

# 102 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

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## NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1997

Hon. Sec. Tom Wingham, 12 Orchard St., Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 1EH



## REPORT ON THE ANNUAL REUNION - YORK, 1997

Once more it is a pleasure to report on a very successful Reunion in this Eightieth year since 102 Squadron was formed in August 1917. This was the 14th. consecutive year we had assembled since the forming of the Association in 1983, thanks to the groundwork put in over ten years by our former Secretary, Jack Sherwin, who we were happy to see, in apparent good health, with us again this year. There was quite a gathering of members who booked in on Friday and with the Langwith Bar open this year we were able to lubricate our tongues from the word go.

Things got under way on Saturday morning with some members making their individual ways to the Memorial Room at RAF, Linton-on-Ouse, where they were met by Peter Naylor who has responsibility for the room. Every Squadron who served at Linton during the war years has its own display case of memorabilia relevant to those years and although, due to being there for only one month in 1940, the 102 Sqdn. contribution is small, the quality is of the highest, being Leonard Cheshire's epic handling of N-Nan. Peter Taylor was delighted to have the opportunity to chat with members and to receive ideas for future displays. Anyone in the vicinity who wishes to visit the Memorial Room should contact Peter on 01347 848261 (Ext 7422).

Of course, this was but one of the attractions that York had to offer and other members were doing the sights and sounds of the city at this time, albeit with an eye on the time to ensure that they were not too late for the afternoon Assembly in Langwith College. After mid-day, numbers swelled in the University as members started to pile in and refresh themselves at the bar before tucking in to the admirable buffet put up by the College. Memories were recalled as names and incidents from the past were tossed freely around, some with sadness but most with laughter. But time passes all too quickly and members began to drift away after 4:00p.m (alright - 1600 hours!) in order to smarten themselves up for the formality of the evening.

It was good to see Lady Walker with us again in the evening together with the Mayor and Civic party from Pocklington Town and our Guest Of Honour once more, Group Captain Richard Thomas, Station Commander, RAF. Linton-on-Ouse. From what was said later, it would appear that our guests were much entertained during the Reception period, prior to Dinner, by many anecdotes and tales from the 40's told with much laughter and, (perhaps?), with some embellishment. From about 6:50p.m. (here we go again, - 1850 hours) our admirable M.C., Robert Sharp, took the guidance of the evening under his sure hand and we proceeded into Dinner on time.

In the unavoidable absence of Valerie Hewetson, Grace was proffered by Ernest Fenton who took everyone by surprise with a superb rendering which brought forth applause before he was able to finish the last two lines which really gave the point to the Grace. An excellent meal followed and the University staff are to be congratulated on the smooth flow of service. After the Loyal Toast was proposed by Dick Dykes, the Mayor of Pocklington, Cllr. Mrs. Norma Jennings, rose to propose the toast to 102 Squadron. In doing this the Mayor pointed out that what one heard was not necessarily the same as what one saw. Listening to members recounting experiences earlier in the evening most of them were amusing and did not reflect the fears and agonies of the times and of being separated from families and loved ones. It was with this in mind that



Pocklington had been glad to have been able to provide some sense of normality to members in those dark days and were pleased now to salute the members of 102 Squadron. The Secretary then followed and was pleased to welcome Lady Walker who had become so much a part of the Reunion and always reminded us of our proud association with 'Gus', of whom we all had our memories. At this point Tom dropped his notes and thereafter spent more time trying to remember them than talking. In extending a welcome to the Mayor and her Consort and supporting members of the Town Council, Tom said he particularly wished to welcome Martin Layton, the Town Clerk, who was always in the background and over the years had worked as a very effective liaison officer with the Council on behalf of the Association. The Secretary then went on to welcome Group Captain Richard Thomas and Sara Godley and pointed out that although the squadron's association with Linton was rather short, nevertheless it was marked indelibly by Leonard Cheshire's exploit with N-Nan. He then welcomed those members who had this year made the trip from Down Under: Don & Mary McPhail and Don Houghton from New South Wales, 'Mid' Middleton from South Australia and Betty Banks (nee Hewitt) from Queensland. It was appreciated that these journeys require a lot of effort and get harder to make as age creeps up but, as Tom said, age is often a matter of perception which changes with the years. He was reminded of this by a letter recently received from Ted Hartley, a Whitley man from the 1940/41 era. In the letter, Ted said that he joined 102 Squadron at Topcliffe with an Ernie Goodall. They reported to their Flight Commander, Flt/Lt Lofty Long. In Ted's own words, "He looked at us unbelievably and uttered "God, are they sending me MEN now?" We didn't understand such an odd remark. I was 26 and Ernie a couple of years older. It was only when we met other crew that we realised that we were old men. All around us were youths from overseas, battle-experienced, none over 20/21. Few of them ever got back to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other places - of that I am sure, - but without them we could not have manned all our Whitleys, so few were we U.K. types. We should always remember them." That sentiment was shared by all present. The Toast was then proposed to "Guests", coupled with the "Royal Air Force". The Response was given by Richard Thomas thanking the Association on behalf of the guests for an excellent meal and a very convivial atmosphere which was unmatched by any other reunions he attended. He had looked up the period which 102 had spent at Linton in 1940 and found that in that time they had carried out 55 operational sorties, lost seven aircraft and had 15 aircrew killed. Quite significant! Richard continued by pointing out that 102 had then moved to Topcliffe, an airfield which came under the wing of Linton and for which he was responsible, so that he felt that the association was really longer than the four weeks spent at Linton. Richard explained that he had spent most of his career in the RAF avoiding desk jobs but nevertheless had come to understand the way the Service works particularly when interpreting comments on the reports which reached his desk. He then proceeded to regale the assembly with an amusing summary of these. (A list is given elsewhere in this Newsletter). In talking about the state of the RAF, he did not wish to sound too downbeat but it was now heading for a strength of 52,000 plus 30,000 civilians and in eighteen months time there would be less than 200 uniformed personnel at Linton with 600 civilians. Everything was budgetary



driven and the AOC was now known as the Chief Executive. There was now a move towards a reduction to 45,000 and loss of further squadrons. Training had also been hit and it was difficult to predict the future. However, on the positive side, there was new equipment coming along, the Eurofighter, new transport aircraft and helicopters. Above all, the quality of staff and morale was still good and this was due in no small part to the inheritance and example, which they could never hope to match, handed down to them from fifty years ago. On behalf of all the Guests he thanked the Association for a splendid evening.

The final Toast was proposed by John Bosworth, during which members were invited to stand and remember their own friends during a poignant silence, before joining him in "Absent Friends".

On Sunday, with the sun shining, a proud body of members marched down the village at Barmby Moor where Lady Walker took the salute. The Service followed with the Sermon given by Canon Jack Armstrong, a former member of groundcrew with 83 Squadron (PFF) who was involved in radar development and was assisting Bernard Lovell in this work. His sermon is published in full in this Newsletter for those members unable to attend.

Following the service, members made their way to the airfield for a short ceremony conducted by the Rev. Valerie Hewetson, after which Lady Walker laid a wreath on behalf of the Association.

Before departure for home, there followed one of the highlights of the weekend when members made their way to the Yorkshire Air Museum, where after partaking of refreshments in the NAAFI, they were able to board the reconstructed Halifax and discuss the layout of the interior with those responsible for the refurbishment of the aircraft. It is but a shell, at the moment, and there is much work to be done but with the dedication of the YAM volunteers it will surely, in the not too distant future, stand again completely restored as a reminder of the proud history of the Halifax.

### CAN YOU HELP?

P/O HARLEY W.E.DONALD, Pilot, was an Aussie who ditched when returning from a raid on Les Hauts Boissons on the night of 24th. July 1944. Only one crew member survived, Air Gunner, F/Sgt. R.B. Seth. Anyone who knew Harley or is aware of the last known address of F/Sgt Seth is requested to get in touch with Tom Wingham.

Sgt. R.H. BREWER, Rear Gunner, was the sole survivor of the aircraft piloted by F/Lt A.J. Page which crashed at Piencourt after a raid on Stuttgart on 15th. July 1944. Sgt Brewer became a POW. Anyone who has any knowledge of his whereabouts is asked to contact Tom Wingham.

C.H. ROBINSON (F/O?) Of the Signals Section, Believed to be involved with Radar at Pocklington from 1942 onwards. Anyone who can remember this officer please contact the Secretary.

SGT. JACK VERNON FINNEY, W/op in crew of Flt/Lt P.E. Young who were all killed on the night of 13 Aug '44 on raid to Ruesselheim. Anyone who has any recollection of Jack Finney or the other crew members please contact Mrs. J.M. Mornin, 24 Meadowfield, Dalgety Bay, Fife, Scotland, KY11 5UT. Tel: 01383 824376



## Sermon Given by the Rev Canon Jack Armstrong at the Annual Reunion Service.

Jesus said in that second Lesson, 'If you keep my Commandments you abide in my love that your joy may be full. You are to love one another. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you obey my Commandments.' And I preach against that background of these certain promises of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, I'm delighted and honoured to be here and to be asked to be your preacher this morning. For over three years I worked as ground crew on 83 Squadron PFF Bomber Command, being a very minor cog in the development and the Air Testing of various radar devices, Gee, H2S, Fishpond, and the rest - you know them all. I flew on flying tests but not on operations, - they reckoned I knew too much!

I flew in Lancasters, (Boos from the congregation) - now, I've got that out of the way! Well, I flew on Lancasters, which, with your Halifaxes waged the war against the Germans. I very much admired your aircraft, especially the escape hatches. As you probably know, to get out of a Lanc in a hurry you found the escape route somewhat difficult, so as far as I am concerned it was as the results said. Out of a crew of seven it was reckoned that 3.2 would get out of a Halifax but only 2.5 would get out of a Lanc. So on that basis your Halifax wins every time.

And now, having made my peace with everybody the next thing I must do is to wish you many happy returns on your 80th birthday which is to happen in a few weeks' time. Your squadron was formed on 9th August 1917 flying F.E.2b's in the Royal Flying Corps and only a fortnight ago I saw photographs of these aircraft painted black and 102 crews with electrically heated jackets and gloves. That was at Old Warden airfield, Biggleswade, which many of you will know. The Squadron was disbanded almost immediately after the first World War. But it was re-formed in October 1935, equipped with the Handley Page Heyford, a biplane bomber with a fixed undercarriage. In 1938 you had the Whitley 3, - that was an improvement, - which was the first designed heavy night bomber, as they said in those days.

Various organizations in Ceylon raised money to purchase an aircraft for the Royal Air Force and in 1941 your squadron was given this plane, hence the reference to Ceylon in your title. It was Whitley D4261 DY-S and it was at Topcliffe. Unhappily, it didn't last long, because it was lost on the night of 1st March 1941 on a raid to Cologne. And then you spent the last three years or so of the war here at Pocklington with minor marks of the Halifax. The plane had to be developed, of course, as you know, with various teething troubles, engines, etc. But here the Base Commander, was the one-armed Air Commodore, 'Gus' Walker and we are delighted to have Lady Walker here with us this morning. He was described by Guy Gibson as the best Station Commander he ever met and I once had the pleasure of meeting Gus at Elvington - but it was after the war. A very fine leader indeed! And so you settled down here and became a fully active bomber station, always active during the war. At first, it was only leaflets you were dropping but then on 19th March 1940 with other RAF aircraft you dropped the first



bombs on Germany, the seaplane base on the island of Hornum. When Hitler struck at Norway, again you were in action and your squadron hit an ammunition shed, - must have been a lucky shot with the bombsights of those days. Never mind, you hit it and it exploded. Well done! And a few days later you were to make a start dropping mines along the Dutch, German and French coasts and that cost great loss to Germany during the war. In fact, your squadron dropped just under 1900 mines in the course of the war. Then in June 1940 Italy decided to join the winning side, as they thought, but you were quickly mobilised and a couple of days later you attacked the Fiat works in Turin and Genoa. A tremendous long flight this in the Whitleys and you touched down in the Channel Isles to re-fuel on the way out and some of you had to do it on the way back too. A very difficult raid, long range over the Alps, heavy icing, and no guidance support in those days, with only radio means at that distance. Aircrew faced many dangers, problems with accurate navigation to the target, perhaps, more important, to find their way back home again, technical problems with the aircraft which occasionally flared up, and always, of course, the problems with the weather, - the Met Man never seemed to get it quite right, did he? And, on top of that, enemy action too. One of the best known members of Bomber Command was Group Captain Cheshire. He completed his first tour with your squadron at Driffield and was given an immediate award of the DSO and he got a DFC later on. We rejoice in our squadron, about our heroes which we know, but there must have been many others, with no record, unfortunately, of them because there were no survivors. As we sometimes say of our saints, unknown to man, known only to God. In 1940, P/O Cheshire was flying a Whitley attacking a secondary target at Cologne marshalling yards, the so-called Happy Valley of the Ruhr. He was hit twice by live flak on his run-in to the target which opened up a fifteen foot gash in the port side of the aircraft. A flare was detonated in the fuselage which started a fire; smoke and fumes filled the plane, of course, but these were fought and extinguished by the Wireless Operator, Sgt. Davidson. Eight and a half hours later Cheshire brought that crippled plane back. He got an immediate award of the DSO and his Wireless Operator received the DFM. The rear gunner in that particular aircraft and the rear gunner, quite often, in the following raids of G/Capt Cheshire was P/O Rivas. later a Squadron Leader who got the DFC. In his book "Tail Gunner" he tells of this story because he was actually in the aircraft at the time. He was twice in a plane which had to ditch in the North Sea on his way home. Each time he was rescued by a dinghy and then by MTB's which came out to pick him up. In the second incident the pilot was lost. The sea was always a deadly crossing for a damaged aircraft, out of fuel, and many aircraft reported Missing must surely have ditched and had no survivors to tell the tale. F/Sgt. Honey of your squadron, attacking Mullheim on 22nd. March 1943 was hit by flak, three engines knocked out straight away, only the Starboard outer running, dived to stop the plane stalling, dropped his bomb load and eventually ditched. The crew got safely into a dinghy: then they were picked up in quite a remarkable way. Two of those Walrus's, the little planes which used to catapult off ships, arrived, and while one was able to take off with half the crew, the other one couldn't, they were too heavy, had too much breakfast and so they had to run on the surface of the sea



towards England until a motor gunboat met them and took the crew off.

As the war progressed the number of 4-engined aircraft increased and the bomb loads increased too. So Germany in turn had to increase its defences. Goering had said before the war that no hostile aircraft would ever cross the Reich and, of course, because of that it meant that no air raid precautions were taken, no air raid shelters built. But the situation was changing quickly. New German ground radar on the coast was watching British and American aircraft almost from Take Off. The bomber streams were being plotted and more and more day fighters were joining the night fighters. These fighters were under ground control and also developed airborne radar to seek out the bombers. The Wild and the Tame Boars, the JU 88's, the upward firing guns, yes, they were all there, and took a heavy toll of our bombers. Our crews had to be alert from Take Off to Touchdown for sometimes the German nightfighter Intruders were flying over Britain and our Air Gunners had to keep a constant watch to warn the pilots of any danger and help them take evasive action. Our crews would reach the target and were often blinded by searchlights: they had to fly through boxes of radar-predicted AA fire from 88 and 110 mm guns. It is said that half Germany's production of the 88mm gun was used in air defence. Otherwise those guns would have been used to destroy the tanks of the invasion forces and those of the Russian Army too. So apart from the damage of bombing, our raids tied down over a million men at the guns and the searchlights, apart from those brought in to clear up and repair the bomb damage from the raids: and if you consider the risks of the aircrew, those of you who weren't there, a Halifax over the target would still have over half its petrol still on board. It might be carrying 6 tons of high explosive, big boxes of incendiaries, ammunition for the guns, those delicate photo-flashes which were a bit tricky at times, flares, and oxygen bottles, all highly combustible and explosive material. Yet our crews flew on night after night facing those dangers. It is said that an average crew would expect to survive 10 raids, were lucky to survive 20, but certainly, only a third would ever complete their first tour of 30 operations.

The fear, the tension, the stress of battle came out in that first lesson, didn't it? Air Vice Marshall Bennett said of the crews, "On an ordinary sortie to an average target each bomber crew came within range of more shellfire than any average senior Army officer ever saw in his entire career." And that's enough? Yet these boys, because they were the best young men of many nations carried on, and others were queueing up to replace them. Now was this really worthwhile? Sometimes the loss of planes crashing over England was higher than those lost over Germany. That was when fog shrouded our airfields. Sometimes our losses were extreme. I think of the 24th. March 1944, Berlin, when 800 aircraft set out, 72 lost, 9% of the attacking force and, six days later on the 30th. March was that dreaded place, Nuremburg. 795 set out, 95 lost, nearly 12% of the attacking force. That was the highest reported loss in air warfare. Two raids, 167 aircraft lost, mostly four-engined and a few Mosquitoes. The loss of the aircraft, you might say, was bad enough, but that represented 957 killed, missing, and returned wounded, and 279 POW's. It struck harder on certain squadrons than on others. Aside from that period, 102 had two operations in two days in



1944, Berlin and Magdeburg. The result of that - you had 9 missing, 2 crash-landed on return and just under half the squadron had gone in two days. Yet a few days later you had a full squadron that went to Berlin - a credit to you all and to the morale of the crews.

Sadly, your squadron had the third highest losses of any squadron in Bomber Command. Many of you, like me, knew those lost in the night: but the next day a new crew arrived and a spare, newly painted, aircraft was there in the hangar. Apple was replaced and the war went on. The ground crews provided the continuity of the story: and they had their unexpected casualties too but not on the same scale. I, personally, recall a bomb dump explosion and two occasions when an aircraft exploded when bombing up, all with a heavy loss of life. All honour to those who fell - bought it, gone for a burton, got the chop. We used all sorts of phrases like that just to take the pain out of the loss. They died to give us victory at a terrible cost, heartache and misery to parents, friends, wives and children. And what a contribution to the future these men would have made had they survived. A little while ago I saw on a war memorial this little text. "He that lived on amid England's pastures green, Remember us and think of what might have been."

Suddenly, for myself, these losses made me think that there must be a better way of running the world than having a war, and certainly. for me, it was one of the factors which made me decide during the war that I would volunteer for the Church of England ministry. During the war, towards the end of it, we all got together. "What are you going to do after the end of the war?" "What are you going to do, Jack?" "Well, I was thinking about going into the ministry." "That's interesting, What Ministry? Food or Aircraft Production?" When I said the Church of England, that was about it!

Well now, I chose that first Lesson thinking of our aircrew, surrounded, as I have illustrated, by enemies seeking their destruction. It describes an early Jewish soldier who had been in the heat of action and turned in thankfulness to his Lord God. He had lived and was going to give thanks for his salvation. He knew God had been with him even in the midst of the danger. Did we remember to thank God for our safe return from the war to Civvie Street and realise that God is still with us. Saved, but what for and why was it us?

In that second Lesson you could see that Jesus understood this terrible sacrifice thing. He said that greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends. Jesus wanted peace but he also knew that sacrifice would open up opportunities for better things to come. He told us to love one another and that the love of God which we experience must overflow in our relationships with other people. We love because Christ first loved us and we must share that divine love with others.

Sometimes when we read the papers these days it seems that people think that we come into this world simply to compete with other people, to dispute and argue with them, to quarrel, fight and even to make war with them. But we're meant to love others even to the extent of putting our lives on the line, as we say. The sacrifice of our airmen in the past brought us the freedom that we enjoy today, freedom from the threat of servitude and Nazi tyranny.

That is why we must remember those who fell and that is why we must tell our children and our young people about that



## ELVINGTON CHAPEL

Members who are in touch with the YAM at Elvington will be aware that the three 102 Squadron Kneelers are now in the chapel, together with those of other squadrons. These are all to be dedicated shortly and it is anticipated that the service will take place on Battle of Britain Sunday in September

## WITH ALL Mod Con?

How many of you when stationed at Pocklington were served tea in bed every morning? I mean, not those in the Commissioned ranks who merited an orderly but those Other Ranks like the AC's, LAC's and Corporals. Well, I was one who did. How did it happen? Well....

I had passed out of training as an 18 year old Instrument Rep at R.A.F. Melksham and was posted to the R & I Servicing Echelon of 102 at Pocklington. Leaving Melksham on a reasonably sunny day for winter my travel pass was to York via London. As the train moved north the countryside became quite picturesque as snow began to fall and on arrival at York the R.T.O. directed me to catch an Everingham bus with, "It will stop at the camp gate" ringing in my ears.

Alighting at the main gate it was now dark: a pathway had been cleared to the Guard Room through the now 12 inches of snow. Reporting in, I was told by the duty S.P., (Service Policeman, if you've forgotten!), "At this time of night I will find you a bed in our hut, you can move tomorrow, if you wish."

The hut, near the NAAFI, was pleasant and housed a mix of Station Staff. After finding the Cookhouse for supper I was soon bedded down after my day travelling. It did not seem very long before I was awakened by a voice saying, "Come lad, where is your mug? - make sure it's on your locker". I soon discovered it was the practice of the duty SP on changeover of shift at 6:00 am to supply a pail of tea to the lads in Hut 2 every morning.

Needless to say, I didn't move to another billet but stayed where I was until I moved to Bassingbourne with 102 when they converted to Liberators and joined Transport Command.

Jim Kembery,  
Ex-102 Instrument Section



LINES FROM PRUNE'S SHOOTING GALLERY

"I leave my top button undone because I haven't got one. It was shot off in a dogfight."

"I'm not guilty of bad flying: landing with one's undercarriage up is just a mistake."

And from RAF Anon -1943

When the Court of Enquiry assembles,  
Please tell them the reason I died,  
Was because of an Irremovable Finger,  
Which mucked-up my angle of glide.



