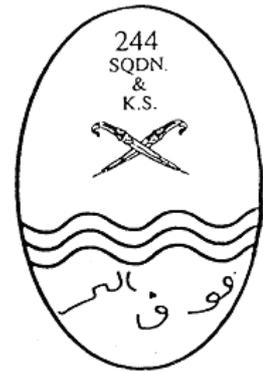




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 35

Members who attended Southport 2001

Bob Bolton – Northumberland
Tom Booth – Uckfield
John Broadbent - Baildon
Fred Cropper - Southport
Harry Dawson - Doncaster
Ralph Gadden - Christchurch
Bill Greenwood - Dover
Bert Hartley - Bolton
Harry Hardie - Bearsted
Jack Hill - Weybridge
Jim Heslop - Southport
Darcy Huntriss – Mold
Don James – Southport
Bob Knox – Alva
Eddy Leicester - Stoke

Eric Luckner - Lymm
John McCormack - Formby
Hector McKinnen - Southport
Ron McDonald - Warrington
Chris Morris - Walsall
Jeff Mellor - Ashton-U-Lyne
Bob Norcott – Otley
Ben Nunn – Stroud
Colin Richardson - Grantham
Stan Roberts - Southport
Jack Sharing - Cumbria
Frank Sheppard - Wallington
Alan Summerbell - Bexley Heath
Charlie Wakeford - Bexley Heath
Bill Westwood - London

Jim says, Well, it's over. Another successful Reunion. However, it was sad to see our depleted numbers. Many of our old supporters, for one reason or another, could not make the trip. Forty-seven arrived for our Buffet Night (twenty-seven were members). Numbers increased to sixty-six for our Banquet Evening. This number was made up by our friends from the local branch of the Aircrew Association. Nevertheless, things went with a swing (as described below). This will be our last Reunion to be held here, but the Association will keep going as long as Don and myself are able. Surprisingly enough, membership has risen (145). Another two lads this week!

What Happened? Buffet evening commenced with our usual sherry reception and get together followed by a reading of an address by our president Ronnie Rotherham. Our photo call was made for our gallant 26. (Copies of the photo are still available - £7 inc. postage. Buy one as a souvenir of our very last Reunion. Names of those thereon will be shown). The Buffet was now laid on. As usual, an excellent repast.

Chris Morris then followed on with his usual epidiscope show. This was well received, as it came over as a history of 244 Squadron. The evening ended with a video of 1937 vintage. It showed the night stopover of the old HP42 airliner at Sharjah fort. Of course the main topic of the evening was the talk of old times and the meeting of old comrades.

Friday morning and our Biennial General Meeting was held -- reported elsewhere.

The evening commenced in the Isherwood Suite (our usual venue). Dinner was our usual repast of' roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and all the trimmings, and much commended. As on previous 'do's' wine was most plentiful.

The Cabaret (?) now started. Led off by 'Sweet Somershire', and followed by our anthem 'Shaibah Blues', sadly for the last time in public, but our lads joined in with gusto! Bob Norcott gave his party piece 'The Siege of Habbaniya'. His mate Eddy Leicester did not, on this occasion, give us 'She's my little Gyppo Bint', but gave us other choruses. Bob Bolton gave us anecdotes and a homily. D'arcy Huntriss delighted the audience with 'Albert and the Lion in Sharjah'. Chris Morris kept things moving with popular songs with his guitar accompaniment. All this was interspersed with dancing and the odd song by yours truly.

The evening drew to a close with 'Now is the Hour' and 'Auld Lang Syne'. We have had many commendations about the event. Don and I feel that our work was appreciated.

Don's Report on the A.G.M.

- 1 The Secretary opened the meeting with a review of the last ten years. He thanked the members for their support with copy for the Newsletters, but reiterated that future issues depended on the continuing flow copy.
- 2 The Treasurer reported that the financial situation was very satisfactory. As far as the Reunion was concerned he mentioned that, at the last meeting at Cosford, it was agreed to keep cost down as much as possible. Also, that it would be subsidised to offset the expected lower attendance. Actually twenty-nine members booked in for the Friday dinner. The minimum number required was made up by wives and friends.
- 3 It was agreed that the annual Subs remain at £5. Forty-one members have already paid for 2002, and fifteen for 2003. Thank you very much. For the rest, I like to remind you that 2002 Subs are due on 1st January 2002.
In answer to a question from the floor about the Newsletters, we stated that it was the intention to try and maintain these at three Newsletters per year, depending on the cash situation, and to be reduced to two if necessary. As the Secretary previously said, keep the copy coming in.
- 5 A further question enquired if 2001 was definitely the last reunion. As everyone could see from this years turnout, the numbers were not there, and in the future could be even less. So this is the last one, which we are glad to say finished on a HIGH!
- 6 We would like to wish all members, their ladies and their families a very HAPPY XMAS and a very HAPPY and HEALTHY NEW YEAR from Jim, Don, Audrey and Frances.

A POST-REUNION LETTER

Dear Jim,

We spoke briefly about the story attached when we were together at Southport recently, I hope that you find it interesting enough to include in the Newsletter, I suppose there are many anecdotes in all of us but I reckon we feel that they are not interesting to other people.

There have been many times when I have thought about those far off days and wondered whether my memories have been imagined-, as no-one else seems to remember them-us last week when the good Doctor was showing Slides. I was surprised to see one of a Heinkel from Mosul left behind after the Raschid Ali affair. It was brought down to Habbaniya by 56 R.S.U. and I was one of the fitters who removed the engines to be sent to Cairo A.H.Q. for examination. We worked at night in the hangars accompanied by many flying insects including some fine specimen of Praying Mantis sitting looking at us. It was one of the last jobs I did before joining 244 Squadron. It was then that we realised that the Germans were exceptional engineers- the engines were a sight to behold-but they had not had the wit to tropicalise them-to protect them from sand etc. and we found nothing wrong with those engines except that they had sand in the petrol.

Sorry for the demise of the re-unions-but like you I think they had run their course and I believe what we agreed was right. I am sure most of us will keep in touch until the end-but getting about is becoming increasingly difficult. I wish you both well and look forward to a continuation of the Newsletter.

NB. Tom's story will appear in our next issue.

Tom Booth (mem. No:59)

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO WIMPEY?

I arrived in Salalah in September 1944, having served in Egypt and the Western desert.

My first thoughts were, "This must be the little bit of heaven that fell from out of the sky one day", not in the ocean hut on the edge of it. I was given a bed in the hut along with the 8 Squadron (I know it's a dirty word Jim) boys. My bed was alongside a lad from Cleveleys near Blackpool, by name of Norman Baker, but always referred to us "Darkie". I noticed that on his bed lay a smooth-haired terrier, who I found out answered to the name "Wimpey", (no prizes for guessing the reason why).

Wimpey was very popular with the airmen at Salalah, but not very popular with the natives, he would chase after them jumping up at them barking and snapping with the wallah shouting "Wimpey mcnoon". Wimpey was a constant companion of Darkie, they went into the NAFFI not run by the NAFFI, but by Bob who had another job hut I never found out what the job was.

They went down to the Flight where Flight Sergeant Wiggins was i/c, he addressed everyone as "ducks", a cockney saying I understand. He seemed to carry the world on his shoulders, but I suppose the responsibility of the servicing of 8 Squadron aircraft would affect some people more than others.

When Darkie went sick Wimpey went with him, and Vic the corporal in charge was a dog lover, he also to put it mildly enjoyed a drink. We never went to see Vic if we were "off colour" before mid morning when he had his first drink, and his hand had steadied.

Wimpey's favourite visit was to the canteen where a kind west countryman whose name escapes me (let's call him Ted) always had a few scraps for ready him. Ted was a wonderful cook, he could make any number of different types of meals from "tins of bully", which made him very popular with the lads, and very popular with Wimpey because of the scraps. At night Wimpey slept on Darkie's bed, except one night when she went missing, she was away for three nights, and came back in a terrible state.

We all assumed she had been running with a pack oldie local piyards, and we thought they had been having their wicked way, however she recovered, and whilst I was there never went roaming again.

I left Salalah in March 1945, and returned to Khormaksar to await return to the UK. in the following September. Darkie turned up later at Khormaksar, sad having to leave Wimpey, I arranged to meet him in Cleveleys after demob but never did. I often wonder if he heard anything of his little loyal friend, or if anyone in the Association had been to Salalah since 1945 and has seen dear old Wimpey.

John Broadbent (mem. No:335)

A TRIP TO HABBANIYA. JUNE 1943

On June first we are told to take a (BA390) to Habbaniya for a double engine change; it was using far too much oil. Just before leaving new' comes through of a crash at Masirah. An engine cut as he was coming in to land in a dust storm and one bloke, Simonds, who lives in our billet was killed. Anyway we take off for Bahrain with bags of smoke pouring out of both engines; it sure is using oil. The pilot officer passenger (not aircrew) is a bit panic-stricken and wants to turn back, he is full of ideas about these ropy Bisleys, but we press on and reach Bahrain in 2 hours. After swim in the wizard little pool and a good lunch we leave on the second leg to Shaibah, keeping well out over the Gulf at 6000 feet, but with the oil pressure on the starboard engine dropping to below 70 lbs. per square inch. Not good; I certainly don't want to ditch in the Gulf. At Shaibah landed for a night stop and repairs, and wish we hadn't because they put us straight out to the tents in the transit camp. However, we wanted to see the blokes stranded there who are on the way to Sharjah. Found that Sam Vesey and Don Nash had already left on the goofer (boat) and that Dicky Larcombe was due to take a Bisley down the next day. That leaves Taffy Williams, Jones and Milam. We also collected some mail. Left for Habb the next morning. Both engines have been using bags of oil on the way up and it wasn't long before the starboard oil pressure started dropping again. Not very effective repairs. Just crossing the Euphrates when the port rev counter started swinging wildly, and we were glad to get down, just in time I think. Our passenger was relieved and so were we.

Now followed a time of luxury during the week or so whilst they changed the engines. The food in the mess is wizo, the billets are wizo with thousands of fans, and so is the swimming pool which is 50 yards by 30 yards; it has constantly changing fresh water. Report each morning for 10 minutes to see how the kite is getting on, and then buzz-off to the technical library where I am able to borrow some books on meteorology and physic's for a 6-month period: How I get them back to Sharjah I know not. There are also interesting books on the Himalayas to read. In the afternoon (5pm) it is swimming time. The billets we are now in are about 20 minutes walk from the mess, Hubb is a very big place, and in the middle of the day it gets very hot with the temperature rising to 109 degrees, but fortunately the humidity is low. Another task is to buy numerous tins of grapefruit to take back to Sharjah. Just before returning there is a crash when Lt. Hill from 244 (we don't know him) burst a tyre

whilst taking on an air test; the kite swung off the runway and hit a tractor. A complete write-off but amazingly with only one bloke killed (a fitter). Hearing more about the crash at Abadan when Cosford, Fitzimmonds and two erks were killed. The kite was taking off when it suddenly went straight in and caught fire. Nobody seems to know the cause.

At last the kite is ready to return. Soda Whiskey, the Polish test pilot, does an air test, I do an acceptance test and then we are away, having all sorts of junk for the Squadron thrust upon us. Between Habb and Sahabiah the electrical system goes for a burto, the gills won't work and the elastic on the undercarriage door breaks. Luckily they patch it up at Sahaibah or so they say so we don't have to night stop. Between Sahahiah and Bahrain the radio goes U/S, the U,C elastic is still pretty poor and the port rev counter starts flickering. A mag drop is found and we have to stay the night at Bahrain, but not objecting to that, so henceforth have a swim and a pretty good dinner. Awoke next morning to a rattle of gunfire. A beaufighter mistook the road for the runway and took off. At a bend in the road he hit the seawall, went up inflames; the ammo went off and the pilot was killed. We then rev up to leave for Sharjah, hut trouble again as our exhaust blows off. Fitters reckon they can fix it by the afternoon, so Mark, Palmi, and I decide to pay a visit to Virgins Pool, a well-known spot on mainland. A taxi transport us from Muharraq, across the causeway to the town of Manama and beyond towards the oil wells, passing through constant groves of palms grown by irrigation. We jolt along besides a running watercourse, an incredible sight in this barren desert, real oasis, and suddenly arrive at the pool, entirely different to what I had imagined. Surrounded by palms, the water is absolutely clear with every contour, rock and mossy strand standing out. On one side there is a small mosque whilst on the other, 20 yards away, there are a series of broad steps leading up to a shelter swathed in borgunvillia. There is a springboard 6 feet above the water. Several chicos were offering to dive for baksheesh, so we changed and offered to set up in competition. I found it impossible to get anywhere near the bottom; not surprising since it is supposed to be 35 feet deep but it is so clear it looks as though it is 10 feet. I think the pool must fill from an artesian spring near the bottom because there is a constant overflow of water, which leads into the stream we had just followed. After spending the whole morning in this splendid place we returned to Manama, had several ice creams, and then returned to camp. The taxi cost 15 chips.

Took off for Sahjah at about half two, the exhaust system having to some extent been patched up and the electrical system fixed. After a short time the starboard rev counter went U-S, flickering between 2400 and 1500 revs. And on arriving to Sharjah found the port exhaust just about finished again. Ah well, I suppose you can't expect miracles.

Frank Moseley (mem No:304)

I was sent to Masirah to relieve the wireless mech who wanted to sit an exam at Khormaksar. The journey was 939 miles in a Valetta. Three hops that took most part of the day. The first stop was Riyan in the Hadhramaut, then Salalah in Southern Oman and finally Masirah.

Masirah's airstrip and the northern lip of the island had been there ever since the war, evidence of this was a couple of wrecked Wellington bombers sitting like sentinels without doors or innards. I tried to salvage some lengths of wiring from one of them during my stay but was driven out by a nest of large wasps that had made their home there.

I had barely settled in when Jimpy, the radio assistant given the job of showing me round the radio system, suggested that he would rise at six am. and go to the transmitter building to change from night frequency to day frequency and I would change back from day to night at seven pm, well after dark.

To this I agreed finding the three hundred yards of rocky desert track in torchlight a little difficult and to hear all the creatures of the night scuttling away from the sound of your approach was sometimes a bit un-nerving.

It was only when, a few months later, someone claimed that the beach at Masirah was haunted following a massacre that took place there in August 1904.

That particular beach was just on the other side of a sand dune from the transmitter building where I had visited in the total darkness sometime before!

There was a narrow gauge railway that ran zig-zag down to the shore on the sheltered side of the island. Where the track ended was an old wooden jetty with an RAF air-sea rescue launch moored there.

Supply ships came as close to the shore as possible with their cargo of aviation fuel, which was dropped into the sea in 40-gallon drums.

These drums floated and the lads that could swim well and a few Arab labourers swam out and grabbing hold of the drums, kicked shoreward where the fuel would then be loaded onto the little railway train and taken up to the airfield.

The aviation fuel drums when empty were stacked on a site at the far side of the railway from the main camp. They stood seven or eight high over an area fifty yards square and very quickly turned brown with rust.

Some of them must have been there for years and were as flimsy as paper such was the rusting action of the sea breeze. We discovered this when one of the lads threw a heavy stone in the air so that it plummeted through the top layer of the drums. There was a strange collapsing noise from within and a plumb of brown dust rose in the air and drifted out to sea.

I only did three weeks a Masirah, hardly time to get used to distilled water and ended up back on night duty, eleven pm. until seven am, on my return to salt pans.

It was the season when scores of wild dog, locally called piyards, came down from the hills and gathered on the outskirts of Aden. After dark you could hear the occasional yap, yap of dogs. This was the case when two of us started our shift at 11 pm. one night. The routine was to carry an old American baseball bat with us and search light that was sighted on top of the transmitting station. This light threw a bright beam for three hundred yards down the track and in effect cleared the area where it shone on wild dogs. At the point of no return the light went out and the moonless night was filled with the yap yapping of dozens of dogs! We ran!

Fred Baxter (mem. No.305).

I REMEMBER WHEN (SHAIBAH)

Xmas 1940 was a good one, or as good as could be expected far from home. It turned out to be the last easy going Xmas because, as is well known; our life styles were to change dramatically in April 1941. Until then the war had bypassed us, and we lived in blissful ignorance of the horrors and turmoil at home. We had limited information the now famous landmarks, Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz etc.

I was airman of the watch pre Xmas week and on the last day of flying, at cease work the airfield gates were pushed closed and locked and someone put a blackboard with the message, 'closed for Xmas,' chalked on it and fixed outside the fence.

We got cracking converting the billet into a bar for the best bar competition. Our theme was a nightclub based on Markovitch cigarette packet design, black and white. We didn't win, we couldn't compete with the armoured car entry, it was brilliant. They had made a cottage inside the billet, thatched with straw from the beer bottle protection, the theme was Snow White and the cottage was her house.

A less popular entry was B flights. Beast Johnson had diverted the water system into the billet to make a fountain and the nice white walls were covered in painted palm trees, the theme, an oasis. It was rumoured that the C.O. was not amused.

Xmas over, it was back to work and flying resumed. One pilot returned from his flight and reported his Elevator and Rudder controls stiff to operate, the rigger checked them on the ground and considered them normal. An air test by another pilot also reported stiff controls, so deeper investigation was ordered. The cable run was inspected starting at the control column working back. The large inspection panel at the port side of the rear fuselage was opened to check the cable run and connections and the fault was revealed.

Before Xmas the aircraft had flown up to Habbaniya to collect fresh turkeys for our Xmas dinner, and it seems that no one indicated how many had been loaded in the "tunnel" of the Vincent. On arrival at Shaibah, they were unloaded and off to the messes ready for preparation. One of the then fresh birds had somehow worked its way to the rear of the fuselage and became wedged right at the tail end where it remained unnoticed, because those who loaded the birds were not aware how many had been loaded. Having been subjected to too much sawing back and forth by operation of the controls a clean retrieval proved difficult and unpleasant. I would like to be able to report what entries were made in the Form 700 but I can only guess it was suitably witty as was the case years later at an I.T.S. when a known pilot reported in the 700 something loose in cockpit. The remedy was quoted something tightened in the cockpit.

Eddy Rose (mem. No.29)

Compliments of the coming Season to all members and families

Jim Heslop

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham

Don James

NOVEMBER 2001