



# NEWSLETTER

## More of Jack Ball's story on Page 2

### Editor's Note

Firstly my apologies for the late arrival and the reduced size of this July edition. I have been experiencing computer problems which finalized in a computer failure. This edition is being produced on a different system and as my son is not available 100% of the time, there may be the odd glitch

### June Meeting

Those who attended our 'summer meeting', what lovely weather, were in for a big surprise. Chris Sprent did show us pictures of various aviation paintings but it was weaved around a fascinating history of the Second World War. This really was a 'tour de force' (as General de Gaulle would say), covering the war from Europe via Pearl Harbour to the Far East. It was not what we were expecting but ten times better. I have heard the Group Captain does other talks so rest assured our Speaker Secretary Bill George will not rest until he has 'booked him' again!

### July Meeting

On 17<sup>th</sup> July we welcome Peter Marks to talk to us on Air Traffic Control. I checked on his credentials with our

resident Air Traffic Controller Bill Hyland, who said we should be in for an excellent talk. Some of you may have seen 'Airport Live' last month and will be up to date on how Heathrow works but I am sure this will be the 'real thing' warts and all rather than the glossy PR version we saw on BBC!

### Condolences

We send our condolences to two of our members whose wives have passed away recently. Alan Chapell and Dick Haven are very much in our thoughts at this difficult time. We look forward to welcoming them back, when they feel the time is right.

### Future Events

Please remember we have our September Buffet Lunch on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Why not think of bringing a guest to help swell the numbers. Tickets will be on sale in August at £8.

On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> we have the 'Aircrew Lunch' at Abingdon. The menu details will be published next month

## Jack Ball's Story Pt 2

We went on to an Initial Training Wing at Aberystwyth. Here we were living in a sea-front hotel and the training was getting interesting. I was picked for the Arnold draft, which sounded like a plum posting. General Arnold of the US Army had arranged for RAF aircrew to be trained in Florida and Arizona etc, where the weather was kinder to intensive flying. As the USA was still officially neutral, we were to travel in civilian clothes and were duly measured for grey chalk-stripe suits and black berets. At the last moment the numbers were cut and I was taken off the draft. My disappointment turned out to be misplaced, when over the years we got stories back of the draftees' mixed experiences. By the middle of June 1941 twelve of us arrived at Burnaston, No.16 Elementary Flying School, between Derby and Burton-on-Trent. It was a grass airfield where now stands a Toyota factory. Instead of the usual biplane trainers – Tiger Moths etc - there were low wing monoplanes, Miles Magisters. We were a mixed bunch, some from ground defence, some re-mustered regulars, one from the army.

The next six weeks were as good as it gets. My instructor was Warrant Officer C.G. Unwin DFM, who had gained fame in the previous summer's air battles. He was a gritty, quiet Yorkshireman who missed the front-line life. He had a habit of taking over the controls and diving in pursuit of any passing aircraft. I was surprised and pleased when he sent me solo after seven hours of training - a tribute to his teaching.

The weeks went too quickly, as the rudiments of aerobatics, forced landings,

map reading and instrument-flying were drilled into us. I managed to sneak off on cross country's, sometimes, in order to do a steep turn around my grandmother's cottage at Eathorpe.

Come August we were at Wilmslow in Cheshire, and were being sorted out for overseas and it was there I first realized how complex was the Empire Air Training Scheme. There seemed to be hundreds of aircrew cadets milling around waiting to be posted to exotic places. After a week we were in Greenock on SS. Leopoldville, a Belgian liner, dirty, allegedly from carrying Italian prisoners, where we had to sling our hammocks in close ranks. There were other decks below us stuffed with troops and, at the bottom of the pile, were the Jersey Coastal Artillery, exiled since the loss of their island. They had been selected to defend Iceland, which we had invaded the previous year.

It was an unpleasant journey, made at top speed in foul weather with our three escorting destroyers. At Reykyavik, we transferred to a hillside at Helgafell, bare except for two empty Nissen huts. We slept in full flying kit on the floor. It never got dark and the days brought jolly route marches over treeless hills, with sometimes a glimpse of an unfriendly blonde holding back an unfriendly hound. Food was bully beef and hard tack and we went to the stream at the bottom of the valley for our ablutions. A real treat was to go in the evening to the hot springs where the mixed toilets had no doors, but were comfortable, and you could wade in the pond to shave.

After five days we embarked on HMS Ausonia, an old Cunarder out of Liverpool with a Scouse crew. The

Ausonia proved to be the flagship. Around the convoy could be glimpsed the escorting destroyers, whilst on either flank in our row, there was a CAM (catapult aircraft merchantman) ship with a Hurricane perched on the catapult. If hostile aircraft appeared, it would be launched on a one-way trip to end in the sea. Sunday church parade saw our elderly Commodore in full uniform, sword dragging at his side, reviewing the complement.

The crossing was a boring eleven days, which put me off ocean cruising for life. It was enlivened by a concert and a boxing tournament to which the RAF contributed a professional clarinet player, two fencers, a stand-up comedian and a flyweight.

The Canadian Pacific train we boarded in Halifax was familiar from Hollywood films. Two-tier bunks at night on either side, shielded by heavy curtains. The train trundled slowly westward for four days, the food was excellent and at rare stops the locals provided apples etc.

### **Empire Air Training Scheme**

Eventually we arrived at Carberry, Manitoba, a small town set in a rolling prairie. The RAF had settled No.33 Service Flying Training School a few miles away where the Canadians had constructed three runways, huge timber hangars and a hutted camp. We were No.28 War Course but, unfortunately, I failed the ensuing medical due to eyesight and my career prospects hung in the balance. I went for re-examination the next day, pleaded a bad cold, and they relented. The thought of shipping me back to England may have been the deciding factor.

For better or worse, I then decided, somewhat selfishly, to commit to memory all four standard eyesight test cards then in use on RAF stations. For the next three months we learned to fly and navigate Avro Ansons. Originally conceived as a six passenger aircraft, the RAF had bought a large number in the desperate expansion days of the late thirties. Fitted out with a turret, guns and bombs they were used for convoy duty around the coasts. Unmodified they were ideal training aircraft.



They were a delight to fly, safe and stable, but on these early models the flaps and undercarriage needed a lot of effort on the hand-pump, whilst the brakes relied on a single air bottle, which quickly emptied. My worst moment came when the maintenance Flt Sgt asked me to taxi an aircraft to a new position, without warning me that the air bottle was empty. I found myself heading for a line of aircraft with the ground crew desperately hanging on or trying to throw chocks under the wheels. I cut the switches, they succeeded and I was saved.

In daylight the flying went well, but at night I realised that I could not see the glide path indicators, red or green, to which the instructor, Flying Officer Clough, was directing me. It was

difficult enough to pick out the airfield in the profusion of Canadian lights, but I never actually tried to line up on the main road. I soon learned to judge the glide path angle from the perspective of the runway lights. Later on 625 Squadron, Clough was reduced to the rank of Sergeant for repeated low flying.

We had all been asked if we were keen on a commission, but my circle of pals, many of them regulars, decided to opt for NCO in the hope of staying together. Suffice to say I was young and foolish with little thought for the morrow. Came the great day, 5th December 1941, when the pilot's brevet was pinned on my chest and I graduated as a Sergeant.

Pearl Harbour was attacked two days later, bringing the United States into the war and a rash of rumours about submarines off the west coast. Of the new pilots, six of us were posted to 33 Air Navigation School at Mount Hope, Ontario. Many others went to similar postings around Canada:

#### **Gunnery School.**

I got to Mount Hope a few days before Christmas 1941 in deep snow. I had first to be cleared for taking trainee navigators around the Ontario skies and bringing them back safely, despite where they wanted to lead us. I was assigned an Aircraftman wireless operator, Norman Lister, who was to fly with me for the next sixteen months, as we carted pupils on two three hour details per day or night, come snow or rain. He was the link to base by Morse code.

**Ed:** *We will pick up Jack's story in Canada next month.*

## **This Month's 'Thumbnail Portrait'**

This month's "thumbnail" victim is George Meredith one of the most regular of attendees at our monthly gatherings.

George started his Navigator training in September 1944 and so was just too late see combat service in WW2. However he remained in the RAF after the war and served with 12, 24 and 202 Squadrons and other Specialist Units. He was very much involved in those very long Met flights over the Atlantic which required some pretty accurate navigation without many 'pinpoints'.

In 1969 he joined No.1 Air Traffic Control course and remained in the Service until retirement, his last posting being Charts Editor at No.1 Aeronautical Information Documents Unit.

After retirement he took up bowls and was for a long time the Membership Secretary at the Stoke Mandeville Club. He has also been very active in Freemasonry and is a highly regarded member of his local Church congregation. He doesn't drive quite so much these days but still tends to range far and wide. He enjoys dining out and keeps very active, and, as he turned 90 last month, we say keep going George!

Congratulations again George on reaching your 90<sup>th</sup> and joining the increasing numbers in that era of their lives. Hope this month's talk will bring back some memories of Air Traffic days!

## **RAF Halton Families Day**

### **A windy and wet affair**

The station celebration was for the families of Station personnel, not open to the General Public as it had been in the past. However personnel were free to invite their friends and families.

The Queen's Birthday Flypast aircraft began the flying show, including 4 x 617 Squadron Tornado GR4's, the E-3D from Waddington with a couple of Typhoons, a Tristar with a VC10 in 'very' close attendance. These were followed by two other aircraft from the Brize Norton stable, the C17 and the massive Airbus A330 'Voyager'

The weather intervened and the strong gusty wind prevented the BBMF Spitfire and Hurricane getting airborne but the trustef Lancaster 'City of Lincoln' spread the noise of 4 Merlins across the Buck's countryside. Finally the flypast finished with the red, white and blue smoke trails from the Red Arrows.



*Miles Hawker Speed 6*

The remainder of the flying display was much curtailed although there was a spirited display by a Jet Provost Mk5. The Chinook and Merlin helicopters from Benson braved the weather, but

alas little else. That was until much to the surprise of the crowd in came the Miles Hawk Speed 6 from White Waltham and after the completion of his display he landed at Halton.

There were a few static aircraft that beat the weather including two Hornet Moths and a Tiger Moth that late in the afternoon displayed valiantly but alas the lare Moth Club participation was ruled out by the wind, a great pity!

## **Woburn Abbey International Moth Rally 17-18 August 2013.**

For those of you with a love of pre war and wartime training aircraft then Woburn Abbey is the place for you over the w/e 17/18 Aug. The International Moth Rally is returning to it's former home at the historic house with a 2 day extravaganza



The Moth Club are bringing together aircraft from far and wide and the tricky runway is in it's best ever condition. Tickets are available on the gate or for Moth Club members in advance (up to 11 Aug).

As well as Tiger Moths the rest of the de Havilland fraternity will be there. The 'Tiger 9' will perform along with Captain Neville's Flying Circus.

**Programme** All events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless advised (\*]

**17 Jul Air Traffic Control - Peter Marks**

21 Aug S.O.E. - Hugh Davies  
18 Sep Guest's Lunch\* 1200 Noon  
27 Sep Aircrew Lunch\* Abingdon 1200 Noon  
16 Oct Member's Meeting  
20 Nov The Lightening - Alan Merriman  
18 Dec Christmas Lunch\* 1200 Noon

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**Welfare**

At least summer seems to have arrived at last, but unfortunately we have to report the passing of two of our member's wives. Dick Haven's wife Emma spent her last days being cared for in the Florence Nightingale Hospice at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, where Dick reports that the treatment and especially the care that she received were superb. Alan Chappell's wife was similarly cared for at the same Hospice. Our thoughts are with Dick and Alan at this difficult time.

Not far away Jack Easter was being looked after yet another fall by SMH but shortly after admission he was transferred to High Wycombe Hospital for further tests prior to the fitting of a pacemaker. Tom and Ron paid a visit before the transfer and Jack was his normal, independent self. Latest news (23 June) is that Jack had his pacemaker fitted and will remain in High Wycombe for a few days. Stan Broomhead has at last been given a date in July for a bypass operation. We wish him well, he has been waiting all year for his 'call-up papers'. Des Richard's wife Janet is still not well and he is very involved with 'juggling' her care with many other responsibilities including the ACA Archive but he remains resolutely cheerful.

Harry le Marchant regrets that he is unable to join us, due to increasing immobility. Harry Purver is now back at the Pulham Nursing Home, Halton after his stay in hospital. He has also sent his wartime story which will feature in a later edition. Have spoken to several other members over the month and they all enjoy the Newsletter and send their best regards to all.

**Bill**