



NEWSLETTER

Jack Easter (98) dies in Nursing Home

Jack Easter

Our redoubtable friend and colleague passed away on Thursday 15 August in the Abbeyfield Leonard Pulham Nursing Home in Wendover. Jack had only been there for little over a week having spent many weeks in Stoke Mandeville and then Wycombe Hospital. During the week preceding his death he was visited by Graham Laurie, Bill Hyland, Ron Doble and Tom Payne. It was poignant that his last ACA visitor was Tom who had been a friend for all the time he lived in Tring. Plans were afoot to bring him to meetings as he settled in. Alas this was not to be. We send our deepest condolences to his son and family.

His funeral will take place at **St George's Church, RAF Halton on Monday 2nd September at 1400hrs.** Then he will be buried at Tring Cemetery, following which friends will gather at Pendley Manor for refreshments.

A tribute to Jack appears on Page 4

August Meeting

On 21st August we welcomed back **Hugh Davis** who spoke to us on the **Special Operations Executive (SOE)**. It was a fascinating presentation given with much aplomb by this well travelled speaker.

We heard of the organisation, the personnel involved and the type of operation that they were involved in. The links with the American CIS (later the CIA) and how Britain and the USA differed in the way they handled information from Bletchley Park.

Buffet Lunch–Weds 18 Sep 13

You can still book **by post BUT to Graham Laurie not Gerry Sealy-Bell**. The cost is £8 per head so please get your cheques payable to 'Chiltern ACA' in the post to Graham Laurie, 19 High St, Prestwood, Gt Missenden, Bucks HP16 9EE **by 10 Sep 13 at the latest**.

Aircrew Lunch-Fri 27 Sep 13

Details of this lunch at **The Black Horse, Gozzards Ford, nr Abingdon** can be found on the pages 7 & 8. Cost is £20 per head and tickets are going fast from those who attended last year. We are limited to 60 places, so first come first served.

Flying Breakfast Frim 18 Oct 13

The usual Flying Breakfast will be held at **The Rose & Thistle in Haddenham** at 12 Noon for 1230.. Reserve your place with a cheque (to The Rose & Thistle) for £15pp to Graham Laurie (see Page 8)



Jack Ball's Story – Part 4

Ed: *Jack's story continues in Bomber Command. Memories for many of you I expect!*

In April 1944 I arrived at 30 Operational Training Unit at Hixon, near Stafford. By this time I was a Warrant Officer, the highest I could get unless I took a commission. It was time to gather a crew from the other categories, which we now met for the first time. I approached a boyish navigator, Gordon Foot, who seemed happy to join me. I liked the look of a large, elderly Aussie, Mike O'Connor, standing nearby. He was a Bomb aimer but had also had navigation training. He volunteered to get a good Aussie wireless operator and I agreed. It turned out to be 18 year-old Peter McGill from Woolamaloo. Out of the melee a pair of gunners approached me. They were short, stocky and elderly to my eyes. They had been pals through training in South Africa. Bob Job and Pat O'Malley admitted to their mid-thirties and came naturally as a job lot. Mike O'Connor was a splendid man, thirty-six years old, calm, imperturbable and rather shy. He claimed to have been in a Western Australian rifle regiment that had been disbanded for insubordination, but I was never sure when he was joking. In civilian life he had been a gold mining engineer in Kalgoorlie and had prospected in the desert. Many years later I found that he had been raised in a foster family. Gordon Foot was to fly with me for the next three years, 18 years old, below average height, he looked so young that if he wore shorts when on leave, he passed for a schoolboy and travelled half fare. He was an excellent navigator, very precise and accurate, never betraying any anxiety.

We went to Stafford Baths for dinghy training, which meant stepping off the top board in flying gear. I had to be first. One of the crew was reluctant, but followed. Mike said to me later, "If push comes to shove I'll hit him over the head and out he'll go". We flew Vickers Wellingtons, designed by Barnes Wallis on the geodetic principle, capable of taking heavy damage, proven since the war began. Now classed as a twin engined medium bomber, they were easy to handle and roomy. The course was about eighty hours flying, with half at night, and consisted of long cross-countries identifying coloured TI's (target indi-

cators) before turning for home, or fighter affiliation, where we tried to out manoeuvre the fighters.

It all culminated in a trip to Holland dropping leaflets. We had an engine cut out over the North Sea, due to Pat, who was a passenger (no turret to man) kicking a fuel tap to 'off' in his sleep. On these flights, I landed using the Blind Approach system as often as possible. It was an early version of ILS (instrument landing system). With this, it was reckoned to be safe to let down through cloud to three hundred feet.

About this time the invasion of Europe took place and long columns of troops and tanks rolled south. I heard later that George Baxter, a friend from Mount Hope, had been lost with all his crew, mainly Canadians, in a disastrous raid against Wesseling oil refinery, when over a quarter of the Lancasters were shot down. Here I was commissioned to Pilot Officer. Our next step in this long progression to operational flying was on 21st July to 1667 Heavy Conversion Unit at Sandtoft on Thorne Waste. Crews already there cheerfully told that it was known as 'Prangtoft' due to the crash rate of the Halifax I. Engines were cutting out because the fuel was fed from a large number of small tanks, the controls for which were hidden under a rest-bed back in the fuselage. It was too easy to select a wrong tank or cause a vapour lock.

Flight Engineer, 'Jock' Mackintosh, joined us here, pushing forty, a fine dancer: his tango was a delight to behold. His civilian experience was as a lorry driver, and he had something of a cavalier attitude to problems, but more importantly to me his eyesight was as keen as Bob Job's, and it was reassuring to have a good lookout at both ends of the aircraft. His immediate job on the Halifax was to operate the fuel controls on my intercom instructions, thus solving the local problem (later Halifaxes were fitted with radial engines and more sensible fuel controls). Once engines were started, there was no chatter on the intercom and the crew reverted to addressing me as 'Skipper' and vice versa. I was being instructed on 'circuits and bumps' by Ted Ellis, who had won the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal over Berlin with 625 Squadron.

There was a crosswind and, on landing one fine day, I failed to cancel out all the drift, the result being that we left the runway at an alarming angle and sped across the grass, scattering football players oneither side. Ted wanted to show me where I'd 'boobed' so we went round again. Unfortunately he got the same result. We laughed about it, but I don't think the footballers or the crew were amused.

From Sandtoft we went to No.1 Lancaster Finishing School at Hemswell, near Gainsborough where, over three days, I put in eleven hours learning to handle the Avro Lancaster. This was an aircraft without vice. Easy to handle, sturdy, fuel cocks on a simple side panel and four throttle levers that fitted snugly to the hand. Sadly, to save weight, the ILS blind landing system had been removed and the armour behind the pilot's head had been replaced with painted plywood. I belonged to No.1 Group which, I later learned, had a philosophy of carting maximum bomb load to the enemy. Anything else was secondary. Ted Ellis CGM was the main reason that I and two other pilots applied to go to 625 Squadron. He described it as very friendly, a great CO and Station Commander. Unfortunately, the demand for this squadron was too great, and my pals with whom I'd spent many happy evenings, 'Taff' Edwards and 'Jock' McGonigle, were both posted to 101 Squadron down the road at Ludford Magna, to be killed, with all crew. They carried an eighth German-speaking crewman whose job was to give misinformation to the enemy night-fighters. 625 squadron was based at Kelstern, near Louth in Lincolnshire. The aerodrome, built in 1943, was high on the Wolds and could be cold and windy at any time of the year. The squadron had been formed there as soon as the accommodation was ready with "We Avenge" as the pointed motto. We arrived there in September 1944. The CO was a young and dashing Wing Commander, Douglas Haig, allegedly of that family; the station commander was Group Captain Donkin, a more venerable gentleman who could also stand on his head to drink a pint of beer if required. We were sent off on a night cross-country trip for experience. After four hours we were diverted to Lindholme, Yorkshire, because of fog at base. Everything looked fine when we arrived, the runway lights being visible

from above at a thousand feet, but as we made the landing approach all lights vanished when we entered the fog at three hundred feet and I had to abandon the landing. This was a very fraught situation: now I needed the missing ILS. The control tower had no reachable alternative airfield to offer. I requested that the Duty Pilot, in a caravan at the threshold of the runway, fire Verey lights when he heard our engines approaching so that I could try to line up the giro compass on the runway heading whilst letting down on instruments. I tried twice more, with Gordon getting me a radar fix to turn on to the runway heading, while Jock and Mike both strained their eyes for a glimpse of the threshold. Twice more we had tabandon. On a third attempt we saw the caravan as we passed over and I put the plane down. We finished up stuck in the mud off the far end of the runway, but safe and unbroken. It was a very lucky escape in which Gordon's radar fixes and the Duty Pilot's Verey lights were essential.

My first operational trip came the next night. It was as 'second dickie' to an experienced pilot, Flight Lieutenant Avery. I was a bit dismayed when he climbed in and put on a pair of spectacles. I sat in the Engineer's seat during the flight and we attacked an airfield at Rheine-Salzebergen with twenty 500lb bombs in support of the Arnhem landings due on the morrow. We left it well cratered. Our 12 Base Commander from Binbrook, Air-Commodore Wray DSO MC DFC AFC, came over to give a welcoming pep-talk. He had been shot down in the previous war and was known as 'Pegleg' as a result of his wounds. He was a doughty warrior who used to take inexperienced crews to Berlin and such places. The gist of his talk was, "don't weave around trying to dodge the flak, just go straight through it". I decided to adopt his credo.

Ed: *Tom Payne reports his troopship he shared with Phil Potts also had an outbreak of Scarlet fever. He had a positive test once he reached 31PD Moncton, which necessitated injections over a number of weeks but later collapsed, yes you've guessed it, with Scarlet Fever. This delayed his training 3 months and as Tom says subsequently, probably saved his life!*

John 'Jack' Easter WOpAG



Jack collecting his 'papers' from MOD

'Jack' started his service at Uxbridge in August 1940 but normal delays made it May 1941 before he started flying at Yatesbury where he honed his Morse skills on the Proctor and Dominie. From July to November 1941 he was posted to Mildenhall where he appeared to be employed mainly in the Dining hall, waiting on the NCOs and washing up. He was supposed to get a shilling a week from each of them but it never materialised. After that it was back to Yatesbury for more flying, mainly on the Proctor until March 1942 when he was posted to Evanton AGS on the Whitley and Botha and much enjoyed the night firing exercises - when the aircraft and guns were serviceable. March 1942 saw Jack posted to Abingdon (10 OTU) on Whitleys again. The following month he took part in 1000 bomber raid to Bremen. Visibility was rather too good, but he said that the flak was bursting well ahead of them due to their very low TAS! August 1942 and it was on to Marston Moor HCU. One evening he was detached to Topcliffe joining another crew. After one aborted approach Jack braced hard for the second attempt and woke up the next morning in York Military hospital alone, all the rest of the crew had perished. Four and a half months later he returned to Marston Moor to join a new crew. In February 1943 he was posted to 148 Special Duties Squadron and left Lyneham for Cairo. After a series of unserviceabilities and other delays he did his first Op. in May, flying from rudimentary strips in North Africa to drop supplies and personnel into the Balkans. He managed a trip home in September 1943 in order that their Halifax

could have a major at Handley Page near York. They managed to bring home some citrus fruit which was well received.

Back to North Africa in November to resume operations and December saw a really scary one.

It was the 12th Op this time over Albania in turbulent conditions, with some icing, in the mountains, when the aircraft suddenly went into a steep dive. The astrodome blew out and the drift flares at the rear caught fire. Jack and the dispatcher managed to open the well doors and jettison the flares before putting the fire out near the rear turret. The pilot recovered the aircraft and climbed away. Jack contacted Tocra and said that they were returning. Base advised of severe crosswind and suggested a diversion but this was unacceptable due to fuel state and hydraulic problems and elected to land at base. On touchdown they collided with a Spitfire which was parked (too) close to the runway. A fire started around the starboard inner and the Spitfire was burned out. They all scrambled out okay!

In February 1944 the Squadron moved to Brindisi and Jack finished his second tour in April. During that tour they had dropped personnel and supplies into the most difficult terrain with little information other than light signals in support of the partisans. They could only drop when the signals were correctly identified. On occasions the signals were late or incomplete and they held in the area, sometimes watching those on snow-fields below trying to complete the code. It came as little consolation that they were occasionally fired on by other partisan groups who thought the presence of a circling aircraft would bring the Germans in!

Just after Jack left 148 they were reassigned to trips to Warsaw with little or no assistance from anyone. It is believed that the entire Squadron was soon lost.

In August 1944 he was posted to Abusueir as an instructor, where he stayed until June 1945 when he was posted to Alexandria 18 Embarkation Unit. Whilst he was there he worked with a marine craft unit checking the loading and unloading of RAF supplies from boats in the harbour. He was demobbed in December 1945 and returned to his old firm as a Provisions Sales Rep. His main hobbies were gardening and cycling.

Ed: *He made many friends in the ACA but none more than Tom Payne who will miss his buddy more than most!*

Did you train with this chap?

One of the regular drinkers in the Greenacres Tavern approached our Chairman with this photo. The crew includes William Jones an Air Gunner with 9 Sqn. We do not have any members of that squadron but....what about your training days, does anybody remember him?



9 Sqn Crew

Fred Maryon, N Herts Branch

Ed: *Fred is one of the many ACA members who receives our Newsletter by email. After some recent correspondence I found out he had re-married and told me a lovely story of his mate and Best Man at 'both weddings'. Here is a resume of Fred and the story!*

My first posting as a Flight Engineer was to 230 Squadron at Pembroke Dock on Sunderland flying boats. My good friend, who was our navigator was like myself a sergeant, his name is David 'Dickie' Burden. He left the squadron before I did, I think early in 1953 to go on a commissioning course. When I was married on 25th July 1953 to Thelma, I asked 'Dickie' to be my 'Best Man'. He was happy to carry out the duty.

He served for many years in the RAF and ended up as a Squadron Leader working at MOD in London.

My diamond wedding anniversary had my wife survived, would have been on 25th July 2013. However, sadly she spent her last three years in care suffering with Alzheimer's disease and died early in 2008.

When Joyce and I decided to get married, on 27th July 2013, I asked 'Dickie' if he would mind repeating his duties of 1953. I was delighted that he accepted, after all it saved me training another 'Best Man'.

He did the job well, charmed the ladies (as he always did), **but asked that I should not ask him again if the occasion arose!**

My wife's name is, or was Mrs. Joyce Davis a widowed lady of 17 years. Our Rector said that we were a first for him as he had never married octogenarians. **I told him not to expect any baptisms in the near future.**

Hope this will not be too risqué for your old chaps! (**Ed:** *How little he knows us!*)

I have often thought of asking if I and perhaps one or two others could come over to hear your talks, usually there is something else on or I cannot stir my bones to tangle with the 'Magic Roundabout'. I nearly came to listen to John Hutchinson (one of our members), and Alan Merriman who was our Vice President until he retired in 2011. We just meet at a monthly lunch (Naafi Break) and have a dinner at Christmas.

Thank you for your interest, I sometimes crib items from your newsletter, so we are quits.

Ed: *Fred, You and any others are always welcome, why not try our November meeting, as Alan Merriman is our speaker.*

Programme

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

18 Sep Guest's Lunch* 1200 Noon

27 Sep Aircrew Lunch* Abingdon 1200 Noon

16 Oct Member's Meeting

18 Oct Flying Breakfast, Haddenham* 1200 Noon

20 Nov The Lightening - Alan Merriman

18 Dec Christmas Lunch* 1200 Noon

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Welfare

News this month dominated by the passing of our old friend Jack Easter. Items will be elsewhere in the Newsletter and perhaps you may like to pen a few words about Jack for inclusion in a future edition.

Medical and other problems continue to beset our members but you all seem to bear up rather well under the strain. Alan Chappell remains in hospital at the moment and is rather poorly. Harry Purver is flitting between Stoke Mandeville Hospital and his permanent abode at the Leonard Pulham home in Halton.

We have several members who are rather under the weather but at the moment would prefer not to broadcast the fact. You know who you are and my thoughts are with you. You know you only have to call and perhaps a trouble shared.....

It was great to see Jim Tomlinson back with us at the last meeting, where we had a good turnout.

Des Richards sends his best regards to everyone and we return them to him and Janet who remains poorly but Des works incredibly hard in her support, in addition to his many other commitments.

Bill

Membership Secretary



Had a look at the latest Newsletter from Abbots Langley & Kings Langley RAFA to see Edna and Dave Francis featured. Edna had been awarded an area Presidential

Certificate for outstanding and devoted service to RAFA. Dave also was recently a guest of 2F Watford ATC Squadron at their 75th Anniversary Service. He was CO for 18 years and served on their committee for 50 Years. Our congratulations, love and very best wishes to them both.

Gerry

The Black Horse 'Aircrew Lunch' Menu

Mains

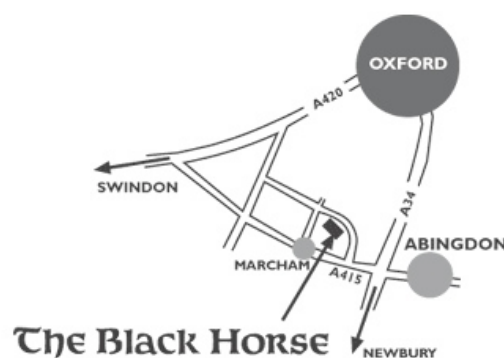
- A. Lamb Shank**
slowly cooked in red wine, rosemary, garlic, redcurrant jelly with buttered mash and seasonal veg
- B. 10oz Oxfordshire Gammon Steak**
with free range fried eggs or pineapple rings, chips and salad
- C. Steak, Ale & Mushroom Pie**
puff pastry lid, chips and seasonal veg
- D. Chicken, Ham & Leek Pie**
in a white wine sauce, puff pastry lid, chips and seasonal veg
- E. Local Sausages**
on buttered mash, caramelised red onion gravy
- F. Traditional Beef Lasagne**
with garlic bread and salad
- G. Gourmet Fish Pie**
seasonal white fish, salmon and prawns topped with cheesy mash and seasonal veg
- H. Fish & Chips**
Morland beer battered fish, mushy peas and homemade tartare sauce
- J. Wholetail Battered Scampi**
with chips, salad and homemade tartare sauce
- K. Grilled Fillet of Salmon**
with hot new potatoes and garden salad
- L. Chicken Caesar Salad**
Cos lettuce, croutons, Parmesan shavings and Cardini Caesar dressing
- M. Prawn & Crayfish Salad**
with hot new potatoes and garden salad
- N. Spinach & Ricotta Pasta**
with a mature cheddar cheese sauce and garlic bread
- O. Pasta of the Day**
with roasted Mediterranean vegetables and a basil pesto sauce and garlic bread
- P. Roasted Red Pepper**
with cherry tomatoes & basil, melted Feta cheese, sweet pepper sauce and salad

Sweets

- Q. Chef's Crumble of the Day**
with cream, custard or vanilla pod ice cream
- R. Bread and Butter Pudding**
with cream, custard or vanilla pod ice cream
- S. Chef's Cheesecake of the Day**
- T. Pavlova**
with summer fruits and fresh whipped double cream
- U. Warm Chocolate Brownies**
with a rich chocolate sauce and vanilla pod ice cream
- V. Classic Hot Sticky Toffee Pudding**
caramel sauce and vanilla pod ice cream
- W. Posh Sherry Trifle**
layered with biscotti biscuits, custard, cream and fruits of the forest
- X. Cheeseboard**
Brie, Stilton, Mature Cheddar with 'biccies', bread and red onion chutney
- Y. Tea**
- Z. Coffee**

TOTAL £20 inc of gratuities

The Black Horse



Gozzards Ford, Abingdon, Oxon,
OX13 6JH
Tel: 01865 390530

Aircrew Lunch

Friday 28th September 2012

1200 Noon

The Black Horse, Gozzards Ford, Abingdon, Oxon OX13 6JH

Please send me tickets (**£20.00 per person**) for the Aircrew Lunch

NAME: ADDRESS.....

TEL NO:

MENU CHOICE: MAIN..... SWEET..... TEA or COFFEE.....

- I enclose:**
- a. **Cheque payable to 'The Black Horse'**
 - b. **Send to Graham Laurie, 19 High St, Prestwood, Gt Missenden, Bucks HP16 9EE**

The Rose & Thistle, Haddenham HP17 8AJ

Friday 18 October 12 Noon for 1230pm

English Breakfast

Eggs ,beans, tomato, bacon, sausage, mushrooms & toast

Rolled chicken breast

Stuffed with fig and feta, served with mash& gravy

Apple & Cinnamon Roulade

With raisins and honey drizzle served with ice cream

£15 per person

Coffee or Tea at £1pp

- I enclose:**
- a. **Cheque payable to 'The Rose & Thistle' plus menu choice**
 - b. **Send to Graham Laurie, 19 High St, Prestwood, Gt Missenden, Bucks HP16 9EE**