

No.160 Squadron, Royal Air Force

AD LIB

("The Chota Coggage" for survivors)

No.5

Summer 1998

S.S.O.s and D.R.O.s

REUNION ORGANISER

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1998 REUNION

Falcon Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon over the weekend of 4th, 5th & 6th September.

FUNDS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

"We have not yet recovered from having to start from scratch in 1996-1997. This, coupled with the ever increasing costs of advertising, paper, priming, etc., means that our Organiser will be seeking a £7 subscription again this year, despite having a small balance at the start of the year and the receipt of a few donations plus the fact that all new members have paid an admission fee of £5 "

THE SQUADRON CREST

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.

"AD LIB"

Design, typesetting and envelopes for AD LIB presently costs 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.

WELCOME ABOARD

In AD LIB No.4, we mentioned John Nutter, who had served on Clan in 1959 and who was seeking particulars of a Liberator which had landed on that island on 13th October, 1943. John demonstrated a great interest in Liberator activities in the Far East, as a consequence of which we invited him to join our happy band as an Associate Member. In a letter of acceptance. John stated that he "gladly accepted. the offer, with considerable humility." . John was the Flying Office Engineer/Surveyor with the small party charged with clearing, widening and refurbishing the wartime runways. Welcome aboard, John.

THE WRITTEN WORD

It has been brought to our notice that 'AIR CLUES', the magazine of the Royal Air Force, carried, on the back page of its January, 1977 edition, three photographs of Liberators in the Far East and a mention of 160 Squadron's minelaying at Singapore on 26th/27th March 1945.

"To apprise the personnel of the work in which they were so arduously engaged, the Squadron commander gave an 'informal talk' on operations to aircrew and ground crew on 8 March. The lull in operations provided an opportunity for him to do so.

"The C.O. stated that maintenance personnel had been working long hours, sometimes through late hours of the night, knowing that their efforts were worth while but with little or no idea of the importance of the operations which were undertaken. Aircrew had a better idea of what was being done, but even they did not at all times get to know fully the results achieved. He noted that earlier in this theatre of war the function of the Strategic Air Force was to cut the enemy's communications. He stressed the importance of mine-laying.

"It hampers ship movements and entails constant employment of mine sweepers of which the Japanese are in short supply," he said, "and generally puts the enemy in a state of complete chaos...

"Operating from an advanced base (K.K.S.) proved very unsatisfactory - we were losing 24 hours work on the aircraft and it involved 200 miles, which meant 200 gallons of gas. This is why Minneriya was chosen as our new operating base. Last month being successful, the second series of operations began in February. ..These were successful; ports again closed, ship movements stopped. On the 24th, 'Chumphorn' was given to us as requiring large scale attention-A total of 60 mines was laid in this area-On March lot information was received that the ports around Penang had again opened, so yet another pounding ...Result: no ships were seen going in, ports again closedAbout opposition, there has been very little. Some A/A fire was encountered and searchlights seen. But on the whole it has been absolutely negligible..."
("Burma Bombers", page 890)

"NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

"Reading again AD LIB No.2, I was reminded of the first long range op I experienced. We did the final checks and lumbered off to the end of the runway. I knelt between the Captain and Co-pilot, you couldn't get to the Navigator's cabby-hole in the nose safely when the nose wheel was down so it was usual for the Nav to stay on the flight deck until wheels-up'.

"Skipper ran the four Pratt & Whitneys up to full power, keeping the brakes on. When they were released I expected us to shoot forward but instead we began to lumber down the runway, gaining speed very slowly because of the enormous weight of the extra fuel in the bomb bay tanks.

"It reminded me of the overloaded coal lorries I used to see pulling out of the station coal yard when I was a boy. As we passed the control tower we were moving faster, the engines making a fearful din, but we were still firmly stuck to the runway and seemingly likely to stay.

"Last September, my wife and I flew to Spain on holiday. It seemed that our Jumbo needed less than a third of the runway before we were airborne, the wheels were up, we were tipped sharply back in our seats as we climbed steeply away from Gatwick.

"It wasn't like that with liberator 'Q' for Queenie. She blundered on, going speed steadily. The Shipper, F/Lt Waddilove, 'tested' the controls to see if she would fly and then heaved back You couldn't say we were airborne, but the weight was off the tyres and somehow he got her clear of the scrub and small trees. Then, to my amazement, he gently eased the control column forward again, so that we could gain a little more speed, before climbing slowly towards the coast at Elephant Point.

"I heaved a huge sigh of relief as the undercut came up and locked. I quickly clambered down to my 'office in the nose and got the chart out. We were now over a solid white cloud blanket, like cotton wool, and could see nothing else.

"We set course to maintain 0900 (due East) to cross 1,000 miles of the Indian Ocean before seeing land again, then down the Straits to our mission and hopefully back to base some 18-19 hours later. (Ron Crawford)

Do any of our readers recall drinking any of the following ales in the NAAFI at Minneriya?

JEFFREY'S LIGHT BEER (Edinburgh, Scotland)

CARLING'S RED CAP ALE (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada)

COSGRAVE WHITE LABEL (Toronto, Canada)

WILLIAM DOW & COMPANY INDIA PALE ALE (Montreal, Canada)

CANADA BUD FINE OLD ALE (Toronto, Canada)

After consuming a few jars, you may have wean one, or more, of the following which were showing at the Camp Cinema during January, 1945:

GRAND CENTRAL
CONSTANT NYMPH
BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS RAY
COURTSHIP OF ANDY HARDY
ON APPROVAL
UNDER COVER

MURDER WATCH ON THE RHINE
CABIN IN THE SKY
ADDRESS UNKNOWN
RHYTHM PARADE
PRINCESS O'ROURKE
HIT PARADE OF 1945

(Photocopies courtesy of R W Palm)

"Your story (in AD LIB No.4) about Tug Wilson, intrepid AG turned ASR crew member, certainly rang a few bells in my memory-box. I recall him as a square-built Londoner whose main interest appeared to be hell-raising stunts. Once, when Stacey came over to visit us in the Sergeants' Mess he left after a few drinks to return to the Officer's Mess. He was not beat pleased to find that Tug Wilson had taken-off the handbrake and pushed his jeep into a ditch."

'Tug was noted for his theme sang, which he used to sing in the mess to a well-known hymn tune, with or without prompting:

We are the Air-Sea-Rescue, no b----y good are we,
The only time you see us, is breakfast, dinner and tea,
And when we sight a dinghy, we shout with all our might,
Per Ardua Ad Astra; Up you. Jack - I'm alright!

(Jack Burgess)

"At the bottom of page 2 of AD LIB 4, reference is made to the first landing on Gan, given as 13th October, 1943. This is not correct. I have checked with my log book and find that on 23rd July, 1943, I flew Liberator FL 929 from Ratnalana to Gan, as the then Wing Commander O.C.160 Squadron, with F/O Boyce as co-pilot. Flight time was 4hrs 40mins. Passengers were Air/Cdr Churchman (then S.A.S.O. 222 Group) and Cdr McCulloch. Royal Navy. Returned the next day.

"I recall that the purpose of the mission was to test the new runway at Gan, recently completed and apparently made from local coral. No-one questioned the situation of the aircraft had it gone through the runway surface and had been bogged down. I am sure there were no facilities for aircraft there then. In those days one did not question any possible hint for a mission failure. With hindsight, I should have checked with my A.O.C. I am older now and see it differently.

"One reason that this flight to Gan was a memorable occasion is that the local ruler and his entourage entertained us in right royal fashion. We had a banquet in a long but with huge Punkas, with Punka wallahs at each end keeping a steady oscillation. Maybe the local ruler wanted to be friendly in case we won the war!"

(Group Captain Colin Butler)

"It was the 8th March 1945. I completed the external checks on FL991 "F" and entered the aircraft via the bomb bay. As I approached the underside of the flight deck, I encountered the Wireless Operator trying to start the A.P.U. (Auxiliary Power Unit). It was unheard of for members of a Liberator crew, other than the Flight Engineer, to embark on this tricky task.. When I asked him that the h...' he thought he was doing', he gestured for silence and pointed upwards. Standing at the edge of the flight deck was the brunette member of the ENSA party we were flying from Minneriya to Kankasanturai. It was most apparent that she had, that morning, overlooked putting on any of her under-garments. As a gentleman, I insisted that the W/OP move over and let me perform my customary duty.

"Once airborne, I had a little time to spare and the lady asked me 'what was the glass thing sticking up in front of the windscreen'. I explained that this was the astrodome from which the navigator book star sights with his sextant. The lady then asked if there was anybody up front. I replied in the negative as we were a just a small scratch crew of four for this local ferry flight. At this, she grew quite excited and pressed for a visit to the astrodome. In view of the way the aircraft was trimmed (we had all the ENSA males in the rear) I asked the skipper, with a wink, for his approval. I think I overplayed my hand, and that he saw the glint in my eye, as his answer was firmly in the negative. I used to wonder whether I lost a chance that morning to become a founder member of the 'Mile High Club'.

"After we landed at K.K.S., the slipper informed me that he had had trouble with the landing, the aircraft being extremely tad heavy. Reluctantly leaving the two ENSA ladies on the flight deck, I went through the bomb bay to investigate the rear of the aircraft. Here I was just in time to find two male ENSA bods leaving the turret where they had been travelling with one sitting on the lap of the other! No wonder we landed tail heavy.

"The girls invited us to lunch with them at the Government Rest House on the coast where they were being accommodated. After lunch, the ladies decided they would like a swim, but their kit had not yet arrived by road. Not wishing to be frustrated, they decided to swim wearing knotted handkerchiefs. Readers will understand our interests in this when I remind them that in 1945 Bikini swim suits had not yet been invented. Furthermore, we knew that knotted handkerchiefs would not be able to withstand the surf. As we all tramped down to the beach, there was a toot toot' and we saw the truck arriving with the girls' kit. Ah, well, you can't win 'em all.

"More frustration was to follow. Back at the airfield, the aircraft seemed to have adopted an odd posture - the nose wheel was as flat as a pancake. It was now evening and we had a h-l of a job to get a spare and help to fit it. We finished up with all the crew, bar myself, right at the back to get the nose off the ground, We managed the job, but it was 20.35hrs bore we took off to return to Minneriya. What a day!!! "

(Bill Cooper)

Liberator bombers first flew from the Cocos Islands ("Browns") in July, 1945. They were from 99 and 356 Squadrons. The position of the base lent itself to the General Reconnaissance (GR) role, and 203 Squadron (Kanksanturai) and 160 Squadron (Minneriya) sent detachments from Ceylon.

An accident to an RAAF Liberator resulted in a strip barrier being placed across the end of the runway to avoid similar crashes. Unfortunately, a 160 Squadron Liberator, coded 'N', caught the wire holding the barrier with its nose wheel causing it to crash and burn out on the airstrip, all crew members being killed.

Was the "N" above BZ 752, which was a Mk Vb in March 1945, or a successor aircraft? The question arises because a photograph of Liberator over the Cocos shows a Mk.VI, with which the squairon was by then being re-equipped.
(Information from "FLY PAST, December, 1989)

HELPLINE

MAYDAY! MAYDAY! MAYDAY! (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! Our news sheet is produced by our typesetter using two fingers (painting downwards, not vertically!). If he can type all the material, surely the rest of you can contribute some of it. We even accept handwriting)

Designed and typeset in Cheltenham by ADASTRAPRINT - free. gratis and for nothing!