



## 244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



### Newsletter No. 40

Jim Says, Here we are with issue no. 40. It's been a long haul since October 1991 when our first Newsletter was published (A one page effort, listing those members who attended our first Reunion, plus a short article on Masirah Island by Tommy Hazel (mem. No. 6) Lots of water under the bridges since then. Membership has grown from the initial 40 plus. Reaching a high of 189, and now tapering down to today's 143. Then again, Don and I have made many friends during all this action.

We have seen the Association been firmly placed 'on the map'. Our proudest moment was the award of our official Squadron crest by the College of Heraldry. It now lies on view at RAF Museum Hendon. It also appears in a stained glass window at the Battle of Britain Museum, near Dover (courtesy of Harry Savage Mem. No.83), and of course it shows on view beside our tree in the National Arboretum.

As I say, forty issues, covering your stories and your anecdotes of your service life in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. I appeal, as usual, keep sending in your tales of yesteryear, in order that your Newsletter keeps thriving.

Don is now back with us (I'm happy to say!). See his contribution below.

Now, the Habbaniya Association Reunion on 11<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER '03. (To which our Association has been invited). We have had several enquiries about this event, and full details are enclosed.

HE'S BACK!! At long last, here we are again, not yet 100%, but on my way. Jim has done a fine job covering for the last nine months.

Now I'm back, what about subs due last 1st January? There are (as usual) quite a few of you non-payers. Jim will let you know if you are one of them with his usual notation on this Newsletter. By the way, subs are still £5, and we intend to keep it that way. We also intend to keep on with the Newsletter as long as we are able.

This Newsletter gives details of our 2002 balance sheet (better late than never!). It shows a very healthy position.

This has been helped by the very kind donations, for which we thank you. Also, thanks for all your cards and good wishes whilst I was in hospital. They really meant a lot to me. A word of warning. If you should bump into me, I am now a mere nine stone, having lost three stone, but I think you will know me. I have not changed much. It's great to be back!

### **FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE**

"Last Remembrance Day (11 November) I was disappointed to see that on the Westminster Abbey Field of Remembrance, there was no cross to commemorate those of our members who made the ultimate sacrifice during that awesome period of war and did not return to these shores. These friends and former colleagues, absent in body but not in our hearts, deserve to have this public demonstration of remembrance. I have now made arrangements for this omission to be rectified. Next November, there will be a cross bearing the squadron association badge in the RAF plot".

"In fact", he continues, "the whole RAF contribution was disappointing in comparison with those from other forces — it would appear that it's left to individuals to take the initiative and arrange for the crosses to be planted on behalf of loved ones or their associations. I don't think I even saw anything relating to any part of the Middle East Air Force let alone our Association".

Jack Sharing (Mem. No. 95)

### **DEMOBILIZATION FORM**

*If I seem rather strange and act rather queer,  
If I seem like a Wand 'ring Jew, never fear,  
I'm perfectly harmless, that's why I'm here,  
I'm on furlough from MESOPATANIA*

*John Bull in an article touchingly wrote,  
Declaring the Air Force was always broke,  
That was the truest word he e'er spoke  
About the airmen from MESOPATANIA*

*They gave us no money, but we didn't complain,  
We would have had some, if we had been sane,  
But money is the cause of all our pain,  
So we left ours in MESOPATANIA*

*If we should do things that seem senseless to you,  
You'll find there's a method in each thing I do,  
I'm a marvel at catching flies, fever and flu',  
They teach us that in MESOPATANIA*

*They sent us to Blighty, I think as a test,  
To see if a change and a few hours rest  
Will bring back the brains the sun has sent west,  
Of the airmen of MESOPATANIA*

*So if look quite lost in some Blighty street,  
With my cap in my hand, and my kit at my feet,  
Just pity me kindly, and say it's the heat,  
And the date palms of MESOPATANIA*

*And if in the Strand I am charging a bus,  
And otherwise creating a terrible fuss,  
If I'm smashed up and squashed, don't stand by and cuss,  
I'm only from MESOPATANIA*

*Take me up tenderly, treat me with care,  
I'm one of the crowd that England sent there,  
To live in the desert a 'trying to scare  
The Arabs of MESOPATANIA*

*We were stationed in Eden for a time they say,  
The place we were told from which Eve ran away,  
And out there she's never seen to this day,  
She has bolted from MESOPATANIA*

*We found milk and honey just floating about,  
Peach Melba and cream grown with fine Brussel sprout,  
But they fed us on grass when the 'Bully' ran out,  
At Habbaniya in MESOPATANIA*

*There 's no known disease that won't thrive there, and then  
The sun dries your blood and the ink in your pen,*

*And dust covers thousands of England's white men,  
In the deserts of MESOPATANIA*

*And if when I die, I am sent for a spell,  
To a place where strained souls are made clean and well  
I'll beseech Peter in mercy to send me to Hell,  
But not back to MESOPATANIA*

### **'SKIP-DISTANCE'**

Gather round all of you ground crew and air Wops, and listen to my tale. You will remember at wireless school, when they illustrated on the blackboard, the passage of radio waves through the ether-those uniform wavy lines. Well, in certain conditions, those wavy lines did not conform to practice, and resulted in gaps in which radio transmissions could not be heard.

One afternoon in July 1944, our crew in Wellington XII took off on an anti-submarine sweep. Before setting course we always had to obtain permission to proceed on our 'trip' by requesting (by W/T) to 'GO'. I was on the set, and as we climbed to gain height, I tapped out on the key INT-GO? ' followed by our aircraft call sign 'L5BK'. Ground station would normally reply 'L5BK-GO'. I must explain that this was a form of check to ensure our radio equipment was in working order.

On this occasion there was no reply from Masirah ground station. I repeated my request again and again dead silence from the ground. Len (our driver) was becoming impatient as we circled the airfield on Masirah Island. After a few minutes of this, and still no reply to my repeated requests, up came the ground station cart Khormaksar (Aden) (over 900 miles away). 'L5BK-GO!'- I reported this to Len. He said 'That's good enough for me. Course was set, and off we went on our 8 hour 20 minute 'trip'. I might add that during our mission, our radio transmitter and receiver functioned normally, as both radio messages were both sent and received.

We returned late evening, landed and taxied to dispersal. On leaving the aircraft, all hell broke loose. 'Pilot and the wireless operator who was on the Key during take off to report to the Flight Commander and Signals Officer'. (In our crew we carried three Wops). My interview with the Signals Officer did not go well "You did not obtain W/T GO after take-off" "A most serious offence! You were endangering H.M. Aircraft!"

I explained as best as I could, but this was not accepted. I handed over my W/T Log, which showed the message received from Khormaksar ground station. The Signals Officer was disposed to think that this was an example of 'cooked' Log. In other words a 'fiddle' to hide my omission to obtain 'GO' from Masirah. He said checks would be made with Khormaksar. It seemed that F/sgt Heslop would be in serious trouble the W/T Log was found to be incorrect. Len, our pilot, was also 'deep in it' if things did not go well.

About five or six weeks later, I was called in again by the Signals Officer, and grudgingly told that my W/T Log tallied with that of Khormaksar ground station, and I was 'off the hook'. He told me that this was a case of 'Skip Distance', when weather conditions caused the radio waves to behave in an odd fashion. Not a word of apology to Jim!

Any of you ex Wops had a similar experience? Please let me know.

Jim Heslop (Mem. No. 51)

### **SURFING AT SOLALAH**

A message had come through from Solalah that Sgt. Jim Chapple (sadly killed in an allied accident after the war) had limped in there on one engine in one of 244's Blenheims. On June 15, 1942, my crew, Gordon Hampton and Bill Allan and I set off in P6931 taking Lac. Smith on a six hour flight via Muscat and Masirah Island to see if the dud engine could be coaxed back into life.

Putting down at Masirah, I walked into one of the buildings and a voice said, "What the hell are you doing here?" - It was a school time friend I hadn't seen since we had moved from the country to Sydney ten years before. He was on his way to India and had just dropped in like I had. It can be a small world.

Circling the strip at Solalah I noted the lovely beach and magnificent surf running and decided we'd better have some of that whilst Jim's engine was being examined. As soon as we could we headed for it.

A number of people, unused to surf conditions, told us we were mad, but we all had surf experience at home, particularly me as a Surf Club member at Collaroy, a Sidney suburb and also as a surfboard rider. We did not blame those who warned us because it is easy to get into trouble if you are not surf wise. A number still do here every year deciding to go in where it is nice and calm and into a rip, then trying to swim against it instead of across it.

We had a great time, overnighted and a couple of days later, flew back to Sharjah in formation with Jim keeping an eye on him in case of more engine trouble. It had been a nice change from Sharjah 's climate.

Tony Tubbenhauer (Mem. No.112) (Australia)

### **MEMORIES FROM THE ARMOURY**

I was the armament officer of 244 Squadron from 29/8/43 to 6/6/44. The Gulf like one or two war zones, may be classed 'forgotten', but of course is well remembered by those who served there.

My duties included looking after four bomb dumps in the Gulf three on the Arabian side, and one on the Persian side. So I was fortunate in not being static in a single site of desolation.

I enjoyed being ferried around, despite that being in 'clapped out' Bisleys, except that one flight caused my adrenalin to flow. Memory fades, but landing once at Jask (or was it at Ras al Hadd?) sitting in the drop down 2<sup>nd</sup> Dickies seat, I realized that the F/sgt pilot was landing too short and was going to hit the perimeter fence. Smartly I elbowed him in the ribs, pointed, yelled a warning, and swiftly, braced my feet against the dash. His reaction was also swift, but too violent on the stick. Such that, the aircraft stalled, and fell out of the sky! A succession of hard and high bounces saw the aircraft disintegrating with each one to end more or less as a separate flat bottomed cockpit, but whose cover still slid back, no trouble.

Amazingly, the pilot merely hit his head, was not a hospital case, and suffered not a single scratch. I didn't hit my head because of my well chocked feet in the near horizontal position.

Conditions in the Gulf were Spartan to say the least, but being the same for all ranks, this made for a very relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Relationships were pleausrably simple. As a section leader, I was closer there to my armourers than at any other time in a RAF career of 27 1/2 years. Hence, when the 244 Association was formed I found that I had four good friends. Three have since died, but Jim Green still survives.

For this, I have to thank you two for starting the Association and all the care, time and effort you have put into promoting its Kindred Spirits atmosphere.

I salute you by declaring:- Advance 244 Squadron & Kindred Spirits Association.

Mike Kerrigan (Mem. No.19)

### **MASIRAH RE-VISITED (continued)**

An Argosy was used as a support aircraft for the Hunter operation, and a Shackleton came up from Aden, and stood by for possible air/sea rescue duties. It left after the returning Hunters departed for Aden, usually beating up the airfield at zero feet, scattering camels, donkeys and Arabs in all directions.

We were never involved in any action whilst I was on the Island. The nearest we came to any form of scare was one occasion. We had to inspect the aircraft for hidden bombs. It was thought that there was a threat to blow up the aircraft, and the threat was taken seriously. The SP 's were supposed to do it, but hadn't a clue where to look, so it fell upon me to do the job.

RAF Valetta's flew the RSM (Riyan, Salalah, Masirah) route, on Mondays and Thursdays; and Aden Airways DC3 on Tuesdays and Fridays, each returning next morning On Wednesday the Beverley came in from Bahrain, returning next morning, and also midweek a Pembroke came in from Sharjah, night-stopped, and then went on to Salalah. This always carried fruit and goodies for the Big-Nebby Arab. On return, it over flew Masirah. A long wooden building by the railway line was the 'new' barrack block. It had several rooms for four, and a couple of single bunks at each end. The veranda was on the front side only. The Education Section was one of the very old (wartime) Nissan huts next to a red coloured one. Another verandered building was the

Corporals Club, NAAFI, and Station Cinema leading onto a large block which was the Airmen's Mess. A hangar housed the MT and ASF heavy ground equipment such as jacks and towing arms. It also contained the bulk of a second-hand hangar sent up from Aden, which I understand, was to be erected down by the new runway that Costains had just completed.

A tall building was where the water desalination plant was situated. This was maintained by AMWD with mostly Pakistani labour. One of them used to give haircuts for 1/6d, a bit expensive we thought, but if you caught him in good mood you could get a glass of goats milk, still warm from the goat.

MT3S was run by Snr/Tech Cato, a West Indian as black as the Ace of Spades ( a really smashing fellow), but the Arabs couldn't understand why a black man could give orders to white airmen. For those who didn't serve in the 50 's and 60's, a Senior Technician was a Technical Sergeant and wore three stripes upside down. I was a Corporal Technician, two stripes upside down, and was paid the princely sum of 1/6d a day more than a Trade Group I Corporal.

Buildings up by the Giraffe House were where the Pakistani workers lived were made of 40 gallon oil drums, some empty, and others opened up and flattened out as sheet metal. In the Wali camp their houses were constructed that way, and from the abandoned ones it looked like the drums did not contain any sand. On the aircraft pan, outside SHQ there was a (war-time American) refueling installation, but it had been out of use for many years. We always refueled using the standard RAF twin boomed bowser.

It may be well over forty years since I was on the Island, but I don't think my memories of my year there will ever fade.

Jeff Mellor (Mem No.341)

## **JULY 2003**

Jim Heslop (Secretary & Supplies) W/Cdr Ron Rotherham (President) Don James (Treasurer)