

No.160 Squadron, Royal Air Force

AD LIB

("The Chota Coggage" for survivors)

No.7

Winter 1998

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

REUNION ORGANISER

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THE 160 SQUADRON EXPERIENCE - 1998

There could be no doubt it - the 1998 Experience was great success. During the Dinner, I slowly looked around and it seemed that all were either engaged in talking, or laughing, with those on their table. I knew then that I had achieved what I had been searching for without ever finding-, yet, for some reason, I could not put a name to it. This was solved by a friend of mine who said that I 'was watching the '160 Squadron Experience' and the effect it was having on members and their partners. There is no doubt in my mind that our Squadron has a certain aura about it' So, all you doubters who don't attend because you think you might not know anybody, remember one thing that is paramount -you were, and still are, of 160 Squadron, ACSEA. That should be reason enough far attending.

(Ted Daines - Organiser)

Immediately after our recent reunion in Stratford, I fell to wondering what makes our gatherings such happy occasions and came to the following conclusion. It is a coming together of persons of similar age, who have shared common purpose and goals in foreign lands, remote from familiar surroundings, and requiring a high degree of mutual interdependence, loyalty, self-motivation, innovation and commitment, such as is often lacking in today's environment.
(Bill Cooper)

THE 160 SQUADRON EXPERIENCE - 1999

The 160 Squadron Experience will be held at the Falcon Hotel Stratford-upon-Avon, over the weekend 3rd, 4th and 5th September, 1999

THE SQUADRON CREST

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

For those who ordered, or are thinking about ordering, the crest; please be patient, we do have a problem. This, we hope, will not be too long in being rectified.

NEWS REPORT

Members of 160 Squadron who passed through No. 111 O.T.U.; Nassau, Bahamas, may be interested to know that representatives of 111 OTU Nassau Association visited Nassau in September, 1997. They presented a plaque bearing the 111 OTU crest to ladies of the IODE. who provided a canteen for R.A.F. personnel during the war years. President of the 111 OTU Association is Wilf Hayes, 65 Central Road, Rudheath, NORTHWICH, Cheshire, CW9 7JD."
(Jack Burgess)

Thanks to Jack Burgess (one of our members) and members of the Scottish Saltire Branch of the Aircrew Association who have contacts at Fife College, the Air Crew Association now has a website under <http://www.fife.ac.uk/aircrew/> .

RIP

It is pleasing to present a'Nil' return. .

WHAT OUR READERS SAY...

'Deceased members of 160 buried in Sri Lanka. A list is enclosed (too long to publish, but a copy will be sent on receipt of an A4 envelope and two 26p stamps. Bill Cooper) showing the 44 who died whilst serving with the squadron. This list does not give information on members who are missing on operations or who are buried elsewhere. Does anyone remember anything about F/O Frederick Keene who died on Christmas Day, 1943? Neither family or the squadron appear to have provided even the scant details usually found in the registers. The death of 19 on 9th June, 1945, was probably a tragic accident: in the squadron history it was not on the move at that time, but it had that month switched operations to dropping agents and supplies to Malaya and Sumatra. Can anyone fill in the details?
(Les Crowley)

(9 aircrew; 9 ground crew and an Intelligence Officer died when aircraft "H" crashed when taking off for a detachment to the Cocoa Islands. My crew were due to take 'H' to the Cocoa that morning but were switched with another crew the previous evening. We were the crew sent up to locate the wreck. When we found it, I fired Verey lights to guide the ground search party. A very sad morning indeed. The entry in my log book, made on the day, is 19th June. Note the discrepancy with official records.
Bill Cooper)

"I feel that the aircrew members of our squadron missed out badly by not being with us ground crew bods for the formation of the squadron at Tburleigh in January, 1942. I suggest that said ground crew bods use "AD LIB" to provide said air crew members with the gen on what they actually missed. So, come on lads, dig into your memories and put pen to paper and send in some of your experiences. Perhaps we could even move on to the s.s. "CUBA" and Durban, and so on, right through to the first three Liberators joining us advance party at Ratmalana, Ceylon. The first three Liberators being 'V', 'H' and 'S'. What about it chaps?
(Frank Green)

"I wonder how many remember, or know of, the Smallpox scare that we had in Quetta during July and August, 1942?

"As I recall, a couple of bods from our hut went down with it. and so the rest of us, unfortunately I don't recall the names, were isolated in a hut that was surrounded by barbed wire - not so much to keep us in, but to keep everyone else out.

"Food was left at the barbed wire for us. For our amusement and to pass the time away, we had a shove halfpenny board and a gramophone with just two records. One was a tune called 'Tangerine', which was played over and over again. Whenever I hear it now, it evokes this memory.

"It was here that I spent my 21st Birthday. After three weeks, when we were due to be released from isolation, two of the lads broke out in more spots. Fortunately it turned out to be Chicken Pox and so were allowed out on 18th August. It was quite a long three weeks, I can assure you."
(Les Dawson)

THE WRITTEN WORD

A PILOT'S STORY

LAURIE JONES DFC

1996

ISBN 0 646 29663 9

Laurie Jones joined the Royal Australian Air Force at the end of 1941. He trained as a pilot in Canada and eventually reached 111 O.T.U. at Nassau. Here he was one of those pilots who proceeded to captaincy of a Liberator without having to serve as a second pilot in the first instance. He and his crew delivered a new Liberator from Dorval, Canada, to Karachi, India. They then proceeded by rail (and the ferry at Dhanuskodi) to join 160 Squadron at Sigirya, in Ceylon, where they arrived at the end of 1943.

Laurie showed an interest in photographic reconnaissance and was engaged mainly on PRU flights until his tour ended in 1945. His aircraft was usually "S" or "V", until "H" arrived. Our ground crew members concerned with these aircraft will no doubt remember him. Laurie feels that he was probably the longest serving captain on the squadron and he flew from Sigirya, Kankasanturai and Minneriya, with a detachment to China Bay.

The R.A.F. part of Laurie's book covers 95 pages of which 58 are devoted to his time with the squadron

At the end of the war, Laurie returned to Australia, where he became a pilot with British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines, performing pioneer airline flying from Australia to California and British Columbia (31 pages); a bush pilot with QANTAS in New Guinea (39 pages); a sales pilot for de Havilland of Australia (22 pages); an executive with Hawker de Havilland (44 pages); finishing his working career as Chief Executive Officer of Hawker Pacific (20 pages)

Laurie Jones had a most distinguished career, visiting many countries and meeting many people in high places, but throughout retaining that sense of humour particular to members of the Commonwealth air forces and his book is highly recommended.

Laurie will part a copy of his book to ex-160 bods on receipt of £15 in Sterling notes, thus helping members to avoid incurring monetary exchange charges. His address is 76A Braeside Street, WAHROONGA, NSW 2076, Australia. As I can confirm from personal experience, delivery is about three weeks from posting your order in the UK

(review by Bill Cooper)

"A number of members were interested in the very well illustrated book about the history of the production of the Liberator from the first prototypes and which I had bought from the R.A.F. Museum, Hendon. In case this is not obtainable from Hendon, I have found that it was distributed in U.K. by: POCKETBOND LTD, P.O. BOX 80, Welwyn, Herts., AL6 0ND (Tel. 01438 789593). Title. 'B-24 Liberator in action' by Larry Davis; Aircraft No.80, published by Squadron/Signal Publications, Inc.: (The agent is Mr P. S. Brooks)" (Les Crawley)

(The copy in my library carries the ISBN no. 0-89747-190-3 and the publishers address is 1115 Crawley Drive, CARROLTON, TX 75011-5010, although it is likely that it is available from Midland Counties Publications, Unit 3, Maizefield, Hinckley, Leics., LE10 1YF (01455 233 737) (Bill Cooper)

A Spitfire, at one time belonging to Royal Australian Air Force, has been brought to this country for restoration by a firm called 'Aero Vintage'. The work is expected to be completed in twelve months and upon completion the aircraft will be painted in United States 12th Army Air Force markings appropriate to the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations where some American squadrons flew the Spit. It is believed that the aircraft will then be dispatched to the USA where it will form part of the deal to bring a Consolidated B-24 Liberator to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford! (FLYPAST, October, 1998)

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD...

Thurleigh to Ratmalana - Part Two

In Part One. I told you how our washing facility - a builder's standpipe - was frozen solid. We did manage to wash by melting snow in our mess tins. The building contractors - Minters - had a large sign adjacent to the cookhouse. This was the focal point for our parades. It was on these parades that the S.W.O., little Joe Cook, would shout his head off (didn't he always). He would detail us off to lectures or various jobs, such as clearing the runway of snow to let a Hampden land - a job so badly organised that the Hampden went elsewhere to land!

I believe the Yanks had the 'drome when it was finished - I hope they had all the mod cons by then.

At last, after standing for a long while in a line at the stores, tropical kit was issued. Embarkation leave was granted, all of four days, (plus an extra three days in my case, to get married). Leave over, now to catch up on my injections - three and a vaccination, a painful job, especially as I had to carry all my kit the next morning.

160 Squadron ground echelon entrained at Bedford (London Road) Station during the night, the station being surrounded by both military and civilian police. The next morning we were escorted on to the S.S. "Cuba". (Frank Green)

Buckshee leave

It was customary for the ground crew of an aircraft which was going to Ratmalana for a major service to travel with the aircraft and stay at Ratmalana whilst the aircraft was being serviced and live it up' in Colombo. Thus we got a few days extra leave, returning to Minneriya on completion of the service.

(Geoff Wyle)

What went on in the minds of aircrew?

A ground crew member informs us that he used to sit for hours on a log at the side of the runway awaiting the return of 'his' aircraft. He used to wonder what went through the minds of the aircrew as they prepared for an operation. This is a hard question to answer due to the proverbial reluctance of aircrew to reveal their true feelings. These were covered by joshing, joking, etc., and one never knew what one's crew mates were really feeling. I recall an occasion when the mask slipped a little. We were briefed to fly over the top of Penang Island and drop mines in the channel beyond. There were three headlands to cross and we were told there was a flak battery on the first of these. We made the run at about 600 feet. I was in the bomb bay, on the catwalk watching for the mines to drop. Over the first headland - nothing. Over the second - nothing. Over the third, and all hell broke loose. We flew right over a flak battery. I could clearly see the guns and their crews in the light of the muzzle flashes. Once the mines were away, I went forward to check for damage. All was well, so I went to the rear to see how things were there. We had been lucky - no damage visible. We were carrying a relief WOP/AG who was manning our sole armament - the tail turret. I knocked at its door and he opened it. I asked if he had given the b----ds a good hosing as they must have been clearly visible to him. He replied that he hadn't fired a shot. I asked him why not and his honest reply was, "Too f----g scared!"

One of my other WOP/AGs sometimes said that he hoped the Japs didn't get him. As he so succinctly put it, 'I hope to die in my own bed, on the job with a blonde, a bottle of beer in my hand'.

I cannot recall any occasion, in the mess or on leave, when conversation turned to 'getting the chop', as we called it. I am pretty sure it would have been considered to be in extremely bad taste.

In my own case, pre-op thoughts were mainly focussed on how many hours we would put in. The more the better, in order to achieve the magic 500 operational hours required to complete the tour,. (For purposes of comparison, the bomber boys over Europe built-up only about half that number of hours in completing their 30 missions.)

How did we feel when we got back? Relief was expressed in different ways. For my part, I would sit in the top escape hatch as we taxied to dispersal, saluting the 'blood wagons' and fire engines with two fingers as we passed them. Perhaps not a gesture of gratitude, but we had defeated them one more time. (Bill Cooper)

On the voyage out to India, the boat called at Durban. One of the weekends we were there, the Grandin family took us on a tour of the local countryside. A place we visited was Isipingo Beach, no doubt 'Whites Only'. Crossing the beach to the water's edge, we could see the shark protection boom. Invited to take a swim, but seeing the familiar triangular fin moving to-and-fro outside the boom, I declined the invitation, settling for a very shallow paddle!

On Salbani airfield we had two main flocks of birds - the Kite Hawks and the Vultures. Both lots were forever seeking food; the Kite Hawks would fly in the areas around the bashas and, most of all, the cookhouse. On leaving this and depositing your leftovers in the swill bins, these would, in nearly every case, be removed by the swooping

The Vultures were a protected species of scavenger and their food had to be dead. At Salbani there was a gun post out in the paddy-fields. One day the crew was witness to what, in some ways, was a funny incident. A native staggered out into the paddy-field and laid down. It wasn't long before he was surrounded by Vultures. The next two days saw the circle of these tighten. On the fourth day, however, the native staggered to his feet and reeled away, not to return. I bet the Vultures were livid!"
(Ted Daines)

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