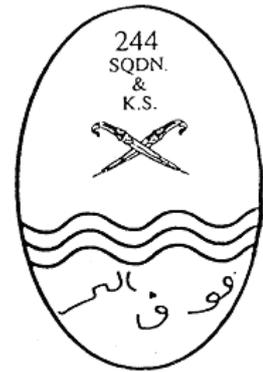




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 43

Jim & Don say, at last we have our belated balance sheet on view for 2003. Many apologies for the delay, but you know our circumstances here. Sorry to say, as I write, Don is back in hospital, and we all wish him well, and hope he is back home shortly. Speaking about balance sheets, we are in a healthy condition cash wise, which leads us to mention that 32 of you have failed to come up with your 2004 sub. Our records show that it was a similar situation last year. So come on lads, send off your cheques for £5, still to Don, and payable to "244 Sqdn. & Kindred Spirits Assn."

Sad to say that one of our stalwarts has passed on. Mike Kerrigan (mem. No.19) was the Squadron Armaments Officer during 1943/44 both at Sharjah and Masirah. He was a great supporter of our Association. I only spoke to Mike a short time ago, when he sent me details of our Blenheim V article in the current Newsletter. From memory I think Mike attended all our Reunions bar 2001.

Don't forget Members, more goad copy required for future Newsletters.

I was at school until after the war ended, but in 1951 I was awarded a cadetship at Cranwell and, after an abortive attempt to become a pilot, was commissioned into the Equipment Branch in 1954. Three years later I found myself posted to RAF Khormaksar, where part of my responsibilities was to organise supplies for the 'route stations' – Riyan, Salalah and Masirah. I became a regular passenger on the 84 Squadron 'RSM' Valetta and sometimes in one of their Beverley's (and I also flew, whenever I could, in virtually every other aircraft on the station as, immediately we took off, we were free from Aden's stifling heat and humidity). And so, some 13 years after my father had left Masirah, I arrived myself - never stationed there but often visiting for several days at a time. In the late 1950s the buildings were not greatly different from how they had been at the end of World War 2 and there was still considerable evidence, both of the petrol tin huts my father had described and of the still-growing piles of empty and decaying 44 gallon aviation fuel-drums. The then Officers' Mess was of a more permanent construction but very basic, and I remember one internal door labelled 'Television Room', which was intended to trap unwary new arrivals from the UK- it led straight out into the desert! I also remember a very well produced mural on one of the anteroom walls which, we were told, had been painted by an Italian POW. My father had spoken of having enjoyed eating turtle while he was on the island and although I never tried this myself, did go down to the beach one night to watch the turtles laying their table tennis ball-sized eggs. They deposited these, one at a time, in a hole they had dug in the sand above the high water mark, and then laboriously levered themselves back down to the water's edge, tears streaming down their faces, before they swam out to sea; never to see their young. The railway was then in full working order, the old wooden jetty in good repair and, in those days, we still floated the fuel ashore in drums, amid much excitement from the locals.

During my time in Aden I also visited Sharjah and flew quite close to another of your kindred airfields-Shaibah-which my late father-in-law, John Manning, commanded at the end of World War 2. Indeed, one of his stories was of a near-mutiny at Shaibah (as at a number of other RAF stations in the (then) Persian Gulf) over the seemingly interminable days in repatriating 'hostilities only' personnel, who were longing to get home again. He described having climbed on the back of a 3-tonner to address the assembled throng and persuade them to go back to work by explaining exactly what was being done and assuring them that he would personally do everything within his power to get things moving quickly.

So-no dramatic wartime stories from me I'm afraid, and I was only involved in a couple of in-flight emergencies throughout my time at Khormaksar. One was when the starboard engine nacelle of a Valetta came adrift taking off with a full load from Salalah, necessitating an over-weight landing ASAP. The other was over Khormaksar itself, when the throttle linkage parted on a Sycamore helicopter and an engine ran away with itself, uncontrollably, taking us soaring skywards. I was sitting on the doorstep at the time, about to go outboard on the winch (all for a bit of fun on a hot afternoon). Fortunately I heard the R/T call to stay where I was and hold

tight, the pilot cut the ignition switches and we spun down in autorotation, landing with a bit of a bump but thankfully no worse. Khormaksar did lose quite a few aircraft during the two years I was there, however. Several 8 Squadron Venoms were brought down by enemy fire up-country and one or two crashed on the range, practising gunnery and rocket firing. A Beverley over-turned on landing at one of the up-country airstrips, a visiting Venom (one of a pair) crashed on take-off at Khormaksar just after I had landed in a Valetta, and a twin-engine aircraft (either a Pembroke or a Twin Pioneer-I can't remember which) flew into the sea on the approach to Khormaksar. Of these accidents, the last was the only one in which there were no injuries or fatalities, and it was by far the funniest. The crash alarm went and the tannoy said that an aircraft had come down in Aden Harbour. As usual, everyone who had access to a vehicle rushed to the water's edge to witness the excitement and there, clearly visible, was the sad sight of a half-submerged aircraft, several hundred yards short of the runway. As I arrived so did OC Flying in his Landrover. Rapidly taking stock of the situation he stripped to the waist, dived in and struck out bravely towards the stricken aeroplane, intent on rescuing its occupants. He was concentrating so hard on getting there as fast as he could that he swam right past the crew, who were unhurt and were walking ashore: the water in that part of the harbour was only two feet deep!!

I came home from Aden in 1959 and, perhaps (as they say) because I had taken the precaution of climbing Mount Shamsan, I never went back. I often wonder what it all looks like nowadays. We have the advantage of Colin Richardson's excellent book to keep us abreast of developments at Masirah and also Salalah, both of which have changed out of all recognition. But what of Khormaksar? Some years back one of our daughters was ill-advisedly flying with Aeroflot to East Africa via Moscow when –surprise, surprise–the aircraft ran short of fuel and had to divert into Khormaksar. She said it was like landing in a scrapyard, with derelict vehicles and broken aircraft littering the airfield wherever she looked, It sounds just about what I might have expected really!

Mike Allistone (Mem. No.362)

ON THE 'BUS IN TEHRAN

One for you guys, won't find its way into the Newsletter. There were two red faces all round. I had my 21st can't remember if the place had a name, on the way on leave to Tehran. Temperature 132F-in the shade. How good it was to reach Tehran and the cool and the fresh fruit. Coming into the City from the rest camp a stop before the one where we disembarked from the bus, there was a tall round monument we'd dubbed The Blue Prick that we used to tell us when to get off. That's what it looked like. Assuming, wrongly as it turned out, that the locals didn't speak English, as T.B.P. loomed up one of us, from down the front hollered out, "there's The Blue Prick, lads, off next stop". Sitting up the back with us we'd noticed a good looking young lass and assumed she too was a local. With a grin on her face she leaned over to us and in perfect English asked us what was the time. Hence the red faces. One of our lot chatted her up and found she was the daughter of an English diplomat living there. The things you remember!

Tony Tubbenhauer (mem. No.112)

ADEN DAYS

It was late in 1953 that I was posted from the foggy winter of UK to Salt Pans, Aden.

Salt Pans Transmitter Station got its name from the adjacent saltwater lakes that stretch inland from the north side of the harbour.

Seawater was drawn into the lakes by Archimedes screw powered by windmills not unlike the ones you see in the Norfolk countryside. The fierce Aden sun quickly dried up the water and eventually the remaining crust of salt was dug out and exported

At the top end of the pans there was a natural lake which was home to thousands of flamingos, although they must have been over two miles away you could see the pink outline on the horizon.

The lads at Salt Pans lived in two huts, the big one housed 15 or so men and the small hut about six.

We were all wireless people except the cook who had a small staff of Arabs to help in keeping the place free from ants, weevils and cockroaches whilst he cooked the food

There was a Somali 'boy' he was thirty if he was a day, who saw to the laundry and kept our shoes clean for a few pence, in general the immigrant Somalis had a higher IQ than the Aden Arab and secured the more worthwhile jobs.

Because he was six feet tall and very thin everyone called him Lofty. If you wanted to know anything at all, Lofty was the person to ask. Every Thursday he would appear with four or five blowlamps and a can of paraffin. Everyone's bedding would be stripped and the iron beds were taken outside onto the sand where we would play the flames from the blow lamps in all the nooks and crevices of the beds to destroy the eggs of the bed bugs that shared the nights with us. We all worked shifts which meant that there was always someone asleep in bed whatever the time of day. It was not uncommon to see bed bugs scurrying across some sleeping persons bare back at great speed seeking the solace and darkness of the owners bedding.

Whilst on duty one night at the transmitter building we once heard an alarming crack from one of the transmitters and ran to see what it was since none of the transmitters had gone off line. Through the grill of a large teleprinter transmitter we could see the remains of a rat that had stepped across the two points of a capacitor and fried itself to death.

It was very humid in Aden, the town is in the shadow of an extinct volcano whose peak is known as Sham San. You get the full force of the sun from above and because of the sea breeze from the south is shielded from the town by the walls of Sham San the heat can really build up.

Wimpey, the construction company, started to dig into the mountain near the district called Maala and dump the rock into the bay. Progressively there was a road built across the other side of the harbour: I've no doubt that it is finished by now.

The Salt Pans site was located, as many radio units are, well away from everything else.

We lived about a mile from the airfield at Khormaksar, up the east bound coast road and the unit where we worked was another few hundred yards further on.

Because of the heat generated by the equipment the Transmitter Station was air-conditioned and that made being on duty agreeably cool.

In 1954 the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were on a world tour following her Coronation in the previous year. She came to Aden during that tour and all servicemen were required to be on parade and lining the route that she took on her inspection of the colony. I guess there wasn't enough of us to do the job properly. She left Steamer Point and visited first the little town of Crater, which actually lies within the volcano crater. Then the Shaikh Othman district at the other side of the bay. This route formed the shape of a letter 'Y' and as the Queen went up the first leg of the 'Y' to Crater, the servicemen lining the beginning of the route were quickly loaded into trucks and shipped to the third part of the route to supplement the men there! So much for manpower shortages. There were many areas in Aden that were out of bounds to us and for good reasons, often little children no more than five or six years old would tug at our jackets saying, "You come and see my Mummy". Street traders who sold cigarettes, chewing gum etc, would offer other merchandise describing it as, "Number one, made in America". When we declined they would sing out after us, "You'll be sorry".

Fred Baxter (Mem. No.305)

YOU CAN'T POLISH A SANDY FLOOR

I begin my story in May 1945 at Bottesford, Leics, where I joined 1668 H.C.U. Here, pilots graduated from flying twins to four-engine Lams, and many are the horror stories I could relate about night flying circuits and bumps. But that would only detract from the whole point of this little epistle.

Having reported to the guardroom, where I was assigned to a billet and even a bed space. I duly located my new home and entered There was my lovely iron bed, the third from the right, and I was dragging my heavy kitbag and tired feet towards it when.....

"Get off the floor!" More a shriek than a shout, it stopped me in my tracks, and an assortment of thoughts invaded my already confused mind scorpions, unexploded bombs, broken glass... "Get off the floor, use the pads!". My weary eyes followed the pointing fingers. There, behind me, just inside the door, stood a pile of felt

mats. I still hadn't quite caught on until one of the erks skated past me, a pad under each foot. Then it clicked, and now I come to the point of this story.

My previous posting to Bottesford had been Masirah, where I spent a year living in a petrol-tin billet with no doors or windows for the first three months, a rough concrete floor, sleeping on bug-infested wooden boards and straw-filled palliasses, all balanced precariously on four-gallon petrol tins, one at each corner. Every two weeks each billet received a supply of kerosene, enough to de-bug eighteen beds, and this worked well except that there was always one silly sod who, in sheer desperation, put a match to his and up they went. Somebody scrounged a Flit /gun, to which we attached some kerosene-soaked wadding on a length of wire. Then we lit it and pumped the gun, picking off flies on the wing. Obviously the forerunner of napalm, and very successful until one erk got a backfire and the fun was over.

To progress further back in time, my previous station to Masirah had been Sharjah and 244 Squadron's Bisleys. There, our billet was of straw, with no windows at all, and no floor, except for straw matting which was permanently covered with uneven mounds of sand. In the first decent sandstorm the whole thing collapsed on us in the middle of the night, and thereafter it was propped up with a tree trunk at each end plus two more resting on each side of the roof to prevent lift-off. We slept on rope charpoys, each leg standing in a cocoa tin filled with kerosene to deter climbing insects, and mosquito net poles, over which we draped our groundsheets. Every morning we would tip out about three inches of water. 98% humidity, they said. More like 100% I'd say, for we were never dry.

I flew on air test in one of the Bisleys after working on the hydraulics, and was quite enjoying the sea view when I saw the starboard wing lift in level flight, leaving a one-inch gap towards the trailing edge. I told the pilot to please slow down as I had a birthday coming up. When we landed I found a dozen rivets had sheared, and when I knocked off the heads of another twelve with a piece of wood I realised the extent of the damage the salt-laden humidity was causing. Our Bisleys were quite literally falling apart. (But then you knew that, didn't you Jim?).

I was about to tell my proud tale of woe to the erk in the next bed, but saw by his expression that he didn't want to know. Then I saw the Africa Star ribbon on his best blue. The skate came by again and gave me two pads. He too wore the desert ribbon. I was going to say, "Get off the floor? My last billet didn't have a bloody floor". But I didn't, and I was glad, because the three of us became the best of friends, and suddenly what we went through in the desert didn't matter.

Alec Alder (Mem. No.26)

THE ADVENT OF THE BLENHEIM

'Tis August 1942, and aircrew of 244 (including Don) are enjoying their leave up in Tehran. They are billeted in tents in the grounds of the British Embassy, and enjoying the facilities on offer. One evening, lazing by the swimming pool, they spy two figures strolling in the grounds. These officers are recognisable as Air Chief Marshal Tedder (I/C RAF Middle East) and Lord Gort (a well known military figure). It is the time of the Tehran conference, when all the big movers are in town.

Tedder comes over to the lads and enquires which squadron they are from. When they answer '244', he smiles and says, "How are you managing with those 'clapped out' Blenheims?" They reply by saying they are due for replacement, and rumour has it they may be getting Hudsons.

Tedder laughs and says the rumours are true, but the squadron will be given Bisleys to fly. Never heard of them say the lads, but Tedder says they are actually Blenheim V's-moans all round.

Tedder says they are new (but doesn't mention they have been standing out in the open up in Middle East). He also says the engines are guaranteed up until their first major (about 240 hrs.). Tedder leaves the lads to mull over what he has told them. The Bisleys arrive at Sharjah in October 1942.

See above for the story of how 244 were granted the pleasure (??) of flying the Blenheim V (Bisley). The list below covers most of the Bisleys of 244 Sqdn. The term 'struck off charge' (SOC) could mean many things.

We know that many of you flew these aircraft, so consult your logbooks, and tell us your connection with the relevant 'Kite. Any good tales, let us know by return.

These details were obtained recently from the RAF museum Hendon by Mike Kerrigan just before he passed on. Many thanks Mike!

BA535	SOC 28/10/44	BB144	Crashed on take-off Siginya 8/5/44
BA540	SOC 27/7/44	BB154	Overshot landing at Ras al Hadd & ran into sea 26/10/4
BA603	Crashed on forced landing on beach near Masirah 31/5/43	EH406	SOC 27/7/44
BA606	Crashed on landing Sharjah 24/8/43	EH441	Crashed on landing Nicosia 27/12/44
BA656	Ditched off Um Rassas, Oman 9/6/43	AZ998	Crashed on take-off Abandan 8/6/43
BA669	SOC 27/7/44	BA101	Crashed in forced landing 35 miles N.E. of Sharjah 1/2/43
BA944	Belly landed Ras al Hadd 2/12/43	BA141	Crashed on take-off Sharah 19/1/43
BA985	SOC 27/6/46	BA157	SOC 1/8/43
BA312	SOC 1/8/43	BA313	Crashed in forced landing on shore 20/2/43.
BA380	Ditched off Sharjah 22/12/43	BA390	Crashed on landing Masirah 26/8/43
BA397	Crashed on take-off Ras al Hadd 18/1/43	BA405	Crashed on overshoot Sharjah 25/10/42
BA408	SOC 5/3/44	BA424	Overshot landing Basra 6/3/43
BA425	SOC 27/7/44	BA426	Crashed on approach Sharjah 4/6/43
BA428	SOC 1/1/44	BA430	Lost prop and forced landed Shinas, Oman 30/4/43
BA437	Belly landed at Sharjah 27/10/43	BA457	Undercarriage collapsed whilst taxiing Sharjah 20/5/43
BA500	Hit ground on approach Masirah 15/7/43	BA504	Crashed on landing Aboukir 2/10/43
BA524	Crashed in forced landing 40 miles East of Jask 1/7/43	BA534	Crashed on emergency approach Sharjah 8/4/43

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