

160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage for survivors



AUTUMN 2004
Number 30

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S.S.O's and D.R.O's "HEROES RETURN"

The list for those taking up the offer to go with the 160 Group is now closed and we have a total of 37 which includes 17 of our vets. We are now firming up travel details and these and other guidance notes will be sent separately to the 17 vets plus co-travellers when we have finalised the arrangements. It has to be said that we do not yet have the money - just the apparent OK that we will be qualifying. (What? me worried?) At least, if it fails, it is giving me useful experience for a career as a travel agent. There is more about the visit in the 'Reunion' notes in this issue.

Our application has been finalised and submitted at the 37 and we cannot add more names but if anyone decides later that they wish to go they can do so but they will need to submit their own individual application to the fund. About Travel Insurance - hold fire on arranging it for the moment as the latest "WHICH?" report advises single trip 15 days worldwide cover for 'ancient ones' may be obtained for as little as £45 (maybe better depending on state of health) from Coventry B.S.

OBITUARIES:

It is with regret that we have to advise of the deaths of Brian Wheldon from Sheringham and Peter Gay from Brentwood. Brian was a Fitter (Engines) on the squadron and Peter, a pilot, did rise to the rank of S/Ldr and at times acting Commanding Officer. We send our heartfelt sympathies to their families and friends,

ANNUAL SUBS: These were due for the year on 1st September and Ted advises that some 24 members have still not paid. Not good for the finances - need one say more?

BOOKS:

The BOMBER War 1939-45 Arthur Harris and the Allied Bomber Offensive: (Neillands) A reprint of this work in paperback is now available from Midland Counties Publications at only £9.99. Tel: 01455 254450

Canadians on Radar in South East Asia: Angus Hamilton: This book was recommended in Ad Lib No.25 and is worth another mention. It appears to be out of print but can be downloaded from Robert Quirk's site for reading, free. It contains a wealth of material and has been well researched with maps, statistics and lots of personal reminiscences. Extracts will be appearing in Ad Lib. At least 23 of these Canadian Radar experts served on 160 Squadron and coincidentally your editor served on 176 Squadron (Beaufighters) at the same time as the author. (Not many people know that).

The Biography of A.C.M. Sir Keith Park. This book covers his entire career from youth in New Zealand to First World War (fighter ace), Malta 1942/3 and through to his role as Allied C in C in S.E.A.C under Mountbatten. Was £12.99 but on offer at £6.95. - Midland Counties Publications. Tel: 01455 254450.

BOOKS: continued

D-Day – The Air Battle. This 192 page hardback book by Ken Delve (our Heroes Return liaison contact) is described as the only full length book on the air aspects of the invasion and has been carefully researched, is nicely presented and easily digestible. Available from Crowood Press, Ramsbury, Marlborough, Wilts SN8 2HR at £16.99.

1445 FLIGHT: Robert Quirk (courtesy of Ken Krag) has provided a copy of the ORB's for this flight which operated from Lyneham more or less solely for the reception and despatch from May to September 1942 of Liberators and crews for 159 and 160 Squadrons plus some BOAC. If anyone would like a copy by email to add to their historical records, contact Les Crawley.

SERVICE MEDALS: This subject cropped up at the reunion and it appears that some of our number missed out on these awards. Briefly, (subject to confirmation in each case) anyone who served at all during the war appears to be entitled to at least the Defence Medal and the War Medal. The 39/45 Star is only issued for service in an 'operations area' for six months (air crew two months). It may be that if anyone spent their entire service in an 'operations area' there might be a doubt about the Defence Medal.

The Africa Star and Burma Star are issued for anyone who 'entered' the relevant 'operations areas' – one day is apparently enough – between specified dates. In the case of the Burma Star the dates are from 1/5/42 to 31/12/43 for anyone serving in the 'operations area' Bengal or Assam i.e. Salbani and Digri, and from 1/1/44 for similar service east of the Brahmaputra i.e. Chittagong etc. Air crew *on operations* could qualify for presumably both Burma and Pacific Stars but only one medal is actually issued plus a clasp denoting the award of the Pacific Star. Apparently, journeys by troopship, whether bombed or not, do not qualify but, if you were a person wherever you were, who was in a position to issue the orders for an operation to be carried out (i.e. a Group bigwig?) you would qualify for the relevant medals. (No, ordering your bearer to go on reconnaissance to find the Char Wallah does not come into this category).

We would like some feedback from anyone who may have more information or is aware of definitions relating to service and 'operations areas' in respect of Ceylon. As to the General Service Medal, you would be eligible if you served for 30 days in French Indo China between 3/9/45 and 28/1/46 or for 30 days in Java or Sumatra between 3/9/45 to 30/11/46. In addition if you served as aircrew ferrying POW's or internees from Java, Sumatra, Malaya, Siam, French Indo China and the Andaman Islands and completed one sortie during dates peculiar to certain units, you could also be eligible. Apparently 160 Sqdn was one of the units specified. (see *Ad Lib No. 13*)

Applications for Medals: The procedure for applications is apparently straightforward but there may be lengthy delays. Send to:- PMA (Sec) 1c (RAF): Room 6, Building 248A, RAF PMA, RAF Innsworth, Glos.GL3 1EZ.

160 Squadron Blazer Badges:Ref.No.R151:From David Barnes, 2 Wylde Close, Quidhampton, Salisbury SP2 9BE.Tel: 07227 43765

REUNION SEPTEMBER 2004:

Friday afternoon and those arriving in Stratford were greeted with an exceptionally heavy downpour - happily that was the only wet thing about the week end. There were 43 of us: a good crowd but somewhat dwarfed by a reunion of HMS Suffolk. Some of their members looked as though they may well have served on the original Suffolk way back in Nelson's time as well as fresh faced youngsters presumably from the latest edition of the Suffolk.

The company was in great form and with good food and reasonable weather we were able to relax and enjoy the sights of the town. Orderly Officer did not appear to have received any complaints.

Saturday morning came and we had a meeting to discuss the proposed "Heroes Return" to Sri Lanka. Whilst the slow return of applications from those interested meant that the formal completion of arrangements was not yet possible, it was established that at least 30 would be taking up the offer. It was clear that we would be an enthusiastic bunch of veterans especially after details of the proposed itinerary and activities had been taken on board though a few did seem to turn somewhat pale at the thought of a challenge to be the first up Sigiriya Rock again. Arrangements for oxygen are being considered.

The consensus was that a trip, later rather sooner, would be better and a stopover rather than a non stop flight to Colombo, if feasible, is desirable. The suggested date of going out on or about 27/28th January 2005, was taken on board as a target date and generally the offers we have from three tour operators all seemed to fill the bill for our requirements adequately though no choice can be made till we are further along the application trail.

So a great week ended but with one regret – that was that we failed, as a group, to thank Ted suitably for making all the arrangements and for making sure that the hotel and staff looked after us well. Sorry, and thanks Ted!
(Les Crawley)

MAKING CONTACT: News, old colleagues and HELP.

The Soya Sausage: Despite extensive research and enquiries of experts in the Catering Corps, we have had no success so far - so this request remains open.

Joe Cohen loss of "M" 22nd September 1943: Hank Illingworth's moving account about this loss (in AD LIB No.28) was read by Joe's elder brother Malcolm and his niece Jocelyn who emigrated from Australia to Israel after the war and it was very much appreciated along with the other historical information we have been able to send.

We are grateful to them for the photo of Joe which appears in this issue and we have also obtained a photo of his co-pilot F/O Taverner (Tav) Pallet from David Clarke who earlier gave us the copy of the photograph of Henry Deeny.

David has sent us copies of letters which we have been able to add to our records, from Henry Deeny to his sister plus the letter Colin Butler sent as C.O. of the squadron. From the latter one realises that this was one of the most poignant aspects of the C.O.'s responsibilities and as 160 had lost three crews in a fairly short space of time in 1943 this made it even

more tragic especially the fact that all could only be recorded as 'missing presumed killed'.

Colin Butler wrote:

S. E. C. Y.,
R. A. F.,
Ceylon
25.9.43

Dear Miss Deeny

Before you receive this letter you will have been informed by the Air Ministry that your brother, Sergeant Henry Deeny, has been reported missing as the result of air operations.

Your brother took off early in the morning of the 22nd and until today we had no further news. We now know that the Japanese have broadcast a report that they brought down a Liberator on the 22nd in the vicinity of the Nicobar Islands where your brother's aircraft was operating, one Japanese aircraft was shot down in the engagement. We have no further details and therefore cannot assess accurately the chances of survivors but, without wishing to buoy you up unduly, I must say that such a possibility exists.

For the sake of those of us who have to continue you will appreciate that these facts are passed to you in confidence. It is important that the enemy should not know that the source of our information was their own broadcast or that this Squadron is located in Ceylon.

The loss of this air crew is a sad blow to the Squadron. Your brother was the chief wireless operator in his crew, he is greatly missed in the Sergeant's Mess and his loss is regretted by all.

Your brother's effects have been gathered together and forwarded to the Standing Committee of Adjustment where they will be kept in safe custody until your brother's survival or otherwise can be confirmed.

May I now express the great sympathy which all of us feel with you in your great anxiety and I should like to assure you how very much we his comrades in the Royal Air Force admire your brother's unselfish sacrifice.

Should I receive more news I will inform you immediately.

Yours sincerely,

C. Butler

Wing Commander

Joe Cohen's brother Maurice Cohen. LLM. OBE, aged 89 (and niece Jocelyn) have been very touched and Maurice is overwhelmed by the details he is now learning about his younger brother. As a friend of Joe's, P/O Doug Strutton of the squadron wrote to Maurice and we are grateful to Jocelyn for being able to produce the letter here:

*P/O Douglas Strutton,
R.A.F. SECY,
Ceylon
1st October, 1943*

Dear Maurice,

Please forgive the familiarity but Joe has spoken of you so often that I can hardly address you by your surname, and I feel that it is much wiser to write to you than to your parents in trying to pass on what little I know of the circumstances of Joe's

disappearance, which we all feel very keenly indeed.

To be quite frank, we know very little. The crew was briefed for a normal operational trip to an area over which we had flown the previous day, when we received no enemy opposition whatever. The weather we experienced was excellent and there was every reason to suppose that the same conditions prevailed for Joe's trip.

However, at the expiration of his estimated time of arrival at base, the authorities became alarmed and endeavours were made to contact the machine by radio, but no response was made to our messages.

The only information we can glean is that given by an enemy communiqué of that date, which claimed the destruction of an aircraft of the type we are using for the loss of one of their own fighters.

That I regret to say, is all I can tell you, except that every endeavour was made to find them by aircraft which made a thorough search of the whole area in which he could possibly have been forced down.

As for Joe's ability as a pilot, that is beyond question, and he was recognised as one of the squadron's most valuable men. Nor could any doubts be entertained as to the efficiency of his crew.

I can but add, as one who is proud to claim him as a very dear friend, that I hope and pray that much better news will be forthcoming in the very near future. If there is anything I can do at this end, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Strutton

Even after more than 60 years it still brings home to us the personal nature rather than the bare statistics of the loss of so many of our colleagues and mates. Knowing that this information will all be available through our newsletters, worldwide, on the internet, adds another dimension to the importance of gathering together memories, reminiscences and otherwise forgotten material for other family researchers and to add to wartime history. For this reason as well as others, we need your continued input whilst we are still around. (Editor)



*P/O Joe Cohen Cptn & F/O 'Tav' Pallet 2nd Pilot
Both aged 21. k.i.a. 22nd September, 1943: "M".*

Paul (Charlie) Bourdon: LAC: RAF: Charlie's daughter in law Carol sends a request from Australia asking if anyone remembers Paul who is presently in hospital and she is trying to put together an album of his life for the family.

Charlie eventually became a member of 159 Squadron and his service follows the 160 pattern – Middle East Feb 1942, India June 1942, SEAC November 1943 – Carol is hopeful that she can make contact with

anyone who knew him. Having seen AD LIB on the internet she picked up the story about the Italian P O W Camp in North Africa and she has a photo showing a group of people behind a barbed wire fence. We now have copy photos from Carol showing various ground crew – they are a welcome new addition to our records. Email copies can be sent to anyone interested or who thinks they can help. Carol says the 160 web pages ‘are brilliant’ – “more people should know what you went through during the war” she adds.

The Mystery of “N” - crashed on Cocos Island 1945: This search which has been going on now for years has still not been resolved. Enquiries of all possible sources have drawn a blank and these include, the comprehensive lists of all Liberators and their fate as kept by both Robert Quirk and Bob Livingstone, various RAF squadrons, RAAF, the Netherlands Air Force History Unit, RAF Hendon, BOAC, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and airmen who served on Cocos. A lead from Ken Rosam’s book about the RAF on Cocos that all who were buried on the island were re-interred in Singapore led to the CWGC searching to provide me with the details but none of them coincided with this loss. In the hope that our newsletter when on the internet is read by a wider audience I am repeating this request for information. It would be easy to dismiss it as to the facts being wrong except that the photographs taken on Cocos do show the Liberator just prior to landing and the wreckage of it in the trees at the side of the runway. Although not very clear, it was just possible to read the letter “N”. I obtained copies of the photographs from the late Tom Henthorne at the start of this search and maybe showing one of them here will bring some response. It cannot have been a Lib from 160 – there would have to be a serious omission from squadron operations records and errors in the war graves registers but, *I do need* to keep trying to solve this mystery. *(Les Crawley).*



Photograph of the Liberator landing on Cocos probably about July/September, 1945. Courtesy of the late Tom Henthorne.

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD:

Three point landings: From an article picked up via the Canadian Burma Bombers Association, it is interesting to read Gerry Boyle’s description of his posting and arrival at Ratmalana.

“We arrived in Ceylon on June 23rd 1943, with the first Liberator in India equipped with Radar in the nose. We had departed from Lyneham, England, about three weeks earlier and bumped along through Gibraltar, Tripoli, Cairo, Habbaniya Iraq, Karachi, New Delhi, Madras to Ratmalana, just outside Colombo.

We were the first new crew to arrive on the squadron, the rest of the people having been converted onto Libs in England and arriving a couple of months ahead of

us. Incidentally, they had been taught to fly Libs onto the ground in a three point landing, whilst, at OTU, we had been taught to float them in on two wheels and then let the nose wheel down gently.

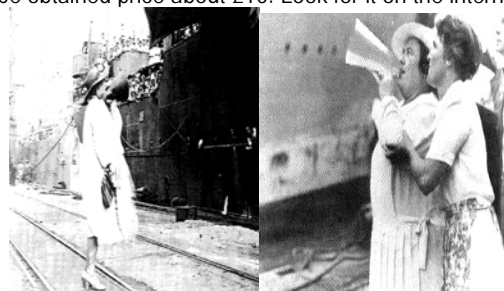
When we landed at Ratmalana that day, it was the first time the squadron had seen a Lib landed this way!” *(Begg the question – did everyone then follow suit?)*

The Lady in White: Ted Daines and Frank Green in their comprehensive story of the epic journey – Thurleigh to Ratmalana - as serialised in AD LIB, covered the African episodes in issues 9 and 12 and duly recorded the fact that the “Cuba” was welcomed into Durban by “The Lady in White”. At various times there has been discussion as to how little we knew about the lady but now, thanks to the internet and Angus Hamilton’s book ‘Canadians on Radar’ mentioned above, we have photographs and something of her story.

The Lady was Mrs Perla Siedle Gibson a professional concert soprano married to a Sergeant with a South African squadron and she had two sons and a daughter in the services. Despite losing one of her sons she never allowed her grief to stop her from singing. When asked if she wasn’t afraid of spoiling her voice singing in all weathers and in the open she replied, “I’ve never thought of it. This is the best thing I’ve ever done with my voice”.

After the war she was instrumental in raising funds from the people of Natal Province to thank our forces for their sacrifice in defence of freedom. Some of this money was used to buy a small hotel in Weymouth, Dorset, and it provides non profit-making holidays for naval ratings and retired servicemen – called ‘The Hotel for the Royal Navy’ it apparently continued to serve all three services. The Perla Siedle Gibson Mobile Library was also founded to serve British seamen and a five room unit at the Highway Hospice was created with funds raised in her memory.

Mrs Gibson died in 1971 at the age of 82 and a bronze statue, designed and cast by her niece, was erected at Durban’s jetty in 1995. The men of the Royal Navy also had a stone cairn erected in her memory on the North Pier. During WW2 more than 400 convoys, 45,000 ships and six million service personnel passed through South Africa and over half of them stopped at Durban and few have forgotten its legendary “Lady in White”. As well as being an international opera star she was also a classical pianist and a portrait painter. Her autobiography “Durban’s Lady in White” can still be obtained price about £10. Look for it on the internet.



‘The Lady in White’ Mrs Perla Siedle Gibson singing to the troops in Durban.

Information and photographs from Angus Hamilton’s book “Canadians on Radar in S E Asia 1941-1945” and from www.warlinks.com (Arthur James Humphreys’ memories) and www.allatsea.co.za.

From 'AIRFLOW' Magazine: June 1945:

This item advises that the following correspondence actually occurred in Colombo. Accommodation was extremely hard to get as can be gathered from this advertisement:

APARTMENTS:

Wanted

Desperate European T.W.A. will soon be compelled to camp out on the Galle Face if no better accommodation near Fort offered. Roof essential.

Food immaterial. Write c/o.....

A letter in reply was sent by:

Sgt.Snooker, R A F Colombo 22.November, 1944.

Dear Miss (?) Mrs (??),

Having read of your desperate condition in the local newspaper, I feel that your appeal merits considerable sympathy although I am not in a position to offer you accommodation.

I trust that your efforts to find a roof will meet with success. Should, however, your valiant attempt fail, I am prepared to express my sympathy in a practical manner and will be very pleased to join you on the Galle Face. I suggest, however, we wait until the end of the monsoon season.

I would like to add that I have had considerable experience of sleeping out and hope that my services will be accepted.

Yours sincerely, Cuthbert Snooker.

The lady replied: C/o (Removed by Censor) Office, Colombo, 24th November 1944

To: Sgt Snooker:

Dear Friend,

Your sympathy has touched me deeply. In gratitude I am sending you a small snapshot, taken by the office peon, as I read and re-read your gracious note.

I shall indeed look out for you at the Galle Face at the change of the monsoon.

Cordially, (Signed) Maggie Bagworthy.



The AIRFLOW editor writes: 'We reproduce this correspondence because we have found that few women have a sense of humour and we are glad to find that one of the few is here in Colombo T W A...we take off our hats to you'.

This editor writes. How come we never saw life as portrayed here but of course we were in the back of beyond? And, for our lady readers, YES the Airflow Editor was perhaps slightly chauvinistic!

FROM CANADIANS ON RADAR: Ed Bastedo.Pt.1.

We pick up Ed Bastedo's story at:-

On 25 February, 1943, one month after arriving at Koggala, Bob Oliver and I were posted again - to 160, a Liberator Squadron, then at Ratmalana, on the outskirts of Colombo. At 160 there were a number of Canadian mechanics from 240 Squadron and others I had known on the McGill course. The radar officer was also a Canadian: Mike Finegood. Our work on the Liberators was rewarding, and, more importantly, our equipment provided the aircrew with an excellent all-weather, all-seeing eye. I remember my first flight with

the Mark V 10cm radar and how well coastline, islands, etc, showed up - just like a relief map. The Liberator was a wonderful aircraft.

On fighter affiliation with Hurricanes at low level I recall watching aircraft 'F' turn inside a Hurricane. This couldn't have been done at high altitude, but it was something to watch. Generally our planes carried two bays of stacked depth charges with extra fuel tanks in the other bays. This enabled them to do patrols to the Andaman Islands, a thousand miles from base. Although this capability had nothing directly to do with radar mechs, it was important to us, and to all the ground trades, to know that our efforts did indeed contribute to the effectiveness of our squadron and to the crews that flew the planes. Both 240 Squadron and 160 Squadron had field hockey teams that played against military and civilian teams - including teams from girls' schools. Although the rules are completely different, for example only one side of the stick can be used to strike the ball, those of us who had played ice hockey caught on quickly. Sammy Davis of Montreal played as a forward and I was a goalkeeper.

In mid-1943 the Squadron moved up to Sigiriya, an airfield newly carved out of the jungle in the centre of Ceylon. It was at Sigiriya that one of my most memorable events of the war occurred.

On 15 May 1944, our Squadron was visited by the Commander-in-Chief, South East Asia Command, Lord Louis Mountbatten. I don't know why but I was one of those chosen to be inspected by Mountbatten. On his way past me, he stopped and said: "I see you are from Canada, when did you leave home?" On being told, he then spoke of his recent visit to Quebec with Churchill and expressed his appreciation for all the Canadians who had been away from home for such a long time. He was a very impressive personality, and the experience was one I have never forgotten.

Sometime in September 1944 the squadron moved again, this time to Kankasanturai, known as KKS, near the northern tip of Ceylon, not far from the city of Jaffna. Again there were all new runways and a few thatched palm buildings, but most of us slept in tents. Several times the torrential rains caused our tents to collapse—usually at night. Also in September I was promoted to Sergeant (RAF) and told I would be moving shortly but before moving I was being sent on a course at the radar school in Bangalore.

Reproduced by permission of Angus Hamilton.

Does anyone remember Ed Bastedo or any of the other 20 or so Radar Mechs from Canada? More in next issue.

PLEASE CUT OUT AND USE TO SEND YOUR SUBS TO:

**Mr E H Daines,
45 Randolph Road,
Norwich, Norfolk, NR1 2RU**

I enclose payment in respect of subs due on 1st September, 2004.

Amount: £5 (plus £3 if AD LIB taken)

FROM.....Name