



244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 37

DEDICATION OF OUR BADGE AT THE NATIONAL ARBORETEM ON WEDNESDAY 22nd MAY '02

From our point of view, it was a disappointing start, as both Don and Frances are presently not well, and were unable to make the trip.

I must say that Dr. Chris Morris, the Secretary of the Habbaniya Assn. was the prime mover in all this, ably assisted by Langton Moore of the RAF Mauripur Assn.

This was a joint dedication ceremony. The Habbaniya Assn. RAF Mauripur Assn. And 244 Sqn & K.S. all took part. We each had a separate dedication service at our own trees.

At mid-day a service was held in the Arboretum Chapel. This was well attended by over 100 people. Afterwards we walked across the Arboretum to our respective trees. I must say that the weather was most inclement, with high winds and rain. The ground could be described as 'heavy to soft'.

The padre, Mr Norman Leake (Manchester) asked me to read the Lesson, which I proceeded to do. This was from 11 Corinthians, verses 4 and 16. It was most apt, as the same Lesson was read in St. Peters Church, Ashlar, Basra on 8/7,41 during a memorial service for 244 personnel who had perished up to that date. I then spoke a few words of commemoration over our dead since that date, both from the squadron and our Kindred Spirits.

The Reverend Leake then went on and completed the Service of Dedication. Quite a moving ceremony. We now dispersed. The other Associations went to their respective trees, and 244 & K.K. went back to the Conference room, to be joined later by the members of both Habbaniya and Mauripur Assns.

Our tree is a Silver Birch about four feet high. The metal badge is mounted on a stalk beside the sapling. It has sky-blue background with our coat of arms. Underneath this is "244 Sqn. 1918-19, 1940-45". So, there you are. We are there for posterity. The Arboretum is presently a bleak spot, but, in years to come, a man-made forest will arise. In it will be many memories, and record of many units from all branches of the U.K. Forces. During and after our buffet lunch, our membership present had a good 'chin-wag'. My name was called, I went to the foyer, and was confronted by Ken Igglesden (one of our early members) and his wife. Ken had been attending the RAFA conference in Blackpool. As he was in the area he decided to visit the Arboretum. Not knowing we were present, he was shocked and surprised to find that his old squadron was operating. What a coincidence! We had a good 'natter'.

A moving and in some ways a poignant day. Once again 244 Sqn & Kindred Spirits are firmly 'on the map'.

MEMBERS PRESENT AT THE ARBORETUM

Jim Green — Oakham	Tom Powell - Shrewsbury
Jim Heslop — Southport	Ken Taylor - Bolton
Langton Moore-Fylde (also Mauripur Assn.)	Harry Woodward - Tamworth
Dr. Chris Morris — Walsall (also Habb. Assn.)	Ken Igglesden - Bexhill

Now, back to business. Although exactly 100 of you have paid this years subs, quite a number of you have yet to 'stump up'. Don will be glad to hear from you. This Newsletter will carry a notation if you have not yet paid. Through the last eleven years since our Association was founded, we have certainly put ourselves 'on the map'. We were successful in obtaining a squadron badge (despite many refusals). This badge is now displayed at RAF Hendon Museum. We have been invited to send a representative (which we did) to Church services at the RAF church of St. Clement Danes. The Squadron has been mentioned in several magazine articles. The latest one to appear is one in the 'Blenheim Society' publication and of course the dedication of our badge at the Arboretum. This badge will be on view long after the Association has disappeared.

Two of our early members have 'passed on'.

Glen Anderson (mem. No. 47) a Wop/Ag Australian. Glen was on the Squadron during my time. He was a member of Millington's crew, flying Wellingtons XIII's. His fellow crew member Joe Showell (Mem. No. 90) and Joyce Steward (mem. No. 65) -- Ken Steward's widow please note.

Also, Dave (Lofty) Temple (mem. No. 114) FIEE. Lofty attended all our Reunions except 2001. He must have been one of the few ground staff to be awarded a 'golden caterpillar' badge. He was forced to 'bale out' of a Blenheim IV (with engine trouble) in the dark over Iraq. His exploits were set out in one of our early Newsletters. Our deepest sympathy is extended to the families of both Glen and Dave.

BISLEY BA408 (See previous Newsletter)

Reading the article by Frank Moseley (mem. No. 304) on his "Smallpox Case to Aden", it reminded me of the Blenheim IV's in 1942 at Sharjah, i.e. falling apart, bangs and bits falling off. I remember being on dispersal, during a minor maintenance inspection. As the cowlings came off it could be seen that the numbers inside were all different (the result of 'patch up' in the Middle East before delivery to 244).

You may be wondering what this has got to do with Frank Mosley's trip to Aden. Well, at the beginning of November 1942 some beautiful new, or newish aircraft were delivered to replace the Blenheim IV's. They were called Bisleys, but were really Blenheim V's.

On the 10th November '42 at 0830 hrs. We took off for Jask piloted by F/Lt Riddell in a bright, shiny new aircraft. Guess which? It was Blenheim V BA408. It was delightful after the IV's. It could not have been at all bad, as here it is still flying in February 1944, in spite of the sand etc. etc. So Frank, do not be too hard on BA408, she did the squadron good service.

Don James (mem. no 49)

SHARJAH HERE I COME continued from Newsletter 36

Before the Time-expired men at Sharjah have got their relief posting, the newly arrived from the UK (a F/Sgt acting SWO) has the off-duty rankers on what passes for a parade ground. He states that from what he has seen so far, we need a little drill to smarten us up. There are shouts of disbelief and laughter! The parade dismisses itself and disperses, leaving him shouting ineffectually for our return.

Within a few days an Air Chief Marshall flies himself in with a F/Lt Aide. Sharjah is one of the stops on a tour inspection. They stroll around the camp talking to various people. I am talking to 'Mad' Morris who is working on the engine of a 'Maggie'. Morris has a reputation. To say he is eccentric is putting it mildly I tell him the Air Chief Marshall is approaching --- no response. Standing behind Morris the AGM asks what he is doing. The answer is immediate. "What the F... .. H... .. does it look as though I was doing?" Amazingly neither ACM or his Aide bat an eyelid. The ACM merely moves into Morris's line of sight and starts a fresh conversation as if nothing previously was said.

At the end of the evening shift the ACM calls us all together and asks for comments or complaints. All the Veterans have the same complaint about the time and a half ruling acting disadvantageously under certain conditions. He promises action, and keeps his word.

We are told to keep clear of an incoming Dakota. The aircrew will look after the under-cart pins, and exterior control locks. The passengers alight and stand behind the tail. They are clad in vivid red robes, monk style. The aircrew appear in surgical masks. A medic arrives to spray the aircraft interior. They are Indian soldiers from Italy being repatriated with TB.

Early May and a gentleman appears on the stage during a USO show to say the war in Europe is over. He is told to stop interrupting the show. The air-trooping steps up a gear. One afternoon Tubby Sullivan returns from the swimming session on the beach to say there has been a death. He gets a 'write up' in the Forces Newspaper. He has pulled out two, but only one has lived. On the night shift he tells me of his bitterness that the survivor has never thanked him, and ignores him when their paths cross.

VJ day arrives. The released prisoners now start to come through, a sad sight. They are the most fit, the most able to stand the flight. What must the other poor devils look like? VJ has not stopped the atrocities. Dutch P.O.W's and internees released by the Japs are being killed by the Javanese, sometimes horrifically as a public spectacle or mutilated. One Dutch Air Force Dakota has a full passenger list, men, women and children. They have had their eyes gouged out.

The fighter convoys still keep coming through. A delivery pilot tells us that they go straight into a dump. A trooping Liberator diverts for an engine check. The passengers sit in the sealed bomb bay facing each other on plank seats, legs interlocked, feet on the narrow catwalk. An Air Sea Rescue Warwick is put on station to cover the trooping. It has the lifeboat tucked in its belly. Taking off on exercise the port engine catches fire. The undercart is pulled up, and as the aircraft belly lands, the crew are out in time.

My time at Sharjah is now up, and I'm off to Habb. Here mixed in with the trooping will be the VIP's, Govt. Ministers, Montgomery, Mountbatten. Diverting with engine trouble on a civilian delivery flight is the famous Jim Mollison. The fitters are installing spares, whilst his radio, tuned to London, is announcing he is missing and long overdue.

S.M. Smith (mem, no. 5)

MASIRAH 1961-62

My first memory of the island was flying in on a Valetta from Khormaksar over the water separating the Island from the mainland and seeing a wreck (I think it was the Electra), and lots, 20 or so sharks swimming about in the perfectly clear sea. There was a jetty around there where our supplies, mainly fuel and oil, were off-loaded. They came up from Aden on a freighter, transferred to RAF Z-craft and were lifted by mobile crane onto either MT trucks or the famous Masirah railway.

During my time at Masirah the Station was commanded by a Sqn. Ldr. (McCleod --- I think), and we had five other officers, accounts, air traffic, adjutant, medic and a stores officer. We had two Warrant Officers, Sen. Technical Officer, WO Thorn, known to everyone as Tojo (not to his face though), and the caterer, a WO Ironside, I believe a relative of the Field Marshall, that, I'm afraid didn't guarantee quality food, it was some of the worst in the Air Force. The two SWO were Flt. Sgt. Jack Holt BEM, straight from Cranwell as a drill sergeant and he treated Masirah as an out-station of Cranwell, socks fully pulled up, shorts regulation length and cap badges that you signal to the mainland the sun caught them at the right angle.

The ground-crew, comprising a Sergeant, myself and a young rigger, an engine Corporal, John Dainty, who later became a Wing Co., and air radio man and an electrician had the job of carrying out the domestic tasks on the visiting aircraft, one of them being to remove any leftover food. If it was edible we ate it or gave it to our Arab boy, or if it was rubbish it was binned. Well one day the AOC, Sir Fred Rosier, flew in his while Canberra, The White Queen or the Arabian Skies, with Flt. Sergeant navigator, all peak cap and white overalls. On board was a lunchbox with four tempting fresh crayfish rolls. Thinking that this was scrap, as all good riggers do, my two pals and I scoffed down one each, probably the best food we had ever tasted on the island. The Nav. Rushed up asking us to ensure the ACO's next-day lunchbox was put away safely in a fridge, just as our Sergeant, Jock Cunningham, was heartily tucking into the ACO's last sandwich.

Our recreation was mostly swimming, but not by the jetty near the sharks, mostly down on the opposite side known as the surf beach. We had set up a radio shack, Radio Masirah and Torn Robson, the radio corporal, and I broadcast on Wednesday evenings. We borrowed the LP's of BBC programmes from Aden Radio, comedy shows, mystery plays and for the final hour our own speciality "Four of the Best", comprising four quarter hours of different kinds of music, pop, brass band, classical etc. We finished up usually playing something soothing to ease the lads off to sleep with their Tannoys still switched on and then finished with our signature tune at full blast, Land of Hope and Glory. We would get some stick the next day, but it made us feel good and very British.

After the troubles in 1961, a Hunter Squadron, either 8 or 43 was detached to Kuwait on a two-month turnaround. The relieving squadron flew up from Aden and refuelled Masirah before journeying on. When they

arrived Kuwait they changed over and the returning squadron dropped in to refuel on the way back. I think after a while a third squadron from the UK came out to ease the repetition after the families at Aden complained.

Jeff Mellor (mem. No.341)

JOINING 244 SQUADRON, EARLY 1943

Early January 1943 and we were posted from 72 OTU Kenya as trained Blenheim crews (myself Mark Roland, who is from southern England and Palmi Palmerson from Winnipeg in Canada make up our crew) destined for the East and beyond. There followed a whole series of complicated movements backwards and forwards, into and out of many transit camps, before we finally ended up in Sharjah (244 Squadron). Many of the crews on our courses at Nanyuki and Nakuru, in Kenya were involved in this highly inefficient posting which took several months. No wonder we always seemed to be losing a war for the first few years, although I suppose there must have been many difficulties at the top with aircraft shortages and other emergencies. The crews included Dicky Larcombe, whose 'Pop' is a Colonel in the Indian Army, Jim Knapp, a great climbing companion in Kenya, Tommy Leicester, from Manchester, Tommy Tucker, who also climbed, and had interesting flying experiences, Sam Vesey, who attempted our rescue at Ras al Hadd, and Don Nash, unfortunately blown up on Masirah and of course their crews. Defined by the pilots because I don't know most of the names of the navigators yet. I won't detail every event but will select just a few to illustrate our movements as we travelled from Cairo to Damascus, Habbaniya (Baghdad) Shaibah (Basra), back to Hubb. Then to Cairo again and finally to Sharjah. In retrospect it was all very interesting, but at the time we were often cheated off.

CAIRO Arriving in Cairo by air from Uganda, a garry takes us to Almaza transit camp. Tents again here sleeping on the sand. Early January and jolly cold, it must be nearly freezing, a shock after all that time in the tropics. I needed all the four blankets plus my greatcoat. We know met some blokes who were on our course at Kumalo (SFTS in Southern Rhodesia) with bags of gen. Les Trussell (my co-pilot on SFTS) has been killed on ops, this was a great shock for apart from being my co-pilot Les and I had been on leave together on several occasions. He was a great bloke. Rayner (also on our SFTS), and two other who were on our course have been killed at OTU. Shaky. The next day catch the mid-day train for Damascus, which has hard wooden seats, and is cold.

DAMASCUS Arrive Damascus about midnight. A garry takes us to the transit camp about miles out. Nothing to do the next day so Mark and I get a lift into the middles of the town, and can find little to do there either, but we managed to get a good steak, egg and chips at the Cafe Triumph. A taxi back to camp. Money system here is crazy. Basic is 'un livre', worth about 2 shillings and fourpence. This is divided into 100, piastres, similar to a Palestinian mil. There are no coins since metal would be worth more than the coin and instead there are notes for everything from 5 piastres upwards, about a ha'penny. Change for a note on a tram would be something like half a dozen stamps, several buttons and a piece of paper with a number written on it. What do you do with this? Just chuck them away I expect. The next day we had cold sleety rain and hail but Mark and I decided to go for a hike along the ridge to the north of the camp. It is about 1000 feet high, an outlier of the Anti Lebanon Mountains (Djebel Kassioum), but a perfect English January day and we get soaked through. Eventually find our way off the ridge into the Arab quarter of Damascus. 'Ugh'. Had a walk back to camp and don't know how we got there, didn't dry for ages. The next day it poured with rain and the camp was a morass whilst the mud huts all leaked like mad, nowhere was dry. The next day it snowed heavily. Who would think that Damascus was supposed to be dry and hot (95 degrees in summer). Eventually the sun came out and the snow melted so Mark and I went for another walk along Djebel Kassioum. Much nicer this time with the mountains still snow covered and with wizard views from the top of the ridge. The villages of Seidnaya and Halboun were nestled in hollows in the mountains and the impressive gorge of the Barada cut through into the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. We ended up vertically above Damascus with a great view of the city (about 300,000 it says in the guide book), and then descended precipitously into the old Moslem part of the town and managed to find a good meal at a local cafe. A good walk this time. A few days later we leave for Hab.

To HABBANIYA .Push off today on one of the Nairn coaches, which are absolutely wizard efforts. First we pass through oases with the snow covered Anti Lebanon Mountains rearing on our left, but as the Barada marshes dwindle the desert develops, although there is still sparse grass. Eventually all traces of any road are left behind and the bus drives straight across an absolutely flat partly stony desert with only a few stones to mark its route. At Rutbah (2am) there is a stop for shai, and then at 9am we reach Ramadi and have breakfast at the Babylon Hotel near the Euphrates. Crops are widespread around here using water from the river for irrigation. Then it is to Habbaniya and to the transit camp, ye gods, not another transit camp! (26 PTC), which is on the shore of Lake Habbaniya. This turns out to be quite a good transit camp with no bull good tents and pleasant surroundings along the lake, although barren desert. The next day (Feb. 4) we take the garry to the main camp, which is about 7 miles, crossing the plateau from which Iraqi rebels shelled the camp last year I think. RAF Habb. It is very well organised and large (8 miles in circumference). Irrigation is widely used to give profuse

vegetation; all the billets are of brick and each surrounded by a garden, and there is a criss-cross of paved roads with names like London Road, Grantham Road etc., a shopping centre (Cheapside, somebody's joke), several churches, a cinema, and a super swimming pool. Back at the transit camp we can walk along the lake shore and at night listen to the eerie howling of the pyards. We find we have to keep a sharp eye on our kit though, because these Iraqi's are noted for being expert kit swipers. There are tales of tents being cleaned out at night, even when the blokes are asleep in them.

By Feb. 8 we are moving again (at least Mark; Palmi and I are). A garry takes us across desert dried swamp with salt patches everywhere and to Baghdad (55 miles). After a short stay here, where we can't get any food there is a train ride in cattle trucks to Shaibah; arriving at 9am. Less said about the journey the better

Yet another transit camp where much to our surprise we find Tummy Tucker, Sam Vesey and Don Nash and crews, all bound for 244. A week later along come Jim Knapp, Dicky Larcombe, Tommy Leicester and their crews .so it is a grand reunion of Kenya OTU's.

Still here, but on March 23 the lot of us are going hack to the transit camp on Lake Habbaniya, incredible, no explanation given which is excusable. We have to travel in those filthy cattle trucks again. However, this camp is better than Shaibah, it is getting warm now and the lake is very good for swimming. A Blenheim I also becomes available at the main camp so we can get in a little bit of flying. Other news is that a Vincent prangs near to Shaibah with everybody killed. The lake, which is about 10 miles across suddenly, rises by about 4 feet. This is because it fed by the River Euphrates which is fed by the flood waters, melting snow and all that from Turkey. The swimming is still very good and the local rocks are interesting with layers of gypsum formed when the desert waters evaporate. Eventually it is April 27th and Mark rings up from the main camp where he has managed to find some navigation work, to say he has organised something. Two Bisleys have to go to Sharjah from 135 MU (Maintenance Unit) Cairo, and Tommy Tucker and crew and ourselves are to do it. Supposed to catch a kite the next day at 07.30 so go down to the main camp in the ration garry, and to Comm-Flight. No sign of life until after half an hour a kite starts up at the other end of the runway about a mile away. It takes off, we were told to wait at the wrong place. A common happening it seems, but we were lucky because a BOAC Lodestar from Tehran was going on to Cairo with a few spare seats. Off we go across miles of desert, the great cleft of the Jordan valley, part of the same rift valley as the African one in Kenya, eventually putting down at Lydda in Palestine. Great to see green grass again. Off again, across the Sue: Canal at Ismailia, into the Cairo area and land at Almaza.

Frank Mosely (men. No.304)

F/SGT VAUGHAN HINDER 1315294-PILOT 244 SQDN.

As mentioned in a previous Newsletter, from lime to time we receive enquiries from people who are researching the lives of relatives. Usually, we are unable to help. On this occasion however, we were able to greatly assist the enquirer (who is Mr Gary Granter of 71 Finsbury Rd. Warren Hill, Arnold NG5 9QF).

Mr Tranter tells this story. The above Vaughan Hinder was a pilot with 244 Sqdn, and lost his life on 24th August 1944 whilst attacking a Japanese submarine. I was most interested, as I was flying with 244 during this period. As regards Jap. Submarines, there was certainly no Jap. Activity in our area at this time.

Also, Mr Tranter had been researching (on the Internet), the Commonwealth War Grave records. He had discovered that Vaughan Hinder is buried in Maala Cemetery, Yemen. (This lies quite near the old RAF base of Khormaksar, Aden). This indicated to me that Vaughan must have been on detachment from Masirah, and would be working out the Aden area.

The name Hinder did not ring any bells with me. I asked Gary Tranter for further information. He came back with the news that next to Vaughan were the graves of three Canadians 21 Sqdn. (??), and also that of Kenneth Mooney, navigator of 244 Sqdn. Now, I knew Ken Mooney very well. He hailed from Liverpool, and was the Navigator of a Canadian 244 crew. A recheck with Gary confirmed what I thought. One of the graves was that of W/officer Miller RCAF of 244 Sqdn. The other two Canadian graves were that of W/o Le Duc and F/Sgt Jones (two Wop/Ags). 'Squiffy' Miller as he was known was crew captain of a Wellington XIII. It became obvious to me that Vaughan Hinder was Miller's second pilot.

On 2nd August '44, at first light they took off from that rough airstrip with full fuel and depth charges aboard Just after being airborne the port engine cut, and the aircraft crashed at the end of the airstrip. The aircraft burst into flames and exploded. All aboard must have perished instantly, excepting the rear-gunner who escaped from his turret. However, he was so badly burned that he died whilst being flown to Aden.

This probably explains-why five of the crew were buried together, whilst the rear-gunner was hurled elsewhere. (The Wellington XIII carried two pilots, one navigator and three wop/ags). The mix-up in Maala Cemetery over the Canadians occurred when their headstones wrongly had them serving with 21 squadron, when they were actually 244 men.

It was nice to give Gary Tranter some definitely true information about Vaughan Hinder. If any one of you knew Vaughan, or have any information about him, please contact Gary Tranter at his address above.

Jim Heslop (mem. no. 50)

JUNE 2002

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