



Nightjar

The Magazine of No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association - April 2009

214 (FMS) Squadron Memorial Dedication Edition



DEDICATION OF No 214 (FMS) SQUADRON MEMORIAL AND ANNUAL REUNION

SATURDAY 18 JULY 2009

Time seems to be moving on at an ever increasing rate and the unveiling and dedication of our new memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, Staffordshire, on Saturday 18 July is drawing rapidly closer. Much has been going on behind the scenes. As well as the obvious activities associated with the design of the memorial, considerable effort has already gone into the arrangements for the day itself and into preparing a bid to 'Awards for All' for lottery cash to help defray the cost of the event. So far as the arrangements for the day itself are concerned, we had originally planned to have the unveiling and dedication ceremony at around 1200 or 1230, followed by a buffet lunch at the Arboretum. However, we realised that this would create difficulties for those who intend to travel to Alrewas on the Saturday morning. We have therefore agreed with the Arboretum that the unveiling and dedication will now take place at 1400, preceded by a buffet lunch in the marquee starting at 1230. Sir Michael Beetham, as President of the Association, has agreed to unveil the memorial, and the Venerable Ray Pentland, Archdeacon for the Royal Air Force, has agreed to conduct the dedication. We heard last month that a flypast by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster has been approved – so keep your fingers crossed for some fine weather! For those who will be staying at the Midland Hotel in Derby on the Friday night, the coaches will leave the hotel at 1030, arriving at Alrewas by 1130, and return to Derby leaving at 1530. This should allow plenty of time to see some of the many other memorials at the Arboretum, and especially the impressive new Armed Forces Memorial, as well as attend the buffet lunch and our own unveiling and dedication. Dress for the ceremony will be RAF No 1 Home Dress with medals or lounge suit/jacket and tie and the equivalent dress for ladies. Those in civilian dress are encouraged to wear their medals.

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/.....

...../ To meet the requirements of the Association Constitution, the plan is to hold a brief Annual General Meeting at the hotel at 1700. Apart from the routine approval of the accounts and election of officers, we need approval for some changes to the Association Constitution; the details are set out elsewhere in this edition of *Nightjar*. Tea and coffee will be provided to encourage attendance! This will be followed by the Reunion Dinner in the Garden Room at 1900 for 1930. Pre-dinner drinks will be available from the cash bar in the Garden Room annex. However, wine with the meal is included in the cost of dinner. Given that the focus of the day's events is the Squadron itself, we have decided not to invite a visiting speaker on this occasion. However, the historians among us will already have noticed that the fiftieth anniversary of Sir Michael Beetham's record-breaking direct flight from the UK to Cape Town occurs a few days before the Reunion. To mark this anniversary, Sir Michael has promised to say a few words about his epic flight after the meal. As usual, dress for the Dinner will be lounge suit/jacket and tie and the equivalent for ladies.

Turning to the cost of the day, if our bid to 'Awards for All' is partly or wholly successful, we should be able to cover some or most of the cost of the unveiling and dedication. **We expect to hear towards the end of April.** However, we have to plan on not receiving any external funding and to set charges for the buffet lunch and coach travel to ensure that the cost to the Association is manageable within our limited resources. We therefore envisage that the Association will cover the bulk of the Arboretum's administrative charges and the cost of the hire of the marquee, chairs and PA system. This leaves those attending, excluding a very few official guests, to cover the cost of the buffet lunch and coaches. We have therefore set the cost of the lunch at £12.50 per person and the cost of the coach at £8 per person. Entry to the marquee for lunch will be by ticket, which will be sent to you prior to the event. For those wishing to travel direct to the Arboretum by road, car parking costs

£2.00 per car; this can be pre-paid using the enclosed Dedication booking form and a parking ticket will be sent to you prior to the event.

In addition, anyone requiring the use of a mobility scooter at the Arboretum can reserve one at a cost of £5.00; again, this can be done using the Dedication booking form. **Please note that we require separate cheques for the buffet lunch and for the coach travel, car parking, and mobility scooter.** This is to cater for the eventuality that we receive part funding from 'Awards for All' and avoids the necessity for the Association Treasurer to raise large numbers of cheques to reimburse those attending. **If you are able to, please check the No 214 Squadron Website or contact the Treasurer for the latest information before sending your cheques.**

For those staying at the Midland Hotel, the cost will be £64.00 per person for dinner, bed and breakfast on the Friday night, and £70.00 for dinner, bed and breakfast on the Saturday night for those attending the Reunion Dinner, including wine with the meal. For anyone coming to the Reunion Dinner but not staying in the hotel, the cost will be £23.00.

Booking forms for both the Dedication Ceremony and the Reunion Dinner at the Midland Hotel are enclosed with this edition of *Nightjar*. Please note that the Dedication Proforma should be sent to the Association Treasurer at the address at the bottom of the form; the Booking Form for the Midland Hotel and Reunion Dinner should be sent direct to the Hotel at the address on the form.

Finally, a plea goes to all members of the Association, former members of the Squadron, and the families of former Squadron members; if you possibly can, please do come to the Arboretum to help us to dedicate this new memorial in a fitting style.

Alan Mawby

Chairman

Treasurer's Note:

Cheques sent in payment for lunch, transport etc will be held by the Treasurer until the result of the 'Awards for All' bid is known. Where payment has been covered by the grant the relevant cheques will be shredded unless return has been specifically requested. I hope I can shred all of them!

JG

Treasurer's Topics

My thanks to all those of you who have paid your subscription promptly. Some of you may have had trouble with your standing orders being returned. This has been caused by our bank changing its administration to another branch which has a different sort code, and now that the process is fully automated, any errors are thrown out automatically. Some of you have contacted me to resolve the issue, and at some stage I shall be trawling through the bank statements to see if any standing orders have been cancelled without us noticing. If I find any, I shall be writing to you.

Some of you have been asking about subs, and they remain at £10 per annum due on 1 Jan. For one or two of you who have yet to update your £5 standing orders from the last three years, I shall be getting in touch! If you have any queries on your membership or have a guilty conscience, please feel free to contact me. I regret that due to increasing costs, and in fairness to other members, we shall be unable to continue to distribute hard copy of the *Nightjar* to those who persistently fail to pay subs.

John Gulliver

No 214 (FMS) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION - REVISION OF CONSTITUTION

During the recent preparation of the bid for funding from 'Awards for All' in connection with the unveiling and dedication of the new memorial, it became clear that the Association's Constitution, which was prepared and agreed in the late 1980s, did not now reflect the membership of the Association and imposed requirements that are now difficult to observe. In particular, the current Constitution specifies that full membership of the Association is only open to those who have served on the Squadron, that only full members shall have voting rights at General Meetings, and that a minimum of 20 full members is required to constitute a quorum. Although former members of the Squadron still form the majority of the membership, many of them are increasingly unable to attend reunions and, specifically, the Annual General Meeting. At the same time, many more family members of those who served on the Squadron and others with a close interest in the Squadron have joined the Association and some are taking an active role in its running.

Your Committee has therefore decided that the time has come to remove the distinction between full and associate members and to have a single class of membership, open to those who have served on the Squadron, persons within the immediate family of persons who have served on the Squadron, and persons with a close association with or interest in the Squadron. At the same time, the opportunity has been taken to propose three other minor changes to the Constitution: a change to the objectives of the Association to include the families of those who served on the Squadron; an increase in the amount that the Treasurer may disburse in emergency from £100 to £250; and a reduction in the number of members constituting a quorum from 20 to 15. The remaining changes are either consequent upon the adoption of a single category of membership or are minor wording changes for clarification. In the proposed Revised Constitution overleaf, deleted text is identified with a 'strikethrough' and the new text is in red.

The proposed changes to the Constitution will be debated at the Annual General Meeting to be held on Saturday 18 July 2009 at the Midland Hotel, Derby. However, if any member has a comment on the proposed changes or any alternative proposals, it would help the Committee if he or she would raise it with the Committee as soon as possible.

Alan Mawby

Chairman

No 214 (FEDERATED MALAY STATES) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

REVISED CONSTITUTION

TITLE

The Association shall be known as:

‘The No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association’

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Association are:

- To maintain contact ~~among~~ **between** those who served on the Squadron.
- **To maintain contact with the families of those who served on the Squadron.**
- To foster good fellowship and maintain comradeship through gatherings of members.

1. MEMBERSHIP

~~Full~~ **Membership** is open to all persons who have served, in whatever capacity, with No 214 Squadron; ~~Associate Membership is open to all persons within the immediate family of a Full Member~~ **persons who have served, in whatever capacity, with No 214 Squadron; or and to persons** who have a close association with, or interest in, No 214 Squadron. ~~(At the discretion of the Committee, Associate Membership may be maintained when the Full member is no longer active.)~~

2. SUBSCRIPTION

An annual subscription shall be due on 1 January. The amount ~~will~~ **shall** be proposed by the Committee and ~~will~~ **shall** be subject to agreement by the membership at the AGM.

3. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Association shall have an Executive Committee consisting of ~~Full~~ **at least four Members of the Association**. At a minimum, the Committee ~~will~~ **shall** consist of:

Chairman

Secretary

Treasurer

Member (additional members may be elected or co-opted)

The Committee shall be responsible for the affairs of the Association and for arranging the Annual General Meeting (**AGM**) and Reunion. The Committee members shall be elected annually. Notification of volunteers or nominations of **Members** to serve on the Committee must be received at least 7 days prior to the AGM. In the event of an election for a particular office being necessary, a vote ~~will~~ **shall** be taken by a show of hands at the AGM; a simple majority ~~will~~ **of those Members present shall** elect the nominee. The Committee shall have the authority to co-opt additional Committee members at its discretion.

4. PRESIDENT/VICE PRESIDENTS

The Association shall invite a distinguished Member to serve as Association President. Other distinguished Members may be invited to serve as Association Vice-Presidents.

5. FINANCE

The financial year shall be from 1 January to 31 December. Accounts ~~will~~ shall be opened in the name of the Association at a bank nominated by the Committee. Cheques ~~will~~ shall be signed by two members of the Committee. Committee Members may be reimbursed, from Association funds, any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred on Association business. In emergency, the Treasurer shall have authority to disburse a sum not exceeding ~~£100~~ £250, such disbursement to be ratified by the Committee and the nature of the emergency payment to be explained to the members at the next AGM.

An audited Annual Statement of Accounts and Balance of Funds ~~will~~ shall be produced by the Treasurer for presentation at the AGM. Where possible, a copy of such documents shall be provided to the membership prior to the AGM. In the event that the Association is dissolved or the affairs of the Association are discontinued for a period of at least two years, all monies held in the name of the Association ~~will~~ shall be transferred to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

6. GENERAL MEETINGS

At all General Meetings, ~~only Full Members shall have voting rights;~~ a minimum of ~~20~~ 15 Full Members shall constitute a Quorum; resolutions ~~can~~ may only be passed at General Meetings where a Quorum is present.

a. Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The AGM ~~will~~ shall be held during the Annual Reunion, which will be on a date determined by the Committee. This will be advised to the membership by letter/~~e-mail~~ at least 60 days prior to such a meeting. Members wishing to have a matter included in the AGM Agenda must advise the Secretary in writing at least 30 days prior to such a meeting. ~~Both Full and Associate members may attend the AGM.~~

Any ~~proposition~~ proposal to alter the Constitution must also be made in writing to the Secretary at least 30 days prior to the Annual General Meeting and the ~~proposition~~ proposal will be debated at that meeting. A vote ~~will~~ shall be taken on any proposed alteration; a simple majority of those Full Members present shall determine the result of the vote.

b. Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)

An Extraordinary General Meeting may be called by the Executive Committee or by 10 Full Members. The subject to be raised at such a Meeting shall be communicated to the Members in the notice calling the Meeting, which must be sent to Members at least 30 days before the date of the meeting. ~~An EGM shall only be attended by Full Members.~~

Letters

Received via e-mail from Vern's son....

I read with much interest your George Wright story in the December Nightjar issue. George was an ideal operational Squadron Adjutant, as he had great respect and admiration for "air crew", and in issuing travel petrol coupons would have erred on the side of generosity for "his boys". Some 15 years or so ago, I wrote to you telling of the time I sat in Georges' office while he dealt with a charge against a ground staff airman who had been AWL for several days. This story was published in the 214 magazine at the time. This information may well be worth re-reading for information.

George wore a row of service ribbons on his tunic and I know he was in the British Army, and also believe that at one stage he was an officer in the British Army in India. It was reputed that he was fluent in several languages and dialects.

About 20 years ago, Ron James (a member of my crew on the 2nd tour) and author of the book, 'Avenging in the Shadows', told me that George had died in less than favourable circumstances. Ron was very disappointed that he had not learnt of George's plight earlier so that he may have been able to help. Ron was a very successful business man.

On one occasion, George Wright decided to take a couple of days leave and asked me to drive him and a lady friend in my Sunbeam Talbot to a small town on the seaside. My reward was some hard to obtain petrol coupons. I now doubt that this was legal in war-time England.

As I am now well into my 88th year, I sometimes wonder how many Stirling pilots are still living – not many I guess!!!

I would very much like to learn more about George Wright and other war time personnel.

Vern Scantleton

[More of Vern on Page 16](#)

Dear Sir

.....As a matter of interest, in the December issue of 'Nightjar' was an article about 'Tubby' Murray who went down in the Channel in 1942 when the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau made a dash up the Channel. He was a great friend of mine at the time, but no news came through and I moved on in my Service life. Then about twenty years ago I saw a 'small ad' in the Daily Telegraph which read roughly "In memory of my crew of 214 Squadron lost in February 1942". It was signed 'Tubby Murray', and I thought that there could not be two Tubby Murrays so I put an 'ad' in the same paper and Tubby replied to my phone number a few days later. We have, over the years, attended several of the Squadron meetings; we are both now widowers, but still phone regularly. He is now on a Zimmer frame, but very cheerful. I have not quite reached that stage yet, but have several physical restrictions being almost 89.

Sincerely,

Brian Vaughan

[Thanks for your letter Brian, it's remarkable how people meet again after so many years, especially when one has thought to have been lost.](#)

[We have heard from a former 214 Sqn member, Ian Andrew, who was around when the Valiant BK1s were conducting long range trials. He now lives in South Africa and is the Vice Chairman of the Johannesburg Branch of RAFA. He tells of the first ever flight from the UK to South Africa in 1959 which was piloted by our President, who was the Sqn CO. \(Bosses always nicked the best trips, and I am told that they still do!!\)](#)

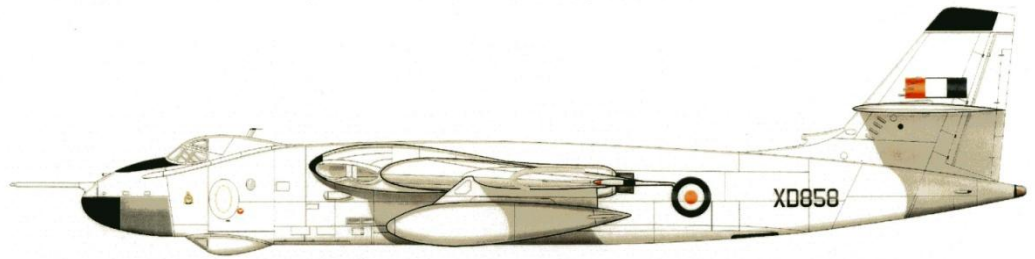
[He hopes to celebrate the event in his RAFA Branch and would like to hear from any Sqn members who were involved with the event.](#)

[Contact him at ianandrew@telkomsa.net](mailto:ianandrew@telkomsa.net)

Sir Michael Beetham's Record Flight in 1959

On 9 July it will be 50 years since our President, Sir Michael Beetham, took off from RAF Marham on his record breaking flight, in a Vickers Valiant BK1 of No 214 Sqn, to Cape Town, South Africa.

Refuelled by other tankers of the Sqn, the flight was completed in 11Hrs 28 Mins at an average speed of 530MPH. This was one of the pioneering long distance proving flights by the RAF's first flight refuelling



Vickers Valiant BK.1, XD858, 214 Sqn., RAF Marham, Norfolk. On July 9th 1959, Wg.Cdr. M.J. Beetham DFC. OC No. 214 Sqn., piloted XD858 on an Air to Air refuelling proving flight, from overhead Heathrow airport (London) to overhead D.F.Malan airport (Capetown, South Africa). Twice refuelled in the air by No. 214 Sqn., tankers, the 6060 miles was completed in a record 11 hours 28 minutes, an average speed of 530 mph. The return flight was made on 14th July in 12 hours 20 minutes, an average speed of 491.5 mph.

Squadron, and only a few weeks earlier Sir Michael had also flown to Johannesburg. We show a print of Valiant XD858 in which the flight was made.

George Wright – No 214 Squadron Adjutant 1942 - 1945

In the last 'Nightjar' we had an item about George Wright in which we asked if any members knew anything about what happened to him after the war.

Bill Wilkinson phoned to say that he was told that George was still around, somewhere in London, in the early 1970s. Bill now regrets that that he did not try to seek him out to chat over old times.

Norman Storey telephoned to say that shortly after the war he had heard that George was working as a commissionaire at the Strand Palace Hotel in London, and also regrets that he did not make contact. Norman felt at the time that George, as a former Flight Lieutenant, might be embarrassed to meet up with former colleagues when he was in seemingly reduced circumstances.

George Mackie wrote to tell me that, in 1951, he was on his way to France with his wife-to-be but had stopped for a while in London, and had visited the Festival of Britain on the South Bank. The man in the ticket booth was none other than George Wright and George Mackie got the impression that he was down on his luck. George also told me that he once drove George Wright and a WAAF from Oulton to Cromer, probably to stay the night somewhere. As far as anyone knows, George was never married, but did he marry this WAAF after the war? George suggests that the WWII years were probably the happiest of his life. Like most people who served on the Squadron during George Wright's time, he is remembered with great affection.

Of course George Wright also served in WWI, we think in the army but does anybody know in which regiment? He was in his forties when he was the Squadron Adjutant, so he was probably born around the turn of the 20th Century.

Peter Walker

Squadron Leader J J Bray DFC

It is with regret that we have to announce the death of Sqn Ldr Jeff Bray on 7 Dec 08 at the age of 90. He was a pilot on the Stirling and the Fortress.

Air Commodore H. G. Brackley CBE DSO DSC

Herbert George Brackley served as a pilot in the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) from early in the First World War. As Flight Lieutenant Brackley he was a flight commander on No 7 Squadron RNAS when the Squadron formed in November 1916, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in May 1917 and appointed a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order in June 1917, both awards for his exploits as a night bomber pilot. When No 7A Squadron finally became independent of No 7 Squadron in December 1917 and was renumbered as No 14 Squadron RNAS, Acting Squadron Commander Brackley was appointed its first commanding officer. On the formation of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918, the Squadron became No 214 Squadron Royal Air Force, with Major H G Brackley as commanding officer.

Known to friends and colleagues as 'Brackles', he left the RAF after the end of the war and commenced a career in civil aviation as Chief of the Air Department of Handley Page Transport. In the early 1920s he went with a British Mission to Japan to instruct the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Department in the use of naval air power and modern tactics. It was in Japan that he met his wife, Frida, who was on a world cruise. She was the daughter of Sir Robert and Lady Edith Mond. Sir Robert Mond (1867-1938) was later Chairman of the family business, Brunner Mond & Co and in 1926 the company merged with others to form ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries). Brackles and Frida were married in London on 27 September 1922 but went back to live in Japan until returning to England in 1923.

Brackles eventually helped to form Imperial Airways as Air Superintendent where he pioneered air routes throughout the Empire and other parts of the world.

Meanwhile, in 1924 Brackles had been appointed to a commission in the Reserve of Air Force Officers in the rank of Flying Officer, being promoted to Flight Lieutenant in 1925 and Squadron Leader in 1927. His work in civil aviation continued until 1939 when, on the outbreak of war, he was recalled for full-time service with the RAF. Most of his war work was in Coastal Command and later Transport Command. Just after the war he left the RAF in the rank of Air Commodore. He continued his civil aviation career with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and British South-American Airways (BSAA) but sadly lost his life in a swimming accident in Rio de Janeiro in November 1948. His coffin was brought back to England (Heathrow) and then in a BSAA York to RAF Langham, Norfolk. He was buried in the Churchyard of the parish church at Blakeney very near to his home.

'Brackles' had left a huge amount of letters, diaries, telegrams etc and after his death his wife, Frida, was determined to produce a book based on his correspondence sent from around the world during his long pioneering career in aviation. In 1952 the book, containing nearly 700 pages, was published with the title *Brackles - Memoirs of a Pioneer of Civil Aviation*. The book includes a photograph and brief details of a 14 Squadron RNAS/214 Squadron RAF Reunion Dinner held in London on 12 April 1947.

A few months ago Jock Whitehouse mentioned to me that he had been reading 'our' book, *Avenging in the Shadows*, and was amazed at the night bomber operations carried out by 214 Squadron's large bombers, the Handley Page O/100 and O/400, in the latter part of the First World War. Jock suggested that I read it and, of course, the name Brackley was frequently mentioned. This set me thinking and I remembered that about forty or more years ago I read a library book about the man. I also seemed to remember that he had a connection with the village of Blakeney in Norfolk. With this in mind I looked in the telephone directory to see if a Brackley still lived in the village and sure enough there was, a Maj. D.J. Brackley. This is David Brackley, one of Brackles' two sons. Sadly at the age of 84 he has recently had to go into a care home. Fortunately I was able to contact, by telephone, one of Brackles' granddaughters, Mrs Jane Colborn, who was at the house. She in turn suggested that I ring her mother, Mrs Yoskyl Brackley, who lives in Norwich and whose late husband was John Brackley, Brackles' other son. These two ladies were most helpful,

especially when I mentioned that I had read the book all those years ago. They informed me that the house in Blakeney is no longer in the ownership of the family and the contents are to be cleared as soon as possible. I was also informed that there were some copies of the book in the house and I could have a copy or two, but first of all Mrs Brackley would like to ask her son, Paul, who lives in London.

A couple of days after I made contact, Mrs Brackley telephoned to say she had spoken to her son and he agreed that I could have a few copies of the book. However, I would have to go to Blakeney to collect them and, as she no longer drives, could I take her and her daughter with me in order for them to show me where the books were stored (it is a large house)? There were not just a few books, but scores, most wrapped in packs of twelve, just as they had been received from the publisher in 1952. The ladies kindly suggested that, because there were far more books than they had realised, I might like to have a few packs for 214 Squadron Association Members who might like a copy. In all, I returned home with 37 books.

About a week later Mrs Brackley rang me again to say that, after talking with her son, perhaps I might like to have the rest of the books and, if we could make a little money from them, she would like the amount to be donated to the RAF Benevolent Fund or a similar RAF charity. Thus, after my second visit to Blakeney, I drove home with almost a quarter of a ton of books with the whole car loaded everywhere except the driver's seat. Thankfully I have a big 3.5litre car.

So what to do with all these books, about 240 in total? After consulting Jock Whitehouse and Alan Mawby, I think that the best course of action would be to bring about fifty copies to the Reunion and see if any members would like to have a copy in return for a modest donation. These books are 57 years old but are as new and not second-hand. Each book weighs two pounds and with packaging would cost £5 to post. Jock and I are therefore looking to find a specialist aviation bookseller who might be interested in buying the rest. Watch this space!

Finally I would like to thank the Brackley family for kindly donating these books to the 214 Squadron Association. We are hoping that Brackles' grandson, Mr. Paul Brackley, might come to the Reunion and Memorial Stone dedication on July 18th as he has just joined the Association.

Peter M. Walker

February 2009

Chedburgh Control:

No! No! No! No!

What I said was –

Now try a STEEPER approach!!



HISTORIAN'S REPORT

Chedburgh Autograph Book:

A surprise offer on 'e-bay' was an autograph book apparently from RAF Chedburgh days as a few names included those of J A Dixon and Williamson confirming '214' days. With five 'bids' already on the books, it seemed unlikely that we could compete, and in the event the book fetched well over one hundred pounds, but one wonders whether it was purchased as an investment or to satisfy an interest in either a specific period or location or even a particular unit/squadron. Although the book is now gone, it would have been very interesting to know the identity of its new owner as I am sure there could be a very useful exchange of information. It seems that the book (one hundred signatures plus associated material) once belonged to a LACW Dawson from the Nottingham area. Its subsequent life is not known, but if by chance, anybody has any knowledge of this sale, please let me know.

La Bussiere sur Ouche:

Vaughan Thomas maintains his close contact with the above French village (see note in last 'Nightjar'), obtaining some remarkable wartime photographs, and I have been able to provide Vaughan with all my archive material relating to the Stirling crash, including a recollection in French (with translation) of that terrible night. Further very interesting information could well be reported in due course, but at the moment the latest news is that a memorial stone for the crew placed at the actual crash site is currently under consideration.

Sept Saulx:

An unusual contact from Mr Ray Quinlan who, whilst on holiday in France with his wife, by chance stayed overnight in the hamlet of Sept Saulx (Seven Willows) situated on the banks of the River Marne. Its impressive church contains a splendid memorial to Joan of Arc, who prayed here on her way to the Coronation of Charles VII in 1429.

Ray's attention, however, was drawn to seven war graves close to the church wall backed by a propeller blade which implied an RAF bomber crew. Ray (an artist) had already photographed the churchyard as a basis for a painting, and later via CWGC, learned that that the crew was from No.214(FMS) Squadron. With his picture nearing



Church at Sept Saulx

Headstones of Plt Off L Powell and Crew and a propeller blade from their Stirling EF331 can be seen behind them.

Photo: Bob Davies



completion, Ray wondered whether it might be suitable for display in a 'Squadron Location', and queried this with Peter, but with no such place existing I have spoken to both Ray and Maurice Leary from Chedburgh. The satisfactory outcome is that the picture (with accompanying story) will hang in the 'Marquis of Cornwallis', the hostelry close by the old RAF Chedburgh where the crew would most likely have relaxed, and where most visitors to Chedburgh call. The framed picture awaits collection.

Aircraft/crew details. Stirling Mk1 EF331, BU-H. Lost on April 14/15 1943.

Crew (6th operation). P/O L Powell, F/O EH Scott, Sgt T Shepherd, Sgt HC Dent (Guatemala), Sgt RE Dutton, Sgt J W Williams, F/Sgt HC Ingram RCAF.

An interesting comment from a publication sent by Ray:

So in the little church and graveyard of Sept Saulx are commemorated the brave, separated by five hundred years, who fought to free France of her enemies. What an irony it is that the English be both enemy and ally on the same soil. However, the English have made amends for their part in the death of Joan..... (How strange history can be: JMW)

Bob Jewsbury:

John, Bob's son, asked for help in tidying up his father's notes detailing his time as Bomb-Aimer in Jack Dixon's crew, and from various sources of information I was able to add to, and correct where necessary, this fascinating account of an operational crew, which obviously worked as a close team and consequently had every chance of dealing with a whole range of situations - which they did!

What does come over was Jack's unflappable nature which undoubtedly filtered back through the crew. Returning from Nuremburg on 27 August 1943. 'Attacked by fighters over target, PO prop lost, SO prop feathered, very low on fuel, landed at Ford'. Jack's log book entry: 'Shaky do'. This brought him an immediate DFC but, just four days later, whilst on Compass Swings, Jack logged: 'nervous, no time to be so during the drama of getting back'.

Identity Tag:

Tidying up his desk, a builder friend of mine turned up an RAF identity tag found five years ago under floorboards of a country house which was being extensively renovated, and which was about four miles from Stradishall. I was asked if the man's family could be traced in order for the tag to be returned, an almost impossible task as it is now vitually impossible to access records of ex-RAF personnel.

The tag shows: RAF, 9/1/40, T Wilks, CoE 945863.

The service number and date suggests early enlistment, but allowing for trade training, it is quite likely that this man served at Stradishall in late 1940/41, ie '214 time' but in an unknown capacity. No aircrew member is known by this name, and why his tag should turn up under the floor of a local house seems most strange; lodger, boyfriend? Wilks is a name found in East Anglia (quite a few in Essex) but I suspect this query is likely to remain unanswered.

Memorial Project:

Although hoping to have as much Squadron memorabilia as possible on display over the Dedication/ Reunion weekend, this will have to be in the Midland Hotel as there are no suitable, secure facilities for any display close to, or within the Dedication area. However, it has been thought appropriate that a Roll of Honour should be available for all to see, and on which any queries can be dealt with. This decision has raised a very interesting point, for although comprehensive Rolls for Squadron losses are to hand for the 'Between Wars', 'WW2', and up to disbandment, details for the First World War are something different! Information is not completely lacking, but we have a need to sort out who was where when, correct ranks, plus places of burial. Accepting that as No 214 Squadron evolved from a Royal Naval Air Squadron, some personnel stayed with the moves. Clarifying actual losses itself is proving a fascinating exercise, but to also read up on an operational period which has been somewhat neglected, and to read of 'glide attacks' (shades of Wellingtons at Stradishall), heavy night bombers challenging enemy bomber fleets (100 Group), and the use of spotlights to check height (617?), is little short of amazing. In spite of having to operate in extremely adverse conditions (open crew positions) those who flew the HP O/100 and O/400s proved to be a remarkable group of men.

If you have any Squadron material which you think might be of interest for display in the Hotel over the weekend please let me know. Space will be limited so we might have problems if offered a full-sized Stirling!

This could well prove to be my last write-up, for on 11 March I am talking to a very select group, namely a number of ex-Royal Air Force National Serviceman! With a bit of luck I may be able to convince them that there is nothing unusual in an ex-regular Army NCO Dog-Trainer lecturing them on local RAF history. Perhaps I will resist mentioning that we always considered the RAF Police dogs in Singapore to be mere 'pussy-cats' when compared to our 'old lags' who always obeyed the command 'Attack' with great gusto (scars and photographs to prove it). Here's to Survival.

Recommended Reading:

'Chocks Away' by Wg Cdr John Leighton Beck DFC. Published by Woodfield Publishing ISBN -1-8468-038-9, via his daughter Penny. I obtained my copy from a well-known bookshop. This is a lively read about John's time in the RAF, including his time as a No 214 Squadron Wellington captain at Stradishall. One illustration is of a 40p Jersey postage stamp featuring a Wellington with BU-G codes. (John lived in Jersey and died there in 2002). Proceeds of sales go to RAF Charity.

'Talk Down' by Brian Lecomber. Although published in 1978 (ISBN- 340-21736-7), it is still available on the 'Net'. The ideal 'couldn't put it down' book. The author, an ex-champion acrobatic and commercial pilot, skillfully tells a gripping colourful story. Not an unknown theme: Man plans to fly girlfriend down to Denham for the weekend. Pilot takes-off from Yorkshire on a crisp January afternoon, but collapses soon after with a severe medical condition. Girl has never flown before. Does she get down? A great aviation read, but not for the nervous.

Received from a friend at Christmas - An aviation exchange:

Stuttgart Airport:

Pilot of a 'Lufthansa' airliner, leaving the main runway asks (in German) for dispersal directions. ATC respond by requesting the captain to talk in English, reminding him that this is the accepted language of commercial aviation.

Excited captain:

"I am a German pilot, in a German airplane, at a German airport. Why should I speak in English?" Before ATC could reply, over the airwaves came a calm polished English voice (presumably from a stacked airliner), "Because you lost the b----y war old boy".



How would you use yours?

Nightjar

Caprimulgus Europeus:

Viewers of 'The One Show' may have seen a delightful piece of film when the programme's wildlife expert was taken at dusk to a remote spot in Dorset in the hope of seeing that most elusive of birds, the Nightjar. Hardly believing that the bird would only appear at a precise intensity of the fading light he was amazed to hear its extraordinary call followed by a fleeting glimpse as it flicked rapidly and hawk-like, hunting for insects between the trees. The bird seen was a male, its four white patches clearly visible in the poor light. This was a rare chance to see this beautiful but shy bird, which

incidentally is also well established in the wooded areas of the Brecklands of East Anglia (No 3 Group country of course).

Jock Whitehouse

PILOT OFFICER JACK DEMPSEY PEEL - AMERICAN (Seeking The Truth)

I recently re-read an excellent short article written by Geoffrey Parsons for the New York Herald Tribune in August 1942 in which he discussed the increasingly important role of Royal Air Force Bomber Command in taking the war to the enemy. While, perhaps rather surprisingly, he expressed nothing but praise for their efforts, he emphasized his grave doubts about the ability of the American USAAF (then establishing themselves in UK) to succeed in their proposed plans for a daylight bombing offensive.

Parsons was allowed to gain 'sharp-end' experience by spending a few days on an unidentified RAF heavy-bomber station (in fact Stradishall and home to No.214 (FMS) Squadron then in the final stage of converting to the Stirling). With obvious restrictions on security and intelligence, the American undertook a local flight in a Stirling, socialised with the crews and wrote of his feelings while watching seven Stirlings being prepared for action before leaving for a night operation. He was soon to sample the reality of the bomber war when only six aircraft returned and was to express his concern for the 'sandy-haired Texan' flying in 'S-Sugar' (W7657 BU-S) which had failed to return. This was not a little 'journalistic licence' used to beef up his text for the benefit of his American readers, he really was speaking the truth and very probably knew the young American airman (who was not named).

So who was the 'sandy-haired Texan' and what did he do? Walter Sturdy gave me his original copy of the article in 1980, early on in our Stradishall researches, and as a Canadian and a Flight Commander on 214 Squadron at the time of Parson's visit, he was probably well placed to be given an early copy. (Incidentally, Harold Bidmead the founder of our Association was Flight Engineer in Walter's crew and remained his close friend until Harold's death in 1989). With no mention of any American in operational records, and without the impressive research facilities now available, I first thought Sgt J B Fleming of the Royal Canadian Air Force (one of the air-gunners in

the missing crew) to be 'our man'. Many Americans got into the European War by joining the RCAF, but their Roll of Honour showed Sgt Fleming's home as Mount Dennis, Ontario, a true Canadian. The answer was ever evasive, and even further confusions arose. A CWGC register for 214 Squadron (which actually excluded Commonwealth and non-UK personnel) gave family information for three crew members, and although no family data was given (not unknown) for Plt Off J D Peel and for Sgt D F Dobson their inclusion suggested British citizenship and certainly not American. Plt Off Peel's headstone in Werkendam Cemetery, Holland, shows only his name, rank, role (pilot), date of death and that he was RAF. No age (no true records?) or any family message. The service number and age are shown on the headstone for Sgt Dobson the Flight Engineer.

There was, however, one clue. Plt Off Peel's two first names were Jack Dempsey and whether the use of the two names of the famous boxer - the 'Manassa Mauler' - was deliberate or not, it pointed towards possible American citizenship. Owing to my 'non-computer' status I turned to my good friend Kate Brettell who, apart from being very computer-literate, had just completed some other family research (Flt Lt R A Turtle DFC) and was quite conversant with 'Things RAF'. Kate agreed to help, quickly accessing American family records and although finding Dempsey-Peel families in the Eastern States, Kate 'headed for Texas'. A Jack D Peel was 'found' in Texarkana (actually in Arkansas but right on the Texas border) who had been born in 1920 into a fairly ordinary family (father- a mechanic in a trucking Co) and had probably only received a modest education. For 'personal reasons' young Jack moved away from the family and at this point his lifestyle becomes unclear, although there is no indication of any 'higher' education. He must have brushed up against aviation possibly 'whelping' at an airfield and learning to fly.

War was already a talking point, and although young men could get to UK via Canada, or under even under their own steam, other arrangements were being created in America to tempt large numbers of young potential flyers from all levels of education including Universities and Colleges. (This was prior to the massive Flying Training Schemes (eg Arnold) of the future, but even at this time the increasing influence of air power and the urgent need for all types of airmen were being recognised). One such scheme was the British Refresher Programme operating in four areas near Dallas, whereby any competent pilot with a set number of hours in his log book (80 and 300 have been quoted) could be graded as of 'OTU' standard and thus able to enter UK with no problem. Some sources state that they went as civilians, but it is possible that some candidates were actually commissioned as RAF Pilot Officers before leaving to guarantee trouble free entry. As accurate details for these schemes are extremely hard to find, any information would be of great interest.

Jack either volunteered or responded to a vigorous recruitment campaign and his entry into UK to join the Royal Air Force (possibly the RAFVR) is mentioned in the book 'Immigrants of War' which deals with Americans and Canadians who came over to fight.

As a Pilot Officer he was posted to No 21 OTU (Moreton-in-Marsh) and in May 1942 joined No 214 Squadron at Stradishall to take on the mighty Stirling.

At this time squadrons converting to the Stirling trained their own crews via their specialist Conversion Flights. Jack was to make four trips as second pilot before being killed on only his second operation as captain. But he had done remarkably well to achieve this.

So the 'sandy-haired Texan' was in fact Plt Off Jack Dempsey Peel whose strength of character, competitive spirit, and inherent skill saw him move from a very humble background right through to becoming a competent heavy-bomber pilot in a distant war when only 22 years of age.

Although it would be very pleasing to uncover further relevant information, the fact remains that very little solid official material seems to exist which would identify him as an American citizen. He came, he fought, and he died, identified by name only, but in reality he was virtually unknown with now his headstone and various Books of Remembrance as his only probable markers. End of his story, but inevitably there would have been others like him.

Jack was not the only Texan to die whilst on No 214 Squadron at Stradishall in 1942. On 25 June, Stirling DJ973 (BU-A) captained by Sgt Craig had been forced to turn back before reaching the target and had just managed to jettison its bomb load before smashing into farmland on the outskirts of Hundon (my village) literally within sight of Stradishall. Six crew died including gunner Sgt Eddie Hester-Brown who, although from Big Springs, Texas, was flying as a member of the RCAF, which itself provided clear evidence of his journey to UK and the war.

Jock M Whitehouse

With grateful thanks to Kate Brettell for her help.

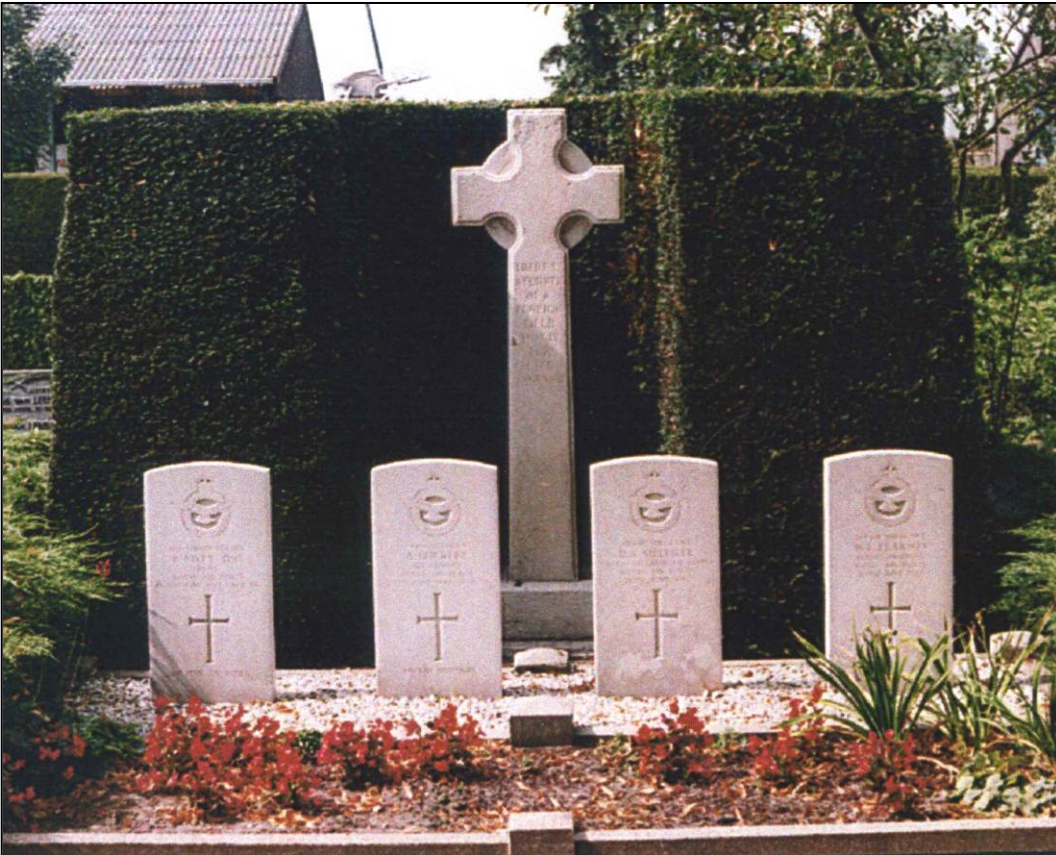


Bombing up a Stirling

An Unexpected Entry

An entry in the Stradishall Memorial Visitor's book for 9 September 2008 was of great interest for it mentioned the name of Sqn Ldr Peter Nixey who won the DSO after bringing his flak-damaged Wellington back from Essen on 12 April 1942. With extensive damage to the starboard engine, mainplane, ailerons, bomb-doors and tailplane and with his navigator (P/O Lloyd) mortally wounded, one gunner injured, and himself suffering shell splinter wounds to his right arm, Flt/Lt Nixey successfully navigated his aircraft back to base to carry out a wheels-up landing - a truly remarkable piece of airmanship. His subsequent award of the DSO approved by the King spoke of 'gallantry displayed in flying conditions against the enemy'. Peter Nixey and his friendly dog chose to stay with 214 Squadron converting to the Stirling, being promoted and becoming a Flight Commander. On 20 June 1942 he elected to fly a sortie to Emden with Canadian F/O Mitchell but tragically was to lose his life with three other crew members when their Stirling was brought down over Holland. Peter Nixey, just 22 years of age was a most popular officer especially with the

groundcrews, playing countless games of shove-halfpenny with them in their remote dispersal huts. John Hoskins, an engine-fitter recalls many enjoyable air tests made with Peter. As Sqn Ldr Nixey's DSO was the second to be awarded to a member of No 214 Squadron (Flt Lt Lucian Ercolani's being the first awarded in November 1941) it would be very gratifying to know who had visited Stradishall to remember this gallant officer and who had written : 'who flew from here to his death'. No contact has ever been made



The Cross and headstones of Sqn Ldr P Nixey DSO and three of his crew at Ommen General Cemetery – Netherlands

Photo: Mr Chris Timmer

with his family, but sadly the signature, obviously made by an older hand was illegible. Records show that Peter was married at the time of his death.

The four crew who were killed were buried in Ommen Cemetery. An original cross placed by the Dutch (which actually replaced an earlier German one) has now itself been replaced by a beautiful stone version which bears the words

There is a corner of a foreign field that is forever England'

Crew (all RAF): Sqn Ldr P Nixey DSO, Sgt A Buckley, Sgt D A Melville & Sgt W E Pearson.

Flt Lt V L Scantleton DFC RAAF



Vern Scantleton - July 2006

'Vern' Scantleton lives in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. He served on 214 Sqn from November 1943 to October 1944 (5 ops on Stirlings and 29 on Fortresses). He remained at Oulton, serving on 1699 Conversion Unit as a Fortress instructor. In February 1945 he volunteered to return to ops and 214 Sqn where he flew a further 15 ops until 10th April 1945, making a total of 49 during his time on the Sqn. In October 2006 Vern sent me a copy of one of his WAR EXPERIENCE STORIES (No.4) and here it is:

My tales of a "worn out airman" would not be complete without a description of an actual raid, and for this purpose I have chosen the operation (Jostle) to Stettin on the night of 29th August 1944. This particular raid combined sufficient anxieties and excitement to give me a few grey hairs (most of which I have since lost). This was a dual attack in which the main force split into two, one going on to attack Konigsberg (then in Poland) and the other to Stettin.

My log book shows we were airborne for 8 hours 40 minutes, which is about a maximum endurance time for most bombers with a full load. (The bombers would have returned having dropped their bombs, the Fortresses would have to lug the very heavy Jostle equipment all the way home. Ed) I well recall the raid as it was the only time we were briefed to fly on into Russia, if our calculations were such that we would have insufficient fuel to return, or damage to the aircraft or motors was such that it would be impossible to return against the strong prevailing headwind. Naturally, no man looked forward to spending a vacation in Russia - however short the

stay. To the best of my recollection no aircraft flew on onto Russia on this raid, though on some other raids, aircraft were forced to do so.

With an actual airborne time of 8 hours 40 minutes it is necessary to add the pre-take off check and the taxi time out to the runway, and on return the time taken to return to the dispersal pan, and shut down the motors. This was the total time the pilot would have sat at the controls without any relief. In this case it was probably a minimum of at least nine and a quarter hours. Actually we did a longer trip on 30th Nov 1943 (Stirling) when we dropped mines at a low level, at night, in a shipping lane just off the coast of Spain. On this occasion we were airborne for 10 hours, and it was the longest time ever recorded that a Stirling bomber had been airborne, so much so that we had been 'written off' as missing back at base. What happened was that we lost a motor soon after the return flight began, in which we were to climb to 16/18,000 feet, and fly back across enemy occupied France. With only three motors, I decided to skirt France and fly over water. This long trip used up so much fuel and our gauges were so low, that we decided to do an emergency landing at a 'drome only 25 miles from base. (Actually it was Stradishall only about 5 miles away. Ed.) Hence the panic back at Chedburgh - our operational base.

With temperatures of -30 celcius, or lower, it is a reasonable question to ask what the pilot did if nature called. Well the simple answer is he went without, or performed with bloody great difficulty. A funnel with a hose attached was fitted to the pilot's seat, but with all the flying clothes, and parachute harness etc, only a person of Houdini capabilities could have come up with a specimen. I vacated the seat on one occasion for relief, but returned immediately when the rear gunner reported an unidentified aircraft on our tail - I never tried again !!!

The normal procedure on an operational squadron was that Group HQ would advise each Station whether "ops" would be on, and how many aircraft were required, at about 10-11am each day. The Squadron Commander would then draw up a battle order with a list of pilots' names, and allocated the number of aircraft. The pre-flight briefing time was usually given later. The pilot would then gather his crew and go out to the aircraft to carry out a 20 minute air test. Any problems or malfunctions would be reported on return to the 'Chiefy' who was the NCO in charge of the ground crew allocated to that aircraft on a permanent basis. The 'Chiefy' held a responsible position as the serviceability of aircraft determined very much the total success of a raid. To have to turn back on a raid was very much a case of 'letting the troops down', and was frowned upon by Group HQ. Briefings were usually carried out about two hours before take-off and were held under tight security. After briefing, all aircrew had a meal of eggs, and prior to take-off thermos flasks of tea and coffee plus a bar of chocolate for each crew member were put in the aircraft. This may seem churlish today but in wartime England these were virtually unknown luxuries to the people in the street. It was a well known fact that babies and aircrew were the best fed in those years.

From when the target was announced at the briefing until after the actual take-off occurred was the time that many aircrew found it difficult to relax, and in some cases symptoms of stress existed. Strangely, once airborne and on the way, this problem largely disappeared, no doubt mainly due to the fact that they were occupied with their particular tasks. The well known saying "no moon tonight" relates to the fact that aircrew had a distinct dislike of 'going on ops' during a period of a full moon, as this gave the enemy 'cats eye' night fighters a definite advantage, as they could readily pick out the bombers visually, particularly when silhouetted against the sky and ground.

On the raid to Stettin on the night of 29th August 1944 we were briefed to fly out over the North Sea at a height of below 500 feet, to a pre-determined latitude and longitude, and then to climb as rapidly as possible to a height of about 15,000 feet, and on a route which would take us over the southern part of neutral Sweden, who would fire on us, but with little intention of doing any damage.

A tremendous amount of work and detail went into the planning of each operation by Bomber Command, and a lot of tactics were used to confuse the enemy. This is too complex to explain in a short story such as this, but suffice to say that the routes were planned to avoid heavy coastal batteries, areas of concentrated searchlights and of course fighter 'dromes.

On this raid it was a full moon, and 350 Lancasters and Halifaxes were in the force to attack Stettin. The planned tactics were that we would fly over the North Sea, at below 500 feet, which was a height at which the enemy radar, in those days, could not pick up aircraft due to the curvature of the earth's surface. About forty minutes ahead of the main force some six aircraft were to carry out a 'spoof' raid by dropping 'window' and simulating a bomber force of several hundred aircraft. The objective was to bring up the enemy night fighters to attack the 'spoof' force. German night fighters had a limited range and endurance and if all went to plan, they would have to return to base for refuelling, thus allowing the main bomber force to fly through relatively free from the fighters. In this, either deliberately, or by poor finger work by the controllers, the fighters were late in getting airborne, or they struck the jackpot by flying up into the true bomber force.

On the Stettin raid we took off about sunset and headed out over the North Sea. It was interesting to see aircraft from various 'dromes in England converging to make up the force of 350. As darkness fell it became apparent that there was going to be little joy in flying a heavily laden aircraft with full fuel capacity at below 500ft with all the other aircraft about. Evasive action at any height with a full load was bad enough, but below 500 feet it was suicidal. All raids were carried out under strict radio silence and total blackout conditions. I am not sure what caused the first pilot to panic (or use his common sense) but someone put on navigation lights, and a lot of others followed. This was the only occasion I can recall pilots putting on navigation lights on a raid. The risk of being shot down at that early stage would have been far less than the chance of a collision, and a watery grave. I have no hesitation in saying it was a bit scary !!!!

Beyond any doubt the most memorable 15 minutes or so of my flying career was when the night fighters got amongst the bombers. In some ways it still seems a bit unreal, as we had a beautiful full moon, and one could pick out other bombers and landmarks easily, and all seemed right with the world. Needless to say the night fighters had a picnic and losses were severe. There is something totally eerie about watching a bomber on fire and plunging to earth, or exploding in mid air, and wondering how many of the crew would be lucky enough to escape.

Fortunately, the rest of the trip was pretty normal. There was only 1/10th. cloud cover over the target, which permitted a concentrated attack. Flak and searchlights were only moderate which was appreciated.

Note. On this raid Vern was flying Fortress MkIII (B17G) HB788 BU-B on a Jostle patrol jamming enemy night fighter communications.

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The Nightjar has been compiled by, and proof read by members of the Committee, then printed, assembled and distributed by the Association Treasurer – John Gulliver.

If you would like to receive your copy of Nightjar electronically, which would save us over £1 per copy; please e-mail the Treasurer.

We hope that you have enjoyed this edition of the Nightjar in its new format. We have tried to improve the print quality whilst making a significant saving by folding the copy and avoiding the large letter postage costs. We would welcome your letters, stories, and comments for inclusion in later editions.