



**THE ROYAL AIR FORCES
ASSOCIATION**
Rutland Branch
THE FLYING HORSESHOE



Branch Newsletter

December 2012

**Speaker Secretary Notes
December 2012**

I'm sorry that your Speaker list for next year is not yet complete. It is becoming very difficult to find a number of interesting and varied people to talk to us. Derek's talk on the wild side was first class and a real bonus. However we are not daunted as we approach 2013.

In January we have a visit from Wing Cdr Kevin Mackie Commanding Officer, MoD Hospital Unit Peterborough, who will be talking and asking "What ever happened to RAF Hospitals". You will recall Nocton Hall, Ely, and Wroughton to mention but three, wasn't Nocton Hall haunted?

In February we have a visit from the past editor of Flypast Magazine Ken Ellis who will be speaking on "Spitfire Heroes". Do you remember Royal Air Force Flying Review I heard that Key Publications who publish Flypast were considering republishing RAF Flying Review again I'm sure Ken can tell us. He told me that he was filling his car boot with goodies, which should ensure a full house in February. March is AGM and traditionally we don't have a speaker, which takes to April where I have asked member Air Commander Peter Gover to come along and talk to us about Voluntary Action Rutland. Peter has been VAR chairman for a very long time and steered it to the support structure it is today. I hope to bring along some young people who are studying under the MOD Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme (DTUS). These young people are RAF Cranwell Cadets studying at Loughborough University. You will recall we had a first class presentation from Mr Tony Halliwell Principle of Welbeck-The Defence Sixth Form College on how the college worked this is the next step. DTUS is to engineers what the University Air Squadron (UAS) is to aircrew. We may persuade some of these young people to come along to our meetings. I spent a very pleasant Remembrance Day with them on Sunday.

Finally I must thank Bob Copping and Gerry Beadle for giving me ideas for speakers I could use a few more.

I think that this position has a limited run so after three years I'm strongly seeking a new role at the AGM and give someone else to find our speakers.

Peter Hart

12 November 2012

Francis and myself (with 2 pal Standard Bearers) visited Birmingham Tattoo on the week end of the 1st Dec and they performed on Saturday evening and Sunday matinee as part of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies both days. There were over 80 Standards in the arena was a magnificent sight. The Tattoo performers were excellent and included military bands from the Netherlands, UK and Ireland, children's free dance display, dog fly ball racing, inter service field gun competition, and individual singers, all of which made a very entertaining event for all ages. Next year is the 25th anniversary so should be a bit special I guess. Hopefully we can arrange a trip together, Derek!

Angie Humphrey



RAFARUTLAND CHRISTMAS QUIZ

1. Who was the first British monarch to broadcast a Christmas message to the nation? (in 1932)
2. Child star Jimmy Boyd sang which hugely popular 1950's Christmas song,
3. Who banned Christmas in England between 1647 and 1660?
4. Who are the four ghosts in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol? (one point for each correctly named ghost, and a bonus point for all four).
5. What liqueur goes into making a 'snowball' cocktail?
6. What is the English title of the carol written in 1818 by Austrian priest Josef Mohr originally called Stille Nacht?
7. What is the popular name for little baked sausages wrapped in rashers of streaky bacon?
8. Which of the Wise Men was said to have brought the gift of gold for the baby Jesus?
9. The 1954 movie White Christmas was the first to be made using what new Paramount film format?
10. What changed in 1752 which caused England to have a White Christmas less frequently thereafter?
11. Traditional in Germany at Christmas, what sort of food is stollen?
12. According to the UK National Meteorological Office what year (prior to 2007) was the last White Christmas in Britain?
13. How many gifts are given in total in the song The Twelve Days of Christmas?
14. The words "Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume breathes of life, of gathering gloom..." come from which Christmas carol?
15. Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean is a territory of which country?
16. Which diarist noted on 25th December 1662, "(Christmas Day). Had a pleasant walk to White Hall, where I intended to have received the communion with the family, but I have come too late
17. John Callcott Horsley designed what first commercial Christmas item in 1843?
18. In Victorian England what people were popularly called robins because of their red uniforms?
19. Which token vegetable is often included in the ingredients of a Christmas pudding?
20. Yorkshire man William Strickland is believed to have brought the first what to Britain from North America in 1526?

Answers to Quiz January issue

Derek Bury.

Remembering Past Christmas Conflicts

Christmas Eve 1941 - Special RAF Operation by CSV Solent

This story was submitted in June 2005 to the People's War site on behalf of Sqn. Ldr. George Glenn and has been added to the BBC – WW2 website with his permission.

The web site is an archive of WW2 memories written by the public and gathered by the BBC

Christmas 1941 and the Battle of the Atlantic was at its height. While Britain's very life-line was in

severe danger of being cut by Hitler's U Boats, two of Germany's most powerful warships lay in the dockyard at Brest, waiting their chance to sneak out into the Atlantic to wreak havoc amongst our convoys.

The Royal Air Force had been keeping up constant attacks by day and night on the pocket battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, trapped in Brest, and it was this blockade from the air which had prevented the two ships from escaping. However, the heavy defences at Brest, supplemented by the anti-aircraft guns of the two warships, made Brest a "hot target" but there was the possibility that unless heavier and more accurate raids were made. The Scharnhorst and Gneisenau would slip out of Brest and escape into the Atlantic.

December 23rd, 1941. 1600 hours, RAF North Luffenham. The tannoy announces "all aircrews of No. 144 Squadron are to report to the main briefing room at 1830 this evening". This meant that something special was on as Ops for the night had already been cancelled due to inclement weather.

In the aircrew rest room conjectures about the reason for this Special Tannoy call were rife. Was it to be another raid on the Big City as Berlin was known or a daylight attack somewhere in the Ruhr? Or another massive daylight formation attack on the warships in Brest? Had they escaped and were they heading up Channel? The only people on the station to know were the Commanding Officer and probably the Squadron Commander. The rest of us would find out soon enough.

After tea in the mess, followed by a game of snooker, I walked over to the Operations Block with "Dusty" Miller my navigator and met the rest of my crew, already in the briefing room. No one had a clue what it was all about and we were relieved when the Station Commander entered the briefing room at 1825 accompanied by our Squadron Commander.

As we all stood, silence filled the room, except for the sound of chairs scraping on the floor and the footsteps of the two senior officers as they walked to the front of the room where a huge map of Europe filled the entire end wall. "Sit down everybody." The C.O. motioned to us as he sat in his usual manner on the edge of the briefing room table, throwing his hat onto a vacant chair.

"I'll come straight to the point. It's those two ships again. There are indications that they might try to slip out of Brest and we've got to stop 'em. Tomorrow! We only want three aircraft from your Squadron so I suggest names are drawn out of my hat. Squadron Leader B. has already written your names on pieces of paper, so I'll put them in my hat here and ask him to draw out three. Incidentally, I understand no other squadrons are involved in this operation - so good luck!"

This was a tense moment for all of us. I could feel my heart beat heavily as the CO held up his hat and the Squadron Commander took out the first piece of paper. Not mine this time! A second piece of paper was drawn out and as it was unfolded, I had the feeling my name was on it. This was it! I heard my name read out loud. I was to be one of the lucky ones! Little did I know at that moment the task which we were to be detailed to carry out the next day. After the third name was drawn, the CO told the remainder of the Squadron to return to their respective messes. "And keep your mouths tightly shut" he added. "Not a word to anyone about this; it's absolutely top secret "

The three air crews were briefed by the CO for the raid. It was to be a low level, daylight attack on the Gneisenau at Brest. We were to take off before dawn from our base in Rutland and fly to Start Point in Devon. There we would rendezvous, format and fly in loose formation to the target. The met office forecast gave us complete cloud cover all the way across the Channel; height of cloud base about 500 feet. It was vital to have this cloud to hide us from enemy fighters, the greatest danger for our comparatively slow Hampden bombers. At that stage of the war, no fighter cover was provided for the smaller, daylight raids.

An unpleasant moment of the briefing occurred when intelligence informed us that barrage balloons were known to be flying in the target area, but how many they did not know. Complete radio silence was to be maintained during the entire flight out and back. Our briefing completed, the three navigators got together and worked out their courses, ET A's, etc. before we returned to the mess at 2100 hours for a late supper.

Take off was in the dark the following morning, into heavy rain and with low visibility. At Start Point conditions were better, although visibility was only a mile or so. Rendezvous with the other aircraft was at 0900 but after circling for 20

minutes with no sign of anyone else, I took the decision to head south for Ushant, the final turning point before the target. Little did we know that our radio receiver was out of order. We did not

therefore receive the general recall put out by Bomber Command. We were the only aircraft to set out across the Channel that morning to attack the Gneisenau in Brest.

We flew at 600 feet, in cloud, and thanks to skillful navigation by "Dusty" Miller, broke cloud over the top of Ushant, right on schedule. No opposition came from below as we turned onto an easterly heading for the final run up to Brest and the target. Everything seemed so peaceful down there. I could hardly believe our luck.

My optimism was short lived. As we approached the outskirts of the town the German anti-aircraft guns opened up and a fierce barrage was concentrated on us, the one and only aircraft that had dared to venture over this heavily defended port.

With less than a mile to reach the target, I suddenly felt the aircraft swerve violently, almost out of control, as full rudder and aileron seemed to have no effect. We had struck a barrage balloon cable with our port wing. Within a few seconds the aircraft was back under control, the cable automatically sliced through, thanks to the device on the leading edge of the wings designed for precisely that purpose.

Thirty seconds later we were over the target and the bomb aimer released the 19001b, armour piercing bomb. The intense anti-aircraft fire was bouncing the Hampden about like a cork and it was almost impossible to maintain control, let alone see if we had hit the target. A tremendous bang near the tail caused the nose of the aircraft to drop. I thought we'd had it. Slowly, the battered kite responded to the control column and the nose lifted. It seemed a very long time indeed before we were once again over open country, clear of enemy guns. At last the infernal noise of bursting shells and the smell of cordite was left behind. It was all over - except for getting home.

The aircraft was extremely sluggish and slow to respond to the controls. It was clear that the tail elevators had been damaged by flak, as fore and aft movement of the control column had little effect. Gradually, we climbed into the base of the cloud and with throttles wide open, put as much distance as possible between ourselves and Brest in the shortest possible time.

Maintaining a steady height was no easy task. We were in and out of cloud, one moment climbing, the next diving until eventually we turned north and headed for the nearest airfield on the south coast of England. The battered old bomber struggled on towards Cornwall and in less than an hour, the welcome sight of the coast brought sighs of relief all round. A few minutes later we were making a circuit of Predanack airfield, on the Lizard Peninsula. The approach and landing were a hair raising business with the damaged elevator but we made it down, on the right runway, without too much of a bounce. The relief of being on the ground once again was tremendous; everyone was talking at once.

Flight Lieutenant Pichel-Juan, the lower gunner, slapped me on the back and congratulated me on getting the aircraft back safely. Sergeant McDonald, wireless operator and Sergeant Ekin, upper gunner, were grinning with the end of anxiety while "Dusty" Miller just stood there with a large smile on his face.

They sent an aircraft down from North Luffenham that afternoon to take us back to base. On arrival we were told to report to the C.O. who wanted to let us know of his personal pride and to congratulate us on the raid. He told me to stay behind when the others left his office as he wanted to inform me personally that my commission had come through, pre-dated to the 17th December, 1941 and that I was to attend the Christmas Eve party in the Officer's Mess that evening. I seem to remember that it was a very good party!

Footnote:

The C.O. (Station Commander) was Group Captain "Gus" Walker, subsequently Air Chief Marshal Sir Augustus Walker.

Wording of letter, dated 3rd January 1942 was from Air Officer Commanding No. 5 Group Air Marshal J. C. Slessor addressed to Pilot Officer G. H. W. Glenn, D.F.C., No. 144 Squadron Royal Air Force Station North Luffenham:

Taken from www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories on 22/12/2012

On reading this article we remember our Service Men and Women who are in active service around the world and we wish them a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

- WHATS ON -

Forthcoming Events:

If you have any requests or details on forth coming events then Tel: 01572 755969 or email rafarutland923@yahoo.co.uk

Derek Bury

DATES for Your DIARY

Wed 9th January 2013	Wing Cdr Kevin Mackie MSc, BA(Hons) RGN, qs, PMRAFNS	"What ever happened to RAF Hospitals".
February 6th	Ken Ellis Editor Flypast Magazine	Spitfire Heroes
March 6th	None	AGM
April 3 rd	Air Commodore Peter Gover Chairman VAR	VAR & It's Services.
Wed 1 st May	DTUS RAF Student Cadets	Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme (DTUS)

Branch Meetings are 1st Wed every month – Next Meeting January 9th 2013

Venue: Cottesmore Sports & Social Club – 7.00 for 7.30pm

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