



Twenty Four

The Magazine of XXIV Squadron Association



Issue 14

92nd Anniversary Edition

Summer 2007

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Editorial



Whilst it has been a quiet year for the Association, it has been ever busy for the Squadron. The Squadron suffered a loss of the material kind, attrition of the first "J" Model. Fortunately without a fatality but it had to be "blown up" by our own demolition experts in Iraq. This event once again brings home the stark facts about the ever present dangers and the repercussions that ripple outwards from these on going world wide campaigns.

We should make up for some of these low points by creating that extra effort to unite together at this years ambitious Reunion event and regenerate some of that flying spirit.

The 91st Anniversary Reunion

The 91st Anniversary Reunion
Sat 7th Oct 2006

meeting up and we were not disappointed.

RAF Lyneham was an agreeable place to be once again for the 91st Anniversary of the Squadron and a chance to meet the meet the new OC XXIV, Wing Commander Don Turnbull and a gallant bunch of able fellow crew members to make the day cruise along without any turbulence.

Don Turnbull gave an excellent presentation on what the Squadron had been up to over the previous 12 months, which as you might imagine was a pretty action packed list to reel off. On the operational side, the Squadron are faced with a huge commitment in Iraq, mainly in Baghdad and other locations. The Iraq government has taken some control over the SW corner of the country in July 2006, which should reduce and on the ground and ease the work load.

Our usual start time of 11:00 proved to be easily achievable for those travelling both near and far. Even the lure of a pre Reunion warm up at the Hilton Hotel the night before had not phased ex-aircrew used to coping with hangovers and pre flight checks. The AGM had a lively feel to it as ambitious plans for the 2007 event were discussed; see your copy or the minutes on the web if you need a refresh. Its always a relief to put aside the admin and crack on with the real reason for

Crews are based in 'luxury' 5 star rubber tents near Basra and although living in up to 48°C temperatures, the excellent catering helps somewhat. A new base with proper air conditioning to give improved rest and sleep is expected to be available soon.

The Squadron are also supporting 16 Brigade in

Afghanistan at Kabul and Kandahar, so it was not a surprise to turn up at Lyneham and see so few aircraft on the dispersal. Operating in Afghanistan involves Weight and Temperature Limit restrictions which are at the extremes of the aircrafts performance envelope. This was illustrated with a video courtesy of HTV showing a night time approach and landing in Kabul using a covert approach technique to minimise damage from hostile fire and involves landing without any lights from the ground or the aircraft until 8 seconds before touchdown. Definitely not for the faint hearted. On a quieter note, we were reminded that operations are on going in the Balkans, Northern Ireland and assisting in relief operations in Pakistan after the earthquakes.

The requirement for training does not go away even when fully operational as new roles for the J model are developed. This includes landing on dirt strips, using night vision equipment and defensive aids to make the aircraft a fully tactical air transport vehicle. The aircraft is now able to swap roles and perform container delivery of stores over the ramp, airborne tactical drops with stand off precision drops something for the future. The bulk of training for new crews is carried out in the simulators, requiring only 3 actual flights before becoming qualified.

You could be led to believe that no time was left for any other duties but you would be wrong. An expedition is planned to go skiing and sailing in the Baltic, walk a WWII aircrew escape route through the Pyrenees in September 2007 and one Squadron member will compete in a race to the North Pole.

Time is also found to support Burton Hill House School near Malmesbury, with £1,000 raised during the year, along with the supplying presents and a Santa for the Christmas Party. The School itself is under threat from closure, more details are included in an article later on in the Newsletter.

The future of the Squadron is well assured with continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the C130J's capability and roles exceeding expectations to support force elements in all theatres. The older C130K is running down in preparation and transition to the A400M around 2010. The closure of RAF Lyneham draws ever nearer, which will mean a change of venue for the Association Reunions as Strike Command elements move to Brize Norton in 2012. The rumour is that the sound of rotary wings will be heard in the area after 2012; we wait and see.

With all this information and news, quite a lot of interest and questions came from the Association members and guests but it did not delay our lunch

and visits to the simulators, tour round the airfield and a closer inspection and guide round a static aircraft. Mike Long did his famous instant raffle and raised around £160 for the Association funds, our thanks for such a boost to funds.

The afternoon soon slipped away before it was once again time to say farewell to those not staying for the Ladies Guest Night. This years dinner seemed a very modest affair in comparison with last years Squadron organized 90th celebrations but no less of an occasion with the Lyneham Mess coming up trumps for food, ambiance and service. With the plans to boost attendance at the 2007 Reunion Dinner, which includes transport to and from a nominated hotel and a band, you had better book early.

IN OMNIA PARATI



A Good Read

No books reviewed or submitted this issue



Flying Machines of 24 – Grumman Goose



It's the turn of the **Grumman Goose** in this issue and as always we would like to hear from any of the members or anyone else who reads this, probably via the web who has experience of this particular aircraft.. The Squadron only flew one serial of those types between Jan 1943 to Jan 1944, namely MV993.

Grumman Goose

The **Grumman G-21 Goose** amphibious flying boat was designed as a ten-seat "commuter" plane for businessmen in the Long Island area. The Goose was Grumman's first monoplane to fly, its first twin-engined aircraft and its first aircraft to enter commercial airline service. During World War II, the Goose became an effective transport for the US military and Coast Guard, as well as serving with many other air forces. During hostilities, the Goose took on an increasing number of combat and training roles. In postwar use, the adaptable little transport continued in use.

Design and development

In 1937, the Grumman Model **G-21** was designed as a light amphibian transport. The typical Grumman rugged construction was matched to an all-metal, high-winged monoplane powered by two 450-horsepower Pratt and Whitney Wasp Jr. nine-cylinder, air-cooled radial engines mounted on the leading edge of high-set wings. The deep fuselage served also as a hull and was equipped with hand-cranked retractable landing gear. The versatile fuselage provided generous interior space and allowed fitting for either a transport or luxury airliner role. Having an amphibious configuration also al-

lowed the G-21 to go just about anywhere.

Operational service

Envisioned as corporate or private "flying yachts" for Manhattan millionaires, initial production models normally carried two-three passengers and had a bar and small toilet installed. As well as being marketed to small air carriers, the G-21 was also promoted as a military transport. In 1938, the US Army Air Force purchased the type as the **OA-9** (later, in the war years, examples bought from civilian owners were designated the **OA-13A**) the US Navy variants were called the **JRF**. The amphibian was soon adopted by the Coast Guard and, during World War II, it also served with the RCAF in transport, reconnaissance, rescue and training roles and for air-sea rescue duties by the RAF. It was while serving with the RAF that it received the name "Goose".

Returning to civilian service after the war, the Goose found use from the wilderness of Alaska to the sunny climes of Catalina.

A total of 345 were built, with about 60 still airworthy today, some of them in modified forms, such as the Turbo-Goose.

General characteristics

- Crew: two
- **Length:** 38 ft 4 in (11.7 m)
- **Wingspan:** 49 ft (14.9 m)
- **Height:** 12 ft (3.7 m)
- **Wing area:** 375 ft² (34.8 m²)

- **Empty weight:** 5,571 lb (2,527 kg)
- **Loaded weight:** 7,200 lb (3,273 kg)
- **Max takeoff weight:** 8,200 lb (3,720 kg)
- **Powerplant:** 2× Pratt & Whitney Wasp Junior SB-2 air-cooled radials, 450 hp (340 kW) each

Performance

- **Maximum speed:** 184 mph (296 km/h)
- **Range:** 1,050 mi (1,690 km)
- **Service ceiling:** 21,000 ft (6,400 m)
- **Rate of climb:** 1,240 ft/min (380 m/min)
- **Wing loading:** 21.9 lb/ft² (106.9 kg/m²)

Power/mass: 0.11 hp/lb (0.18 kW/kg)

Armament

- 2 x .50-cal machine guns
- 2 x 250-lb depth charges

Affectionately nicknamed "Goose," the G-21 was Grumman's first monoplane to fly, its first twin-engined aircraft, and its first aircraft to enter commercial airline service. This remarkably versatile amphibian has served for over fifty years in a variety of roles that have confirmed the strength and durability of its original design.

The inspiration for the G-21 came from a syndicate of ten wealthy New York businessmen and aviators led by Wilton Lloyd-Smith who were seeking a replacement for the Loening Air Yacht they used to commute from their Long Island homes to their offices in Manhattan. In 1936 they approached Grover Loening, who declined but suggested that the syndicate contact the Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation, for which Loening consulted and which he had helped finance. Leroy Grumman accepted and immediately went to work with designer and company cofounder William Schwendler, as well as hydrodynamicist Ralston Stalb to build the new G-21 amphibian air yacht.

The outline of the new design emerged quickly, revealing a stubby yet graceful aircraft. Constructed of 24ST Alclad aluminium, the G-21 was an all-metal, high-winged monoplane powered by two 450-horsepower Pratt and Whitney Wasp Jr. nine-cylinder, air-cooled radial engines mounted on the leading edge of the high-set wings. The deep fuselage served also as a hull and was equipped with hand-cranked retractable landing gear. Inside the cabin was room for four to six passengers and

a flight crew of two. Depending on the level of comfort desired by the individual customer, the G-21 could be fitted with a galley and a lavatory. Floats were suspended beneath each wing and a conventional cruciform tail section installed.

On May 29, 1937, the G-21 completed its first test flight, piloted by Robert L. Hall and Bud Gillies from Grumman's Bethpage, New York, factory. Flight trials went smoothly and after a lengthening of the hull step to improve the aircraft's performance on the water, the aircraft was readied for production. The performance of the G-21 was praiseworthy for its time and rivalled commercial airliners in service. With a cruising speed of 290 kilometres per hour (180 miles per hour), the G-21 possessed a range of 1,300 kilometres (800 miles).

On July 3, just five weeks after its maiden flight, the first of twelve G-21s ordered was delivered to its initial customers, Wilton Lloyd-Smith and department store heir Marshall Field III. Soon other wealthy owners were enjoying the exemplary flight characteristics and handling of the G-21 Goose. Among those customers were financiers Henry H. Morgan and E. Roland Harriman, C. W. Deeds of United Aircraft, Colonel McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*, Boris Sergievsky, test pilot for Sikorsky Aircraft, and Britain's Lord Beaverbrook. In addition, two were purchased by Asiatic Petroleum. Soon these aircraft were modified to G-21A standards with Wasp Jr. SB-2 engines, an increase in certificated gross weight from 7,500 to 8,000 pounds, and a slightly modified hull to reduce water spray.

The popularity of the G-21 spread as its versatility became well-known throughout the aviation community. Soon orders came in to Grumman from airlines, the military, and foreign customers, impressed by the G-21's potential. Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB) was the first airline to purchase the G-21 but did not put it into service. KNILM, the Dutch East Indies subsidiary of KLM, acquired two G-21's and operated them from 1940 until early 1942 when the last one was shot down by the invading Japanese. The coming of World War II prevented the adoption of the Goose on a wider scale by airlines until after the cessation of hostilities.

In 1938, the Royal Canadian Air Force was the first military service to recognize the abilities of the Goose when it ordered one in June of that year, followed soon by orders from the U.S. Army and Navy, as well as the Peruvian Air Force and the Portuguese Navy. During World War II, the Army was the first to order a substantial quantity, operating 26 as OA-9s and OA-13s. The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard operated 169 "Gooses" des-

(Continued from page 4)

ignated as JRFs in utility, transport, and antisubmarine duty. In total, the air forces and navies of eleven nations have flown the Goose. France flew at least fifteen in combat in Indochina where several JRFs were armed with bombs and machine guns. A total of 345 G-21s were produced by October 1945 when production ended.

While most of the G-21s were quickly phased out of military service after World War II, the Goose renewed its career as an airliner in earnest. Uniquely adapted for travel in virtually any environment, the Goose saw widespread service with small airlines in the Caribbean, California, and Alaska. Among those flying the G-21 were Reeve Aleutian Airways, Alaska Coastal Airlines, Chalk's Flying Service, and Mackey Airlines. Antilles Air Boats was particularly noted for flying the Goose around the Caribbean from their base in St. Croix in the Virgin Islands. Avalon Air Transport (later Catalina Airlines) competed for a while with Catalina Seaplanes, connecting southern California with Catalina Island.

The Goose still flies today, in its original form and also modified with turboprop engines for increased performance. For over fifty years the rugged and versatile G-21 has performed its daily tasks providing much needed service carrying passengers and freight throughout the world.

Foot note - a search on the web has MV993 listed as capsizing on 2nd Sep 1945 at Calshot operating for the Met Comms Flt.

Sources:

- 1. Putnams Aircraft of the RAF p367
- 2. Wikipedia
- 3. Smithsonian Museum

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



Memory Banks 1

Operational Aircraft used in the Great War by 24 Squadron.

Simon Batchelor very kindly offered to put together an article on his passion, i.e. the history of XXIV aircraft. So read on for a bit more detail of the trials and tribulations of operating such aircraft in those days.

After working up to operational status over the winter of 1915/1916 the squadron was posted to France.

The initial equipment was the Airco DH2, and 12 of these machines set off on the 7th February 1916 to St. Omer in northern France, only 10 managing the channel crossing. The remainder of the squadron complement proceeding via Southampton, Le Harve, Rouen and Abbeville. On the 10th February the squadron moved into its permanent base at Bertangles, near Amiens, and started operations immediately as the first dedicated Scout or Fighter squadron of the Royal Flying Corps.

Almost 3 years to the day on February 11th 1919 the remains of the squadron returned as a Cadre to London Colney. In that time three major types formed the equipment, the DH2, the DH5 and the SE5A, and the role changed from Fighter to Ground Attack and then back again. 297 enemy aircraft (including observation balloons) were destroyed, 2277no. 25lb bombs were dropped, and 100,572 rounds were fired at ground targets. In addition 360 reconnaissance flights were made, these being noted as such in the History of 24 Squadron published after WWI, and many more patrols were carried out without resulting in contact with the enemy.

The cost of these efforts were 24 pilots were killed in action, 17 were killed in flying accidents, 3 more were listed as missing in late 1918, and 19 wounded. 13 more were taken as prisoners of war, of which 3 were wounded. The high number killed in accidents illustrates the dangerous nature of flying in the early days, as there were many more accidents,

which resulted in injuries if not in fatalities.

The Aircraft

Airco DH2

The prototype of the aeroplane was designed by Geoffrey De Havilland and made its first flight on the 1st June 1915, in appearance it resembled a scaled down DH1A, an earlier type operated as a training craft by 24 Squadron. It was a single seat pusher biplane powered by a variety of Gnome, Le Rhone and Clerget rotary engines, giving a top speed of 93mph. This was relatively high for 1915, and it also had a higher rate of climb, and better manoeuvrability than the enemies Fokker monoplanes. These had been causing very high casualties in the spotter aircraft operated by the RFC, since the "Fokker Scourge" days of 1915.

The DH2 was chosen as the sole initial operational equipment of 24 Squadron, but individual aircraft were allocated to squadrons already operating in France on a trial basis. So they were not the first operators, but they were the first as a wholly equipped unit. Early use in France resulted in 2 deaths caused by failure to recover from a spin. Techniques for recovery were not taught to service pilots during training at that time, and worries developed about the safety of the aircraft. 24 Squadron's commander, Major Lanoe Hawker, demonstrated spin recovery to his pilots and then explained the technique, and losses were much reduced, at least to that cause.

Sadly the Gnome 100hp monosoupape engines had tendency to shear tappet rods, which reduced power or sent metal flying into the airframe. Either result would cause problems, but they also were prone to cylinder loss. In a rotary engine where the whole engine spins around a stationary crankshaft the loss of a cylinder could cause major airframe damage and subsequent loss of life. This problem was never resolved and various other engines were tried to remedy the situation. Another change tried in order to improve performance was the use of a RAF FE2 blade propeller, this gave a marginal improvement. Some new production machines with Clerget engines were fitted with 4 blade propellers as standard.

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The introduction of 24 Squadron and its DH2's, together with later fighter squadrons 29 & 32, much reduced the aerial supremacy established by the German Air Force's Fokker monoplanes during 1915. The "Fokkers" key advantage had lain in its forward facing machine gun armament, which by using interrupter gear fired bullets through the propeller arc. Thus the whole aircraft could be aimed at the opponent, and marksmanship was therefore improved. The British designers had yet to perfect interrupter gear of their own and a simple solution was to have a rear facing pusher engine, so that the bullets did not have pass through the propeller.

Initial flights by 24 squadron had included escort of spotter aircraft and "line" patrols, there were encounters with enemy aircraft but none were shot down. This was attributed to poor gunnery so the squadron had an aircraft shape cut into the chalk subsoil on the airfield at Bertangles for practice purposes. How much use this would be must be debatable but it does show initiative. There were also problems with bracing the Lewis machine gun against recoil, and 24 Squadron introduced a clamp, in spite of official approval of a movable mounting.

The DH2's introduction, together with tactics developed by 24 Squadron helped to wrest air superiority from the Germans during the summer of 1916. They responded by introducing "Flying Circuses" where large numbers of aircraft were concentrated together. The circus moved from base to base so as to meet threats as they appeared, and were able to combat local air superiority.

The German air force introduced the Albatros D1 during September 1916 and this new aircraft had superior performance to the DH2, and it also carried two machine guns ensuring that the De Havilland's period of ascendancy was to come to a rapid end. Nevertheless 24 Squadron had one notable success on the 28th October 1916 when, in a dog fight, C flight's aircraft caused Hptm Oswald Boelcke the famous Ace & commander of Jasta 2 to collide with another aircraft.

Boelcke was succeeded by Manfred von Richthofen, the "Red Baron" who was responsible

for many 24 squadron losses, most notably Major Lanoe Hawker VC. After a running battle between the two on the 23rd November 1916, which lasted 45 minutes, Hawker was shot down. Upon examination of his downed aircraft the only one bullet had struck the DH2, which had hit Major Hawker in the head!

24 Squadron carried on with the DH2 until May 1917, against more and more superior enemy machines, in that time 44 aircraft were destroyed.

Three Aces shot down 5 or more E/A using 24 Squadron DH2's

Capt Alan M Wilkinson

2nd Lt Eric C Pashley

2nd Lt Kelvin Crawford

Trial Aircraft

While researching 24 squadron aircraft over the last few years a number of unusual aircraft have appeared in various records. However I think that I may have solved a small riddle, from information in the 1919 book "A History of 24 Squadron", (reprinted by the Naval and Military Press). The writer notes five "attached" officers from the 18th June 1916, and two of these, 2nd Lt Bayetto and 2nd Lt Prothero, are also in the combat records.

On July 1st 2nd Lt Bayetto forced an enemy aircraft to land whilst flying a **Morane Type N** Bullet monoplane. A photograph showing Morane serial A178 in a line up of DH2s is on the wall in 24 Squadrons current offices, and I had often wondered why it was there.

On July 2nd Lt Prothero caused an enemy aircraft to crash while flying a **Bristol Scout D** serial 5557, I am still looking for a picture of this aircraft, so any help would be gratefully received.

A **Bristol Scout C** serial 5308 was attached to 24 Squadron on the 27th May 1916, this aircraft was later used by 2nd Lt Prothero, to shoot down another EA whilst he was with 4 Squadron.

Another researcher has listed a **Royal Aircraft Factory FE8** with 24 Squadron, a few of these

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single seat pusher engine scouts were sent to operational squadrons for trials in the summer of 1916, so it may be that one was tried. However I have yet to unearth a serial or other reference so this will have to remain a “possible”.

Airco DH5

Whilst 24 Squadron was reaching its first anniversary, the prototype of the DH5 appeared at Hendon. Its roots were in Geoffrey De Havilland’s initial ideas for a fighting scout aircraft, which predated the DH2. Namely a tractor engine aircraft with fixed forward firing armament and the best possible view.

The development of effective interrupter gear enabled these thoughts to crystallise in the DH5, a single bay biplane with 110hp Le Rhone rotary engine, and a single Vickers gun. The most pronounced feature was the back stagger of its upper wing, which was mounted behind the lower wing. This meant the pilot was positioned ahead of the upper wing leading edge, giving an excellent view ahead both above and ahead of the line of flight.

The aircraft’s Vickers gun was mounted off set to port because the chambers had a right hand feed at that time, and this off-setting enabled the largest possible magazine to be installed. Tests of the prototype carried out at home, and in France (possibly by 24 Squadron pilots) resulted in good reports and 400 were ordered on the 15th January 1917.

Early deliveries came some 10 weeks later but introduction into service was delayed. Both vibration problems, and the need to improve the interrupter gear, held things up. Engine bearers were strengthened, as was the cowling, which helped with the vibration. Originally the interrupter gear specified was the Kauper design, a mechanical system. However as insufficient quantities were available the Constantinesco CC hydraulic operated system was fitted. The refining of this system took some time and the

24 Squadrons first DH5 was delivered on May 1st 1917.

Welcome though this new type was, it should be remembered that the same month the Sopwith Camel (the most successful fighter of WWI) entered service, the and next month the SE5 arrived in France with 56 Squadron. So it was already outdated in terms of armament and performance when introduced. The German fighter aircraft were already mounting 2 guns, and the back stagger meant the view rearward was non-existent. In a “Dog Fight” this was a real problem, but added to this, the DH5 was a poor performer at altitude.

Some of 24 Squadron’s achieved success flying their new mounts, on the 25th May Lt S. Cockerell flying A9363 shot down an Albatros DIII, which was following a colleague 2nd Lt H W Woollett . Later 2nd Lt Woollett himself was credited with three victories including two on the 23rd July 1917. A New Zealander, Captain Bernard P G Beanlands, is credited with 6 victories flying the DH 5, by Mick Davis in his book “Airco The Aircraft Manufacturing Company”, published by Crowood in 2001. As such he was the only “ace” who achieved this status flying DH5s with 24 Squadron.

Given the vulnerability of the DH5 in combat, another role was needed, the Ypres Offensive of late summer 1917 brought the planned use of aircraft in a ground attack role. 32 Squadrons DH5s were initially involved from the 31st July in attacking German troop concentrations with their machine guns. 24 Squadron joined in from mid –August, by which time 32 squadron were also using 20lb bombs carried on under fuselage racks. 24 Squadron continued in the ground attack and ground attack support role, flying as escort to the aircraft actually carrying out the attacks. This included action during the German counter attack after the battle of Cambrai, where the British Army had used tanks for the first time. As 1917 was drawing to a close the DH5 operational role was also coming to an end. The SE5a was issued to squadrons flying the DH5 and as described in “A History of 24 Squadron”, on Christmas day 1917 24 Squadron received the “Best of all Christmas pre-

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sents”, a new aeroplane the SE5a.

The Royal Aircraft Factory SE5a

This single bay, tractor engine fighter was designed around the 150hp Hispano Suiza V8 inline engine. This engine, designed by Marc Birkigt, had been first built and tested in Spain in 1915. The French had fitted one to a Spad 7C and this demonstrated that it could be used in fighting aircraft. The designer H P Folland, later the designer for the Gloster Aircraft Co and founder of his own company, had overall design responsibility. The aircraft was ordered with a 150hp engine as the SE5, and some were delivered to operational squadrons. However the development of a 200hp version of the Hispano Suiza led to its installation in an improved version, the definitive SE5a.

A number of squadrons were using the SE5 before 24 squadron including nos.56, 60, 87 92 and 93 squadrons. The first aircraft B8262 a SE5a, delivered to 24 Squadron, only lasted a month before an accident during practice aerobatics killed the pilot 2nd Lt R G M McRae. More aircraft were delivered over the next 2 months, and time was spent practising and generally working up with the new machines.

On the 26th February 1918 the 24 Squadron diarist reports a real red letter day, 7 Fokker triplanes and a Pfalz were brought down, the last being captured and displayed in London later. After this effort Maj.General Trenchard, the RFC chief, visited the Squadron. Eight days later this score was surpassed, when on the 6th March 8 enemy aircraft were destroyed. On the 14th March 24 Squadron pilots Capt. Brown and Lts. Nolan and Richardson carried out a bombing attack on and enemy occupied Airfield Mont d'Origny, believed to be the first bombing attack by SE5a

Later in March the original SE5a models were replaced by, new SE5a model, powered by Wolsesey Viper engines. This engine was a more developed version of the original Hispano Suiza and its better reliability was much appreciated. Between the 30th December 1917 and the 28th March, 24 Squadron moved airfield five times as the front fluctuated back and forth, following the German offensive of early 1918 and the counter attack that followed. These movements meant open air servicing or at best tented hangers through the winter months with the added pressure of an uncertain

war position. Some of the airfields used were used by both the Allies, and the Germans at different times. The 1919 history refers to an Airfield at Cappy, which was occupied on September 8th 1918. This had been one of Manfred von Richthofen's aerodromes, and still had notices, with his signature, warning of the danger posed by the gun butts.

During the German spring advance the squadron had operated in a ground attack role. Attacking columns of troops with bombs and machine gun fire. However the air to air fighting continued, whilst flying the SE5a, 24 Squadron had a further 29 pilots who became "Aces". Two, William Lambert with 18 and Hilbert Blair with 6, were Americans. One Andrew Cowper with 19 was Australian, three were New Zealanders, Conway Farrell 7, George Foster 7, and George Johnson 5. The remainder were British, the highest score coming from Tom Hazell with 23 confirmed victories. These came between the 24th June and the 18th October 1918, when he was promoted and left the squadron. His tally included three shot down on the 8th of August, when he also had an indecisive combat i.e. an unconfirmed victory. He survived the Great War, or at least was still alive when the history of 1919 was published.

The other aces can be found on the website www.theaerodrome.com, so I won't repeat them here. Finally I will salute all of them, together with all the other Officers and Men who served and fought with 24 Squadron in the Great War.

MARCH 8TH, 1945

THE DUKE OF GLOUCETER'S PROCTOR

THE Percival Proctor IV chosen for the use of the Duke of Gloucester and his staff in Australia is a four-seater version of the Proctor used in large numbers by the R.A.F. for wireless training and communications purposes. It is a direct descendant of the Percival Gull and Vega Gull, well known in Australia before the war, and in the hands of Miss, Jean Batten, of, New Zealand, and Mr. H. F. Broadbent, of Australia, these aircraft broke

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the England-Australia or Australia-England record four times.

Dual control is fitted. A compact wireless transmitting and receiving set is stowed under the seat and is operated by the pilot by means of push-button controls on a panel at his side. A complete set of blind flying instruments is installed, and the aircraft is fully equipped for night flying, with landing lamps in the leading edge of each wing, and cabin lights which can be dimmed or brightened as required. Ventilation is provided by an adjustable fresh-air inlet, and sliding windows and sun-blinds can be pulled across the top windows in sunny weather. Variations from standard include the addition of some sound-proofing and extra upholstery, while the two back seats can be replaced by a single large adjustable armchair if required. The engine is the well-known De Havilland Gipsy Queen type of 210 h.p. which, as installed in the Proctor, is fully approved for service under tropical summer conditions.

As previously recorded, the Duke of Gloucester has at his disposal in Australia a flight of three aircraft, of which the Proctor is the smallest. For long journeys over the Commonwealth, the Duke will use the specially equipped (but otherwise standard) Avro York, *Endeavour*, described and illustrated in colour in *Flight*, February 22nd. In between these two extremes, the Governor-General's flight also includes an Avro Anson.

The post-war programme of Percival Aircraft, Limited, will comprise aircraft ranging from small training types up to a light 12- to 14-seater transport, and will include a civil version of the Proctor IV.

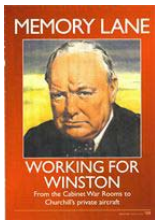


ACCOMMODATION – 2007

A weekend break rate may be available at the **Hilton Hotel (Tel 01793 881777)** which is our nominated get together place on the **Friday 5th Evening off base from 7pm onwards.** Try the Internet or Teletext for a special deal. Over the road is the **Lydiard Travel Inn** offering room only rates at around £40 per day, any day of the week and is the cheaper option for couples or families. They may be contacted on **01793 881490** for more details and bookings. Also nearby and likely to be on the pick up route are the **Holiday Inn Express** and the **IBIS hotel**. The **Wiltshire**, which has the best rates on their website, see **Wiltshire Golf and Country Club**, is on the main **Wootton Bassett to Lyneham road.**

Chippenham Tourist Information Office (01249 706333) will give you details of other accommodation in the area and arrange booking for you. The **IBIS Hotel, Swindon** is on the **Delta Business Park (Tel 01793 514777)**. The **IBIS** is also close to the **Hilton**, so a good place to book up if required.

Memory Banks 2



A tale of two VE DAYS

John L Mitchell flew with Mr and Mrs Churchill on many wartime missions and was in Moscow when hostilities came to an end.

You could say I was lucky, certainly privileged, to be on duty in Moscow over May and June 1945 and so lived through two VE Days, ours and that of the Russians, But perhaps I had better explain what I was doing in the Soviet capital just then, as a Squadron Leader in the RAF on flying duty with a Transport Squadron.

Two years before, in May of 1943, I had been selected for duty in the crew of the Prime Minister's dedicated aircraft. Hitherto, Mr Churchill's earlier long-distance war-time flights, to Moscow and Adana, and to Cairo and Casablanca had been made in an American Liberator aircraft, only partially converted from its bomber role, with no personal comforts whatever. It was flown by a mixed crew of American, British and Canadians, under an American captain and was based in Montreal. This made the planning of tours difficult and getting the aircraft to a state of immediate readiness near London expensive.

At the time I joined this all-RAF crew, a specially-built Avro York aircraft had become available. It was a passenger/freight carrying cousin of the Lancaster bomber. This was fitted out with a private suite for the PM, sleeping arrangements for up to 10 passengers in reasonable comfort, a large saloon-cum-Conference Room, with proper toilets and a Galley. It was captained by an RAF Wing Commander with pre-war experience with Imperial Airways who was then commanding No 24 Squadron and was based at Northolt, situated between London and Chequers, the PM's country home. I was the Navigator.

In June 1941, much to Moscow's surprise, the Nazis invaded Russia. From the moment they became victims of this unprovoked aggression, Mrs Churchill had set to work to raise funds for the Russian Red Cross to relieve the suffering civilians, just as vigorously as her husband was organising military aid,

along with the Americans, for Stalin's armed forces.

Mrs Churchill in Russia

By Christmas 1941, Mrs Churchill had raised £1 million and by 1945 she had sent £7 million to be spent on hospitals and medical supplies for the war victims, particularly the children. In recognition of this work, Mrs Churchill was invited to visit Russia in the spring of 1945 to tour some of the places where the money had been spent. Her travels would take her to Leningrad, Stalingrad, the Caucasus, the Crimea and many places between.

Thus it was that we flew Mrs Churchill and her party to Moscow, via Cairo, arriving there on 2 April. The Avro York aircraft had by this time been replaced by an American Douglas Skymaster (C 54B) aircraft. The Skymaster had a much greater range and interior capacity than the York, so was very suitable for long-range VIP flying.

The Soviet authorities took Mrs Churchill on her travels by train and car; a tour lasting some five weeks, whilst we returned to the UK almost immediately, for the Prime Minister liked to have his aircraft at its Northolt base, ready for his own use. President Roosevelt was gravely ill at this time and a transatlantic trip was in the offing.

Returning to Russia to collect Mrs Churchill on 6 May (the PM did not, in the event, go to his friend's funeral) we were able to spend four days in Moscow before her scheduled departure on 11 May. Little did we know that the German surrender was about to be signed in Rheims, though things were moving that way before we left London.

I recall the main feature of our own VE Day was a request from the British Embassy that we should be present to hear Mr Churchill broadcast the historic announcement that the fighting was at an end in Western Europe. This was followed by a very moving Service of Thanksgiving held in the Residence. It was conducted by an RNVR Padre who was visiting from the British Naval HQ at Murmansk, where our Arctic convoys docked with urgently needed tanks, aircraft and war material of all sorts from the UK and US. The convoys were maintained at enormous cost in ships and seamen, mainly of the Merchant Navy, and were not properly appreciated by the Soviets.

Impassioned appeal

The Service was inter-denominational and I recall that the Dean of Canterbury (The Red Dean) was present in the course of a visit to Russia on his own account. Many members of Allied Missions were present, including M Edouard Herriot, the great French statesman, and his wife who had only recently been released from German captivity. He told us that the last time he had heard Mr Churchill's voice was in the spring of 1940 at Tours, when he had made an impassioned appeal, but in vain, for the French Government

not to surrender to the Nazi forces over-running France, but to continue the struggle from French possessions overseas. M Herriot had wept then in defeat, now he was weeping unashamedly, for joy.

The following day, 9 May, was the Russian VE Day, with spectacular fireworks, for they were not represented at the Rheims ceremony but had to wait 24 hours before Marshal Zhukov, in Berlin, signed the documents ratifying the German surrender.

At the insistence of members of the British Information Services (BIS) of the Embassy (they used to publish a very limited circulation newsletter in English entitled *The British Ally* - its purpose was to promulgate the message that the British had been fighting the Germans since September 1939), some of us were urged to take a walk-about to be seen on the streets of Moscow in RAF uniform. This proved easier said than done for there were vast crowds everywhere, milling about all cheering and happy with relief that the battlefield killing was over. With no warning, at one moment in Red Square, the natural centre of gravity of the city, two of us were seized and hoisted shoulder-high before being literally tossed into the air and safely caught again by strong hands. It was a local gesture, we learned, of approval and goodwill! This occurred after we were identified as 'Equipage Churchill', and not the dreaded Luftwaffe, for we wore similar greyish-blue uniforms, my own being far from new.

Caviar for breakfast

I found this all quite alarming, the flight into the air from the arms of these lusty, cheering folk of both sexes, as well as an incipient agoraphobia - the sheer numbers of people in all directions. The crowds pressed in on us from all sides, keen to see a foreigner and a flyer: There seemed no escape from this mass of friendly humanity. But we eventually made our way to the safety of the edge of the crowd and continued our guided walk-about to one or two incredibly scruffy drinking dives that could not be compared in any way with our idea of a pub. There we had to swallow toasts in low-grade vodka, drunk out of jam jars and cut off bottles; tumblers were unknown amid the appalling privations of war-time Moscow.

We survived this second ordeal and finally reached the calm of our hotel, the Savoy - not then an Intourist establishment but one made comfortable for us in every way. In fact, we were incredibly spoilt, with caviar and smoked salmon even for breakfast (served with vodka, of course), whilst outside the shabby citizenry pressed their envious noses to the windows. It seemed a bit unnecessary to us to be so generous. After all, we were used to war-time rations in the UK but not to their suffering. This was sheer luxury, and a very kind gesture by the Soviet Government.

On Thursday 10 May we were spoilt again, basking in the reflected glory of Mrs Churchill, when we

were given tickets to attend a special gala performance of *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi Theatre, miraculously restored from bomb damage sustained early in the war. The part of Odette/Odile was danced by the Premier Ballerina Semenova and when she took the final curtain she graciously turned the applause towards the former Royal Box (resplendent with the Soviet coat-of-arms) and the whole audience applauded Mrs Churchill, who was escorted by Molotov, the Russian Foreign Minister

Bottle of Scotch

We left for home the following day, flying nonstop to Malta by way of the Crimea, loaded with presents - including a giant portrait of Stalin for Prime Minister Churchill. Included in our freight were some boxes of supplies for the Soviet Embassy in London, which we had been asked to take back. When these reached Northolt, they were loaded along with all the other baggage and taken to 10 Downing Street. Members of the Secretariat were surprised to find these unaccounted boxes and upon opening them, decided in short order to distribute the 'goodies' which they contained around the staff. What a kind gesture, must have thought the staff at No 10 as they dived into tins of caviar and other luxuries. Some hours later, a call from the Soviet Embassy in London enquired if some of their expected freight had been misdelivered. Too late! It had been quickly consumed! There followed abject apologies and compensation in the form of bottles of Scotch, for the consignment was meant for some diplomatic celebration of their own!

We landed in Malta, where the Governor pressed Mrs Churchill to stop over for a rest, but after re-fuelling and time to pick up the weather forecast for the UK, we were off again. She was anxious to get back and we continued overnight to London, reaching our home-base at Northolt at 7am on a fine spring morning. The PM was there to greet his wife, in privacy on board, and welcome her home from such a successful goodwill tour.

As well as her extensive travelling within the Soviet Union, Mrs Churchill had flown over 8,000 miles in four hops - two out and two back. A fine achievement for a not-so-young lady who charmed everyone she met.

Air Commodore J L Mitchell RAF (retd) is a csma member who lives at Lymington Hants. This article is from the csma magazine.

Betty Archbell has sent us a collection of press cuttings and pictures circa 1945 of XXIV on VIP duties with the Queen Mother's first flight and of Jack (not Jock) Hannah helping her off the aircraft and meeting up again 40 years on. We also have a cutting about the Duke of Gloucester's Percival Proctor, listed as one of the aircraft types flown by XXIV.

Recalling the days of the elite pathfinders

Forty years on Jack Hannah meets up again with the Queen Mother



CREATING A PRECEDENT: When Her Majesty the Queen flew with the King from Jersey to Guernsey during the recent royal visit to the Channel Islands, it was the first occasion on which a Queen of England has flown.

This was a XXIV Squadron Dakota 386 at Hendon on 7th June 1945 and the Queen had an escort of Mustangs.



THE YEAR is 1945... and the young RAF radio operator is on hand to help Queen leave the plane.

WHEN JACK HANNAH, the Northern circulation manager for TNL, met the Queen Mother last month at the annual dinner of the RAF Pathfinders Association they recalled their first meeting — when the Queen Mother, who was then the Queen, made her first-ever flight in a plane and Mr Hannah was a member of the crew.

Mr Hannah said: "Her memory of that flight 40 years ago was exceptionally clear. I was a member of 24 Squadron which was based at Hendon and our job was to fly VIPs to conferences and events at home and abroad.

"The King and Queen went by sea to Jersey and we flew them on to Guernsey and then back to England. It was shortly after the Channel Islands had been liberated.

"We knew it was the Queen's first flight, but she showed no signs of nervousness and both she and the King came up to the front of the plane and chatted away to us."

Mr Hannah has since kept the pictures we reproduce here of him standing by the steps of the plane to help the Royal couple disembark once they had landed back in the UK after a later flight took the King, Queen and Princess Elizabeth to Long Kesh in Northern Ireland — the only time the three have flown together.

Mr Hannah was among the 120 former members of the elite Pathfinder force who gathered at RAF Wyton near Huntingdon for the annual reunion dinner which was presided over by the most famous Pathfinder of all — Don Bennet is now the patron of the Association.

Mr Hannah, who was a radio operator in the war and finished up with the rank of Flight Lieutenant, joined one of the first of the Pathfinder squadrons. They had one of the most dangerous jobs of all RAF Squadrons — going in first and marking the targets for the main force.

He was with 97 Squadron and he stayed with them from March, 1943, until October of that year by which time he had completed the full 45 operational missions.

Few survivors

"The usual routine," he said, "was for a crew to do 30 missions and then have a long break before going back and completing the final 15. In our case we did the 30 missions, and then had just a three-week leave and went straight back to complete the final 15."

Very few completed the full tour of operations and, in fact, Mr Hannah's crew had their narrowest escape on the last mission.

He recalled: "It was on October 22 1943. We were visual marking, laying down yellow as the priority target. It was a cloudy night and we had had to drop about 12,000 ft. I was in the astrodome maintaining a lookout and everything was coming up at us — dustbin lids, tracers, shells, searchlights. You name it. Suddenly it went quiet and we found a German fighter was on our tail.

The next thing we knew was a Mosquito roared across the top of us. He had seen we were in trouble and came to our assistance. "When we arrived back at base we discovered how narrow an escape we had had — the whole of the tail plane of our Lancaster bomber had been shot away." They had survived — and Mr Hannah admits they had quite a party in the mess afterwards.

"We had had a sweep beforehand," he said, "to see who would be the first crew to complete the 45 operations. We won, but quite a few crews went missing on their 42nd or 43rd missions.

"We didn't change our crew once throughout and we all kept in touch afterwards. Our pilot was Doug Jones, who unfortunately died a couple of years ago. In fact, out of the seven members of that crew there are now only two left — myself and the engineer.

Close knit

"We were a very close knit group. We never allowed our feelings to show to each other however nervous or frightened we may have been."

Mr Hannah took part in humbug raids all over Europe, including the big ones on Berlin, Hamburg and the Ruhr — which the crews christened 'Happy Valley' because of the large amount of flak they encountered there.

He went on: "Whenever we came away from Berlin I will always remember our tail gunner. There was so much flak with the tracers, and shells, plus our own flares and bombs being dropped together with the searchlights flicking at us.

"As we left our tail gunner used to say: 'It is with genuine regret we say farewell to this panorama of Oriental splendour'."

Some of the most famous names in the RAF were members of the Pathfinders Squadron at one time or another.

Two of the pilots who went on the famous Dam-busters Raid — McCarthy and Munro — were

among them and flew with 97 Squadron when Mr Hannah was a member.

Mr Hannah was awarded the DFC for his tour of operations. In fact, all members of his crew were decorated in one way or another.

He said: "When I went to the reunion dinner I have never seen so many hank ribbons and medals. My DFC was veiled down the list."

Superstition

He said that although nobody showed their real feelings each member of the crew of his Lancaster had his own superstition. "I don't think I washed my white jersey once," he said.

Having completed his 45 operational trips Mr Hannah applied to join his brother, who was also a radio operator and stationed at Hendon.

He was successful and joined 24 Squadron at Hendon. Over the next couple of years he was on aircraft that transported VIPs all over the world — he went to conferences at Yalta, Moscow and later, when the war was over, he was on the regular run to Nuremburg taking British prosecutors to and from the Nuremburg trials.

"We had the opportunity of sitting in on many of the sessions of the trials," he said, "and watching the top Nazis in the dock."

He is very proud of the DFC awarded to him in the war but says he regards it more as a decoration for all his friends who did not make it.

"A lot of them were shot down before they finished their tour of operations," he said.

Mr Hannah has been with THE SUNDAY TIMES for 33 years. He began as a representative in Scotland and moved to Manchester in 1962.

More recently he has been the Northern circulation manager for both papers.

He also devotes a lot of his time to voluntary work, and for the past 14 years has served on the committee of the Old Ben's Southport Centre — an old people's home for former members of the distribution and retail trade.



THE YEAR is 1985... and Jack Hannah, now TNL's northern circulation manager meets the Queen Mother at the Pathfinders reunion at RAF Wyton.

Keeping in Touch

RECENT LOSSES

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

Group Captain Mike Watkins OBE was a pilot and Flight Commander Exec on the Squadron at Lyneham from 1974 to 1975. Mike was a keen and enthusiastic Association member and will be sadly missed.

Group Captain Mike Hardy was a former OC of XXIV who flew Hercules between 1972 to 1974 while the Squadron was stationed at Lyneham. After flying for Cathay Pacific, Mike retired to Hamble and the Association was represented at his funeral in February 2007.

Dennis “Timber” Wood flew on Yorks, Lancastrians and Dakotas as an Air Signaller with the Squadron at Bassingbourn, Waterbeach and Oakington between 1947 till 1950 before eventually retiring to Scotland

Dave Croker had many happy memories of XXIV when he worked on Hastings aircraft as an Engine Mechanic at Colerne between 1957 till 1959.

retired in West Sussex

- **Tim Wells**, ex pilot on Hercules at Lyneham at various times between 1975 to 2005 and now Captain on civil airlines.

NEW MEMBERS

A total of 3 new recruits have swelled the ranks and they are:-

- **Geraint Swann-Price**, Honorary Member and brother of Rick Swann-Price, the co-pilot of XV216, lost at Pisa
- **Robin Cane**, ex pilot on Hastings at Colerne between 1966 to 1968 and now

24 Squadron visit to Pisa Italy to Commemorate the 35th Anniversary of the loss of C-130K XV 216 on 9 November 1971

On 9 November 1971, 24 Squadron suffered a tragic loss when a crew captained by Fit Lt Colin Harrison were lost when their aircraft crashed into the sea off Pisa in Italy with 46 Italian paratroopers on board. They were on detachment at Pisa and had just taken off as number 6 in a formation of 9 aircraft. It was early in the morning and there was un-forecast low cloud over the sea. Shortly after Number 6 failed to check in on the radio the second element lead reported an orange fireball on the sea. The 3rd element stayed on the ground, whilst the rest of the stream returned to base.

The crew members were:

Captain: Flight Lieutenant Colin Harrison

Co-pilot: Flying Officer Rick Swann-Price
 Navigator: Flying Officer Mike Fawcett
 Air Engineer: Flight Sergeant Brian King
 ALM: Sergeant Paul Fulford
 PJI: Sergeant Ralph Lee

To honour this year's 35th Memorial of the crash, a delegation from 24 Squadron led by OC 24, Wg Cdr Don Turnbull, travelled to Pisa to participate in the memorial service. Also in attendance were Gp Capt Richard Bates, who was OC 24 Squadron at the time of the accident in 1971, and relatives of the crew members. They were particularly pleased to see that the Squadron still commemorates this event. In addition, a C-130J from 24 Squadron flew into Pisa for the weekend as part of the Conversion Flight line training, which meant there was a further 10 personnel to pay their respects to the fallen airmen.

The day started with a Church ceremony in the 187th Folgore Parachute Regiments' Barracks with readings from the Colonel of the 187th, Colonel Aldo Mezzalana, followed by a reading from Wg Cdr Mark Attrill representing the British Embassy in Rome. The church was full of family members of the fallen paratroopers and crews, as well as many paratroopers who were onboard the other aircraft in the formation on 9 November 1971. After the service we were transported to the Official memorial on a hill overlooking the coast where the aircraft crashed. Here, even more people turned out to watch the laying of the wreaths by OC 24 Squadron, Gp Capt Bates, Wg Cdr Attrill and the 187th Folgore. A few words were spoken to the large crowd, many of whom had stood outside the church in the rain to be near to the service, to tell of the loss of life on that day, and to remind everyone that the dead shall not be forgotten.

The final visit was to the cemetery where the paratroopers are buried and where a large marble Memorial to commemorates those that died in the crash had been erected. During these speeches, the Italian Colonel gave a roll call of the fallen, which was answered by a chorus of 'presente' by all the 187th members. This was a particularly poignant tribute as the names of the 24 Squadron crew were included as if they were one of their own. After the ceremony, many of the paras that were on that sortie wanted to talk to us and thank us for coming to their memorial. They were very genuine people and were pleased that we had made the effort to visit the memorial service. We later returned to the barracks to pick up our cars and retire for the day only to find that a large lunch had been prepared in true Italian style, with many courses and plenty of wine and pasta. The Italians were truly fantastic hosts and they could not have done any more for us. Many of the family members who were accompanying us were moved by how well we

were hosted and how delicately the Italians



supported the families of the fallen crew.

By Sqn Ldr Rich Waller - Lyneham Globe Spring 2007

24 Squadron say a 'fair dinkum' farewell to 'Crooksie' 12 Dec 06

Flight Lieutenant Michael 'Crooksie' Crooks from the Royal Australian Air Force put up with a fair amount of light hearted banter about his antipodean origins during his two year exchange tour at RAF Lyneham. But his work with the Hercules flying 24 Squadron, proved to be invaluable and earned him an enormous amount of respect and popularity too.

He was made to attend an Exchange Officers Conversion Course and "learn to speak the Queen's English" before he was let loose on low level tactical flights in Hercules planes. But once 'Crooksie' had mastered the differences between the Australian and UK RAFs, his experience in tactical flying came into its own.

'Crooksie' was a Tactical Air Transport (Tac AT) instructor in the Royal Australian Air force (RAAF). When he joined 24 Squadron in September 2004 the Squadron were just starting to explore the Tac AT environment and it soon became apparent that 'Crooksie' would have a lot to offer the C130J Hercules fleet flown by the Squadron.

Tactical Air Transport basically means flying in more difficult than usual situations, with an emphasis on low level flying. The Hercules planes may need to be flown at night, land on unprepared air strips, carry out air-drops in humanitarian aid situations where there are no-air strips, and carry

out aerial delivery of equipment and troops to theatres.

'Crooksie' took to the Squadron's Tac AT environment like an Australian Olympic swimmer takes to the podium and was soon passing on words of wisdom to UK Tac instructors. And within five weeks he was in Afghanistan as the captain of 24 Squadron's Tac crew. He spent over two months there but, being a typical Aussie, he needed some time off! Well, a week's paternity leave to be with his wife Sonia during the birth of their daughter Emily.

"Any trepidation we may have had with respect to being the only Australian exchange aircrew on the camp was soon dispelled as we were made to feel extremely welcome from the outset."

Flight Lieutenant Michael 'Crooksie' Crooks, Royal Australian Air Force

During his short time at RAF Lyneham 'Crooksie' proved to be a well liked, hard working individual who in addition to spending two months in Iraq and two and a half months in Afghanistan, took part in various exercises with the French Air Force. They had even more trouble understanding him!

One of his biggest contributions to the C130J Hercules Wing was the Tactical simulator trips that he introduced, providing many realistic operational type missions to train and test our crews. Flight Lieutenant Crooks said of his stay at Lyneham:

"Any trepidation we may have had with respect to being the only Australian exchange aircrew on the camp was soon dispelled as we were made to feel extremely welcome from the outset. Once we were settled in the Officers' Married Quarter and on completion of the exchange pilot's conversion course I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity of a low level course. This has given me plenty of time to get used to your quaint weather around the UK low flying system."

RAF Lyneham are clearly sorry to see him go, saying that he has been somewhat of a British talisman since his arrival (the Australians lost the Ashes and the majority of their rugby games), and he's taken quite a bit of stick. They are just sorry that he'll be back home by the time this Ashes test will have finished?!

"I have thoroughly enjoyed flying with the RAF," 'Crooksie' continued. "It has been a busy period over the last two and half years and I am both glad and proud to have been part of a strong unit throughout this period. We have made the most of this fantastic opportunity given to us and the birth of both of my children, Emily and Hayden,

amalgamated with the wonderful experiences gained from serving with the RAF, in particular 24 Squadron, have given us many wonderful memories to take back to Australia. We would like to express our gratitude to 24 Squadron for all their help over the last two-and-a-half years and there will always be a welcome for any of them to come and watch the rest of the Ashes at my place!!"

Flight Lieutenant Crooks was presented with his Iraq and Afghanistan General Service Medal in the Officers' Mess before he went back down under. Both of these were earned while serving with the RAF on 24 Squadron.

All on 24 Squadron would like to pass on their



sincere thanks and gratitude to both Michael and Sonia for all their help during their time here and would like to emphasize that there'll always be a welcome for them on 24 Squadron.

Wing Commander Turnbull, Officer Commanding 24 Squadron, (left) celebrating with Flight Lieutenant Crooks [Picture: Richard Ellis]

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.



A letter from Peter Donovan who has been doing research on the history of the former Royal Flying Corps aerodrome at Hounslow Heath sent in a potted history which is quite illuminating about those very early days.

24 Squadron Formed Hounslow, 1 September, 1915, then 7th February, 1916 to St. Omer

The squadron was formed with a cadre of 17 Squadron personnel. One officer, Captain A. G. Moore, MC, four NCO's and eighty men. The squadron was required to train men for service on the Western Front. Prior to their own departure, they provided men for the establishment of 27 Squadron. 24 Squadron also trained instructors for night flying instruction, using Avro 504 aeroplanes. When qualified these instructors would then instruct pilots to operate anti-Zeppelin patrols in the Defence of London. 24 Squadron also had a responsibility for the night flying at Hainault Farm, Sutton's Farm, and Wimbledon. Captain Moore was replaced as Squadron Commander at the end of September, 1915, by Major Lanoe Hawker. He had no flight commanders and of the six machines on charge to the squadron, just one was serviceable.

A mixture of aeroplane types had been used by the Squadron, until the 10th January, 1916, when the De Havilland DH2 arrived. At the end of January, the Squadron was fully equipped with the DH2. Avro 504A. B.E.2c. Bleriot XI. Bristol Scout. Caudron GUI. Curtiss JN4. Maurice Farman S. 11 Shorthorn. Maurice Farman S.7 Longhorn. Maurice Farman. Martinsyde SI. Vickers Gunbus. Airco DH.2 Curtiss JN/3 Caudron G.III. Avro 504. BE2c Bleriot XI Bristol Scout Longhorn Shorthorn Vickers FB5 DH2



John Care who lives near Northampton sent us a few photos of when he was stationed at Bassingbourn in 1948. As he mentions, film was in

short supply and he was lucky to have a camera at all.



Greetings to you all at 24 Squadron,

You may remember that I contacted you last October with reference to an unusual badge on a photograph of a Hastings aircraft. At the time I told you that I was having a model of the aircraft made and promised you a photo of it when complete. The model arrived last Saturday and I have attached a photo to give you some idea of how realistic it is. If you would like more detailed pictures, please let me know and I will do my best, (bearing in mind that I am not a photographer!). If you let me have a postal address, I will put them on a CDROM.

The aircraft selected for the model is a Hastings C Mk2 from 36 Squadron with the registration WJ334. Although I am told that the aircraft at RAF Colerne were not designated to particular

Mailbox ✉

Your Letters

squadrons, photographs show that they did bear the squadron numbers in a small diamond on the tail and also in badge form on each side of the cockpit.

I selected WJ334 purely because it was identified as having completed its flying time before being scrapped and, hence was not the subject of any known accident or other incident. It would have been terrible to model an airframe that was later revealed to have been involved in a tragic accident. The wingspan of the model is approx. 18 inches, (46 cm) and it is constructed from wood. The quality is first class and the price a very reasonable £89.99 including p&p.

Manufacturing time is around 13 weeks. If you or any of your contacts are interested in this model, or one of any other aircraft type, you can contact the model making company direct. The address is: Nice Airplanes Ltd. PO Box 8256, Melton Mowbray, Leics. LE13 9AP.

The man to contact is Martin Weir via e-mail on niceairplanes@hotmail.co.uk Martin tells me that they will make both military and civil aircraft models with the customer's selected livery and are holding that price for the time being. So, if anyone wants a Hastings model with a different registration number or squadron, it would not be a problem. I hope you find this of interest.

Best wishes

Peter de Frere
Thornbury, near Bristol.



Dear Sir,

As an ex-Squadron member in 1949/50, I have just been reading the official Squadron history in both your web pages and that of Lyneham and I find that both contain the same error. Perhaps you will permit me to explain.

Wg Cdr Pat Lombard was the CO when I joined its Dakota flight as a navigator on 1 Feb 49. It was then, of course, No 24(C) Squadron based at Bassingbourn with crews from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa on exchange. (The Canadians did not fully participate but had a crew and aircraft based there for the use of their High Commission staff) Pat Lombard left for Hong Kong around the end of 1949 (He signed my log book for December) and was replaced by Charles Read (popularly known as cunim) who signed up my January 1950 summary. The point I wish to make is that he was a member of the Royal Australian Air Force, not the RAF, and in fact later became its head. Thus it was he and not Major Robbs of the South African Air Force who became the first non-RAF Squadron Commander. Furthermore both versions of the history list Wg Cdr C F Read among Squadron Commanders without adding RAAF to his name.

After serving on the Squadron under Charles Read, I then went to Australia on an exchange posting to find myself on the same Squadron as those Australians who had been with me at Bassingbourn!!

I should be grateful if you could also pass this information to the Squadron's current historian as I do not know how to get in touch with him.

Yours sincerely

Basil Lofthouse (Wg Cdr Ret'd)



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Your Letters

From Wiltshire Gazette and Herald 9 Nov 2006

School closure shocks town

SUPPORTERS of Burton Hill School in Malmesbury have spoken of their shock at news of its closure. Carnival committee chairman and town councillor John Lawton has been one of many supporters of the school.

He said: "My worry will be that the children have not got somewhere better to go. "If mainstream education can support their needs then great, but my fear is a specialist unit is there because specialist needs are hard to care for in mainstream education.

"As a valued community facility, it will be much missed. "It will be a shame to see it go, because it's such a long-standing feature of the community."

Town clerk Phil Rice has volunteered at the school's summer fete for the last 15 years. He said: "I think it's really very sad and I feel for every-body concerned, because it's more than a school, it's a way of life, and I'm particularly sad for the children."

Town councillor Ray Sanderson said he was devastated.

"I think it's just terrible," he said. "I knew their building needed modernising, but I was under the impression they were either going to build a new school on the same site, or share with the hospital."

Centred around a Victorian country house, the narrow corridors and shared bedrooms have made it a less-than-ideal site for such a school.

The school relies heavily on funding and donations from local groups and individuals.

Burton Hill constantly requires money to support its students.

The money goes towards a range of items, such as touch screen computers and speech machines.

The school has been consistently supported by people in the town since it opened and is one of the carnival's main beneficiaries.

Funds from this year's event will be distributed at next week's AGM, with Burton Hill again expected to receive a substantial sum.

Last month, a concert featuring the Thamesdown Ladies Choir and the Swindon Pegasus Brass Band was held in aid of the school at Malmesbury Abbey.

A sporting dinner, featuring football legend Mike Summerbee, is being held in the town hall tonight.

Principal Harry Dicks will inform those attending of the closure, but the school still requires funding to operate next year.



Fact file

- BURTON Hill School will have been a part of Malmesbury's history for 50 years when it closes next summer.
- The Shaftesbury Society, which runs the school, purchased the site, opposite the town's hospital, for £11,000 in the 1940s.
- Their school, which was originally for up to 50 handicapped girls, opened on May 1, 1947, and became co-educational in 1961.
- Its first major purchase came in 1964, when a hydrotherapy pool was built for £10,500.
- The swimming pool is still a major part of its facilities today.
- The school can cater for up to 41 pupils with severe mental and physical disabilities.
- Many of the students live in residential accommodation on the site, giving them 24-hour care.
- Most are reliant on electric wheelchairs or able-bodied support for mobility. The school employs about 100 members of staff, although a number of these are supply teachers, or come from agencies.
- It employs a range of physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, a music therapist and occupational therapist. The school carried out a review at the start of the year into upgrading its dilapidated buildings.
- The Shaftesbury Society, a Christian charity that operates two schools and two colleges nation wide, employs a number of fundraising workers.

By Gordon Simpson

Mailbox ✉ Your Letters

FRIENDS FROM RAF SADDENED AT LOSS

SERVICE personnel from RAF Lyneham have presented Burton Hill School with a donation of nearly £3,000.

Deputy principal Alice Langtree received one cheque for £2,200, raised by Sgt Ozzy Hicks, who completed October's Great North Run.

A second, for £730, was also handed over. That money was raised at Lyneham's fundraising activities staged at the school's summer fete in June.

Previous donations from the squadron have bought two touch-screen monitors for students.

Volunteers also provided refreshments and entertainment at the school's Christmas party last year, with Sgt Hicks replacing his flying suit with a Santa costume. During April and June, members of the squadron refurbished the school's 70-metre sensory path through the grounds.

Wing Commander Don Turnbull said: "Our support to Burton Hill is a very worthwhile cause and we are honoured to be involved in supporting them. We are very sad to hear of the imminent closure and will continue our services to them."

Fundraising coordinator Sarah Davis thanked the



GIVING: 24 Squadron from RAF Lyneham present cheques to Burton Hill School.

Diary of a Navigator Pt 10

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

VIP'S AND OTHER STRANGE PASSENGERS

4th April 1944. We were alerted to leave the UK at night for a non-stop flight in 'Ascalon' to Algiers to bring back General Sir Harold Alexander to the UK for urgent consultations. The January landings at Anzio had not been exploited by the US General Mark Clark with the speed and initiative that the PM had hoped. Thereafter, German resistance had built up rapidly. It was to be a long hard slog for the Allied Forces up the peninsular of Italy. Meanwhile, planning for D-Day was going ahead rapidly and the whole future of operations in the Mediterranean was under discussion both in London and Washington. We took off empty, under Squadron Leader Bill Fraser's command this time and with a new co-pilot from No 24 Squadron (Flight Lieutenant Stokes). We had no passengers but a load of half a ton of diplomatic bags and Service mail. At 10,000 feet all the way we had the stars for astro-navigation until dawn in the vicinity of Alboran Isle. Thereafter, it was literally down hill all the way for the last couple of hours to land at Maison Blanche with the sun well up.

On flights such as these with uninterrupted 'access' to the stars in reasonable comfort (that is, without being encumbered by an oxygen mask) gave me a great feeling of navigational satisfaction - almost a thrill which never diminished, for no one can 'jam' the heavens. Jock Gallacher, (our wireless operator) could sometimes give me enormous help. Radio silence was compulsory except in dire emergency, and for certain ordained communications with Area Control Authorities on nearing destination, for identification and to pass on estimated time of arrival. Ground radio beacons, mainly for shipping and sometimes, certain German beacons (given to us at

briefing, from intelligence sources) did exist which enabled us (that is, Jock) to operate passively and thereby extract relative bearings from these beacons with our own on-board D/F equipment. Jock had come to our crew from Coastal Command with wide trans-oceanic experience and was indeed an ace operator.

6th April 1944. We stayed the night at Algiers and left the following morning with our passengers for the short two and a half hour flight to Gibraltar, getting there in time for lunch on the ground. In addition to 'Alex' they were Brigadier Airey (his Chief of Staff), Lieutenant Colonel Beckett and his ADC Captain Clarke - a short passenger list, so that everyone was comfortable - not least the chef and steward whose duties were obviously less onerous than when we had the 'Owner' on board.

8th April 1944. We had stopped in Gibraltar two nights where our VIP passengers had business and then left for the UK shortly before midnight GMT for the short run home of seven hours.

18th April 1944. Nine days later we took General Alexander back to Algiers, accompanied by Mr Duncan Sandys, plus the Staff Officers. Bill Fraser was in charge once again but with another change of co-pilot, this time a new man Flight Lieutenant Stephen Cliff - newly arrived from the Ferry Pool in Dorval, Montreal. Leaving at 2300 hours local time, we felt the run to Algiers was becoming almost a habit - the Night Sleeper Service to Algiers - 10 hours non-stop, although on this occasion it was only nine and a half hours.

We were under orders to fetch Field Marshal Smuts from Cairo and to bring him to the UK for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. So after a night on the ground at Maison Blanche, sleeping in the aircraft I seem to remember, and, no doubt, enjoying VIP rations for supper, we left early on the 20th April for the eight and a half hour flight to Cairo West, carrying Service mail and diplomatic bags only. For such flights as these, without the Prime Minister and flying only what one might call ordinary VIPs, 'Dad' Collins would hand over the command of the York to Bill Fraser. Collins was later to be posted

away from 24 Squadron on his expiry of his tour of command in August 1944.

We reached Cairo West before dark and went off to a hotel down town for five days; dare I call it 'leave'? We were forewarned for a take off on 26th April to return to the UK via Algiers and Gibraltar.

Having flown the Field Marshal before (in October 1943) we could look forward to a passenger of gentlemanly, predictable ways - one always appreciative of the service he got in 'Ascalon'. This is not to say that other VIP passengers were ungentlemanly - indeed, no one could be more gentlemanly than General Alexander, but perhaps Janny Smuts had that common touch. It was on our return to Northolt from this particular flight that our VIP having been 'greeted' at Northolt by the appropriate dignitaries and then despatched in his car to central London, returned to the tarmac 10 minutes later - remembering that he had forgotten to thank the pilot, Bill Fraser, personally! Few would take the trouble to do this. Our passengers on this occasion, in addition to the Field Marshal, were Sir Godfrey Huggins, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia and their respective staffs totalling five, including 'Young Janny' his father's ADC and now a major.

26th April 1944. This time we did have a minor technical problem which delayed us three hours. We had taken off from Cairo at 0830 hours local time with a good Met forecast and a light tail wind to begin with, for the daylight flight to Algiers and had just climbed to our normal cruising altitude of 10,000 feet when the port inner engine indicated an excessive oil temperature. Whilst all other indications suggested that this engine was functioning normally, the Captain decided to throttle back this engine temporarily and see if its temperature would settle down; but it did not and we had no option but to feather it and return to Cairo West to diagnose the trouble on the ground. We were but 15 minutes away and came back reluctantly, jettisoning fuel over the desert to reduce our landing weight to permitted limits. For about an hour the engine was too hot to touch, but Jack Payne, our Engineer, had a pretty shrewd idea that it was only the oil temperature gauge transmitter unit that was sticking. Once the 'machinery' was cool enough to be

handled Jack quickly changed the offending item and we were off again at 1130 hours local, our VIP accepting the delay with his customary equanimity.

This time we had no hitches - though of course, the ground temperature on take off was much higher. We preferred early morning take offs (or late at night) for liquid-cooled engines, such as the Merlins, become extremely hot whilst ground running or when taxiing for long periods in the heat of the Middle East. We therefore climbed slowly: the outside air temperature even at 5,000 feet was still +25 C. As we flew West across the desert towards the Gulf of Sirte and over the coast of Tripolitania, the air temperature decreased and we inevitably began to lose our tail wind component as we met the cooler airstream from the Western Mediterranean. It was a nine hour flight to Algiers with no further incident. We remained overnight with the intention of leaving Maison Blanche the following afternoon for Gibraltar. We were then to continue by night to the UK along our usual routes.

27th April 1944. Algiers to Gibraltar, a short flight of two and a half hours with our passengers for the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London, still taking precautions to avoid overflying shipping convoys in the Mediterranean, even though the York had now been in service for just a year.

27th/28th April 1944. An uneventful flight in good 'astro' weather and with a lower headwind component forecast we made it in eight hours exactly. Standing operating procedures ordained that we broke W/T silence for identification purposes approximately one hour out from Northolt as we flew on the ENE course up the Bristol Channel towards Hartland Point. The control authority, located at Gloucester, would be given our ETA for Northolt and would acknowledge, confirming our position by D/F bearings, thus providing the UK radar screen with positive identification. We knew we were sufficiently secure from marauding German night fighters, but one had no wish to be shot down by our own Spitfires as a dawn raider.

At Northolt the Polish Spitfire Wing had disappeared

to be relocated on advanced airstrips nearer the Channel Coast. In their place, No 34 Wing of the 2nd TAP had moved in to be our neighbours, but as they were a mobile outfit they were living mainly in tented accommodation around the south and west perimeter of the aerodrome. This Wing consisted of three PR Squadrons, one of Spitfires and one of Mosquitoes, for short and long range daylight reconnaissance respectively, and one of Wellingtons for night photography. Clearly, the invasion of the Continent was getting nearer. In the York Flight we had first news from No 10 that the Skymaster was now a certainty. It was expected to be delivered to Northolt in June.

More obvious preparations for the Invasion of Continental Europe were proceeding apace all over the South of England. Bones of contention continued with the Americans over the proposed landings in the South of France, with the PM still hankering after a Balkan Expedition (though this had long since been discarded by the Combined COS). Wrangles were becoming almost worse with the Free French government in exile in Algiers, not least over the government of liberated Metropolitan France, post Invasion - to which de Gaulle had long felt he was the natural hen-. Much has been written about the various strands of the Resistance Movement which were by no means united. The PM had decided the time had come to bring General de Gaulle to London to explain to him just how things stood, as the Invasion date was clearly getting nearer.

1st June 1944. We left Northolt for Algiers at 2200 hours, empty for the non-stop flight to Algiers with Bill Fraser in command; Stephen Cliff as co-pilot. As usual, when travelling empty we took only diplomatic and official mail. It was a comfortable run at 10,000 feet. So through the Straits and into Algiers (Maison Blanche) for a good breakfast provided on board the aircraft by Jock Duncan, after we had landed. A second York, from 511 Squadron Lyneham was provided, for the remainder of de Gaulle's party.

3rd June 1944. After one night in Algiers we planned to return to the UK with our passengers via Rabat. In addition to the General, these were Rt Hon Duff Cooper, M Palewski who was, I believe

General de Gaulle's Chief of Cabinet, and a Lt Col Raphael - a sort of MA on Duff Cooper's staff. All were therefore accommodated on board in some comfort. We left Rabat Sale at 2200 hours local time the same evening with a good weather forecast for the UK, the VIP's having had dinner on the ground. Visibility was such that we could see the major coastal lighthouses along the Portuguese and Spanish coasts until Cape Villano, for we were flying about 50 miles offshore at 10,000 feet. Thereafter, across the Bay by astro and coasting up the British Channel to identify Newport and Bristol, and so over Farnborough to land at Northolt on schedule at 0600 local time. No courtesy of a word to the crew, even second-hand from this passenger. We saw no more of him after he left the aircraft and learnt later that he had returned to Algiers in a York of 511 Squadron, Lyneham on June 16th with a mixture of passengers and freight; sandwiches and coffee being served this time! Thus our catering barometer indicated that the talks had not gone well at No 10 and the PM had declined to provide his aircraft for the return flight. Later in the month the York was brought to readiness at Northolt in peculiar circumstances. It was to be prepared for departure to North Africa but without us, its normal crew. Jack Payne was highly indignant that any other engineer should handle 'his' engines. We were all in the dark - although, looking back, our Captain 'Dad' Collins must have known what was going on: but for us none of the usual pre-flight conferences over route and timing had taken place, no information on who would be the VIP - for it was clearly not the Prime Minister himself. No special catering was laid on.

I suppose with the date of the Invasion almost on us we naturally did not enquire too far. All I can remember was that a Lyneham crew from 511 Squadron was to fly the aircraft - acquaintances of ours, Flight Lt 'Ozzie' Morris in command. On the day of departure (June 25th 1944) we were firmly but politely told to keep away from the flight office and tarmac at the departure time.

Only long after did I confirm that the PM's aircraft was used in a deception plan code named 'COPPERHEAD' which was to show off 'Monty's Double' in Gibraltar and Algiers to any Axis sympathizers or indeed,

German agents who might see his arrival, to dispel any idea in Hitler's mind that the invasion of Northern France was about to take place with its principal commander abroad. Furthermore, the idea was to lay stress on the idea on invasion of Southern France. The PM had allowed 'Ascalon' to be used by General Alexander and by Jumbo Wilson in the past: Northolt would be the natural VIP departure point for this particular aircraft. It had unmistakable square windows and Bomber Command camouflage. All other RAF Yorks, had round windows and a blue grey colour scheme. The use of this unique aircraft was therefore to reinforce the idea that the passenger was indeed the real Monty. Clifton James own story 'I was Monty's Double' whilst giving a most elaborate account of his exploits, does state that it was the PM's York 'Ascalon' that was used. This is confirmed by Lord Ismay in his 'Memoirs'

1st July 1944. Evidently, there was still considerable acrimony between the British and US Chiefs of Staff regarding the Italian campaign and what was to be the policy after the capture of Rome. The Americans were still terribly keen on a landing in the South of France, but the UK were not prepared to support this policy at the cost of Alexander's offensive against the Pisa-Rimini Line, where the Germans were in the process of creating a strong defensive position for the coming winter. The PM was even prepared to fly to Washington to put his case to the President. One of the Boeing Clippers of BO AC was brought to readiness for him. Our York 'Ascalon' was on standby to fetch Alex from Rome on June 30th. In the event the PM did not go to the US but we left next day for Italy. We were going to Rome but unfortunately we would see nothing of the Holy City but its distant domes from the airfield, called Ciampino. At that time it was nothing more than two adjacent fighter strips joined together to make one long runway; now it is one of the International Airports for Rome. We had two non-VIP passengers ex-UK: a Captain Gibson and a Sergeant Rezincek. Not for us to enquire why these two should be given passage in the PM's aircraft - they were dropped off at Algiers, where we staged on the outward flight.

1st July 1944. Taking off from Northolt at 2115 local time we were to buck a southwesterly headwind

component all the way down the Iberian coast. Our flight time to Maison Blanche was ten and a half hours.

After a two hour break for breakfast and clean up, plus onward flight briefing we continued our journey to Rome empty. We were instructed to approach the Italian coast, crossing from Palermo via Capri to Naples, thence coastwise to Rome. Anti-aircraft defences off the western shores of Italy were very touchy especially after their baptism from the GAP glider bombs. These had sunk several large ships just off the coast. We were warmly welcomed by the resident Thunderbolt Wing (P.47s) of the 7th US Airforce. They had recently 'liberated' a local distillery and had rapidly converted it to the production of a form of gin to drink with the plentifully available Italian Vermouth. The label on the bottles proclaimed 7th Airforce Gin - the more you drink the more you sin'. We quickly realised that we were in Catch 22 country where the 7th Airforce was clearly 'in business'.

Ciampino airfield was extremely primitive and we were warned not to stray from the main buildings and roadways. Many German mines had not yet been cleared. The accommodation being fairly basic we elected to sleep on board - not least, for security reasons to guard the aircraft. As we were to return to the UK immediately there was no question of seeing the City. Furthermore, we learned that in future four-engined passenger aircraft were not to proceed north of Naples, if they were likely to require refuelling. The logistic problem of bringing fuel forward to the fighting zone was difficult enough and it was therefore crazy to fill up large aircraft which would then fly out with their precious fuel. Thus on General Alexander's return five days later, we dropped him off at Naples (Pomigliano) to our disappointment, whence he proceeded north in his own Dakota.

3rd July 1944. July and August were going to be busy months, in contrast to the two previous months. We left Ciampino at 0930 hours local with the intention of continuing straight through to Northolt, via Algiers and Gibraltar, weather permitting. We always enjoyed flying General Alexander, an officer and gentleman in the best sense of the words. He

(Continued on page 27)

appreciated our efforts, especially those of the cabin crew and enjoyed the comparative luxury and indeed the honour, of having the PM's aircraft sent for him. In addition to the General our passengers were the Rt Hon Harold MacMillan (his political representative), General Harding, his ADC. The flight of Maison Blanche, rather bumpy at 6,000 feet and there we dropped off Mr MacMillan and took on board (as a great favour and without reference to No 10!) Air Vice Marshal Charles Medhurst who was 'bumming a ride home'. We were on the ground no more than one hour and forty-five minutes, sufficient for a quick check on the weather and on any new operational data, before continuing to Gibraltar.

Airborne at 2230 hours local time: our passengers having dined at the Convent with the Governor could have their nightcap airborne before turning in. With the threat of German fighter interception becoming less and less as the war turned more and more in our favour we could afford to fly closer in to the Portuguese coast than in earlier days (or rather nights) but we lost sight of the coastal lighthouses after Cape Roca. We made our UK land-fall further south than usual at St Eval in Cornwall, and so cut the corner of our usual back door route up to Lundy Island and Hartland Point. From Taunton homeward we could see the ground all the way along the track; so into Northolt at 0630 hours on a bright sunny morning.

9th/10th July 1944. We had been forewarned that General Alexander would return to his command in Italy after only a short stay in the UK - when the issue of reinforcement of Allied troop strength in Italy must have been resolved. The almost 'superfluous' invasion of Southern France, which was largely unopposed, certainly drew off vital forces and landing craft from the Italian campaign -which consequently was to become a costly stalemate throughout the coming winter. We later realised too that General Alexander must have been discussing a forthcoming Royal flight to Italy.

We left Northolt at 2300 hours local with Bill Fraser in command, Stephen Cliff as co-pilot and with Flying Officer Beveridge as Flight Engineer, for Jack Payne was still on his C.54 Maintenance Course at the Douglas factory at Santa Monica, California. We covered our 2,000 track miles in a shade over 10

hours to Algiers: we had indeed become the night Pullman service. Lots of radio bearings from Jock Gallacher to assist my navigation, more radio beacons were coming back on the air as the occupied areas of Europe were liberated. But we still could not fly direct across France to eliminate this roundabout Atlantic - Gibraltar route. Into Maison Blanche at 0700 hours local time, having breakfasted our passengers on board.

10th July 1944. Two hours on the ground and then a further four hours flying to Naples (Pomigliano) serving lunch en route to General Alexander and his senior staff. These were as for the homebound journey plus Major General King. In fine weather and daylight we had contact with the ground all the way.

Pomigliano was a scruffy airfield, allocated to the RAF for transport operations, on the south east outskirts of the city. It was an industrial area and I believe the Fiat factory was located on the airfield, until the RAF bombed it. The airfield Mess was even scruffier, in a block of workers flats, I remember. But we stayed one night only and returned to Gibraltar the next day empty.

11th/12th July 1944. We had been ordered to return to the UK without delay as a VVIP trip was in the offing later in the month. With a load of 1,000 lbs of diplomatic and official mail only, we made a reasonably fast flight without cutting too many corners: seven hours forty minutes to Northolt from Gibraltar. We had flown some 60 odd hours in the past eleven days, well over half of which was by night and so were quite tired. Home for a day or two's leave. We were briefed that there was another Royal Flight in the offing, this time there was for us less secrecy and we were told it was to be to Italy via Rabat with none of the diversions of our first such experience a year earlier.

Later in this (20-23rd July) the PM flew to the Bridgehead in Normandy in a 24 Squadron Dakota, from Heston but returning to Northolt.

The Photo Album



Hastings TG 582 on Christmas Island 1956 sent in by Dennis Bluie Hobbs, Navigator



Here is one to keep you guessing. Put a name and any other details to this if you can

LATE NEWS

SUMMER SOCIAL

7th June @ Blockley, Cotswolds

If you really wanted an excuse to go deep into the Heart of England, you should have been at this year's XXIV Association Summer Social. The event this year was hosted by Heather and Richard Bates in conjunction with The Crown Inn at Blockley, a few miles north west of Moreton in Marsh in the depths of the Cotswolds. The weather was overcast but fine and mild, which almost sounds like one of the range of local beers.

The plan was to aim for a midday ETA at Blockley, to park near The Crown in what was a typical narrow Cotswold village main street with a raised footpath area that ran along side and meander back about a hundred yards to Milton Lodge. This is a house of many features and levels, including a terrace area that was the perfect setting for the cast of 26 in total who turned up. The Association attendance was swelled by Wing Commander Don Turnbull, Flight Lieutenant Phil Whitworth and Flight Sergeant Stuart Wright all in mufti.

Our meals and menu choices had been arranged in the main stables restaurant for 1pm, which came around pretty quickly as everyone broke the ice

with pre lunch drinks as we overlooked the village and the hills beyond. When our party eventually made its way up the High Street, we appeared not to frighten many of the locals, who were probably used to seeing crocodile trails of tourists gazing at the creamy Cotswold stone and slate.

The layout inside the restaurant allowed us all to be on the Top Table, so everyone was a VIP on this occasion. What then followed was a pleasantly long lunch, nearly of Mediterranean proportions, with each of us totally oblivious of what was going on in the rest of the world. The pub staff coped very well with the fact that some of us had a starter and mains, some a main and desert, some all three and some two starters, plus a wheat free diet, all at a very reasonable price.

After coffee and the briefest of informal speeches, a slow and leisurely dispersal seemed to be the order of the day. This was a lunch time experience to look forward to repeating all being well next year. In Omnia Parati.

ps for those of you who like a bit of 2 wheel nostalgia, Royal Enfield Bullet motor bikes are imported into the UK on the Northwick Business Park in Blockley.



XXIV Association Members on the terrace prior to lunch at The Crown, Blockley , 7th June 2007

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR THE YEAR 2007 XXIV SQUADRON ASSOCIATION REUNION**Friday 5th October****OPTIONAL INFORMAL GET TOGETHER**

19:00 hrs on Option informal Evening Session @ Hilton Hotel, M4 - J16 Swindon, Phone 01793 881777 for reservations and room rates.
(This additional item on the programme is a request from the 2005 AGM and is on casual basis to be arranged outside Committee)

Saturday 6th October**REUNION AND AGM**

10:00 to 10:55 hrs Association members gather in 24 Sqn. Crew room. Light refreshments.

11:00 to 11:45 hrs Association Annual General Meeting in Sqn briefing room.
 Guests and non-association persons remain in 24 Sqn crew room.

12:00 to 12:30 hrs Presentation by OC 24 Squadron
 13:00 to 13:30 hrs Fork Lunch in crew room.

12:00 to 16:00 hrs Cash Bar Facilities and Light Refreshments available in crew room.

13:30 to 16:00 hrs Association members and guests are invited to take part in the following activities. Please annotate the appropriate lists in the entrance hall of 24 Sqn for the various visits in which you wish to take part
 DISPLAY OF SQUADRON HISTORY
 VISIT TO STATIC AIRCRAFT
 TOUR OF STATION AND AIRFIELD
 LEARN to FLY A C130J SIMULATOR (Subject to Confirmation)
 FLY IN THE REAL C130J (Subject to Confirmation)

16:00 to 17:00 hrs Association Members disperse

Saturday 6th October**FORMAL LADIES GUEST NIGHT EVENING DINNER**

19:00 to 19:30 Coach picks up Members and Guests at designated Hotel and onward to Officers Mess
 19:30 to 20:00 hrs Pre-dinner drinks followed by Dinner in the Officers Mess.
 Dress: Mess Kit/Dinner Jackets, Ladies appropriate evening attire, minimum mid calf length dress.

20:00 onwards Reunion Dinner and Formal Guest Night c/w Band with serving personnel of 24 Sqn, Association Members and Guests.

00:00 to 00:30 Coach picks up at Officers Mess for return to Hotel

VEHICLE & SECURITY PASSES WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM THE MAIN GATE ON ARRIVAL FOR THE SATURDAY PROGRAMME of EVENTS

THE COMMITTEE AND SQUADRON LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOU TO THE WEEKEND REUNION.