



Twenty Four

The Magazine of 24 Squadron Association



Issue 9

Summer 2002

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Editorial



The months since the 2001 Reunion have been quiet for the Association except for an initial flurry of returned postcards from some of our "ghost" members. Very pleased to hear from you and that you are quite definite about wanting to stay on the mailing list. So without further ado, another issue of *Twenty Four* to browse over.

It has not been as quiet on the world stage, with our military forces pushed to the limits once again. The back up required to keep the Front Line supplied with men and materials is never more evident at such times with Lyneham and the Squadrons all at 110%. With such overwhelming evidence, it may come as a surprise to some of you that the very existence of RAF Lyneham is in question and under threat of closure.

Huge support for the base by local MP's, councillors, villages, traders and even Association members in the formidable form of "Sam Wright" have been leading an impressive battle to make such an option unthinkable. We would like to add our support also for the only possible decision – KEEP LYNEHAM OPEN.

The Year 2001 Reunion

The Reunion weekend started on the Friday evening as usual, but instead of the informal get-together at the Hilton, it was straight in, all booted and suited for the Ladies Guest night at the Mess. This change of format came about as a result of a suggestion at last years AGM and seems to have worked a treat.

It was the best ever attendance the Association has had for the evening dinner and brought a sense of "family" to the night with so many past and present members sitting down together. Old and long lost friends met up once again, despite the trials and tribulations of the M4 motorway. A toast to many

more such evenings.

Saturday morning did not reveal any casualties late on parade from the previous nights festivities, the welcome from the Squadron personnel and refreshments certainly helped.

With the AGM safely ticked off as the first item on the days agenda, no mean feat in view of a change of Chairman and other hot topics, it was a pleasure to settle down for our official briefing from Wing Commander Rick Hobson, OC 24. This was a year and a day after the Association first met Rick prior to him taking over the from Paul Oborn.

We almost believed we were

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all pilots with wings as Rick gave a briefing on how to fly the new C130J. His team consists of 4 Flight Commanders, 23 Captains, 12 Co-pilots and 14 Loadmasters working for 2 Group. The Squadrons responsibilities also include acting as the J model conversion unit trainers.

With the old K model ageing rapidly, the race was on to bring in the new J model, the first arriving in 1999, but it was not until November 2000 that the first operational route to Gibraltar was flown. The RAF is taking delivery of 25 in total at around £70M each and for the spotters amongst you, here's what to look out for:-

- ⇒ External - no external fuel tanks, 6 bladed props, black boot on base of fin for HF communications and de-icing, not normally fitted with a refuelling probe.
- ⇒ Internal - "Glass cockpit instrumentation, NO Engineers position, Head Up Display and a world class radar system.

The type of tasking the Squadron being allocated is a long slip pattern to the Middle East which ties up around 5 crews, plus other trips to Kenya and Australia. The flight planning process is able to make use of a laptop computer to upload the latest Jetplans, as well as plug in Mission modules. From the flyers perspective, it is a radically different aircraft to fly and requires changes to established operating procedures and thought processes.

All the crews who have flown and become established on

the aircraft are really impressed and quick to point out that larger more recent leased transports (C17) have been around for 10 years, not brand new like the J. The future looks bright with the J as software updates start to kick in during early 2002 and will include a Tactical capability, along with night vision, defensive aids, secure communications and tanker capability by 2005.

The aircrew training and conversion role already mentioned being carried out by 24 Squadron has meant that even on Lyneham base, the crews are working in two locations. The School House contains 4 CBT classrooms and 2 dynamic mission simulators with impressive visual graphics showing a variety of world wide locations. Loadmasters and ground crew have also been included in the complete training package with the facilities of a Rear Cabin Trainer available within the School House. The Station is broadly split into a North and South divide due to the geography and takes the format old models, Tactical role and the new model,

Route flying.

Charities, mainly Burton Hill House School, still continue to be well supported by the Squadron, £350 being raised on a recent tombola evening. This and other events have placed the School in a healthy financial position.

A new avenue of interest for the Squadron is a proposed affiliation to the Carmen Livery Company in the City of London. This unusual request, (in real speak an order) came via the AOC to encourage organisations to improve relations with other local and national societies.

A reminder and invitation was extended to all concerning the commemoration of the Pisa accident with a church service at St. Michael's in Lyneham village on the 9th November 2001. A similar service was planned to be held in Italy to coincide with the UK date.

The presentation was rounded off with the a variety of impressive digital photos of recent trips being shown to a packed audience along with a



ACCOMMODATION

A weekend break rate may be available at the Hilton Hotel (Tel 01793 881777) but not a preferential one for the Squadron this year. Try the Internet or Teletext for a special deal. Over the road is the Lydiard Travel Inn offering Room only rates at under £40 per day, any day of the week and is the cheaper option for couples or families. They may be contacted on 01793 881490 for more details and bookings. Chippenham Tourist Information Office (01249 706333) will give you details of other accommodation in the area and arrange booking for you.

Don't forget this year on the Friday evening it's the new format. We shall be having the formal evening dinner in the Sgts Mess at Lyneham, which should reduce the overall expenses for the weekend by needing to pay for ONE nights accommodation to enjoy the full weekend agenda. If you fancy staying an extra night, the IBIS Hotel, Swindon on the Delta Business Park (Tel 01793 514777) is the nominated venue for an informal get-together off base from 7pm onwards on the 5th October 2002.



lively question and answer session before our lunch.

An afternoon reminiscing in the atmosphere of the crew room, poring over old photos and flight records proved as popular as ever. For the more adventurous, a tour over the new J model was laid on, which also gave a glimpse of what is going on at Lyneham base to support all these global operations.

Suddenly the day was at a close, sad, but another one to look forward to next year. The overwhelming theme this time was a sense of togetherness. The message to be learnt is to bring as many family and friends to this unique experience.

Flying Machines of 24 – Skymaster

In issue 8 of the Newsletter, we covered the Avro York to the years when the Hastings took over the VIP role. In looking back on the aircraft types used by 24, the Valetta C 1 made a brief appearance in the Operations Record Book between February 1950 and November later the same year. With no disrespect to the mark, because of this very brief appearance, a jump to the Skymaster 1 is pencilled in for this issue of the Newsletter. As an aside, if any member has a record of flying in the Valetta, or can throw some light on its role, do send it in. It will be given an airing.

In mid-1939, American, Eastern and United Air Lines and Douglas shared the view that there was a need for an aircraft similar in capacity to the experimental DC-4 but of a lighter and somewhat simpler structure. Agreement was also reached on the need to use less complex systems and to design a cheaper aircraft and one easier to maintain and offering substantially improved operating economics.

The Douglas engineering team, led by A. E. Raymond and E. F. Burton, was aware that there would be little or no benefit in limiting itself to a redesign and decided to design a completely new aeroplane. Confusingly, the new machine was also designated DC-4, thus starting a tradition according to which a DC number became permanently assigned to a given design only when the aircraft was put into quantity production. To avoid the confusion stemming from this practice, the original DC-4 with triple fins and rudders became known as the DC4E, the E standing for Experimental.

As originally conceived, the new DC-4 was some twenty-five per cent lighter than the DC-4E and had a design gross weight of 50,000 lb (22,680 kg). Its fuselage of circular cross-section had an internal diameter of 118 in (3 m), 10 in (25.4 cm) less than that of the DC4E, and carried a single fin and rudder of clean design. The characteristic DC wings of the DC4E, with marked sweep on the leading edge, were replaced by considerably

smaller wings of higher aspect-ratio, and wing area was reduced from the DC4E's 2,155 sq ft (200.6 sq m) to 1,457 sq ft (135.4 sq m). The new wings, with constant taper on leading and trailing edges, had a centre-section of typical Douglas/Northrop construction with three spars while their outer panels were of single spar construction. The tricycle undercarriage, one of the most successful features of the original Douglas four-engined transport, was retained for the new DC-4, although in a modified form as the main units retracted forward into the inboard engine nacelles instead of laterally into wing wells. The aircraft, with accommodation for 40 passengers by day—ten rows with two seats on each side of a central aisle—or 28 passengers by night, was initially offered to the airlines with a choice of powerplants: either four 1,000 hp Wright SGR-1820-G205A Cyclone nine-cylinder radials or four 1,050 hp Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp S I C3-G fourteen-cylinder radials.

Initial reactions from American, Eastern and United were enthusiastic and, after a change in powerplant to four 1,450 hp Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp (R-2000) 2SD1-G fourteen-cylinder radials had been agreed upon, orders began to come in. For a while, however, it appeared that the DC-4 was doomed before it ever flew. The war in Europe had resulted in increased military orders for Douglas, from the British and French Purchasing Commissions as well as by the US Armed Forces, and the War Department instructed Douglas to concentrate on the design and manu-

facture of combat aircraft and of the DC-3 and its military derivatives. Donald Douglas was, however, intent on producing his new four-engined transport for which he had received commercial orders for a total of 61 aircraft. After assuring the War Department that the DC-4 programme would not interfere with prompt delivery of military aircraft on order, the Douglas Aircraft Company prepared itself for DC-4 production and went ahead with its construction, albeit at a reduced pace. The Japanese attack affected once again the DC-4 production plans. However, after some uncertainty regarding the eventual disposition of the aircraft already under construction, they were taken over by the US Army Air Forces and designated C-54-DOs and C54A-DOs.

No DC-4 or C-54 prototype was built, and the first production aircraft, s/n 3050, serial 41-20137, was completed as a C-54-DO in February 1942. Finished in military markings, it made its first flight from Clover Field, Santa Monica, on 14 February with John F. Martin in command. The C-54's successful maiden flight and its trouble-free development trials programme provided the USAAF with a long-range heavy logistic transport, a type urgently needed by the world-wide scale of operations into which the United States had been forced without proper preparation. The need to meet a requirement for longer range on transatlantic and trans Pacific flights led to the modification of the first twenty-four aircraft.

Apart from the US Armed

Forces, only the RAF had Skymasters in squadron service and this only during the last year of the war. The first in British service was an ex-C-5411-1-130 (s/n 18326, 43-17126) which was intended for the Prime Minister. Delivered in the autumn of 1944 and assigned the serial number EW999, the aircraft was operated by the VIP Flight of No.246 Squadron but was returned to the United States in late 1945. Twenty-two C-541d-DCs were also delivered to the RAF beginning in February 1945 and, with the serials KL977 to KL986 and KL988 to KL999, served with Nos.232 and 246 Squadrons, No.1332 Heavy Conversion Unit, No. 1 Ferry Unit, and Air Command, South East Asia. Being Lend-Lease aircraft, these Skymasters were returned to the United States after the war and no other Skymaster was operated by the Royal Air Force.

After VE-Day but before VJ-Day, France became the third nation to fly C-54s when one C-54E-20-130 (s/n 27374, 44-9148) was presented by the United States as a gift to General de Gaulle. This aircraft was later augmented by a number of surplus C-54s, and Skymasters were operated by the Armée de l'Air and the Aéronavale well into the sixties. Like France, many other nations took advantage of the availability of surplus Skymasters. Eventually, C-54s/DC-4s were operated by the armed forces of at least fifteen nations other than the United States, the United Kingdom and France and, in early 1971, some of these aircraft were still flown by the air forces of fourteen countries.

Over the North Atlantic route a converted C-54 of American Overseas Airlines introduced commercial landplane service on 23 October, 1945, by flying between New York and Hurn, near Bournemouth (then serving London)-with technical stops at Gander. During the following years, six other airlines, SAS, Sabena and Swissair, initiated services with DC-4s. Other intercontinental, included trans-Pacific services by Pan Am Airways, the latter flying on behalf of Overseas Airlines and making a first experiment initiating a fortnightly service from Sydney to London via the Atlantic route from South America introduced by Flota Aerea Mercante Argentina beginning on 17 September, 1946. Before that time, following a proving flight which left Amsterdam on 10 November, 1945, KLM and KNILM re-opened with DC-4s their pre-war route linking the Netherlands East Indies. Later, as more DC-4-1009s were delivered and surplus C-54s were made at an increasing tempo, DC-4s saw worldwide service with a large number of scheduled carriers.

(extract from McDonnell Douglas Aircraft since 1920 Volume 1 by Rene J Francillon)

Memory Banks 1

It should have been a routine RAF flight but it ended in a terrifying crash. A group of men, including John Gary Cooper from Ipswich, were returning to the UK after a tour of duty in the Far East when disaster struck. The Hastings aircraft of 48 Squadron from Singapore was en route from Ceylon to the Maldiv Islands above the Indian Ocean on March 1, 1960.

Editors Note:- Apologies for block capitals, but it would have taken ages to retype in normal case and was considered an interesting enough article for those who flew or worked on Hastings for inclusion. Read it as told by John himself.

SPLASHDOWN ON THE EQUATOR

ON TUESDAY MARCH 1ST 1960 SEVERAL ROYAL AIR FORCE MEN WERE BEING REPATRIATED TO THE UNITED KINGDOM AFTER THEIR TOUR OF DUTY IN THE FAR EAST, THESE MEN WERE MAINLY STATIONED AT ROYAL AIR FORCE STAGING POST KATUNAYAKE (KNOWN BY ALL AS 'KAT') IN CEYLON, THERE WERE TWO ROYAL MARINES AND TWO ABLE SEAMEN FROM THE ROYAL NAVY ALSO RETURNING TO THE UNITED KINGDOM. TOGETHER WITH THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF KAT, WING COMMANDER GEOFF ATHERTON D.F.C. AND A FLIGHT LIEUTENANT FROM PAY ACCOUNTS THESE SERVICEMEN MADE UP THE COMPLEMENT OF 14 PASSENGERS WAITING TO BOARD A HANDLEY PAGE HASTINGS TG579 A C1 AIRCRAFT OF 48 SQUADRON CHANGI, SINGAPORE FOR THE 600 MILE TRIP TO ROYAL AIR FORCE GAN IN THE MALDIVE ISLANDS.

THE HASTINGS WAS DELAYED FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME DUE TO TECHNICAL PROBLEMS, ALTHOUGH STEW AND TONY THINK THE CREW MAY HAVE MADE A RETURN TRIP TO GAN THAT DAY AND WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN EN ROUTE TO GAN BY MID MORNING, HOWEVER DUE TO THESE DELAYS THE PASSENGERS AND CREW DID NOT EMBARK UNTIL 1700HRS LOCAL TIME AND EVENTUALLY LIFTED OFF FROM RAF KATUNAYAKE AT 1734HRS. THE KNOWN PASSENGERS WERE CORPORALS BILL GRUNDY A FIREMAN, (BILL) MURRAY AN ENGINE FITTER, SENIOR AIRCRAFTSMEN TONY GREEN AIRFRAME MECHANIC, STEWART TUCKER AIR RADAR MECHANIC, TONY MEALING AIR WIRELESS MECHANIC(?), DAVID BLOOMFIELD AN MT DRIVER AND JOHN 'GARY' COOPER AN ENGINE MECHANIC, LEAVING ONE PASSENGERS NAME WE CAN'T REMEMBER.

THE CREW NUMBERED SIX, THE CAPTAIN AND FIRST PILOT WAS FLIGHT LIEUTENANT R.T.D. SCOTT A HIGHLY EXPERIENCED PILOT WITH OVER 3000 FLYING HOURS ON HASTINGS AIRCRAFT ALONE AND WAS A HOLDER OF A MASTER GREEN INSTRUMENT RATING CERTIFICATE, HIS CO-PILOT WAS FLIGHT SERGEANT G.F. APPLGARTH MUCH LESS EXPERIENCED ON TYPE WITH APPROXIMATELY 500 FLYING HOURS, I AS A PASSENGER UP TO THIS DATE HAD 97 HOURS FLYING EXPERIENCE IN HASTINGS AIRCRAFT. THE REMAINDER OF THE CREW CONSISTED OF A NAVIGATOR, SIGNALLER, FLIGHT ENGINEER AND AIR QUARTERMASTER (LATER KNOWN AS LOADMASTER) WHOSE NAMES ARE UNKNOWN.

THE WEATHER ON LIFT OFF WAS FINE AND STILL DAYLIGHT, THIS AIRCRAFT, APART FROM ITS PASSENGERS, WAS CARRYING SOME AIRCRAFT GROUND EQUIPMENT IN THE FORM OF AIRCRAFT HYDRAULIC JACKS AND THE EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO EQUIP THE DENTAL SECTION AT RAF GAN IN THE AIRCRAFT'S FUSELAGE AND ALSO PERSONAL EFFECTS OF THOSE ON BOARD IN THE LUGGAGE HOLD, THE PASSENGERS HAND LUGGAGE WAS SITUATED IN RACKS STOWED ABOVE THE PASSENGERS HEADS. I WAS SAT FACING AFT ON THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT ADJACENT TO A PORT HOLE WINDOW AND DIAGONALLY OPPOSITE THE MAIN PASSENGER DOOR, A MATE AND WORK COLLEAGUE TONY GREEN, SAT ALONG SIDE ME, WE WERE TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE LAST IMAGES OF CEYLON AND THOSE BRILLIANT SUNSETS ENCOUNTERED IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD, CHATTING ABOUT GOING HOME AFTER TWO PLUS YEARS AND LOOKING FORWARD TO A GOOD OLD ENGLISH PINT OF BEER.

IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE IT GOT DARK AND THERE WAS SOME TURBULENCE, WHICH IS USUALLY FOUND ON MOST AIRCRAFT TRIPS, THIS TURBULENCE INCREASED IN INTENSITY OVER A PERIOD OF TIME, WE WERE INFORMED TO FASTEN SEAT BELTS AS RECALLED BY TONY, AND ON APPROACH TO GAN THE TURBULENCE WAS EXTREMELY SEVERE, I MYSELF HAD NEVER ENCOUNTERED SUCH BUFFETING AS THIS BEFORE, LIGHTNING

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COULD EASILY BE SEEN LIGHTING UP THE CLOUDS, ONE WONDERS WHY THE PILOT CANNOT FLY ABOVE THE STORM BUT OFTEN CLOUD BANKS IN INTENSE TROPICAL STORMS CAN RANGE FROM A FEW HUNDRED FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL TO HEIGHTS OF OVER 30000 FEET, THIS HASTINGS AIRCRAFT DID NOT HAVE THIS CEILING CAPACITY AND TO MY KNOWLEDGE DID NOT CARRY OXYGEN OR MASKS FOR SUCH AN EVENTUALITY (ALTHOUGH SOME HASTINGS WERE FITTED WITH MASKS AND OXYGEN ESPECIALLY WHEN USED IN THE CASEVAC ROLE) , NORMAL FLYING HEIGHT WOULD BE APPROXIMATELY 8000 FEET FOR A TRIP OF THIS SORT. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT AT GAN THE AIRFIELD MEASURES JUST OVER ONE MILE SQUARE AND THE LENGTH OF THE SINGLE RUNWAY EQUALS THE EXACT LENGTH OF THE ISLAND WITH NO UNDER OR OVERSHOOT FACILITIES (APART FOR SOFT CORAL BELOW THE HIGH AND LOW TIDE WATER LEVEL), THERE ALSO WAS (IN 1960) NO OTHER AIRFIELD WITHIN HUNDREDS OF MILES OF GAN TO DIVERT TO IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY, APART FROM A RETURN TRIP TO KATUNAYAKE AND THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FUEL ON BOARD THE AIRCRAFT TO MAKE THIS RETURN TRIP IF DEEMED NECESSARY.

AS PASSENGERS WE WERE ALL GETTING PRETTY ANXIOUS, SOMETHING I HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE WITH FLYING IN BOTH CIVIL AND MILITARY AIRCRAFT, WHEN SUDDENLY THE LIGHTS OF GAN AIRFIELD APPEARED BELOW THE AIRCRAFT, SOME EYE WITNESSES (CORPORAL ANDY MUTCH AN AIR WIRELESS FITTER OF SASF GAN AWAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE AIRCRAFT) COULD HEAR THE AIRCRAFT BUT NOT SEE IT DUE TO THE EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS PREVAILING, OTHERS INCLUDING MIKE BUTLER COULD SEE THE AIRCRAFT AND ESTIMATED ITS HEIGHT AT 80', I FELT THE HEIGHT WAS 400', WE KNOW FROM THE OFFICIAL ACCIDENT REPORT THAT THE CLOUD BASE WAS 420' AND THAT THE HASTINGS OVERSHOT THE RUNWAY, STEWART AND TONY THOUGHT THE AIRCRAFT DID TOUCH THE RUNWAY, DAVID AND I AM CERTAIN IT DID NOT, OTHERS CLAIMED THAT THE AIRCRAFT FLEW IN FROM THE WEST (FEDHOO DIRECTION) INCLUDING FIREMAN ROGER 'STEVE' STEVENS WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THE FIRE STATION THAT NIGHT AND WHO HAD TAKEN UP A POSITION ADJACENT TO AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WITH HIS CREW IN THE FIRE ENGINE WHICH IS NORMAL PROCEDURE, IT IS KNOWN THAT THE AIRCRAFT MADE ONE SINGLE LOW LEVEL APPROACH, EXACT HEIGHT UNKNOWN, OVER THE ISLAND FROM THE EAST AND BANKED TO PORT. THE ACCIDENT REPORT RECORDS THIS TIME AS BEING 2034 HOURS LOCAL TIME, EXACTLY THREE HOURS AFTER LIFT OFF FROM OUR HOME BASE IN CEYLON, (THESE TIMES WERE ORIGINALLY QUOTED 'ZULU' TIMES AND HAVE BEEN READJUSTED TO LOCAL TIMES FROM CORPORAL HARRY HEYWOOD STATIONED IN GAN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL THE NIGHT OF THE INCIDENT AND EX SQUADRON LEADER NEIL JONES AN EXPERIENCED EX HASTINGS AND HERCULES

TRANSPORT PILOT).

HASTINGS TG579 FLEW OFF FOR ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES AND ACCORDING TO THE ACCIDENT REPORT 'MADE A VERY LONG LOW APPROACH TO LAND IN MARGINAL WEATHER CONDITIONS' IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT THE WEATHER WAS STILL RAGING, WHEN WITHOUT ANY WARNING THERE WAS A MIGHTY CRASH AND JUDDERING AND SILENCE FROM THE ENGINES, IT IS KNOWN THAT THE UNDERCARRIAGE WAS DOWN AND ON THIS FIRST IMPACT BECAME DETACHED FROM THE HASTINGS, BOTH WHEELS STILL INFLATED, WERE RECOVERED THE FOLLOWING MORNING BY THE MARINE CRAFT SECTION WHEN FOUND TO BE AFLOAT DRIFTING IN THE LAGOON, THESE WERE RETRIEVED BY ROD VENNERS USING A DAVID BROWN TRACTOR. IT IS THOUGHT THAT ON THIS FIRST IMPACT AT 125 KNOTS THAT NUMBERS ONE AND TWO HERCULES ENGINES WERE TORN OUT OF THE BEARERS AND DETACHED FROM THE BULKHEADS, WE KNOW THAT THESE TWO ENGINES WERE DEFINITELY MISSING, IT IS ALSO THOUGHT THAT NUMBER THREE ENGINE ALSO BECAME DETACHED AS REPORTED BY ALL FOUR SURVIVING PASSENGERS. DEFINITELY NUMBER FOUR ENGINE WAS STILL ATTACHED. ALSO AT THIS POINT IT IS THOUGHT THAT THE AIRCRAFT SWUNG ROUND 180 DEGREES FROM ITS EASTERLY APPROACH AND WAS NOW FACING AWAY FROM GAN (TG580 CRASHED ON LANDING AT GAN IN JULY 1959 AND PREVIOUS TO THIS TWO OTHER INCIDENTS INCLUDING ONE ON THE GREENLAND ICECAP INVOLVING A HASTINGS, EACH TIME THE AIRCRAFT SWUNG 180 DEGREES), A FURTHER THEORY IS THAT THE GAN CHANNEL WHERE THE HASTINGS CAME DOWN IN THE SEA, THAT THE CURRENT HERE FLOWS AT A VERY FAST 7-8 KNOTS AND IT IS THOUGHT POSSIBLE THAT THE AIRCRAFT SWUNG ROUND ON THE CURRENT. NEXT THERE WAS ANOTHER CRASH, NOT AS SEVERE AS THE FIRST BUT TOO HARD FOR ANY NORMAL LANDING IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT A FIRST AID BOX BECAME DETACHED FROM ITS STOWAGE FLEW ACROSS THE CABIN AND HIT GEOFF ATHERTON FULLY IN THE FACE, WE LATER DISCOVERED THIS BROKE HIS NOSE. THERE THEN WAS A THIRD ALMOST GENTLER CRASH ALMOST AS THOUGH THE AIRCRAFT HAD LANDED ON THE RUNWAY. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW AND SAYING TO TONY GREEN THAT I COULD NOT SEE ANY RUNWAY LIGHTS (TONY RECALLS THIS EVENT), IT WAS NOT OBVIOUS TO ANY OF THE PASSENGERS AT THAT TIME BUT WE HAD HIT THE SEA AND OUR FIRST KNOWLEDGE OF THIS WAS WHEN THE AQM OPENED THE MAIN ENTRANCE/EXIT DOOR WHEN WATER RUSHED IN. HERE WE WERE HAVING JUST CROSSED THE EQUATOR BY SOME 41 MILES AND OUR BAPTISM WAS ABOUT TO BE REALISED.!

ON THE ACCIDENT REPORT ON THIS FINAL LOW LEVEL APPROACH TO THE RUNWAY THE REPORT READS "ON THE SECOND APPROACH THERE WAS A BRILLIANT

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FLASH OF LIGHTNING AT ABOUT 2 MILES, CAUSING PILOT TO LOOK INTO COCKPIT TO RECOVER HIS VISION. SECOND PILOT THEN CALLED APPROACHING 50' AND ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AIRCRAFT HIT THE SEA. MINOR INJURIES WERE SUSTAINED BY ALL MEMBERS OF CREW AND PASSENGERS" (INCIDENTALLY FROM BOTH BLOOMFIELD AND COOPER'S MEDICAL RECORDS THERE IS NO MENTION OF THIS). IT ALSO SEEMS INCREDIBLE THAT A TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT OTHER THAN A FLYING BOAT WOULD BE FLYING AT THIS LOW ALTITUDE FROM SUCH A DISTANCE FROM THE RUNWAY (1.5 NAUTICAL MILES), THE CLOUD BASE WAS WE KNOW 420' AND LATER A SHACKLETON MR1 DID A SARAH (SEARCH AND RESCUE AND HOMING), AND THERE IS NO WAY THAT THE SHACKLETON WOULD HAVE BEEN SEARCHING AT THIS ALTITUDE.

IN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL HARRY HEYWOOD RECALLS ' THE EVENING THAT THE HASTINGS DITCHED TO THE EAST OF THE ISLAND, I WAS ON DUTY IN THE ATC TOWER. IT WAS A QUIET EVENING WITH LITTLE ACTIVITY ON THE W/T CIRCUITS AND I WAS CHATTING TO THE DUTY CONTROLLER, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT MORGAN-SMITH, WHEN THE HASTINGS MADE HIS FIRST APPROACH THROUGH THE GALE AND LASHING RAIN THAT ENVELOPED THE ISLAND. THE AIRCRAFT ABORTED ITS INITIAL APPROACH AND ASKED FOR THE RUNWAY LIGHTS TO BE INCREASED IN INTENSITY. THIS WAS DONE, AND WE STROVE TO SEE HIS LANDING LIGHTS THROUGH THE STORM, BUT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE-IT WAS LIKE A SCENE FROM A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE. THE DATCO ASKED HIM (THE PILOT) TO CONFIRM "THREE GREENS" - UNDERCARRIAGE DOWN AND LOCKED - AND THE LAST TRANSMISSION WAS HIS ANSWER, "ROGER, DOWNWIND, THREE GREENS, RUNWAY IN SIGHT".

SUDDENLY THERE WAS WHAT APPEARED TO BE A FEEDBACK SCREECH, PERHAPS TWO MICROPHONES BEING OPENED AT THE SAME TIME, AND THE C/R D/F (CATHODE RAY DIRECTION FINDER) REACTED TO IT. THE TRACE ILLUMINATED ON THE SCREEN, ORIENTATED EAST, THE DIRECTION WHERE HE (THE AIRCRAFT) WAS EXPECTED TO BE. THE DATCO (DUTY AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICER) INITIATED A CALL; NO REPLY; CALLED AGAIN, NO REPLY, AND EXCLAIMED, "CHRIST, I THINK HE'S GONE IN" OR WORDS TO THAT EFFECT. AT THAT POINT CONTROLLED PANIC TOOK OVER AS THE SAR (SEARCH AND RESCUE) DRILLS WERE PUT INTO EFFECT, AND I KEPT OUT OF THE WAY. I HAVE A SUSPICION THAT ONE OF MY WIRELESS OPERATORS SENIOR AIRCRAFTSMAN RUSS TAYLOR, ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE HAD MADE HIGH FREQUENCY RADIO TRANSMITTER CONTACT WITH THE BOATS (AIR SEA RESCUE LAUNCHES).

ROGER STEVENS, IN CHARGE OF THE GAN FIRE STATION WAS ALONGSIDE THE CONTROL TOWER WHEN INSTRUCTED TO 'ENTER THE ACTIVE AND PROCEED WITH CAUTION, BECAUSE WE THINK THE AIRCRAFT

HAS CRASHED'. ROGER AND HIS CREW WERE DISPATCHED TO THE CHANNEL END OF THE ISLAND TO SEARCH FOR THE AIRCRAFT AND SURVIVORS BUT FOUND OR HEARD NOTHING. THEY WERE ALSO INSTRUCTED TO WADE OUT ON TO THE CORAL REEF BUT DECIDED AGAINST THIS COURSE OF ACTION DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF SHARKS AND MORAY EELS IN THE VICINITY. HOWEVER THE SASF DUTY CREW WERE TAKEN BY VEHICLE TO THIS POINT AND DID WADE ON TO THE REEF TO LISTEN AND SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS BUT AGAIN FOUND AND HEARD NOTHING, THE STATION ADJUTANT STOOD THE DUTY CREW DOWN AND GAVE THEM A BOTTLE OF RUM FOR THEIR EFFORTS AS RECALLED BY ANDY MUTCH. ALL EMERGENCY TEAMS ON STANDBY WERE 'CALLED OUT', BY GREAT FORTUNE A SEARCH AND RESCUE SHACKLETON MR1 AIRCRAFT OF 205 SQUADRON INDEX NUMBER WB834 HAD BEEN DETACHED FROM CHANGI ON A TWO WEEK ATTACHMENT TO GAN AND THIS AS FAR AS WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED WAS AIRBORNE WITHIN 20 MINUTES OF THE ACCIDENT OCCURRING. FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JOHNNY ELIAS WAS THE DUTY CAPTAIN AND FIRST PILOT. BILL BARKER WAS ON THE PINNACE 1374 (ASR LAUNCH) AS A SENIOR AIRCRAFTSMAN MOTOR BOAT CREWMAN AND WAS DISPATCHED TO THE SCENE OF THE DITCHING, INCIDENTALLY THIS LAUNCH CAN STILL BE SEEN PLYING THE WATERS AROUND THE HOLYHEAD AREA.

BACK AT THE CRASH SITE, ORGANISED CHAOS WAS TO BE SEEN, WITH THE SUDDEN SURGE OF WATER INTO THE FUSELAGE AREA EVERYONE'S IMMEDIATE REACTION WAS TO VACATE THE SINKING HASTINGS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, I CERTAINLY RECALL TAKING MY LAP BELT OFF, REACHING IMMEDIATELY ABOVE MY HEAD TAKING THE MAE WEST (LIFE JACKET) FROM ITS PLYBOARD STOWAGE, BEING AT LEAST ANKLE DEEP IN WATER, BUTTONING UP THE JACKET BUT NOT TIGHTENING THE STRAPS AND EXITING THE AIRCRAFT BY THE MAIN DOOR (I HAVE SINCE BEEN INFORMED BY FRANK OGDEN AN EX HASTINGS FLIGHT ENGINEER THAT IF INFLATING A LIFE JACKET BEFORE ENTERING THE WATER THERE WAS A GOOD CHANCE OF BREAKING YOUR NECK WHEN ENTERING THE SEA !), AT THIS POINT THERE WAS NO THOUGHT OF SALVAGING ANY OF OUR PERSONAL POSSESSIONS, IT WAS A QUESTION OF SAVING LIVES THAT BECAME THE PRIORITY. IT IS CLAIMED BY PILOT OFFICER COLIN VINCENT WHO WAS POSTED TO HQFEAF FAIRY POINT, CHANGI SHORTLY AFTER THE CRASH AND WAS A SERVING NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICER ATTACHED TO THE LEGAL BRANCH, SEEING THE BOARD OF INQUIRY REPORTS AND RECALLS THAT HE HAD MET WING COMMANDER GEOFF ATHERTON ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AT FAIRY POINT AND RECALLED THAT HE WAS 'A MOST CHARMING AND COURTEOUS MAN' AND THAT IT WAS GEOFF THAT TOOK CHARGE IN HIS CALM AUTHORITATIVE MAN-

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NER WHICH ENSURED THAT THE PASSENGERS EXITED THE AIRCRAFT INTO LIFE RAFTS IN AN ORDERLY MANNER, THAT ALL THE CREW WERE ALSO SAFE AND THAT RAFTS WERE KEPT TOGETHER UNTIL RESCUED BY THE HIGH SPEED LAUNCH' I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION AT THIS POINT THAT NO INSTRUCTIONS WERE HEARD BY THE FOUR SURVIVING PASSENGERS ON EVACUATING THE AIRCRAFT, SOME MEMBERS OF CREW AND SOME PASSENGERS EXITED THE AIRCRAFT VIA THE MAINPLANE ESCAPE HATCHES AND STEPPED INTO THE INFLATED DINGHIES, WHILST AT LEAST ALL FOUR PASSENGERS MENTIONED EARLIER WERE IMMERSED IN SEA WATER, FUEL AND OIL WHEN VACATING THE AIRCRAFT. I ALSO RECALL OTHERS IN THE WATER, IT WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO HAUL MYSELF INTO A DINGHY, AS I HAD INGESTED A LUNG FULL OF WATER, OIL AND FUEL, ONCE IN THE WATER I PULLED MY RED EMERGENCY TOGGLE ON MY LIFE JACKET AND THIS BROUGHT ME TO THE SURFACE, I ESTIMATE MY TIME IN THE WATER AT LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES, I'M NOT SURE, BUT I WAS PULLED ON A LIFERAFT BY A SAILOR OR MARINE AS I CERTAINLY ENDED UP IN THEIR DINGHY. STEW TUCKER HELD ON TO HIS LIFE JACKET UNTIL HE GOT INTO THE DINGHY AS HIS BUTTONS WERE ALREADY FASTENED UP, TONY ALSO RECALLS THE BUTTONS BEING FASTENED WHEN TAKEN FROM THE STOWAGE, DAVID BLOOMFIELD RECALLS HAVING TO FIGHT OFF SOMEBODY HAMPERING HIS PROGRESS TO GET INTO A DINGHY.

ONCE WE WERE ALL IN THE DINGHIES A HEAD COUNT WAS ORDERED BY A FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PAY ACCOUNTS OFFICER FROM KATUNAYAKE AND STEW TUCKER TOOK ON THIS ROLE GIVING EACH PERSON A NUMBER, HE RECALLS NUMBERING HIMSELF LAST, IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT A MEMBER OF CREW HAD BEEN REPORTED MISSING AND WE COULD CERTAINLY HEAR CRIES OF HELP FROM WHAT APPEARED TO BE THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT, IT IS THOUGHT BY ALL THAT THIS WAS THE FLIGHT ENGINEER WHO HAD EITHER ESCAPED THROUGH THE EMERGENCY HATCH NEXT TO HIS STATION OR VIA THE STARBOARD WING, IT IS KNOWN THAT OF THE 20 OCCUPANTS ALL ESCAPED THROUGH EXITS ON THE PORT SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT EXCEPT THE ONE PERSON ADRIFT. IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT GEOFF ATHERTON DIVED INTO THE WATER FROM A DINGHY AND SWAM AFTER THE PERSON WHO WAS ADRIFT. HE STAYED WITH THIS PERSON UNTIL RESCUED DESPITE RECEIVING THE FULL FORCE OF A WOODEN FIRST AID BOX FULLY IN HIS FACE SUSTAINING A BROKEN NOSE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT GEOFF ATHERTON WAS AWARDED A COMMENDATION FOR HIS DEEDS THAT NIGHT AND JUSTLY DESERVED. IT IS ALSO NOTEWORTHY TO REPORT THAT GEOFF SHOT DOWN 5 JAPANESE BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS IN WW2 AND WAS AWARDED THE DFC AND BAR, HE WAS EVENTUALLY SHOT DOWN BY THE JAPANESE INTO THE SEA IN 1944 AND WAS RESCUED BY A CATALINA FLYING

BOAT. SO TWICE HE ENDED UP IN THE DRINK!

SEVERAL MINUTES HAD PASSED SINCE THE INITIAL DITCHING AND WE WERE ABLE TO COLLECT OUR THOUGHTS AND PUT IN TO BEING A PLAN OF ACTION, THE FIRST THING NECESSARY WAS TO GET OURSELVES AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE FOR SEVERAL REASONS, WHEN THE HASTINGS WAS GOING TO SINK WOULD THE SUCTION TAKE US DOWN AS WELL, THERE WAS THE ADDED RISK OF HIGH OCTANE AVGAS FUEL AND ENGINE OIL IGNITING PLUS OTHER HAZARDS OF BATTERY ACIDS AND OTHER VOLATILE SUBSTANCES IN THE AREA. IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT WE HAD FOUND SOME PADDLES IN THE DINGHIES AND I CERTAINLY WAS USING ONE OF THESE FRANTICALLY TRYING TO PADDLE THE DINGHIES AWAY FROM THE TWISTED ALUMINIUM OF THE WINGS AND TAILPLANE, STEW RECALLS HOW HE HAD LEFT THE DINGHY BY STEPPING ON TO A WING TRYING TO PUSH THE DINGHIES AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT, WHAT WE DID NOT KNOW WAS THAT THE DINGHIES WERE STILL TETHERED TO THE AIRCRAFT BY CORD, STEW RECALLS IT WAS ME THAT HAD SPOTTED THIS AND ASKED IF ANYONE HAD GOT A KNIFE, WHEN EITHER A SAILOR OR MARINE PULLED A KNIFE FROM HIS SOCK AND SEVERED THE CONNECTIONS, THE REMAINDER OF THE CORD WAS THEN USED TO TETHER THE DINGHIES TOGETHER, NONE OF US ARE SURE HOW MANY DINGHIES WERE IN USE BUT THE CONSENSUS OF OPINION IS THAT THERE WERE THREE, ONE OF WHICH WAS DEFLATING (PROBABLY PUNCTURED BY THE ALUMINIUM), ONE WHICH CONTAINED THE CREW NO ONE RECALLS HOW THIS BECAME DETACHED FROM THE OTHER TWO.

FORTUNATELY THERE WAS LIGHT FROM THE EMERGENCY BATTERIES LIGHTING UP THE INSIDE OF THE FUSELAGE AND FLASHES OF LIGHTNING STILL RAGING FROM THIS HORRENDOUS STORM, SO WE WERE AT TIMES ABLE TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON APART FROM FEELING AROUND THE DINGHIES FOR EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT. WE HAD CERTAINLY FOUND THE PADDLES AND AT LAST WE WERE MAKING PROGRESS IN GRADUALLY DRIFTING AWAY FROM THE POINT OF DANGER, HOWEVER THE DINGHY THAT WAS DEFLATING WAS CAUSING SOME ANXIETY TO ITS OCCUPANTS AS CORPORAL MURRAY, A RATHER ROTUND CHAP, WAS BEING PHYSICALLY ILL AND SITTING ON THE BELLOWS AS RECALLED BY TONY, DAVID AND STEW, THEY EACH TOOK IT IN TURNS BY KEEPING THE DINGHY INFLATED BY THIS PUMPING ACTION. BOTH DAVID, STEW AND I RECALL FINDING 'HATS', TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES THESE LOOKED LIKE A HUGE TEAT END PIECE OF A CONDOM, THIS CONSISTED OF A PLASTIC TIGHT FITTING HOOD WITH A TINY TORCH BULB IN THE TEAT END, TO ACTIVATE THE LIGHT YOU HAD TO IMMERSE A SMALL CIGARETTE SIZE PACKET BATTERY IN WATER (OBVIOUSLY WE HAD AN OCEAN FULL OF THIS!) WHICH ACTIVATED THE LIGHT BULB ON THE TOP OF THE HEAD, THERE

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WERE MANY OF THESE IN THE DINGHIES BUT HOW THESE COULD BE SEEN FROM ANY DISTANCE IS BEYOND ME. WE NEVER CAME ACROSS ANY OTHER EQUIPMENT WITHIN THESE DINGHIES, TO MY KNOWLEDGE THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN EMERGENCY RATIONS INCLUDING 'DOG' BISCUITS, DRIED HORLICKS TABLETS AND OTHER TABLETS TO CONVERT SALT WATER IN TO FRESH WATER, IN ADDITION THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN A YELLOW BOX KITE (FOR DAY TIME USE) AND FLARES BUT NONE OF THESE WERE FOUND. DAVID RETAINED HIS HELIOGRAPH FROM HIS MAE WEST, THIS IS A SIGNALLING DEVICE EMPLOYING A QUADRANT MIRROR TO REFLECT THE SUN'S RAYS FOR PASSING SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT TO SPOT IN SUCH EMERGENCIES.

AGAIN ONLY MINUTES HAD PASSED FOR ALL OF THIS TO HAPPEN, WE COULD HEAR THE ENGINES OF THE SHACKLETON FIRE INTO LIFE AND TO A TRAINED MECHANIC THIS SOUND OF 4 ROLLS ROYCE GRIFFON ENGINES WAS ALMOST HEAVEN SENT, WE AS SURVIVORS DIDN'T KNOW THERE WAS A SHACKLETON BASED AT GAN BUT MIGHTY PLEASED THAT THERE WAS.

WE WERE NOW BEGINNING TO SETTLE DOWN INTO SOME SORT OF ROUTINE WITHIN THE DINGHIES, WE WERE NOW WELL ADRIFT OF THE CRASHED HASTINGS WHICH WAS STILL AFLOAT, PERHAPS TWO HUNDRED YARDS AWAY FROM ITS TAIL END, THE NOSE POINTING AWAY FROM GAN (AS ALSO REMEMBERED BY STEW, DAVID AND MYSELF), THE AIRFIELD LIGHTS WERE TO OUR RIGHT AND WE COULD ONLY SEE THESE AS WE ROSE ON THE CREST OF EACH GIANT WAVE, HANGING ON TO THE GUIDE ROPES FOR DEAR LIFE, STILL IN A RAGING THUNDERSTORM. HOW TG579 MANAGED TO RIDE THESE WAVES FOR SO LONG IS A REMARKABLE TESTAMENT TO ITS DURABILITY AGAIN IT IS A CONSENSUS OF OPINION THAT SHE STAYED AFLOAT FOR SOME TWENTY MINUTES UNTIL SLIPPING DOWN STARBOARD WING FIRST (STEW THINKS PORT WING DOWN) INTO DEEP WATER. THE PORT WING ROSE INTO THE AIR DEVOID OF BOTH OF ITS HERCULES ENGINES, OTHERS NOTICED THAT NUMBER THREE ENGINE WAS ALSO MISSING, IT WAS SAD TO SEE HER DISAPPEAR AS SAILORS WOULD A SINKING OR TORPEDOED SHIP. IT COULD HAVE EASILY BEEN US GOING DOWN WITH IT, I ALSO FIND IT AMAZING THAT IF TWO OR THREE ENGINES WERE RIPPED FROM THE BULKHEADS WEIGHING OVER A TON EACH WHY THE WINGS WERE NOT TORN OFF ON THE FIRST IMPACT I CANNOT IMAGINE WHY THEY DIDN'T, PERHAPS THE SLOW LANDING SPEED PREVENTED THIS AND WITH THE THREE CRASHES IT WOULD APPEAR AS IF THE AIRCRAFT SKIPPED THE SEA LIKE A PEBBLE SKIPPING ACROSS THE TOP OF A POND.

ONCE TG579 HAD SLID BELOW THE WAVES, IT WAS TIME TO TAKE STOCK, STEW TUCKER SUGGESTED THAT EVERYONE REMOVED THEIR SHOES AND BOOTS TO PREVENT ANY MORE DINGHIES BEING DEFLATED FROM SHARP OBJECTS LIKE EXPOSED NAILS OR

STUDS OR BLAKEY'S, SOME SHOES WERE THROWN OVERBOARD TO STOP CLUTTERING UP THE DINGHIES, THOSE THAT WERE RETAINED WERE KEPT ON THE OWNERS LAP IN CASE WE HAD TO USE THESE FOR BALING OUT WATER FROM THE DINGHIES. THERE WAS WATER IN ALL THE DINGHIES BUT IN MINE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, IT WAS PROBABLY RESIDUAL WATER FROM THE RAIN OR SEA WATER SPLASHING OVER THE HIGH WALLS OF THE LIFE RAFTS.

THE SHACKLETON WAS BY NOW AIRBORNE AND A SYSTEMATIC SEARCH WAS STARTED AS RECALLED BY HARRY HEYWOOD "THE FLARES WERE CLEAR POINTS OF LIGHT, NOT FUZZY AS THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN IF FALLING THROUGH CLOUD. THE SHACKLETON WAS RUNNING IN ON THE RUNWAY LINE FIRING OFF SINGLE FLARES ONE AFTER ANOTHER, THEN AS HE PASSED OVER THE DITCHED HASTINGS HE WOULD FIRE OFF A CLUSTER, PULL AWAY THEN REPEAT THE PROCEDURE." FROM A PASSENGER POINT OF VIEW THIS APPEARED TO BE WHAT I RECALLED, BUT THE HASTINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN ON ITS WAY OR ON THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA BED BY THIS TIME. SHACKLETON AIRCRAFT HAD SOPHISTICATED RADAR ON BOARD AND CARRIED A CREW OF TEN, DESPITE THE FACT THAT NO METAL OBJECT WAS ON THE SURFACE (TG579) THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN QUITE EASY TO DETECT AS IF THE HASTINGS WERE A SUBMARINE, I AM NOT AWARE THAT ANY ASDIC OR SONAR BUOYS OR OTHER SIMILAR EQUIPMENT WAS BEING USED BY THE SHACKLETON. AT THIS POINT DON ELLIS THE FIRST NAVIGATOR ON THE OFF DUTY SHACKLETON AT GAN FROM 205 SQUADRON CHANGI RECALLS THE ATROCIOUS TROPICAL STORM AND ASKED THE OPERATIONS OFFICER WHAT THE CREW OF THE HASTINGS SHOULD DO, THE OPS OFFICER REPLIED 'IF THEY HAD ANY SENSE THEY WOULD RETURN TO KATUNAYAKE'. THE C.O. OF GAN, WING COMMANDER EWAN THOMAS WAS IN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WITH THE DUTY AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICER. THE CREW OF THE HASTINGS DID A BLIND APPROACH BEACON SYSTEM (BABS) APPROACH ALMOST RELIANT UPON INSTRUMENTS. DON LATER RECALLS THE HASTINGS NAVIGATOR CALL "2 MILES" AND THE CO-PILOT SAYING "YOU'RE DOWN TO 50". AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL THEN HEARD NOTHING AND WONDERED IF THE AIRCRAFT HAD LOST RADIO CONTACT AND SO THE RESCUE TENDER (FIRE ENGINE) WAS SENT TO TRAVEL THE LENGTH OF THE RUNWAY TO SEE IF THE HASTINGS WAS ON THE GROUND. THE SEARCH AND RESCUE SHACKLETON CAPTAINED BY JOHNNY ELIAS WAS DESPATCHED TO THE END OF THE RUNWAY TO SHINE ITS LIGHTS LOOKING FOR THE AIRCRAFT, JOHNNY THOUGHT THAT IF HE WAS TO DO THIS HE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE GOT AIRBORNE SO WITHIN 10 MINUTES THEY WERE ON THE RUNWAY THRESHOLD. THE AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF AND STARTED FIRING FLARES FROM 3 MILES TO 2 MILES OUT FROM THE CRASH SCENE ON THE FIRST RUN AND THEN RUNNING IN FROM 2 MILES THEY SPOTTED WRECKAGE

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AND DINGHIES WHERE THE TWO AIR SEA RESCUE LAUNCHES WERE DESPATCHED TO THE SCENE. DON'S AIRCRAFT TOOK TO THE AIR THE NEXT MORNING LOOKING FOR WRECKAGE AND SAW A MAIN WHEEL AFLOAT, THE LAUNCHES LATER COLLECTED THESE. DON ALSO RECALLS THAT HE TOOK GEOFF ATHERTON BACK TO KATUNAYAKE IN HIS SHACKLETON AS GEOFF REFUSED POINT BLANK TO FLY BACK IN A HASTINGS!

THE MORALE IN THE DINGHIES WAS VERY GOOD, THERE WAS PLENTY OF SHOUTING AND SINGING, THE USUAL 'CHESTNUTS' OF 'WHY ARE WE WAITING', 'SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME' ETC WERE ALL BEING SUNG, THE FLARES WERE GETTING EVER CLOSER AND THAT WE SOMEHOW KNEW THAT THE CHANCES OF RESCUE WERE EXTREMELY HIGH, SOME WAG SUGGESTED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ONE OF THE FLARES ENTERED THE DINGHY, HOW HE DIDN'T GET FED TO THE SHARKS IS ANYONE'S GUESS! IT WAS APPARENT AFTER SOME WHILE THAT THE SHACKLETON HAD FOUND US AS THE FLARES WERE FALLING IN AN ARC SOME DISTANCE FROM THE DINGHIES AND THIS WAS TO GUIDE THE TWO RESCUE LAUNCHES TO THE CRASH SITE.

WE COULD SEE SOME DISTANCE AWAY BRIGHT LIGHTS, THESE WERE A MIXTURE OF THE GAN AIRFIELD LIGHTS AND WE EVENTUALLY SPOTTED SEARCH LIGHTS SEEMINGLY LIKE A VERY LONG WAY AWAY, THESE WERE ONLY VISIBLE AS WERE THE AIRFIELD LIGHTS WHEN WE WERE APPROACHING THE CREST OF A WAVE. AT THIS POINT IN TIME WE DID NOT KNOW WHERE WE HAD DITCHED, WE KNEW WE WERE TO THE EAST OF GAN AIRFIELD AND WOULD ESTIMATE AS BEING BETWEEN ONE AND TWO MILES OUT WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL APRIL 2001 WAS THAT THIS AREA IS TREACHEROUS IN THAT IT IS KNOWN AS THE GAN CHANNEL AND SEPARATES TWO ISLANDS WILLINGILI TO THE EAST AND GAN ISLAND TO THE WEST THIS STRETCH OF WATER IS WHERE THE CALMER LAGOON OF THE ADDU ATOLL MEETS THE INDIAN OCEAN WITH THE TIDAL WATERS RUNNING VERY FAST AS RECALLED BY BRIAN BARKER , AT ABOUT EIGHT KNOTS.

BRIAN WAS ON PINNACE 1374 THE SMALLER OF THE TWO RESCUE LAUNCHES, I CANNOT RECALL SEEING THIS BOAT BUT BRIAN RECALLS PICKING UP WING COMMANDER GEOFF ATHERTON AND ONE OTHER (THE FLIGHT ENGINEER?) PLUS ANOTHER DINGHY LOAD WHO WE ASSUME TO BE THE OTHER CREW MEMBERS, WE THINK THIS PINNACE ARRIVED BACK TO THE GAN JETTY AFTER THE LARGE LAUNCH PICKED UP THE PASSENGERS AND I AM INFORMED BY STEW THAT THE AQM WAS WITH THE PASSENGERS. THERE WAS MUCH REJOICING WHEN THE LARGER LAUNCH WAS APPROACHING US, SHOUTING BY ALL, THE WAVING OF ARMS ALL HELPED TO KEEP THE MORALE HIGH. THIS LAUNCH LOOKED HUGE IN COMPARISON TO OUR DINGHIES AND AS IT GOT EVER NEARER

THE SWELL LOOKED EVEN WORSE AS THERE WAS A BACKWASH BETWEEN THE GROUP OF DINGHIES AND THE LAUNCH. SCRAMBLING NETS WERE ATTACHED TO THE SIDE OF THE LAUNCH AND IT WAS WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY TO HOLD ON TO THE ROPE AND THEN PUT ONES FEET ON THE ROPE, IF YOU'VE EVER CLIMBED A LADDER WITH SOFT SOLED SHOES ON YOU CAN APPRECIATE OUR PLIGHT, RAGING SEAS, HUGE SWELL COVERED IN FUEL AND OIL BUT I WAS IN GOOD HANDS AS ONE OF THE MARINE CRAFT GUYS LITERALLY GRABBED THE BACK OF MY MAE WEST AND HAULED ME UP ON DECK, WHERE DAVID RECALLS BEING PULLED ABOARD BY HIS HAIR! I WAS IMMEDIATELY TAKEN BELOW DECK AND GIVEN A BLANKET AND TOWEL AND A MUG OF TEA WHICH I DRANK AND IMMEDIATELY BROUGHT BACK UP AGAIN WITH A CONCOCTION OF OTHER FLUIDS IN MY MOUTH. I STILL REMEMBER THOSE MATTRESSES WITH A TICKING STRIPE COVER AND FEELING VERY MUCH THE WORSE FOR WEAR, PERHAPS IT WAS PART EMOTION THAT BROUGHT THIS ON, I HAD NEVER SUFFERED FROM TRAVEL SICKNESS BEFORE OR SINCE , THAT WAS AN EXCEPTION. STEW RECALLS THE HULL OF THE LAUNCH SCRAPING THE CORAL, THIS MUST HAVE BEEN SOMEWHERE NEAR THE REEF AREA LATER AS OUR IMMEDIATE RESCUE WAS FROM DEEP WATER. IT MUST BE MENTIONED HERE THAT A HEARTFELT THANK YOU MUST GO TO THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE MARINE CRAFT SECTION FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BERNIE SAUNDERS, HIS COXSWAIN DICKIE DENMAN FOR THE BRAVERY SHOWN THAT NIGHT AND THE CREWS OF THOSE TWO MOTOR LAUNCHES WHO SET SAIL IN THE WORST POSSIBLE WEATHER CONDITIONS PREVAILING AT THAT TIME AND IN CURRENTS SO STRONG THAT UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS THEY WOULD NOT VENTURE OUT THROUGH THE REEF AREA EXCEPTING IN DIRE EMERGENCIES, I UNDERSTAND THAT A COMMENDATION WAS AWARDED TO BERNIE SAUNDERS THAT NIGHT AND AGAIN, JUST LIKE GEOFF ATHERTON'S AWARD, RICHLY DESERVED.

IT IS UNDERSTOOD BY VARIOUS PARTIES THAT WE WERE IN THE DINGHIES FOR 1 1/2 HOURS, I HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT TO BE CORRECT, OTHERS THINK LONGER, CERTAINLY THE PINNACE ARRIVED AFTER THE LARGE LAUNCH AND THAT IT IS THOUGHT THE CREW AND THOSE OTHER TWO ADRIFT ARRIVED ABOUT AN HOUR LATER. ROGER STEVENS RECALLS HE GAVE ASSISTANCE AT THE JETTY BY LIGHTING UP THE AREA WITH THE FIRE ENGINE LIGHTS AND RECALLS THE FIRST PERSON HE HAD HELPED ASHORE WAS A CORPORAL BILL GRUNDY WHO HE HAD PREVIOUSLY SERVED WITH AT RAF BALLYKELLY, IT IS ALSO INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT ANOTHER SURVIVOR ROGER HELPED ASHORE WAS A SAILOR WHOSE COMMENTS WERE "THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE FLOWN WITH THE RAF AND THEY TRIED TO DROWN ME, SOMETHING THAT THE NAVY NEVER DID !"

JOHN BAWDEN WHO WORKED IN GAN AIR TRAFFIC RE-

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CALLS THAT WE WERE TAKEN TO THE STATION SICK QUARTERS AND APART FROM ONE OR TWO THAT HAD INGESTED FUEL AND OIL THAT NO OTHER SERIOUS INJURIES WERE SUSTAINED. JOHN TRAVELLED BACK TO LYNEHAM ON 'THE WHITE KNUCKLE BRITANNIA RIDE' THE NEXT DAY AT KARACHI, I REALLY DO NOT RECALL COMING OFF THE LAUNCH AND HOW I GOT TO SICK QUARTERS (WITHOUT ANY SHOES ON), BUT I DO RECALL BEING MEDICALLY EXAMINED, OTHERS SAY THEY WEREN'T AND BEING PASSED FIT TO FLY TO THE UK THE NEXT DAY. I IMAGINE THAT I WAS GIVEN FRESH KD CLOTHING THAT NIGHT AT GAN BUT AGAIN I CAN'T REMEMBER, I DO REMEMBER NOT BEING ABLE TO SLEEP. IT WAS IN STATION SICK QUARTERS THAT THE CREW WERE BROUGHT IN AND THERE WAS MUCH ANIMOSITY FROM THE PASSENGERS TOWARDS THE PILOT, IN THE FORM OF VERBAL ABUSE AND FINGER WAGGING, I REALLY CANNOT REMEMBER THIS HAPPENING BUT I CAN ACCEPT WHY IT DID OCCUR.

I AM ALSO INFORMED THAT WITH WHAT FEW RUPEES WE HAD LEFT BETWEEN US THAT WE CLUBBED TOGETHER AND BOUGHT THE SHACKLETON RESCUE CREW A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY TO SHARE AMONG HIS CREW AND AS A THANK YOU., AGAIN WITHOUT THEIR ASSISTANCE WHO KNOWS WHAT THE OUTCOME WOULD HAVE BEEN.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING WEDNESDAY 2ND MARCH 1960 I RECALL QUEUING FOR SOME EMERGENCY PAY AS ALL MY LEAVE MONEY WAS IN MY CAMERA BAG, £35=0=0 PAID IN 10/= NOTES AT RAF KATUNAYAKE, A KING'S RANSOM IN THOSE DAYS (ABOUT £700-800 POUNDS TODAY), THE REASON WE WERE ALL PAID IN BROWN 10/= NOTES WAS THAT PAY ACCOUNTS HAD RUN OUT OF WHITE FIVERS AND BLUE POUND NOTES! ALL OF THAT MONEY AND MY PERSONAL POSSESSIONS WERE LOST IN THAT ACCIDENT, THE ONLY THING THAT I WAS ABLE TO SALVAGE WAS MY OMEGA SEAMASTER WATCH WHICH WAS ON MY WRIST. WHEN I ASKED THE MARINE CRAFT BOYS WHAT EFFECTS WERE FOUND, THEY SAID NOTHING APART FROM THE WHEELS OF THE HASTINGS, I AM SURE IT WAS THEY THAT TOLD ME THAT THE AIRCRAFT HAD SUNK TO A DEPTH OF OVER 1000 FATHOMS WHILST DAVID BLOOMFIELD WAS TOLD THIS DEPTH BY A MEMBER OF THE SHACKLETON CREW, IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER WHAT DEPTH IT ENDED UP IN WE LOST EVERYTHING. ALL FOUR PASSENGERS SAY THEY LOST EVERYTHING INCLUDING LEAVE PAY AND STEW TUCKERS DEEP SEA BOX WAS ON BOARD THE HASTINGS GIVING A NEW MEANING TO THE TERM DEEP SEA BOX!

I FEEL REMARKABLY LUCKY THAT THE AIRCRAFT STAYED AFLOAT AND DIDN'T BREAK UP ON IMPACT AND THAT THE INJURIES SUSTAINED WERE OF A MINOR NATURE TO ALL. I AM ALSO FORTUNATE THAT WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS ABOUT TO UNFOLD AND THAT THE PILOT DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO HIS AIRCRAFT, IF EITHER OF THE ABOVE WAS KNOWN THEN I AM SURE THAT THE

CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. AS AN ENGINE MECHANIC I HAD NO PARTICULAR LOVE AFFAIR FOR A HASTINGS AIRCRAFT, THEY WERE REASONABLY EASY TO SERVICE AND QUITE RELIABLE AS PISTON ENGINED AIRCRAFT BUT TOOK SOME TIME TO 'TURN AROUND'. HAVING SAID THAT THE DESIGN TEAM OF A HANDLEY PAGE HASTINGS DESIGNED PERHAPS THE BEST AND MOST DURABLE NON FLYING BOAT AIRCRAFT THE ROYAL AIR FORCE TOOK DELIVERY OF AS ANOTHER HASTINGS CRASHED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN OFF CASTEL BENITO AIRFIELD AND ENDED UP FLOATING FOR SOME TIME FOR ALL ON BOARD TO MAKE THEIR ESCAPE.

CREDIT MUST GO TO ALL THOSE THAT TOOK PART IN THE RESCUE, THEY WERE ALL HEROES, ON THE NIGHT THEY DID THERE DUTY THAT THEY WERE TRAINED TO DO IN APPALLING WEATHER CONDITIONS AND NOT KNOWING WHETHER THEY WERE LOOKING FOR SURVIVORS OR BODIES OR EVEN NOTHING IF THE AIRCRAFT HAD SUNK WITHOUT TRACE, AND IT IS TO THESE PEOPLE THAT I SAY A MIGHTY BIG THANK YOU!

THE HISTORY OF TG579 READS THUS:

CONTRACTOR HANDLEY PAGE LTD, CRICKLEWOOD, CONTRACT NUMBER 4186, ENGINES INSTALLED 4 BRISTOL HERCULES 101 AIR COOLED RADIAL ENGINES.

TYPE HASTINGS C1 RAF NUMBER TG579

12/04/1949 CONTRACT COMPLETED

13/04/1949 TO 241 OPERATIONAL CONVERSION UNIT (OCU)

08/10/1949 TO LYNEHAM

18/10/1951 HANDLEY PAGE FOR MODIFICATIONS UNTIL 01/11/1951 AND RETURNED TO LYNEHAM ON THAT DAY

05/02/1953 TRANSFERRED TO RAF TRANSPORT COMMAND AIR SUPPORT FLIGHT (ASF)

02/03(?) /1955 TO 29 MAINTENANCE UNIT

08/03/1956 TO 242 OCU

18/08/1956 TO ROS/60 MU

23/08/1956 EX ROS

03/06/1957 20 MU

06/12/1957 FREE LOAN FOR ONE MONTH

07/01/1958 20 MU

20/01/1958 TRANSFERRED TO 48 SQUADRON FEAF (CHANGI)

01/03/1960 FLYING ACCIDENT CATEGORY 5

08/03/1960 STRUCK OFF CHARGE

TG579 FINALLY HAD HERCULES 216 ENGINES ADDED SOMETIME IN ITS LIFE A.M. FORM 78 DOES NOT RECORD THE DATE.

THE OFFICIAL ACCIDENT REPORT AS PROVIDED BY THE AIR HISTORIC BRANCH AT RAF BENTLEY PRIORY WAS HAND WRITTEN AND THIS HAS BEEN DECIPHERED BY SQUADRON LEADER NEIL JONES AND

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WARRANT OFFICER (THEN CORPORAL AT GAN) HARRY HEYWOOD, THE OFFICIAL BOARD OF INQUIRY WAS HELD AT HQ FEAF FAIRY POINT CHANGI, SINGAPORE, DATE UNKNOWN BUT HELD BEFORE MAY 1960.

IT IS WITH MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO HAVE PAINSTAKINGLY SHOWN AN INTEREST FOR MY SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH, YOU HAVE PROVIDED, IN MANY CASES, THE MISSING PARTS OF THE JIGSAW.

SINCE THE NIGHT OF THIS ACCIDENT I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW WHY OUR LIVES WERE IN SUCH DANGER, I ALWAYS HAD A SNEAKING SUSPICION THAT SOMETHING WAS AMISS AND I COULDN'T GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT, I (AND DAVID BLOOMFIELD TOO) HAD STROVE TO ASK QUESTIONS TO THE VARIOUS AUTHORITIES WITHIN THE THEN AIR MINISTRY AND LATER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND NOTHING WAS FORTHCOMING. I BASICALLY KEPT THIS 'LITTLE EPISODE' TO MYSELF AND ONLY MY WIFE AND CLOSEST FRIENDS KNEW THE 'BARE BONES' OF THAT NIGHT, I KEPT THESE THOUGHTS TO MYSELF FOR OVER 40 YEARS, HAVING MANY FLASHBACKS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS, SWEATS AND NERVOUS TENSION. (I NOW KNOW THAT I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE!) I HAD NO AMBITION OF FURTHERING MY CAREER IN THE WAY OF PROMOTION TO THE NON COMMISSIONED RANKING SYSTEM I STAYED A JUNIOR TECHNICIAN ENGINE FITTER UNTIL MY DISCHARGE. MY DIARIES FROM 1962 TO 1969 SHOW MY INTENSE HATRED FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AND RECORD ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS REQUESTS ON GENERAL APPLICATION FORMS TO OBTAIN A DISCHARGE, BUT THE ONLY WAY OUT WAS BY PURCHASING MY CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT BACK FROM THE AIR MINISTRY AND ON EACH OCCASION AMOUNTED TO £200 WHICH I COULD NOT AFFORD, SO I 'RODE OUT' MY TWELVE YEARS BEGRUDGINGLY. I ENJOYED MY WORK AT 'THE SHARP END' ENORMOUSLY, THE COMRADESHIP OF THE LOWER RANKS APPEALED TO ME MORE THAN THE HIGHER RANKS, APART FROM SOME EXCEPTIONS THERE WAS ALWAYS AN AIR OF ALOOFNESS PREVALENT, HOWEVER I MET THIS LESS WHEN IN FIGHTER COMMAND.

MY QUEST WAS ANSWERED IN MARCH 2001, ALMOST EXACTLY 41 YEARS ON, TO GET TO THE TRUTH, I FIRSTLY BOUGHT MYSELF A COMPUTER IN JANUARY 2001 AND SURPRISINGLY IT DID NOT TAKE ME LONG TO GET USED TO IT. I 'SURFED THE NET' DAY AND NIGHT FOR ADDRESSES AND EYE WITNESSES AND ALL OF THIS WAS READILY AVAILABLE, I PLACED TWO SEARCHES ON CHANNEL 4'S 'SERVICE PALS' PAGES IN JANUARY AND MARCH FOR EYE WITNESSES AND WAS WELL PLEASED WITH THE RESPONSE AND EVEN PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T INVOLVED KNEW SOMEONE THAT WAS! THE INFORMATION I ASKED FROM OFFICIAL SOURCES WAS SLOW IN COMING AND IN SOME INSTANCES NON EXISTENT, THE RECORDS OFFICE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AT RAF INNSWORTH WERE APOLOGETIC REGARDING THE LACK OF INFORMATION

BUT DID PROVIDE ME WITH MY SERVICE RECORD AND THIS INFORMATION WAS SCANT TO SAY THE LEAST, I THEREFORE WENT BACK TO THE MoD IN WHITEHALL FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ALSO FOR A COPY OF MY MEDICAL RECORDS. I AGAIN HAD A REPLY FROM THE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AGENCY (ON BEHALF OF THE RAF) AT INNSWORTH AND THEIR CHIEF SECRETARY INFORMS ME THAT ALL AIRMENS DETAILED RECORD OF SERVICE IS DESTROYED AFTER 6 YEARS OF END OF ENGAGEMENT (IN MY CASE 14/07/75) AND THAT BOARD OF INQUIRY REPORTS ARE DESTROYED AFTER 20 YEARS AFTER THE INQUIRY WAS HELD (IN THIS CASE SOMETIME IN 1980). CERTAIN CONFIDENTIAL MILITARY DOCUMENTS ARE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE AT KEW AFTER 30 YEARS (THIS IS GENERALLY KNOWN AS THE 30 YEAR RULE), HARRY HEYWOOD'S COUSIN DOREEN DID SOME RESEARCH HERE AND AGAIN THE INFORMATION WAS VERY SCANT. SO TO SUMMARISE IF ANYONE TRIES TO GET TO THE TRUTH ON ANY GOVERNMENT CONFIDENTIAL MATTER VIA 'OPEN GOVERNMENT' POLICY THERE ARE MANY OBSTACLES PUT IN YOUR WAY AND JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU ARE ABOUT TO CLEAR THE FINAL HURDLE, YOU FIND THAT MOST OF THAT INFORMATION HAS GONE MISSING OR IS NONE EXISTENT. CURRENTLY THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE THE RIGHT HONOURABLE GEOFFREY HOON MP HAS HAD A LETTER FROM ME ON THIS VERY SUBJECT AND I AM AWAITING HIS REPLY! I SUPPOSE THAT WAITING 30 YEARS, MEANS THAT EVERYONE'S MEMORY RECEDES WITH TIME, I CAN ASSURE YOU IT DOESN'T, IF YOU ARE DETERMINED THEN THE 'TRUTH IS OUT THERE' GO AND GET IT. I NOW HAVE OVER 200 DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THIS ACCIDENT AS AT 30/06/2001 BEFORE 12/01/2001 I HAD NONE, I WAS MERELY A PASSENGER ON A TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE THAT CRASHED INTO THE SEA FOR REASONS NOT KNOWN.

I HAVE SINCE FOUND THREE OTHER PASSENGERS FROM THAT AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT VIA A PLEA BY THE DAILY MAIL 'MISSING AND FOUND' COLUMN AND THEIR STORIES ARE ALSO VERY INTERESTING AND THAT THERE IS SOME BITTERNESS RELATING TO THIS ACCIDENT FROM THESE GUYS. THE AUTHORITIES FOUND THAT THIS COULD BE A RATHER EMBARRASSING INCIDENT TO THE SQUEAKY CLEAN IMAGE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, GET RID OF THESE GUYS, TELL THEM NOTHING AND THEY WILL FORGET ALL ABOUT IT! THEY DIDN'T BARGAIN FOR MYSELF DID THEY? TO NOT COMPENSATE US THAT NIGHT FOR THE LOSS OF OUR PAY (AN ENTITLEMENT), TO ANY RECOMPENSE FOR THE LOSS OF THEIR PERSONAL POSSESSIONS (NO ONE TOLD ME THAT I NEEDED TO BE INSURED FOR SUCH AN ACCIDENT AND WAS WILLING TO CARRY MY PERSONAL POSSESSIONS AT NO CHARGE). KD DRESS WAS WORN THAT NIGHT BY ALL ON BOARD AND 'WHITES' BY THE SAILORS NOW IF WE WERE GOING TO HAVE TOA SWIM THE LAST TWO MILES

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SHOULD NOT SWIMMING TRUNKS BE THE DRESS OF THE DAY? WHY WERE ILL FITTING UNIFORMS ISSUED AT NICOSIA, AND WHY WERE THE SURVIVORS PUT UP IN TENTS IN FREEZING CONDITIONS, WHY WERE WE ALL WEARING TOWELS AROUND OUR NECKS (BECAUSE THE RAF DID NOT SUPPLY FRONT AND BACK COLLAR STUDS) AND WHEN A SAILOR AS ONE OF THE SURVIVORS SPORTING A BEARD IN RAF UNIFORM WITH NO HAT WAS ASKED BY A 'REDCAP' ARMY POLICEMAN AT SWINDON STATION 'AND WHOSE F*****G ARMY ARE YOU IN?' (AS RECALLED BY S.A.C. BRIAN WILMER A PASSENGER WITH US ON THE BRITANNIA), THE WHOLE EPISODE BEGGARS BELIEF, OUR QUICK EXIT THROUGH CUSTOMS AND IN DAVID BLOOMFIELD'S CASE WHEN HE ARRIVED AT RAF WADDINGTON GUARDROOM TO REPORT TO HIS NEW UNIT WAS CONFRONTED BY A SENIOR N.C.O. AS TO WHY HE WAS WEARING CIVILIAN CLOTHING AND NOT UNIFORM, AND LATER HAD TO BUY HIS FULL UNIFORM FOR £35 FOR SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED WHICH WAS NOT HIS FAULT! THIS IS THE SQUEAKY CLEAN IMAGE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE.

THERE ARE MANY QUESTIONS STILL TO BE ANSWERED, THE 'NITTY GRITTY' QUESTION WHY DID IT HAPPEN HAS BEEN ANSWERED AND WE KNOW THAT NEGLIGENCE BY PILOT ERROR WAS THE CAUSE AND AS YET STILL TO BE ADDRESSED.

MY INTENTIONS TO FLY AGAIN AFTER I LEFT THE SERVICE OF THE R.A.F. HAS NEVER BEEN FULFILLED, I DO NOT HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO TAKE TO THE AIR AGAIN, TWICE BITTEN IS ENOUGH BECAUSE WITHIN 24 HOURS OF HASTINGS TG579 CRASHING INTO THE SEA AT GAN WE TOOK THE 'WHITE KNUCKLE RIDE' ON THE 2ND MARCH 1960 AT KARACHI VIA A BRITANNIA XL638 'SIRIUS', WE LANDED AT KARACHI, REFUELLED, TOOK OFF WHEN WE HAD ANOTHER EMERGENCY IN AS MUCH THAT A NOSE WHEEL ACTUATOR FAILED TO OPERATE RESULTING IN 'A NOSE WHEEL RED', AT THE TIME OF THIS INCIDENT NO PASSENGERS WERE INFORMED OF THE PROBLEM. I WAS SAT BY A WINDOW AND COULD SEE WHAT I THOUGHT WAS SMOKE COMING FROM NUMBER THREE ENGINE, I STOOD UP IN PANIC AND CALLED THE CABIN STAFF OVER (A SERGEANT) WHEN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY A MEMBER OF THE CREW (CAPTAIN?) CAME OVER THE TANNOY SYSTEM TO SAY THAT WHAT WE WERE SEEING WAS FUEL BEING JETTISONED AND WHAT LOOKED LIKE SMOKE WAS IN FACT ATOMISED FUEL. TERROR WENT THROUGH MY BODY FOR ONE HOUR AND TEN MINUTES WHILST WE CIRCLED DUMPING FUEL AND AIR TRAFFIC CHECKING THE UNDERCARRIAGE NOSE WHEEL WAS DOWN, I CANNOT BEGIN TO EXPLAIN THE FEAR THAT I AND OTHER SURVIVORS ENCOUNTERED, THIS SPREAD TO OTHER PASSENGERS NOT ASSOCIATED WITH THE HASTINGS INCIDENT. TWO OTHERS ON THE BRITANNIA WERE JOHN BAWDEN AND BRIAN WILMER WHO HAVE MADE CONTACT AND RECALL THE WHITE FACES AND KNUCKLES OF THOSE SURVIVORS AND HOW THE EMERGENCY FIRE CREWS AND AMBULANCES LINED THE RUNWAY AND CHASED AFTER US WHEN WE TOUCHED DOWN SAFELY! I SWEAR THAT IF I HAD BEEN GIVEN A PARACHUTE AT THAT TIME I WOULD HAVE TAKEN THIS EASIER ROUTE OF ESCAPE.....

Keeping in Touch

RECENT LOSSES

Arthur Mitchell died on 11th Dec 2001 of stomach cancer at Bath Hospital. The burial took place at St Mary's Church, Calne on 21st Dec. He was previous Secretary to 24 Sqn Association, treasurer of the Britannia Association, Chief Flt Eng for Monarch Airlines. A good story teller and ex Halton brat.

Arthur Mitchell's funeral was attended by the Standards from the RAFA and the Royal British Legion. Many local retired aircrew were present, including reps from 24 Sqn, The Aircrew Assn, Halton, Lyneham, Calne Businesses, Monarch Airways.

There was a memorial service in the New Year.

R W A Hughes Sqn Ldr RAF Retired (Hughie) RAF No. 577955

It is with considerable regret that I have to inform you that Hughie died on 20 December 2001 from stomach cancer.

He bore his illness with great fortitude and dignity and is really missed by Jo, Robert, Wendy and David.

His daughter, Wendy, wrote to say "Dad was a Navigator with 24 Squadron at RAF Colerne from either 1961 or '62 to 1967, first flying Hastings, then Hercules. We lived at 6 Beech Road, North Colerne.

For those friends of Dad who may be interested Mum, Jo, has early stages of dementia and is at St. Stephen's Care Home in Worcester where she seems very happy, although still asks after Dad at times. Dad retired from the RAF in 1977, and had a very successful career after that, finally retiring at age 74 to look after

Mum, when he then became Field Officer for both the Royal British Legion and SSAFA.

He was a highly intelligent man with an acerbic wit which he retained until the end. He will certainly be a difficult act to follow". Regards Wendy Anwyl Hughes

Peter McCann was a Sqn Ldr pilot on 24 before retiring to work as Citizens Advice Bureau Advisor in Hampshire. Peter was on the Squadron from 1959 to 1961 stationed at Colerne and flew Hastings before being discharged in Feb 79, We were informed he died in November 2000 by his wife Christine who visited 24 Squadron and asked the padre at RAF Lyneham to conduct the Service of Thanksgiving.

Frank Dewell was a pilot with the Squadron from 1944 to 1947 flying Yorks out of Bassingbourn and Lyneham before eventually retiring with the rank of Wing Commander. His son Len informed us that Frank passed away on 15th March 2002.

Flt Lt Raimund Puda passed away on 17th March 2002. Raimund was a Brigadier General in the Czech Air Force and was a remarkable and unique aviator. His career included being involved with the Battle of Britain, flying in the French air Force and a Captain on Czech Airlines, a career that spanned 24 years and included over 80 aircraft types.

A military service and interment took place on May 5th at the Brookwood Military Cemetery attended by the Czech Ambassador and Air Chief Marshall Sir Foxley Norriss, Chairman of the Battle of Britain Association. Raimund will lie next to Eddie

Precht, the pilot on the General Sikorsky Liberator which crashed at Gibraltar.

Raimund was with 24 Squadron at Hendon from 1943 to 1945 and held the Croix de Guerre.

Notification of his death was sent in by his dearest and closest friend Edith Thomas who nursed him to the end. He was also known to Jock Hannah of the Association.

Pilot who flew 15 types of aircraft leaves RAF

RAF pilot Raymond Evans has left Lyneham after more than four decades of dedicated service. In his time, Flt Lt Evans has flown 15 different aircraft during 12,000 hours of flying time.

He has served in both the Falklands and Gulf Wars, as well as the Bosnia conflict. He joined the RAF as an aircraft apprentice in 1959 and applied for aircrew 1 training -after five years of engineering work. Later he applied for a commission as an engineering officer, but was offered, and jumped at, the chance to become a pilot. As the oldest trainee pilot at the time, Flt Lt Evans completed his course in record time. He arrived at Lyneham in 1975, having trained to fly the Hercules and the second half of his career proved just as eventful as the first.

He helped rescue British personnel from Iran after the collapse of the Shah's regime to Nepal, took part in the air bridge during the Falklands war in 1982, and completed

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two tours of duty away from Lyneham.

On his return to Lyneham he became the station's unit test pilot, carrying out trials on new pieces of equipment, including the chaff and flare defensive aids. Finally he returned to fly with 24 Squadron, before being discharged from the RAF after 42 years.

Lyneham spokesman Flt Lt Tom Draper said: We wish him a long and healthy retirement and all the best for the future."

From Wiltshire Gazette and Herald, Jan 2002

DUXFORD'S YORK FUSELAGE COMPLETED

Duxford Aviation Society's York is well on the way to completion of its mammoth restoration.

THE RESTORATION of the fuselage of Avro York G-AM at Duxford, Cambs, has recently been completed after some 14 years of work and has been outshopped into the colours of Dan-Air. The aircraft is due to move into Hangar during May and is promised a secure future inside, as the awarding of its Lottery Grant was on condition that the airframe must remain under cover.

G-ANTWs paintwork has taken two years to complete, needing six coats which were all applied by hand. Two of the engines have been restored, with the others and

the wings to be completed in due course. It is expected that it will take another four years to finish the work. The job done so far has resulted in a pristine finish which former production line workers have described as: "Better than when it left the factory".

Fly Past 11 June 2001

I am looking for information on the usage of the Grumman Goose with No. 24 Squadron. I believe a Goose called MV993 was operated by No. 24, but beyond that don't know a whole lot. Do you have any other information?

If you have any information, contact Derek Linder at GRUMMANGOOSE.COM or reply to the Editor.

If anyone has any information surrounding the crash of No24 Squadron Wellington on the afternoon of 3 December 1943 at Standon, Herts, I would be very grateful to hear from them.

The pilot of the aircraft was F/O R G Warmington, who was killed along with the rest of the crew, with the exception of two ground crew, who were on board at the time. I understand that the aircraft was on a flight test, when it suffered engine trouble, and crashed into a wood near the village of Standon.

I am about to investigate the crash site, and any further background information would be very welcome.

David Ashley
30 Lenmore Avenue
Grays, Essex
RM17 5NZ
email: davidashley@blueyonder.co.uk

Tel: 01375 407740

Sqn. Leader J.R. Ramsden 24 Squadron (54430) R.A.F.

I wonder if you would please help me with any information regarding Ramsden. Normal research is impossible as WW2 records are not yet available at the P.R.O. Ramsden's group includes an A.F.C. (L.G. 9/6/1949) and this, plus surprisingly his other medals are all individually named. The L.G. listing doesn't give any details of why the decoration was awarded and any information you may be able to provide would be gratefully received.

So writes in Alun Mummery, once again any leads via the Editor.

Snippets

A few books that may be of interest to readers spotted during the year.

Aircraft Illustrated have done what they call an "Extra" on "Hawker - Pioner of Air fighting by Charles Bowyer, phone # 01932 26622 for details or contact Aircraft Illustrated by e-mail at richard@tgscott.co.uk

They say all of us have one book in us and our new Chairman, Keith Chapman is no exception. Keith's book is titled "Military air transport Operations" and is published by Brassey in the Air Power Series ISBN is 0-08-034749-5.

John Mitchell who is the author of Nav's Diary informs us that "Hendon Aerodrome - A history" by David Oliver contains a wealth of information on Squadron history and

Memory Banks 2

Dear Editor

24 Squadron Association Magazine.

I have enjoyed greatly the Summer Issue No 8 of the above and correspondents articles. That of Jock Hannah particularly grabbed my attention as I was on the Sqn from 6 June 1941 until posted non-effective in early October 1942 so have a personal interest in sonic of its contents. His reference to W.O Bill Laver was particularly of interest as I new he had been killed in a crash but did not know the circumstances. When I joined the Squadron, Bill was a F/Sgt and in charge of both the ground servicing wireless mechanics and the flying wireless ops.

At this tune we had a motley of aircraft including DH Dominie's DH Flamingos and Lockheed Electras these being the operational Pipes amongst a number of others that never left a hangar. Expansion took place at this tune and Lockheed Hudsons began to arrive and the strength of the ground wirless mechanics was increased from 2-Aircraftsman Benson and myself to 4 initially with the arrival of A/C's Eric Meredith and Tom Weekes but by October the strength was up to 6 actual wireless- operator mechanics and wireless mechanics, Benson and I being the former. We were also strengthened by-the arrival of wireless. operators awaiting their fluffier aircrew

training. It was in September 1941 or there about that the servicing personnel moved into workshops and alongside the railway embankment and W.O. Stride and Sgt Sharp (both ex apprentices) took us over. I had left the Squadron before Bill Lavers misfortune but I remember him as a very nice quietly spoken chap, very much liked.

Jock also mentions Robbie Robson who was one of the straight wireless ops with the squadron when I arrived. We met by chance at Prestwick in October 1944. By this time I was also flying having taken an air gunnery course a few months after returning from my internment in Spanish Morocco. We were in the Terminal at Prestwick having just delivered a Liberator from Dorval via Goose Bay prior to picking up another and flying on to S.E.A.C. Regarding the Flamingo aircraft there were five on Squadron in June '41 and as I recall it the reg nos. were R2763, R2764, R2765 R2766 and R731? of these R2766 was fitted out for V.I.P use with luxurious swivel am chairs. The odd one out R731? never flew to my knowledge.

This brings me to the photograph on page 23, this of course is not a DH Flamingo but a DH Dragonfly, a larger version of the Dominie. As I remember one of these arrived early in 1942. Some members may also remember the four engined Fokker 111 airliner which arrived around this time and of course the Airspeed Oxford Ambulances.' I mentioned Eric Meredith above and have to tell you that he passed away early this year.

He was not an Association member but sonic may remember him as Cpl. Meredith who was with the squadron from Sept 41 to late 43 I think having earlier served as a wireless mechanic servicing Hurricanes at sea on freighters in the early Battles of the Atlantic.

We had kept in touch and in fact my wife and I looked him up in May last year and he was somewhat ailing then. Unfortunately I shall be unable to attend the reunion activities again this year but wish you all a successful and happy occasion and hope this trip down memory lane will be of some interest.

Stanley A Wheeler

Diary of a Navigator Pt 5

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

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

It quickly became clear to us that apart from getting from A to B on time and in comfort, the Prime Minister expected a high standard of catering wherever we were. Once out of the UK we should have to rely on a local Commander-in-Chief's Residence for top-class re-victualling. Fresh, clean water was of course a must: we could only carry a limited quantity. The emptying and cleaning of three lavatory cans (of basic Bomber Command standard, I might say, except for the PM's to which the inventor of the Elsan had fitted a flushing pump which could only re-circulate the contents but little else) was a problem - easy enough on an RAF staging post, but elsewhere

The RAF even at home base was ill-equipped to store the cutlery and china, the linen and blankets clean and dry - in a Spitfire hangar. So, we resorted to the airing cupboards etc of the Northolt Officers' Mess. In these early days, too, a 2,000 gallon petrol bowser had to be specially despatched from Hendon for our use, for Spitfires did not need fuel in that quantity. Gradually these problems were overcome and their solution became routine. But the provision of food, in rationed UK, was to remain a problem and its solution overseas was often unorthodox, but our provisions usually satisfied the Owner. Drink - well,

the NAAFI could supply whisky and gin but more exotic drinks and favourite wines had to be found from No 10's resources.

The galley of the York when she was first delivered had a 'hay box', a keep-warm apparatus, which assumed that we would always load pre-cooked meals at base. Whilst the design genius who installed this device might have foreseen of modern day tourist class airline catering, the RAF had no means to provide such rations, and we quickly saw that the PM would never have accepted such restricted catering, even if it had worked on the maiden voyage.

Thus as soon as the aircraft returned to base after HM's flight, urgent modifications were needed to the galley. A grill of some sort was essential: fast heaters were needed for hot drinks: a toaster was a 'must'. Alterations were needed to improve the crew accommodation in the forward cabin and more stowage was needed for my navigation gear, for the wireless operator's requirements and for the flight engineer's tools and spares. Another big modification needed was the removal of a heavy wooden conference table from the main saloon and its replacement by a much lighter tubular aluminium folding table. This would make a big weight saving in furnishings.

So it came about in mid July 1943 that the aircraft was returned to Messrs A V Roe at Woodford (Manchester) for a month while essential modifications were carried out.

In technical respects we were very fortunate to find two friends, experts in their particular field of civil aviation who had hitherto been ignored by the Ministry of Aircraft Production and the bomber design teams in Manchester. They were GEC's Aviation Division Manager, Frank Buckle, who came up trumps with galley equipment made from RAF-provided raw material (eg sheet aluminium), and Mr Lew Rumbold of Cricklewood who seemed to be the only manufacturer who could make lightweight aircraft furnishings. (Both were to play a big part in the furnishing of the interior of the Skymaster for Mr Churchill's later use in the autumn of 1944.)

Another good friend was the Senior Rolls Royce Liaison Officer to the RAF (Mr Bill Lappin) who was on hand to learn of the behaviour of the Merlin engines in their transport role for the first time. Information was needed by the firm for the post-war sale of Rolls Royce engines in civil aircraft and, of course, to maintain the reputation of the firm in the eyes of the Prime Minister. From then on we were to have a permanent Rolls Royce representative available at Northolt.

At the front end of the aircraft it was soon obvious that the two bunks on the starboard side in the forward cabin would have to be sacrificed to provide accommodation for the flight engineer, Jack Payne. Further space was needed for the crew's accoutrements, for we were likely to be 'en route' for several days at a time between major bases. For

navigation alone, I needed to carry a quantity of maps and charts as well as ephemeral data in various Navigation Tables, etc. Thus the forward cabin was to be used for the crew, except when we were obliged to provide a seat for the detective. The aircraft was flown back to us at Northolt in the first week of August, with its galley re-designed and other modifications incorporated. We now included a Sergeant Chef in the crew and a Steward, both found from the RAF Officers' Mess at Hendon. Corporal Shepherd, the first steward who was really the CO's batman, was retired to his normal duties. With the assistance of the PM's valet, Sawyers, we now had a formidable 'cabin staff.

So much for the general problems of operating an airborne private yacht in wartime on overseas journeys involving absences from home base of up to three to four weeks at a time. These had never been encountered on the pre-war Empire air routes. They landed their slow but luxurious aircraft each night, the passengers slept in hotels or rest houses, and the aircraft was re-victualled from pre stocked stores. Neither had they been met by the King's Flight whose aircraft had never travelled outside Western Europe. We had to learn as we went along, and try and forecast what would be needed.

NAVIGATION AND ALLIED PROBLEMS IN WARTIME

In these days of automatic navigation (whether by inertial or satellite systems), even the most hardened single-handed sailor need only press the right button and look at his watch: hey presto! And the course to steer to a pre-set destination is produced

and most likely cranked into the steering mechanism, so that there is no need even to guide the vessel himself.

However, 50 years ago in my own earliest experience of navigation, the RAF was still ingeniously adapting the time-honoured methods of the marine navigator to the speed and environment of an aircraft. When out of sight of land these methods were basically position-fixing by astronomical observations and/or by primitive and scarce radio bearings, plotted against the dead-reckoning of the aircraft's progress. The 'run' between such position fixes gave a somewhat inaccurate measurement of the track-made-good and speed, as well as a measure of the wind vector over a past period or distance. Such out of date information was then applied to the next sector of the flight to modify the forecast wind vector. These methods may seem extraordinary to the modern practitioner, but this was all we had - not exactly accurate, nor timely enough to make good a landing approach in adverse weather conditions! One was dependent on sight of the ground, both en route and on arrival, except at very few sophisticated bases, where radar approach control or early versions of beam approach systems existed.

All these navigation processes involved manual observation of the stars (measurement of altitude) with a bubble sextant, the manual manipulation of an airborne radio direction-finder, and the plotting of the resultant position lines on the chart: little wonder that a full-time navigator was carried in a long-range aircraft and that he needed space on the flight deck for his chart table and equipment, with access to the 'astro dome' from which he could observe the heavens. To complete the navigation 'fit' of the York, an accurate,

gyro-stabilised drift and groundspeed meter was provided. US-made, it was a considerable improvement on, and vastly more expensive than, the rather primitive RAF optical drift-sights then available. Of course, such an instrument was again dependent on flying within sight of the land or sea. It all seems so primitive these days when such airliners as the Boeing 747-400 series will be flown over very long distances with a flight-deck crew of just two, with not a chart-table or a star in sight, and capable of an accurate landing approach in almost blind conditions.

Learned papers have been written about the accuracy of astro-navigation in an aircraft. Even with a post-war periscopic sextant it would be difficult to claim a position fix by such methods of better than ± 10 miles, and this after some 10-15 minutes of post observational calculations - or 'sight reduction by spherical trigonometry' - as the Admiralty Manual of Navigation quaintly puts it. So navigation was a laborious task and not very precise except within sight of the ground, or with radio navigation help towards the end of a flight, when the accuracy could be progressively improved until the airfield was in sight.

We were thus dependent very much on a view of the stars, or sometimes the sun and moon in certain daylight periods; ergo, night flying was preferred, which in any case was essential for safety, at least on entering or leaving the UK. In the later years of the war, when we had installed both 'Gee' and 'Loran' - hyperbolic radio navigation systems displayed on a CRT - navigation became very much easier. The former was highly accurate over short ranges, the latter gave enormous help over trans-oceanic distances. But these systems could only help in the areas they

covered - no such thing in the Middle East or Russia!

So we spent long night hours, preferably flying above cloud but seldom above 8-10,000 feet when the Owner was travelling, with oxygen masks almost glued to our faces. Jock Gallacher, our Wireless Operator, was of great assistance to me, extracting radio bearings from neutral, and sometimes enemy radio beacons when they could be exploited.

Our routing was designed to keep us out of range of the Luftwaffe JU 88's based in Brittany, when departing from or re-entering the UK. In the early days also, we kept away from the Iberian coastline: long-range Focke- Wolf Condors were known to prey on unarmed transport aircraft if they had any inkling of the victims' passage. Less fortunate aircraft in transit to and from the UK with limited fuel reserves necessarily had to skirt the coast and some fell foul of AA fire from armed fishing boats.

With the primitive nature of our navigation, it will not seem surprising that timing of an arrival was something of a problem. I have already related how, on the occasion of the first Royal Flight in 1943, our early arrival caused some embarrassment to the 'Meeters and Greeters' at Northolt on our return from North Africa. Whilst we were aware that we were ahead of time in sufficient time to make some adjustment to our schedule, we were specifically forbidden by the Air Equerry to slow down or otherwise lengthen the time HM need endure the noise and discomfort of the flight. Due to enforced radio silence we were unable to inform our base operations in sufficient time and we arrived very much before we were expected.

All air navigation relies on

knowledge of the wind component over each section of the route, even today. Modern forecasting methods provide fairly accurate information for the flight-planners of the air routes, enabling them to feed the automatic systems. Even so, aircraft do not always keep to time and Captains may address their passengers with the welcome news that a more favourable wind has speeded up their arrival, only to lose that time waiting for a landing turn. In wartime there were few weather reporting stations overseas, although the coverage improved as the Mediterranean area was cleared of Axis Forces. For long-range flying out of the UK, these observations had to be sent home, in code, and then digested and plotted on a weather chart before being re-issued as a route forecast. Delays and gaps were inevitable; in these latitudes the prevailing weather tends to come from the West, across the Atlantic where weather observations were limited to reports from a few ships and the occasional in-flight report. Theoretically, for flights to the East, it should have been easier to provide accurate forecasting, but Bomber Command was all too often the victim of failure. To the South West and South it was very difficult to get it right.

Imagine the problem of the RAF war-time weather forecaster in Cairo, being asked to provide a route forecast for a non-stop flight to the UK taking some 15 hours, for the VIP passengers and crew to make a decision on whether to go or not, some 24 hours ahead of the start of the flight. Naturally, Mediterranean weather itself was relatively easy to handle, but the local man would have to rely on signalled information from the UK for estimates of the northern half of the flight and for UK landing conditions. Guessing whether there would be morning fog at Northolt, in the winter some 36

hours ahead, is really asking the impossible. The best that could be done would be to suggest alternatives, if Northolt were fogged-out, but this was something the PM hated - the idea of being diverted to Prestwick or Leuchars with the prospect of 12 hours in the train, when he could have another day in the sunshine! But it was the Captain (sometimes with the Navigator) who received the blast when unwelcome news had to be explained. Whilst the Captain's decision was deeply probed, there was no question of attempting to pressurise him. Senior RAF officers kept well away when such decisions were being made!

26 This depressing statement of the forecaster's problem was partly overcome by self-help. That is, from in-flight calculation of past wind components and visual observation of the weather around us cloud formations, turbulence, outside air temperatures, etc. These taken together could often give us some idea of the movement of weather systems as they affected our route, perhaps meeting a weather front sooner than forecasted or finding that a front that looked threatening on the met chart had, in fact, died away. It was said that the 'winds and the tides are on the side of the able navigator' - perhaps it applies in the air, too.

To the joint problem of navigational accuracy and weather forecasting is the closely related factor of the aircraft's range. With full tanks the York had an approximate endurance of some 13 hours to 'dry tanks', operating at a take-off weight of 63,000 lbs. I say 'approximately' for inevitably fuel consumption is affected by the air temperature and flight altitude chosen or compelled by circumstances, to fly. Because of the extraordinary design of furnishings with which we were originally encumbered, including a solid conference

room table in veneered pear wood (provided , we were told by a well-known Manchester departmental store), we found on re-weighing the aircraft at Northolt in a 'ready-to-go' condition, that we had virtually no pay-load to speak of when fuel tanks were full! The Captain applied immediately for technical permission to raise the take-off weight to 65,000 lbs, as for operational Lancaster of the time, which had the same engines. This was quickly granted with the proviso that we too fitted the Lancaster's strengthened undercarriage (the Mk IV) which came with the new treaded tyres and improved brakes, modifications we were glad to see incorporated. But this concession gave us but 2,000 lbs in payload which was not much when divided between the eight passengers we expected to carry at night! About 250 lbs per head - just add the PM's estimate body weight to his baggage! For short daytime flights we were often to carry more than eight passengers. Fortunately, the York, like a Lancaster, could take it.

However, one does not fly an aircraft to dry tank limits, even if the destination is perfect in every respect., though we once did fly 'Ascalon' for more than twelve hours when the PM was not on board. The longest flight with the PM was ten hours and fifteen minutes when we had landed, in Algiers sunshine, with some two hours' fuel in hand. Safe enough when flying into good weather and a reliable landing forecast, not so funny if there was a risk of diversion and/or the need to make more than one 'stab' through the overcast to find the runway. Such was the occasion of the first flight that I made to Moscow, when we had had a very indifferent brief as to the exact locality of the Central airfield (Khodinka), no local maps provided by our Russian hosts and had to land in low cloud and rain.

Thus the York was perfectly adequate for flights from the UK to the Mediterranean theatre, provided we staged in North Africa and used the 'Atlantic Route'. After the liberation of France, routing to and from the Middle East became shorter and easier. But the PM had wider ideas of where he might fly to in his comfortable aerial yacht, perhaps to visit the troops in India and the Far East, or more important in the shorter term, to cross the Atlantic to meet the President - at the drop of a hat! The York, however enhanced, was quite incapable of this. We the crew already had cast our covetous eyes on the President's Douglas C54 (Skymaster to the RAF and likely to be available under leasehold). We briefed the ADC with a certain amount of sales talk and, in October 1943, there was the first mention of such an acquisition in minutes exchanged between No 10 and CAS's office.

24 Sqn – Report for Honorary Air Commodore – 2001

ANNUAL REPORT - XXIV SQN

The past 12 months have been the busiest for XXIV Sqn since the Gulf War. The year commenced with 8 C130-J crews carrying out approximately 30% of RAF Lyneham's Strategic Tasking (ST). This workload increased throughout the year until by the end of December the Sqn was carrying out over 50% of Lyneham's ST with 16 Main Sqn crews and 8 conversion crews. In addition to introducing the C 130-J model into front line service, the Sqn has been involved in all the major Operations and Exercises throughout the year.

The majority of the Sqn's tasking was for OP RESINATE/WARDEN in support of the reinforcement of units in the Gulf and Mediterranean. This has resulted in up to 3 crews being in theatre at all times supporting the Slip pattern. In addition, our crews have supported OP PALATINE, OP AGRICOLA and OP BESSAMER, the support and resupply of NATO troops in the former Yugoslavia. Regular tasks to Northern Ireland in support of OP BANNER the continued support of troops in Sierra Leone on OP SILKMAN and OPs FINBAR, to Minsk, and MARCO POLO, to the USA, have allowed crews to broaden their experiences and ease the monotony of the Gulf Schedule.

Towards the end of the year, Sqn crews flew many sorties in support of OP VERITAS, operations to rout the Taliban and their terrorist supporters from Afghanistan. Furthermore, our crews have recently returned from a very successful detachment to Thumrait where the serviceability and flexibility of the C 130 J was highlighted in the completion of over 140% of the required tasking and gave the crews the chance to really explore the capabilities of the aircraft.

Although Operational flying has provided the majority of the Sqn's tasking throughout the year, crews have had a chance to travel the world in support of EX SAIF SAREEA H, in Oman, EX RED FLAG to the USA and EX DISTANT FRONTIER to the USA and Canada. The Sqn has also been fortunate to receive Red Arrows tasking. Lucky crews have visited the Middle East, Malaysia, Far East and Australia promoting the Red Arrows, the RAF, UK industry and the C130-J. Furthermore, our crews have displayed the C 130-J on the ground at major airshows throughout the UK and Europe and had the opportunity to carry out promotional photo shoots for the RAF PR

agencies.

In addition to the extremely busy tasking, the Sqn said farewell to the final K crews in March. The occasion was celebrated with a large beercall and pig roast. Later in the year the Sqn assumed responsibility for all the Conversion Training for the C130-J when JCF was placed under OC XXIV's command. At the same time the Sqn also commenced Line Training, which also resulted in much flexibility and change. Both of these events were a first for RAF Lyneham and showed that XXIV Sqn is the spearhead for innovation and the new 'modus operandi' of the C130-J. Finally, in November the Sqn moved to new accommodation that had been vacated by 57(R)Sqn. The Sqn is conjointly housed with 30 Sqn, who will reform into a C130-J Sqn in April 02, and presently benefits from much improved accommodation, services and communications.

The Sqn's affiliation with HMS CAMPBELTOWN, our informal twin from the RN, and 12 Air Support Eng Brigade, our informal twin from the Army, continued throughout the year; however, as a result of the high tasking we were unable to host, or be hosted by, our twin units. In July, OC XXIV, Wg Cdr Rick Hobson and Flt Lt Dan Thomas hosted children from Lyneham Infants School. OC XXIV Sqn had the pleasure of formalising the adoption of aircraft ZH881 by the School. Later in the year, the Sqn was invited to be affiliated to the Carmen Livery company, a Guild Company from London; the formal affiliation should occur in Spring 02.

The affiliation between the Sqn and Burton Hill House School for Disabled Children, our nominated Sqn charity, has continued to flourish. Early June saw Sgt Tracey Butler and helpers support the School Summer Fete, bringing and setting up tents for stall holders, providing all the equipment and running a can and bottle stall. The Fete raised over £4000, with the XXIV Sqn stall contributing £385 to the overall figure. In addition, the XXIV Association of 'Old Boys' raised an additional £65 at their Annual Dinner in September. In November, Sqn Ldr David Manning hosted children and helpers at the Stn Firework display, which was a great hit with the children. In December, Sgt Tracey Butler and helpers helped to run, and provide food for, the annual Christmas party for the children. As usual it was an immense success and the headmaster, staff and pupils were all grateful for the continued support that we give. We in return, are proud to help a very deserving cause.

(Continued on page 22)

Socially, the Sqn started the year with the Ladies Dining Society (LADS) which was a great hit with the girls. The Sqn members who served the girls will have long lasting memories of the night. Apart from a few beer calls and the odd pig roast most of spring was quiet as the tasking took most of the Sqn away from Lyneham. However, the Families Day in June proved to be a great success thanks to Flt Lt Andy Ellson who conjointly organised the event with his 30 Sqn counterpart. In July and August there were modest outings to the Classics on the Wing Concert at RAF Lyneham and the Firework and Classical Concert at Bowood House. Bowood is always a firm calendar favourite with much Champagne, fine food and wine consumed whilst listening to excellent Classical Music.

Tasking started to ease towards the end of the year as we received more trained crews. This allowed us to let our hair down with a few beer calls, the Annual Oktoberfest, the Squadron Officers Dining Society (SODS) luncheon and the Sqn Christmas Revue. Overall, it has been a challenging year for the Sqn that has explored and taxed the resources of all Sqn personnel. However, throughout the highs and lows of a difficult and constantly changing year the spirit and motto of XXIV Sqn has shone through: 'In Omnia Parati' in all things prepared.

The Photo Album - a selection sent in by John White

Mess Party at Hendon circa 1944 – W/C John Collins, John Mitchell and Jock Fraser all in fine voice

The Photo Album – continued

Taken at Hendon on 10th Dec 43 on his crews return from a tour of Italy and Sicily with Canadian Defence Minister, Col. Ralston. John White and crew on extreme right and Malta Shuttle symbols on air-

On the Malta shuttle – taken late afternoon outbound from Gibraltar – Jan Rijkhof and John White.

LATE NEWS

SUMMER SOCIAL 8th June @ Station X Bletchley Park

With the flags still flying along the Buckinghamshire lanes for England's 1-0 win over Argentina, what better time for the Association to meet up to learn a bit more about another great victory.

The long planned date for the Summer Social proved to be a fair one out of so many grey and dour days that have been an excuse for summer so far.

Our party of 14, plus a double agent in the guise of Richard Bates, shadowing the Association squad with his BRIXMIS party on a similar mission, assembled in the library for our pre tour briefing. The guide for the day was one from around 40 volunteers that take parties round the site every 30 minutes.

This 1.25 hour tour is packed full of facts, sights and long gone landmarks that bring

vividly back to mind the world of a dedicated task force that was sworn to secrecy for over 30 years. Churchill described them as "The geese that laid the golden eggs but did not cackle".

Bletchley Park lays credit to a number of firsts, the most significant being that of inventing the modern day computer. The Enigma trail starts where the guide finishes and is a very comprehensive collection of exhibits and hands on areas for young and old. We only had time to glance over only a small part of what was on show, so allow plenty of time if you decide to go.

All the volunteer staff at Station X obviously enjoy their job, as it rubbed off and made our day out a memorable one as well. It was a thumbs up vote as we all agreed the final score should remain Code Breakers 1 Germany 0.



A snap of the Association Members at Bletchley, 8th June 2002 by John Martin