



Après Moi

The 617 Squadron
Association Newsletter



Autumn 2019



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Cover Photo: The late Dr Mary Stopes-Roe, elder daughter of Sir Barnes Wallis photographed at the Bomber Command Memorial of which she was a great supporter during the fundraising process.

Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn edition of *Après Moi*. As always, this edition provides an amazing range of articles that I hope are of interest to you. My thanks go particularly to Bob Hailstones, Paul Morley, Annie Cleve and Benny Goodman for producing their stories. Space is always tight, so we may need to publish some material in instalments (remember Saturday morning pictures?)

I am thrilled to provide another update from Officer Commanding 617 Sqn, Wg Cdr John Butcher. You may have read in the news that the Squadron had embarked on its first overseas tour of duty. John provides all the details as well as some personality changes within the hierarchy.

Once again, I sincerely hope that you enjoy this edition of your newsletter although I am genuinely interested in hearing your story. Please get in touch via my email **clarke318@gmail.com** to discuss how we may be able to incorporate your 617 Squadron experience.

I hope you enjoy this edition and welcome any feedback.

Yours
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Deadline for Next Newsletter
31st December 2019
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Walters' Warblings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the passing of time, two important Committee members are standing down. Wg Cdr (ret'd) Chris Henderson has had to stand down for personal reasons. Chris has served on the Committee for over 20 years, during which time he has held almost every post, most latterly General Secretary. During this long period, he has been a core member who has contributed wholeheartedly to the success of the Association. Chris' skills in formatting *Après Moi* and managing the membership database and newsletters will be challenging to replace, but I'm very pleased to report that Air Cdre (ret'd) Ian Dugmore has volunteered to take up Chris' mantle. Ian was OC 617 from 1995 to 98.

Although our outgoing Social Secretary, Debby Henderson, has served on the Committee for a shorter period than Chris, she has emulated his enthusiasm and invested a remarkable amount of time, effort and skill into organising our reunions. Debby jumped (or perhaps was pushed) straight into the deep end and organised last year's Dams 75th which was, in effect, the RAF's official commemoration of this important anniversary. I'm sure everyone who attended would agree that it was a marvellous evening. Debby has also been pivotal at identifying new relatives to take up Associate membership. Rosemary Smith has very kindly agreed to replace Debby. Rosemary is an Associate member whose father, Freddie Watts, flew 37 missions with 617 Sqn during WWII, including all three Tirpitz raids.

We are not quite over the recent spate of anniversaries and important events. The old Squadron Standard, under which many of you will have served, was laid up in Marham Church in March. Amongst the Association guests was Wg Cdr (ret'd) Peter Day, who was OC 617 when the that Standard was consecrated. The 75th anniversary of the death of Guy Gibson (and his navigator, Jim Warwick) is being commemorated at Steenberg in the Netherlands on 19 September, where the Association will lay a wreath. This is shortly followed by the Tirpitz 75th commemorations on 12 November, when the Association will be piggy-backing on a three-day RAF staff ride to Tromsø, Norway, accompanied by the IX Squadron Association.

It's important to remember that your Association is fundamentally a charity. Although we support several charitable causes, our current main effort continues to be to sponsor a disadvantaged young person to go solo through the Guy Gibson VC flying scholarship. Our latest scholar is Miss Ashleigh Duggan, who chose a motor glider course, rather than a light aircraft, allowing us to provide double the usual flying hours. Ashleigh progressed well beyond solo standard and I hope you'll be able to meet her at next year's Dams Dinner.

In closing, I would like to thank all the Committee members for their hard work in organising the many recent commemorations and supporting our charitable causes. We should all be indebted to Chris and Debby for their remarkable endeavours to the Association. Please join me on welcoming Ian and Rosemary to the Committee.

**Yours,
Andrew**

Commemoration of the Tirpitz Raids

The main events commemorating the Tirpitz raids in 1944 resulting in the destruction of Germany's major battleship in 12 November 1944 will be held in Tromsø, Norway over the period 11-13 November. German, Norwegian and UK authorities will be represented, with a wreath laying ceremony and, hopefully, a joint 617 Sqn Lightning and IX Sqn Typhoon flypast over the site of the Tirpitz at the time the battleship capsized, followed by a visit to the Tirpitz Museum and a dining-in night. Our Chairman, Andrew Walters (ajcwalters@outlook.com), and our new Social Secretary, Rosemary Smith (ell4leo@yahoo.co.uk), the daughter of Tirpitz Raider Freddie Watts are coordinating arrangements on behalf of the Association.

For those unable to travel to Tromsø, our outgoing Social Secretary, Debbie Henderson has arranged a commemorative dinner at The Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa on Saturday 9th November. A memorial service will be held at the 617 Squadron memorials on Sunday 10th November, following the Woodhall Spa civic Remembrance parade. The service will be taken by Rev Canon John Thorold - who served at Coningsby when Canberras were based there; and who has been the Wing Padre for the 30 local ATC Squadrons as well as the Royal British Legion Country Chaplain. The church always set aside pews for members of 617 Squadron Association.

617 Squadron – Update

Since the start of the year, 617 has transitioned from a fledgling F-35 Squadron, declaring Initial Operating Capability (IOC) from temporary infrastructure, to a proven and established frontline F-35 operator with our first UK 5th generation overseas deployment under our belts.

March was marked by the official announcement of EX LIGHTNING DAWN. The first UK, overseas LIGHTNING deployment and an opportunity to test and prove expeditionary capability with the UK's newest fighter aircraft. This coincided with the laying up of the old 617 Sqn standard ensuring that our history is honoured as we forge ahead with new capability. The ceremony took place on 5th March in Holy Trinity Church, Marham and was attended by both Wg Cdr Butcher and the former OC 617 who first received this standard, Peter Day.



Laying Up of the Old 617 Squadron Standard

March also saw another end of an era with the station waving farewell to the Tornado in UK Service on 14 March. Whilst many members of the Squadron were involved with hosting duties, we also took time to watch the rather impressive low-level fly past! At work the focus of the first four months of the

year was on preparations for deployment. There was little corporate knowledge on Lightning operations outside of the Squadron and we found ourselves in high demand for all areas of planning.

In the air our pilots continued with exercise participation and combat simulation. The last of the four ab-initio pilots achieved combat ready status in April, meaning the whole Squadron complement of pilots were ready to deploy. We also visited Holbeach range to drop inert Paveway IVs on the 'tanker' target. This was, for most of the Squadron, the first time dropping PWIV from the aircraft.

The crowning moments of our pre-deployment flying were EX POINT BLANK and JOINT WARRIOR. EX POINT BLANK 19-1 was another iteration of the USAFE exercise intended to be a low-cost Large Force Exercise (LFE), improving cooperation between the USAF and its European Allies. This was the second time 617 Sqn has participated in the exercise since acquiring the LIGHTNING and the first time since declaring IOC.

Ft Lt "Wally" and Lt "Sundance" spent the day at RAF Lakenheath on 21 Mar, planning with members of the USAF, fighter controllers from RAF Boulmer, Rivet Joint, KC-135, Typhoon, Hawk and Voyager crews as well as members of the intelligence community.

The mission was to provide air superiority over the east coast of England to enable close air support and dynamic targeting against a High Value Individual and WMD stores, in support of British troops in North Yorkshire. The LIGHTNING was employed as part of the Offensive Counter-Air (OCA) Sweep, clearing out hostile enemy fighters before providing a CAP to defend friendly strikers from any further red launches.

The mission provided an excellent opportunity to prove just what a huge difference the Lightning can make in an air war against and in support of 4th Generation fighters. Ft Lt "Wally" acted as OCA Package commander and controlled the blue air picture whilst using the Lightning to clear out enemy fighters unobserved. The availability of Voyager air-air-refuelling also allowed the Lightning to show its endurance on task, without the need for external fuel tanks, thanks to its extremely high sub-sonic efficiency.

In preparation for a possible deployment on OP SHADER we also spent a lot of our work-up focussing on day and night Close Air Support, working with members of UK Special Forces on Salisbury Plain and Poole harbour. Utilising secure comms and the Lightning's Night Vision Camera (NVC) and Distributed

Aperture System (DAS) IR camera, both of which are displayed in the helmet mounted display for 360 degree, out of cockpit situational awareness.

On 25 Apr, the Squadron's officers enjoyed a 617 dining-in night in the mess. A final boost of morale and camaraderie prior to us departing to Akrotiri. Flt Lt "Vincent" marched in the new squadron standard and dished out fines as the newly appointed Junta leader. As has now become tradition, the "jumper of jointness" (for admin failings) and the "pink boot of shame" (for tactical misdemeanours) were duly awarded by the Junta leader and QWI respectively.

Soon time for training was over and on 21 May 2019, seven of 617 Sqn's Lightning aircraft assembled on alpha dispersal at RAF Marham, ready for the trail flight to RAF Akrotiri. Although only six were planned, the sterling work by engineers, both on 617 Sqn and in the new maintenance facility, meant that a spare was available. The first wave of three aircraft, flown by Lt Pavie, Flt Lt Wallington and Lt Huxtable rendezvoused with a Voyager overhead Brize Norton for the five-hour sortie across the Mediterranean. They were shortly followed by Wg Cdr Butcher leading Flt Lt "Gunter" and Lt "ALAD" in the second wave of three aircraft, which met a second Voyager, carrying an engineering and force protection sweeper party.



Squadron aircraft en route to Akrotiri

On arrival, the crews were welcomed by a large turnout of enthusiastic personnel from RAF Akrotiri as well as the advance party of 617 Sqn, headed by Sqn Ldr "OCA". A historic moment, as the first ever F-35 aircraft on Cyprus and the first ever overseas F-35 deployment for the UK. Thanks to the excellent

work carried out by the advance party the Squadron returned to the air on Friday 24 May, after only two days.



Squadron aircraft on arrival at RAF Akrotiri

Friday 31 May marked yet another historic achievement for UK F-35; the first four-ship formation. Particularly poignant given the fact the Squadron was deployed away from home base. The rest of the Squadron personnel arrived by Voyager on Sat 25 May and were welcomed with a BBQ at Akrotiri mess, which doubled as a farewell for II (AC) Sqn who were departing after an OP SHADER tour on Typhoon.



First UK four-ship of F-35s recover to RAF Akrotiri

After three weeks of successful flying from Cyprus the decision was made to transition from training to OP SHADER, providing Defensive Counter-Air and Close Air Support on the Air Tasking Order (ATO), over Iraq and Syria. The first mission took place on Sunday 16 Jun 19 flown by OC 617 Sqn and Sqn Ldr "OCA", OC A Flight. The F-35 once again performed flawlessly thanks to the hard work of the engineers and support staff and we were able to meet all ATO taskings over the next two weeks.

After finding time for a USAF, Israeli air-force and UK combined F-35 exercise in the Mediterranean it was soon time for us to return home, move to our brand-new Squadron building on the south side of Marham and welcome 207 Sqn, the UK Lightning Operational Conversion Unit. En route OC 617 and Lt "Avo" stopped off at Amendola Air Base in southern Italy for another combined exercise this time with the F-35As of the Italian Air Force.



Members of 617 Sqn and 903 Expeditionary Air Group at RAF Akrotiri

The aircraft arrived back at Marham on 1 Jul and we immediately set to work preparing for EX TYPHOON WARRIOR. The Typhoon QWI course final exercise, in which we provided counter-air, air interdiction and suppression of enemy air defences. The new infrastructure at Marham's southern Hardened Aircraft Shelter (HAS) site has been a total step change in our ability to maintain, plan and manage operation of the F-35. Whilst it's still early days and many

changes are required to truly make the shiny new building feel like home, we feel that we're on an upward trajectory and can see improvements happening



Lt Cdr 'Daisy' takes over as SEngO from Sqn Ldr O'Connor

every day.

Over the course of the last few months we've also welcomed four new members of the Dambusters hierarchy. Sqn Ldr Stew has taken over as OC B flight after returning from conversion training at MCAS Beaufort in South Carolina. Maj "Oprah" has joined us on exchange from the USMC. Our first UK F-35 exchange officer, who brings a wealth of experience operating the aircraft and will be pivotal in our work-up to EX RED FLAG 20. Lt Cdr 'Daisy' took over the role of senior engineering officer from Sqn Ldr O'Connor. Lt Cdr "Daisy" brings engineering management experience from the Commando Helicopter Force to Lightning, including operational experience both at sea and on OP HERRICK. His expertise will be in much demand as the Squadron embarks in support of Operational Test-1 aboard HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH later this year. Lastly WO Jon Hooper has replaced WO1 Mick Davidson as the Squadron Warrant Officer. He brings 14 years of engineering and management experience from the Typhoon force to the Lightning program.

As we look ahead to the rest of the year we are firmly in a mind-set of multi-role exercise preparation with EX TYPHOON WARRIOR, COBRA WARRIOR, POINT BLANK and JOINT WARRIOR all on the horizon. These will test us in both air to ground and air to air roles and prepare us for EX RED FLAG

at Nellis AFB in January 2020. In amongst all this training we'll also be sending some of our aircraft to HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH to partake in operational testing with 17 Sqn off the east coast of the USA. This vital final step will pave the way for carrier qualifications for the squadron and declaration of IOC Maritime next year, our next major milestone on the path to full operating capability.

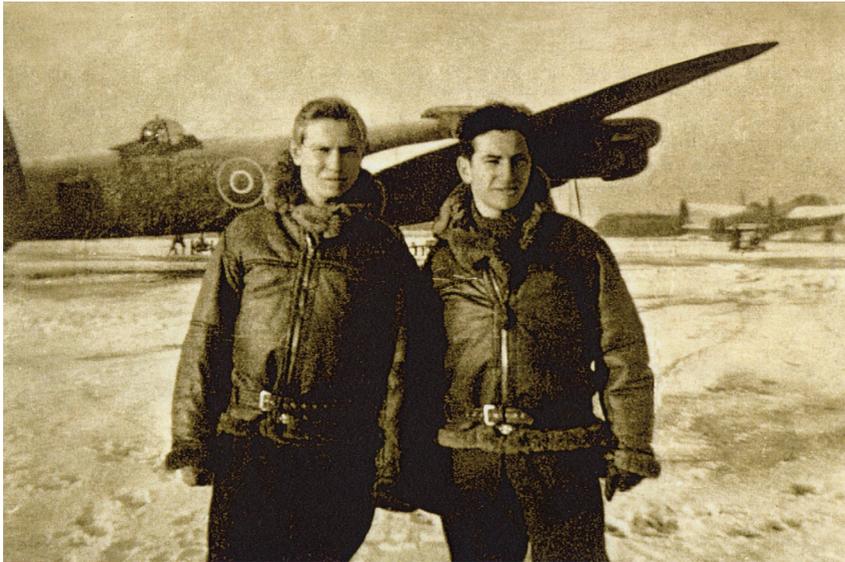
Wg Cdr John Butcher

The Promise

It was a moonlit evening on May 16, 1943. Nineteen specially modified Avro Lancaster bombers of the Royal Air Force took off from RAF Scampton and flew into history. Their targets were the great German dams of the Ruhr Valley. This operation became a part of the folklore of World War II aviation history. The survivors of the operation became instant heroes of war-torn Britain. These brave young flyers, both living and dead, were immortalized in a golden name - The Dambusters.

Despite breaching two of the dams there was a sad side to this heroic event. In a BBC broadcast a newscast closed with this sombre note, "Eight of the Lancasters are missing." This is the story of one of those lost Lancasters, and of my search to discover what happened to my uncle, Frank Garbas of Hamilton Ontario, and his boyhood friend Albert Garshowitz. This search began in the 1950s and wasn't fully understood until the year 2000.

AJ-B took off at 9:59 pm on May 16th, 1943. It had been an unusually warm day. Before boarding, Albert, the Wireless Operator, chalked on their 9,000 pound barrel like mine, "Never has so much been expected of so few". Albert had echoed the famous words of Prime Minister Winston Churchill who immortalized the valour of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. Frank, the front gunner was not surprised by Albert's wit. The boys had played Canadian style football together after high school. They knew each other well. After this they spun the bomb which hung under the cavernous bomb bay. The doors had been removed to allow this large bomb to spin freely backwards. All of the crews had practiced low flying for six weeks at night over water. This was most unusual. Low flying was normally banned as being too dangerous. AJ-B's flight across Holland and Germany with two other Lancs was successful, though dangerous. But near Dorsten the crew was unsure of a turning point, and pilot Bill Astell gained height to get his bearings. Their partner crews reported seeing



Frank Garbas and Albert Garshowitz

AJ-B caught in a crossfire of anti-aircraft fire. In a flash, the plane was gone and never seen again. In the 1950s, this was all that was recorded in the books of the day.

When I was a boy this scant information led me to dream about what really happened. Added to this was my fascination of a portrait of Frank in my grandparents' dining room. It was a coloured 8 x 10 studio print of Frank in his blue RCAF uniform. I became mesmerized by his smile, blond hair gray-blue eyes and most importantly his everlasting gaze. It was as if he was watching over his family.

While quite young I began to read the only two books on the Dambusters. They were written by Guy Gibson and Paul Brickhill. I couldn't get enough of the history and the stories. But there was little about how AJ-B had met its fate.

I must have been 10 or 11 when I first saw the movie *The Dambusters*. I watched it alone with my mother. What I most remember were the tears of sadness and loss that my mother could not hold back. It was on that afternoon that I made a promise to her. She was very upset and wondered if she could visit his grave in Germany that she might find closure. I vowed that if she never made it to Frank's grave in the Reichswald Forest Cemetery in Kleve, Germany, I would. I further promised that I would lay flowers on his grave in her name. This promise lay dormant for many years of high school, university, marriage, child raising and my career teaching high school history.

In 1986 my promise was reinforced when quite unexpectedly my mother passed away. Deep in my soul I remembered the promise, and it rekindled in my need to visit Germany to keep my promise. In the late 1980s, Hamilton became the home of a flying Lancaster. The Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum introduced me to many facts about the RCAF and the RAF. But it was hearing and seeing the Lancaster fly and the death of my mother that rekindled in me the urgency of my promise, and the need to find out more about the Dambusters.



Frank Garbas

With the early 1990s and the dawn of the Internet, I started a more intense search. I was able to attend a Dambuster 50th Anniversary reunion in 1993 at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. I was introduced to three original Canadian Dambusters. All of them remembered Frank and Albert, but old age and the passage of time since the raids made any details sketchy. Dave Rodgers mentioned that there was a lady across the ballroom who had worked in the map room of 617 Squadron. When I introduced myself to Muriel Leach, she started to cry. Not only had she known Frank, they had been dating up until his last flight. She told me she thought she might meet

someone from his family as she flew to Canada for the first time that morning, but 50 years was a long time. Serendipity rises to the occasion. Muriel asked me to come and visit her in England. This would become a big dream of mine. Little did I know that it would happen.

Out of the blue one day in 1998 I received a call from Amanda Barkhouse who was the grandniece of AJ-B's navigator Floyd Wile. We exchanged letters, pictures, and photocopies, and she provided me with the name and phone number of Albert Garshowitz's nephew Hartley. He lived in Thornhill, Ontario. This led to Hartley visiting me in Hamilton with a boxful of Dambuster memorabilia. To my amazement, Albert had taken pictures of the crew and was a prolific writer of letters. Hartley had never read any of them. He opened one of them at random,

and then handed it to me. He and I were shocked. In it, Albert was writing to his brother, Dovie (David), but then stated he was going to give his friend Frank from Hamilton a chance to write. Frank in his own handwriting explained his job as a gunner and told Dovie he would see him when the two returned to Hamilton after the war. It was as if Frank was speaking in the present tense. It was very haunting. My search was starting to bear fruit.

In February 1999, I was hospitalized and unable to work for six months. During my convalescence, I began watching a BBC docudrama named "Colditz". It was a story of Allied prisoners' escape attempts in the most secure POW camp in Germany. On the Internet I discovered that the Royal Research Society offered a historical tour entitled "Dambusters Raid and Colditz Castle". When my wife, Christine, heard this, her first reaction was, "You have to go." I contacted the other Canadian families of the AJ-B crew, and we all planned to take the tour in August of 2000.

Before the trip unexpected events surprised me three more times. I had sent a letter to the town of Raesfeld in Westphalia, Germany, asking for information about the crash of a Lancaster on May 17, 1943. A few months later I received a letter from a museum that not only knew about AJ-B but had a huge picture of it on a wall. Unexpectedly, I had found a photograph of Uncle Frank's plane. The museum also sent me a newspaper in German, which showed three Englishmen at the museum whose express purpose was to catalogue information about the crash. One of the men was Robert Owen, the official historian of 617 Squadron Association. I wrote to him and received the directions to the crash site. I e-mailed Ian Alexander of the War Research Society, who promised to make a detour on our scheduled trip. We would be going to Raesfeld and to the crash site. I could not have foreseen what was going to happen in so short a space of time.

My next surprise led me to another AJ-B family. A nephew of Donald Hopkinson, the bomb aimer, Steve Westwood identified himself in the Guest Book of a major web site: www.dambusters.org.uk. I quickly e-mailed him. He at once told me that his uncle, Ron Tither of Wadebridge Cornwall, had been waiting for years to have contact with other relatives of AJ-B. Donald Hopkinson was Ron's cousin, but had been raised as a brother after the death of Donald's mother. Ron had adored Donald who had primed him in cricket. Ron was 12 years old when Donald went missing. Mrs. Tither, Donald's aunt, was devastated by his death. She had raised him as a son. Like my grandmother she was distraught and couldn't accept it. She died within six months of the crash of AJ-B. There was no medical reason found for her passing. Her doctor noted that she had died of a

broken heart. Ron and I made plans to meet before my trip to Germany. Our planned rendezvous was in Cheltenham Spa near where Muriel Leach lived. What else could happen?

Two weeks before flying to England I received a phone call one afternoon that shook me. Bernie Siehling of Grand Rapids, Michigan, had been told about me by his brother Richard who volunteered at the Raesfeld museum. As a 12-year-old, Bernie saw AJ-B flying at treetop height over his farmhouse near Marbeck, Westphalia. The plane was on fire and as it flew away somewhere in the distance it exploded.



Wreckage of AJ-B

In the morning he bicycled to the crash site. He saw the wreckage of the plane and what appeared to be five chunks of two-foot charcoal bundles. It seemed to him that the flyers escaped the crash but had succumbed to the flames. About 135 yards away was a huge crater. Windows in the vicinity had been broken by the blast of the bomb. But near the crater still stood a statue of St. Joseph holding the baby Jesus, miraculously untouched by the blast. Once again irony had filled my story. Barnes Wallis, the bomb inventor, entreated a special prayer to St. Joseph daily. Bernie later discovered that AJ-B had struck a hydro transmission pylon, sheared the tops off five poplar trees, and then from this low-level, crashed in a farmer's field. Before my trip I videotaped Bernie telling the story of that special night.

In August 2000, I flew to London. Ron Tither had set up a meeting at a beautiful English pub in the Cotswolds. I was met first at the train station by Muriel Leach, who was dressed in her RAF uniform. In Muriel's front hall, Ron and I first met. He with open arms hugged me with tears in his eyes. We bonded

instantly. It was as if we had always known each other. We both knew that our loved ones shared a common place in the nose of AJ-B, and that now they shared a common grave with Albert Garshowitz.

Amanda Barkhouse joined us, as well as other members of Ron's family. Before we left, Muriel gave each of us a 617 Squadron plaque. Muriel asked me to visit her later as she had some personal mementos to give me. Ron drove me to her home in the tiny village of Pamington, and we rang her doorbell for 30 minutes. There was no answer, so Ron drove me back to my hotel. Once there, I received an apologetic call from Muriel. She urged me to return to her house, but as it was late and quite a distance, she offered to mail me the items. Muriel, the young girl who danced with my uncle, died two weeks later. If only I had known.

My next stop was Lincolnshire and a visit to Jim Shortland, the Dams lecturer, researcher and as I was to find out - the best Bomber Command tour guide around. In Woodhall Spa I pencil traced Frank's name which was engraved in the granite of the Dambuster Memorial Monument. We ate our supper in a war converted mansion - The Petwood Hotel. After the raid it became the Officer's Mess. In it there was a Dambuster bar whose walls were filled with pictures, paintings and memorabilia. A few miles north of Lincoln and its famous thousand-year-old cathedral was Scampton, the airbase where the operation originated. I stood on the ground where Uncle Frank had walked and where he spent his last hours. After Scampton I was off to Birmingham and the tour.



Albert Garshowitz

On the tour I was accompanied by Amanda and five members of the Garshowitz family: Hartley; his parents David and Libby; and two aunts Goldie and Margaret. We visited the Möhne and Eder dams, which the boys of 617 Squadron had breached after the crash of AJ-B. Next we were off to Colditz prison in eastern Germany. The historical castle which housed the prison was awe inspiring. It proved to me the adage that escape was the greatest sport. Then we began a long westward drive across Germany to Raesfeld, and the crash site of AJ-B in Marbeck, Westphalia.



Grave of Albert Garshowitz

Albert and Frank had played sports together in Hamilton. They had flown many missions with each other. They died together, and now they lay in a common grave with their simple gravestones beside each other. Richard asked me to stay overnight at his home. The tour continued on to Arnhem. Richard kindly disappeared for a half hour, which allowed me to fulfil the promise that I had made to my mom so long ago. I placed a small silver crucifix inside the engraved cross of the gravestone. My sister Joan had asked me to do this. She was a little blonde girl who sat on Uncle Frank's knee for a snapshot the day he left Hamilton. I videotaped all of the graves. I stood for five minutes praying to

Uncle Frank, my mom and my

grandparents. It had been a long day. I was exhausted. The flower wreath I had ordered from the War Research Society had a plain card. In the emotion of the moment, I printed on it: "To a dear uncle: I never met you, but I felt you in the tears of my mother. God bless you, Paul. Remembered by sisters Angela & Mary (My brothers and sisters) Joan, Ken, Frank & Cathy. You will never be forgotten".

What had inspired me? The words just flowed out of me. In this beautiful wooded part of Germany, I had completed what I had promised my mother so long before. Richard, my new German friend, who was so kind and respectful, walked me out of the cemetery as a light rain began to fall.

Paul Morley

Tail Chasing a Defector: My First Jet Flight

by Sqn Ldr (Retd) Lawrence 'Benny' Goodman

In 1953 I was on a staff tour in the Air Ministry when my telephone rang. My air commodore wanted to see me. I knocked on his door and entered. 'Ah, Goodman' he said. 'Yes sir?' said my outside voice; 'Christ, what have I done THIS time...?' said my inside voice. He continued: 'A Polish MiG-15 pilot has defected, and we want to assess the quality of his training and flying. So, you're going to take him over to Central Flying School (CFS), at RAF Little Rissington, where he will fly with the instructors. And Goodman...'; 'Yes, sir?'; '...don't let him out of your sight.'

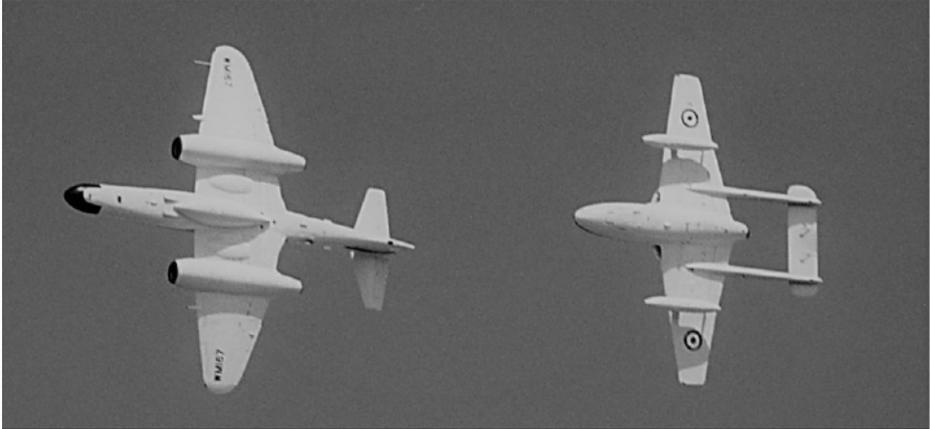
Upon arrival at CFS, we were met by the Station Commander. He explained that CFS would fly the defector in a dual-control Meteor. Since he had strict orders that I should always keep the Polish pilot in sight, I would fly a chase in a Vampire. Well, I had flown the Lancaster, Spitfire and Hastings, but never a jet, so this would be a new experience for me.

A little later, as we all walked out towards the Vampire, I questioned why the CFS chap with me wasn't wearing all his flying kit. 'Oh – there is only room for one in the Vampire, but we thought you'd like some solo time, sir, since you're on a ground tour' was his response. Well, in those days, anyone from the Air Ministry was assumed to be an expert and I felt under pressure to maintain the myth. After a few moments of contemplation, I decided that my priorities were to avoid running out of speed, on take-off and landing, and fuel, so I enquired: 'Err... I haven't flown for a while... just remind me what the take-off and landing speeds are, would you? Oh – and a quick reminder of the fuel system...'

Armed with this information, I strapped into my first jet. Or rather (given the Vampire's tiny size compared with the four-engine Hastings I'd last flown), I strapped the Vampire onto me. The CFS staff pilot had one last tip for me: 'You will remember, sir, that she has a rather long take-off roll'. 'Oh yes... Yes, of course', I said.

So, somehow, I started up my first jet engine and taxied out, lining up behind the defector's Meteor. After he'd started rolling, I opened the throttle and the whine increased as the centrifugal Goblin wound up. But, having released the brakes, not much happened. Eventually and gradually, my Vampire gathered speed down the reassuringly long runway. I was grateful for the CFS pilot's last words of advice, as it stopped me aborting the long take-off run for this tiny aircraft.

Once airborne, the little Vampire handled well and I chased the defector's aircraft as he was put through his paces. But, not wanting to push my luck, I kept my distance during his aerobatics. Once the detail had been completed, and armed with the correct approach and landing speeds, I managed a decent landing.



Walking back in, with my conscience whispering, 'Just got away with that one then, Goodman', I assumed that the day's excitement was over. It wasn't. The Station Commander walked us over to a hangar where two shiny Meteor T7s were parked. Interested as I was to see a Meteor for the first time, I had an increasing sense of foreboding. I was right - CFS were planning another sortie with my defector! I was now in far too deep so, after asking a few, similar question as I did for the Vampire, I had my first ride in a Meteor – all alone!

But, throughout my time at CFS, I followed my air commodore's brief – I kept my defector in sight.

By the wonders of Wikipedia, I recently learnt that the defector was 28-year-old 2nd Lt Zygmunt Gosciniak, who had flown his Polish-built MiG-15 from his air base in North-West Poland to the Danish island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea. Apparently, on arriving over Bornholm, he discovered that the grass runway was being upgraded to concrete, leaving it covered in machinery and workmen. So Gosciniak landed wheels up alongside the runway.

There is a good description of the defection at www.air-intel.nl/docs/Aeroplane_MiGsodBonrholm_June2017.pdf and also the book by Dick van der Aart, *'The Secret Migs of Bornholm: the Covert Intelligence Operation to Examine the First Soviet Mig-15 Fighters in the West'* (Brave New Books: 2016).

Trigger Warning!

Bob Hailstones joined the RAF as a navigator in 1955 on his 18th birthday at RAF Cardington. As an Acting Pilot Officer, Bob soon embarked for a trans-Atlantic crossing to Canada to begin his flying training with the RCAF through the Empire Air Training Scheme. Once back in the UK, Bob picks up the story following his time on the Vickers Varsity and the Canberra. Ed.

In 1962, the three Scampton squadrons, 27, 83 and 617 were receiving Vulcans modified to carry the Blue Steel standoff missile. We spent the first two weeks of October finding out all about the Blue Steel and being checked out in the simulator. The two navigators had all the instrumentation and controls for the missile, which was in effect a small aeroplane but obviously without a pilot. It was powered by High Test Peroxide cooled by a Freon refrigerant giving a range of about 140 miles. The nuclear warhead had a destructive power equivalent to about ten times the weapon dropped on Hiroshima. The missile had a theoretical 100-yard accuracy from the inertial navigation system. That was all very well, as we were planning to operate at over 50,000 feet for which the V Bombers had been designed. The US pilot Gary Powers had recently been downed by a Russian missile in his U2 aircraft at over 70,000 feet! Blue Steel was not yet fully operational and at this point the Cuban Missile Crisis had arrived. Therefore, the readiness levels of the American and UK nuclear deterrents were increased above normal due to the crisis.

I recall that at Scampton the UK's nuclear deterrent, QRA (Quick Reaction Alert), was immediately doubled, requiring eight crews and aircraft at 15-minute readiness. I think there was also a period when we lived in the mess so that aircraft could be dispersed to pre-planned dispersal airfields throughout the UK at short notice if required. At that time, dispersed Blue Steels would have had problems, since they could not remain installed on aircraft indefinitely and required specialist maintenance and equipment at all times.

We did our first flight with a Blue Steel Training Round on 30th October 1962 once the Cuban Missile Crisis had died down. The Blue Steel training profile flight was different to a normal practice gravity bomb. With Blue Steel the practice missile, still attached to the Vulcan, had to run for around 140 miles from "release" guiding itself via the inertial nav unit to its target. The whole thing was called a 3B exercise, and we flew a horseshoe or trombone shaped flight from release to the target with the autopilot flying the aircraft until the missile told the autopilot that it had arrived at the target. This is what I remember but would welcome comment if I have omitted anything!



XL 321 with Blue Steel training round.
(This aircraft is now at the RAF Museum)

In a live scenario, the rocket motor would have ignited, accelerating the missile to about 70,000ft then diving at Mach 2 to its target. It was quite clear to me that the inertial nav technology would one day make the specialist RAF navigator redundant!

Serviceability of the Vulcan and Blue Steel combination was not good early on. On many occasions, we waited for hours for the combination to become serviceable before we could fly. There was probably an hour between getting into the plane, setting up the missile and then finishing the pilot checks. There were technical improvements all the time. For example, a modification allowed all four engines to be started at once. Sometimes the nav unit failed, and instead of our trombone profile we would go racing off in another direction.

The normal routine of squadron life was much the same as a Canberra squadron except that we did QRA two days in every two weeks. We were normally at 15 minutes readiness then 5 minutes in cockpit. Luckily, all the call outs were exercises, and despite one or two fanciful stories I have heard, no V Bomber ever got airborne with a live nuclear device from a UK base. For a live launch, the War Plan required us to track over the North Sea and on through southern Scandinavia to targets beyond the Iron Curtain. I remember our first target was just south west of Moscow.

From time-to-time we discussed the prospect of nuclear war. We usually returned to the fact that we would be on a one-way trip and lucky to get to the target area bearing in mind the Soviet defences. Even if we did get back would there be anything to come back to? Frighteningly, the pilots were given eye patches to cover up one eye to give them some vision left after being exposed to a “friendly” nuclear explosion. Eventually, a policy change resulted in the Royal Navy getting Polaris missile equipped nuclear submarines.

In 1963 the Queen visited Scampton to present the 83 Squadron Standard. We were presented to Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh in front of a Blue Steel Vulcan. The Duke remarked about my surname as he'd been caught in a thunderstorm a week earlier and been pelted by hailstones.

Heads would always turn when a Vulcan started its take off roll at Scampton. I remember one day everything seemed to come to a stop when Les Lunn the Squadron instrument rating examiner (IRE) did a rehearsal for the display which he was due to put on at the Paris Air Show that year. The rehearsal lasted only a few minutes, but the Vulcan was never straight and level for any time, always climbing, diving, rolling, and howling, and seemingly staying within the airfield perimeter at all times. Nobody had ever seen anything like it.

Low level profiles were now becoming popular. A special route had been planned which started over the sea near the south coast, then up into the Welsh mountains, and, via the Irish Sea, to the Western Scottish islands, right turn via the Caledonian canal, and down the east coast into the Vale of York then home. The Vale of York was the only real problem due to industrial pollution, fogs and mist, other airfields and many people. We started at maybe 1500 feet above ground level by day, progressing to do the same thing at night. The Blue Steels were modified so that they were useable at low level but naturally with reduced range. There was no terrain following radar in early low-level aircraft. We navigated by telling the pilots what to look for on the ground, map reading from the visual bombing position, or most important of all avoiding radar cut off ahead. If we could not see the other side of high ground on radar, we were too low so would have to climb to be safe.

The squadron routine continued until mid-1965 when I was posted. My last Vulcan flight was a Western Ranger to Offutt and a practice diversion to Gutersloh in RAF Germany. I left the RAF after 12 years and moved to Australia to train as an Air Traffic Controller.

Bob Hailstones

75th Anniversary of the Death of Wg Cdr Guy Gibson VC DSO DFC

In my absence, Glyn Hepworth kindly stepped in to lay a wreath on the graves of Wg Cdr Guy Gibson and his navigator Sqn Ldr Jim Warwick who were killed on 19th September 1944 when their Mosquito aircraft crashed at Steenberg in the Netherlands south of Rotterdam. Every year on 19th September, civic leaders, Dutch 617 Squadron Association members, Wings for Victory and other groups gather at Steenberg Cemetery to remember these two valiant airman. The local secondary school children organise a remembrance service during the day at the Propellen Park where a monument to Gibson and Warwick is located - a very moving occasion I have attended on a number of occasions.

Chris Henderson

Air Ministry, 28th May, 1943.

ROYAL AIR FORCE.

The **KING** has been graciously pleased to confer the **VICTORIA CROSS** on the under mentioned officer in recognition of most conspicuous bravery:—

Acting Wing Commander Guy Penrose **GIBSON**, D.S.O., D.F.C. (39438), Reserve of Air Force Officers, No. 617 Squadron:—

This officer served as a night bomber pilot at the beginning of the war and quickly established a reputation as an outstanding operational pilot. In addition to taking the fullest possible share in all normal operations, he made single-handed attacks during his “rest” nights on such highly defended objectives as the German battleship Tirpitz, then completing in Wilhelmshaven.

When his tour of operational duty was concluded, he asked for a further operational posting and went to a night-fighter unit instead of being posted for instructional duties. In the course of his second operational tour, he destroyed at least three enemy bombers and contributed much to the raising and development of new night-fighter formations.

After a short period in a training unit, he again volunteered for operational duties and returned to night bombers. Both as an operational pilot and as leader of his squadron, he achieved outstandingly successful results and his personal courage knew no bounds. Berlin, Cologne, Danzig, Gdynia, Genoa, Le

Creusot, Milan, Nuremberg and Stuttgart were among the targets he attacked by day and by night.

On the conclusion of his third operational tour, Wing Commander Gibson pressed strongly to be allowed to remain on operations and he was selected to command a squadron then forming for special tasks. Under his inspiring leadership, this squadron has now executed one of the most devastating attacks of the war—the breaching of the Moehne and Eder dams.

The task was fraught with danger and difficulty. Wing Commander Gibson personally made the initial attack on the Moehne dam. Descending to within a few feet of the water and taking the full brunt of the anti-aircraft defences, he delivered his attack with great accuracy. Afterwards he circled very low for 30 minutes, drawing the enemy fire on himself in order to leave as free a run as possible to the following aircraft which were attacking the dam in turn.

Wing Commander Gibson then led the remainder of his force to the Eder dam where, with complete disregard for his own safety, he repeated his tactics and once more drew on himself the enemy fire so that the attack could be successfully developed.

Wing Commander Gibson has completed over 170 sorties, involving more than 600 hours operational flying. Throughout his operational career, prolonged exceptionally at his own request, he has shown leadership, determination and valour of the highest order.

—*The London Gazette*, Tuesday, 25 May 1943, No. 3630 at Page 2361

‘My Guy Gibson VC Flying Scholarship’

I will never forget the feeling of excitement when, at age 18, I first received the news that had I been awarded ‘The Guy Gibson VC Flying Scholarship’ sponsored by the 617 Squadron Association. The scholarship is intended to assist a young member of the Air Cadets to learn to fly. Not only did it allow me to progress my flying significantly but I have learnt so much about the ethos, courage and values required of aviators that have gone before me.

I also felt a great sense of relief when I received the good news, as it confirmed that the hard work and dedication for the past six months had all been worth it. I cast my mind back to the initial stages of filling in the first application form - I remember trying to think of every little detail to include to make my application as competitive as possible. Several months later I received a letter in the post inviting for an interview at Swire House in Central London - the HQ

belonging to The Swire Group. A very nerve-racking experience for an 18-year-old to say the least, the interview was quite intense but it seemed to go well!

But that wasn't the end of it! The following week I was requested to attend The Officers and Aircrew Selection Centre at RAF College Cranwell, in order to sit the RAF Aptitude Tests. This didn't come at the best time as I was in the middle of my school mock exams. The day began with an early start ready to begin testing at 0700hrs, and six hours later I walked out feeling very bleary eyed but grateful for the challenging yet valuable experience.

When the time came, I began my long journey up to Tayside Aviation in Dundee. Although I was a year out of practice with a previous 12 hours of flying training in my back pocket, I was in an ideal position to carry on from what I had learnt previously.

The initial challenge was to convert to a new aircraft type; my previous flying experience was on an Aquila A21 I, a modern and very lightweight trainer, and the new aircraft was a PA28 Warrior - a larger and heavier trainer. I spent a few trips learning the handling characteristics of the PA28, but before long my instructor and I headed into the circuit.



After many circuits and a considerable number of bumpy landings later, my instructor deemed me competent enough to do my first solo - one circuit all on my own. Before I knew it, I had received my solo brief and I was taxiing to the hold ready to line up on the runway. I don't think a pilot ever forgets their first solo- as it is such a unique and surreal experience. It didn't really dawn on me that I was completely on my own in the cockpit until I glanced over towards the empty seat next to me on the downwind leg! I couldn't contain my excitement when filling in my logbook, once I had returned to earth, with my solo time in the Pilot in Command column!

Shortly after I had concluded my flying training at Tayside Aviation, I was put in contact with the Chairman of the Association - Wg Cdr Andrew Walters. I thanked the Association for the sponsorship and highlighted how valuable the experience had been in order to help me get one step closer towards my dream. Growing up in the county of Lincolnshire has meant that I have always had an interest in Air Force history - especially that of 617 Sqn.

I had the privilege of attending The Tirpitz reunion dinner in November 2017, where I first gained an insight into The 617 Squadron Association. I soon realised that the Association was so much more than I had previously imagined. For a young person like myself, it is truly humbling to be part of the reunions and to dine with so many courageous and inspiring aviators. It is truly extraordinary the way in which the Association helps us to commemorate the exploits of members from WW2, Tornado and Vulcan eras, and of course those involved with current 617 Sqn operations.

Sponsorship from The 617 Sqn Association provided the perfect stepping stone for gaining my PPL the following summer, where I completed my flying at Wellesbourne Mountford Aerodrome. I am due to go into my final year at Leeds University reading Aviation Technology with Pilot Studies, and have a final year on Yorkshire Universities Air Squadron as an Acting Pilot Officer. Hopefully there will be lots of flying for me on the horizon!

The Association has assisted my flying career and has significantly helped me on my journey to becoming a military pilot; to follow in the footsteps of some of the most courageous and inspiring individuals I have ever met. I have always made it my mission to give back at every opportunity; I have helped with the social media pages belonging to the Association, and I continue to be motivated to help the Association and its members further in any way I can.

Annie Cleve

Final Landings

Dr Mary Stopes-Roe

Mary Eyre Wallis was born in York in 1927, the second of the four children of Barnes and Molly Wallis. When her father's job at Vickers took him to Brooklands in Surrey, the family moved to nearby Effingham. Mary went away to boarding school at Godolphin School in Salisbury and was a pupil there in the run up to the Dams Raid in 1943. Earlier she and her siblings had helped her father in his famous home experiments with marbles, a catapult and a tin bath as he tried to work out how to 'bounce' a bomb across water. When she heard



the news about the raid itself from her headmistress, she worked out what had been going on and sent a telegram to her 'wonderful Daddy'.

After the war, Mary got a degree in history from the University of London. She then married the academic Harry Stopes-Roe, who had started his career as a physicist, but went on to take a PhD at Cambridge in philosophy. They had four children of their own, the last born in 1958 shortly before they moved to Birmingham, when he took up a post at the city's university. Once all of her four children were at grammar school, Mary took a second degree in Psychology. 'I thought the subject would be rather interesting, and I didn't want to dust the house for the rest of my life,' she said in a recent interview. She also gained a PhD and became a Research Fellow in the University of Birmingham School of Psychology where she remained until she retired in the 1990s. During her academic career she did extensive research, particularly on parent and family-child interactions, and was widely published.

After retirement she took on organising her father's archives as well as other work on her family history. She edited the extensive premarital correspondence between Barnes and Molly Wallis in the early 1920s which had taken the form of a correspondence course in mathematics, but in fact was composed of dozens of charming love letters. This was published as *Mathematics with Love* in 2004. The archives are now housed in various institutions, and Mary herself became

the President and a Trustee of the Barnes Wallis Foundation, formed to advance education in aviation design and honour her father's name.

Mary was also very active in 617 Squadron Association affairs and made many media appearances in the last few years talking about her father's involvement in Operation Chastise. She will be sadly missed at future events.

Mary and Harry Stopes-Roe were married for 66 years until he died, almost five years to the day before her, on 11 May 2014. Mary leaves four children, ten grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, and also her sister, Elisabeth.

Charles Avey

Born in Brighton in 1925, Charles Avey enlisted in the RAFVR, at the age of 18. After training as a Sergeant air gunner, he was posted to No. 617 Squadron for his first tour of operations as a member of the crew of F/Lt Gordon Price, DFM, an experienced Canadian pilot about to commence his second tour of duty.

As an inexperienced newcomer Charles was somewhat in awe as he arrived at Woodhall Spa on 9 December 1944, finding himself amongst aircrew who, only the previous month, had dispatched the German battleship "Tirpitz" at her Norwegian anchorage. His baptism of fire came a month later with a daylight attack against the U-boat pens at Bergen on 12 January 1945. Visibility of the target was hampered by a smoke screen and Price was forced to make four runs over the target until they were able to release their Tallboy. By the time they left the target area enemy fighters had got amongst the Lancasters, whose Mustang escort were seemingly ineffectual, resulting in the loss of two aircraft and leaving a third badly damaged to limp back to the Shetland Isles. Though Price's aircraft appears to have escaped the fighters' attention, the operation must have made a considerable impression on the novice air gunner.

For the next month the Squadron continued to target German naval installations. 3 February saw a short trip across the North Sea to the midget submarine shelters at Poorteshaven on the Hook of Holland, where the crew's bomb aimer, F/O Joe Merchant scored a direct hit with their Tallboy. A further successful attack was made on 8 February against the U-boat pens at Ijmuiden.

Meanwhile the Squadron was already beginning to penetrate into Germany by day. Communications targets were now a key part in Bomber Command's strategy and railway bridges and viaducts, along with canal embankments were deemed to be ideal targets for the Squadron's Tallboys. A trip to the

Bielefeld railway viaduct on 6 February was aborted over the target owing to poor visibility, all 17 Lancasters returning with their Tallboys. 8 days later nineteen aircraft returned for another attempt, only to find a similar situation, and again all returned with their bombs but not before four aircraft had been damaged flak. Charles later recollected that he felt that flak was worse than the fighters. As a gunner he might have a fighting chance against an enemy pilot, but his Brownings were no defence or even deterrent against ground defences.

After a further abortive attack against the Bielefeld Viaduct on 14 February, the Squadron returned yet again on 22nd and managed to have sufficient sight of the target to release their Tallboys. Even so, Price had to make three runs before his bomb aimer was satisfied, and even then their bomb fell as a slight overshoot. The viaduct remained.

Two days later the weather intervened yet again when the crew took a Tallboy to the Dortmund Ems Canal – as it did for a fourth attempt against the Bielefeld Viaduct on 9 March. On each occasion the crew returned with their valuable bomb load. After participating in all these abortive attempts, Charles was denied the sight of success as the crew did not operate on 14 March when the viaduct finally succumbed to the first 22,000lb Grand Slam.

Another railway bridge was the target on 23 March when 20 aircraft were despatched to Bremen. On this occasion Charles was manning the sole turret of a Lancaster B I (Special). Their Tallboy was reported as hitting the north end of the bridge, but Charles was more concerned about the possible threat from Me 262 jet fighters which were being employed against the Lancasters. Several crews reported attacks but all returned safely to Woodhall.

The following month saw a return to attacks against naval targets; enemy shipping in the port of IJmuiden on 7 April and the first of what would turn out to be three attempts to sink the pocket battleship “Lutzow” at Swinemunde six days later. On the latter occasion, in keeping with so many of Charles’ operations with the squadron, the force of 20 aircraft was thwarted by cloud and icing conditions forcing them to turn back. In the event this turned out to be Charles’ eleventh and last wartime trip with the Squadron.

With the war in Europe at an end, Charles was amongst the aircrew earmarked to travel with the Squadron to the Far East as part of Tiger Force, Bomber Command’s proposed contribution to the Pacific war against Japan. The surrender of Japan following the dropping of two bombs of far greater potency than either Tallboy or Grand Slam resulted in the disbanding of Tiger Force.

However, the Squadron's training was not to be wasted. In January 1946 the Squadron was despatched to India for four months, to maintain the RAF's heavy bomber presence at a time of potential political and civil unrest. Charles completed this time with the Squadron as part of the crew of S/Ldr Gray Ward DFC, returning to the UK in April.

After release from the Service Charles returned to his pre-war employment with an electrical switchgear manufacturer in Brighton.

Gordon Cawthorne

Gordon Cawthorne joined the RAF at the age of 18 in 1943. After training at the Initial Training Wing at Bridgnorth he was sent to the Isle of Man for air gunnery training. After qualifying, he joined his first crew at No. 16 Operational training Unit at Upper Heyford, flying Wellingtons.

Converting to the Lancaster at 1653 Conversion unit, North Luffenham he was posted to No. 186 Squadron in No. 3 Group, based at Stradishall. He participated in Operation Manna – dropping food supplies to the starving Dutch population in April 1945 being subsequently posted to join 617 Squadron. He arrived on the Squadron, now based at Waddington, on the 19 June, 1945 as a Sergeant air gunner flying with F/O Maurice Hall.

At this time the Squadron had just lost "C" flight which had transferred with the BI (Special) aircraft to join No. 15 Sqn at Mildenhall and was re-equipping with tropicalized Lancaster VII's as part of Tiger Force, which was forming as Bomber Command's intended contribution to the war against Japan in the Pacific.

However, he was not to experience that theatre. Following Japan's surrender in August 1945 and the disbanding of Tiger Force the following month, he was posted from the Squadron and transferred to No. 83 Sqn at Coningsby on 4 October. He was released from the Service at Hemswell in 1947.

Dams Dinner 2020

The 2020 Dams Dinner will be on Saturday 16th May, at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on Sunday 17th May at 10.30am.

617 Squadron Association

Registered Charity No 1141817

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