

*Those We Loved Remain With Us*

Those we loved remain with us,  
for love itself lives on.  
Cherished memories never fade,  
because a loved one is gone.  
Those we love can never be,  
more than a thought apart.  
For as long as there are memories,  
they'll live on in our hearts.

Donations if desired made payable to RAF Association,  
Stowmarket or East Suffolk Association for the Blind Stowmarket  
may be sent care of Andrew Bingham Independent Funeral Service.

Ron's family appreciate your support today and  
warmly invite you to join them following the service  
at The Royal British Legion, Stowmarket.



Funeral arrangements entrusted to:  
ANDREW BINGHAM INDEPENDENT FUNERAL SERVICE  
The Nutshell, Milton Road South, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1EZ  
Tel: 01449 771666  
CCL No. 1138712

A Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving

RONALD SAUNDERS  
'Ron'

19th August 1923 – 28th July 2018



West Suffolk Crematorium  
Monday 20th August 2018  
at 3.30pm

## **Ron Saunders - RAF Service No.1803753**

At the age of 18 I volunteered for aircrew duties with The Royal Air Force and was accepted for training as a wireless operator/air gunner. After a few months delay I was finally called up on 29 September 1942.

### **ITW Blackpool**

This is where my initial training began having first been billeted in a typical seaside boarding house of the day. Apart from drill, marches. P.T. and the odd lecture, most of my time was spent wearing headphones translating Morse both in code and plain language. I passed the required speed tests enabling me to continue training as WOP/AG.

### **No. 2 Radio School RAF Yatesbury (Wiltshire)**

I arrived here on 29 January 1943 to complete my training as a wireless operator. This was successfully achieved, the proof of which was the attachment of the official RAF "Sparks" badge on my uniform. Pending the next move, I, along with the rest of the course, were scattered around various RAF sites.

### **20.P.A.T.U Weston-on-the-Green (Oxfordshire)**

The pilots here were flying simulated night landings with the aid of darkened glasses and a runway lit by sodium flares. I had my first ever flight here, made even more memorable when, after warning me, the pilot deliberately stalled the Oxford aircraft in which we were flying. A short lived posting and soon I was back in the main stream to continue training.

### **No.4 Radio School RAF Madley (Herefordshire)**

This was the flying part of the course to confirm the ability to communicate with a ground station from the air. I flew with five others plus an instructor, taking turns at the radio sets. The aircraft was a DH Dominie. Next was carrying out the same exercise, only this time it was just me and the pilot. The aircraft was a Proctor. Then to our collective surprise we were all given seven days embarkation leave.

### **The Boat**

I left England on 13 November 1943, sailing on the P&O liner, now a troopship. My "accommodation" was situated on the lowest deck of the ship, namely "H" deck. This was simply a mattress and a small space alongside for kitbag and clothing.

We were soon on the move joining up with a convoy of 12 other ships plus escort. Sea legs were required across the Bay of Biscay and beyond but eventually we passed Gibraltar and entered the calmer waters of the Mediterranean. So far the trip had been uneventful, but this soon changed when two sustained air attacks took place on the convoy. Being down below deck in "H" deck I could only imagine what was happening above. I listened intently



to the barrage of gunfire and bomb explosions, with the latter producing shock wave thuds against the hull. Many years later I obtained a copy of the voyage report in which part of the captain's statement contained the following "The convoy was attacked twice off the North African coast, the first by 30 enemy planes using glider bombs and torpedoes; the second by 12 dive bombers. The Orion seemed to be the target for the second attack and we had four very near misses, one within 10 feet of the ship which splashed the port side and covered the deck with oil. The ship was severely shaken and the pumps in the engine room stopped for a few moments."

There were no further alarms and after 14 days at sea since leaving England, the "Orion" slowly entered the Suez Canal, passing the statue of Ferdinandde Lessops to dock a short way in at Port Said. Up early the next day, kit packed we left the ship to walk the ½ mile to a railway siding. NAAFI tea and cakes were available before boarding a train taking us to Cairo.

### 22 PTC ALMAZA (CAIRO)

The train journey from Port Said was long and tiring mainly due to the hard wooden seats! It was dark when we arrived at Cairo where we were bundled into waiting lorries which delivered us to the transit camp. It was tented accommodation – six to a tent with just a palliasse for sleeping. We were here for six weeks waiting for No.1 Course to move out from the newly opened gunnery school. Before leaving I was able to pay a visit to the Pyramids.

### 13 AGS BALLAH (EGYPT)

Again it was tented accommodation recently vacated by No.1 Course in which we settled down for another six weeks training. This comprised mostly of lectures, a bit of ground firing as well as airborne exercises with an accompanying aircraft towing a drogue as our target against which we demonstrated our gunnery skills. With more than one trainee aboard, different coloured tipped bullets were allocated for individual markings when the drogue was inspected later. Having obtained the required proficiency at the end of the course I was entitled to display the Air Gunners badge on my uniform, together with a set of Sergeant's stripes which were automatically given at the end of training for aircrew duties.

### No.5 M.E. ARC HELIPOLIS (CAIRO)

To await further postings we were transferred back to a suburb of Cairo. This time the accommodation was in the pre-war Palace Hotel. Although all the furniture had been removed it was a pleasant change from tents. Eventually my name appears on the Notice for Post to an Operational Training Unit (OUT).

### 20 O.T.U. SHANDUR – SUEZ CANAL ZONE

We travelled by trains from Cairo to Port Tewfik and then by lorry to the airfield. South Africans were also there undergoing trainings on Marauders. Before crewing up it was a case of more travelling in our own category. For me this involved flying in Baltimores for

radio tests and in Ansons for gunnery. All went well and then the forming of crews began. This was quite a casual affair. I was walking in a mixed group when a pilot invited me to join his crew which I accepted, meeting up with his navigator and mid-upper gunner later. We flew together on nineteen occasions before completing the course. We then departed for a week's leave in Alexandria before reporting back to 22 PTC – Cairo.

### 56 PTC – NAPLES

After a pleasant week's leave at Beaufighter House in Alexandria we returned to Cairo and 22PTC. Again it was back to tents but our stay was short-lived. After just a few days a morning parade found us on a posting to Naples.

Early one morning we left for Payne Airfield nearby where we were put into a waiting Dakota. On the way we stopped at Benina and Tunis before alighting at Capdechina Airfield at Naples. Things were now very different. There was a general shortage, the children were ragged and starving. This resulted in a queue including some old folk outside our billet (Villa Druise) waiting for scraps every meal time. Thefts were not uncommon and one of our pilots had a full kitbag stolen whilst asleep. The Americans usually had armed guards on the back of food vehicles.

A woman from the crowd which gathered at the gates in the mornings, offered to do my laundry – and it always came back!

It was not long after when a Squadron C/O came to interview the pilots, the result of which we were posted to 114 Squadron flying with Boston Aircraft – a medium bomber (American) operating at night. Not long after we packed our kit and set off to join the Squadron at Tarquinia situated on the west of Italy on the American 5<sup>th</sup> Army Front.

### TARQUINIA – CECINA

We found the Squadron under canvas and our first task was to erect a tent for ourselves in a field of thistles. An interview with the CO followed, which explained the Squadron's activities. I was roughly awakened one morning and sent off with the advance party to an airfield – this was at Cecina and much nearer the front line and the realities of war. With a 15 cwt lorry and ten days rations we slept under some trees which were mostly taped off as dangerous.

### CECINA

114 Squadron was a part of 232 wing which also contained Nos 13-18 and 55 Squadrons, all engaged in similar duties. We converted to Bostons which took nearly a month due to heavy rain. After a particular heavy storm all four Squadrons and crews were called upon to remove stones thrown up onto the runway. We carried out our first sortie from here, bombing the marshalling yard at Modena, followed by a short recce. With the main thrust of the Italian Campaign taking place on the Eastern side of the country where the 8<sup>th</sup> Army



were engaged in heavy fighting against Field Marshall Kesselring forces who set up various strategic defence lines as they retreated northwards. So once again it was another move! The crews split up with the pilots flying the aircraft to Perugia. I was in the road party – a convoy of several vehicles – sleeping the first night in a derelict post office. The second was in Assisi. We reached Chiaravelle where we were to stay pending completion of an airfield at Falconara. Before we left Cecina we were visited firstly by Sir Winston Churchill followed soon after by HM King George VI. Both were met by the American General Mark Clark commander of the American Army.

#### CECINA – CHIARAVELLE – FALCONARA

Chiaravelle was a fairly small town and the building we occupied just managed to house all of us – having a basement and a small yard for the cookhouse. After a few weeks with Christmas 1944 approaching we moved five miles to an empty building in Falconara close to the airfield from which we were to resume our normal flying duties. We did our best to make ourselves comfortable and keep out the cold. The first thing was a fire put in by a fitter from the M.T. section; this was OK if the wind was in the right direction otherwise we were smoked out! One item we were lacking was a wireless, so myself and a pilot from the squadron hitch – hiked around the area initially without any luck, until we came across an Army camp which was on the move, who had a home-made wooden box type set and who reluctantly parted with it.

Our crew took some leave from here going back to Rome. While we were away the Squadron lost a third of its crew including two C/Os. With the arrival of March we heard we were to move nearer to the front line. The next airfield which we were to occupy was at Forli.

While at Falconara our 20<sup>th</sup> sortie was a bit different! Our crew were briefed to recce the airfield at Vicenza. The difference being was taking off in daylight when previously we operated only at night. It was a strange feeling to be visible. Dusk soon fell and nothing was seen at all but as we were receiving interest from the ground, we bombed the runway and headed home.

#### FORLI

Along with the rest of 232 Wing we arrived at Forli Airfield and were allocated a billet in an empty house on the main street. We set up our beds then helped to erect tents for the Mess in the back yard.

We were very busy here in support of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army who had started a new offensive. Many of our sorties were under radar control! One particular area where the army was held up was at Argenta. At 3 a.m. on the 19<sup>th</sup> April, 45 crews took off at 2 minute intervals to assist with the breakthrough. For our crew it was our 50<sup>th</sup> sortie. The area was a mass of smoke but the artillery fired red markers for guidance in bombing. The army now moved further

north as did our flying. After a further 12 sorties attacking ferry points, bridges, the River Po area and movement generally, we were stood down.

VE day came and everyone joined in the celebrations, but it was quite low key. As a crew we were pleased to still be around and very thankful to the ground crews who had looked after our various aircraft and with whom we had often had a chat and a cigarette before the take-off. One event was when a party of airmen wheeled a large floodlight down the street to a PoW camp nearby. Parking outside the main gate they treated the Germans to a few patriotic songs.

After a few weeks watching the German prisoners come through, the news came that we were moving further North to an airfield at Aviano. Soon afterwards we flew up in formation with the C/O. And so ended my nights of peering into the darkness, throwing out flares by hand plus propaganda leaflets in German – and surrender invitations in Italian.

### Aviano

For us, Aviano meant a large airfield situated on the Lombardy Plains, well away from the main road at the foot of the Lower Alps. Our first job was to find a decent tent and settle in. Our first flight was flying in formation for a fly past over Cannes in Southern France, otherwise it was the odd cross-country exercise. About this time Marshall Tito was making claims over Trieste which resulted in aircraft shuttling to and fro to Forli to bring bomb stocks up to the required level should they be needed.

We often visited the nearby village from where local girls were taking care of our laundry and where local partisans were showing themselves distinguished by coloured neckerchiefs; they were still patrolling the mountains. I was once invited to join them but I declined.

One evening, the camp was alarmed by explosions and huge columns of smoke from a nearby bomb dump. German incendiary bombs which had been set off by an Italian civilian who was severely injured. An adjacent dump of anti-personnel bombs were swiftly removed by many hands. That same night a severe storm hit the camp leaving tents in a bit of a shambles to say the least – I woke up looking at the heavens and rain on my face!

A few weeks after this the C/O called us all together to say the squadron was going to Aden, while the other three squadrons were going to Greece.

I was on leave when the main party left to go by sea, but on my return I was put in charge of a small party and we flew from Udine to Bari in two Marauders. From Bari we travelled to Lecce where we met up with others still awaiting a boat.

### Italy – Aden (via Egypt)

The liner "Winchester Castle" arrived at Taranto taking us not direct to Aden as we thought but via Egypt, disembarking at Port Said then back to 22PTC - a repeat of the journey two

years earlier! Soon it was back to board another ship sailing down the Red Sea to Aden where we joined up with the rest of the Squadron at Khormaksar Airfield.

### Aden

114 Squadron were posted here to relieve 621 Squadron who slowly departed. Unfortunately a Wellington bomber belonging to them, with 8 people on board, took off, circled the airfield, established radio contact then set off for Egypt. Nothing more was ever heard from them. Our crew resumed flying carrying out ten more flights around the area including one to Hargeisa (Somalia) before hearing the news that the Squadron was to be disbanded and Mosquitos would be replacing our Leaselland Bostons. Before we all split up a grand farewell was held in the Mess. All aircrew remaining here were allocated ground duties. In my case it was flying control. This included spells in the control towers of Khormaksar and Sheik Othman, a satellite airfield four miles further inland and two weeks on Masirah Island. I travelled in a Dakota stopping at Salalh on the way. My only company was a goat! Finally ending up at the main air traffic control centre for the area at HQ. I now awaited clearance to return to England for demobilisation.

### Aden to England

When the SS Alcantara arrived to accommodate those of us returning home, we were informed at 1700 hrs to be on board by 1900 hrs – naturally we accomplished this! The boat made a short stop at Naples. On the afternoon of the 17 October 1946 we docked at Southampton – two berths away from the Queen Mary.

After approximately three years continuous service overseas it was with mixed emotions I watched a red double decker bus passing along a nearby road. After I was demobbed at 101 PDC Kirkham Lancs, I set off for Hastings, having warned my mother in advance!!!