



160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage for survivors



WINTER/SPRING 2004-05
Number 31

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

"HEROES RETURN" The dreadful tragedy of the TSUNAMI meant that we decided to defer our visit, but only for as short a delay as practical, primarily for the reasons that the emergency use of air fields and facilities meant that our planned trip for the 27th January would seem too self indulgent and insensitive and not have the right vibes. However, we were all determined not to be put off so we set about rearranging our itinerary and duly took off for Colombo on 3rd March returning to London on the 16th March. It was memorable. We will have a job doing justice to what turned out to be an unforgettable experience. The first articles are included in this issue.

ANNUAL SUBS: No, this is not a reminder!! BUT, good news for our overseas veterans/members. From now on we do not seek a subscription from you. Our funds now enable us to make this gesture since we realise that it is not simple to send payment to the U K and we do not want to lose contact with you through difficulties on this account. We may have already have lost some members because of this so if you know of anyone who has dropped out please let Ted Daines know and/or if you are a reader of the newsletter on the internet please let him know so that we may have your details on our mailing list..

OBITUARIES

We regret having to advise of the deaths of Dennis (Bill) Bunkell, Ed Mechan and Richard Carman. Over the years we have been able to keep in contact with all three and will still be in touch with son Gary Bunkell and daughter Jane (Mechan) as they are now honorary members. We have sent deepest sympathies to the three families and we are grateful to Jane for photographs of Ed – with his crew and, much more recently, with Ron Crawford and Ted Horton when Ron visited in Canada. Please read HEROES RETURN regarding Bill Bunkell and look at the moving contribution from Gary in his description of the last journey of his Dad, at www.rafreserves.com/News. Jane wrote to advise that her Dad much enjoyed reading AD LIB (each one more than once!) and to be thrilled that through it he had been able to make contact with crew members Ron Crawford and Derek Collins. With regard to Richard Carman, for the family (wife Judith, daughter Vicky and son Robert) we were able to respond with a coloured print of the squadron crest so that it could be used for the Order of Service at the funeral.

By the way, it would be of tremendous help, if you have an email address, or the facility to use one, if we could send your copy via the internet - and it would arrive much earlier.

NEW VETERANS' LAPEL BADGE: The Ministry of Defence has launched this badge for those who served in the first and second World Wars and it can be obtained by sending details including service number etc. and the theatres of War in which you served. The application should be sent to:

Mr T Marsh, Ministry of Defence, Ground Floor, St George's Court, 2-12 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 25H.

It takes over two months for the application to be processed and you hear nothing until the attractive multi service lapel badge arrives in a very nice box from the *Minister for Veterans* (!!).

REUNION 2005: Falcon Hotel, Stratford upon Avon, Friday, Saturday and Sunday 2nd to 4th September 2005.

The forms have all been sent out and if anyone has not received a copy and wishes to go please contact Ted Daines. We expect to have some new faces this year with some of our carers proposing to come along as well.

BOOKS:

South East Asia Command (P G Dancey): Account of RAF S E Asia operations 1942-45 with tables showing build up of aircraft/types and list of squadrons. 22 b/w illustrations: A4 size: 36 (?) pages: £8.95.

Eyes of the RAF.(R.C.Nesbitt): A history of P R – fully illustrated: 400 b/w photos: 352 pages: £5.99

RAF Squadrons:2nd Edition :(Jefford): Comprehensive record of the movement and equipment of all RAF Squadrons since 1912: 53 maps of 2500 airfields etc: 312 b/w photos:290 pages. £14.99 (Was £40).

(All the above available from Midland Counties Publications, Hinckley: Tel:01455 254450)

British Army in WW2: The Far East 1941-45: (A Jeffreys – a curator at the Imp. War Museum):

Covers the forgotten war in the Far East providing a detailed examination. Paperback 96 pp: £13.99

RAF Combat units SEAC 1941-45: (Brian Philpott): £8.99

(The above two from www.ospreypublishing.com).

MAKING CONTACT: News, old colleagues and HELP!

'SHAG' WEDLAKE: Beauforts: In Ad Lib No.17, Armourer Cpl Wedlake in an article, mentioned his service with 'Q Flight' of 100 Squadron (Beauforts) in Australia and Mr Kim Fawkes picked this up on the internet. Sadly 'Shag' died in 2002 but Mr Fawkes who is writing a history of RAAF Beauforts and their use in the Far East is hoping that others may be able to help in his search for air and ground crews attached to the flight in Australia. His book 'The Beaufort Boys' is due to be finished and published later this year and he would like any stories about Beauforts in WW2.

LAC. PAUL 'CHARLIE' BOURDON. So far there has been no response for information about Charlie Bourdon and as the photograph we have of Charlie with quite a few other bods might stir memories, here it is. Another photo we have shows a similar group with what looks like a year's supply of bottled beer – slight exaggeration.



(Charlie Bourdon – front left)

'C' FLIGHT – 160 and 159 Squadron – Wing Cdr

Douglas Connor, RCAF: Michael Tanney writes to ask if any one has any knowledge of an autobiography entitled 'GOLDEN FLIES THE SNOW' which may only have been published privately. Doug Connor was one of the original 'C' Flight captains and, apart from his special duty exploits, he led an eventful life both in business in Canada (surplus aircraft) and he was one of the leading riders in the famous Cresta Run in the 1950's, later coaching the Canadian Olympic Gold bob sled team in 1964 – hence the reference to the 'Golden Snow'. He died in London on 5th July, 2002, and Michael Tanney is hoping to make contact with Doug's son Pierre or daughter Danielle – can anyone out there help?

Of special interest to our members is the fact that Doug Connor brought back to England the Cosford Liberator and as we have, from Jack Burgess, his own account of this epic journey we intend to serialise it in AD LIB. Although the Cosford Liberator story has been mentioned in previous AD LIBS this fuller version is too good a read to miss and the first episode is in this issue.

G/CAPT COLIN BUTLER: Does anyone have any information on Colin Butler's RAF service after he left 160. It is possible that at our reunions he may have mentioned his later exploits. The reason is that we have an enquiry from Dr Nicholas Reeves, a historian, who is currently researching a sword belonging to IJA Major General S.Hamada which was evidently at one stage in the possession of "Group Captain Butler, Siam". Dr Reeves is also interested in tracking down the present whereabouts of other Japanese swords surrendered in Bangkok on 11th January, 1946.

MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS: In what appears to be an official history of the operations of the U S Army Air Force in North Africa there is a reference to an operation carried out by two Liberators of 160 Squadron. This is a bit of a mystery as, although we have the copy records from the PRO Kew of 160 operations, there is no reference to an operation being carried out on 15th/16th June, 1942. The following is a reprint from this report.

"Passing ships through to Malta was at best a perilous enterprise; and in hopes of forcing a division of enemy efforts the British had decided on a large operation involving two convoys, one from the east and one from the west, to berth at Malta within twenty-four hours of each other.

Convoy A passed eastward through Gibraltar on 13 June, took its losses, and came into Malta on the 16th. Convoy B, westward from Egypt, had been in motion three days when, on 15 June, seven of Halverson's B-24's and two Liberators of 160 Squadron, RAF, were ordered out with torpedo-carrying Beauforts against the Italian fleet, which had now put to sea. Locating the fleet, the Beauforts sank a cruiser, and five of the USAAF planes bombed, claiming hits on a *Littorio*-class battleship and a *Trento*-class cruiser. Had their British bombs been heavier (2,000-pounders instead of 500-pounders) the damage might have been crippling; as it was the fleet did not reduce speed. According to the RAF, however, the damage inflicted by the Beauforts and the B-24's kept two battleships in dock for the ensuing three months. Returning to base at minimum altitude, the bomber formation encountered and shot down an Me-110, achieving the first aerial victory in which Americans had participated in the Middle East. Convoy B, however, was forced to turn back, its ammunition expended fighting off repeated air attacks."

If any of our remaining Middle East types can throw any light on this via log books etc. it would be a help as we would like our records to be as complete and accurate as possible.

CHARLES LIONEL MOODY: Peter Moody has been in touch and is anxious to contact anyone who flew with or remembers his father who was killed when flying on secondment with 354 Squadron on 7/10/43. Charles Moody arrived on the squadron on 18th March 1943 at the same time as David Flett with whom he flew during their early days on the squadron. The others shown as crew members were F/O Calder, Sgt Somerville, F/Sgt Gardy and Sgts Collingham, Litchfield, Burell and Abel. Peter has sent us this photograph of his father – with moustache. If anyone recognises any of the crew he would be grateful for names etc. (Calder, Somerville and Abel were all killed, separately, at other times).



(Charles Moody – with moustache)

MR JAGATH P. SENARATNE – Writer on Military History.

When the group was in Nuwara Eliya, Mr Senaratne came up especially from Colombo to see us and seek information on our experiences in Sri Lanka during the war, to add to his research material on Sri Lankan military history. He asks if anyone can provide

- a) Dramatic and interesting flying experiences and other events which took place in Ceylon or flying to and from the island: encounters with enemy aircraft, submarines or ships: major flight emergencies and any other anecdotal material.
- b) Any interesting experiences and stories pertaining to non flying operations
- c) Photographs which include any types of aircraft connected with the squadron/air fields – ground to air, air to air or of parked aircraft giving relative information thereon. He would like to borrow photographs which would be very carefully copied and returned.

This gives us an opportunity to provide material for Sri Lankan records of the exploits of 160 Squadron for their future generations and history. Jagath can be emailed at jagsenaratne@yahoo.com and his mail address is 18 Right Circular Road, Jayanthipura, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.

COCOS – Keeling Islands: Mr David Honour: A request for anyone who served on Cocos to contact him. He is researching with a view to writing a book covering his father's service on Cocos – his father was Station Met. Officer.

Email: dave.honour@wspgroup.co.za. (South Africa)

160 SQUADRON – POST WAR FLYING: Mr Simon Gifford is carrying out research for a possible book on RAF operations in the immediate post war period, 1945 – 47, and asks if any our members can give him any information on what the squadron was doing in this period. He would like to have recollections on how RAF life changed with the transition to peacetime flying and to have an understanding of the type of flying by the squadron after VJ day.

He can be contacted by email at giffords@tiscali.co.uk.

BACK TO SRI LANKA: The Heroes Return. (1).

There were 34 of us in the party made up of 14 vets, 2 widows, 8 wives and 10 carers and all safely made it to terminal 4 at Heathrow and through the ensuing 13/14 days of quite demanding activity. Having had the job of trying to make all arrangements to suit everyone and fearful of what would be expected of me, I experienced immense relief when Debs Ratcliffe (ex RAF) who had volunteered to take the place of a carer who had to cancel, really did show up – an answer to my prayers. Deborah was our travelling tour operator, guide, shoulder to cry on and confidante. Nothing fazed her but she showed rightful annoyance if anything was not to plan. On 'secondment' from Indus Tours she was a real gem and, for all of us, an unforgettable character.

We hope she will be joining us at the next reunion so we now have an added attraction for Stratford 2005.

Thanks also really go to everyone on the trip. Not always easy going, but all made every effort to cooperate and join in all the activities – even in the heat of the day: there were no shirkers or passengers. We were welcomed with unbelievable respect and kindness and treated like heroes with special displays and ceremony everywhere we went. We could not have done it without our carers who were given plenty to do and were ever ready – as they needed to be.

Because everyone pulled their weight it is difficult to single out anyone specially but I do thank the three who have worked on our behalf since the return – Gary Bunkell for quickly publicising our trip on the internet, Jeanne Eitel for the diary of the trip and Ron Eitel who has completed the quite formidable paperwork requested by the Imperial War Museum.

Extracts from Jeanne's diary will be appearing in Ad Lib – you will find it interesting reading especially for those who were unable to come but were no doubt with us in spirit.

Les Crawley.

BACK TO SRI LANKA 2: Jeanne's diary Part 1.

Jeanne Eitel compiled a personal diary of her trip to Sri Lanka for the benefit of her family but has kindly agreed that we may edit it and use it for our members so that they may enjoy the flavour of pilgrimage.

Here is the first episode.

Welcome to Sri Lanka

"After a long flight we were met at Colombo Airport with a large banner draped across a wall, welcoming "160 Squadron Veterans 60th Anniversary." What a lovely greeting.

We had made one stop en route at Male, in the Maldives, to allow a few passengers who were sharing our flight to disembark and start their holiday there. We weren't allowed to leave the aircraft and our Captain warned us we might be delayed a bit as it was a Moslem country and the unloading staff could not interrupt their Friday prayers, but we were on our way again fairly soon.

The service on the flight was excellent and the cabin staff quite lovely, the stewardesses in dark green printed saris and the stewards in dark red blazers and navy slacks.

After the usual airport confusion (two of our ladies temporarily lost their passports) we headed off in our air-conditioned coach to the Mount Lavinia Hotel. This is a true relic of Colonial history, with a real Raj atmosphere. The Commissionaire was very smart in his white uniform, and wearing a Pith helmet. All the female staff are dressed in saris, so beautiful and elegant. They seem to have such grace and bearing, and so feminine. I

think it must have something to do with wearing the sari; they have to be upright so the drape over the shoulder doesn't slip. The attention and service we received here was superb, and the food excellent, with such a wide choice.

FIRST CALL - RATMALANA

We began our tour the following morning. We saw none of the devastation from the tsunami but were shown two large camps where some survivors were living under canvas until they can be rehoused. Our first visit was to Ratmalana Air Base. We met their Commanding Officer, Group Capt Rohan Pathirage and several of his Officers, and they showed us round their interesting museum. At this point a TV reporter and cameraman joined us, and interviewed Ted Daines, Vice-President of 160, and several of the vets including Dad (Ron Eitel). We were all photographed as Ted presented a plaque to the Group Captain commemorating our visit. Some of the vets had been stationed here during the war. A plaque was also handed over to be forwarded to Kankasanturai which was off limits for visiting.

MEET THE PRESS AND TV

There was also a press conference at which the group outlined the reason and background to the visit and gave individual interviews to reporters. (This was later reported in the local press along with a photograph). This was also the opportunity for Bob and Marian Coates to present the huge heavy cardboard carton they had brought all the way from Colwyn Bay. Through their grandchildren they had appealed and asked if any youngsters were growing too big for their junior bats ending up with 9 in all which they duly handed over for keen youngsters at the cricket ground in Galle where Bob had played and where the devastation was dreadful. (Grandson Jack, who gave up his new bat, is following in Bob's footsteps playing for Colwyn Bay Juniors).

The TV people stayed with us all day, and we were able to watch the news programme in the hotel that evening. They showed the group, but not the interviews, which was a shame as Dad had read the poem that he was given in 1944. However we are still hoping that a copy of the video will be made available.

REMEMBRANCE - LIVERAMENTU

Later we went to the Commonwealth War Cemetery sections at Liveramentu, Colombo, with the vets properly dressed wearing blazers and medals, to have a short service plus reading out all the names and ages of the 160 lads buried there and to lay a wreath. It is in a grand setting and looked after so well. Walking along the rows and rows of graves of so many, some RAF, some Navy, but most of them aged only 19 or so, was so heartrending. There was one line of 9 young aircrew and 10 ground crew from 160 Squadron, all killed on 9th June 1945, not long before the war ended, in Liberator 'H'. They crashed in a swamp close to Minneriya and there were no survivors. Some of our group remembered them well, so that was particularly sad.

We had a very nice lunch at the Grand Oriental Hotel overlooking Colombo Harbour. For security reasons we were not allowed to take any photographs of the harbour.

MOUNT LAVINIA AT IT'S BEST.

We had dinner in the evening at Mount Lavinia, then sat on the terrace overlooking the pool and enjoyed a drink while listening to a lady tinkling the ivories. Such indulgence! It was this evening when I had my one and only stomach upset, due possibly to a little weakness of mine! I was sampling just a spoonful of two or three desserts, avoiding cream, but there was a little in the tiramisu, and my carer thought that was my undoing, but we know how they exaggerate!

POLANNARUWA

On our journey up to Minneriya we were taken to Polannaruwa, the medieval capital of Sri Lanka. Here we saw the reclining Buddha and Chandra, our guide, explained the significance of the various aspects of the Buddha's hands and feet to determine whether it is reclining and sleeping or actually portraying death. Chandra is a Buddhist and is very knowledgeable about all the beliefs. They regard Buddhism as a way of life rather than a religion, and it certainly seems an ideal aim. Lots of ruins here, covering a huge area, and there were many workmen engaged in maintaining the structures. This is a very big tourist attraction.

BACK TO MINNERIYA

Onward then the next day to Minneriya. It was about a 3-hour drive (average speed 10 mph!) and on the way we stopped in a cashew nut plantation to buy some. Half a kilo for about £2. Then further on drove through the pineapple plantation area, where we stopped to try the local fruit. Here an elderly lady would select a fruit from the price range you chose and it was an education to see her prepare it. She had a knife like a scimitar and in seconds, holding the greenery, she swiftly cut down the sides to expose the bare fruit, and then sliced it lengthways into long slices. It was offered on plates or in bags, all untouched by hand. We had a large one which was Rs.65, about 30 pence. It was absolutely delicious and pineapple is usually one of the fresh fruits offered in the hotels and I had it quite often. We heard that though it is tempting to walk through the plantation to cut down a fruit, it can be dangerous as snakes like the smell of pineapple and are often lurking in the undergrowth.

But now to Minneriya air field, where Dad was based. This is still an operational station, at the ready in case of trouble from the Tamils in the north, where we were royally treated and greeted by Wing Commander Sagra. That was his Christian name; we never learned his surname, which he said, was the longest in the history of the SLAF. He and his officers and staff were so interested to hear the vets' stories and see their photographs, and again Ted presented them with a plaque. In return they gave a memento to Ted for the squadron, commemorating our return to Minneriya. They put on a big tea for us and we were made so welcome.

We were escorted round the camp and I had such an unexpected reaction when I saw the actual runway, I couldn't speak. It was so stomach turning, picturing that huge aircraft taking off from here on its long journey. The whole visit at Minneriya was very emotional, but it was that runway that surprisingly affected me so much. The Wing/Cdr led us down the runway in his car and we followed in the coach.

A SLIGHT HIC-CUP THEN A TOUCH OF CLASS

Our next hotel was the Sudu Araliya, where we expected to stay three nights. This, however, was a disappointment. Indus had not used them before but had been led to believe it was a suitable place for us. The location was lovely, but the cleanliness was a little doubtful and the facilities not what we required. Most of all our disabled members (we had three) were expected to get upstairs to their rooms and there was no lift. Some of them had to have dinner in their rooms because they couldn't manage the stairs again, having got up them once with difficulty: it was obvious we couldn't stay.

It was here that Tudor Morris, at 85, had a burst blood vessel in his leg. Help was at hand, as one of the daughters in our group was a nurse and she treated him until he got to the local hospital. His son Philip, his carer, stayed with him but the local doctor thought he should be transferred to the hospital at Colombo, so we didn't see Tudor and Phil for a couple of days and then they

rejoined us at Sigiriya, with the patient being none the worse and ready to carry on.

Meanwhile Deborah, Indus' representative on the tour, got to work on the phone and managed to get our large party into the Culture Club for the following two nights. This turned out to be one of those strokes of good luck, a real Serendipity. Culture Club was delightful, actually beyond the scope of our financial range, and a real Shangri-la. Set in 45 acres of glorious countryside, with a lake, we each had our own Kabana (cottage), beautifully equipped and so tastefully furnished and decorated, and the service was superb. On our beds was a message spelled out in petals and leaves, welcoming us to the Culture Club. It was obvious we had come somewhere special.

The whole place, which belonged to a French company, had a strong eco-philosophy. The pool and surroundings were so inviting that every one of us opted to spend the following day there, rather than sit on the coach for 3 hours each way to visit another temple. Actually it was good to have a day of real leisure.

In the grounds beyond the restaurant there was a very simple little hut with a cadjan leaf roof atop an old bamboo ladder. As it got dark, an old guy would sit in this hut and play a flute, or something like. It was so plaintive and haunting, and seemed to reflect the atmosphere of the place. It was quite enchanting; we wished we could have recorded it.

There was an Ayer Vedic Health Centre here, which a number in the party made good use of – it was so tranquil and relaxing in such peaceful surroundings. The food here has been wonderful and very varied. We also joined in an ornithological walk and saw some rare birds, but that had to be cut short as a mini monsoon interrupted proceedings.

MEET THE CHILDREN

In the morning some of us visited the local school. We had to be driven although it was only a mile or so away, but it was out of bounds for us due to maybe elephants, big cats, or bears. Of course we didn't see any, but the windows of the school were of steel mesh, to keep out the monkeys.

The children were a delight. It's a poor area, in the jungle, but they were all turned out so clean and beautiful in their uniforms, the boys in blue shorts and white shirts and the girls all in white. There were 37 in the school, 2 of whom were special needs children, and four teachers, one man and three women, including the Principal. Our little group had taken pens and pencils, exercise books, and sweets. One imaginative vet, Tom, had taken a pack of combs, which went down very well with the little girls. They showed us their books, and we admired all the ticks they had achieved, and they sang to us. They start school at 5 years, and go on till 15. Their school day starts at 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. The teacher who taught English asked if she could have my address, which I gladly gave, and she promised she would write. The visit was quite inspirational. The children were so happy with the little they had, and it made you realise how fortunate our children are in the West.

The government supply two sets of uniforms to every child in the country every year. If they need more than that, the parents have to provide, but they're very poor so make do, and are kept so fresh and clean. For Sunday School the girls wear full-length skirts with a pretty top with a flounced shawl-like collar, all in white, and the boys wear long white trousers and shirts. Girls do not wear the sari until they are 16 or 17. We also saw a small Montessori school with just 11 pupils, and heard of another at Dambulla.

(Jeanne Eitel – Part 2 next issue)

GROUND CREW HUMOUR:

Having come across this humour twice in the last week or so it seems a good time to have it in AD LIB whilst still fresh. It is also a good lead into the Cosford Liberator article in which you will read of the trials and tribulations of achieving serviceability. Sorry if you have already seen it.

These are reputed actual logged maintenance complaints, as submitted, with the ground crew solutions.

(P = Problem: S = Solution)

P: Left inside main tyre almost needs replacement.

S: *Almost replaced left inside main tyre.*

P: Test flight OK, except Auto Land very rough.

S: *Auto Land not installed on this aircraft.*

P: No.2 propeller seeping prop fluid.

S: *No.2 propeller seeping normal, Nos. 1, 3, and 4 propellers lack normal seepage.*

P: Something loose in cockpit.

S: *Something tightened in cockpit.*

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: *Evidence removed.*

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: *Volume set to more believable level.*

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: *Live bugs on order.*

P: IFF inoperative.

S: *IFF always inoperative in OFF mode.*

P: Friction Locks cause throttle lever to stick.

S: *That's what they're there for.*

P: Number three engine missing.

S: *Engine found on right wing after brief search.*

P: Target radar hums.

S: *Reprogrammed target radar with the words.*

P: Aircraft handles funny.

S: *Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right and be serious.*

P: Mouse in cockpit

S: *Cat installed*

P: Noise coming from under instrument panel. Sounds like a midget pounding on something with a hammer

S: *Took hammer away from midget.*

(With acknowledgements to originals wherever)

THE COSFORD LIBERATOR: KN 751 (Ex 99 Sqdn).

This is the letter written by Doug Connor (Ex 160) to Paul Gallico to describe his adventures in bringing KN751 to England.

"Since you are the man who has written more and knows more about adventure than anyone I have ever known, thought you might like to see some pics of a fun adventure I have just had. Some months ago my friend John Tanner, whose genius made possible the RAF museum at Hendon, was crying over his beard tips that he had WW 2 Liberator bomber in India but couldn't get it back to the UK for his museum. I listened sympathetically but was really more concerned with that shot I had mis-hit at the 15th in the afternoon, costing me the game and five quid. A few evenings later I had the feeling that I was being 'zero-ed in on' when Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Dermot Boyle (Chairman for the museum) was brought by Dr. John into the picture. Since I never really had a Marshal of the Royal Air Force for a pal (for that matter, neither had any of my friends) the cheese began to smell a bit high. Anyway, he seemed to know that I had done a modest turn in the RAF; that I had flown

Liberators; that I had served thereon in India; that I was at least temporarily unemployed, etc. In fact, he knew far too much and it gave him and Dr. John the needed advantage to con me into the idea to run out to India, strap their God-damn aeroplane to my backside and bring it-back to the UK. So a couple of weeks ago, on July 7th, at Lyneham RAF station near Bath, I unstrapped the aeroplane from the above-mentioned position and duly turned it over to them.

But between our two mentioned meetings, some funny things had happened.

In March I had flown out to India with our mutual friend Constantin to ascertain that the a/c actually existed at Poona (of all Raj sites) and if so, could it actually be resurrected and flown after a gap of almost thirty years? Luckily, after the RAF had originally given it to the Royal Indian Air Force in 1948, it had been used and flown on coastal command operations by the now I.A.F. either to watch for Pakistanis or to chase gold-smuggling dhows sailing down from the Persian Gulf. They mucked about with it and a couple of other similar types of aircraft until 1968; at which time the I.A.F. decided to withdraw them from service. In a fit of unheralded generosity, the President of India then decided to cement relations with Canada, Britain and the USA by giving each country a Liberator (B24) for its museum. In return India would be bound to achieve goodwill and perhaps a few additional tons of fissionable material on the side!

Yanks and Canadians, true to their pioneering spirits, loaded up military transport aircraft with engineers and pilots and flew forthwith to Poona to claim their gift, prepare and fly it home to their respective museums.

The RAF, meanwhile, much more worldly and civilised, wrote to thank the Indians for such a noble gesture. This naturally was at the highest level. But of course it didn't stop there since each reducing level was duty bound to pass thanks to his opposite number. After five years, corporals were thanking corporals when I was brought into the act. Probably such a brusque termination of correspondence at this point caused some bad feelings, but the umbilical cord of thanks simply had to be slashed if we were to get the aircraft for Her Majesty.

So, during the March visit, a deal was struck with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd of Bangalore to send a thirty man field party to Poona to try to ready the machine for a flight to the UK by June 10th; this date being about the latest one could carry on the project if the monsoon came on schedule.

Naturally before leaving Bangalore, agreements were signed and monies agreed to be paid over in advance. Indians receive special merit from their gods for all foreign exchange they extract in advance.

But my \$25000 letter of credit couldn't be used that day as no foreign exchange transactions were taking place. Don't worry Sahib; you are going tomorrow Sahib to Delhi - so pay money in Delhi.

Next day in Delhi Sahib goes to bank; shows letter of credit from Royal Bank of Canada, London, but Delhi bank can't find signatures of Royal Bank officers in signature book. When I slowly pointed out to them that the date of the signature book of their own correspondents was 1967 I was informed they would contact London for verification but Sahib that will take a week.

So I returned to London with the L of C unused.

On April 4th on my instructions, the Royal Bank telexed the said funds to the State Bank of India in Bangalore and lodged the actual credit with the State Bank of India, London. For five weeks everyone played the game of 'we no have' and the overhaul contract was threatened constantly with cancellation; but finally

on May 9th the State Bank "found" the money and the job continued.

So on June 10th, with many signs to hand that everything was proceeding on schedule, I climbed aboard PAA's milk run and finally made Delhi the next day, where I moved in on my friend and RAF air advisor Group Captain Denis Barber.

We remained smug for a day or so, thinking we had done everything necessary but pretty soon the termites began to crawl out of the woodwork.

Radio shipped from the UK for installation came without installation drawings; another unit had a major bit missing: parachutes, dinghy units, mae-wests, air/sea rescue beacons were in an aircraft grounded in Djibouti; and since the IAF were not now disposed to allow us to fly the aircraft to the UK under its old IAF name and number, the fuel credit card would have to be changed from London. That's if we could determine under what name and number the old .girl would fly to the UK.

Up to the date of my departure from London, the RAF were quite pleased with the idea of having the aircraft added to the museum but almost no one wanted to be personally involved with the problems - however small they might be.

For example, I was asked: How can the RAF possibly take it back on inventory after having struck it off 25 years ago - we have no provision in KR Air for that, old boy. We have no up-to-date licensed people in the RAF to fly it so how can you? And a non-serving person, even an ex RAF officer, couldn't possibly fly an RAF aeroplane. Where are you going to get the proper fuel at each stop en route for such an old aeroplane? You know, old boy, we use jets today. Who is going to certify that the aeroplane is airworthy? We no longer have anyone who can do it. Some senior clots even suggested we break it up (a sixty ton bomber mind you) and ship it by sea.

But back to reality - on June 13th in Delhi something pretty drastic had to be done. Via secret codes and flying messages to Dr John, the RAF Chief of Staff was informed. In very short order the stuff hit the fan. An avalanche of signals poured in to Delhi.

Of course you can fly in back under RAF colours; let us know your desired route; diplomatic clearances, no problem; fuel, how much do you want and where; of course we accept that brother ex-officers must be competent to fly the aircraft with our roundel on it; technical signing .out of the aircraft - if you're happy, we are; handling along the route - no problem - if an RAF air attaché is not on hand to greet you, British Airways have instructions; and so on.

The worm had now become a golden butterfly and nothing was too good for it.

The next day, light of heart, I flew to Poona - mind you not before I had waxed my moustache a little stiffer and strengthened my upper lip. I was, after all going to Poona. No matter the Raj had been gone for a quarter of a century. Not even an ex British officer could appear there without due decorum and the stiff upper.

So I arrived. Met by Wing Commander Chopra. While in Bangalore in the spring I had met him as chief test pilot for Hindustan Aeronautics - a very skilled and experienced airman a Kashmiri by birth - a flyweight in size but a prince in stature. He had invited me to his home one evening. While knocking back my scotch (him ginger ale) over his bar, we eventually spoke of golf. At that moment I had him for his eyes lit up; he was not only a golfer but a fanatic. So right there and then I offered him some good Gleneagles golf if he would help me fly the Lib back to the UK. He agreed.

Right away at Poona, Chopi and I got down to the business of arranging to test fly the aeroplane. He didn't know much about Liberators; I once knew a hell of a lot about them and had flown them some hundreds of hours - but certainly not lately!!

So we took our pilots notes (dug out of the Indian Smithsonian) and climbed into the cockpit. Within an hour we had gone through the emergency procedures, had located all the necessary tits and knobs and pronounced ourselves ready to go. Half an hour later we were rambling down the runway and off into the blue Poona skies. But there was a gremlin on board and we couldn't retract the gear. So first landing coming up a hell of a lot quicker than we had planned. But no problem - a lazy skip or two and we're down.

So retraction tests got under way. Six jacks and about thirty men - some watching, some talking and some working - but soon she's free of the ground and the chief engineer tries to raise the gear. It's a funny sight - a big aircraft on the ground with its wheels all tucked up - which was soon achieved. We had had, he said, a sticking solenoid.

In the morning we repeat the flying performance but again the wheels won't retract and we land quickly. This time we eliminate the skip - we're regaining the touch.

Onto the jacks again. This time the solenoid is changed - we strip one from an even older aeroplane which is lying out in the field of carcasses. Now the retraction is quick and neat so we again prepare for the morrow.

We are planning to fly it 500 miles south to HAL'S factory at Bangalore where it can receive the best attention and final inspection before we begin the long haul - some five and a half thousand miles - to the UK.

We have decided to put everything on board for the trip. If the gear comes up properly, we'll set course 160 degrees for Bangalore. If not, another night in the Blue Diamond.

Our engineer is ex Flying Officer Daruwala. He's been around Libs since he started in the IAF. As we roll down the runway and lift off, I give him the 'gear up' sign. He depresses the tit, pushes the handle forward and lo and behold, up smartly comes the gear. Thirty seconds later he stages 'up' the wing flaps, turns off the booster pumps, checks generators charging and does a turn down the bomb bay catwalk to the rear of the aeroplane to see that flaps and gear are properly retracted and that no fuel is leaking anywhere. When he returns all smiles, we are climbing happily on track to Bangalore.

Since our previous gear problems didn't allow us to carry out a proper test flight on the aircraft, we now start playing with the radio equipment and checking those systems we will use. Naturally things like de-icer boots, anti-icing, oxygen, heating and cooling, etc are systems we won't use anymore and they get no attention.

But we do play with power settings, familiarising ourselves with attitudes of the nose and reaction delays of power changes, synchronisation of propellers, needle positions on the instrument panels and a dozen other items which must quickly become routine if the aeroplane is to be flown accurately and safely under all operating conditions.

Our radio equipment is very poor. We are using one 30 year old ADF (automatic direction finding) unit that has always been in the aircraft and one VHF (very high frequency voice communications set) which we borrowed in Poona and is therefore only a temporary installation.

But we manage to talk to Bangalore control, who quickly recognize Chopi's voice. We get a homing bearing and are soon on the ground in Bangalore.

Group Captain Kharas (Bobbie for short from the many months he spent in the UK when a bob was still a bob) is the manager of the overhaul division of HAL. He employs several thousand people, terrifies them all with his flamboyant language yet they all happily stand on their heads for him.

Bobbie is a Parsi. He claims Parsis are dwindling in number from constant inter-marriage and inter-breeding. But I tell him since you keep on doing it, you must like it. So since I am not a Parsi, there can be no risk for me and I accept his kind offer of hospitality and move into his home. His bubbling wife Jini and two very attractive teenage daughters soon make me remember that there is more to life than aged aeroplanes.

But since I'm sure you are not interested in my happy Parsi family life, let's get back to the tale of the old girl.

By now she has been hangared for a couple of days and the engineers have pulled off bits and pieces and the replacements work better. But the condition of the radio is a disaster. We don't have the drawings for the new RAF-sent equipment; nor the special plugs required to fit it even if we had the drawings. All these subsidiary facts always come to life eventually as one tries to pick the brains of brainy engineers. They have a splendid knack of feeding you little bits of bad news at a time until eventually you tot them up yourself and it spells 'crisis'. They've known it all along but they sadistically watch you figuring it out as they feed it to you.

So what to do to solve the growing crisis? We must revert to an old Scottish remedy for such things. By 11 pm all the family ladies are tucked in bed and only the two brother ex-officers remain up. Well hardly up since they are both sprawled wearily in facing armchairs, using their remaining strength to grasp the huge aforementioned midnight 'remedies'. As they begin to take effect, we naturally begin to dwell on the crisis. As if struck by a dancing fairy's wand, my friend's eyes light up and he says "why don't I remove the radio we need from some of my other aircraft now undergoing overhaul? I always manage to keep them here for months anyway so you can have the radios back to me long before they will ever be missed." I comment that only the fertile brain of a midnight genius could have come up with such a brilliant idea. But he knows that I know that he knows that I know that there was no other solution in the circumstances of the present 'crisis'. I tell him he must have some Highland blood in him for the remedy to work so well. We take the other half for good luck and go happily to bed, knowing that tomorrow many hands will be busy stripping certain Packets and Caribous of their means of communication and fondly transferring them to the old girl in desperate need of same.

After a couple of days she is sprouting more antennas than a 10 year old elk and the radiomen are talking to Calcutta, a thousand miles away.

Chopi and I test fly it again but we aren't too happy. Things are working but not well enough to suit us for the long flight. Again Bobbie barks orders left, right and up the middle. Tomorrow I'll fly with you, he says, and everything will work. And I'll be damned if it didn't!! He flew with us for a couple of hours and things were working well. Even the 'bog' as he called it.

When overhauling the aircraft, the engineers had even taken down and refurbished the chemical toilet which is located away to the rear of the aeroplane, right beside the rear gunner. It was put there on the theory that the rear gunner was the guy who would surely have most urgent need of it. Well, in this case, it was the manager of the overhaul division himself who was the first customer!! Chopi and I never did find our way.

So now we are at Thursday afternoon and I say to Bobbie "Let's go on Saturday". Bobbie becomes evasive and says that's not an auspicious day for take-off for a Liberator from Bangalore in July of an even year. I say "rubbish" but my Indian crew members listen attentively. I quickly get the feeling that they are not going anywhere until it is auspicious and Bobbie soon announces that that day is Monday July One.

On Saturday evening about eight o'clock I finally learned why Saturday was a bad day for take-off; we would have missed our super farewell party which was then beginning to break out in the Kharas home.

On Sunday we made the circuit of Parsi friends of my hosts. This Jini explained was for luck. Everything Jini was doing during the week-end seemed to be for 'luck'. I must say I was beginning to like the idea because I knew we would need all of it that we could get; whether it be Parsi, Hindu, Moslem or Christian.

In Poona the engineers had taken us through a ceremony of 'luck' before they would sign the aeroplane fit to depart. Fires were lit, sweet, sticky candy passed around for all and a specially blessed coconut was bashed by a specially blessed young priest on the cement before the nose of the aircraft. Then jasmine flowers were draped over the nose. All for luck, everyone said.

Maybe the Poona luck was now becoming less powerful. In any case, Jini wasn't about to take any chances.

As I strolled out of my room on Monday morning to sniff the bougainvillea and jasmine in the garden, I noticed footprints chalked in white on the floor of the hall and the small tables covered with what I now knew were goodies for 'luck'. I said nothing and went to join the family, already seated before stacks of Parsi breakfast delights.

Afterwards and in due course, I was directed to the pre-selected 'luck dispensing' location and made to stand on the chalked footprints. During the few short moments of our very touching ceremony, my pockets were filled with all the known Parsi luck givers, plus a coconut I had to hand-hold and a beautiful jasmine and orange blossom lei was draped over my head. Each one then embraced me in turn and I thought I saw a tear in the eye of my crusty old group captain amigo.

At the airport everything was in readiness. Stores, rations, route maps, medical kit, spare hydraulic fluid, chutes, mae-wests, dinghies, etc, had all been stowed properly aboard. The new RAF roundels were still a little tacky and the "from I.A.F. to R.A.F. museum" plaque was firmly riveted on.

The old girl stood resplendent in the warm morning sunshine. As the many dignitaries marched into their ceremonial places, I caught Bobbie letting down his emotional drawers - he was smiling.

Air Marshal Dastur had just been appointed vice-chairman of the Hindustan Aeronautics group. With **all ears and eyes at attention, he stepped forward**, on behalf of the President of India and the IAF, to present the aircraft to Group Captain Denis Barber, Her Majesty's brilliant air advisor to Her Majesty's High Commissioner to India.

Each, in his way, made a noble speech - graciously giving and graciously accepting this former spewer of death which henceforth would go in peace - to a museum where folks could meditate on the folly of articles of war.

But here this morning in the high, dry, clean air of one of India's most delightful cities, all thoughts were of friendship and co-operation and the fine technical achievement that put the shining Liberator into the air again.

No ceremony would have been complete without the coconut and the flowers, and this was duly done. *(To be continued)*

WORLD WAR TWO 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS; 3rd to 10th July 2005

Unless you are one of the lucky ones who knew of and applied (then was selected) you will not be invited to the Westminster Abbey service on 10th July followed by luncheon at Buckingham Palace.

The week is called 'VETERANS AWARENESS WEEK': there is to be a Veterans Centre in St James Park providing a catering and seated area for veterans with a first aid facility.

The Veterans Agency has also launched a National Calendar of Events covering local and regional areas - log on to www.veteransagency.mod.uk. You can look and see by area, what is happening.

60TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE SOUVENIR JOURNAL:

This journal, with a foreword by the Queen is now available at £7.50 (veterans £3.50) from Horizon Publications Ltd, 4 Ravenswood Avenue, Rock Ferry, The Wirral, CH42 4NX. It is described as a most memorable and treasured publication.

THE 2005 REUNION: 2ND 3RD & 4TH September:

At THE FALCON HOTEL: Stratford upon Avon:

Whilst we may not be having many more reunions there is no suggestion that we are not fit enough to carry on. SO, why not come along and enjoy a relaxing informal week-end with good company and share your memories and photographs and memorabilia. There are also the attractions of Stratford and the River Avon - plenty to fill in your time.

AND, FROM YOUR EDITOR:

Most humble apologies for the non appearance of a winter edition of 'AD LIB' and the lateness of this combined Winter/Spring Edition Number 31.

Shortage of material plus pre-occupation with the application, plus arrangements and planning for our 'HEROES RETURN' were the reasons.

Let it be said though that the total lack of red tape and bureaucracy made a daunting task much less formidable. In addition, the cooperation of Indus Tours in listening to and taking on board our customised requirements down to the finest detail certainly made it a success.

After exchanging some 400 emails, countless letters and telephone calls it was such a relief to have so much appreciation and such a relatively trouble free 'adventure/pilgrimage'.
Les Crawley

OUR PRINTERS:

This AD LIB has been printed and issued by Gary Bunkell and we much appreciate his coming to our rescue just as our regular printer, Mick Daines, has had to give it a rest whilst recovering from an operation and due to pressure of business. Whatever happens we must express our grateful thanks to Mick for keeping us going and for putting up with some, at times, gobble de gook type attachments/material he received from the editor

To see photographs of the vets in Sri Lanka go to

www.rafreserves.com/News/story

AND

www.implicitvols.com/SriLanka/album

Thanks to Gary Bunkell and Philip Morris for putting these on the internet for us.