



Twenty Four

The Magazine of XXIV Squadron Association



Issue 15

93rd Anniversary Edition

Summer 2008

A PICTURE POST ISSUE



Twenty Four is the Newsletter of 24 Squadron RAF Association and issued once a year to all members.

Contributions to Assoc. Sec at :- **15 Birch Grove CHIPPENHAM Wilts SN15 1DD**
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The Photo Album



Some of the selection of photos on the occasion of XXIX Squadron being presented with the new standard at RAF Lyneham on 9th May 2008



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Editorial



This is the "Hello" edition of the newsletter "OK"! The idea is to try for a fresher and more picture based look now that so many of the members can access the magazine in its full colour format on-line. More contributions of digital photos are being submitted and the next phase is to print the hard copy in colour as well if that can be achieved at a reasonable cost per copy.

What better way to demonstrate that than the historic occasion of the Squadron's new standard being presented after 25 years hard service. We hope you enjoy the spectacle. Also on the change is a the top job on XXIV rotating once again and a warm welcome to Wing Commander Andy Bacon . With what limited time there is available for those in flying suits to meet you all, be sure to grab the opportunity to come along to this years reunion on the **4th October 2008**.

Editor

David Burgin

Association President

Air Com Dick Gould

Association Committee

Keith Chapman - Chairman

Sam Wright - Dep. Chair

Keith Rayner - Treasurer

David Burgin - Secretary

Squadron Liaison

W/C Don Turnbull (till 21 May)

W/C Andy Bacon (from 21 May)

F/L Phil Whitworth

F/L Pete Astle

The 92nd Anniversary Reunion

The 92nd Anniversary Reunion Sat 6th Oct 2007

It does seem like a long time ago as I finally get down to writing up the notes I made at last years Reunion but lets hope that the atmosphere on the day survives several months in my jobs pending tray.

The tried and trusted format for organising us part timers onto the site worked well and everybody was in a fully refreshed and chatty mood by the time Squadron Leader Howard Carby gave members, wives, partners and guests a briefing on what XXIV had been up to since last year.

W/C Don Turnbull was at the sharp in Afghanistan as the detachment commander. Its one way of avoiding doing a presentation but maybe not the first one that comes to mind.

Currently the Squadron are not actively involved in trips to many exotic destinations, these are mainly by charter aircraft. At least the tented accommodation has become a bit more luxurious, being rubber and better insulated. The aircraft and crews have moved well out

of theatre but this has the down side of adding 1.5 hours flying time to each mission and consumes additional fuel and flying hours.

Gone are the days of just being able to take a nav bag and suitcase on a trip, its now a huge amount of personnel survival kit for each crew member. The sorties themselves are general centred on moving personnel and equipment from place to place in Iraq. This has involved the upper limit of being extended to a 19 hour day for 6/7 days on and 1 day off. Crews are out on detachment for around 1 month.

In Afghanistan they cover support to Helmund Province, Kabul and Camp Bastion which has a rough strip landing area. We saw a night approach, landing and take off video taken by HTV into Kabul with the crew using defensive aids and night vision goggles onto an airfield at an elevation of 5,500ft in complete darkness, not the sort of thing for a novice.

Flights supporting troops in Northern Ireland have now finally finished, along with support flights to the Balkans. What time is left over is used to cover all the other odds and ends that inevitably crop up. Lyneham is now also the main hub in the UK

Wanted Editor

To allow the current Editor to concentrate on the Association Web Site's development, the job of Newsletter Editor is up for grabs. Ideally suit anyone with reasonable IT skills, e-mail access and keen on Aviation research. You will enjoy this opportunity to give the current Newsletter a make over and reach a readership of 300 members each year.

You would work closely with the Secretary and Web Site Author to ensure a seamless end product. Full details and background from:-

The Secretary and Editor



(Continued from page 3)

for Repatriation of all serving personnel.

Training still continues and is split into 5 tiers of competence, with Level 5 being only Limited Combat Ready up to Level 1, able to support Special Forces. From first hand accounts, landing on unpaved runways at night wearing those night vision goggles is about as demanding as it gets. Crews still deliver containers over the ramp for humanitarian and military needs.

Adventure training has taken the form of a sailing expedition in the Baltic to reinforce team work. With the closure of Burton Hill House School after the many years of support from Squadron crews over the years, another LOCAL charity is being sought to keep the community involvement alive. All this and a new OC XXIV in May 2008, W/C Andy Bacon and a new standard to be presented by The Princess Royal the same month.

The future holds much for the Squadron with its capability to support the huge long term task of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Its resources are the increased capability of the role the C130J can play in forward combat areas. The A400M project moves along towards its eventual manufacture stage, thus providing a potential new aircraft for XXIV?

All this information prompted some lively and sensible questions from the audience, with a special emphasis to the welfare of the crews out on operations.

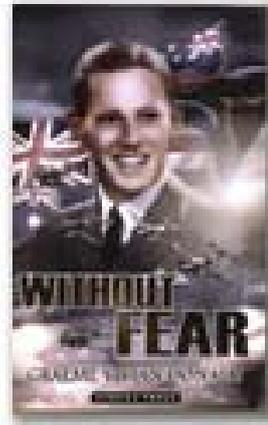
After being fired up by the briefing, it was back to the crew room and patio for a very enjoyable afternoon. This included an action packed Rugby Match on the big screen (England 12 Australia 10), a visit to the Flight Simulator, static aircraft, tour round the airfield and plenty of al fresco lunch time grub. We have to thank Mike Long for organising the raffle and auction which raised a further £170 for Association funds.

A new format for the Ladies Guest Night was tried with resounding success, the local hotel return coach service to the mess, and music during the evening meal all added to another memorable reunion. Don't miss out on the next one is the advice from present.

IN OMNIA PARATI



A Good Read



Graeme Vivian Donald, a former pilot in the RAF (he is in fact a XXIV Association Member), saw active service throughout World War II. Encouraged by a childhood friend, Donald learned to fly aeroplanes at the airfield near Masterton in New Zealand where he grew up. He accepted a commission in the summer of 1939, joining RAF Coastal Command shortly after war was declared.

Without Fear will make fascinating reading for those with an interest in the RAF or aviation in general, but it also contains a great deal about the author's childhood and his life after the war, during which time he worked in civil aviation for KLM, started a family and began a business in wool and other industries.

The Secretary has a paperback edition of this book available for loan out to any member wishing to give it a read. Just drop me a line at the usual address. A few stamps for the postage would be appreciated.



Flying Machines of 24 – 1920 to 1928

Simon Batchelor has been researching our historic list of aircraft types and offered the following details of the various types flown during the period of 1920 to 1928.

Also a request from Simon - would any members have any recollection of 24 Squadron carrying out an Iceland Mail Service using Lockheed Hudsons, starting in 1941? He is in contact with a Ragnar Ragnarson who is researching RAF Flights to Iceland during WWII, and Simon has not seen previous references to Icelandic flights.

He has Lockheed Hudson III's AM717 and AM725 flying into Iceland from Prestwick from 22/08/41. Perhaps someone has these aircraft in their logbook, or remembers trips there, any information gratefully received.

Communications Duties 1920 – 1928

Following World War I, 24 Squadron was reduced to a Cadre based at London Colney in Hertfordshire, later relocated to Uxbridge in September 1919. The squadron was resurrected in 1920, when the Air Council Inspection Squadron based at Waddon airfield, Croydon Surrey, was redesignated under Sqn Ldr E H Johnston. The official reformation being 1st April 1920 and the squadron base was at RAF Kenley, on the North Downs in Surrey.

The initial equipment of the comprised a variety of ex wartime aircraft, and a pair of adapted fighting types. These were flown on communications and training duties until the first new post war designs arrived in 1928. The first official use of term "24 Communications Squadron" is in the Air Force List of May 1924.

The RAF in the early 1920's was a mere shadow of the great forces in place at the end of 1918. However the RAF hierarchy had identified the need for a non-operational squadron. It's duties were to include transport of mail and persons, type training, and continuation training for pilots on ground based postings. Following the end of

hostilities, the RAF had been involved in supporting the large occupation forces in Germany, and the Politicians involved in drafting the Versailles Treaty in Paris. This mainly comprised transport of urgent mail and occasionally passengers, which had been flown in ex bombers such as DH9's and DH4's.

The initial equipment of the squadron included Avro 504's, DH9A's and Bristol F2B Fighters, but as RAF Kenley was also an Aircraft Depot other types were used from time to time. Unusually a United States aircraft a "Le Pere Lusac 11" was assembled by 24 Squadron personnel in September 1920 for use by the US Air Attaché. Captain JM Robb test flew it, but it was not used very often. Two aircraft of this type, serials 42130 and 42131, were tested in France before the armistice so it is likely that it was one of these.

The future Air Commodore D'Arcy Greig was a flight commander with the Squadron in 1924 and he refers, in the Book RAF Kenley, to the "Kenley – Northolt War". This involved various raids on each others aerodromes by the resident squadrons, which included the dropping of toilet paper, and old boots, kidnapping and other high jinks. My interest was piqued by his mention of the aircraft involved in the Bumpf or toilet paper raid. He refers to Avro 504K, DH9A, Bristol Fighter, Snipe and

You might like to know that "Flight" magazine has put their old issues on the internet, and they are fully searchable. Simon has spent many hours looking for 24 Squadron references.

<http://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive/index.html> is the website for those that may be interested. An example was an article featuring 24 Squadron Aircraft displaying and winning a relay race at the 1922 RAF Hendon Pageant,

three Fairey Fawns. This is the only record I have come across Fairey Fawns being used on operational duties by 24 Squadron and I am not sure of the serials, so if anyone reading this has come across their use please let me know.



Aircraft Types 1920-1928

Avro 504J

Aircraft serial C4451 was inherited from the Air Inspection Squadron, where it had been used at Waddon to teach the Prince Albert, the future King George the VI, to fly. This aircraft had crashed twice before being used by the Prince, which caused a considerable fuss when discovered by the Royal Family. However this aircraft has the distinction of being the first of many 24 Squadron aircraft to be associated with the Royal Family.

Technical Details

Crew Pilot and Pupil, Passengers One if used for communications. Length 29'5", Wingspan 36', Engines 1x 100hp Gnome Mono Soupape Range 250 miles, Speed Max 95mph, Cruising 85mph.

Avro 504K

A considerable number, of these aircraft, were used as the principal training aircraft of the RAF throughout the 1920's. They were a development of the 1913 Avro 504, which had been continuously developed and used as a bomber, trainer and even as an anti Zeppelin night fighter. 24 Squadron flew two Avro 504A's in 1915 as trainers, and two Avro 504D's in 1915 as home defence aircraft manned by instructors. The Avro 504K was used for training and continuation flying. Aircraft serial H2314 was used by Prince Albert during his flying training, and the control column suitably mounted was presented to the King in 1948 as a memento, and it remains in the Royal collection.

At the RAF Aerial Pageants held at RAF Hendon, 24 Squadron took part in numerous events and at the first, held in July 1920, they won the Avro 504, and the three type, relay races. The No1 Group Commander, Group Captain H C T Dowding, having noticed that considerable time was lost during relays when starting the competing aircraft, had 24 squadron's aircraft started and warmed up prior to the event. This made them easier to start during the race itself and thereby gained an advantage. Dowding of course became the leader of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. The three types used in the relay team comprised an Avro 504K, a Bristol F2B Fighter, and a Sopwith Snipe.

Technical Details

Crew Pilot and Pupil, Passengers One if used for communications, Length 29'5", Wingspan 36', Engines 1x 110hp Le Rnone or others, Range 250 miles Speed Max 95mph, Cruising 85mph.

Bristol F2B Fighter

This stalwart aircraft was used as a two seat fighter

and for reconnaissance duties during WWI, and it was to remain in front line service until 1931. 24 Squadron was issued with their first "Brisfit" in 1920 and their last was withdrawn in February 1931. They were used for continuation training and communications, and the original F2B's were followed by "J" types, Mk III's, and MkIV's. On the 16th May 1921 the Squadron demonstrated aircraft to the future Emperor Hirohito, when as Crown Prince he visited Kenley. Amongst the aircraft demonstrated was a Vickers Vimy. Captain James Robb was told off for looping a Bristol Fighter with a Japanese general in the back seat.

Two specials the Coupe, and a MkIII serial J8430 especially modified for special service as the Prince of Wales's personal aircraft in 1928, were also used.

In the book "But Not in Anger", written by R Grant and C Cole published by Ian Allen in 1979 which discusses the RAF's Transport role up to 1952 there are a number of references to 24 Squadron. One of my favourite stories refers to 24 Squadron, led by Sqn Ldr William H L O'Neill, entering 6 Bristol Fighters in HQ Fighting Area Dive Bombing Competition! This event held in 1926 had preliminary rounds, followed by a final at RAF Upavon. 24 Squadron's Bristol F2Bs won this with a score of 94%, 7% better than the runner up. This won them the coveted Sir Phillip Sassoon Cup, but they were belatedly disqualified as the competition was confined to single seat aircraft.

Technical Details

Crew Pilot and Pupil Passengers One if used for communications, Length 25'10", Wingspan 36'3", Engine 275hp RR Falcon III, Endurance 3hrs, Speed Max 110mph, Cruising 90mph.

Bristol Coupe

In order to find a post war use for the Bristol F2B Fighter, the Bristol Aeroplane Company converted an aircraft to a Coupe version. This was a normal F2B with an enclosed rear cockpit for a passenger, the idea being to create a more comfortable civil version. Aircraft serial H1460 was converted and sold to the Air Board in 1919 for VIP transportation, it was then allocated to 24 Squadron. In the book "RAF Kenley" author Peter Flint, extracts from the future Air Chief Marshall Sir James Robb's log include flights in Col. Ludlow-Hewitt's Bristol "Tourer". Col Ludlow Hewitt later became Chief of Bomber Command and was at that time a senior figure in the air force.

Pictures of this one-off aircraft, were presented to 24 Squadron by Mr Desmond Evans, whose father served as air mechanic with the squadron.



Technical Details

Crew 1 pilot Passengers 1, Length 25'10"
Wingspan 36'3", Engine 275hp RR Falcon III
Endurance 3hrs, Speed Max 128mph, Cruising
90mph.

unit commanded by Trenchard. After the war DH9A were used extensively abroad, in the Middle East and elsewhere. 24 Squadron used them for continuation and conversion training, in fact Jim Mollison the famous aviator trained on them in 1924.



The Bristol Formation shows the Bristol Coupe and Bristol fighters referred to in the article.

He first went solo on the 9th August 1924 in a DH9A aircraft Serial J567. In the Air Force Lists there are a number of officers with fine names who served with 24 sqn. One of them, described by James Robb as the finest DH9A pilot in the country was F/O Marcel L Trapanga Leroy. In 1920 he was serving as an instructor with F/O Aleth TS Lequen de Lacroix, I can just imagine the difficulty of pronouncing those two names, especially after a couple of drinks!

Technical Details

Crew 1 pilot 1 pupil, Passengers One if used for communications, Length 30',
Wingspan 46'
Engine 400hp Liberty, Endurance 5.75hrs
Speed Max Cruising 114mph.

De Havilland DH4A

This was another one off, inherited from Air Council Inspection Squadron. A 3 seat conversion of the famous WWI bomber aircraft, the aircraft attributed to 24 Squadron F5764 was originally used for transporting delegates to the Versailles talks. Although a number of authors have stated that F5764 was operated by the squadron I am trying to obtain confirmation from the remaining official records. The two passengers sat facing each other in the rear fuselage in an enclosed cabin. The pilot, as in the Bristol Coupe, sat up front exposed to the elements.

Technical Details

Crew Pilot Passengers 2 no, Length 29'8" Wing-span 42'6", Engine 360hp RR Eagle VI Endurance 3.75hrs, Speed Max 121mph.

De Havilland DH9A

These aeroplanes were designed as replacements for the DH4, and were used during the Great War by the Independent Air Force, a strategic bombing

DH10 Amiens Mk III

These 2 engined biplane bombers, powered by Liberty engines, were trialed in France toward the end of WWI. They were then ordered in some numbers to equip the Independent Air Force during 1919, if the war continued. The end of the war resulted in cancellation of the bulk of the orders but sufficient were built to equip 4 squadrons post armistice.

One aircraft serial E5459 served with 24 squadron at RAF Kenley it was delivered in 1919, so it was probably at the Aircraft Depot when the unit formed up. I have struggled to find what use this aircraft was put to, but the possibility is that conversion training was carried out.

Technical Details

Crew 3/4, Passengers 2 if 2 crew carried, Length 36'7.5", Wingspan 65'6", Engines 2 no. 400hp Liberty, Endurance 6hrs, Speed Max 112.5mph Cruising.



Sopwith 7F1 Snipe

These aeroplanes were designed during WWI and served operationally from September 1918. They continued in service until 1926, and for a while in the early 1920s, one squadron of Snipes was Britain's entire defence force. One machine F2409 was allocated to 24 Squadron, where flown by F.L. Luxmore it formed part of the three type relay team.

This team won the Hendon Pageant relay race in 1920, 1921 and 1922. It may have also been used for continuation training during that period. There is a very sad postscript to the Snipe used by the squadron, during practice flying with its next owner, the No1 School of Technical Training. The pilot Flt Lt Ronald St. Clair McClintock MC met his death when the Snipe collapsed and fell to the ground from a considerable height. One thing the Sopwith established was the practise of having a current front line fighter aircraft on the strength.

This continued single examples of the AW Siskin, & Bristol Bulldog, later Gloster Gladiators, Hawker Hurricanes, Curtis Mohawks and Supermarine Spitfires were held right up to 1942

Technical Details

Crew Pilot, Passengers nil, Length 19'9"
Wingspan 30'1", Engines 230hp Bentley BR2 Rotary, Speed Max 121mph

Vickers Vimy

This twin engined bomber was too late to see service during the Great War, but the type found undying fame as the first aircraft, crewed by Alcock & Brown, to fly the Atlantic. References to use by 24 Squadron at Kenley include demonstrations to the Japanese and testing for possible use for newspaper transport during the General Strike of 1926.

Two aircraft, serials F8640 and F9152, are noted as being issued to 24 Squadron, however I am still looking for records of their being used for training or other purposes. Their use would have involved lots of resources in terms of manpower.

Technical Details

Crew 3, Passengers nil, Length 43'6.5"
Wingspan 68'1", Engines 2 x 360hp RR Eagle VIII Range 900 miles, Speed Max 100mph Cruising.



ACCOMMODATION – 2008

Holiday Inn Express M4 J16 Swindon

The Deputy Chairman has managed to obtain a group rate of only £45 per room, including a good breakfast and Sunday newspaper! Those wishing to take advantage need to email gm.swindon@expressholidayinn.co.uk or telephone 0870 990 9690. Any problem speak to Stephen Rees general manager 01793 818800.

Express by Holiday Inn (West Swindon)
Frankland Road, Blagrove Swindon SN5 8UD. www.hiexpress.co.uk

PLEASE BOOK DIRECT

Alternatives: A weekend break rate may be available at the Hilton Hotel (Tel 01793 881777) which is our nominated get together place on the evening of Friday 3rd off base from 7pm onwards. They have offer ed their standard w/e rate for arriving Friday, dinner that night, b/fast sat and sun, depart Sunday at £69:50 per day so £139 in total payable in advance and without cancellation option. Try the Internet or Teletext for other deals. Over the road is the Lydiard Travel Inn offering room only rates at around £40 per day, any day of the week and is the cheaper option for couples or families. They may be contacted on 01793 881490 for more details and bookings. Also nearby is the IBIS hotel. The Wiltshire, which has the best rates on their website, see Wiltshire Golf and Country Club, is on the main Wootton Bassett to Lyneham road.

Chippenham Tourist Information Office (01249 706333) will give you details of other accommodation in the area and arrange booking for you. The IBIS Hotel, Swindon is on the Delta Business Park (Tel 01793 514777) .



Memory Banks Pt 1

A nice long letter embedded in an email via the family of **Air Cdr [Rtd] D. W. Hitchins AM AFC** of SW Australia arrived in November and thought it worthy of inclusion for the Newsletter.



I was privileged to be CO of No 24 Sqn from 1956-58. My daughter recently came by a copy of your Summer 1994 edition which I read with interest, and thought it may be in order to put in a few words from the Antipodes. I was a pilot in New Guinea in WW2 and had no European experience. My first RAF experience was in Japan, 1947 where I had the only RAAF crew attached to No 1315 (quarter past one) Flight of the RAF. They were a good bunch and Spud Murphy, the CO, and I became friends until he died. The examiners gave me the gears and a B category. We taught them to play Aussie Rules football.

Some years later I was polishing a chair in RAAF Headquarters and heard that the posters were looking for someone to go to England and take over the Commonwealth Sqn. I made a rapid run in their direction, tabled my qualifications, finally convinced them that I was the answer to their problem, and

away Joan and I went on the "Oronsay". Spud met us at Tilbury Dock.

I have good memories of those two years. On arrival at Colerne we had just entered our new home when a pall of black smoke appeared near the runway. I called the control tower and was told "A Hastings has just crashed in the valley. Some new Australian who has just come to take over No 24 Sqn".

So began two very satisfying years and some of the best flying experience to come my way.

No 24 Squadron had been a fighter outfit in WW1 and had been commanded then by an Australian, Harry Hawker. It had earned a high standing in the post-war RAF. Command of such an outfit was, for me, an honour, of which I was well aware. The only other RAAF CO was Sir Chas. Reed, who was later CAS. Several other RAAF members were already there and some other Australians who had joined the RAF. We had New Zealanders, including a Maori officer who was an excellent navigator and later became NZ Air Attaché in Canberra. We had several Canadians, some in RAF uniform, one Jamaican and a number of Czechs and Poles, mostly experienced men.

There was no appointed Flight Commander, so I used to ground one of the senior Captains for three months and make him the Flight Commander. In particular I remember Lou Sedivy, a Czech, who made a Hastings look like a Tiger Moth. He later emigrated to Australia and we met several times.

I recall with gratitude the great help from Wg Cdr Peter Merriman DFM [later Air Commodore] while I was finding my feet. He had been a Sergeant Hurricane pilot during the Battle of Britain and was one of the most capable officers I ever met anywhere. That dour Yorkshire man was also a great Mess President. His dining - in nights were some of the best ever.

Training and the categorization system were applied rigorously and that is what made the command so professional. The prescribed monthly/six monthly/annual exercises and tests HAD to be completed or individuals would be grounded and the Squadron Commander in the gun. I re-

(Continued on page 10)



call doing night circuit training in marginal conditions with a flight plan aboard for Malta, all Continental and UK airfields having been closed by weather.

Transport Command's categorization and continuation training system has been copied by other Air Forces including ours and the Americans. We won the Lord Trophy twice and it was the greatest geography lesson I could have.

The Mediterranean area was our backyard. Gibraltar, Tangiers, Rome. The British atomic testing ground at Christmas Island in the Line Islands south of Hawaii was being built and we were involved. Sometimes we went via Australia – Darwin/Amberley-, sometimes via the North Atlantic, sometimes via the Azores. For certain of these purposes the Hastings was authorized to operate with a 5000lbs overload, which made it unsafe in the event of an engine failure. As in all flying, fuel is a critical matter. Transport Command wanted freight carried, not fuel. Crews wanted at least reasonable margins. Crossing the Atlantic in winter the Hastings fuel tank vents would ice up, causing the contents gauges to over-read. The further one went, the more fuel one had.

Domestically the posting was enjoyable and we made some good friends. Plans for Joan and I to visit Europe did not eventuate, though. With any international emergency, RAF Transport Command was placed on stand-by and we lived from one 'crisis' to the next. I think I am still on stand-by to take a detachment to Nyasaland and also I still may have to go to Bardufoss in Norway for a NATO exercise.

Joan enjoyed the little rural village of Coleme which had some cow yards, a few grey stone houses and a small pub on the corner of our airfield.

As in Japan, I found that the RAF has some characters. Sir Fred Handley-Page, whose company built the Hastings, annually invited Squadron Commanders and others to dinner at the Dorchester. Normally one could not afford to walk past the place. It was a really great experience to sit down with about a hundred of the early names of aviation. Lord Brabazon, holder of British Aviation Licence No.1. O.P. Jones of Imperial Airways. Well-known test pilots. Sir Fred and Lord Brabazon had a long-standing rivalry as after-dinner speakers. Sir Fred spoke about the evolution of the aircraft"...and

the damn thing is not safe yet."

Towards the end of that tour I was a passenger in a car which ran off the road. With a broken arm and wrist, I was still wearing a plaster cast when my annual re-categorization became due. I completed all my flying tests with the cast on. With completed day and night tests, instrument test and ground subjects, and my cast off, I was sent to Hedley Court, an RAF Medical Rehabilitation Centre south of London. Arriving at this large old country residence late at night in the rain, I was met by a charming old codger who led the way up the narrow stairs. Breakfast early next morning was preceded by PT on the front lawn outside the dining room. Someone played a squeeze box and the Drill Sergeant gave orders. Arm bending! If you only have one arm, BEND ONLY ONE ARM. Jumping on the spot! Those with only one leg, JUMP ON ONE LEG! And if they fell over they GOT UP AGAIN! We were forbidden to visit the local pub. I was a Wing Commander so organized an expedition that night. Another patient was a test pilot who had lost both legs in an accident. Two miles I carried him to the pub and back. One could only get a couple of pints before closing time. This happened almost every night for a couple of weeks. I was really fit by the time I went home.

In late 1959 we boarded the "Stratheden" and headed home. I had then been a Wing Commander for about a year and was posted back to the RAAF Staff College as an instructor. Altogether a great experience.

In your newsletter you mention several RAA F members. Vern Jackson became a Group Captain and followed me as OC Darwin. He is now in hospital with Alzheimer's disease, and has recently had a stroke. I keep in touch with him. John Cook was killed in an air accident near Adelaide some years ago. In the words of Ned Kelly as the hangman placed his rope 'Such is life'. Two other Australians had a bit to do with No 24. Harry Hawker from Queensland was the first CO [WWI) and AVM D. Bennett of Pathfinder fame, also from Queensland, instituted the Categorization Scheme which has been so effective.

And now, aged 85, and after 36 RAAF years, I still have clear recollections of the RAF and its good people and good systems. They were great times.



The Photo Album - Reunion 2007



One of the Airspeed Oxford's used on ambulance duties during 1942



The October 2007 Reunion - and the lamps are just starting to swing!



The Photo Album – Reunion 2007



Association Members enjoying the October 2007 Reunion under the wing & outside the crew room



Keeping in Touch - XXIV Squadron News



Hercules crews play Santa

By Laura Williams, Wiltshire Gazette and Herald 20 Dec 2007.

Servicemen and women from RAF Lyneham played Father Christmas and headed out to Iraq to deliver presents to troops.

A crew from 24 Squadron, based at RAF Lyneham, flew out at the weekend with a plane full of Christmas gifts and festive treats.

This included cards, hampers, decorations, mince pies and Christmas cakes. But rather than Santa's sleigh they headed out there in a Hercules plane affectionately known as Fat Albert. Senior Aircraftswoman Kayleigh Lemon made her own special donation to the serving troops.

The 20-year-old serving chef was the winner of RAF Lyneham's annual best cake award and decided to offer her prize-winning cake to the troops in the Middle East.

A spokesman for RAF Lyneham said: "Donations from sections around the station will mean that our thoughts are with those serving personnel unable to be with their families during the festive season."

Flight Lieutenant Christian Benson, Officer Commanding Catering said: "It's an event that all the chefs on the squadron look forward to when they get to pit their culinary skills against each other and be crowned winner of the annual Christmas cake competition."

"There is also the added incentive to put that

extra effort in because they all know that the best cakes will ultimately provide a little festive cheer to those RAF Lyneham personnel serving in both Afghanistan and Iraq who won't be fortunate enough to spend Christmas at home with their families and friends."

Sergeant James Ashwell, an Air Loadmaster with the squadron, will ensure the goods are delivered on arrival. Lyneham staff also delivered 50 Christmas dinners to residents at the Leonard Cheshire Greathouse at Kington Langley on Monday.

After the meal pupils from Langley Fitzurse Primary School entertained the diners with Christmas carols.

Volunteer co-ordinator at the home Colin Brady said: "This is a Christmas tradition at the Greathouse and something everyone looks forward to every year.

"The food prepared by RAF Lyneham chefs was top notch and went down an absolute



Princess Anne is accompanied by Station Commander Mike Neville for the parade

storm."

The home has a longstanding relationship with RAF Lyneham and has always been supported by the base commanders.



New standard is given Royal seal

By Ben Perrin, *Wiltshire Gazette and Herald*, 9 May 2008.

MORE than 100 spectators watched 50 officers of RAF Lyneham's 24 Squadron parade in front of the Princess Royal. Afterwards a new squadron standard was presented by the royal visitor - the first in 27 years.

The Central Brass Band played the national anthem during the parade, which was followed by a lunch in the officers' mess in the princess' honour. Andy Johnson, the Captain of 24 Squadron, said: "This is a very big occasion as it only occurs every 25 years or so. "This is the third time in the history of the squadron and we were delighted to have Princess Anne here."

The standard, a fringed and tasselled silken banner, is mounted on a pike.

Eight selected battle honours surround the squadron's badge and a decorative border is adorned by the rose, thistle, leek and shamrock.

Wing Commander Donald Turnbull said: "It is an honour and a privilege to command a squadron with such a long and distinguished history. I was especially proud to be in command on this occasion as this is a relatively rare event."

The origins of the colours and standards date back to the Second World War. On the 25th anniversary of the formation of the RAF, in 1943, King George VI announced his intention to award ceremonial flags known as standards to operational squadrons. The squadron must have completed at least 25 years of service to the RAF before receiving one.



The Queen affirmed her father's decision and gave her personal approval to each standard created. The first standard was presented in March 1954 by Air Marshal Sir Charles Guest at RAF Abingdon.

In 1981, Princess Anne came to Lyneham to hand over 24 Squadron's second standard. The squadron, which was formed in September 1915, is currently committed to overseas operations with ongoing deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, where crews deliver equipment by parachute from helicopters to the troops on the ground.



The story does not stop here.

The first Sqn Standard is in St Michaels Church, Lyneham, so the presentation of the third Sqn Standard also brings with it the question over what to do with the current one?

Over the past two years the Squadron has established strong links with the 187th Folgore Regt in Livorno, a relationship that is hoped will continue to grow. In recognition of this the Squadron would like to propose that they lay up the current Standard in Pisa. Enquires have already made from the RAF point of view and the only stipulation is that the location is consecrated ground. This has been established that both the Chapel at the 187th Barracks and Church in Pisa meet the requirements.

Approval of the association over this proposal has been given by the President and Chairman, with a view to the Standard Bearer party going over to Pisa in November 2008. Look out for more news on this topic.



Keeping in Touch - Association

RECENT LOSSES

We have only been informed of the following Association member passing away since the last AGM.

Dave Carter, Flt Lt retired but flying for Orion Airways. He was with the Squadron between 1965 - 1967 on Hastings CMk1 & CMk2 at Colerne.

John Hayley, retired Sqn. Ldr. of Ripon, N. Yorkshire was a Sig/AEO who was on XXIV between 1951 - 1956 flying Hastings out of Topcliffe and Abingdon. Informed by John Martin he died on 6th Mar 2008 Funeral 20th Mar 2008.

Charles Meeks, Flt Sgt Fitter2 at Hendon during 1938 -1939.

Alfred Pugh, OBE Wg Cdr Signaler 1949 - 1952 from Auckland New Zealand

NEW MEMBERS

A total of 7 new recruits have swelled the ranks and they are:-

Edwin Robbins, an ex engine mechanic and acting Flt Engineer during 1942 on Hudson aircraft at Hendon

Norman Wood, an ex Flt Engineer on DC3's out of Hendon between 1944 to 45.

Richard Browne, ex engine technician with the Squadron at Colerne on Hastings during 1966 to 67.

Al Lockwood, pilot on the Squadron between 1973 to 76, now working as a consultant

Liz Carter, Honorary member and widow of Flt Lt Richard Carter, a navigator on the Squadron between 1983 to 88 and 94 to 98.

Wg Cdr Greg Cook, still serving who acted as temporary OC 24 and currently at the MoD.

Mr McGhee, ex Squadron clerk.



Mailbox ☒ **Your Letters**

We do seem to have quite a lively bit of snail and e-mail traffic on issues featured in the Newsletter and long may it continue. So for your interest and comments, read on.



We had an email from Ray Haffenden who wrote:

I am the son of John Haffenden who I am researching for the family archives. I now know he flew with the 24th at Hendon during WW2.

Sadly he died, and I lost all my family documentation after an acrimonious divorce, and subsequent fire, and am starting from scratch, along with my son Stewart.

Any information would be greatly appreciated, especially which squadron(s) he served with previously. I know he was with bombers initially, and had to ditch 9 miles off shore in the North Sea. He swam to shore and was the sole survivor.

I believe he was transferred to Transport Command afterwards, and was awarded the Czech Air Medal.

I Googled Flying Officer Haffenden and got a book "Czechs in the RAF in Focus" with a picture of him and crew, including 'Jock' Hannah (who I met in the 70's), F. Altman, and J. Habacek by his aircraft.

If you are able to help contact Ray at the address below - 69 Ingram Close, Larkfield, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7GR.



Another email, this time from Nev Cooper in the Vale of pewset, Wilts.

HASTINGS MODEL - MKIV (WJ325)

Thanks very much for Issue 14 of the TWENTY FOUR Sqn magazine, along with the invitation to the 2007 reunion on 6th October.

Very interested in the article by Peter de Frere

regarding models of Hastings aircraft. Having flown the Mk4 (WJ325 - "Shiney Ship") at RAF Changi for a number of years in the 60's for the C in C Far East (Adm Sir David LUCE), I had been on the lookout for a model for a while. It appears that the usual model making companies like Airfix and Revell etc had never gone into production with such a thing, although I did come across a Hermes at one time.....But that of course was a 'nose wheel job' and not QUITE the same thing at all, hey?

Then, one day, while attending an Air Show somewhere (Can't for the life of me remember where), I came across a model stall selling "VacForm" kits, for I think approx £15 or so, and low and behold a "Hastings". On arriving home and inspecting the purchase I was a bit taken aback on opening the large plastic packet (not even in a box you note). There were indeed SOME preformed pieces, like the wheels, props, engine cowlings, etc. But the main model sections themselves were just two large sheet of grey plastic about 3/32" thick, which had the basic shape of the wings, fuselage, tail, etc heat and vacuum formed into it. No usual "breakout" pieces to be seen at all. Not even basic cutting markers. You just



WJ325 landing on Nev's kitchen floor!

had to start from scratch with a very sharp utility knife, a breadboard (literally) to cut on, and a lot of pressure and CARE (for your fingers....not the potential model).

As can be seen from the two pictures



attached.....It can be done. But it is NOT a model for the beginner or the faint hearted. I completed it in WJ325 MkIV VIP "Transport Command Far East" livery (note the lack of Lightning Strike etc) from the few photographs that still exist of the only four ever built by Handley Page (One for RAF Northolt, one for RAF Nicosia, one for RAF Eastleigh (Nairobi), and one for RAF Changi). In the end I considered it well worth the considerable effort, as it finally emerged as a fine model with a 19" wing span, and now takes pride of place alongside my other past 'steeds', the AVRO Shackleton and AVRO Lancaster in my Amateur Radio Shack - G3LMO (No-one allowed IN....not even to dust you understand).



A brief note from Association member Mr. S Wheeler of Bromsgrove to say that he recently visited Worcester Art Gallery and Museum and he came across a piece of Squadron memorabilia, namely the boss and remains of a 4 bladed propeller from the aircraft of Lt H. C. Cutler killed in WWI on 10 May 1917. If you can expand on this story, please write in.



Some of you may have met **The Flying Vet aka Maurice Kirk**. His last visit to the Squadron was on the occasion of the 90th Anniversary Dinner . He is rarely out of trouble or the headlines as described here.

From The Times, February 19, 2008

Crash pilot Maurice Kirk rescued from the Caribbean

An accident-prone amateur flyer who is attempting to go around the world in a 65-year-old aircraft once used by General George Patton has crash-landed in the Caribbean.

Maurice Kirk, 62, a retired veterinary surgeon, issued a mayday call on Saturday before his plane went down about 80 miles from the nearest land.

He was rescued after coastguards picked up

signals from his emergency beacon and was taken to hospital on the island of Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos Islands but discharged himself after being treated for head and neck injuries. Yesterday he was believed to be attempting to organise a rescue mission to salvage the stricken aircraft before it sinks.

Only nine days ago, Mr Kirk was the victim of a street mugging in Cuba.

He owns a practice in South Wales although he was struck off by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 2002 for "disgraceful conduct", the result of 11 convictions including assault. He is a former drinking partner of Oliver Reed, the late actor.

Mr Kirk began his round-the-world odyssey when he competed in the 2001 London-to-Sydney air race. Since then, he has already had his 1943 Piper Cub aircraft rebuilt after crashing it in Japan in 2005.

With unusual aforethought Mr Kirk had the aircraft, which was once used to ferry the American general around the battlefields of Normandy, coated in shark-repelling paint.

Upon being told that her husband had signed himself out of hospital, Mr Kirk's wife, Kirsty, 48, said: "He usually does." She added: "He has phoned me briefly to say he's OK but a bit battered about the head and neck. He has borrowed clothes but he has no money and everything is inside the plane. His computer and all his belongings are on it. It is a race against time because it will sink.

"He told me he had about 12 hours to reach it."

Mr Kirk, from Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan, flew out to the United States on January 22 after the plane, called Liberty Girl, had been restored there. He had spent six weeks flying around the Caribbean. The father of four was flying from the Dominican Republic to the Turks and Caicos when the engine on his two-seater aircraft failed.



He performed a controlled landing in the sea and his emergency beacon was picked up by coastguards in Miami and New Zealand, where the beacon is registered.

from The 24 Sec.



Mrs Kirk was at home with their eight-year-old daughter, Genevieve, when she had a call from the New Zealand authorities informing her that her husband's plane had ditched.

She said: "I was warned that the outcome of these things is usually not very good but I told them my husband is indestructible. He's crashed before and had all sorts of bother. He always seems to survive.

"Sure enough, I soon had a phone call saying he was all right."

Mrs Kirk was calling flying clubs and contacts in America yesterday in the hope that someone could help her husband to retrieve his stricken plane.



A spokesman for the US Coastguard said that Mr Kirk was picked up by helicopter after being tracked by an emergency radio beacon. Nick Ameen, a coastguard petty officer in Miami, said: "It may well have saved his life.

"It was lucky he had that beacon on him. That was a really good decision on his part."

The Piper Cub is capable of taking off and landing on grass strips as short as 200ft but it is handicapped by its top speed of 65mph (104km/h).

Ps - Maurice tried to land on the George Bush Ranch in April to thank the US President for the above rescue. Not surprisingly he was arrested and then placed in a psychiatric ward.



We have recently had a letter from Ralph Barker who is trying to trace Flt Lt J. F. Haffenden who served on the Squadron from August 1941 and did a series of flights to Gibraltar and Malta. Ralph met up with him in 1954 when JF had left the RAF and was director of a whisky firm. Contact us if you have any information. Regards



Diary of a Navigator Pt 11

John Mitchell's account of his VIP flying with the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill in 1943 continues in this eleventh instalment.

THE SECOND ROYAL FLIGHT

22nd July 1944. With many improvements to 'Ascalon' not least to the galley, the addition of a proper RAF chef to the crew (Sgt Jock Duncan ex-Officers' Mess Hendon) and another year's VIP flying experience behind us, we looked forward to this second Royal Right with confidence. We had recently staged through the airfields involved, the local RAF staffs knew what was wanted both technically and domestically, and we expected no hitches over secure communications. Moreover, General Alexander who was HM's host, had recently been in the UK and was obviously aware of all the plans.

HM, this time code-named General Collingwood was seen off from Northolt, hardly dark on a summer evening, by HM Queen Elizabeth, HRH Princess Elizabeth in her Fanny Uniform and a restricted number of senior personages in the know. The Royal baggage had been stowed. In addition to His Majesty, our passengers were Col Sir Eric Mieville, Private Secretary, Group Capt 'Mouse' Fielden, the Ah" Equerry and now commanding RAF Tempsford, and Mr Cameron (CID) plus two Palace valet/batmen. Wing Commander 'Dad' Collins was again in command.

Just before take off when the party was standing in the vicinity of the aircraft some yards away from the nearest air raid shelter, a flying-bomb ('doodle-bug') roared almost overhead, landing on some unfortunate victims in the Harrow area. No one turned a hair. There was nothing that could be done. Her Majesty remarked that they had been

sheltering from 'those horrid things' all day.

Airborne at 2230 hours with our first stop to be the RAF Staging Post at Rabat Sale, we headed westwards to Hartland Point continuing on the same track until we reached a longitude of 10 West. A meteorological reconnaissance flight by a Mosquito PR aircraft earlier in the day confirmed that thunder clouds off the Spanish coast were indeed very weak and that we were likely to have a smooth flight below oxygen level. After we had climbed above the cloud and levelled out, enjoying the long summer twilight from our cruising altitude, HM came forward to the flight deck and remarked on the constellations as they appeared. He questioned me on the main navigational stars I would choose.

As we turned and flew southwards the wind had become northerly so with this tail component we found ourselves ahead of schedule as we passed Cape Vincent so we slowed down after altering course towards Rabat to make our arrival time as programmed. It had been an eight hour flight in comfortable conditions throughout.

This time there was no unexpected arrival, nor a surprised Station Commander (Group Capt J J A Sutton) and no fog to delay our landing. Group Captain Jimmy Jeffs, the SATCO of Transport Command, had flown on ahead to keep an eye on any unforeseen diversions. He joined the aircraft at Rabat for the flight to Naples and for the remainder of the tour. We were on the ground at Rabat for two and a half hours - time for HM to stretch his legs, have breakfast and freshen up at the nearby Hotel Balima, taken over by the RAF as the Officers' Mess.

Taking off at 0900 hours local time, the weather was 'sunny North African', with some broken cloud along the High Atlas. We routed ourselves via the Taza Pass to Oujda on the border of Algeria. Thence to Oran coastwise but always keeping on the landward side to avoid warships. We were able to cruise at



8,000 feet, as for the first leg, a comfortable height: the wind strength increased from the west, a truly tail component as we continued passed Algiers, Bone and Bizerta. We touched the western tip of Sicily at Cap San Vito before turning north east towards the Gulf of Salerno. Air defence requirements routed us first to the southern extremity of the Gulf at Point Licosa, then letting down slowly on a north westerly heading to Capri before turning inland and passing Sorrento on our starboard to land at Pomigliano at 1730 local time. From Oran to Naples we had an escort of 4 RAF Beaufighters.

The Royal Party enjoyed a comfortable lunch with turtle soup, the salmon mayonnaise followed by roast chicken and new potatoes; cold York ham and salad was an alternative, all augmented by Veuve Cliquot; they took tea later before landing. No problems this time. Col the Hon Pier Legh (Master of the Household) was waiting to join the Royal Party at the airfield.

Once again, the York could not proceed north of Naples. Apart from the shortage of aviation fuel, it was too big for many of the airstrips on the itinerary. HM was to visit a number of Army and RAF units in the forward area (and to hold numbers of battlefield Investitures) during the course of a busy twelve days visit. For these theatre tours, HM was flown mainly in Field Marshal Sir Maitland Wilson's aircraft, a Dakota (FZ631) named 'Freedom' and commanded by the personal pilot, Squadron Leader Penfold. For his visits to the US Fifth Army HQ of General Mark Clark he used General Alexander's personal Dakota, which had an all-American crew.

The York crew remained at the RAF Air Transport Wing HQ Mess at Portici, on the southern outskirts of Naples. At Portici were the newly-dug ruins of Herculaneum. We visited this site as well as the better known ruins of Pompeii, not far away. HM's tour took him to Viterbo where he stayed the night at General Alexander's Headquarters on Lake

Bolsena; to Perugia, then to Malignano where HM flew in a small Auster Recce aircraft of an AOP Squadron. After returning via Alex's HQ, where he should have spent two rest days, HM used Field Marshal Wilson's aircraft again to visit Cassino and for a day's visit to Rome.

After these very strenuous days on tour, HM was due to return to the UK in 'Ascalon' on August 2nd - for which we, at the base camp as it were, had been given 48 hours notice. All was set for an 1100 hours departure when it became quite clear that we had no passengers to meet this deadline. HM had a terrific reputation for punctuality. It was some half an hour later, somewhat anxious waiting on the part of senior RAF officers and others, that HM turned up in Admiral Sir John Cunningham's Rolls Royce at the head of the Royal convoy. Luggage was hurriedly loaded: we discovered that the RN driver had got lost in the back streets of Naples.

Evidently, the route of the motor convoy from Admiral Cunningham's residence (where HM spent the last night) was specifically planned to avoid the more obvious main route to the airport for security reasons. Someone blundered and security was made ten times worse by using small side streets where passage was difficult and slow. I believe some naval language was used by HM. Anyway, the delay did not really affect our flight schedule home bound as we had plenty of slack at our Staging Post at Rabat. Incidentally, Admiral Cunningham's residence was the Villa Emma of Nelsonian fame.

7th August 1944. Airborne soon after midday we followed the outbound corridor to Capri then direct to Palermo on the western tip of Sicily, so to the North African coast. It was bumpy but lunch had to be served. There was little point in climbing above our planned height of 7,000 feet for the instability was likely to exist to altitudes above any reasonable level we could reach. There was considerable cumulus cloud development all around us. The bumps



eased off to the west of Algiers, we had to climb to 9,000 feet to clear the Atlas Mountains on our tracks. We landed at Rabat after a seven hour flight: the passengers could then enjoy some respite from the noise and bumps of our passage.

We had a little over three hours on the ground. HM was dined by the Station Commander and the local British Minister Mr Stonehewen-Bird, whom he had met on first landing at Rabat. The weather forecast was reasonably good and landing conditions at Northolt fine and dry, below some cloud cover. However, we could expect some bumps as we flew north, off the Portuguese and Spanish coast. Our route was similar to that flown outbound, that is from Cape Vincent to the north west until we reached the longitude of 10 West then due north almost to the Fastnet Rock before turning eastwards to Hartland Point and so to Northolt.

This eight hour flight was uneventful, if a little bumpy and we landed 0715 hours just a few minutes after our scheduled time. This time there was no crew-call to the Palace: we receive a letter later from the Private Secretary via our Commander-in-Chief that HM 'was very pleased with the way that Wing Commander Collins and all members of his crew of the York carried out their duties during HM's recent visit to Italy'.

A post-script, not really a part of the flight: we were told later by the Station Commander at Northolt (Group Captain R J Legg) that as the assembled VIP's lined up to welcome HM on the tarmac, a doodle-bug had roared almost overhead as the aircraft was in 'the circuit'. It might even have collided with us. So, one on our departure and one to welcome us home! Almost as soon as we got home on the morning of 3rd August, we were alerted for another Italian trip with the Owner himself in seven days time.

Here is another extract from Group Captain John Richardson's Diary - this time we are in -

Moscow

In the spring of '47 the victorious Allies staged a major conference in Moscow. The RAF and the French and American Air forces flew into and out of Vnukovo airfield with a stream of VIP passengers and mail. My share of about 30 flights totalled 7.

On the first we picked up a Russian navigator and wireless operator in Berlin en route for Moscow, and thereafter every flight carried them: not so much to guide us as to ensure we didn't deliberately divert to look at something we shouldn't see. The cold war was then at its chilly worst.

Berlin was a horrific sight - desolation as far as the eye could see. And the terrain over which we flew in Poland and Russia was flat featureless and seemingly unpopulated. Moscow weather was almost always poor with low cloud and snow showers but there were no hills to worry about so landings using our new radar altimeters were not too difficult.

Moscow was a grey city, filled with grey people. I had always thought of Russians as looking like Poles but the majority reflected the mix of nations which made up the old USSR: shapes and colours of every variety but black, speaking in many different tongues.

We hit the tourist trail, at least as far as we were allowed to. Russia, like China in those days, was closed to tourism and we had an unobtrusive tail wherever we went in the permitted areas. It was rumoured that an American flyer had urinated on Lenin's tomb and had not been seen since so we were mindful of our manners when we paid our visit there. The queue to view this was about a mile long (the cynics had it that they were paid to put on this act of worship) but we were marched to the front. And when we later joined another queue to eat at the only Moscow restaurant of note, our minders pushed the 4 of us to the front and, inside, evicted 4 Russians who had to finish their meal standing up and insisted that we sat. We were, of course, mixing with the Party elite there and even more so at the Bolshoi, that superb theatre where we saw Giselle performed magnificently. And now they have McDonalds!

The Hotel Moscow had been taken over entirely for the aircraft crews and the diplomats. We were warned that the girls frequenting the hotel were there to pick us up and learn our

(Continued on page 22)



military secrets so, although none of us knew anything likely to be of interest to the KGB (the NKVD in those days), we left them alone. There was cheap, strong vodka in the bar and inter allied games to organise which brought out clearly the national characteristics. The Brits organised them, the Yanks joined in late, the Russians played only when they could be sure to win, and the French shrugged their shoulders and went off to find l'amour with the Mata Haris.

Departures from Vnukovo were hilarious. We had to sign a blood chit before each take off to say we took full responsibility for any accidents. The interpreter there was Sammy a lugubrious Russian who always looked as if he had just been whipped (perhaps he had) and he insisted that we had a met briefing and signed another indemnity paper. The Met Officer was a tiny aged crone, dressed in black from head to toe, with huge, flashing eyes. Her briefings never varied: "You no go. England very bad. Cloud base zut", bringing her hand down to the floor. "Veeseebeteety, nil", moving her hands together. "You sign this." We went - but on every occasion she was right and we could scrape into Bassingbourn only because we had good landing aids.

We were warned that the bedrooms were bugged and to be careful what we said. The story went about that an American crew, brimful of vodka one night, stripped their room looking for the bug. The only suspicious fixture they could find was a large nut under me carpet. So they unscrewed it. It was fortunate that the dining room below was empty when the chandelier crashed to the floor.

On the last flight, our Russian aircrew were disconsolate, telling us they would be sent to Siberia on a de-westernisation course. They had mellowed considerably after the first suspicious exchanges and were fascinated by what could be bought in Royston to take home. In 1947 English shops were bare and everything was rationed anyway: but to them it was a treasure house. They were sold on fish and chips which, for a joke, we made them eat from Pravda one night. We, in turn, brought home vodka. I gave my father-in-law to be a half bottle of Stark which was 100% proof. He took it to Ayresome Park and reported that his and his cronies' vocal support had at long last encouraged Middlesborough to win a game.

There is one more lasting memory of those Moscow trips. Reporting for briefing at Bassingbourn in the early hours I saw a pile of green wooden boxes with rope handles normally used for carrying ammunition. Sitting on the top of the pile was a massive figure encased in heavy furs, clutching a large pistol in one hand. "Gold" said the briefing officer. "It

came in on the kite you are taking out, in the nose freight compartment. And the guard insisted on riding with it even though he was warned there was neither heat nor oxygen. The poor bugger is frozen solid." I bent down to try and lift one of the boxes. Too heavy. And when I stood up I was looking down the barrels of 2 very large Russian cannons! Ivan had thawed.

Just another incident. But what made it memorable for me was a news item in the 'Sunday Pictorial'. The gold was flown from Moscow in a fleet of converted bombers". Another fleet of armoured cars drove it to London Airport (one RAF truck did the job without guards of any sort, apart from Ivan the Cannons). And a third fleet of airliners "with their seats ripped out" flew it to Fort Knox (it probably was carried in the baggage hold of a standard Pan Am Connie). Ever since then I have believed little I have read in the tabloid press. Every time I have seen reported an occurrence of which I had knowledge, a single fact has been inflated. As a technique it may well sell newspapers but I deplore the lack of journalistic integrity.



The Photo Album – Summer Social, Purton



Some more photos of the Association enjoying the Summer Social at the Pear Tree, Purton 11th Jun 2008



Late News - Summer Social, Purton

SUMMER SOCIAL 11 th June @ Purton, Wilts

It was a lunch time surgery with a difference in Purton for this years XXIV Association Summer Social,

Here is a brief report for the Newsletter to say that the Summer Social at Purton was a big hit with all 27 members and guests. The weather was just about right with us being able to enjoy a pre lunch drink and chat outside the rear of Ivy Lodge, the home of our hosts, Nick and Jackie Yerbury before making our way to the Pear Tree, about half a mile away.

It was also very good news that the new OC

XXIV Squadron W/C Andy Bacon, who has been in post for only 4 weeks, along with his two execs, Howard and Tim were able to join us and meet the Committee and members.

Our party took up all the conservatory with an excellent outlook over the grounds and everyone was soon in full chatter mode. The Hotel staff ALMOST kept things flowing without a hitch with the compensation that the taste and presentation of the food was top notch. The downside was that the minutes flew by before most of the party had to break up and disperse to the four corners around 3pm.

This years summer social looks like it has set a benchmark for others to match up to.



XXIV Association Members at the Pear Tree Hotel, Purton , 11th June 2008

