



160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage for survivors



SUMMER 2003
Number 25

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

Reunion 2003: Fri.29/8/03 to Sun.31/8/03

Don't miss it. Send in you booking form now!!!

(In case of need – Falcon Hotel is Tel: 01789 279953)

Annual Subs: Due 1st September, see note on page 5.

Thurleigh Party: This was unfortunately cancelled possibly due to fewer overseas visitors to UK after 9/11. Watch this space ?

BOOKS: Jim Jackson reports that his novel "Above Sumatra" is now available from Trafford Publishing at www.trafford.com. He emphasises that although the framework of the story is a P.R flight to Sumatra it is not a memoir about 160 Sqdn.

Canadian Radar Mechanics in SEAC by Angus Hamilton. This can be read on Robert Quirk's website at <http://www.rquirk.com/seac.html>. There are some references to 160 as well as a listing of some of the mechanics that served on 160 in the appendix. 723 RCAF Radar mechanics served in SEAC and for Radar buffs this is an absolute mine of information running to nearly 400 pages. The author has generously allowed the downloading and printing of the book, or passages, from Robert Quirk's web site.

Consolidated B24 Liberator: Classic WW11 Aviation Vol.3 (Edward Shacklady) 160 pages hardback £8.99 (was £19.99)

Aircraft Profiles Magazines No.19: The Consolidated B24J Liberator £2.00 (2nd hand)

The Men who went to Warsaw: L.Isemonger: Tells of ops by Libs of SAAF Sqdns 31 & 34 from Italy to Warsaw: These were hazardous journeys but the 11hr trips with only 10% fuel reserve and no reserve landing grounds help to put into perspective 160's twenty hr + ops. £26.95

OBITUARIES:

Good to report that we have a NIL return

MAKING CONTACT: news, old colleagues and help:

Ed Mechan. Welcome aboard to Ed Mechan of Ted Horton's crew and known to both Ron Crawford and Derek Collins. His daughter, in Canada, picked us up from Robert Quirk's web site.

George MacDonald: Wop/AG with Jock Campbell's crew. Sqdn's first loss in SEAC - in "B" FK239 on 24/8/43. George was in the RAF and apparently from Newfoundland. His nephew asks if anyone remembers him and are there any photographs around? The aircraft was lost most likely due to extreme weather conditions as described by Gerry Boyle in the article in AD LIB No.16. (This is yet another contact via the web site).

"Daily Mail" Answers to correspondents: If there are any avid Mail readers about they may have seen the response we were able to send on 24/5/03 to the enquiry about ENSA casualties. Someone had picked up off the Internet the item in AD LIB No.16 telling the story of the rabid dog and a bitten ENSA member and sent in details. We followed up and gave more details plus a plug for 160. Are there any Ssq wallahs about who might know whether the ENSA member recovered OK? The ENSA show was "You're Welcome" and was given on 26 and 27/4/44.

Ken Deans did read the above article and it reminded him that he had been seconded to 160 from 322 MU Cawnpore early in 1945 to help and instruct ground crews on how to fit the extra fuel tank in the bomb bay. At Cawnpore they had been put on a special job to convert Libs for crop and insect spraying which had entailed the necessity for fitting fuel tanks in the bomb bays – hence the know-how. He rightly feels he played an important part in the special efforts that were made to extend the range for the long distance mine-laying operations.

Bubble Sextant: The saga goes on. There is clearly a market for replacement air bubbles – maybe there has been an epidemic. Another lost bubble has come to light and has been referred to our honorary bubble consultant Mike Gerasimoff. This enquiry was from Australia. (Marvellous that someone types in "Bubble Sextant" in one of the search engines and ends up with 160 Sqdn and the answer!

Robert Quirk's web site: This is a good opportunity to give an update on how much material there is regarding 160 on Robert's site. A visit is well worthwhile and you can get directly to the section by logging on to – www.rquirk.com/160.html: Look up the links as well.

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD:

In AD LIB No.21, Les Jewitt of 160 Defence Flight, broke off from taking his multiple medication to give us an insight into some of the nastier things that were happening at Quetta/Salbani. He continues...

'Arrived at Salbani and being advised by the bods that I would soon be put on gun crew duty, which was bloody awful, etc. etc. I got a bit of a shock really when they told me about the eating situation on gun posts. What shook me most was the attitude; defeatist? negative? I hardly know how to describe it fairly, but it made me regard gun crew duty with some apprehension.

The lads were prepared to eat such food as could be eaten without cooking in the first couple of days on site, then starve for the other three days and complain loudly about being badly done to.

My first experience of gun crew told me that everything the bods had been complaining about was factual. Each crew was issued with rations for five days, which covered water, paraffin (hurricane lamp) tinned bacon, Soya sausages, butter, flour, eggs and whatever else I can't remember. Oh yes, bully beef! We were all so sickened by that in Egypt that I don't think anyone could stomach it any more! But on site the cooking facilities were NIL NIL NIL and this really got to me. To think that the RAF could provide us with the wherewithal to shoot at intruding aircraft, but otherwise we could take pot luck. This was not improved by the fact that none of us were accustomed to cooking or camp life in the wilds and, seemingly, the morale of the Defence Flight grew poorer and poorer with each turn of duty. The only time we saw an officer was on the fifth day when crews changed over.

There was no fuel with which to make a fire to even boil a kettle and this was understandable when one remembered that the native population had been seeking out any combustible materials for their cooking fires for centuries; what irked me was that the RAF - in the shape of our officers - could not have cared less about our welfare, foodwise. It is my firm belief, that the officer i/c Defence Flight could have located within the area, maybe from an army source, some primitive kind of stove which would have been adequate for our purposes - had he so desired. *(Les then makes it quite clear that the Defence Flight officers were not held in high esteem - Editor).*

Looking around for some stones with which to build a crude sort of hearth on which to boil the kettle was totally fruitless, so I decided to dig a fire pit. However the ground had the consistency of breeze blocks and not even the pickaxe could make an impression on it; so I got half a pint of water to try soften a small patch of soil, but was brought to heel very quickly with "Stop wasting our..... drinking water you!" *(The first blank, at a guess, could be 'precious' - the second ? nothing fits - Editor).*

The situation was dire, so far as I was concerned, but I wandered off into the scrub to look for something burnable and found a disused well, but there was no

way down to the water level, so I had to get an empty can, tie a string on it, put a stone in it and, drop by drop, obtained sufficient 'pani' to soften the area where I wanted the cooking pit and before too long, with an accumulation of thorn twigs, etc. we got a brew of tea. The fuel situation was a problem throughout; how we managed to get enough to cook with I don't know and when it came to cooking, nobody wanted to know: "I didn't join up to be a cook!" was the cry, so it fell to Mr. Muggins to do it, however crudely'.

(Les Jewitt - to be continued)

REMEMBER "TEE EMM" ?

The figure of fun in last month's issue was, as we all knew (?), none other than P O Prune whose antics and misdemeanours caused many a chuckle but they were of course related to actual incidents. It led to the award from time to time of **The Most Highly Derogatory Order of the Irremovable Finger**, here shown in all its magnificence.



Here are two typical citations

The **M H D O I F** has been awarded to Wing Commander - ----- for Wanting to Get it Quite Clear.

'While acting as Duty Wing Commander he asked Ops Room about certain aircraft and was told they were not available as they were on Daily Inspection. To this he replied: "O.K. And how often are these done?"

The **M H D O I F** has also been awarded to S/Ldr ----- (Tech.E.) for Knowing the Wrong Way to Put Things Right.

'As Daily Servicing Officer, he expressed considerable annoyance with a pilot who returned to base because one of his engines was giving an oil temperature in excess of the safety limit. He explained the pilot should have flown into wind to cool it down'.

(From 'The Life and Times of P.O.Prune' and by permission of H M S O).

THE INDIAN OCEAN AIR FORCE Continued

About the air fields

Sigiriya was a strip hacked out of the jungle at the time when the Japanese threat demanded concealment so it was narrow with the forest trees and machine gun emplacements giving only marginal clearance for the 110 foot wingspan of the Lib. There was a great hump in the middle, so high that it completely obscured aircraft parked at one end of the strip from the other end. In addition, it boasted the famous "Rock of Sigiriya", a 600-foot monolith right inside the circuit. Inevitably we lost heavily laden aircraft struggling off the too short strip at night. An overloaded Lib with bomb bay fuel and depth charges makes a lot of noise when it goes in as it snags the trees on take off.

After two such prangs with the loss of 16 aircrew, Group prepared a new airfield for us at Kankesanturai (KKS) at the northern tip of the island. It was quite fantastic; a long concrete strip with an occasional palm tree scattered about the camp and no other obstructions for miles. However it had two problems. Firstly it added additional miles to the area of our operations and secondly it had, when we first arrived, no hard standing. Not long after our arrival, the heavens opened up and it poured all night. Morning light revealed the astonishing sight of the entire squadron of aircraft with the under carts sunken into the red mud of KKS. Attempts to even get to them by gharry proved hopeless; the vehicles just sank into the mud too.

Looking down at the endless miles of the Bay of Bengal in the days to come, one could not but wonder about the condition of the four P & W engines, remembering the C/O and others like me using every inch of manifold pressure the engines could deliver to drag the 58,000 pounds of Lib out of the mud to park them along the strip. Some of the nose radars took a bit of a pounding too, as the aircraft lurched along on the chin fairing.

PR with 684 Sqdn Mosquitoes

Jimmy Jackson, a Canadian skipper and I who specialised in PR, found we could not reach our target areas from KKS and so we joined a detachment of two 684 Squadron PR Mosquitoes and a survey-camera fitted B25 Mitchell at China Bay, a base dedicated to RN aviation. Previously any crew on top of the ops list flew PR sorties. The solitary 160 Squadron Libs slowly ambling over the Andamans and Nicobars on their reconnaissance runs took a hammering from the Jap fighters and PR was scrubbed for some time. With some reduction in the enemy fighter activity Group agreed to the formation of "C" Flight to handle PR sorties and Jimmy and I did a lot of work with our crews and aircraft to develop some expertise. In addition to reconnaissance trips our main role was to complete the survey of the central section of Sumatra. 684 Mosquitoes worked on the northern segment of the big island and the fleet air arm from the carriers, the southern, which was beyond our range

Fighting the elements

Regardless of the nature of the op being flown, mining, anti-shipping or PR, we all took a hammering as we

crossed the Bay of Bengal at night on our way to the target areas. I guess all of us that flew in the Burma theatre found the inter tropic front a frightening experience. On the squadron we tried many techniques to minimise the trauma of fighting the aircraft through those towering cumulus clouds. At times we would have the gear and flaps down and still the altimeter would be winding upward with the rate of climb needle stuck on the up stop. Then the bottom would drop out of the sky and the aircraft would fall like the proverbial stone. St Elmo's fire would light up the aircraft with balls of fire running over the mainplanes. We tried the under the storm method, with the rain and hail crashing over the cockpit and occasional glimpses of the whitecaps on the seething ocean below, when we lurched wildly downward and full throttle seemed useless against the force of the downdraught.

Tackling the long range problems

Because of the range constraints imposed by KKS's location on the northern tip of Ceylon, the Squadron moved to the comparatively large base of Minneriya, where other Lib squadrons were also gathering. The 'miners' were still clocking up 22-hour trips as the norm and we did lose two crews that ran out of fuel not far from home. Sadly one of those lost was one of our flight commanders who had done the most work in developing our long-range cruise procedures. He came down in the Bay about 60 miles short of his landfall and executed a reasonable ditching, but sharks proved fatal for some of the crew. The survivors' recovery was delayed for many hours because the clown of a radio operator who took their distress message thought it was a practise call. One element of long range cruise was to lean the mixtures as far as possible and then, leaving manifold pressure at the normal cruise setting of about 30 inches, pull back the RPM to a level that just kept the generators running; usually about 1250 to 1350 revs.

The crews on 160

We were lucky on 160 in that we had a good mix of nationalities: about 20% were RAAF, 35% RCAF, 5% Kiwis, South Africans etc and the remainder RAF. When I crewed up at 111 OTU in the Bahamas where most GR Lib crews trained, I put together a mainly RAAF crew: six of us were Australian, the WOM (Wireless operator mechanic) English and the Flight Engineer, Welsh. There were no Australians available in these two latter categories.

Over the period I was on the squadron the nucleus of the crew remained unchanged, but I did have three co-pilots. It was the practise for co-pilots, as they gathered experience, to be returned to the Bahamas to pick up their own crews and then to return to SEA usually collecting a new Liberator at Montreal; as we mostly did; and then ferrying it out to India. I had been lucky, in that I was one of the very few that went straight from SFTS via GR school to receive a command straight off. Most captains at 111 OTU, apart from the second dickies from SEA, were F/Lts or S/Ldrs who had finished one or two instructional tours in Canada.

(Laurie Jones – F/Lt / DFC)

(The book 'A Pilot's Story' is still available - Editor)

“JUST ANOTHER A/S PATROL?” ...Ron Eitel

Intelligence had picked up information that short-range Jap submarines were engaged in dropping Indian agents on the east coast of India and it was decided to mount an operation to intercept these subs and to apprehend any agents who may have landed. A sweep by 4 x 160 Libs was accordingly laid on. They were

“T” BZ830 F/Lt Leeper and crew

“Y” BZ889 S/Ldr Joy and crew

“A” BZ771 F/Lt Netherton and crew

“N” BZ752 F/O Dean and crew

(Each Lib carried 6 D C's).

Due to failure of his S. E. F/Lt Netherton, realising that he would have to rely on visual sighting, narrowed his search from 20 miles to 10 miles and his was the aircraft that spotted the submarine which was on the surface and apparently unaware of the oncoming attack.

Ron Eitel takes up the story advising that this was his first op and Ted Stratford, Fire Controller, had carefully briefed him on how to prime and launch a marine marker from the beam window of the Lib.

They were able to come at the sub directly out of the sun and during the attack Ted in the rear turret saw the D C's straddle the sub and told the flight deck that the marker had gone down with the D C's. Ron thought this was a bit of a miracle as he had a job getting the marker off his legs due to the “G” as they pulled out of the dive. The delay must have helped him get the timing right.

The official report goes on

‘At the moment of attack Marine Marker Mk 11 dropped. Tail turret opened fire with 600 rounds into the conning tower and swirl. Pilot, not considering U boat intending to submerge flew on course of attack for 45 seconds to avoid possible fire from the U boat. During the approach and afterwards the U Boat did not fire.

Results of the first three D C's not seen due possibly to hitting the target. No 4 seen to explode approximately 10 feet ahead of and in path of the sub with the remaining No's 5 and 6 exploding 50 and 100 feet further ahead.

From the narrative of the attack and the interrogation of the crew the U boat appears to have been completely taken by surprise, this surprise being mainly due to the very well executed attack after a visual sighting by the captain of the aircraft; the team work of the crew, after the sighting, being of a high order.

It appears possible that Nos. 2 and 3 struck the U boat exploding simultaneously with No 4 or failed to explode and that No 1 entered so close that it exploded underneath the U boat which may account for the lifting of the U boat and the spilling of water from off the decks as seen by the beam gunner immediately prior to the explosion of No 4 D.C.

As the U boat did not make any attempt to submerge and that within 45 seconds after the attack no part of it was visible, it is possible that it sank immediately. As no wreckage was visible after the attack, except for a growing patch of oil following under water disturbance, and as nothing further was seen of the U boat when the aircraft left 1 hr 15 mins after the attack, it is possible

that the nearness of the explosion of No 4 D C caused the hydroplanes to jam placing the U boat into a dive from which it may never recover.

Without any photographic evidence owing to film sticking to the glass register of the F24 camera it is considered that this attack can be classified as a “probable kill”.

There are two postscripts.

1. Twelve photographs were taken which could have confirmed the kill but the film stuck, probably due to moisture, giving rise to the comment that this may not have happened if the ACSEA ruling, that long-range reconnaissance aircraft did not qualify for the heated version of the camera, had not applied.

2. Two days later enemy agents were discovered on the India Coast and were apprehended.

(From ORB's and Ron Eitel)



Liberator BZ 711 “A” with crew.

JACK BURGESS writes

Much as I would have liked to have retained a closer link with 160 ‘happenings’ it now seems a long time since I was sending bits and bobs to John Munday, Bill Cooper and then Ted Daines.

NOW

The main reason being totally caught up in the Aircrew Association organisation – first of all, setting up their original national web site in 1997 and then operating the Scottish Saltire Branch website as well as video, newsletter, and other time consuming branch projects. Nevertheless, I have been following you all in spirit.

THEN

To recap, I joined Les Waterfield's crew as their F/Engr at 111 OTU, Nassau, joined 160 Sqdn at KKS in August 1944, and carried out the Waterfield operations until I spent a few weeks in dock. Then I completed the final eight ops with Doug Turner's crew after his flight engineer was badly injured in the ditching.

My own final operation of the 500 hr tour was with Doug Turner and lasted 23 hrs 25 minutes – on this occasion we had the distinct luxury of arriving back on all four engines. The Turner crew had ditched before I joined them and the final eight ops were tension filled because of their previous experience.

Edior's Note: *I have set Jack's comments in this format as a starter idea for similar items for future AD LIBS with members sending in a THEN, SINCE (optional) and NOW*

short autobiography – with before and after photos. Contributions would be most welcome but please make them concise – we only have 5 pages. As an incentive - your story will go down for posterity on the World Wide Internet for all time (?) or, at least, it should end up on the great hard disk in the sky.

GROUND CREWS – A TRIBUTE

JACK BURGESS continues with a tribute to ground crews picking up on Robert Quirk's suggestion that there should be more recognition by having a listing of all those who served, adding. 'I am not surprised, for, as John Stacey and many others (including myself) have often stated, the ground crews on 160 Sqdn were second to none. We were indeed fortunate to have such support on the very long operations that Liberators were never designed to carry out. The fitting of bomb-bay tanks and the essential booster pumps on the catwalk etc etc were innovations that ground crews seemed to take in their stride. Keeping those aircraft in good shape for such long-range flights was no easy option and I can't remember ever being let down by faulty maintenance. In the European theatre, a five-hour operation was considered to be a long flight. Little did they know that we were flying 20+ hour operations and it was only the competence, commitment and skill of 160 Squadron ground crews that enabled our aircraft remain in good shape for such long periods'. *(Jack Burgess)*

Jack invites you to visit his website where in line with the BBC Remembrance Project he has managed to twist enough arms to insert over 40 flying experiences from his branch members.

Look up <www.aircrew-saltire.org>

And what did **JOHN STACEY** say?

'The ground crews were superb, which was just as well as they were working under the most appalling conditions. We were at the end of the line on priorities and it was make-do-and-mend all the time. There were no hangars and all the work was in the open, rain or sun – and it was hot! 120 degrees in the tail turret at midday. The backbone of the ground crews was always the pre-war Halton or equivalent-trained apprentice, with an average age of 21, we were never short of ingenuity or enthusiasm'. *(From Wings of the Dawning - Arthur Banks)*

WERE THERE TWO 24 HOUR FLIGHTS? – READ ON

From Jack Burgess we have also received a copy of a letter that raises a question as to whether more than one crew made a 24-hour flight. The one in the record book and published is that by F/Lt J A Muir on 31/7/45 at 24 hrs 10 minutes but W/Op Eugene Vivian ('Newfie'), a member of a crew captained by Jack Bates, RAAF, writes about a long distance flight they carried out on 6/7th June 1945 and even if this is not the one which set the record it was certainly one of incident. His letter dated 1986 includes the following notes about the flight.

"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 whilst 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 close by hoping to be picked up. Finding nothing, we continued on for the 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 we were sure was imminent. Roughly three hours out, we were joined by a Catalina Flying Boat escort (out of Colombo) 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 home base we would have to fly over jungle which would have been suicidal, so we asked permission to divert to China Bay which had a runway either right down the water's edge or at least at sea level. When we reached the harbour, tugs were busy pulling shipping out of the way so we could come straight on in as we were only about ten feet above the water by then. In fact, we often joked afterwards that our altitude ranged between a minus ten and a plus ten.

We did of course make it, but when the 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 certainly not by choice. *(Eugene Vivian)*

The crew comprised: W/O J J Bates RAAF, Sgts L N Cunningham, E J Cooper, N Johnson, W Moore, E D Vivian RCAF, R E Stumbles, H J Moule RCAF, W J Newell RCAF, P R Ryan. Do we know if any of these are still in contact?

According to ORB's the flight from take off at Minneriya to landing at China Bay lasted 19 hrs 2 minutes. Jack Bates gave Jack Burgess an autographed bank note as a parting souvenir relating to his 24 hr 10 mins flight.

*The ORB (completed at Minneriya) shows time of landing at China Bay as 07.35 and confirmed flight time of 19 hrs 2 mins – it would have to have been 12.43 to be the longest flight -perhaps there was a mistake? *(Editor)**

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS: Due from 1st September: MEMBERSHIP £5 : FOR 'AD LIB' a further £3 :

Ted would prefer to have payments before the reunion so that he has more available time to look after the organisation. THANK YOU .