



Woking and District Aircrew Association

www.aircrew.org.uk/woking

Newsletter

13 November 2020

Editorial

We had hoped a pub lunch might be possible this month, but further lockdown has stymied that yet again, so we will be back to Zoom again for our monthly 'meeting' at 1400 on 17 November. To join, click the link in the box below. The link will be live from 1355 onwards.

With help from Tony B whilst I was away, we have enough names now for the 24 maximum for the Christmas lunch on 7 December that would have been allowed by the venue under the old Tier 1 COVID constraints (4 tables of 6 people with table service only, not a buffet as in previous years).

Timing of this latest lockdown seems likely to mean that a decision to go ahead with the Christmas lunch cannot be made until closer to the day than we would like and it may be that we will have to postpone until a later date. We'll keep you posted, but in the meantime please will those who have put their names down be ready to join us at the golf club at 1200 on 7 December. I will circulate further details separately.

We look forward to a return to normality so that we can have a proper branch celebration and get to know each other again. Meanwhile, please do join our Zoom meetings.

David Jackson

2021 Subs

Have you remembered that we will not be levying subs for 2021 in recognition of the effect of COVID on our Association? 2020 membership fees will cover 2021 as well and 2020 members will remain as members for next year.

Please stop your bank payment, due on 1 January next. Any payments received will be taken as donations.

**ACAW Zoom Meeting
1400 November 17th**

Click [HERE](#) to join

RAF News

RAF Poseidon Aircraft Named

The first three Poseidon aircraft have been named Pride of Moray, City of Elgin and Terence Bulloch DSO DFC. The RAF Poseidon fleet, which will total nine aircraft, will provide cutting-edge maritime patrol capabilities working side-by-side with the Royal Navy to secure the seas around the UK and abroad



4th RAF Poseidon under construction

The fourth of nine Royal Air Force Poseidon MRA1 maritime patrol aircraft, which was due to be delivered to Lossiemouth on 3 November, has been named Spirit of Reykjavik in honour of the role played by the Icelandic capital and its people in enabling the Allied victory during the Battle of the Atlantic.

Largest RAF Exercise in a Decade

Exercise Crimson Warrior involved personnel and aircraft from the Royal Air Force as well as the Royal Navy, British Army, United States Marine Corps and United States Air Force. Fast jets, multi-engine aircraft, helicopters and Unmanned Air Systems.

In addition to fast jets, the Exercise incorporated a huge number of aircraft conducting Qualified Multi-engine Tactics Instructors, QWI Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance and Qualified Space Instructors Courses. Voyager aircraft conducted routine Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) sorties extending the reach of each mission and providing a vital battle planning capability.

Secret Britain - No.3

[We are again indebted to Bob Connolly, editor of Contrail the magazine of the NATS Retired Staff Association, for permission to reprint this second article. Ed.]

Northern Ireland played a vital role during the second World War, particularly during the Battle of the Atlantic. As an example, a communications intercept and direction-finding station, located just outside Belfast, picked up a signal from the Bismarck that was being desperately sought by British forces. This in turn led to a Catalina flying boat patrol out of Lough Erne spotting the Bismarck the following day. Incidentally, the Catalina was being flown by one of the US Navy pilots who had been sent to the Province to train RAF pilots on this American aircraft, and this was prior to the United States officially becoming involved in the war. With Bismarck's position now known the Royal Navy quickly moved in to attack and destroy Germany's most powerful warship. It is only within the last few years that it was officially acknowledged that an American was flying the aircraft.

During the Cold War, Northern Ireland once again played a vital role in the defence of the British Isles. In my last feature article in this series I detailed the secret Royal Naval station at Portballintrae on the Co. Antrim coast that listened for Russian submarines. In this article I look at the role played by the RAF in Northern Ireland in the air defence of Britain,



Chain Home Radar

guarding against a potential Russian attack from the Atlantic Ocean.

As part of the defence of the UK during WW2, a series of Chain Home radar stations was established around its coastline, including Northern Ireland. The radar system used four 360 feet high steel transmitter towers spaced approx 180 feet apart, operating on a main and standby basis in the frequency band 20-30 MHz using horizontally polarized radiation. The transmitter 'curtains' were slung between towers and fed by 600-ohm transmission lines leading from a heavily protected transmitter building nearby.

Two identical transmitters were used in a main and standby role, with rapid change-over arrangements in the event of failure of the operational transmitter. Four 240 feet wooden receiver towers carried the receiver arrays.

These towers and the associated receiver building were some hundreds of yards from the transmitter buildings and, in some cases, in a separate compound. This system could detect aircraft as low as 500 feet and had an operational range of 120 nautical miles, giving between ten and fifteen minutes early warning of attack. The system could determine not only distance and direction but also the height the detected aircraft was flying at.

One such station was located at Downhill, close to Portstewart in Co. Antrim. This station remained operational after the war and was to take on a new role during the Cold War. In the early 1950's a new long-range radar was installed at Ballywooden, part of RAF Bishops court, and while it served other purposes, its main role was to provide air defence cover for the UK, in the event of a Russian attack coming from the Atlantic, as part of the Rotor 3 programme. Rotor station operations blocks on the western side of Britain and in Northern Ireland were on the surface as it was believed they were at less risk, compared to air defence radar stations in the rest of the UK that were constructed underground.

In the mid 1950's a new sub-sector for the Western Sector was established in Northern Ireland. In addition to the radar stations at Downhill and Bishops court a new radar station was constructed at Murlough Bay, near Torr Head in Co. Antrim. Interestingly this radar station did not have any RAF personnel living on site but in a hotel located in nearby Ballycastle. It was likely that they were detached from RAF Downhill and/or RAF Bishops court. RAF Murlough remained in operation until 1958, with RAF Bishops court being the sub-sector control station. RAF Downhill also closed in 1958 leaving just one air defence radar station in Northern Ireland.

Two radars were provided at Murlough, one Type 14 Mk. IX search radar on a gantry and one Type 13 Mk. VII height finder on a plinth. A standby set house was to be located alongside the technical block. The station was equipped with six 60A consoles, one 61 console and two video map units. The completion date



Type 14 Mk. IX search radar



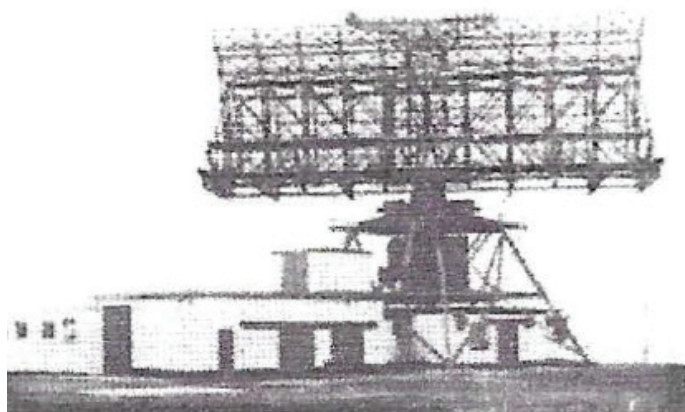
Type 13 Mk. VII
height finder

for the station was April 1956. A VHF transmitter block with a 90ft tower and a VHF receiver block with a 90ft tower were built close to the site at Crookanore. A Type 13 Height Finder was also located at Crookanore, one and a half miles west of the technical site.

Later, as technology improved, new radars, a new operations block was constructed at RAF Bishops court's Killard

Point site that remained operational to 1978 when it closed. By the 1970's the unit had a Type 80 radar on the Killard site and a newer Type 84 radar on the airfield that was fed to the Killard site. The radar station at RAF Bishops court closed in late 1978 and the radars were removed during 1979.

In the early 1980's, due to an increase in east/west tensions, two, possibly three, nuclear bomb proof structures were constructed on the airfield site at RAF Bishops court. I recall reading a local newspaper report on the construction, along with a couple of photographs that were published with the article. When I began my updated research into this, with the help of the local newspaper editor, the article could not be found in their archive material, but one particular issue that fell within our estimated time



Type 80 radar

frame was missing. We had no idea if it was something that was published without MOD approval (given the fact that even five years ago that aspect of the RAF Bishops court site was still classified) and had been subsequently removed by them or was it just by chance that particular issue was lost? These were to be used to house a Marconi Type 259 mobile air defence radar that could be used anywhere in Northern Ireland. This small unit remained operational for two or three years before RAF Bishops court completely closed and was placed for sale. The bomb proof buildings constructed in the early 1980's were completely backfilled with concrete by the RAF during a secret night-time operation, lasting several nights, when the RAF drew lorry loads of ready-mixed concrete from a company located on the outskirts of Belfast.

Remembrance Sunday

Tony Boxall laid a wreath at the Runnymede RAF Memorial on Remembrance Sunday.

Ron Hepburn was at the Guildford memorial, whilst David Jackson attended a ceremony at the Church Crookham memorial which was watched by over 50 people and followed by a Chinook flypast.



Tony Boxall at the Runnymede memorial



Tallboy Explosion in the Piast Canal, Poland

[Thanks to author Dr Rob Owen for permission to use this article and to our own Bill Bawden for arranging it.]

Association Members will no doubt be aware that a Tallboy bomb dropped by 617 Squadron during World War 2 was recently discovered in the Piast Canal in Poland. The bomb exploded while the Polish authorities were attempting to make it safe. We are grateful to Dr Rob Owen, the 617 Squadron Historian for providing the following background information about how the bomb came to be in the canal.

Extensive media coverage over the recent detonation of a 12,000lb Tallboy bomb in the Piast Canal at Swinoujscie, Poland, highlights the valuable work carried out by bomb disposal teams to make safe the detritus of war and reminds us that the effects of conflict extend far beyond the signing of peace treaties.

The Tallboy had remained in the mud and silt at the bottom of the canal for over 75 years. In April 1945, with WWII approaching its final stages, the cruiser Lutzow moored in the canal at what was then known as Swinemunde, to be used as a floating fortress – her guns being able to offer long range heavy artillery support to German troops fighting a rearguard action. In an effort to dispose of this threat, No. 617 Squadron was tasked to attack the ship. It took three attempts. On 13 and 15 April the force was recalled due to adverse weather conditions, but on 16 April the conditions were fine and 18 Lancasters, 14 of them carrying Tallboys, the remainder 1,000 pound bombs, found the ship clearly visible in their bombsights.

Shortly after 5 pm the Squadron made their run in at between 13000'-14500', the Lancasters encountering heavy flak. Few aircraft escaped without some

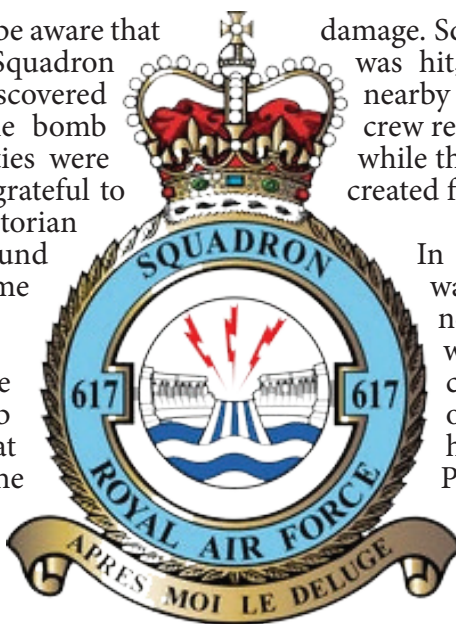
damage. Squadron Leader John Powell's aircraft was hit, losing a wing and crashing in a nearby forest killing all on board. Today the crew rest in Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, while the crash site is marked by a memorial created from one of the Lancaster's tailplanes.

In the clear conditions the bombing was accurate. There were at least 4 near misses with the Tallboys, one of which fell between the ship and the canal bank – the force of the explosion opened the ship's side and causing her to start to flood and begin to list. Photographs taken immediately after the attack by an accompanying Mosquito showed that the cruiser appeared to have survived the attack.

Later reconnaissance showed that the ship was now well down at the stern – in all probability sitting on the bottom of the canal, but the shallow water meant that her decks remained above water. As far as the Royal Navy were concerned this meant that she could not be claimed as sunk. Nevertheless, Lutzow was no longer seaworthy, over 500 of the ship's company were disembarked and ad hoc repairs made enabling her still to be used as battery to bombard the advancing Soviet forces.

The vessel was finally scuttled by the Germans in May 1945. Refloated by the Russians she was towed into Danzig Bay and was finally sunk during weapons trials in July 1947.

Finally, there is some very good drone footage at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5XByj0i4hI>



The Herc and the F-15s

A couple of F-15's are escorting a C-130 Hercules, and their pilots are chatting with the pilot of the transport to pass the time. Talk comes 'round to the relative merits of their respective aircraft. Of course the fighter pilots contend that their airplanes were better because of their superior speed, manoeuvrability, weaponry, and so forth, while the putting down the Herc's deficiencies in these areas.

After taking this for a while, the C-130 pilot says, "Oh yeah? Well, I can do a few things in this old girl that you'd only dream about." Naturally, the fighter pilots challenge him to demonstrate.

"Just watch," comes the quick retort.

And so they watch. But all they see is that C-130 continuing to fly straight and level..

After several minutes the Herc pilot comes back on the air, saying "There! How was that?"

Not having seen anything, the fighter pilots reply, "What are you talking about? What did you do?"

And the Herc pilot replies, "Well, I got up, stretched my legs, got a cup of coffee, then went back and took a leak."

With thanks to rogerk on PPrune

A NAVIGATOR'S TALE

NOT A MOUSE STIRRING

ALFRED VICE was a navigator with 166 Squadron, 1 Group, from Kirmington, who completed a tour of 35 operations.

My operational experience in the RAF may be characterised by the opening scene of Hamlet - "Have you had a quiet guard?". "Not a mouse stirring".

At the age of 19, I was studying law at Oxford and conscription was looming. A life in the trenches did not appeal to me, and the navy did not seem suitable either, for a non-swimmer. That left the RAF, and as it did not occur to me that this meant anything other than a role in aircrew, I volunteered in September 1941 for that.

I reported to A.C.R.C. in London in March 1942 and learned that I had been selected for a navigator's lengthy training. A few weeks after arriving at I.T.W. at Hornchurch, my intake was due to be posted but I, and another trainee, were excluded as our chest X-rays had raised queries. Further medical checks at Uxbridge disclosed that I was eligible for discharge. However, I would be allowed to stay in the service if I were to submit to several months' observation and then a medical board. I chose to go on.

In due course I completed the initial training and then went before the medical board in January 1943; this cleared me for flying duties, though I was offered the choice of ground duties only. Again, I chose to go on as aircrew. I had suffered as a baby from bronchitis, and the medical queries had caused a delay of 15 months in all. (This delay probably saved my life).

My navigation training started in July in South Africa, after an appallingly sordid four week voyage there in a grossly over crowded troopship. In March 1944 I returned by sea in much better conditions altogether. Finally, I joined a crew in July and my persistence to fly began to bear fruit at last.



Flt Sgt Alfred Vice

When we did our first operation at the end of October, losses for Bomber Command had declined to about 1 % generally. The average for the whole Command is not, of course, the average for all its parts. My own squadron (166) losses in my time were 2.25% and within that time we had three operations each with a loss rate of 11%. However, matters proceeded quietly enough for our crew and I was rarely aware of enemy opposition, in my cosy compartment with little need to look outside the aircraft. We occasionally picked up shell splinters on raids, but I never knew of these until we had landed. Once, a hole in the wing showed that an incendiary had passed through precisely between the aileron and a fuel tank without damaging either

en route. A very near miss with another Lancaster, in cloud, is certainly memorable!

There were many nights, though, of hard work. 16 of my 35 ops were over seven hours in duration; the one on the 14th March took over 8 1/4 hours. This trip entailed no fewer than 94 log entries, made under the pressure of exact timing. Time was the bane, and the kernel, of a navigator's job of controlling the onrushing future from the interpretation of the fleeting past.



On 9th April, I routinely attended the navigators' briefing, only to be told that the tour length had been reduced and that, in fact, our crew were tour expired with 35 ops completed. We were thus denied the joy of knowing that our last landing had been made.

When I stood in front of Buckingham Palace for the VE anniversary in 1995 and watched the fly-past, I felt pleased to have done something, however small, towards securing that these were RAF aircraft and not those of a victorious Luftwaffe. If Dame Fortune had allotted me a quiet guard, should I complain?

[A chapter from Upside Down Nothing on the Clock published by Woking Aircrew Association, which is still available on a Windows CD-ROM from David Jackson.]