

ADLIB

("The Chota Coggage" for survivors)

NO.1

Spring, 1997

A couple of years ago, our founder and organiser, John Munday, was posted to a place where he has naught up with the advance detachment. He will be sadly missed. His plane was taken by his niece, Susan Eastley, who had been assisting John for some time. In turn, Susan was supported by her husband, another John. Now Susan has had to reduce her commitments due to a health problem. At the 1996 Reunion, Ted Dairies, offered to fill the gap.

Did you know 160 Squadron existed, very briefly, in the First World War? Formed as a nucleus in June 1918, it was disbanded on July 4th! No. 159 Squadron was formed and disbanded about the same time..

No.160 Squadron was re-formed at at R.A.F. Thurleigh (Bedfordshire) in January, 1942. The acting C.O. was F/Lt C Hunter and the S.W.O. was Joe Cooks. The ground crew set off for India while the air crews underwent training for General Reconnaissance duties. Early in 1942, after their training was completed, 160 Squadron aircrews, and aircraft, set out for India, together with aircraft and aircrews of No.159 Squadron, which had also been re-formed. En route the aircraft and aircrews of both squadrons were detained in the Middle East due to a shortage of bomber aircraft to deal with Rommel's advance into Egypt. From bases in Palestine, Egypt and the Western desert, they were engaged in mine-laying, night bombing, and the provision of air cover for the relief of Malta. Their targets were enemy ports and bases in Libya, including Tobruk.

The ground crew travelled by sea to India. Between Freetown and Durban, FILL Riddell, the Squadron M.O., performed a successful appendectomy, during which the s.s "CUBA" had to steam straight and level. Arriving at Durban, the ground crews were accomodated on Chairwood Race Course, from where they were given 15 days leave.

On 1st October, 1942, No.160 Squadron was renamed No.160 (Middle East Detachment). On the same day, a new No.160 Squadron was created in the maritime role and began working up at Thorney Island. Its C.O.was Wg Cdr C A Butler. On 15th January, 1943, No.160 (Middle East Detachment) was merged with No.178 Squadron, upon the latter's formation as a heavy-bomber squadron at Shandur, Egypt.

The original ground crews arrived in India a few days after the original aircrews had left England far the Middle East. They were nominally based at Drigh Road, Karachi from 4th June,1942, waiting for their aircraft to arrive. In fact, they spent a period in Quetta, before eventually arriving at Salbani, in Bengal. Amongst their number was a Defence Flight whose purpose was to defend any airfield occupied by the squadron in a combat area. The flight was commanded by our new Reunion Organiser. Ted reports that one day, early in 1943, he was i/c the guard on the homing beacon. This was located between Salbani and Digri, some 15 miles distant, and flashed out two letters in Morse, every few minutes, to guide honing aircraft. Hearing a noise, just after midnight, Ted turned to see one of the guards talking to a villager. On enquiring what the marl wanted, Ted was informed that the headman wanted to borrow a rifle. Ted said that this was impossible. The man then requested that one of the R.A.F. guard should be placed in the village. Again, Ted had to turn-down the request Then Ted noticed natives sitting quietly around the beacon. Soon the rest of the guard came up and sat down. Soon the area was full up. The villagers stayed until dawn broke and daylight came. Soon the guard packed up, ready to leave as soon as their transport arrived. What did the villagers want a rifle for? As Ted puts it -"In the excitement, I forgot to tell you that there was tiger about - after all, we were in Bengali" (One day in

1944, at the end of a performance in the Salbani Camp Cinema, the following notice was flashed upon the screen, "Do not leave the cinema on your own; a tiger has been reported on the airstrip."

The aircraft and aircrews of the now 160 Squadron passed through the Middle East in January, 1943, en-route to joining with the original ground crew at Salbani. On 6th February, they began flying over the Bay of Bengal.

With the decision to base the squadron at Ratmalana. and later Sigiriya in Ceylon. for work against the Japanese as part of 222 Group. the Defence Flight became surplus to requirements and its personnel (including Ted Daines) were moved to Burma for the occupation. anal defence of advanced airfields. They became part of the newly formed R.A.F. Regiment

Many of the air crews who served In Ceylon were trained at No.111 O.T.U. Nassau, Bahamas, British West Indies. This unit was formed on 20th August, 1942 and was the first training establishment for Coastal Command and overseas maritime squadrons. It had the aim of converting crews emerging from the Commonwealth Training Plan on to aircraft of U.S. manufacture. From February, 1943, the role of 111 O.T.U. changed to the training of GR captains and crews for service throughout the world, using Mitchells and Liberators. After the war, staff and trainees flew the Liberators of No.111 O.T.U. back to the U.K. where they set up the O.T.U. anew at Lossiemouth, with Milltown as a satellite. The O.T.U. was disbanded at Lossiemouth in August, 1946.

The Squadron flew the longest operational mission by a landplane in World War Two - Flt. Lt. J A Muir and crew were airborne for 24 hours 10 minutes. Missions of over 20 hours were quite common, made possible by the dedication of air and ground crews, the latter working, by day and by night, without shelter, on jungle airstrips,

We are experiencing an increasing interest in our reunion from widows, and wartime sweethearts, of Squadron members. They are most welcome to attend - and discover, like the wives who already do attend - what a distinguished group we are!

Ted Daines had a 30 minute telephone call from a university don in Australia seeking information about the squadron.

The press has recently carried the obituary of one of our Station Commanders at Minneriya Group Captain Leslie Brian Bowler King. Our Special Duty missions, and the hazards encountered by our aircrews, were described in some detail. It was mentioned that the Group Captain flew such missions himself.

Bill Cooper probably has more about the squadron in his computer files than most. He has always been ready to share this information with us at reunions and is willing to attempt answers to queries on receipt of a brief request (and an SAE!) to 37 Oakdene, Lansdown Road, CHELTENHAM, GL51 6PX. Bill is now 19 years into Multiple Sclerosis, so asks that you have patience waiting for him to respond!

Lost touch with a Squadron colleague? Try = Records Branch - Ron Eitel, at 3 Princess Close, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 8HW (remember the SAE) Ron has access to details of all those who have recently attended reunions and particulars of many who have been notified of the event over the years but who have never attended.

The 1997 Reunion is being held at the Falcon Hotel In Stratford-upon-Avon over the weekend 5th, 6th & 7th September. Further particulars from the Organiser, Ted Daines, 45 Randolph Road, NORWICH, Norfolk, NR1 2RU (01-603-660514) (SAE, please!)"

"AD LIB" aims to keep Squadron survivors in touch. Comments and contributions (not more than ten lines of type) to Ted Daines (address above). Donations towards production costs are always appreciated.

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