

The Aldwark Chronicle

Newsletter of the Royal Air Forces Association

- York Branch



**ROYAL
AIRFORCES
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

Branch Headquarters
3-5 Aldwark, York YO1 2BX
Tel:01904 652796
rafayork@gmail.com

Issue No. 65
August 2018



Ex & Current RAF 72 Sqn members + ATC & Bettys staff

Club opening hours: Thurs - 7:30pm to 10:30 pm; Sat - 11:30am to 3pm

Our Website is at: www.rafayork.org

Membership: 494

York Branch & Club Official Appointments for 2018

President:	Mr J J Mawson	
President Emeritus:	Air Commodore W G Gambold DL FCMI RAF (Ret)	
Life Vice President:	Mr H R Kidd OBE	
Vice Presidents:	Mr J Allison BEM Ms S Richmond,	
Chairman:	Mr B R Mennell	chairman@rafayork.org
Vice Chairman:	Mr Richard Gray	depchair@rafayork.org
Hon Sec & N Area Delegate:	Mrs M Barter	secretary@rafayork.org
Hon Treasurer:	Mr D Pollard	treasurer@rafayork.org
Dep Treasurer	Mr A Ramsbottom	webmaster@rafayork.org
Membership Secretary:	Mrs K Allison	
Welfare Officer:	Mrs C Hanson	welfare@rafayork.org
Dep Welfare Officer:	Mr R Ford	
Wings Organisers:	Mrs M Smith & Mr I Smith	wings@rafayork.org
Branch Standard Bearer:	Mr G Murden	
Dep Standard Bearer:	Mr I Smith	
Bar Officer:	Mr R Gray	
Ass't Bar Officer:	Mr G Murden	
Social/Fundraising:	Mrs G McCarthy.	
Public Relations/Press Officer:	Mr A Bryne	andybryne@rafayork.org
Buildings Officer:	Mr R Webster	
Newsletter Editor	Mr D Taylor	newsletter@rafayork.org

Please address all general enquiries to the Hon Secretary

Editorial

After the cold, damp weather of the early part of the year, come May, along with Bob & Chris Webster, I attended the opening airshow of the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden. With participation from the RAF, in their 100th Anniversary year, the opening display was courtesy of a Eurofighter Typhoon, and given the constricted airspace at the small, grass airfield this was a thrilling, maximum decibel act. From here on though, things became gradually much more elegant, subdued, and peaceful as, over the next four hours or so we were treated to a host of aircraft which had served with RAF over the past 100 years - and more - with Spitfires, Hurricanes, Lancaster and Blenheim giving way to aircraft of the earlier years, until we ended up in the still evening air with the 1911 Blackburn Monoplane, the oldest active British aircraft in the world. Not only that, all this took place under a cloudless blue sky.

The following Monday, still under that same blue sky, I relaxed to the sound of leather on willow at the Dunnington Sports Club; perfect conditions for watching cricket. It seemed like summer had arrived early; no complaints from me on that score.

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Eastmoor Memorial Service

Saturday May 12th saw a good attendance of RAFA members joining various other groups, along with their Standards, plus a large Canadian contingent, at The Pound, Sutton on Forest, for the Royal Canadian Air Force's annual Eastmoor Memorial Service. To the skirl of the pipes, wreaths were laid after Last Post and dipping of Standards, followed by the Reveille.

RAF Eastmoor was the nearby airfield from which Canadian Bomber Squadrons operated during WWII, the service being in remembrance of those who gave their lives whilst based here.

As usual, the village council hosted this well attended event, the ladies once again turning up trumps when it came to catering, both before and after the ceremony.

Unbeknown to us, Lead Piper, Jim Sharpe, had discovered another Memorial just up the road - so he said. But to tell the truth, I rarely go that far on my holidays, for we ended up at Brafferton, well on the way to Ripon! Regardless, it turned out to be well worth it, for the drive took us through some lovely villages and beautiful countryside, bluebells well in evidence, to end up at Brafferton Church. The well-tended Memorial - for the twelve man crew of Halifax NA612, which crashed in the early hours of March 4th 1945, whilst returning to Dishforth from a mission over Germany - is sited on a hillside overlooking the crash site.

On the far side of a field below were seen a couple of horses, grazing merrily away. But as the pipers began to play, these quadrupeds pricked up their ears, looked across, and slowly sauntered over, as if also wishing to pay their respects.

So ended a very moving and interesting afternoon as we made our way back to York.

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DINING-IN IS BACK

On May 31st 22 members and partners attended the first Dining-In night since the dining room was recently refurbished. In fact, so recent it was only completed on the day! A lot of our recent, very fortuitous and gratefully received legacies have been spent modernizing all facets of our club, assisted by many hours of hard work put in by members of the committee, Dick Gray, Brian Mennell, and Bob Webster in particular, to mention just a few.

The meal and evening were enjoyed by all, Gill & Dick once again excelling in the modern kitchen.

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RAF 100 Celebration Baton Relay

This Baton is scheduled to visit 100 RAF, or RAF related, sites throughout the country in 100 days. During the 2nd - 8th June the Baton passed through our area. It visited RAF Staxton Wold, Topcliffe, Dishforth, Menwith Hill (along with Stonefall Cemetery, Harrogate), from where it passed to RAF Linton-on-Ouse. Not too sure of the sequence or dates in the city apart from the piece below, but it travelled from RAF Linton to York City centre via canoe along the Ouse. It also visited York Minster, and the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington. Last stop in our area was RAF Leconfield, before being handed over to the Lincolnshire contingent, high above the river, atop the Humber Bridge!



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On Tuesday 5th June, in conjunction with the RAF 100 Baton relay, 72 Squadron held a celebration in Betty's, York. It had been a favourite venue for aircrew and their sweethearts during WW11, where it became custom to sign the mirror using a diamond ring.

Encompassing the past, present, and future, the officer commanding 72 Squadron, invited two of our eldest veterans (whom I was privileged to accompany) along with Squadron pilots and local air cadets, for traditional Afternoon Tea.

Enjoying sandwiches, Bettys famous "Fat Rascals" and other cakes, the veterans were soon encouraged to recount their War stories, when it was noted they were both almost as old as the RAF! Photographs record the happy event. One veteran is shown in front of the inscribed mirror holding the baton.

Catherine Hanson HWO York Branch RAFA



Maurice Vose with the Baton



Mac and Maurice take tea



It's that Baton again

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PRESENTATION BY MRS BETTY WILSON

On Saturday 16th June, RAFA York Branch members were delighted to welcome Mrs Betty Wilson, her daughter and two grand-daughters to the Club at Aldwark where Mrs Wilson presented a cheque from a funeral collection on behalf of her late husband Mr David Wilson.

Branch President, John Mawson, described to the gathering of members the long association between Mr & Mrs Wilson and the York Branch. David Wilson had undertaken his National Service in the RAF, and was a photographic interpreter at RAF Medmenham, near High Wycombe. Both Mr & Mrs Wilson were active members of the Branch and attended many RAFA functions.

Branch Chairman, Mr Brian Mennell, accepted the cheque on behalf of York Branch.

Andy Bryne



Cheque presentation

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MEMORIES FROM LONG AGO

I recall a tee-shirt caption contest myself and a friend had devised whilst sitting outside a bar in Singapore, watching the world pass by, as we were occasionally wont to do. We awarded first prize - another drink for ourselves - to a New Zealand shirt which carried the alliterative message: Pettigrew Plumbing. Purveyors of Prestigious Plumbing Paraphernalia - Otorhanga.

That memory leads to another, in another place, yet another bar, this one in Hong Kong. An old, bent and wizened Chinaman with a straggly beard rushed past outside at all of one hundred feet per hour - full chat! He balanced on a pair of scrawny, matchstick-like legs. Then I noticed the logo on the back of his tee-shirt: Dynapack, it read.

Later that evening I rode back across Victoria harbour on a ferry, appropriately named *Evening Star*. I watched the sun set with almost equatorial

suddenness, before stepping ashore in Kowloon. The crowded streets were now their usual neon-lit hubbub of nightlife. The purpose of those bright lights, after all, is to entice the visitors to part with their cash, a job in which they succeed admirably, it seemed. "The Stoned Crow", "Ned Kelly's Last Stand", and "Bottoms Up", proclaimed garish signs; other bars with which I had at one time or another been familiar. The whole area was the usual, wonderful, colourful kaleidoscope of shops, bars, restaurants, clubs, hotels, and "girlie bars". Neon bottles poured neon champagne into neon glasses as neon can-can girls kicked their neon legs. "Kit Kat Klub" read a sign around which endless red neon arrows chased each other before diving down, leading ones eye to an enticing-looking doorway. I passed on by.

Other memories remind me of other places, such as this brief recollection of a short trip to Kota Kinabalu, Borneo: The main street appeared to be totally composed of would-be emporia, most named after who knows what! A beguiling and often amusing use of the English language. This must have been post July 1969, as the only remaining memory is that of a store which bore the name; Man on the Moon Brassier Co Ltd. I didn't go in, because I was not in need of a brassier! Anyway, it was a store which appeared to sell almost everything *but* brassieres, and had, as far as could be ascertained, absolutely no connection whatsoever with men on the moon.

Mention of which brings to mind a difficult to forget experience, back in 1998; the excitement of watching STS95, the Space Shuttle Discovery launch at Cape Canaveral (Kennedy as it was). We had been holidaying with the children in Florida for years, occasionally glimpsed an unusual vapour trail in the sky, way above where aircraft would be flying - easy to see providing you knew when and where to look; information of which was published in the newspapers - but that was it, a fast-fading vapour trail. Then I decided to make an effort to get closer next time. This entailed a one and a half hour bus trip to the site, plus a tension-filled wait of three and a half hours. All for a mere few minutes of spectacle. But what an electrifying few minutes they turned out to be!

The only sight and sound to be seen and heard at blast off, at least from our 'privileged' position, across a lagoon, seven miles distant - the closest the general public are allowed - were the cheers of the crowd packed around us, and a few lights in the far distance. I briefly wondered what they were cheering, when the appearance of a silent cloud of white smoke from beneath a minute white speck drew my attention to the *actual* pad in use. That minute speck then grew a silent tail of fire, and that was it. Until, seconds later - by which time Shuttle, and the rocket upon which it rode, had reached somewhere I'd estimate as being between ten and twenty thousand feet - when a sound like rolling thunder hit us. It built in amplitude until it was a sound you could actually feel - visceral - a hollow, echoing, crackling, fearsome roar. A display of truly awesome raw power. Awesome! Yes, a somewhat overused word these days, but certainly not in this context. All that was to be seen now was a pillar of flame atop that growing column of white smoke. Then, a break as separation occurred, and the Shuttle - that minute white speck - along with its second stage fuel tank, was on its way out of earth orbit, heading towards... wherever. Even from up where the package

now was, the sound was still audible, but fast fading. One wonders how intense it had been for those actually closer to the site at the time of launch (at blast-off, the only personnel permitted within a three mile radius of the pad are the astronauts themselves, strapped in and praying!)

Now, almost total silence descended like an invisible curtain. Just a drifting white smoke trail discernable in the night sky as we turned away to board our coaches, speech curtailed by the grandeur of what we had just witnessed. Yet one more memorable dream fulfilled, and filed away.

Taken from "A Suitcase Full of Dreams, Expanded & Re-packed", by David Taylor

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RAFA CONFERENCE 2018

May 11th-13th saw 113 delegates from 400 branches gathering at Yarnfield Conference Centre, Stone, Staffordshire for the Annual Conference.

After Friday registration I attended a workshop on Membership, run by Del Rowlands. He told us there are currently 72,000 members, the aim is to recruit 100,000 by 2020. Members suggested ways in which to reach out to others e.g. actively engaging with cadets, using local radio and social media. The rest of the evening was meet and greet, with entertainment from the RAF Jazz Quintet.

On Saturday, the Conference was opened by our President, Air Marshal Sir Baz North. He welcomed all guests, then handed over to the Chairman of Council, Air Vice-Marshal John Cliffe, to address the conference. He told delegates the RAFA employs 250 staff, of whom 150 are full time, 75% work on welfare, on which 87p in every £1 is spent. Everyone is aware of the reduction in serving personnel, but the needs remain the same.

Air Marshal Julian Young, Chief of Material (Air) Defence Equipment and Support, described the present RAF. He said a satellite was launched in the last few months, others are planned in the future. Currently, five F35A Lightnings are in the UK, with four F35Bs expected in June. There are five Typhoon Squadrons, and nineteen, of twenty-two, A400Ms have been delivered. The P8A Poseidon Marine Patrol will be ready in 2019, and the unmanned Protector is expected to be in service by 2022.

Air Marshal Young presented Flying Certificate Awards and National Presidential Awards.

Nick Bunting then gave a review of 2017 and the Future. He referred to the new General Data Protection Regulations coming into force, and a list of things not to do. e.g. no loans between branches and clubs, no single signature on cheques (at least 3 or 5). In the future there will be guidance on the use of social media, and he suggested cadets could shadow branch committee meetings. The new RAFA crest is housed at HQ.

After lunch, resolutions, which had been circulated earlier, were discussed and voted on. Resolution One: Council should conduct a feasibility study on One Person, One Vote. This was accepted. Resolution Two: Council to examine and review the continued individual charity registration of branches, vis-a vis branches becoming legally part of the Association. This was accepted.

The conference ended with a vote of thanks to everyone involved with the excellent organisation.

On Sunday, most members made their way to the Nation Memorial Arboretum to join nearly 2000 people from all over the world in a celebration of 100 years since the formation of the RAF. It was a moving service with 70+ standards being paraded.

Next year's conference will be held at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole on

May 10/11/12th 2019.

I felt privileged to represent York Branch, and suggest others book for next year and enjoy the comradeship found on these occasions.

Maureen Barter

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I Fell 15,000 Feet And Lived

Our in-flight refuelling process was necessary, and routine, because the F-8 Crusader could not hold enough fuel to fly from California to Hawaii.

Soon after plugging-in to the tanker, my fuel gauges stirred, showing that all was well. In my cockpit, I was relaxed and confident. My thoughts were: In a few hours, I knew I'd be having dinner at the Kaneohe O Club, on Oahu.

My fuel gauges indicated that the tanks were almost full. Then - THUD ! I heard the crack of an explosion. Instantly, I saw the RPM gauge unwinding, the tailpipe temperature dropping. The engine had quit - a flame-out!

I punched the mike button: "This is Jud. I've got a flame-out!" Unfortunately, my radio was dead; I was neither sending nor receiving.

I quickly disconnected from the tanker, nosed over into a shallow dive to pick up some flying speed to help re-start the engine. I needed those few seconds to think.

I yanked the handle that extended the air-driven emergency electrical generator (Ram Air Turbine) into the slipstream, hoping to get ignition for an air start.

The igniters clicked gamely, and the RPM started to climb slowly, as did the tailpipe temperature. For one tantalizing moment, I thought everything would be all right. But the RPM hung uncertainly at 30 percent ... refused to increase. Jet fuel poured over the canopy and the **red fire warning** light blinked ON. At the same instant, powered by the RAT, my radio was back, a babble of voices bursting through my earphones.

Fuel was pouring out of my aircraft ... from the tailpipe ... from under the wings. The fuel flowed together, then it ignited. A great awesome trail of fire!

"I'm getting out!" I told my flight leader. I took my hands off the controls, reached above my head for the handle that would start the ejection sequence. I pulled it hard, canvas over my face, waited for the tremendous kick in the pants, rocketing me upward.

Nothing happened !

The canopy, designed to jettison in the first part of the ejection sequence, was still firmly in place. So was I.

I reached down between my knees for the alternate ejection-firing handle, gave it a vigorous pull. Still nothing. I was trapped in the burning aircraft, now in a 60-degree dive. For the first time, I felt panic softening the edges of my determination. I knew I had to do something, or I was going to die.

With great effort I pulled my thoughts together, tried to think of a solution. A voice in my earphones was shouting: "Ditch it!"

That must have come from the re-fueling tanker skipper, or one of the destroyer commanders, because every jet fighter pilot knows you can't ditch a jet fighter and survive.

Upon impact with the water, the aircraft would usually destroy itself.

I grabbed the stick, levelled the aircraft. Then I yanked the alternate ejection handle once again.

Nothing.

That left me with only one imaginable way out: jettison the canopy manually, release the seat belt and harness, jump out of the aircraft.

I was not aware of any Crusader pilot who had ever used this World War II tactic to get out of a fast-flying jet, had been told it was almost impossible, the Crusader's high vertical fin almost certain to strike the pilot's body.

My desperation was growing, and any scheme that offered a shred of success seemed better than riding the aircraft down to the sea.

As I unlocked the canopy, it disappeared with a great whoosh. To move the tail slightly out of the way of my exiting body, I trimmed the aircraft to fly in a sideways skid ... nose high, rudder trimmed to 'crab' right. As I stood on the seat, holding both arms in front of my face, I was harshly sucked out of the airplane. I cringed as I tumbled out, expecting the tail to cut me in half!

I waited ... and waited ... until my body decelerated to terminal velocity. Then I pulled the D-ring, braced for the opening shock.

No opening shock.

I heard a loud pop above me, but continued falling rapidly. As I looked up, I saw the pilot chute had deployed, but the 24-foot parachute had not! I was stunned with disbelief and horror, as I saw the parachute's neatly arranged white folds in a bundle, entangled by the shroud lines. Frantically, I shook and jerked the risers in an attempt to open the main chute. It didn't work. Hand over hand, I pulled the parachute bundle down toward me, wrestled with the shroud lines, trying to get the chute to billow open. But it remained a closed bundle, shroud lines wrapped around it. All the while, I'm falling like a rock toward the Pacific Ocean.

I noticed a ring of turbulence in the ocean. It looked like a big stone had been thrown in the water with white froth in the centre. I quickly realized, it was my Crusader.

Would I be next to crash?

Once more I shook the risers, jerked the shroud lines, but the rushing air was holding my chute in a tight bundle. I began to realize I had done all I could reasonably do. I was just along for a brutal ride that may kill, or severely injure me.

I have no recollection of positioning myself properly, nor even bracing for impact. In fact, I don't remember slamming into the water at all. One instant I was falling fast, then I was very cold. And in an eerie world of half-consciousness. I questioned whether or not I was alive? Finally decided: Yes, I think I am.

The cold water helped clear my senses. But as I flopped around, ingesting water, I began coughing and retching.

The Mae West around my waist had inflated, so concluded the shrill whistling sound I had heard was gas leaving the CO2 cylinders as it filled the life vest.

A sense of urgency gripped me, my mind telling me there were some tasks I needed to do next. Then it dawned on me what it was; get rid of the parachute! It had billowed out underwater, was now tugging me down.

I tried reaching down for knife located in the knee pocket of my flight suit. I had to cut the shroud lines before the parachute pulled me under for good.

This is when I discovered I was injured severely. The pain was excruciating. Was my back broken? I tried to arch it slightly, felt the pain again. As I tried moving my feet, I could feel my broken ankle bones grating against each other.

There was no chance of getting that hunting knife, but I had another, smaller knife in the upper torso of my flight suit. With difficulty, I extracted it and began slashing feebly at the spaghetti-like mess of lines surrounding me.

Once free of the parachute I began a tentative search for my survival pack. It should have been strapped to my hips. It contained a one-man life raft, canned water, food, fishing gear, and dye markers.

Not there. The impact had ripped it off my body. How long would the Mae West sustain me? I wasn't sure, but knew I needed help fast. The salt water I had swallowed felt like a rock in the pit of my gut. And here I was, solo, 600 miles from shore, lolling in the deep troughs and crests of the vast Pacific, Crusader, upon which we had lavished such affection, was sinking thousands of feet to the ocean floor.

In about ten minutes, I heard the drone of propellers. Flying very low, the pot-bellied, four-engine refueling tanker came into view. They dropped several green dye markers near me, and some smoke flares a short distance away. Then they circled overhead and dropped an inflated life raft about 50 yards from me.

I was so pleased, tried to swim toward the raft. After two strokes, I almost blacked out due to the intense pain.

The tanker circled again, dropped another raft, closer to me. But in my condition there was no way for me to reach it, then get in.

The water seemed to be getting colder, and a chill gripped me. I looked at my watch, but the so-called unbreakable crystal was shattered, the hour and minute hands torn away.

I tried to relax, surrender to the Pacific Ocean swells.

I could almost have enjoyed being buoyed up to the crest of one swell and gently sliding into the trough of the next, but I was in such excruciating pain.

In about an hour a Coast Guard amphibious plane flew over and circled, as though deciding whether or not to land. But the seas were too high, and I knew he couldn't make it down, then make a successful take-off.

He came in very low and dropped another raft, this had a 200-foot floating lanyard attached. The end of the lanyard landed barely ten feet from me. Using only my arms, I paddled gently backward. I caught hold of it and pulled the raft to me. I knew I couldn't crawl into the raft due to my physical condition, but I was able to get a good grip on its side and hold on. This gave me a little more security.

The Coast Guard amphibious plane gained altitude and flew off, pilot finding some minesweepers returning from the Far East. Not able to tune to their radio frequency, the ingenious pilot lowered a wire and dragged it across one of the minesweeper's bows, then rocked his wings, heading back toward me. The minesweeper captain understood, instantly veered off and headed at top speed in my direction.

I was fully conscious during the two and a half hours it took the minesweeper to reach me. I spotted the ship while teetering on the crest of a wave. Soon, its great bow was pushing in close toward me. Sailors in orange life jackets were crowding its lifelines. A bearded man in a black rubber suit jumped into the water and swam to me.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "My legs and back." I was now very cold, and concerned about increasing numbness in my legs. Perhaps, the imminence of rescue had made me light-headed, for I only vaguely remember being hoisted aboard the ship.

I was laid out on deck as they cut away my flight suit.

"Don't touch my legs! Don't touch my legs!" I screamed. I don't remember saying that. But then, somebody gave me a shot of morphine. It erased part of

my extreme pain.

An hour or so later, a man was bending over me and asking questions. A doctor had been 'high-lined' over from the cruiser USS Los Angeles, now holding station alongside the sweeper. "You have a long scar on your abdomen. How did it get there?" he asked. I told him about a serious auto accident I'd had four years earlier, and that my spleen had been removed. He grunted, and asked more questions while he continued examining me. Then he said, "You and I are going to take a little trip over to the USS Los Angeles; it's steaming alongside."

They got me into a wire stretcher, hauled me, dangling and dipping, across the watery interval between the two ships.

In the Los Angeles's sickbay, thank God, they gave me another shot of morphine, before they started thrusting all sorts of hoses into my body. I could tell from all the activity, their intense, hushed voices, that they were very worried about my condition.

My body temperature was down to 94 degrees; my intestines and kidneys were in shock.

The doctors never left my side during the night. They took my blood pressure every 15 minutes. I was unable to sleep. Until finally, I threw-up about a quart or more of seawater, and my nausea was relieved a bit.

By listening to the medical team I was able to piece together the nature of my injuries.

My left ankle was broken in five places. My right ankle was broken in three places. A tendon in my left foot was cut. My right pelvis was fractured. My number 7 vertebra was fractured. My left lung had partially collapsed. There were many cuts and bruises all over my face and body, and my intestines and kidneys had been stunned into complete inactivity.

Next morning, Dr Valentine Rhodes told me the USS Los Angeles was steaming at flank speed to a rendezvous with a helicopter 100 miles off shore Long Beach.

At 3:30 that afternoon, I was hoisted into the belly of a Marine helicopter, and we whirled off to a hospital ship, the USS Haven, docked in Long Beach.

Once aboard the Haven, doctors came at me from all sides with more needles, tubes, and X-ray machines. Their reaction to my condition was so much more optimistic than I had expected. So, I finally let go a few tears of relief, exhaustion, and thanks to God and to all hands.

Within a few months, I was all systems go again. My ankles were put back in place with the help of steel pins. The partially collapsed left lung re-inflated, my kidneys and intestines were working again without artificial prodding.

The Marine Corps discovered the cause of my flame-out, was the failure of an automatic cut-off switch in the refueling system. The aircraft's main fuel tank was made of heavy reinforced rubber, and when the cut-off switch failed, this allowed the tank, at high pressure, to go beyond its capacity. The tank burst like a rubber balloon, causing a flame-out and a very spectacular fire.

We will never know why the ejection seat failed, because it is on the bottom of the ocean. The failure of the parachute is a mystery also.

Do I feel lucky? That word doesn't even begin to describe my feelings. To survive a 15,000-foot free fall with an unopened chute is a fair enough feat. But my mind keeps running back to something Dr Rhodes told me during those grim and desperate hours. He said that if I'd had one, the spleen would have almost

certainly would have ruptured on impact, and I'd have bled to death, internally.

Of the 25 fighter pilots in our squadron I'm the only one who didn't have a spleen. That always gives me something to think about.

Amazingly, Cliff Judkins not only survived this ordeal, but he also returned to flight status, flying the F-8 Crusader again six months after the accident.

After leaving the Marine Corps, he was hired as a pilot with Delta Airlines, later retiring as a Captain.

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Just a line to say I'm living
That I'm not among the dead
Though I'm getting more forgetful
And mixed up in the head

I've got used to my arthritis
To my dentures I'm resigned
I can cope with my bi-focals
But - ye gods - I miss my mind

Sometimes I can't remember
When I'm standing on a stair
If I should be going up for something
Or have I just come down from there?

And before the fridge so often
My mind is full of doubt
Now did I put some food away
Or come to take some out?

So remember, I do think of you
I wish that you lived near
But now its time to post this
And say goodbye from here

At last I stand beside the box
And my face it sure is red
Instead of posting this to you
I've opened it instead

From a member who wishes to remain anonymous. Or has he just forgotten who he is?

* *

RECOLLECTIONS OF FLYING SUNDERLANDS, 1945 & 1946

My first flying experience was sitting on my father's knee in the front cockpit of an Avro 504k, a five shilling pleasure flight. I think I was probably aged about six. After that my father took me up whenever the chance arose. Hence my boyhood dream and greatest ambition was to become a pilot, to fly what I considered to be the ultimate aircraft, the Sunderland. With assistance from Adolf Hitler, the King, and Winston Churchill, my ambition was achieved by the age of 22! I consider myself a very lucky man.

Leaving school in 1939, aged 16, I began an Aircraft Engineering Apprenticeship with Armstrong Whitworth, Coventry.

On my 18th birthday, I volunteered to join the RAF as a trainee pilot, was selected, but had to wait almost a year to be called under the Empire Training Scheme; Canada: 33 EFTS, Caron, Saskatchewan, and 33 SFTS at Carberry, Manitoba. I was gratified to achieve an "Honour Student" award, "Above Average" assessment as a pilot, and a Commission as a Pilot Officer.

At that time, Flying Boat pilots had not only to be assessed as "above

average" but also to be a Qualified Navigator, so I was very encouraged when I was sent to 31 GRS at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, to obtain my Air Navigators Certificate on 10th February 1944.

After a period in the UK, including being on leave on "D Day", feeling ashamed at sitting in the garden watching hundreds of Allied aircraft overhead on their way to support the invasion of Europe, I eventually found myself in Mombassa, Kenya, joining 209 Squadron as Second Pilot on Catalina aircraft.

My first operational flight was an anti Submarine patrol between Mombassa and the Seychelles, on 19th February 1945, returning on the 21st. In the month to 24th March, a number of similar flights to such places as Madagascar, Pamanzi, and Dar-es-Salaam were undertaken, before being told we were to convert to Sunderlands before departing to the Far East, to participate in the Japanese conflict.

I joined the Sunderland crew of F/O Gibson, initially as third pilot. During the work up to become "Operational", many exercises in Radar, Bombing, Gunnery etc were undertaken, and on April 20th, whilst on bombing practice - during which a smoke marker was dropped into the sea, to be bombed by smoke bombs - we had our first emergency.

The apparatus for dropping the bombs was somewhat primitive, bombs being individually loaded onto a small rack attached to the sill of the Drogue hatch in the downstairs Galley, then swung out ready for the pilot to operate the electrical release. Unfortunately, our Navigator, "Willie" Hubert, dropped a primed bomb inside the aircraft. This detonated, filling the plane with dense smoke. I was second pilot, and we could not see the control column let alone the instruments! The Captain - whom I could not even see - shouted that we must be on fire and he would try to land. We were some 50 miles offshore. In an effort to see out, I attempted to stick my head out of the rear sliding window, to no avail. I then slid the panels back, an attempt to see out of the front, when the changed airflow miraculously sucked the smoke out of the plane in a second. We were by then straight and level, about five feet above the water, small waves but a large swell. The captain landed, and all seemed well until the port float hit a swell and was knocked rearwards and upwards, lifting the port aileron, knocking the control wheel from the Captain's hands, and dipping the port wingtip in the water. I could see the port outer prop thrashing up spray, so I instinctively grabbed the wheel and applied full power. Luckily the aircraft responded, taking to the air at an incredible nose up, wing down attitude. Although minus the port float, we were able to resume normal flight, return to Mombassa, and land. Myself and another crew member climbed onto the starboard wing to keep the port wing up, whilst being towed to a mooring. The aircraft was taken out of the water, and a new aileron and float fitted. There was no other damage.

On the night of May 14th, two crews: F/O Gibson and P/O Thomerson, were assigned to fly one aircraft on a Night Radar Training exercise, the crews taking it in turn. We all got onto the aircraft, and realising there were more than enough pilots to carry out the work, I said to "Willie Hubert, our navigator, "I don't feel like going tonight" to which he replied "Nor do I. Lets ask the skipper if we can get off". Both captains agreed, so the two of us went ashore. Later, when the aircraft was due to land, a thunderstorm covered Mombassa, so they were told to remain out at sea until it passed. The aircraft flew into a hill, and although some survived, most died.

During that time we flew five operational missions and sank one "Sugar Dog" (code for small, Japanese-manned freighters, used to supply their troops

in Malaya and Singapore) one tug, and two Barges. Also attacked and damaged were, 7 "Sugar Dogs" and one Large Junk. September 1st saw us taking Red Cross supplies to the Cocos Islands, then, on the 9th, carrying Members of the Press to Singapore. On arrival at Seletar we were transported ashore by a Japanese crew boat. The banks of the base were lined with ex POWs who had been "released" from such infamous places as Changi Jail. We had a little food on board, but willingly distributed it to a lucky few.

A Japanese officer offered to surrender his Samurai sword to me. Stupidly, I refused, told him to report to the docks where Lord Mountbatten was due to arrive.

The task of the Press was to photograph the "First Aircraft (a Liberator!) arriving"! along with the Royal Navy, bringing Lord Mountbatten for the official Surrender, on September 12th. We participated in the fly past on that occasion.

The next month or so we flew many Officials into Singapore and, very satisfyingly, ex prisoners back from Ceylon for medical attention.

On the night of October 20th, on one such flight from Koggala to Singapore, we were past the point of no return when the Flight Engineer informed us that fuel was disappearing at a formidable rate. Using the Aldis lamp to inspect under the wings, fuel could be seen pouring from the starboard inner engine. We shut the engine down, feathered the prop, and closed the fuel cock, which had the desired effect. We happily continued on our way, but calculations showed it to be almost certain we could not reach the alternative base at Penang. So rather than put our passengers at risk, we decided to land in Sabang Bay, on the Northern tip of Sumatra, to seek help, notifying Singapore of our intentions. The landing was without incident, and we moored to a convenient buoy. The bay was totally deserted, with no sign of life ashore. Singapore informed us that a South African frigate in the area would arrive about mid day to take our passengers. In the interests of their comfort, the crew ferried them ashore in the dinghy, two at a time. A game of cricket was even devised to pass the time. The Frigate duly arrived and took the passengers aboard. Meantime, our engineer and myself discovered a main fuel feed to the engine had become disconnected. This was easily rectified, but on trying to start the engine it became apparent both magnetos had been soaked in fuel and were unserviceable.

Once Singapore were notified, they arranged for a Mosquito to drop two magneto's by parachute. This was duly done, a superb piece of flying placing them onto the centre of a very narrow beach. After fitting them, we decided to take a chance on reaching Penang, the sea being very calm. If necessary, we would land short, Penang being nearer to civilisation than where we were now.

After a flight of 2 hours 30 minutes we touched down. Taxying to the mooring on two engines, they both stopped, leaving us to be towed to the buoy. The whole affair had lasted two days. But as I often say, "You can't do that with a 747!"

The next few months were spent ferrying personnel and ex POWs around the Far East, visiting Hong Kong, Singapore, Labuan, Penang, Madras, Rangoon, Saigon, Hirowan, Yokohama, Tokyo, and Hainan. The visits to Saigon and Hainan were both diversions, caused by bad weather in Hong Kong. In Saigon, the fighting at night between rebels and the Government in the city was probably the closest I came to being killed by gunfire during the whole of my war.

The diversion to Samah Bay, Hainan Island, was an exciting incident which resulted in feverish diplomatic negotiations with the Chinese to obtain our

release. Having landed and dropped anchor, a Chinese Guard was placed aboard our aircraft, fully equipped with a machine gun and a belt full of grenades. I suspect he was more scared than we were! We had both male and female members of the RAF on board, and since we were there four days and three nights, confined to the aircraft, some interesting domestic arrangements resulted. The Crew slept on the wings, and that is all I can factually report! Food was obtained from many bum boats which came out to visit, and the girls undertook the cooking in the galley. One night, the duty watch reported we were dragging anchor, and drifting. Starting the engines to regain our mooring frightened our Chinese guard, who threatened to pull the pin on a grenade. Discretion became my watchword, engines were shut down. Fortunately the anchor held, so all was well. Then, as diplomacy succeeded in obtaining our permission to leave, a Royal Navy ship appeared on the horizon.

Two other occasions I went to Samah Bay, both ferrying fuel to aircraft which had diverted due to bad weather. We had no further problems with the Chinese authorities. On one of those trips we met two members of the Australian War Graves Commission and spent a riotous evening ashore at a local hostelry. As we rowed the last of our party back to the aircraft in a small dinghy, one of the Aussies fell off the dock into the water. We did see his mate get him out!

Between April 6th and April 12th 1946 we flew an aircraft back to Scotland from Hong Kong, via Singapore, Koggala (Sri Lanka), Karachi (Pakistan), Habbaniya (Iraq), Augusta (Sicily), Calshot, and finally Wig bay.

We were granted two weeks home leave before returning to Hong Kong by BOAC Sunderland.

Having qualified as Captain in December 45, with an "above average " assessment, the rest of my time with the squadron was most enjoyable, flying around the Far East. On July 1st we were despatched to Penang, to carry out a search for a missing Dakota, reported to be down in the Jungle. We didn't find the missing Dak, but spotted a twin-engined Japanese aircraft in shallow water just offshore. An Army detachment were searching the beach, so we tied a message around a tin of food and dropped it, informing them the plane they were obviously looking at was not the missing Dakota. A message appeared in the sand, "Thanks for the Peaches"!

On July 10th I left the Squadron for discharge in the UK, following which I rejoined my original employer, Armstrong Whitworth, completing my apprenticeship. I helped in test flying, and progressed through the organisation to become a member of senior management in the production of both aircraft and missiles.

My story is not one of great heroics, just an account of what happened to a typical volunteer doing what he was told for the war effort. It enabled me to achieve my greatest ambition, and the flying boat era was an exciting and pioneering time in aviation history. I count myself extremely fortunate to have been at least a small part of it. I enjoyed every second.

Norman H Wilson

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THE GOOD OLD DAYS

A slightly modified version of a poem found in a copy of the Air Crew Association, Gen, February 1987, in the days when the ACA used to meet up at RAFA.

Out in the wilds of Yorkshire, where t'pubs shut three o'clock sharp
Lives a piteous, wrinkled ex airman, whose bite is far worse than his bark
Where he comes, from nobody worries, where he goes to, they worry still less
But since he's been living in Yorkshire, the place is one hell of a mess.

Gets up every morn with the sparrows, to begin his day's honest task
They can hear him rant up in Scotland, when he finds he's forgotten his flask
He scoffs down his eggs and his bacon, picks up his snack for midday
Pecks his wife on the cheek, if she's handy, then goes out to work for his pay.

He gets home tired and worn out at teatime, soaks for an hour in the tub,
Eats his meal, reads through his newspaper, then goes out again, to the pub
But on t'second and fourth Monday evenings, he wends his way into York
Takes his wife with him too, if she's lucky, t'RAFA Club, down Aldwalk.

Inside he meets his old buddies, ex-aircrew, known by their talk
Who come for a pint and a natter, with ACA White Rose Branch, York
The wives form a circle at one end, round t'fire, to keep themselves warm
Lads hold the bar up at t'other, to make sure t'beer comes to nay 'arm

They re-live the days in the 40s, when they were young, bright eyed, and aware
When they fought in the skies in their Spitfires, and their Hali's and Lanc's,
"Over there"

For two hours, twice monthly they gather, to recall those days long gone past
To line shoot, and gossip, and wonder, and recall old so and so's past

This then is my tale of an airman. Of it's truth I can honestly swear
And should you be passing by Aldwalk, call in, you'll find us all there.

* *

EVENTS for RAFA (York) Branch 2018

Dates for 2018 (will be up-dated on a regular basis on website and Club noticeboard)

Please note, it would be appreciated out of courtesy if you intend/would like to attend any of the events listed to inform the chairman so we know numbers to seat/cater for.

Limited lunch menu available most Saturdays

Sun 12 Aug	Women's Service, Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington
Sun 2 Sept	Allied Air Forces Day, Elvington Air Museum
Wed/Thur 12-13 Sept	Wings collection York Railway Stn
Sat 15 Sept	Wings, City collection
Sun 23 Sept	B of B Parade - RAF Linton freedom of City
Wed 3 Oct	Ann Lunch, Woodman's, Bishopthorpe, 12.30 for 13.00
Sat 6 October	Entertainment at Club by Alan Ramsbottom 13:00
Tues 23 Oct	St Crux day
Sat 10 Nov	Stamford Bridge Youth - music & poetry at Club
Sun 16 Dec	Combined ex Service, All Saints Pavement 10:30
Sun 11 Nov	100th Anniversary Remembrance Day Parade, York Pre-parade service in York Minster 9.30am

Please note that in relation to all the above Wings/Fund raising events, a list for volunteers will appear on the Branch/Club notice board nearer the event date (as times/confirmation details on some are yet to be ratified).

PS. Please note: 'Themed dining-in dates' may be subject to change/cancellation in order to avoid clashing with other more pressing branch activities/matters.

For the latest events list please check our website - www.rafayork.org