



# Après Moi



The 617 Squadron  
Association Newsletter

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Spring 2014



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**Cover Photo:** A Lightning II (F35B) that the Squadron will reform with at RAF Marham.

## Editorial

Looking through my files on my computer I found that I first produced a one page newsletter for the Association back in 2004, so after ten years and approaching my 70th birthday I think it is now time to hand over the reins to a younger person. Please let our chairman know if you are prepared to take on this role.

The disbandment of the Squadron on Friday 28th March was marked at RAF Lossiemouth with a parade attended by the Duke of York and members of the 617 Squadron Association. The planned flypast by four Tornado GR4s was cancelled because of inclement weather (see page 7).

No details are available at the present time about any commemoration ceremony in the Netherlands to mark the 70th anniversary of the death of the Squadron's first CO - Guy Gibson. My first illustrated newsletter back in 2004 reported on the visit to Steenberg and Rotterdam hosted by Jan van den Driesschen and grateful members of the Dutch community when we marked the 60th anniversary of Gibson and his navigator, Jim Warwick's death by the laying of wreaths at their graves in Steenberg cemetery.

**Chris Henderson**

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**Deadline for Next Newsletter**

**1st January 2015**

**email: [apresmoi@btinternet.com](mailto:apresmoi@btinternet.com)**

or

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

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# Robertson's Ramblings

I hope that this is not to be my last 'Ramblings', but unless someone willing to produce this magazine for the Membership comes forward, this could be the last edition of *Après Moi*. I hope that you agree, and will consider taking over as Editor from Chris Henderson, who would like to retire from this position. I would therefore like to thank him on your behalf, for his many years as Editor and for producing such a fine and informative piece of communication.

Life has returned to 'normal' following the intense interest in the 70th Anniversary of the Dambusters Raid by members of the UK public. Having transformed the Membership over the last few years by introducing categories of membership such as Honorary and Associate, and more recently opening it up to Ground crew members, the Committee considered a proposal for a 'sons and daughters' category, which would permit immediate descendants of members to attend reunions in their own right. However, given the changes that have taken place to date, the Committee decided to 'take stock' for a period and to allow a period of time to elapse before considering this proposal further. That doesn't mean that sons and daughters are not able to attend reunion weekends, as our Constitution permits this by writing to the Secretary to ask permission.

Planning is at a very early stage for two significant events this year; the 70th Anniversary of Guy Gibson's death in September and the 70th Anniversary of the sinking of the *Tirpitz* in November. The September event will involve a trip to Holland and the November event a trip to Norway. If you are interested in attending either one of these, please let me know as soon as you can.

If you're planning to attend the May reunion, don't forget to get to the Petwood Hotel on Saturday in time for the Annual General Meeting that will begin at 1530hrs. This would be your opportunity to have your say about anything to do with the Association and how you would wish to see it develop. If you have any agenda items, then please forward them to the Secretary as soon as possible.

Finally, please consider joining the Committee, either as the Editor of *Après Moi* or as the Stockholder (ties, cummerbunds etc). The current members holding these positions have done so for a long time and look forward to handing over their positions. However, if they are not replaced, you will no longer be able to get an Association tie or read an edition of *Après Moi*. The Association needs you.

Yours aye,

**David**

# “Reflecting on 70 Years”



**D**uring late 2012 I was approached by Sqn Ldr Mark Hayward of No 617 Squadron to commission a painting to celebrate their 70th anniversary in March 2013, a milestone event in the history of that famed squadron. This is the second commission I have painted for 617, the first on the occasion of their 60th birthday\*. And once again I felt the urge to sidestep painting yet another permutation of that famous night-time scenario over the Möhne Dam. Having got away from it once, what to do now for the encore? How to make things “different” with this one?

Light reflections have always fascinated me, and I have used them to advantage in my paintings whenever the opportunities presented themselves. Everything reflects its surroundings, for otherwise they would not be visible to us, and it serves artists to be more aware of this wondrous crystalline world we inhabit, where the intricate effects of light transcend and unite the diversity of objects within it. Wet surfaces and puddles can be especially effective for relieving the monotony of boring foregrounds like airbase tarmacs. The recent British winter has provided chances aplenty to observe the mirroring action of collections of excess rainwater, appearing to present portals into magical nether worlds. This struck me as possibly a solution for this important painting, using reflection to bridge past and present and

sum up the Dambuster heritage in a single visual swoop. I hastily assembled a preliminary sketch of the idea (Fig.1), and luckily for me, 617 immediately took to it. There was some initial uncertainty over whether to show the Herrick fit weaponry, but it was soon decided to revert to the MBDA Sky Shadows and AMRAAMs

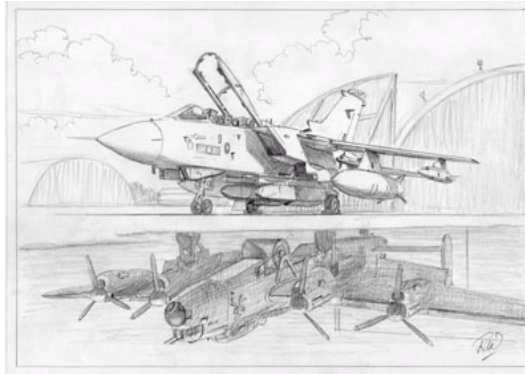


Fig. 1: Concept Sketch

The squadron required a fairly large canvas of 24 x 36 inches, which would yield a framed size some 6 inches more in each dimension. Transferring the layout to the canvas was straight forward, and as usual, I began by outlining the subject in pencil, followed by an overall acrylic wash of a warm and fairly neutral tone (Fig.2). The oil paints then went on, first defining the areas of light and shadow in the composition before moving in with additional colour and detail.



Fig.2: On to the Canvas

The image is designed to be rich in intellectual correspondences and polarisations; the Storm Shadow stand-off missile above vs Upkeep below,

the rounded Lossiemouth aircraft shelters vs the old square Scampton hangars, the current airfield equipment vs their WWII counterparts, and so forth. There is a discrepancy in size between the two aircraft in real life, the Lancaster being substantially larger, so a certain amount of licence had to be applied to the dimensions of the reflected image. To help matters visually, I set the Lancaster a little further back in the scene than the Tornado above. The nose-up, rear-wheeled Lancaster image is complemented by taking a very low eye-level (and therefore also nose-high) perspective of the Tornado. Every step of the way, I was ably assisted by the Lossiemouth aircrew and engineers in matters of the GR4's technical detail (hat off to Flt Lt Oli Payne's unstinting support in this regard). Robert Owen, 617's historian asserted his expertise on points of historical and technical accuracy in the lower half of the painting. The close-up views of both aircraft in the big canvas afforded little fudging of detail, and the nit-picking was fast and furious as the emails, often with attached digital snapshots, flew back and forth across the Internet..

For the background I chose a dark, turbulent sky to a) bring out the light-coloured, Tornado and b) energise the image in compensation for the sharply-defined and static foreground. The sunlit Tornado was in continual dynamic visual competition with that dark doppelganger below, but I was not overly concerned. Reflections on water are always partial, a significant part of the incident light being absorbed, with the result that reflected images are always more subdued than the object reflected. So once everything was in place, and the paint reasonably dry, I could just knock back that aggressive Lancaster reflection with one or more broad-brush glazes. The black dog, by the way, was an afterthought.

On the face of it, this radical compositional juxtaposition may seem a step beyond the usual bounds of the strictly "representational". Some may describe it as surrealist. But then it could be argued that the perspectives of many of the aerial scenes aviation artists routinely paint imply implausible or impossible observational points, and are therefore paradoxical (and surrealist?) images in terms of perspective rules. For all their apparent realism the arbitrary perspective framework expose them as synthetic, virtual imagery, expressions of artists' minds rather than anything capable of being actually witnessed. Perhaps the painted images which really qualify as representational are those static, feet-on-the-museum floor portraiture where the perspective relationship between observer and object remains intact.\*\*

The finished and framed anniversary painting, shown at the top of this article, was safely conveyed by UPS to Lossiemouth, where it formed the

centre-piece for the Dambusters' 70th Anniversary Dinner party on March 23, 2013. The painting was accompanied by 617 copies of signed prints to be used to raise funds for the Leonard Cheshire Disability Charity\*\*\*.

As much as I enjoy the continual flow of commissions from air force units, in recent years there has often been a sad note to some of them, as increasingly they have been for farewell paintings (and prints) as squadrons and air bases faced imminent closure. A further, ominous note is that I have on my books the first commission for a pilotless drone!

**Ronald Wong GAvA**

**April 2013**

\* See <http://www.ronaldtkwong.com/gallery/ProvidingCover....html>

\*\* It may be well here to paraphrase Rene Magritte: "Ce ne sont pas des avions".

\*\*\* Print copies in support of the charity are available at [www.dambusters70.com](http://www.dambusters70.com)

## Rain on Dambusters parade cancels final flypast

The German flak guns did not deter them, but it seems that a bit of light Scottish drizzle did.

A fly-past by the RAF's "Dambusters" squadron to mark the famous unit's disbandment had to be cancelled yesterday, due to rain and wind.



The tribute, by four Tornado GR4 aircraft, was due to take place over a parade at Lossiemouth, in Moray, where the unit has been based.

However, the poor weather meant that the ceremony, attended by the Duke of York, had to be moved into a hanger. As a result, the fly-past was scrapped.

An RAF spokesman said: "VIPs don't like parades in the rain." .....

**From The Telegraph, 28 March 2014**

see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/10729956/Rain-on-Dambusters-parade-cancels-final-flypast.html>

## From the Frontline

It is a strange feeling to be deployed on operations in Afghanistan knowing full well that the Tornado chapter of the Dambusters history will soon draw to the end. At the end of this month, the last two Dambusters crewed Tornado GR4s will thunder down Kandahar's 10,500ft runway to fly our last mission. From my perspective, as the CO, it is great to draw a line under this part of our history whilst deployed on operations. I would much rather go out with a bang than gently fade away.

The team here in Afghanistan remain committed as ever; the engineers are doing their all to keep the ageing jets serviceable, the aircrew remain keenly focused on the task in hand and the support staff are all fulfilling their vital roles so the Squadron can keep doing what it does best, delivering air power. Against this backdrop there is the ever present threat of indirect fire. The sound of the alarm will see us diving to the ground for cover and conducting our immediate action drills. Every time the alarm cries out, it is a harsh reminder that life in Afghanistan is different.

Amongst our current operationally focused activity we have to find time to plan for the disbandment of the Squadron when we return home. We will return to a bare HAS site at RAF Lossiemouth which will appear stark compared to the one we left in October. The aircraft are long gone and all of our memorabilia has been catalogued and packed away for safe storage until the mighty Dambusters rise again. It is absolutely fantastic that No. 617 Squadron has been selected to be the UK's first Joint Strike Fighter squadron. Although the exact timings have yet to be announced, the Squadron will reform at RAF Marham before the end of this decade. It is fitting that 617 Squadron has been selected for this prestigious role, and I for one can't wait to see our beloved Squadron open the next chapter of its history.

**OC 617**  
**Kind regards,**  
**David**

## Tirpitz Dinner 8<sup>th</sup> November 2014

The 2014 Tirpitz Dinner will take place on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> November following the Remembrance service at St Peter's Church, Woodhall Spa and the town's Remembrance Parade. 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.

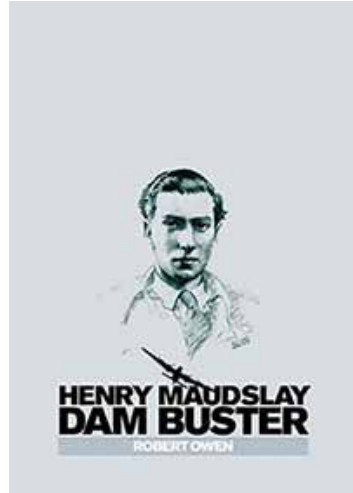


# Henry Maudslay Dam Buster by Robert Owen

## Publisher's Review

The Dam Buster raid (sic), Operation CHASTISE, has gone down in history as one of the greatest feats of arms executed by the Royal Air Force. Extraordinary demands were placed upon the airmen who took part in the raid, one of whom was the particularly accomplished young pilot Henry Maudslay.

Henry, educated at Eton, was well-regarded and respected by contemporaries and Masters alike. He left school in 1940 and volunteered immediately for the RAF, becoming part of a generation for who transition into adulthood would, again, be cast in the heat of battle. Henry flew his first operational tour with No. 44 Squadron on Handley Page Hampdens, following which his experiences and skills were utilised during service trials for the new Avro Lancaster. Henry joined No. 50 Squadron at the start of 1943 for a second tour and in March 1943 he was selected to join a new squadron, No. 617, then forming at RAF Scampton. Henry Maudslay attacked the Eder Dam on the night of 16/17 May 1943. After a number of attempts, he released his weapon which struck the parapet and detonated on impact almost immediately behind the aircraft. Contrary to contemporary reports the aircraft survived, and set course for home, only to be brought down near the Rhine with the loss of all its crew.



Combining material from family, school and official archives, together with personal letters and recollections from those who knew him, Robert Owen, Official Historian of the No. 617 Squadron Association, describes in detail the family background, school life and extraordinary flying career of this young and enigmatic airman.

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Approx 40 black and white photographs

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**Note:** Rob Owen hopes to have copies available for purchase at the Dams Raid weekend 16/17 May

# Harmondsworth

## Barnes Wallis & the Dambusters

The 26th of September saw the unveiling of the ninth Hillingdon Council blue plaque celebrating people of either national or local importance to the area. On this occasion the plaque was to Barnes Wallis the inventor of the UPKEEP bouncing bomb so closely associated with No 617 Squadron's Operation CHASTISE attack on the night of the 16/17 May 1943.



This latest memorial pays tribute not only to the work of Sir Barnes Neville Wallis (1887 – 1979) and the Squadron, but also that undertaken by the members of the Road Research Laboratory the wartime site of which was located to the immediate south of Moor Lane in Harmondsworth.

Following initial work at the Building Research Establishment near Watford where the original model of the Möhne dam was constructed, now a Grade II Listed structure, numerous other scale models of continental dams were built at Harmondsworth. These structures, referred to locally as “ponds”, were used in 1942 for explosive tests to determine not only the theory of Barnes Wallis’s “UPKEEP” weapon, but the depth of detonation and size of explosive charge necessary to breach dams of different constructional types – high, low, earth, masonry, concrete, straight and curved.

The unveiling by the Worshipful the Mayor of Hillingdon, Councillor Allan Kauffman, was attended by Barnes Wallis’s daughter Dr Mary Stopes-Roe and her son as well as local dignitaries, members of the Harmondsworth community, former members of No 617 Squadron and personnel from nearby RAF Northolt.



BRS Watford scale model of the Möhne Dam

The event not only, held in the 70th year of the CHASTISE raid and on what was Barnes Wallis birthday, also served to provide an admirable backdrop to the award of the Bomber Command Clasp to Mr Tommy Thomas a former member of the Command and a Lysander crew man who undertook numerous SECRET missions from RAF Tempsford to occupied France in support of the resistance effort.



Dr Mary Stopes-Roe and Mr Tommy Thomas talk with a former RRL employee at the Hillingdon memorial

# Tauranga City Airshow, 26 Jan 2014

I attended the above show as a guest and spent some time autographing books and other material during the day.

The principle theme of the Airshow was the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of World War 1 and this was marked in particular by the presence of four vintage aircraft of that era that put on a great flying display. This display built on and complemented displays by separate teams of Harvards and Russian Yak 3 fighters both of which put on excellent displays of formation flying. These displays were supported throughout the day by individual displays by a Pitts Special, a Spitfire, a P40 Kittyhawk, a Mustang and a Corsair FG1 and as usual David Phillips, a Cathay Pacific pilot gave his usual aerobatic and falling leaf display in his Tiger Moth. David was one of the pilots that test flew the recently restored Mosquito.

The four vintage WW1 planes that put on what a local paper described as "Classic planes put on a fabulous show" were identical reproductions of a Fokker Dr 1 Dreidecker (triplane), a Fokker D-V11, a Sopwith Camel and a Nieuport.



Members may be interested to know that these four planes are just a small part of the collection of 50 planes of 1914-18 vintage built by "The Vintage Aviator Limited" (TVAL). Initially a number were built for static display at Omaka Aerodrome [Blenheim] but over recent years TVAL have been building essentially, exact reproductions of airworthy aircraft and engines.

The large majority of the 40 planes that are housed at Hood Aerodrome (Masterton) are airworthy and are flown in the WW1 airshows held in Masterton several times a year. Most of the planes are powered by original or exact reproduction engines. Only a handful of the replicated aircraft are

using more modern engines. Currently the Fokker Triplanes are using modern engines as are the Fokker DVii and the Pfalz D.iii. Nearly 80% of the collection is powered by either original or exact replicas built by TVAL.



For those with an engineering bent the engines that TVAL build to power its planes are:

RAF1a – used in the RAF Be 2 Aircraft

RAF4a – used in the RAF RE 8 aircraft

Oberursel UR2 rotary-used in the Fokker DViii

LeRhone 110HP rotary -used in the Hanriot HD1 and others

Gnome 100 HP rotary- as used in the DH2, some AVRO 504k's etc'

Mercedes D.III –used in the Albatros Dva

As well as the four WW1 planes above TVAL reproduces the following:

RAF SE 5a                      Albatros DVA

RAF BE2                        Sopwith Pup

RAF RE8                        Sopwith Snipe

RAF FE2b                        Bristol F2b

The current production manager of TVAL and test pilot of the planes built is Gene De Marco. Gene hails from the United States where he accumulated many hours in various WW1 and "Golden Era" types including the Sopwith Camel one of which he flew on the day of the show.

**Les Munro**

# Memories and Emotions

This has been a busy summer [2013] and a happy one. The last months have shown that “old airmen never die” but also that they do not even “fade away”, to quote the old song. Since April I have been asked to contribute to 24 occasions of celebration and remembrance. It has been moving, tiring and wonderful. So much remembered by so many about one event, one squadron, and one elderly boffin - very elderly compared with the young men who took his invention to the target.

I have tried, when opportunity arose during all these interviews, to put forward my father Barnes Wallis's thoughts and feelings about this great triumph, the work, the stress and the final justification of his determination are all well told, even to the possibility of selling 'pink elephants' to the redoubtable Bomber Harris. But Barnes's inner reactions are not always described. It can be forgotten in the general excitement and relief, so well portrayed in the famous film, that what hit him hardest was the death toll. So many young men, such a large number of promising lives from his own special squadron, had been sacrificed on account of his weapon. He vowed then that never again would he knowingly sacrifice another man's life. It was hard to keep completely, when his job was to devise methods by which the enemy could be deprived of factories, weapons and transport facilities, although the RAF would have flown on even if he had retired there and then. But he would have seen this as a dereliction of duty, which it would have been. So he carried on, and the squadron with him.

He was able to make a memorable gesture when he was awarded a large sum to mark the success of his invention. He would not take the money for himself, but gave it to his old school, Christ's Hospital, to fund scholarships in perpetuity for the orphans of RAF personnel. His bequest was generously matched by the RAF Benevolent, and continues to this day. It was not just a dramatic gesture, but a heartfelt intention. I remember him saying in explanation, “any fool can invent something, it is the people who make it work .....” It is hard to dispute that.

Another very relevant matter which is seldom mentioned, and which I have been glad to emphasise, is the vital contribution made by the AVRO company and its chief designer Roy Chadwick. The splendid Lancaster, as everybody knows, was an AVRO plane, a stalwart of bomber command; but in the late Spring of 1943 not even this grand old lady could carry the bomb load of the Upkeep bomb. No plane to carry the bomb, no raid. Undaunted, Chadwick re-designed the bomb bay, set his team to work, and had a fleet of Lancasters ready for the squadron by early May. He and his work force completed the job in about three weeks; an example that might stand for us now as we get tied up in red tape and 'management'. Chadwick does not now get the praise he

deserves, but a letter which Barnes wrote in thanks to him after the raid shows that he certainly appreciated, and was deeply grateful for, all that Chadwick had done for the success of the enterprise.

I have been able to contribute memories of my father, and information which has come to me down the years from contacts and documents, and it has been a privilege to do so. It has been a varied programme, some more moving, some more informative to me, some more efficiently conducted, and some less impressive. The greatest memory is of 4 days in Lincolnshire over the actual dates of the raid; and in particular the Sunset Ceremony at Scampton, from where it all happened. It was extremely cold, but the memories and emotions were so strong that the cold scarcely mattered. The RAF performed their impeccable marching, and the band played; the Air Marshal and the Lord Lieutenant stood on the dais and the squadron banner was presented; a Spitfire and a Tornado drew up at the back of the parade ground and stood silently, and then came the Lancaster, slowly, slowly right up to the square of immobile men, huge and menacing. The flag was lowered, and the Last Post rang out, a sound which brings tears every time. The next day we, with the squadron and a large congregation, attended a beautiful and moving service in Lincoln Cathedral, again a cause for tears. I sat by Johnny Johnson, and we held hands for comfort.



There were so many other less moving events. TV interviews do not have quite the same effect, although it is taking the message to a wide audience, who could not be at the events. I was filmed in my chaotic attic with all the papers scattered, and in the more sedate sitting room. One company chose to put me in front of a very large collection of extremely tattered old children's books, and then sitting at the original wooden garden table, which we still have, on which stood the wash tub of the very first 'marbles' game with which the famous film of 1955 opened. But at least with TV you are talking to a face, whereas the numerous phone interviews are much harder to manage with a feeling of real interaction. And with none of these can you be sure that the



sections picked out - maybe a sentence here and there - this memory or that memory - really gives the complete impression that was aimed at. However, I did my best, and could truthfully give a picture of a very hard working, inspired man who was a warm and affectionate father with a gift for friendship and loyalty.

There were several days taken up with signing, which Johnny and I shared together. This partnership made them much more fun and less endless. It is not easy signing about 100 times the same name, and concentrating enough not to make a disastrous mistake which ruins an expensive print, photo, or book! And there were two amazing long day trips, on which I was taken by the TV companies. One was down to Chesil Beach in Dorset, where the plan was to film at the lagoon called the Fleet which runs behind the Beach for the best part of 16 miles. It was here in 1942 Barnes made the first trials of the smaller version of Upkeep, the Highball, himself sitting in the Wellington. It was a long day, and rather inconclusive, since it was not clear to any of us where the filming was to take place. However, after driving all the way up the Fleet and back to the beginning, the interview proceeded on the top of the Beach, climbing with equipment and chairs up 40 feet or so of difficult shingle, and sitting for the best part of an hour in bright sun and a cold wind so strong that the poor cameraman had a hard job to keep his black tent over him against the sunlight - he was filming facing West against a bright sky and a bright sea! However, the view across the wide bay to Portland Bill in the East and Lyme Regis in the West was rewarding.

The other long day trip was down to the New Forest, where on the bombing range at Ashley Walk Barnes tested the big bombs, Tallboy and Earthquake. It was very interesting to see the area, a vast heath of gorse and heather in the midst of greener valleys with the trees which usually adorn a forest. Here we stood in a brick hide, from which those watching in 1944 would have been sheltered from the blast of Tallboy explosions, the marks of which can still be seen in large dents in the ground. All that is still visible of the Earthquake bomb test is a large green mound which covers a concrete structure large enough to simulate rocket and submarine pens. The Tallboy craters are now ponds where the ponies come to drink. It was an absorbing and interesting experience, and the TV company had done an excellent job in working out how to manage the maze of rough lanes in order to locate the sites.

It has been a great experience for me, and I have met so many interesting people with whom to remember a great and triumphant event. I have been glad to bring forward a few less well known aspects, and to give honour and acclaim to those who took part. And my love as well.

**Mary Stopes-Roe**



# Final Landings

## Tony Iveson DFC

When Wg Cdr Cheshire succeeded Wg Cdr Tait during July 1944 the Squadron might have expected a few changes. None could have guessed what was to transpire. Several eyebrows were raised amongst hardened veterans as word went round that a new crew about to join the Squadron had no operational experience. That their captain was an experienced pilot offered little reassurance when it transpired that he had previously been a Spitfire pilot and a flying instructor in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

Flt Lt Tony Iveson and his crew were to be the first of several such crews who would be posted to the Squadron as part of an experiment devised by AVM Ralph Cochrane, Air Officer Commanding No. 5 Group. His intention was to take crews who had shown above average ability during the final stages of training and post them directly to the Squadron, their natural ability allowing them to rapidly assimilate experience from highly experienced veterans.

Tony Iveson was born in York in 1919 and educated at Archbishop Holgate's Grammar School in the city. He joined the RAFVR in 1938 and learned to fly at No. 4 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School at Brough on Humber. He was called up two days before the outbreak of war and sent to No. 4 Initial Training Wing at Bexhill for routine square bashing before being selected to become a fighter pilot and posted to Sealand, Cheshire. There he first experienced modern refinements such as flaps and retractable undercarriage on the Miles Masters of No. 5 Flying Training School. After a further period of training at No. 8 FTS at Montrose Tony was posted to No. 7 Operational Training Unit at Harwarden, Cheshire, for his first encounter with the Spitfire.

Tony's first operational posting was to No. 616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron, based at Coltishall and Kirton in Lindsey during the height of the Battle of Britain. On 16 September he was one of a section scrambled to intercept a Ju



88 attacking a North Sea convoy. Spotting the enemy he gave chase. As he closed in the enemy's gunner opened fire, damaging Tony's Spitfire. Forced to break off the attack and with an engine about to seize he was forced to ditch near the convoy and was picked out of the water by minesweeper.

Returning to his squadron he was then posted south to join No. 92 Sqn at Redhill. By this time the major daylight attacks were dying down and by early 1941 Tony found himself again posted – to the Central Flying School to train as an instructor. After qualifying in the spring of 1941, he found himself on a troopship heading for warmer climes – Southern Africa. He was to remain there until the middle of 1943 when he returned to the UK. After a period at Banff, flying twin engine Airspeed Oxfords, he moved on to No 14 Operational Training Unit, at Market Harborough, equipped with Wellingtons, where Tony formed the crew he eventually was to bring with him to Woodhall Spa. From there they graduated to the Stirling at No 1661 Conversion unit at Winthorpe (now the site of Newark Air Museum) and thence No. 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston, where at the end of the course they were selected to participate in AVM Cochrane's new experiment.

Despite initial qualms, they were made to feel welcome. Having earned their spurs with half a dozen daylight Tallboy sorties against U and E-boat pens, on 10 September 1944 the crew were detached to Yagodnik Russia as an advanced base for an attack against the German battleship Tirpitz in Kaa Fjord, northern Norway.

On return to the UK attacks against the Dortmund Ems Canal and Westkapelle resulted in the crew being instructed to return home with their Tallboy, but they were on target again as part of the high level force attacking the Kembs Dam on 7 October 1944. Tony participated in the operation of 12 November 1944, in which the Squadron successfully despatched Tirpitz. The aircraft had been modified with additional fuel tankage in the fuselage, necessitating the deletion of the mid-upper turret, thus placing sole responsibility for defence against fighter attack on the rear gunner. After three more operations against the Urft Dam, IJmuiden U-boat pens and a long haul trip to Politz near the Baltic coast, the crew found themselves on the Battle Order for an attack on the U-boat pens at Bergen on 12 January 1945.

A Mustang fighter escort failed to protect the force and over the target the Lancasters were heavily engaged by Fw190 single engined fighters. Two Lancasters, flown by Fg Off Ross and Flt Lt Pryor were shot down and during the engagement Tony's aircraft attracted the attention of an Fw190 that raked the Lancaster severely damaging the port fin and tailplane, damaging the controls and setting fire to the port inner engine. With an aircraft that was barely controllable the order was given to prepare to abandon aircraft. The rear gunner, mid upper gunner and wireless operator baled out, believing the aircraft to be doomed. As the enemy fighter broke off the attack Tony and

his flight engineer brought some semblance of order, feathering the burning engine and extinguishing the fire before assessing the situation. With the trimming tab cables damaged, the Lancaster continually wanted to climb, requiring the efforts of both Tony and his bomb aimer to hold the aircraft level. The flight engineer effected a makeshift repair to the trim controls, enabling Tony to nurse the badly damaged aircraft back to the Shetland Isles where a successful emergency landing was made. For his skill and airmanship during the Bergen attack Tony was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. I was to be his final operation with the Squadron.

With the war in its closing stages, Tony was seconded to BOAC to assist in the post-war re-establishment of routes to Australia, using Avro Lancastrians – a passenger carrying derivative of the Lancaster. He would later return to the RAF flying Handley Page Hastings with Transport Command, later commanding a Light Anti-Aircraft squadron of the RAF Regiment until its disbandment in 1954. On finally leaving the Service Tony embarked on a successful career in media, television and public relations.

One of the founding members of the Squadron Association, Tony was Secretary from 1966 to 1990. To the public he was perhaps best known as Chairman of the Bomber Command Association. As a public speaker and accomplished presenter, Tony was a vigorous supporter and driving force behind the campaign which culminated in the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park in July 2012.

## **Tony Coles**

Born in 1937, Tony Coles came from an RAF background, his father serving overseas in India during the Second World War. As soon as he was old enough, Tony joined the air Training Corps, determined to make the Service his career.

After experiencing several engineering trades, Tony was eventually selected and commissioned as an Air Electronics Cadet in June 1961. After qualifying as an Air Electronics Officer and he was posted to No. 27 Sqn at Scampton, completing his first tour in January 1965.

Tony found himself back at Scampton at the beginning of April 1965, after completing no. 54 Vulcan Mk 2 Course at 230 OCU Finningley, this time posted to No. 617 Sqn, as AEO with the crew of Fg Off Joe LeBrun.

After several flights with other crews and a further refresher course at 230 OCU at the end of July, the LeBrun crew finally settled into the standard pattern of continuation training, exercises, practice diversions, while the crew worked to build their proficiency with Blue Steel at both high and low level. December saw a Lone Ranger to Akrotiri – always welcome, but more so at

that time of year, followed by yet another refresher at Finningley early in the New Year.

January 1966 also saw a visit by the Squadron to the British Aircraft Corporation, Weybridge. Tony penned an account for Scampton's Station magazine "Delta" – including a prophetic statement reflecting on the demise of the company's order book.

"Wing Commander D G L Heywood and twenty-eight Officers of No. 617 Squadron visited the British Aircraft Corporation Division at Weybridge on 28th January. The invitation to the Squadron to spend the day with BAC originated when the Wing Commander met Dr Barnes Wallis at the Christ's Hospital Girls' School Speech Day last summer.

Dr Barnes Wallis was closely connected with the Squadron during the war when he worked with Vickers Armstrong in developing the unique weapons used by the Squadron in its best known operations. His direct connection with "617" ceased after the war but his interest has never flagged and he maintained contact through the Christ's Hospital Schools whose "Barnes Wallis Foundationers" are associated with the Squadron. His invitation to visit what was formerly Vickers Armstrong's factory at Weybridge was greeted with enthusiasm by Squadron members who welcomed the opportunity to meet the almost legendary Dr Barnes Wallis who is so much a part of the Squadron's past devoted the last part of his lecture to describing his present projects and his ideas for the future.

All who were present were strongly impressed by what they heard and most agreed that the lecture alone had made the trip worthwhile. After an excellent lunch at a nearby hotel, during which the Commanding Officer presented Dr Barnes Wallis with a Squadron plaque, the party returned to the factory for an Inspection of the aircraft production lines. BAC Weybridge is currently engaged in the production of the BAC 111 and the VC 10. There are approximately 80 BAC 111's on the order books at the moment and the VC 10 production line is turning out aircraft destined for RAF Transport Command. The VC 10 received close attention from the visitors, many of whom viewed it in anticipation of the future. Despite the disappointment of the TSR 2 cancellation and the recent failure of a VC 10 order to materialise, the Weybridge Division have sufficient work to keep them occupied for the foreseeable future, but nostalgia for the days when their production lines were crammed with Viscount and Valiant orders could, not unreasonably, be detected.

Weybridge is a long way to travel by coach for a day's outing but by making a very early start the party arrived at 1045am to be welcomed by Dr Barnes Wallis, Mr Geoffrey Quill and senior members of the BAC Staff. There followed a fascinating lecture given by the Doctor in which he related, with the aid of personal recollections, exhibits and film, the story behind the development of

the weapons used in the Dams Raid and other operations. The Doctor, who is now aged seventy-eight, is still very much in the forefront of aeronautical advancement and after tea with their hosts the party took their leave at 4.45pm in an effort to beat the rush hour traffic on the outskirts of London. No coach journey seems complete without stopping at a hostelry en route and the "White Horse" at Eaton Socon was chosen for this occasion. All who arrived at Scampton early the next morning had, without doubt, enjoyed a thoroughly interesting and worthwhile day—a visit which it is hoped will be repeated next year."

April 1 1966 saw promotion to Flt Lt but, following a spell in hospital in June, much of the rest of the year saw Tony regaining his medical category to resume flying. By December he was fully fit to take part in Exercise Kinsman, a week's detachment at Bedford, one of the Squadron's scatter airfields. Returning to Scampton. There was barely time to say "hello" to family and friends before the crew were again setting off on a Western Ranger to Goose Bay and onwards to Offutt.

Another refresher course at Finningley marked the start of 1967, returning to take part in the annual bombing competition. April saw a European exercise: "Springtime", testing the NATO defences of Germany and Denmark followed by a Lone Ranger to Wildenrath, with another Western Ranger in June. During the stay at Offutt, the aircraft and crew were part of a static display to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Strategic Air Command and the centenary of the State of Nebraska.

1967 followed a similar pattern, familiar to all who served on V-Force; the relentless cycle of training and exercises. After a pre-Christmas Lone Ranger to Laarbruch Tony's tour was almost complete and in January 1968 he was attached to the JC&SS Course at Ternhill before being posted from the Squadron in March 1968.

After 35 years' service, attaining the rank of Wing Commander, Tony retired from the RAF in January 1981, to start a second career, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

## **Alec Bates**

Wireless Operator Alec Bates flew his first tour with Wg Cdr Jeudwine of No. 619 Sqn during the winter 1943/44, including five trips to Berlin (four of them on consecutive nights). In May 1944, the crew were posted to No. 83 Sqn at Coningsby. On 10 July 1944, after Wg Cdr Jeudwine was transferred to a Mosquito as a Marker Controller, Alec and other members of his remaining crew were posted to join 617 at Woodhall Spa. There they joined up with A/Flt Lt John Cockshott who had been posted to the Squadron without a crew after a spell as an instructor.

The next month was spent working up as a crew and learning the precision techniques required for Tallboy and the Stabilised Automatic Bomb Sight. Their first operation with Squadron was against the U-boat pens at La Pallice on 11 August. Their second trip was abortive owing to engine failure. Three further attacks were made against French ports, the third being aborted, this time due to cloud, before the crew found themselves heading east to Russia for Operation Paravane, the Squadron's first attempt to sink the German battleship Tirpitz. This operation too was unsatisfactory. By the time the crew ran in the battleship was cloaked in a smokescreen and they did not bomb. As part of the low level formation attacking the Kembs Dam, they hit another aircraft's slipstream just before releasing their Tallboy, causing it to overshoot.

Alec stood in as wireless operator with Bob Knights' crew for the second attack on Tirpitz in October 1944, before returning to his usual crew for the remainder of his time with the Squadron. The crew seem to have been dogged by poor weather. Two trips to bomb the Urft Dam in December were foiled by cloud over the target. It is a tribute to their determination that on the second of these they make five runs over the target trying to get a good run, eventually giving up after 35 minutes on discovering that the bomb sight was unserviceable.

A toppled bomb sight gyro did not deter them from releasing their Tallboy on the Politz oil refinery having made four runs on the target. Alec did not operate again until February 1945, with trips to the midget submarine pens at Poorteshaven, followed by three sorties to the Bielefeld viaduct, where they were defeated each time by the weather. With the increased use of Grand Slam, using aircraft that did not carry a wireless operator, Alec was to fly only one more operation with the Squadron, against the Arnsberg viaduct, on 19 March, 1945.

Promoted to Warrant Officer in March 1945 he had completed 22 operations with the Squadron and, along with many of his contemporaries was posted No. 15 Sqn at Mildenhall on 29 My 1945 as the Squadron started preparations to take part in the war in the Far East as part of Tiger Force.

**Robert Owen**

## Dams Dinner 16<sup>th</sup> May 2015

The 2015 Dams Dinner will take place on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> 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.

## 617 Squadron 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 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

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**Deadline for Next Newsletter**

**1st January 2015**

**email: [apresmoi@btinternet.com](mailto:apresmoi@btinternet.com)**

or

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

# 617 Squadron Association

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