



Woking and District Aircrew Association

www.aircrew.org.uk/woking

Newsletter

12 June 2020

Editorial

We all know how difficult life has been since the COVID-19 lock-down. Lack of human contact has affected us all, especially between family and friends.

Thankfully, as far as we are aware, Woking ACA members have escaped the virus itself, but the consequences of social isolation have removed the pleasure of getting together once a month for our meetings and ruled out any other group activities. All that has been left to us is electronic contact - in our case mainly through scheduling a Zoom meeting in place of our monthly lunches on the 3rd Tuesday.

Sadly, only a small proportion of members have taken part in our Zoom meetings so far and there are serious concerns that the branch may fragment and fade away as a result.

Please do make an effort to join and contribute to our next virtual Zoom meeting at 2pm on Tuesday 16th June. Joining instructions are given below.

If you are unsure of the technology, please email me via akribie@ntlworld.com in advance of the meeting and I will talk you through setting up a trial run. It's a lot easier than you might imagine whether you are using a PC, laptop or mobile device..

David Jackson

Zoom Meeting

2pm Tuesday 15 June

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89412652918>

To join, please click on the link above and follow the on-screen instructions. It will make like easier for you if you have installed the Zoom program/app in advance from <https://zoom.us/download>.

The host will be on line to welcome you from 1355. Please do join us .

Recent RAF Happenings

Development of the Lightning Force

As more F-35B Lightning aircraft are added to the UK's defence forces, the intention is to make it a fully-integrated RAF/Royal Navy force with the land and carrier-borne operations shared (almost) equally by both services with the RAF having a 58% - 42% preponderance.

The first operator of these aircraft, No 617 Squadron based at RAF Marham, has a mixed RAF/RN complement and it is likely that the present OC, Wg Cdr John Butcher, will be succeeded by a Commander RN. The second F-35B unit, due to form in April 2023, will be 809 Naval Air Squadron with the strong possibility that it will be led by an RAF Wing Commander.

Typhoons in Lithuania

A detachment of Typhoon FRG4 aircraft from No 6 Squadron flew from Lossiemouth at the end of April to join the Baltic Air Policing Mission at Siauliai air base in Lithuania. This is the sixth time since 2004 that the RAF has joined other NATO air forces in deployment to defend the Baltic States airspace.

Anti-IS Strikes Continue

On 10 April two RAF Typhoon FGR4s, assisted by an RAF Reaper drone, flew air strikes in support of counter-terrorism operations in Northern Iraq attacking fortified buildings near Tuz Khurma.

Retired Hawks get New Role

Five retired Hawk jet trainers were recently delivered by road to RAF Cosford where they will be used as ground instructional airframes by apprentices at No 1 School of Technical Training.

[With thanks to Bill Bawden for his contributions Ed.]

Battle of Britain 80th Anniversary

Polish Air Force Virtual Commemoration Event

Laguna's Spitfire Legacy 145 Challenge

As we try to remember the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain in 2020, Covid 19 has caused some real challenges for outdoor events and celebrations with crowds.

We firmly believe that this should not go past unacknowledged, and wanted to create a fun VIRTUAL activity event that people can complete in their own time and doing an exercise of choice from Wednesday 13th May (Date of Delivery of P8331 to 303 Squadron in 1941) until 15th September, Battle of Britain Day.

We are encouraging everybody to purchase a ticket to the event and complete a personal challenge of 145 kilometres, 14.5 Kilometres or even 145 metres or 145 minutes worth of exercise in whatever form you wish, to commemorate the 145 Polish Pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain in 1940. This will allow you to complete the challenge over four months and see you awarded with a Special Commemorative medal and certificate upon completion.

This is an honesty-based event and we would encourage you to post your results once monthly on our [FaceBook page](#) Laguna's Spitfire Legacy until completion on 15th September, where we would ask you to take a picture of you having completed your 145 activities in a fun way.



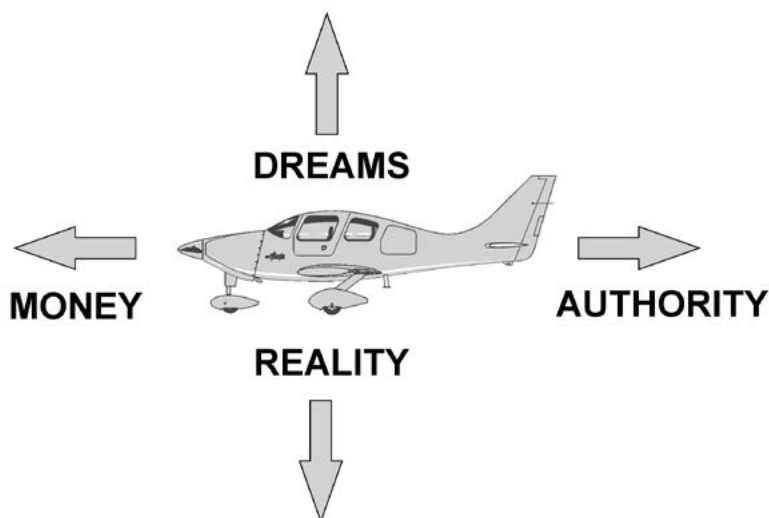
It was the intention of Laguna's Spitfire Legacy to officially launch the project in April 2020 and send a flying Spitfire and Hurricane of the Polish Heritage Flight to Poland in June 2020 as a tribute to the Polish people but this had to be postponed due to the virus.

We are encouraging the public to support the restoration/rebuild of Spitfire P8331 G-KOSC in time for 2025 and the planned Polish Memorial Flight in this year as well as the rescheduled Tour for 2021. Ticket sales will see a thoroughly positive and truly unique opportunity for you to personally honour the 18,000 members of the Polish Air Force who travelled to fight with the RAF as their strongest Allies. Join us together in creating this legacy for generations to come.

Tickets are available at Eventbrite on the Link below. All proceeds will be directly fed back to the project to aid the funding of our Remembrance, Unity and Legacy principals. LSL is a Not for profit Community Interest Company. www.eventbrite.com

For more information on the project please visit [Facebook page](#) or www.lagunasspitfirelegacy.org for more information.

THE FOUR FORCES OF FLIGHT



Stan Instone

Once again we have to report the death of a long-term member of Woking ACA. This time it was Stan Instone on 21st May at the age of 95.

Stan joined the RAFVR in 1943, aged 18. He was accepted for pilot training but turned it down, preferring to train as a Flight Engineer as it was a quicker training and he believed [almost certainly correctly] that this would allow him to get operational flying before the end of the war, whereas he would have been unlikely to complete pilot training.

After passing the Flight Engineers' course at RAF St Athan, Stan volunteered to join a 6 Group squadron [6 Group was the Bomber Command group funded by the Canadian government and was mainly RCAF but in 1944 there was a shortage of RCAF Flight Engineers so most otherwise wholly Canadian crews flew with RAFVR Flight Engineers.



After a spell at 1664 HCU at Dishforth, Stan joined 419 Squadron RCAF at Middleton St George [now Teeside Airport, the most northerly Bomber Command airfield] flying Lancasters in September 1944. After a series of interesting operations, including being attacked by four Luftwaffe night fighters over Bochum on 4th November 1944, Stan was finally shot down on 21st February 1945 and became POW with four other crew members, the Pilot and Navigator being killed. After participating

in the "Short March" in Bavaria from Stalag XIIIId Nuremberg to Stalag VII A Moosburg in March 1945 he was liberated by the Americans on 29th April 1945 before being graded as unfit for further aircrew duties upon his return to the UK as a result of injuries sustained in the crash.

Following demobilisation, Stan eventually trained as a technology teacher and worked in education until he was eighty-four.

In 2007, we located his crash site in Sprockhovel, a small village near Dortmund in the Ruhr and discussion with the local historical society led to an excavation of the crash site. Stan visited Sprockhovel in 2013 and was presented with a large piece of the Lancaster which is displayed on his study wall to this day.

He remained in touch with surviving members of his Canadian crew and subsequently their families until his death.

He was awarded the legion d'honneur in 2015.

Stan joined Woking ACA in the 1970s, was our treasurer during the mid 2000s and acted as auditor of our accounts until the mid 2010s.

He will be greatly missed. Our thoughts and condolences go out to his family and friends.



A Tricky Situation



You are on a horse, galloping at a constant speed. On your left side is a sharp drop-off. On your right side is an elephant travelling at the same speed as you.

Directly in front of you is a bounding kangaroo and your horse is unable to overtake.

Behind you is a lion and what appears to be a London bus apparently trying but failing to catch you. What must you do to get out of this dangerous situation?

Get off the Merry-Go-Round and go to the Dodge!

The late Paul Holden, the branch PRO, sent a series of articles to the local press over the years and many of those published described the talks given to members at the Fairoaks Flight Centre.

This is an interesting one from April 2001.

Veteran Lancaster Returns to UK

Members of the Aircrew Association at their regular monthly meeting at the Fairoaks Flight Centre were treated to a lively and very humorous illustrated account of the adventures of an ex-Pathfinder crew and a very experienced ground engineer who went to Canada in the late 70's to fly a retired Lancaster back to Britain.

The speaker was Dick Richardson, who had the distinction of serving for twelve years continuously on the same RAF station, rising from Corporal Fitter to Chief Technician, looking after Mark I and Mark II Vulcans, and subsequently taking on responsibility for maintaining the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster. Following his RAF career, he became Chief Engineer to the Strathallan Collection of Vintage Aircraft owned by Sir William Roberts.

It was in this capacity that he was sent to Canada to survey an ex-wartime Canadian-built Lancaster B Mk X (KB 976) parked at Calgary Airport, which had been converted to a water bomber carrying 2,000 gallons at a time to be dumped on forest fires. Having scrounged the necessary replacement parts from nine other derelict Lancasters of various vintages which he found dumped at Edmonton, he was joined by a crew led by Captain P.A. Mackenzie, ex- 83 Squadron, who was the Operations Director of British Caledonian Airways, and other B Cal crew members who had also flown Lancasters during the war.

They had a tremendous reception at their first port of call, Toronto, where the aircraft was originally built, with huge crowds to see them off and much media coverage. On departure, the queue of impatient 747s

waiting to take off were told by Air Traffic Control that "Today it is age before beauty" and they had to delay until the Lancaster had completed a requested flypast for the watching crowds.

Similar attention was paid at their refuelling stops at Halifax, Gander and Reykjavik, where it turned out that the British Consul was an ex-rear gunner and so they were required to beat up the town before they left. On their return to UK they were, to their surprise, met and escorted in over Tiree by a Maritime Reconnaissance Nimrod with wheels and flaps down and with 39 people on board all clustering with cameras around portholes on the port side upsetting its trim! Captain Mac asked the Nimrod captain to "clean up his aircraft" to that they could get decent photos, which they subsequently exchanged to great glee all round.

They had another great reception at Glasgow Airport after which they had to fly the aircraft onto an 800-yard dirt strip at its future home at the Strathallan Collection, where it was repainted in No 405 Squadron colours, but sadly, although its engines "never missed a beat" all the way across the Atlantic, it never flew again.

Dick Richardson finished his presentation with slides of derelict military aircraft he found all over Canada in various stages of disarray, but he could name every one and his whole talk sounded as if it had happened only yesterday. He was given a heartfelt vote of thanks and our Social Secretary was urged to provide more speakers like Dick.



812 Squadron RNAS



by John Dickson

Pilot 812 Sqn HMS Vengeance

[Part 2 of the story of John's war starts in Malta just after VE day and moves to the Pacific until the end of hostilities. Ed]

One morning we were up at first light and boarded an Italian destroyer (now our allies) in Grand Harbour. Off we went to Sicily where we enjoyed a week's leave in Taormina. We were billeted in the San Domenico Hotel - posh place - it had been Nazi General Kesselring's HQ. The Italian currency was worthless so all goods and services were paid for in cigarettes. We had a free issue of 20 a day at the hotel and had each bought 2000 duty frees from the ship. It was the only time I've been a millionaire in terms of spending power! The air gunners did not have the same access to cigarettes so they decided to flog off some of their flying kit. One chap went so far as to sell his Irvine jacket as a result of which he became 'wealthier' than all of us put together. We swam and sunbathed all day - ate Italian ice cream and danced all night on the terrace of the Bristol Hotel. All quite magical with the moonlight on the snowy slopes of Mount Etna in the background.

Back on board, we left Malta on 22nd May 1945, eastwards through the Med to Port Said. A couple of days ashore in Alexandria, where we went to the Alexandria Sporting Club and lost our money at the race track. The jockeys were so strong in the arm they could stop the most-fierce nag from ever getting ahead of the field! Sticky cream cakes and strawberries at Pastroudi's, I doubt this place ever knew there was a war on! Lots of little boys had sisters anxious to meet us, but we were able to resist! All the sisters seem to be called Cleopatra - I think she must have been very lucky to have so many little brothers.

Down through the Suez Canal leaving Aden off to port after we had gone down the Red Sea. They said it got up to 140 degrees in the engine room and the lads down there could only work half-hour watches. We had a flight deck engineer officer known as 'Snowdrop' because he was always so pale. The poor chap died in the heat and I remember his funeral off the quarterdeck, this took place within a few hours of his death - the first time I'd seen a burial at sea.

On the 9th June we arrived off Ceylon (Sri-Lanka now), we were accelerated off the deck very early and landed at Trincomalee on the North East coast where we had breakfast. The climate here is DRY and HOT. We were soon airborne again and flew South West

across the Island to RNAS. Katukurunda (a fair way South of Colombo, but on the coast) We flew through a tropical storm en route - it was violently turbulent and a miracle that we stayed in formation. On this side of Ceylon the climate is HOT, STICKY, HUMID and HORRIBLE! And we were here for a month. We didn't do too much flying while we were there but were fitted with RATOG (rocket assisted take-off gear). Lots of smoke and sparks, but not terribly efficient. The idea was to boost us off the deck with a useful load in the prevailing high temperatures.



Fairey Barracuda Mk II 812 NASqn

British Pacific Fleet Markings

July 1945 - January 1946

I guess it was about this time that our future was again in doubt. There were rumours of 'Vengeance', 'Venerable', 'Colossus' and 'Glory' joining the East Indies Fleet ready for the invasions of Rangoon and Singapore. Bearing in mind the poor performance of Barracudas in these climates a year or two earlier, it wasn't surprising we weren't wanted. It was obvious that our role was changing and we shed a few more aircrew notably my observer 'Bambi' Brook, Bill Broad and Joe Spencer. On the 4th July we flew all aircraft back on board and after a day or two in Colombo, round to China Bay and then we sailed for Australia on 7th July 1945.

On the 11th July when we were halfway across the Indian Ocean, we took off with RATOG covering all and sundry with smoke and sparks. We did a mock attack on the Cocos Islands while the Corsair boys practised their photo-reconnaissance skills taking pictures of the native girls on the beaches. Two days later we practised dive bombing with long-range fuel tanks attached.

The ship anchored off Freemantle on 16th July, but we didn't go ashore. I thought our first sight of Australia looked a bit woebegone. On through the Australian Bight. At first light on 22nd July while still miles out at sea we could smell the eucalyptus and gum trees - a wonderful change and the promise of happier days ashore.

[Handwritten comment by the author. Soon after the humiliating disasters in 1941/1942 in Malaya, Hong Kong and Singapore, Roosevelt is on record as saying to the American people that they were not fighting the Pacific war to restore the British Empire.]

The overall commander of the American Pacific Fleet was Admiral Ernest J King who echoed his CinC's sentiments.

The Pacific war was fought on a huge scale and over

massive distances. By 1944/5 the Americans had built a huge fleet of aircraft carriers. They had very soon realised that power at sea had switched from battleships to carrier-borne air power. By 1945 they could deploy 16 fleet carriers, many escort carriers and an immense fleet-train able to replenish groups at sea. Strikes of 400 carrier-borne aircraft were common.

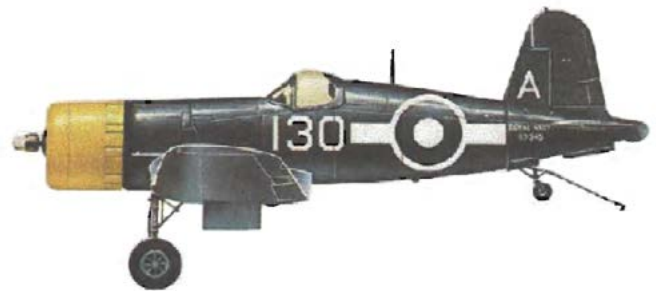
At the end of 1944 Churchill met Roosevelt and offered him a 'British Pacific Fleet' now that the European conflict was winding down. Roosevelt seemed lukewarm and Admiral King, who was at the meeting, was even less enthusiastic and prevaricated. It is said the Churchill lost his temper, thumped the table and demanded to know whether we were wanted or not! King agreed that we should play our part but that we could not expect support from his massive supply organisation – ie his fleet-train.

In 9 or 10 months we established our own Task Force which operated separately from, but alongside, the Americans – and under King's orders. Although we eventually built our own fleet train, it probably never exceeded 400 ships all told. In all our 6 modern fleet carriers were involved with support from a few escort and repair carriers. We operated in 2-carrier task groups, relieving one another after a few weeks on station. In the large part we were flying American-built aircraft – Avengers, Hellcats and Corsairs – more robust and having longer range than our Seafires and Fireflies.]

22nd July 1945 we flew off to Jervis Bay, about 80 miles South of Sydney. This was an RAAF airstrip taken over by the Navy and commissioned as HMS. Nabswick otherwise MONAB 5 (Mobile Naval Air Base). A magnificent breakfast was served in the Links Hotel on the edge of the airfield. I remember steak, eggs and kidneys all served by pretty 'Ossie' girls. There was no proper accommodation on the airfield so we were overjoyed to be billeted at the Hotel. We had left three aircraft behind when we flew off and by the time the ship anchored in the Bay that afternoon they were mended and the Captain did not want them cluttering up his deck. Three of us were taken by launch back on board and told to fly them off. It seemed the Captain had no thought of raising the anchor and steaming out to give us a fair wind over the deck, instead we were told we could be boosted off while the ship stayed firmly at anchor. This did not seem a good idea to me particularly as I had drawn the short straw and was due off first. Johnny Cookson and 'Robbie' Bums thought they could reasonably refuse if they saw me swimming! Anyway, they wound the catapult up to the over boost notch and off I went well blacked out. By the time opened my eyes I was over the edge of the airfield so I just landed never having retracted the undercarriage. It must have been the shortest recorded flight since the Wright Brothers in 1903.

Flying was very spasmodic, mainly consisting of ferrying old (to) and new aircraft (from) the holding pool at Bankstown on the outskirts of Sydney. I

marvelled at the rows and rows of brand-new aircraft from the States all pristine in the midnight blue paint finish of the British Pacific Fleet, shining in the warm sunshine. These were Hellcats, Corsairs and Avengers. The Barracudas were to be found almost out of sight in the rear rank!



Chance Vought FG-1D Corsair IV in British Pacific Fleet markings
1850 Sqn HMS Vengeance July 1945-March 1946.

The ship was in dock in Sydney having new anti-aircraft guns fitted and we all had a week's leave. We lived on board and sampled the delights of the beaches and city as we pleased. On the 8th August 1945, I was on a train going back to Jervis Bay when I saw newspaper headlines about the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima two days earlier. The next day the second bomb dropped on Nagasaki. The War ended on the 15th August 1945 and the World was at peace.

So there we were, probably the most worked up and highly trained Squadron never to have fired a shot in anger. This had been achieved over an intense fourteen and a half months period and sadly 10 of our good chums did not live to see the day and Harry Saggs had a broken back. Of much less importance we had ditched, wrecked or at least, heavily damaged at least twice that number of His Majesty's aircraft

I recollect a strange sense of bewilderment that it had all ended so quickly and, on a personal note, was confronted with the stark fact that I had a future and what was I going to do with it?. Up to then, most of us had given this situation no thought and I don't remember any conversations on the subject

But for the Atomic Bombs, the invasion of mainland Japan would have taken place in November 1945 and I expect we would have been in support. We would have needed to operate from fairly close to the coast due to our limited range. I guess we would have been attacking land targets. If the Kamikazes had still been operating the Light Fleet Carriers might not have done so well as we did not have heavily armoured decks as did our big carriers.

I also read that because the Yanks did not want us in their theatre of operations, we would have gone back to the East Indies to support the invasion of Malaya. I wonder if there was a definitive answer?

VJ Day came on Wednesday 15th August 1945 and the World was at peace. Two days earlier I had flown back on board with 'Stormy' Fairweather as passenger and 'Kid' Attenburrow, one of the Corsair pilots clocked

up the ship's 1000th deck landing. On the 14th August we anchored in Sydney harbour and we enjoyed a run ashore that night.

On the historic day the skies were blue, the sun shone and there were puffy white clouds. We were anchored close enough in-shore to bear the bands playing and from the noise of the ships sirens there was obviously a huge party brewing. 'Clear lower deck' was piped and the whole ship's company in their smartest uniforms, fell in on the flight deck. Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, C-in-C British Pacific Fleet, came aboard and gave us a chat. We were expecting, "well done everyone, splice the mainbrace and take a couple of days leave". Instead we got, "well done everyone, you can splice the mainbrace in a couple of days when you get to Manus and you're sailing this afternoon". There could have been a riot and one or two suggested jumping overboard and swimming ashore, but sanity prevailed and we slunk below to drown our sorrows.

In the afternoon we weighed anchor and sailed North in company with 'Colossus' and Venerable, Bermuda (cruiser) and three destroyers. Leaving the fireworks and fun behind, we sailed at top speed (why?). The next day there was a concert in the hangar and on the 17th August we took off and did a dummy attack on the Fleet, but we wondered for what purpose. Tom Stacey flew his Corsair through both barriers when landing-on and messed up a couple of others, but no-one got hurt. We sailed on past New Guinea, New Britain and the Coral Islands finally dropping anchor off Manus Island, in the Admiralties, in the morning of 20th August. We spent the rest of the day fuelling. Colossus and Bermuda sailed away but we JUST SAT THERE! Manus seemed like jell on earth- HOT, STICKY, HUMID, NO BREEZE and very little to go ashore for. We did 'splice the mainbrace', but bow much sweeter it would have tasted back in Sydney.

The Americans had constructed the anchorage and port facilities and we did eventually go ashore to visit their officer's club where there was an unbelievable range of luxury goods for sale! They were so well organised, BUT their ships were 'DRY' and there was great competition among their officers to secure invitations to visit our ships! They were very, very thirsty! In return we could go on board their ships where lashings of ice cream would be served! I did not get aboard a Yankee ship, but well remember a wild party on our quarter deck. Having slaked their thirsts several Americans staggered up to the flight deck whence they leapt over 20 feet into the sea. They then swam round to our starboard-after gangway, climbed aboard, saluted and then proceeded to repeat the process. In the end the Commander stopped the fun, but one character needed physical restraint! The battleship ANSON came and went but we still sat there sweating.

On the 23rd August we put to sea for a day mainly to get some air through the ship. We flew off, but my engine was rough so I landed back on after only 20 minutes. The next day I was ashore with 'Robbie'

Bums, but we were nearly drowned in a monsoon! After a week which we think could have been better spent in Sydney, we flew off using RATOG loaded with 500lb bombs which we proceeded to drop on some isolated rock. I think the Commander was trying to empty the ship's magazines so that the space could be otherwise used and this was one way of getting rid of the weapons! Ponam Island was just a large lump of coral where the Yanks had flattened a long strip into a runway. It now rejoiced in the name of HMS Nabaron - otherwise MONAB 4. I remember there were some Vultee Vengeance dive bombers of 721 Squadron there. They had only ever been used for towing targets and now they were engaged in spraying DDT on the mosquitoes! It struck me that the personnel who were permanently shore based in these sort of places were just about "round the twist".

We spent two days swimming in the lagoon and organised crab races on the beach! At last on the 30th August we sailed for Leyte in the Philippines. Meanwhile 'Venerable' had got to Hong Kong and 'Glory' had reached Rabaul in New Guinea. We crossed the Equator on the 30th August and dropped anchor at Leyte on the 2nd September where we re-fuelled and re-provisioned and then sailed immediately. 'Colossus' and 'Bermuda' were also at Leyte prior to sailing for Shanghai.

After a pleasant two day cruise through the Philippines we arrived in Hong Kong harbour on the 5th September 1945. Already there were 'Indomitable', 'Venerable' and 'Vindex' (carriers), 'Anson' (battleship), 'Swiftsure' and 'Euryalus' (cruisers) 'Maidstone' (supply ship) 'Empress of Australia' (troopship) and many more. Quite an indication that the BRITISH were back!

There now followed an interval of about five weeks when neither squadron flew, until the beginning of October 1945. 'Vengeance' put to sea on the 1st October and two days later the Corsairs of 1850 Squadron flew ashore to Kai Tak airfield, which became HMS Nabcatcher or MONAD 8. I seem to remember that the Corsairs were given a free reign to 'show the flag' and they had the time of their lives screaming around the Colony at low level. The ship returned to harbour on the 4th October when those of us who had been living ashore like gypsies 'walked' back on board. After not flying for six weeks the Squadron took off on the 8th October 1945 and flew in formation to Kai Tak 'showing the flag' en route. My log book shows Sub-Lt 'Bill' Williams as observer plus two passengers. They must have been very small and very uncomfortable! The next day we took part in the 'Victory Fly Past over Hong Kong'. Included with the Corsairs and Barracudas were RAF Spitfires that had recently flown in from Burma. It must have been quite impressive.

We were now to live under canvas in the middle of Kai Tak airfield. Thinking 50 years ahead one marvels at the thought - imagine a tented camp in the middle of Heathrow! For nearly three months until we left Hong Kong at the end of December we

flew very intensively. Border patrols, mine searches in the harbour entrances (where could they have come from?), anti-piracy patrols, close formation flying for photography and dive bombing with 250lb bombs on Table Island and on a rock known as Gau Tau cropped up very frequently. Commandos made an anti-piracy landing on Ping Chau Island and we gave low level support albeit without weapons! Ships arriving and leaving harbour were 'attacked' and then photographed from low altitude.' Black Prince' (a new cruiser), 'Implacable', 'Glory' and 'Kempenfeld' (destroyer) all received our attention.

While the Squadrons were ashore the ship went about her business. I believe she went up to Japan and helped with repatriating the POWs. She certainly brought back some thought provoking photographs of Hiroshima. Anyway, she was back at the end of November and I flew back on board on the 29th November. There must have been rumours that we would soon discard our Barracudas because 'Mush' Taylor, in an effort to pre-empt the situation, crashed on deck the day before. No casualties but one less Barracuda. I got airborne off the accelerator loaded with 4 x 250lb bombs and dive-bombed a target towed by the ship (or one thrown over the side). Anyway, the 'audience' on board were pretty impressed. When I landed on it was to be the last time I flew a Barracuda on to the deck. After lunch we were airborne again and back to Kai Tak. Quite a busy day.

For the next three weeks we continued flying from the shore base. There were some interesting trips and I recall no untoward incidents. The ship was loading prior to returning to Sydney and because of the deck cargo, we couldn't land on. Our aircraft were lightered out and then craned aboard on the 21st December.

We sailed for Sydney on the 28th December 1945. On board were many ex-internees and other civilians. We were very crowded and bunks and camp beds were set up in the hangar. On the way South we anchored at Labuan on the northern coast of Borneo and picked up many ex-POWs, mainly Australians, anxious to get home. Whether we managed to offload some stores or not I don't know, but they made room on the flight deck for the Corsairs and Barracudas to fly off on the 12th January 1946. This was to be my last flight in a Barracuda and I had PO 'Pip' Piper and another passenger in the back seats.

We landed at Schofields not too far out of Sydney. This base, previously operated by the RAAF, was now run by MONAB 6 and christened HMS Nabstock. There was to be no flying for four weeks giving us time for some celebrations in the big city, albeit five months late. 812 Squadron's Ball took place at a splendid Roadhouse or Night Club called 'Oyster Bills' not far out of Town. The ship's dance band was in fine form and there was no lack of partners invited from the various Wren's quarters, local nurses etc. A crowd of us enjoyed a couple of weeks leave in the Blue Mountains at a place called Katoomba. We swam at Blackheath and spent many days on horseback in

some lovely scenery.

On our return to Schofields at the beginning of February 1946 there had been many changes. The Barracudas had been spirited away to Bankstown where they were ditched or scrapped. In their place were several Fairey Fireflies - all Mark 1 or FR1's. These two-seater Fleet fighters had Rolls Royce Griffon engines of 1735hp. We had envied 1772 Squadron when they were working up back as Burscough in 1944 and now, with the war well and truly over, we were re-equipping with them!



Fairey Firefly F1

With the new aircraft came many new faces, most notably Lt Cdr R A Wynne-Roberts, a hard act to follow and it took some of us 'old hands' a while to accept the change. I first flew a Firefly on the 7th February and after a couple of trips getting used to the 'tits and switches' found myself flying formation, indulging in tail chases and general aerobatics despite having never aspired to be a fighter pilot. 'Spike' Regan, still our Senior Observer, elected to fly with me when I had just a couple of hours on type. I must say I felt rather honoured as 'Spike' normally showed no great inclination to fly just for the sake of it!

The next six weeks were generally a lot of fun with lots of formation practice, some of it at night. We fired our four 20mm cannon at targets in the sea, 'attacked' one another using camera guns and indulged in plenty of aerobatics. Some of the aircraft were fitted with ASH (an up to the minute radar device) and the observers practised their skills at locating and directing us onto friendly targets. I imagine our future might have been as night fighter pilots, although the back-seat boys seemed to be having trouble with their new toys. In the middle of March we concentrated on deck landing practice ready for the 19th March when we re-joined the ship. My first deck-landing in a Firefly could have ended in disaster as, in my anxiety, I failed to select 'full flaps' for the final approach! I must have arrived in rather a hurry catching the seventh (last but one) wire and stopping just before hitting the barrier. On reflection I wondered why the batsman or his 'teller' failed to spot my error and give me a wave off. Never mind - nothing got broken.

We left Australia about this time with some regrets, but cheered by the knowledge that we were at last on the way home. During the next couple of weeks we continued to fly from the ship and enjoyed some new games like skip bombing and RP (rocket projectile) attacks, albeit with dummy weapons. The observer flying with me, Sid Johnson, became very air sick during one rather violent session of aerobatics - the only time I ever made anyone sick and I felt sorry for him. We managed to attack towed targets with live 250lb bombs and practised homing on the ship's radar beacon. It seems on reflection that the standard of maintenance was not up to our usual high standard. On one occasion I got airborne from the deck, the wheels would not retract and all the intercom broke down so I was back aboard very quickly. On another occasion, it was nice to avoid a nasty accident when coolant leaking from the engine spread itself over the windscreen making the approach and landing a bit hazardous. If we'd been anywhere near land I would have certainly opted to put down ashore.

It could be that we were all in need of a rest because Reg Parton, 'Mush' Taylor and Johnny Cookson (twice) all had spectacular deck-landing accidents. Fortunately no one was hurt but the Fireflies looked very battered. One day the starboard side heads were secured, the ship came to a halt, and "hands to bathing stations off the starboard side" was piped. Everyone swam around quite happily although whether anyone had considered the likelihood of sharks being present is not known! The swell was quite marked so climbing back up the ladders was quite exciting! We recorded that 812 Squadron had once swum half-way across the Indian Ocean.

On the 1st April 1946 we were back over the Cocos Islands 'attacking' shore targets with great gusto and a couple of days later a towed target was despatched with salvos of 8 x 60lb rockets - only concrete heads mind you - fired by each aircraft. On the 5th April I flew ashore to our old base at Katukurunda in Ceylon and on 7th April the whole Squadron flew ashore having 'dusted up' the fleet en-route.

The Squadron was shore based in Ceylon for the next three months initially at Katukurunda and then moving across to Trincomalee at the beginning of July. On the 20th May 1946, 'Mush' Taylor's piloting skills were put to the test. Soon after take-off his CSU (constant speed unit) packed up, which meant that the propeller feathered causing the engine's power to have a braking effect rather than a pulling one! Switching everything off, he turned himself into a grossly overweight 'glider' and pulled off a superb belly landing in the middle of the airfield. No damage to 'Mush' but one less Firefly to worry about. By this time almost all the old guard had departed leaving me as the only aircrew member from the original complement that had started out at Stretton in June 1944. 'Rob' Roseveare was the longest-serving observer, a survivor from the group that joined us at Burscough in the following September. I suppose it was about now that we learned that Lt. 'Toby'

Tobias, who had left us for demob back in Hong Kong, was dead. Instead of waiting for passage home in a troopship he elected to 'hitch-hike' by whatever means he could. He had finally got to Paris by early January 1946 and arranged his final leg into England by an RAF transport aircraft. Sadly it crashed en route and Toby never made it home. We mourned the loss of such a lovely, laid-back character.

Most of the replacement pilots were quite inexperienced, having gained their 'wings' as the War ended and electing to take a four-year commission rather than waste their newly acquired skills. I think a couple of the lads won their wings as RAF pilots, but that Service was 'over-stocked' so they were offered transfers to the Army as glider pilots or short service commissions with the Navy. I don't suppose they took too long in making up their minds, but when they came to us they hardly knew port from starboard, forward from aft and Lord Nelson's traditions were a closed book! Never mind - they applied themselves to their new environment, they practised their deck-landings and apart from one more sad event they coped well enough.

Nearly every day we continued with our dive bombing, rocket firing and cannon firing exercises. We flew nice formations in company with the Corsairs and the observers pin-pointed 'targets' in the mountain which was not much fun when the clouds dropped below the highest ground! The climate was dreadful - hot, humid and sometimes very wet. On a dive-bombing practice one day I elected to dive through a belt of cloud that had drifted across the target - surely a stupid thing to do. Thinking I would emerge in the clear below cloud I was still waiting for a clear windscreen when I realised the sea was much too close! It was a very low pull out because I'd forgotten that the pressure change in the dive had kept the hood and windscreen misted over even though I had come through the cloud into clear air!

It became obvious to the medics that I needed a break and the tropical climate did not suit me. At the end of May I was packed off to Diyatalawah where the temperate climate (log fires at night) and some intensive medical attention eventually sorted me out. In the process I discovered that penicillin the new wonder drug and I did not get on resulting in a nasty dose of penicillin fever. I'm still allergic to it.

Meanwhile back at base tragedy had struck again. Sub-Lt Eric 'Smudger' Smith was killed when he stalled and spun into the sea when practising some of his first deck landings. As a newly qualified pilot he had come out to Ceylon and was awaiting a posting. Morris Jones, one of 1850's Corsair pilots and I had been school mates of 'Smudger' and being more familiar with British-made aircraft he had asked to join 812 Squadron. We had looked forward to welcoming him in to life on board. Around this time Sub-Lt 'Lofty' Rouse, another of the Corsair boys, tangled with the crane and barrier when landing on. He made rather a habit of unconventional arrivals, but no one got hurt.

He probably scratched his head and wandered off to compose another verse of the squadron song. He was usually found in a quieter corner of the wardroom after dinner still strumming his guitar well away from the noise around the bar.

By the end of June I was back in harness at Trincomalee where some of the Squadron were based. I flew again on the 3rd July first as a passenger in an Expediter of the communications squadron that used to fly daily 'milk runs' around the bases of Ceylon and Southern India. I was dropped off at Katukurunda, had lunch and then flew one of our Fireflies back to Trinco. A few more ferry trips followed including a rather memorable one on the 6th July. I received a signal to fly across to Katukurunda to collect Captain Neame DSO RN (our ship's captain) who was attending a conference in Colombo. I remembered to take a pair of overalls, parachute, 'mae west' and helmet and on arrival I had lunch and waited for the 'boss' to arrive. The weather was at its best when we got airborne in the late afternoon. The Captain seemed very relaxed and in no great hurry, so I showed him Kandy and the acres of tea plantations sweeping down the southern slopes of the mountains. I asked the Captain if he would like to view the ship from the air before we landed. She was at anchor in China Bay and the bar had just about opened on the quarterdeck. I enquired if he would like a 'close look', which he thought would be very nice, so a nice fast run and then a slow one up and down the port side level with the flight deck did the trick! The Captain was delighted and I think this trip must have influenced the kind remarks he made on my 'flimsy' at the end of the commission. I was most touched, particularly having regard to events six months earlier.

Then we did some ADDLs and on the 11th July I was back on board and did a further four deck landings just to prove I hadn't lost my touch. Sub-Lt Tom Stride, with PO Casey in the back, managed to fly through both barriers and ended up on his belly on the foredeck scattering bits and pieces en route. Both stepped out with no damage to either. Casey said he wasn't even strapped in!. By the 15th July 1946 we were all back on board in reasonably good order and at last, 'Vengeance' sailed for home.

By the beginning of August we had reached the Western Mediterranean having enjoyed a brief run ashore for a cold beer in Suez. A couple of days were spent doing flight and section drills and attacking floating targets with our cannon. There followed a brief stop in Gibraltar with a run ashore to purchase some duty-free watches and other 'goodies' for the loved ones at home. Then North through the Bay of Biscay arriving in the Channel on the 12th August 1946.

And so the final take-off from 'HMS. Vengeance', a last look at our home for the last 18 months and a wave goodbye as we set course Eastwards up the Channel. It was a damp, overcast summer's day as we crossed the Isle of Wight and into Lee-on-Solent where I had joined the Navy nearly 44 months earlier. SPEECHES WERE MADE, NO BANDS PLAYED, NO FLAGS WERE WAVED. We just had lunch, said our 'goodbyes' and caught our trains home. 812 Naval Air Squadron was now disbanded!

to be continued

