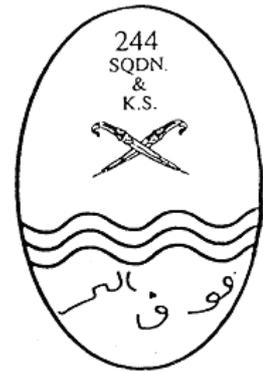




## 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



### Newsletter No. 39

Jim Says, Belated. New Year greetings to all our members from all of us here. Also, many thanks for all the Xmas cards we received. We could not possibly answer them all. Don, who left hospital on Xmas Eve, has made slow progress, but now seems to have turned the corner, and will be resuming his Treasurership duties very soon.

Now, as regards our membership. Our numbers are now down to 143, which is a net loss on 2002 of 7 members. Not bad at all, considering when we started this. Association nearly twelve years ago, we were expecting a membership of around fifty. Surprisingly, new people still join us, which counterbalances our losses.

Don hasn't been well enough to provide-us with a proper, balance sheet, but will do so in the near future. Sufficient to say that, as I write this, our cash at bank stands at £1100.61. This quite;; me on to mention that quit a few of you have not yet 'stumped up' this current year's subscription (due 1<sup>st</sup> January 2003). Please send your £5 to me for the moment). Not being fully 'au fait' with Don's accountancy system, I am not in a position to issue receipts, so please bear with me.

As regards our. Newsletters, I try to keep them of high standard, but cannot continue, to do so without your help. Some of you have promised to forward your stories, but have yet to do so. I appeal to. you, sit down, and get your authorship going and SEND THEM IN!

Chris Morris .has recently sent me details of the 2003 Habbaniya Reunion. This event will occur on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2003, and will be held at Elvington Air Museum (near York). Our Association has been invited to this 'do'. Cost per person is estimated at £16/17 (inc, lunch). Any member interested please ring me, but full details in our next issue.

Finally, in our last issue, I gave details of our Association blazer badges (£15 inc. postage). There has been quite a bit of interest in these, and I have had to reorder twice. This is your last opportunity to have one in all its glory. May I point out that these are Association badges and not just limited to ex-squadron members. Our 'Kindred Spirits ' are eligible to wear the badge. Please order by 31<sup>st</sup> March, and orders to me.

### A MYSTERY

From time to time I receive all sorts of 'phone calls. This one in particular was most curious.

Just prior to Xmas, the 'phone rang. This was from a gentleman (with a strong American accent). He announced he was speaking from North Carolina, U.S.A. His reason for calling was. His hobby was the collection of antique silver. He obtained his items from local flea markets and car boot sales. Recently he had purchased a half pint silver tankard with the notation (engraved) `244 Squadron'. It had been made by Walker & Hall (silversmiths) of Sheffield. Having lived in Sheffield at one. time, I knew this firm to be well known figures in the trade.

I asked our friend how he had obtained my address. He said he had driven across two States and contacted the USAAF 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum in Georgia (The Mighty Eighth). They told him there had never been a USAFF Squadron of that number, but their records showed that there was, or had been a RAF squadron with that number. They also had my details as Secretary (What it's like to be famous!).

Our friend is keen to research any items he finds. His idea was that these tankards would hang up behind the bar in some English country pub, awaiting their owner's return from an 'op. Personally I think our friend has

seen too many "Mrs. Miniver" type movies (the Hollywood idea of the RAF in wartime). I disabused him of that idea, as 244's history covered 1940-45, and all its service was in the Middle East area.

He also mentioned that he also held two other tankards engraved with '933<sup>rd</sup> squadron' and also '1471 Flight 933' sounded like an American unit, but our friend said it was a RAF Balloon squadron.

The upshot is that our correspondent stated he wished to present the tankard to our Association, and would package it, and send it on. However, it has yet to arrive.

All a very interesting tale. Has any of our members an explanation as to why a tankard with our squadron engraving, should end up in a flea market in the East board states of the USA. Any answers?

Jim (your Secretary)

### **A TALE OF MISJUDGEMENT**

Have you ever been unfairly judged? It sometimes hurts your pride and often there is nothing you can do about it. My tale concerns yet repatriation from Aden to the UK after my spell in Masirah. As a ground-to-air Wireless Operator (Air Traffic Control and HF/DF) I was well used to communications between the ground and aircraft and knew most of the local aircrew Signallers. On flights, we were often invited into the cabin to gain air experience and see what it was like from the other side, as it were. As I approached the aircraft that was to take me on the first leg from Aden to the Canal Zone I realised that it was not one of our Aden Comm. Squadron Valetta's but (presumably) one from the Canal Zone. Nevertheless, undaunted I introduced myself to the Signaller and asked him if I could join him on the flight deck for a short period. Now most of our Signallers were Sergeants or Flight Sergeants. This one however, was an officer. He looked at me for a moment and without a word turned and went off. Ah well, I thought, at least I tried.

Shortly after take-off there was a tap on my shoulder and my officer beckoned me to go forward. In the cabin he pointed to the Wireless Operator's chair and with a wave of his hands indicated me to get on with it and promptly disappeared back into the aircraft.

I sat down, a little surprised, and looked at the set. I was familiar with the controls of the T1154 and R1155, so I turned the receiver dial to 8885 (Air Traffic Control) and listened out for a while (which is what one does before one transmits). There was no air activity (Aden was not working any other aircraft) so after tuning around 8885 for a short while trying to find Aden, I checked the 1154 dials for 8885 then pressed the key for a second or so to find my position on the receiver - all standard practice. There was nothing - clearly either the transmitter or the receiver needed re-tuning or possibly both. Thinking about what to do next, I decided to use my initiative and first check the receiver tuning against a known source (neither the 1154 nor the 1155 had the most accurate of tuning dials - you could easily be up at 20 kc/s out from the indicated reading - you had to know your set). The most convenient source I could use to check the receiver was Radio Khartoum at about 8500 kc/s so I spun the receiver dial to Khartoum and was just writing down the scale reading when a rough hand grabbed my shoulder and without a word I was propelled back to my seat in the aircraft. I tried to explain what I was doing but those of you who know the Valetta will know that the flight deck is rather noisy and voice communication is something of an acquired art.

On landing, I again tried to explain what I was up to but the officer would not listen and simply turned his back and walked off. I felt aggrieved that he must have thought that all I wanted to do was listen to the radio! Have you ever been unfairly misjudged?

Jack Sharing (mem. No.95)

### **MORE ON THE SEIGE**

Did Chris Morris let you know about this Major General (Retd)? N Gribbon, who was to give a 'Talk' about the Siege/Battle of Habbaniya at Lancaster last month?

I should think he (Chris) will have done. Well, I wasn't very interested at first, but eventually I decided to go, and hear what he had to say from the Army's point of view. There was a lot I didn't know myself. It was certainly different from ours (Air Force).

To start with, it was one of the 'Kings Own Royal Border Regiment's' greatest victories of the War, and depicted so on their Standards. (I found this out when I went to that Lancaster 'do' a couple of years ago). I think everyone in Lancaster knew what their 'lads' did at Habbaniya.

As for the RAF, there 's no doubt it was a complete 'cock-up' (sorry), from the start, and proved to be so by the way they tried to cover it up. I think you got a letter a couple of years back from a Bill Mullins (mem. No ). He stated that the events at Habb in 1941 were now officially recognised (Min. of Defence no less). This was now! (1995).

That, more or less, speaks for itself, doesn't it? When I got back to 'Blighty' back end of '43 (from Sharjah), I had another five years to do. A few postings in England, and another overseas tour, ending up in Burma (Mingalodun). In all that time, I never once came across any airmen, NCO or Officer who had even heard of Habbaniya, never mind what happened there. So, I thought I might learn something if I went. Unfortunately, the 'talk' didn't start until 6pm, and had to be leaving at 7pm in order to get back to Otley that night. Anyway, I got to Lancaster (Alexandra Barracks) about 4.30pm. It seemed deserted, but eventually I met a 'Squaddie', and he showed me to the Recreation room, where, he said I could wait until 6pm. There were about half a dozen Amy lads, sitting about. Nobody took any notice of me.

When it got to nearly 6pm, I got up and went to find out the room where the 'Talk' was to be held. After wandering about a bit, I found the room. It was nearly full. I spotted Jim McKnight (mem No22) near the front row. So, I sat beside him. Jim was at the previous Lancaster 'do' in 2001. Chris Morris (mem No191) was out in front with all his photography gear. He gave me a slight wave, but I never got to have a word with him, as it was about to start.

It was now about 6. 20pm, so I stood up and apologised for having to leave early owing to train times etc. The Major General had evidently been wounded at Habbaniya, and was in the hospital at the same time as I was at Habb. "Yes, I would say that's about right" he said Well, I got to telling him that, shortly after when things had settled down, I was working in the 'Chippy's' shop. A man (probably a doctor) came in and asked me could make a wooden leg for someone up at the hospital. "You've seen a peg-leg, well something like that," he said

After about six attempts I did one they said would be alright. So up to the hospital it went, and I never heard anymore about it. I told the Major General about this (everyone was listening). I said, 'I wouldn't have been surprised to have seen you hobbling in on a wooden leg!' (Laughter all round!

Then I left, arriving back in Otley about 11.20pm (Shattered!)

Bob Norcott (mem No39)

### **THE LAST OF THE 244 BLENHEIMS. APRIL 1944**

March 1944, Palmi and I are still at Masirah but Mark is stuck at Sharjah. We have to do the odd sortie with any spare navigator, and go out for example with Fish Mills, and Bobby Newton, who is really Neil's navigator, but Neil is stuck at Sharjah with Mark. Kites not breaking down so much just now, perhaps they sense that the 'new' Wimpeys (Wellingtons) that have arrived are replacements and they take a dim view. The squadron is due to move down from Sharjah en masse and so new billets are going up all over the place. Just now Masirah is just about perfect, if you can forget the millions of flies around the camp and some deficiencies in the nosh. The temperature is between 70 and 80 degrees and the sun shines all day the sea is great. Flying is in the mornings so most afternoons several of us wander down to the east beach, which is about 40 minutes walk across a stony type of desert, with numerous small lizards which run at great speeds. We then swim for an hour or more. There is Ian Martyn, who is a farmer in North Island, New Zealand (it sounds a great country) Bobby Newton and other souls who feel sufficiently energetic. The waves are large with really good surf arid in between the sandy stretches there are rock pools with great varieties of shells, all it needs is a few girls and an ice cream stall.

By the middle of March all the Wimpeys have arrived from the Middle East and we expect to be posted at any time. News comes through from Sharjah that Tommy Tucker, Jim Knapp and crews have taken Blenheims through to the Middle East; the first of the postings. The same day after an air test, I start off for Sharjah with Palmi and Bobby Newton as navigator, but have to return to Masirah with the port engine cutting. Next day after repairs, I do another air test, which seems to be o. k. and so off we go again. However that was only to fool me, because the engine starts cutting at about Muscat. It is now nearer to Sharjah than Masirah so we press on with a few more cutting episodes. They only last for 15 seconds or so each and thankfully we get

to Sharjah after a close crossing of the Shinas pass through the mountains. After inspection we learn the engine will have to be changed which means a bit more delay to our postings.

On April 1st, of all dates Mitchell, who was navigator with Tommy Tucker, passes through Sharjah having been posted to a Catalina squadron in India. Not too keen on that. However the very next day our Middle East posting comes through. Neil Wren and myself are taking H and E complete with our original crews. Me, Mark and Palmi, with Stan Hawkes as passenger, leave in H (BA677) on April 3. What a relief but don't breath the last sigh until we have passed Yas Island, when it is nearer Bahrain if an engine packs in. Both kites get to Bahrain, Neil with Bobby Newton and Baines (2 hrs. 40 mins.), and we immediately go into Manama by taxi (3 chips) where we have ice cream and a meal at the coffee shop. Take off for Habb in the afternoon first passing close to an Empire Flying boat and then nearly running into some Beauforts and D. C 's. Quite busy. Land at Habb after 4 hrs. 15 mins. (Via Kuwait and Shaibah). Neil's kite having a spot of engine bother. Everybody takes advantage of the hot baths, seem like the first in living memory, then there is the cinema and `Cheapside'. Trees are all in bud and there are thousands of sparrows fluttering about, but the food has fallen off a bit.

As we rev up to take off the next leg to Lydda, Neil Wren goes U/S with his engine problem, so we push on alone, going via Ramadi and then along the pipe line, across Amman, the Jordan valley and into the Lydda circuit along with about half a dozen Liberators (3 hrs. 15 mins). We have the idea we would like to night stop here, all the lush vegetation after the desert, and there is the excuse that we have to wait for Neil. So Lydda it is with a garry taking us to the main gate en route to Tel Aviv. What a fantastic change, green grass and the wonderful intoxicating scent from the almost continuous orange groves. We don't mind having to walk a bit before we get into town. My first impression of Tel Aviv was an ever-present smell of coffee, very good. Walked down Allenby Road and had something to eat, as well as several glasses of orange juice at 15 mils a glass, then walked to the beach which doesn't seem to be anything special, not as good as Masirah or Ras al Hadd in fact.

Back at camp we hear that Neil finally took off from Habb but he had to force land in the Jordan alley at Jericho when his engine packed in, but I think he made it to a landing ground.

Next day Neil still not here so we decide to push off. We cross the canal zone at Ismalia, where the Littorio and one or two other surrendered or captured Itie Battleships are lying at anchor, and then to Fayid to eventually deliver the kite to its final resting place. All these Maintenance units in the Canal Zone seem to have become Blenheim graveyards; they are now put on the scrap heap as new superior kites are brought in, Mosquitoes etc. Quite sad really. "Not likely" they say at Fayid, "we don't want it, take to 161 MU at Kabrit, they are taking Bisley's now". So we take it to Kabrit, a quick take off and landing. "Sorry we don't want you" they say at Kabrit, "we finished Bisleys now, take it to 168 M. U. at Helio". This is becoming ridiculous and we now have to stay the night at Kabrit, but than goodness next day we get rid of it at Heliopolis, a real junk yard of Blenheims in all states of decay, and much more handy for us, close to Cairo, and to dear old Almaza transit where we will have to bind like mad for some leave, and await our next posting to we know not where. Both Kabit and Fayid are near the canal and either would have meant a horrid journey to Cairo.

Frank Moseley (mem. No. 304)

### **SHAIBAH (119 M.U.)**

In Newsletter No.36 the mention of 119MU reminded me of the day I was sitting down to a plate of steak, egg and chips in a crowded Chan's restaurant in the camp. A female voice asked permission to join me at the table. It was one of the lady Russian Pilots, dressed in flimsy summer apparel. At age 21, and having seen no white woman for nearly two years, I could hardly speak or swallow, so my mouth watering, meal was left untouched, altogether a most unsettling experience!

Alec Martin (mem. No. 324)

### **D'ARCY'S VISIT TO SHARJAH/DUBAI**

11am Manchester-Dubai (about 12 1/2 hrs flying time). Arrive near midnight. Airport very modern. Although, to get to the exit, about half a mile walk via an underground wide walkway, seemed a long distance after a time consuming flight. Hotel in Dubai (via their own transport) 2am into bed.

All buildings and surroundings in Dubai and Sharjah are superb. Ultra modern designs and fittings very well maintained. Makes Southport, Liverpool and most other places in this country look old fashioned and unkempt. But I still prefer the 'Old Country' to live in!!

Met by Mrs Paula Bedford, who contacted yourselves over two years ago. This was at the Rihab Rotana Suites, Gavouk, Dubai.

Typical of her efficiency was a printed letter at the Reception desk on my arrival. She advised of her collecting me at 12 noon that day, together with a child of five to six months.

Saw around Dubai that day after having some lunch at the Yachting Club, with a trip down the Dubai Creek.

Second day, driven to Sharjah via superb three-lane highway (certainly not a sand track!). All vehicles very much up to date, and in top condition, with most drivers feeling that they all want to get there first! Dubai and Sharjah give an atmosphere of affluence, prosperity and first class modernisation.

Visited the old Imperial Airways fort in Sharjah, now used as one of six museums, and now named "Sharjah Heritage Museum". The Director of Heritage, Abdulaziz Abdurahman Al Mussoffam came to meet us in the museum. Which is about a quarter of a mile off the main road. It is surrounded by a high wall, large iron gates with modern buildings, with about thirty metres of open space to the Fort entrance, which seemed very similar to the original. I presume you have the photograph originally sent by Paula of the interior.

A large extension to left hand side was a hangar, now housing a Dakota and an Avro Anson, with a tricycle undercart 'plane suspended from the ceiling, all with propellers, silver coloured and looking immaculate.

Around the walls, large photographs of the old Imperial Airways passenger bi planes of the early '30 's (Handly Page HP42 's). Their route Croydon to Australia. We also saw a film from this era of an aircraft landing, being serviced and morning take-off. Passengers were taken into the Fort for overnight accommodation. (I believe we have this cassette in our library – Ed).

On the right hand side and to the rear of the fort, an extension showing museum pieces of early 20<sup>th</sup> century cycles, furniture, typewriters and other equipment.

There are four other museums in Dubai. All of the old photographs sent by yourselves (via Jim), together with quite a few of my own, were handed over to the Director. They were well received, and I understood that enlargement will be made, and hung up in the section allocated to 244 Squadron. This was set up originally through Paula.

The present display shows 244 Squadron Newsletter No. 29, together with various letters from our members, answering that questionnaire that was sent to us.

I finished the morning visiting the English school where Paula taught. I spoke to an eleven/twelve year old class of some of the experiences I had with the convoy at sea and serving at Sharjah Staging Post attached to the squadron. The pupils seemed very interested, asked some questions, and I gave them a few things to laugh at.

My service at Sharjah was during 1942/43, but visiting the other week did not seem like 60 years ago.

The visit brought back some good memories (you always forget the bad!) and a form of comradeship which is hard to find in one's latter years.

Darcy Huntriss (mem. No. 180)

### **MARCH 2003**

Jim Heslop  
(Secretary & Supplies)

W/Cdr Ron Rotherham  
(President)

Don James  
(Treasurer)