



NEWSLETTER

Project Propeller Report Pages 6 and 7

June Meeting

Geoff Hulett reports: Our June meeting was memorable on two counts. First our speaker Chris Sprent gave a detailed analysis of civilian airliners from the biplanes of the late 20's to the jet age of the Comet citing their manufacturer, size, range, carrying capacity and the airfields and in the case of flying boats the rivers from which they flew.

I was particularly interested in the BOAC flying boat service on the 'Horseshoe' route from Cape Town to Ceylon as I boarded 'Cleopatra' on the Nile at Cairo in 1944 and flew via Habbaniyah, Basra, Bahrain and Dubai to Karachi. A two day journey in supreme comfort and in equal luxury on an Ensign to Delhi.

Our thanks to Chris and to his computer wizard, Jim for an interesting session.



Birthday celebrations

Next we had birthday celebrations marking the 90th of Derek Gurney and the 92nd of George Meredith. Tom Payne came along with a large, beautifully iced cake for Derek which was cut and served at lunch. Thank you Tom and best wishes to George and Derek

Battle of Britain

The MOD has announced that the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain service of thanksgiving and rededication will be held in Westminster Abbey at 11am on Sunday 20th September 2015.

Application for tickets stating all names, addresses, place and date of birth, Passport or Driving Licence number of individuals wishing to attend, should be made in writing and are to be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. Applications should reach:

Mrs Michele Small, SO3 RAF Ceremonial Events
RAF Ceremonial Office, Bentley Priory Building
RAF Northolt, West End Road, Ruislip, Middx HA4 6NG
by 17th July 2015

To assist with seating in the Abbey, applicants are requested to state which of the following categories is appropriate: former Battle of Britain aircrew who would like to escort the Roll of Honour during the service, relatives of aircrew who lost their lives in the Battle of Britain or since, past or present members of the Royal Air Force and its Reserve Forces, members of the emergency services or ground support staff during the Battle or member of the general public. Please state if you are a wheelchair user. Tickets and a note on dress and timings for the occasion will be issued two weeks before the service. Applications are **not** to be made to Westminster Abbey



Remember 17th June 2015

“Concord - Boom or Bust”

Alan Merriman

Malcolm Cloult's Story Part 5

Ed: *Malcolm now prepares to invade Europe*

Now, the reason for the posting, to 271 Squadron, first at Doncaster and then Down Ampney, was preparation for the invasion of Europe. Towing Gliders, night and day was one item of training, another dropping paratroops. An exciting exercise one day was low-flying with a glider in tow – and with the glider pilot flying even lower in the low tow position beneath the tug! Those guys were stout fellows; even on an operation, having crash-landed their Horsa gliders, they then had to join the fighting troops on the ground.

Down Ampney village was also host to the 6th Airborne Division and Glider Pilot Regiment, and WAAF, who managed the temporary hospital to which the injured were brought for initial treatment. Imagine the tolerance of the villagers contending with and accepting the constant noise (often at nights) and the queues at the Post Office and Bakery. They don't bear a grudge – in fact they entertain us survivors every year. The village's other claim to fame is the composer Vaughan Willims, the son of a former Vicar of Down Ampney. Amongst his writings is a hymn tune suitably named "Down Ampney". The local Church Council have allowed us to have a garden of remembrance for the ashes of deceased Down Ampney ex-service men and women. My loved ones may decide that will be a good place for mine.

Alan Hartley, the instigator and perpetrator of the Down Ampney Association, has written extensively about life at RAF Down Ampney, and I am borrowing from him with his permission. Here are some excerpts.

"We soon learned about the dangers of war and flying hazards when, while practising formation flying, the wing tip of one Dakota contacted the elevators of another, which plunged to the ground killing all of the aircrew and some of our mechanics who had gone for a joy ride. By coincidence the pilot who had caused the accident, was himself killed a month later when the glider he was towing got out of control and brought his aircraft down.

One exercise was marred by a lethal accident; one paratrooper's chute became entangled in a tree while his bag (that trailed below him) was in another. So there he swung between the two trees suspended about forty feet above the ground, shouting quite happily to his mates below and receiving some friendly but derisory banter. The fire brigade engine arrived and a telescopic extending ladder was raised. A fireman climbed up to the para', but unfortunately he hadn't been briefed on the para's harness, for instead of cutting the rope to the

bag, allowing the para to swing in the tree, he pressed the release knob on the man's harness, allowing the poor fellow to drop with all his heavy equipment together with the fireman. Both were killed.

On the same exercise a para became entangled in the tail wheel of the aircraft and all efforts failed to free him. They decided to fly to Poole harbour where they flew low and cut him free for him to fall in the sea, but unfortunately he was dead when they found him. I guess it was because of this that pilots were taught to fly nose-down when releasing paratroops.

At the end of May 1944 an order came confining us to camp. The phone box was sealed, all letters left open for censorship, and leave cancelled. Then came the order on June 4th to paint black and white stripes and the fuselage and wings of all our Dakotas and Horsa gliders to aid recognition by our forces on D-Day. The invasion of Europe was on!

Four days later our aircraft were on French soil, taking in vital supplies and personnel. Once emptied, fitted with stretcher racks, we brought back the first casualties, cared for by the young nurse we carried in each crew, plus a German POW with no boots! He pretended to be dead because of tales that the Canadians chopped off the heads of prisoners! - while a Frenchman stole his boots.

As our Aircraft were engaged on war duties they could not carry Red Cross signs, and were therefore prey for German fighters. I'm glad to say that I never came across one, thanks to the great work of our own Fighter Command. It was not unusual for a soldier to be wounded in France and on the operating table at Down Ampney in under three hours. This may today have been forgotten in the mists of time.

To lighten the mood let me tell you about our mascot Billy, who had been secreted back as a puppy from an airfield in France. One day his carer, Nicky, said, "Watch this", as Billy came in decidedly off-white and settled beside the stove in the middle of our billet. Phil picked up the fire bucket, rattled the handle, and said, "Bath, Billy!" Never have you seen such a change in a dog, as he rose tottering, whining in pain and his legs like rubber as he staggered slowly to the open window. Then with an athletic bound he was out of the window and gone for the rest of the day!"

Alan had one lucky escape when Len Wilson offered him a ride that he couldn't accept on his Arnhem mission, from which, as I report elsewhere, he did not return.

(continued on Page 3)

Now to Arnhem

Operation "Market" was the airborne element, which saw Transport Command drop the 6th Airborne Division on Arnhem in a bold attempt to capture the powerhouse of Germany, the Rhur Valley in 1944. Thousands were killed or captured during the controversial operation. 271 Squadron was one tasked with dropping supplies to the Airborne at Arnhem .

On the first day of the operation my Squadron towed heavily-laden Horsa gliders to the dropping zone (DZ). It was an uneventful journey, and the Germans were caught by surprise.. That advantage was lost though, because too few aircraft had been employed to drop enough troops needed for a successful assault to secure the Arnhem bridge. It was terribly poor planning.

The following day other Squadrons took the rest of the troops needed, and mine rested until the third day, September 19th 1944, when supply missions began. Two RASC Despatchers joined the crew to off-load the panniers, and this time some light anti-aircraft fire was met. My Dakota suffered only a small hole in the starboard wing, though it felt as if we were hit more severely. Yet again there was no Luftwaffe activity, most of it supposedly busy on the Russian front.



The annual commemoration at the Oosterbeek cemetery. Children are thinking of their Fathers.

They volunteer for the chance to honour the dead.

I was due for 48 hours' leave, which was not cancelled, so I went home, returning to find half the Squadron missing. This was the time Ft Lt David Lord was awarded the VC posthumously, and the comedian Ft Lt Jimmy Edwards of "C" Flight was shot down by a lone Messerschmitt. P/O. Len Wilson of my "B" Flight, recently commissioned, and all

but one of his crew died after crashing in Arnhem. On a commemoration visit I was shown a stunted tree he hit that has a preservation order on it. Some aircraft made forced landings in other places. Len Wilson's daughter, whom he had never seen, visited me when I was living in Australia.

A fuller report about Fl/Lt. Lord's award reads : "He was pilot and captain of a Dakota aircraft detailed to drop supplies at Arnhem on the afternoon of the 19th September 1944 (? 20th). Our airborne troops had been surrounded and were being pressed into a small area defended by a large number of anti-aircraft (ack-ack) guns. Aircrews were warned that intense opposition would be met over the DZ. To ensure accuracy they were ordered to fly at 900ft. when dropping their containers. While flying at 1500 ft near Arnhem the starboard wing of Lord's aircraft was hit twice by ack-ack fire. The starboard engine was set on fire. He would have been justified in leaving the main stream of supply aircraft and continuing at the same height, or even abandoning his aircraft. But on learning that his crew were uninjured and that the DZ would be reached in three minutes he said he would complete his mission, as the troops were in dire need of supplies.

By now with the starboard engine was burning furiously. Lord came down to 900 ft., where he was singled out for concentrated fire of all the ack-ack guns. On reaching the DZ he kept the aircraft on a straight and level course while supplies were dropped. At the end of the run he was told that two containers remained.

Although he must have known that the collapse of the starboard wing could not be long delayed, he circled, re-joined the stream of aircraft and made a second run to drop the remaining supplies. These manoeuvres took eight minutes in all, the aircraft being continuously under heavy fire.

His task completed, Flt. Lt. Lord ordered his crew to abandon the Dakota, making no attempt himself to leave the aircraft, which was down to 500 ft.. A few seconds later the starboard wing collapsed and the aircraft fell in flames. There was only one survivor, who was flung out while assisting the other members of the crew to put on their parachutes. There could be no finer example of sustained courage and determination by a transport pilot on air supply operations. The Germans are known to have admired the bravery that was displayed that day.

(continued next month)

Guy Buckingham**Part 6**

Guy is still in North Africa but shortly to head South



On one of my leaves, my friend Bob Mitchell and I decided to go and look at the Pyramids. We took pictures, climbed to the top of Cheops (415 feet), climbed on to the Sphinx and then had a look at the newly excavated tombs. We found a mummy, which fell to bits when we tried to pick it up; we finally found some coins and a small alabaster figure. Years later I took them to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford where they were identified as from the Constantine Mint of Alexandria AD333 - 337.



Out of bounds to NCO's but not our Guy!

Another of my friends in Cairo was Major Evan Roberts; he was in charge of military transport. We had a problem, whereby all the Officers could go into all the 'posh' hotels Shepherds, the Gazzera Sporting Club and many others, these were out of bounds to us NCO's likewise, officers who visited the run of the mill entertainment joints were frowned upon. So I would borrow the Major's spare uniform to go visiting the hotels with him, occasionally he would don Sergeant's tapes and then accompany me to the sort of places I would like to visit.

I was then posted to North Africa, to the Desert; we had tents for accommodation. To be reasonably comfortable we dug into the sand for about 3 feet, shuttered the sides and pitched the tent in the hole, this kept the sand out quite a bit especially during a sand-storm, which were frequent in the area. The sand got into everything, ears, noses, eyes etc, we wore goggles,



Trouble approaching

but they didn't help very much, visibility was down to a few feet. The planes suffered terribly, with engines being worn out quickly and many bits of equipment becoming clogged and not working efficiently.

We had four people to a tent. Two of the chaps were good at woodwork and made up some tables and bed frames from old packing cases, it was reasonably comfortable; our big worry came from bed bugs, so we tried putting our beds on legs and then into tins of paraffin to stop the bugs crawling up the legs and onto the mattress to bite us during the night, but this didn't work, - the bugs would crawl up the side of the tent, across the roof until they felt the heat from our bodies, they would then drop off the roof onto us and continue their dirty work! There was nothing we could do to beat the devils

Another rotten thing we had to put up with was being bitten by sand flies, the result of which was a horrible fever. It lasted several days, sometimes longer and was most unpleasant.

It was during my time here that I volunteered to go back to Malta; this was a very short trip, only lasting a few days. I didn't do much at all whilst there, but I saw many badly damaged planes.

I had been in Africa for about 4 years and was due to return home. One day us 'time expired' chaps were lined up and 25 volunteers were asked for, anything could be better than the desert, bombing runs and being bitten by bed bugs every day, so forward I stepped!

We were taken to Port Sudan and put on a boat called the 'Orion'. We waited in port and after a few days passed by, trucks of German prisoners arrived - nearly 500 in all. We were told to guard them down to South Africa. The boat sailed unescorted through the Indian Ocean, zig zagging all over the place to avoid a submarine pack, which was operating in the area.

During one night, we were looking over the side when we saw a light shining through a porthole. A guard was sent down to the prisoner's quarters, only to find that the blackout had been scaped off one of the portholes. Some of the Germans said they had done it to attract the submarines, they didn't mind if they were torpedoed, they had done it in for the Führer. We clapped them in irons!

After about 10 days sailing we reached Cape Town safely and were transferred to Clareswood transit camp. It was a complete dive and did not go down well at all with us, having spent 4 years in North Africa. All the troops were rookies and had just come out from England. Eventually the authorities gave up on us 25 rebels and let us do our own thing. The locals used to call at the camp regularly and take us out for the day, in and around Durban.

One morning when a friend and I were hanging around the guard room, we were approached by a chauffeur driven Buick; out of the car stepped two very nice young ladies, they asked us if we would like to join them for the day, we didn't wait to be asked twice! We got into the car and were driven to a magnificent house on the outskirts of Durban, here we were introduced to a family called Livingstone; they were actual descendants of Doctor Livingstone. We were given a wonderful time here for about 3 weeks, visiting all the local night spots; we also stayed at their grand beach house at a place called Isipingo.

All good things have to come to an end and we were called back to the boat and sailed once again unescorted through the Atlantic Ocean. We picked up a raft with several seamen on board, they had been torpedoed. Perhaps life in Africa had not been so bad after all! The boat called in at Freetown to refuel, then my time in Africa was over and we set course for the two week journey back home. We docked at Liverpool; then had a full day's journey back to Oxfordshire.

I had 14 days leave when I got back to UK, so I got my old car off the blocks and with my petrol coupons (about 5 gallons) I lived it up for about a week until all the petrol

had gone. At the end of my leave I was instructed to go to Hawkinge on the south coast for onward transmission. I eventually ended up at Lydd, on the Romney Marshes; posted to the Typhoon Squadron in the 2nd Tactical Air Force, ready for the invasion of Europe.

Life on the 'Tiffy' squadron was hectic, the planes were all on ops, all the time doing quick hops across the Channel carrying out various 'shoot ups' on trains, trucks, ships, in fact anything that moved! The planes were troublesome and during very cold weather they had to be run up every hour or so, otherwise if they got too cold they would not start at all. We all had to take turns at this job, day and night.



The 'Tiffy'

I lived in a tent (again!) in the snow, this after 4 years in the tropics was not very funny, especially as there was not much for me to do. I shared a tent with an electrical wizard who soon organised hot water for us; the camp had a large mobile generator which supplied all the juice for landing and search lights etc., it had a one inch cable running across the field close to our tent, so he joined two wires to it, these were then attached to two bits of tin, the tin was then fastened to either side of a block of wood. The wood would then be dropped into a bucket of water, which would boil in about two minutes! So we always had plenty of hot water for drinks and washing.

One bit of excitement, we had was a visit from 'Jerry' every morning at 7.00am; so at 6.55am we would all go down to the nearby ditch to be safe and watch the planes flying over us. I often thought if 'Jerry' had varied his visit by a few minutes each day he may have done himself some good, all he did was make holes in our tents! One bit of luxury, we managed regularly to have Roast Trout. We did this by dropping a hand grenade into a local stream, thus stunning the fish, which then floated to the surface and could then be easily collected-it never failed!

to be continued

30th International Moth Rally Woburn Abbey

Saturday 15 August
and
Sunday 16 August

(Gates open 10.00am on both days)

For full details and online booking go to:

www.mothsatwoburn.co.uk

Flying Display on Sunday.
Trade stands and exhibition.
Gathering of vintage, historic
and classic vehicles.
Public admission to the
aircraft park on both days.
Reduced rate for advance
purchase tickets.

Do not miss this wonderful event!

Project Propeller 2015

Ed: A reprint of a letter from Graham Cowie

Now that the dust has settled, I thought I should take the time to express my thanks to everybody who helped make PP 2015 such a resounding success.

I'd like to start by recording my thanks to Squadron Leader Adrian Pickering. Ever since my first meeting with him, I had no doubt that he would organise air-side in the manner required to do our veterans proud. As far as I'm aware, the execution of the joining procedures has received unanimous praise.

I'd like to thank Timothy Nathan, Tom McCormack and Rob Lees for the time they devoted to refining the joining instructions, in consultation with Squadron Leader Pickering. I'm particularly thankful to Tom for undertaking a huge repositioning exercise on the day to pick up a new recruit (one of 40 this year) for whom an easy access aircraft was essential.

The week leading up to the event was immensely challenging from a rostering perspective; at Gloucester last year I had 2 aircraft drop out. This year, there were 21. No criticism is intended of any pilots, who were victims of circumstance. The willingness of the GA community to fill these gaps was truly marvelous, so that I can still say with great satisfaction that (thanks to you) no veteran has ever been left behind on my watch.

As ever, the event also benefitted from the support of airfields up and down the land. It wasn't just about landing fees, either; the generosity of airfields such as Gloucester, Rochester, Biggin Hill and Leeds who rolled out the red carpet for our veterans, adding a gilt edge to our their day, must also be recorded. I am sure there are other airfields that I've either forgotten, or not been informed of, who went above and beyond the call of duty.

On the day itself, I thought the Air Cadets were magnificent, and showed courtesy, dedication and initiative in spades, providing prime evidence against any assertion that the youth of today are a bad lot. The Guard of Honour for departing veterans was a wonderfully touching gesture. I've e-mailed their Commanding Officer to express our collective thanks. My thanks to the hard working Bob, Harry and Trevor, who did such a sterling job in welcoming inbound veterans.

I didn't stray too much to the gathering end of the hangar, but understand that the reception desk and the catering worked like a well-oiled machine: my grateful thanks to the ladies who manned their station all day, and also to my ground-side colleagues who arrived the night before to set everything up. In Abi Betteridge, the RAF Cosford Event Manager, we could not have had a more accommodating host.

To those pilots who were able to effect meetings between veterans, my special thanks. I'm pleased to say the meeting that I wanted to take place above all others - that of three POWs, who all escaped the same prison camp on the same day some 70 years ago - was duly arranged. I had been plotting this for around 5 months, after picking up the common thread in the memoirs that they each sent me, and I know it brought a special enjoyment to each of them.

As you'd expect, I've received many photographs from the day; rather than post them here, I've been uploading them to the Project Propeller Facebook page. There are some wonderful pictures there, and I'd invite you to have a look, and upload your own too.

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You'll have seen the Lancaster print that veterans were signing; this will be used to raise money for the Bomber Command Memorial, and I am still counseling views on how to do this. I am torn between raising the highest amount (which would imply an auction) and giving everybody a chance to win (which would imply a raffle). These veterans fought for us all, so at the moment I am leaning to the latter view.

And so to departures; I can only echo Dave's apology to you, if you were waiting for a long time. I should have planned this better, and am thinking about ways we could improve next year. My thoughts are running along the lines of a loose departure slot system, where "early in" equals "early out"; the slots could then be announced over the PA system. As it was, I think people started queuing for fear of being in an even longer queue. I'm open to all suggestions on this - you have my e-mail address.

As regards the venue for next year, I generally have little input into the decision, so perhaps it is best that I do not comment.

To anyone I've neglected to thank, my apologies. Although I said I would not post photos, I will change my mind and post only one. It was taken overhead Cosford from an early departing aircraft, and I think it is a picture that we can all look at with immense pride, and say "WE DID THIS".

My grateful thanks to each and every one of you who made this event happen.

Graham



The caption supplied with this photo says it all - Pilot...Rod Heath, co-pilot....Geoff Hulett

Geoff Hulett reports: Elstree was very quiet with just 2 aircraft departing for Cosford. More cloud than blue sky as our Piper Arrow clattered down the pot-holed runway, climbing to 2300 ft as we headed to

Bovingdon. Wx improved as we passed over Stratford upon Avon (The Shakespeare Theatre and Holy Trinity Church bathed in sunshine). We joined the stack over Cosford before landing on it's immaculate runway and then waited for our transport to reception (A Sqn Ldr as mini bus driver!)

The scene inside the Museum followed the usual routine, queue for lunch, tables of chattering veterans, war time music and a brief lecture. The array of aircraft in the Museum is a salutary reminder of how great the RAF once was.

A pleasant flight back to Elstree via Edgehill, where we looked up and saw gliders from the nearby field soaring thousands of feet above us.

Finally we are indebted to those pilots who gave their time and aircraft that we might once again savour the joys of flying and to the organisers of Project Propeller for their outstanding contribution to our enjoyment



What is the collective name for a group of veteran Chiltern members?

Tom Payne writes: Over 150 Veterans plus carers/ helpers arrived in 120 plus aircraft, from all over U.K. Met several old friends, Graham Cowie organised the pilots to bring us all together, his energy spread to all of his helpers. Great to meet Ian Burnstock and his charming wife & Daughter; also met many pilots who have flown me & Derek Gurney in the past. Our current Pilot is Mick Place who has his aircraft based at Denham, Mick lives in High Wycombe and comes to to picks me and Derek up and also brings us home.

Programme 2015

Events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless (*)

15 Jul **Concord, Boom or Bust? - Alan Merriman**

15/16 Aug International Moth Rally at Woburn*

19 Aug Battle of Britain - Chris Wren

25 Sep Aircrew Lunch, Abingdon*

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Welfare

Caught up with Bill Hyland who has now ceased his treatment but is still fighting hard and, as ever, thinking of others. Our love to him and Ann. Hope those of you who went flying on Project Propeller and with Woking ACA at Fairoaks were able to remember it was back for up and forward for down etc.!

David

Membership Secretary

So far the new Membership List has been met with silence which is good. Graham tells me he will issue another one later in the year rather than put in lots of little amendments.

Gerry

Secretary/Editor



Earlier this year a good friend from the Woking Branch, Jimmy James passed away and I am sad to report that another of their members who has attended our functions and was known to many of us: Terry Rourke sadly left us on 21 June. Our thoughts are with his family and friends, particularly those in the Woking ACA and No 46 Squadron. His funeral was held on Thursday 2 July and Chiltern ACA was represented.