



103rd Entry Association

Newsletter

Issue 30
June 2009



In The Company of
Heroes

Editor's comments & Editorial

Hello Readers,

Welcome again to another 103rd Entry Newsletter. I hope you enjoy all the contributions from around the world as well as local. This will be my last Newsletter as I am handing over the editor's seat into the very capable hands of Brian Lee. I hope that you will all help him in keeping the Newsletter going.

It is with sadness that I report on the death of Mick Davey. Mick (Airframes) passed away in November last year (2008).

I received a very interesting article from Roger Flitter - '*In The Company of Heroes*' of him rubbing shoulders with distinguished veterans of both World War II and the Cold War. (See the article on this page.)

Don't forget, articles are always required for the Newsletters so please sort out an old photo or a memory you are willing to share.

Send anything for inclusion into the Newsletter to Brian (your new editor) either by e-mail or by letter if you prefer to actually put pen to paper. It doesn't have to be RAF related; maybe you have had an interesting experience that you remember. See the back page for where to send your article, comment or memoir.

I have enjoyed my time as editor and hope that you did too. It is time to pass on the baton and have a fresh helmsman and ideas.

CJW

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In The Company of Heroes - Roger Flitter

You might recall Barry's note from last year when he passed on details of an event entitled 'In The Company of Heroes'. The event was fundamentally a military aviation art exhibition and sale and was sponsored by SWA Fine Art Ltd. It was however attended by a number of fascinating and distinguished veterans of both World War II and the cold war. The guest speakers included our Squadron Commander at Halton, Wg Cdr Peter Ayerst DFC. It was held at a hotel in Bracknell last October so being an amateur water colourist, a bit of a background in aviation and living close by in Fleet I decided to go along.

At this point I must confess to a small personal agenda item - ever since leaving Halton and going to Finningley to work on the mighty Vulcan, including XH558, I have had a soft spot for it. So much so that I have since supported, from a distance, the restoration of XH558. Whilst looking at the detail of this event in Bracknell, I noticed that there was for sale a magnificent painting of XH558. 'That'll do fer me cocker' said I and there began a course of intense negotiation with Senior Management.

Despite the painting being on offer, Lesley thought it was very expensive, I said it was a superb opportunity for future investment!

The agreed compromise was that I would purchase it. However, each Christmas and birthday for the next three years I would take the picture down and give it to Lesley to wrap up for me so that I could then put it back in my study the next day.

So, where was I? Oh yes – come the day I arrived in good time and found myself amongst a variety of military aircraft enthusiasts, arty types and a number of anoraks many of whom were sporting organic jumpers and matching beards. Anyway, had a good look round, found ‘my’ painting and the artist, Stephen Brown, and parted with my money. The work on display was of a very high standard and for me a delight to look at. You can see examples of these paintings at:

www.swafineart.com/originals

The icing on this particular cake were the guests some of whom later spoke about their experiences.



I decided against shouting out 'Rook!'

Sqn Ldr 'Johnny' Johnson was a bomb aimer with 617 Sqn and flew in Joe McCarthy's aircraft which was the only one to successfully bomb the Sorpe Dam during the now famous raid.

Wg Cdr Peter Ayerst spoke so unassumingly about his wide range of flying experiences throughout the war and of the many WWII personalities with whom he flew, most of which are household names. For those of you who have read his book you will know what I mean – for those of you who have not I strongly recommend it. It is called 'Spirit of the Blue'. Needless to say I asked Peter if he would sign both my

book and my painting to which he readily agreed.



Wg Cdr Peter Ayerst DFC

Sub Lt Cdr John Moffat RN, a dour Scot with wit as dry as bottle of Laphroaig, gave a fascinating and extremely humorous account of the attack on the *Bismarck* flying a torpedo carrying *Swordfish* aircraft.

'I broke cloud at 300 feet and saw the ship below me – it was huge! As I turned towards it I had to keep within a small gap between the top of the waves below and the shells above.' Chuckling away he said 'the nearer I got the bigger this thing became and the bomb aimer wouldn't let me off the peg until we were in the right position by which time all I could see was grey metal!' Then he burst out laughing again – how is that for keeping cool? His was the only aircraft to successfully launch a torpedo on the *Bismarck* which damaged the rudder and incapacitated the vessel sufficiently for the Navy to finish it off.



Sub Lt Cdr John Moffatt (RNVR) – 'the nearer I got the bigger this thing became'

Finally, although not a speaker, **Flt Lt Don Briggs** was not only a WWII pilot but also flew all three V Bombers during the cold war and was responsible for dropping the last Atom bomb on Christmas Island. After talking with him for a while it transpired that he was training Vulcan pilots on 230 OCU at Finningley at precisely the time I arrived there from Halton. He flew XH558 on many occasions and has since signed my painting and given me a relevant extract from his log book.



Stephen Brown and Flt Lt Don Briggs (I decided against wearing my medals on that day!)



Without being patronising I found myself in awe at the resilience and bravery of these charismatic men, all now well into their late seventies and eighties.

When the event finished and I was about to leave and clutching my precious painting, our host asked if anyone would give Johnny Johnson a lift to Reading Station. I was going that way and so I immediately offered and he accepted. I asked him about how he felt when taking off on each sortie and what was Guy Gibson really like and had he been in a Lancaster since and and and I thought afterwards he must have got to the point of needing a break! Anyway I was so engrossed in the conversation that I didn't realise I had driven through about 25 Bus Lane Enforcement Cameras at Reading Station! It cost me £30.00 a few weeks later but it was still worth it.

The picture - hanging in my study with two remarkable signatures on the back and a promise from the current XH558 pilot (and operation Black Buck veteran) Flt Lt Martin Withers, to sign at the next opportunity.

I took it down for Christmas only to find it under the tree next morning and its next excursion will be my next birthday in August!

Roger Flitter

HTP and Me! - Ken Bannister

HTP - High Test Peroxide - Missile Fuel - Blue Steel Missile - Scampton 1966

Six of us, Pete Bolton, Mac Cottle, Paul Collins, Duncan Patterson, Bill Rawden and myself arrived at Scampton in January 1966. Straight out of Halton and onto a Blue Steel Missile airframe course. After the six week course, we were let loose on the hanger floor and joined the servicing teams. Internal postings followed and, if my memory serves me correctly, Paul went to the Drying Out section, Mac to the TSAMI

(Test Set Aircraft to Missile Installation) team and the rest of us to Missile Fuelling Flight.

This was our first real contact with HTP - High Test Peroxide. We were told (if my memory serves me correctly) that peroxide bleach used to colour hair blonde was about 5% concentrate but the stuff we would be handling was about 85% and could damage your health if not handled with respect and caution. The catalyst to set off the HTP was pure platinum. The flight commander who was

assisted by one of the troops gave us a demonstration. They were wearing white protective suits. We, of course, stood back at a respectable distance as a piece of platinum on a metal stick was placed into a beaker of HTP and watched as the HTP turned from a liquid into high temperature steam!! Not to be messed about with this stuff. The only thing to control this stuff was water and gallons of it to dilute it down. The hanger floor was always wet and we all wore wellies! During the refuelling operations, just over 300

gallons of HTP and over 70 gallons of kerosene were pumped into each missile. Placed throughout the hanger at regular intervals were huge plunge baths, which were heated and had ping-pong balls floating on the top of the water to keep the hat on and the dirt out.

My most vivid memory of the plunge baths was the day our team was de-fuelling HTP from a missile. One of the guys got some HTP in his face (he wasn't wearing the helmet) and the first I knew of

it was when this white apparition hurtled past me and dived head first into the nearest plunge bath. The ping-pong balls went everywhere but the warm water did the trick and took the sting out of the burning sensation and saved his eyesight.

Some time later, at home, my young son reached up onto one of the work surfaces and managed to tip over a bottle of bleach. I ran into the kitchen when I heard the noise to find his face covered

in bleach. He didn't like it when I grabbed hold of him and stuck his head under a running tap to dilute the bleach and wash it out of his eyes. We took him to the doctor who said that I'd done the right thing and that his eyesight would not be damaged. To this day, though, one of his eyeballs is still a slightly different colour to the other.

Nasty stuff this HTP!!

Ken Bannister

Memorial Plaque, Halton Grove – Ken Bannister



The Halton Grove Memorial Plaque

The June committee meeting had been arranged to be held at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire on Saturday, 13th June, which coincided with the Service of Re-dedication of the memorial plaque in the Halton Grove. We decided to combine the two and hold our meeting first and then attend the service.

The service was intended to re-dedicate the plaque which had been amended to include all those ex-apprentices who had lost their lives in World War II and in subsequent conflicts. The dedication service was carried out by The Rev Richard Lee, the Association Padre. Wreaths were laid by Air Marshal C R Spinks CB CBE, 104th, Bob Shillings, 54th and Phil Stephens, 86th. The address was given by Air Marshal Sir Dusty Miller KBE, 210th, Vice-Patron HAAA. Last post and Reveille were played by a

trumpeter of the Central Band, RAF and the Lament, 'Flowers of the Forest, was played by a piper from the Halton Pipe Band during the laying of wreaths.

Afterwards short march behind the Halton Piper took us to where lunch was served in one of the marquees.

The Halton Grove is in excellent condition and is looked after by a working group from the 207th Entry. It is well worth a visit should you be in the area.



Members of the Entry Association Committee

The photo shows the entry committee against the backdrop of the National Memorial on which are inscribed the names of all those who have fallen in conflicts or died in service since World War II. Included in those names is that of P R Coate.

Ken Bannister

Letter from our Cyprus Correspondent - Jeff Lloyd

4x4-ing in Cyprus



Like most of you my first “company car” was a Series 2 RAF Landrover, the much used and abused “liney” transport. In my later days I graduated to a Bedford 4 tonne truck in which I used to follow Harriers around in Germany. (You could get a lot of beer in one of those!). Civvy life saw a more sexy selection of vehicles, mainly made in either Stuttgart or Munich.

Retirement to Cyprus gave me the ideal excuse to regress to my younger days and buy my very own Landrover Defender. It is the perfect country for this rugged 4X4 vehicle, with hundreds of miles of off-road forest tracks to explore, and secluded beaches to discover. Barbeques in the Paphos forest are now a regular and very enjoyable pastime.

A few weeks ago we joined up with other ex-pat 4X4

drivers for a charity drive in aid of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen’s Families Association (SSAFA).



The day consisted of a drive of almost 180kms of mostly off road tracks but visiting villages in the southern Troodos Mountains. Eighteen vehicles started at Pissouri village at the unearthly hour (for a Sunday) of 8:30am. We travelled to the old Turkish Cypriot village of Paramali with its’ minaret still dominating



the surrounding landscape, then via little used tracks through remote villages to Pano Platres. This village was developed in the late 1800’s by the British along similar lines to the colonial hill stations in India, offering all the trappings of a cool mountain retreat with forest walks, gurgling streams, relief from the searing heat of the plains and gin and tonics taken on the balconies of old world hotels.

Lunch was taken at a spectacular viewpoint, high up and overlooking the Foini valley. After lunch our route took us to the south west on mostly goat tracks through some more wine producing villages each of which is steeped in history and legends. This route took us eventually to a small settlement with the unlikely name of Ayios Thomas a hamlet of Byzantine origin. From here it was just a short way back to our start point and a very welcome cold Keo beer.

A great day out and SSAFA benefited by almost €400.

Yia mas

Jeff Lloyd

The Adventures of Rigger turned Boatman and Sailor - Mick Woodhouse

(Mick sent this November 2008 - Ed)

Since I last wrote about my new ‘career in boating’, life has become quite busy and very interesting and I think it’s time I helped Chris with material for the Newsletter.

Firstly, three years ago, Alaska, the steamboat, changed ownership again when one of the skippers who worked on it almost as long as me (14 years) bought it, and I became the senior engineer. He was able to put more time and energy into the business and since we have

had the best seasons ever. The boat is in its’ best condition since I started and already we have several bookings for next year which is very unusual, this despite the floods of last year and the poor weather this summer.

This time last year my son-in-law suggested I should go on one of the Jubilee Sailing Trust’s tall ships on a trip from Liverpool to Gran Canaria, taking three weeks. I was looking for an adventure to break up the drab winter months, ideally over Christmas, but this was

closed. I asked but it was fully booked! Lucky, I thought, why would I volunteer to sail down the Irish Sea and across Biscay in November? Then a phone call; there had been a cancellation, did I want it? After questions about my courage etc I couldn't refuse without losing a lot of face, so at the end of November I embarked on Lord Nelson at Liverpool. I was told there would be frequent stops as the boat couldn't carry enough water or food for the fifty people who would be on board. Wrong, it has a water maker and can carry enough food and the plan was to go non-stop. The boat is designed for disabled people to crew alongside the able-bodied but because of the length of this voyage and the expected bad weather there were no wheelchair users. However, there were several with reduced vision, one virtually blind, and seven men over seventy years old who count as disabled; the youngest on board was twenty three, the oldest seventy nine. The weather was 'good', with following winds of up to thirty knots most of the way. This is good for sailing a tall ship but wind makes waves and swell and they make the boat roll up to about twenty five degrees either side of vertical. So the first day was dominated by sea sickness. I only felt it, but some really were and I'm sure you know the saying that rather than feeling you are about to die you worry that you won't. Luckily it only lasts a day and we all got into routine, working watches, hoisting and trimming sails, steering, boat cleaning, maintenance etc. Food was a highlight, seeing Chef coping with the rolling boat and a huge cauldron of soup was amazing. We made better than expected progress which was lucky because we ran out of fresh vegetables and had to divert into Northern Spain to replenish - a welcome break for a day, when all seven seventy year olds climbed the mast and went out on a yard for a photo shoot. I went up before we left Liverpool when it was compulsory but chickened out when it was voluntary. There were people who would go up at every opportunity and the youngsters had a small party right at the top once while we were at sea. The weather gradually got warmer and we saw lots of dolphins one day.

We saw other ships occasionally and had two incidents one night when two, which should have given way to us, didn't at first, which was quite scary! The first, from Iraq or Iran, said he had a dangerous cargo and couldn't change course - strange when you are three hundred miles out in the Atlantic. He asked to talk to our captain and when SHE told him she was the captain he asked if it was safe for us to be out there in the dark, and that in his country a woman wouldn't be allowed to be a captain. He eventually conceded! The second boat, only a

couple of hours later, was on a converging course and would pass very close but did not respond to radio calls, a fully lit sailing tall ship or repeated flashing searchlight. We were about to take avoiding action when it suddenly changed course to pass behind us, just a few minutes before midnight. Was it the new watch keeper waking up the off going one - there was no communication.

Still ahead of schedule we went into La Palma for a couple of days where a coach tour of the island was arranged. I learned a lot about the cultivation of bananas. The last day and night we motored into a strong wind and sea to Gran Canaria with the boat pitching instead of rolling. My bunk, a folding net type and the top of three, just above head height, was right in the bows. That night was like trying to sleep in a high speed lift, airborne at the top and then waiting for the crash at the bottom as the bowsprit hit the water. It was as if the boat was being hit by a giant sledge hammer every twenty seconds or so, and the noise of the anchor chains in the hawse pipes only feet away was deafening. Eventually we moored up and I stayed on for a few days of voluntary maintenance before flying home just before Christmas. It was a memorable trip, making some new friends, meeting very interesting people and team work which I miss since leaving the R.A.F. Anybody interested go to www.jst.org.uk.

My holiday sailing has also escalated. This year I have had three weeks in Croatia in May and June with a crew change half way through, and in October the same in Turkey. I have now taken fifty-two different people in the last fourteen years, some have become regulars, like Chris, who has come with me six or seven times. Some are experienced sailors but some are completely new to boating but all enjoy it. Last month, we woke up to find a seal had got into our inflatable dinghy to sunbathe and didn't want to be disturbed. I didn't know there were seals there, thought it would be too hot. Later we had half a dozen dolphins playing round the yacht for nearly an hour while we were sailing at five knots, a memorable experience. In September I also had a week with a friend who had a spare berth for a week sailing from Palermo to the Aeolian Islands.

It's the end of sailing season now and must get some lorry driving in to pay for next year's adventures. Anybody interested in joining, get in touch.

(November 5th 2008)

Mick Woodhouse

Three Cheers For The Man On The Ground – Eric Sykes

(I came upon this wonderful poem by Eric Sykes.

I am sorry but I cannot remember how I got hold of it. I guess that someone sent me it so my apologies to them – Ed)

Three cheers for the man on the ground

*Where ever you walk, you will hear people talk.
Of the men who go up in the air.
Of the dare-devil way, they go into the fray,
Facing death without turning a hair.*

*They'll raise a cheer and buy lots of beer
For a pilot who's home on leave.
But they don't give a jigger for a Flight Mech. or Rigger
With nothing but 'props' on his sleeve.*

*They just say 'nice day' and then turn away
With never a mention of praise
And the poor bloody erk who does all the work
Just orders his own beer and pays.*

*They've never been told of the hours in the cold
That he spent sealing the Germans' fate
How he works on a 'kite', till all hours of the night.
And turns up next morning at eight!*

*He gets no rake-off for working till take off
Or helping the Aircrew prepare
But when there is trouble, its 'quick, at the double'.
The man on the ground must be there.*

*Each Flight Crew could tell you
They know what this man's really worth
They know he's a part of the RAF's heart
Even though he stays close to the earth.*

*He doesn't want glory, but please hear his story
Spread a little of his fame around,
He's one of the 'few', so give him his due.
Three cheers for the man on the ground!*

Eric Sykes, 1942.

Miscellaneous Section

The Burglars!

Going to bed the other night, Dave noticed people in his shed stealing things.

He phoned the police but was told no one was in the area to help. They said they would send someone as soon as possible.

He hung up. A minute later he rang again. "Hello," he said, "I called

you a minute ago because there were people in my shed. You don't have to hurry now because I've shot them."

Within minutes there were half a dozen police cars in the area, plus helicopters and an armed response unit. They caught the burglars red-handed.

One of the officers said: "I thought you said you'd shot them." To which Dave replied: "I thought you said there was no one available."

CJW

Answer to competition - NL29

What musical instrument is George Harrison holding on the cover of the 'Sgt. Pepper Lonely Hearts Club Band' LP?

Answer: **A Flute**

There were no correct answers.

This time there is just a **Fun Quiz**.

In 1969 Neil Armstrong & Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon, but who stayed behind in the command module?

Answer in the next Newsletter.

Did you know...

About 10% of the world's population lives on an island?

Dates for your Diary

Next Committee Meeting:-

5th December 2009 - The Red Lion, Wendover - 11:00hrs.

Possible date for next Entry event

May/June 2013 at Halton Grove, Armed Forces Memorial at the National Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffs.

(Watch this space!)

Committee Members:

Barry Neal, Ken Bannister, Les Garden, Mick Woodhouse, Chris Wales, Malcolm Watts, Brian Lee.

103rd Entry Association Newsletter

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