

# 160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

## The Chota Coggage for survivors



**SPRING/SUMMER 2006  
Number 34**

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#### SSO's AND DRO's

**REUNION 2006: 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> August 2006:** It is all systems go for the reunion with a good number of confirmed bookings but we could do with many more so, if you have not yet sent off your booking form, please DO SO NOW – the sooner we get the numbers up, the better the position we are in to make sure all are needs are properly met. There is new management at the Falcon so it would be good if we can show a bit of muscle. If you do not have the form you can 'phone the Falcon at 0870 8329905 being sure to mention 160 Squadron.

**VETERANS' LAPEL BADGE:** We gave details of how this can be obtained in AD LIB No.31 but if you missed out it can still be obtained by calling the free helpline at 0800 169 2277. You may have noticed that it is being worn by quite a lot of veterans now.

**BOOKS: 355 & 356 Liberator Squadron Association** has produced a book "a brief history plus stories from those who were there" covering their experiences at Salbani and Cocos. Price £22 incl. p & p. Obtainable from Peter Jones, 23

Barn Owl Close, Langtoft, Lincs. PE6 9RG: Tel: 01778 344337: email [prj230@btinternet.com](mailto:prj230@btinternet.com).

**"AD LIB" material:** As you may have gathered this is becoming scarce. So, please let the editor have any stories or anecdotes which would interest our readers – as soon as possible!

(Usual Caveat – whilst the editor does not claim to have an absolute final say as to what may be published his opinion is fairly conclusive).

**FREE MEMBERSHIP:** Just to confirm, in case anyone thought it too good to be true, membership of the 160 Association is FREE so, please, do not think that any subs are currently due.

#### OBITUARY:

It is sad to have to report the death of our old colleague and good friend Hank Illingworth on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. Hank, a "Fitter/Engines" on the squadron, was, despite ill health over recent years, an ever present at reunions and although we tried to coax him to return to Sri Lanka last year, we were all disappointed that he was not able to make it. We send our deepest sympathies to Elsie his wife, and to his family and friends.

#### MAKING CONTACT, news, old colleagues and HELP:

**FRANK KELLY:** From the advert posted on Teletext, Channel 4, Page 272, Tom Kellock has had contact from Frank telling him of his joining 160 at Thurleigh then going with the Libs to the Middle East being posted elsewhere when 160 went to India. Frank was a Fitter/Armourer with the Squadron.

**LIBERATOR "N" – Cocos Islands:** Les Crawley's continued quest to find the facts about the loss of this aircraft seems to confirm again that it was not a 160's "N" and also that there are serious doubts that it actually happened on Cocos at all. Examination (albeit briefly) of the Cocos Islands records at National Archives, Kew, failed to bring up this incident nor has the Cocos Island Historical Society (and its many members) any information about it or of relevant burials or memorials. More recently, contact with Joe Carberry, ex adjutant of 356 Squadron on Cocos, has been made and Joe seems very sure that if this crash had occurred he would have known about it. (Joe is also Secretary of the Merseyside Branch of the Aircrew Association). Hopefully, the answers will turn up some day.

**CHINESE GENERAL:** Did you know that Sigiriya was visited by the General of the Chinese Army Air Force with four of his staff on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1944? He was brought from China Bay by Maj.General Lampion. He lunched with Wing Co. Brady and inspected the station and, as it was at the time that we were preparing to move the squadron to KKS, what was the reason for the visit? The next record shows that the Chinese General and staff left with General Wheeler on 30<sup>th</sup> July in a DC3 for New Delhi. What about that? And what did it mean by saying it was in aircraft 'Hapgift'?

## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD:

### Herbert McLure, RCAF: Radar Mechanic: 160 Squadron.

Thanks again to Angus Hamilton and his book "Canadians on Radar in South East Asia: 1941-1945", we are able to tell of the experiences of Herb who was stationed at both Sigiriya and KKS. Whilst we have had previous articles covering arrival on the squadron there is always something new and different in each one. We pick up his story as he leaves Bombay.

"We left Bombay on 12<sup>th</sup> November by train. There were seven of us radar mechanics. We were given rations and we got hot water from the train engine to make tea. In Madras we changed to a narrow gauge railway that connected with the ferry to Ceylon from the south-eastern corner of India. After an all night trip we arrived in a holding camp in Colombo and stayed there with nothing to do for about two weeks.

On the evening of 30 November we left by train for Sigiriya, a RAF airfield that had been recently carved out of the jungle in north central Ceylon. We were informed that the train would blow two short whistles to let us know that we were arriving at our destination- We heard the two short whistles, the train stopped and we looked out. It was pitch black, no platform, and no sign of life.

A native guard started yelling in broken English from his little car at the back of the train. We began throwing our bags out but the train started moving. There was a frenzied scramble to get them back on and a couple of us struggled up the ladder of the English style coach as the train gathered speed.

About daybreak we arrived at the large native village, the end of the line. Here, we were feeling quite abandoned when we spotted a RAF truck. It had come to pick up supplies for the skeleton crew that were maintaining the facilities at an inactive airfield nearby. The driver took us to the camp where we were fed and arrangements were made by wireless for us to take the train back that evening. We were promised that a lorry would meet us.

Shortly before midnight the train arrived at the crossing. This time it stopped until we unloaded and then, with a toot, vanished into the darkness. When our eyes became accustomed to the darkness we saw that we were on a narrow paved road with no sign of a lorry or anything else except a four foot square shelter used by the guard who controlled the crossing. The guard was preparing to blow out his little kerosene signal lantern, lock up his shelter, get on his bicycle and go home for the night.

There we were, ten airmen in the dark jungle with kit bags piled on the edge of the road and no lorry in sight.

Corporal Bob, who was in charge of the party, approached the gate guard and asked; "Where is Sigiriya air force station?"

The guard gathered his sarong around his groin, and in his bare feet moved out on to the road, pointed, and said, "Down there, Master."

"How far?" The guard, while moving his head from side to side and twisting his hands, said "Maybe ten miles, Master."

"Where do you live?"

"One mile that way."

"Will you ride into the air force station and deliver a message? We will pay you ten rupees."

The guard shook his head, waved his hands and quickly said in a high-pitched voice, "No, Master, rogue elephant, very bad."

There was no way he could be persuaded even with an offer of twenty rupees—a month's wages. He took off on his bicycle down the dark road with his white sarong flowing in the wind. We felt very abandoned.

Nothing to do but bed down for the night. We lugged our bags and packs out beside the railway tracks where there was a gravel and shale strip. While we were improvising supports for our mosquito nets and making ourselves reasonably comfortable, there were, of course, several half humorous, half nervous remarks about being attacked by jungle creatures. Then we heard a hum, a quiet noise, coming from the dark. Suddenly the hum was pierced by a scream as some animal captured its night meal. Finally everybody fell into a deep sleep.

Suddenly I was awakened by a great roaring sound, a rush of air and a shaking of the ground. The first thing I thought of was rogue

elephants. One by one, each of us realized that a freight train had just passed by. Needless to say we didn't sleep much after that.

Just after daybreak a fuel truck came by. The Corporal got a ride into camp, and organized a truck that took us to the camp in time for a late breakfast. As we enjoyed our RAF rations, we watched an elephant and his mahout clearing trees from around the mess hall. We had arrived at Sigiriya!

At Sigiriya we joined a Liberator squadron, No.160. The radar, I believe, was Mark V with a radome and a rotating dish antenna. There were spare parts but no circuit diagrams. Without diagrams the RAF "gen men" were lost, so one resourceful Canadian, Ted Collier, took me as his helper and we traced all the circuits. Then the gen-men went back to work. We were glad to let them stay in the hot workshop while we went back out in the jungle bays and did DI's. The squadron did mostly sea patrols with depth charges but it also made bombing flights over Burma and Thailand.

On 1st August the squadron moved to KKS, a new airfield on the desert peninsula on the northern end of Ceylon. The move was made because there had been several crashes at Sigiriya; some because the planes had trouble lifting a full load out of the jungle and some because of Sigiriya Rock which jutted up six hundred feet nearby. At KKS we lived in tents in the hot sun instead of palm leaf huts in the damp jungle".

Shortly after, on 15<sup>th</sup> August, Herb was posted to Koggala where there were Sunderlands and Catalinas, then had a spell in the Maldives before returning to Ceylon and a final posting to the Supply Depot at Ridgeway.

### A POEM by way of a change

John Rist says he has pilloined and altered this text and thought it might have a relevance to us 160 'bods'.

"One cannot buy a place in the membership of the original 160 Squadron,

The list has closed long since. The ranks will thin as Time's own reaper plucks out random founders from within.

Remember now! Faces that once we knew -

Elsewhere detained and kept from a rendezvous;

And yet while we remember them they do not die,

But stay forever young, and so truly learn to 'Fly'.

They win broader 'Wings' to mount the azure sky -

And form a company, who so surpassed the rest -

(even surmounting Icarus, who failed the final Test).

So from those shades you see not, but are yet close by".

### MINELAYING:

In AD LIB Number 28 we printed a comment on mine laying possibly by the C.O. and to amplify this subject and to allow our Squadron historians to have some original material from the official records, here is a reprint from the squadron appendices on the tactics used.

### REPORT ON MINELAYING TACTICS USED BY 160 SQUADRON FOR AERIAL MINELAYING.

#### GENERAL

The method used to drop the mines in the desired position is to select a prominent datum, such as one bank of a river mouth, headland etc, and to set course from there on a given track, height and ground speed, and to drop the mines by timing from a stop watch.

This procedure is shared by three people:

**Captain:** is responsible for course and height.

**2nd Pilot:** is responsible for speed by necessary manipulation of the throttles.

**Navigator:** is responsible for the timing and actual release of the mines.

Where possible it is advisable to do the dropping on 'George' for two reasons:

(i) Accuracy in piloting.

(ii) Search lights have a blinding effect and when caught in same there is a great tendency to push the stick forward. If flying on 'George' you are safe for a few seconds by which time you can readjust as necessary.

### Maps & Charts

Undoubtedly our greatest difficulty has been the inaccuracy of maps and charts for almost every port, harbour or area we have mined. Photographs, when available, are invaluable and it is strongly recommended that P.R. cover be obtained of the area concerned before mining operations are attempted. This Squadron has had several abortive sorties due to rivers, inlets etc not existing, or existing in places not indicated on maps or charts.

### Dropping Run Data

The usual is as follows:-

Height: 350 feet.

Speed: Ground Speed of 175 M.P.H.

In the event of the presence of flak ships it is advisable to use a dropping height of 200 feet to reduce the flak risk.

Sometimes the last wind found is used for working out course and indicated speed for the run, but owing to the variation of wind around coastlines, it is more accurate to use a visual wind found within a few miles of the target area. Naturally this is not always possible.

### Planning a Mining Operation

Information Required

- i) Number of aircraft to be employed.
- (ii) Number, type and assemblies of mines to be used.
- (iii) Admiralty charts of area to be mined.
- (iv) Latest detailed information of coastline within twenty miles radius of target - photographs where possible.
- (v) Latest information on defences, especially L.A.A. and searchlights.
- (vi) Information on enemy Radar cover to and from target and in target area.
- (vii) Any information on much used channels, swept channels etc, this is rarely if ever, supplied but much information can be gleaned from Coastal Pilots.

The charts, maps and photographs are then perused for suitable datums, and a pattern is then designed to close all inner entrances and, when sufficient A/C are available, to lay an outer pattern as a sort of second line.

During the laying on of a sortie, great care is taken to ensure that aircraft's tracks do not cross during their dropping run or on their run ups to their datums: if they do, aircraft are given different heights to fly.

After last mine away, aircraft are given "break aways" care again being taken to ensure that tracks do not cross or that height bands are given. Usual procedure is to remain at minimum altitude 50-100 feet until at least 50 miles from target area.

Aircraft are given height bands of 1,000, 800, or 1,200 feet to fly on their way out but whenever within Radar cover they descend to a sufficiently low height to guarantee evasion. Out of Radar cover on the return trip, aircraft are given height bands between 7,000 and 10,000 feet i.e. at the best height for range flying in a Liberator of that weight.

To ensure equal spacing of aircraft in the target area, the number of 3 course winds to E bound on the way out is laid down before take off according to the Met. Forecast. This point is at the Captains' discretion for the return trip.

### Approach to Target

When approaching the target it is highly desirable to "aim off" by about 10-20 miles for the landfall, and then to come down the coastline to the datum. Although this takes a little longer it ensures that when you're in the target or danger area, you know exactly where you are and what you are going to do next, with the result that the absolute minimum of time is spent in the target area.

The approach to the target is made at a height of between 600-1,200 feet to facilitate map reading, and once the datum is identified, height is lost down to the dropping height, and speed set at dropping speed.

In this squadron the navigator passes the dropping speed and course to the captain about 5 minute before reaching the target. The navigator also opens the bomb doors, selects bays and fuses mines about 1 minute before reaching the datum, repeating same to the captain over intercom as he does so.

### Intervals between take offs.

Normal spacing between take offs is three minutes - this prevents over crowding in the target area. However, if a large number of aircraft is to be employed on a rugged target, owing to the undesirability of lingering in the target area, the take off interval is reduced to 1 minute.

### Radar

This Squadron is equipped with Mk. V. Radar and it has proved invaluable, A great deal of time has been spent in training one Radar Operator in each crew in map reading by radar, and the results achieved have exceeded all expectations. Ranges of 90 miles and over on mountains when the aircraft is flying at 500 feet and below are the rule and not the exception. In conditions of low visibility the aircraft have many times been guided to their datum by radar alone, and in a few instances the complete run has been carried out and mines dropped successfully entirely on radar - the datum not being sighted visually at all.

Another great use of this equipment, in the hands of a good operator, is to combat bad weather. In tropical regions CU. and CUNG clouds are of such great vertical structure that they may threaten structural damage to aircraft. On a dark night it is impossible to pick your way visually through these clouds, but by using the radar it is possible to plan your flight 30 or 40 miles ahead so as to avoid any cloud which may be hazardous to the aircraft.

Finally, radar has been used to pick up enemy night fighters at ranges of 5-10 miles and the resultant avoiding action has, so far, been entirely successful.

### Radio altimeters.

All this Squadron's aircraft are fitted with radio altimeters, 0-400 feet, and these are considered an essential fitting for aircraft engaged on low level mining operations.

### Briefing

Once the sorties have been planned Forms Green are produced for individual aircraft giving full details of heights to fly, tracks, approach to datum, breakaways etc.

For the briefing, all crew members are mustered in the Ops. Room and are addressed by the following people in the following order on the matters listed against their names.

1. Intelligence Officer.

Location of target, reasons for importance. Local Defences: - includes H.A.A. L.A.A. searchlights, Aerodromes and aircraft. Local pick up points. Maps and photographs of aircraft datums.

2. Met. Officer.

General weather to and from target and weather in target area.

3. Signals Officer.

Normal signals briefing.

4. Squadron Commander or Flight Commander.

General considerations, tactics to be employed on these particular sorties. A detailed run over each aircraft's sortie.

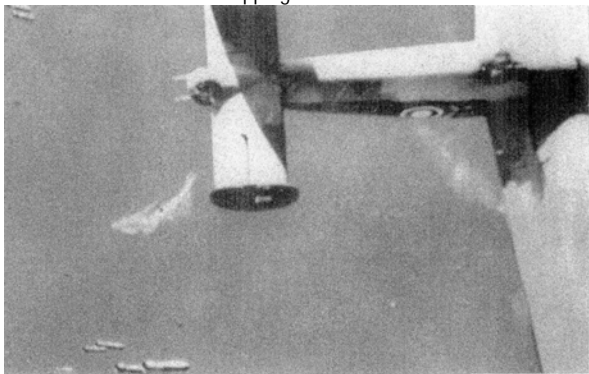
5. Ops. Officer

Normal G.R. briefing as applicable. Air Sea rescue facilities available, including dispositions of our submarines in target area and on track to and from target.

*(With grateful thanks to Robert Quirk - yet again - for reprinting from the Squadron ORB appendices)*

## FROM IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM RECORDS:

We are grateful to Frank Green for making available this photo of a 160 Liberator on an anti-shipping strike.



*The caption reads:*

*"Bombs falling from an RAF Liberator of 160 Squadron on a daylight anti-shipping raid. The wake of a ship turning at speed can be seen just behind the tail plane".*

Has anyone any comments on this photo/operation?

When? And Where? Middle East? And might the aircraft be coded "Z"?

## MORE ABOUT THE HILL CLUB, Nuwara Eliya

So far as I know, I (with Christine) was the only one of our group to go back to pay a nostalgic visit to the Hill Club having previously returned there in 1983 when on holiday. In 1983 it was basking in its faded glory but with a relaxed atmosphere and homely enough. It has changed.

Now more swish and with a somewhat more snooty air about it probably because it now advertises itself as a hotel (for temporary members) and, apart from some obvious remaining gentlemen's club touches, a rather more upmarket appearance. This was no doubt not helped by the fact that there was simply no one around except two ex Naval chaps we talked to in the beautifully kept grounds. They were also on a 'Heroes Return' package.

As a taster for what it used to be 'all about' I am quoting a few extracts from the "Suggestions & Complaints Books".

**2<sup>nd</sup> November 1885:** Supper was ordered at 12.50 for 4 gentlemen – at 1.40 we were told the cook was asleep and supper was brought for one. On ringing the bell for five minutes, a servant appeared to bring a bottle of beer. This sort of thing should not be. Gibert F Traill.

**16 Oct 1888:** That pen wipers be provided at the different writing tables so that the pens can be kept clean.

**About 1890:** It has very frequently been pointed out that a rug or two be provided for the use of Gentlemen who arrive before their horse keepers.

(The Secretary is instructed to provide two rugs which are to be procured at the bar on the member signing an order, which order will be returned to him on his returning the rugs to the bar).

**20<sup>th</sup> September 1891.** Nothing to get for early tea, asked for herrings – "None": asked for ham or sausages, butler replied "Chief clerk taken store key and gone out" - Quality of food at breakfast and dinner on the 19<sup>th</sup> most inferior – even the pepper and toothpicks are *musty*. Chas H Bagot

**18<sup>th</sup> October 1897:** Ordered tea and toast at 4 pm: waited till 4.40 then went to the Grand Hotel for it. A.N.Lloyd.

**November 1898:** That electric bells be put into all bedrooms at *once* as at present men have to call for the boy, and wake up those who are sleeping in the morning. E.Hamlin.

**29<sup>th</sup> May 1901.** The Billiard Room is alive with fleas – one member caught 13 in a few minutes – there is an accumulation of dirt under the matting which brings these pests.

**September 1902:** Would suggest the use of "Bromo" paper in the closets in place of present stuff which is like cardboard.

P P Blackmore.

**16<sup>th</sup> February 1914:** The management deserves great credit in the excellent dinner tonight. Signed by 10 members.

I don't remember an excellent dinner. Signed 1 member.

**December 1928:** We suggest that a notice 'Ladies not permitted by this entrance' be posted at the main porch.

If necessary the entrance to the Ladies' Annexe might be suitably indicated. Signed by 5 members.

(Committee decided not to exhibit 'Notices' but that members be informed that the Ladies entrance is in the Annexe).

**29<sup>th</sup> April 1956:** Flies troublesome – are they members?

"The Hill Club" was originally founded in 1876 and the history shows that it survived crises when the coffee industry failed (and the club closed for a period) then when money had to be found to restore the buildings in the 1920s; and again in 1966 when the exodus of expatriates gathered momentum and membership fell to 300.

In 1967 it was decided to widen the membership and the first national of Sri Lanka was elected to membership on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1967. The steady increase in occupancy by temporary members has enabled the club to prosper over the past 30 years. Ladies were not allowed entry to the club until 1930 and only then if they were relatives of members.

Were these the 'good old days'?

Les Crawley

## THESE WERE NOT THE GOOD OLD DAYS (1945)

### From 'AIRFLOW' Magazine January 1945.

Averages from the statistics of recent years show that the wild beasts of India kill about 2000 human beings every year. Tigers are responsible for half these deaths. Wolves kill about 275 people annually, panthers 175, crocodiles 100 and bears and elephants some 75 each.

In the other 225 cases, the remains lie in the jungle for so long before discovery that it is impossible to say what animals caused the deaths.

These figures, however, pale into insignificance beside the death-roll due to snakes.

This records well over 100 cases a day on an average, or, say, about 50,000 cases every year. C B Cockraine in *Chamber's Jnl*

### AND, also from AIRFLOW, a serviceman's letter home.

Dear Mum and Dad,

You probably won't get many letters from me while I'm here.

When things are happening I haven't time to write and when they aren't happening, I haven't anything to write about.

Love, Jim.

### AND TO CLOSE

Whilst apologies are due for the non (and/or late) appearance of AD LIB, I know how Mum and Dad must have felt because correspondence is now almost non-existent and we have received no new material for some time – not even complaints. I guess everyone must be very busy. PLEASE - HELP!!  
Editor

## SITUATION VACANT

You have probably guessed that despite the terms offered in last AD LIB we still have the same editor.

The position remains open and all applications will be carefully considered.

(You do not have to be mad to take on the job though it might help).