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



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EDITORIAL

At the AGM in June, our President proposed that the 50 and 61 Squadrons' Association should cease to exist after the Reunion Weekend in 2018. The Association would be (instantly) reborn and become "Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe, Home of 50 and 61 Sqns'." We need not dwell and the reason for the changes, as the details are clearly explained in the last (April) Newsletter (Issue No 76) and the proposal was supported unanimously. The 50 and 61 Squadrons' Association has met every year since 1946. It was our late vice-president, Wg Cdr Jimmy Flint (OC 50 Sqn Mar 45 to Jan 46), who suggested an annual reunion at the first post-war reunion at the Cock Inn, Fleet Street, in June 1946; the rest is history. The 73rd Reunion Weekend, next June, will be the last under that title. Members will automatically become "Friends" and there will still be annual gatherings. Who knows, one or other of the Sqn "Number Plates" may yet be revived!

Secretary's Report

As I have only had the secretary position for just over a month I do not have a great deal to report. The last few months have been a sharp learning curve so I would like to offer some thanks. Firstly a great big thanks to Ms Lynda Skinner who not only puts in a great deal of time and effort as our dining secretary but also as the parish clerk at Skellingthorpe organises the purchase of wreaths, issues the invitations to our services for the ATC, school children, padres et al at Skellingthorpe. Also a big thanks to 204 and 1237 Sqns ATC for all their help and support at Birchwood and Skellingthorpe; it is always invaluable. Much thanks also to the RAF Waddington Voluntary Band and the Band Master David Jackson, who helps me with the band admin. The memorabilia from Birchwood leisure centre is now in safe storage while the renovations are carried out.

Wishing you all a great summer and looking forward to 9 and 10 June, when we celebrate the Centenary of the Royal Air Force.

Alan Biggs (The Editors strongly concur the excellent support of Lynda)

GERRY COLLINS

Gerry Collins, our long standing Association Secretary, has retired. It was announced during the recent AGM. Gerry served in the Royal Air Force and proudly wears his General Service Medal. He has been an important member of our Committee and Association for many years. He was always a mine of information; he alone knew the secrets of who to contact to get things done for our Memorial Weekends at Birchwood; he also had contacts with the police, council officers, the local ATC Sqns, the Waddington Station Band and other useful organisations for us.

Gerry Collins was born in Fulham in 1926 and in 1939 he was evacuated to Wiltshire. He joined the Air Training Corps on its inception in 1941 and volunteered to join the Royal Air Force on his 18th birthday, in 1944. He joined 125 (Night Fighter) Sqn and posted to RAF Stow-cum-Quy in Cambridgeshire. This was followed by postings to the Middle East, where he was awarded the General Service Medal. Firstly, RAF Basrah, in Iraq, with 294 (Air Sea Rescue) Sqn and then Baghdad and RAF Habbaniya. He was promoted to Cpl and demobbed in 1948.

Gerry joined the Electricity Board and retired in 1987, when he became the Treasurer for 204(City of Lincoln) Sqn Air Training Corps. Gerry met Ron Snelling through RAFA and became involved in Operation Failed to Return. He assumed the role of Parade Marshal in 1997, then added the role of Association Secretary in 1998 taking over from Bill Kelbrick. Gerry handed over the role of parade marshal to Alan Biggs around 2003/4. For this final year Alan will also be our Secretary. Gerry is married to Margaret and they have one son, Mark.



To recognise his commitment to the Association, Gerry was presented with a Framed Lancaster print and Margaret was presented with a bouquet of flowers by our Association President at the recent Reunion Dinner.

CHAIRMANS COMMENTS

It seems hardly possible that a month has already passed since the end of another highly successful annual reunion. I would like to say thank you to all those involved in making the weekend another great success, one of the highlights surely being the flypast over our memorial by one Hurricane and three Spitfires of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight; a moment never to forget. We have now successfully marked the centenaries of the formation of both of our squadrons. The marking of these important events has provided the committee with a focal point over the past couple of years but alongside the planning of these events we have also been looking to the future. Sadly, the continuing but inevitable decline in the number of former squadron veterans had led us to look at options and you will recall in the last newsletter I put forward a proposal that would see the Association transition to the new title “Friends of Skellingthorpe” to better reflect who we are and what we represent. With 2018 - the RAF’s centenary year - close, it seems the appropriate moment to do so. This idea was formally proposed at the AGM by our President and unanimously agreed by those in attendance.

And so, we now start our final year as an Association. Clearly, there is much to do and things have already started as this year coincides with Lincoln City Council’s redevelopment of the Birchwood Leisure Centre, which currently houses our memorabilia. I did report on this at the AGM but for those not there, this redevelopment has been in the planning for some time during which we as an Association have been consulted throughout. I am delighted that both the Council and developers are committed to preserving the legacy of the former airfield of RAF Skellingthorpe, and its two major squadrons, and although the room we consider to be the Association Room (it’s not officially called that) will become something completely different under the redevelopment. Our memorabilia will now become the focal point of the cafeteria inside the ‘new’ leisure centre, meaning that our proud history will be there for all to see. This redevelopment does mean, however, that our memorabilia will be off display until items have been relocated in the café once the redevelopment is complete (currently scheduled to be mid-December). So please pass the word to warn anyone you know who plans to visit the Leisure Centre between now and the end of the year. Anyway, enough from me. I plan to update you on progress in the next newsletter and will also ask our editorial team to include more information about the Friends of Skellingthorpe, such as details of its Constitution under which the organisation will be run. Enjoy the rest of your summer.

Peter Jacobs

ANNUAL REUNION DINNER

This year saw the centenary of 61 Sqn, formed on 24 July 1917. The Sqn history was published in the April edition of the Newsletter and the event was celebrated during the June reunion weekend.



The Centenary cake was baked by Barbara Lawton from the village (Who also did the 50 Sqn Centenary cake).

The cake was cut by our President, AVM Nigel Baldwin and the Chairman of the Parish Council Shirley Pannell, surrounded by veterans and family of 61 Sqn veterans.



During the dinner centenary badges were presented to the 61 Sqn wartime veteran members present. AVM Nigel Baldwin is shown presenting medals to Athur Atkinson with Ken Johnson.

103 guests attending the reunion dinner. Among the guests were the headmaster of The Leslie Manser School, Adrian Jones and his wife Catherine, the Vice-Chairman of the Skellingthorpe Parish Council, Sophie Bennett and Councillor Ian Callaghan. The Right Worshipful mayor of Lincoln, Cllr Chris Burke and Mayoress Cllr Sue Burke.

This photograph below shows seated, l to r, wartime veterans Arthur Atkinson, Ken Johnson, John Tait, Reg Payne and James Flowers. A raffle and auction of Reg Payne's pictures was held after dinner which raised over £1,000 for the IBBC.



Below is shown a signed print from one of WO Reg Payne's pictures: (Lancaster VN-B (Sir Michael Beetham's aircraft) over RAF Skellingthorpe). Mounted and framed by Rob Long (R), it is being presented to the CO of the Battle of Britain

Memorial Flight, Sqn Ldr Andy Millikin (L). Reg (aged 94 and still painting) is in the centre; he is the last surviving member of Sir Michael's wartime crew; Reg was the WOp). Reg is a treasure.

Andy Millikin was a special guest as his Grandfather flew the Lancaster with 50 Sqn from RAF Skellingthorpe. His father, Paul, also flew the Vulcan and was a contemporary of AVM Baldwin. Andy flew the Spitfire during flypast on the Reunion Weekend Saturday.



BIRCHWOOD SERVICE



The Birchwood service was taken by our Padre Revd Brain Stalley, shown with the Mayor of Lincoln Chris Burke.

Wreaths were laid on behalf of the various organisations and by relatives of past members of the two squadrons.

This was followed by the march past led by the RAF Waddington voluntary band and ably supported by 204 (City of Lincoln) Sqn ATC, who in turn led the small band of veterans and relatives. Not forgetting the support of the standard bearers from various military organisation around the city. Our president AVM Nigel Baldwin and the Mayor of Lincoln Cllr



Chris Burke took the salute.



In attendance throughout the weekend were four visitors from Australia: Carole and Nigel Grant, shown on left and her brother and his wife, David and Sue Roberts, on right of the picture. Carole and her brothers' late father, E J H Roberts DFC, flew with

61 Sqn from RAF Skellingthorpe.

SKELLINGTHORPE SERVICE

Following the service at Birchwood everyone gathered at Skellingthorpe for their service, taken by the Padre Paul Payton. The event as usual was ably supported by the 1237 (North Hykeham) Sqn ATC. Also attending for the first time was the LSST Combined Cadet Force. Wreaths were laid by dignitaries representing the City of Lincoln, the District Council and the Parish Council. As usual the most poignant part was the young people of the community, with



wreaths and flowers being laid by pupils from the Leslie Manser school, the two schools in the village and all the uniformed organisations and several other youngsters from the village. Following the service



everyone was invited to afternoon tea in the centre to take part also in the cake cutting for the 61 Squadron Centenary.

During the afternoon a gift was presented to Skellingthorpe from the Village of Petit Bordey, to remember

the crew of the Lancaster that crashed close to the village. Betty Bascombe's husband, Sgt Ron Jones, the flt engineer, died when his 61 Sqn Lancaster, QR-B, crashed on 24 Apr 1944; they had not been long married. The presentation was made by Betty's daughter, Gaynor Mckay.



1506 BEAM APPROACH TRAINING FLIGHT

1506 Beam Approach Training (BAT) Flight was based at RAF Skellingthorpe between Aug 1943 and Oct 1945.

In 1941, the Air Ministry sought a means of providing the pilots of returning aircraft with a system of identifying the runway in all weather conditions and at night with low visibility. The solution comprised 2 radio transmissions originating from the same point and shaped by the aerials to be elongated lobes. (In the early days a Hillman van parked at the far end of the runway). The information was received by "Rebecca" equipment in the aircraft. By arranging that they overlapped, a beam was created that could be aligned along a single bearing, commonly the Runway centreline. In the lobe on one side was transmitting continuous "N"s in Morse i.e (Dash Dot) and in the other Morse "A"s (Dot Dash) with the spaces in between being filled where they overlapped to produce a continuous tone. The pilot would hear this in his headphones and could fly to intercept the continuous signal. There were variations that substituted needle pointers in the cockpit to make a visual indication.

The Airspeed Oxford was the usual aircraft used for BAT. The large triangle, background flash behind the roundel and wingtips were painted bright yellow to enhance visibility from the air and ground.



Beam Approach Training Airspeed AS10 Oxford
of 1509 BAT at RAF Feltwell in 1942

OTHER UNITS AT RAF SKELLINGTHORPE

In addition to 50 and 61 Sqns and 1506 BAT Flt, there were many other units detached to RAF Skellingthorpe, although albeit not for very long, between the opening of the airfield in Oct 1941 and the closing in 1952. Many airfields simply ran out of space for their aircraft and sought nearby airfields with spare capacity to provide parking. Only the aircraft were stationed there, usually for short periods, with the air and ground crews remaining at their home bases.

The conversion of crews to fly the Lancaster (deemed a “Heavy” aircraft) was undertaken by Heavy Conversion Units (HCUs). 1654 HCU was stationed at Skellingthorpe from May to Jun 1942 and 1660 HCU from Sep to Oct 1942; 1485 Bombing and Gunnery Flt from Aug to Nov 1943; 619 Sqn RAAF from Jun to Jul 1945; 463 Sqn RAAF from Jun to Sep 1945; and 383 MU from Jun to Sep 1945.

In Jun 1945, 50 and 61 Sqns departed Skellingthorpe for RAF Sturgate. They were to be used by the Tiger Force, the relief of Singapore, but the dropping of the Atomic bombs by the USAAF (Enola Gay) in 1945 ended the war and the Tiger Force disbanded. 619 Sqn RAAF and 463 Sqn RAAF were also destined for the Tiger Force upon their departure from RAF Skellingthorpe.

58 MU operated from RAF Skellingthorpe after the end of the war until the closure of the airfield in 1952. The MU salvaged crashed aircraft.

On 19 May 1944, 2 airmen were killed and a hangar substantially damaged when three 1000lb bombs fell from a fully loaded bomb trolley train. Mr Kenneth Green, one of our veteran members, was on site at the time; one of his friends was killed in the disaster. A total of 208 aircraft failed to return or were lost in UK crashes during the operations flown from Skellingthorpe: 15 Hampdens; 6 Manchesters and 187 Lancasters.

Extract RAF Skellingthorpe ORB: 31 October 1945:

“The last 15 Lancasters were flown to 22 MU RAF Silloth by Waddington crews. The Oxford aircraft was flown to 12 MU RAF Kirkbride by Sqn Ldr Drinkall. On 26 Oct 1945 the Station Commander, Group Captain Forbes, declared the airfield clear of all aircraft.” The war was over for RAF Skellingthorpe.

LANCASTER R5682 (QR-R)

On the night of 4/5 Sep 1942, 251 RAF bomber aircraft took off for a raid on Bremen. 61 Sqn Lancaster R5682 (QR-R) departed from RAF Syerston but hit by flak over the Dutch coast and later attacked by a German night fighter; an ME110 flown by the night fighter ace, Oberst (Colonel) Helmut Lent, with 110 kills.

The Lancaster's hydraulic system was hit, causing a serious fire which filled the cockpit with toxic fumes. The crew opened a window to release the smoke.



A ZG 76 Bf 110C similar to those flown by Oberst Helmut Lent

The pilot gave the order for his crew to evacuate the aircraft, but they were unable to contact the rear gunner, The MUG went to the rear of the aircraft, but could not see the gunner in the turret, It is possible that the rear gun turret and gunner may have been lost in the attack. The pilot remained with the aircraft to give his crew the opportunity to evacuate. The aircraft crashed in a swampy area near Wartena in the province of Friesland, Netherlands.

The crew of QR-R were:

Pilot: Plt Off PCV Joslin RAF - KIA (remains found at crash site).

Flt Eng: Sgt EU Booth RAF POW

BA: FS PJ May RAF KIA- interred at Eernewoude Cemetary

Nav: Sgt PJ Bridgeman RCAF POW

WOp: FS BA Farmer RAF POW

MUG: Sgt Mullins RCAF POW

RG: WO JF Cooper RCAF MIA - Inscribed at Runnemedede

Now, some 75 years later, there is planning for the recovery of the wreckage of Lancaster R5682 and hopefully arrangements for a final return of the remains of WO Cooper, if they are found, after all these years. Families have been contacted by the LEEMANS Group Recovery Team and are following the operation closely.

The Lancaster wreckage is situated in a swampy area surrounded by a huge lake. High surrounding water pressure will be a challenge to the recovery efforts. The operation will be as big as the 2015 project to recover a Wellington bomber, but in much more difficult circumstances. The wreckage will have to be recovered in the dry so the team are able to narrow the search for any human remains. It is also in a protected environmental area and in the middle of a toxic waste dump, which has to be covered to protect this environmental operation. The team will have to operate in difficult toxic circumstances, dressed in protective clothing and masks on at a depth of at least 7 meters below water level.



Excavation of the Wellington at the crash site in Wartena
Acknowledgements and grateful thanks to the
LEEMANS Group Recovery Team

ABSENT FRIENDS

William Archibald Fauld Crozier

“Jock” Crozier was posted onto 50 Sqn on 11 Sep 1944. He completed a full tour with his skipper, Fg Off Lillies. An ardent supporter of the Association, Jock never missed a reunion. In recent years he and his wife Pauline stayed with friends in Skellingthorpe.



Jock died on 16 Feb. The village and Association were represented by Pam and Mike Connock and Peter and Barbara Small at the service in Kettering. Jock was a humorous, delightful and very popular man. We show him as a young man and on his “final parade” at Birchwood during the 2016 Reunion Weekend. He will be sorely missed.

Wing Commander Charles Cawthorne DFC

Charles Cawthorne joined the RAF as an Aircraft Apprentice in 1939. He applied for pilot training but was never called upon. Eventually at the age of 18 he was accepted for aircrew training as a flt engineer, firstly on the Stirling and then the Lancaster.

His first flight experience was flying the Manchester and then on joining 467 Sqn RAAF, to fly the Lancaster. As the Lancaster had only one pilot, the flt engineer was given



a shortened pilot's course. This enabled the flt eng to assist the pilot and in extremis, land the aircraft.

He successfully negotiated the task of flying a heavy bomber by achieving 16 hours on the Manchester, (his own comment: "and very scary too"). There followed further training on the Lancaster and at the tender age of 18 years he started his tour of operations. In Aug 1943, he took part in a raid to Penemunde. They were attacked by a night fighter and the aircraft suffered very heavy damage. Despite severe injuries to the crew, they pressed on and landed safely; the pilot was awarded the DFC and the rear gunner the CGM.

Two sorties later, both to Berlin, the crew were certified tour complete and all members awarded the DFC or DFM. This was a record award for all RAAF squadrons and the record still stands today. Wg Cdr Cawthorne did his second tour with 61 Sqn in Sep 1944; his pilot was Sqn Ldr Hugh Horsley AFC.

The funeral of Charles Cawthorne took place on 16 March 2017 at St Michael & All Angels Church, Highworth, Swindon.

Sgt Pilot Reg Dear

Reg Dear was posted to 61 Sqn in April 1944. His first operation on 24 April was to Munich. He completed 35 ops. In 1947 he moved to New Zealand and had a very successful flying career. He was very much involved with



the D-Day invasion in 1944. On 21 October 2016 he was presented with the French legion d'honneur at the Christchurch Memorial RSA by Madame Martine Marshall-Durieux, Honorary French Consul. Reg passed away on Saturday 11 March 2017.

Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe

Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons



The Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe was formed in 2016 to retain the memories of those who served in Bomber Command and served or failed to return with No.50 & No.61 Squadrons.



To join the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe please contact
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