



NEWSLETTER

December 2012

www.olddux.org

Compiled by Larry Cross



Dear Members

My decision to travel up to Duxford to attend the October meeting by rail seemed like a good idea at the time - let the train take the strain. London's underground system was the biggest challenge arriving at Whittlesford, now Whittlesford Parkway, only twenty minutes later than scheduled. However, the return journey took 5½ hours – normally two by car. It also seemed a lonely journey, apparently being the only English speaking person travelling that weekend ! All said it was worth it.

I was met by my old buddy Pete Gibbard at the Red Lion, Bob and Pat Scott, Bill and Shirley Amos, Kerris and Colin Denley and Mike Knighton all showed up a little later. A great night was had by all and the bonhomie continued at the Sunday lunch before the meeting when we were then joined by Alan and Anthea Garner, Trevor and Hillary Bliss, Anne and Les Gange together with Jim Garlinge and Stan Dell.

The Meeting

In Bob's absence the meeting was chaired by Jim Garlinge, with aplomb and commenced at 13.30hrs: He welcomed members and then requested all to stand to observe the minutes silence, remembering those no longer with us. With just 38 members attending it was a little disappointing but so was the fact that of the 17 cars I counted parked up, only 8 bore the Old Dux sticker. They are still available if anyone needs a replacement. Email or call me on 01903 207056

Alan Garner the only new member attending told us he was posted to Duxford for the last year of his four years as a radar/mech.on 65Sqn (cheers and boos !)

Sarah Russell kindly agreed to attend our meeting and gave us an update on all the ongoing activity in preparation for the opening of the Historic Duxford Exhibition. As a major contributor we will receive an invitation to the launch in March/April 2013.

The IWM were able to confirm their Air Shows programme early so we were able to fix a date for our Annual Dinner in **May which will be Saturday 11th the cost £30 a head.**

The AGM will follow on Sunday 12th.

The motion to move the May Dinner back to October was raised with only two votes in favour.

It should be noted however that the Red Lion could only offer us one date in May, due to the growing demand as a wedding venue.

Remembrance Day at Duxford

It was a lovely cold crisp day (wasn't it Anne ?) with a huge turnout that had started to choke the roads up by 10.15 am when we arrived. There were already probably in excess of a couple of thousand on the airfield including a huge number of motor bikes, many of them ridden by men old enough to be members of the ODA ! We soon located our places in the Conservation Hall and also made contact with Louise Wood who had reserved seats for us.

I met the lovely Esther Blaine (Publicity Officer for IWM) at the Control Tower, so I wasn't late. In preparation for the interview, I had agreed with others on the principal points that we wanted to get over. This was passed on to Colin, the interviewer, to peruse over the weekend. It all went very well and virtually the whole briefing sheet was used, so we got some excellent coverage as the feed back has shown.

The call for the two minute silence at 11 o'clock was well respected, the only sounds to be heard were the occasional murmur of childrens voices and with so many people there, it was almost eerie.

The remembrance service was superb. The area was laid out with seats for about 250, but by the time the service was about to start well over 1000 people were crammed in. The ODA was represented by Anne and Les Gange, Alan and Jenny McRae together with Anne Brinkley and myself. The wreath was laid on behalf of the ODA by a very distinguished looking Allan McRae, which was also fitting in view of his service to us all.

Another lovely surprise, given the nature of the day, was that a lady sitting behind leant forward and introduced herself as Helen, widow of the late John Milne, so we were able to integrate her into our group and make her, and her daughter Louise, welcome.

Helen is holding a memorial service for John on the 24th November, this is Family only

Their will be another on the 24th April at Duxford when members of the ODA will be invited..

Letters of thanks were sent to Esther Blaine and Louise Wood with regard to the arrangements for the Remembrance Day at Duxford.

On the left Jennie McRae, Anne Brinkley, Anne and Les Gange, Allan McRae and Helen and Louise Milne.

Stan Dell



Malcolm Niblett Responds

Re: Les Millgate's reply to Julia Tanner (Sept 2011)

I knew Dave Tanner quite well - before 65 Sqn - even before being in uniform. We were at Loughborough at the same time, but on different programmes. I was there longer. Then came 65 where we shared a few incidents together. One hilarious one involving him, me, and Group Captain Bateson (believe it or not!!). He was a fellow pall bearer at the Sorenson/Vaughan (take your pick) funeral service. The last time I actually saw him was when he and his bride to be, visited us in Duxford village. In '55 I think. After he left the Sqn, I remember he came back for a visit flying in a Venom, offspring of the Vampire? The next I heard was that he participated in "live action" with a Venom Sqn during the Suez Crisis, which may explain the DFC.

The last time I heard his name mentioned was here in Canada. At a reception for the Red Arrows, talk inevitably turned to Duxford, 65 etc. and I remember one young chap mentioning his boss at one time was a Wing Commander David Tanner ! I first thought of sending this as a post to "Messages," but then the spectre of verification raised its ugly head; so on second thoughts I decided I would just let you know what information I had and remembered about an old Sqn member and friend.



The Old Dux Association

ODA was founded in 1995 by Bob Hope, Jim Garlinge, and Jim Lynn.

The Inaugural meeting was on 14th May at the front of the control tower. 51 attended of which 35 were ex Dux personnel, the meeting was generously supported by Steve Woolford who provided various facilities to get us started.

The principal aim of our association is to reunite those who served at Duxford, regardless of rank or trade, who enjoyed the unique atmosphere that prevailed throughout its active service life.

Current membership is 270, with a huge range of time span, geographical location, trades and age, approximately 10% of our members are ex WRAF, which although that is probably representative of those who served here, we continue to work hard to improve that number. Our members live throughout the world, USA, Canada, Australia, France and Greece. Thankfully despite the constraints of age and geography they still attend meetings here at Duxford.

As Duxford ceased to operate as an RAF base in 1961, even those who were say 20 years old at the time are now in their 70s', by comparison we have several members in their 90s' the range of trades in our ranks fully represents all those required to run and maintain an operational station during our time.

The last operational squadrons serving at Duxford were 64 flying Javelins and 65 with Hunters, within the membership the squadrons represent about 40%, a further 40% are from all other support staff from the 1950s' period, the remaining 20% are the real nuggets of history, representing various Duxford squadrons through the ages. We are privileged to have 3 members who served in 19 Squadron with Spitfire Mk 1s in 1938. Bearing in mind that Duxford was the first station to be equipped with the Spitfire these 3 men are unique in RAF history.

Another important and significant member of the ODA is a man who started his career as a junior pilot on 64 Squadron and went on to become Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns GCB, KCVO, CBE, FRAeS. Sir Richard kindly agreed to be our president and plays an active role in supporting the ODA. It takes inspiration for anyone to want to set up something like the ODA. In our case it was that everyone who ever served at Duxford has a strong emotional link to their time here. No matter who you speak to, of any rank or trade, regular or national service, in any conversation it is always said in one form or another. Duxford was a happy station. Why was this?

No one can quite put their finger on it, but there are clues. Duxford was a fighter station with huge traditions and a big hitting history, which was soon appreciated by those who served there. It was also an air force still run by heroes, tried and tested, with nothing to prove. We had station commanders who knew and appreciated that while the end game was to get fully functional armed aircraft into the sky, squadrons could not operate efficiently unless they had the full support and backup of everyone serving on the station so everyone was important, and were made to feel so.

In any organisation, if the top man (or woman) has got it right so has everyone else. Duxford had a succession of the best. Throughout the station there was a good mixture of age and experience. We still had N.C.O.s' who had the experience of serving throughout the war, others who were educated in modern technology and avionics and of course young volunteers and national servicemen. This blend of know how, can do, make do, want to do, and the multifaceted skills and abilities of national servicemen was potent, everyone had a role and played it.

The geography of the station layout also had an impact on how personnel were affected. With the exception of medical and messing arrangements, all other trades were parallel to, and alongside the runway everyone consequently felt involved. Whatever the reasons, Duxford was a very happy station which is why the motto on our logo is "genius loci" which refers to a location's distinctive atmosphere and means "the spirit of the place."

Another important aspect for us in the ODA, is that Duxford is not only still here, but in many ways, still operational. So many ex RAF stations are buried under housing estates or shopping malls, meaning that many have nowhere to revisit, here at Duxford the IWM have done a brilliant job of retaining the past while securing the future, anyone who served here can still walk and stand in recognisable places. The old hangars are used sympathetically for renovation and conservation, in effect, the old sheltering the old, at the heart of the airfield.

The new American and Airspace museums are at extremes, significant but not encroaching, exciting and relevant. Of course we also have the air shows our runways are still used, it is still the Duxford where we had the best time of our young lives.

As we have already stated our prime objective is to reunite old friends and colleagues and we achieve this in several ways. We have two meetings here per year, one of which coincides with our popular annual dinner (this year held at the rejuvenated Red Lion in Whittlesford) a traditional RAF pub, second we supply a directory of names, telephone and e-mail addresses together with trade and dates at Duxford. Thirdly, we have three or four newsletters every year. These are the heartbeat of the association, keeping everyone in touch throughout the world. The newsletter is compiled and printed by our media representative Larry Cross, and he does a brilliant job, but he is the first to say that he relies completely on the membership for articles, Larry also runs our website.

Jim Garlinge (vice chairman and founder member) is responsible for recruitment and is to be found by the 65 sqdn Hunter aircraft in hangar 4 at every airshow. He does a great job, borne out by the fact that, the age profile of our members and the sadly high attrition rate, he keeps our membership maintained at around 270.

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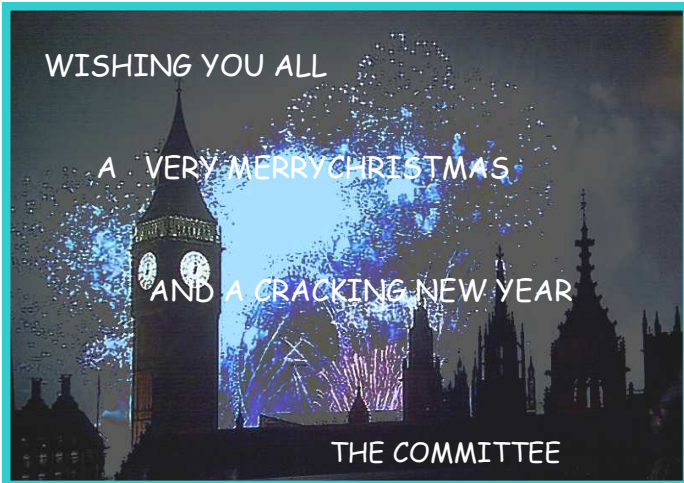
Colin interviews Stan in the Control Tower

Our secretary, Anne Gange a former WRAF, keeps the admin machine well organised and ensures that we have a memorable dinner each year, surprising us on each occasion with a topical theme which is kept secret until dinner is served. The association pickpocket, dignified with the title of treasurer, is Stan Dell, who does his best to keep us solvent. Finally, already mentioned, but worth repeating, the man with the vision, founder and popular chairman is Bob Hope, who runs the committee with a light touch but keeps our wings straight and level.

We are all well aware of and grateful for the enduring and generous support we receive from all at the IWM Duxford. We in turn are always trying to find ways of reciprocating that support. The ODA was a sponsor of airspace, and several of our members were also individual sponsors. Apart from our modest financial donations to the History of Duxford project, perhaps our biggest asset is our membership with so much history of their time at Duxford between them they, together with eighteen years of our newsletters, are a rich resource for the IWM historians to draw upon.

Today we are here to represent these people. We have come to give thanks and pay tribute to all our armed forces, present and past who have served and are no longer with us, by laying a wreath in their memory.

Our promotional literature states "If you served at Duxford at any time, in any role, service or civilian, you are eligible to join us. It costs £5 to join which is both joining fee and subscription for that year. You can find us on the web at www.ouldux.org or just tap in Old Dux. We will be delighted to welcome you.



PROVOST - The Unfinished Manuscript - Gordon Kay

It's more often than not the unexpected things that dictate the way one's life goes.

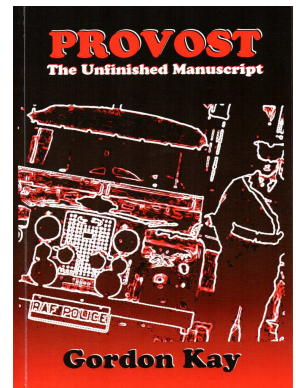
We've all heard the saying, 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans'.

Well, with Alex, God had a real good belly laugh. In fact he's still laughing, but Alex no longer cares; he survived.

Set to do 'the twenty two,' Alex's life was turned upside down at the three years eleven months marker.

The Spooks stepped in with an offer he couldn't refuse ... well, he could, but it would mean doing at least twenty elsewhere, and Alex didn't fancy the view from behind bars. And so Alex entered what he calls The Other World.

Alex was a policeman, Provost to be exact, but God had other plans and changed all that. So, Alex spent almost fifty years doing things nice people don't talk about. Alex - Alex Gordon - is the real working name of Gordon Kay the author of a new book due



for publication on 7th December 2012. Gordon Kay is a nom de plume under which the real Alex Gordon writes. And Provost (The Unfinished Manuscript) is the first in a five-book series, which is based on events in Alex Gordon's life, from March 1956 to the present day. While fortunate indeed to be a member of the Royal Air Force Police Provost Branch, Alex served at West Kirby, Netheravon, No. 4 Police District Duxford, No.12 Provost and Security Services Detachment Geilenkirchen, No. 1 Provost and Security Services Detachment Sundern and then the island of Sylt before returning to Sundern. Sylt was where God laughed

Today, 'Alex' lives in Greece with his wife Emm; his rock, his 'partner in crime' and his protector of more than thirty years.

GORDON KENNARD.

In conversation with Don Chappell at the last meeting, he recalled that a Meteor Mk8 crashed on the Woolwich Arsenal when he was apprenticed there in 1953. He was on his way to lunch with his mate on the pillion and saw the formations flying over and witnessed the aircraft spiralling down to earth... We assumed that it could have been rehearsals for the coronation,however,

In a rehearsal for the battle of Britain flypast in September 1953 W/Commander Robert Duncan Yule flying out of Horsham St Faith (Norwich) in his meteor Mk8 carrying his initials on the side was leading the mass of meteors on the approach path for Buck house, he moved up and over to get a good view of the formation and suddenly found that they were overtaking the lone Hurricane. They were fast approaching the point of no return at Woolwich and manoeuvred to rejoin the formation. What he wasn't aware of was his no2 was flying below and alongside as any good wingman should in combat, they collided knocking W/Co Yules' tail plane off and shattering the no2's cockpit canopy, giving him concussion.

W/Co Yules' aircraft went into a flat spin and crashed between 2 explosives huts on the arsenal site and burst into flames, Arsenal staff attempted to douse the conflagration and rescue the pilot but to no avail. About 7 awards were given to these chaps at later date. The no2 made an emergency landing at Hornchurch.

The original crash photos were taken by the Evening Standard from a hovering helicopter, they were taken to court and fined £10,000.00 for endangering life by flying too close to HT wires and flying over a restricted area, a lot of money in 1953, it led them to dispose of said helicopter. Ed.

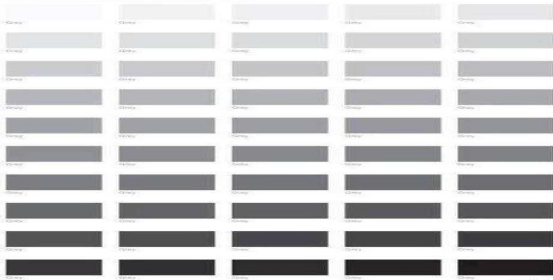
Aircraft QuizShould be easy peasy for you lot !

Q, What is the main advantage of a rotary winged aircraft over a fixed winged aircraft ? (See Page 4)

PROVOST - The Unfinished Manuscript will be available from www.amazon.co.uk at £11.99 (plus P&P) and from www.amazon.com at \$14.99 (plus P&P). A Kindle version will also be available. For Amazon's European market (Germany, France and Spain) the book is priced at €14,99 (plus P&P). In addition to this, it will also be possible to order a signed special edition of the book directly from www.provostthebook.com.

This edition will be printed with an additional page allowing buyers to give the book a special touch and write a personal inscription to the recipient. And as an added bonus each copy will be autographed by the author. This book will be available at €14,99 (plus P&P).

Also on Page 4 for your Christmas enjoyment 'FIFTY SHADES of GREY' (MEN ONLY)



What do you mean you "don't know" where sleigh it is ?!!

While the C-5 was turning over its engines, a female crewman gave the G.I.s on board the usual info regarding seat belts, emergency exits, etc. 'Now sit back and enjoy your trip while your captain, Judith Campbell and crew take you safely to Afghanistan' An old MSgt. in the eighth row thought to himself, 'Did I hear her right? Is the captain a woman?' 'When the attendant came by he said 'Did I understand you right? Is the captain a woman?' 'Yes,' said the attendant, 'In fact, this entire crew is female.'

'My God,' he said, 'I wish I had two double scotch and sodas. I don't know what to think with only women up there in the cockpit.'

'And another thing, Sergeant, We no longer call it the cockpit.....It's now the Box Office

DID YOU GET IT RIGHT ?



It never Rains but

This poor chap was in hospital to have a leg amputated below the knee. After the op the surgeon came round to see him, telling him that the op went very well but he had some good news and some bad news. 'What's the bad news then Doc?', asked the patient. 'Er, well we've amputated the wrong leg' said the surgeon, then added quickly 'The good news is the guy in the next bed would like to buy your slippers !'

A Christmas story .

(Bob Scott)

A couple were Christmas shopping and the whole place was heaving, packed with last minute shoppers. Walking through the shopping centre the surprised wife looked up from a window display and noticed her husband was nowhere to be seen. They had lots still to do and she became very upset.

She rummaged in her handbag and found her mobile to call her husband to ask him where he was.

The husband in a calm voice replied: "Darling, you remember the jewellery shop we went into five years ago, where you fell in love with that diamond necklace that we could not afford and I told you that one day I would get it for you...?"

His wife's eyes filled with tears of emotion, crying softly and stifling a sob she whispered: "Yes, I remember that jewellery shop..."

.....Well, I'm in the pub next door to it!"

Be Careful over Xmas says Ian Swindale: When you drink vodka over ice. it can give you kidney failure. When you drink rum over ice. it can give you liver failure. When you drink whiskey over ice. it can give you heart problems. When you drink gin over ice, it can give you brain problems. Apparently? ice is really bad for you Warn all your friends.

Bad News

Coming into breakfast with the post he says 'There's a letter from your mum,' Well what's it about?' says she. 'Deary me, her hand writing doesn't get any better', says he. 'Is that an I or an O?... She, glancing at it says 'I think it's an O' - 'Then it's bad news says he, your brother's shot himself !

'THE DAY WAR BROKE OUT' with apologies to Rob Wilton

EXCERPTS from the MEMOIRS of CHIEF TECHNICIAN RON POUNTAIN


I was trained as an armourer at RAF Eastchurch leading up to the start of the Second World War. Having completed my training I was posted to 64 Squadron at RAF Church Fenton in Yorkshire. I arrived on the squadron some 7 or 8 weeks before war was declared on Sunday 3rd September 1939.

64 Squadron was formed in Egypt, in November 1937. It was formed by amalgamating the three Demon Flights, which formed the "Defence of Egypt". The Demon Flights each had six Hawker Demon aircraft, six pilots and a miniscule ground crew. The ground crews were all 'old timers' with very old fashioned ideas. This attitude would cause serious problems later. As a result of the threat of war in Europe the squadron was posted home to Church Fenton in August 1938, leaving their Demon aircraft in Egypt. In September 1938 the squadron re-equipped with Blenheim fighters. The Blenheim fighter was, in fact, a modified form of the Mk1 Blenheim Bomber, often called the "short nosed Blenheim". The Mk4 Mercury engines were replaced by slightly more powerful MK6 engines and the bomb bay was modified to accommodate the battery of four .303 Browning guns with 350 rounds of ammunition per gun.

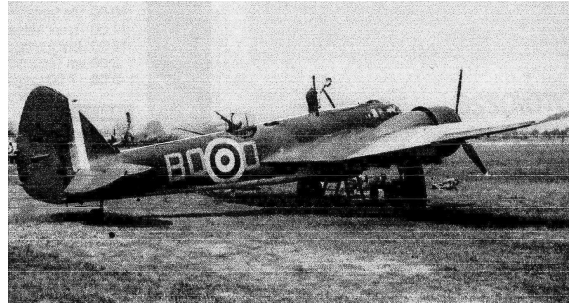
Blenheim bombers flew a crew of 3. A pilot in the left hand front seat, an observer in the right hand seat and an air gunner in the mid upper turret. In those days only pilots and observers were full time aircrew. Observers were, essentially, navigators and bomb aimers. Air gunners were members of the ground crew and were paid flying pay in addition to their normal service pay. NINE PENCE PER DAY UNQUALIFIED. ONE SHILLING AND SIX PENCE PER DAY QUALIFIED. Qualifying meant having "passed out" from gunnery school. The course was 7 weeks long for tradesmen other than armourers, 2 weeks long for armourers. 90% of gunners were armourers. We spent all of Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings cleaning aircraft and polishing drip trays.

All the pilots including the Flight Commanders and ground crews cleaned aircraft which were painted silver. All the non technical staff swept the hangar and cleaned the walls and fittings. The only people excused were the C/O. Squadron Leader George Beamish. The only other person excused aircraft cleaning was Warrant Officer Joe Plummer, the Squadron Engineer Officer - known as Little Hitler. I was astonished at how little flying the Squadron seemed to do. We spent more time pushing aircraft in and out of the hangar than we did flying. The Squadron did not have any tractors for towing aircraft. None of us ever worked on the same aircraft two days running nor did we ever work with the same fitters and riggers for any length of time. As for the pilots, they lived in a different world. There was no real communication between pilots and groundcrew. In fact, the only reference to pilots that I can recall was a mention of the "Terrible Trio", Flying Officer Jefferies, Flying Officer O'Meara and Flying Officer Saunders.

The first sign of change came at the end of July 1939 with the arrival on the squadron of two new Flight Sergeants, Flight Sgt. Wilson who took charge of A Flight and Flight Sgt. Peters who took charge of B Flight. At the same time three new sergeants arrived. I think one was electrical and one instruments but to us the most important was Sgt. Spencer, the new armament boss. He made it very clear from day one that things were going to change. A week later Sgt. Spencer called us into the Armoury and told us that on the following Tuesday and Wednesday the Squadron would undertake GUNNERY PRACTICE. It then transpired that not one of the armourers on the Squadron had ever armed an aircraft. Not even the corporals. On the Tuesday we trundled handcarts loaded with red and white notices "CAUTION - AIRCRAFT ARMED" together with red and white tape to the end of the hangar apron. The four aircraft were carefully lined up, Sgt. Spencer explained that they were lined up so that if the guns were fired accidentally the bullets would land in an area of scrubby woodland which was free of people and animals. We armed the aircraft with just 100 rounds of ammunition for the belly guns, Sgt. Spencer then loaded the two centre guns. He explained that the morning sorties would fire the inboard guns, the afternoon sorties would fire the outboard guns. The aircraft were then surrounded by warning notices with the red and white tape stretched between them.

Considering that the Browning gun fires 1200 rounds per minute one 100 rounds would be fired in 5 SECONDS. Not much practice for the pilots, not Sgt. Spencer's decision but that of the Command Armament Officer. We carried on this laissez faire way throughout August but the news got more disturbing by the day. On Friday 1st September we all realised that something important was about to happen. Two bus loads of airmen arrived at Church Fenton from one of the maintenance depots complete with lorry loads of painting materials. Starting with 72 Squadron Spitfires, they painted all the silver aircraft in green and brown camouflage. They also added Squadron identification letters in dark red, 64 Squadron ident letters were SH. In addition individual aircraft were identified by a single letter. The letters on the side of the fuselage were 30 inches high. Absolutely huge, they were arranged as SH  A: A single aircraft identity letter 12 inches high was painted on the nose.

Finally came the Fatal Day. Sunday 3rd September 1939. As usual the Squadron was on Church Parade. Best Blue, best shoes, webbing belts, cheese cutter caps. On Sunday mornings Squadron Leader Beamish took the parade and always carried out a minute inspection of us. This morning we fell in under our Flight Sergeant disciplinarian, whose name I cannot remember. He handed over, as usual, to the Adjutant Surprise surprise. The adjutant ordered all clerical staff and all Corporals in charge of barrack rooms to fall out and report immediately to the Station Orderly Room. He, the Adjutant, then handed over to the C/O. Another surprise. No inspection, we marched straight off to Church. After Church we marched back and were dismissed immediately. We clattered up the stairs to our room to find Cpl Blud standing there with a clip board in his hand. On each bed were three large sheets of brown paper, lengths of string and three gummed labels. We threw off the belts, hats and tunics. Cpl Blud then shouted for "A bit of hush. Let's have some hush" Then, reading from his clipboard he made the following announcement, "I am required by the Commanding Officer of R.A.F. Church Fenton to inform you that, with effect from 11,00 hours today, this country is at war with Germany". Somebody said "Crikey, what does that mean" Cpl Blud replied "It means that the Luftwaffe will be here this afternoon dropping bombs on us." He went on more seriously, "All personnel are confined to camp from now until further notified. All personnel will now pack up all civilian clothes and accoutrements using the paper and string provided, parcels will be addressed to your home address and left in the lower hall for collection. All personnel will change into working blue and, after dinner, will report to Sgt. Spencer in the Squadron Armoury".



Blenheim Mk.1

Continued over

So over to the armoury we went Sgt. Spencer was already there. "A" Flight and "B" Flight armourers were to load all their tools and wet weather gear on to the first of the lorries lined up outside the hanger. We climbed into the lorry and Sgt. Spencer got into the front with a bunch of keys in his hand, we then set off around the peri track.

Church Fenton was a newly built 1936 pattern station with a concrete runway 1500 yards long and a concrete perimeter track all way round. On the way round we passed three new wooden buildings for 72 squadron use, before arriving at 64 squadron's buildings. There were signs saying 64 SQUADRON OPS ROOM AND PILOTS CREW ROOM. Then 64 SQUADRON FLIGHT OFFICES AND AIRMANS CREW ROOM. Finally 64 SQUADRON ARMOURY AND AMMUNITION STORE. Just beyond the buildings were 14 concrete hard standings with access to the peri track. None of us had any knowledge that these facilities existed.

We jumped down unloaded our kit and Sgt. Spencer unlocked the door, inside was a brand new fully equipped armoury. Benches, cleaning tanks, drying racks. Absolutely everything we needed. Opposite were 12 steel wardrobe sized lockers. At the end of the room were two blackboards marked out in columns in white paint annotated "A" Flight and "B" Flight. Boxes of chalk at the ready. Sgt. Spencer approached the boards and in the next 15 minutes the whole philosophy of aircraft servicing in the R.A.F. would change completely. In the first column he wrote the capital letters A to F. In the second column, along side A he wrote Cpl. Blud. Against each letter a name, alongside E he wrote LAC Pountain. Exactly the same on the "B" Flight board. Then the explanation. Each armourer would be solely responsible for the aircraft against his name. If the aircraft was changed due to unserviceability F/Sgt. Wilson would notify the crew of the letter of the replacement aircraft. "All of you are aware that our aircraft are now notified by letters" he said. If the aircraft is serviceable and on dispersal the armourer named, will without prompting carry out daily and between flight inspections. If the aircraft is on dispersal it will, AT ALL TIMES, BE FULLY ARMED. Is that fully understood? "YES SERGEANT" from the other half there were mutterings "It will never work" - but, by heck, it did.

"Right" says Sgt. Spencer. "Let's go and load ammunition". Round the back we went. Outside the ammunition store door were six steel handcarts with two rubber tyred wheels chained to brackets on the wall. They were marked 64 SQUADRON ARMAMENT. Inside were piles of transfer boxes marked in chalk on the lids "350 rnds. Also piled up were brand new crates each containing 4x100 round magazines for the Vickers K gun in the turrets.

We were not aware in the previous days that war was coming but someone must have been very busy over the previous week, painting aircraft, furnishing buildings and preparing this vast stock of ammunition.

As a point of interest most ground crew had never spoken to a pilot they lived in a different world to us. Fitters and riggers met pilots when they came out to fly and helped pilots to strap in and start up but almost every time it would be a different pilot. For armourers, electricians, instrument men and wireless people we did our work, signed the F700 and went back to our work rooms, we certainly never spoke to any pilots. All that was about to change

During these early months of the war 72 squadron spitfires were held at readiness pending German attacks, while 64 squadron Blenheims flew a standing patrol from the Humber to the Tyne. After a couple of weeks the two long service L.A.C's were posted. Cpl Blud complained that we would struggle to cope but Sgt Spencer sent two maintenance flight armourers over to help out. These postings left the flight short of air gunners.

A few days later 4 armourers, including me, were summoned to the Flt, Commanders office. He was now effectively running the squadron. He asked us, in a manner that would not accept refusal, to volunteer as air gunners. As unqualified air gunners we would receive 9 pence per day flying pay (63 pence per week in today's money 26p). We all volunteered. Armed with appropriate documents we went off to the stores to collect a kit bag full of flying clothing, a flying helmet and goggles and a harness and parachute. We were warned not to wear any flying clothing while carrying out any ground duties.

That afternoon Flying Officer O'Meara came to tell me that I would be flying with him on the patrol the following day. "10.30 take off" he said, "Don't be late". Next morning, having completed and signed for my daily inspection, I went back to the armoury and got into of my flying gear. Half past nine, with the help of some of the experienced air gunners I got dressed. Wear everything, I was told, It's mighty cold in a Blenheim turret. At 10 o'clock I walked across to the aircraft. The rest of the crew were already there. Paddy gave me a mighty boost up the wing. Joe handed me my parachute pack. I went up to the cockpit, got in, and made my way back to the turret. I stowed my parachute pack in the stowage. Then whipped it out and clipped it on to the harness chest hooks. I practiced this two or three times. Loaded the magazine off the seat on to the K gun and sat waiting for Flight Officer O'Meara.

Voices below and in a few minutes the pilot was there. "Feeling alright" he said "Bit nervous" I said, "You will be alright" "Strap in and plug your helmet in" and he was gone. A few minutes later he called me on the intercom. Checked that we could hear each other clearly. "Starting up now". Usual engine starting noises and then we were taxiing out. Not far to go. Taking off from this end of the runway. Brakes are on. Throttles opened. The aircraft shudders and we are off. We lift off, pass the station buildings, the aircraft rocks about as the undercarriage comes up and steadies. We bank around and head for the coast. Over Spurn Head we head north. Droning steadily on, we pass lots of ships and then after about 1 1/4 hours flying we turn round and head south. From my rear facing view I can see Newcastle and the Tyne. We fly south for about an hour and turn to starboard and head for Church Fenton, Flying the down wind leg I feel the undercarriage going down. Two noticeable "clunks" as it locks down. A strange lift as the flaps go down. Facing astern, I can't see anything of the approach but the ground gets ever closer. The peri track flashes by and, bump, we are down. We taxi back along the peri track and on to the hard standing. Banging and coughing the engine stops. I have completed my first flight as an air gunner. I look at my watch, 2 hours and 24 minutes. What did we see, a lot of sea and a lot of ships, not a lot else. I flew these patrols about every three days, we did other flying, including night "circuits and bumps"

To be continued



Musings from John Porter

Just got back from my mate's funeral. He died after being hit on the head with a tennis ball..... It was a cracking service.

Local Police are hunting the 'knitting needle nutter' who has stabbed six people in the bum in the last 48 hours. They believe the attacker could be following some kind of pattern.