



Woking and District Aircrew Association www.aircrew.org.uk/woking Newsletter

16 July 2021

Editorial

Just a short newsletter this time as the COVID restrictions are about to be reduced.

First, though, the very sad news that one of our veteran members, Alfred Vice, has died. His family would welcome an ACA presence at the funeral at Trinity Methodist Church, Woking at noon on Friday 23 July. They'd appreciate advance notice of attendance not least to plan catering in the church hall afterwards. Please advise David Jackson at akribie@ntlworld.com if you are able to attend. His chapter in Upside Down Nothing on the Clock is reproduced on page 2 as a tribute to one of our last WWII aircrew members.

We now need to address the future of our branch, one of the few remaining in UK. Lunches suit only some of our 2019 membership. Would evening meals during the lighter Summer months be more popular? Is there anyone who is prepared to organise speakers for an evening meeting as we had before? What other suggestions are there? Please let us know.

The projected Fair Oaks Simulator session in June had to be cancelled due to COVID. We have been offered 1030-1200 on either 9, 11, or 12 August. So far I have 6 names, but more would be welcome. Please would those interested indicate which days they can make so that I can make a firm booking with Airline Experience. Even if you are not a pilot, seeing a modern cockpit with all its computerised facilities should be of interest as well as having an opportunity to meet up with some branch colleagues after all this time.

We plan a committee meeting in the next couple of weeks to plot a way forward, so your views by return would be most appreciated. Or you can contribute to the discussion at our final(?) Zoom meeting at our usual 2pm on the 3rd Tuesday of July (ie Tuesday next). Details below.

David Jackson

**ACAW Zoom Meeting
1400 Tuesday 20 July**

Click [HERE](#) to join

Recent RAF Happenings

Sentinels Retired

The five Raytheon Sentinel R1 aircraft operated by No 5 (AC) Squadron at RAF Waddington have been withdrawn from service and will be scrapped. The squadron was re-formed in 2004 and flew its first operational mission with the Sentinel in 2008. During the next thirteen years it flew 32,000 flying hours comprising 4,870 sorties providing surveillance and real-time intelligence to ground forces in Europe, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, West Africa and other areas. The withdrawal of the Sentinel leaves the UK without a long-range battlefield area surveillance capability and with no replacement yet announced.

Typhoons Return to Romania

Four Eurofighter Typhoon FGR4s from No 9 (Bomber) Squadron have deployed from their RAF Lossiemouth base to Constanta, Romania in support of NATO's Enhanced Air Policing mission. This is the third time the RAF has taken part in this ongoing operation.

New Chinooks Ordered

A contract to purchase 14 new Boeing H-47 (ER) Chinook helicopters has been agreed and will allow the RAF to modernise its fleet as older Chinooks are retired. Deliveries to the main Chinook base at RAF Odiham will start in 2026.

Welcome Aboard

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Welcome to flight 123 non-stop New York to Los Angeles. The weather ahead is good and we should have a smooth and uneventful flight. Now sit back and relax – OH, MY GOD"

Silence followed and after a few minutes the captain came back and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry if I scared you earlier, but while I was talking the flight attendant brought me a cup of hot coffee and spilt it on my lap. You should see the front of my pants."

A passenger in Economy muttered ruefully, "That's nothing. He should see the back of mine!"

In proud memory of ACA Woking member Alfred Vice who sadly passed away on 21 June aged 98.

Extract from Upside Down Nothing on the Clock by Woking Aircrew Association

ALFRED VICE was a 1 Group navigator on 166 Squadron, Kirmington who completed a tour of 35 operations.

A NAVIGATOR'S TALE: NOT A MOUSE STIRRING

My operational experience in the RAF may be characterised by the opening scene of Hamlet - "Have you had a quiet guard?". "Not a mouse stirring".

At the age of 19, I was studying law at Oxford and conscription was looming. A life in the trenches did not appeal to me, and the navy did not seem suitable either, for a non-swimmer. That left the RAF, and as it did not occur to me that this meant anything other than a role in aircrew, I volunteered in September 1941 for that.

I reported to A.C.R.C. in London in March 1942 and learned that I had been selected for a navigator's lengthy training. A few weeks after arriving at I.T.W. at Hornchurch, my intake was due to be posted but I, and another trainee, were excluded as our chest X-rays had raised queries. Further medical checks at Uxbridge disclosed that I was eligible for discharge. However, I would be allowed to stay in the service if I were to submit to several months' observation and then a medical board. I chose to go on.

In due course I completed the initial training and then went before the medical board in January 1943; this cleared me for flying duties, though I was offered the choice of ground duties only. Again, I chose to go on as aircrew. I had suffered as a baby from bronchitis, and the medical queries had caused a delay of 15 months in all. (This delay probably saved my life).

My navigation training started in July in South Africa, after an appallingly sordid four week voyage there in a grossly over crowded troopship. In March 1944 I returned by sea in much better conditions altogether. Finally, I joined a crew in July and my persistence to fly began to bear fruit at last.

When we did our first operation at the end of October, losses for Bomber Command had declined to about 1 % generally. The average for the whole Command is not, of course, the average for all its parts. My own squadron (166) losses in my time were 2.25% and within that time we had three operations each with a



loss rate of 11%. However, matters proceeded quietly enough for our crew and I was rarely aware of enemy opposition, in my cosy compartment with little need to look outside the aircraft. We occasionally picked up shell splinters on raids, but I never knew of these until we had landed. Once, a hole in the wing showed that an incendiary had passed through precisely between the aileron and a fuel tank without damaging either en route. A very near miss with another Lancaster, in cloud, is certainly memorable!

There were many nights, though, of hard work. 16 of my 35 ops were over seven hours in duration; the one on the 14th March took over 8 1/4 hours. This trip entailed no fewer than 94 log entries, made under the pressure of exact timing. Time was the bane, and the kernel, of a navigator's job of controlling the onrushing future from the interpretation of the fleeting past.

On 9th April, I routinely attended the navigators' briefing, only to be told that the tour length had been reduced and that, in fact, our crew were tour expired with 35 ops completed. We were thus denied the joy of knowing that our last landing had been made.

When I stood in front of Buckingham Palace for the VE anniversary in 1995 and watched the fly-past, I felt pleased to have done something, however small, towards securing that these were RAF aircraft and not those of a victorious Luftwaffe. If Dame Fortune had allotted me a quiet guard, should I complain?

