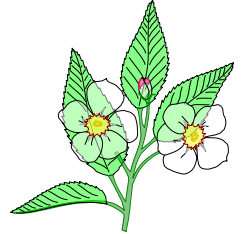




Nightjar

The Magazine of No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association - April 2010

Spring Edition 2010



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2010 Reunion

Saturday 17 July - Sunday 18 July
Midland Hotel - Derby

As notified in the December *Nightjar*, our next Reunion will be held at the Hallmark Hotel, Derby, on Saturday 17 July. Proceedings will start with the Annual General Meeting at 1600 hours, with the Dinner in the Garden Room following at 1900 for 1930. We will try to get the bar in the Garden Room opened at 1900 so that we do not have to move everyone from the Main Bar to the Garden Room in time for Dinner. Our speaker this year will be Association member Gerhard Heilig, who will talk about his experiences as a special operator on Nos 214 and 101 Squadrons. As notified in the December *Nightjar*, the Hallmark Hotel is offering special rates of £66 per person dinner, bed and breakfast for the Friday and Sunday nights and £72 per person for the Reunion Dinner, bed and breakfast on the Saturday night; this latter price includes wine with

the meal. The booking form for the event is attached to this edition of *Nightjar*; it should be sent direct to the Hotel at the address at the top of the form. You will see the menu we have arranged for the Dinner on Saturday evening. Should any of the courses not suit your taste or dietary requirements then please annotate the hotel booking form accordingly.

On the Sunday morning, at 1200 hours there will be a brief ceremony, including the laying of a wreath on behalf of the Association, at our Squadron Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas near Lichfield. Please return the attached form to the Treasurer so that we know who is coming to the various events. In particular, please indicate whether you require a lift from Derby to the Arboretum and back to Derby or whether you would be able to offer such a lift.

We look forward to seeing you at Derby for an enjoyable weekend.

Reunion Dinner Menu

A Refreshing Tower of Melon and Pineapple
Accompanied with a Berry Compote
~~~

Oven Roasted Chicken  
With a Button Mushroom and Tarragon Sauce  
Served with Seasonal Vegetables and  
Potatoes  
~~~

Homemade Sticky Toffee Pudding
With Custard
~~~

Freshly Brewed Filter Coffee

#### Vegetarian Alternative (to be pre ordered)

Cherry tomato and goats cheese tart, warm  
pesto and tomato dressing

Alan Mawby

# HISTORIAN'S REPORT

## **Other Associations' news.**

### **Stirling Aircraft Association**

Sadly, the original Stirling Aircraft Association has had to be wound up with the final edition of the 'Remember the Stirling' magazine appearing in December. A huge effort over the years ensured that memories of this beloved aircraft and those who flew and worked on it were remembered and much is owed to the dedicated people who ran the show. The small local groups, however, may still meet up for their very informal 'noggin 'n natters'.

### **Stirling Aircraft Society**

This later organisation remains active, producing 'The Stirling Times'

### **No 218 (Gold Coast) Squadron Association.**

This July's Social and Remembrance weekend will be the last of its kind. Margery Griffiths, a Chedburgh WAAF when No 218 Squadron flew Lancasters from there, has for many years organised a comprehensive weekend for Association members including a marvellous garden party at her home (usually honoured by the BBMF Lancaster), a Friday social evening, a Saturday Dance and a Remembrance Service at the Chedburgh Memorial on the Sunday, events to which we have always been invited and for a number of years our own Association wreath has been laid. Attendance (but not interest) has naturally lessened whilst the effort of organisation has increased. A similar Service of Remembrance may however continue but whatever, our Association wreath will continue to be laid at Chedburgh.

### **For a change there has been quite a flurry of activity.**

Carol and John Edwards sent me a copy of an article written by Ryan Dudley of Mount Annan, NSW, Australia entitled 'Hockley's Heroes' in which he details the life of a relative, namely Pilot Officer Allan J N Hockley, a Fortress pilot on No 214 Squadron who, together with Sergeant Ray Simpson, lost his life on 24/25 May 1944 when their Fortress SR384 was shot down over Holland. Ryan asked for any advice or suggestions which may improve his article, but apart from one or two very minor points which I sent to John and Carol, there was really nothing to add and Ryan must be congratulated on producing a very comprehensive and accurate account of Allan Hockley's life (1917-1944).

### **Squadron Leader Peter Nixey DSO.**

In the April 2009 'Nightjar' I mentioned an unknown visitor to the Stradishall memorial who had written a comment in the Visitor's Book in memory of Sqn Ldr Peter Nixey, who was lost from Stirling operations in June 1942, but unfortunately the signature was illegible. However, Peter Walker was contacted by a Mr Ralph Tanner who had seen the article in 'Nightjar' and who identified himself as the 'mystery' visitor. Ralph was a close friend of Peter Nixey in their early years, and was very grateful to receive further details of his friend's time at Stradishall both on Wellingtons and Stirlings.

### **Ferry Flights - Two Enquiries.**

1. Some of you may recall the problems encountered in identifying Flt Sgt F J W Steele as an aircrew member of No 214 Squadron, in spite of CWGC data. The answer was that this airman had been the second pilot of a Ferry Flight Wellington, whose crew almost certainly included men on the strength of 214 at Stradishall. The aircraft came down in northern France en route to Malta and all crew survived, although WO Steele was tragically killed on the infamous PoW march in April 1945 and is buried in the Berlin War Cemetery.

We have recently been contacted by Mr Mike Hounslow, the son of Sgt Hounslow (one of the crew) who is researching his father's career. On the positive side, Sgt Hounslow's service records clearly show him to have been on the strength of No 214 Squadron prior to being 'hailed' out for the ferry trip (as happened at this time in 1940), but yet another confusion has arisen in that the Air Historical Branch states that the first pilot was Flt Lt J W Collins, who is in fact buried in Botley (Oxford) Cemetery, having been killed on 28 February 1945 as a 'pupil pilot'! That latter fact is quite correct, so we are now trying to determine if there are in fact two 'J W Collins'. Not quite so easy a task as one might believe.

*Addendum (20 March 2010):* Data has just come to hand showing that there is only ONE J W Collins. We now have to determine what happened to him between being taken prisoner in December 1940 and being killed as a pilot 'under training' back in the UK in February 1945. Any ideas welcome!

2. Surprisingly, a recent 'Haverhill Echo' contained a picture of eleven airmen photographed outside Haverhill Railway Station stating that they were probably ex-No 214 Squadron at Stradishall en route to No 215 Squadron at Harwell, there to ferry Wellingtons out to Burma. This was in March 1942 and just before 214 changed from Wellingtons to Stirlings, but their names were unfamiliar. The photograph (originating from Canada) had been sent to a Mr Colin Burningham who is researching Ferry Flights to Burma, and as the picture identified Haverhill, had sent it to the 'Echo' in the hope that someone might recognise the airmen. Colin told me that the men were two crews who had flown a number of operations on 214, and on checking with Ian Hunt's invaluable operations summary I found this to be true! This was simply a case of certain crews working their way through their tour with nothing really happening to them, and 'slipping through the net' in our early researches. However, one name came to mind, that of Ralph Fellowes, an Observer in Plt Off Murray's crew who had joined the Association in 2001, but had died not long after. I was able to send a photograph of Ralph to Colin who agrees that he is indeed one of two officers shown on the photograph.

#### **Squadron Leader Cyril Penna DFM.**

Peter Walker learned from a researcher that Cyril is bright and well in Devon. Cyril was the Sgt air-bomber in Stirling R9194 (F/Sgt Gatland DFM RNZAF) which was shot down north of Paris returning to Chedburgh from a trip to Turin on 29th November 1942. Cyril initially tried to get to Calais but a long gruelling journey finally got him to Gibraltar, and to eventually return to UK thus cancelling out his 'missing' category. For this effort, regarded as a fine example to other aircrew, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal.

#### **Do they know?**

Although the list of active RAF units (Royal Air Force Year Book) includes a No 1419 Flight ('Merlin' helicopters in Iraq), the original 1419 Flight was something very different, and well known to No 214 Squadron Wellington crews who shared Stradishall with it. Commencing as 419 Flight, 1419 was later identified as the SOE (Special Duties) Flight (Whitleys and Lysanders) prior to it finally receiving squadron status (No 138). The late Ray Glass once said: 'We could only marvel at the courage of those Whitley crews. They took off long before we did and returned long after - God knows where they had been, they never said'!

#### **Stirling House, Stradishall.**

Stirling House continues to be expanded and improved (on the site of the old Nissen hut) and now has the very plush, high tech 'Blenheim' lecture room (the Blenheim just about qualifies as a Stradishall aircraft). The already re-furbished 'Stirling Room' (old dining room) now sports a smart wooden floor, new lighting and awaits new blinds. Four new trees have been planted around the memorial and thoughts are still active to create a small memorial garden in the same area. Stirling House Management is keen for a Book of Remembrance to be placed in the foyer along with the cabinet containing the Station's history, which remains on loan from the RAF Museum. The Haverhill ATC Squadron may well be involved in future Memorial matters - which is only right.

#### **Sept Saulx painting.**

The painting by Ray Quinlan of the churchyard at Sept Saulx showing the seven graves of a 214 Squadron Stirling crew, now hangs in All Saints Church, Chedburgh (see previous 'Nightjars').

## Here come the girls!

One No 31 Squadron Tornado crew based at Marham, but currently very active in Afghanistan, is all-female! With a call-sign of 'Monster Seven Three', Flt Lt Juliet Fleming, the pilot (from Bury St Edmunds) and Sqn Ldr Nikki Thomas recently recalled their satisfaction at 'sorting out' a Taliban rocket crew who were preparing to fire on their friends, and their accommodation block ('I took that rather personally'). A very fast, low level 'buzz' did the trick.

'Red Three' in the coming season's 'Red Arrows' team will be Flt Lt Kirsty Moore. Keep a watch for some wonderful cartoons! Meat and drink for that profession.

Whatever your personal opinion on these development, what is certain is that these girls have proved themselves totally capable of carrying out the very demanding jobs in hand.

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I attended Eddie Wheeler's funeral on Friday 23 October at St Mary's Parish Church in Haverhill. I was asked to read my tribute to him by the family, which I did, and in which No 214 Squadron was mentioned. Overall it was a moving occasion, with a packed church, a brilliantly sunny day and, as appropriate, the Standard of the Bomber Command Association was carried and lowered in salute to 'one of its own'.

Saturday 7 November 2009

19 hardy souls gathered at the Stradishall memorial on a bright sunny but crisp morning to pay their respects. Three wreaths were laid, our own, placed by Don Walter (Valiants), one for the RAF Stradishall Memorial Trust, laid by the daughter of the late Eddie Wheeler, and one laid by the Chairman of the local Aviation Society. We were also fortunate to have the Standard of the Bomber Command Association (very appropriate) paraded by Ron Pearson, to add a splash of colour to the proceedings.



Photograph: Mike Pettitt

On Remembrance Sunday a wreath was laid on the memorial at Hundon Village to honour those service men and women who died within the Parish between 1938 and 1970, amongst whom were a number from 214 Squadron which was stationed at RAF Stradishall from 1940 to 1942. The memorial, with its special relevance (most of the airbase actually lay within the Parish boundary) was unveiled by Bob Hooke, one of our Association's longest serving Members in 1995.

For the February meeting of the Haverhill Aviation Society, held soon after the death of Lucian Ercolani, I put together this small tribute to him on behalf of the members who well know the story behind the badge, which itself is always admired. Although this was photographed in a recently built room, it would certainly have been in Stirling House (the Officers' Mess in 1942) that the badge was presented to No 214(FMS) Squadron by the Ercolani family, so we were as close to history as was possible.

Jock M Whitehouse

# OBITUARIES

## Wing Commander Lucian Brett Ercolani DSO\*, DFC, Hon D.(Des)

We were very saddened to learn of the death of Lucian Ercolani who died on Saturday 13 February 2010 at the age of 92.

His connections with No 214 Squadron, including the award of the Distinguished Service Order whilst serving with the Squadron in 1941, are well documented (full details of his citation are reproduced below). He was one of many bomber pilots who learned their trade the hard way, but set the pattern for the main offensive to follow. On leaving 214 Squadron, and after a spell with No 1483 Target Towing and Gunnery Flight at Newmarket, his bomber career continued in the Far Eastern theatre of operations, where he was to win a second DSO flying with No 99 Squadron, followed by a DFC with No 159 Squadron, both India-based Liberator units.



Lucian showed great interest in our work on RAF Stradishall and always spoke well of his time there. His great generosity enabled us to have access to all his operational records plus his (priceless) photograph album, and I will always remember a long night in the 'Ercol' Board Room (well fortified by food and wine) when Spencer Adams and I learned so much about 'life on a squadron'.

Left to Right: Sgt Barry Holdsworth (KIA 6 Jun 42 with 214) - Sgt 'Jock' MacLennan - Flt Lt Lucian Ercolani DSO

Sgt Don Hamilton RNZAF (KIA 2 Apr 42 with 214) - Sgt Johnny Fry - Sgt 'Sam' Weller

The first phase of the Stradishall Memorial project was for a Memorial Window and a Book of Remembrance (in a suitable cabinet) to be placed in St. Margaret's Church. For the latter item we chose to diplomatically inform Lucian of our plans - the telephone call came immediately. 'Don't worry, just send outline drawings, we have got to do this!' And they did. A beautiful cabinet of English ash, was designed and constructed, and was donated by Lucian, and is now in the church. It carries his personal plaque and rightly so, for of the 650 names in the Book of Remembrance half are for No 214 Squadron.

Lucian, accompanied by his wife, attended the Church service in October 1993, when he was delighted to meet up with Jock McClennan, one of his 'Stradishall crew', and also that for the dedication of the main memorial at Stradishall in May 1994, the unveiling, of course, being carried out by our President!

When our wooden badge was finally 'extracted' from its long hiding place it was relatively sound apart from minor, amateur efforts to paint it! Lucian was equally delighted and surprised at news of the find, and as might be expected requested it to be returned 'for 'Ercol' attention'. Some time later his personal driver arrived bringing the beautifully restored badge with him. Lucian had emphasised that the carrying box was not theirs as it had obviously been made by a joiner and not a craftsman!

Today, the badge, a totally unique piece of aviation history, is displayed whenever possible.

Probably our last contact with Lucian was when Peter Walker organised a colour print of the 'Wellington' in which Lucian had ditched in 1941. He was really delighted and most grateful to receive it. We have lost a good friend and for many, a man whom it was a privilege to know.

## Bob Hooke

Literally, just on completion of material for this edition, I received news of the loss of Bob Hooke, a very old friend who died on Saturday 20th March aged 87. Although Bob had suffered from ill health for some while he was determined to attend last July's Dedication Service and Reunion, at which he and his wife Pat were very welcome guests.

After pilot training at Carberry in Canada, No 23 OTU at Pershore, and No 1651 HCU at Waterbeach, in July 1942 Bob joined No 214 Squadron and its Stirlings at Stradishall as a Sergeant pilot just two months short of his 20th birthday! Between July and the end of December 1942 Bob completed 28 operations (likely to be the second highest Stirling total for 214) and well knew the odds of survival, not only by the six aircraft already lost by the time he joined the Squadron but also by the eleven 214 Squadron crews who failed to return during his tour. Many of his trips were made in R9194 (K) which he took over to Chedburgh, and which coincidentally also completed 28 trips before being lost in April 1943.

Very much a Stirling man, Bob returned to Stradishall as an instructor on No 1657 HCU where a number of future 214 and 620 Squadron Stirling crews passed through his hands en route to Chedburgh, but one name in his log book stands out, that of Sgt Arthur Aaron who so soon after, would ultimately be awarded the Victoria Cross after dying in tragic circumstances flying with No 218 Squadron.

Bob finished his war flying Mosquitoes with No 139 Squadron from Upwood, but his luck ran out when shot down in August 1944. Then followed time in Stalag Luft 3, and on the infamous 'Long March' in 1945. His RAF time concluded flying VIPs around Australia.

He willingly provided valuable material for our work on both Stradishall and Chedburgh and obviously seemed the ideal person to be asked to unveil the memorial in Hundon village within whose Parish boundary men from both No 214 Squadron and No 1657 HCU had died. Bob happily agreed to this and the simple ceremony took place in May 1995. Whilst on their travels Bob and Pat also took the opportunity to visit 'Stirling House' in its new guise.

Jock M Whitehouse

# Keith Richards aka 'The Druid'

Flt Lt K D Richards passed away in February after battling with a particularly unpleasant cancer which he bore with great fortitude, as was in his character. Keith flew the Canberra in Germany before becoming a Nav Radar on the Victor K1s of 214 Squadron during the early 70's. Keith stayed in the Air-Air Refuelling role for much of his career and served on 101 Squadron, before setting up the AAR cell on 216 Squadron (Tristar). Keith also spent much of his time as a trainer on the VC10 serving with 241 OCU and then on the VC10 Training Flight. I knew and served with Keith, on and off, for over 30 years and a nicer 'bloke' you would be hard to find. It was tragic that he departed early just before receiving his 'old age' pension.

Gulli

## In Memoriam

We have received news of the following members of the Association who have departed since the Last edition of the Nightjar.

### Joyce Birch

We have heard from Helen Birch that her mother Joyce passed away in January, and that her father PH Birch (I regret that I do not know his first name) had passed away earlier. Joyce had attended the dedication last year (it was also her birthday) and had talked to her daughters about her cousin Fg Off William Cooper who was killed whilst on 214 Squadron on 30 Mar 43.

### WO Arthur Nichol DFC

We have received the news, from his son Chris, that Arthur passed away on 6 January at his home in Canada. Arthur was enlisted into the RAF in Halifax on 5 Nov 40 and completed his training in Jun 41. He was a navigator of some note and following two particularly noteworthy events where he was able to guide his aircraft to the target and then back to base with an engine on fire, or out of action, he was awarded a DFC on 31 Dec 42 being cited for his efficiency, great determination, and devotion to duty. Arthur and his crew of Stirling BK600 completed 2 full tours of operations.

### Flt Lt H F Farley DFC

Flt Lt Farley died on 26 Mar 09 aged 89, but news of his death came too late for previous editions of 'Nightjar'. He was an air gunner on 214 Squadron during 1941/42.

### L C Palmer

Mr Palmer was a Fitter 2E on 214 Squadron at Stradishall during 1941/42. He died in Dec 09 at the age of 88.

### Fg Off Patrick 'Doc' Dougherty

'Doc' passed away in Nov 09 at the age of 86. He joined the RAF in 1942 at the age of 18 and joined 214 Squadron on the Fortress in April 1945. After the war he was posted to Transport Command to fly the Liberator (102 Sqn) liberating Far Eastern POWs from India back to the UK. He then flew the Dakota on 53 Sqn from Waterbeach on the shuttle to Berlin. He left the RAF in 1948 and had a very successful career in the cable industry. His final appointment was with the Overseas Development Industry in Zambia. His son Simon also joined the RAF as a doctor, and retired as the Director of Medical Services in the rank of AVM.

### Wg Cdr David Mullarkey MBE

We reported the death of David Mullarkey in the last edition of Nightjar, but I got the spelling of his surname wrong in the final edit for which I apologise.



*This is a transcript of the citation for the award of the DSO to Plt Off (Act Flt Lt) Ercolani as it was typed at the time - including spelling mistakes. There were no spell checkers in those days!*

SECRET.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HONOURS AND AWARDS.

Christian names : Lucian Brett. Surname : ERCOLANI  
Rank : Pilot Officer (Now Acting Flight Lieutenant ) Official Number : 62270  
Command or Group : No. 3 GROUP. Unit : No.214 (F.M.S.) Squadron.  
Total hours flown on operations. 158.40 hours.  
Number of sorties carried out. 26  
Recognition for which recommended. Immediate Award  
of Distinguished Service Order.  
Appointment held. Second in Command of  
Flight and Captain of aircraft.

1. On the night of 7/8th November 1941, P/O. Ercolani was detailed as Captain of Wellington X.3206 to attack a target in Berlin. On reaching the target area he found 10/10 cloud and dropped his H.E. bombs on flak and searchlight concentration on E.T.A. His main load 18 x 50 lb. incendiary bombs he kept in order to avoid starting fires in the wrong place and diverting other aircraft. About 15 minutes before reaching the target the aircraft was hit by flak. The incendiaries were dropped at Magdeburg on the return journey.

2. At about 23.45 hours, when in the vicinity of Munster, the aircraft was badly hit in the bomb racks. The floor was torn up and fabric peppered all around Astro hatch. Flames then came through the floor and an unsuccessful attempt was made to jettison the containers which were burning. The flames spread over the complete floor and the aircraft was filled with smoke and sparks.

3. The fire subsided eventually but never went right out. The belly of the aircraft was almost burnt out while the fabric round the mid part of the fuselage and on the starboard centre section was all burnt away. Both wings were badly holed and torn. The trim of the aircraft was upset and it would only do 115 m.p.h. I.A.S. while losing height.

4. Despite the condition of the aircraft, P/O. Ercolani decided to try to reach England rather than abandon aircraft over enemy territory.

5. The enemy coast was crossed at 02.25 hours at 1,000 feet. Finally at 02.55 hours the engines failed owing to petrol shortage and the aircraft came down in the sea. The pilot had then been flying a blazing aircraft for 3 hours and 10 minutes; 2 hours and 40 minutes of which had been over hostile territory where they had been a fiery target for enemy guns.

6. On alighting, the Captain was thrown forward and cut his face and sprained his right ankle. He went down with the aircraft which fortunately came up again. He managed to get out and into the dinghy with the rest of the crew.

7. Despite his injuries P/O, Ercolani at once took charge of the dinghy and organised watches. In the morning he took stock of rations and divided them to last six days. He organised regular exercise and generally by his example of cheerfulness and courage enabled his crew to remain fit and keep in good



sprits. They finally got the dinghy ashore on the Isle of Wight 57 hours after landing in the sea.

8. I consider that his devotion to duty and courage in attempting to bring his blazing aircraft to England when he might well have abandoned it over enemy territory, is worthy of the very highest traditions of the Service. It is undoubtedly due to his resource-fulness, skill and fortitude that his crew owe their lives and liberty. His whole conduct on this occasion display gallantry of a very high order.

9. This officer has taken part in 26 operational sorties, 22 as Captain of aircraft. At all times he has displayed great devotion to duty and his determination to press home his attack on the target has been outstanding. The example of his skill and determination as a Captain of aircraft has inspired the whole squadron.

[Signed R D B MacFadden]

Wing Commander, Commanding,  
No. 214 (F.M.S.) Squadron.

Date ...[8/12/41] .....

Covering Remarks of Station Commander.

I concur in the foregoing remarks. Since P.O.Ercolani commenced operations his determination and perseverance to make a success of the operation upon which he has been engaged have been very marked.

I strongly recommend that his courage and devotion to duty, which culminated in the case cited receive immediate recognition.

(signed) S.M. Park G.C.

Covering Remarks of Air Officer Commanding.

I most strongly support the above recommendation. The Captain has on every occasion exhibited outstanding powers of leadership. After only four trips as Second Pilot, he was appointed Captain. I consider that his behaviour on the night 7/8th November well illustrates his capabilities, courage and endurance.

[Signed J E A Baldwin]

Air Vice-Marshal,  
Commanding No. 3 Group.

12/12/41.

AWARDED THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER  
(IMMEDIATE AWARD)

[Signed R E C Peirce]

Air Marshal,  
Commanding-in-Chief,  
BOMBER COMMAND.

17th December, 1941.

# V FORCE WALKABOUT

(Reproduced from 'Air Clues' November 1963 courtesy of Gp Capt John Ward)



*TWO YEARS ago a Vulcan aircraft of No. 617 Squadron flew non-stop from Scampton in Lincolnshire to Sydney, Australia, in 20 hours. The flight marked the climax of a period of in-flight refueling training and at that time was the longest non-stop flight carried out by a "V" bomber. In March this year the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command (Air Marshal Sir Kenneth Cross) decided that a further exercise in flight refueling over long distances should be undertaken and Perth in Western Australia was chosen as the most appropriate terminal. The route to Perth passed over established refueling bases and in addition we were sure of ready co-operation from the civil and military authorities in Australia. It was also highly convenient because the flight would coincide with a routine exercise of Victor aircraft from the United Kingdom to Singapore. These aircraft were also being in-flight refueled but with a stop at Nairobi. Thus the refueling bases at El Adem, Khormaksar and Gan could be used for both flights.*

*On the 8/9th July, three Vulcans of No. 101 Squadron made the non-stop flight from Waddington to Perth (Western Australia) in just over 18 hours. The crews were given a tremendous welcome and this account of the flight and the subsequent goodwill tour of Australia on the following pages is given by WING*

*COMMANDER P. J. EVANS, O.C. Operations Wing at Waddington, and Project Officer for the Exercise. Most of the photographs are by Corporal J. Lewis of the RAF Waddington Photographic Section.*

Like other 'V' Force Squadrons of Bomber Command, No. 101 crews are well acquainted with in-flight refuelling, and with long distance flying training under all conditions. So Exercise 'Walkabout', a non-stop flight from Waddington to Perth, Western Australia, was undertaken to exercise the crews in long range flying with in-flight refuelling by day and night. The 'Walkabout' Force comprised three Vulcan Mk IAs backed up by a support party of about 55 officers and airmen in a Transport Command Britannia. The Force Commander was Group Captain J. Finch, CBE DFC AFC, then Officer Commanding RAF Waddington, while Wing Commander A Griffiths, Commanding Officer of No. 101 Squadron, led the non-stop flight. As Project Officer and OC



*The crew of Vulcan 1: L-R: Wg Cdr A Griffiths, Flt Lt D Bromley, Flt Lt V R Bird, Flt Lt C E Wilks, Flt Lt D P Thomas, Ch Tech H J C French*



*The crew of Vulcan 2: L-R: Flt Lt J R Ward, FO I J C Hill, Flt Lt P H G Lowe, Flt Lt R W Sievwright, FO T McM Rae AFM, Ch Tech L W Slee*

Support Party, I was lucky enough to get two visits for the price of one. I spent a fortnight in Australia in May to make preliminary arrangements for the tour, and went out again in the Britannia with the 'Walkabout' Force Commander to RAAF Base Pearce, near

Perth, arriving there on 4th July ready to meet the Vulcans.

The Vulcans took off from Waddington in two waves. XH503 (Wing Commander A Griffiths) and XH481 (Flight Lieutenant J Ward) were airborne at 1940Z on 8th July.

Six hours later XH502 (Squadron Leader A Laidlay, DFC.) and XH475 (Flight Lieutenant A Shepphard) took off, the plan being that when the first three aircraft passed Gan successfully, Shepphard, the spare, would land at Gan.

The first pair got away in good style after a send-off by Air Vice-Marshal P H Dunn, CB CBE DFC, Air Officer Commanding No. 1 Group, the operation being timed so that one full refuelling would be necessary at night, and that early on when the crews were fresh and the weather conditions were best.

Refuellings were made at El Adem and Khormaksar at heights of 33,000 to 34,000 feet. At Gan,



*The Crew of Vulcan 3: L/R: Sqn Ldr Laidlay DFC, Flt Lt Halkes, Flt Lt A G Sadler, Flt Lt W J Beacham, FO S J Hedges, Ch Tech W Franklin.*

*(Flt Lt Sadler, unfortunately, became ill at the last moment and his place was taken by Flt Lt D M Frazer)*

however, strong headwinds compelled a delay in rendezvous time. In addition extensive cirrus cloud meant the tankers reducing height to 25,000 feet. Because of the distance from Gan to Perth, and in case the weather at Perth made a diversion necessary, all aircraft were “topped up” again 500 miles East of

Gan. The first pair achieved this successfully, although during topping-up, turbulence was a major problem, the No. 2 aircraft taking almost six minutes to hook-up under wretched conditions.

The second pair found similar difficulties at Gan, where layered cloud delayed the visual sighting of the tankers and turbulence was so severe that a descent had to be made to 25,000 feet. No. 3 aircraft flew in company with the Valiant to the “top up” point, by which time it was dark. Although turbulence was still present, the hookup was made quickly, and No. 4 aircraft then turned, rather reluctantly, to land at Gan.

All four Vulcan captains paid tribute to the tanker crews of Nos. 90 and 214 Squadrons. As Wing Commander Griffiths put it: “They were always in the right place at the right time; they flew accurately and according to the agreed procedures; and their determination to succeed in the fuel transfers, with sympathy for our difficulties, made most of the credit theirs”. A tremendous welcome awaited the crews at Perth Civil Airport. News of the flight became known a few days beforehand, and captured the imagination of the West Australians. There had been mounting excitement in the newspapers and on radio and television. Although the landings were at night there was a half-hour live A.B.C. telecast of the arrival of the first pair, while more than 5,000 people gathered at the airport to see for themselves.

Valiant tankers of Nos 90 & 214 Squadrons lined up on the tarmac at Gan.





The Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir Wallace Kyle KCB CBE DSO DFC, himself a native of Perth and who had arrived by Victor the previous day, was at the airport to meet the crews and to open the telecast with an interview describing the significance of the event in terms of military strength and preparedness. First to land was Wing Commander Griffiths after a flight time of 18 hours 7 minutes, followed ten minutes later by Flight Lieutenant Ward and his crew. They were immediately subjected to TV and Press interviews, then champagne and lobster, interrupted by dozens of handshakes, good wishes and calls for autographs. Finally, the crews clambered wearily into their transport for RAAF Pearce, while the Support Party prepared to see in the third crew in the small hours. Squadron Leader Laidlay arrived at 0350 hours local time the next morning after 18 hours 15 minutes flying time, so being spared the live telecast but still besieged by reporters hoping for a different angle on the story. Having steered his way deftly through the welcoming treatment, he and his crew finally got to bed at 7 a.m. for a well-earned sleep.

The same evening the Force gave a reception in Perth for local civil and Service dignitaries and had the opportunity of telling their stories first-hand to such notable personalities as the Minister for Civil Aviation, the Lord Mayor of Perth, the Lord Chief Justice of Western Australia and a host of others.



The next day, 11<sup>th</sup> July, was a rest day, so the crews made the most of their time with sightseeing and other non-military activities, including a reception by the Perth Branch of the RAAFA at which they were honoured guests. On Friday 12<sup>th</sup> July the detachment flew to RAAF Richmond, near Sydney. By 'popular demand' of the Press and Television reporters Wing Commander Griffiths was asked to fly low over the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge. I flew with him on this; we did our flypast in fine

style and had the pleasure of seeing ourselves so doing on the screen that evening.

A delightful weekend in Sydney followed, including another reception given by the Vulcan Force for notable civil and Service personages, including the Deputy Chief of Air Staff RAAF, the Chairman of Qantas Airways, the Acting Leader of the Opposition, and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the flourishing Bomber Command Reunion Society of Sydney.

Vulcan Turnround in progress on the tarmac at RAAF Richmond.



Monday found the Force off again to Edinburgh Field, near Adelaide, to pay a courtesy call on the RAF detachment there, with a formidable 'shopping list' of towns which had requested over-flights en route. This list was so big that the Force split into three and in this way managed to give the inhabitants of Wollongong, Goulburn, Canberra, Wagga Wagga, Newcastle, Dubbo, Parkes, Mildura, Broken Hill and Renmark a glimpse of a Vulcan.

The afternoon brought a heartcry from Alice Springs "What had they done to be left out?" We scratched our heads; we consulted the map. For some reason, 'The Alice' is almost as dear to Englishmen as to Australians. But it was 750 miles off our return route to Pearce and the West. However, it seemed a pity to fly all that way without visiting Alice, so the following morning Wing Commander Griffiths and I set off for Alice while the other two aircraft headed direct for Pearce. The Alice was as I had always imagined it. The single railway line threading its way up from the South, the barren airstrip, a few hills, a lot of desert, then the incredibly green patch that is Alice. Streets laid out in rectangular fashion, light-roofed buildings reflecting the brilliant desert sun.

The local radio had done its stuff in giving our ETA, the children had been unleashed from their modern-looking school, and traffic was at a standstill as people turned out to wave in the streets. Ten minutes at low level was all our fuel would allow, but we made the most of it. The audience loved it; our ten minutes made it all worthwhile.

The Britannia struck trouble on this leg back to Pearce, with an oil leak from No. 3 engine which forced a return to Edinburgh Field. Next day it made Pearce but the leak was still there. On 18th July the Force bade a reluctant farewell to Australia and headed for Butterworth, but the Britannia's No. 3 engine gave trouble again and it was decided in the air to return Edinburgh Field which, although thousand miles in the wrong direction, was about the only base Australia with full Britannia servicing facilities. The trouble was more serious than at first imagined but help appeared from an unexpected quarter in the shape of another serviceable Britannia sitting at Edinburgh. After a bit of horse-trading had been carried out, the race began to catch up with the westward-disappearing Vulcans. This involved some pretty hard flying for the Britannia crew but Flight Lieutenant Collins and his men performed magnificently and with patently undaunted cheerfulness in the best tradition of No. 511 Squadron and Transport Command.

Of the rest of the operation there is little to say. The Vulcans returned by stages through Butterworth, Gan, Khormaksar and El Adem to Waddington, being joined by the Britannia for the rest of the route from Khormaksar. It was planned from the start that the three Vulcans would be back at Waddington at exactly 0945hrs local time on 23rd July. This plan was kept, but Flight Lieutenant Ward received special permission from the AOC No. 1 Group to return by 0900 hrs on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, in order that the Force Commander, Group Captain Finch, should be in good time to attend an investiture at Buckingham Palace. On getting home only one task remained, to explain to the waiting army of Customs Officers the transistor radios, cameras, Koala bears and coconuts acquired en route!

Exercise 'Walkabout' was successful. More than 25,000 miles were flown, almost 10,000 of them non-stop, with few, and then only minor, unserviceabilities. That 'V' Bombers can reach the farthest part of the Commonwealth in a matter of 18 hours was proven. A widespread audience covering half Australia saw the Vulcans during this brief visit. Throughout, the Force was received with undisguised warmth, affection and almost overwhelming hospitality, particularly by our colleagues in the Royal Australian Air Force. This application of normal operational training, usually performed in a closed circuit around the UK raised one question from our hosts: "Why not do it in this direction more often?"

Why not, indeed.

(John Ward is a member, and past Chairman of No 101 Squadron Association)

# THE 'BRACKLES' BOOKS

Those of you who had a copy of the 'Brackles' book last year might be interested to know that his house at Blakeney, Norfolk is on the market at a guide price of £1.15 million.

Major H.G.Brackley DSO DSC was the first Commanding Officer of 214 Squadron in 1917/18 and bought the house in 1934. He lived here until his unexpected death in 1948. His wife Frida, the author of the 'Brackles' book, continued to live here until her death in 1963. The house then remained in the ownership the family, occupied by David Brackley, one of two sons, until late 2008 when he had to go into a nursing home. He died, age 84, in January 2010.



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This is the house where the Brackley books came from, stored in one of the staff bedrooms, still in the original packaging (12 per pack) as received from the printers in 1952, a total of about 230 books.

Had I not been fortunate enough to discover the existence of these books in early 2009 they would have likely been put into a skip and disposed of when the house was cleared shortly afterwards. Fortunately the Brackley family offered me the books which I accepted on behalf of 214 Squadron Association on the understanding that if we could sell some we would make a donation to the RAF Benevolent Fund. Sell them we did, to our members, to many in the parish and area of Blakeney and others in aviation circles.

As a result we raised about £1,200 (our Treasurer has the precise amount) and were able to send a cheque for £600 to the RAFBF and another for £214 to the Bomber Command Memorial Appeal Fund.

If anyone would like a copy of the 'Brackles' book Jock Whitehouse and I still have a few copies for £10 each, including postage and packing.

Peter Walker

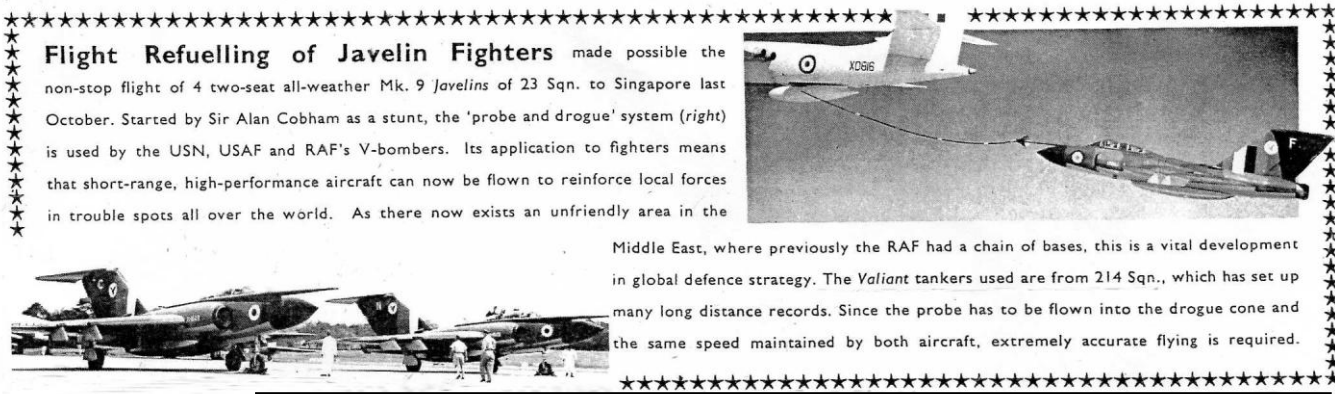
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## Date for your Diary

The Guild of Aviation Artists 40<sup>th</sup> 'Aviation Paintings of the Year' Exhibition  
The Mall Gallery (The Mall side of Admiralty Arch)  
Monday 19 July (pm) - Sunday 25 July  
Free Admission

The latest and the best in the world of aviation art  
Easily reached and very well worth a visit





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**Flight Refuelling of Javelin Fighters** made possible the non-stop flight of 4 two-seat all-weather Mk. 9 *Javelins* of 23 Sqn. to Singapore last October. Started by Sir Alan Cobham as a stunt, the 'probe and drogue' system (right) is used by the USN, USAF and RAF's V-bombers. Its application to fighters means that short-range, high-performance aircraft can now be flown to reinforce local forces in trouble spots all over the world. As there now exists an unfriendly area in the

Middle East, where previously the RAF had a chain of bases, this is a vital development in global defence strategy. The *Valiant* tankers used are from 214 Sqn., which has set up many long distance records. Since the probe has to be flown into the drogue cone and the same speed maintained by both aircraft, extremely accurate flying is required.



From the 'Battle of Britain Souvenir Book' 1961 - (Later this publication became the 'RAF Year Book')



# Treasurer's Topics

**This is the answer to the question that several of you have asked.**

The annual subscription to the Association became £10 a few years ago and hopefully will remain so for the foreseeable future. It becomes due on 1 January. My thanks to all those of you who have taken out standing orders - it really does save me work. My apologies for the return of some of your SO payments, but this was entirely due to the Uckfield branch of the bank being incorporated within the Lewes branch with a subsequent change of sort code. They kept this a secret, but there was not a problem until standing order payments became totally automatic, at which point computer technology rejected them. I think we have sorted most of the missed payments, but if not you will be getting a letter from me!

I would like to thank all of you that have written to me with your news, especially the Colonials. It is good to hear from you, and I would like to publish some of your letters with tall tales or war stories. You will have to meet me half-way however and send them to me. I have just heard from George Fisher who has rejoined the Association after a lapse of 10 years. George and his wife have not been in the best of health and he is a full time carer for her, but at 86 he is still going strong and I am sure that he would like to hear from any of you that remember him. I have one or two of George's stories which I hope to publish in the next edition.



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Committee for their help in compiling this Nightjar, and to John Ward for supplying the 'Air Clues' article which was edited for publication by Vic Pheasant. We have reverted to sending the 'Nightjar' out unfolded to save work, and to give you a better quality product. We hope you enjoy it. Gulli



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**Should you have any queries on Association matters please feel free to contact, by telephone, letter or email, any member of the Committee.**

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*The Nightjar has been compiled by your Committee; it has then converted to a computerised form, proof read, 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 over £1:50 per copy; please e-mail the Treasurer.*