



244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 34

Don & Jim say, This is our last Newsletter before our 6th and certainly our last biennial Reunion on Thursday and Friday 20th & 21st September next. Booked and paid up arrivals now total 72. It is now time that final payment should be made for cost of Buffet and Dinner. As stated previously £34 per person covers both nights (£21 pp dinner only). Last day for payment is Monday 13th August. Cheques to be made payable to "244 Kindred Spirits. Assn." Send to Don James.

Will those member's who have booked their own accommodation elsewhere than the Scarisbrick please let Jim know where they are staying. We need to know this for the distribution of our personal envelopes. Other locals arriving, can pick up their personal envelopes on arrival at the Barker Suite. (Any doubt ring Don or Jim).

Final information for Southport 2001.

Thursday 20th September in Barker Suite (Scarisbrick Hotel).

Bar opens 6 p.m. Sherry Reception. Photo Call 7.45 p.m. Buffet served 8.15 p.m.

Friday 21st September. Morning A.G.M. Time to be announced. Evening (Barker Suite). Bar opens 6.00 p.m. Sherry Reception..

Dinner at 7.00 p.m. Followed by dancing and our usual self inflicted Floor Show. Encls Midnight. Hoping for our usual 'cracking' time

This year as usual, is disappointing for the late payment of Annual Subs. Quite a number of members have yet to pay.

This has got to be the FINAL REMINDER. There is a notation on Newsletter to those who have not yet paid (NB. Cheques to Don payable to "244 Sqn & Kindred Spirits Assn.")

As regards present membership. I make note in Newsletter No 31 (June 2000) that; at that time our paid up membership was 135. Surprisingly enough, even with fifteen members still yet to pay, our paid-up membership stands at 133 today. This is due to twelve new members joining since January. (Where do they come from?). Have you ordered Colin Richardson 's book "Masirah, Tales from a Desert Island"? Some of you have already done so, and all agree that it is a 'cracking' read Not just tales of the War years, when most of us were stationed there, but both pre-war and post-war periods' up until very recent times are well covered. Cost (24.95 plus £.2.50 p.p. (Colin can be contacted at Five Acres, Fulbeck Lowfields Nr. Grantham.. NG32 3JD

In closing, let me remind our 'early birds' that we, Don, Jim, Francis and Audrey, will be holding court in the Baron's Bar, Scarisbrick Hotel from 1730hrs on WEDNESDAY 19th SEPTEMBER. Hoping to meet friends old and new. NB. Both Don and Jim will be on holiday during the period 3rd September to 15th September.

RAF Station SHAIBAH – Notes on Outstanding Events in its History

Shaibah had its origin in the Anglo-Iraq treaty of June 1930. At the end of the First World War Mesopotamia was under British military occupation and in 1920 Great Britain accepted from the league of Nations a mandate over the territory. From 1921 Mesopotamia became known as Iraq and in December 1927 Great Britain recognised her independence under that name. In June 1930, a new treaty was drawn up between Great Britain and Iraq as equal and independent states, under the terms of which Britain was permitted, in addition to other concessions, to construct and use two air bases, one in the Basra area, the other at a place to be

selected West of the Euphrates. The base in the Basra area was sited at Shaibah, and that on the Euphrates at Habbaniya. Forces for their protection were recruited from local Iraqi and Assyrians and under the command of British officers. were. formed into an organisation known as the Iraq Levies.

Of the two bases, Habbaniya was to be the more important and the headquarters of the British Air Command in Iraq. It was the intention to make it in all respects a model station, and to provide it with such facilities as would compensate for the shortcomings of the country and the climate. Against this, Shaibah was merely another R.A.F. base, no more and no less, and very little different from all the other R.A.F. bases scattered over the world. The years from Shaibah's completion to the outbreak of war in 1939 were uneventful. There were some local operations in which the R.A.F. co-operated with Iraqi forces in the settlement of tribal differences, but the main importance of Shaibah, as of Habbaniya, lay in forming a link on the air route to India and the East. Some re-organisation took place when a Station Headquarters was formed at Shaibah on the 18th September 1940, under the command of Squadron Leader H. V Alloway and "S" Squadron was renamed No. 244 Squadron and moved there from Habbaniya.

Meanwhile, though the life of the R.A.F. was uneventful, the life of Iraqi politicians was not. Over the years there were a number of political adjustments and aircraft of the R.A.F. were several times employed to carry to safety outside the country, individuals whose continued presence in Iraq would have been as unwise from their own point of view as it was undesirable from everyone else's.

King Ghazi I, who had succeeded his father Faisal in 1933, was killed in a motor accident in April 1939. He left to succeed him a son nearly four years old, who became King Faisal II under the regency of his uncle, H.R.H. the Emir Abdulla Illah. At that time the Prime Minister was Nuri Said, a politician of long experience who was reasonably pro-British in outlook. However, in March 1940, Nuri Pasha resigned and the Regent invited Rashid Ali Al Gailuni to take his place. Rashid Ali had a considerable and varied career as a politician behind him, extending from office as Minister of the Interior to arrest and deportation as undesirable. For some years he had been in close communication with German interests and the wide dissemination of Axis propaganda and influence in Iraq since 1933, was largely the result of his efforts. From the time of his assuming office in March 1940, his activities in that respect were intensified. An Iraqi Youth Movement (closely similar to the German organisation) existed and newspapers were subsidised to present German views. In January 1941, several Ministers resigned and were replaced by pro-Axis sympathisers, but by the end of the month the political situation had become so confused that Rashid Ali resigned. From that time he conspired with four Generals of the Iraqi Army, known as "the Golden Square" and, backed by German money, seized power on 3rd April 1941, proclaiming himself "Head of the National Defence Government". The Regent lost no time in moving from Baghdad to Habbaniya, where he was flown to Basra and put aboard H.M.S. "Cockhaver". Rashid Ali began to stir up anti-British feeling and in this he was able to secure some support by reason of the reverses which British forces were suffering elsewhere. A British Army was withdrawing from Greece; another was being forced back from Cyrenaica, where Rommel's white charger was being groomed, the first of many times, for the streets of Alexandria. In this rising tide of defeats, the route to India became more and more a lifeline upon which hope of eventual recovery depended. For the preservation of that route through Basra the security of our forces in Iraq had to be maintained.

For responsibilities so wide, our strength in Iraq was not large. The only units of the R.A.F. were No. 4 Service Flying Training School at Habbaniya and No. 244 (Bomber) Squadron equipped with Vincent's, at Shaibah. The aircraft of No. 4 S.F.T.S. were Audaxes, Gordons, Oxfords and Gladiators, and of these 84 were capable of being adapted for operational use, though all but 10 were of obsolete or purely training types. Apart from these aircraft the RAF. was equipped with an Armoured Car Company of 18 vehicles at Habbaniya and seven companies of the Iraq Levies. In comparison, the Iraqi Air Force comprised of seven Squadrons, a Flying Training School and Aircraft Depot. The total serviceable aircraft of the Squadrons was 60 machines, including Audaxes, Vincents, Gladiators, Breda 65's, Northrop 8A 's and Savoia 79'a. Except for the Vincents of No. 244 Squadron and 9 Gladiators and 1 Blenheim at Habbaniya, the machines of the Iraqi Air Force were superior in performance to those of the R.A.F. In addition, the Iraqi Army, although not large, was reasonably well equipped with artillery and armoured vehicles.

The dangers of the situation had not remained unnoticed by the British Command, either in the Middle East or at home, and a convoy carrying 20 Infantry Brigade with ancillary troops from Karachi to Malaya was diverted to Basra. It landed there on 18 April 1941, and although Rashid Ali had expressed no disagreement, it was thought prudent to provide air cover over Basra while disembarkation was taking place. This task was carried out by Vincents of No. 244 Squadron from Shaibah. The landing passed off without incident.

It seemed that, in the event of any deterioration in the situation, Habbaniya, by reason of its importance and location, would form the object of a first attack by the Iraqi. The station was situated 50 miles West of Baghdad on the bank of the Euphrates between the river and Habbaniya Lake. Construction of Habbaniya had been

completed only in 1937 and in April 1941, no line of communication was established to Basra. The station would therefore be forced to rely upon its own resources in an attack. Any communication would necessarily be by air and for this purpose Shaibah was selected to form an advance base to support Habbaniya. A supply sub-depot was set up at Shaibah, petrol stocks were increased and all reserve rations were transferred there from the Supply Depot at Basra. 6 Audax and 4 Gordon aircraft were transferred from Habbaniya to strengthen the station's defences and on 17th into Shaibah came the first of a number of Douglas and Valentia aircraft of No. 31 (Transport) Squadron bringing Men of the Kings Own Royal Regiment from Karachi. In the following week, a total of four hundred troops landed at and were ferried forward to Habbaniya.

While these preparations were in hand at Shaibah, similar measures were being undertaken at Habbaniya. A request was sent to G.H.Q. Middle East for aircraft reinforcements, and 6 Gladiators and 1 Wellington all that could be spared were despatched to Habbaniya.

A further troop convoy was expected to arrive in Basra on 28th April and both the British Ambassador and the A.O.C. Iraq anticipated that its arrival might be the occasion for a hostile demonstration by the Iraqi. This belief was strengthened when Rashid Ali announced that no more British troops should land in Iraq until those already there had passed out of the country. In spite of this, it was decided that the situation made the landing of the troops essential, and it was proposed to ignore these reservations on the part of Rashid Ali and disembark them at Basra. Air and naval escort was provided the convoy up the Shatt al Arab into Basra, and aircraft from Shaibah patrolled overhead.

And we all know what happened after that!

Uplifted from Public Office records.

I REMEMBER WHEN S

We were still S Squadron at Habbaniya, mid 1940, I and a lot more Riggers were assembled armed with needles and lots of thread packed in our small kits boarded a Valencia bound for Mosul. On arrival we were told that there had been a bad storm and a hail storm was the worst seen for years. The crews of the Vincent Detachment said the hailstones were as big as golf balls, this we took with a pinch of salt of course until we were shown the damage. Our normal experience of fabric repairs was limited to minor damage limited to small tears, the damage we were faced with was quite staggering. The hailstones were of sufficient size and weight to have passed through top and bottom mainplanes and tailplanes, and there were plenty of them. The tears were not confined to simple damage, but irregular shapes. It kept us very busy, I think there were about 15 of us sewing away it certainly sharpened up our fabric repair skills.

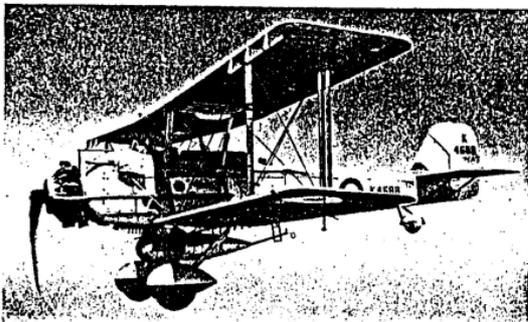
We were also aware that the storm was so fierce that several sheep were killed by the hailstones.

Eddy Rose (mem. No.29)

OUR U-BOAT by Ken M. Igglesden. MBE (mem. No. 4)

The day that Sgt. L. Chapman, DFM and his crew sank the German U-boat. I was flying as Wireless Operator doing an Anti-Sub sweep. My pilot was Sgt. David Illenden (deceased) and P Sgt. Lawrie (Pop Fenwick) was our Navigator. After doing our trip we landed at Jask. We were to stay the night and the following day were to do a Close Escort to a Convoy taking off at first light. Upon landing we were told that one of our Aircraft had attacked a U-boat and we were refuelled as soon as possible (by hand), and we took off at 1720- hours. We went to the position we had been given and immediately saw the oil slick. We took photos, I can't be sure if it was me or Lawrie. They came out fine and many years I had a copy. We were flying for an hour and when we returned Jask it was dark and the Ground Crew had lit petrol tins right down the runway and so I had my first entry to Night Flying just 15 minutes. I enclose a photocopy from my Log Book showing the date, 16th October 1943, and also a note confirming that the Royal Navy had picked up a survivor

| Date | Hour | Aircraft Type and No. | Pilot | Duty | REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.) | Day |
|----------|------|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--|-------------------|
| 6-10-43 | 0530 | GISLEY BA426 | JWT. ILLENDEN | SHIPPING LANE | SWEEP to SHARJAH | 3-35 |
| 14-10-43 | | BA428 (NOT MOD.) | " | LOW LEVEL | BOMBING EXERCISE, SEAMARKER | 3-30 |
| 15-10-43 | | BA428 (NOT MODIFIED) | " | LOW LEVEL | BOMBING EXERCISE, SEAMARKER | 3-40 |
| 6-10-43 | 1415 | BA944 | " | A/S | SWEEP to TASK | 2-25 |
| 16-10-43 | 1720 | BA944 | " | SEARCH FOR | ATTACKED, SUBMARINE | 4-5 |
| 17-10-43 | 0515 | BA944 | " | SEE BELOW - CLOSE | (ATTACKED) AND SUNK BY SGT. CHAPMAN, R.F.M. CONVOY ESCORT | 4-25 |
| 20-10-43 | 1430 | BA935 | " | A/S | SWEEP TO TASK | 2-20 |
| 21-10-43 | 0545 | BA935 | " | CLOSE | CONVOY ESCORT | 4-50 |
| 26-10-43 | 1258 | BA936 | " | SHARJAH | TO BARRAIN w/ft water | 2-25 |
| 27-10-43 | 0815 | BA936 | " | BARRAIN | TO SHAIIBA | 2-05 |
| 28-10-43 | 0500 | BA936 | " | SHAIIBA | TO HARBANIYA | 2-05 |
| 17-10-43 | | | | SUBMARINE CONFIRMED SUNK BY | R.N. - 1 SURVIVOR PICKED UP | TOTAL TIME 149-15 |



Vincent (K 4688) of No. 207 Squadron. (Charles E. Brown Photo.)

Vickers Vincent

In 1934 the Air Ministry decided to adopt a modified version of the Vildebeest, to be known as the Vincent, as a replacement type for the Wapiti and Fairey III F, which had been in service with the General Purpose squadrons of the R.A.F. overseas for a number of years. This decision followed the successful conclusion of extended trials with a modified Vildebeest (S 1714) with the R.A.F. in the Middle East.

The Vincent was basically similar to the Vildebeest, but carried a long-range fuel tank in the place formerly occupied by the torpedo, increasing the range to 1,250 miles, a message pick-up hook for Army Co-operation work, and much special equipment necessary for an aircraft operating in Iraq and similar climates. The first production-type Vincent (K 4105) was actually a converted Vildebeest II and made its first public appearance at the R.A.F. Hendon Display of 1935. From July 1934 to October 1936 total Vincent production for the R.A.F. (including Vildebeest conversions) was 197.

Vincents entered service with the R.A.F. late in 1934, replacing Fairey III F's in No. 8 Squadron at Aden. In Iraq the Vincent supplanted elderly Wapitis in Nos. 55 and 84 Squadrons and in India Wapitis of No. 31 Squadron.

In April and May of 1937 five Vincents of No. 47 Squadron, accompanied by two Valentias of No. 216 Squadron, took part in one of the R.A.F.'s regular training flights from Khartoum to West Africa and back. Until the arrival of the Wellesley and Blenheim monoplanes, the Vincent was one of the R.A.F.'s key types in the Middle East and it did a great deal of hard routine work. A few Vincents remained in service after the outbreak of war and the type was in action with No. 244 Squadron in Iraq as late as 1947.

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SQUADRON ALLOCATIONS

Overseas: No. 5 (India), No. 8 (Aden), No. 27 (India), No. 28 (India), No. 31 (India), No. 45 (Egypt), No. 47 (Egypt), No. 55 (Iraq), No. 84 (Iraq), No. 207 (Sudan), No. 223 (Nairobi) and No. 244 (Iraq). No. 1430 Flight (Sudan).

TECHNICAL DATA (VINGENT)

Description: Three-seat general purpose. All-metal structure, fabric covered.

Manufacturers: Vickers (Aviation) Ltd., Weybridge, Surrey.

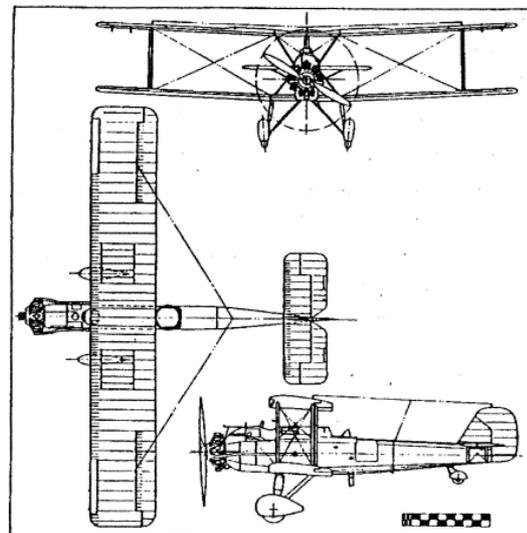
Power Plant: One 660-h.p. Bristol Pegasus IIM3.

Dimensions: Span, 49 ft. Length, 36 ft. 8 in. Height, 17 ft. 9 in. Wing area, 728 sq. ft.

Weights: Empty, 4,229 lb. Loaded, 8,100 lb.

Performance: Maximum speed, 142 m.p.h. at 4,920 ft. Initial climb, 765 ft./min. Range (normal), 625 miles; (maximum), 1,250 miles. Service ceiling, 17,000 ft.

Armament: One Vickers gun forward and one Lewis gun aft. Bomb-load, 1,000 lb.



60th ANNIVERSARY BATTLE OF HABBANIYA

About mid-April, I received a letter from the Secretary of the RAF Habbaniya Association as follows, "Dear Habbite, I am writing to you as it appears you were at Habbaniya during the Rashid Ali siege and the battle of May 1941. If you were at Habb at that time, then you are invited to a parade in Lancaster. This is being dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of that heroic and vital action. The "Kings Own Royal Regiment" who were flown into Habbaniya to help defend the Camp, have now been incorporated in the "The Kings Own Royal Border Regiment". The Lancaster Branch of their Regimental Association usually parade on the first Sunday of May, and this year they have decided to especially mark the 'Battle of Habbaniya'.

Any RAF veterans of the Battle, who are able, and willing to attend the Parade will be very welcome. If you are able to attend, please contact the organiser, Major J.S. Byrne."

After reading through it a few times, and appreciating their thought in inviting us, and of course checking up on an old almost unreadable diary (written in pencil) no Biro's in those days! Just to make sure I had not been at Habb at that time. (Memory getting a bit faded now you know) Well, sure enough there it was in 'black and white'. So, as there was no doubt that I fully complied with the criteria required, I then contacted this Major Byrne for further 'gen'.

Following the instructions in his reply, I eventually arrived at the assembly point on 6th May. Feeling a bit washed out actually, having left Otley at 7.30 a.m., it was now 11.30 a.m. Being a diabetic, a cup of tea and a bite of something was long overdue. This was put right by a visit to Woolworth's Snack Bar, open on a Sunday!! Then back just in time to "fall in" with the Parade.

In the meantime I was joined by other RAF 'Bods' maybe eight or nine, but as far as I could make out only three of us were 'genuine veterans'. The others were obviously 'gate-crashers'. I haven't a clue as to why they came to be there. By the way, I didn't know either of the other two. One came from Blackburn, the other, from Market Drayton. Both were well past 'marching days'. So we, together with a number of other dignitaries were taxied down to the saluting dais at the Town Hall. Then, afterwards, taxied back to a Club in the town centre that had been hired for the day, especially, for the luncheon and hospitality that was laid on for us all.

What, a reception the Army lads gave us. They couldn't do enough for us. You'd have thought it was us who had relieved them from a rather 'sticky situation', instead of it being entirely the other way around. By the way, this was the first time I'd ever heard of the events that took place at Habbaniya during May 1941 as 'the siege and battle of Habbaniya'. As such it is recorded (and rightly so) in the annals of the 'Kings Own Royal Border Regiment' as a memorable and heroic victory. That as events showed, proved to be the turning point and ultimate victory for us in WW2.

Thus it was over 60 years later, there was I, thankfully well, and able enough to join the, the 'Kings Own Royal Border Regiment' in a truly remarkable and enjoyable day at Lancaster. Towards 5.00 p.m. after a real good 'simple lunch' of meat and potato pie and peas, scrumptious it was. Chatting to Privates, Majors, Brigadiers, you name 'em, everyone very, very sociable, the afternoon ended with an announcement. A presentation would be made to the 'veteran' who had travelled furthest to attend the ceremony. This fell to our newfound friend from Market Drayton, a Mr Eric Hale (M/T driver) who was at our table. When Eric went forward to collect his award, to say he was close to tears is putting it mildly, all three of us were the same. I know I had a tear or two trickling down. It was a beautiful solid silver plate, about six inches diameter with 'K.O.R.B.R.' crest etched on the face. Around the rim was engraved '60th Anniversary of the siege and battle of Habbaniya Iraq 1941'.

What a lovely gesture that was. This was something that Eric and his family will treasure for years. So ended a truly, happy, and enjoyable day.

Bob Norcott (mem No. 39)

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER !

JULY 2001

Jim Heslop
(Secretary & Supplies)

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham
(President)

Don James
(Treasurer)