



# TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

## SPRING NEWSLETTER 2016



### *Bob's Diary*

*A little later than planned, here is the TVARA Spring Newsletter.*



Since our last meeting, quite a lot has been happening in the world of the TVARA, but I'd first like to talk about November.

We were fortunate, again, to have a fairly dry day, and it was wonderful to see the number of people who attended. As ever, we were delighted to have the cadets from 2500 ATC Squadron (St Neots) taking an active part in the service. It is very important to have young people involved in this occasion, as we remember the sacrifices of those who flew from Tempsford, never to return. Some of those who were lost were very close in age to the cadets; a poignant reminder that, to this day, wars are fought by the young.

We were thrilled that W/Cdr Ratcliff was able to join us, in a "surprise" visit, and that fellow veteran Ken Hazelwood was also able to attend - seen here talking to Shirley Gibbons.







Aided by Bob, Tom Vincent laid a wreath in memory of his brother, F/Sgt J K R Vincent, and the crews of LW280 NF-K and LL307 NF-J, 138 Squadron



As always, the service was conducted by Rev Margaret Marshall, and the bugler was Mark Stafferton. We are grateful to both of them for helping to make this such a moving occasion for all attending.





Following the service, everyone adjourned to the village hall for lunch, chat, exchanges of information, and a presentation of "This is your Life", featuring French agent Yvonne Cormeau, the mother of TVARA member Yvette Pitt, followed by a short talk on the "radio war" by Geoffrey Pidgeon, MI9.



*We are indebted to Peter Green, as always, for all the photographs of Remembrance Sunday.*

Since the last newsletter, we have heard of the deaths of the following members of the Tempsford “family”.

Tommy Thomas, whom many of you will remember as an enthusiastic participant in TVARA activities; he had been unwell for some time.

His “mail pick-up” pilot, Bob Large, died in January - Bob was able to attend his funeral and pass on the condolences of all TVARA members.

Also in January we were informed of the deaths of Jack Clarkson, and Sidney Smith. Sidney was part of the same crew as Brian Atkins, father of Nigel, who was featured in the last newsletter. Sadly, we only heard about Sidney’s whereabouts after his death, but we are glad to report that he was extremely well cared for in his residential home in Cornwall.



WAAF Maud Lux, who served at Tempsford in 1943, died in December, aged 100. She is seen here with her “special” birthday card!

On a happier note, Bill Stoneman was awarded the Legion d’Honneur, by the Honorary Consul Alain Sibiril on 3 March. Bill’s daughter, Salli Blackford (centre) supplied the picture.



## *From the archives.*

S/Ldr Hugh Verity wrote a “manual” for Lysander pilots, covering in great detail the preparations which needed to be made prior to an operation. Much of it is “technical” in nature, but the final paragraphs contain more prosaic advice.....

### 11. LOADING OF AIRCRAFT

Three passengers are normally the maximum carried, but four have been carried without incident in the past. As you may well imagine, that seems a squash. With either three or four, it is thought impracticable for them to put on parachutes or bale out. If four passengers are carried, one goes on the floor, two on the seat and one on the shelf. This is not recommended with heavy people.

### 12. LUGGAGE

Of course, the heaviest luggage should go under the seat, nearest the centre of gravity. Small, important pieces of luggage, such as sacks of money, should go on the shelf, so that they are not left in the aeroplane by mistake. Mistrust the floor under the shelf, as it is difficult for passengers to find luggage which has slipped down towards the tail.

### 13. PETROL

The more petrol you take, the heavier your aeroplane will be for the landing and take-off; on the other hand, a very large margin of safety is recommended. You may well be kept waiting an hour or more in the target area by a reception committee that is late in turning up, or to find yourself when you are lost, and you may need an hour's petrol when you get back to England to go somewhere where you can land. You should have about two hours' spare petrol altogether.

*(There were certainly some occasions where aircraft made the last part of the return trip on “fumes”) - Ed.*

### 14. EMERGENCY KIT

If you get stuck in the mud it is useful to have in the aeroplane some civilian clothes. Do not put these in the passengers' compartment, or they may be flung out. A good place is in the starting handle locker. You should also carry a standard escape kit, some purses of French money, a gun or two, and a thermos flask of hot coffee or what you will. A small flask of brandy or whisky is useful if you have to swim for it, but NOT in the air. Empty your pockets of anything of interest to the Hun, but carry with you some small photographs of yourself in civilian clothes. These may be attached to false identity papers. In theory it is wise to wear clothes with no tailor's, laundry or personal marks. Change your linen before flying, as dirty shirts have a bad effect on wounds. The Lysander is a warm aeroplane, and I always wore a pair of shoes rather than flying boots. If you have to walk across the Pyrenees you might as well do it in comfort.

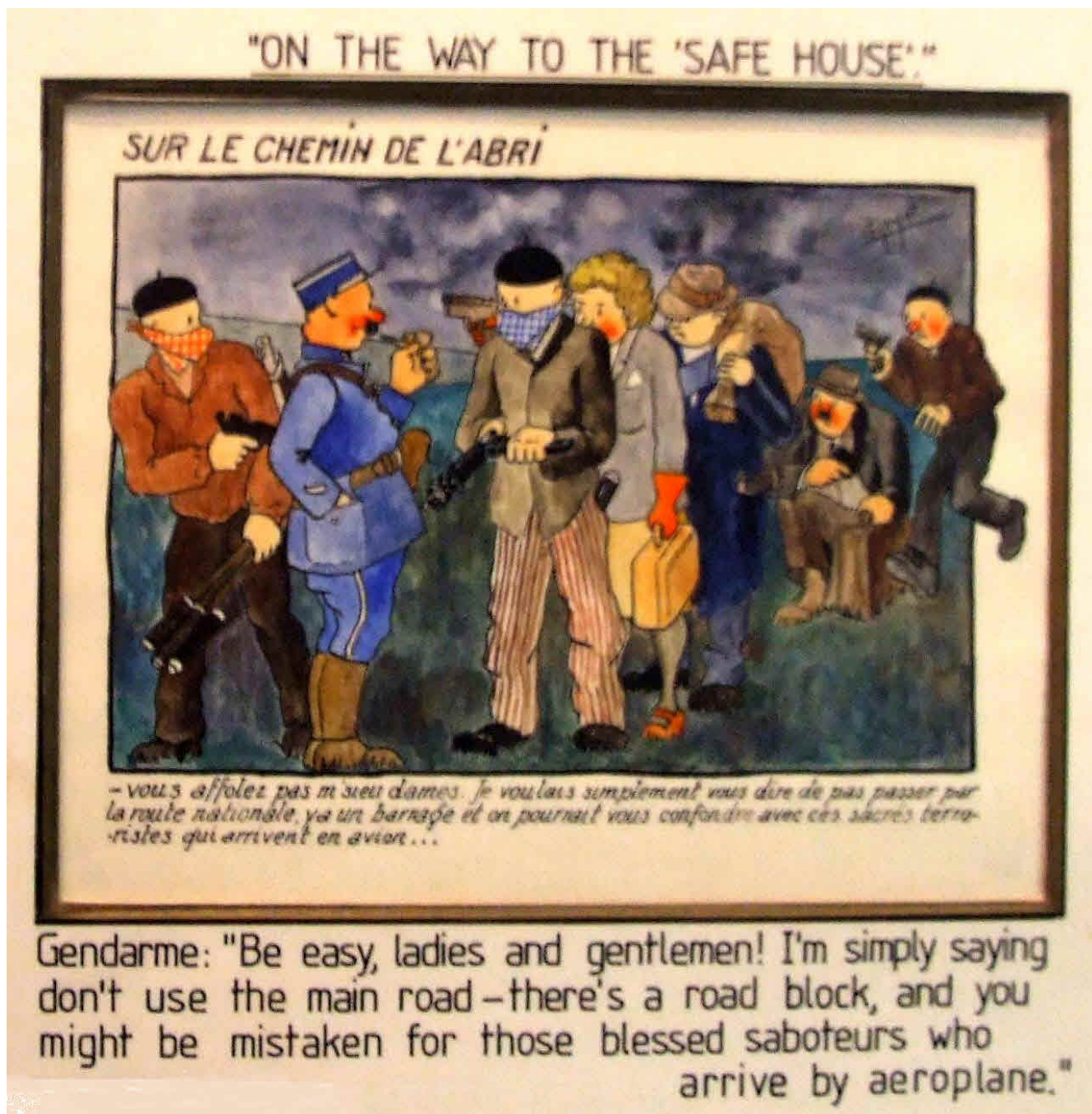
### CONCLUSION

15. You have a hell of a lot of work to do to get an operation ready, but there is quite a lot of it you can do the day before. It never matters if you prepare the op and don't do it. You may go that way some day and somebody else can always use your maps. It is most important to start an op fresh, and a good idea to have a nap or two in the afternoon or evening before you take off. Finally, you get driven to your aeroplane in a smart American car with a beautiful F.A.N.Y. Driver, cluttered up from head to toe with equipment and arms and kit of every description, rather like the White Knight prepared for every emergency.



In memory of Tommy Thomas, here's an excerpt from a memoir by F/Lt McCairns describing a difficult mail pick-up operation.

...Worse still, there was not a pilot left with experience of M.P.U. and all sections were clamouring for such operations. After I had settled my bet about the 1943 M.P.U. operation I was sent down to Tangmere for a fortnight to advise & train a new pilot - Ding-dong Bell [Douglas Bell] who again was a recruit from "B" Flight Halifaxes. He was a careful but excellent pilot, well versed in night flying and picked up the form with no difficulty whatsoever. Although no operations were mounted in January [1944], it gave me the very greatest pleasure to learn the day after I had left U.K., that Bell with Tommie [Tommie Thomas] in the back, had on his initial flight, successfully completed the first M.P.U. in the whole of the war's history. This he did in spite of the very greatest obstacles; not only had he to contend with bad weather at a spot in Belgium well off the beaten track, but, on his way out, he suffered a complete electrical failure with the result he had no radio nor any communication with his operator in the back which was absolutely essential, the plane had no signalling lights so he used a hand torch from the cockpit and lastly he was unable to avail himself of the landing lamp which in such operations was considered a necessity. Four times he tried to fish the bag up but without success - on the fifth time he managed to feel that welcome little tug and flew off, leaving Tommie to haul in the 40lb bag by hand - taken all in all a most magnificent show. ...



# ***138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons***

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