



# Après Moi



The 617 Squadron  
Association Newsletter

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Spring 2015



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**Cover Photo:** The graves of Guy Gibson and Jim Warwick after the civic ceremony at Steenberg commemorating the 70th anniversary of their deaths on 19th September.

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## Editorial

**W**ell, following my maiden September 2014 edition, I have been grateful for the feedback kindly provided on the content, layout and delivery of the newsletter. It would appear that little needs to change at present, although, as always, I welcome any suggestions and comments that you might have. My postal and email address is provided below if you would like to drop me a note.

This edition contains yet more fascinating articles from our readers, such as the inspiring story of Geoffrey Rice DFC provided by John Reed. Furthermore, my 13 year old daughter discovered the original front page of the Daily Express from 18 May 1943, re-produced by the Scottish Daily Express on 1 October 2014. It was pleasing to know that she spotted it without my encouragement!

I remain grateful to Wg Cdr Andrew Fell for another update on the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II; Andrew is part of the team bringing the aircraft into Service and has realised that the aircraft and 617 Squadron are inextricably linked. The updates from Andrew will become annual until 2016, where it is hoped that I can introduce readers to the key personnel charged with standing the Squadron back up.

I wish you all the very best for 2015 and lo forward to meeting some of you at the Dams Dinner in May.

**Stu Clarke**

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**Deadline for Next Newsletter**

**1st August 2015**

**email: [clarke318@gmail.com](mailto:clarke318@gmail.com)**

Wg Cdr Stuart Clarke 125 Bradenham Beeches, Walters Ash  
High Wycombe, HP14 4XN

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# Walters' Warblings

Ladies and Gentlemen, when I represented the Squadron at my first Dams Dinner at the Petwood in 1999, I recall feeling a mixture of awe and camaraderie in the presence of some of the Association's founding members, including Bob Knights, Tony Iveson, Ted Wass and John Langston, to name a few. Flattered by an undeserved place on the top table, I summoned the courage to ask the charming lady beside me, why she was on the top table; nodding towards her husband, Violet whispered 'Bill won the VC'. I gulped. And I gulped again, given this esteemed membership, when, fifteen years later, the Association invited me to serve as Chairman from May.

For those of you that I haven't yet met, I served as a Flight Commander on the Squadron from 1998 to 2001, having flown Tornados since 1989 in Germany, Italy, Iraq and Bosnia. During my tour, I had the regular pleasure of performing the flypasts over the Woodhall Spa memorial (following which I had to regularly intercept the 'thank you' letter to the Squadron Commander, as they tended to be a little too revealing). I retired in 2008 to become an airline pilot, but continue to serve the RAF as a Reservist. So, I share many of the membership's ability to look back nostalgically at my RAF service, but am fortunate enough to occasionally put on a blue uniform.

With the disbandment of the Squadron in March this year, the Association has, in many senses, become the spiritual home of the Dambusters, at least until the Squadron reforms in the USA in 2016 and moves to RAF Marham in 2018. I believe that our challenge is to build our membership to fully reflect the post-War eras and all the branches and trades that have served on the Squadron. This broadening is necessary to sustain the Association through these years and beyond. So, if you know any ex-Squadron members who have not yet joined the Association, please encourage them to contact our Membership Secretary, Bill Williams.

The Association's charitable endeavours to educate the general public about the RAF, and 617 Squadron in particular, remain a fundamental cornerstone of our strategy. The Internet has an increasingly important role in achieving this and a new Association website, hosted by the RAF, should be 'on line' shortly. We hope to sponsor the 'Spirit of Goole' charity to build a biplane and provide youths with the experience of flight. Something we can all play a part in is to continue to educate youth organisations, such as the Air Training Corps. The Committee very much welcomes your suggestions for other charitable endeavours.

The passing of our President, Air Commodore John Langston, in August was a great loss to the Association. John served as Chairman from 1990 to 2005 and then as President following the death of Group Captain 'Willie'

Tait in 2007. Our Chairman described John as 'a true gentleman; a friend, a colleague and a President who was respected and trusted by all who knew him and who will be missed by everyone'. At May's AGM, we will elect a new President.

On behalf of the Association, I would like to thank our current Chairman, David Robertson, for all his leadership and hard work during his extensive tenure. With David's hand on the tiller, the Association has made significant and enduring achievements, not least of which was the post-WWII memorial.

**Yours Aye,  
Andrew Walters**

## **The 70th Anniversary of Operation CATECHISM Visit to Tromsø by Bruce and Alison Hebbard - November 2014**

**W**e visited both Woodhall Spa and Tromsø to remember the important part played by 617 and 9 Squadron's three attacks on the Tirpitz especially the final attack on the 12th of November when the ship was sunk. Our late father, Loftus Hebbard took part in the last two attacks and it is amazing that after 70 years three of his crew are still alive today. They are Arthur Joplin, pilot, from Auckland, Frank Tilley, flight engineer from Hitchin, Hertfordshire, and Basil Fish, navigator from Stradbroke in Suffolk.

Tromsø is the eighth-largest municipality in Norway with a population of 71,600. The city centre is located on the east side of the Tromsø ya Island and is over 300 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle. It is connected to the suburbs on the mainland and outer islands by a series of bridges and tunnels. Tromsø benefits by having the Gulf Stream passing by and this allows and building construction to be carried out year round remarkable for a city 3° inside the Arctic Circle. Tromsø today is a mix of modern and traditional Norwegian buildings. It has a large hospital that serves the whole of the north of Norway and a large university (with 10.000 students) , the world's most northern most, which trains the medical staff for the hospital as well as other courses such as fishery, science, linguistics, entomology Arctic research and others for students.

In 1944 it became well known to the Allies in WW2 when the Germans moved the battle ship Tirpitz into Tromsø Fjord and made the battleship accessible for an attack direct from Britain but only just.

Our purpose of travelling to Tromsø was to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the final attack on the Tirpitz and the loss of life suffered both by the allied Forces in the 33 attempts made to sink the ship as well as the ship's crew who died in those attacks.

We flew from Heathrow to Oslo and on to Tromsø; two flights of approx. two hours each in stark contrast of the 14 hour return trip made by the aircrews 70 years ago. We were met at the Airport by Commander Lief Arneberg. Who took us to our hotel and looked after us 'right royally' whilst in Tromsø.



Alison, the Mayor of Tromsø and Bruce

The 12th of November was the last time in the Artic Summer that there would be light that would enable the bomb aimers to line up Tirpitz with their SABS bomb sights. We were told that on the 20th of November the sun would not rise at all.

Lief picked us up at 8am and took us to the harbour to join the party on a restored Norwegian timber fishing trawler over 100 years old which had cabin space to accommodate the 39 people in the party. In the cabin before we left a gentleman who was talking to us, once he opened his coat revealed his Mayoral Chains. He was there to start off the Commemoration as although he had prepared his address in Norwegian he gave in in English for our benefit.

At this time we were able to pass on a message from the pilot in Dad's crew, Arthur Joplin. He had asked us to pass on his thanks to the Norwegian Resistance for the information they risked their lives to send to Britain. Without that information it would have been impossible to mount the attacks. Unfortunately the last of the resistance members involved died last year. We did find out that the messages were transmitted from the Attic of the Tromsø Hospital. The radio operator had a medical condition that required frequent attention was admitted to hospital any time he had a message to send (the doctor being the head of the resistance in Tromsø ) so the Germans were unable to trace the radio operator or the source of the transmissions.

To our surprise included in the group were three TV crews plus reporters all of who were eager to get interviews with us. We did interviews both coming and going from the Tirpitz wreck site and another on shore in Tromsø with TV channels and newspaper reporters. They were generally surprised that we travelled from NZ to be with them.

It was about a half hour sailing from Tromsø and we arrived at the Tirpitz final mooring the only visible sign is the remains of a platform built to assist in the salvage after the war. As it was low tide there was a few fragments of the hull just showing above the surface. Alison and I were given the Honour to lay a Wreath on the water, at 09.52 am, on behalf of all those involved on both sides of the conflict, especially in memory of the dead. Just prior to placing the wreath we dropped a NZ and an English poppy on the water to connect those countries with the commemoration. 9.52am was the exact Norwegian time the Tirpitz rolled over. We were asked in the interviews how we felt in at that moment and it was a difficult question to answer. A sense of awe in being there and a great sense of the lives lost on both sides as well an appreciation that the crews all made the journey safely back to England. We were later featured on three TV channels and two newspapers

On the way out and all the time we were at the wreck site there was extremely low cloud and snow falling so 70 years on the day would have been unsuitable for a bombing run.

After our return to Tromsø, Lief drove us by road to the memorial on Haakoy Island - the closest point on land to the final anchorage. At low tide it does not appear to be as far from the shore as the published photos of the wreck site would seem to indicate. The memorial there is a simple structure made from a piece of steel from the hull of the ship with a simple inscription on it. Lief laid flowers on it and again we placed a NZ and English poppy there.

From here the most visible sign is the remains of the platform used to assist in the salvage operation. As this platform does not appear in any post war photos, we could only surmise that it was used to assist once the salvage went below water level. The Norwegian Government sold the wreck to a private contractor who in turn sold off the mechanical equipment and scrap steel salvaged. With the experience gained he was able to salvage many other wrecks of the Norwegian coast and became quite wealthy as a result.

There was snow on the ground but two of the Tallboy craters were visible. Even the crater of bomb number three which is the one filled with water on a post war photo would only be 400 to 500 metres from Tirpitz. An amateur diver we spoke to said there are many craters underwater all around the location where Tirpitz was moored.

Our next stop was the Tirpitz Museum of which Leif is the founder and curator. It is located in a WW2 munitions bunker built to supply shore batteries nearby. The door had snow covering it which had to be brushed off before the door could be opened. Inside Leif and his supporters have gathered a large collection of memorabilia from the Tirpitz and its relationship to Tromsø. Of special interest were several fragments of Tallboy casings on display and fence pickets of Malaysian oak from the Tirpitz deck, previously used



Entrance to the Tirpitz Museum

by residents for fences. Many 617 and 9 Squadron members received a piece of these from Norway on the 50th anniversary of the attack. Leif still gets donations of artefacts from the people of Tromsø especially from amateur divers who dive on the wreck site.

Leif is also the caretaker of a War Cemetery over seen by the Commonwealth War

Graves Commission. Leif has received an honorary OBE from the Queen for his work in looking after these graves. Leif took us to this cemetery and pointed a grave of a New Zealander buried there, Sub Lieutenant Clive Woodward who died on the 24th of August 1944 while taking part in in Operation Goodwood. He flew with 1881 Squadron, flying a Corsair, from the carrier HMS Formidable attacking Tirpitz in Kaa Fjord. His body was washed ashore and was buried in Hammerfest in northern Norway. He was transferred to the cemetery in Tromsø once the Commonwealth Cemetery was established.

In the evening we were invited to attend a book review in the Tromsø library of a fictional novel called 'Here Lay the Tirpitz', based on the events surrounding the sinking of the Tirpitz by Norwegian Author Ingrid Storholmen. The discussion was conducted in Norwegian and we could only pick out the words "the Beast", "Tallboy", "Churchill", "bomb" amongst others. After the review was over we were bought into the conversation and were asked about our reason for being in Tromsø. Some of Ingrid's previous books have been translated into English but not the one under discussion yet. Ingrid had accompanied us on the earlier events during the day.

The next day Alison had a walk around the town centre, we had to be very careful whilst walking as the snow had turned to ice in many places. There is quite a mix of modern and traditional Norwegian buildings and we just enjoyed exploring and took photos. In the suburb across the fjord the Artic Cathedral is an impressive building but too far to walk for a visit. Whilst walking along the water front a lady stopped us and asked if we were the people from NZ. Our TV appearance ensured our five minutes of fame. She invited us to come to the Polaria Artic Aquarium where she worked. It was a very striking building built as a modern representation of an iceberg. It housed a huge pool

containing four seals as well as smaller tanks. There was a large theatre and we were given a special screening of a film about the northern lights. We did not get to see them for real as a combination of cloud and the lights of the city obscured them from view. As Leif was to pick us up from our hotel at 11am we did not have time to fully explore this attraction.

Leif took us for a tour of the university, hospital and the site of a WW2 flying boat installation that the Norwegian Government started but was completed was by the Germans and used for aerial reconnaissance throughout the war.

Leif dropped us at the airport at the Airport at 12.15 pm just as the sun was setting.

It was a truly memorable and inspiring trip to Tromsø and the Arctic Circle.

## The F-35B – Inside a Fifth Generation Aircraft

The Fifth Generation (5th Gen) aircraft are the most advanced jet fighters in development. They have numerous technological advances and superior stealth capabilities over the present day Fourth Generation fighters, such as the Harriers and Tornados, which they supersede. The Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II is one of the only two 5th Gen aircraft currently in operation; building on lessons learned in its more mature sister aircraft, the F-22 Raptor.

No longer just an ‘aircraft’ – a 5th Gen jet is a complete ‘air system’ able to operate across the complete spectrum of warfare. Unlike its stealthy predecessors, who used specific capabilities against specific targets, the F-35 is the first truly multi-role 5th Gen air system that can autonomously create and execute a full kill chain against a Target (i.e. find, fix, target, track, engage and assess), without the need for off-board support.

5th Gen air systems have been designed with advanced stealth technology that includes radar-absorbent materials, stealth ‘shaping’ and minimal infrared signature ‘built-in’, and not ‘added on’. The electronics for the communication, navigation and weapons systems are fully integrated and feed into helmet-mounted displays with onboard computing power that is a quantum leap ahead of its 4th Gen counterparts, affording it the ability to manage its systems concurrently to allow for a smooth and integrated, giving the pilot an exotic sounding ‘multi-sensor data fusion for situational awareness.’

### Data Fusion

The F-35’s five major combat systems are fully integrated during the production phase and interact to provide an overall ‘joined-up’ capability.

**APG-81 Advanced Electronically-Scanned Array (AESA) Radar.** The APG-81 AESA radar is the key to the F35’s superior capability. It is one of the

'good news stories' of the F-35 programme as this radar continues to impress in its air-ground (and air-air) roles, allowing the F35 to identify tactical-sized targets from great distances, a capability that is unrivalled by any other tactical aircraft. The use of this and other target identification technology (such as synthetic aperture radar (SAR) mapping, Ground Moving Target Indication (GMTI) technology and Automatic Target Recognition/Cueing (ATR/ATC)) allows the pilot to find, fix, target and track targets from very long range, in all weathers, by day and by night.



### **Distributed Aperture System (DAS).**

Six Infrared (IR) cameras are mounted in the F-35's fuselage and give a 360-degree field of view around the aircraft. The primary purpose of the DAS is to provide warning of a missile launch, but it is also highly effective at finding 'hot spots' in the battlespace and is particularly useful for spotting other aircraft that are beyond

visual range. Notably, the DAS images of the outside world can be projected into the pilot's helmet display, making the aircraft's fuselage look 'invisible' to the pilot and allow him to 'virtually' look through the floor.

**Electro Optical Targeting System (EOTS).** F-35 also features an internally mounted EOTS, similar in use to a Litening targeting pod, allowing the aircraft to designate targets and guide its own laser-guided weapons. The Lightning II's 'laser pod' and weapon load are housed inside the aircraft, allowing it to maintain its stealth characteristics throughout the mission. Alternatively, external pylons can be fitted, affording extra weapon carriage under the wings.

### **Electronic Warfare System and Helmet Mounted Display System (HMDS).**

Coupled with a very Low Observable (vLO) radar cross section, which is displayed to the pilot through the HMDS in the cockpit, the F-35 has high fidelity situational awareness whilst remaining 'invisible' to the threat. This offers an unprecedented 'combat edge', one that has not been experienced within the UK's Combat Air domain before. The F-35's array of integrated, cross-spectrum sensors are all fused to present the pilot with a singular, unambiguous battlespace picture. This also brings a unique surveillance and reconnaissance capability. The information and data gathered from the AESA radar, electronic warfare, targeting systems and bomb damage assessments post-attack, give the pilot all the information he needs to assess the success of the mission.

## **Battle-winning Capability**

The F-35 has been designed to counter some of the world's greatest missile threats with the ultimate aim of de-escalating tension or eliminating a hostile environment - 5th Gen platforms strive to earn the title 'air dominance fighter'.

At present more than 3,500 F-35s have been ordered by customers in the US and Europe, and from Israel to Japan. Having UK air, land and sea systems that are interoperable with the F-35 therefore not only ensures joint capability across UK Defence, but affords interoperability across the 'world' of F-35 and future international coalitions.

The UK are flying their first 3 F-35B development aircraft under sovereign regulation as the UK contribution to the Joint Operational Test Team, and under pooling arrangements with the US Marine Corps; the pooled operation will build up to form 617 Sqn as the first operational Sqn when it transitions to the UK in 2018. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Defence has now signed a contract for the first production batch of 4 aircraft; the contract for the F-35B aircraft forms part of the MOD's investment in Lightning II over the next 5 years to procure an initial 14 of these multi-role fifth generation aircraft, as well as putting in place the necessary support arrangements and infrastructure. Further contracts will cover the procurement of a range of equipment such as engines.

**Wg Cdr Andrew Fell**

# **Vulcan Project – Request for Help**

**M**y name is Nicole Russell, a writer who is researching the role of women in Bomber Command V-Force with a special emphasis on those involved with the Avro Vulcan.

I think I should begin by explaining where the idea of this project originated.

My own fascination began when, as a child, I first saw Vulcans fly over the Golden Ball, (a well-known landmark especially for those based at RAF Halton) in West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. I was quite mesmerised by the incredible power of these aircraft and even now at air shows from the RAFBF tent, where I often volunteer, when XH568 appears in the skies I feel the sense of awe that she arouses.

My own father was stationed at RAF Stradishall between 1944 – 1948 and later in life was involved with Concorde, travelling between Toulouse and Filton. In fact, I remember first seeing her at Farnborough at the tender age of five, although I have to admit being equally excited by the fact I was allowed a glass of Babycham in his firm's hospitality tent. It appears that a fascination for delta wing aircraft runs in the family!



Vulcan B2 of 617 Sqn at RAF Luqa

Recently I was walking around the RAF Museum, Hendon with a Bomber Command historian (whose interests centre around Lancasters and Tempests) when we paused alongside XL318. Without thinking I began stroking her distinctive wing. He asked why this aircraft was so special to me. I explained that she is

like a great oil painting: you look at her and something inexplicable happens. She is a unique part of aviation history that can be traced back to designers such as Dr. Alexander Lippisch working on experimental aircraft in the 1940s such as Convair XF-92A.

However, from a writer's point of view, I feel the need to expand her story. But that biography, as yet, has barely included the role of women in its narrative. It was a chance conversation with Liz Carson, a former RAF engineer, who told me she worked on Vulcan maintenance at RAF St. Athan, that sparked my curiosity and quest to find other women who were, and continue to be involved with this V-Force icon.

In my research I am approaching organisations, companies and charities with specific links, but as 617 Squadron has a particularly long association with Vulcan - from the delivery of B Mk 1 XH482 in 1958 through to being the first operational unit with Blue Steel and subsequent central role in Bomber Command V-Force - I thought its members may be able to assist me in tracing these women.

They could include female personnel working in fields of engineering, flight operations, OCUs and other associated activities. I would also like to hear from the families, particularly wives of Vulcan crew about their memories and experiences.

If you have a story, an idea and/or a contact that might help me in my mission I would be pleased to hear from you. Please email: [nicoleyrussell@aol.com](mailto:nicoleyrussell@aol.com).

I would like to thank the Editor for giving me the opportunity to approach members through this publication.

**Nicole Russell**

# A Journey of Remembrance

by Sharelle Henderson

On Sunday 7th September we watched two Lancaster aircraft fly over Menwith Hill - such an amazing sight. This was followed by dashing to watch them fly over Windermere later in the day in memory of Archie Johnstone from 617 Squadron who had died a few months earlier; the flypast was on the day before what would have been his 100th birthday. Little did we realise this was just the beginning of an incredible trip of remembrance, one which would make a perfect piece for our church magazine in Pateley Bridge which Chris and I jointly edit.

Chris had always wanted to fly in a Zeppelin airship and what better way to celebrate a special birthday! We set off via the Hull/Zeebrugge ferry and then travelled down through France. Our first stop was to lay wreaths on the graves of Sqn Ldr Drew Wyness DFC and Fg Off Brian Hosie RNZAF of



617 Squadron who were murdered by a German official after they had been shot down attacking the Kembs Barrage. What emotion as we searched for two graves amongst so many. Were

these men really only 19 and 20 years of age and from such a wide range of countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and India? To the side of the main cemetery at an angle facing east were more graves with Arabic lettering. Poignantly there were a few Yugoslavian patriots buried here as well; their headstones just carved with their SOE codenames.

Chris had chosen to stay in a hotel in the Alsace region which brought back many memories as we often stayed there when travelling between Italy and Brussels twenty years and more ago when we lived in Naples during Chris' tour at the NATO headquarters in that city.

The following day we drove to Friedrichshafen - Chris excited, me with great trepidation as he had booked us both on the Zeppelin flight the following day. What an experience – were we really going up in this airship which was floating in the sky? Along with ten other people, we boarded in pairs as the previous passengers disembarked in pairs to keep the airship balanced. The pilot was delighted to learn we were English as she said she could practice her native tongue. Chris was also equally delighted as she invited him to join her and they talked about flying throughout the flight. Flying over Lake Constance



was amazing and when we landed to be given a glass of bubbly suitably finished a brilliant experience. We then visited the Zeppelin Flight Museum and later the Dornier Museum – ok, lots of aircraft and flight information but it was fascinating, really, and then we were given a special guided tour by the curator of the Zeppelin Museum, Jurgen Bleibler thanks to Chris' connection as a trustee of the Barnes Wallis Foundation.

We then left for our next destination, Dresden, which meant an overnight stop. Unfortunately the weather had deteriorated and driving on the German autobahns in pouring rain with cars whizzing past at over 100mph was not much fun. A visit to another museum, the Horsch automobile museum at Zwickau, in what was the old Eastern bloc, was again fascinating, especially speaking to a man who talked of how things used to be in communist East Germany and how life is still not easy – goods that once were unavailable are now unaffordable for many in this part of Germany.

Dresden was an amazing place with lots to see and visit. My sister and I attended the Sunday morning service in the rebuilt Frauenkirche; the organ recital and the soprano singing all made it a wonderful experience, the only problem as it was in German the sermon was hard to follow - but that sometimes happens in Pateley! We spent a lovely day wandering around Meissen where we visited the church of Sankt Nikolai, built in memory of local people killed in World War 1, all named on Meissenware wall plaques interspersed with beautiful figurines of grieving mothers, wives and children.

After three days, we left Dresden visiting Colditz Castle where our German female guide obviously had great admiration for the bravery and ingenuity of the young Allied prisoners. We then continued our journey to the Harz Mountains for a trip on the mountain railway – yes it was Chris's celebration!

We then visited the three dams of the Dambusters' raid which are located in a beautiful area; it is hard now to imagine the devastation caused in 1943. A few kilometres downstream of the Mohne Dam, we saw a dramatic war memorial and the ruins of an abbey where Pastor



Josef Berkenkof was drowned as he tolled the bells to warn people of the flood heading down the valley; then remembering the young Lancaster crews who never returned, it was hard to reconcile the events of over 70 years ago.



Memorial service by children of Pius X School, Steenbergen

Our final destination was Steenbergen, about 20km south of Rotterdam, where we were due to join a civic ceremony at the graves of Guy Gibson and his navigator Jim Warwick to lay our two remaining wreaths on the 70th anniversary of their fatal crash. However, in the morning we took a wrong turning and by pure chance we spotted some school children holding a ceremony at a memorial featuring a plane's propeller. We discovered that the children of Pius X School have adopted the memorial to Guy Gibson and Jim Warwick, and each year they hold a service in the memorial park named after Gibson and Warwick, before they join the civic service in the afternoon. The children organise the ceremony with special poems and songs. It was a wonderful thing to witness and made us feel humble and honoured to be part of such a moving event. The teachers, parents and children were pleased to welcome us, plus the nephew of Guy Gibson who, like us, had been just passing. Chris then laid one of the wreaths alongside the beautiful fresh flowers and crosses laid by the children.

We then met an old Dutch friend, Jan van den Driesschen, an honorary member of the Association, who has for many years, with his late wife Conny, looked after the graves of Guy Gibson and Jim Warwick – a task now undertaken by his son Kees. At the civic ceremony in Steenberg Cemetery, Chris laid the final wreath on the graves of Guy Gibson and Jim Warwick. This was yet another remembering time.

Remembrance was a definite theme throughout our trip and with so many happy, sad, moving and sometimes overwhelming experiences yet another time we will remember.

## Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Rice DFC RAFVR

A year on from unveiling of Hillingdon council's blue plaque recognising the work of Sir Barnes Wallis, a green plaque was unveiled on the Sycamores Inn at Burbage in Leicestershire on 18 September 2014. Geoff, along with Tony Iveson, formed the 617 Sqn Association way back in the 1960s where the pair became the first chairman and secretary.



The Lord Lieutenant and the leader of the LCC led the gathering of signatories and family members at the unveiling ceremony. The 617 Sqn Association was represented by Group Captain David Robertson and two associate members, Dr John Sweetman and John Reed, pictured with John's wife, Joyce..

Geoffrey Rice first saw the light of day in Portsmouth Dockyard on 4th January 1917, where his father was serving in the Royal Navy. Following the cessation of hostilities, the Rice family returned to Burbage where Geoff spent his formative years at 26 Coventry Road. He also spent time with his grandmother at her home in nearby Windsor Street, which became the Sycamore Inn following Grandma's death.

A chorister at St Catherine's Church and an accomplished Burbage cricketer, Geoff joined Bennett Brothers on Hawley Road, Hinckley as an apprentice on completion of his grammar school education. However, watching Coventry burn in the distance during the blitz of 1940, enraged him to the point where he wanted to hit back, and so volunteered for service with the RAF. Following pilot training in America and a spell at a Heavy Conversion Unit in the UK, he was posted to C Flight of 57 Sqn at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire in the winter of 1942-3, one of only a dozen squadrons yet to be equipped with the latest four-engined Avro Lancaster.

Wg Cdr Guy Gibson arrived at Scampton on 21st March 1943 to form 617 Sqn, specifically to attack the Ruhr dams using Barnes Wallis's bouncing bomb; and apart from individuals who joined 617 Sqn independently, C Flt of 57 Sqn was posted en bloc across the airfield to become the Dambusters.



At 21:31 hrs on Sunday 16th May, Plt Off Rice was the fourth of nineteen heavily-laden aircraft to take off from the grass runway of RAF Scampton, unaware that his would be the only ex-57 Sqn crew to return from Op CHASTISE, though not in the manner he would have preferred. Although the bombs were to be dropped from a height of just 60 feet, aircraft flew to and from their target at one hundred feet individually, exposed and unescorted. Navigation was reliant to a large extent on visual landmarks transmitted by the bomb aimer in the

nose who was the only crew member with a view of the ground. The pilot could not see below, only upwards, ahead and sideways. Maintaining such a low altitude was quite difficult facing a glaring full moon. Automatic pilots were not accurate at such levels and aircraft had to be flown manually, with pilots having to divert their gaze towards airspeed indicators and other raids while constantly on the lookout for enemy fighters, electricity pylons and flack batteries.

Flying at over 200 mph at 100 feet would take just one seventh of a second to hit the deck, and this is what happened to Geoff over the Waddensee en route to the Scorpe Dam, a fate all participants feared. The cylindrical mine suspended below the aircraft was torn off, and by the time AJ-H had been hauled back to operational height, water was pouring out of the rear turret. Without a mine, Geoff had no choice but to turn back and return to base, touching down at 00:47 hrs on the 17th May, by which time 26 of the 53 fatalities has already occurred.

Following the dams raid, 617 Sqn was retained as a special duties squadron and soon became known as a 'suicide outfit' because of the high loss rates sustained. 617 Sqn



lost 42% of the Sqn on Op CHASTISE and 66% on the Dortmund-Ems Canal raid in September 1943; Geoff's crew being one of only 3 to return for which he was awarded the DFC. However, on 20th December 1943 his luck finally ran out. On a raid against an armaments factory near Liege, the Sqn was recalled due to low cloud blanketing the target area. Returning with bombs still on board, Lancaster KC-Z disintegrated when hit in the bomb bay from below. Geoff was thrown clear but his crew perished. With cuts, bruises and a broken wrist, Geoff evaded capture for 4 months until betrayed and handed over to the Gestapo in Antwerp. He was then imprisoned in Stalag Luft III in the wake of 'The Great Escape' before being force-marched for 3 weeks in January 1945 in deep snow and sub-zero temperatures.

Following release he flew Mosquito bombers with 21 Sqn from Gutersloh in West Germany during the Cold War period before taking up a position with Shell Oil company in 1947. Geoffrey Rice, a courageous and unique airman, passed away aged 64 in Somerset following a short illness in 1981.

**John Reed**

## **Aces High Aviation Gallery – Wendover, Bucks**

**Y**ou may be aware that some of our most esteemed members have attended (and indeed contributed) to some of the events organised by Aces High in Wendover (near RAF Halton). I have visited the gallery several times and thoroughly enjoy rummaging through the hundreds of prints and original pieces on display. Recently, Keith Taylor and



I attended a Dambusters event and were able to chat with Johnny and Les as they conducted some book signings as well as over lunch.

Managed by Caroline Fowler, Aces High always offers a warm reception to veterans so I recommend dropping in. Their website details upcoming events, where veterans may be available to meet and chat with. All events are free but a small donation is requested if you would like to have items signed. However, please ensure that you contact the gallery first to arrange a ticket as they are very well attended.

Established in 1997 by Rick Taylor & Colin Hudson (two aviation enthusiasts) the gallery has now become a hub of aviation art activity as well as a meeting place to catch up with old colleagues. They offer prints, original art, sculptures, picture framing, and cards.

**[www.aces-high.com](http://www.aces-high.com)**

# Final Landings

A tribute to former 617 Squadron members who have died since the last edition of *Après Moi*. Kindly provided by **Robert Owen**

## **Frank Cardwell**

Frank Cardwell, from Rotherham, North Canterbury New Zealand had completed a joinery apprenticeship. Determined to serve his country, he ignored his mother's protestations and joined the RNZAF in 1942. After training in Canada as a Navigator he was posted to the UK to join Bomber Command and completed his first tour with No. 44 Sqn.

He was posted to Woodhall Spa as part of Flt Lt Stuart Anning's crew on 14 October 1944. The crew's first operation with the Squadron transpired to be a demanding introduction - the final attack on Tirpitz lasting 12 hrs 55 minutes. Frank then transferred to Flt Lt Douglas Oram's crew replacing their navigator who had completed his tour and was being repatriated to Canada. He undertook four operations with the Oram crew: against the Urft Dam, the Ijmuiden E boat pens and the Politz oil refinery. After a trip to the Rotterdam E-boat pens with Fg Off Kell's crew he flew a further trip with Oram before rejoining the Anning crew (who had not flown on operations since the Tirpitz raid) for the remaining eight operations of the total of 15 he completed with the Squadron before the war's end.

Commissioned in March 1945, he was posted from the Squadron on 17 April, shortly before the Squadron's final operation of the war. After a short period as an instructor at No. 11 OTU at Westcott he was repatriated to New Zealand. Transferring to the RNZAF Reserve, in October 1945 he returned to his former career, spending the remainder of his working life in the business and construction industry.

## **Alan Potter**

Alan Potter was wireless operator with the crew of Flt Lt John Williams, who arrived on the Squadron on the 15 February 1944.

Alan enlisted on his 18th birthday. He originally aspired to becoming a pilot, but on learning that this might delay his call up, had opted to apply for the trade of navigator. The Service thought otherwise and, noting his membership of the Radio Society of Great Britain, offered him training as a wireless operator/air gunner. After initial training at Padgate he was sent to Blackpool and was one of many who underwent Morse training in the tram sheds of this northern resort.

After further training at Yatesbury, a shortage of aircraft saw Alan posted to a number of RAF and Army ground establishments as a ground radio operator, before returning to Yatesbury as an instructor. His application for aircrew was

finally honoured, and after a brief air gunnery course at No 8 Air Gunnery School, Evanton, he was posted in May 1943 to crew up at No. 29 OTU at Bruntingthorpe.

There he met up with John Williams, who had previously served as an instructor. After becoming conversant with the Wellington the crew progressed onto No. 1661 Conversion Unit at Winthorpe, where they encountered the Avro Manchester (the ill-fated twin-engined forerunner of the Lancaster). After progressing to the Lancaster itself in August 1943 they were posted to No. 61 Sqn at Syerston.

After half a dozen trips the crew switched to the aircraft that would see them through the rest of their first tour and become a legend in its own right, going on to complete some 120 operations.

The Williams crew and their aircraft certainly lead a charmed life. On one occasion over Hanover John Williams took evasive action to evade searchlights. The ensuing dive to low level took them through showers of incendiary bombs falling from main force aircraft above, some of which struck the Lancaster, necessitating an emergency landing at Newmarket on return. Nevertheless, both aircraft and crew survived. Such good fortune was to continue for the rest of their tour which took them to some of the more distant targets in Germany including Kassel, Munich and Leipzig and culminated during the winter of 1943/44 with the Battle of Berlin. The crew completed eight trips to “the Big City” and on another occasion were forced to abort on route to this target owing to an engine fire.

With such an illustrious record, it is not surprising that the crew were selected for No. 617 Sqn.

They arrived during the period when the Squadron were attacking French factory targets with the 12,000lb HC blast bomb and participated in attacks against Albert, Clermont Ferrand, Angouleme and Lyons before attacks switched to targets in preparation for D-Day. Following the attack on Munich at the end of April 1944 the Squadron was taken off operations in order to practice for the D-Day spoof operation “Taxable”. For this operation in which the Squadron’s aircraft dropped “window” (metal foil strips) to simulate an invasion fleet crossing the Channel the crew were paired with that of Australian Fg Off Ross Stanford.

The crew’s first introduction to “Tallboy” came with the attack against the Le Havre E-boat pens on 14 June, followed a day later by the raid on similar pens at Boulogne. From then on the next two months were occupied with attacks against V-weapon sites and stores, switching in August to port targets, including the U-boat pens at Brest and La Pallice and the potential block chip “Gueydon”.

By the middle of August the crew were deemed tour expired and were posted to other duties – Alan, who had completed 43 operations, was commissioned and posted as Radar Liaison Officer to No. 54 Base. Finding a ground tour

uneventful, Alan tried to return to flying with the Squadron, but his efforts were thwarted. Instead he was posted to Transport Command, a move that would take him to the Middle and Far East, and lead to his eventual career in civil aviation, flying with some of the early post-war airlines. He participated in the Berlin Air Lift, and was a member of Handley Page's flight test team before joining BEA. In retirement he moved to the South of France for a period, before returning to the UK when he was surprised to discover that the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster bore the markings of his former No. 61 Sqn aircraft. After a period living with his son in the Caribbean, he returned to the UK in 2013. Last September, only six weeks before he died, Alan was presented with his Bomber Command clasp at a presentation conducted by the Commanding Officer of No. 33 Sqn, Benson.

### **Rob Gilvary**

Wing Commander Robert Gilvary commanded the Squadron between 1975 - 1977.

Rob Gilvary left school after taking his 'O' levels and, to the great annoyance of his headmaster who felt that should continue his studies, embarked on a career in the Royal Air Force. By the age of 18, he had applied, and been selected, for pilot training. After initial training at Kirton in Lindsey he entered Cranwell as a Flight Cadet in April 1955.

Three years later and after passing through the Bomber Command Bombing School, Pilot Officer Gilvary reported to No. 230 OCU for three months' conversion to the Canberra. His first operational posting was to No. 12 Sqn at Binbrook, during which time he was promoted to Flying Officer, subsequently moving with them to Coningsby. His tour completed, in 1961, he was posted as a Flight Lieutenant to warmer climes for a year as the Range Officer for El Adem, Libya .

Selected for the V-Force, he followed the established path onto the Vulcan via No. 230 OCU at Finningley. After completing No. 18 Course in November 1962 he joined No. 27 Sqn as a co-pilot. A little over a year later, following a Junior Commander's Course at Ternhill, he found himself back at Finningley prior to joining No. 35 Sqn. Ground tours at Waddington and Episkopi were followed by promotion to Squadron Leader with a year at Staff College, Bracknell and a jet refresher course at Manby. A return to No. 230 OCU, now at Scampton prepared Rob for his next move in July 1973, a flight commander post with No. 50 Sqn at Waddington.

Rob succeeded Wg Cdr Viv Warrington as OC 617 in September 1975. This was the post-Blue Steel period and the Squadron's role had settled down to that of the other UK-based Vulcan squadrons – a routine of TAVECALs and exercises with exotic, but familiar names such as Cloudy Chorus and Ocean Safari, combined with Goose and Western Rangers. There were additional roles

for the OC 617: on 15 May 1976, to commemorate the Dams Raid, Rob paid an official visit to Christ's Hospital Girls' School at Hertford, to address pupils there, including beneficiaries of the RAF Benevolent Fund/Barnes Wallis' scholarships. The following month he had the honour of leading a formation of three Vulcans, plus following Buccaneers, Phantoms and Jaguars across London on the occasion of the Queen's official birthday and a few days later hosted members of "The Guinea Pig" Club - badly burned former aircrew who had been treated by pioneering plastic surgeon, Sir Archibald McIndoe - when they visited Scampton.

Rob led by example: Participating in an Exercise Index in November 1976, when the Squadron dispersed to RAF Leeming for the first time, he went with them. Low level bombing and navigation legs during the final fly-off were marked to determine the winners of the Squadron Bombing and Navigation Trophy – announced as the Gilvary crew.

Lone Rangers provided an excuse for a weekend's Mediterranean sunshine sampling the delights of Malta and Cyprus. In February 1977 Rob had the challenge of landing the first Vulcan at Luqa following the relaxation of a ban imposed by the Maltese government on account of the aircraft's noisy approaches. Watched by a party of British diplomats and Maltese officials all went well and Vulcan operations were allowed to continue.

To commemorate the thirty-fourth anniversary of Operation Chastise in 1977, an opportunity was created to photograph the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster as it formed on a Vulcan flown by OC 617 Squadron over Lincoln. Rob's swansong should have been leading yet another formation flight, for that year's Royal Review at Finningley. However, having been allotted the task, he was denied this honour by Postings, who decreed that his presence was needed elsewhere and he relinquished command of the Squadron in July 1977.

Elsewhere turned out to be the Air War Centre at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. This furthered a long association with the USAF. After a year he was posted to Castle Air Force Base, California for conversion to the B-52, with further training in refuelling from KC- 135s, culminating in 1979 with transfer to the F-111 at Plattsburg Air Force Base, New York. This was to be his final flying tour, after which his experience was channelled into planning and administrative tasks, including the 1981 Strike Command Bombing Competition, Planning at HQ 2 ATAF and HQ Strike Command before returning to the USA in March 1987, to his final posting as Deputy Assistant, Nuclear Affairs , HQ ACLANT in Virginia.

He retired from the Service in April 1990, to pursue a career in hotel and hospitality management. Nevertheless, he maintained his RAF connections in the Volunteer Reserve, working with pupils of the Air Experience Flight at Leeming until 2002, sharing his experience and enthusiasm with others, as he had throughout his life and career.

# From the Archives

## DAILY EXPRESS

No. 12,882

Black-out 11.15 p.m. to 1.15 a.m.

TUESDAY MAY 11 1947

Price 10p. Home 1.50 p.m. with 1.15 a.m.



Day Paper

**Waterspouts shot 1,000 ft. up as Lancasters swooped with sea mines on giant dam.**

**Escaping torrents devastate vast war-producing area, wreck railways and bridges.**

# FLOODS ROAR DOWN RUHR VALLEY

## Fliers see 30ft. wave

### LIKE A NEW INLAND SEA—AND STILL SPREADING FAST

RECONNAISSANCE planes which flew over Germany yesterday brought back photographic proof that rail and road bridges in the Ruhr had been washed away and that floods were spreading fast in the Dortmund area following the destruction by the R.A.F. of the Melen and Eder Dams and the attack on the Sorpe Dam early in the evening.

**DAM BREYER—IN-CHIEF**



General Breyer, in command of the R.A.F. operations in the Ruhr, is seen in a photograph taken yesterday.

Hydro-erectible power stations are destroyed or damaged. A railway marshalling yard is under the water which is sweeping over the Ruhr valley.

The floods from the Eder Dam, pouring down on Kassel and its 150,000 people, are already as great as those in the Ruhr valley, but the country there is flatter, and they are likely to cover a wider area.

The attack was one of the most devastating of the war. Lancasters dropped one million lb. of bombs in the greatest tonnage, including great bundles of the most incendiary bombs of their kind, into the Ruhr industrial area of Europe. Dortmund, with a population of 400,000, is one of the most important cities in the Ruhr valley.

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## A German advised the R.A.F. to do it

### Industry crippled for months

A FRENCH spy-plane pilot, according to reports, suggested the plan used by the R.A.F. to destroy the Ruhr dams.

The plan was to drop bombs on the dams, which would cause them to burst and flood the Ruhr valley.

The attack was a major victory for the R.A.F. and it is expected that the Ruhr valley will be under water for several months.

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THE BREACH: R.A.F. took this amazing picture yesterday



## Commander reveals NAZIS MASSACRED TODT WORKMEN

Commander reveals that the Nazis massacred the workmen of the Todt organization who were building the dams in the Ruhr valley.

The workmen were killed because they were suspected of being spies and of collaborating with the Allies.

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## Ciano sees the Pope

MADRID, Monday.—Crown Prince Umberto has taken the place of King Victor Emmanuel at meetings of the Italian Supreme War Council.

## 6 A.M. LATEST

### LONDON BOMBS THIS MORNING

LONDON BOMBS THIS MORNING. Bombs were dropped on London this morning, causing damage to buildings and homes.

### VERBOTEN: NEWS ABOUT DAMS

VERBOTEN: NEWS ABOUT DAMS. The news about the dams is strictly confidential and should not be spread.

### DAVIES IN RUSSIA

DAVIES IN RUSSIA. General Davies is reported to be in Russia, where he is working on military matters.

### Explosive 'dropped on Rome'

Explosive 'dropped on Rome'. An explosive was dropped on Rome, causing damage to buildings and homes.

### Mackenzie King guns to U.S.

Mackenzie King guns to U.S. Mackenzie King has announced that he will provide guns to the United States.

### 1,000 FT. HIGH

1,000 FT. HIGH. A plane was seen flying at an altitude of 1,000 feet over the Ruhr valley.

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## THE DAM BEFORE THE RAID



## Liberators hit Bordeaux

Liberators hit Bordeaux. The Allies have launched an attack on Bordeaux, destroying buildings and infrastructure.

## 7-1 WIN

7-1 WIN. The British team has won a 7-1 victory in a recent match.

## Prisoners taken

Prisoners taken. A number of prisoners have been taken during the recent operations.

## Jap gas in

Jap gas in. Japanese gas has been detected in the Ruhr valley, posing a serious threat to the Allies.

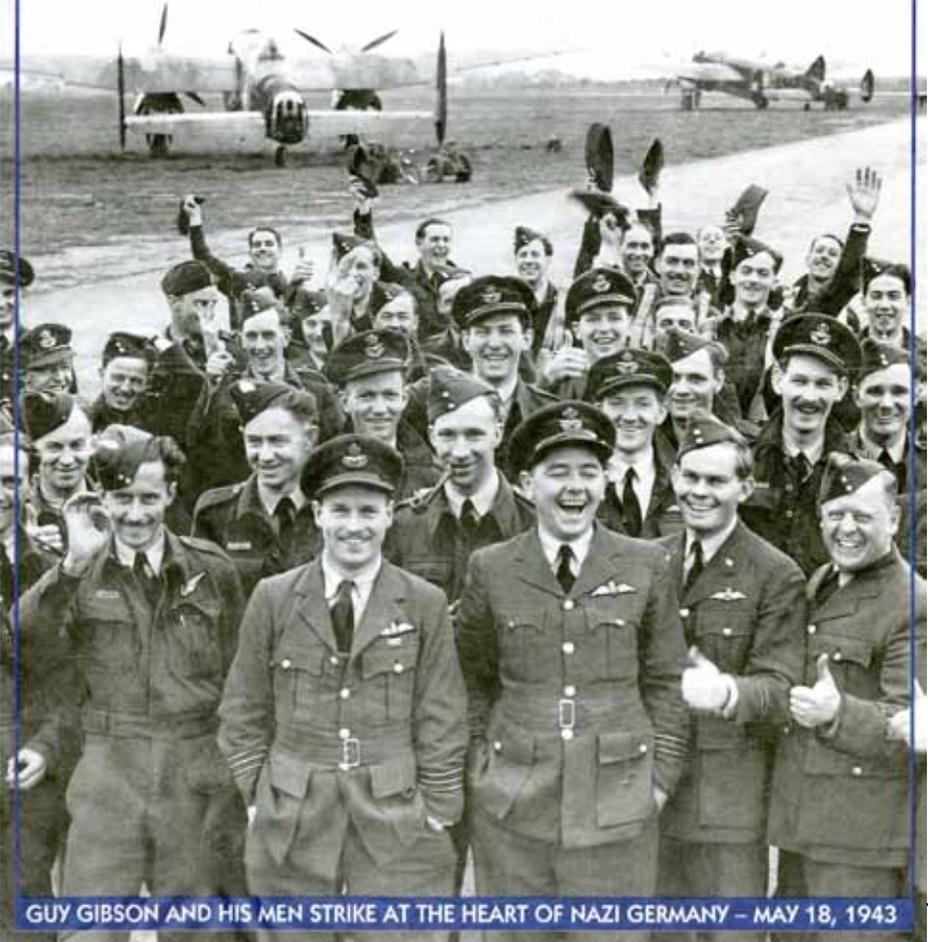
THANKS TO 'aerograph'

KODAK

SCOTTISH **DAILY EXPRESS**

HISTORIC FRONT PAGES COLLECTION

# Dambusters raid



GUY GIBSON AND HIS MEN STRIKE AT THE HEART OF NAZI GERMANY – MAY 18, 1943

## 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

Registered Charity No 1141817

## Chairman (wef 16 May 2015)

Wg Cdr A J C Walters

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