



# **THE HORNET**

## The Newsletter of the 100 Squadron Association

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## **Newsletter 102 August 2013**

Dear Members

Thank you very much for the articles sent to me for this edition. They all go to make the magazine interesting reading, so keep them coming.

The reunion in June at RAF Wyton was enjoyed by all who attended, although numbers were smaller than usual. It was nice to welcome Bob Petersen from Canada and his two sons, and Steve and Rob Hayton to their first reunion. Reports of the reunion and pictures of the visit to the Shuttleworth Collection can be found in this edition.

I hope you enjoyed the warm weather we had in July and perhaps saw the Lancaster at an airshow or flypast after the disappointment of the cancellation at the reunion due to very windy conditions.

Nina Crane

(Editor of The Hornet)

## **Obituaries**

Stafford Vickery informed us that his 89-year old father George Vickery sadly passed away on the 20th of March 2013. He served on 100 as an Air Gunner from October 1944 to May 1945 at both Waltham and Elsham Wolds. He was a very proud member of our Association and is sadly missed by his wife Pam Vickery and all his family.

Fiona Robertson wrote to tell us that her father, John Russell Gray, died on 30th March 2013 aged 92. He served as a wireless operator on Wellingtons and then on 100 with Lancasters at Waltham. He grieved for the 55,000 men, who were killed while serving with him in Bomber Command, and donations at his funeral were sent to the RAFBF for the upkeep of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park.

Geoff Thompson reported the death announced in the Daily Telegraph in April of Group Captain B M Burley, who commanded 100 Squadron from 1 February 1972 to 10 December 1973 flying Canberras based at West Raynham. He was born in 1930 and died on 6th April 2013. He was a veteran of the Korean conflict. Although not a member of the Association, we mourn his passing.

Chris Hickman kindly reported the death of Pat Harrison, widow of Bill Harrison who served at RAF Wittering on Canberras in the early 1950s.

We heard from Cynthia Talbot that her husband, Kenneth (Toby) Talbot, died on 5th August aged 89. He was born at Caister, near Lincoln in 1923. He was a long standing member of the Association and lived at Motcombe in Dorset. He joined the RAF at the outbreak of World War II as a Halton 'Brat'. He served on 100 Sqn at Waltham as a Flight Engineer in Fg Off Gillam's crew from November 1943 to April 1944 and completed 38 operations mainly bombing Germany. He later took part in Operation Manna dropping food parcels into Rotterdam for the starving Dutch people in 1945.

## **Remembrance Sunday 2013**

Remembrance Sunday falls on 10th November 2013. The Service of Remembrance will be held at the Squadron Memorial site in the layby alongside the A16 at Holton le Clay at noon.

Colin and Jean Johnson have again offered to host us for lunch at a very reasonable cost of £6. It was expected that the lunch gathering would be held this year in the new Village Community Centre (formerly the Etherington Arms Public House.) However, the Centre is not yet ready, so they have booked a room at the Royal Oak, which was a watering hole for 100 Squadron during WWII. Can members who wish to attend for lunch inform Air Cdre Bonnor or Colin Johnson by no later than 1st November 2013 of their intentions.

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## **Subscription Reminder**

Just a reminder to those who pay by cheque rather than Standing Order that the Association's financial year started on 1 August 2013, so subscriptions for 2013/14 are now due. If you would like to change to a Standing Order payment, please contact the Treasurer at the address or e-mail shown on the front cover, and he will be pleased to send you the SO form.

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## **2013 Reunion Report**

The number attending the Reunion this year was slightly down on recent years for a variety of reasons. We gathered at the Officers' Mess, RAF Wyton for a fish and chip lunch before setting off for Old Warden airfield to visit The Shuttleworth Collection. There, we divided into two groups each with a guide, who made the afternoon's visit very interesting and enjoyable because of their extensive knowledge of this historic aircraft collection. It was a warm day, so we were pleased to take refreshment in the café before heading back to Wyton.

We gathered again in the Officers' Mess where the staff had created the ambience of a dining-in night with station silverware and candelabra on the tables. The dinner was excellent and washed down with plenty of good wine.



After short speeches by the President and The New Boss - Wg Cdr Tony Cann, the traditional raffle was very successful with some good prizes. This was followed by the auction of a very special framed print of the "City of Lincoln" Lancaster signed by all those involved at BBMF; it had been given to Tony Cann by BBMF when he visited Coningsby that day. The President proposed that the sums raised be put towards a new plaque in the Far East Air Force section at the National Memorial Arboretum, and this was formerly agreed at the AGM. The evening included the moving rendition of a song by Sol Peterson in tribute to his father Bob; Sol's greeting and the words of his song are shown after the AGM Report below followed by a letter from his father.

The AGM was held on Saturday morning after which the gathering moved on to St George's church for the traditional service where the President read out the rather long list of "Absent Friends" lost over the past year.

## **Report of the 2013 Annual General Meeting**

The 2013 Annual General Meeting at RAF Wyton on 22 June 2013 was chaired by the Boss, Wg Cdr Tony Cann, with 23 members in attendance. He reported that the Squadron is in good shape with 17 aircraft and 25 pilots and a number of holding officers, who are providing excellent work in support of the Squadron. Despite heavy snowfall in the winter months that had closed the airfield for several weeks, the Squadron had flown over 4,500 hours in the last year. The main tasks included: "aggressor" support for the four Typhoon squadrons and the OCU as well maintaining similar support for Tornado units, the training of Forward Area Controllers prior to their deployment

to Afghanistan, and exercise deployments both overseas and in the UK. In the past year, these have included: Cyprus, Spain, two to France and Scotland.

The President had retained the duties of Acting Secretary, but nominations for the Secretary post are actively sought. Nina Crane had taken on the editorship of The Hornet and had published her first issue, No. 101. Mike English, Damien English and John Holford offered themselves for re-election as Treasurer, Website Manager and Distributor of 'The Hornet' respectively. These members were nominated and elected unanimously.

Association membership stands at 210. The year-end reserves figure for 2012 was £4,631 compared with £6,356 for 2011, a reduction in reserves over the year of £1,724. However, this was less than the subsidy agreed for those members attending the 95th Anniversary Reunion of £2,000. The audited accounts for 2012 were accepted unanimously.

The President had visited The National Arboretum and was concerned that the Squadron's plaque in the Far East section was much inferior to that in the Bomber Command Wing; he proposed and it was agreed that a new plaque of similar quality should be commissioned.

The Website Manager proposed that a new host be used to permit better flexibility and improved appearance; however, this would involve a small annual cost. The proposal was agreed subject to a report to the committee on future costs.

Trevor Watson reported on his visit to the Dutch Remembrance Day at Twello and requested that others now take on this commitment. Squadron personnel had given good support to these Dutch commemorative events in the past, and the Chairman agreed to look into participation in the future.

The Remembrance Sunday service at Waltham/Holton-le-Clay will be on 10th November 2013 at noon. Colin and Jean Johnson have again offered to provide lunch afterwards but this time at The Royal Oak.

The Chairman agreed to look into the prospect of holding the 2014 Reunion at RAF Leeming.

## **From: Sol Petersen**

Dear Friends,

It was wonderful to meet you all at the 100 Squadron reunion. Some of you asked, so I am attaching the words to the song I sang '*Can I Just Make it Through Tonight*' and a link so you should be able to download and hear a basic version of it on dropbox. I would like to make a slide show/video to accompany the song (and hopefully record it again) and put it on YouTube one day so I am keen to find any photos that would fit into a slide show just in case you have any and can send me something. It was great to meet you all, and I hope to see you all another time.

### **Can I Just Make It Through Tonight**

I watched you go down in flames  
It could have easily been me  
Another wide-eyed young kid  
with a fire in his heart  
Who sailed across the sea

We had to fight that war  
We had to do our part  
How could we know just how much  
It would break our hearts

We fly into the night  
We drop a load of death  
I pray to God it will be all over soon  
And we can find our breath

I'm the rear gunner man  
I see the whole night sky  
Bombs above me, bombs below me  
Fire and smoke  
And I still don't know why

I watched you go down in flames  
It could have easily been me  
Coned by the lights and the radar sights  
You gave your life for our freedom

This is my song  
How come it just goes on and on  
Will I ever see my home again  
Will I return to my love and my friends  
Can we win this impossible war  
Can I just make it through tonight

We never know who's down there  
Sometimes I try not to care  
Children's blood and tears in a flood  
It's more than I can bear

That was so many years ago  
But I remember that night and you  
Cause I'm the last one here to tell my story  
I'm all that's left of my crew

I watched you go down in flames  
It was just last night on the evening news  
Cause those innocent young men still climb in their planes  
And hope they're dealing the truth

This is our song  
How can we let this go on so long  
Will I ever see my home again  
Will I return to my love and my friends  
Can we win this impossible war  
Can I just make it through tonight

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/p4huxiuzpdvh4i3/Sol%20make%20it%20through%20take3.wav?n=170612077>

**From: Bob Petersen**

Former Rear Gunner of Flt Lt Ted Forbes Crew

It was a life-changing experience to attend the 100 Squadron Association Reunion with my two sons; Sean 54 now living in Australia and Sol 63, in New Zealand. My wife Penny would have loved to have attended this occasion, but sadly she passed away last July. Thank-you to Air Cdre Norman Bonnor for providing useful accommodation information and his help with Reunion registration.

The "Meet and Greet" at the Officers' Mess was very welcoming and gave us an opportunity to become acquainted with many of the members. Touring the Shuttleworth Collection was great, and the tour guide very knowledgeable about all of the aircraft. She went out of her way to satisfy any questions or enquiries. It is hard to believe there are so many different aircraft on site that are still airworthy.

Back at the base, we were greeted by cheerful staff and hosted to a spectacular dinner. It reminded me of many sumptuous post-war mess dinners. Later in the evening, my son Sol played guitar and sang "Can I Just Make It Home Tonight" a song he wrote for me about my wartime experience as a Rear Gunner. It was a great honour to listen to him play and share the memories and emotions it never fails to bring up for me. Every time I hear the song I am reminded how blessed our crew were to be fortunate to return home safely. I also felt very honoured to receive 2 commemorative posters from Wg Cdr Tony Cann, CO of 100 Squadron. One, a poster of the Lancaster Bomber and Hawk Jet-Fighter that serves 100 Squadron. It is signed by the current members. The second, a poster of the various aircraft that have served 100 Squadron since its inception.

On Saturday, the CO gave us an interesting and comprehensive update of the activities of 100 Squadron during 2012 and 2013. Following the AGM, we attended a church service at St. George's Chapel, and I was very touched by the chaplain's homily.

We were looking forward to a flyover of the Lancaster, but unfortunately that didn't happen due to inclement weather.

All in all, it was a trip of a lifetime, and I am hoping to return for the 100th Anniversary.

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## **Memorial Trip to Twello, The Netherlands**

We again took a trip on behalf of the Association to the cemetery in Terwolde where, as you will know from previous years (now our 8th year) there are 6 graves of a crew of a Lancaster that went down over Teuge in 1944. The seventh crew member, a Canadian rear gunner, Linton Stevenson, survived the crash. Although badly injured, the Dutch Resistance helped him to escape, but he was taken prisoner by the Germans for the remainder of the war.



It was a lovely day, and we were lucky enough to have a dry evening. It was a shame that it was not our turn to have our Lancaster doing a fly past. Many people came up and welcomed us back for the ceremony. As always, we followed the same order of ceremony with ten Year 9 school children placing long stemmed white roses not only on the six crew graves but also on twelve Dutch graves of villagers who lost their lives to the Germans. At all graves children place the roses and then step back to acknowledge those who gave their lives for Dutch freedom. At our graves, the children all wait until they are given the nod and then place their roses simultaneously, also upholding the two minutes silence with all those attending the ceremony. We think this year there were more than 250 people present. I was then given the signal to lay the 100 Squadron wreath that we had obtained from The Royal British Legion in Aylesford, Kent as in previous years. The ceremony over, Lyndy and I gave the children, as always, a selection of chocolates which are very well received.

We arrived in Twello a little earlier this year as we had been asked if we would like to be there on Queens Day, 30th April, because on that day Queen Beatrix abdicated and handed her throne over to her eldest son, Willem Alexander. Of course we were delighted to be there, and a big thank you to the four families who have over the years shown us great kindness and hospitality. We arranged an evening buffet at one of our friends' houses for us all to be together for the very first time. This evening was very enjoyable, and we thanked them all for all they had done for us on our trips to Twello on behalf of 100 Squadron and the Association.

James (Trevor) Watson



**From: Steve Hayton**

## **Dambuster's Service at Lincoln Cathedral**

We heard through various sources that Lincoln Cathedral was to hold a commemoration service on 17th May 2013 to mark the 70th Anniversary of the famous Dambusters' raid. They announced that there would be 1,000 free tickets available to the public on a first come, first served basis. I wasted no time in sending my postal application and was lucky to receive two tickets!!

We travelled to Lincoln on an overcast but fine day and found a parking space North of the Cathedral, about five minutes walk away. Never park in the town centre for this landmark as you might be in need of oxygen after climbing what is appropriately called "Steep Hill" on the South side!!

We were there to remember all those who were in some way connected to one of the most famous events of WW2, the Dambusters raid. On the evening of 16th May 1943, nineteen specially adapted Lancaster bombers of 617 Squadron, led by Wg Cdr Guy Penrose Gibson, left RAF Scampton in three waves tasked with destroying the Dams in the Ruhr valley in Germany. Operation Chastise, as it was known, required each adapted Lancaster to carry an "Upkeep" mine, better known of course as the bouncing bomb, designed by Barnes Wallis. Eight Lancasters failed to return, 53 airmen lost their lives, as both the Mohne and Eder dams were breached. Guy Gibson was awarded the Victoria Cross following the raid, however Barnes Wallis is said to have never fully recovered from the scale of losses on the raid, and wondered if it had all been worth it.

So we entered the Cathedral; the architecture is stunning! On each of the seats was a commemorative free book and the order of service for the day's special occasion. The service was enthralling, with the wonderful choir and readings by some of the gathered dignitaries; there was even a hymn with words put to the music of the famous Dambusters' March. We felt honoured to be there.

We visited the RAF Chapel before leaving, and people were waiting in line to view and to photograph the memorial stone set into the floor, commemorating Bomber Command. It is worth noting that the Chapel contains several Roll of Honour books, containing the names of all those airmen lost whilst serving with 1 Group. We had previously viewed

our Uncle's entry on an earlier visit last year.

Outside I found myself standing only yards away from a 617 Squadron former pilot, who had travelled all the way from New Zealand to be here, Les Munro. He was unable to complete his raid on the dams as his Lancaster was damaged by flak over the Dutch coast rendering his essential communications system U/S. It was approximately 4.15, and two Tornado GR4 jets of the present day 617 squadron flew over the Cathedral, and then its here, the Avro Lancaster PA474 from the BBMF at RAF Coningsby.

The third and final delight was a high banking pass by the Lanc as it turns and heads home to its base. Time for us to head home too.

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**From: Pip Kay**

**Marvellous weather for a march  
to the Grashoek Monument**

On Saturday the 15th of June, we were blessed with stunning weather for our traditional five year memorial service to remember the crash of the Lancaster ED 973-D. With the Drum band of the St Urbanus historical Shooting Club leading the procession, closely followed by children from the top class of the Horizon local primary school, we made once again a marvellous sight as we marched from the village to the woods.

On arrival in the wood, and just before we began our ceremony, the owner of the wood Mr Fleuren, a farmer from the neighbouring village of Helenaveen, presented a piece of aluminum. This piece had been found by his plough working a field close to the wood and was a piece from the Lancaster.

It was very touching and almost magical for the school children and many villagers to be able to hold and pass around a small piece of the plane and a part of the story of which they had come to remember.

It really was quite remarkable because this time after the official ceremony we would be unveiling an information board which tells the story of the crew members and the crash. The information board is part of a historical and cultural route, an initiative of the Historical Work Group, Grashoek. The routes purpose is to inform villagers and visitors of the rich history the village has had.

One side of the board tells in English the complete story of what happened on the night of the 15th June 1943, and on the reverse side the story is told in Dutch. This project was realized with the help of Rabobank, the local bank, working together with a number of generous and hard working volunteers.



During the memorial ceremony the local drum band the - Semper Avanti - played the British National Anthem, and their solo trumpet player Theo Bartels played the Last Post and the Reveille.

Children from the primary school laid flowers on behalf of their school and provided an escort for the floral tributes laid by the Village Committee, the Town council, the Rabobank, St Urbanus the Historical Shooting club, the Association for the Deported 1940-1945, the Semper Avanti musical organization, and the Historical Work Group of Grashoek.

The Historical Shooting Club made us all very welcome in their club house prior to and after the ceremony and were very supportive throughout. It was unfortunate that we were unable to welcome any overseas guests as the shooting club had invited us to shoot using very old guns. This is still a very important and highly active tradition in The Netherlands and comes complete with all clubs wearing varying authentic uniforms from various time periods.

We were delighted that Pete Kurvers was well enough to attend; he had been keen to see a monument erected since eye witnessing the crash as a boy, and it was a touching sight to see the Alderman Marou Absil representing the town council and Wim van Ophoven accompanied by his grand children unveil the board. Wim, another eye witness, is the creator of the monument.

I believe that the 100 Squadron and its Association would have been proud of our efforts; the villagers of Grashoek and their children have clearly not forgotten what others gave for all our freedom.

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## **The Beginnings of The Jet Age**

An abridged version of a script used for the 90th Anniversary DVD.

Conversion for 100 Squadron from Lincolns to Canberra B2 aircraft took place at Bassingbourne over the three months between March and June 1954. The Canberra was the first of the jet bombers in what would become an all jet force. By July 1954, 100 Squadron had returned to Wittering and was operational in time for the visit of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in late July. The change from a heavy four piston-engined bomber to a two jet-engined light bomber brought about significant changes to crew configuration. Gone were the WOP/AG's, the bomb aimers, the flight engineers and the gunners of the Lancaster and Lincoln days. Crews were selected pilots and navigators to man the new Canberras.



English Electric Canberra B Mk 2



Visit by HRH Prince Philip, 1954

Official Records stated that 100 Squadron was to be a Main Force Squadron of Bomber Command selected, equipped and manned for trials work with the Bomber Command Development Unit (BCDU). In effect, 100 Squadron was a trials unit performing whatever test flying was required by the BCDU, which was also based at Wittering. On 21st April 1954, Sqn Ldr H B Hunt DSO DFC AFC took command of the Squadron, and he did not allow his men to think of themselves in a subordinate role. He continually reminded them that the work of 100 Squadron, in conjunction with the BCDU, was of paramount importance to Bomber Command. The Bomber Command Armament School, based at Wittering, also needed trials work for the V-Force special weapons requirements.

Another important set of trials was the development of aircraft flight patterns to avoid detection by hostile Air Interception (AI) radar. The Squadron operated high sensitivity passive radar receivers mounted in the tail of the Canberras, which provided a pictorial display for pilot interpretation. Using this radar it was possible to determine the flight path of enemy aircraft and take avoiding action to stay out of range. Other trials covered many aspects of Canberra operations including tests to overcome heating problems with the Avon engines and difficulties with

restarting engines at high altitude, landing trials on snow covered runways and co-operation with night fighters from Coltishall. The Squadron also co-operated with Coastal Command's Air-Sea Warfare Development Unit in an exercise where a 'ditched' crew in a dinghy had to recover an airborne lifeboat dropped from a Shackleton and sail it back to port.



The Airborne Lifeboat



On 21st October 1955, at long last, 100 Squadron received its Standard for which it qualified in 1943 after 25 years of service. The Standard was presented by Air Marshall Sir George Mills KCB DFC, AOC-in-C of Bomber Command, who had himself served with 100 Squadron between 1927 and 1929.

Regretting that he was unable to attend the presentation, MRAF Lord Trenchard writing to Sqn Ldr Kunkler said "I look upon 100 Squadron almost as one I have been in myself. I seem to have been connected with the Squadron most of my service life, and I always remember the good work done by members of it."

It was also during this period that the Wittering Wing received the Freedom of the Borough of Stamford, and both 40 and 100 Squadrons began to carry the blue and gold chequer-board on their aircraft. At this time, Wg Cdr Ivor Broom was OC the BCDU with Sqn Ldr Colin Kunkler as OC 100 Squadron. There was a very good relationship between the BCDU and 100 Squadron; indeed, Ivor Broom was present at the wedding of Flt Lt Keith Garrett. Also present were Wg Cdr Colin Bell and Air Cdre Charlie Goulthorpe who, like Keith, are both Association members. Sqn Ldr Bill Bailey, a much respected past Secretary of our Association, was also present.

In August 1956, 100 Squadron was divided into the Trials Flight at Wittering, and a Recce Detachment Flight at Wyton. The Recce Detachment Flight was formed from 82 (PR) Squadron after it had disbanded. This Flight, commanded by Sqn Ldr D A E Hammatt, was tasked with preparing to support Operation Grapple, the British thermo-nuclear H-Bomb Tests at Christmas Island in the Pacific. Between August 1956 and February 1957, the PR7 aircraft underwent extensive modifications to prepare for the task of providing high level meteorological reports, and also high altitude photography, prior to and when the H-Bombs were dropped. The aircraft were fitted with STR18 HF and Green Satin radar to assist with communicating and navigating over long distances in the wide expanse of the Pacific. After a great deal of hard work, the first H-Bomb drop by a Valiant BI of 49 Squadron took place on 15th May 1957. Two further drops were made but, when the Operation was complete, the Recce Detachment was disbanded on return to Wyton in August 1957. The aircraft and many of the aircrews were handed over to 58 Squadron which later took part in further H-Bomb tests on Christmas Island.

Trials work continued at Wittering, and a great deal of work was carried out in developing bombing techniques in support of the TSR2 programme. This involved penetrating at an altitude of 250 feet to get underneath the coverage of enemy radar. One method was termed 'Low Altitude Bombing' (LAB) or 'toss bombing', which entailed approaching the target at low level and releasing the bombs in a steep climb. Even though the TSR2 was cancelled, this trials work proved useful for the Buccaneer and eventually the Tornado.



100 Squadron was disbanded on 31st August 1959. This was the first time that the Squadron would not be in the active list of RAF Squadrons since its formation in 1917. The disbanding parade took place in Stamford.

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## **Recollections of BCDU by** **Air Commodore Charlie Goulthorpe**

I served in BCDU from December 1954 to September 1957. The following are personal and fragmentary recollections of that time; I kept no diary. BCDU was established and tasked by HQ Bomber Command from c. 1954 to develop equipment and procedures for the newly introduced Canberra and V-Force aircraft. It formed at RAF Wittering alongside 100 Squadron, which provided necessary support with its Canberra aircraft.

Three other Canberra Squadrons were stationed at Wittering, and 100 was tasked to match their operational readiness as far as possible. For want of hangars, all the Canberras operated from dispersals when not in 2nd line maintenance. Initially 100 occupied huts on the NW dispersal but, during airfield works, it relocated to an A1-tent on the south side (c.70 square feet for 70 airmen, office and ground equipment, and no telephone!) before eventually taking possession of the SW dispersal and huts. OC BCDU and OC 100 Squadron had offices in No 1 Hangar. Initially 100 had (I think) 10 Canberra B2s, but a PR3 and a PR7 together with a Meteor 7 were allotted later.

### **Personnel**

**OC BCDU:** Wg Cdr R C Cobbe until early 1956, H J Cundall until mid 1956 and I G Broom until my departure.

Project Officers: Flt Lt J Downes, Flt Lt W Milne and others including a GD photo specialist.

Senior Scientific Officer: Paddy Hood

Senior Technical Officer: Sqn Ldr G H Ford

Tech Sigs: Fg Off A Dearden

Tech Eng: (self) Flt Lt P J Goulthorpe also I/C C Flight 100 Sqn

Tech Arm: Sqn Ldr S Fawson (later Sqn Ldr Freddie Cox)

**OC 100 Sqn:** Sqn Ldr H B Hunt until early 1955, C P H Kunkler until 1957 then R A McPhie

**OC A Flight:** Flt Lt G M Bailey

**OC B Flight:** Flt Lt R Davenport & others

**Trials:** I remember only those which brought me some grief!

1. To evaluate a modification to improve the operation and reliability of the swirl vanes of the 100 series Avon engines in the B2 Canberra.

2. To evaluate the Decca Navigator in the Canberra B2. The B2 was very poorly equipped with Nav. Aids. Gee-H was all it had at that time, but Decca proved to be little better. I think we trialled other Nav Aids including a Doppler Nav in one of the PR Canberras.

3. To evaluate a tail-warning radar on loan from the USAF.

4. To explore the maximum 9 x 1000lb bomb-load on the Canberra. 6 x 1000lb was the normal full load, and I think remained so.

5. To study a low altitude bombing system (LABS) for the Canberra. This involved a high-speed, low-level run into the target, steep pull-up and release in a climbing attitude to throw the bomb a few miles forward, allowing the bomber to escape without crossing a defended target. The basic visual bomb-sight in the B2 was not adequate for other than straight and level release. LABS required a specially adapted sight or great skill on the part of the crew. Our Station Commander, Gp Capt Woodruffe, was killed in an accident in the USA in this connection.

6. As an offshoot of the LABS trial, BCDU attempted to design a 'prone harness' intended to restrain the bomb aimer when lying in the nose station during a high-speed run-in through turbulent air. The difficulty was to provide for his rapid return to his ejector seat in an emergency. The matter was taken up elsewhere.

7. To study the adoption of in-flight refuelling in the V-force. Ivor Broom took me along with him for some interesting flying in a USAF KB-29 which used the US boom-type of refuelling equipment.

8. To confirm the take-off performance and in flight fuel usage of the Valiant. Paddy Hood undertook the take-off measurements while I helped to calibrate the fuel flow meters in both aircraft and high-pressure refuelling vehicles. And a fine fuel-spillage I caused!

9. Work was done to clear an installation of a long-focus camera (I forget which) in the Canberra.

10. In preparation for the introduction of the 3 V-bombers and special

weapons into service, I and several BCDU staff attended Staff Courses at Wittering, Gaydon and Waddington; BCDU tasks were increasingly concerned with these aircraft as my posting ended.

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## **The day we “bombed” Hickham Air Force Base** **Bill Wheeler, President of the Moseley RAFA Branch**

On 1st April 1957 my pilot, Mike Retallack, and I landed in our Canberra PR7, WT504 at Hickam American Air Force Base, Honolulu en route from the UK to Christmas Island to take part in Operation Grapple, the British H bomb trials.

Since leaving the UK our HF radio, used for long distance communication, had been misbehaving, only to fail completely on the flight from San Francisco to Hickam so that from reaching our cruising level we had been out of radio contact with the air traffic authorities throughout the majority of the flight, apart from a brief period as we overflew the weather ship November, positioned at the midpoint of the Pacific crossing. The following day we were scheduled to fly the relatively short leg of about 1250 nautical miles south to Christmas Island. The Americans had other ideas, however, and said we couldn't go with a faulty radio but did agree we could fly in formation with another of our squadron aircraft which was following the same route 24 hours behind us. Meanwhile, we were left to our own devices to visit tourist spots in Honolulu and go for a swim at Waikiki Beach.

The second aircraft duly arrived on schedule when arrangements were made for it to accompany us on our final leg; however, were only some 30 minutes out of Hickam when we received a recall as the runway at Christmas Island was flooded. So we had to put up with another 24 hours of rest and recreation by the end of which we were joined by another of our squadron's aircraft, piloted by the Recce Flight Detachment Commander, Squadron Leader Doug Hammatt. The boss decided we would impress the Americans by doing a three aircraft stream take off, him leading and Mike and I bringing up the rear as tail end Charlie.

On a signal from the boss, we all commenced the engine start routine; only in our case we experienced an unidentified minor explosion. Mike then held a short discussion with the NCO in charge of the starter crew to try and identify the cause; the conclusion arrived at being that it was the result of uneven burning of the charge in the engine starter cartridge. This was not of any consequence so we continued with the start-up procedure, then we followed the other two Canberras out to the take-off point, congratulating ourselves that in spite of the problems experienced, we were ready for take-off on time. As third in the stream, we had just lifted off when the American air traffic controller radioed the boss to say that one of his "chicks" had dropped their wing tip fuel tanks onto his runway. Being behind the other two aircraft we could see they still had their tanks on their wing tips so it was obvious which "chick" had bombed the Hickam runway!

From then on until our arrival at the Island, Mike, time and time again mentally went through all the actions he had followed during the start-up checks but remained convinced he had not inadvertently operated the wing tip tank jettison switch. In our normal role, we seldom if ever used wing tip fuel tanks as, after all, we had a range of almost 3,000 miles to dry tanks without them, so they weren't necessary. However, for Operation Grapple, because of the long oceanic flights involved, 'the powers that be' decreed that they should be fitted. Fortunately, on this occasion, because of the short flight down to Christmas Island, they had not been filled, otherwise our bombing might have caused more damage!

During the subsequent investigation and enquiry, it was concluded that the explosive bolts holding the tanks to the aircraft had been fired at the time we had experienced the explosion during the engine start-up checks, due to an electric current being induced into the jettison circuit from an adjoining cable; and in consequence Mike was entirely exonerated.

As the result of this episode, we can honestly claim to be the only aircraft to have "bombed" Hickam since the Japanese did so when attacking Pearl Harbour in 1941!