



Après Moi

The 617 Squadron
Association Newsletter



Spring 2017



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Cover Photo: Our President, Wg Cdr John Bell MBE DFC whose wartime experiences are recounted in this issue.

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of 2017. I have been delighted with the response of several readers to my request for 'My Story' articles. This new regular feature is designed to build upon the wonderful article by our own Benny Goodman, and letting this newsletter become an interesting method of sharing 617 Squadron experiences. As you will see within this edition, we have some rather special offerings that I sincerely hope will inspire you to put pen to paper and let me have your story. It doesn't have to be long, nor during a war, I just want to capture as many memories as possible. Thank you in advance.

Please also note the advertisement for the Dams Reunion and I hope to meet some of you there this year. Indeed, I would be willing to conduct one-to-one interviews with you if you would prefer me to write the My Story article for you.

Finally, I want to express my sincere apologies to Chris Webster for an error within the previous edition of final landings; the sad news of Maurice Webster's passing contained the service record of Chris.

All the very best for 2017 and I hope you enjoy this edition of *Après Moi*.

**Yours aye
Stu Clarke**

Deadline for Next Newsletter

31st July 2017

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Dams Dinner 2017

The 2017 Dams Dinner will be on Saturday 13th May, at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on the Sunday. A limited number of rooms at the Petwood Hotel will be reserved for Association members at a special reduced rate per person for bed and breakfast. Early booking is advised.

Walters' Warblings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm pleased to announce the Association's latest charitable venture. We have set up the 'Guy Gibson VC flying bursary' through the Air League which will sponsor an Air Training Corps/Combined Cadet Force cadet to solo standard. Once they have completed their training, we will invite our newly-fledged pilot to the next Petwood reunion where we will all be able to meet them and wish we were that young again. We hope to make this a recurrent event.

As you know, RAF Marham held a debate on 18 November to determine which Squadron sank the Tirpitz as part of the Station's centenary dining-in night. Our own OC 617 (designate), Wg Cdr John Butcher, supported by our historian, Dr Rob Owen, faced up against OC IX Squadron, Wg Cdr Rocky Sharrocks, and journalist Patrick Bishop. Despite the Chief of the Air Staff, the German Defence Attaché and the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Ops) being in attendance, the guests of honour were, naturally, Benny Goodman and Frank Tilley, who both took part in the raids. The debate was gentlemanly, good humoured and, thanks to very deep research and analysis by Rob Owen, enlightening. John and Rob drew on a very wide variety of RAF, US and German sources, dispelling many of the IX Squadron myths that have been spread by their Association through Wikipedia. I'm sure you would appreciate a resume of the conclusions, all of which are based on evidence glimpsed through the thick fog of war. It would appear that a IX Squadron Tallboy hit the bows of the Tirpitz during the first raid on 15 September (Op PARAVANE), rendering the ship non-operational as a surface raider. The damaged ship then limped south to be used as a floating artillery battery to defend Tromsø against the Russians, where she was moored in the shallow fjord to stop her capsizing. On the final raid, Op CATECHISM, on 12 November, the evidence suggests that three 617 Squadron Tallboys squarely hit the Tirpitz, causing catastrophic damage, flooding, fires and an increasingly significant list. It appears that IX Squadron's bombs all missed the ship, partially due to them using an inaccurate wind in their bombsight, but in doing so blew the sea bed from under the ship, increasing the flooding, and allowing the ship to capsize. In his summing-up, AVM Edward Stringer, who chaired the debate, emphasised the contribution of all those who participated in the twenty-six Allied raids on the Tirpitz.

As I have warbled before, we have several important dates approaching fast. The Centenary of Cheshire's birth falls on 7 September 2017, which we hope to celebrate with Cheshire disAbility. No 617 Squadron is reforming on 23 March 2018 with Lightning IIs at Beaufort, South Carolina, an important event which OC 617 (desig) has kindly invited Association members to attend. On 16/17 May 2018 we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Dams Raid; sadly, the Squadron will still be in the States, but the Association is working with the Air Staff to ensure that the event forms a vignette

within the RAF's Centenary celebrations. By remarkable coincidence, the Centenary of Gibson's birth falls on OC 617 (desig)'s birthday, 12 August 2018, by which time the Squadron will be based at Marham; we look forward to celebrating both events with John Butcher and his new Squadron! And then, in November 2019, there's the 75th anniversary of the Tirpitz Raid. He hopes to arrange suitable celebrations for all these events, even to the extent of a two-Squadron visit to Tromsø in 2018. The RAF now holds 'battlefield tours' of both the Dams and Tirpitz Raids and we are investigating the feasibility of running semi-combined mutually-beneficial events with servicemen and women. So, there are some notable dates for your diary.

I very much look forward to seeing you and your families at the next reunion.

Yours Aye
Andrew Walters

My Story by John Bell

Following on from the memoirs of Benny Goodman in the previous edition, I have been delighted to work with John Bell to capture his experiences and be able to share them with you all. I sincerely hope you enjoy reading his story below, but ask that you too consider providing me with your own experiences of life with 617 Squadron. Whether more modern or not, your story is both important and fascinating so please drop me a note and I will gladly work with you to produce something of interest.

Thank you
Ed.

Tirpitz Dinner 2017

The 2017 Tirpitz Dinner will be on Saturday 11th November, at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on the Sunday. A limited number of rooms at the Petwood Hotel will be reserved for Association members at a special reduced rate per person for bed and breakfast. Early booking is advised.

A Schoolboy Went to War

On 29 June 1943, two years after I had walked into a Recruiting Office and volunteered to serve as aircrew in the RAF, I arrived at Woodhall Spa with my crew to join 619 Squadron. I was the bomb aimer in the crew.

Soon after the declaration of war in September 1939 I left school and obtained a job with a firm of accountants in the City of London. I started as 'office boy', later progressing to junior audit clerk.

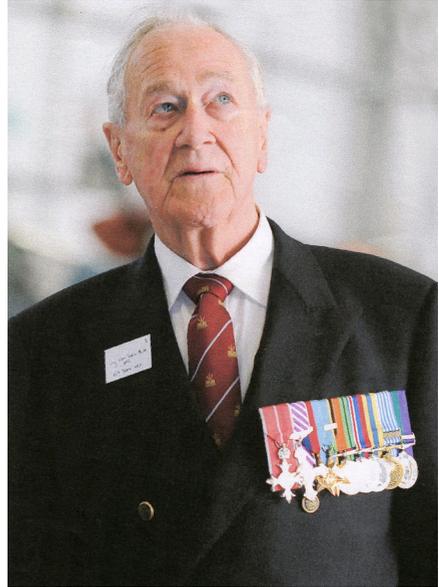
In 1940, age 17, I joined the Local Defence Volunteers – renamed Home Guard – where I was taught to shoot at Bisley and how to sabotage railway engines should the Germans succeed in invading England.

The air war over the southern counties in 1940 and the bomb damage from the night attacks on London that winter convinced me that I had to get into the war - definitely the RAF. Age 18 and three months was the minimum for aircrew.

At my initial medical I was confirmed fit for aircrew, but too tall at 6ft 4 ins to get into a cockpit, so I could not be a pilot. Observer was next on offer which I accepted. I was called up later and went through the standard entrance and initial training programme until, in May 1942, I was shipped off to South Africa for the Observer's course – navigation, bombing and gunnery. In the RAF bombers of that time the observer attended to all those duties. I was conveyed on a 14000 ton ex-banana freighter in a convoy escorted by two destroyers. The journey took three weeks and we lost only one ship to a mine near the South African coast. South Africa was warm and sunny and there was no blackout. I enjoyed my time there, especially the experience of being abroad for the first time. Seeing the stars in the southern hemisphere, which we had to identify on the course, was something special.

Back to Blighty

At the end of the course in December I returned home via New York on a much more comfortable liner. New aircraft were now coming into service and Bomber Command squadrons were re-equipping with the Lancaster and Halifax. These bombers required a crew of seven and the observer's role was now split in two – navigator and bomb aimer. My course results showed that my bombing was superior to my navigation so I was not surprised (actually quite pleased) when I received a posting to 14 OTU Cottesmore as



a bomb aimer. This was where we formed crews and converted on to the Wellington before going on to fly something larger.

Our rear gunner, Peter Derham, selected the various crew members – navigator, bomb aimer and wireless operator – having previously chosen the pilot he judged would see us safely through the war! With the latter, he could not have made a better choice - Robert (Bob) Knights was an excellent pilot in every respect and his record in the war and in his commercial flying career shows the very high regard with which he was held by all who knew him.

Peter Derham, age 29, was the eldest member of this five-man crew whose ages ranged from 19-22, so he soon became used to being called 'Dad' or 'Pop'. He was married with a family which made him determined to survive the war. The navigator, Harry Rhude hailed from Canada. He never got us lost and kept us well supplied with Canadian cigarettes and other goodies. The wireless operator was a Scot, Jock Rowan. In his position in the Lancaster he had the control of the heat coming from the port inner. This often resulted in a contest between the crew who wanted some warmth and Jock who did not want hot feet.

Operational Training

The Wellingtons at OTU had seen better days and were subject to breakdown at very inconvenient times. On one take-off, we narrowly escaped when the port engine stopped just after the wheels left the ground. Fortunately, the ground from the end of the runway fell away into a shallow valley and Bob was able to use the dip to maintain speed before returning low over the hangars and landing safely. He deserved a Green entry in his log book for that.

These Wellingtons were equipped with the Mark 14 bombsight which was now in use throughout Bomber Command and the first three weeks of the course were devoted to bombing. This bombsight was vastly different from the Mark 9 Course Setting bombsight which I had used in South Africa, one major feature being a gyroscope to stabilise the bombsight during the bombing run when the aircraft could be subject to some changes in level flying due to enemy action. The weather was good and we completed all our bombing exercises to the satisfaction of the instructors, earning us seven days leave before starting the navigation phase of the course. This was completed without a hitch in three weeks. The course had enabled us to meld from a group of strangers into a crew who could find their way around the country in the dark and deposit bombs on a target with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

A feature of this part of the course was the introduction of flying instruction for the bomb aimer. Previously, bombers had carried two pilots, but this was stopped because of losses. In the Halifax and Lancaster, the bomb aimer would receive sufficient training to enable him to operate the flying controls if the pilot were injured or became unwell. The intention was to enable the aircraft to be kept flying while the crew dealt with the emergency. My log book records that I had 13 hours in the Link trainer and a total of

four and a half hours at the controls of the Wellington. Later, on the Squadron, I 'flew' the Lancaster on several occasions at Bob's insistence. This usually produced several unprintable remarks from the crew. I found, for a large heavy aircraft, that it was not difficult to move around the sky. So much for being too tall for pilot training!

Lancaster

Our next course was at Swinderby where we were to convert on to the Lancaster. For this we required two more crew members – a mid-upper gunner and a flight engineer. The former, Bill Hobbs, was a cheerful 18-year-old Londoner from Edmonton. The flight engineer, Ernie Twells, was 29 and lived in Nottingham. He, like all flight engineers, had many years in his trade and had volunteered for aircrew because it meant an upgrade to Sergeant and a rise in pay. Both fitted well into our crew in short time.

The long fuselage of the Lancaster was not easy to pass through, especially when carrying equipment, and the crew positions somewhat confined. The bomb aimer's position was about 5ft long and I had to fit my 6ft 4ins into it. Curled up on a rubber cushion I found the position not too uncomfortable. I also had the front turret to look after and I soon found that standing up to man the guns allowed me to stretch my legs. Very useful later on long flights.

619 Squadron

By the end of 4 weeks on course, during which we had accumulated 38 hours of day and night flying, we had become quite attached to the Lancaster. We were now ready to join a squadron – which we were informed would be 619 Squadron based at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire.

Many thoughts on what lay ahead were obviously in our minds during the train journey to Woodhall, but I do not remember anyone voicing opinions on the future or on the odds against completing a tour. I think we were all thankful that the long periods of training were over and that we were about to join a squadron and get on with the job we had volunteered for.

The first squadron to occupy RAF Woodhall Spa airfield was 97 Squadron in 1942. In March 1943, this squadron moved to the Pathfinder Force, leaving behind one flight to form the nucleus of a new squadron – number 619. The squadron had been operating for just three months when we arrived on 29 June.

After reporting to the Squadron Adjutant, we were directed to the communal site (now Thorpe Camp) where we found our accommodation in brick huts deep in the woods. The site also contained airmen's accommodation, both messes and the NAAFI so it was a very busy place.

One local feature we rapidly became acquainted with was the Blue Bell Inn, just 500 yards away. This ancient tavern echoed every night to the sound of thirsty airmen calling for their pints until the barrels ran dry. Then it was on our bikes to Coningsby where rumour suggested there was more beer.

During our three weeks on the Squadron we were engaged on cross-country exercises to further our experience with the Lancaster and with the Squadron routine. During this time, Bob flew on two operations with an experienced crew. This was standard procedure for new crews to have their pilot with some operational experience. The pilot Bob flew with was a New Zealander who gave him many useful tips on staying alert and alive. On the nose of his Lancaster was painted Walt Disney's Thumper.

First Operation

On 24 July, our crew was on the operations board for our first mission. At last we were going to war. At the briefing the target was revealed: Hamburg. Not known to the crews this was the first of several planned attacks on the city under the code name Operation GOMMORAH. It also saw the introduction of Window, the code name for aluminium strips dropped in large bundles over the target area to confuse German radio contact with their fighters.

Our flight to Hamburg was without incident and we arrived at our allotted time to see the city already engulfed in flames. From our height of 20,000ft the intensity of the bombing and the fire power of the defences was a sight we were to see many more times, but on this, our first operation, it was truly alarming. As bomb aimer, I had the 'best' view of the defences awaiting us – the night sky filled with shell bursts and weaving searchlight beams through all of which we had to fly. I remember thinking – how could we fly through that barrage and survive. Fortunately, I could ignore that view of hellfire and concentrate on my task to direct the pilot towards our target – the aiming point. I was able to identify it from the target map and the coloured markers dropped by the pathfinder aircraft.

I had already switched on the bombsight to allow the gyroscope to settle and with a couple of minutes to go Bob opened the bomb doors. We were carrying a 4000lb blast bomb (called a cookie) and a large quantity of incendiaries. I switched on the bomb selector which would allow the cookie to be released first and the fuse panel which armed the bombs. I watched the approaching target with the aid of the bomb-sight on the side of which was a small glass plate with an illuminated graticule in the shape of a sword. I ensured that the sword remained pointing directly toward the aiming point by giving the pilot instructions to make small changes of course – Left or Right – as necessary. At the moment when the target coincided with the cross-piece or hilt on the sword I pressed the bomb release button which electrically opened the bomb cradles.

A small glass panel in the rear of my position enabled me to see into the bomb bay and check that all bombs had been released. We had to remain steady on course for 25 more nerve-racking seconds until the photo flash illuminated the ground for the on-board camera to record our bomb plot. We were then able to climb away and on to our course for home. We landed back at base at 4.30am after a 5½ hour flight and were met by our ground crew who were anxious to know if there were any problems for them to deal with and did we enjoy our first operation? After debriefing and eating



Left to right: F/Sgt Peter Derham (rear gunner), Sgt Bill Hobbs (MU gunner), P/O Bob Knights (pilot), Major Cotterell (War Reporter), Sgt Ernie Twells, (F/E), Sgt Jock Rowan (W/Op), F/Sgt John Bell (B/A) and F/Sgt Bryant (stand in navigator for this trip) - taken on 20 December 1943, prior to an operation against Frankfurt - while the crew were on No. 619 Sqn

the standard meal, egg and bacon, waiting for all crews returning from an operation, we had about two or three hours sleep before reporting for duty.

In the morning, we checked into the B Flight office to find that we were on ops again that night. We had been flying P for 'Popsie' since we joined the Squadron and were pleased to receive a report from our ground crew that it was still serviceable.

Essen in the Ruhr

At the briefing in the afternoon the target was revealed - Essen in the Ruhr – and another late take-off at 2230 hours. We were getting used to the pre-flight procedure – aircraft check, bomb and fuel loads, lunch, briefing, maps, clothing check, pre-flight meal (egg and bacon), Mae West and parachute. I cannot remember anything significant about this op. The defences seemed to be as intense as those at Hamburg and again I tried to ignore them as I concentrated on my task. I was already finding that the only way to deal with the flak barrage was to ignore it. Yes, it was an alarming (perhaps frightening) sight viewed on the approach to the target, but since it was not possible to take evasive action for shell bursts I thought we might as well trust to luck. It was the only way to deal with this business we were engaged in.

There was egg and bacon again after debriefing and a little more time in bed before reporting in the morning. No ops tonight so we flew Popsie for an air test and a spot of bombing practice. We received a visit from the AOC 5 Group (the Lancaster squadrons Group) who congratulated the Squadron on having dropped a greater tonnage of bombs on the previous two nights than any other squadron in the Group. In the evening, we joined the crowd in the Blue Bell and helped to empty a barrel.

Next morning, we saw that we were on ops again. There were the usual guesses on the target based on the amount of fuel we were to be carrying. All was revealed at briefing – Hamburg again. We knew the way and what to expect from the defences, but it wasn't going to be like our previous visit and we were heading for our first emergency. About 50 miles short of the target one of the port engines was seen to be on fire. It was quickly extinguished and the engine shut down. Bob explained the situation to us; we were losing height but could maintain about 10,000ft. We had two options – to abort the operation and return to base or continue to the target and bomb from this lower height. After a short joint discussion, the crew decided to continue to the target. We also felt that we would be well under the flak barrage 10,000ft above us. It was only later that we realised we were lucky not to have been struck by any of the bombs raining down from the aircraft above.

A solitary bomber passing over the city at 10,000ft must have presented a good target for the guns and we probably had that feeling of exposure. We flew unscathed through the defences and Bob was able to gain a little more altitude for the flight home on three good engines. We congratulated ourselves on dealing successfully with our first emergency and completing another operation.

Two nights later we returned to Hamburg for the third time. I wondered if it were really necessary; there could not be much left standing. We had no problems this time and transited the city without being hit.

Four operations in six days was a baptism of fire that had shown the strength of Bob's crew. We were learning fast and from a group of seven individuals we had become a close-knit crew dependent on each other. During the next few months we would have to complete a further 26 operations over enemy territory before an entitlement to a rest period. There was a long haul ahead and we were well aware that, despite our confidence, it would take only a small fragment of an exploding shell to bring us down.

To be continued...

John Bell

Squadron Leader Rob Perry served with 617 Squadron during the Tornado era, as an Engineer officer. Deploying on Operation HERRICK in Afghanistan in 2011, Rob led an engineering shift of 45 technicians, responsible for eight Tornado GR4 aircraft. In Afghanistan, the mission was a challenge, requiring a complex weapons package of the Paveway IV 'smart bomb' and the Brimstone guided missile. Further, the Tornado has the integral Mauser 27mm cannon at its disposal. Here, Rob offers a glimpse of life as an engineer officer on operations:

My Story by Rob Perry

It is possible to look on a tour in Afghanistan as 'doing your day job in a different place'. To a certain extent this is true, once you have become accustomed to weapons, indirect fire and general security awareness. One of the peculiarities that needed to be experienced was the weather, particularly the ever-present dust and heat. In many senses, Afghanistan was an operation in a hostile environment.



Some of the engines supplied by Rolls-Royce during 2011 had been conceded due to a failure to reach peak performance. These were proving fairly limiting as the temperature rose through the spring, necessitating numerous engine changes. During June, one of these changes had been carried out through the night and, as our shift took over in the morning, one of my teams picked up the job and carried on with the post-fit installation runs. The jet stayed on the flight line throughout the tests in the full glare of the sun, the talcum-like dust being absent on this day.

After a short run in reheat (a significantly noisy activity), the test was completed and the team opened the engine bay doors. With the temperature edging towards 50°C, an airframe heated from above, below and within, SAC(T) Brendan Gallagher would vouch for the fact that the issued gloves proved woefully inadequate. I arrived a few moments later and quickly found the taileron was blistering hot to the briefest of touches. In

carrying out the EGR, SAC(T) Chris Gallagher had idly leant his arm along the cockpit edge and experienced the same. A judicious pause was necessary before the aircraft was carefully towed back under a sun shelter. Every process, particularly if it was necessary to carry it out under the sun, had the ability to catch you out.

When more invasive maintenance was necessary, and scheduled maintenance was required during the same period, the sun shelter was closed to keep out the worst excesses of dust. This had the effect of forming a smashing little oven. The margins were slight, but the slightly hotter air naturally rose within the shelter. Any work that was necessary on the top surfaces became that much more demanding so a cooling pipe was jury-rigged

across the roof in an attempt to provide a modicum of comfort for the teams (with 12-hour shift, seven-days per week, for four months, fatigue is a very real threat).

It wasn't simply the personnel overheating. Special procedures were developed to ensure the RAPTOR pod (a highly capable camera system) was cooled sufficiently prior to taxi. With a potential 15-minute transit to the departure point, there was a real risk that no usable imagery would be generated if the circuitry overheated. The consequences of this were all too apparent as intelligence briefings would keep us informed of the vast quantities of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) identified during the routine Raptor sorties. One weekly mission took photographic images of around 175 miles of roads and supply routes, used by the insurgents and friendly forces. Comparing these images, week-by-week, showed where the Taliban has buried explosives in the roadside or on a track. This intelligence allowed us to inform land forces to avoid a certain area or road; saving lives.

Operating and maintaining armed aircraft throughout the tour in Afghanistan focused the mind. Being responsible for personnel in this environment far more so. The balance between operational necessity and personal safety required constant evaluation, but is all part and parcel of being an Engineer Officer.



Rob Perry

Rob Perry

Final Landings

Arthur Poore

Born in 1920 Arthur Poore's interest in aviation was fostered by the 1930s Hendon air displays. With war imminent Arthur, employed as a junior clerk, volunteered for the RAFVR and was called up in 1940 and commissioned in 1941. After Elementary Flying Training on Tiger Moths near Derby he graduated to flying Whitleys at Kinloss. During April-May 1943 he was part of an attachment by No 10 OTU to St Eval flying Whitleys on anti-submarine patrols, during which he attacked an enemy U-boat, without result, and was fired on by a friendly convoy, fortunately without causing damage to his aircraft.

Although he had always hoped that he would become a photographic reconnaissance pilot, Arthur was directed into Bomber Command and after due conversion to the Lancaster was posted to No 106 Sqn at Syerston in the summer of 1943. The night following his initial trip as "second dickey" with Flt Lt Stephens on Hamburg in July 1943 (the first of the series of intensive attacks on the city), he took his own crew to Essen. During a further attack on Hamburg in August he was approaching Heligoland when his Lancaster was attacked by an enemy fighter which made a large hole in his starboard wing. After 18 operations, including five to Berlin, four to Hamburg and two to each of Hannover and Munich, and long range sorties to Stettin and Milan Arthur and his crew were asked to volunteer for No 617 Sqn.

The offer was accepted and they transferred to Woodhall Spa on 15 February 1944. After reaching the required standard with the Stabilised Automatic Bomb Sight the crew began operations in the offensive against the German aircraft industry, attacking plants in occupied France, starting with an aero engine factory at Albert on 2 March. Other French targets followed as the build-up to D-Day began: St Cyr and Juvisy. During May Arthur was teamed up with Fg Off Bob Knights, practising the demanding technique for Operation "Taxable", flown on the night of 5/6 June when the squadron dropped strips of metal foil ("Window") in a pattern intended to deceive the Germans into believing that the invasion was taking place to the east of the genuine D-Day landings. Three nights later he was amongst those dropping the first Tallboy (12,000lb deep penetration) bombs which blocked the Saumur railway tunnel. This was followed by the attacks on the E-boat pens at Le Havre and Boulogne, before attention switched to the large V-weapon sites. By August these were being overrun by ground forces and after 23 relatively uneventful operations Arthur's tour was coming to a conclusion. An ineffectual attack on a railway bridge at Etaples, when the Squadron was forced to use 1,000 pounders owing to a need to conserve Tallboys, marked Arthur's penultimate operation, before targeting the U-boat pens on 5 August 1944. On this occasion the defences were extremely active. Fg Off Don Cheney and crew failed to return and no fewer than seven of the Squadron's Lancasters were damaged by flak, including Arthur's "O-Orange".

Arthur remained with the Squadron until 13 September, but would take part in no further operations. He was promoted to Acting Squadron Leader and posted to No 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston, as a flight commander. With the decline in the need for new aircrews as the war came to a close and losses declined, he was transferred to Transport Command who were at that time in dire need of multi-engine pilots. He joined No 511 Sqn at Lyneham, flying Avro Yorks to Ceylon and Singapore.

Grounded post-war by an eye problem, Arthur left the RAF in 1947 and became a sales representative for Gillette, before forming his own business as a pharmaceutical wholesaler.

Maurice Webster

Leaving school at the age of 14 Maurice Webster completed two years further education at Technical College before joining British Railways as an apprentice fitter in 1943. As a member of the ATC his interest gradually switched from trains to aircraft and in 1948 he applied to join the RAF as aircrew. Passing the selection board, he was sent to Southern Rhodesia as an Officer Cadet Pilot, but subsequently re-categorised as Officer Cadet Navigator. Granted a short-service commission as a Pilot Officer, he was awarded his Navigator's flying badge on 23 February 1951.

On return to the UK he was posted to No 201 Advanced Flying School at Swinderby followed by No 242 Operational Conversion Unit, Dishforth, in preparation for a posting to Transport Command at Abingdon in 1952. After taking a Staff Course at the Central Navigation and Controllers School at Shawbury in 1954 he was posted to No 4 Flying Training School at Middleton St George as a Staff Navigation instructor. This unit trained aircrew for Vampires and Meteors, and led to an introduction to the world of night fighters, consolidated by a Specialist Airborne Intercept Course, which led to his being posted in August 1956 to No 64 Squadron, based at Duxford, flying the delta-winged Gloster Javelin all-weather fighter.

His tenure with Fighter Command was brief. After two years, in 1958 he completed a refresher course at Stradishall and was posted to the Bomber Command Bombing School (BCBS) at Lindholme to undertake the NSC/MBF weapons course. After a brief ground period with No 721 Mobile Signals Unit, carrying out practice navigation and bombing assessment, he was posted to No 232 Operational Conversion Unit at Gaydon to convert to the Vickers Valiant prior to joining No 214 Sqn at Marham as a Navigator Radar in the spring of 1962. This was followed by a further ground tour based at the Joint Air Reconnaissance and Intelligence Centre (JARIC) at Brampton before returning to BCBS in 1966 for a visual bombing course followed by four months at No 230 OCU converting to the Vulcan B2.

Maurice joined No 617 Sqn at Scampton in October 1966 as a Navigator Plotter with Fg Off Peter Breton's crew. Following a return to Lindholme for induction into the technical aspects of Blue Steel the crew regrouped at Scampton where they settled

down to categorisation training. April 1967 saw their first major exercise – a Kinsman dispersal deployment to Bedford, followed two months later by Exercise Emlyn – a fly off and mock Blue steel attack on Lindholme following a station weapons generation exercise.

July 1967 saw the crew's first Goose Ranger, during which they completed two Canadian low level routes. September was a busy month with Exercise Black Eagle, designed to test the NATO defences of Denmark, and No 1 Group's competitive Exercise Billion. The pattern of generation and dispersal exercises, Lone, Goose and Western Rangers was to become familiar over the next two years. There were the occasional novelties, such as performing a display at the Biarritz Air Show in September 1968, and Lone Rangers to Luqa from where they would venture out over the sun baked Libyan low level routes, a marked change from the more usual tundra topography of the Canadian routes.

Peter Breton retired from the service in July 1969 and Maurice transferred to the crew of Flt Lt Gordon Rayfield and the following year was designated Specialist Aircrew, enabling him to retain his aircrew status as one of the Squadron's more experienced members. The Squadron had now relinquished Blue Steel, with the Royal Navy's Polaris armed submarines taking over the nuclear deterrent role. Things began to focus on sea-borne activity as the Squadron began to take on an additional maritime reconnaissance role, undertaking Instow Patrols – seen by most as unbelievably boring doing hours and hours of “boat spotting”. Nevertheless, there were some compensations. In July 1970, the Rayfield crew were selected as part of the RAF's representation in the US Strategic Air Command bombing competition “Giant Voice” and were detached to Waddington to join the Giant Voice Training Flight, but after this interlude it was back to the routine tasks. The crew's final sortie with the Squadron in December 1971 was atypical – taking AVM Horsley, AOC No 1 Group to McCoy AFB, Florida for that year's “Giant Voice” presentations.

After five years at Scampton it in January 1972 it was time to head for warmer climes, with a posting to Akrotiri, Cyprus and a three-year tour as an instructor. During this tour he was instrumental in he was very instrumental in establishing the “All crew Trainer”. This linked up the Pilots simulator with the NBS sim and the AEO's Electronic sim by intercom, thus providing an all crew training platform (eventually adopted throughout the Vulcan force). For this he was awarded the MBE in January 1975. Returning to the UK that year, Maurice was promoted to Squadron Leader and after a refresher course at No 230 OCU was posted to No 44 Squadron at Waddington, where he would remain, becoming Operations Officer in 1979. A year later he was back in Cyprus, initially as Operations Officer, Akrotiri and then as a Staff Officer. He retired in May 1982, remaining for many years in Cyprus before returning to the UK.

Rob Owen

617 Squadron Association

Registered Charity No 1141817

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Dr R M Owen - 617 Sqn Association Official Historian

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