



Issue 57
DEC 2010



***No 50 & No 61 SQUADRONS'
ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER***



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Dec edition. Where has 2010 gone? There is definitely some time-speeding-up process at work. It only seems yesterday that we last met for the marvellous reunion weekend. Still, if time has speeded up, it makes the next reunion weekend even closer.

You may notice that we have included our honorary members on page 2. It is fitting to include them as they have given so much to the Association and inviting them to become honorary members is a small way of saying our “Thank You”. There is also a very kind letter from Gillian Merron responding to our invitation to her.

We are pleased to offer a DVD of the unveiling and dedication of our squadrons’ memorial at Birchwood in 1989. You will also see much detail about the forthcoming biography of Sir Michael written by our chairman, Peter Jacobs. We have suspended Tail End Charlie to give Amazon’s description of the book. Signed copies will be available.

We also provide the real story behind the verse on the Skellingthorpe memorial by R W Gilbert. We are indebted to Peter Small for his work in locating Ralph Gilbert and helping with the host of documents he has of this poetic airman. The story of how and why Skellingthorpe got such a splendid memorial for our two sqns, is the subject of a future article.

We are still very keen to have input from members, whose memories of wartime service on either sqn would make good reading for their fellow members. It may even trigger more responses. Mike and I do have a small “bank” of memories, but are ever keen for more.

Correction: We regret incorrectly naming the Lord Lt in the last edition. It should have been Mr Tony Worth, and the Lord Lt and his wife were two of our distinguished guests.

Any opinions given in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Association. Moreover, the accuracy of the submissions is also the responsibility of the author.

Richard Jones & Mike Connock

LETTER TO MEMBERS

Gillian Merron says that she so enjoyed reading the recent newsletter and would like to say 'thank you' for honorary membership through the pages of this one:

“To all members of the Association.

I was so touched and humbled to be awarded honorary membership of the Association which I was delighted to accept - I very much appreciate your kindness and thoughtfulness.

It is a privilege and pleasure to join the re-union and remembrance weekends as a way of honouring those who gave so much. For me, the weekends have always been a highlight in the year, where I could enjoy meeting friends, old and new. As President, Sir Michael has always given me a gracious and warm welcome and I was deeply honoured to receive his letter, formally inviting me to be a honorary member.

A heartfelt 'thank you' to you all. All good wishes.

Gillian”

SECRETARY'S PIECE

I was proud to show Mrs Jean Fuhrer of Titusville, Florida, our Birchwood memorial and memorial room recently. Her cousin, Sgt Robert Norval Cunningham, an air gunner of the RCAF, was killed in action on 11 May 44. Mrs Fuhrer was accompanied by her daughter, Lisa Ferns, and they made the journey from New Mills in Derbyshire to Lincoln.

An Association tie is now on its way to Florida!

Gerry Collins

(Sgt Cunningham is shown in the Roll of Honour to have flown in Lancaster LM429 and lost on the Lille raid - **Ed**).

REMEMBRANCE SERVICES

On 11 Nov, I had the honour of being invited again by the villagers of Skellingthorpe to lay the Association wreath and give the Homage at our memorial. It was a wonderful day, the rain stopped at 1055 and started again at 11.10; perfect timing. The occasion was well attended and, as always, it is the children laying the poppies that bring a lump to the throat. The kindness of the people of Skellingthorpe knows no bounds. I usually say a few words and was preparing to talk about the author of the poem engraved on the memorial, R W Gilbert, when I spoke with Peter Small. Thank goodness I did! The information I obtained from the internet was quite wrong. Peter had met R W Gilbert and has provided details of the man and the “Requiem for a Rear Gunner.”

The service on Sunday 14 Nov, at Birchwood, was also very well attended by civic dignitaries and the staff and cadets of 204 (City of Lincoln) Sqn ATC. Unfortunately Jimmy Flint was not well enough to attend, so Gerry Collins read the Homage, as well as acting as master of ceremonies. The Rev Brian Stalley presided over the service and gave a short address. Michelle, our regular cornet player, was splendid with the Last Post and Reveille.

Richard Jones

SERGEANT WILLIAM WOOD

Following our remembrance service at Birchwood we met one of the visitors, a wonderful elderly lady, Mrs May Wood. Mrs Wood is the widow of Sgt William Wood, 50 Sqn, rear-gunner of NN694 lost on the Lille raid, 10/11 May 44. It was his 30th and final op; he was 22 years old. Mrs Wood never re-married; she was also 22 years old when she was widowed and now lives in Blackpool. Her grandson, who had done all the research and tracked us down to the service on Sunday, is Kevin Fielding of St Annes-on-Sea, Lancashire. Mrs Wood was very moved to see husband's name in Roll of Honour and Peter presented her with a copy. This is the one of the great strengths of the Association: bringing information to the families of 50 and 61 Sqn members lost during the war.

Richard Jones

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Well, the clocks have now gone back which means it will soon be Christmas once more. It hardly seems possible and the re-union weekend, already five months ago, is now well and truly in the past. Planning for next year's event, which is to be held over the weekend 11-12 June 2011, is already underway and we will make sure you get all the information you need through the Editorial team but please make sure you have the event marked in your diary. There are two changes to the format we have adopted over the past few years. Firstly, there will be no formal meet and greet on the Friday afternoon. That said, the Association Room will be open so please feel free to just turn up during the afternoon and have a look around if you so wish. Secondly, there will be no organized visit on the Saturday afternoon. For the past three years we have organized a visit and have probably exhausted the local area – namely, Waddington, Digby and Scampton. To go anywhere further would make timings tight on what is already a busy Saturday with the AGM and formal dinner. And so we feel the time is best spent doing whatever you wish to do in and around Lincoln.

I am sure the recent Strategic Defence and Security Review did not go unnoticed and you will all have your own thoughts about the future size and shape of the Armed Forces, in particular what is happening to the Royal Air Force. From my own perspective, this was the first time I had personally been involved in a Defence Review; in the past I was serving on squadrons where, by and large, work was done by those more senior than me in headquarters around the Service. But this time, I could not escape involvement and it was a quite fascinating experience. Whilst many of the cuts announced were, to be honest, expected – certainly in terms of the future size of the Royal Air Force – there were still some surprises and now we will spend the next period adjusting to the changes. Interesting times!

In this Newsletter you will see information about how you can purchase the DVD 'Operation Failed to Return', the unveiling of the Squadrons' memorial on the former airfield of RAF Skellingthorpe on 3 June 1989. Some of you may already have the video of the occasion but we have had it put on DVD as we all need to move across to more modern media.

I certainly recommend it to you. Not only is it a bargain but it is a wonderful historical record of the occasion and a chance for you to show your families what you looked like more than twenty years ago; it is also a chance to see footage of many former members who are sadly no longer with us. The occasion was also very special for me because it was the day I first found out there was a 50 and 61 Squadrons' Association!

As far as work behind the scenes is concerned, we are just about to start Phase 2 of the Association Room. Just as a reminder, we are spending time (and money I'm afraid) on making sure the Association Room looks as good as possible. Those of you who have been to the room will know that some of the pictures were looking a little tired (to say the least) and disorganized. We aim to continue putting that right. The first phase, which tells the history of the two squadrons and about some of the brave young men who flew during the war, looks great and this second phase will tell the story of the airfield of RAF Skellingthorpe, and link our Association with the local community. The aim is to have it done by next year's reunion.

Finally, I can now inform you that the book 'Stay the Distance – The Life and Times of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham' is due for publication in February. More details are included in this Newsletter and I recommend it to you all. It only leaves me to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Peter Jacobs

(During the Remembrance Service on 14 Nov, the local authorities, (Birchwood, Hartsholme and the City of Lincoln) offered us a grant to assist in the refurbishment of the Memorial Room.

This will be a very great help and enable us (we ardently hope) to have the story of RAF Skellingthorpe and a corner for Jimmy and Sir Michael's stories to be displayed in time for the 2011 reunion.

We are indebted to them and will report back in the Apr edition. **Ed**)

OPERATION FAILED TO RETURN DVD



The VHS tape, kindly loaned by Reg Payne, has been transferred to DVD, and is available for members to purchase at £5 (inc p&p). It is a wonderful reminder of the unveiling and dedication ceremony and a chance to see old friends, who are no longer here. I was delighted to see Bill Reid on it, whom I have never met, but only seen in the photographs taken on the occasion of his award of the VC. What a distinguished and modest man.

I am indebted, once again, to Jamie Barr who confirmed that the wg cdr, in the newsreel at the start of the DVD, is indeed Wg Cdr R N Stidolph, OC 61 Sqn. Jamie also confirmed that the Sqn Ldr Moss on the DVD is the Sqn Ldr E H Moss lost on the Nuremburg raid a month after the newsreel was filmed.

Jamie also has a very poignant memory of Sqn Ldr Moss: “I spoke to him after the briefing for the Nurenburg raid. He told me that all the crews were told what height to fly at. It was the first time crews had been given this information. He did not like it, and said, “If I don’t come back it is no good”! Jamie also adds a short note about the late Howard Farmiloe, whose obituary was included in the last newsletter. Jamie writes: “Howard Farmiloe joined 61 Sqn in Oct 43 and flew as 2nd pilot in our plane on the Leipzig raid 20/21 Oct. He was known as Tommy on the Sqn. His wireless operator was Eddie Davidson who got the DFM on the Berlin raid.” (The raid on which Farmiloe was awarded the DSO - Ed).

If any Association members have contacts with the families of Wg Cdr Stidolph, Sqn Ldr Moss, Sqn Ldr Benjamin or Sqn Ldr Pullen, then the families may wish to know about our DVD.

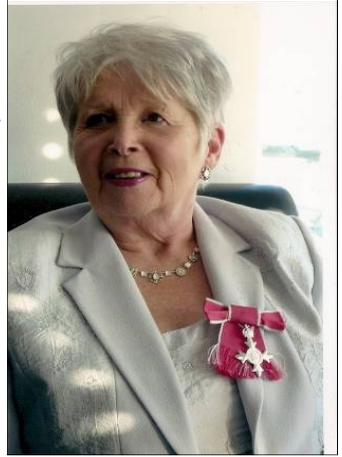
For a copy, please send a chq, payable to 50 and 61 Sqns’ Association, for £5 per DVD, to me at the address on page 2.

Richard Jones

PAMELA FLORENCE CONNOCK MBE

Pam, Mike, Pam's mother, Elsie, and daughter, Rebecca, travelled to Buckingham Palace on 20 Oct, also by happy chance Elsie's 94th birthday. The investiture by HM The Queen of the MBE was a wonderful reward for Pam's unstinting work for the local Skellingthorpe community and our Association. What a year for Pam, new grand daughter, royal garden party and the MBE. Without Pam the Association would be the poorer. We salute you Pam for being you and giving so much to our veterans and their families.

Richard Jones



R W GILBERT AND THE SKELLINGTHORPE MEMORIAL

My brief sweet life is over, My eyes no longer see.
No summer walks, no Christmas Trees, No pretty girls for me.
I've got the chop, I've had it, My nightly ops are done.
Yet in another hundred years, I'll still be twenty-one.

So run the words on the 50 and 61 Sqns' memorial at Skellingthorpe. They are moving and can cause misting of the eye. The story behind these poignant words, written by air gunner Sgt R W Gilbert, is well-worth recording.



Mary and Ralph Gilbert

Ralph Wilson Gilbert was born in Mar 1916 and joined the RAF in 1936. He retired in 1948 with the rank of Warrant Officer. From 1943 he trained as an air gunner and served with 158 Sqn at RAF Lisset in the Yorkshire Wolds. On 2/3 Jun 44, he was the mid-upper gunner in the crew of Halifax NP-X, tasked for a raid on the railway yards at Trappes in France; it was their 20th operation. Having successfully carried out the mission, they were returning home when they were attacked by a JU88.



NP-X crew 2/3 Jun 44 (L to R): Jim Pennie (W Op); Sid Fox (RG); Larry Toombs RCAF (BA); Ralph Gilbert (MUG); John Shore (Flt Eng); Alan Reynolds (Pilot); Bill Thompson (Nav)

The rear gunner, Sid Fox, the only married member of the crew, was killed in the attack and the remainder of the crew bailed out. Sadly their aircraft crashed onto the home of the Descamp family at St Columnage, killing the son and daughter.

Two of the crew, Alan Reynolds and John Shore, were captured and the

remaining four were hidden by the French Resistance. Sid Fox was buried at Evreux in Normandy. The tale of waiting to be repatriated to England is a story in itself. Ralph Gilbert was able to witness the D-Day activity from a front row seat on the other side of the Channel and finally returned safely to England in Sep 44. Ralph wrote a poem, he was already a recognised poet, as a tribute to Sid Fox entitled “Requiem for a Rear Gunner”. The poem runs to 38 verses plus an epitaph. It is this epitaph that is on our memorial.

We were very fortunate that Mary and Ralph Gilbert were able to visit Skellingthorpe a few years before he died. It is largely due to Peter Small that we have our fine memorial and this account of Ralph’s wartime experiences and so much detail of his life.

Ralph Wilson Gilbert died in Mar 2000, aged 84 years. RIP.

Richard Jones

STAY THE DISTANCE – THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE SIR MICHAEL BEETHAM

I am pleased to inform you that the book ‘Stay the Distance – The Life and Times of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham’ is due for publication in February after nearly three years of work. I am sure that those of you fortunate enough to know our President will agree with me that Sir Michael is a wonderful man who has served the Royal

Air Force with such distinction since he first joined up as a young eighteen year old during the war. His wartime experiences whilst serving with 50 Squadron at Skellingthorpe are covered in some detail and I am sure this will be of particular interest to you. As you may well be aware, Sir Michael was awarded the DFC whilst serving at Skellingthorpe and he went on to enjoy an extremely successful career in the Service, becoming the Chief of the Air Staff in 1977 and he was the CAS during the Falklands Conflict of 1982. The period of nearly forty years since leaving Skellingthorpe and reaching the highest rank of Marshal of the Royal Air Force is packed with interest and the book takes you into some fascinating areas such as aerial surveying of Africa in the post-war period, the RAF's Goodwill Tour of America, the nuclear trials at Maralinga in Australia, the early days of air-to-air refueling, the Cuban Missile Crisis, life as the station commander at RAF Khormaksar in Aden (the RAF's biggest overseas base) during the terrorist campaign, NATO Policy and plans during the Cold War, RAF Germany (as the Commander-in-Chief) and, of course, the five years as Chief of the Air Staff which includes a detailed chapter covering Sir Michael's perspective as the CAS of the Falklands Conflict. There are plenty of other interesting areas as well during his staff tours, far too many to mention here. What rounds off the book, although I am probably biased, are the excellent illustrations - more than sixty of them covering Sir Michael's career.

It has been a privilege to have written the book. The book will be available from all major book shops and can already be pre-ordered; I also believe some of the supermarkets aim to stock it. However, if you are interested in a signed copy – by Sir Michael and I – then please send me an e-mail or a short note to my home address with your contact details (name, address and telephone number). I don't know yet what the price will be through me and so please do not send any money now – it will depend on what the publishers can offer me, which will, in turn, depend on the number of books ordered and will need to take into account postage and packaging, but I would hope to be able to offer you the book at less than what you would pay in the shops (certainly no more) and for your money you will have a signed copy – I hope Sir Michael will not mind me volunteering his time to sign your book!

Peter Jacobs

FLT LT DENNIS LUNDY DFC

A story of one of our members from a local paper of 64 years ago:

Volunteering to pilot a Lancaster on Victory night, a young airman from Walthamstow thrilled merry-making crowds when he flew above the West End after a flight of 9 Lancasters, planned to synchronise with a searchlight display, had been abandoned because of adverse weather conditions.

He was Flt Lt Dennis James Lundy, who has served in the Air Force for 5 years and is due for demobilisation in a few weeks. Saturday's flight was his last in the RAF. It had been planned that the Lancasters should be caught in the beams of the searchlights just before 11pm. When bad flying weather grounded the aircraft, Lundy went up from his Camberley station with Richard Dimbleby of the BBC as his passenger. Dimbleby broadcast from the air a description of the West End crowds.

Earlier in the day, the Walthamstow pilot flew over the Victory procession, taking with him Raymond Glendenning, the radio commentator, 2 press photographers and a Reuter reporter. Glendenning gave 2 short commentaries from the aircraft.

“London looked marvellous from the air,” Lundy told the *Guardian* after the parade, when he arrived home for Whitsun leave. “We must have had the best view of the parade. We saw the King and Queen leave Buckingham Palace, and could pick out the people on the saluting base. The weather was alright in the morning, and we flew between 500 and 800 feet above the parade. During the evening, however, we were in cloud for 50% of the time. We were in the air for 2 hours and we saw the floodlit buildings and some of the fireworks. It was just wonderful over London, with all the lights on. We took Raymond Glendenning to an air station in Lincolnshire, and all the way northwards we saw bonfires blazing.”

Lundy, who was awarded the DFC during the war, piloted Lancasters on 31 bombing “ops”.

Walthamstow Guardian 8/9 Jun 46



50 Sqn Lancaster VN-T at RAF Skellingthorpe Winter 43/44

Bill Drinkell kindly sent us this photo of his aircraft VN-T at Skellingthorpe undergoing snow clearance, looks like the winters may have been worse then. Although judging by our weather here at the moment, perhaps not.

If members can help with similar personal photographs and would like to see them in the newsletter, please let Richard or me know.

Mike Connock

MEMBERSHIP

At the AGM it was unanimously agreed to raise the subs to £10, with effect from 1 Jan 11. A renewal slip is enclosed with each newsletter, which also indicates your class of membership. It is included with every newsletter so that members who do not pay (eg Life) can make a donation should they so wish. **Please remember to change your standing order** if this is how you pay. Thank you.

Mike Connock

SKELLINGTHORPE FRIDAY EVENING

Hi everyone we are mid way between last years reunion and next, so time to plan. The evening will be similar to last years, and the cost will be the same at £8. Please indicate on the booking form if you will be attending and as always it is acceptable to pay on the night; the important part is knowing the numbers. Barbara, myself and the gang look forward to seeing you in June and wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Pam Connock

(This event is always so enjoyable and we are made so welcome. It really is a great “opening” for the reunion weekend. Pam and her ladies work very hard and we know just how much our mrmbers and friends appreciate it. – Ed)

REUNION WEEKEND BOOKING FORM

Organisation for the 2011 reunion dinner is well under way, but unfortunately prices have increased considerably again making the cost of the 2011 dinner £33 per person. We do apologise for this increase, but it is the lowest price we could negotiate with the Assembly Rooms. However, this price does include the wine and port for the loyal toast. The Lincoln Hotel on Eastgate has allocated 10 double and 5 single rooms for the weekend. The double rooms will cost £85 per night including breakfast, and the single rooms £60 per night again including breakfast. Bookings are made, as usual, **direct to the hotel** quoting Reference “SQN” for our special rate. Details of the hotel are contained in the enclosed booking form. Please book the room you require as soon as possible with the hotel, and return the weekend booking form, with your reunion weekend dinner cheque, to me by **15 April**. Thank you.

Lynda Skinner

CAN YOU HELP?

John Aldridge has asked if anyone has any detail or photographs relating to RAF Fulbeck, he was there in 1943 with 1485 TT Flight with Lysander and Miles Martinet. John can be contacted on 01920 464511.

ABSENT FRIENDS

David Davies. George Parsons of a Welsh RAFA Branch has told us of the passing of David Davies, a 61 Sqn flt eng, from Clydach near Swansea.

Jack Sockett. Gerry Collins informed us of the death of an old friend of his from their electricity board days, Jack Sockett who was a ground staff member of 61 Sqn and always keen to hear Sqn news.

Dr John Cook DFC. 61 Sqn Obs/Nav. Died 1st Dec. We plan for a piece about Johns life, by his son Alistair, in the April news;etter

NEW MEMBERS

Rev Richard Billingham, Skellingthorpe. Richard is current chairman of the Parish Council and conducts the service at Skellingthorpe on alternate years; the year's when the sun shines, so he says.

The Rev Brian Stalley, Washingborough. Brian has been a supporter of ours for many years and conducts the service at Birchwood.

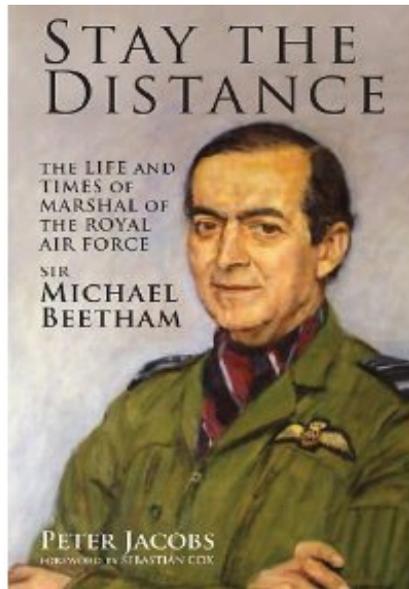
Mr Garrick Yates, Isleworth, Middlesex. The grandson of Robert (Bob) Yates, who did a full tour with 50 Sqn at RAF Skellingthorpe, before joining 467 Sqn RAAF for a 2nd tour at RAF Waddington.

Mr Adrian Van Zandvoort, Eindhoven, Holland. Adrian has been doing some research into crews who came down in Holland, in particular Lancaster LM 718, Sqn Ldr Horsley & crew.

Pam Connock, Skellingthorpe. Pam initially became interested in the Association through her involvement with the Skellingthorpe parish council; fortunately she continued this interest when she ceased to be a parish councillor. But she never formally joined. In recognition of all her support, Pam was made an honorary member at the last AGM.

Gillian Merron, Canwick and London. We are delighted that Gillian has accepted honorary membership. She has been an ardent supporter over many years and continues to maintain a lively interest..

SIR MICHAEL'S BIOGRAPHY



Published by Frontline Books (17 Feb 2011) in hardback at £25

Sir Michael Beetham enjoyed a long and distinguished career in the Royal Air Force. He joined the RAF as a pilot in 1941 and was awarded the DFC whilst serving with Bomber Command during 1943/44. Remaining in the post-war RAF, a number of flying and staff appointments followed. Notably he drafted the first specification for the ill-fated TSR 2 and later joined the V-Force as commanding officer of 214 Sqn at Marham. Beetham then served at the heart of Bomber Command's affairs when the V-Force was at the forefront of the Nation's defences. The most critical moment came with the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. In 1964 he was given command of Khormaksar in Aden, the RAF's biggest overseas station. His arrival coincided with the start of a terrorist campaign against British forces in Aden. More senior appointments followed, notably as Commander 2nd Tactical Air Force and Commander-in-Chief RAF Germany, but the big prize came in 1977 when Beetham was appointed Chief of the Air Staff. In 1982 came the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands; as acting Chief of the Defence Staff, he was involved in the decision to send the Task Force to battle. After victory in the Falklands, Sir Michael Beetham handed over as CAS and was appointed Marshal of the Royal Air Force.

(Acknowledgements to Amazon, who are stocking the book)