



TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2022



Bob's diary

The Summer Gathering was a great success, much enjoyed by all who attended. We were fortunate with the weather, which meant that most people were able to picnic outside the village hall.



Many thanks to Ian Titman and Anne Alexandre for a fascinating talk about the Lysander operations.

FAMILY STORIES

Remembering My Brother Jim RAAF Rear Air Gunner Flight Sergeant 138 Squadron Tempsford

My brother, Jim (Graham Ernest Snook), was the only son of Harry and Henrietta Snook. Jim was a year younger than Mena and two years older than I. We grew up in North Perth, Western Australia.

To help write about Jim, I retrieved Mum's writing box which still holds lots of family memorabilia including some of Jim's letters home while serving with the RAAF, only to bolster the facts; my childhood and teen hood memories hold clear and firm.

Jim was a cheeky, happy blond-haired kid who loved mum and dad and liked helping in the garden and pulling the cart along that dad had made him to go shopping with mum. He was a typical boy of the era who enjoyed sport, especially tennis and football, winning the local tennis championship as a 17 year old.

Dad would insist Jim combed his hair before coming to the table and to dress in collar and tie even when he went out shooting. Growing up, Jim had lots of friends and continued to make friends readily throughout his RAAF training and service.

Sweethearts are often mentioned in his letters.

He was good fun to be around with his mates we played 'monkey up the tree' on Woodville Reserve, handy to home. He got me to wag kindergarten one day, but Mum heard us playing down the side and caught us out. I like digging for worms with him at Mandurah, except that once, in my eagerness to help, Jim's shovel gashed the back of my hand. Much later, during Mena and Don's courtship, Jim thought it was funny when Don would insist Mena re-wash dishes that were already clean. Jim, a tease himself, used to call his sisters 'fat' and 'skin'.



Jim with his 2 sisters

After North Perth Primary School, Jim attended Leeder-ville Junior Technical School and even offered to dinky his little sister when I was taking home science as a subject. Then war broke out. Jim worked at Western Assurance in Perth before enlisting in January 1942. When Jim arrived at Victor Harbour in South Australia for training, he wrote '... Phil Atherton's been good, helping me settle in, telling me things I needed to know...'. Phil, who was a colleague of Jim at Western Assurance, became my husband after the war.

After finishing training at West Sale in Victoria, Jim was on embarkation leave at home with us. He attended the standard medical examination which detected an ailment that held him back from leaving for overseas service until November the following year. What if?

Jim wrote detailed letters, as much as censorship allowed, and until his service in the RAAF abruptly ended in September 1943, it seemed as though he was enjoying the excitement of training and much-looked-forward to leave. He met wonderful families who fed him up, showed him around and stayed in touch. Jim maintained strong connections through his letters with several sweethearts including Jean Hatch, Irene, Lacey, and Moira Jowett.

The Hatch family in Maldon, Massachusetts sponsored Jim on many weekends and one furlough. They called him 'Baby Snooks'. Their letters oozed friendship and kindness and our family appreciated their support following the news that Jim had been reported as missing.

On re-reading his letter dated June 29th 1943, it is poignant that Jim writes '... it won't be long now. At a conversion unit, then we will be posted to a squadron. Promotion to Flight Sergeant.' His flight log shows he did conversion training at Marston Moor on Halifaxes and joined 138 Squadron Tempsford.

In a letter to mum and dad dated June 16th 1944, the wife of Flying Officer James Bradley, listed as missing with F/Sgt Snook G.E., was desperately looking for information and holding onto hope. Mrs Bradley wrote that the crew was told it had a 100-to-1 chance of coming back and had been given a week to decide.

We did not know how Jim met his end until I attended a service at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne in 2012 to unveil the Tempsford plaque when details were revealed that at the time of Jim's death, his plane was shot down while ferrying goods to Poland, the great weight of the load necessitating low flying.

The last entry in Jim's log in his own hand on September 8 1943 details Rear A/G did 5.35 hours on operations night flying over France in Halifax 'B'. Jim was listed as missing in action on September 16th 1943 in the Baltic Sea off Norseminde, Denmark while flying in Handley Page Halifax JD 156. He was 21 years old.

The last letter number 10, from Jim in mum's writing box is dated July 8th 1943.

Jim is remembered in Kings Park, Perth in the Honour Avenues on the south side of Lovekin Drive at a sugar gumtree L152A west of Wren Pass. The plaque commemorating Tempsford Veterans at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne is at Tree A 09, a *Bhutan Cypress*.

Norma J Atherton
Yokine WA Australia

We are grateful to Norma for this wonderful account of her brother's life and service. It was sent to us by her daughter, Jennifer.



We have been giving some thought to the format of the Summer Gathering for the future.

As the “picnic” format was so successful, this will continue, but there is a question about the design of the church service, most especially with relation to hymns. So we thought a simple survey is appropriate, and would welcome a response:

Do you wish to continue to have hymns at the service? Yes/no. If yes, then you will need to SING!

The second question relates to the running of the day. There are various “jobs” which need to be done to help the day to run smoothly. We are very grateful to those who currently do them, but want to ask if anyone else is able to volunteer to help. Please let us know if you could spare a bit of time - we will let you have details of what might be involved, of course!

A BIG DATE

Many of you will be aware that the website - www.tempsford-squadrons.info - includes a section titled “In Memoriam”, containing pictures of members of Tempsford aircrew who made the ultimate sacrifice.

612 members of the Tempsford Squadrons were killed on active service. They are all listed on the Rolls of Honour on the website, but I would dearly love to include more of them on “In Memoriam”. May 2025 marks 80 years since the end of the war in Europe, and my aim is to have photographs of as many as possible of these young men included by that time.

It is now down to you! If you have a photograph of your relative and/or his grave, please let me have it to include. If there is no grave, this is acknowledged, so don't let that put you off. All these young men were someone's son/husband/brother/cousin/father/uncle, and we owe it to them, I think, to show who they were - not just one in a long list of names. You can send the photos to the usual email address.

Many thanks.

Helen

Help from the “colonies”!

A significant number of those who served at RAF Tempsford came from countries which are now members of the Commonwealth - at the time, part of the British Empire.

Having highlighted the story of one Australian earlier in the newsletter, we thought it would be good to remind members of other Tempsford veterans from far away countries. All of these men survived, and became keen members of the TVARA. Sadly, they are all no longer with us, but the conversations and correspondence we had with them over the years was very special.

Here we have:



Noel Gomershall, Australian



Len McFarlane, Canadian



Jack Galbraith, Canadian

Naylor Hillary
New Zealand



138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons

Special then

Special now

Special always

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