



Twenty Four

The Magazine of XXIV Squadron Association



Issue 11

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Editorial



2004 is the Squadron's 89th Anniversary, not that a significant number you might say, although another anniversary you could not fail to notice was that of the 60th Anniversary of D-Day being celebrated this year. This should act as a timely reminder that we are ourselves edging closer towards a milestone anniversary, 2005 will mark the 90th year in service for XXIV.

Preparations and planning will need to start at the AGM in October and should be reason enough to ask for some extra commitment, help and ideas to make 2005 an anniversary to remember.

The Year 2003 Reunion

THE YEAR 2003 REUNION

A very warm welcome was in store for us this year from Wing Commander Kevin Groves as the new OC XXIV Squadron. Kevin has been serving in the Air Force for 23 years, 21 of them with his wings before picking up this post, which must be on everybody's wish list. He took over from W/C Rick Hobson on the 6th June 2003, not far in front of ex OC XXIV, Group Captain Paul Oborn who will be the next Station Commander of RAF Lyneham. A very good track record for the Squadron.

What was on offer was a busy agenda for the reunion weekend including a fully digital simulator ride from the set up next door to the

Squadron HQ. The simulator ride was so real we did catch a glimpse of the Loch Ness Monster on one of the sorties. Kevin went on to outline some of the many tasks and missions the Squadron had been involved in since the last reunion, including constant shuttles to IRAQ and night flying operation in theatre with the defensive aids suite in action. (see also 24 Report article in Issue 11 Newsletter for more details)

The C130J model is the aircraft of choice for the Falcons display team because of its pin point accuracy. This has lead to many other detachments, which in turn have generated a higher number of flying hours not anticipated so early in the aircraft's life being clocked up to the extent that some

airframes are without engines.

What of the future? Well the J model and hence XXIV is scheduled to move to Brize Norton before 2012, so make the most of the Lyneham visits which are still on offer. The move should not be all doom and gloom as Brize has a better infrastructure, the Danes and Italians have also bought J models, some exchanges may be on the cards.

The message is that over the years, the crews have not changed, they still hold the same values and camaraderie as ever. We needed no further proof than another excellent reunion weekend to remember. "In Omnia Parati".

p.s. thanks to Mike Phillips for another impromptu raffle that raised £86 on the day.

Membership Survey Results

Have your say.

Total Forms Sent 235 Forms Received 45 Percentage Returned **19%**.

Q 1a. Do you agree that the Annual Reunion should continue to be held during the first weekend of October? **YES** 84% **NO** 13% **N/A** 2%

Q 2a. Please indicate whether you are in favour of retaining the existing format of the Reunion weekend? **YES** 76% **NO** 20% **N/A** 4%

Q 2c. It has been suggested that the ambience of our formal dinner would be enhanced by music played throughout the meal by a small band or quartet. This was formerly an Association tradition but was dropped as an economy measure two or three years ago. Would you favour the re-introduction of a musical dimension, even if this meant adding to the overall cost of the dinner? **YES** 53% **NO** 36% **N/A** 11%

Q 3a. Some RAF Sqn Associations defray the cost of attendance for members whose financial circumstances would otherwise preclude their attendance at annual reunions. Such help is always extended in a highly discreet and sensitive manner. With that in mind, do you believe – in principle - that the XXIV Sqn Association should offer similar financial assistance? **YES** 91% **NO** 9% **N/A** 0%

Q 3b. Would you be in a position to attend the Annual Reunion if an Association member could arrange a lift to the event? (not hardship related) **YES** 38% **NO** 16% **N/A** 47%

Q 4a. The Association traditionally arranges an informal and self-financing social event in the middle of the year. Recent venues have included the War Cabinet Rooms in London and the Bletchley Park, but attendance has rarely reached double figures.

Q 4b. Are you likely to attend one or both of the above events? **YES** 53% **NO** 44% **N/A** 2%

Q 4c. Would you be in a position to attend if an Association member could arrange a lift to the event? (not hardship related) **YES** 20% **NO** 27% **N/A** 53%

Q 4e. Members who do not live in central southern England may prefer to organise small regional events (e.g. those living in East Anglia might like to make a group visit to the excellent museum complex at Duxford). The updated membership list with postcodes distributed with this year's AGM minutes will facilitate such get-togethers. Please state whether you would be interested in organising/participating in a regional summer event. **YES** 31% **NO** 53% **N/A** 16%

Flying Machines of 24 – DC3



When United Airlines ordered the Boeing Model 247, the revolutionary all-metal monoplane promptly rendered all other airliners obsolete and threatened the economic survival of many of United's competitors. Worried about losing business to United and unable to purchase the new Boeing, Transcontinental and Western Air inc. (TWA) decided to come up with a better aircraft. TWA's vice president of Engineering, Jack Frye, sent a letter to various aircraft manufacturers requesting proposals for a new airliner. One of the recipients of Frye's letter was Donald Douglas who received it on August 2, 1932. The letter (which Douglas was to later call "the birth certificate of the DC ships") said that TWA wanted to buy at least 10 tri-motor aircraft capable of carrying 12 passengers and 2 crew. It had to have a range of at least 1,000 miles at a top speed of 185 mph and be able to take off fully loaded on 2 of the 3 engines. It also asked that if the Douglas Aircraft Company was interested in the project, how long would it be before a prototype would be ready for service tests. Interestingly, no mention was made of cost.

Until then, Douglas had specialised in military aircraft but he decided the opportunity was worth the risk of moving into the commercial market. He also knew that if he were to secure a contract, his designers would have to come up with a proposal as soon as possible. Only one week later, 2 company engineers travelled to TWA's New York office armed with plans for a luxurious new twin-engine aircraft. Once there, the plans were shown to Frye and TWA's president, Richard Robbins. Both Frye and Robbins were impressed with the initial proposal but before any formal contract was issued, they asked their technical advisor, Charles Lindberg, to inspect the plans. Lindberg

thought the proposed aircraft showed promise but voiced concerns that it had only 2 engines instead of the 3 requested. He was insistent that it had to be able to take off and climb to 8,000 feet in the event of an engine failure; if this could be achieved then TWA would buy the aircraft. After some hasty "on the spot" calculations by the Douglas engineers, it was decided that this was possible and a deal was struck. Work began on the Douglas Commercial Model 1 (DC-1) shortly afterwards and following extensive design work and rigorous testing, it was rolled out of the hanger on June 22, 1933. At the time, it was the largest land based twin-engine monoplane ever built in the United States.

The DC-1 was of all metal construction with a streamlined fuselage sitting on top of exceptionally strong monocoque construction cantilevered wings. The 710 hp Wright SRG-1820-F3 engines were enclosed in streamlined NACA (the forerunner of NASA) designed nacelles that not only reduced drag but also helped with engine cooling. Hydraulically operated main gear was located in the engine nacelles and retracted to about half the diameter of the wheels. This was mainly for safety reasons, as the partially exposed wheels would help cushion the impact of a wheels-up landing. Variable pitch Hamilton Standard propellers and split trailing edge flaps assisted with takeoff and landing, the flaps also acting as a form of speed brake helping reduce the landing speed to 58 mph. A great deal of attention had been paid to passenger comfort, a detail often overlooked in previous airliners. Comfortable reclining seating mounted on anti-vibration rubber pads was provided for 12 passengers as well as a kitchen and practical washroom/toilet. Because the cabin floor was fitted to the top of

the wing centre section there was no structural member intruding into the cabin, allowing more freedom of movement inside the aircraft. Extensive soundproofing led to interior noise levels that were considerably lower than any other airliner of the time. A thermostatically controlled steam boiler mounted on the engine exhaust kept the interior temperature at a comfortable 21° centigrade with the cabin air being changed every 60 seconds. In addition, self-adjustable fresh air vents were installed next to each seat. Of course, all these creature comforts would be of little consequence if the DC-1 were not structurally sound, a problem that plagued some previous airliners. Because of the lack of any sophisticated stress testing facilities and limited knowledge in all metal aircraft design, Douglas designers chose to use materials that were far stronger than necessary in many aspects of construction. The end result being that the DC-1 was not only very safe, but also extremely strong.

At exactly 12:36 pm on July 1, 1933 the DC-1's wheels left the ground for the first time, marking the beginning of the end for the wood, fabric and wire airliner era. Further flight-testing followed, including the all-important single engine test (which was successful), before the DC-1 was delivered to TWA on September 13, 1933. It was not long before TWA realised that the DC-1 showed great promise and offered a chance to recapture the commercial airline market so they promptly placed an order for 20 DC-1s. The airline also requested that the aircraft incorporate several improvements that they felt were necessary. To meet TWA's requirements, Douglas decided that rather than trying to modify the existing design, it would be better to come up with a new aircraft based on the DC-1. Consequently, on May 11, 1934, the DC-2 made its first flight and was delivered to TWA 3 days later. To the casual observer, the DC-2 looked very similar to the DC-1. However, due to the availability of more powerful 855 hp Wright SRG-1820-FS2 engines, the fuselage had been lengthened by 2 feet allowing for an extra 2 passengers to be carried. The lengthening of the fuselage also altered the aircraft's centre of gravity so the position of the wings was moved rearward to compensate. Like its predecessor, the DC-2 set new levels of passenger comfort and service, including the introduction (by TWA) of the first "in-flight" movies. When compared to all

other contemporary aircraft, the DC-2 was the safest, most comfortable and fastest airliner in the sky. It went on to establish 19 United States speed and distance records in its first 6 months of operation before receiving the Collier trophy for "outstanding achievements in flight" in 1935. Such was the success of the DC-2 that many airlines both in the United States and abroad rushed to place orders for the aircraft. In addition to the flood of orders for the DC-2, manufacturing rights were sold to Fokker in Holland and Nakajima Hikoki KK in Japan. A single DC-2 ended up in Russia where the design was copied, slightly altered and put into production (without a licence) as the ANT-35. A KLM Royal Dutch Airlines DC-2 (PH-AJU) was to achieve worldwide fame when, in October 1934, it was entered in the London to Melbourne air race. It followed KLM's regular 9,000-mile commercial route which was 1,000 miles longer than the official race route, made every scheduled passenger stop en-route (even turning back once to pick up a stranded passenger) and finished second, only 34 minutes flying time behind the winning custom built de Havilland "Comet" racing plane.

In an attempt to recoup some of the money that was being lost by their older aircraft, American Airlines experimentally installed sleeping berths on a Ford Trimotor. Much to their surprise it was found that some people welcomed the chance to sleep on long haul transcontinental flights, even on the slow and noisy Ford. The airline figured that if they could incorporate sleeping facilities on a more modern aircraft they would get an edge over other carriers. Cyrus Rowlett Smith, the president of American Airlines and William Littlewood, vice president of engineering, decided that the DC-2 would be ideal except they were too narrow to accommodate comfortable berths. As a result, Littlewood and his engineers drew up sketches of a larger DC-2 that incorporated the changes they wanted and then set about trying to convince Douglas on the viability of the project. Douglas was initially reluctant to commit to the idea as sales of the DC-2 were progressing well with at least 90 orders waiting to be filled and to build the modified aircraft that American wanted would involve extensive disruption to DC-2 production. Following a lengthy long distance phone call from Smith, Douglas was finally persuaded but still remained sceptical. After months of design, con-

struction and testing, the Douglas Sleeper Transport (DST) was rolled out of the factory on December 14, 1935. Although based on (and bearing a strong resemblance to) the DC-2, the DST was essentially a completely new aircraft. The fuselage was of almost circular cross section and both longer and wider than the DC-2s. It comprised a 55 cubic foot baggage/mail hold to the rear of the cockpit with a private "Sky Room" (sometimes called the "Honeymoon Hut") for VIP passengers immediately behind this. The main passenger compartment was divided into 8 sections, each containing 2 seats that converted into the lower berths with the upper berths folding down from the ceiling. A toilet and dressing rooms were located at the rear as well as kitchen facilities capable of serving hot meals, a first on an American airliner. New sound proofing material was used to line the cabin walls, reducing the interior noise levels to less than that of a railroad car.

Littlewood's original plan had suggested that the wingspan of the DST be increased by using a DC-2 wing with 5 foot wing-tip extensions added. Subsequent wind tunnel tests discovered that this idea resulted in a wing that was unstable to the point of being dangerous and did not provide sufficient lift. After many different designs had been tested, a completely new cantilevered wing with a narrower airfoil was used. As with the DC-1 and DC-2, the wings were exceptionally strong but in the case of the DST, a built in flexibility allowed them to "flap" by up to 5° in flight (many first time DST passengers had to be reassured by the crew that this was completely normal). The long-screw trailing edge flaps of the DC-2 were replaced by hydraulically operated ones and a new hydraulic pump was installed that could raise or lower the landing gear in 7 seconds instead of the 1 minute it took in the DC-2. As with its predecessors, the main gear didn't retract completely and was located in the engine nacelles behind the new 1,000 hp Wright SGR-1820-G2 powerplants. For added safety, the main gear was held in the up position by hydraulic back pressure meaning that if the system lost pressure, gravity would cause the gear to drop and lock into position. Further visible (and not so visible) changes included a larger tail surface, Hamilton Standard Hydromatic constant-speed variable-pitch propellers and an autopilot system. On December 17,

1935 the DST made its first flight with pilot Carl Cover at the controls and Frank Collbohm as co-pilot. The aircraft lifted off from Clover field, Santa Monica and was airborne for an hour and a half. The flight was described as "very routine", so routine in fact, that no Douglas executives took the time to watch it and no photographs of the event were taken. Further test flights followed and apart from the addition of a small dorsal fin to the tail to improve directional stability, no major problems arose.

As well as the sleeper version, specifications were also drawn up for a "Day-plane" capable of carrying 24 passengers in 8 rows of 3 seats (2 on one side of the aisle and 1 on the other). It was soon found that more baggage space would be needed to cope with the extra seating so the first row of seats was removed and the baggage hold bulkhead was move rearwards, reducing the passenger capacity to 21. It was in this configuration that the aircraft was developed as the DC-3. The removal of the Sky Room on later DC-3s allowed for additional cargo space and extra seating to be installed, bringing the total number of passengers carried to 28. Because of the ability to carry twice as many passengers as the DC-2 with only a 3 percent increase in operating costs, most airlines opted for the more profitable DC-3 over the DST with only 38 of the latter being built. Orders for the DC-3 (and, to a much lesser extent, the DST) began flooding in with American Airlines taking delivery of the first DST on April 29, 1936 followed later in the same year by the DC-3. By the end of 1936, orders for 100 aircraft had been placed by several airlines. The DC-3 was a hit with the aviation industry, earning praise as it surpassed even the DC-2 with its combination of speed, comfort and safety. Airlines worldwide were clamouring to get hold of the aircraft so in order to keep up with demand, Douglas sold manufacturing rights to Holland, Japan and Russia. Fokker was to construct the DC-3 in Holland but this never eventuated, leaving Japan and Russia as the only foreign manufacturers of the aircraft. The Japanese built the DC-3 as the Showa L2D while Russian built aircraft were initially designated the PS-84 before becoming the Lisunov Li-2 on September 17, 1942.

The start of World War 2 led to large orders

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being placed by the military of various nations. The basic DC-3 design was modified for military service with the addition of an extra 6 inches to the wingspan, strengthening of the floor and rear of the fuselage and the fitting of a larger cargo-loading door. The original Wright engines were replaced with more powerful 1,200 hp Pratt and Whitney R-1830-92 Twin Wasps and a revised fuel system was installed. Put into service as a military transport and troop carrier, the aircraft received the designation C-47 with the US Army Air Force (and R4D in the US Navy). Further adaptations and modifications of the C-47 led to a plethora of different designations and suffixes such as the C-53 (a dedicated 28 seat troop transport) and C-117 (21 seat staff transport) to name just a couple. The Royal Air Force also operated the C-47 where it was given the name Dakota, this name also being adopted for the aircraft by many other Commonwealth nations. In addition to the C-47's official names, it also picked up various nicknames like "Skytrain", "Skytrooper", "Doug", "Dak" and (perhaps the most well known) "Gooney Bird".

The military DC-3s became known as Dakotas, the same continuing the British tradition of assigning geographical names to transport and bomber aircraft and representing a clever acronym of the letters DACoTA-Douglas Aircraft Company Transport Aircraft. Mark numbers were assigned only to aircraft corresponding to genuine military C-47s, and C-53s received under lend-lease, the Dakota Mk I to IV respectively being C-47-13L, C-53-DO, C-47A-13L/13K and C-4713-13K. The impressed DC-3s were named simply Dakotas, and the name came to be used after the war for DC-3s and surplus military derivatives in many parts of the world.

During the war the Royal Air Force received a total of 1,928 Dakotas including eight ex-civil DC-3s (LR230/LR235 and MA925/MA926) acquired from US airlines by the British Purchasing Commission, 53 Dakota Is (F13768/F13818, HK983 and Y1K993), nine Dakota IIs (Fj709/Fj712, HK867, MA928/MA929 and TJ167/TJ170), 962 Dakota IIIs (FD819/FD967, FL503/FL652, FZ548/FZ698, KG310/KG809, T5422/TS427 and TS431JS436), and 896 Dakota IVs (KJ801/KJ999, KK100/KK220, KN200/KN701, KP208/KP279, TP181 and TP187). However, a number of these aircraft

were transferred during the war to other Commonwealth and Allied air forces as well as to BOAC.

With the RAF, Dakotas were operated during the war by squadrons of No.45 Group, Ferry Command, on routes across the North Atlantic as well as in Canada and the United States. The most unusual flight across the Atlantic by a Ferry Command aircraft was made by F13900, between 24 June and 1 July, 1943, from Montreal to Prestwick towing a Waco Hadrian glider loaded with vaccines for the USSR. Other ferry units, including Nos. 45 and 47 Squadrons and No.2 Aircraft Delivery Unit, flew Dakotas on routes over the South Atlantic and across Africa. In the war zones the Dakota's became the RAF's most important transport aircraft and performed regular supply missions and took part in many famous glider towing airborne and paratrooping operations. The first major use of the Dakota in this spectacular role was made during July 1943 in Sicily and this was followed in August and November 1943 and September 1944 by paratrooping operations on islands in the Aegean Sea, in June 1944 in Italy and Normandy, in August 1944 in Southern France, in September 1944 at Amhem-during which Flt, Lieut David Lord won a posthumous Victoria Cross in Dakota 111 KG734-, in March 1945 in support of the Rhine crossing, and in March and May 1945 in Burma.

After VE-Day several RAF fighter and bomber squadrons were scheduled to be converted to Dakota transport squadrons for use in the final stage of the war against Japan. However, Japan surrendered while most of these squadrons were still being converted; the RAF quickly disbanded several of its existing transport squadrons and disposed of many of its Dakotas. None the less, this did not mark the end of its Service life as the remaining aircraft, supplemented by several civil aircraft which were temporarily impressed, took an active part in Operation Plainfare-the RAF contribution to the Berlin Airlift. Other RAF Dakotas were involved in operations in Malaya and Kenya. The RAF finally retired its last Dakota KN645 on 4 April 1970.

Production of the DC-3/C-47 finished in 1945, shortly after the end of World War 2. By this

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stage, a total of 10,926 aircraft had been built, 10,123 of which were for the military. Unlike many thousands of wartime aircraft, most surplus C-47s managed to escape being reduced to scrap metal with many being used for various commercial applications from passenger services to freight carrying and even crop dusting and top dressing. Still more remained on air force inventories and were used on a regular basis. Prior to their retirement from USAF service in 1975, the C-47 was again to gain fame, this time in the Vietnam War as the AC-47D "Spooky" gunship. Nicknamed "Puff the magic dragon" (after the song of the same name), the AC-47D was fitted with three 7.62mm MXU-470A gattling miniguns firing out of the side of the aircraft. The first 2 went into service in December 1964 with a total of 25 eventually being used. The AC-47D proved very effective, however combat duties began to take their toll on the aircraft so the survivors were phased out of service in 1969 and replaced with the Lockheed AC-130 Spectre gunship.

Although the basic design of the aircraft is now almost 70 years old, hundreds of DC-3s and C-47s remain in military, commercial and private use worldwide. Many have been modernised to extend their capabilities, the most common modifications being the fitting of turboprop engines, lengthening of the fuselage and installation of new avionics and interior fittings. It is perhaps a tribute to the versatility and dependability of the DC-3 that so many remain in use today and give every intention of being around for the foreseeable future.

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Memory Banks 1

Have you ever wondered how many flying hours the RAF Hercules have done in total and per year? Well take a look at the stats below, it certainly equals a lot of nautical miles.

Total	1,535,540
2002	39,819
2001	33,678
2000	36,900
1999	39,135
1998	40,096
1997	36,087
1996	39,636
1995	38,941
1994	41,670
1993	40,335
1992	42,306
1991	50,751
1990	60,309
1989	44,127
1988	46,522
1987	40,571
1986	45,933
1985	45,536
1984	46,531
1983	50,763
1982	53,039
1981	32,279
1980	35,623
1979	37,026
1978	41,595
1977	43,153
1976	39,580
1975	41,855
1974	46,559
1973	51,550
1972	55,841
1971	51,731
1970	46,258
1969	51,325
1968	41,470
1967	7,010

A selection of airspace gaffs for your amusement.

Pilot: "Can I climb to high altitude?" ATC. "Affirm, but standby while I co-ordinate with NASA."

On a night mail flight from Lydd to Liverpool, on first contact with London (it always used to be quite relaxed on the R/T in the middle of the night back in the 1980s): London: "Your route this morning is Detling, Lambourne, Bovington, Daventry, Whitegate. " Mail pilot: "Roger. M20, M25, M1, M6 to Liverpool." London (without a moment's pause): "That's correct, your clearance limit is Knutsford Services. "

The same pilot, on an ambulance flight into Alconbury, carrying doctor, nurse and an ice box containing a heart for transplant: ATC.. "How many souls on board?" Pilot. 'Now, that's really a tough one!'

Aircraft: I require a priority landing, I have government ministers on board.' ATC.. 'Do you have an emergency. or ore you an ambulance flight?' A/C: 'Negative, but I have government ministers on board and they cannot accept a twenty minute hold.' ATC: 'If you do not have an emergency and you are not an ambulance flight you cannot be given priority. That is the law.' ... quite a long pause, say 60 seconds A/C.. I have the Justice Minister on board and he says not to tell him what the law is!'

Nice sunny, calm evening in Scotland:
Male Voice: "Lossic Radar, good evening; hot air balloon rising through 2000ft. one five miles north west of Inverness, heading in a generally south easterly direction; request flight information service."

Lossie Radar: "Are you transponder equipped?"

Balloon: "Negative".

Anonymous Voice: 'Make a turn for radar identification".

'It was about 2.30 in the morning, I was going into Brussels and was very surprised to be given a substantial delay of around 20 minutes. The next aircraft comes onto the frequency and is given a similar delay, when the following exchange takes place:

Jetstream 41 maintaining Flight Level 130 with a

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Beech 200 just about to pass over the top from the left at FL140: Pilot. "How much longer must we maintain FL130, the turbulence is making it very uncomfortable!. ATC, It's going to be more uncomfortable if you bash that King Air to your left!"

Picture the scene, late night at Belfast clear skies. One easyJet inbound and one Jetset closely following for landing. Radar.. "Easy traffic is straight ahead at 5 or 6 miles, report it in sight. ` Jetset: "Got him in sight dead ahead, straight shot!" Easy: "Easy to Jetset, we're reducing to 180kts. We're chaffing by the way. ` Jetset: "Ahh we won't go to guns too early then!"

ATC: 'Shamrock 123 cleared LAGAR". Shamrock. "Where is that?" ATC: "Spelt 'L A G A R Shamrock: "Aaaahh, had it been Guinness we would have found it!"

A Beechcraft from a farm strip in Norfolk, returning home: "Gxxxx, what is your destination?" "Stradsett, sir" "Say again your destination?" "Stradsett, sir" `Say again?" "Norfolk!"

Approach: "American 123 confirm you have captured the ILS. " American 123: "Err, negative, but we have it surrounded ...

Pilot: "Palm Springs Approach, Cessna 124, I am over the golf course." Controller.. "Great. That narrows it down to 89 golf courses in the Palm Springs area..."

Tower: "Cheyenne Eight Romeo Charlie, cleared to land runway 13 left. Caution a flock of buzzards circling over the approach end of the runway." Pilot: "Roger. I hope they're not for us." Tower: That all depends on your landing. `

Tower: 'W24331 taxi into position and hold." Pilot: Into position and hold, N24331." Pilot: 'Tower, there's a dead seagull on the right side of the runway near the wind sock." Tower: "Roger. N24331 cleared for take-off - and watch for dead seagull on the right side of the runway!" Pilot: "N24331, dead seagull traffic in sight."

Aircraft landing at Dubai are experiencing wind-shear on final. An Indian Airlines A320 lands and after vacating the runway, calls Ground Control: "Ground, Indian 123 please be advised on final we were getting strong wind from backside."

After arrival, we checked in with the ground controller. His radio wasn't the clearest. As we were taxiing to the ramp another aircraft asked the controller, "Has anyone else told you your communica-

tions are garbled?" Ground replied, "My wife!"

Heard at Republic Airport, Long Island. Ground controller to a cargo Beech 18 taxiing in: What are you hauling today?" Twin Beech: "Ten thousand baby chicks ... we had a heck of a job getting them to put their seat belts on."

Heard at Heathrow: 'Tower, Speedbird 011 is with you, monitoring 118 decimal 5. " "Roger Speedbird 011, kindly monitor the frequency silently like everyone else

Heard at Luton recently, Challenger business jet being followed to the holding point by an easy Jet 737: Tower: "SWZ from Tower, are you with me?" (No response) Tower: 'SWZ, Tower..." (Still no response) Easy: 'Tower, Easy 123 with you to Alpha" Tower: "Easy123 roger" Tower: 'SWZ, Tower are you with me?" (No response) Followed by another call with still no response.

Easy 123: I could get the First Officer to jump out and bang on his window if you like

Helpful controller on Clacton Sector trying to ascertain a good or bad time for another controller to go stand-by to the Far East: ATC: "Air China 938 can you tell me when Chinese New Year is?"

938: "Say again."

ATC repeats. 938: "Say again." ATC repeats. 938: "Affirm on callsign Air China 938." Unidentified BA voice: "Why don't you try ordering a take-away?"

Two aircraft leaving the Lambourne hold for Heathrow on the same heading, Beech 200 at FL 70, Airbus A340 at FL 80 about 4 miles behind, but going much faster. As the Airbus caught up with the King Air and the returns on the radar merged, a meek little voice was heard . It's gone awful dark

This allegedly happened at JFK. An American Airlines 757 is taxiing out of the AA terminal cul-de-sac at high speed, checking in on the Tower frequency. Controller asks: "Why the hurry?" and the reply, although a bit garbled, sounds exactly like I have a dangerous cargo". "Okay" thinks our hero, "better give this guy priority in the departure sequence." This is done and furthermore a message about this particular flight having a dangerous cargo is passed down the line through the ATC system. After the flight has reached O'Hare airport in record time. the Ground controller asks the pilot: "AA123 you need any special assistance when parking? "

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AA: "Errr ... no ... why d'ya ask???" (sounding quite baffled) Ground: "Well, I understand that you told JFK Tower that you had a dangerous cargo..."
 AA: "No no no, I said I have a date in Chicago."

Ground: 'ABC 123 taxi stand three. " Pilot: "Taxi stand three, any route?" Ground: "Just stay off the grass."

Rather snooty captain: "Good morning Tower, Birdseed 123 request the information. " Tower: "Good morning Birdseed 123, surface wind light and variable, runway 23, temperature +15, QNH 1011." Rather snooty captain: "Can you be a bit more specific about the wind?" Tower: "Certainly, 270 to 360 degrees, one knot, gusting two."

Memory Banks 2



A Good Read

We did appeal in our last Newsletter for a submission for a book review. Well our thanks to John Mitchell for the following as he has not attempted a book review before. He only recently come across this book, written by a retired Group Captain, PJI who commanded a Station and was awarded an AFC for his long involvement with the inter-service training of para. forces. Not a bad career for the old Physical Ed. Branch !

The Flying Rebel (HMSO.1994)

I have only recently read Peter Hearn's biography of Louis Strange, a pilot of both World Wars and an amazing man who was connected with No.24. The book relates how in the 14-18 Conflict Strange was promoted to command No.80 Wing on the Western Front which included No.24 the first RAF squadron in a truly fighter role (under Hawker, VC), that is in the defensive role escorting Army Co-op. Squadrons and in an offensive ground-attack role using MGs and primitive bombs. He finished that war with a DSO and a DFC.

In the Second WW, Strange applied to re-join the RAF (having kept up his private flying meanwhile) but found himself relegated to admin.duties be-

cause of a doubtful heart condition. This was not to his liking and with initiative and unorthodox methods, for which he had been long famed, he wangled himself on to flying duties (at the age of 49) and was posted to 24 at Hendon as an A/P/O.

There he found himself amongst friends and during the Battle of France, as an aside to his communication flying duties, took the initiative to organise the flying-out of abandoned but semi-serviceable Hurricanes back to the UK, including bringing one home himself, having never flown one before. Back at Hendon as a co-pilot on such commandeered transport aircraft as the Ensign and the Heracles, he flew ammunition in to the beleaguered garrison at Calais and took part in evacuating troops under the very noses of the advancing Germans, earning a Bar to his First War DFC.

By coincidence, H.B.Collins (recently ex-Imperial Airways) who was later to command the Squadron, was doing much the same thing and also was awarded a DFC. Collins was to become Winston Churchill's personal pilot on the York 'Ascalon'.

I can thoroughly commend this book to members. It is a well-written account of a remarkable pilot who went on to command the Parachute Training School at Ringway and to be an Air Staff officer on No.46 Group. Incidentally, Peter Hearn himself is a retired Group Captain PJI with an AFC.

Yours etc., J.L.Mitchell.



Also by John Mitchell who has put together a piece on the Royal Hudson aircraft which briefly was on the books of the Squadron and always closely associated with 24 until it went to 161 for special duties ops.

The Royal Hudson

On 4th.August 1939 a Lockheed Hudson was flown to Hendon from the Lockheed UK Depot at Speke, near Liverpool. It was one of the first batch of 200 Hudsons ordered in 1938 by the British Purchasing Commission (Air) in Washington, DC, and paid for in cash - long before the days of Lease Lend. They were to replace the Ansons in Coastal Command. This depot assembled and modified these aircraft, shipped in crates from February 1939 to Liverpool. The twin-

(Continued on page 11)

Browning turrets and IFF were fitted and, to this particular aircraft, additional sound proofing as well as comfortable passenger seats embodying seat-type parachutes. Modifications to the radio installation were also made. Standard Bomber Command camouflage was retained and no squadron markings or other identification were painted on. Just the RAF number, N7263.

It was to replace the first RAF aircraft of the Royal Flight, the Airspeed Envoy, which had become too limited in range and payload. Furthermore, it was unarmed and hostilities with Germany had by then become a distinct possibility. Like the Envoy, this Hudson was allocated to 24 Squadron and formally taken on charge on 9th August, 1939, and was based at Hendon. The Envoy had given two years service before its limited range and payload became a handicap. It was subsequently sold to a private buyer.

The connection between 24 Squadron and Royalty had been begun after the end of WW 1. In Dec of that year, No.1 (Coms) Squadron had been formed at Hendon, to provide regular mail and VIP passenger support for the Versailles Peace Conference. A part of this Unit, known as the Air Council Inspection Squadron and based at Kenley, was redesignated No.24 Squadron in Feb.1920. The Squadron moved to Northolt in 1927. It had at first a variety of WW I aircraft, and later the Fairey IIIFs and the Westland Wapitis, all slightly modified to carry VIPs in the rear cockpit.

The ownership of Hendon aerodrome itself was still being negotiated with its pre-war owner (Graham White) when the first Hendon Air Pageant was staged in 1920. With King George's attendance at the now Royal Air Force Pageant in 1921, with Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales, the relationship between the Squadron and Royalty began, endorsed by the Prince's evident enthusiasm for flying. The RAF Air Pageant became an annual event and Hendon was finally bought by the Air Ministry in 1926. It became the base for the two London Auxiliary Squadrons, 600 (City of London) and 601 (County of London).

In 1926, the Prince of Wales, hastily returning from holidaying in Biarritz on account of the impending General Strike, without hesitation flew from Paris to Croydon in a hurriedly chartered Imperial Airways Handley Page W.8 airliner - evidently without parental permission to fly! He had become air-minded very rapidly.

In 1929 the Prince of Wales is recorded to have flown from Hendon to Tangmere in a Squadron Wapiti, piloted by Sqn.Ldr. D.S.Don, and the Prime Minister, then Ramsay MacDonald, began to

use regularly a Squadron Fairey IIIF to commute to his constituency, near Lossiemouth.

The Prince had his first flight in a private aircraft, a DH60 Gipsy Moth, in August of that year, again with Sqn.Ldr. Don, and only three weeks later he bought his first aircraft, the same model. This was serviced by an unofficial arrangement with 24 though generally flown from Smith's Lawn, Windsor, convenient to his residence at Fort Belvedere. Prince George (later the Duke of Kent) was also very air-minded and was flown about in the Squadron's 'Royal' Wapiti. By the end of 1929 the two Princes had flown in and out of Hendon no less than 44 times. The Royal connection was well and truly formed but the Royal Flight, as an RAF unit funded by the Air Force Vote, was still some years ahead.

During 1930 the Squadron was kept busy with Royal flights and in July of that year the Prince of Wales traded up his Gipsy Moth for a D.H. Puss Moth and Flt.Lt. E.H.Fielden was appointed his personal pilot. Prince Henry - later the Duke of Gloucester, also bought an aircraft at this time, a similar Gipsy Moth. The Squadron itself had moved from Northolt to Hendon in 1933 and the Royal aircraft were housed first in the Communication Flight's hangar. Later they were moved across the airfield to the main tarmac, into what became known as the Royal Hangar. This was adjacent to the Officers' Mess where an Annex was later built, with direct access to the tarmac, for the convenience of the Prince and his guest-passengers. (During the War years this was converted into the Mess Billiard Room). The Prince's fleet had been augmented in 1932 by the leasing of a twin-engined Vickers Vialra, with a much increased range and payload for his Continental flights.

By 1935, the Prince had traded in his small aircraft (by then including a DH Fox Moth and an original DH Dragon) for two DH Dragon Rapides. They were his private aircraft, on the civil register and painted in the colours of the Brigade of Guards. At this time, 24 Squadron itself had acquired its first DH Rapide, a six-seater, VIP transport.

On 20 January, 1936 King George V died and the Prince of Wales, now KG VI, flew with his brother, the Duke of York, to Bircham Newton in one of his Rapides to visit Sandringham. Later that year the Air Ministry agreed to finance the royal flying and the King's Flight was formed with the support of 24 Squadron but under command of the newly-promoted Wing Commander Fielden. In 1937, the first Air Ministry-ordered aircraft, an Airspeed Envoy, was added to the fleet and the Royal Rapides dispensed with, perhaps traded in and added to the

(Continued on page 12)

growing 24 Squadron fleet, as a part exchange! It retained civil markings for, up to the outbreak of the War, it was useful to be able to fly about Europe in a civil-registered aircraft.

The next aircraft ordered for the Royal Flight was a VIP version of the DH Flamingo, a very advanced aircraft for the period, with retractable undercarriage and a Sperry Autopilot. Three in all were ordered for 24 Squadron, one of which had a modified interior for the Prince's use. But with outbreak of war now threatening, following a series of international crises, the need for an armed aircraft was seen as essential. The unarmed Royal Flamingo, when delivered in September, 1939 was absorbed into the Squadron and the armed Hudson, by then available, took its place. This was flown by Wg. Cdr. Fielden, with the rest of the crew found from 24; that is, an Air Gunner/ Wireless Op., a co-pilot (no separate navigator) and the indomitable Mr. Jenkins as Engineer - who had always accompanied Prince's aircraft, as a man of all trades. He had first been a civilian aircraft engineer on the Royal payroll, but later became a Flight Sgt. and was subsequently commissioned.

On the outbreak of hostilities it was quickly realised that Royal movements should be operated from an airfield outside London and RAF Benson was selected, being convenient for Windsor. The Royal Flight moved to become a lodger unit on 12 OTU (then Fairey Battles). The AM Form 78 is annotated 18th April '40 the date this particular Hudson was taken on charge by 24, tho' it was re-allocated to The Kings Flight, as such, on 31st December '41. In the early months of the war it was often used by the Duke of Kent, serving in the rank of Air Cdre., on his visits to RAF units in the UK.

It remained available for Royal Duty until June '42, when, conveniently, it was transferred to the newly formed 161 Squadron at Newmarket, still under command of Fielden. Newmarket was an operational bomber base in No.3 Group, but 161 operated an assortment of aircraft in support of SOE and other clandestine operations. Owing to pressures from the AOCinC Bomber Command no long-range multi-engined aircraft could be diverted from his growing strike force to SOE. He enforced his will so rigorously that the only aircraft allowed to Special Forces at first were some tired Whitley Vs, no longer required for bomber operations. With Wing Commander Fielden now commanding 161, and having his hand on this particular Hudson, as it were, it became a most useful vehicle out of reach of Bomber Harris. It saw much adventurous service on special duties operations. While Newmarket remained a No.3 Group bomber base, the Special Forces support operations were transferred in April '42 to Tempsford, with Fielden, now promoted

Group Captain, in command. 138 Squadron, also on special duties, converted from Whitleys to Halifaxes, when Bert Harris relaxed his veto!

While all this was happening to the Royal Hudson, the Mk III version of the aircraft, but without turrets, were being delivered to 24 Squadron at Hendon, in May. '42. These were for overseas communication flights, to Malta and North Africa, via Gibraltar. This was just within range with a worthwhile payload of 2,000 lbs, by topping up with fuel at Portreath or St Mawgan. The story of the Malta Shuttle by 24 Squadron to help the relief of that beleaguered Island, bringing in urgent spares and stores and returning to the UK by the same route, often with evacuated women and children, is a drama in itself, for another time and another writer.

The Queen's Flight. Blandford Press 1986
RAF Squadrons. Air Life. 2001

Hendon Aerodrome. A History. David Oliver 1994.
Air Life.

Forged in War. (History of Transport Command).
Humphrey Winn.

ACCOMMODATION

A weekend break rate may be available at the Hilton Hotel (Tel 01793 881777) but not a preferential one for the Squadron this year. Try the Internet or Teletext for a special deal. Over the road is the Lydiard Travel Inn offering Room only rates at under £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.

Don't forget this year on the Friday evening it's the new format. We shall be having the formal evening dinner in the Mess at Lyneham, which should reduce the overall expenses for the weekend by needing to pay for ONE nights accommodation to enjoy the full weekend agenda. If you fancy staying an extra night, the IBIS Hotel, Swindon on the Delta Business Park (Tel 01793 514777) is the nominated venue for an informal get-together off base from 7pm onwards on the 2nd October 2004.

Keeping in Touch

RECENT LOSSES

Master Engineer Bert Millican, left the Air Force in Jul 68 and was employed as a Customs Officer and lived in Calne until his death in the Spring of 2003. Bert served on 24 Squadron at Topcliffe from 1951 - 1952 flying Hastings aircraft. (Association informed by John Martin)

Sqn Ldr Bill Wickson was a popular and well known figure on the Squadron who went on to become Engineer Leader. He served on 24 from Jan 1968 - Nov 1969 at Colerne, Fairford and Lyneham on Hercules. Bill was also a war time member of Bomber Command. He died 22 Sep 2003 at Swindon hospital from blood clot. A church service held in Lyneham village was packed to capacity, a statement in itself. (informed by John Martin)

Jo Dickinson left the RAF as a Sgt ALM in Oct 1974 to go on to become a Director of his own company specialising in business Communications situated in Belgium. Jo was with 24 from 1969 - 1974 based at Fairford and Lyneham flying Hercules. We were informed by his wife Nickola of her sudden loss just at a point when Jo had re-contacted the Association the previous year and was becoming involved with its activities.

Jack Clemons served on 24 as an Air Engineer between Mar 1951 - Apr 1954 based at Topcliffe and Abingdon on Hastings C Mk1 & CMk2. He reverted to become an Airframe Fitter in Apr 1954. On leaving the services he was a manager of a Newsagents in Southend on Sea. Jack was a regular at reunions until health prevented him in recent years. (informed by his wife Dec 2003)

Edgar Quested worked as an Engine Fitter on 24 Squadron and was also awarded the MBE. His tour of duty with the Squadron was Jan 1931 - Oct 1933 at RAF Northolt and Hendon working on Avro 504K, Avro

Tutor, Hawker Audax, Hawker Hart, Fairey 111F and Tiger Moth. Died at home in Maidstone on 15 Mar 2004. (informed by Dennis Keogh)

VISIT BY 24 SQN TO BISSEGEM AIRFIELD BELGIUM (13-14 MAR 04)

24 Sqn, on its formation at Hounslow Heath on 1 September 1915, was the first WWI Sqn equipped with fighter aircraft. An early Commanding Officer was Major L. G. Hawker VC DSO, the British ace who was regrettably to become one of the Red Baron's 80 victims, lost in combat on 23 November 1916. The airfield at Bissegem, also known as Kortrift, became operational in January 1917 with reconnaissance its primary role, and 24 Sqn was the second sqn to arrive, calling the airfield home from November 1918. Now operating the C 130J Hercules from RAF Lyneham, 24 Sqn were recently contacted by local historian Jan Vancoille with the hope of locating Sqn memorabilia from the Bissegem period. Despite heavy commitment to Ops in Iraq and Afghanistan, contact between Jan and 24 Sqn led inevitably to 15 Sqn members utilising a routine training sortie to visit Bissegem, with the hope of maintaining the Sqn's historical links and learning a little more about the Sqn's history.

In addition to visiting the airfield museum, the 24 Sqn crews and support personnel were fortunate enough to be given a tour by Etienne Vanackere of the Flanders Aviation Society, who was proud to show the airfield's collection of well-maintained WWI vintage aircraft, including the world's only flying Hawker Fury. Jan Vancoille then showed his extensive historical knowledge as the Sqn's guide during a battlefield tour that included Hill 60, an area of extreme strategic importance which was devastated by trench mines, and Marckebeeke, the airfield from which the Red Baron operated between July and November 1917.

This memorable and educational tour culminated in an emotive Last Post ceremony at the Menen Gate, memorial to the 54,896 British and Commonwealth soldiers reported missing during WWI. When presenting M. Vanackere with a framed photograph of a J model Hercules deploying airborne troops, OC 24 Sqn, Wg Cdr Kev Groves said, "With the Sqn fast approaching its 90th anniversary, it is important for all Sqn members to reflect on the historical achievements over the years. The Sqn was formed during conflict in WWI where crews flew in hostile conditions. Almost 90 years on our young airmen and women are still operating in

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hostile environments in both Iraq and Afghanistan".

See also photo in Picture Gallery

In-flight entertainment

RAF Hercules pilots face the threat from missiles over Iraq

IT IS probably the most dangerous air route in the world, and guess who's flying it: the RAF. Not that the planes and the pilots are the problem – indeed they are the solution. It's the missile-toting guerrillas on the ground who make the Basra to Baghdad shuttle the route from hell.

For them, achieving a bulls-eye on a coalition aircraft would be the equivalent of winning the national lottery, only better because they would probably also get to take tea with Saddam Hussein.

Coalition troops know the shadowy resistance as FRLs (former regime loyalists) or foreign fighters, who may even include Al-Qaeda. But the captain of a freight aircraft which recently flew into the sights of a missile launcher had his own unrepeatable name for the bad guys.

After the DHL Airbus was hit in the wing seconds after take-off from Baghdad, the crew skilfully dumped fuel and brought the aircraft back around for a successful emergency landing. The Arab pilot kissed the ground and cursed his would-be killers.

When the Focus team was invited to travel from Basra to Baghdad aboard a Hercules C130J of 24 Squadron, we accepted quickly – quickly because it was not the sort of trip one wanted to think about for long. We reassured ourselves with statistics: the RAF has not lost a passenger yet, and surely the Hercules had flown in more hostile conditions than this.

Well, probably not, actually. But this fact did not emerge until we were strapped into the flight deck jump seats, just behind the pilot and co-pilot, Flight Lieutenants Dave Stewart and Gav Whitehead.

Dave Stewart, in the left-hand commander's seat, was calm and reassuring, but frank. "This whole theatre is the highest threat zone that we've operated in," he said. "The challenge is trying to set a different pattern every day."

Gav Whitehead took his eyes off the green-glowing screens before him long enough to glance over his shoulder and correct his colleague's last remark. "The challenge," he said, "is trying to stay in the air."

The threat was not the only thing on Dave Stewart's mind. He was in a hurry. "We're aiming to be back in Kuwait by lunchtime; the Americans have a Thanksgiving special on the menu."

A voice from the tower gave us the go ahead and both pilots pushed forward the throttles. We climbed through slightly bumpy cloud whereupon the instruments revealed de-icing problems.

The C130J is a relatively new aircraft, and as the crew exhausted the obvious ways of correcting the fault, they resorted to the aircraft manual. Gav talked Dave through procedures, but nothing made a difference. The book's final blindingly obvious instruction was, "avoid icing conditions".

"Great advice," said the man in the left seat sarcastically. We would, he said, carry on, as icing was minimal. "And anyway, we've got to descend sometime."

None of this optimism seemed to be an act. Both pilots were happy with the new generation Hercules and they clearly enjoy flying it. They fly for two days and have one day off, and they visit Baghdad regularly.

The missile threat is being constantly assessed, and the routine pre-mission intelligence briefings major on this. We did not know the day's assessment, and ignorance was bliss.

But what would we do if the onboard systems established we were under attack? We should not need to do much: the very clever C130J, with its all new avionics and computer-driven defence systems, would automatically launch decoy flares to tempt a missile away.

Reassuringly, the system has been shown to work. The very aircraft in which we were flying had been the target of a missile a few months before. As infrared detectors spotted the missile, flares were launched and the missile was lured away to explode harmlessly. The plane landed safely.

Some 50 minutes into the flight Gav called the control tower in Baghdad. Everyone knows

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that this city is now being run by a mix of nations, but it is still strange to hear an Australian voice come back through the ether. We were clear to approach the airport and



sweaty brows in mock relief; it was just business as usual. Another word or two with the Aussie voice and a quick taxi to the mess of tents, cabins and vehicles that passed for a terminal, and the mission was over.

“Welcome to Baghdad” read a hand-painted sign. We never thought we would be pleased to be there, but we were. Now all we had to do was fly out again.

Missile watch: Flight Lieutenant Dave Stewart at the controls

**From issue 173 of Focus December 2003/
January 2004**

indulge in whatever “tactical” evasion manoeuvres the crew considered necessary. “Brace yourself, Sheila,” uttered Gav into the microphone. “We’re coming in.” “Sheila’s not here today,” the Antipodean voice replied. “But we’re not choosy.”

Humour cloaked a grimmer reality. The mood on the flight deck was now tense. Somewhere along the line the crew had donned Kevlar flak jackets.

We broke through the cloud to see the ground cluttered with ramshackle buildings and military tents not far below. There was no joking now. Pilot and co-pilot exchanged curt orders and acknowledgements.

Security concerns mean that we cannot detail the flying procedures taken during the next few minutes, but we touched down surprisingly smoothly, and it was a pleasure to do so.

No congratulations, no hands wiped across



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.



Dear Editor,

Your may find this of interest for your association. I found these letters some years ago whilst I was working in a mental Hospital in Surrey. No one at the time or since has been able to establish the writer or who was the owner of the letters or how they came to be lying in the draw of an abandoned workshop.

Maybe someone in your association could enlighten me as to who Edgar was?, where he was at the time of writing? and what happened to him? I have a hand written letter dated 20 . 6 1917 and another from the same person dated 12.7.17 They read as follows:

After doing quite a lot of travelling in France I have at last arrived at the aerodrome. I am as far from Athies as I possibly be and if I went any farther I should go out of the British line all together. Weather has been quite warm these last two or three days but there are thunderstorms knocking around now the weather shows signs of breaking.

People who complain of bomber raids should see the devastation out here; we are living on the re-conquered area; every village has been deliberately razed to the ground and the only way to find out the name is to read it on the board stuck up above the ruins. Will send back your key when I get some strong envelopes. Haven't been over the lines here yet that " pleasure " is yet to come. We are fairly comfortable here considering the devastation I suppose mustn't grumble.

Remember me to all Love to all

Yours affectionate son

Edgar

32 Squadron R.F.C 12.7.17

Dear father ,

Haven't written for some time as I have been

transferred to another squadron this time. Weather very changeable but conditions are fairly comfortable so mustn't grumble. How is everything getting on in London? did it catch any bombs? Please write to this address again as I've lost it with all this changing and travelling. There is real no news to report; heath A1 feeling cheerful as usual expect to come though all right. Excuse scrawl as I've not settled down here yet I am writing this on my knee. Give my love to all remember me to the usual people. Nothing else to say so I will shut up.

Your affectionate son

Edgar

P.S note new squadron

Colin Covington

P.S I would gladly donate the letters to a squadron archive or museum as I feel they should be preserved on record.



Dear Sir,

My grandfather, 2nd Lt. **Raymond Harcourt Kirkaldy**, (of Cook's Hill, Newcastle in New South Wales, Australia) served with the **Royal Flying Corps** from 15/11/1916 until 26/3/1918 (when he was posted "missing in action").

At the time of his apparent demise he had "**Crossed [the] Channel with [the] 24th Squadron**" -- as you will note from the known posting details, recorded below, which were taken from his official War Records, obtained from the Australian War Memorial.

He had begun his military service as a Driver in the Australian Army in January 1916, but transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in November of that year.

Known postings (or movements, etc):

-- 24th Coy ASC 3rd Div Trn (11/1/16) [at "Larkhill" ?]

-- "A34 Persic" to England (embarked Sydney 30/5/16; disembarked ["Hymontty" ?] 25/7/16)

-- 1st Anzac 77/41 of 13/11/16 (England)

-- Trans.to Royal Flying Corps (England) as from 15/11/16 [Remarks: Army Form B213 (or 13213?) F.R.195 ? D.O.?? 30/12/16]

-- Marched in to Brasenose College (Oxford) 26/1/17 & taken on the strength with effect from that date [Remarks: 2E 28/2/17 ER9382]

-- Royal Flying Corps No.3 School of Mil.Aero., Oxford 26/1/17

-- Commission Royal Flying Corps, London

Gazette 30014 dated 10/4/17; 1st Anzac 77/41 of 13/11/16.

-- Was in Stirling, Scotland on 4/6/17 (from "Proceedings of Discharge Record" signed that day)

-- 48th Res.Sqdn, R.F.C., Waddington 2nd Lieut R.H.Kirkaldy (as at 23/6/17)

-- 52nd Res.Sqdn, R.F.C., Stirling (Scotland) 2nd Lieut R.H.Kirkaldy (as at 24/7/17 & 27/8/17)

-- 37th Training Squadron, R.F.C., Scampton 2nd Lieut R.H.Kirkaldy (as at 5/10/17)

-- **"Crossed Channel with 24th Squadron"** (from letter dated 9/11/19 to A.I.F. Records Branch from D.H Watkins, M.P.)

-- **Posted Missing 26 March, 1918** (Defence Cable of 14/11/19 ... refers to: "...Kirkaldy 3rd Divisional Train commissioned R.F.Corps, 1917").

One reason for making contact is to enquire if your Archives might have any records relating to my grandfather and his time with the Squadron -- but I would be interested in any of the benefits deriving from association (at a distance, in the Antipodes).

You will notice my distinctively Australian *email* UserName ... not quite as good as a rooster, I admit -- but we Scrub Turkeys are similarly "prepared for anything".

Regards,

Ronald K Flanagan,

a.k.a.

scrub-turkey@bigpond.com



Dear Secretary,

I am contacting you in the hope that one of your members may be able to help me. I have been trying to track down a copy of the book No 24 Squadron, as it may help me find the following. The information that I seek covers the Squadrons history, period in question Jan 1918 to Nov 1918. In particular any references to a No 24 Squadron SE5a No F5451 or the pilot of this aircraft. At the moment all I have on the aircraft is that it was delivered to No 24 Squadron early in January 1918 and may have survived the war intact.

I am also looking for any information concerning someone from No 24 squadron, possibly the pilot of F5451, making a trophy from a section of a downed enemy aircraft propeller blade during this time. But not the walking stick made for General Rawlinson. The trophy I am researching was made from a section of enemy propeller about 12 inch high and has the pilots RK cap badge mounted at

the top with the Germans pilots badge at the bottom. Between the two badges is a painting of the SE5a No F5451 shooting down the aircraft.

Do you know of anyone within your association or perhaps a Squadron historian who could help me?

Do you have any suggestions?

Kind regards

James Thompson
Campbell Cottage
Village Street
Sheet
Hampshire
GU34 2AH



Dear Sir,

I thought the attached photo' might be of some interest to members of your Squadron Association. I flew to N.Z.. in 'York' MW199, from Lyneham on Feb.28, arriving in NZ on March 10, 1950. . FI/lt. Birdling was skipper, and the crew were a mixture of RAF, SAF, & I think RNZAF. Am I correct in remembering that the title was, '24 Commonwealth Squadron' at that time? I transferred to the RNZAF at the at the end of my R.A.F. engagement, (Jan.'50) and along with eight other ex-R.A.F. tradesmen, RNZAFHQ in London arranged an air passage for us with the RAF authorities.

We had a fairly uneventful flight stopping at various Stations on the way. The first was an overnight at Luqa, Malta, then a refuelling stop at Fayid, (Canal Zone) & on a few hours later to Habaniyah, in Iraq, (overnighted in tents, very basic, no lights and palliases on the sand, no sheets!). Next day to Mauripur, Pakistan, where we at least had 'charpoys' to sleep on. On to Negombo, Ceylon, for a very humid overnight stop & next day to Tengah, Singapore for a 2 day stop. There was a small RNZAF element at Tengah & we stayed with them, getting some info on new 'outfit'.

Down to RAAF Darwin after that, spending one of the most uncomfortable nights ever in a bomb damaged barracks, (no, they hadn't got round to repairing the damage after more than 5 years) & was eaten alive by tiny sandflies who had no trouble getting through the 'mossie' nets!. RAAF Amberly, (Brisbane) next stop,

where we were put up in a very dusty, 'spider webbed' room, which reminds me of Miss Havesham's room in 'Great Expectations'!. Mascot Airport (Sydney) next day where we were put up in the RAAF Club right in the heart of Sydney, where we spent 3 nights. My electric shaver blew up on me because I didn't know that that part of the city was still in D.C power! Our last stop was RNZAF Ohakea, in the North Island and we were mighty glad to get there!

I remember this flight because it was my first in a Service aircraft that was in any way comfortable. The aircrew looked after us really well & we were not allowed to do anything! Just a couple of months earlier I'd worked the preceding year mainly on in-air-adjustment of auto-pilots on 'Lancasters' at Mildenhall and I spent many, many hours perching anywhere I could fit myself into & was pleasantly surprised to find the seating on the 'York' very comfortable. I stayed on in the RNZAF until mid '71, after doing a few tours in various parts of S/E Asia & finishing as I/C the avionics overhaul facility I started off in as an 'erk'.

I've extracted the dates, places & flight times of this journey from my log book and here they are:

DATE HOUR A/C TYPE & NO. PILOT DUTY
FLYING TIMES DAY NIGHT

28 2 50 06.00 YORK MW199 FL/LT
BIRDLING AIRLIFT TO NEW ZEALAND
LYNEHAM - LUQA 6H.05MIN
01 3 50 05.00 " " " " " - LUQA - FAYID 5H.15M
01 3 50 13.15 " " " " " - FAYID - HABANIYAH
4H.05M
02 3 50 08.00 " " " " " - HABANIYAH -
MAURIPUR 7H.05M
03 3 50 06.00 " " " " " - MAURIPUR -
NEGOMBO 7H.25M
04 3 50 06.15 " " " " " - NEGOMBO - TENGAH
9H.10M
06 3 50 03.50 " " " " " - TENGAH - DARWIN
9H.40M
07 3 50 07.40 " " " " " - DARWIN - AMBERLEY
9H.20M
08 3 50 09.12 " " " " " - AMBERLEY - SYDNEY
2H.30M
10 3 50 07.00 " " " " " - SYDNEY - OHAKEA,
(N.Z.) 6H.25M
TOTAL 67 HOURS

The attached photo is not published due to low quality.

My regards to you & the members of your Association

John Sandilands, Blenheim, S.Island, N.Z.



Dear Sirs,

I am currently researching General de Gaulle's June 1940 flight to England prior to the creation of the Free French, and visited the Flamingo web site. The author of that site directed me to you for further information about the flight which, I understand, 24 squadron RAF operated.

The de Gaulle flight apparently left France at 3PM on May 16th. The French leader was accompanied with General Hastings Ismay, Sir John Gill and Inspector Walter Thompson. I am trying to establish a full passenger list for the flight and also have sight of the pilots log.

Do you have this information or know of its whereabouts? Of course, any additional assistance would be appreciated.

Many thanks

Yours faithfully, Tim Vollans



Dear Editor

I was wondering if you could help me with some research into W.O. Wilson, who was killed while serving with the squadron on 20-5-1942. He is buried on Gibraltar (CWGC website page

http://www.cwgc.org/cwgcinternet/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=2814728)

I attach a photo of W.O. Wilson in the cockpit of a Wellington. See Photo page.

His DFM has recently been donated to Falkirk Museum, Falkirk being his home town.

Many thanks,

John Walker Falkirk Local History Society

Dear Sir,

I have recently acquired a pair of leather aeroplane seats from an old family friend. He has told me that they were out of Winston Churchills personal plane. On searching the internet I have become fascinated with the story of the York 'Ascalon'.

I have read the articles in the newsletter with great interest. Can you give me any other information about the planes history and whether there are any photos available or anyone I can contact who was directly involved with the aeroplane. Should you wish to have a look at the pictures I can send you some by email. You may be able to confirm whether they are genuine or not!

Many thanks, Simon Pitham Harwich,
Essex

This e-mail was sent on to John Mitchell,
who replied:-

Simon, I am the last surviving member of the Flight Deck crew of Churchill's aircraft. It was the third prototype and was quite unlike any other York with square windows and standard Bomber Command camouflage of the period. It was fitted with Lanc.MkIV undercarriage in order to raise the auw. The single entrance door was midships on the port side.

It had nine green leather chairs, eight in the main cabin and one in the Owner's suite. They swivelled and were on slides, with limited recline. Made by Rumbold of Cricklewood.

The Yorks at Duxford and Cosford are production models with round windows. I have not seen the interior of the former but the latter is stripped freighter with side loading doors.

I could probably identify a chair from a photo. Hope this is helpful. Air Cdre John Mitchell.



Dear Sir,

The 16th May 2005, represents 50 years since the DeHavilland Homet was retired from service and a reunion of ex-Hornet pilots is planned for this date. Did any of your older members fly these aircraft with other units in the U.K. or in FEAF?

I would be obliged if you could circulate this in any newsletter that you have and ask for replies to Peter Sheppard on 01285 642997 or email: dhomet50@hotmail.com

Dear Editor

REUNION IN MALTA GC - SEPTEMBER 2005

I am writing to tell you and your squadron association comrades about a reunion planned to be held on 'The George Cross Island' in September of next year and in the hope that you might feel able to bring this information to members' notice in your next newsletter.

"To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the ending of World War II, and to coincide with the Malta International Air Day, plans are now actively being laid for the event - invited to which are aircrew and groundcrew members of RAF (and FAA) squadrons which fought in the Battle for Malta, and members of the Army (Commonwealth and Maltese) units involved in the anti-aircraft defences, together with spouses and any other family members who might wish to accompany them.

The reunion itself will involve an Ecumenical Service at St Paul's Pro Cathedral in Valletta (the Anglican cathedral still displaying the battle scarred RAF ensign from RAF Luqa), a wreath laying ceremony at the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Floriana, attendance at the International Air Day (which in 2005 will have a 'Victory in Europe' theme and where, it is hoped, both Spitfires and Hurricanes will return to grace the Maltese skies), the opportunity to visit former military sites and ceremonies - and a whole lot more, but geared to the age of the proud veterans whom we hope will honour us with their presence.

To register an interest (with no commitment at all) and for further details please contact Colin Pomeroy on 01035-848895, at CPomeroy@aol.com, or by writing to C A Pomeroy, Pallington Lakes, Pallington, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8QU."

In anticipation, thank you very much indeed

Diary of a Navigator Pt 7

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

THE SARCOPHAGUS AND OTHER LUNACIES

A note about the flight safety and survival aspects of our passenger-flying.

First, parachutes: at one time it was considered that the crew only of a transport aircraft should wear parachutes, or at least the harnesses, with separate stowages for parachutes. This policy was iniquitous for a crew would be quite unlikely to abandon an aircraft full of passengers to their fate. In most cases, even if they could successfully bale out, their own chances of survival, not least over the sea or desert, would be small. An emergency landing, on land or sea, was clearly the only feasible policy. Design circumstances also dictated a policy of the crew remaining with the aircraft, for nearly all the American aircraft entering the RAF transport force were in fact adaptations of civil aircraft in which there were no properly designed parachute exits anyway. The policy very quickly became 'no parachutes for crew or passengers'. A waste of payload anyway. But flotation waistcoats (Mae Wests) and dinghy accommodation for all. Emergency rations, and water were carried in the PM's aircraft, mainly under the floorboards.

As regards oxygen, the York was fitted with a standard RAF system, not very cunningly concealed in the furnishings, with enough oxygen for a twelve hour flight at all outlets. The York was not pressurised (neither was the Skymaster, which was to come a year later). We therefore tried to restrict our cruising altitude to 10,000 feet or below, depending on icing or other meteorological circumstances, when topography allowed. There were occasions when we had to fly higher, either to clear mountain ranges or to avoid icing.

Little did we know that deep in the Ministry of Aircraft Production, an organisation with precious little civil aviation experience, and certainly no experience of the whims and wishes of the PM, someone was conjuring up a small (or not so small) one-man egg-shaped inner pressure cabin for Mr

Churchill. In this 'they thought he would lie down and be maintained at an equitable pressure height whenever we were obliged to fly high. It was first mooted in February 1943 after the Casablanca Conference, for which flight in the Liberator Commando, the PM had been to RAE Farnborough to be fitted with a private oxygen mask. Unfortunately for the boffins, by the time the Sarcophagus, as it was called, had reached prototype stage, our particular York had left the production line, and it would have been necessary to cut the aircraft in half to get it in! Where it would have been situated had not been thought through, for we found it would have occupied the whole of the Owner's cabin; if not there, then it would have half-filled the conference saloon.

It is difficult to imagine the Captain and or the Medical Adviser inviting the Prime Minister to scramble inside the egg - well before the aircraft was obliged to climb above oxygen height - with his cigar, brandy and his writing materials, not to mention Red Boxes etc. When he heard about it, he was appalled and expressed his views with such vehemence that the whole idea was (temporarily) dropped. Provided we climbed or descended gradually, the Prime Minister was never bothered by the few occasions when we had to go above oxygen height. Sawyers, the valet, confided in us that it was a problem of gastronomic wind with the PM, not his heart!

However, this was not the end of the story. When the interior design of the Skymaster was being finalised in October 1944, the Sarcophagus was trotted out again - fortunately to be killed stone dead by No 10. By the time the Skymaster was to enter the PM's service, on Christmas Day 1944, we had had eighteen months of operating experience with the York and the worst anyone suffered was a headache, and then not necessarily from the lack of oxygen! However, the project was not finally abandoned by the Air Ministry until May 1945.

The 'chair-borne' safety experts did not give up. On the Skymaster, one parachute harness and pack was provided for the PM and stowed beneath his bed, accessible only by removing the mattress (for the designers had not given us sideways access to the space under it). The PM said he would only make a parachute descent in company with Sawyers to look after his comforts on the way down. Quite apart from the matter of launching the PM on his own into space through an outward-facing cabin door, which had never been tested for evacuation safety in the wind tunnel, one can imagine the problems of persuading the PM to leave his bed in an emergency on which he spent a lot of every journey either sleeping, reading or dictating. As there was not a great deal of standing space in his cabin in which to assist him into the parachute

harness and to adjust the straps etc, the whole situation could only be described as a certain farce. Nevertheless, we were ordered to carry this unnecessary bulk and weight - out of sight - and pretty well out of mind.

From a medical point of view in flight, Lord Moran, the PM's doctor, was always with us; he did little more than administer pills. On the occasions when the PM was seriously ill on the ground, upto-date medical help was secured either from the nearest BNM, or if need be, from the UK. There was one particular flight when, at the weather briefing, it seemed likely that we should have to exceed 10,000 feet in order to cross mountains in bad weather, the AOC-in-C at the time (Tedder) ordered that his Command PMO be included in the crew: but that is another (libellous) story.

THE CAIRO AND TEHERAN CONFERENCES

In the winter of 1943 Ascalon was to be joined by two more York aircraft: they were the first production models, number MW 100 and MW 101 mentioned earlier, both built to a VIP standard of a sort, but not to the same layout as the PM's. They were designed to carry only eight passengers, seated in the forward part and abeam the propellers where it was most noisy, but in very luxurious armchairs. To match they had eight bunks, two up and two down on either side of a gangway, dormitory fashion, aft. Toilets were amidships and a very limited galley was situated right aft. The Air Council had ordained that they were to be used for what CAS described as 'First Class passengers' and operated 'with due regard for the age and dignity of the passengers'. These two aircraft had been first allocated to 511 Squadron at Lyneham before it was finally decided in February 1944 to combine the three VIP aircraft at Northolt in what then became known as the 'York Flight'.

The CO then ordered me to live in at Northolt and to act as the Flight Commander, though of course the actual duties of the aircraft and their respective crews were out of my hands. I became a sort of domestic manager and a telephonic focal point. By this time the last Spitfire had been pushed out of the hangar and the Polish Fighter Wing deployed to forward airfields along the South Coast in preparation for the Invasion. I then had possession of all the hangar offices; this gave us better storage, a briefing room and a passenger reception room. Hitherto, there had been nowhere for 'meeters and greeters' to assemble, nor a telephone for VIP's use in any privacy.

The Quebec Conference had taken place during August 1943 and the PM crossed the Atlantic to

Halifax in the RMS Queen Mary and continued by train to Washington. He had returned from Halifax in HMS Renown. These journeys are written up in a most sensitive way by Gerald Pawle in his book 'The War and Colonel Warden' (this was the PM's wartime pseudonym). In Washington plans had been going forward for a Big Three meeting to settle the future of Allied policy in conducting the war. Eden had gone to Moscow mid October for a Foreign Secretary's Conference, with Cordell Hull, flying as far as Cairo in the PM's York, as I have already recorded. It then became known that Stalin would come no further than Teheran to meet the PM and the President, should a Big Three Conference be convened. Mr Churchill was anxious to meet first with the President for a preliminary talk, in the Middle East or even in Malta, before proceeding to Teheran. Eventually, Cairo was found acceptable. The President was to go further than not just 'ganging-up' on Stalin at the forthcoming conference - quite the reverse, as it turned out.

The three Yorks had been ordered to readiness and we had been warned to expect a departure in mid November. The PM himself left the UK on 12 November by sea in HMS Renown for Malta, passing through Gibraltar on the 15th where he picked up Harold Macmillan. The PM was said to have a heavy cold and kept very much to his cabin.

16th November 1943. After the various states of readiness and a delay of 48 hours due to weather forecasts of heavy icing en route, we left Northolt just after midnight (in fact, on the 17th) for Gibraltar, taking the Chief of the Air Staff (Sir Charles Portal), the CIGS (Sir Alan Brooke), General Bob Laycock of Combined Operations (who had taken over from Mountbatten) and Colonel A B Boyle RAMC. It was a straightforward flight of seven hours twenty minutes, though bumpy in parts and rather uncomfortable for the passengers. Whilst the PM had left the UK by the battleship but we had expected to take him on board at Gibraltar. In the event, he had already left the day before we had arrived and was on his way to Malta. Surely, we thought, we would take him on from Malta, for there had been talk that we would fly over to Naples with him to visit the troops on the Italian front: but everything was changed. The PM was not well and the President was making difficulties over having a preliminary meeting of the two of them alone. Meanwhile, the President had taken passage in the battleship 'IOWA' from the US to Oran, where his own aircraft, somewhat irreverently called 'The Sacred Cow' (a Skymaster C54D model) flew him direct to Cairo. There was by then no chance that he would see Churchill alone before the Teheran meetings, the situation being made worse by the American inclusion of the Chiang Kai

Shek which wasted much time on inconsequential talk about Far East plans.

We were already decidedly envious of the 'Sacred Cow'. It had all sorts of refinements, an electric lift was built in to the floor of the Owner's Stateroom so that the handicapped Roosevelt could be raised and lowered to ground-level in his wheel chair. There was a large picture window on one side of the aircraft so that he could have comfortable view out from the position his wheel chair was clamped to. It had the main folding steps electrically operated from within the aircraft and they stowed neatly when retracted. Above all, the aircraft had a long operating range with its air-cooled engines, a bonus, (however worthy our own Rolls Royce Merlins), in the hot ground temperatures encountered.

17th November 1943. We carried straight on to Malta with the same passengers after only one and a half hours at North Front, Gibraltar. The CIGS recalls in his own memoirs that he had a most satisfactory flight, for he had use of the PM's suite. It took us just over five hours, time for a leisurely lunch for the passengers (and for the crew - at a second sitting, as one might say). We landed at 1515 local time, about the same time as 'Renown' sailed in with the PM.

We then learned that he was generally in a bad moon, still not really well from his pre-flight inoculations and a heavy cold. His irritation with the American pre-conference shenanigans did not help matters. Had he been well enough to visit Italy and the weather conditions been suitable, he wanted the York to stand-by for him in Malta. In the event neither conditions were met and he decided to carry on in HMS Renown to Alexandria. Meanwhile, York MW 100, flown by Squadron Leader Tony Watson and his ex-Lyneham crew arrived in Malta from Northolt. This was to take CAS to Cairo via Tunis. So, leaving Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal to Tony, we carried on with CIGS and the Chief of Combined Operations (Major General Bob Laycock) as our only VIP passengers.

20th November 1943. We spent two rather dismal, cold and wet days actually on the airfield at Luqa. Accommodation was very difficult for visitors in transit through Malta, regardless of rank, so we slept on board. We took off at 09 10 hours local time for the six and a half hour flight to Cairo West and I note from my flight log that we made our track direct to Marble Arch in the Gulf of Sirte, thence due east to Cairo, so keeping a long way south of Luftwaffe-occupied Crete. Again, CIGS commented in his diary very favourably on his flight. We skirted the edge of the great Quattara

Depression before dusk and made a comfortable arrival in the dark. Here we found domestic arrangements were not entirely to our liking. Because of the Allied Conference being held at the Mena House Hotel on the western edge of the green Nile Valley (and located between Cairo West Airport and the centre of the city itself), all the aircrew were to be restricted to the tented camp at the airfield. Conditions were very poor and our Wing Commander Captain - who might have expected at least accommodation in a permanent Mess, was badly bitten by bed bugs in the issue-blankets for our tents. The resident Squadron Messes in Cairo West were literally 'out of bounds' to transit air crew - of whatever rank. They couldn't really be blamed for this for they were not built to accommodate a huge transient population, requiring meals at all times. We were not able to sleep on board the York on this occasion as it was located on a floodlit hard standing, under armed guard, with other VIP aircraft and almost inaccessible except for maintenance.

The next morning 'Dad' Collins presented himself to the Senior Medical Officer and exhibited his bites and asked the MO to record that he had not slept properly owing to local conditions. He then wisely took his medical certificate to the Station Commander and asked him to convey to the ADC (Tommy Thompson) that the crew were in no fit state to fly. I don't think the CO in fact did pass on this message, for he could hardly say that, as a result of his order, the PM's pilot was not available should the PM wish to fly that day. However, the effect of this demarche was fairly rapid and we were dispatched down town to a decent hotel with no further ado. The Station Commander was to find himself in another awkward spot, this time with the CAS, six days later.

27th November 1943. Back on duty for the PM, as it were, the airborne caravanserai was on the move, this time to Teheran. There had been considerable movement between Cairo and Teheran in the few preceding days. Thus we girded up our loins for the next leg. The RAF were to use Mehrabad on the south east outskirts of the city where we had established a small staging post, whilst the Americans used the major base, with the Russians, on the West side of the city, a location which is now Teheran International Airport. An early start was ordained for all the VIPs. CAS, with CIGS and the Chief of Combined Operations, plus FM Dill and Admiral Cunningham transferred to York MW100 - flown by Tony Watson. We took the PM, with Sarah Oliver in her WAAF uniform, with us for the first time as an additional ADC, Moran, two Thompsons and two secretaries, plus Sawyers the valet. Early morning fog at Cairo West delayed the CAS aircraft which was first off and there had been a sharp word for the Station Commander from the

CAS that he had been got out of bed unnecessarily early when with early morning fog forecast it was clear that takeoffs would be delayed. CAS and CIGS in MW100 stopped off briefly en route at RAF Habbaniya, so we caught up with them on arrival in Teheran.

We ourselves were away at 0530 hours, the fog having lifted, a lovely Egypt dawn and soon after take off a clear view of the Nile Delta and the Canal which we crossed at Ismailia. Our track lay towards Baghdad, cruising at a comfortable height of 8,000 feet. The PM sat in the co-pilot's seat for a long spell, enjoying the view of El Arish and the Gaza Strip, the Dead Sea and the oil pipeline across the desert which linked Haifa to Kirkuk. He enjoyed an excellent lunch: I still have a copy of the menu. Bill Fraser took time off to type it out on a blank menu card brought along specially for the purpose - on my typewriter (which I used to type out the BBC Overseas News headlines for the benefit of passengers). The PM started with turtle soup (no longer thick pea soup) and followed it with hot-roast chicken and/or cold ox-tongue and salad: saute potatoes and peas were on offer. Pears (tinned, no doubt) and jelly followed, then cheese and biscuits. This was somewhat in contrast to the President's fare which we learned later was sandwiches and milk.

We were to cross the three other great rivers of the Middle East; the Jordan, the Tigris and the Euphrates, then after over-flying RAF Habbaniya, we started to climb slowly and had a wonderful clear flight at 12,000 feet over the Zagros Mountains to pass Kermanshah and Ramadan before letting down to land mid-afternoon at Meherabad - five and a half hours of enjoyable flying for all. The PM was met at the airport by Sir Reader Bullard, the British Ambassador, and the GOCinC of 'Paiforce'. He went off to the Embassy in the centre of the city whence we were to get our victualling for the return flight. Amongst the baggage we were carrying the Stalingrad Sword to be presented to Stalin in honour of that great victory. It had been designed and wrought by The Master Cutlers of Sheffield.

For once, everything was laid on and we were taken with the other RAF aircrew to the Darband Hotel situated on the northern outskirts of the city on high ground, in the cool. It was a former Palace of the Shah and accommodation was luxurious. Today it is within the urbanisation of the city limits. We stayed at Darband four nights. For the last night our crew was quartered at the British Military Hospital, which was also the Mess and Headquarters of Paiforce. It was a most modern building built pre-war by a German contractor. The number of telephone lines installed in the various wards and rooms were said to be far in excess of

what was needed for a hospital. Apparently, Hitler had ordered that the contractor was to plan the design and accommodation of this hospital so that it could become a military headquarters in Teheran - upon the juncture of Rommel's desert army and the hoped for Axis seizure of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan - prior to the invasion of India - some plan!

22nd December 1943. Returning to Cairo we left Teheran at 0800 hours with the PM on very good form. The same route was followed (direct) and we climbed initially to 11,500 feet, but reduced to 10,000 feet as soon as we cleared Kermanshah. Again, an excellent lunch was put on by Jock Duncan, the chef - quail, I remember, was the main course, served I think with an appropriate white wine - all from the Embassy and a good time was had by all. Sir Archibald Clarke-Kerr, the British Ambassador in Moscow was an additional passenger. We circled Baghdad for the PM so that he could have a good view; he was riding, once again, up front in the co-pilot's seat.

Dressed in his siren suit, which he often wore, over a white shirt when relaxing in the aircraft, he was wearing his Air Commodore's great-coat over the top. His carpet slippers - on which were embroidered VC', completed the outfit. But as it was sunny and we were flying south west into the sun he needed his glasses and a hat. In stentorian terms, Sawyers the valet was instructed to produce both, the white Panama hat being specified. Unfortunately, Sawyer's guess as to 'baggage wanted on the voyage' had gone wrong the white Panama hat was riding with the rest of the parties' baggage in one of the support Dakotas. Poor Sawyers. He was called all the names under sun. But he did find it difficult to satisfy the PM's requirements for the many changes en route, especially when restricted to the 'wanted on voyage' baggage space in the York. If Sawyers had had his own way, we should have had the plane full of luggage to satisfy any whim or fancy of the Owner. The stock regalia's included the siren suit, with a great-coat or either a Colonel of the 4th Hussars (his old regiment) or an Air Commodore's get up, for he was Honorary Air Commodore of No 615 Squadron - a famous Hurricane Fighter Squadron. I don't remember him ever wearing his Warden's uniform of the Cinque Ports on board. I think this was reserved for Naval occasions. However, he did sometimes wear a combination of all these. This episode over, the flight continued serenely and we landed at Cairo West mid-afternoon, but before the PM's party left we were alerted by the ADC for duty on the following day.

24 Sqn – Report for Honorary Air Commodore – 2003

ANNUAL REPORTS AND AWARDS 2003 - XXIV SQN CONTRIBUTION

The events in the Gulf and Afghanistan have provided a high operational tempo as the backdrop to the life of No XXIV Sqn during the past year. It has also provided opportunities for significant milestones in the development of the C130J Hercules (J), these milestones having been achieved by crews made up of personnel from across the J Wing. The Sqn as a whole has been extensively involved in operations, but there has also been time to see 3 members of the Sqn recognized by commendations for their own endeavours and the command of No XXIV Sqn passed from Wg Cdr R A Hobson to Wg Cdr A K Groves on 6 June 03. It has been a year full of new challenges and the J and No XXIV Sqn have not been found wanting.

The year began with regular tasking in support of Op FINGAL in Afghanistan, but this soon reduced to a single ac and crew taking part in the in-theatre ops whilst the rest of the Sqn included, amongst other exercise and operational tasking, a twice weekly re-supply flight to Kabul.

As tensions rose in the Gulf, Op TELIC began where Op RESINATE had finished; more tasking routed through Akrotiri and slip crews were permanently positioned there to extend the reach of the supply lines into Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and to a new det that was being set up in Fujairah in the UAE. Fujairah was used as a hub for in-theatre distribution and was supplied by daily J 'mail run' tasks, other military assets and civilian AN124 aircraft. The det comprised, at its largest, 4 aircraft (ac) and 12 crews, changing over every 4-6 weeks and spread between Nos XXIV and 30 Sqn. The operations at the height of the conflict provided the opportunity for the first operational J low level night task into a threat zone using night vision goggles, which was carried out by a crew that included Sqn Ldr Nick Davies, a Flt Cdr on No XXIV Sqn, and representatives from No 30 Sqn and the J component of the Hercules OEU.

This first mission, flown on 30 Mar 03, mounted from Ali Al Salem and took a recce team beyond our advancing front lines to Tallil. A second mission followed soon after, it was documented by Carlton TV for the Air Base series and saw the same crew, supplemented by the Stn Cdr, Gp Capt Lock, taking food and water to an isolated group of US Marines who were on their last day of rations. Another Flt Cdr from No XXIV Sqn, Sqn Ldr Mike

Wilson was also involved in these combat re-supply missions.

In order to meet the demands of Op TELIC the recently implemented Quart continuation training packages were suspended. The J Conversion Flight (JCF), which is the part of No XXIV Sqn providing initial training and conversion for aircrew coming onto or returning to the J, did not stop training, although for many of the student crews their line training involved trips to Akrotiri and Jordan and not much else.

On 8 May 03 with most of the fighting seemingly over, the detachment at Fujairah closed down and 2 ac and 4 crews deployed to Basrah International Airport.

This detachment and its re-supply by daily mail runs was the mainstay of the Sqn's Op TELIC tasking during the summer months. In mid July the detachment reduced to 3 in-theatre crews and when civilian AT started to use Basrah in late Sep 03 the daily mail run tasking was dropped, removing the need for No XXIV and 30 Sqn to man a 3 crew slip pattern through Akrotiri. At the start the in-theatre crews lived in one of the many customs halls at Basrah, where marble floors were crowded with baggage scanners and the crews' camp beds.

During August when the daytime temperature raised to 56(C, the crews moved into tented accommodation for a period of a week, as the terminal buildings were being cleared in preparation for re-opening as a civilian airport. It was very quickly realized that it would not be possible for the crews to sleep during the day in the tents, although they had rudimentary air conditioning and so space was found in the rooms at the base of the air traffic control tower, where a home from home was created. Although the initial conflict ended early in the spring the threat to crews operating in Iraq did not change and so the in theatre ac remained armed with flares for self-defense.

Back in July Flt Lt Lennon of No XXIV Sqn, having recently flown into Basrah as the captain of a mail-run re-supply, was called upon to provide the operational know-how for the first civilian airliner to fly to Basrah. He flew on the flight deck of the Virgin Boeing 747, operating radios and guiding the civilian crew through the operational airspace, once clear of all threats on the way out found time to relax with Richard Branson and the

(Continued on page 25)

24 Sqn – Report for Honorary Air Commodore – 2003

press pack, who were along for the ride.

Tactical air transport (Tac AT) has provided more firsts for No XXIV Sqn, including a crew on the first formal J Tac AT course, which began in Sep and participation in the first airdrop during EX EAGLES EYE. The Sqn also sent personnel to South Africa to take part in ACE, a free-fall parachute exercise.

A Commander in Chiefs' (C in C) commendation was awarded in the New Year Honours list to Flt Lt Dave Stewart for his prompt actions when a member of the RAF Lyneham Cricket team was hit on the head by a ball and killed during a game against RAF St Mawgan and for his support for the players' family when they were notified of the tragedy. In the Queens' Birthday list a further C in C Commendation was awarded to FS 'Oz' Reardon for his outstanding service on JCF where he has been involved since the very beginning of the J, and his long standing commitment to the Pegasus Club where he has been the deputy Chairman and played a leading role for many years. Flt Lt Hedley Myers was awarded a Joint Commanders' Commendation for a mission, without any defensive aids, into a threat zone in order to rescue a Canberra that had made an emergency diversion to Pasni airfield.

No XXIV Sqn has continued its close association with Burton Hill House, a residential school for children with severe disabilities. This has included helping to organise the children's Christmas party, taking the Children to the RAF Lyneham Stage Club pantomime and raising money at the schools' summer fayre, where Sqn personnel ran a tombola stall and raised nearly £400 on the day.

During the busiest months of the year when most of the Sqn personnel were involved in OP TELIC, 2 of the administrative support staff were detached, Sgt Tracy Waldron going to Kuwait City to work in the Apod HQ and Cpl Jeff Romaine to the Falklands. In rotation with No30 Sqn a ground detachment has been filled at the CAOC in Al Kharj and then at Al Udeid, coordinating tasking requirements for the Hercules in Afghanistan and Iraq.

From Oct onwards the amount of tasking has reduced to near normal levels and the Sqn has begun to spend more time in support of exercises for other agencies and training for its personnel, so

that when required to increase workload again it will appear fresh and with strengthened Tac AT attributes, so that we can say that No XXIV Sqn truly follows its motto, 'In Omnia Parati' and is in all things prepared.

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

The Photo Album - a selection



W.O. Wilson in the cockpit of a Wellington.



James Thompson's query on who made this trophy?

The Photo Album - a selection

Jan Vancoillie schrijft boek over Bissegem tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog

„Sporthal was munitiedepot”



Het 24 Squadron RAF bracht een bezoek aan het vliegveld van Bissegem, op uitnodiging van Jan Vancoillie, die een boek over Bissegem tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog wil schrijven. We zien de schrijver vierde van links. (Foto BWB)

■ Naar aanleiding van het wellicht in november te verschijnen boek over Bissegem in de Eerste Wereldoorlog, nodigde Jan Vancoillie, woonachtig in de Koffiehoekstraat 37, enkele leden van het Britse 24 Squadron Royal Air Force uit. Dit squadron was in WO I op het vliegveld van Bissegem gestationeerd.

Met een C130 Hercules landden een vijftiental leden van het 24 Squadron RAF op het vliegveld van Wevelgem-Bissegem. Ze brachten een bezoek aan Bissegem op uitnodiging van Jan Vancoillie, die een boek aan het schrijven is over zijn gemeente tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog.

„Ik ben daar al twee jaar in-

tensief mee bezig”, vertelt Jan. „Als je op zoek gaat naar de geschiedenis van Bissegem tijdens WO I, dan kom je onvermijdelijk bij dit squadron terecht. Ze waren gestationeerd op de voormalige Duitse Flugplatz Bissegem, die na de bevrijding in 1918 door de Britten verder in gebruik werd genomen. Toen ik hen uitnodig-

de, waren zij meteen geïnteresseerd om af te komen. Ze zijn nog altijd in alles wat met de Eerste Wereldoorlog te maken heeft, geïnteresseerd.”

Munitiedepot

Om meer informatie voor het schrijven van zijn boek te verzamelen, deed Jan al archiefonderzoek in onder meer Duitsland en Engeland. „En ik ben al heel wat te weten gekomen,” knipoogt de auteur. „Zo was er ooit een munitiedepot op de plaats waar nu de sporthal op het sportcomplex Ter Biezen staat. Ik beschik over een lijst met Ortzcommandanten en ontdekte ook dat Bissegem dankzij de Duitsers twee sporen heeft. Een eerste _ Kor-

trijk-Menen _ was er al maar onze Oosterburen legden er een tweede spoor in de richting van Kortrijk aan. Dit deden ze om onder andere munitie te vervoeren,” verduidelijkt Jan Vancoillie, die niet aan zijn proefstuk toe is. In 2002 schreef hij al een boek over Geluveland 1914 - 1918.

Na de verwelkoming kregen de RAF-leden een rondleiding op het vliegveld, bezochten ze het nabij gelegen RAF-museum en verkenden ze ook nog de streek. Ook de Menenpoort in Leper werd bezocht.

In november zou normaliter het boek van Jan Vancoillie moeten verschijnen. Dit zou gepaard gaan met een tentoonstelling.

(CDW)

VISIT BY 24 SON TO BISSEGEM AIRFIELD BELGIUM (13-14 MAR 04)

LATE NEWS

SUMMER SOCIAL

5th June @ Bibury Court Hotel, Cotswolds

B - Day

And the B in B Day on this occasion stands for Bibury. With all the planning at last coming together for another successful Summer Social for the Association. With only one casualty not making the rendezvous point, we still had a healthy 20 to attack a splendid lunch prepared for us along with exclusive use of the restaurant at the Bibury Court Hotel.

Bibury itself was teeming with trout and visitors but we were tucked away from the main hustle and bustle of the village in the Hotels exclusive grounds. The weather was fair and pleasantly warm, something we have come to expect at our little mid year mini reunion.

It was also the first chance for our new President, Dickie Gould and his wife Jackie to meet some of the Association having taken up the reins earlier

this year. Another special privilege was to have within our party, three veterans from WWII. We could muster two pilots and a navigator, who gave us a timely reminder of the hazards they faced as young men on numerous occasions and how lucky they were to have survived those dark years.

As ever, the hours rolled by in a flash and it was almost teatime before we said our farewells, with a re affirmation of meeting up again in October for the main event.

Our thanks to all that support these mid year events and make it a very worthwhile occasion as well as an opportunity to keep in contact and keep the Association a viable concern. Also thanks to our permanent photographer on these occasions, John Martin.



A snap of the Association Members at the Bibury Court Hotel, 5th June 2004
