



‘NIGHTJAR’

NEWSLETTER OF No. 214(FMS) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

President:

**Marshal of the Royal Air Force
Sir Michael Beetham GCB CBE DFC AFC FRAeS**

Chairman:

Wing Commander A J Mawby OBE BSc RAF (Ret'd)

WINTER/SPRING 2008

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman	Wg Cdr A J Mawby OBE BSc
Treasurer	John Gulliver Chucky's, Swains Lane, Bembridge, Isle of Wight, PO35 5ST
Secretary	Peter M Walker 21 Beverley Road, Brundall, Norwich, NR13 5QS Phone: 01603 713754
Historian	Jock Whitehouse
Web Site Managers	John & Carol Edwards mailto:raf214squadron@yahoo.com
Committee	Sqn Ldr G W Moffatt
Committee	Roy Monk
Committee	Shaun P Broaders MBE MSM
Squadron Website	http://214squadron.atspace.com/default.htm

Should you have any queries on Association matters please feel free to contact the committee by email at <mailto:raf214squadron@yahoo.com>

Readers will note some small changes in the form and layout of this edition of Nightjar, this has been due to an attempt to reduce production costs. It has still been compiled by Association Secretary – Peter Walker; it was then converted to a computerised form by Vic Pheasant; and then printed, assembled and distributed by Association Treasurer – John Gulliver. If you would like to receive your copy of Nightjar electronically, which would save us 40p per copy in postage, please e-mail the Treasurer c/o <mailto:raf214squadron@yahoo.com>

Minutes of the 19th AGM of No. 214 (FMS) Squadron Association held at the
Maids Head Hotel, Norwich on Saturday September 22nd. 2007

Committee present:	Sqn.Ldr. G.W.Moffatt	Chairman
	Wg.Cdr. Alan Mawby	Chairman elect
	John Gulliver	Treasurer
	Peter McD. Walker	Secretary
	Jock Whitehouse	Historian
	Roy Monk	
	Shaun Broaders	

and 15 members

APOLOGIES had been received from: AVM Eric Macey, Gerry Combie, Des Athol, Bob Mackett (Canada), Gp.Capt. Peter Hill, Howie Wing, Don Walter, Peter Frost, Sqn. Ldr. Jim Newman, John Morton, Frank Lee, Gp.Capt. Charles Lilley, Maurice Matthews, Paul Henry, Alan Wilkes and Clare Pollard.

IN MEMORIAM: The following names of members who had died since the 2006 Reunion were then read out by the Secretary.

AVM JACK FURNER
SQN. LDR. BOB DAVIES
MARTIN STAUNTON
JACK BENNETT
FLT. LT. "JOHNNY" JOHNSON-BIGGS
NORMAN BRADLEY
M/NAV. COLIN ROSS
CHIEF TECH. DAVID PARSONS
SON. LDR. CHARLES HAINES
SON. LDR. DON McDOUGALL

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME: The meeting commenced with the Chairman welcoming all members attending, with an especial welcome to those from overseas; Sylvia and Maurice Harding from Australia, Sqn. Ldr. John Brown from Washington State, USA and Gerhard and Sissy Heilig from Vienna. Also to new members Tom and Eva Raine and John and Carol Edwards who run the 214 Sqn. Website. The Chairman continued by mentioning the long and much valued part played by two of our late members, AVM Jack Furner and Bob Davies. Mention was also made of Dave Parsons who had been a crew chief on Victors and a Committee member. Thanks were also due to Bill Wilkinson who had resigned from the Committee and could not be with us today. Bill was Treasurer for many years until 2004 and kept our finances in immaculate order without computerised help. Thank you Bill for your great contribution to keeping the Association on the right track. The Chairman then thanked all members of the Committee for their efforts and hard work over the past twelve months and was able to report that the Association was in a healthy state both financially and membership.

AGM continued: The Chairman then introduced the next item on the agenda which was the proposed 214 Sqn. memorial stone to be placed in the RAF section at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, near Litchfield, Staffordshire. From investigations carried out by Jock Whitehouse the cost, including the placement of the granite stone, would be in the region of £2,500.

Jock had carried out a thorough investigation by letter and telephone with the management at the Arboretum and by personal visits to a Suffolk stone mason who has much experience in producing military memorials; ie Stradishall and Chedburgh among many others. Jock had prepared an approximately actual size illustration of the proposed wording and this was shown to the members present who in general were very enthusiastic. Jock mentioned that at this stage this was only a prototype and a few amendments will need to be made but hopes that an illustration of the final wording will be available to put in the next Nightjar due out in February 2008. The Treasurer, John Gulliver was then asked to give a figure of the amount available from Association funds towards the cost. John reported that £1,000 should be available without depleting the funds to enable us to continue running the Association and producing the twice yearly Nightjar (our biggest expense). The Chairman then informed us that the balance of £1,500 could hopefully be raised by donations from members and other sources. Work will be continuing throughout the coming months to make sure that this project can be brought to fruition before the end of 2008. The motion to proceed with this project was proposed by John Gilpin and seconded by Gerhard Heilig.

ELECTION OF THE COMMITTEE : With the existing Committee members prepared to continue in office, the Chairman, who was standing down after five years in the post, formally proposed that Wg.Cdr. Alan Mawby be elected as the new Chairman. This was put to the floor and unanimously agreed by a show of hands. Sqn. Ldr. Moffatt will continue as a member of the Committee. Having lost two Committee members this year (Bob Davies and Dave Parsons), and one resigned (Bill Wilkinson), it was decided to invite John and Carol Edwards to join the Committee. They run the 214 Sqn. website and, looking to the future, should bring a modern day approach and a comparatively youthful outlook to keep the Association going into the future.

TREASURER'S REPORT: John Gulliver was able to report that as at December 31st. 2006 the account balances stood at £2,565.24. No.2 account had now been closed and the small amount held there transferred to No.1 account. If any member wants a copy of the accounts please telephone or write to John.

OTHER BUSINESS: During the meeting the minutes of the last meeting were agreed with no matters arising. Roy Monk reported that recruitment had resulted in eight new members in the last twelve months.

Our Historian, Jock Whitehouse, reported on his work since the last Nightjar; his full report will appear in the next edition in February. (*See later pages.*)

Peter McD. Walker
Secretary

THE 'NEW' NIGHTJAR NEWSLETTER.

This edition of the Nightjar has been produced on a computer by some of our members who are well versed in this electronic wizardry. Previous editions were produced on a laser photocopier but the cost of this method was getting rather expensive, both for production costs and postage. The great advantage of computer production is that we are now able to send the newsletter by e-mail to our members able to receive it or who would prefer to receive it by this method. If you wish to receive future editions by this means please inform our Treasurer, John Gulliver, of your e-mail address. John's e-mail address is c/o <mailto:raf214squadron@yahoo.com>.

Peter McD. Walker
Secretary

THE 2007 REUNION DINNER

The Reunion and Dinner were held at the Maids Head Hotel, Norwich over the weekend of September 21st/22nd 2007, attended by 37 members and guests. New members were Tom and Eva Raine and John and Carol Edwards. Overseas members were: Sylvia and Maurice Harding (from Australia), Sqn Ldr John Brown (from the USA), Gerhard and Sissy Heilig (from Vienna). Ted Walker, almost 97, came all the way from Darlington driven down by his son James; he even managed, with help, to climb up the stairs to the Minstrel Room to attend the Dinner. After the Dinner Sir Michael Beetham kindly came over and had a chat with Ted, and also with Sylvia and Maurice Harding, all veterans of WW2. At the commencement of the evening, our new Chairman, Wg Cdr Alan Mawby welcomed all attending and was pleased that Lady Beetham and Mrs. Osborn were here with their husbands. After a good meal and plenty of wine all agreed that the food was a great improvement on previous years.

Our speaker this year was Gp Capt Phil Osborn, Officer Commanding RAF Marham. His talk, illustrated with slides, stressed the role played by the 21st century Royal Air Force and the problems of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. Marham is now a very large base with about 3,000 staff, one of the biggest employers in East Anglia which injects many millions into the local economy. Of the staff, some are civilians employed by British Aerospace who work with RAF technicians in a large engineering centre carrying out major overhauls of all the RAF's Tornado aircraft.

Thank you to Phil Osborn for a very informative and interesting talk.

At the end of the evening, our previous Chairman – Sqn Ldr “Moff” Moffatt, was presented with a bottle of Malt Whisky as a thank you for his five years in the post.

All in all it was a most enjoyable and successful weekend. The Maids Head has certainly been improved, although a few members said their rooms were no better than in previous years. However the refurbishment goes on and within a few months should be completed to bring the hotel to a much better standard.

The year 2008 will celebrate 20 years since the Association was formed but as at the time these notes were typed (Oct. 2007) the venue has not been decided. However we are looking at a date of Saturday September 27th.

TIES & BLAZER BADGES

We still have a supply of top quality 214 Sqn. ties, either maroon with gold nightjars, or dark blue with the squadron crest. These normally cost £10 plus postage but you can have one for £6 including postage. A few gold wired blazer badges are also available for £8 incl. postage (normally £12 plus postage). This may be your last chance to obtain a 214 Sqn. tie or badge, it is unlikely any more will be produced. Please send your order and cheque to John Gulliver, Chucky's, Swains Lane, Bembridge, Isle of Wight PO35 5ST (payable to 214 Sqn. Association)

Peter McD. Walker
Secretary

IN MEMORIAM (Since the last Nightjar)

Sqn Ldr **BOB DAVIES**. Bob died on 3rd June 2007 and was briefly reported the last Nightjar. The funeral was held on 27th June at the West London Crematorium. Representing the Association were: "Moff" Moffatt, John Gulliver, Vic Pheasant, Bill Wilkinson, Roy Monk, Peter Walker. Rob Walden attended on behalf of the 100 Group Association.

Master Navigator **COLIN ROSS**. June 2007. Colin was 86 and had served in WWII and into the jet age on 214 Sqn Valiants. Jock Whitehouse attended the funeral on behalf of the Association.

Chief Tech. **DAVE PARSONS** age 69, died July 16th. Served in the RAF May 1954 to June 1977. Crew chief on 214 Sqn Victors. The funeral was held at Gorleston-on-Sea, Norfolk on July 26th. Peter Walker attended on behalf of the Association.

Sqn Ldr **DON McDOUGALL** AFC. Totness, Devon. Died on August 1st. 2007. Don McDougall had served as a 214 Sqn Victor pilot.

NORMAN HILL DFC of Caister-on-Sea, Gt. Yarmouth, Norfolk. Died age 84 on September 28th 2007. Norman had learned to fly in the USA under the Arnold Scheme and, between late 1943 and late 1944, flew with 214 Sqn. He completed 4 ops on Stirlings and 33 on Fortresses before moving to India and later Australia to fly Dakotas until 1946. After the war Norman joined the Inland Revenue where he eventually became a Senior Tax Inspector. Despite flying large aircraft in his younger days he never learned to drive a car and never particularly wanted to. Peter Walker represented the Association at the funeral.

FREDERICK C BLAIR DFM, Appleby, Cumbria. Died October 2nd. 2007 Wireless Operator on Fortresses 1944-45 (Bob Nelson's crew).

WILLIAM G. HOWARD ISM. Died, age 86, on Oct. 30th. 2007. Bill was a Flight Engineer on Stirlings and Fortresses, 1943/44, mainly with the crew of Jake Walters RCAF (the same crew as John Gilpin). Representing the Association at the funeral in Norwich was Peter Walker.

EDWARD (Ted) WALKER. Died, age 96, on November 30th 2007. Ted was a navigator on 214 Sqn until mid 1943 when a number of aircraft and crews were transferred to the newly formed 620 Sqn at Chedburgh. On August 23/24th 1943, on a raid to Berlin, Ted's Stirling was shot down over Germany. Of the eight crew only Ted and two others survived to be taken POWs. Ted had attended many 214 Sqn Reunions and, although frail, he insisted that he attend that held in September last. His son Jim who brought him from Darlington says that Ted thoroughly enjoyed himself although he got rather tired towards the end of the evening.

BOB MOORBY. Farnham, Surrey. On January 5th 2008 age 86. Bob was a Wireless Operator on 214 Sqn. Stirlings and Fortresses, 1943/44. He was one of the founder members of the Association and believed to have attended all the 214 Sqn Reunions from the beginning as well as those of the 100 Group Association. Whenever wreaths were to be laid at Chedburgh or Oulton Bob would go out of his way to attend. He will be much missed by all who knew him. These notes have been written before Bob's funeral but Shirley Whitlock and Clare Pollard, both Assn. members are hoping to attend.

NEW MEMBER.

KEN TOYNE. Admaston Hall, Telford, Shropshire. Ken's father was KIA in a 214 Sqn. Wellington on April 28th. 1942.

HISTORIAN'S REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2007

For a change, a slight but welcome flurry of activity.

DONATION. Our anonymous donor has again made funds available to enable wreaths to be placed at both Chedburgh and Stradishall.

The Chedburgh wreath was laid on a sunny Sunday 1st July at the No. 218 Sqn Association Reunion weekend. As unfortunately neither Bob Moorby nor Clare Pollard were able to attend, I did the honours on behalf of our Association. The weekend was its usual success and, after the regular social activities and a very impressive flypast by the BBMF Lancaster over the Saturday garden party, it concluded with a very simple service of Remembrance in front of the Chedburgh memorial.

All being well, the Stradishall wreath will be laid at the memorial on the Saturday of Remembrance weekend.

I was contacted by a Mr Martin Cole hopefully for any more information about his aunt's death at Stradishall on 25th August 1942. This lady was Ivy Perham, a WAAF MT driver who according to records 'died accidentally'. Mr Cole thought that his aunt was an ambulance driver but, as we had not picked up any precise details during our researches, I contacted an ex-Stradishall WAAF MT driver with an excellent memory and luckily she recalled the incident which involved a service lorry. Ivy was from London and just 22 years old but, as an MT driver, it is quite likely that she drove 214 Squadron Stirling crews to and from their aircraft and for this reason we believe that there is a real link with '214'. As a result Mr Cole funded the purchase of a wreath to be laid, if possible, at Stradishall on the anniversary of her death. The local RBL came up with a No.214 Squadron wreath which I placed at Stradishall on the given day. Mr Cole, who resides in Tenerife, was very grateful - so much so that he has become an Associate member of our Association. Ivy Perham is buried in Acton Cemetery Middlesex.

A gentleman from Telford in Shropshire contacted me to see if I could help in any way with his efforts to find out a little more about his father(Sgt G K M Newman) who was lost on 214's last Wellington raid of the war. This took place on 28/29 April 1942 on Kiel. Sgt. S W G Avent was the pilot. Sgt. Chapman's body was not recovered but four of the crew are buried in Kiel war Cemetery. If anyone can help in any way please let me know.

Another MT item is that the '214 Squadron Embroidery', made and donated to the Association by Mrs Sheila Engelse who, as Sheila Foley, was an MT driver at Stradishall and Chedburgh with strong links to 214, is now framed and ready to be displayed in Stirling House at Sheila's request. Sheila has seen a photograph of the finished article and is delighted with how it has turned out. (The work was on show at the Annual Reunion.)

I have been corresponding with Brian Walker from Nottingham, a classic car and motor-cycle enthusiast who has a wealth of information on the pre-war career of Sqn Ldr Bill Clarke, lost from Chedburgh when his Stirling was shot down over Holland on 3rd February 1943. The fascinating story links Bill with the Vincent motor-cycle Company pre-war and will eventually be featured in 'Nightjar'. (*See later pages.*)

Ian Hunt has produced yet another chapter of the operations flown by 214. Ian's dedication is quite remarkable as, from experience, I know that transferring information from often poor quality microfilm can be frustrating in the extreme.

I was contacted by Peter Crighton, the son of the late Dr. Ian Crighton who, as F/O Crighton, was the

navigator in Flt Lt Frank Lee's crew at Chedburgh who were shot down in September 1943. The family, naturally, inherited Ian's collection of memorabilia, including his uniform which still fitted him in his later years; Peter kindly gave me the opportunity to have a look at the material and select anything which might be of use but I finally had to opt for only the 'written' word. Ian gave many talks locally on his experiences as a PoW (including the 'Long March' in 1945) and, as he had flown at Chedburgh and at Stradishall (1657 HCU), I now hold material which could produce an interesting display for Stirling House – where, incidentally, improvements continue. Currently, a new wooden floor is going down in the entrance lobby, we could see new windows of a more historical style, and the old garages are to get new wooden doors, which will not only improve the overall appearance of the site but probably provide more useable working space.

After my 'RAF Chedburgh' talk to Wickhambrook History Society earlier this year I have been asked by the nearby Barrow Group to visit them in April and repeat the exercise - and I thought I had retired!

Whilst looking through the service diary of a friend (whose father was a F/E with 620 Squadron at Chedburgh and Fairford) I noticed that Bryan (Svensson) had visited Marham to inspect some Valiants back from the Suez operation and identified as being from '214 Squadron'.

A recent Midland newspaper obituary featured one of its local 'lads' - Sqn Ldr Norman Scrivener (navigator) who flew over 100 'ops'; firstly with No. 75 (NZ) Squadron at Feltwell then No.106 Squadron under Guy Gibson, and finally with No.83 (Pathfinder) Squadron under John Searby. He was then asked to fly one more trip with the new C.O but, on seeing the proposed Battle Order, Gp Cpt John Searby ordered his old friend not to go. In the event, the crew was lost over Berlin. The C.O who was lost was in fact Wg Cdr Ray Hilton, a 214 Squadron Flight Commander in the early Wellington days at Stradishall.

Similarly, we have also lost Wg Cdr S 'Tubby' Baker who, although a leading Pathfinder captain, also served with 214 Squadron at Stradishall in the early days.

Finally, an interesting item gleaned from the September 2nd 1939 edition of 'Flying' (every Friday, 3d), which advertised the start of the Gordon Bennett Balloon Race starting in Poland on 3rd September! The balloon certainly went up - but not as anticipated! Far more sinister were articles on German Gliding Schools (swastikas well in evidence) and German Air Exercises (Heinkel 111s being bombed up).

Update. November 2007

In spite of cold blustery conditions, a few hardy folk gathered at the RAF Stradishall Memorial on Remembrance Saturday morning, No. 214 Squadron being well represented. Eddie Wheeler DFC (Stradishall 1941) laid the RAF Stradishall Memorial Trust wreath, Don Walter (AEO on Valiants) performed the honours for our Association and a member of the local Aviation Society (which meets in Stirling House) laid their wreath. Ron Penhaligan, a local retired baker who came to the area serving as an 'engine man' at both Stradishall and Chedburgh (and marrying a local lass), was present as was Dr. Slade of the Aviation Society and his father-in-law, ex-No.622 Squadron. It was afterwards that Dr. Slade recounted details of when No. 214 Squadron disbanded at Marham and, apart from details of the Victors and of the actual ceremony, he also recalled that 'No.214 were NOT at all happy'. It turned out that at the time Dr Slade was a young Medical Officer at Marham and no doubt well placed to hear all the gossip! A small world. We were again pleased to have the Bomber Command Association Standard paraded by Ron Pearson its local custodian. Along with the wreath laid in August in memory of WAAF Ivy Perham still in place, the Memorial looked particularly colourful.

Improvements to Stirling House continue and the social area will be enhanced by a conservatory. All this points to the very busy, and increasingly attractive, building having a secure future - good news for the RAF Heritage aspect, which remains of prime importance.

Following our recent research into the tragic death of his aunt (Ivy Perham) I met up with Martin Cole in October over from his home in Tenerife and was able to show him the remaining and identifiable parts of RAF Stradishall (this side of the wire!) including the levelled site of the MT section. After a visit to Stirling House and lunch at the 'Cherry Tree' we called in at Saint Margaret's Church where Martin was able to see his aunt's name in the Book of Remembrance, quite a moving moment for him. After seeing the war graves we visited our small Hundon Memorial, commemorating service personnel (including Ivy Perham and others from No. 214 Squadron) who died in the parish 1938-1970. After seeing Ivy's name on the Roll of Honour in the Village Hall, Martin left, well satisfied at the success of his efforts to find out more about his aunt who died so young, but more importantly to know that she and so many others are remembered. Martin also visited her resting place in Acton Cemetery: a grave shared with other service personnel - tidy, but perhaps fortunately, tucked right away in a far corner away from a not very impressive environment.

Martin has written to express his thanks, but work is in hand to find out more about the military aspect of the history of White Lodge Hospital in Newmarket where his aunt was taken after her accident and where she sadly died.

Jock M Whitehouse

No 214 (FMS) SQUADRON REUNION 2008 – A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

The 2008 reunion will be held on Saturday 27 September at the Maids Head Hotel, Tombland, Norwich. As usual, the Annual General Meeting will be held during the afternoon and the Reunion Dinner will be held during the evening. After the meal, we are hoping to have a veteran of the raids on the *Tirpitz* as our guest speaker. Full details and booking forms will be included in the next edition of '*Nightjar*'. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please contact the Secretary, Peter Walker, at the address shown inside the front cover.

Before deciding to hold the 2008 Reunion at the Maids Head, the Committee did consider the possibility of holding it at Marham as well as alternative locations around Norwich. Although a visit to Marham might be attractive, especially to those who served there in the Valiant and Victor, it would be difficult to reach for those dependent on public transport, some attendees might have to be accommodated off base with the attendant transport problems, and we were advised by the Station Commander that any Reunion would be subject to possible cancellation at very short notice for operational reasons. There would also be little for wives and other family members to do during the Annual General Meeting. Some of these same considerations also applied to hotels around Norwich. Overall, the Committee considered that the advantages of the Maids Head in terms of its location for easy access to public transport and to the cathedral and centre of Norwich for sightseeing and shopping outweighed the higher room charges which had been imposed starting in 2007. There was also a feeling that the hotel was making a determined effort to improve its facilities and to offer a better service than we had experienced on some occasions in the past. Of course, this does not mean that we are committed beyond 2008 and we will, in any event, need to consider the location for 2009 in the light of our experience in 2008.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Reunion in September!

Wg Cdr Alan Mawby, Chairman

No 214 SQUADRON MEMORIAL APPEAL

The Summer/Autumn 2007 '*Nightjar*' reported that your Committee was investigating the possibility of placing a tree and memorial dedicated to No 214 Squadron at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas near Lichfield, Staffordshire. The Arboretum stands on a 150-acre site within the National Forest and contains a large number of trees and memorials dedicated to British military units, including many to RAF squadrons. A new Armed Forces Memorial commemorating British service personnel killed on duty or by terrorist action since 1948 was dedicated in the presence of HM The Queen at Alrewas in October. The Arboretum is run by the National Memorial Arboretum Company Limited which is part of the Royal British Legion Group. For those with internet access, the Arboretum's website is at memorialtreesuk.org.uk.

The proposal was discussed at our Annual General Meeting held in Norwich on 22nd September when our Historian, Jock Whitehouse, outlined the results of his discussions with both the Arboretum and with a stone mason who has created a number of similar memorials in the past, including those at Stradishall and Chedburgh. The intention is to establish a permanent memorial to the Squadron commemorating its service over the whole period of its existence, as opposed to the existing memorials relating to specific bases. Although the Squadron has a long-standing connection with RAF Marham, there is no guarantee that that Station will remain in existence beyond the foreseeable future, and a memorial placed there might well have to be moved at some future date should the Station close. On the other hand, the National Memorial Arboretum is intended to remain in existence in perpetuity, and we could reasonably expect that a permanent memorial located there would survive indefinitely. In line with the rules set by the Arboretum, it is proposed that the memorial should be a block of rough-hewn natural granite approximately 91cm high by 76cm wide (3ft by 2ft 6in) with a rustic edge, placed adjacent to the tree. The front face of the stone would have a smooth, slightly inset, central panel on which will be engraved basic details of the Squadron's history together with a dedication to all those who have served on the Squadron. An outline of the proposed wording appears on the page opposite; there may be one or two minor adjustments to the wording before work commences but the basic information and layout should not change. The estimated cost of the memorial and its installation at Alrewas is £2500. This is a substantial sum, but it is important to remember that we wish to create a *permanent* memorial and thus need to use long-lasting materials that will withstand the British climate. Our Treasurer, John Gulliver, reported that the Association is in a position to contribute £1000 from our funds without jeopardising our ability to run our affairs and produce the '*Nightjar*' newsletter. This leaves us to find some £1500, which works out at only just over £7.50 per member, which does not appear excessive. These proposals were well-received by the members attending the Annual General Meeting and approved in principle.

We obviously cannot place a firm order with the stone mason until we are well on our way to raising the necessary funds. Equally, we cannot at this stage commit to a specific date for installation of the memorial. However, if fundraising goes well over the next few months, it may be possible to consider a date in spring 2009 for installing the memorial at Alrewas. In any event, if we are to have the memorial created and installed within a reasonable timescale, we now need actively to seek donations from both members of the Association and from former members of the Squadron who are not members of the Association. To this end, an appeal for funds will also appear on the 214 Squadron Website. Some members may wish to donate more than £7.50 and some may feel unable, for understandable reasons, to contribute. However, we now seek donations large and small, with the aim of giving the go-ahead, if possible by September this year. Please send your donations to the Treasurer, John Gulliver, at the address inside the front cover of '*Nightjar*'. Cheques should be made payable to '*214 (FMS) Squadron Association*' and crossed '*A/C Payee*'.

Wg Cdr Alan Mawby, Chairman.

No 214 (FEDERATED MALAY STATES) SQUADRON

ROYAL AIR FORCE

1917

Formed as No 7A Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service 28 July 1917
Renumbered as No 14 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service 9 December 1917
Renumbered as No 214 Squadron, Royal Air Force 1 April 1918



In 1941, No 214 Squadron was adopted by the British Malayan Federation, which raised funds to pay for a number of Wellington aircraft for the Squadron. In recognition of this, in June 1941 the name 'Federated Malay States' was officially included in the Squadron title.

1977

No 214 Squadron, Royal Air Force, disbanded 28 January 1977

BASES AND AIRCRAFT

Coudekerque and Alquines (France) 1917-1918
(Handley Page O/100)

Downham Market 1943-1944
(Short Stirling III)

St Inglevert, Quilen and Chemy (France) 1918-1919
(Handley Page O/400)

Sculthorpe 1944
(Boeing Fortress II)

Heliopolis and Abu Sueir (Egypt) 1919-1920
(Handley Page O/400)

Oulton 1944-1945
(Boeing Fortress II and III)

Boscombe Down and Andover 1935-1936
(Vickers Virginia X)

Amendola (Italy) and Ein Shemar (Palestine) 1945
(Consolidated Liberator VIII)

Scampton 1936-1937
(Handley Page Harrow II)

Fayid (Egypt) 1945-1946
(Avro Lancaster BIII)

Feltwell 1937-1939
(Handley Page Harrow II/Vickers Wellington I)

Upwood 1946-1954
(Avro Lancaster BI(FE)/Avro Lincoln B2)

Methwold 1939-1940
(Vickers Wellington IA)

Marham 1956-1977
(Vickers Valiant B1, B(PR)1, B(PR)K1, and BK1/
Handley Page Victor K1, B(K)1A, and K1A)

Stradishall 1940-1942
(Vickers Wellington IA, IC, and II/
Short Stirling I and III)

Chedburgh 1942-1943
(Short Stirling I and III)



Commemorating the distinguished record of No 214 (FMS) Squadron in the bomber, radio countermeasures, transport and air-to-air refuelling tanker roles.

Remembering all who served on the Squadron and especially those who gave their lives in both war and peace.

'Ultror in Umbris'
(Avenging in the Shadows)

No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association [date]

Squadron Leader Bevis Denton ('Bob') Davies AFC RAF

Most of you will know that Bob Davies died on 3rd June 2007 in St Mary's hospital, Paddington, from multiple organ failure. He was nearing the end of his 87th year. Many who had listened to him recounting incidents from his life will know that he had a colourful RAF career, and no less colourful civilian and private life.

'Bob' Davies was born on 11th July 1920 at Gravesend in Kent where his father was a Trinity House river pilot on the Thames piloting between Gravesend and the London Docks up to London Bridge. Bob's father had served in the Royal Naval Reserve in World War I with the rank of Lieutenant Commander and was the captain of a destroyer – HMS Bevis, operating out of Malta. Bob's mother was one of five daughters of a German father and Scottish mother. Although having some German heritage, Bob's father was a British national, but he had been Court Martialled on some trumped up charges, which resulted in the marriage of Bob's father being somewhat frowned upon, and denied him full recognition of his WWI exploits. However, in WWII, this seeming injustice was later rectified when Bob's father, serving again in the RNR as a Lt Cdr commanding a flotilla of mine sweepers operating out of Dartmouth and Falmouth, was awarded the DSC.

Bob was actually christened 'Bevis Denton'; Bevis being the name of his father's WWI ship (and also the name of the Scottish knight in the Court of King Arthur); Denton was one of the names of his father's Best Man – Captain Percival Denton Feathers. (Having no children of his own, he had entreated Bob's mother and father to give their first child one of his names – Bob's mother chose Denton.) However, from a very young age Bevis Denton Davies assumed the christian name of Bob, which has remained ever since.

Educated at Gravesend Grammar School, Bob 'matriculated' reasonably well and gained a place at the College of Aero and Auto Engineering in Sidney Street, Chelsea. While there, following the Munich crisis of 1938, Bob responded to a recruiting drive, featuring a searchlight demonstration outside of the Majestic Cinema in Gravesend, and joined No. 313 Territorial Army Searchlight Battery of the Royal Engineers. In 1939, he was 'called up' and joined a ten man searchlight team, as the generator and truck driver, located on a cliff site close to Sheerness; it was from here that he witnessed the aerial battles of the Battle of Britain in the late summer of 1940. In the autumn of that year Bob responded to a General Order, circulated through the Police, Royal Air Force ground crew and the Army, calling for aircrew volunteers. Just prior to this, one of Bob's friends had lost his life as an Air Gunner in the RAF, so Bob volunteered to replace him. However, at his interview the 'authorities' had other ideas; with his marginal maths capability being rather detrimental for navigator training, Bob was offered training for the category of pilot, which he accepted.

Joining the RAF through the Regents Park Aircrew Reception Centre on 17th July 1941, and after Initial Training ('square bashing') in Newquay, Cornwall, Bob's flying training started at the end of September 1941 at the Watchfield Elementary Flying Training School on the DH82A 'Tiger Moth'. After a brief period 'holding' in Manchester, in early 1942 Bob was selected to continue training as a pilot under the Arnold Scheme in the United States, and went by sea to the Aircrew Holding Unit in Moncton, Canada, and thence to the Ground Training Unit at Turner Field, Georgia USA. A couple of months followed at the Primary Flying Training unit at Carlstrom Field, near Albany in Florida on the Boeing Stearman PT17a, and then two further months at the Basic Flying Training Unit at Gunter Field near Montgomery, Alabama. At the beginning of July 1942, Bob found himself at the Advanced Flying Training Unit at Craig Field, at Selma, Alabama flying the AT6a 'Harvard', graduating from the Class 42H on 5th September 1942, when he was awarded his wings and commissioned.

After a short visit to the Toronto Aircrew Holding Unit to collect his full officer's uniform, Bob was selected for a Qualified Flying Instructor course at Maxwell, California, which he joined in late September 1942 to fly the Vultee Valiant BT13a 'Vultic Vibrator'. He was then posted to Shaw Field, near Sumpter, South Carolina where he spent the next 8 months, through to the summer of 1943, as a QFI, training mainly American Aviation Cadets.

It was during this period that Bob was first married, to a lady some 14 years his senior – Sylvie St Clair, a singer whom he met in a New York night club. However, the marriage was not to last and, after the war, there was a mutual parting and divorce. Sylvie later went on to become Vic Oliver's leading lady in his 1947 London production of *The Pyjama Game*.

In mid 1943 Bob returned by sea to the UK via New York and spent a few months kicking his heels as he went through the Personal Reception Centre at Harrogate followed by three weeks at the Aircrew Officers School, at Sidmouth in Devon. Flying for Bob restarted at the end of October 1942, at the Twin Conversion Unit of the Advanced Flying School, Little Rissington on the Airspeed 'Oxford'. This period of training began to drag for Bob; through November he was at the Windrush satellite airfield to Little Rissington, and then at the non flying Beam Approach Training Flight at Docking, Norfolk, returning to Windrush for the Christmas and New Year period of 1943/44. But Bob's frustration was brought up short when he had to spend a few weeks at the ('bad boys') Aircrew Disciplinary School at Shedfield, for taking an unauthorised weekend off.

Early March 1944 found Bob at the multi engine No 19 Operational Training Unit at Kinloss training on the Armstrong-Whitworth 'Whitley'. After escape and evasion training in Yorkshire, Bob joined No 4 Group's 1658 Heavy Conversion Unit at Riccall, Yorkshire, on the Handley-Page 'Halifax MkII', where he was crewed up and joined 578 Squadron at Burn near Selby in July 1944 to fly the Handley-Page 'Halifax MkIII'. Bob and his crew were to complete some 18 day and night operations on the Squadron, which suffered very heavy losses over a period of 14 months losing some 48 aircraft and 219 aircrew. Bob was a great believer in 'luck', and over this period he had his fair share: In September 1944 on a bombing run on Venlo airfield, a German night fighter base in Holland, just as his bomb aimer called 'bombs gone' he felt and heard a mighty crash in his aircraft. At first he thought they had been hit by flak, but in fact a bomb dropped by a Lancaster flying above them had gone clean through the aircraft fuselage just aft of the mid upper gunner's position. Apart from the tail gunner losing his oxygen supply, the aircraft continued to behave normally. They set course for home, electing initially to fly to the emergency airfield at RAF Woodbridge; but as they approached, although losing height, Bob then decided to try to make base (as they were all going on leave the next day!). But deteriorating weather forced a landing at Old Buckenham, an American bomber base south of Norwich. Remarkably, later in the Officers Mess bar, Bob met by chance the Bomb Aimer of the crew of the Lancaster that dropped the bomb through his aircraft, and then even more remarkably he met his former Flight Commander from his US days as a QFI, who was now a Major flying B-24 Liberators.

A man of independent spirit, Bob did not suffer fools easily, as members of his crew were to discover as he attempted to dispense with a rather incompetent Bomb Aimer. He also did not have too much respect for 'rules', as his earlier stretch in the 'bad boys' detention centre at RAF Shedfield would bear witness; later he was to be court martialled and admonished for inadvertently wrecking his COs nearly new 'runabout' aircraft.

After 578 Squadron, Bob then did a stint on the newly formed 171 Squadron of the similarly newly formed (Radio Counter Measures – RCM) 100 Group, joining a mid tour crew. However, before the aircraft were delivered to start flying, Bob was promoted to acting Squadron Leader (having completed the Junior Management Course at RAF Cranwell) to take up the position of A flight Commander on No. 214 (FMS) Squadron flying the B-17F & G 'Flying Fortresses' out of RAF Oulton, to the north of Norwich. Bob remained there until the end of the war, completing some 12 operations, including the Dresden raid, before the advent of VE day terminated all operational flying. (Although recommended for a DFC, it was refused at Group level, due he believed, to him being considered 'reluctant' in his operational flying following a countermeasure mission, for which he had volunteered, but had turned back because of a complete lights failure in the aircraft.) But Bob's luck continued to hold during his 214 time. Returning on three engines from one countermeasure operation in early 1945, he was given priority to land and the aircraft ahead of him was instructed to 'go round again' to allow him in. Unfortunately, this aircraft encountered a German night fighter intruder which

shot it down. And again, a short time later, the aircraft returned and shot up the de-briefing room just as Bob and one of his crew were leaving, somehow missing them in their very exposed position. Bob's somewhat irreverent philosophy on this question of 'luck', and in keeping with his rather irascible nature, is eloquently summed up in one of his favourite wartime poems, written by Wg Cdr Dennis McHarrie, and titled 'Luck'.

I suppose they'll say his last thoughts were of simple things,
Of April back home, and the late sun on his wings.
Or that he murmured someone's name,
As earth reclaimed him sheathed in flame.
Oh God! Let's have no more of empty words,
Lip service ornamenting death!
The worms don't spare the hero.
Nor can children feed upon resounding praises of his deed.
"He died who loved to live", they'll say,
"Unselfishly so we might have today!"
Like hell! He fought because he had to fight.
He died, that's all. It was his unlucky night.

After the war, Bob wanted to continue flying in the RAF and, being an exceptional pilot, he was offered a four year extension to his war time commission in the rank of Flight Lieutenant, which he accepted in the knowledge that his next appointment would be flying the B24 'Liberator' in Transport Command. After again spending a period on a holding unit in Yorkshire, in September Bob was at the B24 Ground school at RAF Bourn in Cambridgeshire. In October 1945, Bob joined No 102 Squadron of Transport Command at RAF Bassingbourne engaged mainly with trooping flights to Karachi, India, and was to fly the last operational Liberator sortie. In February 1946, Bob joined 53 Squadron at RAF Upwood on the same aircraft and task, before converting to the Avro C1 'York' at RAF Waterbeach to join No. 242 Squadron at RAF Oakington (previously Douglas Bader's fighter squadron) on the lengthy trooping flights to Singapore (Oakington-Lyneham-Castel Benito/Tripoli-Lod/Lydda (Palestine now Israel)-Habbaniya (Iraq)-Karachi-Ngombo/(Ceylon now Sri Lanka)-Changi/Singapore) usually going out empty except for freight, returning with passengers. Then, in November 1946, Bob joined No. 40 Squadron at RAF Abingdon again on the same aircraft and task.

However, it was on the Singapore route with 40 Squadron that Bob collected his second Court Martial. On one occasion when flying down the Gulf towards Karachi, he caught up with another of the Squadron 'Yorks', and they decided to do a little unauthorised formation flying – which might have passed unnoticed had they not been involved in a slight collision in a turn to port. The aircraft recovered to land OK but the damage was obvious and there was no escaping the consequences. Bob was returned home as a passenger in close arrest, but was fortunate to receive only a reprimand at his Court Martial, but he also suffered the loss of his B/VIP flying category. (The other non-commissioned pilot was dismissed the Service.) Bob was grounded for a period working in 'Ops' on 40 Squadron, and then subsequently only allowed to fly freighting sorties with the Squadron. But then, in the summer of 1948, came the Berlin Airlift. Over a period of some 10 months with 40 Squadron flying Yorks, Bob flew 330 trips into the beleaguered city.

After the Berlin Airlift, in the summer of 1949, Bob was posted to RAF White Waltham, as the personal pilot to the CinC Home Command – Air Marshall Sir Robert Foster, flying in the De Havilland 'Dove/Devon' – in all-white overalls! Bob was to clock up some 500 hours with the AM on his recruiting drives, landing in some very strange places. (Bob's skills as a pilot and that of his navigator were exceptional – a necessity as a VIP/personal pilot. This was demonstrated one day returning to White Waltham when the airfield was covered in very low cloud with poor forward visibility. Bob and his nav had worked out a procedure for this eventuality, there being no radar or other landing aids available. The procedure was to fly low following a railway line, and upon reaching a known point, to turn on to a specific heading soon after which the airfield runway would be quickly sighted. This they did, but on landing successfully they were confronted by their AM. All he had seen

out of his window was the cloud and very poor visibility. Although he had said nothing during the flight, perhaps because he was accompanied by his wife and did not wish to alarm her, he was clearly a little shaken. While he congratulated Bob and his nav on getting them down safely and back at base, he made it very clear that he had no wish for them to repeat the procedure again!) It was also in this period, Bob met and married his second wife – Ann Simpson, an ex ATS girl from Gravesend.

Throughout the tour at RAF White Waltham, and despite the above detailed incident, Bob and his navigator enjoyed an excellent relationship with the AM - so much so that when he was promoted to Air Chief Marshall to become effectively CinC RAF Germany, Bob and his navigator went with him, having first converted on to the Vickers 'Valette C2' at RAF Dishforth. Based at Bad Eilsen/Bückeburg through 1951-3, Bob was to fly some very notable politicians/world leaders over this period, including the German leaders - Conrad Adenauer and Willi Brandt (the latter always rewarding him with a case of Rhine wine). It was also during this period that Bob was awarded his AFC as recommended by his ACM, but in his usual stubborn way Bob insisted that if he was to be so awarded, then so should his Master Navigator who was duly awarded the AFM.

In early 1955, Bob was back at RAF Dishforth to join the Transport Command Examining Unit, where he became qualified to examine crews flying 'Anson', 'Devon', 'Valette' and 'Viking' aircraft. This rather pleasant job took him all over the RAF world in those days through the Near, Middle and Far East RAF stations, as well as Germany and the UK. One additional, rather pleasant, job that Bob undertook during his time at RAF Dishforth was to ferry a Pembroke to Singapore. Accompanied by a navigator, this was to involve some 18 stops en route through some 13 countries before reaching his RAF Changi destination in just less than 60 hours flying. As an un-pressurised aircraft, this involved flying at less than 10,000 feet; remarkably they encountered very little poor weather and the aircraft remained serviceable throughout – including the Smith's autopilot, which worked very well and proved most useful.

But it was in this period that Bob's second marriage began to falter - largely due to an extra marital affair with a lady whom Bob had met on a visit to the jewellers – Aspreys, where she worked. Bob's second marriage again ended in divorce. But in 1956, through the divorce procedures, Bob was to meet his third wife Eunice, who at the time shared a flat with the lady involved. This time Bob had met his match and was to share the rest of his life with Eunice.

In 1958, Bob was posted to his first real ground job as a Flight Commander at the Officers Initial Training School, first at RAF Kirton Lindsay (although there was some flying to be had in the Chipmunk and Anson) and then RAF South Cerney. Despite his own rather chequered career, Bob was something of a hard task master to aspiring RAF officers. In April 1960, Bob found himself at a desk job in the Personal Department of the Air Ministry in Theobalds Road, which he stuck until the summer of 1963, when he was able to retire at age 43 under the then Queens Regulations (with a Gratuity of £2,200 and a pension of £805/per annum - not to be index linked until July 1975!)

In an RAF career spanning some 23 years, of which near 20 had been in the cockpit, Bob had flown some 23 different aircraft and types. He had flown 30 wartime operations and 330 flights on the Berlin Airlift; in the process he accumulated a total of some 7315 flying hours, of which near 4300 had been on multi engine aircraft.

Apart from flying, Bob had two other great passions in his life: one was his beloved Bull Terrier dogs, of which he had nine consecutively in 45 years; the other was cars, particularly large American cars, and the driving of them. On leaving the RAF, Bob went back to North America, where he bought a van and spent a couple of months or so driving from Toronto to Los Angeles and back. On returning to the UK, Bob tried a job in insurance working for Legal and General, but he only lasted three days before the tedium got to him. Bob finally found his métier as a chauffeur. First running his own business for a couple of years until he went broke, then as a free lance chauffeur for a couple of years, then as company director's personal chauffeur (where he was overworked and had his employment ended due to his involvement in an accident with their Rolls Royce). In the early 1970s, Bob became

the personal chauffeur to a Bahrain business man (until he was sacked on the spot for driving the man to the tradesman's entrance of his destination rather than to the front). Finally, from the earlier contact he had made, Bob became a chauffeur with the Bahrain Embassy, for whom he worked for 13 years until his final retirement in 1990 at age 70.

During this period, Bob also had to battle his own demons; recovering from alcoholism, he became an ardent supporter of Alcoholics Anonymous. And with his series of large and fast cars that he owned, notably of American manufacture, he was not immune to an accident or two on the road (one resulting in a complete write-off), though none to be seriously detrimental to his health.

On retirement, Bob was a keen supporter of RAF associations, in particular that of 214 Squadron. Serving on the committee since its inception, Bob's singular contribution was his undertaking to photograph the graves of all those airmen that died while serving on 214 Squadron – a task which he succeeded in accomplishing, apart from a number of graves in Iraq to which he was allowed no access. One of his journeys in this quest, in the company of a German historian – a Dr Nutterman (who had befriended Bob to help in his endeavours) took him on a circular route through Europe via Bordeaux, Marseilles, Milan, Vienna, Berlin and Hamburg – some 4,900 miles in 9 days!

Bob's final years were not particularly pleasant for him as, with rapidly failing eyesight, he had to give up his pleasure of owning and driving the large and fancy cars to which he was so attached. In later years, his eyesight deteriorated to the point where he could no longer read, whereupon the 'talking books' became something of a solace for him in these days. Yet Bob bore all of this with stoicism and fortitude, his dry sense of humour always to the fore. Though given to bouts of irascibility, and no lover modernity, Bob always embraced life to the full. Much cared for in his final days by his loyal wife Eunice, Bob passed away nearing the end of his 87th year on Sunday 3rd June in St Mary's hospital, Paddington, from multiple organ failure, despite the outstanding efforts of the hospital staff. In some ways, a merciful release. Bob had lead a very full an active life, but his luck had to run out some day.

Vic Pheasant



Bob Davies & his Halifax crew at No. 1658 Heavy Conversion Unit, Riccall. L-R
Sgt R E Burn RCAF Nav. Sgt S Brown RAF RG. **Flt Lt B D (Bob) Davies RAF P.**
Sgt W Scarf RAF FE. Sgt Hayworth RAF TG.FO R Corbett RCAF BA. Sgt Tither RAF WOP

AMUSING STORIES FROM 214 SQN.

In the late 1950s an Air Commodore from HQ 3Group, Bomber Command, needed to go to Malta on Air Force business. He was qualified to fly the Valiant as a co-pilot and sent a signal to Marham to see if they had an aircraft going to Malta on the date required. Indeed they had and the Air Commodore duly arrived to be informed that he would be flying out in a 214 Sqn. aircraft. After all the usual preparations the aircraft took off for Luqa. About two hours out the Air Cdre asked if anyone would like some soup, and some of the crew agreed that they would. Now for those who are unaware the Valiant was fitted with two soup heaters in the cockpit. The crew were entitled to cans of soup and also canned fruit juices for consumption in flight or return to stores. On cold winter nights the aircrew would, on landing, leave a few cans for the ground crew. Very thoughtful and much appreciated.

Having suggested that the crew might like some soup he decided that he should be the one who dealt with the matter. He left his co-pilot's seat, found a tin of soup, placed it in the heater, switched on and returned to his seat. After about ten minutes there was one hell of a bang and the Air Cdre turned round to see a large area of the rear cockpit and the rear facing crew members covered in tomato soup. He had not realized, or had forgotten, that he should have pierced a small hole in the lid of the tin before he placed it in the heater.

Despite this mishap the Valiant arrived safely in Malta no doubt leaving some poor ground crew lads to clear up the mess and check that nothing had been damaged.

Note: The above, and the following story, have been told to me by a reliable source and I have no reason to doubt that they are just yarns. PMW

In the first two years that 214 operated Valiants (1956/57) the CO was Wg Cdr Leonard Trent VC. Now Leonard Trent was a New Zealander, a countryman and a keen gardener, especially the growing of vegetables. A Wing Commander's residence at Marham had a fair sized garden and he kept his family and friends well supplied with a good selection of goodies. He was also very keen to try his hand at growing mushrooms and discovered, somewhere at Marham, a small building that was not in use but suitable for the purpose. Presumably he must have obtained permission or did he ?

Apparently he was successful and was able to produce more mushrooms than his family and friends could consume. So what to do with the surplus? I am told that he tried to supply the Officer's Mess but was not successful. Perhaps the Mess management did not want to upset the regular supplier, or that it was not the done thing for a senior officer to be seen as a producer and supplier.

When Wg Cdr Trent was promoted to Gp Capt and posted to a desk job, his residence at Marham had to be prepared for the new CO, Wg Cdr Beetham. When the builders and decorators came in to carry out their work they had occasion to go into the loft. The sight that greeted them must have been amazing to behold, trays and trays of mushrooms and bags of mushroom compost.

My only comment is that thank goodness Leonard Trent did not keep pigs! PMW

A little "snippet" sent by Jock Whitehouse:

Two bomber aircrew meet for the first time:

"What's your name?"

"Smith"

"What's your last three?"

"Berlin"

‘A hitherto unknown Squadron personality’

‘The burning aircraft was making a big curve in the sky’

This grim observation by a Dutch villager was one tragically seen many times during the Second World War.

Bomber Command’s long, complex and destructive, offensive provided future authors with an almost inexhaustible supply of material involving that bloody and costly conflict; and publications covering group/squadron exploits, the impact of particular raids (especially those deemed ‘controversial’), official policy and tactics plus personal stories (often written by aircrew members themselves) continue to appear. Rarely, however, have authors found it worthwhile or necessary to deal with the pre-war lives of future fliers, identifying no sort of link between the two time periods. But occasionally a story emerges which exemplifies, not only the calibre of men who volunteered for aircrew, but also, in the event of their death, the real loss to their country.

One such story concerning a member of No.214 (FMS) Squadron is of a man whose pre-war working life became dedicated to the development and production of a high-quality British machine, his ambition being to help create, not only a world-beater, but something whose ownership might be the dream of any red-blooded young man. Sadly, William (Bill) Clarke was unable to see the fruition of that dream, losing his life as a Stirling captain on No.214 Squadron, but his influence and enthusiasm lived on post-war in the superb range of magnificent ‘Vincent’ motor-cycles, true Icons many of which remain lovingly owned and used to this day.

This first part of the story is of Bill’s brief time on No. 214 Squadron, and the second part, to appear in the next edition of ‘Nightjar’, will tell how he became involved with ‘Vincents’ and of his time spent racing and testing the early models.



Bill Clarke's group at Cranwell

After a lengthy spell of instruction on twin-engine aircraft, Flt Lt Will

William Clarke, 32 years old and a pre-war flier (Oxford University Air Squadron) like many other instructors, finally succeeded in getting released from training duties to head for the real

war. For Bill this meant leaving RAF Little Rissington for a Stirling Conversion Course followed, in November 1942, with a posting to No.214 Squadron which, for the last few weeks, had been operating Stirlings from a 'miserable and muddy' RAF Chedburgh. On 13th November Flt Lt W Clarke

was promoted to Squadron Leader and commenced settling in to the reality of life on a bomber squadron, which would inevitably include a taste of 'ops'. On 28th/29th November Bill flew as 'second dickie' to the experienced Ted Youseman in Stirling R9191 on the long haul to attack the Fiat works in Turin, and witnessed visual identification, PFF flares, runs over the target, a successful attack and, after a six-hour flight, a safe return. Bill would have known that the squadron had already lost several aircraft and crews, but this time he would sense the gloomy atmosphere when a crew failed to return - on this occasion that of Flt Sgt Gatland. Bill was 'on' again next night, again to Turin, but flying with FO Williamson, another experienced captain and this time in W7621 which, due to severe icing conditions, failed to maintain altitude. Loss of the ASI, plus throttle and exactor problems, forced an early return after the bomb load had been jettisoned; further 'sharp end' experience for Bill.

On 14 January Bill captained his own aircraft for the first time successfully 'gardening' in 'Deodars' - the mouth of the Gironde river. This operation was in R9282 (BU-Q)

On 3rd February, after a spell of bad weather, HQ Bomber Command signaled a major raid on Hamburg, and No. 214 Squadron responded by detailing eleven crews. At around 18.00hrs, after all the usual hectic preparations, ten Stirlings (one withdraw!) prepared for take-off, each with its load of 1710x4lb and 90x4lb 'X' incendiaries packed into the belly and wing bays. The captains for this operation were: PO Carruthers RCAF, FO Wallace, Flt Lt Glass, FO Campbell RCAF, Sgt Harding, FO Hewitt, Sgt Berthiaume, Flt Sgt Lyall RCAF, PO Smith (with Sgt de Garis as co-pilot) and Sqn Ldr Clarke, again in R9282 (BU-Q) and crewed by: Sgt J E Johnson, Sgt D J Connearn, Sgt T W Burke RAAF, Sgt J A Lawson, Sgt N F Crawley and Sgt J C Adam. Bill was first away at 1827hrs, with the last Stirling leaving just twenty-three minutes later. After two 'early returns' due to technical problems, Chedburgh waited. Six Stirlings returned safely between five and six hours later, their captains reporting successful attacks all seemingly made within a short time of each other, but two dispersals remained empty, those for R9197 (PO D H Smith) and R9282 (Sqn Ldr W Clarke), both these aircraft being finally listed as 'missing'.

Of the 263 aircraft dispatched to Hamburg, sixteen bombers (6.1%) were lost including eight of the sixty-six Stirlings sent by No.3 Group. The attack on Hamburg ultimately proved to be of only limited success.

Chedburgh eventually learned that its two Stirlings had been shot down over Holland, and that all of PO Smith's crew and three of Sqn Ldr Clarke's crew (including the captain) had been killed, with four men being made prisoners of war. But unless some information filtered back via survivors, little could ever be known of the actual circumstances concerning the loss of an aircraft. Fortunately, a report (reproduced over page) made by WO T A Burke, Bill's Australian wireless operator, upon his release from captivity in 1945, describes exactly what befell Stirling R9282 on that night, and readers are left in no doubt, not only of the terrible moments for the crew following the attack but even more so, of the outstanding selfless courage of their pilot.

On the 26th September 1945, Warrant Officer T. W. BURKE put on record his thoughts on the shooting down of the No. 214 Squadron Stirling Bomber aircraft Piloted by Squadron Leader Bill Clarke on the night of 3rd /4th February 1943. The report was to the Air Officer Commanding Royal Australian Air force, Overseas Headquarters. The report is given in full as follows (retyped due to the poor quality of the original):-.

To: A.O.C. R.A.A.F. O'SEAS Hqs.

From: W/O BURKE. T.W.

Date: 26th February. 1945.

On the night of 3rd/4th February 1943 the Stirling Bomber Q for Queenie with Sqd-Ldr. W. Clarke as Captain, departed from R.A.F. station Chedburgh Su. (214 F.M.S. Sqn.) approx 1900 hours for an operational mission to Hamburg. On reaching the Dutch coast bad weather was experienced and on the V2-hourly broadcast from Group the a/c was asked for a weather report. It was given and an R received.

Approximately one hour before reaching the target the cockpit lighting and instruments, with the exception of the A.S.I., became u/s and Sqd-Ldr. Clarke without the use of his artificial horizon, carried on the mission. We arrived 2mins. ahead of our E.T.A. and as the captain turned the a/c the P.F.F. force was seen and the flare was seen to drop directly in front of our a/c. The bomb load of incendiaries was released with the exception of the port wing bomb-bay, which the engineer was unable to open electrically or manually. On our course home and on the outskirts of the target, a flak burst hit the fuselage forward of the rear turret but no serious damage was sustained. When a/c was approx. 15 mins from the Dutch coast, thick cumulus cloud lay ahead of our course, and it was necessary to gain 800/1000 ft. altitude to clear the cloud, the Captain started to climb to approx 21,000 ft. while the a/c was climbing the m/u gunner and r/gunner only started losing their supply of oxygen without being conscious of it. (Previous hit by flak may have contributed to this failure.) At this moment an enemy a/c J.U.88 attacked from astern and with its first burst, shot one engine u/s. The r/g then reported e/f but was presumably killed immediately afterwards as no reply was received from him on the i/c. At this same time, the m/u gunner aroused and fired two bursts. The e/f second burst made another engine u/s and set fire to the incendiaries in the port wing bomb bay. The third engine cut, I presume, to a petrol leakage. At an early stage in the combat the Captain had the presence of mind to turn 180° and fly inland, avoiding the sea and giving his crew an opportunity to bale out over land. With the order to "bail out" the Engineer, Bombardier and Navigator were unable to abandon a/c due to cannon fire directly below the a/c and as we were in a steady dive with one motor running, valuable height was lost. As I left the wireless operator's position Sqd-Ldr. Clarke's words were "I'm sorry chaps, I couldn't do better than this". After e/f finally broke away, the Engineer baled out, then the Bombardier. As I reached the front escape hatch the Captain was still at the controls and the Navigator on the right hand side of the hatch. I was in the air a very short time an when the parachute opened I saw the a/c hit the ground and a sheet of flame rise up and then fade.

A week later I was told by a German Interrogating Officer that they were able to identify the remains of the bodies in the wreckage.

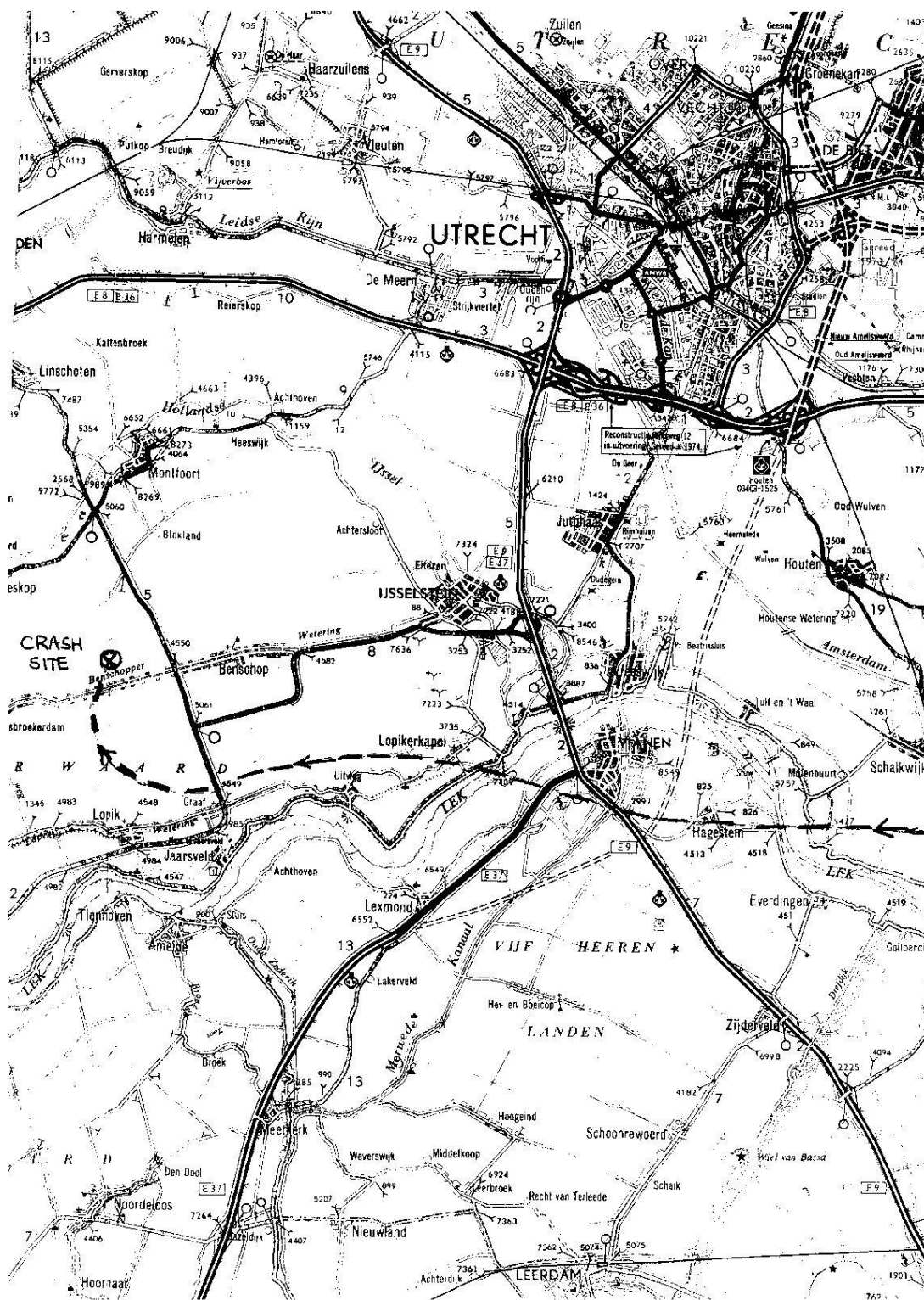
As I am alive today due only to Sqn-Ldr Clarke's bravery and unshakable courage to his duty, I submit this statement to you Sir, for your recommendation and approval.

Further information on Sqn-Ldr. W. Clarke's outstanding behaviour can be obtained from the undermentioned members of the crew, who are prisoners of war in Germany.

Sgt. J.T. Lawson R.A.F.	Bombardier.
Sgt. D. Connlarn. R.A.F.	Engineer.
Sgt. R. Crawley. R.A.F.	M/U Gunner.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant

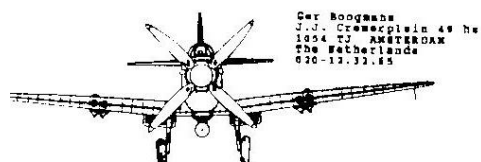
Abbreviations used: **R.A.A.F.** = Royal Australian Air Force. **214 F.M.S. Sqn.** = No 214, Federated Malay States, Squadron. **Sqd-Ldr.** = Squadron Leader. **A/c** = aircraft. **E.T.A.** Estimated Time of Arrival. **P.F.F.** = Path Finder Force. **m/u.** = mid-upper. **r/g.** = rear gunner. **i/c.** = inter- comm(unication). **E/f.** = enemy fighter. **R** Roger, the term for message received and understood.



← — — — Track of Shirling.
'A burning aircraft making a curve in the sky'

The sound of aero engines was nothing new to the Dutch people who also soon became able to recognise aircraft in trouble. At 23.30 hrs on 3 February, members of the Oskam family, who farmed near Benschoop, ran out of their house at the sound of engines only to see a large downward curving flame followed by the sound of an explosion and a large fire. On reaching the scene some minutes later they saw that the aircraft had impacted into marshy ground behind the farm. (A local police officer also reported hearing gunfire.) The devastation was

enormous, with a large area littered with pieces of burning wreckage, incendiary bombs, and exploding ammunition and with barely identifiable remains of crew members lying adjacent to the main part of the aircraft most of which was embedded deep in the soil. After a number of curious onlookers had been moved away by the Burgomaster, German soldiers arrived, detailed to guard the wreckage. Next morning when the son of the family and a local police official went out to where most of the remains of the crew lay, they could clearly see Bill Clarke's body still at the controls.



Date of crash : 4th February 1943
Time of crash : 23.30

Aircraft : Stirling Mk. III
Codes : R9282 BU-Q
Squadron : 214
Base : Chedburgh

Crashed near/in: Benschop
Crash due to : Nightfighter Offz. Koltringer of 3./NJG1

Cemetery : Benschop General Cemetery

Take-off : 18.27
Target : Hamburg

Remarks : crashed 300 mtrs. behind the farm of the Oskam family.
3rd mission.
The aircraft came burning from Vianen direction, via
Lopik in a big curve towards Benschop.
After a few days the Germans picked up the big parts
and removed them on 3 or 4 big lorries.
Clarke, Adams and Johnson are buried in unnumbered
collected graves.

Killed:

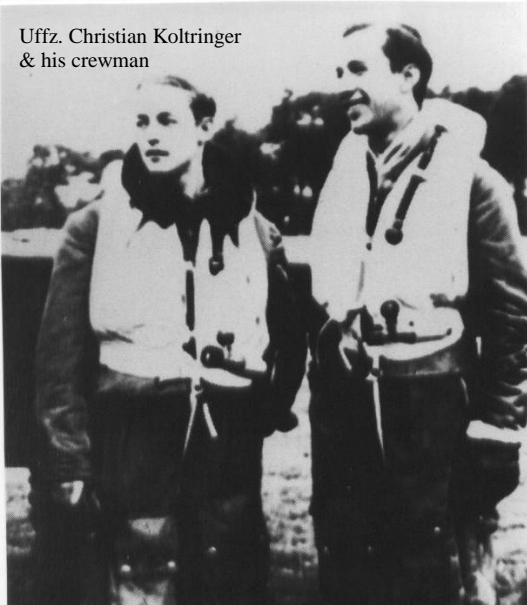
S/Ldr. William CLARKE, 28, Pilot, 70132, RAF (VR)
Sgt. John Cladwell ADAM, 29, Ag. 1340346, RAF (VR)
Sgt. George Eric JOHNSON, 21, Nav, 1124496, RAF (VR)

Prisoner:

D.J. CONNEARN
T.W. BURKE
C.A. LAWSON
N.F. CRAWLEY

German salvage attempts were delayed for several days due to bad weather but, after recovering a wing, probably one engine and most of the larger pieces of surface wreckage, they departed almost certainly leaving the remaining engines and other wreckage buried deep in the ground where they may still remain. Whilst the delay in removing the wreckage due to bad weather was understandable, the action taken by a German officer in charge, that of forbidding the removal of the crew remains for several days ('This is your faith for helping the enemy') was looked upon with contempt by the Dutch, who thought it just a further attempt to humiliate the enemy. However, the sad remains of the three crew members were finally collected by local people and later buried by the Germans who treated them with 'military honour', which was usually the case.

Uffz. Christian Koltringer
& his crewman



Two days later the Oskam family were visited by some Germans, very likely the night-fighter crew who had shot the Stirling down; if so, the pilot would have been Uffz. Christian Koltringer of 3/NJG1.

There were few real victors in those deadly night skies for this German officer met his death just two months later on 30 March 1943.

(Extracted from reports by the Oskam family and the Municipal Police at Willeskop)

Sqn Ldr William Clarke, (pilot), Sgt G E Johnson (navigator) and Sgt J C Adam (air-gunner) now lie together in a collective grave at Benschoop in Holland close to where they fell in action.

In 1945 Sqn Ldr William Clarke was Mentioned in Dispatches for his decision to stay with his stricken aircraft in order that his crew may escape knowing full well that he would be unable to get out. Whilst this award may be recognised it may be thought that a much higher honour for such an act of courage (witnessed) would have been in order.

MOTOR CYCLING January 11, 1940.

SPORTS GOSSIP

By
"CYCLOPS"



Flying Officer W. ("Bill") Clarke, R.A.F.

Flying Officer W. ("Bill") Clarke needs no introduction. Bill is a director of the Vincent-H.R.D. concern and, up to the outbreak of the war, he was a regular competitor in trials. Nowadays he is instructing would-be pilots how to fly twin-engined planes "somewhere in England". He expects to be drafted to Canada in the same capacity in the near future. Lucky Bill. Here's wishing him, all the others, the best of luck.

February 11, 1943



As we go to press we learn with much regret that Squadron Leader "Bill" Clarke, a director of Vincent H.R.D.s, has been posted as missing. He joined the Oxford University Air Squadron when an undergraduate at Oxford and remained a member of the R.A.F.V.R. For the first three years of the war he was an instructor attached to Training Command and was transferred to Bomber Command a few months ago. His motorcycling activities on Vincent H.R.D. machines are, of course, well known.

Material for this article has mainly been gleaned from records willingly made available by Brian Walker, a dedicated classic vehicle enthusiast, a 'Vincent owner' and an authority both on the history of the Company and on the life of Bill Clarke.

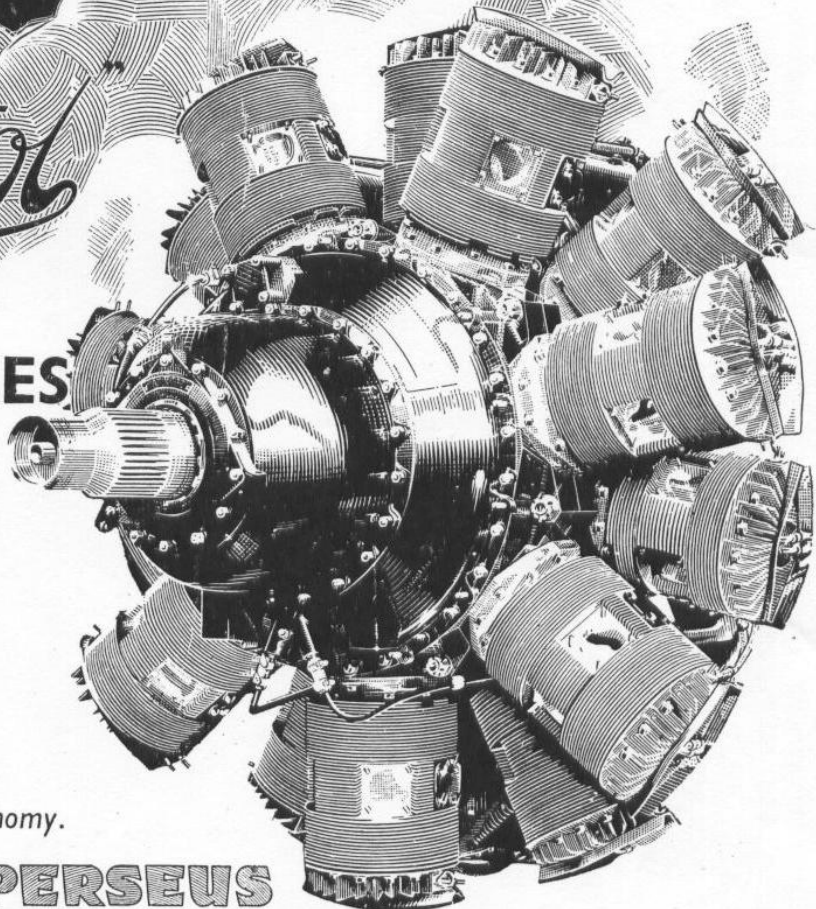


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