



Nightjar

Spring 2015

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Chairman's Letter

It is now five months since our 2014 Reunion, which was held at the Maid's Head Hotel in Norwich in October, and I am pleased to report that the numbers attending were around the same as the 2013 Reunion in Derby. The Oak Room again proved to be an ideal size, both for the Annual General Meeting and the Dinner that followed in the evening. You will find the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting elsewhere in this *Nightjar*. After dinner we were entertained by John Gulliver, who gave a presentation on the history and present capabilities of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, an amazing organisation that receives no Government money and yet provides a vital emergency service. On the Sunday, a group of us visited the Air Defence Radar Museum at Neatishead, where we were given our own private tour, thanks to the arrangements made by Shaun Broaders. In the 1960s and 1970s Neatishead was one of the Master Radar Stations that we used to work with when refuelling Lightnings and, later, Phantoms off the East Coast.

This year, following the principle established a few years ago, we are holding our Reunion at the Hallmark Hotel at Derby. Unlike Norwich, Derby is close to the centre of England and is relatively easy to reach by road and

rail, indeed the railway station is only yards from the Hotel's main entrance. So there's no excuse for not making the effort to come! Once again, we will take the opportunity to visit our Squadron Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas on the Sunday morning and place a wreath as usual. If you are one of those who has yet to visit Alrewas, there is a lot more to see than just our own Squadron Memorial. In particular, there is the awe-inspiring Armed Forces Memorial on the top of a small hill, which records the names of all those Armed Forces personnel killed on duty since 1 January 1948. It never ceases to amaze me how many names I recognise, either people I have known or people I have heard about. So please, if you possibly can, do make the effort to join us in Derby. We need to keep the Association alive, at least until the one hundredth anniversary in 2017 of the Squadron's formation in 1917. The aim is to meet next year in Norwich again, and then back to Derby in 2017 so that we can incorporate a visit to our Memorial in the Anniversary Year. If we are to achieve that, we need people to come the Reunions this year and next. Details of this year's Reunion, including Booking Forms, can be found elsewhere in this *Nightjar*.

Finally, the recent death of member Gerhard Heilig in Vienna reminds me how fortunate the younger members of the Squadron and Association like me have been to have the opportunity to meet and talk to people who served on the Squadron in earlier times. I will always remember, at one of the first reunions that I attended, someone said to me 'Have you met Gerhard yet?' 'Gerhard?' I replied. 'Yes, Gerhard Heilig.' That someone with such a name should be a member of the Association appeared somewhat incongruous, until it was explained to me about the German-speaking special operators carried on the Fortress. Fortunately, Gerhard's story of how he came to England as a schoolboy refugee from Austria before the war and later joined that RAF has been published, and so has not been lost with his death. But it does help to make the point that we all need to write down our memories of our time in the RAF and on the Squadron, even if only for family consumption.

Alan Mawby

No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association Reunion 2015

The Hallmark Hotel – Derby

3rd & 4th October

Timings:

Saturday:

AGM: Saturday - 1500 hrs
Dinner: Saturday - 1900 for 1930

Sunday: Visit National Arboretum - Alrewas for a wreath laying at the Squadron Memorial at 1200.

This is a popular hotel and it is advisable to book early to avoid disappointment.

There are 2 booking forms included with your Nightjar. The first should be returned to the Hallmark Hotel by 31st August if possible, **but no later than 13th September.**

(A credit card is required to confirm your reservation - no money will be taken at time of booking).

The second should be sent to the **Secretary** so that he can check that the hotel has received all the bookings, and to give us time to prepare place cards etc.

The Cost: All prices are for Dinner, Room, and Breakfast.
(Wine is included with dinner on Sat 3 Oct).

	Friday 2 nd	Saturday 3 rd	Sunday 4 th
Single Occupancy:	£75	£82.50	£75
Double Occupancy:	£115	£132.50	£115 (Prices per couple)

The Menu has yet to be decided, but will include 3 Courses and Coffee. It will be published before the event.

There will be alternatives, and vegetarian options, which can be arranged with the hotel.

Over 90 Club

FA Wiles has enclosed a letter with a cheque for his annual subscription and has told us that he is now in his 90s so welcome to the distinguished members' club.

In Memoriam

R O Connolly: 10 Aug 14. Plt Off, mid upper gunner on the Stirling and Fortress.

M C Cooper: 17 Oct 14, aged 93. Air Gunner on Stirling EH895. Mairice, Bob Leadbeater & Ken Chapman were all in the same crew on Short Stirlings. 'Returning from Berlin on August 24th 1943, our aircraft was attacked by a German fighter and the rear gun turret was set on fire. After abortive attempts to extinguish the fire, it was noticed the wing was on fire, and the order to abandon aircraft was given. Preparing to leave we were shot at again and 3 of us were wounded. Maurice risked his own life ensuring we bailed out carrying Ken and Bob to do so. We know he was saved by his parachute and a POW until Russian Cossack-like soldiers on mules all tooled up with swathes of ammunition liberated his POW camp in 1945.'

A H Deadman: 14 Jan 15, aged 93. Navigator on Stirlings and crewed with Bob Mackett and Bill Wilkinson.

G Heilig: 24 Oct 14. Special German speaking Wireless Operator on the Fortress and then on Lancasters of 101 Squadron.

J (Dan) Gurney: Mar 15. Co-pilot Victor K1 early 70s. Then Captain on 57 Sqn.



Gerhard Heilig passed away on the 25th October 2014 aged 89. Born in Budapest in 1925, Gerhard arrived in England as a 14 year old Austro-Hungarian refugee



from NAZI persecution in December 1938. After finishing school in Yorkshire he worked as a telephone engineer in London and as an 'enemy alien' was ineligible to be called up for wartime military service. However, aged just 17, in January 1943 he volunteered for aircrew duties in the RAF and trained as a wireless operator. His 'knowledge' of German got him a posting in March 1944 to 214 Sqn, which specialised in Electronic Counter Measures, flying the B-17 Flying Fortress equipped with 'ABC'. He was involved in a number of 'spoof' Ops over France and Germany, and in support of D-Day. Gerhard was transferred to 101 Sqn flying Lancasters in July 1944 and completed his operational tour of 30 Ops on the 25th October. During his time at Ludford Magna his aircraft was hit by flak on three occasions and once crash landed at Ludford wheels up. However, he stated that the nearest he came to death was when a V2 exploded over his head while on leave in London! Gerhard then transferred to Transport Command and flew the Dakota DC-3 in the Far East until being demobbed in 1947. He continued in civil aviation, flying for Eagle Airlines and BEA and got his pilot wings. In 1965 he finally returned to Vienna to fly for Austrian Airlines. Gerhard wrote a number of books about his flying career, including one called 'Around the World in 80 Beds!'. He kept up a prolific correspondence right up to the day of his death and his final missive appears on page 11.

Minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting of No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association held at the Maid's Head Hotel, Norwich on Saturday 4th October 2014

Committee present:	Wg Cdr Alan Mawby John Gulliver Jock Whitehouse Shaun Broaders Peter M Walker	Chairman Treasurer Historian Secretary
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and ten members

1. Chairman's Welcome. The Chairman welcomed all the members attending the Annual General Meeting on the occasion of the Annual Reunion, the 26th Reunion since the Association was formed. Twenty-eight members had booked to attend but due to a last-minute indisposition, only twenty-six would be sitting down to dinner that evening.
2. Apologies. Apologies had been received from: MRAF Sir Michael Beetham (President), Gp Capt Peter Hill, Alys Smith, Gerhard Heilig, H P (Peter) Jowett, and Vic Pheasant (Committee Member).
3. In Memoriam. The names of Association members and those connected with the Squadron whose deaths had been reported since the last reunion in 2013 were read out:

Wilf Clough – groundcrew (2013)
Mrs Rona Bayliss – widow of Stan Bayliss (Summer 2013)
Eddie Smeeth – Victor Pilot (February 2014)
Mike Dane – Victor AEO (9 March 2014)
P J (Peter) Anderson – Fortress Pilot (March 2014 – age 91)
C J (Charles) Holmes – (29 June 2014 age 90)
Cyril Penna – Stirling Air Observer (2 July 2014 age 92)
4. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 5 October 2013. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Hallmark Hotel, Derby on 5 October 2013 were published in the February

2014 edition of *Nightjar*. No comments or corrections had been received. Acceptance of the Minutes was proposed by Geoff Barrell and seconded by Paul Henry and agreed unanimously.

5. Matters Arising. There were no matters arising that were not covered by an Agenda item.

6. Chairman's Report. The Chairman reported that, as in other recent years, the main activities over the past twelve months had been the production of the *Nightjar* newsletter, responding to enquiries from the public, and organising this year's Reunion. The Chairman stressed the importance of the *Nightjar* in keeping the Association alive. It continued to be well received by members, both at home and overseas, and thanks were due to John Gulliver, who assembled the material and printed the final version, to Jock Whitehouse for his 'Historian's Reports', and to those several members who had heeded the Chairman's pleas for contributions. The result had been some interesting tales that would otherwise have remained unknown to the majority of members. Once again, the Secretary had organised a lunchtime get-together at Stow Bardolph in May for those members living mainly in East Anglia. As in previous years, it was hoped it would give Sir Michael Beetham an opportunity to attend a Squadron function. Sadly, in the event Sir Michael was not well enough to come and it seemed unlikely that he would be able to attend such an event in the future; nevertheless, an enjoyable time was had by those who attended.

7. Secretary's Report. The Secretary reported that he had, as usual, had a number of enquiries from members of the public seeking background to the time spent on No 214 Squadron by a family member. The Secretary and the Historian had between them been able to help on most occasions. Some of this material would be included in the Historian's report in the next *Nightjar*. The Secretary also reported on his regular contacts with former Squadron member Murray Peden in Canada; this would also appear as a separate item in the next *Nightjar*.

8. Treasurer's Report and Approval of Accounts. The Treasurer summarised the income and expenditure for the year ending 31 December 2013, as set out in the Balance Sheet (attached). He reported that the current financial situation was sound and that the current annual subscription of £10 would be adequate for the foreseeable future. Thanks were given to Vic Pheasant for once again auditing the accounts. The acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Shaun Broaders and seconded by Godfrey Moffatt and agreed unanimously.

9. Historian's Report. The Historian gave a brief outline of activities over the past year relating to the Squadron's history. An updated and expanded report would appear in the next *Nightjar*, due out in early Spring 2015

10. Election Of Officers. All six members of the existing Committee had indicated their willingness to serve for another year. A motion that the existing Committee be re-elected for a further 12 months was proposed by Geoff Barrell and seconded by Gerry Crombie and agreed unanimously. The Committee therefore remained:

Chairman	Wg Cdr Alan Mawby
Secretary	Peter M Walker
Treasurer	John Gulliver
Historian	Jock Whitehouse
Member	Shaun Broaders
Member	Vic Pheasant

11. Options for the 2015 Reunion. Consistent with the decisions taken at previous reunions, the general consensus was that future reunions should continue to be held in alternate years at Norwich and Derby. After much discussion, it was agreed that the 2015 Reunion would, subject to the availability of the

hotel, be held at the Hallmark Hotel in Derby on Saturday 3 October 2015. It would be followed on the Sunday morning by a visit to the Squadron memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas.



12. Any Other Business. The Treasurer proposed a vote of thanks to John and Carol Edwards for their efforts with the No 214 Squadron website; this was agreed. The Chairman reminded those present that, thanks to the efforts of Shaun Broaders, the Air Defence Radar Museum at Neatishead was opening especially for the Association on the Sunday morning after the Reunion; members were encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to visit a facility which had had close connections with the Squadron in the 1960s and 1970s. Finally the Chairman thanked all those who had given up their afternoon to attend the AGM, which was a very necessary part of keeping the Association going.

Harold Bidmead – 1988
Founder of 214 Sqn Association

No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2013

2012			2013	
Income	Expenditure		Income	Expenditure
£2,491.22		Bank Account Balances Brought Forward	£2,469.22	
£,1010.00	£75.00	Membership Subscriptions & Donations	£920.00	£125.00
	£665.00	Nightjar Costs		£248.00
	£202.00	Committee Expenses		£79.60
	£90.00	Reunion Expenses		£60.00
	0	Web Site Rental		0
£3,501.22	£1,032.00		£3,389.22	£512.60
£2,469.22		Bank Account Balances Carried Forward	£2,876.62	

Balance carried forward on 31 December 2013:

£2876.62

Change on Year:

+£407.40

Original Copy Signed

5 March 2014

J GULLIVER

Treasurer

This is to certify that I have completed an audit of the 2013 Accounts of No 214(FMS)Squadron Association and found them to be a true and accurate record.

Original Copy Signed

17 August 2014

V A Pheasant

Auditor

HISTORIAN'S REPORT

This report is an updated and expanded version of that presented to the relatively few members present at the Annual General Meeting at Norwich in October.

As might be expected with the passage of time, the number of truly historic contacts is reducing although there are signs that some families are becoming more interested in the service careers of their relatives, especially those relating to the Second World War. Any from the First World War have yet to appear, but who knows?

Wreaths. An Association wreath, along with others, was laid at the RAF Stradishall Memorial on the sunny but breezy morning of Saturday 8 November. Amongst those present were the usual two members from Bury St. Edmunds RAFA, and a number from the younger generation which was good to see. The visitor's book at Stirling House shows that the site receives a wide variety of interested people. Another Association wreath was laid at the Chedburgh Memorial on Remembrance Sunday and we have also to express our very grateful thanks to Mrs Anne Cheung for laying an Association wreath on the '214 stone' in the National Memorial Arboretum. Anne lives quite near to Alrewas but a closer link is that her mother served on 214.

In August I met up with the niece of P/O G H Webster an RCAF pilot lost with his crew on 28 January 1942 when their Wellington failed to return from a raid on Munster. They have no known graves. I provided Rosanne and her partner Colin, both 'Winnipegians', with her uncle's operational record (via Ian Hunt's valuable work) and details on life on 214 at Stradishall. In St. Margaret's Church Stradishall they saw the Memorial Window and the names of her uncle and his crew in the Book of Remembrance, being quite moved on learning of the story of the 'Ercolani' cabinet in which the book is housed. The old church with its ancient wall paintings impressed them greatly. We also visited Stradishall Memorial and Stirling House with its aviation memorabilia and on being shown a photograph of her uncle's crew I recognised it as one on file which had always been classed as 'unknown'! Rosanne and Colin plan to return to UK to see the Bomber Command Memorial in London and the National Memorial Arboretum, having already visited the Runnymede Memorial.



Peter Walker has been contacted by a relative of Sgt T Brennan, an air-gunner in the crew of F/Sgt C Brown whose Chedburgh Stirling EF402 was badly damaged by 'flak' on 27/28 September 1943 on a Hannover raid. All the crew baled-out safely to become PoWs, although the Stirling managed to fly on for a while, eventually crashing in Denmark. However, this query is one way beyond our capabilities. Although Sgt. Brennan is certainly listed as a PoW, and we understand that the family were aware of his fate, he never returned to Ireland after the war and apparently disappeared without trace. Whilst imagining some likely possibilities, we feel that contact with higher authorities is advisable for the family to try and unravel the mystery!

My talk to Haverhill Aviation Society is now scheduled for January, but as to cover the whole history of 214 in one go is an impossible ask, I plan to give a second talk (post-war to closure) at a later date. John Jewsbury (son of Jack Dixon's bomb aimer) hopes (weather permitting) to come up from Kent to hear the January part. (Welcome support I hope).

Flt Lt E G Youseman. (See previous 'Nightjars'). A little more information on Ted's career has come to light, although his pre-Chedburgh service is still vague. However, in my Chedburgh records I have found that Ian Hawkins, training on 1657 HCU was detailed to fly three operational sorties with 214 at Chedburgh (such details did take place). Ian did his three 'second pilot' trips, the first two with Sgt Baldock (who sadly, was killed soon after) and the third with Flt Lt Youseman. Ian then returned to 1657 HCU to complete his conversion course and then, with his crew, returned to Chedburgh to commence his own operational career with 214.

Peter has also heard from Mr Keith Payne, a childhood friend of Frank Hares who later flew as a bomb aimer on No.214 Squadron's Fortresses from Oulton. Frank proved to be a valued crew member, especially so

on the night of 7/8 February 1945 when, on leaving the target area, his Fortress was severely damaged by a night-fighter. With the navigational aids knocked out and the navigator badly injured, Frank first tended the wounded man and then navigated the aircraft back to base. As the navigator could not be moved Frank stayed with him in the nose offering protection and support, well knowing that a crash-landing was likely due to the damage sustained. 'FS Hares displayed outstanding qualities of courage and initiative in a most critical situation'. This was the wording for his worthy award of the Distinguished Flying Medal (14 February 1945. L.G 23 March 1945). Sadly however, Frank was to lose his life, ironically very close his home base when on 3 March, Plt Off Bennett's HB815 was shot down by a German intruder. Eight of the crew of ten were killed. Frank was buried in Coalsville (Hugglescote) Cemetery in Leicestershire and every year since, Keith Payne has placed a poppy on the grave of his friend: 'we owe so much to these young men'.

Along with 'most?' of the UK population, I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the two Lancasters flying together, my chance being at the Little Gransden Air-Show in August. They gave several passes which were linked to a simple service of Remembrance to Bomber Command, always part of this superb show, and it was very moving to see ALL the crowd stand in silence at the appropriate moment. Some dramatic cloud formations provided a really 'artistic' backdrop for both the Lancasters and for the Vulcan which followed with a truly stunning display. The finale was a low slow approach with undercarriage down, then, as anticipated, 'wheels up, nose raised and POWER ON'. The climb away and the 'nearly but not quite' roll off the top was felt rather than heard. Memorable indeed. Gransden always includes a huge classic-car meet, and after the flying we watched the magnificent collection depart. One thing came to mind; most of the glorious Bentleys, Rolls, Daimlers, Armstrong-Siddeleys etc. seemed to be driven by mature gentlemen nearly always accompanied by a very elegant MUCH younger lady! My only wistful comment to my friend had to be: 'where did I go wrong?

A change from Bombers, I was invited to attend the Annual Battle of Britain Service held in the ancient and beautiful St.Mary's Church in Bury St. Edmunds. The Royal Air Force was strongly represented by a contingent from the RAF Regiment from nearby RAF Honington, which for many years has had a close link with the town. A superb band and march-past included personnel from the USAF based at either Mildenhall or Lakenheath, and the glorious Battle of Britain weather made for a memorable and colourful day. It was interesting to note the many medals worn by the young servicemen and women from Honington. Amongst those attending the service was Lord Tebbit who in fact was not far from the site of part of his own RAF service. Prior to becoming a Meteor fighter-pilot he trained on No.226 Operational Conversion Unit at Stradishall. Although perhaps a little irreverent, but hopefully safe for this 'ex-brown/olive green job' to relate, the parade at Bury reminded me of a story I once heard relating to the famous Guardsman, RSM Britain (he of the incredible parade-ground voice and in whose presence one trembled) who for many years commanded most of the important Service parades. Prior to one large multi-Service parade he was asked how he intended to deal with the different 'skills' of those involved. "Very simple" he replied. "Just accept that the Army will march by, the Navy will walk by, and the Royal Air Force will have to do the best it can!"

The remarkable escape story of Sqn Ldr Cyril Penna DFM has been well covered in recent editions of 'Nightjar', but it should now be recorded that on Tuesday 22 July our own Bertie Jukes travelled across Devon to be present at Cyril's funeral service, and the fact that No.214 Squadron was represented was very much appreciated by the family. To quote Bertie; "it was a dry sunny day, the wake was at the local pub at Topsham near Exeter and family and friends were most touched that '214' was present". Our sincere thanks to Bertie.

A slightly tangled web, but it is all in a name!

By coincidence, Bertie's name is again in the frame. Our May speaker for the Haverhill Aviation Society (which is privileged to meet in Stirling House) was Sarah, daughter of the late and great war-bird owner and display pilot Ray Hanna, who as we recall was also one of the very early leaders of the 'Red Arrows'. Sarah's talk mainly concerned the long relationship between the Hanna family and MH434, the magnificent Spitfire

IX which was one of the earliest private display aircraft, and indeed remains so, and who can ever forget Ray's displays in that Spitfire? I happen to possess the log-book entries of a pilot who although serving at Stradishall on several units, in the 50's was an instructor on No.3 Flying Training School at RAF Feltwell. Two of John's Harvard trips named 'Hanna' as the pupil. John, sadly no longer with us, did confirm with me that it **was** Ray Hanna. So when Ray's daughter came to speak to us I was able to give her copies of the flights in question much to her delight as she had not seen them before, but the dates coincided with Ray's arrival as a very young New Zealand member in the RAF. Move on to the days of No.1 Air Navigation School at Stradishall where John was seeing out the end of his long career flying as a Staff pilot. Same log-book but I noted that on 4 and 21 June 1962, the trainee navigator in John's regular mount, Meteor NF14, WS744 was a certain 'Jukes'.

4 June.Ex.J4. 1 hour 40 minutes. QGH and GCA.
21 June . Ex.J9. 1 hour 15 minutes.

Bertie has since confirmed that it was indeed him in the back seat, and luckily there are at least three surviving photographs of 'A' WS744.



In my separate article on 'Stradishall To-day', I failed to mention that although a large number of bird species have been logged, the list unfortunately does not include the 'nightjar' and it is unlikely that it ever will. This particular and unusual bird thrives on the large open dry sandy Brecklands to the north (Stradishall lies on very heavy Suffolk boulder clay), but at least one ex-214 base, namely Methwold, is reasonably close to the habitat.

A final but rather moving tale from Little Gransden

Whilst relaxing and watching some 'after- event local flying', and prior to the previously mentioned vehicle parade, those remaining, via the 'Tannoy' (*other PA systems are available! – Ed*), were treated to very unusual story from a visiting American lady who was apparently over in UK on a visit which had strong aviation connections, and which included the Little Gransden air-show. She said that UK meant a lot to her family as her father had been a B-17 ball-turret gunner, flying and safely surviving a full tour of missions between October 1944 and March 1945. I can't recall her mentioning his actual Bomb group, but she did say that most, if not all his trips, were made in a B-17 christened 'The Stag Party'. In amongst the exhibition/trade stands she came upon a display of model aircraft which included a superb large-scale B-17 Fortress which particularly pleased and surprised her as by chance it represented one from her father's Bomb Group, but what she saw during a closer look took her back completely - the nose-art was that for 'The Stag Party' - her father's actual aircraft. The owner of the model was totally surprised and obviously quite a moving discussion ensued. I believe that her request to purchase the model was initially refused, but only for it to be offered to her to take back to her family at home where it really should belong! When asked how on earth she was going to get it back, she replied quite emotionally "Don't worry, this aircraft WILL get there". I am sure that it did! Coincidence? Maybe, but I for one would certainly not like to try and work out the odds of such a happening taking place. However, it did provide food for thought on the way home - a good end to a great day.

Jock M Whitehouse

And another thing!

The current edition of 'Flypast' (January 2015) contains an interesting article on Bomber Command which includes No 214 Squadron's Fortress ECM operations in 100 Group. The front cover depicts an artist's colour image of B-17 BU-W (KH999). Fame at Last!

ROYAL AIR FORCE STRADISHALL-- A COMPLETE UPDATE

Various reports in past editions of 'Nightjar' have shown how the old Station has undergone vast changes since its closure in 1970. The gradual expansion of HM Prison Highpoint has resulted in the removal of most of the ex-RAF buildings with perhaps Stirling House (Officers' Mess) remaining as the best known 'survivor'. The MoD owned original central flying area has seen limited grazing use (central) the planting of a few small copses and arable farming on the outer areas, and significant military training mainly with helicopters and most prominent at night! However, that changed when MoD sold the land back into private ownership, and following the expected concern as to the land's future 'us locals' were finally informed of the proposed plans. These were to create a 150-acre solar-park, with the remaining 450 acres (after careful monitoring and assessment) to be developed as a high-status wildlife conservation area as work had already shown that the area was capable of offering unique habitats for wildlife. You bird-lovers may be interested to know that at least 81 species of birds have already been 'logged' including a few turtle-doves. Raptors and owls thrive and care is being taken to create 'bat' areas. Rather than plant



more trees (the usual belief for such projects), Broxted's high value areas are those of ancient pasture/grassland, and it was the long use as an airfield which allowed these to naturally establish undisturbed, and are now vital for ground nesting birds; for example on a recent private visit to the site I watched skylarks and lapwings, and enjoyed a close encounter with a hare who no doubt came up to check out who was interrupting his secure existence. The solar-park, now fully operative is designed to be wildlife and sheep-friendly' as the panels are set low enough to

provide shelter, but more importantly grazing for sheep, although not for cattle which will graze other fenced central areas. Due to the natural lie of the land and natural hedgerows (more to be added) it is virtually impossible to see the large solar panel areas from any outside point. Ponds have also been dug and left to develop their 'own' flora and fauna.

Broxted Estate: Now the official title for the area (its true and natural historic name) it has the assistance of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Natural England, and others to monitor and advise on its natural development, and will have strong local educational links. In spite of its sensitive nature the area is now open to the public by virtue of a 'permissive footpath' which in effect follows the old peri-track and/or boundary of the original 1938 flying area.

Information boards are planned for the spring covering all aspects of the site's history right from its days as one of three local Royal Deer Parks, its pre-war agricultural life and the creation of the solar-park. Not forgetting of course those remarkable flying years of 1938 to 1970, and I will leave you to guess who has been asked to do the work on that one. No problem then of what to do in the winter! (214 will get a good mention). There is still much work to do as the site develops naturally over time. I and a friend walked part way round on the opening day, and spent time trying to find any 'RAF' traces. There are a few faded white paint markings on the old flight-line area, and the surface of the main runway is still evident at both ends where it crossed the taxi-way.



After my years researching Stradishall I naturally developed a close affinity with the site and did wonder what its future might be, but now I think all is well and it is in good hands for our heritage and the enjoyment of many. Once tasked to help ensure that 'people could sleep safely in their beds', now its solar power helps keep them warm in the same environment.

HOW I JOINED 214 SQUADRON – AND SURVIVED!

At the beginning of October 1943, we had found ourselves at Number 4 Radio School at Madley near Hereford. After the first few days of sweltering in greatcoats (regulations demanded that these be worn from 1 October regardless of the weather), the skies turned grey and bleak and our body temperatures dropped below boiling point. At the first parade, our flight commander, himself a 'penguin', told us in his welcoming address that we had no cause whatsoever to consider ourselves as anything special. In his opinion, aircrew were no more than a necessary evil in the Royal Air Force!

The physical conditions of the camp were no picnic either. We had to walk a mile from our sleeping site fully equipped for the day's work before we could wash and shave at the messing site. Then interminable marches from one working site to the next with a fiendish system of constantly retracing our steps from one instructional site to the next with a dash back to the messing site for our midday meal. We were not a very happy band, and when 'Flight' announced one morning that anyone with a knowledge of German was to put down his name in the flight office, several of us fell out with glee at the vague chance of escape from this depressing life. But the weeks stretched into months and there was no let-up in the treadmill. Then one Saturday, it was the 11th March, we were having our evening meal when our corporal came into the mess hall and shouted for Johnny and I to report to the flight office immediately. This could only mean trouble, but for once neither of us had a guilty conscience. One thing was certain, someone was out to sabotage our one day off in the week. We were puzzled and relieved when, instead of being detailed for some unpleasant duty, we were ordered to report with flying kit to the airfield the next morning. Due to bad weather our intake had barely started flight training and even the flight instructors could not tell us why an exception should have been made for just the two of us. Being airborne as a crew member certainly more than made up for our lost day off.

Lacking definitive orders, we paraded as usual on the Monday morning for normal duties. As we were about to march off, 'Flight' came rushing out of the office shouting: "Heilig, Herzog, why the hell aren't you at the airfield?" Well, no one had told us to, and we weren't sorry to make a quick escape from the usual drudgery. Having lugged our flying kit miles to the aerodrome, we were told that due to bad weather there was to be no flying that day anyway. However, the Chief Instructor wanted to see us, so off we went to add yet some more mileage to our peregrinations. On arrival we found another dozen or so cadets waiting to see him, having been ordered unexpectedly from their various classes. We were filled with apprehension and foreboding about our impending fate. Seeing no reason for preferment, it could only mean trouble. Then I had a brainwave. "Do any of you speak German?" I asked. They all could. No one said a word, but by the expressions on their faces it was obvious that all had the same vision of little figures dangling on the end of parachutes on sinister and dangerous missions behind the enemy lines.

Before I had time to collect my shattered wits, Johnny and I were ordered into the Chief Instructor's office. "You two are required for immediate posting to a squadron. I do not know why. Can you get your tests and flying finished by Wednesday?" We were not due to complete our course for another three weeks, in fact it would take longer than that to finish our flying, and there was a bottleneck on further postings, and the thought of facing the ordeal of our final examinations had not even crossed our minds. But here was an opportunity to pack all that into the next 48 hours and, while we had no doubts about our ability to pass the tests, it's always a good thing to have the instructors on your side. We were being offered a short cut to - what? But the long way round is not necessarily safer, in fact, usually fraught with more uncertainties. All this flashed through our minds and we answered with a firm "Yes Sir!" "All right then. There's no flying today so go and get your exams done right away. Report tomorrow morning at the airfield for flying". We did not have to stand and wait. The instructors pounced on us like a flock of vultures and by mid-afternoon we had passed all our tests. We then wallowed in the luxury of quietly ambling back for tea as almost free men while the rest of our intake had their noses well and truly strapped to the grindstone. The next day was no different. No sooner had we poked our noses into the flight office, we were whisked off for our first flight of the day. While cadets from previous intakes sat around getting bored, we were up and down like yo-yo's and finished the day with our air qualifications in our pockets.

On Wednesday morning we ambled along to breakfast in our own good time and then paid a visit to our flight commander. He handed us our signaller's wings and sergeant's stripes, wished us luck and told us to get cleared and collect our marching orders for our secret destination. The date was the 15th, the Ides of March. Six years to the day since my father had been arrested by the Gestapo in Vienna. Ominous - but for whom? Well, I'm still alive and kicking, more than 50 years later. But our first thought was a visit to the tailor to get the visible signs of our new-found glory sewn on our uniforms. So far everything had

worked like greased lightning, but now bureaucracy reared its ugly head. It took us until Thursday afternoon to get through all the bump and be issued with our travel warrants for Fakenham in Norfolk - to report to 214 Squadron at Sculthorpe. However, our time was spent quite pleasantly. There was no one to chivvy us and everyone was very polite. The weather was mild and we luxuriated in no longer having to wear a greatcoat buttoned up to the neck and hump our small kit around all day. Passing Service Police no longer held terrors for us. To their smart "Good morning Sergeant," we replied with a gracious "Good morning Corporal". We were really very, very pleased with ourselves.

Johnny and I arrived very late one night at Fakenham station, wondering what we'd let ourselves in for. It was Friday 17 March 1944 and we'd been humping our kit since early morning on a wartime train journey in fits and starts across country. They'd been most helpful in seeing us on our train in Hereford. We'd had to fend for ourselves during the interminable changes to our destination and here we were, surrounded by our kit on a deserted platform. However, a phone call to the Station soon had us bouncing along deserted lanes in a transport to our new home. We were bursting with curiosity, but all we could get out of our driver was: "It's all very secret, you'll have to find out for yourselves". He would not even tell us what type of aircraft the squadron was equipped with in case we turned out to be German spies in disguise. Our quarters were in a hut accommodating about two dozen NCO aircrew in one long undivided space. To reach the two vacant beds at the far end we had to run the gauntlet of our new companions who eyed us with undisguised curiosity. We had heard tales of scruffy, devil-may-care aircrew, but what we saw here out of the corners of our timid eyes were immaculate uniforms of Warrant Officers, Flight Sergeants and the odd Sergeant, nearly all sporting the 1939-43 Star and some even the DFM. We felt very small indeed.

"Just been posted in?" said a voice.

"Yes."

"Where have you come from?"

"Radio School."

"Been instructing?"

"No. Just passed out."

There was a deathly silence.

"How many hours have you got?"

"Ten and a half," said Johnny. "Eleven," said I.

Another deathly silence. We felt like crawling away into a hole.

"Ah well, never mind. You'll soon get into the swim of it. Better kip down for the night and we'll show you around in the morning."

One of the lads took us to the Sergeants' Mess for breakfast next morning and told us to check in with the PMC, then report to the Adjutant. We had no idea who or what a PMC was, so he enlightened us that he was the bloke who ran the mess and if we wanted feeding we had better go and say hello to him. The Adjutant proved the efficiency of the system by expressing great surprise at our arrival. But being a man of infinite resource, as well as of a generous nature, he promptly sent us on seven days leave. That very same Saturday evening saw us wallowing in the flesh and other pots of London.

However, someone or other had evidently tumbled to the fact that our posting to the Squadron had been of a very urgent nature and on the Tuesday we received an immediate recall to duty. This time they were ready for us. We were informed that the sole object of the Squadron was to carry special operators like ourselves along in the main bomber stream and that it would be our duty to find, identify and jam enemy fighter control transmissions, causing havoc and confusion to their defences. The whole thing was so secret that not even the Commanding Officer knew what it was all about. No time was wasted in getting us trained on our equipment. It consisted of a control unit with a cathode ray tube scanning the German fighter frequency band and any transmissions would show up as blips on the screen. We would then tune our receiver to the transmission by moving a strobe spot onto it, identify the transmission as genuine (this was where our knowledge of the language came in, as the Germans were expected to come up with phoney instructions in order to divert our jammers), then tune our transmitter to the frequency and blast off with a cacophony of sound which, in retrospect, would put today's pop music to utter shame. The transmitters were standard T1154 MF/HF transmitters modified to operate on 38-42.5 mc/s. Later on, specially designed equipment was to be used. The Squadron was not yet operational, having recently been converted from Stirlings. The B-17 Fortress had been chosen for the job, later to be followed by B-24 Liberators for 223 Squadron, as the American type bomb bay was better suited for the installation of the planned equipment than the British underfloor bays. As there



Fortress II SR 384. BU-A, 25.5.1944, lost that night with P/O Hockley

were not enough special operators to go round, we were allocated to whoever happened to be flying until our establishment would be complete and allow permanent crewing up. We soon made friends and found our favourite crews. The old hands, a number on their second tour, made us welcome and we soon lost the feeling of being intruding greenhorns. Training went on apace and we all felt it could not be long now before we became fully operational.

One day Johnnie and I were called to the adjutant's office. He advised us that our German names would put us at considerable risk in the event of being captured by the enemy and that arrangements could easily be made to change them to something more innocuous. Johnnie took him up on his suggestion, promptly opting for the innocent sounding one of Hereford, but I was not so sure. What were the options? First of all, they would have to shoot me down. Secondly, I would have to survive, and thirdly they would have to catch me. My innate optimism, or more likely ignorance, told me that none of this may ever arise. But supposing it did and I was captured, might it not be just my luck to be interrogated by some former school fellow who would recognize me and brand me as a spy sailing under false colours? On the other hand, we had been told that under the Geneva Convention all we were required to reveal, and in fact obliged to do, was number, rank and name, and so long as we did this with a correct military bearing, the Germans were not likely to press for more. What finally decided me was my father's example. When the crunch came at the time of the *Anschluss* he unhesitatingly decided to face the music - and, though sorely tried, got away with it. Of course, luck had also played its part but when does it not, and does not fortune favour the brave, at least part of the time? One day, during his time in concentration camp, the head of the Gestapo and SS, Himmler, had come on a tour of inspection and had all the prominent politicals from Vienna paraded for his particular attention. Amongst others, he stopped to address my father.

"What were you," he asked.

"Journalist."

"Do you know where the publisher of the *Stimme* is?"

"I last saw him at the Gestapo headquarters in Vienna."

After Himmler had passed on, my father realized how that man's ignorance had saved him from a difficult, if not potentially fatal situation. The publisher is only the business head of a newspaper, the man Himmler had been looking for was the editor, the man responsible for what was actually written - and he himself had been the editor! It had been a close shave. Another instance of facing things boldly came to mind. In the early twenties my father worked in the editorial office of a Budapest paper and this frequently involved a lonely walk home in the early hours of the morning. The direct route home would take him past the headquarters of the Arrow Cross party, an anti-Semitic and fascist-oriented organization, which, being a Jew, could well involve him in an unpleasant and perhaps even downright dangerous situation. The alternative was a lengthy detour which he was averse to taking at the end of exhausting working day, or rather, night. There were invariably a pair of sentries in front of the house and his first instinct was to slink past in the shadows on the opposite side of the street. But they would hardly fail to notice his surreptitious passage and, if only to relieve the boredom of their stint, hail him if only to amuse themselves at his expense. No, he decided to put a bold face upon it all and march past under their very noses as if they did not even exist, though inwardly he quaked. To his utter amazement, they not only allowed him unhindered passage, but jumped to attention and gave a smart salute as he passed. This happened on each subsequent occasion and it was only very much later that he discovered the reason for this unexpected mark of respect. He bore a superficial resemblance to one of the senior members of the party and his bold approach had convinced the sentries that it must indeed be him. Had they taken a closer look at the shadowy form across the road it would have been a different story. No, I would not change my name. I had calculated the risks and decided to follow my father's example. He had borne his name with honour and not deviated from his true course; I would do no less and place my trust in providence.

Johnny and I had been on the Squadron a month when someone had the kind thought that, being now fully trained, a spot of overdue leave would not come amiss. It was the afternoon of the 20th April and we were getting our things together when we were called to report to our section immediately. There we were told that we had been selected, along with two others, to take part in the Squadron's first operational flight in its new role before proceeding on leave the next day as planned. Some of my special chums were flying that night and I had the pleasure of getting teamed up with Canadian Jake Walters and his



crew. Forty-one years later I would be in touch with them again, but that's another story.

The target was the railway marshalling yard of La Chapelle in Paris. We did not know it at the time, but strikes against focal points of transport were part of the prelude to the Normandy landings. I had celebrated my 19th birthday on the day before and today was another birthday, Hitler's. Before climbing aboard our captain, Canadian Jake Walters said to me:

"I don't want to know what you are doing, but do you think it's worthwhile?"

To which I replied, "ask me again when we get back. But do you know what day this is?"

"Yes, Thursday."

"I mean the date?"

"The 20th April."

"That's Hitler's birthday, and it gives me the greatest of pleasure to deliver him my worst regards in person."

We had an uneventful trip and after we had parked our aircraft I said to Jake that yes, I thought it was worthwhile. That's all we wanted to know, he replied. After all, one does like to know what one's risking one's neck for.

After a few hours sleep Johnny and I caught the train to London for our week's leave. As the train rolled south carrying two very self-satisfied young airmen, a travelling companion remarked with a knowing smile: "You boys had a busy night last night!". For a moment we were horror-struck. How on earth could he have known that we'd been on ops last night? Then we realized that he meant the RAF generally and not ourselves in particular. "Ah yes," was our noncommittal reply. "We try to keep the ball rolling."

I can't remember many details about my time with 214 Squadron, but I have deep and lasting impressions of a happy unit with a high morale and a great sense of professionalism. Survival in war is largely a matter of luck, but it has always seemed to me that the high standard of airmanship on 214 must have had something to do with the fact that of the twenty-odd crews I knew, only four were lost. 214 Squadron has certainly always had a very special meaning for me.

The Squadron moved to Oulton on 16 May. One of our specialities was spoof raids, small groups of aircraft shovelling out great quantities of 'Window' (aluminium foil strips) to simulate a bomber stream. Following the pattern of attacks on French railway marshalling yards, several of these had been flown over France giving the real raids to Germany a clear run while the German night fighters were chasing *Window*. Then one night we flew a spoof to the Dutch coast while the real attack consisted of a force of Mosquito night fighters over France. The Germans fell for it and flew straight into the waiting guns of our Mossies. Another spoof was in support of the D-Day landings. Months later I was told that in the late autumn of '44 some twelve aircraft of 214 and 223 had stood by for 48 hours, waiting for some particularly nasty weather over Germany. Due to our intruder raids, German aircraft were not allowed to approach their airfields without prior clearance as all unidentified aircraft were immediately fired on and they had instructions to bale out if they failed to get permission to land. The spoof force flew a Cook's Tour of enemy territory and the threat forced their night fighters up into the murk. Our aircraft returned unscathed, while many of the enemy either came to grief in the filthy weather or had to abandon ship as we fouled up their communications.

On one of my leaves I had lunch with my father at a Czech émigré's club in Bayswater. Amongst the group of his friends there was a WAAF sergeant and I made polite conversation with her. To my opening questions she replied that her work was so secret that she could not even tell me where she was stationed. However, before many minutes had passed, I knew that her job was my own counterpart on the ground with 100 Group. When I started to grin, she told me indignantly that it was nothing to laugh about, it was all terribly important, but she was mollified when I told her that I was in the same racket. She then told me the following story.

Receiver operators passed Luftwaffe radio traffic to a controller who then issued co-ordinated false instructions to transmitter operators designed to cause confusion to the enemy. One night there was nothing happening whatsoever. Then the controller was roused from his torpor by repeated calls for a homing, which evidently remained unanswered. Mainly in order to relieve the utter boredom of a routine watch, he decided to give the lost sheep a course to steer - to Woodbridge airfield in Essex. The German pilot had been faced with the prospect of having to abandon his aircraft and was going to buy everyone



concerned a beer on his return to base. He came down safely - to find himself a prisoner and could hardly be expected to keep his promise to stand drinks all round. The aircraft was a Ju 88, stuffed with the latest German equipment, quite a catch for Intelligence. The capture of this aircraft was made public at the time, but not how it had all come about.

I did three more trips with Jake Walters, the last of which finished his tour. Meanwhile I had also flown with other crews and had got very pally with F/O Jackson's. In mid-July we had reached our full complement of special operators, which enabled us to be crewed up permanently and I joined Jacko's. We had all done the same number of trips and I could expect to finish my tour with him. His mid-upper gunner was Dave Hardie, a nephew of the actor Leslie Howard, to whom he had quite a marked resemblance. We did our tenth op on July 17 and two days later I was told that I had been posted to 101 Squadron of 1 Group along with Johnny and an Australian whose name I believe was Bluey Glick. 101 had pioneered airborne jamming and had continued the job as a sideline, they were short of specials and for some reason had priority over 214. Three of us had to go, and the powers that be had decided on us. I protested and pleaded to no avail, I had to pack my bags and leave my cherished friends to finish my tour with strangers. In fact, this probably saved my life. Jackson and his crew were lost some weeks later on the last operational flight of their tour.

It's strange how some matter, trivial in itself, can have such far-reaching effects. Johnnie and I had always wondered why we were less than popular with Flt Lt Collins, our special signals leader, for we had never given him cause to complain, and it was many years later that I realised what must have been the cause. No sooner had a couple of new members for his section turned up that they buzzed off on a week's leave, and he must have thought his had been at our own request. When the call came for three specials to be posted to 101 Squadron, we must have been the obvious and inevitable choice. Had I been one of his favourites, I would not now be sitting here to write these lines. July 22 saw me airborne in a Fortress for the last time when Flt Lt Bray took us to fly on Lancasters at Ludford Magna in Lincolnshire, where Johnnie and I finished our tour.

Gerhard

Gerhard kept in touch with us throughout his illness and was always very upbeat and positive about his condition. He was incredibly very well organised and had this letter prepared and ready to be posted on the day of his passing.

Gerhard had a remarkable life which many of us were privileged to share, and will be sorely missed.

Our condolences go to Sissy and the other members of his family.

The time must come, inevitably, when even the best of friends must part and this is now the moment to say farewell to express my thanks to all with whom it has been such a privilege to have spent so many happy hours together. I have been granted a long and interesting life. I have succeeded to achieve all my desires, at least to a satisfactory degree, and to the best of my knowledge that I have never caused any deliberate harm. I have of course made mistakes which must have caused some anger but this is unavoidable in life. I have therefore no cause for regrets. Your current responses have given me such happiness that I can now face the time which remains in complete and utter contentment. Though being an agnostic, my idea of hell has been that if the final thought should be "if only I had" and heaven "I have lived a full life".

Gerhard

Vienna, October 24th 2014

Some Stories from Bertie Jukes

When I was flying I had three very, very, close near misses, but I am here to tell the tale.

One was very sad, and I wasn't even there. On the third Monday evening in August 1968 I didn't turn up for flying. On that Monday evening I started my Nav Plotter's course at RAF Finningley. That night a Victor took off from RAF Marham. The only other RAF aircraft airborne that night was an RAF Germany Canberra finishing a UK low-level exercise. It was the worst weather August had ever had and they were the only aircraft flying. Midland Radar allowed the Canberra to climb, but they missed the fact that a Victor, under their control, was in the area. Yes, it happened! All crew members were killed and Victor crews never trusted Midland Radar again. My wife told me that a vehicle stopped outside our married quarter that night and two people got out and moved to the front door. Before they got there however another vehicle arrived, and two more people got out, went into a huddle, and then got back into their cars and drove off. It turned out that one of the passengers in the first car was the Station Padre. The reason for all this was that it was presumed that I was dead. My name had been entered in the authorisation sheets, but had not been erased when I didn't turn up for flying. The Victor crew killed were Bill Gallienne, Roger Morton, Ken Peacock, and Mick Doyle.

Another close call was over the Indian Ocean whilst flying from Singapore to Gan. We were past the 'point of no return' when we approached a cloud system which we estimated to be seventy thousand feet high. Obviously we couldn't climb over it, and there were Cumulo-Nimbus clouds as far as the eye could see. "Bloody Hell", we are going to have to go through them! I told the Nav Radar to put the heading marker on the thinnest point of the radar responses as the best route to follow. We went into cloud at forty one thousand feet and started to ascend. Both pilots pushed their sticks forward and still forward. At fifty four thousand feet and just on the stall buffet we cleared the cloud and then found ourselves in a forty five degree dive. At twenty five thousand feet we levelled out and resumed our trip to Gan in quiet mode. Post flight we anaesthetised ourselves! The Captain that day was Terry Bliss.

Perhaps the funniest near miss was on a very hot summer afternoon at RAF Marham. 'Sod's Law' – we had a replacement co-pilot so the 'five man' instinct wasn't there. A standard take-off was started, but past the point where it was far too late to abandon the take-off the guest co-pilot, who was flying the aircraft, announced that the rudder had jammed. The captain took control and confirmed the fault. We were still accelerating and nine thousand feet of concrete were disappearing rapidly. The brake parachute was deployed, and promptly split in two, whilst the brakes were struggling to retard the aircraft. For five seconds the world stood still. We left the end of the runway at approximately fifty knots digging into the overshoot. I was less than confident that the undercarriage would stay intact.

I was in the Nav Radar's seat that day and in an escape should have been the third rear crew member to leave the aircraft. After the five world stopping seconds had elapsed, I thought "bugger training - I'm off!" I leaned across the Nav Plotter and threw the switch to blow the cabin door open. At this stage 'Fight and Flight' was in overdrive and I undid my seat strap and forgot to release the dinghy. In my hurry I stood on anything I could to launch myself out of the aircraft. Sadly, one of the objects I used was the Nav Plotter's groin. Needless to say, he was not impressed and was going to let me know of his displeasure. Whilst the aircraft was still moving I hit the ground and it passed over me and then came to a stop, still very much intact. The next person out was the Nav Plotter, and for some reason he had forgotten to disconnect his dinghy. The manner in which he was approaching me was not one of friendship. When the fire crews arrived they found that one crew member was being chased by another with intent to kill! The Captain that day was Ted Longden whilst the offended Nav Plotter was Pete Simmonds.

The No 1 engine fire warning light illuminating at forty five thousand feet on the completion of a long navigation exercise is another story. I realised that my nine lives were running out, and it's just as well that I left the RAF when I did. One thing though; I should have been killed so many times in my twelve flying years that I have treated every year since as a bonus.

Some Ground Crew Tales

It has often been said that the ground crew lads flew in more types of aircraft than the aircrew members. We did not, of course, have official logbooks, and neither did we accumulate hours. From my own time in the RAF I was always keen to scrounge a ride in whatever was available. After I left the Air Force I served for twelve years in the ROC (Royal Observer Corps). At the ROC Open Days, (usually at Coltishall) I flew in Beverleys, Ansons, Varsitys, Hastings, and Valettas.

I arrived at Marham in early 1954 and was sent to 115 Sqn, but not for long, someone had made a mistake and I should have been sent to 35Sqn. This was soon corrected, and I joined 35 Sqn as an engine mechanic (T), T for turbine, serving for almost two years on Canberra B2s until I joined 214 in early 1956. At this time the four Marham squadrons (35,90,115 and 207) were re-equipping with Canberras, having previously operated Washingtons (B-29 Superfortress). There were still a few Washingtons on station awaiting return to the USAF who had supplied them on loan under the Mutual Defence Pact. Many other Washingtons from other stations had been flown into Marham for preparation to be returned to the USAF.

I had only been at Marham about three weeks when our 'Chieffie' asked me if I would like a trip in a Washington, apparently they were taking ground crews up for a ride, at least those who wanted to. Of course I jumped at the chance, but I had to obtain a parachute, and a couple of days later off I went,

brilliant. I was only 18 and it was my first ever flight. We were up for about an hour to somewhere off the Humber estuary and return. I was just a greenhorn in RAF ways and did not record the aircraft serial number, but I did note that the aircraft had a 57 Sqn badge on the nose.

Nonetheless many years later I made a model Washington of 35 Sqn. with that squadron's blue



nose wheel doors. Here it is, taken on a camera built into my I-pad a few months ago.

During my time with 35 Sqn I was taken on a couple of 'Lone Ranger' trips in Canberras, one to RAF Wunsdorf, near Hannover in Germany. These were a navigational exercise for the crew and they nearly always took a junior ground crew member. This one was up the Norwegian west coast, down again to the area of the Friesian Islands, turn east and then inland to Wunsdorf. I sat on the rumble seat, with a headset on, and I seem to remember that it was bloody cold. Arriving over Wunsdorf we had problems with the undercarriage and after much stooging around we had to land on the snowy runway with wheels up or not locked down. That is a story for another time, but I weren't half scared. This aircraft was WH944

and we did not come back in her, we had bent her a little. Years later I made a model of her and here it is.

She was eventually repaired and did come back into service, but not



with 35 Sqn. Sometimes when there was an RAF or USAF 'Open Day' we had to supply an aircraft for a static display, which were usually over a weekend, at various airfields in Britain. Again, a ground crew member, an engine or airframe mechanic, would be taken along for the ride.

Another exciting trip we went on was carrying out a fly past at Basel in Switzerland by four of our Canberras. They had been practicing formation fly pasts for some weeks beforehand, and on the journey to Basel each aircraft carried an aircraft mechanic, engine or airframe, to carry out duties such as changing starter cartridges, dealing with bungs etc. I seem to remember that we stayed there about three days, but as we did not have passports, we were not allowed off base. Basel was a Swiss Air Force base as well as having some civilian aircraft there. Nonetheless we were well looked after and entertained.



Another memorable trip was in a USAF Fairchild C-119G Flying Boxcar which came in from Sculthorpe to Marham to carry our ground crew lads to RAF Geilenkirchen in Germany. Our Canberras were part of a simulated bomber force used to "attack" the British Isles to test the reactions and ability of Fighter Command to defend Britain from bombers coming in from the continent. I think that we stayed at Geilenkirchen for four days before returning in the Boxcar. These Boxcars were fitted with simple seats normally used for paratroopers, so we had to use long back type parachutes and sit along the

aircraft sides. One thing I remember well was the aircraft crew chief/load master who was a big coloured chap who said to us, "pull them straps up real tight unless you want to lose the family jools" (jewels). That caused a laugh! Here is one of my models of a C119G based at Sculthorpe at that time.

In Sept. 1955 an Open Day was held at Marham (a Saturday) and, on the following Monday, a big bombing up exercise was held. Our Canberras were due to take part, and, being parked nearby to those of 115 Sqn, there was a lot of activity and loaded bomb trolleys around. It was mid-morning and luckily most people were having their tea and a wad in the crew rooms. I was one of four people just preparing to carry a new tip tank to be fitted to a Canberra. We were just starting to lift when there was an almighty bang not too far away. Two thousand pounders had blown up on a trolley being pulled by a tractor. Everybody was stunned and, at first, did not really know what it was. We soon found out! We all ran to see what we could do to help, including the Station Commander, who roared across the grass in his Standard Vanguard bouncing so hard he probably damaged the suspension? Scores of people ran over but none of us thought at that moment that more bombs might go off. Fortunately none did. The tractor driver, a Flt Sgt, died and three others received injuries. Many Canberras were full of holes from shrapnel, and some were write-offs. I seem to remember that Station Flight's old Anson was a write-off. Towards the end of 1954 I was told that I was to go on a Valiant course at Gaydon and would be joining 214 Sqn at Marham. Jolly good show as I lived near Norwich, so could continue to use my racing bicycle to and fro.

Peter Walker

Hi Peter. Hope this finds you well.

Just thought I'd drop you a quick note to let you know that after putting it off for about 9 years I've finally got round to doing the "big one": a list of ALL Fortress aircrew on ALL their 1,270-ish sorties from April '44 to May '45 including, where I can, notes about where they came from and went to (immediately before and after their service with 214). To do this I've been buying downloaded copies of the Sqn ORB's month-by-month entries from Kew. It's quite a massive undertaking (c.13,000 names listed so far) and I've been working on it since before Christmas. It'll be far too big to print off a paper copy, but by having it spreadsheet-based I should be able to trace the operational story of everyone who was recorded a flying ops on the Fortresses. So for example, by using the 'filter' function on the spreadsheet I'd be able to answer your enquiry about F/O Young who came and went with only a few ops flown, and who I hadn't picked up on my earlier 'random representative sample' aircrew list. Got another few weeks' work on it yet, doing an hour or so each day when I can. Then final checks, corrections, infills and tidying-up. More anon though. Watch this space ...

All the best, Ian Hunt

Thanks Ian, it will be a valuable source - Ed

Treasurer's Topics

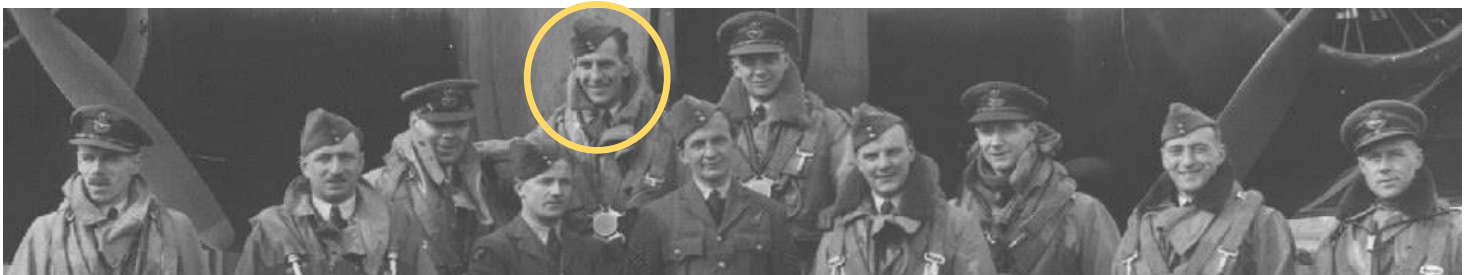
Many thanks to all of you who have paid you subs for 2015. Many of you have a standing order which makes things very easy and saves you forgetting. The problem we have is that 90 members paid subs last year but I send out over 130 copies of each edition of 'Nightjar'. A few of these are complimentary, but not that many!

If you have a guilty conscience, then I am happy to assist, but, in the meantime, I am going through the books in order to send out the odd reminder. With the cost of post and printing increasing I will be unable to send out copies in the future to those who do not contribute. I think that it is only fair to those of you who do pay your subs regularly. I have standing order forms available.

I have produced an overseas edition of 'Nightjar' this time which is on slightly thinner paper and has been folded to fit a C5 envelope. New postage rates make it prohibitively expensive to post A4 envelopes overseas. I hope that this will not detract from your enjoyment of our newsletter.

I would like to give my thanks to everybody who has contributed to this edition. Whilst I assemble the 'Nightjar', I very much rely on copy coming in from you to fill it. Please have a look through your memoirs and send me some interesting stories, with photographs if you have them.

Do you know this man?



I have a photograph in my collection of an unidentified Wing Commander and Group Captain. The Wing Commander looks very much like one of the group standing in front of the Whitley of 138 Squadron. The photograph I have was taken prior to September 1940, a good year before 138 Squadron's stay at Stradishall.

I did wonder if he could possibly be OC 214 Squadron. I can find no names for the CO of the Squadron for this period, all I know is that Station Commander was Group Captain S.B. Harris. If you know any of 214's COs for this period (1939-1941) and know of any source for a photograph of Group Captain Harris, it would be a great help?

The man in question is at the back on the left.

Kind regards

Guy Hudson

Please let us know if you have the answer and we will pass it on to Guy.



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Squadron Website

www.214squadron.org.uk

Web Site Managers

The website is up and running again

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

The Nightjar has been compiled, and proof-read by your committee. It has been converted to a computerised format, printed, assembled, and distributed by the Association Treasurer - John Gulliver.

If you would like to receive your copy of Nightjar electronically, which will save us over £1:50 per copy; please e-mail the Treasurer.