

160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage for survivors



**WINTER 2008
Number 38**

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 SSO's and DRO's and Obituaries
- 2 2008 Reunion Report & Making Contact
- 3 Making Contact cont'd
- 4 Making Contact cont'd
- 5 Now it can be told: Jim Jackson
- 6 Cont'd and "The Navigator"

SSO's and DRO's

2009 REUNION: THE ANGEL, ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA, ON THE 11TH AND 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2009.

It was decided, at the last reunion, that we would revert back to the single annual reunion and that, although The Falcon is again available, it will be held at The Angel, Royal Leamington Spa. Falcon rates have considerably increased since refurbishment and our reduced numbers seem not to have helped. Certainly, The Angel is offering us a much better deal and even some of the doubters now agree that it is a good venue especially as it too has now undergone refurbishment. Being smaller it is also a lot more 'homely'.

Although it is early, a booking form is enclosed with this issue and it would help greatly if you would return it as soon as possible. The Angel is not a very large hotel and it would be good if we can give them early indications of the number of rooms we are likely to require so that we do not have any disappointments.

Whilst we can never tell what might happen by September, as there is no booking fee, and cancellations are accepted right up to the last day or so, **do, please, at least, make an early provisional booking.**

SICK PARADE: Whilst the years may well be taking their toll we have had no word of any special cases but, to those who may be ill at the moment, we send our best wishes for a quick recovery – and don't forget your flu jabs.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: For the present, we are hoping to continue managing without a call for subs so, membership remains FREE.

OBITUARIES.

Sad to have to report the following deaths.

Walter Norfolk: Liz Hardy, his daughter, has advised that Walter died on the 13th September, 2008. Strange that this was our reunion Saturday and, as we know, it is an occasion when we pause to pay tribute to all our old comrades. Wally was with Laurie Jones' crew along with Taff Williams with both of whom we are still in touch.

He made a contribution to the BBC web site "WW2 People's War" and this covered his experiences during training and with 160. You can see it at:-

www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/74/a4144574.shtml.

Colin Armitage: Colin had not been able to attend reunions for some years and we were sorry to have the information at the reunion that he died some time ago. Unfortunately we have no other details.

Colin was an Instrument Mechanic on the squadron.

Owen Morgan: Owen's son, Alun, has advised us that his father died on the 27th September after a long illness. "Taff" Morgan was well known by all at reunions at which he had been an ever-present and, what is more, always an early arrival as well as ensuring that everyone enjoyed his company almost till "lights out".

Taff lost his wife some few years ago. He was 87 years of age. He was a Corporal in the MT Section and was with the squadron from the very beginning: there is a photo of him, whilst at Quetta, in AD LIB number 20.

To all the families, relatives and friends we extend our deepest sympathy.

BOOKS:

R A F "PLUMBER": Michael Anderton. 'The work of RAF Armourers is well described in this entertaining book – a must read for all former armourers'. £9.95, 200 pages, many photographs.

"WAS IT LIKE THIS FOR YOU?" Nostalgic collection of stories and cartoons. RAF veterans laugh at the absurdities of service life. £6.00.

"WHEELS UP!" Nostalgic recollections of the RAF boy entrant scheme. £9.95.

All the above available from Dept. AM/08, Woodfield Publishing Ltd, Bognor Regis, Sussex. PO21 5EL. Tel.01243 821234.

REUNION REPORT: SEPTEMBER, 2008.

Whilst we were all saddened by the loss of some of our regular attendees it has to be said that the 2008 second reunion was a very successful 'do'. It was obvious that all appeared to have now settled in to our new venue which, following refurbishment, was very comfortable with excellent food as shown here by the menu.



Unfortunately, I was suffering from a very bad cold so my input was minimal as I spent most of the weekend trying to keep everyone else "F F I" thus I hardly left the confines of the bedroom.

However, Christine assures me that the shopping went well (what a pity I missed it!).

At the last minute our President, Frank, had to withdraw so this was also a disappointment. We all missed Frank and his family but rest assured he has every intention of being at the next reunion.

Whilst the shopping experiences were going on, we had a treat in that Robbie Robinson came along to give us a talk on the Saturday morning. I have had quite a bit of correspondence with Robbie in connection with his writing up the histories of all the Ceylon airfields and his talk was very illuminating and interesting.

We learned about the early days of the airfields and the various squadrons and activities. He has included a lot about 160 Squadron including photographs - thanks, to a large extent, to the cooperation of a number of our members.

Robbie has provided us with copies of his histories and they will be available to read at our next reunion.

For the record Robbie was a dog handler with the R A F Police being posted to Ceylon after the war. He had made the journey from Flintshire to the reunion to be able to give us the talk.

Thanks again, Robbie.

For added interest, it was possible to give a showing of the Editor's collection of photos using modern technology. There were some hiccups but we got there and next time we hope to repeat with more of the recent intake of material.

On to the evening and, the banqueting room being available, the staff had placed all the tables in one large square thus we very much more together as one large company.

The 93 year old star of the show, Vic Lilienthal, then took to the floor and regaled us with some very amusing anecdotes about his experiences on the squadron. He advised that he had been officer i/c the Sergeants' Mess and had delighted in attending any 'do's' that were going and getting into the spirit by wearing borrowed Sergeant's stripes. He had fond memories of 'Sweet Pea' Stacey mentioning occasions such as the C O apparently taking his jeep on a short cut into his bed.

It was refreshing to have an Aussie turn up and do a turn.

(Wonder if he also does the Social clubs and Masonics?)

With an excellent meal, as shown by the menu, and Glyn Williams adding his regular party piece it was a very successful evening for which our thanks are due to Gary Bunkell for setting it up.

(Les Crawley).

MAKING CONTACT, news, old colleagues and HELP

After a quiet spell we have made a few contacts, all of which are very interesting.

F/Lt Sydney Taylor, Signaller. The enquiry has come from his grandson Simon and followed contact made by Robert Quirk in response to a query on 'rafweb' trying to obtain details about a pink Liberator. Robert pointed him to AD LIB No.28 where we had included an article from Jack Stokes in which he mentioned a photograph of Sid Taylor but which had not been published as the copy I had was so indistinct. I have since slightly improved it and it is now shown so we have been able to oblige.

Sid arrived on the squadron in "N" BZ752 with J C Rowley's crew on 23rd July 1943 being commissioned round about January 1944. Unusually, he wore an "S" brevet. He completed probably a full tour of operations and is referred to in ORB's, being commended for work alongside the Navigation Officer, Sid Redmond, in connection with installing 'the tactical floor'. He appears to have later served in Germany and was involved in the Berlin Air Lift. He died in 1976.

Simon has advised that his grandfather had said that there was an occasion when he had flown in a pink Liberator, possibly a "Y", - can anyone throw any light on such a paint job either with or out with 160 Squadron? From enquiries already made it seems very unlikely that there was ever a pink Liberator on 160 Squadron.



W/O WALTER LODINGTON SMITH, RCAF

"S" AL 620 Lost over Tripoli 15.1.43 – the last Middle East operation.

In Ad Lb No. 29, there was mention of the unusual situation with regard to this loss in that in compiling the Roll of Honour only 7 of the crew had been traced with no mention of the fate of the eighth, Sgt W Smith, either in squadron or war grave records.

Enquiries of the Air History Branch (always helpful) revealed that W/O Walter Lodington Smith, RCAF, was the only survivor having parachuted out of the burning aircraft. He was picked up by the Germans and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of war till May 1945 when he returned to Canada. There was not really much hope of finding Walter Smith so this item just stayed on the record after including it in AD LIB.

It has now come to light, through Robert Quirk, that a Mr Murray Straker living in a small town in Saskatchewan met Walter Smith and is writing a book about him and his exploits. Walter died about a year ago.

We hoped that a photo of "S" and crew might become available but the photo is of Walter with a Wellington crew but something may yet turn up. This will be of interest to the families and friends of John Patrick Foster and Peter Price who have asked in the past for any details of "S" and the crew. It is also interesting to add that Walter Smith had two brothers in the RCAF, one a Spitfire pilot k.i.a. and buried in Cambridge and the other a Wop/Ag on Dakotas also k.i.a. and buried near Rangoon, Burma. There was another brother who served in the navy.

F/Lt E J MULLINS:

Although, sad to say, we learn that he died in the 1980's his daughter Anne has contacted Robert Quirk and we are grateful for the photographs which she has sent on to us of her father and various crew members.

The editor is particularly pleased to have the photo of F/Lt Sid Redmond who was his i/c in the Navigation Section. Here are three of the photos kindly provided. F/Lt Mullins joined 160 in 1943 and left in 1944.



F/Lt Mullins



(Anyone recognize the aircraft or remember the Mullins' crew?)

KEN BATT:

Through his daughter, Susan, we have heard that, at the age of 87, Ken is alive and well living in Canada where, after training in UK, he was posted as an instructor at Charlottetown from 1942 to 1944 when he then joined 160 Squadron as a second pilot flying with Roy Schroeder and others. Ken was originally from Ashford in Kent. We are also grateful for the photographs which Ken has provided of "P" with full crew including Roy Schroeder, and the ground crew.



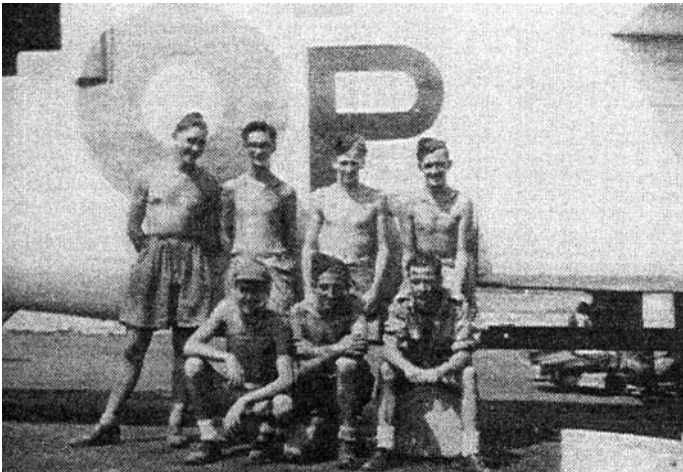
*(Back Row: Roy Schroeder, W/O Shepherd, Ivan Longman, Ossy Osborne and Bill Everest
Front Row: Ian Edmiston, Bill Stubbs, Jack Sherman, Ken Batt)*



F/S Chandler W/O Cyr F/Lt Redmond F/O Bellman
W/O Shelley F/Lt Mullins F/O Paterson

KEN BATT , continued

"P" Ground Crew



(Sorry – no names and unfortunately the photo is in low resolution – can anyone add any names?)

F/Lt VIC LILIENTHAL RAAF:

Vic has already received a mention in the reunion article but must have a bit more said about him. So far as the editor can establish, at 93, Vic could be our oldest member in touch and the fact that having made the journey to London then joining us at very short notice adds to the notion that, is it not time that some of our 'young' vets made the same effort. Alright, when booking he had assumed that the Angel Hotel, Regent Street, must be in London where he was staying with family but this entailed a very last minute change of plan to get to Leamington Spa! Amazing what a bit of determination can achieve.

Vic joined the squadron in July 1944 as the new second pilot to Dixie Dean and later flew with F/Lts Crawley and Netherton. He left for a captain's course in April, 1945. As yet, no photograph but after this mention maybe something will turn up – someone may have a snap of one of his crews.

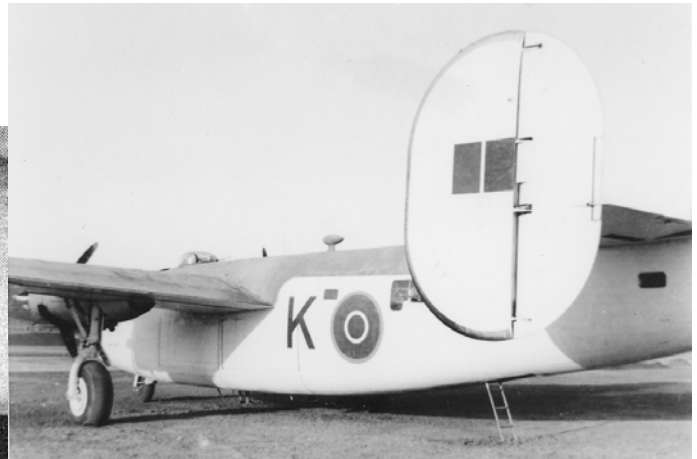
KENNETH FREDERICK BERNARD BALCON:"Ken" or "KFBB":

Son, Peter Balcon, writes to advise that his father died in January aged 96 and that he was a navigator with 160 rising to the rank of S/Ldr but was made acting Wing Commander so that he could captain the cricket team! Peter adds that he believes that there was at least one other S/Ldr in the team – *Peter Gay comes to mind.*

From the records, Ken joined 160 receiving a first mention on 21/4/43 with his first op on 23/5/43 and last on 25/3/44. He obviously flew just about every one of the squadron's Libs. He was later with Air Command in 1944.

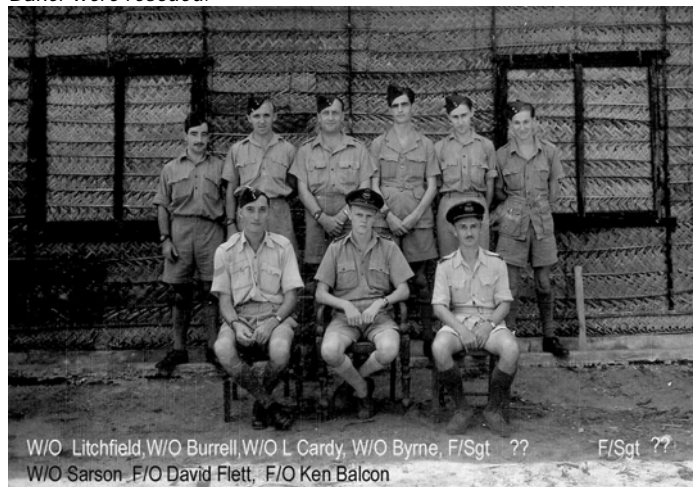
As a result of this contact we now have photos of "K", FL 911, and have been able to send the details to the family/friends of Jack Dunkley, Doug Skinner and Duncan McDonald who have enquired in the past.

We are very grateful to Peter for these photos.



"K" taking off - Sigiriya

"K" FL 911 Capt. Dixie Dean, lost off Puttalam 6/5/44 on a training flight – 9 lost including 2 army gunners. Only Dixie Dean and Kiwi Baker were rescued.



W/O Litchfield, W/O Burrell, W/O L Cardy, W/O Byrne, F/Sgt ?? F/Sgt ??
W/O Sarson, F/O David Flett, F/O Ken Balcon

Good also to have a photo of David Flett with this early 160 group which also includes W/O L Cardy – recalled as quite a father figure by the editor – especially to new arrivals.

LOST CONTACTS

We would like to up-date our mailing list (including current email addresses) so if Roy Schroeder, Jack Salvage, Herb Brown, Jack Smith, Ron Palin, W Stubbs, L Lees or B Turley are reading this would you please contact either Gary Bunkell or Les Crawley.

Or, if any member (or other person reading this) has any contact with, or information about, any of these colleagues would you please let either Gary or Les know.

Also, if there are any ex 160 personnel reading this who have never been in touch – we would like to hear from you.

AND, if anyone else is now on the internet, or has access, it keeps costs down if we can have your email address

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD.

PHOTO-RECONNAISSANCE TACTICS

160 SQUADRON RAF

By Jim Jackson with help from Laurie Jones.

General

Photo-reconnaissance (PR) was a 160 Squadron role from the time the squadron arrived in Ceylon in February of 1943. The loss of several PR aircraft through 1943 over the Andaman Islands and Sumatra tempered 222 Group's enthusiasm for that type of operation, but PR continued through 1944 and 1945.

Sorties were by single unescorted aircraft in daylight, although squadron records show a few night sorties into 1945, using high-intensity flash illumination. Initially PR sorties were assigned from a PR roster that listed all crews and that was separate from the roster for normal general patrol, escort and anti-submarine sorties.

However by late 1944, the squadron was concentrating its efforts on its new mine-laying role, and it was evident that PR could be carried out most effectively as a separate specialisation. On 14 December 1944 a PR flight, C Flight (not to be confused with the earlier electronics reconnaissance C Flight), was formed with four crews dedicated, although not all exclusively, to PR work. Its original members were W/O Hughes (RAF), F/O Jackson (RCAF), F/O Jones (RAAF), and F/L Leeper (RCAF).

The following is a brief outline of the tactics employed on daylight PR sorties from early 1944 until the writer finished his tour in April 1945.

The equipment.

C Flight was assigned two B-24 Liberator Mk III aircraft with the Perspex nose, and painted the standard PR blue. This mark carried fuel tanks in the forward bomb bay, plus two small tanks in the rear bomb bay for a total fuel load of 2,770 gallons. The K17 camera was used for survey or mapping, which constituted most of the flight's work, with the F52 being used for specific targets. The Mark III was nimbler than the Mark V.

Preparation

PR sorties were flown from the squadron bases at Sigiriya, Kankasanturai and Minneriya and on detachment from China Bay. Sorties were usually scheduled to arrive over the target as soon as there was light enough for photography and before clouds built up along the enemy coast. Thus take off was around 0100 hrs, with crews being wakened at around 2300 hrs to proceed to their respective messes before being driven to the operations room for briefing.

Briefings were not elaborate, inasmuch as most targets were short camera runs near the coast and there was little helpful intelligence on enemy defences to affect the flight. The general assumption was that the main Japanese fighter strength was at Medan, with some fighters possibly stationed nearer the area of 160 Sqdn PR sorties at Sebang, Keota Raja, Meulaboh or Treomon.

The "Form Green", the printed order for the sortie, followed the admirable RAF custom of simply stating what photographs were required, and leaving it to crews' initiative to get the job done.

Outward bound.

After takeoff the captain would choose a cruising altitude normally on a course direct to the target or to a selected landfall. If the sky was clear with the usual scattering of small

cumulus, the choice of altitude would depend on the navigator's need to see the stars and the avoidance of turbulence, not to mention the crew's desire for cool air after the jungle's heat and humidity.

There were no radio aids thus navigation was by dead reckoning, using three-course wind-drift triangulation and the occasional star shot. Since first contact with enemy territory would be in daylight, it was thought prudent to avoid landfall too near an enemy airfield.

With no reliable weather forecasts available, and in an area of intense tropical storms including the inter-tropical front capable of destroying an aircraft, the weather was an ever-present concern to PR captains and navigators. At night and without radar, let alone the advanced equipment of mine-laying aircraft, it was impossible to guess the best path through a barrage of lightning that couldn't be outflanked, or to record accurately the course changes necessary in groping through the turbulence encountered within the storm. With the greatest danger being the updrafts and downdrafts in the body of the cloud, the only passage through was just under the cloud base at what the altimeter indicated to be around 500 to 800 feet. At that height the turbulence was still violent but manageable, although the standard barometric altimeter was hardly reliable, and PR aircraft did not carry radio-altimeters.

Photography

With the coming of dawn, crews would retrieve heavy flying clothing from their duffle bags, don side-arms, flying helmets, oxygen masks and parachute harnesses, and man their combat positions. Approaching the enemy coast, height would be reduced to 500 feet or less to remain as long as possible undetected by Japanese land-based radar and then, about 30 minutes before the target and taking into account the time to climb to 20,000/25,000 feet from virtually seal-level, throttles would be advanced and superchargers engaged to full climbing power.

PR aircraft carried a receiver that flashed a red light when it detected Japanese radar transmissions, but PR crews were unconvinced as to its operational value. At 10,000 feet oxygen would be turned on.

Most PR work was aerial mapping of Sumatra and the offshore island of Simoleur, and photographs were usually to be taken from 20,000 or 25,000 feet true altitude on a track specified at the briefing, which required the navigator to calculate both a compass course and an indicated altitude for the pilots to hold on their instruments. On most missions a camera altitude of 25,000 feet was favoured, but the captain could opt for 20,000 feet if the weather at height so dictated. Once altitude was gained the navigator would direct the pilot onto the starting points of the runs, and instruct the camera operator in the bomb bay, usually a flight engineer or wireless air gunner, to turn the camera on. The pilot's duty was to maintain altitude and course precisely, which at high altitude was quite demanding. The duty of gunners in the turrets and on the beam guns was to watch for enemy aircraft, although beam gunners also took oblique photographs.

An additional task for the beam gunners was to unpack and unload several thousand propaganda leaflets on the assumption the prevailing wind would not scatter them seaward. More satisfying was the occasional unauthorized ejection of empty beer bottles, which were said to sound like screaming bombs as they descended.

When the navigator signalled the runs completed and ordered the cameras off, the aircraft set course, usually directly, for Ceylon, making a gradual descent to cruising altitude with the crew alert for enemy fighters for the next hour. Oxygen would be turned off at 10,000 feet, after which flying rations, made cool and delicious by altitude and stress, would be handed out.

Not all sorties were for high altitude mapping, and tactics were adjusted accordingly, sometimes on the spot. One sortie called for photographs of Sabang for damage assessment the day after an attack by the RN Eastern Fleet, and was pressed home without the

Photo Reconnaissance Tactics Cont'd

cloud cover the briefing had stipulated as a necessary minimum (Jerry Boyle's report in the 160 Sqdn newsletter "AD LIB The Chotta Coggage", number 27, Winter 2003).

The new Troemon airfield was first sighted from a mapping run, and photographs were obtained after the run although the aircraft had been sighted approaching Sumatra by a Japanese fighter (the writer's report in "AD LIB" number 17, Summer 2001).

Yet another sortie required the audacious daylight crossing of the Malacca Strait for oblique photographs from 1,000 feet of potential landing beaches at Phuket Island (described by Laurie Jones in "AD LIB" number 18, Autumn 2001). Astonishingly, the aircraft incurred only a little damage from light flak.

In 1945 C Flight aircraft flew several sorties from Burma.

Return to base

Returning to base from Sumatra by daylight made encounters with bad weather less difficult than at night, and it was usually possible to maintain very economical engine settings. This compensated to some extent for the fuel burnt in climbing to and flying at high altitude, although with PR sorties averaging about 15 hours and 30 minutes it was not unusual to land with an engine (and at least in one case, two) shut down for lack of fuel.

The main determinant of the success or failure of a high level PR sortie was the weather, which was as unpredictable over the target as it was en route, and made about 50% of PR flights abortive. Even such intelligence as was available, such as from RN submarines, was no guide to the visibility from 20,000 feet, and in fact crews nearly always found it necessary to make the climb to altitude before deciding photography was impossible.

When PR aircraft were about half way home a coded signal would be sent to indicate the sortie's success or failure, the latter enabling the Harvard or Hurricane ready to courier the film to Colombo to be stood down.

Jim Jackson

THE NAVIGATOR

Mention of the reliance on the navigator in Jim's narrative has brought to mind a poem sent in some time ago by Jack Burgess in response to a search for a different poem on navigators. This poem refers to England operations but it also applies for navigators anywhere and more so when the return journey is 1000 miles plus.

A lot has been said of pilots and gunners
And similar Lords of the Air
But no one has lauded the poor navigator
Who certainly also was there,

He patiently sat in his dark little cabin
Apart from the rest of the crew
Their guide and their mentor in reaching their target
And doing what they had to do.

Alone with his charts and his fine calculations
Their lives and success in his hands
His brain and Mercator combining directions
O'er enemy waters and lands

He could not allow any kind of distraction
Like flak or an engine cut out
Or jinking or searchlights or somebody wounded
To cause him a shadow of doubt

He must have had powers of deep concentration
To press on regardless of this
And calmly sit plotting, in spite of the mayhem
The route back to England and bliss

His only advantage above all the others
To keep the adrenalin flowing
Was due to his maths, his dividers and compass –
At least *he* knew where he was going!

Audrey Grealy.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES - KEW

In addition, this mention of charts also reminds me that Robert Quirk in his ongoing research advises that he hit upon the fact that the archives hold some 38 actual plans of coastal areas where mines were laid by 160 Squadron in the period February to May 1945.

So if anyone would like to see these actual plans for these particular operations and should a trip to the National Archives ever be on the cards they are filed under reference MFQ 1/152: Air 27/1067.

If you look up the National Archives web site, whilst the plans are not viewable, there is quite interesting narrative about the operations

The starting web page address is at:-

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/displaycataloguedetails.asp?CATLN=6&CATID=4881958&SearchInit=4&CATREF=MFQ+1%2F152+> (But you still have some work to do to find the portfolio details although you might just find an easier way to get there – take it as a challenge starting with www.nationalarchives.gov.uk).

MORE ABOUT ROBERT QUIRK'S WEBSITE:

This is always being worked on and a visit to view latest updates is well worthwhile. Additions include operational records of 159, 200 and 354 Squadron records with, in the latter case, a considerable number of photographs.

FUTURE ISSUES OF AD LIB

Sorry that there is not the regularity of issues now – they are virtually compiled on an 'as and when' basis. The editor hopes that the next Ad Lib will not take quite as long as this one but more material, especially from the newer members, would be much appreciated.

TWO SPECIAL NOTICES

First - please let Gary have your Reunion Booking Form a.s.a.p

Second


**MERRY
CHRISTMAS!**

And a very happy and healthy
New Year