



# TEMPSFORD VETERANS AND RELATIVES ASSOCIATION



## SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2014

*TVARA DIARY - Bob's notes.*

*A quieter six months than that reported in the last newsletter.*

*My sole trip "abroad" prior to our Summer Gathering was to attend the May 4 Remembrance Service in Makkum, Holland, which is where my uncle and his crew are buried. As this year marked the 70th anniversary of the day on which they were killed I felt that I should be there "in person" to lay flowers on the grave of Fl/Lt Menzies. In other years, some kind Dutch friends lay flowers on behalf of all the members of the crew. I was delighted that relatives of F/O Bunney were also able to make the trip and lay flowers as well - it was a very emotional occasion for them; the first time they had encountered Dutch hospitality!*



*The start of the ceremony in Makkum churchyard, during which flowers are laid on the graves of ALL the Commonwealth servicemen who were killed in that area.*



*Pam Smith with the remains of the tail plane of FK790 at the Kazematten Museum, Kornwerderzand. The museum (which overlooks the stretch of the IJsselmeer where the aircraft crashed) contains a small exhibition dedicated to the crew and four Dutch agents who lost their lives.*

Friday 4 July 2014

The “traditional” Friday evening start to the TVARA Summer Gathering. It was a very great pleasure to welcome “new” veteran Bill Stoneman on the Friday evening. Bill had, in the past, been in touch with Edwin, but I had not, previously, had the pleasure of meeting him. It was soon obvious that he was eager to make the most of the occasion, and was happy to chat to everyone who was there. It isn’t often that we have a “TV star” in our midst - Bill was featured in the BBC’s “Remembrance Week” last year, and had taken part in the coverage of the D Day commemorations at the beginning of June; his duties in 1944 had led him to overfly areas where the gliders were in readiness for the dropping of dummy parachutists (nicknamed Ruperts) which were part of the “misdirection” of the German forces in advance of the actual landings.

Saturday 5 July 2014



This was a very special day for me and the other relatives of the crew of Hudson FK790. We thought it appropriate to lay a wreath in the barn to mark the occasion. Relatives of 3 of the 4 crew members were able to be there, including Joan Pearson, the widow of Sgt Denis Withers, the W/Op. Joan is pictured here with her two daughters, Bob, Edwin & Lady Erroll.



Other “founder members” of the TVARA present this year were Fay & Peter Gerrard - Fay is the daughter of Sgt Eric Eliot. They are seen here talking to Bob and Colin Thomas, Joan’s son-in-law.





## The Traveller!

The “award” for travelling the furthest to attend this year’s “Gathering” goes to “Aussie” Ross Gomersall, the son of Noel Gomersall, whose entertaining articles featured in earlier newsletters. We were delighted to welcome Ross, and his wife Rhonda, to Tempsford - an emotional occasion for him, of course.

Not only did Ross win the prize in the raffle, (a copy of Freddie Clarke’s ‘Agents by Moonlight’) but we discovered that it was his birthday, too!

We were lucky to have four veterans at this year’s “Gathering”. Mike Gibbons (below), Jack Clarkson (another first timer), and Bill Gass, as well as Bill Stoneman. As always, it was important to “link” relatives & veterans from crews. One of our newer members, Tony Farr, was able to talk, at length, to Bill Stoneman about the father he’d never met.



Bringing together people with a shared history is one of the most important functions of the TVARA, and during the lunch following the church service many were able to renew old friendships and create new bonds.





We received, as ever, messages of support and friendship from various quarters - from French agent Bob Maloubier, and from John Williamson, the “convenor” of the Australian branch - ATVARA. We sent a reciprocal message to John, to be read out at their own meeting the following weekend, and an edited version of John’s report of that event appears in this newsletter. If anyone would like to see the whole report, please let us know. Bob had fun making the announcement about John’s message (TVARA & ATVARA ended up a bit like alphabetti spaghetti!) If the New Zealanders join he will admit defeat and refer to the group “down under” in future.....All joking apart it is wonderful to see the way that their association is developing. We were also delighted to welcome SOE historian Mark Seaman, who has a long association with the Tempsford Squadrons.

As our own association grows, help of various kinds is needed on the day, so we’d like to thank David Briggs for printing the service sheets. Doreen & Elaine did a fantastic job organising the raffle, as always, helping to raise a substantial sum which was received with thanks by the president of the little animal welfare charity which we support here in Crete.

Sue Woodard did a great job with name badges - we have reached the stage where they are really necessary, with more people making contact and joining all the time. Close to 90 people sat down to lunch - a record!



We always like to provide chairs for those who need them, and they travel in style.....

As ever, the day would not have been complete without the church service, and we all, I’m sure, very much appreciated the thoughtful address from Rev Margaret.



Most importantly, we all owe a great deal to Lady Erroll, for giving us the chance to continue to commemorate all those who served at RAF Tempsford. Her commitment to our “cause” is very much appreciated by all.

70 years ago this month.....

AUGUST 1944

From 161 Squadron Operational Record Book.

*Although the results of the operations carried out were most satisfactory, the amount of work was below expectation as many operations laid on had to be scrubbed either due to adverse weather conditions or for other reasons.*

*The advance by the Allied forces which has been so rapid over France, no doubt has been a contributory cause and much of the work there now has come to a highly satisfactory finish. The fruits of the past years efforts have materialized to a highly successful degree shown by the excellent work carried out by the MAQUIS and this collaboration in the defeat of the enemy, which could only have been brought about by through the medium of the organization with which this and other Squadrons have been working.*

*The Hudson flight has come to the fore this month with a record number of pickups successfully carried out - the total being nine of which W/Cdr Boxer brought off three; four pilots in all are now fully trained for this work. Several Hudson sorties were also made on "drops" and the usual "Ascension"\* programme was carried out.*

*The Lysander flight was detached to Winkleigh from where they operated. In all ten operations were carried out from there of which seven were successful - two of these were mail pickups.*

*The Halifax flight carried out 68 sorties comprising 77 operations of which 55 were successfully completed. Three unfortunate losses were sustained. Crews of F/Lt Loos on the 5<sup>th</sup> Aug, F/Sgt Nicholls on the 9<sup>th</sup> Aug and F/Lt Green on the 28<sup>th</sup> Aug failed to return. No news whatsoever has been received of these crews.*

*Four Halifax crews were switched over from 138 Squadron to complete their tour with this unit and it is anticipated by the end of this next period conversion here will also be made to the STIRLING aircraft. Two crews P/O Bennett & /O Lawrence are now tour expired and the crew strength has been reduced to seven only. No replacements will be made so that work will have to be on a reduced scale until the Stirlings become available.*

*NB It was omitted to mention in the previous months summary (July) that the Hudson pickup on the 27/28<sup>th</sup> July by W/Cdr Boxer was the first attempted in the "Black"\*\*\*period.*

*\* Ascension flights. These were what might be described as communication flights. Aircraft flying back and forth along the South Coast at a height of around 20,000 feet would make radio contact with agents on the ground who were using "S" phones - the forerunner of today's mobiles.*

*\*\* With the Allied advance the German resistance was lessened and flights were now being made in the BLACK period - ie outside the normal MOON period.*



## *Memorials overseas*

*This has been, also, a busy period for other TVARA members whose relatives are buried overseas.*

*The Kidd family were able to be present at a memorial service in Marigny to the crews of two Allied aircraft that collided over the drop site nearby. Fl/Lt John Kidd was the pilot of the 138 Squadron Halifax involved in the collision.*



*Simon Kidd sent these pictures of his father, Ken, laying a memorial stone to his brother John in front of John's grave.*



*In conversation with French historian Sophie Dumont and other local people.*



As part of the D Day commemorations, Martyn Cox, a good friend of the TVARA, laid a wreath honouring the Tempsford Squadrons at a memorial to French Resistance and Maquis agents at Losse.

The event was organised by a French association in the Gers called the Anciens Combattants et Résistants du Réseau Hilaire-Buckmaster, and it consisted of wreath laying and the playing of the French and British national anthems at smaller monuments close to two of the wartime DZs (drop zones), and then a major ceremony at the main memorial that was attended by around a hundred people.



It is dedicated to the drops in 1943 and 1944 organized by the Wheelwright network in that area. It lists the names of the agents involved, including Yvonne Cormeau, mother of TVARA member Yvette Pitt.

This is not a memorial in memory to anyone who died in connection with the Wheelwright actions in SW France - more in proud recognition of the circuit's successes and the local people who helped.

The inscription on the right hand stone is to the airmen of the RAF and USAAF responsible for these special missions, airdrops of weapons and agents for the

French Resistance and the Maquis. Although they are not named on the stone, the records show that the following Tempsford pilots and their crews were involved in these missions: S/Ldr Ratcliff, F/Lt Buchanan, F/Sgt Hayman, Fl/Lt Gray, F/Lt Downes.



# ATVARA Service Report

## Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance

13 July 2014, at 2.00pm

*The 2014 Commemoration Service was held once more in the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance Sanctuary (as the usual Melbourne July weather was “unpredictable”!)*

*Once again this was a “special” gathering.*

*Some 25- 30 people attended from four Australian States and from New Zealand. In addition to family representations of several RAAF veteran “Special Duties” (SD) airmen of the RAF Tempsford Squadrons, this year for the first time we had family representations of late and decorated SD veteran airmen of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) and of the Polish Air Force (PAF).*

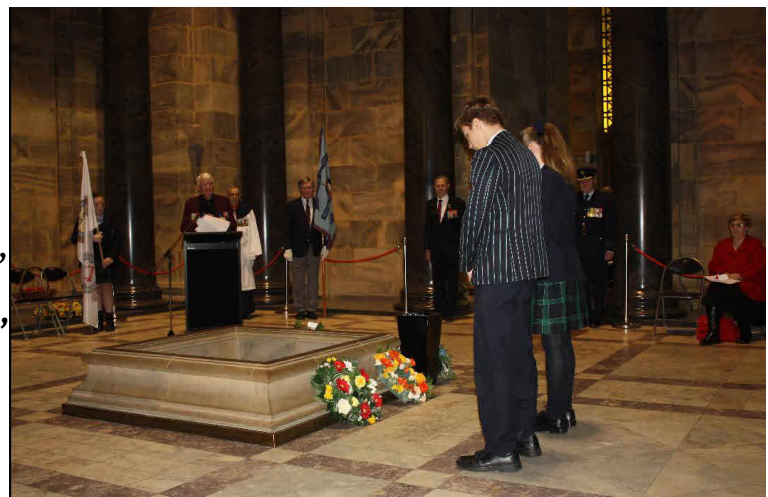
*Also present for the first time were three students, accompanied by the Teacher Director of Humanities, from St Leonard’s College, East*

*Following introductions by the MC, the Opening Prayer was conducted by Chaplain John Brownbill and this was followed by the Shrine Governor, SQNLDR Ron Ledingham, welcoming all present on behalf of the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. The MC, Dr John Williamson, then spoke of the significance of the occasion.*



*Family Commemorative Wreath laying then followed the official RAAFAVic Wreath. The family groups respectively laid personal Commemorative Wreaths in memory of their loved ones - some of whom were airmen “Killed in Action” (KIA) and some who survived the war, but are since deceased. These Wreaths represented airmen of three different allied Air Forces who served in RAF Tempsford (SD) Squadrons, namely RAAF, RNZAF and PAF.*

*The final Commemorative Wreath was laid by two St Leonard’s College students on behalf of all the College Staff and Students, in honoured memory of all RAAF Personnel who served in the worldwide “Special Duties” Squadrons of WWII.*



*The Readings & Ode” were then conducted by Sue Witham, a niece of a lost RAAF pilot, Flt/Lt Reginald Witham DFC of No 138 (SD) Squadron RAF. This was followed by the “Last Post”, one minute’s silence and the playing of the “Air Force Rouse”.*



# REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Remembrance Sunday this year is Sunday 9 November. We are planning to hold the usual Service on the airfield on that day. 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. Dogs must be kept on the lead.

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