



Nightjar

Centenary - 2017

Summer 2017

Chairman's Letter

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As I write this letter, we are barely two months away from our celebration of the Centenary of the Squadron's formation in 1917 and our final Association reunion. It has been a fairly quiet period over the Winter and Spring, but we now have to start firming up the arrangements at the Hallmark Hotel in Derby and at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas. It is therefore imperative that we have as up-to-date information as possible on those planning to attend on which to base these arrangements.

Both events offer a last opportunity to celebrate one of the RAF's more noteworthy squadrons and the people who served on it. As we have said previously, we hope that as many as possible former members of the Squadron and/or their families and friends will make the effort to attend one or both events, whether or not they are members of the Association. Should either the Reunion Dinner or the lunch at the Arboretum be oversubscribed, priority will obviously be given to Association members. Similarly, the reduced price of the buffet lunch at the Arboretum will apply only to Association

members. Full details of both events and the relevant booking forms are contained elsewhere in this newsletter. So please, if you are considering coming or know of others who might be interested, don't leave action to another day; fill in and post the booking forms or pass them on to someone else who is interested in attending. Do it now!

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in October.

Alan Mawby

Centenary Celebrations

**There is still time to apply, and the booking forms are enclosed.
Join us for the very last formal reunion of the Association as we
celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Squadron**

In Memoriam

Extracts from some e-mails with the sad news of members who have flown skywards

Dear Peter and John

Thank you for the recent copy of the Nightjar and the sad news that the Association is going to wind down. Old soldiers never die, but old airmen just fly away!

In this centenary year, I also have to give you the sad news of the death of my mother, Elsie Williams, who I believe was your oldest member - 100 years and 9 months. She had been in a nursing home since her 100th birthday last May, where she was well cared for but frustrated at her lack of mobility and independence. She tried to make the best of it, in keeping with her character, but we could see her dwindling and fading over these last months.



She died on Thursday, 16 February, painlessly and peacefully. She leaves one daughter (me), one granddaughter, (Melanie), three great-granddaughters (Kyrena, Aveline and Caitlin) and four great-great-grandchildren (Severin, Mireille, Mael and Joline) - all in Switzerland. She was overjoyed at the beginning of February to be able to cuddle and sing to her latest great-great-grandbaby, Joline, exactly 100 years and 7 months her junior, as you can see in this photo. She had a long, mainly healthy and happy life, and has been a blessing and inspiration to very many people. I like to think that she is once again with my father now, and that they are probably enjoying a very happy reunion with many old friends from 214.

Please keep me informed of Squadron news. If at all possible, I will try to attend the last AGM on behalf of my mother, but at present I am unable to make any plans for so far ahead.

When my father died, my mother sent most of his RAF things to the Squadron. However, I do have one or two other little items here, including his logbook, which may be of interest to the Squadron Museum or the RAF Museum. Please let me know if I should send them to you. I understand that the logbook and medals should be together but my cousin has Dad's medals, which he has handsomely displayed together with those of his father and our grandfather from WWI, but they too will revert to the RAF Museum eventually.

Kindest regards

Catherine

It is with great sadness that I am advising you that my father, Alastair McDermid passed away on 23rd February aged 92 at his nursing home with his family.

Alastair served in 214 Squadron at Oulton, Norfolk in 1944 - 1945 as waist gunner in Flying Fortresses carrying out sorties over Germany & Poland. His plane was shot down by an intruder over Oulton on 3/4 March 1945 and he was 1 of only 2 survivors from a crew of 9.

Linda McDermid
Alastair's Daughter

I write to inform you that my mother Mrs Shiela Agnew of sadly passed away in October 2016 aged 91 years. She always enjoyed reading the Historian's Report in Nightjar as she felt it was her last connection to my late father, Gordon Agnew, who died 21 years ago. Thank you for keeping in touch for so many years, all very much appreciated.

I wish you well with the Centenary Celebrations!

Many thanks for your kind comments. In answer to your question regarding my father's (Gordon Agnew) service in Bomber Command during WW2, I am afraid to say that I know very little. He really never spoke about his experiences and what I do know now has been gleaned from a few anecdotes expressed by my Mother in later years. I understand that he was a rear gunner and flew in Wellington and Stirling aircraft, possibly the Lancaster too. He was apparently the sole survivor of a crash in which the whole crew perished in a fire and he was sent somewhere else to fly with another crew the next night. Participation in bombing raids on Dresden and Cologne were mentioned as was dropping food and supplies over Holland.

He and my mother were of that generation for whom the word 'stoic' was clearly very apt, they just got on with life and looked forward. Active and public-spirited people, they gave over a large part of their lives in service to others and were dedicated to their chosen charities.

We miss them terribly and will never see their likes again.

Kind regards,
Marilyn
Marilyn Agnew Keenan

Dear All,

It was with much sadness that I learnt this morning that Gp Capt Peter Hill, who succeeded Sir Michael Beetham as OC 214 Sqn in May 1960, passed away last Friday, 28th April, at the tender age of 96. It is hoped that a formal announcement will appear in the Obituary columns of both The Daily Telegraph and The Times tomorrow morning.

As ever Eric Macey

Posted on PPRuNe on 28 May 2017

Flt Lt W L 'Tommy' Thompson 1927-2017

With immense sadness, I announce the death of my Father, William 'Tommy' Thompson. Blessed with a common name, I wouldn't want him confused with any other 'Tommy Thompson' so for those of you who think you may have known him from the RAF, here's a potted version of his flying life:

Non-Flying Duties (Engine Fitter):

1944-47 48th Entry, No 1 SoTT, Royal Air Force Halton

1947-48 No 4 SoTT, RAF St Athan

1948 RAF Topcliffe (Modification Bay - Wellington, Anson)

Flying Duties (Pilot):

1949 6 FTS, RAF Ternhill (Prentice, Harvard)
1950 203 AFS, RAF Drifffield, 226 OCU RAF Stradishall (Meteor T7, Vampire F1)
1950-53 67 Sqn, RAF Gutersloh, Wildenrath (Vampire FB5)
1953-55 19 Sqn, RAF Church Fenton (Meteor F8)
1955 CFS 'B', RAF South Cerney (Provost)
1955 CFS 'A', RAF Little Rissington (Vampire T11)
1955-57 4 FTS, RAF Middleton St George, RAF Worksop (Vampire T11 plus 19 Sqn for Hunter F6)
1957-60 HQ FTC (Meteor, Vampire, Balliol, Provost, Anson)
1960-63 10 Sqn, RAF Cottesmore (Victor B1)
1963-66 57 Sqn, RAF Honington (Victor B1A)
1966-67 214 Sqn, RAF Marham (Victor B(K)1a)
1967-70 Tanker Trg Flt, RAF Marham (Victor)
1970-74 232 OCU (Simulator) (Victor)
1975 85 Sqn, RAF West Raynham (Canberra B2, T4, T19)
1976-78 100 Sqn, RAF Marham (Canberra B2, T4, E15, T19)
1978-82 Royal Aircraft Establishment Llanbedr (Canberra (mod), Meteor T7, NF11.5, D16, Devon/Dove)
1983 RAF Leeming
1983-87 4 FTS, RAF Valley (Simulator - Hawk T1)

'Snakecharmer' (PPRuNe name)

Many of us on the Victor K1 remember Tommy - especially the pilots who benefitted from his instructional talents.

Brian Vaughan died on 19 January 2017 aged 92. He was a rear gunner on the Wellington and Stirling and served at Stradishall during 1941 - 1942. I regret that I have no further details.

Sidney Pike who lived in Norwich has died at the British Legion home at Cromer in July. He was a navigator on the Fortress at Oulton.

Correspondence:

I have received a charming letter from ACM Sir David Parry-Evans who has sent his good wishes to all Association members for the centenary reunion in October. Sadly, health issues preclude his travelling to Derby.

ACM Sir Anthony Skingsley has e-mailed his apologies for the reunion. Sadly, he had a stroke in 2014 which means that travel is no longer feasible. He also sends his very best wishes to everybody.

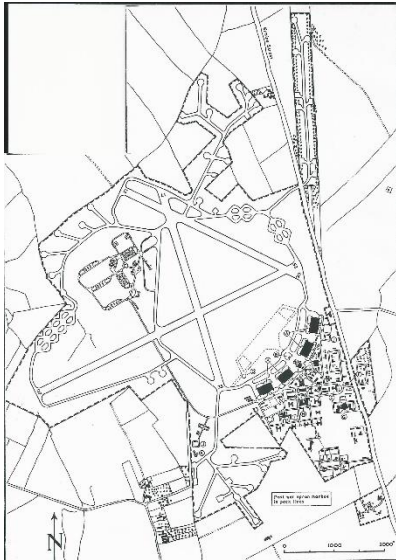
I had the privilege of serving with these two gentlemen when they were consecutive COs of 214 Squadron during the 1970s.

After having me on their Squadron, they both went on to have outstanding careers!

REUNION

By Jock Whitehouse

In wishing to recall the past we have all attended reunions of various kinds (school, college, university, workplace, military service) indeed any reason for 'meeting up' either as a one-off or on a regular basis and whilst most are simply enjoyable others may be classed as memorable. Sorting out some old LPs recently, amongst the 'big-band' pile was the programme for a reunion concert held on 20 June 1974 together with an LP bought at the event and which when played (record decks never date!) brought back very strong memories.

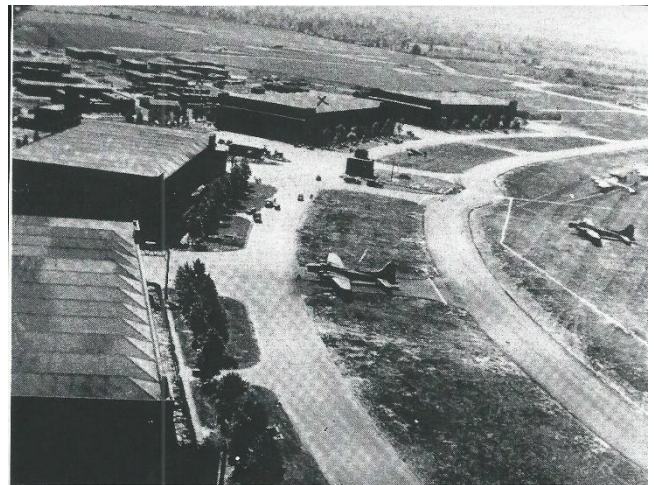


On that very hot June evening my wife Pat, daughter Keely and myself headed for Cambridgeshire for as a member of the East Anglian Aviation Society I had obtained tickets for a 91st Bomb Group, USAAF, Reunion Concert to be held at Bassingbourn Barracks, which as Royal Air Force Bassingbourn had been the home for this famous American unit ('The Ragged Irregulars') and their B17 Flying Fortresses from 1942 until 1945.

RAF Bassingbourn 1942 - 1945
Home of the 91st Bomb Group

The 91st BG were already quite well known by the famous documentary, 'The Memphis Belle' filmed by William Wilder during the

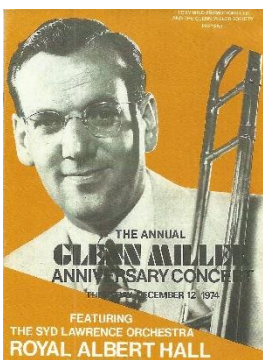
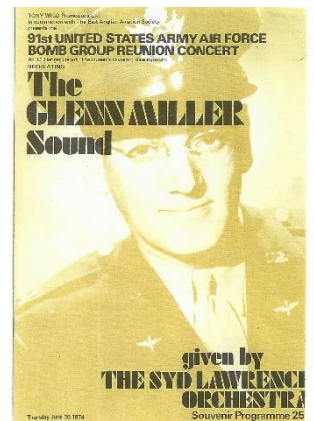
war, and the concert was part of a reunion tour by a number of veterans and their



families and which was being hosted by The Queens Division who were then the occupants of the 'Barracks'. After a thorough vehicle search by armed soldiers on arrival (these were bad times in UK) we drove across the airfield and parked up in front of the big C- Type hangars-recalling various photographs of lines of B17s parked in the same area. Amongst the large number of concert goers were the American veterans easily recognisable by their colourful outfits: the flying jackets, hats, badges and medals on show leaving no-one in doubt as to which wartime outfit they belonged!

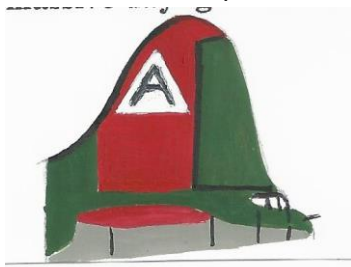


The concert - advertised as recreating 'The Glenn Miller Sound' was staged not just in one of the four hangars' but in hangar 'C', the actual one used by Major Glenn Miller and his Army Air Force Orchestra during their famous tour of USAAF bases in the UK. A number of veterans who were present were indeed able to recall that momentous occasion which had meant so much to



the young Americans in those traumatic years. The musical element for the evening was provided by 'The Syd Lawrence Orchestra' who at the time were by far the best in recreating that famous 'Miller Sound' and their skill plus the whole unique atmosphere promised an evening to remember. There was already a real 'buzz' amongst the audience and when all were seated the tension rose further as we awaited the musicians who were given a wonderful reception as they walked in and took their places. In anticipation, the atmosphere could only be described as

'electric' and doubtless memories for many veterans were already starting to flood back. Dead silence for a moment, but as soon as the first few bars of 'Moonlight Serenade' echoed around that historic hangar 'Pandemonium' for a while as the veterans loudly and excitedly expressed their feelings - there were many moist eyes! All then settled to a memorable evening of great music played brilliantly and so very close to that famous unique sound of years ago but which in fact has never quite been exactly matched.



We could only try to imagine the memories and feelings recalled on that evening when thoughts would have gone back to the scenes in that same hangar where young GIs laboured to repair battle-damaged B17s which often bore grim evidence of the bitter conflict in which the young crews were involved: the 91st BG suffered the highest losses of the campaign losing 197 aircraft for 420 missions flown and, of

course, thoughts for friends who were lost. Driving home having enjoyed a memorable and somewhat emotional evening, I could not help wondering that when the night guard later checked the deserted concert hangar with its memories, whether he would have been totally correct if he believed it to be **empty!** Whatever one chooses to believe, I have my own thoughts! However, it was certainly a Reunion occasion with a difference and certainly one to be remembered.



We went to another Syd Lawrence concert in the December, held this time in the splendour of the Albert Hall. Great music, well played but in a very different atmosphere! For this event, one could stand for 40p or have a Grand Tier Box for £3.00 per seat!

(Thanks to Mr J Hamlin for the Bassingborn map and photo).

RECOMMENDED READING:

Closely linked to my Reunion Concert experience is a book published in 2016. Kevin Wilson's 'BLOOD AND FEARS' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) presents a different slant on the oft- covered American Bomber Offensive flown from the UK. One main point stressed is that as the missions were flown in daylight, sights regularly seen by crews were at times truly horrific and how they dealt with this is well discussed via many interviews. The 91st BG is featured and the value of social life is also covered. This book, whilst not 'enjoyable' in the true sense, is one which should be read.

At the same time, I read 'Target Germany' one of many official publications produced during WW2. Although I have had my copy since childhood I realised that I had not really read it in full. It tells of the American 8th Air Force in its early days and perhaps surprisingly I found it extremely well written in spite of not giving too much away! You can still pick up copies at book fairs etc.

Thanks to Peter, I am enjoying reading a number of his retained copies of Journals of the Royal Air Force Historical Society which are providing a fascinating and informative insight into the many varied presentations, albeit given at a number of levels! Journal No.31(2004) contained a particularly interesting one: namely that of the relatively short presentation given by the Rt Hon The Lord Healey recalling his six years as Defence Secretary. Apart from realising that many of today's problems are really nothing new, one fact which stood out for me was his apparent ability to get on well with the Chiefs of Staff, especially those of the Royal Air Force and his firm belief that his WW2 service proved highly beneficial when talking 'matters military' with 'those who mattered and understood'. All sorts of subjects were briefly covered and not a few questions answered (eg. the background to the TSR2).

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

By Jock Whitehouse

Over the years I have given many (100+) talks to various groups in East Anglia all usually following the same format: specified subject (aviation history), evening meetings (19.30- 10.00 hrs) including refreshments and held in a wide range of venues.

Believing that I had finally 'hung up my projector' I was surprised to receive an invite (via an old work associate) to talk to a local 'Probus' Group and even more so to learn that it was held late-morning and my allocated time would all of 45 minutes! (Impossible). Of course, I should have declined but always willing to take on a challenge, I accepted.

When asked for the title of my talk, and with 45 minutes being my usual 'warm-up' time I could only suggest: 'Aspects of Aviation' (a very wide canvas). Knowing that an audience of retired businessmen of a 'certain age' and of varied tastes would probably not contain any 'aviation buffs' I opted for 'simple'.



Photo from the RAF Stradishall archives

I started with a small memory test by showing them a photograph (Box-Brownie quality) of an investiture held in No.5 Hangar at Stradishall in February 1941 (214-time). "All you have to do, is to study the photo. for 15 seconds, and mentally note what you see. "At the end we will see how you did". This done, I then showed them a fairly light-hearted selection of photos from the 'archive'. Then came the reckoning. The answers

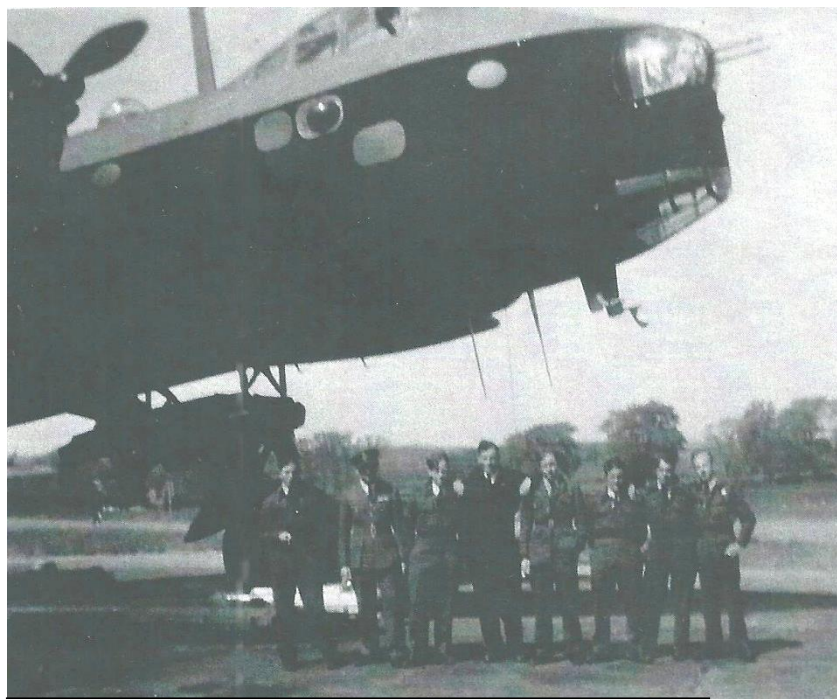
were as expected: 'The King', RAF airmen paraded, other RAF officers accompanying His Majesty, some RAF officers to the left'. I explained that the investiture was the presentation of the DFC to four officer pilots of No.3 Group (those on the left). The large parade was of station personnel and the VIPs were: His Majesty King George VI, Air Vice-Marshal JEA Baldwin - Air Officer Commanding No 3 Group, and Group Captain SM Park - Station Commander of RAF Stradishall. Although all present had done their best, they had, in fact, all failed, for like myself and others they had concentrated on the main picture. If they had looked harder, in the background they would have seen a dark outline of a large single radial engine and a profile of very unusual high wings. This was a Westland Lysander as, at this time operating out of No.5 hangar, was No.1419 (SD) Flight run by SOE. As far as I am aware, this is the only photograph of a Stradishall - based black Lysander of SOE, albeit taken unofficially and probably unknown by a WAAF Cypher Officer, one of several historic shots this lady took on that day. Thankfully the audience found it of interest. To emphasise the point, I then risked showing them a rather mildly risqué cartoon based on the motto of No.16 Squadron: 'Hidden things are revealed'. All survived! For their further interest, I identified the four medal recipients along with their subsequent histories which just added a little reality behind the exercise:

F/O Lloyd Watt Coleman (of New Zealand) No. 149 Squadron: Immediate DFC (Bar to first DFC). Died as a S/L on 11 March 1942 when Stirling R9295 of 149 Sqn crashed on landing back at Mildenhall. Buried at Beck Row. This experienced officer had completed 53 operations and had read Law at Cambridge.

P/O Victor Fernley Baker Pike No.58 Squadron: Killed as a F/L on 9 April 1941 in Stirling N6011 of No.7 Squadron flying operations from Newmarket. Buried Reischwald Forest.

P/O Alwyn Crampton Hamman (of South Africa) No.115 Squadron: Won a second DFC. Killed on 30 May 1942 on the first 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne. He flew as a F/L instructor on No.22 OTU in Wellington RI714. Buried Rheinberg.

F/L John Leighton Beck: Wellington captain on No.214 (FMS) Squadron at Stradishall. Survived the war to follow a distinguished career in the RAF. He knew nothing of these photographs taken on the day, but I was able to provide him with copies many years later.



Stirling N3751 (B-UP) Stradisall - May 1942

Possibly prior to the 1000 bomber raid.

Photo from the late Bill Wildey who donated his personal photo album.

He is pictured on the extreme right.

Sgt Frank Griggs took P-Peter to Cologne and back

Overall the talk went down well and I was able to finish within the allotted time. I hear that I may be asked back! I also gleaned a little piece of unknown history. Due to a missing Station Diary, we have never found details of the 30 Horsa gliders stored at Stradishall in 1944, always assuming that they were destined for D-Day, but one gentleman told of a friend who, as a lad, had seen a Dakota leaving Stradishall towing a glider. His recollection was that the Dakota carried the black & white bands, which puts it post-D-Day. The glider could well have been ear-marked for a later lift - perhaps we will never know.

I have already mentioned the first 1,000 bomber raid, but I am actually writing

this on 31st May - the 75th Anniversary of that remarkable event which has recently been in print. An excellent article appearing in the current issue of 'Britain at War' includes a well-designed layout of casualties (men, machines and squadrons) and it is interesting to note that of the total number of bombers dispatched over 600 were Wellingtons - the might of the 'heavies' was to come. However,

No 214 Squadron, only just having converted to the Stirling at Stradishall were told to select their best crews and along with other No.3 Group Stirlings flew as an-all incendiary force ahead of the main force in order to 'light the target' which they did successfully. The article also includes an impressive photograph of a Stirling awaiting its substantial load of incendiaries, but although the unit and station are not identified (codes on another aircraft cannot be deciphered), with a C-type hangar in the background, we could well imagine it to be Stradishall. No.214 Squadron lost one crew that night, probably as a result of a mid-air collision.

At least one very senior officer flew on the raid. Air Vice-Marshal JEA Baldwin (AOC No.3 Group) boarded a Stirling of No.218 Squadron at Marham and was returned safely. Over Cologne that night were also a number of ex-214 men, who had moved on after their first Wellington tours with the squadron, usually flying in the instructor role.

A rather nice end-piece to this 'linked-ramble'. At the time of Cologne, the Station Commander at Stradishall was Group Captain Dermot Boyle. His log book shows several 'ops' flown with both 214 and 101 Squadrons, and when I was privileged to meet him during our research, he recalled those times with

CALL SIGN		SQUADRON		AIRCRAFT		NAME OF CAPTAIN		TAKE OFF	E.T.A. TARGETS	E.T.R.	LANDED	BOMB LOAD	DELAY	M.T. SEC'Y		L.R.	ROUTE	FIX	STRESS
PT 9				NO	LETTERS														
CJ1		214		497	C	S/L NIXEY		2258	0055	0315	0314								
					T	F/L TURTLE		2308	0055	0315	0302								
					Z	S/L RYALL		CANCELLED											
					O	S/L CARR		2311	0055	0315	0310	1440	(41) INCS						
					S	S/L GASPER		2313	0055	0315	0347	48	(30) INCS						
					G	S/L TONKIN		2352	0119	0339	0423								
					P	S/L GRIGGS		2315	0055	0315	0325								
					F	S/L ORDISH		2327	0055	0315	0336								
					H	S/L FINCH		2320	0055	0315	0332								
					B	S/L ALLEN		2330	0057	0317	0120								
					U	S/L SMITH		CANCELLED				4600	(0) HC						
					E	S/L MUIR		2335	0102	0322		180	(4) INCS						
					A	S/L MASSIE		2355	0122	0342	0321								
					M	S/L FLEMING		0033	0200	0420	0403								
					B	S/L JOHNSON		2359	0126	0346	0130								
M60-3WZ		23 OT		630	L	S/L EWART		2337	0157	0432	0415								
					B	S/L WALKER		2339	0153	0434	0154								
					H	S/L PARKER		2341	0201	0437	0357	3	(500) GFTI						
					F	S/L KIMPTON		0005	0225	0500	0135	240	(4) INCS						
					X	S/L BRECKON		2343	0203	0438	0458								
ZTK-FTB		1483		650	C	S/L ERCOLANI		2337	0130	0422	0411	5	(500) GFTI						
					H	S/L BARRETT		2340	0133	0432	0401	60	(4) INCS						
					L	S/L MASTER		2344	0137	0435	0413								
SVB-K50		109		700	U	S/L EDDY		2250											
					A	S/L DOEL		2351											
					Q	S/L MACKENZIE		0003											

RAF Stradishall's Ops board for the first 1000 bomber raid on 30/31 May 42 showing the Captains of 214 Sqn's Stirlings. Sgt Muir and crew were lost over the target. F/L Ercolani DSO took a Wellington crew from 1483 Gunnery Flight (Newmarket) and returned safely. F/L Turtle returned safely but was killed a few nights later. F/S Eddy of 109 Sqn was shot down near the target, but survived as a POW with 2 of his crew.

affection, and was full of praise for the men under his command. His daughter later loaned me a photograph of the Stradishall 'Ops Board' for the night of 30/31 May. No.214 Squadron: 13 crews detailed. 2 cancelled. 1 Failed to return.

One recent entry in the visitor's book at Stirling House is that of the grandson of Sir Dermot Boyle. Unfortunately, he left no contact address. Full Circle.

Jock Whitehouse

Some more contacts:

I received a telephone call from Fred Wheeler, not a member of the Association, but who had heard about the reunion. He flew 33 missions with 214 flying the wellington as a Wop/AG. Sadly, he is unable to travel.

A second call was from Ray Smith who was on 214 in the early seventies as a Nav Radar on the Victor K1. I remember him being on the Sqn and then leaving when there was the first of several redundancies being offered to aircrew.

JUST BY CHANCE

By Jock Whitehouse

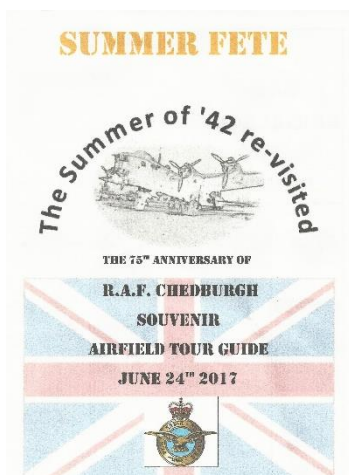
In March, a friend and I visited IWM Duxford mainly to see how far work had progressed on the major refurbishment of the BBMF Lancaster. Arriving early and confirming that the small (very) public viewing cabin was open, we made our way to the large new hangar operated by the Aircraft Restoration Company (ARC) who were undertaking the project, only to find that both doors were locked. A lady at the reception area offered to check with IWM, but at that point a member of ARC staff came out of the hangar and on hearing of our small problem offered to take us over to the viewing cabin via the hangar. Naturally we hesitated by the Lancaster which confronted us, and after making a few comments struck up a conversation with our 'escort' which turned into very detailed explanation on the complexities of the work involved, and a chance to appreciate the high levels of skills being employed. We told our host quite a few things about the aircraft's local visits over the years including a photograph I had of her at Duxford's first air-day in October 1973 before she was fitted with a mid-upper turret, and the fact that her front-turret had been gifted by our local Haverhill ATC Squadron. It had stood outside for years at their HQ but although a little 'green', was in good condition. (See: 'A Lancaster at Peace' by S/L Ray Leach which details the original restoration to flight started in 1965 and covers the time of PA474 in East Africa when on No. 82 Squadron when our own Sir Michael Beetham flew 45 hours in her).



I also mentioned a visit made to RAF Coningsby in 1976 when I presented the Flight with eight nearly-new 'Merlin' exhaust-stacks found on Stradishall's old dump area. After expressing our very grateful thanks, one hour later, we finally arrived at the small viewing cabin, where we took a few fairly indistinct photographs through the clutter of the workshop (none allowed in the work area unfortunately!). So what a visit it turned out to be! A day to remember when Lady Luck had certainly smiled on us, although I doubt whether my plea that one side of the aircraft should carry unit markings of No.3 Group (which flew many G-H daylight operations in 1944/45) will be heard, that honour usually going to Lincolnshire! We now look forward to seeing and hearing a very smart Lancaster on a busy display programme.

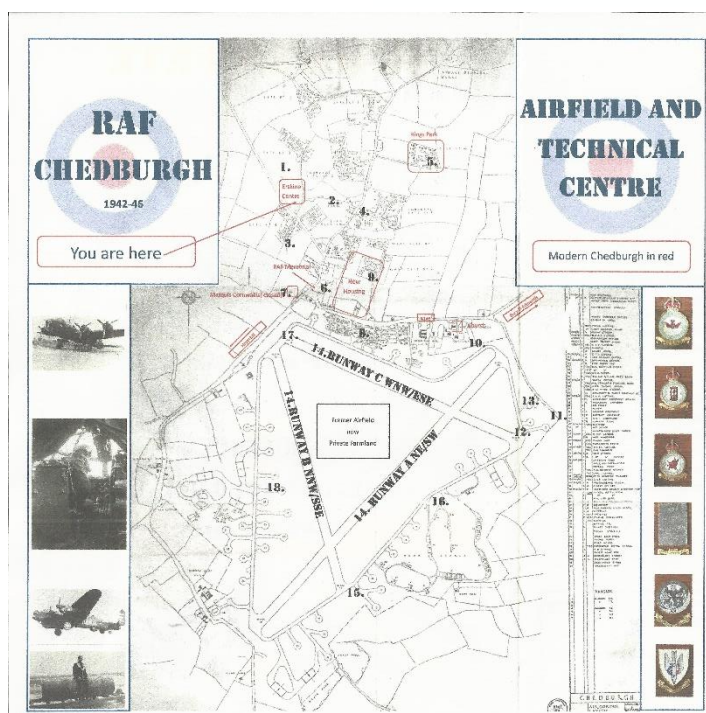
SUMMERTIME CELEBRATIONS

By Jock Whitehouse



On Saturday 24th June, Chedburgh village held its annual Summer Fete and for this year. Apart from the usual fun activities, there was an element of Remembrance, namely the 75th Anniversary of the opening of Royal Air Force Chedburgh in October 1942, hence the theme title: 'The Summer of '42 Remembered'.

A gloriously bright and sunny day brought out the crowds to enjoy a packed programme which started with a short service of Remembrance and the laying of a wreath at the RAF Memorial when the few villagers who wore '42 styles of attire plus the large number of classic and military vehicles in the background certainly helped 'set the scene'.



Key

1. You are here
2. Sick quarters
3. Site No. 4
- 4/5 Areas of off Queens Lane
6. R.A.F Memorial
7. The Marquis Cornwallis
8. Control Tower
9. WAAF Quarters
10. Church
11. Rede airfield entrance
12. Perimeter Track/Dispersal
13. Petrol dump/pumping station
14. Runways A,B and C (not the actual names)
15. Perimeter Track southern end.
16. Bomb stores/Hanger base
17. Western airfield entrance
18. Petrol dump, now a wildlife feature/hanger area

A pictorial exhibition depicting those years of 1942-1946 drew a lot of interest, and as might be expected 214 Squadron was well covered along with 620 Squadron (formed in June 1943 from 'C' Flight of 214), 218 Squadron, 1653 HCU and the two post-war 301 and 304 Polish squadrons. Hopefully the story of RAF Chedburgh was of interest to those newer families who have settled in the village, probably unaware of the piece of wartime history which surrounds them.

The last entry in Chedburgh's Flying Log was recorded on 30 November 1946 and read:

"Weather cloudy and hazy at first, then moderate or intermittent rain at noon, becoming fair visibility, and good at night".

But, it had no relevance for the buildings were mostly deserted, the flare paths unlit, and dispersals eerily silent. There was no feverish activity as groundcrew made the final preparations to their Stirlings or Lancasters and there was no excited or nervous chatter as the young aircrew in heavy flying clothes left their transport to climb into their aircraft. There was no swelling roar as one by one the Hercules or Merlin engines were started and run up for those last minute checks.

No nervous crossing of fingers as the heavily laden bombers accelerated down the runway to lift off and again set course for 'Fortress Europe'.

This last night passed peacefully with no need to wait anxiously for the returning bombers and their crews. No more would Chedburgh's young warriors, drawn from so many countries and different walks of life, go forth to fight their battles in the distant darkened and deadly skies of Europe. No longer would they have to die or suffer maiming for the cause of freedom. They had done all that was ever asked of them and for so many, and their loved ones, the price had been tragically high for the freedom that we now enjoy.

Also on offer (by kind permission of two landowners) was the chance to 'tour' the airfield in a genuine 1948 Bedford 29-seater coach (who remembers those?) which after a spell of outside redundancy, had been re-furbished and is now pristine in its original colours. The trip itself was memorable with the old vehicle (no power-steering or air-conditioning) gamely dealing with parts of the old peri-track and runways which were not quite of motorway standard! But it, its driver and a willing guide survived three fully-booked tours which were enjoyed by all. It is comforting to think that in addition to all the official/professional coverage of history, simple 'on the spot' events such as above, organised with sincerity by ordinary folk ensure that the service and sacrifices of the past are not forgotten.

This article has come from the Historical Association of Leuden in the Netherlands who are dedicating a memorial in February 2018 to the 8 crew who are buried in the village. [Read the note at the end.](#)

The Demise of Stirling R9197

Caju ter Kuile



In the darkness, a Bf 110 approaches its prey, a British bomber, from behind.

On 3 February 1943, barely an hour and a half after the Short Stirling Mk 1 (serial R9197, radio call sign BU-V) took off on a mission to Hamburg from the British station in Chedburgh, the aircraft was attacked and taken down by a German night fighter whose pilot also died in the action. The only survivor of the encounter that took place at around 8 PM was German navigator Kurt Bundrock, who later reported the event.

In *Der Landser Grossband*, a series of reports on the Second-World War, number 90 includes a description of the experiences of Bundrock as navigator / gunner in a Messerschmitt Bf 110.

We start our story on the night of 3 February. The German night hunt command guided the Knacke / Bundrock team to a Handley Page Halifax in the centre of the Netherlands. At least, that's what Kurt Bundrock thought. But he was wrong. In actual fact, it was guided to the Short Stirling (serial R9250, code AA- W) from 75 Squadron on its way from RAF Newmarket to Hamburg. This aircraft, under the command of New Zealander K.H. Blicoe, dropped its bomb load early, but despite the reduction of weight and evasive manoeuvres, it could not escape from its German opponent. After four attempted attacks, the burning **Stirling** that had been taken for a **Halifax** crashed. Bundrock: "It happened so quickly. I had only just registered this one when the next one appeared on my Lichtenstein [radar, Ed]."

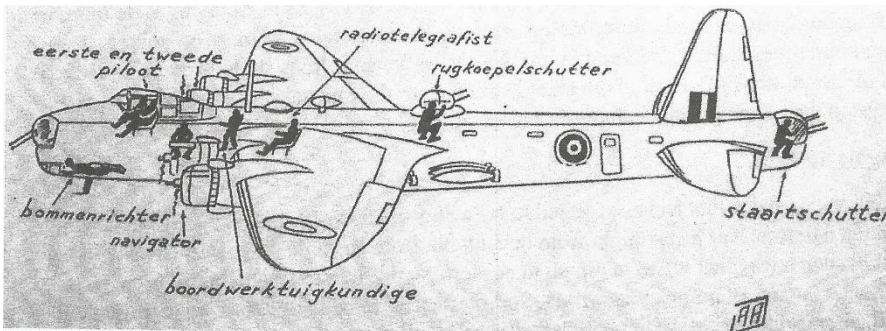
With help of the radar the night fighters were each assigned their own sector in which to operate and intercept potential victims. With the help of a powerful new Wurzburg ground radar, the night hunt command guided them towards targets in the area. The Wurzburg determined not only the direction of the enemy plane, like the Freya radar that had been in operation longer did, but also the altitude. Once they were close and the enemy plane had been identified, the fighter crew would take control and inform the flight control team about the launch of attack with the words '*Pauke! Pauke!*' (a code signal). Of course a bomber would just be 'passing through' the sector on its way to the target area or on its way back home, so the trick was to act quickly or the bird would have flown. Obviously it was almost impossible to have a go at every enemy plane in the target area. Initially the air attacks on targets in Germany were more or less random but gradually the bombing missions became more and more organized. It wasn't long before they started operating in groups, and entire squadrons started launching attacks. As the aerial war progressed, both sides learned from their mistakes and weaknesses and adjusted their strategy and techniques accordingly.

Engine on fire

Bundrock explains that Knacke wanted to try a new method of attack that they had already practiced before. Not just straight from behind but from an angle. "I guided Knacke to the Brit in such a way that it had to dip up to our left. It appeared to be another four-engine Halifax." Again, Bundrock was wrong. Shortly after, it turned out to be 'our' Stirling. Oh well, aircraft identification in pitch darkness and in the heat of the battle ... "Knacke moved from right to left, shooting as he went. The salvo must have been well-aimed, because the right outboard engine caught fire. We were now to the left, behind the British

plane, that had started to lurch defensively during the first attack. The rear gunner kept firing continuously and the tracer bullets were coming right at us. Knacke now flew from left to right, accelerating the plane and firing as he went. There was no visible result, but it must have worked, because the rear gunner in the British plane stopped firing. Right to left again, but we missed target this time because the opponent was manoeuvring wildly. Not only that, but the mid upper gunner was also keeping us under fire whenever possible."

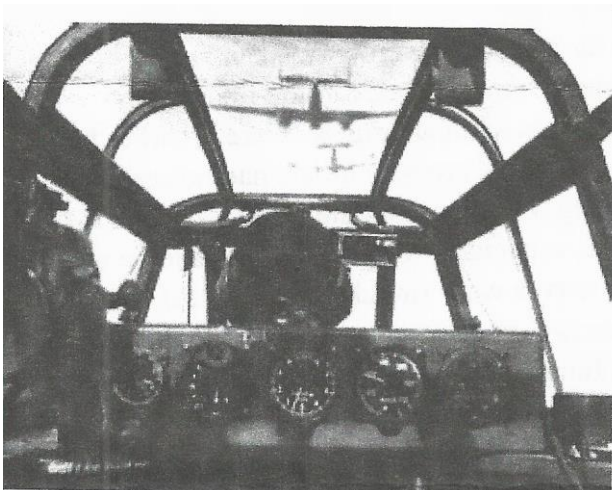
Vulnerable despite darkness



Drawing of a Short Stirling and the positions of the crew members

It must have been a terribly harrowing experience for the Stirling crew. We can hardly imagine what it must have been like. Naturally, Captain Smith reacted to the first enemy impact on his aircraft by making stomach-turning lurches in an attempt to make it harder for the enemy to aim with any accuracy. Maybe he or one of the crew members had noticed the danger

earlier on, but what hope was there of avoiding the enemy or deterring them, chasing them off or even destroying them with defensive fire, especially with an aircraft as large as the Stirling, carrying heavy, dangerous load? Their nerves were stretched to the limit, all eyes were on the threat that was lurking outside in the pitch-dark sky and on the tasks that had to be performed on board. The huge machine was bobbing and hopping in Captain Smith's hands, and he was the only one who could initiate and predict the outcome of the wild defensive manoeuvres. Every crew member, restricted in their freedom of movement by heavy aviator clothing, inconvenient oxygen masks and the narrow Stirling body, could be hit by a missile fired from the barrels on the Messerschmitt at any minute. Those bullets and grenades would cut straight through the aluminium skin of the bomber. There was nowhere to hide. The mid upper gunner and the rear gunner in their tiny turrets were especially vulnerable. They didn't exactly have ready access to an escape hatch. The occupants wouldn't even have prepared their parachutes yet, since moving would have become completely impossible if they had. The freezing cold temperatures at an altitude of four or five kilometres, the racket of the engines and the wind, and the stench of fuel, lubricants and exhaust fumes must have been unbearable. And all of this for five or six hours straight, assuming that the mission was to be completed. What it must have been like inside an aircraft that was off-balance, losing height, spiralling downwards and crashing because of enemy fire or whatever other reason doesn't bear thinking about. The crew members of the bomber were genuine heroes who did their duty with no regard for their own safety.



The view from Bundrock's position behind pilot Knacke

Hitting the attacker

Kurt Bundrock asked his captain if he wanted to try another attack with the old approved method straight from behind or from below and behind - the Stirling's engine fire had stopped and the bomber had no visible damage. The navigator continues his account: "I'm going to try one more time," Knacke answered, and so we switched from left to right again and again we missed. Now he flew left under the 'Halifax' and began the fifth attack from below, to the left. Trails of light entered the left wing between the body and the left inboard engine, after which Knacke manoeuvred the aircraft to a position behind the British aircraft and to the left.

At that moment, the bullets from the mid upper gunner hit our aircraft; I saw the trail coming at Knacke and me with lightning speed. Blazing light, fire! Probably the circulation pipe between the right and left wing tanks had been hit. The burning paraffin was spurting into the air. I heard Knacke announce something over the intercom. It sounded like '*raus*' [out] or '*aussteigen*' [get out], but it also could have been some kind of groaning as if he had been hit by the British fire ... "

Parachute landing

The left emergency handle of the cockpit canopy was already covered in flames, and when Bundrock turned and reached for the rear handle it was swinging on a thread and unusable. Then he reached his right arm through the flames to pull out the front handle, and it worked. "The canopy flew off, flames were lapping at my face, I pushed off with my feet and the howling gush of air lifted me out of the cockpit. I fell and tumbled into the dark night. Our machine disappeared immediately and then I noticed I was on fire." His fall fanned the flames, but by beating at them Bundrock managed to get the fire under control despite the frightening shower of sparks. He didn't panic, and managed to open the parachute. It unfolded quite easily and was still intact. Hanging from the parachute, Bundrock witnessed the two burning aircraft crashing to the ground kilometers apart from each other. The German assumed he would land on Dutch ground, but he didn't have a clue where! "I knew the Zuiderzee must be somewhere north from where we were, because we hadn't flown that far in that direction." Eventually, in pitch-darkness, he landed safely, his parachute getting stuck in a birch that bent slightly under the weight and brought him 'comfortably' down to earth. "Half a meter in front of me was a high barbed wire fence - I felt like the luckiest man on earth. I felt my limbs and everything seemed to be all right; I wasn't wounded or anything!"

The end of the Messerschmitt

Bundrock spotted a weak light a little distance away, and walked towards it. It led him to a detached house. When he knocked and shouted, a woman opened the door. The disheveled, grubby character made her recoil in horror. He asked her politely if he could freshen himself up a bit and whether she had a telephone. Eventually he managed to make contact with the home base in Venlo and with the local *Ortskommandantur* and was then put in touch with Mayor Joachim Westrik of the town of Barneveld, who had received notification of a crashed aircraft and a dead aviator. Bundrock's captain, Major Werner Streib, wanted him to identify the casualty; of course they were afraid that it might be Knacke. When Kurt Bundrock and the mayor arrived at the scene (on the Helweg), their fears were confirmed. Bundrock recognized his *Hauptmann* in the bent-figure that was lying next to an opened parachute, not far from the smoking wreckage of the Messerschmitt. He recognized him by his Knight's Cross, not by his face, which was badly damaged. Bundrock thought he had been shot in the head, but wasn't sure. Anyway, it seemed that the bomber's mid upper gunner had hit his target, but that Knacke had managed to evacuate the aircraft before it smashed into the ground.

A new pilot for Bundrock

On 6 February 1943, Kurt Bundrock's 26th birthday, Captain Reinhold Knacke was buried with full military honours in the military cemetery at Luftwaffe Base Fliegerhorst Deelen near Schaarsbergen/ Arnhem. Major Streib urged Bundrock to take some time off, so he went to Kitzbuhel to recuperate. While he was in Austria, the sixth German army suffered a humiliating defeat near Stalingrad, which marked the beginning of the nazi downfall. When Werner Streib's regular navigator ended up in the hospital following a landing accident, the squadron leader asked Bundrock to cover for him. Streib was promoted several times, as well as becoming an executive for General der Jagdflieger Adolf Galland in Berlin-Gatow in 1944. Bundrock remained with Streib and survived the war. All crew members of both Stirlings died and were buried in the Commonwealth Field of Honour at Rusthof cemetery in Leusden.

[The story behind this article, an e-mail from Peter Walker:](#)

John, I have recently received a letter from The Historical Association of Leusden of The Netherlands from a Dr. Schothorst. It is regarding a 214Sqn. Stirling that was shot down by a night fighter on 3rd. February 1943 coming down at Leusden. The aircraft was R9197 BU-V which had taken off from Chedburgh to bomb Hamburg, all 8 crew on board were killed. They are buried in the General cemetery at Oud Leusden. To commemorate the 75 years since this aircraft was shot down the good folks of the Hist. Assn. of Leusden are planning to lay a memorial stone near the crew graves on 3rd. of February next year (2018) and would hope that some relatives of the crew or someone representing the Sqn could attend. They have been carrying out a lot of research and in recent years, including access to the logbook of the navigator of the Messerschmitt that shot them down. This log shows that the rear gunner of the Stirling was responsible for shooting down the enemy night fighter whose pilot was killed in the crash (Kapitan Knacke).

The Leusden Assn. people have carried out a lot of research into this crash and are proposing to shortly issue a brochure about their findings with photos, printed in both English and Dutch.

John, could you please put this story into the next Nightjar, to hopefully draw people's attention of the ceremony that is planned in Leusden next year. You never know we might turn up someone who might know someone who might enjoy a visit to Holland on a cold February day to see a new memorial stone being laid by the good folk of Leusden. If anyone is interested in attending, request that they get in touch with me, even if next year.

[This is an e-mail I have received from Gail Elliott with some nostalgia from Bob Butler \(at the end of the arrows\), her father's time on 214 Squadron during the war.](#)

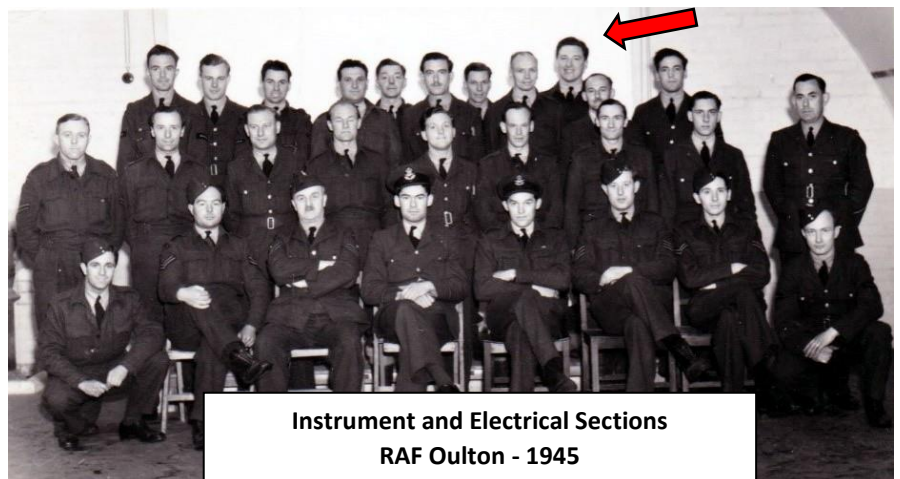


I have finally dug some things out, and got my scanner working. I don't know if they are of any interest for inclusion in the Nightjar. I had intended to do this some months ago, but got side tracked.

I have attached some photos from 1944 & 1945. They are all annotated on the reverse by my father, but the writing is rather faint. He refers to Oulton Street, rather than just Oulton.

When we visited the exhibition at Blickling, I was amazed to see copies of the VE photos there, so I guess Dad donated them. Whilst there, I was also interested to see the local police log book, recording all the convictions and fines imposed for cycling without lights. This was a story my Dad delighted in telling, under the title "Did you know I have a criminal record". Apparently he was caught cycling back from the pub one evening, in the dark, and without lights on his bike.

It would seem that the bicycles were issued to personnel so that they could get around the airfield quickly. As the bicycles were really designed to be used mainly during the day, and on base, then they were not fitted with lights but, needless to say, they were also found useful for getting to the local pub quickly, but at night. Some "culprits" were quick off the mark when they saw the local police, and dumped the bikes by the roadside and made a run for it, so they would not be caught, hoping to go back later to retrieve the bike. My Dad was not so quick, and got caught, and subsequently was fined and got his "criminal record".





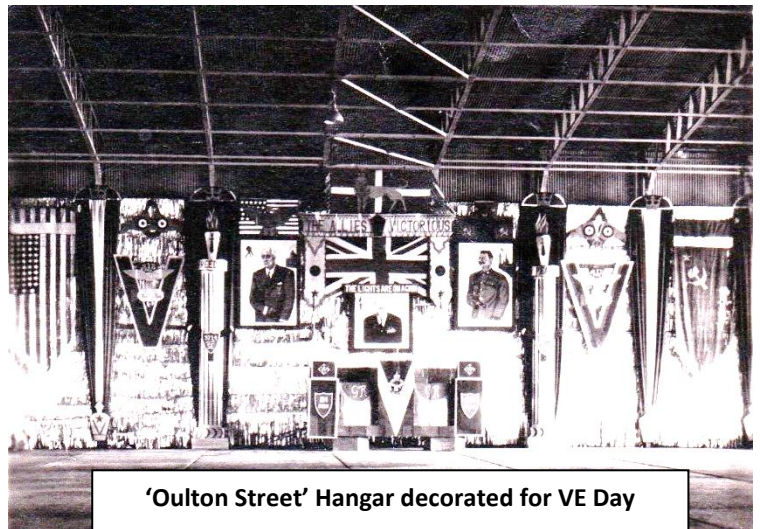
VE Day - Hitler destined for the bonfire!

Looking at the numerous entries for this misdemeanour. I would think that the local police would lie in wait to catch culprits, and it was almost a regular nightly event. I would have loved to have flicked through the police log book and find my Dad's conviction.

I would think that some of the evenings in the pub could get quite merry, and one story my Dad told me, was of when someone suggested cutting off the ends of the ties of everyone, so that they could be pinned up in the pub bar. Unfortunately, when it was discovered next day that all those at the pub the previous night now had only half a tie, it was made very clear that the most senior person present that evening, had the responsibility of getting replacements PDQ at their own expense, as so many ties needed replacing, or they might be up on a charge of permitting the mutilation of government property.

I have attached the front pages of the booklets which I have, some are dated 1943. I believe some are propaganda drops made by the RAF, and are in various languages, I do not know much more about them. I remember Dad talking about preparing aircraft which were to take "agents" across to France, and seeing them board the planes, but where and when that was I do not know. It would be interesting to know more about them. I seem to remember in the late 50s/early 60s, being told that he should not have kept copies, why I don't know.

I now have put most things together in a box, and these include all Dads manuals, work books and notes, his service record cards etc, and a Royal Air Force issue writing pad which urges the writer to write on both sides for economy, and a pre-stamped forces letter. A little snapshot in time. I also have a 1941 issue blue shirt, and 1943 issue crew trousers. Both in excellent condition. I think that we would like to find appropriate homes for these in due course, if they are of any interest to anyone.



'Oulton Street' Hangar decorated for VE Day

in



Where are they now?

John, here is a chap to whom you have sent quite a few Nightjars to over the years. His name is John Lyall, a long-standing member, who lives in Bull Creek, Perth, WA. Here he is recently in The RAAF Museum at Bull Creek where he lives in a RAAF veterans home. John is a former air gunner and flew in Stirlings and Fortresses. His pilot was the late Jeff Bray. He was last at one of our Reunions about 14 years ago. He is about 93/94 years of age.

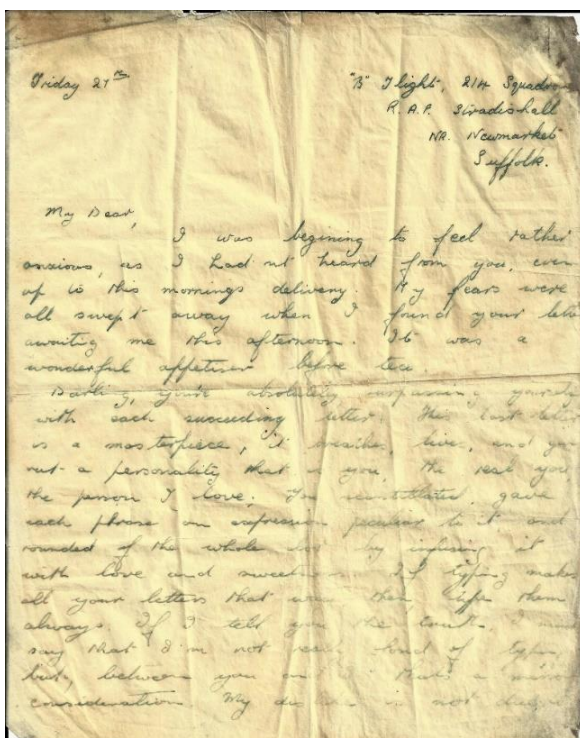
Peter M. Walker.



Lost Members:

Each time I send out the *Nightjar* I have one or two returned. Sadly some are marked 'Deceased', but annoyingly some just say 'Moved Away' and I have no means of finding out where unless they contact me. One hint is where their subs standing order is cancelled which does not bode well and I have to assume the worst.

The latest return was from Glen McKay in Canada, so does anybody know where he is?



You may remember the love letter published in the last *Nightjar*. Jock has done some research and has found that it was sent to 62 Pope Road, Bromley where a Mr & Mrs Stringer were living in 1939, although we do not know if they were there throughout the war. There was also a Miss Simmonds at that address but, as she was aged 44 in 1941, she was probably not the writer of the letter. It is possible that there was a WAAF billeted there from RAF Biggin Hill but who is to know. It will probably remain a mystery, but I wonder how the story ended.

John

The next *Nightjar* at the end of the year will be the last, so if you have a story to tell then please send it to me as soon as you can.

John

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