



TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2020



Bob's diary

As there was no Summer Gathering this year, this newsletter will be shorter than usual!

However, we have been able to find some interesting archive material to entertain you, and hope you enjoy having another glimpse into the work of the Squadrons.



Those who are fairly new to the group might like to see a couple of photographs from the early days; veteran Ron Morris receiving a copy of the citation for his Dutch Vliegerkruis in 2004, and Harold Watson doing a “this is your Tempsford life” on Ken Tattersall in 2008.



LET'S BUST A FEW MYTHS

SOE agents are often referred to as SPIES is this correct?

Score 10 points for NO and -10 for YES.

The Definition of a SPY.....a person employed by a government or other organisation to secretly obtain information on an enemy or competitor.

A quotation from a memo written by Gladwyn Jebb (CEO of SOE until Feb 1942) to a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

“A further general criticism is that S.O.E. seem to be referred to under the heading of ‘Intelligence’ and are purely an operational body whose function is to give direct assistance to the other three Services in the conduct of the war.”

Another definition from official papers:

“SOE - an organisation working secretly in France for *other than* * intelligence purposes”

Finally:- Special Operations Executive was established, and its first Directive given, in a War Cabinet Meeting memorandum of 19th July 1940, in which it is recorded that:

“The Prime Minister has further decided after consultation with the ministers concerned that a new Organisation shall be established forthwith to coordinate all action by way of subversion and sabotage against the enemy overseas....this Organisation will be known as the Special Operations Executive.”

Conclusion:- SOE personnel were most definitely secret agents and although they undoubtedly came across “intelligence” during their work they were not spies.

* Highlighting editorial

No.138 and No.161 squadrons were SOE squadrons and the pilots SOE pilots.

True or False?

False. Again 10 points for correct answer and -10 for incorrect.

During the summer of 1940 the need for air transport to get agents deep into enemy occupied territory and, perhaps more importantly, the need to get intelligence reports back to London without delay resulted in the first allotment of aircraft to a “Special Duty” RAF unit being made in the UK, at the request of SIS! A Flight of 2 Lysanders (+2 in reserve) was created in August for clandestine landing operations.

Conclusion:- the term SOE pilot is completely wrong.

While on the subject of SOE and their requirement for air transport for Pick ups and landings it is worth noting that around 75% of this type of operation was for SIS not SOE!

Last one:

The famous Lysanders used by 161 Squadron were not always matt black.

True - 10 points again! False - minus 10.

Hugh Verity joined the squadron in late 1942 and, being a former night fighter pilot, pointed out that on a night of a full moon a black painted aircraft would be bathed in light and perfectly silhouetted against the ground so around the beginning of 1943 (exact date unknown), the Lysanders were repainted in more normal camouflage colours.

FROM THE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES

SECRET

From:- F/Lt Murphy, 138 Squadron, Stradishall

To:- Officer Commanding, 138 Squadron, Stradishall

Date:- 24th December 1941

Subject: - Report on Operation STOAT

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report on the above operation attempted on the night 8th/9th December 1941.

I became airborne at 22.10 hours at Tangmere and set course for Beachy Head. I reached the pinpoint at 22.30 hours and set course for Abbeville. At approximately 22.40 10/10^{ths} cloud appeared below me with a further 10/10^{ths} above, and I was unable to pinpoint myself on the French coast, so altered course at 23.00 hours on E.T.A.

Ten minutes before E.T.A. the Meuse the cloud became about 7/10^{ths} below so I went down through a gap and found the Meuse beneath me. I pinpointed myself here and set course for Neufchateau at 23.50.

The ground was covered with snow which made the woods stand out very well and at 24.00 hours I had no difficulty in pinpointing myself over the aerodrome at Neufchateau. I circled the aerodrome, but saw no lights until at 00.40 hours, when I saw a light north of the woods on the southern edge of the aerodrome. This light advanced in a northerly direction flashing a series of dots interspersed with "I's". I continued to circle having given my signal and at approximately 00.45 hours another light appeared approximately due west of the flashing light and at a distance of approximately 100 yards from it. This light gave a steady beam.

The first light continued to flash so I closed my throttle twice over again, but it still continued to flash.

I knew that this agent was being chased and thought that in the excitement of seeing the aircraft he had forgotten to switch his torch on to a steady beam, and I thereupon decided to land.

I approached the flarepath and touched down some 20 yards short of the flashing light. I was using my landing light and approximately 100 yards in front of me the ground seemed to dip down very sharply so I opened up again and took off.

I then decided to land on the Eastern edge of the aerodrome, and this I did remaining where I was as soon as the aircraft stopped moving, thinking that STOAT would run up to the aircraft. Not, however, being too certain of the situation I lowered the port window and had my revolver ready in case of any nonsense.

The flashing light now became a steady beam and advanced towards me from a distance of approximately 200 yards, with some figures on each side of it spaced out some 10 yards apart. This struck me as being unusual but as the operation seemed unusual anyway I felt there was no reason for alarm.

At approximately 00.55 there was a sharp explosion and I thought that my trigger finger had been itching a little too much, and that I had inadvertently fired my revolver.

It soon became obvious that this was not the case and that the gentlemen approaching had every intention of being as unfriendly as possible and furthermore were being actively belligerent. Realising that there was nothing to be gained by staying, I waited neither upon the order of my going nor upon the direction of take-off, which was completed in a northerly direction at approximately 01.00 hours.

I set course for Base and landed there without further incident at 03.20 hours.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,
(signed) A.M.Murphy

In "Agents by Moonlight", Freddie Clark described the escapade, and added the following:

"The aircraft received some 30 or more hits but he (Murphy) managed to take off safely but he sustained a wound in his neck. Fortunately, and in true RAF tradition, he was flying with one of his wife's stockings round his neck for luck - which in this case it was. He tightened it, staunching the flow of blood, and flew the aeroplane, not without difficulty, back to Tangmere.

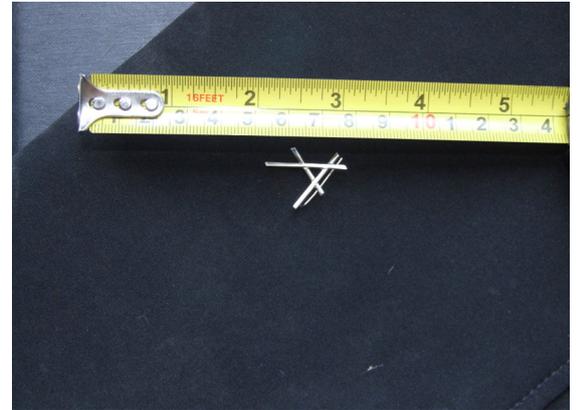
The two agents waiting to be picked up were Captain Jean Cassart of the Belgium Air Force and Henri Verhaegen his wireless operator. In spite of Henri Verhaegen being wounded and both closely pursued they scrambled away. Captain Cassart was captured a few days later and taken to Berlin for trial. He escaped and eventually returned to England. This was to be the one and only Lysander pickup sortie outside of France".



RUNWAYS TO FREEDOM

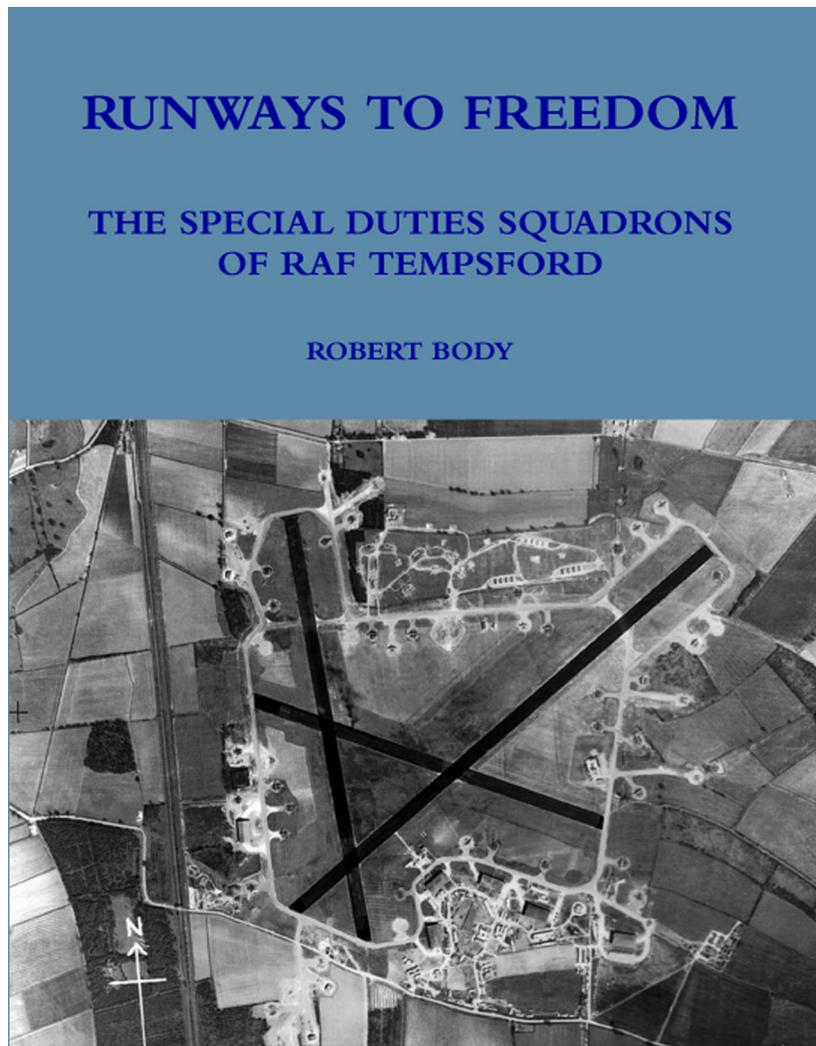
New members might like to know that we have for sale silver lapel pins, designed to represent the three Tempsford runways. The design was named “Runways to Freedom” by veteran of the Tempsford Squadrons, Jack Galbraith.

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 and Amazon.



138 & 161 Special Duties Squadrons

Special then

Special now

Special always

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