



102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



Q "Queenie" Left to Right – John Crisp, "Taffy" Kingdom, Mac McPherson,
Bill Smith, Bill Ollerton, "Peck" Peckham and Johnny Grist

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2018

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Dear Friends,

Firstly let me say how honoured I am to have been asked to provide a Newsletter for the Squadron Association. Secondly please accept my profound apologies for the delay between this edition and the last that was edited by our dearly departed Secretary Simon Kularatne. When I agreed to take on the provision of the Newsletter nobody told me that I would have to use a computer rather than a quill and parchment. However, with the help of those considerably younger than me I am getting to grips with this computer.

In the future I hope to be able to produce a Newsletter for you every three months. Hopefully it will be in a different format to this and more in the format provided previously. I look forward to you sending any articles, photographs and/or obituaries for inclusion in the Newsletter.

This edition will contain a number of obituaries for those members of the Association who have died since the last newsletter. My apologies to their families for having waited so long for their inclusion in a Newsletter.

Ronald William Bruton (Ron) (17.6.1922 – 23.1.2016)

Ron volunteered to serve in the RAF during World War 2 and was selected for aircrew, training in Canada, and gaining his commission in 1943, he was awarded the DFC in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty. His active service was with 102(Ceylon) Squadron as a Bomb Aimer on Halifax III bombers from 30 April 1944 to 21 November 1944. He was a member of C flight and completed 44 operational flights over enemy territory, a total of 168 hours flying time. The crew of Pete Bailey, Don King, Tony Newham, Doug Cunningham, Alfie Scrivener, Vic Taggart and Ron had been recognised as the “Best all round crew” from their course at No.10 O.T.U. Abingdon in January 1944 and were together throughout their time with 102 Squadron.



Dougie Cunningham	Alfie Scrivener	Ron Bruton	Pete Bailey	Tony (Tubby)	Don King	Vic Taggart
<i>Rear Gunner</i>	<i>Engineer</i>	<i>Bomb aimer</i>	<i>Pilot</i>	<i>Wireless operator</i>	<i>Navigator</i>	<i>Mid upper gunner</i>

102 squadron Halifax W

Pocklington 1944

Their initial 17 bombing sorties were for the Operation Transportation plan, and were concerned with the destruction of roads, railway lines and marshalling yards, bridges and canals in the Normandy coastal area. This was to limit the ability of the German army to rush reinforcements and weapons to the area once the D day landings had started. The flights were almost entirely at night. In July and August 1944 they were sent on missions to destroy V1 rocket sites. On one daytime attack on a site near Noyelles-en-Chaussee they were hit by heavy flak and pilot Pete Bailey and rear gunner Doug Cunningham were injured. Their remaining missions were to the Ruhr valley including to Hamburg on the first daylight raid on a German target for 3 years. On the final operation of their tour (1 November 1944) to the oil refinery at Sterkade the starboard outside engine failed before reaching the target; some of the payload was jettisoned and they carried on to complete the mission.

On leaving Pocklington and 102 Squadron he moved to photographic reconnaissance, initially at RAF Nuneham. He finished his service in August 1946. Ron visited Pocklington on his 89th birthday in 2011. He walked around the airfield and spent some time at the memorial to those who weren't as lucky as him and didn't make it back.

Ron also visited the Air Museum at Elvington and as a veteran he was allowed to go inside the rebuilt Halifax which brought back many memories to him and enabled me, his daughter, to realise a little of what it must have been like for the crew on an active operation over Germany.
Sylvia Odell

Wallace (Wally) Lashbrook (3.1.1913 – 6.6.2017)

Squadron Leader Lashbrook died in December 2017. I am grateful to Bill and Meirwen Hyett for bringing his obituary to our attention.

Wallace Lashbrook was born in the Devon village of Chilsworthy to a farmer Charles and his wife Elizabeth the second of four children. He won a scholarship to Okehampton Grammar School and on leaving joined the RAF as an apprentice fitter at RAF Halton. At the end of his three years he was recognised as the top fitter and also distinguished himself as an athlete in bantam weight boxing and pole vaulting.

His first posting was to RAF Mountbatten near Plymouth where he worked on high speed boats with an Aircraftsman named Ross who like Wally had a Brough Superior motorcycle. Ross was in fact the man now commonly known as Lawrence of Arabia, who was living under an assumed name. Both Ross and Wally became good friends. After a spell in Singapore between 1934 and 1936 Wally returned to the UK and went to Prestwick to train as a pilot in Tiger Moths. Whilst there he met his future wife Betty whom he married in 1938.

Now Sergeant Pilot Lashbrook he was posted to No3 Group Bomber Command. Until 1940 his role was to ferry aircraft. But in 1940 he moved to 51 Squadron No4 Group Bomber Command where he flew bombing operations. By January 1941 he had flown 25 operations over Europe earning him the Distinguished Flying Medal.

He was involved in Operation Colossus the first ever mission to drop paratroopers in February 1941, their mission was to destroy the Calitri Aqueduct in Southern Italy. After that he joined 35 Squadron flying Halifaxes. In April 1941 he survived a near miss when his engines failed and he had to land in the dark crashing into an oak tree. He and the crew survived unharmed.



On 17 April 1943 his Halifax was hit returning from a night raid in Czechoslovakia. The tail gunner was killed and another gunner wounded. Wally Lashbrook, by now a Squadron Leader, gave the order to bale out. By the time that he gave the order the aircraft was only 500 feet from the ground. He landed hard but he and the rest of the crew were unharmed. They had landed on the French / Belgian border and having split up Wally hid in woods where he was discovered by a French farmer who contacted the Comet escape line of the French resistance.

Over a period of six weeks he travelled through France, spending time in the Champagne region, where he stayed with a family helping to bottle and drink their wine, his lifelong favourite tippie. He was nearly discovered when a German soldier on a train asked him the time in French. Wally Lashbrook just extended his arm to show the man his watch. The soldier then went back to looking out of the window. A guide helped him escape over the Pyrenees into Spain where he made it to Gibraltar. Wally Lashbrook forged lifelong links after the war with the families of the brave Resistance workers who helped him out of France, not all of whom survived the war.

Wally Lashbrook worked as a civil airline pilot after the war becoming the chief pilot for the British airline Skyways. He noted that "some of it was more dangerous than the war" particularly a flight out of Jamaica when all the instruments failed. It was a highly fraught situation but he safely landed on Bermuda only to find someone had put grass in the engine.

In 1948/9 he organised 24 aircraft to help provision West Berlin after it was blockaded by the Soviets in the so called Berlin Airlift. He competed in flying races winning both the King's Cup and the Air Challenge Cup but in 1953 gave up flying to focus on his growing family.

In 1960 he became executive officer of the Ayrshire Army Cadet Force. He enjoyed seeing the young people he worked with grow in confidence. A particular passion was promoting their sports, for which he was awarded an MBE.

His daughters remember a father who could turn his hand to everything from mending a shattered plate to making a ballet dress. After retiring in 1978 he loved spending time with his family, playing bridge, travelling, and attending ACF events. He lived with his daughter Jessica, after his wife died, but before his death moved into Berelands House Care Home in Prestwick where he was very popular with local primary school children who loved to listen to his stories.

Wally Lashbrook is remembered as a brave, adaptable, upbeat and humble man who made a great impression on those who knew him. He is survived by his daughters Jessica and Diane, his grandchildren Sarah and Michael and his step-grandchildren Kieran and Carly.

Flt Sgt Jack Pragnell

Jack's daughter wrote to the Association Secretary in February as follows. "I regret to inform you that my father Jack Pragnell has died. My father thoroughly enjoyed being part of the Squadron Association and really appreciated that work that you do. His RAF days were such an important part of his life and were the subject of many discussions particularly during his last few days. His mind and memory remained agile right up to the end . Please pass on best wishes to anyone that knew Jack.

Sandy Pragnell

Jack wrote a book "Rhymes, Battles and More" which is now lodged in the reference library in the Chadwick Centre at the International Bomber Command Centre Memorial and International Education Centre at Lincoln



Flt Sgt Ron Parsons – Air Gunner – 102 Squadron

Ron Parsons is pictured above prior to laying the Squadron wreath at Pocklington in 2015. Glynn Parsons Ron's son wrote to the Association Secretary informing him of Ron's death in the following words. "It is with great sadness that I have to inform you that my father Flt Sgt Ron Parsons passed away yesterday morning (March 6 1018) at 9am. He was 92 years old and may best be remembered for placing the Squadron wreath on the memorial at Pocklington in 2015 a very touching and poignant moment for all".

CONGRATULATIONS

We are delighted to welcome a new member to the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association family, Otilie Nora Evelyn Usher a daughter for Holly (nee Holly Kularatne) and Paul Usher and a sister for Orlando. Born on Thursday 15 of February weighing in at 7 pounds 5 ounces Otilie continues the link between the Kularatne family and the Association.



AC1 Flight Mechanic Stanley Ernest Jeffrey (31.10.1920-16.1.2018)
A HUMBLE FLIGHT MECHANIC

Stan served the whole of his time, during the war, in Bomber Command Ground Crew with 102 (Ceylon) Squadron and was posted to Pocklington from Topcliffe finishing his service at Bassingbourne, Cambridgeshire.

Stan and his fellow ground crew, when crews were allocated a specific aircraft to service and maintain, looked after DY-E (Easy). The aircraft that carried this designation were never lost on operations and Stan and his fellows celebrated a number of “End of Tour” parties with those crews in Pocklington village.

Stan Jeffrey was born on the 31 October 1920 in Leicestershire and at the time the Second World War started he was living in King Street in the town of Oadby to the south east of Leicester city. He described himself as “just another young lad” whose main interest was with the Scouts, something that later in wartime Pocklington would have a poignant link for him.

Stan had trained as a mechanic at the Imperial Typewriter Company which was based in Leicester near the old castle. He was called up in February 1941 and was posted to the RAF on the 12th March 1941. After his initial training at Padgate, near Blackpool, Stan was sent to RAF St Athan the No. 4 School of Technical Training to be trained as a Flight Mechanic.

After 19 weeks of intensive training on the maintenance, inspection, repair and operation of a variety of aircraft engines Stan was posted to 102 (Ceylon) Squadron and joined A Flight in September 1941. 102 Squadron was at this time based at RAF Topcliffe which had started operations as a satellite of RAF Linton on Ouse in North Yorkshire. The squadron was equipped with Whitley bombers which were fitted with the “in-line” Merlin glycol cooled engine. Stan's work with A Flight was based on a morning parade and being allocated an aircraft for that day's duty. This could be preparation for operations later that day or to inspect and maintain aircraft not in use that day.

Later in 1942 102 (Ceylon) Squadron moved to RAF Pocklington where it remained through to 1945. By now Stan was a fully qualified Flight Mechanic and the Squadron was then equipped with the Mark 1 Handley Page Halifax fitted with four Merlin engines. At the time there were only two Flight Mechanics to look after the engines but as the war continued and the number of aircraft operational hours increased Flight mechanics were allocated to a specific aircraft to work on one of the engines, This became even more important with the introduction of the Mark III Halifax with its four Bristol Hercules radial engines.

Stan was allocated to the aircraft designated E (Easy) and for the remainder of his service with Bomber Command serviced all of the Halifax aircraft with the E letter. Stan recalled the significant change from the “in-line” Merlin glycol cooled to the more powerful radial Bristol Hercules air cooled engines. This was such a change that he was sent on a “conversion” course which lasted a whole two weeks! As Stan said “It was wartime and you hadn't got time to waste. You just got on with it”. One of the happier elements of this short posting was that it was based at Stoughton in Leicestershire less than a mile from his home town of Oadby. This allowed him to continue his courtship of his girlfriend Iris who he married on the 23rd of December 1944.

After the Continuation course he returned to 102 (Ceylon) at Pocklington where he continued his work keeping E (Easy) ready for operations. Stan felt that his work and that of his Ground Crew colleagues has largely been missed in the history of Bomber Command. Working long hours, rising early to carry out their daily work, to seeing off their aircraft and then rising in the early hours to receive the aircraft back from “Ops” was gruelling.

Aircraft losses were high in the squadron particularly in 1943/44 and Stan recalled that the Air Crews tended to be close socially with their Ground Crews. Many of the pilots and crew would go down to the “flight lines” during the day to share a cup of tea and a cigarette with their mechanics building a bond between them. It became a regular thing for the ground and air crews to socialise by visiting the pubs of Pocklington village, the Station Hotel, the Black Bull and the Cross Keys travelling by a variety of overloaded cycles and cars to the terror of the local populace and the local police.

It was during this time that Stan met an old friend of his who was also serving in 102 Squadron. Flying Officer Douglas Harper had attended the same Scout Group which met in the Methodist Chapel in their home town of Oadby before the war. FO Harper was the Navigator in Halifax JB848 “G” (George). He had already flown a number of operations but on the evening of 29th March 1943 his aircraft was circling above Pocklington and the airfield in preparation for heading off on a raid. Stan recalls standing watching the aircraft circling when “G” (George) “jinked” to avoid another Halifax and flipped over on its back. It crashed some 400 yards from where Stan was standing. The whole crew were killed. Doug Harper was 22 years old.

The crew of “G” (George) are remembered on a new memorial constructed from one of the recovered engines, established in 2015, at the crash site which is now in the grounds of the new doctor's surgery at Pocklington.

Stan met many of the Air Crews who flew with 102 and recalls that they were the ones who appreciated the efforts of him and his ground crew contemporaries.

In 1945 102 Squadron moved, still equipped with the Halifax, to RAF Bassingbourn, south of Cambridge. After the German surrender in 1945 Stan and his fellow ground crew, along with other ground crews, were taken on a flight over Holland to Germany where they saw the effects of the bombing the squadron had carried out. Stan remained at RAF Bassingbourn until he was “demobbed” in May 1946.

Stan felt that the public were never allowed to appreciate the effort Bomber Command contributed during the war. The thousands of ground crew and aircrew who were killed on operations, in training and on the ground were a long time in being honoured. He always remembered the camaraderie of those he met and worked with during that part of his life that he gave in the service of his friends and of his country.

I am grateful to Harry Bartlett and to Stan's widow Iris for their provision of this article which we print in Stan's memory.

COMMENT

I hope that you find my first attempt at a Squadron Association Newsletter acceptable. I now have even more respect for the wonderful Newsletter's turned out on a regular basis by Simon. I would not have achieved any success at all if it had not been for my daughter who helped me by informing me that I had to turn on the computer before we would get anywhere. This is your Newsletter and for that reason I am dependent upon you sending me obituaries, stories, poems and photographs. Further I am dependent upon you for the appearance of the Newsletter. If you want the print smaller or larger, more photographs, more colour then please let me know. My e-mail address is stephengrist@btinternet.com and my home telephone number is 01981 500695. I shall be at the Reunion on the 12/13 May if you want to pass on any material or to discuss the format of the Newsletter.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE ANNUAL ASSOCIATION AGM AND DINNER IS TO BE HELD ON THE 12/13 MAY 2018 AT THE GLIDER CLUB IN POCKLINGTON. PLEASE CONTACT THE SECRETARY IN ORDER TO ATTEND THIS IMPORTANT EVENT



“And when you come to 102

And think that you will get through

There's many a fool who thought like you

It's suicide but its fun”.

Anonymous 102 Squadron member, 1941



Royal Air Force
Pocklington Airfield

The home of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron RAF and 405 (Vancouver) Squadron RCAF No 4 Group Bomber Command during World War II from where so many gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

This memorial was raised by Old Comrades in gratitude to all those men and women who served in both squadrons in War and Peace.

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