



Celebrating 50 years of the Puma

LOYALTY

The 33 Squadron RAF Association Newsletter

Issue 15 Autumn 2021

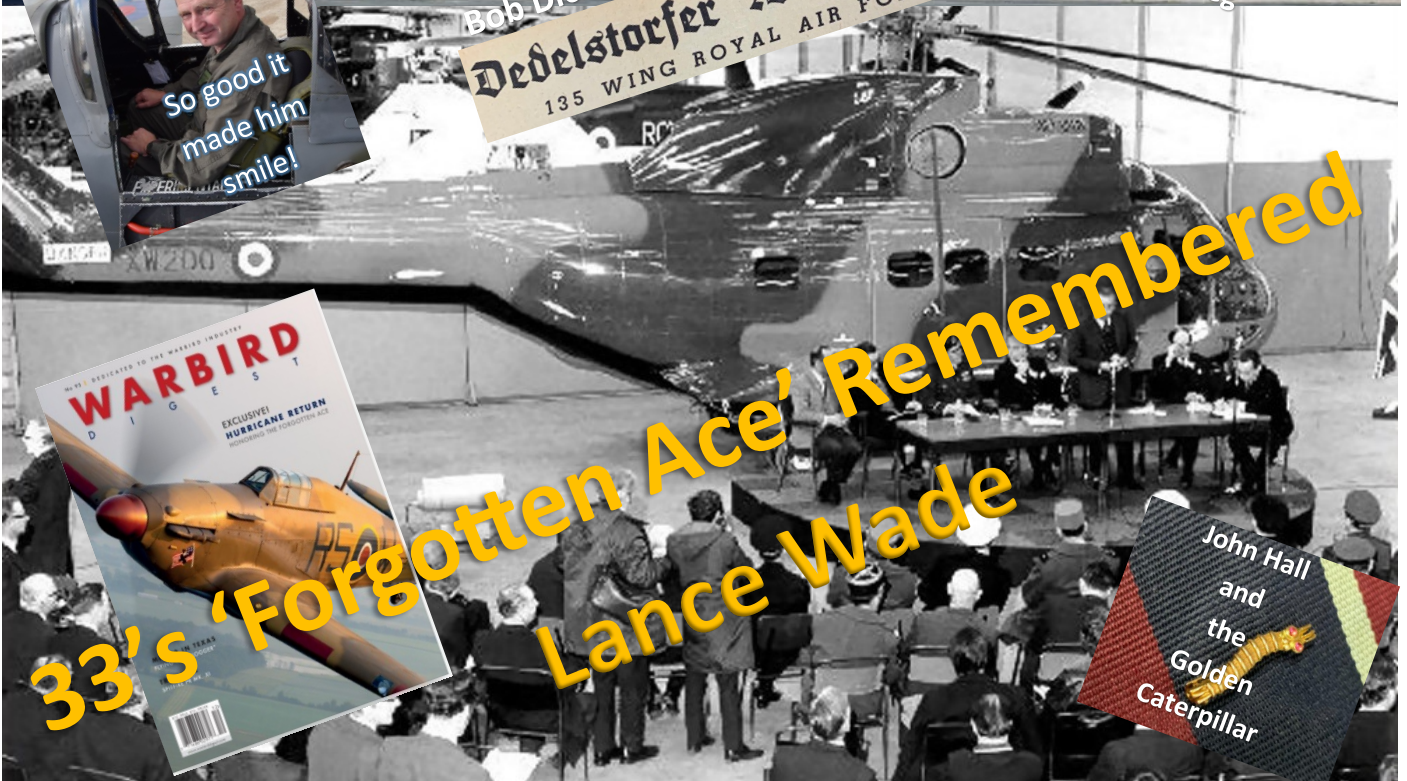
2021 and we're back at the Cenotaph. A special feature by Jez Reid



Bob Percifull
Post-War P II Pilot
with never before
seen photo of 33 at
Zeltweg



Bob Dickson - Benina to Dedelstorf
Dedelstorfer Wochenblatt
135 WING ROYAL AIR FORCE



Inside this issue...

From the Editor	Pages 3-4
From the Chairman	Pages 5-6
The Glorious Dead - collated by Jez Reid	Pages 7-15
Op Prince 1985 by Chris Perkins	Pages 16-21
Tony Whitehead - u/t Spitfire Pilot!	Pages 22-25
From a Texas Muleskinner to a WW2 RAF Fighter Ace - Lance 'L.C.' Wade	Pages 26-35
Sgt John Brodie Thomson Hall—33's answer to Douglas Bader	Pages 36-40
The Mysterious Cornishman—Robert Bedford Pedlar	Pages 41-45
Corporal Douglas Haig Graeme Dickson I Rep 1	Pages 46-53
Pilot. II Robert Francis Percifull (3002112) RAF	Pages 54-62
I'm a Veteran.	Page 63

Cover Pictures:

Top picture shows the Puma 2 wearing the 50th Anniversary colour scheme, with the Squadron badges of all those that flew the Puma since 1971. The port cockpit door bore the name of Fred Hoskins, the Commanding Officer of 33 Squadron when it reformed with the Puma HC Mk1 in 1971. RIP Fred.

The lower picture shows the signing over of the first batch of Puma HC Mk1 to the RAF.

From the Editor..

The closing quarter of 2021 sees 33 Squadron at another watershed moment in its long and impressive history. In this issue I was hoping to have written about celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Puma being in RAF service with several impressive events and dinners, having filled three issues already with members' stories and pictures that highlighted the achievements of this helicopter and the people who have flown and fixed the Puma since 1971. The 2021 Loyalty issues were going to be full of reports and photographs of all of the special events that were going to be arranged to mark such a wonderful milestone—50 years in continuous service, the longest that 33 Squadron had ever flown one aircraft type.

Sadly, the global pandemic we still find ourselves in prevented all but a few small and muted celebrations which, in the end, were somewhat bittersweet, as we had been informed earlier this year that the Puma was unlikely to reach its 51st anniversary. As I type, we are still waiting for the Minister's 'official announcement' about the Out of Service date to be made, an announcement that we have been expecting to hear since Easter. Yet it would appear that so much discussion and activity had been taking place in the margins that it is most unlikely that there will be any aircrew, engineers or working aircraft left at Benson if a stay of execution was to be announced, once the Minister finally gets to his feet to brief the House. Having seen

the Puma fleet up for sale in the Defence Equipment Sales Authority (DESA) catalogue in September, after so many years of impressive service, the failure of the authorities to make a timely and proper announcement has turned the final year of this wonderful aircraft, and the two wonderful squadrons that have operated the Puma, into an utter and complete farce.

As for the capability gap that the departure of the Puma will leave, in light of the many short notice, rapid deployment tasks that the fleet has reacted to around the UK and the globe, being such an easily airportable helicopter, one has to question how long the 'Two Chinooks' answer will be able to solve all of the problems. There is no sign of a medium lift replacement yet, there is no sign of a competition to decide on a replacement yet, and history reveals that no new helicopter has ever entered productive service in less than 8 years.

Ironically, we have never been a Squadron that makes a lot of noise about our achievements, we have always done the job and moved on, with no fanfare and no fuss, and we can trace that approach to the flying and fighting business throughout our history. We did not make a fuss when we had to fight Zeppelins in the dark in aircraft that couldn't fly as high as the airships we were supposed to shoot down. We deployed to the Middle East as a first rate bomber squadron in one



THE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT

Air Commodore Paul Lyall

CHAIRMAN

Dick Brewster

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Dave Stewart

TREASURER

Jez Read
jezr69@gmail.com

SECRETARY

Neil Scott

LOYALTY EDITOR

Dave Stewart

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Paul Davies
33sqnassociation@gmail.com

SQUADRON AIRCREW REP

TBA

SQUADRON GROUNDCREW REP

Sean Docherty (WO Eng 33 Sqn)

of the fastest aircraft in the RAF inventory, and then became a fighter squadron when war was declared. We changed aircraft types and became one of the best fighter squadrons in the Middle East, yet our exploits and our aces were largely unknown because we were not fighting over London or the White Cliffs of Dover. We went to Greece and lost the cream of a generation when the odds turned against us, but within a month or

two we were back in the fight and played a large part in the success of kicking the invaders out of a continent, back to where they came from, and then hunted them down in the skies above their own countries. No fuss, no fanfare, 33 got on with the job. Once that was all sorted out, 33 was sent out to the Far East to help quell another uprising, with a small break at home to try Air Defence of Great Britain for a third time, this time against a Soviet threat. And that's how we got to 1971 and the delivery of the Puma HC Mk1, we got on with the job.

As you know, I am an avid reader of 33 Squadron's Operational records, and you will find plenty of references to them in this issue. In September 1971 Wing Commander Fred Hoskins - sadly one of several veterans that we lost this year - was the C.O. and had hosted a reformation parade at Odiham to mark the start of the Squadron's new role of helicopter operations. The Reviewing Officer was Air Marshal Sir Dennis Smallwood, himself a former 33 Squadron C.O., and there were a number of other ex-33 C.O.s in attendance, including Squadron Leader C.G. Burge OBE, who had commanded 33 Squadron RFC in 1917. In his comments for September's ORB Fred wrote that the support given by former members and former squadron commanders was pleasing, and had given rise to the suggestion that a Squadron Association should be formed. He finished with the sentence: "The possibilities will be investigated later". It is sad to consider just how opportunities were missed in those intervening

years, what stories and memories could have been recorded and captured for posterity, how many faces and locations in the History Room photographs albums and drawers could have been noted down for future reference. The 'No fuss, no fanfare, just get on with the job' approach may not have been the best road to take when that opportunity arose. How lucky we were when Paul Davies came along and put this Association of ours together.

You can all look with pride at what we are doing now. The comments that Jez Reid has gathered from the Cenotaph Parade attendees in the first article illustrates the feelings many of you have for the Association. It is also heartening to see that two of our stalwarts—Chris Perkins and Tony Whitehead - managed to send in articles for this issue, and fine reads they are too.

With 33 having concentrated its efforts on writing articles about the Puma Years for the 'Lions Roar', now available online, it seemed pointless copying what they had put together when I can add a link via social media, so Chris' 'Op Prince 1985' article is the only Puma-related piece in this issue, and there will be another link to the 'Lions Roar' when the article on the last 12 months of Puma activities is published. So I have concentrated in this article on a particular bunch of people whose stories have come about through families of our veterans, or researching historians, who have contacted the Association via our website.

Lance Wade, John Hall, Don McLarty and Graeme Dickson all joined after Crete, serving in the period when 33 suffered its heaviest casualties - 1941-1942 - as you can see from our Online Roll of Honour. Their stories are very different, but what binds them is the fascination of their stories to their families, something those of you who talk about writing things down for our records, but won't, don't or haven't done yet, should think about. Bob Percifull's daughter found a box of letters and memorabilia in an attic after her father's death, , unaware of the details of his military career, and yet Bob was present at 33 Squadron's 100th anniversary as a guest of honour.

It is now the end of the line for me as Editor, it is time for me to change my loyalty focus from Squadron to family, as my parents need me at the moment more than the Association needs me. I am laying my pen down for the last time, having created fifteen issues of 'Loyalty', three Battlefield Tours, five Tour Guides and Readers (and one draft, ready to go!), reported on and written about three AGMs, a trip to the IWM to view unseen footage of 33 in the Western Desert, had memorable meetings with 33's oldest surviving member, Jan Linzel, other family members of some of 33's wartime veterans, met Jan and Renate, the Dekkers and the Roneys, and so many more things beside. *Tempus fugit* when you are enjoying yourself. To the next Editor, best of luck! Help him, chaps, he - or she - will need it!

Proud to be ...33!
Dave Stewart

From the Chairman - Dick Brewster

We continue to live in strange times; however, we have had the opportunity this year to hold the Puma 50th anniversary which, you were not able to attend, was a thoroughly enjoyable day in all respects. It was wonderful to see and be able to touch base with so many old friends and once again the Association's thanks goes out to Squadron Leader Jez Allison and the Puma Force for organising the day. We even received a blessing off the Padre at our Puma Force briefing which was a first!!!

The Cenotaph Parade this year was one of the best yet, not only for the fact that we were marching again but because we were at the front, not at the back. That made a huge difference to our marching and once again it was wonderful to see so many old and new members' faces and catch up and share some great 'Banter'. However, what a 'Faff' it was getting into 'Horse Guards'?! On behalf of everyone there I would like to thank Jez Reid for his liaison with the RBL and organizing everything for the attendees. Another big 'thank you' goes to the ever reliable Paul Davies, who met us all in the revamped 'Lord Moon In The Mall' afterwards with a very welcome drink, courtesy of the Association. In addition, it was also a great turnout by the wives, partners and family members who met us in the new 'Horse and Guardsman'. Finally, my thanks to all those members who were able to catch us on TV and post pictures of the day.

Lockdown, or Lockup depending on your point of view, continues to be the 'Elephant in the Room'; however, we are shortly to hold an Association Committee Meeting to discuss 'Art of the Possible' and future events. One of the potential visits is to Sywell Airfield to visit the 'Ultimate Warbirds' the largest collection of WW2 Classic aircraft, including Spitfires, Me.109, Mustangs, Thunderbolt, and the Tempest in 33 Sqn Colours. I contacted and met Richard Grace in person earlier this year and he is most agreeable to a visit. In addition, there is a fantastic air museum adjacent to his hangars, there are excellent eating and drinking facilities and there is always lots happening at this busy airfield based just outside Northampton. In addition, we will look at getting together for a lunch and plan to a formal AGM for 2022. We are keen to get the Association back onto a normal footing as soon as possible.

As a former C-130 Ground Engineer I recently attended a dinner at Swindon, organised by a former legend on the C-130 Fleet, held to commemorate almost 20 colleagues who had lost their lives due to COVID. It was an impressive turnout and there were over 200 guests in attendance. What a night! - and yes, there were even

some former old hands from 33 Squadron. It was a sharp reminder of the family and friends we have lost during this pandemic, along with former 33 Squadron and Association members.

It would be remiss of me not to send greetings and our thanks to Jan and Renate Westhoeve over in The Netherlands, who have worked tirelessly on behalf of the Association during the pandemic. I hope you all saw Jan's post last month when they joined the Dekker family to unveil the formal and permanent memorial site, complete with mounted plaque, honouring W.O. George Roney. Thanks to this permanent reminder at his crash site, George will be forever remembered.

My thanks and appreciation, as always, must go out to our Committee, who have continued to work tirelessly during this pandemic to promote and hold the Association together. I have already thanked Jez and Paul for organising attendance at the Cenotaph Parade, Jez has kept our finances in order and Paul, especially, has maintained his efforts to entice 'New blood' into the Association. Through the use of social media, personal contacts and some occasional 'Arm Twisting' I am pleased to say that our membership has now crept over the 200 mark!!

Thanks to their networking, liaising and attendance at a number of Station and squadron meetings, Neil Scott and Dave Stewart have always been able to keep me fully informed of the ongoing discussions and developments at Benson, which was especially useful when access to the Station was so restricted. Maintaining my 'Situational Awareness' proved invaluable this last year, and we benefitted with two excellent commemorations for the Kosovo crash and the Crete 80th despite the imposed COVID restrictions.

As he steps down after 5 years as the editor of 'Loyalty', I would like to record a special thank you here to Dave Stewart, for all of the time and effort he has spent to make our 'newsletter' and website such an excellent and informative read. People across the globe are now aware of our Association, and the incredible history of our Squadron, and we regularly hear from people who are delighted to have found a means of tracing and understanding their father's, or grandfather's, military achievements. He will be a tough act to follow, but I will be looking for willing 'volunteers' to accept the challenge next Friday!

As we look forward towards the remainder of this year, on behalf of myself and the 33 Squadron Committee, I hope you and your families remain safe and in good health and I look forward to seeing as many as possible of you at the 'Puma Reunion' this week. My hope for

the forthcoming year is that we can get back to some form of normality, get to see more old friends, make new friends and get the Association out and about. Finally, please consider making a contribution to the `Loyalty` magazine, and remember that the Committee needs to hear or read your suggestions and feedback regarding the Association. Thank you for your support,

Dick Brewster

LOYALTY



A fine gathering of 33 Squadron and 230 Squadron veterans who attended the Puma Force briefing at RAF Benson recently.

'The Glorious Dead'

Cenotaph 2021 - 100th Anniversary of the Royal British Legion



Since 2016 the 33 Squadron Association has been represented at the Cenotaph Parade on Remembrance Sunday every year, with the exception of 2020 when the Parade was cancelled due to the Covid 19 restrictions.

After the Association was formed in 2012 it has been a great passion of mine to have 33 Squadron represented in this marked act of remembrance, not only to remember those members of our Squadron that have laid their lives down in their duty, but also those absent service friends of past and present that are no longer with us. Our attendance also provides an opportunity to those Association members who have family members to remember from either WW1, WW2 or other more recent conflicts, to share this special day with veterans from their family member's Service, Battalion, Group, Regiment, and indeed Squadron, standing proud in their memory in remembrance together.



Every year I bid for 33 tickets in the hope that. One day, I will get 33 of our Association veterans on the parade together. To date we have never achieved this, and thus the RBL will only award us 30 tickets, as year on year we struggle to fill the 30 places. This year I played it shrewdly, in a hope to change this, and instead of offering our free tickets back to the RBL, at their request, I have kept the registered members tickets, to give the impression we can, in fact, fulfil our commitment. This venture, I hope, will have your continued support year on year. Please do continue to get back in touch with ex-Squadron friends and twist their arms into joining our great Association.

We have our regular annual attendees, some that will march every other year, and some who join the Association for one year only just to participate in the Parade. All are welcome, for whatever reasons.

This year our age range went from 38 to 83, and as the organiser it was fantastic to stand back and witness the introductions of the old and new members amongst us, sharing likeminded stories and comraderie over a few sips from the hip flasks, and raising toasts to absent friends.

In recognition of their support, rather than just a Horse Guards photograph and some comments from the post-Parade pint and debrief, I asked the attendees to share their thoughts about what the Association and the Remembrance Parade meant to them. Here are their personal comments:

Our Duty Runner – Flight Sergeant Paul Davies - Association Membership Secretary

As I am currently still serving, I am unable to march with my 33 Squadron brethren, but I still attend and stand on the side-lines in support. To see the Association represented in the nation's focal point of Remembrance is one of the highlights of the calendar for me. I like to pause to reflect and remember those that we have lost in my time on the Squadron and also those we have lost as a Squadron. Dave Stewart's timely release of the Online Roll of Honour on the day the Parade took place, detailing all of the men who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving, made sobering reading.



As the guns sound at the start of the two minute's silence at 11:00 I remembered time spent with the Association and the visits we have made during the battlefield tours. My mind drifts back to the time I laid the wreath on the grave of Flight Lieutenant 'Add' Argument in the Schoonselhof Cemetery in Belgium, a gentleman that we are finding more and more information about due to the research carried out by Chris Perkins.

As the ceremony around the Cenotaph ends and the columns begin to march past I keep an eye out for the inevitable 'fleeting view' of the Association marchers as the coverage cuts to another story. This is my cue to make my way back through security to the Horse and Guardsman pub to get the round in for the Marchers, a little reward from the Association for making the effort to represent us all on this important day.

Brian Fitzpatrick - Master Aircrew. Jan 1981 - Oct 1986, June 1991 - Sept 1993. Age 83 but going on 50. (Yeah I know, old git, KOS)

I joined the Association to keep in touch with old mates and to help keep the old squadron spirit alive. The Cenotaph parade is important to me to remember and acknowledge all the sacrifices made for us. Also I was a child during World War Two and still have lots of memories of it.

I travelled by train from Alton.



Steve Petrie – Junior Technician/ Corporal. Age 52.

I always felt more with 33 Squadron, what with being my first posting after training, plus easier to remember names and stories before brain cells totally shot.

Having grown up with strong family links to the military and RBL, it's my way of continuing that legacy brought more to light by the passing of my father Warrant Officer H.L.Petrie (RAF) earlier this year.

I travel down from Northallerton in North Yorkshire and stay in Basingstoke for the weekend. This allows me to catch up with old friends locally and also utilise SWR free rail service, sometimes with fellow Association members.

James (Jimmy) Blunden – Senior Aircraftman Age 38. 33 Sqn 2005-2010

It's very easy to leave the Royal Air Force and lose all ties and contact; the Association allows you to stay connected, remain proud and maintain lifelong friendships.

It was an honour to be able to attend the Cenotaph this year, a chance to reflect and remember all of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. My personal thoughts this year were with Warrant Officer Sean Turner, a life that ended far too soon - what a great man!

I have travelled from Lincolnshire with my wife and 3 children.

Glen Stringer

Time

Time to think and reflect about friends and colleagues who are sadly no longer with us.

Time to thank those that have made the ultimate sacrifice for others and their country.

*Time to realise that all the p*ss-taking, joking, storytelling blokes and ladies you meet up with on Horse Guards, and march past the Cenotaph with, are the closest you can get to family without being blood relations.*

Time to be whole again.



Andy Barber - I served on 33 Squadron at RAF Benson from 1999-2002, I was a Sergeant at the time, and left the RAF after 26 years as a Chief Technician.

One of the reasons I joined the 33 Squadron Association was that it was the last Squadron on which I served before leaving the RAF in 2006; prior to leaving I was on a secondment to QinetiQ, Farnborough where I ran the RAF Spectrometric Oil Analysis Program (SOAP Laboratory). I also wanted to keep a strong connection to the RAF and keep in touch with the lads I used to work with.

It will be a privilege to march with the Squadron Association, and give me a chance to pay my respects to all fallen servicemen and women, in particular My Great Grandfather, his brother, my Great uncle Luke. Both brothers were called up in their teens for the Great War, Sadly my Great uncle Luke was killed in action aged 21 and is honoured at the Menin Gate, luckily for me My Great Grandfather survived the war.

I will be traveling to London from Didcot in Oxfordshire on the evening prior to the parade and raising a glass or two to our fallen heroes.

Graham Lowe – Corporal first tour. Sergeant second tour 19/11/84 to 07/07/89 and again 16/10/89 to 02/05/93. Both at Odiham. Age 64.

I've served on three flying squadrons and other sections (MU's, ASF's, etc.) in my RAF career. Without a doubt 33 Squadron stands head and shoulders above the rest. The comradeship of all, both aircrew and groundcrew, are second to none. The Association allows me to maintain contact with these marvellous people. The pride of being able to commemorate, nationally, all those who served and died for our freedom.

I have travelled in from Alton, Hampshire.

Angus Dawson - Squadron Leader - 1994 RAF Long Sutton, 1995-2001, 2003-2007 RAF Benson. Age 53.

In the seventeen years that I served in the RAF, I had the privilege to make many lifelong friends, supporting each other in some crazy, dangerous places. I've yet to find the same camaraderie in the commercial world, so having that enduring link with old colleagues through the Association is really important.

Attending the Cenotaph is always a process of thanksgiving as well as an important day for reflection. To be surrounded by so many fine veterans from all the Services is uplifting and always entertaining, with some good banter being passed around. I reflect on the service that my Grandfather, Fred Dawson, gave in the North Atlantic Campaign. It is always an honour to carry his medals with me. Inevitably I think about some of our fallen crew members. To name a few; Chris H, Andy, Magoo, Kris G, and especially my OCU stick buddy, Richie Rees. They were all fine gentlemen and greatly missed.

Jerry Keates - 1997 to 2001 Sergeant 33 Squadron (B Shift Rectifications) RAF Benson. Brief stint in between on PASF (Puma Aircraft Servicing Flight) but tunnel dug to get back on the Squadron! 2001 to 2004 Chief Technician 33 Squadron (S&D Flight) RAF Benson. Age 58.

I am an association member to stay connected and celebrate with the most cohesive and steadfast bunch of reprobates I have ever had the pleasure of serving with. Simply put the Squadron motto - Loyalty - says it all!

Attending the Cenotaph Parade fills me with pride and honour to represent and remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

To recognise everyone who stepped up to the plate and made a difference putting their country before personal priorities. Our fallen should never be forgotten and if in some small way our physical presence and march encourages people who are unaware of the sacrifices on their behalf to stop, think and be curious, then mission accomplished.

I personally remember absent friends and my Great Grand Father Alfred Bowerman, WW1 tank driver.



Twice removed from the line due to shell shock he fought on and although he survived the war physically, mentally he never really came home or was unable to resume his profession as a piano tuner.

To my greatest pride my son, helicopter pilot Flight Lieutenant Callum Keates, will soon be arriving at RAF Benson to join one of the Operational Conversion Units (OCU).





Dick Brewster – Sergeant / Flight Sergeant /Warrant Officer 1979-82, 1998- 2002, 2003-2005. Age 67

I served for over 40 years. A great part of my service was with 33 Squadron and for me it's a lovely way to maintain contact with all those wonderful dysfunctional individuals I have served with.

Being born in the 1950s Remembrance Day has always been a special time for remembering those who have given their lives in the service of their country. My family has served the country for over a hundred years. My great, great uncle lost his life in the Boer War, my grandfather served throughout WW1 in France from 1915 onwards, my grandmother nursed in France throughout World War One and my father served as a Wireless Operator / Air Gunner (WOp/ AG) on No 612 Squadron in Coastal Command from 1941-46. Finally my next door neighbour, a Mr Blatchford, was an 'Old Contemptible' serving from August 1914 till Nov 1918 which was truly remarkable .

I have travelled in today from Worcestershire.

Chris Perkins – 33 Squadron Odiham: – (1). 1971 to 1976 – Sergeant/Flight Sergeant Crewman (2). 1984 to 1989 Flight Lieutenant. Age 74.

The 33 Squadron Association is a way of maintaining my connection with what I consider my 'Aircrew Roots', firmly laid down at RAF South Warnborough half a century ago.

Each year as I walk across the leaf covered pathways of Green Park, paying homage to the Bomber Command Memorial, my mind always drifts back to the myriad of guys, particularly my father, plus Veterans of WW2 and the Cold War years, who greatly influenced my future career. Sadly, they may no longer be with us, but their irrepressible Squadron Spirit lives on magnificently with those that I have the privilege to form up with.

This year, my thoughts on The Day focussed on two of the RCAF Pilot brethren who served on 33 'Mixed Pickles' Squadron in 1944-45: Flight Lieutenant 'Add' Argument and his close friend, Flight Lieutenant Ed Smith. Since visiting Add's grave in Belgium four years ago my research into his RAF Aircrew service has taken me from Toronto to Newcastle on Tyne.

I have managed to make contact with his daughter, Barbara (photo overleaf) and we have teamed up to piece together his complete life story from schooldays to operational flying with 33 Squadron. This year, in recognition of both Canadian brethren. It was indeed an honour to wear an RCAF Cap Badge and Maple Leaf poppy pin.



Paul (Rocky) Silvester - March 2002 - April 2005 – Sergeant - MT Support. 63 Years old

I am a member of the Association because I believe it is a combination of both the 33 Squadron spirit along with the unique sense of loyalty displayed by all the Squadron personnel, both past and present.

Attending the Cenotaph Parade is the opportunity to remember those I've known and have been lost due to conflict. Along with my colleagues, we are able to consider our shared memories and reflect upon all those that have passed in conflicts over the years in a formal setting.

I travelled to London from Crowmarsh Gifford.

Ian (Fozzie) Foster – Mar 88 to Jul 97, when 33 went to Benson from Long Sutton (Odiham). Arrived on Promotion to Flight Sergeantt, and stayed until retirement. Age 79.

To continue the camaraderie that was built up over nearly 10 years on the unit with its 'can do' attitude. To remember comrades and family that have passed, not necessarily in conflict, to be thankful for all of us that survived the situations encountered during our careers and to be part of a military gathering with service banter missed in the rest of the year.

From Alton with my children and grandchildren so they can remember too.



Paul Newman - October 79 to February 82. Location: about 4 months a year at Odiham, the remaining 8 months detached to Norway, Belize, Denmark, Salisbury Plain, etc., etc.... First Posting as a Sergeant, an eye opener.....Age now: 72, but my boyish good looks, and sparkling wit make that hard to believe.

I joined 33 Sqn Association to rekindle friendships made on the Squadron. On 33 Squadron you depended on the 'other guys' more than most RAF Squadrons, real friends.

Like most people I had only managed to see the Remembrance Ceremony on TV; to be afforded the Honour, and Privilege of taking part filled me with immense pride and emotion at being there in person to pay my respects at the most recognised point of commemoration in this country.

I travelled from St Ives in Cambridgeshire, close to RAF Wyton

Boris Burnett - Served on 33 Squadron from 2009 to 2011. Chief Technician. Age 58.

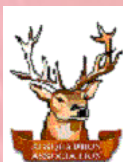
I'm an Association member to give me a link to the past and an eye to the future. Attending the Cenotaph gives me a chance to say thank you to all those that have given the ultimate sacrifice throughout all time, especially a good friend, Baz, who "bought the farm" when we were in Iraq in 2008.

I travelled from Aylesbury.

Eamon Geraghty - 2014-2017 RAF Benson - Warrant Officer. Age 59.

I joined the Association as It has always been an ambition of mine to march at the Cenotaph. Attending the Battle of Crete commemorations confirmed who I'd be honoured to march with.

I have always had a deep sense of honour and respect for those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and equally for those left behind to rebuild lives and families. Marching at the Cenotaph allows me to reflect on both past and present and fills me with immense pride. Thanks for another great Remembrance Sunday.



'Loyalty'



Many thanks for your contributions, I am truly honoured to stand amongst you all – Loyalty

Jez Reid



'Operation Prince' November 1985

by Chris Perkins



I guess, as aircrew on an RAF Odiham Puma helicopter squadron, we were used to being caught on the hop during those uncertain days of the 1980s! It was a Friday evening on the 15 November 1985, 35 years ago, and a number of us were enjoying a convivial supper evening hosted by "The Boss" in his married quarter. The fare for the evening was delicious and copious glasses of alcohol most certainly adding to the cordiality. I remember the Wing Commander receiving a lengthy phone call, looking very serious indeed and enquiring if anyone knew who might be on the next squadron detachment out to Belize. At that time 33 Squadron at Odiham provided crews for a permanent helicopter detachment based in the Central American country. It so transpired that there were four of us present that were due to go, but not for another month. Well, that was all about to change then and there.

If one remembers in the days before computer driven, live media coverage, reporting of events came via telex and the BBC World Service. In this case the British Government had been requested to provide search and rescue plus humanitarian aid in the wake of a volcanic eruption in Columbia. RAF helicopter support would be provided from a permanent Puma helicopter flight in Belize, augmented with extra crews from the UK. The information was sketchy indeed: we were to get all of our flying kit together that evening, have various inoculations and be prepared to fly out to Bogota via Miami from Heathrow the next morning of 16 November!

Driven by disgruntled wives and girlfriends our evening's enjoyment came to an early close as we were transported around the station finally ending up at the Station Medical Centre. The standby doctor, a civilian GP had been called in to administer a whole host of jabs against a range of 'horrible afflictions'. This he did, at one go and very reluctantly I might add, especially as we all had 'imbibed' a fair modicum of alcohol during the evening!

At Heathrow Terminal 4 early the next morning we teamed up with a multitude of civilian emergency SAR and medical specialists and were able to elicit a much fuller picture of the unravelling situation on the other side of the world. An 18,000ft high volcano, the Nevado del Riuz, had erupted three nights previously, melting the ice cap and sending down a tidal wave of mud, water and boulders to engulf the town of Armero. Roads and bridges had been destroyed

making rescue efforts impossible. With limited internal resources, the Columbian government had urgently requested aid to tackle the situation.

After an 18 hour flight via Miami to Bogota we arrived very late at night. The only hitch was almost losing all of our flying equipment and personal baggage whilst changing flights at Miami. Assured by BA Heathrow that our kit would automatically be transferred, we were very surprised to see everything forlornly 'circulating' around a baggage carousel in the arrival hall. As the aircrew adage goes – "never assume always check"!

Arriving in the 'menacing atmosphere' of a crowded, darkened terminal building, we were met by the British Army Defence Attaché for an overnight stay. During the previous week an attack had been made by the M19 guerilla movement on the city's Palace of Justice. As a consequence, rigid military control had been enforced and there was evidence of tanks and armed patrols on the streets. It was quite reminiscent of being back in Northern Ireland!

The next day saw us back at the main airport to meet an RAF Hercules crew who would transport us forward to our operating base at Palenquero, a Columbian Air Force jet fighter airfield. Part of Bogota airport was to function as the focal hub for incoming humanitarian supplies and we spent most of that day helping with the development of a 'safe and cohesive system of aircraft loading'. A Spanish speaking British Army Warrant Officer flown down from Belize was left in charge to minimise damage.

In the heat of the evening dusk, clouds of mosquitoes and piles of freight unloaded from the departing Hercules we were abandoned on the edge of the aircraft pan. Eventually, a liaison officer arrived with jeeps to take us to our accommodation again with our own 24 hour armed guard positioned close by.

Unbeknown to us, our Puma helicopters travelling 1500 miles down from Belize had encountered problems involving the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime and had been refused diplomatic clearance to stop for refuel or even overfly. An unscheduled overnight stop, grounded in Honduras whilst authorisation was eventually granted, meant that arrival at Palenquero did not occur until Monday afternoon. That said, within two hours of arrival we had the aircraft made ready with freight aboard for the first sorties with our crews from Odiham.



18,000 ft Volcano Nevado del Ruiz. The eruption melted the ice cap creating a mud slide.





Above and below: The town of Armero before and after the mud slide that killed 23,000 people.







Above: The Unsung Heroes cracking on with a gearbox change at Palenquero Airbase in Columbia.
Below: Name the people - from left to right the aircrew were: John Bray-Smith (hand on sponson), Dick Godley (standing on the step), Chris Perkins, John Darby (leaning out of the cabin holding a plaque), Doug Finlay-Maxwell (leaning against the winch), Steve Speight(on Doug F-M's left), Any Swetman (kneeling in front of Dick). Groundcrew nominations, please?



Teamed up with Doug Finlay-Maxwell, we were absolutely stunned with what we saw on that first trip. A town the size of Hook with its two storied buildings had all but disappeared under a covering of mud. Around 23,000 people had been killed or were missing, swept away in the mud flow along a flat open plain. There were bodies, both of humans and livestock, everywhere and smaller helicopters were darting about with rescue parties collecting live casualties, moving them to designated first aid posts on higher ground.

It was into one of these that we made our first approach for offload. I assumed that the smoke from a burning mound was a signal giving the wind direction. However, on opening the door on finals to land, the stench from the burning flesh, I don't think, I will ever forget. With daytime temperatures in the mid upper 30s, typhoid fever had broken out and before the area could be effectively fumigated, the initial action by the Columbian Army was to burn the corpses using petrol. Besides staple foodstuffs, huge amounts of fresh bottled water supplies were desperately needed in the area both for the medical centres and villages. On one particular trip I also transported 10 chainsaws into the Armero area. This had been in response for a request from medical teams trying to free survivors still trapped in buildings by arms or legs in the most appalling conditions.

Other operating conditions included the ever-present dust and layers of volcanic ash that covered everything and made approaches to the confined, ad hoc landing sites in mountain villages extremely hazardous with reduced visibility at crucial moments. We always carried one of the Columbian Air Force fighter pilots in the cockpit for navigation and radio assistance with the Spanish language. 'Down the back', I made sure that I had 'ample muscle' to aid me move the supplies out of the doors and prevent 'unwanted passengers' climbing on board to escape the area.

On one particular heavily loaded sortie, I enlisted a man from the BBC, cameraman/reporter Bernard Hesketh to give me a hand. With camera and mike capturing both picture and sound, he unwittingly captured an 'interesting arrival' at the 7500 ft Villahermosa football pitch in temperatures of nearly 40 degrees. This went on air, with 'no bleeps' back home a few days later.

During the ten days of operations shuttling supplies and personnel into the area from Palenquero we most certainly extended the capabilities of our helicopters. We were part of an international relief operation that included Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters from the United States Air Force in Panama, French Puma and Columbian UH1 'Huey' machines. In the 10 days working from dawn to dusk 76,000lbs of

supplies were transported by our two aircraft in Columbia. Needless to say, when making our way back to Belize we too were held up by the Sandanista regime in Nicaragua. We were placed under armed guard by the side of our helicopters, all day and without relief, of any sort, until eventual diplomatic intervention by the embassies through the military.

From my flying logbook I can see that the date of arrival back at Belize Airport Camp was 26th November 1985. We had covered some 1500 miles from Palenquero, Columbia with a total flight time of 11 hours and 15 minutes. With our aircraft and crews back at base and part of 1563 Flight, business carried on as normal throughout December and into January supporting the British Army and Belize Defence Force in its deterrent role against possible invasion from Guatemala. It's extremely useful to still have the possession of one's 'logbook/diaries' as, after 35 years, they help trigger fast fading memories of places, people and incidents. I see a note at the end of an entry for the 23rd December that, once again, I'm crewed with Flt Lt Doug Finlay Maxwell on a re-supply sortie to an army post on the Guatemala border. In a bracketed entry, it would appear that we had clandestinely paused on our return to source Christmas trees for both the Officers' and Sergeants' Messes and help the festivities along! Operating over the jungles and pine covered ridges of Belize in all weathers was an incredible experience and the subject, maybe, of further record before permanently forgotten.



Chris's clandestine Christmas trees caper, captured on camera!

Tony Whitehead - w/t Spitfire Pilot !



The White Cliffs of Dover Spitfire Experience, Biggin Hill, 11 Sept 2021

Mention 9 / 11 and most of us think of only one thing, the day when 20 years ago our world changed forever. At the time many of us on 33 were at Thumrait deployed on Ex Saif Sareea II and all have our own recollections of the day.

For me this year it would be a little different. Fast forward to March 2020. Having left the Royal Air Force and changed my allegiance to Babcock engineering we were in the final stages of converting the Tucano fleet into Airfix kits for someone in America. My parents had come across a newspaper advert for Spitfire trips from Biggin Hill and with a redundancy package looming I thought, "Why not?" After 30 years' service and another six in support of RAF operations it would make a fitting retirement present to myself.

After a couple of false starts and an 18 month delay due to COVID the big day finally arrived. Rocky, Mark Nuttall and I headed for the Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar from our overnight accommodation in nearby Orpington. Paul Davies would join us later, having attended the Sergeants' Mess Battle of Britain commemorations the evening before. For those unfamiliar with the town, Orpington is a bit of a dump but the people and beer are nice. I think it gave us all a greater appreciation of the places we have chosen to live.

Paul arrived at the venue a little behind schedule, his progress thwarted by a rather officious electronic barrier. Having re-grouped we proceeded to negotiate security. This led to me ringing Joan in the office to announce our arrival whilst she and Rocky waved at each other through the window, him listening to both ends of the conversation live. A short time later we were in. (Editor: Slightly quicker process than getting through the Main Guardroom at Benson then?)

Having completed in the requisite paperwork and answered a few questions we had time on our hands, the program had slipped due to weather earlier in the day. I had already used the facilities at the overnight accommodation five times that morning and had experienced some self-harming with a disposable razor. I'm not sure if it was the previous evening's Guinness, piri-piri Chicken, trepidation, or a combination of all three but it was time to get the show on the road.

Next up were a couple of pre-flight video safety briefs covering everything from possible mechanical failures to emergency egress procedures, with Rocky contributing snippets of sage advice in order to cheer me up. Following that it was time to be introduced to



Above: A Tucano in Airfix kit mode. Love the pilot figures!

Below: Tony meets his pilot, Ian Smith.



my pilot, retired Squadron Leader Ian Smith, for my final briefing. Ian had flown Chinooks with 18 Squadron at Gutersloh so a rapport was soon established within our little group. It came to light that Ian's father Squadron Leader Derek John Smith had been a flight commander on 33 circa 1980-81, Ian thought he was OC B. Sadly, after leaving the RAF he was later lost in a light aircraft accident. Any information appertaining to his time on 33 would be gratefully received.

Now it was time to meet the star of the show. Spitfire MT818 was the first Spitfire converted to a two seater, the sole MK VIII version. This aircraft was built as a single seater in May 1944, (the same vintage as my dad, obviously a good year), and later purchased back by

Vickers Armstrong for conversion to a 'type 502', flying again in August of 1946. In order to accommodate the second cockpit within the airframe the front cockpit was moved forward by 13 ½", reducing the main fuel tank capacity from 96 to 39 gallons, which was supplemented by placing additional tanks in the wings. During flight testing the aircraft was observed to have tightened in the turn, to counter this a 9 ½ pound bob weight was fitted in the elevator circuit. Additionally a 7 ¾" long piece of 'L' shaped metal was added to the elevator trailing edge upper and lower surfaces. These are retained to this day.

Uniquely equipped with an anti-spin parachute facility located in a hatch in the rear fuselage, she is also the only Spitfire Trainer to have a retractable tail wheel, now modified to allow it to be locked down. Vickers registered the aircraft with the Civil Registration G-AIDN and it was sent to Boscombe Down for handling trials, later giving many demonstrations to the RAF and Royal Navy. These services were never to buy the two seat Spitfire, whilst the RAF found her performance like a single seater but the visibility from the rear cockpit was restrictive. Throughout the 1950s the aircraft was used for air races, winning the piston engine category of the 1959 Daily Mail London – Paris Air Race with a certain Billy Butlin in the back. Later conversions for other air forces were all from MK IX airframes. MT818 is the only Spitfire prototype still in existence.

Having donned my flying clothing I was led out to the aircraft by Al, my liney for the occasion. Back in the day I had been in his shoes many times, but this was someone else's train set. In the process of strapping in I had to demonstrate that I was familiar with the different release mechanisms of seat and parachute harness. If I unclipped the wrong one in an emergency I could be in for a rapid descent. Then a recap of exit drill, seat down, jettison canopy, open door and roll out left. I was a little disappointed at not being able to take my grandads pipe along due to the potential loose article hazard. Must remember it for the Cenotaph Parade. Canopy and door closed, Al made sure all was secure, Ian whistling in the front as he goes through his checks, I'm ready for the off. "Tony, can you raise your seat please?" "Ah, sorry."

Hand signals from pilot to see off team, chocks removed, asked if I'm all set in the back and still want to do this. All good in the back, "Hands and feet clear".

"Brakes on, clear start please."

"Clear start."

A little cough and splutter and the Merlin roars into life. T's & P's all good and we head on to the taxiway. En route to the runway Ian informs me that this aircraft is currently the only one on the circuit with a

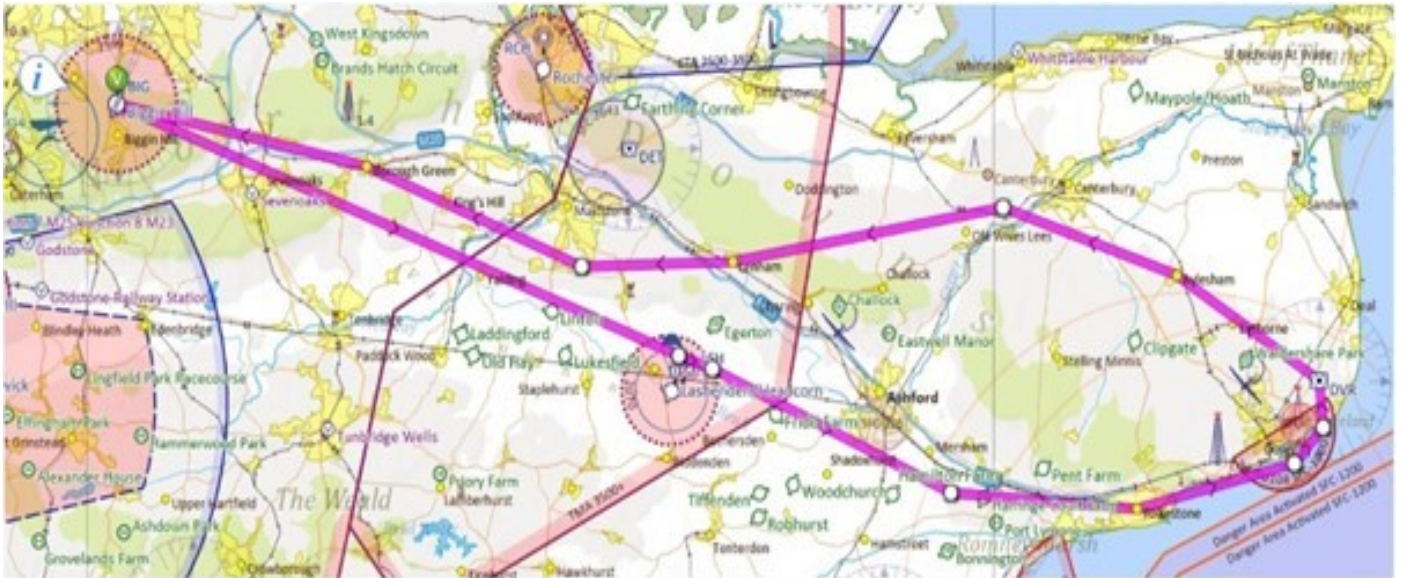


Above and below: Spitfire MT 818 'G-AIDN'.



thoroughbred Rolls Royce Merlin, the others are all Packard variants. Then we are at the piano keys requesting clearance to take off. I have been advised that on take off and climb out it will be hand signals only as we are sitting behind a 27 litre engine without silencers. Clearance is given and the throttle opened up. I cannot begin to describe the incredible noise, vibration and power, suffice to say a barely audible "**** ME!" escaped my lips.

Once clear of the airfield the engine note decreased and having checked comms we settled down to a leisurely 200mph. Now operating in uncontrolled airspace Ian had me take hold of the rear stick to get a feeling for the range of movement required to fly safely and moments later I had control. Initially I was a bit apprehensive but with some reassurance from the front soon began to relax in my newfound environment. With a few course corrections carried out I was heading towards Dover. Approaching Folkestone Ian took control. Keeping an eye out for aircraft and other potential hazards I enjoyed the view as we flew over Hawkinge, Capel-le-Ferne Memorial, and the Port of Dover, there was added interest as we had explored this area during the 2019 battlefield tour. Next came the Swingate transmitter station complete with mobile phone masts and on to the Famous White Cliffs. I had a



Tony's route: Biggin Hill - Headcorn Aerodrome - Hawkinge - Folkestone - Capel le Ferne - Dover - Swingate Down - Aylesham - south of Canterbury - south of Maidstone - Borough Green - Biggin Hill

cursory look for migrants but the scenery was far more interesting. Banking left we came around for a second run. An Irish ferry was making its way into Dover!! We made our way back to Capel-le-Ferne, on this pass barrel rolling overhead and paying our respects to the boys.

The return to Biggin Hill was largely uneventful. At one point we met a Spitfire coming the other way and Ian took back control. I could not see the approaching aircraft from the rear cockpit, thus confirming the findings of those early trials. Back in controlled airspace Ian again took the helm. I had been given quite a bit of stick time but let him have a go at the more complex manoeuvres to keep his hand in. All too soon we were on final approach and touching down, at this point I was advised that while the main wheels are down the aircraft is still flying, she doesn't know any different and we have to remain on our toes. Taxying in Ian told me he was on a tight schedule, he was due to depart for an air display with a single seater, I guess someone has to do the s**t jobs.

After extracting myself from the aircraft with rather shaky legs I was reunited with my guests and we were left with the aircraft briefly for a photoshoot, Paul taking great delight in the fact that after all these years he has finally caught me smiling. As we returned to the Ops building I hoped a furtive glance toward MT818 would cover the tear in my eye. Back upstairs I was presented with a few souvenirs of the day including a Flight Certificate to be signed by the Aircraft Commander and Second Pilot. The Second Pilot had to practice on an envelope as his hands were mimicking his legs. I was also informed this was my second certificate of the day as in spite of specific instructions the adminers had spelt my name wrong, a common but irritating error. At least QA were on the ball.



A rare picture indeed.....a smiling Tony Whitehead!

We briefly caught up with Ian and chatted about our common interests, his fathers time on 33, and where our paths may or may not have crossed in years gone by. We were then shown to the engineering facility for a fascinating guided tour. There are beautifully restored aircraft here, next to bare bones relics and everything in between. A naked BBMF Hurricane waits to be re-covered, respecting the owner's wishes we are not allowed to photograph it, the RAF can be a fickle bunch. Motor vehicles and bikes also abound, there is something here for everyone, as the photographs over leaf show.

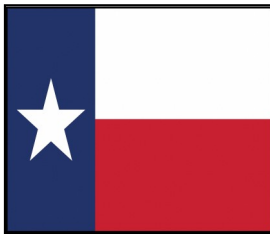
All too soon our visit was coming to an end. Time to head back to the ranch, relax with a beer and reflect on the day's events. Rocky and I are halfway through our first pint when Paul and Mark appear. Paul offers me a brown paper bag, "Thanks for today, we've got you a little something". It contains a photo album, "That will do for my pictures once I'm sorted". Looking inside I find a complete photographic record of the day. The boys have well and truly done me. For the second time that day there is a tear in my eye. I must have forgotten to take my hay fever meds. Beer flowed, we chewed the fat and the evening wore on. Last orders were called and Mark managed to grab himself one more beer. On returning to the table it became apparent his last minute acquisition was alcohol free, his face was a picture.



9 / 11 / 2021 would indeed be a day to remember.

LEST WE FORGET





From Texas Muleskinner to RAF fighter ace Wing Commander L. C. Wade DFC & Two Bars, DSO, RAF

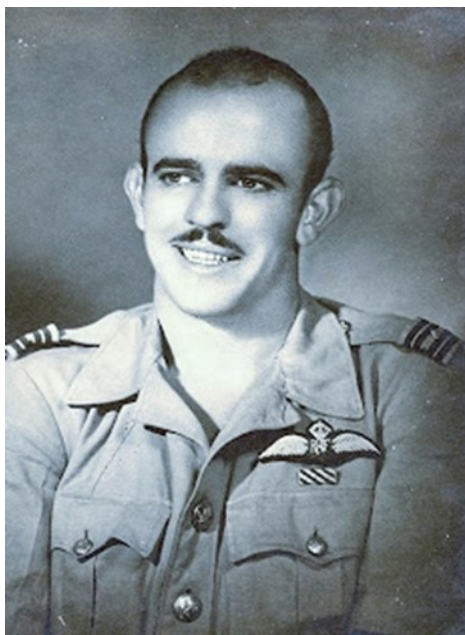


An examination of 33 Squadron's history reveals an impressive number of pilots who became fighter aces during the Second World War. Many of them learned their trade flying Gladiators and Hurricanes in the Middle East before moving on to other squadrons and types to build their scores. Former 33 Squadron members and 'Loyalty' readers may recall reading about 'Dixie' Dean, 'Ping' Newton, 'Deadstick' Dyson, Frank Holman, Robert Perry St Quintin, 'Jumbo' Genders and Len Cottingham, who all appear on the WW2 RAF fighter aces list, having recorded between 5 and 20 victories during their careers. There were a few – 'Woody' Woodward and 'Cherry' Vale, for instance – who scored between 20-40 victories but, perhaps with the exception of Pat Pattle, none of these names spring to mind in the same way that the wartime British public could recall pilots like Al Deere, 'Cats Eyes' Cunningham, Douglas Bader, 'Sailor' Malam and Johnnie Johnson after the Battle of Britain.

Among the other aces I could have listed who started winning their spurs with 33 Squadron, there is one exceptional character - Lance Wade - who is frequently overlooked or forgotten, yet on the RAF aces list his record places him higher than Deere, Cunningham or Bader. Lance Wade is usually listed with 25 victories, although official RAF records show that he had 22 solo victories and an additional half credit on two more, for a total of 23. Having been born in America, he would tie for 10th place the top American aces list with 25 victories, and 13th with 23 victories. Either score ranks him as the leading American fighter ace to serve exclusively in any foreign air force.

Lance Wade's story is not well known to the public, but that could soon be changing, thanks to Chuck Cravens, the historian and author at AirCorps Aviation (AirCorpsAviation.com) who I have been conversing with since October 2020. Chuck is a World War Two aeroplane enthusiast who has had many articles published in a number of military aviation magazines, and was the man who contacted us about the Hurricane restorations in America. If you watched the link to the Oshkosh EAA Air Show, available on the

Association and Past & Present Facebook pages, dated 10 August 2021, you will have heard Chuck talking most authoritatively about L.C.'s life and career. I am extremely pleased that Chuck was able to share some of the lesser known facts about Lance so that members of his old squadron can understand and appreciate his achievements even more. This article about Lance appears at the same time as Chuck's article on our 'Forgotten Ace' is published in the November - December edition of 'Warbird Digest', with some truly stunning photographs of the restored 33 Squadron Hurricane in desert camouflage bearing Lance's personal nose art, shown in the header.



L.C. Wade DFC RAF
(Photograph courtesy of the Wade Family collection)

L.C.'s Early Years

L.C. was born on 18 November 1916 in Texas, second son of Bill and Susan Wade. Initialism - using only initials for a child's Christian and middle name – may strike us now as odd, but the practice was more common in the early 20th century and remains a legal naming convention in most US jurisdictions.

He grew up on the family farm near Reklaw, Texas, about 124 miles southeast of Dallas, and he was only 13 when the Great Depression started in October 1929. When he was 19 he joined the Civilian

Conservation Corps, a voluntary public work relief programme established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 to relieve unemployment, and he moved to Arizona. L.C. realized that his work with the Corps was very much like working on the family farm back home, much of it involved working as a 'mule skinner', a term given to a professional mule driver whose sole purpose was to keep mule-drawn wagons moving. While sounding rather derogatory, 'to skin' was slang for outsmarting a mule through skill, wit and determination. However, L.C. did not like the 'mule skinner' label and was soon looking for other opportunities to prove his worth. With the dark clouds of war developing in Europe and the Far East, L.C. saw his chance, but he would have to work out how he could bypass certain restrictions regarding military service with countries other than the neutral United States of America.

L.C. had wanted to join the U.S. Army Cadet Training Corps but he did not meet the requirements in force in 1940 and early 1941 of two years of college, or the equivalent. Even though these requirements were modified several times during World War Two, L.C. wanted to join the war effort as soon as possible. The clearest path to flying, and aerial combat, was joining the RAF, and to be accepted into the RAF training system he needed some flight experience. L.C. began his flight training in Tucson, Arizona and by 14 June 1940 he had obtained a student pilot certificate.

Basic Flying Training and Enlistment

Chuck Cravens was given permission by the Wade family to look through L.C.'s log books and was able to trace L.C.'s progress through private pilot training, RAF 'refresher' training, and his journey to Egypt via England. Entries started on 19 July 1940, and he soloed after 8 hrs 25 mins on 11 August. On 18 December 1940 L.C. flew from Tucson, Arizona to enlist in the RAF in San Francisco, where the 'Oath of Allegiance' was replaced with an 'Oath of Obedience', thus ensuring that L.C. would retain American citizenship.

However, he did encounter one slight problem during the enlistment process, highlighted by a handwritten comment at the top of his RAF service record card: 'Officer has no Christian names'. Using 'L.C.' on official paperwork was deemed unacceptable. In order to comply with RAF regulations, he took the name of his cousin, Lance Cleo, thus 'L.C. Wade' was accepted into the RAF as 'Lance Cleo Wade'. RAF records, and authors of other articles and books, referred to Lance from this point, as I shall for the remainder of this article.

Shortly after enlisting, Lance's next stage of training was at the Spartan School of Aeronautics in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which was officially designated as a British Refresher School. Lance started flying there on 21 December, graduating on 26 April 1941 with a dual and solo total of 104 hrs 40 mins. He wrote in his logbook: 'End of flying in USA, balance of this log contains RAF hours'.

To England - Combat Flight Training

From Tulsa Lance made his way to Canada. He was in Ottawa by 3 May 1941, and by 23 May he had received orders to proceed to Montreal by rail and then by boat to England. He left Canada on 24 May aboard a small Norwegian freighter - without a convoy - and arrived in Liverpool ten days later.

By 19 June 1941 Lance was on No. 52 Operational Training Unit at Debden in Essex, and would remain there until 6 August, 1941. He flew almost nine hours in a Miles Master before he was allowed to fly an RAF fighter for the first time - a Hawker Hurricane Mk1 (Ser No 7749) with a 1025HP Merlin engine. He completed

his training in mid-August and was ordered to proceed to the Middle East. Along with his dual and solo flying, his log book also records 13 hrs. 45 mins. Instrument Flying training in a Link Trainer.

Lance flew a Hurricane Mk IIB (BD834) from Kemble to Abbotsinch, near Glasgow, on 16 August, where aircraft were being prepared and loaded onto the aircraft carrier *HMS Furious*. Once embarked on *HMS Furious* Lance met up with several RAF and RCAF pilots, including Pilot Officer Don Edy. For an understanding of what it was like being onboard the carrier as it sailed down to Gibraltar, I recommend reading the first instalment of Don Edy's book, 'Goon In The Block' (Issue 10 Summer 2019 pages 22-35).

The carrier arrived in Gibraltar at 1500 hrs on 7 September with 49 Hurricane Mk IIs, of which 26 were loaded onto *HMS Ark Royal*. *Ark* left Gibraltar with her escorts on 8 September, sailing towards Malta with Lance and Don onboard. The Hurricanes had been fitted with long range tanks to allow them to be launched approximately 600 miles away from Malta to RV with, and be guided to the island by, Malta-based Blenheims that had flown out to meet the carrier. On 9 September the 26 Hurricanes onboard *HMS Ark Royal* were prepared, but only 14 were launched before the operation was cancelled and the convoy turned back to Gibraltar, arriving there on the 10th. The operation recommenced on 10 September at 2100 hrs, with both *Furious* and *Ark Royal* taking part. On 12 September 12 Hurricanes took off from *Ark Royal*, 19 took off from *Furious*, they met up with the Blenheims and flew safely to Malta.

Lance's logbook does not give away any detail of his onward movements to Egypt, so once again I would recommend looking at Don Edy's first instalment. He wrote that he and some of his Canadian colleagues met up with Lance in the Orderly Room at Abu Sueir and were told to report to No. 33 Squadron at Gerwala (LG 10). They all flew in a Bristol Bombay from Amriya to Berg El Arab to collect some reconditioned Battle of Britain Hurricanes with long range fuel tanks, and Lance led the formation to 33's landing ground.

Looking at 33 Squadron's ORB, it states that Pilot Officers Lush, Patterson, Lowther, Wade, MacKenzie and Edy arrived on posting from the UK on 15 September 1941. That entry is somewhat at odds with Don's memories, who mentions staying overnight with No.1 Squadron RAAF with Tommy Patterson before flying over to Gerwala the next day. No. 1 Squadron RAAF was a bomber squadron based in Malaya at that time, so its likely that Don was referring to No. 451 Squadron RAAF who were flying Hurricane Mk1s at Qasaba airfield (LG 11) , close to Gerwala. In the next edition of Loyalty, Don's second instalment continue on page 9, where he states that he glided onto

Gerwala landing ground and became an active member of No. 33 Fighter Squadron on 16 September 1941, where they were met by Lance Wade and Don Lush.

Lance, Don and the other new arrivals were joining a fighter squadron that had been badly mauled in Greece and Crete. It had lost 8 pilots and 18 ground crew, and could only muster one flight when the survivors regrouped back in Egypt in June 1941. These new pilots were desperately needed and were quickly trained up and sent into combat. Unfortunately, ten more pilots would be lost in action before the end of the year; however, others, like Lance, flourished.

Operation CRUSADER

Prior to the launch of Operation CRUSADER, the Allied offensive to defeat Axis armoured forces and relieve the siege of Tobruk, 33 Squadron and its Long Range Hurricane Mk 1s were placed under Air Headquarters Western Desert and moved from Gerwala to Giarabub oasis in preparation for another move to a new airfield 100 miles NW of Giarabub in open desert - LG 125, which would allow air attacks along the coast south of Benghazi.

Lance claimed his first two victories, both Fiat CR 42s, on 18 November during Operation CRUSADER, as the Allies pushed to Axis forces out of Egypt and Libya; by 24 November Lance was a recognised 'ace'. He had been on 33 for just over two months. Again, I recommend Don Edy's book, which contains some excellent pictures of the conditions at LG 125, which 33 moved to on 20 November, and describes some of the sorties carried out while they were based there.

One particular incident that involved Lance while he was at LG 125 was recorded on 5 and 6 December 1941:

'ORB 5.12.41 LG 125 - Six a/c with escort of two as top cover ground strafed Agedabia at Midday. One S.79 was destroyed which blew up and caused P/O. Wade to force land in the desert 20 miles east of Agedabia. Three C.R. 42s were destroyed, two S.79s and five C.R. 42s were damaged. Sgt Wooler landed to pick up P/O. Wade but he broke his tail wheel on landing. A recco was sent out later in the afternoon to report on the progress of the pilots.'

'ORB 6.12.41 LG 125 - Two reccos were sent out to report progress of P/O. Wade and Wooler. They were picked up later in the day and were brought back to L.G. 125 by a Blenheim escorted by two Hurricanes.'

Lance and Sgt Wooler had decided to walk back to base, and managed to cover 25 miles before they were picked up. Sgt Wooler is the bearded young man on the left of the photograph to the right.

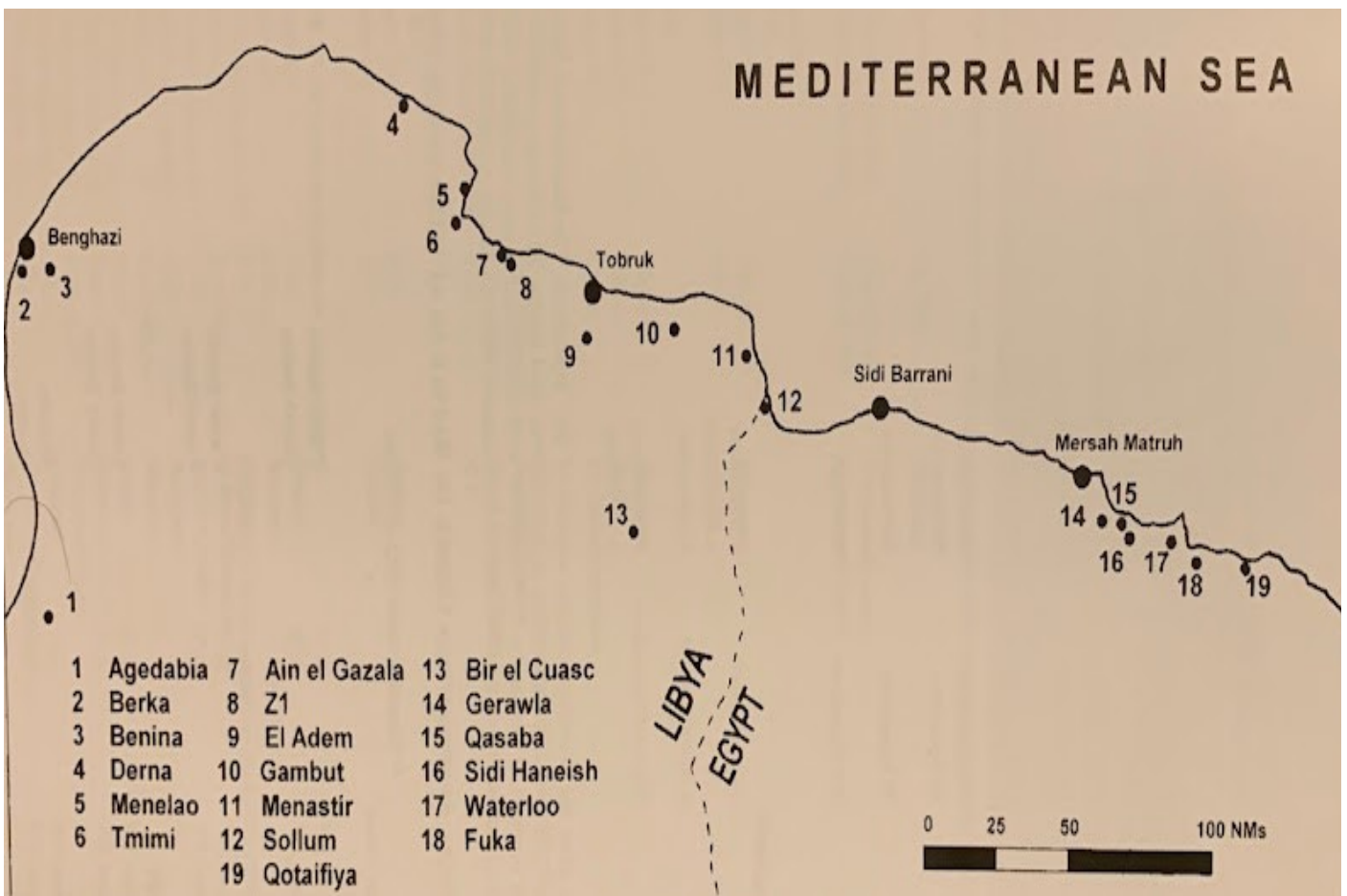


Above: Lance at Gerwala.

Below: Don and Lance with Tommy guns at LG 125.

(Courtesy of the Edy Family)





Rommel's Counterattack

While CRUSADER was an Allied success, Rommel launched a surprise counterattack from El Agheila on 21 January 1942 which drove the Eighth Army all the way back to Gazala. Axis success continued into the summer, and the First Battle of El Alamein.

33 Squadron had moved from LG125 to Msus on 1 January, and were carrying out patrols over shipping entering Benghazi Harbour and tactical reconnaissance (Tac-R) along the coast road leading south to El Agheila. News of the enemy breakthrough came through on 22 January and strafing attacks were launched on the advancing enemy columns. It was during one of these attacks on 23 January that Pilot Officer Edy was shot down. His flight leader, Lance, circled around Don's aircraft looking for a place to land and pick him up, but heavy anti-aircraft fire drove him off and Don was captured. Don's capture was the start of another hard year for the Squadron, which would see 6 pilots captured or listed as missing, and 26 pilots killed in action. By the end of the month the Squadron was operating from Gazala, west of Tobruk.

In February the C.O., Squadron Leader Derek Gould, and Lance flew to El Adem to collect two long range Kittyhawks from 112 Squadron, but they had been damaged by an enemy strafing attack. Yet on 7 February 33 was released from operations pending a move to LG 101 to re-equip with Kittyhawks. By 9 February all of 33's Hurricanes had been handed over to 208 and 238 Squadrons and by 12 February the Squadron was at Sidi Heneish, where all of the pilots, several officers and 50% of the ground crew were given 14 days' leave. During this period two Kittyhawks and one Tomahawk was delivered to 33, but no practice flying was carried out.

The success of the Axis advance led to 33's re-equipping with Kittyhawks being cancelled on 3 March, and orders were given to collect twelve Hurricane IIBs. Practice flying commenced, Hurricane IIB deliveries continued, and eighteen aircraft moved forward to Gambut on 28 March. After more localised training and wing sweeps of the Tmimi - Gazala - El Adem - Tobruk sector, 33 was declared 'at readiness' on 4 April. Two days later Lance damaged a Macchi 202.

Back in England, the 7 April Supplement to The London Gazette announced the award of Distinguished Flying Crosses to three members of 33 Squadron: Flying Officer D.S.F. 'Winnie' Winsland, Pilot Officer Lance Wade and Warrant Officer Len Cottingham.

The Battle of Gazala

The Axis advance was making steady progress east along the Libyan coast towards the Allied defensive Gazala line, shielding Tobruk. Throughout April and into

May short notice readiness was maintained, and many Tac-Rs were flown seeking the enemy columns. The Battle of Gazala opened on 26 May, with Rommel launching a decoy attack in the north while his main force tried to outflank the Gazala line to the south, around Bir Hakeim. On the night of 25-26 May the Squadron reported considerable enemy air activity 'in the neighbourhood', and it was soon in action the following day. It reported seeing a tank battle in the El Adem area on the 27th, the attacked Stukas bombing the Allies' forward troops on the 28th, and in a large dogfight with Italian and German aircraft Lance destroying a Macchi 202 and a Ju 87. More tank battles between Acroma and Gazala were reported on the 31st.

Enemy air activity became much heavier in June, and 'F/O. Wade D.F.C.' destroyed an Me.109 on 9 June. This was the day that Rommel broke the Bir Hakeim defences, and pushed towards El Adem, south of Tobruk. Over 70 enemy bombers and fighters were encountered over El Adem on 11 June, with Lance having to force land there with a damaged aircraft, and the following day over 100 enemy aircraft attacked El Adem again. The young and newly arrived Sergeant John Hall was shot down that day, and you can read more about his story later in this issue.

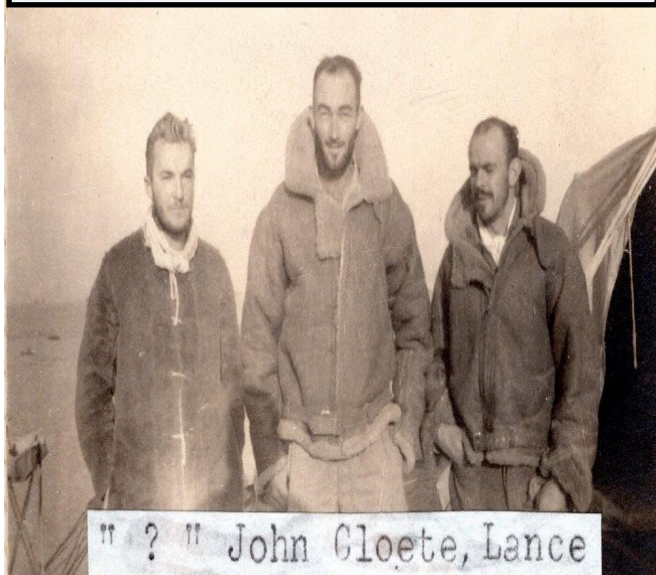
The Fall of Tobruk

To the north, Allied forces along the Gazala line were in danger of being cut off and permission was given to withdraw towards Tobruk on 14 June. To the Eighth Army, 13 June became known as 'Black Saturday', and continued Afrika Korps pressure on defensive positions at Sidi Rezegh and El Adem forced another withdrawal on 15 and 16 June, leaving Tobruk open for attack. The Eighth Army was ordered to withdraw some 100 miles east to Mersah Matruh, a retreat nicknamed by some as 'The Gazala Gallop', allowing the German assault on Tobruk to commence at 5.20 am on 20 June. After an intense air bombardment of nearly 800 sorties, the leading German units were at the outskirts of the port by 6.00 pm. Even though an order was given to attempt a breakout that night the commanding officer of the defending forces considered the risk of casualties was too high, and he surrendered to General Rommel at 09.40 hrs on 21 June.

The Squadron's withdrawal back towards El Alamein commenced on 17 June, stopping at Sidi Heneish and El Daba to re-equip with Hurricane IICs 'as soon as possible' before settling at LG 154, an airfield several miles SW of Alexandria, where they tested the new aircraft and their cannons. Operations commenced with Hurricane MkIICs on 1 July, with patrols over El Alamein. Lance, by now a Flight Lieutenant, was mentioned in the 5 July and 14 July ORBs with one Me



Above and below: Lance at LG 175.



" ? " John Gloete, Lance



Above and Below: Lance and members of 33 Squadron examine a Stuka, location unknown. (all photos courtesy of the Edy Family).



109 confirmed each time, and a Ju 88 on 16 July. The end of July and beginning of August appears to have been a training period, and then the Squadron moved east of Alexandria to Edcu (now Idku) on 5 August for rest, training and leave. There was a large changeover of personnel, 100 Other Ranks started 7 days' leave, with a further 123 on leave from the 14th.

Flying training increased throughout the month, and Lance, who must have been in charge of 'A' Flight, acted as C.O. from 19-21 August vice Squadron Leader J.F.F. Finnis. On 30 August the Squadron was advised to be ready to move, and the advance party moved out on 31 August, the day that the Battle of Alam el Halfa commenced, the last big Axis offensive of the Western Desert campaign. The offensive failed, due to superior Allied firepower and Allied air superiority, and the scene was set for the Second Battle of El Alamein, the final and successful Allied push in October that would eventually lead to the defeat of Rommel and the subsequent end of the war in North Africa in May 1943.

Lance had a probable Me. 109 on 2 September confirmed on the 4th, which led to some wonderful headlines in the Egyptian Mail on 7 September:

"FAMOUS DESERT SQUADRON BRINGS SCORE TO 200"

During the present desert battle, one of the most famous of all R.A.F. fighter squadrons achieved its 200th enemy aircraft definitely destroyed. All these victories have been gained in the Middle East, some of them in Greece and Crete, but most of them in the desert itself. For the squadron has been fighting in the desert now since the start of the first campaign against the Italians. The 200th enemy aircraft to be destroyed by the squadron was a Messerschmitt 109 shot down over the battle area by F/Lt. Lance Wade, a United States citizen who volunteered for the Royal Air Force sometime before his own country entered the war. With this victory, he brought his personal score of enemy aircraft destroyed to twelve.

He damaged a Macchi 202 on 8 September, and achieved the final victory of his first combat tour on the 11th - a Ju 87 Stuka. His final sortie was on 16 September and he was hit twice by a pilot in an Macchi 202; that was the first time a fighter he was flying was damaged by another fighter. At the end of the day, Lance handed over command of 'A' Flight to Flight Lieutenant H S. 'Steve' Woods, brother of Eric 'Chico' Woods. Lance had reached the end of his first combat tour as one of the leading RAF aces in the desert war.

Stateside Rest Tour

After 12 months in theatre, and 15 victories under his belt, Lance deserved a rest. After flying back to London, where he was presented to King George VI and Queen Elizabeth he boarded a Pan American Airlines DC-3 for a trip home, arriving in Miami, Florida on 6 October.

With the US officially part of the war effort, the story of an American ace in the RAF's Desert Air Force had received wide coverage in the US newspapers, so reporters clamoured to meet him in person. By 12 October Lance was in New York City conducting a press conference at Rockefeller Centre. While he was there he was awarded the second bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross atop the building by RAF Air Commander Henry Norman Thornton, the British Air Attaché in Washington DC. Joining the RAF delegation in Washington afterwards, Lance was soon touring USAAF training bases to share his air combat knowledge with new American pilots and test fly fighters like the P-39, P-47, and the early P-51.

Lance also spoke to crowds everywhere he went, supporting the purchase of war bonds. In his speeches in his Texas home area, Lance told the audience that he was impressed with the job that Americans were doing in the war. "The spirit in which they were buying bonds and stamps to finance the war was extremely heartening to a man who had been away in the fighting front so long."

When he visited Texas, he was given a hero's welcome. In his early letters home, he wrote "I understand that the American papers have had quite a write up about me, but I suppose it went to Tucson papers again. I wish they would get it clear as to where my home is." This was a problem that reoccurred whenever newspapers ran articles about him. The wire services like the Associated Press sent the articles to the Tucson papers, not his hometown Texas papers.



**Lance talking to the crowds.
(Courtesy of the Wade Family).**

Second Combat Tour

In January of 1943, Flight Lieutenant Wade returned to North Africa as a flight commander on 145 Squadron – a Spitfire Mk V unit - and was promoted to squadron leader and given command of the unit shortly thereafter. For much of February, 145 Squadron was stood down because of gasoline shortages and weather, but Lance was back in the air on 26 February, and damaged a BF 109. In March he increased his tally of 109s, with 4 shot down, 3 damaged and a probable. In April, with 145 Squadron having changed over to Spitfire Mk IX, Lance bagged three more 109s and a Macchi MC 202.

On 16 June the Squadron moved to Luqa on Malta in order to cover the invasion of Sicily, Operation HUSKY, which began on 9 July 1943. Through the following months Lance must have thought he was back with 33 in North Africa as the squadron was frequently on the move up the east coast of Sicily: 13 July - Pachino; 17 July - Cassabile; 25 July - Lentini West. On 3 September 1943 Italy capitulated, and on 24 September 145 Squadron made the jump to Gioia del Colle on the Italian mainland.

Lance's final victories were accomplished on 2 October 1943, shooting down two FW 190s while flying a Spitfire Mk VIII. Two days later, the squadron moved again, this time further north to Tortorella in the Campania region. His last combat success against the Luftwaffe was on 3 November, when he damaged three FW 190s. On 7 November he flew his last combat

mission, but no enemy aircraft were encountered. When his second tour ended on 16 November 1943 Squadron Leader Lance Wade, DFC and two bars, was the top scoring fighter ace in the Mediterranean theatre.

Staff Officer Tour and a fatal accident

With his distinguished record of leadership and success in aerial combat, it was inevitable that a staff tour in Headquarters, Middle East Air Force would follow, sweetened a little by acting Wing Commander rank. At 27 years of age it is highly likely that Lance Wade would have gone on to have a very successful career in the RAF and he may have been recalled to England early in 1944, just as 33 Squadron was, and been given command of a fighter wing with 2TAF in the build up to D-Day. Unfortunately, his career was cut short by a tragic accident on 12 January 1944.

On that day he flew to an airfield in Italy to attend a lunch that was hosted by the USAAF's 57th Fighter Group. Many online accounts state that he was flying an Auster, but through his discussions with the Wade family Chuck Cravens discovered Lance's RAF personnel records, which reveal that he was flying a Spitfire Mk V (JK603).

The family also possesses an eyewitness account from Captain Paul Carll, a pilot with the USAAF 12th Air Force, 57th Fighter Group. Paul was stationed at Amendola, which was an airfield on the east coast of Italy, part of the Foggia airfield complex, and he wrote:



April 1943: C.O. No. 145 Squadron RAF, Lance Wade, inspects the damaged starboard wing of his Supermarine Spitfire Mark IX back at his base at Goubrine North, Tunisia, following combat with enemy fighters. (Source: IWM)

"It occurred on Wednesday, 12 January 1944 at about 1500 hrs. Lance was flying a Spitfire V, and in his role as C.O. of the RAF's 239 Wing, he had come over to visit our C.O., Lieutenant Colonel Archie Knight. He arrived at about 1400hrs. They had their meeting, which lasted for about an hour, and Lance prepared to leave. Our strip lay east to west. The wind was from the east and Lance took off from west to east. The west end of the runway was directly south of our tent.

I watched him take off, and as soon as he got off the ground and picked up his wheels, he did a slow roll. He remained low and did a 180 degree left hand turn. He came back parallel to the runway, between our tent and the runway, and started another slow roll. He fell out of this one right before my eyes. His left wing hit the ground and the airplane crashed and burned furiously. Lance had no chance. The Spitfire V he was flying was used as a utility aeroplane by the Headquarters flight of 239 Wing, whilst its frontline units were primarily equipped with newer model Spitfires. Speculation was that Lance had not made allowance for the underpowered Mark V. There is no room for error when performing a manoeuvre like that."

Shortly after this tragic accident it was announced in the London Gazette of 25 January 1944, that King George VI had awarded Wing Commander Lance Wade the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). The DSO is the second highest British military honour and is awarded for meritorious or distinguished service by

officers of the armed forces during wartime, typically in actual combat. Lance Wade was buried with full military honours in the British Cemetery in Italy. After the war his remains were returned to the United States with a military honour guard, and his body was transferred to Reklaw, Texas and reburied in the McKnight Cemetery.

CONCLUSION

Lance Wade had joined the RAF long before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 drew America into the Second World War. He did not transfer to the USAAF, or any other American Air service, despite being approached to join with a higher rank and higher pay, but his answer was short: "Thanks, but I'd rather string along with the guys I've been with for so long". Perhaps that is the reason why Lance did not receive the publicity that he deserved or the acclaim that other American aces received. We can be proud that at the time of his death, this young pilot who had started his flying career with 33 Squadron had gone on to become the leading RAF ace in the Desert and Mediterranean theatre, ensuring his place alongside aces like Pat Pattle and that ilk. Lance Wade's story deserves to be told and remembered, let us hope that a whole new generation of enthusiasts now pick up on his achievements with the publication of our Association magazine and this month's Warbird Digest.

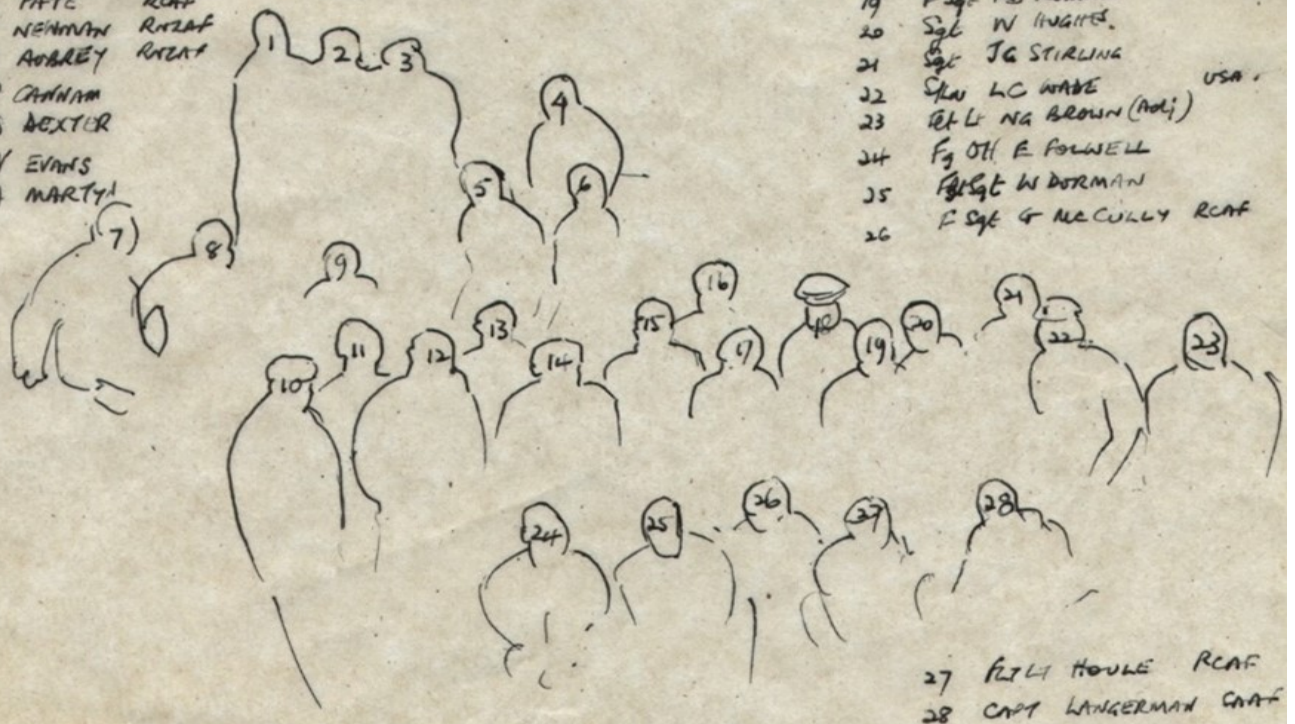




Having mentioned in a previous issue about not knowing where Steve Woods was in this picture of No. 145 Squadron, I am very grateful to Rick Cannam, son of Flight Lieutenant Peter Cannam (No 10.), the officer in an SD leaning against the wing next to the flap. Peter, who did two tours with 145 and then flew with 92, 241 and 111 Squadrons, was a member of the 145 Squadron Association, which is where the photograph and key came from. As you can see from the key below, Steve Woods is No 2, Lance is No 22. Thank you, Rick.

Fg Off B BLACKBURN
 Plt-Lt S Woods
 Lt J.C BOWTHO SANE
 Fg Off W. TAYLOR
 Sgt RW MCKERNON
 Fg Off B THORNTON
 WO K PATE RCAF
 Fg Off P NEWMAN RCAF
 Fg Off B ANDREY RCAF
 Plt-Lt P CANNAM
 Fg Off B DEXTER
 Fg Off V EVANS
 Fg Off A MARTYR

14 Fg Off JC MINTO
 15 Plt-Lt WAR MACKENZIE RCAF
 16 Equip Off WO W FRANCIS RCAF
 17 Equip Off
 18 Fg Off B PURBURY
 19 Fg Off KD ROMAN
 20 Sgt W INGHAM
 21 Sgt JG STIRLING
 22 Sgt LC WARD USA
 23 Plt-Lt NA BROWN (Maj)
 24 Fg Off E FOWELL
 25 Fg Off W DORMAN
 26 Fg Off G MCCULLY RCAF



27 Plt-Lt HOWLE RCAF
 28 Capt LANGERMAN RCAF

Sgt John Brodie Thomson Hall - 33's 'Douglas Bader'



Flight Lieutenant Tom Mullins, Ellie Harris, Penny Harris and Dave Stewart in the 33 Squadron History Room.

Friday 8 October 2021: A chance encounter with an RAF pilot at a wedding in August led Penny Harris, daughter of a 33 Squadron Hurricane pilot in 1942, to visit RAF Benson recently in order to discover rather more about her father's involvement in a key period during the Western Desert campaign than she knew before. It also revealed far more to us about Sergeant John Brodie Thomson Hall than we had hoped.

Penny had met a Eurofighter Typhoon pilot from No. 1 (F) Squadron (a squadron commanded by a certain Major P.B. Joubert de la Ferté from 19 August - 24 November 1915) and she had told him the story of her father being on 33 Squadron during WW2. The pilot was a friend of Tom Mullins, who is serving on 33 Squadron, so Tom contacted Penny, arranged a visit, and he asked me to be on hand to provide some historical background and details.

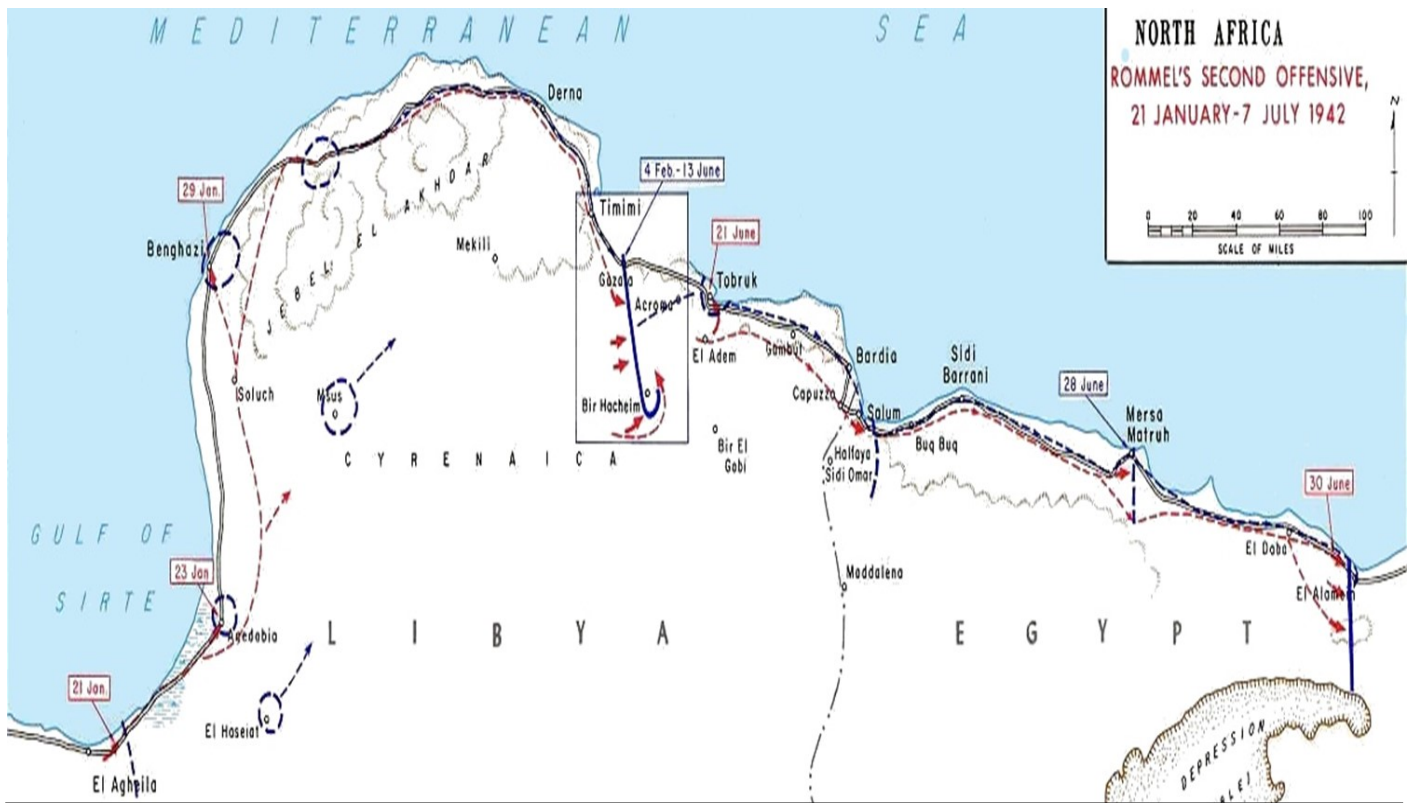
The Western Desert 1940-1942

I met Penny and her daughter, Ellie, in 33's History Room and explained a little about the Squadron's history up to the outbreak of the Second World War and then explained how the Squadron had reacted after Italy had declared war in June 1940 and invaded Egypt from Libya in September. With our Gladiators and Hurricanes we played a vital part in helping to repel the invasion and force the Italians all the way back to Agedabia and El Agheila. The first units of Rommel's *Afrika Korps* arrived to reinforce and support

the Italians in January 1941, with Churchill halting the Allied advance in early February 1941 in order to support Greece, which had been invaded by Italy from Albania. Facing a reduced Allied force, Rommel counter-attacked and by April he had forced the Allies all the way back to the Egyptian border, leaving Tobruk besieged. After its efforts in Greece and Crete the remnants of 33 Squadron was back in Egypt in June 1941, in time to participate in Operations BATTLEAXE (June 1941) and CRUSADER (November-December 1941) which saw the Tobruk siege lifted and the Axis forces pushed back to El Agheila again. January 1942 saw another Axis counter-attack and by 6 February 1942 the front was at the Gazala Line, just west of Tobruk (see map overleaf and the maps in the previous Lance Wade article).

The Battle of Gazala

In the spring of 1942, by which time 33 had converted from Hurricane Is to Hurricane IIBs, both sides were preparing for another battle. The British were planning to launch Operation BUCKSHOT to destroy Rommel's *Panzerarmee* and re-capture Cyrenaica in June, but in early May defensive measures on the Egyptian border took priority, as an Axis attack became imminent. At the time, Squadron Leader Derek Gould was in command of 33. His replacement arrived on 18 May, a Battle of Britain veteran like Gould, Squadron Leader Proctor D.F.C.. The importance of the forthcoming battle was shown by the visitors who flew in to give



Rommel's Advance from El Agheila to El Alamein, and the Battle of Gazala (26 May – 21 June 1942)

pep talks to the Squadron, the AOC, AVM Coningham, was there on the 19th and the AOCinC, AVM Tedder, visited on the 21st. Sergeant John Hall arrived on 33 Squadron just three days before the next big battle commenced, and the photo at the top of the page shows John at Gambut in May 1942. The Operational Record Book entry states:

23 May 1942_Gambut Main:

'The Squadron escorted a convoy into and out of Tobruk from dawn to dusk. After the first patrol Sgt. Belec crashed on landing Cat 2. During the fourth patrol 4 Me 109s attacked the top cover. Sgt. La Flamme's aircraft was damaged but he returned safely. F/LT. (Desmond Percy) Wade was hit and was last seen diving towards the sea. The navy have since confirmed this. No trace of the aircraft could be seen. P/O. Schwartz and Sgt Hall joined the Squadron in the afternoon.'

John flew one calibration test the day that the Battle of Gazala began - 26 May 1942 - when the *Afrika Korps* and Italian tanks drove south around the flank of the Gazala line, but were isolated by Free French and other Allied troops at Bir Hakeim. Flying from Gambut increased accordingly, with aircraft at constant readiness and carrying out daily scrambles, sweeps and escorts as they tracked the enemy advance and tangled with the *Luftwaffe* and *Regia Aeronautica*. Several aircraft had to force land or return damaged to base. John Hall was thrown straight in at the deep end, and between his arrival and 12 June he only had five days when he did not take off. On 11 June there had been a

large enemy raid on El Adem, with 70+ bombers and 12+ fighters, and in the ensuing dogfight and two of our Hurricanes incurred Cat 2 damage. John Hall flew three sorties on 12 June, the first of which was a 12 aircraft scramble. His second sortie was a 5 aircraft scramble, and the third was against an even bigger force than they had faced the day before:

12 Jun 1942_Gambut:

'In the morning the Squadron was at readiness from dawn. One flight carried out a Tac/R over the El Adem area. Very considerable A.A. fire was met. Later the Squadron was scrambled twice but were recalled early on both occasions. In the evening 6 Squadrons of Hurricanes including 33 were scrambled to intercept 100+ enemy aircraft bombing El Adem. During the large dog fight which took place F/Lt. Cloete claims 2 Me. 109's probably destroyed and P/O. Woods, P/O MacDonald and P/O Inglesby each claim 1 Mc.202 probably destroyed. Flt Lt Aldridge was shot down but is safe back with the squadron. Sgt Hall and Sgt Cameron are both missing.'

In Christopher Shores and Giovanni Massimello's acknowledged reference series of books 'A History of the Mediterranean Air War 1940-1945' the evening's activities of Friday 12 June 1942 reveal the bigger picture:

'At 1910 eight Kittyhawks of 260 Sqn took off again on a bomber escort sortie. They were followed at 1935 by Hurricanes of 33, 73, 213, 238 and 274 Sqs, and Spitfires of 145 Sqn, all of which were scrambled to

intercept a large formation of Ju 87s and 88s, escorted by eight Bf 109s of I. Gruppe, ten of III. Gruppe and eight MC.202s of 9° Gruppo, all of which were heading for the El Adem area.

73 Sqn got to the bombers, claiming five Ju 87s and one Ju 88, plus four more of the former as probables. Most of the other Hurricane units submitted a plethora of claims, the overall result of these amounting actually to the loss of one Ju 87 and one MC.202! The cost was three aircraft to 33 Sqn and two of 213 Sqn shot down, plus one of 73 Sqn badly damaged. In all, the Allied casualties that day were 21 aircraft lost or damaged, with 3 pilots KIA, 1 MIA and 2 POW.'

Sgt John Hall was one of the POWs. He had been flying Hurricane IIb BG917 'X' and the book states he was shot down by Bf109s near El Adem between 1910-2000 hrs. He had flown thirteen successful sorties and was shot down on his fourteenth sortie. In total, he had 14 hr 10 mins of flying time with 33 before his aircraft was shot down, forcing him to bale out.

Penny's mother, Edwina, had written a book for the family and in the second chapter she described what happened to John that evening. These are her words:

On June 12th 1942 he was shot down by a Messerschmitt 109. A cannon hit his plane from behind, shattering his leg; the engine was ablaze in seconds. He baled out.

His plane landed in flames behind British lines, but the wind blew him in his parachute into German territory. Taken prisoner by the Germans, who treated him humanely, sharing water and morphine, he was transported to Derna, where he was handed over to the Italians. Castel San Pietro in Caserta became his prison, where his leg was amputated first below the knee. Conditions were appalling there, with bed bugs a nightmare and hunger a constant craving. Gangrene forced a further amputation above the knee a few weeks later.

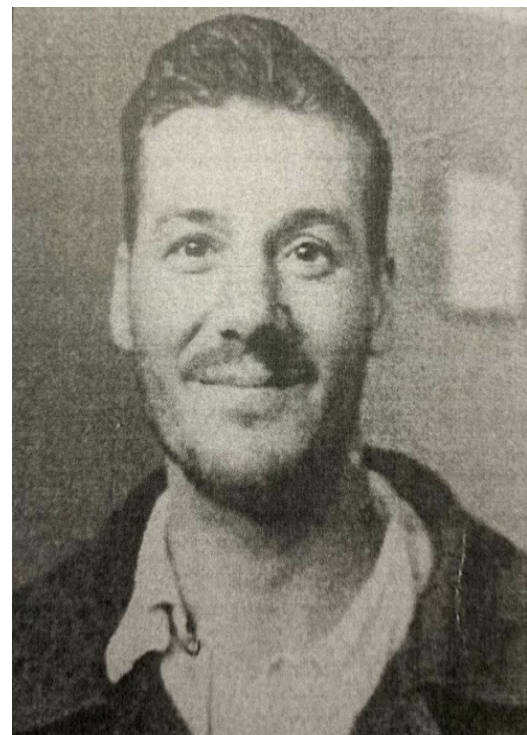
John's parents had received a notification from the RAF informing them that '...his aircraft of which he was a pilot, was missing, having failed to return to its base on 12th June after an operational flight'. Squadron Leader John Proctor had written to them on 17 June, and in his letter he said John had not baled out and he did not think he was still alive. A further letter of 9 August stated: 'A communication regarding his effects will be sent to you in due course'.

Despite these letters, his mother was firmly convinced he was still alive, and her instincts proved correct when a telegram arrived on 26 September to inform them that John, previously reported missing, was a Prisoner of War (POW). They also received a Red Cross POW card from John a few weeks later. Only then did they



John's 'Golden Caterpillar' on his RAF tie, awarded by the Irvin Airchute Company of Canada.

In 1922 Leslie Irvin agreed to give a gold pin with amethyst eyes to every person whose life was saved by one of his parachutes. Flight Lieutenant Bram van der Stok's 'Golden Caterpillar', was sold at auction in 2018 for £3 200. Bram was one of only three men to make it home after the Great Escape.



John's POW photo, taken in January 1943.

realise that he was wounded. "Dear Folks, All is well, just a little short in the left leg. Love John."

Edwina

Penny's mother, Edwina, had joined the WAAF as a Driver, Mechanical Transport in August 1942 and after Recruit Training at Innsworth in November, Basic Training at Morecambe and Driver training at Pwhelli she was posted to No 65 Maintenance Unit at RAF Chessington in Surrey. It was not quite the operational camp she had hoped for. On the afternoon of 3 May 1943 she was tasked to drive to the Horton Hospital in Epsom to collect a 'Mr Hall', one of the 'walking wounded' who was part of a group of ex-British POWs who had recently been repatriated in exchange for a number of Italian POWs. When 'Mr Hall' stepped forward on his wooden leg made by an Italian carpenter, Edwina told him that she had come to take him home.

Edwina drove a Morris ambulance, which had very little leg room up front due to the compressed bonnet and engine, had made it difficult to get her legs and drive. John rejected her idea that he might prefer to lie down comfortably on a stretcher in the back, opting to struggle into the front and sit with her in the driver's compartment, with his wooden leg extended across and over the steering wheel. And that was how Penny's parents met and fell in love. They married two months later, on 15 July 1943, with John's brother, a soldier in the Canadian Army, as their best man. During their honeymoon they both went flying in an Auster with some Air Observation Post (AOP) pilots from RAF Penshurst, south of Chard, probably members of No 664 Squadron, associated with the Canadian 1st Army. That was John's first flight since being shot down, and may have rekindled his determination to fly again. He underwent a number of appointments at Roehampton Limb Fitting Centre where he was fitted with, and taught to walk with, a new artificial leg of lightweight metal and a confusion of straps and buckles.

He then started to badger the Air Ministry to commence flying again. John won the argument that the Red Cross Geneva Convention prohibited prisoners from entering into combat against their country of repatriation by pointing out that Italy had capitulated on 8 September 1943 and was no longer in the war. The Ministry agreed with him and he was given the green light to fly in single engine aircraft only. Following a rehabilitation course at Caistor in Lincolnshire, John's commission as a Pilot Officer was confirmed in the London Gazette of 7 November 1944, with a seniority date of 27 August, and he went on to fly Spitfires and Hurricanes until the war ended. His first posting was to RAF Scilly Isles, where a German POW working at the aerodrome designed a stirrup-like pedal attached to the rudder bar for John's 'tin foot'.

As John and Edwina were both in uniform, they met up



**Above: The commissioned John Hall.
Below: John and his Spitfire on the Scilly Isles.**



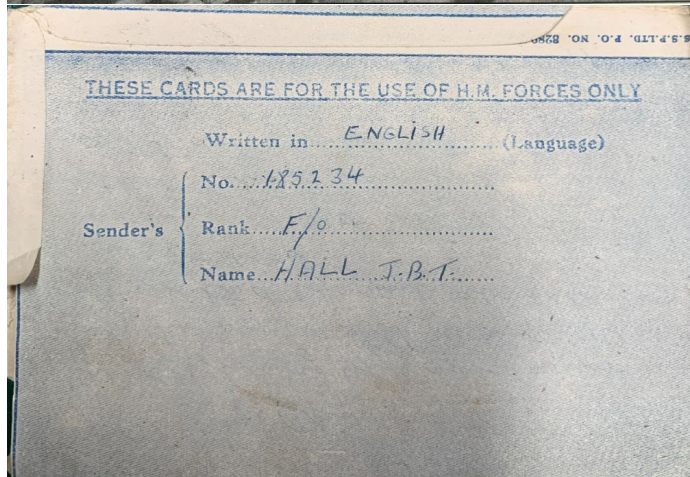
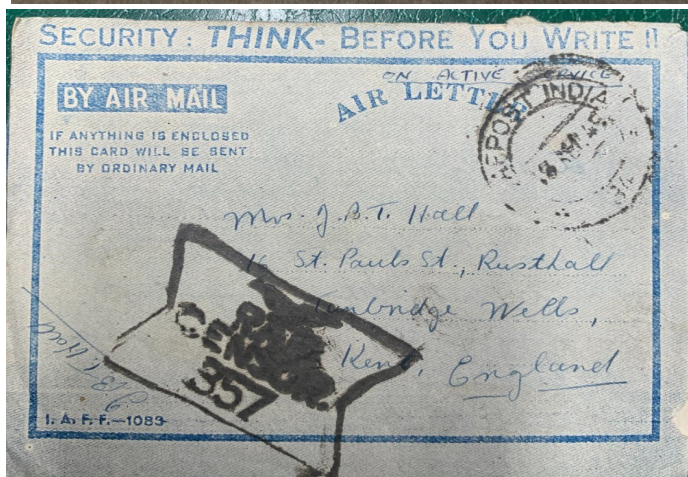
at weekends or during leave. In June 1944 they had agreed to meet in Penzance, and having stayed in the Station Hotel overnight they caught the ferry to St Mary's the next day. During the trip over they realised that there was a huge armada of ships sailing towards them – it was 6 June 1944 and the start of D-Day.

Edwina wrote in her book that the next 3 months back at Chessington were hell for her. Either she was dashing to and from air raid shelters clutching her gas mask, or on constant duty in her ambulance collecting patients injured by the latest German weapon, the V1, and recalled seeing a Tempest fighter tip the wing of a doodlebug and send it crashing into woods nearby.

In November 1944 Edwina was posted to RAF East Kirkby in Lincolnshire, a Lancaster bomber base. One day she heard over the tannoy, "Will LACW Hall report to the CO's office immediately." Wondering what she had done wrong she knocked and entered the office where she found, much to the CO.'s amusement and her relief, that John was sitting there, having flown up from the Scilly Isles.

After flying up to East Kirkby several times John wangled a posting for Edwina to RAF Torquay, an Initial Training Wing full of UAS and trainee pilots rather than stressed out bomber crews. This is where she celebrated VE Day on 8 May 1945, and where she discovered that John had been applying for postings to the Far East so he could continue to fly. He broke the news to her in a telephone call, saying that he would be away for a while and would write! Although he had applied to South East Command for an operational tour in the Pacific, he was posted to India and became the CO of 1344 Flight at RAF Sambre. No 1344 (Special Signals) Flight had formed at Gujrat within No 225 Group on 20 January 1945, equipped with six Hurricanes. Its role was to train personnel to control fighters, fighter-bombers and fighter recce aircraft in mobile warfare. The Flight had moved to Sambre in February 1945, from where it undertook calibration of a GCI station from March to June and then returned to normal training until disbanding on 6 December 1945. Sambre, located some 10 kilometres east of Belgaum, was the oldest airport in North Karnataka, built in 1942 by the RAF and used as a training site in World War II. In the photo below, John is standing front and

centre with his Flight at Sambre. Below that photo is a very early 'bluey', sent by John back to Edwina in Tunbridge Wells. While John was away, the Americans dropped the atomic bombs in Japan and the Second World War ended. Edwina, as a married woman, was demobilised on 23 August 1945 and had set up their first home in a 'very poky flat' in Tunbridge Wells by the time John returned from India, with an offer of a full time commission and six months to make a decision. John had gained his PPL in Cambridge before the war, and had always wanted a career in flying, but the loss of his leg meant that a commercial flying career was unlikely. So John and Edwina made a decision - they would become publicans! On 19 November 1946 they were offered The Blacksmiths Arms at Chiddingstone, and John applied for his release from the RAF. Running a pub was hard work, and in October 1950 they changed careers and became pig farmers. The photograph below shows John happily driving a Ferguson tractor, and if you look closely you can make out John's false leg sticking out of his shorts and tucked into his wellies. The family remained on the farm for many years, buying it outright in October 1968. John died on 6 July 1986, in Edwina's arms. As far as we know, he never met Douglas Bader!



The Mystery Cornishman - Corporal / Flight Lieutenant Ronald Bedford Pedlar

This rather wonderful wartime portrait of Ronald Bedford Pedlar was sent to me by his son, Jonathan, who is a dentist in Kingston, after one of his patients contacted me and told me about some incredible photograph albums that Jonathan had shown him while in the dentist's chair! Tracing Ronald's career is still a work in progress, and there is very little information appearing online.

So far, I know that Ronald Bedford Pedlar was born and lived in Truro. At the beginning of the war he had written to enlist in the RAF, and Jonathan has papers showing that he was called up by RAF Uxbridge to join the RAFVR with effect from 24 May 1940. Progressing through the photographs that Jonathan has emailed me, there is one of a convoy was sailing between Durban and Suez with the comment: "A photo I wasn't supposed to take, taken with a camera I wasn't supposed to have, though a porthole that wasn't supposed to be open!" There are then a number of photos of different personnel in Cairo and Helwan in 1941, and the picture on the right showing Arthur Tedder giving a speech at the HQRAFME Christmas Dinner in Cairo in 1941. Do I assume that Ronald was on the HQRAFME administration staff at this point?

The link to 33 Squadron, and the particular period that links most of the men in this issue, comes from the photograph below of Ronald in Cairo, and a comment that reads: "Summer 1942 - After a rather trying time at the Base Personnel Office in Cairo, I eventually succeeded in getting a posting to 33 Squadron at that time located at Gambut in the Western Desert. This shot was taken on Gezira Island Cairo during a few days leave prior to going into 'The Blue'. Today this area is known as Zamalek, and is characterised by upscale hotels, restaurants and pleasant gardens.



Ronald wrote against the next set of photographs: "After a brief stop at the Squadron base camp I joined 33 at Gambut. 4 days later Jerry broke through and we left in a hurry, heading east on a compass course across the Desert. We lived very roughly on the move for several days, eventually arriving unshaven at a landing strip near the Cairo – Alexandria road. There was a brief move up to an advanced landing strip near Alamein, but after losing several planes in quick succession the Squadron was moved to Edcu near Alex. for training."

The ORB shows that 'B' Party left Gambut for LG 75 near Sidi Barrani on the evening of 14 June. The Squadron was warned on the evening of 17 June to leave Gambut, and retreating east from the Gazala Line to Mersa Matruh and El Alamein, it went to Sidi Assiz (18th), LG 075 (19th), LG 076 (21st) and Sidi Heneish (24th) where it reequipped with Hurricane IICs. It then moved on to El Daba (27th) and LG 154 (29th). In July, the 1st Battle of El Alamein took place (1-27 July 1942) with 33 undertaking further moves to LG 72 (24th), LG 85 (28th) before settling at Edcu on 5-6 August for an extended leave and training period.

Ronald's photos overleaf of a Fieseler Storch in British markings, and a number of wrecked Axis aircraft at unknown locations, indicate that he stayed with the Squadron for the start of the 2nd Battle of El Alamein, the relief of Tobruk, and the push to Benina in December. The ORB tells us that AVM Coningham, AOC Western Desert, visited 33 at LG 154 on 15 October, about a week before the start of the 2nd Battle of El Alamein (23 October—4 November 1942). Sir Arthur Tedder, the AOCinC Middle East, also visited 33 on 5 November, by which time they were at LG 172. .

The Fieseler Storch was Coningham's favoured means of getting out and visiting his units, as these two quotes from Vincent Orange's book 'Coningham: A Biography of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham' confirms:

In the Western Desert 1942 (page 101): Coningham's possession of a Fieseler Storch (a German aircraft able to take off and land in a very small space) enabled him not merely to be in touch with the General without losing touch with his squadrons, but also to visit isolated units and formations in two or three hours which could not by other means have been visited in under two days'....

In Normandy 1944 (page 209): ...During these exhilarating days, Coningham flew his own Fieseler Storch from airfield to airfield, as in North Africa....



Above and below: An unshaven Ronald, and colleagues, during the Gazala Gallop.

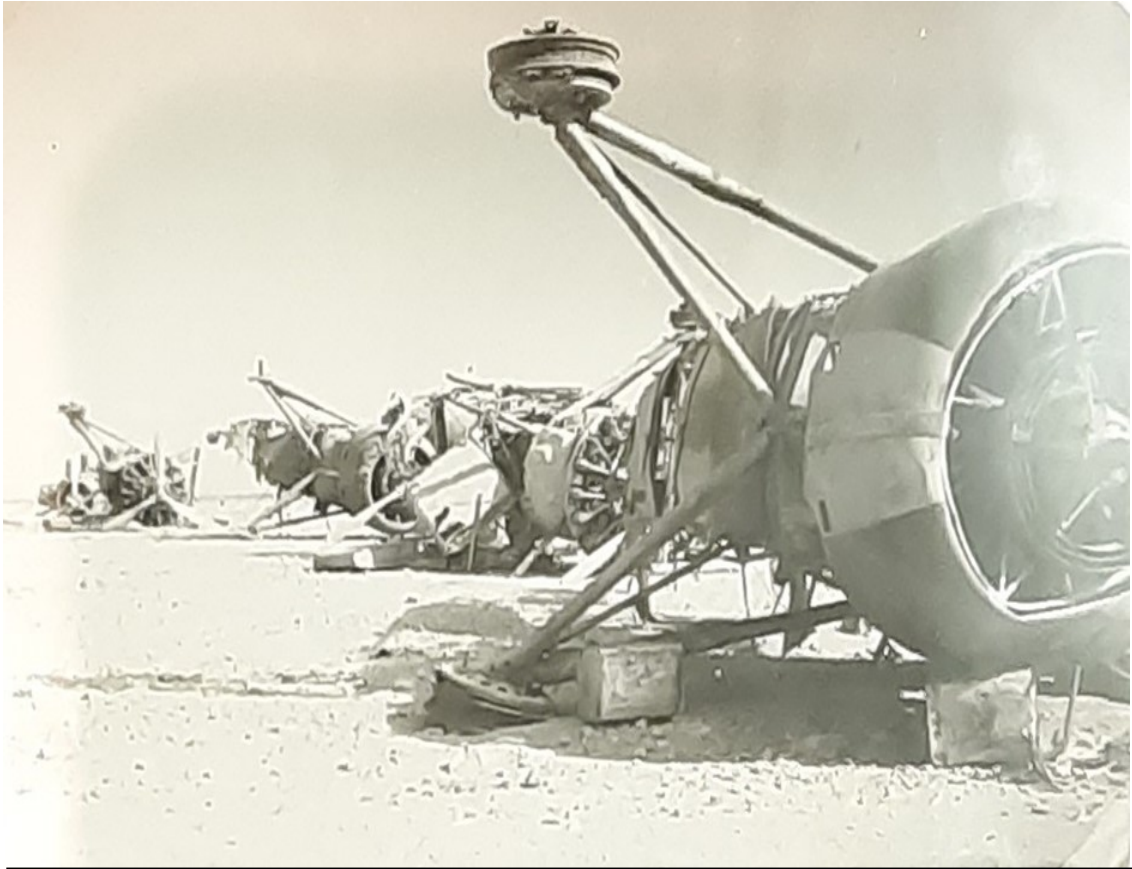


Ronald's caption reads: "Corp. of Accounts cooking a meal at Edcu."

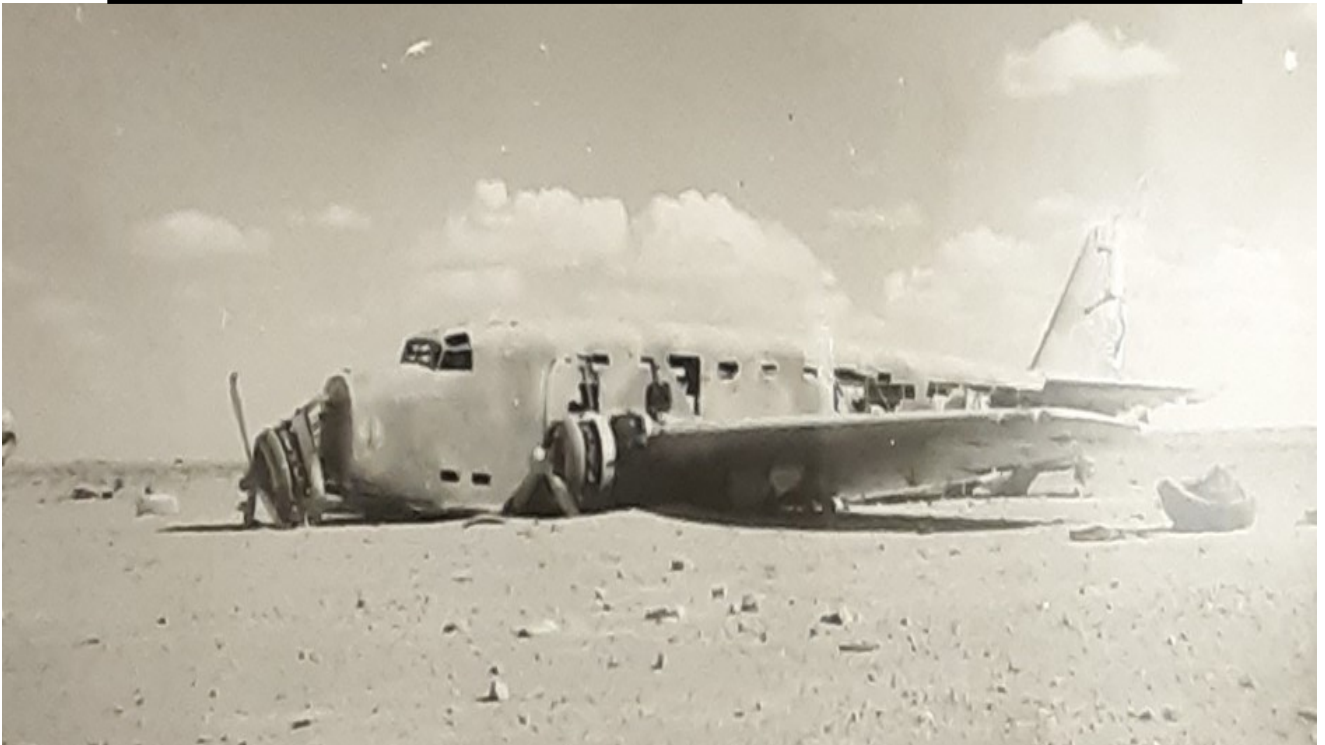


LG 154 - 15 October 1942: "Air Vice Marshal Coningham A.O.C. Western Desert visited the Squadron and addressed all personnel, this greatly enheartened everybody."





Above: Italian CR 32s?
Below: Italian SM 81?



The next set of photographs start in May 1943 and show 232 AMES (Air Ministry Experimental Station) at Kilo 32 along with some of the personnel in that unit. Jonathan said that his father had told him that he was on a mobile radar base and had found out that he was on a unit which was part of the 'Dirty Tricks' brigade, as he called them, after watching a programme on TV.

Throughout the early development of radar the title adopted to describe units employing the equipment was 'Air Ministry Experimental Station (AMES)', which was intended to disguise the true purpose of the equipment. This system continued into and throughout World War 2 and eventually covered a wide range of units operating a variety of equipment, such as search radars, GEE, OBOE, GEE-H. According to the records, 232 AMES was shown awaiting despatch to the Middle East, presumably from the UK, in November 1941 and probably becoming operational in Cairo in June 1942. The unit moved to Aleppo, Syria in January 1944, Helwan in Egypt in April and then to Cardito, Italy in June.

Next there are some strange and unexplained photographs dated July 1943 which appear to show a group of men in what could be NBC or decontamination suits in the middle of the desert?

Shortly before Christmas 1943 Ronald commissioned as a Pilot Officer on probation (emergency) in the Administrative and Special Duties branch on 21 December 1943, which was published in the London Gazette of 29 February 1944. By this time Ronald appears to have moved to another unit in Syria, as he has photographs of 8014 AMES at Latakia from January to March 1944. Unfortunately there are no records regarding 8014 AMES. The London Gazette of 7 July 1944, under the Administrative and Special Duties branch column, states 'Confirmation and promotion. Pilot Officers (probation) confirmed in appointments and to be Flying Officers (war subs) - R.B. Pedlar (159551), effective date of promotion 21 June 1944', six 6 months after he commissioned.

I have yet to see the whole album collection, we are hoping to invite Jonathan to 33 Squadron to visit the History Room, but I was sent pictures of Ronald on leave in Luxor in February 1945, a set of Daily Routine Orders from the Empress of Australia, signed by Flight Lieutenant R.B. Pedlar, Assistant Adjutant on 16 February 1946 on behalf of Wing Commander D.A. Peacock D.F.C., and his Ration Card with a '10 M.U. RAF Hullavington' stamp dated 18 March 1946.

Apart from the men in the strange suits, one of Ronald's interesting artefacts is shown bottom right - a cheap World War Two version of JP233? I hope there are more interesting photographs and artefacts to come.



Corporal Douglas Haig Dickson (951357)

33 Squadron_Instrument Repairer

Douglas Haig Dickson, known to most people as 'Bob', joined the RAFVR on 16 February 1940, aged 23. His father had served in the British Army in World War One, fought during the Battle of the Somme and had returned home badly wounded shortly before Douglas was born in August 1916. Bob admitted that he was a terrible sailor, so the RAF was probably the best bet for enlistment. Little did Douglas know, as he passed through No. 2 Recruits Centre at RAF Cardington, and during his technical training at RAF Cranwell, No. 19 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Kinloss and No 11 School of Technical Training at RAF Hereford that his career would see him living in austere conditions close to the front lines more often than not, be involved in some of the most important land battles of the war, or that he would amass some 15 000 sea miles onboard RN ships during his time in the RAF.

After his Instrument Repairer training was complete, Bob had a brief spell in March 1941 at No 10 OTU at RAF Abingdon, where Whitley night bomber crews were training, before he received the news that he was being posted to No 107 Maintenance Unit (MU) at RAF Kasafareet, an airfield close to the Great Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal. According to Bob's son, Graeme, who has been kind enough to provide me with a lot of information about his father's military career, Bob was onboard the MV Highland Chieftain when it left Liverpool on 22 April 1941, arriving at 107 MU on 21 June 1941. The journey reinforced Bob's decision not to join the Navy, as at one point during particularly heavy storms he had to be tied to stanchions on the deck because he was too sick to go down below!

As part of 107 MU Bob would have been a busy man, as aircraft were constantly being assembled, tested and shipped out to squadrons all over the Western Desert. These vital replacements either arrived by sea in crates, or via the famous Takoradi Route from West Africa. He remained with the MU for almost 18 months before being posted to one of those squadrons that had been in constant need of replacement aircraft since arriving back in Egypt in June 1941 - No 33 Squadron. On 31 December 1942 Corporal Douglas Dickson (951357) joined 33 at the captured German/Italian airbase of Benina in Libya, as it advanced in support of the Allied ground troops chasing Rommel and his Afrika Korps out of Libya after the success at El Alamein. From 33's records it is very clear that 1942 was a tough year for the Squadron, losing 26 pilots killed in action and six pilots either prisoners of war or missing.



Just as his trade specialisation implies, as an I Rep 1 Bob was responsible for checking and repairing instruments, almost exclusively aircraft instruments but I Reps could easily turn their hand to almost any 'normal' instrument if required. It had been part of Trade Group 1 since 1919, when the technician was known as an Instrument Maker & Camera Repairer. These men and women were responsible for maintaining and repairing all aircraft instruments on unit strength, or which came to their workshop or depot for normal servicing and calibration, and, provided they had the correct test equipment, for calibrating or testing completed instruments, either actually fitted in aircraft or on special test rigs in the workshop. Certain instruments required quite elaborate and exact testing or calibration (such as artificial horizons or automatic pilots), and if this equipment was not available, the instrument repairer



Top: From the Squadron's albums, the caption says, 'B' Flt—Bersis. (Donor is holding the flag).
Middle: One of Bob's photos, with the mysterious flag.
Bottom left: Another of Bob's photos showing the tented site at Merville, with an enlarged picture on the right showing 6033 Arm(ourers?) and the mysterious flag symbol?

would be responsible for the disconnection and removal of such instruments and then despatch them to another depot that could carry out this work. Special containers were on hand to protect particularly delicate instruments during transit, containers which were frequently marked with special warnings, including the exhortation: 'Aircraft Instrument - Handle like Eggs'.

Unfortunately we have no details of Bob's daily workload with 33, but the following extract from an I Rep's diary on a Hurricane squadron during the Battle of Britain gives us an idea:

" I passed out from Cranwell in February 1940 at the tender age of 16 and three months, and was posted to 56 Squadron at North Weald as an Instrument Repairer group 2. I was attached to 'A' flight. After some wandering around in Suffolk and Kent (Biggin Hill) we went back to base at North Weald. 'A' flight was moved to dispersal on the north side of the drome, in tents alongside large two-plane earth bays with an air raid shelter.

We had to ensure that the aircraft were ready from dawn onwards, even when the squadron was not at readiness. There was only one Instrument Repairer per flight, which meant that I was on duty until flight was stood down - usually after dusk. My job was to ensure that all the instruments were serviceable and all the oxygen bottles full on the six aircraft which comprised the flight, plus any spare aircraft. All instruments which required changing had to be done when the squadron was stood down or at night with shielded torches.

To save everyone getting up at about 4am (from a small squad of, say mechanic, fitter, armourer, radio mechanic, plus me) it was soon decided that I should not get up every morning but that one of the others would do my inspection and get me out of bed if there were any snags. When I was up I was usually asked to sit in a cockpit while the engine warmed up, while the others attended to the other aircraft. They would return one to cockpit and two on tail while the magnetos were checked when on full throttle."

The picture opposite shows a WAAF I Rep testing an artificial horizon, described in the original wartime caption as one of the most essential of flying instruments. This fully qualified 20 year old I Rep was working in the calibration room 'of an important Bomber Command station', no doubt enjoying far better living and working conditions than Douglas would have encountered during his time with 33 Squadron.

From January 1943 to April 1944, 33 Squadron was employed primarily as convoy escort in that part of the Mediterranean, guarding vital cargo and troop



Original wartime caption: 'One of the highly specialised jobs in the R.A.F. in which W.A.A.F. are rendering outstanding service is that of Instrument Repairer'.

convoys. Douglas moved with the Squadron from Benina to Bersis, an airfield near Benghazi in February 1943, and then further west towards Tripoli to Misurata airfield in June 1943. When Italy surrendered in September 1943 the Squadron moved back to Bersis, and a rumour began to circulate that 33 was destined for North West Africa but, much to their disappointment, that move was cancelled in October.

In January 1944 33 Squadron moved further east, back to Mersa Matruh in Egypt, where it had been based when the Second World War began. At Mersa Matruh preparations commenced for a return to the UK, and the Squadron sailed back from Egypt at the beginning of April. Arriving in Liverpool on 23 April 1944, all personnel were taken by train to North Weald. All of the aircrew and 75% of the ground crew then proceeded on 7 days' disembarkation leave, the remainder staying at North Weald to assist with the re-equipping of the Squadron's new aircraft, the Spitfire Mk IX. It was during this leave period that Bob was able to get back to Scotland and see his girlfriend, Vair Boyd, who he had not seen for 3 years.

When he got back from leave at the beginning of May, Bob may have been surprised by the changes that were then imposed on the Squadron now that it was under 2nd Tactical Air Force (2TAF). Formed in June 1943, 2TAF was organised into wings, squadrons and

servicing echelons on airfields, and were therefore mobile and capable of operating indefinitely from forward airfields or Advanced Landing Grounds (ALG).

Wings were initially formed with three squadrons each although, from late July 1944, they usually had four squadrons each. Usually a wing contained only one type of aircraft and was based at one airfield. 2TAF squadrons usually had thirty aircraft and thirty crews, of which twenty four were active and six were reserve.

The idea was that a squadron could operate from any airfield or airstrip as required and not have to worry about any administrative and logistic matters. It was the airfield that provided the headquarters staff, control, signals, meteorological staff, supply, catering, transport, police, defence and so forth.

Officially, No 6033 Servicing Echelon was formed at North Weald on 22 April 1944 to service No 33 Squadron's Spitfires and it was disbanded on 1 December 1947. In theory, it could be attached to any airfield as required, on a scale of one per squadron. In practice servicing echelons served the same squadron more or less permanently and were trained in the servicing of only one type of aircraft, while the Servicing Commandos, based on Refuelling and Rearming Strips nearer the Front, were trained to service more than one type of aircraft.

While training began in earnest for D-Day, 33 also found itself heavily involved in the bombing campaign against V1, V2 and V3 sites in the Low Countries. After D-Day, 33 became part of 135 Wing and readied itself for a move to the Continent. On 31 August 1944 it moved to Caen in France, spent a short period spread out between Caen, Le Treport and Lympne, and then moved up to Merville in France on 11 September. After the capture of Walcheren and the opening of the port of Antwerp, 135 Wing (33, 222, 349 and 485 Squadrons) moved up to Maldegem on 2 November, close to the Belgian-Dutch border. Both 33 and 222 left Maldegem on 15 December 1944 to return to the UK and re-equip with Tempest Vs at Predannack, but

Bob managed to get permission to return early to the UK. Having got engaged during his disembarkation leave in April, Bob married his fiancée, Vair, in Edinburgh on 11 December 1944.

In February the Squadron went back into Europe with their Tempest Vs and after supporting the Rhine Crossings from the Gilze-Rijen airbase 33, along with 222 and 274 - the squadron formed from elements of 33, 80 and 112 Squadrons in August 1940 - ended up at Quackenbruck in Germany when the war finished. By 9 June 1945 they were at Dedelstorf, and having been a compositor before the war Bob helped to produce the 135 Wing newspaper, the 'Dedelstorfer Wochenblatt', which then became the 'Fassberger Wochenblatt', when 33 moved to Fassberg on 23 October 1945. There are a couple of incomplete collections available in the UK, but as yet I have been unable to look at them because the COVID restrictions have kept Reading Rooms closed.

Bob stayed with 33 until after the war had finished, becoming part of the occupying forces in Germany. He had served with 33 Squadron during some of the key campaigns and battles of the Second World War, several of which are displayed on the Squadron's Standard as Battle Honours: Egypt and Libya (1940-1943), Normandy (1944), France and Germany (1944-1945), Walcheren and Rhine. Bob was discharged on 8 December 1945, and I believe that he went back to being a compositor. The Dickson family emigrated to Australia in the sixties and Graeme's 98 year old mother, Vair, and his brother still live over there. His mother said that Douglas had no desire to remain in the RAF after the war, but he always felt that he had been part of an important job which was done well.

Graeme is very keen to see the propellor, and has offered to come up from Dorset and bring some of his father's collections for us to view. I, for one, have never seen a complete newspaper, just cuttings stuck into the Squadron's photo albums, as you will see on the following pages, which also show more of Bob's photographs. Let's hope it won't be too long.



Loot! Note the Group and Wing markings on the car.



From the Squadron's albums: 'We were here when the war ended.'



Quackenbruck, May 1945: Two days before VE Day, two German Heinkel HE111 aircraft flew in from the Russian Front and surrendered.





Above: 33 Squadron aircrew, Quackenbruck May 1945. Squadron Leader A W Bower DFC, is in the centre of the front row, with Flight Lieutenant 'Lucky' Luckhoff to his right, and Flight Lieutenant R J 'Bluey' Dall DFC to his left.

Below: 6033 DSE at Quackenbruck , with Bob sat on the front row, third from the left. A '6000' series indicates 2TAF, ADGB and Fighter Command units, with the Squadron number thereafter. We know 'SE' stands for 'Servicing Echelon', I cannot find out what the 'D' stands for.





Above: Quackenbruck Main Gate.
 Below: Bob's picture of 33's propellor, somewhat different to the one on display in 33 today.



20 Apr ORB entry: 'The squadron is no longer under canvas since there are a number of buildings at Quackenbruck.'



Dedelstorfer Wochenblatt

135 WING ROYAL AIR FORCE

No. 2

Wednesday, 11th July, 1945

FREE

Wing Personality of the Week

SQUADRON Leader A. W. ("Bill") Bower, D.F.C., commands No. 33 Squadron, and hails from Pretoria, South Africa.

Joining the South African Air Force in April, 1940, he trained as a pilot in Rhodesia, transferring to the R.A.F. in January, 1941.

He "touched down" at 56 O.T.U., Suttonbridge, late in 1941, and for his zealously there spent six months as gunnery instructor at the C.G.S.

A short stay in Northern Ireland with 134 Squadron preceded a posting to 131 Squadron at Anglesey in April, 1942.

Came an "ops" tour with the Squadron at Tangmere ("Wish we were there now!"), which included the old "sweeps" and shipping strikes.

August, 1942, marks a milestone in his service life — his first "kill", a Dornier 217, and a recommendation for a commission — but don't blame the one on the other!

The memorable Dieppe show found "Bill" still logging flying hours and helping the ground troops with air support and cover. Shades of 'D' day!

In May, 1944, 33 Squadron, then at Lympne, received "Bill" into its midst as a Flight Commander; and soon 33 was to be found helping 135 Wing to make history in 2nd T.A.F.

He is very naive about his own exploits, but his promotion to Squadron Commander of 33 in March of this year and the D.F.C. on April 13 — who said 13 was unlucky? — speak for themselves, "Bill" recalls with pride, and rightly so, one of the Squadron's finest shows after Falaise Gap which netted during one sortie 20 MET destroyed; 16 smokers and 10 damaged on the ground.

As regards the future "well I'd like to pay a visit to South Africa"! But we gather that England is not without its attractions either.

TRIBUTE

All who knew F/L R.J. ("Bluey") Dall D.F.C., of 33 Squadron, will remember him for his keenness and enthusiasm in all things, and for his great sportsmanship.

He was one of the original "Typhoon" pilots in 2nd T.A.F., and was "gonged" on his first tour whilst flying "Typhoons".

After his first tour he went to Napier as a test pilot, shortly afterwards going home to New Zealand.

Returning to England in March, 1945, he was posted to 33 Squadron, becoming "A" Flight Commander in May.

He was a daring pilot of sound judgment and skill; and his fellow countrymen and many other R.A.F. friends will miss his pleasing personality.

Printed and published every Wednesday by the "Dedelstorfer Wochenblatt" Company at Intelligence Section, 135 Wing, Royal Air Force, Dedelstorf.

Above: Cuttings from the second edition of the 'Dedelstorfer Wochenblatt', introducing O.C. 33 to the readers, and with a tribute to 'Bluey' Dall. Bob Douglas would have worked on this edition.

Below: The paper was printed at the 'Cellesche Zeitung' (lit. 'Celle Newspaper'), a town 40 km west of Dedelstorf and 40 km south of Fassberg. The 'Cellesche Zeitung' is still printed in this building today.



"WHERE IS THE 'WOCHENBLATT' PRODUCED EACH WEEK?"



Pilot. II Robert Francis Percifull (3002112)

RAF



Some of you reading this article today may recall attending the wonderful 100th Anniversary Parade and Dinner that was held in 33 Squadron's hangar at RAF Benson in January 2016. One of the guests of honour that day was Robert Percifull. Robert was mentioned in the Autumn 2016 issue, a veteran of the Squadron who was also celebrating his 90th birthday. Unfortunately I never had the chance to interview Robert, who sadly passed away on 6 January 2021.

Robert served on 33 from July 1947 until the Squadron was shipped out to the Far East in 1949. Annoyingly there are some major gaps in the Squadron Operational Records: April to November 1946, which covers two detachments to Gatow in Berlin, and April to December 1947, which covers a little known detachment and the move from Fassberg to Gutersloh. However, thanks to his daughter, Dr Elise Percifull, who discovered a box in her parents' attic full of letters and photographs that Robert had sent home, we now have more details of his tour on 33 in post-war Germany and beyond, with a very rare photograph of that little known detachment to Zeltweg in Austria.

Robert Francis Percifull came from the railway town of Wolverton in Buckinghamshire and his father worked in the engineering department of the Railway Works. A clever lad, Robert became an engineering apprentice in the Works when he left school at 16, but in early 1944, as soon as he was 18, he applied to join the RAF. He was an avid reader of 'Aeroplane' magazine and Elise has copies dating back to the late 1930s that Robert still enjoyed looking at in his retirement. Clearly his focus on becoming a pilot had started at an early age. Elise remembers her father telling her the story of him going to London on the train for an interview and one of the interviewers being impressed that he played the violin.

The outcome of the interview was that Robert was accepted and sent to St Andrews UAS in April 1944 to do a 6-month course. According to what she found out on the internet, Elise told me that this was created as a fast-track system, mostly for more mature entrants and boys from public schools. According to his log book Robert then began his basic and flying training, progressing through the system as follows:

T.A.C.R.C. Torquay: Oct-Dec 1944

30.R.C. Bridgnorth: 1 Jan -14 Feb 1945

Aircrew Officers School, Hereford: 14 Feb- 4 Apr 1945

11 E.F.T.S. Perth: 16 Apr - 13 May 1945

19 F.T.S. Cranwell: 14 May 1945 - 23 Jul 1946

54 O.T.U. Leeming Bar: 24 Jul - 29 Sep 1946

A.C.A.U. Bircham Newton: 30 Sep - 22 Nov 1946

61 O.T.U. Keevil: 19 Oct 1946 - 3 Jun 1947

S.P.D.C. Burton Woods: 6 Jun-19 July 1947

33 Squadron B.A.F.O. Fassberg: 23 Jul 1947

Unfortunately there are gaps in the 33 Squadron ORBs from 1 April 1946 to 1 December 1946 and again from 1 April 1947 to 1 January 1948, so the period when Robert arrived on 33 is missing. Having arrived on 33 Squadron in July 1947 the earliest reference to 'Plt. II Percifull' I could find was 17 February 1948, flying with the C.O. and Pilot II Tyrer, who was previously listed as a Flight Sergeant. I do not know whether Robert arrived on 33 Squadron as a Sergeant, or when he was rebadged as part of the new aircrew rank system, introduced in July 1946.

We are fortunate that Robert was writing home 2 or 3 times a week, so Elise is busy sorting through an extensive collection of old letters trying to make sense of the information in his log book. So far she has found out that her father crossed from Harwich to the Hook of Holland on the 20-21 July 1947 and on the 22nd was assigned to 135 Wing's 33 Squadron. He travelled from Bad Eilsen to Fassberg the following day. There he wrote, "I have at least a week of messing around to do as the whole wing is at present in Austria on an exercise until 5th August".

Having got thoroughly bored he went to the Adjutant on 28 July and asked if he might join them in Zeltweg since their stay had been extended to 11 August. A signal was duly sent, the answer came back 'yes' and so on 3 August he left for Zeltweg in an Anson (XIX) with Flight Lieutenant Cadman as first pilot. They could not fly in a straight line because of 'avoiding the Russian air zone' and stopped overnight in Vienna, arriving at Zeltweg on the 4th where he met 'some of the blokes'. He writes that on 6 August he was on his own again (there was no plane for him there) because the rest of the Squadron spent the day going to Italy and back 'not doing anything there, it's just to let the Yugoslavs know we are still around'.

He doesn't write anything more about this, and on the 10 August there was a briefing when 33 were told they were to go straight back to Fassberg, while 26 and 16 (also at Zeltweg) were to return via Vienna with "...orders from Group to 'show the flag' by doing a







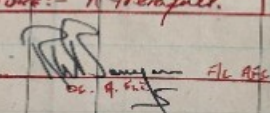
Aircrew Rank	RAF Rank	Insignia
Master Aircrew Warrant Officer Pilot, renamed Master Pilot in 1946.	Warrant Officer	
Aircrew I Flight Sergeant Pilot / Pilot I	Flight Sergeant	
Aircrew II Sergeant Pilot/ Pilot II	Sergeant	
Aircrew III Sergeant Pilot/ Pilot III	Corporal	
Aircrew IV (Sergeant Pilot/ Pilot IV)	LAC	
Aircrew Cadet	Trainee	

Table showing post-WW2 RAF aircrew ranks, used from 1 July 1946 until 1950. Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) serving as aircrew were assigned different rank badges to distinguish them from Other Ranks (ORs) in ground trades. Only the Master Aircrew rank and insignia is still in use today.



May 1947: 33 Squadron's Tempest F.2s at Fassberg.

Year		AIRCRAFT		Pilot, or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, Pupil or Passenger	DUTY (Including Results and Remarks)	SINGLE-ENGINE AIRCRAFT			
Month	Date	Type	No.				DAY		NIGHT	
						Dual (1)	Pilot (2)	Dual (3)	Pilot (4)	
33 Squadron B.A.F.O. (FASSBERG)										
Totals Brought Forward										
August	5	ANSON (XIV)		F/L CADMAN	SELF					
"	12	ANSON (XIV)		F/L JAMES	SELF					
"	16	HARVARD II	WES69	SELF	F/O WALKER					
"	18	TEMPEST II	SRV	SELF				1:00.		
"	19	TEMPEST II	SRV	SELF				1:00.		
"	19	TEMPEST II	SRV	SELF				1:25		
"	21	TEMPEST II	GRK	SELF				1:30.		
"	21	TEMPEST II	SRV	SELF				1:05		
"	22	TEMPEST II	SRV	SELF				1:15		
"	22	HARVARD II	WES69	SELF	F/L JENKIN			1:00.		
"	25	TEMPEST II	SRV	SELF				1:10		
"	26	TEMPEST II	SRH	SELF				1:10.		
"	27	TEMPEST II	SRH	SELF				1:25		
"	27	HARVARD	WES69	SELF	F/L TAYLOR			1:00.		
Summary for August 1947.										
Unit: 33 Sqn 135 Wing.				Aircraft		4 TEMPEST II				
Date: 1-9-47.				Flown		2 HARVARD II's.				
Signature: R. Perfull.						3				
 FL PERFULL DL. 9. 4. 47										
GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]							Totals Carried Forward			
297							10:50			
10							3:10			
10020							15735			

Above: Bob's logbook for August 1947.

Below: A rare photo of 33 Squadron aircraft lined up at Zeltweg Airbase in Austria.



Year 1947	AIRCRAFT		Pilot, or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, Pupil or Passenger	DUTY (Including Results and Remarks)	SINGLE-ENGINE AIRCRAFT				
	Type	No.				DAY		NIGHT		
Month	Date									
SEPT					Totals Brought Forward	100:20	151:35	6:25	6:25	14:00
SEPT.	12	TEMPEST II	SR-5	SELF	GATOW - FASSBERG (Arrived) LOCAL FLYING @ G.C.A. X-Country - (BASE - BRUNSWICK - HAMBURG - BASE) @ G.C.A. LOCAL FLYING @ G.C.A. G.C.A. GATOW - FASSBERG. AIR TEST @ G.C.A.	1:00				
"	15	TEMPEST II	SR-3	SELF		1:30				
"	16	TEMPEST II	SR-0	SELF		1:20				
"	17	TEMPEST II	SR-0	SELF		1:15				
"	19	TEMPEST II	SR-7	SELF		:40				
"	29	TEMPEST II	SR-T	SELF		:40				
"	1	TEMPEST II	SR-T	SELF	1:00					
SUMMARY for: - SEPTEMBER 1947. UNIT: - 33 Sqn 185 Wing. DATE: - 5.10.47. SIGNATURE: - R.Y. Percival.					AIRCRAFT } 1 TEMPEST II FLOWN } 2 } 3 } 4	130				
R.S. Allen oc. 9. 47.					R.S. Allen s/c. oc. 33 Sqn.					
OCT.	6	TEMPEST II	SR-7	SELF	DIVE BOMBING. (New type bomb)	:30				
"	9	TEMPEST II	SR-7	SELF	DIVE BOMBING	:25				
"	10	TEMPEST II	SR-2	SELF	AIR TEST (all w/s)	:30				
"	10	TEMPEST II	SR-2	SELF	AIR TEST (2/c 2000 ft)	:30				
"	17	TEMPEST II	SR-D	SELF	ARMY COOP. - BEAT UP OF GUNS @ H. LAZAR	1:10				
"	20	TEMPEST II	SR-D	SELF	INTERCEPTION OF METEORS from LIBERATION	1:20				
GRAND TOTAL (Cols. (1) to (10)) 296 Hrs. 40 Min.					Totals Carried Forward	100:20	164:30			14:00

Above: Robert's logbook for September 1947.

Below: One of Robert's photographs of 33 Squadron's Tempest at Gatow in Berlin.



formation flypast slap over the top. We expect the Russians to fire a bit afterwards, as of course it is their zone'.

The pilots of 33 arrive back in Fassberg on the 11th August - but ground crew are travelling back by train which takes days, so not much flying until after the 15th." His log book records on the 16th he flew a Harvard IIB (No.KF569) as 'safety pilot on I/F'. From 18th August he is flying Tempest II almost exclusively - on the 18th and 19th it was 5R-V on 'sector recce', then in the afternoon of the 19th he took 5R-K on a height climb to 25,000 ft which in his letter to 'Mum' he records with great delight!

33 Squadron Operational Record Book Extracts:

Pilot II Percifull R.F. (3002112)

1948

We know that on 1 January 1948 33 Squadron was at Gutersloh, busy preparing to deploy to the Armament Practice Camp at Lubeck. Bad weather held them up, and it took the Squadron two days to get to the Camp over 4-5 January. On 14 January a 3 Squadron aircraft flew into the sea at Lubeck, killing the pilot, and by 29 January the Squadron's aircraft had been grounded as a consequence of investigations into the fatal crash. The engineers began to fix a fault that had been discovered during the crash investigation, but spares did not arrive from Gutersloh until 7 February, and it took until 11 February until the aircraft were ready to fly back to Gutersloh. The ORB states that as there was no flying going on, the NCO pilots completed a General Service Course run by the RAF Regiment between 29 January and 5 February, followed by some flying on the range, and then an Aircraft Recognition Test.

12 Feb: Today gave every promise, at first, of being just as hopeless from the weather's point of view, as yesterday. However, by lunchtime, it had begun to clear, and at approximately 1430 hours the Squadron Commander decided that it was safe to get the kit in the aircraft. Although this might be thought to be tempting providence, everything turned out O.K. and by 1500 hours, 5 aircraft, the Squadron Commander, F/O. C.W. HILL, Pilot II TYRER, Pilot II JOHNSON and Pilot KING were en route for Gutersloh. They were closely followed by Pilot II PERCIFULL, who was held up temporarily with an oil leak. The weather was perfect the whole way and by 1500 hours everyone was safely down and the aircraft pushed into the hangars. Nothing more could be done then, and everyone then returned to get themselves once more re-instated in their 'home from home'. A rather interesting point was the considerable surprise shown by the other two squadrons when we arrived with 6 serviceable aircraft. They apparently had none!

17 Feb: A section of three aircraft, the Squadron

Commander, Pilot II's TYRER and PERCIFULL, took off. After a successful recce was completed, formation practice followed and the whole trip brought to a conclusion with a tail chase led by the Squadron Commander. Having familiarised themselves with the (Nordhorn) range, the same section of three went off after lunch on R/F. (Rocket Firing). A total of 22 R/Ps (Rocket Projectiles) were loosed off, two aircraft having hang ups.

18 Feb: Only two sorties were flown this morning. Pilots II TYRER and PERCIFULL were airborne at 1000 hours on Cine gun exercises and cloud flying.

20 Feb: At 1000 hours Pilot II PERCIFULL was airborne on an aerobatic trip.

25 Feb: Flying started straight after lunch, F/Lt. BUNYAN and Pilot II PERCIFULL both doing aerobatics.

27 Feb: The Squadron Commander held a last minute briefing and in company with Pilot II PERCIFULL, F/Lt. BUNYAN and Pilot II TYRER, were airborne at 1230 hours. News received later in the day that they had arrived safely at Thorney Island to give a practical demonstration at the School of Land/Air Warfare.

5 Mar: Later in the afternoon, a Dakota landed with the ground crew returning from England. Also on board was Pilot II KING returning from leave, who had, on the trip over, acted as second pilot. The Squadron Commander, with F/Lt. BUNYAN, A.F.C. and Pilot II TYRER landed a little later on, and upon enquiry, told the rest of the squadron that th detachment had been a success. Pilot II PERCIFULL remained in England with his aircraft owing to it being unserviceable.

10 Mar: Later in the afternoon Pilot II TYRER and Pilot II PERCIFULL returned from England, both having a good trip.

12 Mar: Today saw a lot of activity, with a formation of four led by F/Lt. BUNYAN, A.F.C. with Pilot II BROOKS, Pilot II TYRER and Pilot II PERCIFULL, which got off at 1045, closely followed at 1055 by another formation of three led by F/Lt. GALL with F/O. D.B.R. HILL and Pilot II JOHNSON. These two formations joined, by arrangement, and did several runs over the airfield, the last time being in a large VIC which was well done.

15 Mar: At 0915 hours at formation of four aircraft with a spare, took off led by F/Lt. BUNYAN, A.F.C. with Pilot II PERCIFULL, F/Lt. GALL and Pilot II JOHNSON for an interception exercise with Superfortresses. Unfortunately no contact was made, and they returned at 1050.

17 Mar: A formation of four took off at 1030 led by F/O. D.B.R. HILL and accompanied by Pilot II JOHNSON, Pilot II PERCIFULL and F/O. BARBER, did close and battle exercises.

25 Mar: A rocket firing programme was arranged and carried out at 1105 hours with four aircraft led by the Squadron Commander, followed by Pilot II JOHNSON, F/Lt BUNYAN, A.F.C. and Pilot II PERCIFULL.....The break for Easter starts tonight, until Tuesday morning, although there is a standby of five aircraft and Pilots. The Pilots are F/O D.B.R. HILL, F/Lt. GALL, D.F.C. Pilot II KING, Pilot II JOHNSON and Pilot II PERCIFULL.

29-30 Apr: 'B' Flight 33 Squadron detach from Gutersloh with eight aircraft to RAF Station Gatow, Berlin.

4 Jun: 'B' Flight 33 Squadron return to RAF Station Gutersloh.

3 Jul: Party in the Malcolm Club to bid S/Ldr Allen farewell and welcome S/Ldr Smallwood.

6 Aug: General Flying Training was carried out throughout the day. In the afternoon F/Lt Bunyan, F/Lt Langer and P.II. Percifull practiced formation aerobatics until a cowling fell off the leader aircraft, thus bringing the exercise to an end.

9 Sep: F/Lt Bunyan took an aircraft to Manston with 16 Squadron for the Battle of Britain flypast and P.II. Percifull also went taking a 16 Squadron aircraft.

22 Sep: In the evening the C.O. very generously threw a farewell party at the Officers' Club in Gutersloh. He fortunately returned from Manston in time to be present and he introduced us to S/Ldr Furse, our new C.O.

30 Sep: Pilot II Percifull listed on 'A' Flight strength throughout the month at Gutersloh:

C.O. Sqn. Ldr. Furse.

'A' Flight

Flt. Lt Bunyan AFC

Fg Off Henderson

F/O Barber

P.II Vine

P.II Tyrer

P.II Percifull

P.II Brooks

B Flight

Flt. Lt. Gall DFC

Fg.Off. Wood DFC

Fg.Off. Hill D.B.R.

Fg.Off. Hill C.W.

P.II Johnson

P.II. King

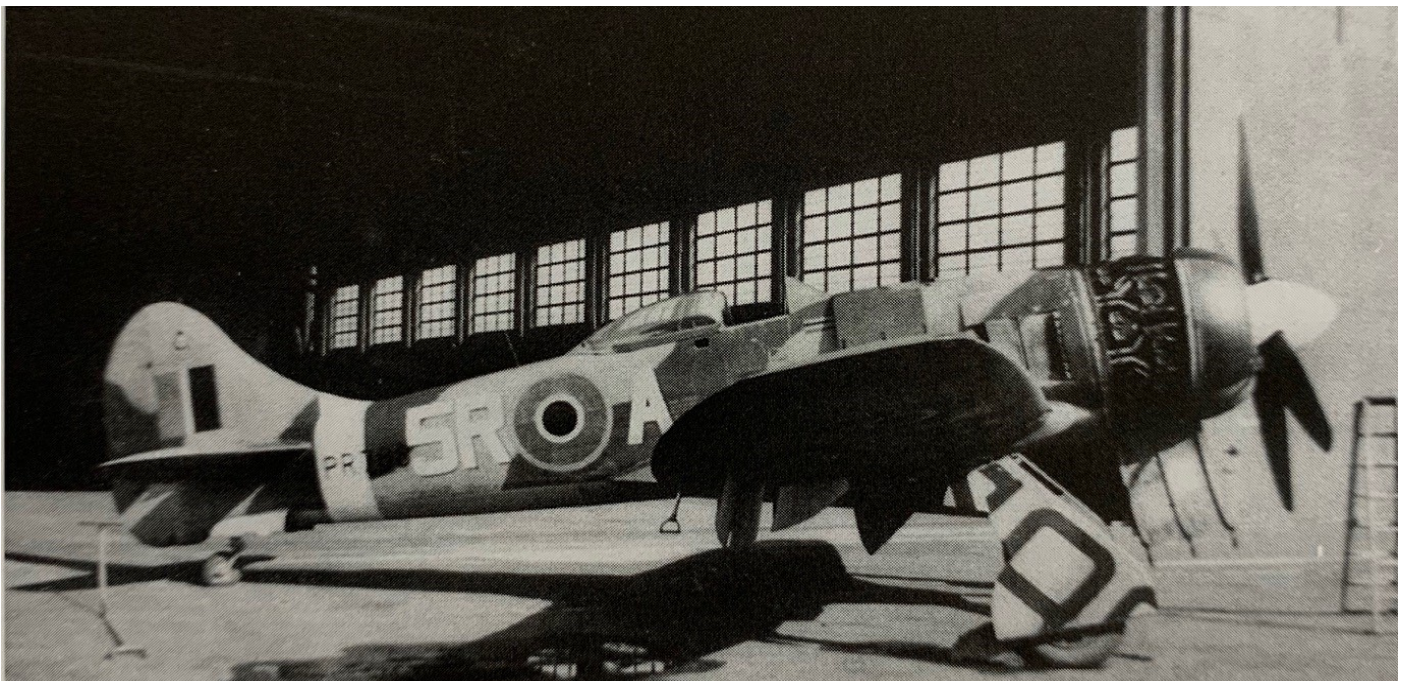
1 Oct: Five a/c from 'A' Flight left for Thorney Island. The pilots were Flt. Lt Bunyan, F/O Barber and P.II's Vine, Tyrer and Percifull.

19 Oct: A rehearsal of the demonstration to be given before the senior Commanders Course of the School of Land/Air Warfare at Westdown Ranges took place today. 10 aircraft took part, and dive and skip bombed, R/P and straffing were practised. P.II Percifull unfortunately encountered some debris, and his aircraft was slightly damaged.

22 Oct: In spite of bad weather, Flt.Lt. Bunyan, Flt.Lt. Gall and Fg.Off. Henderson and Fg.Off. Hill managed to practice supply supply dropping at Netheravon. The C.O. and P.II Percifull practised cloud flying.

26 Oct: Weather for the demonstration was well nigh perfect. 10 aircraft took part, divided into three sections of 4,4,2. The first section demonstrated R/P firing, the next high divebombing and the last skip bombing. Results were most satisfactory.

30 Oct: 11 aircraft took off at 09.55 hrs to return to Gutersloh, the detachment to England having been



February - March 1948: OC 33 Squadron, Squadron Leader R.G. Allen's, Tempest F.2 at Thorney Island for the School of Land / Air Warfare demonstration at Old Sarum in Wiltshire.

completed.

11 Nov: At 1430 hrs six night flying tests were carried out on aircraft participating in the nights programme. At 1700 hrs the following pilots – Sqn Ldr Furse, Flt Lt Bunyan, Fg Off Barber, Plt.II Vine, Plt. II King and Plt. II Percifull, carried out one dusk landing and then took off on local night flying. Weather conditions ideal.

17 Nov: At 1000 hrs Plt. II Percifull led Plt. III Wilcox and Plt.III Lockett on a section formation practice. Dummy R/P attacks were made on ‘opportunity’ targets in the low flying area.

10 Dec: Plt.IIs Vine, Tyrer, Brooks, Percifull and Johnson practiced night formation drills.

1949

25 Jan: Fg Off Barber and P.II. Percifull flew the last sorties of the day, engaged in formation flight drill.

2 Jan: Offensive Air Support (OAS) Demo to Army at Caen Ranges: “Both attacks were entirely successful, an overall average error of less than five yards being recorded. The Range Safety Officer (Army) stated that never in his tour of duty at Caen Range had he seen such accuracy with rocket attacks. The Army Commander commented very favourably on the prompt delivery of the strike on E.T.A.

Pilots participating: Flt Lt Gall, Flt Lt Johnson, P.II’s King and Percifull and P.II Wilcock.”

14 Mar: Five aircraft from ‘A’ Flight were airborne at 1000 hours for their detachment to Thorney Island to take part in a demonstration at the Westdown range on the 17th. The pilots taking part are Flt Lt Johnson, Pilots II Tyrer, Vine, Brooks and Percifull.

19 Mar: No flying at Gutersloh. ‘A’ Flight returned from Thorney Island landing at Gutersloh at 1300 hours. They were very pleased with themselves for the excellent results achieved at the Westdown range.

11 Apr: The Commanding Officer (Sqn.Ldr. Furse) flew back to Wahn to continue with his Court of Enquiry. His Tempest was flown back by Plt. II Tyrer who got to Wahn in a Harvard flown by Plt. II Percifull.

24 May: Work commenced at 0600 hours when the weather was very poor. It improved slightly during the morning and Plt.II BROOKES and Plt. II PERCIFULL went off on a cross country and low flying respectively.

31 May: Divebombing at NORDHORN range was carried out by the C.O., Fg.Off. Hill C.W., Plt.II. Percifull and Plt. III Wilcock.

PERSONNEL

Aircrew on strength during this month were:

Sqn Ldr Furse C.O.

‘A’ Flight

F/L Johnson DFC

F/L Bunyan DFC

F/L Langer

F/O Barber

Plt.I. Vine

Plt.II Tyrer

Plt.II Percifull

Plt. II Brooks

Plt.III Wijeyewickrema

Plt.IV Cooke

‘B’ Flight

F/L Gall DFC

F/O Wood DFC

F/O Hill DBR

F/O Hill CW

Plt.II Johnson

Plt.II King

Plt.II Wilcock

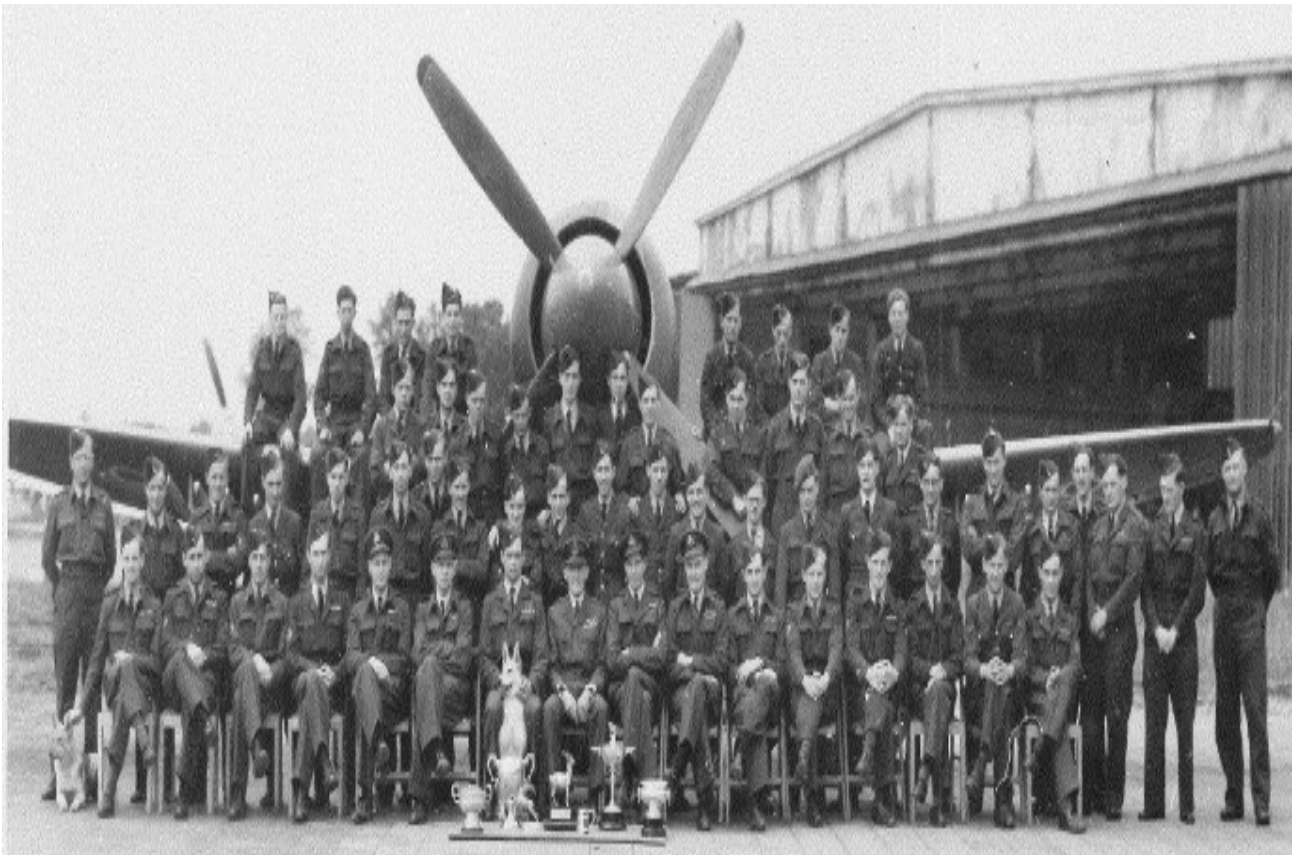
Plt.II Lockett

33 Squadron did not produce an F.540 for June 1949. There is an F.540 for July, which stops on 14 July as the Squadron sets sail to the Far East, and the August F.540 starts on 1 August, a week away from Singapore. Reading through the August ORB there was no mention of Robert Percifull.

Elise discovered that her father had moved to No. 1 Ferry Unit at Manston on 22 August, and stayed there until 2 September 1949. His old C.O., Squadron Leader Bob Allen, who had moved to the Air Ministry, had requested Robert and two others for some Tempest ferrying. However, on 28 September he wrote that that ‘when they learnt I had too short a time to do, they promptly lost interest’. He had interviews and job offers from the Ministry of Supply at Chessington and the English Electric Co. and on 19 October wrote ‘I’ve got my date for reporting to the demob centre - its the 30th, which is a week on Sunday’. Robert had accepted the job with English Electric and mentioned a start date of ‘the 7th’, possibly November 1949.

In Germany FS Eddie Tyrer was Robert’s best friend on the Squadron. Eddie married a German girl, Margot, in October 1948 and Robert was the best man.





A 33 Squadron photograph with Squadron Leader Dennis Smallwood DSO DFC seated centre, front row, which must have taken sometime between mid- July and mid-September, the duration of his spell as C.O. Robert is on the front row, third from the left.



A Christmas Party at Gutersloh, Robert sat second from the left. He appears to be wearing the new aircrew rank insignia on his right arm, and the aircrew rank badge on his colleague's left arm, opposite, is clearly visible.



Above: Bob Percifull in his Tempest.

Below: Bob, standing back row, far right, wearing a forage cap, date and location unknown. Possibly a pre-1946 OCU picture, as he is wearing sergeant's stripes and the pilots look so young?



To understand a Military Veteran you must know:

We left home as teenagers or in our early twenties for an unknown adventure.

We loved our country enough to defend it and protect it with our own lives.

We said goodbye to friends and family and everything we knew.

We learned the basics and then we scattered in the wind to the far corners of the Earth.

We found new friends and new family.

We became brothers and sisters regardless of colour, race or creed.

We had plenty of good times, and plenty of bad times.

We didn't get enough sleep.

We smoked and drank too much.

We picked up both good and bad habits.

We worked hard and played harder.

We didn't earn a great wage.

We experienced the happiness of mail call and the sadness of missing important events.

We didn't know when, or even if, we were ever going to see home again.

We grew up fast, and yet somehow, we never grew up at all.

We fought for our freedom, as well as the freedom of others.

Some of us saw actual combat, and some of us didn't.

Some of us saw the world, and some of us didn't.

Some of us dealt with physical warfare, most of us dealt with psychological warfare.

We have seen and experienced and dealt with things that we can't fully describe or explain, as not all of our sacrifices were physical.

We participated in time honoured ceremonies and rituals with each other, strengthening our bonds and camaraderie.

We counted on each other to get our job done and sometimes to survive it at all.

We have dealt with victory and tragedy.

We have celebrated and mourned.

We lost a few along the way.

When our adventure was over, some of us went back home, some of us started somewhere new and some of us never came home at all.

We have told amazing and hilarious stories of our exploits and adventures.

We share an unspoken bond with each other, that most people don't experience, and few will understand.

We speak highly of our own branch of service, and poke fun at the other branches.

We know however, that, if needed, we will be there for our brothers and sisters and stand together as one, in a heartbeat.

Being a Veteran is something that had to be earned, and it can never be taken away.

It has no monetary value, but at the same time it is a priceless gift.

People see a Veteran and they thank them for their service.

When we see each other, we give that little upwards head nod, or a slight smile, knowing that we have shared and experienced things that most people have not.

So, from myself to the rest of the Veterans out there, I commend and thank you for all that you have done and sacrificed for your country.

Try to remember the good times and make peace with the bad times.

Share your stories.

But most importantly, stand tall and proud, for you have earned the right to be called a Veteran.

I'm a Veteran.

We will remember them