



244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 38

Jim Says, Don is presently in hospital making recovery from a serious heart operation. I know you will be joining me in wishing our friend (and treasurer) a complete recovery. In the interim, as Don will be making a longish convalescence, would you please (until further notice) direct all correspondence to me.

Now, just a couple or three items. First of all, current year's subs (£5). Still a few of you yet to pay up. I will make notation on this Newsletter if you are a non-payer. If no pay, sadly your Newsletter will be discontinued (Not fair to those members who have already paid).

The dedication of our tree took place at the National Arboretum way back in May. An hour long Video was made (very professional), and we now have copies for sale. These are priced at £8 (inc. postage). Orders to me. Buy one and see us braving the elements!

Also, Blazer badges. These will be of interest to our newer members, who now have the opportunity to purchase a badge. These are most resplendent. (As one member said "People see you coming!"). Priced at £15 inc. postage. First come - first served only two left. All cheques payable to "244 Sqdn. KS. Assn."

Finally, copy for Newsletters. Please continue to send in your efforts both large and small. If your tales of yesteryear dry up, I will be reduced to making stories up!

Early Xmas and New Year greetings to all members, paid or unpaid from Don, Frances, Jim and Audrey.

LETTER RECEIVED RE NEWSLETTER No.37

Dear Jim, I read with great sorrow the death of Lofty Temple. I baled out with Lofty on that 'dark night in Iraq'. He was the one who told me to "get out". As usual, the intercom was u/s, and we were passing paper messages with instructions. The rigger for that Blenheim V5579 was the late Jim Swan, another one of our members. Another little episode with Lofty was when we crashed on take-off in a Lodestar at Heliopolis with Lord and Lady Cornwallis on board.

Jack Earnshaw (Mem. No.145)

It was on the morning of the 26th November, 1942, that I was to accompany Pilot Officer McNight to Shaibah to pick up Blenheim V5579 which had been repaired. With me was our Engine Fitter LAG Lofty Temple. The Aircraft had been repaired after a forced landing with engine trouble. We were to be ferried down by Wing Commander Fitton in a Blenheim carrying Air Vice-Marshal Russell who was touring the Airfields and Landing Strips down the Persian Gulf area.

The Wireless Operator in Fitton 's Aircraft was my friend Sandy Tullis. At 05.30 hrs when we taxied passed the hangar and someone was heard to say, "something is going to happen – Earnshaw and Tullis are flying together". We had never flown together before – IT DID.

We landed at Shaibah at 7.30.GMT located our Blenheim, Lofty and McNight did their tests and I tested the radio. After being convinced that repairs had been satisfactorily carried out, our pilot; a Canadian. Pilot Officer McNight enquired of us "have you got your small kit?", We confirmed we had, when McNight retorted "let us bugger off I am not staying here tonight". (Shaibah was reputed to be the worst station in the Royal Air Force). And it was! They wrote a song about it, "The Shaibah Blues".

Although we had no weather report and I had no signals briefing, we took off without permission. We took off at 1300GMT. When we got airborne I informed Shaibah that we were airborne and on course for Habbaniya. They in turn acknowledged signal and then I called Habbaniya. They in turn acknowledged my signal, and then I called Habbaniya giving my ETA, (expected time of arrival).

After about an hour we flew into a dust storm, in fact it was doing everything, rain the lot. The intercom was useless and we communicated with me climbing over the main spar, handing notes to Lofty in the second pilot seat --- and the pilot was passing messages back to me via Lofty. Every-time I had to remove my jack from the wireless socket before I could go, then I got a note, "look at the starboard engine and tell me what you can see". I scrambled back and wrote on the note, "exhaust flames". Another note came back "was I sure the flames were coming out of the exhaust". I looked again and realised the flames were coming out of the engine over the petrol tanks (in the wing) and not the exhaust. Having put my wireless jack back into the socket, I then realised that my wireless receiver was dead. However, my transmitter was ok – so I could send signals but unable to receive. I told the Base at Habbaniya (our Base), to send up flares as visibility was still bad and that my receiver was US and sending and SOS "starboard engine on fire -- visibility low". Every now and again we could see lights below on the ground (ARAB VILLAGES), and then we saw what we thought was a landing strip (two rows of lights). The pilot lowered his undercarriage and made his approach. It was a bridge over the River Tigris or Euphrates (I never did find out). We climbed to about 5000 feet. Engine blazing, I received a note from Lofty "Bale Out", he indicated by pointing down and pulling the rip cord. I immediately locked down my Morse key, this would send out a continuous signal which would enable the D/F Station to trace the aircraft. Then, "where did I put my parachute harness, where was my parachute?" Found them, "how do I put it on?" You very quickly remembered.

I was wearing full flying kit, parachute, harness and parachute, "where do I get out", the escape hatch was on the floor. I released the hatch, the air came rushing in. I sat, feet dangling out of the bottom of the aircraft looking at the parachute pack I was thinking of Rupert Brooke 's poem, 'If I should die thinking only this of me'. I thought, "I wonder if this bloody thing works". However, I decided to get out, easier said than done. I got stuck halfway, the man that designed this escape hatch had never used it. I eventually wiggled myself out and saw the aircraft flying away with the engine on fire. I got such a shock I realised the chute had opened.

Still no feeling of falling, but every now and then I could see lights on the ground and began to think it was not long ago since the RAF were fighting and bombing this lot, so I started taking stock I could count to ten, Sahida Afendi was hello friend; Salam Alacum peace be with you; parachute was international; tiara meant aeroplane. This was not much to prevent them cutting my genitals off. The act that was not uncommon and executed by Arab women. For occasions like this we carried a "gooney chit", but on this occasion I had left mine in the billet.

I seemed to be hanging up there, going nowhere, and all of a sudden I was falling very fast and eventually landed in a cesspool outside a village. I did a strategic withdrawal after releasing my parachute. The family 'motto' of the Earnshaw family is "always in the mire, only the depth varies". I got away from the village as soon as I could I walked through irrigation ditches, climbed walls, walked and walked for about an hour, then I saw a light, two miles away, which appeared to be on high ground. The dust storm must have lifted to enable me to see in the distance an electric light. More walls and ditches. I then came to a wood building, I knocked and went in. I met an Iraqi, he looked at me as though I had come from another planet, the power station for the town of Hilla, after a brief conversation on the telephone he told me to sit down, the police were coming to pick me up.

In due course a Landau arrived, pulled by two horses. They ushered me into the carriage and I sat in the back next to the Police Chief. Off to the police station followed by scores of villagers, (hoping to see a "ball" removing ceremony). The Chief of Police wore British 1914/18 medals, Pip, Squeak and Wilfred. I thought, well he was on our side once, he was very friendly, but I did not care for the one behind him who inhaled a cigarette through his nose. When I looked towards the door there were faces right around the doorframe, eyes looking at me.

I was told I was to be taken to Colonel Coates, the Political Agent, so it was back in the Landau and off to the Political Agent. I knocked at the door, Col. Coates shouted, "Come in boy". I indicated and said I was a bit of a mess. When Col. Coates retorted, "I don't care a pig's fart just come in".

Now came the barrage of questions. "Where do you come from? What is your rank and name? What type of aircraft? What was your mission? How many baled out and why? How far have you walked, and then he said instantly, "I am Wing Commander Coates". This was to be one of the characters of the Royal Air Force. Jasper Coates, he was 6'4" an exceptional height, and a moustache a foot long. Most regular Officers knew of him and they said, "He was in the Air Force when Air Ministry was a tent".

"Get out of those clothes and have a shower". (Stone dish on the bathroom floor with an Arab pouring buckets of water over me). I was given a shirt, a pair of trousers, and a pair of Persian slippers. I was given a meal and off to bed.

Next morning over breakfast I was informed that they had found my parachute and the aircraft had just missed the village when it crashed. I was informed that we would visit the scene of the crash after breakfast.

I was given a jacket (which came to my knees), and a pair of slacks (which came up to my armpits), and the Persian slippers – I looked quite a prat.

On the way to the scene of the crash I was told we had to inspect the police stations on the way, it was expected of us, "come on Earnshaw let's have a look at these scruffy buggers". I was mortified; I got out of the car and followed him along the line. I still laugh today when I think of the prat I looked. We spent some time looking for my radio. We returned and then back to Habaniya where I had to attend a Court of Inquiry.

"Why was I flying Air Crew when I was just a Leading Aircraftsman?"

Jack Earnshaw (Mem. No145)

'HAPPY MEMORIES OF TWO WONDERFUL PEOPLE'

In early May 1942, whilst a cook at Sharjah, I cracked up with Heat Exhaustion. I recall lying on a charpoy in the fort, starkers, and the Medical Orderly swabbing me down with wet cloths.

Later I was flown to Shaibah, after a few days I was taken by truck across the desert. We arrived mid-morning at a group of mud huts, with a single rail track ending with buffers.

I was ill and not really with it. The truck driver wished me well and said I was ok. as the train did not leave until 19.30 hours. Luckily I found four British soldiers in one hut. From them I found I was in Ahwaz, Iran.

It was a twenty four-hour journey to Teheran, and I was met by an R.A.F. Officer and driven through the town, up the mountains to a lovely wooded area surrounded by a wall, with a stream flowing through the grounds.

I was told I was in the R.A.F, Rest Camp in Gui Hel, and was in the British Summer Legation.

I was the camp cook and had six men to help me. There were three Iranians and three Turkish labourers. Their only English was the word 'porridge'. There were many Scots asking for porridge for their breakfast. I had to learn Farsi fairly quickly. Just fancy an English chap teaching a real cook (Iranian), how to make porridge.

Those of you who were lucky enough to go to that camp will recall just below the camp area there was a house built within the Embassy grounds, but walled off. There were two ladders over this wall into the garden of this house. It was 'Open House' to the R.A.F. It was occupied by Stan and Jo Smith. Stan was the head of the Iranian Tobacco Industry. Do you remember Jo, a short plump lady, with snow white hair? Jo's parents were French and Swiss; she was born in Hungary. Early in 1914, aged sixteen she was sent to Finishing School in Germany. When war broke out in August, because of her mixed background, she was put in prison and was there until the war ended.

Stan told me before the last war, she was a courier, taking people on European holidays, she spoke about twelve languages. Stan once asked her, "How is it you come back with more people than you went out with?" She just said, "If things go wrong and you don't know anything, you are safe". She was a very brave lady, rescuing many from the Nazi's. Many R.A.F. lads owe a great deal to them.

Every month they sent 100 parcels to British P.O.W's through the Red Cross. I know, as I wrote the addresses on strips of canvas, then sewed them onto the parcels.

They had no children, but called me their adopted son. I met them later in Cairo on their way back to the U.K. Months later, my mother wrote to me, telling me that Jo had arrived at their house in Liverpool, finding her way from Cardiff, mum did not know anything about this.

After Stan retired, they bought a Caravan Camp in Mudeford, Christchurch, Hampshire. My wife, daughter and I spent some wonderful holidays there with them. They passed away many years ago, but I have wonderful memories of two great people who made life more enjoyable for many of us.

John H. V. Purcell (Mem. No.296)

THE DAY THEY SHOT THE SULTAN

I was posted to Aden and then detached to Salalah. This is a little green Paradise surrounded by mountains (the Djebel) and wasteland (the Empty Quarter). The sea is teeming with fish. The place is crawling with snakes, scorpions and camel spiders. When they open the aircraft door the heat just hits you, but it was like being in a fridge at night.

The date was June 1965, but the date in Salalah was 1365, (they are 600 years behind us), and you believe it! No schools, no hospitals. An Aspro did wonders for them, they had no drugs. They lived in mud and dung huts, the poor sods had nothing. I felt straightaway we are here to keep them 'in the dust' and I didn't think a lot to it.

Next day we had a meeting (the whole camp). There would be a new C.O. They were giving up Aden, Riyan was closing, and Salalah would be the main staging post. (Masirah was not mentioned). Also, a curfew was now in order, nobody to move between dusk and dawn without authority, and it was a 'shoot to kill' policy. We were assured that only 'Rebels' moved at night, and that our lives were in danger. Information was that we were now 'front line' to Russian trained rebels, and they were going to free the people of Salalah.

During the previous uprising in 1964, the Royal Engineers had marked out a 14 mile strip of road down to Resuit using waste oil on sand. This track was now subject to minelaying by the rebels and had to be checked for mines daily. Our main daily task was to pick up the native labour from Salalah, and to drive the 'wobble wheel' (a mine sweeping truck). These vehicles had no cabs. They were filled up with sand, and had half inch steel plates welded all round. The 'Wobble' ran daily down to Resuit. On arrival we turned round in the big compound, where we unloaded all the old 45 gallon drums, and then straight back to camp. This job started at first light every morning. The driving seats were always damp first thing in the morning. As it got hotter, the blown sand got on your rear end, and the result was big sand boils on your bottom (truth! I've had 'em).

Next thing, we had to check our Bren guns. They were in a right shoddy state. There were boxes of magazines all loaded full of ammo, but the magazine springs were all useless. We managed to obtain new springs from Bahrain, and got eight out of ten Brens working.

Things at R.A.F. Salalah were becoming hectic. A guard every second night and a morning run down to Resuit. But we now had a cinema on the camp (on a wall in the open air).

The Sultan's birthday arrived. No one knew what was going on. I was told to put on K.D. (our usual dress was P.T. shorts, flip-flops, and desert boots and a cap). The Sultan had a million rounds of 303 ammunition stacked at the camp. This was now redundant as his forces were now using weapons which were using 7.62 calibre shells. We wanted the old 303 ammunition removed from the camp. I was told to request their removal whilst I did my morning trip to pick up the native labour. I had no escort, so I drew a Sten gun and a couple of magazines.

When I got to Salalah the chief Wali was there. I told him about the removal of the 303 ammo from the camp. He took me to see the Sultan. I did not know how to address him. Anyway, he said, "ok next week, ammo away". The Wali said, "No coolies today. You can watch the Birthday parade while you are here". I drove the truck round the back so I could get a good look at the Courtyard.

The Sultan got up on the dais, and the parade started. The locals were going round and round firing in the air, and everyone seemed happy. Then 21 Pakistani troopers paraded with their warrant officer in charge. The Pakistani brigadier then mounted the dais, everything went quiet. He then made a speech. The warrant officer gave the 'present arms'. They all brought their rifles up and fired. I saw the Sultan go down, and the brigadier dropped on top of him. I shouted out (it had all gone quiet) and then the mob looked up at me, and I knew they thought I had something to do with it. They started yelling and running at me. I fell on the wall, and tripped over the Sten. It seemed ages before the Diesel started. I had to drive round the front of the town. When I got level with the town gates they were after my blood! Talk about being scared, I went up that desert strip like a 'bat out of hell'! I reckon I was doing 60 mph when I got to camp. I burst into the C.O's office and told him, "They've shot the Sultan and they are coming for us"! He said nowt, and just looked at me, so I was off!

I knew where the Armoury keys were, and picked up two Brens plus ammo. Together with another M.T. bloke (Taff Day) we stationed ourselves on top of the redundant ammo dump. Just outside the wire started popping up, so I fired off some five or six rounds, nothing happened. Half an hour later a Land Rover drove up to the camp gates, showing a big white flag. It was driven by 'Brits'. A British officer shouted that it was all over.

The next day the Paras arrived from Bahrain, and did sweeps looking for the 'shooters'. We were told later that they had been caught and hanged (so they could not enjoy themselves in Paradise). Movements called me in and said they wanted me out. I got posted back to UK (Marham), but on the way we called at Masirah. I had a good look at the set-up. The lads all had swordfish blades over their beds.

In 1970 the Sultan's son led a revolt against his Dad, and Dad was exiled to London. This new Sultan Quaboos has done wonders for his people, and brought them into modern times. Of my doing, never heard what happened, everything was hush hush. In a book by Ranulph Fiennes he states there was an assassination attempt in 1966 (he's wrong!).

Jim Muir (Mem. No.334)

CAIRO TO SHARJAH. (joining 244 Sqdn. Early 1943 – continued).

Decided to spend the night in town before reporting to HQ.ME (Headquarters Middle East). No lifts forthcoming so Ian Martin (a New Zealander on Tommy's crew) and I lug our parachutes to the trains where we get a taxi to the Corner Club to stay the night. We are now split into three separate groups. After dinner of half a chicken, eggs, bacon, sausage and chips, six lemonades, fruit salad and ice cream, which makes us too heavy to walk, the others all arrive. We decide to go to HQ.ME. at 9am the following morning. After messing around at HQ the instructions are to report to 216 Group the 'next morning'. This allows time for some shopping, desert boots etc., and finally an enormous dinner at Groppies I think it is called. 216 Group send us to Cairo West, about 15 miles out, past the pyramids and along the Alex road. Here we are messed about and then told to go out to Kilo 40, further along the Alex road, to pick up kites. At Kilo 40 they tell us to come back the 'next day', which happens to be May 1st. Amazingly the kites are to be ready the next day. They are and we fly them to Cairo West to do a few jobs (swinging the compass etc.), and then are all set to leave the following day. Only three and a half months since being posted to 244 and we might be on our way at last. What has been happening all this time, nobody tells us.

Cross the canal at Ismailia and land at Aqir in Palestine (2 hours) where oranges are the order of the day; buy 130 for 300 mills (6 shillings), and carry them in a sack. Off again, 3 hours twenty-five minutes to Habb; easy to see the reason for Lake Habbaniya from the air. It is an overflow from the River Euphrates. At Habb, 4 Ferry Control brief us to go through to Karachi, but this is queried, they must be daft. The next day we have kit to collect from the Transit Camp. When this is loaded onto the kites the temperature in the cockpit is unbearable (50 degrees C, that is more than 120 degrees F.), with the poor oranges getting even more dried up. Glad to get off the deck and as high as possible, 7000 feet, across miles of desolation, passing over Kuwait where a merchant vessel is standing off, and there are several dhows, with the Sultan's palace prominent on a headland. Eventually to the British islands of Bahrain, where we land on Muharraq Island (3hrs. 50.) only a few yards from the sea, and joined to the main island by a causeway. Tommy landed shortly afterwards and burst his port tyre whilst taxiing in. The atmosphere is much more humid than Habb, but the billets are wizo, made of palm branches and leaves, and with electric light and fans in each billet. It is 3pm so we all pile into a garry going into town, passing many dhows with a delicious smell of salt and seaweed prevailing. In town a few things are bought, shops are in very narrow closed in streets (bazaars), and then ice cream is consumed in a modern looking café. Taxi back to camp (4 miles for 3 rupees), and then a swim in the small pool, only 10 yards long and 4 feet deep with a palm frond roof giving protection from the sun. It is fed by an artesian spring with the water changing all the time.

Next morning took off for Sharjah, crossing a big barren patch of Arabia (Qatar and Yas Island) to land at Sharjah after 2 hrs. and 10 mins. Tommy didn't make it, his port tyre and wheel still U/S. It was lunchtime so had tiffen and then organised our beds. The billets are similar to those at Bahrain, light and airy so that they can be wafted by the slightest breeze, but there isn't any. And so at long last we have arrived at Sharjah. A few days later Jim Knapp and a few others arrive at Sharjah on the goofer (the local ship that sails up and down the gulf). They had the experience of another move by cattle truck from Habb. Well here we are and what now? Day by day it is getting hotter and more humid, and it's only May. Old timers tell lurid stories about August, you wait, they say, it's only 100 degrees now but 120 before long, you can fry eggs anywhere, but we don't believe them. Some bad news is that Cosford and Fitzimmonds, from the squadron have been killed at Abadan, but we don't have the details yet.

OCTOBER 2002

Jim Heslop
(Secretary & Supplies)

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham
(President)

Don James
(Treasurer)