



Tempsford Veterans and Relatives Association



Newsletter
Summer 2011

Welcome, everybody, to our latest newsletter.

Our summer reunion was held on 9th July and it was wonderful to see not only many familiar faces but also a number of people with us for the first time. Our numbers are certainly growing each year. It is difficult to single out a reunion and say that it was the best so far. Each one is best in its own way but our latest reunion was certainly the most interesting and devious.

Secrets are the norm at Tempsford and, this year, I was thinking about the presentation to Lady Laline (Lal) and how she would react - little knowing that my alleged friend Bob had another secret up his sleeve! It had been decided earlier in the year that we should make a presentation to Lal as a way of showing our appreciation of the work being done in the museum. Many ideas were formed and discarded until Bob and Helen came up with the idea of the brooch designed to represent the runways at Tempsford. A bit of "underground" work had been carried out by the daughter of Nick, the estate manager at Tempsford, who advised us that Lal liked to wear silver jewellery. The design was given to a jeweller (Rafi) in the village where I live and 3 weeks later I collected the finished article. After I had explained the background to the design and the work carried out at Tempsford Rafi told me that he considered it a privilege to have done it.

On to Operation Payback. There is very little I can add to what I said on the day. I consider it a privilege to be involved in the organisation of such an association and feel that I have been very lucky to have met such wonderful people and made some good friends - my thanks again to all involved. The Lysander is now in a prominent position at home together with the 2 frames of prints which contain many wonderful memories of past reunions.

AT THE MOLETTE FARM.
First agent: "How shall we transmit,
we have no electricity!"
Farmer's wife: "Don't worry, I can
lend you some paraffin.!"



Edwin

Summer “Gathering” July 2011

...as seen by Bob!



This year’s event was exceptionally well attended, and was, perhaps, one of the most successful and enjoyable yet, even though each meeting has, so far, had something special about it. Over 50 people sat down to lunch, including many “first timers” - even one from distant Oz!

The weekend turned out to be full of surprises - more for some than others!

On Friday night, Tania, the daughter of Violette Szabo, joined us at The Crown and seemed to make time to talk to everyone there.

More surprises were in store for Saturday. As Edwin said, a “thank-you” present had been made for Lal, the young lady who is working so hard at completely refurbishing the Museum. Edwin and Bob had carefully planned the surprise presentation of the Tempsford Brooch by W/Cdr Len Ratcliff (himself a first-timer at one of our gatherings).



Edwin thought all was going well until his welcome speech (leading to the presentation to Lal) was interrupted by Bob, with an announcement. You may remember that, in 2007, Edwin had conspired with some veterans & others to present Bob with a specially commissioned painting of the Barn. The secret planning went under the code name “Operation Lemon Tree”.



This year’s gathering was the 5th Anniversary of Edwin taking over the reins of the TVARA (all he had to do, after all, was to get a few people on a deserted airfield twice a year) and some people had recently become embroiled in “Operation Payback”! On cue, Lal came forward and presented Edwin with a print of Hugh Verity’s Lysander, “Jiminy

Cricket”, which had been signed by both Hugh Verity and some of the other veterans. This now put the unsuspecting Lal in the right place for the completion of “Operation Tempsford Brooch”.



When Edwin had recovered, he called on W/Cdr Ratcliff to do the honours, and give Lal the brooch as a thank you from all of us in the TVARA. Before making the presentation, however, the W/Cdr gave us all an impromptu, and very entertaining, history lesson, at the conclusion of which he singled out a TVARA member for special attention (and a hug) - Yvette Pitt, the daughter of agent Yvonne Cormeau, whom he had dropped into France in 1943. We all much appreciated the “input” from W/Cdr Ratcliff - I hope he realises that he has added himself to the list of those called on

to make presentations & speeches!

The presentation to Lal of the brooch (representing the 3 Tempsford runways, for those who haven't seen it) was duly accomplished - duties carried out as detailed!



During the airfield visit, everyone had a chance to look at the “work in progress” at the museum - there is already a huge improvement, and we very much look forward to seeing the finished project.

I would like to say a very special “thank-you” to Reverend Margaret Marshall for, once again, conducting a very moving service, even though she was feeling way below par - it was much appreciated.

The day's events drew to a close over a long lunch in a new venue, The Crown. I would like to express thanks, on behalf of the TVARA to the staff of The Crown who a) gave us the whole restaurant, and b) coped extremely well with the influx of 52 diners.

All in all, this was an exceptionally enjoyable gathering; many new friendships were created and much information was passed between families. A final “thank-you” goes to all of you who travelled from near & far, as without you, none of this would be possible.

Bob

Beyond Tempsford.....

The young widow, mother of a five year old daughter, was driven along a twisting country lane near the airfield at Tempsford, turning first into Gibraltar Farm and then to the Barn. There she checked that nothing about her clothes nor the contents of her pockets could in any way connect her with England. She received her final briefing before the mission she was about to undertake, and was assured that she could still withdraw from it if she so wished. It was August 22nd 1943.

Then she was off to board the Halifax MA "X" DK 232 piloted by Wing Commander Len Ratcliff DSO, DFC, AFC, Croix de Guerre. Before dropping her by parachute to precisely the right spot three hours later and 500 miles away in South West France, 125 kms North East of Bordeaux, he ensured she got some sleep. Then a red light was switched on to awaken her and warn that the drop zone was near. Len Ratcliff then waited for a special signal from the reception group of resistance workers on the ground, who flashed a special code to him with a hand-held battery torch. Upon receipt of this he gave the signal to jump by turning the red light to green. She was followed by canisters containing her wireless set, personal belongings and weapons. As he saw her floating down to the field below, he and his crew commented, "What a lovely, brave little lady."

For the next thirteen months her task was to receive and de-code messages from London and encode and transmit messages from the field to London; or "play the piano" as the local Maquis put it. Initially her W.T. plan was a schedule allocating a certain hour on a certain wavelength three days a week with London, but this soon increased. She had to constantly move from place to place with her radio, a Model B2, weighing some 20kg, usually by bicycle or train. After the war she saw some Gestapo papers indicating they had found a radio operator. They were quite clever as they knew it was a woman by the touch - lighter than a man's. A traitor told them she was in Castelnau in the Gers, but they could not find her as there are eight Castelnaus and the one she was in was just a hamlet with no electricity to run her set and no running water. So she ran her set off six volt car batteries and just used a pump in the yard.

She also helped in other ways by advising how and where to lay explosive charges, though she never touched them for fear of damaging her fingers, so essential for her radio work. She had some close shaves with the Gestapo, but taught herself to deal with fear by remaining calm and thinking clinically. On one occasion, she was actually shot at, grazing a knee and a shoulder, but escaped the dogs by walking through the waters of the Auvignon River. She also had cover jobs such as being a district nurse or a farm hand. She had to keep London informed of everything from troop movements to the fate of pilots who had been shot down.

The thirteen months of working undercover with lack of sleep and food in enemy occupied France, took their toll on her health, but at least she returned to England. She trained with three others but only she got back alive.

Who was she?

She was born Beatrice Yvonne Biesterfeld, in Shanghai, China, becoming Yvonne Cormeau upon her marriage to Charles Cormeau, and "Annette" once she landed in France behind enemy lines.

And she was my mother.

Yvette Pitt
Farnham,
August 2011

D Day Airborne Deceptions and The Tempsford Squadrons' Involvement

On the night of the 5/6th June 1944 four operations, involving a number of squadrons, were flown in the area between Le Havre and Calais. The purpose of these operations was to try to make the Germans believe that the invasion was taking place in that area. The four were, *Airborne Cigar* - a radio jamming exercise, *Glimmer* - an operation using 'Window' to simulate a convoy approaching, *Taxable* - the same as *Glimmer*, and *Titanic*, flown by the Tempsford Squadrons, which involved dropping Window, dummy parachutists and SAS teams.

Operation Titanic split into four parts, Titanic I - IV

11 Halifaxes from Tempsford (7 from 138 and 4 from 161) were involved with Titanic I and 1 Halifax from 138 on Titanic IV

Titanic I

From papers in The National Archives, Kew:

"In conjunction with other operations it is intended to create a diversion by dropping dummy parachutists by simulating an assault by airborne forces in the YVETOT area."

Each of the 11 Tempsford Halifaxes would carry 5 small bomb containers carrying: 3 dummy parachutists, 2 pintail lamps and 2 rifle fire simulators.

Also loaded would be two types of Window (aluminium strips used for radar jamming), M(B) and (N) - 600 bundles of each. (Sorry, but I cannot find a description which explains the difference.)
The instructions for the dropping of the Window were explicit.

"Window is to be dropped during the flight from a point 50° 20' N 02° 52' W on the outward flight until the same point is reached on the homeward flight as follows.

(I) Type M(B) 2 bundles together every 12 seconds through the special chute.

(II) Type N 1 bundle every 6 seconds through the normal chute."

"Dropping of parachutists; aircraft to reduce speed to 140 IAS (140 knots Indicated Air Speed) and a height of 600 feet to drop dummies on the DZ.

For security reasons crews are to be briefed as late as possible and not allowed to leave the camp after briefing. All outgoing private calls stopped until completion of operation."

Titanic IV

"In conjunction with certain other operations it is desired to create a diversion by dropping dummy parachutists and a few airborne troops."

The intention was to simulate an airborne assault in the MARGNY area.

One Halifax from 138 Sqdn, Tempsford, piloted by F/Lt Johnson, was used for this operation, The aircraft loads were slightly different from those of Titanic I. Each aircraft was to carry six S.A.S. troops, and 5 small bomb containers, in each of which would be carried 3 dummy parachutists, 2 pintail lamps and 2 rifle fire simulators.

Again there were two types of Window;

1200 bundles of type M(B) and 1200 bundles of type N

Window Dropping.

“Window is to be launched from a point 60 miles from landfall on the French coast until the same distance is reached on return, as follows:-

- (i) Type M(B) - 2 bundles every 12 seconds through special chute.*
- (ii) Type N - 1 bundle every 6 seconds through normal chute.”*

“Dropping of Parachutists: *Aircraft are to reduce speed to 140 I.A.S, and height of 600 feet to drop the dummy parachutists in the Dropping Zone.”*

As with Titanic I security was tight, with briefings left as late as possible, crews not allowed off base after briefing and no outgoing private calls.

Further security and route information was issued separately.

“With effect from 2200 hours today I.F.F. (Identification Friend or Foe) is not to be used by any aircraft except when in distress. All I.F.F. sets are to be sealed in the off position and seals are not, repeat, not to be broken except in real emergency.

Aircraft on Titanic I base to 5 minutes short of English coast 3,000 feet then down to 1,000 feet to cross coast out. On return 1,500 feet at Hastings and climb to 3,000 feet or above till base area is reached

Aircraft on Titanic IV on outward journey - gain height over base to 6,500 feet or above - continue at this height till 5057N 0220W. Then lose height at 800 feet per minute to be at 1000 feet at pinpoint. From this point - height to be as in operation order. On return - Bridport 3,000 feet then climb to 6,500 feet or above till vicinity of base.”

A memo from the Commander, Airborne Troops, (21 Army Group) relating to Titanic IV contained the following:

“O.C. 1 SAS Regt will be at Tempsford by 1800 hrs on D-1 to attend briefing of pilot. In briefing it will be laid down that should there be considerable light flak or small arms fire from the exact DZ selected the parties would not be dropped on that DZ but would be landed blind within a radius of 3 miles beyond the DZ on the same run. We confirm that 3 containers would be carried and landed with the two parties. O.C. 1S.A.S Regt will arrange at Tempsford the best order these containers are to be dropped with the two parties.”

Pilots' reports. Titanic I

All aircraft dropped their loads between 0040hrs and 0110 hrs. One aircraft from 138 Sqdn failed to manage to drop all the Window, as *there was no time to get rid of it all*, and brought back 6 bundles of each type.

Three of the 161 Sqdn. crews reported light flak and small arms fire when on way back whilst travelling at..... 50 feet!

Pilot's report. Titanic IV

All passengers jumped with alacrity, and were dropped on north west corner of marsh north of Le Mesnil-Vigot. Containers were dropped slightly late due to a technical hitch in the lighting which caused them to be dropped about 10 seconds after the last man jumped.

An extract from www.raf.mod.uk/dday/timeline_june5.html

Operation TITANIC. A force of 40 Hudsons, Halifaxes and Stirlings dropped dummy parachutists, rifle fire simulators, Window and two SAS teams to simulate airborne landings away from invasion area. 200 dummy parachutists were dropped near to the base of the Cotentin Peninsula, 50 more east of the River Dives, and 50 to the south west of Caen. 200 more dummy parachutists and the SAS teams were dropped at Yvetot, 30 miles south west of Dieppe. The SAS had orders to allow some of the enemy to escape to spread alarm by reporting landings by hundreds of parachutists. Two of the Stirlings (149 Sqn) were lost in this operation. The dummy parachutists were crude cloth representations of a human figure, a simple series of cloth bags and strips connected in a roughly cross-like shape to give the impression of a parachutist, certainly they were not accurate rubber figures suggested in some accounts. The dummies were equipped with a device that would prevent the enemy discovering that they were a deception. This was an explosive charge that destroyed the cloth figure by setting it on fire, which suggested that the man had burnt the parachute and lay hidden, ready for action or sabotage.

Pilots on Operation Titanic I

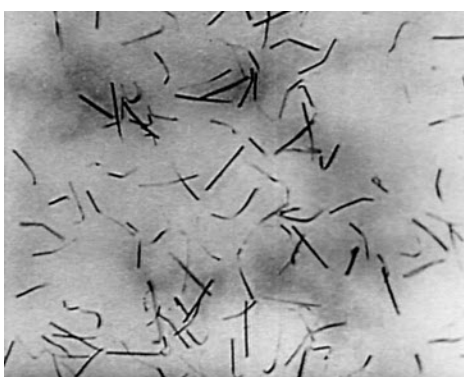
138 Sqn. - F/Sgt. Lawrence, P/O. Baker, P/O. Yardley, W/C. Palmer, P/O. Lyne, F/Lt. Kidd and P/O Jones.

161 Sqn. - F/O. Green, F/Sgt. Bennett, P/O. Smith, F/O. Johnston.

Pilot for Titanic IV F/Lt Johnson 138 Sqn.

Window and its use against enemy radar.

“...World War 2 included two main types of counter-measures: **jammers** transmit strong radio waves in the same frequency as the radar, which saturate the radar receiver with signals so much that it can't see the weaker signals of real targets. **chaff** (nicknamed 'window' by the royal air force) are a cloud of thin lightweight strips of metal cut to a specific size, which can be dispersed from a heavy bomber. These strips are designed to be detected by radar and therefore instead of detecting isolated real targets, the radar operator sees just a huge cloud.” (www.century-of-flight.net)



Picture from www.bombercommand.com

Those interested can use the following link to find a close up image online which shows clearly what it was.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/finkangel/2931708052/sizes/l/in/photostream/>

GROUND CREW

He's known by number, name, initial, trade,
There are so many like him he might pass
As undistinguished as a blade of grass,
Whose numbers make the glory of a glade.

Rigger or fitter, beneath his corporal's eye,
His working day can number twenty hours.
The brain that's in his fingers trims the powers
That keep his aircraft steadfast in the sky.

His pilot is his king, his "kite" his throne;
He is the humble servitor who tends
A ceaseless round of maintenance that lends
A glory to a fame not claimed his own.

He wears no "wings", he'll never get a "gong";
Three blankets and three "biscuits" make his bed;
He's easily replaced when he is dead -
A Record's posting sends the next along!

And oftentimes, partaking of a "jug"
With others of his kind who've saved their pay,
He's apt to state it was a sorry day
He let the Air Force take him for a mug!

But yet, his ear trained to the faintest clues
A faulty engine throws, he can detect
(Inspired as any one of the elect!)
The homing music of returning crews!

Then see him sprint across his aerodrome
When still the sky is bare of all but sound -
Faithful custodian of the landing ground!
To hail the formation thundering home!

And as they land, his little shape is plain,
Waving thin arms to guide them safely in,
And they will see his ever-widening grin,
Since twelve went out and twelve are back again!

Anthony Richardson

MEMORIAL COMMEMORATIONS HELD IN CUGNY, AISNE, FRANCE
7/8 MAY 2011
FOR THE CREW OF 161 SQUADRON HALIFAX LL358 MA-Y
LOST ON MISSION TOM 53 8/9 AUGUST 1944

In May this year I travelled with my wife, brother and sister in law (both French speaking) to the small village of Cugny 60 km north of Paris for commemorations being held on the 7th and 8th of May - Victoire de 1945 Day.

These commemorations included the laying of wreaths at the monument and graves of the crew of a 161 squadron Halifax, which was shot down nearby. I am a relative of the rear gunner, Sgt Ellis Markson, and had researched the events related to the night action resulting in the loss of this aircraft and crew. We had been invited to stay with the Mayor, Monsieur Michel Bono, and were looking forward to participating in the events, and meeting the Cugny villagers who erected the monument and look after the graves. These are the same villagers, or their relatives, who had defied the Gestapo's orders and marched en masse through the village to lay flowers on the graves back in August 1944.

Upon arriving on the Saturday we were met by the Mayor and a delegation, including members of the French Resistance Veterans Association, who took us to the graves, which are in the local cemetery. Here we laid a wreath and recited the Anzac Poem; the French were very interested in this and asked us for a copy.

With the visit to the cemetery completed, we were then taken back to the village hall where wine and food had been prepared. We were introduced to local councillors and their wives, including an historian who has devoted himself to recording the events of the night of 8/9 August '44. After several hours enjoying their hospitality, we retired to Monsieur Bono's house, for an early night and to rest up for the following day.

The next day at 11 o'clock about twenty people met at the memorial, which is sited by the road side where the aircraft crashed. Along with members of the local press, and with a Resistance Veterans Association guard of honour acting as flag bearers, a short service was held. The Mayor read a summary of the action that had taken place in the field in front of us back on the 9th August 1944. Wreaths were then laid by the monument. We concluded with a minute's silence and the releasing of three large boxes of pigeons; this flock circled us three times and, with the resonance of their fluttering wings still in our ears, they disappeared up into the sky. It was a fitting tribute to the memory of the crew. Then it was back to the village hall where lunch had been prepared; there was time to talk to locals who were alive at the time of the shooting down of the aircraft and who remembered the night very clearly.

In the afternoon we drove to the Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation de Picardie in Tergnier, not far away. The curator and director met us and showed us around this wonderful museum. They have a small exhibit on the crash and were so friendly and accommodating to us, even inviting along an eye witness who was with the ground party on that night; he recounted how he ran to the aircraft and pulled two of the crew out of the wreckage; sadly they were both dead.

The time seemed to fly, and all too soon we had to leave so as to return to Paris. It was with mixed emotions that we arrived back to our hotel with the knowledge that the crew were in good hands, as they have always been since that night way back in August 1944.

Dennis Markson
Auckland New Zealand

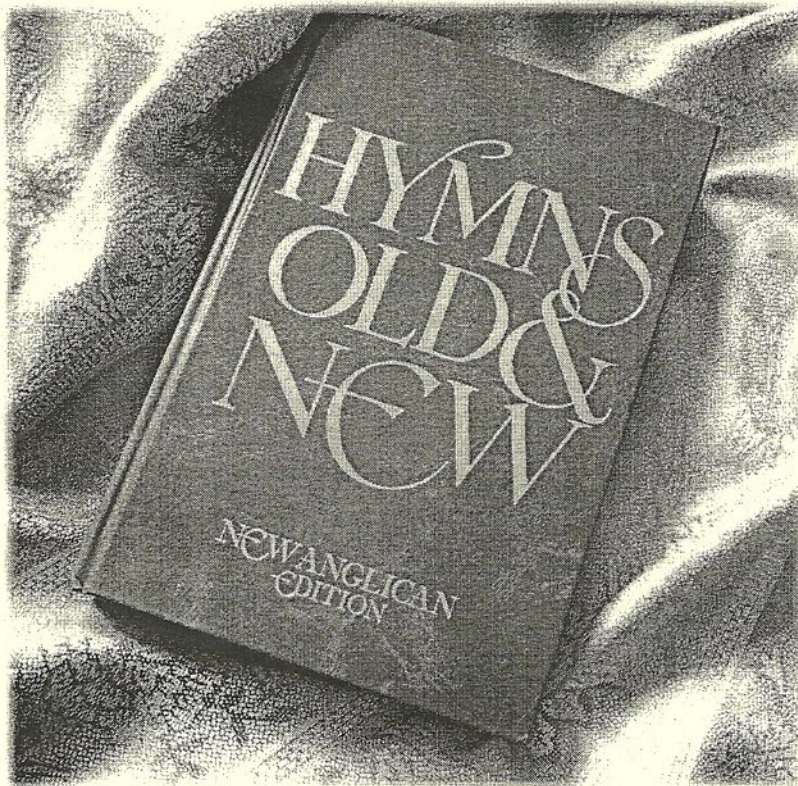
For those not present at the Summer Gathering:

St Peter's Church needs new hymn books, and there is a chance for you to support it by buying one - and, if you wish, adding a personal, hand written dedication. Prices: £10.00 with a dedication, or £8.00 for a plain hymn book.



St Peter's Church, Tempsford

Will you help us...



... to

SING a NEW SONG?

Contact :

David Beagent
Old Rectory
Mill Lane
Tempsford
SANDY
SG19 2AT

Looking ahead - our newsletters can only be produced if we have something to put in them, so please put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) and let Bob have some of the many stories you no doubt have tucked away.

Work on the Remembrance Service in November is now underway and the format will be along the lines of those in the past - should anyone wish to make a suggestion about the format please let us know. All suggestions will be gratefully received.

Finally - my thanks to all of you who came in July and helped to make it a success. Thanks to Reverend Margaret for the church service and also my thanks to Bob and Helen for the work done in helping me to get a few people to a disused airfieldand last but not least - my thanks to Jane for allowing me to convert our lounge at home to a mini office and helping me pull together all the bits and pieces of admin.

Edwin



138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons

***Special then, special now,
special always***

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Tempsford Web Sites

www.tempsford-squadrons.info

www.161squadron.org

www.tempsford.20m.com