campaign in Central Oman during 1957-59. Then, beginning in 1960, there was a huge building programme which lasted for about a decade. The reason for it was the new RAF Transport Command route to the Far East. A new staging post was built on Gan, one of the Maldivian islands to the south west of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Masirah was the last staging post before the long ocean crossing to Gan. After the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967, Masirah became even more important when the RAF concentrated in the Persian Gulf. RAF Sharjah and RAF Bahrain were also improved at that time. By the end of 1971 the British forces had withdrawn from the Gulf and the Far East. Gan was no longer needed so Masirah and Salalah became the only RAF bases east of Suez. Squadrons from the U.K. Germany and Cyprus went to Masirah for exercises, well away from old ladies complaining about the noise of low flying aircraft. But more important than this was the war against communist guerillas in the area around Salalah. It was a bit dodgy at Salalah where British personnel were assisting the Sultan in his war against the communists. RAF aircraft were not allowed to spend the night at Salalah, and were routed via Masirah. After the war was won at the end of 1975 there was no reason for retaining RAF bases in Oman. Masirah was sold to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) as a training base.

Many of the buildings at Masirah were destroyed or damaged by a cyclone in June 1977, only 2 1/2 months after the RAF had left. The place was patched up but still looked like RAF Masirah. In 1980 America C-130 Hercules aircraft used Masirah for their unsuccessful attempt to release their hostages from the Tehran embassy.

There was then another huge building programme which was mostly complete when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. The Americans once again moved into Masirah. There were a couple of C-130 Hercules squadrons taking supplies to Saudi Arabia, and KC-135 air to air refuelling tankers. They refuelled fighters and strike aircraft on the Saudi Iraq border, and also the B52 heavy bombers which were based at Diego Garcia in the southern Indian Ocean. So what is Masirah like now, nearly a decade later? I was there on holiday in December '99. There are two tarmac runways, long enough for any aircraft. They have parallel taxiways which can be used as runways if necessary. There are bomb-proof aircraft shelters which housed the SOAF Jaguar fighter bombers which were there for years. They had a microlight aircraft which was crashed and land yachts which they took with them when they left. There are now SOAP Hawks, two-seaters for training and single seater, lighter bombers. The flying training squadron is still there, equipped with Pakistani light piston engined trainers and Strikemasters which are a beefed up version of the RAF Jet Provosts which were used for training for many

years. These Strikemasters are due to be replaced by PC 9 turboprop trainers at the end of this year. There has been a rescue helicopter at the base ever since SOAP moved in.

On the black hills (behind where the Petrol Tin Camp was situated) there is a radar station and an underground operations bunker. Near to the site of the original jetty and next to the ruins of the second jetty, there is a new third jetty which extends out into deep water where supply ships and tankers can unload. Reverse osmosis is a cheap and efficient way converting sea water to fresh water. Both officers' and sergeants' messes have fresh water swimming Pools, and there are gardens in the accommodation and messes. The personnel are mostly Omani, but there are some British officers and SNCOs and personnel and Airwork Services Ltd. There are married quarters for the Omani servicemen, but the British live in the accommodation near the messes, a few accompanied by their wives. They have satellite TV and can telephone anywhere in the world. The Sultan permits alcohol to be sold in the messes, but it is strictly forbidden to pass it on to the local islanders. There are athletic tracks, cricket and football pitches, and tennis and squash courts. There are motor gliders for recreation, but unfortunately the horses have gone and the go-kart club has packed up. On the north beach there is a golf club between the water sports club and the BBC Eastern Relay Station which is on the north-east corner of the island. There are about a dozen British families there at "BERS" and a number of Pakistani employees.

The local village (more like a town now) is behind the black hills next to the sea. There are shops, banks, restaurants, petrol filling stations, etc., and a hospital. There is a power station and water desalination plant, and an hotel has recently been completed. Fishing is the main livelihood of the locals, and is very profitable. Ferries ply between the island and the mainland, taking refrigerated trucks of fish to the north. There are said to be a few millionaires among the local population.!

It's a very different Masirah from the one you knew.

C Richardson (mem. no.125)

### **244 SQUADRON RECORDS (SHARJAH)**

8/2/42 Signal received from SNOGP (Senior Naval Officer for the Gulf) giving instructions to locate and destroy enemy submarines in the Gulf of Oman. Heavy rain and low cloud prevented sorties at dawn. Two aircraft were kept in readiness carrying four 250lb anti-submarine bombs. The patrols were begun with Vincent aircraft. (As with 160 squadron the most common entry was No Enemy Aircraft Sighted. This could be the title for the book.) From time to time bombing, practices were carried out.

30/3/42 Signal received from Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf reporting submarines in the Gulf Oman and ordering dawn 'til dusk patrols.

Again, a series of pages record no submarines sighted.

22/4/42. 0620. One patrol was carried out by Sgt. Alcock, Sgt. Hemy and Sgt. Bridgborn. No submarines were sighted and the aircraft returned at 1100 GMT but was forced to land 15 miles north east of the aerodrome because of a petrol shortage. The pilot made a heavy landing and the aircraft was damaged. The aircraft was refuelled and flown off on the same day and after examination it was found that repairs could be carried out at the unit.

SHARJAH 7/6/42. One Blenheim carried out patrol duty. No enemy craft sighted. Three Blenheims carried out local flying. One Hudson crashed on landing. Crew of four sergeants uninjured Aircraft obstructing flying field Temperature 104°, humidity 59.

10/6/42. HRH Duke of Gloucester arrived aircraft. We refuelled and HRH had light refreshment. (He seems to have toured many areas in the Indian Ocean for encouraging the troops over the years.

4/10/42. P.O. McDonald, Sgt. Graham and Sgt. Ingham. While on patrol Cork sighted convoy PB4 consisting of 14 ships and 3 escorts. Co. 180 speed 8 knots.

This same convoy was escorted throughout daylight by three of our aircraft. It was composed of five large modern tankers, one cargo liner 12,000 tons, eight cargo ships 5-6,000 tons with escorts HMS "PANGKOR" and HMS "GERALD TOWN" Blenheim 7975 met convoy Co. 170 speed . knots in position 2540N 5710E at 0730 hours and escorted it to position 2520N 5710E at 1030 hours.

15/10/42. Two Bisleys flew to Jask and returned with stores and signals equipment. (First mention of Bisleys). For the next month or two the convoys continued to be escorted up the Gulf

22/10/42. A second sortie by Sgt. Chapple in Blenheim BA408 resulted from a submarine attack on one of our ships but nothing was sighted during search lasting 4 hours 20 minutes.

31/10/42. While on patrol Cork, Sgt. Brindle and crew on BA430 intercepted convoy at 0745 in position 2680°. Quion 10 miles. Catalina B. carried out PEEPING TOM anti-submarine patrol in daylight, alighting in position 2310N 6041E to examine ship wreckage believed to be from Ocean Vintage. Live locusts were seen on the water. Arrangements had been made for 244 squadron detachment record book and diary to be kept daily at Ras al Hadd

(1/5/43. Station cinema opened and was a large success.)

October has broken all previous records R2 flights reached a total of 526 operational hours and Sgt. Chapman probably sunk submarine. It is most satisfactory to note that in the excitement of our only sighting in over 1160 hours of searching the lessons of training were not forgotten and the attack which followed seems to have been a model. This incident, the climax of the squadron's work over six months, was a prelude to unprecedented operational activity throughout the month close escorts to convoys have passed to and fro with regularity of a shuttle service. But the lone presence of enemy submarines caused priorities of all convoys to rise whatever their composition. The record was five ships four escorts priority two and with them rose the number of sorties flown. Between 15th and 19th of the month base flight alone carried out 110 hours operational flying while on the 21<sup>st</sup> the flight total for the day was 80 hours. The rate of sickness among crews has been high and the burden on the increased effort has been borne by comparatively few, all of whom have welcomed the opportunity for extra flying. Our night flying hours have not been entirely without cost. There have been three engine failures resulting in forced landings. All of these seem to have been due to bearing failures. Fortunately there were no casualties.

An almost satisfactory month; the known presence of the enemy more indeed, the actual presence in the camp of a real German prisoner (picked up by the Navy after having been 28 hours in the sea) has been a spur to the efforts of air and ground crews enabling us to realise that we really are taking part in the same war as the others. The weather has at last enabled us to work hard and even play, without undue discomfort; while Sgt. Chapman's excellent performance has both provided a flip to moral which extends even to the maintenance men.

### **U-BOAT SUNK BY BLENHEIM V**

Sgt. Pilot Lewis William Chapman enlisted in the RAF in 1941, and was posted to 244 Squadron of 215 Group, Stationed at Masirah, he flew Bisley aircraft (Blenheim Vs).

On 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1943, operating out of Sharjah in EH404(0) with Sgts Bonyng and Murrell, he sighted and attacked a surfaced U-Boat U533. The U-Boat, captained by Kapt-Lt Helmut-Hennig, was heading into the Gulf of Oman to operate against tanker traffic, when Sgt. Chapman and crew attacked. The U-Boat was taken completely by surprise, and although Hennig dived, the four 250lb depth charges stove in the pressure hull. Two men, an officer and a rating escaped from the submarine without breathing apparatus. The officer died and the rating spent another 28 hours in the water before reaching land at Khor Fakkan, where he was rescued by HMS "Hiravati". The survivor, Gunther Schmidt was later entertained in 244 squadron's Sergeant's Mess at Sharjah.

Sgt. Chapman was awarded the DFM on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1943 for "His effort, brilliant execution worthy of great praise". The fact that he didn't know he sank her as post war records were to prove, nor did he live to see the end of the Second World War makes this story all the more poignant. In July, 1944, Lewis Chapman was a passenger on board a Dakota of 44 sqdn. SAAF, when it crashed into cliffs west of Resuit whilst attempting to land at Salalah. All 32 on board were killed, including seven men, from 244. Lewis Chapman was listed as P/O 179798 with seniority 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1944, and is commemorated on the Alamein Memorial to the Missing.

Footnote. Regarding the 'Dak' crash above, Jim was on Masirah at the time. The aircraft was returning from Asmara (in Eritrea) with leave personnel. When 'Rescue' arrived at the accident scene a short time later, they found all bodies had been stripped and robbed by the local population.

NB The above article appeared in the Blenheim Society magazine and was submitted by an Australian (ex RAAF,) named Hoey. We are presently trying to track this gentleman down.

***MARCH 2000***

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James