



NEWSLETTER

The ladies are invited to our April meeting and of course to the Buffet Lunch in May (details P8)

March Meeting



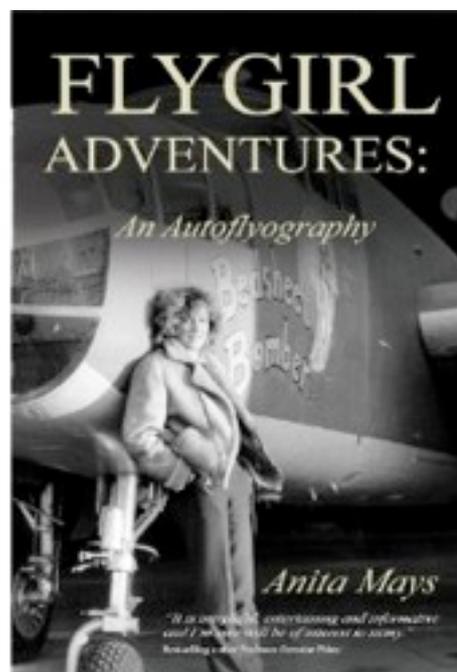
Tony Eaton told the fascinating story of the sudden wartime arrival in UK of Rudolph Hess. He parachuted in but allegedly the plan was for him to land on a private strip owned by a senior Lord. There to meet him was not the house owner (he was the Operations Controller in Edinburgh that night) but a member of the Royal Family.

The full details have always been kept secret by the British Government, initially for 50 years, now for 100 years. Scottish Dukes, Lords and other senior Government officials were all in the know, so why all the secrecy?

Plenty of questions still to be asked but very few answers forthcoming.

April Meeting

Wednesday 17 April 2013 at 11.00am



It is the time for 'Flygirl' to make her appearance and tell us her story of her aviation career. A PPL, building up hours in the USA, then an Assistant Instructor, flying the B25 across the Atlantic, a VIP Boeing 727, a spell with 727 airline Sabre Air and then many years as a VIP pilot. Quite a tale, so why not bring along along your wife/partner to this one and hear from Anita Mays yourself.

In Memoriam

Sadly we have lost two members this month, **John Franklin** and **Don Tanton** (see Page 6) and the Chiltern ACA were represented at both funerals. We send our condolences to their families.



LOTTERY FUNDED

Warrant Officer P J (Jim) Copus 97 Sqn Part 3

Ed: *We continue Jim's story of becoming a POW.*

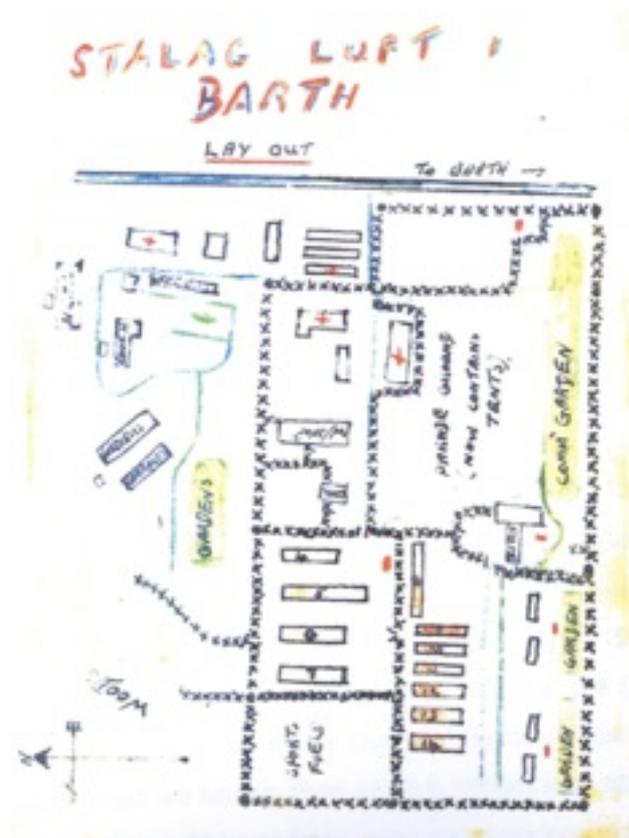
It was not for many years that I discovered that the rear-gunner, Ron Hindle, whom we knew as 'Slick', although he had acknowledged the order to bail out, had in fact been killed. Clearly something had gone wrong and as I discovered there was ample capacity for The Unexpected! The aircraft crashed in woodland outside Hanover and Ron is buried in Hanover War Cemetery.

When the holding area reached a certain number of inmates, we were moved out for transfer to a permanent camp (Stalag). The first step in the process was to get to Frankfurt. Accompanied by two guards I was shoved on to a train for a two day trip. Progress was very slow, the timetable somewhat upset by Bomber Command's constant re-arrangement of the rail network! The guards were pleasant and pointed out landmarks along the way. During one of the halts one of my guards announced he was going to get some water. In due course he returned and sat down sipping his water bottle. After a while he offered me the water bottle. 'Wasser?' he asked. I took a gulp. Schnapps!

Thus I was delivered to Frankfurt station where a large number of weary and disconsolate aircrew were already gathered. The station was a mess! There were hardly any buildings standing, just several platforms. I did not feel the need to point out that this had been our handiwork! We were crammed into cattle trucks, 30 per truck. We had no idea where we were going or how long the journey would take. We travelled day and night. There were occasional stops when we were given food and water. three days later we arrived at Stalagluft 1.

The POW camp Stalagluft 1 was close to the Baltic coast near a town called Barth. There were

British and American aircrew there numbering 10,000 in total. The days were spent walking about, playing football, talking and reading. There was a lively black market trade based on Red Cross food parcels. It was not unknown for the guards to join in, running the risk of joining short-sighted Flak crews and other defaulters in Stalin-grad!



Jim's map of the camp

It can be imagined perhaps that for young men used to an active, adrenalin-fuelled life, the resulting boredom was a special form of torture. We had no idea how long this would go on nor how it would end. One of the original inmates of the camp had been shot down in mid Sept 39, only a few weeks into the war. How were we new arrivals to know that our own confinement wouldn't last just as long....or longer!? But for the resilience of youth and the comradeship, it would have been easy to fall into hopelessness and despair.

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One of the first people I met on entering the camp was a chap who had been on the same gunnery course as me on the Isle of Man. Two weeks after my arrival, our pilot, Fg Off Cooper turned up. Although I was unaware of it at the time, he had been wounded in the back when we were shot down and had been in hospital since that time.

The most senior German officer whom we saw regularly on his 'rounds' of the camp was Major Mueller. He was a decent chap, clearly one of the 'old school'. He was not above joining in and on one occasion after watching some Americans fencing, took over one foil (actually a stick) and showed them how it was done! Of course, the camp was run entirely by the Luftwaffe, much preferable to the Wehrmacht we thought. There was empathy between airmen, albeit on different sides.

The Germans routinely produced their version of The News riddled of course with propaganda: a rain of V1's and V2's had reduced London to rubble: the Wehrmacht was pushing the Red Army back into Russia: an attempted Allied invasion had been pushed back into the sea whilst a German invasion was imminent and so on. Fortunately we had our own sources-the BBC via an illicit radio hidden somewhere in the camp. It was not therefore entirely unexpected when one night, 30 Apr 45, after we were locked up, all the Germans fled! We already knew, as they did, that the Red Army was approaching. We were not overjoyed at being liberated by the Russians and were somewhat concerned by what might happen. Had we known then, what is known now about how the Russians sometimes handle these situations, we would have been even more concerned!

For some days after the departure of our guards, the only sign of our liberators were in the distance. In the meantime our own officers advised us not to venture outside the camp confines. Free to explore the whole camp we discovered a hoard of Red Cross parcels. This windfall allowed us to celebrate in some style. The Russians' eventual arrival was

marked by an hour long speech, delivered in Russian by a senior officer. Since hardly anyone understood a word we were obliged to follow the speaker's lead and applaud or cheer at what appeared to be suitable pauses in the oratory. Thereafter we saw little of our liberators.

It was two weeks before we were picked up. The Russians had intended us to go to Odessa from where we would be shipped home. However, the British and American did not believe their stated intention and a mission to pick us up was initiated. The suspicion was that the Russians would hold us hostage to increase their bargaining when it came to dividing up the spoils of war!

We were marched in batches to the airfield to the south of the town. On the way we passed within yards of the perimeter of a concentration camp. The occupants did not appear 'liberated'. It was probable that they had just swapped one captor for another. We knew of the camp as some had escaped as the Russians arrived and came begging food.

I returned to England in a USAF B-17. We were eventually taken to Biggin Hill, where we were told none of us would fly again with the RAF, and given two weeks leave to make up our minds whether to stay on or not. In a 'Land fit for Heroes' there was little on offer in the way of employment and so I elected to stay in the RAF and chose to join a transport unit. Here I learned to drive and acquired my driving licence which stood me in good stead for my eventual transfer to 'civvy street'.

Just to remind you:

A few minutes before 7.00pm on 22 Mar 44 I took off on what was to be my last operational sortie as the mid upper gunner of Lancaster OF-P ND351.

By the end of that night I was a Prisoner of War having bailed out of the aircraft as it fell crippled and burning, the victim of a German night-fighter.

This was the story of that night and the year of captivity that followed.....

WO James Copus 97 Sqn

From the Archives



WO Mark 'Jock' Hamilton watching on

I was passed this photo by Ron Doble. The chap arrowed in the second row watching The King and Queen and Princess Elizabeth was WO Mark 'Jock' Hamilton, his claim to fame was simply, he was Ron's Mid-Upper gunner.

Ron was invited to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party in 2007 and sent a copy of the photo to Her Majesty prior to the big day. Ron is now the proud owner of a letter of thanks signed on behalf of Her Majesty by her Equerry (that time round a Royal Naval Officer).

60 Years on but the memories of comrades never dim and thanks to organisations like ours they never will. Special photos like this are treasures to those left behind and I am sure that Her Majesty was pleased to see that here were a group of chaps who were not forgotten but very much in the thoughts of those who still remember those days with pride.

So if proof were needed here is the letter of thanks.



A letter to the Battle of Britain Flight

As you know George Biggs is now confined to barracks and is permanently connected to oxygen. This would get a lot of guys down but not our George. He is up and tapping at his computer and one day wrote to OC Battle of Britain Flight (Sqn Ldr Duncan Mason) with his story. Within days he had a reply offering him a trip to Conningsby but as this was impractical for him they have agreed that when down south they will try and visit him in Bushy.

The reason I am writing this is simply if you are in the outskirts of Watford one day and the roar of a Spitfire is low overhead, you will know it is the B of B flight visiting George.

The computer can be a wonderful friend when you are grounded - ask George!

A testing time at Luton

Luton Airport testing out new navigation system

Problems with planes straying out of an official flight path from Luton Airport and flying over St Albans homes has prompted the airfield to start trialing a more precise satellite navigation system. The trial is being conducted in two phases, from March 7 until April 18 and from April 19 until May 24, and affects western departures travelling routes via Clacton and Dover – a track designed over 20 years ago.

A spokesman for the airport admitted that ground-based navigational technology currently in use was not as accurate as the latest satellite navigation aids. Some aircraft are deviating from the noise preferential route (NPR) which is supposed to avoid populated areas like St Albans.

The satellite navigation aids being used in Europe are better at keeping aircraft closer to the centreline. It is the second time the airport has initiated a trial to resolve ongoing difficulties with planes not keeping to the centre of the air corridor.

A resident from Jersey Farm, who did not wish to be named, said that having studied Luton's map of the proposed tweaked routes, it appeared the centrelines were much lower and going nearer to Hemel Hempstead. The woman said that Redbourn and Flamstead might benefit from the trial.

Luton is seeking feedback on plane noise during the trial, which can be emailed to rnav@ltn.aero or phone 01582 395699.

Luton borough council has received around 380 submissions on the airport's scheme to double passenger numbers to 18 million a year. A spokeswoman said she did not know when the planning application would be determined by the council.

Ed: *Let us hope that this time the response is valid and is based on a balance of noise and safety unlike*

the review of Luton departure routes a couple of years ago. London ATCC wanted to lower the departure route to the South West. This was rejected by lobby groups. Sadly the revised airspace would have given the controllers more flexibility to climb aircraft quickly. The end result would have meant less low level departures and thus a reduction in noise. Sadly our NIMBY culture won in this case, so we all suffer.

It would seem in aviation circles progress is difficult to come by!

Would you like to learn to fly a Spitfire?

In UK there is now the chance to get a 10.5 hour course on a Spitfire. The Boulton Flight Academy is based at Goodwood Aerodrome in Sussex. The owner bought the aircraft in 2009 at a Bonham's auction for £1.78 million and those around him cheered when he stated it would stay in UK and continue to fly.

It is now a fully licenced training establishment and the courses for those with suitable licences and medicals start on Tiger Moth or Chipmunk (tailwheel conversion), through the Harvard prior to the Spitfire conversion. Cost is not a 'snip' but it is a Spitfire conversion after all!

Intro Course - Tiger Moth or Chipmunk 2.5 hours

£5,500 + VAT

Tiger/Chipmunk conversion 5.5 hours

£2,500 + VAT

Harvard Conversion 10.5 hours

£8,500 + VAT

Spitfire Conversion Course 10.5 hours

£39,025 + VAT

Abridged courses can be arranged for those with sufficient experience.

Any takers? My thanks for the info from our Chairman who is now 90 but looks as fit as he did during the war and he tells me at a similar weight!

In Memoriam

Sadly we have lost another two colleagues this month. Don Tanton, a recent recruit from Uxbridge introduced by Bill George and John Franklyn, one of those rare airmen who managed to escape, having been shot down near Cognac in his Halifax. Both gentlemen had something in common, after the War they both continued careers in aviation.

Don Tanton

11 Aug 23 - 4 Mar 13



Don joined the RAF in 1942 and immediately volunteered for Aircrew but failed initially because at that time they were looking for fighter pilots and he was too tall. However a kindly medic let him through and he went to Canada for basic training.

His attempt to become a pilot nearly failed again because on his first solo having been told by his instructor, as he climbed out of the seat, keep a really good lookout, there are many aircraft out there. With this in mind, as he taxied out he looked up to check on the circuit pattern and he managed to collide with a Nissen hut. A story he told many times. Having gained his wings he joined Coastal Command and was posted to the Far East on Wellingtons and later Liberators.

At the end of the war he wanted to continue flying and succeeded in finding a job flying Sunderlands for

Shorts at their base on the Medway. This suited him because he was 'A Man of Kent'. Looking for more adventure he then joined Nigerian Airways as a captain flying a variety of aircraft.

In 1962 on one of his trips home he met a chap in a hotel in Damascus who offered him a post with Euravia, a new airline operating out of Luton flying Constellations. This airline became Britannia and he spent the rest of his working life with them initially as a captain, then Chief Training Captain. He was followed in this role by Stuart Grieve, who has given us a talk, and also our own Alan Fisher. He retired in the early eighties having amassed over 24,000 hours. His son also followed him into a career with Britannia and gave a very moving eulogy at his cremation. The ACA was well represented and we send our condolences to Don's family.

John Franklin

2 Apr 23 - 1 Mar 13



Where does one start with John? Well I am certain this months Newsletter will not be large enough to do credit to his amazing tales, these will be told in next month. Until then we send our condolences to his daughter Susie and the rest of the family. A funeral mass was held in St Albans and we were represented.

Programme
Welfare

All events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless advised (*)

17 Apr	Fly Girl - Anita Mays
15 May	Guest's Lunch* 1200 Noon
19 Jun	Aeronautical Artist - Chris Sprent
17 Jul	Air Traffic Control - Peter Marks
21 Aug	S.O.E. - Hugh Davies
18 Sep	Guest's Lunch* 1200 Noon
16 Oct	Member's Meeting
20 Nov	TBN
18 Dec	Christmas Lunch

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The winter seems to drag on for ever since it started in November (2011). For those of you not at the last Meeting there were a few of our regulars 'off sick' or as is often the case these days, visiting the Doctor or Hospital for another check up. **Eric Barnard** was one of those and, as he said, once you have managed to get an appointment you don't give it up easily. **Stan Broomhead** is also rather unwell, I suspect mainly due to his heart surgery being delayed yet again by Harefield Hospital. **Guy Buckingham** from the far western reaches of Empire is also a bit under the weather, as is **Fred Bryant**. It was good to see **Ian Nelson** at the March meeting, another one who is running out of fingers for the number of times the NHS have cancelled his operation. They have promised him May but have yet to confirm the date and the year for that matter! We wish them all well.

Peter Woodard had an invitation to 10 Downing Street to be presented with his Bomber Command Clasp but **Ted Mathews** was unable to attend. He has, however, recently taken tea with the Lord Mayor of York care of the 77 Squadron Association and also tells me he has now become an Honorary Member of both the Canadian and French Bomber Command Veterans Associations. **Bill**

Membership

Thank you to those who have responded to our request for membership subscriptions. I think we are nearly there and poor health may be the reason for the couple that are outstanding. If you have yet to do so please just give me a ring on 01923 262707. **Gerry**

Treasurer

I am nearly there with the handover from Ian, we just need to get the paperwork for HSBC Bank sorted, It appears that between visits the rules change! We didn't get where we are today without perseverance, so we soon get there! **Rod**

Buffet Lunch

Greenacres Tavern

Wednesday 15th May 2013

Noon for 12.30pm (Please do not arrive before Noon)

Cost £7.50 per head

Please complete the form below and send to Gerry Sealy-Bell together with cheque payable to 'Aircrew Association' and a stamped addressed envelope, the closing date for postal requests is Monday 6 May 2013. Tickets will also be on sale at our April meeting.

----- Please Tear here -----

Buffet Lunch

Greenacres Tavern

Wednesday 15th May 2013

NAME:

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TELEPHONE

Please send me tickets for the buffet lunch on 15 May 13.

I enclose cheque for £..... and a stamped addressed envelope

Post to: Gerry Sealy-Bell, 31 Hempstead Road, Kings Langley, Herts WD4 8BR