

ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

**Issue 12
Spring 2003**



Whirlwind XV729 / G-BVGE



Derek Jones (ex C Flt 202 Sqn, 1963-65) writes

The enclosed photo is of the last airworthy Westland Whirlwind Mk 10. Its tail number was XJ 729 and it served with both 202 and 22 Squadrons in its career. When it was withdrawn from active duty, it remained at the SAR Wing HQ at RAF Finningley. Unfortunately, when the unit closed down, it was pushed outside and suffered quite a lot of deterioration which still causes problems with the electrics in spite of extensive refurbishing. The aircraft now belongs to Mr James Kelly and is based in Southern Ireland.

My connection is that after 14 years of RAF Whirlwind flying, I continued to fly them with Bristow Helicopters and for various private owners. I was the last active civil Type Rating Examiner on Whirlwinds and now get to fly XJ 729 when the owner needs his licence revalidating.

Gibraltar Reunion

By now everyone will have made their decision about attending the reunion – I look forward to seeing many of you there. It certainly will not be like the old days; most of us have seen too many days/years since then.

At least the weather will not have changed too much; the long term weather averages for North Front in October are:

1. **22 Degrees Celcius**
2. **24 dry (ie rainfree)Days**
3. **7 Hours of Sunshine per day**

Editors Note: There's no point in having an association half full Met Men if you don't use them!

Secretary's Note

The last year has seen an increase in the membership, which now stands at 135. Most of the subs for 2001 are now in with only a few stragglers.

One way of making my job as Secretary a little bit easier and has saved the Association money is the use of Email addresses. I can currently save 60 stamps per letter so if you have an Email address and wish to receive 202 correspondence this way let me know at my home e-mail or you can mail me at the secretary's e-mail address

See you at the Reunion,

Jules

Finance Corner

The 202 Squadron Association Bank Account has a balance of £3694 – as at 10 February 2003. This does not include the deposits paid by members who will be attending the 2003 Reunion in Gibraltar.

Please note – of our 135 members we have 36 who are life members. In addition there are “several” members who have not paid their annual subscription for 2002.

Why not pay by standing order – the easy way! Forms are available from Jules

Brian Tanner

Master Pilot Tony Harrison

With regret we record the death in hospital in Hull of Master Pilot Tony Harrison on Sunday 29th October 2002. Tony was a member of B Flight at Leconfield in the late sixties

Things that go Bang in the Night

After reading the 202 Squadron Association Newsletter I thought you would be interested in my experiences on the Shackleton squadrons with which 202 Squadron Met Observers flew reconnaissance flights in Australia and Christmas Island between 1951 and 1958.

In the 1950s the British Government was testing A-bombs and rockets in the Southern Australian desert at Woodmere and Maralinga, and also in the Monte Bello Islands off the NW Australian coast in the Timor Sea. The Ministry of Supply scientist in charge of these tests, Sir William Penny, asked the Australian Government if the RAAF could fly some Meteorological reconnaissance flights over the Timor Sea for the tests in 1956. The short answer was, "No, it's your bomb so you can supply your own aircraft!" So this is where 202 Squadron members and the Shackletons came in.

In January 1956 myself and 3 other Met Observers joined 269 Squadron for the task (called "Operation Mosaic") - the first time Shackletons flew on met reconnaissance flights.

The met instruments were fitted in the nose on a special panel. The aneroid barometer, ASI and altimeter tapped off the dynamic and static vents as in the Hastings, and the psychrometer was bolted on the outside of the nose, with the water tank and pump fitted inside by the seat for the Met Observer to operate. It amused the Shackleton crews to watch the met observer climbing up a ladder to change the wick on the wet bulb thermometer before each flight, as the psychrometer was not accessible from inside the aircraft.

Four Shackletons took off from Ballykelly in January 1956, led by the CO, Wg Cdr Norton-Smith DFC, and flew the old RAF Transport Command route to Darwin where we all arrived about six days later in the middle of the "wet" which is the Darwin summer, with temperatures (and humidity) in the upper nineties.

I flew out with an all NCO crew, captained by Sgt. Alan Bourne AFM, and the only member of this crew I have met since is Ron Wayne, one of the signallers who now looks after the Vickers Varsity in the Air Museum at Winthorpe near Newark, Notts.

From March till June we flew reconnaissance flights over the Timor Sea until the operation was complete in the Monte Bello Islands. We then flew down to Melbourne and Sydney as guests of the RAAF for 3 days. On the 2nd of July, all four Shackletons took off from RAAF Laverton near Sydney, formed over the coast and thundered over Sydney Harbour at 1000 feet and brought all the traffic to a halt on the bridge as we flew over with everyone waving furiously. [Photo in last edition]

The next Shackleton Met Recce operation was the first H-bomb test at Christmas Island in the Pacific about 2°N and about 1200 miles south of Honolulu with the highest point about 5 ft above sea level. This was the first "Grapple" operation out of a series of four.

206 Squadron, based at St Eval, was the next squadron Air Met Observers joined from 202, so myself and three others flew out to Christmas Island in January 1957 with a detachment of 4 aircraft led by the CO Wg Cdr Preston. We flew down to Lagens then across to Bermuda (a long haul, over 2000 miles) - Charleston - El Paso - Sacramento and then across to Honolulu and down to Christmas Island.

"Operation Grapple" lasted until June 1957 when a Vickers Valiant dropped the first H-

bomb on Madden Island about 300 miles south of Christmas Island, from about 30,000 feet with the burst at about 10,000 feet.

The 206 Sqn Shackletons flew Met Recce every day. These flights were about 12 hrs and we did standard Bismuth type tracks: low leg at 1500, the climb to 500MB (just over 18000') - top leg at 500MB for 200 NM then the descent to 1500 with observations every 60 NM.

The met recce flown on the 2nd March 1957 captained by Fly Lt Robertson was slightly different from the usual one. The Ministry of Supply had some of their scientific instruments for recording the oncoming test aboard aircraft carrier HMS Warrior, which had steamed across the Atlantic through the Panama Canal and into the Pacific and was about 50 nautical miles east of one of our reporting positions on the first leg of our recce on this day.

Someone found an old Lindholm container, so we filled it up with Christmas Island crabs (horrible things which you can't eat!) and fixed it in the bomb bay, and we took off about 8 am for the first leg of the recce. About 3 hours out, the navigator said "Make your observation now, and we will shoot off to meet HMS Warrior and get back on track in time for the next 60 NM observation"

The Shackleton then did the laid down procedure for attacking enemy shipping - down to 100 ft on the radio altimeter, a quick scan with the Radar at 500' - the fix - then back down to 100' and in! HMS Warrior was dead ahead when we roared past at about 500' and called them up on VHF telling them we had a present from Christmas Island. All the sailors, who appeared to be sunbathing at the time, jumped up and waved furiously, as we made our pass with wheels and flaps down and dropped the crab container, which bounced on the deck and shot into the sea!

We made one more pass, shouted "Cheerio, see you at Christmas" over the VHF, shot back on track, and continued on the Met recce and landed back at Christmas that evening.

When HMS Warrior steamed into Christmas about a week later, most of us were in the SNCOs' tent, when the flaps burst open and about a dozen hairy sailors advanced towards us wanting to know where the Shackleton crew was who dropped the crabs on their deck. We all pointed to each other but then all took the blame, so it was drinks all round that evening and a good "booze up" was had by all!

One more trip I was on was when F/L Robertson and crew flew down to Penrhyn Island (or Tongareva the Polynesian name). An RAF unit was based there to keep open an old US navy airstrip used in the Japanese war with a runway was about 1000 yards long with Palm trees each side. There was also a Met Office Radio Sonde Unit on the island.

After we had landed, and unloaded the "equipment" - about 200 tins of beer and other trivial items which nobody wanted! - we paid a quick visit to the small village before take off; we had to get airborne before dark as there was no runway lighting!

We were all on board and the Flight Engineer pressed number one starter button - there was a horrible "clicking" sound then nothing. After a big crew conference it was decided that the starter motor was u/s. Luckily we had a spare one on board, but it's about a 2 hour job to change one and there were only about 2 hours daylight left! The engineer made it! All the RAF camp came down to the airfield to see us off. With only a few minutes daylight left the captain told the young F/O in charge to drive his Land Rover to the far end of the runway, turn it round with the

headlamps shining down towards us - "and when you see us coming - just DUCK!"

Well, we made it, and flashed past the Land Rover with a few feet to spare! Six hours later when we joined the circuit at Christmas Island, it was belting down with rain! Apparently the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone had passed south of Christmas for the first time for about forty years.

The second part of John's story will appear in our next edition.