



Après Moi

The 617 Squadron
Association Newsletter



January 2022



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Cover Photo: 'Johnny' Johnson celebrating his 100th birthday.

Editorial

I sincerely hope this edition of Apres Moi finds you well. I must first apologise for the absence of an edition for a while, but with various lockdowns and pandemic fatigue, I sensed it was a little too much to press our readers for their stories. However, I hope you will agree this edition more than makes up for the brief gap.

In this edition, Joe Irving provides his 617 Squadron extract from a book he wrote for his family on his Royal Air Force experiences. I think you too will find the extract enlightening and charming in equal measure; perhaps a lesson for more of us to write down our memories. At the turn of the last century the philosopher George Santayana wrote that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it... so these accounts of history truly matter! Also in this edition, Dudley Baker provides a more recent insight into Exercise Green Flag with a Tornado GR1 crew, and we have a first-hand story of a Dambusters Ride event in Moray.

I hope you enjoy the content of this edition but, as always, I kindly ask you to consider providing future material for the newsletter. You do not need to have a PhD just a good tale to tell. I will work with you to ensure we get it right.

I hope to see you at the Dams dinner in May. Details of the event are published in this edition.

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Dams Dinner 2022

The 2022 Dams Dinners will be held on Saturday 14th May at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on the morning of Sunday 16th May.

Walters' Warblings

In November, we finally overcame the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic to hold our Tirpitz Dinner, jointly with IX(B) Squadron Association, in the Petwood Hotel. It was a great success that we hope to repeat, with over 90 attendees and Sir Stu Peach and the Australian Air Attaché, Group Captain Adrian Maso, as our guests. This year's theme focussed on the RAAF contribution to Bomber Command's Tirpitz campaign, not just as individual members of 617 and IX(B) Squadrons, but also recognising the role of 463 Squadron RAAF in filming the raid. Several UK-based RAAF personnel were our guests, and we received a smashing message from our senior member, Alan Buxton, in Galston, Sydney, who turned 101 years old on 4 December 2021. Interestingly, Alan's pilot, Howard Gavin, later became the Australian Air Attaché in London. During the evening we also held a slightly early celebration for Johnny Johnson's Centenary on 24 November. Happy birthday to them both!

Sadly, given the hiatus in our reunions, we have lost some key members since our last Petwood reunion. We are holding a commemoration for our very popular founding member, Squadron Leader 'Benny' Goodman, in the Central Church of the RAF, St Clement Danes, in The Strand on Friday 4 February 2022 at 11:30. All members are invited to attend, followed by a reception in the RAF Club.

Having reflected on the achievements of the Squadron's Second World War personnel, this is an apt time to look at the accomplishments of our subsequent members. Our post-World War Two memorial in Woodhall Spa commemorates their sacrifices and we should strive to ensure that our membership reflects everyone's contribution across the decades. We have a growing identity up at Lossiemouth under the stewardship of Clive Mitchell that provides a focus for members unable to travel to the Petwood. At the other end of the UK, the current Squadron has just returned to Marham having made more history during their deployment on HMS Queen Elizabeth during the Carrier Strike Group 21 tour of the Indo-Pacific. Just as our WWII members aimed their innovative Tallboys and Grand Slams through their Stabilised Automated Bomb Sights, 617 Squadron continues to be at the forefront of cutting-edge technology, this time leading the world's largest deployment of fifth-generation stealthy air power. Safely back for Christmas after many months at sea, we now have the opportunity of bonding with the current Squadron members and ensuring that we embrace them as part of our Association.

As always, I would like to take the opportunity of thanking all your Committee members for their hard work and to wish you all a very safe 2022.

Andrew

617 Squadron Canberra Experiences

by Joe Irving

I arrived at Binbrook in late October 1954, and I was immediately crewed up with Sam Boyce, Pilot, and Pat Lennon, the Navigator/Plotter. I was the Navigator/Observer, and my job was to acquire position information and pass it to Pat, I was also responsible for dropping bombs. I spent a lot of time in the hangar getting to know the aircraft, inside and out, and practicing the safety procedures and emergency drills. At every stage someone would warn me about the flight motion of a high-speed jet which was, I was assured, totally different to the old prop types. It could not be worse than the Anson – or so I thought.

Getting into the Canberra was not easy. The entrance was a little hole on the starboard side of the nose of the aircraft and I had first to clamber up and sit in the door-well with my legs dangling outside. Next came a left turn to face forward with my legs drawn inside, then a graceful fall backwards under the Gee box. Finally, taking great care not to damage the equipment by banging my head on it, I had to pull up on the grab handles into the tiny rear compartment. It really was tiny too, with considerably less legroom than that provided by the world's favourite airline. As soon as I was sitting uncomfortably, another series of Houdini like contortions was needed to secure the multitude of connections to the dinghy, pressure suit, parachute harness and the ejector seat itself. Then came the oxygen mask, intercom, bone dome and finally the removal of the safety-pin to make my ejector seat live.

At some point in this process, I was also responsible for the removal of the safety pins from the top of the Sam's ejector seat. This was a delicate operation which I did with painstaking diligence. For Sam it was the ultimate act of trust as one slip, and the two of us would have departed the scene, in close formation, at high speed, initially in the direction of heaven. Finally, when all these little chores were completed, my seat straps had to be pulled TIGHT. Lots of ex-Canberra aircrew could have sung with the Bee Gees.

Sam and Pat had completed the genuine Canberra Conversion Course together at RAF Bassingbourn, near Cambridge. I was the spare part for whom they had been waiting to make up the crew, and they were surprised to find that I had never even been inside a Canberra. For me, it was greatly reassuring to find that someone in the aeroplane knew what they were doing. At 13.30 on 25th October, I took off on my first flight on a Canberra B2 Jet Bomber – WD961.



Canberras at RAF Binbrook

It was unbelievably different to anything I had experienced on the Anson, Wellington, Varsity or Hastings. Being thrust back in one's seat on take-off; the angle of climb; the smoothness of flight; and the relative silence of the twin jet engines were all incredible. The trip was a simple local area familiarisation purely for my benefit. We just whizzed around Lincolnshire at about three-times any speed I had previously experienced. It was totally exhilarating until, suddenly, I did not feel at all well. I managed to grab a sickbag before being violently ill. It was all totally humiliating. Too late I remembered all those warnings. "It is amazing how often that happens on a first trip on jets" Sam called cheerfully. "We'll do a practice diversion to Hemswell and get rid of that lot". I was never airsick again, but I have a special Log entry on the 25th October 1954 – "diverted to Hemswell – Airsick."

I thought that I would never get used to working in the Canberra's cramped, uncomfortable rear cabin, or to being trussed up like a Christmas turkey; but, like everyone else, I soon did. Just three weeks after my inauspicious start we flew on a Bomber Command exercise which involved large streams of Canberras from bases all over UK and Germany.

Domestic Arrangements

Binbrook, the village and the RAF Station, were 12 miles southwest of Grimsby and Cleethorpes. It could not be classed as a glamorous location in any way, but

it was a good station. This was just as well, as there was every likelihood that it would be my home for several years. There were five Canberra Squadrons at Binbrook – 617 Sqn, 9 Squadron, 12 Sqn, 101 Sqn, and 139 Sqn. Each of these had ten aircraft, about 16 aircrews and over 100 ground crew. Together, these Squadrons made up Flying Wing, the largest of the three ‘Wings’ found on all operational stations. The other two Wings were Admin and Technical. With a total strength of more than 1,500 personnel, RAF Binbrook was far larger than Binbrook village.

A high percentage of the aircrew on the station were young single officers and, in theory, we all lived in the Mess. At least we all dined, and were refreshed there, but there were far too many of us to be accommodated in the rooms in the main mess. The majority had a room in what were termed as ‘huts’, which were pre-constructed single-storey buildings that had nine separate rooms, plus several bathrooms and showers. There was one room for each of eight young men, and the ninth was for the Batman who sort of looked after them. The huts were not luxurious, but they were adequate and they were always warm and comfortable. I loved my room.

In the first few weeks of January 1955, the Boss – Sqn Ldr John Ruck – announced that, later in the year, half of the squadron would be detached to Malaya for about three months. This was exciting news but, as we were the most inexperienced crew on the Squadron, we had no prospect of being part of the operation. However, almost immediately things began to change as, one by one, our experienced crews were earmarked for places on the conversion course for the first of the V Bombers – the Valiant. In early March, the Boss told Sam that we would definitely be going to Butterworth in Northern Malaya, and that the training for our new role would start immediately. The plan was that we would go out in mid-June and would return at the end of September.

Training for Malaya

The Squadron had already been re-equipped with Canberra B6s in place of the B2s. The B6s were more powerful and had increased range and, more importantly from my point of view, someone had finally designed the layout of the rear cockpit and made it easier to get in and out. Our training programme changed completely. The high-level GH bombing role was replaced by low-level visual bombing to reflect our new task in Malaya. During April 1954, the Boyce crew flew 12 sorties and dropped 12 x 25lb practice bombs on each, all from 2,000 feet. Even when training on the Varsity, I had never bombed from such a low level. The next stage was to move on from lots of little 25lb practice bombs to a bombload of six 1,000lb bombs. These were missiles that had been

stored since WW2 and although they were perfectly safe, they looked anything but. I had never seen such big bombs and I developed a very healthy respect for them as I crawled around the bomb-bay doing my pre-flight checks.

One major difficulty had not been anticipated. Most of the usual bombing ranges around the English coastline were not suitable for our new type of operations. The solution was unexpected as the Ministry of Supply (MOS) came to our aid and allowed us to use their range at Luce Bay. Their target was a large concrete triangle raised out of the water by a concrete support at each corner. The MOS posed one condition – we must not hit or damage the target. This was not normally one of our problems, and the MOS duly received the required assurances. The first aircraft to bomb at Luce Bay raced in at high speed at 2,000 feet and aimed to undershoot the target. The bomb knew nothing of the Squadron's intentions and hit one of the sides of the triangle and smashed it in two. The Range Controller saw the funny side of things and we were forgiven by the MOS. We did not hit the target again.

In May, we did several sorties dropping the 1,000 bombs and the final part of our training was an overseas trip to Cyprus, where Sam's father was the Air Officer Commanding. It should have been a three-day sortie but that soon changed when we touched down at Nicosia. The Canberra immediately began to vibrate violently, and it quickly became clear that we had a flat tyre. Despite Sam's efforts, the aircraft swung off to the left and quickly stopped on the hard bundu alongside the runway. We climbed out of our sick Canberra just in time to greet a large staff car complete with a fluttering standard. A large extensively decorated staff officer jumped out of the back of the vehicle and shouted, "Sam, what the hell is going on? You have successfully blocked the only diversion runway for a thousand miles". It was Sam's father, the AOC.

The aircraft was soon pulled clear of the runway and towed to the maintenance hangar. And that is how our first attempt at a three-day trip took nearly a week.

The Flight to RAF Butterworth – Malaya

On 13th June, we did an air test on our aircraft - WH950. All went well, and at 09.10 on 14th June we took off for Idris (Tripoli) on the first leg of our five-day journey to RAF Butterworth. I had once before tried to fly to Idris and on that occasion the aircraft went sick in the south of France. This time there were no problems, and, after almost four hours, we landed at the airfield that was once named Castle Benito, after the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. It was very hot, dusty and dirty and the entire station looked as though it had been neglected since the end of WW2. We got a lift into Tripoli and back, had a beer

or two, prepared for the following day, and went to bed. Neither Tripoli nor Idris would ever be on my holiday list.

Day two saw us flying east over the Mediterranean heading for RAF Habbaniya, about 60 miles west of Baghdad. Habbaniya was an incredible place. It was surrounded by thousands of square miles of sand and desolation, and when we landed the temperature was 128°F (54°C). Despite this, the station was a green and pleasant oasis thanks to a network of irrigation ditches built by a succession of ingenious Brits. As we approached the station, we could see its dark green outline, set against the background of sand, from over a hundred miles. It was getting dark by the time we reached the Mess, and so, with an early start planned for day three, we managed to keep out of trouble.

Due to the limited runway length, it was essential that we took off from Habbaniya before the temperature started to rise, and so we were airborne at 07.25 (local) en-route to Mauripur (Karachi). On this leg, navigation was simply a matter of map reading. The weather was beautiful, and the visibility was amazing – that is until we approached to land at Karachi which was almost hidden under a thick middle eastern smog. Later that afternoon some well-meaning person offered to take us on a sight-seeing tour of Karachi, and we innocently accepted the offer. The drive was reasonable until we reached 'Fish Corner', a refugee camp on the edge of town. Before we saw the camp, we could smell it – the stench was overpowering, and it made our stomachs heave. The poor inhabitants lived in total squalor, their homes made of sacks, cardboard and bits and pieces of wood. Everywhere there was filth, dead animals and rotting vegetation. Our car was besieged by beggars, but we kept moving slowly and we were warned not to consider opening a window. It was truly horrendous. I had no interest whatsoever in exploring Karachi; all I could think of was that we had to go back through that awful place. In the next two years I was to spend some time in Mauripur, but I never again went near Fish Corner.

The next day provided a pleasant flight, heading south off the west coast of India to what was then Ceylon and is now Sri Lanka. As we climbed out of the aircraft at Negombo, we were met by a beaming gentleman with large cups of hot, strong, sweet tea. Maybe it was because we had just landed after a long flight, but that thick, sweet Ceylon tea was the best I have ever tasted. Ceylon itself was wonderful; after all the sand we had seen, it was lush, green and friendly. That night, we sat on the patio outside the Mess with lager, peanuts and crisps. This was the eastern paradise that the brochure had promised. Another day in Ceylon would have suited all three of us, but WH950 remained

serviceable and on 19th June we landed at RAF Butterworth – our home for the next three months.

Operation Mileage

Mileage was the name given to the operation to support the Army in the war against the Communist Terrorists (CTs) in Malaya. Our job was to flush the CTs out of their hideaways in the jungle, based on Army intelligence. Now one tree in the jungle looks very much like another from the air, particularly when one is streaking along a few hundred feet above the treetops. The Army Air Corps resolved this problem by dropping flares to mark exactly where they wanted us to bomb. For the little Army Auster aircraft, this was a very hazardous occupation. As soon as they dropped their markers, they had to clear the area - pronto, before the RAF arrived and dropped a flurry of 1,000lb bombs. We practiced with the Army for the first two weeks before, at the beginning of July, we were declared fully operational.

RAAF Butterworth lies on the NW coast of Malaya with just a short ferry journey to the holiday resort of Penang Island. The Mess, the accommodation and the social life were all excellent and we played soccer, rugby, an early version of beach volleyball, or we splashed about in the sea-snake infested water. The



Joe Irving, Sam Boyce and Pat Lennon (the Boyce Crew) at Butterworth 1955

latter pursuit was not as risky as it might sound as all that was necessary to avoid an unpleasant bite was to keep one's feet out of the muddy sand.

Some months earlier, my wife Moreen's younger brother Keith had joined the Army for his two years of National Service, and he was duly posted to a unit in the south of Malaya. As we had frequent flights to Singapore, I promised Moreen that I would go to see him. On 19th August 1955. I stood in for Bob Brightman and I flew with Paddy Ritchie's and Pete Smaje on WH958 to RAF Tengah on Singapore Island. As the name suggests, Paddy was an Irishman, and he was mildly superstitious. We had planned to fly down to Tengah at 11,500 feet but we soon found that this meant that we were bobbing along in and out of cloud. So, we decided to climb, and the next useable height for us was 13,500 feet. Here Paddy's superstition took a hand and he preferred to continue the climb to 15,500 feet, which was completely in the clear. I was lying in the nose, map reading. As we were levelling at our new height, the aircraft suddenly pitched forward, the nose dropped, and we started a high-speed descent.

I heard Paddy shout "Pete, get back" and all went quiet. I knew that I had to get back too, but we were now in an uncontrolled dive, and I was pinned backwards against the roof of the of the aircraft. I could not move, and all I could see was jungle, which was rapidly getting closer. My back hurt like crazy and I knew we were going to crash. I remember hoping that it would not take much longer as I thought my back was breaking. I felt the aircraft roll and I thought we were spinning, then, just as suddenly, all was calm, my back stopped hurting, and for an instant I thought that we had crashed. I then realised that we were straight and level, the sky was above, and the jungle and mountains were about 1,000 feet below. I dived backwards out of the nose just in time to see Pete Smaje clambering into the rear cockpit. Paddy looked dreadful, already his eyes had swollen and reddened due to the positive G-forces. I soon discovered why everything had gone quiet; my intercom plug had been pulled out when I was resting on the roof. Paddy transmitted a Mayday call and turned for home, flying at the lowest possible speed in order to control the aircraft. We thought that we had survived a runaway tail-plane actuator and, more ominously, we knew that whatever had caused the problem was still there. To add to our woes, Paddy announced that he could not see and for a moment we considered the possibility of ejecting. That was quickly a non-starter as, whilst we had been upside down, the two parachutes in the rear cabin had fallen out of the base of the ejection seats. This movement activated each parachute and they had immediately deployed. The rear cabin was now full of white silk and Pete had to climb on top of the pile in order to get to his equipment.

We crept back to Butterworth. Paddy did a genuine 'blind landing', guided by Pete on the internal radar, and by me visually from the rumble-seat. The aircraft

touched down like a feather before we taxied gently back to the Squadron dispersal. As we rolled to a stop on the hard standing, the Boss plugged into the external intercom socket, “Shut it down Paddy, and we’ll scrap it.”

We spent that night under observation in the sick quarters. Pete and I were OK because lying flat and unrestrained was the ideal position for combating the effects of positive G. I was in that position in the nose, and Pete assumed something like it when he was thrown about the cockpit. Paddy was pretty sick as his blood had been pushed towards his head by the G-force and he had experienced a ‘red-out’. The medics were anxious about his sight and within 24 hours Paddy was on his way back to England. The cause of the runaway actuator was soon discovered. As Paddy was retrimming the aircraft at 15,500 feet, the trim switch had stuck in a fully forward position and that had put WH958 into an uncontrollable dive. We then completed two-thirds of a ‘bunt’ – an outside loop – at high speed. We were extremely lucky on at least two counts: The first was that thanks to Paddy’s superstitious nature we had sufficient height to complete such a manoeuvre; and the second was that thanks to the resilience of the Canberra it did not break up when exposed to stresses way outside its design limitations. As a final note, when the airframe experts examined the aircraft, they found that they could put their fingers into the gap that had appeared between the wing-roots and the fuselage.

My main concern was how could I explain to Keith and Moreen why I had failed to turn up in Singapore. I did not want Moreen to know the details of our aerobatics until I could tell her myself, and that meant I could not tell Keith either. In the end I hid behind an ‘aircraft unserviceable’ excuse. The Squadron sent a signal to Keith’s unit on my behalf but, of course, he never received it.

In late August and September, we did everything except our primary job. We flew photo-recce sorties, lots of formation flying practice for the Battle of Britain Parade in Kuala Lumpur, special high-level sorties for the Meteorological Office, low-level searches for two passengers who, it was thought, had fallen overboard from a cruise-ship, and several flights to the Tengah, Changi, and Seletar on Singapore Island. In October, in the final two weeks before we were due to return home, we did not do a single bombing sortie. Finally, on 15th October 1955 we left RAF Butterworth and set course for home.

The Flight Home

For our return trip, we were allocated WH950, the same aircraft that we had flown to Butterworth. Most unusually, however, we had a crew change. Pat had to stay behind until the very end of the detachment, so Bill Kemp

volunteered to take his place. We also took a different route home; instead of going through Ceylon for my favourite tea, we planned to go via Dum-Dum (Calcutta) and then on to Karachi. Calcutta fully justified its continued association with the 'Black Hole' concept. It was shambolic, scruffy and dirty with a thick protective coating of dust, sand, grease and grime over everything. After landing, we attempted to follow a series of conflicting instructions until we eventually found somewhere to park the aircraft. We then sat waiting in the sweaty sweltering heat for more than an hour before anyone came near us.

Long before our man arrived, we had decided that we would not night stop in Calcutta, but we would do a Quick Turn Round (QTR) and press on to Mauripur (Karachi). However, the Turn Round proved to be anything but quick, and we had four frustrating hours on the ground before we were cleared to depart. We then encountered problems that had nothing to do with Dum-Dum, the starboard engine refused to start.

At start-up, the engines of a Canberra B6 were powered into life by a cartridge which was very similar to those used in a shotgun, only much bigger. Each engine, when loaded, held three cartridges in a magazine was screwed into the front centre of the engine. Firing one cartridge was generally enough to start an engine - with a huge bang and flames flaring out of the exhaust vents. The



The dreaded Canberra starter cartridges

other two cartridges were there as belt and braces should the first cartridge fail. WH950's port engine started immediately but the starboard engine steadfastly refused to make whistling noises after each of the three attempts. We all agreed that one of the starboard engine's cartridges had misfired, and so we decided to fit one replacement and try again. As I was the nearest to the

door, I was elected (by two votes to one) to effect the change. The magazine screwed out easily although it was white hot. I pressed the small release button on the cartridge housing and gave the magazine a shake to cause the empty cartridges to drop onto the hard standing. At least that is what they should have done, according to the owner's manual. In the event, two dropped out and one did not. Without thinking, I gave the offending cartridge a quick slap and it obediently fell to the floor. I nearly followed it as the cartridge was several hundred degrees hot (centigrade or Fahrenheit, it mattered little) and the fingers and palm of my right hand were instantly turned into one large white blister. It did not hurt too much at first and I managed to dispose of the used cases, reload a spare cartridge, and get back into the aircraft. The engine started immediately and away we went. I spent the whole trip with my hand over a punka-louvre and was comforted by its ice-cold flow of air.

As we had flown two legs that day, we were late into Karachi. There was just enough time to get my poorly hand fixed, refresh the inner body, and go to bed. Tomorrow we would be heading for Habbaniya.

The next morning WH950 behaved beautifully, and we had no problems with the start-up. I watched the ground-crew loading the cartridges with rather more interest than usual, and I did not pass on any tips about possible reloading. Just before 0700 local time, we were airborne from RAF Mauripur. We were climbing through 35,000 feet when there was a loud bang and the aircraft swung violently to starboard. We knew immediately what the problem was – the starboard engine had flamed out (shut down). We advised ATC and descended to 25,000 feet in order to attempt to relight the engine. It restarted without difficulty, and as all indications were normal, we cancelled our emergency and started to climb again. No more than a few minutes had elapsed when, with another huge bang, the starboard engine flamed out again. That was it; we had no choice but to return to Mauripur on one engine. We were carrying a full fuel load, which meant we were far too heavy for an immediate landing. We therefore planned to descend and to hold overhead Mauripur until we had used sufficient fuel to put us below the maximum all-up weight for landing. That plan was short lived as ATC immediately passed a message from the Squadron at RAF Butterworth to say, "Suspected contamination of fuel storage tanks at Butterworth. All squadron aircraft grounded pending inspection of fuel system" This was not the type of message that we wished to hear as we already had enough problems. Our revised plan was that we would land immediately.

About 15 minutes later, I was strapped in on the rumble seat alongside Sam and we were making a single engine approach to Mauripur, considerably above the

maximum weight for landing. As we crossed the perimeter fence the starboard wing dropped and WH950 began to roll. The wing hit the ground and, as we cartwheeled into Mauripur, we were enveloped in a huge cloud of dust. The people watching from the Control Tower feared the worst and activated the crash alarm.

I had no idea what happened next. We hit the ground with a fearful crash, and I thought we were spinning around. I could see nothing outside because of the dust or smoke and I thought we might be on fire. I could see Sam still fighting the controls and we seemed to be going sideways. After an eternity of chaos, we stopped. I heard Sam shout, "Get out" – so I did. I tore off my seat straps, spun the emergency door release, kicked the door away and dived out. I fell about three inches and was shocked to find that the complete nose section was lying on the taxiway. There was no sign of fire. I crept back into the aircraft doorway. Sam was shutting everything down; he was OK. In the back Bill was throwing off his many straps and attachments and he too was unhurt. In less than a minute the three of us were out of, and away from, the badly bent aircraft and we were surrounded by fire-engines and an ambulance. We stood, marvelling at our escape, and watched as the aircraft was made safe. A little Pakistani, who I had met on our outbound trip, pedalled over to us, "Welcome to Mauripur, sirs." he gushed, "And how long will you be staying on this trip?" The answer turned out to be two weeks – two pretty miserable weeks in fact. A Board of Inquiry was set up immediately, and we were very anxious about outcome. A further inconvenience that affected all three of us was the Mauripur version of Delhi Belly, a consequence of the combined effects of high humidity, excessive heat, inedible food and iffy water and just perhaps, over excitement. Remember, in 1955 there was no air conditioning and no San Pellegrino. The unofficial RAF cures for these problems were:- use lots of ceiling fans, eat no food, drink imported beer, use local beer for cleaning one's teeth, and never stray more than 100 yards (less in metres) from the nearest RAF approved facility. Oh happy days!

WH950 was a write off. That was really sad because we had become very possessive and protective about our aircraft. It also meant that I had been a party to writing off two of Britain's finest aircraft in less than eight weeks. We flew back as passengers on a Hastings flight into RAF Lyneham, Swindon, on 5th November 1955. First, I went to Binbrook to pick up warm clothing and then I went home - on leave.

Joe Irving

The Dambusters' Ride – 15 May 21



100 Milers

Saturday 15 May 21 started early for the team heading out on the 100-mile adventure, planned by Colin McGregor, with an 0745 RV at the Windswept Brewery (owned by 2 Association members who were taking part in the rides) for an 0800 departure. The weather was overcast and a cool 8C with a slight nip in the air but, thankfully, little wind. The obligatory pre-departure photos were taken both at Windswept and at the Main Gate before heading off along the coast towards Buckie and Cullen.

Initial progress was good with an average speed of 18 mph on the relatively flat roads at the start of the route and before long we were crossing the River Spey at Garmouth.

Our route then took us through Nether Dallachy and Port Gordon before skirting Buckie and then on to our first planned pit stop at Cullen. Unfortunately, we arrived slightly ahead of schedule and the café was not open. With no other obvious option, we elected to cycle straight to our next planned stop at Boogie Woogie café in Keith. The route



Ben Dempster, Nige Tiddy,
Colin McGregor and Clive Mitchell

remained relatively flat, so progress was still brisk, and we continued to average above our 16mph target. Again, we arrived early so took advantage of the opportunity for a leisurely brunch with a coffee and bacon roll.

Suitably refreshed, we were soon back on the road and heading for a planned lunch RV with our wives at Fogwatt Village Hall. Colin's route was still lulling us into a false sense of security and the gently undulating terrain enabled us to average close to 20 mph for a couple of 5-mile splits and progress was rapid. Additionally, the sun was starting to peek through the clouds and all was well as we arrived at Fogwatt, for our RV with the girls,

15 minutes early.

Still pretty full from the bacon rolls at Boogie Woogie café, not much food was taken onboard at Fogwatt, but we were grateful to be able to replenish our water bottles and to divest ourselves of unnecessary clothing now that the sun was coming out. Additionally, Colin's wife Sarah joined us to assist in breaking the wind for the last 44 miles of the journey. All was good as we set off on the last 2 legs of the route, but it was not very long before misfortune struck. We had gone less than a mile before Clive Mitchell's bike suffered a seized gear selector which left him in a low gear which would make it impossible for him to complete the route as planned in the time available. Fortunately, the location was close enough to Colin's home for him to call his daughter and arrange for her to bring his spare bike and to RV with us at a point on route. Clive nursed his bike the few miles necessary whilst the others enjoyed the spectacle of him pedalling furiously but hardly moving. More good fortune followed when Colin's alternate bike fitted Clive perfectly and also had the same cleats as Clive's mountain bike shoes. After a short delay we



Caifer Hill Memorial

were back underway with Sarah setting the pace at the front of the group. As we approached the 70mile point we were all well aware of Colin's plan to climb Caifer Hill and to stop at the memorial to the XV(R) Sqn aircrew lost in the mid-air over the Moray Firth on 3 Jul 12. So it was that our average speed took a bit of a hit as we compressed most of the 1200 metres of climbing on the route to

the section between miles 68 and 73. Our average speed for the leg dropped to just under 12 mph but the climb was worth it both to pay our respects and for the view over Findhorn Bay.

With the climbing now complete it was time for a fast descent towards Forres and a pre-planned stop for afternoon tea with Paul and Jo Lenihan. Paul is a member of the IX(B) Sqn Association but is well known to all of the team members and he and Jo provided a fantastic spread and even had the Dambusters' theme playing as we arrived.

Suitably replete, we set off on the final 17mile leg to RAF Lossiemouth. Returning to relatively flat terrain the promise of a cold beer or two at the end spurred us on and our pace again crept over 17 mph. So it was that at a little after 1630 we joined the 56mile group at Windswept for a few beers and some pizza.

56 Milers

Having enjoyed a much more gentlemanly start to the day, the 56 milers dragged themselves out of bed in time to start at 0900. After much moaning from Ronnie, they decided to head out to Cullen so that they had a very slight tailwind on the return route. A later departure time was intentionally picked so we could try and coordinate the return to Windswept with the 100-mile team (Henceforth to be known as the Sport-Billys); more on this later.

A nice gentle pace was established because Ronnie didn't want to go too fast, with the initial route the same as the Sport-Billys had taken out towards Garmouth and across the Spey viaduct. Spirits were so high that the initial planned stop at the Coffee Shop in Garmouth was abandoned in favour of pressing on with the outbound route. From Garmouth the team cycled past Dallachy airfield and then on to Buckie along the coast road. From there it was a mixture of coastal paths, the old Moray Coast railway track and through some of the very picturesque coastal villages that pepper the Moray coastline. There was a brief stop outside Strathlene Golf Club where Ronnie tried one of his newly purchased energy gels - needless to say, he wasn't impressed and moaned about the flavour. The final stretch into Cullen was along the old railway viaduct, which provided some spectacular views over the links, beach and cliffs in the area.

Now, because the scheduled stop at Garmouth did not take place, the 56-milers made really good time to Cullen....great news for getting back



Pete Beckett, Ronnie Lawson and Al Read

to Windswept early....not so great news because the planned lunch facility (The famous 'Linda's Fish and Chip shop'), was still closed. Needless to say, Ronnie had a moan; however, we did find a local cafe 100m away that was open and had space for us! This turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Deciding that a full breakfast might be a step too far with another 30mile ride to complete afterwards, the team 'just' had a breakfast bap each. To say they were generous would be somewhat of an understatement.

Starting on the route home was, to be honest, a bit of a challenge to the resolve - even Ronnie had a bit of a moan. Perhaps, in hindsight, we might have been better completing a few more miles before lunch and leaving a smaller mountain to climb after the lard-attack.

Worst of all though, shock, horror, it turned out that the Met Man had made an error in the forecast, so the team ended up with a gentle headwind for the return leg (guess who had a moan?).

The route home initially followed the same as the outbound route, but after re-crossing the Spey at Garmouth the team headed towards Elgin to ensure the necessary miles were covered. Aside from one minor cramp attack (Pete) and a few moans about the wind and his dodgy knee (Ronnie) this was pretty uneventful. After taking advantage of the mercifully smooth new cycle path east of Elgin, the team stopped at a well-known coffee establishment for a further intake of sugar and caffeine. Only after stopping did Ronnie announce that he didn't do any kind of hot drinks....although this did give him a rare opportunity to complain about something. Al's family joined at this stage for a quick catch-up. We were initially very impressed that they had ridden all the way from Lossie into Elgin to see us. It was only on leaving Costa we noticed the Camper Van parked just 50m away...complete with bike rack!

From Elgin, it was a short jaunt back to Lossie via the back roads to complete the trip. Confessions in the open.....to ensure the 56 miles were fully completed a minor excursion to check out the 3rd Tee at Moray Golf Club was needed, but the Team arrived back at Windswept at 1550 to a warm welcome from the finishing committee and a nice cold beer from the bar (other fruit-based drinks were available).

After a short wait the RAFBF 56mile team arrived back followed shortly after by the Sport-Billys.....timing would have been about spot-on for a coincident arrival if it wasn't for Clive's inability to properly service and look after his bike. Oh well.

A great day was had by all, and we raised over £3200 for the RAF Benevolent Fund. All in all, a magnificent achievement by everyone involved!

<https://www.rafbf.org/event/dambusters-ride>

Exercise Green Flag

by Dudley Baker

Many readers here will be familiar with Green Flag but some of will be interested in how it all worked.

In those days only UK-based Sqns were tanker qualified. That would be 617 Sqn and 27 Sqn. The Germanysquadrons of 2TAF were near enough to the Cold War not to need tankers. Nine aircraft would fly to Marham. They would have the latest fit for electronic warfare such as regarding Radar Warning Receiver. The aircraft would then be flown out by 617 crews. Ground crew would form part of the trail with a C130 Hercules in the lead, with a VC10 or Tristar as main body and another C130 as sweeper.

Tristar would fly direct to McCarran or VC10 to Nellis Air Force Base (near Las Vegas) via Washington. C130, Tornadoes and Tanker aircraft fly to Goose Bay, in Canada to night stop.



Dudley Baker at Ellsworth AFB

We, on 617 would have an extra week in Nellis for the work up or shake down to ensure we were ready to participate with the numerous other countries. Essentially, Nellis is a host to dozens of air forces, offering us a chance to fly and fight together against real threats. If you are familiar with the movie 'Top Gun' you will have seen the air-to-air combat missions flown between friendly and enemy teams. This is the highest end of our training to be combat ready, testing our skills and equipment in a very realistic setting.

After the shake down Red Flag – the subsequent Green Flag events (the Electronic Counter Measures elements) would start on the Monday. All crews must fly on Monday to be part of the show. The Monday flights are to train crews on the range facilities. If a crew does not get up in the morning, they have another go in the afternoon. On Tuesday the exercise starts proper. As ground crew we would see the aircraft off. A '15 pack' (minibus) would go to the launch point. It was policy to go with the aircraft but remain on the Electronic Counter Measure pod side – not the Boz pod side. The 15 pack would have all trade cover to handle any crew-in snags. A Tornado with a snag would raise its airbrakes as a signal. If you were not part of the *Hit Team*, in the 15 pack, you could go over to the cinema to watch the fight. As with so much of 617 Sqn events, whether air or ground crew, we were passionate that we all did our job well.

The Tornado GR1 was modified to carry a Cubic pod. A company called Cubic would mount a pod on the aircraft. These telemetry pods would send back data. We could hear the radio chatter and watch simulated missiles etc being fired. Cubic provided the data that allowed the exercise headquarters to determine what was going on and if counter measures were effective more not. We would watch live, and the aircrews would watch the repeat during debrief.

Two weeks later a VC10 would arrive with members of another Tornado squadron, who would take over the aircraft and take their turn to hone their skills. Once handed over, the VC10 would then takes us home to Marham. This would continue until all Tornado squadrons had completed Green Flag. At the end, the aircraft would then be flown to Goose Bay for further training. Again, crews would swop over to ensure maximum benefit from the investment. Canada provided another set of objectives, including working with Special Forces on the ground. The vast empty spaces are famously uninhabited and very dark, permitting night vision equipment exercises and air-land integration. Finding a small group of troops within thousands of square miles is a skill that requires practice.

Finally, 27 Sqn would take their turn before tanking the aircraft home in a package of C130 and VC10s as described earlier. Of course, not all the aircraft made it on one hop, so various ground crews were appointed to recover aircraft often strewn across the route!

Dudley Baker

Final Landings

Lawrence “Benny” Goodman



Lawrence Goodman – the soubriquet “Benny” inevitably acquired from the jazz clarinettist, was born in West London in September 1920. Leaving school at Herne Bay he embarked on an engineering career, which was interrupted by the outbreak of war. Having been a member of the Officer Training Corps at school, Benny immediately decided to enlist in the Royal Air Force with the intention of becoming a pilot.

Called up in 1940, his immediate concern was passing the aircrew acceptance medical. Positioning himself at the back of the queue for the eyesight test, he was able to hear and memorise other candidates to ensure that he achieved the required number of lines.

Having completed that hurdle, he thought that he'd be immediately trained as a pilot – but it was not to be, the RAF had more trainee aircrew than the system could cope with. Instead, he was posted to Abingdon, a Whitley OTU. Any thought of pilot training was quickly dispelled, when to his dismay he was allocated duties as a ground gunner, a miserable existence sleeping out in tents – guarding remote parts of the airfield.

Thing changed for the better in 1941 when he was sent to Peterborough to commence his flying training on Tiger Moths. After gaining his “wings” with an above average assessment, he was immediately sent to Reading on a flying

instructor's course. This led to his embarking on a troopship to Canada where he found himself training, amongst others Fleet Air Arm pilots a range of skills – such as dive bombing and jinking the aircraft to one side after take-off, (in case of engine failure so you didn't get run over by the ship) – things that he'd never done before. He would later relate how he always wondered what his pupils would have thought had they known that he was only a chapter or two ahead of them in the manual!

By 1942 and concerned that the war might come to an end before he'd really "done his bit", Benny was able to obtain a posting back to the UK. It was eventful Atlantic passage; on his first attempt the troopship he was on was damaged by a torpedo and had to return to Halifax.

On return to the UK, he found he was destined to join Bomber Command and sent to No. 17 OTU at Silverstone where he learned his craft on the Wellington transferring to Swinderby to master the larger 4 engined Stirling, before finally converting to the Lancaster at 5 LFS, Syerston. There the crew's above average assessment saw them selected as part of an experiment devised by AOC No. 5 Group, AVM Cochrane to introduce a few exceptional newly formed crews straight in to 617 Sqn – in effect fast tracking them to be mentored and learn from the experienced "old lags".

Benny and his crew arrived at Woodhall Spa on 16 August 1944. After a trip with Bob Knights to learn the ropes, his first operation with his own crew against Brest two days later was a baptism of fire – literally, when the aircraft's radio set caught fire shortly after take-off. Extinguishing the flames, they carried on to attack the target successfully.

Benny completed 30 operations with 617 – including the second attack on the German battleship Tirpitz, dropping one of the first ten ton Grand Slams on the Arnsberg railway viaduct in Germany and participation in the final attack on Hitler's Bavarian redoubt at Berchtesgaden, the Squadron's final operation of the war.

It was a dark wet night on 29 October as Benny waited his turn to take off. Suddenly out of the gloom he saw a low flying Lancaster heading directly for his aircraft. Another of the Squadron aircraft, piloted by Tony Iveson, had suffered a minor engine malfunction on take off and swung off the runway line causing Benny and his flight engineer to duck as the other heavily laden bomber scraped over his cockpit canopy, its wheels seemingly missing them by inches. Unperturbed, Benny then went on to complete the 12-hour trip without incident.

On 27 March 1945 during an attack on the U-boat pens at Hamburg in daylight, his attention was attracted by his Flight Engineer thumping him on the shoulder and pointing out along the starboard wing. Looking out to his surprise and horror he observed a German Me 262 jet fighter forming on then a short distance off their wing tip. He could clearly see the German pilot, and fully expected him to

turn in for an attack, but after what seemed ages, though probably a very short time, the German banked his aircraft and dived away. Benny could only ever assume that the German was out of ammunition.

Like many bomber pilots at the end of the war, with experience of large four-engined aircraft, Benny found himself transferred to Transport Command, where he flew Halifaxes and Stirlings.

After two years with No 604 Sqn, a Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadron, gave him the opportunity to fly a Spitfire, before he returned to Transport Command – flying the Handley Page Hastings taking troops to The Middle East and India and assisting in casualty evacuation from Korea. Transferred to the jet age, Benny's final flying tour was on the Canberra with No. 80 photographic reconnaissance Squadron based in Germany.

He left the RAF in 1964 with the rank of Squadron leader – and went back into the family advertising and signage business. Nevertheless, flying was very much in Benny's blood. He remained an enthusiastic pilot, retaining his licence and shares in an aircraft well into his 80s.

In later years he offered a younger generation the benefit of his wartime experiences, visiting the Joint Services Staff College to talk to young present-day officers about his time in the Service.

In 1995 the Association's Historian invited him to attend the launch in Germany of a book written by the Arnsberg's local history group about the town's wartime history, including the attack on their viaduct. After an official reception Benny was invited to say a few words to an assembled audience of the local population. Speaking fluently in German, he thanked them for their invitation and said how delighted he was to be there, saying that he saw the event as a striking symbol of friendship and reconciliation. It was the start of a strong relationship that continued for the rest of his life.

A modest man, who lived for the present and looked to the future rather than the past, he often remarked how fortunate he had been to be allowed to fly what he considered to be the RAF's best aircraft, the Lancaster, Spitfire and Canberra and was genuinely surprised at the interest shown in him in later years "I didn't do anything special".

Like many of his generation – he saw that he had been called to perform a role and that's what he did, to the best of his ability. He was always very supportive of his crew and the unsung heroes – especially the ground crew "without whom", he said, "we'd never have got off the ground."

In September 2020 Benny was the first member of the Association to commemorate his 100 birthday. His passing leaves the Association with only one remaining wartime pilot, Arthur Joplin, together with three other wartime veterans.

Bill Taylor

By the time he joined the Royal Air Force in 1961, Bill Taylor was no stranger to wearing a uniform. He had already served as a rating in the Royal Navy (with a period on board the H.M. Yacht Britannia 1955/56) before being commissioned in the Fleet Air Arm. After leaving the Senior Service in 1958 he had spent a brief period with the North Rhodesian Police Force.

As a 27-year-old Flying Officer his first acquaintance with the Vulcan at No. 230 OCU Finningley came in May 1963 was followed five months later by a posting to Scampton. After two and a half years as a co-pilot with No. 27 Sqn, passing the Intermediate Captaincy Course in July 1965, he had returned to Finningley in May 1966 for full captaincy training. His first flight as a solo captain took place on 27 July, piloting the legendary XH558 – now preserved at Finningley by the Vulcan to the Sky Trust.

Conversion complete, on 1 September 1966 Bill, now a Flight Lieutenant, and his crew were posted to No. 617 Sqn, almost immediately being attached on the four-day Blue Steel Course at Lindholme. Fully briefed on their new weapon they returned to the Squadron. Six months later Bill had earned a “White” rating and his “Combat” classified crew were well established and respected, being one of four selected to represent the Squadron in the annual Bomber Command bombing and navigation competition.

Bill's place in the annuals of the Squadron's history was assured when, on the evening of Thursday 6 April 1967, he and his crew were detailed to fly a routine Blue Steel training sortie. After lining up on the runway, the engines were opened up and as the aircraft rolled a double explosion was heard by the crew, followed by the illumination of the wing tank fire extinguisher warning light. Bill ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft. All engines were closed down, fire extinguishers operated and the electrics isolated. As the crew abandoned the aircraft, the flames had already taken hold of the port wing and shortly afterwards, the port main undercarriage leg collapsed. Light relief was provided at this point by an ATC cadet who was being taken up for air experience omitting to disconnect the static line for his parachute which deployed, necessitating him to bundle it up in his arms and carry on running. Despite the attendance of fire appliances from all over the county, the blaze could not be contained. On several occasions the fire seemed to have been brought under control, only to flare up again as fresh fuel tanks exploded. The aircraft remained settled on its port wing for about an hour, but when the fuel in the bomb bay tanks (both full) exploded, the fire quickly spread to the starboard wing. The starboard undercarriage collapsed soon afterwards and afterwards the crew compartment broke off just forward of the nosewheel. When the fire was finally brought under control some two and a half hours later, the crew compartment was still lying on its side almost intact while the rest of the aircraft was almost completely destroyed and continued to

burn until the flowing morning, leaving a delta shaped pile of ash and debris on the runway threshold. Damage to the runway would necessitate all but lightly laden sorties to be flown from Waddington for the next month or so while repairs were undertaken.

The cause of the accident was traced to a disintegrating port engine turbine disc which sliced into the neighbouring engine and also ruptured the fuel tanks. Bill was exonerated, and action was immediately put in hand to reduce the risk of a similar incident in the future. Perhaps fittingly the undamaged cockpit section found a new lease of life as a crew escape trainer.

A year later, on 29 April 1968, Bomber Command was stood down at Scampton as it merged with Fighter Command to form the new Strike Command. Bill was selected to lead a two Vulcan formation performing a spirited low-level flypast in front of the assembled dignitaries including Sir Arthur Harris, Barnes Wallis and numerous Second World War Bomber Command Veterans.

Bill continued to serve with 617 Sqn until May 1969, and finally left the Service in 1975, to pursue a successful career in civil aviation, initially joining Dan Air. After transferring to Kuwait Airways, he was approached on behalf of the Kuwaiti royal household, and for 12 years captained their luxuriously appointed aircraft – a far cry from the cramped confines of the Vulcan with its thermos flask and soup warmer. Even so he retained endearing memories of the Vulcan “I loved it. The Vulcan was the most exciting aeroplane I have ever flown. It was a four-engined fighter.”

In retirement, Bill became an active member of the Association, serving as a Committee Member for many years, including a period as Secretary.

Robert Owen

Memorial Service for

Sqn Ldr Lawrence ‘Benny’ Goodman

A memorial service to celebrate the life of Sqn Ldr Lawrence ‘Benny’ Goodman will be held on Friday 4 February 2022 at the Central Church of the Royal Air Force, St Clement Danes in The Strand at 1130. The service will be followed by a reception at the RAF Club, 128 Piccadilly. All members are invited to attend.

Happy Birthday 'Johnny'



'Johnny' Johnson with 17 out of 19 of his great grandchildren on the occasion of his 100th birthday

617 Squadron Association

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