



# THE HORNET

## The Newsletter of the 100 Squadron Association

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## Newsletter 111 November 2015

Dear Members

Thank you once again to those who have sent in articles for this edition including in particular Keith Ellis who has written a moving tribute to John Holford whose death was reported in the August edition. My sister and I attended John's funeral, together with Keith and Bill Kingston, and he was given a fitting send off. The death of Wing Commander Colin Bell is also reported in this issue. I recall my father and I meeting him in the TV room of the Officers' Mess at RAF Leeming on the occasion of the laying up of the old standard. He also attended my father's funeral at St Clement Danes, and I remember chatting to him outside the church. My thanks also go to Frank Ockerby for his story about his raid on Kiel together with interesting photographs. I was unable to attend the Remembrance Sunday Service at Holton Le Clay, but I gather about 20 members attended.

Nina Crane

(Editor of The Hornet)

# Remembrance Sunday

**8th November 2015**

## **RAF Grimsby/Waltham**

On Sunday, 8th November, a good number of Association members, cadets from 195 (Grimsby) ATC Squadron and the usual very good turnout of folk from Holton le Clay village gathered around the Squadron memorial on the A16 layby. It was a very dull day with low cloud so the hoped for flypast by Squadron Hawks had to be scrubbed. The Reverend Chris Woadden started the service promptly at 1200 noon. After the "last post" and the two minute silence followed by "reveille", Wing Commander Andy Wright stepped forward to lay the Squadron's wreath. Our President then laid a wreath for the Association followed by wreath layers from the Royal Observer Corps, the ATC Squadron, the Holton le Clay parish council and the village hall committee. After the service, we were again provided with an excellent lunch in the Village Community Centre.



Flight Lieutenant Tim Clement paraded the Squadron Standard

# Obituaries

## Wing Commander Colin George Bell 25th August 1933 – 30th August 2015



I first met Colin in 1966 at the RAF College of Air Warfare which was then based at Manby. I was a student on the Staff and Specialist Navigation courses and Colin was a senior member of staff. Over the 50 years since, we have stayed in touch primarily through the Association but also through the Aries Association - old boys from Manby - and the Royal Institute of Navigation in London.

Colin's early years were spent at Childs Hill in North London before he was evacuated to Willingham in Cambridgeshire at the beginning of the war. On returning to London, he took the 11+ and was awarded a scholarship place at Christ's Hospital in Horsham, Sussex where he was a boarder in Middleton A house from 1944 – 51. In later life, Colin was a great supporter of the school, and he was always popping back for various events and was very well known to many of the Foundation and School staff.

Colin started his RAF national service on the Ferry Squadron at Hawarden in 1951 and took every opportunity to fly in the many types of aircraft they were operating. His enthusiasm for flying led to a recommendation for officer training at Digby and Cranwell where he was commissioned on 5 November 1952 followed by attendance at the Air Navigation School at Bishops Court in Northern Ireland. He then completed further courses at the Bomber Command Bombing School at Lindholme near Doncaster before converting onto the Canberra at



Bassingbourne and joining 100 Squadron at RAF Wittering which is when he married Gill, who he had known since their childhood in London. The Canberra had only recently entered RAF service, so this was a plum posting for a newly qualified navigator. Over the next two years, he became an expert in the light bomber role as much of the Squadron's task was to support the Bomber Command Development Unit. So it was no surprise that he was chosen as the lead navigator for Canberra operations during the Suez Crisis in 1956. He was woken on the night of 28th October by a policeman throwing stones at the windows of his flat near Wittering shouting he was required at Binbrook immediately. By 0745, he was airborne in a Shackleton and on the way to Nicosia in Cyprus. On 30 October, he was airborne with a 139 Squadron crew. He finally got back to Waddington on Christmas Day.

In February 1958, Colin began conversion onto the Valiant V-Bomber at Gaydon and on completion of the course was posted to 207 Squadron at Marham. In May 1960, the Squadron won the Lawrence Minot and Armament Officers trophy in the annual Bomber Command bombing competition, the aim of which was to find the most efficient squadron in the V-Force; clearly, Colin had played a major role in that achievement through his work on developing astro-navigation techniques in V-Force aircraft. He moved on to post-graduate navigator training firstly at Shawbury and then at the College of Air Warfare in 1963 to undertake the Specialist Navigation Course.

On graduation in 1964, he stayed on the staff of the College as an instructor on compasses and instruments. He was promoted to Squadron Leader and retained on the College staff as the Senior Specialist in Electronics, lecturing and advising on all aspects of aircraft avionic systems and the military aspects of space, which was a very fast developing field at that time. As I said at the beginning, I first met Colin when I was a student at Manby and I got to know him well as he was my tutor for the personal project. I remember taking the first draft of my script to him expecting praise for all my hard work, but he tore it apart on both style and technical content; initially I was upset by his comments but, on taking a second look, I realised he was right, so I got on with revising and updating my script to his recommendations.

Colin and Gill's next move in 1970 was a big one to USAF Alaskan Air Command at Elemendorf Air Force Base, where Colin was the chief of operational services. His role involved developing polar navigation techniques for the C-130 Hercules equipped with skis as well as wheels which supported the radar early warning sites of the Dew Line (Distant

Early Warning Line) from Alaska through Northern Canada to Greenland. He was also the USAF representative to the Federal Aviation Administration in Alaska. It sounds a busy job, but Colin also found time to qualify for a pilot's licence for both land and floatplane single-engine aircraft.

On return to the UK, Colin was posted to Air Support Command at Upavon to be the chief planner for all fixed-wing transport flights around the World. But he also found time to be the Wiltshire County Squash Coach. He had a further staff appointment as Chief of Intelligence Plans at the Second Tactical Air Force at Rheindahlen in Germany before he was promoted to Wing Commander in July of 1979 and took up an appointment in the MOD Central Staff in London related to RAF operations in NATO. His final posting was as Air Advisor to the Defence Operational Analysis Establishment at West Byfleet who were involved in the continuing development of UK surveillance, target acquisition and command and control systems. He finally retired on his 55th birthday in 1988

This was a very busy and productive career, yet Colin still found time to be involved in many other activities including a number of charities. In retirement, he took on even more. He was a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Navigation, a Fellow of the British Institute of Management and its Treasurer for 10 years, a Freeman of the Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators, a fund-raiser for Marie Curie, a Donation Governor of his old school Christ's Hospital, President of the RAF Association - City of London Branch, Chairman of Yarbrough Village Hall Committee and the Friends of Yarborough Church Group and somehow also found time to complete an Open University degree in Mathematics.

His enthusiasm and dedication in all he did was obvious to all his friends and colleagues, and I learned a great deal from a man I have greatly admired over the last 50 years. Colin was a devoted husband to Gill and loving father to Tim, Simon, Judy and their families.

*Air Commodore Norman Bonnor – October 2015*

We have sent a donation in tribute to the RAFA.

## **John Holford**

### **March 1933 - 20th August 2105**

No doubt many of you will recall the obituary I produced for Judy Holford on her passing some 6 years ago. Judy was a warm, caring, bubbly lady loved and admired by us all. It was a sad experience for me, but nevertheless a privilege. It is now my privilege to write this tribute for John, husband of Judy. He too was a warm, generous, kindly man; a good friend to myself and all 100 Squadron Association members.

John was born in Sutton Coldfield in March 1933. After completing his schooling, he trained as a toolmaker, and his gift as a designer provided an outlet for his creative talents as demonstrated by his prodigious output of 'things mechanical'. Like all young men born before the start of WWII, John was called up for National Service and trained as an Airframe Mechanic in the Royal Air Force. He was posted to 100 Squadron which was then equipped with Avro Lincoln heavy bombers. He deployed with 'The Ton' to Kenya and saw campaign service during the Mau-Mau uprising.

On leaving the RAF after 3 years, John returned to Sutton Coldfield, and in addition to marrying and creating his family, John enjoyed many pursuits. He was a keen cyclist, an enthusiastic if often unlucky angler, and was also involved in mountain rescue mainly in Snowdonia. Later in life he moved with his family to Wimborne, Dorset where, eventually he and Judy met and married. Wimborne benefited greatly from having John as a resident. He contributed substantially to the social and civic life of the town in many ways including the restoration, and then maintenance and running, of the dilapidated Tivoli cinema turning it into a thriving centre of entertainment in the town.

In 1997, John joined 100 Squadron Association, and took over as Editor of 'The Hornet' from Arthur White. In this demanding role, assisted by Judy, he produced four volumes each and every year involving long hours assembling the material, typing, editing, printing, stuffing envelopes and then despatching copies to all of us. On Judy's death, John carried on in his role expressing his determination to carry on until Volume 100 was safely produced. To his great credit, and despite losing his soul-mate, he achieved this splendid aim.

John was an Association stalwart, attending all reunions up to and including Cosford in 2015. He drove from Wimborne to Holton le Clay every Remembrance Sunday during his years as an Association member. In so doing John contributed much to the Association. He was always ready to help other members during reunions, cheerful and humorous with his ready smile and an explosive laugh that was infectious. After I joined the Association in 2004, we became firm friends, and Laura and I enjoyed the company of John and Judy, sharing memorable time together at reunions and other locations.

He built models of all of the aircraft operated by 100 Squadron during its distinguished service including, of course, the Lancaster and the Victor. He also produced an Fe2b built from drawings he somehow obtained and manufactured all the components himself. He took great pride in his model collection, and his protective care of the models stretched as far as Judy not being allowed to even dust them! John loved good food and wine, and held the enlightened view that life was for living with as much enjoyment as it was humanly possible to pack into every day. He did both with great verve, dedication and gusto! The photograph below reveals John in 'serious concentration' mode at Yeovilton during an outing there in 2008 accompanied by Judy, Laura and myself.

John's presence at Association reunions will be greatly missed; he was a lovely man and those who have been fortunate enough to have known him have lost a loyal and affable friend. Reunions simply will not be the same without him. Bless you John, and thank you for being a part of and enhancing our lives for so long. You will be fondly remembered.

*Prof Keith Ellis - October 2015*

We have sent a donation in tribute to the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance.



John 'concentrating' on 'flying' a model Harrier at Yeovilton supervised by Judy!

## **William Henry Walter Beckett**

We have learned from his son Christopher that William Beckett sadly died on 21st August aged 85 years. William served on the Squadron between June 1948 and April 1950 at RAF Hemswell; in those days, this was a long way from his home in Portsmouth. As a National Serviceman, he trained as an air radio technician and worked on the Lincoln aircraft both at Hemswell and during a deployment to Egypt. He recalled with great fondness his time with the Squadron including playing in goal for the football team and being waited on by the officers at the Christmas dinner. He also recalled with sadness a Lincoln crashing in fog and being part of the guard of honour at the subsequent funeral of the aircrew lost in the incident.

When his National Service was coming to an end, one of his fellow Squadron members asked if he had a job to go to back in Portsmouth and, as he had not, he was told of an opportunity to work in the wages department at Leeds Fireclay, and he moved to Leeds in 1950 and stayed for the rest of his life. He met his wife Pauline at Fireclay, and they married in 1959 having two children: Christopher and Susan. Pauline died 1989. William has three grandchildren whom he adored.



## **Ivan William Castle**

We have learned from his daughter-in-law Susan that Ivan Castle sadly died on 15th October aged 92 years in the Rushwood Nursing Home. Pilot Officer Ivan William Castle, known to all on the squadron by his middle name, arrived on 100 Squadron at the end of April 1944, just as the preparations for the D-Day landings were approaching fever pitch. On the 9th of May 1944, William flew a "second dickie" trip, along with his Bomb Aimer, with the experienced and popular crew of Flying Officer Sheriff in 100 Squadron celebrity Lancaster ND644, 'HW-N', which would go on to complete 115 operations before being lost the following March. Their target that night was the gun battery at Merville, on the French coast.

His "baptism of fire" completed, William and his crew completed their first operation together on the night of the 27th/28th of May 1944, again against the enemy the gun battery at Merville. 1 Group's own Pathfinders, the 1 Group Special Duty Flight, marked the target, and William, with 53 other Main Force Lancaster crews from 1 Group, made good their attack on the enemy position. Initial marking by the SDF was very accurate, and subsequent bombing on them led to a successful attack. With D-Day now just a week away, William and his crew operated again the following night, against the gun battery at Eu, and again three nights later against a German radio installation at Bernaval. On the big night itself, the 5th/6th of June, 100 Squadron attacked two separate targets. William and his crew in Lancaster JB289 'HW-T', were part of the attack on the gun battery at St. Martin De Varreville. Cloud over the target was 10/10ths, necessitating crews to bomb on red marker flares dropped by the SDF. William and his crew took the added precaution of obtaining a 'Gee' fix to confirm their position before releasing nearly 6 tons of deadly cargo over the target.

Over the course of the next few nights, William and his crew attacked enemy targets at Vire, Acheres, and the docks at Le Havre. On the night of the 16th/17th of June they attacked the V-1 assembly works at Domleger, and then took a well-earned week's leave. Back on the battle order on the 29th of June, the crew took part in their first daylight operation - such was Allied superiority in the air over the beach-heads and northern France by now, Bomber Command was able to mount raids in daylight without the grave risks attached to such operations that had been present just a few weeks before. Once again the V-1 assembly works at Domleger was the target, and William and his crew were able to make a visual identification of the target from their bombing height of 13,000 feet.

A mix of night and daylight raids on targets such as Vierzon and Orleans (both railway marshalling yards, attacked to stop the movement of German troops and supplies) followed, before William and his crew participated in one of the most successful raids of the war. The Canadian 1st and British 2nd Armies had made a good breakout from the Normandy beaches after D-Day, but by early July were being held up by a series of German strongholds close to the French town of Caen. Bomber Command dispatched 467 "heavies" (including no less than 192 from 1 Group, and 18 from 100 Squadron themselves) to attack German positions. Controlled by a Master Bomber, the raid quickly developed into a very accurate attack, with German troops reported to be "considerably shaken". The success of the raid allowed the British and Canadian Armies to break out easily and continue to prosecute their advance through France.

On the 18th of July, William and his crew operated against Sannerville on a daylight raid - 942 aircraft from Bomber Command took part in this raid, laid on once again to provide close air support to British troops who were about to embark on 'Operation Goodwood' - the retaking of the city of Caen. The marking of the target was excellent, and William reported to the debrief officer on his return that the "marking and bombing were both very accurate". Once landed and de-briefed, the crew would just about have had enough time to sleep before being woken up again for briefing and pre-flight meal before another raid that same night, the 18th/19th of July - an attack against the oil refinery at Scholven. Although William had been on the squadron for several weeks, and was well over half way through his tour, this was his first operation to a German target. The attack was very successful, and production of oil at the plant was stopped for some considerable time. A short rest was given to crews before they operated again two nights later, on the 20th/21st of July, against the railway yards at Courtrai. Post-raid reports from the Bomber Command Intelligence Section report that William and the 302 other crews who attacked Courtrai that night left it "totally devastated".

A return to Germany on the night of the 23rd/24th of July saw William and his crew attacking Kiel with 628 other "heavies" - the first big raid on a German target for nearly two months. The raid was, again, a complete success with no mains water supplies or public transport for several days after the raid, and no mains gas for three weeks. William and his crew were giving their all to the bomber campaign and being rewarded with excellent results - on this raid they bombed from 20,000 feet and got their payload bang-on the target.

Raids to Coquereaux (V-1 site), two raids to Stuttgart (in the campaign against the German industrial city), Calmont (another close air support raid in the Normandy battle area), Foret de Nieppe, Trossy St. Maxim and Pauillac (all V-1 sites) followed, before William embarked on the last operation of his tour.

On the night of the 7th/8th of August 1944, the British Army had again called for a raid in support of Allied troops on the ground, at what has become known as the 'Falaise Gap'. A number of targets were identified, and 100 Squadron provided 15 aircraft for an aiming point at Fontenoy Le Marmion. At 21:05, William lifted Lancaster ND644 'HW-N' off runway 18 at Waltham, and making height, set course for France. Shortly after 23:00, approaching the target in excellent visibility, he saw the first green target markers going down, and at 23:20, exactly on 'H-hour', he released his bombs on the target from 7,000 feet. Setting course for home, the crew were diverted from Waltham and landed instead at Little Horwood at 01:27 on the morning of the 8th. A short hop back to Waltham the following morning saw them land at 10:19, switch off their motors, and breath a sigh of relief that their tour was over. Such was the intensity of air operations at that time that William completed his tour in just eight weeks - just a few short months later it would take on average nearly twice that time to finish a tour of operations. He had flown 19 of his operations in Lancaster ND644 (HW-N) which later became a centurion (115 missions) before it was lost in March 1945.

Doubtless there would have been the traditional party to celebrate the completion of his tour in the mess at Waltham for him that night, a "stand down" night for 100 Squadron, before William was posted away later that month for duty as an Instructor at 28 Operational Training Unit at Wymeswold."

*Greg Harrison*

We have sent a donation in tribute to the Alzheimer's Society.

# **Squadron Leader Hugh Harold Grant-Dalton**

**March 1921-12 September 2015**

We have learned that Hugh Harold Grant-Dalton passed away peacefully at home on 12th September, aged 94. His funeral took place on Wednesday 23rd September at Exeter & Devon Crematorium.

Born in Eastbourne, Sussex, in March 1921, the son of Leslie and Marmie Grant-Dalton, Hugh Grant-Dalton joined the RAF in September 1939 aged just 18 years old. Like so many of his generation, he saw the threat from Nazi Germany and wanted to do his bit for King and country. Initial training at Padgate, Hastings, and Torquay was followed by a short course at No.5 Elementary Flying Training School at RAF Meir in Staffordshire. Elementary training completed, Hugh went to No.6 Service Flying Training School at Little Rissington in August 1940, where he remained until November of that year. Commissioned at the end of his flying training, Hugh's next stage of training took him to No.2 Air Navigation School for two months before going on to 16 Operational Training Unit at Upper Heyford in January 1941, where he learned to fly the Handley Page Hampden.

On the 19th of April 1941, Hugh received his first operational posting, to 44 Squadron at Waddington but he moved on to 50 Squadron at Lindholme just ten days later. Whilst flying Hampdens with 50 Squadron, he flew 5 operations as a second pilot, and 22 as a first pilot. Aside from a short spell at 14 OTU at Cottesmore, Hugh remained with 50 Squadron until February 1942 when, having completed his first operational tour, he went to the RAF Central Flying School at Upavon. A number of postings to various training establishments followed, before he was posted to 1662 Heavy Conversion Unit at Blyton on the 21st October 1943, to learn to fly the Lancaster. Once he'd completed his course at Lindholme, and by now promoted to Squadron Leader, he was posted to 100 Squadron on the 9th of November 1943 and took charge of "B" Flight.

Unusually, Hugh didn't fly a "second dickie" trip with 100, but was thrown straight in at the deep end with a trip to Berlin on the night of the 18th/19th of November 1943. Although a relatively uneventful first trip, the crew found themselves short of petrol on their return home and landed at the American base of Boxted. Their next four trips were all to the "Big City", and they too were not without incident. On their third trip they were "coned" by searchlights over the German capital



and hit by flak, and on their fourth they were coned yet again, this time the Bomb Aimer's perspex was holed by flak and gave Sergeant Hamblin in the nose of the aircraft some unwelcome air conditioning.

On their sixth trip, to Leipzig on the 3rd/4th of December 1943, they collided with another Lancaster whilst on the bomb run, destroying the port tail fin and the H2S dome. For getting his damaged aircraft home, Hugh was awarded an immediate DFC, details appearing in the London Gazette the following April. As Hugh's tour continued through the battle of attrition that was the bomber offensive during the winter of 1943-44, he went to Berlin on no less than seven more occasions, making a total of TWELVE trips to the German capital during his tour, a remarkable achievement. He also flew to Frankfurt, Brunswick, Schweinfurt, and Munich during his tour. On a trip to Stuttgart, on the 15th/16th of March 1944, his aircraft was again hit by flak, holing a fuel tank and causing it to catch alight. One of his engines was also feathered. Hugh's last trip wasn't a bombing operation, but a trip to lay mines in the Bay of Gdynia, on the north Poland Baltic coast. On completion of his tour, he was awarded a Bar to his previous DFC, with a citation that reads:

"He has at all times pressed home his attacks, undeterred by the heaviest enemy opposition. And in his ability to make instant decisions in emergencies and superb airmanship have, on many occasions, extricated his aircraft and crew from perilous situations."

Following service with 100 Squadron, Hugh took up an Instructor's post at No.1 Group Aircrew School at Lindholme, before flying operationally again in 38 Group with 620 and 299 Squadrons, converting to the Short Stirling to undertake the glider-towing roll. He took part in Operation Varsity which helped the army divisions take important bridges on the Rhine in March 1945. After the war, Hugh moved on to civilian flying with BOAC ending his flying career in 1972 on the VC10.

*Greg Harrison*

## **Wim van Ophoven**

We have heard that, Honorary Member, Wim van Ophoven has died aged 79. As a member of the Historical Group Grashoek, Wim was the man behind the idea of a monument in Grashoek to the 100 Squadron Lancaster ED973 shot down on 15th June 1943. With a picture of the Lancaster in one hand, a hammer in the other, combined with his craftsmanship, he actually created this unique monument. The unveiling in 2002 showed the unrivalled result of his creativity and not surprisingly the monument has become a landmark in the region.

As a 7-year old boy living very close to the site of the crash, and having experienced the days just after the crash, he had a very emotional interest in the story. The crash of this Lancaster and the death of the crew had an impact on his life. For Wim it was very important that the story of the Lancaster would not be forgotten and would live on for future generations. As long as his health allowed, Wim visited and cleaned the monument and the site every week. His enthusiasm and his dedication to the monument and the squadron will always be remembered. For the Historical Group Grashoek his death is felt as a great loss. Wim is survived by his wife Lies, his four children



## Linton Arthur Stephenson



We reported the passing of Linton Stephenson in Issue 108, February 2015. However, at that time, we were not aware that he had made a request in his will that his ashes should be interned with the six members of the crew of Lancaster MkIII ED 976 who perished on the night of 11/12 June 1943.

Our Dutch members and friends at Twello helped organise a very special service at the Terwolde cemetery on 2 September when Linton was reunited with his crew. Although nobody from the Association in the UK or the Squadron could attend the ceremony on the ground, we were there in body and spirit as Wilco Gorter laid a wreath on our behalf and, in the air above, as a Squadron Hawk flown by Squadron Leader Adam Collins made a flypast in tribute to a fallen veteran.





**The gathering at Terwolde Cemetery on 2 September 2015**



**Terry Stephenson and other members of the family**



## **Speech by Terry Stephenson (Linton's son)**

There's so much to say about our Father. For me, I had so many wonderful experiences with him, from coaching me in ice hockey at an early age to the number of times we went back to Holland together. Memories I will treasure the rest of my life.

He touched so many lives along the way, both here in Holland and at home. It was hard not to like him and for most of us, to love him. He was the most compassionate, forgiving and thoughtful man I had ever known. He was a man that few people forgot once they met him.

Here in Holland, people came from 30-40 kilometres away just to meet him, to shake his hand. Each time we went back, it was always a very humbling and emotional time for him. He was mentioned in the newspapers, interviewed on radio. In their eyes, he was a hero; in my eyes, he was my Dad.

The first time my Father, my son Harley and I came to Holland, Harley being just 14, we were invited to be in a parade in honour of those Canadian men and women that helped liberate Holland in May of 1945. The parade was held in Apeldoorn. We were told that day there would be over 300,000 people along the parade route extending over two kilometres. Waiting at the start of the parade we were offered a ride on one of the military vehicles that would carry the hundreds of veterans along the parade route. Without hesitation, my Father said, "I'm walking". Knowing that he meant it, my response was "Well if you're walking, we're walking." We walked three abreast, people rushing out to him giving him flowers, hugging him, shaking his hand. We had so many flowers, our friends in the crowd had to join us just to help carry them along the way. My Father couldn't believe what was happening. It was beyond our understanding, it was the best walk I ever had with my Son and my Dad.

I was blessed to have my Father in my life all these years. He taught me about people. He taught me about respect, helping those along the way that needed help and without expecting anything in return. For him, it was just his nature, for him it was just the right thing to do. He taught me to never give up. He taught me about life. He was my best friend. He was my Father.

## **Chief Technician Edward Arthur Brede**

We reported the sad passing of Ted Brede in Issue 99, November 2012. In Issue 106, August 2014, we also reported the positioning of a new plaque by our tree Number 21-7 in the Far East Section of the National Memorial Arboretum.

This prompted Ted's son David to commission a plaque in tribute to his father who served with the Squadron in Singapore, escaped to Java but was captured by the Japanese and imprisoned at the Innoshima POW camp on an island 45 miles east of Hiroshima for next three years. David took his mother Sheila to the Arboretum in September to position the plaque.



## **A Survivor's Story by John Swales**

I volunteered for the RAF in November 1940 at a recruiting office in Wesley Hall, Middlesbrough, which has since been demolished and is now the site of a British Home Stores. I was called to Padgate near Manchester for three days attestation, given army service number 1028540 and sent home to wait for further instructions. However, I had to spend the night in Manchester because of no through train, so I slept on a floor at a Hostel with bodies all over the place.

My next move was to Cardington, Bedfordshire, where I was kitted out and given inoculations and moved about in general. I then moved to Bridgenorth, Shropshire where, apart from being given basic training in rifle drill and square bashing, I learnt to be bawled and shouted at and to be smart. It was a very cold winter with bags of snow. Having finished basic training, I moved again to Hereford, which is where I was trained to be a gun armourer. At the end of the course, I pass all the tests to be a fully qualified tradesman. After a lot of bull and clearances of the station, I was given a week's leave. I had to take all my gear home with me, full pack, gas mask, tin hat and full kit bag. Can you imagine what it was like? I walk on the railway station and it is chock a block with people, all waiting for my train. As soon as it arrived, they all surged forward like locusts. With the pile of kit, I had no chance and finished up standing in the corridor unable to move all the way home. Trains were always packed then. Near the end of my leave, I was given a posting to Litchfield, where I worked on Spitfires for a short while before receiving an overseas posting. I was given a week's embarkation leave and it was the same routine again; get a clearance from all sections on the station, have jabs for overseas, then sent home.

I had to report to West Kirby to be re-kitted for overseas and await a ship. After a day or two, we are marched down to the railway station, our destination Gourock on the Clyde in Scotland. We were packed like sardines on the train but glad to sit down having been on the move since early hours. We arrived at Gourock where the weather was lousy, Scotch mist and tossing it down. We had a full pack and kit bag, gas mask and tin hat. The other kit bag is already on board ship. We were taken on board a ferry, and people gave us tea and sandwiches. Then out to our ship, the Duchess of Richmond, I was amazed at the size of it, 22,000 tons. We went up the gang plank with all our gear, and it was a case of follow the leader because nobody knew where they were going. The army were already on Board and had taken all the bunks; it was a case of hammocks or the ship's deck. We were allotted to long tables, about 20 to each, there we lived and slept for

the whole journey. Some slept in hammocks, some on the floor, some on the table, bodies all over the place. I wish you could have seen the performance with the hammocks; nobody had a clue. Actually, they were quite comfortable when you got used to them. Over the journey, we had to take turns on collecting the food and serving it up and cleaning everything afterwards, ready for inspections. A lot of the lads couldn't eat the food, sea sick most of the way so I managed very well thank you.

After Gourock, our first stop was Freetown on the west coast of Africa; it was very hot. They had two Bofors guns on board ship so I was trained on one of the gun crews. The army had one gun and RAF the other. Not long after our stop at Freetown, I got my first taste of action; an enemy aircraft fired on our ship and we return fire. I must admit, I was scared but we chase him off. We sailed round the Cape of Good Hope to our next stop at Durban, South Africa. Here we were taken off the ship and settled in a camp of bell tents near a prisoner of war camp just outside Durban. After a couple of weeks or so, we returned to the ship and set sail for Singapore, our destination. I might add, we were in convoy as so many ships were getting sunk. The U-boats were having a field day. Two of our escorts I remember, were the cruiser Exeter and the aircraft carrier Argos.

We landed at Singapore, and I was posted to Seletar Aerodrome where there were two squadrons of aircraft called Vildebeests (36 and 100 Squadrons 100). I was allotted to 100 Squadron. There was also a fighter squadron of Brewster Buffalos, a little fat chunky aircraft, so you see was quite a large aerodrome, and we were about 5 or 6 miles from town. The Vildebeest aircraft are biplanes, which travelled at about 100 miles per hour flat out, and carried a torpedo underneath in a cradle. It was while I was working on the aircraft that I met a couple of lads from Guisborough; they were on 36 Squadron and their hanger was only a matter of yards from ours, we often have a chat. Their names were, Jardine from Bolcow Street and Lightburn from Northgate. Actually Lightburn was a friend of our Flicks - my brother.

The aerodrome was all geared up for peacetime because there was no war on; bags of bull but life was pretty good. It was very hot and we only worked till lunch time and then it was Siesta time. There was a large swimming pool on the camp with large umbrellas and tables all-round the edge, and the families and everyone used it. We also have a cinema. A mini bus service ran regularly to town, but most of the town is out of bounds to ordinary ranks. We received a booklet on arrival about the "do's and don'ts" which frightened the life out of me. Singapore had always been the playground of the East, so you can



imagine there was plenty to do. However, all good things come to an end I am afraid, and ours came very quickly. We had a new programme of training and guard duties, and we didn't seem to have a minute to ourselves. Guard duties were on the airfield, and it was a case of one man here and another about a mile away all around the aerodrome. I can tell you we were always very pleased to be relieved. Two hours at a time on your own was a very long time, especially at that period of expectant war. We used to hear all sorts of weird noises and everywhere was pitch black except for an odd flash of light.

War came suddenly. I remember a voice on the Tannoy about 4 o'clock in the morning saying something about a blackout. Afraid nothing really registered, it was too early. However, round about 6 or half past 6 in the morning, there was a terrific bang and a blue flash and I was out of my bed like grease lightning. I realised it was a bomb. I was in my bare feet with just a pair of underpants on and, on my way to the door, the next bomb went off. I was joined by the other lads, and we darted outside to the trenches. There was a flight of Jap planes in a V shape, and the Ack Ack was belting away but doing no good. After they had gone, we made our way back with a struggle as we were in bare feet. Apparently our cookhouse, just across from us, had been hit so we had to go and sort things out. It turns out one of our men had been killed and two injured; as far as I remember War had not yet been declared; that came later in the day.

It was all action stations and life became very hectic. The Indian gunners move onto the airfield and, believe me, they were trigger happy. If you didn't shout quickly enough, you were in trouble, they nearly shot one of our own aircraft down. The Japs were raiding us regularly now, and they didn't half come in low. We had some dummy aircraft among the real ones and guess which ones they hit, that's right, the real ones. We could actually see the pilot's faces. It was all go now, and we changed over to loading bombs on some aircraft so we could help the army. I was sent with some reinforcements up country in Malaya to a place called Kuala Lumpur, another aerodrome. There were about 30 of us, and we only had rifles and one machine gun between us, the rest of the kit was aircraft spares. We roughed it for a few days, slept where and when we could, and the food had much to be desired. As we neared our destination, everything was all a bustle. Trucks flying about all over the place. We stopped one lad in a petrol bowser and ask why they were all dashing south; he said the Japs were closing in fast at the aerodrome, and they were getting out while they had a chance. We informed our officer of the situation, but he took no notice and we move on; you can guess that we were not very happy about that.

A few more miles up the road the traffic had stopped except for one truck coming hell for leather towards us. Our officer decided to halt it, and boy am I glad. It turned out it was about the last to get out of the place as the Japs had taken the airfield. We were only a half mile away, and our officer was still undecided; there was a big discussion, and it was decided to about turn and make for our base. Our journey back was terrible; what with the food shortage and lack of sleep and the Japs hot on our heels. Life was rough but could be worse. On our return to Singapore, the other lads were over the moon, apparently we had been reported missing and presumed captured, and nobody expected to see us again. Incidentally my Mother was informed I was missing. A short while after our return, the Japs really went to town on us. We were bombarded night and day, we got no sleep and food was mostly iron rations, bully beef and hard tack biscuits. We were diving for cover every so often as we tried to work on the aircraft and, make no mistake about it, we were all a bundle of nerves. Our aircraft were getting shot at right left and centre and a lot of the lads were getting killed both on the ground and in the air. We were now down to three aircraft so we serviced them the best we could and they flew out to Java. We moved into a copse just at the edge of the airfield. The army moved their Ack Ack guns beside us and believe me, life was hell, bombs and shells flying all over the place. We finally were told to make our way under darkness to the docks and the army lads were not very happy, giving us a few jokes about leaving them to it.

As soon as we reached the docks, the Japs came over and gave us hell. I think somebody sent them a telegram. After a few days, the whole place was one mass of flames; it was absolute chaos. I didn't ever think I would get out of that place; in fact we used to talk about it and not one had any confidence of getting out. However, somebody above was looking after us as a small boat arrived in the very early hours of the morning. We boarded it and set sail; goodbye Singapore and glad to get out. We were on edge in case we got spotted by the Japs, but we travelled down some very small water ways and could practically reach the shrubbery. They had an old Lewis gun on this boat, and I was allotted to it, but I prayed I would never have to use it. We did have an occasion when I might have when we encountered a dog fight; they were just above us and, if they had spotted us, we would have been sitting ducks. That bloke above was looking after us again. We finally arrived at Java to a place called Balaclava and moved into an old school. There was nothing in the place, not even a stick of furniture so it was a case of bare boards and a blanket with the gas mask as a pillow. I got my first taste of bread for about a month. Boy it was lovely. Every morning we were bundled into trucks and

taken down to the docks to unload supplies.

One day I was given a posting to join our last three aircraft at a place called Bandung. However, I was working at the docks and someone else had to take my place. Some poor devil was unlucky, they were all captured or killed so we were informed. The Japs were closing in fast and life was hectic again. I wondered if we would manage to get out of this place as it was certainly very dangerous. At last we got the order to move to the docks for a ship and it looked like we were going to make it after all. When we got aboard, it turned out we were all remnants of different squadrons, and I met a lad I had joined up with; Jimmy Young from Skegness. He had had a rough time in Malaya and their squadron was practically wiped out. We set sail, but I didn't know where we were going and only hoped for the best. We had a little skirmish along the way but nothing serious. We landed first at Fremantle, Australia and then continued on to Perth. On our way in, we passed the ship Queen Mary and also a hospital ship which has been bombarded, it had holes all over it. We were given a great welcome by the Aussies and felt as though we were victors instead of vanquished. They took us to a little place called Northam, a few miles up country and we were made very welcome. At this place we made a propaganda newsreel; we all had to march round in a field whistling "there will always be an England" followed by interviews and all that stuff. Cameras rolling, fame at last. I always knew I would be a star someday. I met up with a bloke a long time after, and he reckoned he had seen the newsreel and recognised the lads. After about three weeks we are taken by train across Australia to Melbourne; it took us about three days. There we move in with the RAAF and were given some kit; at least we look like airmen again. There were no aircraft and it was just routine stuff, bull as usual. The people are good to us, house parties and all the different places we could go to, theatre and what have you, life was great again. Sadly we were on the move again; we boarded ship and sailed to Adelaide then on to Perth. We asked our officer where we were going. He said "I cannot tell you, but I can assure you it is the right place." That was Blighty to us. After a few days at sea, we were very disappointed to see postings on a notice board for India and Ceylon. I am for Ceylon. We landed at Ceylon and I was taken by road to a place called Ratmalana, an aerodrome; however, where I was allotted to a bomb dump to look after ammunition.

*Editor's Note: John knew how lucky he had been to have escaped from Singapore when so many of his friends and colleagues were taken prisoner by the Japanese and many of them did not survive.*



# INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE

A Story of Discovery, Education & Remembrance

The Rt. Hon. Earl Howe, Minister of State for the Ministry of Defence, officially unveiled the International Bomber Command's (IBCC) Memorial Spire and Walls of Remembrance (phase 1) on 2nd October. Phase 1 is the first significant and visible development in the building of the new International Bomber Command Centre on Canwick Hill, Lincolnshire, which will create a world-class facility to serve as a point for recognition and remembrance of Bomber Command. Designed by Stephen Palmer of Place Architecture, the Memorial Spire is based on two wing fragments, tapering as they rise towards the sky. The height of the memorial is 102ft (31.09m), which is the wingspan of the Avro Lancaster; the width at the base is 16ft/5m, which is the overall width of a Lancaster wing. The Spire was delivered to the site and erected on 10th May this year marking the 70th anniversary of VE Day.

The official unveiling ceremony was attended by 300 of the remaining WWII Bomber Command veterans together with their families and dignitaries who were treated to an amazing fly-over of the Vulcan, Blenheim, two GR4 Tornados, three Hawks and the current MacRobert's Reply from XV Squadron.





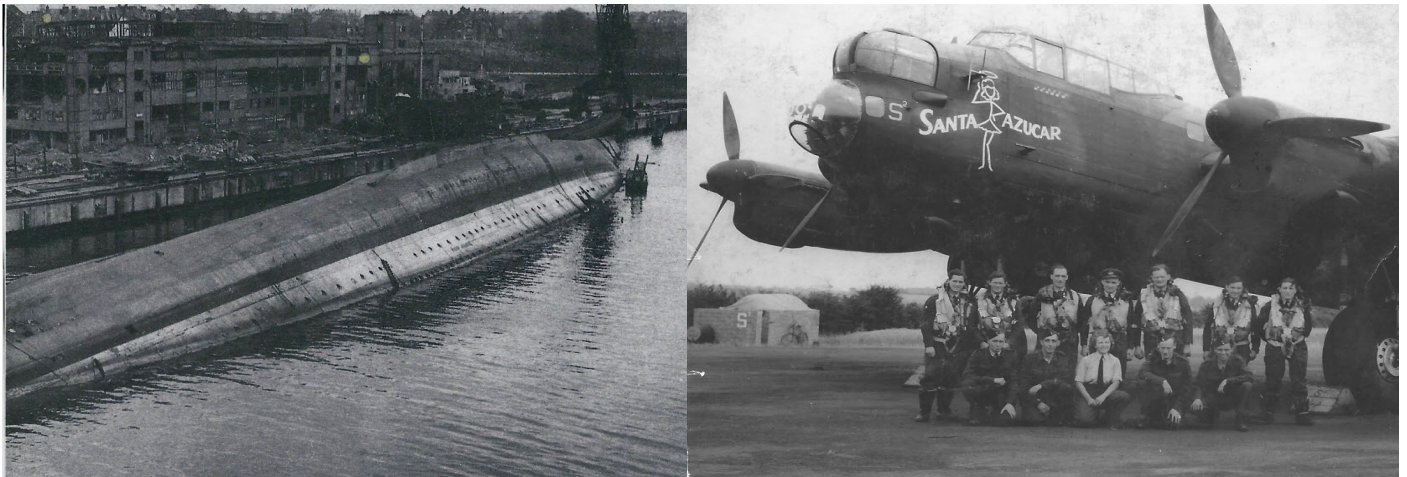


# A Memorable Raid by Frank Ockerby

On 9th April 1945, I was a wireless operator on Lancaster "Q" Queenie operating from Elsham Wolds when we were ordered to bomb the submarine pens on the Kiel Canal. It was a long trip taking 6 hours and 7 minutes. Weather conditions were good and the trip uneventful apart from a near mid-air collision with another Lanc! We were lined up to bomb the target when another aircraft appeared below us forcing us to delay releasing our bombs. Naturally we concluded that we had missed the target and that the bombs had fallen in the water.

However, photographs taken by a Mosquito the following day revealed that the German heavy cruiser Admiral Scheer, which was a sister ship to Graf Spee, had been hit and capsized in one of the dockyard basins. It was not known that Admiral Scheer was at Kiel. It had probably crept into the Canal the previous day. Whilst we couldn't claim for sure that our bombs had been responsible we thought we were in with a good chance of claiming the hit.

I saw the scuttled Graf Spee on 2nd November 1946 in Montivideo when I was a wireless operator on Lincoln GB-A on my way to Santiago de Chile to represent this country along with some 21 other aircrew at



the inauguration of their new president.

The crew in the back row from left to right, Frank Ockerby - wireless operator, Bob Mellows - bomb aimer, Arthur Jackson - flight engineer, Eric Richmond - pilot, Arthur Rose - navigator, Colin Gowens - mid upper gunner, Jimmy Wallace - rear gunner





'A' Flight at Spitalgate in 1926 with the Hawker Horseley



'C' Flight groundcrew on Practice Camp at North Coates 1930

## **ASSOCIATION MEMORABILIA**

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100 Squadron polo shirt (state size)	£14.00
(Sizes of T-shirts and Polo shirts are S, M, L, XL and XXL)	
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