



Tempsford Veterans and Relatives Association



Newsletter
Summer 2012

Welcome to the Summer 2012 edition of the TVARA newsletter.

In this issue we will cover topics as diverse as a visit to France to the grave of a relative, the dropping of agents in Norway, and the “building” of a crew of relatives.

There are also reports on our “gathering” in June and the opening of a branch in Australia. On top of all that we have the details of what has been described as one of the most important operations of the war and, on a completely different tack, how a scoop purchase on Ebay helped to feed the street animals in Bob’s town of Sitia in Crete. A real mixed bag!

...and finally, there are details of the Remembrance Sunday Service!

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FROM "THE UNDERGROUND"
Forger, to son who has altered his
School Report: "Miserable boy, where
did you learn to do this?"
Son: "From you of course!"



Photo courtesy of Tangmere Museum

Whitley V, Z9131 'Q' (Queenie)'s last flight.

On the evening of the 24th September 1942, at RAF Tempsford, in Bedfordshire, the seven crew members of Whitley V, Z9131, 'Q' for Queenie, climbed aboard their aircraft. They had a mission that night to drop two agents, 6 containers and some crates of pigeons to two drop sites in Belgium on Operation MONGOOSE 2 /PRIMO.

Normally a Whitley V would carry a crew of 5, however in the early SD (Special Duties) days, a co-pilot was carried plus a volunteer from ground trades who usually sat in the rear of the fuselage with the agent(s) to see that he/she (or they) parachuted safely from the aircraft together with the packages. Later this crew member was given the rank of sergeant and was called the dispatcher. At the controls was the captain Pilot Officer Boothby with his co-pilot Sgt. Quirk alongside him. Sitting at his plotting table immediately behind the pilot was the navigator/observer W/O Rayson. Pilot Officer Reed, the wireless operator/gunner sat at his radio set a little further back. Sergeant Franklin manned the guns in the rear turret.

The aircraft's only armament consisted of two machine gun positions. The front and the rear. When the need arose one air gunner would occupy the space in the nose of the aircraft and man the single Vickers .303 machine gun. This position was normally taken by the wireless operator if the aircraft came under attack. At the far end of the long slab-sided fuselage was the rear turret; this had four Browning .303 machine guns in it and was the best protected part of the aircraft. This was Sgt Ron Franklin's office! He was a "Tail-end Charlie" as they became known in the RAF. Also carried within the long fuselage were the two dispatchers. Here they sat on the floor of the aircraft with the valuable cargo - two agents and the packages that were to be dropped with them. Tonight it was Sgt Blyth and F/Sgt Clayton's job to see the two agents on their perilous journey into France along with their equipment.

The take-off time was set for 20:30 hrs. After the initial flight checks the aircraft taxied around to the main runway and set off. It was airborne at 20:40 hrs.

The pilot's report read as follows:-

"Although there was cloud and rain over Northern France, visibility was clear over the target area but began to deteriorate rapidly".

"After crossing the English coast at Beachy Head at 22:00 hrs at a height of 2,00ft, we crossed the French coast at approximately 22:30 hrs at Point Haut-Blanc and set course for Guise, and then for the loop in the river at Givet and on to PRIMO pinpoint. Here we dropped our two passengers and their packages from 500 ft. This completed we then set course for MONGOOSE 2 pinpoint and found the target area. Switched signal light on when A/C near and the code "R" was flashed. The load (containers and pigeons) was dropped from 500 ft. heading South. I then signalled, on downward recognition light, and the reception lights went off. We then set course for base and almost immediately noticed a Glycol leak in port engine. We jettisoned anything we could in an effort to lighten the aircraft, now at 1,500 ft at 10 miles S.W. of Givet. I managed to climb to 3,000 ft but had to switch off the engine in case it went on fire. We continued flying on our one good engine for some distance but we continued to loose height. We had no other choice but to abandon the aircraft so I gave the order for the crew to bale out when down to 1,300 ft about 43 Kms. north of Reims in the Ardennes area. The aircraft crashed two fields away from me and burst into flames. After making a safe descent, I left the vicinity as quickly as possible. This happened about 01:13 hrs. 25th September. 1942".

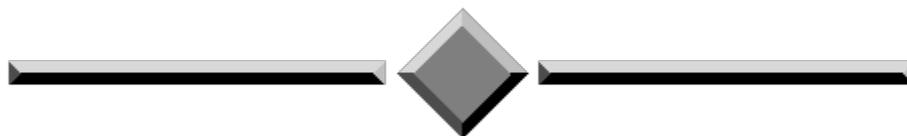
Pilot Officer Boothby managed to evade capture, as did Sgt. Blyth and Pilot Officer Reed. Flt Sgt. Clayton, Sgt. Quirke and W/O Rayson were captured and became P.O.Ws. Sgt. Franklin had also managed to bale out but it seems his parachute failed to open properly and he fell, landing in a field close to the village of Sevigny-Waleppe in the Ardennes region. Barely alive, he was carried to the village church (which was being used as a temporary hospital), by the some of the German garrison occupying the village. Here he was tended to by the German doctors, but due to his condition there was little hope of saving him and he died of his injuries the next day .

Epitaph to Sgt. Ronald Eden Franklin

Ron Franklin joined the RAF on 26th June 1941 and was posted to No.6 ACSB on 27th June. Although an outstanding marksman he was recommended for training as an observer and posted to No.19 O.T.U. based at RAF Forres close to RAF Kinloss in Scotland. Here he trained as an Air Gunner and an Observer and, on 9th September 1942, was posted to RAF Tempsford, in Bedfordshire, to join 161 Squadron on Special Duties. The pay was greater, but so were the risks!

His total service in the RAF was 1 year 92 days. He was 28 years old when he died. His is the only War Grave in the tiny churchyard cemetery in the village of Sevigny-Walleppe, Ardennes, N.France.

Gordon Franklin



TVARA creating a “crew” of relatives.

Way back in 2007 I was contacted by a gentleman asking for information on behalf of a 138 Sqdn. Veteran (John Charrot) who flew as one of two navigators on Operation Gunnerside. This operation to Norway had been made famous by the film “Heroes of Telemark”. I supplied the information as requested, and thought no more of it.

This is where it starts to get complicated!

In February 2011 I received an email from Val Hill, a relative of an airman, Jeff Hill, who had served with 138 & 161 Sqdns. Val was asking for help regarding his service at Tempsford. Unfortunately, because of the way the 138 Sqdn. records had been entered, I could only find details of his service with 161 Sqdn. Val told me that Jeff had written a book about his escape and evasion following the shooting down of his aircraft in 1944. Searching the internet produced few results; those I could find gave prices for the book of £60-£150!

In May 2011 Steve Stokes contacted me with regard to his cousin Arthur Stokes, who turned out to have been the wireless operator on the Gunnerside operations. Six months later, the grand-daughter of the pilot, Sqdn/Ldr Gibson got in touch with me for information about his service at Tempsford!

So - I put the grand-daughter & daughter of Gibson in touch with Steve Stokes.

In July this year, Tim Deeks (the relative of the “other” navigator, Sgt. Rigden) came to me for information, so now we have relatives of 3 crew members and 1 veteran from Gunnerside.

At our meeting in June I picked up a copy of Jeff Hill’s book “Escape from a Halifax Bomber” which I had found at a sensible price and had had sent to Edwin Bryce. This month I finally got around to reading it, and discovered that some of the details of Jeff’s time with 138 Sqdn had been in front of me all the time - he was the despatcher on the Gunnerside operations!

Strange how the TVARA is becoming “Relatives R Us”!

Gunnernside Operations

“Gunnernside” was, perhaps, one of the most important operations carried out by 138 Sqdn.

The purpose of the operation was to drop 6 Norwegian Commandos into Norway to team up with 4 of their colleagues who had been dropped in October 1942 and who, since then, had been camping out on a high plateau north east of RJUKAN awaiting the rest of the team and equipment. The task of these 10 Commandos - to destroy the Heavy Water plant at RJUKAN and so stop the German Atomic Bomb programme.

Halifax BB281 NF-O took off from Tempsford at 19:10 on 16th February 1943 and headed for Norway. Landfall was made at STAVANGER, and they now had the job of finding the dropping zone, which was to be marked with 5 red lights and 1 white flashing light.

Such was the importance of the mission it had been agreed that, should the lights not be seen, then the 6 Commandos would be dropped “blind”. No lights were seen, and preparations were made for the drop to be made on the pinpoint co-ordinates given.

It should be mentioned, also, that due to the importance placed on this mission the Halifax carried 2 extra crew members: John Charrot was on board as a second navigator/map reader, and Lt. Ellis as an assistant to the despatcher, to ensure swift unloading of the packages.

The pinpoint was located and, in the fuselage, a red light came on indicating that the target area was coming up. Next came the green light for “GO”! All went well until the last man to jump, Knut Haukelid. Haukelid said that, as he prepared to jump “the English assistant pressed himself close to the side of the plane, but on the wrong side; the line fastening my parachute was wound round his body in such a way that I would carry him with me when I jumped, catching hold of him. I pushed him over to the other side and jumped from a standing position”. This was not the normal way to exit an aircraft, but all was well and he landed safely.

As a result of this flight and the efforts of the Commandos the Norsk Hydro Plant was destroyed on 26th February 1943; without a supply of Heavy Water, the scientists had to abandon their project.

The full crew of Halifax BB281

Pilot - Sqdn. Ldr. Gibson

Navigator - F/Sgt. Rigden

2nd Navigator - F/Sgt. Charrot

Wireless Operator - F/Sgt. Stokes

Rear Gunner - Sgt. Ward

Despatcher1 - Sgt. Hill

Despatcher2 - Lt. Ellis

Flight Engineer - Sgt. Hudson

Summer Gathering

Yet again I'm reaching for the thesaurus to find another superlative - bigger, better, more successful, perhaps? Yes, this year's Summer Gathering was the best-attended yet - 76 of us sat down to lunch at the Crown, and there were probably over 100 on the airfield. It is wonderful to think that this association of like minded people has grown so much. Linkages between the relatives of particular crews are developing all the time (those relating to Halifax 281 NF-O are described elsewhere in this newsletter). This is, in many ways, the part of running this organisation which gives the greatest satisfaction - enabling relatives to meet each other and share the memories of those "Tempsford people" they have in common.



We were delighted to see the very significant progress that



has been made in the Museum.

Lady Laline has, obviously, been working extremely hard and it is possible now to visualise how the "finished product" will look.



It is not unusual for there to be a "surprise" of some sort at our Summer Gatherings - a fly-past by a Lysander, or presen-

tations of special gifts! The latest meeting saw something slightly different - a raffle!



Earlier in the year I had bought a signed print of a 161 Sqdn. Lysander on eBay; the seller said that he could not make out the signature. I could - it was that of Sir Lewis Hodges. My winning bid of £4.99 secured the print, and it was delivered to Edwin. Close inspection, and a bit of research, proved that this was not a limited edition signed print, but a print that had been individually signed at a later date - making it unique.

When I collected the print from Edwin I realised that it would be too big (in its frame) to go in my suitcase, and removing it from the frame would have ruined it. Edwin & I agreed, therefore, to

raffle it in aid of the animal charity which I work for in Crete. The raffle raised the magnificent sum of £200 and the lucky winner was Peter Green.

Once home in Crete, one of my first visits was to the local pet shop. £200 buys quite a lot of dog food.....

I called on Maria Papadaki, the president of the charity and told her I had some dog food for her. She thought I meant just a bag or two, not a car full! She was delighted. Thanks to your generosity the street dogs in Sitia will be “kept going” more easily for a while.

Anyone interested in the charity can find out more on the website: www.animalwelfareinsitia.org



Bob

Remembrance Sunday

As usual, there will be a Service on the airfield on Remembrance Sunday (11th November). This will take the same format as in previous years. Further information about the day, and details of the menu (for those who would like to have lunch) will be issued in due course.

TVARA members are reminded that, as this is a formal “military” occasion, medals may be worn. We encourage family members to wear their Tempsford relative’s medals, on the right hand side.

Anyone who wishes to lay a wreath should contact Edwin as soon as possible, so that their name can be included in the Order of Service.

We are pleased to report that the personal papers of the late F/Lt Laird Nicholson are now with the Canadian War Museum.

138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons

Special then

Special now

Special always