



160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage for survivors



SPRING 2003
Number 24

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S.S.O's AND D.R.O's

Reunion 2003: The Falcon seems very keen to have us! Booking forms were sent out in January. For your diary the dates are Friday 29th to Sunday 31st August 2003.

D.R.O's flashback to 10th July 1945. "Airmen having civilian experience in the building trade needed for reconstruction work at Rangoon". If the 8 who volunteered are still available they might be needed for another place in the news.

Awards List: This is progressing and we learn that F/Lt J.A.Muir, DFC, previously, when a flying instructor in Canada, was awarded the MBE for saving the life of one of his pupil pilots by rescuing him from a burning plane. This was in 1943 – the record states that his medal was "sent by registered mail on 8 June 1948". J.A.Muir is also famously known as the pilot who completed a 24 hr 10 mins operation.

A mention in despatches is also recorded in ORB's under date 25/11/42 at Quetta for Cpl (now Sgt) W.H.Duckett: it must refer to pre 160 days as it was "gazetted" on 1/1/42.

Air Dropped Propaganda: Mr S Baggett of 14 Westhill Av. Epsom KT19 8JU (Tel:01372 728404) is a researcher seeking original examples of leaflets and newsheets in all languages including info on squadron, aircraft, dates dropped etc.

Thurleigh Party: No further details about proposed 8th June 2003 party. As the next issue of "AD LIB" will not be out in time anyone interested should contact Ted Daines nearer the date or email: 306museum@nscmh.fsnet.co.uk.

OBITUARY:W/Co. John Beck,DFC & Bar. We have received a copy of the "Telegraph" obituary advising that John Beck died aged 90, on 2nd January 2003. He was a widower with two daughters. We send our deepest sympathies. See item under "Making Contact".

MAKING CONTACT: news, old colleagues and help:
BBC Remembrance Project: The aim of this project is to build a web community for discovering and sharing WWII history: it will create a unique history of a nation at war. The site will be launched to the public next year. Our own historians (or anyone else) should think about sending contributions/personal stories re 160 history or their own experiences. A database of contacts is being compiled and, in the first place, a response form is obtainable from Patricia Mitchinson, BBC, at tel: 020 8752 6305 or email: patricia.mitchinson@bbc.co.uk.
Bubble Sextant: We believe we came up with the answer about the missing bubble via Mike Gerasimoff of Wisconsin University; now Mike is asking if anyone knows where a calibration test stand may be available. Mike, a Canadian, is a geologist who will just have returned to Wisconsin after his 3 months 'summering' on research in Antarctica and I have been able to provide him with details of the simple trial and error method we used for sextant calibration. He is also interested in obtaining an Astro Compass – ordinary compasses don't work at the poles. (Yes, he knows about GPS – but they are not as much fun and don't challenge navigational skills!). Replies to the Editor
Goolie Chit: Many thanks to Laurie Jones for an original copy of this potentially vital piece of life saving equipment. It is being put to good use by a friend as one of the more humorous props in connection with his humanitarian fund-raising efforts.
W/Co. John Beck: Joined 160 Sqdn on 8/5/42 but was sent back to Lyneham the next day and does not reappear in ORB's until his ops with 160 (& mostly 159) in the Middle East in September and October 1942. He was then posted to Salbani where he rejoined 159 Sqdn. A pre war pilot, John Beck had a most colourful career in the RAF completing a U K tour with 99 and 214 Sqdns before his Lib days. After completing his Far East tour he had a spell with the Chindits. Through Robert Quirk we have a copy of his memoirs – 53 pages covering his action packed life. If anyone would like a copy (by email only) please advise.
Sgt Reg Holbrook: Reg was one of the first Flight Engineers on the squadron and the first to be killed – in the crash of "B" BZ 864 on 19/4/44 – S/Ldr Percival, Captain. We have provided his grandniece (now of New Zealand) with a lot of information concerning the crash. His logbook indicates that maybe he trained in India qualifying on 29/9/43 and maybe was with 160 Sqdn then. Any comments hereon?

MAKING CONTACT (Cont'd)

S/Ldr Edgar Cooray, Sri Lanka Air Force (Rtd)

Here's something to work on ! Following up on the contact in AD LIB 23, Edgar writes as follows:

"I think it is timely for the Sri Lankan people to be reminded of the pivotal role the RAF played in defending the country and the world from Japanese imperialism. If you could possibly send me an article about 160 Sqdn for a start, I can try and generate some interest in one of our weekly newspapers and get it published in instalments. Ideally, this could be started by the middle of the year as a prelude to a group visit to Sri Lanka of ex 160 members, perhaps towards the end of 2003.

Food for thought"

Judging by the reunion mob we are still a fairly fit, lean and hungry bunch (with some minor exceptions) - do we have any takers ? Having been back to Sri Lanka I can recommend it and there may be some special deals about.

From the description, a return visit to Ratmalana would be an eye opener and just think about the thrill of climbing Sigiriya Rock again. (*Wonder if they know about Stannah Stair Lifts ?*)

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

A Graphic Journey – NOT the Oriental Express

Re Les Dawson's rail trip in Ad Lib 23 reminded me of my Bombay to Colombo rail journey. Nowadays they are advertised as the Great Train Journeys of the World and cost thousands of pounds. After disembarking at Bombay we went to Worli transit camp. We awoke next morning to find that over half of us had blisters and bites, the bugs etc., had been waiting for a new batch of fleshy white men from Blighty. The medical orderly's main surgical tool was a heated needle to pop the water blisters. We were told to go over to the parade ground and pick up our deep-sea kit bags.

When we got there we were confronted with a pyramid of several thousand kit bags. The 30 of us started to look for our own bag but after half an hour we realised we were on a loser and decided to lay them out in alphabetical order. As other groups arrived they mucked in, some crafty ones just looked in the rows for their own but they were soon told to get stuck in. After 3hrs I found mine and when I left an hour later the pile was only half done. Bombay was an interesting city but I was shocked to see the inhabitants sleeping six deep, heads to toe, on the pavements at night. Also during the day the police controlling the traffic at junctions would lash out with their long sticks at anyone who stepped off the pavement before they blew the whistle to cross. About a thousand of us boarded

the train not realising that it would be seven days before we arrived in Colombo. The seats and bunks were wooden slats. Twice a day the train stopped and we had to go and collect dead wood from the scrub to refill the tender. At night the stream of sparks from the engine stretched for miles behind the train. On my first day I was introduced to an Indian train toilet with two footprints and a hole in the floor. It's a work of art to sit there in a swaying train with one hand holding your shorts, and the other hand gripping the handrail especially if you had a dose of the "nudgers" or Delhi belly. Now and again a blast of air would come up through the hole and complicate matters. In spite of being cooped up day and night everyone was in good humour except for a small, but could have been an explosive, incident. On the fifth day we stopped at a station, which had several water pumps, so we took the opportunity to freshen up. One person splashed another, blows were exchanged, and another two joined in, before we managed to pull them apart. A minute later two officers left their Raj style luxury carriage to ask what the problem was, "What problem Sir?" Eventually we arrived in Trichinopoly and the trip to Colombo was as Les Dawson has described. (*Tom Kellock*)

Ted & Les are doing an excellent job but to keep Ad Lib going they need lots of written material. We are all getting on in years and our personal memory helps to keep us going. For the majority of us those times 60yrs ago were our "GAP" years, something that today's young demand because they have been at schools a long time. If fifty of us can spend a couple or three days at the Falcon nattering about our time with 160 then why not share it with the other members by putting it in print.

(*Tom Kellock*)

(*Thanks for the plug, Tom*)

And, again thanks to Tom, you thought you would never see her again – the one and only 'Pineapple Lil'



Pineapple Lil

THE LANDINGS BEHIND JAP LINES

In AD LIB's 8, 9 and 10 there were various articles about unscheduled landings behind Jap lines and after researching ORB's the facts are given as:

13/9/45 Aircraft "Q" (BZ823 captained by 151543 F/L Morley H K) was airborne on sortie 'Pontoon 24' (S D Mastiff) but developed engine trouble en route and was diverted for forced landing to Butterworth Airfield, Malaya. Stores carried, and nickels, were delivered to O/C Troops, Central Malaya, for disposal. A successful landing was made and aircraft serviceable so that return to base could be made on the 19th. Time down 15.16 hrs 19.9.45.

The Sortie report reads as follows:

Weather fair on way out except for heavy rain around Nicobars. Engine trouble in the vicinity of 98 deg E prevented A/c from completing flight and after signalling a proposed landing at Sabang, instructions were received from group HQ to proceed if possible to Butterworth A/F in Malaya (Penang) where it would be practical to take off again after trouble was remedied. A successful landing was carried out there, stores and nickels handed over to O.C Troops, Central Malaya, and return to base made on the 19th. Being the squadron's first aircraft to land in Malaya much useful information was collected.

Crew: F/Lt H K Morley, F/S D P Hodgson, F/O J S Fortt, F/O A Tait, F/S G Lindsey, Sgt H J Holtham, Sgt I Chapman, Sgt F R Hunter

The above are the official versions and from the earlier comments the crew would probably be more forthcoming to colleagues at the time about the experience. No doubt there are a number of anecdotal tales of this incident and in this context we are grateful for the following email from Mr Alastair Cameron (via Robert Quirk).

"It has come to my notice in my research on my dad's friend W/O Fraser R Hunter - he was a Flight Engineer with 160 Sqdn - that his aircraft BZ823 in having to crash-land on Butterworth was the first allied aircraft to land there since it was evacuated in 1942. The Captain was F/Lt Morley.

He has given me the bare bones of the story. On 13th September 1945 BZ 823 had engine trouble on an S D Op to Malaya. The only option was to land at Butterworth in Malaya where the airstrip was still held by the Japanese so they expected trouble.

The engines were running and the turrets and the crew were armed when two Japanese officers and their driver turned up and said in good English "We were expecting you".

The locals tried to reach the crew but were turned back by soldiers with fixed bayonets. Fraser asked for an interpreter and a teacher came forward but

was very afraid - shaking so visibly that his shorts shook - that the Japs would shoot him

Fraser told him that he would 'blow off the first man to move head if they tried anything'

The teacher obtained the OK for the villagers to come up to the aircraft and from then on the locals treated them like heroes.

The aircraft was on the ground for more than six days and Fraser and one of the crew members asked for a car to go to look for the army. The officer would only let them use the car if they used a Japanese driver. After a trip lasting about 10 minutes from the airfield they threw the driver in the back. Neither could drive very well and they ended up in the ditch a few times - even the Japanese soldier in the back was saying "Brake, Brake," when they went too fast.

Fraser still has a bugle liberated from the stores at Butterworth - it is well battered now from his children playing with it but you can still see the Japanese markings on it."

There was a second landing - coincidentally - but in Sumatra this time

ORB's have another report of a landing, this time on Sumatra on 16/9/45: it reads:

On 16/9/45 Aircraft "F" (FL991, Capt. F/O D Johnstone) on sortie Mastiff/Medan. All stores fell on DZ and all chutes opened. After drop was made aircraft was forced to land on the airfield (Medan, Sumatra) owing to failure of fuel transfer system. Successful landing was made and trouble remedied to allow return to be made to base on 19/9/45.

The sortie report adds:

'Weather fair en route with isolated showers but good at DZ. Medan Airfield was easily found where drop was made. Owing to failure of fuel transfer system a/c was forced to land after dropping on A/F. Successful landing was made and failure remedied so that return could be made to base on 19th. This was the first a/c to land in Sumatra and much useful information was obtained including serviceability of airfield etc. A visit was made to internment camps in the vicinity by the crew and a considerable amount of internees mail was brought back for forwarding'

Crew: F/O D Johnstone, F/S A Limpitlaw, F/O M J Burchill, F/O J Salvage, W/O M Batten, F/S K Baldwin, F/S C N Dunn, Sgt Hill.

But was *this* the first?

Possibly the first landing behind JAP lines was by a Mosquito of 684 Sqdn on 31/8/45, Pilot F/Lt C G Andrews, RNZAF, Navigator W/O Painter, operating from Cocos Islands. Due to engine trouble they landed at Kallang, Singapore, where they were met by a party of JAP officers who were expecting a Dakota from Lord Louis' H Q to finalise the terms of surrender of the Jap troops on Singapore Island.

THE LANDINGS BEHIND JAP LINES (Cont'd)

They stayed the night at Changi POW camp returning to the Mosquito the next morning with an RAF Fitter and a Rigger who repaired the fault. Meantime the CO of the 684 Sqdn detachment (S/Ldr Newman) arrived in another Mosquito and the two aircraft returned to Cocos Islands together.

A Liberator of 356 Sqdn also from Cocos made several passes over the airfield obviously noting the presence of the 'Mossie' and this may explain the report of a sighting of an RAF plane on a Jap held airfield, which has been asked about in the past.

(Les Crawley)

(With info from ORBs and Ken Rosam's book 'Operation Pharos' courtesy of the author. ORB's stick to the 'party line' but why does one get the feeling that the 160 coincidental landings were somehow orchestrated? Editor).

MEANWHILE, BACK AT MINNERIYA

Peter Gay has memories of these events per Ad Lib No.9 and it is worth bringing up that, despite the very busy time on the squadron on 'Mastiff' ops, which curtailed squadron inter crew sporting activities, 160 was still prominent in station sports though less so in football. In cricket however it was a different matter and ORB's state:

"...S/Ldr Gay's faultless innings in one match seems to indicate that this stylist has completely regained his former prowess".

(Coincidentally, Peter Gay was acting C O at about that time – but, no, he would not write the reports!) For clarification – the Aussies had all left 160 earlier so perhaps this evened the odds a bit.

The squadron team also did very well in the Table Tennis Tournament - maybe they could have taken on the Aussies.

At time of going to print, Peter Gay is not very well and we send him our best wishes – you are in our thoughts Peter.

(Editor)

THE INDIAN OCEAN AIR FORCE (No.222 GROUP)

(It is some time since we had a contribution from our Aussie colleagues so it is good to have this reprint of an article Laurie Jones prepared for his local S.E.A. Air Command Association. For those who have not had the pleasure of reading Laurie's book, this is a good 'taster'.

Interestingly, Jim Jackson who receives a mention later, has made a plea for us to be more assertive about 160's role which by any standards because of the variety of operations, was unique: it also coincides with Edgar Cooray's request for an article for publication. Editor)

"When our learned leader recently suggested that I might contribute some recollections of squadron life

in Ceylon I agreed, but in no time realised that to write about life on 160 RAF Liberator Squadron it would be necessary to provide some background as to why squadrons supporting the offensive in Burma should be so happily lodged out of harm's way on the western periphery of the Bay of Bengal or on the emerald isle of Ceylon.

At this point in time I should disclose that I have drawn on the Canadian publication "Burma Liberators", as well as my own epic – "Pilot's Story" for some of the source material.

RCAF Catalina sounds the alarm

On 4th April, 1942, some five months after Pearl Harbour, a lone RCAF Catalina on patrol to the south of Ceylon, beheld the awesome sight of an advancing Japanese fleet, comprising five aircraft carriers, four battleships, three cruisers, 11 destroyers and a variety of transports and oilers literally filling the horizon. He got away a brief warning message before being shot down.



(The Captain was S/Ldr L J Birchall C/O of 413 RCAF Squadron here seen in the ill fated Catalina – and he survived though taken prisoner with five other crew. As the Japs had also picked up their warning message they were mercilessly beaten – from 'The Most Dangerous Moment' by M.Tomlinson - Editor)

It was sufficient to alert the shore defences and next day when the Japanese armada of 80 aircraft struck at Colombo, the RAF aircraft although far outnumbered, comprising but one squadron of Hurricanes, destroyed 21 of the enemy.

Four days later the Japanese struck at the dockyard at Trincomalee and the adjacent aerodrome of China Bay. The defence comprised one squadron of Hurricanes and six Fairey Fulmars facing 54 bombers with escorting fighters. Fifteen enemy aircraft were shot down for the loss of 11 RAF fighters. In the first ever attack against a Japanese fleet since the start of the war, a small force of Blenheims targeted one of the major Japanese ships with foreseeable results.

A number of RN ships in port or in the vicinity of the island were sunk or damaged, but the main fleet was safely tucked away well to the south at Addu Atoll.

The JAP admiral withdraws

Admiral Nagamo withdrew, back through the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, sending some of his carriers back to Japan to replenish and re-equip with aircraft to replace the battle casualties. Whilst the enemy had been repelled by a minute force, little remained of the RAF in Ceylon and the task of rebuilding it's strength was formidable in view of the demands of other war theatres. Progress was slow in 1942, but accelerated in 1943. New airfields were created at Sigiriya, Minneriya and Vavuniya.

And the fight back begins

No.222 Group, established in Colombo, was charged with the maritime responsibility for the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, the largest operational area of the war. Liberator squadrons arrived to help take up the load off the Catalinas based at Koggala. No.160 Squadron was based first at Ratmalana (Colombo), then at Sigiriya deep in the jungle at the centre of the island. No.354 was based at Cuttack in India. General reconnaissance aircraft of the Aden and East African commands were placed under the operational control of 222 Group.

Typical of the sort of operation run by the Group was that of a U boat reported off Madagascar that resulted in a combined chase by ships of the Eastern Fleet and aircraft from East Africa, the Seychelles and Ceylon. Finally the raider was destroyed off the Japanese submarine base at Penang on the Malayan coast.

The search for 'The Butcher'

In July and August 1944 submarine warfare in the Indian Ocean reached it's peak, with Liberators and Catalinas ranging far and wide over vast stretches of ocean in the search for U boats and, sadly, for the survivors of the many ships sunk. One of the more aggressive U Boat commanders was known to us as "The Butcher" due to his habit of surfacing after sinking his merchant ship target in order to machine gun the surviving crew on their rafts and boats.

In my own case I flew almost double the number of hours in July as for a normal month. It started on 2nd July with two aircraft "O" and "T" on a parallel track search. We were out for exactly 11 hours, most of it at night. Following a 16 hours 40 minutes photographic reconnaissance trip to the islands off the west coast of Sumatra, my next op was with four other Libs on an anti-submarine patrol, which took us to 1 degree South latitude. At the southern extremity of our patrol there was a call for help from a merchant ship under attack further to the south and unfortunately beyond our range. It was "The Butcher" once again. He failed to kill all the mariners and a handful were rescued by a Catalina the next day

(It is likely that 'the butcher' was Lt.Comm Tatsunoseke Ariizumi of submarine 1/8 – he carried out, with unbelievable cruelty, the massacre of 98 unarmed survivors of the Dutch ship Tjisalak and repeated it when he torpedoed the American ship Jean Nicolet. Ariizumi had moved elsewhere when the sub 1/8 was sunk off Okinawa a year later but he shot himself while taking a squadron back to Japan to surrender. By the end of the war all Jap subs in the Indian Ocean had been sunk with their crews.

Information from 'Wings of the Dawning' – Editor)

An Inspiring sight

Three nights later it was to take part in stage six of a "hunt to exhaustion" off the west coast of India. This was followed up with the task of flying anti-submarine escort to the Eastern Fleet returning to Trincomalee from the bombardment of Sabang on the northern tip of Sumatra. Quite an inspiring sight: 16 cruisers in tight formation doing 30 knots ahead of the main fleet of three aircraft carriers and two battleships plus destroyer escorts. And so the month went on.

Taking the war to the JAP shipping lanes.

Initially the Liberator role was defensive - anti submarine patrols and long range reconnaissance but as the U Boat threat eventually phased out and more Liberator squadrons became operational, the task became offensive taking the war to the Jap's shipping lanes and coastal installations. Squadrons 160. 354. 200, 203 and 321 based at Madras, Cuttack, Akyab and at Sigiriya, Kankasanturai, and Minneriya in Ceylon attacked shipping and laid increasing numbers of mines in enemy waters off the Malay Peninsular, the Kra Isthmus and the Dutch East Indies.

Increasing the range

At 160 we had been working on developing long range cruising techniques for some time and progressively increased the range to make Singapore a feasible target for the mine layers. These sorties of 3350 miles to Singapore had the aircraft airborne for an average of 21 to 22 hours, with the occasional 24-hour mind boggler. The need to install long-range tanks in the rear bomb bays considerably reduced the mine load, but in four months operating from Minneriya the squadron laid just on 1,000 mines down the Malayan coast and in Singapore harbour. *(To be continued)*

NOW FOR A TEASER



Who is this airman who received more awards of the MHDOIF than any one else. More in our next issue. *(Picture by permission of HMSO)*