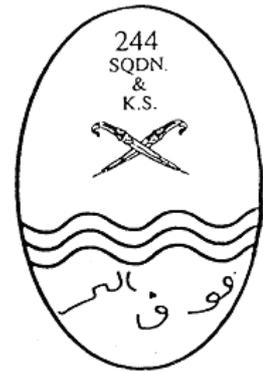




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 33

Jim says, a belated happy, healthy New Year to all our members. This is our 6th Reunion, in September, and bookings are slowly coming in (see Don below). For those members who have not studied our last Newsletter closely, I will repeat the formation. (Two of our members thought there were no more reunions. Another thought the venue would be Cosford). Cost of buffet and banquet is £34. The following hotels are usually used by our members:-

Scarisbrick Hotel.. 3 star 'phone 01704 543000
Balmoral Hotel 2 star 'phone 01704 544298
Carlton Lodge Guest House 'phone 01704 542290

If anyone wishes to book their own billets, I can arrange a copy of the 'Southport Tourist Guide' to be sent.

The year 2000 showed, as expected, a slow decline in membership. However, since the turn of the year, five new members have arrived, principally due to our advert on Channel 4. We are now at 150 membership.

At long last Colin Richardson's (mem. No. 125) book has come into print. I am enclosing a 'flyer' to members who served on the Island To those who wish a signed copy by the author, it would be best to contact Colin direct. His address is "Five Acres" Fulbeck Lowfields, Nr Grantham, NG32 'phone 01 100 272427. "Masirah - Tales of a Desert Island" contains a full rundown of 244 Squadron's activities on Masirah during WW2.

In closing may I make my usual appeal for your Gulf area experiences? The lack of Newsletter copy makes it hard to maintain a reasonable standard of articles etc.. I can see me having to make up some stories soon.

Don says, When we sent out the balance sheets last year we had 70 odd who had not paid their Subs. This year it is down to 60 odd, but of course we have lost some members, so it is about the same.. So please take a few minutes to write a cheque. As usual Jim will be making a note on this Newsletter to those who have yet to pay. We are working very hard to keep the Newsletter going, but we need your help with not only Subs but copy as well.

Jim is working very hard and recently he has drummed up five new members, and we are trying very hard to get them 10 the Reunion at Southport Talking of which, we are looking for more support. It may well be the last one, so please support us, and try to come. The old regulars are booking in, but we still need more to make it as usual, a highly successful affair.. Ring if help is needed.

SO WHAT WAS THE FATE OF SHARJAH'S LUCKY LAD?

In 1943 I was serving with 244 Squadron (Blenheim V) at Sharjah. Where we had a self-appointed camp mascot. A local lad about five or six years old, and known to everyone as Lucky.

A great favourite, he had the run of the camp. He was fed and, under protest, washed! He possessed a startling vocabulary for one so young. He was constantly kilted out with clean shorts and vests. Only to return the next day in even more tattered garments, and was an inveterate beggar of those ever popular cigarettes V's! In early 1944 the squadron, on converting to Wellingtons, moved to Masirah. Rumour had it that Lucky was smuggled

on to the boat, but was discovered before we sailed, and promptly returned to Sharjah. Can any of the readers of Air Force News continue the story, or did Lucky just become another Sharjah villager?

Jim Green (Mem. No. 20)

Subsequent letter in Air Force News

With reference to Mr Green's letter concerning the young 'Lucky' (see Air Force News). I enclose a photograph of the now 38 year old 'Lucky'. Real name Hassan Bin Ali taken outside the gates of RAF Sharjah.

Following the withdrawal of all his friends after the war, Lucky went to Aden to live. He stayed there for several years. He returned to Sharjah however, and settled down to marry (twice), and became the father of two children. He is now 38 years old, and is employed as a driver on the camp.

P/O C.A. Britton RAF Sharjah (circa 1975).



Sunday December 24th. Christmas Eve

3.30 p.m. British league football finals. All US. personnel invited to see the Championship match.

6.30 p.m. Protestant Service at the EM Clubhouse.

7.30 p.m. "Brother Rat" at the Base Theatre. Xmas music will be playing from 7-7.30 p.m.

11.30 p.m. Protestant Services. Midnight Mass and Xmas Carols at the RAF Camp --Padre Holme.

11.59 p.m. Catholic Service. Midnight Mass at RAF Catholic Chapel.

Monday 25th December. Christmas Day

7.30 a.m. Protestant Service at RAF Chapel

8.30 a.m. Catholic Mass at EM Club.

10.00 a.m. Protestant Service at EM Club

1.30 p.m. (Beach) Football and other events (All are invited) Lt. Kripke will make the bus available all day.

3.30 p.m. "Fancy Dress" Football Match. Comic Football game in which everyone plays

Loads of fun and everyone is invited to come out and enjoy the goings on.

Transportation leaves Mr at 3.15 p.m. for the Football grounds.

OR Open Volley ball game. All welcome to attend Lt. Youngman will conduct the proceedings
Or Open Softball game. All are urged to come Out and join in. Auspices – Lt. Speizer.
5.30 p.m. Horseshoe pitching. Darts, Ping Pong and Billiards will be available all day and night.
4-4.30 p.m. All Officers and enlisted men will pick up Xmas Beer Ration (Baksheesh) at Enlisted Men's
Clubhouse.
5.30 p.m. American Xmas Supper. All ATC Personnel, including Officers, will eat at 5.30 p.m. Whilst all
Detachments 110th AACs, 19th Weather, M.P.'s, Signal Corps and other 'Orphans' will graze at 7.30 p.m.
Entertainment will be furnished at both Messes.
7.00 p.m. British Airmen invite all personnel to an informal Buffet at the Airmen's Canteen. All Ranks invited.
10.30 p.m. American enlisted Men invite all personnel to an informal Buffet at the Airmen's canteen.
8.00 p.m. Smoking Concert at the RAF Airmen's Canteen. All ranks invited
10.30 p.m. American Enlisted Men invite all RAF Personnel to the Amerks Mess Hall. Officers of Both camps
are invited to an Informal Open House at the U.O. Officer's Mess.
American 'Hangover Day'
12.00 midnight Free drinks, aspirins and towels at Flanagan's Bar Room. Open all night
Tuesday 26th December British Boxing Day.
10.30 a.m. Sports and Carnival at the Hockey Grounds. RAF transport leaves 1015. Amek transport leaves
from Bus Depot at 1015.

I REMEMBER SHAIBAH APRIL 1941

The day our little war started the first we knew about it in our billet was the fact that our Arab billet boy failed to arrive. We soon found that there were no local labourers. We assumed it was a strike, but on arriving at work found that it was more serious than that. We still didn't get a full picture, just that we were going to be very busy. My memory of the exact sequence of events is a bit hazy, so the events may be out of sequence.

We were told to bring our bedding to the hangar. We put our mattress in a corner and that was it; we were about to be very busy. We dispersed the aircraft, which wasn't easy in the space available inside the wire. As usual all hands to push amid, much shouting and two sixing. In one instance most were pushing from the rear. It was getting dark when we hit a snag, we appeared to have hit an obstruction. The aircraft stopped, so amidst renewed shouting and the N.C.O l/c shouting rock it, we made a concerted effort rocking back and forth to no avail. There was a pause, in the shouting except for a lone voice at the front. We went to the front and found the problem. Nick Nicholls, a fitter was pinned by his leg under the Port wheel, and we had been using our combined efforts rocking the aircraft along Nick's leg. His ankle was pressed into the sand; the wheel had been travelling along his leg. It didn't take long to release him, but we had no transport to get him to sick bay. However, someone suggested loading him on the petrol bowser that was nearby. He was lifted on, none too happy, and the tractor driver set off Unfortunately with too much enthusiasm, because he did a smart turn and Nick fell off adding a bit more to his injuries. Luckily he recovered with no lasting problems.

I came across Nick in the sixties; he was working in a machine shop in Halifax. I learnt a few years ago that Nick had died.

Another episode in the early days of the phoney, was a need to camouflage nice silver aircraft. In later years having taken up aero modelling, I was amused to read a book on aircraft colour schemes detailing the precise marking systems. Because when the call came, all hands were again involved in the paint job. There was a snag, we soon ran out of paintbrushes and had to cope with fabric dipped in the paint. What a mess. As far as I remember there was no set pattern. All aircraft were about the same, but there was a fair amount on clothes and the hangar floor. What amused me was being told off because I hadn't feathered the edges thus making an even demarcation. I failed to see what difference it would make in the heat of battle. In any case it isn't easy to achieve a feathered edge with a piece of fabric dipped in dope... ..

When I read the post war experts defining colour schemes with such precision I wondered how many other units hastily carried out the work, with no time for precision.

I was reading back numbers of newsletters and an article in No.24, by Howard Alloway, (Shaibah's Phoney War) reminded me that there were some humorous moments among the serious outcomes.

I was awake one night in May 1941 and heard the Wellingtons taking off one after the other. I think three were on their way and the next one set off. Then suddenly there was silence. I thought it had aborted, but then there

was an explosion. I think I was the only one awake. The next few minutes were like something from a Carry On film. Someone put the lights on; someone else turned them off shouting, "It's an air raid". I got out of bed and put the lights on again telling anyone who would listen that it was a crash. Too little avail, two lads were under their beds. I think the crash alarm had sounded which probably accounted for the panic. One chap whose defence post was to man the machine gun on the roof of the Guard Room opened the door leading out to the road muttering "I had better get to the gun post", when there was another explosion. "Sod the gun" he shouted, and rushed to the opposite door where the slit trench was. Then he paused again, still muttering about his duty, and had another go at getting to the Guard Room and another explosion stopped him. I tried to get him to listen to the true facts to no avail. However duty won, and he dashed to his post, which as he found out was a wasted effort.

There was still a lot of pointless rushing about. I convinced a couple of my mates that it was a crash, got dressed and went outside. Still trying to stop the panic when the ammunition started to go off. That didn't help, someone said we are under ground attack. Some ether expert said, "when I was in France, its artillery fire they are heavy shells". We were all outside near the slit trench. I and my mates still couldn't get the crowd to listen. When a Sgt. told me to stop trying to be a hero and get down the trench. I protested, but was threatened with a charge, so had to join crowd in the trench, feeling a bit daft knowing the true situation.

E. Rose (Mem. No. 29)

THE STORY OF OUR U BOAT

When after their mauling at the end of May, Donitz recalled his U-boats from the Atlantic; it was only in this area that there was to be a temporary lull. Elsewhere, such as the American eastern seaboard and the Indian Ocean, U-boats were still operating successfully.

Early in June U-boat headquarters detailed nine U-boats and two supply U-boats to the Indian Ocean to relieve those already operating in that theatre. The outgoing U-boats had a rough passage with attacks from the Biscay patrols and American carrier-borne aircraft so that only five reached their destination. Early in September the new group fuelled from a tanker off Madagascar and dispersed to their operational areas.

In October there were two U-boats off the Arabian coast and one each operating off Bombay, Colombo and Mombassa. Their targets were independently routed ships sailing without escorts. These U-boat, and their forerunners had caused the British serious dislocation and it was for this reason that No 244 Squadron was at Sharjah. The squadron had been in existence, in the Middle East, since the end of 1940, and since October 1942 had been equipped with Blenheim V's-the Bisley.

The Bristol Bisley was a mid-wing twin radial engined aircraft with a single fin and rudder. In June 1935 the original Bristol Type 142 'Britain First' caused a flurry in official aviation circles when it actually flew faster than the latest fighter then produced. The design was developed by the Air Council into military bomber. Thus from a high-speed purely commercial aircraft was born the Blenheim which served the RAF extremely well in the early part of the war.

The Blenheim V appeared in late 1943, by which time the medium bomber was being replaced by the Boston and Mosquito. Differing from the earlier Marks in having a solid attack nose, it became known as the Bisley. Production models reverted to a new type glazed nose and operated for a short time in the Middle East, suffering heavy losses when attacking defended positions. The RAF airmen of 244 squadron, equipped with the Bisley, were therefore flying aircraft nearing the end of their operational life. Their base at Sharjah was under control of the Iraq and Persia Command.

The squadron was another of those that appeared to have been forgotten by those at home, and left to their own devices. They organised football tournaments, had a visit from the RAF Gang Show and flew occasional boring patrols over the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean. In mid-October the most important thing that appeared likely to happen was the impending visit of Josephine Baker, the international cabaret star. However, all was to change on Saturday the 16th when Sergeant L. Chapman took off at 1330 in C-Charlie, for yet another patrol.
*1943

The temperature was in the nineties as the Bisley took off from the shimmering airfield. No intelligence had been received about the location of a U-boat so it was something of a surprise when Chapman and Sergeants Bonymgre and Murrell, his other crewmen, suddenly saw a U-boat four miles away after they had been in the air for eighty minutes. The U-boat, a Type IXC46, was U-533, built at Deutsche Werft in Hamburg and launched

on 11 September 1942, under the command of Kapitanleutnant Helmut Hennig. It was on its second patrol and left Lorient on 6 July.

U-533 was on the surface making eight knots when first seen. The pilot lost height and manoeuvred his aircraft to such a position that he was able to make a head on attack. The U-boat quickly submerged but ten feet of the stern was still showing as the Bisley made its approach. Four depth charges were dropped, bow to stern, and two were seen to fall in the swirl. The Bisley circled the area and after five minutes the crew were rewarded by the sight of oil rising to the surface. As the oil patch increased air bubbles and two or three white objects were seen. The pilot also thought he saw a survivor. The Bisley was compelled to return, owing to a W/T failure. When it touched down at base at 1620 and reported the attack another Bisley was ordered up and was airborne within half-an-hour. Another aircraft was ordered up from Jask. However, failing light made observation difficult.

The AOC-in-C RAF Iraq and Persia signalled, "Delighted to hear your news -- anxiously await further details".

The further details emerged the following evening when news was received from Hormuz that the lone seaman survivor had been picked up after 28 hours in the water. The German was taken to Sharjah to 244 Squadron's base. He said that many seamen joined U-533 without having received any U-boat training at all. Later he was to say more about the outward passage.

"On our way out one destroyer depth charged us the whole night, always at short intervals, the W/T operator kept reporting "Destroyer coming nearer, right above us". Whenever she was straight above us the captain proceeded at maximum or three-quarter speed and turned off and then back to silent running. If she is right above us she can't hear us on account of her own propeller noises. The search gear made a sort of singing noise, -which is always deceptive when it sings like that. We sweated blood that night. How it rumbled, and we were then at a depth of 180 metres too. Finally when we got through to the Gulf of Aden, the officer of the watch said, "I feel like a new man now". Even he had never experienced anything like that; he too had sweated blood. He thought that was the end of, us; nearly all the lights were smashed. Which had never actually happened to us before; we were bombed from the air and depth charges. None of our fuses was ever affected before, but, this time they were all knocked out, although, on the first patrol all six tubes were put out of action as a result being depth-charged. All the upper deck torpedoes were smashed and all the tubes bent."

The seaman also said U-533 had come up the Arabian coast and made local purchases.

Unfortunately this German voice was the only note of variety to be heard at the base, for a later note recorded the extreme displeasure felt at the non-appearance of Josephine Baker, the cabaret star.

Some reference books still give the cause of sinking of U-533 as by Bisley aircraft E and H of 244 Squadron. The U-boat was sunk by Sergeant Chapman's C-Charlie. I believe the confusion arose because the serial number of the Bisley was EH404.

HELP Can anyone help Ralph Gadden? Does any member hold photos taken of the German survivor (Gunther Schmidt?) of the German U-boat after he arrived at Sharjah in 1943.
Ring Ralph at 01202 482420

MARCH 2001

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