



# TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION



## SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2013

*Bob's diary!*

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June - evening. The “reserved” part of the bar in the Crown Inn at Wyboston is starting to fill up. It is the start of the TVARA's 2013 Summer Gathering.

I'm pleased to say that it wasn't just the usual group of “die hards” crowding into our corner, as quite a few of our new members joined the party.

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June - morning. A steady trickle of people arriving for breakfast, and not a sore head in evidence.

Soon after the gates to the airfield were opened, members started to arrive. Most visited the museum (now nearly fully refurbished) and saw one of the major improvements - an access ramp making it easier for disabled people to visit. Thank-you, Lal!

At the Barn, we were delighted to greet a veteran joining us for the first time - Mike Gibbons. Mike has the distinction of being the first to bale out of a stricken aircraft, and that was on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday - some birthday present!

Mike baled out over Woodbridge in Suffolk, and we were able to introduce him to a veteran who now lives in Woodbridge; Norman Riches, our oldest member, who is 100 in August - congratulations, Norman.

Once again, it was time for a surprise presentation. Edwin had told Mike that he had a copy of the pilot's report for the night that the aircraft had been abandoned, and he produced from his pocket a crumpled piece of paper and proceeded to read out the details. I interrupted him, asking if he intended to give that scruffy piece of paper to Mike. “Why not?” A short debate ensued - surely it would not be right to give a veteran such a poor copy of a report.

I eventually ended the charade by giving Mike copies of all reports for all his operations; three volumes, 250 pages. Another successful Tempsford surprise - who or what will be the next?

*Mike Gibbons (right) with Norman Riches, who said that if Mike gave him more notice of baling out next time he would put out some straw for a soft landing!*



Before people left for the church, W/Cdr Ratcliff took centre stage and passed on the good news that, finally, the Special Duties Squadrons' work is to be recognised by a plaque in St Clement Danes church. The unveiling is set for 18<sup>th</sup> October. This will be a "ticket only" event - we will pass on more details as soon as we have them.



*W/Cdr Len Ratcliff addressing the "crowd"*



*Bob presenting the records to Mike Gibbons*

*W/Cdr Ratcliff, Edwin & Mike Gibbons*



## THE DESPATCHER

We have read about the Pilots needing great skill and concentration to fly the aircraft at the required low levels. We have read about the Navigators performing the seemingly impossible task of guiding the aircraft to a precise spot, in occupied territory, and arriving within minutes of their E.T.A. We have also heard of the Bomb Aimers who, during the low level flights, became the 'eyes' of the Navigators. They were constantly on the lookout for landmarks; rivers, churches, railway lines etc., and relaying this information to the Navigators who could not see the outside from their stations. The Wireless Operators often doubled as Air Gunners; the "proper" Air Gunners, of course, were ever alert to the possibility of night fighters, but what of the Despatchers? Did they just sit and wait for a green light then tap the 'Joes' on the shoulder to indicate that they should jump and then chuck the supplies (packages and parcels), carried inside the aircraft, out as quickly as possible?

The following piece is taken from a file in the National Archives, Kew (thank you Steven Kippax) and describes the job and the responsibilities in a way I have never seen before.

*"The role of Despatching is one that calls for a considerable knowledge not only of parachute equipment, but also human nature.*

*The Despatcher must be fully conversant with all types of equipment used on an operation, the method of attachment, employment and adjustment. He must be able to calculate and decide on the positions to be taken up by each man, and piece of parachute equipment in the aircraft, and the order of dropping and jettisoning for each particular operation, always bearing in mind that the aim is to reduce the length of the stick to a minimum consistent with safety.*

*Furthermore he must appreciate the state of mind of the men, and by his own behaviour and efficiency instil the necessary confidence. He must be considerate, calm and cheerful, and at all times place the comfort and safety of the men before his own. He will readily realise that it is a 'nervy' business for those who in cold blood are launching themselves into enemy-occupied territory. They are individuals and have to be treated as such. The needs of each may vary. One will jump seemingly care-free, another, possibly the braver, will require cheerful (but not boisterous) encouragement. Some - but only at their own desire - may require a little gentle assistance out. Enquiries on all these points should be made beforehand at the rehearsal from the officer accompanying the men.*

*The Despatcher, as one of the crew, comes of course under his Captain's orders, but he is in sole charge of those within the fuselage, and this is a considerable responsibility.*

*These notes are written so that the Despatcher may appreciate that there is more in his job than merely slinging out animate or inanimate objects. His work is highly skilled, and one that calls for quick thinking and courage. The Despatcher should take a pride in the highly skilled and important work he is doing and realise that upon him depends the success or failure of an operation, and even the lives of the men under his charge."*

Presumably containers were meant to be dropped in a more organised fashion than this!

The skill of the despatchers was not confined to the personnel they dropped, but in ensuring that the containers & packages reached the ground with as little chance as possible of injury to those waiting on the ground.



Picture courtesy of Tangmere museum.

It is with sadness that we must let you know that, in April, Ken Tattersall passed away.

Ken was a staunch supporter of the TVARA and was loved and respected by all. He would attend both the Summer Gathering and the Remembrance Service until, in the last year, his health prevented him from coming.

He served in 161 Squadron, completing 41 operations, and was awarded the DFC for his work at Tempsford.

The funeral was held in his home village of Sulgrave. Bob, Edwin, Colin Thomas and Alf Garrett represented the TVARA at the service, which was also attended by a great number of his family and friends. During the service Edwin read, on behalf of the TVARA, an emotional tribute about Ken's time at Tempsford.

He will be greatly missed by all of us.

# ATVARA

July 14 2013 saw the second meeting of the ATVARA for its annual memorial service held at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance.

The day opened with a special ceremony - the dedication and raising of a full sized flag depicting the crests of both 138 (SD) and 161 (SD) Squadrons.

Unfortunately, the weather was not as kind to those in Australia as it had been to us for our day in June, and all had to move into the Shrine to continue.

John Williamson, (cousin of Sgt G Williamson KIA 1944, 138 Sqdn) the organiser of the ATVARA, acted as MC for the day. Some 50 people were in attendance; an excellent turnout, considering that this is only their 2<sup>nd</sup> "do".



Following an opening prayer by Padre John Brownbill there was a second dedication & unveiling - a special plaque which will be permanently set in front of a tree in the Shrine gardens.

Those attending were privileged to hear a short talk about the work of Tempsford, the atmosphere & camaraderie that existed from a veteran, W/O F Bowman.



Before the closing of the service, tributes were laid to 5 airmen, 4 of whom were KIA.

1. F/Lt R R Witham DFC RAAF KIA
2. F/Lt M O'Bern RAAF - survived 24 ops
3. F/Sgt G H Williamson RAAF KIA
4. F/Sgt E R Clayworth RAAF KIA
5. Sgt E Markson RAF KIA

Following the closing prayer the MC, John Williamson, was in for a surprise, when Fred Bowman stepped forward and presented him with copies of all F/Sgt Williamson's ops, including Operational Record Book entries, debriefing reports and some reports from the ground. It seems that surprise presentations are not limited to the UK!

Following the service, many adjourned to the cafeteria for more talking. John Williamson then read out the messages from people who, for one reason or another, were unable to attend. A message worth repeating here in full came from Jack Galbraith in Canada, a 138/161 Squadron veteran.

*“Although an RCAF Tempsford Veteran (and so not of your group), and despite being half a world away, I feel a special bond with you this Bastille Day, as you conduct your commemorative acts on behalf of Tempsford and the wartime RAAF.*

*Accordingly, I am most pleased to send this congratulatory message for how you are remembering Tempsford this day - by dedicating and raising the Tempsford flag as well as dedicating a Tempsford memorial plaque, both in a great place of honour. There, on public display, they will serve to keep the name of Tempsford on public view. I hail you for these achievements. I can do this only as a class of one - as most likely the sole surviving RCAF Tempsford airman who is still capable of standing witness to your great acts of Remembrance this day.*

*That I am doing this on Bastille Day gives me added pleasure, as most of my ops were to France during the climactic months during which France finally won its freedom again. My first op was a month before D Day, and the last one was on the very day France gained complete freedom again! By standing with you today, spiritually, in acknowledgement of Tempsford's efforts on behalf of freedom, we hereby keep alive the legacy of Tempsford - that freedom can never be extinguished no matter how dire the circumstances.”*

The Remembrance service held by the ATVARA is now firmly established and will be held on the same day each year - 14<sup>th</sup> July. We in the TVARA wish them success and hope that their association continues to grow from strength to strength.



## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

As usual, there will be a Service on the airfield on Remembrance Sunday (10<sup>th</sup> November). This will take the same format as in previous years. Further information about the day, and details of the menu (for those who would like to have lunch) will be issued in due course. We will also be asking for the names of those who wish to lay wreaths or tributes on the day so that their names can be included in the order of service. Details for ordering wreaths & tributes may be found here.

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/wreaths>

TVARA members are reminded that, as this is a formal “military” occasion, medals may be worn. We encourage family members to wear their Tempsford relative’s medals, on the right hand side.

May we remind you all, and inform new members, that you must keep to the perimeter track and the areas immediately around the Barn & museum while on the airfield. The runways and all other areas are out of bounds and may, indeed, be dangerous. This is a working farm, and farm machinery is in use at all times.

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

***Special then***

***Special now***

***Special always***