



# TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

## SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2019



### *Bob's diary*

This year's Summer Gathering took place in the sunshine, so members had plenty of time to "mingle" at the Barn, before heading to the church for the normal service. The Antipodean connection was alive and well, in the person of Kate Sanford, who gave one of the readings in the service. It is wonderful that, for so many years, we have had visitors from the other side of the world taking part in our Summer Gathering.



After the church service we again moved to the village hall for lunch, and enjoyed a fascinating talk given by a member of one of the Squadrons doing the same work in today's RAF. We were told that, although today they have high tech equipment (GPS and night vision "kit", for example), some of the old methods are still used - torches are used as target markers on the ground.

However, on one occasion when they were approaching the target area, at the agreed time, the target was marked in a most unusual way; a Union Jack beach towel laid out on the sand in the middle of nowhere!



## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

We are awaiting confirmation of arrangements for Remembrance Sunday. These will be emailed separately as soon as they are available.

## JUNE & JULY

Bob writes:-

July is a special month for me. In the early hours of the morning of 6 July 1944, the Hudson aircraft flown by my uncle, F/L J W (Ian) Menzies DFC was shot down over the IJsselmeer, and all on board were killed.

In 1998, following the discovery of the aircraft (which contained my uncle's remains) the tiny village of Exmorra dedicated a monument, formed from one of the salvaged propellers, to those who had died. This year, on the 75th anniversary of the crash, the villagers decided that it would be appropriate to mark the event with a solemn commemoration. Relatives of the crew and the agents who died with them were invited; some of the agents' relatives travelled from New Zealand.

The main organisers of the event, Klaasje & Paul Bijlsma, have been close friends of ours since the unveiling of the monument, 21 years ago.



They set up a simple, moving ceremony, with local children taking an active role. After the ceremony, refreshments were provided in the village hall/pub and there was time to talk to people I hadn't seen since my uncle's funeral in 1998.



During my time in the Netherlands, I also paid a visit to the Dutch “Identification and Recovery” unit. Their job is just what the name suggests; bodies are still being found, and enormous efforts are made to identify them and to contact the next of kin.

I am extremely grateful to Capt. Geert Jonker, who took the time to explain their work to me and allowed me inspect some of the artifacts.



The care and respect afforded to the remains are impressive, and I was grateful to know that my uncle would have been treated in this way. I was shown some artifacts from his aircraft - a shoe, an empty wallet, a pair of broken reading glasses and other pieces. As it could not be ascertained which person on board had owned which of these objects they could not be passed to the next of kin. At the end of the visit, though, there was an emotional surprise! I was given a watch and was told that it had been found in the cockpit next to Ian's remains and they were, therefore, sure that it was his. Sadly, but unsurprisingly, after 53 years in the water it didn't work!



## FROM THE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES

Following the formation of No.419 Flight on 20 August 1940, a meeting was held on 25 August. In attendance were representatives from S.I.S., S/L Knowles, and others. Under discussion were the requirements of S.I.S. It appears that, as yet, there was little understanding of the capabilities of both the Lysander and its pilots when it came to pick up operations.....

From the minutes of the meeting:

“3. S.I.S. require the flight to discharge the role of:

- a. Parachuting Agents into enemy occupied territory such as the South of France, Czecho-Slovakia, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Southern Norway and Poland.
- b. Landing Agents in these countries on moonlight nights and later picking them up.

4. To discharge the role under a) it is obvious that something better than a Lysander will be necessary. To get the range and a suitable platform from which to make easy drops and aircraft like a Whitley with the dustbin removed would probably be best. 419 Flight should therefore have a Whitley added to establishment. I suggest 1 + 1.

5. With regard to the role under b) in the first place, although the landing of even Lysanders at night on a landing ground - perhaps a disused aerodrome or large field - is hazardous, Sercombe stated that it was impossible to get firm information regarding any landing ground it was prepared to use. Information would therefore have to be got by either P.R.U. Spitfire reconnaissance or moonlight reconnaissance by a Lysander. It is doubtful whether reconnaissance of either kind would give sufficiently good information to undertake landings with a chance of getting away with it, since if the landing grounds were obstructed I very much doubt if obstructions would show up. On the other hand moonlight landings on the beach at DUNKIRK or the HAGUE would be quite practicable since these could take place below high water mark and the likelihood of obstruction would be slight, but S.I.S. are able to arrange for Agents to be landed from small craft on beaches and therefore air landings are not required.

6. It seems, however, that S.I.S. are in rather a tangle regarding the getting of information and until we can start them off, information will not get better. We shall, therefore, have to undertake the first landings on imperfect information in the hope that when the organisation is going, information will improve and Agents can then be landed and picked up at aerodromes where the landing conditions are known.”



Picture courtesy of Tangmere Museum

## Flying Officer Pym - Operational Dog (from our own archives)

Pym was the offspring of a rough-haired fox terrier dog, and a smooth-haired bitch. At the very early age of eight weeks, he was given to me as a mascot. I had just commenced operational flying with 427 Sqdn. RCAF. He was terribly small - about the size of a pint beer mug - and fitted comfortably into my great coat pocket. At this tender age he was considered too young for flying operations, but got airborne on all other occasions. Whilst we did our stint, he was left in the tender care of a charming WAAF, who generally had a lot of problems with him. Animals were frowned upon on some Air Force stations, and certainly in WAAF quarters, and when the Orderly Officer did her rounds, Pym inevitably finished up at the bottom of the bed, beneath the blankets - lucky dog!

He did two operations with 427 Sqdn; one a "gardening" job off the Friesian Isles, and the other the raid on the Dunlop Rubber factory at Mont Lucan, near Vichy, France. During these trips he spent most of his time lying on the Bomb Aimer's couch in the nose of the aircraft, and Len Grant, our Bomb Aimer, was always loath to move him.

On posting to 161 Sqdn his first adventure was to cock a naughty leg over the signing in book in the guard room, much to the displeasure of the SF on duty. He loved flying, whether it was circuits and bumps, cross country, or operations, and it was during his stay at 161 that he was steadily promoted, eventually becoming titled Flying Officer Pym. His name arose from a caricature at that time called Pilot Officer Prune, but we knew he was no prune, so he became Pym. RAF Henlow decided to make him a parachute which was fastened to his harness and worked by static cord - it took up to 40lbs in weight. Henlow were responsible for much of the equipment used by Special Operations Squadrons, and they insisted on trying out the chute over their own airfield. Pym was duly despatched from 600 feet on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1943, with numerous ground personnel waiting for him, as he had no means of quick release. There were no problems, other than that he tended to drift, having lack of weight, and he was picked up safely.

Pym became everybody's friend, and the mascot of the squadron; he was even caricatured on the nose of an aircraft! All "B" flight crews flying at various times to reception committees all over Europe would always find Pym in the Crew Room, for a pat and a good luck wish before getting airborne. He had a "doggy" flying jacket, should he feel the cold but, as always, his routine was to visit all crew members in their various positions within the aircraft; once airborne he took up his position with the Bomb Aimer, and curled up beside him in the nose of the aircraft. One pre-flight tradition he had was to "lubricate" the landing wheels of the aircraft while the rest of us did our inspection.

For Pym, flying was only hazardous on one occasion, the night of 16<sup>th</sup> /17<sup>th</sup> December 1943 when, after a dicey trip, and the weather men had boobed, we were forced to abandon the aircraft and I brought him down tucked in my Irving jacket, with just a hand over his head until the chute opened above our heads. We both landed safely and proceeded to a farmhouse, where the inhabitants were just getting up for milking etc.; it was 5.35 am. The farmer showed no surprise at an airman and a dog arriving, there, and gave me a gammon breakfast, and a bone for Pym, which was the biggest he'd ever seen.

On arrival back at Tempsford, the first question asked by all, including the Padre was where was

Pym, and was he alright? After he had completed 42 ops, and we had finished our tour with 161 sqdn, our crew was broken up, and I was sent to 405 Sqdn RCAF. But high level raiding and potential Pathfinders was no place for a terrier, and he was sent to his home town of Hereford to live with my mother. He lived to be sixteen years of age, finally succumbing to a heart attack whilst lying in front of the fire, so died peacefully. He was buried at the foot of the garden and a large lilac tree now grows over his burial place.

Flying Officer Pym was a delightful little dog, and a great friend to everyone - ground crew, aircrew, WAAFs; everyone. He enjoyed his "tipple" of beer like the rest of us. In our "off" days we descended to Hitchin in Herts; "The Cock Hotel" adopted us and there was always a large dish of Wells & Winches' bitter waiting for him when we visited this hostelry.

One almost sad occasion occurred in Hitchin. We used to stay at the Hermitage flats, run by a delightful couple, Mr & Mrs Sergeant. One anticipated late night, we left him there, but somehow he got out and a mass search was made at about three in the morning. Fortunately we found him. I still have his parachute and jacket and at almost every Tempsford reunion he is mentioned by several members, so even though he is gone, he is still not forgotten - he was so much a part of our flying days in that Squadron.

*By J R Matthews - reproduced by kind permission of Mrs P Matthews*

Recently, Bob became involved in a discussion about which airborne troops were the first into France on the eve of D Day. Was it a JEDBURGH team, as claimed by the other party to the discussion, or was it a team of SAS troops, which Bob suggested.

A dip into the archives gave the answer.

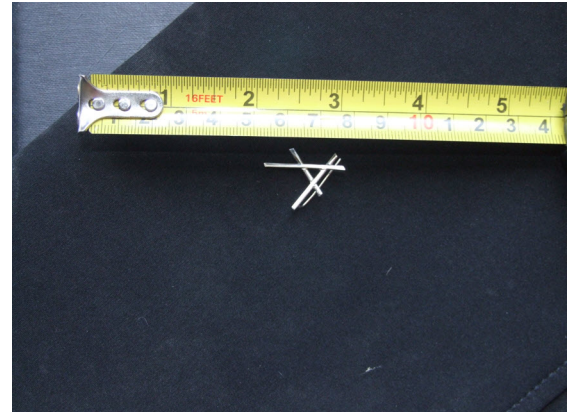
The first Jedburgh team to be dropped was from a 161 Sqn Halifax (later teams were dropped by the American "Carpetbaggers"). The first of the SAS teams was dropped from a 138 Sqn Halifax. These aircraft were piloted by P/O Tattersall and F/L Johnson respectively.

P/O Tattersall's debriefing report gives the time of drop as 0133 hrs (nice to be exact), and F/L Johnson's report gives the time of drop as 0043 hrs. Therefore, Bob won the debate by a margin of 50 minutes!

## RUNWAYS TO FREEDOM

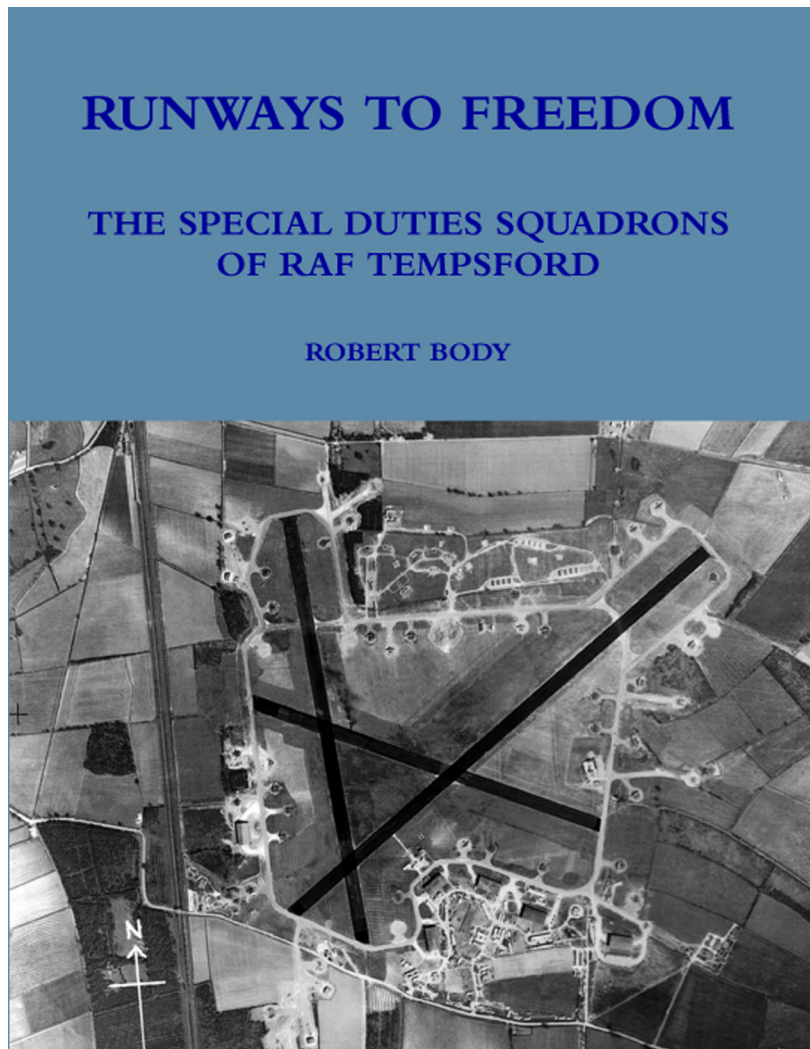
New members might like to know that we have for sale silver lapel pins, designed to represent the three Tempsford runways. The design was named “Runways to Freedom” by veteran of the Tempsford Squadrons, Jack Galbraith.

The pin is shown below, together with a scale to show the size. Exclusively for TVARA members, pins are made to order by a local jeweller here in Crete, and can be purchased from Bob & Helen. The price is £25 + £2.50 postage. Please contact us if you would like one, and we will let you have payment methods.



Bob’s book, “Runways to Freedom” is available in both print and ebook formats from:

Lulu - [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) and Amazon.





# ***138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons***

***Special then***

***Special now***

***Special always***

## Contact details:

Bob Body - [editor@tempsford-squadrons.info](mailto:editor@tempsford-squadrons.info)

Helen Body - [tvaradmin@tempsford-squadrons.info](mailto:tvaradmin@tempsford-squadrons.info)

## Websites

[www.tempsford-squadrons.info](http://www.tempsford-squadrons.info)

[www.161squadron.org](http://www.161squadron.org)

[www.tempsfordairfield.com](http://www.tempsfordairfield.com)