



Number 31

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## The newsletter of the 202 Squadron Association



202 Squadron Association Reunion Dinner, RAF Boulmer, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013

## **The President's Piece**

Having just returned from our reunion at Boulmer, the last one that I shall organise, I've been reflecting on the future of our Association, particularly as the civilianisation of Search and Rescue looms. It's expected that 202 Squadron, and 22 Squadron also, will disband, although there remains the possibility that the number plate might be transferred to a training unit. This has happened with other squadrons when they have disbanded and they have been given a new lease of life when that unit has been designated a "Reserve" squadron. 203 (R) Squadron, the Sea King OCU, is a perfect example. Nonetheless it remains the fact that we shall no longer be able to visit SAR Flights, so having visited Boulmer this time we have planned to go to Leconfield next time and then in the following year to Lossiemouth for absolutely the final one to a Search and Rescue Flight. The fact that the Squadron might disband and the fact that we might lose a source of new members means it's even more imperative that we do our recruiting now - especially amongst the serving members, and moreover amongst our old squadron mates who are not members of the Association, but should be.

At the reunion we had a little reshuffle amongst the committee. Geoff Bakewell agreed to take over the position of Reunion Organiser, relinquishing the Almoner post to Derek Whatling, who in his turn will be handing over as Chairman to Steve Garden. Derek has ably led the committee for some 10 years or so and we're most grateful to him for the time and effort that he's expended on our behalf.

A final thought to bear in mind is that 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2014 is the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of 202 Squadron, at Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey. So we might have a little more than just a boring old Reunion to think of. I know that the Squadron are thinking of a series of events to celebrate the occasion and no doubt we shall figure in that programme.

In Comradeship

**Pete Chadwick**

## **News From the Front Line Nov 12 – May 13**

The passing remarks of Sqn Ldr Stu Reeks as he pondered on the November exploits of D Flt:

*‘November continued the quiet run that D Flt has had this autumn, with the flight wondering whether this is a lull before a storm or an indication of people being better equipped and prepared for venturing outdoors.’*

His questioning was soon to be answered as, not long after, the snows arrived bringing the jobs with them. At first, a north south divide in the weather saw Leconfield and Boulmer having to contend with the wintry conditions whilst Lossie sat basking in sun north of the border. Soon playing catch up the Scottish winter arrived in force in February and D Flt had a notably busy month. 26 SAROps and over 133 hours were flown and the majority of these hours were in the mountains in challenging winter conditions both day and night.

Two notable SAROps were an avalanche on the 14 February and a fallen climber on the 25 February. The initial scramble was to an avalanche in the Chalamain Gap, in the Cairngorms. This is known to the crews as a smallish gully at fairly low level, through which a popular footpath leads. However, on arrival the apparently benign nature of the area and good weather conditions belied the severity of the occasion. Snow had avalanched down a slope and effectively filled up the gully entirely engulfing a group climbing below. On arrival R137 landed downslope and the Winchman and MRT (picked up en route) walked into the area to commence search immediately for the three missing casualties. R137 then proceeded to shuttle over fifty further MRT members and dogs into the small area whilst the Winchman continued to assist in digging and probing. A second crew was assembled and the spare aircraft launched from D Flt. Within a couple of hours, the three victims were found under 3m of snow and the rescue took on a personal aspect when it became clear that two of the casualties were RAF mountaineers, known to some of the searching party. The second aircraft took the first uncovered casualty to Aberdeen, whilst the first aircraft waited en scene for the others. All three casualties were taken to the hypothermic unit in Aberdeen and the

specialist doctors were hopeful that given the unprecedented speed of recovery there was a chance of recovery, but sadly, despite everyone's best efforts, all three casualties subsequently died.

The scramble on the 25<sup>th</sup> February highlighted different challenges for a rescue crew. The scramble was to a climber high on Ben Nevis who had fallen and suffered significant injuries, and who was hanging suspended from his climbing ropes. En route the crew spoke to the casualty's climbing partner on his mobile phone to get information including details on the ropes, and given the severity of the situation, decided it was worth flying past the incident to take a look instead of routing into the nearby MRT base and potentially prolonging the situation. On arrival, the crew assessed the casualty as being in a critical position and recoverable by helicopter. Whilst the Winchman was with the casualty and whilst working with the multiple ropes and climbing equipment from which he was suspended, the casualty became detached and fell to the valley floor. He was pronounced dead on recovery. This incident, which is being investigated, however serves to remind everyone, in the SAR community and the wider military and civilian worlds, that SAR crews frequently put themselves in positions of danger and are asked to make critical decisions to try and rescue people who have already got themselves in a precarious situation through the course of their pastime or employment. Given the statistics, there will always be some SAROPs which do not have the desired positive outcome. That these were just two of many testing SAROPs in February meant that fatigue levels were being watched very closely. Crews were frequently flying 8 hour days in marginal weather conditions and often with a disappointing outcome.

E Flt have had a turbulent period over the past six months. The manning issues continue to plague the Squadron, and E Flt seem to have had more than their fair share. Although flush with RadOps, E Flt only had one fit Winchman for the majority of December so was reliant on help from other flts and could only manage a 3-man crew on occasions. They were tasked to a couple of rescues with a 3-man crew which highlighted issues, namely how does the single crewman help with operating the aircraft, particularly navigation or radar, whilst supervising the casualty? Discussions over a way forward on the issue has led to recognition of the 3 man crew being there for 'UK Resilience'

tasking and not SAR. This reduces the risk of crews getting drawn into a moral dilemma to help on SAROps, when 25% of their crew and capacity is simply not there. With plans in place to solve the rearcrew manning issues a pinch point has already been identified in the not too distant future which will affect front seaters...that should cause some interesting three-man-crew jobs!!

January brought 15 SAROps for E Flt, picking up the tempo a little after a subdued end to 2012. Of note was a job on New Year's Day where a coroner, police and paramedic were tasked to a body recovery on the banks of the Humber near Brough. R128 was tasked to assist in case the body was a distance from the high water mark. As the coroner was carrying the body he unfortunately collapsed, suffering from cardiac arrest. Luckily he was in good hands with the paramedic and police carrying out immediate CPR which was continued on the aircraft. The casualty showed signs of life during the transit to hospital and later underwent a heart by-pass operation. It was an excellent example of how all the emergency services work together at their best.

On a lighter note, E Flt had an informal visit from the RNLI in January and it was not until the attendance list was received that it was realised that the team consisted of two recently retired Vice Admirals, one of which is a member of the Royal Household. They were very complimentary of the service provided, and a free and frank discussion was had about the future of the RNLI, the quality of training and their new boats which are not far from delivery.

Amid the busy past few months it has been easy to forget the work ongoing towards the privatisation of military SAR. Now that the SAR-H contract has been awarded the flow of information has quickened and we are very much aware now that military SAR really is coming to an end, and fast! Bristow have already started with their roadshows and a 'managed transition' has been agreed upon for those who wish to continue SAR wearing an orange immersion suit. How this will impact the squadron we shall have to see as there are still three years left to push until the final flt folds. Having witnessed how the Squadron has coped with everything that has been thrown at it over the past 6 months I am certain that the professionalism of all those in the

Squadron will ensure that a first class service continues till the end.

**STOP PRESS**----- This year's Bullock Trophy for the best RAF Search and Rescue Flight has just been announced at the annual SAR Force Dinner. It has been retained by 202 Squadron and will be passed from E Flt to D Flt.

**Flt Lt Dave Punchard**



### **Memories of 202 Sqn, Early 1960s**

My first tour as a pilot – having been an air signaller on the Vickers Valetta previously – was with 202 Sqn, to fly the Handley Page Hastings. Arriving at Aldergrove in December 1961 I was allotted to Iggy's crew (Flight Lieutenant K Ignatowski). A privilege as it turned out; there could hardly have been a more experienced or determined pilot in the whole of Coastal Command.

Living in the Officers' Mess, with a goodly handful of other bachelors, WRAF officers and one or two Army Air Corps pilots was a pleasant experience. The Mess staff were excellent and looked upon us as "our officers". Dining-in nights could be highly entertaining. Among the pranks was the tying together of a bunch of napkins immediately before the Loyal Toast. We male officers would quickly tie a WRAF officer to her chair with the napkins so that on standing for the toast the unfortunate lady was encumbered with her chair. The President was not always amused.

The "raison d'être" of 202 was the Bismuth weather flight, launched most days of the week. The detail of such flights has already been adequately covered in a previous bulletin, so I will not repeat the nitty gritty. Several were, however, memorable. Two failed to get airborne off the take-off run, one catching fire in the process and the other one remaining more or less intact. There was no loss of life. A fellow co-pilot told me that, with the aircraft on fire, he escaped through the direct vision panel alongside his seat. On later inspection he observed that the panel was too small for him to get through – without a raging fire to propel him. Also, he stated that on sprinting away from the

wreck he was passed by a Master Aircrew member who, twice his age, would normally have been pushed to run at a slow jog!

During the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962) Iggy's crew had the rare pleasure of flying in excellent weather on a "probe" Bismuth – straight out into the Atlantic on a Westerly track at 1500 feet for about four hours, then descend to 200 feet prior to the return. The Atlantic was almost like a mill pond; just as we levelled at 200 feet a submarine surfaced dead ahead. We were excited and surprised at this co-incidence. Nothing like as surprised, I am sure, as the submariner whose head appeared from the hatch of the Soviet Navy vessel, saw us bearing down on him, and immediately slammed the hatch shut. Iggy circled the vessel and we saw it dive in double quick time. The water was so clear that we were able to follow its track for quite some time.



202 Sqn Hastings (image courtesy of [www.aviationphotocompany.com](http://www.aviationphotocompany.com))

As well as flying Bismuths, 202 acted as Coastal Command's transport Squadron. Sports teams were flown to venues in England and Scotland, even furniture and RAF police dogs were moved from one base to another. On one trip to Scandinavia, with the C-in-C of the Command on board, our flight engineer, "Paddy" Torrns, and signaller Jim Stratton (both World War two

veterans), carried out their “AOC’s inspection” routine. One of them doffed the Air Marshal’s hat and borrowed his black stick. Proceeding down the back of the Hastings, the “AOC” pointed out anything that was remotely not 100 per cent perfect and the other duly noted down in his notebook the offending article. The C-in-C was most amused and on returning him to England he stated that it was the most enjoyable trip he could remember.

Another of their routines was the “on board thunderstorm”. The two Master Aircrew would wait for an unsuspecting crew member to be resting in the passenger compartment – and drop off to sleep. One of the two Masters would carry the Aldis signal lamp (a mini searchlight for younger readers) and the other a metal tray and large spoon. Creeping up close, with a quiet countdown, all hell would be let loose as the thunderstorm struck. Perhaps that’s why I now need hearing aids.

Pity the young airwoman who came up front one day to ask the whereabouts of the toilet. “Mmmm”, said one of the deadly duo. “We don’t really have one, but if it is a real emergency you may use THAT” – pointing at the floor at the rear of the aircraft, he indicated the hatch used for dropping flares. As the look of fear enveloped the young lady’s face he then kindly showed her the real loo.

What else may be said of Iggy that has not already appeared in print? Well, possibly two things. Firstly, he was rarely seen without a cigar in his mouth (Havana of course). One day he was without one. “Iggy, where is the cigar?” “Denny, I have given up. I have decided I want a new car, so this will pay for it”. And so it did. Next, picture a very wintry scene prior to Bismuth departure time. Everywhere was icy, so much so that even to taxi was to take a big risk. No problem to Iggy. He sent for the ground-crew boss (we had civilian servicing for the last few years of operations) and told him to tow the Hastings to the end of the runway. We climbed aboard, departed straight as an arrow along the ice-bound runway – and were airborne on time.

Finally, I have to confess to a dereliction of duty. I played some six or seven sports for the Station, and became the Physical Fitness Officer when the full-time incumbent was posted. I got to know a goodly number of airmen and airwomen as a result. One of the young ladies was a keen philatelist and asked

me to send her a postcard from any of the foreign places I visited. I agreed and used the pseudonym of Vasco de Gama when signing the card. In return, her name was to be Florence Nightingale. Early one morning, whilst serving as Orderly Officer, I had a 'phone call from Florence (all calls went through the WRAF-operated exchange – hence the use of “names”). “Three of us are in Belfast and we have no money, would you please collect us?” Well, I thought, it means I must abandon the Station for at least an hour. Will it survive without me? Of course it would. So I agreed, picked the three slightly worse-for-wear girls up and dropped them about one hundred yards from the main entrance to Aldergrove.

Before volunteering for 202 Squadron in 1961, my mates queried my decision. “Why on earth do you want to fly for hours on end over the ocean?” “It was different” I said “and a change from endless hours across the desert and jungle in Transport Command”. I was right; I could not have wished for a better way to start my pilot career. So many great Squadron characters, so much fun, and so many good experiences, and so many happy memories.

**Dennis Pasco**



### **202 SQUADRON REUNION – 20 APRIL 2013 – ALMONERS REPORT**

1. I am in some ways sorry to report that, as the Association Almoner, I have been involved in a number of arisings throughout the year since our last reunion. Some have been of a representative nature; others, unfortunately, have been either through bereavement or personal difficulty.
  
2. On the ‘representative’ front I have been active in representing the Association at the former RAF Coltishall through the Spring, Summer and Autumn. Following a request from Dave Welch, an active member of the Spirit of Coltishall Association (SoCA) and former Flt Sgt of the Coltishall Flight, the 202 Sqn Assoc was requested to provide an engraved Squadron Crest to be attached to a park bench in the RAF Coltishall Memorial Garden created by its new owners, HM Prison Services.

3. Following a fact finding visit on 19 Apr 12, the requirement was determined and a suitable plaque obtained. This was affixed and I attended the bench dedication on 11 Nov 12 held following the Remembrance Day Parade, Church Service and wreath laying at the memorial.

4. In similar vein I was invited to, and represented, the Association at, the SoCA Battle of Britain Dinner held on 8 Sep 12. This included a march past by the band of the local Air Training Corps Squadron and was well supported by a flypast of a Sea King from Wattisham that just happened to be en-route at exactly the right time! It was perhaps a little disappointing that although advertised across the 202 Sqn Assoc there were no further takers offering support, particularly as many of our members live in the Norwich area.



5. Whilst still with Coltishall, Pete Chadwick was also able attend the annual commemoration to Dave Bullock and laid a wreath.

6. There have been a number of losses during the past year which have involved both myself and others. You may recall that Hester Davies passed away and was buried at West Malling on 10 Jan 13 – a small number of us were able to attend. We also heard that Marie, wife of Pete Fuller (a Canadian exchange pilot – and member of the Assoc) passed away just before Christmas.

7. There have been a number of members and their wives who have

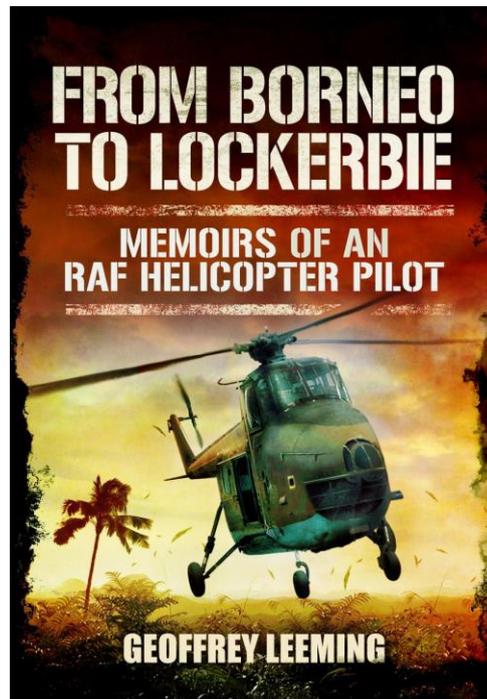
sought help during the year and also some well known names who are not in the Association. This has involved both myself as the Almoner and, to a large extent (because everybody knows him), also Pete Chadwick. I don't intend to elaborate on the specifics save to say that help, in the form of more professional involvement from SSAFA, the British Legion and Social Services, has been able to be arranged. Often, however, the person concerned has simply been seeking someone to talk to and this is where you all can help. Let me reiterate that the Association Committee (and especially me) cannot react to a member's problems unless other members keep me informed. Then we can ask for your help through, perhaps, being someone who knows the individual well or who is geographically better placed.

Geoff Bakewell

### **202 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION ALMONER**

**Derek Whatling has now taken over from Geoff as the Association's Almoner.**

## Book Review



This is an extremely well written account of Geoff Leeming's life in the Royal Air Force; in parts the excitement is such that one cannot put it down. After pilot training he was posted to be a co-pilot on Valiant bombers. But the Valiant was found to have severe fatigue problems and had to be permanently grounded. It was at this time that the Borneo confrontation was beginning and there was a need within the RAF for a lot of helicopter pilots. Geoff was one. He was sent out to Singapore and despite being married and under 25, managed to fly Marian out there to join him. But, from Singapore he was detached for long periods to Borneo to live in fairly basic conditions flying over the jungle with few or no navigational features. Despite the continual tree cover he was able to carry out an immaculate forced landing on a sandbank in a river when he lost his engine. Once the Borneo situation was settled politically Geoff was posted back to UK where he had high hopes of being sent to SAR. Instead he was sent to fixed-wing CFS before going on to a UAS flying Chipmunks in Northumbria.

After his fixed-wing tour he managed to get himself back onto helicopters, and the longed for SAR role. He was posted to Lossiemouth as flight commander of D Flight 202 Squadron, again flying Whirlwinds that he had earlier flown in

Borneo, but this time painted yellow. He describes some astonishing rescues in appalling weather conditions well outside normal weather limits. I will not give any more detail here as these rescues are best described by Geoff in his own words using his very matter of fact and very readable style. The tension is palpable and the reader is as exhausted as Geoff and his crew when they finally get home.

Geoff received a well deserved promotion at the end of that tour and was posted to be the CO of the SARTU at Valley, where he moved the unit from part of the Ternhill helicopter training school to be controlled by the SAR Wing. He had a couple of ground tours before deciding to go 'specialist aircrew' after a falling out with a group captain at Innsworth, so he finished his flying career at Valley with SARTU. It was from here that he became involved with the horrors at Lockerbie.

Geoff has had an interesting life, beautifully described in this excellent book - a thoroughly good read. He is a straight talking sort of guy and this led him into the odd scrape with higher authority on occasion – but never, happily, with me. I thoroughly enjoyed this well written book and wish Geoff and Marian a happy retirement in Anglesey and look forward to catching up with him again at future reunions of the 202 Squadron Association - and I look forward to the next volume?

**Ian Robins**

**CO 202 Sqn 1973-1976**



## **Editor's End**

Once again my thanks to all those who have contributed directly or indirectly to this edition, in particular Ian Stephenson who has provided many ideas for articles; that by Dennis Pasco is the first fruit of his labour and I am hoping that more will follow!

**Charlie Logan**