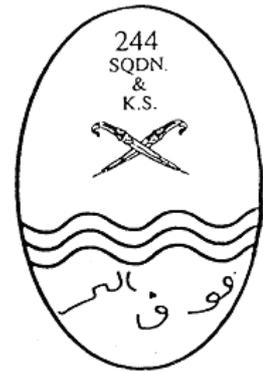




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 31

Jim says, It seems a long time since our last Newsletter but, as you know, it was decided at our last AGM at Southport '99 that, in future, only three Newsletters would appear each year instead of the usual four.

The reason for this was not expense, but the fact that we were not receiving decent copy. We must keep up a reasonable standard to make our Newsletters as interesting as possible. I keep asking for articles, anecdotes etc. from our members. The difficulty is we insist on material covering our days in PAI Force, and that's how it should be. So, please send in your stories. Don't be afraid, we have good sub-editors here.

We now look forward to 14th October, on which date our joint Reunion with the Habb Association will be held at RAF Cosford. Full details and booking form are attached herewith. Please book as early as possible. Any queries, ring Don or myself. From enquiries received, it would seem a higher turnout than Southport is very possible. Don and I look forward to meeting all our old attenders, as well as seeing some new faces.

Now, on a sad note, I have received news of the death of one of our early stalwarts, Les Jackson of Torquay passed away whilst visiting France. Several of you had connection with Les, as he produced that piece on the Duchess of Bedford convoy. Quite a few of you obtained a copy. Our sympathies go to his family.

In closing you will note that the theme of this Newsletter is 'How I joined 244'

See you at Cosford!

Don says, At the moment 244 & K.S. has 135 fully paid up members. Numbers are slowly decreasing, but all other WWII associations are suffering from the same loss, and we all know the reason for this. Our regular advert still appears on TV, but recruitment has seemingly dried up. This year has been most disappointing in regard to payment of annual subs, and quite a number of you have yet to pay. It is most important to get subs in. This has to be the final reminder. Jim will make notation on this newsletter to those who have not yet paid. It is very much regretted, but we cannot continue to send out Newsletters to those who have not yet paid.

Cosford looks like being successful with a large number of our 'Band of Brother' dignifying their intention of attending. See you there on 14th October.

NB. Cheques to be payable to "244 Sqn & KS."

JOURNEY TO 244 SQUADRON

In a previous Newsletter Don James wrote an interesting article describing his journey to 244 Squadron, then based at Sharjah.

Readers may be interested in a similar journey our crew, Tony Tubbenhauer (pilot) Gordon Hampton (navigator) and myself Bill Allan made leaving Nakuru (Kenya) on 9th February 1942 and arriving at Sharjah on 8th April.

On completion of our course at the OTU, we decided to take a few days AWL in Nairobi to say goodbye to friends. On Monday morning we learnt that our posting had come through and we were due to leave Nakuru at

6.45 pm. We managed to get on a train and arrived back at 6.00 pm. I think we jumped off the train at the railway level crossing near the R.A.F. Station. The Adjutant was not pleased!

Travelled all night by road to Kisumu and from there by Lockheed Loadstar to Khartoum for a 24-hour train to the river Nile where we boarded the Paddle Steamer "Lotus". The two day trip down the Nile to El Shallal was something to remember all your life.

Another, unpleasant, two day train trip took us from Cairo through Palestine (as it was then called) to Haifa and then by car to Damascus (Syria). The visual impression here was the number of olive trees and red "flanders poppies". After an interesting 16 hour trip across the desert in a "Nairns Transport" bus we arrived at the RAF Station in Habbaniya (Iraq) and were amazed at the standard of accommodation and food which was apparently still on "peace time" basis. We were very pleased to learn that we were to be attached to a Communications Flight here for 3 months prior to the posting to 244 Squadron. The flight consisted of Vickers Valentias! Providing transport to and from Cairo.

On 21st March Phil Main and I received our posting to Sharjah but only got as far as Shaibah where after a week found ourselves posted back to Habbaniya to await "new" aircraft for 244 Squadron.

Eventually we arrived at Sharjah after an interesting two months journey covering many countries and thousands of kilometres. The contrast between the Stations at Sharjah and Habbaniya was unbelievable!

Bill Allan, Australia. (Mem. No. 104)

MY JOURNEY TO SHAIBA/SHARJAH

I left Blighty from the Clyde about April '42, and after a hellish journey of six weeks on the troopship "Maliajah", we arrived at Durban. Where we stayed for three days. I never left the transit camp. I just stuffed myself the lovely bread, jam and fruit.

Then sailed to Bombay, just 24 hours ashore, but long enough to get gastro-enteritis from the Wog food or something. I sailed up the Gulf in the Sick-Quarters, and went ashore on a stretcher. Discharged from a Field Hospital to the Hell Hole transit camp at Shaibah (managed to get heat exhaustion there).

After what seemed ages, a gang of us were sent off back down the Gulf to Sharjah, where we waded ashore to what looked like a holiday camp. We were soon to find out it was not!

I was at Sharjah for 18 months. Our MT duties were fetching your water from the wells to the camp, ambulance, fire tender and ferrying engine parts etc., round the flights. I remember the M.O. Dr. Markham. We called him "Mad Markham". We were told he would zoom around the other ranks billets, burst in the doors, hoping to catch somebody in a homosexual act. He caught two of our drivers wrestling one day on the sandy floor. They were both naked and he thought he had a catch.

My main job was ferrying the wireless bods up the big sandy hill with the wireless transmitter on top. One had to drive at full speed to hopefully reach the summit. Duty driver task at night was driving to the Creek when a Catalina landed, and row out to ferry the crew in. My turn came one night and I couldn't row a boat for trying. Well, eventually I reached the impatient crew with shouts of encouragement from them.

One day my mate and I were driving over the desert when we saw a Blenheim crash down. We hastily jumped off our truck, armed with a small hatchet to rescue the crew. We hacked to break the Perspex with one eye on the fumes coming from an engine. We then realised the cockpit was empty. The crew had baled out some distance away. I caught both dysentery and malaria at Sharjah. Doc. Markham told me not to eat the cookhouse food or use the canteen. He said buy some limes and make a drink, "You will survive", he said My weight dropped from eleven to eight stone, so a party of us were sent by flying boat to Shaibah, and then by train to Terheran (then Persia) for convalescent leave.

Coming back to Sharjah I found that our drivers had procured half a dozen Primus stoves from the native shops, and were busy frying pancakes. Our billet sounded like a powerhouse. We never went to the cookhouse again. To this day I can cook a delicious pancake.

Bill Datlen (Mem. No. 280)

HOW I JOINED 244

Your two founder members of our Association both joined the Squadron more by accident rather than by design. Don left UK. in December 1941 en route to Singapore. Singapore was no place to be in early '42, so by some fortunate chance, Don lost his aircraft in Iraq, and the rest is history.

As for myself we left Portreath at 0324hrs. 4th November '43, in Wellington MK XIV (Leigh-Light) bound for 38 sqn. (Benghazi). Landed Rabat-Sale, (Morocco) at 1030hrs. Next day staged onto Castel Benito (Tripoli). After night stopover, took off for Benghazi.

Things now took a turn for the worse. A rather complicated story! Sufficient to say, we eventually crashed just off the runway and MP417 was a complete write-off. However, just a few bumps and bruises for the crew. We were now stranded at Castel B. News was that 38 sqn. was no longer interested in us (it was our aircraft they were after). As we were surplus to requirement in the Transit Mess at Castel B, they wished our early departure, and after a few days we were shipped out in a passing USAAF Dakota. We eventually arrived at that dreary camp, 22 P.T.C. Almaza (Heliopolis).

We languished there for nearly three months. If money was available an occasional visit (by tram) to the bright lights of Cairo was indicated. Did we succumb to the blandishments of the doorman of the Spitfire Club? "Come this way Sair. All our ladies are white like Queen Victoria, Sair. They all spik English like Liverpool". How could we resist?

However, on 5th February '44 we joined 244 detachment at Shalufa (Canal Zone) where 244 Bisley crews were converting onto Wimpey XIII's. Eventually, we finally left Shalufa bound for Sharjah, staging through Habb and Shaibah. On 10th March we left Sharjah en route to Masirah (0645hrs). This take-off was not without incident. As we left ground level, a large stream of 100 octane could be seen issuing from the starboard wing tank (the filler cap was no longer in position!) This meant a swift landing before disaster occurred and more delay. We finally landed on the Island just before dusk.

The news was that Masirah was still unfit for Squadron use, so next morning, onwards to Aden (Khormaksor), to stay until services on the Island were up to scratch. Before leaving, I had my first taste of Masirah cuisine. Not impressive (the turtle steak). I particularly remember my mug of brackish tea, liberally doused with condensed milk - not thirst quenching at all.

At Khormaksor we formed 244 detachment, doing convoy escort duties. It was here that the squadron suffered its first Wellington casualty, when one of our aircraft blew up in mid-air off Perim Island whilst on escort duty. On 11th April '44 we finally returned to Masirah Island. I could then feel like a full member of 244 Sqn.

Jim (Mem. No. 50)

I REMEMBER WHEN

I arrived on the Squadron with seven other new arrivals; we had just completed an enjoyable journey. I believe we were the last draft to travel on the overland route, we arrived in the morning of April 6th 1940, after the usual formalities we settled in to our billet D 11E east.

By the time we had got sorted out it was pack up time, so we had to wait until the next day to know our postings. In the morning we were told that we were all posted to S Squadron and duly reported in. Being green as grass we felt like spare parts the morning flew past and we went back to the billet.

A Cpl came to the billet and told us to report to the N.A.A.F.I. at 1930 hrs, we were all a bit peeved at having been picked on to work in the evening especially as no one else seemed to be involved, and none of the old hands could shed any light on the matter, however, an order had to be obeyed so we reported at the appointed time to find the place deserted, after a while we began to think we were being set up moaning to ourselves in true Air Force fashion, we were about to return to the billet when sliding doors at the end of the room were opened to reveal the whole Squadron, the C.O. Officers, N.C.O's and airmen sat at a long table laden with beer and food, we were overwhelmed we were welcomed by the C.O. and proceeded to have a memorable evening including an introduction to a wide range of boat songs.

That event was most affective in making us feel part of the team, and did a lot to dispel the mixed emotions when uprooted, transported thousands of miles and finished up in a strange and foreign land, especially in 1940, when few of us had any experience of long distance travel. In my case, I had only been in the R.A.F. nine months and just 18 years old, never having been further than 20 miles from home. With hindsight, it was a model of man management. Readers of the Newsletter will know that the C.O. at that time was the then S/LDR Howard Alloway (mem. No. 309). I served a further 25 years in the R.A.F. and never had a welcome like that, not that it could have survived with the war conditions.

Howard Alloway was a first class C.O. I can't remember anyone having a bad word to say about him, unlike his successor who transformed a happy station into a place of misery and discontent. But that is another story, and we were now in a very different situation strategically. The station strength was increasing fast and we were becoming a mixed service base with the Army well in evidence and added camps building up in the area. It was inevitable that our lives had to change.

One duty we ground crew detested was Airman of the Watch. It was a seven day duty and one had to remain in the watch office 24 hours a day apart from meals during working hours it was fine, always something happening to pass the time, the duty pilot was on hand and there was the usual flying all morning and the telephone was very busy. At cease work however the place was deserted and normally there was no more activity, and it was a lonely spot, the afternoon was alright siesta time unless disturbed by a signal indicating a visitor.

In the late afternoon the noise of the hangar cooling down was quite loud and the crash alarm later to become the air raid siren was situated on a wall outside the bedroom and in even a slight breeze it moaned incessantly.

The evenings were worst and seemed to drag on forever. Friends would come over occasionally and bring something to eat from the N.A.A.F.I. and that helped to make life bearable. Nowadays it seems strange to realise that here was no diversion no television, no radio even, nothing but home made diversions, there were not even many books available. I don't think paperbacks had reached us until the Americans arrived.

So I was on this duty it was mid afternoon I was sitting writing a letter when I heard an aircraft, looked up and an Airspeed Oxford was landing whether by accident or design there had been no notice of an arrival. It was too late to contact the duty pilot so I jumped in the pick-up truck and sped out to the now stationary aircraft unfortunately arriving in a cloud of dust that covered the visitor. I had left the office in a hurry and was hatless and shirtless. The visitor was a W/Cdr and he was not happy. He read my horoscope and was most unhappy because I was improperly dressed. He then asked me where the C.O. was. I replied he was probably in the mess. So making the best of a bad job the irate W/Cdr detailed me to take him to my leader although he didn't put it quite like that.

That was how I became the first at Shaibah to meet our new station commander, and to feel his wrath. Eddy Rose (Mem. No. 29)

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James