



TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2015



Bob's diary

Well, here we are in a New Year, with our Spring Newsletter. It is often difficult to find something new and exciting to start with, so perhaps we should take a note of the phrase used during Prime Minister's Questions and paraphrase it to read "we refer our Honourable Members to the statements of the Editor in previous newsletters!" All joking apart, the latter part of 2014 was definitely quieter than the previous year, so we have less "news" to report. However, we are delighted to be able to include the account, written by one of our members, of a very moving ceremony in Denmark to mark the 70th anniversary of the crash of a 138 Squadron Stirling.

Moving, as they say, swiftly onwards.....

We have three diary dates for you this year. Information about the Summer Gathering is later in this newsletter, but we would also like to bring to your attention an event over the weekend of 15-17 May. You will recall that there was an event in the Stuart Memorial Hall on the weekend of Remembrance Sunday, which many members attended and enjoyed. This event was such a success that those who organised it thought it would be a good idea to build on it.

In Tempsford Church there is a plaque to the two SD Squadrons. This was dedicated on 18 May 1975, and it therefore seemed fitting to hold the next "conference/convention" at the weekend nearest to the 40th anniversary. The programme has not yet been finalised, but here is a taste of what will be happening:

There will be talks from experts in matters relating to Resistance in Holland, France, Norway and, possibly, Poland. Several prominent authors in the field of SOE are expected to be present so there will be a chance to "meet the author". In addition, there will be a showing of filmed interviews with agents etc.

As soon as the programme is finalised we will send out details.

The third date for this year is, of course, Remembrance Sunday - 8 November.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY



As you can see, we were fortunate, once again, with the weather! I have no idea precisely how many people attended the Barn Remembrance Service, but it was wonderful to see so many who wished to pay their respects to the fallen members of the Tempsford Squadrons.

As always, the ceremony was conducted by Rev Margaret Marshall; the Cadets of 2500 ATC Squadron (St Neots) played an important part in the proceedings, forming the guard of honour and taking on wreath laying duties. They were a credit to themselves and their Squadron.



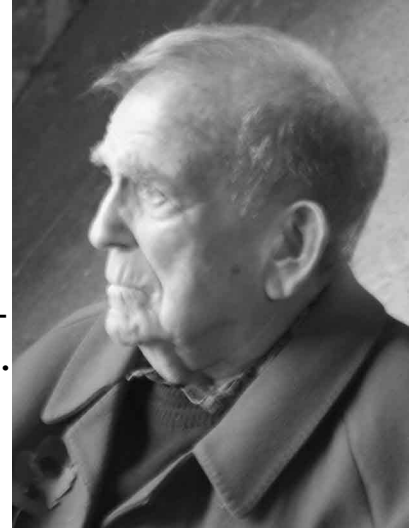
We feel it is extremely important to have young people involved in the Remembrance Service each year and we are grateful for the participation of the cadets.

The youngest “family” wreath layers. The wreath was laid in memory of their great, great uncle, who served with 138 Squadron. It is wonderful that he is remembered by young people so many generations later.



We were delighted that three Tempsford Veterans were able to attend the Remembrance Service - W/Cdr Ratcliff, Mr. Mike Gibbons, and Mr. Ken Hazelwood.

The presence of veterans at the Service is extremely important to the rest of us, and we were pleased to welcome Ken Hazelwood to his first TVARA Barn Ceremony. We very much hope that he (along with the other veterans) will be able to attend future events.



Following the service, W/Cdr Ratcliff spoke about the tragic events of the “Englandspiel”, which was the cause of many Tempsford personnel losing their lives on missions to the Netherlands.

This is a relatively unknown part of the Tempsford story, so it was fascinating for many people present to hear about it. Many of the details of this tragedy are still unknown, but facts are slowly emerging. Relatives of those who lost their lives as a result of these events may, eventually, have the answers they seek.



Anyone wishing to know more in the meantime should read “SOE in the Low Countries” by M R D Foot, and “London Calling North Pole” by H Giskes, the German behind the deception.



We are sad to report the death of Kath Croad, widow of Tom, who died at New Year. Bob was able to attend Kath’s funeral both as a friend, and to represent the TVARA.

Tom & Kath were very early members of the TVARA, and were a great asset to the group, offering support and welcoming newcomers. They will both be very much missed.

Tom’s brother, George Croad, was KIA while a member of 138 Squadron.



Ceremony in Fredericia 10th February 2015

On 10th February 1945, Stirling LK279 crashed into the waters of Lille Baelt, Denmark, while attempting to deliver arms and ammunition to the Danish Resistance. All the crew perished. The body of my brother, Flight Sgt. William Carthew, was found on the shore the following July, by which time the war had ended. He was buried with full military honours at the nearby town of Middelfart. The following year the body of Flight Sgt. Richard French was found. He was buried at Fredericia. In 1951 the plane was lifted from the sea bed and the body of an unidentified airman was discovered. He also was buried at Fredericia. The bodies of the remaining crew members were never found.

In 1946 my mother received a letter from Mr. Frederick Jespersen explaining that the local community had paid for a granite monument to be erected over her son's grave in Middelfart. My mother and I visited Denmark in 1948, our first opportunity to do so, and were made extremely welcome by Frederik and his wife, Ingeborg. Later, in 1961, I was able to make the journey again, this time with my husband and son.

On Monday 9th February 2015 I found myself once again in Denmark with my son. We had been invited by Mr. Peer Petersen to attend a ceremony at Fredericia the following day, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the deaths of the crew of LK279. On the first day we visited my brother's grave at Middelfart, which was beautifully tended and set in peaceful surroundings. The following morning, by a series of remarkable coincidences, we met the grand-daughter of Ingeborg and Frederik Jespersen, having last seen her 28 years earlier. Together we attended the ceremony at Christianskirken Church in Fredericia in the afternoon. Remarkably for the time of year, the day was dry and bright.



The church is relatively modern, with bright stained glass windows and a wide gilt altarpiece depicting the Last Supper. Orchids were growing in pots everywhere, with huge blooms by the altar. We were seated at the front row to the right of the aisle, between the Australian Ambassador to Denmark and the Military Attaché to the British Embassy in Copenhagen. To the left of the aisle were seated high ranking Officers in the Danish Forces and the Count and Countess Ingolf, representing the Danish Royal Family.

As the church bells tolled a parade of eight flag bearers proceeded down the aisle, coming to attention on each side of the altar. The vicar spoke mostly in Danish but also gave a translation in English. The service was beautiful and very moving. Before leaving the church the Count and Countess and military officers came across to welcome us. The congregation then followed the flag bearers to the cemetery where three airmen are buried, two of whom were crew members of Stirling IV LK 279. The dignitaries laid wreaths and the Last Post was sounded.

We then went into the Church Hall which had tables attractively set out and yet more white orchids everywhere. We were served with coffee and delicious Danish pastries. The Australian Ambassador asked me if I had met any of the crew, as he would like to know something of the two Australian crew members. Unfortunately I hadn't met any of the crew but I was able to pass on things that my brother had told me about the skill of the pilot and to tell him that I have letters from the mothers of both of the Australians and a photograph of Flight Sgt. Tucker taken shortly after he gained his wings. When the plane was reported missing the mothers of the crew wrote to each other and, in the case of the two Australian mothers and my mother, the connection remained for life.



Mr. Peer Petersen then made a speech recounting the story of the plane and the British Head of War Graves in Denmark gave a similar speech. My son made a speech on my behalf, thanking everyone for inviting us to this wonderful memorial service and praising the heroism of the crew and members of the Resistance.

At the end of the meeting Peer Petersen showed me a photograph of the fuel tank from LK279. He had arranged for this to be examined forensically for any signs of burning. In fact there was no evidence of this, suggesting that the plane had crashed into the water as a consequence

of poor visibility due to appalling weather and possibly to instrument failure. This was in accordance with reports from the Resistance that they had seen the plane flying extremely low over the drop zone. Peer then presented me with a large metal bolt and told me that this was one of the bolts retaining the fuel tank to the fuselage. The previous evening he had shown us German radar records tracking the Stirlings that had turned back to England on meeting bad weather and the path of Stirling IV LK279. It was a chilling moment seeing that the plane had suddenly disappeared from their screens.

I feel extremely fortunate to have been able to attend the ceremony at Fredericia. As on previous visits to Denmark, the kindness of the Danish people was extraordinary and the way in which they honour our fallen airmen is both remarkable and humbling.

Anne Dellow 15.02.2015



There were sometimes occasions when operations did not go *entirely* to plan! In his diary, F/Lt McCairns wrote the following account of a somewhat tricky Lysander operation.....

Straining to tackle the November (1943) ops which showed promise of being numerous, early in the moon [moon period] I went out to find a field near Compiègne - this time choosing a new short route and entering by the prominent estuary at Cayeux instead of the familiar Cabourg. There was a considerable haze over France at the time and visibility was very poor and it was no surprise to me when I suddenly woke up to the fact that I was completely lost. I thrashed around looking for some familiar landmark but it was hopeless, so gambling on one wild last chance I made my way back to the west, called up Tangmere for a bearing, which gave me an approximate idea of my whereabouts and then as soon as I was sure of my position, I went in for the second time. Success greeted such persistence and with little further difficulty I found the field even before I had seen a feeble signal coming up from one corner.

It was an invariable rule that operators should use as strong a lamp as possible and use it as soon as they heard the aircraft in order to attract the pilot to the field. This weak torch coupled with the fact that only two lights appeared on the ground made me most suspicious - at least if they were short of torches they could have used candles. For one night Peter [Peter Vaughan-Fowler] had landed on a flarepath entirely improvised by candles burning in tins and blazing newspapers. However, the signal had been correct so I flew low over the field and could observe nothing wrong but where I exactly was to land I did not know. Whether the second lamp represented "B" or "C" - I was not to know. Eventually I did a last low-level dummy run and as I came to the field I switched on my landing light - a miniature searchlight contained in the wheel spats - I saw the crowd scatter from "A" - concluding that all was well I came in and as usual landed on the left of "A" and ran past the second light. Still, I was not sure and as I taxied back for the second time I had my gun ready and just before I reached "A" I flicked on my landing light and confirmed they were a harmless crowd of civilians. Summoning the operator [Edgard Potier], I complained how badly he had conducted the operation, why were his maps so poor. He explained that he did not wish to dazzle me so had put on paper covers - I could have killed him. Also he warned me that I must take off to the left of the second light - mentioning that it represented "C" and that "B" had failed, pointing out incidentally that because I had not been sufficiently (low) in the air to appreciate this, I had landed well to the right of the proposed strip. Thank heavens it was a large, flat field. However he promised he would do better next time and I found difficulty in restraining myself - "There will be no next time as far as I am concerned". Without a thought to the passengers off we went to England and as we taxied to a stop at dispersal I was regaled with the sight of first one, then two, three & at last four hefty Americans technical sergeants climbing out, bending down, kissing the ground and exclaiming, "Christopher Columbus, we are in England!"

Maybe this is what was needed!

Cartoon courtesy of Tangmere Museum.



Helper: "Don't be angry, this is all we can find to replace the lamp which failed."

Tempsford Veterans & Relatives Association

We help the old to remember

and

The young to understand

138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons

Special then

Special now

Special always

Contact details:

Bob Body - editor@tempsford-squadrons.info

Helen Body - tvaradmin@tempsford-squadrons.info

Websites

www.tempsford-squadrons.info

www.161squadron.org

www.tempsford.20m.com