



TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

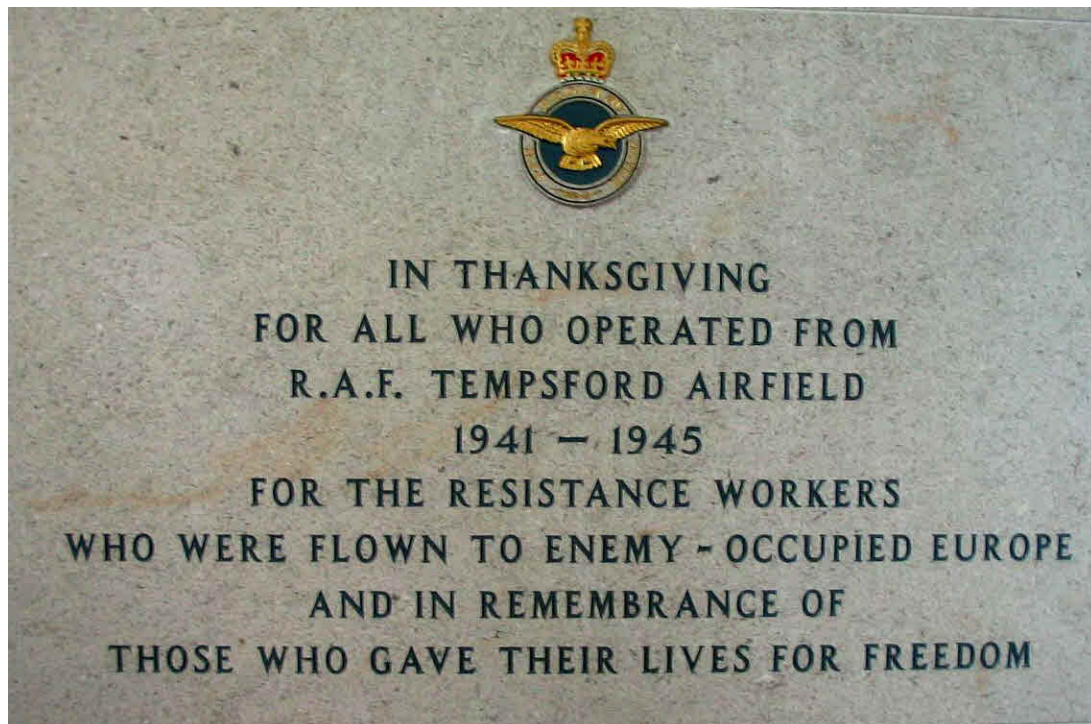
SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2015



Bob's Diary

Wow! We have certainly been busy since the last newsletter. In conjunction with others, a three day event was held in May; one of our members gave a talk in Denmark; the Australian (or, more properly now, Australasian branch, including members from New Zealand) held its own summer meeting and, last, but not least, we had our own Summer gathering at the end of June.

The May event “Now it Can be Told”, was planned to fall, as near as possible, to the date on which the plaque to the SD Squadrons in St Peter’s Church was dedicated, 40 years ago. The event was held in the Stuart Memorial Hall, in Tempsford village.



On the first day, Friday, local schools were the focus of the activities. Martyn Cox was able to show the children some videos that summarised the work of the SD Squadrons and their “customers”, the SIS and SOE. Harrington museum had lent us some display boards and artefacts relating to the SD Squadrons; one of the artefacts was a parachute. The children helped to open it in the area behind the hall, and it was then taken inside, so that the size could be truly appreciated.



The children were given a role playing exercise - Bob gives advice!



Day two focused, initially, on talks by experts from France and the Netherlands, (Olivier Blanc-Brude and Huub van Sabben) who gave fascinating information about how the work of the SD Squadrons helped their own countries. These talks were followed by the “star turn” of the weekend - W/Cdr Ratcliff, assisted by Mark Seaman, gave an entertaining Q & A session. I am sure many would have liked it to go on longer, but we must all remember and respect that Len is no longer a young man!

Day three began with talks by writers Clare Mulley and Matthew Cobb about their books on the subject of SD operations and concluded with a service in St Peter’s Church. During the second and third days of “Now it Can be Told” we had been honoured to have with us a female veteran from Tempsford - Doreen Galvin. Doreen, now in her nineties, spent a great deal of time talking with those present; her wonderful memory gave a valuable insight into Tempsford during the war. During the wreath laying ceremony, following the church service, Doreen laid a wreath at the Tempsford memorial on behalf of the TVARA in memory of those who never returned.



JUNE

The TVARA Summer Gathering in June was probably the best to date. The day followed the usual format, but with one major change - to the lunch venue.

The proceedings on the day of the Summer Gathering were opened with a short speech of welcome from David Briggs. David has taken over the "MC" role performed, in the past, by Edwin, who has decided to have no further involvement with the TVARA. He has, moreover, asked that no-one contacts him.

After meeting on the airfield and the church service - and, by the way, I'm sure Reverend Margaret would like me to pass on her thanks for the most generous donations in the collection plate - we headed to the Stuart Memorial Hall in the village, instead of to the "Crown".

The numbers attending are now so large that meeting and eating in a pub causes problems in trying to get everyone served quickly as well as meaning that, as everyone is seated, there is very little chance to "mingle" with anyone apart from those with whom you are seated.

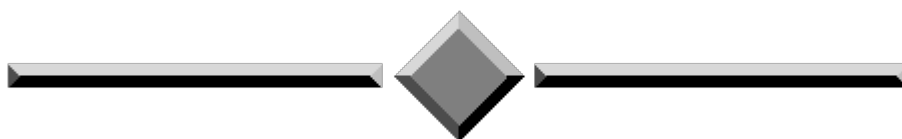


The move to the Hall proved to be a great success: with a bar and a buffet lunch everyone was free to move around and talk to more people. Once lunch was over, Mark Seaman gave a fascinating talk about the first Lysander operations and, in the subsequent "question time" was able to cover many other features of SD work.

As this formula for our meetings has proved so successful we will be using it for future events.

Shortly before the end of June, and prior to the Summer Gathering, we were contacted by a relative of a 138 Squadron Navigator living in New Zealand. We were informed that this veteran, Naylor Hillary, would be 100 years old in July. A few emails later and some plans to help to celebrate this special birthday were in place.

Naylor's operational records, Operation Record Book entries and the pilots' debriefing reports were collated and sent electronically to New Zealand, where they were printed and made ready for presentation to Naylor. David Briggs used his contacts to obtain a banner, wishing Naylor a Happy Birthday, and the finishing touch came at about 11.15 on the morning of the Summer Gathering, when around 100 people on the airfield sang "Happy Birthday"! This was videoed, and sent to New Zealand - a lot of fun for a very special occasion.



Since the last edition of this newsletter we have said a final farewell to two more of our longtime members, veterans Mike Gibbons (whom many of you will have met at reunions) and Canadian Len MacFarlane.

Mike had been unwell for some time, but "escaped" from hospital last year to be with us on Remembrance Sunday - he is pictured in the Spring 2015 newsletter. His widow, Shirley, and son, Stuart, were able to join us in the summer.

Len MacFarlane had been in an assisted living facility for a while, but had kept up to date with TVARA via his daughter, Jan.

They will not be forgotten.

70th Anniversary of the Danish liberation in Holbaek

“An Englishman is coming next week. He wants to visit the crash area of a Halifax in our area. His father was one of the crew members”, the local archivist in Tølløse told me. I was on my first visit to the local archive researching some newspaper articles from another Royal Air Force crash. “I have marked the Halifax crash area in 1943 on this map for you, but I can’t tell much more about it”, the archivist said.

One week later, on 11th December 2013, I gathered a small delegation which met the Englishman - Nigel Atkins - at the Halifax BB378 crash site. It was on the exact day of the 70th Anniversary of the crash; we looked over the fields and decided to uncover the full story of the 138 Squadron crew and the operations coded Table Jam 18 and 19. Eighteen months later, in May 2015, more than 200 people attended an international seminar on the 70th Anniversary of the Danish liberation, covering the full story of Halifax BB378, the 138 Squadron crew and SOE airdrops in the area of Zealand in Denmark. The seminar was hosted by Museum Vestsjælland for three days and was attended by historians, WWII veterans, descendants of Allied airmen, descendants of Danish resistance fighters, and members of the public. A new WWII-exhibition also opened at Holbaek Museum with focus on the local SOE airdrops, the story of Halifax BB378 and the dramatic emergency landing on a frozen field near Holbaek on the night of December 10/11 1943.

The 138 Squadron crew of pilot A. C. Bartter (“Peter”), 2nd pilot bomb aimer Brian Henry Atkins, Navigator Clarence William Fry (“Joe”), Wireless operator Ernesto Howell, rear gunner Walter Ralph Riggs, Mid-upper gunner Stanley Gordon Smith, Frederick Turvill (on a training flight) and Flight engineer Nicholas Anderson flew operation Table Jam 18 and 19 on 10/11 December 1943. The tasks were to drop the Danish SOE Chief of Operations Major Flemming B. Muus near Roskilde and, after that, nine containers near the lake Tissø.

Halifax BB378 never returned to Tempsford. It was shot down by a German night fighter over Zealand. Three airmen managed to evade to Sweden. Five airmen became POWs. Major Flemming B. Muus was safe and managed to find his way to Copenhagen with very important plans from London about reorganising the whole Danish resistance movement.

In February and March 2015 local metal detectors teams examined the crash area of Halifax BB378 and more than 1.000 items from the aircraft were found. The main items became a part of the new Halifax BB378 exhibition in Holbaek.



After more than one year of research in Denmark and the UK, with support from Bob Body from the TVARA the full story of SOE Operation Table Jam 18 and 19, the crew of Halifax BB378 and the Danish helpers was told in a seminar at the 70th Liberation Anniversary event in Holbaek.

Nigel Atkins, the son of Brian H. Atkins gave the speech “Halifax BB378 - Table Jam 18 and 19”.

Mark Seaman also gave a speech in Holbaek under the title “SOE - Making the spark, feeding the flame”.

An introduction to 138 Squadron airdrops in the Holbaek area was given by the former Danish military attachè in London, Soren Lund.

Nigel Atkins telling the story of Halifax BB378.



On May 4 speeches were held at the high school in Holbaek where Mark Seaman and Nigel Atkins and veterans from RAF 10 Squadron gave more than 200 students lectures on the SOE and the local WWII, including the events near Holbaek, involving the Royal Air Force.

A delegation including Mark Seaman and Nigel Atkins were invited to the official remembrance ceremony in Copenhagen in presence of the Danish Queen and Prime Minister. The story of Halifax BB378 and SOE also found its way to national TV and radio and regional newspapers.

The Gerry Holdsworth Special Forces Trust, Museum Vestsjaelland and Holbaek Municipality made the seminar possible with help from a local organising committee under Holbaek Museum. A special thanks to Bob Body of the TVARA whose initial contacts into the Danish SOE world set us on the right path.

Jan Christensen, August 2015

A note from Nigel Atkins.

I would personally wish to thank Jan Christensen for all his efforts. Without his dedicated research and support this story could not be told. He has published a book in Danish on the background to the mission Table Jam 18 and 19 called The Heartshaped Lake named after the identification point for the dropping zone. Hopefully it will be translated into English. As well I wish to thank Karen Munk Nielsen Curator of the Holbaek Museum for her organisation behind the exhibition and seminar and Mark Seaman - well known to members of the TVARA - for his eminent input! Last but not least grateful thanks to the Gerry Holdsworth Special Forces Trust for their financial support.

Editor's note. Nigel's speech can be viewed [here](#) and Mark Seaman's speech is [here](#).

**Australasian Tempsford Veterans and Relatives Association
Report of Annual Commemorations at Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance,
Sunday 12 July 2015**

Our 2015 Commemoration was notable for several reasons. The attendance of some 40 people was remarkable, mindful of the Melbourne's winter weather on the day, which could only be described as "dreadful"! Further, in the presence of senior officers of the RAAF Association Victoria, the RAAF Association Melbourne, of family descendants of the RNZAF and on behalf of the Royal Polish Air Force, British, Australian, New Zealand and Polish wreaths were laid in memory of "Special Duties" (SD) airmen of all these nations.

It was a particular pleasure to welcome (in some cases once again from previous years) family descendants of killed in action (KIA), or still surviving, or since deceased, SD Squadrons airmen of the RAAF, the RNZAF and the Polish Air Force (PAF). A special welcome was also extended to RAF and other veterans, to distinguished persons and/or any French citizens present.

Significance of the Occasion

This fine Address was given by Sue Witham, on behalf of herself and her sister Jill, in which emphasis was placed upon the importance of the ATVARA commemorations of these long neglected multinational air personnel of the secret, World War Two "Special Duties" Squadrons of RAF Tempsford. These carry personal significance for the Witham family, due to the loss of their Uncle in 1944, a decorated RAAF pilot of No.138 (SD) Sqn., along with all of his 6 crew.



Laying of Wreaths

Following the laying of official wreaths, families of the Airmen made the following tributes:

In memory of 425800 Flt/Lt Reginald Ronald Witham DFC, RAAF Pilot, No 138 (SD) Sqn., KIA 27-11-44. His name is recorded with honour on the Air Forces Memorial to the Missing, in Runnymede, England.

In memory of 414741 Flt/Sgt George Herbert Williamson RAAF Pilot. No 138 (SD) Sqn., KIA 28-04-1944. He lies in a Commonwealth War Grave on Terschelling Island, The Netherlands. The names of his multi-national six crew, including Flt/Sgt Eric Raymond Clayworth, RAAF Tail Gunner, are recorded with honour on the Air Forces Memorial to the Missing, in Runnymede, England.

In memory of the late NZ405608 Sqn/Ldr Jack Parker DFC & Bar RNZAF Pilot, No.161 (SD) Sqn. Also in acknowledgement of all RNZAF "Special Duties" air personnel, including the surviving NZ422918 W/O Naylor Hillary RNZAF Navigator, No 138 (SD) Sqn., aged 100 years, in the presence of his granddaughter and partner, Katie Hillary and 'Macca' McDonnell.

In memory of the late 410369 Flt/Lt Max O'Bern RAAF Pilot, 138 (SD) Sqn..

In memory of the late 794386 W/O Stanislaw Gojdz, Polish Defence Medal, Polish Air Force (PAF), Despatcher and 2nd Pilot, No. 138 (SD) Sqn.

At the close of the ceremony, those attending who wished to, placed Remembrance Poppies into the Sanctuary Urns, while the Master of Ceremonies thanked all who attended and participated.

Many of you will remember W/O Fred Bowman, an RAAF Navigator/AG in No 138 (SD) Sqn., survivor of 21 SD Operations and 3 Main Force Bomber Command Ops., then subsequently several mercy flights to pick up allied POW's and to deliver food drops to starving Dutch families - Operation Manna

To everyone's delight, Fred, along with a group of other WWII RAAF airmen, on 19th June just past, was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the President of France.



He received this in Sydney, from the French Consul General to Australia, Christophe LeCourtier.

Report by John Williamson

Following last year's Tempsford Remembrance Sunday Service, Joan Munden, a cousin of agent Lilian Rolfe, sent us the following, which she wrote having visited Ravensbruck, where Lilian was executed. It sums up very clearly the importance so many families place on tracking down as much information as they can about their relative's history.

Lilian

Don't leave a trace,
Don't trust anyone,
Remember each face,
Hide wireless and gun.

Code is your voice,
Silk is your tool,
Morse is your key,
A pianist, that's all.

Speak only French, especially of love,
No English button or brand.
Your secret is mine, I'll still be here
Through danger, torture, and...

We found your trace.
Your photo, your call.
We felt your courage transcend.
We came and stood where you died, not in vain.
We followed your trail to the end

138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons

Special then

Special now

Special always

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Websites

www.tempsford-squadrons.info

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