

# 160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

## The Chota Coggage for survivors



**SUMMER 2011**  
**Number 40**

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### SSO's and DRO's

**SICK PARADE:** As we are all somewhat elderly, no doubt we have our ailments but we still seem to be battling on. Wilf Hardcastle, after sustaining a broken leg following a fall, has made a good recovery and has now moved into a care home where he has settled in well. To all who are ill at this time we send our best wishes.

#### **POPPY CALLS; Stay independent in your own home:**

The British Legion has set up this free service for ex service people or their dependants to carry out small repairs and minor alterations if these tasks become too much for you. They use their own trusted and trained fitters and specialist agencies "to take away the jobs that make life difficult". You do not need to be a member of the Legion. They do not take any money but, of course, making a donation to the British Legion would be a way of saying "thank you". If you ask the fitter he can leave a form for this purpose – but this is entirely up to you.

Their skills include putting up shelves, curtain rails or grab rails: changing light bulbs and tap washers: door and window locks and other security items: hanging/repairing doors: hardstanding and ramps for scooters etc., and a multitude of other tasks. If they can't fix it they will endeavour to replace it as part of the service. Not sure that an emergency service is available but they appear to be very resourceful.

Freephone telephone: 0800 032 0306

Email: homesupportadmin@britishlegion.org.uk

#### **REUNION 2011 – AT THE ANGEL, LEAMINGTON SPA, 9<sup>TH</sup> -11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2011**

This booking has been arranged on the same terms as last year after the research carried out by Gary following which the Angel was accepted as the preferred venue. Gary made this a booking for at least 41 attending as this has guaranteed us the use of the private dining room.

We do have more than 41 but would dearly like to see this number increase. Even at this late date we should be able to add to our numbers so if you have been in two minds about making it – pick up the phone now and ring (or email) Gary at the addresses given above and if you have any other 160 contacts please seek their support.

#### **2010 REUNION REPORT with apologies for its lateness.**

Another very successful reunion at The Angel, with good food and company plus the chance for families and other carers to renew their friendship arising from their Sri Lankan adventures. It was a very happy party with all in good spirits and reasonably good weather for the ladies to enjoy the shopping or going out to Stratford upon Avon for a change of scene.

With such support from family members one wonders whether they may carry on 'ad infinitum'. I think everyone will agree

#### **OBITUARIES**

**Wellington Leroy (Roy) Schroeder. DFC.** From nephew Gary via Robert Quirk and Matt Poole, we learned of the death of Roy on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. He died at the age of 91 following complications from a broken hip. Roy flew 26 operations with 160 from 1944, being awarded the DFC on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1945. His brother Gerald was missing in action flying with 159 Squadron and Gary mentions that when flying over the jungles on operations Roy wondered if, by chance, he was flying over his lost brother. A message of sympathy was sent to his daughter Susan and family and friends.

**Dennis G Wellings.** We were sorry to learn of the death of Dennis, suddenly, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December last, from his brother Mike living in Texas. Dennis of Stocksfield, Northumberland, was a Warrant Officer Wop/AG with 160 in 1944/45 and a member of Ken Westcott's crew. Through Mike we were able to send a message of sympathy to Dennis' wife Stella and family.

We had not had any contact from Dennis, sadly, nor from Ken Westcott who is still around living in Hatherleigh, Devon. Mike Wellings advises that he has kept up with the activities of 160 Squadron Association over several years and tells us that he "finds everything so very interesting".

**Laurence Nolan RAAF:** We have heard from son Greg that his father passed away last year at the age of 89 and have sent a message of sympathy to him and his family. In the contacts section there is a note of his request for information about his father's time on the squadron.

**Fraser Robertson Hunter:** We have heard from his daughter, Kay Crawford, that Fraser died last August. Fraser was Flight Engineer in F/Lt Morley's crew and he had been able to read up about his time with 160 as mentioned in the item about him in "Making Contact"

that the younger element do enhance the week end and it is nice to have that little extra tender loving care.

There was the usual socialising on Friday night and on Saturday morning there was a Video and big screen showing of many of the photographs of the Sri Lanka return visit followed by a special presentation to Gary of an original painting commissioned from Tim O'Brien, GaVa, of Liberator "N" BZ 752 flying over the Malacca Straits.

The presentation was by way of a thank you to Gary for all the work involved in organising the trip.



Gary, Alan and Les: We believe Alan was actually much better at keeping the real thing straight and level

Come the Saturday night, we were treated to an impromptu talk from our Honorary President Frank Green giving an account of how he eventually managed to join 160 Squadron after many trials and tribulations. It was very well received and, with lots of little personal experiences, provided some very amusing anecdotes which encouraged a few more personal memories from other members. *Special note: Appointment of Les Crawley as an Honorary Vice President:* For the record this actually occurred at the 2009 reunion: it was carried by the members and Les expressed his thanks for the honour so paid to him. As it happens it was very timely as, with Frank Green being unable to make the Heroes Return trip, Les, unworthy as he felt, was able to act as 'your leader'.



Frank Green, Arthur Evans and Bob Coates – three of the originals and not hard to see that they were enjoying the reunion. (270+ yrs between them!!)

**HEROES RETURN 2:** On behalf of the veterans and wives it is still timely to put in newsletter records the gratitude of all to our carers, guides and mentors for the tremendous work put in to make this trip such a success and so enjoyable. In true operational style there were nightly briefings with just about every possible eventuality being anticipated and Gary, Debbie and Hettie ("H") were on duty 24 hrs a day. There were enough incidents to make life a challenge for them and there were times when they just made it for their meals – some were probably missed.

Interesting aside that "H", a retired teacher and historian, was genuinely fascinated by the tales of our vets and clearly there has been a new learning curve for him on the wartime involvement of his country and the part paid by the RAF. Likewise, this interest was shown to an amazing degree by the many Sri Lanka air force members we were able to meet.

Their hospitality, good humour and genuine interest impressed us all. TV, interviews, and the press conference were all well reported upon and in a way, we seemed to open windows on the part played by the RAF in the war in the Far East.

British High Commissioner, Colombo. He shall remain anonymous but, until he made some amends by sending a wreath in time for our visit to Trincomalee war graves, put up quite a black by failing to respond to our giving notice to him of the visit of several veterans in their late eighties to Sri Lanka. The reason for making ourselves known to him are pretty obvious but specifically we needed to make sure of contact and support in the event of any special needs rather than have him taken by surprise and wondering how to respond. We did eventually receive a reply to our emails but only after *considerable (Debbie type) pressure* had been applied. Apparently the original email sent by Les must have been treated as spam "and dumped it out of sight of us" – they say. Something must have gone amiss with their art of communication – it does make one wonder.

This was at least better than the previous visit in 2005 when emails were just not acknowledged.

Accompanying this newsletter there is an article by Therese Crawley on some of her memories of the trip. Unfortunately, the diary we had hoped to have available was on Patrice's lap top which "crashed".

And, if you have not had enough, you can follow some of the exploits of the group on the following web sites.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbKzPMikqk>

(Isobel's comprehensive videos of the whole journey with some accidental real 'foot'age. Many thanks 'Issy' – (Sam Porter's daughter) Check the right hand column of the site for additional footage.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MWjzCTXTU>

<http://www.airforce.lk/news.php?news=281>

<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2010/04/11/new40.asp>

[http://www.sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws\\_18.html](http://www.sundaytimes.lk/100411/News/nws_18.html)

[http://www.news.lk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14540&Itemid=44](http://www.news.lk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14540&Itemid=44)

<http://www.airforce.lk/news.php?news=283>

**(To bring up these sites use CTRL+click to follow the link)**

**RAF MUSEUM HENDON:** At our fairly advanced ages it is not that easy to visit the RAF Museum but, next best, is a virtual tour via the internet. Go to [www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/virtual-tours/](http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/virtual-tours/)

**AND,** whilst you are there you can also read the full history of the ex Cosford Liberator KN751 right up to its return to UK and its transfer to Hendon. The Indian Air Force continued to use Liberators right up to the end of December, 1968, without suffering any major accidents. Go to

<http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/collections/aircraft/aircraft-history/74-AF-790%20Consolidated%20Liberator.pdf>

**DEBBIE – OUR INCOMPARABLE GUIDE AND 'PUTTER RIGHTER'. An appeal.**

"Just back from 2 months in India and a week in Sri Lanka – only went to my friend's plantation but had so many fond memories as I passed Ratmalana! Times are getting harder there – funding is drying up for tsunami projects as other countries need is perceived to be greater (or, in many cases, better publicity). The government are only keen on self aggrandisement. If you know of any companies willing to sponsor an Old Peoples drop in day centre providing vital meals for the elderly or a kindergarten and junior outreach centre do let me know..... am calling in all the favours I can to help the <http://www.jayawickreme.org/> they are looking especially for funding as the 5 year term by Playmobile has ended".

**BOOKS:**

**"JUNGLE SOLDIER" – The true story of Freddy Spencer Chapman:** By Brian Moynahan.

For anyone who has read Spencer Chapman's autobiography "The Jungle is Neutral" this is a good read and received good reviews in the press. He was obviously an amazing character being awarded the DSO and bar, even being recommended by Mountbatten for the VC. He gave a talk to the squadron in June 1945. It was tragic that he committed suicide at the age of 64.

160's other involvement was of course in dropping agents and supplies for his guerrilla units. (See also "Now it can be told" in this issue)

As it happens, along with Robert Quirk, we have tried to find out more about the aircraft which took Spencer Chapman back to Malaysia in August, 1945, without actually nailing down all the details but it is worth mentioning that the Pitt Museum in Oxford holds his original diaries and other memorabilia of his exploits and they were kind enough to provide photocopies of some of his original diary pages.

**RAF LIBERATORS OVER THE EASTERN FRONT: By Jim Auton:**

This includes the exploits of 178 Squadron operating over the Balkans and Poland. It probably includes some of the crews of Middle East 160 Squadron who transferred to 178 Squadron. Available from Amazon.

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

**BILL ADAMS:** A welcome return to the fold by Bill Adams and what a character. Bill was a Warrant Officer Wireless/Radar Op/AG and Fire Controller in F/O Knowles crew. I have received quite a bit of material from him and there is a lot more to him than his service with 160.

There were five welshmen in the crew and Bill remained friendly with Howell Davies who lived just a few miles away, meeting up with their wives for lunch every month. Howell died in August 1907 at the age of 84 but his (Howell's) son, who had given him copies of AD LIB for 2007-8-9 (hence the contact), continues to visit him with his mother.

Bill, for a hobby, does a bit of writing (no computer) and has also made many contributions to the Peterborough column 'One-line Philosophers' in the Daily Mail.

He told me it was 108 published at the time we talked on the phone earlier this year but there has been probably a couple more since. The samples he sent me are all good but here are a couple of examples:

"Some girls reverse evolution by making monkeys out of men"

"Love is a money spender thing"



Back row: Ivor Jones: Ivor Whitcombe: Howell Davies:  
Front row: Wilf Spurrell: Bill Adams

Bill, with no family, lives on his own and has had quite serious health problems – stomach ulcer, bladder tumour, kidney and heart conditions - but was very philosophical when I spoke to him just before he went in for major surgery in January. I spoke again to him afterwards and he was as cheery as ever.

**542644 W/O STANLEY WILLIAM BRYANT, MBE.** Son Paul is seeking information about his grandfather's service which included a period in the Middle East having found a mention of a W/O Bryant in 160's ORB's. We have been able to provide Paul with his father's service number (and the gazetting of the MBE) so that he may obtain a copy of his service record but meantime, does anyone have any recollection of Stanley Bryant who was probably ground staff.

**FLt WILLIAM HALL, C.B.E, DFC, M.in Desp: 160 Middle East and 159 Far East.**

Have heard from his nephew Doug Hall who advised that his uncle was still living in a home in Paisley though very frail. He gives some details of Bill's exploits worth passing on:

*"Once I got copies his logs a few weeks ago I started researching his history in more detail starting with his time flying Wellingtons on 149 squadron out of Mildenhall. He crash landed in March 1941 after a raid on Cologne which is recorded in Chorley's Bomber Command Losses 1941.*

*There is a book called 'Flying onto the Flames of Hell' which recounts individuals Bomber Command experiences and Chapter 2 deals with 149 and covers some of the ops Bill flew on including attacks on the Gneisenau and Scharnhorst.*

*He always felt a bit conned into operating in the Middle East as he was only supposed to ferry out a Wellington and return but was told to stay which led to his joining 160.*

*(Editor's note: See AD LIB No.36 re the book Lost Voices of the RAF and the exploits with 149 of 160's S/Ldr Jim Malley)*

*After he went to the Middle East he caught paratyphoid which nearly killed him and he was sent on the hospital ship Atlantis to Poona for several months before being allowed back on ops. Meantime the 'system' had lost track of him and word got back home that he had died*

*I know he flew several missions alongside the Americans whilst in the Far East as well as raids on Mandalay.*

*Eventually he went on to instruct on Liberators before returning home to Coastal Command and the Western Isles communication flight.*

*He eventually ended up as a Flt. Lieutenant and a DFC as well as being mentioned in despatches.*

*He turned down a permanent commission after the war and became a Chartered Surveyor, eventually becoming Chairman of the Lands Tribunal for Scotland for which he was awarded a CBE.*

*His daughter is in process of writing a book of his exploits Interestingly he still has his battledress and sheepskin flying suit as well as his medals and press clippings".*

*(Editor:-Bill is listed in our earliest 160 mailing addresses but we lost touch some years ago).*



Bill Hall

**W/O FRASER ROBERTSON HUNTER, 1824820; Flight Engineer.**

Kay Crawford, daughter, made contact with us some time ago saying that she had just discovered the 160 web site and had printed off pages where her father was mentioned advising that he was amazed and delighted at all the information. Fraser was mentioned in AD LIB No.24 being a member of F/Lt Morley's crew in "Q" BZ823 which landed behind Jap lines in September 1945. Sadly, as mentioned in the obituaries, Fraser died last year.

**SQDN/LDR DOUGLAS G M JOY, R C A F, Killed – ditching BZ868 1/5/45.**

Through Robert Quirk I have obtained a copy of Douglas Joy's complete service history – it is such a comprehensive record that I am not sure how I may be able to utilise it but, meantime, I have the information for anyone who may have a specific interest in his RCAF career.

**RONALD FRANCIS MOORE; LAC (Elec?)**

David Kirk an auctioneer with Baldwins sought information about a group of five medals and dog tags brought in for auction in aid of "HELP THE HEROES" by a friend of the family.

We have been able to help with most of the details he needed.

As the 5 would presumably have included the North Africa and Burma Stars it indicates that he joined the squadron very early. The photo below looks like either Ratmalana or KKS??



*R F Moore The rank looks like corporal but when blown up in size it is more likely an LAC badge.*

The auction is due to be in September and possible price £100 - £120.

**F/O LAURENCE NOLAN RAAF.** Son Greg writes to ask if anyone can give him any details of his father's time with the squadron, hopefully with photos of him. Laurence joined S/Ldr Trotter's crew in 1945 and although I have been able to send a photo of the original crew, plus referring Greg to the squadron history on the web site, I have not located any later photo. Can anyone help?

**WILLIAM ROBERT OLIVER RCAF:No. 124314: Cpl Radar:**

Son Mark Oliver has contacted us with regard to his father's service, first with 413 RCAF Sqdn (Koggala) and then 160 in Ceylon in 1943 and 1944. His father was a Radar technician with the squadron and it just so happens that we have been able to tell him that ORB's indicate that he was a crew member on two operational flights in November, 1943 and January, 1944. Mark is

seeking as much information as he can about his father's service with the squadron.

We have also received a copy of his diary showing that he was with the squadron from February, 1943, to May, 1945 and giving an insight into some of his daily routines but what is surprising is that, during his time with 160, he had 6 leaves adding up to 58 days and probably more than a couple of 48 hr passes. Did RCAF personnel have an additional leave entitlement as this adds up to possibly 28 days a year? Does anyone remember what the leave entitlement was for RAF personnel?

*(Editor's note: I remember in my near one year stint on 160 I had 7 days on a tea plantation – except it was not 7 days as I was recalled by the 'usual' telegram after 5 days. For the life of me I cannot remember whether this was from choice, or lack of opportunity, as over the remaining couple of years of the 3 year tour I only had two more leaves).*

Bob Oliver does receive a mention in AD LIB No.30 in an article attributed to Ed Bastedo covering the nature of the work of the Canadian Radar teams on 160 with further articles in later issues..

However, if any reader does have any further information, Mark would like to hear from them



Bob Oliver

**CHARLES PELLING: Cpl Airframes:** Charles died in 1990 but we have heard from his son David with photographs and some details of his service which must have started at the very beginnings of 160. David has asked if anyone remembers him and it may help memories in so far as Charles played Alto Sax in one of the RAF bands. The members of the band were listed in a programme dated August 1942 at the Garrison Recreation Hall at Quetta, the programme being entitled 'Baluchistan District Entertainment Notes' – wonder if the two ladies were part of the ensemble? David is not sure when the photograph was taken.

*(Editor: Noted from records that Sgt Ernie Packer asked from way back, about the whereabouts of Charles Pelling).*



Band Members: Piano:Ed Puddy. Trumpet:Spike Pinn. Alto Sax:Chas Pelling. Tenor Sax:Wilf Kilgariff. Guitar: Flash Gordon. Accordion: Jock Cunningham. Drums: Jimmy Kent

If you were at KKS for Christmas 1944 you are likely to have enjoyed the following menu:

*Cream of Tomato Soup*

*Roast Turkey: Roast Pork*

*Savoury Balls: Apple Sauce*

*Roast Potatoes – Cream Potatoes: Green Peas: Gravy*

*Christmas Pudding: Brandy Sauce: Mince Pies:*

*AND to finish:*

*Beer: Nuts: Chocolates: Biscuits: Cigars: Cigarettes. (Dates and figs were listed but, in catering terms, 'off')*

*(Editor:- Just like any other day !!)*

The autographed menu contains a few familiar names such as

J N Stacey, J Jackson (*waiters?*):

L Hughes: L R Dawson: J F Laicombe: D S Ford: J Fraser: F Shepherd: W Lock: - Hill: - Middleton: R D Horobin: - Price: F Salt: W V Lawrence: Chico Hunter: D R Hebborn(?): J H Shrosbery: J Edmunds: G Walton: R Llewellyn: Harold Shipp: and two or three indecipherable.

Bob Oliver, mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, refers to this Christmas Dinner in his diary.

**ANTHONY SMALLWOOD: Sgt Fitter:** Via Robert Quirk we have received a request from son Trevor Smallwood to try to give information about his father and he has sent on to us photographs with other members of the squadron. The notice on the first photo reads '160 Maintenance' 'The Unique Squadron'. (*Sounds like one of us*)

Can anyone put names to those in the pictures – taken during the Middle East period.



Anthony Smallwood extreme right

And another of the 160 Middle East crew.



Anthony is third from right and Donald Smith who is mentioned in AD LIB 39 is at centre back - but who is the corporal in the custom tailored bush jacket?

**JACK SMITH:** Good to hear from 'Smitty' again responding about aircraft "D" FL 969 badly damaged hitting an object on landing at Addu Atoll on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1944. He was a member of Ayers' crew flying "D" and confirms that the object was a post about 30 feet from the shore – the Navy saying that it was used for the purpose of tying up landing craft. Despite the damage "D" was patched up and flown back by S/Ldr Stacey where it was considered beyond repair. Grateful also for other material which adds to our archives.

**FRASER STEVENSON – nephew of George Isley of 160:**

We have been able to point Fraser towards learning more about 160 squadron via the internet and various book references though we have little information about his Uncle George who, nevertheless, was usually one of the first on the list of attendees at our reunions. Fraser works for DFS Middle East with US military connections re Iraq/Afghanistan but the video link which he gave to show the type of work is unfortunately no longer accessible.

If anyone has any particular memories of George he would like to hear about them. Meantime, he sends his best wishes to all at 160.

**CPL L N WILLS:** Having seen the article about our return to Sri Lanka sent by Gary and published in *RAF News*, Mr L N Wills sent a letter to *RAF News*, reading as follows:

*'The article about 160 Squadron on page 23 in RAF News 1247 brought back happy memories for me – I had been with them on their trip back to Sri Lanka.*

*I spent more than two and a half years there as an airframe fitter. I worked on many of their B24's at 145 RSU (Repair and Salvage Unit) at Ratmalana, and also a short while at Sigiriya – a jungle airstrip where maintenance (sic)(?Malaria) was very prevalent – where I unfortunately caught dengue fever, caused by mosquitoes.*

*I also worked on many other types of aircraft – Spitfires, Mosquitoes, Avro Yorks and others.*

*It was a time I really enjoyed and I met some really good friends.*

*I reached the rank of Corporal and was very proud to have served in the RAF.*

*L N Wills, Exeter'*

As we know that he was not with us I guess the opening sentence should maybe have been – 'I wish I had been with them on their trip back to Sri Lanka'

But does anyone know different? Does anyone remember him when he was on the squadron.

We have had no contact with Cpl Wills in the past but maybe he may become aware of AD LIB and read this. He will be more than welcome when we make our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary return in 2015. At the moment there is no waiting list.

**FIO FRYDON (DON) MARKLAND YEOMANS, RCAF.** Through a friend, Chris Harland, who sent the enquiry, and with the help of Jack Burgess (of the same Turner crew) plus Frank Green, our enquiry service is called into action again. Chris is seeking help re photographs of "P" BZ828 plus the Turner crew which ditched (all rescued) so that he could present a picture to Don's daughter in law. We were able to give some help but not re "P" photos/crew – unless there is anyone who may have the information. We do have photos of the later "P", FL940, but, obviously, this is not what he needs.

Anyway, he has said that he was expecting to be able to commission a painting of "P".

Jack Burgess confirms that he has kept contact with Don's son and granddaughter and in the past has provided information to them. The granddaughter, Tanya, even came to see him in May 2009.

**CHRIS WROBLEWSKI (Canada) – Aircraft maintenance by Polish Tank Corps mechanics.** An unusual request in that Chris' late uncle Michal Krzywoszanski a tank mechanic of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Armoured Brigade had told him that with others he had been volunteered or utilised as skilled labour to repair and overhaul landing gear, etc., on SAAF B24's (No. 31 or 34 Squadron) as well as other aircraft. One lead he has so far is that a Flight Engineer from 178 Sqdn recalled seeing Polish mechanics working on his squadron's B24 Liberators in Celone or Amendola in Italy.

It is not known whether they may have been Polish Air Force or Army. Chris has a possible explanation that it may have been part of a larger unofficial expression of Polish gratitude for air force efforts in support of the Warsaw uprising.

His already extensive enquiries have brought little result and it would help if he could find out about and locate the various MU's etc which were based in Italy in 1944/45 and handled Liberators.

#### **MORE ABOUT THURLEIGH;**

Thurleigh at War: East Anglia Air War Project. Dr Vernon L Williams, Professor of History, Abilene Christian University, Texas.

Dr Williams has advised that he is engaged in a preservation project of the history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in England and has produced a new documentary film titled 'Thurleigh at War'. He writes:-

*"There is a small section in one of the early segments that discusses Squadron 160 and its occupation of Thurleigh early in the war.*

*Would you or someone else in your organisation have 3 or 4 photographs taken at Thurleigh of your planes and personnel that could be emailed to me for use in illustrating this section of the story? I would appreciate any assistance that you could give me of referrals to anyone else who could provide photographs of that time of 160's history."*

Email address: [vwilliams@acu.edu](mailto:vwilliams@acu.edu) or write to his address at Dept. of History, ACU Box 28310

Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas 79699-8130.

With Frank Green's help we were able to send him some aerial photos of the airfield plus Frank's notes of his experiences at Thurleigh but, of course, none of the squadron's aircraft or personnel as the squadron was never operational at Thurleigh.

Information about the film which is available as a VHS tape or DVD is obtainable on the website <http://oldsegundo.com/item-thurleighatwar.shtml> though it does not seem to be readily available in the UK.

You can read their newsletters at [www.306bg.org/PDFs/apr2010C.pdf](http://www.306bg.org/PDFs/apr2010C.pdf).

## **NOW IT CAN BE TOLD**

### **CEYLON SUPPLIES FOR MALAYA GUERRILLAS**

#### **Liberators flew from Minneriya and China Bay**

*(Although there have been similar articles and excerpts of this news item, this is a fuller version of part of 160's contribution)*

As more of Malaya and Sumatra come under Allied occupational control the story of the guerrilla army, which was on the point of striking when the Japs surrendered, is unfolded.

The existence of this army trained by hundreds of British officers and N.C.O's, was one of the best kept operational secrets of the war in South East Asia. To supply it with arms and ammunition and parachute reinforcements, Liberators from Minneriya and China Bay, flew some of the longest sorties, of all time, enduring all the discomforts of flying in tropical heat and storm often for as much as twenty two hours at a stretch.

In no other theatre of war was a guerrilla army maintained at so great a distance from its bases of supply. In France, the Balkans and other parts of the European war zone patriot armies were supplied from the air, but few places were more than seven hours flying from the home bases.

The story of Malaya's secret army began after the fall of Singapore when Lt Col F Spencer Chapman, former Arctic explorer and conqueror of the Himalayan mountain of Chomolhari, made his way into the mountains of Malaya to begin the work of organising guerrilla warfare in the heart of Japanese occupied territory.

For nearly eighteen months he remained cut off from the outer world. In May, 1943, a small party was landed on the west coast of Malaya from a Dutch submarine and made their way to a Chinese guerilla camp among the Perak Hills. Lt.Col. Chapman joined up with them on Christmas day of that year. The message giving particulars of the meeting was concealed in a tube of toothpaste and taken by the skipper of a native craft to an Allied submarine and relayed to S E A C Headquarters in Ceylon.

Contact was severed for a while after the Japanese had attacked one of the guerilla camps and, by means of torturing the Chinese, obtained information on the existence of the threat growing in their midst. Col Chapman and his party were captured but succeeded in escaping.

In November, 1944, further men were landed in Malaya by submarine. The nucleus of an army was coming into being and arrangements were soon in hand to supply both materials and men by parachuting them from long-range Liberators. From that time and right until the close of hostilities, the guerilla army was built up across 1500 miles of water. In one month alone nearly two hundred men were dropped.

In June of this year parachutists landed in Sumatra, the first Allied troops to enter the island since its fall. A guerilla army on the same lines as the one in Malaya was being formed.

By then air supply had reached a stage unprecedented in history. Daily, Liberators made the long crossing of the Indian Ocean. In many places airdrops were so difficult that they could only take place in daylight. The Liberators flew all night arriving over the target area...(then?)..... back to Ceylon. Patriot forces worked like Trojans to clear the parachutes away before there was any chance of detection by the enemy.

The longest flight was that made by a (160 Sqdn) Liberator captained by Flight Lieutenant J A Muir, whose home is in Vancouver, British Columbia, which flew for 24 hours 10 minutes to drop supplies at a point on the coast of Malaya.

"Except for an odd half an hour's doze we were all awake most of the time," he said afterwards. "Apart from anything else the monotony of flying for hours and hours over an empty sea can be very tiring, but it is surprising how fresh we all felt when we landed. I think it was the thrill of knowing that we had set up a new endurance record that woke us up.

We had not set out to create a record. Dodging the bad weather prolonged our patrol. For three quarters of the way out, and again coming back the

weather was very poor – rain, low cloud and visibility nil. That kept us pretty well on our toes most of the time.”

The Liberators, which were stripped of all armament except the tail turret, to increase their range, carried a crew of eight; each man trained to take over another man's duty during what usually amounted to almost a full day and night over the ocean. Opportunities for sleep, however, were very rare. With such light armament an eye had always to be kept open for the chance intruder. On only one occasion was an aircraft attacked. Then it had no difficulty in shaking off its opponent.

Normally each crew undertook one of these long flights about every five days, but the record for sheer concentrated flying belongs to Warrant Officer R H Crawford, (*160 Sqdn*) a navigator, who in eight days flew four sorties ranging from 18 hours 42 minutes to 19 hours 38 minutes duration – a total of more than seventy six hours. Warrant Officer Crawford lives in West Hove, Sussex.

#### EXPERIENCE IN EUROPE

One of the squadrons which carried out these operations from Ceylon – 357 – was specially formed for work of this description in South East Asia. Many of its personnel had experience of the work in Europe: others had participated in the sorties which supplied Wingate's long-range penetration force in Burma.

Other squadrons – 160 and 8 – had totalled thousands of hours of anti-submarine, mine-laying and other patrols before they took over the duties of supplying the Malayan guerillas. Their experience of conditions over the Indian Ocean stood them in excellent stead.

Directing these operations from the Colombo headquarters of the Indian Ocean Air Force was Wing Commander J N Stacey, D.S.O., D.F.C., of Dogmaes, Cardigan, South Wales, who had completed three anti-U-boat tours. Wing Commander Stacey received the D.F.C. when he piloted a Catalina from Ceylon to bomb harbour installations at Sabang and his D.S.O. for leading the first mining operation off Singapore.

“Patrols of the type we've laid on could never have been accomplished unless every member of the crew was thoroughly 'keyed-up' and knew his aircraft backwards,” he said. “These crews had to be specially nursed, beginning with the shorter flights – a sortie of 2,750 miles, for example, was an almost daily occurrence – and gradually working up until they could tackle a 3,400 miles flight with confidence.

Whenever possible, we briefed them the previous day, but in planning ahead we had to take into account many possible weather hazards. Navigating over these enormous areas was a most intricate business. There was always the likelihood that weather would force an aircraft up to sixty miles off its normal course and there might be an unexpected long search for the target which always seemed very small indeed from the air.

With very little margin to play with the pilot had to keep a shrewd eye on the petrol gauges and in the event of an unexpected change in the wind had to use his discretion, whether to turn back or complete his task at the risk of running dry many miles out at sea.

These operations threw a tremendous responsibility on to the ground crews, but they did a really grand job. They worked under merciless conditions of heat – some of us went through a Liberator with a thermometer one day and recorded a mid-day temperature of 140 degrees – but they never let the air crews down. Indeed they looked after the aircraft as proudly as if they flew them themselves.”

The close of hostilities did not mean “cease operations” for the squadrons engaged on this work. The guerilla forces in the jungles and among the mountains had to be supplied until they joined up with the Allied Occupational troops and the long-range capabilities of the Liberators made them specially useful in supply-dropping to Allied prisoner of war camps.

Today, the men who kept an ever growing secret army fully maintained are still crossing the Indian Ocean. They fly to Southern Sumatra and even to Java on missions of mercy to camps where medical and other supplies are still needed.

*Reprinted from the Ceylon Times probably September 1945.*

*(From Bill Adams).*

#### JAP ATROCITY – “W” BZ 938 “C” FLIGHT – AD LIB No. 16.

This article gave all the details of this loss including the fact that the fate of 3 of the crew was unknown – they may have stayed with the

aircraft or bailed out and never found. Through Robert Quirk we learn that Glen Smith a nephew of W/O Arthur Roland Williams RAAF (one of the three) has visited what is believed to be the crash site of “W” in Burma. Difficulties with communication from Burma have meant that few details are forthcoming as yet but more may follow.

As to the three missing crew, there was a later newspaper report via Colin Lowery which stated that when the wrecked aircraft was first located there was one body in the plane and as he was apparently the rear gunner it might have been that of W/O Williams who had volunteered as a relief rear gunner. However, the War Graves Commission still lists him as ‘missing’.

**SRI LANKA HISTORY – AN INTERESTING WEBSITE:** There is a lot of interesting material on this site at [www.lankalibrary.com](http://www.lankalibrary.com). The ‘Humour’ link is also worth a look at for an idea of Sri Lankan sense of humour and there is an article entitled “HOW TINY CEYLON BECAME A TARGET” by H G P Jayasekera President of the Ceylon War Veterans Association of World War II. The article gives the background to the reaction in Ceylon to the threat of Japanese attack and puts a local slant on the preparations made by the authorities for the defence of the island. If the link does not bring it up you can read it at [www.lankalibrary.com/geo/japan5.htm](http://www.lankalibrary.com/geo/japan5.htm).

#### 160 SQUADRON “ON THE AIR” – “NINE RIVERS FROM JORDAN” BBC WAR CORRESPONDENT, DENNIS JOHNSTON, FLIES ON OPS WITH 160 SQUADRON.

Out of print but a few copies available through AMAZON from £11.50 up - [but it can be read on the internet. \(See below\).](#)

We are indebted to Jean Hood who, through contact with Robert Quirk, has provided us with what is quite a gem.

Dennis Johnston was the BBC Radio War Correspondent who covered the North African campaign and then through Italy, France and Germany (hence the nine rivers) making regular broadcasts from each war zone. 160 Squadron, then based in Palestine, provided what appears to have been his first operation, flying in Mk II Liberator AL 536 “N”.

The crew comprised: F/Lt P G H Pearson, P/O A R Kimmins, Sgt. J C Laker, F/O Shawyer, Sgt. Banks, Sgt. Gumbrell, Sgt D A Moverley and Sgt Wood. Take off from Aqir was at 19.10 hrs on 22/9/42 landing back at 05.15 hrs on the 23/9/42. The operation was to bomb shipping at Benghazi and it appears to have been successful with no losses. The intention had been to make a recording of the flight but not enough preparation had been carried out to be able to install the recording gear in the aircraft.

This was just shortly after 160 assumed its identity and personnel of 159 squadron became attached.

F/Lt Pearson, and presumably the others, went on to complete a tour of operations with 178 squadron.

So far as can be seen from the records, only P/O Kimmins has ever been on our mailing list.

If you would like to read his description of the flight and his other wartime experiences, alongside the likes of Godfrey Talbot, his book (“Nine rivers from Jordan”) is readable in full on the website. The description of his flight with 160 is from Page 65 onwards and can be accessed at- [http://www.archive.org/stream/nineriversfromjo006116mbp/nineriversfromjo006116mbp\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/nineriversfromjo006116mbp/nineriversfromjo006116mbp_djvu.txt)

The book is described as ‘brilliant and hilariously funny apart from the weird bits and the ending which is even weirder’. It has been referred to as his infamous diaries and his daughter, also a writer, did not have a high opinion of him

About Jean Hood. Jean describes herself as a naval and maritime writer, then engaged in writing a book about war correspondents to accompany a forthcoming Imperial War Museum exhibition. She asks if anyone can add anything to what is known about this particular war correspondent flight by AL 536 of 160 Squadron. Her website is at [www.jeanhood.co.uk](http://www.jeanhood.co.uk).

#### GROUND CREW ACCOLADE *(Anon per Alan Johnston via RAFA magazine)*

He wears a suit of faded blue, no brevet on his breast

He's got more streaks of engine oil than medals on his chest

He doesn't sit behind the guns of a multi-engined 'plane

Or steer a graceful fighter above the wind and rain

He wields a heavy spanner and a piece of oily rag

While the other fellow shoots the foe and boasts about his bag

He works in mud and sleet and rain, and curses senseless war

And wonders what he joined the air force for

Just an ordinary fitter, nothing more nothing less

A pair of dark blue overalls in place of battle dress,

But he strikes a blow for freedom with his honest British skill,

As sure as the man who aimed the bombs or the gunner who makes the kill.

## HEROES RETURN TO SRI LANKA

By Therese Crawley

*(Prepared from memory by Therese so, as Eric Morecambe has said – ‘they are all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order’).*

### “WOT” no passports?

It is hard to imagine that it is now well over a year since we all met up at Heathrow for our Heroes Return trip to Sri Lanka, albeit two of us with the wrong passports! Debbie’s first outstanding achievement was to get us on flights the following day and gallant Gary came to fetch us from the airport in Colombo in the wee small hours.

### NEGOMBO - Little Rome

On arrival in beautiful Sri Lanka, *The Pearl of the Indian Ocean*, our first port of call was the Brown Beach hotel in Negombo. We enjoyed a trip out to the local fishing village, stopping off at the Buddhist temple, where Hettie (or “H”), our guide, explained the history of Buddhism and meanwhile Marian headed off, on her own, in a tuk-tuk to the local shops about her glasses, and somehow ended up playing the piano for the optician and his family! It was Sunday and a feast day and it seemed everyone was in Sunday best and on parade.

### DAMBULLA AND MINNERIYA

Then all aboard our luxurious coach and up through the jungle to Dambulla, and our first Air Base visit at Minneriya. In a pattern to be repeated at all the Air Bases, we had egg sandwiches and spicy pastries with the Sri-Lankan officers, and a discussion of the old photos and times past. We also presented our hosts with a 160 Squadron plaque as we did at the other airfields.

Before we leave, a charge up the runway in our coach, to see if we can take off!

It was also a time to share memories of the terrible crash into the jungle a short distance from the airfield, where 8 air crew and 11 ground crew were killed.

Then on to our next hotel – NILAVELI BEACH

### TRINCOMALEE AND CHINA BAY

Next day, off to the immaculate China Bay Air Base which, as the Sri Lankan officer told us “was built by you and we are looking after it very well!” As indeed they were.

Just outside the officer’s mess, the beautiful panoramic view across China Bay to the Indian Ocean.

Back then, pilots would know if they could get back to China Bay, they would be safe. Alan Johnston talked of how they would come up to China Bay to fuel their returning planes for that last leg back to Sigiriya.

A trip down to the base’s stunning private beach and some photos. We thought the coach driver would never manage to get back up that hill but somehow he did.

For those keen on wildlife our host officer pointed out the animals in the surrounding jungle; and it was interesting to see the monkeys rifling through the contents of a skip at the barracks.



*China Bay, the officers’ private beach*



*A Sri Lankan officer at China Bay – isn’t he handsome?  
(and Debbie checking everything is in order)*

Gary pointed out that the Sri Lankan Air Force runs its Officers’ Messes along exactly the same lines as the Royal Air Force, with the names of garden member, house member etc. posted.

The C.O., an Air Vice Marshal no less, although busy at a conference, on hearing that we had arrived, insisted on bidding us welcome which gave us the opportunity to present him with the 160 plaque to be housed with their other plaques in the lobby of the Officers’ Mess.

### TRINCO WAR GRAVES

Our first overwhelmingly emotional visit to the war graves was at Trincomalee. It is almost impossible to imagine the horror of burying men so young (still just boys) and so far away from home.

There were just two of the squadron buried here but, as Les said, it wasn’t a question of numbers; we would have come even if it had been only one.

Although a long way from home, the war graves were all beautiful gardens in which to be laid to rest. A look around the graves to find those of the squadron, then to the memorial to recite the names of the fallen, short readings by Marian and Les, and the laying of our wreath and another sent by the British High Commissioner.

Remember the young boy who followed us in there? He was the nephew of the cemetery’s caretaker, now living with his uncle and grandmother, his parents having been killed in the war. Trincomalee also brings memories of a high street with a herd of wild deer roaming free, just like the rest of us, out to do their shopping.



*Trinco war graves*

### SIGIRIYA

Back out into the jungle for our trip out to the Air Base at Sigiriya, with its stunning backdrop of Sigiriya Rock, and more egg sandwiches and spicy pastries with the officers under the trees at the Officers mess. After the presentation, back onto the coach to charge up the runway again!

The Sri Lankan officer pointed out where he thought the old billets were. Memories of hiding the planes under the trees in the jungle, working in red-hot cock-pits, and putting out the paraffin lamps to light up the runway for the

returning planes. Les and Arthur Evans were convinced the orientation of the runway had changed since 1943.



Waiter service under the trees at Sigiriya

### ROCK CLIMBING

Then some of the carers attempt the rock! To the veterans we probably seem quite young, but many of us have grown up children so we heaved and puffed our way up, most making it to the very top. What fantastic views! I think Fred Salt said they would sometimes go up there of an evening, just to have a cigarette or two before coming back down. I'm ashamed to admit I hired a Sherpa for a few rupees to carry my handbag and give me a pull. Poor man....

Back to Amaya Lake and our first taste of the monsoon rain, but it didn't last very long before the sun was shining again and once again we could hear the sounds of the birds in the surrounding tropical forest. Sam Porter had a swim fully clothed in the pool and, unfortunately, Fred stepped into the flood water ditch but, patched up by Patrice, he survived this mishap. At the evening meal Chris (Sam Hirst's grandson) played "It's a long way to Tipperary" on a sitar, accompanied by Marian on the 'squeezey' piano'.

My room boy fashioned my towel into a swan, and the petals on the bed read "welcome". Marian, I'm told, on departure, wrote her own petal message of "thank you".

### KANDY

Bats (large flying foxes) hanging from the trees, and another monsoon shower. The innovative Dick Moules discovers he can cover the long walk down to the lobby from his room, by pushing a dining chair in front of him! Fantastic visits to the famous Temple of the Tooth, and the Kandyan dancers.

We ladies try on the batik garments and Chris decides he looks good in a Sarong. Also a visit to the Spice Garden and a wander round the plants, with a taste of some herbal teas and a lovely massage.



Kandy War Cemetery

Back: Fred Salt:Les Crawley:Bob Coates:Arthur Evans:Wilf Hardcastle.

Front. Sam Hirst:Alan Johnston:Dick Moules:Sam Porter

The Elephant orphanage at Pollonaruwa was another delightful day out and it was wonderful to watch the elephants. However, another highlight of the day was the amusing spectacle of Les trying to reverse himself into a Tuk-tuk. A word of advice from Hettie, to "go in forwards like everybody else" and he makes it.

(It actually **looked** more difficult to go in head first – Les)



Les and Marian in the Tuk-tuk at Pollonaruwa

### BACK TO COLOMBO

Finally Mount Lavinia and our last Air Base visit to Ratmalana in Colombo where, as with the other Air Bases we presented a plaque to the Sri Lankan officers and some of their wives. As usual Marian greets all the smiling officers with an enthusiastic and warm "Good morning!" The rest of us offer our more reserved greetings.

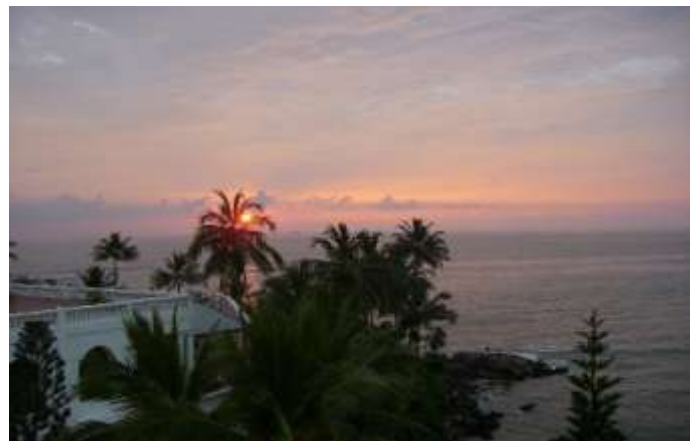
We are treated to a tour of the base, and a fascinating close up look at some of the aircraft. All the highly complex navigation instruments nowadays, and Officers who were intrigued to learn that Liberator navigating had been by dead-reckoning and the stars.

Then on to the aircraft museum where we were interviewed for the Sri Lankan TV news, with Gary and Les talking about the importance of the older planes for aviation history. Some sad stories from the Sri Lankan officers about the impact of the civil war on their families.

Our last visit was to the Colombo War Cemetery at Liveramentu where 32 members of the squadron were buried. Another very moving ceremony with press and television much in evidence.

Back to the hotel overlooking the Indian Ocean and that beautiful lobby with the piano. We all loved to hear Marian play - so a sing song ensued - and Les and Therese sat and prepared his Power Point presentation and talk for the press meeting the following morning and where, in the question and answer session, we carers learned more about life on the jungle airfields.

Mount Lavinia was also a place where we became very "lossy" – losing Wilf's passport, a memory stick, various cards from digital cameras and the plaque given to us earlier that day at the officers' mess. All eventually found again thank goodness.



View across the Arabian Sea at Mount Lavinia

AND so, in the words of the travelogue, we said farewell to this beautiful island until, perhaps, (?) our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary return in 2015. No names yet!