



# Twenty Four

The Magazine of XXIV Squadron Association



Issue 16

94th Anniversary Edition

Summer 2009

## Livorno Issue



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

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## The Photo Album - Livorno 2008



**The retiring Squadron Standard on its way to its new home in Livorno, 9 Nov 2008**





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W/C Andy Bacon (21 May 08)  
F/L Paddy McLarnon

## Editorial



This is the **2nd colour edition** of the Newsletter and judging from the feedback on the first, worth the additional time and effort. Thank you for your positive response. Also as editor, still! I have found myself with quite a good stock of material to include in this years Newsletter. So if your article did not make it this time, don't stop sending the news in, it's what the Association is all about.

One of the quickest methods of broadcasting news, events gossip is our [Blog Book](#). I have made use of this medium to post updates between Newsletters, especially for items about XXIV and RAF Lyneham that appear in our local Wiltshire paper. Do try it out, give it a browse and add your own comments.

Be sure to grab the opportunity to come along to this years reunion on the **3rd October 2009** as you will see that Lyneham and the Squadron's days are running out before it up sticks to Brize Norton.

## The 93rd Anniversary Reunion

### The 93rd Anniversary Reunion Sat 4th Oct 2008

After another very worthwhile and productive AGM, with plenty of interaction from the members present, the more relaxing part of the weekend kicked in. It was a short walk to the Station Briefing room for an update this year with a different spin from the new OC XXIV, Wing Commander Andy Bacon.

Andy had decided to give the presentation a more personal flavour by asking a Squadron co-pilot, air loadmaster and an ex OC XXIV to complement his own views.

Andy took over from Don Turnbull in May 2008 having previously flown C17's out of Brize Norton. He started off his qualified flying career from Lyneham and was pleased to be back on the base. He was very proud of all that a squadron badge means, the need to support and sustain the squadron and look after the members and families.

The Squadron are operating 5 x C130J model aircraft at the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar as part of Op Telic and carrying a mixture of passengers and freight. In Afghanistan, 4 x C130Js are based at Kandahar for in country re supply of water ammunition and food as part of Op Herrick. It is this operation that is the most challenging with unpaved landings in adverse weather conditions at high altitudes in hostile threat zones. Crews have been completing up to 108 sorties a week, which is at the top limit of possibility in the circumstances.

Meanwhile, back at home a landmark event took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2008 with the presentation of a new Squadron Standard by the Princess Royal. This was the second time the Princess had carried out this duty, the previous occasion was 25 years ago. (see also the Issue 15 Newsletter). No time for idle hands as those left holding the fort managed to complete the transformation of a "spare" room in the building into a Squadron History Centre". The Squadron are very proud of the finished

### 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)*

results, as now all the memorabilia has a permanent home. A request was made by Andy for additional artefacts and items to add to this important part of the Squadron's heritage, with the assurance they would be well looked after.

A new charity has been adopted by the Squadron now that The Burton Hill House School has closed in Malmesbury. CALM is the Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Movement. It is an independent local charity, caring for the needs of families within the Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust, who have and had children or young persons dealing with Cancer or Leukaemia. The Association is also pleased to be able to support this charity with its yearly donation. A Squadron family's day was also organised and enjoyed by all which put the finishing touches to a very good years work.

Next up was co pilot Flt Lt Steve Galley-Tonks with his perspective of life on XXIV. Steve would say that life was non stop with task after task coming along. Although "Harmony" guidelines set out ideally how many days maximum personnel should be away in any 20 month period; (its 125 days actually), they appear to be ONLY guidelines. Crews would expect around 4 detachments in any one year plus secondary duties. So all in all - BUSY.

Now the aircraft crew is down to 3, sorry all you ex Navigators and Flight Engineers, it is the turn of the Air Loadmaster to give us a picture of what is going on. Sgt Gavin Livingstone only joined the RAF in 2005 and progressed from civilian to operational Air Crew in less than three years. That involved passing through RAF Halton for Ab initio training, RAF Cranwell for leadership skills, 55 Reserve Squadron for the flying training and airmanship on a Dominie aircraft as the pilot's assistant.

It was not until that point they were streamed as either suitable for ALM or AEOP training. In Gavin's case it was then on to the C130J conversion course. This was quickly followed by being assigned to shadow a fully qualified ALM on Op Telic in Iraq. Having to use night vision goggles, land on desert strips carrying out these brand new found skills brought home the value of the highly professional training he had received.

Last but by no means least; Group Captain Richard Bates related his experience of being OC XXIV in the early 1970's. Richard took over from John Tetley at a stage when the Hastings piston engine aircraft was destined for the scrap yard and a quantum leap in technology was now to be a familiar sight parked on the dispersal in the shape of the Hercules C130K.

The pattern of flying still had a familiar Transport Command feel to it with slip patterns operating to Singapore and Cyprus, schedules and detachments in support of military exercises. Timescales for these trips were compressed from the slower and lower Hastings and Argosy aircraft, allowing greater utilisation of crews and airframes.

It was during Richards's tour as OC that the Pisa disaster unfolded on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1971 when XV216 crashed into sea at night with the loss of 6 crew and 44 Italian paratroopers. Richard had always kept a diary over the years and the reading of the events surrounding the tragedy as it unfolded put other routine entries into context.

Richard paid tribute to all the succeeding OC XXIV Squadron for maintaining the strong links and bond between the families of the 6 crew and the Italian Paratroop Brigade in Livorno. This has cumulated in the very significant gesture of lodging the previous Squadron Standard in the local Italian church on Remembrance Day 2008.

A surprise ending to this years briefing was the presentation by Keith Chapman to W/C Andy Bacon of a real killer boomerang sent over by Air Commodore Dave Hitchins AFC. Dave, who is now 85 was in charge of XXIV Commonwealth Squadron on exchange during 1957. The Association are making a modest donation to have a small brass plaque made stating its provenance.

For the first time in years, the weather was not quite good enough to allow us to spread out onto the patio area for lunch but this did not detract from the chance to catch up with everyone for a really good chin wag. Some good raffle prizes and enthusiastic selling via Mike Long helped to increase the Association funds.

The three main attractions on offer this year were the C130J simulator experience, a look over a real one and for the first time a guided tour around 47 Air Dispatch Squadron. 47 AD are situated on the opposite side of the road from the main Lyneham site with their own Dakota as a gate guard. They are part of the Royal Logistic Corps, around 140 strong and a usual mix of cap badges.

Our host was Staff Sergeant Dave Jelly who has been based at Lyneham for 20 years. Long tours are quite common as the Hercules is the only aircraft at the moment dropping a quite extensive range of airborne stores. That does not mean they are away from the battle zone. Far from it, with



47 AD teams out in theatre on a continuous basis flying on most of the air drop sorties using the latest Container Delivery System (CDS). This is easier to install and load and coupled with the aircrafts GPS system allows pin point precision on the Drop Zone, even from height through cloud which is in effect, dropping “blind”.

The old way of dropping was from ever lower heights to avoid radar detection but has now changed to higher release heights well away from the threat from small arms fire. Ariel delivery has been practiced and refined right back from WW1 and WW2 days. Another aspect of thinking that has changed is the mass overhead drop scenario carried out in the early days of the C130.

We were shown one of the largest loads to take off out the back of the Herc, namely an inflatable boat for Special Forces which is some 8.5 metres long. If that load does not exit in a straight line, its curtains for all. Some of the other groups leaving by parachute are Submarine Parachute Assistance Group, Rece Forces and lots of one tone containers filled with water and food using the CDS system to troops in forward outposts.

One final job was to stand in front of the DC3 with our hair blowing in the wind, (if only we had some) for a group photo, kindly taken by F/L Si Hulme, who was our escort for the afternoon. All the groups who went off to the different afternoon’s itinerary reported back best pleased and appreciative for the time and effort put in by our hosts. Now its away to scrub up for the highlight of the day, the Reunion Guest Night in the mess.

A lone piper in full regalia, with an uncanny resemblance to the Deputy Chairman, was nervously waiting for the coach party to turn up on time from the hotel run with its precious cargo. It did arrive on cue and from that moment on, the evening swung along at a great tempo with more music from the Chippenham Silver Band during the meal and our own contribution as a finale.

For the first time we can remember at a guest night, an impromptu sing-along was organized by Sgt ALM Gavin Livingstone. This was not as casual affair as it may have looked with the words and chorus to “The Wild Rover” conveniently taped to the underside of our place mats and a guitar conveniently placed next to the seat of Mr. Vice.

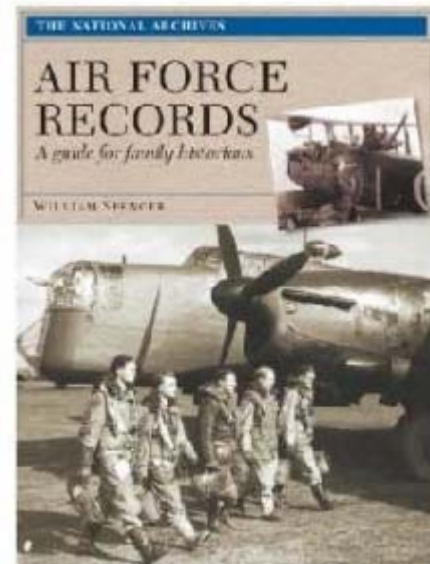
A fitting end to what was voted by top table and side tables alike a thoroughly first class evening. This was the new OC XXIV’s first dinner engagement with the Association and met with approval in everyway.

**IN OMNIA PARATI**



## A Good Read

### Air Force Records Book



I receive quite a few email requests during the year from people who are researching family and friends who flew in the Royal Air Force, most with the impression that it was XXIV Squadron that the person was attached to.

My usual response has been to direct them to the Public Records Office who have the complete series of WWII information. The book I have included in this post has been recently featured in the Telegraph Books section and may be of some help. I have not read or used it personally but it certainly looks like it has all the key facts together in one document to be able to do a good job on tracking down that elusive missing piece of the jigsaw.

Its published by the National Archives at £12.99, written by William Spencer. **ISBN13:** 9781905615254

It is newly revised including expanded section on the interwar years including records of RAF actions in North and South Russia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Somaliland, India and Palestine





## Flying Machines of 24 – The Northolt Years

**Simon Batchelor** has been researching our historic list of aircraft types yet again brought together an article on the aircraft operated whilst the Squadron was based at RAF Northolt between 1927 and 1933. Simon's contributions are rapidly building up to a definitive history of the Squadron Flying Machines **and avidly read by others who visit this site on the Internet.**

### The Northolt Years

On January the 18<sup>th</sup> 1927 A Flight moved from RAF Kenley to RAF Northolt in Middlesex, where it continued in its role as a communications flight. Meanwhile the HQ and B flights remained at Kenley continuing in a practice and training role for a few more days. When the whole squadron had completed its move in March, the squadron establishment included DH9As, Bristol F2B Fighters and Avro 504Ns. The DH9As were transferred to the reserves in June of 1927, and the operational component now comprised Bristol F2B fighters and Avro 504s which were still WWI vintage designs.

A new squadron CO, Sqn Ldr Seaward.N Cole took over on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1927 and from January 1928 the first post war designed aircraft were allocated to the squadron, the DH60 Cirrus II Moth. Aircraft serials J-9114, J-9118 arrived in April 1928. In addition to the Cirrus Moths, a specially converted Bristol F2B MkIII J8430 was taken on charge to act as a VIP transport in June 1927.

This aircraft was used by the Prince of Wales to fly between Scarborough race course and Bircham Newton on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1928, escorted by another F2B (J6681). The pilots were SL. J.S. Don, and FO. Stemp respectively, Stemp's passenger being a Captain Ogilvy.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> May both aircraft were used to fly the Prince and a Brigadier Trotter to Mousehold Aerodrome, near Norwich.

I have a wonderful photograph of this flight showing the modified and highly polished J8430 and a crowd of onlookers in front of the Norfolk & Norwich Aero Club. Although these Bristol aircraft were new build aircraft, it was decided that in the future more modern machines were re-

quired and a pair of specially fitted out Westland Wapitis were acquired by the squadron.

### The New aircraft:

#### De Havilland DH60 Cirrus II Moth

These were part of a batch of 20 Moths ordered by the Air Ministry for use by 24 Communications Squadron and the Central Flying School. A development of the DH60 Moth first flown in 1925 powered by the Cirrus I 60hp engine, the Cirrus II referred to the higher power engine of 85 hp fitted. It was also known as the DH60X. These early versions had an airframe made of wood and were effectively Civil aircraft with little in the way of Military equipment. These aircraft were used for continuation training and communications flights.

#### Aircraft Details,

Single bay biplane, Pilot and one passenger/pupil  
Span 30ft, length 23ft 8½ inches, max speed 95 mph, Ceiling 17000 ft, Range 430 miles  
Engine ADC Cirrus II 4 cylinder inline 85hp

#### Westland Wapiti 1A Special VIP version

Two specially converted Westland Wapitis were delivered in June 1928, these were for VIP flights and these machines were serialised J.9095 and J.9096. The conversion from the standard Wapiti comprised removal of the armament and Scarfe ring, building up of the rear fuselage to provide a head rest, provision of a seat and windscreen. Some rear panels had their fabric covering replaced with sheet metal, and a Fairey Reed metal propeller was fitted. The finish was as a standard RAF general duties Wapiti, but the Royal Wapitis sported the 24 Squadron Chevron on the tail, and miniature Group Captains rank pennants painted at mid point on the outer pair of interplane struts.

These machines were used by a number of VIP's in addition to the Prince of Wales but to illustrate their use I will relate the details of a journey from Marseilles.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> April both Wapitis and a Fairey III F were flown to Marignane Aerodrome near Marseilles to await the Prince of Wales and his party who were arriving by boat after a trip to Africa. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April the Wapiti J.9095 piloted by SL. Don carrying the Prince of Wales took off at 7.35am accompanied by the other two aircraft. The



group landed at Lyons to refuel, and after 25 minutes took off for Le Bourget near Paris. They had lunch with the British Ambassador and officers of the 34<sup>th</sup> Air Regiment of the French Air Force. Taking off after lunch, accompanied by an escort of 9 French aircraft, the royal party set off for England. The French turned back at Cap Gris Nez, near Calais, and escort duties were performed by an RAF Flying Boat as they crossed the Channel. Reaching the coast an escort of nine Armstrong Whitworth Siskins IIIA's joined them and the whole formation set course for Windsor. The Royal Aircraft landed at Smiths Lawn at 4pm, after a total flying time of 6hrs 10mins, to be greeted by the King & Queen.

The above account comes from Flight magazine of May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1930.

#### Aircraft Details

Single engine two bay Biplane, 1 pilot and 1 passenger,

Span 46ft 5ins, Length 32ft 6ins, max speed 140mph, ceiling 20600ft, range 530 miles

Engine Bristol Jupiter VI 9 cylinder radial 460hp

#### Fairey IIF VIP Communications Version

The Fairey IIF was used in a number of versions by both the RAF and Fleet Air Arm and was built in greater numbers than any other aircraft apart from the Hawker Hart series in the Inter-war years. This record was superseded when rearmament got underway in the late 1930s. The Fairey IIF was a development of the Fairey IIC, and IID which had been used by the RAF since 1919, and the prototype N198 first flew on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1926. They were flown as Day Bombers, General Duties and Reconnaissance aircraft, and were operated in England and the Middle East.

Fairey IIFs J9160, J9061, K1115 and K1749 were specially fitted out as a two seat VIP communications versions, with armament removed a seat fitted in the rear cockpit and a windshield provided. The first Fairey IIF joined the unit in May 1928, on the 20<sup>th</sup> August Winston Churchill was flown by 24 Squadron for the first time on a trip from Lympe to Biggin Hill. K1115 was used by the Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald on a number of occasions, including a trip from Hendon to Lossiemouth on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1931 which took 3hrs 15mins. The return trip 2 weeks later took 3hrs 10 mins, for the times to be recorded shows that they were considered to be very fast at the time.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1931 Ramsey MacDonald was flown from Berlin to Hendon in a Fairey IIF piloted by Flt.Lt. H W Heslop, accompanied by two other IIFs. This flight being notable as the first time a British military aircraft had landed in Berlin. Indeed flying the Fairey IIF was described as a gentlemanly pursuit, like most naval aircraft it was

very strong with a low landing speed, making it a good deal easier to fly than many of its contemporaries.

The aircraft were finished in standard silver with black upper panelling from nose to tail, the 24 Sqn Chevron on the tail and the number 24 in large numerals in front of the fuselage roundel, and all metal panels were highly polished

#### Aircraft Details

Single engine two bay Biplane, 1 pilot and 1 passenger,

Span 45ft 9ins, Length 36ft 6ins, max speed 136mph, ceiling 20600ft,

range 400 miles (80Gallon Tank)

Engine Napier Lion XIA 12 cylinder inline 570hp

#### De Havilland DH60G and DH60M Gypsy Moth

The DH60G and DH60M were essentially the Cirrus Moth described above re-engined with a De Havilland Gypsy Engine, a slightly smaller wingspan and steerable tail skid. The DH60M had a welded steel tube fuselage replacing the timber construction of the earlier moths, and these were the models operated by 24 Squadron. Serials K-1111, K1214, K-1215 were amongst the 20 aircraft of this type operated by the Squadron, which included MX463 an impressed aircraft used by the Belgian Air Attaché during WWII.

Many of these aircraft were used on record breaking flights all over the world. Most famously by Amy Johnson who flew a DH60G Gypsy Moth called "Jason", to Australia in May 1930 and by Francis Chichester who flew from New Zealand to Australia in 1930.

A Gypsy Moth serial K-1838 was taken on charge by the squadron during November 1930, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1931 was involved in a mid air collision with an AW Siskin IIIA J8893 of 43 Squadron. The pilot Flt Lt H M Moody and his passenger AVM F V Holt lost their lives, but the Siskin landed safely with its pilot uninjured.

#### Aircraft Details,

Single bay biplane, Pilot and one passenger/pupil

Span 30ft, length 23ft 11 inches, max speed 105 mph, Ceiling 17000 ft, Range 320 miles

Engine DH Gypsy I 4 cylinder inline 100hp

#### Hawker Tomtit

In the late 1920s the RAF were looking for trainer aircraft to replace the Avro 504 series. The Hawker



company produced the Tomtit and it was selected for small scale production and extended trials. The prototype J9772 was issued to 24 Squadron in July 1930 and served until May 1932, it was followed by 3 more production aircraft between April 1931 and August 1932. They were used for training and communications duties, and the Prince of Wales was regularly flown in a Tomtit. The one surviving Tomtit is currently flown at Old Warden by the Shuttleworth Collection, but this particular aircraft was not one of those used by 24 Squadron.

#### Aircraft Details,

Single bay biplane, Pilot and one passenger/pupil  
Span 28ft 6ins, length 23ft 8 inches, max speed 124 mph, Ceiling 19500 ft, Range 350 miles  
Engine Armstrong Siddeley Mongoose IIC 5 cylinder radial 150hp

#### Armstrong Whitworth Siskin IIIA

A single aircraft serial J8869 of this fighter aircraft was delivered to 24 Squadron during December 1930 to provided continuation flying for pilots on ground tours in the London area. Aircraft of this type were the main fighter aircraft operated by the RAF at this time and did not differ substantially from the fighter aircraft of WWI. They were still armed with 2 Vickers machine guns firing through interrupter gear and although their Jaguar engines were more powerful than the Le Rhone and Wolsey engines, of the DH5 and SE5As, used 12 years previously. Their low top speed meant they were still slower than the Hawker Hart day bombers then in service.

The Siskin was operated for about six months before transferring to the Central Flying School.

#### Aircraft Details

Single Bay Sesquiplane (a Biplane with the top Wing much larger than lower) 1 pilot  
Span 33ft 2ins, Length 25ft 4ins, max speed 153mph, service ceiling 27100ft, endurance 1.2hrs  
Engine Armstrong Siddeley Jaguar IV 14 cylinder two row radial 420hp

#### Avro 621 Trainer

The other aircraft chosen by the RAF for extended trials in competition with the Tomtit was the Avro Trainer. After these trials the Trainer was chosen as the successor to the Avro 504 and eventually 394 aircraft were built for the RAF, as the Tutor with a more powerful Armstrong Siddeley Lynx engine. In November 1931 three of the 21 Trainers built

were allocated to 24 Squadron, so at the time Avro 504N's, Tomtits and Avro Trainers were all operated together. Part of 24 Squadrons operations at that time was a flight designated the Air Pilotage School formed on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1931 with a notional complement of 6 aircraft, three were actually issued K1236, K1239, and K1791. Air Pilotage training was in navigation, indeed in 1931 there were no specialist navigators in the RAF, only pilots who had been on navigation courses.

The School of Air Pilotage was established in April 1932 at Andover, and 24 Squadron relinquished this role.

In September 1932 Lord Londonderry, the Secretary of State for Air, was given flying instruction by Squadron Leader Whitford in Avro Trainer K1234, an aircraft which had joined the squadron in February.

#### Aircraft Details,

Single bay biplane, Pilot and one passenger/pupil  
Span 34ft, length 23ft 6 ins approx., max speed 120 mph, Ceiling 16200 ft, Range 350 miles  
Engine Armstrong Siddeley Mongoose IIC 5 cylinder radial 150hp

#### Hawker Hart Communications

The Hawker Hart series of aircraft were the most prolific in use by the RAF in the inter war period, they were used as Day Bombers, Trainers, and developed into Fighter, Army Co-operation and Naval General Purpose types. Whilst researching markings carried by Harts, I came across 24 Squadrons own special Hart variant the Hart (Communications) version. The rear cockpit had its armament removed and a seat, headrest, and windscreen installed. The first Hart (Communications) K2456 was delivered on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1933, and it served with the squadron until June 1935 when it hit a tree whilst descending in fog. I am still researching use of the communications Harts, but I have a lovely photograph of Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Air, struggling into a parachute prior to flight in 1935. The aircraft serial is not visible, but once again the highly polished pristine state would indicate a VIP hart probably K2433 or K2455.

Single bay biplane, Pilot and one passenger/pupil  
Span 37ft 3ins, length 29ft 4 inches, max speed 168 mph, Ceiling 21350 ft, Range 430 miles

*(Continued on page 9)*





Engine Rolls Royce Kestrel 1B, V12 cylinder inline 525hp

### Bristol Bulldog IIA

The Bristol Bulldog was in service from 1929 to 1936 as a single seat interceptor fighter with the RAF. They were operated by the Australian, Danish, Latvian, Swedish and Siamese Air Forces and a small number flew with the Finnish Air Force during WWII. Estonia exported 8 of their Bulldogs to Spain in 1936 where they were used by the Republican forces during the Civil War.

Aircraft serial K2209 was serving with 41 Squadron based at Northolt during 1932, when it hit an Avro 504N K1989 which was operated by 24 Squadron. After repair it was allocated to No1 Air Defence Group of which 24 Squadron was a component. According to 24 Squadron records a Bulldog was on charge on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1932, so it is reasonable to assume that K2209 was the aircraft involved. The Bulldog superseded the Armstrong Whitworth Siskin IIIA as a continuation trainer for fighter pilots on ground based tours in the London area. I have yet to discover a photograph of the Bulldog operated by 24 Squadron, but unlike most aircraft operated by the RAF

Between the wars you can at least see a real aircraft at the RAF Museum in Hendon.

#### Aircraft Details

Single Bay Biplane Single Seater

Span 33ft 10ins Length 25ft 2ins, max speed 178mph, service ceiling 29300ft, range 350 miles

Engine Bristol Jupiter VIIF 9 cylinder radial 440hp

On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1933 the Squadron transferred to RAF Hendon, C flight formed under Flt Lt. H A Hammersley remaining at Northolt. C flight became the station Flight at RAF Northolt in January 1936, and a new C Flight was added to the establishment at Hendon.

### **Mercy dash for twins was Herculean task - 8:00am Tuesday 20th January 2009**

[By Emma Streatfield »](#) Wiltshire Gazette and Herald

A CREW from RAF Lyneham was at the centre of an overnight mission to save the lives of premature twins.

The twins, a boy and a girl, born premature at only 27 weeks are fighting for life in a Glasgow hospital after they were transferred by the crew from a Scottish island in the

Western Isles.

Sgt Jason Howard, of Priory Vale, captain Major Olly Luneau, a Frenchman who lives just outside Lyneham, Graham Prager, who lives on the base, and engineer Ian Davies all from 24 Squadron, sprung into action late on Sunday.

Efforts by the air ambulance to transfer the twins to a maternity hospital on the Scottish mainland were abandoned due to the snow and high winds.

So the Hercules C130J with four crew and two RAF medics was scrambled from RAF Lyneham and landed at Stornoway 90 minutes later.

The crew said they were happy to help.

Sgt Howard, 23, was at home when he got the call at around 11.30pm and the crew were airborne by 1am.

He was able to see what was going on at the back of the plane and said medical staff remained calm throughout.

"Everything seemed to go as well as expected and there was no panic," he said.

"It's not what we routinely do.

"It's nice to be able to do something that in terms of our job is a bit out of the ordinary.

"It was obviously important to the community and it shows that we're willing to go to those lengths."

Flight Lieutenant Prager, the co-pilot, said: "It's surprising the kind of impact it's had in the media.

"You don't really think about having that sort of effect."

The mother went into labour around 6.30pm and was taken to the Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway, in the Outer Hebrides.

A medical crew flew out from Prestwick to help stabilise the babies' condition.

At that point it was considered too dangerous to use the air ambulance again – so Lyneham expertise was drafted in.

The twins, who were in incubators, set off on their 40 minute journey to Glasgow Airport at 5.40am – accompanied by medical staff aboard the Hercules, including consultants from Glasgow's Princess Royal Maternity Hospital who had travelled out to Stornoway.

The mother remains in a stable condition and is expected to be transferred to Glasgow to be with her children who were said yesterday to be in a poor condition, but stable.

An RAF spokesman said weather conditions were beyond the flying limits for the air ambulance, so using a Hercules was the best option.

A spokeswoman for Western Isles Health Board said the twins' mother wanted to thank the Stornoway and Glasgow teams for the excellent service they provided and the assistance of the RAF.

Wing Commander Andy Bacon, the officer commanding 24 Squadron, said: "It was a well co-ordinated exercise between the military and civilian authorities.

"It's the sort of operation we're always pleased to take part in and help where we can."



## Livorno - 9 November 2009

### LAYING UP OF XXIV SQUADRON STANDARD IN LIVORNO, ITALY - 9 NOVEMBER 2008

It has become the custom in the Royal Air Force for a flying squadron to be awarded a new Standard at intervals of at least 25 years of unbroken front-line service. As one of the oldest squadrons in the Royal Air Force – ranking sixth in order of squadron seniority – No. XXIV Sqn has to date received three Standards, the latest being presented by Princess Anne at Lyneham on 9 May 2008. Princess Anne had also presented the previous Standard at Lyneham on 15 September 1981, replacing the original Standard that is now laid to rest in the Village Church at Lyneham.

When a new Standard is awarded, the one being replaced (the “retiring” Standard) is normally laid up in the nearest C of E Church or in some other appropriate Church or Cathedral. However, when he learned that the Sqn was to receive a new Standard in 2008, Wg Cdr Don Turnbull (then OC XXIV Sqn) had the inspired idea of breaking with tradition by handing over the former Standard to No. 187 Parachute Regiment (“The Folgore”) of the Italian Army, to be laid up in perpetuity in the Regimental Chapel in Livorno. This proposal – intended as a symbol of the enduring bond between the two units – was subsequently approved at the highest levels of the respective Ministries of Defence in London and Rome. As many readers will know, the special relationship between XXIV Sqn and 187 Regiment had been forged in the aftermath of the tragedy that befell each unit on 9 November 1971, described below.

### The Loss of Hercules XV 216 on 9 November 1971

In the early hours of 9 November 1971, a Hercules of XXIV Squadron crashed into the sea shortly after take-off from Pisa. Captained by Flight Lieutenant Colin Harrison, XV 216 was number six in a formation of nine C-130s taking part in a joint Anglo/Italian tactical exercise. The aircraft had experienced a technical problem before taxiing but this was not thought to have been a factor in the subsequent accident. However, the stream of aircraft did encounter un-forecast low cloud over the sea soon after departure. The first inkling of something untoward was when Number Six failed to check in with the stream leader by radio after take-off. The leader of the second element of three air-

craft then reported seeing an orange-coloured fireball in the sea. On receiving this grim news, and with Number Six still failing to respond, the stream leader aborted the mission. The third element, still awaiting take-off, remained on the ground while the remaining five aircraft returned safely to Pisa. It soon became apparent that everyone on board XV 216 had died when the aircraft plunged into the sea, including 46 soldiers of 187 Parachute Regiment, Italian Army.

The crew members of XV 216 (all Royal Air Force) were:

Captain: Flt Lt Colin Harrison  
Co-pilot: F/O Rick Swann-Price  
Navigator: F/O Mike Fawcett  
Air Eng: Flt Sgt Brian King  
Air LM: Sgt Paul Fulford  
PJI: Sgt Ralph Lee

### The Laying-Up Ceremony in Livorno - 9 November 2008

Fittingly, the day chosen for the laying-up ceremony and annual service of commemoration in Livorno – Sunday 9 November 2008 – was not only Remembrance Sunday in the UK but also marked – to the very day – the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pisa accident.

For us, this truly memorable day began with a wake-up call at 0500. One hour later, with dawn breaking over the Tuscan hills, Peggy and I set out from the old walled city of Lucca to drive the 25 km to Pisa, where we rendez-vous'd with the remainder of our civilian party at their city centre hotel. This group comprised Gp Capt Richard Bates (OC XXIV Sqn at the time of the Pisa accident) his wife Heather and six relatives of the crew of Hercules XV 216.

An Italian army bus arrived at 0700 sharp to transport us to the barracks of 187 Parachute Regiment in Livorno, located some 15 km south of Pisa. En route, we stopped to pick up the RAF team from their hotel in Livorno. They had flown into Pisa the previous afternoon in a Hercules operated by 30 Sqn. The RAF contingent of 10 personnel was led by Sqn Ldr Jon Edmondson, Flt Cdr Exec of XXIV Sqn. His team included Father (Sqn Ldr) Christopher Marsden, an RC padre based at RAF

*(Continued on page 16)*





## The Photo Album - Livorno 2008



The standard being handed over and its final resting case in the chapel





## The Photo Album - Livorno 2008



## Keeping in Touch - XXIV Squadron News



RAF Lyneham Main Gate

### RAF Lyneham gets its marching orders

Here is the latest local news (7th May 09) from the Wiltshire Gazette and Herald on the future of RAF Lyneham. Despite efforts to keep it open, it does look like we will be having Reunions from 2012/3 at Brize Norton. The positive view is that we will still be having Reunions.

After six years of uncertainty and campaigns to save RAF Lyneham it has been announced that the air base will close permanently in 2012.

An internal MoD letter passed to North Wiltshire MP James Gray said plans drawn up under Project Belvedere, a review of re-housing helicopters from the three armed forces, has fallen through.

The base is now expected to close on December 31, 2012, with operations and personnel being moved to RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire the previous year.

Mr Gray, who has been campaigning since 2003 to secure the future of the base, said he was devastated.

"The fact that ministers did not have the courage to make this announcement to Parliament speaks for itself," he said.

The news would come as a great blow to the RAF personnel, the 750 civilians employed at the base and many hundreds of others in his constituency who owe their livelihoods in one way or another to the base, he said.

Mr Gray has pledged to reverse the closure or to find an alternative use, probably agricultural or leisure, for the 1,164 acres.

"I will be leaving no stone unturned but whether or

not I will be successful I do not know," he said.

"It would be quite wrong if I turned around and said it could be saved, but I will try to find an alternative use.

"We must try to take what is a tragedy for the area and turn it into something positive."

RAF Lyneham was one of the front runners to house helicopters and personnel under Joint Helicopter Command.

But the aging accommodation and service buildings needed £2 million to keep them up to standard just in case the site was chosen.

Residents have called for a quick decision on the future to avoid the closure having a devastating impact. Parish councillor Tim Webb, 40, said: "We do not want years of not knowing what's happening."

His wife Maria, 38, said: "Out of the 27 children in my son's class, the families of 22 work at the base."

Nearly 17,000 people signed a Gazette petition to save the base, which Wiltshire Council estimates contributes £25 million a year to the economy.

District councillor Allison Bucknell, who took part in the campaign, said: "Many people round here gave their life and soul to the RAF. In the short term there will be a lot of uncertainty."

Civil contractor and web designer of Lyneham Village online Andy Humm said: "This will have a terrible impact – it is worrying for all of us. It is still not clear that Brize Norton will be able to support everyone.

"I do not think this has been thought through."

In a written statement to Parliament, defence minister Adam Ingram said the closure will result in a reduction of around 1,780 service and 360 MoD civilian posts.

Flt LT Phil Whitworth has sent in this article on a recent trip the Squadron made to the WWI Battlefields they visited.

### Exercise Hawker Trail 09-13 March 2009

On the 9th of March, 16 members of the J Conversion and Training Flight converged in the





## Keeping in Touch - XXIV Squadron News - cont

Car Park. Their Mission: Travel to France and Belgium via Hounslow Heath and trace the footsteps of XXIV Squadron Royal Flying Corps from formation to deployment during WWI. It seemed like only yesterday it had been casually discussed, but there we stood, bags packed, mini buses loaded and wikipedia thoroughly plagiarized. POB lead the formation in his Scout machine staffed by the Professional Aviator Cadre with Chris Kelly and Matt covering the flanks. Heading east we began the advance upon Hounslow Heath and stage 1 in the History of British Aggressive Air Operations.

### **Stand 1- Day 1- Hounslow Heath. Flt Lt Green and Sgt Main.**

Upon arrival at Hounslow Heath, Matt and Sam gave a brief on the evolution of XXIV Squadron detailing Squadrons roles and responsibilities. We then set off for Dover. Upon arrival the PA bus used their wisdom (or massive pay checks) to charm their way onto an earlier ferry leaving the mortals to soak in the delights of the Dover Burger King. A few refreshments later we arrived in Calais and began the 2 Hour journey to Amiens.

Following an evening of French cuisine and local wine in Amiens premier Irish Bar, day Two commenced with a brief given by Sqn Ldr Brandon on why WWI began and how XXIV Sqn came to be posted to Bertangles Airfield just North of Amiens. In miserable, wet and windy conditions, very similar to those reported during the summer of the Somme campaign, the Flight visited the site of the original XXIV Sqn hangars. An animated brief by POB regaled the daring exploits of the young fighter Pilots, their Aircraft and more importantly the tactics developed as the war progressed. Strong Westerly Winds made the brief more poignant as many RFC pilots met their end to ground fire when battling strong head winds at the end of a mission while heading home. Searches in the Local woods for the original Nissan Hut Officers Mess proved unsuccessful but did allow for some impressive Off-Roading by Buckloader, before following the original route of the Red Barons funeral Parade.

Stand 3 was an opportunity to study and discuss the flying career of Captain Manfred, Freiherr Von Richthofen "the Red Baron". At the Bertangles War Cemetery where Todd laid a Cross on the Grave of James Arthur Miller an American Pilot on XXIV Squadron who is buried 10 Feet away from Von Richthofens original burial site. The Group then

heard of Von Richthofens life and flying achievements. The point was raised as to whether it was possible to have claimed 80 Aerial conquests and heard to some extent how his reputation caused him to be of extreme value to German Forces who regarded him as a national hero. A comparison was made to more modern styles of piloting and it quickly became obvious that there will never be another aviator that will attract as much attention or be as well remembered as Manfred Von Richthofen. The group visited the crash site where the Red Baron was brought down following a prolonged engagement with the Sopwith Camel of Wilfred May. Despite controversy over who actual fired the fatal shot, it is generally accepted that it was most likely to be that of the Australian Ground Troops at Vaux-Sur-Somme.

After a spot of lunch at Doullens we drove the short distance to the Arras Flying Services Memorial, which commemorates more than 1000 Airmen of the RNAS, RFC and RAF killed on the Western Front who have no known graves. The Group laid a Cross on the monument to commemorate those members of XXIV Squadron who lost their life in World War 1. Pete and Flash gave a short brief on the losses during the offensive and the tactics implemented. We were informed that XXIV Sqn suffered relatively light losses during this time with 24 Killed, 19 Wounded, 17 lost to accidents and 13 taken prisoners. Bearing in mind that the Squadron consisted of 12 pilots at this time, the losses are a lot larger than they first appear.

On day 3 the group set out for the Thiepval Memorial where Rich and Mobbsy gave a brief on the lead up to and reasons for the Somme offensive concluding that it was a purely political decision made to placate the French who at that time had a much larger army than the British Expeditionary Force and had been doing the majority of the fighting. Haig would have preferred more time to train his new recruits but his hand was forced when the French were bogged down in the battle of Verdun and was forced to make his offensive a month early. The objective of the Somme campaign was to keep the French army intact and fighting because without France victory would have been impossible.

After another early start and fun packed morning, we made our way to Luisenhof farm, the crash site of Maj Lanoe Hawker VC DSO on which the Group laid a memorial Cross. Maj Hawker was OC XXIV

*(Continued on page 17)*





## Keeping in Touch - Association

### RECENT LOSSES

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

**Len Hagon**, Len, along with his wife Norma were staunch Association members who enjoyed the Reunions and social side of the weekends. Len or Patsy Hagon was a Flt Engineer on the Squadron at Abingdon from 1951 to 1956 before joining Civil Airlines. He passed away October 2008. Len was a crew member on first landing on Christmas Island alongside "BLUEY" Hobbs, Navigator. Photos show them both unloading a piano from the Hastings to keep the troops entertained by the American Pacific Fleet band. The crew were interviewed by Hawaiian TV around this time. The family made a donation to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

**John (Jimmy) Ingle** made a valuable contribution to the Squadron during his time working in the Safety Equipment section between 1971 to 1976. John also was a keen rugby player and fan but succumbed to cancer earlier this year. His brother in law contacted us to say they were making a donation to the nominated CALM charity.

**Dennis Keogh** was an ardent supporter of the Association and loved to attend the annual Reunions. He sadly passed away in July 2008 after a long illness aged 78. Dennis was a Engine Mechanic working on Yorks and Lancastrians at Basingbourn and Waterbeach between 1949 - 1950. He also supported his local RAFA events in the Maidstone area.

### NEW MEMBERS

Thanks to an initiative of new OC XXIV, W/C Andy Bacon who probably had the Adj rustle up a list of those who left the Sqn in recent times, we can report a healthy influx to the membership list.

A total of 8 new recruits have swelled the ranks and they are:-

**J Hall** - ex Squadron Adj between 1984 - 1989

**Roisin OBrian** - a pilot and Flt Cdr SF Training between 2003 - 2007.

**Don Turnbull** - Served as OC XXIV Sqn Dec

05 - May 08

**Doz James** - 2 tours as a pilot on XXIV. Latest 2005 - 2008

**Mike Neville** - as a Navigator between 1987 - 1991

**R Lett** - did 2 tours as a pilot. 1981 - 88, 1992 - 95

**P Oborn** - Served as OC XXIV Sqn 1998 - 2000

**Mike Meleady** - a pilot on XXIV between 2001 - 2008

### Military Dads wanted for BBC TV series on Fatherhood

The BBC is making a new TV series, looking at the way **fatherhood** has changed during the course of the last century. We want to talk to veterans of the Army, Navy or RAF who were, or were about to become, dads when they fought in the Second World War.

Although as a dad in the forces you had a duty to King and Country, it must have been incredibly difficult to leave your sons and daughters, or your pregnant wife behind when you went off to train and fight. How did you cope with that moment, knowing that you might never see your family again? And what was it like seeing them when you came home on leave?

For all dads in the military, homecoming must have been a joyous occasion. What was it like to see your family again? Did your children remember you? Was it hard to settle back into family life? Or were you one of those who faced the agony of receiving a 'Deai John' letter before the war ended?

We'd also love to hear from the children whose dad went off to fight - so if you're in your sixties or seventies now, perhaps that's a memory you have?

Whatever your story, please write to Pete Vance or Hazel Fearnley, Testimony Films, 12 Great George Street, Bristol, BS1 5RS; email [pete.vance\(a\)testimonyfilms.com](mailto:pete.vance(a)testimonyfilms.com) or telephone 0117 9258589



## Continued Livorno - 9 November 2009

*(Continued from page 10)*

Cranwell. This was because Lyneham did not currently have an RC padre on strength.

On arrival at the regimental barracks, we were taken to the all-ranks canteen where our Italian hosts had thoughtfully laid on coffee and pastries. While we were enjoying these refreshments – effectively breakfast for many of us – relatives, friends and former comrades of the Italian soldiers who had lost their lives in the accident began to arrive. Meanwhile, the UK Air & Naval Attaché in Italy, Cdr Sean Steeds RN, accompanied by his wife and personal assistant, also arrived to join the British contingent. The fact that Cdr Steeds had travelled all the way from Rome to represent the UK at these events was highly appreciated.

The formal programme began at 0900 when a contingent of 187 Regiment, accompanied by the XXIV Sqn Standard party, formed up on the parade ground, while we onlookers took up position outside the Regimental Chapel. The short march to the Chapel was led by the Squadron Standard party flanked by 187 Regiment's Colour, with more paratroops lining the route and bringing up the rear. [See photo]. To digress, 187 Regiment is known as the "Folgore" Regiment, a term meaning "Lightning", which is usually incorporated into its title. One of the most prestigious units in the Italian Army, 187 Regiment expects to deploy to Afghanistan in Spring 2009 for a second tour of six months.

Waiting on the steps of the Chapel was the Italian military Chaplain accompanied by Padre Marsden. The Standard party halted at the foot of the steps where Sqn Ldr Edmondson gave a brief speech before formally handing over the Standard to the Chaplain. [See photo] The Standard was then carried into the small Chapel, followed by a mixture of military participants and civilian guests who somehow all managed to cram into the limited space available, albeit with many people forced to stand. A service of blessing followed, including a moving commemoration to all those who had died in the 1971 accident. The Standard was then formally furled and bound with red ribbon before being placed reverently in a handsome glass-sided oak cabinet that had been commissioned for the purpose by the Commander of 187 Regiment. [See photo].

Leaving the Chapel, we climbed back onto our

bus to be driven to the next location - a Memorial to the lost paratroops erected in a civilian neighbourhood close to the coast overlooking the site of the crash. We arrived to find this Memorial guarded by two paratroopers dressed in the same kit as that worn in 1971 [See photo]. Other soldiers of 187 Regiment in modern uniforms formed an impressive guard of honour, their number including a bugler who later sounded an appropriate salute. Another large crowd of relatives and former comrades, together with local bystanders, had gathered at this spot to hear simple prayers said in both Italian and English. Moving speeches were then made by the main participants, including Colonello Toscani De Col (Commander of 187 Regiment) and Gp Capt Richard Bates. Finally, flowers were laid at the memorial, including two wreaths of poppies placed respectively by Richard Bates and me.

After about 30 minutes at this site, we boarded our bus once again for the short drive to the next location within Livorno's main municipal cemetery. After entering this vast cemetery, we walked several hundred metres to the military section containing the graves (and in some cases, tombs) of many Italian soldiers who had lost their lives in the two World Wars and other conflicts. Eventually we reached the site where the paratroopers of 187 Regiment are buried. A large marble Memorial stands proudly at this spot, bearing in alphabetical order the names of all those - including the RAF crew - who died on 9 November 1971.

More prayers were said and more speeches delivered before the adjutant of 187 Regiment, in a sombre and moving roll-call of the fallen, read out the name of each man who had perished in the accident. In accordance with regimental custom, as each name was spoken the paratroopers lining the Memorial area called out in unison the traditional salute of "Presente!" Finally, the bugler sounded an appropriate call before more floral tributes were laid, including four poppy wreaths placed at the foot of the Memorial by the various British representatives.

This marked the end of the formal ceremonies but more speeches followed once we were back at the barracks for the buffet lunch that the Regiment had generously laid on for all participants. This was an opportunity to mix informally with both military and civilian locals, including an elderly Italian lady whom we had noticed placing two bouquets of flowers at the



Memorial in the municipal cemetery. It turned out that her family had suffered a particularly grievous blow in the accident: she had lost not one but two sons on board XV 216.

We finally dispersed about 1500 hrs, the UK contingent returning to Pisa city via the airfield, where our bus was escorted by a "Follow Me" vehicle straight out onto the dispersal used by visiting aircraft. There, ramp already open, stood the Hercules operated by 30 Sqn waiting to take the RAF contingent straight back to Lyneham! No second night-stop in Italy for them. Theirs not to reason why!

So concluded an emotional and historic day. No RAF Squadron Standard had ever before been laid to rest on non-British territory. We were informed that the Standard of a disbanding squadron had once been laid up in an Anglican church in Hong Kong but that had occurred when Hong Kong was still a colony. The significance of this ceremony in Livorno was strikingly different and it was very apparent that the officers and men of 187 Regiment were extremely proud to have been accorded such a singular honour.

To sum up, the Association can be assured that the retiring Standard of XXIV Squadron (presented by Princess Anne at Lyneham on 15 September 1981 and laid up in Livorno on 9 November 2008) now rests in very good hands indeed.

Gp Capt Keith Chapman, Chairman XXIV Sqn Association, November 2008.

*(Continued from page 14)*

Sqn at this time and one of the first of the flying aces. Liz and Caz gave a very detailed brief on the importance of leadership using current training aids utilized at Cranwell, Shrivenham and Bracknell. Having suitably educated ourselves on the importance of effective leadership we headed back to Amiens and our final night in France.

The Sun finally came out on Day 4 as the group digested the delights of Amiens and headed north. Following an arduous journey involving road works, diversions and comments of "you should have gone that way, it was twenty times quicker" the group eventually made it to the Hill 62 museum just outside Ieper. Chris and Brodes described the important battles that surrounded the area in particular Hill 60, Sanctuary Wood and Passchendaele, followed by a visit to a very realistic museum.

As an aside, the group then moved the short distance to Shrewsbury Forrest, the location of the

attack by the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment Commanded by Lt Col Edgar Mobbs a notable pre war Rugby player. He had personally recruited many friends and fellow sportsmen to form what became known as the "Mobbs Corps". Having fought through the battles of Loos, the Somme and Maison, being wounded twice, mentioned in dispatches twice and awarded the DSO; he died attempting to storm a Machine Gun post that was holding up the advance. This stand was presented by Flt Lt Phil Mobbs, Lt Col Mobbs' great, great Nephew, just short of where his body still lies, buried beneath the Flanders mud, because his body was never recovered. Later, as the weather took an appropriate wintry turn, the group visited the Tyne Cot cemetery near Zonnebeke. To finish the day we returned to Ieper to watch the daily last post ceremony at the Menin Gate memorial to commemorate the Officers and Men from all the British and Commonwealth forces who fell on the Ieper Salient in the Great War.

On Friday, we visited St Omer Aerodrome to finish off the Staff Ride. St Omer is the Airfield where the Squadron first landed in France and where the Squadron suffered its first fatality on French soil when 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Archer Spun his machine into the ground upon arrival. Standing here today it is very difficult to imagine St Omer as it was, being the RFC HQ, BEF HQ, RFC Pilot Pool, No1 Air Depot and the Scout Pilot school. Today all that remains is the Memorial dedicated in 2004. Afterwards we made the short Journey to Longuenesse cemetery and laid a Cross on the grave of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Archer.

With stands complete and objectives met the retreat was finally sounded on Friday morning. And thus we departed, heading toward the white cliffs. I would like to think we arrived back in Blighty wiser and humbler. The characters of the Squadron back then were the most inspirational and fearless young men we had ever come across. Their personal stories are the chronicles of the most extreme bravery and we struggled to comprehend that a human being can deport himself in such a manner day in day out for almost 2 years. But they did, and they paved the way and paid the price for introducing a new dimension to warfare.

### **Welcome to the 2008 edition of the XXIV**

**Squadron Journal**; a popular source of information about what has been going on in recent months. A new OC, a new standard and much much more. See it on the Blog Book

Click on the link below and view the journal with your favourite pdf add-in. (Its 3MB, so lets hope you have broadband, its worth the short wait)

[XXIV Journal 2008](#)





## 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.***

***Ps - you can also comment on line at the BLog Book.***



We had an email from Daniel Geoghegan who lives in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia about an Alvis car.

AVC 80 was purchased new directly from Alvis by 21 year old Rolf Pasold in 1935 for, he said, "the price of a house in Henley-on-Thames". "Flying a Union Jack from the spare wheel pillar, he, his brother, Eric Pasold OBE, and Squadron Leader Jack Matthews AFC, (Lord Mountbatten's personal pilot), drove AVC 80 to Czechoslovakia in Spring 1935. They chased the magic 100 mph at the Nurburgring and along the new German Autobahn, winning a Concours D'Elegance on the way. Eric later commented in his book "Ladybird, Ladybird", "we waved to all the pretty girls on route... the low, red drophead caused a sensation wherever we stopped".

Whilst researching my old Alvis, I found out that Jack Matthews and the original owner, Rolf Pasold, collected it new in 1935 and drove it to Bohemia! I wonder whether you have any background on Jack Matthews, and even a picture. I think he may be in the attached, but not sure.



### F/L Henry Edward Bryant - repair of Mountbatten's Dakota

Chris Bryant contacted us from Ontario, Canada with this request:-

His father joined 24 Squadron in August 1945, and after some working in went to the Far East with F/L O'Neill in Dakota KN386 flying the new Secretary of State for War, Mr. Jack Lawson, returning early October.

He was given his beloved, brand new Dakota IV KP230 which had been VIP'd at Kemble and was assigned as the personal pilot for Lt-Gen Sir Charles Gairdner and flew the British Legation out to Chofu, Tokyo. He was still there with the General when Lord Louis Mountbatten's Dakota Sister Anne FL510 forced-landed on Sado Island off the eastern coast of Japan on January 18, 1946.

Because he had AME qualifications which he had earned before the war he was assigned along with his co-pilot F/O Cox to go and repair the aircraft. He apparently did a great job because Lord Louis was very pleased and sent Dad a very gracious letter of thanks. I have the letter now.

Chris is writing an article for Aeroplane about this incident which is remarkable for more than just his father's connection to it. The Countess Mountbatten of Burma is interested to see the story as well!

He is am looking for any details that may be in people's memory or in any archives the Squadron might have in order to flesh out this story. He has articles from Flight archives and AM Sir Victor Godard's article but no repair details.

He should be contacted via the 24 Sqn Sec, see main web site.



(Continued on page 20)



## Memory Banks - Recent Operations

### Editor's Note

The fascinating account below was written by Sqn Ldr Roisin O'Brien who at the time was serving in the Gulf as a Hercules C 130J captain on XXIV Squadron. Her report is a vivid description of an air drop mission performed by her crew in February 2007. The reference to the "Carmen" alludes to XXIV Squadron's affiliation to the Carmen Livery Company in the City of London. This report is re-printed in the Association Newsletter by kind permission of Sqn Ldr O'Brien, who continues to serve at RAF Lyneham as a Flight Commander on 47 Squadron.

### REPORT BY FLT LT ROISIN O'BRIEN – CAPTAIN SERVING ON XXIV SQN

February 2007

For almost eight months now, the Hercules fleet has been the lifeline of the Maysaan battle groups which patrol the border between Iran and Iraq. Tonight's mission – another airdrop. Under cover of darkness, a maximum payload of 17 tonnes of food, water and ammunition will be dropped. Well, that's the plan. Our aircraft tonight is Hercules C-130J registration number ZH 876, the Carmen's own adopted aircraft from XXIV Squadron. Joining our normal crew of two pilots and a loadmaster are three soldiers from the Army's 47 Air Despatch Squadron. Their role during the actual drop will be vital, ensuring that everything slides off the ramp in under 10 seconds. The drop will be under the force of gravity, but a bit of Army "encouragement" often helps!

We brief and get airborne into the night sky on track for our "time-on-target" of 0400 local. The weather en route forecast predicts isolated thunderstorms. Soon we see flashes of lightning on the horizon. Nothing yet on the weather radar; the storms are too far away. But they are definitely in the area where we are heading!

Patches of deep red creep onto the edge of the radar. The showers are indeed isolated but they are right in our path sitting across Iraq's small coastal border. Strap in everyone, it's going to be bumpy! Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are off to our left, Iran to our right – so there's not much room for manoeuvre. We climb as high as we can with such a heavy payload and skim the top of the storm cells. As we cross the border, we have turned our missile warning systems on and

our aircraft lights off as part of our combat checks. Crossing the border into Iraq is normally where the flight deck becomes quiet and focussed. We are very focussed but it's certainly not quiet. The lightning is continuously setting off the missile incoming warning system and hailstones are battering the windows. Then it becomes quiet as we pass through to the other side. It looks clear ahead. We can see the lights of Basra beneath us and Baghdad in the distance. But to our right – along the Iranian border – we see the flash of lightning again. I scan the weather radar in the direction of the drop area; there is just one band of thunderstorms and it's sitting right over the drop zone (DZ). Just our luck. It's a strong westerly wind, though. The storm band should have moved clear by the time we reach the area.

We carry on as planned and start running our pre-drop checklists. Time to establish comms with The Queen's Royal Lancers on the ground below. "Pirate 01, Jasper." Crackling ... a voice breaks through, shouting through the elements ... "Jasper, it's Pirate 01 ... the weather on the DZ is awful ... gale force winds ... lightning ... heavy rain ... cloud base on the deck." I envisage a TV reporter broadcasting from a hurricane zone battling the wind and rain to get his message out.

The storms are too dangerous to fly through at our low level drop height and in any case the parachute canopies might not cope with such turbulence. If a canopy failed, the load could go anywhere. A ballistic one tonne container is not something you want to land on your head.

Feeling very consciously within range of Iranian air defence radars, we elect to sit in the air-to-air refuelling holding pattern nearby, disguising ourselves as a tanker in the hope that we are less conspicuous and can avoid compromising our mission. We watch the storm. Then Pirate 01 comes back on frequency. It's getting worse. The wind is stronger and we now have hailstones.

The storms have halted at the Iranian mountains along the border and are now rotating over the DZ. How long before they move? Will they move? We start looking at our fuel. We can no longer make it back to base and



are holding Kuwait as our diversion. The only other option is Basra, giving us just under two hours of holding fuel at our present location. But more critical than fuel is that, in under those two hours, it will be daylight and our low and slow aircraft would be too vulnerable to ground attack from enemy forces. The troops will have to go onto minimum rationing if they don't get this resupply – so the pressure is on! We examine the pattern of the storm's movement in the hope we may find a window. We have recently been cleared to drop in cloud but this technique has yet to be used in anger. Yet it may be our only option. We just need the heart of the storm to move.

After an hour and a half, decision time is coming. The latest report from the DZ is that the lightning has stopped and the rain has eased. There's a gap between two storm cells on the radar. We make a go for it. The operational wind limit for the parachutes is 40 knots – it will be close. We are running in and use our codewords to get clearance for the drop. Usually an Infra-Red strobe on the DZ is our clearance but we won't see anything tonight so we must rely on comms. We have now descended to low level, sitting in the base of the storms. I fight the controls in the turbulent air as we slow down to our drop speed and open up the ramp. The lightning in the vicinity is starting to set off our missile warning systems again; luckily, being in cloud means nothing and nobody can see us. Clearance to drop comes back in code ... "Red On ...Green On". I raise the nose of the aircraft and fight the trim changes as 17 tonnes of containers roll off the back. "Load Gone". Much lighter, we climb away. A voice comes over the radio. "It's amazing!" he shouts. "All this wind and rain and I can see them coming through the cloud. They are spot on ... absolutely spot on!"

Relieved that our mission is done and the troops have their vital resupply, we head for home. As for my next mission ....

My crew flew ZH 876 again three days later on a troop changeover for The Queen's Royal Lancers. Due to an incident on the austere strip just miles from the Iranian border, the Carmen-adopted aircraft had to be destroyed! See footnote.

Footnote:

Hercules ZH 876 suffered a landing accident in February 2007 on a desert airstrip 20 km north of Al-Amarah in Iraq. The aircraft sus-

tained substantial damage. Because the damage was too difficult to repair, it was decided to blow up the Hercules with explosives. This drastic action also obviated the risk that hostile forces might obtain information about specialist equipment on board the aircraft.

*(Continued from page 18)*

Another most interesting email from Nick Scarr set about a whole chain of events, including a link up with France, as you will see.

Dear Sir

I would be most grateful for your assistance. A colleague of mine, Mr J.C. Mathevet, has written a report on the Pyrenean crash of Dakota FL588 on the 5th December 1944.

This aircraft belonged to the 24th Squadron of the Transport Command of the RAF based at Hendon.

Mr Mathevet is in the process of re-writing the work and wishes to include an accurate, authentic image of the type of Dakota in question.

The Dakota was a Mark III, RAF Number FL588 with twin wasp R1830-92 engines - I can supply more information about this if you require.

Regards  
Nick Scarr



This seemed like a good case for Simon Batchelor, who had some success in assisting Lt Col Air retd Jean Claude MATHEVET of Lyon. He has given us permission to include some of the extract of a booklet he written about the incident.

It is a sad coincidence that we have two features in this on a similar theme in this Issue but assurance s were given that this Pyrenees article would be printed. The booklet will hopefully be available on the [Association Blog Book](#)

The XXIV crew members were F/LT N.O. CLEMENTS Pilot , F/LT M.L. RICHARDS Navigateur, F.O W.P. GRIFFITHS Radio





## FLYING DRAMA IN THE PYRENEES Pic de la Camisette (Ariege) December 5th, 1944 In Memory

On December 1944, a new tragedy hit the Royal Air Force, the Army Air Corps and the Glider Pilot Regiment again. A Royal Air Force C-47 Dakota crashed on a snowy, majestic ridge in Ariège.

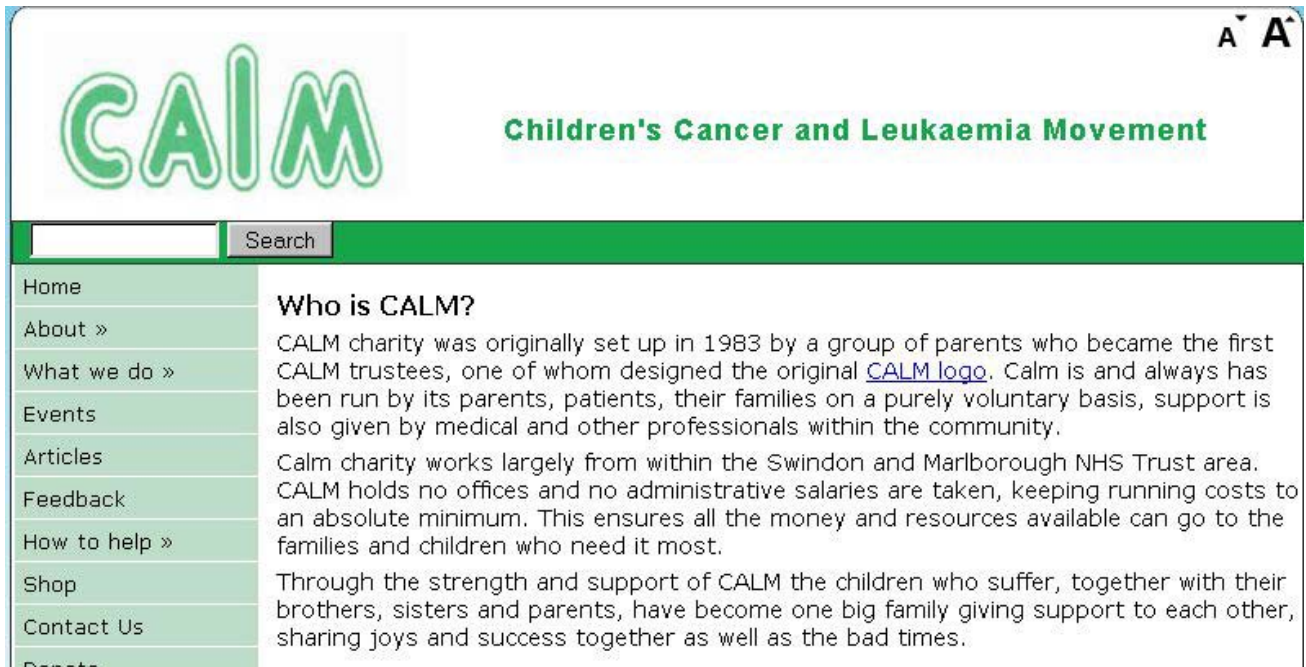
Twenty three airmen were on board, twenty of whom belonged to the Glider Pilot Regiment. Seventeen of them died on that day; another one died a few days later because of his injuries. Some of the bodies were only found the following Spring, when the snow had melted away.

Three men were saved thanks to the courage and outstanding determination of two among their comrades who, though seriously wounded themselves, managed to reach the village of Mijanes for help.

This story is dedicated to the memory of those eighteen British airmen who lie in Mazargues cemetery today.



A couple of notices for you to read. The first is the new sponsored charity, CALM, that the Squadron has adopted since the closure of Burton Hill House School. See below for a screen shot from its web site. Its internet address is <http://calmcharity.org> Also we have details about accommodation for the Reunion weekend. You are of course free to select anywhere but the coach will only be picking up from the M4/J16 Swindon area.



#### ACCOMMODATION – 2009

##### Holiday Inn Express M4 J16 Swindon



The Deputy Chairman is trying to obtain a discounted group rate but the hotel is heavily booked the October weekend! Those wishing to check on rates need to email [gm.swindon@expressholidayinn.co.uk](mailto: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](http://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. Try the Internet or Teletext for other deals. Over the road is the Premier 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. Chippenham Tourist Information Office (01249 706333) will give you details of other accommodation in the area and arrange booking for you.

**NOTE - the coach will only be picking up guests at the J16 hotels, i.e. Hilton, Express Holiday Inn, Premier Travel Inn.**





## The Photo Album – Issue 16



Above - a windy outdoor briefing before we are handed our parachutes! and below the killer boomerang is presented at the 2008 Reunion





## Late News - Summer Social,

### SUMMER SOCIAL - 3rd June in Wiltshire

The weather was excellent as usual for this years XXIV Squadron Association Summer Social. It was going to be an expedition of two legs, the first waypoint adjacent to RAF Lyneham Main Gate, i.e. the home of Sam and Sue Wright. With its garden looking its best, (see photo below) along with a lively crows of guests, full of fun and plenty of pre lunch chat to put everybody in the right mood, a real appetiser.

In no time at all everyone is suitably seated a few miles down the road from Lyneham at the La Flambe, Restaurant for a long and leisurely lunch. In view of the fact that we were around 30 and with other customers on the premises, we were all well looked after by the owner and staff.

Myself and a few others departed around 3pm, deciding to miss out on the desert course, but the party was still going strong and the prospect of coffee, chocolates and aperitifs back at Sam's, was a persuasive temptation to keep the party going. Its probably still in full swing today.

John Martin has provided the photo and I think it does show that a good time was had by all. Our thanks again for a great day out. Put a note in your diary for 2010, its sure to be another excellent occasion.



XXIV Association Members about to depart for La Flambé, 3rd June 2009

