

160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage

for survivors



SEPTEMBER 2007
Number 36

Life President & Reunion Organiser	E H (Ted) Daines, 36 Stone Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR3 2JZ Tel: 01603 485950
Vice President:	Frank Green, 4 Silo Drive, Farncombe, Godalming, Surrey GU7 3NZ Tel: 01483 416655
Editor:	Les Crawley, 10, Cleasby Gardens, Low Fell, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear: NE9 5HL Tel: 0191 4878734 Email: lescrawley@lineone.net

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

1. SSO's and DRO's & Reunion 2007
2. Reunion 2008 & 'Making Contact'
3. 'Making Contact' cont'd & 'Now it can be told' "G" BZ867
4. 'Now it can be told' cont'd – more "G" BZ867 & "J" FL928 plus Jim Jackson writes
5. Jim Jackson cont'd
6. Jack Burgess article
7. BILL COOPER & 2008 Reunion Questionnaire

REUNION 2007. THE ANGEL HOTEL, 143 REGENT STREET, ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA: 3rd – 5th August, 2007.
Ted and Les report:

Although the hotel had been 'sussed out' it was with some trepidation that we turned up on the Friday. We need not have been concerned – it was comfortable with good food and a friendly atmosphere from all the staff. The location in the town centre proved good with much to see and enjoy.

Leamington had suffered from some flooding which had also concerned us but by the time we arrived there was little, if any, evidence and the hotel was above the water level anyway. Phew!!!

For the record, it was near enough for a number of our party to enjoy the delights of Stratford - some making the short journey by bus.

There was a good attendance, though last minute cancellations did reduce our numbers. Thus we did miss some of our usual regulars but we hope that they will be back again next time.

Our thanks to all who helped with the organising and especially to Glyn Williams for his contribution, particularly the tribute to our late Life President Bill Cooper. There is more about Bill in the final article in this issue.

OBITUARIES:

Bill Cooper: It is with great sadness that we heard the news that our old mate and colleague Bill had died on Sunday 8th July. Bill is survived by his loving wife Margaret to whom we send our deepest sympathies. Bill had left instructions that 160 should be informed of his death so this gave us time to ensure that we were represented at his funeral. Without Bill's pioneering there would have been no "AD LIB" and possibly no continuing reunions.

Ron Ryall: Frank Green has advised us of the death of his old mate Ron Ryall on 15th May. Frank spent almost his entire service life with Ron who was an engine fitter – particularly on "P" FL940. Ron lost his wife two years ago and he never really got over the loss. Our sympathies go to his family and friends.

Len Evans: Len died earlier this year but we do not have any of the details available. What we do know about Len comes from an article he sent in to 'AD LIB' plus the fact that he was an airframe fitter mostly maintaining "Y" when at KKS. He joined the squadron in the early days at KKS and was one of the support crew when "Y" with two others from the squadron was 'repatriated' to Leuchars in July, 1946. Len must have been one of the last of our members with the squadron as he remained at Leuchars until demob in March, 1947. Our sincere sympathies are extended to his wife and family and friends.

Reunion 2007 cont'd

With our usual informality, approval was given to the appointment of Ted Daines to succeed Bill as Life President with Frank Green as Vice President. For those not aware, Frank was with 160 from day one and is the essence of 160 Squadron with his fund of knowledge of its history along with photos and documentation. If you need to know anything about 160 – ask Frank.

It was good to have with us, again, honorary member, AD LIB distributor and much appreciated supporter, Gary Bunkell, recently promoted to Group Captain. Congratulations from us all, Gary.

REUNION 2008: Your input needed.

Each year we look ahead and wonder about next time. Well, there was the same enthusiasm but with a suggestion that maybe we should be realistic and not wait another twelve months and instead hold the next one in March/April, 2008 then consider going back in August or September. With the knowledge that the number of vets is going down this seems well worth considering. Also, it is just possible that we may have more attending if we take a slot before, rather than after, the peak periods and when we are likely to be more ready for a break.

The Angel Hotel management has advised that they can accommodate us on the same terms and give us an earlier booking so we need to know the wishes of our members. No approach has, as yet, been made to the alternative of the Falcon Hotel where we fear we may have difficulties about future bookings though they may be more receptive to an earlier date.

There is a short questionnaire at the end of this issue which please answer by email or mail to the editor as soon as possible so that we may firm up on a booking.

BOOKS: National Archives lists two books which look interesting.

"Shot down and in the drink" RAF and Commonwealth aircrews saved from the sea 1939 – 1945 covering all theatres of war.

"Shot down and on the run" - aircrews who got home from behind enemy lines 1940 – 1945.

Both by Air Comm. Graham Pitchfork @ £19.99 each from York Publishing Services Ltd., 64 Hallfield Rd, York YO31 7ZQ. Tel. 01904 431213 or from the internet bookshop www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/bookshop.

"LOST VOICES OF THE R.A.F by Max Arthur.

I make no apology for mentioning this book again. Having now read it, I can highly recommend it. As it happens, it includes the exploits of Sqdn Ldr Jim Malley and, although he does not mention 160, he did complete 16 operations as a navigator on 160 in the Middle East then completing the 32 trips of that Liberator tour with 178 Squadron. In all he flew 127 operations starting with Wellingtons and ending up as a pathfinder on Mosquitoes. He flew operations with "F" for Freddie (of 'Target for Tonight' fame) and in fact crash landed and wrote it off on a bombing range near Mildenhall on returning from a bombing raid on the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at Brest.

The book is listed by Hodder and Stoughton at £8.99 but I obtained my copy from Amazon for £4.50 plus p & p. It had previously been issued under the title "There shall be wings"

"60 AVIATION EXPERIENCES". Jack Burgess advises that he has just completed his second book. It is entitled "60 Aviation Experiences" and will be published by Woodfield Publishing in a few weeks time. It includes 2 or 3 of Jack's experiences, including 160 Squadron, plus a tribute to AVM John Stacey entitled "Aircrew Leadership". This will be used in AD LIB but meantime this issue includes one of Jack's other articles.

MAKING CONTACT, News, old colleagues and HELP!

Jack Smith: Canada. Through Robert Quirk we have made contact with Jack who arrived on 160 at Sigiriya in April 1944 as a Sergeant A/G with P.O. Ayres crew and completed his ops tour with the Squadron.

Jack Salvage: Australia. Flight Engineer. Again, through Robert we have heard of this other Jack but not yet made contact. He enquired about details of a flight he made to Malan in Indonesia apparently having arrived on the squadron mid 1945. His first flights were with J A Muir's crew in August, 1945.

Les Waterfield and Gus Goettler, RCAF: We knew that both are still around but somehow no contact has, so far, been made. We now know that Jack Burgess has exchanged emails with his former crew members so maybe we can obtain their details and add them to our nominal roll. Les is now 90 years of age.

Herb Brown: Through Robbie Robinson we have learned that Herb is still around and his daughter has been looking for information re his pilot Jack 'Longest Flight' Muir. Sadly, Jack Muir died about two years ago after a very successful career as a pilot with Air Canada amassing a total of 25,000 flying hours in their service.

Norman Hall: After recently hearing from Norman we have lost contact – non delivery of emails. Come in Norman so that we may update the record.

Colin Burningham: Colin has not received the feedback he hoped for covering the first deliveries of Liberators to India and 160. Even a single story plus crew and copy log book details would be a start. Meantime, from AD LIB, Colin has put together the story of the **ground crew** trials and tribulations in making the **journey from Thurleigh to Ratmalana** via the various ports of call – Karachi, Quetta, Salbani et al. He will be asking for the agreement of the authors to the publication in his book.

Peter Moody: Another instance where change of email address has meant we have lost contact. Come in Peter! Colin Burningham is wondering if you have your father's log book and if this includes a delivery of a Liberator to 160 and/or Karachi.

Blazer Badges for 160: After Jack Smith asked if badges are available I made contact with the supplier (David Barnes) to learn that he has sold the business. I have been in touch with the new supplier and he advises that he can continue to supply. He is Major Lee Hatton, Royal Artillery, and he can be contacted at 01980 594378. As a serving officer he may not always be contactable but I have his address if needed. The price is £10 plus post and packing..

F/Lt Sydney Poole, Equipment Officer: Thurleigh to Ratmalana.

Mrs Valerie Hunt, daughter of Sid Poole, has been in contact and we are grateful for the photograph showing her father (centre) with F/Sgts Holland (left) and Cornish (right). The photograph was taken at Quetta.



As a P/O, Sid joined 160 at Thurleigh and completed the journey right through to Ratmalana being then posted from 160 to an Air Sea Rescue unit (990?). Valerie hopes to be able to send copies of other photos so we may be seeing Hunter and MacDonald, Doc Riddell, plus equipment personnel Bradley, Davies and Friend and W/O's Cook (*who we all remember?*), Fletcher, Nickson and Morgan.

Valerie writes that her father died in March 1953 aged just 53 having rejoined his employers 'Philips Electrical' in London then later, as Regional Manager, in Bristol.

Valerie has also sent a copy (below) of the Officers Menu on the Cuba for Sunday 15th February, 1942.

OFFICERS.				Sunday, February 15th, 1942.			
BREAKFAST							
Chilled Grape Fruit		Compote of Prunes and Figs		Corn Flakes		Puffed Rice	
		Shredded Wheat		Quaker Oats			
		Grilled Fresh Herrings		Fried or Boiled Egg		Broiled Breakfast Bacon	
Scones		Rolls		Butter			
Tea	Cocoa	Coffee	Preserves				
LUNCHEON							
Potage Andalouse							
Filletts of Haddock, Parsley Butter							
Bombay Curry and Rice							
Grilled Rump Steak and Mushrooms							
Dressed Cabbage		Macedoine of Vegetables					
Baked and French Fried Potatoes							
Cold—Boiled Ham		Pressed Pork		Brawn			
Salad—Cole Slaw		Beetroot					
Fresh Rhubarb and Custard							
Biscuits		Cheese		Coffee			
DINNER							
Hors d'Oeuvres Varie							
Consomme Paysanne							
Filletts of Halibut, Parsley Sauce							
Lamb Cutlets, Reforme							
Roast Turkey, Cranberry Sauce							
Fresh Lima Beans		Braised Endive					
Boiled and Roast Potatoes							
Plum Pudding							
Fruit		Coffee					

Les Crawley writes:

"Can this really be true?? Alright, I suppose it was a Sunday.

Now compare this with a typical lunch on the troop deck on my "cruise".

Main course: Chef's 'Curled-up-at-edges' dried beef with either grey or near black mashed potatoes and one other vegetable..

Pudding: Can't remember one – anyway I think we only had the one plate!

The purser did a roaring trade selling a ration of biscuits for a limited period daily to a queue almost back to Liverpool.

Complaints were made everyday but it was not until a "down knife and fork" strike that a proper meal was served which proved it could be done – but this was late on in the voyage and it did just happen to follow an invasion of the galley by the Scots Commando lads armed with hosepipes.

As the "Cuba" menu seems unbelievable, will someone please reassure me that those 'below decks' did not also enjoy such a sumptuous repast otherwise a claim re human rights seems justified,

(However, I do believe that the War Crimes Commission is still looking for those responsible)"

NAVIGATORS' POEM: Ken Meyer, a navigator with 159 squadron, died recently and his son Ian made contact hoping that we may know of a navigator's poem which his father had quoted and which he would have liked to have read at the funeral. A round robin was emailed to our immediate mailing list and we did receive one poem but not the one requested. Ian could only recall the last two lines which are:-

"AND NOW HE STEERS WITH CLEARER EYES
PLOTTING HIS COURSE THROUGH PARADISE"
Does anyone out there know the rest of this poem?

JEFF (ROBBIE) ROBINSON: Minneriya Photographs. Ad Lib Issue 36 advised that Robbie is researching airfields for a book he is compiling and mentioning, particularly, Sigiriya. Robbie now asks if he might borrow any photographs available of Minneriya. Please contact the editor if you can help.

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD:

"G" BZ 867: Robert Quirk is working on 200 Squadron records and has located a listing of those aircraft which later transferred to 160 squadron including "G" which, it would appear, had a U boat as a probable 'kill' whilst with 200 in West Africa. The report goes on to advise that "G" was damaged in the attack and he is curious as to whether anyone who may have worked on the aircraft recalls any lasting evidence of the damage. ("G" became "P" with 160 and replaced "P" BZ828 which ditched 20th March 1945). The attack report reads:-

12th February, 1944 Liberator G/200 BZ867
Pilot. F/O Andrews Navigator F/O Roderique

"Liberator G/200 carrying 8 x 250 Torpex D Cs was airborne at 0703 to carry out the Batsman Patrol. Course was set for 0921N 1938W. At 0913 the aircraft was in position 0913N 1953W and from this position set course for 0456N 2645W which was reached at 1226. The normal patrol was continued until 1256. At this hour in position 0810N 2725W a U-Boat was visually sighted on the port bow, at 4 miles distant, by the front lookout.

The aircraft was flying at 4,000 feet on a Course of 055 degs true, above 8/10ths cumulus cloud. G/200 continued on course for approximately two minutes losing height and with Radar switched off. Immediately on sighting the aircraft the U-Boat took evasive action by

zigzagging. Intense light flak was put up by the enemy vessel when the aircraft was within about 800 yards. The attack was made across the U-boat's bow from starboard to port.

Whilst on the run in, height was increased from sea-level to 200 feet. Continuous fire was maintained from the aircraft's front guns and hits were observed on the conning tower. Smoke was rising from the aft end of the U-boat. Height was then lost to 50 feet and the A/A fire from the U-boat passed over the Aircraft.

DCs were then selected but hung up. The Captain of the Aircraft then turned through 360 degs at about one mile distant to allow a check to be made on the bombing gear. Fire was exchanged all the way round by the port side gunner, but owing to a No. 1 stoppage he was only able to fire single shots. By this time the bomb gear had been checked but showed no visible fault. It was then decided to attack with DCs a second time.

The attack was again started from the starboard but slightly more ahead of the U-boat. Just prior to the second attack, however, the Captain swung the aircraft violently to port and attacked from 010 degs. During the turn flak was concentrated ahead of the aircraft. Two shells entered G/200, one above the 2nd Pilot's head which injured him slightly and the other hit the propeller of No. 3 engine, shattering and penetrating the wireless operator's cabin and injuring the flight engineer. During this attack the conning tower of the U-boat was subjected to continuous fire from the front gunner and bodies were seen to fall into the water. The starboard side gunner fired a burst of twenty rounds as the aircraft passed over which brought the U-boat to a standstill. At this time the port gunner noticed a depth charge explosion immediately behind the stern of the U-boat and as the gunner's guns had by then completely jammed he seized a camera and took photographs after the explosion had subsided.

The A/C, having been hit, continued on a straight course and climbed to 400 feet before turning. By the time the aircraft reached the spot where the D/C had exploded the U-boat had submerged and all that was visible were two large patches of light blue and white foam ahead of the D/C explosions. An oil patch was also seen approximately 60 yards in length and 10 yards in width in an area of about 100 degrees. G/200 then climbed to 6,000 ft., and set course for base, landing at 1832 hrs. The U-boat was estimated to be of 1,200 tons with one gun in front and twin guns aft of the conning tower."

MORE ABOUT "G" BZ867.

Les Crawley advises that by the long arm of coincidence he recently attended the funeral of George Casey, a fellow parishioner and cricket club 'socialiser' of many many years who flew in "G" in Africa and was in F/O Kelly's crew when they brought it to India when 200 Squadron moved to Madras.

"J" FL926: Robert Quirk has sent us a photograph of this Liberator which has the caption that it was with 200 Squadron. This could not be so and Robert's theory is that it must have been photographed whilst in transit from UK to Ceylon. Anyone know any different?

It was reported missing on an operation over the Nicobars on 26th October 1943. This is an extract from the Circumstantial Report:-

"J" FL926 took off for P.R. Car Nicobar Island. Aircraft failed to return.

Last known location 09.10 N 92 45 E at 11.09 FG.

Crew: F/O W. A. Wallace (Can.) Captain

P/O H. P. Willson 2nd pilot,

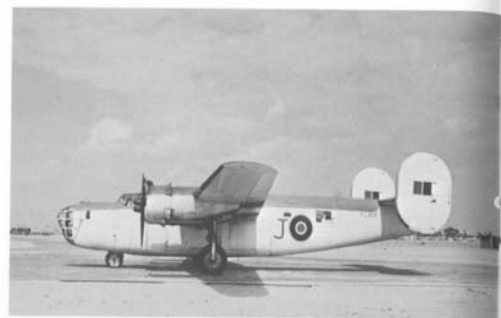
P/O C. W. Hamann (Can.) Navigator;

Sgt Wop/AGs. H. R. Crust, E. B. Gillespie (Can.) C. R. MacGregor, R. Morgan and T. Leckey

Extract from Circumstantial Report:

"Liberator IIIA FL926 took off from Sigiriya at 05.44/FG on 26/10/43 captained by F/O W. A. Wallace, to carry out a Photographic Recce of Car Nicobar Island. The aircraft was due over the target at 1100/FG and at 1109/FG it transmitted its call sign with one 30 second dash. D/F bearings of these transmissions indicate that the a/c was over the Nicobar Island at that time.

Since then there has been no further news. It is believed that the Japanese now have a small number of fighters which they operate from the Car Nicobar landing ground, with an adjacent R.D.F. Station whose range is believed to be in the neighbourhood of 100 miles. It is presumed that the a/c was intercepted by enemy fighters. An aircraft of this Squadron was destroyed by enemy action in the same area on 23rd September, 1943."



No. 200 Squadron moved itself by air from West Africa (Yundum) to its new operational base of St. Thomas Mount in March, 1944. Mk. III FL926 J is seen at Fayid en route.

(Editor's note re the caption. "J" FL926 appears to have been flown from UK by W/O Stowe and crew but was then left at Nagpur, India. W/O Stowe arrived at Sigiriya with his crew, by rail, on 14/9/43 from Nagpur. The first flight by "J" is recorded on 20/9/43. Robert Quirk thinks this photo is of "J" during transit at Fayed but not to 200 Sqdn and the date does not match as "J" was lost on 26/10/43. The photo is from a book by Rawling's entitled "Coastal Support and Special Squadrons"

The copyright is unknown but gratefully acknowledged to whomever).

MORE OF THE 160 EXPERIENCE

JIM JACKSON writes:

"I joined the squadron in December 1943 and my tour started in April of 44, so I had my share of white-knuckle Sigiriya take-offs before we moved up to that beautiful strip at KKS and then back into the jungle at Minneriya.

Formation of December 44 "C" Flight:

I also had my share of unproductive anti-submarine patrols, and under normal circumstances would have

welcomed the squadron's assignment to minelaying, which took place I think at KKS in early '45. However, by that time, I'd become hooked on photo reconnaissance (PR), and Laurie Jones and I were lobbying for a separate PR flight, which culminated in the formation of "C" Flight on December 14 of '44.

PR and minelaying.

However, I opted to fly any minelaying trips that the late great "Sweetpea" Stacey might send my way, of which there turned out to be three, so I had one of the few crews fortunate enough to enjoy the variety of both taking pictures and laying mines. I was even told I'd be doing the famous Singapore junket, but according to Tinker, the kindly adj, Group HQ took me off because I "knew too much", whatever that meant!

The two kinds of work were really different. PR was taking off at about 0100 hrs and flying alone through the night dodging the inter-tropical front and then scrambling up to 25,000 feet over target in the early morning.

Night take offs

The worst part was the hours before the flight; thoughts of a night take off at full load tended to overcome the need to sleep. I wasn't blessed by good luck in my night takeoffs generally; on one, the cockpit lights fuse blew on lift-off and I had to climb with my flight engineer, I think it was Bert Crumbie, draped over my lap fixing the fuses, on another I didn't discover until too late that the airspeed indicator was calibrated in knots, and on another the whole damned instrument panel disappeared in a vibrating blur which only quit when power was cut back. Today, whenever I'm pushed back in my seat as a Boeing 737 rotates into about a 45 degree climb, I think of those sweaty half-hours coaxing a Lib clear of the jungle and up to cruising altitude.

Minelaying camaraderie.

In contrast to PR there was a certain camaraderie about minelaying, with a good crowd of crews being briefed all at once and a bunch of aircraft lining up for take off in the afternoon sunshine. The aircraft for minelaying were heavy and the heat diminished lift, but at least one could see where one was going. That applied also to most of the trip out, because one could see the weather ahead, and I don't remember beating through really bad weather minelaying, although PR was a different story.

Need to be wide awake.

I suppose the separation of take-off times was a good idea, but I remember one night down at about 500 ft going past Sabang to avoid the radar and getting a rather anxious call from the tail turret and looking back to see this bloody great four-engined apparition about to climb up my backside. I don't know if whoever it was even saw me. On another trip in just about the same location and height George suddenly took it into his tiny head to shove the stick forward and head us straight for the ocean. Fortunately both pilots were, for once, wide awake.

Magic of Radar.

Our radar for minelaying (was it called Mark X?) was wonderful. I recall going back to the flight deck and staring in fascination at the way it outlined every detail of the coast of North Sumatra. We never had trouble locating our datum points but that wasn't always the end of the story.

Bert Crumbie and 'one at a time'

On one trip there was a rumour of an army camp just inland from the datum so we figured we'd better nip in and out quite smartly. The only problem was that the mines refused to drop. We decided to put Bert in the bomb-bay with a screwdriver and make circuits dropping one mine at a time at navigator Tom Knott's command. Lights seemed to be going on in the army camp beneath us but I don't think they shot at us; perhaps they figured it was one of their own. The downside to this was reading in some official report many years later that we had jettisoned the mines; it is not the only report of 160 sqdn operations I know to be wrong.

A close look at some pillars.

Another unnerving incident was at Phuket, whose name was pronounced differently than today. The mines had dropped in good order and I was turning for home but staying pretty low. My face had been more or less jammed into the instrument panel to get height and speed right for the drop, and the reflection on the windshield cut out any view ahead, but just on impulse I put my head forward to see past the reflection and saw we were headed straight for a huge black something resembling a pillar of rock. Very swift evasive action, believe me! Years later I saw pictures of those pillars in that harbour, nicely tarted up for a tourist brochure, fortunately without the outline of a B-24 engraved on one of them.

An extra look-see.

An unexpected result of my involvement with minelaying gave added pleasure to my last PR sortie. I was briefed to photograph a small piece of west coast Sumatra, but something had made the PR gang feel slighted and boiling mad. When I had taken the photos I felt insubordinate and kept on going east. I kept on going east until I was about five miles south of Pangalansoso on the east coast. This was an oil refinery, and I had dropped mines there not long before, and to my delight we could see ships lined up outside the port waiting for our mines to be cleared. I don't think any other crew had that kind of experience. And, possibly, no other crew had a skipper stupid enough to fly within minutes of Medan, the big Japanese fighter base, but we were young and knew we were immortal.

The view over Sumatra

The thing I didn't get from minelaying, or any other sortie except PR, was the experience of flying through a long and often nerve-wracking night and coming into the dawn to look down on that beautiful green island of Sumatra. Even if it was enemy territory it was a kind of affirmation, and when years later the astronauts mentioned looking back at the earth and finding it so beautiful in some vaguely spiritual way, I knew what they meant.

Cooling off and thanks to the cooks.

But less transcendently, one of the joys of PR was temperature. Granted there was a lot of scrambling getting into warm gear as we approached Sumatra, and my toes came near freezing once, but after the jungle that cold, however brief, was lovely! And, I have been to some pretty upscale restaurants since then, but I have never forgotten those flight lunches, no more, I seem to recall, than cheese sandwiches but transformed by altitude into wonderful chilled gourmet delights!

A ground crew accolade

I suspect that no other sqdn in SEAC did so many different kinds of work as 160; anti-sub patrols, convoy escorts, minelaying, high altitude and low level PR, low-level bombing, supply dropping, and parachutist transport. Whatever the type of flying, the true miracle of 160 was the incredible reliability the guys in the dispersals achieved despite ghastly working conditions. All the flights were long, but the only times I feathered an engine was because I'd run out of petrol.

(Jim Jackson, RCAF)

AND FROM JACK BURGESS

160 The 'Anonymous' Squadron

Reading an article "The Forgotten Air War of Malaysia" in a recent edition of an aviation magazine, I was reminded that sure enough, the 'high security - low profile' life-style of members of 160 Squadron, was something that all personnel accepted and had taken for granted. Not for us the basking in the glory and wide publicity of our operations like some other squadrons be it in the air or for the specialised maintenance of our Liberators.

Long range plus anonymity.

The belated account I refer to, described the long-range operations from India, when Liberator crews dropped guerrilla forces and supplies deep into Japanese territory. In describing precision dropping in difficult jungle and mountain dropping zones (DZ) carried out by one squadron, the article went on to state "- several other Liberator squadrons were allocated to bases in Ceylon but were kept anonymous, for example 8, 160 and 35." Possibly, bearing in mind that a Japanese Invasion Fleet had already attempted to inflict damage in Ceylon in April 1942, SEAC had decided to keep 160's base as secret as possible considering our long-range capability. This policy of secrecy was kept to the letter by our Squadron Commander as the following incident shows.

160 The fore-runners

I was flight engineer with F/O Les Waterfield's crew (all RCAF), and we were summoned to the Squadron Briefing Room on 21st January 1945. There we were joined by two other crews and briefed by section leaders, but the outstanding briefing was undertaken by Wing/Co. John Stacey who set out operational plans for the great day.

It all amounted to the fact that our three Libs were to attempt to cross the Indian Ocean, and be the fore-runners of similar operations to drop mines in the Malacca Straits to halt the flow of Japanese supply ships that were supporting Japanese Forces in Burma.

Wing/Co. Stacey intended to fly Liberator aircraft 'N' BZ752; F/O Crawley was allocated aircraft 'F' FL991; and myself in F/O Waterfield's crew were to fly in aircraft 'P' BZ828. I can still feel the 'buzz' at what was being planned. Especially when John Stacey underlined the importance of avoiding Sabang (north tip of Sumatra, which was the epicentre of the recent Tsunami) but at that time was a base for Japanese fighter planes.

Therefore it was just as well that Wing/Co. Stacey had gone over beforehand in a Catalina, and bombed their airfield.

Stacey's Trump Card

However, for Stacey's crew, the highlight was still to come. After going over every detail, and stressing the importance of approaching the target area at under 50 feet in order to get under the Japanese radar, Stacey still had a trump card to play. He calmly announced that after we dropped our mines at Penang, Crawley and Waterfield crews had to maintain low level to avoid the Japanese radar, and get the heck out of it back to base. Meanwhile, he intended to climb and set course for India. The purpose of this was to give the impression we were based in India - in the hope 160 could remain anonymous at our base in Ceylon.

I shall never ever forget the amazed look on the faces of Stacey's crew as he outlined their unexpected heroic role. I believe they may have preferred to scarper home with us after the job was done!

The 'OP'

In any case, we took off at 14.45 Hrs on 21st January 1945, and Squadron ORB's will confirm that our Liberator 'P' BZ828 with skipper Les Waterfield dropped our mines in the exact spot intended.

This was the start of a whole new mine-dropping era. Post war records show that ten Japanese ships were destroyed in this manner. Let's hope we played some small part in reducing Japanese supplies being used against our Allied Forces.

First of many

As 160 Squadron members will recall, the operation described was only the first of many, where distances and duties were increasingly varied, and where in my own case, the longest operation was 23 hrs 25 mins with my second skipper Doug Turner who sadly died three years ago.

I still keep in touch with my original skipper Les Waterfield who lives in Toronto.

Flight Engineer's Log

Looking at my 'Flight Log' recorded during the actual operation described above; for those members who may be interested, I append some details of this first mine-laying operation.

Date: 21st January 1945.

Aircraft: Mk V. Liberator 'P' BZ828 **Captain:** F/O Waterfield, RCAF.

Task: Mine-laying, Penang North:

Take-Off: 14.45 Hrs: **Duration:** 18.50 Hrs: **Air Miles** 2,586

Fuel: Main cells 1950 Imp Gls: Wing Overloads 370 Gls: Bomb Bay Overloads 330 Gls. Total Fuel: 2650 Gls.

Total Bomb Load 4,040 lbs: **Take-Off Weight** 62,000 lbs.

Air Miles Per Gallon 1.06

The ground crews:

No record of 160 Squadron activities could ever be complete without some reference to the high regard we all had for the sterling quality of our maintenance staff at all levels. We were indeed fortunate to be able to take off, in the knowledge that our aircraft were serviced to an extremely high standard which was really appreciated.

160 and 'FORCE 136'

I have also recorded 160 Squadron Operations at a later period (up to August 1945) and these include the Squadron's part in SOE operations "Force 136" which involved dropping guerrilla types into Malaya & Thailand. The title "Force 136 Liberators" appears in a book "Well - You wanted to Fly!" which I published in 2005. The same story also appears as No.56 in Saltire Branch Library on website: - www.aircrew-saltire.org.

*(Jack Burgess, former F/Engr. No. 160 Squadron).
(Editor's note: 2650 gallons would be enough to take the average family car round the world more than 4 times!!)*

AND TO CLOSE:

"BILL COOPER"

We are grateful to the undertakers, Cowley and Son Ltd, and to the Very Reverend Canon John Mead for making the following eulogy available to us.

The Address given at the funeral service for Frederick 'Bill' Cooper on Wednesday 18th July 2007 by Canon John Mead.

"I am so grateful to those who knew Bill well for helping me to understand and appreciate the person he was.

We come here to recall just some of the events of his long, active and varied life, but also to come as close as we can to appreciate the qualities and character which made Bill a man of stature and a true gentleman.

Like so many young people of Bill's generation, the serious and dangerous events of the Second World War were to have a great effect on him. He was trained as a flight engineer in America and flew twenty-four hour missions in Liberators in bombing raids, reconnaissance, mine-laying, plus dropping supplies and agents in the war against Japan.

But the war brought him the great joy and happiness of meeting Margaret in the Far East and, when hostilities had ended in 1947, they married and shared sixty years of love and companionship together; for Bill, the most wonderful part of his life was the joy of sharing his life with Margaret.

The next phase of Bill's life was his professional career in management, first for the Esso Oil company at Fawley and living in the New Forest, and then as Administration and Resources Manager for the Education Department of Sheffield City Council. Bill brought to his professional career meticulous care and competence. He expected the same high standards from his staff; but he also supported and cared for those who worked with him and would never allow them to suffer injustice of any kind.

Retirement brought the great joy for Bill and Margaret of their move to a small village in the Totnes area of South Devon, and the opportunity to indulge himself in the greatest of all hobbies, (I speak as a devotee) to be involved in the great movement of steam railway preservation.

Already, Bill was a member of the British Tram Preservation Society based at Crich in Derbyshire, and a tram driver. He was also a keen and skilled model railway enthusiast, but now it was possible for him to be involved in running a real railway. The contribution Bill

made to the South Devon Railway Society was impressive as a member of the management team and as a working station master. Being an enthusiast myself and a station master too, I can appreciate the happiness and sense of achievement this period of his life gave to Bill. Living in such a beautiful place also gave Bill and Margaret the opportunity to enjoy their love of the natural world — plants, birds and butterflies.

The advent of ill health meant that Bill and Margaret came to live in Cheltenham, where the facilities Bill needed were more readily available. I don't know if Bill visited the Gloucester Warwickshire Railway. I hope he did, and enjoyed the train being hauled by a Prairie, a Hall or a Castle. We come to give thanks for Bill's life, to surround Margaret with our love and care, and to commend Bill to that great journey which never ends. Amen".

(Editor's note: Bill's interest in trains [and tram cars] will relate to his earlier employment as an engineer in the railway engine sheds in Doncaster and Gateshead).

We are also grateful to Glyn Williams in his after dinner talk at the reunion for setting the tone of our remembrance of Bill by including this AD LIB item by Bill: - *"Immediately after our recent reunion I fell to wondering what makes our gatherings such happy occasions and came to the following conclusion.*

It is a coming together of persons of similar age, who have shared a common purpose and goals in foreign lands, remote from familiar surroundings, and requiring a high degree of mutual interdependence, loyalty, self motivation, innovation and commitment, such as is often lacking in today's environment."

(Bill Cooper – from AD LIB Number 7)

AN APOLOGY FROM THE EDITOR FOR THE NON APPEARANCE OF AD LIB FOR SOME TIME. THE VACANCY FOR A NEW EDITOR IS STILL OPEN!!!

REUNION 2008 QUESTIONNAIRE

It has been mooted (and well received by those who did attend The Angel) that we bring forward our next reunion at The Angel Hotel, Royal Leamington Spa to the end of March or early April, 2008. So we seek your views on these questions:- (Please reply to Les Crawley)

1. Are you happy about using The Angel rather than The Falcon?
2. Will you (and your party) attend the earlier reunion in March/April 2008?
3. Would you prefer to keep the later usual date in August/September, 2008?
4. If there is enough support would you attend two reunions in 2008?

Please weigh up question 4 carefully. If we try to hold two reunions we may run the risk of becoming fragmented with members actually attending only one reunion in the year with reduced numbers (and 'clout'). Please add any comments you would like to make

.....
.....
.....