

102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON



ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

March 2017

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102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association Reunion Saturday/Sunday 6th/7th May 2017

In 2017 we will again be holding the reunion on the same weekend as the Flying Man Festival in Pocklington

The format will be as in previous years:

Saturday 6th May

- Dinner at the Wolds Gliding Club at 6.30 pm for 7.00pm.
- **Speaker TBC.**

Sunday 7th May

- Service at St Catherine's Church Barmby Moor at 10.45am;
- Wreath laying at the airfield memorial next to the Wolds Gliding Club followed by light refreshments in the clubhouse at 12 Noon.
- Association AGM in the clubhouse at 12.15 p.m.

We will again have the Hercules engine and the very large flying model Halifax in Pocklington over the weekend.

Keep an eye on the Flying Man Festival Website:

www.pockflyingman.org.uk

A booking form is included, please return this as soon as possible but no later than 30th April so that we can organise the dinner accordingly.

Since taking over as secretary, it has become apparent to me how significant a job the administration has become. The fabulous news is we have many new members but this makes it increasingly difficult to contact all members and to manage the paper work.

To solve this problem I have set up a Google Group, which enables me to email you all without it being rejected as spam. You will need to accept the invite you have been emailed to join the group. Each invite only lasts one week so please let me know if you need a new one and check it is not in your spam.

I also propose that the association moves to become paperless and all newsletters and correspondence be emailed. Please tick the box on your subscription form if you would like to go paperless.

Remembrance Day Sunday 13th November 2016

Members of the Association and friends gathered at St Catherine's Church Barmby Moor on Sunday 13th November. Yorkshire was again at its beautiful best with clear blue skies over the airfield.

We were welcomed to the service by Reverend Jan Hardy, a dear and long standing friend of the association. During the service, the page in the Book of Remembrance was turned by our late Secretary, Simon Kularatne in the absence of any veterans this year.



Following the church service, a short service was also held in the Military cemetery in the grounds of the church where wreaths were laid.

We then proceeded to the airfield where further wreaths were laid to the sound of the club gliders taking off in the background. Good use was also made of the Gus Walker Memorial bench in the autumn sunlight. After the short service, the Wolds Gliding Club offered refreshments to those present. Special thanks go to Colin and Judith who put this on at very short notice. Grateful thanks must also go to Rev Jan Hardy.

Continuing Remembrance By Stephen Grist

Many members will remember an article that I wrote for the Newsletter in April 2015. My article was about Halifax NA175 – Q “Queenie” from 102 Squadron. On the night of 7 February 1945 Q “Queenie” took off from Pocklington to become part of a force of four hundred and sixty aircraft directed to bomb Goch on the edge of the Reichswald Forest. The attack

was a part of Operation Veritable. The aim was to free up the advance of XXX Corps into Germany. Given the low cloud base that night the Master Bomber ordered the main force to come below the cloud to an estimated base of five thousand feet. Bomber Command records state that the attack was highly accurate and very soon the target became obscured by smoke. The Master Bomber stopped the attack after one hundred and fifty aircraft had dropped their bombs as smoke was causing control of the raid to become impossible.

As Q “Queenie” turned away from the attack flames were reported in the starboard wing. The rear gunner spotted gun flashes from the port quarter and recognised the outline of a Ju88. The pilot Bill Smith put the aircraft into a corkscrew manoeuvre and shortly afterward as the flames spread gave the crew the order to abandon the aircraft. Pilot Officer Smith held

Halifax NA175 – Q “Queenie” Crew (Left to Right) Johnny Crisp, ‘Taffy’ Kingdom, ‘ Mac’ Macpherson, Bill Smith, Bill Olerton, B Peckham, Johnny Grist



the

aircraft steady as the crew baled out. The aircraft crashed close to the Belgian town of Lommel exploding on impact. Bill Smith's body was found some five hundred yards from the aircraft. The Wireless Operator John Crisp came down through the roof of a local farmhouse owned by the Didden family. As the rest of the crew arrived the family cooked everyone bacon and eggs. The young men of the family then conducted the crew members through the forest to look for a British patrol. Given the flexibility of the front line this was a very dangerous task.

My father John Grist, who was Flight Engineer, came down close to a road and after having been recognised by motor cyclists as an RAF airman rather than a German parachutist was taken to hospital suffering from concussion. After a night in hospital in Eindhoven my father was transported to Eindhoven Airport where he met up with three members of the crew. Unfortunately the two other members of the crew Kingdom and Peckham had parachuted into trees and had suffered injuries which required hospital attention. The four members of the crew were then flown back to Pocklington via Down Ampney in Gloucestershire.

The site of the crash is now marked by a small tree that was planted in 1995 by the remaining members of the crew John Grist and Bill Ollerton. The site lies on land owned by a major plastics company Teepak who have cared for the tree and memorial ever since its inauguration.

In February 2014 on the 70th anniversary of the raid on Goch and the death of Bill Smith a commemoration was held at the tree. Relatives of John Grist's family, members of the Didden family, Mr Gaston Van Genechten

who was central to the placing of the memorial in 1995, Mr Luc Van Erom the Plant Director of Teepak, and Standard Bearers of the Royal British Legion from Antwerp gathered at the tree to place a wreath and to remember in a minute of silence the courage of the young men of Bomber Command.

Pilot Officer Bill Smith was buried at Leopoldsburg Military Cemetery in 1945. Flowers have been laid on his grave by the Didden family and by



Gaston Van Genechten every year since 1995. Attempts had been made by my father and Bill Ollerton to trace any members of Bill Smith's family but with little success. However, late last year, due to the wonders of the internet, I found a small piece asking for information about Bill Smith and the crew of Q "Queenie". The request had been placed by his sole surviving relative, his niece, Mrs Anne Patterson who had never been able to find out exactly what had happened to her uncle. A link has now been made between Anne and the Squadron Association.

Further to such a successful event I have always had a

concern that Pilot Officer Smith's name was not placed upon a war memorial. The Commonwealth War Grave records showed his next of kin being his mother and father who lived with him in Staithes in Yorkshire.



made of
British

Enquiries
the Royal
Legion

and the local Parish Council confirmed that Bill Smith had been resident in the village with his parents and that his name had never been placed on the war memorial. Anne and her husband John are now setting out to rectify this situation with my support on behalf of the Squadron Association.

I have written to the Didden family and to Gaston Van Genechten informing them of this wonderful news. They are now in contact with Anne Patterson who was overwhelmed to hear that her uncle had been remembered in such a positive manner. Further it is proof that again the continuation of the 102 Squadron Association is central to the remembrance of those brave young men of Bomber Command.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

AC1 Flight Mechanic Stanley Ernest JEFFREY
102 (Ceylon*) Squadron (RAF)
(A Humble Flight Mech)

Stan is one of our Squadron veterans, now aged 96 years, he still lives in Oadby, Leicestershire, where he was born, with his wife Iris. He served the whole of his time in Bomber Command Ground Crew with 102 (Ceylon) Squadron and was posted to Pocklington from Topcliffe, finishing his service at Bassingbourne, Cambridgeshire.

Stan and his fellow Ground Crew, when crews were allocated a specific aircraft to service and maintain, looked after DY-E (Easy). The aircraft that carried this designation were never lost on operations and Stan and his fellows celebrated a number of 'End of Tour' parties with those crews in Pocklington Town.

Stan Jeffrey was born on the 31st of October 1920 in Leicestershire and, at the time World War II started he was living in King Street in the town of Oadby to the South East of Leicester City. He describes himself as just another young lad whose main interest was with the Scouts, something that later, in wartime Pocklington, would have a poignant link for him.

Stan had trained as a mechanic at the Imperial Typewriter Company which was based in Leicester, near the old Castle. He was called up in February 1941 and was posted to the Royal Air Force on the 12th of March 1941. After his initial training at Padgate, near Blackpool in Lancashire, Stan was sent, taking into account his mechanical training on typewriters, to RAF St. Athan,, the No. 4 School of Technical Training, to be trained as a Flight Mechanic.

After 19 weeks of intensive training on the maintenance, inspection and repair and operation of a variety of aircraft engines Stan was posted to 102(Ceylon) Squadron and joined 'A' Flight in September 1941. 102 at this time was based at RAF Topcliffe which had started operations as a satellite of RAF Linton on Ouse in North Yorkshire. The squadron was equipped with Whitley bombers which were fitted with the 'in-line' Merlin glycol cooled engine. Stan's work with 'A' Flight at this time was based on a morning parade and being allocated an aircraft for that day's duty. This could be for preparation for operations later that day or to inspect and maintain aircraft not in use that day.

Later in 1942 102 (Ceylon) Squadron moved to RAF Pocklington, near York, where it remained through to 1945. By now Stan was a fully qualified Flight Mechanic and the Squadron was then equipped with the Mark I Handley Page Halifax fitted with four Merlin engines. At this time there would probably only have been two Flight Mechanics to look after the engines but, as the war continued and the number of aircraft operational hours increased Flight Mechanics were allocated to a specific aircraft to work on one of the engines. This became even more important when the introduction of the Mark III Halifax with its four Bristol Hercules radial engines.

Stan was allocated to the aircraft designated 'E' (Easy) and, for the remainder of his service with Bomber Command, serviced, maintained and repaired all of the Halifax aircraft with the 'E' letter. Stan recalls the significant change from the 'in line' Merlin glycol cooled to the more powerful radial Bristol Hercules air cooled engines. This was such a change that he was sent on a 'conversion' course which lasted a whole two weeks! As Stan said, "It was wartime and you hadn't got time to waste. You just got on with it."

One of the happier coincidences this particular short posting had was that it was based at Leicester East Airport which, being at Stoughton in Leicestershire, was less than a mile from his home town of Oadby! This allowed him to continue his courtship of his girlfriend Iris who he married on the 23rd of December, 1944.

After the continuation course he returned to 102 at Pocklington where he continued his work keeping 'E' (Easy) on top line, ready for operations. Stan feels that his work, and that of his Ground Crew colleagues has largely been missed in the history of Bomber Command. Working long hours, rising early to carry out their daily work, to seeing off their aircraft and Air Crew and rising in the early hours to receive the aircraft back from 'Ops' could be gruelling.

Aircraft losses were high in this squadron, particularly in 1943/44 and Stan recalls that the Air Crews tended to be closer, socially, with their Ground Crews than the other Air Crews. Many of the pilots and crew would go down to the 'flight lines' during the day to share a cup of tea and a cigarette with their mechanics, riggers and fitters building a bond between them. It became a regular thing for the Ground and Air Crews to socialise by visiting

the pubs of Pocklington village, the Station Hotel, the Black Bull and the Cross Keys, travelling by a variety of overloaded cycles and cars to the terror of the populace and the local police!

It was during this time that Stan met an old friend of his who was also serving in 102 Squadron, Flying Officer Douglas Harper, who had attended the same Scout Group which met in the Methodist Chapel in their home town of Oadby before the war. FO Harper was the Navigator in Halifax JB848 'G' (George). He had already flown a number of operations but, on the evening of the 29th of March, 1943, his aircraft was circling above Pocklington and the airfield in preparation for heading off on a raid. Stan recalls standing watching the aircraft circling then, all of a sudden, 'G' (George) "jinked" to avoid another Halifax and flipped over on its back. It crashed about 400 yards from where Stan was watching. The whole crew were killed. Doug Harper was 22 years old.

The crew of 'G' (George) are remembered on a new memorial constructed from one of the recovered engines, established in 2015, at the crash site which is now in the grounds of the new doctor's surgery at Pocklington.

Stan met many of the Air Crews who flew with 102 and recalls they were the ones that appreciated the efforts of him and his ground crew contemporaries.

In 1945 102 (Ceylon) Squadron, moved, still equipped with the Halifax, to RAF Bassingbourn, South of Cambridge. After the German surrender in 1945 Stan and his fellow ground crew, along with other aircraft ground crews, were taken on a flight over Holland, to Germany, where they saw the effects of the bombing the squadron had carried out. Stan remained at RAF Bassingbourn until he was 'demobbed' in May 1946.

Stan feels that the public were never allowed to appreciate the effort Bomber Command contributed during the war. The thousands ground crew and aircrew who were killed on operations, in training and on the ground were a long time in being honoured. Nowadays, Stan remembers the camaraderie of those he met and worked with during that part of his life he gave in the service of his friends and country.

An anonymous poem about the Flight Mechanics still rings true for Stan, a copy of which is handwritten in the back of one of his service notebooks:

**** THE HUMBLE FLIGHT MECH**

The Lords of the Air they call us
They speak of our glorious fame
On the front page of every newspaper
Tells us of some pilot's name,
Connected with deeds of valour, performed in the azure blue.
The usual, the Heinkel and Dornier, crashed to earth in two.

One chap who gets no medals
You never hear his name
He does not fly in the pale blue sky
Or pose for the news in a plane.

His job cannot be called romantic so he's not in the public eye,
But your heroes can't do without him and I will tell you the reason why.

He's up at the break of dawn,
He's there when the twilight falls,
Pulling his weight to keep his crate
Ready for all that befalls.

So the next time you see a picture of a plane and a flying crew
Remember the guy who keeps it aloft.
Although he may only be an AC2

So the next time you praise a pilot,
As the enemy falls in a wreck
Just think of the guy you do not see.

Yours truly, a humble Flight Mech.

Anon.
RAF Pocklington
1942/43

(From the memory of Stan Jeffrey AC1 Flight Mechanic 102 (Ceylon)
Squadron 1941 to 1946)

A Generous Offer to 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association

We have received a very generous offer from Jan Hardy, the Vicar of St. Catherine's Church at Barmby Moor to create an educational point, within the Church, for the Squadron Association and anyone with an interest in 102 (Ceylon) Squadron to use for enquiry, information or simply a quiet place to visit.

Jan has offered us the old 'Choir Room' which is on the first floor above the vestry/entrance area for such use.

Some current 'blue sky' thoughts of possible uses and operation of the room are:

1. A permanent display of some of the many photographs of crews (a particular theme) who flew from Pocklington.
2. A link, by computer probably, to the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC), Chadwick Educational Centre when it becomes operational at the Bomber Command Memorial site at Lincoln.
3. A repository for some of the many documents held by the Association as a basis for a 'reference source' which could, at some time be digitally copied for inclusion in the IBCC Digital Archive.
4. To display a short individual history of each of those who are buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in the churchyard at St. Catherine's.
5. To provide a 'focus' point in this area of Yorkshire for the Bomber Command links to the airfields close to.

More importantly, we are asking for the views of all of our Association Members and the families of veterans on how we could develop this offer. Please let Holly know your views so that we can look to discuss this at the Reunion Weekend.

Simon Ananda Kularatne

It was with great sadness that we lost our Association Secretary and dear friend just two weeks after Remembrance Sunday. Many members made the journey to Blackpool for his celebration of life. Harry Bartlett spoke on behalf of the association and his eulogy has been included below.

Simon's Eulogy (102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association

When Elaine asked me if I would say something about Simon's connection with 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association I was honoured that such a new member of the Association, as I am, should be considered.

As the majority of you here today know, Simon's connection to 102 goes back to the tragic loss of his father in Feb, 1944, a few months before he was born. That personal connection led to his closer involvement in the continuation of the work of the Squadron Association we know today.

An accomplished researcher, he searched and researched many of the individual histories of those who served and gave so many people an insight and understanding of their day to day lives, their training and work and, ultimately, for many, their final sacrifice. Simon believed passionately that the Association should not just be a historical source of facts and academic memories but, rather, it was a living and continuing memorial to all those who served with 102 and to whom we owed so much of our lives, in freedom, we enjoy today.

Working closer and closer with Tom Wingham, it was almost inevitable that, in 2012, Simon should become the Association Secretary. Continuing the tradition of remembrance, welfare, support and information, Simon brought his organisational skills, his energy and his lifetime of community service to the benefit of all our veterans, members and their families. Continually searching, researching and delving on behalf of the Association Simon could spend hours upon hours following family lines of those who served, both here and in the Commonwealth. As recently as 2015 he was still building links, with Canadian, New Zealand and Australian researchers and historians to assist him in preserving those memories. His excitement in finding and acquiring a Squadron Crest from RAF Gutersloh was a joy to see.

However, those hours, I now know caused the imposition of a "Computer Curfew" by Elaine when she regularly found herself alone in bed, in the early hours, and Simon still in the spare bedroom tapping away on his well-worn keyboard.

Such was his commitment that his priority when arranging our Services at St Catherines at Barmby Moor, the airfield and in Pocklington Town, and our Annual Reunion, was the link with our veterans and their families to ensure their ability to attend them. Those close links extended to fostering the continued support and commitment by Pocklington Town Council and Barmby Moor Parish Council to our Association, both of whom Simon thought so highly.

His organisational skills, coupled with the continuing support from Bernard Kennedy and his staff at the William Wilberforce Care Home, ensured that many of our veterans could attend, participate **and be cared for**. The phrase, "...*going the extra mile*", is so appropriate.

Simon's ethos is best, I think, summed up in the final paragraph of that part of our Squadron History; "Where They Came From."

"102 Squadron lost 140 Halifaxes during the war. Hundreds, perhaps over 1000, brave young men went through the main gates of RAF Pocklington on the York Road never to return. We should remember them perhaps so that in the words of Bill Comrie's fellow countryman, Abraham Lincoln, 80 years earlier "from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion".

I only came to know Simon just over three years ago while researching my father's service with 102. He was able to help with facts and dates and records but, as our telephone conversations progressed, Simon knew that there was more to my research than simply knowledge. He was able to help give me an understanding of why so many, who did survive this time in our history, still suffered and, in their suffering, were misunderstood and isolated. Something I believe Simon was able to do for many other family members of those who served.

I only met Simon on five occasions, all through his work with the Association, but he made me feel I had another brother, a lifelong friend, a confidante and someone who I could rely on.

Our loved and respected Association Secretary has gone now to the peaceful skies, but his departure to whatever part of space and time awaits him, is marked by the legacy he has left in the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association. His name will join with all those we remember in the future.

Thank you

I would just like to take a short moment to thank all Association members and friends for their incredible support since I took over as secretary. I would also like to thank members for their patience whilst I acquaint myself with the running of the association and delve through my father's office of papers!

Although inevitably the association will change and evolve, I hope we will be able to continue the events which veterans and members have enjoyed so much over the years.

Harry Bartlett and Stephen Grist have supported me with excellent advice and correction over the past few months, I could not have done the job without them.

A big thank you goes to all of you, dear members, whose support in your letters and telephone calls has been very encouraging.

We could not organise the events without the help and support of the following organisations and people:

- Pocklington Town Council – The Mayor and Clerk (Richard Wood);
- St Catherine's Church - Rev Jan Hardy;
- The Wolds Gliding Club - The Committee and members;

Any errors or omissions in this newsletter are entirely mine, corrections are welcomed. Holly Usher



*'And when you come to 102
And think that you will get through
There's many a fool who thought like you
It's suicide but its fun.'*

Anonymous 102 Squadron member, 1941.



Royal Air Force Pocklington Airfield

The home of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron RAF and 405 (Vancouver) Squadron RCAF No 4 Group Bomber Command during World War II from where so many gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

This memorial was raised by Old Comrades in gratitude to all those men and women who served in both squadrons in War and Peace