

No.160 Squadron, Royal Air Force

AD LIB

("The Chota Coggage" for survivors)

No.4

Spring 1998

The 1998 reunion will be held at the Falcon Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon over the weekend of 4th, 5th & 6th September. (Organiser, E. H. "Ted" Dames, 45 Randolph Road, NORWICH, Norfolk. NR1 2RU (01-603-660514))

Various publications have mentioned the longest operational flights of WW2 (eg. Jack Muir, 160 Sqdn; Harry Bray, 356 Sqdn). Much less has been noted about W/O Bates, also of 160 Squadron, whose 24 hours 10 minutes operational flight is worthy of mention. Jack Bates, who came from Brisbane in Australia, carried out this flight on 6/7th June 1945 whilst based at Minneriya One of his W/Ws, 'Newfie' Eugene Vivian) still lives in Newfoundland and sets this account of the flight to me of our members in 1986:

"It wasn't particularly a fun flight. We had been sent to take night photographs of a spot along the coast of Sumatra and another near Singapore, and to drop the usual propaganda leaflets. However, on the return trip while still some 8 hours away from home base and one engine down, it was agreed that in no way could we make it on the gas we had remaining. The captain then shut down the corresponding engine on the opposite wing to reduce drag and save fuel, and ordered everything removable to be thrown overboard. We then sent out an S.O.S. and tried without success to contact some friendly shipping in the area. Had we done so, we would have ditched down to be picked up.

"Finding nothing, we continued on for want of something better to do, although it was difficult to maintain altitude and the two remaining engines were working overtime. By now, all crew members not on duty had taken up ditching positions with headsets disconnected just waiting for the crash which was imminent. Roughly three hours out, we were joined by a Catalina flying boat escort and it was some comfort to see them a few feet off our wingtip, with the captain grinning from ear to ear and the rest of the crew waving at us from the bubble.

"To reach our base we would have to fly over jungle which would have been suicidal, so we asked for permission to divert to China Bay which had a runway either right down to the water's edge or at least at sea level. When we reached the harbour, tugs were busy pursuing slipping out of the way so we could come straight in as we were only about ten feet above the water by then. In fact, we often joked after that our altitude ranged between minus ten and ten feet.

"We did, of course, make it, but when our tanks were dipped only one tank showed the faintest stain on the stick. The turbo superchargers on the two overworked engines had generated such heat that they were actually out of shape and had the appearance of something about ready to melt. We couldn't have lasted another minute. We did get the distinction of making the longest flight alright but it was not by choice" (via Jack Burgess)

Tug' was an Air Gunner and a great character. He was alleged to have baled-out of the tail turret of an aircraft falling in two halves. Captured, he escaped by killing a guard and got back to the UK. As the Germans had his rank and name, he could no longer fly over Europe, so he was sent out East and eventually arrived at an A.S. R. unit at Ratmalana in Ceylon. Here he made such a nuisance of himself, by doing things like driving a 3-ton truck into a Beaufighter whose colour he didn't like, that he was sent on a detachment to a section of his unit stationed at Minneriya One night he climbed on to the roof of the Sergeants' Mess and fell through the same into the bar below. On arriving on terra firma he stacked up the cadjan material from the fallen roof and set fire to it. The Station Commander was called and Tug' was ordered to be off the station by dawn. On asking where he should go, the C.O said he didn't care just so long as Tug' went. So our hero made his way to Colombo where he was last heard of living in the Aircrew Club, drawing his pay from his unit at Ratmalana - they thought he was still at Minneriya!

(Bill Cooper)

"Ernie was a Corporal posted from Wittering to Thurleigh and 160. He was an amiable, very rotund, person. From the Stores he was issued, with a very large Wolsley helmet; so large, in fact, that it became a standard joke on the boat that if we were torpedoed we could all get into it. When at Karachi, we used to hitch a lift into town for some cheap egg and chips. The trouble was getting a vehicle to stop long enough to get on. On one occasion, we screeched to a stop; three of us climbed on, Ernie being the last., and the wagon roared away. Turning to the rear, I called, 'Are you on, Ernie?' To my horror, all I could see was his two feet sticking above the tailboard and we feared the worst. Ernie staggered to his feet, helmet jammed well and truly over his eyes and ears, badly shaken but O.K. He had taken a lot of stick over that helmet but it saved his life that day." (Ted Daines)

'AEROPLANE MONTHLY' for November and December, 1997, carried an eight page, illustrated, article by the late Group Captain Leslie King about the work of Force 136 and 160 Squadron at Minneriya. We reported Wing Commander King's passing AD LIB No.1. The article is most informative and is a must for us 'jungle wallahs'. There is mention of the unofficial use of parachutists' folding motor cycles at the July, 1945, Station Spats Day and that one of the faster riders lost control and disappeared at full tilt into the jungle. What is not mentioned is that the rider

in question was a rather corpulent Intelligence Officer who found himself unable to turn the handlebars at the end of the first straight! We have confirmed that photocopies are available from the publisher at a price of £1.80, inclusive of postage. Send orders for the attention of Lydia Matharu, at 'AEROPLANE MONTHLY', King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, LONDON, SE1 9LS. (from material contributed by J G Ilsley)

"Can anyone remember being a member of a mad convoy of vehicles when 160 Squadron moved from KKS to Minneriya in early February, 1945? A sector army officer, leading the convoy as a military exercise, later reported that a B24 Liberator flew very low over the road vehicles, with an idiot leaning out and making rude signs. I now confess to being that 'idiot who, leaning out of the starboard beam window, gave the 'V' sign to those below. I almost became a bigger idiot when captain Lee Waterfield suddenly banked very steeply, also to starboard, and I just managed to avoid joining the convoy on the road below. I believe the army officer was furiously outraged and refused to believe I was merely suggesting 'V-for Victory'. No sense of humour these army types"

(Jack Burgess)

R I P

Ron Crawford reports that Fred Shepard, one of our Navigators, passed away in October, 1997.

"During my visit to Minneriya in November, 1992, the C.O. and Adj. were very keen to show me the remains of large, high, masonry constructed budding and asked me if I could remember its function. Can anyone succeed here where I failed to identify its specific use? It appeared to have been partly destroyed by fire, but gave the impression, despite its years, of being a massive, well-built, structure. Could this be the remains of major maintenance workshops? Incidentally, both officers of the Sri Lanka Air Force assured me that they still used our WW2 runway and, while looking at this, I tried to describe the Liberators of 160 Squadron which took off from **this** same point. They claimed they know nothing of these happenings as they were only born in the sixties. Exit one old man!"

(Jack Burgess)

Copies of the squadron crest, in full colour, with or without dedication (£3 inc. p & p), will again be available when the member who arranges such things is settled at his new base.

Design, typesetting and envelopes for AD LIB presently cost us nothing. Production of the first three issues attracted sponsorships which are £5 for printing and £10 for postage. Further sponsorships are earnestly solicited by your organiser. (address above) Additional copies of AD LIB may be obtained by sending him two 26p stamps for each copy, to cover photocopying and postage.

'MAYDAYI MAYDAYI MAYDAYI (or you prefer the period touch, SOS! SOS! SOS!). This publication will sink without trace if readers do not extract the digit and send in material. You will have noticed already that the material used is coming from a limited number of contributors. We all have a tale to tell, SO GET CRACKING and don't be shy. Contributions are earnestly solicited from our groundcrew members not to mention our esteemed Wing Commanders! news sheet is produced by our typesetter using two fingers (pointing downwards, not vertically!). If he can type all the material, surely the rest of you can contribute some of it. We even accept handwriting

Like a certain brand of margarine our fame is spreading. Mention of our reunions in the R.A.F.A. journal, 'FLYPAST', led John Nutter, a National Serviceman on Clan in the mid-fifties to ask if any of our members can add to a report in the Public Record Office that a Liberator from 160 Squadron first landed on Gan on 13th October, 1943. Rack your brains and send any details to Ted Daines (address above) in the first instance. John aims to write a book on the R.A.F. in Gan, if he can get enough data.

Designed and typeset in Cheltenham by ASASTRAPRINT - free, gratis and for nothing!