



# 160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

## The Chota Coggage for survivors



SUMMER/AUTUMN 2005  
Number 32

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### S.S.O'S AND D.R.O'S

**ANNUAL SUBS:** Due from 1<sup>st</sup> September but not from overseas members who are all now honorary members (that means you pay nothing). Others, please use the slip at the end of the newsletter to pay.

**REUNION 2006:** Yes, 160 will be back next year. Note the dates - 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> August. The report on the 2005 reunion is in this issue.

**BOOKS: Squadron Signals Publication of the B24 Liberator** earlier mentioned in AD LIBS is again available - 60 pages or so describing all models of the Liberator but at a much enhanced price £9.70. Ref A71903

**B24 Liberator:** Another Squadron Signals book Ref 6125 (Holder). Colour profiles: 167 b/w photos: 64 pages: softback £13.95. Ref

**"Changing Course" (Houston):** If anyone has a particular yen to read about the life of a WREN including her time in Ceylon - the characters, the excitement, danger and happiness (why does this make me think of Bill Cooper?) this could be a good

### OBITUARY:

All will be sad to hear of the recent death of George Isley. George was a quiet member of our group but an ever present at the reunions. We will remember and miss him.

We have also learned of the death of Mrs Glynn Williams. Glynn, our Honorary Padre, had recently been attending reunions though perform on his own, and we did miss him this year.

We have sent our deepest sympathies to both families and friends.

read - but £17.99! 278 pages, some photos. Hardback. Ref M43101

**SLIM, Master of War - Burma (Lyman):** Read about the victory achieved by a demoralised army. 356 pages with 14 maps and some b/w photos. Paperback: £8.99. Ref MA226X

**Air War for Burma:** 3<sup>rd</sup> and concluding volume of the 'bloody shambles series' covering the fight back in South East Asia including the struggle to survive against superior Japanese aircraft. 200 b/w photos, maps and tables: 416 pages, hardback £32.50:Ref A10954.

**All the above from Midland Counties Publications, Hinckley, Leics. LE10 3EY: Tel: 01455 254450.**

**BUT BE SURE TO TRY THE INTERNET FIRST - AMAZON - for discounted prices.**

**WAR MEDALS:** Good to learn that some of our number have at last received their service and campaign medals thanks to the details given in AD LIB. Anyone else out there including overseas members who have missed out should apply to the M O D. See AD LIB Number 30 for details of how to go about it.)

## **MAKING CONTACT : News, old colleagues and HELP!**

**CHARLES LIONEL MOODY:** David Flett confirmed that he well remembered the father of Peter Moody and has been in touch with Peter to tell him about their service together.

### **THE MYSTERY RE THE "N" LOST IN COCOS ISLANDS.**

Through Alan Johnston I have made contact with the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Historical Society and although there is no confirmation of any sort as yet, we now have at least 10 people led by Mr Lionel Allen who are going to considerable lengths to try to obtain information locally and through members of the society. For those who served on or visited Cocos, for your interest, there is a website at [www.cocosdive.bizland.com/cocoshistory](http://www.cocosdive.bizland.com/cocoshistory). *Les Crawley*

## **INTERNET – MORE WEB SITES OF INTEREST.**

**READ TOM KELLOCK'S** account of the return to trip to Sri Lanka at [www.worldwar2exraf.co.uk](http://www.worldwar2exraf.co.uk). Tom also had an article printed in 2 local newspapers.

**LIKE TO FLY KH 191 ?** The Collings Foundation offers 30 minute flights in this B24 in USA. KH 191, and a B17, do barnstorming visits round USA offering these flights at \$400 (tax deductible!). Perhaps not for us but the web site is worth looking at [www.collingsfoundation.org](http://www.collingsfoundation.org).

**FITTERS IIE, HERBERT AND DE LA RUE** (Nickname 'Chuffa'?). We are waiting for more information about this enquiry from someone trying to locate them so that they can make contact with each other. Anyone know of them? Sam Hirst thinks he knew one of them – might have been a chap from the Channel Islands nicknamed 'Chuffa' - so called because he had never seen a steam train!

## **REUNION SEPTEMBER, 2005 REPORT**

This one was a cracker from the word go with a wonderful relaxed atmosphere. Augmented by most of our carers from 'Heroes Return' it was a happy affair enjoyed immensely by everyone. There was the opportunity to get up to date on news and photos and Gary Bunkell spared no effort in striving to give us a run through of his Sri Lanka DVD despite the hotel not being able to provide viewing equipment.

Deborah, our guide, mentor and Girl Friday came along as promised and added her glamour and personality to the occasion. Debs says she now looks on 160 as part of her extended family!

It was also good to see that all had survived the return though we did miss Sam and Lois Porter and Liz Dixon who, at the last minute, were unable to be present. Sam, with his ever ready smile, always made life more interesting on the tour with his challenges as to what might happen next. We recalled the incident at the Culture Club when Sam must have lost his equilibrium in the swimming pool and, nothing daunted, carer Kevin dived in to the rescue though not in swimming garb - we were still able to perceive where Kevin seems to carry a spare pair of socks.

After an almost trouble free Sri Lanka it was an unfortunate accident suffered at the hotel by Wilf Hardcastle when he fell and broke his leg, that brought us back to reality but he was well taken care of by our valiant carers, Lynda, his daughter, and Gary who accompanied him to hospital and stayed until

they were sure he was in good hands and comfortable. In the process they missed out on the dinner!

The news about Wilf is that he is recovering well and is now back in his own home: we send him our best wishes for a speedy return to full mobility.

As usual the organisation was nigh perfect with the hotel providing our own room and bar once more and a new meeting aid – a bell borrowed from some illustrious organisation to call order. Ted found this very useful and made sure that we did give him our attention but we did have trouble trying to prise it away from him before the end of the evening. This was another good one Ted, and we owe you our grateful thanks. Thanks also to Joe Stokes for donating his striking painting of "V" being attacked by a Zero: it raised £101 in the auction.



*Joe's painting of 'V' under attack Sabang 1/10/43: Joe was the only casualty.*

## **BACK TO SRI LANKA: Jeanne's diary part 2**

### **SIGIRIYA – What a welcome on a brilliant day.**

Wednesday 9th March (I think). Saying goodbye to the Culture Club we're now heading for Sigiriya to the camp where some of the group were stationed. It's a bit misleading in the itinerary to say 'morning at leisure' because it usually entails being in the coach to some distant place. We reached the Sigiriya Village Hotel and were greeted by a Guard of Honour, at the salute. Our Vets acknowledged the salute, of course, and then we were escorted inside. The hotels always greet you with a folded flannel and a cool drink to refresh after a long journey in the heat. It's so welcoming. Again, petals and leaves greeted us in our room to wish us a pleasant stay, and we really appreciated these little extra touches.

Here again, we each had a rustic cottage, very tastefully decorated with all one could need. This also is an eco-oriented hotel. The country is very environmentally aware, they don't like needless waste. There was an Ayer Vedic Health Centre here as well, but we didn't have time to experiment. We'd been there only a few minutes when he saw a troop of about 30 monkeys, chasing about in the greenery.

### **THEY'VE MOVED THE RUNWAY!**

When we got to the SLAF base at Sigiriya we were very warmly welcomed. There were armchairs set out under the trees and we were brought drinks and nibbles. The officers and staff were so interested in the photos our Vets had brought. This is not an operational airbase but one that specialises in training in bomb disposal.

Then we were taken to see the remains of the original RAF base. This turned out to be quite a hazardous trek through jungle. The disabled amongst us couldn't attempt it, and to be honest I don't think any of us should have gone. We were told it was only 200 metres but Sri Lankan distances (and hours) are very elastic. When we finally got there all that was left was a few small remnants of a wall, so it really wasn't worth the trouble. The ladies were brought back to camp in a jeep but the able-bodied among the men walked. It was quite tiring in the heat in that terrain.

It was here that we later learned that Gary Bunkell whose father, Bill Bunkell, had died just before we were due to leave in January, quietly laid his Dad's ashes to rest in the jungle at this old RAF site.

### **LET'S GO FOR A CLIMB**

It was also here that the opportunity to climb the Sigiriya Rock was offered. Many of the group as youngsters had made the climb but this time there were only three hardy carers who volunteered. Chandra was duty bound to accompany any of his travellers who wanted the climb and he has done it over 300 times. There are 1200 steps and it takes about an hour and a half to reach the top. They all made it, and returned fulfilled.

The next day after lunch we went to the Dambulla Cave Temple. There is a huge golden Buddha (the largest in the world) at the entrance. The coach took us to the approach and we began the 350ft climb, some of it on roadway made of rock and then several flights of steps.

At the entrance we had to leave our shoes and walked to the temples. It was hard going on the bare feet on the stony ground, but of course very warm. There are 5 temples in this cave and the first had a 45ft reclining Buddha, all carved out of one piece of solid rock. Chandra was at hand to remind us of the signs. It dates from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. In wonderful condition, so well preserved and maintained. We went into each of the remaining 4 temples, all of which had carved Buddhas, some standing, some reclining. One temple had a line of about 12, all in a row, standing.

### **THE KANDY EXPERIENCE**

The following day saw us heading for Kandy where we were to stay for two nights. We called at a Spice Garden on the way, which was quite fascinating. Their guide showed us ginger, turmeric, vanilla, aloe vera and peppers and many more. He then introduced a Hindu, a Tamil, who had come down to Kandy after losing his 'all' in the tsunami at Trincomalee. Of course they don't have very much to start with, and we weren't able to discover what his 'all' meant, his family, home, or whatever.

However his speciality was in climbing coconut trees. He slipped his feet into a loop of rope and shinned up this very tall tree in seconds. We were all gazing at him high up as he cut down a coconut, didn't throw it but carried it down and removed the outer husk which is quite a skill in itself, chopped the end off and handed the nut round for us all to have a drink. There was plenty of milk for everyone, and it was very refreshing. Then he chopped the fruit and we all had a piece.

We were then invited to a gazebo type shelter where we were given a drink of herbal tea. The guide asked if we would permit some of their students to use some of the oils on us and some of us proceeded to have another massage, of the neck, head and shoulders. Then into their shop, where we bought some of the spices we'd seen growing.

We also called at a Batik factory where the very lengthy and detailed process was demonstrated.

At another time we visited a wood carving factory to see the carvers at work. They use mostly teak here, but we also saw ebony, rainbow wood and others. They showed how adding different chemicals changed the colour of the wood. Delightful examples of carving, from large elephants to tiny, and we bought a Buddha and an ebony elephant.

### **DOWN TOWN BY 'TUK TUK'**

There was an opportunity in the afternoon to visit the Royal Botanical Gardens, where Lord Mountbatten had his HQ for three years from 1943. We didn't 'do' the gardens which apparently were really beautiful and where Kew Gardens obtain some of their rare plants.

We chose instead to take a TukTuk (a 3-wheeler) down into Kandy to have a first look at some shops. There had never been time before to fit this in. We bought yet more spices and a hold-all to house all the things we'd bought en route. We told ourselves we were helping the Sri Lankan economy. Very difficult to 'just look', as someone immediately latches on to you and always has a brother or cousin who has just what we're looking for. They're quite charming though, have a lovely sense of humour, and many times when asked if we were English they thanked us for our help after the tsunami.

In the evening we attended a Kandyan Dance Festival which was very colourful but very noisy, with lots of banging of drums.

### **REMEMBRANCE AT THE WAR CEMETERY**

The following morning we were at the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Kandy. Each one we've visited has been in most beautiful surroundings, and the graves tended so carefully and kept so well. There are so many graves, including all the Services and there were a lot of RAF aircrew buried here. Three of the Vets read out the 160 Squadron names, taking the opportunity to include all other 160 casualties including those with no known graves, one of whom was a friend of Dad's who had been killed shortly after arriving in Ceylon in 1944. Ted with Josie, one of the widows, laid a wreath and again there was a short service: it was incredibly sad.

## **GEMS, GEMS AND MORE GEMS**

A lovely afternoon followed when we were taken to a government authenticated Gem Centre. The ladies enjoyed this opportunity and did much to help improve the Sri Lankan economy with jewellery and repairs being done to order and delivered to the hotel the next day.

In the end we didn't get to see the Temple of the Tooth Relic. There had been another mini monsoon during the afternoon and it continued till the evening. We would have to walk barefoot over quite a long rocky path in heavy rain and we decided against it. A few stalwarts went but they were very disappointed at the distance they'd had to walk. Bear in mind a lot of these people are in their 80's, so we were glad we'd not gone.

## **THE ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE**

We left Kandy at 7.30 in the morning on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> for the long drive to Pinnewala and the Elephant Orphanage. We wanted to get there in time to see them have their 9.15 feed. In an enclosure there were four elephants, two about 3 or 4 years, one about 18 months and the baby of 5 months. He was adorable. When found in the jungle very young, he had only one ear, and it could only be speculation how that happened, but the assumption was that either a leopard or crocodile had attacked him. There aren't many crocs in Sri Lanka so leopard seemed to be the most likely culprit. He was fine though, appeared oblivious that he had lost an ear and thoroughly enjoyed his breakfast.

They are fed 5 times a day, and drink 7 bottles each time. We asked what milk was used and surprisingly were told Nestles. There was another young lady elephant that had been rescued and brought to the orphanage after she stepped on a land-mine up in Tamil country and lost a foot, but she limped along with all the others.

About an hour after their feed all the elephants, about 80, are brought down to the river. The track is cleared of visitors and we had a super view as the mahouts led them. There were several babies who were always protected by two older elephants walking either side of them. One old elephant was always kept apart from the rest of the herd, as he was blind, and he followed on behind them.

We were able to watch them for about an hour, and it was quite magical. The babies played as the water came up to their necks and you could see how they enjoyed it. Some of the older ones were brushed down with soap and scrubbed. A few wanted to amble off but they always brought them back. We heard of one mahout who had been killed. In the past he had badly treated and beaten his animal, and the elephant didn't forget and eventually got his revenge.

## **AND ON TO NUWARA ELIYA**

After Pinnewala we continued our long drive climbing into the hills for our two night stay at Nuwara Eliya, 6200ft above sea level. En route we called at the Mackwood Tea Plantation where we were shown the process from plucking the leaves, down to the cup. We were given Broken Orange Pekoe, the best tea, and it was drunk without milk and was delicious.

As it was Sunday, the pickers were not working, but we were able to get some good photographs of them at another plantation a couple of days later. Every possible foot of ground is used, with terrace after terrace of plants, some of them very high, and all in such perfect condition it is really beautiful to see. The views up here are stunning, with plantation after plantation. Of course tea is one of their main industries.

The atmosphere at Nuwara Eliya is delightful. We stayed at the St. Andrews Hotel, the very best, once again upholding the British traditions. The care and attention given to us was just so sincere. Being at this height it was of course cooler, and a lovely touch when we retired to our rooms was to find a hot water bottle tucked into the bed. The food and service here was superb, and it became one of our favourite places, along with the Culture Club.

We had a special interest here as it was where Dad had spent some rest and recuperation recovering from some treatment to his leg, and it was in the hospital here that he met the Royal Marine who wrote that poem. It was strange, as we walked into St. Andrews Dad said "I've been here before".

We spoke to the General Manager of the hotel about his earlier time and he arranged for us to try and find the original hospital, and the lake where Dad had fished. We found the lake, but the old hospital had long gone. However we did find an old road sign naming Military Road, and a local told us the Golf Club had some old photographs and we might find some clues there. So, up to the impressive Golf Club where they gladly showed us some photos. One of them was of the military barracks, which seemed to bear out our earlier road sign, but that was the only reference we could find.

## **TEA ON THE LAWN AND A PRESENTATION**

Had afternoon tea on the lawn overlooking a very British style garden. Our bedroom opened out on to these lovely lawns.

Our final evening at St. Andrews, when we made a little presentation to thank Les Crawley for all his work and effort involved in arranging the trip. Dad was asked to read his poem, and it was particularly appropriate as Nuwara Eliya was where he was given it. Dad read it beautifully and it was extremely moving. Many people asked for a copy, and Tudor (who had completed three tours of operations as a Navigator before coming to Sri Lanka) said Dad must have been a remarkable young man to have someone write such a thing to him.

## **LUXURY BACK IN COLOMBO**

The following day, literally eight hours, was spent in the coach returning to Colombo. Our final night in Sri Lanka was spent at the 5-star luxury Taj Samudra hotel. Deborah, who was our go-between throughout the tour, laid on a cocktail party, and then Dad, Stewart and I had dinner in one of five restaurants in the Taj. The England "A" and Sri Lankan cricket teams were also staying at the hotel. (England lost that day!)

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

During our fortnight it was good to hear the pleasant references to when Sri Lanka was one of our Colonies, with no resentment about it as one sometimes hears. There was frequent mention of "when you were here" or "the British did this or that". They seem very proud of their British connections.

We learned that there are two kinds of marriage here, "Arranged" and "Find Your Own". 30% are arranged, and Chandra said the Bollywood version of poor girl meets rich boy and they live happily ever after just doesn't happen. The arranged marriage is always to bring two families, usually wealthy, together, to enhance their position in society and increase their prosperity. After a wedding, 40% continue to live with parents, where they often have in-law problems.

We heard that there are about 35,000 Buddhist monks, and 1000 female monks, all dressed in the familiar saffron robes. The ladies also have their heads shaved, so how to tell one from another? The robes of the ladies have sleeves.

We quite often saw tree houses with cadjan leaf roofs in fields. They look very quaint but they're really a look-out post. Farmers sit up there at night as wild elephants often come to supper. They can obviously decimate the entire year's work, so when he hears an elephant the farmer lets off firecrackers to deter them. If that doesn't do the trick, he sings to them, and apparently the elephant changes his mind and goes to dine somewhere else.

We three kept very well. No bites to report. Some of the group fell prey to what became known as Ratmalana's Revenge, and were poorly for a few days. All recovered quickly to continue and enjoy the holiday.

## AND SO TO SUM UP

We had a wonderful time. It wasn't a typical holiday, we saw many interesting and fascinating things at some exotic places and met the charming, modest and welcoming Sri Lankans with their lovely sense of humour, and we learned a lot about their lovely country.

For our group, although the Vets had hardly remembered each other from when they served out here, they had experienced similar events and had such a common interest that their comradeship was obvious.

We were all aware that they had had 60 years, known the joys and heartaches of raising a family, building a home and finding a career, denied to those who lost their lives.

I'm not, I hope, being sentimental, but one would be stonyhearted indeed not to take pride in what these lads did.

A truly memorable experience. *Jeanne Eitel.*

## "WHAT THE PAPERS SAID" about the veterans

In an article which was written up from the various individual interviews at the press conference on Day 2 the reporter did justice to the exploits of 160 but ended with:

"With their wheelchairs and walking sticks and carers at hand, it was hard to picture them as courageous and fearless men who put their lives at stake in a land which was totally

alien to them. But their proud stories and tales which conjure up the epic moments of their lives is more than enough to give you an image of what they would have been like sixty years ago"

*Ranga Kamaladasa*

Actually, I thought we were quite a sprightly and young looking bunch of old crocks (*Editor*)



Some members of the group of former members who served in the 160 Squadron, Royal Air Force, addressing Journalists during their recent visit to Colombo. The war veterans came to Sri Lanka under 'Heroes Return', a scheme which sponsors such visits to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in the Far East

Pictured are Les Crawley, Ted Daines, Ron Eitel, Bob Coates & Alan Johnstone.

With acknowledgements to the "Sunday Island" and a.n.o. newspapers.

And, this is the poem given to Ron Eitel by a marine who was at Craighton Village Leave Centre at the same time in 1944.

## The Mask of Time - a fantasy

Time wore a strangely contemptuous mask  
Upon his ravaged face  
From which two eyes leered  
O'er an unkempt beard  
With a faintly cynical trace  
And he said to the passing pageant of years  
"I have given the earth much peace  
I will bury some dead in a river of tears  
When the War-Gods I release".

And on that dread September morn  
In the festering womb of the hours  
A frenzied monstrous child was born  
A war with unlimited powers.  
It scourged the world with its deadly whip  
Men fell to the ground like flies  
On invaded land, in each little ship  
In a limitless sacrifice.

Time watches his fatal hourglass drain  
As the war spread out its claws  
Right to the sands last golden grain  
In an era of primitive laws.  
"I have seen enough", he said to Death  
"I feel that the war should cease"  
And his mask was moist with his cynical breath  
For his face had a smile-filled crease.

To Ron, from Bob Evans, Newara Eliya, 10.12.44.

Ron has endeavoured to trace Bob Evans but without any success. Maybe in due time with this poem appearing on the internet, something could turn up.

## THE COSFORD LIBERATOR: KN751 (Ex 99 Sqn) Continued:

### PART TWO - THE EPIC JOURNEY STARTS

#### BANGALORE TO BOMBAY & CB's

"As we taxied out to line up for the take-off to Bombay, I checked that I had the lucky coin that Jini had given me, that the lei was in its proper spot and that Daruwala had his rabbit foot on the engineer's table. One gets into the habit of this 'luck' stuff. Afterwards I was hoping Chopi had remembered to check the cockpit!!

An hour out of Bombay we hit the monsoon. High, dirty black clouds of rain and vertical winds. I had experienced such "CB's", as they are called by airmen, many times many years ago. And sometimes they break up even the newest, strongest aeroplanes. Our old girl was neither new nor strong. We did our best to avoid the worst and radar brought us down for a landing at Bombay's Santa Cruz airport. But just as we broke cloud in line with the runway a couple of miles from the airfield, a savage rain squall obliterated everything and we had to pull up again into the muck. Luckily because of our "condition" (pregnant old girl) the control was kind to us and kept us at a low level for another crack at the field. This time we could see - so we landed.

#### THE I C S & "WOT, NO FUEL?"

Group Captain Barber, a great transport pilot who had commanded the RAF Transport Command base in Singapore before his desk-driving job in Delhi, had bravely decided to fly with us from Bangalore to Bombay. The air forces of the world describe such an action as "above and beyond the call". And we were certainly glad of his support. Bombay was in flood - water everywhere after months of drought. Our chances of getting out in the morning looked a little dim but first of all we had to fight the battle of the Indian Civil Service - often described in the past as neither Indian, civil nor service. But today there is no question that it is Indian and it seems that everyone in it has a master's degree in empire building. Maybe the empire part is a legacy but getting a straight answer or an OK to anything, without hours of excuses, takes more patience than I have. And it mustn't be overlooked that I already have a master's degree in this same subject, from many years' exposure in Spain.

Fuel was the first problem. British Airways Indian staff, delegated by the RAF to handle us, hadn't organised a bloody thing. Burma-Shell's upstart manager informed us that our RAF credit card was no good in India. And besides, he didn't know if he even had the right grade of fuel. That moment was the closest I came to strangling anyone on the whole adventure.

After three hours of wrangling, the man agreed to accept a letter from British Airways stating that they would reimburse Burma-Shell in cash in the morning. Finally in two more hours we had the fuel - and the little bastard did have the right grade.

But he couldn't produce, he said, at such a late hour, the few gallons of oil we needed. So this was finally obtained during the night, on an old-boy basis, from the Indian Air Force detachment at Santa Cruz.

#### EARLY CALL THEN ON TO ABU DAHBI

We had landed at 4 pm; we checked into the hotel on Juhu Beach at midnight. Everyone was almost too punchy to eat but we gave the call at the desk for 05.00. If we were to

escape the monsoon, we had to be early and ready to go off, if there was a moment's break in the weather.

At five o'clock it didn't appear likely but we duly prepared our flight Plan - 8 hours to Abu Dhabi - and waited. Our departure clearance (military and all that) was of one hour's duration and dated for July 2nd. No departure within this stated time and date and the clearance would be void - requiring another day to obtain a new one. At this point Barber threatened to phone the IAF CAS - very quickly the D & P clearance was extended by 2 hrs!

So we sat in the aircraft with everything prepared - watching and listening to the rain pelting down. Then one of the luck pieces must have started working. There was a break in the black cloud swirling about and we cranked up the engines. Luckily, in spite of all the downpour they had been subjected to during the night, they purred into life. Quick clearance to taxi and out to the take-off runway before anyone could have a mind-change. Within five minutes we were airborne, in the rain, but climbing on track to the west. We'd made it out of there! Days later I read that Bombay's worst monsoon in 50 years had struck that morning and lasted for a week. Sure glad we had gathered all that 'luck'.

We droned up through the muck to our clearance altitude of 8500 ft. We were heavy with fuel, the outside air temp was high and we just munched along through the sky, dodging as best we could the worst black ones. But gradually the weather improved and within three hours of take-off, the sun broke through above and we could watch the rolling white caps on the Arabian Sea below. Only then did we take off the head-sets and call for some coffee and sandwiches.

#### HEAD FOR THE HILLS

A thousand miles separate Bombay from the wild and inhospitable coast of Oman. Nowhere on earth is more desolate. In places the jagged scarred peaks reach up to 10,000 ft. There is no sign of a living thing. We had hit the Oman coast a bit south of track, purposely because the RAF base on the island of Masira was our best alternate if we developed any problems, including fuel shortage. However at this point there were no major problems and the fuel quantity looked OK. We altered course slightly to the north-west to bring us over the aerodrome of Sib a new and large development on the south side of the Gulf of Oman, which we had named as alternate No 2. We checked in with Sib control and continued cruising westward towards Abu Dhabi. From Sib north-westwards the Muscat & Oman coast is dotted with fishing villages every few miles, the mud huts blending with the streaked brown sand all around them. From them camel trails lead in profusion into the mountains to the west.

The mountains end abruptly at the border with the Trucial States and the land height once more descends to very little above sea level. Some hundred miles to the west, over this ocean of sand, lies the city of Abu Dhabi, built on a long peninsula jutting out into the Persian Gulf.

The Sheik seems to have things well organised. Brits and Indians appear to run the place for him in efficient fashion. The airport was a hive of activity with heavy transport aircraft unloading plenty of heavy machinery. Light aircraft were buzzing in and out to service rigs and outlying camps. Very few formalities. Things are happening. Busy people don't have time for queues and interminable paperwork.

There are only two good hotels at the moment and we didn't have either one of them. The whole city is laid out in plenty of space with wide paved main thorough-fares. It will never suffer from traffic jams during this century.

#### **NEXT STOP JEDDAH & SOME 'YANKEE' HELP**

Shortly after nine the next morning we were once again airborne, this time for the Arabian Red Sea city of Jeddah. Even at our cruising altitude of 8500 ft the outside air temp hovered around +30 degrees C. Our route took us across the beautiful blue waters of the Persian Gulf as far as the island city of Bahrain, where we turned inland over Dharan and set course to the inland capital city of Riyadh.

Over Doha, the sensing unit of our old radio compass finally had given up the ghost so we were now left with only VOR arid one VHF set to cross the 500 miles of barren Arabian Desert. Rather than divert to Bahrain for possible repairs, we decided to carry on, basing this decision on the fact that if we located Riyadh correctly, the flight from there westwards took us at right angles to the Red Sea and therefore no great problem to position ourselves for a course correction to Jeddah. If we failed to locate Riyadh within a reasonable time of our ETA, we had plenty of fuel reserve to divert to Bahrain.

Navigating over the desert without radio aids, even from our low altitude, is most difficult. There is insufficient detail on the map to relate to negligible clear land marks on the shifting terrain below. And horizontal visibility is often very poor.

At one point we were having no success in raising Riyadh radio when a Yankee voice came in, loud and clear, asking if he could relay our message to Riyadh. He was obviously flying a Saudi Arabian Airlines jet, not far from us horizontally but probably upstairs at 35000 ft. We explained our problem, telling him that we were flying a Lib at quite low altitude and that as a consequence, we weren't reaching anybody to talk to except him. "HEY" he said, "what are you guys doing away down there flying one of those things? That was my first love". So I suppose, for his old love, he duly passed our message - and we were thankful to him.

From Riyadh to Jeddah there is nothing but burning rocks and sand below, rising in places to hills and mountains of considerable altitude. The rising air currents caused us to be tossed up and down like a yo-yo. With such turbulence and rapidly fluctuating airspeeds, the auto pilot was useless. So for some three hours we hand flew the big machine. Tiring work.

Jeddah has runways stretching from the sea into the desert and we touched down on one of them exactly seven hours after leaving Abu Dhabi - and a ground temp of 113 degrees F.

#### **NO RADIO BUT MORE YANKEE HELP**

By now our radio problems were no longer un-serious. Some work had to be done to them. i •

Luckily for us, Saudi Arabian Airlines is American managed and the arrival of the Liberator had flushed out quite a crowd, among the curious being two fellows who had been on Yankee Lib squadrons many years before. So with their assistance, we were soon arranging with the right people to have the work done.

At length when they couldn't repair our HF set, these remarkably hospitable fellows loaned us one - on the simple basis of my personal promise to return it to their London aeroport manager as soon as we reached the UK.

We never did see or hear of the British Ambassador. He was away on his yacht; and the Group Captain Air attaché was, as his sergeant informed us, busy in conference with the Ambassador!!

#### **UP THE RED SEA, PAST LUXOR TO CAIRO**

The Jeddah-Cairo flight looks relatively short and straightforward if one looks at the old school atlas. But modern wars and modern airline procedures have a way of quickly doubling these straight-line distances. So it is with Jeddah-Cairo. One proceeds up the east shore of the Red Sea almost into the southern Sinai; then there is a most powerful beacon, over which one turns west south-west in a direct line to the Nile city of Luxor. Then again due north from there to Cairo.

For the trip up the eastern shoreline of the Red Sea, I quote from our flight log:

"0900 hrs - cruising up the Red Sea! The sandy coast line of Saudi Arabia, fragmented by a million emerald swimming pools, gradually gives way to grey-black hills in the background. No sign of any habitation whatsoever since Jeddah, 150 miles to the S.E. The auto pilot is steady this morning above the stable air of the large body of water below.

Since the Red Sea is nearly 150 miles wide at this point, we cannot see the western shoreline from our position, 8500 ft and 10-15 miles off the eastern shoreline."

Over Luxor, the green is very green - but only as far away from the Nile as water can be channelled in the intricate canal system. At the outward extremity, absolute desert. Which is exactly what one flies over all the way from Luxor to Cairo. During this 150 miles flight only two roads are seen; black-top ribbons arrowing their way from the south-east towards Cairo. Except for them, sand.

Cairo is a confusion of runways. Luckily we chose the right one and landed at the military base of Almaza to a warm welcome - which could have been a hell of a lot warmer if our ident hadn't been OK!! Haven't seen so many fellows toting sub-machine guns since Chicago in '29. But at least we were provided with top security on the aircraft and a minimum of security and fuss for us.

Chopi had spent three years (from 67-70) in Egypt on an advisory mission so soon that news spread. From then on some of his old pals were flushed out and we were very persona grata.

His best pal turned out to be Col. Sobeh el Tawil, a splendid fellow, and director of engineering for the Egyptian Air Force.

By majority decision, it was decided we would fly on the Moslem Sabbath from Cairo to Rome - in spite of my personal objections, and instructions were laid on for fuelling and a car at 0400 to bring Daruwala to the airport to supervise.

Our accommodation had been booked in the Nile hotel - we would have been probably cleaner and a lot more comfortable if we had been booked into the Nile itself. F/S Ingram, who had met us on arrival, tried to ease the pain and at the same time excuse his boss, the Wing Commander, by offering us a sundowner on his roof garden. But it had to be an early night for our planned 0700 take-off.

Next morning, as we approached the military gate and the avenue of stens, we were informed by the corporal of the

guard, in his best English, that fuel was OK and aircraft ready. But such wasn't the case.

The fuel truck or bowser or whatever the Egyptians call it, had arrived alright to begin the refuelling but the alert Daruwala didn't like the red colour of it - feeling, and rightly so, that it was probably an aromatic fuel which was strictly not suitable for the fuel lines of our Lib.. Now the problem began. Great conferences in the base commander's office. Coffee while we talked. More coffee while we got out the technical manuals to compare the specs. More coffee each time another colonel appeared to offer his advice. Finally our brilliant air attaché, who had brought us to Almaza in the first place, came up with the bright idea to call Shell in Cairo. More coffee to celebrate this stroke of genius. No more problems Sahib - Shell would send right away the correct green-tinted fuel over from Cairo International Airport, ten miles distant. At roughly two miles per hour the fuel arrived at four-thirty - a bit too late to go anywhere except back to Cairo for the night.

#### **MORE PROBLEMS BUT R A F TO THE RESCUE**

In the meantime, however, because we had some time to spare, Daruwala began to inspect too closely the aeroplane, and as one would guess, he began to find problems. First with radio, which wasn't surprising, and secondly with a propeller constant speed unit which was sticking both in coarse and fine pitch; a somewhat serious happening because it meant that we couldn't bring it back from fine pitch after take-off.

Now our RAF colleagues really came front and centre. Westland Helicopters are delivering Sea-King helicopters to the Egyptian Air Force. As a consequence, they and Decca Navigation people have skilled technicians "in situ" as they say. So forthwith two of them were called from Cairo and work began to sort out the problems.

John Lewis produced his electronic spy equipment and soon located the propeller pitch problem. Gordon Brown rolled up his sleeves and began mucking about with our ancient radio. Naturally, as a modern and very skilled radar/electronics engineer, he had never seen anything to compare with our Mickey Mouse sets'. Nevertheless he soon reported to me that he had found corrosion on the aerial leads, loose something somewhere else and that having cleaned up these points, we would benefit by 300 more ohms or amps or something. I didn't understand it very well but it all sounded great and looked as if we were making fine progress. At that point the aircraft was surrounded by work stands brought under the Colonel's instructions and the fiercest gang of gun-toting soldiers were guarding us proudly from any sneak attack on our military secrets.

During a temporary lull in all this activity, Chopi and I ambled over to try to phone the fuel people. We didn't like to hurry them but it was already five hours since they had told us that the fuel would be there "right away". Not speaking Arabic, I wasn't quite sure what "right away" meant, but it did seem a little long. While doing so we met Don Farquharson, Westland's test pilot. When he found out where we had been lodging he was quite aghast and offered us a share of his room in the Sheraton. In due course Gordon Brown offered the same facility so when we returned to Cairo, Chopi and I had a comfortable kip for the first time since leaving Bangalore.

When we were driving to the aeroport in the morning around six o'clock I remarked that everything seemed pretty

quiet - even for Cairo so early. Fred Ingram explained that we happened to be driving past Cairo's City of the Dead!

#### **CAIRO - ROME - 'A RELATIVE BREEZE'**

Cairo-Rome was a relative breeze. We played a bit with the propeller governor control as we rolled down the runway and were airborne smartly. The forecast time for the 1400 mile leg was 9 hrs 30. We hit the Med over El Alemain and it looked like a mill-pond. Obviously the winds were lighter than forecast. We hit the western tip of Crete in 3 hrs 45 min. which put us nearly half an hour ahead of schedule. Passed the toe of Italy and opposite Sorrento we were more than an hour ahead so we decided to request permission to continue on to Nice. The aircraft was flying beautifully and we had ample fuel reserve. Rome control OK'd the change but within five minutes they came back to us with instructions to descend to 3000 ft to clear under the Rome approaches. As this descent and subsequent climb back to 8500 ft would have seriously dented our fuel reserve, we landed at Ciampino in accordance with our original flight plan, 8 hours after take-off from Cairo.

The RAF handling unit at Ciampino was a hive of activity. Yes Sir, you're leaving in the morning at 9; Yes Sir, flight lunches for three will be aboard; Yes Sir, your hotel accommodation and transport are laid on; fuel and oil. Yes Sir, we're ready to refuel right now - Boy, what a change to return to civilization.

No member of the Air Attaché's staff showed. We did manage to reach him by phone. Yes, he was "pleased" to know we had arrived; yes, he would pass an arrival message to Upavon for us. Thank you Sir, hope we haven't put you out!!

#### **OFF TO LYNEHAM IN THE MORNING**

In the morning we decided a relaxed 9 or 10 o'clock take-off would be in order as the days are so long in the UK at this time of year. It had been our continuing policy to fly "daylight only" and we weren't about to change that now; even 10 o'clock departure would see us in the UK around 5 pm so there really was no need for a dawn patrol.

In a large, modern airline everyone has his function and usually there are two people running about to do the job of one. But in this case, even in Rome, we were still obliged to do our own flight plan, check out the aeroplane before departure, make sure everything was aboard, etc. This is all pretty time-consuming, particularly when it is additive and not done simultaneously by many people.'

We felt it was important for us to speak with Rome control and explain the particular circumstances of our aged aeroplane in order that we could get them to take us over immediately after take-off and guide us out of the congested Rome area as far as Elba. In this way we could concentrate solely on flying the aeroplane and not have to concern ourselves with airway navigation with our very depleted radio equipment.

They were very sympathetic and readily agreed. At 8500 ft over Elba we were on our own but heading happily across the blue Med in the direction of St. Tropez. A quick, sanctioned cut off from there to Montelimar instead of Martigues saved us 20 minutes and soon we were over Lyon. From there over Moulins, Orleans, Chartres, and Dinard was really a beautiful airborne tour over la belle France, particularly that lovely section down the valley of the Loire.

As we reported in at Dinard, we were above 10/10ths cloud. A quick word with the southern approach controller



and we were ground controlled for the approach to the UK and Lyneham. It really is a comfortable time to be up there and know that you have an eagle-eyed accomplice away down below who has you on his scope.

#### **FLYPAST GREENHAM – 'PURRING LIKE A PUSSY'**

While comfortably cruising north-bound over the Channel Islands, our Controller came on the horn again to ask if we would be prepared to do a 'fly-past' at Greenham Common, where an air show was in progress. We said "Sure, provided you keep us under your control until we are finally over Lyneham!" Affirmative from him so in due course he brought us down through cloud and rain from 7500 to clear at 3000 ft just south of Greenham Common aerodrome. We prepared our run from the south and crossed the massed display at 200 ft and 200 mph - purring like a pussy.

Then westwards to Lyneham. Another requested junior fly-past for the waiting folks below and we are on the ground at 17.35 - eight hours exactly from Ciampino.

#### **THE U K WELCOME - BRING ON THE CHAMPAGNE**

As we taxied down through the long line of C130 transports, the clicking of shutters was louder than zippers in Hyde Park on a Saturday summer evening.

The last time I had landed at Lyneham was nearly 30 years ago - with a Dakota coming from Karachi - and certainly without fanfare.

Dr. John, resplendent in a bold pin-stripe, looked pleased as he walked out to greet us; Group Captain Slade cracked welcoming champagne in the mess; a sympathetic immigration and customs officer knew from much experience how to help through a weary crew; S/L Ian Brotherton, an old Cresta pal and 99 sqdner from Brize Norton flew over to add to the welcome; all the very helpful chaps from the station were doing all they could to take over from us the post-landing details, including equipment, messages, etc.. Made me feel I'd never left the Air Force. And I'm sure our two Indian friends felt equally at home again.

Somehow, after dinner, Dr. John got all of us, and baggage, piled into his massive Bentley automobile and we headed the 90 miles into London for a couple of days of sleep.

On Wednesday, much refreshed, we drove again to Lyneham. The aeroplane had always been scheduled to end its days at Cosford, near Wolverhampton. But after studying pics of the airfield and the runway plan, and noting with some terror the obstructions at either end, we thought it prudent to fly up there first to have a look-see before making a decision.

Group Captain Dave Dowling laid on a 'Heron' and we flew up. Made a few passes from each end of the runway before landing to be greeted by the station commander and a great welcoming committee. Over tea we broke the news to them that we didn't think it wise to try to put the Liberator in, over obstacles, onto a 3600 ft runway. We had very aged rubber, suspect brakes and neither Chopi nor I had presently the expertise required to do it.

#### **ON TO COLERNE ; MORE CHAMPAGNE THEN TEA IN THE SERGEANTS' MESS**

On the way back we inspected Colerne's 6000 ft runway through the broken clouds. It would be no problem to put the Lib in her new home there.

On the following day, with G/C Dowling and S/L Brotherton aboard, plus airman J.T.Hall somewhere in the bowels of

the aft section, we lifted the old girl gently off from Lyneham and deposited her equally gently onto the Colerne runway. The Air Officer Commanding 46 Group, Air Vice-Marshal Hoad, was there to welcome us and to accept the aircraft back into the fold. Too was Jack Bruce, Dr. Tanner's very able deputy, who had sprouted a few new grey ones over the radio and equipment problems involved.

We were now becoming hardened drinkers - two consecutive landings followed by welcoming champagne. But all that was tempered by tea in the sergeants' mess and an inspection of the museum aircraft, kindly laid on by the station commander, G/C Cooper, and his officers. It is clear the old lady will have a very loving home.

So, as Basil Embry had cryptically written some years ago -  
**"MISSION ACCOMPLISHED"**

I hope, Paul, that you will have excused my rambling; but once the words started to flow ..... you know so well how it is. I've seen you hunched over your infernal machine during your St. Moritz writing days, completely oblivious to the din of yapping nearby.

If you have no intention of tearing yourself away from the Antibes sunshine let me know and I'll fly down for a visit.

Love to your two beautiful women.

Cheers, DOUG.

15 Grosvenor Square, London W 1.

July 20<sup>th</sup> 1974



*The Cosford Liberator KN 751 plus Editor - (NOT Doug Connor): with wings stripped off it ended its journey by road to Cosford – it is well worth a visit!*

#### **DID YOU KNOW THAT: -**

Many years ago, in Scotland, a new game was invented: it was ruled "Gentlemen Only ....Ladies Forbidden"... and thus the word GOLF entered into the English language.

#### **ANOTHER APOLOGY**

Whilst structural work was underway your editor was without a roof over his head and had to be temporarily relocated (or was it dis-located) for four months hence no AD LIB and up to a point, off the air. All is (nearly) well now and, as the papers would say, I hope you enjoy this bumper issue.

**PLEASE CUT OUT AND USE TO SEND YOUR SUBS TO:**

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

I enclose payment for subs due 1/9/05  
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