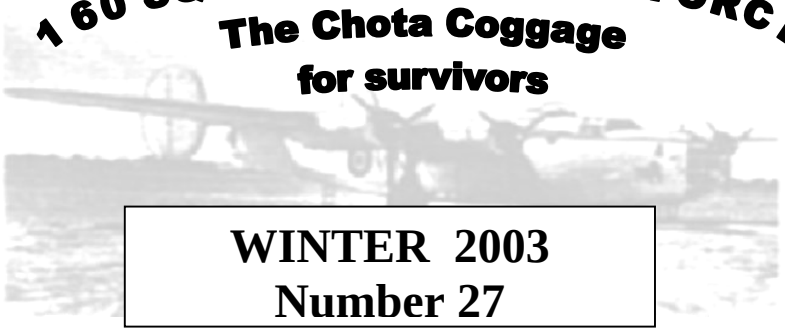
160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE
The Chota Coggage
for survivors



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

S.S.O's and D.R.O's

ANNUAL SUBS. A few remain outstanding. Please cough up.
AWARDS. The list must be very near completion and will, I hope, be made available soon. However, it appears that no one has any information as to awards to the C.O's Brady and Butler. It would be unlikely that either or both would be ignored.
THURLEIGH VIDEOS. At the showing of this video at the reunion Ron Palin volunteered to make copies for anyone who wanted to order. Would the 3 who asked for copies please make themselves known to Ted Daines as they are available.
MODELS OF "V", FL 936. Thanks to Robert Quirk we have another source of "V" replicas. They are a little larger than before and there are one or two inaccuracies but still a good memento. I have confirmed UK availability but still waiting for further details from the importers regarding prices (reasonable I expect)
It is a Motormax toy Model 77026 and should be obtainable at Motormax Toys, Hithercroft Ind Est. Lesterway, Wallingford, OXON OX10 9TH Tel.No..01491 833477.

OBITUARIES.

There is a nil return.

MAKING CONTACT: News, old colleagues and 'Help'.
Henry Deeney: So far, thanks to Hank Illingworth, we have been able to come up with more information for the family. Would be nice to have a photo of "M" for them.
Henry was known as 'the old man' to the rest of Joseph Cohen's crew.
John Patrick Foster: Another relative has asked for information. As a long shot – if any ex 178 Sqdn members are readers – can you help? Most 160 aircrews in the Middle East transferred to 178 Sqdn.
Douglas Henry Skinner (RNZAF) was listed as missing following the Dixie Dean ditching. Pauline Braaksma (British Columbia, born Manitoba) emails that researching her mother's life has unearthed a lot of letters between her mother and Doug Skinner. Pauline has joined the 160 mailing list and has become very interested in learning more about 160 asking if anyone remembers Doug or knows of a mate of his - James Trott, also NZ, but not of 160 Sqdn. Pauline would also like to hear any tales of training at Dafoe, Saskatchewan or being stationed at Manitoba also training in the Bahamas – all places mentioned in the letters.
BBC WW2 History. We have been sent a copy of the"WW2 People's War" newsletter for December. The site, at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2, was launched on 29/10/03. This is the site for the public to send in their memories of events and experiences in WW2 and for putting on record the history of squadrons, units and ships etc. for future generations. Read more at www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2/apply.shtml.
LEIGH LIGHTS. Member D W Bunkell flew in a squadron Lib fitted with lights and Ted confirms that there is a drawing so showing in the archives (now at Hendon).

A little late but still a good idea to wish everyone the Season's Greetings and all best wishes for 2004 with good health to enjoy it

HOW I GOT TO SIGIRIYA - eventually

Laurie Jones writes:
The train halted and we dropped down onto the railway track in the half light, at what was declared to be our destination; Habarana. The porter nodded his affirmation as we unloaded our gear. This was it. There was the railway track and there was jungle, but nothing else, nor had the sergeants disembarked from further up the train. Despite a shouted warning, the train lurched forward and amid a few futile shouts a kit bag landed nearby, before the little red light at the rear of the train and the sergeants disappeared around the bend into the jungle.

In the gloom of the small clearing we were assailed by the smell and the damp of the jungle. The sky was all but obscured by the canopy of trees above, vines and creepers fell in great festoons to the ground, water dripped and a low mist or cloud drifted slowly down through the high foliage. It was eerily quiet.

It seemed inconceivable that but four or five weeks past I had been standing in the forecourt of the Empire State Building, at times directing elderly out-of-towners, who mistook my RAAF blues and peaked cap for the not dissimilar uniform of the elevator supervisor, to the nearest toilets, whilst I awaited my girl friend Helena to join me for lunch

Collecting the sergeant's errant kitbag, and our own gear we stumbled a short distance along the rail track until we reached a road crossing where we discovered an army truck, whose occupants kindly offered to deliver us to our destination. The road, more accurately described as a track, was rough and winding, and the jungle appeared to he even more impenetrable since the gloom deepened. The only signs of life were occasional groups of oxen and water buffalo that impeded our progress. An hour of this bone-jarring bumping and crashing brought us to a slightly improved dirt road; and we had arrived at RAF Station, Sigiriya, home of 160 Squadron.

Finding our way through the rain to the Officers' Mess, which was deserted, we helped ourselves to a cup of tea and in the mail rack found a pile of correspondence from home and America awaiting us. Eventually help arrived in the form of the only Australian captain on the squadron, P/O Ben Hall. He took us to his room to clean up and then showed us the way to the Adjutant, the C.O., the '.A" Flight Commander and, most importantly, pay accounts. Having explained that the only vestige we had of five aircrew sergeants was one kit bag, it was pleasing to learn later in the day that they had arrived after hitching from two stations along the line from our point of debarkation.

Having been allotted accommodation we settled into the rooms left vacant by the last crew who failed to return from a trip to Sumatra a few days before; and so life on the squadron began.

The siting and the dimensions of the aerodrome at Sigiriya must have been the work of a diabolical ally of the Japanese. The one strip was about 5,000 feet long, just enough to get a fully laden Liberator airborne, and just wide enough for the 110 foot wingspan of the aircraft. The strip was badly surfaced macadam and humped in the middle, so that a Liberator parked on the turning circle at one end of the strip could not be seen from the other end. Packed tightly against the verges of the runway were a number of sand-bagged ack-ack gun emplacements and the whole lot was over-shadowed by the encroaching jungle.

The immediate geography was hilly, but most importantly, right within the circuit was the 600 foot high "Rock of Sigiriya", an impressive hunk of historical stone work, not unlike Ayres Rock m Australia. It was crowned by the remains of the Lion Kings' fortress and palace and decorated with frescoes of earth pigment on plaster. A stalwart adversary for a low flying aircraft trying to find its way on to the strip in bad weather. Small dispersal areas, just sufficient to accept the wingspan of the Liberators were hollowed out of the jungle. From an operational point of view it was a pilot's nightmare, and indeed, a death trap for some.

Sigiriya, which was home to just the one squadron with supporting station staff, had been established in a way intended to optirnise the natural camouflage provided by the near impregnable jungle, and this had resulted in the camp being spread over a very large hilly area, with winding tracks joining the various living segments and the Squadron headquarters, ops room and other working facilities. It was over half a mile along a rutted mud track, winding downhill from the ops room to the strip.

The thickness of the jungle canopy shut out much of the sky, so that the sun rarely penetrated, even when the station was not covered with low cloud. Everything was wet, damp, slimy and mouldy from the constant monsoonal rains. The rough cadjan buildings, constructed of woven palm and palm thatch, on timber taken from the jungle, were shadowy in the stygian gloom, their propped up window flaps of palm fronds giving them a degenerate, bedraggled appearance.

A small hut, here, was the officers latrine. Built over a deep pit, regularly soaked with 100 octane, it was not a place to sit in contemplation whilst enjoying a cigarette. Nearby there; a large palm leaf edifice, the officers' bath house with tracks leading off into the shadows; were billets divided off into a number of individual bedrooms. Lighting was by hurricane lamp, except for the working station buildings and the messes, where the station generator supplied power.

Not much of a world for human beings, but paradise for the rats, white ants, scorpions, snakes and malarial mosquitoes that dwelt in abundant numbers about our bed chambers. Other close associates drawn to the neighbourhood of the billet were the monkeys. Whenever the rain eased the small gregarious monkeys would arrive, chattering, leaping and frolicking through the tops of
The trees whilst a sterner type, large and grey, would quite suddenly be with us sitting in a row on the stumps of the trees that had been felled immediately behind the building, from where they would spend

hours peering solemnly through the window apertures into our rooms.

Not that there was much to see. The rooms were spartan, concrete floor, shrivelling palm leaf walls, a charpoy with the inevitable mosquito net, chest of drawers, desk, wash stand and bucket and a hanging rack, plus oil lamp. It was found that it took approximately four days for the blues, great coats and drabs to absorb sufficient moisture for droplets to appear along the lower edges of the uniforms and then drip to form puddles on the floor. The whites and purples of the mould on the fabrics formed interesting patterns, too.

Having settled in we, as a crew, were gently eased into the squadron working routine, mostly revisionary activities such as gunnery, signals, aircraft recognition and aircraft systems. I, for my part, found myself detailed as ACP (Aerodrome Control Pilot) and Duty Pilot. Since most flying activity took place at night or in the early morning, this meant getting out of bed at the most unreasonable hours and lurching around in the dark and rain. I soon discovered that, apart from ensuring the flare path was correctly laid and illuminated, the principal task of the ACP was removing the inevitable herd of churlish oxen and water buffalo from the strip so as not to impede the departure of the squadron aircraft.

Our reception into the brethren of the squadron crews and the mess was a more complex matter. The squadron had been at Sigiriya for about six months and were exhibiting signs of strain. There had been significant hospitalisation of personnel due to malaria and aircraft serviceability had suffered. Again, the isolation of the unit in poor living conditions did little for morale and this was not helped by a commanding officer who did not display the leadership that came readily to the COs that followed him.

Losses of crews on photographic reconnaissance over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Sumatra had been far beyond acceptable levels and morale was suffering. This had climaxed just before our arrival with the loss of three out of four crews sent across the Bay of Bengal on P.R. Ben Halls crew, the sole survivors of the sortie, had been attacked by two single engine fighters thought by the crew to be Oscars, but after one pass Ben managed to evade them by diving into cloud. The aircraft sustained considerable damage, but the crew managed to nurse it back home successfully.

On my second night as ACP I saw off a further three aircraft on a PR of Sumatra, and to the disbelief of all concerned, they returned unscathed. The pukka gen was, however, that this would be the last PR sortie as Group's main priority was to have the squadron available for anti-submarine warfare.

Extract from Laurie Jones' book 'A Pilot's Story'

AND THIS WAS THE SIGIRIYA STRIP

Jack Stokes' coloured painting of Sigiriya 1943 is entitled "Runway Repairs". This copy (of a copy) using my scanner does not do it justice and this is an understatement but perhaps it will help bring back memories. Editor

AUSSIE CITIZENS

Since the previous article comes from one of our antipodean members may be its time we set about paying them back for one or two of the compliments which we have become so used to over the years. The Aussies actually refer to it as pommy bashing (as if they would do such a thing!)

From an anonymous Australian source - "Why they are all proud to be Australian citizens".

Only in Australia…. can a pizza get to your house faster than an ambulance.

Only in Australia….do supermarkets make the sick people walk to the back of the store to get their Panadols etc. whilst healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front.

Only in Australia… do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries … and a diet coke.

Only in Australia …. do they use the word "politics" to describe the process of government. "Poli" (poly) in Latin meaning "many" and "tics" meaning blood sucking creatures.

Only in Australia … do they live by the saying "you're never too plastered if you can still find the floor"

There is an added comment "STAND PROUD AUSSIE'S" and - after all, rugby is only a game.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT 160 SQUADRON, M.E. AND S.E.A.C.

If ever a body of men seemingly had a cause for complaint, it seemed that 160 was created just for them. Take the arrival of that squadron's ground echelon at Thurleigh mid January 1942. The area was blanketed in three inches of snow, worse still this airfield was largely of the unfinished variety, what billets there were had no windows or doors, frozen builders stand pipe for ablutions - conditions were less than favourable to say the least. The overseas leave allowance of four days was indeed most inadequate hardly allowing one to get home, let alone to get back. Furthermore this body of men were under the command of an acting C/O and the SWO that I had just left at my previous posting, say no more.

Then on an evening in February we were whisked away to the docks at Liverpool to embark on a ship that looked less than likely to be able to convey us to our overseas destination. The seemingly long voyage made one port of call. Freetown on the west coast of Africa, a stay of some five days before, with a much lighter escort, we continued on our way to South Africa, Durban in fact, for a stay of some fifteen days. Really happy days with people who were determined to see that you had a good time before carrying on to Egypt aboard the Blue Ribbon liner the Niew Amsterdam. Egypt, the land of flies and disease, of dog biscuits and small eggs, how pleased we were to carry on with our journey, albeit on a slow boat (Dunera) to India via Aden. Within three days of disembarking at Bombay, we were back on the boat (Rajula) for the trip back to Karachi. Then after yet another short stop at Drigh Road, we were on the train to Quetta the then capital of Baluchistan - to get acclimatised they said. You would have thought with all this endless travelling etc tempers would be in short supply by now, not so; some of these places are remembered with some affection, some with humour.

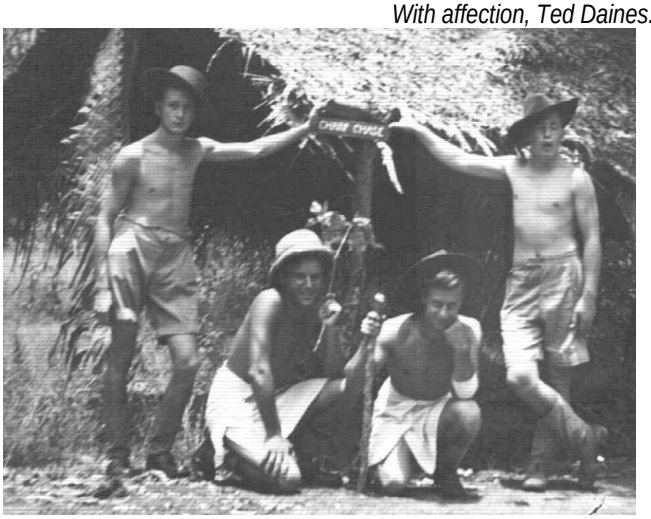
Even now our journey was not over, with our aircraft needed to curb Rommel's supply line, this they did with heavy casualties before turning the remainder of what was left over to 178 squadron

The squadron left Quetta in two parts, the advance party to Ceylon was about eighty strong the remaining body of nearly three hundred left for Salbani some 75 miles from Calcutta the base of 159 squadron. Again no aircraft for us, would the wandering never stop. After perhaps about eight weeks the remainder of 160 would be leaving for Ceylon via Calcutta After unending travelling they arrived in Ceylon To await their aircraft to start their overseas tour of duty.

I contend that it was all these hardships and rough living conditions that bound these men together, even in Ceylon they operated from jungle airstrips, had problems with malaria etc, often unsatisfactory conditions when flying, turbulence plus all operations were flown over the surrounding seas, no land marks to guide the navigators. 160 flew long, very long, operations with great distinction throughout the conflict. Sadly we lost several friends and left them together in the cemeteries of the Middle East, Ceylon or their names are listed on the Singapore Wall for those with no known graves

Even now survivors still remain friends and still laugh at the mention of Thurleigh, Quetta, M & V etc. SS Cuba, Char Wallahs, flies and the bad eggs of Egypt, and of Charley and Joe. The airfields of Ratmalana ,Sigiriya, KKS, and Minneriya. Yes, those were certainly the days

With affection, Ted Daines.



This was Minneriya and this was how they ended up. Actually, they don't look too bad. (Reminders of 'It aint 'alf 'hot mum'?).
From left Stan Johnson, Glyn Williams (now Reverend) Jim Parry and Tom Kellock

THE FINAL FLIGHT, from Gerry Boyle's diary.

On Friday, July 28, 1944, I was lounging in the Crew Room of RAF 160 Squadron, based at Sigiriya, Ceylon. My back was against a wall, the other side of *which* was the Commanding Officer's office. As the walls of all the buildings on the base were made of dried palm tree leaves, sound travelled through them with ease. I heard the CO speaking on the 'phone. I distinctly heard him say "I don't want to go there, we are short of aircraft". I thought "To hell with the planes, what about the crews?" There was more conversation and then the CO acquiesced to whatever they were directing him to do. It sounded like a dicey trip to me and I was glad to be well down on the Strike Crew list.

By this time we had been on 160 squadron for nearly a year. We were the senior crew in length of operational service and in operational experience. Since we had come to the squadron, there had been a total of 27 crews serve on it, 9 of which had been lost. I was beginning to think, for the first time, about the odds of our number coming up. I had noticed in the last couple of months that we had drawn several important flying assignments because of our experience.

That afternoon, the CO called a meeting of all the pilots in the crew room. As usual, the newer less experienced pilots sat in the front row, eagerly awaiting operational assignments or an opportunity to volunteer for something. I sat in the back row with the wiser types, trying to look as insignificant as possible, eager neither to fly nor to volunteer. Wing Commander Brady told us that the Far Eastern Fleet of the Royal Navy, based at Trincomalee, Ceylon, had

steamed across the Bay of Bengal and attacked the Japanese base at Sabang. Two of the planes that had bombed the island had been equipped with cameras, in order that an accurate assessment of the damage could be made, but that neither plane had returned to their carrier. They wanted a B24 Liberator from 160 Squadron to fly there the next morning and take photographs of Sabang. He realised there would be some risk to this trip but the photographs could be taken from as high an altitude as cloud levels would permit. It was most important that photos be taken and this was a critical mission. Because of this, he wanted the crews at the top of the Strike Crew List to stand aside, so that the squadron's most experienced crew could take on this assignment, Flying Officer Boyle and his crew! Two thoughts hit me simultaneously as this pronouncement rolled over me. The first was a surge of fear at the possible consequences. The second was the pleasant feeling emanating from the public acknowledgement of our crew's capability. The meeting ended.

The pictures were to be taken the next morning around 9.00 am when the sun would be well up and the light good. This meant a 2.00 am briefing, followed by a 3.30 am take off. Our crew took it easy for the rest of the day and tried to get some sleep after dinner. At 1.30 am on Saturday, July 29 a truck picked us up and took us to the Operations room. There we were briefed on all the information that would be needed for the trip. Sabang was a Jap staging point for troops and aircraft enroute to Burma and they might send some Zero fighters up after us. If this happened we were to head home and cancel the mission. We had 900 miles of water to cover and one bullet in the wrong place would make it impossible. We were to fly across the Bay of Bengal at 5000 feet until we were 2 hours from target, then go down to 50 feet over the water, to get under the Jap radar, until we were only 30 minutes away. From this point we were to climb to 25,000 or 30,000 feet as fast as possible, run in over the target, get the photos, head back to 50 feet as quickly as possible and return to base.

W.C. Brady said that unless there was at least 7/l0ths cloud over the target we were to abort the mission. I was glad to hear this. We took off at 3.00 am. Four hours later the sun began to come up. Not long after this, we went down to 50 feet and skimmed over the ocean under the Jap radar. Then we all connected up to the oxygen, put on our oxygen masks and began the climb. It was cold at 5 miles up and we donned fleece lined leather flying jackets. It quickly became evident there was not 7/l0ths cloud. There was hardly any. No one said anything, so I kept going. I had not come this far to turn back now. Vic Allen came on the intercom. "This doesn't look like 7/l0ths cloud to me". I said, "It's OK. There's enough". I thought to myself that he was not very smart to say that so publicly'. Now we were at 26,500 feet. That's high enough. The air was so thin that the propellers seemed to be spinning and the plane wallowed for lack of lift. We levelled off and headed over the target. Stan Heffer reported the cameras were ready to go. Steady for about two minutes and we had our pictures. Just then, someone reported they could see a Jap plane taking off below us. Now was the time to get the hell out of there. I called to everyone to strap themselves in, did a steep left bank and headed for the deck. The maximum diving speed permitted for a Liberator was 400 miles an hour. I looked at the airspeed indicator – 440! I had to slow down, even though every fibre in me wanted to get down to sea level quick. It seemed an eternity. Finally we were there, right down on the water. Everyone searched the sky looking for enemy aircraft. None. After a while we were out of range, so climbed back to 5000 feet and relaxed. Home was only five hours away.

We landed back at Sigiriya, late in the afternoon. The C.O seemed pleased that we had got there and back and even had some photographs. He told me that he would recommend me for a "Mention in Dispatches". A few days later we heard that the photos had turned out very well and had shown that the British Fleet had done a good job of smashing Sabang. I never heard any more about the "Mention in Dispatches".

A few days later, we learned that we had been posted back to England. That made this our last operational flight in Ceylon, and maybe in the war. Subsequent events made it the latter. It was a good way to finish up. *Gerry Boyle per Jack Fudge*

Foot note:

Jim Jackson writes about Gerry Boyle's diary articles which he has enjoyed (see previous issues) but thought they fall short of doing justice to Gerry's contribution to the squadron. He remembered being in the Ops Room when Gerry was briefed to fly Sir Guy Garrod to India and although the incident of a noisy IFF was a bit of a black, the general belief was that Gerry was chosen for that flight because he was the most reliable pilot on the squadron.

He added that this particular flight to Sabang, now included above, deserves special emphasis. The Eastern Fleet had made this much publicised attack on the air and naval base and Gerry was briefed to do the PR the next day.

The day after a major attack, with the defences thoroughly stirred up, is the worst time imaginable to arrive over a target and Gerry had been told to abort if he had less than 7/10^{ths} cloud cover. In the event there was no cloud cover at all but Gerry went on in and got his photographs. Apparently, Air H Q properly impressed, wanted to give him an immediate gong but the Admiral in charge of the attack, for whatever reasons, vetoed the award. Jim wonders if this was because the photos of the grand assault showed they had done practically no damage at all and the Admiral was somewhat furious.

(Re medal awards. I have been unable to find that Gerry was ever honoured - does anyone know different? Editor)

Crew members : B Taylor, J Follis, J Fudge, G Boyle, J Roberts and S Heffer leaving "P", July 1943.

AND FINALLY ANOTHER REMINDER TO PAY SUBS – NEARLY EVERYONE HAS.