



NEWSLETTER

£10 Subscriptions are now due - see Page 8

Editor's Note

Always good to start the New Year with an apology. Somehow between the last Newsletter, 10 days in Germany, 5 in Cornwall and some other festivity has played havoc with my time at the Editor's desk! But as they say 'better late than never' and a Happy New Year to you all.

Christmas Lunch



As ever we had an excellent Christmas Lunch at The Greenacres Tavern. It was so nice to see old friends and in this case new ones in the form of

Andy Hardy and his good lady (Andy fresh from his return from 'Down Under').



The meal was super and the service in the hands of Stephanie and Fiona was outstanding. We really are so lucky to have such a wonderful venue to hold these lunches and our meetings.

The photos of the day courtesy of Roger Miller

Bomber Command Veterans

On the next 3 pages you will find a questionnaire from Lady Helen Nall and The Lincolnshire Bomber Command Memorial Committee. Lady Helen is a fellow Ambassador of the RAF Benevolent Fund and I encourage all of you, so qualified, to fill in your details and send them off.

Also see P7, as Lady Helen has written a book 'The Courage of The Small Hours', with proceeds going 50/50 to the Bomber Command Memorial appeal and The RAF Benevolent Fund.



LOTTERY FUNDED



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Bomber Command Veterans

The Lincolnshire Bomber Command Memorial committee are asking veterans to provide us with information which can be collated and used in the proposed Bomber Command Interpretation Centre, by the planned memorial in Lincoln. The centre intends to employ cutting-edge technology to appeal to younger visitors, and will be a world-class venue where visitors from all nationalities can come and learn about what Bomber Command achieved during the war, and about the enormous sacrifices. We will also be reflecting the wider effect of the campaign, not just on the British people, but on our former enemies, too.

This is, however, just a guide; please do feel free to include any other memories you would like recording. Likewise, you may prefer not to answer some or any of the questions, and we will fully understand.

We are immensely grateful for all your help in sharing your recollections of all aspects of Bomber Command with everyone, for future generations.

Perhaps you would be kind enough to post this questionnaire back to me at the above address, or you can e-mail it if you prefer.

If you would prefer to talk to me in person, please do contact me on: 0115 966 3634.

Helen Nall

Your Name:

Squadron:

Your Rank:

Crew position (s):

Date enlisted, and where:

Home town:

School:

Civilian job (if any):

Where did you train, once enlisted?

Where were you posted to, after completing your training?

Did you think your training left you well-prepared for operations?

What were your thoughts / emotions on your first op? (what was the destination / target, and when was it?)

Cont...../

How many Ops did you take part in?

When was your last Op, and where?

Were you ever a POW? If so, where were you captured, and where were you held prisoner and for how long? Were there many other Bomber Command aircrew there with you?

Briefly, are you able to describe the WAAFs, ground crew, and other aircrew you encountered in Bomber Command?

What were living conditions like on the airfield (s) you were posted to? (Either in the UK or abroad) For example, accommodation, food, social life (on and off the base!)

What type of aircraft did you fly in? What was the best – and worst – feature of that aircraft? (ie, blind spot, quirkiness, and so on)

Do you have any particular memories of incidents on operations – night fighters, flak, searchlights, emergency landings, being off-course / lost, mechanical failure of aircraft or equipment?

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Do you have any thoughts or views about the targets you flew to – for example, which was the ‘worst’, in view of danger / length of flight / weather?

What do you recall about aircrew losses, and what effect did the losses have on you and other squadron aircrew?

Were enemy civilian casualties ever considered by aircrew?

Where and when were you demobbed? Did you return to your former employment?

How would you like Bomber Command, and the sacrifice of the men who served in it, to be remembered by future generations? (This is probably the most important question)

Thank you very much for taking the time to share your memories.

Jack Ball's Story - Part 8

Ed: *Jack's story continues on Christmas Day 1944.*

It was Christmas morning, drawn by the noise, we rushed out of our Nissen huts to see two V1 doodlebugs about two hundred feet above our runway heading West, probably meant for Sheffield, Manchester or Liverpool. They had been launched from a Heinkel over the North Sea. The Germans had sometimes sent Heinkels to observe our mustering and Junker 88 'intruder' night fighters to intervene in our landing pattern, with some success.

On Boxing Day we were called early from our beds. The weather had cleared and we went to attack the SS Panzer Division at St. Vith. The ground was snow-covered and the target clearly visible at the curve of the railway, so the bombing was concentrated. From this point the German advance was stalled due to the resistance of the soldiers on the ground and the armoured columns running out of fuel. The following day I was detailed to take fifteen aircrew (skeleton crews) over to Fiskerton for a FIDO landing to recover some aircraft stranded there. They had been refuelled and bombed up so the weight was high for a return. Once the snow had been cleaned off we set out and my landing was naturally smooth. We had a commendation from the Base Commander at Binbrook for this and I got three days rest in the sick quarters because our CO thought I looked 'peaky', but I was confident it was the Christmas beer!

The New Year saw us going to Nuremburg on the night of the 2nd. This was the scene of a Bomber Command disaster some months previously, but on this occasion things went well. The weather was good, and although the rising moon illuminated the contrails we left, which would normally cause concern, the use of Mosquito fighters, code-named Serrate, weaving through the bomber stream, was a great comfort. They were at great risk to themselves from nervous air-gunners. One Mosquito flashed across our nose, too close for comfort to

my mind. It was a different story on January 14th when we went to the refinery at Merseberg- Leuna. The weather was grim and so were the flak and fighters. This was a trip of nearly nine hours and it seemed particularly cold, with condensation putting a film of ice over the side windows and inside the windscreen. Bert Hazell, a quiet, twenty-four year-old Londoner, and his crew, were killed this night.

At last we came to my thirty-third trip, with all the crew having done at least the regulation thirty. It was to the oil refinery at Zeitz. I don't remember a lot about it except that it was a very black night and we were doubly glad to return to the English coast. Another force of Lancasters went to Brux in Western Czechoslovakia, a longer trip. They only lost one aircraft but I learned later that it was my friend, Jock McGonigal with all his crew. Probably he had finished the magic number as well.

I threw a dinner at our usual Louth pub for the crew and the ground staff who had looked after us so well. We had our photograph taken in front of the aircraft, but Bob Job was absent from the photocall for some reason I forget.



We went on leave, the crew were disbanded and posted elsewhere. Gordon and I had applied together for Transport Command and were pleased to be posted to Canada (via Morecambe, to wait for a ship). We were happy until we boarded SS. Louis Pasteur and realized lots of new Sergeant Air Gunners were on the same draft. Why did they need them in transport aircraft? (cont'd on P6)

We had a cargo of German prisoners heading for safety in a Canadian camp. They were an ingenious group and among the souvenirs they peddled was a plentiful supply of fake Iron Crosses.

We arrived at Moncton on April Fools' day 1945. Gordon and I took a fortnight's leave in Boston, Massachusetts, where we were made to feel very much at home by local families and by the British Officers' Club formed by veterans of the previous war. Then we had to proceed via Montreal and Winnipeg to Boundary Bay, near Vancouver. Here we picked up two wireless operators, Flying Officer Basil Harrington and Warrant Officer Joe Sharp. A Flight Engineer, Bomb Aimer, O'Reilly Sykes, and a new second pilot, an ex-Dundee policeman, Jock Brown. The engineer was an ex-London bobby who proved too tall for the turret and was shipped home, to my chagrin. The airport was on the foreshore and we learned to operate the B25 Mitchell, a powerful American twin-engine medium bomber with a tricycle undercarriage that was like having your own sports car, a delight to fly.

The country to the north was unmapped at that time, wild and mountainous. We went looking for a missing aircraft with no luck and heard later that ground parties had found almost a dozen that had been lost for years. There were two sights that are well remembered: the forest fires and the great rafts of logs being towed by tiny tugs. I had some friends visiting Vancouver Island so took the ferry to Nanaimo and was rewarded by the sight of Finnish-owned 'Passat', one of the last four-masted clippers.

VE day arrived which meant a wild night in Vancouver. Somehow I finished up on a tugboat in the harbour among friends. We learned that we were destined for the Far East, the next stage being a move to Abbotsford, some way inland, with Mount Baker looming in the distance. Here five gunners joined the crew, two of them being experienced men: Warrant Officers Cooper and Rees, and Sergeants Benton, Beale and Herbert.

We flew Liberator B24 heavy bombers, very different in our experience. The USA was turning them out at the rate of one per hour. They were seriously armed with ten heavy machine guns in four turrets (Sgt Herbert had to be squeezed into the Ball Turret underneath) and open waist-hatches. They carried a bomb-load that was small to our eyes. One feature was a very thin wing, the tips of which only became visible to the pilot when they rose into view on take-off. It was a complicated aircraft, and having no engineer, I made it my business to learn every detail. The reliable engines had an excellent supercharging system that enabled a climb to 30,000 feet. We only approached that height on one night flight over the Rockies when fire broke out in the radio room, just behind the pilots. Time stood still while Warrant Officer Joe Sharp fought and extinguished the fire that melted the radio. The senior radio officer had fled the scene and was buckling on his parachute.

Our time was spent practicing formation tactics against fighters supplied by a local squadron. There were longer flights over the Pacific and a great deal of high- and low-level bombing on the range. There was one regrettable incident when our Bomb Aimer, more used to a sophisticated British system, left a neat row of craters across the estate of a citizen living near the bombing range. We both had to appear before the CO for that, but our explanation was accepted.



B24 Liberator

Ed: *Next month Jack really does join Transport Command*

AGM Wednesday 16th January 2014

We are holding our **AGM** during the first meeting of **the year on 15 Jan 14**.

The Agenda is as follows:

1. Chairman's opening remarks
2. Committee reports
3. Election of Officers
4. Any other business

The AGM will be followed by some a film supplied by Martin Baker Ltd on the '**History of the Ejection Seat**'.

The Courage of the Small Hours by Lady Helen Nall



In the final months of the Second World War, on the 12 and 29 January 1945, two Lancaster bombers crashed in fields close to the village of Hoveringham in Nottinghamshire, with the loss of both crews.

Over six decades later, Helen Nall unexpectedly came across a fragment of aircraft alloy in one of her husband's fields.

Unaware, until then, of the story of the Lancasters, she talked to a local farmer who remembered the incident and decided to investigate further. Over the next year Helen tracked down the families of the aircrews and pieced together the final moments of the two Lancasters.

This is her remarkable account of how the war affected Hoveringham and the surrounding villages.

Her book is a tribute to the 55,573 Bomber Command aircrew who did not live to see the end of the Second World War, but particularly to the fourteen young men who died so violently within sight of her home.

The book is priced at £9.99 and the proceeds are split between the RAF Benevolent Fund and the Bomber Command Memorial.

Chiltern Aircrew Association

Membership renewals are now due for 2014. The annual subscription remains £10.

Please send your cheque, made payable to 'Chiltern ACA' to our Membership Secretary, Gerry Sealy-Bell (details on Page 8). Please include your membership card (if possible) and a stamped addressed envelope.

Membership is open to Military Aircrew and also Civilian Aircrew holding any licence. Therefore if you know anyone who you think might like to join us, please invite them to a meeting with a view to them joining. In exceptional circumstances we may also invite Associate Members who although they may not qualify for full membership, may have a well proven background with Aviation.

Programme

All events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless advised (*)

15 Jan AGM

19 Feb History of Leavesden, Derek Sayell
19 Mar TBA
16 Apr National Service, Wg Cdr John Gearing
21 May Guest's Lunch

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Welfare

Ed: *As you will see our Welfare Officer has been in the wars over Xmas but still managed to report on others!*

Unfortunately things went a bit haywire after the Lunch (in no way connected) and I was eventually trolleyed off to SMH for yet another CT scan and where I spent a very uncomfortable Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. They refuelled me with large quantities of antibiotics which did the trick.

I had a very long and cheery phone call with Ron Rosier who seems well if now a little immobile. Visited Alan Chappell who was not at all well having suffered a severe chest infection. Ted Matthews is now wheelchair bound but this doesn't bother him unduly as he continues to carry out his electronic developments. Also spoke to Joan Maile who was pleased to catch up on news. Christina Bunn is also coping well and is fortunate in having the opportunity to travel widely. Unfortunately our normal contact with the ladies, Mavis Dyson has had a couple of falls recently and has been unable to contact as many widows as usual.

We wish everyone all the very best for 2014.

Bill

Membership Secretary**Subscriptions for 2014**

It is time for **Membership Renewal**. A simple matter of a **£10 cheque payable to 'Chiltern ACA'**. If you can find your Membership Card please enclose it with your cheque and of course a Stamped Addressed Envelope.

I will of course be happy to take your subs at the AGM

Gerry