



Après Moi



The 617 Squadron
Aircrew Association Newsletter

January 2013



Contents

Editorial	2
Robertson's Ramblings	3
The Dambusters' Front Line	5
Happy 98th Birthday from the BBMF	7
68 Years On, Thumper Returns to the Circuit	8
Sir Barnes Wallis 125th Anniversary	11
A Flight in a Mosquito	12
Dominion Post - Magical Merlins in a Flying Machine	15
Final Landings	16
617 - Going To War With Today's Dambusters	18

Cover Photo: John Bell looks out from the cockpit of the BBMF Lancaster at the official unveiling after a re-paint in 617 Sqn markings.

Editorial

Many thanks to Jock Cochrane and especially to his wife Rachel for managing the Association's accounts for the past few years. I am sure you will join me in wishing them an interesting and fulfilling time during Jock's posting to Jordan. Even more thanks to Stuart Greenland for taking up the post of treasurer (just as soon as NatWest sorts its paperwork out). I would like to make a plea to all members to ensure that they pay the full subscription of £10 to ease the treasurer's workload - it is six years since we increased the subscription from £8 and still we have members who have not updated their standing orders.

The other problem we have is members not advising us when they move house or change their email address. The membership secretary, Bill Williams and I have spent the last few months chasing up members who have disappeared from our radar over recent years, and updating the membership list. It has been decided not to distribute a new Members Handbook because too few members responded with their permission to publish their details, as required by the Data Protection Act. If you need the contact details of another member please contact me (details below) or Bill Williams (billwilliams631@gmail.com).

Chris Henderson

Deadline for Next Newsletter

1st June 2013

email: 617sqnnews@tiscali.co.uk

or

Springfield Farm, Old Church Lane, Pateley Bridge, Harrogate HG3 5LY

© 2013 617 Squadron Aircrew Association

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, recording, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

Robertson's Ramblings

I am delighted to say that the Dams Dinner in May with an integrated auction was a huge success and raised over £4000 for the Memorial project, which together with a revised but critically, lower-cost design, allowed the Association to proceed with letting a contract with the stonemason to construct the Memorial. Subsequently, further donations from the Lincolnshire Lancaster Association and the Trustees of Coronation Hall at Woodhall Spa funded a plinth on which the Memorial will be set. Furthermore, using our Memorial project as a catalyst, the Woodhall Spa Parish Council proposed a six-figure project to renovate the Royal Square where both memorials will reside. To cut a long story short, the Association was asked to reposition the new Memorial to the western end of the square, which from our perspective, is in a better position and sets the Square off nicely. However, as the project is likely to take two years to come to fruition, we have pressed on with our post-WW2 Memorial, a revised planning application has been made and I am very confident that it will be in place in time for the 70th Anniversary of the Dams Raid. At this point, I would like to express my personal thanks to Robert Owen, Phil Spencer and Rachel Lewis for their significant support in getting this project to the position it is today.

The 70th Anniversary of the Dams Raid will be an exciting and significant period for the Association with much media interest and events to commemorate it extending from the Wednesday prior to our reunion and culminating with the unveiling of the new Memorial by Air Marshal Andy Pulford CBE RAF on the Sunday. A letter requesting your interest in each event was sent to each of you recently and your response to Mike Hines is required before 22nd February 2013. Unfortunately, as these events are not organised by the Association, we are limited on the number of available places for Association members, so early bids are required. The letter also gave details of the AGM and Dinner on Saturday 18th and your response is required by 31st March. As it is such a significant event, the Committee decided to permit members to invite up to two additional guests to the dinner on a 'space available, first come, first served' basis and with Les Munro and Johnny Johnson both intending to join us, it is certainly an occasion not to be missed. So get your responses back to Mike as soon as possible.

The vote at last year's AGM to permit ground crew to become members of the Association has led to its first applicants and we hope to see more join us prior to our next reunion. A proposed draft Constitution to accommodate this change was enclosed with details of the 70th Anniversary events for you to consider. This will be voted on at this year's AGM ahead of our dinner, so if you have any concerns or if you are unable attend the vote, please let Mike Hines

know your opinion. Furthermore, if you have any items for the agenda, please also let Mike know.

There is still much work to be completed between now and the 70th Anniversary commemoration events, but it is lining up to be a wonderful period for the Association. I look forward to seeing you there but in the meantime; it continues to be an honour and a privilege to serve the 617 Squadron Aircrew Association as Chairman of the Executive Committee.

D G Robertson
Chairman

617 Squadron Aircrew Association

Tirpitz Dinner 9th November 2013

The 2013 Tirpitz Dinner will take place on Saturday 9th November at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorial on Sunday 10th November following the Remembrance service at St Peter's Church, Woodhall Spa and the town's Remembrance Parade. Booking forms and menus will be sent out in September. 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.

Les Munro - Navigator!

Les Munro, at the sprightly age of 93, has finally graduated as a navigator. On 18 January he occupied the navigator's seat in the recently restored Mosquito FB Mk.26, KA 114 prior to the Wings Over Wairarapa airshow. The flight included a low flypast over Wellington International Airport at 350mph which left the accompanying Spitfire and Kittyhawk far behind. See Les' report on the flight on page 12.

Penarth Council Plaque

The Penarth Branch of the RAFA was recently invited to witness the unveiling of a plaque to mark the connection to Penarth of Wg Cdr Guy Penrose Gibson VC.DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar, RAF. In 1940, Wg Cdr Gibson married Eve Moore, an entertainer from Penarth, and they spent some of their married life living there. To honour this, Cllr Anthony Ernest (Mayor of Penarth) and Penarth Town Council, commissioned a plaque in his honour. This has now been placed in the Penarth council offices building.

Wing Commander Gibson married Penarth born entertainer Eve Moore, at All Saints Church, Penarth in 1940 and they resided in her family home at 21, Archer Road, Penarth between 1940-1943.

from 'Airmail, RAFA Magazine

The Dambusters' Front Line

A very warm welcome to the winter edition of *Après Moi* from 617 Squadron. Since you last heard from us, we have arrived home from our second operational tour in Afghanistan in the space of 12 months, we have enjoyed a lot of leave, a lot of the fine British summer and the sudden realization that we were back at work before we knew it! Well, maybe not the bit about the fine British summer.

Our homecoming was a very momentous occasion, not just for arriving home, but arriving home, on time, on the day our families expected - as the old saying goes, always expect the unexpected! Having been met by the Stn Cdr, Gp Capt Gale, as we disembarked, it wasn't long until we were reunited with our families. National press covered the whole occasion and we are still awaiting the "slab" of beer to be provided by Sqn Ldr Lownds for his and Karen's appearance on STV.

The August bank holiday weekend saw the 617 Sqn medal presentation ceremony take place and fingers were crossed for the British summer to make an appearance. On the day, it didn't, but it also didn't rain for the duration of the parade, so success in some part. Op HERRICK, Queen's Diamond Jubilee and Long Service and Good Conduct medals were presented by Maj Gen The Hon Seymour Monro CBE LVO to some 150 recipients. The whole Squadron paraded in front of HAS 29 which housed 200 friends and family who were eager to see loved ones collecting their awards. Amongst the awards was an Air Component Commander's commendation to 617 Sqn's engineers for their ability to provide jets for all of the Air Tasking Order serials, with a 94% serviceability rate, meaning 617 Sqn flew more hours than any TorDet Squadron in any previous Op HERRICK. In addition, Flt Lt Axcell and Flt Lt Mullineux were awarded a green endorsement for flying, an award reserved for displays of exceptional airmanship. When faced with a complex and time critical emergency, at night, in the extreme south of Afghanistan, they safely recovered the aircraft to Camp Bastion. Well done chaps, and we hoped you enjoyed your R+R at Bastion!

Just as the hangovers subsided, the Officer's homecoming dining in night was held in the Ramnee Hotel, Forres, where the departing members, including OC 617, Wg Cdr Taylor, were dined out. To mark his leaving, the Boss was presented with the original of a specially commissioned Squadron caricature to mark our time during Op HERRICK 16, ably organized by Flt Lt Pargeter.

The change at the helm sees Wg Cdr Dave Arthurton taking over from Wg Cdr Taylor who leaves Ice Station North for new surroundings, and civilization in London.

The Squadron were heavily involved in 2 major exercises in early October, Combined Qualified Weapons Instructor (CQWI) and Joint Warrior. CQWI is the culmination of a year's work for each platform specific QWI course and most days saw 60 aircraft launching, mostly from Lossiemouth, and prosecuting simulated targets around the country. Integration with the Typhoon and Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) assets was vital to achieve the aim. Although Joint Warrior was smaller in number of participants, both exercises allowed crews to practice the fading but essential skill of planning and operating as part of a Composite Air Operation (COMAO). It gave junior crews the exposure to flying as a large package and the senior crews the chance to gain new qualifications such as four-ship lead - something rarely seen these days outside the QWI course. With the odds stacked against them, the engineers working at 46% manning, worked miracles and provided us with jets to fulfil the commitment to both exercises. With the reduced manpower we currently find ourselves with, it was a truly herculean effort but in the finest traditions, huge commitment and determination ensured that we made the required serials. Thank you! The reward at the end of the busiest UK peacetime exercise was a well-deserved week of block leave!



Lightning over Kandahar during
Op HERRICK

With everyone looking ahead to next May and the 70th Anniversary of Op CHASTISE, you will be aware the Battle of Britain Memorial flight has painted their Lancaster for the 2013 season as "Thumper III" wearing the code KC-A, a nod to the 617 Squadron Lancaster DV385, one of the replacement airframes delivered to the Squadron after the losses received during the Dams raid. The Squadron were invited to the unveiling of the new artwork and to fly in a mixed formation with the Lancaster, a chance of a lifetime. Expect to see more of KC-A on the display circuit next year and in the run up to the 70th Anniversary in May.

As we look ahead to the 2013, we are in the privileged position to send two crews to the Tactical Leadership Programme in Albacete, Spain where four weeks of COMAO training will take place, this time with European partners as well as other UK assets. We are sure the weather in Albacete in January

will be more conducive to flying training than the grim winter predicted at Lossiemouth! Further in the future, we will see the Squadron deploy to Eilson AFB for Ex RED FLAG ALASKA, a 2 week COMAO exercise in the vast expanse of Alaska working with our American partners, shortly before returning for the unveiling of the 70th anniversary jet with the new tail art and the 70th Anniversary.

I'm sure you will agree, busy times ahead in the future and a lot to squeeze into the first half of 2013 but with the determination and the can-do attitude shown by all members of the Squadron, it is sure to be an enjoyable year.

Until next time...



Happy 98th Birthday from the BBMF

Robert Johnstone noticed that the BBMF Lancaster was due to fly at the Southport Air Show on Saturday 8th September - the 98th birthday of his father Archie who flew on 44 Sqn and 617 Sqn during WW2 including attacks against the German battleship 'Tirpitz'. Robert asked if there was any possibility of the Lancaster flying past Archie's care home in Skelmersdale, about 10 miles away, on its way to or from Southport. I passed Robert's request to the BBMF via Rob Owen together with a map and a Google satellite



photograph of the care home and the orientation of the patio where Archie and his guests would be celebrating his birthday.

On the day, the Lancaster made not one pass but four perfect circuits of the care home precisely positioned for optimum viewing by Archie and his family and friends. There was hardly a dry eye amongst those gathered as the sound of four Merlin engines disappeared towards Southport and a kilted piper appeared playing 'Over the Sea to Skye'.

Chris Henderson

68 Years On, Thumper Returns to the Circuit

Given that the average life of a Lancaster was reckoned to be 40 hours or so, perhaps only six or seven operations, some might be surprised to learn that a nearly half a dozen of the Squadron's aircraft managed to complete 50 ops or more, with several others reaching almost that total.

One such aircraft was DV385 which is generally believed to have taken part in 50 operations. Whilst not the highest scorer on the Squadron it is possibly one of the most recognised, due to its distinctive nose art depicting "Thumper" the rabbit from Walt Disney's 1942 cartoon "Bambi", the personal choice of Flt Lt Bob Knights and his crew.

Delivered to the Squadron on 11 November 1943 the aircraft was one of a number allocated to bring the Squadron back to strength following the disastrous losses of the Dortmund Ems Canal operations of September 1944. Coded KC-A and fitted with large bomb doors it was capable of carrying both the 12,000lb HC blast bomb and later Tallboy.

Making its first operation to Flixecourt V-1 site on 16 December 1943, for the next month it was flown by a number of crews, usually that of Flt Lt O'Shaughnessy. In February 1944 it was allotted to Bob Knights' crew who had the nose art applied, together with the "Mk III" suffix, denoting that it was the third aircraft so named to be flown by Knights. Over the next six months the crew would complete 28 operations in DV385. Targets comprised French factories, German cities, E-boat and U-boat pens and V-weapons sites, and included Operation Taxable, the D-Day deception.



In August 1944 Knights and his crew were given a new aircraft, and DV385 transferred to other captains. Most notable of these was 'Cas' Castagnola who took it on a number of renowned operations including attacks against the Kembs Dam, the Bielefeld Viaduct and most significantly the final two against Tirpitz, for which the aircraft had its mid-upper turret removed and extra fuel tanks fitted inside the fuselage.

DV385 led something of a charmed life – on 4 July 1944, during an attack against the V-1 storage site at St Leu d'Esserent, (on this occasion being flown by John Sanders and crew rather than Knights) its gunners claimed a Ju 88 destroyed, duly recorded on the nose art by a swastika on the 32nd

bomb. On 7 August, the aircraft was withdrawn from operations for overhaul and modifications, returning to the Squadron mid-September after which the new codes KC-V were allocated. Hit by flak over the Urft Dam on 8 December it was despatched to a Maintenance Unit for repair, returning to the Squadron on 27 January 1945, when codes were once again changed, becoming KC-T. Assessed as Cat B on 6 April 1945 on account of its long operational life, DV385 was subsequently flown for storage with No. 46 Maintenance Unit at Lossiemouth. It remained there until it was ingloriously broken up and consigned to the smelter after being Struck Off Charge on 9 November 1946.

At the time of his posting from Woodhall Spa in August 1944 John Bell, Bob Knight's bomb aimer, could have had absolutely no idea that 68 years later he would be returning to the same area of Lincolnshire to look once again at the artwork of a playful bunny painted on the nose of a Lancaster bearing the codes KC-A.

With the 70th Anniversary of Operation Chastise approaching, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight took the decision to re-paint their Lancaster PA474 to commemorate the event. This would not be the first time that the aircraft had carried the Squadron markings; during the 1980-83 it had been painted as Wg Cdr Gibson's AJ-G, (a scheme many enthusiasts felt inappropriate since PA474 was a standard aircraft, rather than an "Upkeep special"). Bearing this in mind, it was decided to select a scheme more suited to the aircraft's configuration. As a result a "KC" coded aircraft from 1944 was selected. With its colourful nose art it was finally decided that Thumper should take to the air once more, painted as it appeared after 35 operations at the beginning of August 1944. Thus it was that in late August 2012 "Phantom of the Ruhr" was flown to Humberside Airport (formerly RAF Kirmington, a former wartime Lancaster station) where, in a remarkably short time, Clive Denney of Vintage Fabrics completed the transformation to "Thumper".

On 27 September John Bell was guest of honour amongst those from the Association who assembled at Coningsby to witness the formal unveiling of the new scheme for the 2013 season. Also present were wartime captains Benny Goodman and Ken Trent, wireless operator Colin Cole, Association Chairman David Robertson, and Membership Secretary Bill Williams, along with members of the



BBMF. Representing the present day Squadron, Wg Cdr Keith Taylor and his navigator arrived in their Tornado from Lossiemouth echoing the return of Squadron crews some 68 years earlier.



It was an emotionally charged moment as John first viewed the “reincarnation of my old warhorse”. Acknowledging his gratitude to all who had brought the project to fruition he said: “It is an honour to be here at the Flight with the team and so many old and new friends. This aircraft depicts the one I flew 27 of my 29 operational sorties on. The ground crew maintained it to an exceptionally high standard and our skipper kept us safe.”



Wg Cdr John Bell MBE DFC
admires the artwork

Although this was strictly speaking the official revelation of the new scheme, the aircraft had already made several flights carrying the new markings. During one of these, thanks to the generous co-operation of Sqn Ldr Duncan Mason and members of the Flight, the Lancaster was able to pay another appropriate tribute. Whilst en route between Hanley and Southport on 8 September, its crew made a memorable diversion over Skelmersdale, making several passes over the home of Association member Archie Johnstone as he celebrated his 98th birthday.

The Flight’s motto is “Lest we forget”. Now resplendent in its new scheme, “Thumper” is all set to make 2013 a year for the Association to remember.

Robert Owen

Sir Barnes Wallis' 125th Anniversary

On Sunday 16th September Christ's Hospital school marked the 125th anniversary of the birth of Old Blue Sir Barnes Wallis. Members of Barnes Wallis' family, including his two daughters Mary and Elisabeth and granddaughter Rosalind, were joined by representatives of the RAF, the RAF Benevolent Fund, Old Blues and others at a special service in Chapel. Squadron Leader George 'Johnny' Johnson (90) one of the last surviving members of 617 Squadron - the 'Dambusters' - was amongst the guests and talked with pupils and others about his wartime experiences. A former Treasurer and stalwart supporter of his old school, some of Sir Barnes' favourite music and readings were featured in the service and the Chaplain spoke movingly of the great man's personal qualities, generosity and kindness. Following the service guests were treated to a March Past by the School Band and Lunch hosted by the Head Master.



Pictured left to right: Fit Lt David Mulae, RAF contingent Senior Cadet Annie Moxon, Sergeant Bernard Morgan, Squadron Leader George 'Johnny' Johnson, Dr Mary Stopes-Roe, Air Commodore John Langston, RAF Senior Cadet Alex LeGon, Mrs Elisabeth Gaunt and Rosalind Bonsey.

Dams Dinner 17 May 2014

The 2014 Dams Dinner will take place on Saturday 17 May at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on Sunday 18 May. 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 Flight in a Mosquito

On the 19th of January 2013 I was privileged to be invited to occupy the navigator's seat in the recently rebuilt Mosquito KA 114 on a flight from Masterton to, and over the city of Wellington. After being rather unceremoniously squeezed into the cockpit of the Mossie – I had real difficulty in getting my bent legs to move forward from the entrance and unable to find somewhere to grip and pull my body forward - I eventually made it and thankfully settled into the Navigators seat. On being belted up, the pilot Keith Skilling, an ex-Air New Zealand pilot, started up, a quick cockpit drill, taxied to the end of the runway and we were on our way.



Les Munro and Keith Skilling

Some few minutes after take off we were joined by a dual-seat Spitfire on the starboard wing and a dual seat Kittyhawk on the port wing. The pilot of the latter was Liz Needham a B767 Captain with Air New Zealand. Both these planes had journalists with cameras as passengers. They formatted on the Mossie all the way to Wellington and on reaching the city the trio completed a pass over the CBD (central business district). Keith then flew over the Hataitai ridge and executing a diving tight turn to starboard, carried out a high speed [350 mph] pass along the Airport runway. On being invited by the control tower to carry out another pass as the runway was free Keith needed no second bidding and carried out a second low level return pass along the runway. After completing a second pass over the CBD we headed up the Hutt Valley on the return flight to Masterton.

It was noticeable that on the high speed approach to the Airport we left the two fighters well behind and they did not resume their positions on the Mossie's wings until well into the return flight with Keith cutting back to cruising speed. I was grateful for the opportunity to fly in a Mosquito even as a passenger after some 68 and a half years since I last flew one and very moving to listen to the distinctive sound of those two Merlins,

A brief history of KA114: Following the completion of a Mosquito fuselage for static display at Windsor, Ontario for the Canadian Mosquito Bomber Group quite a few years ago work commenced on the first complete airframe for Jerry Yagan, owner of Fighters Factory, Virginia Beach, VA, USA by Avspecs



Ltd of Ardmore near Auckland with the wooden frame and wings being the responsibility of Glynn Powell of Mosquito Aircraft Restoration. Glynn actually had to build the moulds from scratch because all the wartime moulds had been destroyed and his skill and perseverance plus the skill and dedication of Warren Denholm and his team of engineers ended with KA114 being test flown on 28/09/2012. It was the star turn of the 'Wings over Wairarapa' air show at Masterton in January attracting close inspection by people of all ages and not least a number of wartime veterans who had flown Mosquitoes on operations.

While on the subject, I could mention that a restored wartime Avro Anson originally built in 1943 flew for the first time last July after 6 years work owned by Bill and Robyn Reid of Nelson gave flying displays. There are two post-war Anson's still flying but MH120 is the only airworthy wartime Anson in the world.

While not wishing to appear parochial I returned from the air show with a sense of pride in having seen the Mosquito and the Anson, two restored wartime aircraft, giving flying displays as a result of Kiwi ingenuity and engineering skills.

Les Munro



Mosquito FB26 XA 114 prepares for take-off



Some of the wartime Kiwi aircrew who flew the Mosquito were invited as honoured VIP's for the 'Wings over Wairarapa' air show. They all posed with Mossie display pilot Keith Skilling and Les Munro (in the blue sweater). Alan George (in the leather jacket on Keith's left) flew three complete night bomber tours, the last one being on the elite Pathfinder Force flying Mosquitoes.

Dominion Post - Magical Merlins in a Flying Machine

They came in low over the Rimutaka Saddle going about 320kmh - three aircraft that changed the course of World War Two, bearing down on Wellington. In front was the De Havilland Mosquito, the “wooden wonder” known for its speed, agility and low-level flying. On either side were the Spitfire, the fighter that tore through the Luftwaffe, and the P40 Kittyhawk, the workhorse fighter of nearly every theatre of the war.

As they flew over the city at 300m they banked gently above Lambton Quay then passed swiftly over Hataitai, where Mosquito pilot Keith Skilling hit the throttles and tore ahead at about 560kmh, before diving to 30m for a southward buzz of the runway.

When the control tower said there was no traffic and he should feel free to make another pass, Skilling was quick to swing around and do it again in the other direction. At his side in the navigator’s seat was Les Munro, the last remaining member of the Dambusters (sic). Best known for piloting Lancasters, he also spent a while in Mozzies (sic). The 93-year-old could be seen calmly glancing about as the aircraft flew through rays of sun on its way from Wairarapa to the harbour.

“The sound of those Merlins brings back a lot of memories,” he said after the flight. The two Rolls-Royce Merlin engines meant the aircraft was capable of reaching more than 600kmh. “It was a lovely smooth flight for us. We saw you bobbing round a bit,” he said of the two fighters.

Inside a warbird the noise is immense, even when wearing headphones. The torque of the engine combined with the aircraft’s bare but functional interior makes clear the designer’s brief: make it fast. And the Mosquito, which could also carry bombs, really epitomised the elan of designers and airmen that won the war.

When Luftwaffe head Herman Goering first saw a Mosquito in flight he was aghast at its speed and wooden construction. “They have the geniuses and we have the nincompoops,” he was reported to have remarked.

Few have seen a Mosquito in flight. It was a special day for Wellington yesterday. More so for the many whose grandfathers or fathers flew in the war.

And for me, the lucky bloke sitting in the back seat of the Kittyhawk, it was a visceral addition to the logbooks, photographs and brevet of the Mosquito-flying granddad I never met.

Taxiing back along Masterton’s Hood aerodrome airstrip, past hundreds of cameras and gawping faces, I got the impression I might not be alone.

Marty Sharpe © Fairfax NZ

Final Landings

Frank Cholerton

After completing a tour with No. 49 Sqn at Fiskerton, and instructor duties with No. 1654 CU at Wigsley, Frank Cholerton joined the squadron from No 51 Base, Swinderby, on 29 September 1944, as F/E with Flt Lt Ian Marshal's crew.

The crew's first operation with the Squadron, the second operation against the Tirpitz on 29 October was a challenging one for any Flight Engineer. Operating at extreme range from Lossiemouth, fuel consumption was critical, despite the provision of extra tanks inside the aircraft. The exercise was repeated again for the final attack of 12 November that saw the despatch of the vessel. If two trips in succession to the same objectives seemed unusual, it was only the harbinger of multiple trips. For Frank things seemed to come in threes – by the end of hostilities he had been three times each to Ijmuiden, Bielefeld and the Lutzow at Swinemunde.

Taking into account other sorties to Politz, the Urft Dam, Dortmund Ems Canal, Heligoland and the finale to Berchtesgaden, Frank completed a total of 21 operations with the Squadron. Promoted to Warrant Officer in July 1945 he remained with them and transferred to Waddington to be trained for Tiger Force, after the disbandment of which they were despatched to India at the beginning of 1946. On return, in May 1946 Frank was posted to No 97 Sqn for twelve months, briefly being detached to No. 617 Sqn a year later to take part in the Squadron's Goodwill trip to the USA, re-joining 97 on his return in September.

Bill Deubert

Bill Deubert enlisted in the RAFVR and served for a period in the ranks before being commissioned as a Pilot Officer in September 1943. Trained as a navigator he was promoted to Flying Officer in March 1944 and thence to Flight Lieutenant in September 1944.

After completing his first tour with No. 189 Sqn, operating Lancasters from Fulbeck, he joined the Squadron on 11 April 1945 as a member of Canadian Fg Off Cliff Hill's crew. With the war drawing to a close he was able to complete only one operation, (believed to have been his 38th) to Heligoland on 19 April, before the cessation of hostilities. At a time when many of the longer serving members of the Squadron were being posted, or transferred to No. 15 Sqn, Bill remained with the Squadron at Waddington, flying with Flt Lt Parnell and Fg Off Digby-Ovens and taking part in the Squadron's four month detachment to India in January 1946.

On return from India, after disembarkation leave he transferred to Binbrook where the Squadron was re-equipping with the new Avro Lincoln. After attending a Junior Leader's Course and Air Sea Rescue survival course, he was sent to the Central Navigation School at Shawbury in January 1947. Here he undertook an Advanced Navigation Course in preparation for becoming lead navigator, flying with the Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr Clive Saxelby, on the forthcoming Goodwill Tour of the USA and Canada.

Returning from this trip, in September 1947 he was posted to Binbrook as Operations Briefing Officer and four months later posted to No. 97 Sqn at Hemswell. Moving to Lindholme in October 1948 for instructor duties, he transferred to the Reserve in 1950 and retired from the RAF in 1955.

Gordon Hickmore

A keen sportsman at school Gordon Hickmore joined the RAF at the earliest opportunity in 1954. After training as a Cadet Pilot he was commissioned in May 1955 as a Pilot Officer, having signed on for a minimum of 12 years.

Posted to No. 617 Sqn at Scampton in September 1973 he was Nav Plotter in Flt Lt Steve Monaghan's crew, flying their first sorties as the Squadron's contribution to Exercise Priory, culminating in a simulated attack on Leuchars before recovery to Scampton.

Gaining Designated Aircrew status in November 1973, his flying career with the Squadron appears to have been uneventful, in terms of avoiding any significant incidents. Typically the crew undertook the routine Western and Goose Rangers to Offutt and Goose Bay. A Goose Ranger in August 1974 had the added spice of the crew being the reserve aerobatic aircraft for the Toronto Air Show, although No. 230 OCU's serviceability held up and the reserve was not required. Display skills of a different sort were called upon on a cold December afternoon in 1974 when the crew took part in a four aircraft demonstration Scramble to impress the visiting Secretary of State for Defence, Brynmor John.

In April 1974 and May 1975 warmer climes beckoned as they flew to Malta to participate in Exercise Dawn Patrol. After three years with the Squadron the crew completed their final sorties in October 1975, flying to Lossiemouth and participating in Exercise Ocean Safari, the largest NATO maritime exercise of its time. Designed to carry out a two-fold mission: maintaining control of vital sea-lanes and providing carrier air support of the Allied Command Europe; the exercise comprised sixty-five ships, hundreds of aircraft and more than 17,000 Navy and Marine Corps personnel from Allied nations operating in the Eastern North Atlantic and Norwegian Sea.

Posted from the squadron in November 1975, was promoted to Sqn Ldr in 1982 Gordon was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday honours, June 1989.

Not one to seek an easy retirement, he focussed his energy into performing notable public service as Clerk to Monk Burton Parish Council, and President of the Lincolnshire Branch of the Motor Neurone Disease Association raising significant funds for charity.

Robert Owen

617 - Going To War With Today's Dambusters

Press Release:

In May 1943, 617 Squadron RAF executed one of the most daring operations in military history. Flying barely fifty feet above black marble waters, Wing Commander Guy Gibson and his bombers mounted a raid against hydro-electric dams in Germany. Bold, courageous and precise, 617 Squadron became a WWII legend.

Nearly seventy years later in April 2011, a new generation of elite flyers followed their Dambuster heroes into the theatre of war. Now flying supersonic Tornado GR4 bombers, 617 Squadron was deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan - their mission, to provide close air support to troops engaged in brutal conflict on the ground.



Commanding 617 was their new boss Keith Taylor. An operational veteran with seven tours over Iraq, he knew that even with the latest cutting-edge weapons and sensors, only rigorous flying standards and watertight tactics would keep his young pilots safe. A full-throttle account of daring feats in modern fast attack jets, this is also a personal story of a closely-knit band of men and women working under immense pressure, where every decision could affect the lives of NATO troops and an entire country's hopes for a better future.

Tim Bouquet was given unprecedented access to 617's pre-deployment training at RAF Lossiemouth and their blistering tour in Afghanistan. From dramatic air strikes to the life-and-death search for IEDs and low-flying shows of force designed to spook and drive insurgents from civilian cover, he tracks every mission, and the skill, resilience and banter that see 617 through.

Tim Bouquet is a journalist and author and has reported on conflicts, organized crime and takeover battles across the world for leading titles including the Telegraph Magazines, The Times Magazine, The Irish Times and Esquire. He also broadcasts and teaches journalism and creative writing. He lives on the south coast of England.

Published in hardback by Orion, priced £20 in hardback or ebook at £11.

617 Squadron Aircrew Association Merchandise

The following items are available by post from John Bell at the address below. John will advise the additional cost of packing and postage. Cheques should be made payable to 617 Squadron Aircrew Association. John will also have the full range available for purchase at Association events at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa.

Gold Wire Blazer Badge - £5

Large Squadron Lapel Badge - £3.50

Small Squadron Lapel Badge - £3.00

Silk Tie - £13.00

Polyester Tie - £7.00

Bow Tie (untied) - £6.50

Bow Tie (tied) - £7.50

Scarf (Maroon & Blue) - £8.50

Cummerbund (Poly) - £12.50

Silk Cravat - £17.50

Polyester Cravat - £11.00

Contact: John Bell

Tel: 01903-741743

5 Manor Court, Church Street, Storrington, Pulborough, RH20 4LH

Deadline for Next Newsletter

1st June 2013

email: 617sqnnews@tiscali.co.uk

or

Springfield Farm, Old Church Lane, Pateley Bridge, Harrogate HG3 5LY

617 Squadron Aircrew Association

Registered Charity No 1141817

President

Air Cdre J Langston CBE

Trustees

Gp Capt D G Robertson - Chairman

(Lancaster/Lincoln Era)

Wg Cdr J R Bell MBE DFC

(Canberra/Vulcan Era)

Wg Cdr C J Henderson - Newsletter Editor

Wg Cdr F M A Hines - Secretary

Sqn Ldr D H Moore MBE

Gp Capt J K Walters

(Tornado Era)

Sqn Ldr S Greenland RAF - Treasurer

Mr R Owen - 617 Sqn Aircrew Association Official Historian

Membership Secretary

Flt Lt W Williams

Overseas Committee Representatives

Joseph Dacey DFC DFM - Australasia

Shere Fraser McCarthy - North America

www.617aircrew.com



Published by the 617 Squadron Aircrew Association
Reproduction of 617 Sqn Crest by permission of MoD