



# NEWSLETTER

## Book for May Buffet Lunch - see Page 7

### March Meeting

Sadly we had one, if not the lowest attendances at a meeting. It was such a pity as we had a superb lecture on flying Concorde from Gwyn Williams a former Civil Aviation Authority 'Flight Operations Inspector' with responsibility for British Airways Concorde pilots.

Gwyn started his presentation with a short film with an amazing backing track by 'Queen'. He then took us on a typical flight from London/Heathrow to New York/JFK. This started in the BA briefing room at Compass House on LHR Northside before proceeding to the aircraft about an hour before departure. The aircraft was normally refueled to maximum for the westbound flight BA001 left London at 10.30am arriving in New York around 9am local time, after a 3 hour 30 minute flight, with over 2 hours at Mach 2. The maximum altitude was 60,000 feet achieved with a steady cruise climb under max power (less reheat). A slightly unusual descent route deviating to the south, kept Concorde over the sea and thus able to stay supersonic for longer.

Gwyn then explained how Concorde had succeeded whereas the Russian TU 144 has not. It was all down to the special modifications within air intakes of the Olympus engines, which somehow Rolls Royce managed to keep from the Russians! Gwyn also explained how fuel was moved aft and then back by the Flight Engineer during flight to adjust the Centre of Gravity of the aircraft.

He concluded by talking about the return flight from New York. He started by explaining the extensive



Noise Abatement procedure for departure (essential to keep the New York Port Authority on side), far more complicated than the one at London/Heathrow. We then saw a short film of Gwyn flying his last sector from New York to London Heathrow and the congratulations he received from the remainder of the crew, on his 60th birthday.

A fascinating story from a former Hawker Hunter pilot, who finished his civilian flying career with many years on Concorde. He has promised to return to give us a further insight in the great aircraft with 'Concorde - the beginning and the end'. We can't wait!

### April Meeting

As you can see below we have one of our members giving the April presentation. A wartime operation involving his father. It should be a fascinating story, so why not make an extra effort to join us, as sadly of late the attendance for various reasons has been dropping.



LOTTERY FUNDED

**Remember 20th April 2016**

**"The Cinderella Operation"**

**by**

**Dusty Miller**

**Greenacres 1030 for 1100am**

## The Flying Fortress By Flight Lieutenant Gordon Carter

**Ed:** *The article is a narrative completed by Flight Lieutenant Gordon Carter and his son in 2001 for 'Through Eyes Of Blue', a book written by Wing Commander A E Ross (pages 176 and 177, published by Airlife in 2002. ISBN 1 84037 345 8). While you are searching for this you might like to look at P301-302 written by your editor!*

My experience as a Flight Engineer began after six months of intensive training with the emphasis on engines and airframes, at RAF St Athan in South Wales. I graduated in September 1943 as a Sergeant and this was followed by selection for the aircraft type in which you were destined to fly.

This process was very much a hit and miss affair. All the graduates were assembled in a hangar and the numbers required for each aircraft type were read out. There were only a few vacancies for Coastal Command, but as this was considered to be a safer option, there was no shortage of volunteers to step forward. People were nearly killed in the crush. To this day I am convinced that all coastal command engineers made either good rugby players or bouncers.

The next stage was a heavy conversion unit, in my case to Stirlings at a Conversion Unit in Suffolk. Crewing up was akin to a 'slave market'. The pilot, navigator, bomb aimer, wireless operator and gunners were already a crew from a Wellington OCU. Once again the hangar was used. The engineers stood in a group waiting for something to happen. Suddenly a pilot stood in front of you and asked if you would like to join his crew (no documentation - he must have just liked the look of you), and then the serious business of conversion training began.

There was very little ground instruction - no simulators, no mock-up aircraft, but straight down to sorting out the gauges and levers as the aircraft lumbered into the sky. The screen engineer occasionally slapped your hand and encouraged you if he was so minded. The heavy conversion unit standard of maintenance was very poor compared to the high quality experienced later on operational squadrons.

In less than three months as a crew, we had an undercarriage malfunction, narrowly escaping a collapse on one side. On another occasion complete brake failure on landing resulted in an over-run into a field beyond the aerodrome. Oil pressure failure on an inner engine, with a loss of auxiliary systems, nearly wrote off the air traffic tower due to a swing on take-off caused by a hy-

draulic throttle control leaking. Worst of all, a fractured elevator hinged arm on an aircraft signed up as serviceable: if I hadn't noticed it on pre-flight check we would have crashed for sure.

The fuel system on the Stirling relied on gravity feed, and tanks being used in sequence, the cocks for the fuel tanks not required were turned off to prevent inter-tank feeding. On my first cross-country trip a well kept fuel log was essential, gauges being far from accurate. However, late in the trip when the fuel state was crucial, condensation dripping from my oxygen mask due to lack of heating, covered the paper of my log, ruining all my readings. Without upsetting the crew I turned on all the cocks, balance as well, and prayed for continued aileron control and a safe return.

The Stirling experienced ceased when we were posted to Sculthorpe in Norfolk, to join 100 Group Bomber Support and Radio Counter Measures (RCM) operations. There we were introduced to American Flying Fortress crew members, who had arrived with some tatty war-weary aircraft.

Conversion to these Flying Fortresses was carried out on an entirely friendly basis, and some firm friendships established. The local Norfolk farmers were less impressed as during our solo conversion training we regularly "buzzed them up" as they stood on their haystacks. The aircraft all had American markings and any complaints would have been made to a puzzled American 8th Airforce Headquarters.

The engineer on a USAAF Fortress was also the gunner, and two pilots were always carried to make up the crew. We already had a mid-upper gunner who became the top gunner, and as the policy of the RAF was to have only one pilot, the engineer occupied the co-pilot's position.

Although we were not qualified to be pilots we were compelled to spend hours in the old Link Trainer to practice touching down and flying on to the final approach, and we had to be able to relieve the pilot whilst in flight. Some brave souls achieved reasonable but unofficial touch downs on real flights. My pilot actually fainted at altitude on a training flight, when I brought the aircraft down to a lower level, he recovered in time to land; a worrying event that turned out all right. In event of a pilot "snuffing it" we had been advised by the Flight Commander to attempt a "belly flop" at one of the special airfields Manston, Woodbridge or Carnaby.

The engineer's task on the Fortress was the usual requirement of fuel handling, engine setting and monitor temperatures and pressures

The early Fortresses had hydraulic waste gate controls for the Turbo Superchargers. Sometimes at altitude this would congeal, and then suddenly one or more of the engines would start to roar as the turbine over-spun, swinging the aircraft off course. The engineer would then fight to bring back control by devious manipulation of the cockpit levers. The later Fortress Gs (Mark 3) had electronic control: one simply dialled a number to set all four engines.

One drawback with the Fortress was that its optimum cruising speed was about ten knots slower than the Lancasters and Halifaxes, so in order to keep up higher power than desirable had to be used. This considerably reduced our endurance. The engineer's part in this was the management of a manual mixture lever labelled "auto lean, auto rich". The power settings were a combination of manifold pressure (boost) and rpm - i.e. above a certain figure "auto rich" was required to keep the cylinder and oil temperatures within limits. A chart kept by the engineer recorded the consumption for all engine settings. This figure had to be continually divided into the remaining fuel to establish the endurance figure. The compilation of the engineer's log was therefore quite important. The clerical work in compiling the log was far from easy, the paperwork was on a small board, the control column was in the way, only a little red light could be used, otherwise the pilot's night vision was impaired and too much light was hardly wise over enemy territory. Added to this the heating appeared non-existent so cold hands did not help.



*Boeing Fortress III of 214 Squadron*

One trip in mid 1944 was to Konigsburg, East Prussia, flying over Sweden at a height of 9000 feet and for a duration of nine hours forty minutes. The aircraft's endurance was stretched to the limit. For such trips the aircraft relied on the use of so-called long-range or

Tokyo Tanks: these tanks had no gauges, but relied on cocks being operated around the bomb bay area to turn them on. The fuel from the Tokyo Tanks gravity-fed into the main tanks. There was no indication of fuel flow: all one had to go on was the main tanks appeared to be reducing their usage. All the aircraft on this trip experienced very low tank readings on our return over the North Sea. One engineer kept a small hacksaw in his toolkit and panicked to the degree that he sawed through the hydraulic pipes of the Tokyo operating cocks, as we had been led to believe that pressure held them shut.

One other thing for the engineer to do was keep a good look out: with a hundred or more aircraft with no navigation lights on, all eyes were important.

In conclusion, the Fortress was a much more docile aircraft than the Stirling, more like a four engine Anson from a handling point of view. The low powered, but very reliable 9 cylinder Wright Cyclones were no match for the 12 cylinder Merlins or the 14 cylinder Hercules of British aircraft. However the blower enhanced the performance at altitude.

Our task in RCM operations was to neutralise German defences as much as possible and thus help to cut down our night bomber losses.

We carried devices to jam German Air Interception radar and ground/air communications. These had strange code names such as "Jostle" and "Airborne Cigar". We carried German speaking Wireless Operators as extra signallers. We dropped "Window" to blanket German radar. We carried out spoof raids in which aircraft would head towards a target and hopefully draw the attention of the German defending forces from a genuine raid. We would then drop a "Window" and withdraw under its cover. We might repeat this manoeuvre several times during one night.

Stirlings of our Group would similarly orbit in wide circles over the North Sea in a manoeuvre known as "Mandrill Circle" - also designed to neutralise German radar detection. Bombers would then emerge from behind its cover, hopefully on a course German defences had not anticipated.

During one tour on the Fortress, we were damaged by flak, attacked several times by fighters, and had a minor mid-air collision with an out-going (friendly?) aircraft which damaged our tailplane. The Pilot received the DFC after 39 operations, the Rear Gunner the DFM for shooting down an enemy plane.

*(Continued on Page 4)*

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We were safer in the Fortress at night because we had four Air Gunners with 0.5 in ammunition. However, our RCM role with "spoof" raids on German cities became more hazardous in early 1945, as the enemy started getting wise to our tactics and aircraft were shot down in the circuit of our final base at Oulton.

Despite these early experiences I went on to "engineer" in many four-engined RAF aircraft until the early 1970's. By then I had just about got the hang of it!!



**Ed:** As a contributor to this book I would obviously recommend it but it really is a great read with 193 personal memories from life in the RAF. It spans the years from the formation in 1918 to operations in the Balkans in the 21st Century. It is available on Amazon but only in used format, but keep an eye open in your Public Library (if that is still open!)

### 11 Days

You will have heard many times the plea, to write it down, so that others will be able to read it in the future. Well Fg Off Eric Hartley did just that but his diary has only just seen the light of day!

His story has emerged of how six airmen survived 11 days at sea in a dinghy, using their underpants as a fishing net and their shirts as a sail, created by sewing shirts together. They drank by sucking rainwater from their sodden handkerchiefs.

On 27 Sep 43 their Halifax of 58 Sqn was on the trail of a U Boat that had already sunk 11 allied ships. The U boat was spotted and sunk but their aircraft ditched after an exchange of fire from just 50 yards, 400 miles west of Ireland. Eric's diary just read "Sighted and attacked U Boat. Sustained hits in fuel tank, burst into flames and ditched 1 minute later. U Boat straddled and 'kill' observed".

The front and rear gunners were sadly killed but the remaining six crew managed to get into a dinghy. The aircraft had sunk so quickly they were unable to retrieve any food or survival aids!

During the ensuing 11 day ordeal they battled with huge waves using their flying boots to bail out the water. They were also overturned which meant all their remaining kit was soaked. They tried to catch fish using chocolate as a bait in a soggy pair of underpants but all they managed were a few foul tasting jelly fish.

Although they tried to keep up morale by praying twice a day, two of the crew became delirious that their condition was deemed 'critical'. They remained in the vicinity of the crash site for the first few days before deciding to rig a sail, to enable them to make better use of the westerly winds to carry them nearer the convoy routes. On the eleventh day they were spotted by a Royal Navy Destroyer and were given a hero's reception on board.

The story came to light when the family auctioned his DFC, together with his log book, diary and a number of letters. The black and white picture below captured the moment they were rescued.

#### The Survivors:

F/O E.L Hartley, Pilot, awarded the DFC.

G/Capt R C Mead AFC, 2nd Pilot

F/O T E Bach RCAF, Navigator

Sgt G R Robertson, Engineer

F/Sgt K E Ladds, Mid Upper gunner awarded the DFM

Sgt A S Fox, Wireless Operator

#### Crew Members lost:

Sgt R K Triggol, Rear gunner

Sgt M Griffiths, Front Gunner

Gp Captain Mead was the Station Commander of RAF RAF Holmsley South and was flying on the sortie as second pilot



The moment of rescue - Day 11

**Tom Tate (Part 2)**

In March 1945, airman Tom Tate was on special duties over Germany when his B17 Flying Fortress was hit by fire. The crew bailed out. Seven of them were captured a few hours later near the village of Huchenfeld, close to the town of Pforzheim. A month earlier Pforzheim had been destroyed in a massive RAF bombing raid killing 18,000 people. Revenge was in the air. The British airmen were dragged to a nearby cemetery to be executed by a Hitler Youth lynch mob. Only Tom and one other crew-member escaped.

They wanted to kill us in the school, but the mayor of the village refused, saying that blood would be on the heads of the children for all time. So we were dragged outside and down the hill. When I realised we were about to be killed, a sudden burst of energy overcame me and I ran for it. I was barefoot and exhausted, but somehow I got away. The next day I was recaptured by the German army and taken to a POW camp by two Luftwaffe escorts. I was treated according to the Geneva Convention and assured that my comrades were safe. One of my escorts even handed me a pair of boots. He explained that a woman in Huchenfeld, hearing of my plight, had sent them to me.

After the war, back in England, the RAF asked me to return to Pforzheim to find out what had happened to the missing crew. So back I went, and turning into the cemetery in Huchenfeld I knew instantly what had happened, for there in front of me were five wooden crosses.

The perpetrators of the crime were brought to justice at the War Crimes trials in Essen the following year, and the

ringleaders were sentenced to death. I had no compassion. I despised them and said to my wife that I was never going back to Germany.

But then, 50 years later, a fellow golf player mentioned a possible holiday to the Rhine. It was a SAGA holiday, and with their brochure came a magazine. For weeks it lay unopened by my fireplace, until I finally took it out of its plastic cover. It fell open at a double-page spread, which read: "The Village that asked Forgiveness." I couldn't believe it – it was all about Huchenfeld and the executions.

I read how Pastor Heinemann-Grüder had arranged a memorial plaque to the five British airmen murdered in his church. On the plaque was written "Vater Vergib" (father forgive). Many people still had that terrible event on their conscience. Only the widow of one of the murdered airmen had been traced, but press interest meant that the pilot, John Wynne, eventually contacted the village too. He had taken a rocking horse and presented it to the new kindergarten in Huchenfeld as a gesture of reconciliation. It was called Hoffnung – the rocking horse of hope.

I contacted John Wynne through the magazine. He couldn't believe we'd found each other after so many years. "You have to go to Pforzheim," he urged me. "For years people have longed to meet a survivor to express their shame and horror. They want forgiveness."

A short while later I received a letter from a couple, Renate and Gotthilf Beck-Ehninger, who were very involved in the reconciliation process but hadn't known I was still alive. They were so thrilled to find me, and invited me to the commemoration ceremony in 1995. Renate wrote: "I was only nine when Pforzheim was raided, and you were in your youth when you saw the abyss, the darkest depth of human nature."

I didn't attend the actual ceremony because I still felt in danger, imagining someone might want to finish the job off. But when I arrived the following week I was given such an enthusiastic welcome. It was clear I had become a symbol of reconciliation. I was greeted by so many people, all of whom wanted to shake my hand. I've never been hugged by so many ladies in all my life! I also met Emilie, the woman who in 1945 had sent me the boots.

Guilt had hung over the village for years, but by going there it somehow changed things for them. I was so welcomed, and so well looked after, that suddenly I realised I'd made a mistake. I wish that I'd gone to Germany earlier to relieve these people of their guilt. When someone comes with arms open to embrace you, you can't feel enmity any more. The act of friendship invites forgiveness.

**Ed:** *A lovely story and one Tom took to the end with gladness*

### The Cuban Air Force



*Our ever roving reporter Dave Bray reports:*

The Cuban Air Force forms part of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. Air and Air Defense Force (DAAFAR) are the primary agency handling Cuban air force planes and its flying and maintenance. The Cuban air force has many aircraft designed and manufactured by the Soviet Union and Latin American countries. During 1980s, Cuba showed the air powers to countries in Africa with the help of Soviet Union. During this period Cuba dispatched many fighter planes to African countries such as Angola and Ethiopia to execute many aerial attacks on South Africa and Somalia respectively.

The Cuban air force has operated fighter planes such as MiG-21, MiG-23 and MiG-29 and the L-39, which is used extensively to train pilots of DAAFAR. The transport aircrafts the Cuban air force operate include Mi-8, An-24 and MI-17. Currently Cuban Air force fighter is the MiG-29UB.

They had owned the Hawker Sea Fury, MiG-15, MiG-17, MiG-19, North American P-51 Mustang and North American B-25 Mitchell. It is estimated that at present Cuban air force has over 200 fixed wing aircrafts. There are thirteen military bases in Cuba. The Cuban air force are spread around these stations. The exact picture of Cuban air force assets are not known to the open world.

An assessment in 2007 stated that Cuban air force has 8000 personnel, 31 combat airplanes, and another 179 aircraft. which also includes transport aircraft and helicopters for surveillance.

Defense specialists have differing opinions on the strength and weakness of the Cuban air force and Cuban air force fleet. Some believe that Cuban air force just possess bare minimum planes just enough

to run the defense internally. whilst some experts think they have enough aircraft to tackle any internal and external threats.

In 1959 during the Cuban Revolution, the Fuerza Aérea del Ejército de Cuba (FAEC) purchased a total of 17 refurbished (ex-Fleet Air Arm) Sea Furies from Hawker. The aircraft were briefly flown by FAEC prior to the ousting of President Fulgencio Batista and the assumption of power by Fidel Castro. Following the change in government, the Sea Furies were retained by the Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria ("Revolutionary Air Force"; FAR); the Sea Fury proved difficult to keep operational, partially because the new military lacked personnel experienced with the type.

In April 1961, during the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the only FAR fighter aircraft to see combat included three Sea Furies belonging to the Escuadrón Persecución y Combate ("Pursuit & Combat Squadron"), based at the San Antonio de los Baños and Antonio Maceo air bases. In pre-emptive attacks on April 15, two Sea Furies were destroyed on the ground, one at Ciudad Libertad and one in a hangar near Moa. During the ensuing aerial combat, a single airborne Sea Fury was lost during the Invasion.



*Sea Fury F 50 preserved at the Museo Giron*

But of course now with the new relationship with the United States, will we see a new era in the Cuban Air Force? Ex USAF aircraft could soon appear over the skies of Cuba, it will be interesting to see how far this new friendship will be allowed to go? United States airlines are bidding now for new routes to Cuba for tourists but the USA seems reluctant to accept Cuban Airlines at the moment.

**Ed:** *Thanks Dave, we must get you to report on the other countries you will be visiting!*

### Memorial planned for USAF 490th Group

Formed in Utah in Oct 43 they moved to RAF Eye near Diss in Suffolk in Apr 44 flying initially B24's but converting to B17's in Aug 44. They operated primarily against strategic targets until Feb 45. These strategic missions were interrupted during the Battle of the Bulge, in Dec 44 and Jan 45 with the group tasked to attack German supply lines and military installations. The Group was redeployed to the USA in Jul 45.

At its peak over 10,000 personnel called RAF Eye their home. During the two years they operated from Eye, 237 men failed to return from bombing missions. Recently a group of residents came together to discuss the possibility of creating a permanent memorial at Eye Airfield to the men who served in the 490th Bombardment Group. They flew 158 missions from June 1944 to July 1945. Mid Suffolk District Council gave the plans, for land at the airfield off Progress Way, the green light earlier last month.

It will see the creation of a memorial garden, war memorial, information board, two benches and a pair of flag poles, and it is hoped the new memorial will be dedicated at a ceremony on May 29.

Although a final itinerary for the day is yet to be confirmed, it is set to include a presentation at Eye Town Hall, before a guard of honour from airmen from RAF Mildenhall and Lakenheath.

A member of the organising committee said "They were young men and they did not die easy. They died falling in flames, falling from their aircraft. "It means quite a lot to me. When you see Eye Airfield, and when you see what is happening there in the future, the industrialisation of it, it could be completely forgotten it once was an airfield."

The project has been funded by about £20,000 through the group's fundraising, as well as benefitting from nearly £40,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.



**Ed:** *Details from Tom Payne via his niece and the Diss Express*

## Buffet Lunch

### Greenacres Tavern

**Wednesday 18th May 2016 at 12 Noon for 12.30**

**Cost £8 per person**

Please book your seat and send cheque payable to "**Chiltern Aircrew Association**" to:

Gerry Sealy-Bell, 31 Hempstead Road, Kings Langley, Herts WD4 8BR (please include a stamped addressed envelope)

Names of those attending:

**Programme 2016**

Events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless (\*)

**2016**

**Apr 20** The Cinderella Op Dusty Miller  
 May 18 Guests Lunch\* 1200 Noon  
 May 19 Veteran's Day (RAF Museum)\*  
 31 Jul 16 A Gathering of Moths Old Warden\*

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**Welfare**

I have been away on the high seas in the Orient again but have been kept up to date by email, particularly on the case of Charlie Flint. Charlie left hospital for some Respite Care before going home, but sadly fell the next morning and ended up back where he started. He is now awaiting clearance to leave hospital again. Our thanks to Sue and Rob for keeping us up to date and for Rod for visiting. Ron Doble had to miss the last meeting with a chest infection but I am glad to report that Graham found him fit again when he phoned. It was good to see Doug Hadland back with us too.

**David**

**Membership Secretary**

We have just been advised that **Ron Rosie** passed away late last year, our condolences to his family. At our March meeting members stood in remembrance.

Ron was born in 1926 and joined the RAF as a pilot and flew with 51, 224, 269 and 202 Squadrons, as well as the Coastal Command Comms Flight. After leaving the service he became an Airline pilot with British European Airways and later with British Airways.

He flew Anson's, Oxford's, Halifax, York's, Shackleton's, Hasting's and the DC3 among others. A working life in aviation, he was a life member of RAFA, RAFHAAA (Old Haltonian) and the British Airline Pilot's Association as well as the Aircrew Association.

In retirement he enjoyed travel, spending a great deal of time in the USA with relatives. He played golf and was a keen on DIY.

Sadly we were unable to report his death earlier but only heard through a third party. RIP Ron.

**Gerry**

**Secretary/Editor**

I will publish the Membership List next month, so, if you want to be in it, send in your £10 to Gerry now! Ian Nelson sends her best wishes to all from Horsham.

I am looking at getting a couple of visits for us. It is Veterans' Day at the RAF Museum on 19 May, if you would like to go on transport from Greenacres then please let me know ASAP and we will see if we can organise a minibus. I am also hoping to get a visit to RAF Halton for a passing out parade, now that we are approaching the warmer weather. Watch this space.

**Graham**