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Newsletter

Winter 2011



Tadcaster Branch

Royal Air Forces Association

Editors bit.....

I would like to start this Winter Newsletter first by wishing you all a very happy Christmas and the hope that 2012 turns out to be a very good year for you. Secondly I would like to thank those who have contributed articles for inclusion in Newsletters over the last year and record my appreciation for the supportive comments received on my efforts to provide items that may be of interest.

The article on Nicolson VC in the Autumn Newsletter turned out to be a timely inclusion as following publication I was made aware that Branch Member Wing Commander John Brown had recently attended a Caterpillar Club Lunch where he had sat next to a man who had served for some time with Nicolson VC. I was also provided with the following photograph of Nicolson VC by Branch President Brian Trench which he had taken on a recent stay at the Union Jack Club London. As a result of these two coincidences I thought it right that I should use a photograph of VC10 Tanker XV107 named Nicolson VC on this Newsletters cover.



Government was stealing two years of their lives.

It may interest you to know that when John left English Electric he worked for various companies and managed to purchase his first aircraft. This led to him becoming a commercial pilot, a profession he continues to pursue with 12,000 hours flown. His two sons are also commercial pilots.

Editor's note: This story came to me from the Royal Air Force Boy Entrants Beachat group; I understand that it was first posted on the pprune Forums website at <http://www.pprune.org/>

To The RAF – A Poem By Alfred Noyes;

To The RAF

Never since English ships went out
To sing the beard of Spain,
Or English sea-dogs hunted death
Along the Spanish Main,
Never since Drake and Raleigh won
Our freedom of the seas,
Have sons of Britain dared and done
More valiantly than these.

Whether at midnight or at noon,
Through mist or open sky,
Eagles of freedom, all our hearts
Are up with you on high;
While Britain's mighty ghosts look down
From realms beyond the sun
And whisper, as their record pales,
Their breathless, deep, Well Done!

PS: I Almost Forgot To Ask;

Members who have email addresses may like to provide their email address to our Membership Secretary Lance Saddington for inclusion in the list of contact details. If you do Lance may be emailed at: lance-chris@live.co.uk or by phone at: 01757 611333

unescorted. He was bought many beers by the homesick and disaffected.

In this period his other kit was moved to D block along with the tools from his car, he now had two sets of uniforms with him. The Court Martial was convened on 11th February and he was convicted and his services were no longer required. The findings were confirmed and he was transferred for a holiday at RAF Uxbridge which lasted with time deducted for that being served in D Block at Gutersloh until May 1958. He was on leaving paid a cheque for the time he was away from Gutersloh.

There were two really surprising things at the end of this affair, firstly that the evening trips to the NAAFI during his time in D Block were unaccompanied because they used his car tools deposited there to cut through the bars of a cell. This allowed the residents to go out in the evenings. This comfortable arrangement could have continued but the other two went out on the town and were discovered missing which caused search parties to be raised but they returned by taxi and demanded their beds back.

The major surprise was to find out that John had replied to a newspaper advertisement by English Electric of Preston for ex-RAF technicians to work on Canberra aircraft on RAF stations in the UK in their "out-working" teams. He was interviewed in late May and accepted for employment but could not start until September because he was under 21 years of age.

His first job in September 1958 was at RAF Upwood and for the next three years he worked on many other stations on both Canberra's and Lightning's. He was accommodated in the Sgts Mess. He met many people he had known in the RAF. They must have been surprised to see him.

So when someone tried to nick a Canberra to solve a short-term problem it was a surprise but not really earth-shattering. The subsequent events were reported with glee and John became a folk hero especially for the National Servicemen who felt the

Branch Meetings

Committee Meetings

Committee Meetings will be held at the Fox and Hounds Tadcaster. Commencing at 19:10hrs (Unless otherwise advised).

The Next Committee Meeting date is to be advised.

Monthly Social Meetings

Social Evenings are held at the Tadcaster Social Club from 20:00hrs (Unless otherwise advised)

The next social evening will be on Wednesday 4th January 2012 commencing at 20:00hrs.

Future Events;

The following Social Evenings are scheduled, put the dates in your diaries now please:

Wednesday 1st February 2012 in the Tadcaster Social Club.

Wednesday 7th March Following the AGM in the Tadcaster Social Club

Wednesday 4th April 2012 in the Tadcaster Social Club.

Wednesday 2nd May 2012 in the Tadcaster Social Club.

Wednesday 6th June 2012 in the Tadcaster Social Club.

Wednesday 4th July 2012 Venue to be decided.

No Social Evening in August 2012

Wednesday 5th September 2012 in the Tadcaster Social Club

Wednesday 5th October 2012 in the Tadcaster Social Club

Families Lunch dates for 2011/12 are as follows:

Sunday 19th February 2012 at The Pax Inn Thorpe Arch arrive 12:00 for 12:30 Menu to be provided by Brian and Pauline Trench.

Sunday TBA April 2012 Venue choice Basil Jewitt.

Sunday TBA July 2012 Venue choice Geoff Atkinson and Sheila O'Donnell.

Sunday 14th or 21st October 2012 Venue choice Hazel and Phil Lacey

The 2012 Branch Annual General Meeting will take place in the Tadcaster Social Club on 7th March 2012. This will be followed by a short Committee Meeting and a Social Evening.

Other events are planned to take place as follows:

Friday 1st to Monday 4th June 2012 The Queens Jubilee Celebrations – Details to be advised.

Date in June 2012 to be advised for the YUAS Families Day.

Date in August 2012 to be decided for the Branch BBQ at Church Fenton.

John had a heavy cold when he arrived at Wilmslow and a few days going through the mindless routines of square-bashing convinced him that he should return to Gutersloh and face the music, get it out of the way and get on with his life. His current quality of life was pretty dreadful.

So on the evening of 6th November he packed some belongings and jumped over the fence to catch a 31 bus into central Manchester. He found out that the next sailing date for Germany from Harwich was on the evening of Monday 9th November and on that date he reported with his 1250 to the ticket office at Manchester station and reported he had lost the return half of his ticket to RAF Gutersloh. He was issued with a ticket to London and advised to report to the RTO at Liverpool St for further ticketing to Germany. He told the same story at Liverpool St and was issued with a ticket to Harwich and advised to contact the RTO there.

In Harwich when he reported to the Sergeant in the RTO office he showed his 1250 and repeated his story. He was asked to wait and the Sergeant left the room with his 1250. The Sergeant returned with a Corporal, a Flying Officer and two RAF police He was asked "Are you 4168649 Junior Technician John Neville or are you 4235478 Junior Technician John Neville?". He replied "Yes, yes". He was arrested and escorted onto the ship to the Hook of Holland.

At the Hook he was met by F/Sgt Clitheroe and Sgt Hockey from the SIB at Sundern and driven back to Gutersloh where he was housed in the Detention Block (D Block) opposite the guardroom by the main gate along with two other prisoners.

He was in the next few days interviewed by F/Lt O'Niell and F/Sgt Clitheroe from the SIB in Sundern and he made a full statement 12 pages in length.

John was marched to the Mess each day to be fed and I well remember the cheering which took place. He was something of a folk hero especially amongst the National Serviceman. He also intermittently appeared in the NAAFI on some evenings apparently

On arrival in the UK he went on the shuttle to London and booked in the Union Jack Club overnight before going by train to Manchester and booking into digs.

John loved the RAF and loved his job in it and it was always his intention to re-join it when he returned to the UK. To achieve this he visited the Manchester Recruiting Office and filled in the forms but was told he needed a National Insurance Number. The local Labour Exchange gave him his old number but were puzzled that he had not been called up for National Service. He went back to the Recruitment Centre to take tests but felt nervous and moved over the Pennines to Leeds where he went to the Recruitment Office there and again applied to join the RAF as a regular. He was told it would take a week or so before he would be called for tests etc.

Money was now running low so he hitch-hiked to RAF Dishforth showed his 1250 told the Cpl in the guardroom there that he was on leave from Germany visiting his brother and could he stay in the transit block. He was issued with bedding and was happy until he found a note on his bed asking him to report to the RAF Police Office. He then moved on to Topcliffe and went through the same routine until he learnt that there was a letter and warrant in the Leeds Recruiting Office instructing him to report to Cardington on 20th November.

At Cardington he reported that he had some knowledge of electrics and Canberra systems and was sent to Melksham in civilian clothes for a trade assessment.

The result of all of this and much more detail was that on 28th November 1957 the absconded 4168649 J/T Neville J. was now the newly recruited 4235478 J/T Neville J. He from that point on kept his 1250s taped together with the most recent one on top.

After the issuing of kit and the necessary jabs John was collected together with a group of other new recruits and sent on 3rd December to RAF Wilmslow for square-bashing again.

There is still to come the arrest, trial and really surprising aftermath.

Wings Collections September 2012;

Dates to be confirmed for the following:

Millennium Square Boston Spa collection

Sainsburys Tadcaster collection

Morrisons Selby collection

Wings Count will be combined with the September Committee Meeting.

Sunday 16th September 2012 Wreath laying ceremony at Kirkby Wharfe Cemetery at 09:30hrs followed by the Battle of Britain Service at St Marys Church Tadcaster commencing at 10:30hrs.

Photographs From Recent Branch Events;

Remembrance parade 2011:



Chairman Steve Helsdon laying the Branch wreath at Tadcaster War Memorial



A few of the Branch Members who attended the Remembrance Service



Pauline Trench and Basil Jewitt

Branch Member Basil Jewitt's 90th Birthday Celebrations:

Branch members joined with Basil's family and friends in the Tadcaster Old Boys Sunday School to celebrate Basil's 90th Birthday.



Basil preparing to cut his cake and with Branch Member and Tadcaster's Lord Mayor Ted Mansfield and Teds wife Linda

During this period AVM Ubee the AOC of 2 Group made an indiscreet and probably miss-quoted reply to a question from the press concerning the capabilities of the Canberra bombers recently stationed in Germany to deliver nuclear devices.

This in the context of the recently completed WWII, where tens of millions of people had been killed or injured by the Russians and Germans was political dynamite. This was at the height of the Cold War when there was a possibility of escalation into WWIIII.

It was also in the context of the UK testing of thermo-nuclear devices in the Pacific. Many fellow airmen were returning from Megaton Tours with suntans and loud Hawaiian shirts.

So when one of these nuclear-capable aircraft came close to being removed from a first line military airfield (this was the closest active station to the Eastern Block) it was a major incident. The first thing to be established was if the perpetrator had a political motivation or had there been some financial incentive. Where was he now? Was he going to appear at a press conference in East Berlin with an adoring blonde ballerina on his arm stating his disaffection with the basing of nuclear weapons in Germany?

A major investigation began at RAF Gutersloh with Tannoy messages asking for anyone with information about or knowledge of the whereabouts of John to contact their Officer i/c immediately.

A large number of interviews were conducted by strange men with large feet, blazers and bad haircuts. The interviewees were told that they would soon get him, checks had been instituted on all road, rail, air and sea exits from the area.

The organisers of the activity at Gutersloh were F/Lt O/Niell and F/Sgt Clitheroe from the SIB in Sundern.

We left John in the Herzebrock area on the morning of 15th October where he caught a train to Bielefeld and another one from there to Düsseldorf (it passed through Gutersloh station). In Düsseldorf he went to the BEA office and bought a services rate single ticket on a Viscount to Heathrow using his 1250 ID.

His master plan included taking off from Gutersloh, flying to Dishforth in Yorkshire, landing on the North/South runway parallel to the to the A1, taxiing to the boundary fence and jumping over it to hitch a lift to North of Manchester where his family lived. It should be piece of cake really he had a key for Canberra's and had studied the Pilot Notes.

In the early morning of 15th October 1957 he went out, taking with him a suitcase and small pack, onto the airfield to the 59 Sqdn line and removed all of the covers and external attachments of Canberra XH204. He set up all of the necessary switches to start up on internals, did not arm the ejection seat and at 6:30 pm when Reveille sounded he threw the master battery switch thereby masking the noise of start up.

When the canopy had de-misted and the engines settled at 2700 revs he released the parking brake and started to move forward. He immediately found difficulty in steering with the engines and toe brakes but was making good progress until approaching Runway 09 when the combination of a slight slope and a curve in the track caused him to swing onto the grass and bogging down. Now panic set in and he thought there would be a hue and cry so he decided to abandon the aircraft and run to the boundary fence which he scaled and a German on a moped gave him a lift to Herzebrock Station. He did not need to hurry because it was almost 2 hours after start up before the missing Canberra was discovered by the Control Tower and 59 Squadron initially denied they had lost it.

When they entered the Canberra cockpit and discovered the suitcase, the police quickly put two and two together and decided the documents in the case may lead to the identity of the tyro aviator.

These events led to a major investigation with more snowdrops on the ground than at Kew in January
This was the beginning of a bizarre and at times python-esque series of events with a surprising ending.



Some of the Branch Members who attended Basil's Birthday Celebrations

Women at War – Cpl Dot Laidlaw;

My thanks to Branch Honorary Secretary Ted Sumner for providing the following information and photographs relating to his mothers service and an insight into wartime Bletchley Park.

Bletchley Park was 'fed' with teleprinter copies of messages intercepted at 'Y' (wireless) stations, which were staffed by RN/WRNS; RAF/WAAF; Army or civilian personnel. The work, at Bletchley, was TOP SECRET ULTRA and compartmentalised (only a very few knew all that was going on and it was normal for hut occupants not to mix with other hut residents at work or off-duty). The following is a snapshot of Cpl D [Dot] Laidlaw's life in the WAAF that included service at 'Y' stations and Bletchley Park.

“I volunteered for the WAAF on 21 Jun 43, aged 20, and proceeded to RAF Innsworth for enlistment, kitting and basic training. The journey stuck in my memory because I was just a country girl and this was my first train journey and venture out of Kent! Then I did a short spell at RAF Hendon followed by a posting to No 1 Radio School RAF Cranwell in June 1944 for teleprinter operator (TCO) training. This period was one of contrasting emotions – both very sad and happy. Sad because news came through that a friend had been killed in a V1 (Doodlebug) flying bomb raid on Hendon. Happy because I loved the TCO training. During this time I received a high level security clearance, subsequently becoming a ‘Y’ station TCO. In Jan 1945, I was posted to RAF Hawkinge in Kent for duties at Capel-le-Ferne near Folkestone. Here my job consisted of delivering intercepted coded German signals traffic for courier transfer. Later I typed the messages, comprising blocks of letters, which were sent by teleprinter to a place that I later learnt was Bletchley Park. We worked in requisitioned bungalows right on the cliff top and we were ferried back and forth between our work place and private billets in Folkestone. Ironically, my home was still in Kent but travel was quite restricted. There then followed a posting to Bletchley Park in June 1945 and I was billeted at RAF Chicksands (another ‘Y’ station) and bussed to and fro’. Nothing was known about any other activity as it was all totally ‘hush-hush’. At Bletchley I worked a 3 x 8 hours shift rota from 8am-4pm, 4pm-12 midnight and 12 midnight-8pm, in a blacked out hut. My duties comprised much the same as Capel but on far larger scale and I was an NCO in charge of 30 teleprinters and their operators. My final posting, in late 1945 until December 1946, was at Blackbrook, Lancashire in an underground bunker. Again my job was similar but the environment was claustrophobic. Secrecy was paramount at the time and it was not until some 25 years after the war when watching a BBC documentary that I learnt fully what went on with Bletchley and Enigma. It was then that I managed to tie up the

1954, some 20 years before his crucial contribution to the cracking of Enigma, and to the Allied victory, was declassified. It is remarkable that the secret was entirely kept for 30 years and much of it for 50 years: the story is still unfolding, including the deeds of those hitherto sworn to secrecy all those years ago!

The Amazing Story of J/T Neville & J/T Neville;

In October 1957 Fingers was 20 years and one month old. He had gained the nickname Fingers at Melksham on his Fitters Course when he pressed the wrong button and discharged an aircraft battery with a loud bang.

He had recently purchased from a local scrap yard some second hand tyres for his car and had subsequently been interviewed and questioned by both the RAF SIB and the German Polizei on the provenance of these tyres and they had impounded his car. The next Saturday he removed his car from the compound on camp with spare keys and went to a local dance. When he left much later he found that someone, reportedly from the car parked next to his, had let his tyres down. As the tyres were the same size as his, he and his companion jacked up and removed the wheels and replaced the deflated ones on his own car. He put his own wheels in his open boot; all of this was to the cheers and encouragement of the local Germans.

The world seemed to be his oyster until he ran out of petrol on the main road a few miles short of the camp and the German police stopped to check it out. Well, here was a car supposedly impounded and subject to an investigation about stolen tyres on the public highway with a boot full of wheels. Not good news.

Over the next couple of days Fingers considered his situation not only with the police of two nations but also his current problems with his girlfriend and decided drastic problems merited drastic solutions and he decided he would borrow a Canberra.

decrypted daily at Bletchley Park. The Nazi Germany government never knew that the Enigma cipher had been broken and that its military communications were often transparent.



Rebuilt Bombe Machine at Bletchley Park

The flood of SIGINT, of which the product from the attack on Enigma was only a part, crucially influenced the direction and outcome of WW II. The North Africa, Italian, and North-West Europe campaigns, but above all the Battle of the Atlantic), were heavily affected by the Allies' foreknowledge of Axis intentions. Never in a major war has one combatant had his intentions betrayed so comprehensively to his opponent.

In retrospect, the intelligence gleaned from this source, codenamed ULTRA by the British, was a substantial aid to the Allied war effort. The exact influence of ULTRA is debated, but an oft-repeated assessment is that decryption of German ciphers hastened the end of the European war by two years and saved thousands of British and Allied military lives, as well as many more European civilian casualties. The Enigma story did not end on VE Day. Tragically, Alan Turing was persecuted after the war for his homosexuality. His security clearance was revoked, he was forced to undergo debilitating hormone treatments, and he was banned from the development of the digital computer. Turing committed suicide in

idiosyncrasies of my postings and solve the puzzle of my own WAAF service”.



Dot Laidlaw



Dot's Service and Release Book

TOP SECRET ULTRA

THE ENIGMA CODE BREAKERS OF BLETCHLEY PARK

An Enigma machine is any of a family of related electro-mechanical rotor machines used for the encryption and decryption of secret messages. In its developed form the Enigma machine had a keyboard, plug board, three (army, air force) or four (navy) rotors, and a lamp table. The rotors were set to a ‘ground setting’ (grundstellung), usually changed daily. Each message would be preceded by an individual ‘key setting’. The message would be typed onto the keyboard, the rotors changed the cipher at each letter, and the enciphered letters would light up on the lamp table. After wireless transmission by Morse code the enciphered message would be typed by the receiver onto an Enigma machine having the same ground setting, the key setting entered, and the text deciphered automatically. During World War I, cumbersome paper-and-pencil ciphers were still the rule, as they had been for centuries past. (A cipher is any scheme for transforming ordinary written language – plaintext- into a coded, but apparently random string of characters,

ciphertext.) After World War I, several inventors turned their attention to the mechanization of ciphering, seeking to increase accuracy, speed, and security. The most successful inventor was the German engineer Arthur Scherbius, who in 1918, created a cipher machine he named the Enigma. (The word "enigma" is the same in German and English). Scherbius was unsuccessful in selling Enigma to commercial buyers but in 1923 Enigma was chosen by the German government as its standard ciphering system, as Germany had only just learned how much damage had been done by the breaking of its ciphers by the Allies in World War I. Between 1925 and 1945, over 30,000 Enigma machines, with slightly differing systems were used by the German army, air force and navy.



Enigma Machine with a Rotor Removed



Enigma Machine Labeled

Three Polish mathematicians (Rejewski, Rozycki, and Zygaliski) established the theoretical basis for breaking the output of German military Enigma machines in early 1933, through a process of combining mathematics, statistics, computational ability, and inspired guesswork. In July 1939, at a secret meeting with British representatives, the Polish government handed over their theoretical

data on breaking Enigma and a replica Enigma machine. In August the Government Code and Cipher School (GC&CS) was moved to Bletchley Park, an estate 46 miles (75 km) from London. Chess masters, mathematicians, professors, and linguists were recruited from all over Britain, many from Cambridge University led by British mathematician and computing pioneer Alan Turing (1912–1954), the group succeeded beyond even the most optimistic expectations. The Servicemen and women of Bletchley Camp knew their unit simply as Station X.

The first Bombe machine (named after the ice cream, not explosive) permitted the British to read some traffic during the fall of France. This intelligence, dubbed ULTRA, was passed on to a very limited number of recipients, among whom the most voracious reader was

certainly the British PM, Winston Churchill. ULTRA supplied advanced warning of Luftwaffe intentions during the Battle of Britain in 1940 and was instrumental in the interdiction of Axis supplies in the Mediterranean, contributing substantially to the turning point at El Alamein. Theoretical data was shared with the Americans even before they entered the war, although there were always reservations about their less stringent distribution and occasionally careless use of ULTRA. During World War II, the German military modified the Enigma system at intervals, requiring the British to continue re-cracking the cipher throughout the war. The battle against Enigma was never completely won. Advances came from the capture of ground settings from German weather ships (taken in a ‘cutting out’ operation on suggestion from Bletchley Park) and a U-boat. First principle was the identification of a standard message such as ‘nothing to report’ and the possible key setting such as the operator's wife's name, from which it was possible to work back to the ground setting. The Bombe machine could then find the key settings for other messages in that ground setting. By 1944, over 4,000 German messages were being