



# Tempsford Veterans and Relatives Association

Newsletter  
Spring 2013



## Welcome to our Spring Newsletter

As you will see, we have contributions from both a veteran (Jack Galbraith) and the relative of an agent (Yvette Pitt, whose mother was Yvonne Cormeau) this time - a "rounded" picture of the work of RAF Tempsford and the people behind the facts & figures.

We were delighted by the numbers who attended the Remembrance Sunday Service, and by the number of tributes laid - this increases every year, as more relatives find out about the wartime activities of their family member. Some of these activities have remained "buried" since the end of the war, and it is always a pleasure when relatives "appear" and ask for help.

We are sad to report the death of Flt/Lt Leonard Smith DFC. Bob came into contact with Leonard Smith in the early years of searching for information about his uncle, Flt/Lt Menzies, and found him helpful and willing to share whatever information he could about life at RAF Tempsford. TVARA member Clive Page was able to attend the funeral.

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### Websites:

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

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

[www.tempsford.20m.com](http://www.tempsford.20m.com)



Photo courtesy of Tangmere Museum

## An unusual Operation!

On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1942 RAF Station Tempsford received a communication from the Air Ministry regarding a request by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. The communication was as follows:

“Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands has requested the Air Staff to undertake an operation involving the dropping of about 20 cwt of cigarettes over Holland.

The Air Staff have agreed that R.A.F. Station Tempsford should undertake this operation.”

Tempsford was informed that the operation could take place from 22<sup>nd</sup> August onwards, which was the date from which the cigarettes would be available.

The cigarettes were to be collected from Messrs. Ardath Tobacco Co. Ltd., 15-51 Worship St., London EC2.

“There will be 50,000 packets, wrapped in stout cellophane, measuring 3”x 2½”x ⅞”

The areas for the drops given by the Dutch authorities were:

“On the west side of the ZUIDER ZEE, ENKHUIZEN, HOORN.

On the east side of the ZUIDER ZEE, the area bounded on the east and north by the coast, and a line drawn through HILVERSUM 52° 18’N, 06° 40’E; APPINGDAN 53° 18’N, 06° 55’E, missing out the towns of LEEUWARDEN, GRONIGEN & ZWOLLE, and it is preferred that villages and small towns picked out so far as is practicable within these areas. The boundaries of these areas are, of course, subject to the latest intelligence on flak and searchlights.”

A second communication from the Air Ministry on 19<sup>th</sup> August gives simpler instructions that “the cigarettes may be dropped over any suitably populated district of Holland or over villages where towns are protected by flak.”

The packaging of the cigarettes awaiting collection left a little to be desired.....

“The cigarettes will be wrapped in packets of 20, covered in cellophane but will not be in cartons.”

Helpfully, the memo states “it will, therefore, be advisable to take down some sacks or boxes to put the cigarettes into.” Not a bad idea when one considers that there were 50,000 packets!

Of course, with this quantity of tobacco products to be shipped, Customs required the correct paperwork.

“Customs & Excise requires the following:

- a) The shipping bills to be receipted by the Commanding Officer at the aerodrome to which the cigarettes are removed.
- b) The preliminary receipt as at (a) to be completed subsequently by the production of certificates given by the C.O. concerned, that on a specific date a specified number of cigarettes were dropped over Holland from bombers from the Station.”

On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1942 a certificate was supplied stating that on 1-2 September 1942 100,000 cigarettes were dropped by No. 161 Squadron.



In yet another memo from the Air Ministry (12<sup>th</sup> August 1942) the matter of security was addressed.

"5. Security - It is essential that no packets of cigarettes should get into the hands of personnel at the Station who may be likely to throw away empty packets in the neighbouring villages!"

This operation was carried out using 3 crews in Whitley aircraft.

**SECRET.**

W/L 30420134 22004, 7043 P.L.S. 91-821

R.A.F. Form 540 Page No. 33-5

See instructions for use of this form in K.E. and A.C.I., para. 2349, and War Manual, Pt. II, Chapter XX., and notes in R.A.F. Pocket Book. No. of pages used for day \_\_\_\_\_

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK

of (Unit or Formation) 101st Operations

Place	Date	Time	Summary of Events	References to Appendices
<u>TEMPSFORD</u>	<u>SEPTEMBER</u>		<u>Operations carried out.</u>	
	<u>1942</u>			
	<u>1/2</u>		<u>3 WHITLEYS land in F trap against 101st HOLLAND:</u>	
	<u>1/2</u>			
			<u>Z. 6629-N</u>	
<u>GASPER I</u>			<u>Z. 9160-U</u>	<u>Z. 6828</u>
<u>GASPER II</u>			<u>F/Sgt Wynne Capt</u>	<u>P/O Smith. Capt</u>
<u>GASPER III</u>			<u>Sgt Readhead Capt</u>	<u>Sgt Gray</u>
			<u>F/Sgt Rolfe</u>	<u>W/O Kite</u>
			<u>Sgt Cruwys</u>	<u>Sgt Farley</u>
			<u>Sgt Sheares</u>	<u>Sgt Pope</u>
			<u>Sgt Andrews</u>	<u>P/O Russell</u>
			<u>Sgt Moxon</u>	<u>Sgt Gander</u>
			<u>Sgt Manning</u>	
			<u>Aircraft left off at 22.00 hours &amp; operations successfully carried out</u>	

The crews were:

F/Sgt Wynne (Capt)

Sgt Readhead (Capt)

P/O Smith (Capt)

F/Sgt Rolfe

F/Sgt Roy

Sgt Grey

Sgt Cruwys

Sgt Wilson

W/O Kite

Sgt Sheares

Sgt Martin

Sgt Farley

Sgt Andrews

Sgt Scott

Sgt Pope

Sgt Moxon

Sgt Glazzard

P/O Russell

Sgt Manning

Sgt Gander

OPERATION CODE NAME

**GASPER!**

## Remembering Marcelle Adamson

It was in the Spring of 2006 that Marcelle Adamson, an elderly French lady elegantly dressed and wearing a smart beret to keep out the cold, first set eyes upon Tempsford Airfield. She gazed around in nostalgic wonderment, recalling how, as a twenty year old girl in France she had become involved with the flights from Tempsford of the RAF's Special Duties Squadrons. Her task then had been to find suitable clandestine landing sites, in order for the RAF to transport personnel between England and France, and for the parachute drops of personnel, weapons, equipment, funds and even pigeons to the French Resistance behind enemy lines.

She was one of the first women to take part in aircraft landings, doing so for the first time at the landing of a Hudson in the Ain region in April 1943, code named JUNOT. The pilot was Wing Commander Pickard of 161 Squadron, who was astounded to find that one of the torch bearers was a woman.

Marcelle's time as a Resistance Agent started while she was a student in Lyon when a stranger, who turned out to be Paul Schmidt, called on her one evening in 1942. Paul, one of the first three people to collaborate with Jean Moulin in the fledgling Resistance Movement in France, set about recruiting Marcelle because she had been recommended by a mutual friend. But there was much for her to consider. It meant that she had to give up her studies, place her family and friends in danger, and last, but not least, give up the love of her life, who was a Polish Army Officer whom she had met at the university in Lyon.

But she agreed, and Paul gave her the codename "Collette". She was trained, initially, to work as a courier, picking up messages from designated letterboxes and leaving new messages there; travelling extensively between Lyon, the Massif Central, the Vercors and Clermont in cold, dirty, smelly trains and always at risk of detection by the Germans, of bombings and of sabotage.

After this initial introduction to Resistance work she was officially engaged in General de Gaulle's secret service, the B.C.R.A., (Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action), and was instructed in the workings of the S.A.P. (Service des Atterrissages et Parachutages). This was the organisation created in 1942 by Jean Moulin responsible for parachute drops, set-downs and pick-ups by the RAF. Before each full moon Marcelle would submit to the RAF, via the B.C.R.A., a provisional list of landing sites for their approval. All potential landing sites were listed in coded descriptions, including their co-ordinates based on Michelin maps. She would send the RAF very precise details of the layout of the proposed landing sites including length, width and safety aspects. For set-downs and pick-ups, the RAF needed to know the condition of the ground: was it flat, firm, well drained; were there any obstacles like bushes or rocks and, if so, how tall were they.



*Marcelle  
on her  
90th birthday*

She was hunted by the Gestapo, but worked on until the Liberation of France. She was then reunited with her family and friends, and with her beloved Polish Army officer, whom she soon married. After the war they lived first in Scotland, and then they settled in England with their two daughters.

She was laid to rest in the gentle sunshine of a late November day close to the Hampshire home she had shared with her husband for many years.

She had seen 92 Springtimes.

*Yvette Pill*

## Tempsford's Contribution in WWII

As seen by one who served there

For aircrew like me, who flew out of RAF Tempsford in heavy bomber aircraft, it is difficult to assess from our individual flights what contribution was being made to the war effort in WWII. To begin with, those flights were secret, carried out by Tempsford's two special duty squadrons, 138 and 161. Most of those flights were not dramatic and consisted of mainly individual aircraft carrying supplies to underground resistance movements in occupied Europe in the dark. A crew were given a target identified only by the map coordinates of latitude and longitude. Finding that pinpoint - some isolated spot in the country side - and flying at low level, the crew would look for a signal from the ground that a resistance reception committee was in place to receive a drop of supplies. What the supplies were, who the recipients were, and what happened afterwards was never anything revealed to the crews. Crews could only guess that something useful for the war effort would be the outcome of a night's flight.

It was worse, of course, when because of bad weather, one could not find the target area; the crew was on its own, there being no pathfinder planes, as in the bombing raids, to mark the target area. Even finding the area did not mean success if there was no one on the ground ready for the flight, or if ground personnel gave the wrong identifying signal, as often happened. Even if all seemed right, one could not be sure the supplies might not have ended up in the hands of an enemy who had infiltrated the reception committee. It would not be unusual for a crew, during the course of its tour of duties at Tempsford, to return to base at least half the time with its load still intact, with demoralizing effects for both the aircrew and the serving ground crew.

Although these drop operations (or missions) were not in the nature of offensive ones against the enemy, they were just as dangerous in terms of casualties as those carried out as part of the RAF's bombing raids. Despite that, Tempsford ops lacked the glamour of taking part in the bombing offensive, and a tour of ops could pass without being associated with anything spectacular. Furthermore, Tempsford operations had, by their very nature, to be secretive. Crews could not tell anyone off base what they were doing, not even loved ones at home. Should aircrew get killed in action all their next-of-kin could be told was just that - no details on what action they had been killed in. If lucky, a Tempsford crew could complete a tour of duty (33 ops in my case) in a non-offensive role, without knowing what had been accomplished for the war effort. Even decades later, with the release of a great deal of secret files about underground activities, it is still not possible to relate one's ops to what happened in the occupied territories to help win the war.

This is most frustrating for Tempsford veterans (such as me) who would like to believe we did something specific to help end a terrible war. Saying that we saw active service during the war seems so inadequate. Hence this attempt here to offer an insight into what Tempsford was all about in a wider sense.

For this, Tempsford cannot point to having sent aircraft out on a regular basis, night after night, weather permitting, to attack the enemy, in order to destroy his means to fight and his morale to do so. Instead, to gauge the significance of the non-offensive Tempsford flights it is necessary to see beyond their mundane action of delivering essential supplies to resistance groups in occupied Europe to the intangible effect these flights must have had in uplifting the spirits of an occupied population. Those flights brought the means to the occupied to resist oppression and so indirectly the message, delivered, in the dark night, by large, noisy bombers flying low over their home land was that those below had not been forgotten and so not to give up hope. Here were Allied aircrew risking their lives towards regaining freedom and liberty for those oppressed. In short, Tempsford flights introduced an element of humanity into an otherwise desperate and ugly theatre of war. Tempsford flights certainly did not win the war but they did eventually make it just a little easier to free Europe. So what did I do during the war? I helped to give occupied Europe back its freedom, without actually engaging in active warfare.

*J.A. (Jack) Galbraith, DFC*

Jack's article raises some very interesting questions.

We have all heard a lot, over the years, about the activities of Fighter Command and Bomber Command; the work of Bomber Command has, finally, been acknowledged by the creation of the wonderful new memorial in Green Park.

There is no large scale physical memorial to the work of the Tempsford (and other) squadrons who carried out Special Duties. We (TVARA) are making our own "memorial" by acknowledging their work, and remembering. This is where you come in.....

Perhaps you might all like to think about how the work done at Tempsford has had an impact on your life.

Did your father/brother/uncle (if he survived) talk about what he had done or did he maintain the habit of secrecy?

If he was killed, did family members know anything about his work, or was it something only to be investigated later - as with so many of us?

Have you only discovered anything about his Tempsford life after his death?

Do you think that the impact of the secrecy was worse/different for the families of personnel who came, like Jack, from the Commonwealth countries? They were unable to see their families while they were serving at Tempsford, unlike the British aircrew.

Please let us know your thoughts; it would be good to be able to follow up Jack's article in future newsletters, so that we can all learn more.

## Remembrance Sunday 2012



The Wall of Remembrance

Members of 2500 ATC Squadron  
(St Neots)  
with W/Cdr Leonard Ratcliff



Relatives & guests enjoying the autumn sunshine!



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

***Special then - Special now - Special always***

***TVARA***

***We help the old to remember and the young to understand***