



Twenty Four

The Magazine of XXIV Squadron Association



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90th Anniversary Edition

Summer 2005

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Editor

David Burgin

Association President

Air Com Dick Gould

Association Committee

Keith Chapman - Chairman
Clive Harley - Dep. Chair
Keith Rayner - Treasurer
David Burgin - Secretary

Squadron Liaison

W/C Kevin Groves

F/L Phil Whitworth

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

Contributions to Assoc. Sec at :-

15 Birch Grove
CHIPPENHAM
Wilts SN15 1DD

email

the24secretary@royalairforce.net
data on disc most acceptable

Editorial



This is a historic edition of the Newsletter as we go press to celebrate the 90th Anniversary of XXIV Squadron this year on the 1st September at RAF Lyneham. The list of Squadron locations, aircraft types and Commanding Officers shows no signs of coming to an end, surely a good omen to keep the Squadron operational for the next ten years.

A memorable day to celebrate for XXIV but not without a thought for the sad and unexpected loss of the 47 Squadron aircraft and crew in Iraq. The narrow dividing line between support operations and front line was brought home most forcibly with this incident that struck a cord throughout the country.

The Year 2004 Reunion

THE YEAR 2004 REUNION

Our Reunion weekend started at the Friday evening dinner in the Sergeants Mess and despite a smaller number of Association members attending, the evening as usual galloped along at a cracking pace. The top table was very active and entertaining with some witty anecdotes from the Chairman, New President and OC XXIV. We also had a number of new faces at this years dinner who hopefully will spread the word that this part of the Reunion really is a highlight not to be missed.

The sky cleared on Saturday morning on cue for another successful Reunion at XXIV Squadron HQ at Lyneham. A jam packed crew room

proved an eager audience for W/C Kevin Groves to tell and show what has been happening over the last 12 months.

With the new Hercules C130 J aircraft and simulator fully available, the Squadron are now working up to a full Tactical role and have demonstrated at Waddington, Fairford and Farnborough the aircraft's ability to deliver Land Rovers and Light Tanks to tactical forward airstrips. The C130J is the leading and preferred aircraft mark for parachute tasks with its precision dropping of either troops or stores on DZ's. A great selling point in its favour for potentially taking the Falcons display team around the world. A very impressive and dramatic video was then shown of the 'J' flying at low

level through mountainous regions, nearly time for Loadmaster to pass round the sick bags.

Current operations are Op Telic in Iraq consuming a very large amount of the overall flying hours but not forgetting ongoing Op Fingal in Afghanistan. The operations are shared with 30 Squadron and fluctuate between 6 to 10 crews in theatre using Basra as the hub for troop roulements. This has led to the situation where more aircraft are in Basra than Lyneham. Threat levels have increased with odd mortar attacks being experienced but morale remains high among the crews who have to sleep day time in preparation for night operations.

The 'J' model proves itself the right aircraft for its role on Operation Fingal in Afghanistan in these hot and high environments. Another short video put this into perspective as we saw what a night operation is like landing at Kabul with runway lighting only being switched on at the last minute. Operations are still ongoing in Northern Ireland and the Balkans.

Some of the less stressful support roles have included a trip to Australia on a maritime exercise, Red Arrows Far East Tour, various UK airshows and support to Eurofighter (Typhoon) to Singapore. Closer to home was Exercise Combined Strength for all C130J users and was based at Lyneham with the Australians winning the competition.

D-Day commemorations celebrating the Arnhem anniversary meant dropping around 500 people of all ages, which involved 6 aircraft in 2 sorties. Quite close by was the Belgian airfield know as Bisseghem during WWI. This was the HQ of the Red Baron who shot down Major Hawker of XXIV and a landing was duly authorised to see this historic location.

What little time is left over after covering all of the above has not stopped Squadron personnel raising more than £600 for Burton Hill House charity in Malmsbury.

The future - well a 90th Anniversary celebration on the 1st September 2005 is a

proud moment and a sign of longevity that many squadrons would envy. An invitation to the many people, previous OC's, groups and organisations that the Squadron has been involved with over the years will be sent out in the months leading up to the big day.

A final note that may seem to give credence to why the Squadron has kept such a long history is that although the RAF is reducing its resources in total, the Air Transport side is still a growth area. And so ends another year in the Squadron's annals.

IN OMNIA PARATI

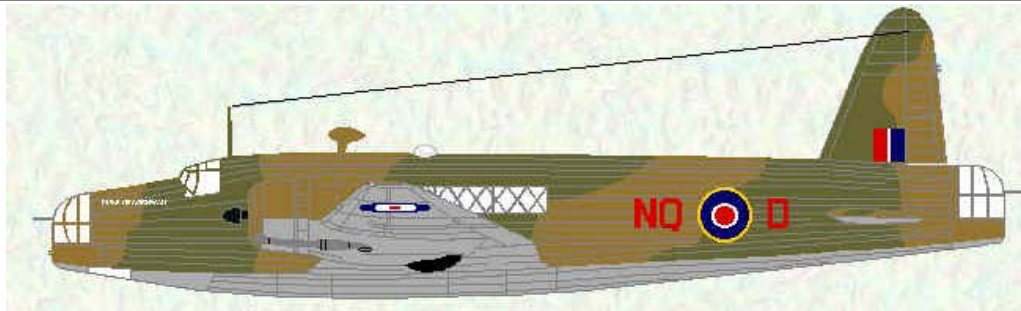
p.s. our thanks to Mike Phillips for another impromptu raffle for Association funds.

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.

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 31st August 2005. The IBIS is very close to the De Vere, so a good place to book up if required.

Flying Machines of 24 – Vickers Wellington C XVI



Vickers Wellington C.Mk XVI

Like the Vickers Wellington C.Mk XV, this was a conversion for transport of (18) troops. Unlike the Vickers Wellington C.Mk XV, this version was based on the Vickers Wellington Mk IC

The Vickers Wellington was a twin-engine, medium bomber designed in the mid-1930s at Brooklands in Weybridge, Surrey, by Vickers-Armstrongs' Chief Designer, R.K. Pierson. It was widely used in the first two years of World War II, before being replaced as a bomber by much larger four-engine designs like the Avro Lancaster. The Wellington was popularly known as 'the Wimpy' by service personnel, after J. Wellington Wimpy from the Popeye cartoons.

The Wellington can be traced back to 1932, when the Air Ministry released its B.9/32 requirement for an advanced twin-engined bomber. Vickers decided to enter the contest since it had gained experience with its Wellesley design in which new kinds of structures were used making the aircraft very sturdy. The resulting Type 271 design was a fabric-covered mid-wing monoplane with tailwheel landing gear including main units that retracted into the underside of the nacelles for the two wing-mounted engines, enclosed accommodation, turret-mounted defensive armament and internal provision to carry nine bombs varying in weight between 250 and 500 lb (113 and 227 kg).

Although the Air Ministry was very strict with its demands concerning weight, Vickers was able to convince them, in order to retain structural strength and performance. The Type 271 eventually turned out to have an empty weight of 11,508 lb (5,220 kg) instead of the required 6,300 lb (2,858 kg).

Not only Vickers was opposed against the tight weight requirements of the Air Ministry, other companies as well. Add to this the gradual build up of forces by Germany, and the Air Ministry

changed its course. From 1933 onward heavier structures were allowed, and by 1935 a type with a max take-off weight of 30,500 lb (13,835 kg) was considered by the Air Ministry. This extra weight was used for an increase in weapons load and armament.

Originally the Type 271 would be powered by two air-cooled radials, or two liquid cooled Vee engines. In the first case these would be the Bristol Mercury, in the second case these would be Rolls-Royce Goshawk, with a slight preference for the Goshawk by the Air Ministry. Armament would include a nose, dorsal and tail power-operated turrets. In the meantime the high-wing design was changed to mid-wing design to provide a better view for the pilots, and a number of aerodynamic changes to improve handling.

Since all these changes kept increasing the weight, Vickers became concerned with the power that was delivered by the Goshawk. The Air Ministry then approved the use of either the Bristol Perseus or Pegasus. These engines had a much better power-to-weight ratio and would improve single-engined flight, better performance, better climb ability, and a higher ceiling. The choice was made in favor of two Pegasus radials, each driving a three-blade propeller of the variable-pitch type. Enlarged internal fuel capacity would provide a range of 1,500 miles (3,414 km) at 213 mph (343 km/h) at 15,000 ft (4,570 m), and manually operated nose and tail defensive gun positions would be of Vickers design.

The Wellington used a unique geodetic construction designed by the famous Barnes Wallis for airships and used to build the single-engined Vickers Wellesley bomber. The fuselage was built up from a number of steel channel-beams that were formed into a large network. This gave the plane tremendous strength because any one of the stringers could support some of the weight from even the opposite side of the plane. Blowing out one side's beams would still leave the plane as a whole intact. Wellingtons with huge holes cut out of them con-

tinued to return home when other planes would not have survived.

However, the construction system also have a distinct disadvantage, in that it took considerably longer to complete a Wellington than for other designs using monocoque construction techniques. Nevertheless, in the late 1930s Vickers succeeded in building Wellingtons at a rate of one per day at Weybridge and 50 per month at Chester. Peak wartime production in 1942 saw monthly rates of 70 achieved at Weybridge, 130 at Chester and 102 at Blackpool.

The Wellington went through a total of sixteen variants during its production life plus a further two training conversions after the war. The prototype serial K4049 designed to satisfy a ministry specification B.9/32, first flew as a Type 271 from Brooklands on 15 June 1936 with J. Summers as pilot, initially the type was named Crecy. After many changes to the design, it was accepted on 15 August 1936 for production with the name Wellington. The first model was the Wellington Mk I, powered a pair of 1,050 hp (780 kW) Bristol Pegasus engines, of which 180 were built. It first entered service with No. 9 Squadron RAF in October 1938. Improvements to the turrets resulted in 183 Mk IA Wellingtons and this complement of aircraft equipped the RAF Bomber Command heavy bomber squadrons at the outbreak of war. The Wellington was out-numbered by its twin-engined contemporaries, the Handley Page Hampden and the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley, but would ultimately outlast them in productive service. The first RAF bombing attack of the war was made by Wellingtons of No. 9 and No. 149 Squadrons, along with Bristol Blenheims, on German shipping on September 4, 1939. During this raid, the two Wellingtons became the first aircraft shot down on the Western Front. Wellingtons also participated in the first night raid on Berlin on 25 August 1940. In the first 1000-aircraft raid on Cologne, on May 30, 1942, 599 out of 1046 aircraft were Wellingtons (101 of them were the Polish ones).

The first main production variant was the Mk IC which added waist guns to the Mk IA and a total of 2,685 were produced. The Mk IC had a crew of six; a pilot, radio operator, navigator/bomb aimer, observer/nose gunner, tail gunner and waist gunner. The Mk II was identical with the exception of the powerplant; utilising the 1,145 hp (855 kW) Rolls-Royce Merlin X engine instead around 400 were produced at Weybridge.

The next significant variant was the Mk III which featured the 1,375 hp (1,205 kW) Bristol Hercules III or XI engine and a four-gun tail turret, instead of two-gun. A total of 1,519 Mk IIIs were built and

became mainstays of Bomber Command through 1941. The 220 Mk IV Wellingtons used the 1,200 hp (895 kW) Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp engine and were flown by two Polish squadrons.

There followed a number a experimental and conversion variants:

- * Mk V Three were built, designed for pressurised, high-altitude operations using turbocharged Hercules VIII engines.

- * Mk VI Pressurised with a long wingspan and 1,600 hp (1,190 kW) Merlin R6SM engines, 63 were produced and were operated by 109 Squadron and as Gee radio navigation trainers.

- * Mk VII Single aircraft, built as a test-bed for the 40 mm Vickers S machine gun turret.

- * Mk VIII Mk IC conversion for Coastal Command service. Roles included reconnaissance, anti-submarine and anti-shipping attack. Included the D. W.1 which was equipped with degaussing hoops for detonating floating magnetic mines.

- * Mk IX Mk IC conversion for troop transport.

The most widely produced variant was the Mk X of which 3,804 were built. It was similar to the Mk III except for the 1,675 hp (1,250 kW) Hercules VI or XVI powerplant and a fuselage structure of light alloy, instead of steel. The Mk X was the basis for a number of Coastal Command conversions; the Mk XII was a maritime version armed with torpedoes and with a chin radome housing the ASV Mk III radar - in the nose it had only one machinegun. The Mk XI and Mk XIII were another maritime variants with an ordinary nose turret and mast radar ASV Mk II instead of chin radome; these variants had no waist guns. The Mk XIV restored the radome and added rocket rails to the wings.

Finally there was the Mk XV and Mk XVI which were unarmed conversions of the Mk IC for transport service. Two trainer models were also built or converted; the T.10 and the T.19, the latter for navigation training. The Wellington remained in use as a trainer until 1953.

While the Wellington was superseded in the European Theatre, it remained in operational service for much of the war in the Middle East and Far East theatres. It was particularly effective in North Africa, where it could fly faster than most of the Italian fighter aircraft, and carried a heavier bomb load than the Italians.

The number of Wellingtons built totalled 11,461 of all versions.

Memory Banks 1

Just Ask. We Can Do It.

Royal Air Force C-130J Operations
Article And Photos By Jamie Hunter

The Royal Air Force C-130J fleet notched its 50,000th flight hour last February 2004, an achievement celebrated at the aircraft's home base at RAF Lyneham, Wiltshire, about ninety minutes west of London. The 50K mark fell about a year after the RAF prepared to go to war for the first time in the C-130J during Operation Telic, the British contribution to Operation Iraqi Freedom. At the start of 2003, few would have foreseen that the RAF C-130J crews would approach, let alone break, the 50,000-hour total within a year. But the C-130Js like their engineers and crews have been kept extremely busy. Seventy-five percent of the 50K total involved operational flying in Iraq. The C-130J has proved doubters wrong and shown itself to be an extremely capable tactical workhorse.

As they prepared for combat action in early 2003, RAF crews at Lyneham needed the all-important clearance to allow low-level tactical operations while flying with night vision goggles. Before the clearance was given, the aircrews of the Hercules Operational Evaluation Unit as well as 24 and 30 squadrons practiced NVG flying and procedures in state-of-the-art simulators. Simulation gave way to actually flying with NVGs when the clearance finally came through on 14 February 2003.

Eight days later, six RAF C-130J crews were fully trained and ready to take part in low-level night insertion missions in Iraq should they be required. The crews were capable of flying a six-ship formation to a designated drop zone to dispatch paratroopers and drop loads from the ramp of the aircraft. Although a six-ship formation night insertion mission was not needed, many of the crews honed their new-found skills operating behind the Iraqi front lines at night and at low level.

The British crews consisted of experienced operators who had all flown NVG sorties before.

However, completing such an involved training regimen in such a short period of time was a tribute to the ease of operation and total integration of the C-130J's glass cockpit and the drive of its pilots, particularly members of the evaluation unit who taught the other crews.

The RAF's C-130Js have been in Iraq ever since. The RAF now has crews and aircraft permanently based in Basra, flying daily resupply and communication flights in and around Iraq. With Hawker Siddeley HS125 transport aircraft of 32 (Royal) Squadron, the C-130J is one of only two fixed-wing RAF assets permanently based in Iraq.

Herculean Feats

The Royal Air Force has operated the Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules since the first C. Mk. 1s (C-130Ks) entered service in April 1967. Heavy workloads and more than thirty years of flying have taken a toll on these original aircraft, however.

To ensure service for the Hercules well into the current millennium, twenty-five next-generation C-130Js were ordered from Lockheed Martin in the early 1990s. The RAF acquired two versions of the C-130J: fifteen of the longer fuselage aircraft, known by the RAF as the C. Mk. 4, and ten of the standard C-130J, known as the C. Mk. 5. The arrival of the first C-130Js meant the return of some early C-130Ks to the manufacturer for refurbishment and redelivery to new customers. The remaining examples retained in RAF service are now used for tactical, special, and some strategic operations.

The introduction of the C-130J has resulted in some major restructuring plans for RAF Lyneham's operational squadrons. The first C-130J unit, 24 Squadron, is responsible for strategic transport and training. The second C-130J unit, 30 Squadron, which became operational in 2002, is now responsible for tactical training.

Initially, 24 Squadron had a number of constraints on the new airplane. Therefore, strategic missions instead of tactical missions became the normal tasking. C-130Js supported British troops in the Persian Gulf with twice-a-week flights staging through Cyprus. However,

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as tactical workload trials progressed in the United States and at the Boscombe Down test centre in England, the C-130J began to spread its tactical wings.

An early RAF C-130J pilot commented: "The C-130J necessitates such a different method of operation over the previous-generation Hercules. Instead of a four-man flight deck, for example, we use a three-man crew. This means that the crew operation is very different. The airplane provides a mass of information, and we need to manage it. Apart from the control column, the cockpit is almost completely different."

Eighty-eight crews have been trained by 24 Squadron so far, in twenty-four courses. The unit is training two crews per course at the moment. At eight courses a year, 24 Squadron is producing sixteen crews annually. The squadron was training four crews per course at its peak (thirty-two crews per year). Ten pilot instructors are dedicated to initial conversion training, and the squadron is steady with twenty-five crews. There are a similar number of crews in 30 Squadron.

"The C-130J has proven to be much more effective than the older C-130K in some areas, particularly areas warranting hot and high operations," says Flt. Lt. Dave Stewart, the current executive officer for 24 Squadron. Operations in Afghanistan during 2002 provide a good example. The high altitude of Kabul and the relatively large amount of fuel required to get to Thumrait restricted the C-130K to a seven-ton payload. The C-130J carried twelve tons. These figures for the C-130J were derived using normal operating standards. The C-130K, on the other hand, had to use military operating standards to justify its smaller payload. In short, the C-130J was flown at lower risk for more capability."

The most noticeable changes to the fleet have come as the RAF has increased its experience and received clearances to match. The whole arena of tactical, NVG, and low-level operations has been constantly developing. To a large extent, the improvements in navigational accuracy and ease of operation in a two-pilot flight deck with a flight management system are now taken for granted by the crews. Every-

one comments on the relative quiet on the flight deck at high-workload times, when the K-model flight deck would have been buzzing with a constant drone of information being passed between the navigator and the pilots. The throttles and carefree engine handling are normal for RAF C-130J crews now, and a head-up display is considered a standard and necessary instrument.

Workhorse Goes Tactical

The operational tempo at 24 and 30 squadrons is as busy as ever. With just eight squadron crews trained, the new C-130J wing was able to carry out more than fifty percent of the whole of Lyneham's route tasking, mainly supporting operations in the Persian Gulf. In addition to its strategic transport role, the RAF C-130J is now busy with tactical operations.

Squadron Leader Mark Pearce is officer commanding of the tactical training flight at 30 Squadron. His unit conducts tactical flying and postgraduate training for the C-130J. "We are aiming to train an equal number of crews on the tactical side of flying the C-130J on both 24 and 30 squadrons," he explains.

"I have worked partly with the guys at Boscombe Down (the UK Ministry of Defence's aviation research centre) but mainly with the Hercules Operational Evaluation Unit, which is an asset of the Air Warfare Centre based here at Lyneham," Pearce notes. "We've worked hand in hand with them for two years developing tactical procedures. The C-130J has great situational awareness for pilots; it has so much equipment to let crewmembers know exactly what is going on at any one time. For example, we can effectively have one pilot off doing a lot of work on the radios and the other pilot will be flying, knowing exactly where the aircraft is and how the mission is going. We are taking the C-130J into combat theatres, and twelve aircraft in the fleet will soon have the full defensive aids system installed. Many of our operating locations need these defensive systems. We have reviewed a lot of the threats and worked out how we are going to fly against them."

Flt. Lt. Steve Forster is also on the tactical team

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at 30 Squadron. "I flew nine years on the C-130K," he says. "The C-130J is more of a pilot's aeroplane; we don't have a navigator so it really concentrates the mind. The tactical flying is outstanding in the C-130J. When we start the mission planning phase, we have a lead crew and a follower, and maybe more with a bigger formation. One of the lead crews will plan the mission and brief it. JAMPA, a PC-based C-130J Advanced Mission Planner, downloads to a ruggedized PC card and the card is then plugged into the aircraft. The loadmaster has picked up a lot of what the navigator and the engineer used to do in the cockpit, certainly in terms of lookout and managing the fuel panel."

"We have never flown with navigators on the C-130J and don't have any in the squadrons," notes Stewart. "When it comes to tactical training, our guys start at a much higher workload to get them used to the demands put on them by changing routings and tactical scenarios. Indeed, the first flight on the tactical course involves airborne re-routes and changes in targets and timings. The computers make such on-the-fly changes much slicker than the old pen on a map. We could have an occasional role for a third person on the flight deck for a mission-specific task. This person would not replace the navigator, but would more likely be used for high-workload missions. The extra crewmember might be a signaler or a mission commander with specialist knowledge of the ground situation."

Future Operations

Wing Commander Kevin Groves, 24 Squadron commanding officer, is extremely positive about operations with the C-130J. RAF C-130J crews are operating from rough strips around the world. The aircraft's defensive aids system is being updated to meet theater-specific threats. C-130J crews are putting in a lot of hours to support the frontline forces, and the Hercules continues to be the workhorse of the Royal Air Force.

Jamie Hunter is an aviation photojournalist based in England.

Memory Banks 2

I have managed to persuade Simon Batchelor to submit an historical article for the Newsletter. He is starting from the beginning of aircraft types flown by XXIV and may be will meet in the middle. Many thanks and we hope you enjoy this piece of nostalgia.

Earliest Days

24 Squadron was formed at Hounslow as an offshoot of 17 Squadron on the 1st September 1915 initially under the command of Capt A G Moore. The earliest aircraft were transferred from 17 Squadron stock but as training developed more were allocated.

Unlike later training regimes there seems to be no real standardization on one aircraft and this was complicated by the dual role the squadron had in its earliest days.

The main role of the squadron was to train pilots for "Fighting Duties" in a new scout unit under Capt Lanoe Hawker VC from the 28th September. This was in order to form the Royal Flying Corps first dedicated fighter squadron. The other role they had in the early days was night anti-Zeppelin flights by the squadron instructors using Avro 504D's and RAF BE2c's.

Hawker was a highly innovative inventor and tactician who had fitted his Bristol Scout with an offset machine gun, firing outside the propeller arc, and had shot down 2 enemy aircraft on the 25th July 1915. For this and other exploits he was awarded the VC, and promoted to command 24 Squadron. He introduced many new techniques in training, new equipment and new tactics and the "Hawker Spirit" to each new recruit. An example of this was the executive order painted on the squadron noticeboard,

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ATTACK EVERYTHING

The aircraft used by the squadron before they left for France on operational duty were in common with other squadrons at the time a mixed bunch, single type units were in the future. In no particular order the aircraft operated whilst at Hounslow were:-

Avro 504 Sample Serial 777,

This pre-war 2 seat design served in many roles with the RFC and RAF and is principally remembered as a training aircraft used in large numbers up to the 1930's. Later models were used for joy riding between the wars, and a few survivors of the 504N model were impressed in 1940, and used for radar experiments during the Battle of Britain.

Avro 504D Sample serial 798

This ex 17 Squadron aircraft was a later model of the original 504 and was used from the 28th September only 6 of these were built as a single seat patrol aircraft fitted with a long range tank and Lewis machine gun for anti Zeppelin flights.

Curtis JN3 Sample Serial 5607

Another ex 17 Squadron Aircraft these American designed 2 seat trainers were originally ordered by the Royal Naval Air Service, and were later transferred to the RFC. This aircraft was very similar to the JN4, and were manufactured in large numbers for the RFC and RNAS in Canada. These aircraft, known by their unofficial nickname of "Jenny," were also used by the United States Army Air Force. These were sold off as surplus after 1919 and became famous as "Barnstormers" performing daring stunts during the 1920's and beyond. Lindburgh, the first solo flyer across the Atlantic, was one such barnstorming pilot before becoming a mail pilot and his later fame.

Caudron GIII Sample Serial 5270

These 2 seat French machines, one of which is in the RAF Museum at Hendon, were widely used for training and were built in France and England. They were fairly easy to fly but unsuitable for combat use in the hostile environment caused by the German Fokker Eindekker (monoplane).

Martinsyde S.1 Sample Serial 4229

These single seat scout aircraft were an early reconnaissance type built in fairly small numbers three were used were used briefly for training purposes pending the arrival the Vickers FB5 Gunbus the proposed initial equipment for the squadron. The S.1 was small and low powered and therefore unsuitable for development into a fighting aircraft.

Maurice Farman Se7 Longhorn Sample Serial 556

These French designed 2 seat aircraft were used as trainers by many units of the RFC and were manufactured in France and England. The instructor and trainee were sat in a cupola attached to a large uncovered fuselage, which looked very fragile. It was in fact capable of standing up to the sort of handling student pilots were likely to hand out, as well as being slow and safe to fly. The nickname was due to a canard elevator mounted in front of the crew cupola.

Maurice Farman Se11 Shorthorn Sample Serial 4726

The Se7 had a forward elevator mounted in front of the crew cupola, this was deleted in the Se11, and the overall design was cleaned up. Hence the change in nickname, this aircraft was another successful trainer whose rugged qualities were much appreciated.

Bristol Scout C Sample Serial 4665

This type of aircraft had been used by Lanoe Hawker, before joining 24 Squadron, and it is probable that he had one as a personal plane during his time at Hounslow. Four aircraft were used over the next few months and Ace's had latitude in the types they flew. Albert Ball VC for instance had a preference for Neuport types before becoming accustomed to the SE5A.

Bleriot XI Parasol Sample Serial 2862

This aircraft was a 2 seat training version of the plane Louis Bleriot first flew across the channel in 1909 on the 25th July. The parasol wing position was used to improve visibility for re-

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connaissance and training. I have not been able to find a photograph of this type so if anyone knows of one please let me know. This was the last monoplane used by the unit until the Bristol 142 "Britain First" was tested in 05/11/36 nearly 20 years later!

Vickers FB5 Gunbus Sample Serial 5651

These 2 seat pusher aircraft had been in service since early 1915 and had suffered from the less than reliable engine. The armament was fired by a gunner, seated, in front of the pilot. This arrangement overcame the need for interrupter gear on the propeller, however the extra weight of the gunner had a major effect on performance. This performance penalty was overcome by the DH2 which superseded the Gunbus in service with the squadron.

RAF BE2c Sample Serial 2085

These 2 seater tractor biplanes were used for home defence units operated by the squadron. These were based at Wimbledon, Hainault Farm, and Sutton's Farm on detachment from Hounslow. These plane were designed to be very stable and so were possibly the best type available for night operations.

Airco DH1A Sample Serial 4600

Another 2 seat pusher, these were built in small numbers and only served with one operational unit, 2 were used for training purposes for less than a month. The layout was for the Gunbus and I assume it suffered from the same problems.

Airco DH2a Sample Serial 5918

These single seat pusher aircraft were the first operational equipment used by the squadron. The aircraft was a match for the Fokker E1 which had held air superiority for the Germans, being faster with a better rate of climb. In service in Hounslow it was used to work the Squadron up to front line readiness. The Squadron left for France on the 7th February 1916 and was based at Bertangles. To give some idea of the reliability of the aircraft of the time two of the 12 leaving Folkestone failed to make the channel crossing

The thirteen aircraft types used by 24 Squadron when based at Hounslow are just the start of

the 92 types used over the next 90 years. They were initially trained as and became the first "Scout" or Fighter unit in the RFC and helped wrest air superiority from the enemy in the spring of 1916. The operations in France and Belgium up to the end of the war and the types used will be the subject of another article. Finally I would like to thank aviation historian Mick Davis for sending me the serials of all the types used at Hounslow and beyond.

Association member Gp Capt John Richardson promised many years ago when he was Chairman to send in some extracts from his memoirs of his time on XXIV. Now for the first time we can give you a flavour in part 1.

Transporter at Bassingbourn

Eventually we received a proper posting - to 1359 VIP Flight at Bassingbourn, near Royston in Herts. soon to become A Flight of No. 24 (Commonwealth) Squadron. This was to be my job for the next 3.25 years flying Lancastrians and Yorks on world wide routes. We had 6 Lanes and 6 Yorks, with 12 Dakotas in B Flight. and most of the Lane and York crews were vastly experienced and high ranking; some were pre war airline pilots.

For 4 months nothing much happened. Our crew was allocated ferry and other internal flights only. so Joe took his release and went to study for his civilian licences with the half promise of a job with a friend's new airline. I spent a few weekends with him and his girlfriend Faye at Sunbury, the highlight of which was to gatecrash a party of the stars at Shepperton film studios by borrowing a couple of waiters jackets and pretending to clear up glasses and plates. Some of the girls took an interest in us when they discovered that we were interested in them and not the other men. Those actors were strange fellows: so many lovely girls and they were 'darling-ing' each other! But it couldn't last and we had to beat a retreat failing over dustbins in our haste.

Joe was younger than I having joined at 15. He looked much older than he was so got away

(Continued on page 10)

with it and had completed his first tour before he reached 18. He quickly got a job with one of the small charter firms which proliferated in '46 and '47, flying Halifax 1 Halton freighters and also the DH86 which was a sort of 4-engined Tiger Moth and capable of carrying 20 passengers. He badgered me to join him and I had the offer of a job if and when I obtained my Licences.

We saw Joe off with a splendid session in the Mess. He told a story about a publican, a cockney called Joe Mullins, who had run a pub called 'The Volunteer' in Cambridge. Apparently the pub was always packed at closing time to hear Joe - an ex boxer - call, and enforce Time'. He would do this by naming individuals or groups and telling them to "piss off". One night King Peter of Yugoslavia was in the pub and dismissed with the bellow "All Kings piss off---. It seemed he had semi-retired to a small pub in the country about 30 miles away. (Joe M. not the King).

At about 1 a.m. Joe (Pete) 'borrowed' the squadron commanders car and the pair of us set off to find Joe M. We hammered on his door and threw gravel at the windows. Eventually a face appeared and was greeted by the shout Open up, police". "All coppers piss off" snarled Joe. slamming the window.



A Good Read

The Whispering Giant: the Story of the Bristol Britannia by F. McKim

Scoval Publishing, PO Box 36, Ponteland, Newcastle-upon Tyne NE20 9WE, UK. 2003. 187pp. Illustrated. £30. ISBN 1902236-08-4.

This is a history of the Bristol Britannia in airline service. Among over 200 colour photographs are shots of every airline livery ever to grace this lovely machine. Included are full details of dates, fleet size and destinations for all the relevant operators, some 50 in all.

It was an aircraft loved by passengers and crews - when it managed to be on time. It might now seem obvious that making the inlet

air turn round two 180 degree bends before reaching the compressor was not particularly efficient and could well lead to icing problems. Solving the latter took far too long. The type's late entry into airline service eroded the potential value of sales. A pity for it deserved better.

There is an amusing story about Bristol trying to sell the aircraft to Howard The Aviator Hughes. He insisted on only talking to the md and it had to be at midnight at a street corner a meeting to which Hughes arrived barefoot!

Although only in main airline service for a rather short time compared to its contemporaries, it had a much longer life with the RAF's Transport Command. The Britannia probably has the distinction of being the last major design that protected its electrics with fuses rather than circuit breakers.

This is the latest addition to Scoval's 'Aircraft of Distinction' series. If you would like to know all about the lives of every Britannia built - this is the book for you.

Reviewed by Capt John L. Cox, DIFC, FRAeS



Herk: Hero of the Skies

By LE. Dabney Pub by Bright Mountain Books, 206 Riva Ridge Drive, Fairview, NC28730, USA. 2003. 496pp. Illustrated. \$29.95. ISBN 0-914875-40-X

My initial impression is that this book is of a series of stories written in a journalistic style which at times drifts into something almost reminiscent of a Tom Clancy novel. There are descriptions of military operations that have involved the Hercules, in which the 'bad guys', who often have reprehensible traits such as cannibalism, being high on hemp or, perhaps worse still, an incomprehensible dislike of Americans, are in line to get blown away by a bunch of heroes, who drop in from their amazing Hercules aircraft. Alternatively there are stories of Hercules crews delivering much needed relief supplies to the survivors of natural disasters, who are only too ready show their gratitude to their saviours, or who wait in expectation muttering such phrases as "viene el 'ercules?" (Is the Hercules coming?").

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Keeping in Touch

RECENT LOSSES

**Copy of letter of condolence to OC 47
from Air Commodore R H Gould CBE
MA BSc FRAeS RAF (Ret'd)
Honorary President XXIV Squadron
Association**

I am writing on behalf of the XXIV Squadron Association to offer our sincere condolences to you, all the members of 47 Squadron and the bereaved families, on the loss of your crew members, friends and loved ones in the recent major incident in Iraq.

This is clearly an awful tragedy to befall your Squadron and the Station and it must be very hard to come to terms with your loss. It may seem like little consolation at this point to know that your colleagues were fulfilling an important mission in our national interest and that their ultimate sacrifice will forever be remembered and appreciated. I have no doubt that the immediate practicalities of bereavement will be uppermost in your minds, and those of the families involved, and that it will be hard to appreciate the full significance of that sacrifice, but I hope you will all eventually draw comfort from the many generations of RAF aircrew who, while going about a job that they found truly fulfilling and rewarding, have given their lives in furtherance of the needs of their country and the honour of their squadron and Service.

I shall be keeping in close contact with Kevin Groves over the coming weeks and, if there is anything of a practical nature that our Association can do to help, I am sure that Kevin will let me know. Meanwhile, please pass on our deepest sympathy to those affected by this terrible tragedy – a tragedy that has touched all of us associated with RAF Lyneham and the C130 Hercules.

Yours sincerely,



*Our Thoughts And Prayers
To All Those Who Lost Their Lives
Their Families And Friends
From
The Committee & Members
Of The 24 Squadron Association*



Just A few lines from Mike Phillips who attended the two funerals on Friday 1st April and Monday 4th April.

I attended two on the 1st April, Cpl Williams 11 am, & Master Eng Nicholson, 2 p.m., both were massively attended, and the services were very moving, everyone wearing their best blues, fresh suits, and medals shinning, there was I'm proud to say not a dry eye, in any of the church's, The weather was very kind, and this gave ideal conditions for all the flypast, Members of the Special Forces were there to pay their respects and tributes, also, it was very moving to see so many (civvies) people in the streets pay their respects, and once again the Lyneham spirit came shinning through, it was very strange to see so many faces, who must have passed through 24 Sqn, at some time, Group Captain Paul Oborn, and his wife were at the funerals, later at the reception Friday afternoon, the Group Captain was very interested in our 90th anniversary arrangements, James Gray MP, was at the 11 am funeral and at Mondays funeral of Flt Sgt Gibson, which reflected the respect and support for the crews at RAF Lyneham, In the Iraq theatre, once again the church was over filled, all the services were in good spirits, with a touch of humour shinning through from those that died, hymns like, Puff The Magic Dragon, and (Is This The Way To) Amarillo, and a

(Continued on page 12)

very beautiful "A Place Nearby", sung by Lene Marlin, reflected very much the spirit that exists, in all RAF personnel.

Frank "Jock" Hanna, was known by many and will be sadly missed from our reunions. Frank's determination to attend these events despite his advancing years and physical limitations sums up his character. Jock was a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner who flew in Hudsons, Dakotas and other types from Hendon and Basingbourn with XXIV between 1942 to 1946.

The following is a copy from the e-mail sent by Karin Simmons on the 21st February 2005 who maintained an electronic link to the Association as Frank moved frequently between Sweden, London and Scotland.

"I have just returned from Scotland with some sad news. Frank Hannah passed away on the 15th February. He died peacefully in a Paisley Hospital with pneumonia. Frank lived at Erskine Hospital outside Glasgow for the last nine months. Two weeks before he died I visited him for a few days. I took him in the wheelchair round the grounds of Erskine Hospital. He enjoyed seeing the Kilpatrick Hills and get a glimpse of the Clyde.

The circle is completed. Frank will be buried in Scotland, the country he loved."

Tony Rippengal was a pilot who flew Hastings aircraft while on XXIV at Abingdon between 1953 to 1956 and also awarded the DFC and DFM. He spent his retirement living in the local area at Lechlade. The Association was informed by his daughter that Tony died on 9th Jan 05. A Requiem Mass was held on 20th Jan 05 at Fairford Glos.

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,

I just thought I would drop you a line to say that the Imperial War Museum in conjunction with the Naval and Military Press Tel 01825 749494 or web www.naval-military-press.com, have reissued A History of 24 Squadron by Capt Illingworth first published in 1920. It costs £20.00 plus £3.00 P&P,

It is a fascinating read of the RFC and RAF in W.W.I, and may be of interest to the Association membership.

Cheers Simon Batchelor



Dear Editor

24 Squadron Aircraft

I am researching the various aircraft, types and marks, flown by the Squadron over the years. You will see from the attached list that 92 different types have been flown since 1915, including most of the famous fighters up to the Spitfire, nearly every De Haviland type prior to the Mosquito and odd bods such as a Messerschmidt 108 and Fokkers.

I am trying to illustrate my research's with stories and anecdotes about each of the types used and to that end I have a request of the membership.

Would you please mark up the list of types to indicate the aircraft you have been involved in, and send it to me. For those of you involved with Hercules could you send me a list of

serials of those aircraft you flew in whilst posted to 24 Squadron.

Then if you have any amusing/hair raising/poignant stories you would like to pass on either write, email or call me.

My contact details are email sbatchelor@kingswood-london.co.uk

my home telephone is 0208 647 8417 and my address is,
14 Manor Road North
Wallington
Surrey
SM6 7NT

I would be happy to visit anyone to discuss my project, and to pay any costs involved in copying or postage.

I am not sadly an ex-24 Squadron member, but I am an association member and I feel very strongly that as much of the History of your illustrious squadron should be preserved as possible.

Thank you,
Simon Batchelor

PS Please accept my grateful thanks all of you who have already been helping my research



Hello David,

On Saturday I promised to let you have ALMA contact details, which (according to the Summer 2004 newsletter) are as follows (but the website has since changed to www.rafalmanac.com, so the co.uk addresses may have changed too)--

Secretary:
Mrs Ann Bihan,
15 Staddlestones,
Midsomer Norton,
BATH BA3 2PP
secretary@rafalmanac.co.uk

Magazine/ Website:

Barry Cooper,
9 Riverside,
CALNE SN11 0LF
webmaster@rafalmanac.co.uk

I don't know how many members ALMA now has, but I believe I heard it was in the region of 300 or so within only three or four years of formation, and lots of those must have been in XXIV.

Best wishes

Alan Turner

✉ ✉

Dear Editor

Recently I presented a RAF plaque, on behalf of myself and MALM Stu Bailey (Ret'd), to Rod Beattie who runs the Commonwealth War Graves Commission branch here in Thailand and is responsible for the two WWII cemeteries in recognition of the fact that he cares for the graves of some RAF lads who died working on the infamous Death Railway.

Stu and I were a little shocked that the RAF was not represented amongst the plaques on the memorial stairway in the Thailand Burma Railway Centre which has described as the best museum in the Far East.

Yours aye Harry East, Kanchaburi, Thailand

✉ ✉

Via e-mail ref 24 Squadron 1945/47

I am currently researching for a possible book covering RAF operations during the rundown of the RAF in the immediate post war period (circa mid-45 through to 1947). I am interested in the recollections of RAF members of this period of their service, especially the amount and type of flying training undertaken (some squadrons were definitely more active than others during this time). I believe that 24 Squadron were primarily

flying Dakotas and Yorks during this time period and am keen to find out more on the squadron's activities. I was wondering whether any members of the association were with the squadron during this time period, and if so, whether it might be possible to route a request for help with my research to them via the association?

Thanks and regards,

Simon Gifford giffords@tiscali.co.uk

✉ ✉

Via e-mail

While surfing the net yesterday came across the 24 Sqn Association web site. I spent some time reviewing it and wished I had been aware of it sooner.

I am now 75, 10 years retired from Aviation. I spent 28 years in the R.C.A.F. and 20 years flying Corporate Jets, but a real highlight of my career was the three years I spent as an Exchange Officer with 24 Commonwealth Sqn. at RAF Colerne (1957-1960) on Hastings. I lived with my wife and three very young children in Bath. Sqn Ldr Hitchins(RAAF) was CO and we had crews from several other Commonwealth countries.

I did my conversion course at 242 O.C.U. Dishforth, my para drop training at Abingdon, flew twice "around the world", and spent 3 months at Christmas Island as part of "Operation Grapple". I witnessed Britains last experimental H-Bomb test in August 1958. The night before the test I flew the head of Britains Atomic Energy Program (I believe his name was Sir William Penny) from Honolulu to Christmas Island. Rumour had it that he and his staff were carrying the essential parts of the bombs "trigger".

My wife of 51 years goes in for laser eye surgery in October or I would have come across to your annual reunion. *I'll keep track of 24 Sqn on the web. The GOOD LORD willing and the creek don't rise Ill try for next year. Jerry Fosberg (Retired RCAF and CAF)*

✉ ✉

Dear David

Many thanks for the Sqn Ass'n Newsletter and the invitation to attend this year's get together at the beginning of October.

I am still in Singapore as the UK Defence Adviser and am likely to be so until mid-2005. Therefore, my apologies for not being able to join you this year, but my best wishes to the Ass'n and all of its members.

Yours: Martin Stringer

Gp Capt (RAF)
Defence Adviser
British High Commission
Tanglin Road
Singapore 247919



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There is also a fair crop of superlatives regarding the admittedly good performance and handling of the aircraft. However, this approach does help to bring the stories alive, although in a rather lurid form, and probably makes for easier reading, especially for the nonexpert. More sceptical readers can always amuse themselves by trying to spot the most cringeworthy quote. My own particular favourite is in the description of a formation display put on by four US Hercules, which includes the words: "zoom-bum-bum-zoombum-bum-zoom-bum-bumzoom." Perhaps all this is not surprising given that the author was once employed as a public relations representative by the Lockheed Corporation.

It is, however, worth persevering beyond initial impressions, as the book does contain some interesting insights into the technical development of the Hercules during the 50s,

revealing the dedication and hard work, in addition to technical prowess, that was required to bring into being an aircraft that represented the latest technology for military air transports at that time. This includes a recognition that the water tank fatigue testing technique, used on the pressurised fuselage of the Hercules, drew greatly on British experience on the Comet. Also of merit are the many insights into the operational capabilities of the Hercules, including an early operation to help out the Indian Air Force during the 1962 conflict with China. This contains a particularly informative, if brief, comparison with the Antonov An-12 Soviet equivalent to the Hercules, which was in service

with the Indians at the time.

Other interesting insights include the successful trial operation of a C-130 from the deck of the aircraft carrier Forrester, the successful Israeli attempt to rescue hostages from Entebbe and a host of other operations, both military and civil. However, in general the book largely avoids mention of anything remotely negative, such as the abandonment of the early attempt to produce a super STOL version in the form of the proposed C-130C, which featured boundary-layer control. It would also have been interesting to have had an insider's view of some of the stillborn Hercules variants and even perhaps the US 'Credible Sport' project to rescue hostages from Iran, using a rocket-festooned Hercules.

This is the third edition of this book and the major change from the first edition is the inclusion of a section on the C-130J Super Hercules. Just as the reader has been convinced, by the rest of the book, that the basic Hercules could do everything that could possibly be required of it, the C-130J is revealed, with its 'mindboggling' performance improvements, as the aircraft that everybody really wants. On the more positive side there is some interesting background on the stall problem that resulted in a one-year delay in the delivery of the first aircraft to the RAF and on the C-130J's record-setting achievements.

Overall this is not the book for the reader who requires a definitive technical history and description of the Lockheed C-130 Hercules, including, for example, comprehensive lists of all of the variants and their performance, the civil and military operators and all of the roles undertaken. There are other books that do that much better. However, in addition to all of the feel good stories and anecdotes, the book is a useful addition to the documented history of a truly remarkable aircraft that has become an industry standard to the technical world and an icon to much of the non-technical world.

Colin Frazer, AMIRAEs

Diary of a Navigator Pt 8

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

TURKISH INTERLUDE AND RETURN TO THE UK

All through the autumn months of 1943 the PM had been busy with a pet scheme of his to convert Turkey from mixed neutrality to join the war on the Allied side. The Turks had been prudently sitting on the fence, anxious not to be on the losing side and equally anxious about Soviet Russian intentions in the long term, at her back door. It could be said that the Turkish Army was generally pro-German, having been largely trained and equipped by them, dreaming perhaps of past great ideas of the Kaiser and the Berlin-Baghdad Axis. On the other hand the small but efficient Turkish Air Force was RAF trained and decidedly pro-British - in fact, remnants of our training mission had lingered on after the outbreak of the war in various roles, under a particularly energetic Air Attaché in Ankara, one Bobby George, later to be Air Attaché in Paris in 1945/46. Evidently Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed to invite Inonu, the Turkish President to Cairo for talks - at which Vyshinsky was to be present, on Stalin's insistence. The York was therefore despatched to Turkey to fetch the President, with Captain Randolph Churchill (as a special compliment) to do the honours. Little did we know on departure that Roosevelt had despatched his aircraft, the Sacred Cow, on a similar mission led by his son-in-law, Major Boettinger with a bevy of senior Colonels, etc. Adana, in South East Turkey, was to be the pick up point.

3rd December 1943. Supplied from RAF sources (I believe the Cairo bazaar) with rather ill-fitting sports jackets to wear with RAF uniform trousers, so that we might perhaps masquerade as a civil aircrew, we left Cairo West at midday on a short three hour flight to Adana, a small civil airfield with no facilities whatsoever for large aircraft, except for a barely adequate tarmac strip. Our route lay eastwards through the Ismailia corridor of the Canal air defences and around the coast of Palestine, over Gaza, Haifa, to Acre, thence direct to Adana. The few local Turkish air force officers at the airfield were most friendly and their numbers

grew as they sampled our hospitality (Scotch Whisky) which we were fortunately able to offer in Randolph's name. Probably RAF trained, they literally 'homed-in' on the sound of the soda siphon. A good time was had by all: they soon demolished our limited stocks; regrettably, they could only offer the local spirit, Raki, a Levantine version of Ouzo, and that at aviation strength. I believe it is a good disinfectant though prone to hang-over production.

4th December 1943. The following morning the VIP train of the famous blue Wagons-Lit carriages drew up alongside the airfield. The President's party seemed to be surrounded by officials of all colours of uniforms but we were more concerned to be ready for the off. In a few minutes Randolph arrived in a panic and somewhat breathless to say that 'they' had got him in a Skymaster. 'What is to be done?' Send a message at once to Cairo to tell the Prime Minister what was happening. Jack Gallacher, our very Glaswegian wireless operator, explained succinctly that there was no way in which he could raise Cairo on the WT (for we had no long range voice HF in those days) until we were airborne. The message would have to be in cipher in any case and that by the time that he had encoded it and Cairo had received it, decoded it and passed it to the Prime Minister's party (who might well already be en route to Cairo West Airport to welcome M.Inonu), we should ourselves have landed.

We were a slightly faster plane than the Skymaster. and if we cut directly across the Eastern Mediterranean and so cut the corner and beat the USAF aircraft, we could land in time to explain where the VIP was. What a master-piece of planning! So off we went, stepping up the engine power; and who were our passengers? We had been left with the Turkish Vice President, the British Ambassador to Ankara, the Russian Ambassador and our Air Attache, Bobby George, and a vast amount of luggage, and of course, Randolph, out ranked and probably out-drunk the night before.

Certainly we raced the USAF Skymaster into the landing circuit of Cairo West but not by very much. The RAF Air Traffic Control, assuming we had the VIP on board had us marshalled onto the place of honour where the PM et al was waiting. As we swung into position with the door facing the awaiting dignitaries, we showered the band with sand to tickle up the Turkish National Anthem. Out got Randolph: to be confronted by father with, one presumes, the question "What have you done with M.Inonu?". What else was said of course was out of our earshot. Meanwhile, the Skymaster with its VIP passenger, unknown to the RAF Air Traffic Control, was marshalled onto a distant hard-standing and met by a jeep and a ladder, for

there were no steps of Skymaster height at Cairo West. I suppose for once we thoroughly enjoyed the discomfort of officialdom from the level of the cockpit. We tidied ourselves away and took off for a hotel in down-town Cairo.

This attempt to bring Turkey into the war was a failure, reinforced no doubt by our disastrous attempt to retake Kos and Leros earlier in the autumn. However, the PM was determined that the Turkish President should return to Adana in the York.

7th December 1943. We left at midday from Cairo West for Adana, this time the PM taking Inonu firmly by the arm and guiding him to the door of the aircraft, with no Americans in sight. On the short flight, champagne and delicate sandwiches were served; these were specially acquired, I believe, by Teddy Smouha from Groppi's in Cairo. This time there were no excitements. We had the whole Turkish diplomatic entourage on board and there was no doubt that Randolph did justice to the refreshments and the honours to the Turks. Just before we landed, the President presented the Captain with a gold wrist watch as a souvenir; the rest of the aircrew got boxes of a 100 best Turkish cigarettes; and to Jock Duncan, the chef, he gave £20 in notes - we all felt he came off best! We returned directly to Cairo the same afternoon with no further risks from Turkish ground based hospitality.

10th December 1943. Four days later, we left Cairo to head homewards, so we thought, with the next stop Tunis. There were rumours (again) that the PM wanted to visit the troops in Italy, although inside information indicated that he was very tired. Our passengers were as for the Teheran journeys plus the CIGS, Sir Alan Brooke, who was going to proceed on his own visits to Italy later and return to England separately, after getting to Tunis. The take-off was set for 2100 hours local time and the RAF Movements Staff of Cairo West, mindful of the PM's recent birthday celebrated in Teheran, had provided a splendid birthday cake for him and this was set out on the conference room table in the aircraft for all to admire.

Rumour had it that the PM was not at all happy with the proceedings at Teheran and in Cairo, especially with the American attitude. He was also disappointed with the outcome of the Turkish President's visit. Furthermore, he had a heavy cold. The aircraft was ordered to be specially warmed for him on the ground (Cairo West airfield on the edge of the desert plateau could be incredibly cold at night - we were in blue uniform). So we used an electric fire on the airfield mains for this purpose. The aircraft's own heating would work only from

the engines and therefore would take a little time to warm up after take off. Local intelligence, supplemented by Flight Officer Sarah Oliver on her visits to the cockpit, told us the PM was not in the best of humour. Although he was pleased with the gift from the RAF, he did not want his cake now: it was to be put away safely, for a future occasion. The flight itself was uneventful at about 8,000 feet and my log records a brilliant star-light night. Our route lay due west across the desert to Marble Arch and then via Tripoli to Medenin where we turned north for Tunis. Our destination airfield was EI Aotrina, on the outskirts of the city on the road to Carthage.

Fifteen minutes short of landing time our corrected ETA was sent by W/T and acknowledged by Tunis ATC with the message that EI Aouina was closed to all traffic and that we were to divert to 'Whipsnade', the code name for an airstrip some ten minutes flying time away. We queried these instructions by WIT - we had to observe strict R/T silence regarding our mission, and continued to EI Aouina, actually overflying the airfield and lowering the under-carriage to indicate our desire to land. ATC was adamant: EI Aouina was closed and we were to proceed to Whipsnade which had been identified for us amid the plethora of landing strips which had been constructed in the area. We could only assume that last-minute unserviceability or obstruction of the one and only long runway. Thus we sailed over the heads of the assembled VIPs awaiting the PM's arrival and went off to land at a half-deserted airstrip inhabited by a Beaufighter squadron. Clearly, something was badly wrong when we were met by a scruffy flying control jeep. Hasty telephone calls established that EI Aouina was indeed closed to all aircraft, - except the PM's York!

Unfortunately, the PM insisted upon disembarking and sat glumly on a packing case for five or ten minutes while contact was established. There were angry words and some confusion. It was a cold, winter morning and the aircraft cabin had been particularly warm; the damage was done. We took off some half an hour later for EI Aouina with the PM in a worse mood and the start of what proved to be an attack of pneumonia. We land again in ten minutes at the correct destination this time, to the embarrassment of the assembled VIPs.

A visit to Italy was still in the plan but after 48 hours it was quite clearly off. For almost two weeks the PM was extremely ill and it was not until Mrs Churchill's arrival on December 17th that he began to recover - and then rapidly. It was said that only she could insist on him taking the medicines that were prescribed. Mrs Churchill had arrived in a BOAC Liberator from Lyneham, via Gibraltar, flown by Captain Armstrong and had had

a very rough passage. She was escorted by Jock Colville, one of the PM's Private Secretaries. Meanwhile, the crew were entertained most comfortably not far away by one of Eisenhower's ADCs in a villa at Sidi Bou Said. It was not until eight days later that we were despatched to Cairo, although we had been dispersed the day after we arrived (12th) to Sidi Amor, another airstrip in the vicinity: the York in its standard UK camouflage was all too obvious on the bare ground, should a nosy Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft be searching out the PM's whereabouts.

Gerald Pawle in his book on Churchill's travels 'The War and Colonel Warden' describes the events of the next few days at Eisenhower's villa - 'The Little White House' where the party was put up. Churchill's temperature shot up: Moran sent off to Algiers and Cairo for ace RAMC Specialists and two QA's. The RN Chief Petty Officer Chef in HMS Renown, then at Gibraltar was flown to Tunis to cook for the PM's party, for he had looked after the PM's gastronomic requirements on the journey out. A company of Irish Guards were brought in from Constantine to guard the premises and various anti-aircraft guns arranged for air defence.

20th December 1943. There had been some scare about this time of a German commando raid to seize the PM. A cover plan had been devised in which a VIP villa was rented and ostentatiously guarded by British troops on the outskirts of Cairo at Helwan. As a part of this plan, the York was despatched back to Cairo West with no attempt to conceal its arrival. We were carrying only Lt Colonel Scadding, one of the RAMC doctors who had been sent for by Lord Moran and whose services were no longer needed at the Little White House. The Axis press and radio promptly reported that the PM was indeed in Cairo. The crew had some decoy value in down town Cairo because by now our comings and goings were associated with this unique aircraft.

25th December 1943. We were summoned back to Tunis on Christmas day to find a different scene: the PM very much better. We had flown into Tunis empty, a seven and a half hour day-time flight, arriving in good time so as not to miss our invitation to the Little White House on Christmas evening where Sarah Churchill gave a party for some of the many servicemen and women who had been involved in his stay there. It was a buffet supper-drinks party with all the 'family' and about five Commanders-in-Chief with their retinue. The PM was in sparkling form in his dressing gown and slippers.

On December 26th we had a briefing conference for the flight to Marrakesh where the PM would

convalesce. The Met Officer expected a big cloud build up over the Middle Atlas Mountains, the highest peak of which was in the vicinity of 12,000 feet some way to the south of our expected route. The PM's doctors were not keen that he should fly above 6,000 feet. The Taza Pass through the Atlas Mountains, near Fez, is about 3,000-4,000 feet. We had two choices. To fly westwards down the Mediterranean in and out of cloud over the sea all the way, out into the Atlantic through the Straits of Gibraltar and so south to Marrakesh; or, to fly inland south of the Algerian coastal mountains over the relatively low desert hills, over the Shatt el Hodna and take a chance that the cloud was clear of the Pass and that we could sneak through it though it would obviously be very bumpy. But we were warned that there could be a deterioration in cloud conditions, though meteorological reports en route were sparse.

The Captain 'Dad' Collins opted for the latter route, if **the BOAC Liberator** aircraft, which was to carry some of the entourage would fly ahead of us and radio back the weather conditions they found. The AOC-in-C concurred in this decision, for to fly over the Mediterranean at 6000 feet with all those large convoys sailing hither and thither, the risk of being shot at was too great. The York, a four-engined aircraft strange to the area would be immediately associated with a Luftwaffe Focke Wolf 'Condor' with hostile intentions. The Royal Navy were notoriously trigger happy, not without reason.

In confirming the Captain's choice, which for three quarters of the route would be in clear, dry desert air, Tedder decreed that we would take along with us his PMO, one Air Commodore Kelly, notwithstanding that we had Lord Moran with us at all times. Kelly brought along a portable hospital oxygen kit which was quite unnecessary as the aircraft was fitted with an abnormally large oxygen supply and enough outlets for all the various passenger seats. Kelly was 'in the way', both from the crew's point of view as well as Lord Moran's.

27th December 1943. Airborne at 0815 hours local time with all the family including Mrs Churchill and Sarah Oliver, we settled down to a smooth flight at just under 6,000 feet for the first three and a half hours. Approaching the main Atlas range our own meteorological observations, strengthened by the Liberator's radioed reports, made it clear that the Taza Pass was in cloud. The Liberator had gone through with a bad bumping and perilously near the high ground on either side of track. We were therefore faced with the decision whether to turn north and come out over the Mediterranean near Melilla and thence westwards through the Straits, or to climb for 15 minutes and clear this section of the Middle Atlas range at 11,500 feet. At this point

it is a comparatively narrow hogsback and we knew we could start reducing height almost as soon as we topped the climb.

The aircraft Captain chose the latter course and informed Mr Churchill and the other passengers. I think the PMO nearly passed out with fright at the thought of it. However, the PM said "Don't worry about me, consider the safety of the aircraft first". After 15 minutes slow climb we broke out into glorious sunshine and cruised level at 11,500 feet for about 20 minutes, before gently reducing height via Meknes to Marrakesh, where we landed after a flight of just under six hours.

After an excellent lunch the PM had taken oxygen from the aircraft's system as and when he felt like it "happy playing with his oxygen apparatus" as Lord Moran puts it and drinking his customary brandy and soda. The only panic appears to have been the PMO himself who darted breathlessly up and down the aircraft with questions of all and sundry. Fortunately, we did not have the embarrassment of extraneous medical advisors on later flights. But naturally, it was a great relief to us that the PM was unaffected by the altitude, in spite of his pneumonia. He had been in splendid form, and suffered only from the 'wind', in Sawyer's terms. So we arrived in glorious winter sunshine but knew that this paradise was not for us. We left precisely twenty minutes later, without refuelling, for the one hour flight to Rabat where we were to pick up General Sir 'Jumbo' Maitland Wilson, his Chief of Staff, Brigadier Murphy and his MA Colonel Chapman Walker and take them back to the UK. He too had a personal aircraft - a Dakota given the name of 'Freedom' and flown by Squadron Leader Penfold, but this aircraft with its furnishings, did not have the range and payload to make a non-stop flight to London.

28th December 1943. The use of Rabat was now routine for us. Time for our supper and flight preparation, a good route forecast but with risk of fog in the London area. Our flight plan time was eight hours ten minutes flying at 10,000 feet. In the event, the flight was straightforward and comfortable and we started to reduce height some 150 miles out from Hartland Point gaining a little speed all the time. Landing forecast received made it clear that Northolt was impossible with thick fog so we had no option but to put down at Lyneham whence cars were organised for our VIP passengers. We hung about until midday, getting some breakfast and tidying up the aircraft, before leaving for Northolt when the rain and fog had lifted. So home for the New Year, but with instructions to be ready to return to Marrakesh a week later, with Jumbo Wilson and his staff. We had been away for six weeks and the York had behaved faultlessly with no mechanical hold ups.

We were becoming a good deal more experienced in the running of this airborne yacht and the whims and wishes of its owner.

While the PM was enjoying the sunshine, painting and picnicking in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains the crew enjoyed late Christmas celebrations at home. The RAF Mess at Northolt had saved us some turkey and plum pudding. Obviously there was a certain amount of activity in the York Flight as the engines had to be overhauled, the airframe thoroughly cleaned of desert sand both inside and out, and all the catering accoutrements washed and polished. A fresh supply of clean sheets and towels had to be acquired and, from lessons learned, crockery and glass and utensils exchanged or replaced.

6th January 1944. Off again with the same passengers whom we had brought home a few days earlier, plus Captain Manley Power RN, the Chief Naval Planning Officer on Admiral Cunningham's staff, whose expertise on the availability of landing craft was highly valued by the PM (especially in his drive to mount amphibious operations on the coast of Italy). In addition, we also brought out from the UK. General Sir Bernard Paget to be Jumbo's deputy. On this flight we were lucky with additional navigational assistance. The USAAC operated a regular passenger/flight service between Prestwick and Marrakesh, routed down the Atlantic coast of the Irish Republic. As navigation had never been an American specialisation, to say the least, they had installed a powerful radio-range of distinctive signal characteristics which the stupidest pilot could follow like a sign post, without a trained navigator at both terminals. Of course, in fine weather and in clear moonlight, the snow-capped summit of the Grand Atlas range could be seen miles away. Our flight time of nine hours forty minutes, at a cruising height of 9,600 feet. We landed at Marrakesh an hour after sunrise, on a glorious morning. We ourselves were lucky to be accommodated in the Hotel Mamounia where the PM's staff was also put up - this was a luxury hotel, a former palace, with lovely gardens and Arabic decorative tiles everywhere.

9th January 1944. Two days later we were despatched to Algiers to fetch the Duff Coopers, then the British Diplomatic representative with the Free French in North Africa. We took with us from Marrakesh, Brigadier Fitzroy MacLean, leader of the UK Mission to Tito's partisan forces in Yugoslavia. He had been summoned for talks with the PM, Randolph Churchill (who always seemed to turn up when there was free drinks and food to be had) and Captain Sanderson who were

with Fitzroy MacLean would continue on to Bari, in Italy, and then to be dropped by parachute back into Yugoslavia. One would assume correctly that this was a jovial trip of about four hours to US with no worries about the height of crossing the Atlas range. We climbed to 15,000 feet and flew the direct track, letting down slowly all the way to Algiers and making a fast trip. Notwithstanding the relatively low ranks of our passengers, Jock Duncan offered them a fillet steak and saute potatoes, following cream of vegetable soup: this they polished off with fruit salad and cream, then the statutory cheese and biscuits, and coffee. I think the Owner would have approved; after all, they wouldn't be getting this sort of menu in Yugoslavia. The crew slept on board the aircraft at Maison Blanche as we knew we were to return early the following morning to Marrakesh.

10th January 1943. We were standing by ready for an 11 o'clock take off when it became clear that this would be delayed. First, Lady Diana Duff Cooper arrived at the aircraft with the ADC or Staff Officer, one Major Boggis-Rolfe - said to be connected with 'Security'. Their vehicle, a splendid pre-war Citroen Light 15 had had a minor 'panne en route', the traffic around Algiers naturally being truly French. Then Duff Cooper himself arrived slightly later and it was immediately clear that only champagne would be a suitable medicine to settle their jangled nerves before the flight. This was the only time (in spite of Randolph Churchill) the rule was broken that the aircraft's bar was not opened until after take off. This restorative wasted more time and eventually we took off for the return flight at 11.45 on what today would be a sort of Airborne Orient Express lunchtime flight. It was smooth at 8,000 feet and our records show that roast chicken was the main course followed by a choice of grilled lamb chops or cold ham and salad. Jock Duncan our chef was at his best. A four hour flight enabled the passengers to do justice to the menu and to have a short sleep before landing. They were met on arrival by Mrs Churchill and Sarah Oliver. We retreated to the Hotel Mamounia once more, being warned for departure to Gibraltar and the UK four days later. On 16th January, the day before departure, Sarah gave a large party for the lesser conference supporters and the crew were all included.

14th January 1944. The PM was now really rested up. He had had numerous conferences and had settled the details of the Anzio landings; had entertained de Gaulle and thoroughly enjoyed meeting El Glaoui, the Pasha of Marrakesh who was the most senior tribal chieftain in this French Colony. We left for Gibraltar at 12.45, a lunchtime flight of two and a half hours with the PM, Mrs Churchill, Sarah Oliver, Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Moran and two Thompson. We coasted out over

Casablanca and then into the Straits to Europa Point and so to land at North Front at 1500 hours. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, to be going home - the PM keen to continue home in the York that night, weather permitting. He made it clear that he preferred the comfort of his aircraft to the 'draughty' battleship which he knew was awaiting him.

The VIPs went to the Convent, the Governor's Residence in Gibraltar for dinner whilst Captain 'Dad' Collins and I went to the Meteorological Office and worked out a flight plan for a crossing that night of approximately eight and a half hours to Northolt.

Meanwhile, it was confirmed to us that the battleship King George V was standing off Gibraltar and that the PM was expected to travel home in it, on Cabinet instructions. A wintry sea voyage was said to be good for his convalescence. A little while later, on instructions from the ADC, Collins reported to the Convent and was taken into the PM's bedroom where he was resting. Collins was quizzed on the weather, on take off time, etc, and all seemed set for our departure.

Outside the PM's bedroom in the corridor, C-in-C Med Admiral Sir John Cunningham, and the Governor of Gibraltar, General Mason MacFarlane, told him (Collins) that on no account was the PM to fly home whatever he had said. Lord Moran was against flying and even the AOC had been suborned into saying that the weather was none too favourable. All in all, it transpired that the PM was shanghaied to the battleship and Collins was instructed that on no account was he to attempt to fly empty from North Front that night or indeed start his engines without express instructions. He would be stopped and forcibly restrained if he did. Further more, one of the York's engines was to be covered with a tarpaulin and step-ladders placed alongside the aircraft to simulate unserviceability for the benefit of the duty spy - who would have known by then that Churchill was on the Rock.

Jack Payne our Flight Engineer was deeply hurt - the aircraft had never been unserviceable when it was needed by the Prime Minister. We all felt that we were being bullied by the Navy for whom it would be a loss of face if the Prime Minister returned home by air. We were ordered to remain at Gibraltar, covered up, until the KGV sailed into Plymouth on 17th January, when we were released.

17th/18th January 1944. We took off by night for Northolt empty, on an eight hour flight plan with doubts about landing conditions at home base. We checked in over Hartland Point and continued towards Northolt when we got diversion orders to

Portreath - near Camborne in Cornwall, only to be countermanded (for weather was closing in) and ordered to Chivenor, near Barnstaple. This was a sea level airfield in contrast to Portreath which is on cliff tops. There we landing in miserable weather and low visibility and were parked on a most distant hard-standing, away from all civilisation and laid out right against some unfortunate Devonshire farmer's orchard. Mat a contrast from North Africa and the Mamounia Hotel! Northolt was fogged in, 'solid' in RAF parlance, and we remained at Chivenor, living in the aircraft 48 hours more before we could fly home on the 20th January. We had quickly made friends with this dispossessed farmer by giving him some bananas for the children. Leaning over the farmyard gate, he nonchalantly remarked of the York, "She be a big bugger bain't she" - in his local dialect, "we didn't expect to see the likes of that thar on our orchard!". So, with the end of the Cairo and Teheran conferences came a period of two months slackness, as far as the York was concerned. The co-pilot, the wireless operator and myself returned to 24 Squadron duties, apart from the occasional test flights of our aircraft to make sure that it was in constant readiness for the PM's orders.

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

24 Sqn – Report for Honorary Air Commodore – 2004

ANNUAL REPORTS AND AWARDS 2004 - XXIV SQN CONTRIBUTION

The year 2004 commenced with No XXIV Sqn heavily involved in Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and indeed OP Telic and OP Fingal were to form the mainstay of Sqn life throughout the year. The vast amount of flying in these theatres contributed to the C130J reaching its 50,000 hours milestone in mid 2004. The crews have adapted well to the challenges that these regions brought in terms of extremes of climate, high altitude operations and the associated threats both in the air and on the ground. Throughout the year there have been 6 crews and 4 aircraft based in Basrah with this increasing to 10 crews and 6 aircraft during the roulement periods. There was an in-theatre crew with 1 aircraft in Kabul and a slip crew based in Bucharest to support OP Fingal until September when this was handed over to the C130K.

The Sqn continued to support other major Operations. Op Banner re-supply and troop rotation in N. Ireland was ongoing and Op Oculus in the Balkans continued with Op Mercia integrated when fighting broke out in the region in March. Throughout these various exercises, crews have flown many VIPs including Hammed Karzai and Tony Blair.

Due to AT availability being at a premium, overseas fast jet exercises, and hence the need for C130 support, were greatly reduced limiting the opportunity for crews to experience the ‘nicer’ parts of the globe. Red Arrows support and the deployment of Typhoon to Singapore did provide respite for a number of crews from Gulf operations.

With 5 Tac qualified crews now on the Sqn and new clearances coming through for the aircraft, the number of Tac exercises is increasing for XXIV. Crews were involved in Exercise Combined strength, a multi-national C130J exercise based out of Lyneham. This was a good opportunity for nations operating the J in the tactical role to share tactics and experience. The Sqn was also involved in Exercise Eagle Strike and ACE – Para training in South

Africa. Some special events in which the Sqn was involved included the D-Day Commemorations and the Arnhem Anniversary drop. The Sqn provided the lead crew for the Pathfinder drop and flew the poppy drop over Lichfield for the D-Day commemorations. Ex Market Garden marked the anniversary of Arnhem and the Sqn was also involved in this drop.

Apart from flying, the Sqn also found time to participate in various Expeds including trekking Nepal, diving in Nova Scotia and skiing in France. A Sqn visit was made to Bissegem in Belgium to visit Red Baron’s HQ and airfield that has ties with XXIV. A Sqn crew liberated a Gator vehicle from theatre, which was refurbished and marked in Sqn colours. This was then branded in London at a Ceremony by the Worshipful Order of the Carmen with whom the Sqn is affiliated. The Carmen are among the many who are hosted by the Sqn on visits. During visits the C130J simulator is an excellent resource giving us the opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of the aircraft and allow guests ‘to try their hand’.

XXIV SQN CHARITY ACTIVITIES FOR 2004

BURTON HILL HOUSE

Burton Hill House has been XXIV Sqn’s adopted charity for over 50 years (since 1952). The school is a branch of the Christian Shaftsbury Society and provides for children with severe mental and physical handicaps. The school does not receive sufficient state funding to keep and maintain the costly specialist equipment that the children rely on, and instead depend on support and charitable donations from the community. The support from XXIV Sqn is not only financial, but includes the provision of resources and helpers for events.

Many of the events throughout the year have

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become traditional events in the XXIV Sqn calendar. January 2004 commenced with the children getting a special preview of the Lyneham Station pantomime at the final dress rehearsal. As the school desperately needed a new specially adapted minibus this year, the success of the annual Summer Fete was a major focus for the School. The Sqn, as always, provided and set-up all the tents, tables, chairs and crockery for event as well as running a Tombola stall on the day. With donations of food, drink and cuddly toys from the families quarters at Lyneham, the stall was a great success with £625 being raised. Having approached the Stn Charities committee with the minibus appeal, we were able to secure a donation of £1000 for the school.

Already experts at erecting tents, Sqn members returned the following month to set up for the Principals leaving party, which was also run as a fundraising event. At the Stn families day in August the Sqn ran a 'Du Pain, Du Vin and Du Boursin' stall raising £60 for the school. Moving into the autumn, the children are hosted by the Sqn at the Station fireworks display and are provided with food and drinks. The year then draws to a close with the Sqn organising the Christmas party for the staff and students at the school. The Sqn provides the food for the occasion and Sqn members team up with the children to play party games. During the party, Father Christmas, played by a suitably shaped volunteer, makes an appearance to give the children presents. Plans are already in place for the preview of the Christmas panto in the New Year.

OTHER XXIV SQN CHARITY CONTRIBUTIONS

The Sqn Loadmasters contributed to the Station 'Jamie Mitchell' appeal by running a Quiz night and raised £200 for the cause.

Flt Lt Phil Young completed the Cologne marathon, raising £1000 for the building of a school in Tanzania.

HONOURS AND AWARDS (covered by PSF)

SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS

Between Detachments to the Middle East, many Sqn members have still managed to represent the RAF at various sports.

Flt Lt Nathan Ormshaw – RAF Skiing Team
Flt Lt Donny Walker – RAF Snowboarding Team

Flt Lt Dan Wilkinson – RAF Tennis Team

Flt Lt Mark Brodie – RAF Squash Team

Flt Sgt Hicks – RAF Rugby Team

Flt Lt Rich Tomala – RAF Angling

Many others have been involved in representing the Stn and are involved in the local community.

The Photo Album - Early Aircraft Types



The Avro 504D, only six of which were built, was the RFC version of the 504C but with a comma style rudder. The first 504D was delivered in August 1915.



Bristol Scout – from Simon Batchelor

The Photo Album - 50,000 hours & Christmas Island



The Royal Air Force passed the 50,000 flight hour mark with its fleet of twenty-five C-130J-30s (referred to as C. Mk. IV) and C-130J (C. Mk. V) Super Hercules aircraft during September 2004.

Photo By John Rossino



TG 582 on the ground at Christmas Island July 1956 – from Sgt Navigator Dennis ‘Bluie’ Hobbs

LATE NEWS

SUMMER SOCIAL

1st June @ Bibury Court Hotel, Cotswolds

After last years successful mid year social at Bibury, it was not a difficult decision to rendezvous once again at this lovely Cotswold village and Hotel which is set next to the famous trout stream. Attendance figures were broken yet again with 21 of us looking forward to lunch in the conservatory overlooking the Hotels exclusive grounds.

The weather was for the first time not as fine as it had been on previous years but this made no impression on our party safely preserved under glass. We almost had a passing party of ducks and ramblers join us but for our alert security member who secured the patio doors in the nick of time.

A varied and delicious menu soon had everyone tucking in and catching up on news and gossip since last meeting. The summer social does seem to give the opportunity to those who cannot make the main reunion a chance to meet fellow Association members and the Committee. As ever, the hours rolled by in a flash and it was late afternoon before we said our farewells, with a re affirmation of meeting up again in September 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.



XXIV Association Members after lunch at the Bibury Court Hotel, 1st June 2005
