



LOYALTY

The 33 Squadron RAF Association Newsletter

Issue 13 Autumn 2020

GEORGE RONEY'S SCHOONDIJKE MEMORIAL UNVEILED

Mixed Pickles
Mix Up :-)

*Battle of the Scheldt
- Film premiere in
December!*

*Angus and
his Fat Bus!*

**and more
inside!!!**

DON EDY'S 'GOON IN THE BLOCK': THE FINAL INSTALMENT

Inside this issue...

From the Editor	Page 3
From the Chairman	Page 4
From the Hart - OC 33 Squadron	Page 6
George Roney's Memorial: the almost 'Never Ending Story' by Jan Westhoeve	Page 8
A Brief Encounter Down Under	Page 12
Remembrance Day 2020: a unique commemoration	Page 14
From a Big Cat to a Fat Bus	Page 19
Goon In The Block - the final instalment of Don Edy's time with 33 in 1942	Page 22
The Origins of the Support Helicopter Force	Page 37
The Fighting Dentist - Wing Commander Ray Harries	Page 46



Cover Picture: One of several outstanding photographs taken last month by RAF Photographer Corporal 'Matty' Matthews at Brize Norton, when 33 Squadron was supporting a TIESI course at JADTEU. (Photo: Crown Copyright.)

Above: Too good to shrink! This cockpit shot was sent in by Angus Dawson as part of his 'Fat Bus' article on page 19.

From the Editor...

To paraphrase Alan Carr, 'What a year its been!' Under normal circumstances many of you now reading this issue of 'Loyalty' would be looking forward to a trip into London today for the annual Puma Reunion, or wishing you could be there. Having received this issue ahead of the Reunion there would be plenty of things to talk about on the way to, and inside, the 'Lord Moon in the Mall'. However, as we are all well aware, 2020 has been anything but normal; we have even lost the Lord Moon, which is now closed for redevelopment and has become a 'pop up pub' called 'Spoons under the Water'?! Have a look at the FB page to see the changes, they have set up an indoor golf course at the 'Library End'!

COVID-19 has meant considerable changes to our daily lives, both at home and at work, with several aspects likely to become the norm as we look forward to 2021 and a return to a pre-coronavirus lifestyle now that vaccines are in production. Yet life has gone on, and people have found ways to stay involved with a variety of projects, some have even put pen to paper to pass the enforced and prolonged periods at home. Worthy of special mention is the determination that Jan and Renate Westhoeve, and the Dekker family, have shown in achieving their ambition to mount a permanent memorial to George Roney, in the face of ever changing challenges. Read about their struggles on Page 8. Jan, on behalf of the 33 Squadron Association, I salute you.

In this issue, apart from the regular contributors - me and the Chairman - I am very pleased to have received additional material from the Netherlands, Japan, New Zealand, Yorkshire, Basingstoke

and Crowmarsh Gifford. This shows that the work we have done to spread awareness of 33 Squadron around the world via our website is paying dividends. We also have a new, regular contributor joining us, Wing Commander Sam Fletcher, who has taken over command from Chris Royston-Airey. Welcome Sir, good to have you with us and we look forward to working with you.

We have also had some good news about the reformation of 30 Squadron, perfect timing for the Crete 80th celebrations next year. Graham Lowe is doing a fine job as our POC and helping to organise the attendees for next year's event via the Members' Forum.

The flurry of new contributions in this issue has gone some way to restoring my faith in the members to provide more Puma-centric material for the Loyalty issues next year. Previous requests for stories and pictures that cover 50 years of the Puma being in service have produced absolutely nothing, so I have shelved the idea of producing an issue each quarter next year. Such a disappointing lack of response has confirmed my decision to handover the role of 'Loyalty' editor to someone else and call it a day after the Summer and Autumn 2021 issues. I hope that there is a volunteer out there who is willing to take this important role on, maybe in a direction that will suit the needs of the Association more.

Lorraine and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Proud to be....33

Dave Stewart



THE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT

Air Commodore Paul Lyall

CHAIRMAN

Dick Brewster

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Dave Stewart

TREASURER

Jez Reid

jezr69@gmail.com

SECRETARY

Neil Scott

LOYALTY EDITOR

Dave Stewart

davestewart33@icloud.com

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Paul Davies

33sqnassociation@gmail.com

SQUADRON AIRCREW REP

TBD

SQUADRON GROUNDCREW REP

Sean Docherty (WO Eng 33 Sqn)



From the Chairman.....



“Anything you want to tell me, Andy?”

The Prime Minister of the day, Harold Wilson, once said in the 60's, "A Week is a long time in Politics." - well, try a year! Here we are and quite frankly not one of us could have predicted this year and how things have so far panned out. Does 'On the Bus,' and 'Off the Bus' ring a bell with any of you? And we aren't out of it yet, as we all know. It's like your worst Det ever, I am sure you will agree.

Well enough of that. My thanks goes out first and foremost as ever to Dave Stewart and all the contributors who make 'Loyalty' such a success and a superb read. Dave maintains a continuous watching brief for new information regarding the history of 33 Squadron and his COVID lockdown project to type up all of the ORBs from 1929 to 1945 will provide an invaluable reference in future years. I also thank Paul Davies, Jez Reid and Neil Scott for their continued support to the Committee during this difficult year for the Association. Dave and Neil have been our 'Boots on the Ground', keeping a close watch and attending the inaugural meetings in regards to the 'Puma 50th', trying to keep track of who has the 'Lead' in regards to this event amongst the myriad of changes that are happening in the RAF Benson senior management. Sadly, due to the coronavirus restrictions, there has been very little sign of any progress being made.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Jez's efforts to have an Association presence at Whitehall for Remembrance Sunday, continually liaising with the RBL and updating our members as plans changed with regard to numbers at this year's Cenotaph Parade. He has doffed his Treasurer's hat again though, so make sure your finances are in order and your subs are paid on time! Talking of Remembrance, I was very impressed by Jamie Smith who, on visiting High Wycombe, observed that a mural that was being painted for Remembrance Day was going to feature a Merlin helicopter. After a chat with the artists I was pleased to hear that the final version revealed a Puma! Anyone around the High Wycombe area able to provide us with a photo?! In terms of my Committee, congratulations to Paul Davies on his promotion to Flight Sergeant. Paul has added another 'hobby/interest' to his collection recently, and he is now actively involved in maintaining Commonwealth War Graves throughout the Oxfordshire county. I have reserved my very special thanks for Jan and Renate Westhoeve for their continued support to the interests of 33 Squadron over in The Netherlands. As you will read shortly, despite everything that 2021 threw at them, at long last they have achieved their goal and have unveiled a plaque in memory of WO George Roney at his crash site near Schoondijke. It was

heartening to note that official red tape is as bad in Zeeland as it is in the UK. With all things being equal I for one am looking forward to seeing them in 2021, as I am sure all of you are.

So, I suspect that this year has turned into one of quite reflection possibly for us all, well it has for me. At the end of October I celebrated the fact that it was 50 years ago that I joined up at RAF Halton as a Mech Apprentice at the age of sixteen and half with 404 Entry. Yes, I hear you say, he doesn't look that old? Well, Prayer, Jack Daniels and !!! keeps me ahead of the drag curve you might say !!! I vividly still remember the day; some did not even get off the bus and returned straight back to Wendover railway station and by the end of the third day our ranks had fallen even more.

For me Halton was an epiphany and just before Easter 71 I was told to report to Group Captain Bater, head of Apprentice Training, where he offered me a Craft Apprenticeship and two years later, I passed out a J/T - remember them? The rest, as you might say, is history. I do remember our entry being told that out of our whole entry less than a quarter of one percent would achieve WO status and that was in an air force totalling 100,000 - you do the maths!!! Frank Hughes, a Crewman Leader who I had the honour and pleasure to serve with on the Kuwait Liaison Team and sadly who has gone to the great OCU in the sky, would no doubt have said 'Old Age and Trickery Overcomes Youth and Experience Dicky'!!! So, I wonder what your memories of joining are (Micky Conlon, a 33 Sqn stalwart, admitted that he joined the RAF because on reaching the Careers Office there was no one at the RAF desk and he was strapped for time!!!) To all those who have served with Micky, we were truly blessed on that lunch hour. So why did you join? Who can remember their first day on 33 Squadron or their first detachment with 33 Squadron? I am sure there is a rich vein of stories there to fill 'Loyalty' many times over.

You might agree with the statement that Social Media is very much a double-edged sword; however, in respect to the Association it is a marvellous medium to stay in touch with those we have served with, along with the many 'What's App' groups that have sprung up since March. Personally I find it very useful to stay in touch with those I have served with as some are experiencing desperate times right now and I would implore all of you to keep a close watch of friends and family during these strange times we are living through.

I would like you to consider this verse from Hilaire Belloc that was part of a program on the formation of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I feel more than ever at this current time that it is truly relevant:

*From quiet homes and first beginning,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends.*

Now let's look to the future, shall we? Potentially 2021 looks to be an amazing year in all respects and I for one look forward to picking up where we left off in March of this year with an AGM, the Puma 50th and the Crete 80th anniversary just for starters. Additionally, and given the opportunity, more 33 Squadron lunches and 'Battlefield Tours' and hopefully a Tower of London visit. Let's hope that this is not beyond the realms of possibility because I, for one, could do with a 'Get Together', a 'Chin Wag' and a few beers as I know all of you are looking forward to the return to normality and what that brings to us all.

Finally, as we look forward towards Christmas and the New Year may I be the first in wishing you and your families a very Happy Christmas and New Year. I look forward to seeing you again 2021.

Loyalty

Dicky Brewster

From the Hart - OC 33 Squadron



Wing Commander Sam Fletcher (left) takes over command from Wing Commander, soon to be Group Captain, Chris Royston-Airey (right).

Gone are the days of senior officers arriving at a station to complete an aircraft conversion course, have a gentle handover and take over command of a squadron. In the last 12 months I have seen the new Benson station commander, the Chief of Staff, and two squadron commanders go through conversion training with 28 Squadron while doing their handovers or, in one case, after their predecessor has left! We cannot blame everything on the coronavirus! I am pleased to say that 33 Squadron's new CO, Wing Commander Sam Fletcher, has finally escaped the confines of an office in Force Headquarters, is now firmly established in the CO's office where he belongs and was able to find time in a very busy schedule to write the first of his regular contributions to 'Loyalty'. Sam, the Association wishes you every success and we look forward to working closely with you during your time in command. (Ed.) :

Taking command of one of Her Majesty's Squadrons is a privilege; assuming command of 33 Squadron is all the more special. In my experience it has always been a very happy Squadron, brim full of character and imbued with a distinct spirit.

I am fortunate indeed to be following Chris Royston-Airey in command. Chris created opportunity from thin air, taking our Squadron variously to Lebanon, the United States and Afghanistan and fostering the

expeditionary spirit of the unit. Through energy and initiative he faced down challenges around aircraft availability, built on the successes of his predecessor and leaves 33 stronger than ever. The Squadron joins with me to wish him congratulations on his selection for promotion and the best of luck at the Joint Helicopter Command.

I come to 33 Squadron by way of HQ Air Command, PJHQ, Regent's Park and Buckingham Palace, where I served as The Queen's Equerry. Whatever my vantage point, I watched the Squadron's activity with great interest. From the Caribbean, to the Middle East, Afghanistan and at home supporting the Pandemic Relief operations 33 Squadron has been at the fore, frequently defying the expectations of Defence to deliver more than had been considered possible.

This success has been built on the extraordinary dedication and loyalty of a small group of men and women who engineer, fly and support our machines on operations and at home.

This year, in spite of the sickly season, the Squadron has again outdone itself, exceeding its annual flying target and delivering in spades. Let me paint a picture of Benson today: Daily, the flight line is full of Puma, with our engineers generating more aircraft than we have crews to fly. Their output, led by an outstanding Senior

Engineering Officer, has been extraordinary.

The stock of the Force the Squadron supports is high and we are frequently called on as the platform of choice. Last month we traded our Vortex callsign for Kittyhawk as we flew the President of Ukraine onto the deck of *HMS Queen Elizabeth* during a State Visit. VIPs from the Prime Minister to Chiefs of Staff have recently called on our services. As we approach Christmas our Squadron is busy. 'A' Flight are in the final stages of preparation for deployment to Afghanistan, 'B' Flight hold readiness for global deployment and the Puma Training Flight continue to drive capability advancement by training our aircrew. As I left flight planning this evening, the Squadron Standards Officer was planning a 6-ship air assault that will be flown entirely by 33 Squadron crews.

I reflect that this success has not come easily. The pandemic has limited our freedom to mix, forced isolation and presented a unique challenge to our cohesion. The Hart's Head has been closed since March and there will be no gathering at the Lord Moon this week. But 33 Squadron is resilient and continues to come through with characteristic grit, determination and humour. An ongoing Defence Review has created

uncertainty over the future of the Puma. That uncertainty has yet to be resolved, but 33 Squadron continues forward with confidence, recognising the unique and vital contribution that it makes to the Defence of the Realm. The young crews and engineers we are training today will be the supervisors, authorisers and commanders of the future.

When I arrived at RAF Benson as an ab-initio flying officer in 2004, it was 33 Squadron that led the charge. Back then they were fresh from the Al Faw, from Mozambique and Bosnia. In the bar or in the air, they had the best of the action. *Plus ça change*. The Squadron still has sand on its boots and still has the very best of the Support Helicopter Force. During my time in command I will do everything I can to live up to the legacy of those who have served in this Squadron before and prepare us for continued success in the future.

Loyalty,

OC 33 Squadron



**Then and Now: Above, 33 Squadron aircrew officers on parade, Ismailia 1938.
Below, 33 Squadron aircrew officers on operations, Afghanistan 2020.**

George Roney's Memorial: the almost 'Never Ending Story', or 'I love it when a plan comes together..eventually!'

by Honorary Member #1, Jan Westhoeve...with help from Renate!



As you all know, on 6 October 2019 we held a commemoration for George Roney in Schoondijke. On that rainy and wet Sunday morning we first visited the crash site, along with the people of Schoondijke and Alderman Werkman from the council of Sluis. On that very spot Alderman Werkman received a plaque. The plaque was sponsored by me, to honour George Roney, and it had been made by Michel Kool, father in law of our son, Tom. I had planned to have the plaque mounted on a stand, which should have been set in the ground already. Unfortunately the stand was not ready and permission for erecting this small memorial had not been granted at that time. So after I had handed over the plaque and revealed it to the public, I promised that I would have the memorial in place as soon as possible, and relieved the Alderman of the plaque for safekeeping. The Alderman assured me that as soon as permission was granted, we would be able to conduct an official ceremony, " *met toeters en bellen* " (with horns and bells). Following the plaque reveal we all went to the church in Schoondijke for a splendid service in George's honour.

In January 2020 Renate and I received the news from New Zealand that three of the Roney family were coming to stay with us in April 2020. Along with representatives from the Association they had been invited to attend the official release of 'Luchtoorlog boven Zeeuws-Vlaanderen' (Air War over Zeeland-Flanders) on 15 April 2020, which included details of George's service with 33 Squadron and his last flight on 6 October 1944. At the presentation I had planned to



Under Jan's watchful eyes, Alderman Werkman receives George's plaque. He didn't keep it for long!

present them with a set of the books as a gift from Renate and me, along with a painting of George's plane and his portrait that was being painted by Kees Stoutjesdijk, one of the authors. With that news I started putting a plan together:

1. The stand for the plaque had to be ready.

2. Permission to erect the stand had to be granted.
3. I had to contact Sluis council and the people of Schoondijke and make arrangements for unveiling the plaque on the morning of 15 April, with all the “toeters en bellen”.
4. The painting had to be ready.
5. Nobody must say a word to the Roneys!

On 17 January I got the message that the stand for the plaque was almost ready, and on 3 March permission was finally granted to place the monument on the verge of the Groeneweg. The painting was also ready and a week later I had finalised the planning for the unveiling on 15 April. So now we were all very anxious but excited, waiting for the big day.

Then disaster struck! The Corona virus pandemic hit the whole world and on 13 March Europe went into lockdown. The Roneys were unable to leave New Zealand and eventually the restrictions in England prevented Dick and the two Daves from driving over to join us. The book release in April was postponed until October or November and although the books were published the official release ceremony was subsequently cancelled. This was our first disappointment, and I am still holding some sets of the books for people at home.

So there was Renate and I, thinking what to do with the Roney’s books, their painting and George’s plaque. Because there was no end in sight to the pandemic we decided in August to send the painting and the books over to New Zealand. Due to the corona measures they eventually arrived some four weeks later, and we were thrilled to receive the reactions of Rob and Trish Roney:

“Hello Jan and Renate, great news, the parcel has arrived safely. Thank you so much, the painting is beautiful and I found it very emotional to view for the first time after opening it. It will become a very important part of our family history and will remain in our family for generations to come. The books are wonderful, and I wasn't expecting so much on George. What a great record for us...”

So now I had to work out what to do about the plaque unveiling? We (‘we’ being Renate, me and the Council of Sluis) decided that with all of the current COVID measures we could still have a small official unveiling, with “kleine belletjes en toetertjes” which could be attended by the Mayor of Sluis, a small amount of local people from Schoondijke, two bagpipers and so on. We just had to make sure that it was COVID proof and not overcrowded. With help from the Dekker family we put the stand in the ground on 2 October and covered it over with a sack until the 6th. We would put a cloth over it on the 6th so that Bram Dekker and the



Rob Roney with the books and painting.



Bram Dekker excavates the hole for the stand.

Mayor of Sluis could remove it and officially unveil the plaque. But when we got home there was a message waiting for us. Due to extra COVID measures the official unveiling ceremony had been postponed again. This picture describes my thoughts at that moment (when a picture paints a thousand words!).



Once again, we were very disappointed. We were informed that we would only be allowed to do the unveiling with a maximum of four people present, and maintain a distance of 1.5 metres separation from each other. So with permission of the council we were finally able to unveil George Roney's plaque close to location of his crash on 6 October 1944, with help from Bram and Suzie Dekker.

I think George must have felt sorry for us and arranged that we could unveil the plaque under gorgeous weather. According to the weather forecast that morning it should have been windy, with rain, but the sun was shining and there was hardly any wind. After the unveiling of the plaque and the placing of bouquets, we celebrated the occasion with the Association's favourite Zeeuws specialities - BOLUS!!!

Afterwards Renate and I paid our respects and placed flowers at George's grave. The wreaths and bouquets had been beautifully arranged by our daughter in law, Chayenne Kool. Afterwards we sent photographs over to Rob and Trish Roney and since our COMSEC had ensured that the plans were such a well kept secret they were, once again, very surprised to hear about the plaque. This is their reaction :

"Hello Jan and Renate, thanks so much for what you have done and for sponsoring the books and painting. I have found a good place in our home for the painting. I actually had 2 members of our Parliament visit yesterday and they both commented on it. The plaque for George looks wonderful, I hope we get a chance to see it soon..."

Well after all of the false starts and spoiled plans, this is the end of the 'Almost Never Ending Story' of getting a monument placed for George James Roney. Just to let you know, next year we are planning to do another commemoration for George, with the Association attending and the Council of Sluis and the people of Schoondijke, of course. Let us all hope that we can all travel Covid-19 free again next year, as Renate and I



Op 6 oktober 1944, tijdens Operation Switchback, vertrokken twaalf Spitfires van het 33 Squadron Royal Air Force vanaf Merville in Frankrijk om Duitse postities rond Breskens te beschieten en bombarderen. Tijdens de missie werden drie Spitfires door Duits luchtafweer neergeschoten en daarbij werd een vliegenier gedood. Die vliegenier was George Roney uit Nieuw- Zeeland. Het vliegtuigwrak, met het stoffelijk overschot van George, werd pas op 9 juni 1948 geborgen. Drie dagen later werd George Roney begraven op de begraafplaats te Schoondijke.

On 6 October 1944, during Operation Switchback, twelve Spitfires of 33 Squadron Royal Air Force took off from Merville in France to strafe and bomb German positions in the Breskens area. During the mission three Spitfires were shot down by German anti-aircraft and one airman was killed. That airman was George Roney, from New Zealand. The wreckage containing George's remains, was not salvaged until 9 June 1948. Three days later George was buried in the cemetery in Schoondijke.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them

Warlord Officer George James Roney RNZAF
No. 33 Squadron RAF
1 January 1932 - 6 October 1944

33 Squadron Association

have to deliver some books - and more - to some of you personally.

Jan en Renate



STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

Great news from Jan this morning regarding the latest big budget war film 'Slag om de Schelde' (The Forgotten Battle: The Battle of the Scheldt). Premiering in cinemas across Zeeland on 16 December, and the whole of the Netherlands on the 17 December, film producer Alain de Livita has made a film that finally tells the story of the intense battle that took place in Zeeland in October and November 1944, involving more than 80.000 soldiers and 12.000 casualties. You can watch an interview with the film producer, Alain de Levita, on the YouTube channel 'WW2 TV'. Hit the You Tube logo which takes you to the site, and scroll down to Interviews, where you will find 'The Forgotten Battle'. In the interview there is a mention of the film being shown on Netflix, possibly in early April 2021. There is also a trailer for the film on Imdb.com.

A tour of this important, yet forgotten battle was the first one undertaken by the 33 Squadron Association, accompanied by members of 33 Squadron. Many of the attendees made the same observation, why does the world not know anything about this hard won Allied victory, yet everyone knows about Arnhem? We have read the history books, visited the museums, walked the ground and met some of the people who still remember the occupation. Through Jan's efforts we also met people who recall George Roney's Spitfire crashing in a field on their farm on the first day of the first operation to capture the Breskens Pocket and the Scheldt in order to open up access to Antwerp.

This is a film that needs to be watched together, alongside serving Squadron personnel if possible, and the Committee will now look approach OC 33 Squadron to discuss the options of a big screen viewing once we know that the film has been released on Netflix.

LOYALTY



A Brief Encounter Down Under

Frex and Trish meet Rob and Trish

When Dave Stewart asked me for a few words I was wondering what to include or leave out and then thought bugger it! I'll just write.. by the way this is in no way authorised by the New Zealand Tourist Board.

Backstory: I was a nav on 33 for two tours (the whole Kosovo/Bosnia hooaaa), moved to New Zealand in the early noughties and now am an Air New Zealand pilot.

A year ago I booked a month off in October for a triumphant return to the UK as a newly minted Captain. Clearly that pesky Covid had other ideas and so like other Kiwis I decided on a trip round **Aoteroa** (Wiki it..) and this is what happened....

D-Day: My partner Trish and I use the Auckland domestic terminal very often and in our lockdown-less nation it's pretty bloody busy. Kiwis have clearly got the message about holidaying at home and we're off to Christchurch. This place got comprehensively demolished by an earthquake in 2011 with quite a big death toll. I can relate that Christchurch is not just recovered, it's an excellent venue for first night madness. I was meeting up with an AirNZ colleague Anita (a Southlander and a petrol head) and we painted the town slightly red. There has been a big rebuild in the city and the various bars, restaurants and eateries were delightful. Even the most vacillating of SH faffs would've turned up gold. My final abiding memory (and indeed quite a bit before bedtime) was debating the excellence of the whiskies on offer.

Day 2 was a regrettably early start to board the Tranz-Alpine (Kiwis love crowbarring NZ into most word combinations) to Greymouth. This was soothing balm to a fragile physical state, a steady revealing of the most delightful Alpine scenery. And because of the strange times all our fellow travellers were Kiwis marvelling at the beauty of our land. The weather on the west coast was a bit 'Aldergrovey' in that it was peeing down, which was slightly distressing as we'd booked to do 3 days of mountain biking on the west coast wilderness trail. By the time we got to Greymouth it was hosing down. Sideways. So we went to the Monteith's Brewery....

Day 3, however, dawned lovely and sunny and so we saddled up for an easy 3 hours of riding trails through bush, wet lands and old railway lines. Now literally 48 hours before I'd been made aware of a fellow member of the 33 Squadron Association, Rob Roney, who lives nearby. It was one of those typical "I'm in New Zealand too!" things and with great good fortune we were able

to meet up in Hokitika. Luckily Rob looked just like his Facebook pic and a splendid dinner was had. Rob, like his wife Trish, is a retired teacher (and a handy contact if you fancy any fly fishing). He talked of his last trip over to Holland and how impressive Dave Stewart's command of the Dutch language was! As many of you know, Rob's uncle George died flying Spits with the Squadron in 1944 in Holland. He mentioned the efforts of the redoubtable Jan and Renate Westhoeve who have been absolute stars in memorialising his uncle. Whilst we were chatting I couldn't help thinking that it's an awfully long way for a young New Zealander to travel to meet his Maker. Of course it would have been an adventure, and defence of the mother country was almost a rule, but for a country untouched by bombs or threats it seemed even more poignant.

Day 4. Cycling. Wet.

Day 5. Cycling. Even wetter.

Day 6. Hire car! Today was a drive from Kumara (once a thriving town due to the gold rush) to Picton. The route was just beautiful and crucially the 9 million camper vans on New Zealand's roads were all going the other way. Lunch was at Reefton (own gin distillery) which is a lovely little slice of *kiwiana* with its wooden shops and cafes surrounded by mountains. But the big target was the aeroplane museum at Omaka, near Blenheim. The big point of difference here is the input of Sir Peter Jackson, who is a keen *aviophile* (is that even a word?) and has donated very, very generously. The museum is divided into world wars and I think the First World War element is the stronger. Apart from the display cases chock full of uniforms, from Richthofen to Rickenbacker to Rene Fonck, there are marvellous dioramas manufactured at Weta Studios (Jackson's 'Lord of the Rings' award winning set up). These are amazing! From a Rumpler Taube suspended from the ceiling to a DH2 about to get airborne they are wonderfully lifelike. The Nieuport fighter in the tree is particularly good.

The Second World War hanger is still very impressive. On the Allied side is a Hurricane, Griffin-engined Spitfire, Hudson, Anson and Yak 9. On the Axis side there is a FW 190, BF 108 and a Stuka suspended from the ceiling. It's worth noting that the Yak, Anson and Focke Wulf regularly fly. I got chatting to one of the excellent and knowledgeable tour guides and he ushered me out a side door to see their latest find; a Mosquito which had been lying in a barn since the 1940s. The wings had been removed and were being

worked on but the fuselage was very obviously a Mossie bomber and is a fantastic discovery! By the way the Yak was at Oshkosh last year flown by an Air New Zealander and did extremely well in the air races. Well done Graham!

Over the next week we ferried to Wellington (often a roller coaster, a welcome mill pond for us), flew to Napier (Art Deco heaven due to being flattened in the 1930s by a, yes you guessed it, earthquake) but I suspect it may be boring or sound like I'm boasting. You'll just have to wait for the next Puma reunion...

KiaOra from Waiheke Island, and kia kaha!

Frex



L to R: Trish, Trish , Frex and Rob .



Remembrance Day 2020: a unique commemoration

In a normal year our members would flick through this Autumn edition of 'Loyalty' to read about the Association's participation at the Cenotaph march past, having watched the BBC's coverage of the Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall on Saturday night and the Remembrance Parade in Whitehall on Sunday. Photos on Facebook and the website would lead to discussions about who was there, did we get a mention on TV, did the coverage show us marching down Whitehall, or cut to an interview and miss our big moment? Unfortunately, like so many big events affected by the coronavirus this year, Remembrance commemorations around the country were either cancelled or allowed to run with a minimal attendance. As so often before, the Queen led the nation in marking Remembrance Sunday 2020, while people around the UK privately paid their respects at home due to the pandemic. It was an extremely scaled-back service at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, social distancing measures were in place and the service was closed off to the public for the first time. Normally, Whitehall would be packed with thousands of veterans and members of the military for the commemorations, but this year there were less than 30 veterans in attendance.

In an effort to gauge the effect of the coronavirus on this special act of remembrance, I sent out some emails to friends and colleagues around the world to ask them if they had been able to mark the day. These are some of the responses I received:

New Zealand

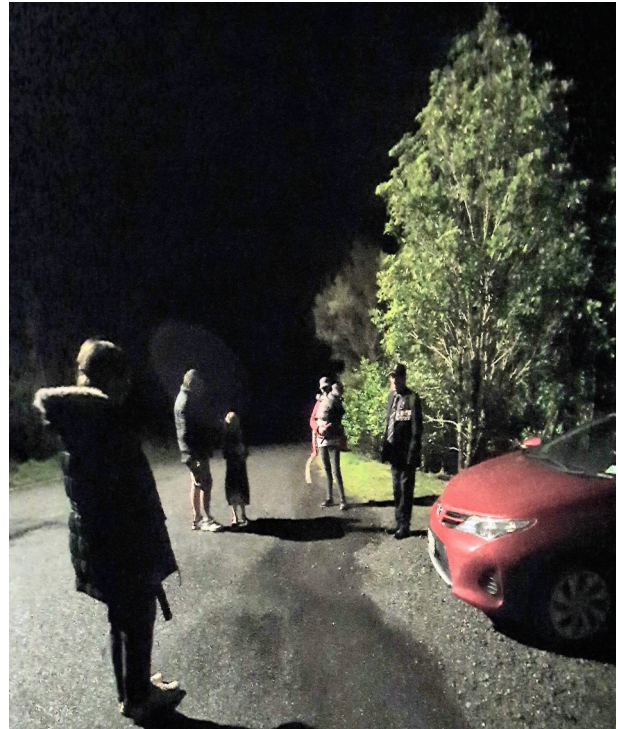
Hi David, good to hear from you. Our Remembrance Day is usually celebrated as our ANZAC day on April 5th. This year I attended a very modified version which was at our street corner, with a couple of neighbours, due to Covid. I took a photo, but due to dawn conditions it wasn't great. I'll send it when I find it. Currently on a fishing trip, in South Westland.

Cheers, Rob Roney.

Japan

As promised please find attached the photos of myself and Debbie attending the Remembrance Sunday ceremony at the immaculately tended CWGC cemetery in Yokohama.

I actually contacted the British Embassy here to find out if there were any ceremonies and this is the only official



ANZAC Day, 5 April 2020, Greymouth, New Zealand.

one in Japan. The RBL and RAFA do have a presence at the ceremony but speaking to them their numbers are dwindling fast and the RBL chairman here says it's not easy for expats to join the RBL as they need to have a bank account in the UK apparently which many of course don't have once they move permanently. RAFA is represented by a sole member, Patrick Mansfield, a very energetic octogenarian who has only given up running marathons in the last couple of years. I would join but we are heading back to the UK at Christmas as the project here is over, with the final nail in the coffin being the pandemic.

The Commonwealth Embassies take turns hosting the ceremony, last year was Canada's turn, this year it was India's. There were maybe a couple of hundred in attendance, including the British Ambassador and a lot of Military Attachés from various embassies including interestingly enough the German Embassy, and the Japanese Government, Civil and Military representatives, who all laid wreaths. Personally I think this is how it should be at ceremonies. While some may not agree that former 'enemies' should be there, the attendance of these countries' representatives show how times have changed.

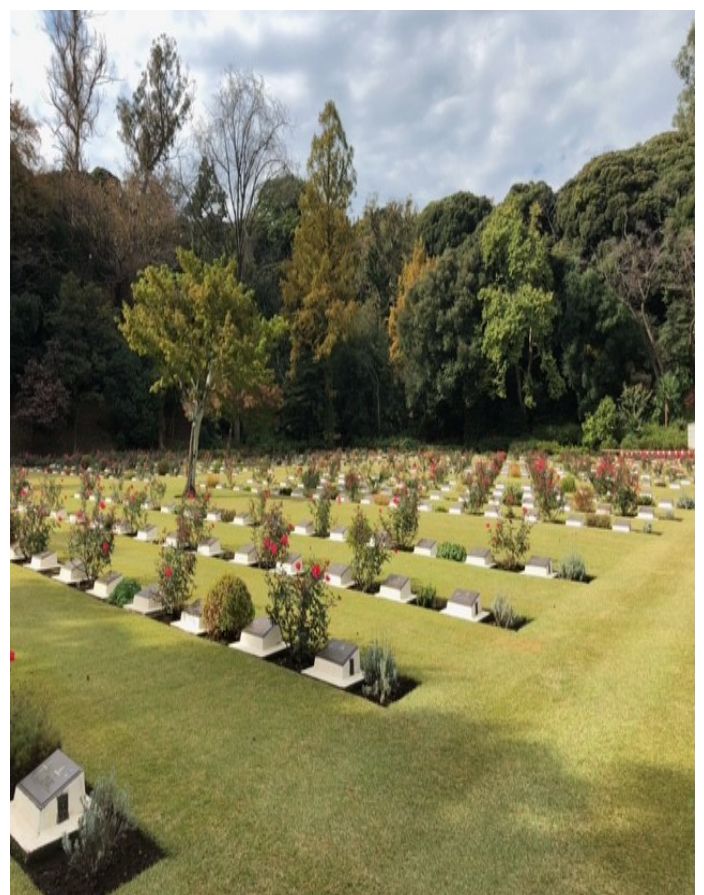
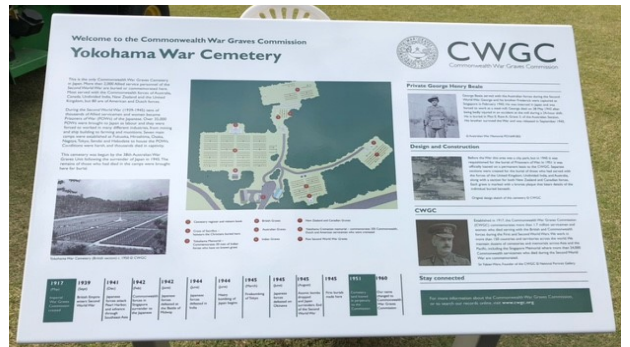
All at the ceremony wore masks and social distancing was maintained where possible. Food and refreshments

are always put on free for those attending after the ceremony, which was great this year as the Indian Embassy put a very nice spread of curries and other Indian food, which was lovely as a good Indian curry is not always easy to come by in Japan.

I'm hoping to be back on Whitehall again next year with the Association because, as mentioned, I will be back in the UK come the New Year so the job hunt has begun again. Its a real shame as Japan is an amazing place to live, Covid has a lot to answer for, lets hope the 'New Normal' gets back to being like the 'Old Normal', in some ways, next year. We are looking forward to it in as much as we miss all the family, especially as we have a new grandchild on the way but obviously it's not an ideal time to be returning to the UK with Covid restrictions as they are, and looking for a new position in the industry at the moment will be challenging. Maybe its time to look for something other than aviation?

We will undoubtedly miss Japan for many reasons, the people, the countryside, mountains, wildlife and of course a very comfortable standard of living. It is very disappointing not to see the project through to the end and unfortunately the chances of certifying this aircraft and getting it into service are now very slim even here in Japan let alone the rest of the World.

Best regards and stay safe and well.
Glen Stringer



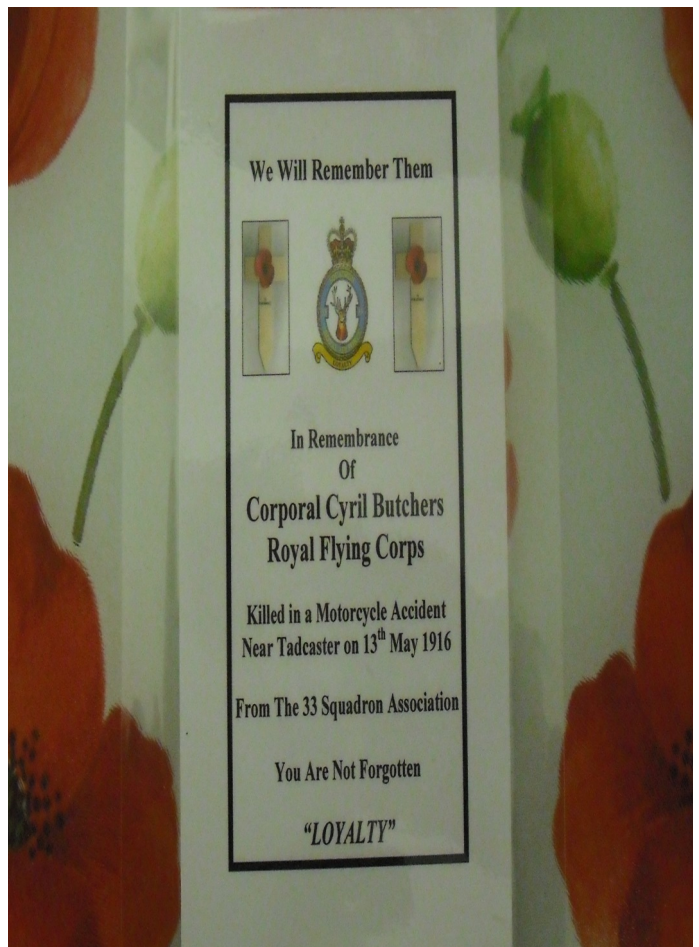
Yorkshire

Three of us from the Yorkshire Air Museum laid a wreath at the Fulford Cemetery in Fordlands Road, York. There are some interesting persons with local connections buried here. As we discovered during the 2018 Battlefield Tour, when we looked at our role in the North of England countering the German Zeppelin threat, Corporal Cyril Butchers, an aircraft engineer serving with No. 33 Home Defence Squadron at the Royal Flying Corps airfield at Bramham Moor, was the Squadron's first recorded fatality, and the First World War hangar that 33 Squadron used is still visible from the A64. Corporal Butchers collided with a poorly lit horse and trap while riding his motorcycle back to camp after a night out. Others interred here are the Polish crew of Vickers Wellington HZ251, lost near Skipton on 23 September 1943. I came across the site and nearby memorial on the Leeds - Liverpool canal at Bradley. Another notable is Jane Harrison, a stewardess on BOAC Flight 712, who was posthumously awarded the George Cross after BOAC Flight 712 crashed at Heathrow on 8 April 1968. Her story is worth a read.

Tony Whitehead



Jane Harrison G.C.



© Dave Thaxter aviation-safety.net

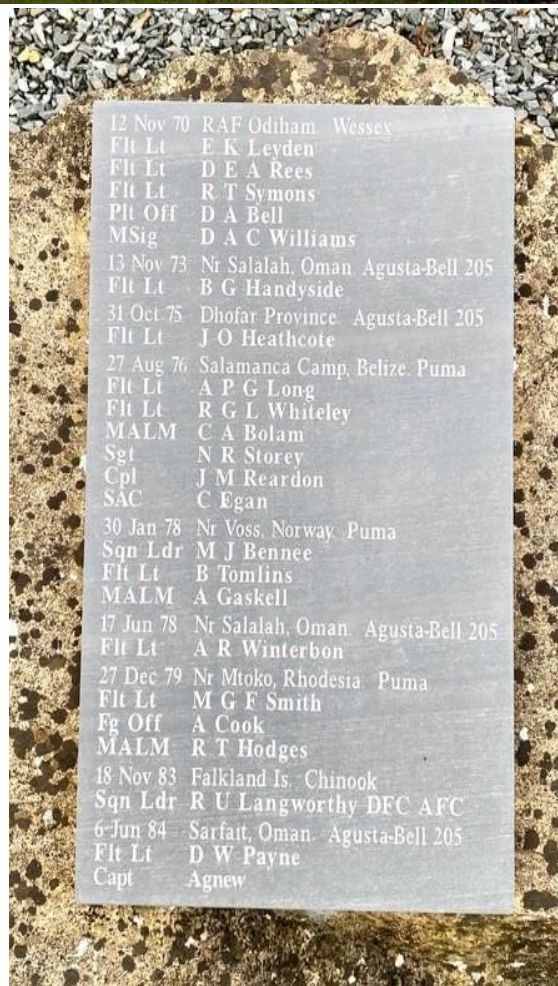
RAF Odiham

The Basingstoke Gazette recently published an article about a tragedy that struck RAF Odiham fifty years ago, on 12 November 1970, when an accident involving two Wessex helicopters of the Helicopter Operational Conversion Flight (HOCF) resulted in the deaths of five crew members. Arrangements were made to lay a wreath at the SH Memorial, but the commemoration service was yet another that was postponed due to the latest coronavirus restrictions. The service would have had particular poignancy for one of members, Chris Perkins, who was going through his Wessex crewman training course at the time. Chris told the Gazette that he had arrived at Odiham in September 1970 after completing a parachute training course at RAF Abingdon, and he witnessed the crash that day.

There were three other students on the course with him, all trained aircrew converting onto the Wessex. *"We were one of the first groups to come straight through from the parachute course. I remember, when we were assigned to Odiham, saying to the parachute instructor, 'But they have helicopters there!',"* he recalled. *"But we were like sponges, soaking up every little piece of technical information and excelled with the practical mentoring provided by a superb bunch of instructors. It was absolutely fantastic. By the end of the course we were more than comfortable in sitting up in the Wessex left-hand seat starting, stopping, flying and navigating that fantastic beast. "*

Chris remembers November 1970 as being full on with consolidation flying. He said: *"On that fateful Thursday the 12th I was awaiting a rotors-running crew changeover teamed up with a student pilot. Noticing our Wessex returning to south side dispersal, we left the crew room hut. Just as we were in the process of donning our helmets another Wessex, nose up in the final stages of an engines-off landing, collided with our machine. All of the five crew on board both helicopters were killed instantly in the ensuing explosion and fireball."* Among those who lost their lives was one of the other students, Pilot Officer Don Bell. Chris said: *"Everyone was in shock. I remember one of the navigators, he had flown on operations during WW2. He took me to one side and he looked at me and said, 'Flying is an inherently dangerous business, if you don't like it don't do it.' And that's all it took."* Chris wasn't put off a flying career, but his fallen colleagues and what he witnessed that day have never left him. *"I have had a couple of accidents myself since. Nobody was killed, but my mind went back and I thought, wow, I got lucky,"* he said.

Recently walking past the Odiham memorial to helicopter personnel killed over the years, he spotted the names among many that were familiar to him, and decided to organise a commemoration to those who



were killed that day. *“They were all friends of mine. There are not many people at Odiham, who still walk on the airfield, who will know them. It’s extremely important that those five names on the Support Helicopter Memorial at RAF Odiham are not forgotten. They were all part of an incredible close aircrew family that we were very privileged indeed to be allowed membership.”* He arranged with the station to lay a wreath, but the plan had to be postponed. RAF Odiham marked the anniversary on social media, and Chris will revisit visit the memorial as soon as he is able. *“I will ensure that the 50th Anniversary of their passing is properly recognised when restrictions permit,”* he said. *“Indeed, it was a hell of a way to start a flying career.”*



BACK ROW: P.O. BELL
FRONT ROW: P.O. JONES

SGT FLETCHER
P.O. COCKSEGE

MSIG. CARTER
LT. MACGREGOR

SGT PERKINS
P.O. ELLIOTT



From a Big Cat to a Fat Bus!

by Angus Dawson

During the COVID-19 pandemic this year, global travel restrictions hit the aviation business very hard, and as a consequence many pilots and cabin staff faced an uncertain future and the very real threat of redundancy throughout the lockdown period. Angus was one of several ex-33 Squadron personnel who had enjoyed a busy career flying Pumas with the RAF before making a move into civil aviation. In this short, informative article written during furlough he illustrates well the commercial and financial aspects of civil aviation and the art of flying an aircraft whose take off weight is approximately 80 times more than a Puma HC Mk1! (Ed.):

In 2007 I finally left the RAF to join British Airways. I say finally because I had tried previously at an Option Exit point in 2001. The events of 9/11 'Yellow Carded' that escape plan. Now in 2020, I, and many of my colleagues await nervously on the side lines of the football pitch. This COVID business is a potential 'Red Card'. So perhaps it is time to pay homage to an amazing machine, the Super Airbus A380-800, or, as we know her the 'Fat Bus', as many of her crews' affectionately call her.

Most of us on the fleet graduated from the 'Mini Bus', the Airbus A320 Series. There are many other names for her, most of them disparaging, made up by jealous pilots on other fleets! As I write this most of our aircraft are parked in Chateauroux, France. Cheap parking, compared to Heathrow of course. Air France/KLM and Lufthansa, amongst others, have taken steps to ground their fleets permanently. It seems this leviathan was a little too late, too large and too expensive. But, it seemed that Heathrow's Achilles Ankle could ensure our fleet's survival, albeit under normal market conditions. Heathrow is always running to capacity and landing-slot constrained; Schipol, Charles de Gaulle and Frankfurt are not full. Therefore cheaper, smaller, airliners can undercut her costs. In any case, production is planned to cease in 2021. The newer, twin-engined, part carbon fibre aircraft are cheaper and about 30% lighter than their equivalent aluminium forebears. Lighter equals less fuel required. Most aircraft are procured under complex financial mortgages. The unit cost was just under US\$450 Million before considering the COVID second hand market price of course!

So back to the 'Big Bird'. No yellow paint here. My first close up look was in December 2014, when I converted to her from the A320. Crewing levels for ultra long haul



Above: Chateauroux 29 May 2020

Below: Angus and Bill - Ground School at Heathrow
December 2014



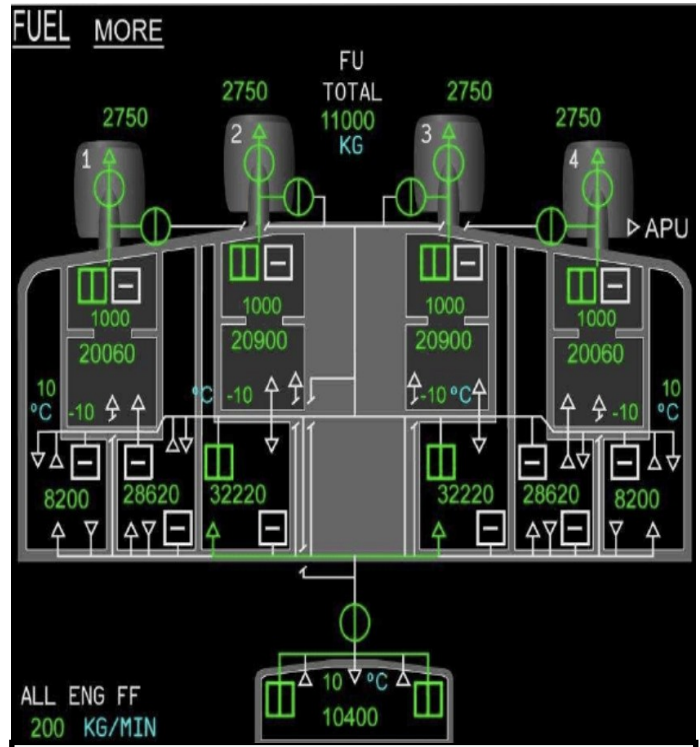
are mostly a three pilot affair, meaning that there are more Co-pilots than Captains. So I did my conversion with fellow Senior First Officer Bill. It's not until you walk under the belly and gaze at the 16 Main Wheels that its size really hits you. The wing is just shy of 80 meters in wingspan. In fact she looks rather dumpy (cue more disparaging, fattist jealousy jokes) as she was designed to be stretched! Our fit, over four classes of seats, is 461 passengers but you can squeeze 853 in an all economy seating, though not at 2 metre social distancing. The wing root is enormously thick, surprisingly blunt and chunky to hold a huge main spar and most of the fuel. Full to the brim, including Centre of Gravity Tail Trim Fuel, there is just a smidge over 254 Metric Tonnes. On average she burns 12 Tonnes an hour, the cost of enormous drag pushing that wing,

double deck fuselage and four huge Trent 900's through the air. The average fuel load for a return from Singapore, a thirteen hour flight, is 200 Tonnes. Payload 50 Tonnes. Take-off weight 500 Tonnes. Nowhere near full! The Maximum Certified Take Off Weight is 561 Tonnes!

Enough of the big numbers, back to this wing. During trials it was apparent that the wing was incredibly resistant to ice accretion because of its blunt thickness. To save weight and complexity only the Number 4 Slats have Wing Anti Ice, and it is rarely needed. The fuel system is perhaps the most complex of any airliner to date - 16 fuel cells alone in the main wing. If you don't fill her up, something really clever goes on automatically throughout the flight. On the ground the wings sag under their own weight, engines and that of the fuel. So the fuel is not held in the tips. However, once airborne, the opposite is true. The fuel is pushed automatically to the wing tips to reduce the bending moment. All the while fuel is shuffled between the tail and main wing tanks to keep the Centre Of Gravity pretty constant and the Feed Tanks to the engines full at about 20 Tonnes if possible. The Collectors, inside the Feeds, only hold 1.3 Tonnes each but are always full to prevent flameout.

Only towards the end of the flight does the reverse bending moment process occur. Fuel is allowed to return from the Outer Tips to the Feeds in anticipation of ground taxiing. Landing weight is about 370 Tonnes including about 10 Tonnes of Reserve and Contingency fuel. The result? The aircraft feels surprisingly similar on the side stick controls at whatever weight. It is light and responsive. Well it does have 6 ailerons, 16 spoilers, 12 used for Roll Control, 4 elevators on an All-Flying Stabiliser, 2 rudders, 16 slats and 6 flaps. It uses broadly similar fly-by-wire control laws to its smaller sisters, making conversions between types easier. In fact an Airbus is an Airbus. A Puma 2 pilot would feel at home in the cockpit, the manner of communication in altitude, heading and speed on the Main Control Panel and longer term adjustments on the Flight Management Computer will all feel very familiar.

The fuselage is very strong. The mid level floor supporting the upper deck splits the tube in two pretty much full length. The cockpit and pilot toilet and in-flight rest bunks are mid way in between, accessed by a small stairwell. This permits a higher pressure differential than traditional airliners. Average Cabin Altitude is 6 000 feet compared to 8 000 feet. This means the air is denser and more humid, making the long haul experience less tiring for the customers. Combined with this it is incredibly quiet. We have had cases of First Class Passengers complaining about the late running of a service. "But Madam, we took off 20 minutes ago" The aircraft does kind of suck itself into



Straight out of the Manual, simplified for pilots. The Collector tanks are shown here holding 1 000 kgs, compared to 184 kgs for the Puma. There are fuel expansion cells that are not shown.

the air! Other weight saving measures were innovative. There are no traditional wiring looms as we would recall from a sweaty Standards Check in the hangar. Instead Switch A is connected to Light B via one of many Core Processing Input Output Modules. In other words each switch or control has a unique address but shares a common network. The result - less wiring but more computers. Therefore, training focusses on the understanding that you had better know precisely what is going to happen if you need to do an airborne reset or pull a circuit breaker, and the procedures are necessarily rigid and comprehensive.

The second interesting fact is that the twin hydraulic system isn't actually needed in flight! The systems operate traditionally, albeit at 5 000psi, but to save pipework weight, the backup to each critical control is achieved by an independent Electro-Hydrostatic Actuator which hydraulically isolates itself if the pressure falls. Should you suffer a double hydraulic failure, the critical servos continue to work in isolation, the gear is lowered under gravity (which can take up to two minutes, so you had better plan ahead accordingly), the slats and flaps still come out, though only at half speed and even some braking and nose wheel steering is available to get you safely off the runway.

However not all is easier! We spend a considerable portion of our training understanding the threats associated with energy management in the air and

ground taxing. The main wheels alone are 14 metres between Wing Landing Gears and you have to use Judgemental Steering, like a huge Pantech lorry. To help us, ground cameras show a split view of the nose and main gears, it helps judge turns but it is still a visual manoeuvre like any other aircraft. Not all taxiways at any given airport can take the width of the wheels, the wingspan or the weight. So we have special 'Green Taxiways', that are provided, post survey, for destination and suitable alternate airports. This fact therefore makes for some interesting in flight discussions. Were we to have a problem (rare) or a medical situation (common) that required diversion (thankfully uncommon as the cabin crew members are trained in advanced first aid), we have to think very carefully about where we go. We often think about the Atlantic as being an ocean of course, but so is Africa to the A380. The last and best approved diversion airfield before arriving in Johannesburg is Barcelona! That does not mean you can't do an emergency landing, you can. It is just that the support on the ground might not be there or you have to stay on the runway because the taxiways are too soft or narrow. Indeed that fat wing means we can fly slower and stop more quickly than a B747 Jumbo Jet, or the light quad as we like to call it.

Talking about stopping there a few interesting facts that might surprise you. Firstly, only the inboard engines have reverse thrust, the braking is so efficient that having this weighty complex system on all the engines wasn't justified. But this is the really clever bit. To help us make sure we get the right approved runway exit and taxiway we can programme the aircraft to do the braking automatically for us so as to target safe taxi speed just before the exit. This is called Brake to Vacate, and works whether the runway is dry or suddenly made wet in a rain shower. The system continuously updates the landing distance by calculating Dry and Wet Stopping lines, after we put in basic parameters like wind, temperature and barometric pressure. It will also tell you verbally if conditions have deteriorated which would necessitate a go-around and a re-think. Once landed it also warns you if it thinks it's going to miss the exit or conditions have changed to make you start manually braking more forcibly. This is called Runway Over Run Protection and Warning.

So that's it. As I type I recall the landing technique, hoping before long to return to the simulator for a refresher, and Hong Kong of Los Angeles for a beer with the Chap(ess)s having been grounded for a little while. Listen to the Radio Altitude Calls, At 100 Radio, look to the far threshold, 4 Kilometres away (not the landing threshold, that tends to make arrivals a little firm!) but keep the PAPIs in the scan. At 40 Radio smartly pull Thrust Levers to Idle and start to flare, keep looking at the other end of the runway, gently squeeze off the



Finals!

drift (the flight control computers automatically keep the swept wings level) and keep squeezing in the flare on the side-stick controller. Touchdown and select reverse thrust (only the inner two engines as described). Fly the nose wheel onto the concrete. Brake to Vacate does the rest. I will be conducting a full ground Cat in the next issue of 'Loyalty'. Simple!



Angus looking sharp in Association No1 Dress at St Mary Magdalen church in Crowmarsh Gifford on Sunday 8 November 2020, with his grandfather's medals worn proudly alongside his own.

Goon In the Block - Chapters 12-14

Concluding the serialisation of Don Edy's memoirs with 33 Squadron in the Western Desert

Chapter 12

The big push by our armies up in the north of the desert had not been going according to plan as the Germans put up a much stiffer resistance than expected. At first it was thought that our troops would break through the enemy defences in three days and then have the Germans on the run. Instead of that it took several weeks to break the backbone of resistance, and this was the reason we had to stay down in the desert so long. At long last the enemy was on the run and by the time I got back the boys began to report that the Bengasi road was packed with equipment, all headed west.

Now our Squadron really began to work and for two full weeks we had as many as six, and sometimes eight, Hurricanes over the Agedabia area two and three times a day. Our job was to strafe this retreat, destroying or damaging as many of the vehicles as we could, and generally upsetting and discouraging the beaten Germans.

The first time I went out it was with Winnie, who led the flight of six aircraft. We flew well to the north of Agedabia and just before arriving at the coastal zone we encountered a heavy thunderstorm. This provided perfect cover for the raid. When the coast road became visible through the drizzle we could see a convoy of about forty trucks ambling along, close together, with apparently no thought for of an attack in such a rainstorm. Winnie signalled for a line astern formation and we followed him as he went down on the last truck. I took the second last, the man behind took the third last, and so on. By the time each of the Hurricanes had attacked, Winnie was up and ready to go down on the next. This method of attack usually worked very well, especially on a day like this when the victims were huddled inside the trucks so that they couldn't see us and the noise of their motors drowned out the sound of our engines.

For ten minutes we flew back and forth along that column, strafing it thoroughly, and concentrating on the motors so as to destroy the vehicle. Looking back on it now the consternation and confusion inside those trucks must have been terrifying, but at the time it was just a damned good raid, about the second best we made. The area we concentrated on was the stretch of road about 30 miles south of Bengasi and ending some three hundred miles south and west, away past Agedabia, and as far as the Tripolitanian border.

Once or twice we hit the airport at Agedabia, but mostly the roads and the transports were the objects of our attacks. Apart from the aircraft that were lost through being so far out in the desert, the Squadron as a whole was very lucky. During the whole push, and right up till the end of January, we lost only Bobby Price and Peter Charles killed, and Mark Jewell taken prisoner. Peter had apparently hit the ground with his wing tip while turning in to make an attack and the Hurricane somersaulted, then exploded. One of the sergeants blamed the flight commander for the accident, saying that he had turned in on Charles and forced him into the ground, but no-one will ever know just how it happened and accidents like that were common.

Kay Stammers lost an aircraft near Agedabia because of a piece of shrapnel in the engine, but Lance Wade landed, and picked him up before the Germans could get there. Kay sat on Lance's lap and worked the stick and the throttle, while Lance worked the rudders.

Sgt. Wooler had a very bad time. He too got some shrapnel in his engine and came down in the desert, about eighty miles from the base. We couldn't find him anywhere, although we located his plane from the air, and at last the search was given up as hopeless. He had either wandered off into the desert and died, or the Germans had picked him up. On Christmas morning the CO received a message from one of the LRDG saying that they had found Wooler in the desert, about twenty miles from our base. He had walked for eight days, the last four without any water except for the small drink he managed to get each morning by licking the water off his ground sheet. That certainly was the most memorable Christmas he ever had.

For the first month or so with the Squadron I had flown as number two to one of the more experienced pilots, first Genders, then Tiny and Winnie. For the rest of the time I led a section of two on most raids and then, just before we left LG 125 I took a flight. This day six Hurricanes were to do a strafe of the Agedabia airport. Just before take-off, Intelligence gave us a report that enemy fighters could be expected in the area. The chap who was supposed to take the flight developed a severe headache and asked me if I could take over. I did so, with only a few qualms, as the idea of being Flight Commander, even temporarily, was a step in the right direction. We took off immediately after lunch, formed up into three pairs stepped slightly up, and headed

west.

The attack went off successfully as we didn't find any enemy fighters around after all. We found later that Command had put on a specially long range patrol of Tommyhawks for the area as escort. The airport didn't have many planes on it when we went over Agedabia, so I decided to save that for another day, and picked on a fat convoy of about forty trucks and gasoline carriers. They saw us coming and headed for the desert on both sides of the road, but a slow truck hasn't got much chance, and we figured we got at least half of them.

Two days before Christmas 1941 we made our last big strafe on the coastal road south of Bengasi. This raid warrants a full description as it was just about the perfect strafe. The LRDG had reported that salt flats came right up to the road, on both sides, about thirty miles west of El Agheilia, and close to the border of Tripolitania. They figured that a lot of damage could be done to the Germans if the road was blocked right at this point. It would be impossible for any vehicles to turn off on to the flats, and pass. Our wing commander discussed the idea with Derek Gould and it was decided that eight Hurricanes could do the job in two flights of four. Derek would lead one and George Rumsey the other.

At dawn the following day I took off with Derek and two other pilots and headed west. George and his boys were to come along ten minutes later. This was a long flight. We headed south, well into the sand sea in order to avoid detection, flying low as we skirted Gialo, and going well south of El Agheila. After an hour and a half we climbed a few thousand feet to get our bearings, then started down so we could come in on the 'deck'.

While we were diving I caught a glimpse over my shoulder of four little streaks of silver, directly behind and above. It seemed too early for George to be coming along so they might be the enemy. As usual the R/T didn't work so I waggled my wings to get Derek's attention, then peeled off to have a look at the planes behind. The climbing turn took me well up above and behind them and then it was easy to see that they were Hurricanes. George had been travelling faster than I figured. There was a certain amount of excitement for a minute as I tried to join them, but they soon recognized the plane as one of their own, and I settled in beside Winnie. I got a bit of a 'rocket' from the CO when we got back from leaving the flight, and another from George, who said he nearly shot me down, but it actually turned out well as this gave us five Hurricanes for the follow up work.

Derek had done a wonderful job ahead of us by catching a large gasoline truck right where he wanted it, between the salt flats. He set it on fire with incendiary bullets, then he and the two others strafed

as much of the transport as they could on the way back. George led his section right down to within fifty feet of the ground and we flew that low for a good many miles. The road was hidden to us by a low hill, but we could see a column of smoke rising high in the air which indicated that Derek had hit something and set it on fire. The hill also deadened the sound of our engines so that the troops in the trucks couldn't hear our planes approaching,

The five Hurricanes pulled up over the hill and climbed to about five hundred feet for the attack. As we topped the hill, a wonderful sight met our eyes. The gasoline truck was blazing furiously in the middle of the road. Behind it, for more than two miles, all kinds of trucks and transport were stalled, bumper to bumper. They must have figured that the raid was over once the first Hurricanes had disappeared and so drive on, only to be halted by the fire. Most of the lorries were filled with troops fleeing from the advancing British Army so you can imagine how many men there were in that line.

Our attack was a complete surprise and not a man had jumped out before we started firing. The five of us were in line abreast and all we had to do was to set our sights on the vehicle directly in front, press the trigger, then push the rudder bar a little so the swing of the plane sprayed a large area with bullets. There is nothing to aim to ground firing and we just couldn't miss. After the first sweep our five Hurricanes flew up and down that long line and strafed until all the ammunition was gone. The Germans and Italians scrambled out after the first run and we then concentrated on putting the trucks out of commission.

Each Hurricane flew home independently as we had lost all semblance of formation during the raid. I didn't even see any of the other fellows until we were all back at the base. There was a large black cloud over El Agheila and this meant rain and dirty weather, so I decided to climb up over it. For forty five minutes I went through the worst weather I ever flew in. First there was rain, then sleet and snow. There were high winds and as I was flying blind in the cloud there was no horizon and the instruments were going crazy. One time the plane would be close to stalling, then in a high speed dive as I tried to correct it and get the feel for it. I found myself in turns and slips when I thought the plane was straight and level. When the aircraft did at last burst through into brilliant sunshine I was completely dazzled, and in seconds the air was calm and clear. Far ahead, through breaks in the fringes of the storm cloud I could see the desert and in a few minutes there wasn't a sign of the storm.

From this height (I came out of cloud at about fifteen thousand feet) the desert was a lovely sight and I had a panoramic view of it. Far to the south the sand sea shimmered from the sun on the white sand, and I could

see the Gialo oasis where we had often patrolled. I could also see the complete black strip of land, right from its beginning at Giarabub to the point where it faded into the regular desert near Gialo. Behind there was the Mediterranean sea, and to the north there was fertile green land which showed up startlingly where the brown desert stopped. It was a comparatively simple job to find the two sand hills and land at base. All agreed that night that it had been a good day for 33 Squadron.

As you can imagine, there was very little to do at LG 125 when we were not flying. I went for a walk in the desert with Lance and we wandered several miles away, just to see what it would be like to be completely alone in that vast space. The trouble was that the farther away we got from camp, the more the trucks and planes stood up on the horizon in mirage. We did dip into a shallow depression, but the silence and sense of loneliness was so overpowering that we retraced our steps and headed back.

The dugout that Davo and Rusty had built was the largest gathering place with a roof over it. They organised a poker school and there was a game going on at almost all hours of the day. If one or two players had to leave to go on duty a couple more, just back, would drop in their places. We also spent many pleasant hours there in the evening and sometimes the cook could be prevailed on to brew up a small amount of tea or coffee and a few biscuits. The most annoying thing about the place was that every afternoon without fail a breeze came up and started a sandstorm from the dust stirred up by our aircraft. This was strictly local and was one sure way of finding LG 125 when returning from a raid. Lunch and afternoon tea were hardly palatable because of the generous portion of sand with each bite. Every day was hot and sunny so we wore nothing but shorts and boots. We were all tanned like Indians and healthy from outdoor living .

Generally we steered clear of the dangerous white desert to the south. It was impossible to make an emergency landing there with the wheels down, and it was so big a plane could be lost forever. One day the CO received a signal saying that some lorries had become separated from their convoy and were lost in the desert. They had no radio so 33 was requested to search for them. Derek laid on ten Hurricanes for the job and we drew lots for the areas we were to search. I drew an area due south and over the sand sea. It wasn't very likely that the unit had strayed in that direction but we weren't taking any chances. I flew for about an hour and was soon more than one hundred and fifty miles from Giarabub and out of sight of any signs of habitation or vegetation. It was really farther than I had to go or even should have gone, but I was fascinated by the tremendous expanse of desolation. I

planned to zig zag back and forth on the return route but on the first turn I spotted a line of black specks on the sand and went down to investigate. It seemed impossible that the trucks had strayed this far but I had to make sure. As I came closer I went down to about a hundred feet from the sand and found that it was not a line of trucks at all but a camel caravan.

To me it was like stepping back into the Arabian Nights. There below was a caravan of eight camels, all decked out in colourful trappings, and four bearded Arabs in their coloured robes and white turbans. They were at least two hundred miles from the nearest oasis as far as I could tell, and as they were heading north west, they must have come from the deep south. The camels were heavily laden with great bundles strapped on their backs, and they plodded along, just as other caravans had plodded along, for thousands of years. The idea struck me how incongruous it was to have the very latest method of transportation, my Hurricane, flying over one of the very first modes of carrying goods, the caravan. I circled several times, far enough away that the plane wouldn't frighten the camels, then waved to the Arabs and headed north. I actually felt sorry for them, leaving them all alone on that waste land, but I guess they knew what they were doing. All the other boys had returned by the time I got back but none of them had spotted the lost vehicles. We heard later that they found themselves, far to the north, and behind our own lines.

Chapter 13

Shortly after Christmas our Armies in the north had advanced so far that now the regular fighter squadrons could patrol the Agedabia area and our role as long range strafers was complete. The raid on the road at the salt flats was the last big one. We were now to move farther west and join the other squadrons. Before going on I'd like to tell you how we celebrated Christmas in the desert.

Christmas Eve I flew back to Giarabub with some papers from the CO to the Supply Regiment stationed there. After greeting Jock and the boys, I phoned the Regiment and they sent a staff car over to pick me up. We drove through the town and then south through a tremendous supply dump. There must have been enough equipment and supplies there to keep a whole Army going for weeks. The major to whom I delivered the papers was quite a pompous man, but quite friendly. It was rather late so he invited me to stay for their mess Dinner, and the night. There were about fifty officers there, most of them dressed in full uniform for the festivities, and I felt pretty scruffy in the old battle dress. They all made me feel right at home and we had a wonderful time. The food was excellent, with lots of it, and there was plenty to drink. That night I slept on the floor of the major's tent with his Dunlopillo

mattress.

I awoke to find that the major was already up, bathed and shaved and dressed. His black boys were heating more water and in a minute I was having a hot tub. Even got my back scrubbed by one of the boys. After breakfast the major himself drove me back to Giarabub and soon I was on my way to LG 125. This was Christmas Day. As I approached the base I could see something new had been added. There, blossoming out of the desert, was a big tent. The Bombays had flown it in the day before on special request from Derek. Now we could get out of those eternal sandstorms to eat our meals.

Christmas dinner in that barren wasteland was something to marvel at, and the sight that met my eyes as I walked into the tent was almost unbelievable. One table along the side was covered with a white paper tablecloth and coloured decorations. Red candles burned brightly in their saucer holders and gave off a festive glow. The centre piece was an enormous bowl full of nuts, oranges, grapes and candies. There were even Christmas crackers with hats and favours.

A second table on the other side of the tent was also decorated and it held a wide variety of bottles of Rye, Scotch and Gin, with a background of pyramided bottles of beer, enough for two each for all the pilots and officers in the Squadron. We all gathered in the tent as the sun set and soon everyone was adorned with a paper hat and was full of good cheer. The radio in the station wagon was tuned to England and the Christmas music from there certainly added to the spirit of things.

At the height of the party there was a big banging of pans outside and with a flourish the cook flung open the flap of the tent and marched in with the first plate of Christmas dinner. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the food. Here was a huge helping of cold roast turkey, squash, peas, potatoes, salad and dressing. On the side were two devilled eggs sitting on a piece of fresh (?) lettuce, with a stick of celery on top. The whole thing was topped off with a serving of cranberry sauce. When everyone was served the cook then brought in plates of fresh white bread, butter and even pie and cheese. To top it all Doc produced a huge box of candy. I doubt if I ever enjoyed food so much before that.

All this had taken quite a bit of arranging but Derek took care of that by sending Hurricanes off on various missions. The Chef at the Cecil Hotel did most of the catering and buying and the planes arrived back loaded. The pilot with five hundred eggs aboard made the smoothest landing of his life and didn't crack one. The Bombays had also been bringing in supplies and Derek made sure that every man on the base had two

bottles of beer each. All in all it was quite a day.

At long last, after seven weeks of terrific fighting, our troops had defeated the Germans and the Italians and chased them past Bengasi as far as Agedabia and El Agheila. Instead of the estimated eight or nine days, 33 Squadron had been deep in the desert for nine weeks. Now the regular fighters were at advanced bases and could reach as far west as we could. During those nine weeks the Squadron was credited with destroying, or rendering unserviceable, five hundred vehicles. We also received credit for twenty-six aircraft destroyed on the ground or in the air. High Command sent a special communique to the Wing Commander commending our work and its help in slowing down the retreat, enabling the armies to capture or destroy more equipment and take more prisoners.

On December the thirtieth 33 Squadron moved out of the desert to Msus, a landing ground just behind the front lines and about forty miles from Agedabia, still held by the Germans. Here I got my first glimpse of our fighting forces in action. Tanks rolled through Msus all the time, followed by the twenty-five pounder guns, pulled by their carriers, and hundreds of smaller Bren Gun carriers, tankers and lorries. There were five fighter squadrons already on the airfields when we arrive, so that the roar of their engines, plus the roar of the tanks and the trucks, was constantly in our ears. Added to this was the never ending rumble of heavy guns and exploding shells and bombs at the front, only a few miles away.

I spent the first evening settling down in the new camp. The next morning I wandered around to the other squadrons to see if any of my friends were there. Wally Conrad and George Keefer, both with 94 Squadron, were there and doing well. Each of them had several enemy planes to their credit. There were other fellows I had known, scattered among the various squadrons, and I sent a most enjoyable day talking to them. It was here that I learned from No. 1 Aussie Squadron that all three of my friends there - Roberts, Bobby Jones and Fred Ecclestone - had been shot down.

33 Squadron was given part of the job of protecting Bengasi harbour from bombers and reccos. The British had not been in possession of the port very long but I believe the day after they took it over, supplies began pouring in from Alexandria. The whole town was a shambles from the incessant bombing by both sides for more than a year. The damage was worst along the waterfront but, strangely enough, a great cathedral right by the water's edge seemed to be intact. From the air the bottom of the harbour was plainly visible and it was covered with pock marks from bombs. There were several sunken ships lying on the bottom.

Winnie and I decided to build ourselves something a



LG 125: Christmas Day



little more comfortable than a slit trench with a pup tent over it. First of all we borrowed a supply truck and went scrounging for materials. We found two large gas drums, four or five sheets of galvanized iron, and a twenty foot long rusty pipe. Working on the sergeant in charge of maintenance Winnie managed to borrow a truck tarpaulin and we were ready to go to work. I marked out an area on the sand eight feet by ten feet, then the two of us started to dig.

For two days we dug that hole every time there was a minute to spare. By the third morning it was four feet deep all around with a long doorway cut away from one corner. The two drums were placed, one on each side of the pit, and then we put the pipe across them. This provided good support for the tarpaulin, and to hold the canvas down tightly we filled about forty five-gallon gas tins with sand, placing them inside the tent with the wall outside, and then under the tins. These tins not only held the wall steady, they raised the roof at the edges by another foot and also provided excellent protection from shrapnel. The galvanized sheets were put at each end where the canvas didn't meet, then banked with sand. Neither one of us expected to live in the place very long as it was rumoured that the squadron was moving soon, but we were determined to build it even if we only spent one night there. As a result we put up with a lot of jibes from our friends and they dubbed the place 'Edy's Folly'.

When I went inside for the first time, the place seemed enormous. The roof was about five feet high at the walls and about six feet in the centre so that I could stand upright. We moved the two cots in, plus two canvas chairs and a writing table, but there was still lots of room for our kit and to move around. Soon all our personal pictures adorned the walls, a kerosene lamp hung from the pipe for light, and we two just lay back on our cots and beamed. It was by far the best dugout in that part of the desert. A house warming was arranged for the evening of the day the 'Pit' was completed and all the boys in the Squadron came around to have a look. Derek brought along his record player and each one brought their own refreshments, if any, so we had a nice party.

There was never a dull moment at Msus, even if the fighting had bogged down on the ground. Every day bombers came up to rendezvous with the fighters, then headed off to carry out low level attacks on the enemy troop concentrations. About an hour later they would return, sometimes all of them, sometimes not. Later still the fighters came home. Once their job of protecting the bombers was over, and they hadn't had to fight off enemy attacks, they went looking for trouble. If they got it we would sometimes see a pretty good dog-fight. If they didn't, then they usually went

down to ground level and strafed anything they could find. I was always fascinated by the action around Msus and the excitement of the beginnings of a raid, or the return of the aircraft.

The Germans came over too, in their wicked looking little 109s. They even had the audacity to strafe Msus, where there were six of our fighter squadrons. One day I was watching our Hurricanes coming in to land when three 109s came down out of the blue and attacked. A Wing Commander Charles was just about fifty feet off the ground on his approach when one of the Germans hit him with cannon shells. The Hurricane just blew up and crashed in a ball of flames. The attack was so close that I had to dive into a shelter to avoid stray bullets and the 109 streaked by about fifty yards away.

German recco planes often came over to see what was going on and then all hell broke loose as the ground defence went to work with the Bofors gun. A really good ack ack barrage is something to see. Once a JU 88 went over, escaping unharmed from the guns on the ground, but it ran right into a full squadron of Kittyhawks returning from a patrol. The boys all scrambled to get into position for an attack and in the confusion the 88 nearly got away. One of our pilots finally caught it sneaking out of the melee and sent it down in flames.

One day Winnie and I went up to do a routine patrol of the convoy coming in to Bengasi. We circled the harbour for a long time, then headed out to sea to have a look at the ships coming in. On the way back I lost Winnie when he dove down to look at something on the water. As I searched the sky a tiny glint of light caught my eye high above, and closer inspection showed that it was a twin-engine aircraft. Obviously an enemy recco. I was at about three thousand feet and it was at ten thousand, so I pushed the throttle through the gate and started to climb.

It took quite a while to catch up but finally I was above and behind and went in to attack. The first burst tore some kind of a door off the plane and it nearly hit my wing, but no major damage was done and it dived into a cloud. I had seen that it was an Italian Caproni, one of those planes made mostly of wood and fabric, and very difficult to bring down unless hit in a motor or something vital.

I circled above the cloud waiting for the thing to come out but he had fooled me, turned over on his back and dropped straight down heading for the sea. Once again the sun shining on the cockpit gave him away and I headed down in the fastest dive I ever made. The skin on the wings was rippling and the airspeed indicator read over four hundred miles an hour. This time I misjudged the speed of the two aircraft and the bullets from the eight guns hit the water ahead of him.



'Edy's Folly' - Don's palatial dug out that he shared with Winnie Winsland at Msus, rather more comfortable than his previous dugout at LG125.



Wally Conrad, Charles Keefer, Charlie Brown

When I pulled up from this attack, a Tommyhawk flashed by and also fired at the Caproni, then circled around and joined me. My gas was so low, and the ammunition, that I decided it was time to head for home. We were out of sight of land but I had a pretty good idea of the direction. I even surprised myself when we crossed the coast and hit Msus dead on. When I landed the mechanics found that the guns in one wing had caught fire and had burned perilously close to the wing tank. Luckily the fire blew itself out, probably in that fast dive.

On January the twelfth our Squadron moved to Antelat, a landing ground just twenty miles from Agedabia, and that town was still in enemy hands. Almost as soon as we landed it started to rain, and it rained for three days. This was the most miserable period of our sojourn in the desert. Everything became soaked through and the ground was in such a muddy mess that no aircraft could take off or land. After four days of this Winnie and I became fed up, no more so than the others, but we decided to do something about it. The two of us approached Derek and asked for a leave, explaining how long it was since we had been back in the Delta. As a matter of fact I hadn't been back East since the lucky leave in early December, and hadn't had an official leave since October the fifteenth. Derek finally gave in and said that we could have four days in the Delta, plus travelling time.

A Bombay transport was coming in for a landing as we left Derek's truck. These fellows, like the ones at LG 125, only stayed for a couple of minutes. Winnie looked at me, let out a whoop, and dashed for his pup tent. I ran too, threw all my clothes and utensils into a kit bag, and was out in about ten seconds. We ran as hard as we could towards the Bombay, but wouldn't have made it if a truck hadn't come along just then and picked us up. The driver dropped us off as the plane rolled to a stop, and we got hold of the pilot before anyone else could nail him. He was going back to El Adam right away and had room for passengers so we piled in.

The door clanged shut almost on our heels and in a minute the big plane was waddling out for the take-off. To avoid detection the pilot flew all the way to Benini at less than a hundred feet, going around any small hills rather than risk going up. We didn't stay long there, although it would have been interesting to see all the burned out German planes, and the Bombay took off for El Adam.

At El Adam there were no planes leaving for the Delta that day. This didn't bother us in the least, as our travelling time was free, so we decided to try hitchhiking. With all the traffic on the road there was no trouble at all in getting rides. It was intensely interesting to watch the hustle and bustle of the supply

columns and all the paraphernalia of war. Everywhere we looked there were burned out tanks and trucks, and we saw dozens of crashed aircraft. The fighting had been very intense all along this road, and every mile or so there was a cemetery, neatly fenced off, with rows and rows of crosses. Here were the graves of the British, Australian, New Zealand, Indian, Rhodesian, South African, French, German and Italian soldiers and airmen. There wasn't a building standing all along that route.

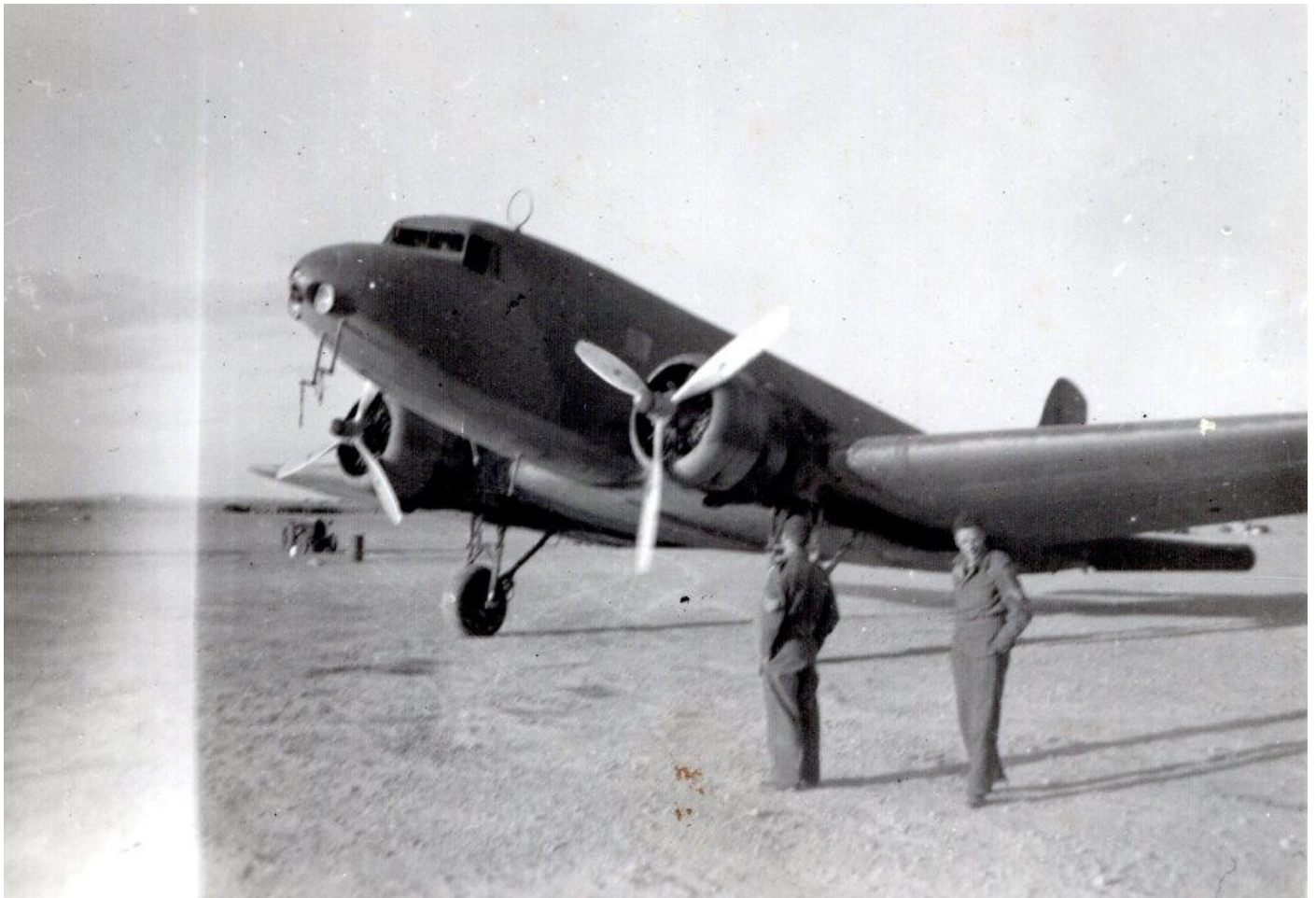
Tobruk itself had taken the worst beating of any town in the war so far. When the Italians held it we bombed it every day. In the first great desert battle in 1941 the British took Tobruk and held it even when our troops were pushed back to Egypt. All that time the Germans bombed and shelled the place day and night. Even now, since we had relieved the garrison, the Germans were over every night. There wasn't a complete building anywhere to be seen, and although there was plenty of shipping in the harbour it was all sitting on the bottom.

We left Tobruk late in the afternoon to go to the Gobi airport on the outskirts and see if there was a plane for Cairo. On the way we passed a deep wadi and saw a most amazing sight. It was completely filled with the wrecks brought in from the battle grounds. As far as I could see the sides of the ravines were covered with tanks, guns, trucks, jeeps, aircraft, tin cans, drums and even pieces from the sunken ships. I've never seen such an enormous pile of junk and it certainly impressed some of the waste of the war on me. That pile represented a mere fraction of the wrecks scattered over the desert.

At the airport we had dinner with the pilots of a transport squadron stationed there and lined up a ride for the morning. The Medical Officer gave us one of the ambulances to sleep in. It had two good bunks in it so we settled down for a comfortable night. Early in the morning, before dawn, the Germans came over and bombed the place. Winnie and I dove into the nearest slit trench and then had a grand view of the raid. I hated the noise and the exploding bombs but the fireworks were quite something to see.

When we got up in the morning men were already busy with bulldozers and shovels, filling in the holes made by last night's bombs. There apparently had been little damage done and our plane, a DC 3, had no trouble taking off. I spent some time up in the cockpit with the pilot and he told me that this was the same plane that Howard Hughes had used years before to fly around the world. The engines had been changed often but the fuselage was the same. Just how true that was I don't know, but he offered to show me the log book for the aircraft.

This pilot was a sightseer and went out of his way to



Above: Howard Hughes' DC 3 at the Tobruk Gobi Airport, described by Don as a DC2 in his logbook.
Below: Halfaya Pass, 'Hellfire Pass' to the Allies. After the fall of Bardia on 2 January 1942, Commonwealth forces besieged the Halfaya garrison. Cut off from supplies, and bombarded from the air and the sea, 4 200 Italians of the 55th Savona Infantry Division and 2 100 Germans surrendered to the South African 2nd Infantry Division on 17 January 1942.



take a look at all the battle grounds. We flew over Gazala and Capuzzo, and Sidi Rezeyek and the famous 'Hellfire Pass'. Heavy fighting had taken place at all these locations and the wrecks and debris were still strewn all over. Here and there crashed aircraft stuck up in the sand like darts thrown at a board. When we flew by Bardia the pilot told us that it had just capitulated two days before. In the original battle weeks ago, the Germans stayed stubbornly in the town so our troops merely bypassed it and went on, leaving enough men to keep the Germans there and starve them out.

After a long, long flight I saw one of the wonders of this desert territory. We had been flying over nothing but brown sand all this time. Suddenly a streak of green appeared on the horizon and I could see that it was made up of trees and green fields. The change from waste desert to fertile land in the Delta is startling. There is no gradual change and it's just as though a line had been drawn between the two. We circled the Pyramids and the Sphinx to get a good look at them, then flew over Cairo and landed at an airport a few miles outside the city.

Cairo looked mighty good to Winnie and I as I drove in to it in a taxi, and we enjoyed the sights. This was my first time there and there was much to see. The first thing was to get cleaned up. Our battle dress was dirty, unpressed and torn, and our hair was thick and matted. Neither of us had shaved, nor had a bath, for weeks and all in all we looked like a couple of tramps. The minute a boy took us to the room we turned on the hot water and luxuriated in a steamy bath. It seemed a pity to put on the old clothes again but it couldn't be helped, we had nothing clean to put on. Downstairs we visited the barber shop and had the works—haircut, shave, shampoo, massage etc—then went into the main dining room.

Feeling stuffed after an enormous steak dinner and tired from our travels we retired to the room and decided to get a good night's rest before doing up the town. Winnie rang for service and when a boy appeared he asked how long it would take to do up our laundry and fix up the battle dress a bit. He promised them by eight o'clock in the morning, so we stripped and turned over everything we owned.

Sure enough, sharp at eight, the boy came in with the morning tea, two bundles of neatly washed and ironed laundry and two absolutely unrecognizable uniforms. They had been cleaned and pressed alright, but what amazed me was that every evidence of rough wear collected during two months of daily use in the desert had been invisibly mended. They actually looked brand new. The charge for all that work was twenty piastres, a dollar in our money.

Winnie and I crowded so much into that short leave in Cairo that I can't honestly remember much of it. We saw Charlie Dallas, the lad who left us after walking back to Giarabub, and found that he was still holding out for a transfer to twin-engine aircraft. I also met a couple of friends from my home town and several of the boys who had flown out to the Middle East with me. We did up most of the night spots and well known cafes, and also rode around a lot in horse drawn buggies to see the sights.

The fourth day was reserved for a visit to the Pyramids and the Sphinx. After that we intended to start back for the Squadron. In the morning a taxi drove us along a beautiful boulevard to Mena House, the famous resort hotel near the Pyramids, and then we were standing at the base of the largest of those fabulous cut stone mountains.

It's really quite a thrill to stand there, looking at that structure, and trying to visualise its building, thousands of years ago. Each block of stone measured about twenty five feet long, four or five feet high, and I should judge four or five feet in depth. They must have weighed thousands and thousands of pounds, and yet they were so beautifully cut and placed that only the smallest of cracks was visible around them.

We hired an old Arab guide and spent hours wandering down and through various passages and corridors, deep in the ground. At one point we climbed down a hole in the sandy floor, using an old ladder, and stood in a five thousand year old tomb. The only light available was from a flickering candle held by a very old, and very wrinkled, Egyptian. He led us over to a stone casket in the wall. Through an opening which had at one time been the stone cover of the coffin, but was now broken, we could see the mummified body of a man. Part of the body was still wrapped up, but the head and shoulders were bare. The skin seemed to be intact but looked like old, dried up leather. I should have guessed that in such an atmosphere the old man was a fortune teller and it cost us ten piastres while the old fellow squatted in the sand, drew pictures with his finger and mumbled things we could hardly hear. It was a relief to get out in the open once again.

Amongst other things we saw an ancient Galley, quite well preserved, and then took the path down to the Sphinx. I enjoyed seeing this wonder more than anything in the desert. There she squatted, just as she had for thousands of years, and would do for thousands more. It was a thrill just to look at her.

It was quite late by the time we finished our tour, and although we could have spent days wandering around to see everything our leave was up and we now had to make our way back to the Squadron. We went over to Mena House to have late tea on the lawn. This was a

lovely place and was the favourite resort for the district. The house itself was large and rambling, and handsome in all its appointments. A wide verandah ran around three sides and the lawns and gardens were beautifully landscaped. It was a real pleasure to sit in such surroundings and to see the Pyramids rising into the sky ahead.

Winnie made some enquiries by phone and found that we wouldn't be able to get an aircraft from Cairo for some time. We then decided to hitch-hike to Alex and see if there were any Hurricanes at Aboukir. This was a long, cold trip. Each truck that picked us up only seemed to go a few miles before it turned off to one or another army camp. It was as cold as the dickens, so when we got to Half Way House, a hotel affair about half way between Cairo and Alex, we decided to spend the night there. It was midnight by this time and as we had a very busy day we slept like logs. In the morning I called Wadi Matruh, a huge Maintenance depot a few miles from the House, and had a driver call for us.

With luck there should have been a couple of Hurricanes there for 33 Squadron, or at least one of the other squadrons at Msus, but on that particular day there wasn't one. The CO said he did have two Tommyhawks to go to Aboukir, but before we could arrange to take them two Aussies came in to pick them up. Its probably just as well, neither Winnie or I had flown a Tommy before. At last, late in the afternoon, two Hurricanes were ready to go to Aboukir for camouflage, so we grabbed them.

The only bit of excitement on that trip was when I landed and found that there was no air pressure in the brakes. The landing ground there was very short anyway, and without brakes it was almost impossible. The Hurricane ran right off the end of the runway but slowed down enough in the soft sand to avoid running right into a palm grove. Luck was with us. When we handed the two planes over to the officer in charge, he asked if we were by any chance going back up to the front. There were two Hurricanes for 33 Squadron that would be ready in the morning. With our transportation now all fixed up, we headed for Alexandria and one more night's leave, That was a grand night and we visited all the familiar haunts, saw all the floor shows and, as usual, ended up at the Anglo Hellenic. Late at night we took a taxi out to Aboukir so as to be ready in the morning.

The trip up to El Adem was uneventful, except that we flew low over the battle grounds again to have another look. I just couldn't get over the appalling number of derelict vehicles scattered for miles around. At El Adem we both landed. There had been a slight change of plans and Winnie was to leave his plane there. He was quite sure there would be another one he could pick up, and if there wasn't it wouldn't be too hard to get a

ride. I stayed with my plane while they refuelled it, then climbed in and started up. Winnie drove by just then in a truck, shouted something, and then went on to another Hurricane. I waited for him to get started, then we took off and headed along the coast. From El Adem on the ground became very rugged and hilly. It was fun to fly low, down the valleys and even below the coast line. We almost got into trouble when Winnie led the way up a gorge. At a narrow point an air current nearly flipped him into the side of the cliff. I was far enough behind to pull up sharply but Winnie got quite a scare.

When we reached Msus I kept right on going, hoping to reach Antelat before dark. After a couple of minutes I noticed that Winnie wasn't with me and turned back to find him. He was just landing so I came around and landed too. Before the plane stopped rolling Winnie, who had been talking to some men there, taxied out again and waved me on. Once more we took off and I headed for Antelat but Winnie flew over to the landing ground at Msus. It was getting darker every minute so I said to heck with Antelat for today and landed behind Winnie.

Imagine my surprise when Lance came out in the station wagon to pick us up. He said that the Squadron had had to evacuate Antelat that very morning and that the Germans were now in control of the place. Winnie had been told at El Adem that things were not good at the front, and to check at Msus before going on. This was what he had shouted to me before we took off. It was a little shaking to imagine what might have happened if I hadn't turned back and followed him down to Msus.

There was a gay time in the Mess that night. We brought back a good supply of chocolate bars, biscuits, chewing gum, American cigarettes and a few bottles of Rye. I paid up my Mess bill, which pleased Doc, the treasurer, and then cleared up a few poker debts with Lance and Davo. We had brought a small primus stove between us so that could heat up shaving water in the morning and brews at night. With the stove we had also bought a goodly supply of cocoa and coffee. Apart from the fact that the Germans were just a few miles away, Winnie and I were going to live a life of luxury for a while. I even had six weeks clean laundry in the kit bag.

Chapter 14

Before leaving the Mess for his tent that night, Derek Gould called Lance, John Cloete, Kay Stammers and I over to his end of the table. There was to be a strafe in the morning, with we four taking part in it. We were to take off at 7.30 am and beat up anything we could find in the way of enemy convoys or equipment. If we found anything at all more than twenty miles away it would be German for sure.

I stood out in the desert for a few minutes before



The Mena Hotel, Cairo in 1938, now the Marriott Mena House, 6 Pyramids Road, Giza.



Antelat January 1942: Mac Macdonald, John Cloete, Lance Wade

turning in. It was a perfectly clear, quiet, black night and I could hear many sounds and see many sights. Tanks and trucks squeaked and rumbled nearby, while heavy guns crashed as they shelled the enemy positions. In the distance an occasional machine gun set up its chattering. On the horizon I could even see the flashes of the guns, and here and there a very light went up as a signal from one unit to another. Spotted in the distance there were no less than eight fires from tanks, knocked out in the day's fighting and still burning brightly. The air was cool and I started to shiver, but even in bed later on the shivers wouldn't stop. I lay awake for a long time, thinking about the raid in the morning and suddenly I knew that something was wrong. Nothing definite crept into my mind then, but somehow I knew that something was going to happen in the morning and it wasn't going to be good. At last I fell asleep.

In the morning when I wakened the jitters were still there. I couldn't put my finger on the trouble and didn't really know what was wrong. All I could feel was that something was going to happen to me that day. I did think of asking the Doc to ground me on some pretext or other, but then I knew what the boys thought of one or two who had done just that, including myself, and I decided to go anyway.

At the last minute the raid was postponed until later in the day, so that the reccos could go out and find where the Germans were. Thus didn't help at all and just gave me more time to worry. By the time we took off after lunch I was in a real state of nerves. Lance took off with me as his number two and climbed to five hundred feet before heading for the front.

I nearly screwed my head off keeping a lookout for enemy aircraft and nearly missed Lance when he headed for the deck after about twenty minutes flying. He had spotted small dust clouds ahead, which indicated vehicles on the move, and had gone down low to avoid detection. We hadn't flown more than two minutes when we saw a much larger dust cloud rise up on our right. This looked like enemy fighters taking off from Agedabia, so Lance wheeled around and headed for home. Two seconds before the turn I was scared silly about something unknown, and two seconds after I was as happy as a lark. We still had orders not to tangle with the 109s if it could be avoided, and Lance was doing the right thing in tuning back. We could always come out again when there were no fighters around. I figured that we would land at Msus, the raid I had worried about would be over and therefore all my fears were senseless. With this in mind I started to sing at the top of my voice and was really enjoying myself.

Suddenly Lance climbed to about a thousand feet and started to circle. I didn't gather what his plan was at first, but after circling for about fifteen minutes he

headed for the deck again, this time towards the German lines. My heart leaped up into my throat and stayed there. Lance, instead of letting a few 109s get the better of him, had circled until he was sure we were not the intended prey and then he headed in to finish the job. All my fears returned in full strength, but strangely enough they disappeared the moment we climbed for the attack. Our first dive was a complete surprise to the Huns and I guess the excitement made me forget to be afraid.

I can remember the first target very clearly. Was flying too low really and when the bullets left the guns some of them were hitting the desert well before the others reached the truck in the sights. A German, who had been lying in the sand well out of the line of fire, suddenly jumped up and ran right into the cone of fire from the eight machine guns. This was the first time I really realized the impact of bullets striking. It seemed as though some invisible force smacked him and rolled him over and over like tumbleweed. As I pulled up over the truck I could see a lick of flames coming from the back, and out of the corner of my eye I saw a gasoline truck explode from Lance's attack.

We all made three passes at that column and used up most of the ammunition in the guns. By that time the Germans had their twenty mm cannons unlimbered and were firing at us from all directions. There were four or five lorries with these ack ack guns mounted in the back. The sky was thick with little black puffs of smoke but I was too busy and excited to pay any attention to them.

I had been turning and weaving to distract the gunners below but suddenly, in the split second that I was going to turn and dive on the last truck in line, two shells hit my Hurricane in quick succession, specifically one in the engine and one in the radiator. The noise was terrific from the explosions, and then the engine ran down like a huge busted alarm clock and stopped dead.

The cockpit filled with spraying oil and white smoke and my first thoughts were 'FIRE, the plane's on fire, get the hell out'. There is a Sutton harness in fighter planes that holds the pilot to the seat in case of a crash. I pulled this harness and started to climb out of the cockpit to jump, then realized that the aircraft was only a hundred feet or so up and a parachute wouldn't have time to open. I slumped back in the bucket seat and turned off the switches, but the situation seemed pretty hopeless and pictures flashed through my mind of the plane burning or crashing with me in it.

All this happened in a matter of seconds and I was in a panic. As no flames appeared, and some of the smoke started to clear away, I began to automatically guide the plane. A Hurricane drops pretty quickly with a dead engine and I subconsciously pulled the stick back into

my stomach. I don't know what made me do that as I couldn't see the ground through the smoke but it was a lucky move. The aircraft ricocheted on the sand like a skipping stone, and as it was travelling about two hundred miles an hour it skimmed up in the air again. This gave me time and height enough to bring it down straight and level.

The smoke was actually escaping glycol from the radiator and it cleared enough so that I could see the ground just a few feet below. With one hand braced on the top of the instrument panel, and the other on the stick, I held the plane level. It hit the soft sand, skidded for several hundred feet and then dug its nose into the ground.

I couldn't have been luckier. When I first hit, the cockpit canopy, which wasn't locked back, slammed forward and nearly took the top of my head off. The plane didn't ground loop, or throw me around much, and the skid slowed it down to a point where it didn't flip over on its back. The pressure forced me forward hard enough to make me crack my head on the gun sight, but I wasn't knocked out. Blood gushed out over my eyes and I thought at first that I was badly hurt, but it turned out to be just a bad cut. It only took about two seconds to jump out and run like a hare in case the poor old Hurricane exploded. As I was running I could see over my shoulder little spurts of sand flying up all around the wreck of the plane and realized that the Germans were still shooting at it.

After running about a hundred yards I began to feel sick and sat down. My head was throbbing and blood was all over me. All of a sudden an aircraft circled overhead and I looked up to see Lance waving at me. He had his wheels and his flaps down and was trying to land to pick me up. The land was too rough there so that a landing or a take-off would have been impossible. After circling three times trying to find a smooth spot, Lance had to wave again and fly off for the base. I waved back but when he was gone I sat down again, feeling more sick and discouraged than before. The most amazing part of Lance's attempt to pick me up, and the proof of just what kind of man he was, was the fact that all the time he circled my position every gun in the German column was trained on him, pumping shells in his direction as fast as they could. He paid no attention to them and not one shell hit him. I'm certain Lance was truly sorry he couldn't pick me up and save me from what we always considered to certain death.

Strafing always seemed to be such a dirty trick in a way, we figured we would be shot if we were unlucky enough to be caught by the people we were actually strafing. This was very much in my mind when an armoured car came across the sand in my direction. There was a German officer standing in the front, with a tommy gun pointed straight at me. I started to run,

then saw how useless this was and just stood there waiting to see what would happen next.

When the car was about a hundred yards away the officer lowered the gun and I had a flicker of hope, but when he got closer he aimed it again and my heart sank right down in my boots. All I could think was, "He's going to shoot." over and over again, and I could see a picture of a forlorn little figure, standing out in a waste land, as though I was up above looking down on myself, with the German and the gun bearing down on me.

Before I could recover from the scare, the car pulled up in a cloud of dust and the Germans jumped out, laughing at this joke they had played on me. They were highly pleased with themselves for having shot the aircraft down, and the officer, a very young fellow, came up with a pistol in his hand and said, "You are my prisoner. If you try to escape you will be shot. For you, the war is over."

One of the men pulled out a first aid kit and started to work on the cut over my eye. It wasn't as bad as the bleeding indicated, just a gash, and he soon had it patched up and bandaged. We all went over to have a look at the Hurricane, then climbed into the armoured car and headed back for the column a quarter of a mile away. I could see four back pillars of smoke rising up into the sky so it had been a good enough raid after all.

The rest of Don's book covers his time in an Italian POW camp, being moved to Germany after the Italians capitulated, and his experiences at Stalag Luft III. There are copies in the 33 Squadron History Room, or you can order a copy from Don's daughter via the website:

www.goonintheblock.com

American ace Lance Wade is mentioned several times in Don's book, and in the next edition there will be an article on Lance and, hopefully, a follow up to the recent announcement on the 33 Squadron Past & Present FB page (6 October 2020—Pima Air & Space Museum's Freshly Refurbished Hawker Hurricane Mk. XII Unveiled) which revealed that there are static and flying Hurricanes in the States in 33 Squadron colours and bearing Lance Wade's insignia. As a certain JHSU MACr pointed out, Pima isn't too far away from next year's IZ base. Too good a photo opportunity to miss for the Puma 50th celebrations? (Ed.)

YEAR 1942	MONTH	AIRCRAFT		PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT	2ND PILOT, PASSENGER OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)	
		Type	No.				
	JAN					Totals Brought Forward	
"	3	HURRICANE	7780	SELF		REP COVER TO OUR BECCO (RETURNED)	
"	3	"	4107	"		MSUS MAIN TO GARZALA	
"	3	"	4572	"		GARZALA TO MSUS MAIN	
"	7	"	7649	"		PATROL BENVINA HARBOUR	
"	9	"	4040	"		" " "	
"	11	"	9299	"		MSUS MAIN TO GARZALA	
"	12	"	7841	"		GARZALA TO MSUS MAIN	
"	12	"	7844	"		MSUS MAIN TO ANTELET MAIN	
"	13	"	7844	"		ANTELET MAIN TO ANTELET MAIN	
"	17	BOMBAY			SELF	ANTELET - BENVINA - EL ADAM	
"	17	D.C.2	WK877	1/SGT POTTER	SELF	EL ADAM - MERIA MATRUH - BARI	
"	18	HURRICANE	4326	SELF		BARA MATRUH (H.O.S.) - ABBUKIR	
"	18	"	7770	"		ABBUKIR - EL ADAM	
"	18	"	3822	"		EL ADAM - MSUS SATELLITE	
"	23	"	3822	"		STORES OF HURRICANE FLEET	
						TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD	
GRAND TOTAL (Colk (1) to (10))						Hrs	Mins

	SINGLE-ENGINE AIRCRAFT						MULTI-ENGINE AIRCRAFT						PASS- ENGINEER	INSTR./CLOUD FLYING (Colk (1) to (10)) Dual	PILOT			
	DAY			NIGHT			DAY			NIGHT								
	DUAL	PILOT	(4)	DUAL	PILOT	(4)	DUAL	PILOT	(4)	DUAL	PILOT	(4)				DUAL	PILOT	(4)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)				(14)	(15)	
			1:25															
			1:35															
			1:25															
			3:00	DAMAGED IS 174. LANDING WHEELS ALSO ATTACKED (SMALL FIRE IN MAIN ENGINE)														
			2:10															
			1:30															
			1:20															
			1:20															
			1:10															
			1:35	SAME AS HOWARD DUNES MADE AROUND WORLD TRIP														
			2:30															
			1:15	CAN. SGT KELLY BRITTON, CAPTAIN, BOMBING UNIT 32, SQUADRON MOVED FROM ANTELET TO MSUS SATELLITE.														
			?	SHOT DOWN, CRASH LANDED IN ENEMY TERRITORY. "MISSING, BELIEVED PRISONER OF WAR"														

23 January 1942: The final entry in Don Edy's logbook records him being shot down and crash landing in enemy territory, 'Missing, believed prisoner of war'. On 18 March 1942 the Squadron was informed officially that Don was a POW in Italy.

The Origins of the Support Helicopter Force

From the Royal Air Force Historical Society Journal No.25

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the Puma entering service with the RAF, so to start the ball rolling and offer the reader an understanding of where we came from I have extracted two briefs given at the 'Helicopters in the RAF' seminar of 18 October 2000. Having earned their spurs in a variety of roles and operations around the globe, we now await the next step in vertical lift aircraft development (Ed.):

SETTING THE SCENE

Wing Commander Colin Cummings, a former supplier who served with the SH Force during the 1960s and now runs the Old Rotors Society, opened the seminar by reviewing the first thirty or so years of the RAF's involvement with rotary wing aircraft, covering four topics:

1. The Air Ministry's initiatives and the pre-war developments which resulted.
2. Joint Anglo-American work during World War II, which led to the procurement of the first helicopters for all three British services.
3. The immediate post-war years.
4. The first deployment of helicopters to Malaya.

The rotary wing journey started in 1923 when the fledgling RAF was struggling to survive as an independent force, as the khaki, dark blue and Treasury vultures circled to pick off what might be for the taking. Despite machinations over the very survival of its Service, the Air Ministry offered a prize of £50 000 for a helicopter or equivalent flying machine. This offer at once drew criticism from the Royal Aeronautical Society, who observed that 'such an offer gives entirely the wrong view of the relative values of serious work along established lines and such highly speculative constructions as the helicopter.'

The competition provided a much needed stimulus amongst inventors and engineers, and numerous proposals were made in response. The development of rotary winged aircraft had lagged behind that of fixed wing machines because of the significant technical problems and complexity involved in designing a rotating wing which would be capable of performing adequately and safely throughout the intended flight envelope. By the same token, the rotary wing required by a gyroplane, was somewhat less demanding to design and develop than that of a pure helicopter, their similarities notwithstanding. So it was that a gyroplane design found favour initially. The main differences

between a gyroplane and a helicopter is the former derives most or all of its lift from a freewheeling rotor and has a separate means of propulsion, while the helicopter uses a powered rotor as its principal source of lift, directional control and propulsion. 'Gyroplane' is the correct generic term here, 'autogiro' and 'autogyro' being trade names.

In the UK, the main force behind the development and construction of gyroplanes was a Spanish engineer and inventor, Juan de la Cierva. From his arrival in the UK in 1925, de la Cierva built a number of gyroplanes of ever increasing sophistication. His early models were based on the fuselage of an Avro 504K, the wings of the donor aircraft being replaced by a rotor system mounted over the front cockpit to provide lift. Later machines addressed, stage by stage, the many problems of rotor technology and by 1932 these had evolved sufficiently to allow cyclic movement of the rotor to provide directional control as well as lift. The Air Ministry obtained modest numbers of Cierva autogiros during the early 1930s and used these for experimental and low key trials work. It was not until 1935 that production orders for gyroplanes – the Cierva C.30 and C.40 - were placed by the RAF. Most of these aircraft were allotted to the School of Army Co-operation where they were used for artillery spotting and liaison work. Production was undertaken by Avro, the RAF's designation for these machines being Rota I and II. Juan de la Cierva was killed in an airliner crash at Croydon in 1936 and with his demise the driving force behind the gyroplane as a serious commercial proposition began to evaporate.



Juan de la Cierva (21 Sep 1895-9 Dec 1936)

Nonetheless, Cierva autogiros continued to be built and used throughout Europe and the United States and by the outbreak of war more than 350 people had qualified for gyroplane flying licences. The RAF's interest in rotary winged aircraft had waned during the late 1930s, however, and its autogiros had been withdrawn from use before the outbreak of hostilities, most of them being sold off. This is perhaps understandable, as emphasis had to be placed on mainstream aircraft during the frantic efforts to rearm. On the outbreak of war, autogiros were reintroduced and those which had previously been sold were requisitioned, along with a number of civilian machines. Several autogiros went to France for gunfire support duties with the British Expeditionary Force, the remainder being allocated to radar calibration, a role in which they served admirably throughout the war until No 529 Squadron, to which they had been assigned, disbanded in 1945.

In America the story was somewhat different, courtesy of the Royal Navy. In 1941, the Navy was anxious to work jointly with the US authorities on developing gyroplanes for anti-submarine and convoy protection work, operating off the decks of ships. This idea had already been demonstrated successfully by de la Cierva's chief test pilot, Reginald Brie, flying on and off the British carrier *HMS Furious* and the Italian cruiser *Fiume*.



Avro Rota at the IWM Duxford.

As the RN had no suitably qualified rotary wing pilots, they sought the help of the RAF. Assistance was forthcoming in the form of the ex-CO of the gyroplane unit, Reginald Brie, now an RAF wing commander. Using a licence-built Rota autogiro and a platform installed on a British merchant ship, Brie demonstrated the autogiro's capabilities to the joint Anglo/US team in America. Amongst those involved with the team was Igor Sikorsky and he and Brie soon developed a mutual respect. This led Sikorsky to invite Brie to see his own offering, the VS300, and, after some persuasion, he even allowed Brie to fly it.

The main advantage of the helicopter over the gyroplane was the former's ability to hover and to make vertical landings and take offs, the latter only possible to a limited extent in a gyroplane by a 'jump take off'. These factors, coupled with other features, made Brie realise that the true helicopter, with its powered rotor for propulsion, lift and directional control was a more realistic option and had greater development potential than the gyroplane. Brie approached Air Marshal Sir Roderick Hill, Head of Procurement in the USA, and impressed upon him the essential superiority of the helicopter over the gyroplane and an order for three versions of Sikorsky's helicopters, the R-4, R-5 and R-6, swiftly followed. For those who are aware of recent manifestations of American misrepresentation of history, it is worth noting that the RAF team was able to help Sikorsky formulate many operating concepts and to deal with some of the ergonomic issues which arose. For example, in the R-5, the cockpit and crew positions were designated because of advice from 'the Brits' and an experimental winch was also installed at their behest.

Training in the USA for the initial group of British helicopter pilots, drawn from all three Services, was arranged alongside the US Coastguard Service. As you might imagine, it did not take long for the young students to realise that the ability to hover, allowed them a bird's eye view of the local beauties sunbathing on apartment roofs. Complaints swiftly ensued, not from the aforementioned local beauties you understand, but from a householder, annoyed that vibration from the helicopter rotors had dislodged the soot in his chimney!

The first British R-4 helicopters were assembled and brought home on the merchant ship *SS Daghestan* sailing in convoy. The aim was to use the opportunity to put the new helicopter through its paces but the weather conspired against the trial and few sorties were flown during the sixteen-day crossing. In the last year of the war in Europe, supplies of the Sikorsky R-4 and R-6 began to arrive in UK where they became the Hoverfly I and II respectively.



Sikorsky YR-4 / Hoverfly I on SS *Daghestan*.

Unfortunately, their appearance coincided with a cooling in the Royal Navy's interest in employing helicopters in the anti-submarine role because the U-boat threat was being contained by other means. A consequence of this change in requirement was the cancellation of the naval order for the R-5.

At about this stage, with the European war fast approaching its end, the navy and air force went their separate ways with helicopters. The RAF, for its part, had relatively few pilots qualified on the Hoverfly and there was little enthusiasm for the technology, particularly when the experts returned to civilian life at the war's end. On arrival in UK the RAF aircraft were reassembled at Hanworth, an old de la Cierva site, and eventually an OTU was set up at Andover in January 1945 to train pilots from the autogiro squadron and Army AOP pilots from Germany. This unit was also tasked with training maintenance personnel.

In the immediate post-war years, the RAF's Hoverflies were employed in a variety of roles but it must be said that it was an aircraft looking for a purpose, rather than an answer to a clear operational need. Some examples of the uses to which they were put included:

- a. Support for airborne forces.
- b. Radar calibration, a role previously carried out by using autogiros to fly in circles over a known point, using their own radar signature to calibrate the ground radars. By contrast, the Hoverfly carried a two-foot circumference metal ball of a given radar response, suspended from a 1,400 feet long cable and flown at heights of up to 6,000 feet.
- c. Simulating radio sonde balloons.
- d. Very elementary search and rescue trials at St Mawgan, using a net and a strop.

One other short-lived task involved Brian Trubshaw, later of Concorde test pilot fame, delivering mail from Aberdeen to Balmoral whilst the Royal Family was in residence.

During 1946-47, the helicopter fleet was rationalised with the RAF and Army standardising on the Hoverfly II and the RN having the Hoverfly I. Although the Mk IIs were more powerful (all things being relative in this regard!), it suffered from serious oil leaks which tended to deposit oil onto the magneto, with predictable results. It is generally agreed that the RN had the better part of this exchange. The army, for its part, persevered with the Hoverfly and a separate squadron was formed which eventually became a flight of No 657 Squadron. This unit continued to operate the Hoverfly until 1951, when Sycamores were provided.

To understand the outcome of the next phase in the acceptance of the helicopter as a serious military aircraft, we should briefly consider the industrial picture in UK. There were four home-grown types under development and one US import in production.

The first pair of British offerings were the Fairey Gyrodyne, a hybrid aircraft, and the Skeeter, originally developed as the Cierva Sceptre and about to begin a long and complex gestation. Meanwhile, at Bristols, Raoul Hafner, the Austrian designer and engineer, was working on the Types 171 and 173 which would, in the fullness of time eventually become the Sycamore and Belvedere.

The imported offering owed much to Westland Aircraft, who post-war turned to helicopters. They obtained licences permitting the manufacture and marketing world-wide (except North America) of the Sikorsky S.51, an iteration of the R-5 which had been rejected by the RN in 1944. As part of the deal, Westlands received several pattern aircraft to reverse engineer the helicopter and reduce the lead time for first deliveries. Westlands made a few changes to the S.51, which it eventually produced as the Dragonfly. An initial modest

order came from the Royal Navy but nothing from the RAF.

By the end of the 1940s, the RN and RAF had both concluded that there was no really substantive role for helicopters and whilst each Service had a handful of prophets keeping the concept alive with trials and demonstrations, the aircraft themselves were a dwindling asset, on which ever increasing restrictions were placed, as they became older and less reliable.

The catalyst for a helicopter to address a real operational requirement was provided by the Malayan Emergency. In March 1949, the Chiefs of Staffs were advised to expect an increase in Communist banditry which would demand a counter-terrorist response. Despite their being supplied by air, allowing troops to go further and remain 'on station' longer, deep patrolling in the jungles of Malaya had a significant drawback. If casualties were suffered, the entire effort of a patrol would inevitably be diverted into evacuating the victims. Such evacuation would take many days with the chances of the casualty's surviving reducing accordingly. Prompt evacuation by helicopter, would allow offensive action to continue, improve the casualty's prospects and boost morale all round.

Unfortunately, the RAF had two problems in responding immediately to this requirement: First, it had no viable aircraft to deploy; the old Hoverfly was simply not a contender, for the reasons outlined above. Secondly, the RAF had very few helicopter pilots. The aircraft would need to come from industry and, having immediately ruled out the Bristol 173, which was still on the drawing board, there remained the four possible choices outlined above: the Skeeter, the Bristol 171, the Gyrodyne and the Dragonfly.



Westland Dragonfly



Fairey FB-1 Gyrodyne

(Flightglobalimages.com)



Saunders-Roe Skeeter

(airpowerworld.info)



Bristol Type 171 Sycamore in CFS colours



Based on the Type 173, the Bristol Type 192 entered service as the Belvedere HC Mk1 in 1961

Despite an early view, that the Skeeter might be a serious contender, it was quickly ruled out on delivery time, range and payload constraints, whilst neither the Gyrodyne nor the Type 171 would be available in time. By default, therefore, the choice fell on the Dragonfly, although it was accepted that it was far from ideal because of its 'hot and high' performance, its load carrying capacity and several other factors. The initial aircraft required for the RAF were taken from the Royal Navy's Dragonfly order, but only after some high level arm twisting, with the navy insisting that their first six examples must be supplied without interference.

Pilot training was also a problem and again the RN was persuaded to help. The arrival of the first RAF students for training at Gosport, however, coincided precisely with the first Dragonfly landing on its side next to the training school. Whilst a replacement was awaited, basic hovering practice was provided in Hoverfly Is, with their ceiling limited to six feet AGL! Nonetheless, the aircraft eventually materialised; the personnel were trained and the whole lot was shipped to Singapore in early 1950; operations began in June.

The first three Dragonflies in theatre were initially operated by the Casualty Evacuation Flight which was reorganised to become No 194 Sqn in 1953, flying later versions of the Dragonfly alongside the superior Sycamore. It was soon joined by No 155 Sqn, flying the Whirlwind HAR 4. In the closing days of Operation FIREDOG, the two units were merged to create No 110 Sqn. During the ten years during which they had been committed to FIREDOG, RAF helicopters had carried 4000 casualties, lifted 100 000 troops and other passengers and shifted 1000 tons of freight.

By the end of the 1950s, therefore, helicopters had established themselves as an essential component of air power but they were, like a decent claret, always in short supply.

LATER SUPPORT HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

After Operation FIREDOG, the predominant activity for helicopters in the Royal Air Force over the years became Support Helicopter (SH) Operations. The size, scope and flexibility of the SH Force in its heyday, before the contractions of the 1980s and '90s, are impressive to recall. Including Short Range Transport, there was a cumulative total of some twenty squadrons and units located at a similar number of stations and bases world-wide. Their commitments ranged from everyday tasking on innumerable Army exercises at well-remembered places, like Salisbury Plain, Soltau, Otterburn and Ulu Tiram, to operations in full-blown military campaigns in the Middle East and Far East, those conducted in Aden and Borneo being prime examples. Continuing involvement in NATO exercises (for example with the Allied Command

Europe (ACE) Mobile Force in Arctic Norway, Denmark, Greece and Turkey), with United Nations peacekeeping operations (for example the UN Force in Cyprus) and the long haul in Northern Ireland were interlaced with many and frequent minor detachments to locations like the West Indies, the Oman and Belize, and even one to the East River heliport in New York by a Wessex of No 72 Sqn in support of the 1969 Transatlantic Air Race.

in an historical context, it is easy to see how such a wealth of activity, which must also include the campaigns in the South Atlantic, the Gulf, The Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan could without difficulty provide more than enough material for several articles, but for this scene setting article we will take into account that SH operations in Aden and the Confrontation in Borneo did not include the Puma Force.

AIR MANOEUVRE DEVELOPMENT

The history of Air Manoeuvre Development involving SH was delivered by AVM David Niven. Having joined the RAF in 1968 his flying appointments were all on helicopters, including a tour with the RN and command of Nos 18 and 78 Sqns and of RAF Aldergrove. He was Air Advisor to Director SAS during the Falklands campaign and DACOS Plans at the JHQ during the Gulf War. In 1995 he was a member of the team developing the new Permanent Joint Headquarters and later joined its planning staff. He subsequently led the Joint Helicopter Study and Implementation Team until October 1999 when he became the first Commander of the Joint Helicopter Command. He focussed on the development of air manoeuvre within the RAF and its Support Helicopter operations with the British Army and covered four issues: command and control of RAF Support Helicopters (RAF SH); touch on the ownership issue; air mobile 'trials'; and, finally, the development of an integrated UK air assault capability at the start of the 21st Century.

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF RAF SH

During the Cold War NATO developed command and control states to which all the nations agreed. The definitions and their interpretation were familiar to all and, seen against a background of Article 5 operations and contingency plans with associated alert states, appeared to work well. But did they work for the RAF SH Force? As with all other UK forces, operational command would transfer to SACEUR at the appropriate alert state. Below SACEUR the delegation of operational control remained within the air chain of command. Many of us, in the 1970s, wondered why.

The answer, we thought, was that, for political reasons, the UK, if it was to maintain its level of influence within the air corridors of NATO, needed to keep up the numbers of assigned RAF assets. A second order issue

was to maintain RAF influence within the NATO command chain. There was also the issue of air doctrine: centralised control and decentralised execution. If control was delegated to a UK Army commander, this amounted to de-centralised command. We needed to be able to cope with the unexpected when, in Article 5 operations, RAF SH would need to switch, quickly, from support of a UK Army formation to other tasks whether in support of RAF or other-nations operations.

From the 1960s the RAF SH Force had a presence in Germany with the remainder of the UK-based force planned to reinforce at an appropriate alert measure. COMTWOATAF had operational control with the force assigned 'in direct support' of I (BR) Corps. There were two problems with this arrangement. First, COMTWOATAF had no effective organisation to delegate command below his level and therefore tactical command went to Commander 1(BR) Corps, exercised through a squadron leader in the Air Support Operations Centre (Support Helicopter) (ASOC(SH)) at Corps Rear HQ. ASOC(SH) was dislocated from ASOC (OS) at Corps Main and therefore did not have ready access to air control orders and, importantly, could not influence the formulation of air control orders. The result was an inability to support I (British) Corps effectively due to air control limitations combined with weather constraints.

The second problem was the perceived lack of RAF commitment to I (British) Corps who saw contingency planning for employment of RAF SH as a minor task within the Corps planning organisation. The attitude was very much that 'we cannot depend on the RAF SH Force to be there on the day so why should the Army build them into their defence plans?' This situation was not helped by a debate in 1978-80 when the RAF was discussing the acquisition of the Chinook and the option to support the Germany Harrier Force in the field. Such a discussion only led to an Army 'suspicion' that the Chinook would, 'on the day', not be allocated to 1(BR) Corps operations. Suspicions were reinforced when Boeing, probably in an effort to increase the original Chinook buy, produced a study showing the attributes of a Chinook deployed in support of Harrier field operations. As an officer based at RAF Gütersloh during the redeployment of the Harrier Force from Wildenrath in 1977 and closely observing its operations during my two tours at Gütersloh, I was envious of the Harrier command and control arrangements based on a group captain who was dual-hatted as Harrier Force Commander and Station Commander. We in the RAF SH Force were not able to persuade our masters of the need to follow the Harrier Force example.

OWNERSHIP

Avm Niven recalled numerous rumours and studies dur-

ing his career over the ownership of the RAF SH Force. Other countries, like Australia, went through the same traumas, with the Army taking over the RAAF's Support Helicopters. All of this had an unsettling and adverse affect on morale. In the mid-1980s an Air Commodore John Thompson visited 18 Squadron and asked for a view on whether its personnel would be prepared to transfer to the Army. The answer he received could not be printed! Later, as Commander Joint Helicopter Command, AVM Niven gained a better insight into Army Air Corps fears and concerns during the 1970s and 1980s. Although the Lynx, with its TOW anti-tank missile, had been introduced into Service in the 1970s, they were still a small corps within an Army dominated by the infantry and armour. They felt undervalued and were, on occasions, fearful that they would be absorbed into another corps. An alternative was to expand rapidly by absorbing the RAF SH Force. The Army Air Corps, and others, clearly understood that the RAF SH Force was not being effectively utilised due to the command and control muddle. Not surprisingly, given his background, AVM Niven claims the introduction of the Chinook into service saved the day. Now that the SH Force had a very capable helicopter in terms of payload, range and weather. Many senior Army officers realised that the Chinook, operated to its considerable limits, in all weathers and at night, and backed by the RAF's ability to organise the necessary support, offered exciting opportunities. Thus an air mobile force was born.

AIR MOBILE TRIALS

The precursor to established trials had started in 1977 with No 18 Squadron and its venerable Wessex working with 5 Field Force based at Osnabrück. Much of the liaison was driven by the need to establish an effective Rear Area Security Force to counter the Warsaw Pact raiding threat. Brigadier Robert Pascoe challenged 18 Squadron to match the reaction time of the infantry; 18 bettered the Army's reactions. The Squadron collocated in the field with the 'supported' infantry units to further reduce reaction times, with the air force crews living alongside their army colleagues. The concept worked well until the weather deteriorated or until night fell. At the time, the *modus operandi* at night required visual flying to relatively brightly lit and pre-recced landing sites; therefore the air planners needed to know where the enemy was going to land! Experiments with the forerunner of Night Vision Goggles - Pilot Night Vision Goggles commenced. With the arrival in Germany of No 230 Squadron's Pumas in 1981 and No 18 Squadron's Chinooks in 1983, coinciding with 6 Brigade having no significant task the 'powers that were' decided to trial Air Mobility:

'An operation in which combat forces and their equipment manoeuvre about the battlefield by aircraft

to engage in ground combat.'

This was more than 'rear area security'. The entry into Army service of large numbers of MILAN anti-tank missiles, coupled with better intelligence to identify Warsaw Pact main lines of attack, enabled Army commanders to decide the time and place to start 'attriting' a Warsaw Pact armoured thrust. But speed of reaction was the key. MILAN-equipped infantry lifted into position by Chinook, with positions reconnoitred by teams inserted by Puma, and the flanks protected by Lynx armed with TOW gave 1(BR) Corps an embryo counter-penetration force capable of at least delaying an armoured attack. The problems were immense: organising such a force without secure communications; arranging access to the airspace with only a few hours' warning and then controlling such a disparate force. Brigadier Robin Grist, followed by Rupert Smith, became masters of the art by orchestrating the proceedings from a Lynx or Puma airborne command post. Some of our members may recall Rupert Smith from Belize and the First Gulf War, a very impressive general. The SH Force in Germany develop a realistic capability, only to see their efforts amount to very little as infantry battalions moved after two years as part of the Army's arms plot programme.

In 1989, 6 Brigade reequipped as an armoured brigade and air mobility came back to the UK in the form of 24 Brigade at Catterick. After the initial success in Germany, because 24 Brigade had to compete for helicopter resources, they found it difficult to develop the concept further. Later on they moved to Colchester where they acquired Army Air Corps Lynx, which could operate in the light utility role, but for RAF helicopters the brigade was always in competition with Aldershot's Parachute Brigade who were based right alongside Odiham's Chinooks.

It was the 1998 Strategic Defence Review that drew a line under ten years of marking time in the air mobile arena and Air Manoeuvre came of age:

'Operations, primarily within the land scheme of manoeuvre, seeking decisive advantage by the exploitation of the third dimension; by combined arms forces centred around rotary wing aircraft, within a joint framework.'

Putting this philosophy into effect led to 5 and 24 Brigades being used to create 16 (Air Assault) Brigade and the formation of the Joint Helicopter Command. All Battlefield Helicopters of the three Services have been brought together under one commander whose command also includes the new Air Assault Brigade. Operational command was vested in CinC LAND with Commander JHC exercising it on his behalf. At the time of this seminar, AVM Niven stated that ownership was not an issue; as all of the battlefield helicopters be-

longed to one organisation. He said that command and control was simple. COMJHC had day-to-day control and, as for all other front-line forces, the Joint Commander at Northwood would assume operational command of JHC force elements when CDS allocated them to an operation. Thus, COMJHC passed command to the Joint Commander when so directed. COMJHC's key tasks were to ensure that all of his force elements, navy, army and air force, were trained both individually and together for joint operations world-wide. The focus was on expeditionary warfare to manage and, if possible prevent, crises. JHC units needed to be at high readiness, typically two to five days' notice to move, and, most importantly, able to mount operations on a joint basis as soon as they arrived in-theatre; there would be no time to work-up.

CONCLUSION

AVM Niven concluded by saying that the RAF SH Force lacked a significant role in Germany from the 1960s to the mid-1980s for NATO Article 5 operations, due to a lack of clarity in the command and control arrangements and, until the arrival of the Chinook, lack of capability. In the post-Cold War period, the advent of expeditionary operations has seen the RAF SH Force play a significant role in most operations. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review resolved both ownership and command and control issues by establishing the Joint Helicopter Command.

The Fighting Dentist

Wing Commander Raymond Hiley Harries, DSO, DFC, RAF



According to 33 Squadron's ORB on 12 May, written at North Weald: "For the first time the whole wing had a practice flight, Nos 33, 74 and 127 Squadrons led by W/Cdr R.H. Harries D.S.O. D.F.C. had a practice wing formation." Two days later, "On 14th W/Cdr R.H. Harries D.S.O. D.F.C. led a wing 'Balbo', and much other training was carried out on this as well as the intervening days."

In the work up to D-Day, 135 Wing was in very good hands. Raymond Hiley Harries was a Welshman, born in Llandilofawr, Carmarthenshire in 1916. By 1939 he was studying dentistry at Guy's Hospital, London, but joined the RAF as an airman when war broke out. He entered pilot training and was posted to No. 43 Squadron in Scotland, then No. 52 OTU as an instructor before being posted to No. 131 Squadron at Llanbedr as a flight commander, where he claimed his first kill after shooting down a Junkers 88. On 19 August 1942 Harries took part in the aerial operation covering the ill-fated Dieppe raid, claiming one kill and sharing two others. He was awarded the DFC for his work that day. He was then given command of No. 91 Squadron at Hawkinge which received the new Griffon-engined Spitfire XII in April 1943. He went on to become the highest scoring Griffon Spitfire ace, scoring 11 kills in this aircraft alone, and was also credited with the downing of a V-1 flying bomb.

He spent some time in the US lecturing on fighter tactics before returning to Britain to become Wing Leader of 135 Wing, 2nd TAF, in the spring of 1944. Between May and December 1944, 33 Squadron took part in big 'wing sweep' operations led by Harries no less than 15 times, several of the early missions against

V1 and V-2 sites.

In January 1945 he converted to the Hawker Tempest, prior to the wing being re-equipped, but he was then posted to 84 Group as Wing Commander/Training. By the end of the war Harries had been awarded the DSO and Bar, the DFC and two bars and had scored 15 victories against enemy aircraft, as well as three shared kills, two probable kills and five damaged, as well as the destruction of the V-1 flying bomb. He remained in the RAF after the war and became CO of No.92 Squadron.

Raymond Harries was killed on 14 May 1950 when flying a No. 92 Squadron Gloster Meteor F4 which ran out of fuel and stalled. He attempted to bale out of the stricken aircraft but his parachute became entangled in its rear wing and he was killed. He was buried in Newton-on-Ouse (All Saints) Churchyard.

The report that now follows was written by Charles Bray, a well-known pre-war cricketer for Essex who went into sports journalism in later years. Bray served in the Middle East during the war, and was in Cairo when Arthur Tedder was AOC RAF Middle East Command and, later, the Mediterranean Command, which explains why Bray, supposedly tasked to write an article about Harries and 135 Wing, waxed lyrical about 33 Squadron - 'Double Three':

**WANTED, an air battle – apply to "Double Three"
by Wing Commander Charles Bray**

The Luftwaffe won't fight. Squadrons that have won fame in the Battle of Britain, in the desert, in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, are waiting impatiently for the opportunity of once again meeting the German fighter force.

There are Polish squadrons, squadrons of Free French, Czechs, Belgians and Norwegians – all in one group in the South of England, which I have visited during the past few days.

They ‘trail their coat’ across France day after day looking for the Hun – and rarely meeting him.

One wing, which includes some of the greatest fighter squadrons of the war, can claim only 16 enemy aircraft destroyed since D-Day.

And the Wing hoped to have many times that number. Its sorties run into hundreds a day: their combats are few and far between.

As one squadron commander said to me: “We seem to go over there now to give the German ack-ack shooting practice.”

Little and Quick

Perhaps the Germans are wise, for these Spitfire boys have the same fighting spirit, determination and enthusiasm as their predecessors in the Battle of Britain.

There is a happy mixture of experience and youth. Wing Commander Ray Harries, DSO, DFC and two bars, commands the Wing and flies with it at the slightest excuse.

Short, slight of build but with that perky tenacity of a small man, he speaks quickly – almost staccato – and his brain works equally fast, whether he is fighting the Germans or issuing orders.

He has destroyed 17 enemy aircraft and five flying bombs. The flying bombs are a sort of sideline, but good shooting practice.

He is 28 years of age and a Londoner, who was studying medicine at Guy’s Hospital when war broke out. He threw up his studies to join the RAF as an AC.2.

Subsequently trained as a fighter pilot, he had rapid promotion, and just before going on a lecture tour of America commanded an all-Spitfire wing.

Now he has another Wing of which he is exceedingly proud, and while he must not favour any one squadron, he is obviously delighted that the famous “Double Three” has joined him.

What memories this squadron brings back to me! Do you remember these names? Pat Pattle, Lance Wade, Dixie Dean, Pete Wickham and Bill Howell?

A book could be written of their deeds. They were all, at one time or another, commanders or members of “Double Three.”

Pat Pattle was one of the greatest fighter pilots of this war. He died in the Battle of Athens when he led a handful of Hurricanes against overwhelming odds in a

desperate “do or die” attempt to stave off that huge Luftwaffe which then had much the same superiority as we have now.

The difference was that we went up and fought.

Pattle flew that morning with a temperature of over a hundred. He had been fighting day after day. He had influenza. But nothing would keep him on the ground. Pattle had 34 enemy aircraft confirmed and he died early in April 1941.

His record has only just been beaten by “Johnnie” Johnson.

After his death Bill Howell flew to Crete to take over the remnants of the squadrons. At Maleme he led a bayonet charge of the “Double Three’s” ground crews against the invading Huns. (Is this report where the rumour started? - Ed.)

He was left, believed dead, on the airfield, but was taken prisoner seriously wounded, subsequently escaped, and is now back in this country.

“Bag” Of 260

Lance Wade, DSO, DFC and two bars, who was killed recently in Italy (12 January 1944. Ed.), was a flight commander in “33”. Wing Commander Dixie Dean, DSO, DFC and bar, and Pete Wickham, DFC and bar, also served with the squadron in those hectic days of Greece.

All the squadron records were lost in the retreat, and so it is impossible to say the exact number of enemy aircraft it has shot down, but it is believed to be well over 200.

The present commander is Squadron Leader R.R. Mitchell, a quiet spoken Cornishman, who joined the RAF as an apprentice and has 14 years service.

He brought the squadron from the Middle East, where one of its last operations was to chase German bombers away from a convoy proceeding down the Mediterranean.

There was an American troopship in the convoy, and the troops on board, when they saw the Spitfires spread-eagling the enemy planes, had a whip round and subscribed £1,000, which was to go to the dependents of any of the “Spit” pilots shot down. None were. So the money went to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Spirit Lives On

Mitchell and the present “Double Three” pilots are not unmindful of the traditions of the squadron to which they belong.

There remain two airmen who went right through the Middle East campaign with the squadron. The rest of the personnel have changed, but the spirit lives on.

Mitchell would like to have any authentic information of the squadron's records before Crete, so that the history may be completed.

A Belgian and New Zealand squadron are also in this wing, and other famous squadrons in the group. But because of my personal intimate knowledge of "33", its pilots and its deeds, over a long period, I make no apologies for giving this squadron so much space.

The group, incidentally, is commanded by another famous Middle East personality – the genial Air Vice Marshal "Bingo" Brown, who was for a long time Air Officer Commanding in Palestine and Syria.

At the bottom of the page is a picture of Harries talking to Flight Lieutenant Lloyd George Mason, DFC, RNZAF (NZ402028), who is listed as serving with the RNZAF from 1 July 1940 to 23 April 1945. Mason joined 33 Squadron in 1943, and by the time the Squadron arrived back in the UK on 1 April 1944 Mason was listed as 'Flt Cdr (A Flt)'.

Once 33 Squadron was settled down on the south coast and preparing for its move over to Europe, the 26 July ORB recorded: "During the morning eleven aircraft (3 of which became separated in cloud and returned early) led by W/Cdr R.H. HARRIES, D.S.O. D.F.C., provided top cover for 36 Mitchells and 24 Bostons which attacked a P.O.L. camp at ALENCON. A formation of 30+ M.E. 109 and FW 190 were sighted and engaged by Yellow and Blue sections. F/Lt. L.G. Mason (RNZAF) fired several bursts at an ME.109 which exploded, he then attacked an FW.190 which was last seen spinning down on fire, both aircraft claimed as destroyed...".

On 5 August 1944, while at Funtington, 33 Squadron

flew escort to another bombing mission: "At mid-day twelve aircraft were airborne as escort to 100 Halifaxes on operation RAMROD 1163, 25 miles N. of PARIS. Moderate flak was encountered. One aircraft returned with u/s L.R. tank, two landed at 141 A.F., returning in the late afternoon. Non-operational flying consisted of three air tests and one exchange of aircraft with THRUXTON (G.G.S.). A further twelve aircraft carried out a sweep, S.E. of the beach-head from which the aircraft returned early with u/s L.R.tank. F/L. L.G. Mason, and F/O V.J. McFarlane, D.F.M., were both shot up and were compelled to land on the beach-head. P/O R.R. Clarke also landed with his section leader F/L. Mason. F/L. Mason returned in P/O Clarke's Spitfire, and P/O Clarke and F/O McFarlane returned by D.C. 3."

The last entry in the ORB that mentioned Mason was on 26 August: "A combat film report received today amended F/L. L.G. Mason's (R.N.Z.A.F.) bag to 2 destroyed and not one destroyed and one probable as was previously claimed." Mason's citation on 8 December 1944 for a Distinguished Flying Cross refers to him flying Hurricanes, presumably in the desert before converting to Spitfires and a posting to 33 Squadron. The citation said: "This officer has displayed a high standard of skill and determination. He has participated in a large number of sorties, including many attacks on locomotives, barges, mechanical vehicles and numerous other targets. He is a most efficient flight commander, whose good leadership and fine fighting spirit have contributed materially to the successes obtained." Acting Flt Lt Vincent John McFarlane, DFM, RAAF, mentioned above, was awarded his DFC the same day. Which leads on to





The boys that went to Fairwood Common - S Wales 1944

Tommy Junior Pete I Mac I Blondie

Dave George Chick Jessy Pete II Harney

Mac II Lloyd CO-Mitch Bill Self (Tug Wilson)
 (DFM) (S/L Mitchell)
 (DFC)

This wonderful picture from the 33 Squadron photo collection, was taken sometime between 12-18 August when the Squadron was near Swansea at No.11 Air Practice Camp. In the centre of the front row sits 'the quiet spoken Cornishman', Squadron Leader Mitchell, flanked by his two flight commanders. On the far left of the front row, wearing his DFM ribbon, is Mac II - Flying Officer Vincent John McFarlane. Sat next to him is Flight Lieutenant Lloyd George Mason. Lloyd appears to have a medal ribbon under his brevet, but it cannot be his DFC as that was not awarded until 8 December 1944? Finding this photo has uncovered two errors of mine in previous issues. Mac I on the back row here is

not the 'Mixed Pickles' MacFarlane from Issue 7 (Mixed Pickles? The Quest Continues...). I now think this is Sgt J. McNee. Similarly, having found information in a copy of the 'Dedelsdorfer Wochenblatt' and looked at his posting in date in the ORB, 'Bill' above is a future OC 33 Squadron, A.W. 'Bill' Bower, who joined 33 as a flight commander at Lympne in May 1944. I misidentified him as W.J. 'Bill' Cleverly, who was a flight commander at Quackenbrück in 1945. I have since heard from W.J. 'Jimmy' Cleverly's son, who kindly informed me that 'Jimmy' is on the front row in the Quackenbrück photo, second from the left. The Quest for the rest continues.....

