

TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2016



Bob's Diary

This has been an “eventful” six months, to say the least; I've been thinking of buying a season ticket back to the UK, given the number of visits this year for TVARA activities!

Starting at the end: I think a good time was had by all who attended the unveiling of the Tempsford Plaque at the National Memorial Arboretum on 11 September. The weather was kind to us, we were given great support by the Cadets from 2500 ATC (St Neots) Squadron and, most importantly, the Plaque looks wonderful - many thanks indeed to all who contributed both financially and with their time to ensure that this permanent memorial to the men of 138 and 161 Squadrons is in a place of honour at the UK's year-round centre of Remembrance.

When the suggestion for the Plaque was first made, it seemed the ideal opportunity to commemorate the Squadrons in a public arena, and we are, I think, all delighted that it has come to fruition. Special thanks must go to David Briggs for the simple and dignified design of the Plaque, and to Mark Seaman for providing the words.



It is hoped that this memorial will give many more people a chance to learn a little more about 138 and 161 Squadrons.

Summer Gathering



We were delighted to welcome Australian sisters, Jill Wilson and Sue Witham to the Summer Gathering - they are the nieces of F/Lt Reginald Witham, 138 Sqn. Jill and Sue are regular attendees at the ATVARA Ceremonies, so it was wonderful to be able to show them the “original” version!

It is part of the true spirit of the TVARA that relatives from all over the world are able to join us on these occasions from time to time.

Many people had a chance to look at the exhibits in the airfield museum.



Shirley Gibbons proudly wearing the Légion d'Honneur awarded to her husband, Mike.

At the Barn



After an enjoyable lunch, we were treated to another fascinating talk by Mark Seaman. Many thanks to him for giving TVARA members a glimpse into the very early days of the “Secret War”

Looking back - Part 1

Those of you who have been “around” a while may recall that in 2006 we were visited by a small group of cadets from No 161 (Highland) Squadron ATC. The cadets prepared a questionnaire for the veterans, but the “answer sheets” have never been published - until now! As it is 10 years since this event, we thought it might be a nice idea to share the questions, and the answers given by 161 Squadron pilot, Ron Morris.

Please tell us your name

1. What year were you born?
2. Did you enlist or were you called up?
3. What did you train as and was the ATC involved in the process?
4. How and when did you get involved with 161?
5. Were you able to tell your family what you were doing?
6. How did you feel?
7. Where were you sent to?
8. How did you stay in touch with your family?
9. What was the accommodation like?
10. How did people entertain themselves?
11. What did you do when on leave?
12. Where did you travel while in the service?
13. What was the journey like?
14. Is there any incident that really stands out in your mind?
15. Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual event?
16. What were some of the pranks that you or others would pull?
17. What did you think of officers or fellow soldiers?
18. Was there something special you did for "good luck"?
19. When did you leave 161 and how?
20. Where were you and what were you doing on D-Day?
21. Where were you and what were you doing on VE-Day and VJ-Day ?
22. How did you celebrate the end of the war?

22. How did you celebrate the end of the war?

23. How did you get home, what was it like arriving home?

24. Is there anything that you would like to add/tell us?

The cadets also asked some questions about POWs. Ron Morris was not a prisoner of war, but at the end of his answers he makes some interesting comments about the way in which POWs were brought home.

① 29 AUG 1922. IN LIVERPOOL
② I VOLUNTEERED → 6 MONTHS PRIOR TO CALL-UP
③ I TRAINED AS A PILOT. NO A.T.C. INVOLVEMENT
④ ALTHOUGH I HAD BEEN AN A.T.C. CAPTAIN IN
⑤ 1941
⑥ MARCH OF 1944 I WAS ON OPS MARKET
⑦ NO LEFT CONTINUOUSLY
⑧ SORRY TO HAVE TO MISHANDLE PEOPLE BETWEEN 5 AM '43 AND JANUARY
⑨ R.A.F. TEMSFORD
⑩ BY LETTER AND BY PHONE
⑪ GOOD BY WARTIME STANDARDS
⑫ SHOWS, CINEMAS, SPORT, DANCE, SKATING
⑬ AS IN TEN
⑭ 3 weeks in HEATON PARK - 17 DAYS TRAIN
⑮ JOURNEY TO GREENOCK - 14 DAYS IN
⑯ CANADY TO NEW YORK. 17 DAYS TRAIN
⑰ TO MONTREAL CANADA - 6 DAYS TRAIN
⑱ JOURNEY TO ALBERTA.
⑲ HUNDREDS FOR SOME OF THE AMERICAN
⑳ TROOPSHIP EATING AMERICAN FOOD AT THE
㉑ WARTIME RATIONS. WE WERE MADE
㉒ VERY WELCOME IN USA AND IN CANADA
㉓ BEING PRESENTED WITH MY WINGS
㉔ HANDING TO DRIVE A CAR ON THE
㉕ WRONG SIDE OF THE ROAD WITH HAND
㉖ CHANGE GEAR LEVERS
㉗ UNPRINTABLY DISGUSTING
㉘ GENERALLY GOOD THOUGHTS HAVING
㉙ BEEN BOTH
㉚ NO

19
20
3 JUNE 45 - SQUADRON DISBANDED
TAKING AGENT TO HOLLAND. HE IS
STILL ALIVE AND WELL AT 90

21 ORGANISED FUN AND GAMES ON
THE STATION
22 WITH GREAT JOY AND THANKFULNESS
THAT I HAD SURVIVED (23) BY TRAIN
24 YET THE A.T.C IS A GREAT
WAY TO LEARN DISCIPLINE AND
ABOVE ALL SELF DISCIPLINE. IT
WILL PREPARE YOU FOR YOUR FUTURE
WHATEVER DIRECTION YOU TAKE.
A GOOD WAY TO GET INTO THE
R.A.F FOR A WONDERFUL FUTURE

P.O.WS NOTE
IN MAY OF 1945 I TOOK MY MUSSON
ON 3 OCCASIONS TO LÜNBURG HEATH
WHERE THE PRACE HAD BEEN
SIGNED. THERE I PICKED UP ON
3 SEPARATE DAYS, 12, 14 and 15
OF OUR FOX POWS AND BROUGHT
THEM BACK TO THE U.K. THEY
WERE OVERJOYED TO GET BACK
SO QUICKLY AND I WAS DELIGHTED
TO HAVE BEEN OF SERVICE

R.M. MANN



Cadets with Ron (right) and
Harold Watson

From Helen - Looking back - Part 2

In October of 1997, I received a phone call from Bob that marked the start of a totally new phase in our lives, and which led to the foundation of the TVARA and where we are today.

“They have found Ian” was what Bob told me that day. Ian - Fl/Lt John Menzies DFC - had been listed as missing, presumed killed, on the night of 5/6 July 1944. Over the years of searching for information about him, we had encountered Joan Pearson, the widow of Denis Withers, his wireless operator, and it was Joan who had given Bob the news about Ian. Denis and the other members of the crew of 161 Squadron Hudson FK790 were buried in Makkum, in Friesland, close to where the aircraft was shot down, and Joan had made contact with people in that area many years before. When it was decided to raise the aircraft from the IJsselmeer Joan was informed straight away.

Fl/Lt Menzies was buried in Makkum the following year, beside his crew, and with members of the families of all the crew members in attendance. As time went on, the friendship between us grew, and the concept of a Tempsford “association” grew with it, gradually involving many other families and a number of veterans of the Tempsford Squadrons. So here we are - the TVARA has around 400 members now, and “new” families are getting in touch all the time.



Joan Pearson died earlier this year, and Bob was able to go to her funeral - on his own account, of course, and also to represent the TVARA. We will always remember Joan with affection and appreciated very much her support of the TVARA as it grew.



The other person now “missing” from our group is, of course, Wing Commander Leonard Ratcliff. Wing Commander Ratcliff was described at his memorial service as the “Patriarch” of the TVARA, and he was, indeed, the centre of our meetings over the past few years. Many will remember him presenting Lady Erroll’s daughter, Lal, with the “original” Runways to Freedom brooch. He was always able to rise to the occasion and give generously of his time to those who wanted to ask questions about Tempsford.

Wing Commander Ratcliff is seen here with Bob and Edwin at a reception following the unveiling of the Memorial to the Special Duties Squadrons at St Clement Danes’ in 2013. This was a project dear to W/Cdr Ratcliff’s heart, and we should all be pleased that he was able to see it through to its conclusion and have the Squadrons’ contribution recognised at long last.



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.tempsfordairfield.com