



NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2023

102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



Hon. Secretary Harry Bartlett

Email: 102squadronassociation@gmail.com

Website: 102ceylonsquadronassociation

DEATH OF OUR CHAIRMAN – HARRY HUGHES DFC DFM

It is with great sadness that we must inform you of the passing of Flight Lieutenant Harry Hughes DFC DFM, Navigator who also flew with 692 Squadron (Pathfinders) in 1944/45. He flew 35 operations with 102 (Ceylon) Squadron and over 50 with 692 Squadron (Pathfinders)

Harry was our association Chairman for the past seven years and a member of the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association since its inception. He was also a past Chairman of the Pathfinder's Association and was a member of the Consultation Committee for the Green Park Bomber Command Memorial.

Harry was a larger-than-life character who along with Tom Sayer, another of our past Chairmen, strove to keep the memory of the sacrifice by Bomber Command crews in the public view. Harry passed away in the early hours of the morning of the 25th July at his home in Cornwall, seventeen days before his 101st birthday.

There is another space in our Veteran's Roll.

Harry Bartlett

Secretary's Ramblings (Summer 2023)

Well, another year has progressed to a very successful Reunion Weekend, and onward into the warm Summer months.

As an Association, we are still holding our very positive position of an active one, alongside some of our 4 Group 'sister' Squadron Associations. The 10 Squadron Association benefits from being linked to an existing RAF Squadron, based at Brize Norton, carrying out Air Mobility Duties. 77 Squadron Association is our closest comparison.

We must face the future from a position of optimism. Many of our contemporaries, like us, have few, or no, veterans from 1939 to 1945 era. Many, unlike 102, were 'stood down' in 1946 to 1948 and live on through their veterans and Associations. 102, reactivated in the 1950s, from October 1954 to August 1956, as a nuclear bomber squadron, using the Canberra, served during the early years of the 'Cold War'. Through the re-organisation of the Royal Air Force, again 102 ceased to operate as a 'flying' squadron, but from 1959 becoming a Strategic Missile Squadron equipped with the Thor Missile.

102 ceased to be in April 1963.

Sadly, we only have two 'Life Members', from the Canberra era, in our Association. Because of their personal circumstances, neither of them are in a position to take an active part in our activities.

On a positive note, the International Bomber Command Centre (Digital Archive) at Lincoln have begun a project to record the oral histories of personnel who served in the final years of Bomber Command. Bomber Command, (and Fighter Command), were combined to form Strike Command in April 1968. Perhaps we will feature in that project?

Summer brings the opportunity for us to travel to Europe to remember some of our fallen aircrews. Last year, members of the Association were invited to attend, and visited, memorial services in Holland and France. Once again Association members will, at the invitation of the Mayors of the villages of Wattignies la Victoire, Brissy-Hamegicourt and Lissor (Lyon la Foret), pay our respects to those who died in the area. We will also thank the villagers for their continued care and maintenance of our crew's resting places.

John Williams and I will be meeting our friend in the Avesnois region, Bernard Feutry, (<http://aviateursavesnois.free.fr/>), and another Mayor, Monsieur Dupont, of Boussiere sur Sambre, to discuss the dedication of a new memorial to all of the allied aircrew who were killed in the Avesnois Region of Northern France between 1939 and 1945. This will include all of our aircrew. The memorial is planned for dedication in April 2024, when we, as an Association, will be invited to attend.

Our Remembrance Weekend falls on the weekend of the 11th and 12th of November this year when we will gather again at Pocklington to pay our respects at Driffield, Pocklington

Enjoy the Summer, enjoy your holidays, (Rail, Ports, Air Line staff and Air Traffic Controller strikes permitting), and some precious time with friends and family.

Harry

REUNION WEEKEND JUNE 2023

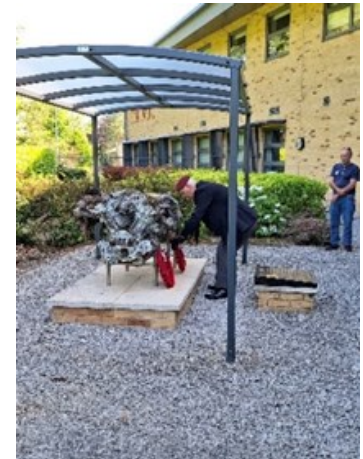
Well, we made it once again! Another milestone Reunion Weekend with over 55 attending the Reunion Dinner on the Saturday! In line with tradition, we started the weekend on Friday, with the gathering of the Reunion Sub-Committee, a loose group of members who support the Reunion Weekend by donating large amounts of money to the Pubs and Restaurants of Pocklington. As a certain member said, "We couldn't let Pocklington's social scene fade into the sunset. Where would we be if the Town declined due to a lack of financial support from the likes of us!" His further comments were lost as he fell off the bar stool in the Feathers Hotel!

We were delighted to have Catherine (Alma) Dodd attend our weekend. Her brother, Michael (David) Dolan, was killed in May 1940, while on an operation, in Whitley DY-R, to bomb the bridges over the Oise river at Ribemont, in an attempt to stop the German Field Marshall Guderian's armour reaching Dunkirk. (This is one of our annual visits to France, when we attend the annual memorial ceremony in Brissy-Hamegicourt where David and his crew are buried in the Churchyard. More of this later in the year.) We were able to access Driffield Camp where Alma could see the original HQ Building at the airfield entrance and then visit the memorial in North End Park.



The wreath at North End Park was laid by Steve Grist, commemorating the bombing of RAF Driffield in August 1940, when a number of our ground crew were killed, including ACW Margueritte Hudson, the first WAAF to killed by enemy action in the second World War.

Our visits to Pocklington included the Saturday informal memorial services at the ‘G George’ memorial at the Beckside Medical Centre, West Green, where the Mayor of Pocklington, Councillor Roly Cronshaw, laid a wreath on behalf of the Town Council. The Association wreath was laid by Bill Stowe.



Before the service started, Team Smart, (Patrick Smart, Peter Irvin, and Tom Perrin,) had begun fitting the additional memorial plaques on the engine memorial. These plaques compliment the existing family plaques, in memory of the remainder of the crew who are remembered by the Association.



After profound apologies to Jenny Wilson, for starting the service five minutes early, (not the first of the Secretary’s mistakes this weekend!), we made our way to the Pocklington Burial Ground where we paid our respects to the members of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron who are buried there. After the Binyon Epitaph the Secretary laid the Association wreath and crosses of Remembrance were laid.



Our Remembrance duties finished for the day it was back to the Hotel to limber up for the evening Reunion Dinner. (Which meant a quick lunch and a beer.)

Reunion Dinner.

On a beautiful evening Patrick Smart had brought his Hercules Engine to the Wolds Gliding Club which gave a wonderful pre-dinner photo opportunity.



(L-R Rob & Annette Langham, Mark Johnson (Guest Speaker), Paul Campbell, Harry Bartlett, Clare Wilson (Archivist) & Darren Wilson.)

From 6:30 pm onwards we gathered, (some of us were on time Annie!), at the Wolds Gliding Club who had, once again, agreed to provide our dinner venue in our spiritual Squadron home. Our guests included Councillor Richard Bryon, a past Mayor, representing the Pocklington Town Council, (*second Secretary's mistake), Councillors, Parish Councillors, past mayors, and many friends. Rob and Annette Langham on a visit from Australia, having joined us as most of the day's events were to be entertained by the Allen/Campagna clans for the evening. We were also joined by Trevor and Wendy Taylor and Mark Abel of the Pocklington and District Royal British Legion. Patrick Dare of Pocklington School was also our guest.

After welcoming our guests to dinner, the Secretary called on our Chaplain, (who had arrived at this point!), to say the Grace.

The gracious reply to the Visitors toast was made by Ruth Hodgson, a past Mayoress of Pocklington.



Our guest speaker, Mark Johnson, the great nephew of Flight Lieutenant John Blair DFC, a historian, gave us an emotive and thought-provoking presentation, entitled The Black Eagles, the contribution made by black aircrew during RFC and RAF operations in Europe, 1915 to 1945. Mark is seen below in conversation with Trevor Taylor after, after his presentation.



During dinner we displayed a painting by one of our members Steph Stowe, who had painted her impression of the aftermath of the bombing of RAF Driffield, where her father was stationed with 102 Squadron in 1940. Although uninjured in the attack, he held the memory of it throughout his life.

(It should be noted that Steph is visually impaired, which makes her painting all the more poignant.)

And so on to the Secretary's second and third mistakes of the day!

*Now you know that saying I have used for many years now, "Never mix old people and technology, it's a recipe for disaster!" Well, it is so true. The simple use of cut and paste can be the downfall of many. So, when you copy, cut, and paste the 'Order of Occasions' from the previous year, and then save it for use in this year's Dinner preparations...! Yes, Councillor Richard Bryon had carefully prepared his 'Reply to the Toast to Our Visitors', only to have your secretary rise and announce that the past Mayoress, Ruth Hodgson, would do that! An apology to Richard after dinner, seemed so inadequate.

*The third one was, while concentrating, hard, on the order of proceedings, I was asked a question about a name mistake on a place card, (sorry Catherine Mitchell). Rising to introduce our Guest Speaker, yes, you've guessed, I got his name wrong. Mark was very gracious about it and, considering the size of him, I'm really pleased he didn't take offence!

If anyone needs advice on the use of grovelling apologies, ring me!

Sunday.

After a very late night, we were all out in the lovely Yorkshire morning sun, in time for our Memorial Service at St. Catherine's Church, Barmby Moor. Well supported by the attendance of Association Members and our super smart members of the Pocklington School Cadet Force, who brought their Standards to parade alongside Mark Abel, the Pocklington & District Royal British Legion Standard Bearer.

Our Chaplain, Annie Harrison, led us through a moving and very relevant memorial service, during which John Williams turned the page in the Roll of Honour. Cadet Corporal Tom McDowell read the poem, 'I Will Remember'. During the service we were grateful to have Tom Taylor, father of Freddie Taylor (of broken leg fame), to play the organ and to play the Last Post for us. Following a blessing the Standards were recovered from the altar along with the wreaths.



L to R: Mark Abel RBL, Cadet Ben Wood, F.Lt. Patrick Dare (Pocklington School), Harry Bartlett Chaplain Annie Harrison (with eyes open!), Bill Stowe (Association), Cadet Corporal Tom McDowell, Cadet Zander Adlington.

After the Church Service we moved to the Commonwealth War Grave Section of the Churchyard where a short Memorial Service was held for those who are buried there.



The Service



Cllr. Carolyn Haynes (BMPC)



Cllr. Richard Bryon (Pocklington TC)



Cadet Ben Woods (Association Wreath)



The Silence

The Airfield Service (Wolds Gliding Club)

Following our Service at St. Catherine’s Church, we moved to the Airfield (Wolds Gliding Club) for our Service at the Airfield Memorial.

Once again, led by our Chaplain Annie Harrison, we were able to pay our respects to those who flew with 102 and 405 Squadrons and did not return.



Our Chaplain leads the Service flanked by the Standards of the Pocklington & District Royal British Legion and Pocklington School.

Wreath Laying



The Wreath Laying Party



Cllr. Richard Bryon Pocklington Town



Nick Spencer, Barmby Moor



John Williams, Association



Colin Stevens Wolds Gliding Club



Steph Stowe (Father)



Paul Campbell (Uncle)



Honour Guard: L to R Secretary, Mark Abel (RBL), Cadet Ben Wood, Cadet Corp.

Tom McDowell, Cadet Zander Adlington, Flt. Lt. Patrick Dare.

Following the Service, we were treated to the Hercules engine, owned by Patrick Smart, being fired up. Unfortunately, despite numerous videos and photographs, we only managed to get still photographs that worked!



Patrick Smart's Tribute to his father's crew

And so, following tea and biscuits in the Gliding Club, we departed Pocklington after another very happy Reunion Weekend.

See you next year?

World War II Service of Peter Henry Pexton DFM *'On Barmby Moor Baht At'*

At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Peter Henry Pexton was a day student at St Ignacious College, Whitehart Lane, North London. He commuted there daily by train from his home in Stanstead Abbots (St Margarets), Hertfordshire. In the early days of the war the college was evacuated from London but Peter, then aged 17, left school and began office work with the local sand and gravel company before moving to a small accountancy practice. Meanwhile his father had been sent to work for the Ministry of Food in Colwyn Bay, Wales. Peter's first air force experience was as a member of the Air Training Corps. He had a very boyish appearance and was frequently annoyed when his accurate reports of aircraft having been shot down were not initially believed.

As soon as he was old enough, he volunteered for air crew service in the Royal Airforce. Initially he wanted to be a pilot but because of his mathematical abilities was directed towards navigator training. He joined the RAFVR on 7th September 1942 (aged 19). His training, unusually, all took place in the UK while many of his future colleagues had trained in Canada or South Africa. He commenced flying training on 19th August 1943 with 7 Air Observer School at Bishops Court in Northern Ireland. The photograph of Peter wearing his training uniform was taken on 22nd October.



He qualified as a navigator on 18th November 1943 and was then posted to Operational Training Unit 19 in Kinloss, Scotland where he flew on Whitley bombers.

On 8th May 1944 he joined 1652 Training Conversion Unit at Marston Moor flying Halifax Mark II bombers and where he teamed up with Flight Sergeant Adams who was his pilot for the duration of his time in Bomber Command. He was then posted to 102 Squadron at Barmby Moor, Pocklington where he made his first flight on 22nd June 1944.

He also made his first encounter with the base commander who gently reprimanded him for not wearing his hat when he was walking around the camp periphery 'bhat at'. After five familiarisation flights on Halifax III, he began operations just five days later in MZ300C (C Charlie).

- 27 June Mont Candon (Bombing V1 ('Doodle Bug') sites)
- 29 June Blainville (5 aircraft failed to return)
- 1 July St Martin, L'Hortier (Bombing V1 site)
- 4 July Domlegger (Bombing V1 site)
- 6 July Mimoyecques (Bombing V1 site. Leonard Cheshire, Master bomber, 100th and final operation)
- 7 July Caen (Army support)
- 12 July Les Haut Buissons (Bombing V1 site)
- 17 July Bois de la Haie (Bombing V1 site)
- 18 July Frisian Islands ('Gardening')
- 20 July Chapelle Notre Dame (Bombing V1 site)
- 21 July Frisian Islands ('Gardening')

- 28 July Foret de Nieppe, (Bombing V1 site. Plane hit by flak. Forced to land at the United States base at Sudbury, Suffolk on return.)

- 1 August Noynelle en Chausse (Bombing V1 site)
- 3 August Bois de Cassan (Bombing V1 site)
- 5 August Foret de Nieppe (Bombing V1 site)
- 7 August Brest ('Gardening')

Most of the sorties recorded in his Log Book at this stage were over France, attacking sites from where V1 missiles ('doodle bugs') were launched which resulted in 5,500 deaths and 16,000 injuries in London alone. However, possibly the most dangerous missions were not entered in Peter's Log Book as they were not regarded as 'ops'. 'Petrol missions' were carried out in the period 25th September to 2nd October and involved transporting fuel in the aircraft bomb bay to supply the advancing armies. This required the four-engined bombers to fly at low level within range of German rifle fire and to land on a makeshift runway at Melsbroek (Brussels).

On one occasion when travelling between home in Hertfordshire and the squadron in Yorkshire he had to cycle between Liverpool Street and Kings Cross stations during the Blitz and was warned by a policeman that this was a dangerous activity and told to be careful! More advice came from the postmistress in Pocklington when she noted with disapproval the amount of money he kept withdrawing and advised him to save for his old age. At a time when as many as five aircraft in a group of 20 from the camp did not return from a single mission this advice fell on stony ground. Ultimately only 1/3 of Bomber Command aircrew survived a tour of 30 operations.

The focus then turned onto Germany and Peter's German 'visits' (the expression for bombing missions adopted by the crews) began on 12th August 1944 and from that date onwards were the main target. The notes below were compiled using Peter's Log Book. The term 'gardening' was used to refer to laying mines in the sea and 'coned' referred to being picked out by enemy search lights which were linked to guns making it difficult to escape.

- 12 August Brunswick
- 16 August Kiel
- 3 September Venlo (On return landed at Attlebridge)
- 6 September Texel ('Gardening')
- 10 September Le Havre
- 12 September Munster
- 14 September Wilhelmshaven (Recalled)
- 6 October Buer (Intense, accurate, predicted flak. Returned on 3 engines)
- 14 October Duisburg
- 15 October Wilhelmshaven
- 30 October Cologne
- 2 November Dusseldorf (Moonlight, 'coned')
- 4 November Bochum ('Coned' twice, attacked by JU88)
- 21 November Sterkade
- 27 November Oslo Fjord (Moonlight, 'gardening')
- 29 November Essen
- 2 December Hagen (Ruhr)

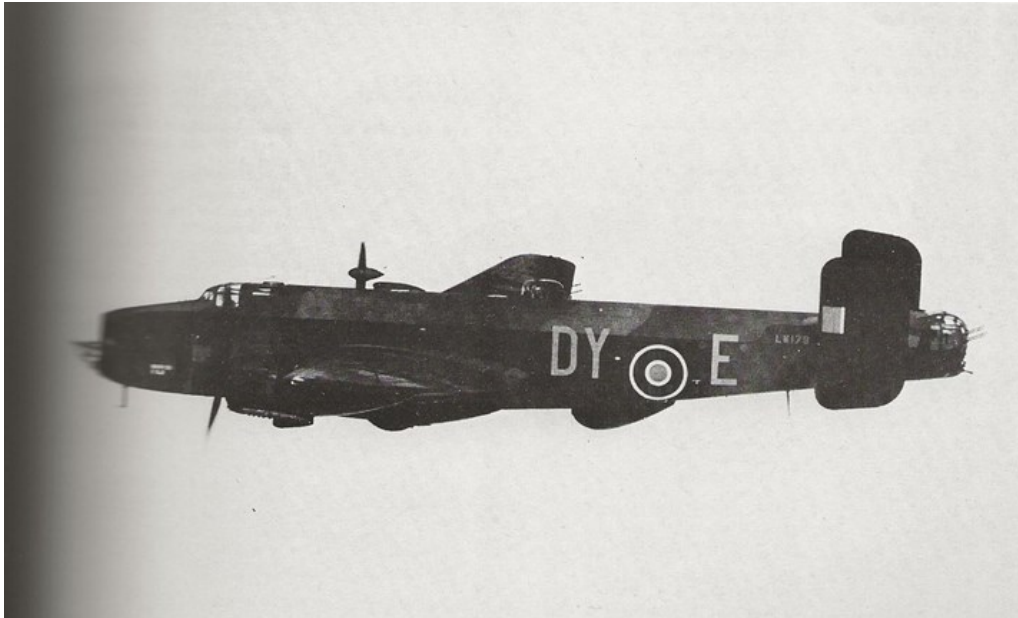
5 December Soest

18 December Duisberg

21 December Kattegat

Total flying time with 102 Squadron –

102 hours 35 minutes during day light 110 hours 15 minutes by night



This bomber was from 102 Squadron. The squadron is indicated by the letters DY and the letter E refers to the crew. Peter's crew generally flew under the letters DY - C (radio identification 'C Charlie') and took these letters with them from plane to plane.

Peter recorded the registration number of each Halifax III he used and in later years publication of a Halifax file made it possible for him to research the fate of each of these aircraft. The abbreviation SOC ('Struck off record') refers to the date when an aircraft was removed from the RAF books and was sold for scrap or to another country.

MZ 752	Overshot Pocklington and crashed into a field 25/6/1944
LZ 179	Failed to return from Magdeburg 16/1/1945
MZ 300	SOC 20/3/1947
LW141	Failed to return from Dusseldorf 2/11/1944
NP 966	SOC 18/9 1946
LW 168	Failed to return from Mulheim 24/12/1944
NR 242	SOC 28/11/1945
MZ 800	Undershot Carnaby after ops and lost under carriage 18/11/ 1944
MZ 830	Crashed into high ground near Mowthorpe Yorks. Ex ops 16/3/ 1944

The record of the final aircraft in the list is particularly interesting as clearly this was restored after its initial removal and was flown by Peter's crew on his final operation in December 1944.

His final operation on 21st December was a memorable one. Returning to Pocklington it was too foggy to land and the plane was diverted to Carnaby which was also shrouded in fog but was equipped with Fog Intense Dispersal Of (FIDO) which involved burning petrol on either side of the runway to temporarily improve the visibility). No room for mistakes and not for the faint hearted!

On 25th May 1945 Peter was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. The Bomber Command Clasp was a later award for 'The Few' whose contribution failed to win the recognition they deserved in the immediate post war years. Peter never received this, but his son applied for the clasp in May 2013.



The Halifax III carried a crew of seven; pilot, flight engineer, navigator, bomb aimer, radio operator and two gunners. For the most part Peter's crew stayed together for the entire tour. Some favourite tales from his time in Yorkshire included his recollection of his 21st birthday which he spent with his crew celebrating at Betty's Tea Rooms in York and needing transport they 'borrowed' a fire engine to make their journey back to base. This had serious repercussions as on previous visits to York if they missed the last bus they had been allowed to sleep in the fire station overnight but when they next went to the fire station hoping to spend the night there, for some reason, that privilege had been withdrawn! He also remembered how, when drunk, a member of his billet had the habit of bringing back a gravestone late at night. The following morning it took the combined strength of all the occupants to carry it back to the graveyard and no one could understand how he had carried it in alone.

Life on the camp was not without its grim humour. The Met Office on the airfield was in an underground bunker and one day when the navigators walked for their pre-flight briefing in a torrential downpour, they became drenched to the skin. On their arrival in the office the met officer commented 'Is it raining out there? According to my charts it should be fine and dry.' Such comments cannot have had inspired much confidence in the briefings the navigators were given.

Bombing exercises took place from time to time on local coastal ranges. The story goes that on one such occasion the plane took off with a practice bomb aboard but when the crew came to release the bomb it had vanished, presumably lost somewhere over Yorkshire. At various times crew members received specialist training and when the two gunners were on a course the rest of the crew were sent on an initiative exercise. A coach dropped them in the middle of the countryside without cash or maps and the task was for them to find their way back to base. While doing so they discovered the coach used for their transport was parked outside a nearby hostelry with no driver and the keys still in the ignition. They used their initiative and drove themselves back to base.

In 1945 after the war in Europe had ended, Peter joined 108 Operational Training Unit at Wymeswold making his first flight and two others in the Dakota III on the night of 21st August. He then moved to 1382 TCU and was based at Wymeswold and Castle Donnington until 19th October. On 11th December 1945 he joined the 1334 Conversion Unit at Baroda, India, flying Dakota III and IV until 11th February 1946 when he joined 353 Squadron at Palam, Delhi.

This was an airline squadron, and he made his first flight on 2nd March. Most of his subsequent flights were during daytime on Dakota III aircraft flying a three or four day circuit around India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Peter's final flight was on 2nd May and his service in India ended on 26th July 1946.

The time in India provided an exciting and welcome break from the rationing and bleakness of immediate post-war Britain. Food in India was both plentiful and exotic and Peter enjoyed the luxury of apartment living with the services of a bat man. As a result, he always retained a great affection for the country and in later years would frequently count and quote various local phrases in Hindi to his son. Even the loss of his new swimming trunks to thieving monkeys and the need to check his boots regularly for 'squatting' snakes did not dent his enthusiasm. When travelling by train he was required to carry a pistol for his personal protection. On one overnight sleeper he awoke to feel a hand under his pillow near where he had hidden his gun. He was relieved to discover that it was his own!

Peter liked to tell the amusing story about taking off in a camouflaged Dakota and landing in a silver-coloured plane after the paint had been stripped by lightening in a tropical storm. It was only after his death that his sister revealed that the plane interior had caught fire prompting the crew to put the flames out with their bare hands. She also listed various possible reasons for his receipt of a DFM award which included flying the Halifax back to base when the pilot was injured. Needless to say, Peter had never mentioned any of these.



Peter's Log Book always remained as one of his most treasured possessions even when this was badly damaged during the floods at his parents' home shortly after the war. In later life Peter became Town Clerk of Downham Market Rural District Council and his secretary was a German who told him she was born in an air raid shelter during the war. Despite the damage to the Log Book he was able to confirm his suspicions that his own squadron was bombing her birth place that night. Both Peter and his secretary were strong believers in the unity of Europe and remained firm family friends.

Peter L Pexton

Trinity

Jersey 2022



*“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 it's 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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