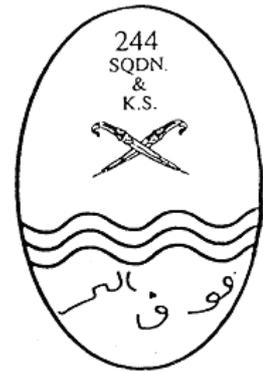




244 SQUADRON & KINDRED SPIRITS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 45

Jim (on his own) says, A Happy, healthy New Year to all our members, and a belated thank you for all the Xmas greetings received here. We could not possibly answer them all.

First of all, apologies for the non appearance of our 2004 balance sheet. In the near future I will produce a simple, 'In and Out' set of figures. At the moment I'm still trying to puzzle out Don's intricate method of accounting. Suffice to say I have not run off with the money! Yesterday I received our balance from the bank. Currently we stand at £2023, but of course the cost of this current Newsletter will be deducted

Many thanks for the donations received from members. Since I took over my dual role these have amounted to over £100.

Talking 'money' again, you are reminded that 2005 subs were due on the 1st January last. Still £5. Cheques should be payable to '244 Sqdn & Kindred Spirits', and send to me. As was decided at our very last Reunion in 2001, in the event of my demise or the disbandment of our Association all monies left would go to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Chris Morris, Hon. Secretary of our brother Habbaniya Association tells me that their 2005 Annual Reunion will be held in Oxford on Saturday, 8th October. The Habb Association cordially invites members of our Association to join them at their Reunion, they will be having a daytime Reunion and an evening dinner. The venue is a large Masonic centre in Summertown, Oxford There are convenient motorway links, and also buses from the centre of Oxford. Full details will appear in our next Newsletter.

Once again I must appeal for your contributions (anecdotes and stories for inclusion in future Newsletter) we cannot continue to operate without your help.

Up lifted from 'E-BAY' on the Internet (see Newsletter 44).

We've had quite a response from those who remember W.R. Morgan from the Comm. Flight days. Jack Earnshaw (mem. No.145) writes to say "Yes I knew LAC Morgan. I flew with him on occasions in the 'Vicks' he was doing the same job as Lofty Temple (mem. No.114) and Jim Swann (mem. No.115) there were quite a crowd of us flying as LAC 's it was nice to see some of his Log entries, it brought back many 'Happy Memories'.

Also Alex Alder (mem. No.26) remembers Morgan very well, and indeed enclosed a photo of a group of Comi Flight fitters including himself Morgan, and both Lofty Temple and Jim Swann.

ON TROPICAL ISLE R.A.F. OFFICER AS 'RULER'

A sand tropical island complete with surf bathing and barracuda fishing, is a posting for several hundred airmen in Middle East Command

Officer commanding the island detachment, an unofficial ruler of its native population, W/cdr R.G. M. Walker DFC of Gosport, has just completed his tour of duty.

Airmen remain on the island for one hot season. Then they are re-posted.

"They have all kinds of sport — football, cricket, hockey and swimming" said W/cdr Walker.

When the RAF first landed on the island, it was completely deserted — no buildings, no natives. Now, the camps are built of empty petrol tins filled with sand and cemented roughly together.

Natives gradually arrived, especially fishermen anxious to sell their catches.

RAF HEADMAN.

Quite a number of natives are employed at the camps and to unload ships, and while W/cdr Walker "ruled" the island he had to settle any trouble in which the natives were involved and see that justice was metered out.

"When a native had to be punished", W/cdr Walker explained, "I summoned the rulers representative who wore a gown with 'RAF Headman sewn on it". After a native has been sentenced this official puts him into the native jail for a time.

As there is no water on the island, it has to be brought by ship with cargoes of food and stored. Throughout the monsoon season no vessel is able to call at the island, and any supplies or equipment have to be brought by air.

PART ADRIFT

Life on the island is not without its spells of excitement. On one occasion a lifeboat used by the airmen broke away and drifted towards the mainland. Two officers and two airmen decided to swim after it and bring it back. After they climbed into it, they hoisted the sail, but they could not reach the island. They had to beach on the mainland, and the boat was damaged. An aircraft located the men and dropped supplies. For five days they were stranded on the beach, for there was no boat available, and on each occasion that an aircraft flew over, one of the officers wrote their requirements in huge letters in the sand. Eventually they were taken by dhow to the comforts of their 'desert island'. (Uplifted from 'Air Force News' — circa 1943)

Colin Richardson (mem. No.125)

244 PASSENGER SERVICE (1943)

Bisley BA427 was due for a Major Inspection and was to be flown to the MU at Shaibah for that purpose. Sgt Mac' MacDonald and his stalwart crew, Sgt Don Surtees (observer) — me, and Sgt Tim Faulkner Wop/Ag, were lucky enough to be selected for the job.

I say lucky, because you will remember that both Bahrain and Shaibah were 'civilised' places — beer and ice cream ad lib, not to mention duty free watches etc. etc. (Good as a forty-eight hour pass in the U.K!)

So on 19th January '43 we roared into the air, and after one circuit we set course for Bahrain. Hadn't been on our way very long, about twenty minutes in fact, when Tim called up from his turret to tell us his radio was u/s. You could gather that the intercom was also out of action. Well, the intercom we could do without, but the radio — well, there was a lot of water not to mention desert! So back to base we went, to be told we were to repeat the exercise the next day.

Off we went the next morning, with Tim reporting he was getting 'squeaks' out of his radio (would it have the old type 1082?).

It was a typical clear winters day in the Gulf and Bahrain came up on ETA as I remember we had something to deliver to the RAF at Bahrain. We had done this and were taken out to our aircraft at dispersal. There, waiting for us beside our aircraft were a Squadron Leader and a Naval Commander. The Squadron Leader told us that the Commander urgently wanted to get to Shaibah and would we be good enough to give him a lift? Mac said O.K. and pointed out it wouldn't be very comfortable, but yours truly would stow him and give him 'the drill'. We decided I would sit in the nose at the navigator's table. The seat was athwartships and over a panel covering the 'blister' containing two rearward firing 'scatter' guns. I don't think the guns were installed at the time. The Commander was put on the observer's 'take-off' seat next to the pilot. He was shown where to stow his parachute and told under no circumstances to pick it up by the shiny handle. We knew by now that he had never flown before and that all this being drilled and pushed hither and thither by a Sergeant was not exactly

what he expected. I tightened his lap strap. He was a rather rotund officer and I wondered if the straps would go around him. I settled myself in the nose, and gave 'Mac' the thumbs up and away he went.

'Mac' was a shortish fellow and in order to get the stick right forward at take-off (to get the tail up) he had to hitch his parachute forward to more or less poise himself on the edge of his seat. I was used to this arrangement, but I don't think the Commander sitting there with his eyes popping, could really come to terms with the pilots odd posture.

As far as I could judge we were about three-quarters into our take-off run, when there was a 'bang' and the aircraft slewed to port, but kept going and we were airborne. I waited until things settled down and we were on our way, before I wrote a note to 'Mac' asking what had happened on take-off. The note of course had to be passed to 'Mac' via the Commander. 'Mac' sent note back saying we'd blown the port side tyre! I gulped because my feet had been in the 'blister' and would have been the first thing to go if 'Mac' hadn't clawed the beast into the air! Now the notes went back and forth, and we decided we might as well go onto Shaibah and 'bellyland' it there. A waggle of the wings called Tim from his turret to a small opening behind the pilot's seat, so he could take my notes telling him what had happened, giving him our E.T.A. at Shaibah, and asking for permission to 'bellyland' there. All these bits of paper had been passed via the Commander whose eyes had popped out like organ stops. Eventually, Tim told us we could put down at Shaibah and that they were expecting us. I now wrote a note to the Commander explanting everything, and to tell him that for the landing I would be sitting on his lap. He was told he was to hold me as tight as he could and that when we came to a stop to release me at once, undo his belt, and get out of the hatch-pronto! (Just in case of fire!) I don't think the poor man really believed this was happening. Shaibah came in sight and we'd already been told to land towards the 'tower' side of the airfield. 'Mac' brought the aircraft down very low on the far side of the field from the 'tower', fire station, ambulance etc. Now, that airfield is built on a slight hump, and when 'Mac' brought her down to about four feet, we were completely out of sight of all the appropriate services.

I had told the commander to hold me securely, but nothing prepared me for this vice that was fastened around my lower rib cage. I couldn't breathe, but I daren't ask him to loosen his grip, I just had to hope I could hold my breath until we had landed.

At a height of about four feet we breasted the rise - still airborne. All the vehicles, fire wagons, ambulance, Station Commander's car, wing-co flying's car and Uncle Tom Cobbeley and all were heading towards us, thinking we'd touched down on the far side. Well, the ways these vehicles turned at speed to get out of our way had to be seen to be believed!

'Mac' decided it was a good place to put down, and lowered the Bisley to the ground There was a crunch and a cloud of dust, and I was fighting like fury to undo the hands clasped around my middle. In a second I was free and whipping his seat belt off, and shouting to him to move. Up he goes through the hatch helped by my shoulder. He stumbles onto the wing and goes flat on his face! As he scrambled up and away from the aircraft, the Station Commander came over, looked down on him and said, "Had a good flight Commander? "

'Mac' got a green endorsement for good effort!

Don Surtess (mem. No.154)

THE CRUISE OF THE VINCENTS (continued)

Now, leaving Muscat, the first leg of this stage of the trip, over the eastern end of the Djebel Akhadar range was uneventful. Flying high in clear skies, I tried to lessen the incipient boredom by singing to myself through my own speaking tube, trying to out-Bing the old groaner himself. A bathroom occupation taken up at the time by millions of fans throughout the world. After less than a short while I gave up and reverted to staring at the dry, and empty groundscape passing endlessly beneath us. Just watching the world go by, feeling detached and uninvolved.

We were heading towards Masirah island off the southern coast of Oman and, on reaching the coastal strip, all that one could see was the cotton wool top of uninterrupted cloud tucked into mountains, and stretching right to the horizon. And somewhere under there was Masirah.

S/Ldr Howe disappeared down into the mass of cloud and the rest of us remained circling above. Fifteen or so minutes later he reappeared, wagging his wings, then we lined up line astern and descended through this all embracing blanket that, fortunately bottomed out at about five hundred feet. There we were right over Masirah.

Navigation had been pin point perfect, but the look of the boulder strewn coastline landing strip seemed to be far from perfect. Luckily it provided all that was necessary for the whole squadron to make a successful landing. After refuelling from the stock piled cans, and carrying out routine inspections a meal was enthusiastically prepared This simply involved opening enough tins of McConachie beef stew to fill a large cooking pot, to be heated up, served out and eaten with the appreciative relish of deprived but hungry gourmets.

This activity had been watched intently by the only Arabs we saw on the island, just one man and his son peering over a ridge of sand They eventually made tentative and shy contact, making signs that they wanted to take away the empty stew cans. A prize beyond measure it would seem, and an unbelievable starting point from just fifty four years ago to the air-conditioned modern Masirah of today.

That night we slept under the wings within sight and sound of the sea, too tired to think of any unwanted sleeping partners, such as centipedes or scorpions. I slept soundly until being nudged awake by my immediate neighbour. "Can you hear anything?" he whispered

I listened, but all I could hear was the gentle rustle in the distance of waves breaking on the shore. "No, nothing", I said, and dropped off again. But another nudge and a curt injunction to "listen" woke me once more. This time I could hear the irregular scraping sounds that were disturbing him. We scrambled out of our bags and stood up. The scraping noises increased and as suddenly stopped. We had been surrounded by a small army of land crabs that had quickly disappeared down their individual holes on being disturbed. We disappeared back into our bags and slept erratically, and somewhat warily until dawn.

The following morning the low cloud was still with us and, after the sparsest of toilets and a quick breakfast we took off to fly some three hundred and fifty miles along the coast to arrive at Merbat in time for another McConachie's lunch.

Fred Hitchcock (mem. No.272)

MARCH 2005

Jim Heslop (Hon Secretary/Treasurer)

W/cdr. Ron Rotherham (President)