



# Tempsford Veterans and Relatives

Newsletter Spring 2010



## *Notes from the Cockpit*

On behalf of Steve, Bob and myself may I wish everyone a belated "Happy New Year".

Last year proved to be another successful year for TVAR with our numbers continuing to increase and now approaching 150.

Our service of Remembrance in November was attended by over 80 people. The service was conducted by the Reverend Margaret Marshall who, after making her "début" at the Summer reunion, experienced the less than warm temperatures of the airfield in November. Margaret delivered a first class service and I would like to thank her, on behalf of TVAR, for that and hope that it will be the first of many.

Once again we were privileged to have with us Mr Mark Stafferton, bugler, and members of 22 (Sandy) Squadron ATC. There is no doubt that the presence of Mark and the staff and cadets of 22 (Sandy) Squadron ATC enhance our service and for that I thank them.

In the days leading up to the service I recall saying to people "please make sure that we get time to speak to each other on the day". Sadly, due to the numbers attending it was not possible for me to talk to everyone and for that I apologise. I do hope you will understand.

There is no doubt that the organising of our events is very much a team effort and I would like to thank Steve and Bob for all of their help. As we all know - there is always a good woman behind each man and I would like to say thank you to Pam, Helen and Jane for their help and for being there when the toys were being thrown out of the pram.

Steve and I look forward to seeing you all again in July when, hopefully, the temperature will have risen. Bob hopes to see you all in July when he hopes that the July temperature in UK will match that of Crete in the winter.

*Edwin Bryce*

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### Tempsford Web Sites

[www.tempsfordsquadrons.info](http://www.tempsfordsquadrons.info)

[www.161squadron.org](http://www.161squadron.org)

[www.tempsford.20m.com](http://www.tempsford.20m.com)

## Love Conquers All

The first full moon period of April 1945 was to be a very busy one for the crews of 161 Squadron. My own crew had nearly completed 30 trips but were told that we were being retained on the Squadron because of our knowledge of the East Coast of Denmark. The Allied troops had crossed the Rhine and were pressing forward into Germany, however Intelligence had been received that two German Armies were retreating into Denmark with intention of making a stand there. It was most important that supplies be dropped to the Resistance Groups in this area.

On the nights of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April we carried out drops to Groups in Holland. Bad weather prevented operations the next night but on the 13<sup>th</sup> we carried out a drop on a Resistance Group at Sjaellands Odde on the East Coast of Jutland and from where we could clearly see the lights of neutral Sweden. We landed back at Tempsford at 04.19 hours.

We were aroused from our beds the following morning with the call that all crews were to report to Squadron offices. On reporting in we found that our crew did not appear on the Battle Order of that night, so arrangements were discussed on where to go, and Bedford was the answer. However this did not last for long as our crew were told to report to Intelligence for an individual briefing and that we would be flying that night. At this briefing, which was attended by Intelligence Officers, two members of Danish Resistance and a member of SOE, we were told that our target was to be in Denmark - Tablejam 322 and that it was most important that the drop was carried out, as the arms were urgently required. It was usual that only one run was made over a dropping zone, but on this occasion we were told that as many runs as necessary could be made; also if the drop could not be made it was essential that the containers were not jettisoned.

Take off was at 21.08 and, after crossing the coast at Cromer, we carried on over the North Sea at 1000 feet. On approaching Nissum Fjord the Danish Coast was crossed at 700 feet; we then dropped to 500 feet until reaching Allborg, where we then came down to 200 feet for the run up the North East coast of Jutland to the Dropping Zone. Visibility was excellent and the lights from neutral Sweden could be clearly seen on the horizon. The last pinpoint was located and a run in was made on the DZ. No lights or activity of any kind was seen and so we flew away and returned a short time later. Again no lights were seen and the same manoeuvre was carried out again. On the third run there was still no sign of any activity and as fuel was getting low it was decided to abort the mission. On leaving the DZ on route to Allborg a DZ was seen about four miles from our DZ but the lights were exceptionally bright plus the wrong code letter was being flashed. As a similar experience had been encountered over Holland, when on approaching the DZ anti aircraft fire had opened up, it was decided to ignore this DZ.

On reaching Allborg course was changed for Ringobing Fjord, which entailed flying over the Northern Lakes. As was the practice of our crew while over enemy territory I, as Flight engineer, was sitting in the second pilot's seat as I was the only other member of the crew who had instruction in flying a Stirling, and I would therefore be able to take over from the pilot if he was hit.

After flying over the Lakes for a short time, there was a loud bang and the rear gunner called out "Corkscrew, corkscrew we have been hit by a fighter". The pilot started to corkscrew then realised that we were too low to carry out such a manoeuvre. This was immediately followed by a further call from the rear gunner stating that we should not corkscrew as we had been

hit badly in the rear and that he thought the aircraft was on fire as there was a terrible smell. The pilot stated that the controls had gone stiff but that he could maintain height. I was instructed to go to the rear of the aircraft and assess the damage. I found that aft of the rear door there were a number of holes in the fuselage and at the same time located where the smell was coming from as shrapnel had punctured the Elsan (chemical toilet) and the contents were leaking onto the floor.

The rear gunner had vacated his turret and, with his assistance, I was able to scramble into the rear turret and then saw that the starboard elevator was missing except for some twisted metal at the far end - this no doubt was causing the controls to be stiff. It also appeared that part of the rudder was missing. Nearly every piece of Perspex in the rear turret had been shattered, plus a Thermos flask belonging to the gunner - he, however, was untouched but severely shaken.

On reporting to the pilot the extent of the damage and that we did not appear to be losing any fuel, he suggested that we should head for Sweden which was only minutes away, as it appeared to him that the aircraft was too badly damaged to get back over the North Sea. This did not go down at all well with some members of the crew who thought we should go home, one member especially saying that he had a heavy date lined up for that night. The pilot asked my opinion and of the chances of making it back to England and after our little 'committee meeting' it was decided to make for England. It was obvious that some of the crew thought that their engineer could carry out miracles!

Rinkobing Fjord was crossed, very low, without any opposition, but shortly after this our troubles commenced. The pilot, who had a cold, started sweating badly and had difficulty in breathing, and it appeared that there was every possibility that he might lose consciousness. The automatic pilot could not be used, and, as there was a danger with the controls being very stiff, it was arranged that the two of us would pilot it as a joint effort. Further troubles were to come as first the 'Gee Box' failed, and then the starboard inner engine started to run rough.

Discussion then began as to how we were going to get the aircraft down. As I had never attempted to land a Stirling, I suggested wheels up on the emergency airfield at Woodbridge, but finally it was decided to attempt to make a normal landing. On using Channel D (commonly called 'Darkie' and was used for emergencies only) the crash drome at Carnaby answered and gave us a bearing to them. Our pilot was feeling a little better then and suggested that with help he could land the aircraft. This brought forth the comment from 'lover boy' that in that case could not the same happen if we carried on to Tempsford. This was agreed on and the English Coast was crossed at Cromer, from where we were able to home in on the Rebecca operating from Tempsford.

On reaching Tempsford and informing Control of our problems, we were advised to fly low over the main runway so they could have a look at us and at the same time jettison the containers. Completing the circuit a landing was made (or possibly an arrival) and we were followed down the runway by the crash truck and ambulance. After parking on the hard standing next to the Control Tower, the aircraft was soon the centre of attraction with the remarks "How did that thing fly"?

After debriefing our pilot collapsed and was taken to Hospital suffering from severe bronchitis and mental and physical exhaustion. We were not to fly as a crew any more at Tempsford.

What happened to the young lovers? Well he was able to keep his date and they soon became a twosome. Did they live happy ever after? I'm afraid not as on VE Day she found that he had a girl friend at home and he was given his marching orders!!!

Fact or fiction? I will leave you to guess - but funny things happen in wartime.

*Harold Watson*

## Research

Q. How do you connect Pennsylvania (US) with Crete, Australia, New Zealand and Tempsford?

A. Enquire about the loss of a Tempsford Halifax flying a SOE mission.

Explanation:

In June 2009, I received (**CRETE**) an email from John Grady (**PENNSYLVANIA**) regarding his uncle (a navigator) who was lost when Halifax LL358 was shot down on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1944, after taking off from **TEMPSFORD**.

The number of this Halifax seemed familiar; I suddenly remembered that Steve & I had both had correspondence with the daughter, Davina Engelman (**AUSTRALIA**) of the Air Gunner, Ellis Markson, of LL358. She, in turn, had been in touch with her cousin, Dennis Markson, who lives in **NEW ZEALAND**.

John Grady joined us for the Service of Remembrance last November at Tempsford, where he and his sister laid a wreath. Below is an email received from John Grady.

“Because of you, I was able to send the letter which follows (along with a library of photos, documents and history) to the sisters of John Grady, who died on Aug 9 1944. You can imagine the surprise, disbelief and joy this information has brought them. It was as if their brother had come back to life, if just for a while. I must mention that my very good friends Davina Engelman and Dennis Markson gave their help so generously, too. Davina was 6 months old when the Halifax crashed. Her father, Dennis Markson, was the tail gunner. Eddie Rowlands has also been terrifically generous with his time, effort and assistance.

I followed this research up with a November trip to Cugny, France to visit the grave sites. My sister and I were treated to a half day reception honouring these seven airmen. We were given medallions from the Musée de Résistance for my aunts. What a special day that was in our lives. The people of Cugny spent five hours touring us from the cemetery, to the memorial, to a reception and then to the museum. We met a beautiful lady named Guislaine who witnessed the crash, and a wonderful man named Roget Charbonnier who pulled the bodies from the Halifax. These people are most humble and grateful for the sacrifice these airmen made for their freedom. My sister and I were very humbled to be treated so incredibly well by them.



Thanks to everyone. You have all contributed a lot of good to this world by keeping these airmen's memories alive.

John Grady, Bradford Woods, PA USA."

*"To my Aunts*

*July 1, 2009*

*A few days ago, I thought that my uncle and namesake, John Bruce Grady, was a mediocre navigator who flew only three missions in WWII....and crashed in all three. I was told he and his plane were never found. He was long forgotten. About the only thing I heard about him was that John was unusually kind and humble, and that he had loved to dance. John died 65 years ago this August near Cugny, France.*

*But then I was surfing to see if I could see any evidence of John Bruce Grady's life as an RAF navigator. I happened along a couple websites that had his name on them. I found that not only was there a marker, but there were actual graves! I found a wonderful man named Bob Body who generously gave his time and effort to help me. Bob put me in contact with some really great folks from New Zealand and Australia that are related to Ellis Markson, the rear gunner in John's plane. Dennis (Ellis' nephew) and Davina (Ellis' daughter) had already done much research in the last several months. They too have been incredibly generous with helping me find the true and fascinating story of these men. Apparently, their mission was so secret that they could never tell anyone, not even their families. The secrecy is the primary reason you are learning the true story 65 years later.*

*I have to say that it seems a tragedy that John Grady's parents and three brothers all passed away never knowing John was a hero. How proud they would have been. However, this is balanced by the thrill knowing that you, John's three sisters (Earlene, Pat and Ruth) are here to find out about his military career. You can now know what exceptional things your brother did in WWII. John and his crew are larger than life in France, and are the adopted sons of the people of Cugny. They are revered as heroes and honored in an annual ceremony. There exists a memorial to the crash site built for them. Queen Elizabeth herself wrote to Étienne Dromas to thank him for the memorial. Aunts Earlene, Pat and Ruth, your brother's memory has never faded a bit. In fact, your brother is a War Hero!*

*Your nephew*

*John Grady, Pittsburgh, Pa."*

It has been a delight to put these relatives in contact with each other - this is, largely, what TVAR is about!

*Bob Body*

## Flying Officer Pym - Operational Dog

Pym was the offspring of a rough-haired fox terrier dog, and a smooth-haired bitch. At the very early age of eight weeks, he was given to me as a mascot. I had just commenced operational flying with 427 Sqdn. RCAF. He was terribly small - about the size of a pint beer mug - and fitted comfortably into my great coat pocket. At this tender age he was considered too young for flying operations, but got airborne on all other occasions. Whilst we did our stint, he was left in the tender care of a charming WAAF, who generally had a lot of problems with him. Animals were frowned upon on some Air Force stations, and certainly in WAAF quarters, and when the Orderly Officer did her rounds, Pym inevitably finished up at the bottom of the bed, beneath the blankets - lucky dog!

He did two operations with 427 Sqdn; one a "gardening" job off the Friesian Isles, and the other the raid on the Dunlop Rubber factory at Mont Lucan, near Vichy, France. During these trips he spent most of his time lying on the Bomb Aimer's couch in the nose of the aircraft, and Len Grant, our Bomb Aimer, was always loath to move him.

On posting to 161 Sqdn his first adventure was to cock a naughty leg over the signing in book in the guard room, much to the displeasure of the SF on duty.

He loved flying, whether it was circuits and bumps, cross country, or operations, and it was during his stay at 161 that he was steadily promoted, eventually becoming titled Flying Officer Pym. His name arose from a caricature at that time called Pilot Officer Prune, but we knew he was no prune, so he became Pym.

RAF Henlow decided to make him a parachute which was fastened to his harness and worked by static cord - it took up to 40lbs in weight. Henlow were responsible for much of the equipment used by Special Operations Squadrons, and they insisted on trying out the chute over their own airfield. Pym was duly despatched from 600 feet on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1943, with numerous ground personnel waiting for him, as he had no means of quick release. There were no problems, other than that he tended to drift, having lack of weight, and he was picked up safely.

Pym became everybody's friend, and the mascot of the squadron; he was even caricatured on the nose of an aircraft! All "B" flight crews flying at various times to reception committees all over Europe would always find Pym in the Crew Room, for a pat and a good luck wish before getting airborne. He had a "doggy" flying jacket, should he feel the cold but, as always, his routine was to visit all crew members in their various positions within the aircraft; once airborne he took up his position with the Bomb Aimer, and curled up beside him in the nose of the aircraft. One pre-flight tradition he had was to "lubricate" the landing wheels of the aircraft while the rest of us did our inspection!

For Pym, flying was only hazardous on one occasion, the night of 16<sup>th</sup> /17<sup>th</sup> December 1943 when, after a dicey trip, and the weather men had boomed, we were forced to abandon the aircraft and I brought him down tucked in my Irving jacket, with just a hand over his head until the chute opened above our heads. We both landed safely and proceeded to a farmhouse, where the inhabitants were just getting up for milking etc.; it was 5.35 am. The farmer showed no surprise at an airman and a dog arriving there, and gave me a gammon breakfast, and a bone for Pym, which was the biggest he'd ever seen.

On arrival back at Tempsford, the first question asked by all, including the Padre, was - where was Pym, and was he alright? After he had completed 42 ops, and we had finished our tour with 161 Sqdn, our crew was broken up, and I was sent to 405 Sqdn RCAF. But high level raiding and potential Pathfinders was no place for a terrier, and he was sent to his home town of Hereford to live with my mother. He lived to be sixteen years of age, finally succumbing to a heart attack whilst lying in front of the fire, so died peacefully. He was buried at the foot of the garden and a large lilac tree now grows over his burial place.

Flying Officer Pym was a delightful little dog, and a great friend to everyone - ground crew, aircrew, WAAFs; everyone. He enjoyed his "tipple" of beer like the rest of us. In our "off" days we descended to Hitchin in Herts; "The Cock Hotel" adopted us and there was always a large dish of Wells & Winches' bitter waiting for him when we visited this hostelry.

One almost sad occasion occurred in Hitchin. We used to stay at the Hermitage flats, run by a delightful couple, Mr. & Mrs. Sergeant. One anticipated late night, we left him there, but somehow he got out and a mass search was made at about three in the morning. Fortunately we found him.

I still have his parachute and jacket and at almost every Tempsford reunion he is mentioned by several members, so even though he is gone, he is still not forgotten - he was so much a part of our flying days in that Squadron.

*J R Matthews*

(Reproduced by kind permission of Mrs P Matthews)

**From Hamish Ross**

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of my Uncle (Squadron Leader AB Smith DSO, DFC, MID) on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

Ambrose Smith joined 138 Sqdn., together with Sgt. Reimer (a Canadian) from 51 Sqdn., on August 3rd 1941.

Operationally, he flew Whitley Mk V's from Newmarket Heath, Stradishall and Tempsford. He flew missions to France, Belgium, Denmark, Holland and Norway.

Memorable operations include the Squadron's first mission to Norway on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1942 (Operation Cheese/Fasting to the Flekkefjord area, dropping two agents). Also, he flew the first mission out of Tempsford on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1942. This was Lucky Shot/Weasel to Belgium (west of Givet).

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 1942 he flew from Kinloss on operation Grouse to Areks Fjord. Grouse was the codename for operations connected with the destruction of the Norsk Hydro plant near Vemork producing "heavy water" used in the research for atomic energy. The agent dropped was Einar Skinnarland, an engineer who had worked on the building of the plant.

His final flight with 138 Sqdn. was on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1942, which was a "test demonstration" in Whitley No 9282. He had completed 33 missions, totalling 239 hours and was awarded the DFC in June following a recommendation by Wing Commander Bob Hockey.

His RAF career continued with 83 Pathfinder Squadron (Wyton), flying in the Peenemunde Raid destroying the V2 rocket base. He was awarded a DSO and MID. He ended the war as a test pilot, mainly putting the Avro Lincoln through its paces.





From time to time, comments are received from members of the public about the condition of the Barn. Since the Barn is on private land, and we are all much obliged to Lady Erroll and the Estate for allowing us to continue to hold Summer Gatherings and Remembrance Sunday Services here,

**Circa 1942**

we thought it might be instructive to show the condition of the Barn at various times in the past (especially in its Wartime incarnation) compared with the way it is today.



**Circa 1950**

Veterans will, of course, remember the c1942 version, while younger members can see very well how the "image" of the Barn as a delapidated farm building served as camouflage for the activities taking place here.



**Circa 1980**

**138 & 161**

***Special Duties Squadrons***

***Special Then***

***Special Now***

***Special Always***



**2009**