

Old Dux Association

Newsletter



Compiled by A. McRae

Autumn 2003

Annual Dinner & Meeting

This is the last newsletter before the date of our Annual Dinner so this is the final reminder to book your place(s) now. The booking list for the dinner will close in early October as this when we have to submit the final numbers to the Mess.

At this time George Poole would be extremely grateful if you could pay the full amount due, and of course any outstanding subscriptions you may have forgotten to pay!

If you are staying in local accommodation let Bob Hope know the details and if there are sufficient numbers he will arrange a taxi service to and from the mess. If this happens the driver must be paid direct by the passengers at the end of each journey. Also let Bob know the registration number and passengers names in each vehicle who will be attending the Sunday meeting.

Newcomers note: Entry to the Museum on the day of meeting day is through the main (Guardroom) gate and not the public entrance. Also, all occupants whether they come to the actual meeting or not have to pay £2.50 attendance fee. This not holiday money for George but a fee to the Museum for the use of their premises, please ensure this is paid as any shortfall has to be made up from our funds.

Raffle

We are again asking for items to put in for the raffle, previous appeals have yielded a veritable cornucopia of goodies which has ensured that the raffle, although somewhat protracted duration has at least kept most people in their seats until the end of the evening!(What a devious plot!!)

Officers Mess

A recent article in the Cambridge press revealed that the Imperial War Museum had applied for planning permission to convert the existing Mess building into a 120 bed luxury hotel by building an extension at the rear of the main building.

However the latest news is that the initial planning application has been rejected as the proposed extension falls foul of some listed buildings. It is believed that one of these building is the old camp cinema, well known to back row Lothario's!

We are keeping a watchful eye on this development as it could affect our plans for the year 2004 Annual Dinner.

As some of you are aware I come from that lovely land North of the border and I receive from the Aberdeen & North-East Scotland Family History Society their quarterly journal. In the current edition there is an article which you may find amusing.

We are indebted to the contributor Alison McCall and the editor Dave Anderson for permission to reproduce the article.

Dux Boards

Do brains run in your family? Was great-Granny an "affa clivir quine"* , or great-Grandad a "heidy knipe"** , or anyone reputed to be a "lad (or lass) o' pairts"***? If so, their names might be preserved somewhere on a school dux board.

Dux boards are wooden boards on which the name of the best pupil in the school is painted, often in gold paint. These boards are usually prominently displayed in a school. Schools may have had just one annual dux, or a male and a female dux, or a junior and a senior dux, or an arts and a science dux. Some schools have dux boards going back over 100 years. Families were usually proud of having produced a dux- so, why not ask around? You may have had one in your family!

*awfully clever girl

** brainy person

*** outstanding scholar who goes on to do well in life.

Refresher course for our pilot members

- Every take off is optional, every landing is mandatory.
- Flying isn't dangerous. Crashing is.
- Always try to keep the number of landings equal to the number of take-offs.
- It's a good idea to keep the pointy end going forward as much as possible
- If you push the stick forward the houses get bigger. If you pull the stick back they get smaller.
- When in doubt hold your altitude. No-one ever collided with sky.
- In the continuing battle between aluminium things
- going hundreds of miles per hour and the ground going zero miles per hour, the ground has yet to lose.
- Stay out of clouds, mountains have been known to hide in clouds.
- A good landing is one from which you can walk away. A great landing is one after which they can use the plane again.

How three fighter boys from Duxford nearly became three air gunners over Cologne.

Some time in 1940 (or 1941), Duxford became the base for the Air Fighting Development Unit, more generally known as the AFDU and remained there until 'pushed out' by the USAAF in 1943. Apart from the 'permanent staff', consisting of the Commanding Officer, a Wing commander, and an O/C Flying, a Sqdn.Ldr, there were four or five junior officers posted in from operational squadrons at the end of their tour of 'ops'.

The basic work of the AFDU was to test anything new which was suggested for use in Fighter Command, this could vary from a new or bought aircraft such as the Mustang or , to a new type of goggles or different armament. In 1942 the unit was asked to assist Bomber Command by providing Spitfires for mock attacks while instructing the bomber pilots in the art of fighter evasion.

Accordingly a sub flight was formed with an experienced bomber command pilot as CO, three of the junior officers and the necessary ground staff. The latter were flown around in whatever transport aircraft was available, at first an Anson or Oxford and later a Douglas Boston. The first CO was a rangy Scottish Sqdn.Ldr. named Jock Murray who had survived his first 'tour' as a Sgt. Pilot, being awarded a DFC and bar, a second tour as an officer, rising rapidly to the rank of Sqdn Ldr. with the award of a DFC and, I believe, a DSO, (or perhaps that came later). He was a real "press on" type, who later volunteered for a third tour on Pathfinder Lancaster's and ended up flying Mosquito's in the same capacity.

The three fighter pilots to fly the spitfires were Flying Officer Walker, Canadian Flying Officer Hugh Godefroy and yours truly, newly commissioned Pilot Officer Len Thorne. I had joined the unit at the end of my tour with 602 "City of Glasgow" Auxiliary Sqdn. for a nominal six months rest as an AFDU Pilot. Hugh was a quiet, handsome young man who had acquired an Alsatian puppy which accompanied him on his travels either in the spare aircraft or tucked into a parachute bag with Hugh in the cockpit, inevitably the puppy was called "Spitty". I do not remember a lot about F/O Walker except that he was well thought of by most of the WAAFs on the station. Not only was I newly commissioned, but also newly married, only too anxious to complete each bomber command 'tour' and return to Duxford and my 'sleeping out' pass!

I had arrived at Duxford on May 6th 1942 still in my Flt. Sgt's uniform, only to be told to 'buzz off' as they did not have NCO pilots in the AFDU. A check revealed that my commission was gazetted on May 1st but no one had told me, I was given 7 days leave and told not to reappear until properly dressed as an officer.

I joined the unit on May 12th, was introduced to Jock Murray etc. and ordered off to Marham for fighter affiliation with the poor souls who were flying Stirlings. In the days following we visited Waddington, Syerston, White Waltham and Langham. The real business started

on May 29th with a trip to the 'Lancs' at Waddington, then Scampton then the following morning back to Waddington.

It all seemed very quiet and we were told by the duty officer that a briefing was to take place at 1200 hours when all would be explained, meanwhile everyone was confined to camp. Through the good offices of Sqdn. Ldr Murray we were allowed to attend the briefing and learnt that the big day had arrived, absolute maximum effort. **The first 1,000 bomber raid on Germany, the target-Cologne.** Every squadron and unit in the command was asked to get every possible aircraft ready for the attack including conversion units and even trainee crews. OTU's were combed for extra aircraft to make up the number. Our intrepid Sqdn. Ldr. Jock immediately asked for an interview with the base commander, I believe it was the one armed hero, Gus (later Sir Augustus) Walker and volunteered his services. He was told that every serviceable aircraft was allocated, but after some enquiries found one at Scampton which was in maintenance for one or more engine changes. If it was ready in time Jock could have it, but what about a crew? Jock was told that a navigator/bomber aimer, and probably a flight engineer could be found, but air gunners were a major problem. To our absolute horror Jock said that was no problem, he had three fighter pilots with him who could go along for the ride.

Of course we expected that this idea would be turned down flat, but nothing was said and so three unwilling "volunteers" spent a few anxious hours before the news came through that the Scampton aircraft would not be ready in time. There was no truth in the rumour that three shiftY strangers were seen at Scampton putting handfuls of sand in the engine oil, Jock was greatly disappointed but we three were mightily relieved.

We spent the next few hours watching preparations for the raid, and later the massive Lancasters taking off heavily laden with their bomb loads. I do not remember seeing them return but have a vague memory of being invited to join them for their 'after the raid' eggs and bacon. The records tell us that 1046 aircraft started out from their bases, but due to heavy cloud and severe icing, over 100 of the older aircraft were forced to turn back. A smaller number were shot down by German fighters over Holland but over 900 reached the target area. Surprisingly only two were known to have been lost due to collision, these were included in the total of 38 planes which failed to return to England.

The following morning I received an hours instruction from Jock in flying a twin engined aircraft, in this case the Airspeed Oxford. It was the only instruction I ever received in flying multi-engined machines, Jock gave his approval and later that day I flew the 'Oxford' to Duxford and back to Waddington with a load of passengers.

It is interesting to note that since starting my flying career and up to joining AFDU, I had flown only four types of aircraft, the Tiger Moth at EFTS, the Miles Master at SFTS, the Hawker Hurricane for advanced solo training and the Spitfire Mk's 1 & 2. In the first three weeks at Duxford

I added four more, the Stinson Reliant, the Boulton Paul Defiant, the Fairey Fulmar, and the Airspeed Oxford. The following month four more were added, the Blackburn Skua, the Lancaster (2nd pilot status only), the Mustang Mk 1 and the Douglas Boston. In August there were the Miles Magister, the Vickers Wellington, and the Airacobra. So it went on and by the time my service flying career was over I had flown over 70 types and variations of WW2 aircraft. These included most Mk's of Spitfire up to the 21, ditto of Mustangs, Typhoon, Tempest and the Meteor Jet, and also the two most feared enemy fighters, the Me109G and the Focke Wulf FW 190 A3.

But by the grace of God I did not fly to Cologne in a Lancaster bomber as one of the air Gunners and I salute those brave chaps who did.

Two years ago Len was made a life honorary "Friend of the Fighter Collection" one of the Duxford based Vintage aircraft companies, and this is copy of the article he wrote for their house magazine.

Directory update

New Members

Bartle	Glen bration	1634-863407	Kent	Instrument Mech. 65 Sqdn & Cali- Room 1952-1954
Bassett	William Frank	01892-864831	Sussex	Airframe Mech 66 Sqdn 1948
Brown	William	01159-226882	Notts	Electrical mech, MT 1958-1959
Gaitskell	John Brian	01543-424930	Staffs	Air Traffic Control GCA 1956
Griffiths	Alan	01924-253162	W.Yorks	Armourer 64Sqdn & Armoury 1958-1959
Shepherd	Colin F	0121-558-0199	W/Midlands	Officers Mess Steward 1957-1958
Wellum,	G.H.A.	01326-240078	Cornwall	Pilot 92 Sqdn 1940
Willett	Philip G.	01480-217225	Cambs	Supplier II EPAS 1952-1954
Woodward	Gordon	01993-811229	Oxford	Armourer 56 Sqdn 1940-1942

Amendment

Jennie Whitley (Canada) Nee Stott not Stutt, and their post code is now V1E 3H6.